

STRINGED THINGS

The DIY time warp

As mentioned in previous articles, I recently returned to a serious pursuit of the DIY musical electronics hobby after being away from it for a long time – I'd say about 20 years.

Strangely enough, I got out of the hobby at about the same time the Internet was coming into its own. Now I know what I've missed!

Lately, I've spent hours surfing the Internet and finding great circuit ideas. There are several forums that give advice. Small parts and pedal businesses have sprung up – something they probably could not have done before the Internet.

So, how did one get information on musical electronics back in the stone age? First, there were books. The classic is [Craig Anderton's *Electronic Projects for Musicians*](#). I have both the first edition and the revised edition.

I also stumbled across a book by the British writer [R.A. Penfold](#). The use of veroboard (stripboard) in the book's projects was a discovery. A friend of mine who went to Great Britain actually brought back a piece of it for me!

I wish I had not torn up the book through overuse. It's going for \$70 on Amazon now!

I scoured the magazine racks for electronics magazines in the hopes that there might be a musical DIY project in them. *Guitar Player* was running Craig Anderton's column, which would feature some DIY projects. *Electronic Musician* and *EQ* magazine ran good projects fairly often. Jules Ryckebusch, a Naval officer whose specialty was nuclear reactors, created and wrote about some nice projects, particularly for the home studio.

I drove the local librarians crazy. I would track down DIY articles by finding references in books, articles, and in directories of periodical literature. After identifying an interesting article, I'd submit an inter-library loan request for it. Usually, a photo-copy of the article was in my hands within a couple of weeks after putting in the request.

I started a notebook of DIY audio articles and schematics. It survived several moves over the years. I *almost* threw it out once; I'm glad that I didn't.

So, some old-fashioned research and digging kept me well supplied with DIY information. Back then, one had to work hard to get any information; now, the hard work is in determining what information is worth keeping and what should be disregarded. There's just *sooooo* much good stuff!

It's nice, though, to see some good old standbys hanging around. Anderton's EPFM is still out there. He also did another nice DIY book: *Do-it-Yourself Projects for Guitarists*.

EPFM still soldiers on. Many of the parts used in the

projects, some of which were hard to find back in the 1990s, are even more difficult to find now. Thanks to folks such as Small Bear Electronics, the hard-to-find parts are accessible.

Parts hunting was a major part of the hobby. The thrill of the hunt and the excitement of finding that rare part was a nice rush! I accumulated several electronics suppliers catalogs, some of which were two inches thick. I identified the suppliers who were more suited to what I wanted and stayed with them.

[Paia Electronics](#) was great – they offered circuit boards and kits for the EPFM projects as well as a host of other great analog devices. Paia founder and DIY legend John Simonton died a few years ago, but Paia carries on. They're carrying the flame for DIY electronics, especially analog synthesizers.

Two of my favorites were [Mouser Electronics](#) and [All Electronics](#). Mouser was/is a huge electronics parts distributor catering both to hobbyists and huge manufacturers. They did not have a minimum dollar amount for an order and charged only actual postage.

All Electronics, on the other hand, was somewhat of a surplus electronics parts store. Even though they were a fraction of the size of Mouser, they stocked a surprising amount of the stuff I wanted. I looked forward to their monthly catalog just to see what new exotic goodies they had unearthed!

I also found an electronics store in a nearby big city that had counter sales. Through special order, I managed to snag some SSM2120 chips for some of the Paia studio devices.

Interestingly enough, I now live in a town of about 35,000 people and it has a full-service electronics store. They don't stock many analog components, but I'm often surprised when I need a rare part and they have it.

I'm friends with one of the owners. We always have a pleasant chat when I come in, even though I rarely spend a large amount of money there.

What I would've given to have had a resource such as [Small Bear Electronics](#) back then! Small Bear mastered the art of sourcing exotic music electronics components so we hobbyists wouldn't have to.

As stated earlier, my main musical gear is in the digital realm. Recently, though, I dug up some old analog signal processors that I built in my first run at the hobby. Analog is cool and I might find a way to integrate those old projects into my digital setup. Regardless of what I can do with them, those old projects were worth it just for the fun of building them and that incredible feeling of plugging one in and using something that I had built!