

THE EXCELLENCE ISSUE

FOR PROGRESSIVE MUSIC RETAILERS

DECEMBER 2014
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Quinlan & Fabish

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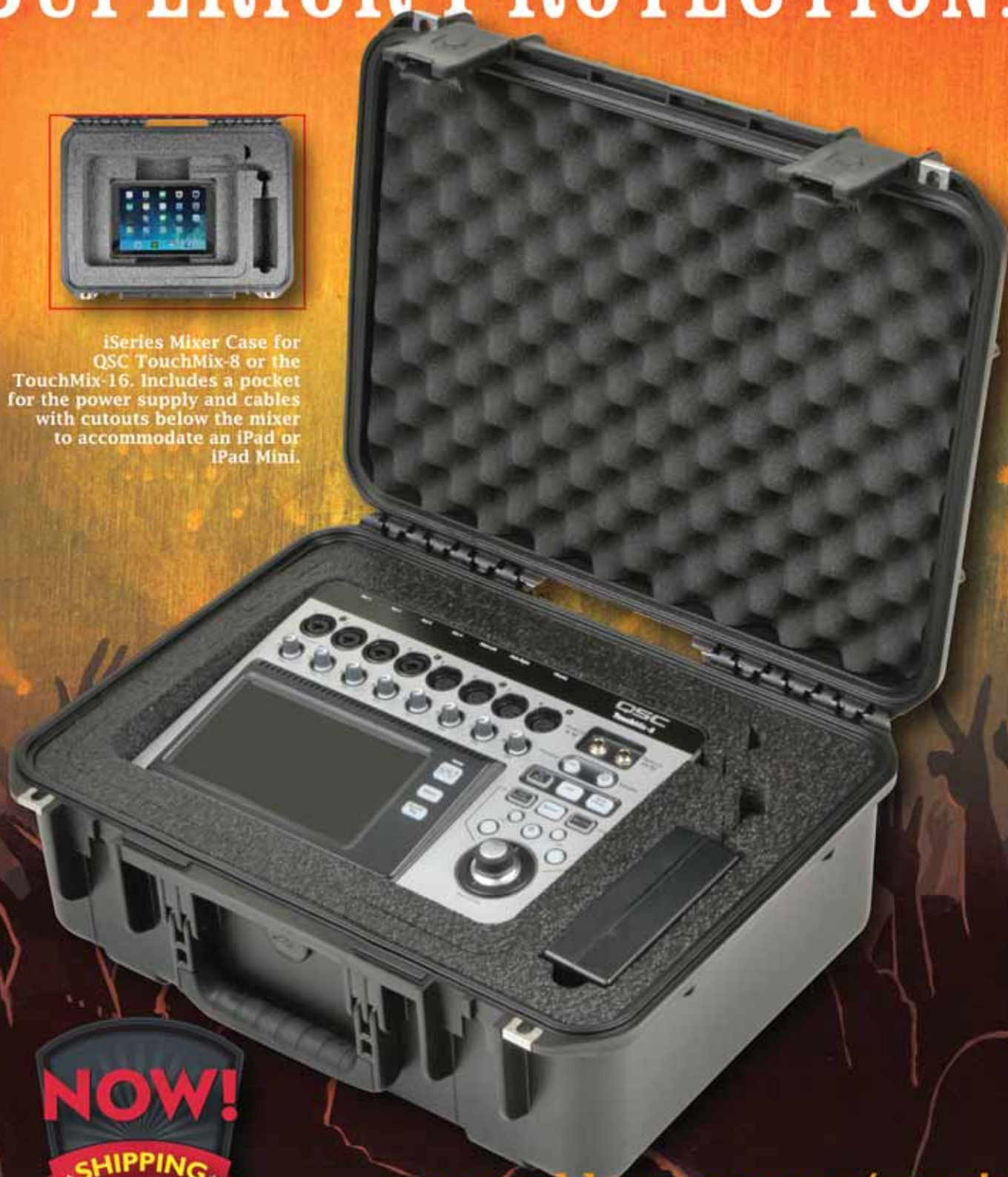
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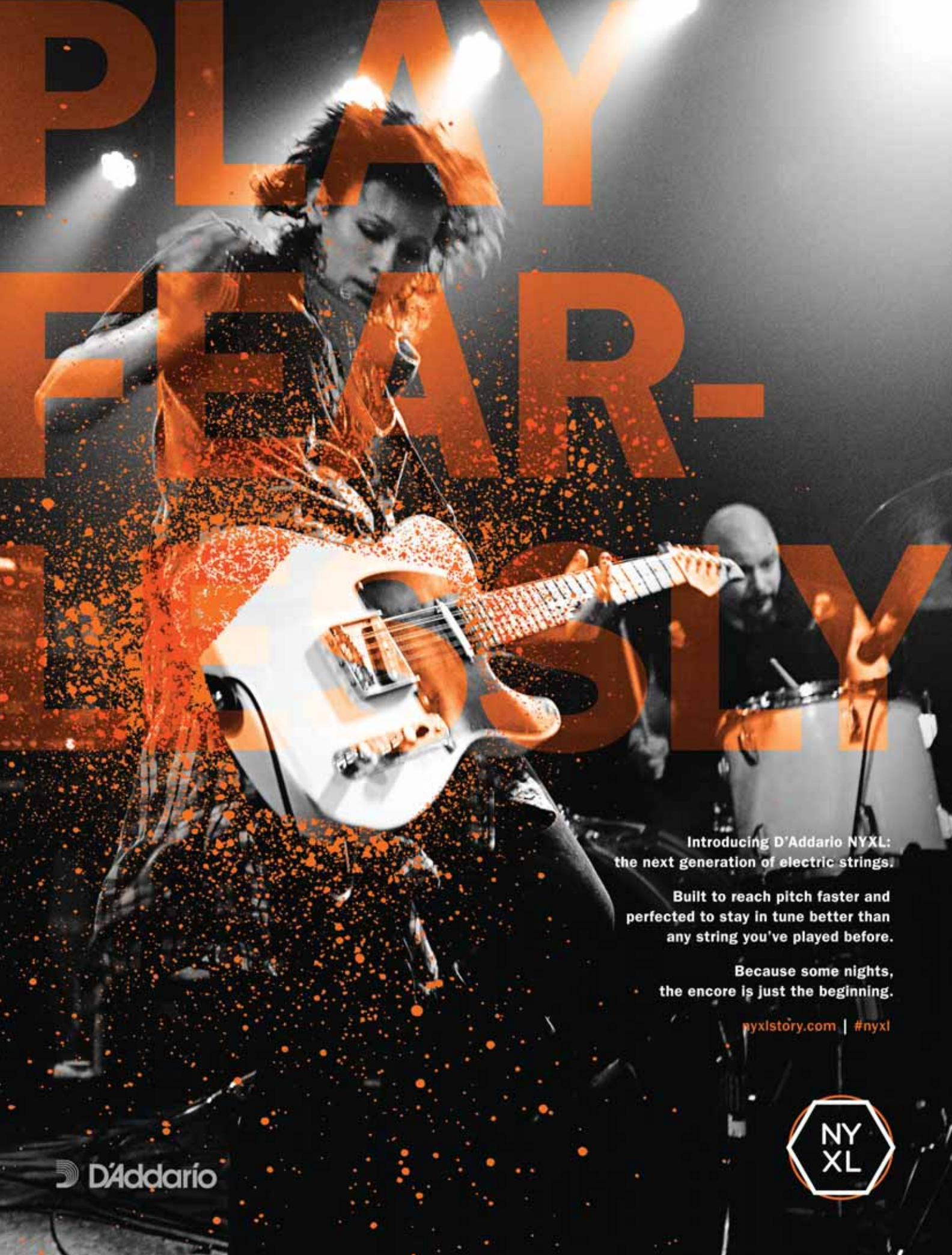


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PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE | BY KATIE KAILUS

BETTER BUSINESS BIBLE

The *Music Inc.* 2014 Excellence Awards winners are the Oscar winners of the MI industry. These 10 retailers and 10 suppliers — all nominated by their industry peers — have focused all year on improving their businesses and their bottom lines.

Starting on page 31, this year's honorees provide insight into what made them successful in 2014. From Sweetwater's Chuck Surack discussing his company's continued growth, to Yamaha's Tom Sumner talking product innovation, to Drum Center of Portsmouth's Shane Kinney explaining how he finds and hires great employees — all of these Excellence winners have a lesson to teach.

But the lesson that is possibly the most accessible to all is that of *Music Inc.*'s 2014 Retailer of the Year, George Quinlan. The owner of the B&O chain Quinlan & Fabish discussed how his business completes a successful school rental season year in and year out, but mentions that the biggest secret to his company's success is simple: serving the customers with dedication and quality, while constantly tweaking his business.

One way Quinlan stays on top of what needs tweaking is by sending out a note to everyone in his company immediately after school rental season is complete.

"We ask for three things that [they] notice were improved over last year and three things that still need improvement," Quinlan said. "Sometimes you

get responses from the newest members of the team that are like 'Duh, Why didn't we think of that?' It's because we've been doing it for so long that we can't see the forest for the trees.

"And then you see trends. You see things that weren't very good. You say, 'That's our No. 1 thing to fix' because 10 people mentioned it."

Congrats to this year's honorees. And to everyone reading this: Hold onto this issue. Keep it as a sort of "better business Bible," and look to it for inspiration when facing challenges in 2015.

In closing, possibly my favorite bit of insight came from Hoshino President Shogo Hayashi. When discussing the importance of MI dealers and their relationship with MI suppliers, Hayashi said, "The sense of magic that great dealers can bring to the experience of buying an instrument is what keeps all of our products from becoming commodities. And once we lose that sense of magic, we stand to lose everything."

Now, if that doesn't get you motivated heading into 2015 — I don't know what will. **MI**

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Kluson Gives Praise, Looks Ahead to 2015

I wanted to express our deepest thanks for the outstanding article “Bringing Back Kluson” in the November 2014 issue of *Music Inc.* featuring the Kluson brand and the new products we have been developing over the past year or so.

We’d like to thank all of our valued customers from the largest names in instrument building, to the repair shops and musicians. Your evaluations, feedback and assisting in testing our new products has been invaluable. Thanks to all of you!

We have many more exciting new products from Kluson coming up towards the end of this year and planned through next year.

The newest Kluson series of tuners, which includes the new one-piece F-mount die-cast set and was featured last month — after much thought — has been named the Revolution Series.

I just received samples and completed testing of the newest addition G-Mount die-cast tuner which is based on the footprint of the original Kluson stamped steel tuners but with a screw-in



bushing and the silky smooth 19:1 gear ratio.

These new Revolution Series tuners will be the featured tuners during Kluson’s 90th anniversary at the 2015 Winter NAMM Show along with the



brand new Kluson Supreme stamped steel tuner.

Based on popular requests from many of our users, the Kluson Supreme Series takes the original Kluson designed

tuners one step further. For the first time, we will be offering an 18:1 gear ratio in our original stamped steel design housing but with the new Kluson Supreme name stamped on the dust cover.

Lastly, we do have the original Kluson Banjo tuner as used on the Gibson Firebird in tooling now. So look for all of these in 2015!

*Dave Lewis
Manager of Sales
WD Music Products
N. Fort Myers, Florida*

Congratulations to Billings on 50 Years

Congratulations on your retirement. You have been a great asset to the world of music. Your expertise and sage advice has been appreciated by all.

I thought your column in the October 2014 issue of *Music Inc.* “What I Learned in 50 Years,” was especially good and most appropriate. Sharing your observations was very informative,

and, acknowledging so many fine people that were helpful through the years was perfect.

I wish only the best in this next phase of your life. I’m betting it will be filled with new adventures and new interests.

*Bruce Stevens
Former President and CEO
Steinway & Sons*

E.L. Music Extends Thanks for Shoutout

Thanks for running an article on my store, E.L. Music, in your “Retail News” section of your November issue. We can’t thank you enough for the impact it has had on us.

We’ve picked up multiple new lines, and have noticed an increase in our Web presence on Web search engines. We continue to get calls from companies each week that have read the article and then went to our website, elmusicllc.com, to see what our little store is all about.

Once they go on our site and see the pictures and read more about us, we have been able to see the impact of our website on the public.

We have been able to get industry feedback that, without *Music Inc.*, we never would have been able to get.

So, thank you *Music Inc.* for shining a light on our cool little store.

*Matt Robbins
Owner
E.L. Music
Worcester, Massachusetts*

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Partners with Yamaha to donate guitars to Sending Hope International
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Hosts Paul Reed Smith in store
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Merges with Gand Music & Sound
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RETAIL

ARTICHOKE COMMUNITY MUSIC | BY MARTHA SPIZZIRI

BUILDING COMMUNITY

From the start, Artichoke Music was a little different. When Judith Cooke opened the tiny storefront in 1971, she focused on creating a sense of community, hosting song circles and jam sessions. The next owner, Steve Einhorn, expanded that tradition — adding a small music school and a performance space. But in 2006, after 35 years in business, the Portland, Oregon-based retailer was struggling, and Einhorn announced it would be closing.

Upon hearing the news, local music teacher Richard Colombo decided he couldn't let that happen. In January 2007, he and his partner, Jim Morris, bought the for-profit retail store and turned the school and concert space into a 501(c)3, not-for-profit organization. The store was folded into the non-profit in 2012. They decided on the non-profit structure believing Artichoke Music would grow into an even greater community resource. Today, Colombo is the artistic director while Kathi Osborne runs the day-to-day operations as executive director.

Ninety percent of the store's product offerings are new, while 10 percent are used with guitars, banjos and mandolins making up the majority of Artichoke's stock. Revenue also comes in the form of customer cash and



Richard Colombo and Kathi Osborne

instrument donations.

Proceeds then go towards different musical outreach programs. One example is the store's partnership with Portland's Metropolitan Family Service through which Artichoke provides weekly music instruction and instruments to disadvantaged children. At the end of the program, the kids perform in a student showcase, and those who see the program through to the end keep their guitars.

"Giving the students the instrument to take care of and practice on at home between their weekly classes helps build a sense of pride and responsibility," Osborne said. "And the look on their faces when we give them the guitar at the end of the course is its own reward."

CREATING A COMMUNITY FEEL

Artichoke provides the feel of a living room — a welcoming

vibe for customers and musicians.

"You can tell right away that there's something different about Artichoke Music," Colombo said. "The storefront has a couch in it and a dining room table to sit and have coffee. People are welcomed and encouraged to sit down and play a song or two."

Customers even get an impromptu guitar or ukulele lesson. "You see this fear and this rigidity in people just kind of melt away as they get into it," Colombo said. "It's so cool."

From the roughly 950-square-foot retail area, customers can see through a set of French doors to the 1,600-square-foot concert space, dubbed Cafe Artichoke, and a 350-square-foot classroom. There are also five small rooms for individual classes. At any given time, about 25 different group classes are on offer.

"One of Artichoke's goals is to create a creative economy, which means we employ musicians," Colombo said, adding that a typical group class might cost \$120 per student and have about 10 students in it. Teachers then get 70 percent of the class proceeds.

When it comes to individual lessons, teachers rent a small room for \$5 per hour and can charge students whatever they like. (Colombo estimated that the average is about \$45 per lesson.) Artichoke doesn't bill the instructors for the space; rental payments are made on the honor system.

Each aspect of the business — the store, school and cafe — feeds the other. Both students and teachers perform at Cafe Artichoke, which seats 60 and features open-mic nights and Saturday night concert series. Admission is a \$5 donation and, on Saturdays, it's \$15 with 70 percent going to the musician.

Events aside, Colombo said he does not feel threatened by the Internet when it comes to the store's sales. "To be able to come in and put your hands on an instrument and have somebody show you this instrument, tell you what it's made of, where it came from, and how to play a chord is a beautiful thing," Colombo said. "People just love it." **MI**



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GELB MUSIC | EVENT

GREGG BISSONETTE, DIXON PARTNER UP FOR DEALER TOUR

Gregg Bissonette, of Ringo Starr & His All-Starr Band, partnered with Dixon Drums to put on a clinic tour of drum retailers in Northern California from Sept. 10-14.

“Gregg’s clinic is incredibly engaging,” said Jim Udling, Dixon brand manager. “He immediately connects with the audience and gets everyone involved with clap-a-long patterns and sing-a-long drum solos.”



Gregg Bissonette addresses the crowd at Gelb Music.

Tour stops for the clinic included: Bentley’s Drum Shop in Fresno, Gelb Music in Redwood City, Ingram & Brauns of Pleasonton, Skip’s Music in Sacramento and Bananas At Large in San Rafael.

Although the clinics generally followed the same format, Bissonette adapted his presentation to the individual character and clientele of each venue.

“He answered everyone’s questions, from the kids, to the guys who are pros and want to know what it’s like [for Bissonette] to work as a full-time musician,” Don Frank, store manager of Gelb Music, exclusively told *Music Inc.*

Playing to a full house at Gelb Music, Bissonette “covered everything from playing techniques, to the music business in

general, to his own experiences — auditioning for David Lee Roth, playing with Ringo, Maynard Ferguson — even digging back to when he was at school at North Texas State.”

When asked how Bissonette’s clinic compared to others, Frank said, “It was one of the best we’ve ever done, and we’ve done quite a few.”

METRONOME MUSIC | CHARITY

Metronome Music, Yamaha Donate to Sending Hope Int’l

Larry Miller, owner of Metronome Music in Mansfield, Ohio, recently partnered with Yamaha to donate 10 7/8-size guitars, extra nylon strings and tuners to Sending Hope International, an organization founded by fellow Mansfielder, David Atkins.

Sending Hope International intervenes to save young girls at risk of sex trafficking in Thailand. Atkins’ ministry provides at-risk girls with a safe home, citizenship, an education, and encourages their interest in music.

“[Atkins, a longtime customer] was talking about how much [the girls] enjoy and love music, but said they only have real cheap guitars,” Miller told *Music Inc.* “And I thought, ‘Hey, maybe that’s something we could participate in.’ We’re committed to helping them as a store project.”

The initial donation consists of 10 classical guitars, “because the nylon strings are easier on their fingers and have more longevity than the steel strings in that climate,” Miller said.

To continue the project, Metronome Music has offered to fix up any guitars people donate to the organization, and provide some kind of certification as to where the guitar ends up.

“It’s nice to get the word out,” Miller said. “Maybe other stores can do this kind of thing.”



Store Manager Chris Stecker (left) with Miller.

MAKE'N MUSIC | EXPANSION

Make'n Music Merges With Gand Music & Sound

Make'n Music, based in Chicago, has expanded its operation to include Gand Music & Sound in Northfield, Illinois.

"After admiring Make'n Music's operation for more than 40 years, the synergy was right there in front of us," said Gary Gand, president of Gand Music & Sound. "Teddy Gordon [owner of Make'n Music]

represents the next generation of retailers and is uniquely equipped to carry our tradition of high customer service deep into this century."

As of Oct. 13, Make'n Music has moved its headquarters, shipping and distribution facilities to Northfield. Its Chicago showroom will be closed throughout the process

of business consolidation.

Make'n Music's current gear selection will now additionally include the electric piano, keyboard, drum and guitar selection from Gand Music & Sound.

Gand Concert Sound and Gand Sound Installations will remain independently operated.

IN MEMORIAM



STANLEY JAY

Stanley Jay, president and founder of Mandolin Brothers in Staten Island, New York, has died. He was 71.

Mandolin Brothers is known as one of the largest dealers in the world of vintage and new American fretted instruments. Founded by Jay in 1971 with partner Harold "Hap" Kuffner (who left the business in 1982), the store has since been named "The Best Guitar Store in New York" by *New York Magazine*, and has sold instruments to top musicians, including Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and George Harrison.

Jay had a Masters degree in English/Education from Wagner College which lent a unique, funny flavor to his catalog descriptions.

His office at the front of the store made him the welcoming presence to anyone who walked in the door.

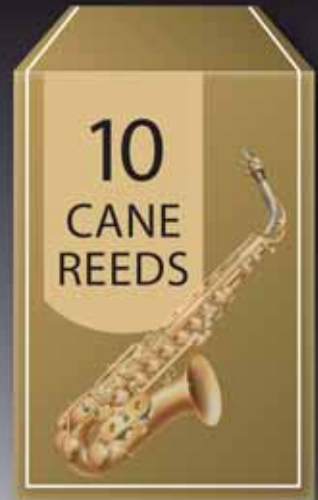
Jay was hospitalized in September with Mantle Cell Lymphoma, a rare blood cancer. His children, Alison and Eric, have been running the store in his absence.

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Note From Joe

Happy Holidays From Our Family to Yours

We wish everyone a successful end of 2014 and look forward to welcoming the global industry to Anaheim next month.

The 2015 NAMM Show is right around the corner—hard to believe another year has flown by. We're in the final stages of getting things ready for your arrival. It sure seems that everyone's "end zone" for the show is as unique as the products being exhibited and the creative ways our retail members will sell them.

And while our number one goal is seeing you achieve your goals for the show, I thought I would share a few things I am looking forward to most in Anaheim.

Breakfast of Champions: Thursday morning's opening session is a behind-the-scenes look into the thought processes of some of the industry's biggest names as they weigh in on the important issues of the day. The quotable moments that have come out of this session are legendary! Not to mention, you never know who will walk out on that stage. Interviewing these folks is quite a stretch from my regular day job, but I really love doing it.

The Opening of the Show Floor: Like Dorothy landing in Oz, the colors, the sounds, the million square feet of new gear combine to awaken the senses. There's nothing like those first few moments when you walk out onto the floor. I loved it my first time back in 1983, and even more today.

The Annual Tribute to Those We've Lost: Thursday evening on the Grand Plaza, we honor our friends and coworkers who have passed away. This brief music and video presentation is an industry tradition now. It's what we're supposed to do for each other, especially knowing that we'll all be up there some day. It is powerful and moving, and hard to get through with dry eyes.

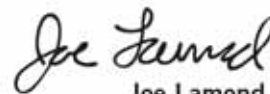
The NAMM TEC Awards: Saturday night in the Hilton, this award show honors the people and gear driving the live and recorded sound industry. There are memorable words and musical performances. And, besides, where else will you hear applause for "microphone of the year"?!

Steve Wozniak: No question, Saturday's NAMM U Breakfast session will certainly be a highlight as we hear firsthand from the co-founder of Apple. His ideas and inventions changed the world. What question would you ask "Woz" if you had the chance? I'm working on the list now—if you've got a particularly good one, drop me an email and you just might hear his answer.

The Grand Plaza Concerts: We have cool bands set to perform on the Grand Plaza stage each evening as you leave the show floor. And with L.A.'s best food trucks out there, it's a great place to grab a bite before hitting all the evening parties, concerts and events. The networking possibilities between the hotel lobbies are also tremendous; it's like "Cheers"... where everyone knows your name. Many people tell me this is where the real work gets done.

The Family Reunion: I've often described The NAMM Show as the industry's annual family reunion (and then a trade show breaks out). And while business continues to be trying at times, in many ways, there's never been a time when we didn't face challenges. The glue that keeps us all coming back is our love of what we do. We're the luckiest people in the world because what we do brings joy to billions of people around the world, and the friendships we make along the way last a lifetime.

I'm guessing your NAMM Show goals and "must see" list are coming together now as well. The best advice I've heard? Make it *your* show and use it as a platform to launch you and your company to a successful 2015. I'll see you there!



Joe Lamond

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LAKLAND | BY KATIE KAILUS

LOCALLY GROWN

Lakland Guitars is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, but the Chicago-based bass manufacturer has more to celebrate than just this milestone. The company has amped up its U.S. production, officially producing three-quarters of all its instruments' components at its Chicago facility.

"We have taken over more than 75 percent of all of our outsourcing and are doing it all in-house now," said John Pirruccello, Lakland's owner. "We only have one step left and that is metal working, but it might be a couple more years before we do that."

The spike in stateside production took hold when the company moved from one location in Chicago to a larger space on the city's north side four years ago. The increase in space allowed the company to install machinery and even a spray room for adding finishes to its U.S. Series. (The company also has its Skyline Series which is manufactured in Indonesia, but includes pickups made at the Chicago facility.)

LEARNING CURVE

Pirruccello said it took a lot to make this jump and figure out how to do these manufac-



Lakland owners John & Bo Pirruccello

Lakland Guitars amps up its U.S. production as it celebrates 20 years

turing processes.

"We had to get someone in here to learn 3D CAD and computerized machining," he said. "And the spray booth has to be a really, really clean environment in order to spray stuff like this dust free. It's expensive to set up a booth that can do a clean job. When we moved into this space, it already had a spray booth, but



Lakland's 20th anniversary party

it was being used for sheet metal work. So, we ground off all the layers of gook on the walls and the floors. It took us a good solid

year to get that cleaned up, and that was just the beginning. Then we had to learn how to spray as well as our outsourcers.”

Learning curve aside, Pirruccello said the increase in U.S. production — including manufacturing the pickups in-house — has helped the company become more efficient.

“We started making our own pickups, and then when we introduced the Skyline Series we started putting the U.S.-made pickups on the foreign-made instruments because our supplier at the time couldn’t keep up with us as they had other customers,” Pirruccello said. “We were ordering from them, and we would get them eventually, but at the end of the year I’d have more than 100 sold instruments sitting here waiting for pickups. So my brother [and co-owner] Bo [Pirruccello] stepped in and pioneered the whole pickup and electronics department.”

As a U.S. manufacturer since the company’s start in 1994, Pirruccello said the increase in U.S. production also came from wanting

to be as competitive of a company as possible.

“We were looking to vertically integrate our U.S. operation so that we could grow and become as efficient and competitive of a company as we could,” he said. “We are kind of in an in-between state of being a smaller manufacturer to being a medium-sized manufacturer. In order to make that leap to become competitive with the large manufacturers, you can’t use outsourcers. The key driving factors are expense and lead times so that we can produce instruments faster and our ability to create and develop products at will more rapidly.”

All 12 employees at Lakland have some background in instrument building and most are luthiers.

“Those skills don’t necessarily lend themselves to production, so we have a good method of taking the best of those handcrafted, high-quality luthier skills and streamlining them into semi-mass production,” he said.

With the addition of the milling machine and the spray booth, Pirruccello said his

company is poised and looking forward to growth in the U.S. manufacturing field.

“I hope to see our U.S. manufacturing become a major player in the United States in the next five or 10 years,” Pirruccello said. “This is our first step in creating a model for a factory that can be grown modularly, so when we reach our capacity with what we are doing it will come down to adding another machine, more personnel and space.” **MI**



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HAL LEONARD | COMPANY

HAL LEONARD SEES INCREASE IN 'UNIQUE' BOOK TITLES

It's no secret mandolins, cajons and banjos have all seen a spike in sales in recent years. In line with that trend, Hal Leonard has upped its print titles of "unique" instruments, including steelpan, bagpipes and handpipe.

"We're finding that more and more musicians are becoming curious about instruments outside their comfort zone, and keen to acquire new skills that can provide unique sounds," said Jeff Schrodel, executive vice president at Hal Leonard. "Musical interests today also seem more diversified than ever, and people are finding enjoyment making music in new ways. Thanks to YouTube and the Internet in general, the world is a smaller place and the opportunity for exposure to new music is at an all-time high."

Schrodel said the best way for retailers to merchandise these titles is by putting them together in one display.

"It draws attention to all the various op-

tions for learning and spurs people to try new things," he said. "Some instruments, such as cajon or lap steel, are often stocked by dealers. Others, like sitar and Irish bouzouki and steelpan, are not. Still, most dealers can help their consumers find and order an instrument they want."

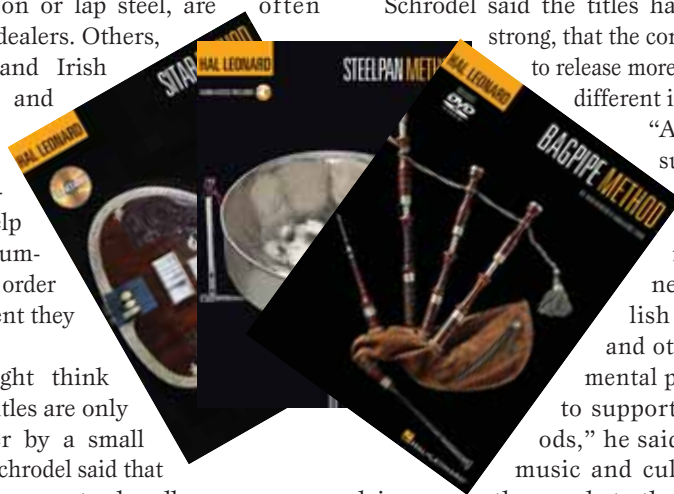
One might think that these titles are only sought after by a small group, but Schrodel said that all these titles are steady sellers.

"Our new method for bagpipe is off to a great start, lap steel and pedal steel do

very well, and even our oud method sells consistently," Schrodel said.

Schrodel said the titles have been so strong, that the company plans to release more methods on different instruments.

"As our consumers learn new instruments, we'll need to publish songbooks and other supplemental publications to support the methods," he said. "Popular music and culture really drives the market, though. Look what *Legend of Zelda* did for the ocarina." halleonard.com



PEAVEY | COMPANY

Peavey Named 'Corporate Role Model'

Peavey Electronics was recently named a "Mississippi Corporate Role Model" by *HR Professionals Magazine* for its health program. Implemented in 2013, Peavey Wellness is an innovative employee wellness program led by Peavey Corporate Health Director Karin Roberts. The initiative has yielded positive results, as the company as a whole has lost a combined 1,000 lbs. since March 2014.

"The whole intention of the corporate wellness program is to empower the employees to take accountability for their own health," Roberts said.

Peavey Wellness is individually tailored to the needs of Mississippians based on their risk factors, and offers support in topics ranging from nutrition, to exercise, stress management, and general morale in the workplace. Roberts was hired by Peavey Electronics President Mary Peavey, who recognized the need for a more health-focused environment.

"Mary and Hartley Peavey are very progres-



Peavey staffers in the company's health program.

sive-minded and having their support to begin this program made all the differ-

ence," Roberts said. "It starts from the top down." peavey.com

AES | SHOWS

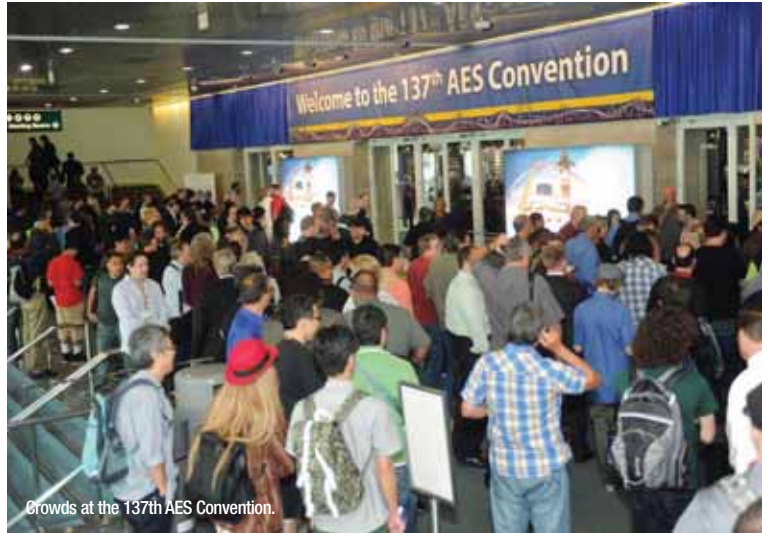
AES Sees 28-Percent Increase Since Last West Coast Convention

The 137th Audio Engineering Society Convention was held Oct. 9-12 at the Los Angeles Convention Center in Los Angeles. The show saw 15,403 registered attendees and 307 exhibitors/sponsors — surpassing any West Coast AES Convention in the last 10 years.

At show close, AES reported a 28-percent increase in registration since the last time the convention was on the West Coast back in 2012.

“I cannot put into words how thrilled I am with the 137th AES Convention,” said Bob Moses, executive

director of the AES. “Our organizing committee really outdid themselves with over 350 presentations from an astounding 731 leading researchers and practitioners in the field, many of them standing-room-only. We have some serious momentum built from recent conventions in New York and Berlin, and we are going to keep it going for the coming conventions in Warsaw in May and then back to New York next October. You could say that our conventions and the AES organization have a renewed energy, and we couldn’t be happier.” aes.org



Crowds at the 137th AES Convention.

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DISTRIBUTION NEWS:

TMP PRO ADDS NEW BRANDS

TMP Pro has added Martin Professional and Gepco to its list of distribution agreements.

Martin Professional has created dynamic lighting solutions for the entertainment, architectural and commercial sectors. Martin also offers a range of advanced lighting controllers and media servers as well as a complete line of smoke machines as a complement to intelligent lighting.

“TMP PRO is known for offering the

finest professional audio brands available today, but today marks a new chapter in that story,” said Eugene Mulcahy, director of pro-audio products at TMP Pro Distribution. “TMP is honored to welcome Martin Professional lighting products to its lineup. Martin Professional Lighting products are industry staples in the production and installation community and are true innovators.”

Gepco, a brand of General Cable, delivers a full line of solutions for high-definition

audio and video applications.

“TMP Pro is always looking to strengthen and nurture its line card,” Mulcahy said. “When the opportunity to partner with a respected and renowned company such as Gepco arose, we welcomed the opportunity and the partnership. To offer our clients the finest cable available in the marketplace strengthens TMP’s commitment to providing complete design and application solutions.”

{tmppro.com}

LOS CABOS STRIKES AGREEMENT WITH FUSION MUSIC

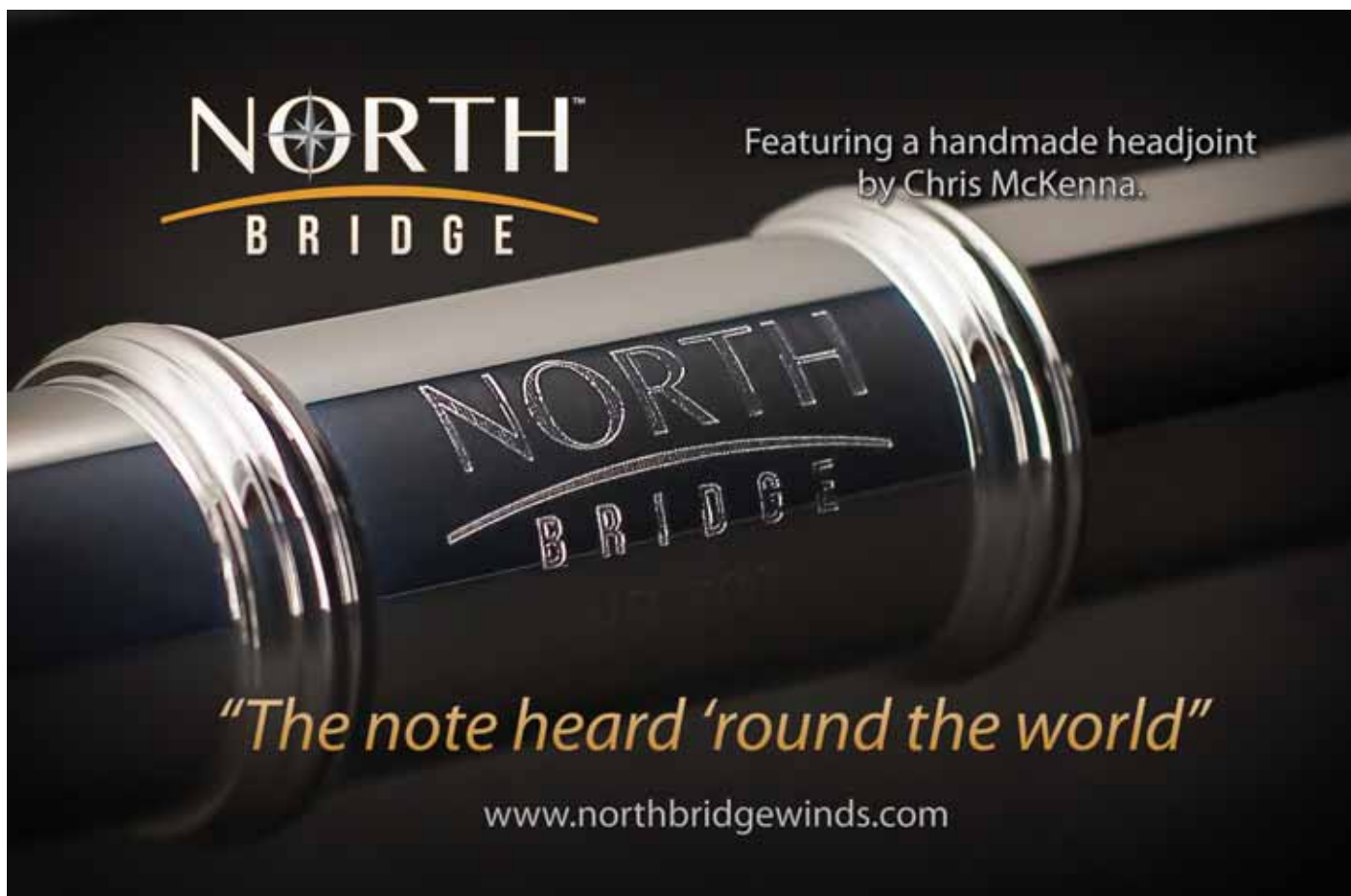
Los Cabos Drumsticks has struck a distribution agreement with Fusion Music. This agreement marks the company’s introduction to the Chinese market and an

expansion of the company’s Asian distribution.

“We are pleased to add another distribution company to our family of suppliers,” said Larry Guay, president of Los Cabos

Drumsticks.

“This means Los Cabos is continuing to grow and expand in Asia.” **{loscabosdrumsticks.com}**



GROVER, HAMMERAX TEAM UP

Grover Pro Percussion recently reached an agreement with Hammerax granting them exclusive rights to worldwide distribution.

“Grover Pro represents the pinnacle of quality in every product they touch,” said John Stannard, Hammerax president. “The business model of a single distributor working with export distributors and dealers is the best way to reach drummers and percussionists.”

“The Hammerax offerings of innovative metallic sonorities blend perfectly with Grover Pro’s palate of high quality products,” said Neil Grove, Grover’s founder. “The synergy between us is obvious. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to introduce all the new Hammerax products into our sales channels.”

{groverpro.com}



HAL LEONARD PARTNERS WITH APOGEE

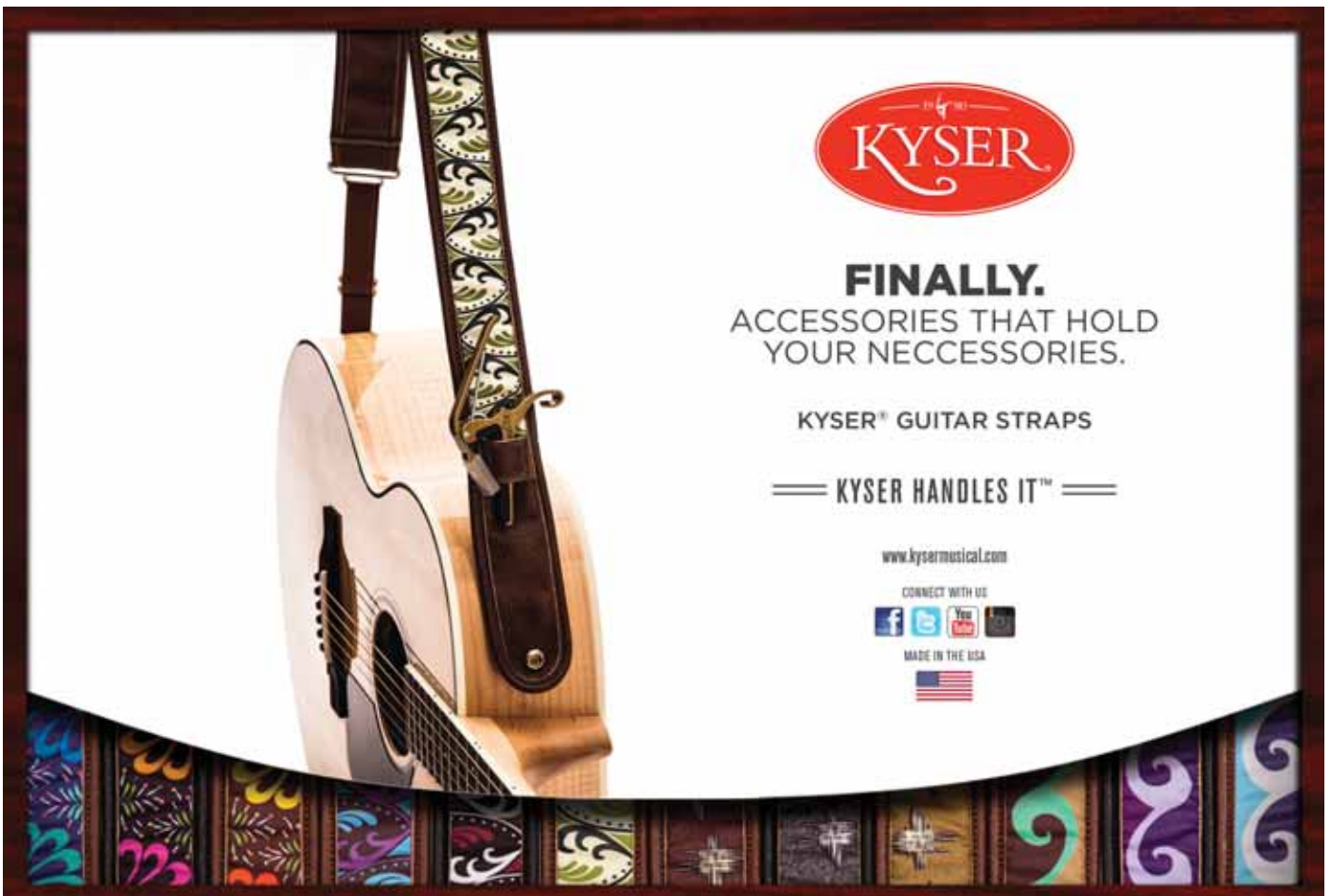
Hal Leonard recently began distributing Apogee Electronics in the United States and Canada.

Hal Leonard will initially distribute Apogee’s ONE for iPad and Mac, MiC 96k, JAM, JAM 96k and GiO lines. Many of these products have the distinction of being the first professional-quality audio interfaces for recording using iPhones, iPads and Macs.

“We’ve been watching

Hal Leonard’s growth in the tech distribution area, and we’re very impressed,” said Jeremy Stappard, Apogee director of worldwide sales.

“We hear nothing but raves from our retailers on their sales team and the services they offer. Hal Leonard reaches independent dealers and the school and church markets better than we ever could, so we’re moving forward with them. We plan to stay very involved, as true distribution and marketing partners.” {halleonard.com}



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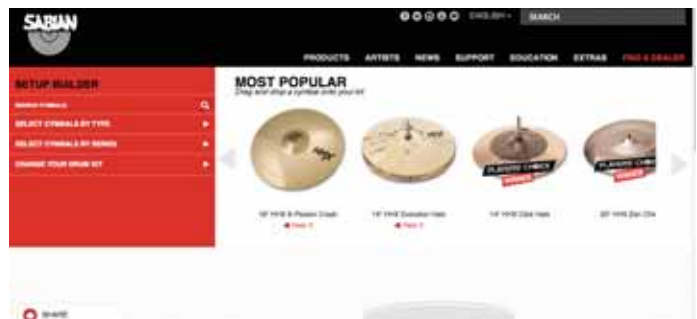
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WEB NEWS:



Sabian Rolls Out Site

Sabian's popular Set-Up Builder is back and can be found at cymbalsetup.com. The Set-Up Builder is much cooler and easier to use than the previous version. It lets users build as many kits as they like, listen to high-quality sound samples and easily share them. Top Sabian endorsers will also get busy creating their own setups, where all of their activity is automatically updated live to their profile pages on the Sabian website.

"Building a setup, keeping it up-to-date and sharing on social media is a great way to stay in touch with drummers everywhere," said Katie Bursey, Sabian's online marketing coordinator. "With our new, high-quality Sabian sound samples, it's also a great way to try new cymbals before you buy — the new builder allows you to hear how they blend with your current setup." (cymbalsetup.com)



Guild Revamps Website

Guild Guitars recently launched the newly revamped guildguitars.com. The website has been completely overhauled and now features a fresh, clean aesthetic and a responsive design. Whether viewing the site on a phone, tablet, desktop or laptop, the website auto-adjusts to optimize the browsing experience. Brand new product pages include never-before-seen high-resolution images of Guild's current offerings, along with complete guitar specs and integrated video demos.

Guild's new website also incorporates much of its history, featuring a gallery of artists who have played Guild guitars and basses since the 1950s. Guild will continue to flesh out each product page, offering a thorough product history of iconic models, as well as an archive of discontinued models. Guild's blog and community section helps consumers stay up-to-date with the latest developments behind the scenes. (guildguitars.com)



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APPOINTMENTS



James Mingo

TMP PRO WELCOMES BACK MINGO

TMP Pro Distribution welcomes back James Mingo as national accounts manager. He rejoins TMP after a nearly two-year absence. Mingo has more than 20 years of A/V experience and returns to TMP after serving as sales director at a leading A/V systems integrator.

"I'm excited to be back at TMP to apply all the new skills sets I've learned while I was away," Mingo said. "Wireless has become my forte. I bring my wireless expertise and understanding of the new white space spectrum issues to every job that I work on."

"We are excited to have Jim back, and we look forward to having him apply his new additional experiences and knowledge to the distribution side of the business," said Sharon Hennessey, senior VP of sales & marketing for TMP. "Many of our longtime customers, contractors and suppliers are looking forward to working closely with Jim again, and so is TMP. His knowledge, skill set and passion aligned with the industry's top audio lines is a win-win, so call him now and welcome him back to TMP." tmppro.com

CORDOBA APPOINTS NEW VP OF SALES

Cordoba Music Group named Scott Thompson its new vice president of sales. Thompson will be responsible for leading growth and development of CMG's global sales, spearheading sales initiatives and strategies, and working closely with the marketing and operations departments.

"It's been a tremendously exciting growth year for our company, and we've been working hard to assemble an all-star team that will continue to propel Cordoba and Guild forward," said Jonathan Thomas, CMG's president. "Scott brings proven passion and leadership to a key position for us, and we're excited to bring him on board."


"I feel very privileged to be joining

the CMG team," Thompson said. "The opportunity to work with the very successful Cordoba brand and the iconic Guild brand is very exciting, and seems like a natural and well-timed transition for me, my family and the company. I plan to continue to build upon a solid foundation at CMG, and work hard to bring great instruments to players around the world." cordobaguitars.com

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THE 2014

EXCELLENCE

AWARDS

Music Inc.'s 2014 Excellence Awards honor 10 retailers and 10 suppliers who went the extra mile this year. These companies were voted upon by their peers, who recognized them for not only building their businesses, but for being innovators in the MI industry. Learn from these stories, hold onto this issue and use it as a guide all year long.

By Frank Alkyer, David Ball, Ed Enright, Michael Gallant, John Janowiak, Katie Kailus and Martha Spizziri



RETAIL EXCELLENCE

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PRODUCT EXCELLENCE

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SUPPLIER EXCELLENCE

Page 64



MUSIC INC. 2014 RETAILER OF THE YEAR

By Frank Alkyer

THE ART *of*

**IN AN ERA THAT APPLAUDS BOLD MOVES AND BIG RISK
TAKERS, QUINLAN & FABISH SERVES AS A REMINDER TO**



TWEAKING

Photos by Karen Solem

**SIMPLY SERVE THE CUSTOMER WITH DEDICATION AND
QUALITY — AND CONSTANTLY IMPROVE**

In considering our 2014 Retailer of the Year, there were plenty of candidates — from the very large to the very innovative to the very fast growing. But for this year’s honoree, *Music Inc.*’s editorial staff — with the input and counseling of suppliers from across the industry — selected a retailing operation that’s simply very good at serving its community. Quinlan & Fabish Music, an eight-store, band and orchestral chain headquartered in the Chicago suburb of Burr Ridge, Illinois, is *Music Inc.*’s 2014 Retailer of the Year.

“We don’t do anything that much different from every other school music dealer,” said George Quinlan Jr., Quinlan & Fabish CEO. “Little tweaks, but there’s nothing where you go, ‘Oh, now that’s completely new.’”

All Quinlan & Fabish does is intensely serve music educators in Chicagoland, northwestern Indiana and southwestern Michigan with a dedication that is the envy of the school music industry.

In giving a tour of the company’s Burr Ridge headquarters, Quinlan proudly points to the empty shelves in the warehouse noting, “We just got through ‘the season,’” — meaning the school music rental season. Quinlan & Fabish rents more than 20,000 instruments annually to children in school band and orchestral programs. The goal at the end of each rental season is zero inventory, Quinlan said. He knows it will probably never happen, but setting it as a goal lets everyone in the organization know how important it is to order properly and rent every instrument possible.

“We actually quantify the seasonality of our business,” Quinlan said. “We say we have 46 weeks of planning and six weeks of execution. The only other people who understand the school music business are farmers. You’ve got that narrow window when it all happens and then you’ve got the rest of the year when you’re planning and planting seeds.”

In an effort to better plan and execute, Quinlan and his staff evaluate how the rental season went immediately after its over. It’s part of a do-it-now philosophy that keeps Q&F sharp, focused and on task.

“We send out a note to everyone in the company and ask for three things that you notice were improved over last year and three things that still need improvement,” he said. “Sometimes you get responses from the newest members of the team that are like ‘Duh, Why didn’t we think of that?’ It’s because we’ve been doing it for so long that we can’t see the forest for the trees.”

Communication Interface

Drilling down while its top of mind has led to this season’s No. 1 tweak for next year — creating a one-stop information interface for the company.

“We have places where parents and teach-

ers can get information and others where our staff can get information, but they’re not really interfaced together — mostly where reps are going to be and what activities we’ve got going on,” Quinlan said. “Then there’s another form that does all the math for the riders because our reps are busy with parents, and everybody kind of developed their own little version. It’s like maybe we should have something standardized. So, that’s our big project for this year, an all-encompassing calendar that has all of that information.”

The goal is simple, Quinlan said — more accuracy and better communication during the company’s crunch season.

Staffing Up Seasonally

The six weeks of rental season requires some steep ramping up each year. Quinlan & Fabish runs a lean shop for 46 weeks, then doubles or triples the staff for the rental-season sprint.

“Our reps are charged with developing their own team or teams,” Quinlan said. “But we also have a pool of people to help interview kids at schools, try them out on instruments, help contract writing or school displays, deliveries. Whatever.

“For years, we tried to run it 9-5, but then 10 years ago, we decided, ‘You know what? It’s not 9-5 for six weeks. It’s 24-7, basically.’ So, now we have two shifts, but they go overtime.”

That pool of seasonal employees is a mix of college students, private teachers and musicians looking to make some extra money. They generally work the second shift, so it won’t interfere with school or other day jobs.

In an effort to make every minute count, the warehouse crew at Quinlan & Fabish does everything possible to gather, batch and process orders way before rental season even begins.

“Let’s just say we have a school that has their recruiting meeting in April, but the kids don’t start until August,” Quinlan said. “That’s five or six months before we need to send the instruments, but we process that order with relatively the same urgency as if they were starting four days later. We get everything in the computer. We get everything generated, and then we wait until August to deliver.

Orders are gathered and shrink-wrapped to ensure everything is there and nothing is accidentally taken from the batch. In Quinlan’s view, processing with a degree of urgency cuts down on errors.

“Here’s an example of not following this process,” he said. “So, we’ve got this batch of 25 rentals from

QUINLAN & FABISH
BURR RIDGE, ILLINOIS

Principals:
George Quinlan

Founded:
1958

Employees:
80

Locations:
8

Annual Revenue:
Undisclosed

April, then toward July you're thinking, 'Oh, it's not going until August, we've got time.' Then suddenly, it's four or five days before you start thinking, 'Maybe we should start working on this.' And you realize, 'Wait, we're out of books.' 'Hey, he changed reeds.' All of a sudden, you've got all these problems — and we had six months to figure them out."

The Essential Nature of Road Reps

When asked about the biggest challenges facing his business, Quinlan quickly pointed out the importance of relationships between music educators and Q&F's road representatives.

"We have 20 road reps companywide," he said. "And they're heavily skewed toward the baby boomers. These guys have done this job for 20, 30 years. They've developed a rapport. They know the ropes. What if, two, three or four decided to hang it up all in the same year?"

"It could be their choice — 'I'm going to retire.' Or they could get sick. Or their spouse could get sick. Or they have to move to help their kid who's in Texas. There are lots of reasons to change at this point in their career."

In response, Quinlan & Fabish has created a rep-mentoring program where the leadership team has identified younger employees and started grooming them early for openings that might, or will, arise.

"I always look at our company as entrepreneurs — 20 little companies," Quinlan said. "And somehow we provide this infrastructure of repairs and ordering and brands so they can run their company well because I don't manage them. It's like herding cats!"

Quinlan laughed, then said he feels the key is to spend extra time on hiring, training and supporting his road reps, then let them do their job.

"It's really about identifying the right people who have the heart of a servant, because you take a lot of crap. But they benefit, too," he said. "I think our reps, particularly in the Chicago area because of their volume, are probably the best-paid reps in the country. They're paid commis-



sion. So, they're renting and selling a lot of stuff, but they're pretty well paid.

"So, for me, it's sit back and enjoy the show. Don't micromanage your race horse. Just help them when they need help. Every once in awhile, even the best get in trouble and need a hand."

But with transition on the horizon, Quinlan knows a more hands-on approach will be necessary to help new reps flourish and veteran reps continue to excel.

"Recognizing that of these 20, probably 12 of them could retire within the next one to five years means we've got to be ready," he said. "We don't want to guess wrong and put this young person in and have them go, 'This job is horrible.' We want them to go in and see the bad and the good before they take the job.

"We're on our second one of these transitions now. We had one of our most tenured guys have a heart attack two years ago and he cut back quite a bit. Fortunately, we had the process in place. We put the new guy in and he loves it.

"This year, we promoted our second woman as a road rep. She was a star on the retail side, just unbelievably good. So, we put her on the road and gave her a small territory to get started. Then, we took the oldest of the young guys, he's 40, and identified him as the next me, as far as sales manager. These younger people

are going to report to him. He's going to groom them and train them, just like I did for the older guys."

For Quinlan, the goal is a smooth transition where the next generation of reps can make their mark as an experienced crew wraps up a successful career.

"The strength of Q&F is that this whole group stayed at it for a long time," he said. "How do you get the next generation ready, and not push those guys out the door? They've given their whole professional life to this job and this company. We want to make it good for everybody."

Clicks & Mortar and Motor

While road reps continue to be the key link between Q&F and educators, a new corporate website serves as a 24/7 resource for the teaching community. Launched in August of 2013, the Quinlan & Fabish team had one goal in mind: make online rentals easy for parents.

"A lot of our customers, unless they've got multiple kids in band, they're a one-time customer," Quinlan said. "They rent the instrument, and they may never buy anything from us ever again. So, the main thing we needed was a website that you only have to go in and put in your information one time."



The Enduring Value of the Newsletter

Quarter Notes, Quinlan & Fabish's quarterly newsletter for music educators, is still thriving, in print, no less, after 28 years.

When asked what makes this marketing vehicle such an important project for the company, George Quinlan opened the latest edition and pointed to an article that was no more than four lines long.

"Because their friends want to see that in print," Quinlan smiled. "That John and Laura got married. This is small-town news."

What Quinlan calls small-town news, others might call embracing community. In 16 pages, Quinlan & Fabish can cover important educator events, both personal and professional, and also squeeze in a note or two about Q&F.

The first newsletter came out in the spring of 1988, and from Quinlan's perspective, it was out of pure necessity.

"We were not very well known," he said. "Back then nobody knew who we were, particularly outside of the Catholic school system."

Today, the newsletter is about staying connected, Quinlan said. "That's why we have to do two regional editions because the group in Chicago is not in the same circle as the group in Michiana. They're not doing the same state events."

He added that this was the first year Quinlan & Fabish really promoted the idea of online rentals, which lead to a 20 percent increase in parents using the system. He said it's particularly convenient for parents who miss the instrument rental meetings.

"Teachers used to say, 'Call this number,'" he said. "But now they say, 'Just go online at qandf.com and take care of it.' It's just more of the expectation now. If you're not going to take care of it at the school, you're probably going to go online."

Partnering with American Eagle, a major Web developer based in Chicago, Quinlan & Fabish is sticking its toe into selling instruments and accessories online, too.

"No matter what, we remind people that we deliver to their school," Quinlan said. "Everything has the online option. If you look at the site, you'll see 'Clicks & Mortar and Motor' because we're going to be at your school anyway. It's the last mile theory. We've got the last mile figured out, we just have to let people know that we can deliver whatever you need direct to your teacher."

He added that Q&F is also training teachers to use the site and has set it up where they can have an account that will bill them later, which they are used to, instead of requiring immediate payment online.

"Our thinking here is that if we train them to use it, they'll probably buy more because they'll actually be in a virtual store instead of just emailing a list of what they need," Quinlan said. "But they will also tell their students, 'Oh, you need reeds? Just go to qandf.com and order and they'll deliver it to the school for free.'"

Q&F has also started creating individual pages for teachers where they can outline required products and recommend others.

Including inventory on Q&F's site has already produced some interesting results.

"Did you know that there is a \$150 bassoon reed?" Quinlan asked. "I didn't either, but we've sold three of them."



Up In A Down Year

It's rare to honor a retailer when they've had a flat or down year financially, but Quinlan & Fabish had a "slightly down" year in rentals for 2014.

"This year, we knew going in that it would be down slightly because our largest school district decided to skip a grade," Quinlan said. "They went from starting band in 5th grade to starting it in 6th grade. Normally, a change like that in one school district doesn't have a huge effect on us, but that one did because it's a large district and a lot of rentals."

The scenario stirs a number of questions: Is there something a retailer could do in this situation? How do you deal with it?

"You have to go with the flow," Quinlan said. "This wasn't a cut. The cuts happened two years ago with staffing. But they tried to keep the programming exactly the same with fewer teachers. They probably had 80-something teachers and they cut it down to, let's say, 60. Everybody was just spread really thin. So, the leadership in the music department said, 'You know what, we have some of our teachers spending more time driving than teaching. We've got to fix it. We want teachers teaching.'"

"So, the best scenario was, 'We're not going to be able to hire 20 people back, so if we move band up a grade, we'll provide a better program.' And I think they will because they'll have band or orchestra every day as a class. If they improve the program moving into sixth grade, and have it every day as a class, the dropout rate goes from 30 percent to almost zero. You don't quit math. You don't quit reading. You don't quit band. You don't quit orchestra. It's not how many start band. It's how many that stay in that matters." **MI**

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By Frank Alkyer

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

GUITAR CENTER FINDS NEW GROWTH FREEDOM WITH NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND RESTRUCTURED DEBT

Guitar Center hit a home run, actually several, in 2014.

The musical product industry's largest retailer restructured its debt, took on a new lead investor, opened new stores (including its new flagship location in New York's Times Square), acquired others and launched the industry's first true national advertising campaign.

And that combination of right moves, smart marketing and aggressively pursuing the market captured the attention of suppliers voting in the Excellence Awards.

"They constantly strive to improve their shortcomings," said one. "But when it comes down to it, no one promotes and advertises as aggressively as they do. And usually, strong sales follow."

"Their new stores are excellent," said another. "The Times Square store is a monument to our industry."

But the one hit that has Mike Pratt, Guitar Center's CEO, most proud is called Vision 2020 — a goal of becoming a \$300 billion company with \$300 million in EBITDA by the year 2020.

"Without question, I think the launching of our Vision 2020 platform to all our associates across the country was something that got everyone incredibly focused and really excited about what's next for Guitar Center," Pratt said. "Further to that, we were very focused on improving our customer experience in-store, while also re-investing heavily into our people across the company."

Pratt had high praise and higher expectations for the Guitar Center family of brands, which includes online retailer Musician's Friend and school music retailer Music & Arts.

"Without saying too much before some key announcements we are planning next year, what I can say right now is that all the brands are doing well and had a solid year with respect to advancing our strategy," Pratt said. "GC continues to look at new services to drive a better customer experience in-store. We aggressively rolled out our new rentals and lessons to consumers across the country and so far the results on these have been very promising. We also looked really closely at how our customers were interacting

in-store, and we made a host of retrofits and upgrades to key store locations across the country in response to that.

"As for Musician's Friend, they had a very productive year, and specifically, introduced some key enhancements and upgrades to the website that included enriched content and media. Response back from our MF customers was very positive in that respect. MF also has some new

financing offers we are preparing to roll-out that should drive online value even further. Stay tuned for more on that.

"As for M&A, they delivered solid results this year. They are continuing to grow across the country and had the largest acquisition year on record. It's a business unit that we have big expectations for in 2015."

Another major accomplishment was a restructuring of debt that reduced interest payments alone by \$70 million a year. To get the deal done, Ares Management came onboard as GC's lead investor back in April, converting debt into a 60-percent ownership stake in the company.

"The year has been great from a retail perspective, but it's also been a milestone year for us in terms of our financial position," Pratt said. "When the Ares Management deal was finally completed, it really eliminated a lot of challenges for us and enhanced our board of directors with some exceptional leaders from both Bain Capital and Ares teams. And while most retailers would agree with me that the U.S. economy is still in its 'recovery' phase, I'm cautiously optimistic about the holiday period this year. Definitely more so than last year ..."

GUITAR CENTER WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CALIFORNIA

Principals:

Mike Pratt, Tim Martin, Gene Joly, Steve Zapf, Dennis Haffeman, John Bagan, Kevin Kazubowski

Founded:

1959

Employees:

More than 10,000

Locations:

GC, 263; Music & Arts 139

Annual Revenue:

Undisclosed, but reported to be more than \$2 billion



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GC's three-story digital marquee at the new Time Square location.

By John Janowiak

HYBRID RETAILING

THE RECIPE TO DRUM CENTER OF PORTSMOUTH'S SUCCESS INCLUDES YOUTUBE, BOUTIQUE BRANDS AND KNOWLEDGABLE STAFF

After working in a drum store for a decade, Shane Kinney decided to make a big change in his career.

"It got to the point where I knew I could do this," he said. "I just wanted to do it my way."

And so, in June 2009, he launched the Drum Center of

Portsmouth, New Hampshire. "In just a few short years, Shane has worked hard and now has one of the top drum shops in the United States," said a voting supplier. "He represents the top brands well and is turning his drum shop into a destination location."

Initially, Kinney set his store apart with a keen spe-



cialization in snare drums. On YouTube, he and his small staff presented snare drum demonstrations at different tunings.

“YouTube demonstrations by stores at that time were almost non-existent,” Kinney said. “We were the only guys doing that for quite a while, and that led to other videos — cymbal videos and then drum set videos. It just really brought us out into the forefront.”

Given the shoestring budget he was working off of at the time, it turned out to be a highly effective way to market his store for free. Drum Center grew rapidly in its first three years, and continues to grow at a rate of five to 10 percent each year, Kinney said.

The store now has a base of local customers as well as customers from around the world — and not just online. “We’re

such a destination that I have people coming to the shop from all over the world,” Kinney said.

The Winning Recipe

By the time Kinney launched his store in 2009, there were already many examples of successful retail stores that combined walk-in traffic with Internet business. Whether you call it hybrid retailing, omni-channel or bricks-and-clicks, Kinney embraced this model from the beginning, and it has served him well.

“It’s becoming the drum store when it comes to personalized service and selection,” one supplier said. “You can always trust the opinions of the staff when you are on the fence about a product. They carry a larger variety of brands and products than most stores, so there

is more to choose from.”

Besides major brands, Drum Center of Portsmouth carries a variety of boutique brands, such as Dunnett, Noble & Cooley, Canopus, Longo, Soprano and Upif.

“We carry unique drums from brands that a lot of people haven’t even heard of,” Kinney said. “But there are people out there who want it, and they come find us. It’s not just unique brands, it’s unique products that we develop with the manufacturers as well.”

Combine this selection with a knowledgeable staff, and you have a winning recipe.

“The staff are not just drummers, but they’re incredibly knowledgeable as well. You can talk to the guys on staff here, and they hyperspecialize. In a lot of ways, they know more about the equipment than I do. A lot of our customers really trust the opinions of the staff.”

Where does Kinney find his award-winning staff?

“The best employees I’ve had are ones who just started out as customers, and the relationships blossomed from there and turned into careers for them.”



Shane Kinney

DRUM CENTER OF PORTSMOUTH
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Principals:
Shane Kinney

Founded:
2009

Employees:
6

Locations:
1

Annual Revenue:
\$2.75 million

By David Ball

A FAMILY AFFAIR

AS THE THIRD GENERATION CONTINUES TO EXPAND THE FAMILY BUSINESS, THE ASH FAMILY GROOMS THE FOURTH

If there is one thing that *Music Inc.*'s voters have noticed about Sam Ash, it's been the company's ability to maintain a "family vibe" throughout its continued expansion.

Founded in 1924 by Sam Ash, then passed down to his sons Jerry and (the late) Paul Ash, the company — now in its 90th year — is operated by a third generation of Ash's paving the way for a fourth to eventually take over.

"We have three generations working currently in the business as we speak," said Sammy Ash, COO. "Besides my mother and father [Bernice and Jerry Ash], and my brothers Richard and David — I have two sons, my brother Richard has two sons, and my brother David has one daughter — all within their 20s — actively working for the company.

"My grandfather started it, and they had certain rules of how to take care of your customers and all that. Part of my and my brothers' job is to teach that to the next generation, so that the company story is told — to make sure everybody in the company understands, and that the next generation understands. There are not many other companies like that out there."

And Sam Ash has been able to harness this unique family dynamic and direct it toward, as one voter stated, "wise business decisions and growth plans over the last 15 years." Although few companies may be able to experience the benefits of having such closely tied executives, the Ash brothers' dedication to preserving their company's legacy promotes a level of cooperation among executives that any company might envy.

"Unlike certain organizations where the players that are on top change about every 18 months, we've been working together a long time," Ash said. "I have to anticipate what [my brothers] want — and think — and they do the same for me."

Solid Growth

Throughout Sam Ash's store expansion, the Ash family circle has grown to include long-term managers Barry Horowitz,

vice president of purchasing, and Howard Mendelsohn, executive vice president of stores, who have both been with the company since the 1970s. "These become very personal decisions," Ash said. "Everybody's got to be comfortable knowing that we're opening a location, and who's going to run it, and why."

Despite one store closing this past year, Sam Ash has continued plans for growth in 2015. "We are actively looking to open one or two more stores this year — big ones — in markets we are not in," Ash said. "Even if it's an underserved market, if it's going to cannibalize a nickel of our business, we're not going to even look."

Beyond brick-and-mortar locations, Sam Ash's online business has grown substantially, especially in the high-end market, by serving players and collectors who are looking for more unique premium instruments.

"Our high-end business [with] guitars on the Web has been a very good payoff for the investment we made," Ash said. "We're going to now do this for brass and winds. There's an awful lot of very cool, unique horns out there that most people don't have access to."

One thing that Sam Ash is sure of: It's a family business, and the family plans to keep it that way.

"We've been working harder than we've ever worked for the past couple years just to get to this place," Ash said. "I think I can say that from everything we've done, Sam Ash will at least be around for my children to run. And that's a very solid feeling."

SAM ASH HICKSVILLE, NEW YORK

Principals:

Sammy Ash, Richard Ash, David Ash, Howard Mendelsohn, Stu Leibowitz, Barry Horowitz

Founded:

1924

Employees:

Approximately 1,600

Locations:

45 locations, 48 storefronts

Annual Revenue:

Undisclosed



Sammy Ash

By David Ball

HITTING THE STAGE

MOZINGO MUSIC GETS CREATIVE WITH ITS VENUE SPACE

When it comes to getting people in the door, Mozingo Music thinks outside the box, getting creative both in crafting music education programs and in planning events for its newly rebuilt venue, “The Stage.”

Founded in Ellisville (a suburb of St. Louis), more than 40 years ago by their father Don Mozingo, sons Jeff and David have added two locations since taking over the business — the second store, opened in O’Fallon in 2005, and a third, which opened this past year, in Columbia.

“Our father started it in 1972 — just built the business from literally nothing — and we have owned it over the last 15 years and have taken it to where it is today,” said Jeff Mozingo, president of Mozingo Music.

Mozingo Music has built its reputation on its music education program.

“We have always been about getting the beginning students into an instrument, and we continue that quest,” Mozingo said. “We have a lot of teachers on staff, and we average anywhere from 1,400 to 1,600 students per week throughout all of our locations.”

Banking in on Events

Like most brick-and-mortar retailers, the biggest challenge that Mozingo Music is currently up against is the Internet.

“People come in and they’ll shop us, then go home and go online and buy it,” Mozingo said. “Or they’ll buy it online and then they’ll bring it in wanting us to fix it.”

Taking up the challenge, Mozingo Mu-

MOZINGO MUSIC ELLISVILLE, MISSOURI

Principals:
Jeff Mozingo,
David Mozingo

Founded:
1972

Employees:
25

Locations:
3

Annual Revenue:
\$3 million



Jeff Mozingo

sic uses the one thing the Internet does not have — a physical space — to bring people into the store, planning a variety of events at its multipurpose venue, “The Stage,” at its O’Fallon location.

“Its got a nice sound system, great lighting and a stage. [We host] birthday parties, business meetings, with the option of having a grand piano in there for recitals, for any type of group that wants to come in and rent the facility,” Mozingo said. “Diversification is where it’s at. If you’re just thinking about doing music, you’re not going to succeed, in my opinion.”

With such a versatile space at its disposal, Mozingo Music has planned events that combine the company’s reputation for music education with a wide array of interests, hosting everything from concerts and clinics to musical theater productions, corporate business meetings, Xbox competitions and karaoke nights.

“We offer dance classes,” Mozingo added. “We offer the Mozingo Center for Creative Arts [a non-profit program for children that promotes the fine arts]. They teach acting and music theory.”

Of course, “The Stage” is also used for clinics and concerts as well, from professional touring musicians like guitarist Tommy Emmanuel or Jim Riley of Rascal Flatts, to local jazz bands. There’s also a monthly bluegrass jam.

“Local bluegrass players love to come and just jam for three hours and have fun, and they pack the place out,” said Joe Bruce, general manager.

Whatever the event, Mozingo added, “There’s just a lot of opportunity that brings people to the store [who] would not normally come into Mozingo Music.”



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By John Janowiak

GROWTH LEADER

SWEETWATER EXPANDS ITS PHYSICAL FOOTPRINT AND CONTINUES TO SEE 20-PERCENT ANNUAL GROWTH

Sweetwater Sound just keeps on growing. To meet the burgeoning demand for its music and sound products, the Fort Wayne, Indiana-based retailer completed a 132,000-square-foot addition in May, increasing its total square footage to 320,000. Since then, Sweetwater has moved on to a slew of other expansions.

“We’re tripling the size of our cafeteria seating area, and we’re putting a nightclub in with a dedicated stage,” said Chuck Surack, the company’s founder and president. “And there’s a 12,000-square-foot building being built to house our marketing and merchandising department. Then the most exciting thing — we haven’t started yet, but we’re well into the plans of designing a real high technology, state-of-the-art store.”

Meanwhile, sales are growing at a rapid pace, and suppliers continue to praise the company’s across-the-board professionalism.

“These guys continue to nail it in every way,” said one supplier who nominated Sweetwater. “Their website is amazing, and their product display photos help the customers pick their exact instrument by serial number. Their customer service is flawless, and their tech help is incredible. And on top of it, they have a great organization from the top down. These guys will continue to grow for many years.”

Customer Confidence

Sweetwater has won Retail Excellence awards before, but Surack said this year’s honor brings a smile to his face. The musician and entrepreneur, who start-



Chuck Surack

ed the company out of his VW bus 36 years ago, brims with excitement as he rattles off some recent sales figures. For the past couple of decades, the company has grown 20 percent per year on average, he said. But this year, they’re experiencing months of much greater growth. October was up 36 percent from last year, and over the summer, some months were up as much as 39, even 54 percent.

Surack attributes this growth to improved customer confidence, but also to a business model that works very well.

“We fit very neatly between Guitar Center — or frankly any other music stores across the country — and Amazon,” he said. “We provide the old-fashioned, true customer service that a traditional store can provide, but then we also do enough volume of business that we can get the economy of scale to work for us. Our model is just working really, really well. I’m very thrilled about it.”

He pointed out that, at 20-percent annual growth, a company can double in size in less than four years. At a recent leadership meeting, he raised an even more dramatic possibility: If the company keeps growing at this pace, it will be a billion-dollar company by 2020.

“I’m not saying we’re going there — that’s way too strong and too arrogant, but based on the path we’ve been going at 20-percent growth, by the year 2020, we’re a billion dollar company,” he said. “It’s kind of frightening when you think about it. But it’s all about the customer. I can look at all these business things that we do, and all the practices. But from our point of view, you always do what’s right for the customer.”

SWEETWATER
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

Principals:
Chuck Surack, John Hopkins, Jeff Radke, Marc Leveridge

Founded:
1979

Employees:
750

Locations:
1

Annual Revenue:
\$300 million

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By Martha Spizziri

EDUCATE & ENTERTAIN

HEID MUSIC WORKS HARD TO DO MORE THAN JUST SELL TO ITS CUSTOMERS

Heid Music works hard to be everything to every musician and — contrary to the conventional advice on the matter — it's working very well. The Appleton, Wisconsin-based retailer handles pianos, band, orchestra, guitars, drums, accessories, sheet music, lessons, repairs and more throughout its five locations.

"We try to be dangerous in all areas," said Todd Heid, president and third-generation owner. "[With] that pro musician — we hope that our name comes up. With that mom that has a beginning band student, [we hope that] our name comes up."

The company was founded in 1948 by Todd's grandfather Peter. Peter's sons Paul and Bob took over from him. Today, husband and wife Todd and DeDe Heid run day-to-day operations.

When it comes to music education, Heid Music is doing it right. And it was one of the major factors voting suppliers mentioned during this year's Excellence Award voting. Heid Music offers group and individual lessons at all of its locations. Kids as young as six months can participate in Music Together classes with their parents. And an all-ages Rock University was so popular that it expanded from a summer camp to a year-round program.

"We are the resource for musicians at any stage and any age,"

DeDe said. "Whether you're just getting started [or] you've had your trumpet packed underneath your bed for 20 years."

The store also teaches teachers. Music Education Consultants' Marcia Neel recently led a workshop on modernizing the classroom. The Heids work hard to provide free music workshops at all of their locations.

"One of our core values is to educate and entertain, and we take that very seriously," DeDe said, adding that close partnerships with manufacturers and the community have been crucial to the store's success.

For instance, Heid bumped up its sponsorship of the local performing arts center. "What [that partnership has] done is that [the center] feels really engaged in our business," DeDe said.

Manufacturer partners have helped Heid Music bring workshops and other events to its locations.

"What the partnership has created is a full circle collaboration," she added. "We are engaged in helping them to succeed at their goals, they help us to meet ours, and the community benefits from a stronger offering."



DeDe and Todd Heid

HEID MUSIC APPLETON, WISCONSIN

Principals:

Todd Heid, DeDe Heid, Paul Heid,
Kim Heid-Mantey & Bob Heid

Founded:

1948

Employees:

93

Locations:

5

Annual Revenue:


\$10.5 million



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By Ed Enright

PERSONALIZED SERVICE

PROWINDS.COM THRIVES BY OFFERING CUSTOMERS A CLEAN SITE AND EXPERT ADVICE

Plenty of retail websites make it easy to buy musical instruments and gear. But when a site like Prowinds.com can provide an opportunity for customers to really “shop,” it stands apart from the rest of the pack.

Prowinds.com was launched in November 2011 by Dean Foster, founder of the Bloomington, Indiana-based Pro Winds retail store — a business dedicated to serving a niche market of only wind instruments and related accessories since 1994.

“When we launched the current Prowinds.com, we wanted to make the most interactive site that we could, the most simplistic site that we could, and make it user-friendly,” Foster said. “We wanted very detailed product information, good photos, video when applicable, and to make it an interactive experience with the customer focusing only on wind instruments, unlike our competitors that sell every type of music product.”

The brick-and-mortar Pro Winds location closed its doors in April 2012, with all retail transactions transferred to the website. In June 2013, Prowinds.com was purchased by the National Educational Music Company (NEMC), a long-established and well-respected entity known for its nationwide band-instrument rental programs. Since that acquisition, Prowinds.com has remained strong, and its future looks promising. That has been accomplished by keeping the site clean-looking, inviting and easy to navigate, as well as by making some essential upgrades on the back end.

“Since Prowinds.com became part of

the NEMC family, the focus has been on enhancing the customer experience by expanding the product assortment and adding features, such as live chat and video,” said Ron Beaudoin, chief sales and marketing officer at NEMC. “Our go-forward plan is to be the destination for the serious wind players to visit often for the latest and greatest instruments and accessories at great

PROWINDS.COM

Principals:

NEMC & Dean Foster,
brand manager

Founded:

2011 (original Pro Winds
retail store founded in 1994)

Employees:

NEMC staff numbers 50

Locations:

Web only

Annual Revenue:

Undisclosed



prices backed by expert advice and service.”

Much of that advice and service comes from Foster, a passionate, detail-oriented, hands-on manager who draws on his years of experience and knowledge to market the site and address his customers’ needs directly, with an informed personal touch only he can provide.

“The tremendous support of the NEMC team and their belief in the vision for Pro Winds has been amazing,” he said. “The staff’s music industry expertise has really taken customer service and supplier relationships to the next level.”

Under the leadership of NEMC, Prowinds.com appears to be in the hands of an entity that is capable of carrying out Foster’s original business vision. “For over 50 years, NEMC has served the needs of parents and students by providing quality instruments on a rental basis backed by expert advice and personalized service from our national network of local independent music stores,” Beaudoin said. “Pro Winds was founded and thrives today by offering the customer who prefers to purchase online with exactly the same type of expert advice and personalized service. Making music is a highly personal form of self-expression. Shopping for the tools to make music should be as well.”

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Tim Pratt, President
Dietze Music
Omaha/Lincoln, NE

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Mike Marlar, Sales and Purchasing Manager
Williamson Music
Plano, TX

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By Michael Gallant

BELIEVE IN THE BRICKS

WITH MASSIVE INVENTORY AND PROGRESSIVE CUSTOMER INTERACTION, ALTO MUSIC MOVES THE BRICK-AND-MORTAR MUSIC STORE INTO THE FUTURE

In an age where the words Amazon and eBay can send some MI retailers running for the hills, Jon Haber, owner of Alto Music, is not concerned. “I believe in the brick-and-mortar music store,” Haber said. “The majority of those who are into music probably got a shot of adrenaline from first walking into their local store. It’s this shot that really fueled the industry and, I believe, keeps it going.”

Though the power of brick-and-mortar is clearly on display every day in Alto’s store locations, Internet sales and marketing have become an integral part of the MI sales world — and the need to alchemize physical and digital presences is a reality that Haber embraces.

“This is a challenge,” he said. “There are several businesses, who I highly respect, who do such an amazing job. My basic premise is to bring our personal customer service to all of our online sales.”

In practice, that means encouraging online customers to interact directly with the staff members best able to help them.

“This level of service, I believe, keeps many of them coming back,” Haber said. “They often go right to their salesperson, as opposed to just clicking a button on our website.”

Secrets to its Success

Haber describes the MI industry as a constantly evolving one. He said, in order to stay successful, rolling with the changes is key, while wishing for the “good ol’ days” brings nothing but less business.

One voter described Alto as “independent” and “forward-thinking,” saying that they have “consistently grown their business.” For Haber, flexibility is key to such ongoing success. “Though we are a decent-sized business, we are able to turn on a dime,” he said. “The way the business is organized really hasn’t changed much over the years. We are quick and nimble. We are able to jump at opportunities and act on opportunities right away when, in many cases, our larger competition cannot.”



Jon Haber

ALTO MUSIC
MIDDLETOWN, NEW YORK

Principals:
Jon Haber

Founded:
1989

Employees:
94

Locations:
3, plus a showroom in New York City

Annual Revenue:
\$42 million

Haber’s customer-focused initiatives include in-store promotions like August’s Customer Appreciation Day, a well-attended party which included live music, free food and sales promos.

“I give full credit for our promotions to some of our folks — in particular, Jessica Valentin and Dennis Shepard,” Haber said. “They come up with

the ideas. I just signed the check to pay for it.”

Alto’s staff continues to play a key role in keeping Alto in high regard amongst customers and Excellence voters alike.

“We really have experts on our respective departments,” he said. “The drum guy, the pro-audio guy, the guitar guy, right down the list — and I use the word ‘guy’ figuratively; the women here are tops — really know their stuff. We really are able to sell you the right thing the first time, service it and so on. The fact that after Christmas, year after year, we essentially get no returns — that says it all.”

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By Martha Spizziri

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

A NEW LOCATION AND A RENTAL AFFILIATE PROGRAM HAS HELPED THE MUSIC SHOPPE SEE STEADY GROWTH

According to owner and President Randy Wood, The Music Shoppe “was built on school music service.” When Wood’s father, Tom, bought a music store in Bloomington, Illinois, in 1941, he immediately began calling on schools. The store’s motto was “specializing in service to music education.”

The Music Shoppe now stands on a broad foundation. It gained some of its current territory when Springfield, Illinois-based Samuel Music closed its doors this summer. Wood took over Samuel Music’s school music clients and bought much of its inventory.

But Wood didn’t stop there. He hired four of Samuel Music’s former employees, including a road rep and a repair tech.

“Of course there was sales potential for taking on the business,” said one voting supplier. “[But] had Randy not stepped in, at least three-quarters [of the] people could have been out of a job.”

The Music Shoppe’s Champaign location, in particular, has grown as a result. The store expanded its reach with a savvy affiliate program where The Music Shoppe provides other music stores with new instruments to rent out, carries the inventory, performs repairs and service, and the affiliates get a commission. The company partners

with about 10 stores throughout Illinois. Wood, Champaign store manager Christopher Moors and the field reps stay in close touch with these affiliates.

“The educational representatives visit them as they visit schools every week, so that we can keep a nice flow of instruments and accessories going into these farther out communities,” said Moors.

Lesson Builders

Many colleges and universities offer a pool of highly qualified music teachers. Moors took full advantage of that when he started as manager in Champaign five years ago. Back then, that location didn’t offer lessons. Today, it has about 25 teachers. Every instructor has a music education degree or a performance degree except guitar teachers. Overall, the shop’s approach seems to have paid off.

“We’re looking at expanding our studios in both locations,” Wood said. “They’re pretty much maxed out, which is great.”

And Moors said it’s a measure of a successful transition after the purchase of Samuel Music. “Our goal is to make sure we continue to serve the students in the schools and keep them going, because we all care about music education, first and foremost,” Moors said.



Randy Wood

THE MUSIC SHOPPE
CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS

Principals:
Randy Wood, Terry Houchin, Joy Hippensteele, Monica Irwin and Christopher Moors

Founded:
1961

Employees:
49

Locations:
2

Annual Revenue:
Over \$5 million

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BARCUS-BERRY GIBBSCH

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EVANS mono

Jackson ovation

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audio-technica BBE Sound Inc.

MXR LP REMO

Martin & Co GALAXY AUDIO

GRETSCH RICO

D'Addario Becker

H G AKG

KAT Takamine

Fender TOCA

PRO-MARK HERCULES

FURMAN

PERCUSSION PLUS Lee Caber

Squier NADY

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- Large orders can be cut-and-pasted from your Microsoft Excel spreadsheets
- Consumer-ready product descriptions and images for your website



- Order at your convenience and only when you need stock, reducing your inventory costs and improving your customer service.
- Locating and ordering items is a snap with KMC Online's search enhanced function. Find complete product information for every SKU.



Ordering is easy with KMC!

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- Only KMC has the iconic 1 Stop catalog—Published twice a year, 900 full-color pages with a product selection so vast, it's a turnkey source for opening and maintaining a well-stocked retail store.
- Take advantage of exclusive deals in our monthly 32-page flier, where we focus on best-selling products and value-added deals



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These strings feature an engineered, break-resistant, high-carbon steel core and plain steel alloy to deliver a new level of playing power. NYXL's provide more strength and up to 131-percent greater tuning stability by using a reinvented wire drawing process coupled with a "fusion twist" process for the plain steels. The reformulated nickel plated string windings have greater magnetic properties resulting in **higher output and enhanced mid-range frequency response for more presence and crunch.** {daddario.com}

Taylor 814ce

The revoicing of the 800 Series has brought greater warmth, a more mature midrange, and a looser low end to the 814ce, due to the customized bracing and a new, custom-calibrated Elixir HD Light string-gauge set. Appointments include maple binding and back strip, rosewood top edge trim, a rosewood pick-guard and Taylor's new Element fretboard inlay in mother-of-pearl. **"Great new take on a best seller,"** said one voting retailer. "Great buzz has made this a most-asked-about guitar and fast seller." {taylorguitars.com}

Yamaha L Series

The series offers such features as A.R.E. (Acoustic Resonance Enhancement), new designed bracing patterns and a high, comfortable traditional neck profile. The L Series boasts a choice of Rosewood or Mahogany back and sides. "It's a **fantastic bang-for-the-buck guitar,**" commented one voter. "They are an easy upsell from the basic models." {yamaha.com}



**G&L
Fallout Electric**

The Fallout shares the original Leo Fender-designed SC-2 body shape and features a sustain-rich G&L Saddle Lock bridge and easy-playing medium-C-shape neck with a 12-inch radius and medium-jumbo frets. "The G&L Fallout has proven to be **our best-selling electric this year**," said one voter. "While we do well with both their U.S. and overseas guitars, the American-made Fallout is our best-seller. So impressed!" glguitars.com

**Seagull
Merlin**

Inspired by the dulcimer and crafted in LaPatrie, Quebec, the Merlin is a compact 4-string diatonic acoustic instrument **designed to introduce people of all ages to the joy of creating and playing music**. This is further accentuated by the Merlin's diatonic scale, which makes it difficult for a player to hit an "off note" on the fingerboard. "At first I thought that buying eight at a time was going to be difficult, but the sell-through has been very good," said one voting retailer. seagullguitars.com



Supro
Reissue Tube Amps

The 1624T Dual-Tone combo amplifier is a 24-Watt, 1x12 tube combo that can easily be driven to glorious saturation at a manageable gigging volume while retaining clarity and bandwidth at any level of gain. This amp is just one of Supro's reissue tube amps that Excellence voters praised. One said, "These U.S.-made, **high quality amps offer a great margin.**" [{suprousa.com}](http://suprousa.com)



Line 6
AMPLIFI

This amp lets players create their own combination of pedals, effects processors, and amp and cabinet models using the AMPLIFi Remote iOS app. Users can then store them as presets — in the cloud, in the app or using the amp's 100 onboard preset locations — for instant access via FBV Shortboard MKII [{line6.com}](http://line6.com)



Boss
Waza Craft Pedals

The Waza Craft series of special edition compact pedals includes the SD-1W Super Overdrive, BD-2W Blues Driver and DM-2W Delay. All three pedals provide the classic sound signatures of the past and present BOSS pedals they're based on, plus switchable modes for customized tones. [{bossus.com}](http://bossus.com)





**Electro-Harmonix
B9 Organ Machine**

Electro-Harmonix B9 Organ Machine transforms the tone of a guitar or keyboard into the full-body, electric organ. It features nine presets that have been finely tuned to emulate popular and classic electric organ tones. "The B9 has done extremely well with my church-going customers," said one voting retailer. **"Now any guitar player can get an organ sound with ease."** {ehx.com}

**Blackstar
ID: Core**

These amps from Blackstar feature an intuitive control set like a traditional amp, but have the versatility of programmability. The controls let guitarists custom design their own sound. The Voice control has six different settings - Clean Warm, Clean Bright, Crunch, Super Crunch, OD 1, OD 2. When used together with Blackstar's ISF control, users can get the exact tone they want. **"They are feature-packed amplifiers at entry level prices,"** said one voter. {blackstaramps.com}

Yamaha

Clavinova CLP-500 Series

Ideal for **families seeking an upright piano alternative**, the six models of the Clavinova CLP-500 series include the CLP-525, CLP-535, CLP-545, CLP-565GP baby grand, CLP-575 and CLP-585 models. These digital pianos include the first Clavinova models with grand piano voices sampled from both the Yamaha CFX 9-foot concert grand and the Bösendorfer 290 Imperial models. usa.yamaha.com



Kawai
CN Series

Kawai America's CN Series of digital pianos includes the new CN25 and CN35. Both CN models feature the new RHIII keyboard action with **graded hammers**, let-off, Ivory-touch key surfaces and triple-sensor key detection. New to the RHIII action is key counterbalancing, which **enhances the realism of the action's dynamic weight sensation**. Both instruments also boast Kawai's Progressive Harmonic Imaging sound technology, which offers 88-key piano sampling. kawaius.com

Hal Leonard
Frozen

The "Frozen" songbook features 11 songs as penned by songwriters Robert Lopez and Kristen Anderson-Lopez, plus color artwork from the film. Songs include, "For The First Time In Forever," "Frozen Heart," "In Summer," "Let It Go," "Love Is An Open Door" and "Reindeer(s) Are Better Than People." One voter said, "**It's our best-seller** — perfect for the demographic of the movie and musical ability." halleonard.com



Roland
RD-800 Stage Piano

The RD-800 is an intuitive instrument **designed for fast, effortless operation while performing**. The keyboard features the latest weighted-action keyboard technology, a streamlined interface and a Tone Color function. One voting retailer said that the RD-800 has "been desired by many." rolandus.com



Pearl
Crystal Beat

Pearl celebrates the return of the original seamless Acrylic drum shell with the new Crystal Beat Acrylic drum sets and component drums. The new Crystal Beat's **upgraded 7mm seamless acrylic shell comes standard in four stock configurations.** Individual components are also available from 8 to 22 inches in UltraClear, Ruby Red and Tangerine Glass transparent finishes for custom configuration. {pearldrum.com}

Mapex
Mars

This kit offers shallow depth 100-percent Birch shells complete with the SONIClear Bearing Edge, which increases the contact between the drumhead and shell and lets the head sit flat on the edge. The SONIClear Bearing Edge produces a stronger and more centered pitch and makes the drums easy to tune. One voting retailer noted that the "**color choices stand out** from the traditional flat black, red and blue." {mapexdrums.com}



DRUM CLIP

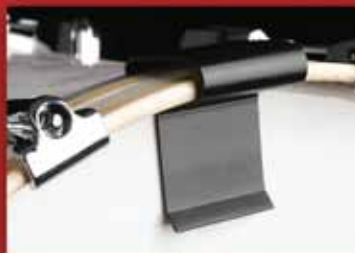
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**Ultimate Ears
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The 900s features four precision-balanced armature speakers per ear – two for low end, one for midrange and one for high frequencies. A three-way crossover routes highs, mids and lows to the optimal speakers, **delivering professional-grade clarity.** "As a retail-level ear phone, these can be used for stage and studio use along with the standard iOS and Android uses," commented one voter. "They sound amazing and the packaging is awesome." ultimateears.com

**QSC
TouchMix Series**

The TouchMix Series offers musicians, production professionals and live performance venues the power and capability of a large format console in a portable, fully integrated, easy-to-use product. The TouchMix-8 (12 input channels) and TouchMix-16 (20 input channels) provide the user with a choice of Advanced Mode operation that offers total control over all parameters, or Simple Mode that provides only the most essential controls. One voter mentioned it was a product of the year because, **"It's an affordable compact touch screen mixer."** qsc.com

**Samson
Expedition XP106w**

Samson's Expedition XP106w rechargeable portable P.A. is **packed with features**, including Bluetooth connectivity and a built-in 4-channel mixer. The P.A. also comes with a USB digital wireless system for delivering impromptu performances and professional presentations in any environment. "It's compact [with] unique features allowing us to fill a void when people ask for something specific," said one voter. samsontech.com

**Universal Audio
Apollo Twin**

This 2x6 Thunderbolt audio interface for Mac combines the same high-quality 24/192 kHz audio conversion of UA's Apollo Series with onboard real-time UAD SOLO or DUO Processing. With its ergonomic desktop design, rugged aluminum construction and front panel headphone and instrument connections, Apollo Twin **lets Mac users record in real-time** through the full range of UAD Powered Plug-Ins available in the UA online store. uaudio.com





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By Katie Kailus

QUALITY IS KEY

KAWAI TAKES QUALITY TO NEW LEVELS IN BOTH ITS PRODUCTS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

When it comes to quality, Kawai doesn't tread lightly. The company, which has been named a Supplier Excellence winner three years in a row, takes the quality and durability of its products very seriously.

"Sometimes, people think quality and durability are the same thing — but they're really not," said Brian Chung, senior vice president of Kawai. "Kawai's main goal is to build instruments that will maintain terrific tone and touch over time. In other words, we strive to build playing quality that is durable. You might try two pianos that sound and feel great today and assume that they are of equal quality. That may be true at this moment. But five or 10 years from now, it's very likely that one of them will sound and feel far better than the other. We've invested a bundle in both time and money to make sure that 'better instrument' over time is a Kawai."

In particular, gigging musicians' gear can especially take a beating. Chung said Kawai took this fact into consideration

40 years ago after realizing wooden parts in piano action were unstable.

"Humidity could really mess up a piano action because parts that continually shrink and swell will not stay aligned — and the misalignment wreaks havoc with touch and tone," he said.

As a result, Kawai has spent tens of millions to incorporate composite parts that are stronger, lighter and more stable than wood for use in its piano actions.

"Now, we're even using carbon fiber parts to make sure tone and touch stay consistent over time," Chung said. "All these things help us establish a level of piano

quality that is durable — so what you hear and feel today will last longer into the future. Kawai has really been the leader in piano technology for more than 40 years. Our dealers already know that, but I think consumers realize it now, too."

First-Class Service

Product quality aside, voting retailers also mentioned Kawai's customer service quality as a major factor when naming it an Excellence winner.

One voter said Kawai has the "best customer service in this or any business." That is something Chung and the Kawai team pride themselves on and focus on maintaining every day.

"We try to be decent, trustworthy people who treat our dealers and retail customers the way we would want to be treated," Chung said. "That's another part of our company that we strive to make durable. When you work hard over many years to treat your customers with fairness and

integrity, you build a great foundation for partnership. We're certainly not a perfect company — but we do try hard to be good partners with our dealers."

Looking ahead, Kawai has many new releases for 2015 that Chung said the company is excited to share with its dealer base.

"We always try to have something new and compelling to offer our dealers each year — and 2015 is no different," Chung said. "Some of those new offerings will be on display at the upcoming NAMM Show in January. So, we hope our dealer partners will join us in Anaheim and be the first ones to see them."



By John Janowiak

GROWTH IN OFFERINGS

THANKS TO ITS VAST PRODUCT OFFERINGS, SLM RECENTLY RECORDED ITS BIGGEST SALES MONTH IN HISTORY

While St. Louis Music has been a major distributor of musical instruments and accessories for decades, it was only six years ago when U.S. Band and Orchestra Supply Inc. purchased its name and assets from LOUD Technologies Inc. Since then, SLM has come a long way. The company now distributes more than 10,000 products from over 150 brands to thousands of retailers throughout North America and beyond.

Voting Excellence dealers said they are comforted by the company's friendliness and sensitivity toward the industry's independent brick-and-mortar retail music stores. "In the last two years, they have become one of our top five vendors, and they have



Mark Ragin

exceeded expectations," said one voting retailer. "They are totally a top supplier."

And the numbers back up that assertion. According to Mark Ragin, company CEO and owner, this past August was the biggest sales month in company history, and September followed closely behind with a 20-percent increase over the previous year.

Covering All Bases

Ragin said he purchased the company to round out his product offerings, which were immediately enhanced by the addition the professional line P. Mauriat saxophones and trumpets. The company then added Zonda, its full line of student woodwind and brasswind instru-

ments. By purchasing SLM, Ragin gained a respected string brand in the form of Knilling Instruments.

"[And], St. Louis Music was always well known for being in the combo business," Ragin said.

On the guitar side, SLM sells three guitar lines, two of which they own: Sigma and Austin. Alvarez, which LOUD still owns, is the company's biggest growth area in terms of units sold and dollar volume, Ragin said. "Alvarez sales continue to grow with the brand now in over 24 different countries, a major push for us in 2014," he added.

Rounding out the picture, SLM took on the Dixon drum line two years ago. "Dixon has really started to flourish," Ragin said.

By David Ball

TRUE TO ITS ROOTS

AS BREEDLOVE CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF GUITAR MAKING, IT DOESN'T STRAY FROM ITS CORE BELIEFS

Approaching its 25th anniversary in 2015, Breedlove is experiencing record-high demand by staying true to its roots, continuing to deliver quality products across all price points and supplying retailers with an attractive margin.

Throughout its 25 years, Breedlove's history of innovation has continued to set it apart in the marketplace.

"Whether it's the bridge truss, asymmetrical headstock, pinless bridge or our distinctive body shapes, Breedlove has never settled for the status quo," said Rick Froio, sales manager at Breedlove. "While we respect tradition, we simply choose not to make instruments of yesterday."

Delivering quality products across all price points allows retailers a wide selection of Breedlove instruments to showcase.

"All our instruments are made or quality checked in our Bend, Oregon, facility, so our fans always know they will get the quality they expect from Breedlove at every price point."

Building Strong Bonds

But it's not just Breedlove's products that have made it a widely sought-after brand; maintaining relationships with dealers has been a cornerstone to the company's success.

"We are very aware that this high demand would not be met without the great partners we have in retail stores across the country," Froio said. "When the correct product mix and value equation is delivered in each outlet, the manufacturer, the retailer and the consumer all win. Getting that right is the secret to success. We see each of our retail partners as bringing their own strengths to the relationship, and we leverage their strengths with the correct set

of products for their customers."

And, as voting retailers pointed out, Breedlove's instruments consistently return a decent margin. "We aren't the biggest manufacturer, so we have to work even harder to deliver the right value to both our retail partners and our fans," Froio said.



Rick Froio

By Michael Gallant

MAINTAINING THE MAGIC

FOR DECADES, HOSHINO USA HAS HELPED DEALERS OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES THRIVE

When Hoshino began work in the United States more than 40 years ago, the company was a stranger, describes president Shogo Hayashi.

“But independent dealers listened, advised us, and supported the ‘underdog,’” he said. “As a company, we’ll never forget that they contributed to our survival and, in turn, we are always mindful of their survival and success.”

And this year’s Excellence voters heard Hayashi loud and clear. “True partners with retailers to satisfy customer needs,” wrote one voter, while another stated, “They are very responsive to independent dealers and their needs.”

As the United States distributor for Ibanez and Tama, Hoshino has also earned praise for the quality of its instruments.

“Bass guitars are the best value for the buck,” wrote one voter. “Their acoustic line has really improved and [is] also a great value. They don’t jack you for massive quantities.” Another simply stated, “They have a great product mix.”

To wit, Hayashi describes Hoshino’s instrument offerings as one of its greatest strengths, citing a famous story from sixteenth-century Japan by way of explanation.

“A samurai taught three sons the importance of the ‘power of unity,’” Hayashi said. “He showed them that a single arrow could be easily broken by hand but three arrows together could not.”

Hoshino’s three arrows? Ibanez’s triumvirate of electric guitars, acoustic guitars and basses.

“To maximize the power of unity, each arrow needs to be strong enough, and to have a clear reason to exist for customers,” Hayashi continued. “We have been paying special attention to both bass and acoustic guitars for a decade, and now there is a desirable balance between all three. Of course, our work is not finished yet, and we keep improving.”

Unity indeed has its benefits. “Our electric team inspires the bass team, who then stimulate the acoustic team, and so on,” he said. “This internal competition is healthy, and manifests as a wide range of exciting new products, year in and year out.”



Shogo Hayashi

Meeting Dealer Demands

When it comes to creating the perfect product mix for its customers, Hoshino goes for breadth as well as depth, creating instruments ideal for beginners and intermediate players, as well as the Steve Vai’s of the world. Hoshino has applied a similar strategy to Tama as well, working to expand coverage to educational percussion markets such as marching drums.

“It may be hard to see from the outside, but the synergy of having both guitars and drums is incredibly huge for all aspects of the company in a positive way,” Hayashi said. “I really would like to emphasize our product mix is the result of listening to dealers’ needs and market demand.”

Hayashi is quick to share credit for Hoshino’s success with the dealers that his company serves.

“It shocks me to hear that, after years of building successful businesses in tandem with music dealers, there are vendors who no longer view dealers as essential,” he said. “The sense of magic that great dealers can bring to the experience of buying an instrument is what keeps all of our products from becoming commodities. And once we lose that sense of magic, we stand to lose everything.”

By John Janowiak

SUPPORTING THE DEALER

THE RECIPE TO GODIN'S SUCCESS INCLUDES SEASONED REPS AND GREAT MARGINS

In nominating Godin Guitars for a Supplier Excellence award, retailers praised the Montreal-based manufacturer for its varied product selection, fair pricing, seasoned reps and helpful service.

"Godin makes excellent products that are competitively priced with excellent margins at MAP," said one retailer. "They have sensible stocking requirements, and they really stand behind what they sell when something goes wrong."

Founded in 1972 by luthier Robert Godin, the company started out as a small boutique manufacturer that developed a reputation for technical innovation and product quality. Today, the company has about 600 employees and six factories, five in Quebec and one in Berlin, New Hampshire.

Godin encompasses six separate brands. Besides the solid-bodied electric Godin guitars, there are traditional-looking Simon & Patrick acoustics and the more modern-looking Seagull acoustics. Meanwhile, Keegan offers entry- to mid-level acoustic guitars, Art & Lutherie makes entry-level budget guitars and La Patrie manufactures classical guitars.

"We have different guitars for different players," said Mario Biferali, vice president of sales and marketing. "From the

beginning of the price point all the way to the custom shop stuff, it's all built with that same quality. We really pride ourselves on that."

Dealer Support

It's no accident that Godin reps have a solid reputation among retailers. Some have been with the company for decades, which says a lot about how Godin values their knowledge and skills, Biferali said.

"We surround ourselves with a good team. We try to communicate. We're very big on product training. We don't sweep stuff under the rug. If there's an issue, we handle it. I think that extends to all our reps."

In terms of pricing, Biferali said



From left: Mario Biferali, Robert Godin and Patrick Godin

Godin seeks a win-win-win situation.

"We're going to make a great guitar, and we're going to sell it to a dealer at a reasonable price," he said. "The dealer will make a fantastic margin, but it's still a great bargain for the end user. We always keep that in mind."

By David Ball

TOP-NOTCH SERVICE

A COMMITMENT TO SERVICE AND INNOVATION KEEPS ERNIE BALL AT THE TOP OF THE MARKET

As an established MI brand, the challenge that Ernie Ball currently faces is one that most companies would love to have: increasing production in order to meet the growing international demand.

"The challenge for us is we need to keep enough products on the shelf to service all these folks all over the world," said Derek Brooks, artist relations and marketing rep at Ernie Ball. "It's a good problem to have, but we have to be smart and make sure we don't lose confidence in how we deliver our products."

Brooks said Ernie Ball's Coachella Valley, California-based facility, which opened in 2002, is currently running at full

capacity. "We've had to get some graveyard shifts going and hire more people," he added.

Customers First

Despite the comfortable ubiquity of the brand, Ernie Ball continues to stay on the front lines innovation, offering products that are "uniquely beneficial" to musicians.

"We offer products that give musicians a chance to have a new voice on their instrument by



Derek Brooks

providing strings that aren't just 'me too' products, but strings that offer a different type of tonality so you can have a different playing experience," Brooks said.

Ernie Ball also offers strong service to its dealer network, with one voter calling it, "top-notch."

"We have inside sales reps that call around 6,000 dealers in the United States every three to four weeks as a courtesy check-in, because that's the amount of time that stores who do a lot of business turn over their product," Brooks said.

Even with the increasing demand, the company's reputation for fast, free shipping remains uncompromised.

"We ship same day," Brooks said. "If the order's over \$150, we pay shipping. Music stores know they can call us and know their order is going out that day."

By Michael Gallant

SETTING THE STANDARD

YAMAHA BRINGS QUALITY, INNOVATION AND SERVICE TO NEW HEIGHTS — BOTH GLOBALLY AND LOCALLY

As one of the most well-known brands in the MI world, Yamaha isn't content to rest on its proverbial laurels. From creating cutting-edge products to finding fresh ways to help dealers large and small, the corporation continues to set the standard for what an MI supplier can be.

One Excellence voter praised Yamaha for creating the “products of the future,” while another pointed out that the supplier is “very adaptable in dealing with changing market conditions. Hard to do with such a large company.” Though Yamaha makes it all look easy, rigorous work behind the scenes makes such success possible.

“We certainly appreciate the compliment,” said Tom Sumner, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Yamaha. “There’s a common saying in our Buena Park, California, headquarters that ‘a day in a dealer’s store is worth 100 days in the office.’ We learn a lot from market reports, but we learn a lot more by actually being there.”

Boutique Mindset

Yamaha relies on a strong team of district managers that are in “the field” all the time, Sumner continues, but the company’s marketing managers and other executives regularly visit dealers to witness, first hand, what happens on the front lines.

“I would say that we also try to thoughtfully react to changing market conditions, but not have a knee-jerk response,” he said. “More of a measured response to changes.”

Voters also praised Yamaha’s dealer-facing initiatives

— freight policies, free POP materials, customer service, and online payment systems, to name a few. For Sumner, it’s all part of the culture.

“I think that if a Yamaha dealer could spend a few days as a fly on the wall at our headquarters, they would be surprised — maybe shocked — that the dealer point-of-view is discussed for every decision we make,” he said. “We have dealers from very small to very large, but our teams consider all types of dealers when we put programs together. It helps that our customer support associates and inside sales teams are in daily contact with so many dealers, and that most of our executive team, including me, at one point worked in a small music store.”

When it comes to the “high quality products” and “technical innovation” called out by voters, Yamaha again puts in rigorous work behind the scenes to make the company shine.

“Even though Yamaha makes a wide variety of products, I think

we operate more like a group of boutique manufacturers, but all building on the same foundation of quality product and service,” Sumner said. “Our brand attracts the most talented engineers and craftsman, and each product area knows they must innovate continuously.”

Case in point: the piano — a centuries-old product that Yamaha continues to innovate with instruments like Clavinova digital pianos, Disklavier reproducing pianos, AvantGrand hybrid pianos, and, most recently, TransAcoustic pianos.

“As a company, we try to make small improvements in products every day, but still keep looking for ways to make making music easier, more creative, or more interesting,” Sumner said.



Tom Sumner

By Ed Enright

DEALER'S BEST FRIEND

KMC GROWS ITS DEALER NETWORK THROUGH ITS DEDICATED REPS

Every year, retailers express their appreciation for KMC Musiccorp, one of the largest distributors of musical instruments and accessories in North America.

“They have an outstanding selection of products,” said one nominator. “And these products are current. Although I like to buy from individual manufacturers, it’s just easier to go to one place to buy all the products that we run out of in patches, such as strings, harmonicas, drumsticks, cases, picks, you name it. For everyday needs, they can’t be beat.”

In addition to its vast product selection, retailers also praised KMC, which is a wholly owner subsidiary of Fender, for its efficiency, timely delivery and excellent fill rates.

“They have fast shipping and make very few mistakes,”



Jeff Ivester

another dealer observed. “KMC also has a good dealer ordering website, and they keep retailers up-to-date about specials and new product offerings.”

But what dealers said they ap-

preciate most is KMC’s team of knowledgeable and service-minded road reps and inside reps. The company works closely with dealers on any issues that might arise in the course of doing business — from problem-solving to merchandising support. And they never push product just for the sake of making a sale. It’s part of the company’s mission to strengthen its relationship with retailers and grow its dealer network by offering the right products combined with on-hand inventory and expedited shipping.

“KMC will continue to offer its retail partners an expansive line of products from the industry’s most sought-after brands,” said Jeff Ivester, KMC Music’s director of marketing communications. “KMC is equally dedicated to the development of technologies like KMC Online, our exclusive B2B portal, which makes doing business with us faster and easier than ever before.”

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By Katie Kailus

PICKING UP PRODUCTION

SCHECTER PUTS A FOCUS ON U.S. PRODUCTION

After nearly 35 years of making guitars, Schecter shows no signs of slowing down. The guitar manufacturer continues to innovate and expand its product offerings — most recently with its U.S. production. The launch of the USA Production Series and the recent debut of its American-made hand-wound Schecter Custom Shop pickups are two areas the Schecter team is currently concentrating on.

“We are putting more of a focus on our USA guitars, and bringing more models in,” said Dave Hager, Schecter’s national sales manager.

Hager said when it comes to its American-made guitars and pickups — which are both manufactured at the company’s Sun Valley, California, headquarters — Schecter is picking up where it left off during its earlier years.

“It’s actually a revival of what we were doing in the 1970s and ’80s,” he said. “The advantage now is that we can do it better and offer a wider range of products.”

While the U.S.-made pickups are already included on USA Production Series guitars, Schecter plans to add the pickups to its models that are manufactured overseas, beginning in 2015 with the Banshee line. The pickups themselves soft-launched earlier this year and will be hard-launched in January at the upcoming NAMM Show. Schecter already has 30 different pickup models available and is planning on adding more.

“We’ll definitely grow in the pickup market,” Hager said. “One of the biggest selling points of our USA guitars is the overwhelming response from the consumers and dealers that the American-made pickups are so amazing. So we see that growing quite substantially over the next year.”

Production aside, Schecter also puts a heavy emphasis on its quality control — and retailers have noticed.

“[We’ve been] dealing with Schecter for nine years and never had to send a guitar back,” said one voting retailer.

No matter if a guitar is manufac-

tured at Schecter’s facility in California or at its overseas facilities in Indonesia and South Korea, all instruments get the same quality control treatment.

“It’s what sets us apart from other companies,” Hager said. “When they get guitars in from overseas they might just spot-check them and not necessarily go through every single guitar and make sure they are set up properly and play properly. But here at Schecter, each guitar goes through the setup department and the shipping department.”



Dave Hager

By Michael Gallant

SERVING THE CUSTOMER

HARRIS-TELLER RENEWS ITS DECADES-OLD LEGACY WITH A SIMPLE FORMULA: GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

The votes are in and the consensus is clear: When it comes to customer service (and nearly everything else), Harris-Teller is one of the most respected suppliers in the business. “Simply put, the best customer service experience we get from any vendor,” raved one Excellence voter.

Such recognition is not something that the company takes lightly. “In 1967, my father took over the company and changed its focus to one of excellent customer service,” said Jon Harris, president of Harris-Teller. “He instilled the notion in every employee that our most important and valuable ‘product’ was servicing the need of the customer. He believed that, if you take care of the customer, then everything else will take care of itself.”

That theme is something that Harris has continued to focus on in his own leadership of the company. “Every employee at Harris-Teller, from the sales staff to the warehouse employee, understands the concept that their individual

efforts directly result in the overall experience of our customer,” he said. “Each employee takes pride in the knowledge that their good workmanship results in a positive

experience for the customer.

Key to Harris Teller’s continued success is a roster of veteran dealer reps, many of whom have been with the company for decades — and have the longstanding business relationships to prove it. The result is, according to Harris, a better experience for all involved.

“From the top down, we understand that if you have a great relationship with your customer, then work does not seem like so much of a job,” he said. “We try and remember that this is the music industry and at the end of the day, we have the best job in the world.”



Jon Harris

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FROM THE TOP

INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL GALLANT

KIM NUNNEY | ROLAND CORPORATION U.S.

HOW DO YOU START YOUR DAY?

Email. Since I live and work on the West Coast, I can be in touch with the East Coast in the morning and just catch the part of the company that's in Japan at the end of their day. After that, it's a bowl of oatmeal and a nice cup of coffee. I'm normally up and at it by 6:30 a.m. at the latest and can sometimes be on email again as late as midnight.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB?

The sheer variety of market development and product application scenarios that Roland creates. We have such a broad range of products, each with a unique technology story to tell. Trying to introduce all of those capabilities to a new market, or to a customer, keeps it all incredibly exciting.

AND THE LEAST FAVORITE?

My least favorite are the times I find myself having to say "uncle" to anything. The opportunities created by being at Roland are fantastic, but sometimes you have to let something go — not a product, but an idea, maybe a concept for a particular marketing strategy. If something's not working, sometimes you have to say "uncle," move on and try something else.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO PERSEVERE AND PUSH AN IDEA THROUGH — AND WHEN IT'S IN FACT TIME TO SAY "UNCLE"?

Often, you have to look in the mirror and ask yourself the questions that someone else might ask you. Other times, you have to look at the analyses. Once you feel that you've asked all of the right questions, then you make your final decision.

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN QUALITY ACROSS THE WIDE SWATH OF PRODUCTS THAT ROLAND PRODUCES?

Through very significant discipline. Even today, it's a daily discussion about reconfirming what the brand is and what it should be. Within that, the topics of quality of service, quality of technology and quality of design process are all part of a continuous conversation.

IN YOUR OWN LEADERSHIP, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'RE PARTICULARLY PROUD OF WHEN IT

COMES TO MAINTAINING THAT HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY?

Having a true understanding of what quality means is important. Really knowing how quality can inspire the customer, the musician, makes it so much easier to communicate that value across the company.

HOW DO YOU COME TO THAT UNDERSTANDING?

Certainly traveling and listening to customers, and just being outside of the office, is probably the biggest source. Somebody famous once wrote that business creativity is something that happens outside of the office. I believe that. Just getting out and listening to customers — including our dealers and sales associates, who are amazingly qualified to tell us, "here's what customers are saying and thinking" — can be hugely valuable.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH ROLAND IN JAPAN?

It's an extremely valuable and helpful relationship, and we have a very established network of communication. Roland Corporation Japan plays a key role in pulling everyone around the world together several times each year. We're all openly encouraged to share ideas and challenges and look for best practices. It's a very fluid structure and a great joy to be able to chat with everybody.

SO IT'S NOT JUST A TOP-DOWN ARRANGEMENT.

Japan fosters a phenomenal level of open communication. I think it's an amazing achievement that communication within the global company isn't just in a centralized form, or exclusively localized, either. We have achieved a global process that is really a hybrid of both. Communication happens across the organization, not just from executive to executive or senior management to senior management. It happens at all levels in the company on an international level. That's a big strategic victory.

ARE YOU FRIENDS WITH YOUR CONTEMPORARIES IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COMPANY AROUND THE WORLD?

For sure. I used to work in Canada, so as a region, we are extremely well coordinated. We stay in great contact with Roland in Europe and Australia as well.



THE DETAILS

KIM NUNNEY, CEO

HQ: Los Angeles

Founded: 1978

Employees: 115

Best selling product: Year to date by unit is the Boss TU-3 Chromatic Tuner and the Roland TR-8 Rhythm Performer.

Fun Fact: Nunney loves jazz and considers his introduction to the band Fourplay to be "one of those reference, benchmark musical experiences. Since then, wherever my wife and I travel, we always ask, 'Where's that jazz club where we can go, hide in a corner, and just listen?'" he said.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE IN THE RELEASE OF, SAY, THE ROLAND V-PIANO?

The V-Piano was a very inspired engineering product in Japan and still, today, it's a benchmark of digital piano technology. When we're focussing on sales, marketing and support here in the U.S., our role is helping the market to understand just how accomplished that piano is. Sharing the message and the experience is where our forte has to be.

HOW DO YOU LEAD A SUCCESSFUL PRODUCT ROLLOUT IN THE UNITED STATES?

One of the keys for us is strong communication and partnerships with our dealers. That's an area we've been working to develop in the U.S. for the last two years. The fact is that our dealers play an extremely important role in any rollout, so it's important that there's communication and understanding of the new product, particularly when there's new technology or a new application at play. The story needs telling and the dealer is superbly equipped, particularly with the new media tools available now, in telling it.

'HAVING A TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT QUALITY MEANS IS IMPORTANT.'

HOW DO YOU PREP DEALERS TO TELL THAT STORY?

Given that I started with Roland U.S. only two years ago, we're still at the fairly early stages of doing anything too differently from the past, but certainly, we have been investing more deeply in communicating product direction at a much earlier stage to our dealers. More and more today, dealers simply need plenty of time to prepare, because their investments are, in turn, higher and more sophisticated. We have to be able to support them with much earlier planning.

HOW SO?

People work with websites, websites need planning, stores need planning and associates might need extra support in training, for example. We need to be not in the mode of doing all of that after the product launches. We have to think in terms of supporting the dealer at the earliest possible stage. We will be working on that continuously in 2015 and look forward to being even better at it.

WITH SUCH A BIG OPERATION, HOW DOES ROLAND KEEP THINGS CONFIDENTIAL UNTIL THE CURTAINS PART ON A NEW PRODUCT, SAY, AT NAMM?

Trust. Good partnerships. There is no point in not investing in trusting partnerships. It takes time to tell a story properly and for everybody to bring their best game. You have

to start all of that with trust.

WHEN IT COMES TO PRODUCT TESTING, WHAT ROLE DO YOU PLAY?

One of my favorite processes is watching the reactions of those who are trying the products, be they employees or customers. You can learn an awful lot by watching and listening to others' reactions.

WHEN IT COMES TO PRODUCT LAUNCHES, ARE THERE EVER CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES THAT NEED TO BE DEALT WITH?

Very rarely. The amount of thought and communication that goes on in advance to a product release is of such a high quality that, generally speaking, potential issues are discussed long before anything enters the market.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS A MANAGER?

Engaged, open, energetic and always welcoming a good debate.

WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU OFFER TO OTHER MANAGERS AND EXECUTIVES?

Never forget to look in the mirror. As I mentioned, creativity often happens outside of the office. And keep trying.

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND IN MUSIC?

My musical experience started with playing the French horn as a very young child, and I still remember quite a bit about the instrument. After that, I got into percussion, guitar, and most recently, ukulele, just so I could experience the phenomenal boom the ukulele has been enjoying recently. I wouldn't really call myself a musician. I simply enjoy the prospect of understanding the instruments themselves.

IF NOT THE MUSIC INDUSTRY, WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

I started my career as an apprentice with British Airways specializing in avionics which, at that point, was defined as radio, radar and similar electronics. I'd have to say that I probably would have continued on in a technical field like that. Interestingly, the discipline of working in avionics, from the engineering and quality control point of view, was all beautifully foundational to my understanding and enjoyment of the Japanese approach to manufacturing, product design, and technology that I experience with Roland today.

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HUGHES & KETTNER | 30TH ANNIVERSARY TUBEMEISTER

NOS Tubes

Hughes & Kettner celebrated its 30th anniversary with the New Old Stock (NOS) tube-equipped limited edition TubeMeister Series. The amps feature Soviet "New Old Stock" EL84 power tubes. Manufactured in the Saratov factories, the tubes comply with military-grade specifications for the aircraft industry. NOS power tubes deliver noticeably more output than standard EL84s, which results in more headroom for clean tones and even more punch for overdrive sounds.

{hughes-and-kettner.com}



IBANEZ | KAOSS GUITAR AND KAOSS BASS

Hybrid Kaoss

Ibanez has introduced the new RGKP6 and SRKP4 Korg mini kaoss pad 2S equipped guitar and bass. Each model includes a built-in/detachable Korg mini kaoss pad 2S to create a hybrid instrument that offers guitarists and bassists endless opportunities to incorporate the dynamic effects of Electronic music into their performance. The kaoss pad 2S puts 100 effect programs within the reach of a finger for seamless, "real-time" manipulation and integrates with the RG guitar and SR bass, implementing elements, such as built-in gain/distortion, an effect bypass toggle, and a 1/8-inch headphone jack for private jam sessions.

{ibanez.com}



TWA | LITTLE DIPPER MK II

Double Dipper

An updated version of Totally Wycked Audio's flagship pedal, The Little Dipper Mk II is an envelope-controlled vocal formant filter based on the Colorsound Dipthimizer circuit. The Little Dipper's dual filters will bend and morph your guitar tone, creating frequency peaks and notches that simulate the vowels and diphthongs of human speech. The Mk II features five new controls, improved tracking, fuller frequency response, lower noise floor and a pedalboard-friendly chassis.

godlyke.com



GRETSCH | G6112TCB-JR

Tommy Two-Tone

Gretsch has introduced the Professional Collection G6112TCB-JR Center-Block LTD 2-Tone guitar, a Nashville Junior model with a thinline body, chambered spruce center-block, and a two-tone finish with a limited production Jaguar Tan top and Copper Metallic back and sides. It features a 1¾-inch-deep single-cutaway three-ply maple body, arched top and back, two-ply black-and-white binding, and dual F holes. The spruce center block, chambered to reduce weight, helps produce a spirited and lively tone, and minimizes body-resonant feedback.

gretschguitars.com

TAYLOR | BLACKHEART SASSAFRAS 700 SERIES

Sassafras Sound

As part of its Fall Limited Edition collection, Taylor has introduced the Blackheart Sassafras 700 series, featuring blackheart sassafras, a rare and exotic tonewood selectively sourced from Tasmania. The sassafras was paired with a Sitka spruce top and is offered in three models: a non-cutaway Grand Concert 12-Fret (712e 12-Fret-FLTD), a cutaway Grand Auditorium (714ce-FLTD), and a non-cutaway Grand Orchestra (718e-FLTD). taylorguitars.com



THE LOAR | LH-204 BROWNSTONE

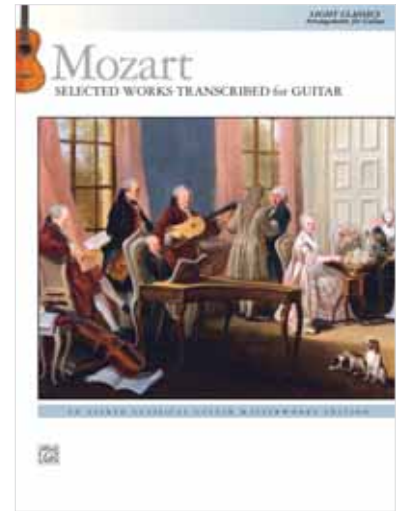
Brown & Blue

The Loar has introduced its new LH-204 Brownstone, an acoustic guitar with a dark and meaty tone that's ideal for emulating a vintage-style blues sound. Based on the award winning LH-200, the Brownstone has a solid Sitka spruce top, mahogany back, sides and neck, and a rosewood fretboard in a classic pre-war body style. The body features a brown satin finish and a vintage-style bound soundhole. theloar.com

ALFRED | 'CLASSICAL GUITAR MASTERWORKS SERIES'

Light Classic Editions

Alfred Music has released its *Classical Guitar Masterworks, Light Classic Editions*. Each book in the *Classical Guitar Masterworks* series that features a celebrated composer also includes information on the composer. Titles include: *Beethoven: Selected Works Transcribed for Guitar*, *Mozart: Selected Works Transcribed for Guitar* and *Wedding Music: Selected Favorites Transcribed for Guitar*. alfred.com



KORG | SLIMPITCH

Pocket-Sized Precision

Korg's new Slimpitch is a pocket-sized, hand-held chromatic tuner with a bright, full-color display. Its first-rate screen features high contrast and a wide viewing angle for easy tuning in a variety of situations. Equipped to support all concert pitches, the Slimpitch includes a mini jack contact mic for high precision tuning as well as a built-in magnet that lets the tuner be securely fastened to a music stand or any metallic surface. korg.com



HAL LEONARD | 'AMERICANA CLASSICS'

Strum-along Songs

Hal Leonard recently introduced its *Strum Together* series with its new collection: *Americana Classics*. This easy-to-use format features melody, lyrics, and chord diagrams for five popular folk instruments: standard ukulele, baritone ukulele, guitar, mandolin, and banjo. The volume features 68 traditional American folk songs, including "Blowin' In The Wind," "Folsom Prison Blues" and "House Of The Rising Sun." halleonard.com



JACKSON | PRO DK2M DINKY SLIME GREEN SWIRL

Get Slimed

Jackson has released the Pro DK2M Dinky Limited Run guitar featured in Slime Green Swirl. The DK2M Pro Series Dinky features an alder body, flat-sawn graphite-reinforced bolt-on maple neck with wrap-around heel, 24-fret compound radius maple fingerboard with offset black dot inlays, black neck and headstock binding, direct mount Seymour Duncan JB Zebra (bridge) and '59 Zebra (neck) humbucking pickups with five-way blade switching, and Floyd Rose bridge. jacksonguitars.com



ALTO PROFESSIONAL | TX SERIES

Bi-amplified Design

Alto Professional has unveiled the TX Series two-way, active loudspeakers: TX8, TX10, TX12 and TX15. Each TX model features a bi-amplified design, Class-D power, high-efficiency drivers, resonance-reducing durable trapezoidal multipurpose enclosures, and rugged steel grilles to provide accurate, transparent sound in a lightweight design. altoproaudio.com



ZOOM | iQ6

Record to Lightning

Zoom North America has released the iQ6 stereo X/Y microphone for the iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad. The compact and lightweight iQ6 turns any lightning-equipped device into a field recorder, perfect for podcasting and for capturing the sound of concerts, interviews, meetings and lectures. It features two high-quality unidirectional condenser microphones in an X/Y configuration and comes with an extended lightning connector and removable spacer that allow it to be used with most iPhone, iPod, and iPad cases.

zoom.co.jp



KORG | ELECTRIBE

'Tribe's Next Generation

The next generation of Korg's Electribe Music Production Station has evolved to include features, such as polyphonic synth playback, 16 freely assignable parts, and compatibility with Ableton Live. Boasting 16 back-lit trigger pads and an intuitive X/Y touch pad, the new Electribe is easy enough for a beginner to understand, yet sophisticated enough to satisfy even the most experienced performers. korg.com



ROLAND | HS-5

Session Mixer

Roland has debuted the HS-5 Session Mixer, a digital mixer and recording interface designed for rehearsing bands, vocal groups, and other ensembles. The HS-5 allows up to five musicians to play together and monitor the sound with headphones, with each player having hands-on control of their own mix. It includes built-in amp modeling and effects, and gives groups the ability to easily capture their performances to a USB flash drive or DAW software on a computer. rolandus.com



MACKIE | MIX5, MIX8, MIX12FX

Compact Mix Control

Mackie has launched the new Mix Series Compact Mixers with three new models, the Mix5 5-Channel Compact Mixer, the Mix8 8-Channel Compact Mixer and the Mix12FX 12-Channel Compact Mixer with

Effects. Ideal for singer/songwriters, small band rehearsals or instrumentalists on the go, Mix Series mixers deliver high-quality Mackie preamps and electronics in proven high headroom, low-noise designs. mackie.com

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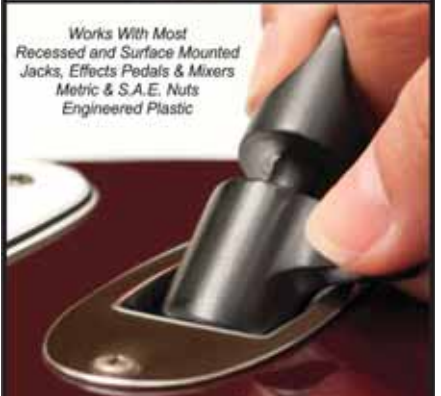
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LP | BLACK BOX CAJON

Beat Box

Handmade in the United States, LP's new Black Box Cajon features a smooth black matte finish, giving it a polished appearance, while the Baltic Birch front plate provides a clear, distinct tone. The Black Box Cajon features fixed internal snare wires for plenty of projection, and distinct snare and bass tones. Easily portable with a footprint of just 19 inches by 11 inches by 10 1/8 inches, this cajon lets the player easily fit in any live situation. kmcmusic.com



DW | EXOTIC MONOGRAM

Personalized Snare

Drum Workshop has added its first-ever personalized snare drum, called Exotic Monogram, to its Collector's Series line. Each drum is hand-inlayed with laser-cut exotic wood veneers to comprise a "Retro Shield" design containing two personal initials. The drum is offered in two distinct themes using exotic African Bubinga and highly-figured Birdseye Maple. dwdrums.com



YAMAHA | ABSOLUTE HYBRID MAPLE

Hybrid Sets

Yamaha has introduced its Absolute Hybrid Maple drum sets. The Absolute Hybrid Maple drum set combines a core ply of harder Wenge wood with outer plies of North American Maple. Absolute Hybrid Maple drum sets feature the original hook lug design, which allow quick and easy head changes and provide precision tuning. yamaha.com



SPAUN | REVOLUTIONARY SERIES

Old Skool

Spaun has debuted the Revolutionary Series, which revisits the look and feel of drums from days past. "Old Skool" style and sizes are coupled with modern manufacturing techniques and quality producing a rich, full sound and unique look. Features include: 8-ply Maple shell, classic rounded bearing edges for a darker more subtle voice, beaver tail lugs and custom wood badges. Available with Revolutionary wood hoops and claws or triple flanged metal hoops.

spaundrums.com



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ANTHEM | NORTH BRIDGE FLUTES

Handcrafted Headjoint

Anthem Musical Instruments has introduced North Bridge flutes, which feature a sterling silver headjoint handmade in the United States by flute artisan Chris McKenna. The North Bridge flute pairs a McKenna headjoint with flute body that is assembled in Taiwan, and serves as an ideal stepup instrument. The McKenna headjoint is designed to be both responsive and flexible, while offering superb control and projection.

{northbridgewinds.com}



REUNION BLUES | RBX SERIES CASES

Lightweight Hardshell

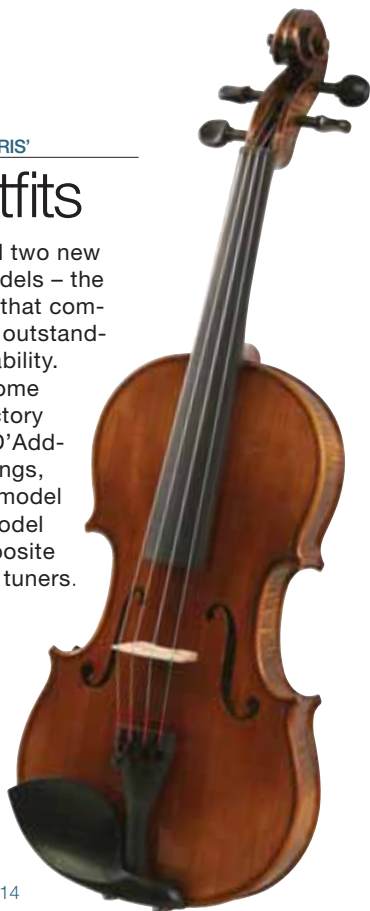
RBX, the new series from Reunion Blues, is now available for band and orchestra instruments, including clarinet, flute, trumpet and alto sax. RBX band and orchestra instrument cases are designed using the RBX Protection System, which features lightweight hardshell construction, and a contoured molded foam interior for optimal instrument protection. {reunionblues.com}

SEBASTIAN | 'LONDON' AND 'PARIS'

Stepup Outfits

Sebastian has launched two new intermediate violin models – the 'London' and the 'Paris' – that combine quality construction, outstanding aesthetics and affordability. Both Sebastian models come with Knilling approved factory adjustment, and include D'Addario Prelude steelcore strings, German Aubert One Star model maple bridge, Guarneri model ebony chinrest, and composite tailpiece with four built-in tuners.

{stlouismusic.com}



VANDOREN | JUNO 25-PACK

Economy-Sized

Due to strong demand, Vandoren has introduced a box of 25 JUNO reeds. When JUNO was introduced at NAMM 2013, only 3-packs and boxes of 10 were offered. JUNO now provides "sample" reeds for rental instruments, boxes of 50 and now boxes of 25 to complement the rest of the line.

{junoreeds.com}

GEAR >

PIANOS & KEYBOARDS



AKAI PROFESSIONAL | MPK SERIES

Take Control

Akai Professional recently introduced four new additions to its renowned MPK Series of keyboard/pad controllers: the 25key MPK225, the 49key MPK249, the 61key MPK261, and the ultraportable MPK mini mkII. For the performer, each full-size MPK keyboard provides a semi-weighted keybed equipped with aftertouch, plus ultraresponsive pitch bend and modulation wheels. Dedicated octave buttons provide rapid access to an expanded note range. Each model is appointed with assignable pedal inputs for additional control. akaipro.com



KORG | RK-100S

Keytar Turns 30

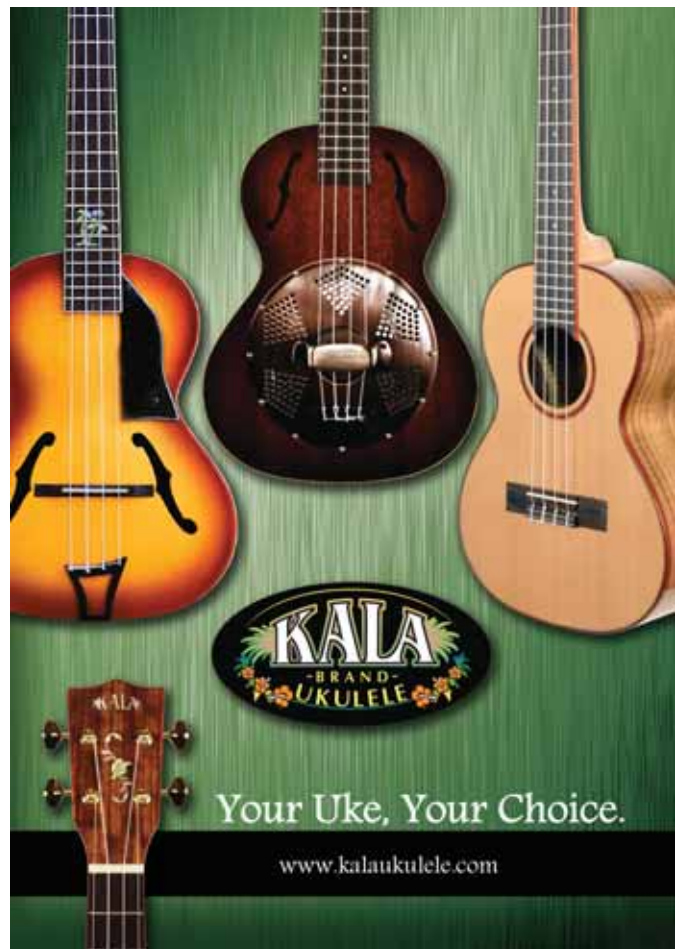
Korg has debuted the RK-100S synth/controller for the 30th anniversary of the original RK-100, equipped with a full palate of keyboard sounds from the built-in microKORG XL+ engine. In addition to the 37-note slim keyboard (as featured on the Korg MS-20 Mini), a short ribbon controller on the neck and a long ribbon controller in front of the key bed are included for controlling parameters such as pitch and filter. korg.com



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EPSILON | QUAD-MIX

Channel Four

Epsilon has debuted the QUAD-MIX, a powerful 4-channel USB MIDI DJ controller. The QUAD-MIX features two large 134 mm touch sensitive jog wheels for scratch effect and a built-in high speed 16 bit USB 2.0 - 4 in / 4 out audio interface. Other key features include XLR and RCA master outputs, jog wheel sensitivity adjustment knobs, long-life fader with fader curve adjustment, eight soft hot cues and sample pads with sample select knobs. Available in black or white. epsilon-pro.com



NUMARK | NDX500

CD Scratcher

Numark has introduced NDX500 USB/CD Media Player and Software Controller, which lets DJs instantly play and access music from nearly any digital audio source — CDs, USB flash drives, and MP3 files on CD. Real-time performance features, including the touch-sensitive scratch wheel, maximize the DJ's abilities. numark.com



QTX | MITO

RGB Effects Laser

The Mito high-power RGB effects laser offers a vast selection of patterns and diffraction grating effects, including "3D," "3D thread" and "galaxy" displays. Intelligent time modulation mimics a two head laser system, letting two different patterns be displayed simultaneously. avsigroup.com



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JOE BRUCE
MOZINGO MUSIC

On his store's cymbal event:

"We did a cymbal tasting event over the summer. We brought all of our cymbals that we had in stock, and we brought in additional stock and had them all set up in the room where people could come in and try them out. We encouraged people to bring their own cymbals in, and if they had a cymbal that they liked but were just looking for an additional ride or crash cymbal, you could try ours with yours and see how it fits."



DEEDE HEID
HEID MUSIC

On partnerships with manufacturers:

"Recently, we had a great pianist that was coming to our area with our Fox Valley Symphony Orchestra. And thanks to the help of a manufacturer, we were able to host a very special conversation and clinic within our stores. I think that is really showing what service is. Going beyond to continue to educate musicians, give them different opportunities to learn more, to network with each other and grow through those free workshop opportunities. It's not just the classes that they can sign up for or take lessons, but the different ways we inspire them to come in and continue to grow."

CHRISTOPHER MOORS
THE MUSIC SHOPPE

On his store's affiliate program which supplies band instruments to area retailers to rent out:

"Those affiliate stores can act as a drop-off place, so if anybody needs to get us anything, they can drop it at the affiliate stores and know we'll be able to go and get it pretty quickly. Or if we need to get something to somebody in a community that isn't going to be at the school or isn't a school student, we can also facilitate that through the affiliate."



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