

# M M M R

## MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

Celebrating 147 Years of Serving the MI Industry

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# KEYS TO THE LIVING ROOM: DECODING THE HOME DIGITAL KEYBOARD BOOM



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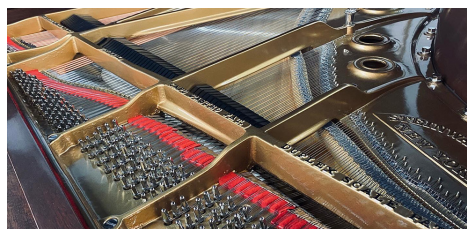
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Cunningham Piano Relocates, Positions for Future Growth



Small Business Matters

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# C O N T E N T S



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By Christian Wissmuller

# GHOST DATES ON THE CALENDAR

There are certain dates that seem permanently etched into the minds of people who have spent enough years in a particular industry.

No matter how much the landscape changes, no matter how many events come and go, those dates retain a kind of gravitational pull. You find yourself thinking about them even after the reason for doing so has disappeared.

For me, late spring and early summer still trigger one such reflex.

Around this time of year, I invariably catch myself thinking about Nashville.

Not because I have a trip planned. Not because I'm checking flight schedules or confirming hotel reservations. And certainly not because I'm preparing for Summer NAMM, which has now been absent from the industry calendar longer than many of us would care to admit.

Yet the instinct remains.

For decades, Summer NAMM occupied a unique place in the MI industry's annual rhythm. It was never the sprawling spectacle that the January NAMM Show became. It wasn't intended to be. Instead, it offered something different: a more relaxed gathering, a chance to reconnect with colleagues, conduct business, see products, attend meetings, and perhaps have a few conversations that might have been impossible amid the sheer scale and frenetic pace of Anaheim.

Like many industry events, Summer NAMM evolved over the years. It changed locations, formats, and emphasis. Some years felt stronger than others. Some exhibitors embraced it enthusiastically while others questioned its value. Such debates are hardly unique to our industry. Trade shows have always been subject to periodic scrutiny, particularly as communication technologies improve and manufacturers gain more ways to connect directly with dealers and end users.

Still, for those of us who attended regularly, Summer NAMM became more than a business event. It became a marker of time.

The music products industry has always been, at its core, a relationship business. Yes, products matter. Sales matter. Technology matters. But relationships remain the connective tissue that holds everything together. Trade shows provided a venue where those relationships could be renewed and strengthened. In many cases, they were where careers began, partnerships formed, and lifelong friendships took root.

Perhaps that is why the disappearance of certain events can feel surprisingly personal.

Of course, Summer NAMM is hardly the only example.

For many years, Musikmesse Frankfurt stood as one of the global MI industry's premier gatherings. To walk its halls during its heyday was to experience the truly international nature of the music products business. Manufacturers, distributors, retailers, media, artists, and educators from around the world converged in a way that felt both enormous and remarkably intimate.

Then came the disruption that affected every corner of our lives and businesses.

Musikmesse did not take place in 2020 or 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, organizers announced its permanent cancellation, bringing an end to a trade show whose history stretched back decades and whose influence had been felt across generations of MI professionals.

Questions that had once seemed hypothetical suddenly became urgent: Do trade shows still matter? How many are necessary? What role should they play in a digital-first world?

Those conversations continue today.

The reality, as is often the case, has proven more nuanced than either side of the debate predicted.

Trade shows have neither disappeared nor returned unchanged. Instead, they are evolving. Organizers are experimenting with new formats. Exhibitors are becoming more strategic. Attendees are looking for experiences and opportunities that cannot be replicated through a video call or a livestream.

In some respects, that may ultimately strengthen the events that endure.

The value proposition has become clearer. If people are going to invest the time and expense required to travel, the experience must offer something meaningful: genuine connection, hands-on interaction, education, discovery, and the kind of spontaneous conversations that remain one of the great advantages of gathering in person.

Perhaps that is why I still find myself thinking about Summer NAMM.

What I miss most is not necessarily the event itself, but the rhythm it represented. The anticipation. The preparations. The familiar faces. The sense that, for a few days, a significant portion of the industry would find itself in the same place at the same time.

There was comfort in that continuity.

Yet industries, like people, do not stand still.

While some familiar landmarks have disappeared, new ones continue to emerge. Case in point: NAMM NeXT Europe, scheduled for June 10-11 in Amsterdam. The event reflects both continuity and change — an effort to create new opportunities for connection, education, and business development while acknowledging the realities of today's marketplace.

As summer approaches, there will undoubtedly be moments when my mind drifts once again toward Nashville, even though there is no Summer NAMM awaiting me there. Old habits have a way of persisting.

And perhaps that is not such a bad thing.

Those reflexes remind us that our industry possesses a rich history, one built not only on instruments and technology, but also on communities and connections. Trade shows may change. Some may disappear altogether. New ones will emerge. The calendar will continue to evolve.

And, hey — at least I've got plenty of beach-days, outdoor concerts, and BBQs to look forward to this summer, even if no Nashville jaunt is in the cards. Hopefully the same is true for you!

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## NAMM ADVANCES INDUSTRY ADVOCACY IN WASHINGTON, D.C., HIGHLIGHTING TARIFF IMPACTS AND EXPANDING ACCESS TO MUSIC EDUCATION

In mid-May, NAMM concluded a series of high-impact advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C., advancing the association's commitment to protecting the U.S. music products industry and expanding access to music education for more than 54 million students nationwide.

On Friday, May 8th, NAMM President and CEO John Mlynczak delivered oral testimony before the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) Section 301 Committee, where he outlined the unintended consequences of current and potential tariff policies on the U.S. music products industry. NAMM's testimony also highlighted a decline in imports of beginner instruments in 2025 — trends that could threaten the long-term pipeline of musicians and the broader music ecosystem. NAMM urged USTR to adopt targeted, evidence-based trade remedies and implement an exclusion process for musical instruments, components and raw materials.

From May 10-14, NAMM returned to Capitol Hill for its 20th annual Advocacy D.C. Fly-In, bringing together a strong, diverse delegation of industry representatives. The Fly-In convened over 100 NAMM members and industry partners for more than 200 meetings with members of Congress and staff to advocate for federal funding supporting music and arts education. Additionally, two celebrity delegates — Miss America Cassie Donegan and legendary drummer Queen Cora Coleman — joined the effort as advocates to help elevate the industry's message.

Delegates called for increased investment in key federal programs, including Title I, Title II, Title IV, Part A and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). These programs are essential to ensuring that music and arts remain integral components of a well-rounded education, as defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Delegates also urged members of Congress who sit on Senate Finance and House Ways and Means Committees to provide targeted tariff relief for musical instruments, their components and the raw materials used to manufacture them.



"Our members travel from across the country to share a unified message with lawmakers: Music education is vital to student success, workforce development and the cultural fabric of our society," said John Mlynczak, NAMM President and CEO. "This consistent and persistent messaging that our NAMM members have delivered for the past 20 years is working, and we will continue to champion music education and industry trade for the benefit of every NAMM member around the world."

This year's Fly-In also featured Congressional Record, a bipartisan event on May 13 celebrating the unifying power of music and the arts — with participation from members of the Congressional Musicians Caucus and Congressional Arts Caucus, all made possible by NAMM's support.

Additionally, The NAMM Foundation began the week by hosting its annual Day of Service at McKinley Tech High School in Washington, D.C., connecting students with music industry professionals through its Careers in Music initiative. The program provides mentorship and career insights, helping inspire the next generation of music makers and industry leaders.

Through coordinated advocacy on both trade and education, NAMM continues to champion policies that support innovation, access, and growth across the music products industry.

For more information on NAMM advocacy efforts, visit: <https://www.namm.org/issues-and-advocacy/fly-in>

To get involved, consider joining NAMM's SupportMusic Coalition: <https://www.namm.org/support-music/coalition>

## GUITAR CENTER LAUNCHES MITCHELL SILVER CREEK, A NEW LINE OF FOLK AND ROOTS INSTRUMENTS



Guitar Center has launched the Mitchell Silver Creek Folk Instrument Line, a game-changing seven-piece collection of high-quality instruments including banjos, mandolins and resonator guitars at price points accessible to a wide range of players. Mitchell looked toward the historic icons, developing a collection that meets high standards for quality and playability. The collection is available exclusively at Guitar Center stores nationwide and at [GuitarCenter.com](http://GuitarCenter.com).

Mitchell has built player-focused acoustic instruments under Guitar Center's leadership since the brand's formation in 1986. This line extends that legacy to a wider range of acoustic musicians and leans into Mitchell's promise of high-quality instruments with great playability. The collection was built to meet that standard, using the finest instruments in the category as its benchmark throughout design and production.

"These instruments were built to the quality and performance standards of the most iconic instruments available today,

but to also be affordable by real, working musicians," said Gabe Dalporto, CEO of Guitar Center.

The collection was developed through direct collaboration with working musicians, product designers and Guitar Center's front-line sales associates. The result is a blend of traditional instruments and forward-thinking designs. Shapes, finishes and tonal characteristics were refined at every stage, with high-end folk instruments serving as the performance target rather than the inspiration.

"We looked toward the historic icons of folk instruments and re-imagined them with our own design for playability, consistency, and modern relevance," said Rich Thrush, Vice President of Mitchell. "The goal was to build instruments that feel and respond like they cost twice as much."

The seven-piece lineup spans banjos, mandolins and resonator guitars, covering playing styles from traditional folk and bluegrass to modern acoustic performance, and more. Guitar Center's 300 stores nationwide give players the opportunity to put these instruments in their hands before buying — a critical advantage in a category where feel, tone and response are best understood firsthand.

### COLLECTION OVERVIEW:

#### Banjos

**RB100 Resonator 5-String Banjo (\$349.99):** Traditional resonator banjo built for strong projection and bright, focused tone. Clear articulation and forward presence suited for bluegrass and ensemble playing.

**OB100 Open Back 5-String Banjo (\$249.99):** Open-back banjo delivering warm, mellow tone with natural decay and balanced volume. Ideal for folk, old-time and acoustic settings where nuance and feel are central.

#### Mandolins

**FM200 F-Style Mandolin (\$349.99):** F-style mandolin with carved arched top and solid spruce construction. Strong projection, crisp articulation and the classic response that bluegrass and traditional acoustic playing demand.

**AM100 A-Style Mandolin (\$169.99):** A-style mandolin with arched spruce top and balanced body design. Even projection and clear, consistent tone suited for folk, Americana and ensemble work.

**DM200E Double Cut Acoustic-Electric Mandolin (\$299.99):** Modern double-cut acoustic-electric mandolin with hollow carved Okoume body and onboard electronics. Expanded fret access and flexible performance across stage and studio environments.

#### Resonator Guitars

**RR200CE Resonator Guitar (\$429.99):** Spider-style acoustic-electric resonator guitar with strong projection, sustained response and clear articulation. A sweet-sounding humbucker pickup with volume and tone controls for versatility in live and studio settings.

**RR100 Resonator Guitar (\$349.99):** Biscuit-style resonator guitar with mahogany construction delivering punchy, dry tonal character with quick decay and strong midrange presence. Rooted in traditional blues and folk.

The Mitchell Silver Creek Folk Instrument Line is available now exclusively at Guitar Center stores nationwide and online at [www.GuitarCenter.com](http://www.GuitarCenter.com).

## EASTMAN MUSIC COMPANY TO DISTRIBUTE JEWEL MUSICAL PRODUCTS INTERNATIONALLY

Eastman Music Company has announced a new international distribution arrangement for Jewel Musical Products' Expressions ligatures. Eastman will offer the Expressions ligature line to dealers, educators and musicians, with models in stock at Eastman's Pomona, California, facility and available immediately.

The Expressions ligature line includes signature models developed by Dave Knox of Jewel Music for such artists as Ricardo Morales, Johnathan Wintringham of the International Saxophone Academy and Eddie Daniels. Designed for clarinet and saxophone players, the line is built around Jewel's focused approach to reed contact, instrument response, and tonal expression.

Ricardo Morales and ISA Expressions ligatures feature Jewel's Flex Rail design, which promotes even reed response and improved vibration for a projecting, controllable tone. The Eddie Daniels Expressions ligatures use a coated fabric construction, open pocket design and unique rail design intended to enhance reed vibration while supporting a warm, balanced sound with clear projection and responsive articulation.



"We're excited to partner with Jewel Musical Products and bring their innovative Expressions ligatures to our dealer network," said Joe Montgomery, wind accessories product manager at Eastman Music Company. "These ligatures deliver fantastic responsiveness and tonal core for developing players and professionals alike."

With immediate availability from Eastman's Pomona facility, the Expressions ligature line is positioned to support dealers seeking premium accessory offerings for advancing students, educators, and professional players. Product images and additional information are available upon request.

Eastman Music Company contact: Joe Montgomery, Wind Accessories Product Manager, [jmontgomery@eastmanstrings.com](mailto:jmontgomery@eastmanstrings.com), (909) 850-3468

Jewel Musical Products contact: David Knox, Owner, [jewelmusicalproducts@gmail.com](mailto:jewelmusicalproducts@gmail.com)

## YORKVILLE SOUND TO DISTRIBUTE MORLEY IN CANADA

Yorkville Sound is proud to announce that it is now the exclusive Canadian distributor for Morley, the legendary effects pedal company renowned for its iconic wah pedals, volume pedals, switchers, and innovative guitar and bass effects solutions.

For decades, Morley has been trusted by musicians around the world for its roadworthy construction, reliable electro-optical technology, and artist-driven designs. From its classic wah pedals to signature artist models used by some of rock and metal's most influential players, Morley products have become staples on stages and in studios worldwide.

"Morley is one of the most recognizable names in effects pedals, with a legacy that spans generations of players," said Dave Miner, Brand Manager at Yorkville Sound. "Their commitment to innovation, durability, and great tone makes Morley an exciting addition to the Yorkville portfolio. We're proud to bring these products to dealers and musicians across Canada."

Canadian retailers interested in carrying Morley products are invited to contact their Yorkville Sound sales representative for more information.

## PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



Guitar Center has named Jennifer Hatton president of Music & Arts, the company's school music division. Hatton brings nearly three decades of education sector leadership, most recently as chief growth officer at Aramark Collegiate Hospitality, where she helped secure more than \$240 million in new business partnerships and achieved a 98% account renewal and retention rate over the last 18 months. Her appointment positions Music & Arts to accelerate growth across its school music, rental, and lessons businesses.

"Music and Arts is the largest provider of K-12 band and orchestra rentals and equipment in the United States, and we currently have great momentum in the

business," said Gabe Dalporto, CEO of Guitar Center. "Jennifer has spent her career serving the education sector while building scalable operations, and that's exactly what Music & Arts needs to keep growing."

At Follett Higher Education, Hatton served as chief business development officer and EVP of Retail Operations and Course Materials Strategy, overseeing a \$1.6 billion business serving students and fans across 1,100 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. That background translates directly to Music & Arts' network of school partnerships, rental programs, and lesson offerings.

"This brand has been inside schools

and music programs for over 70 years," said Jennifer Hatton, president of Music & Arts. "That kind of trust is hard to build and easy to lose. I'm here to make sure we keep earning it."

Music & Arts is Guitar Center's dedicated school music division, with more than seven decades of experience connecting students, families, and educators with instruments, lessons, and support. Hatton's appointment reflects Guitar Center's continued investment in Music & Arts as a key component of its broader brand ecosystem, designed to support musicians at every stage of their journey. For more information about Music & Arts, visit [musicarts.com](http://musicarts.com).



Taylor Guitars has announced the appointment of Geoff Smith as Chief Financial Officer. Smith previously served as the company's Controller and brings more than two decades of financial leadership experience across manufacturing, technology and consulting organizations.

As Chief Financial Officer, Smith oversees the global financial strategy and operations of Taylor Guitars, supporting the company's long-term vision while helping preserve the values, craftsmanship and culture that define the brand. He works closely with CEO, President and Chief Guitar Designer Andy Powers and Taylor's

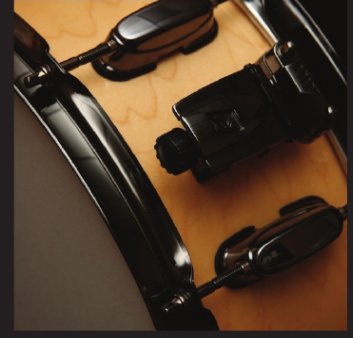
executive leadership team to guide financial planning, operational strategy and sustainable growth across the organization.

Smith has held senior finance and accounting leadership roles across multiple industries. Earlier in his career, he served as Controller for Fadal Machining Centers, a manufacturer of CNC machining centers widely used in precision manufacturing—including equipment that has long played an important role in Taylor Guitars' production processes. He later served as Director of Accounting at a division of Motorola Solutions and has led financial strategy and

operational initiatives involving mergers and acquisitions, ERP integrations, global costing systems and process improvement.

Smith succeeds Barbara Wight, who served as Chief Financial Officer for more than 16 years and played an instrumental role in the company's growth. During her tenure, Wight helped guide Taylor Guitars through global challenges during the pandemic and the company's transition to a binational Employee Stock Ownership Program that made the company fully employee-owned.

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# PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



Fishman is pleased to announce that Billy Martinez has joined the company as Vice President of Sales & Marketing. Billy's quarter century of industry experience includes, most recently, 10 years at Fender Musical Instruments as the Vice President of Product. During his tenure at Fender he was responsible for multiple product lines including Electric and Acoustic Guitars as well as Guitar Accessories. Prior

to that, he spent 15 years at Guitar Center where he worked in Retail planning, Inventory Management, Finance and left as the Director Of Category Management for the Acoustic Guitar division, overseeing all buying decisions for Guitar Center and Musician Friend.

Billy will oversee Fishman OEM Sales, Domestic and International Retail Sales,

and Marketing.

Jason Cambra, Fishman's Chief Operating Officer stated, "Billy's background at both Fender and Guitar Center offer a unique set of skills that have touchpoints to sales, marketing, and finance. Moreover, he's performed at the highest levels of our industry making him ideally positioned to help drive Fishman into the future."

## TRADE REGRETS

Korg USA announces with deep sadness the passing of longtime employee, celebrated sound designer, and musical instrument industry icon Jack Hotop. Joining Korg USA (then Unicord) in 1983, Hotop started as Senior Voicing Manager and spent over four decades driving the development, sound design, programming, voicing, and product demonstrations for more than 100 Korg products. As a pioneering engineer and exceptionally skilled performer, his extensive contributions helped guide the evolution of synthesizers and digital workstations from the early 1980s through the modern era, leaving an indelible imprint on instruments used by musicians around the world and for generations to come.

Hotop's foundational expertise was anchored in a rigorous musical and technical background. Raised in a musical family, he began piano lessons at age seven, inspired by his father, a musician featured on several Broadway cast recordings, and numerous pianists on his mother's side. By age 14, he was actively performing in local bands on a Gibson 101 organ. He pursued formal training at the Berklee College of Music, majoring in arranging, composition, and accompaniment, before expanding into emerging music technology at the Boston School of Electronic Music under Roger Powell. It was there that Hotop established his core synthesis fundamentals using early hardware including the ARP Odyssey, 2600, 2500, and EMS Synthi, building a deep understanding of waveforms, envelopes, low-frequency oscillators, and modulators.

His professional engineering career with Korg began following an extraordinary individual trial-and-error initiative around 1982. After buying a Korg PolySix, Hotop spent 36 consecutive hours completely reprogramming every factory voice. Looking to hot-rod and hardware-modify the instrument to add expanded preset locations, a noise generator, oscillator sync, and ring modulation, he initiated a three-hour technical phone call with a company engineer. This exchange led to an invitation to present his custom reprogrammed presets at the corporate office, resulting in an immediate employment offer. Hotop initially designed sounds for the Poly-800, later expanding his development and sound design credits to include



the DW-6000, DW-8000, Poly-800MKII, DS-8, 707, M3R, O3R, and the extensive factory sampling libraries for the DSS-1 and DSM-1 samplers.

This extensive development experience culminated in Hotop's historic role as a core member of the international team that created the legendary Korg M1, widely recognized as the world's first successful MIDI music workstation. Traveling to Japan eight times for the project, Hotop handpicked an elite voicing team consisting of Peter Schwartz, Robby Kilgore, and Ben Dowling, collaborating alongside Michele Paciulli and Athan Billias to centralize Korg's global preset preloads. To overcome the hardware limitation of the M1 lacking a resonant filter, Hotop and his team engineered innovative workarounds by manipulating PCM samples in unusual ways and deploying digital multi-effects, including flanging, phasing, chorusing, distortion, and rotary speaker simulation. This meticulous process included historic, spontaneous sampling successes, such as capturing a pick-played dead-string bass to create the iconic M1 pick bass, and buying a market pan flute in Yokohama that became a staple factory preset.

Following the massive success of the M1, Hotop led an expanded international voicing team known as the "MPBs," incorporating John "Skippy" Lehmkuhl, Steve McNally, and Michael Geisel to design the T-series. When Korg acquired Sequential Circuits

from Yamaha and established Korg R&D, Hotop split off with Lehmkuhl, Dowling, and John Bowen to develop the Wavestation, integrating vector synthesis and wave sequencing. He then collaborated with Stephen Kay, integrating Kay's Sound Genesis libraries into the O1/W, X-series, and N-series, while personally remaining dedicated to professional-tier product lines, including the SGproX piano. This collective expertise reassembled to build the groundbreaking Trinity workstation, which reintroduced resonant filters, deployed a touchscreen interface, and incorporated physical modeling synthesis via the MOSS expansion board.

Hotop continued to define Korg's flagship architectural paradigms by contributing to the Triton workstation, shaping its internal sounds and authoring six expansion boards. This layout evolved into the KARMA Music Workstation, which swapped traditional arpeggiators for Stephen Kay's generated effect algorithms. Hotop transitioned this framework to the OASYS, a major hardware leap using direct-integrated proprietary editors. The OASYS replaced individual expansion boards with built-in software modeling engines, including the AL-1 analog modeling engine, the CX-3 tonewheel organ modeler, the STR-1 plucked string engine, and the MOD-7 Variable Phase Modulation synthesis engine. Hotop later scaled this core framing into the M3 and M50, ultimately culminating in the flagship Kronos,

where he integrated the PolySix and MS-20 engines along with premium SGX-1 and EP1 piano engines.

Beyond his technical achievements, Hotop maintained a parallel, high-profile career as an active touring keyboardist, composer, and musical director. During the 1970s and 1980s, he conducted strings and toured the world with major recording acts including The Drifters, Gloria Gaynor, and Silver Convention. He later recorded and toured extensively with Equinox, Rat Race Choir, The John Entwistle Band, Leslie West, and The Robin Zander Band. This direct experience as a touring professional deeply informed his sound design approach, ensuring that Korg's complex, multi-engine hybrid synthesizers functioned as intuitive, real-world toolkits capable of delivering musical utility for home players, gigging musicians, and ensemble performers alike. Hotop often collaborated directly with legendary artists to shape their custom instrument palettes, working closely with industry figures such as Herbie Hancock, Keith Emerson, Joe Zawinul, and Brian Auger.

As a global clinician, webinar host, and prominent trade show presenter, Hotop was a widely recognized and beloved public face for Korg USA. For decades, his exceptional playing technique, enthusiastic product demonstrations, and educational videos at Winter NAMM and international events showcased emerging music technology to global audiences. His technical insights and artistry were featured extensively in publications such as Keyboard magazine and Electronic Musician magazine. Renowned for his deep, bonding professional relationships with engineers, programmers, and artists, Hotop was highly respected for his collaborative spirit and an enduring passion for his craft, often noting that he truly loved what he did and did what he loved.

Korg USA CEO Joe Castronovo added "Jack's contributions to the global music products industry were transformative. His work helped shape the sound of modern music, and his legacy will continue to inspire musicians worldwide for generations. Throughout his remarkable career, Jack exemplified KORG's guiding principle of 'New Music Always,' bringing together innovation, artistry, and a deep understanding of the musician's experience in everything he created."

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## KEYS TO THE LIVING ROOM:

# DECODING THE HOME DIGITAL KEYBOARD BOOM

By Christian Wissmuller

Few categories in the MI industry have demonstrated the kind of consistency, adaptability, and broad consumer appeal as home digital keyboards. Long viewed primarily as entry-level instruments or educational tools, today's models occupy a much larger space within the music-making ecosystem, serving everyone from first-time players and students to hobbyists, worship musicians, content creators, and returning adult musicians. Advances in sound quality, key action, onboard technology, and connectivity have dramatically reshaped consumer expectations, while manufacturers continue to blur the lines between portability, performance, education, and home entertainment.

Just as importantly, the customer base itself has evolved. The pandemic-era surge in at-home music making brought new consumers into the market, many of whom discovered that modern digital keyboards offer a practical, affordable, and space-conscious path into playing music. At the same time, online lessons, social media influencers, YouTube demonstrations, and app-based learning platforms have fundamentally changed how buyers research instruments and make purchasing decisions. Today's consumer often arrives at retail — whether online or in-store — more informed than ever, but also faced

with an overwhelming number of choices across a wide range of price points and feature sets.

For retailers and suppliers, that creates both opportunity and challenge. Home digital keyboards continue to represent a critical gateway category for the industry, frequently leading to add-on sales in lessons, accessories, software, recording gear, and future instrument upgrades. But competition remains intense, margins can be tight, and the pace of technological development shows no signs of slowing. Manufacturers are increasingly tasked with delivering premium experiences at accessible prices, while dealers must find effective ways to demonstrate value, simplify the buying process, and connect products to the real-world needs of today's players.

In this roundtable discussion, leading voices from across the category share their perspectives on the current state of the home digital keyboard market. From emerging product trends and evolving consumer demographics to merchandising strategies and the growing role of integrated learning technologies, our panel explores the forces shaping one of the most important — and continually evolving — segments of the MI business.



**Rich Formidoni**  
DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT MARKETING  
Casio

**The home digital keyboard category has evolved significantly in the last few years. What consumer trends are currently shaping product development, and what features are today's buyers prioritizing most?**

**Rich Formidoni:** I'll focus on 88-key weighted digital pianos. We've nearly reached a kind of singularity in this category. The major brands are all quite capable of producing instruments that sound and feel very authentic. There are still big differences in each manufacturer's approach, but the question of "Is it 'real' enough?" has diminished slightly in importance.

What's becoming more important is how the instrument fits into players' homes. With so many affordable choices that can effectively recreate the multi-sensory piano experience, consumers begin to consider additional factors.



When developing instruments for home use, we focus on trends like interior design, decor, furniture, fashion, and work/lifestyle habits. These factors are increasingly informing instruments designs. One recent example is the growing interest in lighter wood finishes on traditional console-style pianos such as our CELVIANO line. Beyond the traditional aesthetic, though, bolder and more modern designs are having a moment.

Size and weight are progressively important factors as well. High housing costs are causing people to choose smaller spaces, making a compact instrument more appealing.

**Jean Bellefeuille:** Today's buyers are looking for instruments that combine authentic piano feel and sound with modern connectivity, compact design, and strong overall value. Weighted hammer-action keyboards and realistic piano sounds remain top priorities, but consumers also increasingly expect features like USB audio/MIDI, Bluetooth connectivity, recording capability, and integration with computers and mobile devices.

We're also seeing growing demand from hobbyists and content creators who want a versatile instrument that works equally well for learning, performing, and music production.



**Corey Fournier:** We're finding that customers are interested in what a piano can provide for them and their family from a learning perspective. Features that allow self-guided education and interactivity with mobile apps appeal to returning players, students, or those seeking to begin music-making for the first time.

**Luciano Minetti:** One of the biggest shifts we've seen is increased pressure in the entry-level segment, particularly below \$1,000. That part of the market has become very compressed and competitive, making it harder for products to stand out.

At the same time, there's been strong growth in the mid and high end. Products with a clear identity are resonating more, especially when they combine high-quality sound, a strong playing experience, modern connectivity, and a design that fits naturally into the home. Instruments like our Poetry piano, for example, show that customers respond well to something that feels like a complete musical experience rather than just a list of features.

**What is your brand's current top-selling model, and what specific features or value propositions do you think are driving its success with consumers?**

**JB:** Our top selling models are a tie between the KaP1 W Portable Digital Piano and the CUP G1 W Digital Mini-Grand. First and foremost, the Kurzweil sound samples are a highly sought after and valuable feature of both, but these two models also have great aesthetics, wooden keybeds and loads of connectivity options that have proven to be very popular among



**Corey Fournier**  
SR. PRODUCT MARKETING MANAGER  
Piano/Winds, Roland Corporation U.S.

THE ONE  
THAT  
CHANGED  
IT ALL.



Fender

The One. For All.

## ■ roundtable

consumers. Another feature of the KaP1 driving its success is the included wireless (Bluetooth) pedal unit – currently, a pretty unique feature in the industry.

**CF:** The FP-E50 has grown in popularity since its introduction as an instrument that satisfies the needs of both piano enthusiasts and hobbyists alike. It has the grand piano tone and touch of Roland's high-level home pianos but with portability and performance-friendly features like onboard accompaniment backing and microphone input with effects.

**LM:** We're seeing strong performance across a few key models, particularly the Liano, LP-380U, and B2 Plus.



**Luciano Minetti**  
Category Manager  
KORG

Each one addresses a slightly different need, but the common factor is that they deliver a very clear value story. The Liano offers portability and simplicity with a solid playing experience, the LP-380U brings a more refined, furniture-style solution for the home, and the B2 Plus remains a strong entry point with the core features most players need. Across all of them, it comes down to good keyboard feel, quality piano sound, and connectivity that adds real usability without overcomplicating things.

**RF:** Again, sticking to 88-key pianos, our success story is the Privia PX-S7000. What's really telling is that the Harmonious Mustard finish is far and away our top seller of the three available finishes. This is the first time I've seen any color way outsell black in a piano product, and it tells us a lot about how the market has changed. The nice thing about the PX-S7000 is that it backs up its style with substance. The keys, voicing, speakers, controls are all part of why it wins awards. Every aspect of the instrument has a story to tell.

**What merchandising, demonstration, or customer-engagement “best practices” have you seen adopted by successful MI retailers when selling home digital keyboards?**

**CF:** Customers may not realize how far digital pianos have come in terms of wireless connectivity. They might expect that they can stream audio to the piano from their phone, but they are often surprised to learn about how they can use Bluetooth MIDI to get even more value. When our dealers show customers how they can use the Roland Piano App on their own device, they can engage directly with the piano right there in the store in a way that makes a powerful impression. The customer becomes the demonstrator and is eager to continue the journey at home with their instrument.

**LM:** In this category, the most effective approach is keeping things simple. The retailers that do this best focus on helping the customer quickly understand how the instrument feels, how it sounds, and how it fits into their setup.

When that information is communicated clearly and without overwhelming the buyer, it makes a big difference. This is a category where accessibility matters a lot, especially for first-time players, so keeping the experience straightforward and approachable tends to drive better results.

**RF:** In short, make it feel like home. Floor space constraints and cost are always understandable concerns, but if digital pianos are simply sitting back to back on a sales floor surrounded by glass counters and guitars on the wall, the vibe is off. These are emotional instruments, and we need to help the customer imagine it in their space. Even small additions like a nearby plant, rug, or lamp can transform a simple sit-down into a full ownership audition.

With regard to demonstration, we see success when the customer goes hands-on with some additional guidance, rather than simply being played to. Connectivity is also key. There is often more to the story than what's in front of the customer, and many brands (including Casio) have enhanced features and control options available via apps. Successful retailers have a tablet or phone with the apps ready to show.

Manufacturers also often create on-product POP displays that can do some of the work for you. In Casio's case, each digital piano has an available "silent salesman" music rest display that includes messaging, quick how-to guides, and app download QR codes. And for sales staff, we produce downloadable training guides and videos that can help you quickly become an expert, and identify which features to show to specific customers.

**JB:** The most successful retailers focus on creating a hands-on experience. Customers want to feel the key action and hear the sound quality for themselves, so dedicated demo spaces and knowledgeable staff are extremely important.

We've also seen strong results from side-by-side product comparisons, lifestyle-oriented displays, and video or social media content that helps customers understand how an instrument fits into their musical goals and home environment.

### **How are manufacturers balancing the needs of first-time players, hobbyists, and more advanced home musicians within today's digital keyboard lineup?**

**LM:** It really comes down to building a lineup that has a clear progression while keeping the experience consistent.

Entry-level products need to be easy to use and provide a solid foundation. As you move up the range, you add more refined key actions, improved sound, and a stronger sense of design for the home. The goal is to make sure that players can move up within the lineup naturally, without feeling like they must relearn everything along the way.

**JB:** Manufacturers are increasingly building tiered product lineups that provide clear upgrade paths as players grow. Entry-level

models focus on simplicity, affordability, and core piano fundamentals, while mid-range and advanced instruments add enhanced sound engines, expanded connectivity, recording features, and greater expressive control.

The goal is to keep instruments approachable for beginners while still offering enough depth and performance capability for more experienced musicians.

**RF:** Manufacturers like Casio address this by providing diverse product lines with easy entry points and clear upgrade paths.

The highest-end digital pianos would be just as ideal for beginners as they would be for more seasoned players, but most beginners (or their parents) prefer something more affordable to start, especially if there's any question about sticking with it.

By making it easy for someone to take their first steps, you're also creating an opportunity for loyalty when it's time to upgrade.



## ■ roundtable

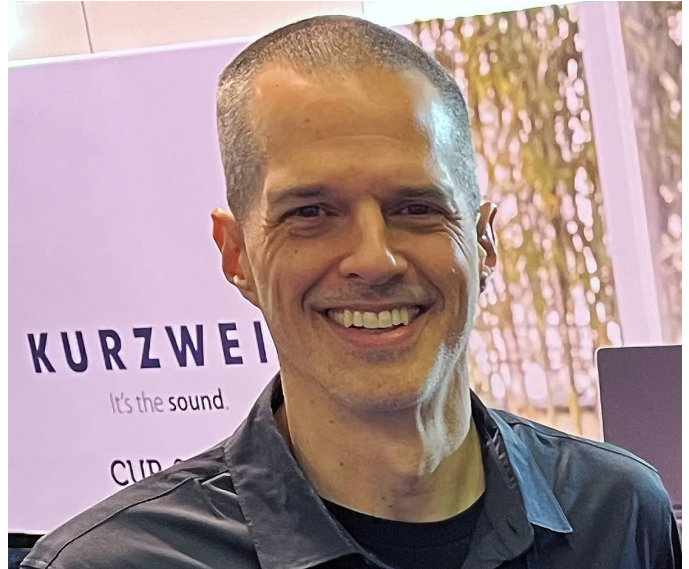
**CF:** The key is to build on the core fundamental values of quality sound and feel, and build from there. If a beginning player of any age is not using a quality instrument, it is more difficult to become inspired and maintain motivation to practice. This only becomes more true for advanced musicians or those who have played previously. Musicians inherently seek to develop a bond with their instrument and their creativity is sparked by how a keyboard responds. Roland's most affordable pianos have the same weighted hammer action found in our home pianos over \$2,000. This provides a satisfying experience for a player at any level and a greater likelihood they'll continue to pursue it.

### **Looking ahead, what opportunities or challenges do you see for the home digital keyboard category over the next two-to-three years, both for manufacturers and retail partners?**

**RF:** Ever-present woes like tariffs, inflation, and international conflict are the obvious challenges. Manufacturers and retailers need to work together to provide customers with fast and easy solutions, and sticking to what we've always done in the past clearly won't work. There's opportunity here for the nimblest among us. Those who can adapt quickly to buying and marketing trends are the ones who get customers' attention, and ultimately their business.

Manufacturers are also competing against themselves on an increasingly thriving used market. This is the cost of making gear that lasts. One opportunity this presents at retail is to offer trade-ins so customers have an easier way to upgrade.

**CF:** Ultimately, capturing the mind-share of existing musicians while helping to foster the creation of new ones represents both the greatest opportunity and the most significant challenge for manufacturers and retailers in our industry. Once a player begins, maintaining motivation and interest in improvement will wane, which requires us to be creative with learning features that will help keep the "surprise and delight" alive. Supporting parents and teachers is also a huge component. We need to keep providing them with tools they can use to compete with the many distractions



*Jean Bellefeuille*  
MARKETING MANAGER  
Kurzweil Music Systems

faced by their students. Our challenge is to show the next generation what's beyond the instrument itself and experience the joy and fulfillment offered by a lifestyle of music-making.

**JB:** Manufacturers are increasingly building tiered product lineups that provide clear upgrade paths as players grow. Entry-level models focus on simplicity, affordability, and core piano fundamentals, while mid-range and advanced instruments add enhanced sound engines, expanded connectivity, recording features, and greater expressive control.

The goal is to keep instruments approachable for beginners while still offering enough depth and performance capability for more experienced musicians.

**LM:** The sub-\$1,000 segment will continue to be one of the biggest challenges, as it becomes harder to stand out in an increasingly crowded space.

Because of that, I think we'll see more focus on a smaller number of models that really drive the business and are clearly differentiated. The opportunity is in continuing to create products that feel unique and meaningful, especially concepts like Poetry that offer a distinct musical experience.

At the same time, rising component costs will put pressure on pricing, so the challenge will be maintaining a strong value.



# CUNNINGHAM PIANO RELOCATES, POSITIONS FOR FUTURE GROWTH

By Christian Wissmuller

For more than a century, Cunningham Piano Company has been synonymous with piano retailing in the Philadelphia region, building its reputation on a combination of deep musical roots, customer service, and an unwavering commitment to the instrument itself. Now, the venerable company is embarking on a significant new chapter, relocating its headquarters to a new facility designed to better serve customers, support operations, and position the business for continued growth in an evolving marketplace.

The move represents far more than a change of address. For Cunningham, it is an opportunity to reimagine how a modern piano company engages with musicians, educators, institutions, and consumers while honoring a legacy that stretches back generations. At a time when many retailers are reassessing their physical footprints, Cunningham is making a substantial investment in the future—one that reflects confidence in both the enduring appeal of the piano and the company's place within the musical landscape.

Leading that effort is president Rich Galassini, whose tenure has been marked by a focus on innovation, strategic growth, and strengthening Cunningham's relationships throughout the music community. In this conversation, Galassini discusses the vision behind the new headquarters, the planning and challenges involved in the transition, and how the facility will help the company better serve customers and partners in the years ahead. He also reflects on what the move says about the state of the piano business today and why Cunningham remains optimistic about the future of the industry.



*Patrick Cunningham at his desk at the turn of the 20th century*

**Before we dig into the new HQ, let's get a brief overview of Cunningham Piano Company's history, for those who don't already know: What prompted Patrick Cunningham to found the business back in 1891? Who were the principal figures in the early days? Where was the original business' location and how large was it? How many employees were on staff in those early years?**

We were founded in 1891 by Patrick J. Cunningham, an Irish migrant with woodworking experience. The company manufactured acoustic upright, grand, and player pianos until 1943 when the factory ceased production.

In their first decade of manufacturing, Cunningham Piano Company gained recognition and became Philadelphia's most popular piano manufacturer.

During the 1920s, the heyday of the pneumatic player piano, Cunningham Piano Company was the largest manufacturer of player pianos in Philadelphia and shipped their wares to the entire East Coast of the United States.

Noted musicians used the instruments, including Vincent Persichetti, a native Philadelphian and noted composer and professor at Juilliard, George Gershwin, who used a Cunningham Piano to write his opera "Porgy and Bess" in Folly Beach, South Carolina,

The Great Depression was a major blow to business. Cunningham Piano Company ceased production in 1943 to support the war effort.

After the Second World War, Louis Cohen, a young piano technician who had worked for Patrick J. Cunningham, took over Cunningham Piano Company. Cohen determined that building a small number of pianos by hand without the national recognition of some larger companies was difficult. He decided to set up a restoration facility in the Germantown, section of Philadelphia, which remained a part of the company until today.

**Cue to the present day: who are the owners/principles of Cunningham Piano Company? How large is the Germantown factory building and how many employees are on staff in 2026?**

Louis Cohen turned the company over to his daughters, Rose Cohen-Karr and Doris Cohen-Reber in 1976. The sisters hired Rich Galassini, and later Tim Oliver, who ran the business for them until 2008, when the sisters turned the company over to them, including the Germantown restoration center.



The Germantown factory building is over 20,000 sq. ft. and it is spread over four floors. For many decades, it has functioned as a piano restoration center and a warehouse for new pianos. However, under the ownership of Galassini and Oliver, Cunningham Piano Company has continued to branch out in both product offerings and territory. Today,



Cunningham Piano has locations in three states and is the region's exclusive home for desirable brands like Yamaha, Bösendorfer, and their own Matchless Cunningham. They have gotten multiple awards from Yamaha and Bösendorfer over the years and the company has also become known as the region's experts on 21st C. piano technology.

Many of their 18 employees have specialized knowledge in technology, performance, or piano restoration.

**Ok, on to the big move: what was the catalyst behind leaving Cunningham's longtime home?**

The main catalyst is efficiency. Having a single location in King of Prussia that can house a school, warehouse new pianos, have a performance space and a showroom, as well as do piano restoration. It will happen all on one floor and under one roof.

**As exciting as the shift to King of Prussia must be, I'd imagine it's somewhat bittersweet to be saying goodbye to the Germantown factory — for the staff and also for customers. Is that's what was behind the decision to invite the public to tour the facility one final time?**

Exactly. We have been a home for musicians and music appreciators for generations. Many people have memories of Germantown, including performers like Andre Watts and Eric Wortham.

**Aside from that public tour, does Cunningham have any other events, initiatives, or celebrations planned to mark the shift to King of Prussia and the departure from Germantown?**

Our factory closing sale in March of this year was very successful. We will have a soft opening of our new King of Prussia location this summer. However, we will have a grand opening celebration in the Fall that will last at least a month. It will feature special programming for teachers, performances, and special pricing for our clients.



**Speaking of the new facility, can you describe the “upgrades” in terms of size, capability, accessibility?**

Absolutely. First and foremost, the new facility's location is easily accessible. King of Prussia is located at the junction of 3 major highways so many people can reach us easily. Second, this facility will allow us to house a school, our warehouse, a performance venue, restoration services, and a store all in one building and on a single floor. This is a huge improvement over our former building, which was spread over 4 floors and required a freight elevator to move anything.



*Rich Galassini and Tim Oliver about to go onstage and sing for Andrea Bocelli*

**Aside from the new Headquarters, what's on the horizon for Cunningham Piano Company? How do you envision the business evolving in the coming months and years?**

We look forward to "growing into" our newest location over the next year or so. This facility will allow us to serve the educators, worship leaders, and artistic community in our region in ways not previously possible. We are excited by those possibilities.

Beyond that we will explore further expansion in the future and look for ways that we can better serve the musical community.





# HARMONY, HUSTLE, AND THE LONELINESS OF THE ‘FRONT OF THE CHECK’ LIFE

By Jeff Mazza, Royal Music / Backbeat Retreat

Owni**ng** a music store can be one of the greatest things in the world — and also one of the loneliest places to stand. I’ve been one of 100,000 people wandering the aisles of the NAMM Show, surrounded by noise, energy, and excitement, yet feeling completely alone. There’s a very real difference between the person who signs the front of the check and the person who signs the back. Only the owner carries the full weight of that responsibility — the payroll, the inventory decisions, the late-night worries, the quiet moments when you wonder if you’re doing any of it right.

About ten years ago, I joined an entrepreneurial group — not music retailers, not industry peers, but business owners from completely different industries. That group changed everything for me. They helped me level up my business in ways I didn’t even know I needed. They revealed blind spots I didn’t know I had. They challenged my assumptions, pushed me to grow, and reminded me that leadership doesn’t have to be a solitary sport.

It reminded me of our wedding. Someone surprised us with a set of luxury chef’s knives — the kind you’d never buy for yourself. We laughed, because we were totally fine with our \$30 Farberware set, and we hadn’t even registered for anything nicer. Then we used them. One cut. That’s all it took. Suddenly we understood an entire world we didn’t even know we were missing.

**You don’t know what you don’t know... until you do.**

That entrepreneurial group sharpened everything for me — my thinking, my leadership, my business, and my sense of what was possible. It made me realize how easy it is for store owners to get stuck in the day-to-day grind, doing the same things the same way because that’s what we’ve always done. Meanwhile, the world changes around us. Customers change. Technology changes. Expectations change. And unless we’re surrounded by people who challenge us, we risk falling behind without even realizing it.

With the growth and clarity I gained from being around other driven business owners, I started thinking about what something like that could mean for our industry — for store owners who want to improve, who aren’t satisfied with the status quo, who want to grow beyond the industry’s 1% annual pace, and who want to succeed not just in business, but in life outside their stores. Because the truth is, most of us didn’t open a music store to become exhausted, isolated, or overwhelmed. We opened because we love music, we love people, and we love the idea of building something meaningful.

That’s what led me to create the Backbeat Retreat: a place for owners who want to think bigger, connect deeper, and talk honestly about the frustrations and realities of running a store. Not a conference.

Not a seminar. A retreat — intentionally small, intentionally curated, intentionally real. A place where you can take off the “I’ve got it all handled” mask and talk with people who actually understand what it’s like to carry the weight of a business on your shoulders.

And to capture some of those frustrations — and the humor that keeps us sane — I created a fictional music store owner named Leo, who runs a fictional shop called The Melody Mill. Leo lives on a Facebook page called *Harmony & Hustle*, where he navigates the same daily chaos, customer quirks, and emotional roller coasters the rest of us do. He’s the guy who deals with the customer who wants to return a trumpet because “it doesn’t sound like Miles Davis.” He’s the guy who stays late to restring a guitar for a kid who has a recital the next morning. He’s the guy who loves his store deeply... and occasionally wants to run away from it.

**This business is easier, healthier, and more fulfilling when we don’t try to do it alone. We need each other — not just for ideas, but for encouragement, perspective, and the reminder that we’re not crazy for caring as much as we do.**

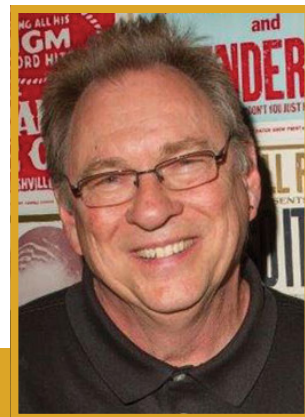
I’ve included one of his NAMM Show cartoons here, because I think many store owners will see a bit of themselves in him. And who knows... Leo might already follow your store.

At the end of the day, whether you’re wandering the NAMM floor or standing alone in your shop after closing, the truth is the same: this business is easier, healthier, and more fulfilling when we don’t try to do it alone. We need each other — not just for ideas, but for encouragement, perspective, and the reminder that we’re not crazy for caring as much as we do.

If you’ve ever felt the weight of the front-of-the-check life, you’re not alone. And if you’ve ever wondered what it would feel like to be surrounded by people who truly get it, that’s exactly why the Backbeat Retreat exists.



Jeff Mazza founded and operated Royal Music in New Jersey for nearly three decades. He is the creator of the Backbeat Retreat and the Harmony & Hustle cartoon series featuring Leo, a fictional music-store owner. He can be reached at [info@backbeatretreat.com](mailto:info@backbeatretreat.com).



## NAMM Fly-In 2026:

# 20th Annual Advocacy D.C. Fly-In

By Menzie Pittman, Author of *The New Musician*

### There is always a back story

At a NAMM show back in 2008, I had the good fortune to engage with former NAMM president Joe Lamond on the topic of music education. That impromptu conversation was the beginning of a 20-year long relationship with NAMM working on Capitol Hill in support of music education in schools.

As most in the music industry know, NAMM's annual Fly-In on Capitol Hill takes place in May, and over the past twenty years, along with the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), NAMM has become the trusted leading voice in support of music education in schools.

This year NAMM tackled a second issue along with supporting music education, an issue that affects NAMM manufacturers and music students directly. Tariffs!

In 2025, American music product companies paid \$1.34 billion in tariffs, more than five times the \$250 million paid in 2024. So, regarding tariffs, NAMM's "ask" to congressional leaders was one requesting "tariff exemptions" for the music products industry. NAMM is distinctly aware that these added cost increases would also have a devastating effect on music students, and school districts, as well as working musicians.

On Friday of the prior week, NAMM's president John Mlynczak gave testimony before the United States Trade Committee (USTR) highlighting the unintended consequences of tariff policies on the U.S. music products industry. NAMM urged the USTR to adopt targeted, evidence-based, trade remedies and implement an exclusion process for musical instruments, components, and raw materials.

### An encouraging statistic

While gathering take aways from NAMM members that I interviewed, I discovered that about 30% of this year's Fly-in participants were attending The Fly-in for their first time; and I found the passion of



all the attendees to be at a fever pitch. Thirty percent of "new" attendees shows that NAMM's message is being heard, and that NAMM members are willing to do the necessary leg work to move our industry forward and protect music programs in schools.

On Tuesday, after a full day of training, NAMM held its annual rooftop event. NAMM's own Eric Eble and music educator Glen McCarthy joined the evening's entertainment provided by Mike Risco and Miriam Risco. Together they made up the solid rhythm section at the NAMM rooftop Jam and as the evening progressed, they invited other musicians to join in to play some music. Who better to have as a guest singer than this year's Miss America, Cassie Donegan?

Wednesday, it was back to business. NAMM members took to Capitol Hill for meetings with congressional leaders, and their staff members. It takes a host of "Fly-In participants" and NAMM staffers weeks to set these meetings in place. The persistence needed to make the fly-In meetings a success falls on the shoulders of the NAMM members, so a tip of the hat to them. Cassie Donegan (Miss America) also joined NAMM members for appointments on Capitol Hill Wednesday

afternoon. After attending Capitol Hill meetings all day, Miss Donegan also sang at the Congressional Record event, Wednesday Night, on Capitol Hill. At this event, the extraordinary drummer Queen Cora Coleman joined Cassie Donegan as well as multiple performances from congressional members and other young artists.

The Congressional Record is a bipartisan event held at the U.S. Capitol, and it focuses on the power of the arts and the positive impact that exposure to arts education has on students of all communities.

On Thursday NAMM members close out any meetings that were not completed on Wednesday, and NAMM always recommends that its members follow up with their congressional relationships and keep the rapport going once they return home.

### Overall

The NAMM Fly-in is quite a unique and productive experience, certainly an extremely valuable opportunity for music retailers, music educators, and music manufacturers to share a common bond around a subject that connects us all: The Love of Music.

Fretted

## Taylor Guitars Releases Next Generation Grand Concert Models

*The Next-Gen Performance Enhancements Debut on the Grand Concert 812ce, 412ce, 322ce and 312ce*

Taylor Guitars has announced the release of four new [Next Generation](#) Grand Concert models: the 812ce, 412ce, 322ce and 312ce. Featuring Taylor's latest performance-enhancing Next-Gen design innovations, the compact-body guitars deliver greater warmth, dynamic range and musical versatility while preserving the articulate, intimate voice long associated with the Grand Concert body style.

"The Grand Concert delivers a sound that's responsive, articulate and deeply personal," said Andy Powers, Taylor Guitars' Chief Guitar Designer, President and CEO "With the addition of Next-Gen features like new bracing architecture and the Action Control Neck", players will appreciate the enhanced warmth and expressive range along with the precision and clarity the body style is known for."

### Next-Gen Design Features

Three signature design features define the Next-Gen models: the patented [Action Control Neck™](#), [scalloped V-Class® bracing](#), and [Claria™ System](#) electronics.

The Action Control Neck enhances sustain, warmth and resonance while allowing players to adjust string height instantly through the soundhole. Scalloped V-Class bracing bolsters the sonic depth, including low-end response, while preserving Taylor's hallmark pitch accuracy and sustain. The Claria System pairs an improved under-saddle pickup with a proprietary preamp and intuitive soundhole controls for natural amplified tone and effortless sound shaping in live settings.

All four Next-Gen Grand Concert models feature a 24-7/8-inch scale length and a cutaway body.

### New Next Generation Grand Concert Models

#### NEXT-GEN GRAND CONCERT 812CE (INDIAN ROSEWOOD/SITKA SPRUCE)

- Part of the flagship 800 Series, the 812ce pairs Indian rosewood's rich, complex resonance with the responsive clarity of Sitka spruce for a warm, balanced voice with exceptional touch sensitivity. A rosewood radius armrest and elevated appointments make it the most premium option in the wave.
- Maple binding with black/maple top purfling
- Green abalone single-ring rosette
- Smoked nickel tuning machines
- Ebony bridge pins with green abalone dots
- Indian rosewood pickguard
- Mother-of-pearl Element fretboard/peghead inlays
- Natural gloss body finish, satin neck finish

#### NEXT-GEN GRAND CONCERT 412CE (INDIAN ROSEWOOD/SITKA SPRUCE)

- Offering the rich overtones and full-spectrum voice of the rosewood/spruce pairing in a more understated package, the 412ce delivers a warm, balanced tone with rich overtones in a refined yet understated package.

- Black binding with black/white top purfling
- Single-ring white rosette
- Nickel tuning machines
- Ebony bridge pins
- Firestripe pickguard
- Italian acrylic Weathervane fretboard/peghead inlays
- Natural gloss body finish, satin neck finish

#### NEXT-GEN GRAND CONCERT 322CE (SAPELE/MAHOGANY)

- Built for players who want a naturally compressed, woody voice with a smooth, even response, the 322ce pairs sapele back and sides with a mahogany top for an organic, warm character well-suited to fingerpicking, chord strumming and singer-songwriters. A shaded edgeburst adds a vintage aesthetic touch that complements mahogany's dusky hue and rich grain structure.
- Black binding with black/white top purfling
- Single-ring white rosette
- Satin black tuning machines
- Ebony bridge pins
- Firestripe pickguard
- Italian acrylic Weathervane fretboard/peghead inlays
- Shaded edgeburst top, gloss body finish, satin neck finish

#### NEXT-GEN GRAND CONCERT 312CE (SAPELE/SITKA SPRUCE)

- The entry point to the all-solid-wood Grand Concert family, the 312ce blends clarity and balance with added warmth and dynamic range. The fast, responsive attack complements a lighter touch while still offering ample headroom for strumming, making it a versatile and expressive instrument.
- Black binding with black/white top purfling
- Single-ring white rosette
- Nickel tuning machines
- Ebony bridge pins
- Firestripe pickguard
- Italian acrylic Weathervane fretboard/peghead inlays
- Gloss body finish, satin neck finish

"The Grand Concert has always been our most intimate design, built for players who want to feel every note they play," said Powers. "Bringing Next Generation features into that equation felt like a natural evolution of what this guitar has always offered players."

The Next-Gen Grand Concert models are available now through authorized Taylor dealers worldwide starting at \$2,499. All models include Taylor's Deluxe Hardshell Case.



## Fretted

### Limited Edition PAC-MAN Player II Telecaster

Fender is excited to announce a partnership with Bandai Namco to celebrate their classic game, PAC-MAN — arriving in the form of the renowned Fender Player II Telecaster. Designed to bridge generations, this collaboration speaks to millennials who grew up chasing Ghosts and to a new wave of consumers drawn to nostalgia-driven cultural icons, all while delivering the premium playability today's guitarists demand. Developed in close partnership with the PAC-MAN brand team, the guitar features a fast and fluid Modern "C"-profile neck, a 9.5"-radius fingerboard with rolled edges, 22 medium jumbo frets — and makes a bold visual statement with a graphic of the iconic PAC-MAN game on the front and the classic PAC-MAN logo on the back. Player Series Alnico V Single-Coil Tele® pickups deliver crystalline highs, musical mids and tight lows, while a 3-way blade switch, 6-saddle bridge, and ClassicGear™ tuners ensure precise tuning stability. This is more than a collector's piece — it's a fully loaded instrument where arcade legend meets Fender legacy.



### Jackson x Misha Mansoor ET8

[Jackson](#) teams up with longtime partner and Periphery guitarist Misha Mansoor to introduce the Pro Plus Series Limited Edition Signature Misha Mansoor Juggernaut ET8. In a first for the brand, this model brings the highly requested EverTune Bridge to a Jackson eight-string guitar, delivering unparalleled tuning stability across Misha's expansive tonal range. Engineered for players who demand precision without compromise, the Juggernaut ET8 is a bold fusion of innovation and raw performance.

"I'm so excited to finally have an eight-string signature model, and it's a special one, too," said Misha Mansoor. "We have been working on the design for a while now, and I think the EverTune was the final piece of the puzzle. Periphery uses eight strings quite a bit, and both live and in the studio, the EverTune has made it so I can focus more on my performance and tone and let the bridge handle the tuning stability."

Misha Mansoor, co-founder and guitarist of progressive metal band Periphery and pioneer of the djent movement, epitomizes technical mastery and forward-thinking artistry that Jackson celebrates through his signature series. Building on his 2025 Juggernaut releases, including the HT6, HT7, HT7P, ET6 and ET7, the highly anticipated ET8 reflects the natural evolution of a partnership rooted in shared values of premium craftsmanship and sonic exploration, while also making history as Jackson's first-ever EverTune bridge eight-string guitar.

"The EverTune on the eight-string for Misha is a long-awaited fan favorite," said Peter Wichers, Product Development Manager, Jackson Guitars. "Eight-string guitars demand a lot, and the extended range and lower tunings can make staying in tune a real challenge, especially under the heat of stage lights or the grind of a long tour. The EverTune bridge keeps every string locked in pitch, so that low F# or A stays as tight and punchy as the moment you tuned it. Players can solely focus on their performance and creativity rather than stopping to retune between songs."



Fretted

### Cort Expands New Core Series Acoustic Guitars

Cort announces the expansion of its new Core Series acoustic guitars, a lineup of all-solid instruments designed to emphasize tonal integrity, choice of material, and player-focused refinement. Featuring semi-gloss, UV-cured finishes and a selection of exotic tonewoods, the series adds the new Core-GA Formosan koa and Core-OC Maple to previously released Core-MC Ovangkol, each built to deliver distinct tonal characteristics within a consistent design philosophy.

At the foundation of the Core Series is all-solid construction paired with hand-scalloped X-bracing and a dovetail neck joint at the 14th fret. The Core-GA Formosan koa pairs a solid spruce top with solid Formosan koa (Acacia Confusa) back and sides, offering warm response and harmonic depth supported by the resonance of a fully solid body. The Core-OC Maple features a solid spruce top with solid sycamore maple back and sides, delivering a bright, articulate voice with strong projection and dynamic response. The Core-MC Ovangkol combines a solid spruce top with solid ovangkol back and sides, emphasizing clarity, depth, and a wide dynamic range. Across the series, the ultra-thin, sonically enhanced UV finish is designed to preserve resonance while adding a vintage-inspired burst aesthetic.

Neck construction and playability are tailored to each model while keeping a consistent feel. The Core-GA Formosan koa features a mahogany neck with a Comfort C profile, paired with a rosewood fingerboard (15.75" radius) and a 25.5" scale length. The Core-OC Maple uses a hard maple neck in a Comfort C profile, also matched with a rosewood fingerboard and 25.5" scale. Both models feature 20 frets and genuine bone nuts, with widths of 1 3/4" (45mm) on the GA and 1 11/16" (43mm) on the OM. These specifications are designed to balance comfort and precision across different playing styles.

All Core Series models are equipped with Fishman® Presys VT electronics, featuring discreet, side-mounted controls for volume and tone. This onboard system is designed to provide straightforward amplification while keeping a clean acoustic signal, allowing players to transition easily from studio to stage environments.

Added appointments across the series include genuine bone nut and saddle construction, rosewood bridges, and vintage open-gear tuning machines for smooth and precise operation. Aged white ABS binding and black-and-aged white ABS rosettes contribute to a cohesive visual identity, while Venetian cutaways enhance upper fret access on applicable models. Each guitar ships strung with Elixir® Phosphor Bronze Nanoweb Light strings (12–53) and includes a Cort gig bag.

The Cort Core Series acoustic guitars are available now. For more information, visit [www.cortguitars.com](http://www.cortguitars.com)

**Street Price:**

**Core-GA Formosan koa 739.00 €**

**Core-OC Maple 729.00 €**

**Core-MC Ovangkol 759 €**



Pro Audio

### The Acclaimed ZEN-Core Synthesis System Captured in a Powerful Standalone Instrument for iPad

Roland announces [ZENOLGY GX](#) for iPad, a fully-featured ZEN-Core software synthesizer designed for a touch-based interface, via the Apple App Store starting May 12. This robust musical instrument includes thousands of classic and modern tones paired with accessible sound design capabilities, making it an ideal entry point into Roland's sonic ecosystem.

Boasting the same powerful synth engine and inspiring sound shaping tools as its desktop sibling, ZENOLGY GX for iPad has been rebuilt and carefully considered for a tablet-first experience. New sounds and integration features will continue to roll out for ZENOLGY GX for iPad in the future, offering an expanding musical experience suitable for everyone from the most demanding synthesists to those creating with an iPad for the first time.

Best of all, for a limited time, ZENOLGY GX for iPad is a free experience with the full feature-set unlocked for all users. This allows musicians at all levels to go hands-on and try it for themselves on Apple's ubiquitous iPad platform.



## Accessories

### Low Boy and Sweetwater Launch Exclusive Finish for Boutique Bass Drum Beaters Just in Time for Drum Month

Low Boy, maker of handcrafted bass drum beaters, today announced the launch of its newest exclusive colorway in partnership with Sweetwater: Natural with Red Sparkle Stripes. The release, part of Low Boy's Drum Shop Designed program, marks the third exclusive finish collaboration between the two companies and arrives just in time to kick off Sweetwater's annual Drum Month. The Natural with Red Sparkle Stripes finish is available across all eight of Low Boy's signature beater models. Drummers can choose between the Standard (95g) and Lightweight (80g) weights, with each turned from premium North American hard maple and offered in wood, felt, leather, or lambswool striking surfaces. This versatile combination of weights and materials ensures a tailored feel and tone for players across every genre, from metal and punk to jazz and Americana. A key highlight of this latest collaboration is its affordability. The Natural with Red Sparkle Stripes beaters are priced in Low Boy's entry tier, starting at just \$35 MAP.

"I know money is tight for everyone right now, including musicians," said Low Boy founder Jeremy Brieske. "When developing this line, Sweetwater challenged us to create a beater that was stunning while remaining highly affordable—to build a true boutique piece of drum gear at a \$35 price point. I think we delivered."

Sweetwater shared equal enthusiasm for the ongoing partnership. "We love every opportunity to collaborate with Low Boy and we always have so much fun coming up with new designs," said Evan Turner of Sweetwater. "This latest offering is simple but elegant, and feels amazing – just like every Low Boy beater!"

The Natural with Red Sparkle Stripes beaters will be available exclusively through Sweetwater beginning June 3, coinciding with the start of the retailer's annual Drum Month.

In addition to this product launch, drummers can also check their local drum shops for exclusive finishes closer to home. Low Boy's Drum Shop Designed program continues to offer custom, exclusive colorways tailored to independent authorized Low Boy dealers worldwide.



## Cases & Stands

### Frameworks' Latest DJ Facade Transforms into a Screen-Driven Booth Element

Gator Frameworks has introduced the DJ Facade with TV Mount and Carrying Bag, a version of its DJ facade that incorporates an integrated TV mount. The design builds on the role of a facade in shaping a clean booth setup and adds the ability to present content directly from the front of the booth.

The GFW-DJFACADE-TVM supports turntables, mixers, DJ controllers, laptops, DJ cases and related accessories within an enclosed workspace that keeps cables and equipment out of view. An adjustable front-mounted TV bracket accommodates most VESA mounting patterns and supports displays up to 70 inches. A wide base and additional support legs provide stability, with a total weight capacity of up to 200 pounds for combined equipment and display.

A ventilated tabletop helps reduce overall weight while promoting consistent airflow around equipment, while two cable management portholes allow for organized cable routing behind the setup. Black and white scrims are included to keep cables and equipment out of view, and the system collapses into an included padded carrying bag for transport between locations.

For more information on Gator's DJ products, visit [gatorco.com](http://gatorco.com).



### Gator's ONYX Series Expands with LED-Equipped DJ Case Options

Gator Cases has expanded its ONYX Series of DJ flight cases with four new models featuring integrated LED lighting, building on the series' blacked-out aesthetic with added visual functionality.

Each case maintains the ONYX Series' all-black 9 mm wood construction with black aluminum valances, precision-fit interiors, and ATA-style hardware designed for reliable protection during transport and use. The models introduce an LED light strip system with remote control and USB power, offering multiple color options and adjustable modes to enhance visibility in low-light environments and complement stage lighting. Each model also includes a smooth-gliding upper deck platform for laptop placement.

The G-ONYXUD-FLX10-LED and G-ONYXUD-REV5-LED are designed for Pioneer DJ DDJ-FLX10 and DDJ-REV5 controllers, respectively, while the G-ONYXUD-FLX10-2U-LED and G-ONYXUD-REV7-2U-LED add 2U rack space for mounting additional gear within the case.

Red recessed twist latches and spring-loaded rubber-gripped handles support secure closure and handling, while EVA-lined interiors help protect equipment during transport. For more information on Gator's ONYX DJ cases and other DJ accessories, visit [gatorco.com](http://gatorco.com).





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