music:

The Moog in live concert

By P.E. Schindler, Jr.

He's got it, by love, he's got it! Gordon Kingsley has cap-
tured the Moog Synthesizer and brought it onto the concert stage.

He had a little help, of course, because until recently no one ever
thought of using the Moog in a concert setting. The Moog in the con-
cert hall represents a new concept, partly because of the inno-
vative adaptations. One adaptation, of which we are proud, is the first
Moog Quartet (FMQ).

The FMQ, as Kingsley points
out, is actually 8 people, only 4 of whom perform on the Synthesizer itself. The Moog
performers are all keyboard artists, and besides jazz pianist Stan
Freire, they include Kenneth Bichel, Eric W. Knight, and Don York. Also part of the per-
forming group are Leah Horen (ex-
piano), Mike Redding (percus-
sion), Richard Nynida (Fender
bass). The group consists primar-
ily of Julliard graduates, with a sprinkling of Columbia; engi-
neering schools seem conspi-
crously absent.

As Kingsley explained it, “Moog players must be primarily
keyboard players, and only sec-
ondarily engineers. Almost any good keyboardist can understand the
programming to play the Moog.”

Such is certainly the case with the First Moog Quartet. Playing a concert which predi-
cates pianist Gordon Kingsley re-
ferred to as “a smashing success,”
the group moved with ease from
classical to original selections, per-
haps doing best on the rock numbers and the original material, but doing everything most satisfactorily.

There were several outstanding
selections in the group’s 26-
hour concert, including one origi-
nal tune (“Popcorn”) and two
adaptations. One adaptation, of
the Beatles tune “Eleanor Rig-
by,” made full use of one of the Moog’s sound effects ability, starting off with a siren-effect that had the whole auditorium on its feet. It was followed by a fire engine, and running through a vast bag of audio tricks that invaded a lengthy ovation.

The other adaptation, “Patriotic Moog” to a greater ex-
tent than any other selection, an
imitation of a real band. It started with “Dixie” and conclu-
ded with a version of “Stars and
Stripes” which brought such per-
sistent cries of “Encore!” that the
FMQ played a reprise, while the audience clapped and stamped in unison. Leah Horen was caught up in the spirit too, so that the audience was treated to an impromptu but well done dance on stage.

“Popcorn,” while a light piece reminiscent of some TV coffee commercials done a few years back, was also given overwhelm-
ing approval by the audi-
ence. The tune featured Gordon
Kingsley on a fifth Moog, which was a “Mini-Moog,” playing a simple “popcorn-popping” melo-
dy while the other 4 Moogs did a jazz vamp backup.

Half the fascination of the performance was the opportu-
nity to watch a Synthesizer in action — to see the performers continually re-tune, adjust and repatch their control panels. Since only one note at a time can be played on any one moog, it is played one handed with the other hand used to control tone, volume, or timbre.

Of note was the selection of speakers for the FMQ: they use Bose speakers exclusively, a type designed by the MIT professor of the same name. “They are a little expensive,” noted Kings-
ley, “and in very large halls they are sometimes insufficient, in terms of power: But they repro-
duce accurately, and without distortion, exactly what it is we are playing on our Moogs.”

The group already has one other album out, and there was a remote engineer from another, unspecified label with which Kingsley and the FMQ are negoti-
atting, at last Sunday’s perfor-
mance. Thus, the First Moog Quarter will soon have a chance to reach an ever-widening audi-
cence with the concept of live
“Moog” (previous moog efforts were strictly studio work, with one player and one synthesizer, using a multi-track tape recorder to produce chords and complex musical patterns). They wouldn’t have to go far to reach a wider audience than they did at this concert.

The turnout was disappointing to Kingsley, who finished off a nationwide concert tour with the performance at Harvard Business School’s Burden Hall last Sunday night. At the end of the concert, Kingsley announced that the half-filled hall “maybe we will be back next year. Don’t keep our arrival such a secret.”

Arts Across the River, the Harvard Business School group which is sponsoring this and several other concerts, did not try to keep it a secret, but they ran into budget problems and a very surprising lack of interest in concert Moog music. In spite of a reasonable ad campaign on this campus, very few MIT students attended the concert.

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