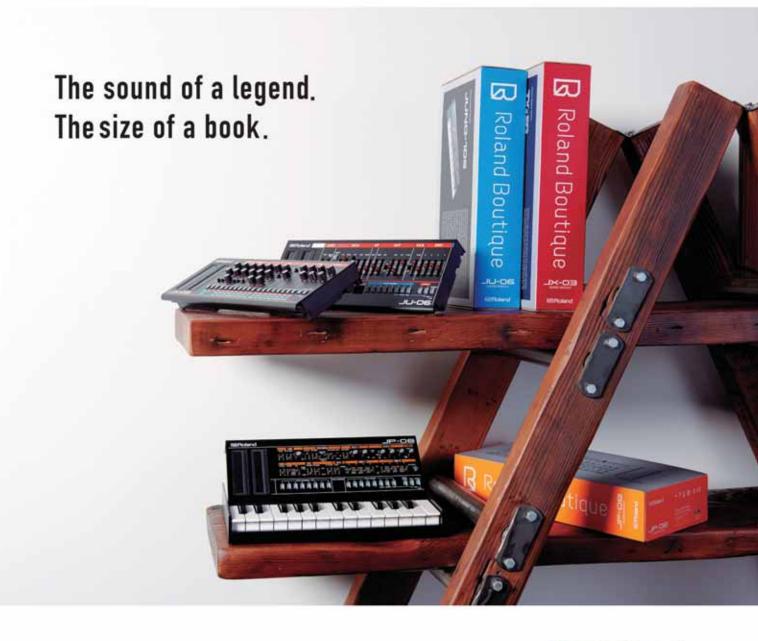


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THE MUSIC ZOO
WEST MUSIC
GUITAR CENTER
LONG & MCQUADE
MERRIAM MUSIC
WASHINGTON MUSIC CENTER
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PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE I BY KATIE KAILUS

EXCEL YOUR BUSINESS

nd so it is upon us — the close of one business year and the start of another. Now is the time to take a look and evaluate your operation, and there is no better place to get inspiration for the next 12 months than right here in *Music Inc.*'s annual Excellence Issue.

This month's awards coverage features the story of 10 retailers and 10 suppliers who have gone above and beyond during 2015 to not only provide solid customer service and constant innovation, but also to raise the bar overall in our industry.

As we all know, the days of a store owner relying soley on word-



of-mouth to keep a cash register full are gone. Active social media pages, cutting-edge websites and that special in-store personal touch are necessary to compete with online mega retailers. All three of these aspects play a major role in the operation of *Music Inc.*'s 2015 "Retailer of the Year" Russo, a New Jersey-based full-line dealer. In past years, the title of "Retailer of the Year" has gone to an industry stalwart, a recognizable name. And, when this year's votes started filing in for Russo, it was clear to see why.

While the two-location dealer is more than 50 years old, its store managers have kept the business fresh and current by staying on course with the latest trends in retailing — not just MI. As a result, Russo boasts 20,000-plus engaged Facebook followers and more than 2,200

followers on Instagram, a rare feat for many retailers. They hire young staffers who want to grow with the business and build product displays themselves. They've thrown the unfriendly clerk cliché out the window to provide personalized service for their customers.

"We go out of our way to avoid the local music store stereotypes," said Scott Engel, manager at Russo's Asbury Park location. "The cranky old guy leaning on the counter blocking kids from the Les Pauls is obsolete. Every one of my staff members can recount a story from their local stores growing up where they felt intimidated and insulted. A young laid back staff avoids that issue."

Whether it's learning what makes a solid Instagram post from Russo's Engel or hearing the importance of educating consumers from Taylor's Andy Powers, this month's issue packs a better-business punch that is second to none. We hope you'll hold onto it, and refer back to it when making hiring decisions, creating a social media strategy or when you just need some business inspiration. MI

ART'S MUSIC SHOP OPTIMIZES MOUTHPIECE SALES AND RETENTION



TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT ART'S MUSIC.

rt's Music Shop, Inc. is a school music dealer and full line retail store servicing Alabama, Georgia, and Florida with a dozen School Service Representatives. The main store is located in Montgomery, Alabama with branch stores in Dothan and Birmingham. Alabama. Started by the Freehling family in 1905, the company is still a Freehling family-operated business with the 3rd and 4th generations actively involved in the day-to-day operations (the 5th generation helping out around high school hours). Art's Music Shop is an active participant of NAMM, IMMG, NASMD, RPMDA, GASMD, NAPBIRT, ABA and several local groups. YOU HAVE ALWAYS DONE WELL IN REGARDS TO VANDOREN SALES. ANY SPECIFIC PRODUCTS THAT YOU ATTRIBUTE THIS SUCCESS TO?

We have always had good success with the Vandoren AL3 Optimum mouthpiece; we "prepackage" some of our rent-to-own student/ intermediate alto saxophone offerings with the AL3. We have some school programs/ educators who highly recommend them and we, as a music education company, believe beginners need the best playing, best sounding instrument and mouthpiece from the start - we feel it helps tremendously with student retention.

IS THERE A PARTICULAR REASON THAT YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE VANDOREN AL3 MOUTHPIECE FOR THESE RENTAL OFFERINGS AS OPPOSED TO OTHER MOUTHPIECE BRANDS?

When you purchase an expensive dress in a boutique, it comes with a cheap, vinyl belt that you would never wear with the quality garment. This is sometimes true with beginner/intermediate instruments. Unfortunately, novices don't realize the extreme importance of a quality mouthpiece; the "microphone" of the instrument, in relation to the tone, tune-ability, dynamics, and overall enjoyment and ease of playing the instrument.

OBVIOUSLY PROMOTING A NEW MOUTHPIECE TAKES A LOT OF EFFORT. WHY DID YOU THINK IT WAS WORTH THE EFFORT TO PROMOTE THE AL3?

Tt does take quite a bit of effort and knowledge to promote a new product. We devoted quite a bit of time "testing" the product in-house with experienced players/educators before presenting the mouthpiece as an "Art's recommended" upgrade to the educators we service on a regular basis. Any new/different product has to be able to stand on its own when compared to a current or well-known product - then it is just a matter of educating (showing how it benefits their student/program; the value) and making it available (making it accessible for students to start on or upgrade to; pricing and programs). We believe it was worth the effort to promote the product as we are always looking for ways to help student retention.

"They are readily available when we

need to order them in batches or in bulk, and the margin is higher than other comparable brands."



WHY DO YOU CARRY VANDOREN PRODUCTS IN ALL THREE OF YOUR LOCATIONS?

We use the Vandoren products because they are consistent, they fit our requirements for quality, it is a brand recognized by educators everywhere, they are readily available when we need to order them in batches or in bulk, and the margin is higher than other comparable brands.

Visit bit.ly/optimum3 and artsmusicshop.com for more information.

LETTERS

Profitable Puppets

eading the cover story, "From Puppets to Profit" on my store Mozart, Einstein & Me in [Music Inc.'s] November 2015 issue brought to mind how visually focused our stores have become towards the non-musician. Many music stores over the past few years have spent thousands of dollars doing in-store makeovers (us included). But I couldn't tell you how many have tried window displays that feature absolutely nothing about music.

Our whole goal has been to lure the general consumer, kids and families not currently interested in music, into our stores. Through new techniques in window displays and the addition of art and science consumables we have successfully brought in 35 percent of total sidewalk foot traffic. And after seeing we have guitars and other instruments hanging from the walls, the newbie shopper in our store ultimately asks, "Do you guys offer music lessons?"

Back in the 1960s and '70s you couldn't get past noon on a Saturday without hearing a garage band playing somewhere in the neighborhood. Sadly, those days of rock 'n' roll subsidized by adolescent testosterone are gone.

What's evolved over the past decade or so are more sophisticated pre-teens, along with the reciprocal challenge of invigorating their early interest in music. And it's not that kids aren't listening to music as much as they did 40 years ago, but that music participation takes a back seat to the many new activities available to them.

I'd be disingenuous if I didn't claim that 100 percent of our marketing is directed to women: mostly moms and grandmas. Af-



ter many years of selling lessons and instruments we could no longer ignore that it's almost always 'mom' or 'grandma' that stands in front of the cash register. So we took the long view that if we could get kids and parents into our stores we'd have a better chance of telling the music story: that lessons and playing an instrument grow the brain, and it's a ton of fun. We'll keep you apprised on how our business plan evolves. In the meantime, to our fellow comrades in arms, think change.

Stan Houston Director Mozart Einstein & Me Livermore, California

A True Gentleman

hank you so much for your feature on Rice Music House [in the October 2015 issue]. I

have known "JP" Parekh for several years, as we are both active in the South Carolina music scene, and have twice been to Washington D.C. together on the NAMM Fly-In (in 2014 and 2015). JP is a true gentleman; he is also one of the most passionate advocates for music education we have in our industry, and I am proud to call him a good friend.

JP's extensive marketing efforts not only bring Rice Music House to the forefront in the Columbia, South Carolina, area, he also works tirelessly to promote the benefits of music education for all children — whether through providing lessons in his store, sponsoring local and regional events, hosting concerts, working with local educators to provide instruments for their

schools, or going out of his way to help other fellow members of the music industry. He has done an admirable job of preserving the traditions for which Rice Music House is known, but is also always looking for innovative, new ways to promote his company — and music in general, often referring to the "power of music" as something that excites and motivates him. He just finished a term as a member of the NAMM Board of Directors, and is well-known and well-respected in our industry.

We have been honored to have had Rice Music House as an affiliate store this fall. JP was gracious to allow us to rent band and string instruments, sell accessories, and work alongside him in his Columbia store. We have had road service throughout Columbia for five years, but having an actual, physical location has been wonderful for us, and we believe it has introduced Rice Music House to hundreds of new families potentially interested in piano and piano lessons as well as in band and string instruments. [This was] another of JP's great, forward-thinking ideas to promote not only his company but music education in general in our state.

Thank you again for highlighting this remarkable company and this remarkable gentleman.

> Tracy E. Leenman Owner Musical Innovations Greenville, South Carolina

EDITOR'S NOTE: MUSIC INC. ENCOURAGES LETTERS AND RESPONSES TO ITS STORIES. E-MAIL LETTERS TO EDITOR@MUSICINCMAG.COM; OR WRITE TO 102 N. HAVEN RD. ELMHURST, IL 60126; 630-941-2030; FAX: 630-941-3210.



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PETAIL

ARTHUR'S MUSIC I BY DAVID BALL

IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

inda Arthur Osborne is a busy woman. On top of running two other businesses (a teleprompter service, ExecuPrompt, and Castings Artistic Finishers, scenic painters for media and business), Osborne also owns and operates the family business, Indianapolis-based Arthur's Music, with the help of her daughter, Amy England.

Opened in 1952 by big band guitarist Amos Arthur, Arthur's Music pioneered the sale of guitars, amps, drums and P.A.s in Indianapolis, as well as specialty instruments like pedal steels, lap steels, accordions and harps.

"[Arthur] pretty much single-handedly got rock 'n' roll started when it came of age [in Indianapolis]," Osborne said. "We had piano stores and orchestral stores, but we didn't really have any live music stores for guitar and fretted instruments. He really emphasized that, and that's what got us on the map."

Arthur met his wife, Leola, while giving her mandolin lessons, with whom he would establish a business partnership, much like the one Osborne has with her daughter today. "He always said that [Leola] was a big part of the store being a success, because she was more on the logical, financial end of things," Osborne



Arthur's Music brings guitars and specialty instruments to its community for 60-plus years and counting

explained. "She kept tabs on that so he could just enjoy playing and buying and selling guitars."

England, who's taken over the sales role while Osborne manages the books, said, "You really need two people to handle it, to give each of those areas the attention that they deserve for the business."

"Also, you have to have more than one voice to know

what you're doing," Osborne added. "[Stores that] only have one person doing all the buying and making all the selections [are easy to] tell that they're like that when you walk in. They become a little bit sterile."

MUSIC MAKES A DIFFERENCE

n addition to being named a NAMM Top 100 dealer this year,

Arthur's Music received the Music Makes a Difference Award at Summer NAMM for its efforts in organizing a guitar donation program for a local school.

A teacher from the Southeast Neighborhood School of Excellence (SENSE) charter school had purchased a guitar at a yard sale and brought it in to Arthur's Music for repair, intending to use the guitar for her students' music class. She explained that most of the students' families were below the poverty line and couldn't afford guitars on their own.

"The guitar was just awful," England said, "and they didn't have any plan for getting guitars for the kids. The school didn't have any budget for the music program.

"She was really at a loss. So, we offered to do a guitar donation program," England continued, "where we advertised [on social media] and took in guitars from customers in our community, fixed them up, made sure they were playable for the kids, and then donated them and our time to the school so that the kids could have guitars to learn on."

By the end of the program, Arthur's Music was able to donate 16 playable guitars to the school. "We were very, very excited by the response that we got," Osborne said. MI





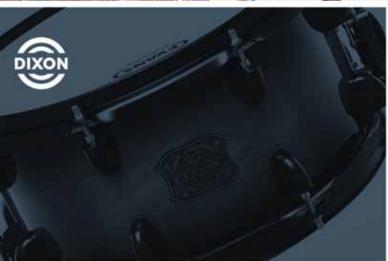






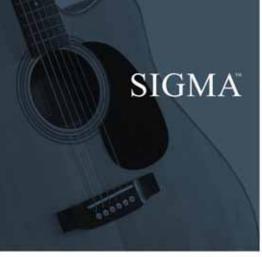
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MUSICAL INNOVATIONS I EVENT

MUSICAL INNOVATIONS HOSTS BOOK SIGNING

Musical Innovations held a book signing on Oct. 3, featuring *Black Day: The Monster Rock Band*, the first book by Marcus Sikora, a 25-year-old with Down Syndrome.

The book is a 40-page illustrated children's book that tells the story of Brad, a paperboy who dreams of becoming a rock star. When Brad discovers the band "Black Day" — comprised entirely of monsters — rehearsing in an old garage, he approaches them and asks if he can become their new bass player. The monsters' response is swift, "No humans!" So Brad sets out to change their minds.

"[Marcus] is an incredible storyteller

with an imagination to be envied," said Mardra Sikora, Marcus' mom. She and her son worked on *Black Day* together, with Marcus Sikora dictating the story as his mom transcribed it.

"Mardra's name may be familiar to many members of the music industry," said Tracy Leenman, owner of Musical Innovations. "Until 2011 she was president of Progress Publications and Wright Printing, until she retired to further pursue her own writing career and, as it turns out, become an active advocate for and with Marcus. We had a wonderful time with Marcus and Mardra at our store. The children loved the book, and loved



Marcus — and he loved them."

The event occurred in conjunction with October as Down Syndrome Awareness Month. "Marcus is an example of how different ability does not equal less ability," Mardra said. "Yes, there are skills that come easier to others, but Marcus teaches those around him to celebrate every day, give compliments freely and follow your passion. Which in his case, is creating stories."

THE DRUM PAD I CLOSING

The Drum Pad Closes

After 30 years of serving local drummers, The Drum Pad in Palatine, Illinois, closed its doors at the end of October.

Owner Jim Streich plans to retire and began running a clearance sale in August. "A lot of the older students and their families have been returning and saying they bought their gear here," Streich told the *Daily Herald*. "It has been wonderful helping drummers solve their performance problems or get their right gear here."

A native of Maywood, Illinois, Streich earned a bachelor's degree in music at the University of Iowa and worked at a local music store for about 11 years. He had hoped to one day buy that store, but it didn't work out. So, he decided to open his own.

He cashed in a \$2,000 life insurance policy and rented a room at a house used by other businesses just a few blocks from downtown Palatine.

Eventually, he rented more space there as his business grew. He then sold his condo in Schaumburg, Illinois, to finance buying more merchandise and eventually moved the store to its current location.

After the store closes, he plans to live at another home he and his wife, Lynda, own in Galena, Illinois.



SAM ASH I EVENT

Jennifer Batten Wraps Clinic Tour

Guitarist Jennifer Batten, best known for her work with Michael Jackson and Jeff Beck, has just wrapped up a 26-city Sam Ash clinic tour in support of Fishman's TriplePlay Wireless MIDI Controller for guitar.

Over three months this summer, Jennifer visited Sam Ash locations across the country, meeting with fans, educating store personnel and spreading her gospel on creativity and the creative process.

"The TriplePlay really changed my life with regard to guitar," Batten said. "It tracks perfectly, is wireless and comes preloaded with tons of great sounds. Many guitarists have been scared about MIDI, but they really don't understand the difference between a controller and the more-common closed system-type guitar synths. When they see that the sounds from TriplePlay are literally infinite ... their minds are blown."

Interest in Jennifer and her approach to music and guitar is extremely high, Fishman founder Larry Fishman stated. "Her talents as both a player and communicator figured strongly in our decision to invite her to represent TriplePlay at the 2016 Winter NAMM Show. She's a special talent."





Reverb Launches Music Lessons Marketplace

Reverb has announced the launch of Reverb Lessons, a new marketplace that connects aspiring musicians with experienced music instructors for online and in-person lessons.

"Reverb Lessons' vision is to be the preferred destination for any musician learning a new instrument, brushing up on existing skills or seeking to master a new genre or technique," said Jason Hunt, president of Reverb Lessons.

The launch follows the June acquisition of Lesson Lodge, an online music lesson marketplace founded by Hunt and Will Cebron.

Reverb Lessons features a variety

of music-lesson packages that are built around specific music genres and playing techniques to help ensure that students can learn what they want and allow instructors to better market their specific areas of expertise.

In addition to packaged lesson blocks, Reverb Lessons has fixed pricing designed to be fair for both students and teachers.

"Reverb.com is powered by a large and highly engaged community of active musicians, and the addition of Reverb Lessons makes it easier for them to do more with their talents," said David Kalt, founder and CEO of Reverb.com.

MUSICIAN'S FRIEND I WEB

MUSICIAN'S FRIEND ROLLS OUT NEW LOYALTY PROGRAM

n Oct. 1, Musician's Friend launched its new loyalty program, Backstage Pass. Customers in the program receive a variety of special offers, including an exclusive 1-800 support number, a special birthday coupon, exclusive releases, and first access to door busters and special deals.

"So far Backstage Pass has been off to a great start," said Michael Amkreutz, executive vice president of merchandising, marketing and ecommerce for Guitar Center, parent company of Musician's Friend. "Loyalty marketing is a big component in retail, and it has been lagging a little bit in the world of MI. With Musician's Friend's introduction, the hope is that we continue to serve all the customers we already have."

The program also offers members 8 percent back on every purchase they make in the form of points. For example, if a Backstage Pass member purchases a guitar for \$1,000, he or she will receive an \$80 credit towards a future purchase.

APPOINTMENTS

FULL COMPASS PROMOTES MUNDTH



ull Compass Systems has announced the internal promotion of Nick Mundth as Web population lead and OC specialist. His broad knowledge in the musical instrument, musical recording and professional audio industry will continue to aid the

company in the promotions of its well-established product offerings and listings online. As part of his duties, Mundth will handle all training and quality control for both the Web population and video production teams at Full Compass.

"In the two years that Nick has been at Full Compass he has proven to be an invaluable member of the team with a great attitude and a proactive approach to problem solving and team building," said Laura Lawrence, marketing manager. "We very much appreciate his hard work and want to congratulate him on his promotion." {fullcompass.com}

GC HIRES SENIOR VP OF MARKETING



uitar Center has appointed Frank Crowson as senior vice president of marketing. Crowson will work closely with Michael Guitar Amkreutz, Center executive vice president of merchandising, marketing and e-commerce, in imple-

menting a comprehensive marketing plan to increase overall brand visibility.

Crowson joins Guitar Center from Target Corporation, where he most recently held the position of vice president of marketing, and was responsible for promotion strategy and weekly customer-facing communications. {guitarcenter.com}



Note From Joe In Praise of Music Teachers

With so many things to be grateful for this holiday season, I would like to recognize the music teachers around the world who are our partners in NAMM's vision of a world where every child has a deep desire to make music and a recognized right to be taught. While our industry creates wonderful tools, it is the music educator who then unlocks the musical potential in each of us and helps create lifelong engagement in the arts.

"I would teach children

music, physics, and philosophy;

but most importantly music.

for the patterns in music

and all the arts are

the keys to learning."

PLATO 428 - 348 BCE

Research shows that while some are self-taught, most of us got our musical start with a teacher. And whether in a school music program, in a NAMM member store or with an after-school private music teacher, our industry's success is dependent

on the success of high-quality music teachers in their mission to help more people get involved in music making and to get fewer people to quit.

Think back to your own experiences; I bet there was a teacher who was influential in getting you to start playing or maybe to keep you from quitting. Someone who inspired you to get past those clunky first few notes to a point where you were actually making music with your instrument. My first drum teacher actually came along after I had been playing for awhile but when the world of rudiments and reading music was opened, I really got serious

about my instrument and remain a loyal industry customer to this day!

Every day in classrooms, in music studios and increasingly online, music teachers are influencing the next generation of players, as well as returning lapsed hobbyists of all ages.

Our industry's connection with music educators goes back to NAMM's earliest days. And our records show how common it was for school music teachers to become NAMM business owners and vice versa-just think of Vic Firth's lifelong impact!

> Most other industries are different and don't rely on this symbiotic relationship but the music products industry is absolutely connected to the educators who help people to unlock the potential of the beautiful instruments produced by NAMM members.

> Believe it or not, some question NAMM's focus on supporting music education as a primary market development activity. But most fair-minded members throughout our industry's vast musical ecosystem understand the downstream impact of a child starting out on an instrument in school. Whether you make high-end electric guitars or digital mixing consoles, most

know that without the beginner, there is no next step.

At a TEC Tracks panel not too long ago at Winter NAMM, with technology luminaries like Craig Anderton and industry leaders like Hartley Peavey, Henry Juszkiewicz, Chuck Surack and

Marcus Ryle, I was very interested to see how the conversation

Music educators are responsible for giving most musicians their start.





In Fall 2015, approximately 50.1 million students will attend public elementary and secondary schools*



90%+ of schools offer music education translating to millions of potential lifelong music makers and customers**



Students who are involved in music are not only more likely to graduate high school, but also to attend college as well - with more earning potential to continue to make music into adulthood ***

School Band & Orchestra Magazine holds an annual essay writing contest, co-sponsored by NAMM, on the impact of music education on students.

In their own words, my music teacher taught me...

- · To fulfill the potential I possess
- · The importance of practicing to reach your goals
- Music is fun, inspiring and stimulates a love of learning
- . Lifelong skills that will prepare me for the future

Learn more and read winning student essays at shomagazine.com.

- U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistic (NCES)
- Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools Report from 2012 (NCES)
- Kraus N., Slater J., Thompson E.C., Hornickel J., Strait D.L., Nicol T. & White-Schwoch T. (2014), "Auditory Learning Through Active Engagement with Sound: Biological Impact"

MMAN

The NAMM Foundation supports teachers, parents and community leaders with resources and programs to advance music making for all.

SupportMusic

The SupportMusic Coalition, a national network of businesses, nonprofit organizations and individuals, works to support music education and provides advocacy

NAMM impacted the **Every Child Achieves Act** (S. 1177), the current federal education re-authorization legislation. resulting in core academic subjects defined to include music and the arts.

EGRAND RALLYE MUSIC EDUCATION

The first annual Grand Rally for Music Education at The 2016 NAMM Show, featuring Weird Al Yankovic and Canadian Brass, is a salute to music educators everywhere.

NAMM

Held at The NAMM Show, Music Education Days gathers music educators to network and learn ideas to inspire children to learn to play music.

Learn more about NAMM Foundation programs at NAMMFoundation.org.

turned to the importance of school music education. They all said that more must be done to support young students or there wouldn't be customers for their more advanced products in the future. I found it exciting to hear this news, especially since NAMM's "Music Education Days" conference with thousands of current and future music teachers was happening at the same moment just across the way in the Hilton Ballroom.

I write this month's note from Shanghai while attending the NAMM-sponsored China Conference for Music Education. It was an inspiring gathering of several hundred teachers and education policymakers who are charting the path of music education in Asia. NAMM has facilitated these types of conferences in the United States and in countries around the world to share best practices and to expand the vision of music education to include all instrument categories and students of all ages. We've also been the lead voice in lobbying for more

support for music and arts education with governments and policymakers and, while our work may never be done, we can point to some very solid gains that have impacted millions of students in the United States and around the world.

All this is made possible by NAMM's Circle of Benefits business model where trade show resources are reinvested to strengthen and grow the market for all. Your continued support though your membership and NAMM Show participation makes this possible, and the credit for this wonderful work all goes back to you.

Happy holidays everyone—now go out and thank a music teacher!

NAMM PRESIDENT AND CEO

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SUPPLY

KALA BRAND MUSIC CO. I BY KATIE KAILUS

CALIFORNIA CUSTOM







n the midst of a small business park in Petaluma, California, lies Kala Brand Music Co.'s headquarters. From the outside passersby would never guess that this quintessential office building houses the bustling workings of a custom ukulele shop — but in fact it does.

Kala launched its U.S. manufacturing about four years ago when it started making solid body U-Basses at its old head-quarters down the road. Today, in addition to the USA U-Basses,

Kala's U.S. custom shop has increased its production with its new Elite line of ukes — showing no signs of slowing down

Kala builds 10 different uke models in the States.

"The vision is evolving as we see what we can do," said Michael Upton, Kala's founder. "Every month we're growing a little bit more."

ADVANCED EXPERTISE

At the 2015 Winter NAMM Show, Kala rolled out its Kala Elite U.S. line, which is the first line of traditional ukes from the company that are entirely built in the States. Response for

the line has been great, which is no surprise considering the investment the ukulele company made into educating its builders and honing its product. The company had a few of its builders apprentice with well-known uke luthier Michael DaSilva in Berkely, California.

"They went through and learned his process from selecting the wood to cutting to the whole build process to hand carving the neck," Upton explained. "It was a couple months of training and they kept build-



ing here."

Next the Kala crew traveled to Hawaii and met with master uke builder Noa Bonk at Ko'olau Ukuleles as well as several independent builders.

"We wanted to take in all the different processes before we started production," Upton said, adding that John's brother Andrew Kitakis, who runs Hawaiian Music Supply, was also integral in offering constructive criticism of Kala's finished prototypes. "We'd bring a lot of ukes to them and send a lot to them for feedback. They'd say, 'Modify that, change that.' There could be a lot of people that don't even notice certain things that they notice because they are looking at thousands of ukes constantly. So, that has been helpful trying to get things really dialed in."

LIMITLESS GROWTH

ala is currently producing about 80 ukuleles a month at its custom shop,

which currently employees about 10 builders, and Upton hopes to see that number rise in the future.

"I would like to see us building 400-500 instruments a month and hope that we, at some point, will be offering full customization," he said.

Upton said he also hopes Kala will soon be recognized as one of the leaders of highend, U.S.-made ukuleles, and, thanks a demand of high-end players, that goal might not be far off.

"The demand for the higher end is there," Upton said. "Whether it's a cosmetic inlay or just more expensive woods, people seem to want that variety. With ukulele, people purchase multiple instruments. They like having a collection, and there's a lot of brand loyalty.

"As we talk to customers, we notice that they just want variety, and they are willing to pay more for it."

Upton also hopes to begin experimenting

with other woods in the future.

"Right now we are building pretty much everything out of Koa, and we've got other woods that we want to start using," he said. "There's a desire to use other types of woods and to not stop learning, but to get better at building what we do.

"Don't feel like you've arrived yet. Don't stop growing or learning. That is kind of the company ethos. And not to put any limits on what you can do." MI







PEAVEY I AWARD

HARTLEY PEAVEY RECEIVES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

uring the annual AV Awards ceremony in London, Hartley Peavey received the 2015 Lifetime Achievement Award. Recognized for 50 years of innovation and manufacturing, Peavey accepted the award before a crowd of 950 AV industry professionals in the Great Hall of the Grosvenor House Hotel.

"I was pleasantly surprised to learn that AV Magazine would be giving me the honor of a 'Lifetime Achievement Award,'" Peavey said. "It's hard to realize that I have been in this industry for over 50 years now. We have always tried to bring new and fresh approaches to the areas of technology in which we operate. Back in the mid-1970s we revolutionized the manufacture of guitars with our introduction of CNC machinery for the first time. Later, in the early 1990s, we introduced the first digital audio net-



working and control system in the form of MediaMatrix, which revolutionized the way professional sound is distributed and controlled." {peavey.com}

HAL LEONARD I TECHNOLOGY

Noteflight Takes Notation Farther

Noteflight online music notation software, now part of Hal Leonard, is rethinking the way music is created, and with the recent addition of John Mlynczak, the company's new director of educational technology, it is poised for continued innovation. Music Inc. sat down with Mlynczak who explained more about the company and what it offers dealers.

MI: Congrats on your new position. Can you tell us a little about your background and your new position with Noteflight and Hal Leonard?

JM: My background is in music education, educational leadership, creative arts standards and assessment. I have spent the past five years presenting to educators, students and retailers on how to integrate technology into music education. I am excited to continue my growth in music education technology with Hal Leonard and Noteflight, where I can work with retailers and educators on providing the best products and support materials for today's students and teachers.

MI: For many retailers who might not be familiar, in your words, what is Noteflight and how is it different from other notation programs?

JM: Noteflight is online music notation software that has revolutionized the way we create music with computers and mobile devices. Because Noteflight works on any device with a browser, users can create, share, and collaborate on scores in the same manner that we all create, share, and collaborate any idea

today: online. Noteflight offers professional music notation and editing features, but also community groups, score commenting and sharing.

We now have two simple product offerings: Noteflight Premium and Noteflight Learn. Noteflight Premium is the full-featured product for individual users and is sold as an annual subscription model, with no software to install, update, or upgrade through multiple product versions. Noteflight Learn is our new music education product where students and teachers can all enjoy premium accounts within a private school site, which

is COPPA compliant. This allows students to have music for performance,

composition, or theory, while teachers can view, comment, and consistently engage in meaningful feedback with their classes. Noteflight Learn will also be adding many new features for schools, including: recording, assessment tools, and subscriptions to content libraries to support the music students are learning in class.

MI: How can dealers benefit from and promote Noteflight along with other Hal Leonard technology?

JM: For Noteflight Premium, Hal Leonard offers a significantly discounted subscription only through the retail channel, which gives dealers a strategic advantage for selling Noteflight to their customers. Dealers can either sell a boxed subscription or sell via Hal Leonard's Vault program. The customer receives a code in their retail box or via The Vault and enters the code on the Noteflight site, giving customers the ability to compose right away. There is nothing to install and there aren't multiple SKUs for various versions or upgrades or operating systems; it just works out of the box. Since the dealer initiated the sale, they receive a commission on all renewals.

For Noteflight Learn, Hal Leonard's dealers now have the ability to sell schools or districts a subscription-based online learning platform for music education. With the

subscription model, dealers have the opportunity constant access to their note flight to cultivate more lifelong customers by signing them

> up and reminding them about annual renewals. Any chance to engage a customer is valuable, and the subscription model is ideal for consistent customer interaction.

> Hal Leonard now distributes a number of technology product solutions suited for the classroom, such as digital recording DAWs, recording gear for concerts and rehearsals, and many accessories that are valuable to educators. I encourage dealers to reach out to me personally, so I can help with school music technology sales. We can work together to schedule webinars with their sales staff and teachers on music technology solutions where we can identify the right technology solutions for each school. {noteflight.com}



SLM Management Meets for First Strategy Meeting

ue to St. Louis Music's growth over the last year, the company has recently made new additions to its senior management team to help guide the company's expansion. September saw the first meeting with senior managers, old and new, in attendance — a group that draws upon industry veteran experience and major skill sets across sales, marketing, administration and IT.

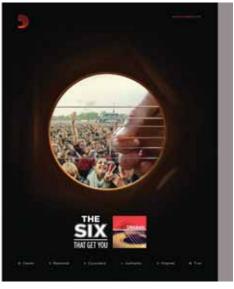
"As my friend and colleague Paul Damiano says, 'To build a great company you need great people," said Mark Ragin, president and CEO of St. Louis Music. "That is why we've added to our team. These are exciting times and working with these people day in and day out is a real honor."

As well as expanding its team, SLM has increased its product offerings. It recently became the Sabian distributor, acquired Blessing Brass Instruments and Kiwi Wind Products, and launched Apollo Drums. {stlouismusic.com}









D'ADDARIO LAUNCHES FIRST ACOUSTIC CAMPAIGN IN A DECADE

'Addario's new campaign, featuring the tagline "The Six That Get You," highlights how the company helps musicians get to whatever moment they are chasing with their music. D'Addario recently launched a new website for "The Six That Get You," featuring exclusive interviews with top acoustic performers, interactive content, as well

as new images and videos shot through the soundhole of a guitar and more.

The campaign's print advertising depicts a unique perspective of the world shot through a guitar's sound hole. As part of the Web campaign, the new site features trendsetting guitarists discussing the influences that have shaped their sound. Artists featured

in the video include Sam Outlaw, bluegrass virtuoso Dave Rawlings, Americana legend Jim Lauderdale, Jackie Green, Fats Kaplan and many more. Videos will be debuted over the next several months. Additionally a new portal invites players to compare how the different sets of D'Addario strings sound via an interactive sound chart. {daddario.com}

APPOINTMENTS

KHS APPOINTS NEW NATIONAL SALES MANAGER



HS America has named Patrick Stevenson national sales manager for its combo division. Stevenson has more than 25 years of experience in the MI industry in sales, marketing and executive positions. His experience includes product/brand development, marketing, retail sales, sales management and financial management. He has been responsible for significant growth in sales and dealer satisfaction for several large companies in the MI industry.

In his new role, Stevenson will be responsible for strategic and tactical sales initiatives, and will participate in furthering the KHS core

principles focusing on music, integrity, ingenuity, respect and teamwork.

"I am very excited to be joining the KHS team," Stevenson said. "We have great brands on the combo side of our business, and this is a very important time in the development of KHS America. The financial and branding strength of our company and the professionalism of our team members create an environment of powerful opportunity for retailers across all MI channels."

"We are very pleased and happy to have Patrick on board with KHS," said Andy Strayer, vice president of sales for KHS America. "His industry experience with retail, product management and sales management make him a perfect fit to head up the combo division." **{khsmusic.com}**

SLM APPOINTS FIRST NATIONAL SALES MANAGER



St. Louis Music recently appointed Richard Grossman to the newly created position of national sales manager.

"Richard will work closely with our outside team to help them manage the extraordinary growth St. Louis Music is experiencing," said Mark Ragin, president and CEO of St. Louis Music. "His first major task is to help the outside team expand the retail footprint of our newest strategic partner, Sabian cymbals."

Grossman comes to SLM with over 35 years experience as an outside sales representative at

a major company in the music and distribution business.

"I am very excited to be joining St. Louis Music," Grossman said. "For many years, SLM was a major competitor to my former company, but I was always impressed with how they conducted business with their dealers. The new team at SLM is a very seasoned and dynamic group. I am looking forward to being part of that team, and continuing SLM's tremendous growth and success." **{stlouismusic.com}**



PMC I CONTEST

PMC Offers IDM Promotion

The Percussion Marketing Council wrapped up its 2015 International Drum Month promotion on Oct. 10 with grand prize winner Fatima "Zohra" Brown meeting Godsmack drummer Shannon Larkin at the Rock Allegiance Festival, in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Brown, a 26-year-old drummer that has been playing for 15 years, won the International Drum Month (IDM) "Drum Roadie for a Day" grand prize by submitting her entry through PMC's online entry process. The program was associated with participating percussion retailers during May. She was chosen from over 350 entries, making this years' IDM contest the most successful ever.

"The International Drum Month campaign and 'Drum Roadie for a Day' grand prize received tremendous interest and support from the entire percussion industry," said Karl Dustman, PMC executive director. "We doubled the number of participating retailers nationwide. Thousands of grand prize entries were processed and more than 100,000 social media impressions were recorded. This is the most successful International Drum Month campaign of the organization's 20-year history." {playdrums.com}

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- www.PianoNet.com is your comprehensive guide to everything about pianos – their history, noted artists, pianos in the news and more. The piano may be 300 years young, but there's always more to learn about everyone's favorite instrument!
- Join PMAI as a manufacturer and participate in all this plus an industry statistics program.
- Join PMAI as a retailer and join the NPF/PMAI dealer network!
- National Piano Foundation promoting the benefits of music education through the piano and RMM!
- Shipment statistics
- Major market statistics
- Partnership with Music Teachers National Association and RMM Outreach
- Retailer & Manufacturer Code of Ethics





inc

THE 2015 **EXCELLENCE** AWARDS

Each year, Music Inc.'s Excellence Awards honor 10 retailers and 10 suppliers who went above and beyond in their businesses over the last year. Voted on by their peers, these winners are responsible for advancing the entire MI industry. Hold onto this issue; it is chock-full of ideas that will provide inspiration year-long.

By David Ball, Baxter Barrowcliff, Ed Enright, Michael Gallant, John Janowiak and Katie Kailus





RUSSO



THE MUSIC ZOO



SWEETWATER







BOSS





SONOR











| BY KATIE KAILUS, PHOTOS BY KRISTEN DRISCOLL |

THE NEW INDIE

Russo is changing the MI retailing game by leaving music store stereotypes behind and focusing on a fresh approach to retail

ith thousands of likes on Facebook and a staff made up of mostly millennials, Russo is the quintessential modern day retailer. The New Jersey-based full-line dealer focuses on more than making its customers happy. It focuses on offering a fresh approach to retail.

"We go out of our way to avoid the local music store stereotypes," said Scott Engel, manager of the store's Asbury Park location and lead guitar repair tech. "The cranky old guy leaning on the counter blocking kids from the Les Pauls is obsolete."

This approach to MI retailing is just one of the reasons Russo has been referred to by Excellence voters as the "the Apple of the MI industry" — and one of the reasons it is *Music Inc.*'s 2015 Retailer of the Year.

"These guys at Russo just get it," said one voting supplier. "They understand what the future is, and they want to be around 20 years from now."







Hiring Millennials

While the 55-year-old business is still owned by the founder's wife Lucy Russo, Engel manages the Asbury Park location and Jeff LaCour manages Russo's original store in Hamilton, New Jersey. Together, the two bring a fresh approach to music retailing, one that includes hiring yo

"Every one of my staff members can recount a story from their local stores growing up where they felt intimidated and insulted," Engel said. "A young laid back staff avoids that issue."

Engel encourages employers to provide a place for young employees to grow.

"Some of my employees have been with me since 2010," Engel said. "They have grown with the store and made nice careers for themselves. Employees growing with the business is a no-brainer."

Updated Design

Russo's Asbury Park location was added in 2010, then moved to an updated a new space in 2013 much to the acclaim of the store's manufacturers.

"Russo has a great display of products," said one voting supplier while another commented, "They've got a beautiful new store, [which] they've redesigned to really give a modern retail experience when it comes to buying guitars."

Engel said eliminating old displays and minimalizing slatwall adds to the location's modern feel.

"Music stores have a tendency to be a bit behind retail trends," Engel said. "In Asbury Park we use as little outdated manufacturer displays as possible. We have just enough slatwall to hang our products. If we need a display, we re-purpose something, or build it ourselves. Customers should feel as comfortable and excited in our store as they would any other retail spot. Displays should change to keep employees and customers interested in the environment."

As a result, the store draws musician's from all backgrounds.

"There really is no average Russo customer," Engel said. "I've sold a Squier Mini, a 59 Les Paul Custom Shop and reset a Taylor neck in the same hour recently. We strive to be the place where you buy your first instrument and every subsequent instrument after that."

And Russo's laid back approach to customer service helps the retailer achieve that goal.

"We try to gauge our customers when they walk in," Engel said. "The response to an honest greeting can tell you a great deal about what [a customer] wants from the store and the staff. Customers in this industry are often defensive because they have had bad experiences in the









past. We do our best to let them know that it's OK to [let] your guard down. We just want to talk about gear and maybe help you find something that's right for you."

Engel said new customers to Russo have an expectation from modern retail, and the store does its best to deliver.

"Helping a customer who is open to our guidance and professional experience is our specialty and honestly the most rewarding part of the job," he added.

Casting a Web

For Russo, its website is its catalog, and it aims to have as much of its product selection online for customers to view.

"We find that most of our customers have looked at our website quite a bit before they come in," Engel said. "We try to keep it as updated as possible. Chances are, if someone is calling you they're looking at your website or one of your social media sites.





Ideally though, we want our Web customers to call us, so we can give them the service they deserve."

While Russo puts a lot of focus on its website, it is not aiming to compete against the big boxes.

"Our goal is to get [the customers within a] 50-mile radius into our stores to try these tangible instruments, experience our level of customer service and hopefully take one home."

Social Media Mania

With more than 22,000 likes on Facebook and 2,200-plus followers on Instagram, social media plays a large role in Russo's business. The retailer puts some money into Facebook advertising when it comes to events and products, but mostly it tries to provide consistent and interesting content to satisfy its current customers and attract new ones.

"We try to interact with customers and manufacturers to make our stores someplace a new customer would want to be, or want to buy from online," Engel said.

Nevertheless, garnering over 2,000 followers on Instagram is a rare feat for an MI retailer. Russo's formula for success on the platform is similar to its formula for Facebook: posting interesting content consistently.

Engel

"Instagram is less formal than other social media platforms," Engel said. "It's all about the photo. If the photo isn't interesting nobody is going to read the caption. [You need to] post quality stuff once or twice a day that's consistent with the brand and image you want people to have of your business."

Engel advocates learning from what you post.

"If a photo doesn't get a reaction, learn from that. If people really like it, learn from that as well."

The Future of Russo

Looking ahead, LaCour said he would like to focus on the company's lesson program, which currently instructs students on guitar, drums, bass, piano, flute, saxophone and clarinet at the Hamilton location only. This pairs nicely with the company's band rental business, which supplies on average about 5,000 instruments a year to school districts in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Engel said he would like to see the Hamilton location remodeled and the Asbury Park store expanded within the next five years.

"We are doing our best to make Russo a destination," he said.
"The goal would be for our local draw and customer satisfaction to spread through to a more national Web-based market, for those seeking the product knowledge and service we are excited to offer."

While Russo doesn't have the infrastructure for a massive Web business just yet, it is working on it.

"A nice organic growth in all directions is the right way for us," Engel said. **MI**





Congratulations, Russo Music, On Being Named Dealer of the Year!

We're proud to be a part of your team!







| BY JOHN JANOWIAK |

CONTINUED GROWTH

Sweetwater keeps **growing in all directions** by quadrupling its retail space and expanding its campus

sk Chuck Surack about
Sweetwater Sound
— the company he
founded in Fort
Wayne, Indiana — and
you're bound to hear
some staggeringly
large figures. Surack
is careful not to brag,
but the numbers speak loudly for themselves.

"Last year we grew 28 percent over the year before," he said. "That's a huge number when you get to the size we are today. This year [as of late September], we're already up 27 percent, so that number will probably grow. The month of September, we're up 38 percent over last year's September. Stunning numbers, and I'm very thankful and appreciative. We'll do over \$350 million this year, and I started this crazy thing in my VW bus 36 years ago! And to continue to have this 25 to 30 percent growth when the numbers are in the hundreds of millions, it's a crazy thing."

The numbers may be crazy, but they stem from an entirely rational business model.

Sweetwater is an efficient, well-managed operation that is now big enough to benefit from an economy of scale, but it still provides old-fashioned, personalized customer service.

Mail-order customers get free candy with each order. Better yet, they can call a salesperson who can help them determine exactly the product they need, and they benefit from free support from a dedicated tech team.

But back to those crazy numbers: Sweetwater's guitar business is exploding. Fifteen years ago, the company didn't sell any guitars, and in 2014, it sold 75,000 of them.

"This particular month of September [2015], we were doing 500 guitars a day for a while," Surack said. Sweetwater does a thorough quality-control check on each guitar and sends back about 10 percent that don't meet its standards. Guitars that make the cut are photographed in detail, and when a customer buys one online, they're welcome to send it back if they're unsatisfied.

Surack's customer-service philosophy in a nutshell is: "I want you to be happy long term, not just make one quick transaction."

Expanded Footprint

Guitars are one growth area for Sweetwater, but in fact, each of its product areas are growing.

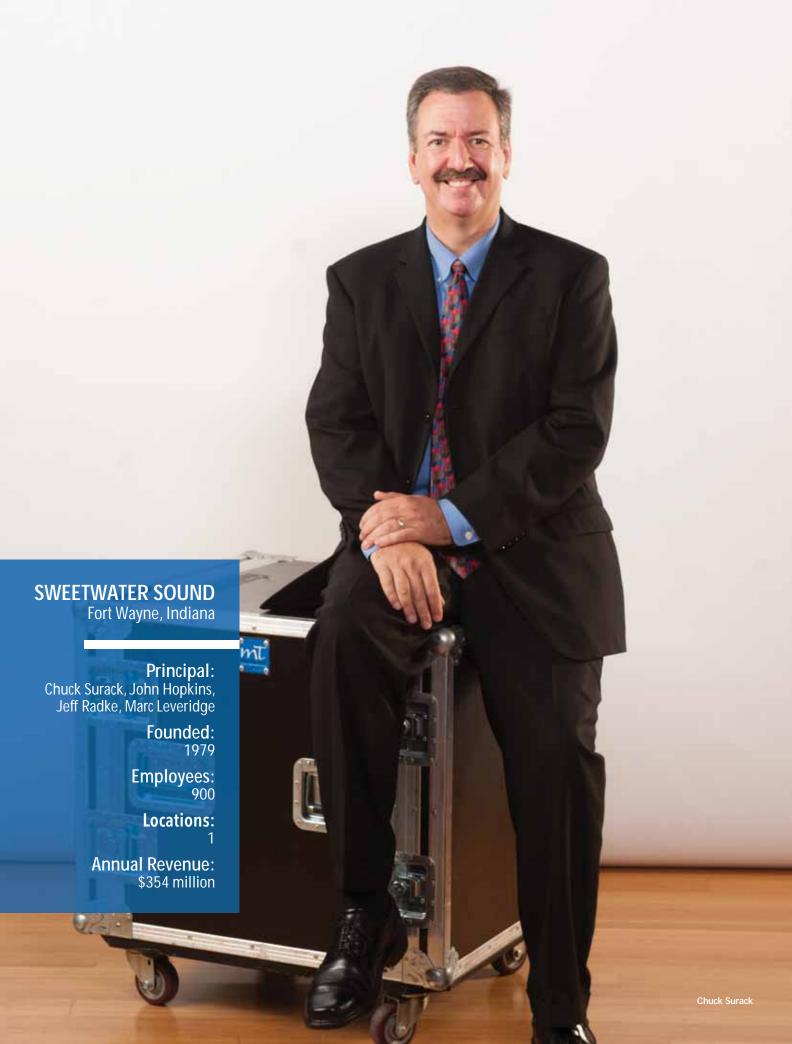
Traditionally known as a mail-order powerhouse, Sweetwater also has a strong local presence, and it has reinvested heavily in its retail operation lately. The company hired a consulting firm to design a brand-new store, which opened on June 1.

"We built a store that we think is pretty stunning, and our customers think is stunning, and the sales prove that it's effective," Surack said. "We don't get a lot of credit for our local store, but we will do \$7 million locally, and that's a lot of business for one store. It's four times the store we had before, and it's beautiful to look at "

Among other innovations, the location features a "digital warehouse." Each room has a 50-inch screen that lets customers quickly find products that may not be displayed in the showroom but can be quickly accessed.

Sweetwater also created a studio for producing online video demos of products and hired several talented musicians to demonstrate them online. And it expanded its campus to include the Crescendo Coffee Bar, which provides a classy performance space for students, employees and supplier reps. There's also a new marketing and merchandising building in the works.

"Once that's done, for 12 or 18 months, maybe we won't build anything," Surack said. "I don't know, we'll see!"





| BY DAVID BALL |

SHOWING ITS STRIPES

Noted for its **knowledgeable owner and 'top-notch' staff**, The Music Zoo exemplifies what a guitar store can be, both in store and online

ong before opening his first retail shop in 1994, Tommy Colletti was the go-to guy when it came to buying a guitar.

"I was teaching guitar at the time, and every time one of my students or a friend was looking for a guitar, they'd somehow gravitate to me," Colletti said. "It was a common rule of thumb that you talked to somebody and made sure that you found a good one. I became one of those people that my students relied on to make sure [the guitar they were considering] was good."

Colletti went on to use his wealth of product knowledge and the relationships he established with manufacturers to build a store of his own. Now, over 20 years later, The Music Zoo in Roslyn, New York, continues to build on Colletti's reputation both locally and worldwide through his store's presence online.

"We got in early on the Internet, which I think helped a ton," Colletti said, citing his forward-thinking business model as the key to his store's success. "Especially now, more than ever, you have to stay cutting edge. I think that the dealers that work really hard rise to the top and have good careers. And the ones that don't pay attention to their store and growing their business everyday, suffer.

"We're constantly looking at The Music Zoo not only as a guitar store, but as a living, breathing thing."

A Like-Minded Milieu

As The Music Zoo has grown, communication with staff has been a focal point of the business.

"In the early days of The Music Zoo we

worked in a 900-square-foot space," Colletti said. "So, we all watched each other as we were selling a guitar to someone."

Since moving into a larger space in 2011, regularly scheduled meetings have been integral in keeping everyone on staff tuned in to the store's goals. "We do what are commonly known as 'Town Halls,' where everybody in the entire store — whether they're a salesperson or warehouse

worker — gets together and stands in one room and just talks. That way, everybody knows what's going on, whether they're packing boxes or a bookkeeper. So, we all have the same mindset."

Along with habitual communication and training programs for employees, suppliers noted that the company's "top notch" staff is what makes The Music Zoo stand out to vendors.

When hiring new employees, Colletti admitted that a good staff is hard to find. "You need somebody that knows the product and understands it, who's potentially a player. And it's something that we've wrestled with because we're all players, but with the player thing also comes the ingredient [that they can be] a bit of a dreamer. That can start to interfere with getting here on time."

Over the years, Colletti has learned to spot a few telltale signs for potentially good employees. "What's their motivation? I tend to look for that, because

I want somebody that's really in here because they love to be here, they're into guitars, and they're good with people. We're not necessarily looking for the guy that's just doing this for the time being before he becomes famous.

"We look for excitement," Colletti continued. "Somebody that's into it. You can just see it right away. I would say that at least 75 percent of the kids here are in bands, but their first and foremost [obligation] is here. Or at least they tell me that! [Laughs]."

THE MUSIC ZOO Roslyn, New York

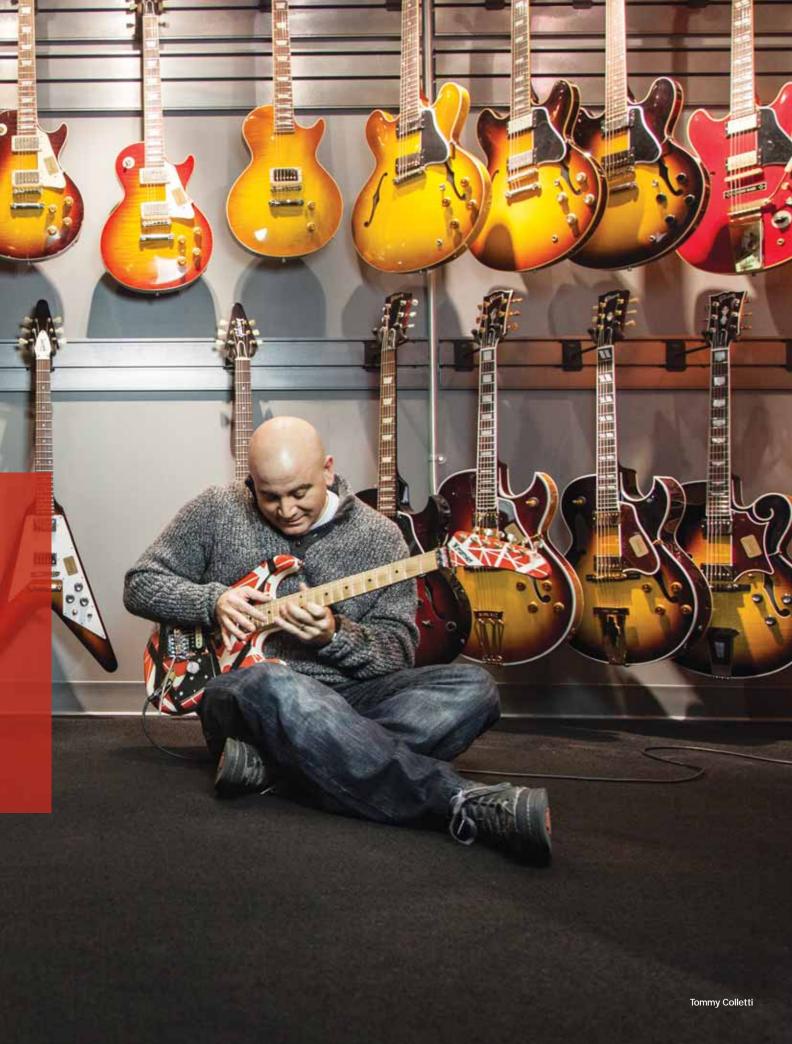
Principal: Tommy Colletti

Founded: 1994

Employees:

Locations:

Annual Revenue: \$10 Million





| BY ED ENRIGHT |

CUSTOMER CENTRIC

Heading into its 75th year, West Music focuses on the customer's experience

ith sevenretail locations in eastern lowa and western Illinois, and multiple ecommerce websites,

West Music Co. prides itself on being a complete music source whose products and services support lifelong music makers. Such relationship-building with customers, suppliers and employees is at the core of the company's philosophy as it heads into its 75th year of doing business.

One Excellence Award voter described West Music as an "amazing" business partner that does a great job of representing brands to the marketplace.

"We believe that to have a great relationship, both parties must be successful in order for the relationship to be healthy," said Robin Walenta, president and CEO of West Music. "So, we partner with our key suppliers through the entire supply chain process, from concept to customer, making sure that each of us are communicating and collaborating on how we can get the product in the end user's hand in the most effective and efficient way possible. And when that musician starts experiencing that product, we can support it through their musical journey.

"We sit down and put a marketing plan together for how we can incorporate not only their products and merchandising in our stores, but marketing efforts as well as advertising support," Walenta continued. "It really is about market development, and that can only happen

if you have great communication and positive collaboration, recognizing that all parties must succeed."

Maintaining Its Focus

West Music is currently working on its own branding initiative, which aims to create new store logos and artwork related to the company's various niche business entities, including the Flute Authority, the Percussion Source and the Piano Gallery.

"We have a lot of brands and subcategories out there, and we're trying to create this West Music umbrella so people will recognize us for who we are and what we do," Walenta said. The re-branding launch, which coincides with the company's 75th anniversary celebration kickoff, will take place at West Music's annual meeting and awards banquet in February.

Walenta stressed the importance of focusing on the beginner market and providing young band and general music students with whatever they need to continue making music.

"Through that process — whether it's through lessons or clinics or repairs, any of those additional services that we provide — we can help them on that journey to become an intermediate and professional musician," she said. "It's that commitment to that musical journey that will determine people's success in this industry. [Retailers] that are transactional-based and have their business model built on the number of transactions you can process in a day — that's good for a few, but those of us who stay committed on building relationships and creating experiences will remain successful."

When prompted for any parting advice she could share with fellow retailers, Walenta responded: "The most important thing is to remain true to the customer's experience. Be very customer centric, and design every process, product and program around creating that unique experience for the customer."

WEST MUSIC Coralville, Iowa

Principal: Robin Walenta, Ryan West and Steve West

Founded: 1941

Employees: 210

Locations:

Annual Revenue: \$37 million





BY KATIE KAILUS I

OMNICHANNEL RETAILING

Guitar Center amplifies its omnichannel approach by enhancing its Web presence

t seems every week Guitar Center is making news in one form or another from launching new customer contests to expanding its retail operations. In late August, the MI giant rolled out its latest addition — a completely new website, and according to Michael Amkreutz, executive vice president of merchandising, marketing and e-commerce, it's been greatly received by GC's customer base.

"Response has been really spectacular," Amkreutz said. "This was a complete overhaul — we switched platforms, we switched everything. The site saw a remarkably smooth introduction, and if you look at the feedback it's just been phenomenal."

The new site continues Guitar Center's omnichannel approach to retailing.

"Our website, sales and call center associates have all been trained to provide service any way the customer chooses," Amkreutz said. "Sales associates get commissions for online purchases placed in-store. We learned early on that we had to eliminate any hurdles. There's another 50,000-plus products available online. Customers can choose on the site whether they want to buy a product online or stop into their nearest store. If they choose online, shipping products to a store is free."

Adding to the omnichannel experience, Guitar Center has placed terminals in its store that let sales associates assist customers who don't want to use their cell phones to search GC's Mobile Plan for a product on GC's website while in store.

"The sales associate will offer to help them through an online purchase and drive traffic to all the GC brands," Amkreutz said.

Along with the new website, GC also rolled out a new mobile site which customers have been praising for its used gear inventory.

GUITAR CENTER Westlake Village, California

Principals: Darrell Webb, Tim Martin, Michael Amkreutz, Ronald Japinga, Wayne Colwell, Dennis Haffeman

> Founded: 1964

Employees: More than 10,000

Locations: Guitar Center, 270: Music & Arts 141

Annual Revenue: Undisclosed

"Our used gear changes daily," Amkreutz said. "Through the mobile experience, users have the ability to shop used gear in any store. We've heard a lot of people say, 'We've been waiting for this for a long time.' Now they can see what all of our stores have in terms of used gear, and we love that."

Looking ahead, Amkreutz said GC plans to continue its omnichannel method by enhancing its mobile offerings.

"We currently have an app in development, and plan to roll it out in 2016. [It is] a new technology platform where one of the key benefits is the ability to

Michael Amkreutz



access content in store that is generated online," Amkreutz explained. "A customer can go to one of our stores, scan one of the price tags and we will be able to give educational information to that customer about the product they scanned."

Amkreutz added that the company plans to make the shopping experience even more intuitive for its customers.

"We are testing different mobile devices in store, and I think you should expect that there will be some new technology released that will enhance that omnichannel approach."



Canada's largest chain dominates with a low-key approach

From left: Jack, Steve and Jeff Long

LONG & MCQUADE Pickering, Ontario

Principal: Jack Long, Steve Long, Jeff Long

Founded: 1956

Employees: 1,200

Locations:

Annual Revenue: \$260 million (CAD)

uring Music Inc.'s
Excellence Award
voting, many suppliers praised Long &
McQuade as a solid,
storied retailer that
makes customers
feel right at home.
"Long & Mc-

Quade continues to have a small-store feel, but offers customers everything they need," said one nominator. "The stores' staff is very knowledgeable and passionate about what they do."

Such praise might describe a typical musician's favorite local mom-and-pop shop, but Long & McQuade happens to be Canada's largest and most widespread full-line MI chain. With nearly 70 locations spread throughout all 10 Canadian provinces, the company sold \$260 million (CAD) worth of musical instruments this past year and will celebrate its 60th anniversary next year. Despite its dominance throughout the Great White North, Long & McQuade maintains a distinctively down-home, local focus — and that seems to be a big part of its appeal. Whether the customer is a

beginner, weekend warrior or seasoned pro, Long & McQuade is there to serve them.

"Our motto is, we want to be a lifetime supplier to musicians," said Steve Long, president and son of the company's founder, Jack Long (who, at 86, is still active in the business). "Once you're a musician, you're always a musician, so we want to be there for people at any stage of the process."

Behind the retailer's laid-back reputation lies a regimented four-level training program. Level one occurs before employees start their first day of work. They visit the company's Toronto-area headquarters for a three-day crash course that teaches them the basics of retail and the company's philosophy.

"Usually I, my brother [Jeff] and father will meet all of the employees, and make sure they understand that we take it seriously as a company," Steve said. "I let them know that keeping the customers happy is their day job."

Level two teaches product knowledge that every employee should know, level three teaches advanced sales techniques and level four provides management training. Throughout the year, employees are brought into the head office to attend product training seminars.

It's a huge expense, Steve said, but the investment pays off by keeping employees informed and keeping them around for a long time.

"I think that's one of the things we've done a good job of — keeping our staff happy and consistent," he said.

At the management level, turnover is only 3 percent, so when customers visit a store, they to see the same employees year after year. "Each staff should have their own customers that they see on a regular basis," Steve said.

Low-key Growth

The chain is still growing and will soon add more locations, but even its approach to expansion is low-key.

"Generally we look for vacancies in the market, whether that is caused by somebody retiring or closing the store," Steve said. "We don't take the model that says, 'There's a store in that market that's doing well, but we're going to go head-to-head with them.' We don't see it as adversarial. We don't have to be in every market."





An outstanding music school continues to drive Merriam Music's retail growth

erriam Music bills itself as "Toronto's toprated piano store and music school," and the school is every bit as impressive as the company's two suburban retail showrooms.

"They have one of the largest instore lesson programs in Canada," said one nominating supplier.

Of the company's 150 employees, 120 are teachers, and the school has a student body of 3,500. And that number keeps growing; this year's fall enrollment was the biggest in the company's 28-year history, said Alan Merriam, the company's president and founder.

"That's because we continually reinvest in the school and continually innovate."

Education was a priority from the start. When Merriam opened his first 2,500-square-foot store in 1988, he dedicated 800 square feet to a small but high-quality music school.

"I decided in my fourth and fifth year that I would really focus on building one of the best music schools in the country," he said. "I assembled a team of renowned musicians and professional educators and built a curriculum called Keyfest, which is a holistic curriculum that teaches nine areas of musical literacy."

The Keyfest method is designed to build musicianship from day one. From as young as four years old, students are immediately immersed in diatonic theory, harmony, rhythm, improvisation and playing in ensembles.

"We don't dumb down the names, we make sure that every concept that is introduced will be the same nomenclature as they would find in a symphony orchestra or a studio band," Merriam said. "So as the kids progress through our curriculum, they are able to play classical music at a high level in their



fifth [and] sixth year, as well as having a good understanding of jazz, pop and diverse genres."

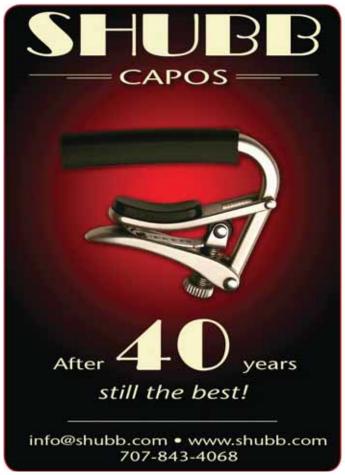
The school published a series of books throughout the 1990s and built up a student base of 1,000 by 1998. Then, to better accommodate them, Merriam built a 20,000-square-foot building in Oakville, a prominent suburb of Toronto. Within four years, the student base grew from 1,000 to 3,000.

Naturally, having such a large music school enhances Merriam's pianos sales. The company's team tracks this correlation carefully.

"At least one third of our piano sales come from our internal customers, many whom have purchased two or three instruments from us," he said. "The more the kids progress on the piano side, the better the instrument they will end up with. We have sold hundreds of very fine grand pianos to some very accomplished students we have nurtured and developed over the years. They come here every week, and they're walking through the piano showroom."

Each year for the past five years, sales at have increased 3 percent to 8 percent, Merriam added.

"We know that the industry is in decline, which means we are gaining more market share."









From the left: Adam, Alan and Abbe Levin

CHUCK LEVIN'S WASHINGTON MUSIC CENTER

Wheaton, Maryland

Principal:

Adam Levin, Alan Levin, Abbe Levin

Founded:

1958

Employees:

Locations:

Annual Revenue: Undisclosed

OLD SCHOOL

Now with a third generation stepping into the game, the Levin family continues to deliver high-end service the good old-fashioned way

alk into Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center and any seasoned MI retailer is bound to get a sense of the familiar.

"We are as old school as old school gets," said Alan Levin, co-owner. "If you came in here for a

week, you'd say 'I don't know how that place works!' But we have customers in the store. We have phone calls. There's always something going on."

Established in 1958 by Alan's father (from whom the store takes its name), little has changed in the way that Chuck Levin's treats its clientele. "We still do things the way we've been doing them [because] this is the way my parents did it, and right or wrong it works for us," Alan said.

Adam Levin, Alan's nephew, described how he was taught: "Chuck's way was, you help the customer no matter how high you have to climb to find a piece of gear, or how many boxes you've got to jump into. No matter how small or big, or who the person is, you take care of them as best you can

every single day, all day. That's why people come back to us, and that's why people talk about us."

Family Business

Despite his relative young age, Adam stepped into a senior role after the unexpected passing of his father, Robert Levin. "That really threw everybody for a loop," Alan recounted, "because he was only 56 years old. It was out of left field."

Adam, who had already graduated from business school and begun working at the family business, recalled getting a crash course during the time before his father passed away. "I didn't think that I'd be doing what I'm doing for another 30 years," Adam said. "[Robert] got sick, and I learned a lot from him very quickly in seven weeks. But that wasn't long enough to learn how to run a business."

But the loss of his father showed Adam that the store was full of family members. "Every single day, someone tells me another story about my father, or about Chuck, and I glean from that, 'What did they do in this situation? How would they go about that scenario?' I have 30 surrogate mothers and fathers here that are looking out for me everyday. They certainly help me personally, but they help me learn how to run this business, too. It was the worst and best experience that I could have hoped for."

Now with a new, revamped website up and running which Alan notes is "Adam's baby" — and Abbe Levin (Alan's sister) running the B&O side of the business, the Levins continue to do what they do best — old-school retail.



I BY BAXTER BARROWCLIFF I

GOLD STAR SERVICE

Ken Stanton goes back to the basics by focusing on solid customer service

n an age where brick-and-mortar retailers find themselves constantly competing against the Internet, good old customer service is sometimes the best defense. And not many retailers take that to heart as much as Atlanta-based Ken Stanton Music. Founded in 1949. Ken Stanton has strived to provide excellent customer service since day one — something they hope sets them apart from the competition, according to Kenny Stanton, second generation owner.

"[Customer service] is most important because if you don't take care of them the first time they're not going to come back," Stanton said. "If you don't have good sales people to work with your customers they can go online and buy stuff. You have to have good people. If you don't you've just got a store full of stuff, and you don't set yourself apart. Everybody's basically selling the same [product] so, if you want to separate yourself from other stores, it's with your people."

Ken Stanton Music also improves the customer experience by hosting a slew of in-store events as well as other promotional gatherings and clinics. Voting suppliers commented that the five-location retailer is a great place to host its events.

"Ken Stanton Music has been an excellent partner, especially [with] events," said one.

"We have clinics, we have sales events, we just work with our vendors to try and get some excitement," Stanton said. "We have a really good marketing company that we use, and we meet with them every two weeks."

Stanton added that the company is always working on email blasts, its catalog and promotions.

KEN STANTON MUSIC

Marietta, Georgia

Principal:

Kenny Stanton, Matt Abott, Scott Cameron

Founded: 1949

Employees:

Locations:

Annual Revenue: \$11.7 million

"We hit the school band season pretty hard with promotions," Stanton added. "And with Christmas [coming up] we're working on our catalog. [Our] marketing company is doing a good job [helping us] with a lot of that stuff."



Kenny Stanton

Next Gen Hiring

Stanton said another way the company tries to set itself apart from local competition is by hiring a younger staff, including Stanton's son who he hopes will take over the business, making Ken Stanton Music family owned for three generations.

"Our focus is in growing some young people that we're bringing on so that we can continue the company as a third generation," Stanton said. "[We are] growing some young people in our business so that we can continue to get better."



| BY BAXTER BARROWCLIFF |

SELLING A SOUND

Memphis Drum Shop aims to give its customers exactly what they want — the perfect sound



Drum emphis Shop is obessed with sound. And, as any MI retailer should, it goes to great lengths to help its customers find their perfect sound. One way

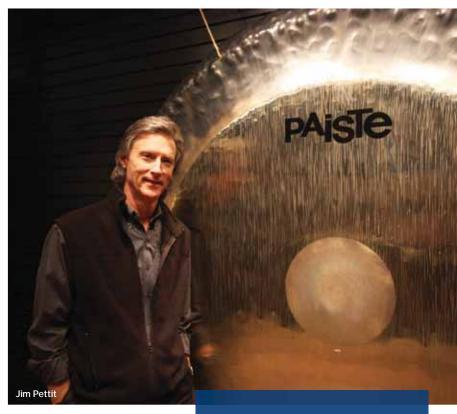
the retailer does that is through its interactive website, mycymbal.com. The site has garnered praise from many suppliers, helping it win three Retailing Excellence awards over the past seven years. This year, one voter called the site "[a] truly unique experience for the online customer."

But, owner Jim Pettit does not claim to have reinvented the wheel. Instead, he said mycymbal.com is ideal for players who appreciate the website for being more than just an his team exemplify excellence and online stockroom. The website features videos that let users hear the exact sound of an exact cymbal before they purchase.

"Some consumers out there are concerned and then visting the store." about their cymbal sound, and so they're looking for a specific sound for a specific type of music or whatever they hear in their head and they want exactly that," Pettit said. "When you go to most online experiences, you're hearing a generic cymbal and you get one of that type, model and brand, but you don't get to hear that [exact] cymbal."

From Clicks to Bricks

Memphis Drum Shop was also praised by Excellence voters for its in-store services. One voter complimented the company by saying, "Jim and and we're willing to find that."



enhance the customer experience."

Pettit said that he sees many customers shopping online first,

"It seems like it takes all of those things today to make a sale," Pettit said. "The feeling that we try to give the customer is that we do care. We are drummers. We want the drummer to get the sound that he's looking for."

Pettit said the main objective his sales staff keeps in mind is that they are "not just trying to sell a unit or a SKU."

"We're selling the guy a sound,

MEMPHIS DRUM SHOP Memphis, Tenneesee

Principal: Jim Pettit

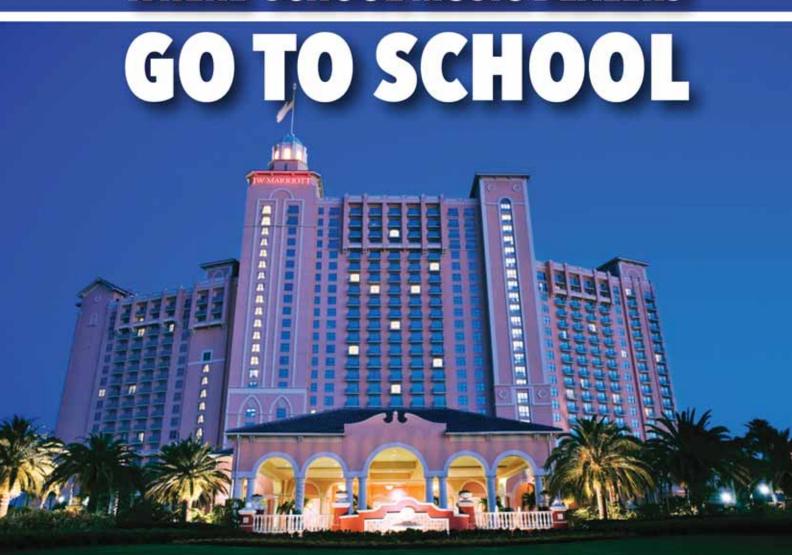
Founded: 1987

Employees:

Locations:

Annual Revenue: **Undisclosed**

WHERE SCHOOL MUSIC DEALERS



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9V@+

REDUCTION

RELEA!

D'ADDARIONYXLSTRINGS

D'Addario unveiled a Slew of new sets of its NAXT strings this hear and retailers are still raying about them. This is a boutique string that built steam at the first of the year and has taken off. The world didn't really need another guitar need another your string, but we need string, but we need one of this one. "Said one ed this one." Said one of this one. "Said one of this one." feature a break-resistant, high-carbon steel core and plain steel alloy which delivers a new level of power. {daddario.com}





noise gate/effects loop electro-barmonix NEW YORK CITY, USA

THRESH

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

Responding to players looking to control the noise of their high gain effects, EHX created The Silencer — a noise gate that can tame a single pedal or an entire effects loop. The Silencer's three-control layout provides precise fine-tuning to fit a system, instrument and playing style. A footswitch selects whether the Silencer is engaged or in bypass mode; buffered bypass allows the effects loop to remain in your signal path when the gate is bypassed. {ehx.com}



Band Creator

DRUMS

BASS

TRIO

DIGITECH

The DigiTech Trio offers users the ability to create a band that plays along with the user. The TRIO Band Creator pedal listens to what is played and automatically generates bass and drum parts that match chord progressions and rhythmic feel. "The pedal is great for at home soloist who want to **jam**," said one voter. {digitech.com}







AKAI PROFESSIONAL ADVANCE KEYBOARD SERIES

Akai Professional's Advance Keyboard series includes the Advance 25, Advance 49, and Advance 61, which offer playability and advanced manipulation of any virtual instrument via an interactive, full-color display. Designed to fuse the power of software instruments with the live playability of a keyboard workstation, the series transforms computer-based plugins into a handson playing experience. {akaipro.com}

ROLAND JD-XI SYNTHESIZER

Roland's JD-Xi is a versatile analog/digital crossover synthesizer. Equipped with 37 mini keys, the JD-Xi features a true analog synth engine along with a wide selection of Roland's SuperNATURAL digital sounds. This affordable instrument also comes with a variety of extras for self-contained music creation, including a gooseneck mic for using the synth's Vocoder and AutoPitch effects. {rolandus.com}





SONOR VINTAGE SERIES

Sonor celebrated its 140th anniversary by bringing back the iconic look and sound of the time between the 1950's and early '70s. Similar to the original Teardrop drums, the Vintage series drums boast hand-selected German Beech shells with rounded bearing edges. Sonor has recreated the look of the 1950's teardrop lug and updated it with Sonor's Tunesafe tuning system. {sonorusa.com}

NFUZD AUDIO NSPIRE SERIES

The NSPIRE series I/O Module uses Open Architecture, enabling access to a sample library that is virtually endless, and includes BFD Eco NFUZD Edition VST software. The NSPIRE Series Advanced Drum Emulation System (A.D.E.) utilizes true WAV sample playback allowing for superior acoustic drum sound reproduction with a wide dynamic range. This technology lets drummers easily adapt the system to best fit their creative needs, without the limits imposed by traditional e-drum hardware and software systems. {nfuzdaudio.com}



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FISHMAN PLATINUM PRO EQ

Completely redesigned from the ground up, the all-analog Platinum Pro EQ and Platinum Stage universal instrument preamps deliver accurate sonic detail for any acoustic instrument. The discrete, high-headroom Class-A preamp uses precision and high-speed circuitry for the highest fidelity and low distortion. {fishman.com}



YAMAHA YCL-CVR CLARINET CVP clarinot offers a

The Yamaha CVR clarinet offers a consistent quality at an affordable price — and Excellence voters agree. "Yamaha designed a high-end clarinet that you can actually make money on, and the consumer pays less than other comparable instruments," said one voting retailer. The Custom CVR clarinet was specifically designed with the input of professional clarinet educators. Product evaluations were held in major cities across the country. The instrument features a thick silver plating, durable leather pads and a 65mm traditional barrel shape. {usa.yamaha.com}



include a standard USB connection lets users wirelessly connect to all of them using the new D-Fi USB transceiver. It eliminates the need for any DMX cables. The USB transceiver is powered directly from the fixture. USB fixtures can be controlled using any of CHAUVET's wireless controllers, or from a user's smartphone with the D-Fi Hub and FlareCON. {chauvetlighting.com}



The Sessions MH510 headphones are designed for the accomplished performer. The headphones produce an articulate frequency response with extended lows, smooth mids and life-like highs. The MH510's isolation ensures a private listening experience virtually eliminating bleed into the playback environment. {cadaudio.com}

ATTEND THE MOST INSPIRING JAZZ EVENT OF THE YEAR







IANUARY 6-9 LOUISVILLE, KY

JazzEdNet.org



BY KATIE KAILUS

THE YAMAHA DIFFERENCE

With its attentive customer service and educated reps, **Yamaha** once again proves size doesn't always matter

hen you think of Yamaha, "boutique" isn't the first word that comes to mind. But, despite its size, the manufacturing giant prides itself on its boutique mindset — and dealers approve.

"This is a company that could easily rest on its laurels, but what astounds me is they behave like

an underdog," said one Excellence voter.

Tom Sumner, senior vice president at Yamaha, said the

company strives for that "boutique" feel.

"We think of ourselves
kind of as a collection of
boutique companies — for ex-

kind of as a collection of boutique companies — for example [we think of] band and orchestral as one group as we have folks that are specialists in clarinets or brass," Sumner said. "We feel internally we are a bunch of boutiques under the brand."

Top-Notch Reps

Sumner said the Yamaha brand itself covers all the major aspects of the company, such as customer service, which, year-in and year-out,

is praised by Excellence voters.

"The attention to their dealers' needs is never overlooked," said one of this year's voting retailers. "They have the best manufacturer reps in the business."

And that is not by happenstance. Yamaha's sales reps go through a gauntlet of interviews that can last anywhere from two to three months.

"In B&O, we'd put together a team of six to seven people [for reps candidates to interview with]," said Roger Eaton,

Yamaha's chief marketing director. "Yamaha wants to make sure candidates are viewed in a 360[-degree] type of environment."

The other piece of the service puzzle is the close relationship Yamaha's district managers have with headquarters.

"The district managers travel with us," Sumner said. "They have the support they need out there. When we visit stores, we get high marks for our district managers and the sales support. All of our folks really care about the dealers."

Many Excellence voting dealers shared their positive experiences with Yamaha's service. One voter praised their district manager for recently going "above and beyond to

resolve an issue."

"The resolution happened to be off the page a little, and [he] really went to bat for us with upper management," said the voter. "Even though they are huge, they treated this little guy like an important customer by making an exception when they didn't have to."

an exception when they didn't have to."

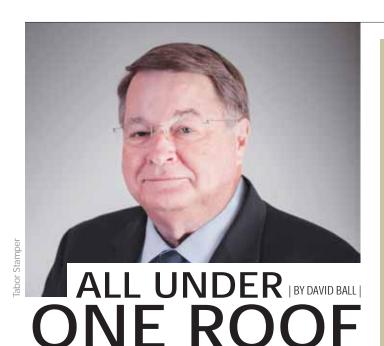
Sumner said Yamaha's service is so strong due to its employees' dedication.

"It's a combination of two things: Everyone here is dedicated to it, and there's a dedication to the dealer base," he said. "There's some paranoia that we feel we need to be better, and it's healthy in that respect. A good chunk of us come to work in the morning wanting to make Yamaha even better."

"It's also fundamentals," Eaton added. "We put a lot of focus in the fundamentals, we return calls and return emails. That makes the Yamaha difference. I think about that quite often; we stick to what we do well."







KHS provides a wide array of brands with a timely and supportive customer service team

ollowing the acquisition of HOHNER brand products this past year, KHS has significantly increased the size of its product offerings — but according to the retailers surveyed by *Music Inc.*, that hasn't slowed the company down one bit.

"We spend a tremendous amount of time making sure that every team member understands their role in creating the best possible customer experience," said Tabor Stamper, president of KHS. "That means that even when we face internal challenges, such as those typical of an acquisition this size, we try our very best to prevent those internal challenges from affecting our customers."

With a customer service team that's "quick to communicate and maintain a high standard of filling and shipment," it's easy to see why dealers go to KHS as a one-stop-shop for multiple lines of instruments and accessories.

"Between the HOHNER brand products, Hercules Stands, Sonor, Lanikai and Kohala Ukuleles, and the several accessories brands we distribute, we are now a source for retailers in well over 20 major product categories," said Mike Robinson, vice president of marketing. "Even better, several of those categories are highly complementary to each other and to different retail business models."

And, as another retailer pointed out, KHS makes sure it takes care of the "exceptions to the rule."

"Whenever possible, we make the effort to adapt how we operate to the retailer's business model, rather than force them to adapt to ours," said Andy Strayer, vice president of sales.

| BY DAVID BALL |

OUT OF THE BOX

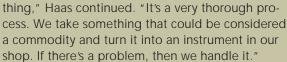
Ready-to-play right away, Reverend's unique designs are catching on

s brand awareness for Reverend guitars continues to grow, the company has cultivated its reputation among its dealer network by supplying unique guitar designs with a good margin, plus a setup that's "top notch right out of the box," as one retailer put it.

Ken Haas, general manager of Reverend, said of the margins, "We just haven't saturated the market to the point where MAP stuff starts to become a big issue. There's no reason to discount on MAP, because if you have the thing, then you're winning."

Haas also recognized that a good margin is not all that dealers look for when they take on a new line. "I think the number one reason why dealers like us is because the guitars are 100 percent ready to play right out of the box.

"We go through every-



One retailer noted that Reverend's sales manager, Zak Ward, has been particularly helpful, "friendly, knowledgable and prompt."

"Zak worked in an independent retail environment for years," Haas said. "So, he's very comfortable with what guys are going through in their stores. [We] pride ourselves on not only selling the dealer guitars, but then trying to teach the dealer how to sell the guitars — what the finer points of Reverend guitars are and things they can use to sell them."





BY DAVID BALL

AN EASY CHOICE

With top tier customer service and top-of-the-line product offerings, **Taylor** takes the worry out of choosing which acoustics to stock

hen *Music Inc.* surveyed retailers to find out which suppliers to feature as this year's Excellence Award winners, it didn't take long for Taylor's name to to come up.

This shouldn't come as much of a surprise, in light of the fact that Taylor's master

guitar builder Andy Powers considers maintaining the company's relationship with dealers as essential to the operation as assembling the guitars themselves. "I view our dealers as part of the guitar-making process," Powers said. "They're the ones who are actually taking the guitar out of my hands, putting it into the hands of a musician who finally gives that instrument its voice."

And when it comes to those instruments, retailers have been equally pleased with low- to high-end lines — from the GS Mini Koa, to the 200 Deluxe series, to the new additions in the 600 series.

"This year we've been building a lot of maple guitars," Powers said of the 600 series. "I think that was such a surprise for a lot of dealers, [but] these guitars had a real personality and a real voice to them that gave them a more broadly appealing type of sound for a lot of players. The dynamics are musically useful."

Resource Responsible

When asked about the choice to begin working more with maple, Powers said, "[It's] so closely tied in with what we're trying to accomplish with more sustainable wood sourcing and keeping an eye towards the future."

"One of our close friends and wood suppliers is em-



barking on a project to propagate instrument-specific maple trees," Powers continued. "So, in a way it will become 'farm to table' guitar making, where you've got maple trees grown in the domestic United States specifically to be used for guitars in a generation or two's time."

Taylor's commitment to responsible forest management extends beyond maple to its exotic hardwoods, like Koa, as well. "We've started our own company, specifically pursuing Koa — to grow, propagate and do responsible forest management of our own Koa forests in Hawaii. We're becoming more vertically integrated that way so that we can be even better stewards of the resources that are entrusted to us."

Educating Consumers

With a diverse product offering, Taylor has reached out not only to dealers, but to potential buyers as well, visiting stores to inform consumers about Taylor products through its Taylor Road Shows.

"The Taylor Road Show allows music-makers to congregate in [the dealer's] store and have an evening of guitar knowledge," said Monte Montefusco, Taylor's director of sales. "The brand is able to bring people into a location that they're not familiar with, and maybe the store gets to earn a new customer from that evening."



BY ED ENRIGHT

PERPETUAL INNOVATORS

As **Kawai** continues to pioneer new lines, it maintains its focus on dealer support

awai has a decadeslong track record of being a technologically advanced, forward-thinking company that holds an esteemed position in the piano market. That reputation is largely sustained by Kawai's commitment to continually improve the designs of its pianos, digital pianos and stage pianos.

"We're perpetual innovators, always trying to build a better instrument," said Brian Chung, senior vice president of Kawai America. "Most people think the piano industry putts along at a snail's pace. But we've launched four new lines of acoustic pianos in the past four years — that's got to be some kind of record."

Those lines include the luxury Shigeru Kawai Concert Series (debuted in 2012), the GX Performance Series grands (2013), the K Series professional uprights (2014) and the GL Series of value-priced professional grands (2015).

"In an industry known for glacier-like progress, we feel like we're moving at 60 miles per hour," Chung said.

The same is true for the company's digital pianos, which are regularly upgraded and improved to keep up with player demands and advancing technology.

Dealer Support

Kawai is known throughout the industry for treating its dealers like true business partners. One way the company provides valuable support is through its annual Kawai Keyboard Academy event — which Chung described as "one of the highlights of our

"The Kawai Keyboard Academy is one of the best ways we can serve our dealers," he said. "We've trained over



1,000 salespeople from 17 countries since 2000. Our goal is bigger than just dispensing product knowledge. We strive to help our partners become more successful — both personally and professionally. The program builds confidence among the participants — confidence in our brand, confidence in their own selling skills and confidence in their ability to communicate with the kind of conviction and nuance that leads to a sale and provides real value to retail customers."

| BY BAXTER BARROWCLIFF |

GOOD RELATIONS The Music Link builds strong relationships with its core dealers leading to new business



uilding a good reputation amongst its dealer base is goal No. 1 for Hayward, Californiabased The Music Link. Steve Patrino, owner and president, said the company strives to meet this goal on a daily basis and, as a result, has an "incredibly high retention rate" with its core dealers — from mom and pops and larger chains. Patrino said that maintaining good relations is something The Music Link has focused on since it began in 1997. This is also one of the aspects voters touched on in this year's Excellence Awards voting with comments like, "great service" and "nice people to work with."

"It's trust, and trust is very difficult," Patrino said. "Once you get it, it's very important that you keep it because once you lose it, you never get it back. I still have the

same customers [from] our customer list from the first few days when we opened up, and I was making cold calls. I think that's a big deal."

Patrino's style of business rebukes others methods of constantly looking for new customers to do business with. Patrino said investing deeper with its current clientele brings new business in on its own.

"What's actually more important for me is selling deeper into existing customers," Patrino said. "Because if that formula works, new customers will come to you. If that formula doesn't work, you're forced to get new customers."





GRASSROOTS BY MICHAEL GALLANT JOHN CHARLOW THE CONTROL OF THE CONT

D'Addario's innovative Reserve Method Program connects its artists with its dealers and institutions

hen it came to spreading the word about the D'Addario line of woodwind reeds and mouthpieces, the Excellence winner took a unique approach: Introducing the products to the music community from the ground up.

D'Addario's Reserve Method Program began as a prototype in 2011, when one professional musician in Texas was selected to help promote Reserve clarinet mouthpieces. Dubbed Reserve Method Artists, these brand ambassadors visit local schools, giving educational clinics and product demonstrations.

"The Reserve Method Program is a tactile marketing initiative that unites high-level performing artists and teachers with students, institutions, and community retailers," said Kristen McKeon, who co-manages the program with Josh Redman. "It's not that common for students, teachers and institutions to connect with someone working on behalf of a manufacturer, so it's an opportunity we're happy to make possible."

Especially with woodwind players, McKeon continues, technical and gear-based education can easily be overwhelming.

"We've trained our Reserve Method Artists to administer equipment-testing best practices and help students match the right products to their own art," she said. The results have been noteworthy: D'Addario's Chris Scialfa reports a 100-percent increase in Reserve reed sales during the program's last year, with local sales in states with clinicians increasing by a stunning 800 percent within the same timeframe. And that's just the beginning.

Since 2011, the program has grown to include 28 clinicians in 20 states across the United States, with each artist scheduling four appointments per month at institutions ranging from elementary schools to universities, and local retailers to pro-repair shops. Regardless of the location, McKeon said, the program makes a point of clearly answering the question, "What's in it for me?" for every single participant.

Local retailers are looped into all Reserve Method clinics, for example, and artists are trained to execute sales on their behalf via mobile technologies like Square.

"It's very important that we insure that we are driving sales to members of each community we're working in," McKeon said. "The first question we train our artists to ask anyone they're connecting with is where they shop. If the answer isn't someone in the community, we make sure that the audience knows that this program happens in partnership with local retailers. We always want to bring sales and educational opportunities to them."

Audience members at the artists' presentations can expect to see and sample D'Addario products, while also learning about topics relevant to their musical needs and interests — classical, jazz or beyond. But the educational aspect of the program isn't limited to students alone.

"It's important for us to provide opportunities for our artists themselves to develop entrepreneurial and communication skills," McKeon said. "Most of the artists that we have teaching are highlevel, conservatory-trained musicians. At least ten of them have doctorates. But they might not have had an opportunity to learn in the music business arena or to understand how things work in the sales world, so we try to give them experiences from which they can grow and learn."





THE PROBLEM BARROWCLIFF SOLVERS

The Music People strives to develop products that solve musicians' problems

he Music People is more than just a musicial accessory manufacturer. It's a problem solver. For 35 years, the company has been solving musicians' problems — starting from day one when President Jim Hennessy had the idea to build a guitar rack to hold upwards of three or four instruments. Failing to convince his then boss Charlie Kaman on the idea, Hennessy ventured out on his own and started his own company.

"Because that is how the company was started, that's how we continue [today]," said Jeremy Payne, brand director and national accounts manager. "That's how we approach new products. 'How can we solve the problems or make performing more convenient or more enjoyable for musicians?'"

And retailers appreciate the company's ingenuity. One retail voter lauded The Music People saying, "Some of their products solve musician problems that have always been there, some we didn't even know we had. This allows us to be relevant in the eyes of the consumer, literally making their lives easier and the music making more productive."

This forward-thinking mindset has allowed The Music People to grow in size and profitability alongside its endless array of problem-solving products.

"I'm not sure if we've ever had a year where we didn't grow as a company," Payne said. "Certainly not in the past decade. So, every year we've seen growth. We talk about the future of the company and how we're going to make that leap from being a \$42–43 million company to be a \$55–60 million onwards and really working our way up in the industry."

| BY MICHAEL GALLANT |

WHITE HAT PHILOSOPHY

St. Louis Music soars by putting the dealer first

t every St. Louis Music meeting, President, CEO and owner Mark Ragin reminds his employees that "we are the company that wears the white hat. Everything we do has to be based on that. If dealers feel comfortable and know that we are in their corner, that's the big thing."

St. Louis Music's dealer-centric culture has resonated throughout the MI industry, earning the company widespread loyalty. "The staff from top to bottom take an active interest in my business and my success," wrote one Excellence voter.

Voters also praised St. Louis Music's selection, pricing, programs,



and fill rate — the latter of which has been increased by the company by roughly one third in the last six months. Also mentioned was St. Louis Music's focus on the school band, orchestra, and overall educational market.

"Education has always been the backbone of our company and will always be a major part of what we do," Ragin said. "We've dramatically increased our stock levels in all aspects and have

expanded our focus on combo and percussion products."

Key to keeping the customer first — in band products and beyond — is a team of dedicated veterans.

"If you could take a tour of our company, we'd start with Linda in billing who's been here for 42 years," Ragin said. "Then in the violin shop, the person in charge has been there over 40 years. In the guitar shop, too, there are three guys who we've had for over 40 years. The list goes on."

Ragin said part of that is due to the fact that St. Louis Music is a close-knit company with an open door policy.

"Anybody can see me any time and dealers can always call me directly if there are any problems," Ragin said. "It's all in service of keeping the customer coming first."



BY JOHN JANOWIAK

STORIED SUPPLIER

Manufacturing stateside and indentifying areas for improvement have helped **Conn-Selmer** manage to grow above industry growth

or B&O retailers, Conn-Selmer seems to be hitting all the right notes lately.

"Although they have been a leader for decades in the school music business, they have rededicated themselves to an outreach program for band and orchestra directors that is unsurpassed, led by Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser and the Music Education division," said one retailer in nominating the company for a Supplier Excellence award. "Conn-Selmer Institute, VIP Days, and a host of other programs have provided some new perspectives on the educator-retailer-manufacturer partnerships."

Retailers also praised the company for having great fill rates, fair customer-protection practices and an even-handed MAP policy that lets independent dealers sell at a fair discount while still making a healthy profit. Most of all, they praised Conn-Selmer's broad range of student and professional instruments, about 75 percent of which are still made in the United States. Ever since 2003, when Steinway Musical Instruments acquired United Musical Instruments and merged it with Selmer, the company has held sway as, by far, the largest manufacturer of band and orchestra instruments in the nation.

John Stoner became president 13 years ago and served at the helm during the merger and through the recession that struck the industry soon after. Although he and his team considered manufacturing products overseas to cut costs, they ultimately decided to keep their operations in the United States. "We think it differentiates us from a lot of other manufacturers," Stoner said. "We knew we were improving the efficiencies in our plants, and we were confident we could continue that trend. Our entire team is proud to be a U.S. manufacturer."

Above & Beyond Growth

When the economy slowed down, Conn-Selmer saw it as an opportunity to take a good look at itself and



identify areas for improvement.

"And so we focused our resources on improving the service and the quality, which I think the dealers have recognized," Stoner said. "When the business picked up again, we were in a much better position from an efficiency and cost standpoint because we made those improvements. And we haven't looked back since."

For the past several years, the company has grown above industry growth both internationally and domestically, Stoner said. In the past year alone, it has added a host of new skill sets and talents to the organization. It hired Markus Theinert as vice president of marketing and Jeff Miller as vice president of operations. It added category managers in low brass and accessories, and it enhanced the Division of Education with several new employees.

Dr. Lautzenheiser, the company's vice president of education, continues to seed the market. Heading up the Conn-Selmer Institute, he equips music educators with the resources they need to build and sustain thriving music education programs. This year the institute had 350 attendees — the maximum the facility would hold — with a waiting list of 20 more.

Programs like this aim to strengthen the foundation of the entire industry, Stoner said. "And if we continue to do that well, the dealer benefits from it, and all the manufacturers will benefit from it."

The merged company has come a long way in 13 years, and the future looks promising. "Through a lot of hard work by a lot of people, we're going to utilize the strength of our brands, our U.S. manufacturing, and our division of education to grow participation in instrumental music."



PHOTO: ANJANI LYNN WHITE

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FROM THE TOP

INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL GALLANT

MARK TERRY I JAM US MUSIC GROUP

HOW DO YOU START YOUR DAY?

Every morning I have a ritual of checking the news from all the places where I have lived. It takes a little time, as the list includes Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles, Vermont, Montana, and London, but now with the apps on my phone, I can get it done rather quickly. After that, I feel ready to take on the world.

WHAT ABOUT ONCE YOU'RE IN THE OFFICE?

I always check my numbers first. I watch key business metrics like a hawk — sales, inventory levels, fill rates, things like that. So many decisions every day depend on those numbers, and it's crucial to stay on top of your business. You can't check that information every few days and expect to be successful.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE?

It's very open. I'm a big believer in real leadership, as opposed to just management. I find the right people for the job and let them do their thing — I like to say that I give them running lanes to work in. One of the keys to my personal success is that I hire people who are smarter than I am and are very good in particular areas, and I try to keep them focused in those areas and get out of their way.

WHAT'S ONE OF THE CHALLENGES YOU HAVE TO DEAL WITH WHEN MANAGING LIKE THAT?

One of the biggest challenges in business, in general, is maintaining focus, so if an employee of mine has a particular expertise in product management and the skill set to excel in that that area, I let him or her make all of the decisions. I don't step in and say what color the speakers should be or how it should be built. So, expertise is important, too. I make sure that guitar people are developing guitars, and drum people are developing drums.

ARE THERE ANY PRODUCTS THAT YOU WORK WITH THAT YOU'RE PARTICULARLY FOND OF?

Probably Washburn guitars. I can't play for a damn, but I love the craftsmanship. I'm a bit of a wood smith myself — not a luthier, but a furniture maker — and the craftsmanship that goes into those guitars is amazing. I also just love the story behind Washburn. It's the second

oldest guitar brand in the United States, and it's roots are in the blues scene in Chicago, which is where I was born. It's very romantic to me, and I'm just enamored with it.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE MI WORLD?

I started as a recording engineer in New York City. One night, at 2 a.m. at the end of an 18-hour work day, I looked around and realized that I was the lowest paid guy in the room. I said to myself, "I bet whoever sells this equipment makes a lot of money," and the next thing you know, I'm selling mixing consoles and studio equipment throughout the Northeast. It was a great, heady time in the late 1970s and early '80s.

I remember the time that I was in the Hit Factory and met John Lennon when he was working on his last album. I had just sold [the Hit Factory] a Q-Lock synchronize to sync two 24 track tape machines together. That was my life, and I enjoyed it a great deal.

HAS YOUR BACKGROUND AS AN ENGINEER AND SALESMAN HELPED YOU AS AN EXECUTIVE?

Spending my whole professional life with musicians and understanding the musician mentality gives me a valuable view of the marketplace.

At the same time, I've held executive positions in some extremely large Fortune 500 and New York Stock Exchange companies. I was a senior VP at Fender, which is owned by a private equity firm — so I know how big and small businesses work, and how musicians think. That triangulation puts me in the right seat to be running a great company like this one.

WHAT'S ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT YOUR JOB?

When I can see the light click on with employees. When I know that they see the mission ahead, have the vision to accomplish it and see them start running up the hill towards it. That's when you know you're doing well. Getting everybody on the same page and focused on the same collective goal is so important, and I've worked in some very big corporations that waste so much time squabbling with one another. I've always said that, when a company starts spending more time focused within its four walls than outside its four walls, the company is in trouble.



MARK TERRY I KMC MUSIC

HOW SOS

I can't tell you how many companies there are that spend all of their energy inside the building — in conference rooms and meetings — fighting with each other instead of focusing on customers and the marketplace. If, as the leader of a company, you can give your team the mission and vision of what needs to happen and let them go to take care of their customers and products, then you can see amazing results and it's incredibly rewarding. It's funny — I look at all of the great accomplishments in my career and they've all been done by other people. I put them in the right position, gave them the right challenges, and they made things happen. I'm thrilled by that.

YOU LEAD NOT ONLY KMC, BUT ALSO DAVITT AND HANSER AND US MUSIC. HOW DO YOU KEEP THE BUSINESSES WORKING TOGETHER AND NOT GETTING IN EACH OTHERS' WAY?

Keeping these companies strategically aligned and dif-

ferentiated is a big part of my role. Dealers should have reasons to go to both KMC and Davitt and Hanser, for example. Or, if they only want to go to one, they need to be able to get the service they need from that company. If we sold exactly the same thing with both companies in the same way, the companies would cannibalize each other.

One way that we go to market differently is that KMC has a dedicated field sales force while Davitt & Hanser uses indepen-

dent sales reps. And both companies' sales people have lots of personal relationships. Many have been with the companies for decades and go way back with the dealers that they work with. They've built a great bond and that trust is important.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH FINDING AND RETAINING THOSE RIGHT PEOPLE THAT WILL STAY WITH THE COMPANY FOR DECADES?

It's always a challenge. My mantra is that experience and knowledge do not always equal competency. A lot of people make a mistake in business where they assume that, just because this guy has been around forever and knows about products, that he will be good at the job you're trying to fill, whether it's a sales position, product manager, whatever. You have to look for real competency and not just the fact that someone has done it all before,

so to speak. I call that principle hiring the person, not the paper.

HOW DO YOU PUT THAT PRINCIPLE INTO PRACTICE?

If I interview someone and feel good about them, it usually works out. If I interview a candidate and am worried, but hire him or her anyway because the background is right, it usually backfires. It's a matter of skill versus experience. Our industry is full of very experienced and knowledgeable people who, unfortunately, can't get the job done. At the end of the day, getting the job done is what counts.

GIVEN YOUR YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY, ANY PREDICTIONS FOR THE FUTURE?

This industry has been around for thousands of years and will be around for thousands more, since it's not the sort of business where Samsung will come out with a new

> chip tomorrow, and we'll all suddenly be obsolete. As long as there have been human beings making and enjoying music, there has been a need for musical instruments. It's fundamental to our DNA and what changes over time is simply the instrument and the channel. Accordion used to be the biggest seller in the United States and, at one point, it was the harpsichord. Now it's acoustic guitar. Next year, who knows?

'I'VE ALWAYS SAID THAT WHEN
A COMPANY STARTS SPENDING
MORE TIME FOCUSED WITHIN
ITS FOUR WALLS THAN OUSIDE
ITS FOUR WALLS, THE
COMPANY IS IN
TROUBLE.'

WHAT ABOUT THE CHANNEL CHANGING?

There have been fears that catalog sales would put the whole industry out of business, then it was chain stores, then the Internet, and then Amazon. The reality is that there will always be a demand for products that make music. If you look at the history of the industry on a revenue basis, the ups and downs are minor compared to any other business you can think of, which makes it a great industry. One key to survival is being able to adapt to the change from brick and mortar to Internet sales — and, as we're starting to see now, back to brick and mortar. The people that can adapt to those changes are the ones who will succeed.

IF NOT MUSIC, WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

I would probably be a professional fishing guide. [Laughs.]

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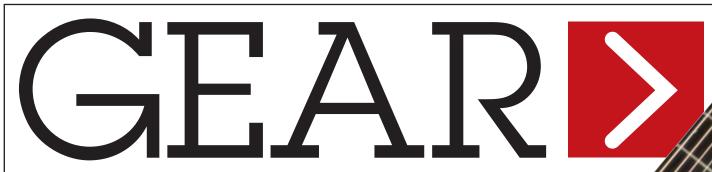
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Palatino unveils new violin kit
> Pianos & Keyboards | P. 77
Roli launches Seaboard RISE

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> DJ & Lighting | P. 78





KORG

GA CUSTOM

Korg's GA Custom packs high-end functionality into a convenient and portable package. The GA Custom features a 3D visual meter with three types of display modes to deliver visibility and precision, input/output jacks, plus a built-in high-sensitivity mic that allows for tuning not only acoustic guitar but also wind and string instruments, as well as keyboards. {korg.com}



Pickup System with EQ and tuner. The Bubinga U-BASS sports distinctive grain patterns of Bubinga wood on the top, back and sides and comes with a custom-fitted padded logo gig bag.







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DD-500

BOSS has debuted the DD-500, a versatile digital delay pedal, featuring 12 distinctive delay modes along with deep editing controls, a graphic display, patch memories and MIDI. Plus, the Vintage Digital mode offers BOSS's first emulations of classic sounds from the 1980s, including the SDE-2000 and SDE-3000 rack units from Roland and the BOSS DD-2. {bossus.com}

GHS

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AMERICAN SERIES

GHS has launched the Americana series of specialized guitar strings, developed for a wide range of instruments, including acoustic guitars, banjos, mandolins, pedal steel guitars and resonator guitars, drawing on input from their artist family to define preferred gauge sizes. All American series strings feature cryogenic treatment to extend string life and tone, plus GHS' NitroPack packaging. {ghsstrings.com}

landolin



ROTOSOUND CARE PRODUCTS

TAP/CTL

DIGITAL DELAY DD-500

Rotosound has released a range of quality care products including guitar polish, string lube and lemon oil. The guitar polish's cleaning action reduces fingerprinting, streaking, dust and grime in seconds, restoring an instrument's shine and luster. The siliconbased string lube aids friction reduction as well as helps to prolong string life and the brightness of the string tone, while the lemon oil is a natural conditioner that will keep the fretboard looking fresh. {rotosound.com}



THE SCHAFFER REPLICA

Modeled after the original Schaffer-Vega Diversity System (the wireless transmitter used by guitarists like Angus Young and Eddie Van Halen in the late 1970s and early '80s), SoloDallas' Schaffer Replica has been designed to boost low-mid range frequencies, as well as "compand" (compress then expand) the signal, enhancing the instrument's tone. {solodallas.com}







FENDER ACOUSTIC SFX

Fender's Acoustic SFX features smooth bent plywood construction, designed to enhance the outward projection of the guitar's tone. With a lightweight design, portability and room-filling Stereo Field Expansion technology, the SFX is the ideal solution for the acoustic player looking for a grab-and-go rig for small venues. The amp imparts dynamic life to the onboard hall reverb, echo, delay, chorus and Vibratone effects by moving them around the listening area to create a multidimensional sound. {fender.com}

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MOD KITS DIY RING RESONATOR DELUXE

MOD Kits DIY's Ring Resonator Deluxe contains the octave-up fuzz effect of the original Ring Resonator with added LED, push-push output pot and minitoggle switch. With the push-push output pot down, the octave-up effect is removed and fuzz-only is achieved. In the fuzz-only mode of operation, the toggle switch lets users switch between dark fuzz and bright fuzz tones.

[modkitsdiy.com]







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ANTELOPE

R49

The Antelope R4S remote control is a flexible, USB-powered companion to the Satori monitoring controller. The R4S puts all the functionality of the Satori monitor controller at the user's fingertips, making it easy to access source and speaker section, volume level, summing, stereo effects and even talkback. The R4S has a small footprint and ergonomic design, which makes it easy to fit in limited desk-space. {antelopeaudio.com}





the CONVERT-2 and CONVERT-8
two-channel and eight-channel
reference digital-to-analog converters. CONVERT one-space
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Todd Whitelock, Audio Engineer for Chick Corea and Wynton
Marsalis says of the CONVERT-8,
"It was the clearest, most detailed
stereo field I've ever mixed in."

{dangerousmusic.com}

SONICSMITHS THE FOUNDRY

Sonicsmiths's *The Foundry* is a sound creation tool for composers and designers that lets users quickly produce original sounds. *The Foundry* draws from over 18,000 samples, allowing for a plethora of ways to manipulate and combine sounds by selecting adjectives that describe the ideal sound, selected from groups ranging from non-pitched and pitched to simple and complex.

{sonicsmiths.com}

LD SYSTEMS MAUI 5

Providing both sound reinforcement and monitoring from a single system, LD Systems' MAUI 5 sports 800 watts of peak power, yet weighs in under 25 pounds. The ported 8-inch subwoofer and three-piece column P.A. boasts extra wide dispersion, extended vertical directivity and superior feedback resistance while custom multipin connectors facilitate fast, cableless assembly. The MAUI 5 incorporates a four-channel mixer with LD Systems' LECC digital processing. {Idsystems.com}









HAL LEONARD JAZZ DRUMMING

Jazz Drumming is part of the Essential Concepts series from Musicians Institute Press and is designed to help today's rock, pop and R&B drummer learn the jazz idiom quickly and efficiently. It is an inclusive in-depth study of how to authentically perform alongside a rhythm section within jazz's popular styles and forms. The package includes a set of detailed charts, and each composition focuses on a particular musical form, drum set sound, solo concept and comping approach. {halleonard.com}

PEARL CRYSTAL BEAT

Pearl has introduced additional finish options to its crystal beat line of drum sets, including Frost Acrylic and Tangerine Glass. The Crystal Beat series feature seamless construction that is molded (not rolled), creating a strong acrylic drum set that can stand up to the rigors of touring. {pearldrum.com}

VIC FIRTH STEVE GADD WIRE RRUSH

STEVE GADD WIRE BRUSHVic Firth's Steve Gadd Wire

Brush has refined the wire brush design with a new angle that lets the wire better glide across the drumhead, providing a smoother sweep and a velvet swish. Additionally, the retractable pull-rod now includes a third crimp that offers the player an enhanced setting capability. Plus, the brushes are labeled with the special commemorative 70th birthday logo. MSRP: \$40.15. {vicfirth.com}





PALATINO

GENOA VIOLIN KIT

......

Palatino has debuted the Genoa violin kit, which includes the Genoa violin, assembled with a hand-carved spruce top and hand-carved figured maple back and sides. The strong, high-density ebony fingerboard is comfortable, free from buzz, and won't wear down over time. Also included is the Palatino octagonal stick box, full suspension oblong case featuring a deluxe bluevelvet interior with a blanket, plus four bow holders and a hygrometer. MAP: \$159.99. {themusiclink.com}



PETERSON

PITCHGRABBER MOBILE

Peterson's PitchGrabber Mobile is a clip-on tuning pickup that works by capturing an instrument's vibrations via a sensitive piezo pickup that can be used with both acoustic and electric instruments. The PitchGrabber Mobile improves tuning accuracy and confidence by isolating the instrument's output, giving mobile tuning app users a direct instrument connection. {petersontuners.com}



THOMASTIK-INFELD

Thomastik-Infeld has introduced Versum cello strings, which are balanced with a "sweet" top end and a "warm, velvety" bottom. With their focused sound and powerful intonation, they give an instrument a unique personality while offering versatility, as well as boast a long, stable lifespan. They are ideal for principal and orchestra players, as well as quartets. {connollymusic.com}









AIM GIFTS MINT TINS

Stuff those holiday stockings and get your store's cash register ringing by carrying AIM Gifts' music design candy mint tins. Each display holds 24 mint tins with each tin holding 50 mints. Available tins include piano, multi note, violin, acoustic and electric guitar designs. The tins are reusable and make great collector gifts. {aimgifts.com}

ROLI SEABOARD RISE

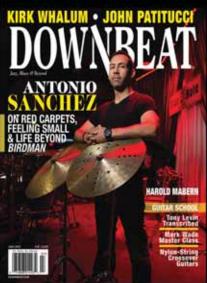
ROLI has announced the Seaboard RISE, a universally accessible music-making device. Like the Seaboard GRAND, the Seaboard RISE features patented SEA Interface technology, which remodels the keyboard as a pressure-sensitive, continuous surface that responds to subtle gestures. The Seaboard RISE's "continuous surface" lets musicians shape notes by modulating the character of sound in real time with simple finger movements. {roli.com}





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ASK THE | MORE BUSINESS ADVICE FROM | RETAIL EXCELLENCE WINNERS

On Building Relationships With Suppliers:

"I had a relative who was really close to me, who used to say that if you want to make good relationships, just get on a plane and go. Don't second guess yourself. So, that's what I did early on if I wanted to build [specialty custom-shop guitars]. That's how it started for me. We're constantly working with different companies and trying to do our own thing. It's really one of the things that separates us from everybody else."

Tommy Colletti The Music Zoo



ON MAKING LIFELONG **CUSTOMERS:**

"In that ever-changing landscape of the combo market it's very competitive, and it's easy to get distracted with top brand sales. But you can't; you've got to remain true to the customer's experience and recognizing what you need to do to create a lifelong music maker."

> Robin Walenta West Music

On Multi-Channel Sales:

"The people that think it's cheap to have a website are certainly mistaken because it's very expensive to have a really good website and to maintain it in the proper way. In the past few years people have been saying, 'Wow, store traffic really seems to be down. What's going to happen?', 'Is it best to have the online and not the brick and mortar?' We've seen a little bit of uptick in the store traffic, but again it's come through the website, so they kind of play together. We're just going to continue on our Web work and continue on the store [because] that's been our plan from day one to have both."

> Jim Pettit Memphis Drum Shop

ON BUILDING A WEBSITE THAT SERVES AS AN **EXTENSION OF THE STORE:**

"We saw the need for a website that had to stack up against the other guys, but we didn't do it the same way. Our website is not 'Sale, sale, sale; ad, ad, ad; 50-percent off slashed prices.' It's a more curated experience. We built our own photo studio, and we take our product photos because we're trying to convey this hightouch one-on-one experience.

"On the website, we took a lot of care to make it very easy. Because we know that customers don't want to pick up the phone and call, we made it very easy for the customers to talk to us directly through the website. We have LiveChat, [with] four guys manning it. On every single page of the website, there's a box that pops up from the bottom that says 'Ask an Expert.' We made it very in-your-face obvious that, if you are looking at anything, we're right there, and we want you to call us, talk to us, email us. The way we see it, the website is just a way to have people find us."

> Adam Levin Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center

ON PROMOTING YOUR STORE USING **SOCIAL MEDIA:**

"We put a little money into Facebook advertising to promote events and products, but mostly we try to provide consistent interesting content that satisfies our followers and draws new ones in."

> Scott Enael Russo Music





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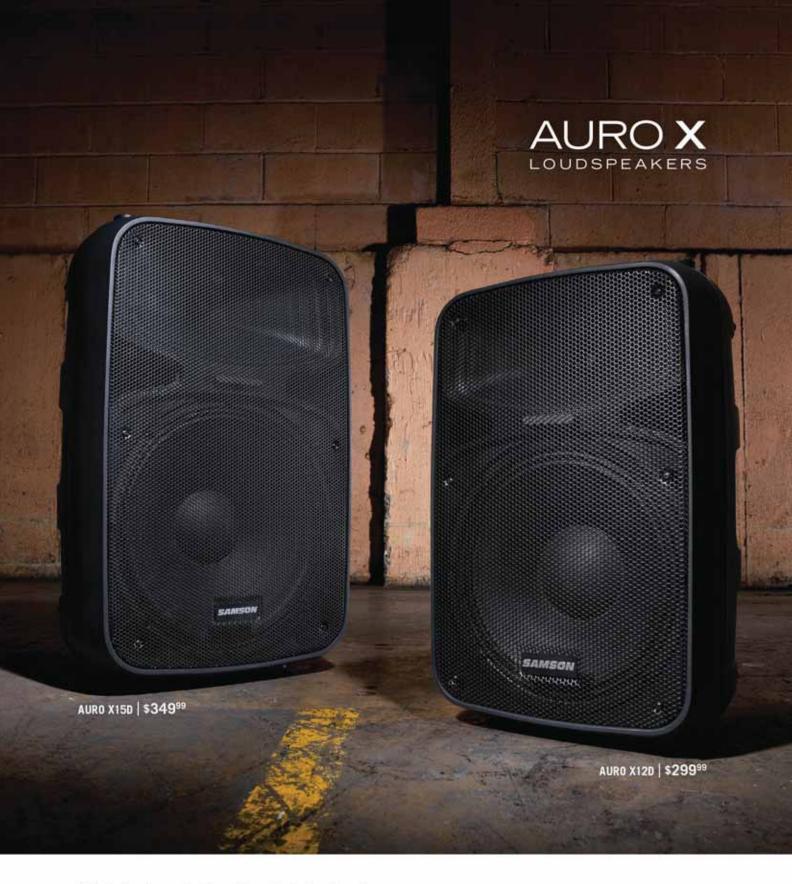
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