

MMR

MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

Celebrating 147 Years of Serving the MI Industry

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FROM STUDIO TO STAGE:

THE SNARE DRUMS PLAYERS CAN'T PUT DOWN

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January 28-30

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JOSH VITTEK OF VITTEKPR: PART II8

The conclusion of our chat with Josh Vittek, founder of VittekPR, who works closely with musical instrument and pro audio companies to shape stories that resonate with dealers, artists, and players alike. In this Q&A, Vittek shares stories from his past, his perspective on today's MI media landscape, effective brand communication, and where smart PR can make the biggest impact right now.

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In this Q&A, Dalporto shares how Guitar Center is approaching AI adoption in practical, business-driven ways, what lessons the company has learned so far, and how intelligent tools can complement — not replace — human connection on the sales floor.

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NAMM marked its 125th anniversary at The 2026 NAMM Show with a week that did more than celebrate history — it clarified where the music products industry is headed next. Concluding on Jan. 24, the five-day gathering combined education, live performance, and high-level networking with three full days of exhibits and brand activations, setting the tone for the year ahead and beyond.

ROUNDTABLE

FROM STUDIO TO STAGE: THE SNARE DRUMS PLAYERS CAN'T PUT DOWN UP..... 18

Few components in the drum kit inspire as much obsession — or as much innovation — as the snare. From shell materials and bearing edges to throw-offs, hoops, and heads, today's snare drum market reflects a blend of heritage craftsmanship and forward-looking design. As players chase signature sounds across genres and price points, manufacturers and retailers are navigating shifting demand, supply chain realities, and a renewed appetite for customization. In this roundtable, leading industry voices weigh in on the trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping the snare drum segment in 2026.



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By Christian Wissmuller

THE SNARE DRUM IS HAVING A MOMENT (AGAIN)

The snare drum remains one of the healthiest categories in the percussion segment. It's personal. It's expressive. It's relatively affordable.

If the drum kit is a drummer's vehicle, the snare is the steering wheel. It's the part they actually *drive*. And in today's MI market, the snare drum segment is once again proving that it's not just the backbone of the kit — it's one of the most dynamic, creative, and surprisingly resilient categories on the floor.

Let's start with the obvious: snares sell. They're the most frequent "next purchase" after a player upgrades from their first complete kit. When budgets don't allow for a new shell pack, a new snare feels both practical and indulgent. It's the rare product that can justify itself emotionally ("I need that sound") and logically ("It's an upgrade, not a splurge"). For retailers navigating cautious consumer spending, that's a sweet spot.

But what's interesting right now isn't just that snares are moving — it's *which* snares are moving.

The era of the one-size-fits-all chrome-over-steel workhorse isn't over (it never will be), but personality is winning. Drummers are increasingly shopping for a voice, not just a tool. Brass, bronze, copper, aluminum, walnut, cherry, hybrid shells — if it has a distinct sonic fingerprint, it's getting attention. The modern buyer, shaped by home recording and social media performance clips, is hyper-aware of how a snare sits in a mix. "Will this crack?" "Will this fatten up?" "Will it make my backbeat sound like it belongs on a playlist?" These are real purchase drivers.

The content-creation economy has quietly elevated the snare's importance. When a drummer posts a 60-second groove clip, the snare is the headline. It's the punctuation mark. And that reality is pushing players toward more specialized options. Deep 7- and 8-inch shells for cannon-like authority. Tight 13-inch models for funkier articulation. Snares tuned unapologetically low. Snares tuned to the stratosphere. The "Swiss Army snare" mentality is giving way to curated arsenals.

For dealers, that's good news — and a merchandising opportunity. A well-organized snare wall is a candy store. Even better? A few pre-tuned examples at different pitch ranges so customers can instantly hear the difference between "stadium crack" and "moody studio thud." Knowledgeable staff who can explain the impact of hoops, snare wires, and shell composition can turn curiosity into conversion. Triple-flanged vs. die-cast isn't trivia anymore — it's a closing strategy.

Price-wise, the \$299–\$499 band remains especially active. It's what might be called the "gateway premium" zone. Drummers feel like they're stepping up to something serious — upgraded throw-offs, better hoops, more distinctive finishes — without entering boutique territory. Brands that can deliver meaningful differentiation in this tier are seeing consistent turns.

That said, don't overlook the high end. Boutique-style snares and limited runs continue to attract buyers who want something with a story. Serialized badges, exotic veneers, artisan-level finishing — these details matter. Even larger manufacturers are leaning into this mindset, blending scaled production with custom-shop aesthetics. Transparency around sourcing, craftsmanship, and design philosophy resonates more than ever. Drummers like to know who made their instrument — and sometimes, what they had for lunch while doing it.

On the innovation front, hardware is having a quiet glow-up. Throw-offs are smoother. Snare beds are more precise. Manufacturing consistency, thanks to CNC and improved finishing processes, has raised the performance floor across price points. A mid-tier snare today often plays and tunes like a custom build from 15 years ago. That's good for consumers — and it raises the competitive bar for everyone.

Material sourcing and sustainability are also shaping product development. As certain tonewoods become more regulated or expensive, manufacturers are experimenting with alternative species, steam-bent construction, segmented shells, and hybrid layups. The result isn't compromise — it's creativity. Constraints have a funny way of producing innovation.

And while electronic and hybrid setups continue to expand in the broader percussion market, the traditional snare remains the anchor in most live and studio environments. Even in hybrid kits, the acoustic snare is often the emotional center of the setup, with triggers layered for reinforcement rather than replacement. The snare hasn't been sidelined by technology — it's been amplified by it.

Looking ahead, expect continued segmentation. Players are building collections with purpose. One snare for the cover band. One for recording. One that just makes them smile every time they hit it. For brands, the opportunity lies in embracing that specialization while maintaining accessible price points and clear storytelling.

At the end of the day, the snare drum remains one of the healthiest categories in the percussion segment. It's personal. It's expressive. It's relatively affordable. And it's endlessly tweakable — which, if we're honest, drummers love almost as much as actually playing.

If you needed further proof of the category's energy, look no further than this issue's Show Report from the recent NAMM Show, where new shell materials, inventive finishes, and refined hardware designs made it clear: the snare aisle isn't just alive — it's cracking.

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ON-STAGE DONATES 2026 NAMM BOOTH TO ANAHEIM SCHOOL DISTRICT



On-Stage, a division of The Music People, announced the continuation of its long-standing support for teacher-centered music education through its annual donation of On-Stage gear to Music Will following the NAMM Show. This year's contribution directly benefits the Anaheim Elementary School District (AESD), expanding access to hands-on music learning for thousands of students.

For 15 years, The Music People has partnered with Music Will—one of the nation's leading music education nonprofits—to ensure teachers have the tools they need to inspire creativity in the classroom. "We're proud to continue our tradition of supporting Music Will's mission to transform lives through music education. For 15 years, we've been partnering with Music Will and making donations of our On-Stage booth after the NAMM show, to help inspire creativity and empower the next generation of musicians," said Tom Tedesco, President at The Music People

Supporting Teachers, Empowering Students

This year's donation of music equipment and supplies

will be distributed across multiple AESD school sites, enhancing classroom instruction and expanding hands-on learning opportunities. By equipping teachers with high-quality stands, racks, and other On-Stage essentials, The Music People is helping educators create vibrant, engaging music environments where students can explore, create, and perform.

AESD serves more than 15,000 students across 24 schools in Anaheim, California, and is nationally recognized for its commitment to arts education. The district's comprehensive music program provides instruction in general, vocal, and instrumental music beginning in the elementary grades. Through partnerships with organizations like Music Will and The Music People, AESD continues to expand equitable access to instruments, curriculum, and performance opportunities for students of all backgrounds.

The district emphasized the impact of this year's donation, noting that these resources will strengthen instruction, support creativity and collaboration, and ensure students have the tools they need to grow as musicians and learners.

THE GUITAR AND BASS SHOWS CONFIRM MORE LIVE STAGE TALENT AND PRS GUITARS FOR UK'S BIGGEST GUITAR GATHERING

With less than a month before the UK's biggest guitar event, The Guitar Show has revealed more details of exhibitors and artists appearing over the weekend of 28 February /1 March at Cranmore Park in Solihull.

PRS Guitars return to the show in style this year with an impressive array of new models including the just-released SE Ed Sheeran Cosmic Splash Limited Edition. The wild-looking hollowbody, piezo-equipped baritone model is limited to 1000 pieces worldwide and will join the Maryland-made S2 Vela HH double humbucker-plus-trem guitar and the stunning new DGT semi-hollow.

PRS will also be offering the chance for one lucky visitor to win a PRS SE DGT guitar AND DGT 15 combo, simply by sharing a selfie from the show. Full details on how to

enter will be on the PRS stand during the weekend.

Recently confirmed for the show's Lark Music Live Stage are Thunder bassist Chris Childs courtesy Bass Direct), Paul Hindmarsh (Yamaha), Tay Grace (Ibanez), Gasoline & Matches (Blackstar), The Daley Crowe Band (Patrick James Eggle), Joki Schaller (Lehle), Whiskey Brothers (Ortega Guitars), JD Short and Manuel Rodriguez III and Dos Guitarras. They join renowned YouTube bass star Danny Sapko, Dagan Wilkin and Billy Watman (Ortega guitars).

Alongside no fewer than 145 exhibitors on the show floor, retail partners Absolute Music, Fairdeal Music, guitarguitar and Bass Direct will also allow visitors to take advantage of some very special show-only deals available over the weekend.



Tickets allow access to both The Guitar Show and The Bass Show and are priced at £16 for adults and £10 for children aged between 8-16 (booking fees may apply) and are available from <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-guitar-show-the-bass-show-tickets-1312683173709?aff=oddttdcreator>

JAM INDUSTRIES USA APPOINTS DAVID 'BAGEL' UNGAR AS HEAD OF ARTIST & ENTERTAINMENT RELATIONS

JAM Industries USA is pleased to announce the appointment of David Ungar as Head of Artist & Entertainment Relations. Known throughout the music industry by the nickname "Bagel," Ungar brings decades of experience and long-standing relationships across the musical instrument and professional audio communities.

In this newly defined role, Ungar will focus on the musical instrument "combo" segment of JAM's US business, with a strong emphasis on expanding and strengthening the artist program for KMC Music and JAM-owned brands. The American Music & Sound (AM&S) Artist Relations team will continue to operate as before, maintaining the high level of support currently provided, with no material changes to its structure or mission.

Ungar's career spans multiple facets of the music industry. He began by promoting clubs and DJing in New York City before establishing himself as a respected professional photographer, producing advertising campaigns for numerous MI brands. He later joined Korg USA, where he served in Artist Relations and worked closely with a wide range of globally recognized artists.

Throughout his career, Ungar has collaborated with an extensive roster of artists, including Luke Bryan, Five Finger Death Punch, System of a Down, Alice Cooper, Korn, Lady A, Stevie Wonder, Alice In Chains, Imagine Dragons, Shinedown, Godsmack, Queen, Aerosmith, Florida Georgia Line, Justin Timberlake, Kesha, The Who, Foo Fighters, Paul



McCartney, LINKIN PARK, The Struts, Black Sabbath, and many more.

In his role at JAM Industries, Ungar will lead artist and entertainment relations initiatives across the company's portfolio of iconic musical instrument brands, strengthening connections with artists, touring professionals, and the broader music community.

"As we continue to ramp up with new products, new websites, and an expanded marketing team across multiple brands, Bagel is a key part of taking JAM to the next level," said Jeff Hawley, JAM US MI/Pro Vice President of Marketing. "His deep artist relationships and long history in this space are a critical piece of the puzzle. The successes we saw at the NAMM Show are a testament to his ability to connect the right products with the right people and make real impact."

"I'm incredibly excited to be joining JAM Industries and working with such legendary brands as Washburn, Randall, Rhythm Tech, and the many other respected names under the JAM umbrella," said Ungar. "I already know several members of the team, and I'm looking forward to collaborating closely as we continue to grow these brands. I'm

truly grateful for the opportunity."

JAM Industries continues to invest in talent, partnerships, and programs that reinforce its commitment to innovation, artist support, and leadership within the global musical instrument and professional audio markets.

CELESTION ANNOUNCES THE TSQ2160 21-INCH DRIVER AT ISE 2026: FURTHER DEFINING ULTRA-HIGH-POWER PERFORMANCE WITH UNWAVERING CONSISTENCY

At this year's Integrated Systems Europe (ISE) conference, Celestion, the premier manufacturer of professional loudspeakers and compression drivers for sound reinforcement applications, is proud to announce the debut of the TSQ2160. This 21-inch neodymium magnet low-frequency driver follows the groundbreaking launch of the flagship TSQ2460, further expanding the revolutionary Ten Squared (Ten2) Series.

The TSQ2160 was born out of a specialist development program spearheaded at Celestion's R&D facility in Suffolk, England. This program focused not just on peak output, but on maintaining that performance throughout the speaker's entire lifespan—even after hundreds of hours of use. The TSQ2160 delivers a combination of massive power handling and excursion control, along with superior audio reproduction, fulfilling the need for unwavering performance in high-output subwoofers, large-format line arrays, and two- or three-way loudspeakers.

The TSQ2160 features an immense 5000W continuous power rating and achieves 97.5dB sensitivity. These achievements are intrinsically tied to its 6-inch (152 mm) diameter round copper voice coil and advanced magnet cooling technology. Meticulously built on a state-of-the-art robotic production line in the UK, the driver ensures the highest levels of precision and repeatability.

At the heart of the Ten Squared philosophy is a commitment to reduced thermal stress. The TSQ2160 utilises the Precision Tuned Venting (PTV) system, a three-channel cooling method that ensures constant airflow across the frequency band. This thermal performance is further



enhanced by its proprietary voice coil structure, custom wound in-house by Celestion. They synergistically combine to maximise cooling potential allowing the TSQ2160 to operate at temperatures up to 80°C lower than competing drivers in its class. By significantly lowering temperatures, the TSQ2160 reduces power compression and thermal stress, directly contributing to its high-performance longevity.

The TSQ2160 is constructed to maintain its integrity even during maximum cone excursion. The Reconfigured Magnet Assembly allows for substantially greater movement (Xmech) while ensuring that electrical motor strength (Bl) and mechanical compliance (Cms) reach their limits at practically the same point. This results in consistently low distortion performance even when pushed to the limit.

Durability is further enhanced by a dual polysiloxane-laminated suspension, which prevents the system from losing stiffness under heavy loads. To address common failure points, lead-out wires are precision woven through laser-cauterised holes in the suspension to reduce "whipping" and fatigue. Additionally, the driver features a double-sided, water-resistant cone coating for protection against humidity and the elements.

"The Ten Squared Series reflects Celestion's unwavering commitment to excellence," commented Paul Cork, Celestion Head of Engineering. "The TSQ2160 doesn't just provide power; it provides consistently lasting, superior performance, extending the new benchmark for professional low-frequency audio that we established with the TSQ2460."

Upfront Q&A:

Josh Vittek of Vittek PR – Part II

By Christian Wissmuller



Josh Vittek

From boutique builders to global MI brands, getting the right story in front of the right audience is a constant challenge—and that’s where Josh Vittek comes in. As the founder of VittekPR, Vittek has spent years helping musical instrument and pro audio companies sharpen their messaging and build credibility in a crowded marketplace. In Part II of this Q&A, he shares his perspective on how PR has changed in the MI industry and how his passion for music drives all that he does.

You, of course, do quite a lot of work directly in the MI industry — suppliers, brands, industry organizations — but you also have represented major artists and musical acts. Do you consider VittekPR to be more MI- or consumer facing, or is it more a case of “we cover music, period”?

move forward. The projects I did with Lita Ford, Brian Kahanek, Steve Trovato, and John 5 were really based off of an established relationship I already had with them. I am a fan of their artistry and am friends with each one. But this latest project with Marcus Deml took me by surprise. He was referred to me by former Guitar Player magazine Editor Michael Molenda. Coming in with a recommendation from Mike, I had to at least listen and when I did, I was blown away. Marcus is an amazing guitarist. I would even say that he is one of the best in the world today. More people need to know about him, and I want to be the one who tells the world all about it.

“I want to inspire more people to play musical instruments. The more people that play a musical instrument, the better our society and

New hires, industry personnel, and corporate restructuring are only relevant to the trades.

The MI industry and its consumer base are just not big enough to justify mainstream media coverage — for the most part. We are a very small percentage of their demographic. BUT! Occasionally, we do have something that is unique or entertaining, it crosses over.

In the so-unique category, Ciari Guitars had been around for a few years. Needing more attention, we ended up putting together a press release and distributing it for them as they headed into NAMM. This was a folding electric guitar that could fit in a carry-on. But it was a REAL electric guitar. A professional player can literally use this guitar for fly dates. When I distributed the release, I also distributed it to some of my engineering and technology media contacts, and it took off like wildfire.

As for entertaining, one of the best mainstream hits for me was a client with a product called The Guitar Hanger. A great idea that was simple — one of those “why didn’t I think of that” ideas with a very entertaining promo video. The video was so funny, it made it onto Fallon. If I remember correctly, the product even made it into a skit on the show later that year.

It’s all about finding the right fit. I take more of a sniper approach than a buck shot. I try my best not to send content to journalists where the subject is not relevant. I don’t send guitar press releases to keyboard journalists. And when something has legitimate potential for the mainstream, then I reach out to the relevant journalists.

Aside from VittekPR, you also are top-dog at Heist Monkey Entertainment — can you talk about that side of your professional activities?

Heist Monkey Entertainment was a video production company started by me and a guitar student of mine, who happened to own an ad agency in Orange County, California. I had an idea for a television show, we created a sizzle reel to shop around Hollywood, and everyone kept raving about the sizzle reel.



Doyle from The Misfits, Lita Ford, Josh Vittek, and DJ Ashba

I am a sucker for anything music. But I’ve got to be into it. VittekPR primarily represents manufacturers and brands. The strong majority is in the MI space. That is where I come from and that is my love. But we do represent other businesses in other industries. The PR mechanics are the same, regardless of industry. And I really enjoy digging into new market segments.

As for artists, those are unique situations and not something I really would seek out in the past. But it is something I want to explore again. The landscape has changed for artists, and I want to dig deeper into how artists can

world will be.”

What are your thoughts on the differences between media outreach to trade media, such as MMR, compared to more mainstream publications and outlets, such as Rolling Stone, Huffington Post, Fallon? Is one “easier” than the other? Do you need to bring different approaches to each, or are they pretty much the same strategies?

The strategies are the same. Knowing what the objective is is what determines which ones we approach. New product launches are of interest to both trade and consumer media.

Sizzle reels are like a trailer for a movie, but instead, a trailer for a television idea. People started asking us to make trailers for other ideas. The company is dormant right now. All of us involved evolved, my PR firm took off. Their ad agency got bigger. And the other two guys behind the camera started winning EMMY's and OSCAR's. And this whole internet 2.0 changed all the rules.

But I have always been on the periphery of television and film. It is such an amazing medium. I love the production side of things. In fact, we have been assembling a new team at VittekPR to start a video production division.

There have been some significant developments for you of late — please share with our readers some of the “big news” and how those opportunities arose?

Thank you. I am so stoked for this. NAMM has brought in VittekPR and Stungun Productions to lead artist relations for the 2026 show. It is a collaborative effort where we will handle managing, overseeing, and executing all aspects of VIP artist, musician, and band appearances, as well as celebrity participation. Everyone involved has been preparing for this for quite some time now. As of this morning, the star power scheduled to attend the show is bigger than it's ever been before. I can't wait for the announcements to hit. NAMM and our exhibitors are coming in strong to make the industry's 125th Anniversary unforgettable.

As for how it arose. VittekPR has been representing brands at tradeshow this whole time. NAMM is our Super Bowl. NAMM is the pinnacle of MI trade. At any given show, we have represented anywhere between three and 28 brands on the floor. In addition to managing publicity and media coverage at the shows for brands, we are often overseeing the artists for those brands. There is a lot of hospitality involved that includes travel logistics, accommodations, moving them on the floor, and safety. All those responsibilities have put me in constant contact with NAMM and ACC personnel over the years. I believe it arises from the 30 years of work we have put into the show. Artists play a pivotal role for NAMM, the exhibitor, the media, and the consumer. We want to elevate the experience for everyone.

Looking back on your many achievements, what are some milestone moments that stick out for you? Any favorite accomplishments, favorite clients, favorite events?

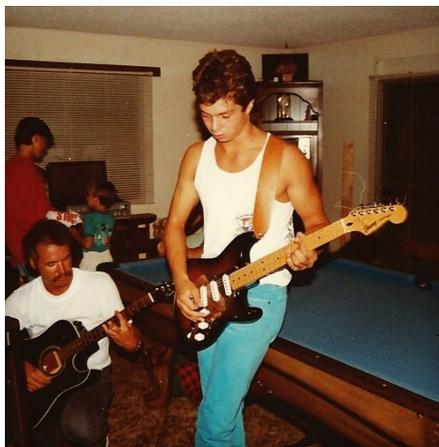
Being a small part of Gary Kahler's journey will always be pivotal. All my time and experience at Carvin is what would later set the groundwork for whatever it is I have become.

Favorite events tend to be the accumulation of the perfect storm — often at NAMM. Way back in the 1900's with Carvin, I had Timothy B. Schmit of the Eagles signing at the booth. Unbeknownst to me, Tony DeLaRosa had Paul Stanley of KISS signing across the aisle for Samick. Apparently, Paul and Timothy are close friends, so Paul came over to the booth. Then Chris Squire of YES shows up. Paul is

in full KISS attire and ends up standing up on the cocktail table posing for pictures. The crowd was insane. The aisles were completely blocked. Security had to come and shut it all down.

In 2006, I had Victor Wooten come perform in the little 10x10 Kahler booth. The crowds infiltrated the neighboring booths, moving displays and disrupting business for all. The company who had Ovation and Hamer at the time had a huge island booth across the aisle with a second floor full of meeting cubicles. The crowd even went up there to get a view of Victor. Security had to come and shut that one down, too.

I had Dean Markley as a client for a while. Nikki Sixx had been out of the spotlight for a bit but had new projects coming out. We had a 5PM signing at the booth and the line started as soon as the doors opened at 10AM. It wrapped and weaved all around the aisles of Hall B. A fist fight broke out and when Nikki walked out, everyone converged. It was a beautiful thing. Security showed up. But I was smart enough to give them the heads up this time and we managed through.



A young Josh rocking out on the guitar

My favorite accomplishments are when I get to see the results of our work for our clients, artists, and consumers. When we land a lead story or cover will never get old. Helping artists achieve the tones they hear in their heads and bring it to life is so inspiring to watch as it all unfolds live, onstage. And ultimately, seeing all of it inspire someone to pick up a musical instrument, that is the greatest accomplishment of them all.

But revisiting all those memories recalls what ended up being a documentary called HAITI 10. Back in 2010, a huge earthquake ravaged Haiti. Injuring millions, killing hundreds of thousands, and destroying a lot of the infrastructure within the country. Many were left homeless. Many children were orphaned. There was a family outside of Port au Prince, with 10 children of their own, taking direct care of an added 17 orphaned children with food, clothing, shelter, education, and more throughout their neighborhood. NAMM photographer, Jon Moyer, was there documenting the aftermath on a private trip through his church. I was

working on some PR for his photography work in California. When he returned, he showed me images and mentioned that one kid was a fan of Victor Wooten. His bass was destroyed in the earthquake. The fact that a kid in Haiti knew who Victor was blew my mind. I knew Victor. I reached out to him to get some autographed CD's and a copy of his book, *The Music Lesson*. I reached out to Cort Guitars who gave him a new bass. I just wanted to send them down to the kid. I wanted to give him some inspiration. Some hope. Hartke donated a bass amp. Dean Markley donated more strings than anyone had ever seen on the island and handed over all the shirts, hoodies, and swag they had in stock. After talking with Victor, the idea of Victor flying down to meet the kid was put on the table. Which led to, if Victor is flying down to meet the kid, we should send Jon to take photos. If Jon is going to take photos, we should take videos. We recruited NAMM's Pete Johnston to shoot the video. If Victor is flying into Haiti, then I should go to at least try and make everything safe and easy for him. We ended up taking a team of nine into Haiti. The U.S. Secretary of State made us sign waivers making sure we understood that the US government was in no way responsible for our safety or return. They made it clear — do not call us. While my conversations with NATO were a little more productive, they really didn't want us there either. The UN was just a bit more welcoming. But for some reason, we all wanted to do it, nonetheless. Seeing the kid's face when Victor shows up and surprises him is unforgettable. Word spread fast that Victor was in town leading to Victor performing during a church service. It was standing room only. Outside, they had PA speakers and car boom boxes on the roof blaring out over the neighborhood as he performed his wonderful arrangement of *Amazing Grace*. To be a small part of the joy and inspiration that Victor brought to that entire community is probably my greatest milestone, my biggest accomplishment, my favorite event, and a good representation of my favorite clients over the years. Everyone involved has inspired me for a lifetime.

Looking to the future, what's on the horizon for you and your work in the MI industry?

Music is my everything. It is my life. Music makes the world go 'round. It is in the beat of your heart, the rhythm of your breath, the cadence of your walk. Your speech. It is in the love you share. Music takes you to places that are not possible by any other means. Music helps express thoughts and emotions that words simply cannot. I want to inspire more people to play musical instruments. The more people that play a musical instrument, the better our society and world will be. And as a byproduct, the better our industry will be. I would estimate that I only know about 20% of the businesses and people within our industry — if that. If I can continue to grow my network of people and businesses, I can contribute more to inspiring people to make a little music.

GUITAR CENTER'S GABE DALPORTO DISCUSSES AI IN MUSIC RETAIL

By Christian Wissmuller

As the MI industry continues to navigate shifting consumer expectations, omnichannel retail, and margin pressure, Guitar Center is making a deliberate bet on artificial intelligence as a lever for both efficiency and differentiation. Under CEO Gabe Dalporto, the nation's largest musical instrument retailer is exploring how AI can support everything from in-store selling and customer engagement to inventory visibility, associate enablement, and back-of-house operations — all while preserving the hands-on, expertise-driven experience musicians expect.

In this Q&A, Dalporto shares how Guitar Center is approaching AI adoption in practical, business-driven ways, what lessons the company has learned so far, and how intelligent tools can complement — not replace — human connection on the sales floor. His perspective offers a look at how AI may shape the next phase of musical instrument retail, with implications for retailers, manufacturers, and the broader MI ecosystem.

"AI isn't like another coding language that's modestly better than the last one. It makes things that were completely impossible, possible."

What motivated you and GC to invest in AI-powered tools right now?

There have been four major disruptive transformations in my lifetime: the PC, the Internet, the iPhone and AI. AI is going to be bigger than the internet and will happen much faster. We have a simple choice. We can either (1) embrace AI fully and disrupt ourselves, or (2) ignore AI, and someone else will use AI to disrupt our business model and kill us. We choose option 1.

Can you talk specifically about the new Pitch Practice and Rig Advisor platforms? What do these systems do and what are the benefits for customers and GC team members?

They each do slightly different things, but solve the same problem. When I ask customers why they come into a Guitar Center store when they could buy the same things on the internet, they almost always say they need to speak with a deeply knowledgeable expert before making a major purchase. And mostly, that's what they get. But we're constantly hiring new people who have varying degrees of product knowledge, and that knowledge is really specialized in one product category or another. So, we wanted to up the bar and make sure every associate in any area of the store will be able to deliver that knowledge.

Pitch Practice is an AI voice agent, which pretends to be a customer. Our associates go through an entire simulated customer engagement, from greeting the customer, drilling into the nuances of what the customer needs, consulting with them on the best possible solutions, and then completing the simulated sale. Afterwards the tool critiques them on their entire end to end interaction, what additional questions they should have asked, maybe alternative product recommendations they should have made. It gives them 2-3 things to work on that day to get better. And it gives them a score. Salespeople are competitive, so they quickly start trying to outdo each other, which incentivizes them to practice more. So, it's a fun, gamified way to get our associates to enhance their knowledge and customer service skills.

With Rig Advisor we took a different approach. The question was, how do we create a customer centric tool capable of acting like the most knowledgeable music gear advisor to ever walk the earth? Just scan a QR code and it pops up on any mobile device. It's geo-aware, so it knows exactly what products are available in the store you're standing



Gabe Dalporto

in. And you can ask it literally any music and gear related question. "How do I sound like Jimi Hendrix on Purple Haze in 1968?" It will tell you the exact guitar to pick off the wall, the pedals to plug into on our pedal stations, and the right amps. It will even tell you the right settings. "I have \$5,000 and need a PA system for my gig this weekend." It will select the right mixer, the right speakers, cables, mics, etc., that fit your budget. It's pretty awesome.

One unintended consequence with Rig Advisor is that while we designed it for customers, our sales associates started using it too. Many of them are experts in a specific product category. Say a customer asks a guitar specialist what recording mic they recommend. In the past, they'd have to go find you a tech specialist. Now they can consult Rig Advisor and give highly relevant answers on the spot. It turned out to be a great training tool as well.

How does AI fit into your broader GC business strategy in the next five years?

We're going to dramatically increase our use of AI to make everything we do better and faster. We already have about a dozen high-value AI tools that are in use at scale already. That's going to increase by orders of magnitude.

Are these AI initiatives primarily about improving efficiency, enhancing customer experience, or driving new revenue streams?

They are a mixture of customer facing tools like Rig Advisor, associate productivity tools like Pitch Practice (and many more), and back end operational efficiency tools. The latter is what I call "boring AI." It's not very sexy but can have a pretty major and positive impact on the speed of your organization and the associated cost structure.

How do you see AI changing the traditional retail experience for musical instruments and gear, which often rely on personal, hands-on interaction?

Right now, we're experimenting to see how customers interact with tools like Rig Advisor, which we'll continue to evolve and improve. We're going to be launching additional retail-oriented experiences as well. We think the lessons area is ripe for disruption as just one example. I also think that AI can bring so much incredible complementary information to your shopping experience in real time.

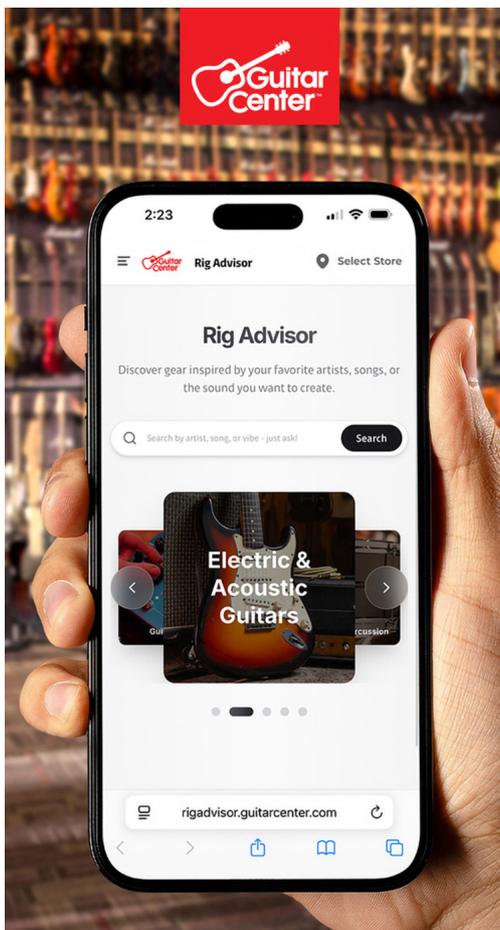
That said, I don't think anything will ever truly replace the tangible experience of being in a music store and being able to play the instruments. You can read all the articles, all the user reviews, watch all

the YouTube videos and think you're going to love it, and then you come into the store, play it, and you hate it. That's because every instrument is deeply personal. It either speaks to you, or it doesn't

We're working hard to make every area of the store experiential. And we're using AI to supplement those experiences with really incredible insights and information.

AI is a hot-button topic across many segments in global culture right now, with a measurable degree of concern — even fear — about potential downsides of the technology: privacy breaches, threats to employment stability, over-reach, and outright unchecked use of power as AI advances, etc. What are your responses to those who approach AI-assisted/driven initiatives with hesitation? How are you addressing concerns that AI could replace certain roles or skills within your workforce?

I see it quite differently. As it relates to our associates, a really significant amount of their time goes to fighting with our antiquated tools or doing a lot of unrewarding things like trying to find a missing guitar case in our warehouse (which is actually shockingly hard). That makes nobody happy. So, we can use AI to make those tasks fast and trivial. Instead of using those recaptured minutes to reduce headcount, we're letting them spend that extra time serving our customers. That makes much happier customers, and much happier customers tend to spend more money with you. It's a win all around.



Have you seen any measurable improvements in productivity, sales, or customer engagement already since introducing AI-driven tools?

Yes, meaningfully so. Here's an example. Nonprofits are allowed to purchase products sales tax free, but the laws are different in all 50 states. The process is incredibly manual, and if you get it wrong, the state sues you. Normally, this process can take a long time, sometimes up to two hours. We've used AI to automate the entire process in five initial states, and now it takes only a couple minutes. That's a game changer, and there are many, many more coming.

What's been the most surprising insight or outcome from implementing AI so far?

AI isn't like another coding language that's modestly better than the last one. It makes things that were completely impossible, possible. If we tried to use traditional coding to build the state tax tool, it would have taken a huge team a very long time to get all the logic nuances correct, and it would be obsolete a year later. With AI, that's suddenly a solvable problem.

What advice would you give to other MI retailers considering similar AI adoptions?

We welcome the competition.

Anything else you'd like to share with MMR readers on these topics?

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NAMM 2026: THE INDUSTRY FINDS ITS GROOVE AGAIN

By Christian Wissmuller

The 2026 NAMM Show once again delivered an incredible week of unity and energy for our global NAMM members, and while showcasing products are an important element of the show, it's also where business strategies, partnerships, and new technology such as AI are discussed," says John Mlynczak, NAMM president and CEO. "NAMM continues to be the global stage for our industry where products go from vision to groundbreaking announcements to impacting the global music industry in real time.



NAMM marked its 125th anniversary at The 2026 NAMM Show with a week that did more than celebrate history—it clarified where the music products industry is headed next. Concluding on Jan. 24, the five-day gathering combined education, live performance and high-level networking with three full days of exhibits and brand activations, setting the tone for the year ahead and beyond.

The 2026 show brought together more than 1,650 exhibitors representing over 5,400 brands, alongside 200-plus educational sessions designed to support NAMM's global member community. Across the show floor and campus-wide events, manufacturers, retailers, artists, and media converged to exchange ideas, launch products, and assess emerging technologies and trends shaping the future of music making.

Innovation was a central theme throughout the week, with new product introductions and evolving music technologies on display in an environment built for connection and collaboration. As an international meeting point for the industry, NAMM 2026 reinforced the role of in-person engagement in strengthening business relationships and growing the global music ecosystem.

NAMM SHOW 2026 BY THE NUMBERS

- 60,000+ total attendees, including 8,670+ international attendees from 122 countries, regions and territories
- 1,650+ exhibitors representing 5,400+ brands, a 25% increase over 2025
- Nearly 15,000 artists demonstrating and endorsing products and brands
- 200+ education sessions featuring 550+ speakers
- 1,600+ media, influencers and content creators reaching more than 200 million followers, a 50% increase over 2025

The 2027 NAMM Show is scheduled for January 26-30, 2027 at the Anaheim Convention Center

DEALERS' CHOICE AWARD WINNERS



The Buffet Crampton team took home Dealers' Choice Award trophies for Product of the Year and B&O Line of the Year

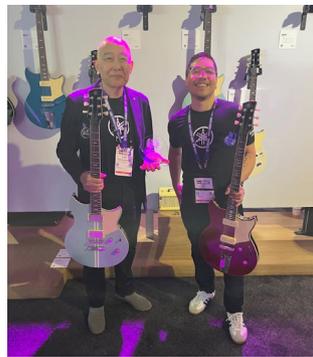


Chris Martin with C.F. Martin & Co's trophy for Acoustic Guitar of the Year



Brian Piccolo and Rich Formidoni of Casio with the trophy for Home Digital Keyboard of the Year

DEALERS' CHOICE AWARD WINNERS



The Yamaha team with the DCA trophies for Acoustic Piano of the Year, Electric Guitar of the Year, and Percussion Line of the Year



Jeff Wadulack with Hal Leonard's impressive array of MMR and SBO trophies



Jeff Hawley with Nord's trophy for Pro Digital Keyboard of the Year and Allen & Heath's DCA for Sound Reinforcement Line of the Year



Dino Monoxelos with Ampeg's trophy for Amplifier Line of the Year



Kala's Mike Upton with the DCA trophy for Ukulele of the Year



Neumann's Hugo Caballero with the trophy for Microphone of the Year



John D'Addario III holds the Dealers' Choice Award trophy for Accessory Line of the Year



Fender took home one SBO+ Teachers' Choice Award (amplifiers) and one DCA (Electric Bass of the Year).



Laura Camacho with Focusrite's trophy for Recording Equipment Line of the Year



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VOICES FROM THE SHOW FLOOR

NAMM 2026 was a big year for JAM, as we significantly expanded our presence across our booths, training areas, demo rooms, performance stages, and special events. Attendance felt well balanced, with strong representation from dealers, consultants, and artists alongside the general public. Longtime favorites like the Allen & Heath University console training once again highlighted just how valuable in-person interaction remains. While online certification and training videos absolutely have their place, the consistently overflowing AHU sessions made it clear that hands-on time with the gear is still essential.



With more than 75 new products launching across JAM brands this year, it was especially important to take full advantage of opportunities like the Pre-NAMM Hang, TEC Tracks sessions, and the new JAM Experience Stage at the Hilton. These events allowed us to better connect with a wide range of attendees and showcase our products in a variety of real-world environments.



“Overall, the show delivered great conversations, strong visibility, and excellent support from the NAMM operations team. We were also honored to receive multiple JAM Best in Show awards (Allen & Heath, BASSBOSS, and On-Stage), along with two MMR Dealers’ Choice Awards for Allen & Heath and NORD. Rock and roll!

JEFF HAWLEY Vice President, Marketing - JAM US MI/Pro | AA&V | AM&S | D&H Pro | KMC | Owned Brands

This year’s NAMM – particularly the first two days – felt incredibly energized. Attendees were highly engaged and focused on products that were both innovative and genuinely useful to their specific applications. They were looking not only for solutions to today’s audio challenges but also for tools that could open up new possibilities in their future workflows.



“NAMM was extremely productive for me and our team. I connected with key marketing partners, strengthened relationships, and had strategic conversations that will help us collaborate more effectively and deliver meaningful content for MMR’s readership and the broader MI community. I also learned a great deal about the opportunities ahead. By aligning on strategy first and tactics second, we built a strong mutual understanding, and I’m excited about the partnership and the work it will generate moving forward.



JEFF MCQUEEN Sr. Manager, Marcomm | Pro Audio | Yamaha Corporation of America

From my perspective, the 2026 NAMM show was about the same as last year. It continues to be an efficient way for us to meet with a lot of our retail and wholesale customers, as well as key vendors, artists, etc. However, it remains difficult for us to justify going back to having a sizeable booth on the show floor, which is why we will likely continue with our discrete meeting room format for the foreseeable future.



JOHN D’ADDARIO III | CEO | D’Addario & Co.

The show seemed to run well this year and from what I hear, attendance was up slightly. But the wider aisles made it feel less congested.



However it felt very spread out with more ‘concrete’ showing between the booths than ever before, which was strange. Loud, too!



“Felt like there were more ‘non-industry’ people there, too – general public – which I’m 50/50 on.

{Otherwise, we were busy most of the time, although I think the expectations of dealers and vendors have changed through the years. It’s definitely not the show for writing business like it used to be. But still good for reconnecting with the dealers and industry to help get a barometer on the year ahead.

AL MANISCALCO | Director of Sales & Marketing - Group Keilwerth Product Manager | Buffet Crampon USA

NAMM 2026 felt more focused and more intentional than last year, with a noticeable shift toward deeper, more substantive conversations. The industry has clearly moved beyond recovery and is now centered on sustainable growth, relevance, and long-term partnerships.



“What stood out most was the quality of dialogue with our dealers—open, candid discussions about changing customer expectations, real-world challenges, and how manufacturers and retailers can work more closely together to support musicians and drive the category forward.



BRIAN PICCOLO | Senior General Manager of Sales | Casio, Electronic Musical Instruments Division

NAMM 2026 was an extremely positive experience for us. It gave us the chance to connect in person with our dealers and distributors, celebrate our artists and partners, engage with creators and the media, and spend time with our fans. It was also a meaningful way to start 2026 together as a team.

“This year, we took a slightly different approach, extending the experience beyond our booth with live busking performances using our CUBE Amp Series in authentic, real-world settings. Attendees engaged hands-on with products, spoke with experts, and experienced them in live performance contexts. We showcased select museum-style pieces alongside our current lineup, from the legendary TR-808 and TR-909, through the TR-8S, to our new flagship TR-1000, highlighting decades of innovation and the heritage behind our products.

“And through NAMM-exclusive activations, we recognized select artists and partners with Lifetime Achievement Awards and shared some special, one-of-a-kind moments with our dealers.

KATHERINE WING | VP of Channel Marketing | Roland Americas



While I didn't get to see as much of the show as I usually do, I do know that the crowds were awesome for Tre Cool and Mike Dirnt of Green Day on Friday. Mix Master Mike over at the Alpha Theta (PioneerDJ) booth had a huge crowd. And I know Miles the Music Kid demo/performed up at the InMusic booth with Jimmy Jam to a good size crowd.

One of my big projects for this year's show was bringing in Billy Corgan as an honoree at the TEC Awards. It was great to see all of that come to fruition Thursday night. His performance was great and he was playing through his new Laney amp pedal which sounded amazing. Even in a room like that, the note separation in those chords was so impressive. Especially considering all the gain/overdrive/distortion he had on his signal.

“The Bass Magazine Awards over at the Observatory was fun. Great artists were recognized and obviously, watching Primus with all of those all star appearances was great. Green Day killed it. Robert Trujillo on My Name is Mud. Marcus Miller on Tommy the Cat. Those were so good. It was nice to see that style of event again. They've been missing the past few years. I really want to make sure we keep that going.

“But nothing was better than when Chad Smith walked into the green room Saturday morning before the Grand Rally. All the kids were in there waiting to perform. They immediately went silent and were in awe. He took the time to acknowledge all of them. He and Victor Wooten even gave them insights during while they all warmed up and gave encouragements for how they were all to perform on stage. Seeing the kids light up in the presence of Chad and Victor was my highlight. And those girls who sang! Holy cow! Can they sing. Getting to listen to them warm up vocally in the green room was heavenly. Man, they can sing.

JOSH VITTEK | Artist Relations Director | NAMM

FROM STUDIO TO STAGE: THE SNARE DRUMS PLAYERS CAN'T PUT DOWN

By Christian Wissmuller

Few components in the drum kit inspire as much obsession — or as much innovation — as the snare. From shell materials and bearing edges to throw-offs, hoops, and heads, today's snare drum market reflects a blend of heritage craftsmanship and forward-looking design. As players chase signature sounds across genres and price points, manufacturers and retailers are navigating shifting demand, supply chain realities, and a renewed appetite for customization. In this roundtable, leading industry voices weigh in on the trends, challenges, and opportunities shaping the snare drum segment in 2026.

What's your current top-selling snare drum model, and what do you think is driving its popularity right now?



Scott Donnell, Director of Brand Management, DW

Scott Donnell: DW's Custom Shop offers drummers a full menu of shell types, finishes, drum hardware colors and more. It's always fun to see what DW customers create. That said brass and maple snares in 5,5x14" and 6.5 x14" industry-standard sizes are still the top sellers.



Jeff Mulvihill: The top selling Mapex Snare Drum is the Black Panther Persuader, 14" x 6.5" Hammered Brass. This instrument is an enormous success because it is so Versatile. The sound profile is Deep/Dry regardless of the pitch making for an extremely well received playing experience for an immense variety of players across multiple genres.

Let me answer this in just a little bit of a different way since for SONOR snare drums it's less about "bestselling" and more about "most legendary."

This past year was the 150th anniversary of SONOR drums and part of the celebration was the release of an

anniversary edition bronze snare drum inspired by SONOR legendary Signature Series Drums of the past. They sold out immediately upon release, but the idea is anchored in the SONOR lineup with our Artist Series Cast Bronze 14" x 6" model always available. Known for natural acoustic focus, and monster projection cast bronze snare drums are certainly "most legendary."



Bill Ludwig, Sales Strategist – Strategic Accounts / TAMA Drums & B&O Manager

Bill Ludwig: The PCP147, Starphonic Copper is one of many top selling TAMA snare drums. I attribute the popularity of this drum to the price point and high versatility. The Starphonic line of drums has many great features above the 'intermediate' level, but still come in at a reasonable price.

Matt Rudin: Year after year, we sell far more Stage Custom Stainless Steel 14" x 6.5" deep snares than any other snare. This is because it is easy to stock for dealers and for drummers, it is an incredible value for those looking for rich and punchy tones without spending a lot, making it very easy to sell. For our Absolute Drum Shops and drum dealers that cater to a more particular audience, our Recording Custom Aluminum line is the top seller. This snare was designed, with input from Yamaha Drum Artist Steve Gadd, for professionals looking for superb consistency and articulation. With a crisp staccato sound, the expressive RAS-1455 and RAS-1465 represent the finest in

Yamaha metal snare drums

Joel Tetzlaff: Yamaha Concert Snares drums also have a popular Maple snare CSM-1450All – this is a great all-around concert snare sound that is easy to tune and more articulate.

What materials, shell constructions, or manufacturing techniques are you currently emphasizing most in your snare lineup — and why?



Jeff Mulvihill, Combo Drum and Concert Percussion Brand Manager, Sonor Drums, Mapex Drums, Majestic Percussion, KHS America

JM: We at Mapex are always emphasizing our proprietary SONIClear bearing edges. This formula of an inner 45-degree profile coupled with a rounded outer profile featuring a flat top profile allows for the optimal relationship between the head and the shell, makes tuning easy and increases tuning range. This spec is featured throughout the Mapex product line on entry level drums through pro level on both metal and wood shell products.

For SONOR, Cast bronze is the most legendary, but brass is really in the market lead these days and we have the SONOR Kompressor series 14" x 5.75" beaded brass drum that gets a lot of emphasis.

MR: At Yamaha, instead of focusing on one style of snare drum, or one specific material, we make sure we have something in our lineup for everyone. So, if you desire a Live Custom Hybrid Oak



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snare known for its depth, powerful attack and projection, or the articulate crack of our Recording Custom Brass snares, with its dark yet punchy sound, we have you covered.



Something that also sets Yamaha Drums apart, aside from just the diversity of our product lines, is that our snare drums all feature wide tuning ranges, so whatever your preference for tuning is, high, low or anything in between, you won't struggle finding the sweet spot of the drum. This is because of our dedication to only using the highest quality materials and everything on the snare, from snare wires to hoops, are all very purposefully selected to bring out the best sonic properties of every snare in our line-up.



Joel Tetzlaff, Marketing Manager – Percussion, Yamaha Corporation of America

JT: Concert snares use the same Q-type snare throw off, rims and shell designs found our drum set snares. Utilizing the same Brass and steel shells along with thicker and thinner maple shells, all featuring a 3-piece tube lug design. Concert snares feature a few modifications like double cut bearing edges and deeper snare beds for a wide dynamic range with precise articulation.

BL: TAMA uses many materials in their shells and parts to offer a vast array of products across all price points. I wouldn't say that any one material or configuration

is being emphasized more heavily.

SD: When it comes to wood snare drums, we offer a wide selection of customizable options via our menu of tone woods, grain orientations, and sizes — we believe almost anything is sonically possible. In addition, there are several patented processes, components and materials that are employed in the drum making process. These elements have been refined over years practical application



and R&D experimentation. This, a longstanding legacy of craftsmanship, and the validation of many of the world's top players are what we emphasize most.

Specifically, Collector's Series Pure Purpleheart snare drums have always been a favorite. We're also launching Collector's Series Pure Walnut, which is a new tone wood for the Custom Shop and sounds phenomenal in the studio and in live venues.

How can dealers best merchandise or position your snare drums to maximize conversation — both in-store and online?

BL: Depending on your regional market, physical retail locations usually benefit from carrying a wider array of price points to attract drummers at different stages. For in person demo, it's also important to have them accessible and tuned well. Online, the same sentiment applies for



covering more price points. The bigger task is getting as many drummers to your website, which might be improved with updating SEO, targeted ads, or building/growing a social media presence.

SD: Our hope is that our retail partners carry a breadth of DW snare drums so that their customers can chose what suits them most. Sound is very subjective, and a drummer's signature sound is highly dependent on their snare drum,



Matt Rudin, Product Marketing Manager – Drums, Yamaha Corporation of America

so it's a very personal choice. Seasoned sales associates know how to spark a meaningful conversation about what will be the best fit and DW offers a wide variety of choices and price points to suit every player.

MR: When it comes to the in-store experience, making the snares accessible and any POP available is displayed on the snares to inform the customers what the top features are, or sonic properties will help ensure the customers can easily find whatever it is they are looking for. When they find it, making sure the snares are tuned and that they can test the snare out will ensure they have a good experience with the product and get them closer to deciding on the right snare to purchase.

To best position our drums online, we find product reviews or even comparisons do very well to not only capture the attention of the audience, but to inform them of the sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle differences in our snare lines. Allowing a customer to hear the difference between not only different snare types and materials, but showing the diverse tuning ranges is a very useful tool in helping them select the right snare for them.

JM: Well in the case of the aforementioned Persuader [Mapex], it is a matter of High Value meeting true playability. Spec to spec it stacks up against all competition but feels better to play but again, because of the SONIClear bearing edge story it plays much better than it costs.

Physically, we offer playable snare drum POP towers to our retailers that present SONOR snare drums in an interesting

way with specs and silent salesman information while still allowing them to be touchable and playable by customers. In terms of overall market position, the SONOR brand has always been a luxurious and sought after legacy drum brand famous for high quality and German engineering at its finest.

What trends are you seeing in player preferences for snare drums today? (sizes, depths, finishes, tuning range, application)

MR: Because snare drums a) play such a large part in defining a drummer's sounds, and are also b) easy to change out, or have multiple snares in a collection, drums with unique materials or having drums that offer drummers a wide range or diverse sonic properties are always very popular.

We have also noticed a rise in popularity of snares that offer warm and punchy tones, like our brass line recently.

The recent launch of our Roy Haynes signature snare, which is not only a stunning hand hammered copper shell, it also offers something different sonically than other drums in our lineup, with a warm sound and that "snap and crackle" Roy was known for. Because of this, we are almost already sold out of the limited quantity of 35 in the US (100 globally) and may be completely sold out by the time this article is published.

Concert snares designs are focusing more on the single snare material with a focused sound profile, rather than a snare to tries to adapt all types of compositions.

JM: The trend for Metal shell snare drums in general has been with us for a while and is not slowing down.

SD: There have always been snare drum trends as musical genres and playing styles have shifted in popularity over the years. These days, all bets are off. Everything is in play, from piccolos to deep snares, thin shells, thicker shells, and a host of specialty snares. It's nice to see drummer stretching out and trying new things.

BL: No specific trends are notable from my perspective. I think many drummers look for variety in their snare collection, so offering many options for sizes, depths, et cetera will be more attractive than focusing on a specific style.

How do artist feedback and real-world player input influence the development or refinement of your snare drum models?

SD: DW's mission statement has always been focused on "Solving problems for drummers". We're listening to our incredible family of artists, our customers, and drummer's everywhere when we have those design conversations. There



are also a quite a few active players at the company and we're certified drum geeks, so we're not afraid to try things.

BL: TAMA uses a lot of artist feedback for all products being developed. Any TAMA product that launches usually goes through multiple rounds of artist testing and feedback to help refine and optimize. A top focus is to provide products to motivate and inspire drummers, and what better way to do that than to make a product that meet the needs of and inspires our artists.

JM: Artist feedback plays a crucial role in our development process at Mapex along with engineering team members and retail partners. It's an ecosystem.

Artist input is huge and SONOR has some of the best drummers and drumming minds in the world on the roster.

MR: Our artists are an integral part of our product development process, on everything from snare drums, to hardware, to everything in between. This is not just with our signature snares, in which an artist will hand pick components to their exact specifications when developing, but with every product we bring to market. We have a lengthy artist evaluation process when designing, in which we get their assistance selecting the right thickness for shells, best type of hoops, strainers, correct type of lugs and even what type of finishes to apply to each of our drums. Keep in mind, we have a lot of artists, each with particular preferences, so if we can impress the majority of them when a product is being developed, we know we have a great chance of success when that product is launched.

Concert snares R&D, much like drum set snares, are based on artist feedback and performance testing. Artist feedback is key to making great sounds and useful features for the performer. Our extensive testing also includes artists that are educators, allowing the perceptives of long-term use.

Looking ahead, what can dealers and players expect next from your snare drum offerings over the coming year?

BL: At NAMM, we launched more snare drums into the TAMA lineup and we have more exciting products in the works for the rest of 2026 and beyond. You can always count on TAMA to seek innovation in developing products to answer drummers' needs and inspire!

JM: We have plans to continually add to our [Mapex] flagship Black Panther snare drums line up while focusing our marketing and supply on the extremely popular Midrange MPX series and we have one very special artist-inspired release coming later in 2026 that I'll leave all of your readers wondering about for the moment. Keep your eyes on your favorite Mapex Drum shop!

The release of the new SONOR Momentum series includes some extremely exciting looking and uber-playable snare drums in Beech, Maple, and Birch featuring sizes 14" x 5.75" and 14" x 6.5" adding to the pro-level workhorse SONOR arsenal.

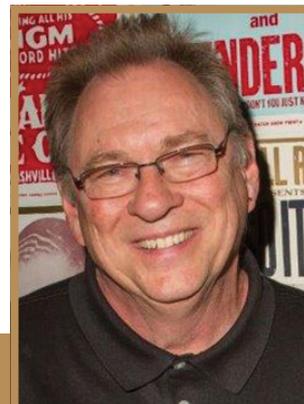
MR: We have a lot of incredible signature snares in our pipeline and look forward to releasing them once they are ready to go into production, but for now we are focusing on promoting the Roy Haynes snare, to help dealer with sell through and the recently released new colors on the Recording Custom series, including the stunning Red Autumn, Polar White and exclusive to Absolute Drum Shops, Silver Sparkle, which will all be in stores this March.

Concert snares like our most recent addition the 14"x14' maple field drum, will continue to offer a tremendous value while maintaining great sound quality need for concert stage.

SD: Expect the unexpected. Our DW MFG fully machined snare drums are proof positive that we'll always try to push the envelope. Our goal is to further the artform and deliver more choices and drummer-friendly features. From our hybrid Edge snare drums to workhorse snares that drummers can count on at every gig—nothing's more validating than putting a smile on a drum tech or FOH engineer's face.

How Do You Measure Success in the Arts?

By Menzie Pittman, Author of *The New Musician*



“ My first metric for success is to ask this question: Have you positively affected the lives of others through your performance, your writing, or your teaching? ”

Let me begin by identifying the definition of “success” from four traditional sources.

Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines success as the favorable or desired outcome of an attempt, or the attainment of wealth, respect, or fame. It also defines success as the satisfactory completion of something, or the gaining of prominence.

Reddit users define success as personal fulfillment, freedom, and happiness rather than just wealth or status.

Google defines success as the accomplishment of an aim, purpose, or desired outcome.

Indeed defines success more subjectively. Success is based on the achievement of specific, deliberate goals, personal targets, and finding satisfaction in work. It involves intentionality and aligning daily actions with long-term career or personal ambitions.

Personally, the “arts” needs its own definition of success. More than likely, we can all agree that those answers above, while acceptable, are generic, yet a career in the arts is anything but generic. The artists I know approach the definition of success a bit more expansively. When you think about it, it’s a lot like the word “musician;” it’s multi-faceted.

One metric used to define success in the arts is longevity. When you have sustained a career in the performing arts over a long period of time, that’s generally a good standard for measuring success. However, even though that checks a major box for the idea of success, you also have One Hit Wonders. Try to name the top five bestselling VH1’s Greatest One Hit Wonders recordings. Keep in mind this only goes back to 1985 and just for the record, I failed this test...

At #1 The Macarena, 1996 Los Del Rio.

At #2 Tainted Love, 1986 Soft Cell.

At #3 Come on Eileen, 1983 The Midnight Runners.

At #4 I’m Too Sexy, 1991 Right Said Fred.

At #5 Mickey. 1979 Toni Basil.

You must call those tunes and artists successful, although I would not call them classic artists, That’s the comedy because some people would.

Most serious folks in the arts would agree you need to have some skills to stay relevant in the “success” discussion; however, having skills is not always a good measure of talent. It is safe to say in the arts those two words are not synonymous.

One can view success, talent, and longevity as a collage or as independent of one another. Some may base success only on a monetary metric, and although that’s fair, the genuine artists toss that idea out the window. So, if we toss financial success out as the only standard, how do we measure the definition of success in our careers?

My first metric for success is to ask this question: Have you positively affected the lives of others through your performance, your writing, or your teaching?

Robert Baden-Powell, credited with the founding of the global scouting movement, famously said, “Try and leave this world a little better than you found it.”

If you have positively impacted another person’s life by your actions in the field of music, in my book, you are successful.

In the arts, the first metric of success should be your relationship with your craft, and craft pertains to retail too. Of course, you can be amazingly successful as an artist and yet remain broke. Just ask Vincent Van Gogh.

Too often we measure our success by only one metric- money! And while a fan of this currency thing, understand your artistic vision is Fort Knox in comparison, so leave the gate open to that creative way of thinking.

In closing, the question I always ask myself is: Am I enhancing the lives of those around me and lifting others in understanding the opportunities they may or may not see or understand. Any educator, businessperson, or artist worth any salt, should always be enhancing the creative understandings of those around them. That includes students, employees, music directors, or manufacturers.

Remember, a rising tide lifts all boats.

Fretted

Lighter, Faster, Thinner Reverend Roundhouse Series from Reverend Guitars

Introducing the lightest, fastest Roundhouse ever built. Reverend Guitars releases the new Roundhouse Series guitars for 2026. As part of a complete line makeover, the Roundhouse Series presents three updated models based on the classic Roundhouse platform: the Roundhouse HH, the Roundhouse H90, and the Roundhouse 290. These guitars now feature a thinner body for lighter weight and a rear belly contour for added comfort. All Reverend Roundhouse guitars have been upgraded with ebony fretboards for a smooth, fast feel and tight tone.

The Roundhouse Series introduces the new Steelhead pickups, available in both humbucker and hum-cancelling P90 versions. Designed by Joe Naylor, these pickups use oversized steel poles to deliver a punchy, responsive sound.

The new Roundhouse models come in bold colors with a beautifully arched top, giving them a standout look. Transparent brown backs add a classic touch, and a new headstock logo ties it all together. The Roundhouse Series offers reimagined guitars that blend classic style with the high performance you expect from Reverend.

The Reverend Roundhouse Series is currently shipping to Reverend Authorized Dealers.



Faith Guitars Unveils New PJE Legacy FG4 Earth Satin Sunburst at NAMM 2026

Faith Guitars is delighted to announce the international debut of the new PJE Legacy FG4 Earth Satin Sunburst model.

Handcrafted with a Solid Torrefied Sitka Spruce top and Solid African Mahogany back and sides, the FG4 combines time-honored tonewoods that deliver shimmering treble detail, warm low-end resonance, and a rich, articulate midrange. The top is enhanced through a meticulous torrefaction (roasting) process that improves structural stability while imparting a mature, "played-in" tonal character from the very first strum.

Visually striking, the FG4's Satin Sunburst finish highlights the natural grain of the torrefied spruce, elegantly framed by Solid Flamed Maple binding for a refined aesthetic. Premium appointments include Indonesian Ebony for the fingerboard, bridge, and pickguard, Grover Deluxe Nickel machineheads with Ebony buttons, and unbleached bone nut and saddle for superior tonal transfer and sustain.

For stage and studio use, Fishman's Flex-T system delivers a natural, expressive amplified tone. Combining an undersaddle piezo with an internal condenser microphone, it allows players to capture every nuance of their performance with remarkable authenticity.

Focusing exclusively on Patrick James Eggle's historic acoustic body shapes, the PJE Legacy Series represents the pinnacle of Faith's craftsmanship and tonal artistry. The new FG4 model is the latest to be granted access to Eggle's revered 'Earth' body shape – a true Orchestra Model (OM) design celebrated for its balance of comfort, clarity, and expressive tonal depth.

With retail guide price of \$1,979.00 / £1,565.00 / €1,831.00, PJE Legacy FG4 Earth Satin Sunburst (FG4HCE) is available now through Faith Guitars' network of authorized international dealers.



Takamine Guitars Adds Two 'Taka-Mini Guitars to their G Series

Takamine Guitars has announced two new additions to their popular line of travel-sized guitars known as Taka-Minis. The GP3HSE and GX31CE made their debut at the 2026 NAMM Show.

"Both of the new Taka-Mini models are more than they appear at first glance," says Tom Watters, director of product development for Takamine Guitars. "The GP3HSE is designed for high-strung Nashville tuning, while the GX31CE represents a higher-quality solution in a compact and convenient size. Both of these value-packed guitars are very appropriate for use by pro players in recording and live performance."

The Takamine G Series GP3HSE is a 3/4-sized guitar (22.4" scale length) with the shape and full body depth of a dreadnought. Its pro features include a solid spruce top and sapele back and sides, with a laurel fingerboard, multi-binding on the front and back of the body, and Takamine's TP-3G electronics with 3-band EQ, volume, and a built-in chromatic tuner. Available in Natural Satin finish with gold hardware, the GP3HSE comes factory-strung with the high-strings from a 12-string set – known as Nashville tuning – delivering the signature shimmering tone that adds depth and sparkle to performances.

The Takamine G Series GX31CE is designed for exceptional portability without compromising Takamine's renowned tone. This compact model – using Takamine's popular NEX cutaway body shape – features custom-designed bracing, along with a solid spruce top and mahogany back and sides. It delivers exceptional projection and clarity for a smaller (22.4" scale length) instrument, and includes pro features like multi-binding on the front and back of the body, gold hardware, and Takamine's TP-3G electronics with 3-band EQ, volume, and a built-in chromatic tuner. Available in Natural Satin finish, the GX31CE also comes with a convenient GBXM gig bag.



Accessories

Gator Launches New Air Glide and Spindle Locking Saddle-Style Drum Thrones

A premium collection of saddle-style drum thrones and matching backrests marks the latest update to Gator's Percussion Series, a group of accessories available for both aspiring and professional percussionists. The launch includes thrones with pneumatic height adjustment, a spindle-style version, and color-matched backrests compatible with both throne styles.

Gator's Air Glide thrones use a piston height adjustment mechanism in place of a threaded post, allowing for smooth changes in playing height between 18" and 24" (45.7–61.0 cm). Each model features a contoured saddle seat with 3.5" (8.9 cm) of thick padding and a soft velour surface for improved airflow, supported by a chrome-plated, reinforced, double-braced steel tripod base with an extra wide 23" (58.4 cm) stance and oversized rubber feet for stability. Air Glide thrones are available in black, blue and red finishes.

A spindle-based alternative is also available in a saddle-style configuration. This drum throne uses a threaded height-adjustment post with a locking mechanism that provides the same adjustment range as the Air Glide thrones. The seat matches the pneumatic models with 3.5" (8.9 cm) of thick padding and a velour surface, supported by a chrome-plated, double-braced tripod base with oversized rubber feet. This spindle-adjustment throne is offered in a black finish.

Color-matched backrests are available for both throne styles. Each unit offers up to 4" (10.2 cm) of vertical adjustment, allowing the distance between the seat and backrest to be set within an approximate range

of 1.75–5.75" (4.4–14.6 cm). The back panel uses 2" (5.1 cm) of padding with a velour surface, combining a soft contact area with a durable outer covering. Backrests are offered in black, blue and red to align with all saddle-style finishes.



Sound Reinforcement

d&b audiotechnik Introduces the 42S Loudspeaker

At ISE 2026, d&b audiotechnik unveiled the 42S, an ultra-compact, multipurpose point source loudspeaker excelling in all applications where both size and acoustic performance are paramount. As the newest member of the d&b xS-Series, the 42S – a sibling of the 44S – offers extraordinary broadband dispersion control in the HF and extended LF performance and comes with the same mounting options and advantages as its relative, but in a smaller form factor.

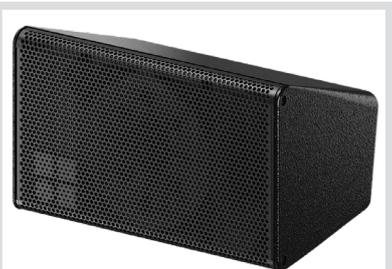
The 42S is a passive 2-way loudspeaker featuring a 4.5-inch neodymium LF driver as well as an asymmetric 0.75-inch HF dome tweeter. Its 120°x 90° (h x v) dispersion allows for even coverage, precise directivity and high perceived intelligibility.

"The 42S is a great option for permanent installations where the loudspeaker needs to be as unobtrusive as possible," says Marvin Denk, product manager Loudspeakers at d&b audiotechnik. "It proves its acoustic strengths in audience areas needing a wide dispersion, such as under-balcony or stage lips or to add a powerful and versatile solution for delay or FX extension to a main system."

Featuring a wide selection of mounting options, including flush mount, as well as an extensive Custom Solution offering, the 42S can be integrated flawlessly into nearly any venue, i.e. in hospitality, performing arts or houses of worship.

The 42S is acoustically tuned for use with all d&b amplifiers in main, auxiliary and distributed audio configurations. Offering additional value through its frequency response extending down to 77 Hz, it delivers a surprisingly rich low-frequency performance for its size, lending warmth and natural character. Its nominal impedance of 24 ohms allows for 6 to 8 loudspeakers per amplifier channel, making it a highly cost-effective option for distributed systems. When combined with the 5D amplifier or the new Milan-version 5DM, audio professionals can achieve even more budget-friendly system designs.

"The 42S is truly an all-purpose solution when acoustics and size matter," adds Denk. "Its compact design, versatile mounting options and high acoustic performance open the door to countless uses. With its exceptional horizontal dispersion, it's also a perfect match for d&b Soundscape applications, especially for acoustic emulation scenarios, where only the reverberation characteristics of a performance need to be supported."



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WORK FASTER
SOUND BETTER



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CQ-18T



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CQ-12T



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