

John Richards of Dirty Electronics interviews the designer of the Korg Monotron Tatsuya Takahashi. Takahashi, T. 2013. Interview with John Richards, 31 July 2013.

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Could you tell me about your background in DIY electronic music and the hand-made electronics duo sharinnosaihatsumei?

I started young, building amps and speakers from when I was about eleven years old. But I wasn't that interested in hi-fi audio as such, so I moved onto making sounds with circuits: hacking a guitar amp to play with the spring reverb, taking a keyboard apart and soldering pads to the key contacts to make electronic drums. It wasn't until I went to university to study engineering that I got into synthesisers. I never had enough money for a real analog synth, so I kept building.

sharinnosaihatsumei was formed by another Korg engineer, Kazuki Saita, and is the continuation of this activity. It is an output for stuff that cannot be done at Korg. When we do a gig we basically have a table full of breadboards and PCBs and we play them.

In terms of DIY electronic music and making your own circuits etc., where do you draw inspiration?

I like going out to clubs and it's really exciting when sound waves take on the physicality that really makes you move. So I'm not that into sitting down and listening to album recordings, or listening to music on my iPhone. When I listen to a dance track it will either be in a club or at home on my decks. I am not an analog fanatic, but I do like seeing a record circling on a turntable. I would probably enjoy iTunes too if I could see the disks inside my hard drive or even the charge carriers in the NAND gates of my SSD. I may never get to see electrons and holes, but this is the kind of sensibility that drives what I do.

How were Korg convinced they should manufacture a hand-held, battery powered synth that would feed the interest of the DIY community?

Our initial motivation was not to deliver something for the DIY crowd. It was to provide engagement with real analog sonics at a price point that I could have bought when I was a kid. To rid analog of its snobbery and make it available. The low price point and the inherent simplicity of the analog circuit just happened to resonate with the DIY crowd. Obviously the hacker friendly PCB markings and disclosure of the schematics were instrumental in making the DIY appeal happen.