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FOR PROGRESSIVE MUSIC RETAILERS

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SEPTEMBER 2010 | MUSICINCMAG.COM

Growth SPURT

Bradley Boynton of Rhythm Traders rebounds from the recession to have his best year yet PAGE 44

"I specifically don't tell my staff my margin on products."

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Sets Its Sights
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Alternative
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES: \$50 one year (11 issues). \$90 two years (22 issues) to U.S.A. addresses. \$75 one year (11 issues), \$140 two years (22 issues) to Canada and other foreign countries. Air mail delivery at cost.

SINGLE COPY (and back issues, limited supply): \$9.95 to any address, surface mail. Air mail delivery at cost.

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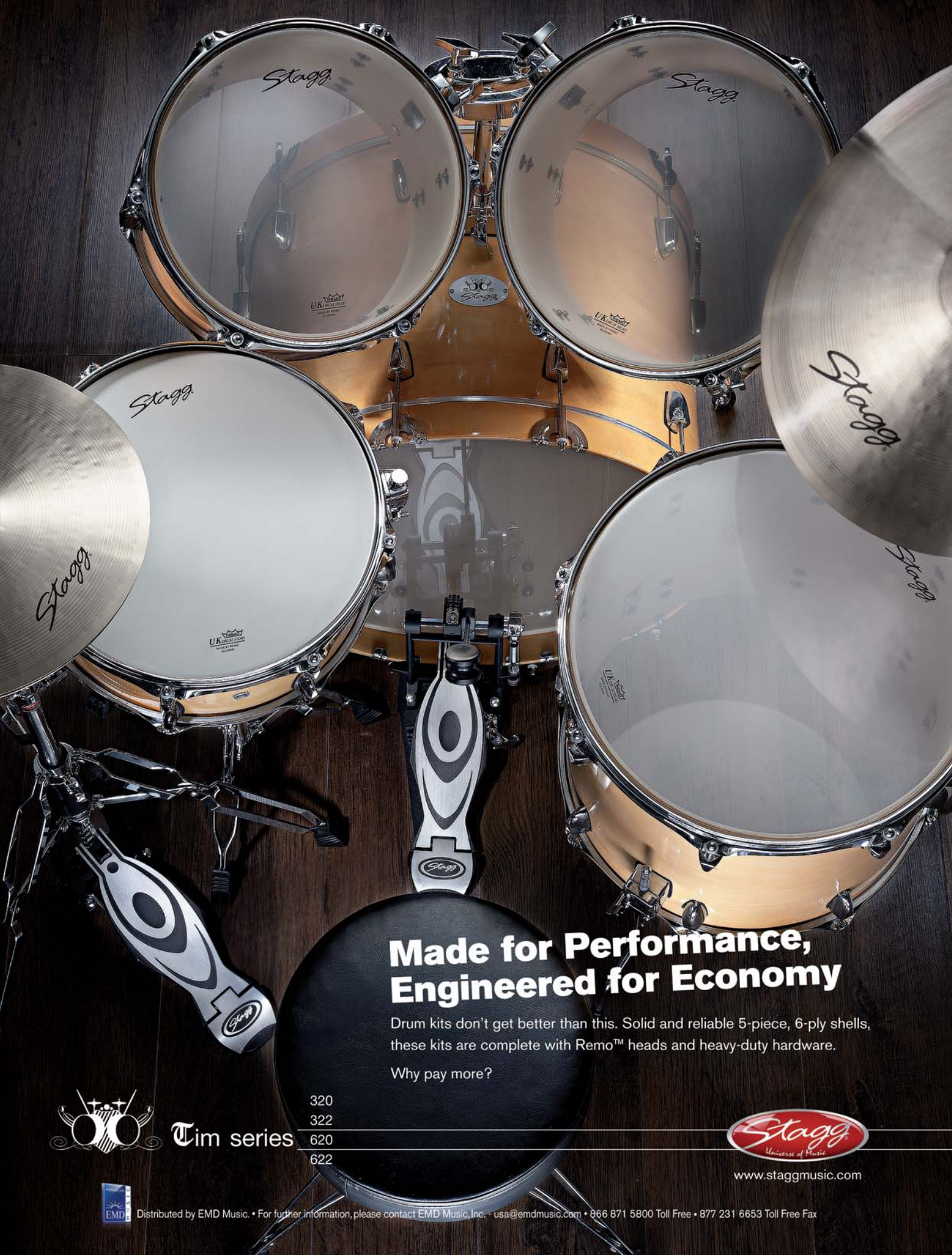
DownBeat, UpBeat Daily

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please allow six weeks for your change to become effective. When notifying us of your new address, include your current MUSIC INC. label showing your old address. MUSIC INC. (ISSN 1050-1681)

Published monthly, except April. Printed in U.S.A. by Maher Publications Inc. 102 N. Haven, Elmhurst, IL 60126-2932. Periodical Postage Paid at Elmhurst, IL and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MUSIC INC., P.O. Box 11688, St. Paul, MN 55111-0688





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Photo by Fritz Liedtke



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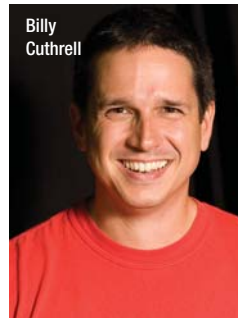
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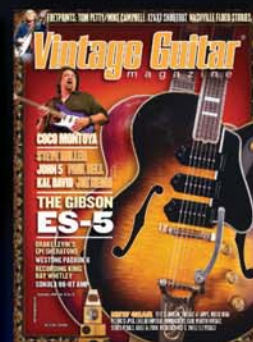
Billy
Cuthrell

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PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE | BY FRANK ALKYER

UNCOMFORTABLE? NO. TRY ANGRY, FRUSTRATED

I found myself becoming angry, frustrated and flat-out disgusted as I read Greg Billings' feature article on music retailers attempting to deal with the skyrocketing cost of health insurance ("Does Looking at Your Health Care Costs Make You Uncomfortable?," starting on page 36). Billings does a tremendous job attacking this industry-wide — make that nationwide — problem head-on. Still, I wanted rock-solid solutions.

Unfortunately, there are none.

I felt I could have spoken for each and every person interviewed for the article. They certainly spoke for our experience at *Music Inc.* Over the last 20 years, health insurance costs have risen faster than any other expense at the company. That's especially true in the last decade.

We've followed every logical step to keep costs down and benefit levels high, including examining plans and changing insurance carriers every few years — and that's just to keep our increases in the laughable, as opposed to insane, range.

It has caused Kevin Maher, our owner and president, a great deal of frustration. Like so many companies in our industry, this is a family business, and as employees, I can say we're treated like family. Kevin wants to

offer the best possible benefits package to everyone working here. But no one's making it easier for us. This year, we raised our deductibles and changed plans (but not carriers). In short, we're paying more for less.

How much more? By moving a few things around, we were able to keep our increase down to just 42 percent.

That's right, 42 percent. In the midst of the greatest recession of our generation, a year after most businesses experienced double-digit slides, our health insurance rates increased by 42 freaking percent.

Billings makes a case that insurance carriers don't really want to deal with small businesses. Given our experience, it's hard to argue the point.

But what can we all do? Blame it on Obamacare? Blame it on the baby boomers? Blame it on illegal immigration? Quit offering health insurance? Someone's got to stop the blame game and start finding a solid, healthy solution. Let's face it: The only double-digit increase any of us want to see in our businesses is to the bottom line.

In the meantime, this article lets you know that you're not alone.

ON A BRIGHTER NOTE ...

I'm proud to say that the American Society of Business Publication Editors recently honored *Music Inc.* magazine. Billings won the national Gold Award for his feature story "What Went Wrong With the Piano Industry." Editor Zach Phillips won the regional Gold Award for editorial writing, and Art Director Andy Williams won the regional Bronze Award for design. Congratulations to all three. **MI**

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LETTERS

Twenty Years of Ideas

Congratulations on the 20th anniversary of *Music Inc.* (July 2010). Reaching this milestone, especially during the massive industry and economic changes of the past two decades, is truly something to be proud of.

The 20th anniversary edition is a must-read for any retailer trying to navigate these challenging times. The sharing of ideas and advice from the best and brightest in the industry, many through their own hard-earned experiences, is priceless. I imagine dealers will look at this issue more as an owner's manual and keep it close for future reference. Those who do will have a decided edge by referring to the authors of the *Lessons Learned* feature as an informal board of directors for guiding their success.

Joe Lamond
President and CEO
NAMM

Shoot for the Moon

For several years in the 1990s, I had the privilege of writing the column *Moon's Law for Music Inc.*

Your topic for the July anniversary issue was "What's the most important lesson you've learned about retailing?" In the theme of the old *Moon's Law* articles, let me pass along the three that stand out the most to me:

1. *The sales are in the store, but the business is outside of the store.* You have to go out and find the business and take your store to your customers with promotions, sponsorships, events, advertising and clinics. If you only wait for the customers to walk in the door, soon you won't have a door to open.



2. *Continually train your people.* The godfather of NAMM training, the late Jim Kleeman, always told this story. A retailer walked up to him and said, "What if I train my people, and then they leave?" Jim's answer was, "What if you don't train them, and they stay?" Enough said.

3. *You now have two stores — your physical store and your Web site. Clean them both every day.* A lot more potential customers visit your Web site than your store, so give it the same daily attention that you give your store. Add new information, products, services, customer profiles and events every day, if you can. Make it a site that your customers feel a need to visit.

For two decades, *Music Inc.*

has been the voice, proponent and champion for the retailers that make the MI and P.A. businesses work. Dealers of all shapes, sizes and skill sets have been profiled in a way that the rest of us can learn from and add a few more tools to our business toolboxes. Thanks for the past 20 years, and best wishes for the next 20.

Phil Moon
Vice President of Sales and Marketing
Lynx Studio Technology

Congrats on Twenty

Please accept my congratulations on the first 20 years of *Music Inc.* The arrival of the July 2010 anniversary edition compelled me to express my support and recognition of the accomplishments the publication has made to the music products industry.

The July cover is indicative of the depth and scope *Music Inc.* has served the music industry with during these 20 years. While the industry continues to see individuals and companies exit from our "music biz fraternity," *Music Inc.* remains relevant and full servicing to all aspects of our industry during these challenging times. You have accomplished what a significant number of others have only attempted or dreamed of, and as the *Perspective* editorial echoes, this accomplishment did not come without the pain of growth and success.

The stability of *Music Inc.*'s leadership and its commitment to the music retailer has made the publication a monthly must-read for all of us who have been in this industry for decades. There is never an issue that goes by that I don't cut, clip, copy or quote something from. None of us can afford to skim through this, as there are so many corners for us to learn and share from.

Congratulations again, and all of you have our best wishes for another successful 20 years ahead and beyond. We'll be reading, watching and sharing your lessons and insights with the many individuals entering the business in need of a compass.

Karl Dustman
President
Dustman & Associates
Marketing Communications

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> **Fork's Drum Closet**

Hosts star-studded drummer event

PAGE 14> **Gist Piano Center**

Opens store in Lexington, Ky.

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Sues Audioline over Web content

PAGE 16> **Ontario Music**

Closes after 50 years in business

PAGE 18

RETAIL

MANTOVA'S TWO STREET MUSIC | BY KATIE KAILUS

CIVIC LEADER

At a time when marketing budgets are tight, Anthony Mantova has found a way to promote his store, Mantova's Two Street Music, without breaking the bank: community sponsorships.

"Two things that work well for us are hiring knowledgeable employees and our community involvement," said Mantova, who runs the Eureka, Calif., full-line dealership with his brothers, Nick and Matt. "We sponsor a lot of events and are the lead sponsor for many of them."

In particular, the company donates gear for use during charity events, linking its name with good causes.

"What we do is we look for good events to sponsor, and then we donate our P.A. gear for the day and get the sponsorship," Mantova said.

NEW DIGS

The Mantova brothers, who took over the former Two Street Music in September 2009, have made several changes to the store, which has been a community staple since 1976. Mantova's Two Street Music currently offers rentals, repairs and lessons in every-



Matt (left) and Anthony Mantova

Mantova's Two Street Music makes good by doing good

thing from band instruments to guitars. The brothers also opened a second location in McKinleyville, Calif., during the last holiday season.

"We have made some changes," Mantova said. "We are putting the 6,000 square feet to really good use, and we are in the process of restoring

[the Eureka location] to what it used to be: a million-dollar-a-year store."

The most recent addition to the Eureka location is its "Green Room" concert hall. The "Green Room," housed in the old guitar showroom, seats 150 people and serves as a venue for local bands to perform on Saturday nights. Mantova markets these events on Craigslist.

"We are really active in social marketing through our Facebook page and Craigslist postings," he said. "We do quite a bit on the Craigslist community board just by post-

ing what events are going to be on the stage or what acts we are sponsoring."

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The store has teamed up with different fundraisers, too, including a New Year's Eve bash for the American Cancer Society and Relay For Life, and a Sounds 4 Hounds event, which raised money for animal rescue projects.

This summer, Mantova's also joined forces with the Redwood Acres Fairgrounds in Eureka to sponsor a two-day summer music festival, which welcomed thousands of visitors from all across the area.

"We get out in the community as a lead sponsor and really represent ourselves and try to promote [charities] that are doing good work," Mantova said. "From a marketing standpoint, any time you can get double coverage from radio and TV, it's worth doing."

Mantova attributed much of his success so far to this doing-well-by-doing-good promotional strategy.

"Community involvement has been huge," he said. "I can't even put a price tag on the results we've gotten from that." **MI**

OPENING

Uptown Service

Downtown Music recently opened for business in historic downtown Seneca, S.C. The shop is run by Brad Sanders, a local musician who brings 15 years of experience with community musicians and educators to the full-line dealership. Downtown Music, which has the motto "Downtown Music, uptown service," specializes in school band and string sales, rentals, repairs, and music lessons.

CONTEST

GC, Slash Choose Band

Guitar Center has named State Line Empire (pictured) of San Mateo, Calif., as the winner of Guitar Center Presents Your Next Record With Slash, an unsigned band competition. After sifting through more than 12,000 entries, GC and guitarist Slash hand-picked State Line Empire for the opportunity to record a three-song EP with producer Mike Clink, as well as have Slash write, record and perform on the single.



PERSONNEL

WWBW's Hiring Spree

The Woodwind & Brasswind of South Bend, Ind., announced in July that it would be hiring 50 new employees over the next six months. According to a statement from the company, these will be mainly sales and customer service staff in the company's call center, plus a handful of marketing and creative staff. The Woodwind & Brasswind also recently launched a new international shopping experience. Customers can shop its Web site, wwbw.com, in the currency of their choice and see their complete order, including shipping fees, duties and taxes, before checkout. The company now offers shipping to more than 91 countries on six continents.

"It's a very exciting time for our organization," said Tim White, vice president of sales and general manager. "We continue to pick up momentum and are now growing exponentially."



All-star drummers drop by Fork's for the Ludwig Keystone launch

FORK'S DRUM CLOSET | EVENT

LUDWIG ENDORSERS DESCEND ON FORK'S

Fork's Drum Closet in Nashville, Tenn., played host to more than 20 Ludwig endorsers and 100 fans on June 14. The evening of product demos and poster signings served to launch Ludwig's Keystone series drums and help Fork's recover from flood damage it experienced in May.

"The store was so packed, we couldn't hardly walk through it," said Gary Forkum, owner of Fork's Drum Closet. "It was a great hang."

"Gary Forkum and his team are a true asset to the drummers of this town," said Ludwig Sales Manager Bob Henry. "We are grateful for the partnership Ludwig has with Fork's and the players who have found a home here."

"One of the things I really enjoy about being part of the Ludwig family is the camaraderie between the

drummers when we see each other at events like this," said Rascal Flatts drummer Jim Riley. "There's a brotherhood, you know, like we're the ones holding the flame now, and it's a pretty cool thing."

DEALER THINK TANK

In related Ludwig dealer news, nine independent drum retailers paid a visit to the company's Monroe, N.C., manufacturing facility on April 20 for the first Ludwig Dealer's Summit. They discussed percussion-industry trends, looked at market changes and identified customer needs.

"It was a great pleasure to be able to sit and share ideas with this knowledgeable group of dealers," said Ludwig and Musser General Manager Grant Henry.

BILLY HYDE MUSIC, ALLANS MUSIC GROUP | AGREEMENT

AUSTRALIAN RETAIL GIANTS MERGE

Two of Australia's largest music products retailers, Australian Music Group (AMG) and Allans Music Group, merged businesses on July 26. AMG's retail arm, Billy Hyde Music, includes a network of more than 20 stores. Allans Music has seven stores in four states.

The merger creates a network of 30 stores that are now co-branded Allans Music + Billy Hyde. According to a statement on Billy Hyde Music's Web site, no stores closed. The new company employs roughly 580 people. Both companies' Web sites currently operate independently but are scheduled to merge soon.

AMG also operates a wholesale business that represents some of the industry's largest names, such as D'Addario, Korg, Line 6 and Ludwig.

GIST PIANO CENTER | OPENING

GIST'S SWEET OPENER

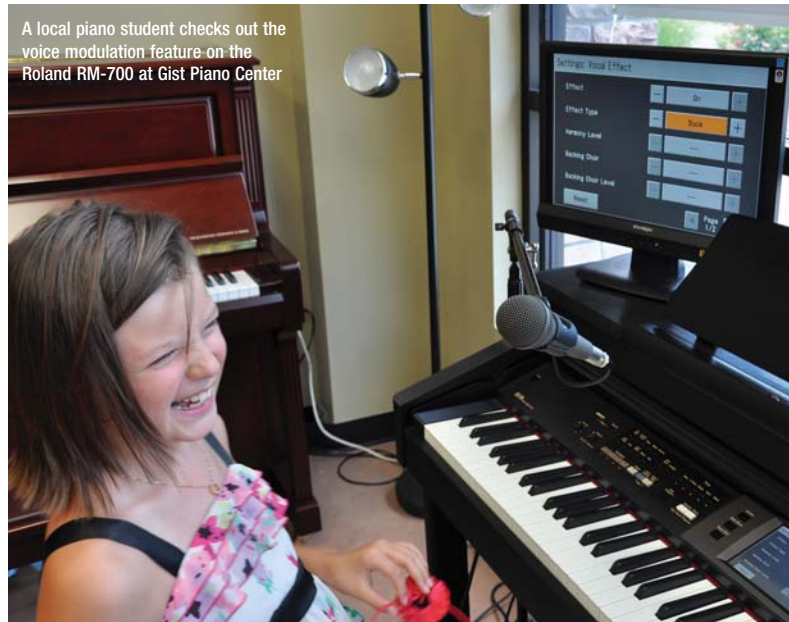
On July 10, Gist Piano Center made a sweet introduction to the community as it celebrated the opening of its new Lexington, Ky., store and 50-seat recital hall. The grand-opening celebration featured free chocolate, live music and the unveiling of Roland's new SuperNATURAL line of digital pianos.

Gist Piano Center's opening showcased local students in a talent show and a live performance from jazz and pop band Beth Mankel Group. Gist also partnered with local chocolatier Old Kentucky Chocolates to provide a free chocolate buffet to all grand-

opening attendees.

"We have always supported universities, teachers and music organizations in the community," said Gist Piano Center Vice President John Gist. "We look forward to working with our Lexington partners to forge the next generation of lifelong music makers and give music a future in Lexington."

The new piano store will carry nine name brands, including handmade Steinway & Sons pianos and Roland digital pianos. Gist has also been named Roland's exclusive factory-authorized representative in eastern Kentucky.



A local piano student checks out the voice modulation feature on the Roland RM-700 at Gist Piano Center

IMSO | PERSONNEL

IMSO NAMES NEW BOARD

Independent Music Store Owners (iMSO) recently reported that it increased its membership by 100 percent during the past year. The organization's mission is to search for creative and productive ways to support local independent music store owners.

iMSO has also announced its new board, which includes the following members: Gordy Wilcher of Owensboro Music Center in Owensboro, Ky.; iMSO and iBuy program president; Jeff Simmons of Watermelon Music in Davis, Calif.; vice president; Maureen Johnson of Johnson Music in Dracut, Mass.; treasurer; Kevin Damm of Damm Music Center in Wichita, Kan.; Chris Basile of South Jersey Music in Sewell, N.J.; iBuy vice president; Matt Frascioni of Matt's Music Stage and School in Paso Robles, Calif.; Lisa Kirkwood of Discount Music of Jacksonville in Jacksonville, Fla.; Bob Campbell of Campbell's Music Service in York, Pa.; Bill Wagoner of Wagoner Music Shop in Plymouth, Ind.; Donovan Bankhead of Springfield Music in Springfield, Mo.; Jeff Nixon of Instrumental Music & Sound in Ludington, Mich.; and Jim DeStafney of Blues Angel Music in Pensacola, Fla.

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PROMOTION

Super-Low Rentals

Village Music Store of Deerfield, Ill., has announced that it will keep the price of certain band and orchestra rentals at \$12 per month, a rate that hasn't changed since 1998.

EVENT

Marty's Shred-Off

Marty's Music Store recently hosted the Lead-Riff Guitar Competition at its Annville, Pa., store. The event, which was open to all guitarists, attracted 20 competitors and roughly 100 audience members. Dan Miller took first place, winning a Fender guitar. Marty's will be hosting the Lead-Riff Guitar Competition again in April 2011.

"Giving a musician the opportunity to show their talent sums up why the event takes place," said Shawn Gerhart, sales manager of Marty's Music Store. "Practicing and lessons need to have a reason behind them."

APPOINTMENTS

GC Pro Taps Simpson

Guitar Center Professional, GC's outside sales division that focuses on pro users, has appointed Doug Simpson to spearhead a new sales initiative geared toward providing the Las Vegas market with special access to all of GC Pro's services — focusing, in particular, on the hotel and hospitality industry. Simpson has more than 20 years of experience using and selling pro audio and video gear and has lived and worked in the Las Vegas market for six years.

FINANCIAL

Sam Ash Music Offers Consumer Financing

GE Money, the consumer lending unit of General Electric, and Sam Ash Music recently forged a multiyear agreement to provide consumer financing. The Sam Ash card will let musicians finance purchases from the company's product line, including instruments, software and sound gear. The program will be managed by GE Money's sales finance unit. Customers will be able to use their cards at any Sam Ash location or online.

"We look forward to our partnership with GE Money and are eager to share the possibilities of this program with our customers," said Stu Leibowitz, executive vice president and chief financial officer for Sam Ash Music.

SWEETWATER, AUDIOLINES | LEGAL

Sweetwater Sues Audiolines

In mid-July, Fort Wayne, Ind., retailer Sweetwater filed suit against J2 Electronics Group, which does business as Audiolines, for trademark infringement. The suit alleges that Chicago-based J2 deliberately sold products under the Sweetwater name. Sweetwater is seeking more than \$75,000 in damages in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Indiana in Fort Wayne.

A representative of Sweetwater claimed that J2 Electronics stole Sweetwater's online content, including product information and specs, and posted it on Audiolines' Web site, audiolines.com, as its own content. Certain pages stated that customers should contact their Sweetwater sales engineer for more information. These pages have since been taken down.

Bernard Fryman, president of J2 Electronics, purchased Audiolines in September 2008. He said he believes the company's previous owner

posted Web offerings taken from Sweetwater's Web site, but it had been unknown to him until the lawsuit. "More than 20,000 items on our site makes it beyond impossible for any reasonable business owner to police," he said.

Fryman added that Audiolines' Web site was guaranteed at sale to be free and clear of liens and incumbencies. "I understood that I had purchased a 100-percent legal Web operation with no infringements," he said. "We do hold an archived copy of the original Web site database we purchased before any changes were made. This dated file supports our position."

"I regret that I had to take legal action, but the abuse was blatant," said Chuck Surack, president and founder of Sweetwater. "My hope is that we'll resolve this quickly and that it will give others pause before they attempt to infringe on our brand and to steal our content."

MUSIC & ARTS | CONTEST

Music & Arts Names Give the Gift of Music Winners

Music & Arts recently announced the winning essays for its annual Give the Gift of Music band and orchestra contests. Middle school students had been invited to write essays describing how their directors inspired them musically.

Aarzu Maknojia (pictured, second from left in the front row with her family) of Seabrook Intermediate School in Seabrook, Texas, received first place in the band contest. Seabrook Intermediate School will receive several Jupiter instruments, including six flutes, six trumpets, six clarinets, four trombones, four alto saxophones and two tenor saxophones — all valued at \$27,350. Maknojia also received a \$500 Music & Arts lesson scholarship.

Andrea Brooks of McDevitt Middle School in Waltham, Mass., took the grand prize in the orchestra contest. Her school will receive Otto Benjamin by Eastman instruments, including two violins, two violas, two cellos and a string bass — a prize valued at \$20,742. Additionally, Brooks received a \$500 Music & Arts lesson scholarship for her winning essay.



CASSELL'S MUSIC | EDUCATION

CASSELL'S AWARDS GRAD

Cassell's Music, a San Fernando, Calif., music retailer, has awarded a violin outfit to recent high school graduate Karen Callejas to help her pursue music at the collegiate level. Working closely with Monroe High School music director Franklin Gomez, Callejas was selected to receive the new 4/4 outfit based on her love of music, loyalty to the Monroe High School orchestra and desire to study music at Pierce College in Woodland Hills, Calif., where she is enrolled for the upcoming fall semester.

According to Ed Intagliata, owner of Cassell's Music, many Monroe High School students and their families have been hurt by the recession, and owning an instrument is out of the question for the majority of these low- to middle-income families.



From left: Robert Klingbeil; his wife, Kelly, and son, Noah; and Tony Thomas

AMRO MUSIC | BY JENNY DOMINE

Amro Employee Finds Long-Lost Father Within Music Industry

For six years, Robert Klingbeil has worked in piano and organ sales at Amro Music in Memphis, Tenn. Adopted as a child, he reconnected with his biological mother seven years ago. But when his wife became pregnant last fall with their first child, Klingbeil wanted to know more about his biological father, if only for essential medical history. Unfortunately, his mother only had a common name.

It wasn't a high-tech database that gave Klingbeil the clue he needed to solve the mystery. It was a memory from his mother's sister, a piano retail salesperson. "Even if he wasn't in the business anymore, I knew I could trace him," Klingbeil said.

Amro Chairman Chip Averwater knew of Klingbeil's search. So, when Klingbeil asked him about a man named Tony Thomas, Averwater's face lit up. He'd known Thomas, owner of Black Hills Piano Gallery in Rapid City, S.D., and Thomas Events Solutions, for years. Klingbeil tracked down Thomas' phone number and contacted him on Jan. 4, just days after Thomas' own father passed away. He'd never been told he had a son.

"I don't know if I could put it into words," Thomas said. "I had just lost my father and gained a son, a daughter-in-law and a grandson within about a three-day period."

A paternity test confirmed a 99-percent match. In July, Thomas visited Memphis to meet his new grandson, Noah Taylor.

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BILL'S MUSIC | CLINICS

Bill's Music's Wootenmania

Bill's Music recently hosted bassist Victor Wooten (pictured onstage), drawing in a crowd of more than 400 to the store's Baltimore location. Wooten engaged the crowd with riffs and anecdotes from his long musical history. According to Bill's Manager Tracey Kern, customers flooded the store to purchase Wooten's books, DVDs and Hartke amps.



ONTARIO MUSIC | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

ONTARIO CLOSES DOORS

After 50 years in business, Ontario Music closed its doors on July 31. The Ontario, Calif.-based full-line dealership was founded by James and Wilma Jones and was most recently owned by longtime employee Todd Trent. Along with musical instruments, Ontario Music offered music lessons, repairs and rentals.

Trent cited the recession, school budget cuts, financial debt and Ontario's economic decline as the reasons for the closure.

"It just became impossible for me to continue to operate," he said.

Owner cites economy, school budget cuts as main factors

STRONG START

Trent, who began working for Ontario Music at 16, purchased the company from the Jones family six years ago. He said business was strong at the time, and his attorneys and CPA encouraged him to go forward with the purchase.

"And for the first three years, we did really well under the new ownership."

As the economy began to soften three years ago, he refocused his business strategy, refinanced his long-term debt and "that next year went pretty well."

'THE LAST STRAW'

But Ontario Music took a major hit in 2008 with the recession's onslaught, which further weakened the local economy. According to Trent, 2009 was the worst year in the company's history. Revenue from musical instrument sales continued to decline as prices dropped industry-wide. This was especially damaging to the company's school music business.

"Consumers, instead of doing the rent-to-owns, which were a staple for our business, decided to buy \$199 instruments at Costco and Best Buy," Trent said. "And some of the schools were starting to spend their money on buying their own instruments and leasing them back to the students, which cuts us out."

He called more recent school budget cuts "the last straw." "We were told our mother district, Ontario-Montclair School District, was more than likely going to cut most of its band [programs] for next year," Trent said.

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Note from Joe

Getting More Teens in Bands—and We Need Your Help!

Teenagers are the biggest consumers in our economy with the most expendable income, and as such, they are vitally linked to our industry's growth. It's critically important that we capture this market by encouraging them to play a musical instrument. NAMM has been supporting school music programs for years as one of our core business objectives. We've funded research and led advocacy efforts with the goal of growing and providing support for school music programs—ultimately resulting in the creation of a vibrant school music market.

Now, NAMM is targeting music-making teens head on, encouraging those kids who play in bands outside of their traditional school music programs to jam. We want to get every teen playing, and one way we're doing it is through our national SchoolJam USA competition.

SchoolJam USA showcases the talents of teen musicians across the country by providing them the chance to rock on a national performance stage and bring their music to the masses, all while promoting the many benefits of music making and the importance of school music programs.

The top bands win prizes, new gear, funding for their school music programs and the chance to perform live in the finals at the NAMM Show. How does it work?

- A national school outreach initiative, social media campaign and a nationwide PR program have already been launched, encouraging teen bands to sign up online
- In November, the public is encouraged to vote online for their favorite band(s)
- The top two most popular bands in each region—plus two wild card bands—then move on to the finals held LIVE at the NAMM Show in Anaheim
- The winning band will travel to Frankfurt, Germany, to perform, while the top German band comes to California to play at the NAMM show
- All 10 SchoolJam USA finalists and their school music programs win money to purchase new gear at their local NAMM Member stores
- The competition is open to any style of band with members between 13 and 19 years of age who play original music

Here's where we need your help. To meet our goal of signing up 1,000 bands this year, we're asking every NAMM Member to encourage their customers and students who fit the profile to get their band to enter. Many of us remember what it felt like to dream big, and you can help your young customers do the same by entering SchoolJam USA and going after their dreams.

Visit www.namm.org for ways to support your local teen bands and help them enter, or visit www.wannaplaymusic.com to see teen music videos, photos and access the voting site.

Joe Lamond

Joe Lamond • NAMM President/CEO

We're Looking for the BEST Teen Band in the USA...



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SUPPLY

AUDIX MICROPHONES | BY JENNY DOMINE

LISTENING IS BELIEVING

Microphone maker Audix is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Looking back, Cliff Castle, the company's vice president of sales and marketing, attributed the Wilsonville, Ore.-based manufacturer's early success to a handful of music retailers who were willing to give the mics a chance.

"We found dealers here and there who were at least willing to check them out," Castle said. "I was surprised that, in most cases, dealers had not really spent much time listening to the various vocal mics in their stores, so it was an eye-opener for everyone once they started listening and comparing."

DRUMMING UP BUSINESS

Today, Castle credited Audix's longevity to supporting retailers through fair pricing and services, such as ongoing dealer training.

"I know this may sound crazy, but we answer the phones with a real live person," Castle said. "Dealers can usually get their orders, concerns or questions resolved within one call. We consider ourselves to be partners with our dealers."

The close dealer connection has also helped Audix adapt its products over the years, as



Audix's Cliff Castle; inset: clinician Mike Snyder in Audix's online video "How to Mic Your Drums"

retailers have expanded their businesses to include school, church and corporate installs. But Audix has made its biggest impact in drum microphones.

"Audix has become very well-known for drum and percussion mics, and the i5, in my opinion, symbolizes this success," Castle said of Audix's 25th Anniversary Limited Edition i5 drum mic. The company also launched a low-cost New Fusion professional drum mic line this year.

"Given the challenging state of the retail market today, it is more important than ever to bring interesting and useful products to the market," Castle said.

According to Castle, the project was a joint effort between Audix and local production company Mountain Air Studio.

"We wanted to make it professional but keep it casual and let the content be the main focus," he said. "I wanted it to have an improvisational feel, so after talking through each of the scenes, we just let the material unfold in an interview fashion."

The series is now included as a DVD with all of Audix's D series drum packs. Castle said end-user response to the videos has been very positive, and music retail-

ers are also using them as educational tools.

"Retailers with drum departments like to play them in the store and also use them for clinics and promotions," Castle said. The company is planning to produce more online video content in the future.

"Consumers, especially the iPod generation, are hungry for informative and educational materials, particularly when it comes to recording and live sound," Castle said. "It's hard to imagine the level of success the company will achieve in the next 25 years." **MI**



MIC LIKE THE PROS

The company has further established itself in the drumming community with an online video series on its Web site called "How to Mic Your Drums." Starring engineer Dean Kattari of KINK-FM radio in Portland, Ore., and drum clinician Mike Snyder, the seven-video series provides clear, practical instruction for using Audix products to mic an entire drum kit. At press time, the installment on kick drum mics had received 6,435 views on Vimeo since its February launch.

ARTIST APPROVED

Adams En'riched

Grammy-nominated alt-country/rock artist Ryan Adams (pictured) is the newest endorsee for B.C. Rich guitars. Adams has played and written songs on his



B.C. Rich guitars for years, and his latest release, a metal project called *Orion*, was recorded with B.C. Rich instruments.

"As far as songwriting

goes, I pretty much have written all my songs from the prettiest ballads to the craziest rockers on my B.C. Rich Beast," Adams said.

{bcrichguitars.com}

EVENT

IMSTA to Be Held in New York

The International Music Software Trade Association (IMSTA) and the SAE Institute will hold the IMSTA FESTA on Sept. 25 in New York. Audio technology companies from around the world exhibit at the one-day event, which is geared toward professionals and prosumers alike. Event highlights will include \$100 of free software by IK Multimedia for every registered visitor and a presentation by Clyde Stubblefield (aka The Funky Drummer). {imsta.org}

SALES

Music Group Restructures

The Music Group has restructured its European and U.S. sales programs for the Behringer and Bugera brands toward a factory-direct sales model that lets it streamline distribution and logistics operations. The company is increasing focus in such areas as product conceptualization, development, manufacturing and customer experience.

"As The Music Group continues to grow, it is critical that we refine our focus to the Group's core competencies," said Chairman and CEO Uli Behringer. "We will invest heavily in areas, such as R&D, intellectual property in manufacturing and overall customer experience." {music-group.com}



Girl Rock Nation panel

GIRL ROCK NATION | EVENT

FENDER GIVES GIRLS A VOICE

Fender kicked off Girl Rock Nation, a movement designed to empower women of all ages to participate in music, on July 22 at the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles with a launch party.

The event included a panel discussion on women in music with speakers Allison Robertson, guitarist for The Donnas; Alicia Warrington drummer of The All-Girl Boys Choir and The Gore Gore Girls; and Mona Tavakoli, drummer of Raining Jane and Radical Classical. The discussion was moderated by Carla DeSantis, a leading advocate for women in rock.

"This is about creating a revolu-

tion, a Girl Rock Nation," said Jennifer Burton, community relations manager for Fender. "Fender is a proud supporter of female guitar players. This initiative is about giving these girls a resource and a place to learn how to rock, not only in the musical sense, but also as a person."

A new Web site, girlrocknation.com, is a place where women can discuss music, learn about female rockers, and seek advice on songwriting, producing music and playing an instrument. The site is meant to give beginning rockers a starting point and developed musicians a place to improve. {fender.com}

KORG | PROMOTION

KORG OFFERS FINANCING

Korg and GE Money have teamed up to offer financing programs for several of Korg's major brands.

The program lets dealers offer six months of interest-free financing on qualifying Korg, Marshall or Vox purchases more than \$499 until Sept. 15.

Korg dealers can contact GE Money for marketing materials, such as hangtags, counter cards and posters, to promote this limited-time offer.

Music product retailers without a GE Money program can still take advantage of the summer sales offer by contacting GE Money's national sales department at 866-209-4457.

{korg.com; voxamps.com; marshallamps.com}



TYCOON | EXPANSION

New Digs for Tycoon

Tycoon Percussion has relocated and expanded its U.S. base of operations as of July 1. The company's new facility is located at 1344 Parkside Pl., in Ontario, Calif., and features additional office space for management, sales, marketing and artist relations. It also includes a fully stocked showroom and a large, state-of-the-art warehouse.

The move marks the next step in Tycoon's efforts to manage its growth in the United States and around the world.

The grand-opening celebration will take place during next year's winter NAMM show. tycoonpercussion.com

HAL LEONARD | ONLINE

Hal Goes Digital, Again

Hal Leonard has added video content to its Digital Retailer Program. The program originally let more than 3,000 music dealers offer sheet music on demand, and now these

retailers will also be able to sell downloadable and streaming video lessons to their customers through the Hal Leonard Digital Video Retailer Program.

The Digital Video Retailer Program lets music dealers profit through the Hal Leonard Web site GuitarInstructor.com (GI.com), which features lessons in all styles of music, from beginner to pro.

Hal Leonard also recently launched lyricstore.com, a site where visitors can print accurate, licensed lyrics on a wide variety of products. Prices start at less than \$12. halleonard.com



SUPPLY  

AMERICAN DJ | LAWSUIT

AMERICAN DJ SUES WAL-MART

American DJ has filed suit against five companies, including Wal-Mart Stores and DBL Distributing, for violating the Lanham Act, which covers federal trademark law.

The suit alleges that the five companies used the American Audio trademark in advertising and promoting audio products that were not made by or affiliated with either American DJ or its

American Audio brand. According to American DJ, the five firms "intentionally, continuously and wrongfully advertised, distributed and/or sold audio equipment using the American Audio mark since 2009."

Other companies named in the suit are V2GO Technology, American Audio Laboratory and Laser Karaoke. americandj.com

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For more information on djembes other additions to our family, visit our newly designed website.



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PARTNERSHIP

Samson Teams Up With Image Marketing

Samson Technologies has joined forces with Image Marketing, a firm run by longtime Samson friend Bob Rufkahr. Image Marketing now covers the Southern California and Southern Nevada territories for Samson.

"[Samson] has developed some truly revolutionary products since I last worked with them, and I am extremely excited for Image Marketing to help them achieve their vision for the future," Rufkahr said.

{samsontech.com}

PARTNERSHIP

Renkus-Heinz Partners With AMI

Renkus-Heinz has appointed AMI Music International as the company's new Brazilian distributor.



Based in Sao Paulo, AMI is one of the leading professional audio distributors and project design groups in Brazil and offers regular training seminars and technical assistance to its user base.

"We're excited to welcome AMI International into the Renkus-Heinz family, and we're confident that this is the beginning of a long and mutually supportive relationship," said Rik Kirby, Renkus-Heinz's vice president of operations. {amimusic.com.br}

TECHNOLOGY

Amped-Up iPad

K Multimedia's AmpliTube is now available for download to the iPad. The currently available iRig interface adapter and the AmpliTube combination represent the first portable multi-



touch tone-modeling solution for guitar and bass players, giving users the chance to play and practice anywhere.

Functions include a tuner, metronome and backing track player for improving guitar-playing skills. The five amp models include: clean, crunch, lead, metal and bass. The AmpliTube for the iPad is available at the iTunes store. {amplitube.com}

NAMM | BENEFITS

NAMM Members Bank In

NAMM has added new benefits for its members that will help them more efficiently and cost effectively manage their foreign currency purchases and international payments.

With the new benefits, U.S. NAMM members will receive services from Tempus, including foreign currency and international payment services; monthly currency outlook reports in euros, British pounds and Japanese yen delivered via e-mail; a Standard Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) fee of \$20 discounted to just \$10; and no locking into a set contract for any period of time with Tempus.

International NAMM members will receive services and benefits from SGM-FX, which include low or

no transfer fees; fast transfers; a proactive account manager to alert members of positive movements in the market; FX risk-management services; savings on currency purchases due to highly competitive foreign exchange rates and services; a personal NAMM account manager; no commission; online trading platforms that eliminate the issues of working in different time zones; and the ability to access the 24-hour FX market with various tools, helping members take advantage of market movements.

"In this era of competitive business practices, NAMM continues to explore programs and services to help members lower their overhead," said Melanie Ripley, associate director of membership at NAMM. {namm.org}

APPOINTMENTS**Music Inc.'s New Editor**

Katie Kailus is the new associate editor of *Music Inc.* magazine. She previously served as the editorial assistant and intern. Kailus graduated from Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, Ill., and is a self-taught guitarist and avid ice skater.

{musicincmag.com}



Katie Kailus

Tascam has named David Volpe regional sales manager for New



>>> David Volpe

England and much of the company's East Coast territories.

Crown Audio recently appointed Daniel Saenz the market

manager for installed sound.

Jeff Hawley has been named the director of **Yamaha Corp. of**

America's newly created Customer Experience Group (CEG), a strategic and tactical creative team that will implement the company's corporate marketing and advertising.

D.A.S. Audio has appointed Steve Trimble to the newly created position of Southeast regional sales manager.

CAD Audio has selected Glenn Roop as its new executive director of business development. Roop will be responsible for developing new products and marketing and sales promotions to expand the scope of existing markets.

YAMAHA | PROGRAM

Steppin' It Up

Yamaha recently announced that its Step Up to Yamaha program will begin Oct. 1 and run through Dec. 31. The initiative, which offers direct consumer rebates from Yamaha of up to \$100 and dealer bonus opportunities, is aimed at easing the financial burden on the customer when purchasing an instrument and supporting dealers in their sales efforts.

Along with the financial incentives, Yamaha will also be providing a wide range of marketing materials featuring Yamaha saxophone artist Mindi Abair. Abair's instruments of choice are the Yamaha YAS-82ZS alto saxophone and a YSS-62R curved neck soprano saxophone,

which she has been playing since she was 18. The YAS-82ZS is one of the dozens of step-up instruments included in this year's promotion.

"In today's economic environment, we feel that supporting our dealers and customers with direct rebates and turnkey promotional opportunities will help our dealers' business and provide our customers the enjoyment of playing an amazing instrument," said Kurt Witt, marketing manager for winds at Yamaha's Band and Orchestral Division.

A full list of instruments included in the promotion, along with participating dealers, can be found at stepuptoyamaha.com.

yamaha.com



Mindi Abair

A large, detailed image of an Austin acoustic guitar, showing its light-colored wood body, dark fretboard, and sound hole.

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ALFRED | DISTRIBUTION

NEWSSTAND TO MUSIC STORE

Alfred has joined forces with the Music Magazine Publishers Association (MMPA) exclusively to distribute the complete selection of MusicMags titles to music retailers, making it easier for stores to profit from industry magazines.

"Alfred brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to this new venture that will make both music retailers and magazine publishers more

profitable and successful with magazine sales, while making transactions between the parties more manageable and enjoyable," said Bob Durkee, Alfred's director of distribution.

MusicMags exclusively supplies a selection of more than two dozen music magazines including *Guitar World*, *Guitar Player*, *Bass Player*, *Acoustic Guitar* and *Sound On Sound*. {alfred.com}

AWARDS

SUPPLIERS AND ORGANIZATIONS RECOGNIZE INDUSTRY PEERS AND AWARD NEW TALENT.



A-T PRESENTS PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Audio-Technica presented Pine City, N.Y.-based Ark Productions & Marketing with its President's Award at a ceremony held during InfoComm Expo on June 9 in Las Vegas.

Tim Chamberlain, Ark Productions & Marketing principal, accepted the President's Award, which recognizes a manufacturer's representative for outstanding commitment and dedication during the Audio-Technica 2009-2010 fiscal year. The firm sells Audio-Technica professional products to retailers and sound contractors in upstate New York.

{audio-technica.com}

Adams Musical Instruments

President Frans Swinkels received the The King William I Award in the small business category from the Dutch Crown Prince Willem-Alexander at the Royal Theatre in The Hague, Netherlands, on June 25.

API recently named the six winners of its 2010 Visionary Scholarship: Taylor Bray, Jay Yaskin, Chris Conover, Jacob Rosse, Hanna Stenson and Benjamin Poff. The scholarship promotes creativity and excellence among young sound engineers.

Chauvet's second annual DJ Product Review Contest had two winners. DJ Wicked Jester and DJ Omega80 were named grand-prize winners and official YouTube product reviewers for the company in the coming year.

Gretsch's Fred and Dinah Gretsch were presented with a commissioned portrait by the Savannah Folk Music Society on July 2 in Savannah, Ga.

A large, gold-colored saxophone is the central focus of the advertisement. To its right, a silver flute is shown horizontally. The background is white with a pattern of small yellow dots.

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Larry Fine, author of *The Piano Book*, has recently introduced a new publication, *Acoustic & Digital Piano Buyer*. This **free online** resource is used by tens of thousands of active piano shoppers annually to research for an **imminent piano purchase**. The **Local Market Offers Program** is designed to guide these highly motivated shoppers into their local piano dealerships by **matching readers' zip codes with dealers' market territories**. Visit the program's website, www.PianoBuyerDeals.com, for details.

- Targets serious piano shoppers more precisely than any other method
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IDEAS

>>> **Inside IDEAS**

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

Trying to motivate staff with old-school carrot-on-a-stick incentives simply doesn't work. According to a study by author Daniel Pink in *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, bonus commissions can actually incentivize poor performance. I can't say I disagree. Bonus commissions cause friction in team settings, where sales staff depend on one another's cooperation and support. If salespeople stop getting extra remuneration, they can also become lethargic. And "What's in this for me?" is a poor attitude to have while helping customers with their big-picture needs.

Pink's premise, based on some compelling studies, is that workers need to make enough to live on, but once rewards are based on additional incentives, they can actually be counterproductive. Have you seen staff fight over commissions? Ignore basic responsibilities in a selfish pursuit of extra money? Blow a sale because commission addiction prompted them to oversell to an apprehensive customer?

Me, too.



AUTONOMY

Pink exposes three motivators that are greater than monetary enticement: *autonomy*, *mastery* and *purpose*. The first, *autonomy*, is an often unrecognized compulsion that offers powerful self-drive. This concept holds that employees need to "own" a part of the operation, be it a simple store-improvement task, elements of a marketing drive or a protocol decision.

Do your employees believe they have a say in setting policies that better serve your customers? After all, they're the ones in the trenches, and they'll know firsthand when a policy can conflict with customers'

best interests. Do employees get to suggest product display efficiencies? Sometimes, a little uninhibited creativity can give your showroom pizzazz. We had a "Good Housekeeping" promotion for instrument care accessories, and one staff member suggested dangling mops and cleaning supplies from fishing line above the shelves. He and others are now empowered to suggest outlandish but effective display ideas.

We have regular meetings on what's working and what's hampering our instrument rental program. I can't tell you the number of powerful tweaks our people have come up with to make the program more efficient and customer-friendly. Again, they're the ones in battle.

MASTERY

Mastery should be an easy one for music store employees to understand. From the day they started on their first instruments, the drive to get better made them dig from within. These people know firsthand the rewards of practice and perfecting performance skills, and it should be no different on your sales floor.

When you hire right, you

get people who *want* to be good at their jobs, and that sense of personal satisfaction is a massive motivational force. How many of them play in bands or situations where they work nearly for free but can't wait to leave work to get to the gig? It's not about money. It's about doing something well — and for fun. Their work life should have the same goals.

PURPOSE

Purpose is the third motivator, and the world is full of examples. Look at Wikipedia, and compare it to Microsoft's failed Encarta encyclopedia. Who would have thought that, after a decade of huge financial investment in the latter, the world's most popular research body would've been done with volunteer labor? Humans have a strong drive for meaning and to leave a mark on the world. Staff who believe they're creating musicians through your store have a good reason to get out of bed in the morning.

It's not just about the wage. It's about significance. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 30-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Treating Staff Infections

You may have terrific employees and customers, but every once in a while, a store experiences staff infection. Serious staff infection starts when employees begin showing up late for work and stop caring about performance or appearance. This is accompanied by a sudden or unexplained inability to work with fellow employees, management and customers, as well as displays of poor judgment. The symptoms are hard to treat once it sets in, and the condition can worsen quickly and spread to others.



BEWARE OF EARLY SYMPTOMS

The common staff infection can exhibit a wide range of traits. In most cases, it's visible in small traces, such as an employee saying, "Today is laundry day, and I don't have a clean company shirt to wear," or "My guitar is in the back of my girlfriend's car, so I need to borrow a guitar from your inventory to teach my lessons."

Beware of these "once in a while" instances because they can signal the start of a trend that infects other employees and teachers. Then, those people will start saying, "If Steve gets to wear whatever shirt he wants, why do I have to wear a uniform every day?" You can stop this affliction from spreading to the entire staff by identifying and treating it early. Prompt treatment, in fact, is necessary because staff infection can turn into a staff epidemic.

Often misdiagnosed in younger employees or mistaken for a lack of

training or experience, staff infections can be caused by a variety of sources, including, but not limited to, job burnout, drug or alcohol abuse, a change in marital status, death of a spouse, and any number of outside influences that you can't predict or change. In some cases, staff infection is contracted at another company that had poor procedures. These are things that will

surface down the road as the employee serves at your company for longer periods of time.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Managers sometimes go overboard by placing tough rules and expectations on staff when treating this condition. This is not always the most effective treatment option. If, on occasion, one of my employees shows up wearing something other than the standard-issue company shirt,

we don't treat it as a big deal, as long as the clothes are workplace-appropriate. In many cases, simply taking an employee aside and addressing the issue directly is sufficient.

I've found that being direct at the time of hire is an effective pretreatment method. Lay out your expectations for every employee in writing — no exceptions. At my dealership, we have a detailed employee manual that works well, but you can also get away with a basic overview of your expectations.

Set a regular date and time for employee reviews, so you can meet with each person and review his or her work, discuss expectations, and consider solutions. Reviews are also a good time to treat any problems that might be lurking beneath the surface. Many potential staff infections in my business have been warded off with a private meeting.

You may never have to treat staff infection, especially if you run a business with a fun atmosphere where people have latitude and get positive reinforcement. After all, when you're accessible and visible in your workplace and have a clean, positive environment, you will attract clean, positive, honest, hard-working employees. **MI**

Billy Cuthrell operates Progressive Music Center and askourmusicians.com. Contact him at billy@ppdsonline.com.

Watch employee behavior for early warning signs, and take preventative action before it spreads

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LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLUM

Customers for Life?

I have a little exercise I'd like you to try. Close your eyes, and think of your five best customers. Got 'em? OK, now, when did you last see them or talk with them? I'm going to guess it was sometime recently. If you're pretty good at sales, you may very well know most of what they own, what they're thinking of buying next, their birthdays — maybe even the names of their bands, spouses and children.

What do these top clients think of you and your company? If you're like most sales folks, you are probably hard-wired to reason that they obviously love you since they buy so much. I'm guessing you feel quite certain that they're devoted to you and that you are their exclusive music store for life. After all, look at how much they've spent and how often they frequent your establishment.

This line of logic represents the salesperson in you selling yourself. Don't be fooled.

RUDE AWAKENING

When I closed my retail store, I decided to conduct something of a lengthy postmortem to evaluate what I could have done better and what decisions might have led to a different outcome. I figured, if nothing else, these lessons would help me hone my business skills.

One of the things I did was review my company's top 200 clients and how recently they had shopped at my dealership.

You can imagine my shock when I discovered that 75 percent of them hadn't made a significant purchase in the past five years.

Admittedly, the stuff sold in our stores today often costs less than what we sold five years ago. That tends to skew the numbers, so older customers appear to have purchased more. But 75 percent! It was a rude awakening that demonstrated what a poor job I'd

done helping my staff nurture those all-important customer relationships.

Finding my own personal clients on the list also gave me the opportunity to study what I'd done wrong. Here's one case in point: I had a client who was a certifiable equipment junkie. If it was new, he had to have it. If it was cool, he wouldn't rest until it was in his rack. Over a period of about 10 years, he spent an obscene amount of money with me. He always followed my advice. That is until he stopped showing up.

If you'd asked me back then if I had a relationship with this person, I

would have certainly said "yes." In reality, there was no relationship, evidenced by his disappearance years ago and my failure to realize it. At best, I was his gear pimp.

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

Sales are based on relationships, and relationships should be two-sided affairs. Your clients, when treated well, will feel a natural affinity for you and the products or services you sell. You need to reciprocate by letting yourself become genuinely involved in those things that they hold dear. You need to gather reams of information that will help you in each successive conversation. And unless you have super-human recall, you need to develop a system to store and retrieve all the information you've gleaned.

In return, you'll receive their payments, loyalty and maybe even admiration. A relationship lasts as long as you continue to invest in it. As soon as you stop, it's in peril. No amount of previous effort will secure your most valued customers. The only way to do that is to earn their trust over and over again. It's this tireless and consistent effort that will earn you customers for life. **MI**

Gerson Rosenbloom is managing director of Wechter Guitars. He's former president of Medley Music and a past NAMM chairman. E-mail him at gersonmusicinc@gmail.com.



'Seventy-five percent of my top 200 customers hadn't made a significant purchase in the past five years.'

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DOES LOOKING AT YOUR HEALTH CARE COSTS MAKE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE? JOIN THE CLUB

By Greg Billings

How often do you get good news from your health insurance agent? A few months ago, ours happily announced our premiums would only go up 2.1 percent this year. The top of the renewal form featured a highlight: Health costs in our county had gone up 9.2 percent. Demographic changes in our group reduced our exposure by 7.1 percent.

Before you ask for his e-mail address, you'll want to hear the rest of the story.

The renewal document included a little footnote indicating our current program had been discontinued. The new product featured higher copays and dramatically higher deductibles. The renewal didn't disclose that a comparable policy would actually be 42-percent more expensive. This followed a 28-percent bump the year before. Parsing the numbers revealed that the insurance company was using a not-too-clever ruse to disguise a huge reduction in coverage.

The premium increase — and isn't it interesting they call the fee a "premium" — doesn't appear to be a direct consequence of increased cost of care. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, in fact, pegged medical inflation at just 3.2 percent last year.



Insurance companies operate on the same mathematical basis as Las Vegas casinos. With state regulators' help, they set rates, and the odds always favor the house. Health insurers collect money from patients and pay it to providers, the same way casinos collect money from losers and pay it to winners. By government mandate, health insurers get to keep a few points as profit. Their profit is essentially guaranteed, so they have no incentive to reduce costs (or bets) because, in the long run, the bigger the bill, the higher their profits. Other ways for them to profit include denying coverage and increasing the portion customers pay through deductibles and copays.

Providing health care remains a pervasive problem for most employers, and it's not just about the money. Music retailers I spoke with are sincerely interested in taking care of their employees and accept that health care is a reasonable component of compensation.

Menzie Pittman, founder of Contemporary Music Center, which has two locations in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., also saw health insurance costs jump last year.

"When the price of something goes up 34 percent, you expect an improvement in quality, but there was no change," he said. "I had to come down a tier in quality [of coverage] and increase the deductible and copay to keep the coverage affordable."

And as bad as it's been for business owners, it's been far worse for our employees and their families. Many employers have stopped paying the family portion, begun charging employees for a share of the expense or done both. Some have terminated coverage altogether. Copays and deductibles have risen dramatically, increasing employees' out-of-pocket health expenses.

The burden of health and workers' comp insurance is causing some music stores to

adopt a new business model. Ellen McDonald has structured Hartland Music Center in Hartland, Wis., as a confederation of independent contractors. Complying with all the state and federal tests and requirements hasn't been easy, but McDonald said, "If you can find good people to work as independent contractors or part-time, there are many advantages. And not having to deal with health insurance is just one of them. To pay insurance for everyone is insane. You can't afford to do it."

A NECESSITY WE CAN'T AFFORD

It used to be easy. We bought coverage for everyone. There was one rate for singles and another for families. If we weren't big enough to form a group, we could get insurance through the chamber of commerce or other industry or civic organizations. It was a significant expense but not overwhelming, and coverage was excellent. Times have changed.

First, families got rated by size, then employees got rated by age and gender — at least in Florida. Ironically, it's illegal to discriminate based on gender or age in every other area of employment, but somehow, the insurers got a free pass and created a huge disincentive to hiring young women or people over 50 — and a bigger disincentive to hiring full-time employees at all.

Over time, health insurance rates went up faster than any other cost of doing business. According to a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, between 2001 and 2007, while wages rose 19 percent and inflation went up 17 percent, premiums for family health coverage nationwide increased 78 percent. Rates have gone up even more since 2007, far outpacing increases in medical costs. In 2009, we were able to reduce almost every expense, but health insurance costs still went up nearly a third, even though we reduced coverage and instituted

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The problem we face providing care for our employees isn't only economic. It's structural. An employer-based health care system is fatally flawed and ultimately unsustainable. Employer-provided health insurance ties people, especially sick people, to their jobs, restricting mobility and inhibiting economic and personal growth. An employer who fires a nonperforming worker, who happens to have health issues, can be perceived as cruel, and COBRA forces an ongoing relationship with former employees. There are incentives for gender and age discrimination (mentioned earlier), and finally, the system gives a huge advantage to big employers who can afford human resources professionals to study, monitor and handle health care issues.

THE LITTLE GUY LOSES

There's a revealing chapter in bicyclist Lance Armstrong's book, *It's Not About The Bike*.

He describes how Mike Parnell, CEO of his sponsor Oakley, went to bat for him with a health insurance carrier that wanted to deny coverage for his pre-existing condition, cancer. Unfortunately, few of us have the clout of a CEO willing to fire his insurer or the celebrity of Armstrong when dealing with health insurance companies. Advantage: big guys!

Most of us understand the upfront issues — deductibles, copays, lifetime caps and so on. Fewer really understand what would happen if one of our employees or someone in his or her family got really sick. Given the demands of running a business, there's limited time to examine health insurance programs, which change every year. Big companies, government entities and unions have human resources departments and the means to self-insure or hire experts who can analyze policies and negotiate with insurance carriers from a position of strength.

Few of us understand what would happen if one of our employees got really sick

Small businesses are at a permanent disadvantage.

The U.S. health insurance industry is an oligopoly, with most policies underwritten by a handful of dominant players. Most parts of the country are served by only a few of them.

"We went across the board and checked comparable plans, but the only way we could cut costs was to reduce the coverage to nothing," Pittman said. "There are really only three companies, and they are in lockstep with each other. It's an area where the consumer is held hostage. I am trying to offer my employees an acceptable level of insurance, but this

year, their deductible doubled. Everybody understood that it was a function of the economy, and I could only afford to keep covering them if we made this sacrifice."

A 2002 report from the Government Accountability Office echoed Pittman's remarks, finding that the five largest carriers, when combined, represented three-quarters or more of the market in 19 states and represented more than 90 percent in seven of these states. As you might expect, the big five don't compete on price. Today, Blue Cross Blue Shield, in all its incarnations, may have 40-percent market share nationally and nearly 90 percent in some states. Would buying insurance from exchanges or across state lines really reduce costs when the sellers are the same?

IS THIS HEAVEN? NO, IT'S IOWA

While bigger — as long as you're really big — is still better, the main factor of afford-

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able health care now seems to be location. Martha Meyer, manager of benefits and payroll at West Music in Coralville, Iowa, has 140 associates in her company's plan. She reported that West's premiums increased 5 percent this year and would've been 12 percent without changes in the deductible. Over the last few years, its health insurance increases have been running only 10–12 percent. What's up in Iowa?

The Hawkeye State has some of the best health care in the nation, ranking third in the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index and barely edged out by sparsely populated North Dakota and Hawaii, which is notorious for its long-standing state-run health insurance program. Iowa also finished second in access to health resources. It has a strong state department of health and vigorous insurance regulation. (Insurance companies in Iowa can't rate for age or gender.) Iowa also has a state-run shared-risk pool for catastrophic illness, which significantly reduces the exposure of

the insurance carriers. Our home state, Florida, rates near the bottom in these indexes and has no shared-risk pool. Could it be that states with vigorous health programs and aggressive insurance regulation are a better insurance risk?

Being a big employer doesn't seem to help much in Indiana, which also fares poorly on the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. Sweetwater of Fort Wayne has 385 employees and serves as the poster child of employee benefits in the music retail industry. Along with a 401(k) plan, cafeteria, fitness center and game rooms, its associates have a menu of health insurance options, including a wellness-incentive program. Employees who enroll in a high-deductible policy with a company-funded HSA account and achieve goals related to body fat, smoking, blood pressure and cholesterol can reduce their health insurance payroll deduction to less than half the cost of co-workers who choose to not participate in the program and select conventional coverage.

"We have really pushed hard to educate our employees about wellness, and it has made a difference for us," said John Hopkins, vice president of operations. Still, Sweetwater experienced a 15-percent rise in health insurance expenses last year, and its rates have jumped as much as 30 percent in a single year.

SQUEEZING OUT SMALL BUSINESS

For nearly all music stores, and even most suppliers, employee benefit programs, such as those at Sweetwater, are impossible. Sweetwater has two human resource directors who devote 25 percent of their time to health insurance issues. West Music's Meyer said she has been spending 20 percent of her time on health insurance and expects it to consume as much as half her time eventually. Those of us with small stores, whose duties include everything from serving customers to emptying waste baskets, don't have enough time to become health insurance experts.

After presenting our new health coverage, one employee took matters into his own hands. Within a half-hour, he had a quote for a better policy through the same insurer, via AARP, at a cost less than his share of our plan. When I told my agent that my employee could buy insurance from the same provider cheaper as an individual, he wasn't surprised.

He explained, off the record, that insurance companies are pricing small groups out of the market because of exposure to pre-existing conditions. If a small business hired an employee whose spouse had cancer, there would be no way the insurer could permanently exclude them. Individual policies are based on underwriting decisions about who to accept

and what conditions to exclude. That employee qualified for an individual policy this year, but there's no guarantee it will be renewed.

With no financial benefit to having a group, we decided to offer our employees a raise sufficient to cover the costs of their individual policies. Similar to the transition from employer-funded pensions to 401(k) programs, employees are now responsible for managing their own health care policies and benefit from the cost savings. But if they get really sick, their insurance carrier can raise their rates — or just drop them.

Like the rest of the country, I watched last year's health care debate from the sidelines. I'm not very political, so I never bought into the scare tactics from the right or the rosy scenarios of the left. My wife, a lifelong nurse, assured me there wouldn't be death panels and that there are thousands of practical things that can be done to reduce health costs. I tried to tell my ideological friends this was a very serious problem for small business and more than a red/blue, right/left theoretical argument. My real-life concerns fell on deaf ears.

Unfortunately, no one I spoke with thought the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, known to many as the health care bill, is going to completely fix these problems. Meyer, who has studied the subject and attended several seminars about it, said that, while the bill was signed into law last March, the Department of Health and Human Services is still writing the regulations, so no one knows how it will evolve. Requiring coverage of pre-existing conditions and college students appears to be a step in the right direction, and enrolling young, healthy people

+ BETWEEN A ROCK & A HARD PLACE

While writing this article, I had a kidney stone too big to pass through my system. Untreated, I would have lost a kidney and might have died from an infection. Along with excruciating pain, a few thousand dollars in out-of-pocket costs and missed work, I had nearly \$50,000 in medical bills.

That's right: \$50,000 for a kidney stone, and I have a full-time nurse, my wife, who made sure I didn't have unnecessary procedures. Of course, that was the list price, and there are lower numbers for the insurer and even lower costs for Medicare or Medicaid. There are reasons why a kidney stone costs \$50,000, and physician ownership of service providers and the referral system is part of it. But that's a story for another day, and my wife, Sara, will have to write it. — G.B.

into the pool of insured is essential to the basic economics of insurance, but the small-business subsidy will be useless for most of us. Companies the size of West Music will be too big, and companies like Pittman's won't qualify.

NO PLACE FOR IDEOLOGIES

I'm no expert on health insurance or health care — I'm barely an expert at running a small music store. What I know about the subject I've learned trying to provide health care for my employees over the last 35 years. But a few things are clear. The increased cost of health insurance doesn't appear to be solely a consequence of an increase in the cost of care. There appears to be a strategy to squeeze out undesirable (i.e.

sick or potentially sick) clients. And the health insurance industry seems to be trying to break the backs of small business health insurance groups. I don't know if this is part of a grand strategy to transform their business model so they're insuring mostly healthy individuals, with a generous subsidy from the government, and leaving sick people for someone else, but it sure looks that way. And a subsidy for individual insurance policies is a major part of the new law.

"I like to be positive and think that it's going to get better, but I believe it probably will get [more expensive]," Hopkins said. "Companies that weren't doing things right may be better off or may be forced to do some things right. But

companies that were already doing things right are going to get hit negatively."

The new law also hasn't addressed the structural deficiency of an employer-based health care system or insurance carriers' anti-competitive nature. Numerous studies have concluded that Americans pay much more for health care and receive fewer benefits than other economically developed nations. And everyone knows, notwithstanding the steps taken last summer, the government is going to have to revisit health care, and it's going to have to do so sooner rather than later.

As small-business people, we are going to have to put ideology aside and confront this problem in a realistic, pragmatic way. Maybe the immediate problem

will be solved for us by insurers. The burden of providing health care for our employees, at least for those of us who are small, may soon be so overwhelming that we can no longer offer conventional group coverage. But our employees and their families are still going to get sick and occasionally suffer catastrophic illness. They're going to have to be taken care of one way or another because our businesses can't survive without them.

We're going to have to get past the debate on whether we're going to pay these costs through taxes or through tribute to oligopolies and figure out the most efficient, effective way to do it. The current system is neither efficient nor effective, and the one we appear to be facing looks downright brutal. **MI**



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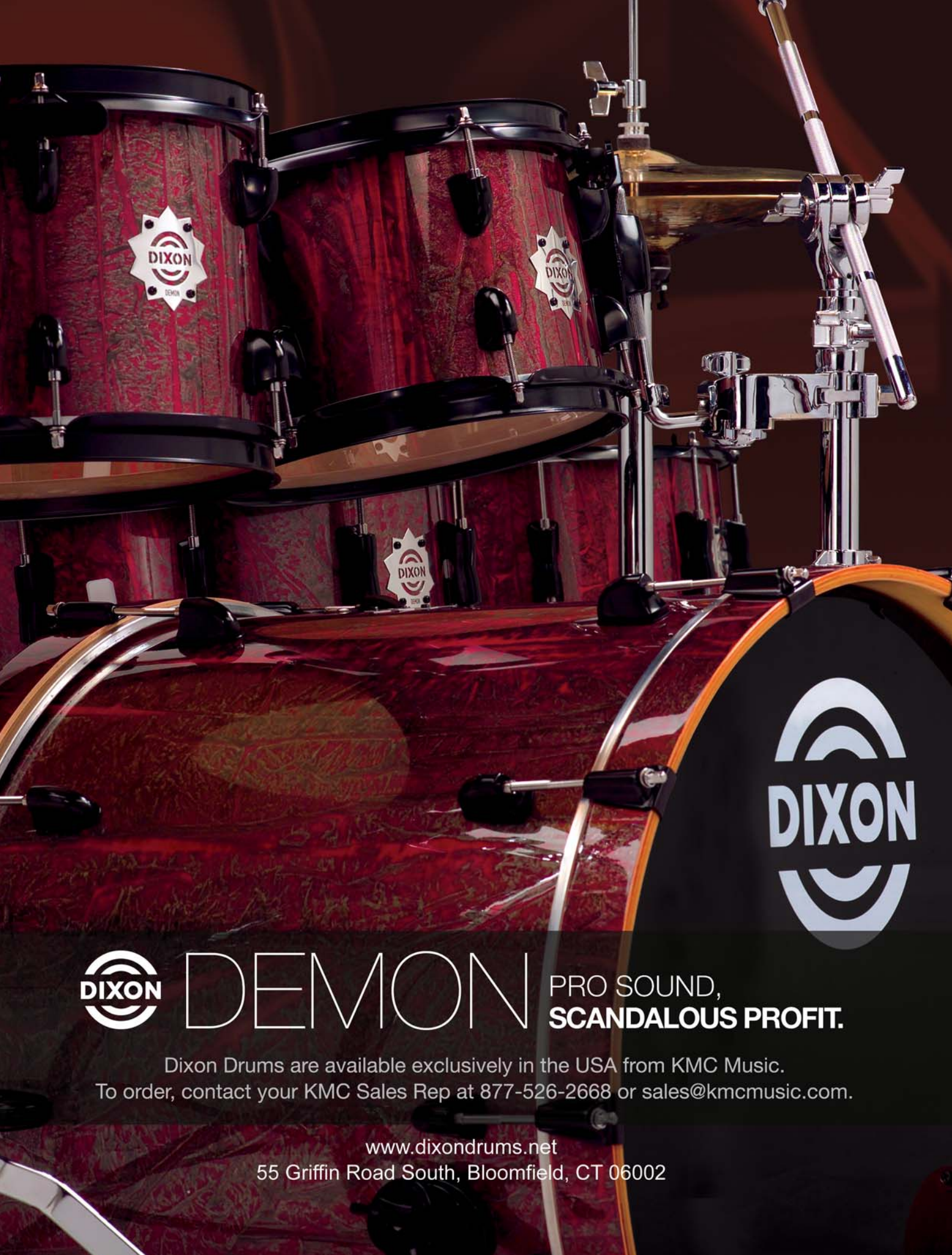
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Bradley Boynton

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WON'T TALK ABOUT
MARGINS WITH HIS
SALES STAFF AND
MAKES FRIENDS
WITH BIG-BOX
COMPETITORS.

TRADING ON TRUST

SO, AFTER
SUFFERING
THROUGH THE
GREAT RECESSION,
WHY IS HE HAVING
HIS BEST YEAR EVER?



BY JEFF CAGLE
PHOTOS BY FRITZ LIEDTKE

Bradley Boynton finished 2007 with his best year ever — only the celebration was short-lived.

New online competitors were starting to pop up in the world percussion industry, and Boynton, who owns Rhythm Traders in Portland, Ore., began losing market share. Then, in the fall of 2008, the Great Recession hit, and flat sales became declining sales. Adding insult to injury, a storm blew through the Pacific Northwest the following December, stopping retail dead in its tracks. “It was devastating,” Boynton said. He ended 2008 down 13 percent.

Then a wonderful thing happened: The real estate bub-

ble burst. His lease was up, and he found a building slated for condos selling for the land’s appraised value. With a Small Business Administration loan and the help of various local government programs, he was able to buy and renovate the space. Since then, his biggest problem has been filling it with enough inventory.

“But we have more to sell, we have room for events, and there’s local buzz about what we’re doing,” Boynton said. “And sales are catching up. We had 20-percent growth in 2009 and are on target for similar growth this year. We’re way up over our 2007 peak. We’ve laid the foundation for future growth and won’t lose our lease anytime soon. For me, it’s all about tomorrow.”

AUTHENTIC BEGINNINGS

Looking out for tomorrow was how Rhythm Traders came to be — though, at the time, Boynton was planning for a much different future. He studied drumming with Obo Addy at Portland’s Lewis & Clark College, where he graduated in 1990 with a bachelor’s in anthropology. The following year, he worked as a security guard in Amsterdam, got Malaria in Hungary, emergency landed during a sandstorm in Nigeria and lived with Fulani nomads in Ghana. It was there that he won an apprenticeship with a group of drum makers. All they asked for in return was a handful of kola nuts and a truck battery, so they could listen to music in their workshop.

“I figured I should do field

research in Africa to see if it was a good match,” Boynton said. “In Ghana, I set up a bunch of mini-internships to learn more about music and drumming.”

Near the end of the apprenticeship, the drum makers asked Boynton if he’d market their drums in the United States. He explained he’d come from a family of teachers, social workers and musicians and had no sales experience. They came back with a proposal that changed his life: They’d give him a dozen drums. If he sold them, he was to send back half the money for another dozen. If he failed, they were content knowing that he’d tried.

“The next day, after harvesting cassava in the morning, carving drums in the afternoon and playing for a wake-keeping

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that night, I looked at myself and realized that I was already doing what I wanted to do,” Boynton said. “And I was doing it without a Ph.D. behind my name.”

MAINTAINING MARGINS

Eighteen years later, Boynton credited his success in the Portland market to being highly specialized while offering a one-stop shopping experience for drummers.

“It used to be that drum stores didn’t do much other than drum sets,” he said. “And the hand drums were found at gift or incense shops, CDs were found at record stores, and books were found at sheet music stores. I’ve tried to look at the entire picture from a drummer’s perspective to have everything under one roof. Yet I don’t have a single set of guitar strings in my shop, and that’s great because I can send [customers] down to Portland Music and support what they do. Eighteen years into this, it seems to be working.”

The Internet has forced him to compete harder for business he once took for granted. Still, Boynton said he believes it has also opened the door for specialty stores to better broadcast their niche — to the point that big-boxes will send customers to Rhythm Traders for its deep selection. To keep those customers coming back, the store stocks everyday odds and ends drummers can easily find on the Internet. And to keep margins up, Boynton has a strategy that he admitted might be outside some retailers’ comfort zone.

“I buy a China container twice a year with generic high-use parts: snare wires, hardware, bags, thrones, clamps, felts, tension rods, egg shakes — stuff like that,” he said. “It has high margin, which helps offset the increased exposure of importation and the inventory dollars that are tied up for six to nine months. Still, it has helped my overall margin up to where I can price match nationally when necessary and still have products that are uniquely my own.”

“We try to assemble everything drummers need under one roof. So as they’re at home contemplating their dream setup, we try to have the pieces of their puzzle to make it a reality. To bring them back often, it can be something as small as a pair of foam ear plugs or the latest drum magazine.”

THE PERCUSSION LAB

The company also generates return customers by trading on an atmosphere of discovery. Boynton likened his store to a laboratory. Product is taken out of boxes and set up, and customers don’t have to ask to try it.

“It’s great to have overstock in neat little rows on your slatwall, but you’ll sell

more if there’s a model out to play,” he said. “There are other parameters besides price that will sell a product, such as weight, pitch, volume, texture, sustain and ergonomics, which are all important to the drummer. It has got to be out of the box to gauge all those things. How else can a percussionist decide if a tambourine is too heavy or the edges on a cajon too sharp? If

The advertisement features a collection of REMO drums and tambourines arranged on a light-colored wooden surface. At the top left is the REMO logo with the website remo.com. Below it, two large, oval-shaped wooden drums are shown, labeled "TAR". In the center, a black-headed drum is labeled "Irish Bodhran". To its right is a photo of Randy Gloss, a man in a black shirt, holding a tambourine. Below the photo is a starburst graphic that reads "NAMM University BEST SHOW Summer NAMM". To the left of the photo are two more drums: a smaller one labeled "Kanjira" and a larger one labeled "Capoeira Pandeiro". At the bottom left is another drum labeled "Choro Pandeiro". At the bottom, a banner reads "Professional Sound Quality - Superior Construction Design - Affordable Prices".

they can't discover [in] your shop or are afraid to open a beautifully packaged item or feel like they're in a museum, they won't be back. If we approach it from their perspective as a musician, our products can come alive to them."

Another simple but often overlooked way to make instruments come alive, according to Boynton, is to tune them. He said it's the quickest, cheapest thing retailers can do to move drums, yet he continues to be amazed by the number of stores that sell untuned djembes and tablas.

"A brick-and-mortar shop shouldn't sell an instrument they can't tune, demonstrate or give a brief overview on," Boynton said. "Sure, it takes time to tune the instrument. But you wouldn't think of putting a guitar on the floor that hasn't been tuned out of the box, so why should drums be any different? I had to teach myself to tune a djembe, play a berimbau and turn the knobs on a Roland TD-20. I'm still weak on didgeridoo and afraid of pandeiros. But this is my job. Customer loyalty is created when they see that you take pride in what you do. They trust in your product knowledge, and that creates good will."

SMALL IS AGILE

When CD sales tanked a couple of years ago, Boynton trimmed his CD inventory by 75 percent. When the 2008 recession hit, customers began foregoing big-ticket items in favor of purchasing accessories and repairing existing gear. So, he immediately doubled up on his parts wall and small goods. After Rhythm Traders' 2009 expansion, he sought to take advantage of Oregonians' penchant for shop-



ping local. In no uncertain terms, Boynton sees advantages in being small and adaptable.

"We've pulled back from national advertising, such as Google's AdWords, and shifted the ad dollars and staff hours to doing local events, partnerships with local organizations and promotions," he said. "This plays to our strengths since there's no sales tax in Oregon, and that draws customers in from out of state. We keep hammering away at what only a brick-and-mortar shop can provide, such as assembly, lessons, a partner when dealing with warranty issues, product knowledge and the trust they have in us as their neighborhood shop."

This also entails buying what's best for the customer, not just the fastest turners and biggest-margin cash cows. Still, Boynton will often remind his clients that he can order most anything they need. And he's always on the lookout for deals.

"I'm a sucker for bargains, and I'm willing to buy in quantities and hold it," Boynton said. "I get calls from suppliers who have a discontinued finish who want to move it quickly to someone who can make the decision right then and there."

"I just bought 13 brand-

name kits with hardware for \$100 apiece with a 5-percent freight cap, which brought them to my doorstep for \$105 each, just because I answered my phone. Even sweeter, no one in town has the same one, and there's no MAP [minimum advertised price] because it's discontinued. Small is agile."

THE CUSTOMER ADVOCATE

Another way Boynton and his staff build trust and establish customer loyalty is by serving as an information filter.

"As retailers, we are the filter for all they see online, and we can point out features and tell the customer why what we have is the best value with the best functionality for them," Boynton said. "You have to road-test what you sell and know about the products your competition has. This can be overwhelming, and it changes every time there's a new product, price increase or backorder. An easy way is to go category by category and come up with a favorite and know why."

"Drummers can spot a phony in a second. Trust here is imperative, and that means that at Rhythm Traders this process is guided not by my margin or which supplier

we're cozy with but by what is best for the customer. I specifically don't tell my staff my margin on products, so they will educate and advocate for the customer."

As much as his Portland-area customers are front-of-mind, Boynton hasn't forgotten Rhythm Traders' roots, and he does all he can to show his appreciation. This includes support for West Africa — getting tools to carvers, buying costumes for dance ensembles, paying hospital bills, even purchasing a motorcycle for a village that needed it, according to Boynton. "We've paid for weddings, and we've paid for funerals."

"It has always been my philosophy that it's not enough just to sell a drum," he said. "We should all know about the culture it comes from, the people who made it, how to repair and play it. The key for us is supporting the artists who come from those traditions. I owe it to my customers to know about the instruments I sell. On a very basic level, my job is to turn people on to music and to give them the tools to make it. Everything I do needs to support that mission, and if it doesn't, I won't do it." **MI**



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Wes Faulconer

NEW PLAYERS HAVE CRASHED THE HISTORICALLY CLOSED-OFF CYMBAL INDUSTRY. HERE'S WHAT IT MEANS AT RETAIL

Dennis Ricci estimated 15 percent of his cymbal sales are now with Stagg.

"Stagg has been my home run hitter for the last year or so," said Ricci, owner of The Original Long Island Drum Center in Plainview, N.Y. "Its product is remarkable."

Stagg's success would be a non-story in most any other industry. But in the closed-off cymbal market, it's symbolic of a major shift. Once dominated by just three major players — Zildjian, Sabian and Paiste — the cymbal industry has blown up over the past five years with new importers and rising stars, such as Stagg, which manufactures its product in China.

"It happened with the drum [brands] 10 years ago," Ricci said. "These companies came in with lower pricing and quality product, and it's continuing now with cymbals."

THE NEW MARKETPLACE

Eager Turkish builders and inexpensive Asian manufacturing are driving the trend, resulting in such up-and-coming brands as Stagg, TRX and Dream Cymbals. Also, some companies, namely Meinl, have grown by marketing to more specialized niches and aggressively publicizing their artist rosters.

"At one point, the cymbal industry looked and acted monopolistic; those days are gone," said Dan Barker, president and CEO of EMD Music, which distributes Stagg.

One cymbal industry veteran estimated that these alternative brands make up only 10 percent of the marketplace. Wes Faulconer, owner of Explorers Percussion in Kansas City, Mo., guessed they add up to roughly 15 percent of his total cymbal sales. That said, he deemed this significant considering how long the market had been dominated by three companies.

"I remember going to NAMM shows, and there'd be a lot of these cymbal companies downstairs [in Hall E]," Faulconer said. "Now, they're not downstairs — they're upstairs. And I heard there's going to be more coming next year. I saw at least four new companies at The NAMM Show in January."

Consumers' lust for personalization might also be playing a part in this development. "Like any instrument, each player has a personal sound — their touch — so that they get not only that tone they desire but so that their playing sounds like them — a signature sound," said Soultone Cymbals Public Relations and Marketing Coordinator Daniel East. "Having options allows every drummer to discover their personal preference."

'CYMBALS ARE MOVING'

Faulconer admitted the marketplace is starting to get crowded, and finding shelf space for new models within his store has become a headache. Michael Vosbein, president of Bosphorus Cymbals USA, even said small, non-drum retailers "don't need alternative brands" at all. But, he added, these brands can be critical for drum specialty retailers looking to differentiate themselves.

"Full-service drum shops and stores with dedicated percussion departments who want to appeal to serious students, baby boomer amateurs and working pros need to offer something different other than the big three or risk losing out to stores that do," he said.

Some full-line retailers, including *Music Inc.* columnist and Alta Loma Music owner Pete Gamber, have turned to lesser-known brands. Gamber, who has two locations in Southern California, praised China-made Stagg and Dream Cymbals for their high quality and customer service. He uses Dream for his music education events, including back-

+ ALTERNATIVE CYMBALS

STAGG EX SERIES

This company has gained a reputation for producing high-quality, low-priced product. Dan Barker of EMD Music, Stagg's U.S. distributor, said EX cymbals are the first models from China that are made from 92-percent copper and 8-percent tin alloy. staggmusic.com



SOULTONE OLD SCHOOL EDITION

Based upon the classic dry sounds from the 1950s and '60s, these models feature a rich, dark tone, as well as the EarthStroke natural finish with deeper lathing, giving them a sweeter open sound. soultonecymbals.com

TRX LTD SERIES

These heavyweight, handcrafted crash-rides and hi-hats have a three-zone design for a brighter, more explosive crash and well-defined ride and bell sounds. They're designed for a variety of playing situations. MSRP: \$350–\$550. trxcymbals.com



BOSPHORUS MASTER VINTAGE RIDES

Bosphorus' Michael Vosbein said these completely hand-made models are "off-the-hook," in terms of their popularity. The rides boast a dry, dark fundamental with precise articulation and a played-in feel. bosporuscymbals.com

AMEDIA AHMET LEGEND SERIES

The company's flagship cymbal is ideal for jazz or funk with its medium-dark, full-bodied sound. It's extensively lathed and hammered for a medium wash and performs well in big band and small group settings. amediacymbals-usa.com



DREAM BLISS SERIES

These hand-hammered models are the company's flagship product and designed for most musical styles. They feature a warm, rich undertone and low, dark pitch range. Wes Faulconer of Explorers Percussion said they're among the best-sellers at his dealership. dreamcymbals.com

+ THE NO. 4

MEINL GENERATION X FILTER CHINA

During the past five years, Meinl has established itself as a major player in the cymbal market. This Gen-X model is one of the reasons why. It bursts with an explosive attack and decays quickly via the waved edge. meinlcymbals.com



lines at jazz festivals and student showcases.

"The price point and the quality make them work — and cymbals are moving right now," Gamber said.

That price point often includes a generous margin, too. "Even if only 5 percent of a store's cymbal business is in a boutique line, that could be an extremely profitable 5 percent compared to their profit margins on the standard brands," said David Levine, TRX's marketing consultant.

MEINL RISING

As Ray Fransen, owner of Ray Fransen's Drum Center in Kenner, La., pointed out, some alternative cymbal lines "are not so alternative" anymore.



Dennis Ricci

"Meinl, Dream and Wuhan's S series are actually being requested by name," he said. "Meinl, in particular, is sought after by many different types of players."

That wasn't the case five

years ago. At that time, Meinl had little more than a tiny footprint in the U.S. cymbal market. Nowadays, the company's bronze is being asked for so often that most retailers no longer speak of the cymbal

market as the "big three" but the "big four."

"Meinl Cymbals has grown by 10 times," said Meinl President Mitch McMichen, comparing the company's 2005 sales figures to 2009's. "2010 is going even better than 2009, so this year will be another year of huge increases."

"Meinl has found a niche with both jazz players and the contemporary/alternative crowd," Fransen said.

Other cymbal brands are competing for market share by pitching quality, offering competitive dealer programs and promoting aggressively. Dream, for instance, has rolled out the Cymbal Tasting Event series. Participating retailers get to borrow 100 of the company's cymbals for a week, so cus-



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tomers can try from the full range. Dream also runs ads in conjunction with the events. Faulconer said these ads have generated interest in his market. “They’ve had people asking for their product over the past couple of years,” he said.

TRX, which builds its cymbals in Turkey, lets customers purchase replacement models for half of what they’d originally paid when a model wears out from heavy use.

And Bosphorus, also a Turkish cymbal maker, has partnered with Shopatron to steer its Web site visitors to local dealers who carry its inventory.

“In fact, we’re seeing an increase in online ordering because drummers can sometimes find it difficult to find significant Bosphorus inven-

tory locally,” Vosbein said.

East at Soultone stressed his company’s “zero-tolerance quality control” and Turkish manufacturing as key selling points. Dominick Gagliano, owner of Amedia Cymbals, said he pitches his company’s quality and “higher-than-normal” profit margins.

BIG NAMES COMPETE

John Sorenson, marketing director for Zildjian, is unfazed by all the newcomers. His company continues to enjoy dominant market share in the cymbal industry.

“From our perspective, a major cymbal company is one that demonstrates sustained and significant sales for at least five years in all the major consumer markets around the

‘At one point, the cymbal industry looked and acted monopolistic; those days are gone.’

— Dan Barker

globe,” Sorenson said. “Given this definition, the landscape has not changed much.”

Andy Zildjian, president of Sabian, said his company is competing with its world-class customer service and the highest-quality product available. He added that quality remains an issue with many cymbals made in China.

“Copying an electronic circuit is something that can be done in a measurable way,” he said. “It works or it doesn’t. Making an instrument like a cymbal is a skilled craft and something that cannot be commoditized.

“We do research on a daily basis to find out what is needed in cymbal sounds. That research means that whatever we make is being asked for in the drumming community. I think those things are what make Sabian different from all other companies.”

But Gagliano stressed that more companies only strengthen the market.

“It’s ultimately good for the industry,” he said. “It keeps everyone on their toes and from becoming complacent.” **MI**

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DRUM TRENDS | BY KATIE KAILUS

DRUM DVD DOMINATION

Print music giant Alfred Music Publishing deals in everything from piano methods to portable recorders. And yet Daniel Frohnen singled out drum DVDs as one of the company's best-performing product categories.

"We continue to see growth in this area year after year," said Frohnen, the company's director of marketing, trade and digital.

Rob Wallis, who has produced more than 400 drum videos and DVDs, agreed, adding that drum instruction translates well to the video format, as drums are visual instruments.

"Drum DVDs seem to be the largest-selling instrument group and have been for a long time," said Wallis, co-president of Hudson Music. "I think because drums are so visual, you can learn a lot by watching."

Most retailers have gotten the memo. At the recent Summer NAMM, for instance, drum DVDs got a "Best in Show" nod. And while a DVD can't replace private or group lessons with a live instructor, drum videos prove to be a good alternative. Unlike other instruments, drum surfaces are large and easy to view on a screen.

"Drums are a physical instrument that incorporate every part of the body," said David Jahnke, Hal Leonard's vice president of national sales. "There are some topics, styles and grooves that are difficult to transcribe and explain



in a book. It's easier to learn by watching a DVD. That gives you a strong base for a market category when you consider that for still only \$20–\$40 you can learn from performers like Steve Smith, Chad Smith, Neil Peart, JoJo Mayer, Jason Bittner and Tommy Igoe."

ADD-ON GENERATOR

Because of instructional drum DVDs' relevance, they're an ideal add-on — and add-on generator — for music retailers.

"We've sold some accessories that these guys use in their videos," said Derek Sharp, owner of Supersonic Music and TreeHouse Drums in Topeka, Kan. "From time to time, we offer a discount off the video if

you buy the accessory, brand of cymbal or kind of brush that the artist uses in the video."

Sharp also requires his staff to watch all of his DVDs, so they can speak knowledgeably about each title. His store often displays the product

next to the checkout counter.

"We have all watched them, so we can talk about that random five-minute segment in some three-hour video that shows something a customer wants to know more about," Sharp said.

Stephen Rupp, co-owner of Columbus Pro Percussion, a drum specialty shop in Columbus, Ohio, has also noticed a rise in DVD sales and looks to them to increase revenue.

"We do well in DVD sales," Rupp said. "They can help generate some excitement in our customers that may turn into larger sales."

The instructional drum DVD customer can be nearly any drummer at any level, adding to the growth of the category. Beginning and advanced players alike can benefit from the DVDs.

"Customers can be professional players who want to work on a particular style of drumming [or can be] the semi-pro; weekend warrior player; hobbyist; or any musician, writer or arranger who needs to understand how to communicate their ideas to drummers," Frohnen said.

As far as sure-fire add-ons go, Lorene Faulconer of Explorers Percussion in Kansas City, Mo., singled out JoJo Mayer DVDs and Tommy Igoe's *Getting Started On Drums* as steady sellers.

"JoJo Mayer consistently sells well," Faulconer said. "Steve Smith, Neil Peart and Tommy Igoe's DVDs also always do well." **MI**

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RHYTHM TECH | BY JENNY DOMINE

FATHER OF INVENTION

Richard Taninbaum has been attending NAMM conventions since he was a kid, but he had no intention of going into business.

Instead, Taninbaum, son of reed and mouthpiece maker Wolfe Taninbaum, became a session drummer, working the New York studio scene in the 1970s. It was during this time that Taninbaum developed the idea for a crescent-shaped tambourine design after playing an exhaustive 15-minute take with the traditional, full-sized percussive instrument. He founded Rhythm Tech in 1980, joining the music products industry family with plenty of business connections to support his new venture.

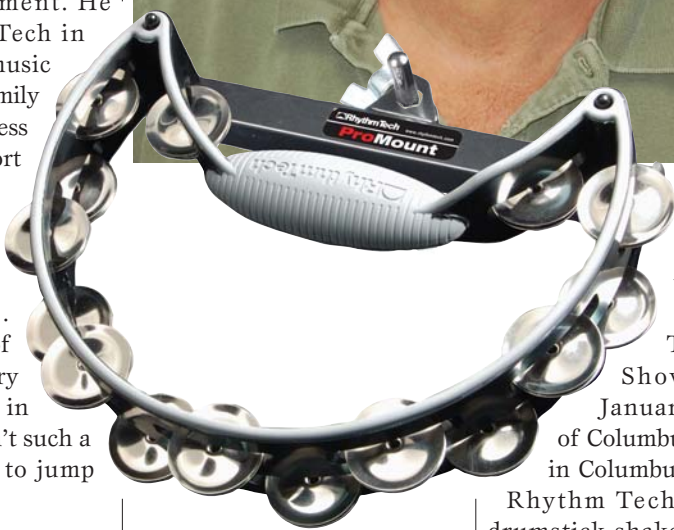
"It was one of those things where life takes you," Taninbaum said. "Given my history of knowing the industry and a lot of players in the industry, it wasn't such a scary thing for me to jump in."

INDIE ALLEGIANCES

After 30 years, Rhythm Tech has developed a range of unique percussive instruments, including the Trigger Triangle, EGGZ and Canz. Taninbaum acknowledged independent music retailers as key in making those products a success.

"Given the background of the company, we do have an allegiance to the small dealer," Taninbaum said. "And I still

Richard Taninbaum



**Rhythm
Tech's Richard
Taninbaum
pushes
percussive
conventions**

believe firmly that the guy behind the counter is your strongest ally. You have to support that."

HITTING ON INSPIRATION

Taninbaum said he doesn't take a formulaic approach to developing new products, and he doesn't believe in lightning-bolt inspiration either.

"We are in a genre of instruments that has a deep tradition," he said. "We make an active effort not to be confined by it and try to look at all these things as sound sources. Maybe there is a better way to do it and not be so channeled by strictly the tradition."

The crescent-moon tambourine design was so new for its time that, shortly after developing it, Taninbaum was approached by the Museum of Modern Art in New York for permission to add the unique instrument to its rotating Architecture and Design Galleries installation.

This year, the iconic tambourine is back on display as part of the exhibition "Shaping Modernity: Design 1880–1980."

"It was a happy accident that it happened to be incorporated into this show the year we are celebrating our 30th anniversary," Taninbaum said.

Looking ahead, he's considering bringing hand percussion into the electronic realm, following the lead of many drum makers, but there's still plenty of room for innovation with "analog instruments."

"There is an immediacy to picking up and playing without being tethered to a sound system," Taninbaum said. "For the foreseeable future, we are going to keep doing what we are doing." **MI**

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NEW PRODUCTS

Pink is IN! After dozens of requests Vic Firth is now offering PINK 5A (5AP) and PINK kids stick (KIDSPINK). Specifications are at: www.vicfirth.com/products/newproducts.php

Bill Bachman “Billy Club” Tenor Sticks (SBBTS) are selling very well. The Sta-Pac(registered R) design provides maximum strength and density. Product information and “solo footage” at: www.vicfirth.com/products/bachman_billyclub.php

NEW PERFORMANCE VIDEOS

The Vic Firth artist support crew had a busy summer! DCI performances, artists on tour—catch all the new video footage of our artists at vicfirth.com. Warped Tour performances at: www.vicfirth.com/features/warped_tour2010.php, DCI “in the lot” videos at: www.vicfirth.com/features/DCI2010.php and more artist videos added weekly!

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LOS CABOS DRUMSTICKS | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

CANADA'S DRUMSTICK

In five short years, Los Cabos has gone from a newcomer to one of Canada's premier drumstick makers. The strategy? Building its business one dealership at a time.

In fact, owners Larry and Gillian Guay — a husband-and-wife team who came from the furniture industry — spent Los Cabos' early days going from store to store around Canada to pitch their wares.

"They flew to every major city in the country," said Matt Carter, director of marketing for the Fredericton, New Brunswick, company. "Like old-fashioned salesmen, they went in and said, 'This is who we are. This is what we make. Would you be interested in taking a chance with us?'"

"They bought our products not only because of the quality and workmanship but because they believed in a Canadian product," Gillian said.

The grassroots tactic secured Los Cabos roughly 350 music retailers in the Great White North, where the company continues to operate without a distributor. Nowadays, its challenge is replicating that success in the more formidable U.S. marketplace, where it competes against the likes of drumstick giants Vic Firth and Pro-Mark.

NOT JUST ANY DRUMSTICK MAKER

Carter said Los Cabos differentiates itself as the only drumstick company to offer all its models in either maple, white hickory or red hickory.

"There aren't a lot of red hickory manufacturers out there," he said. "Red hickory



Larry Guay (left) and Matt Carter

Los Cabos sets its sights on the U.S. market

has been very popular for us, especially for hard-hitters."

The company's small size has also benefitted its quality control, according to Carter. "I think the fact that our operation is relatively small compared to other stick manufacturers [makes] it easier to oversee the production and quality standards," he said. "Everything is done by hand. There are some

days that it's five hours of weighing sticks and organizing them by hand."

Plus, Los Cabos goes out of its way to be eco-friendly. It only buys Canadian wood from suppliers certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, a non-profit organization that promotes responsible management of forests. The company's facility is also heated from its own wastewood and sawdust.

"A few years ago, I got an e-mail from a drummer, and it was just a one-line sentence: What do you do to help the environment?" Larry said. "That got me thinking. So when we built the new factory, we

decided to use our wood waste to heat the plant. Now, the wood chips and wood cutoffs don't go to a landfill but keep us warm during the winter."

CUSTOMIZED PRODUCT

Los Cabos is also catering to consumers' desire for customization. In July, it debuted the Build Your Own Percussion Package Program. The initiative lets retailers create their own customized stick and mallet packages from virtually any product in Los Cabos' catalog.

"We wanted to give our retailers the ability to better cater to the needs of their specific markets by giving them access to our entire catalog of sticks and mallets in a package format," Carter said.

Each package includes a pair of sticks in any choice of wood; a main accessory, including a timpani mallet or brushes; and a secondary accessory, such as bell mallets or a pair of slapsticks.

"Say a percussion teacher or a percussion school has a curriculum that might not require bell mallets or tympani mallets," Carter said. "Maybe they need a set of 5Bs, brushes and slapsticks. Retailers know their customers better than anybody else. So if they know what their customers want, they can create custom packages for their store, for their clientele.

"We have the ability to take the time and make these individual packages. I don't know if a larger business has the ability to take something and make, say, 10 units of a specific combination." **MI**

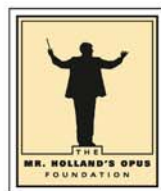
Dear

M.H.O.F., Thank you, not only for donating our instruments to us, but also for giving children like me the opportunity to learn music and develop a talent that we will keep our whole life. You give us something that will define us, make ourselves special, without you I would probably never have learned to play guitar. So
Thank you again

Sincerely yours Joseph Posey



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(Like, for instance, the above letter.)

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www.mhopus.org

GEAR



PRODUCT OF THE MONTH >

TAMA | HYPER-DRIVE

Superstar Set

Tama Drums has released 30 Superstar Hyper-Drive Limited Edition kits in a White Satin Haze finish. The seven-piece set features 100-percent hand-selected birch shells with black nickel shell hardware. It also includes a 20- by 22-inch bass drum, 6- by 8-inch and 7- by 12-inch rack toms, 12- by 14-inch and 14- by 16-inch floor toms, and a 5.5- by 14-inch snare drum.

The Superstar line features the Star-Cast mounting system, Hyper-Drive toms and Sound Bridge high-tension lugs. The kit is available as a shell kit or complete drum set.

{tama.com}



> Inside GEAR

> Drums & Percussion

Sonor celebrates 135th with new snares
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Monroe's MDM-1 packed with features
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Blue's three-mic drum-recording solution
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> Pianos & Keyboards

Yamaha's Motif XF turns ideas into reality
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> Band & Orchestra

Barcus Berry brings black back
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> Print & Multimedia

Hudson's George Kollias gets intense
[PAGE 75](#)

> DJ & Lighting

Numark builds ultra-compatible mixer
[PAGE 76](#)



LUDWIG | KEYSTONE

Keynote Keystone

Ludwig's new Keystone series drum sets feature a three-ply maple core, with a 1/16-inch inner and outer ply of American red oak. Two shell packs and four glass glitter finishes are available. MSRP: 22/16/12/10, \$2,399; 24/18/16/13, \$2,769. conn-selmer.com

MAPEX | HORIZON

On the Horizon

Mapex has released the limited-edition birch/basswood version of its Horizon drum kit. Each six-piece set features one of two transparent lacquered finishes and black hardware. All drum sets include a free 8-inch add-on tom, complete with mounting hardware. A full complement of Mapex 500 series hardware is also included. The mixed shell offers controlled sound for versatility in any setting. MSRP: \$1,249. mapexdrums.com



SONOR | ANNIVERSARY SNARES

Summer Snares

Sonor has unveiled two 135th Anniversary Summer Special snares, the Gavin Harrison and the Dave Langguth Special Edition models. Both drums feature a North American maple shell and a white sparkle finish. The Gavin Harrison model has designer-based series chrome hardware. The limited-edition snares will only be available through summer 2010. MSRP: Gavin Harrison Special Edition snare, \$1,499; Dave Langguth Special Edition snare, \$2,999. sonor.com



PROTECTION RACKET | TRIPLE AAA

Triple AAA for Drums

Protection Racket's new Triple AAA line is made up of polycarbonate frame cases. Featuring strong, lightweight advanced polymers, Protection Racket has created Triple A-Plex, a polycarbonate frame that offers resistance to impact.

Rocket Foam is used inside each AAA case to provide protection against knocks and trauma during transit. The cases are waterproof and feature an ergonomic handle.

{protectionracket.com}



REUNION BLUES | RB CONTINENTAL

RB Protection

Reunion Blues has expanded its RB Continental line with a cymbal case that combines contemporary design with protection.

The outside has a 1-inch-thick shock-absorbing Flexoskeleton exterior and is lined with reinforced impact panels. The inside features padded dividers to protect individual cymbals and a plush, quilted double helix lining.

{reunionblues.com}



SABIAN | VAULT ARTISAN CYMBALS

Old-World Feel

Sabian's Vault Artisan Traditional Suspended cymbal joins the recently released Vault Artisan Traditional hand cymbals in offering old-world sounds that feature deep tones and a robust, vintage musicality.

Available in 15- through 20-inch sizes, the cymbals are medium-thin in weight. They feature a natural finish and are constructed of B20 bronze. The sound replicates that of a century-old model that has matured through decades of playing.

{sabian.com}



LP | ASPIRE STANDS

Double Take

The new LP Aspire slide mount double conga stand is a system that lets drums be placed on a stand without the usual wing screws. Each component works in sync to stabilize two LP Aspire congas in the optimum playing position, hold them in place for the performance, and replicate the configuration over and over. The two congas rest firmly on LP shell grippers and can be sealed precisely in place with memory locks. lpmusic.com



ADAMS | WIDE-BAR 4.3

Padouk Piece

Adams Concert Percussion has launched a wide-bar marimba designed specifically for students and intermediate percussionists. The Adams Wide-Bar 4.3 Octave Concert series padouk marimba has the same features as the Concert series marimbas, including Concert series bar width, welded essential resonators, a Voyager height-adjustable frame, upgraded leg castings with large locking casters and black vinyl-covered hardwood rails.

The padouk wood bars offer a warm, woody sound. They're tuned through the sixth overtone, which offers complete control over all aspects of the marimba sound. pearldrum.com



MUSICORP | PERCUSSION PLUS

Fit for a King

Musicorp has expanded its Percussion Plus drum thrones with two new models: the 4000T and 4400T. The 4000T is a heavy-duty drum throne with a double-braced tripod base. The 4400T is a heavy-duty drum throne with a double-braced tripod base, swivel post and thick padded saddle seat with cast mount. Both thrones are height-adjustable from 18–23 inches and boast a chrome finish and durable rubber feet. MSRP: 4000T, \$109.95; 4400T, \$149.95. musicorp.com





MORGAN MONROE | MDM-1

Feature-Packed

The new MDM-1 is a distressed-finish F-style mandolin from Morgan Monroe that features a hand rubber oil finish, solid spruce top, solid flamed maple back and sides, and mahogany neck. It also has a radiused extended ebony fingerboard, gold hardware, Grover tuning keys, Ashton Bailey tailpiece, D'Addario strings and hardshell case. Plus, the MDM-1 boasts a new tone bar design that adds volume and warmth. MSRP: \$799.

{morganmonroe.com}



ORANGE AMPLIFIERS | THE OPC

Orange Computing

Orange Amplifiers has announced the final specifications and price of its all-in-one computer amplifier speaker, the OPC. The unit has been designed to deliver playing, recording, editing and computing capabilities to musicians. It comes bundled with more than \$860 of free premium, hand-picked digital recording music software. Presonus Studio Orange custom edition software is included. MSRP: \$1,499. {orangeamps.com}

VOYAGE-AIR | BELAIR

Catching Air

Limited to 250 sequentially numbered guitars, the new Voyage-Air Belair is the company's first electric guitar that folds in half for travel. It has a solid alder body, Canadian maple neck and a high-gloss TV Yellow finish. Two custom Tonerider P-90 Soapbar pickups are wired through a three-way toggle with two volume and tone controls. MSRP: \$799.

{voyageairguitars.com}



**1****2****3****4**

2 YAMAHA BROAD BASS MODELS Yamaha has released two Broad Bass models, the BB2024X four-string and the BB2025X five-string. The instruments are constructed of a three-piece alder body with spline joint and miter stringing designs. New technologies include Yamaha's proprietary Acoustic Resonance Enhancement (A.R.E.) Treatment, a wood refining and maturing process that gives new instruments a mature, vintage tone. yamaha.com

2 BIG LOU GUITARS WIDE NUT Big Lou Guitars has launched Big Lou Wide Nut guitars with extra-wide fretboards and nuts to accommodate players with bigger hands and fingers. The wider string spacing offers generous room for easier playability and accuracy. The Big Lou Wide Nut guitars feature a pinkie slot, which improves picking accuracy and provides a point of reference for the player's right hand. MSRP: \$299. biglouguitar.com

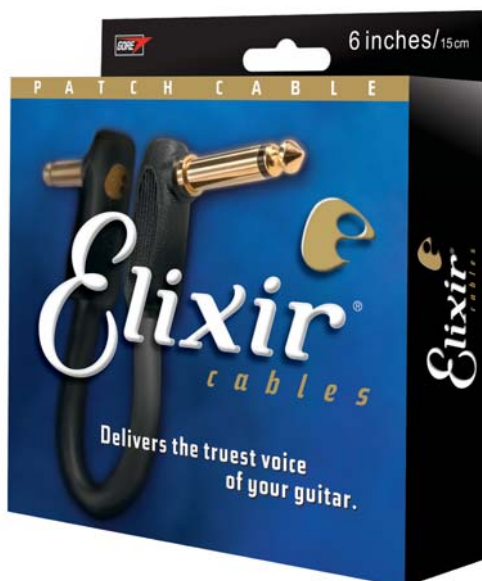
3 EASTWOOD GUITARS AIRLINE MAP Eastwood Guitars has expanded its dedication to southpaws with the release of the new left-handed Airline Map guitar and bass. Both of these models come in the retro sea foam green color. The bass is also available in black. These retro classics offer two matched Alnico Hot-10 humbuckers with three-way switching, separate volume controls and a combined tone control. eastwoodguitars.com

4 FENDER 60TH ANNIVERSARY TELECASTER To celebrate the Telecaster's 60th anniversary, the Fender Custom Shop has introduced a series of limited-edition "Tele-Bration" guitars. These are reproductions of several of Fender's most collectible historic instruments. The 60th Anniversary Limited Telecaster Proto, Broadcaster, Nocaster, Single-Pickup Esquire and Two-Pickup Esquire were released this summer. fender.com

ELIXIR | CABLES

Clean Cables

Elixir Cables' full line of instrument and patch cables provides low capacitance, minimizing tone loss from a guitar setup. The cables' dual-shield construction protects against EMI and handling noise with an abrasion-resistant jacket that provides greater cut resistance. The instrument cables are available in 10-, 15-, 20- and 30-foot lengths in either right- or straight-angle jacks. The company's recently introduced patch cables are available in 6- and 12-inch lengths with a right-angle-to-right-angle plug configuration. elixirstrings.com



AGUILAR | FILTER TWIN

Get Funky

Aguilar Amplification has launched the Filter Twin dual envelope filter. The unit uses two identical filters sweeping in opposite directions, one up and one down, while the design creates classic 1970s-inspired funk sounds and completely new and original filter tones.

The unit features a four-knob layout, blend control pans between the filters, threshold control to determine how sensitive the unit is to different playing styles, gig-saver bypass and heavy-duty steel construction. MSRP: \$199.

aguilaramp.com



T-REX | MUDHONEY, OCTAVIUS

Dino Effects

T-Rex has added to its distortion/overdrive and modulation pedal lineups with the new Mudhoney II and Octavius pedals. A second distortion channel has been added to the original Mudhoney to create the Mudhoney II. Each channel has four controls: gain, level, tone and boost. It features the same boost function as the original pedal. MSRP: \$369 each. t-rex-effects.com



GODLYKE | TAPE

Good Grip

Godlyke's new Power-All Power-Grip pedal mounting tape is ideal for mounting effect pedals securely to pedalboards. Power-Grip mates to itself via rows of small, mushroom-shaped stems that form a strong bond to one another. The backing adhesive used on Power-Grip is temperature- and weather-resistant.

MSRP: \$24.95.

{godlyke.com}

LEVY'S LEATHERS | SUBLIMATION

Sublimation Straps

Levy's Leathers recently added two more designs to its sublimation-printed guitar straps. These sublimation-printed designs are featured on 2-inch polyester webbing and come with polyester ends and tri-glide adjustment. Pictured is model MPD2 in two of the multiple new designs.

{levysleathers.com}

D'ADDARIO | THE WHO STRAPS

Who Are You?

Planet Waves has launched licensed straps featuring the artwork of The Who. Designs include The Who Bullseye and The Who British Flag. The Bullseye design includes the bull's-eye that commonly represents the band. The Who's logo adorns the strap near the end-pin hole. The British flag strap boasts black leather with the flag printed on the front.

MSRP: \$54.99.

{daddario.com}

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ROCK ON AUDIO | LIMITER & CABLE

Affordable Monitor

Rock On Audio has developed an inexpensive method of accessing an in-ear mix.

The new Rock On system features two products: the Rockbox Limiter, an in-ear monitor headphone amp with output limiting, and the Rockon Cable, an instrument cable that provides signal flow for both the instrument and an in-ear monitor mix. MSRP: entire package, \$199.

{rockonaudio.com}



BLUE MICROPHONES | PRO DRUM KIT

Blue Drum Setup

Blue Microphones has developed the Blue Pro Drum Kit microphone package. The kit includes two of the company's Dragonfly microphones and a Mouse microphone for professional drum recording.

Based on the three-mic technique for recording drums made famous by The Who, The Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, the mic kit comes in a custom-made ATA flight case with a padded interior for housing the two Dragonfly microphones, the Mouse and shockmounts for each. MSRP: \$1,999.

{bluemic.com}



WAVES AUDIO | ARTIST SIGNATURE COLLECTION

Puig's All-Access Pass

Waves Audio's latest Artist Signature Collection was developed with Grammy-winning producer and mixer Jack Joseph Puig. Created from Puig's custom processing chains, this collection



includes six application-specific plug-ins with dedicated tools for bass, drums, cymbals and percussion instruments, guitars, stringed instruments and keyboards, and vocals. {waves.com}



MACKIE | ONYX BLACKJACK

It's a Hit

Mackie has added the Onyx BlackJack and Onyx Blackbird recording interfaces to its Onyx family. These new interfaces combine the company's Onyx mic pre-amps with high-end Cirrus Logic AD/DA converters and workflow-friendly features. The Onyx BlackJack (pictured) is a compact desktop USB interface with two Onyx mic pre-amp channels, each featuring built-in DIs. The unit includes a separate level control for studio monitors and headphones, along with true analog hardware monitoring. MSRP: \$259.99. {mackie.com}



SHURE | KSM42

Defined Design

Shure has added the KSM42 to its KSM microphone line. The KSM42 is a side-address, cardioid condenser microphone for vocal recording. With a tailored frequency response and extensive internal and external pop filtering, the single-pattern, dual-diaphragm design of the KSM42 offers a wide dynamic range and smooth proximity control for studio applications. MSRP: KSM42, \$1,249. shure.com

SAMSON | XML POWERED MIXERS

More Impact

Samson's new XML powered mixers incorporate professional sound reinforcement with a lightweight class D amplifier design for three new systems. The XML410, XML610 (pictured) and XML910 provide reliable, versatile sound quality. All of the XML mixers are equipped with 1/4-inch speaker outputs. samsontech.com



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GEAR >

PIANOS & KEYBOARDS

KAWAI | DIGITAL PIANO ACTIONS

Digital Action

Kawai is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its first wooden-key action electronic piano with the release of the RM3 grand action. The RM3's mechanical design closely emulates Kawai's acoustic grand piano actions. Its action features moisture-absorbing Ivory Touch key surfaces and counterbalancing weights. kawaius.com



AMERICAN MUSIC & SOUND | NUMA ORGAN

Organ Oasis

The recently released Numa Organ from Studiologic was designed in collaboration with organist Joey DeFrancesco and represents classic tonewheel organs. Pitch and mod wheels provide extra functionality to the Numa as a keyboard controller. The keyboard can be split so that the lower manual or bass pedal sounds are triggered from the left part of the keyboard and the upper manual sounds from the right. Transposition can be done in half steps. americanmusicsound.com

YAMAHA | MOTIF XF

Next Generation

Yamaha's new next-generation Motif XF keyboard workstations boast enhanced features to transform any musical idea into reality. They're feature-packed with 741 MB of internal WAV ROM, realistic acoustic instruments, vintage synths, hip-hop sounds, and sturdy front-panel knobs and sliders. The category search function allows for easy navigation of controls. Each unit includes 1,664 instrument voices and 97 drum kits, as well as 2 GB of flash memory expansion.

The new four-part arpeggiator includes 7,881 arpeggio types, and the 16-track Integrated Sampling Sequencer includes 128 MB of on-board sample RAM. MSRP: Motif XF8, \$4,039; Motif XF7, \$3,539; Motif XF6, \$2,999; FL1024M, \$349; and FL512M, \$199. yamaha.com



AVID | AXIOM CONTROLLER SERIES

Avid's Additions

Avid's new versions of the M-Audio Axiom USB MIDI keyboard controller series are designed for live performance and software-based music production. The Axiom 25, Axiom 49 (pictured) and Axiom 61 offer new features, including DirectLink technology, an updated semi-weighted piano-style keyboard and redesigned user interface. All models provide feedback via a graphic LCD. MSRP: Axiom 61, \$499.95; Axiom 49, \$439.95; Axiom 25, \$319.95. {avid.com}



ROLAND | LX-10F

Supernatural Shipments

Roland has begun shipping new upgrades to key models in its home digital piano line. The LX-10F, DP-990F, RG-3F and RG-1F digital pianos feature the new SuperNATURAL piano sound engine, uniting Roland's V-Piano technology and 88-key stereo multisampling technology. The LX-10F digital upright piano (pictured) also features the PHA III ivory feel keyboard, which replicates the properties of actual ivory and ebony keys. {rolandus.com}



NEW FROM JODYJAZZ
DV CHIC Tenor

A close-up of the Jody Jazz DV Chicago Tenor saxophone mouthpiece, showing its polished metal finish and the Jody Jazz logo.

U.S. Patent No. 7,470,844

The DV Chicago Tenor is the culmination of Jody Espina's quest to make the perfect saxophone mouthpiece.

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GEAR >

BAND & ORCHESTRA

CONN-SELMER | SD20

Concert Attire

Conn-Selmer has released the Selmer Paris SD20 mouthpieces for alto and tenor saxophones. The hard rubber mouthpieces feature a round chamber and a traditional facing, which provides players with balance and flexibility. Designed with the concert saxophonist in mind, the round chamber is reminiscent of early Selmer Soloist mouthpieces. MSRP: alto sax, \$269.95; tenor sax, \$309.95. conn-selmer.com



YAMAHA | SILENT VIOLINS

Natural Silence

Yamaha's new silent violins offer traditional string spacing on the four- and five-string models and let players move as naturally as they would on an acoustic violin. The silent violins weigh the same as an acoustic violin since the electronic components have been removed. MSRP: SV-250 four-string, \$2,295; SV-255 five-string, \$2,395. yamaha.com



REUNION BLUES | SAX CASE

To Play and Protect

Reunion Blues is expanding its RB Continental line with an alto saxophone case that features a 1-inch-thick Flexoskeleton exterior lined with reinforced impact panels. A knurled abrasion grid cradles the bottom to help resist scuffing. It comes with a zippered accessory pocket and an adjustable shoulder strap. MSRP: \$179.95. reunionblues.com

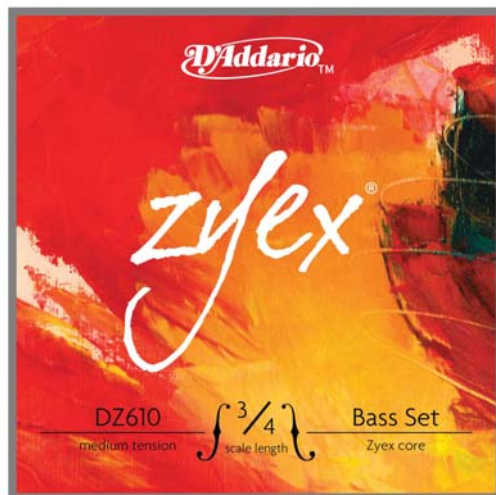


D'ADDARIO | ZYEX BASS STRINGS

Stable Control

D'Addario recently reconfigured its Zyex strings with a new generation of synthetic material for the release of Zyex bass strings. The core configuration gives musicians greater control over the finer nuances of their tone. Zyex strings maintain a warm, rich, gut-like tone quality while remaining in tune under extreme climate conditions. MSRP: full set, \$337.

{daddario.com}



PEARL | CHAMPAGNE
CANTABILE FLUTES

Good as Gold

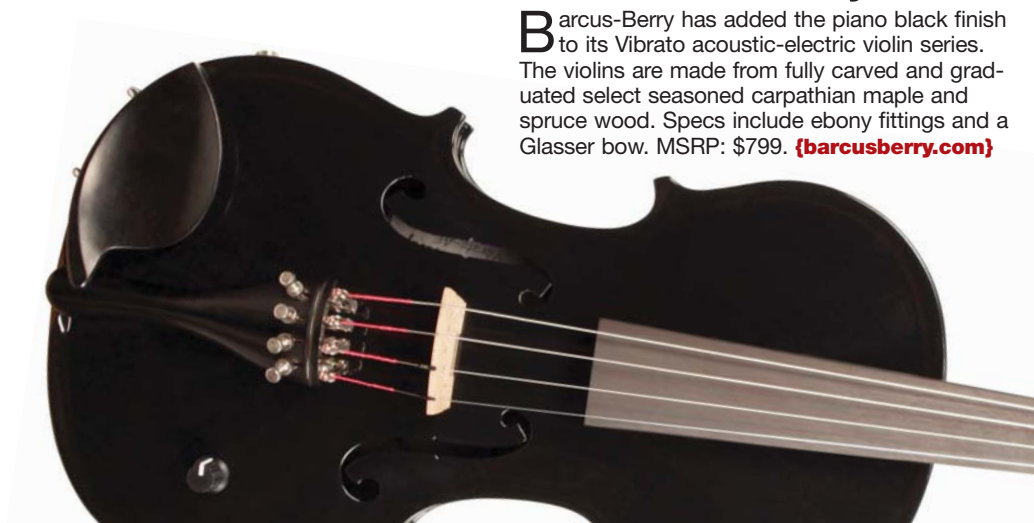
For a limited time, Pearl's Cantabile Pro Flute series from Japan will feature champagne gold plating. The series includes handmade professional flutes constructed of sterling silver. The 22-karat gold plating adds strength and projection to the tone.

{pearlflutes.com}

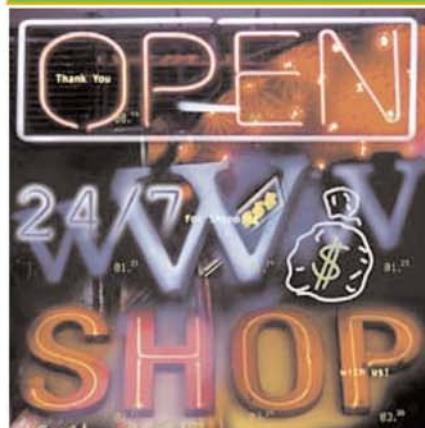
BARCUS-BERRY | PIANO BLACK FINISH

Black Beauty

Barcus-Berry has added the piano black finish to its Vibrato acoustic-electric violin series. The violins are made from fully carved and graduated select seasoned carpathian maple and spruce wood. Specs include ebony fittings and a Glasser bow. MSRP: \$799. {barcusberry.com}



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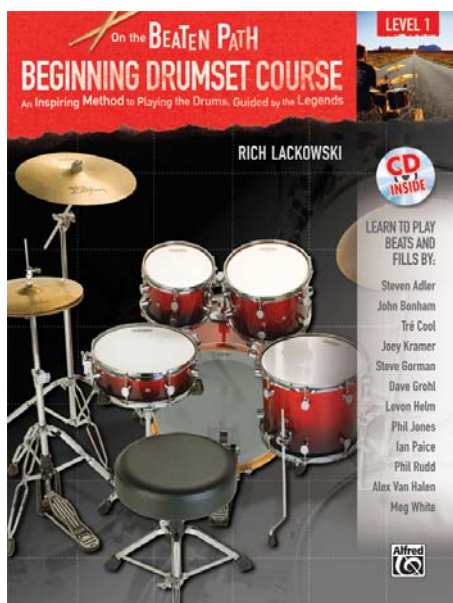
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ALFRED | 'ON THE BEATEN PATH'

Beat Down

Alfred has released *On The Beaten Path: Beginning Drumset Course*. The three-volume drum set method teaches users how to play using carefully selected beats and fills from hit songs made famous by legendary drummers. Each title includes authentic transcriptions and easy-to-follow lessons with an accompanying audio CD containing all the beats and fills presented in the books.

The course will eventually be available in three levels. Drummers Steven Adler, Tré Cool, Steve Gorman, Dave Grohl and Alex Van Halen are all featured in the books. MSRP: \$9.99. alfred.com



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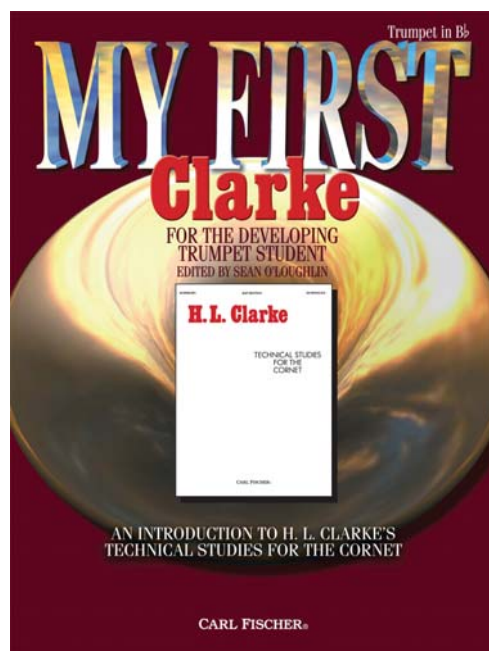
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CARL FISCHER | 'MY FIRST'

First Timer

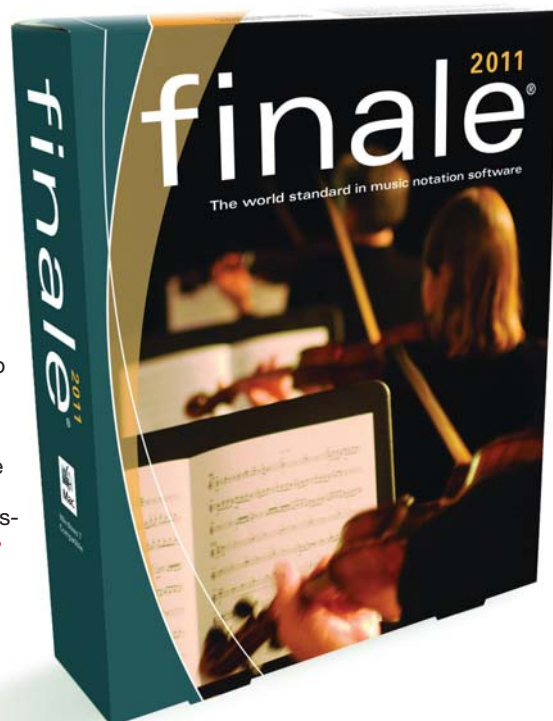
Carl Fischer Music has added *My First Clarke For The Developing Trumpet Student* to the My First series. The book introduces players to the famous and fundamental Herbert L. Clarke trumpet method. The exercises are reorganized by key signature for easier use, and new minor key versions have been composed especially for this edition. *My First Clarke* features more than 150 exercises and 16 etudes for flexibility in teaching and learning trumpet technique, and it's structured to build up strength and endurance without strain or injury to the embouchure. MSRP: \$19.95. carlfischer.com



MAKEMUSIC | FINALE 2011

Finale Updated

MakeMusic's Finale 2011 features new upgrades that enable easier music making. The new staff layout capabilities make it simple to move and edit staves, groups and brackets, which lets musicians work in any order they want. Entering lyrics is now easier, and they're automatically spaced with greater precision when printed. Additional enhancements to the software include automated capo chords, improved pickup measures and a new Quick Reference Guide with step-by-step instructions and colorful illustrations. makemusic.com





RON GREENE | 'GUITAR ACCOMPANIMENT CHORDS'

Visual Guitar Aid

Guitar Accompaniment Chords is the first book in the Music Chart series of reference guides from Ron Greene. The series provides visual aids to help musicians learn their instruments and improve their playing. *Guitar Accompaniment Chords* contains 24 charts that help guitarists



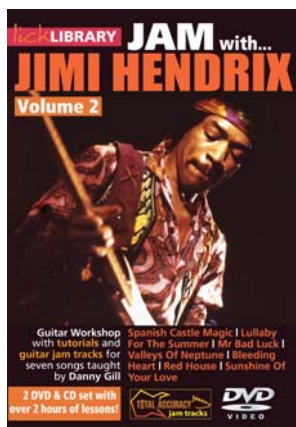
understand which chords to play for songs in each major and minor key. It also offers instruction for learning all major, minor and seventh chords; figuring out chords to songs by ear; jamming and improvising; learning the circle of fifths; and understanding basic chord theory. MSRP: \$14.95.

{rongreenemusiccharts.com}

LICK LIBRARY | 'JAM WITH JIMI HENDRIX VOLUME 2'

Jammin' Jimi

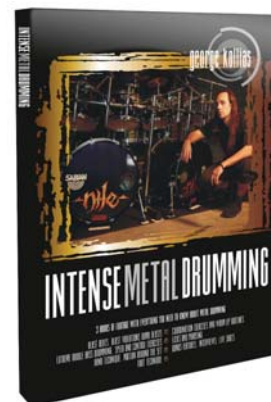
Lick Library's second installment of *Jam With Jimi Hendrix* is a double-DVD set with more than two hours of lessons to help players learn each song the way it was originally played with guidance from Joe Satriani's former pupil Danny Gill. *Jam With Jimi Hendrix Volume 2* also includes a CD of professionally recorded guitar jam tracks for each song, letting users play along with a full session band. Tracks include "Spanish Castle Magic," "Lullaby For Summer," "Bleeding Heart" and "Red House." {licklibrary.com}



HUDSON | 'INTENSE METAL DRUMMING'

Intense Session

George Kollias: *Intense Metal Drumming* is Hudson Music's first title from Kollias. Throughout the new DVD, he details exercises and workouts to help players achieve the speed, power and technicality that's needed in today's metal drumming, especially for the double bass technique. The DVD also features explanations of the combination of heel-up and heel-down techniques that Kollias uses to get up to 280 beats per minute. MSRP: \$19.99. {hudsonmusic.com}



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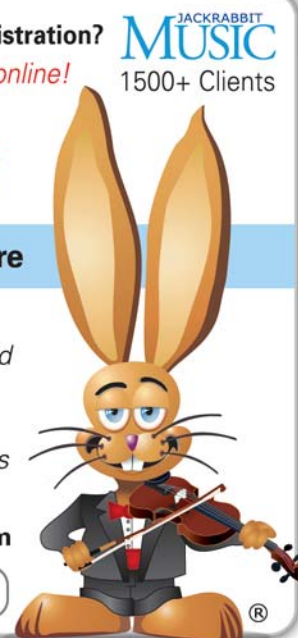
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NUMARK | X5

It Takes Two

Numark's new X5 is a two-channel digital mixer that's compatible with all turntables, CD players and other sources. It features rugged, club-friendly construction, including high-quality knobs, buttons and faders, as well as Numark's CP PRO crossfader. The unit also boasts cross-fader and line-fader slope, reverse controls, channel transform triggers, and repositionable phono/line switches. numark.com



NOVATION | DICER

Roll the Dice

Novation's new Dicer performance controller seamlessly integrates with the cue-point and looping features of Serato Scratch Live. Supplied in pairs, the compact USB-powered devices are compatible with any Scratch Live setup, whether using turntables or CDJs. Scratch Live 2.1 automatically maps Dicer to key software functions and provides LED feedback. novationmusic.com



MACKIE | U.420D

Easy Rider

The Mackie U.420d is a new four-channel production mixer that provides connection, flexibility and a centralized user interface to ease workflow. The U.420d provides two Mackie mic channels featuring Mackie mic pre-amps, 30-mm channel faders and a three-band active EQ with mid-sweep, allowing full tonal control over vocals and instruments. The unit also features a built-in DI box and two stereo line channels, which are DJ-friendly and include dual Mackie-designed RIAA phono pre-amps for turntables. mackie.com

CHAUVET | Q-SPOT 160-LED

Brighter Light

Chauvet has launched the Q-Spot 160-LED. The moving yoke is equipped with a powerful 20-watt white LED, which is comparable to a 150-watt fixture. This fixture is 46-percent brighter, with a lux measurement of 7,641 at 1 meter.

The Q-Spot 160-LED is ideal for small club installations where heat emissions are a factor. It weighs 14 pounds and includes a color wheel with nine slots plus white. chauvetlighting.com



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Brian Meader
Washington Music Center
Wheaton, Md.

We still write handwritten tickets, so when the power goes off, we can still sell stuff. We have an e-commerce site that we do with Pro-Active as the back-end support. Even within that, my cohort, Moggio Hozna, and I have done our own customization in-house.

We have customized the way that the individual products are displayed, the layout of the overall navigation menus on the site, the graphics and color scheme. We have also worked with Pro-Active on a lot of behind-the-scenes things.

>>>

Mathew Schirado
Eckroth Music
Bismarck, N.D.

We use the Active-e piece of the TriTech software suite, and with that, customers make payments online. The main thing we do is the online rental. We have thousands of customers who have chosen to do that. We fill it all from our stores, and it's all delivered to the schools. The schools love it, and it's set up so that every school is customized to exactly what the school wants. It's something we are proud to offer. By moving to the TriTech system, we are able to streamline and get things processed for our customers much faster than we had in the past because everything is linked and everything works together.



>>>

KR Cunningham
Saied Music
Tulsa, Okla.

One thing we are doing with Retail Up! is we have built our instrument lease-to-own program. It works just like a rental program. When [customers] put their items in their carts and check out, it actually brings them where they can give us the same information that we require on our lease-to-own agreement. That is all tied to a data table that then fills in all the terms of our agreements, so that they actually see a completed rental agreement.



>>>
**Ben
Blakesley**
George's Music
Berwyn, Pa.

How do you use retail technologies?

We use e-commerce in our retail stores in a unique way, almost as a replacement for special-order systems. Essentially, we have an 11th store, which is a warehouse.

A customer might come into a store, and maybe we don't have something in-stock in that store. Rather than writing the customer a special-order ticket and telling them, "We can order it for you — come back and do this, that and the other thing," we have computer kiosks in our stores where an associate can take the customer and complete the sale via our e-commerce site.

We launched our e-commerce site in earnest

two years ago. It's definitely the future. I don't think you can ignore it, so we are trying to embrace it and get on-board and make this happen now, as opposed to waiting until it's too late. It has changed the way we purchase [product] or bring stuff in for inventory. We think about how we can use the e-commerce system to better enhance our customer experience.

Essentially, I manage a lot of the e-commerce system. But there is a bit of a learning curve with that because you get all excited and then the first order actually comes in and you're wondering, "What do we do now?"

In the last couple of years, we've had to revise our systems to process orders efficiently and profitably.

There has definitely been a learning curve. The best thing I can equate it to is opening a new store. When you create a new retail store, just putting your sign on the front door doesn't mean any customers are going to come in.

One of the hardest things to do is to get your inventory online. It's an uphill battle at first to get everything up there and running in an efficient manner and then to continue to expand it. The next step is to expand, expand, expand.



Franz Liszt



Johannes Brahms



Johann Strauss



Tori Amos



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