



LEAD SYNTH WORKSHOP - SOLOS

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In the workshop at VoyagerFest I played excerpts of five solos from Kraftwerk, Rush, Yes, Steve Winwood, and Pink Floyd. Those excerpts were short so what follows is a list of the songs with album details and track times of the full solos. In addition, I have included some YouTube links to alternate and/or live versions of the songs

There many other synths lead lines worth studying so I have listed six more excerpts from albums by Steven Wilson, UK, Jan Hammer, Happy the Man, Thirteen of Everything, and Genesis. In particular I wanted to include work from some of my favorite synth players: Adam Holzman, Jan Hammer, and Kit Watkins. I have selected songs where the playing is phenomenal *and* musical. YouTube links are included where available.

FIVE SOLOS HIGHLIGHTED DURING THE WORKSHOP

Kraftwerk, "Europe Endless" from **Trans-Europe Express**, 1977, 1:43 to 2:00

The main melody was played manually with mod wheel adding subtle vibrato (this is in the days before MIDI). The vibrato sweetens the sound, making it violin-like. The melody is restated 2:53 to 3:10 then an alternate melody (really a solo) runs from 4:02 to 5:29 with additional lead lines later in the song.

Geddy Lee with Rush, "Tom Sawyer" from **Time Machine Live**, 2011, 1:35 to 2:01

The original version of the song from **Moving Pictures** (1981) does not have any modulation. When touring 30 years later Lee added some deep vibrato to a few sustained notes. At the end of the line he pushes the mod wheel to the end of travel for effect. There are glimpses of his keyboard playing on the DVD and in this official YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJoTxywiRGo>

Patrick Moraz with Yes, "The Gates of Delirium" from **Relayer**, 1974, 12:49 to 13:44

The band is thrashing about when this Minimoog melody soars out of the chaos. There is plenty of vibrato on the sustained notes. The phrase ends with four quarter notes then a long sustained note where Moraz bumps up the pitch then slowly falls off. He repeats the last part of the phrase an octave higher. The entire melody is played through three times, sounds dramatic, and cuts through a busy mix. The live version on the Yes official channel focuses on Moraz during this part of the song (starting at 13:30): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJRVBQtKltM>

Steve Winwood, "When You See a Chance" from **Arc of a Diver**, 1980

Note that Winwood scoops up the very first note of the melody. He tends to scoop up at the beginning of a phrase then fall off at the end of a phrase while using a subtle amount of mod wheel vibrato on sustained notes. His solo synth style sounds organic, much like a sax intro of a pop-rock song.

Richard Wright with Pink Floyd, "Shine on You Crazy Diamond (Parts 6-9)" from **Wish You Were Here**, 1975, 1:01 to 1:45

Early in the solo Wright plays a bend-and-release but *downward* in a fashion that makes the sustained note really stand out. Later he uses the bend-and-hold technique to slide from the first to second note of phrases.

SIX ADDITIONAL SOLOS WORTH STUDY

Adam Holzman with Steven Wilson, "Regret #9" from **Hand.Cannot.Erase**, 2015, 0:18 to 2:29

This extended Minimoog Voyager solo is an amazing combination of keyboard technique, synth performance skill, and musicianship. The sound uses oscillator sync for edge but not in an overbearing way. Many of the pitch bending techniques covered in the workshop are clearly recognizable: bump up, falloff, scoop up, bend-and-hold. Adam set up a YouTube channel to post a video of a soundcheck recording of the solo that is more adventurous than the album version (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lw8MdNd3n4>). Note that Adam uses his left hand on the keyboard at times to play wide intervals or fast runs; also note that Adam presses the touchpad on the front panel, likely to recall a slightly different sound. Steven Wilson did a livestreamed concert in which "Regret #9" was combined with the previous song "Home Invasion" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c254l4DBgp8>); Adam's solo starts at 6:43 and is restrained compared to the one in the soundcheck. These three versions of the solo start and end similarly but are quite different otherwise.

Eddie Jobson with UK, "Thirty Years" from **UK**, 1978, 3:22 to 3:56

This well-constructed solo includes performance techniques from the workshop such as mod wheel vibrato, scoop up, bend-and-hold, and falloff. The playing is never flashy; in fact, the smooth nature of the notes and bends makes it an idea solo to transcribe and learn.

Jan Hammer, "Darkness/Earth in Search of a Sun" from *The First Seven Days*, 1975

There is Minimoog all over this song: the sliding bass notes early, the "human sequencer" line that starts about halfway through, then an edgy solo towards the end. Note the way that Hammer expertly works in subtle scoops during the middle of phrases.

Kit Watkins with Happy the Man, "Service with a Smile" from **Crafty Hands**, 1978

Of all the soaring Minimoog lines that Kit Watkins has played this one is perhaps the best known. Note the effortless doubling with lead guitar at times; in fact, it's not really noticeable until one of the players shifts to a parallel interval. Oh, and the song is in 11/8 time! There is a live video not of the highest quality (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6fWNvOryQ4>) of the circa 2005 version of Happy the Man that included David Rosenthal on keyboards.

Thad Miller with Thirteen of Everything, "Flying East" from **Welcome, Humans**, 2005, 4:20 to 5:13

Austin band Thirteen of Everything will play VoyagerFest 2016 and Thad Miller will rip off 32 bars of synth solo goodness with ease. Note that he plays a Korg instrument with a joystick controller for pitch bending instead of the Moog-style wheels of the other songs in this list.

Tony Banks with Genesis, "Cinema Show" from **Seconds Out**, 1977, 6:13 to 10:50

This extended synth workout shows Banks using his prodigious keyboard technique in a musical way while playing organ chords with his left hand. In that era his lead instrument was an Arp Pro Soloist, an analog synth preset keyboard. What's unique about this song is how he changes the sound between presets on the fly. Genesis shot a concert film in 1976 (with Bill Bruford!) that was shown in theaters but has never had a high quality release on DVD or Blu-ray. There is a decent version on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtglbmylvvA>) with "Cinema Show" from 15:48 to 20:28. The director inexplicably inserts footage from a slapstick silent film for much of the song then spends most of the rest of the time focused on the drummers. Fortunately, there is about one minute (17:34 to 18:39) where the camera is aimed at the synth keyboard and controls. Watch how Banks changes the sounds and settings between phrases.