

# Knobula - Press briefing doc

## How it all started

Jason built his first synthesiser aged just 13. It was a Transcendent DPX designed by the legendary Tim Orr. Sold in kit form, it took months to build and when it finally did work the sound was... *disappointing*. The problem was that its notes were so perfectly in tune from its early digital oscillators that chords just sounded dull and lifeless when compared to the fully analogue poly synths coming from Sequential Circuits and Roland at the time, with their intrinsic tuning instability.

With that lesson learned, Jason went on to be a record producer and remixer in London, forming the successful 90's band, FAB, producing chart hits such as 'Thunderbirds Are Go!' And 'Stingray'.

Building a collection of classic synths along the way, it was Eurorack that caught Jason's imagination, and that format has since become his sole source of electronic sounds. But what it lacked was polyphony. Eurorack by default can only play one note at a time. Meanwhile, Jason had learned how to write code, and this, together with polyphony being at the top of his Eurorack wish list, inspired him to form Knobula, and develop a polyphonic Eurorack module.

This new device would have to meet the stringent requirements that any seasoned record producer and synth programmer would expect. It would have to take inspiration from great and renowned synths and pack them into a single module,

He was influenced by the simplicity of the TB303 bass line with its 6 knobs, the Moog Prodigy with its ease of programming and total lack of presets, the silky smooth super saws of the Roland JP8000 and the Access Virus, and finally the patchability and built in reverb of the ARP 2600, but with none of the digital tuning perfection that the Transcendent DPX inflicted on its owners.

And now Knobula is up and running, with a strict focus on the simplicity and charm of retro instruments, reimagined by Jason and made real by some of the top minds in electronic music technology.

## Where does it fit with the culture of Eurorack?

Eurorack modular synths allow you to take your imagination anywhere. There's no limit to their flexibility - **unless you want a pad or a polyphonic stab**. Polyphony is hard with modular: it's not designed for it - and yet **you need polyphony in almost every composition**. Poly Cinematic provides CV and Gate control that works together with Midi. So it feels at home in a Eurorack.

Midi in Eurorack is viewed with some suspicion. But Knobula just uses it to get polyphonic notes in: nothing else, much the way it was in 1983 when midi was invented. Poly Cinematic is aimed squarely at modular.

In many ways Poly Cinematic sums up the eurorack culture perfectly: you can't store patches and if you want LFO modulation you have to bring your own. It's totally patchable and CV friendly. It could be the first module you ever buy or it could be a final addition to a rack. It can be integrated into any rack and we're really looking forward to seeing how creative people use it for their music.

## How to fit a poly synth in a Eurorack module

It's digital, with a great-sounding, powerful, synth engine. We've taken this engine and **built our ideal Eurorack poly synth around it**. We've harnessed the power, tamed it and made it easy to get extremely usable polyphonic sounds.

Like most Eurorack modules, **this one is focused**. It's for pads and sounds that need polyphony. **Pads need a certain type of filter, they need reverb, and rich voices, each made up from multiple de-tunable oscillators**.

A general purpose polyphonic synth would need either a gigantic control panel (typically with 40 or 50 knobs and controls) or a baffling, impossible-to-use-live selectable parameter control system. We ruled both of those options out and **focused on designing the smallest number of controls that would give the biggest results**.

Even with our low control count, **you're never far from the sound you want to make**. And with fewer controls, the speed and intuition of muscle memory quickly takes over.

## Does it really have 56 oscillators?

Yes. Seven per voice in super-saw mode. You can detune them for dramatic effects or bring them closer together for a wonderful ensemble sound. **This is an extraordinarily powerful synth module**.

Detuning is central to the design of the synth and the spectacular sounds that result from it are what inspired the name “Cinematic”. **Each of the 7 oscillators has its own** individual tuning curve mapped to the rotation of the detune knob, furthermore each voice is subtly micro-tuned depending on what chord you are playing so the sound is always moving; always natural and never static.

## What does “Cinematic” mean

It means - literally - like you’d hear in the cinema. **You could describe this with words like lush, full, warm, expansive, as well as dramatic, powerful, shimmering and big.** We’d also use words like **epic and all-surrounding**. It’s an **original soundtrack for modular synthesisers**.

## Why are there no presets?

With presets, the position of the physical knobs doesn’t always represent the real settings. The way we’ve designed Poly Cinematic, **you can tell what the sound will be from the position of the knobs** - and it’s never going to make an unexpected, unpleasant sound.

Modern synthesisers are so well specified - with controls for almost everything - that **most people can’t program them, particularly while performing, and it’s boring**, so at Knobula we’ve taken a different approach: **no screens, no menus, no encoders**. Just knobs and switches, it just **makes it feel more like a musical instrument** and mentally more satisfying and creative to operate.

We wanted to create a module that **always sounds great, with no black holes**. Something tactile that **begs to be tweaked without the fear of hitting something nasty**. The TB303 had only 6 knobs and no presets, and yet it could bring a big room to its knees when played live. We wanted to build on that simplicity and create **a module you can just play in the dark using muscle memory**. We even gave it different sized knobs for **a strong haptic image, so you can recognise the controls with your fingertips**.

## What about the future?

**Knobula is all about knobs.**

We’re going to be bringing out a whole range of sound generation modules based on the same ethos: easy to operate, tactile and uncompromising in sound quality.

**No screens, just a big-screen sound.**

Our next module is already in development but we can't say what it does yet.

We do have plans. We're going to introduce Knobula to the world with Poly Cinematic. **Future products will have the same design ethos, the same usability, and will bring more essential functionality to Eurorack.**