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MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

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MIDDLE-WEIGHT CHAMPIONS: 61-KEY SYNTHS TAKE CENTER STAGE

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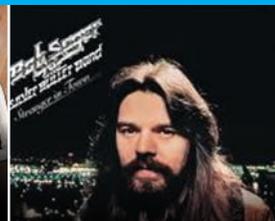
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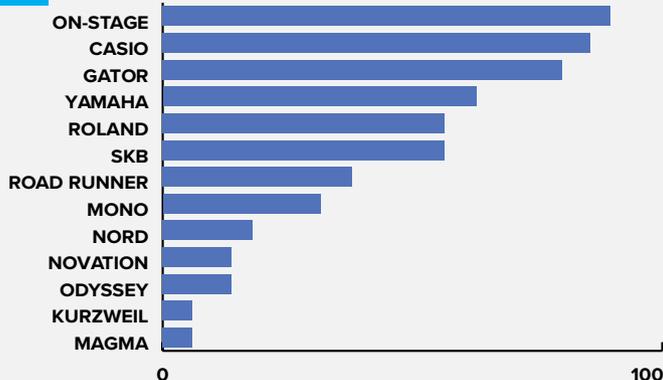
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**By Christian
Wissmuller**

The Music Class Is Still in Session... Barely

It's nearing the end of another school year in districts throughout the nation and, as industrious teachers already begin to map out their lesson-plans for the coming year, it'd behoove those of us *not* actively engaged on a day-to-day level with public education to imagine how things will play out in September. Walk into any elementary school in America this fall and you'll likely find a few familiar sights: backpacks too heavy for small shoulders, classrooms festooned with construction paper optimism, and—if you're lucky—the faint sound of “Hot Cross Buns” drifting from a distant music room. But more and more, that music room is dark, or shared with the lunch program, or in some cases... completely gone.

Welcome to public music education in 2025: still kicking, still inspiring, but too often surviving by the skin of its teeth. If you're in the MI industry, this should keep you up at night.

Here's the good news: Music education has never been more *proven*. Study after study confirms what we've all known since the first time a trumpet cracked out a C major scale—music makes better humans. It boosts cognition, fosters collaboration, improves attendance, and lights up the parts of a young brain that standard testing will never touch. That's not news. That's gospel.

The bad news? In far too many school districts, especially the underfunded and overlooked, music education is still treated as a luxury. A “nice-to-have.” Something that exists only when a bond measure passes or when a nonprofit swoops in with a box of used recorders and a prayer. In a year where AI literacy and STEM expansion dominate the educational conversation, “the arts” get lumped in as a talking point, not a priority.

Let's call it what it is: neglect. Budget neglect. Cultural neglect. And frankly, a kind of institutional amnesia that forgets how many of us found our voice—or at least survived middle school—because of a school band, choir, or jazz ensemble.

But here's where it gets complicated. The *visibility* of school music has never been higher. Thanks to TikTok, YouTube, and every high schooler with GarageBand and a ring light, music *feels* like it's everywhere. And it is—*outside* of schools. Inside? Too many programs are scraping by, held together by overworked educators, donated reeds, and the occasional fundraiser car wash.

So what does this mean for those of us in the musical products world?

It means we stop treating school music like a back-catalog business and start seeing it for what it really is: the future. The first clarinet a 10-year-old tries today? That's the future saxophonist in your 2040 NAMM booth. The music stand the school orchestra bought this year? That's a tangible investment in a lifelong customer who hasn't bought her first effects pedal yet.

If we lose music education, we don't just lose a few SKUs from the B2B channel. We lose the whole next generation of players, creators, and customers.

Thankfully, some in the MI industry are stepping up. We're seeing more partnerships with school districts, more accessible entry-level instruments, and a growing understanding that equity in music education isn't charity—it's strategy. That's a start. But it's not enough. The industry needs to advocate louder, partner smarter, and, yes, push harder for policy that prioritizes arts education not as an elective, but as essential. And I'm not just talking about the recent NAMM Fly-In, though that remains a vital and inspiring initiative.

To all the manufacturers, retailers, and reps reading this: If you're not actively fighting for school music, you're conceding your future market share. To the educators: We see you. We support you. And we'll keep shouting from the rooftops until your programs are funded like the essentials they are.

The music class is still in session in 2025. But the clock is ticking. Let's make sure we're not the generation that let the music die on our watch.

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PUBLISHER OF



TWO OLD HIPPIES GUITARS, LLC ANNOUNCES SALE OF BREEDLOVE AND BEDELL GUITARS



Two Old Hippies Guitars, LLC, parent company of Breedlove and Bedell Guitars, is proud to announce the completed sale of the company to Nashville-based artists and music industry advocates Pete Mroz and Shannon Pollard. The passing of the torch marks the beginning of a new chapter for the respected American acoustic guitar brands.

This transition brings the company under the stewardship of two individuals who have each spent a lifetime immersed in music—as players, performers, and dedicated stewards of the musical community.

Pete Mroz, a nationally recognized singer-songwriter and former standout on NBC's "The Voice," has long been part of the Breedlove and Bedell family as an artist. In addition to his deep connection to songwriting, stage performance, and guitar culture, Mroz brings advanced business acumen to the role, shaped by his high-performing roles at brands like Ping Golf, Travis Mathew, and FootJoy. His combined expertise in music and business positions him uniquely to help guide the next era of Breedlove and Bedell Guitars.

Shannon Pollard, grandson of country music icon Eddy Arnold and founder of Plowboy Records, is a longstanding entrepreneur with a unique focus on bespoke development. His career spans music, design, and craftsmanship—

including the award-winning Você community in Nashville, where his passion for high-end woodworking and reverence for the natural landscape are deeply reflected. Pollard brings a commitment to preserving musical legacy while creating space for new voices to emerge—honoring the roots of American music while helping shape its next chapter.

Together, Mroz and Pollard are honored to carry forward the legacy built by Tom Bedell, his team, and the generations that came before. Their shared values of acoustic excellence, uncompromising craftsmanship, and community connection align directly with the spirit of both brands.

"We're incredibly grateful to Tom Bedell and the entire team for creating this foundation and vision for us to build on," said Pete Mroz. "We can't wait to get to know our partners, artists, community of players, and everyone who loves these instruments. This is a legacy we intend to honor and elevate."

Shannon Pollard added, "We feel a deep sense of responsibility and are honored to help shape the future of these brands. This isn't just a business venture—it's a personal and passionate commitment to ensuring Breedlove and Bedell continue to inspire and serve players around the world."

The heart and soul of both brands—their craft,

values, and team—remain firmly in place, with operations continuing uninterrupted at their U.S.-based custom shop headquarters.

New Orleans' Violin Shop Celebrates 50 Years While Preparing for New Ownership

Keller Strings, a second-generation family-owned shop specializing in orchestral stringed instruments, is celebrating 50 years in business as it transitions to new ownership.

"We are super excited to watch our 50-year-old family business continue to serve the needs of our string community in the Gulf Coast and beyond," said owner Paula Keller Smith.

Previously established in Lawrence, Kansas, Keller Strings relocated to New Orleans in 2013 with a mission to provide sales, rentals, repair and restoration to the city where music is the backbone of our culture. Currently located in the Lakeview area with easy access to I-10, the full-service shop has become a vital resource for the local musical community and has contributed to the creation and growth of at least five new orchestral string programs in the city.

The new owners plan to boost national awareness with a greater selection of professional instruments and online sales. Current owners Paula Keller Smith and John W. Smith plan to retire in mid-summer.

NAMM NeXT SHIFTS TO ONLINE CONTENT ON VITAL TOPICS FOR ALL NAMM MEMBERS



NAMM has announced that this summer's NAMM NeXT event will now serve the needs of NAMM's entire global membership base by offering free online sessions on the most vital topics, including:

Global trade; Future of global economic growth; Leadership strategies to navigate disruption

Originally planned as an in-person event in Nashville June 30-July 1, and currently in its second year, NAMM NeXT offers high-quality professional development from globally recognized speakers on topics that impact NAMM members and the music industry.

"In speaking with our NAMM members, it is

clear that businesses are laser-focused right now on tariff impacts and navigating economic uncertainty" said John Mlynczak, NAMM president and CEO. "NAMM will always pivot as an association to support our industry, and that focus right now is providing all NAMM members with the most relevant and timely information to help them navigate these recent global economic changes."

Chris White, Chairman of NAMM's board of directors and president and CEO of White House of Music, Inc., added "Our NAMM NeXT event is packed with compelling business content and creative ideas. Shifting that incredible content

online for free in 2025 will help ALL members. It is the right move at the right time."

NAMM NeXT online content, which will be complimentary for all NAMM members, will be available starting on July 1.

In addition, NAMM NeXT Europe will still be held June 3-4 in Brussels, where the top music industry brands, companies, and associations from across Europe will meet to focus on how to strengthen our European music products industry.

NAMM will announce the 2026 NAMM NeXT offerings later this year.



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GEORGE LYNCH SHREDS ON ESP AT BILL'S MUSIC



Bill's Music in Catonsville "Music City" Maryland recently hosted rock guitarist and ESP Signature Artist, George Lynch.

Lynch is best known for his work with the 80's hard rock band Dokken and his current band Lynch Mob. Regarded as one of the most renowned and influential guitarists of the 1980s, Lynch is noted for his distinctive playing style and sound. Session Bassist Dave DeMarco and Drummer Frank Young joined in for a powerful performance showcasing Lynch's exceptional technical skill, speed and accuracy. The Clinic & Meet n' Greet drew a crowd of over 200 to the family-owned music retailer, which is celebrating its 60th year in business this year.

Many of those in attendance brought pictures, vinyl and their own ESP guitars to get autographs from the legendary shredder. One lucky attendee drew the winning ticket for an ESP Ltd George Lynch Tiger Stripe Electric Guitar valued at \$699 while many others took home ESP hats, t-shirts and guitar straps.

SUPPLIER SCENE

PRS GUITARS BECOMES EXCLUSIVE ELECTRIC GUITAR SPONSOR OF THE JOHN LENNON EDUCATIONAL TOUR BUS



PRS Guitars has announced its partnership with the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus as the exclusive electric guitar sponsor into the spring of 2026. The sponsorship officially kicked off with PRS Guitars hosting the bus, crew and several local high school music students at its Stevensville, Md. factory today. Paul Reed Smith, founder & managing general partner of PRS Guitars, helped to mentor the students, who were writing an original song and recording it in the mobile, state-of-the-art recording studio. Beyond monetary sponsorship support, PRS has also donated a selection of guitars to the bus for students to use.

"This partnership highlights our shared priority of music education and provides opportunities for developing musicians to get their hands on exceptional equipment in a professional recording experience," said PRS Guitars director of artist and community relations, Bev Fowler. "We look forward to an exciting year ahead!"

Inspired by John and Yoko's vision of embracing creativity and imagining peace, the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus is committed to providing youth, communities, and schools across

the nation with free events, workshops, interactive experiences, and hands-on opportunities to create original audio, video, and broadcast projects that reflect their ideas and inspirations. Since 1998, the Lennon Bus has brought the nonprofit mobile studio featuring the latest music, audio and video products and solutions as well as workforce development, to many hundreds of thousands of students across the country. The Bus' mission is made possible with the support of some of the other biggest names in music and technology including Apple, Dolby, and Avid.

The Lennon Bus will be accompanying Wu-Tang Clan on their 2025 "Wu-Tang Forever: The Final Chamber" tour dates, kicking off June 6 at the CFG Bank Arena in Baltimore. Students will visit and record on the Bus in each of the 27 cities of the tour. RZA, the founding member of Wu-Tang, is writing a collection of original songs to be recorded on the Bus. Students and celebrity guests will be included on the recordings. The entire process will be shot by the Lennon Bus' onboard crew and a Dolby crew, and edited to be a documentary to be previewed October 24 at the Dolby Theater in Las Vegas.

D&B'S KSL SOLVES THE EQUATION FOR ED SHEERAN'S MATHEMATICS TOUR IN INDIA



Ed Sheeran's Mathematics world tour successfully completed its India leg in February, employing a KSL PA system from d&b audiotechnik's ground-breaking SL-Series to address the need of a lightweight, flexible system with no compromise in sound quality. The tour also marked a couple of notable firsts for the region's live touring industry, while keeping the tunes clean and the audiences happy.

The d&b KSL system was supplied for Sheeran by Mumbai-based NJSM ProSound. Signaling the KSL system's wide acceptance across the sub-continent, the entire tour of India used a d&b KSL system supplied by one vendor. More importantly perhaps, the India shows were preceded on 24 January by the first ever international concert in the small Himalayan country of Bhutan, before playing in five cities in India and then completing in the country's capital, Delhi.

To ensure a smooth and successful delivery of the system design and supply, with all the logistical challenges inherent in a tour across the vast sub-continent, NJSM ProSound's team worked closely with d&b India's EAS (Education & Application Support) representative, Neil Lean.

Shows for this leg were presented in end-on format – a less complex setup than the 360° in-the-round productions of previous legs – chosen to minimize deployment challenges to cater to tight setup schedules. d&b's KSL was chosen because the production needed a top-tier system which would be available in enough cities to allow it to leap-frog a touring PA, while supplementing the inventory with local supplies where required. Thanks to KSL's cardioid performance and unequalled full bandwidth directivity, it could also be relied upon to deliver

consistent, controlled, high quality sound for each venue, from the stage itself all the way to the ends of the audience areas.

The system design featured main hangs of KSL8/KSL12 (16 cabinets per side), accompanied by 10 flown SL-Subs per side, plus 24 ground-stacked SL-GSubs in end-fire configuration. These were complemented by d&b's V8 and V12 cabinets as front-fills, with delays provided by KSL, XSL and V-Series cabinets, depending on the specific needs of each venue.

The biggest challenge for the team was transportation logistics. India is almost the same size as Europe, excluding Russia, and cargo landing in a city in the early morning would have to be converted to a tuned system by 10am. Another logistical challenge was the need to ensure that the correct amp racks and connectivity was available at each venue.

Thanks to the characteristic ease of deployment of the d&b system, with its dedicated dollies and integrated rigging solutions, plus the expert on-site support provided by d&b India, the system was comfortably flown and tuned at each site.

The exceptional cardioid performance of KSL, a defining characteristic of d&b's SL-Series, ensured the music was enjoyed without distortion or feedback by the entire audience – a fitting solution for such a globally significant artist. "The SL-Series' cardioid pattern allowed us to open up the body of the system with no worries about feedback from the small body guitars Ed was using on stage," says d&b's Neil Lean.

Ed Sheeran's touring sound team—Simon Kemp at FOH and systems engineer Adam Wells—echoed the audience's positive feedback, expressing their admiration not just for the exceptional audio quality but also for the commitment and professionalism of the local crew. "We delivered outstanding results, and it's incredibly rewarding to have Simon and Adam share that sentiment," says Warren D'Souza of NJSM ProSound.

UPNXTDJ 2025 FROM BASSBOSS

Join the DJX Show, #NoChaser Kidz Café, BASSBOSS, Reloop, and Xone for the third annual #UPnXtDJ Contest, a premier platform for emerging youth DJs to showcase their talents. Open to anyone under 18 in the continental USA, this exciting contest offers a unique opportunity for up-and-coming DJ talent to shine on a national stage. Special guest DJs, including DJ KSprinkles, will be joining the judge's panel this year, with more surprise guest judges to be named later.



The grand prize for the first-place winner includes a pair of RP-2000 MK2 Turntables and a Reloop Mixer. Additionally, the winner will enjoy hotel accommodations at the Hard Rock Hotel in Atlantic City for themselves and a guardian, and will have the opportunity to perform on stage at the DJX Show in Atlantic City, showcasing their skills to a national audience.

Second and third place winners will each receive a Reloop Mixer and the chance to perform on stage at the DJX Show in Atlantic City. Furthermore, the top 10 contestants will be allowed to perform at the DJX Show, providing them with invaluable exposure and experience.

All contestants will receive two DJX Show Exhibit passes for themselves and a guardian, as well as a lifetime subscription to DJ LIFE Digital Issues & Newsletters, ensuring they stay connected with the latest in the DJ industry.

"Having the opportunity to share their skills with the wider DJ community is invaluable for the next generation of talent. We can't wait to hear what these DJs are mixing in their shot at winning the contest!" -Lian Amber, CEO of BASSBOSS

nXt at DJX:

The nXt initiative at DJX is a pioneering effort designed to discover, nurture, and showcase emerging DJ talent. It includes the nXt DJ Summer Camp, which returns to DJX'25, offering students ages 7-20 the chance to advance both life skills and DJ skills that build confidence, leadership, and teamwork. Led by Coach Hapa, a top advocate for a National DJ Education program, students will learn from industry leaders who have performed with icons like Michael Jackson, Earth, Wind & Fire, and Drake. This initiative is a call to action for the industry to support the next generation of DJ talent, producers, and influencers.

The contest runs until July 1, 2025, with winners announced on July 15, 2025. The DJX Show will take place from August 11-14, 2025.

For more information on how to enter and to learn more about the nXt initiative, visit <https://www.djxshow.com/upnxtcontest>.

FRESHLY REMASTERED LIVE AT POMPEII FILM PREMIERE ERUPTS WITH PINK FLOYD'S ORIGINAL ANALOGUE PA WITH CELESTION DRIVERS

Over half a century from its original filming, Pink Floyd's iconic concert film, *Live at Pompeii*, has been digitally re-mastered in 4K with a new high-resolution, Dolby Atmos audio mix by Steven Wilson. Thanks to the meticulous restoration efforts of author and audio historian, Chris Hewitt of CH Vintage Audio, a once in a lifetime opportunity arose for attendees of the world premiere screening to experience the film's soundtrack through Pink Floyd's original analogue PA system used during their 1971 performance in the ancient Roman Amphitheatre. The WEM PA system, groundbreaking for its time, features period-authentic Celestion G12, G10, and MH1000 drivers.

Chris Hewitt's journey into the world of audio began early. "I started listening to rock albums in grammar school," he says. After leaving for college at 16, he started promoting bands through the student union. This led to work as a road manager and sound engineer, with his first festival gig coming before he turned 17, working with the Grateful Dead. Over his career, he supported a who's-who of early punk acts including The Sex Pistols, The Damned, Motörhead, The Stranglers, and many others. Today, Hewitt owns CH Vintage Audio, housing "one of the largest collections of 1960s and 1970s sound equipment."

Hewitt's fascination with Pink Floyd's started decades ago. He recalls first seeing them live around 1969 and being "blown away" by their innovative use of audio, particularly in their opening number "Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast" which started the set with the sounds of frying eggs and bacon panning around the room. Inspired by a photo on the back of the *Ummagumma* album sleeve that showed the band's gear laid out, it became a dream to one day own a large PA system like theirs.

The path to owning Pink Floyd's actual Pompeii PA began incrementally. "I started off by buying six WEM Audio Masters that belonged to Pink Floyd," Hewitt explains. From there, as people learned he was collecting Pink Floyd gear, offers started coming in. While some later PAs used by the band were "fairly standard technology for the time," Hewitt notes that the Pompeii and Dark Side of the Moon PAs were "unique" and represented "groundbreaking live sound" for their era.

The Live at Pompeii PA system was created by WEM (Watkins Electric Music), a UK company considered a pioneer in large-scale concert sound reinforcement. A hallmark of the WEM sound, and this PA specifically, was their use of Celestion drivers in select models.

The system used at Pompeii featured a complex

configuration on each side. This included 10 SL100 slave amps, WEM 4x12 and 2x12 PA columns loaded with Celestion and Goodman 12-inch speakers, and a WEM Festival stack. The Festival stack incorporated Celestion 15-inch bass units, Celestion 12-inch lower mids, and Celestion 10-inch cone speaker upper mid horns. Additional cabinets featured Celestion MH1000 horns and Vitavox 15 cell, multicell horns. The Celestion 12-inch and 10-inch cone speakers used were new G12 and G10 designs at the time, built with different cones and suspensions than their guitar amp counterparts, alongside the MH1000 midrange compression driver developed by Les Ward.

Hewitt highlights key technical and sonic characteristics that make the Pompeii PA stand out, especially compared to modern systems. "Technically, the special thing about the Pompeii system is that all the speakers are running full range," he explains. Unlike modern setups



which use electronic crossovers, "for the most part, in 1971, they hadn't been invented yet." The system operates with a stereo feed where "everything on the same channel gets the same signal." The only thing resembling a crossover is "two 2.0 uf capacitors on the positive leg of the cable on the horn drivers. Everything else, the 15s, 12s, and 10s, even the amps, all get the same signal," says Hewitt.

Beyond the technical design, Hewitt points to the sonic character imparted by the drivers. "The other thing I think that gave the Live at Pompeii PA and WEM speakers in general their characteristic sound, is the fact that they used English-made drivers." He posits that speakers made in England sound different due to the damp manufacturing environment. "Celestion drivers in this PA were made in East Anglia, Ipswich," he explains. This contrasts with American speakers of the era made in places like "sunny California," resulting in a "damp cone when you manufacture the speaker," that Hewitt says, "imparts tonal characteristics you can hear... a totally different sound."

Restoring the 50-plus year-old system required

significant work. "With the Pompeii PA, it's all the actual speakers," Hewitt notes. Some of the vintage Celestion G10s and G12s were blown, and Hewitt was able to re-cone them using drivers from his extensive, period-specific collection.

The world premiere screening with the restored PA took place at the Parkway Cinema in Barnsley. Hewitt recounts setting up the system, initially encountering a skeptical cinema audio engineer. This engineer spoke confidently about the cinema's "state-of-the-art Dolby Atmos system, with fantastic sub-bass units, a digital desk, digital amplifiers, and racks of processors," and initially only wanted to provide a stereo feed and suggested Hewitt not play the Pompeii system "too loud." Hewitt listened and then politely asked "When I've plugged mine in will you at least hear how it sounds?" Hewitt recalls. The result was immediate. "As soon as we turned the original Pompeii PA on, he changed his tune and declared 'We won't use the cinema sound system tonight other than the surround channels. Your analogue PA sounds so much better.'"

The screening was a resounding success, selling out the 200-seat cinema, and included three Pink Floyd fans who drove from the south of France just to have the experience. Both Sony Music and Pink Floyd's Nick Mason have praised Hewitt's efforts and its effect on the film's promotion, but Hewitt noted that the response from the audience, largely comprising audio engineers and musicians, was what was exceptional. The general consensus was that it was that it "felt so authentic to hear Pink Floyd's Pompeii performances through the actual gear they had originally performed with". Hewitt adds what truly stands out for him, "Never in my life have I heard a PA get a standing ovation."

Hewitt has further events planned for the Pompeii PA, including showcases at Nick Mason's open house in Wiltshire on 7th-8th June, the Northwest Hi-Fi show in Cheshire on 20th-21st June, and PLASA, London Olympia 7th-9th September.

Looking ahead, Hewitt is busy restoring other legendary systems from his collection. "I've acquired David Bowie's 1972-73 Ziggy Stardust PA and Led Zeppelin's 1970 PA that they toured the world with," he reveals. His ambitious plans include trying to get Robert Plant to perform through the Led Zeppelin PA and organizing Bowie-themed events with the Ziggy Stardust system. Other restoration projects include recreating Sun Studio in England with authentic equipment used by Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley, and building an Abbey Road control room with gear used on Beatles recordings and mixes.

PEOPLE

Guitar Center has announced the appointment of **Jennifer Thayer** as president of **Music & Arts**.

A results-driven executive with over 25 years of leadership experience, Thayer has held senior roles across retail, logistics, sales, and customer experience at companies including Harvia US, STG Logistics (through an acquisition of XPO), and Lowe's Home Improvement. Known for driving performance, developing talent, and scaling complex organizations, she has led high-performing teams and delivered measurable results across large-scale, service-focused businesses.

"Jennifer brings incredible passion for Music & Arts' mission of developing young musicians and helping them thrive," said Gabe Dalporto, CEO of Guitar Center. "That passion is matched by an incredible track record of delivering outsized growth across multiple industries and companies. Her leadership reflects our

ongoing investment in the future of music education and our long-term commitment to supporting musicians on every stage."

Thayer's connection to Music & Arts is both professional and personal. A former band and orchestra student herself, she played clarinet throughout her school years and recently began learning the saxophone. Her son is also a current student of Music & Arts, giving her a unique, firsthand perspective on the company's important role in supporting young musicians and families nationwide.

As president, Thayer will help drive performance across Music & Arts' retail, lessons, and rental channels; strengthen relationships with educators and schools; and advance the mission to expand access to music education through innovation and community engagement. She will also help identify growth opportunities and acquisitions that support the brand's continued impact.



Sweetwater announces two leadership promotions, along with the creation of a new senior leadership role, solidifying our commitments to strategic growth and to serving core customers and new audiences.

Bob "Shep" Shepherd is taking on the newly created role of senior vice president of Business Intelligence & Analytics. A 25-year veteran of the music retail industry, Shepherd spent the last seven years serving as Sweetwater's senior vice president of Merchandising. In his new role, Shepherd will partner with business leaders across the company to drive operational performance and outcomes. He will report to chief financial officer Greg Clark.



"Shep's experience and track record of strong performance across many disciplines at Sweetwater demonstrate he is uniquely qualified to lead a world-class team of analysts to elevate Sweetwater's level of insights and actionable strategies," explained Clark.

Additionally, **Kenric Knecht** has been promoted to vice president of Merchandising. In this role, Knecht will oversee the industry-leading, world-class merchandising efforts previously implemented by Shepherd. This includes leading Sweetwater's best-in-class strategies for product assortment, pricing, promotions, and vendor relationships. Previously, Knecht served as a Vice President of Merchandising for Drums and Band & Orchestra (B&O). He will report to Chief Supply Chain Officer Phil Rich.

"With over 30 years of experience in numerous disciplines and leadership roles, Kenric is one of the top professionals in the music industry today," said Rich. "I'm confident that under Kenric's leadership, we will continue our mission of developing our people, partnering with our vendors, serving our community, and ensuring every customer experiences the Sweetwater Difference."



Guitar Center is cranking up the volume on its commitment to the next generation of musicians. In a bold move to revolutionize the learning experience, Guitar Center proudly announces the addition of two high-impact leaders to its Lessons team: celebrated educator **Giovanni "John" Bianchette** as vice president of Music Education, and GRAMMY® Award-winning rock guitarist **Dave Kushner** as senior director of Music Education Experience.

With this powerhouse duo at the helm, Guitar Center is charting an electrifying course toward 50,000 active students – redefining how music is taught, experienced, and shared across its nationwide store network.

John Bianchette is a respected educator and brings public and private sector experience from leadership roles at Mathnasium, including Vice President of Education and Training. He has led instructional strategy, driven talent development, and shaped innovative, student-centered learning models. Focused on impact, Bianchette builds high-performing teams, broadens access, and redefines quality instruction. As Vice President of Music Education, he'll oversee the expansion, innovation, and quality of Guitar Center's music education offerings – building a scalable, inclusive experience that keeps students progressing, engaged and excited.

Dave Kushner is best known as a founding member of rock supergroup Velvet Revolver and brings decades of stage, studio and education experience to his new role as Senior Director of Music Education Experience at Guitar Center. Kushner has composed music for film and television, collaborated with icons like Elton John and Stevie Wonder, and developed popular online guitar courses. In his new role, Kushner will bring the magic of performance to every lesson – energizing curriculum and content for students online and in-store.

With the visionary leadership of Bianchette paired with Kushner's deep experience within the music industry, Guitar Center's Lessons Program is poised to spark creativity, confidence and community for tens of thousands of students across the country.

TRADE REGRETS

Sho Sato, founder of **Hosa Technology** in Buena Park, CA passed away peacefully on May 15, 2025, in Whittier, California. He was 81. Born on November 27, 1943, in Yokohama, Japan, Sato embodied the spirit of determination and innovation. At the age of 25, he moved to the United States with no more than a dream and a few dollars in his pocket. In 1984, with nothing but a borrowed desk and telephone, he founded Hosa Technology. Under his leadership, Hosa grew into one of the most respected and recognizable companies in the music and professional audio industries.

Sho's journey from humble beginnings to pioneering entrepreneur is a testament to his relentless work ethic, vision, and belief in

providing value through quality and service. His legacy continues through the company he built and the people he inspired. In recent years, he proudly passed the torch to his daughter, Mayumi Allison, who now leads Hosa with the same mission her father held dear: to create reliable connectivity solutions with unparalleled service, passion, and care.

Sho is survived by his two daughters Mayumi and Yuki and his grandchildren, Dylan, Rhys and Alexa.

Memorial services will be held on July 22nd at 11:00 a.m. at the Friendly Hills Country Club in Whittier, CA. A virtual option will be available for those who cannot attend

in person.

For more information about Sho's memorial, please contact Jennifer Paquette at jennifer@hosatech.com.

In lieu of flowers, the family is asking that you might consider donating to either one of Hosa's two favorite charities:

Save the Music Foundation: Empowering students through music education. <https://donate.savethemusic.org/campaign/692368/donate>

Corazón de Vida: Providing support for orphaned and abandoned children in Baja, Mexico, by funding local orphanages <https://e.givesmart.com/events/Jfv/>



RON VAN OSTENBRIDGE OF BARI WOODWINDS, INC.

By Christian Wissmuller

“We just never have worried, and we probably never will worry, about any competitor or anybody else. We just do what we do. We do what we think is best.”



Gary Spears and Ron Van Ostenbridge

2025 marks 50 years since the establishment of Bari Woodwinds, Inc. and the Bari team is celebrating the milestone by doing what they've always done: bringing innovative, quality product and game-changing innovation to market.

MMR recently chatted with CEO/managing partner Ron Van Ostenbridge about some of the new lines Bari has been introducing and also got his thoughts on such wide-ranging topics as tariffs, the NAMM Show, and challenges facing smaller brands in MI.

Q. First off, congratulations on guiding Bari to its 50th year – that’s quite an achievement.

Yes, Wolfe Taninbaum started Bari and Associates in 1975. We bought it originally on October 3rd, 2003 and, then Gary Spears and I bought it from our partners in 2016 and have owned it through to the present.

Let’s start off with a topical subject: tariffs and supply chain. MMR has been covering those issues in-depth, of late, and I’m curious if you’re feeling the pinch?

No, we're not, really. Not directly. The reason being, Christian, is that everything we sell is made right here. All the mouthpieces are made right here in our factory. And everything we sell is American-made with American-made material – with one exception, and that's the hard rubber ebonite we get from Germany, because it's the best we can find in the world. Other than that one component, it's all manufactured in the United States.

Q. That's fantastic. Are you following how trade concerns are impacting your colleagues and competitors?

Not especially. We just never have worried, and we probably never will worry, about any competitor or anybody else. We just do what we do. We do what we think is best. We don't follow the competitors. Gary, my business partner, is probably one of the best damn mouthpiece-makers in the world, and nobody knows it! And he has designed all of our lines, almost, that we have now. And we’ve come out with several new lines – including a new reed that we had at NAMM, as a preview.

Q. Tell me more about that.

We showed it at NAMM to see how it was doing and we knew we were still going to have to do some tweaking to the reed, but we wanted to get it out there and get it in people's hands. And it was just unbelievably well-received.

Q. What's the name of this line of reeds? What makes them unique?

It's going to be called the Cobalt reed. It's a unique reed to us because we have a distinctive shape to our reeds, okay? They have beveled edges and it's made with an entirely different material – a much more expensive material.



The new Bari Woodwinds Cobalt Reed

Q. What material would that be?

It's proprietary. I'm not going to give that out. We've been through a lot of research and development, and we protect ourselves. We do a lot of research and development out of this little building. And Gary, he's an engineering guru, but my background is in plastic – I've got 22 years [of experience] in plastic. We felt we had this one plastic that was really, really good, and it's coming out to be. We have quite a few mouthpiece endorsers that will not use a synthetic at all. They only use cane, traditional cane. And right now we have three of them who converted from cane to this reed.

Congratulations to Ritmüller for 230 years of achievement!



From Johannes Brahms to David Syme, Ritmüller

pianos have shaped music history for over two centuries. It was on a Ritmüller piano in Göttingen where Brahms composed his groundbreaking *Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15*, blending perfectionism with innovation. Today, his legacy continues to inspire pianists around the world.

The new Limited Special Edition Ritmüller RZ9, our 230th Anniversary upright model, brings concert-level performance to an upright design. Featuring the revolutionary



Esmonde-White Action, that offers the touch of a grand



piano, PR2.0 hammers for pure sound, and German Rös lau wire with copper-wound

bass strings for tonal richness — all crafted to European standards.



As Ritmüller's Worldwide Brand Ambassador, American virtuoso David Syme carries this tradition of excellence forward. This year, David will commemorate the 230th anniversary of Ritmüller with his "Living Room Concerts" series at his estate in West Cork, Ireland.

From Carnegie Hall to collaborating with leading orchestras, Syme embodies the artistry and innovation that will continue to define Ritmüller for decades to come.



David Syme, Ritmüller Worldwide Brand Ambassador



Ritmüller

Since 1795

Q. This sounds like a pretty big introduction!

Yeah, it's a great reed, and it has the feel. I'm not a player, but they're telling us that it feels a lot like a cane, and two of our endorsers absolutely refused to ever try [synthetic], but they love it. This reed is probably going to be really, really... It'll probably be our top reed, I have no doubt. I think we're ready to go. We're just going to make them now. We'll test fly them, and then we the packaging. The packaging will probably be our hold up, but the product itself is pretty much ready to go. I've already gotten several calls from people wanting to buy it, and it's not for sale yet, because it was mentioned on the Donna Schwartz podcast [Everything Saxophone Podcast – Ed.] back at the end of January.

Q. Are there any other recent or upcoming product introductions or developments at the company that you'd like our readers to know about?



WTII mouthpieces

Gary just designed and built a WTII line with Alto and Tenor, and Gary just created a Baritone for that line. So that's new and coming out excellent. Gary said it gives a really nice, warm sound, being a metal. We've got a few metal mouthpieces, but at NAMM, a lot of people were really getting interested in them. And we have several people that play our WTII line that would like to add a Baritone to that line. So we're really happy with that.

Q. That sounds excellent. Now we've measured NAMM a couple times. What are your thoughts on the sort of ever-shifting, nature of trade shows, specifically the NAMM show? You were in Anaheim in January – will you be exhibiting next year?

I'll be honest with you, we were not happy with NAMM. First off, it's too expensive and there's nothing for the little guy. I don't really want to knock NAMM, but they do nothing for us. They say they do, but they really don't. And NAMM used to be affordable, you know. I'm also not happy with the shipping in there. Things get destroyed. Things get lost.

We got charged, like, \$464 for Freeman to bring a pallet 50 yards. Freeman just, for a small company like ours, a \$20,000 expense for us is a lot of money for a small company. 10 years ago, we could go to NAMM and we could write enough business to pay for the trip. That's not been existent for the last eight or nine years. NAMM, in our view, has now become an expense with little or no benefit for us. There are no big dealers to pick up there. You know, the whole industry has changed since COVID. But I know people are going to hate me, and I really don't want to knock NAMM, but we are not sure yet if we'll be back next year.

I think the service is going downhill with Freeman. Also, you know, we used to see Joe Lamond walking around that show. I haven't seen Mlynczak yet and I haven't seen him the last two years. He can come down the aisle. Joe would at least stop by. He wasn't the most helpful guy, but at least he would stop by and say hello and inquire about things. And, again, it just gets so freaking expensive. We can do five or six educator shows and Florida and Texas, and we do a lot more business than we do at NAMM, so I don't know that we're going to spend that money this year. We haven't said no, definitely, but we're leaning in that direction. I'm not against the three-day show, though. I actually love the three day show because I'm getting older and I don't have a lot of patience. And, all kidding aside, though, the fourth day is a waste for us, so the three-day show worked out great.

Now, if NAMM lowered the rates and make it affordable, we would definitely do it, but it's just not going to happen in Anaheim

Q. It makes sense that you'd want to feel any significant expenses you're incurring pay off for the company. I get it. Anything else you'd like to share with our readers about Bari Mouthpieces.

One thing I would like to get out there is that we have the expertise to do mouthpieces for other people. We do private label, okay? And Gary makes a lot of mouthpieces that are out on the market. Nobody knows that they come from us, and we don't have that kind of an agreement. We don't divulge our private label customers. But I would like people to know that they've come and they're coming to one of the best damn mouthpiece makers on this face of this earth. So I'd like to somehow get Gary's name out there a little bit. He's not a well-known player, so nobody knows him, right? And he's going to be the primary owner of this company, if not the only owner of this company, in the next year or so. So I really want to get him pumped up here so people know who to come and talk to. And he was tutored by the best guy in the industry, Wolfe Taninbaum. And I wish Wolfe was here to see what Gary's doing, because I think he'd be damn proud.

MIDDLE-WEIGHT CHAMPIONS

61-Key Synths Take Center Stage

By Christian Wissmuller



We were forced to implement a modest price increase last month directly related to tariff adjustments. However, since Nord keyboards are manufactured in Sweden, the overall impact on pricing has been minimal.

- Bryan Pistone, Brand Manager, NORD



In a world increasingly dominated by virtual instruments and bedroom studios, the humble 61-key synth has not only held its ground – it’s evolved into a creative powerhouse for stage and studio alike. To explore what’s driving the staying power and innovation of these compact, road-ready keyboards, MMR gathered key voices from some of the most influential brands in the game: Roland, KORG, NORD, Oberheim, and Kurzweil. From sound engine philosophy to user interface trends and the delicate dance between vintage appeal and modern tech, this roundtable dives deep into what’s next – and what’s timeless – about the 61-key synth.



For your brand, what model is currently the best-selling 61-key synthesizer?

Luciano Minetti: Right now, it’s the KRONOS 61. It’s been our flagship for years, and we’re excited to have it back in the lineup with this new and improved version. The 61-key version has always been a top seller, especially for players who want a compact but seriously powerful workstation. That said, I’d also give a strong nod to the KROSS2 61, our entry-level workstation. It’s super lightweight, portable, and hits a really accessible price point. It’s been a reliable best-seller for years.

Jean Bellefeuille: I'd like to say K2061, as it is the only 61 note synth we are selling – but it is not officially shipping yet.

Kohei Ishii: The JUNO-D Series is currently Roland’s best-selling 61-key synthesizer. Roland had sold over 300,000 JUNO-D series units from 2004 to 2024, and the sales of the latest model "JUNO-D6" is very positive, globally.

Bryan Pistone: Aside from the newly released Nord Organ 3, Nord currently offers two 61-key models: the Nord Electro 6D 61 and the Nord Wave 2. Among these, the Electro 6D 61 is the best-seller. Designed as a lightweight (just 18 lbs.), cost-effective solution for gigging musicians, it features high-quality pianos, organs, and synths – making it especially appealing to a broad market segment.



David Gibbons: At Oberheim, the flagship OB-X8 stands out as our only 61-note instrument, but that distinction shouldn't diminish the fact that it's been an unqualified success. OB-X8 has been exactly the kind of bold statement we hoped for in reintroducing the beloved Oberheim brand to the world.



We’re expecting strong momentum in this space. The demand for compact, feature-rich instruments isn’t slowing down.

- Luciano Minetti, Category Manager, KORG USA, Inc.



Identify the customers who are drawn to performances and ensure your demo setup allows for playing freely, accompanied by great monitors to facilitate critical audio evaluation.

- David Gibbons, CEO, Sequential, Oberheim



What features and qualities do you feel today’s customers are looking for when considering purchasing one of these instruments?

DG: A really iconic intrinsic sound character is essential. But also having enough flexibility to avoid being a one-trick pony. And keeping the control layout simple, so you can create new tones while staying in the flow of the music. Fortunately, OB-X8 embodies all three elements.

JB: Not in any particular order: sonic excellence; various sound generation and processing methods; ease of use; playability; compatibility; connectivity; portability; price.

KI: The JUNO-D has three fundamental features that have been maintained for over 20 years: "professional quality sound," "easy operation," and "light weight." Meeting these three requirements is crucial for customer satisfaction with the JUNO-D, according to our research and feedback.

BP: Today’s customers value versatility and sound quality. Instruments like the Nord Electro 6D 61 offer three independent sound engines – Organ, Piano, and Sample Synth – that can be layered or split for performance flexibility. Key features include:

- A Piano section with a wide range of acoustic, electric, and digital pianos from the exclusive Nord Piano Library.
- An Organ section with physical drawbars, a semi-weighted waterfall keybed, and optional half-moon switch.

- A Sample Synth section featuring high-quality sounds from the Nord Sample Library 3.0, including licensed Mellotron and Chamberlin samples.

- Combined with built-in effects, this makes the instrument a compact, affordable “Swiss Army knife” for keyboardists.

LM: In the workstation category, customers are looking for flexibility and value. They want something that can do it all- perform live, produce in the studio, sequence tracks, and handle all kinds of sounds. The KRONOS nails that with its nine unique sound engines, including throwbacks to classic KORG synths like the MS-20 and Polysix. And for those just starting out or looking for a super mobile option, the KROSS2 61 delivers a ton of features without the bulk or the price tag.



Have sales or production of these synths been in any way impacted by current tariffs and supply chain issues?

KI: Roland expects to be affected to some extent going forward, but we are relatively low-risk within the industry and see an opportunity to grow.

BP: Yes, we were forced to implement a modest price increase last month directly related to tariff adjustments. However, since Nord keyboards are manufactured in Sweden, the overall impact on pricing has been minimal.

LM: We’ve all felt the shifts in the supply chain over the last few years, but we’ve adapted. One thing we’ve been intentional about is pricing the KRONOS competitively within the current market. It’s important that our key revenue drivers are positioned for success, and pricing is a big part of that strategy.

JB: Looks like this may be creating some price increases, yes (K20 vs K27 et cetera)? I, myself, do not have the numbers. Would love to hear your take. [See the May, 2025 issue. – Ed.]



Be able to answer, ‘What sets this apart?’ and be able to demonstrate a few key features.

- Jean Bellefeuille, Director of Marketing, Kurzweil



Any tips for MI retailers when it comes to successfully marketing and displaying 61-key synths?

JB: Educate the sales force with at least the fundamentals of the given model. Be able to answer, "What sets this apart?" and be able to demonstrate a few key features. Create an Experience Zone: Demo Stations with headphones and powered on; Loop/Backing Track Options: Let users jam over beats – this helps them visualize the synth in their own setup/application; Provide a bench or stool at the synth – standing in front of a synth is less inviting.

Keep the display clean, well-lit, and free of clutter. Mount mini info cards that list key features (e.g., "V.A.S.T. synthesis engine" or "512 factory patches" et cetera) and primary uses ("Great for composers, EDM producers, and keyboardists").

Target the Right Personas. Segment email/social campaigns for: Producers (focus on workflow, DAW integration); Gigging musicians (lightweight, MIDI flexibility); Synth hobbyists/collectors (emphasize synth engine, mod matrix, rare features).

Create short Instagram Reels/TikToks or YouTube Shorts with: short sound demos (genre-specific); "3 Sounds in 30 Seconds" type content; feature walk-throughs by staff or local artists.

Host "Synth Days" or workshops. Bring in reps or artists for demo events. Offer exclusive discounts for attendees. Encourage RSVP to build a lead list.

Lastly, bundle offers (stands, pedals, cases/bags, headphones, speakers, DAWs, FX, et cetera).

LM: Put the focus on the versatility and "all-in-one" message. Workstations like the KRONOS and KROSS2 aren't just synths, they're full production and performance tools. Interactive demos are key. For KRONOS specifically, we put together a preload set list that's a great way to quickly show off what's new sonically. It gives a really concise tour of the updated sounds and capabilities. That kind of curated demo makes it easier for retailers to give customers a real sense of what the board can do without needing to dig deep right out of the gate.

KI: As mentioned above, the JUNO-D range has easy operation and professional quality sounds as two of its core offerings which we feel makes for a great first impression when demoing the product in a retail

environment. We would, of course always recommend wiring the product into a good quality set of stereo speakers placed at head-height for the best listening experience. JUNO's 3rd core offering is its light weight, making it particularly portable. To this end, we'd suggest displaying a compatible carry case or bag with the product to make customers' lives easier.

DG: Oberheim appeals both to players with strong chops, and also to producers looking for interesting new sounds and textures that don't require virtuoso skills. The 61-note keyboard has always appealed more to the stronger players, offering enough room to stretch out while remaining portable. Identify the customers who are drawn to performances and ensure your demo setup allows for playing freely, accompanied by great monitors to facilitate critical audio evaluation.

BP: Absolutely. Retailers should display the keyboard with key accessories—not necessarily to sell the accessories, but to enhance the overall presentation of the instrument. Including items like the optional music stand, half-moon switch, and Nord Piano Monitors helps the keyboard more closely emulate the instruments it's designed to replicate. An interactive, fully set-up display is far more engaging than a static one.



The 61-note keyboard market is very broad and well established for good reasons. It covers a number of use cases, user experience levels, and budgets.

Kohei Ishii,
 Manager, Electronic Instrument Division / Piano & Synthesizer Product Strategy Group, Roland Corporation



■ roundtable

Any new or upcoming 61-key models you'd like to draw MMR readers' attention to?

LM: The return of the KRONOS is the big headline for us. It's coming back stronger than ever, with upgraded features and sounds. It's a major step forward while still keeping that classic KRONOS DNA. It's a go-to for serious players. And again, the KROSS2 61 continues to be an awesome, budget-friendly option that packs in a lot of power.

DG: We are not announcing any new models at this time, but this is definitely a category where Oberheim will continue to create highly coveted instruments.

JB: Unsure. I can say our users have been expressing interest in a 61-note from us for a long time. Not sure that speaks to the market at large, however.

BP: I am not aware of any upcoming 61-key models at this time.

KI: In terms of 61-note keyboards, the JUNO-D is our latest product release joining its mid-range and flagship siblings, "FANTOM-06" and "FANTOM-6EX." While not a 61-note keyboard, in January this year we released a new range called "V-STAGE." Available in a 76-note keyboard as well as an 88-note weighted version, V-STAGE fuses Roland's premium sound technologies with a fluid, purpose-built workflow.



Expectations for this market segment in the coming months?

DG: It will continue to be strong, especially at the higher end, where the synth can also serve as the centerpiece of a studio. Customers will often look to combine with desktop modules to fill out their desired sound palette.

KI: The 61-note keyboard market is very broad and well established for good reasons. It covers a number of use cases, user experience levels, and budgets – from those looking for a second-tier keyboard for their established live rig, to those who are just starting their musical journey into synthesis, production, or live performance. Of course, a 61-note keyboard offers the advantage of being lighter weight, compact, portable, and is often more affordable than their larger counterparts usually without sacrificing too much functionality. For this reason, we think this market segment will continue to go from strength to strength in the coming months.

BP: For the broader keyboard market – particularly professional models – tariffs may have some effect on sales. That said, gigging musicians still need reliable tools. While economic pressures may force some to prioritize essentials like rent or food, many still view a quality instrument like a Nord as a worthwhile investment.

For 61-key models specifically, this format has remained stable in recent years. Its portability and performance-focused design make it ideal for live musicians. While some purists prefer 88-key models, the practicality of a 61-key board for touring and gigging is hard to beat.

LM: We're expecting strong momentum in this space. The demand for compact, feature-rich instruments isn't slowing down, and both the KRONOS and KROSS2 hit that sweet spot, just at different ends of the experience spectrum. Whether someone's gigging, producing, or just diving into synths, there's a lot of value in 61-key workstations right now.

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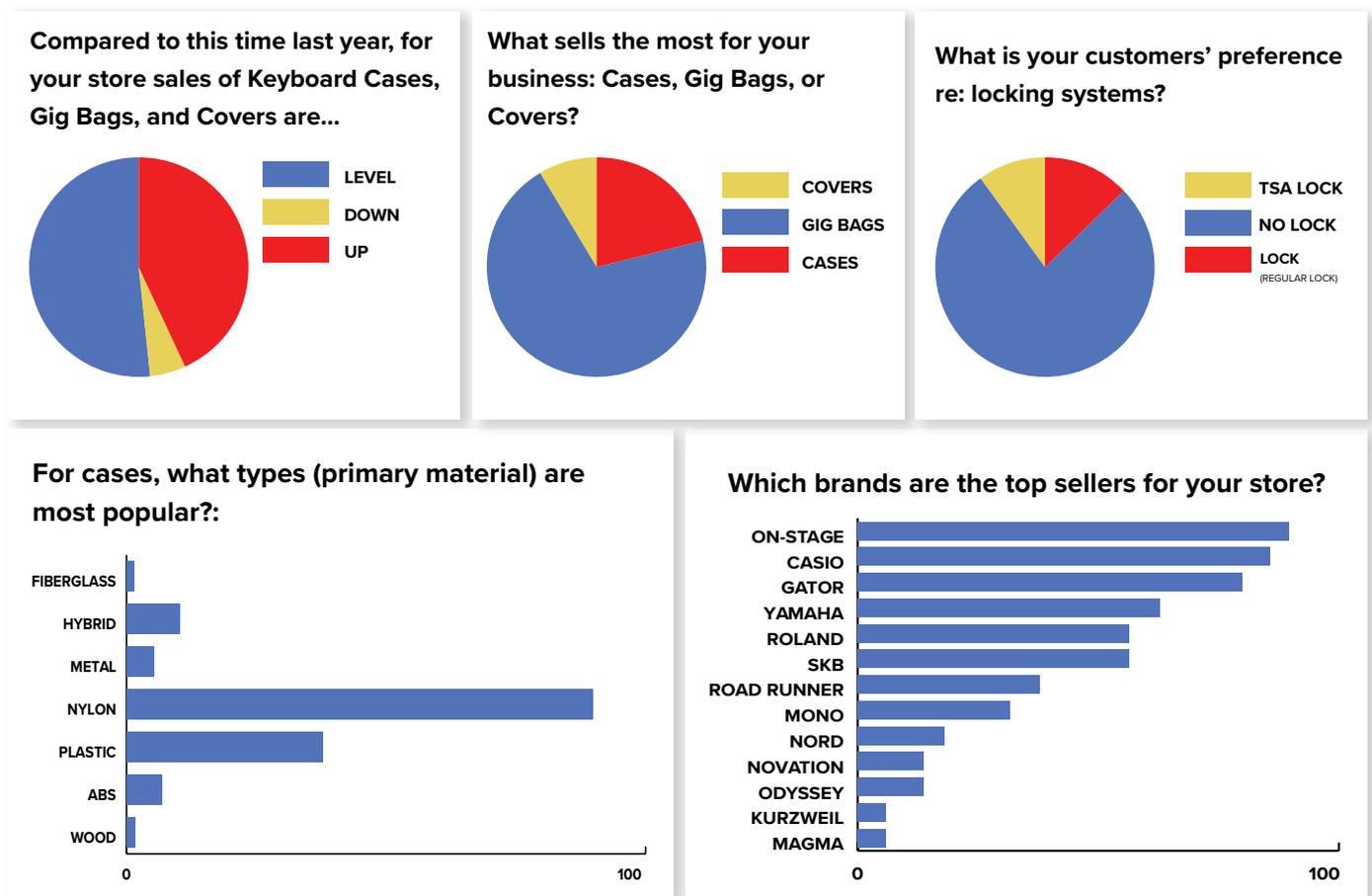
BEST-CASE SCENARIOS

Sales of Keyboard Cases, Gig Bags, and Covers

By Christian Wissmuller

As with most instruments and music-related gear, when not in actual use, keyboards require a means of both protection and portability. Cases, Gig Bags, and Covers provide a degree of safety for these cherished instruments and, in the case of the first two options (get it, “case?”) also a means of getting keyboards from the bedroom to the classroom, from the practice space to the stage.

Read on to learn about what types of cases and bags are resonating with players in 2025 and what brands are ringing up the most sales for dealers across the country.



What trends are impacting sales of Keyboard Cases, Gig Bags, and Covers in 2025?

“We try to stock a wide variety of protection for all of our inventory and customer needs. Lately there have been supply issues that hamper our ability to offer multiple options of protection to our customers. The increase in online offerings have also impacted our sales over the years. We have always done well with our private label gig bags and sell them at slightly lower margins than the national brands for the impact of exposure those bag give us.”

JERRY VESELY | Vesely Music | Parowan, Utah

“The prices started to increase during COVID. Then once the container cost went back down, the price did not decrease and now they are using the tariff scare as another reason for prices to go up. The manufacturers seem to be gouging on their prices which is costing sales.”

JOHN BOND | Music & Arts | Marietta, Georgia

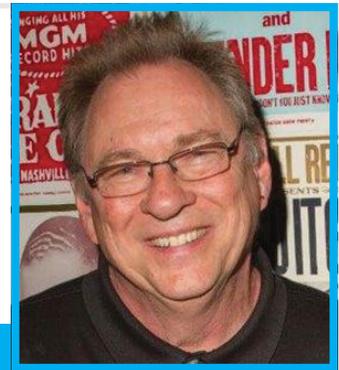
“ Fewer keyboard sales and rentals. ”

WESLEY DILORIO

Menchey Music Service, Inc. | Hanover, Pennsylvania

IN BOB SEGER, WE TRUST

By Menzie Pittman, Author of *The New Musician*



The time-worn maxim, “All hat and no cattle,” translates to, “all talk and no action.” In life there are those, who like the mythological Sirens, captivate our attention and lure us into believing they are more than they appear to be. What appears to be enthralling at first can prove to be shallow. Sadly, my latest feedback regarding the music industry reverberates this sentiment to a degree.

While there are new artists streaming music every week, the product is, often, saturated with huge production, and the new music seems to depend on big production for its legitimacy. It makes no difference whether it’s the #1 pop song or the #1 country song. In today’s recordings it’s all about production. Trust me, when country songs use drum machines, you know you have entered the Twilight Zone. I can hear Willy freaking out as I type, (and he’s in Texas.) Perhaps that was what Bob Seeger meant when he sang, “Just take those old records off the shelf, I’ll sit and listen to ‘em by myself...”

In today’s current pop world, we are becoming gadget gobblers. We have begun to replace the value we once placed on composition and artistry on gadgetry and big production – make that “huge production.” It is not just the music industry that is suffering gadgetry overkill though. It is everywhere. Take, for example, the auto industry. Last week I took my car in for its scheduled service, and for this service, I had to leave my car overnight, so the dealer gave me a “new model” loaner. I noticed immediately that the manufacturer has completely redesigned the car, and it now has gadgetry galore. The new model has become a sluggish, “over designed” product that automakers market to have the very latest in technological advancement. The sales pitch is, “The car drives itself.” And sadly, the entire driving experience has been swapped out for bells and whistles, and I don’t want a car that makes my decisions for me, any more than I want to listen to click tracts on

a country tune. No doubt, Willie would agree with me on that.

The point is, we have slightly wandered off the reservation, and the music industry has suffered some of the current tech-intoxication. I am not, by any means, inferring that all technology advancements are bad. But imagination is what is special. It is imagination that leads us to develop new products, and to try innovative approaches. I am still one who believes experimentation guides us to invention. If we take a walk down Chet Atkins Lane, it will help us remember what “feel” is all about, and “feel” paired with imagination allows the music to become special. You can’t download imagination, but you can be influenced and inspired by it.

If any music store rockers want to see how to sustain a lifetime career in music, take a few minutes and browse Dan Huff on Wikipedia, or better yet take a stroll and find him on YouTube. On his Home Schoolin’ channel, Tom Bukovac has posted a great YouTube session where he interviews Dan Huff. It is a casual conversation between two legendary guitarists who also happen to be friends. They are also two of the top-hired guitarists in Nashville and deservedly so.

Most guitar players today have serious technique, but there is a difference between a typical chopster and legends like Dan Huff, or talented players like guitarist and producer Robben Ford. They have the magic ingredients of feel, tone, creativity, and patience, and a healthy respect for the songs they are performing. Thus, they have very successful careers which is the ultimate goal for a working musician. They also respect and appreciate technology, but they put the music first. Like the car that should be designed around driving first, with bells and whistles second, they are musicians first. What else did Seger tell us? Oh, yeah, I almost forgot, “Today’s music ain’t got the same soul... I like that old time rock ‘n’ roll.”



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PRS Guitars Releases 40th Anniversary McCarty SC56 Limited Edition

PRS Guitars has announced the 40th Anniversary McCarty SC56 Limited Edition. With a classic PRS single-cutaway body shape and carefully chosen specifications, the McCarty SC56 is both a tribute to tradition and a reliable tool for the modern performer. Only 400 pieces will be made.

“The SC56, signifying Singlecut and 1956, model is our most recent tribute to my late mentor Ted McCarty and his impact on the guitar industry. We started with our take on a classic late ‘50s singlecut body. 1956 marks the year that Ted first had guitars made with his newly coined ‘humbucker’ pickups. It also happens to be the year I was born. Bringing vintage design into the modern era, we loaded this model with our McCarty III pickups, meticulously designed to deliver warm, clear, vintage tone with exceptional note separation and dynamics,” said PRS Guitars founder & managing general partner, Paul Reed Smith.

Anchored by a maple top and mahogany back, the 24.594” scale length and 22-fret Pattern Vintage neck work with Phase III non-locking tuners and PRS two-piece bridge to promote its musical sustain. The PRS McCarty III pickups are controlled by a simple layout — two volume controls, two tone controls, and a three-way toggle on the upper bout.

Single-cutaway guitars are known to be heavier than their double-cutaway counterparts. The McCarty SC56 Limited Edition design incorporates weight-relief, decreasing the weight of the guitar by about 2/3 of a pound, while maintaining several points of attachment between the guitar top and back to eliminate the “hollow” sound of the cavities and promote tone transfer.

With appointments like binding on the fretboard, classic bird inlays, and a vintage-inspired nitrocellulose finish, the 40th Anniversary McCarty SC56 Limited Edition blends heritage and innovation into a timeless instrument.

PRS Guitars continues its schedule of launching new products each month in 2025. Stay tuned to see new gear and 40th Anniversary limited-edition guitars throughout the year. For all of the latest news, click www.prsguitars.com/40 and follow @prsguitars on Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, X, and YouTube.

www.prsguitars.com



Taylor Guitars Issues Replica of 'The Last Of Us' Guitar

Taylor Guitars has teamed up with Sony Pictures Consumer Products and HBO® to unveil a replica of the acoustic guitar featured in the award-winning HBO Original series *The Last of Us*, which is now streaming its second season on Max. This collaboration brings fans and musicians alike an exact replica of the guitar Joel gives Ellie in the critically acclaimed show. Taylor's *The Last of Us* Replica 314c guitar is based on its best-selling 300 Series and features Taylor's most popular body style, the Grand Auditorium. Crafted with Taylor's hallmark playability, pro-level sound and refined workmanship, the guitar showcases a visual aesthetic that matches the guitar featured in the series.

For fans of the show, the guitar's most recognizable design element is a custom moth inlay at the third fret. The guitar also features a Tobacco Sunburst top finish and grained ivoroid accents, along with a satin-finish body and neck, creating a vintage, well-worn aesthetic that fits seamlessly into the gritty post-pandemic world Joel and Ellie inhabit.

This acoustic-only model features a solid Sitka spruce top and solid sapele back and sides, delivering a clear, warm,

balanced voice with appealing midrange presence — an ideal sonic tool for storytelling through song. Additional appointments include grained ivoroid body binding, grained ivoroid fretboard inlays that include the moth and large dot position markers, and a custom double-ring rosette also in grained ivoroid. The Grand Auditorium body features a Venetian cutaway for easy access to upper-register notes. Each guitar comes with a Taylor-built deluxe hardshell case to ensure safe transport, whether across the country or across the quarantine zone.

Availability and Ordering

The Taylor x *The Last of Us* Replica guitar is available for purchase now via [TaylorGuitars.com](https://www.taylorguitars.com) and select authorized Taylor dealers. Orders are built on demand in Taylor's Southern California factory, with an expected delivery time of 6–10 weeks. Due to the nature of this release, quantities are limited.

Whether you're a musician, collector or a devoted fan of the series, this guitar offers a one-of-a kind connection to the legacy of Joel, Ellie and the enduring spirit of survival.



www.taylorguitars.com

Kramer Unveils Volante, Four New Guitars Engineered for High Performance Players with Premium Design and Components

The Kramer Volante builds on Kramer's history of innovation, arriving as the premium choice for today's high-performance player. Kramer has long been known as a brand that makes guitars that meet the needs of highly fluid, fast, and technical players—a brand for shredders and virtuosos. Kramer is proud to announce that the Volante Series is engineered to meet professional players' ultimate need for speed and premium quality. The Kramer Volante series is now available worldwide at all authorized Kramer dealers and online at www.KramerGuitars.com.

The Italian word "Volante" translates to "flying" or "light" and signifies the musical ideas of speed and movement. The new Volante transcends nostalgia and repositions Kramer as the progressive choice for high-performance guitarists who play fast and fluid and are ready to rock. Equipped with Kramer USA Neptune pickups, satin-finished, thermally aged 3-piece maple necks with a compound radius, and a 5-bolt sculpted heel, this Kramer Volante Series is everything you need to push your sound to the edge and beyond. The Kramer Volante HSRF and HSGT models also feature a brand new, built from the ground up, noiseless single coil Triton pickup made in the USA by the Gibson Pickup Shop.

The new Kramer Volante Quilt HSRF is here to put any retro illusions firmly to rest. Ideal for the modern shredder and virtuoso, the Kramer Volante HSRF pushes the boundaries of performance. The Volante Quilt HSRF offers cutting-edge features, including a lightweight alder body with a gorgeous AAAA quilt maple veneer top and forearm and body comfort carves. The three-piece, satin-finished maple neck is bolted to the body with five bolts and ferrules and has a sculpted heel for improved upper fret access. It also features the new Kramer KeyLock System. The KeyLock, developed by Senior Product Development Engineer Richard Akers, provides incredible neck stability.



Paired with Kramer's 5-bolt neck-to-body joint, it prevents movement in the neck pocket, increasing vibrational tone transfer, sustain, and intonation.

The neck is thermally aged and has a fast-playing Kramer Elliptical C profile. It is capped with an ebony fretboard with 24 jumbo frets, mother-of-pearl diamond inlays, and a compound (10-14") fretboard radius. The truss rod uses a spoke wheel style adjustment at the body end of the fretboard, making it quick and easy to access. The 25.5" scale length is great for drop tuning. A Floyd Rose® R3 locking nut and 1000 Series tremolo keep the tuning rock-solid no matter how much you use the vibrato bar.

The bridge pickup is a Kramer USA Neptune humbucker™, while the neck pickup is a Kramer USA Triton Noiseless pickup. They're wired to master volume and tone controls and a three-way blade-style pickup selector switch. The tone control has a push/pull switch for series/parallel switching of the bridge humbucker. It's a Kramer, so like all of our guitars, it has plenty of in-your-face, Made to Rock Hard attitude and all of the features that today's virtuoso players demand. A premium gig bag is also included to keep your Volante Quilt HSRF safe when stored or while it's being transported to your next show.

The new Kramer Volante HSGT is here to put any retro illusions firmly to rest. Ideal for the modern shredder and virtuoso, the Kramer Volante HSGT pushes the boundaries of performance. The Kramer Volante HSGT offers cutting-edge features, including a

lightweight alder body with forearm and body comfort carves. The three-piece, satin-finished maple neck is bolted to the body with five bolts and ferrules and has a sculpted heel for improved upper fret access. It also features the new Kramer Key Lock system. The KeyLock, developed by Senior Product Development Engineer Richard Akers, provides incredible neck stability. Paired with Kramer's 5-bolt neck-to-body joint, it prevents movement in the neck pocket, increasing vibrational tone transfer, sustain, and intonation.

The three-piece maple neck is thermally aged and has a fast-playing Kramer Elliptical C profile. The maple fretboard has 24 jumbo frets, black dot position markers, and a compound (10-14") fretboard radius. The truss rod uses a spoke wheel style adjustment at the body end of the fretboard, making it quick and easy to access. The 25.5" scale length is great for drop tuning. A Graph Tech® TUSQ® XL nut and Kramer Locking Die Cast tuners help to keep the tuning rock-solid, no matter how much you use the 2-point tremolo.

The bridge pickup is a Kramer USA Neptune humbucker™, while the neck pickup is a Kramer USA Triton Noiseless pickup. They're wired to master volume and tone controls and a three-way blade-style pickup selector switch. The tone control has a push/pull switch for series/parallel switching of the bridge humbucker.

A premium gig bag is also included to keep your Volante Quilt HSGT safe when stored or while it's being transported to your next performance.

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Sound Reinforcement

EAW Adds UXA4807D to Fixed Installation Amplifier Line

Eastern Acoustic Works (EAW) adds the UXA4807D to its successful installation amplifier line. With this addition, UXA installation amplifiers are perfectly matched with EAW's Engineered Solutions Loudspeakers for fast, seamless system integration and reliable performance for years to come. UXA installation amplifiers offer onboard processing that includes FIR and limiter settings called Greyboxes. Greyboxes come preloaded and can be assigned to each output from a pull-down menu using intuitive software. Ample user-adjustable EQ, limiter/compressor and "Through the creation of the UXA Installation Series and specifically the UXA4807D, we are making it easier and faster to specify and integrate EAW systems," says TJ Smith, president of EAW. "We understand that today's consultants and integrators do not have time to review mountains of specifications and download settings. EAW UXA installation amplifiers save time during specification, integration and commissioning to provide



trustworthy and long-lasting results." Multiple input signal formats come standard – Dante®, four analog and SPDIF signals are available in the UXA4807D's comprehensive input matrix mixer.

To eliminate tampering, there are no front panel controls. All amplifier control is accomplished using a web browser when connected to the amplifier's integrated Wi-Fi access point or hardwired TCP/IP connection. For larger systems, multiple UXA amplifiers can be

monitored and controlled with EAW's award-winning Resolution 2 software. The Power Factor Corrected (PFC) universal power supply is efficient and tolerant of mains disturbances. UXA amplifiers operate from mains voltages of 100-240 volts and 50 or 60 Hertz. ErP and EnergySTAR compliance mean operating costs are reduced. UXA amplifiers recover from a loss of mains power quickly, passing audio from the analog inputs within 10 seconds from application of power.

<https://eaw.com>

Cases & Bags

Gator Expands Grooves Case Series with New Snare Sizes

The Gator Grooves Series maintains its reputation for premium protection, with weather-resistant roto-molded construction and a plush, micro-velvet interior that cushions the drum while preventing damage during transport. Like the rest of the series, these new cases feature interlocking channels for secure stacking, a rear-aligned design for balanced transport, and compact nesting capabilities for easy storage. These new cases also include key design elements like adjustable 2-inch heavy-duty straps with high tension buckles, and metal exterior sizing badges for quick sizing identification. Inside each case, drummers will find a dedicated removable drumhead pouch, ensuring they have replacements ready on the go.



<https://gatorco.com>

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TASCAM Announces the MP-800U SD/USB Player with Bluetooth® Receiver, USB DAC, and FM Tuner



TASCAM is pleased to announce the MP-800U SD/USB Player with Bluetooth® Receiver, USB DAC and FM Tuner. This next generation memory player is designed to provide a wide range of options for music playback in restaurants, clubs, hotels, banquet halls, and similar PA and sound reinforcement environments. As both system integrators and the public move away from the use of CD media, the new MP-800U is a next generation commercial multimedia player with a wealth of features that enable it to fit seamlessly into a myriad of environments.

The MP-800U is adept at handling a variety of audio sources as a single device. This includes the ability to play audio from PCs, smartphones, streaming audio, SD memory cards, USB flash drives, and more. The MP-800U's USB / flash drive ports allow for the playback of WAV, MP3, and AAC files—enabling the unit to accommodate most popular audio file formats. Equally important, the SD card slot and USB type A port are located on the unit's front panel, ensuring easy access at any time.

The MP-800U also supports USB DAC (Digital Audio Conversion), which allows for any device equipped with a USB-C connection to be plugged into the unit's front panel. This capability means that computers, phones, tablets, and similar devices can all be connected to the MP-800U and used to playback media stored on said devices, opening a wealth of audio sources that can be used.

The MP-800U also incorporates an FM tuner. To optimize FM performance, the MP-800U includes a rear panel port for connecting an antenna. Similarly, there are rear panel unbalanced RCA connectors to facilitate dedicated tuner output capability. This feature facilitates easy integration of FM broadcasts into any existing installation. Additionally, a DAB (Digital Audio Broadcast) tuner model is also available in the European Union and Australia.

For added convenience, the MP-800U also supports Bluetooth audio by means of the optional AK-BT2 Bluetooth adapter. With Bluetooth capability, users can pair their Bluetooth equipped devices with the MP-800U to add yet additional streaming audio sources to the setup.

For maximum versatility when interconnecting with a variety of other equipment, the MP-800U provides both Stereo balanced XLR outputs plus unbalanced RCA outputs (independent from the RCA connectors used for the FM tuner). These two sets of connectors enable the MP-800U to easily fit into a wide range of environments, including professional level

installations or those that may be less sophisticated.

The MP-800U features Auto Cue, which automatically skips silence at the beginning of a track, guaranteeing instant playback from the first audible sound. The Auto Ready function enhances control by pausing playback at the start of the next track. Together, these functions provide playback options for professional environments.

Completing its key features, the new MP-800U features a +/-16% Pitch Control function that enables adjustments to be made to the audio if required. Further, external control of the MP-800U is available via Ethernet (Telnet) when used with the optional IF-E100 Ethernet Control Card.

In addition to the aforementioned features, the MP-800U has an extensive set of secondary attributes. These include a Power-on-play function that can automatically start playback when the unit is turned on, an incremental playback function that jumps to the beginning of the next track, the ability to key the original function, which changes playback speed without changing pitch, as well as a fade-in / fade-out playback function and direct track searching using the unit's number keys.

In addition to its track related capabilities, the MP-800U offers wireless control using the available free iOS/Android app. One can also use the optionally available RC-20 remote control which facilitates cueing of up to 20 tracks. It should also be noted that when paired with a mixing console, Fader start / stop is possible using the CONTROL 1 / 0 connectors on the back of the unit.

Completing its feature set, the MP-800U offers unbalanced RCA connectors dedicated for tuner output, a Level adjustment function, a panel lock function that can disable use of the front panel buttons to increase operation confidence, and a headphone output that enables audio monitoring.

Sean Daily, TASCAM Product Specialist, commented on the new TASCAM MP-800U, "The MP-800U takes audio playback for commercial spaces to an entirely new level. With a rich feature set, this unit can take music sources from just about anywhere while offering a high level of control that simply hasn't existed in commercial audio players previously—all in a 1RU form factor. I encourage AV system integrators to take a good look at this new offering. I'm confident they will be impressed."

The TASCAM MP-800U is expected to become available early June 2025.

<https://tascam.com>

Focusrite announces new RedNet TNX Thunderbolt and Dante interface

Focusrite announces RedNet TNX, a flexible Dante® interface that delivers high channel counts, ultra-low latency, and powerful audio workflows to any PC or Mac with an available Thunderbolt™ connection. The release marks the first new offering in Focusrite's RedNet range since RedNet PCIeNX in 2023. The new RedNet TNX, however, enables users to pass audio via Dante to and from a computer without having to install a PCIe card.

Designed to handle large recording sessions and post-production work including Dolby Atmos® and other immersive formats, RedNet TNX's combination of ultra-low round-trip latency, effortless setup and scalable flexibility makes it ideal for recording studios, schools, venues and broadcast facilities. Out of the box, the new interface offers 128×128 channels of low-latency, 24-bit/192kHz audio, with the optional Dante Ready™ payable upgrade expanding RedNet TNX to 256×256 channels at 24-bit/96 kHz.

"This release marks the latest chapter in Focusrite's four-decade-long history of pro audio innovation," says Jack Cole, Product Manager: Professional Solutions & Drivers.

"RedNet TNX brings power, flexibility, and user-friendliness to studios, live rigs, broadcast environments, and education spaces that are Dante-equipped, or looking to get started with building a Dante system. Users can expect the same robust performance and feature set from RedNet TNX as with RedNet PCIeNX, with the added bonuses of Thunderbolt daisy chaining and 15W charging, Sonnet ThunderLok support and mounting points on the underside for securing in a rack tray."

RedNet TNX's simple, single-cable connectivity makes it particularly valuable for high-channel-count workflows involving multiple users. Visiting engineers can easily patch into a Dante network, student laptops can be hot-swapped, and FOH or playback engineers can integrate desktop or laptop systems into live rigs with minimal setup. RedNet TNX also integrates with RedNet Control, allowing unified control and monitoring of all RedNet devices via a single application.

Its built-in network interface supports both audio and control data through one rear-panel Ethernet connection, while a second RJ-45 port enables switched or redundant modes for added flexibility and resilience in mission-critical environments.

For broadcasters, RedNet TNX offers support for Dante Domain Manager and the latest AoIP standards, including AES67, as well as compliance for SMPTE ST 2110 (DDM required). And, thanks to its compact form factor, it's portable enough to use on location.

KEY FEATURES

Powerful, portable audio workflows: 128×128 channels at 24-bit/192kHz with ultra-low latency — perfect for large sessions and immersive formats like Dolby Atmos.

Seamless Thunderbolt™ connectivity: Connect to any compatible computer with one cable; quick swaps between users make it ideal for shared workspaces.

Upgradable with Dante Ready™: Expand to 256×256 channels at 24-bit/96kHz with an optional Dante Ready™ upgrade.

Dual Ethernet RJ-45 connections: Supports switched or redundant mode for flexible, reliable network connectivity in critical situations.

Broadcast-Ready AoIP support: Compliant with AES67 and SMPTE ST 2110 (DDM required) for broadcast and pro audio standards.

Windows and macOS compatible: Works with Thunderbolt™-equipped Windows (Intel) and macOS (Intel & Apple Silicon) systems.

Simple integrated network control: Manage everything via a single-cable connection with the built-in network interface.

Easy integration: Dual Thunderbolt™ ports (15W each) support daisy-chaining multiple devices, securable with Sonnet ThunderLok™ retainer clips.

Rack shelf-mountable: Secure with M5 x 12mm screw threads underneath.

Award-winning support: Backed by Focusrite's three-year warranty and 24/7/365 technical support



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