

THE EXCELLENCE ISSUE

FOR PROGRESSIVE MUSIC RETAILERS

DECEMBER 2013
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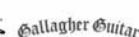
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INSIDE *FEATURES*

COVER STORY

²⁵ **THE EXCELLENCE ISSUE**

A group of 10 retailers and 10 suppliers, selected by their peers, share their successes for 2013.

PAGE 26 RETAILING

Sam Ash
Sweetwater Sound
West Music
Guitar Center
Corner Music
Quinlan & Fabish
Unique Squared
Strings & Beyond
Alto Music
Kraft Music

PAGE 62 SUPPLIER

Peavey
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PAGE 50 PRODUCT EXCELLENCE

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INSIDE *DEPARTMENTS*



RETAIL

PROFILE

14 Kenny's Music, a laid-back California stalwart, marks two rocking decades.

NEWS

16 George's Music hosts a harmonica event; Philanthropic honors for the owners of Full Compass; and a promotion at Ward-Brodt

SUPPLY

PROFILE

20 Hohner continues to innovate, while nearing its 160th anniversary.

NEWS

22 Korg USA expands force in Canada

23 ADJ reaches settlement with Chinese company

GEAR



70 GUITARS, AMPS & ACCESSORIES

Reverend says color is king

76 AUDIO & RECORDING

AKG goes beyond human hearing

80 DRUMS & PERCUSSION

Scymtek makes a splash with new cymbal

82 BAND & ORCHESTRA

Zonda sets the standard

84 PRINT & MULTIMEDIA

Hal Leonard goes country

86 DJ & LIGHTING

Blizzard roughs it up with new LED

ASK THE RETAILER

90 The Excellence Edition: Even more words of wisdom from this year's winners.

On the cover, from left: Sammy Ash, COO; Stu Leibowitz, CFO; Howie Mendelson, EVP Stores; Richard Ash, CEO; Barry Horowitz, SVP Purchasing; John Pereksta, National Sales Manager; David Ash, Co-CEO and General Counsel.

Cover photo by Ken Schles

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PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE | BY DAVID ZIVAN

THE FULL MEASURE

Going all the way, pretty baby — see what I can see.

— SLICKEE BOYS

I've thought it over, and I have decided; this is my favorite issue of the year. It's a lot of travel and phone calls, and thousands of emails, but we are always the bearers of good news. Hello, our staffers say. We asked around, and your peers have voted you tops in the business this year. You gave it your best effort, all year long, and *people noticed*. They like you. They really like you.

Those calls are not hard to make.

But that's not why this issue is my favorite. The reason is that, more than at any other time in the year, my mind gets blown. Talking with leaders whose companies are excelling is like auditing a crash course in How to Thrive in the Music Products Industry. And as you might imagine, a lot of these folks' insights apply not only in the workplace, but in everyday life.

"When it comes to service," said Rick Young, a senior vice president at Yamaha, "we take a very broad view. Everybody in the company is empowered to help [dealers] get what they need." Does that happen all the time? I doubt it. Nothing's perfect. But it sounds like the right way to approach any customer interaction.

I'm not sure how I would have reacted to someone telling me my company is known as the nice guys. But it didn't phase Brian Chung of Kawai one bit. He didn't even seem surprised. "I'm ... thrilled to receive an accolade that ... puts the fairness and the respect we have for our dealers right up there" with product selection, he said. Nice, indeed.

Best lesson of all, this year? For me, it was something I heard from two big-time retailers that I visited myself. Both pointed out that calling yourself full line and really executing that are different. And both acknowledged the challenge of carrying enough inventory in your shop to provide the kind of experience that trumps e-tailing and competition of all sorts.

Jerry, Paul, David, Richard, and Sammy Ash all separately mentioned the importance of carrying a wide selection of gear. That approach might literally be in their DNA — each of them also noted that founder Sam Ash had put the policy into place 90 years ago. "That has been a trait since we were founded," David said. "It's tough. But we make it a point to have the most extensive inventory in whatever locations we have to satisfy customers."

Jon Haber of Alto Music (his business card names him the "Grand Poobah") pointed out that his company does band instrument rental under the same roof as their big-ticket pro audio department. Most important, he said, is that "none of these things are afterthoughts."

So commitment and excellence go hand in hand? Somebody alert the media. **MI**



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LETTERS

Yamaha Praise

We were thrilled to be featured in the November issue of *Music Inc.* highlighting specialist retailers in the article, “The Power of One.” We here at Downtown Piano Works think the article captured the vibe of our store quite well.

We wanted to focus upon one facet of the article: our decision to only carry Yamaha products, as it is unusual in the piano industry. That shows just how wonderful a partner the Yamaha piano division has been. From the top of the organization to our district manager Chris Gilbert, we have always received unyielding support and encouragement. We believe the quality of the Yamaha brand is reflected in the people that make up the company, and they are stellar.

Dan and Theresa Shykind
Downtown Piano Works
Frederick, Md.

Responding to ‘Balancing Acts’

I was very excited to see “Balancing Acts,” the “My Turn” column by Gene Joly in the October issue of *Music Inc.* Women in the MI industry is such an important topic that we need to address. The fact that female musicians are not taken as seriously as male musicians is absolutely absurd. Since when does gender make a musician better or worse? When does gender make you more knowledgeable about musical instruments? It’s crazy to even think about, but unfortunately, it’s real, and these crazy misperceptions are out there.

When Joly and I started researching this and really looking from within our own four walls at Guitar Center — where Joly was formerly executive vice



president of stores (he is now the president of Musician’s Friend, which is owned by GC) — we saw that we needed to work on changing this, and knew we needed to start from within.

So we changed a lot of our marketing strategies and materials, and we trained our store associates on how to treat our female customers. It’s simple — the same as our male customers.

We did more store clinics that featured female artists and added more contests that we felt would drive more female participation. We focused on recruiting more females in our stores. We did many focus groups with both customers and employees. We reached out to anyone and everyone who was willing to talk to us so we could understand how

to help change this. And some of the stories we heard were eye opening.

We knew we would have internal issues to address and we have and will continue to do so until every person that enters our stores is comfortable and has a great customer experience. However, the one issue that we didn’t realize would come to be one of the largest issues was how our customers were treating our female employees.

Joly illustrates this well in his article. Some of the stories that we heard were just awful. It’s time for us to recognize that women are being treated differently, and it’s not OK.

We need to do something about it. Our job is simple; we want to help people make music.

However, we will never foster an environment where this type of behavior would ever be tolerated. Our industry needs to grow and harvest new musicians. It’s time to stop this ridiculous behavior and encourage all people to make music.

Laura Taylor
Senior Vice President of Operations
Guitar Center

Gator Gratitude

A heartfelt thank you for featuring me and our company Gator Cases in *Music Inc.*’s “From the Top” article in the October issue. I cannot thank you enough for the continued focus on the accessory category and for helping us to bring our lineup in front of the dealer community. We truly appreciate the opportunity to tell the dealers not only about the products, but about our story as a company.

Crystal Morris
President
Gator Cases

Thanks From the Top

I can’t tell you how exciting it was to read the “From the Top” article featuring Crystal Morris, our company president.

Gator Cases is truly a unique organization. We always listen, work hard and definitely have fun doing it. It all comes “from the top.” Having such a nice piece featured in your fine publication really means a lot to all of us.

Ken Fuente
Vice President of Sales
Gator Cases

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> **Harmonic Convergence**

George's hosts a happening harmonica hootenanny

PAGE 16

> **Giving it Away**

Full Compass owners honored for lifetime of philanthropy

PAGE 16

> **Promotions**

Longtime Ward-Brodt hand named new vice president

PAGE 16



RETAIL

KENNY'S MUSIC | BY MARTHA SPIZZIRI

ROCKING THE HOUSE

Stop by Kenny's Music in Dana Point, Calif., and you'll likely find a group of strangers sitting outside jamming in the West Coast sun, within sight of the ocean. They'll be near the guitar-playing mermaid sculpted (with a chainsaw) by former Runaways singer Cherie Currie.

The relaxed atmosphere created by owners Kenny "Big Daddy" Williams and his wife, Kimberly, has been a big factor in helping the store reach its 20th anniversary this year — no small achievement any place, but especially in the store's highly competitive area.

The vibe has also helped put Kenny's Music on NAMM's Top 100 Dealers list each of the past three years.

But it took time for the shop to become that successful. In fact, when Kenny started out, the guitarist and producer was giving lessons from his home until his then-girlfriend suggested he find another place to teach.

He rented office space, then decided to start selling product. Though he "knew nothing about retail," he said, he had one advantage. "I started in 1993, when things were a lot cheaper, relatively speak-



Kimberly and Kenny Williams

ing." And competition wasn't as fierce then, he noted. He was able to get exclusive local rights to sell certain brands.

Even so, the retail side of the business took a long time to establish itself. But it did grow, and it really took off five or six years ago when he moved down the street to a busy corner. Kimberly quit her job to work in the shop, a move that turned out to be quite serendipitous. "She turned out to be the face of Kenny's Music. She's really got

great rapport with customers. I'm better with the teaching," Williams said.

GETTING — AND GIVING — DEALS

Williams' strategy is simple: Offer quality instruments at the best price. The shop doesn't sell B-stock instruments, except for trade-ins, but Williams prices his A-stock merchandise as close as possible to other outlets' B-stock prices. He said vendors are often willing to give him good deals, because they appreciate

his commitment to quality.

"They know that you're making their product look good, because your image is better than some of these bigger stores," Williams said.

Lessons remain a strong part of the business. Kenny's Music offers private classes in just about every instrument — guitar and other strings, piano and keyboards, drums, woodwinds, brass, harmonica — plus vocals. There are about a dozen instructors, plus Williams. (Some instructors

teach several instruments.)

Williams' strict hiring criteria include knowledge of music theory. "Even the drum teacher has to be able to read music. And they have to show me that they have worked in the industry at a high professional level," he said. (The roster includes Ray Weston, a drummer with Wishbone Ash; jazz saxophonist Greg Vail; and Martin Gerschwitz, Iron Butterfly's current vocalist and keyboard player.) "That tells me that they have accomplished what they're trying to get [students] to accomplish. And they've got to be good with kids."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Also a significant contributor to the shop's success is the packed schedule of events and activities Williams maintains.

"We put on an open-mike jam twice a month at a nearby club," Williams said. A mix of people perform, including professional musicians and Kenny's Music students.

The city of Dana Point calls on Kenny's Music to put on concerts, partly thanks to Williams' music-industry connections. "I can get acts down here that they normally wouldn't be able to get. And usually, since they're friends, they'll do for a good, reasonable price," Williams notes.

Another big event: a summer band camp for kids. For \$350, the kids are kept busy for six weeks. They form bands, rehearse with a teacher, and at the end of the summer perform live at the same club that hosts the open-mike night. They also visit the Grammy Museum and

go into a studio to record a CD.

This year Williams took on another activity: DJ'ing at a local radio station. That's increased the store's visibility, and helped Williams make even more connections. "I'm going to have Buddy Guy on my show. I had Rod Piazza last week. I've had Guitar Shorty on there, too," he noted.

SOCIAL ACTIVITY

All these events give Kenny's Music plenty of content to post online — and they follow through effectively. The shop uses Facebook, Twitter and email to publicize upcoming events. Kimberly takes photos at the events, which are posted on the shop's active Facebook page. (Facebook posts are also displayed on every page of KennysMusicStore.com.) Williams

turns his radio shows into podcasts and posts a link whenever a new episode is available.

"[Social media] is huge, because we can communicate with people who are already friends of ours. I use my personal Facebook friends, and my wife's, to notify everybody [about] whatever special event we're doing," Williams said. He also posts on the page for Kenny "Big Daddy" Williams and Lexi G, his band with his stepdaughter — so that's four outlets on Facebook alone.

But what Williams really appreciates are the in-person relationships with customers — kept through good times and bad. "It makes you appreciate life more," he said. "That's what music's all about. I think Nietzsche put it the best way. He said 'Without music, life would be a mistake,' and I totally believe that." **MI**



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GEORGE'S MUSIC | EVENT

GEORGE'S HOSTS HARMONICA HOEDOWNS

In October, George's Music hosted roadshow events for Hohner in three of its Florida locations. "It was a great event, [and] customers were very excited," said JP Fuller, manager of the operation's Jacksonville, Fla., location. "We had never done anything like this before. It brought in a lot of our regulars, but there were also a lot of new faces in the store that night. We sold a lot of harmonicas, [including] a lot of the more expensive Crossover harps and others that we don't normally stock. This was a

great way to drive in traffic on a Monday night. At one point, we had over 70 people in the store, resulting in a bunch of other residual sales."

"This roadshow is an event unlike any other," commented Drew Lewis, harmonica product manager for Hohner. "Attendees experienced amazing harmonica performances, harmonica lessons, harmonica repairs from a factory technician, games of chance for prizes as well as being able to see and play unique and exotic harmonicas."

WARD-BRODT | PROMOTION

Smith Named Ward-Brodt VP

Connie Smith has been named vice president of Ward-Brodt Music Company. She also serves as general manager for the retailer. Smith has been with Ward-Brodt for more than 28 years, joining the

company as an intern and subsequently holding numerous operation positions.

"She has shown dedication, commitment, and energy," said Mick Faulhaber, president of Ward-Brodt, in a statement.

FULL COMPASS SYSTEMS | HONORS

Lipps Receive Philanthropy Award



In November, Susan and Jonathan Lipp (at left), owners of Full Compass Systems in Madison, Wis., received the 2013 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Madison chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP). The award is presented to individuals or couples with a minimum of 20 years of philanthropic involvement, outstanding civic and charitable responsibility, and a record of exceptional generosity that has also encouraged others to take leadership roles in philanthropic activities.



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Note From Joe

The Future Will *Not* Resemble the Past

The story of the music products industry has been one of innovation and change, with ongoing breakthroughs helping to drive profitable new markets and musical styles. The piano evolved from the harpsichord and inspired Mozart. The electric guitar did more than make the acoustic louder, it helped create rock 'n' roll in the process. The invention and adoption of MIDI allowed instruments and computers to talk to each other and drove the electronics boom of the 80's. And, more recently, recording software has brought a home studio to every smartphone and tablet. Whether these trends were good or bad could be debated in the Anaheim Hilton lobby bar 'til late into the night, but what's not in question is that each of these breakthroughs helped to grow the market.

And breakthroughs aren't just in instruments. Business methods are also targets of innovation—increasing efficiency, bringing down costs and improving the customer experience. Music education is also changing, as teachers embrace new musical styles and instruments in our schools.

So how are we doing as an industry? What grade would we earn for innovation? Tough question... especially since I believe we're an industry firmly committed to and, in some ways conflicted by two worlds. One consists of beautiful handcrafted instruments of intrinsic value, where obsolescence is measured in generations. The other: technology-based products that become obsolete as soon as the next model is introduced.

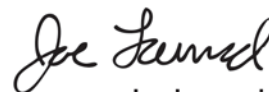
My hunch is that the next big breakthroughs will be technology-based and solve the problems of today's and—perhaps more important—tomorrow's customers. Some may even address one of our biggest challenges: It remains difficult for most people

to learn to play an instrument. Personally, I believe we could double the size of our industry if we could find a way to make it easier for the average person to play an instrument, even if just for personal enjoyment.

So, what breakthroughs are on the horizon? I can't answer that question, but I do know where to go to find out. Next month's NAMM Show will be the epicenter of global change, the place where the industry's newest ideas and products are going to be on display. As a matter of fact, we're going to recognize some breakthrough products at Friday night's NAMM TEC (Technical Excellence & Creativity) Awards. Those who sell or use music technology will want to see which companies are recognized with TEC nominations and awards. Not to mention, this year's Les Paul Award (named for the guitarist credited with numerous musical breakthroughs, including multi-track recording) will be none other than the creative genius—and my old boss—Todd Rundgren.

Innovation is the lifeblood of any industry—especially ours—and I assure you the future will *not* resemble the past. To get a glimpse of our future and position your business to take advantage of it, come to the 2014 NAMM Show.

Happy holidays to our Members here in the United States and around the world. We look forward to seeing you next month!



Joe Lamond
NAMM PRESIDENT AND CEO



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PAGE 22
- > **ADJ**
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PAGE 23

SUPPLY

HOHNER | BY JESSICA TOBACMAN

HARMONIC INNOVATION

For most companies, nearing a 160th anniversary while continuing to release new, innovative products seems like an unattainable goal. But it is exactly what is happening at Hohner. One of these products is the AirBoard, set to debut at The NAMM Show in January. The colorful, portable mix of piano and harmonica is an updated version of Hohner's Melodica, which was invented about 50 years ago, became popular in Europe, and thus far has been sold mainly to educators.

"We've been working on the AirBoard for about a year," said Scott Emmerman, director of marketing and sales. "The idea is to get people interested in this new, really cool instrument. It's like having a portable piano that has a unique voice. You blow into it, and you don't need a computer or cables. We hope this product will reach a whole new audience. We've previewed Airboard to some of our key customers and they've all agreed that it looks like it will be a big hit."

The AirBoard represents a renewed focus for the company.

"In the past seven years, we've continued to focus on the evolution of our core products," Emmerman said. "The AirBoard



Rock Clouser and Scott Emmerman

represents the most recent example of this strategy."

EXPANDING MARKETS

Another area of innovation is Hohner's new line of Latino string instruments, also planned to launch at the

upcoming NAMM Show. The instruments are ideal for many Latino musical genres, including mariachi, norteno, conjunto, tejano and Tex-Mex.

"We're seeing real growth in the products that are used in making Latino oriented music,"

Emmerman said.

Called the H. Jimenez series after its designer Hilario "Layo" Jimenez, a well-respected guitar, bajo quinto, and lute player, the product line will include a five-string Vihuela, a six-string Guitarron, eight models of the 10-string Bajo Quinto and three nylon-stringed guitar models.

"Layo has great insight to traditional build quality, yet he adds his own, player-friendly spin," said Rock Clouser, product manager for Hohner U.S. "The H. Jimenez series will continue Hohner's support of Latin music genres and certainly complement our Hohner accordions — a favorite of Latin musicians for more than 100 years."

BEYOND HARMONICAS

When Matthias Hohner launched his harmonica company in Germany in 1857, he couldn't have known the Latin market would become a core component of his namesake's success. But growth was certainly evident. By the turn of the century, the company had reached 1,000 employees and was making 4 million harmonicas a year. By 1920, 4,000 employees were helping to produce 20 million instruments — and acquisitions began.

Hohner himself “had an eye to the world market, and was very forward-thinking with his approach to marketing and sales,” Emmerman said. “He targeted other countries around the world and found ways to connect with each of them by celebrating something in their cultures.”

Accordions followed the harmonica, and then the Melodica.

“Hohner’s heart and soul is reed instruments, such as the harmonica, accordion and melodica, that’s where the company started,” Emmerman said. “Over the years, we have added fretted instruments, such as the acoustic guitars, banjos,

mandolins, ukuleles, as well as Hohner Kids and Green Tones Musical Toys to the Hohner portfolio.”

WIDER REACH

Hohner continues to produce the 1896 Marine Band Har-

those core products. Hohner founded a U.S. division to distribute Sabian Cymbals, Hohner Fretted Instruments, and Sonor Drums and Percussion products in 1986, and fully acquired the Sonor brand in 1991.

Part of the evolution parallels

been, and continues to be, part of jazz and classical music, but has jumped in and out of the spotlight for different reasons over the decades.

“The harmonica was never really designed to be a blues instrument, but many blues guitarists, like the early Mississippi Delta musicians accompanied themselves with a harp,” Emmerman said. “Sometimes, what’s happened naturally in popular music can affect the popularity of certain



The AirBoard

monica, one of the most enduring products in the industry, and its original calling card to the world. But it has diversified well beyond

the ever-changing popularity of music styles. The harmonica, for instance, was played by soldiers during the Civil War, and has

instruments.

“We see great opportunities for all of our Hohner instruments in the future.” **MI**



Play



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KORG USA | APPOINTMENT

Korg USA Adds to Canadian Team

Korg USA has expanded its sales force to be able to provide the same service to Canadian retailers as it does in the U.S. market.

Joining existing West Coast sales representative Martin Richmond will be Jeff Bard, who will cover Quebec and the Maritimes, and Glen Booth, who

will cover Ontario.

To support the expanded sales team, Korg USA is handling all shipping and logistics out of Canadian warehousing facilities.

Korg USA's New York-based facility houses a dedicated marketing staff as well as sales and product support personnel. **{korgusa.com}**



From left: Korg USA VP Sales Nick Owen with Korg USA Canadian sales reps Martin Richmond, Jeff Bard and Glen Booth, and Korg USA National Sales Manager AJ Reitz.

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APPOINTMENTS

Mark Terry Named President of KMC Music

Fender Musical Instrument Corp. (FMIC) has appointed Mark Terry to the position of president of KMC Music, a division of FMIC.

Terry has more than 37 years of music industry experience, including his own global consulting firm, president of The AVC Group, and president of Harman Pro Group.

"Mark is a highly accomplished and respected music industry executive and will be able to bring his extensive musical instrument industry experience and expertise to help KMC meet and exceed its business goals," said Larry Thomas, CEO of FMIC. **{kmcmusiccorp.com}**



Yamaha has appointed Alan Macpherson to the position of general manager of the pro-audio and combo division, and Brian Petterson to the position of winds marketing manager.

Pearl has hired Dan McNally as its brass and woodwind marketing manager.

Owen Xing has been named managing director of **TC Group China**.

PRO-ACTIVE | EVENT

Fire Disrupts Service at Cutting-Edge, Pro-Active

A fire which started at Cutting-Edge Solutions and Pro-Active Websites' Chicago-area data center on Oct. 9 interrupted service for websites the companies service. The fire reportedly started with an accidental hit of an outside power junction causing a massive power surge within the facility and blowing the center's surge protectors. No one was hurt.

"The emergency shutdown added to the problems caused by the massive power surge and many of the hardware devices experienced shorts in their moth-

erboards, hard drives and power supplies" said Bill Walzak, CEO and president of Cutting-Edge Solutions. "Without being able to follow standard shutdown procedures, our equipment experienced a number of serious failures causing our entire network to be shutdown.

"We were overwhelmed with the support from our customers. We can't thank [them] enough for their understanding and loyalty during that highly unusual perfect storm of circumstances."

{pro-activewebsites.com}

HAL LEONARD | DISTRIBUTION

Griffin Signs With Hal Leonard

Hal Leonard has signed a deal to exclusively distribute Griffin Technology music products and accessories to the MI trade in the United States and Canada.

Founded in 1992, Nashville, Tenn.-based Griffin Technology offers accessories for home, mobile and personal technology. Griffin offers on-the-go musicians its StudioConnect with Lightning, GuitarConnect Pro, GuitarConnect Cable and MicConnect, which is ideal for practicing, recording and performing anywhere by using the power of an iPad or iPhone.

"With the rapidly changing face of technology today, anyone with a smartphone, tablet or laptop has a

powerful recording studio at their fingertips," said Brad Smith, senior sales and marketing manager for Hal Leonard. "Griffin has a long and successful history of working with Apple, and produces superb products for musicians looking to make music on their iOS devices."

{griffintechnology.com}



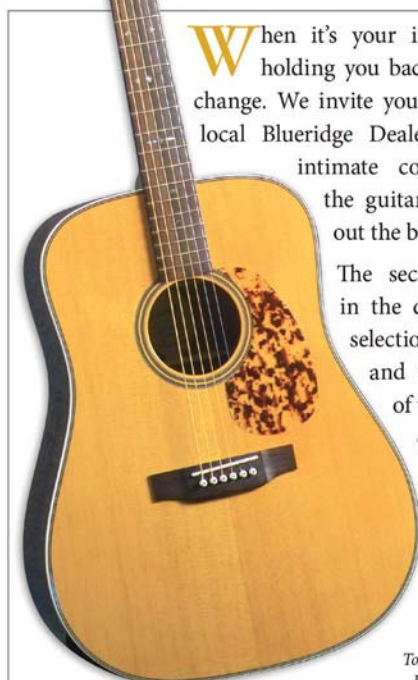
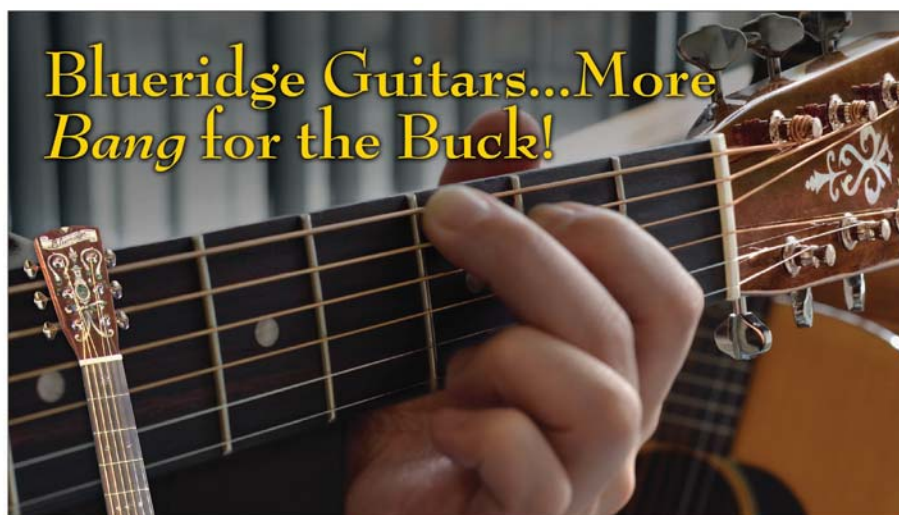
AMERICAN DJ | LEGAL

ADJ Reaches Settlement

ADJ companies American DJ Supply and Elation Professional have reached an out-of-court settlement with American Lighting, Inc. and its Hong Kong-based parent company, Neo-Neon, involving a trademark infringement lawsuit. Under the terms of the agreement, American Lighting and Neo-Neon have agreed to stop selling special effects lighting products and distributing marketing material that use the names "American," "Revo" and "E-Pro" in the U.S. market.

The ADJ companies initiated legal action against American Lighting in 2012, charging it with trademark infringement and unfair competition under the Lanham Act.

"When any competitor contrives to create confusion in the market in an attempt to reap the benefits of the brand recognition and stellar reputation that ADJ has earned in its market, we're compelled to take legal action," said Toby Velazquez, president of the ADJ group of companies. {americandj.com}



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music_{inc.} THE **2013** **EXCELLENCE** **AWARDS**

Music Inc.'s 2013 Excellence Awards honor 10 retailers and 10 suppliers that spent the year improving their businesses as well as their bottom lines. In our awards coverage, these companies — voted on by their peers — discuss their successes, innovations and best business tips. Hold on to this issue and use it as a year-round source of ideas.

By Frank Alkyer, Kathleen Costanza, Ed Enright, Michael Gallant,
John Janowiak, Katie Kailus and David Zivan

RETAILER
EXCELLENCE
PAGE 26

PRODUCT
EXCELLENCE
PAGE 50

SUPPLIER
EXCELLENCE
PAGE 62

POWER GENERATION

Opportunistic growth and stocked-to-the-roof stores help carry **Sam Ash Music** into its 90th year

Depending on how you count, the Dallas location of Sam Ash Music, opened this past summer, is probably the chain's 48th location. The number wobbles a little — there are 52 actual storefronts, the company's Long Island headquarters does a little commerce, and the five stores that once reigned on Manhattan's 48th street are now one superstore on 34th (see pages 28-30). But the main facts are clear: For nearly a century now, this classic retail operation has set a standard for what music stores look, sound and feel like. It has thrived where others have failed. It is an American success story now entering its fourth generation of family ownership. And suppliers around the nation have spoken: Sam Ash Music Corporation is *Music Inc.*'s 2013 Retailer of the Year.

In a series of conversations at the company's offices, the family's leadership was quick to praise the handful of top longtime managers who share only their business DNA. They also spoke eloquently about the chain's humble origins, its operating principles, and its old-school approach to inventory. Here, edited to fit your magazine, are conversations with Jerry and Paul Ash, the brothers of the second generation, and Sammy, Richard and David Ash — the brothers of the third. —DZ

MODEST ORIGINS

SAMMY ASH, COO We're celebrating our 90th year in 2014. It's a milestone — 90 years and the same family still owns it. My son, and Richard's two sons are the fourth generation.

RICHARD ASH, CEO We're a family-run business, skipping along.

DAVID ASH, CO-CEO & GENERAL COUNSEL I started because my father made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

PAUL ASH, PRESIDENT We work hard at it. We've been working at it for a long time. It's our 90th year, and my brother and I have been there most of that time. I am 84, and he is 88.

JERRY ASH, CHAIRMAN When our parents got married my mother said, 'You can't make a living just playing,' so they opened up a store.

(continued on page 28)



Bernice and Jerry Ash, with Paul Ash
— the second generation



SAMMY My grandfather was a bandleader, and relatively successful. But like any bandleader you only work when there are gigs. My grandmother pawned her engagement ring for \$400, they got a lease and started the business. That was Brooklyn, 1924.

PAUL There was no place to play, so when I came home from school every day I would open boxes. We lived in three rooms behind the store.

JERRY Come dinner time, if a customer walked in, he would wipe his mouth, go down, wait on them, come back and finish eating.

PAUL We didn't start to expand until after he died. We moved across the street to a corner lot, and that made a big difference. After a while we noticed that many people were coming from Long Island, and we decided to open a store in Long Island.

DAVID My grandmother worked until she was physically unable to do it. Well into her 80s. She had an incredible ability to look at any receipt and add it up in her head and know whether it was right or wrong.

THE INDUSTRY TODAY

JERRY It's hard — and it gets harder all the time. There was a time when if you saw a keyboardist there would be a whole array of equipment — a couple of keyboards, a bunch of effects. Now it's all computerized. So before where a guy might have spent \$4,000, now he's spending \$1,200, maybe less.

RICHARD By all accounts that I have seen, the industry is probably smaller today than it was in 2006. And then, of course, we have brilliant competitors. All the top players in the business are difficult to keep up with. The e-commerce guys are extremely good at what they do. Everyone goes after every opportunity to make a sale.

SAMMY There are a lot of people coming into the industry who are not from the industry. What are you going to do? Say "boo-hoo"? They're not going away.

DAVID The environment is definitely tougher these days — and it's not just tougher for the music industry. It's tougher for all because there are so many huge competitors out there. Amazon alone. You have to be part of it, but at the same time they are extremely difficult. Walmart is another one. There is a huge concentration of power in a few companies right now. It hasn't been like that since the age of the robber barons.

PAUL I lived through the Great Depression. There was a time when a man came in to have his violin bow rehired. My father used to do that work. 75 cents. And my mother said, "Do you have the money to pay that now?" And he said, "Yes." So she took his money and went to the grocery store. So is it better now? It's better now.



STOCKING UP — AND KEEPING UP

JERRY The difference between us and all the other little dealers out there is we stocked up. Our stores had everything. If you walked into Sam Ash and you needed something, it was there. Some other dealers would say, ‘What do you need all that merchandise for?’ They couldn’t understand it.

RICHARD A huge part is, you sell one of those a year. A smart guy would say, ‘You don’t need that, and you don’t need that.’ But if you pulled out all the one-a-years, you wouldn’t have a business. If we’re gonna make somebody bother to come down to a music store it better be an important experience for them.

DAVID This has been a trait since we were founded. We view it as essential that when a customer comes into our store we have to be able to satisfy them. To make it worth their effort.

SAMMY One of our cultures is, “Make the slatwall disappear.” Every inch of Sam Ash Music is covered in slatwall. And your job is to cover it with accessories so we don’t see it.

PAUL One of the differences that helped us get established in New York City was that we were one of the first to let people try instruments. The slogan [on 48th Street] had been, ‘You want to see that guitar? Show me the money.’

JERRY Now everybody lets people try. We bought a store in New Haven, Conn., and the owner of the store had all his guitars behind glass. If you wanted to try it they would sit with you and then they would wipe them off and put them back. Customers were having fun in our store.

PAUL Guitar is so personal. You have to feel it.

RICHARD Used is a big part of the profitability. Our people are

incentivized to buy as much as they can and sell as much as they can. We promote it everywhere — on our websites, on Facebook, in our catalogs, in our email blasts.

SAMMY Customers don’t want to walk into a generic, all-new world. Even if they love new, they would like to see some alternatives, whether it’s just a used ’80s Strat, or a vintage Strat, or they want to see what their guitar is worth. We buy tons of items a week. Majority is used, sometimes it’s vintage, sometimes it’s cheap. But everything has a price.

PAUL We also followed trends. When accordions became big, we had our own brand of accordions, and we had the big brands. We were the first to sell synthesizers. When discotheques were popular ... we had the first DJ unit to sell. Through the years we’ve tried to keep up.

DAVID Technology is a big part of that. We have to know what the trends are, in real time. And a lot of credit for that goes to our CFO, Stu Leibowitz. He’s been around a very long time.

STAFF & CULTURE

SAMMY Our regional managers who hire managers have been indoctrinated. Barry Horowitz, V.P. head of purchasing, has been with the company 42 years. Howie Mendelson, EVP of stores, is in charge of personnel and has been with the company since 1975. All the purchasers came out of the stores. Our tech buyer has been with us 18 years. Our guitar buyer 15 years. Our drum buyer has been with us 18 years. Our accessory buyer started as a cashier in the Queens store a lifetime ago. And all the people who have something to do with





talking about the company to other people know the company backwards and forwards.

JERRY Howie was hired as a manager. Barry was hired as a salesman.

RICHARD We pride ourselves on keeping people as long as we can. Talented people will drive a company, and we constantly try to look for that. Guys with ideas who know how to execute an idea — that's what will propel a business. You gotta be willing to listen and cheer 'em on and not say, 'That's a stupid idea because it wasn't my idea.'

JERRY In the stores, the wrong manager can mean 10 percent. Personnel is very, very important. The key thing.

PAUL The regionals know everybody, the guys who are up and coming and deserve a promotion someday when something opens up. They know who is flexible to move, and they make changes. They're not afraid to make changes.

COMPANY PHILOSOPHIES

RICHARD There's no grand plan. We grow if we see an opportunity. You get to 48 stores by taking advantage of opportunities when they arise. We built the business on the back of that. If something comes our way that looks interesting we'll invest.

PAUL We've been aggressively growing — but not too fast. We're cautious, but we take chances. We don't have the back-

ing of a huge corporation. We have finance from within.

SAMMY There are ways we have always dealt with things, and most of it goes back to Grandpa Sam. He wasn't the world's greatest businessman, but he had a great understanding of people. He understood how to treat people.

PAUL In my father's day, he was friends with the suppliers. Friends with the customers. That was his personality. We try our best to do the same.

JERRY We have three of the fourth generation full time and one part time at this point — that's what makes it worthwhile. I'm here 11 hours every day. Haven't taken a day off in 20 years. It's life. This is all we know. We're not suited for anything else.

DAVID My life is very much interwoven with the business. I don't know that I have had a golf club in my hand since I was a kid on the mini-golf course.

JERRY Nobody owns a boat.

SAMMY Outside of this business I have nothing else to talk about. This is what we do. We're not landowners, building owners. No one has a slew of cars.

PAUL I have always felt that the goal is to keep the reputation we inherited from our father. Enhance it and protect it. It's not like we had a generic name like Musicland or something. This is our family. Our father's name. It's the most important thing that we own. **MI**

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SPEED OF SOUND

Sweetwater continues to expand its staff, facility and product offerings while focusing on innovation

It's no secret Sweetwater Sound is growing at the speed of, well, sound. The company, run by founder Chuck Surack, is already housed in a 180,000-square-foot complex in Fort Wayne, Ind., and it's continuing to expand with a \$24 million, 110,000-square-foot addition that is expected to be fully completed by May 2014.

Christopher Guerin, vice president of corporate communications for Sweetwater, said that while the space will provide expanded warehouse and shipping capacity — along with additional conference and training space — the lion's share of the new addition will accommodate the company's growing sales force.

"We are bursting at the seams," Guerin said. "We already have more than 500 employees, and the expansion will accommodate 1,000. We plan to add 315 just over the next four years."

Almost more astounding than the number of the employees Sweetwater has is the training

that its 200-member sales team goes through. All new sales engineers attend a 13-week training program, which covers not only musical gear, but also sales techniques.

"Twice a week we have sales training on gear," Guerin said. "We have various vendors come in for a 90 minute session and train the staff on the latest gear."

GROWTH IN INNOVATION

Part of those sessions include education on new products that Sweetwater brings on — many times well before other retailers. One voting supplier mentioned that Sweetwater,

"is willing to try new, innovative products targeted to new markets."



Artist rendering of Sweetwater's headquarters post-expansion

Phil Rich, senior vice president of merchandising for Sweetwater, said that while the company features a versatile mix, they are careful about what brands and products they choose to carry.

"When we consider new products or new brands, part of our decision making process is credibility," Rich said. "At Sweetwater, we stand behind everything we sell and nearly every product gets

our free two-year warranty and lifetime tech support. That's not carte blanche to carry everything under the sun; rather it's a daily reminder that we want to carry quality products we are confident that our customers will love."

So, why is Sweetwater willing to carry these products before most retailers?

"Look back at how Surack built the business: innovation over novelty, quality over cost, and relationships over a quick buck," Rich said. "When we stick to that formula, things seem to work out pretty well for our customers, our vendors and Sweetwater." —KK

SWEETWATER SOUND

Fort Wayne, Ind.

PRINCIPALS
Chuck Surack

FOUNDED
1979

EMPLOYEES
500+

STORES
1

ANNUAL REVENUE
About \$300 million



Chuck Surack

EXPERIENCE EXPERTS

Experiential rooms at **West Music** distinguish the full-line dealer from its competitors

At West Music, it's all about the customer experience. And the six-location operation provides that experience in many ways through its customer service, school music reps, and, more recently, the expansion of its experiential rooms — spaces that cater to one instrument, letting dedicated customers shop and test out gear.

Currently, all six locations feature three experiential rooms: an acoustic guitar room, a drum room, and an electric guitar and amp room — also deemed the “loud room.”

“Our experiential rooms allow customers to go in, close the door and just really get involved in getting to know the products,” said Robin Walenta, president and CEO of West Music.

SPECIALTY STRINGS

This past October, West Music took its experience to another level by debuting its Artisan Fine String Shoppe at its flagship location in Coralville, Iowa.

Besides showcasing West Music's string selection, the Ar-

tisan Fine String Shoppe features the store's string luthier and his work space — bench and all.

“Customers can go, meet him and see his work first hand,” Walenta said. “He also interfaces during the selling process, for instance if a customer wants to tweak an instrument. I believe having him in the space also adds a little romance to the process. He's a craftsman and there he is in the room with all these tools.”

Walenta said that while West Music plans to eventually expand its experiential rooms into the band instrument field, it doesn't plan to add an orchestral room at every location. In a state the size of Iowa, she doesn't believe they have to.

“When you bring in unique, high-quality instruments, people will drive a fair distance to have that kind of experience with that quality of a product,” she said. “So, we feel like we don't need that kind of room at every facility. We don't want to dilute it.”

SCHOOL MUSIC BOOSTER

The string shop not only caters to the high-end client, but Walenta said it will also help

West Music become even more of a resource for local school music programs. (It currently works with 482 schools in three states.)

“Our shop will enhance their school music programs,” Walenta said. “We will partner with all the orchestral directors across the area recruiting and retaining students for their orchestral programs.”

Another aspect of the “West Music experience” is the contract the store provides B&O students.

WEST MUSIC

Coralville, Iowa
PRINCIPALS
 Robin Walenta, Steve West, Ryan West

FOUNDED
 1941

EMPLOYEES
 172

STORES
 6

ANNUAL REVENUE
 \$32 million

Once they get started in the orchestral program at their school, the money they pay

towards the lease of their instruments accumulates credit that they can later redeem towards a step-up instrument at West Music.

“So once they get to a 3/4 or full-size instrument, we are reaching out to them and letting them know they have this much money invested in a better quality instrument and we ask them if they'd like to set up an appointment with a consultant to see how they can best utilize those funds,” Walenta said. “It's an opportunity for them to take the lease monies that they've invested and put them into a higher quality instrument that will enhance their playability and be something that they play for a long time.”

B&O aside, Walenta said evoking strong customer service skills throughout all departments of the store keeps them top of mind with customers.

“We have extraordinary associates,” she said. “We know they are the most important assets and the thing that differentiates West Music from anyone else, not only in the school music marketplace. It's our people that make us different.” —KK



Robin Walenta

ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT

Guitar Center has a new CEO, more than 250 stores, and a renewed commitment to serving customers

Last October, Guitar Center invited members of the industry's trade press out to its headquarters in Westlake Village, Calif., for the company's first-ever Media Day. Journalists were given access to top executives and a preview of plans for the future, offering a rare glimpse inside the industry's largest music retail operation.

For Mike Pratt, GC's CEO, who took the reins in March, it was an opportunity to be more forthcoming with the press because, "I think we have a lot of good things to talk about," he said.

"I'm just energized by what I'm seeing in the organization," he added. "It's a very, very exciting company. The tenure in the organization at all levels blew me away. The knowledge about the industry, the knowledge about our customers, the knowledge about the equipment we're selling is very, very impressive."

For the rest of the day, his executive team set out to prove him right, echoing his sentiments and highlighting a variety of GC initiatives. Each consistently demonstrated that the company's top management was headed in

the same direction, and speaking with one voice. Well, one voice, except on one question: How many Guitar Center outlets are there? At the time, they wavered between 252, 253 or 254.

It's difficult to blame them for a lack of agreement. Guitar Center has been opening stores at a blistering pace. In October, 252 stores were officially open, but others were ready to go. By the end of 2013, the company expects to have 255 Guitar Center branded stores doing business. That's 15 new locations this year.

RAPID REWARDS

That kind of expansion, alone, made voters take notice in this year's Retailing Excellence Awards polling, but Guitar Center also received a variety of nominations for improved customer service, merchandising, sales, marketing and promotions. Voters also lauded the company's new lesson programs and player experience events.

On the events level, GC is unrivaled in its ability to deliver musician-driven opportunities that nurture musical talent. With competitions like the On-Stage

battle of the bands, a Singer-Songwriter competition, Battle of the Blues and Drum-Off, the company highlights unsigned artists, giving them a legitimate shot at being discovered.

In April, GC aimed to bring The NAMM Show to consumers with its first public Musician's Expo that featured 60 exhibiting brands at the Long Beach Convention Center in California.

GC continues to roll out its Guitar Center Studios concept,

Pro Tools and Logic.

"Guitar Center Sessions," a performance and interview show, is entering its seventh season on DirectTV. On the horizon are appearances by Korn, Gary Clark Jr., Joan Jett & The Blackhearts and Cheap Trick. Christopher Ian Bennett, vice president of corporate affairs & communication, said the show's audience has rivaled major cable programs like "Boardwalk Empire."

But it's the store growth that continues to wow, and sometimes worry, vendors. In an industry that has seen other retailers rapidly expand only to crash and burn, Guitar Center says it's different. Tim Martin, the company's CFO, said that all 253 Guitar Center stores are cash flow positive, and that physical stores continue to fuel the business, especially the company's growing number of secondary and tertiary store footprints.

"We've got it really dialed in now," he said. "It's not trying to take a primary store and shrink it down. It's opening it up. It's also a much more inviting concept. Much more community interaction, which is critical." —FA

GUITAR CENTER

Westlake Village, Calif.

CEO
Mike Pratt

FOUNDED
1959

EMPLOYEES
Approximately 10,000

STORES
255

ANNUAL REVENUE
\$2.1 billion (includes all brands)

offering rehearsal and practice space in its stores as well as certified training on programs like



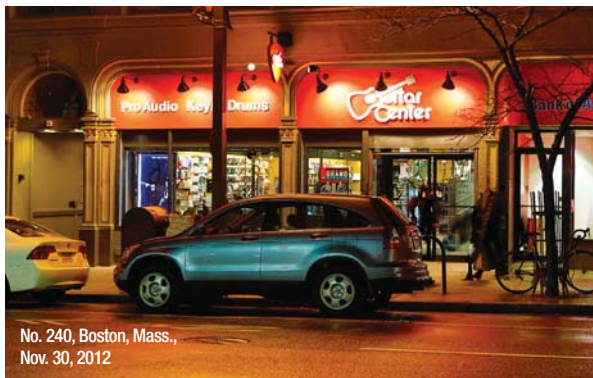
No. 239, Midlothian, Va.,
Nov. 29, 2012



No. 253, Ocean City, N.J.,
Sept. 26, 2013



No. 250, Waco, Texas,
July 11, 2013



No. 240, Boston, Mass.,
Nov. 30, 2012



No. 251, Mesa, Ariz.,
Aug. 1, 2013



No. 243, Shreveport, La.,
Feb. 21, 2013



No. 246, Mesquite, Texas,
May 2, 2013



No. 247, Southington, Conn.,
May 16, 2013



No. 244, Katy, Texas,
March 14, 2013



No. 241, Chico, Calif.,
Jan. 17, 2013



No. 248, Bellingham, Wash.,
May 30, 2013



No. 245, Macon, Ga.,
April 25, 2013

STAYING POWER

Customer service to the pros has made **Corner Music** a Nashville stalwart

Corner Music started on a simple premise in 1977 — to open an hour before the Nashville recording studios so musicians could make last minute stops to stock up on gear.

“I just gave the folks I knew a call and said, ‘Look, we’re gonna open at nine so you guys can get your supplies — your picks, your strings, your drumsticks, whatever you might need for the ten

home base for professional musicians in the heart of country music. Corner Music also houses an AV division, which installs audio, video, light and production systems primarily in houses of worship. On both sides of the business, Arsenault credits the store’s success to attentive, detailed customer service to pros and rookies alike.

“We realized early on that this is a really competitive business and pretty much everybody has the gear, so what can we offer that the other guys don’t? And that’s exceptional service,” Arsenault said. “It’s been more than one time that we’ve been



Larry Garris, J.D. Williamson and Ray Arsenault

o’clock session. That’s basically how we started out,” said Vice President Ray Arsenault, who worked for Monument Records before he and owner Larry Garris founded the shop.

What started as a 600-square-foot building is now an expanded guitar and repair shop that’s

out at the Nashville airport at three in the morning delivering guitars to put on a flight for a large tour. We go the extra mile for our customers to make sure they’re taken care of beyond reproach.”

Corner Music’s customer service philosophy extends to the

repair shop as well, which has seen only three different repair techs in the last 36 years. Repair techs Joe Hinchliffe and Jeff Marple repair about 50 instruments a week and see customers who travel from far outside Nashville for repairs.

Beyond prioritizing their customers’ needs, Corner Music stocks a wide range of instruments and products, from guitars for beginners to specialized lines and esoteric products,

ment stocks the largest selection of microphones anywhere within 1,000 miles, according to Arsenault.

“Whatever the big box stores are doing, we try to go in the opposite direction and not try to fight that fight,” Arsenault said.

The AV department, which accounts for about 50 to 60 percent of Corner Music’s business, also doesn’t fight the big box competition. Over the last 25 years, the department has done more than 750 house of worship installs in Nashville and as far away as Arizona and Florida. More recently, they’ve branched out into doing installs for government entities.

In 2014, Arsenault said they plan to further expand AV department and continue to cater to their customers in the same way they have for over 36 years.

“Those guys who were cutting sessions back then, now I’m selling to their children and grandchildren,” said Arsenault of the first musicians who headed to Corner Music before the 10 o’clock sessions. “It’s kinda funny how things have played out here in Nashville.” —KC

CORNER MUSIC

Nashville, Tenn.

PRINCIPALS

Larry Garris and Ray Arsenault

FOUNDED

1979

EMPLOYEES

15

STORES

1

ANNUAL REVENUE

Undisclosed

which keep people from the surrounding areas traveling to their corner. The AV depart-

The new **S2** Series from PRS Guitars



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Made in Maryland • Starting at \$1,179

Manufactured with new processes and specs in the same Maryland factory as all US-made PRS instruments, the new S2 Series brings classic PRS playability and reliability to a new price point. With a simple, straightforward design these guitars have serious style and expressive tone. Check one out at a PRS dealer near you and see for yourself. www.prsguitars.com/s2series

PRS PAUL
REED
SMITH
GUITARS

SCHOOL MASTERS

Quinlan & Fabish keeps coming up with new ideas worth studying

At Quinlan & Fabish, the numbers don't tell the full story. Fifty-four — the number of years since the company started. Seven — the number of locations the company operates, across three states, spanning about 200 miles. Number of students served? That's beyond estimation. Still, it all adds up to a school music dealer who is leading the way with smart innovations.

"George Quinlan Jr. and his team really have it together," wrote one supplier.



George Quinlan Jr.

"They have created brilliant programs," noted another.

We couldn't agree more. Here's one, from company presi-

dent George Quinlan Jr.:

"This year, we did something new that we thought worked really well. We have great relationships with our band and orchestra directors, the people who teach in school as their full-time job, but we haven't had that same quality of relationship with private teachers. And yet they seem to be the key influencers when it comes to the second purchase — a step-up trumpet or a better flute — and they tend to appreciate it when the parents invest. We've struggled with it for years.

Our school reps visit between 7:30 a.m. and 3 p.m., and we try not to interrupt the flow. But the private teachers don't get there until 3. So just by sheer scheduling we never meet these people.

So we decided to put together an advisory board of people like that, knowing that we hadn't reached out to them directly. Some of them knew of us, some didn't. It's a group of 25 teachers — flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone — and we had an event at the store and invited our key suppliers. For the flute group, there were five people, and they had a chance to visit with one manufacturer for a half hour, and then another. We had them critique our music selection in the store, our acces-

sory items and things like that.

They learned a lot about us, things they didn't know, and we learned a lot more about them. And they shared their expertise. They showed us a couple of really good instruments that we didn't necessarily carry at that price point. The vendors liked it, too.

The teachers were somewhat flattered — hey, we're getting recognized with an award, and hey, my opinion matters.

This is a longterm investment but we're seeing short-term rewards, too. Here's the story: About two years ago, I had been on Facebook and a flute

of her students. And I thought, darn. Because she used to send a lot of kids our way.

About a month after that, she sent a request for some funding: Could we help out with her community orchestra? And I said, well, we'd love to — but I always thought that local stores supported local musicians, and local musicians supported local stores, and I just saw a glowing review of this other store. Maybe we should meet, I said.

So we did. And I asked her: 'What would you think about putting an advisory board together? Get six or seven different flute companies, five or six teachers, and you could help us make good selections.' We did, and she loved it. Then the following summer, which was this summer, I opened up Facebook and there she was saying, 'I just got back from Q and F, and they did a great job with taking care of one of my students.' Her student had bought a Cannonball flute, a Mio, which she hadn't known about before the board was formed.

And I thought, well, that was a pretty instant reward. It will be our obligation to continue and develop that relationship. Now we need to find 25 more, and 25 more." —DZ

QUINLAN & FABISH

Burr Ridge, Ill.

PRINCIPALS

George Quinlan Jr.

FOUNDED

1959

EMPLOYEES

125

STORES

7

ANNUAL REVENUE

\$20 million

teacher that I know was raving about what a great job one of my competitors was doing with one



KW181



Thank You.

A product does not become great on its own, it is also takes the support of the people at the front line of sales that passionately articulate its value proposition and earn their customer's trust. On behalf of everyone at QSC, a hardy Thank You for making the KW181 Active Subwoofer a 2013 Product Excellence Award winner.



K Series



KW Series

QSC
qsc.com

GROWTH SQUARED



Expertise in both pro audio and e-commerce has helped **Unique Squared** become a top dot-com in only six short years

Unique Squared was born in a dorm room at Georgia Tech University in 2007, the brainchild of Paul Darrigo, Eugene Fernandez and Richard Scalesse, three music aficiona-

dents decide to set out and create the next big thing in pro audio when they saw an unfilled niche.

"We saw an opportunity in the online space for a hyper-efficient online retailer to capitalize on the gap between

so many capacities."

It's that obsession, along with a deep understanding of the products they offer, that has helped Unique Squared grow.

"We tie our rapid growth to our expertise with the Internet in conjunction with the products we sell within the market and demographic in our respective space," Scalesse said. "We know our market, our products, and, most of all, our online-centric customers."

has an "amazing attention to detail, and the owners are truly focused on the business."

So focused that Scalesse said Unique Squared's office boasts many whiteboards and mind maps that stun manufacturers when they stop by.

"Some of their reactions are priceless," he said. "These illustrations give [them] a glimpse into our ecosystem of how the Internet intertwines with our business."



CFO Adam Huang with co-founders Paul Darrigo and Richard Scalesse

dos. Today, the pro-audio and DJ e-tailer boasts more than 40 employees and a 100,000-square-foot headquarters in Atlanta.

Unique Squared offers almost every pro-audio and DJ line imaginable in addition to a few keyboard, amp and guitar brands such as Yamaha, Fender and Vox. The three college stu-

dents are now a couple dominant players and slow, evolving brick-and-mortar stores," said Scalesse, who shares the title of co-founder with his two partners, but said he wears multiple hats that range anywhere from operations to sales. "We live and breathe e-commerce. We are obsessed with the online world in

UNIQUE SQUARED

Atlanta

PRINCIPALS
Paul Darrigo,
Eugene Fernandez,
Richard Scalesse

FOUNDED
2007

EMPLOYEES
About 40

STORES
1

ANNUAL REVENUE
Undisclosed

And manufacturers have noticed that focus. One voting supplier mentioned the company

GROWTH ON THE HORIZON

With about six years under its belt, Unique Squared is not done growing yet. Scalesse said looking ahead he hopes to grow the company to six times its size in the next five years.

While Unique Squared currently offers products outside of the pro-audio and DJ categories, Scalesse said he and his team are planning on continuing to grow the site's product offerings even more.

"We have pretty aggressive plans for expanding into other categories that we are not currently offering yet," Scalesse said. **-KK**

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We look forward to a prosperous partnership in 2013.



BEYOND E-COMMERCE

A focus on personal interactions has helped
Strings and Beyond thrive

In 2002, Mike Griggs was shopping for guitar strings online but couldn't find a quality customer service experience. For Griggs, whose entrepreneurial mindset goes back to mowing lawns and painting mailboxes, that problem meant an opportunity.

Using his background in engineering, and partnering with his father-in-law, Bob Cowan, for help on the inventory side,

Griggs launched Stringsandbeyond.com to sell direct to consumers. Problem solved.

Eleven years later, Strings and Beyond is still running on the mission of providing a memorable, personalized e-commerce experience. The site carries more than 3,000 choices for everything from acoustic guitar strings to strings for the dulcimer and oud. Still a family business based in North Carolina, the site has seen

between 25 to 30 percent growth over the past five years.

"We've never compromised our attention to the customer," Griggs said, adding that their customer service approach is all-inclusive, from shipment packers to the customer service team who answer emails and calls. Every invoice is signed with a personal note, and customers often find free extras in their packages like picks or guitar cleaning cloths. "That's just

been the most important focus for our business," Griggs said. "And for us to offer that inside the e-commerce world made for a profitable fit."

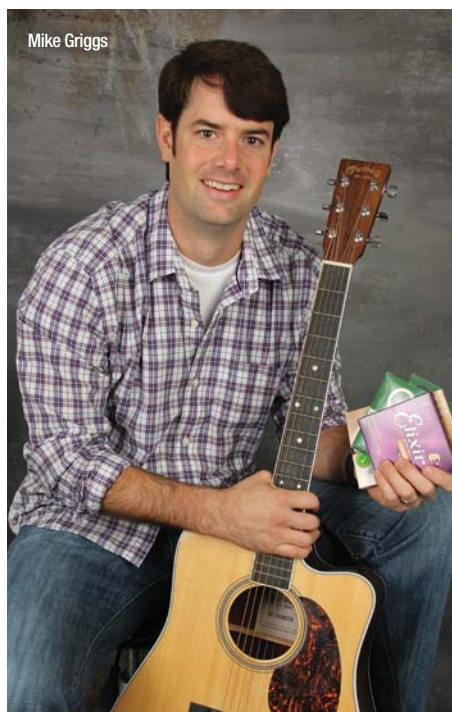
Comments from suppliers echo that emphasis on personal interactions. "These guys are some of the smartest people in our industry," wrote one. "Their site is well maintained and user-friendly and their customer service is excellent. They do a great job selling our products and offering great deals to their customers."

Part of that service is how fast

out fast. So while we pay close attention to customer service, the next important thing is guitar strings have to get out the door fast — every single day," Griggs said of the company's same-day shipping. Plus, shipping is free for orders over \$35, and since the average order is around \$60 to \$70, many customers get their strings shipped fast at no cost.

The upcoming year is scheduled to be full of changes including new automated email marketing strategies and an emphasis on improving workplace culture. At the top of the list? A complete redesign of the website to help guide customers through the thousands of options. Griggs said the current site and search function work perfectly for musicians looking for a specific string, even tough-to-find products like handwound strings from Germany-based Pyramid. But to help attract new buyers, Griggs said they plan to streamline the website to create an easier browsing experience.

In other words, even though their formula has kept growth consistent so far, Griggs isn't taking the success for granted. "I think we have a long way to go," he said. —KC



Mike Griggs

STRINGS AND BEYOND

Southport, N.C.

PRINCIPALS
Mike Griggs

FOUNDED
2002

EMPLOYEES
14

STORES
1

ANNUAL REVENUE
\$3 million

customers find their strings in their mailboxes. "If I place an order somewhere, I want it to ship

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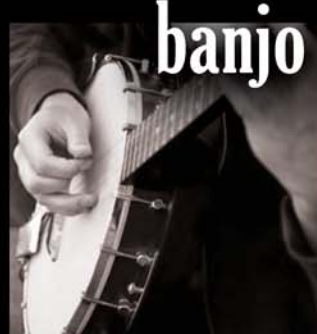
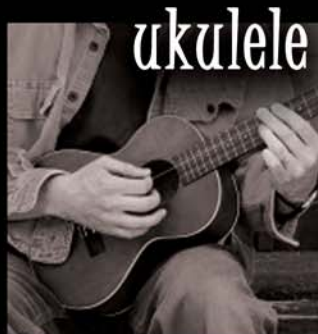


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The folks at **Alto Music** call the operation "The Most Complete Music Store In The World." They just might be right



Haber (second from right) with the Alto Music crew at the AES convention in October.

Well, darn. You were probably hoping that Jon Haber had some sort of secret to his success. And given his "willingness to share insights with others," as one supplier put it, you might think this year's Retailing Excellence award for Alto Music would present the ideal opportunity for the owner to share his previously concealed wisdom.

Nope.

Haber surrounds himself with smart, hard-working, largely homegrown staff. In the past three years, he has upgraded all four of his locations (three full-line retail stores, in Middle-

town, Airmont, and Wappinger Falls, N.Y., as well as a pro-audio office in Manhattan). He sees every check the company cuts. He attends trade shows. In other words, there is no secret.

"I'm a hardworking guy," Haber said. "Everyone says that about themselves. But everyone who knows me would say that about me, I think."

ALL THINGS TO ALL CUSTOMERS

Perhaps Alto's greatest trick is to attempt to live up to the moniker that appears on its website: "The Most Complete Music Store In The World. Period." "It's been said that it's hard to appeal to everyone, but we do band

instrument rentals in the same store where we do \$100,000 audio systems," Haber said. "When rock and roll guys come in to the store and see trumpets and flutes, that's not their gig. But the way our store is laid out I think we can appeal to all. None of these things are afterthoughts."

One current focus is online sales. In 2012, they accounted for 22 percent of the company's gross; this year, that number jumped to 29 percent. That's the sort of result that helps offset

This year, Alto upgraded its entire web system. "I've never brought in a ringer," he said. "That may not have been the smartest way to do it. We've had to figure it out ourselves."

For physical upgrades, however, he'll call in reinforcements. "We've had contractors in [Middletown] nonstop for the past seven months," Haber said. "We expanded our office space to accommodate the internet growth. I've got photo studios, web content people, video guys. I've been staffing up for the past year, but I needed the infrastructure to house all of that in an orderly fashion."

SHOWING THE WAY

Suppliers who nominated Alto this year focused on Haber's leadership. One described him as "the best of the best," noting an enthusiasm that is "carried throughout his entire organization." For his part, though, Haber is quick to prop his compatriots — and they are one of the few things he will take credit for.

"I am able to see talent," he admitted. "And none of this could be done without really good people." —DZ

ALTO MUSIC

Middletown, N.Y.

PRINCIPALS

Jon Haber

FOUNDED

1989

EMPLOYEES

90

STORES

3, plus one pro audio outlet

ANNUAL REVENUE

\$43.5 million

the "soft" demand Haber says he is seeing in walk-in retail. But it also creates a lot of work.

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ORANGE, CA

UPWARD MOTION

Two years of upgrades have positioned Kraft Music for continued growth

There's a lot going on behind the scenes of KraftMusic.com. From completed upgrades to expansions in new directions, the full line web deal-

They say, "Don't you do most of your business on the web?" said Ben Kraft, owner of Kraft Music. "The truth is that it takes an awful lot of analog activities to make it all happen."



From left: Dan Stouff, Jamie Medina, Ben Kraft, Ray Tevich and Brandon Zunker

Founded as a keyboard retail operation in 1984, Kraft Music's online sales became the majority of its business around 2001. Getting in early was key for Kraft, who says he's had time to adapt to the constant changes in the world of e-commerce. He stresses it has never been a web-only operation, however, as customers are encouraged to call or email

customers with enough confidence to place an order.

"Combining personal service [with] the digital world has always been our goal," Kraft said.

The scale of that goal continues to grow. Kraft's 42,000-square-foot distribution facility is finishing up its second year of operation and has allowed the company to expand and increase efficiency.

Nearly quadrupling the size of its distribution center didn't

than ever to offer customers in-stock inventory as well as same-day shipping.

If 2012 was the year of the distribution center, Kraft said 2013 has been all about office renovations. By building into what was once warehouse space, they've tripled the office size and created a state-of-the-art workspace with a sound masking system and a refreshed showroom — "a big investment in the future and growth of the company," Kraft said.

For 2014, Kraft hopes that his steering committee of four department leaders (plus himself) will ensure the company's strategy flows through every department and that each area is equipped with the tools it needs.

"As a small business owner it's so tempting, and sometimes necessary, to do many things yourself. There was a time when I was selling, buying, shipping, planning, paying bills, choosing landscaping contractors, etc.," Kraft said. "Placing many of those activities in the hands of this capable group has helped to build the company bigger and faster than I could have alone." —KC

KRAFT MUSIC

Franklin, Wisc.

PRINCIPALS
Ben Kraft

FOUNDED
1984

EMPLOYEES
26

STORES
1

ANNUAL REVENUE
Undisclosed

ership is poised for a year of sustainable growth.

"Folks who visit our office for the first time are often taken aback by all of the people and activity within the walls here.

music-speaking sales reps with any questions.

Kraft also said an "enormous" amount of time and resources go into the site's numerous video demos, which aim to provide

come without challenges to systems and technology, but Kraft said they're in a better position



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String Swing Guitar Wall Mounts

String Swing offers a variety of guitar wall mounts, including its Stylz line that lets musicians display their personal style. "String Swing makes a good product that does not harm a guitar's finish," said one voting retailer. "It is the only brand we will use at our shop." stringswing.com



TC Electronic Ditto

Made by guitarists for guitarists, TC Electronic's Ditto looper gathered much praise from retailers, including, "an easy-to-use looper that is an extremely hot item in 2013." The looper offers True bypass and Analog-Dry-Through as well as an undo/redo function. tcelectronic.com

Kala Ukuleles

According to retailers, the uke craze isn't over yet. "Ukuleles are still really good sellers, and Kala's are the best," said one retailer. The company recently debuted its U-BASS Rumbler, which is ideal for commuters or airline travelers as it meets most airline carry-on requirements. Strung with Kala's Silver Rumbler Strings, each model is equipped with a Kala piezo pickup and EQ with a built-in tuner. kalabrand.com





Breedlove Guitars

One voting retailer called Breedlove Guitars “an excellent product with excellent customer service” and “[nothing but quality all around.](#)” One of these quality products is Breedlove’s America C25, which is crafted in Bend, Ore., and features a Sitka spruce top. [{breedlovemusic.com}](#)



Taylor Guitars Limited Edition 500 Figured Mahogany Guitar

Taylor’s all-mahogany guitars boast special appointments, including ivoroid binding, a black pickguard, and a new “Century” inlay, which incorporates a retro-inspired progressive fretboard pattern and headstock detail. The new models have been blowing retailers away, with one exclaiming, “One word ... wow!” [{taylorguitars.com}](#)



Schecter Nikki Sixx Bass Guitar

Schecter's Nikki Sixx bass guitar features a mahogany body, rosewood fingerboard and EMG Active P/J pickups. "Out of the box, [Schecter guitars have the best set-up available](#)," said one voting retailer. schecterguitars.com



Dunlop John Petrucci Signature Guitar Picks

These signature picks are created using John Petrucci's own specs and feature a raised JP logo grip and polished, beveled tip. But according to one retailer, it's their unique design that's helping them flying off shelves, "[I can't keep them in stock](#)." jimdunlop.com



Music Nomad ONE Guitar Polish, Cleaner and Wax

This streak-free, high-shine gloss magnifier is organically formulated to clean, polish, wax and protect. The Guitar ONE is infused with white Brazilian carnauba wax that delivers an acoustically transparent durable shield with [a high gloss shine that protects the instrument's finish](#). One retailer even likes the scent, "The wax and cleaners smell great, and the cleaning cloths are terrific." musicnomadcare.com

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Roland SPD-SX Sampling Pad

This sampling pad was described by one voting dealer as “the industry standard for drummers, and becoming a standard part of acoustic drummers’ arsenals even though, gasp, it’s a piece of electronic gear.” It features 2 GB of internal memory for approximately 360 minutes of sampling without requiring external memory. rolandus.com



Ludwig Atlas Mount

The Atlas Mount, short for Aerial Tom Lug Attached Suspension, creates a mounting location anywhere on a drum requiring no drilling. Dealers are sold on it, with one stating that it’s “one of the first new, exciting products on the market in many years that can launch an entire new way to do things in percussion.” ludwig-drums.com



Majestic Prophonic Snare Drums

These snares feature a mechanism that allows for the use of up to four different types of snare material simultaneously, each with individual tension adjustments and throw off levers, while still letting all be engaged or disengaged together with a master switch. “There is no reason to own four or five different drums when the desired sound is all in one,” one retailer said. majestic-percussion.com

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Yamaha DXR Series Speakers

Yamaha's DXR series is comprised of four full-range models ideal for front-of-house sound, monitors, simple amplification and rigged applications. They feature ultra-precise 48Bit DSP processing for high-def sound and an intelligent onboard three-channel mixer. "We've been selling the pants off of this speaker," said one voting dealer. "For the money, this product is hard to beat. [They're a great value.](#)" [\[yamaha.com\]](#)

QSC KW181 18-Inch Subwoofer

This lightweight loudspeaker boasts extensive DSP featuring DEEP and Intrinsic Correction, which enhances system performance. But one dealer said it's the unit's built-in caster wheels that are the deal closer. "Once people see how easy this sub is to handle, and how big it sounds, they always choose to step up from the more affordable subs we offer. [By far the highest gross-profit-producing SKU this year that was not an accessory.](#)" [\[qsc.com\]](#)



PreSonus StudioLive

The StudioLive line, state-of-the-art, integrated hardware-software mixing and recording systems, gives users the features they need for live sound, live recording and studio recording. According to voting retailers, [the systems' affordability is a strong selling point.](#) "Very advanced technology and smart-system communication at a reasonable price. Used with their software, they form a complete live sound-recording-publishing system," said one retailer. [\[presonus.com\]](#)



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GREAT MARGINS

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Juno Reeds Reeds

Juno offers different strength reeds to help players find the right fit for them and their style. The reeds are grown from selected cane on the Mediterranean coast, and retailers have praised the product. "It's a great quality reed at a competitive price," commented one. junoreeds.com



Eastman Single French Horns

Eastman's french horns are ideal for players of all levels. The professional model offers articulated F side linkage arms, an adjustable hand rest and a deluxe JW Eastman fiberglass travel case. "They are so popular, you can't get any even if you order them," said one voter. eastmanmusiccompany.com

Hodge Silk Swabs

Hodge's swabs are super absorbent. The silk is compressible, making it possible to pull through instruments with large variations in bore size, and never leave lint behind. "A very effective cleaning product and a good value," said one retailer. hodgeproductsinc.com



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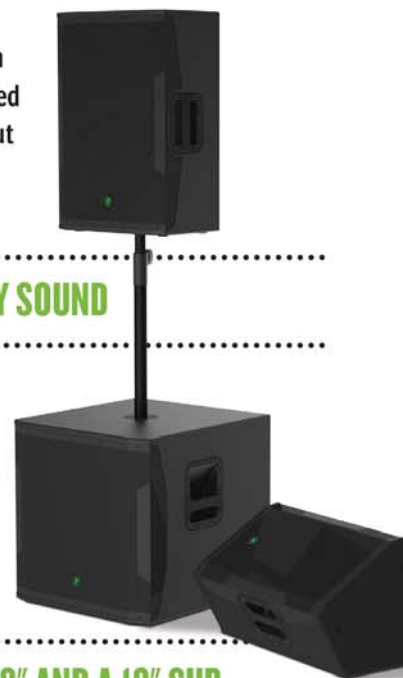


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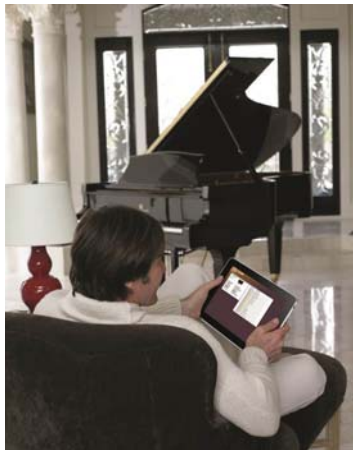


Roland V-Combo VR-09

This feature-packed keyboard offers instant-access operation for performing musicians, a SuperNATURAL-powered virtual tone wheel organ with nine harmonic bars, and a transistor-type 1960s organ tone. However, possibly **the biggest feature is its mobility.** "It is extremely easy to use and very portable," said one voting retailer. **{rolandus.com}**

QRS Pianomation II

The second installment of the Pianomation includes an integrated record with PNOscan integration, which gives players the possibility of networked lessons, performances and recordings. It provides position feedback of the keys' movement, as well as improved accuracy and performance. "Their philosophy of not obsoleting their customers is admirable," commented one retailer. "**The rest of the industry should take note.**" **{qrsmusic.com}**



Seiler Pianos USA Pianos

Seiler Pianos offers musicians a number of grand and vertical models, but retailers were really sold this year on the Eduard Seiler grand piano models. "**The ED-186 has beautiful fit and finish,**" said one. "It's an awesome performance piano at a great price. This grand is a great value with German historical heritage." **{seilerpianousa.com}**

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RIDING HIGH DOWN SOUTH

After nearly a half-century, **Peavey Electronics** continues to serve dealers with innovation and quality

Some 48 years after founding Peavey Electronics, Hartley Peavey is still trying to build a better mousetrap. “The last thing we want to come out with is a re-issue of our 1965 model,” said Peavey, the company’s CEO. “Instead of trying to recreate the glories of the past, we’re trying to set the course for the future.”

Over the years, the Meridian, Miss.-headquartered manufacturer has earned more than 180 patents worldwide. This year, as usual, there were a host of intriguing new products. Peavey received rave reviews for its AT-200 auto-tuning guitar, and players embraced the Power Slide, a lap steel guitar that can be played standing up.

In nominating the company for a Supplier Excellence award, retailers lauded Peavey for products like these, as well as for the helpful support of its staff. “Service, as well as intensity of products, repair network and innovation make Peavey great,” said one. Said another: “It’s the people — honest, friendly and service oriented.”

The company’s down-home flavor is a reflection of the CEO himself. Peavey points out that he answers his own phone calls and emails, and he takes pride in his company’s friendly work



environment. There are no “mistakes” at Peavey Electronics; everyone is on a first-name basis, he said. “We’re kind of an odd combination of doing business the old fashioned way, yet on

the cutting edge of technology. And amazingly, a lot of people consider Peavey a low-tech company, when nothing can be further from the truth. We have some of the most sophisticated

products out there. For instance, we introduced our Vypyr II VIP series modeling amplifiers last year at The NAMM Show. And our little low-end Vypyr got a ‘Best of Show’ from *Bass Gear* magazine.”

Bolstering its product range, Peavey maintains a full-time educational facility and a top-notch repair service center. “We’ll still repair amplifiers and have parts to repair amplifiers we made 40 years ago,” Peavey said.

In this industry, few people can claim as much experience as Peavey. He attended his first NAMM show in 1954 with his father and, except when he was in college and the military, he has attended every one since. Along the way, he feels he’s made a difference. He’s created hundreds of jobs in Mississippi while putting affordable, quality equipment in the hands of musicians and churches worldwide.

“I’ve always looked at business kind of like a rodeo,” he said. “The one who wins a rodeo is the one that can stay in the saddle the longest. And you know, I’ve been riding this buckin’ pony for about 48 1/2 years. In our end of the business, I don’t see anybody that’s been on the pony nearly as long as I have.” —JJ

A STRING OF SUCCESS

D'Addario keeps the supply chain humming with profitable gear

D'Addario & Co. gets high marks from retailers for its impressive in-stock rates, fair pricing, generous shipping terms and aggressive product development — a great portion of which can be attributed to the company's implementation of "lean manufacturing" methods derived from the Japanese manufacturing industry.

"We've focused on working in what's called a 'supermarket mentality,' where product

gets pulled through the pipeline and you respond immediately to fill it on the back end to meet demand," said David Via, D'Addario's vice president of sales. "One of the things that enhances our ability to do that is the fact that so much of our product is made in America."

By focusing on demand and building an efficient back system to supply product, the company has been able to raise its fill rates, while also lowering internal inventory levels on its

U.S.-produced and domestically assembled brands like D'Addario, Evans, Rico, Pro-Mark and Planet Waves.

D'Addario has examined the total costs of production and delivery and made adjustments to reduce waste in the supply chain. "When you look at producing what you need, when you need it, as you need it, we find that we can be very competitive manufacturing on Long Island," Via said. "We're

managing the entire supply chain as opposed to strictly managing the transactional component of the buy-sell arrangement."

More efficient production and steadier cash flow translates to more attractive freight rates for D'Addario dealers. "We don't want the dealer feeling compelled to buy a week's, a month's or an entire quarter's worth of supply and just sit on it," Via said. "Free freight is available at \$150 across all of our brands that can be combined into one order, and we welcome a dealer who calls us five days a week to get what he needs. We know that we're assisting in keeping their cash flow as relates to their accessories very profitable and very active as it continually churns. We consciously brought those rates down to a lower level, and we took our savings from elsewhere to subsidize the ability to do that." —EE



David Via

FAST COMPANY

Harris-Teller continues its long tradition of high fill rates and wide selection

In nominating Harris-Teller Inc. for a Supplier Excellence award, retailers praised the Chicago-based distributor for its friendly customer service, extensive inventory and, above all, its 98 percent fill rate. "They have a large variety of product and get it to me in two

to three days, with competitive discounts," said one retailer.

Maintaining a deep stock has always been a priority for the company, said Jon Harris, president. It goes back to 1967 when his father and uncle, Mike and Ed Harris, acquired the company and took on the massive debt



Jon Harris

burden of its previous owner. Maintaining high inventory levels proved to be not only a means of paying off creditors. It was, and continues to be, a great asset in serving the needs of retailers and end consumers.

"They started Harris-Teller as it is today, and we really haven't changed much," Harris said. "Our core mission is

still to service the music dealer, and we do that with fair pricing, quick turnaround and knowledgeable sales help. We recognize that the music store is the backbone of our industry, and we do everything we can to support that."

The 100,000-square-foot warehouse is continually stocked with guitars, percussion, band and orchestra items, keyboards, accordions, boutique items, stands, cases, and more. "We attempt to keep a three- to four-month supply of over 30,000 items and hundreds of thousands of print titles in stock all the time so we can turn it around quickly," Harris said. —JJ

KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Kawai America shows that nice guys can finish first in the minds of dealers

"Kawai America is not the biggest piano company," wrote one anonymous nominating dealer. "Kawai isn't the richest piano company. They are, quite simply, the nicest people to do business with that I've ever experienced. From Senior Vice President Brian Chung right down the line, their interest in serving their dealers' best interests is clear. All business is, ultimately, done on the basis of relationships. How we deal with our customers, in the end, determines our success (or lack thereof). Kawai tends its business relationships very well."

Perhaps needless to say, such a glowing testimonial is music to Chung's ears. "So often in business, the word 'nice' is associated with weakness," he said. "You don't always think about niceness as a valued virtue that's critical for business. And I'm absolutely thrilled to receive an accolade that implies that we are excellent in terms of product and service but then puts the fairness and the respect we have for our dealers right up there with those things. It's tremendously gratifying to see the relationships be placed on an even keel with product and overall service."

So, how did a leading piano

and keyboard manufacturer like Kawai America come to make dealer relationships a top priority?

"This is not something new for us," said Chung, who noted that Kawai America celebrated its 50th anniversary this year, and that its parent company in Japan dates back to 1927. "This is part of a culture that has existed here for decades. We have a core precept: We do not exist without our dealers. So they have to come first. And if you base your actions on that prime directive, and if you use that as your filter for the way you treat people, that's the foundation for a great relationship."

Kawai America cultivates that mindset among its dealers and employees when they gather for events like the annual Kawai Keyboard Academy. "We've done 16 of them now, and it's regarded as one of the finest training events in the industry," Chung said. "At that event, we try to communicate to our dealers and

salespeople how deeply we value them. It's the underlying theme behind everything we're doing. We're not trying to teach people something because we're an im-

the new GX Blak series of grand pianos and the CS10, a hybrid digital piano that builds on the success of its award-winning CA95 series. "The GX line continues the legacy of Kawai continually trying to raise the bar," Chung said. "There's a synergy between how it looks and sounds."

"When we created the Blak level with our previous RX Blak series, it was like a black label, and it was going to look as good as it sounded. We continue that tradition of creating a visually stunning piano, but there are a lot of things we've done that add to the foundations of the instrument and ultimately will cause it to be more

consistent and more stable and produce better tone over time. We use composite materials, specifically carbon fiber, throughout the non-tone-producing action parts. In a nutshell, wood shrinks and swells tremendously. Carbon fiber is lightweight and strong and it doesn't shrink and swell, and the stability of that has long-range implications." —EE

NEW WAVE PRODUCTS

Kawai continues to introduce innovative products for dealers to get excited about, including



Brian Chung



POINTS FOR CONTACT

St. Louis Music keeps in touch with its dealers — and offers them attractive terms

Since Mark Ragin purchased St. Louis Music five years ago, his U.S. Band & Orchestra Supplies company has experienced tremendous growth, tripling its gross sales from \$8 million in 2008 to \$24 million this year.

Even though he merged an industry-leading combo manufacturer/distributor with his own band and orchestra supplier to create one of the largest general

distributors of MI products in North America, Ragin has managed to hold on to the “family business” mentality that makes his operation successful. He still appreciates the power of the personal touch that defines his relationships with a diverse dealer network, drives new product innovation and upholds a high standard of quality control.

“Our strongest point is our inside sales crew’s daily contact

with dealers via phone,” said Ragin, noting several staff members who have been around for 10 to 20 years and have survived more than one change in company ownership. “There’s more than 100 years of experience between our inside sales reps, and they’re the ones getting to the dealers with our various accounts.”

SLM’s product managers know how to put the personal touch to good use. Each product category has its own manager in charge of overseeing production and developing new lines. They visit their respective overseas factories multiple times per year, taking a hands-on approach that helps

them manage production costs and stay up to date on the latest manufacturing techniques.

“They actually have to manage their own company, so they’re responsible,” Ragin said. “I give them free rein to do what they want with the products, so they make sure that they know the new things they bring to the market are going to be successful.”

SLM scored major points for dealer accessibility. “They appreciate having a family-run business as opposed to dealing with some of the large companies where you can’t get to anyone,” Ragin said. “Anyone can call and get to my desk and talk to me if they want. It’s an open policy.” —EE



Mark Ragin



FIRM ROOTS

Hal Leonard excels with a focus on fundamentals

Kudos like “best run business in our industry” may seem like unusually high praise, but with companies like Hal Leonard, such accolades from dealers come as no surprise. The world’s largest music print publisher, Hal Leonard has more than six decades of experience providing retailers and customers with a hugely diverse array of materials — and doing so with finesse.

The best-in-the-biz quote above is far from the only acclaim that Hal Leonard received during this year’s competition. “Ordering is made simple and if a problem arises, it is dealt with immediately and efficiently,” noted another voter. “Back orders are kept to a minimum.”

According to company President Larry Morton, Hal Leonard takes pride in the high level of service it provides to dealers, as well as the well-trained and knowledgeable staff they interact with. “Our phone lines are open seven days per week, with late hours to accommodate time zones across the country,” he said. “We keep investing in better and more sophisticated ordering and

distribution systems. We’ve also expanded and improved our dealer access website to give our dealers real-time info and many other tools to help them with their business.”

Such a dual focus — relying on firm fundamentals but looking towards innovation — has helped Hal Leonard thrive with its end consumers as well. And the company continues to expand distribution of tech-oriented products.

“We’ve seen a big sales increase around products that enable consumers to play and record music on their iPads, iPhones, and other mobile devices,” says Morton. “It’s a big growth area for our dealers.” —MG



Doug Lady, Brad Smith and David Jahnke

THE BRAND BUILDER

Beyond the keyboard, **Korg USA** connects customers with creative tools

For many in the music world, the name “Korg” immediately brings to mind visions of Triton synthesizers, Kaoss Pads and other high-tech, creative tools. But if this year’s voting dealers have anything to say about it, the company is much, much more than such products — as iconic and ubiquitous as they are — might imply.

In fact, Korg USA recently began distributing products for Ashdown Engineering and will exhibit the British bass amp designer and manufacturer for the first time at Winter NAMM 2014. The company has also expanded its role in the Canadian market, pushing such brands as Blackstar, Lâg, and HK Audio. Dealers are taking notice of the company’s ever-expanding host

of offerings. “Great new products at great price points,” gushed one voter.

Korg USA President, Joe Castronovo, affirmed that “the premium brands we represent all have a keen ability to produce innovative new products that either fill or offer a whole new creative approach to making music. We strive to bring those products to market at a fair price.”

A second voter praised not only Korg USA’s outstanding selection, but also its desire to constantly improve its overall service.

“We are fortunate to have a lot of seasoned employees who are extremely dedicated to serving our dealers,” Castronovo said. “And we continually challenge ourselves to improve upon processes and utilize new technolo-

gies that will benefit the customer. At the same time, we regularly seek out brands to distribute that offer a breadth of high-quality products we can be proud to represent.”

—MG

Joe Castronovo and Ashdown’s Mark Gooday



POSITIVE DIRECTION

Products from **KHS America** continue to improve — while improving bottom lines

For the second year in a row, nominating retailers praise KHS America for its top-notch service and continual upgrades. “Jupiter has been improving its product quality for years,” said one.

Lately, KHS has paid particular attention to details like trombone slides, valves and finishes, and consumers have taken notice. “Jupiter, Mapex and Majestic are now accepted and even preferred among pro players, students and schools,” said Tabor Stamper, president.



Tabor Stamper

“In addition to quality, we have also focused on line-logic and pricing strategy, as well as service for our retail partners. No matter which portion of the

company that our dealers and end consumers touch, our goal is that they walk away with a positive customer experience.”

The Mt. Juliet, Tenn.-headquartered distributor has also added several brands to its portfolio. Besides Jupiter wind instruments, Mapex drums, Majestic concert percussion, Altus flutes and Walden guitars, KHS now distributes BG Accessories, Vandoren, Dennis Wick, Rico, Remo and Innovative Percussion. In October, it also introduced a new line

of proprietary stands called NOMAD featuring color-coded packaging. “Our goal with these additions is to become a better partner to our dealers by providing more of the products they need

and want while complementing our own brands,” Stamper said.

In its management, KHS has striven to harness the power of its collective talent, creating alignment throughout the organization and helping everyone understand the company direction. Retailers have taken note of these improvements as well. “They have an improved focus on who they are, what their brands stand for and how they can best serve their dealers and end-users,” said one nominator. —JJ

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SERVICE ENTRANCE

KMCMusiccorp delivers, with an ongoing effort to provide its dealers what they need

In nominating North America's largest distributor and wholesaler of music products, retailers continue to praise KMCMusiccorp for its efficiency, wide range of product, excellent fill rates, and timely delivery. "KMC does a great job of fulfilling our orders with very little error," said one voter. "While we know we can always go direct for most products, KMC allows for

lower-volume stocking to adjust our inventory seasonally. Their sales reps are always knowledgeable and great to work with if there is ever a problem."

These achievements are a two-way street, according to James Tsaptsinos,



James Tsaptsinos



Roger Hart

KMC's vice president of sales. "We could only improve accurate delivery and quick turns because of the information being shared with us by our customers. Our salespeople take product knowledge very seriously, and it builds great customer service, as well as a positive reflection in sales."

Each quarter, the company assembles its sales team to review brand strategies and product knowledge. "Our rela-

tionships with our dealers are getting stronger every day, and our service levels are meeting, and exceeding new thresholds," Tsaptsinos said. "Our success is directly attributable to the success of our dealer network. If we can create programs and service our customers to achieve their goals, we can't ask for anything more."

For KMC's merchandising and purchasing teams, dealer service-improvement continues to be the primary goal. "We realize our customers have a choice, so we strive to offer the right products combined with on-hand inventory and expedited shipping," said Roger Hart, vice president of merchandising. "Adding in the talents of our sales team creates a winning combination." —JJ

LISTENING CLOSELY

Yamaha empowers employees, leaving retailers feeling like they're part of the team

"When it comes to service, we take a very broad view," said Rick Young, Yamaha's senior vice president. "Everybody in the company is empowered to help the [dealer] get what they need as quickly and efficiently as possible — whether

it's a return, a mistake, or they want to order something new. It's not only the district managers or the regional managers that have that; it's the product specialists, the product managers and the marketing managers, too."

One way Yamaha does this is through its Customer Support Group, a whole department that

does nothing but work with consumers. "Service is part of our whole company," Young said. "It's critically important to us."

Developing quality, relevant products is another Yamaha hallmark. The company relies on input from dealers, customers, endorsing artists and development artists for ideas regarding new designs and instrument upgrades. "We worked with John Hagstrom, trumpeter in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in developing our Xeno Artist Model 'Chicago' C

Trumpet," Young said. "He is a tremendous player who has an amazing attention to detail,

and he is interested in helping us develop a better trumpet for symphony players."

"It's easy to say, 'I think this is what the market likes.' But we try to take it much further than that and use as many of our con-

tacts and relationships that we have to look at a much broader base."

Yamaha is also known for making great clinicians out of its endorsing artists, something that dealers love to take advantage of. "We can help with almost any instrument they might be

interested in, and it would go along with the dealer's marketing plan," Young said. —EE



Rick Young

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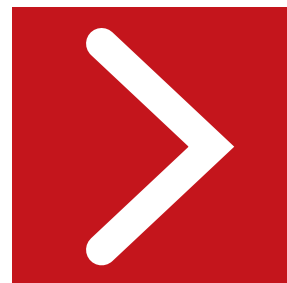
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GEAR



JAY TURSER | J-TONES

A Blast From the Past

Jay Turser has introduced its line of vintage surf and garage rock style guitars from the early 1960s, the J-Tones. The J-Tones encompass three distinct body styles. The Mosman is based on guitars made popular by surf bands of the '60s like The Ventures and Punk bands in the '70s such as The Ramones. The 1457 is inspired by the electric guitars used by garage bands from the mid '60s and features a birch body with maple neck and rosewood fingerboard. The 1423 is based on late '50s era guitars and boasts a single cutaway mahogany body. (jayturser.com)

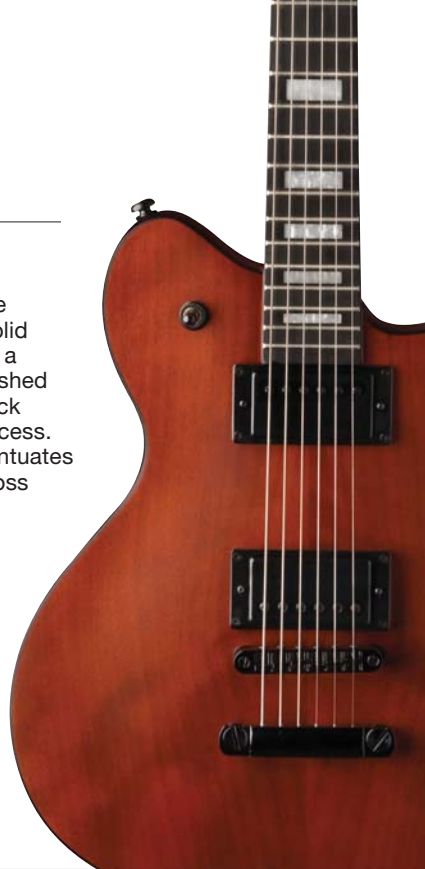
> InsideGEAR

- > **Guitars, Amps & Accessories**
Cort celebrates its 20th with Artisan bass line
PAGE 72
- > **Audio & Recording**
AKG debuts new dynamic headphones
PAGE 76
- > **Drums & Percussion**
Latin Percussion adds more cowbell
PAGE 80
- > **Band & Orchestra**
Jody Jazz expands DV CHI range
PAGE 82
- > **Print & Multimedia**
Hal Leonard goes country with Jason Aldean
PAGE 84
- > **DJ & Lighting**
Chauvet slims down with new low-profile par
PAGE 87

WASHBURN GUITARS | WI140NM

American Idol

Washburn Guitars has added the WI40NM to its Idol family of solid body guitars. The WI40NM features a solid two-piece mahogany satin finished body with a Canadian maple set neck with recessed heel for upper fret access. The 22-fret ebony fingerboard accentuates the pearloid block inlays and the gloss black capped headstock features a pearloid Washburn logo and stylized W inlay. {washburn.com}



REVEREND | KINGBOLT

King of Kolor

The Reverend Kingbolt is now available in two new colors. The standard Kingbolt, with the Reverend Special-H Zebra pickups, now comes in Satin Army Green with a maple fretboard. The Kingbolt RA, loaded with Railhammers, is now in Lakeshore Gold and features a Rosewood fretboard. Both Kingbolts are still available in the original colors.

{reverendguitars.com}

ANTHOLOGY GEAR WEAR | BLACKWOOD

True Grit

Anthology Gear Wear's new Blackwood strap is made from full-grain leather and tanned all the way through for durability. Top side and underneath side stitches are both made of high-grade industrial stitching. The strap is adjustable between 45 to 54 inches long and features a 100-year warranty on craftsmanship. {anthologygearwear.com}

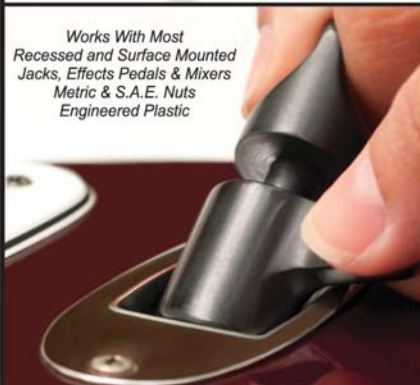


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CORT | 20TH ANNIVERSARY ARTISAN BASS

Birthday Bass

Cort Guitars has unveiled its 20th Anniversary Artisan bass guitars. Each model features the 20th anniversary logo on the electronics cover plate. The Artisan A-Custom 20th is available in four and five strings models and has a bird's eye maple top and back body. The Artisan B 20th is also available in four and five string models with a swamp ash body. **{cortguitars.com}**



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SAVANNAH | NEW MODELS

Folk-Friendly

Savannah recently introduced the SGD-12 Dreadnought, SGO-12 000 and SGP-12 Single 0. These models offer basswood tops and carved Sitka spruce braces give the guitars a full, warm sound. The new models also feature a bound rosewood fretboard, ivory body binding and nickel-plated hardware. MAP: \$99. **{savannahacoustic.com}**

ELECTRO-HARMONIX | OD GLOVE

Fits Like a Glove

Electro-Harmonix recently added the OD Glove. The MOSFET based OD Glove delivers a rich, overtone laden sound that doesn't get muddy, even with darker settings. Other features include a Tone Shift switch, selectable 9 or 18V internal voltage and true bypass switching. **{ehx.com}**



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KALA | MAKALA UKES

Shark Attack

Kala has added a shark bridge design to its Makala Ukulele color series. The Makala Sharks are available in six colors matched to emulate 1950s classic cars that will include vintage shades of white, blue, pink, yellow, red and green. The Shark bridge ukes are available in the soprano size and are the same body design as the Makala Dolphins. kalabrand.com



SOURCE AUDIO | SOUNDBLOX 2 OFD

Sound Off

Source Audio has released two new pedals, the Soundblox 2 OFD Guitar microModeler and OFD Bass microModeler. The “OFD” stands for overdrive, fuzz, and distortion. Both pedals offer twelve overdrive, fuzz and distortion tones specifically voiced to accommodate the individual frequency range of either guitar or bass. sourceaudio.net



TC ELECTRONIC | MINI REVERB

Mini Fame

TC Electronic has followed up its Hall Of Fame Reverb pedal with the Hall Of Fame Mini Reverb. The pedal features an ultra-small footprint, true bypass and an analog-dry-through design which means no conversion of the dry signal for tonal transparency and zero latency. tcelectronic.com



AKG | REFERENCE HEADPHONES

Beyond Human Hearing

AKG has introduced its K812 reference headphones with a new, open-back design. The K812 offers an oversized 53 mm driver for the highest dynamic range in an AKG headphone. Its copper-covered aluminum voice coil extends sounds beyond the limits of human hearing, hitting a full spectrum of frequencies. Each K812 is built with an adjustable headband and soft ear pads to ensure comfort for extended periods of time. akg.com

EVENTIDE | POWERFACTOR 2

Power Hungry

Eventide has rolled out the PowerFactor 2 stompbox power solution, which was co-developed with Cioks of Denmark. PowerFactor 2 simultaneously powers up to four Eventide Stompboxes plus up to four additional pedals. It features eight outlets configured in eight isolated sections with a total output of 1,600mA of current, a custom European toroidal transformer and four powerful DC sections with 400mA each. eventide.com



CLEAR-COM | ECLIPSE HX DIGITAL MATRIX SYSTEM

Enter the Matrix

Clear-Com's newly enhanced Eclipse HX Digital Matrix Systems — comprising the Eclipse HX-Omega, Eclipse HX-Median, Eclipse HX-Delta and Eclipse HX-PiCo — offer simplified setup, user operation and administration and have a large system capacity for many audio and user connections. All the systems have new capabilities, including ethernet and IP intelligent trunking with IVC-32-HX card redundancy, and dual-labels for multi-language preferences on V-Series user keypanels. clearcom.com



WESTONE | W-SERIES

Advanced Series

Westone has debuted its W-Series. The 10, 20, 30 and 40 W-Series models add improved audio performance, an enhanced design for comfort, and user customization with two cables and interchangeable faceplates for users' choice of colors. The W-Series features Westone's proprietary balanced armature drivers and advanced crossover designs. The W10 features a single armature driver, while the W20/30/40 feature multiple balanced armature drivers and multistage crossover designs that yield sonic purity. westone.com



KORG | PITCHBLACK PRO

Pitch Perfect

Korg has unveiled its latest rack-mounted tuner, the Pitchblack Pro. The 3D-style tuning meter features bright color LEDs and offers three display modes: regular meter, strobe meter mode, and half strobe meter mode. Occupying only 1U of rack space, the Pitchblack Pro is lightweight at 12.8 ounces and only 1.93 inches deep. korg.com

TC ELECTRONIC | BG COMBO SERIES

Quadruple Combos

TC Electronic has launched the all-new BG250 combo line-up. The four different combos differ only in their speaker configurations; all sport 250 watts of power, TonePrint functionality, a built-in tuner and intelligent EQ. The combos consist of a 1-by-12-inch speaker, a 1-by-15-inch speaker and a 2-by-10-inch speaker configuration all with a custom 1-inch piezo tweeter. Rounding out the series is a 2-by-8-inch with clarity and attitude that doesn't lose the rumble. (tcelectronic.com)



SOLID STATE LOGIC | LIVE

Live it Up

Solid State Logic has introduced Live, the first SSL console for live sound production. Based on SSL's new Tempest processing platform, Live features 976 inputs and outputs and 192 full processing audio paths at 96 kHz. All processing is built into the console surface. (solid-state-logic.com)



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LATIN PERCUSSION | GUIRA COWBELL

More Cowbell

Latin Percussion has added two guira cowbells to its U.S.-made cowbell line. Handmade from stainless steel, the guira cowbells have a textured surface that lets them also serve as guiras. The guira cowbell is available in hand-held and mountable models. A scraper is included with each hand-held model. MSRP: Hand-held, \$75.99; Mounted, \$79.99. lpmusic.com

SCYMTEK CYMBALS | VENTED SERIES

Big Splash

Scymtek Cymbals recently expanded its Vented series with the addition of three splash cymbals. The vent holes are proportioned for each cymbal to create the best combination of splash and trash. The 8-inch splash features six 1-inch vent holes. The 10-inch splash features six 1.25-inch holes, and the 12-inch splash features six 1.5-inch holes. scymtek.com



SONOR | 'MARTINI'

Kit With a Twist

Sonor has the launched the Martini, a new take on the cocktail kit that's offered in a retro Emerald Isle turquoise sparkle and includes natural-grain finish bass drum hoops. Martini's compact poplar shells produce bright tone with powerful projection and are cross-laminated for strength. Top-quality Remo heads are included as well as a single tom holder to mount the rack tom. MAP: \$359. sonor.com



GROVER PRO | PROFESSIONAL MUSICAL ANVILS

Watch Out Below!

Grover Pro Percussion recently unveiled its Professional Musical Anvils. Unlike other anvils, Grover's are multi-tonal, capable of producing two distinct pitches plus a third harmonic sonority produced by striking on the center logo. Each anvil comes with a sturdy hardwood mounting stand that is designed to let the anvil vibrate freely, resulting in maximum resonance. MSRP: Models PMA-A and PMA-B, \$195; Model PMA-H1, \$30. groverpro.com



TAMA | BUBINGA BIRCH SNARE DRUM

Hittin' the Beat

Tama's limited edition Backbeat Bubinga Birch Snare is built to withstand live performance with an exterior ply of naturally finished white oak and a Bubinga Birch blend inside. Marrying the rich tonality of four interior Bubinga plies with the cracking projection of four Birch out plies, the snare offers immense volume and sensitivity despite its depth. Included also are 2.3 mm Mighty Hoops. tama.com



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JODY JAZZ | DV CHI TENOR 9*

All That Jazz

JodyJazz has added the DV CHI Tenor 9* model to its DV CHI (Chicago) range of mouthpieces. The mouthpiece provides a larger facing and now offers the widest tip opening in the range. The 9* tip opening allows for the movement of more air, adding fullness of tone and volume to the robust sound that characterizes the DV CHI models. jodyjazz.com



ZONDA | ZFL-101 STANDARD FLUTE

True Standard

Zonda has released the ZFL-101 standard flute, which comes in the key of C, tuned to A442. The ZFL-101 features a standard cut headjoint, stainless steel springs, skin/felt pads and cork bumper material. stlouismusic.com



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HAL LEONARD | 'BEST OF JASON ALDEAN'

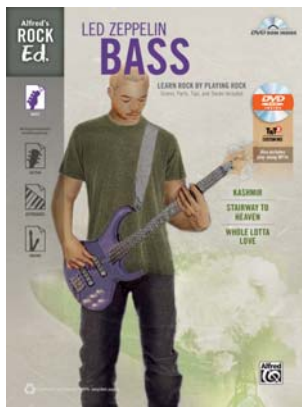
He's Country

Hal Leonard's new *Best of Jason Aldean* features 16 tunes arranged for piano, voice and guitar from the award-winning country star. Songs include "She's Country," "Big Green Tractor," "Why," "Take A Little Ride," "Dirt Road Anthem," "Don't You Wanna Stay" and "Fly Over States." halleonard.com

ALFRED | ROCK ED. SERIES

Whole Lotta Learnin'

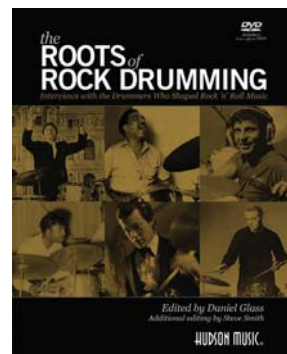
Alfred Music has added four new titles to the Alfred's Rock Ed. series: *Led Zeppelin Bass*, *Led Zeppelin Drums*, *Led Zeppelin Guitar*, and *Led Zeppelin Keyboards*. Crafted for group performance and instruction, each book teaches all the parts for "Kashmir," "Stairway To Heaven," and "Whole Lotta Love." Each product also includes full score and vocal part PDFs, in-depth lessons, a DVD with sound-alike and minus-instrument MP3s, and instructional MP3s that correspond with the lessons. alfred.com



HUDSON MUSIC | 'THE ROOTS OF ROCK DRUMMING'

Rockin' Roots

In 2001, Hudson Music founders Paul Siegel and Rob Wallis, along with veteran drummer Steve Smith, began conducting documentary-style video interviews with important drummers from rock history. Twelve years later, *The Roots of Rock Drumming* is a behind-the-scenes look into the origins of rock 'n' roll told by the groundbreaking drummers who were there. With 256 pages of rare photographs, the book and accompanying DVD, which contains three hours of interview excerpts, is a time capsule of the early days of such artists as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard. halleonard.com



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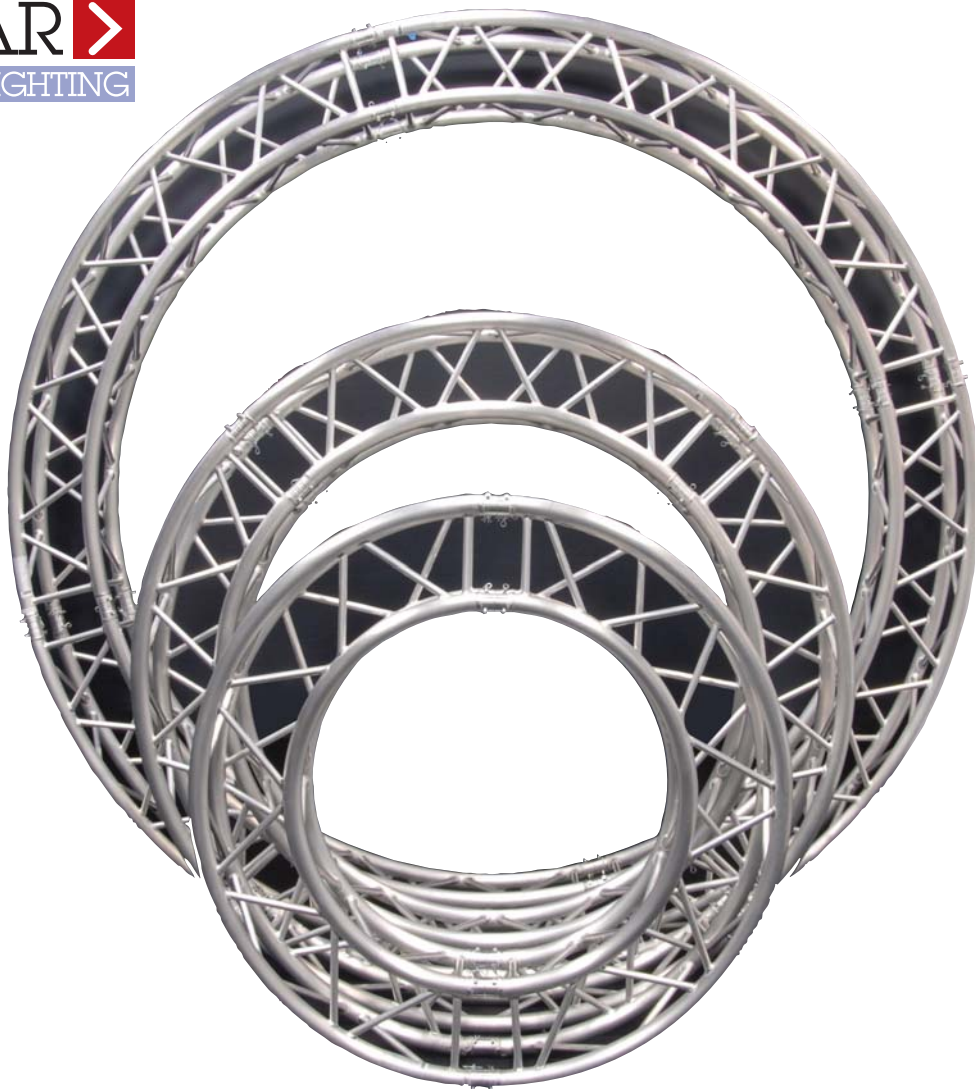
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TRUSST | NEW MODELS

Circle of Truss

Trusst recently added three truss arcs. Manufactured from lightweight, high-grade aluminum for easy transport and setup, the truss arcs are crafted by SLV-certified welders and available in three sizes: 3-meter with a 90-degree arc (CT290-430CIR-90), 2-meter with a 90-degree arc (CT290-420CIR-90) and 1.5 meter with a 180-degree arc (CT290-415CIR-180). Each arc includes connecting hardware and is compatible with many Trusst accessories. trusst.com

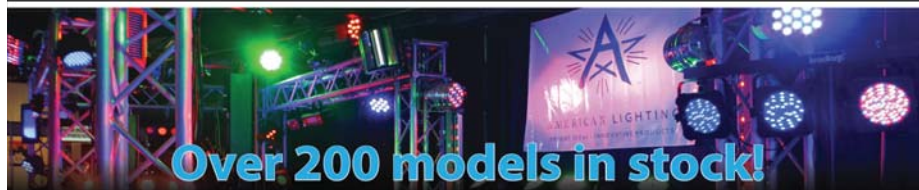


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GEMINI | G2V

Well Under Control

Gemini's new G2V is a USB controller and audio interface with a built-in two-channel mixer. The G2V transforms the standard DJ controller into a dynamic performance controller. Within its fully metal enclosure, the G2V provides two full-featured physical DJ decks, ASIO drivers, touch-sensitive jog wheels, two channels of audio with 3-band EQ and filter controls, and 16 multi-function performance pads and rotary encoders. geminisound.com



CHAUVET DJ | SLIMPARG HEX 3 IRC

Slim Down

Chauvet DJ recently introduced the SlimPAR Hex 3 IRC, a low-profile par with 6-in-1 LED technology and built-in infrared remote control capability. The SlimPAR Hex 3 IRC generates a spectrum of colors and achieves natural-looking color temperatures using three 9-watt, 6-color LEDs. To simplify setup and easily manage cables, its new, sit-flat housing design hugs the floor and features power and DMX outlets on both sides of the unit. chauvetlighting.com



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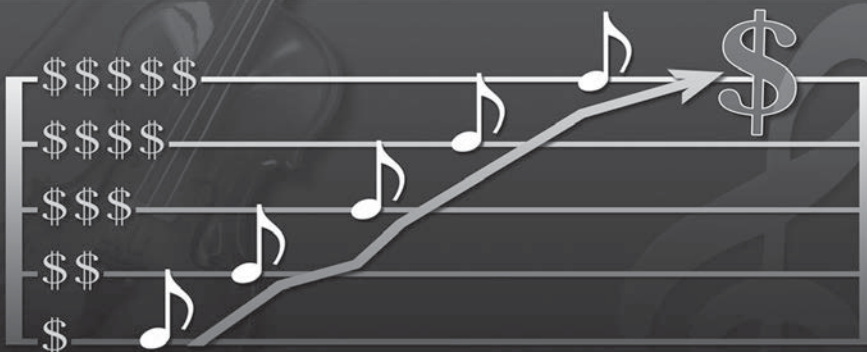
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| Alfred Publishing | 85 | Presonus | 67 |
| Allparts | 71 | QSC | 41 |
| AP International | 75 | Radial Engineering | 10 |
| Breedlove Guitars | 24 | Re-Axe | 72 |
| Cavanaugh | 13, 91 | Roland | 2, 61 |
| D'Addario | 5, 15 | Saga | 23 |
| Hohner | 73 | Samson | 92 |
| Hunter Musical | 81 | Shubb Capos | 71 |
| Irradiant Lighting | 86 | SKB Cases | 47 |
| Juno | 21 | St. Louis Music | 16 |
| Kala Brand Music | 22 | String Swing | 45 |
| Kawai | 69 | The Music Link | 7, 9 |
| KHS America | 43 | Theo Wanne | 17 |
| Korg USA | 79 | Veritas | 4 |
| Kyser | 74 | Vic Firth | 54 |
| Levy's Leathers | 31 | WD Music | 81 |
| Loud Technology | 59 | Yamaha | 49 |
| Music & Arts | 83 | Zoom North America | 11 |
| Music Nomad | 4 | | |
| NAMM | 18-19 | | |
| NEMC | 87 | | |
| Paul Reed Smith | 3 | | |

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Robin Walenta, West Music

“Our mantra is we have extraordinary associates. **We put a lot of time and attention on growth, development and recognition of our associates** each and every day because we know that they are the most important assets that we have. I think that truly is what sets us apart.”



Ray Arsenault, Corner Music

“Everybody here has been on both sides of the fence. By that I mean everybody here is a player and a salesperson. So we know what the customer is running up against when they walk through the door. We’ve been there, we’ve been in their shoes. So that helps a lot compared to someone who just gets hired on in a music store and has to learn the business. **Most of our guys were pros when they walked through the door and asked for a job.**”

Jon Haber, Alto Music

“It’s not easy out there. You’ve really got to go in with the attitude of, ‘How can I make myself better?’ Because things that worked 10 years ago, or even five years ago for that matter, aren’t flying. In my opinion **if you’re not really paying attention to what’s really going on in the greater world, it’s only going to get more difficult for you.**”



George Quinlan Jr., Quinlan & Fabish

“We do have, I think, an opportunity and almost an obligation to improve our Web presence for customers, because they expect it. So we’re really working hard for that. **We redid our web site this fall and got compliments, but we think we’re just at the beginning of making that the main connection between us and the parents we serve** and eventually the teachers as well. So that’s going to be a big part of our focus in the future — taking some of those things that are face to face or voice to voice and allowing them to be computer to computer and doing it as seamlessly as we did before.”



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