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C O N T E N T S



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As brick-and-mortar MI retailers continue to navigate shifting consumer expectations, experiential retail has moved from a differentiator to a necessity. Guitar Center's new in-store "Pedal Island" —an interactive, plug-and-play effects playground—represents a notable investment in hands-on discovery, streamlined merchandising, and category growth. MMR spoke with company leadership about the goals behind the concept, early results, and what lessons dealers of all sizes can take from this approach to driving engagement and sales on the showroom floor.

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HOW THE 2026 NAMM FLY-IN FIGHTS FOR FUNDING 14

As the MI industry navigates a complex landscape of shifting trade policies and the critical need for expanded music education, NAMM president and CEO John Mlynczak recently returned from Capitol Hill with a clear message: the industry's voice has never been louder. Marking the 20th anniversary of the NAMM Advocacy D.C. Fly-In, Mlynczak and a delegation of industry leaders will lobby for essential tariff exemptions and a \$1.3 billion federal investment in music programs. In this exclusive Q&A, we sit down with Mlynczak to discuss the strategic goals for the 2026 mission, how these high-level political conversations translate to the local retail floor, and what the next decade of advocacy looks like for the world of music products.

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In an era where convenience is king, the days of piecing together a live rig component-by-component are fading fast. For today's working musicians and venue owners, "plug-and-play" isn't just a preference — it's a requirement.

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By Christian Wissmuller

SOUND INVESTMENTS IN A CHANGING MARKET

Today's PA buyer could just as easily be a fitness instructor, worship volunteer, school administrator, solo acoustic performer, event coordinator, livestreamer, or entrepreneur running community events.

If there's one thing the MI industry has learned over the past several years, it's this: musicians may argue endlessly about tone, tube amps, and whether anyone really needs another overdrive pedal, but when the PA goes down, everybody notices.

Fast.

That's why this issue's focus on PA Systems and Live Sound Packages/Bundles feels particularly relevant right now. Live sound is one of those categories that tends to tell the truth about the broader state of the industry. When performers are gigging, venues are investing, schools are rebuilding programs, houses of worship are upgrading systems, and creators are stepping into live production, the live sound category starts humming — sometimes literally.

And unlike some MI categories that can lean heavily on aspiration, nostalgia, or collector mentality, PA and live sound products are about utility. They solve problems. Usually under pressure. Usually five minutes before downbeat.

What's especially interesting today is how dramatically the category has evolved. Not that long ago, putting together a sound system required enough separate components, cables, adapters, and technical vocabulary to make some customers feel like they needed an electrical engineering degree just to host an open mic night. Now? Entire systems can be unpacked, connected, controlled from a smartphone, and running before the drummer finishes asking where to plug in the fog machine.

Progress.

The rise of complete live sound packages and bundled solutions has been particularly important for the MI channel. Customers increasingly want solutions, not scavenger hunts. They don't necessarily want to piece together every component individually — especially newer buyers, part-time performers, schools, worship teams, DJs, podcasters, or content creators entering live production for the first time. They want confidence that everything works together, sounds good, and won't spontaneously combust during a wedding reception.

Honestly, that's not an unreasonable expectation.

For retailers, thoughtfully assembled bundles create a win-win scenario. Customers get simplicity and clarity. Dealers increase attachment opportunities while reducing confusion and hesitation. And manufacturers get to showcase ecosystems rather than isolated products. Everybody leaves happier — except maybe the guy still trying to explain impedance matching in the accessories aisle.

Meanwhile, customer expectations for sound quality continue climbing at an almost absurd pace. Today's buyers are accustomed to polished streaming audio, professional-level content creation, and compact systems that somehow manage to sound far larger than they physically appear. Portable no longer means "acceptable compromise." Increasingly, it means "surprisingly excellent."

That shift has pushed manufacturers to innovate aggressively. Compact column arrays, battery-powered systems, digital mixers, wireless integration, app-controlled DSP — all of it has transformed the category from intimidating to approachable. Systems that once required road crews and large-format vans can now fit in the trunk of a crossover SUV parked between a coffee shop and a yoga studio.

And speaking of yoga studios...

One of the most significant developments in live sound is the expanding definition of who the customer actually is. It's no longer just bands and venues. Today's PA buyer could just as easily be a fitness instructor, worship volunteer, school administrator, solo acoustic performer,

event coordinator, livestreamer, or entrepreneur running community events. The lines between live sound, installed audio, streaming, and content creation continue to blur.

For MI retailers willing to embrace that reality, the opportunities are substantial.

Of course, adapting to change has always been part of surviving in this industry — which makes our coverage of the 2026 NAMM Fly-In especially timely as well.

Advocacy may not be as flashy as a new product launch, but it matters enormously. Tariffs, supply chain challenges, small business concerns, arts education funding, and economic uncertainty all directly affect this industry's future. Programs like the NAMM Fly-In give MI professionals the chance to communicate something policymakers often overlook: music products are not niche luxury items disconnected from daily life. They support education, creativity, small business growth, mental wellness, workforce development, technology, and local communities.

Also, anyone who has ever watched a fourth-grade beginner band concert understands the importance of supporting music education. Perhaps not always musically. But spiritually? Absolutely.

The point is this: if our industry wants a seat at the table, we have to keep showing up for the conversation.

This issue also examines Guitar Center's new Pedal Station concept, which — while seemingly unrelated to live sound — actually reflects another major trend shaping MI retail: experience matters.

A lot.

Modern customers can research products endlessly online before walking into a store. What they can't download is interaction, discovery, community, or the experience of plugging something in and unexpectedly losing twenty minutes playing the opening riff to a song they haven't thought about since high school.

That experiential side of retail has become one of the biggest differentiators for brick-and-mortar dealers. Whether it's a dedicated pedal demo environment, a live sound listening room, a podcasting station, or hands-on streaming workshops, successful retailers are increasingly creating destinations rather than simply maintaining inventory.

And frankly, that feels healthy for the industry.

Because at its best, the MI business has never really been about boxes sitting on shelves. It's about possibility. The technology changes. Customer habits evolve. Trends come and go. Somewhere, somebody is still arguing about analog versus digital. But the core mission remains remarkably consistent: helping people connect through music and sound.

Preferably without feedback squeals.

As you dig into this issue's coverage of PA systems, live sound solutions, advocacy efforts, and evolving retail concepts, one theme keeps surfacing: adaptability. The companies succeeding right now are the ones balancing expertise with accessibility, innovation with usability, and technology with genuine human connection.

In other words, they know when to turn it up — and when to mute the channel before things get ugly.

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Where retailers and suppliers meet
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NAMM PRESIDENT AND CEO JOHN MLYNCZAK DELIVERS ORAL TESTIMONY BEFORE THE USTR SECTION 301 COMMITTEE ON IMPACT OF GLOBAL TARIFFS TO MUSIC PRODUCTS INDUSTRY



NAMM has issued the oral testimony that was delivered by NAMM president and CEO John Mlynczak before the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) Section 301 Committee in Washington, D.C., on Friday, May 8. Mlynczak's oral testimony delivered a powerful narrative on the impact of tariffs on American businesses, music education, and consumers of musical instruments. This message enhances the case and data already provided in NAMM's previously submitted written comments.

The USTR selected 151 associations and companies to provide in-person testimony to support the 811 written comments received. NAMM joined other well-established associations, such as Consumer Technology Association, Consumer Brands Association and United Auto Workers Association, to name a few.

In his testimony, Mlynczak underscored the unintended consequences of current tariff policies on the U.S. music products industry, particularly as the Administration considers additional actions under Section 301 authority. NAMM

continues to advocate for evidence-based trade remedies that do not disproportionately harm American manufacturers, retailers and students.

"Tariffs are tilting the playing field against American businesses and the millions of students who rely on affordable access to musical instruments," Mlynczak said. "Our industry depends on a global supply chain built over generations. Policies that increase costs without expanding domestic capacity ultimately reduce participation in music education and weaken long-term U.S. competitiveness."

NAMM Advocacy Actions for Section 301 Investigations

Announced on March 17, the Administration has indicated it may use the results of the Section 301 investigations into 16 countries relating to structural excess capacity and production to restore tariff levels previously imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

NAMM submitted formal comments on April 15th calling on USTR to ensure that any trade remedies are precisely calibrated to the practices

under investigation — and do not impose collateral harm on an industry that depends on open global trade to serve American students, schools, and musicians.

NAMM submitted oral testimony on April 28th and testified in the Section 301 excess capacity hearing on May 8th, outlining the industry's concerns and answering questions for the USTR Section 301 Committee.

Following the hearings from May 5-8, USTR is expected to propose specific remedies, triggering a second public comment period. NAMM will remain actively engaged throughout the process and will notify members when the next opportunity to provide input opens.

Core Message From NAMM Testimony

In his remarks, Mlynczak emphasized:

- The U.S. music products industry represents \$9 billion of a \$19.5 billion global market, with NAMM representing more than 10,000 companies.
- Global supply chains for musical instruments rely on

specialized materials and craftsmanship that cannot be replicated domestically.

- Tariffs are increasing costs for American manufacturers while giving foreign competitors pricing advantages.
- Entry-level instruments — critical for music education — are disproportionately affected, with imports of wind instruments down 27% and pianos down 20% in 2025.
- Reduced access to beginner instruments threatens the pipeline that sustains U.S.-made professional instruments and the broader music ecosystem.

NAMM is urging USTR to implement an exclusion process for musical instruments, components and materials for products under HTS Chapter 92 should they recommend tariffs.

"Music education and music-making are fundamental to American culture and economic vitality," Mlynczak added. "We respectfully ask policymakers to ensure trade actions support — not hinder — the students, businesses and communities that power this industry."

VIOLET AUDIO US LAUNCHES TO SUPPORT NORTH AMERICAN INITIATIVE IN LIVE SOUND



Cap: Phil Wagner, president, Violet Audio US

Violet Audio (Melbourne, Australia) announces the formation of Violet Audio US, a new distribution company established to bring the company's professional audio solutions to the North American live sound market. Industry veteran Phil Wagner is President of the new entity, which will oversee sales, marketing, training and support for the evolving Violet Audio product range across the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Violet Audio US will focus initially on the rollout of the dMix 128, a high-performance live mixing platform designed to deliver advanced processing power and flexibility at a highly competitive price point. The product will begin shipping in June through select pro audio dealers and system integrators.

Violet Audio US's launch reflects a broader global expansion strategy for the brand, following a new partnership with the company's headquarters. The dMix platform is the latest and most advanced implementation of technology developed by founder Danny Olesh, a live

sound engineer who has deployed earlier versions of the system for real-world production environments.

"From the outset, it was clear that Phil not only understood the technology, but also how to position it effectively in the market," said Danny Olesh. "He has spent decades working with leading audio brands and building strong relationships across the industry, so he knows what is expected in terms of performance, reliability and support. As we expand into North America, having someone who can translate that value into real-world applications for our retail partners, sound companies, integration firms and audio engineers made him the right choice to lead the effort."

Based in Los Angeles, Violet Audio US will establish a national footprint including planned expansion into the Eastern Region and Nashville. The company will support a wide range of professional markets, including live sound, systems integration, house-of-worship and more.

"With Violet Audio US, we

are creating a dedicated infrastructure to support North America customers," said Phil Wagner, Violet Audio US president. "This is about bringing a powerful new technology platform to a wide variety of applications."

Wagner brings decades of experience in the professional audio industry, including extended leadership roles at Solid State Logic and Focusrite Novation, as well as earlier work with Soundcraft and Rupert Neve. His background spans both commercial and technical sides of the business, with longstanding relationships with dealers, integrators and high-profile customers.

At the center of the launch is the Violet Audio dMix 128, a compact yet scalable mixing system built on latest-generation FPGA (Field-Programmable Gate Array) architecture, with the dMix 128 feature set traditionally reserved for significantly higher-priced offerings. The system delivers full processing on 128 channels/88 busses with 32 mic line inputs and 24 outputs in a single unit, along with integrated effects,

redundant power supplies and networking including MADI/AES67 IO. Integration with platforms such as Q-SYS and Crestron provide ease of setup for installers.

The dMix 128 offers HTML5 browser-based control accessible via computer and/or tablet(s), enabling remote configuration, monitoring and diagnostics. For integrators, the system provides a network-based control and visibility, while rental companies benefit from its flexibility as a primary or secondary/backup console. End users can deploy the platform in environments ranging from clubs to stadiums or anything in between, in any environment requiring high channel counts and connectivity.

The system is also expandable, allowing up to four units to be combined for significantly increased I/O and processing capacity, making it suitable for larger-scale productions and complex installations.

For more information on Violet Audio, please visit www.violetaudio.com.



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Ed Bazel

Internationally acclaimed, award-winning pianist, composer



Kayserburg

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FENDER CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF THE TELECASTER WITH 'TELE TOWN' EVENT AT THE RYMAN AUDITORIUM



In celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Telecaster guitar, Fender returned to Nashville, the heart of country music and home to generations of legendary Tele players, for a once-in-a-lifetime evening at the historic Ryman Auditorium. 'Tele Town' united legendary artists, modern torchbearers and rising talent to celebrate 'the one that started it all' — the guitar that has shaped the sound of modern music.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Renowned Nashville guitarist and living Tele historian Zac Childs hosted the evening, leading the audience through performances that celebrated the Telecaster's pioneering design and role in shaping Music City's legacy and beyond
- Fender CEO Edward "Bud" Cole opened the evening by paying tribute to the Telecaster's lasting impact on music and the artists who helped define its legacy
- "75 years ago, Leo Fender had a pretty simple idea: to build a guitar that worked for players. Great tone. Reliable. Zero fuss. What came out of that was the Fender Telecaster. And it ended up shaping the sound of modern music. From James Burton to George Harrison to Sheryl Crow and the incredible artists on this stage tonight – generations have picked it up and made it their own. And there's no better place to celebrate that than right here in Nashville. This city didn't just embrace the Telecaster. It helped

define it," said Fender CEO Edward "Bud" Cole

- Musical director Derek Wells led the evening's dedicated house band, providing the musical backbone for the night's all-star performances and collaborations
- The Telecaster's 'next generation' of players took the stage with standout sets from Nate Gregory and Mateus Canteri who tore up the "Country Blues Shuffle", followed by Luke McQueary tribute to Johnny Cash's "Orange Blossom Special"
- Andrea Benz and Maggie Baugh covered Sheryl Crow's hit "Soak Up The Sun" while Emma Zinck paid tribute to Chrissie Hynde and The Pretenders with a performance of 'Back of The Chain Gang'
- The spotlight then turned to the Telecaster's deep roots in session and touring culture with Fender signature artist and acclaimed session guitarist Brent Mason who played "Blowing Smoke" and "Gator Bite"
- Guthrie Trapp and John Oates performed "Please Send Me Someone To Love"
- The evening then turned to the Telecaster's modern torchbearers with Zach Top performing his hit single "I Never Lie" alongside Brent Mason
- Fender signature artist Christone "Kingfish" Ingram brought his signature soul and intensity to 'Fresh Out' and Prince's 'Cream'

- Jessie James Decker debuted a one-night-only rendition of "Luxury Liner" alongside guests Ricky Skaggs, Trey Hensley and Tommy Emmanuel
- Hard-hitting duo Brothers Osborne, including Fender signature artist John Osborne, tore through "Muskrat Greene" and "Deadman's Curve"
- Sister duo Larkin Poe captivated the audience with a performance of "Bad Spell" alongside surprise guest, legendary Billy Gibbons
- The evening then honored icons and architects of the Telecaster sound, including Tommy Emmanuel who took the stage with "Hearts Grow Fonder"
- In a tribute to country music pioneer Waylon Jennings, Ricky Skaggs performs "Only Daddy That'll Walk the Line" and ends with his original song, "Heartbroke"
- Fender signature artist, Jack White, made a stand-out special appearance with an electrifying performance of the White Stripe's "Ball and Biscuit"
- A true piece of Tele history, Zac Childs surprised the audience by bringing out James Burton's iconic red Telecaster, offering fans and guitar enthusiasts a rare up-close look at one of Burton's most storied instruments. Burton's primary guitar from 1952 to 1969, it was purchased by his parents when he was just 13 years old. Originally finished in Butterscotch Blonde, Burton later had the guitar refinished at the Fender factory in a custom shade he called 'Coronado Red,' matched to his red Cadillac at the time
- Fender signature artist and Tele legend Brad Paisley closed the evening by welcoming pioneering Telecaster player James Burton to the stage for a tribute performance joined by many of the night's artists
- Burton wore the same jacket he appeared in while performing with Elvis Presley during the icon's final tour in 1977
- Paisley went on to lead a tribute to Burton, with a rendition of "Working Man Blues," as well as Paisley's own original "The Nervous Breakdown" and "Alcohol"
- As a tribute to the man that made Paisley Telecasters cool, Paisley gifted Burton the 001 prototype of the Brad Paisley's 1967 "Lost Paisley" Telecaster® that Brad hand built and painted
- Full list of 'Tele Town' performers included (alphabetical order): Andrea Benz, Billy Gibbons, Brad Paisley, Brent Mason, Brothers Osborne, Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, Derek Wells, Emma Zink, Guthrie Trapp, Jack White, James Burton, Jessie James Decker, John Oates, Larkin Poe, Luke McQueary, Maggie Baugh, Ricky Skaggs, Steve Wariner, Tommy Emmanuel, Trey Hensley, and Zach Top

SENNHEISER SPECTERA ON THE ROAD WITH ED SHEERAN'S 'THE LOOP' GLOBAL STADIUM TOUR

The hotly anticipated launch of Ed Sheeran's 'The Loop' tour has already seen a massive run of stadium shows starting in New Zealand at the beginning of January, then on to Australia, with the production set to continue across South America and the United States later this year. On a show of this scale, Sennheiser's Spectera takes center stage in the global star's audio system, dramatically reducing RF set-up time, solving key workflow challenges and delivering a clear improvement in audio quality according to monitor engineer and RF tech Dave White.



Years of Sennheiser evolution, now with Spectera

White has been working with Sheeran since 2014 and is a seasoned Sennheiser user. When he started, it was just Ed on stage with his guitars and a loop pedal, but as the sets have grown and become more complex, and the number of musicians has increased, so too has the equipment list. That means more audio channels and more RF. "We've gone through quite a few generations of Sennheiser products over the last 12 years," White recalls. "We always keep updated to get the best sound quality we can and work with new equipment as and when it's appropriate. Over the years, we've moved from Sennheiser's 2000 series to Digital 9000, before switching to Digital 6000 for the 'Mathematics' tour." With each change, there was a noticeable difference in sound quality, and smaller bodypacks such as the SK 6012 transmitter have also proved advantageous. "I love things that are small; I don't want to see technology, I just want it to work," White continues. "We went to the tiny theatre-style micro belt packs on the stadium show with the SKM 6000, and it was really good for us. It was nice and scalable. 16 channels of Digital 6000 and 16 channels of 2000 Series IEM was our main rig for the Mathematics tour, and for the fly-pack shows, we

went down to four channels of each."

When White heard about Spectera, he was excited. Finally, a product had been developed that would not only reduce the number of transmitters and receivers required on stage, but would also solve issues with artists switching stages, which could otherwise result in bumpy transitions in and out of range. The promise of an off-the-shelf product that could do exactly what he needed was too enticing, and he couldn't wait for the release date.

One show, two stages, no awkward hand-offs

"We had seen some small demos and I knew, with the stage design of 'The Loop', that Spectera would be perfect for us," he says. "We are covering such a large area; Ed is on the main stage and then seamlessly transitions through to a B stage. If we were managing that with standard analogue IEMs, it would be quite a complicated system with lots of switching and over-gaining amplifiers to get even coverage. It can be done, but with Spectera, everything is off-the-shelf and designed for the job. I'm pretty sure that giving a pre-pre-release product to a major artist doing a tour could have been nerve-racking for the Sennheiser team, but I knew it would be fine. They're very good at what they do."

Sennheiser's reliability and quality have allowed White to concentrate on fine-tuning his set-up, while constantly assessing new technologies ensures the team always has the very best tools for the job. However, unless there is an issue that needs immediate attention, White will not change equipment during a tour cycle, so the move to Spectera was made at the beginning of this year.

A change the whole team could hear

"Integrating a new piece of technology, especially one that's brand-new, requires a level of testing, so for the move to Spectera, we spent a lot of time comparing IEMs, and tuning the system for the handhelds and guitar packs," White continues. "The big difference with Spectera is that even though on paper the dynamic range and volume response should be the same, it's not. You audibly get far more depth of dynamic range. Ed seems happy with the technology and, in terms of how it works for the show moving forward, the transition was pretty seamless. The techs are happy, too, and said, 'we can actually hear things now'. There's definitely a depth and a clarity we didn't have before."

White notes that beta-testing a brand-new product is something that divides the pro-audio industry. "Some

engineers like me love using the very latest technology, while others prefer to wait until every possible test has been run," he says. He emphasises that Sennheiser's testing covers all areas of resilience required by equipment, especially personal devices like IEMs and radio transmitters.

FOH perspective

The move to Spectera has also made a strong impression at front of house, where sonic transparency, dynamic range and consistency are critical in a show built almost entirely around Sheeran's live vocal and guitar performance.

"Working with Spectera has been great so far," says FOH engineer Simon Kemp. "Moving from 6000 to Spectera has been a real sonic improvement. The sound of Ed's guitars has become even more transparent, and the dynamic range has really helped him move from very quiet, gentle songs to loud, in-your-face moments."

Kemp also highlights the way the system handles the highly percussive nature of the artist's playing style. "Ed uses his guitar for percussion and kick drum-like beats, and the pack has been great at handling that while staying very transparent-sounding," he explains.

For Kemp, reliability is just as important as sound quality.

“Ed’s show is unique and has specific requirements from a wireless system, one of them being reliability even in the most challenging outdoor conditions,” he says. “We’ve had no issues so far. We’ve had shows where we’ve emptied water out of his guitar and microphone and still had no problems.”

He adds that the vocal chain is equally exposed on a production of this kind. “We’re using the MM 445 capsule, which really suits Ed’s vocal. The show has no playback or auto-tune; it’s very much a singer-songwriter on his own in a huge stadium. There’s no hiding behind anything, so I’ve been very impressed with the clarity the mic delivers, combined with the signal chain being fully digital from the transmitter right through to the speakers. We’ve managed to achieve clear, present vocals all over the stadium.”

Singing in the rain, still holding RF

One thing all engineers can agree on is that water absorbs RF energy. RF can drop significantly when a bodypack is placed on a performer who is exposed to rain and humidity. Such extremes can be particularly challenging, not only because of liquid ingress and its effect on electronics, but also because humidity can affect the strength of RF signals between packs and receivers or transmitters. White found that, when using Spectera, this was not an issue; even in an Auckland downpour, his equipment kept going.

“The packs have been extremely resilient. We started this tour in Auckland and the only way I can describe it is the rain was biblical; it just didn’t stop. It’s the first time I’ve seen Ed perform in a raincoat,” he exclaims. “We didn’t have any failures at all with any of the handhelds or the bodypacks. We had five guitars die just due to water ingress, which seemed fair enough, but we didn’t have any RF problems. You don’t really get much of a harsher environment than out here in Australia. One minute it’s 40-45 degree heat, the

next minute it’s torrential rain.”

Another challenge for RF is LED video walls in stage design, and White has been grateful for the robust coverage offered by Spectera. For ‘The Loop’ tour, he utilises Spectera’s DAD antennas over media converters, which provided best coverage.

Less time coordinating, more time finessing

“We are using 11 antennas. We have Stage Left side hang, Stage Right side hang, and B stage for each resource,” White explains. “We have a 50 by 18-meter video wall; in fact, the whole stage is one big video screen, and we have a set of antennas upstage just to cover that area. Pretty much every port is used on every Spectera unit, but it does mean we have seamless hand-off and coverage from right the way backstage to halfway down the stadium.”

When designing the system, the Spectera workflow helped to reduce White’s workload. The software delivers remote access and virtual setup for Windows and Mac OS, while the 1U Base Station offers up to 32 simultaneous I/O and completely flexible configuration.

“I must admit, when they released the technology, I felt a little bit like my RF coordination knowledge was obsolete,” White laughs. “This innovation has shown that, in the future, understanding intermodulation and frequency mapping is going to be a little bit redundant. If you have 30 channels, for example, with a standard narrowband system, you would have to calculate and tune each one individually. With Spectera, you select a center frequency, and it does all of them for you. You don’t need to worry about intermodulation, or about trying to pack in 30 channels – you just say, this 6 or 8 MHz block, this is me. I think it will make wireless far more accessible for people who might previously have been wary of RF. With standard narrowband carriers, a lot of things can happen and if you don’t understand the basic maths behind it, it’s very

easy to get confused. With Spectera wireless is massively simplified. As long as there is a chunk of spectrum to find, you’ll be fine.”

Wideband systems like Spectera are designed to dramatically reduce the workload of RF engineers like White. As pressure on wireless continues to grow, Sennheiser is delivering solutions that not only work better in increasingly congested RF conditions, but also simplify workflow. For White, this means less time coordinating and setting up, and more time finessing.

“We currently run three Spectera Base Stations over three RF carriers for the show, one of which is a complete backup,” notes White. “I just need to find three 6 or 8 MHz holes in the frequency spectrum. Previously that would have taken me half an hour to coordinate, but now I’m probably down to seven minutes, even if I go slowly. It’s remarkably quick!”

More flexibility for complex stage set-ups

White uses Spectera for all of Ed’s vocal mics and guitars, plus regular collaborators Beoga. The Irish folk band co-wrote the hits ‘Galway Girl’ and ‘Nancy Mulligan’ and have been performing as part of the tour. The Spectera system has been especially useful for Eamon Murry, the bodhrán player in the band. For him, the addition of a Spectera bodypack provides a completely mobile solution, not just for the acoustic sound of the bodhrán, but also for the sampled sounds triggering snare and kick drum sounds offstage.

“It has been interesting working with Beoga; they’re not your standard rock band or pop band. They’ve got two accordions, a bouzouki, fiddle, keys and the bodhrán,” White explains. “Eamon has a snare trigger on his bodhrán that goes straight out of his Roland trigger into a Spectera bodypack and then feeds through to a triggers rack offstage, generates a sample, and comes back in. And we do that with the kick pedal, too,

so he can have a kick drum and a snare trigger as well as his drum, but still be pretty much completely mobile. The only thing he’s got to pick up is the kick pedal. The sound you get from Beoga is totally different. Spectera has been really handy because most musicians have at least one instrument output and one IEM input. With Spectera being a transceiver, we can get away with using half the number of bodypacks we usually would on any other system.”

Monitoring Spectera is also easy with WebUI, Sennheiser’s web-based monitoring interface. WebUI offers remote control and access to essential monitoring functions like battery status, IEM volume, RF status and much more. As White explains, such tools are non-negotiable for a setup of this size.

“I like the WebUI because it gives you more live data quickly, so that’s what I use,” he says. “I have every single channel and I watch it throughout the show. If there’s a problem, I need to be able to see whether it’s a Spectera issue or an instrument issue, and I need to define that really quickly. So, I’m constantly looking at the back end of the Spectera units to check out all the level qualities in RSSI and everything else that’s going on. Another benefit of the flexibility of Spectera is that I need fewer spare bodypacks. Any bodypack can pick up any stream, so if something goes wrong with one of Ed’s bodypacks and his dedicated spare isn’t there for whatever reason, a tech can give him another bodypack, I can pick up that MAD1 stream, and it will switch within seconds.”

New for 2026 is the Spectera handheld, which White has also been beta testing. For him, a handheld microphone was the missing piece in the puzzle. As part of that process, White and the team have been in close contact with Sennheiser’s development teams, feeding back directly on both hardware and software as the system continues to evolve in real-world touring conditions. Marcus Blight,

Technical Application Engineer at Sennheiser, has been White's key technical contact throughout, with additional support from Peter Craig and Pierre Morant of Sennheiser's Relationship Management.

"Spectera has truly made my life in RF so much easier and more manageable, and reduced freight costs," White admits. "On the last tour, our RF rack for all of the in-ears, the combiners and the amplifiers, was a 32U rack. I've completely got rid of that rack

and put three Spectera units, with all the chargers, within our existing monitoring equipment. It's cut down on freight costs and it's much more streamlined, which is exactly the way the industry should be going. It's a very good system."

Long-term trust, built on performance and support

Good equipment is just one factor in White's continuing relationship with Sennheiser. The team behind these products work tirelessly to ensure that each user has the

best experience possible.

"Clarity and reliability have always been present with Sennheiser," he concludes. "The working relationship is another aspect. If there is a problem, there is such a wealth of knowledge within the company and they're always very happy to come and help us out or field our queries. I've learnt so much from them.

"Part of my job is to keep up to date with everything that's happening in the industry,

and we've always said that, although we love working with Sennheiser, if there was a better product, we would probably move to it. Our job is to give the artist the most stable and best audio quality. It just happens to be that, for the last 14 years, that has been Sennheiser. And they keep bringing out good new products. It's one of the reasons we've stuck with Sennheiser for so long, and why we're very happy to keep going with the relationship!"

SWEETWATER AWARDED MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA BELL SEAL FOR WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

Sweetwater has been awarded a 2026 Gold Bell Seal for Workplace Mental Health, one of the nation's top recognitions for U.S. employers. Issued by Mental Health America, a leading nonprofit dedicated to advancing mental health and well-being, Sweetwater joins a select group of organizations recognized for their commitment to fostering psychologically safer, supportive environments where employees can thrive professionally and personally.

The Gold Bell Seal Award recognizes Sweetwater's efforts across several key areas, including:

- A strategic and holistic approach to employee well-being
- Mental health-friendly benefits and resources
- A strong emphasis on work-life balance
- A commitment to a fair and accessible workforce

"This Gold Bell Seal Award reflects the care, intention, and responsibility we bring to support our people every day," said Jeff Ostermann, Sweetwater's chief people and culture officer. "By sharing this good news during Mental Health Awareness Month,

we are proud to reaffirm that supporting mental health isn't just a program for us. It is a core part of who Sweetwater is as an organization."

This latest recognition builds on Sweetwater's reputation as an employer of choice. In addition to the Gold Bell Seal, Sweetwater has recently been named one of the most inspiring employers in the world, earning awards for well-being, inclusion, and company culture by Inspiring Workplaces™ organization. In 2025, Sweetwater also received 13 Comparably® Awards including Best Company Culture, Happiest

Employees, Best Company Perks & Benefits, and Best Company Career Growth.

Since 2019, Mental Health America has awarded the Bell Seal to hundreds of employers supporting the mental health of 5.1 million employees combined, based on decades of research into best practices in workplace mental health.

Sweetwater is committed to supporting its employees' well-being. To learn more about its efforts for workplace wellness and to see current career opportunities, please visit Sweetwater.com/Careers.

DPA MICROPHONES CAPTURE NUANCE AND DETAIL ON YANN TIERSEN'S TOUR

Reproducing the full emotional and dynamic range of a solo piano on a large-scale sound system presents a unique set of challenges, especially when that performance is as nuanced as Yann Tiersen's. Known for his emotive, minimalist compositions and genre-blending artistry, his latest tour, titled "Rathlin from a Distance | The Liquid Hour," unfolds in two distinct chapters: an opening set of a solo piano followed by a second half steeped in modular synthesis and electronics. For Veteran Live Sound Engineer Jamie Harley, whose four-decade career spans electronic, indie and acoustic music, the challenge was finding a way to blend these two very different sound worlds into a seamless live



experience each night. The DPA Microphones' DPK2015 Piano Stereo Kit became an essential part of that equation.

For the piano-driven portion of the performance, Harley deployed the stereo pair of DPA 2015 Wide Cardioid Microphones, which are included in the miking kit.

Known for their natural sound reproduction and controlled off-axis response, the 2015s proved to be a powerful tool in managing the delicate tonal characteristics of Tiersen's playing style. "Yann plays in a very textural way," Harley explains. "He'll hold notes and build layers of tone. If you're not careful, things can

get mid-range-heavy quite quickly. I was really interested to see how the piano kit would handle that, and it worked extremely well."

The 2015 microphones were positioned inside the piano to capture both clarity and depth, with a focus on maintaining tonal balance across the instrument's full range. The wide cardioid pickup pattern of the mics allowed Harley to capture the natural resonance of the piano while minimizing unwanted bleed. "Having that directional control is a godsend," he says. "Especially when you're working with a very quiet, delicate instrument on a large system. You need microphones that keep everything tight and focused exactly where they need to be."



BEYOND THE GLASS CASE:

TALKING GC'S INNOVATIVE PEDAL STATION WITH CEO GABE DALPORTO

By Christian Wissmuller

As brick-and-mortar MI retailers continue to navigate shifting consumer expectations, experiential retail has moved from a differentiator to a necessity. Guitar Center's new in-store "Pedal Island" —an interactive, plug-and-play effects playground—represents a notable investment in hands-on discovery, streamlined merchandising, and category growth. MMR spoke with company leadership about the goals behind the concept, early results, and what lessons dealers of all sizes can take from this approach to driving engagement and sales on the showroom floor.

What core retail challenge was Guitar Center aiming to solve with the rollout of the Pedal Station, and how does it fit into your larger in-store experience strategy?

At its core, we were solving for friction in one of the most complex categories in music retail. Effects pedals are experiential — players don't buy them based on specs, they buy them based on feel and sound. Historically, we locked these pedals up behind glass and customers couldn't access them, and had to track down an associate and beg them to set one up. Then do it again for the next. And so on. A hugely terrible customer and associate experience. Personally, as a customer before I joined Guitar Center, it was one of my biggest annoyances.

The Pedal Station removes that friction entirely. It turns a fragmented, one-at-a-time trial process into an intuitive, immediate, and immersive experience. Strategically, it's a clear expression of where physical retail wins. We are leaning into experience as a differentiator — creating an environment where customers can explore, experiment and discover in ways that simply aren't replicable online.

The Pedal Station leans heavily into self-guided discovery. How intentional was that shift, and what impact are you seeing on customer engagement and time-on-floor?

That shift was very intentional. Today's customer is highly informed and often prefers to explore independently before engaging with a sales associate. We wanted to empower that behavior, not interrupt it. What we've seen is a meaningful increase in engagement. Customers spend more time in the category, they interact with more products, and they move from passive browsing to active experimentation. That matters because time-on-floor directly correlates with conversion and basket size.

And while we made several experiential improvements at the same time as the pedal tables, aggregate time in store increased materially and so did sales.

From a merchandising standpoint, how are you measuring success for the category within the station — sell-through, attachment rates, or overall category lift?

We look at this holistically. Sell-through is important, but it's only one piece of the equation. We're equally focused on category lift, attachment rates, and the overall basket growth. In the 8 weeks following the Pedal Station rollout, Effects Pedals experienced a sales increase of +18%.

Pedals rarely exist in isolation — what we're really measuring is how effectively the station drives ecosystem purchases. We also look at engagement metrics — how long customers are interacting with the station and how many products they're trying. The data consistently shows that when engagement increases, so does conversion.

The ability to directly compare products — from legacy stompboxes to newer platforms like IK Multimedia Tonex — is central to the concept. How has that influenced purchasing behavior versus traditional “try one at a time” setups?

In a traditional setup, customers tend to default to what they already know, the popular brands or what's recommended. In a comparison-driven environment, they make decisions based on experience. That leads to more confident purchases and, importantly, more discovery across brands and price tiers. We're seeing customers trade both up and across — sometimes choosing higher-end solutions because they can clearly hear the value, and other times discovering alternatives they wouldn't have considered.

For smaller and mid-sized MI retailers, full-scale installations may not be feasible. What elements of the Pedal Station model do you believe are most adaptable at a lower cost or smaller footprint?

At its heart, the Pedal Station is about reducing friction and enabling immediate trial. Even a small retailer can achieve that with a curated selection and simple signal chain. You don't need a large footprint to create a compelling experience. You just need intentional design.

How do you balance the efficiency of a “plug-and-play” environment with the value of knowledgeable sales staff, particularly in a category where education often drives the sale?

We feel both strategies can coexist and actually support one another. The Pedal Station allows the customer to begin the journey independently. Our associates then step in at the right moment to deepen the experience — whether that's explaining signal chains, dialing in tone or helping the customer translate what they're hearing into a purchase decision.

What we've effectively done is elevate the role of the associate. Instead of facilitating access, they're adding expertise and insight. That's a much higher-value interaction.

And I want to mention one other supplement to the pedal table: Rig Advisor, which is our AI driven gear advisor. There's a QR at each pedal station to access it, and when you ask it how to sound like Jimmy Hendrix on Purple Haze, it knows the pedals available right in the store and will tell you which ones to try and even what settings to dial the tone in perfectly.

Have you seen measurable halo effects on adjacent categories (amps, accessories, or even guitar sales) driven by increased experimentation within the station?

Absolutely. Two months after the Pedal Station rollout, overall store performance for the Effects category experienced a +11% sales lift. Additionally, Guitar Accessories were +7% and Guitar Amps +3%, demonstrating an overall halo effect for the larger store.

Looking ahead, do you view immersive, modular displays like the Pedal Station as a long-term shift in MI retail, and what advice would you offer dealers evaluating similar experiential investments?

This is absolutely a long-term shift. The future of physical retail — especially in MI — is not about inventory density. It's about experience density. Customers can access product anywhere. What they can't access everywhere is meaningful, hands-on engagement.

My advice is to start with the customer journey. Identify where friction exists, where uncertainty is highest and where experience can unlock confidence. Be deliberate with your strategies and what you build. The retailers who win will be the ones who create environments that inspire exploration, not just facilitate transactions.

CHANGING THE SCALE:

How the 2026 NAMM Fly-In Fights for Funding

As the MI industry navigates a complex landscape of shifting trade policies and the critical need for expanded music education, NAMM president and CEO John Mlynczak recently returned from Capitol Hill with a clear message: the industry's voice has never been louder. Marking the 20th anniversary of the NAMM Advocacy D.C. Fly-In, Mlynczak and a delegation of industry leaders will lobby for essential tariff exemptions and a \$1.3 billion federal investment in music programs. In this exclusive Q&A, we sit down with Mlynczak to discuss the strategic goals for the 2026 mission, how these high-level political conversations translate to the local retail floor, and what the next decade of advocacy looks like for the world of music products.



The 2026 Fly-In marks the 20th anniversary of NAMM's advocacy efforts in Washington. How has the mission evolved over those two decades, and what feels most urgent for the industry right now?

The past two decades have consistently focused on how Federal funding can be used to support music education programs at the state level. This has evolved as No Child Left Behind was supplemented by Race to the Top and then the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, but the mission has been the same: ensure the Federal law allows states to use federal funds for music education. And, for congress to continue appropriating these funds in each budget.

The past two years we have added an additional tariff track as this is of course an important policy focus of our industry right now.

This year's Fly-In includes more than 250 meetings on Capitol Hill. What makes those face-to-face conversations with lawmakers uniquely effective compared to other forms of advocacy?

The personal stories of NAMM members drive home the message. NAMM provides the data and the ask, but when a constituent of a member of congress' district or state walks in with a personal story, the message is amplified.

Federal funding for music education remains a central focus—Title I, Title II, Title IV-A, and NEA support among them. Where do you see the biggest opportunities (or risks) in the current policy environment?

Every congressional budget, or more recently continuing resolutions, is an opportunity to cut, retain level, or increase funding that can support

music education. We must come back every single year to keep the pressure on each and every budget.

The new factor in the environment is the Administration's focus on dismantling the Department of Education and "taking education back to the states." Without Federal guidelines that create a level playing field for all children in the U.S., the risk is 50 disparate education systems that are not aligned on providing equitable access to all students.

NAMM has increasingly connected music education advocacy with workforce development. How are you framing the "music economy" story to resonate with policymakers in 2026?

The economic impact of music and the arts is a major talking point right now, and NAMM this year is providing specific impact one-pagers for every state to drive this message home. We frame our industry as a career field that has significant economic and cultural impact, and that message is resonating (pun intended) through the aisles of congress right now.

Tariffs and global trade pressures continue to impact MI businesses. How important is it that the Fly-In also addresses these commercial realities alongside education advocacy?

It is essential that NAMM lobby on behalf of the music products industry on any issue that impacts us, so the tariff delegation is crucial this year. About half of the NAMM member delegates will be holding additional tariff meetings with strategic members of Congress who hold committee seats that can influence the Administration on tariff and trade policies.



“ The personal stories of NAMM members drive home the message. NAMM provides the data and the ask, but when a constituent of a member of congress’ district or state walks in with a personal story, the message is amplified. ”

- JOHN MLYNCZAK

The Fly-In now blends advocacy with experiential elements — like the Day of Service and new bipartisan events on Capitol Hill. How do these moments help humanize the industry’s message?

Great observation! Did you know that NAMM excels at organizing lifechanging events that blend industry, experience, education, and networking together? We had a realization that The NAMM Fly-In is like The NAMM Show, and like NAMM NeXT, in this way. So, we are intentionally making the Fly-In include a robust advocacy education day, a Day of Service, and events like NAMM Jam and the Congressional Record event to add more value and strengthen NAMM member

relationships while we are in D.C. advocating. This also demonstrates that we are an industry that brings joy through music, which transcends any political affiliation — and that strengthens our message on the hill.

For MI retailers and manufacturers who haven’t participated before, what’s the biggest misconception about advocacy — and why should they consider joining a future Fly-In?

The biggest misconception is that they have to understand policy to join. All you need is a passion for the music products industry and a willingness to tell your story to your elected official. NAMM provides all the other training you need!

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THE FULL PACKAGE:

UNWRAPPING THE LATEST IN LIVE SOUND BUNDLES

By Christian Wissmuller

In an era where convenience is king, the days of piecing together a live rig component-by-component are fading fast. For today's working musicians and venue owners, "plug-and-play" isn't just a preference—it's a requirement.

We sat down with a panel of industry experts to discuss how the latest PA system packages are bridging the gap between technical complexity and professional performance, and what that means for your bottom line.

What is your brand's top-selling PA System/Live Sound Package, and what makes it a strong performer at retail?



Lance McCord
Director of QSC Audio Sales
US West

Lance McCord: For us, it comes down to two platforms that consistently perform well at retail: the QSC KC12 and the QSC K12.2. The KC12 has been a particularly strong seller because it removes much of the uncertainty from the buying process. It's essentially a complete system—a three-way powered column speaker system with mixer, and Bluetooth—all in one. Customers immediately understand what it is and what it does, and that clarity helps retailers

close sales faster. It's also incredibly quick to set up, which you can demonstrate on the floor in seconds, making the value click instantly.

The K12.2 is a different kind of strength. It's a well-known powered loudspeaker in the market—high output, great sound, and extremely reliable. What makes it so effective in retail is how easily it can be built into packages. A customer can start with a pair and grow into a full system with subs and accessories. That flexibility gives retailers plenty of room to meet different budgets while keeping the customer in a QSC solution.

At the end of the day, both products sell because they remove friction. They're easy to explain and demonstrate, and they deliver right away.

Brandon Knudsen: JBL EON700 Series is one of our top-selling portable PA packages, and its success at retail comes down to delivering professional performance at an accessible price point, paired with exceptional ease of use across a multitude of applications.

JBL EON700 Series strikes a compelling balance between output, sound quality, and smart features. The series uses JBL's latest acoustic science and transducer designs, premium cabinet materials, and advanced DSP and control technologies to deliver extraordinary performance in a fully professional, highly flexible, easy to use, portable system. All without the weight, complexity, or cost traditionally associated with professional systems.



What ultimately drives sell-through is the EON700 Series price-to-performance advantage. The system delivers professional-level output and functionality at a cost that remains accessible to a broad range of users, making it a capable and versatile solution across many applications. For retailers, that balance translates into a product that fits comfortably within most budgets while still meeting performance expectations.

Nick Kochanek: The PreSonus CDL12P is currently our best-selling loudspeaker and continues to grow in popularity every year. It is a constant curvature array that has wide coverage and is easily scalable. The crossover point is 420hz on the CDL, which is lower than usual for biamped speakers, but the result is incredible vocal clarity. People who have mixed on them always comment on how effortless it is to get the vocals to sit right in the mix. The CDL12P and the smaller CDL10P excel in small to medium-sized rooms, providing exceptional sound quality with an attainable budget. Customers often pair these with one of our StudioLive Series III consoles or one of the StudioLive ARc mixers. Series III and the ARc mixers are also both great recording solutions that come with

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■ roundtable

Fender Studio Pro, as well as Capture software to make live recording easy. Additionally, the Fender Passport is a best-selling, industry standard for someone looking for an all-in-one, easy to transport PA system.

Ray Wilson: The top-selling product is the Yorkville YXL12P, based on sell-through data. It is a 12-inch powered PA speaker priced at approximately \$539 MAP. It performs strongly at retail primarily due to its accessible price point, lightweight design, and ease of use. The inclusion of Bluetooth is also a major factor in its popularity, as it allows for quick and simple connectivity. Overall, it is one of the most affordable and versatile options in the Yorkville line, making it appealing to a wide range of customers.



Andres Franco
Sr. Product Marketing Specialist
Yamaha Pro Audio

Andres Franco: Our top-selling PA systems come from the Yamaha D Series powered loudspeakers, a versatile series of loudspeakers designed to meet the needs of a wide range of customers and applications. From cost-efficient models that deliver great sound with simple, plug-and-play operation to flagship solutions engineered for demanding venues and large-scale concerts and events, D Series offers

scalable performance at every level.

Within the lineup, the DBR Series performs very well at retail, known for professional sound quality at an accessible price point, lightweight design, and proven reliability. With the introduction of the new DXR mk3 Series in April 2026, Yamaha has enhanced D Series offerings with a revolutionary level of quality that is truly best in its class, delivering exceptional power, clarity, and advanced processing and app control for users who demand uncompromising performance.

What types of customers are currently driving demand for PA systems, and how can retailers best position products to serve these segments?

BK: Demand today is driven by a wide range of users as portable systems become more versatile. Gigging musicians, bands, and DJs can use PA systems as their main PA speakers or floor monitors to deliver consistent sound night after night. The speaker has a rear yoke mount option, as well as M10 mounting points, which can serve as connections for fixed installations, like houses of worship, schools, and corporate A/V users who prioritize intelligibility, reliability, and ease of operation.

Retailers can best serve these segments by guiding customers toward the right performance tier, like the JBL EON700 Series for entry-to-mid-level users who want professional sound with minimal setup complexity, or the JBL SRX900 series for users requiring maximum SPL and system scalability for larger venues or production environments. Helping customers understand not just

price differences—but how performance, durability, and control scale from one series to the next—is key to driving satisfaction and repeat business.



Nick Kochanek
Technical Sales Lead
Fender Studio and PreSonus

NK: It really depends on where you're located and what your local market is like. We see a demand for PA systems from all types of customers, but the main driver varies so much from one region to another. Down South and in the Midwest, we notice it's mainly houses of worship driving the loudspeaker business. In big cities, there's a high demand for our AIR XD loudspeakers with DJ's and corporate AV. Vacation and tourist

destinations often have a thriving live music scene with tons of gigging musicians. There's also a consistently growing demand for PA speakers for competitive marching bands and indoor drumlines. PreSonus has been a leader in that market for several years as the CDL has become one of the most popular choices. It's also important to understand there's seasonality to each type of customer as well. We always see a bump from houses of worship before Christmas, Easter, and other religious holidays. Mid-to-late spring, and even into early summer, we get a lot more musicians and rental/production companies buying as they prepare for warmer weather and concert season. At the end of June and early July is when we see a lot of school purchases as that's when their fiscal year usually ends and starts. As a dealer, you need to know the verticals that have the highest demand in your area, which requires understanding your region, your customers, and how your customers are using products.



AF: Demand for PA systems is driven primarily by gigging musicians, DJs, houses of worship, and small corporate AV users. These customers value reliable sound, easy setup, and portable systems that can adapt to different performance and event needs. Retailers can best position products like the D-Series loudspeakers by presenting them as versatile, ready-to-use solutions that work across music, worship, and speech applications. Organizing systems by common use cases helps shoppers quickly identify the right option and improves purchase confidence.

RW: The primary customers driving demand are what can be described as “weekend warriors.” These are typically casual users who need a PA system for occasional use, such as backyard parties or small events. They are not generally professional production companies or full-time performers. These customers are looking for products that are battery-powered, lightweight, and affordable. Retailers can best serve this segment by positioning PA systems as simple, portable, all-in-one solutions that are easy to set up and use without technical expertise.

Having a solid reputation for bass, DJs flock towards our PA systems whether it be battery powered, A.C powered or unpowered. We have offerings of all kinds. The weekend warrior also benefits from our equipment because of the ease of use. These customers are looking for products that are battery-powered, lightweight, and affordable. Retailers can best serve this segment by positioning PA systems as simple, portable, all-in-one solutions that are easy to set up and use without technical expertise.

LM: What we’re seeing right now is a broad mix of customers, but they all share one thing in common: they want professional results without overthinking it. That includes gigging musicians, mobile DJs, houses of worship, production companies and a growing number of corporate and presentation users. Each group has slightly different needs, but they’re all looking for systems that are reliable, easy to use, and sound great without a complicated setup. Where retailers really win is when they shift the conversation from specs to real-world use. Instead of talking about wattage and dispersion, it’s more effective to say, “Here’s how quickly you can set this up,” or “Here’s how this will sound in your typical gig.”

When customers can picture themselves using the system, and feel confident it will work for them, the decision tends to come together quickly.

How can retailers effectively demonstrate and merchandise live sound packages in-store or online to increase conversion rates?

NK: Customers need to be able to hear the product. It needs to be set up, ready for demonstration, at any time. Using well mixed, and high quality audio tracks is also key. Avoid using low quality mp3 files, streaming off Spotify, or playing a YouTube video. Also, keeping accessories like cases and covers in stock is important. Customers don’t like to have to buy from more than

one place, so if you don’t have the accessories, they’ll likely go elsewhere to get it all from one place. The challenge with selling speakers online is obviously that people can’t hear them. Getting reviews of the product on your site along with pictures of customers using the product makes a big difference and instills confidence when someone isn’t able to hear it in person before buying. We also make demo and tutorial videos on our products that dealers are welcome to use on their websites.

AF: Retailers can increase conversion by demonstrating PA systems in simple, real-world scenarios such as vocal and acoustic instrument playback or DJ-style music. Hearing the system immediately builds confidence and shortens the decision process.

RW: Retailers can increase conversion rates by focusing on simple, immediate demonstrations. Battery-powered systems are particularly effective because they eliminate the need for wiring, allowing for quick setup. In-store, some retailers use full PA demo walls, while others rely on a single powered speaker setup for demonstrations.

LM: Honestly, the most important thing is to let people hear it. In-store, a simple demo with vocals or a familiar track goes a long way. If you can put



two systems side by side—say, a column system and a traditional speaker—and let the customer hear the difference in coverage and clarity, that’s often when the sale happens. It’s also worth showing how quickly these systems come together. Watching something like the KC12 come out of the box and be ready in seconds is a very real, tangible benefit.

Online, it’s about simplifying the story. Customers don’t want to piece together a system from five product pages. If you present complete packages, such as, “everything you need to perform” or “everything you need for a DJ setup,” and back them up with short, clear demo videos, you remove a lot of hesitation. The more straightforward you make it, the better your conversion rate will be.



Brandon Knudsen
Product Manager for PPA
for JBL Professional

BK: The most effective demonstrations focus on letting customers hear the difference.

Using high-quality source material routed through a switcher allows customers to seamlessly test speakers against each other through A/B testing, in which customers can immediately recognize differences in clarity, low-frequency response, and overall balance.

While many customers

will ultimately make purchase decisions based on specs or features within a certain price point, those who come into a store want to listen—and a proper demo often seals the deal. Retailers should also showcase real-world use cases by showcasing a wide range of speaker configurations, demonstrating onboard DSP presets, and highlighting app-based control where applicable. Online, this translates to clear system bundles, application-based recommendations, and video content showing setup, tuning, and performance in real environments.

What key selling points or product features should retail staff emphasize when helping customers choose between different PA systems?



AF: When helping customers choose a PA system, retail staff should emphasize sound quality, ease of use, portability, and reliability. Customers want systems that sound professional right out of the box and can be set up quickly without technical complexity.

BK: Retail staff should focus on a core set of considerations when helping customers choose between different PA systems, emphasizing how each option aligns with both immediate needs and long-term use. Sound quality and output are foundational, as customers expect consistent coverage, strong low-frequency performance, and clear intelligibility across a range of volume levels. Explaining how design elements such

as waveguides, transducers, and integrated signal processing contribute to a balanced and reliable sound can help customers understand performance differences between systems.

Ease of use is equally important, particularly for users who may not have extensive technical experience. Intuitive onboard controls, built-in presets, and app-based system management can significantly reduce setup time and minimize frustration, making a system more approachable and efficient in real-world use. Durability and reliability should also be emphasized, as PA systems are often transported and used in demanding environments.

Scalability is another key factor, especially for customers who anticipate growth. Systems that can expand from a single speaker to a larger setup with matching subwoofers and networking options provide flexibility as needs evolve. Finally, retail staff should address long-term value, explaining that investing in higher-tier systems, such as JBL PRX900 or SRX900 Series, can reduce the need for frequent upgrades as performance requirements increase. Helping customers balance their immediate needs with plans for future growth is often the deciding factor in selecting one PA system over another.

LM: The most effective sales conversations tend to stay focused on a few key points.

First, consider the sound. Does it immediately sound clear and balanced, especially in the vocals? That's usually the first impression that matters. Second, how easy it is to get up and running. Most customers don't want to spend time figuring things out—they want to plug in and go. Third, make sure they're getting the right amount of power and flexibility for what they're doing today, while also leaving room to grow if their needs expand. And then there's brand trust. QSC has built a strong reputation over time, and that reputation really does come into play. When a customer hears the name and recognizes it, it often removes the last bit of hesitation.



Ray Wilson
National Sales Manager
Yorkville Sound

RW: Retail staff should focus on features that directly impact ease of use and flexibility. Battery power is one of the most in-demand features and can be a major differentiator. Bluetooth connectivity is also highly important, as customers want to easily connect their phones and play music. Additionally, having multiple inputs allows users to plug in a microphone and an instrument, such as a guitar, directly into

the unit without requiring additional equipment. These features collectively support convenience and all-in-one functionality. Ease of use, convenience, sound quality and most importantly, our rock solid warranty sell our products in comparison.

NK: The key is to qualify the customer before you start trying to sell them on a product. You need to understand what they're trying to achieve or what problem they're looking to solve. Of course, we have our universal selling points like six year warranty on speakers, exceptional sound quality, ease of use, and affordability. However, you need to know what the customer cares about before you know what specs and features will resonate with them. A church that wants their congregation to hear clearly wherever they are sitting will care more about the 120 degree horizontal coverage of the CDL than the easy rigging system. A rock band trying to keep stage volume down will care more about the cardioid mode on the AIR XD subwoofers than the built in Bluetooth. An Event/Rental company will probably be more interested in the Bluetooth on the AIR XD than the cardioid mode.

A wedding DJ who needs to be able to mix multiple zones will care more about the Flex mixes on a Series III console than the 32-bit floating-point DSP processing. The key selling points/features of each product is going to change depending on who you're talking to.

What tools, training, or support does your brand offer to help retailers successfully sell and support live sound packages?

RW: The brand provides a three-tiered support system for retailers. This includes in-house product videos that cover features and functionality, a team of sales representatives who travel across Canada to provide training and live demonstrations, and a dedicated product specialist focused specifically on PA systems. This combination ensures that retailers have access to both educational resources and hands-on support when selling and supporting live sound packages.

LM: We place a strong emphasis on making it easy for retailers to sell our products with confidence. That starts with training, both in-person and online, so staff understand not only the features but also how to position the products in a real-world context. We also provide a full set of marketing assets—images, videos, and merchandising support—that help bring the products to life both in-store and online. Beyond that, the products themselves are designed to be intuitive. That reduces

friction at the point of sale and minimizes post-purchase issues, which is just as important for the retailer relationship.

And of course, we back it up with strong customer and technical support. When retailers know they're supported, they're much more comfortable putting our products in front of customers.

NK: The sales team and our sales rep force are constantly out visiting dealers, doing demos, and training. I like to get out and visit dealers with the reps as well, so we can always arrange a more in depth training if needed. I'm easily accessible via phone or email as well to help answer any questions or help with system designs and provide Ease Focus plots. I love gear, so I'm always happy to talk about our products and find solutions for

customers. On the back end, PreSonus/Fender has a great tech support and service team that is quick to respond and help resolve any issues. Additionally, we have a very comprehensive YouTube channel with plenty of training and how-to videos.

AF: We support retailers with product training, sales enablement materials, and clear application guidance to help staff confidently recommend complete PA solutions. This includes product videos, setup guides, and use case examples focused on real world customer



needs.

BK: JBL Professional provides a range of tools designed to support both retailers and end users. Retailers and customers have access to online training resources, product documentation, and application guides through the JBL Professional website, along with an extensive library of how-to and product overview videos on the JBL Professional YouTube channel. These resources help users of all experience levels get the most out of their systems. In addition, JBL Professional's products are designed with consistency across product lines, making it easier for retail staff to explain upgrades and cross-sell complementary products such as subwoofers and accessories. Combined with JBL Professional's global support infrastructure and long-standing reputation in live sound, retailers can confidently stand behind every sale.

BUILDING A STRONGER ECOSYSTEM FOR GROWTH IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

By Lisa Canning

In the evolving landscape of the music industry, fostering participation requires more than just promoting products; it necessitates the creation of a robust ecosystem that supports collaboration among musicians, repair technicians, product specialists, and educators. Drawing inspiration from Greg Horowitz's book, *The Rainforest: How to Build the Next Silicon Valley*, it becomes evident that nurturing a healthy ecosystem can lead to increased engagement and participation, ultimately strengthening the industry. We will explore how building an ecosystem can enhance participation in the music industry, empowering individuals and organizations alike.

Understanding the Ecosystem Concept

Horowitz describes a thriving ecosystem as a dynamic, interconnected environment akin to a rainforest. In this context, the various components—musicians, manufacturers, dealers, educators, and repair specialists—interact in ways that enhance their collective success. Developing these relationships can spur community involvement, innovation, and a shared love for music.

Fostering Collaboration for Collective Success

Central to a vibrant ecosystem is collaboration. By encouraging musicians to engage with repair technicians and product specialists, we create pathways for knowledge sharing and skill development. Collaborative environments not only foster a sense of community but also empower individuals to contribute to our shared passion for music.

Example: Community music programs that involve local repair technicians can illustrate this principle. When musicians are educated about the importance of instrument maintenance and repair, they are more likely to develop a lasting relationship with repair specialists. Additionally, this collaboration can lead to workshops focusing on instrument care, where participants gain hands-on experience while fostering a greater interest in music.

Enhancing the Role of Repair Technicians

Repair technicians play a critical role in the music ecosystem. By involving them in community programs, we can elevate their status from mere service providers to integral contributors to the musical experience. This collaboration enriches the entire community and enhances engagement.

Example: Programs that train amateur musicians in basic repair techniques create a greater appreciation for their instruments. When musicians understand how to care for their tools, they are more likely to stay engaged with their craft—and this could easily lead to a stronger demand for professional repair services. For instance, repair workshops that allow musicians

to repair their instruments under expert guidance can spark curiosity and pride in both their skills and the instruments they use.

Expanding Engagement Through Product Specialists

Product specialists, who deeply understand both the products and the needs of musicians, serve as bridges between manufacturers and the musical community. By engaging product specialists in education and outreach initiatives, we can create deeper connections with aspiring musicians and hobbyists.

Example: Brands like Yamaha and Conn Selmer often host clinics and workshops led by product specialists. These sessions not only demonstrate instruments' capabilities but also foster community engagement. By creating opportunities for musicians to interact with experts who can teach them complementary skills—such as improvisation or composition—these brands cultivate a loyal customer base and enthusiastic participation in music.

Cross-Pollination of Ideas and Skills

A healthy ecosystem thrives on the cross-pollination of ideas across its members. Encouraging collaborations between musicians, educators, and repair technicians can lead to innovative approaches that broaden participation and engagement with music.

Example: Educational institutions that partner with local music shops can be invaluable. For instance, a school's music program might collaborate with a local shop to offer students workshops on both playing and maintaining instruments. This multifaceted approach enhances student learning, enriches their experience, and encourages more students to join the music community, providing them with both technical skills and performance opportunities.

Nurturing a Love for Music

Building an ecosystem that nurtures a love for music involves creating spaces where new and



experienced musicians can thrive. Programs that promote mentorship among seasoned musicians and newcomers contribute significantly to a culture of participation.

Example: Initiatives such as "Music Buddy Programs," where experienced musicians mentor those new to playing, foster an inclusive atmosphere and encourage participation. Additionally, incorporating repair technicians into these programs can provide mentees with valuable insights on maintaining and caring for their instruments, further enriching their musical journey.

Emphasizing Inclusivity and Diversity

To foster a thriving music ecosystem, it is crucial to prioritize inclusivity and diversity. Encouraging participation among underrepresented communities can lead to richer musical expressions and broaden participation in the industry overall.

Example: Programs designed to bring music education to underserved communities can make a significant impact. For instance, organizations that provide free or reduced-cost instruments and lessons can empower young people to engage with music. By involving local repair personnel in these initiatives—offering repair clinics alongside music lessons—it helps build a comprehensive framework that promotes sustained engagement with instruments.

Conclusion

Building a strong ecosystem in the music industry is essential for encouraging participation and fostering a vibrant community of musicians. By prioritizing collaboration among musicians, repair technicians, and product specialists, we can create a rich environment that enhances individual connections and nurtures a love for music. Embracing the principles laid out in Greg Horowitz's *The Rainforest* will help us cultivate an engaged and supportive musical community, leading to a flourishing ecosystem where passion for music thrives and participation flourishes.

By encouraging musicians to engage with repair technicians and product specialists, we create pathways for knowledge sharing and skill development.

At just 17, Lisa Canning launched her first business while studying at Northwestern University, pioneering a unique blend of art, creativity, and entrepreneurship. With over 40 years in the industry, Lisa has dedicated her career to empowering musicians and creative organizations to merge their passions with effective business strategies.

As a certified ecosystem builder, Lisa specializes in developing trust-based environments that foster innovation and creativity within the music industry. Through her involvement with The Rainforest Architects and T2Venture Creation—leaders in ecosystem design—she became certified to cultivate vibrant creative ecosystems.

Lisa's contributions to the music sector have earned her several prestigious accolades, including:

Top 100 Small Business in America, US Chamber of Commerce (2024)

Top 500 Female Founder, INC Magazine (2025)

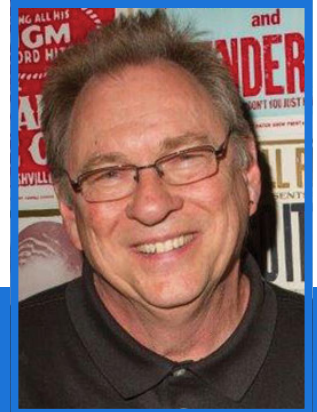
Midwest Regional Fastest Growing Company (2025 & 2026)

Winner of Innovation in Education, 2.0 Conference (NV, 2026)

To engage in an upcoming roundtable discussion on enhancing music ecosystems, contact Lisa at lisa@lissclarinetshop.com.

The Ever-Changing Face of Music Education: 'Go Back Jack and Do it Again'

By Menzie Pittman, Author of *The New Musician*



“Trends come and go, but fundamental approaches are time-tested, and they remain consistent; they apply to all styles of music and performance, and along with authenticity, they are never out of vogue.”

I return to this topic often because as everyone knows our industry is changing in real time, and as stewards of the music industry, we have the responsibility of leaving the industry a little better than we found it.

As music educators and music entrepreneurs, we can do that; we can aid rising musicians by sharing our specialized knowledge. We can teach them about expressions in music and share examples of passion and unique performances. A good teacher has a deep knowledge of most styles of music and a true understanding of the qualities that bring a performance to life.

Any teacher worth his salt knows music history in his specialized field. We can support rising musicians by helping them avoid making the same mistakes we have all made. It's a tough love approach, but good teachers don't shy away from that responsibility. Trends come and go, but fundamental approaches are time-tested, and they remain consistent; they apply to all styles of music and performance, and along with authenticity, they are never out of vogue.

Lately, however, an unusual trend has emerged, and it's a trend that could have long-lasting effects. Interestingly, it is not AI; in truth, it might be more detrimental. Just as with AI, the current trend has a great deal to do with the advances in technology. In 2005 technology began to blossom, but the game changer came in 2006, when Google acquired YouTube. Historically, in the world of communication, that was a seismic shift. YouTube can certainly be a valuable tool when it comes to teaching music and enjoying music performances. From a music teacher's perspective, though, the YouTube visuals have taken the place of important fundamentals such as reading music.

The good news, nonetheless, is when you pair the two, you have a new tool and a fresh method of communicating. It's a bit of "old school-meets new school." Teens seem fine with that. But there's a bigger teen problem looming on the horizon. Teens are dropping out of in-person methods of learning. They used to be first in line to take lessons. But lately every music store owner I speak with, is experiencing the

exact same scenario. Today, there are fewer teens involved with studying music "one on one" with a qualified teacher.

Teens are fast, teens love technology, and they also have very short attention spans. So, you can't really blame them for their boredom with methods of learning such as reading music; the truth is reading music gives learners an advantage and a chance to have the information soak in and with a good teacher, they learn the reasoning for why the music is written a certain way.

The evolution in private music education with teens appears to be in their intense lack of interest in learning the value of fundamentals. There is a lack of passion and desire to learn how to play genuinely and how to express music. The current attitude can be summed up in the opening phrase of the teen reasoning, "what difference does it make" because I can just look it up on YouTube, so I don't really need to learn how to read music or take formal lessons. Keep in mind these are the Covid kids, and their feelings seem to rest in their belief that they can learn on their own, and they don't need a teacher. Personally, I think we owe them an apology.

The other distraction teens have and have always had is social. They want to hang with their friends and jam. In truth, I was that kid. My father, who was a professional musician, took the stance, "If you're going to play music, you must know your craft." He was not easily impressed by my attitude. Of course, now I sound just like him.

In Closing:

The music industry cannot afford to lose a generation of musicians. Nor can we put on party hats, make a shiny logo, and call ourselves music educators. Think about the impact of artists such as the Beatles, Jeff Beck, or new rising artists like Charlie Puth. We need leaders of that caliber on every front, and the music industry needs teens to return to studying music. Nonetheless, enticing them to return to learning an instrument from qualified teachers may be more difficult than we realize. Too many shiny distractions are furiously floating out there in the teen ether.

Fretted

Winzz Guitars Launches into Orbit with the WOS 100-24 Electric Guitar

Winzz Guitars has officially launched the WOS 100-24 Electric Guitar, the premier model in their new Orbit Series. Designed for players who demand speed, precision, and power, the WOS 100-24 delivers a new level of modern performance. The new instrument is available to guitarists exclusively factory direct.

The WOS 100-24 is built with a lightweight and resonant alder body using a unique offset shape. The body is finished in gloss polyester, and binding is featured on the Silver Sunburst and Pearl white color options. The guitar uses a 5-bolt construction to join the roasted Canadian maple "glider neck" to the body for maximum stability and finished in a satin polyester for comfort. An ergonomic neck-body joint with an asymmetric heel design ensures easy access up top. The C-D shape neck has a 25.5" (647.7mm) scale length and is paired with a 12" to 16" compound radius fingerboard to provide a smooth and fast playing feel. The neck also features 24 medium jumbo stainless-steel frets, a synthetic bone nut measuring 41.3mm/1.63" in width, and dot position inlays paired with Luminlay side dots for easy navigation in low light settings.



Equipped to deliver a versatile array of tones, the WOS 100-24 features custom Alnico V humbucker pickups in both the bridge and neck positions. These dual humbuckers provide everything from crystal clear cleans to tight, high-gain aggression. Players can shape their sound using a master volume, a master tone, and a 3-way toggle pickup selector. Furthermore, a push/pull pot on the tone control allows for coil splitting, unlocking an extended range of expressive freedom.

The hardware appointments on the WOS 100-24 are performance designed for stability and reliability, featuring a 2-point tremolo with black, steel block saddles. The instrument's iconic headstock features a 10-degree angle to maximize tone and uses 4+2 locking tuners. The hardware finish is available in black or chrome. Adjusting the action is easy via the adjustable truss rod without needing to remove the strings or components. The WOS 100-24 is available in four finishes: Gray Sparkle, Cosmic black, Silver Sunburst, and Pearl white.

For more information and to purchase the Orbit Series WOS 100-24, please visit www.winzzguitars.com. Direct Price: \$389.99 USD

Amplification

Blackstar Unlocks Features on BEAM MINI Desktop Amplifier

Blackstar Amplification delivers its BEAM MINI desktop guitar amplifier, initially shown at the January NAMM show, now with expanded functionality. Designed as a compact, portable solution for modern players, BEAM MINI combines component-level digital modelling, native support for TONE3000 NAM captures, and app-based control in a self-contained format aimed at practice, recording, and content creation.

A key addition is native compatibility with TONE3000 NAM captures, allowing BEAM MINI to load more than 200,000 community-created profiles. The platform also incorporates CabRig, Blackstar's IR-based speaker and microphone simulation system, designed to extend usability across practice, recording, and playback scenarios. Bluetooth audio functionality is included for music streaming, and a studio-quality headset microphone input with built-in reverb supports vocal and guitar recording simultaneously. Integration with Moises AI for stem separation enabling users to isolate or remove instruments from songs, is scheduled via a software update in August 2026.

At its core, BEAM MINI is a DSP-powered desktop amplifier built around Blackstar's component-level modelling architecture. The system includes twelve electric guitar amp models, six Blackstar designs and six Ampton recreations, alongside three bass amps, two acoustic voices, and an acoustic simulator. Developed by Blackstar's UK engineering team, the platform is designed to deliver a responsive playing experience in a compact enclosure, supported by a sealed, acoustically tuned cabinet with dual 60mm full-range drivers and



two passive bass radiators.

Tone shaping is handled through a combination of onboard and app-based controls. The amplifier features Blackstar's patented ISF control alongside a library of amp models and over 35 effects. The SpeedDial interface and Light Beam Display provide direct, menu-free access to key parameters, while the XpressFX function enables simultaneous adjustment of multiple effects. Through the Beam app, users can further edit tones and access a growing library of amp, cab, mic, and pedal models, as well as user- and artist-generated patches.

In terms of usability, BEAM MINI is designed for flexible, everyday use. The onboard control system emphasizes immediacy, while deeper editing and content access are handled through the companion app. Players can also engage with an online ecosystem that includes artist patches and a community-driven tone-sharing platform. Additional app features include backing tracks and instructional video content.

Physically, BEAM MINI is engineered for portability and durability. Its sealed cabinet is paired with an IP66-rated dust-tight and weatherproof design, and the unit delivers over 18 hours of battery-powered operation.

Blackstar's Super Wide Stereo technology is implemented to enhance playback across both guitar and Bluetooth audio applications, supporting use in a variety of environments.

For more information, visit www.blackstaramps.com.

Street Price \$229.99 USD

UA Announces UAD Enigmatic '82 Overdrive Special Amp

Universal Audio Inc. (UA), a worldwide leader in audio production tools, is proud to introduce UAD Enigmatic '82 Overdrive Special Amp, a new native plug-in that gives guitarists the authentic tone of the rarest, most coveted amps in history.

Available for Mac and PC, UAD Enigmatic '82 Overdrive Special Amp plug-in captures the authentic D-style amp sounds made famous by decades of legendary guitarists including Stevie Ray Vaughan, Carlos Santana, Eric Clapton, and more.

"These are tones you associate with uniquely great players," says James Santiago, senior product manager at Universal Audio. "We modeled more than 4 different era D-style amps, from early Santa Cruz builds to later LA studio favorites... because no two were exactly alike."

Built upon Universal Audio's industry-leading amp modeling and component-level circuit analysis, UAD Enigmatic '82 puts the essential ODS sounds into an immersive and inspiring plug-in. Players can mix and match power sections, tone stacks, and even add the legendary Hot Rubber Monkey (HRM) mod to create a D-style amp circuit that's entirely their own.



Key Benefits:

- Authentic Overdrive Special Tones. Get the same boutique amp tones made famous by Stevie Ray Vaughan, Carlos Santana, Joe Bonamassa, and more*
- Amp Models from Every Era. Dial in any D-style sound across four decades, from clean to crunch
 - Deep Customization. Mix and match power sections, tone stacks, and the legendary HRM mod to create an amp that's uniquely yours
 - 9 Curated Cab and Mic Setups. Get mix-ready tones with expertly curated mic and speaker cabinets
 - Pro Artist Settings. Explore 40+ presets from Joey Landreth, Megan Lovell, Daniel Donato, and more*

UAD Native Format. Purchase separately or with a UAD Spark plug-in subscription

Upgrade to Paradise Guitar Studio at special pricing for the ultimate guitar recording experience

UAD Enigmatic '82 Overdrive Special Amp became available through authorized UA retailers and at uaudio.com starting May 1, 2026.

\$99 USD | Intro Price \$49 USD | Included in UAD Spark Subscription

Accessories

Roland Future Design Lab and Neutone Advance Project LYDIA with Phase 2

Roland Future Design Lab, the forward-looking research division of Roland Corporation, and Tokyo-based AI music technology company Neutone have announced Project LYDIA Phase 2, a refined evolution of their experimental AI-powered neural sampling pedal concept. Shaped by months of direct feedback from musicians, developers, and live performers, Phase 2 moves the project closer to a fully self-contained, performance-ready hardware platform.

Project LYDIA Phase 2 builds on the technology preview first unveiled in November 2025 and made its public debut at Superbooth Berlin (May 7–9), offering attendees hands-on access to the latest iteration.

Phase 2: Integrated, Performance-Ready, and More Expressive

Responding directly to feedback gathered through live demos, industry showcases, and global surveys, Project LYDIA Phase 2 introduces several key hardware enhancements:

- Refined hardware design with enhanced flexibility, supporting easier Raspberry Pi 5 installation and standalone USB MIDI controller operation
- Fully integrated audio I/O, eliminating the need for an external USB audio interface
- Onboard LCD display for clearer navigation and real-time parameter feedback
- User Preset memories for saving control settings and more
- MIDI connectivity for deeper control, automation, and integration with existing studio and live rigs



A Feedback-Led Approach to AI Hardware Design

Roland Future Design Lab partnered with Neutone to introduce Project LYDIA as an open, public-facing experiment: exploring how neural sampling could be embodied in a tactile, musician-centered hardware format. The initial prototype quickly generated strong interest from many corners, prompting extensive dialogue about workflow, control, and musical expressiveness.

“From the very first demos with professional audio developers through the overwhelming response from musicians worldwide, it was clear that Project LYDIA was resonating,” said Paul McCabe, LA-based leader of Roland Future Design Lab. “That dialogue directly shaped Phase 2. This version reflects what creators told us they want from AI hardware in real musical contexts, while also bringing forward new ideas from our team.”

Rather than positioning AI as a replacement for musicianship, Project LYDIA emphasizes augmentation and control, allowing performers to interact with neural models in immediate, physical, and musically expressive ways. The familiar pedal format places AI processing into a workflow many musicians already trust, bringing transparency and tactility to technology

often associated with screens and abstraction.

This feedback-driven development aligns with Roland’s broader commitment to responsible AI innovation, as outlined by [AI For Music](#), the initiative co-founded by Roland and Universal Music Group to establish ethical principles for AI use in music creation.

Accessories

Sonique Drums Introduces the Bead King Beaded Snare Adapter for Throw-Offs

The Bead King™ is the successor to the original BS1 beaded snare adapter and the latest addition to the Sfx family of percussion accessories. The Bead King™ expands compatibility to many other popular throw-offs that can adjust to or statically use a 7/8" hole spacing. It also features a larger arch cutout to accommodate snare beads of all sizes and longer mounting slots to accommodate unexpected variances in throw-off hole spacing. The Bead King™ adapter is available through [soniquedrums.com](#), Reverb, Amazon, and Authorized Dealers.

This is yet another example of how Sonique listens to drummers who not only expect, but demand better gear.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Expands compatibility to a wide range of popular throw-offs with 7/8" hole spacing, both adjustable and static configurations.
- Enlarged arch cutout accommodates snare beads of all sizes, eliminating fitment limitations found in previous designs.
- Extended mounting slots compensate for real-world variances in throw-off hole spacing, ensuring a secure fit across a wider range of hardware.
- A complete hardware kit is included that works in most mounting situations.



LERXST Introduces the Analog Kid Double Chorus Pedal

LERXST Amplification, in collaboration with legendary guitarist Alex Lifeson, proudly announces the release of the Analog Kid™ Chorus Pedal, a powerful and expressive modulation pedal designed to capture the unmistakable chorus textures that defined a generation of iconic recordings.

Drawing inspiration from the lush tones heard across Permanent Waves, Moving Pictures, and Signals, the Analog Kid delivers everything from shimmering cleans to expansive, swirling modulation, while opening the door to an entirely new sonic territory.

Built for the Stage, Designed for Exploration

With two LFO circuits, accessed with each footswitch, the Analog Kid offers real-time control over your modulation landscape enabling players to build, layer, and shift textures on the fly.

The pedal is designed to integrate seamlessly into modern rigs while maintaining clarity and low noise performance. Run it in stereo to unlock a massive, three-dimensional spread that transforms your tone from centered to cinematic.

- Mono or Stereo operation
- Top-mounted I/O for pedalboard efficiency
- Optimized for isolated 9V DC power (150mA)

Dual LFO Architecture — Twice the Movement, Infinite Possibilities

At the heart of the Analog Kid is a true dual-LFO chorus engine, giving players unprecedented control

over modulation depth, rate, and movement.

- Independent or Master Rate Modes for dual LFO control
- Independent Depth Controls for each modulation circuit
- Stereo Output Capability for wide, dimensional soundscapes
- Chorus and Vibrato Modes for expanded tonal range
- Selectable LFO Direction for unique modulation behavior

Players can run both modulation circuits independently for complex, evolving textures, or sync them together for classic, cohesive chorus tones.

The Sound of a Lifelong Tone Journey

Throughout his career, Alex Lifeson has relied on a wide range of modulation tools, often combining multiple chorus units to achieve his signature sound. The Analog Kid distills that experience into a single, highly flexible pedal that captures the essence of those tones while pushing beyond their limitations.

This isn't a one-sound chorus, it's a platform for exploration.

Availability

The Analog Kid™ Double Chorus is available now exclusively through the Reverb LERXST store.



Pro Audio

Avid Powers Faster Workflows and Next-generation Immersive Audio with Latest Pro Tools Release



Avid® has announced the release of Pro Tools® 2026.4, delivering powerful new capabilities that enhance immersive audio production, accelerate professional workflows, and expand creative possibilities for music and audio postproduction professionals.

Designed to meet the evolving needs of creators working across music, film, television, and broadcast, Pro Tools 2026.4 introduces Track Pin – a powerful new way to stay focused in large, complex sessions – alongside support for the MPEG-H immersive broadcast standard and Dolby Headphone Personalization. The release also enhances Avid’s integrated Speech-to-Text capabilities, brings Massive X Player and premium sound content to Pro Tools, and delivers new Inner Circle rewards for active customers.

“This new version of Pro Tools is all about helping creators stay focused, work more efficiently, and meet the demands of modern production,” said Chris Winsor, Director of Pro Tools Product Management at Avid. “Whether they are mixing immersive audio, navigating complex sessions, or exploring new sounds, Pro Tools 2026.4 delivers the tools creators need to stay in their creative flow and produce their best work.”

Helping creators stay more focused with smarter, faster workflows

As audio sessions grow larger and more complex – often with hundreds of tracks – maintaining visibility of critical elements becomes increasingly challenging. Track Pin introduces a simple but powerful way to stay focused by enabling users to lock important tracks in place within the edit window, ensuring they remain visible throughout the session. As a result, essential elements, such as lead vocals or dialogue, are easily accessible, eliminating unnecessary scrolling and enabling faster, more efficient edit. Pro Tools 2026.4 also enhances Avid’s integrated, AI-powered Speech-to-Text capabilities, making dialogue and lyric-driven workflows faster, more flexible, and more efficient. Transcription data is now automatically carried through to newly rendered files when users perform processing operations such as AudioSuite, Commit, Consolidate, and exporting .ptxm Media Composer-compatible session files.

The latest version of Pro Tools also delivers greater flexibility by enabling users to:

- Make separate timeline clip selections by word, sentence, or speaker
- Choose which tracks display transcription lanes
- Select CPU or GPU processing for transcription analysis.

Together, these updates streamline editing and dialogue workflows – saving time across music and postproduction environments.

Expanding immersive production for broadcast and beyond

Pro Tools 2026.4 expands Avid’s best-in-class immersive audio with new capabilities designed for modern broadcast and streaming workflows.

Editors can now create flexible, object-based immersive audio experiences directly within Pro Tools using MPEG-H, a rapidly growing broadcast standard adopted across major global markets including South America and Asia. The MPEG-H Renderer plugin, developed by Fraunhofer IIS for monitoring and delivery, is included at no extra cost to Pro Tools Studio and Ultimate customers. MPEG-H enables creators to define a wide range of interactive and personalized audio options during production, including selectable immersive mixes, multiple languages, dialogue enhancement, and interactive spatial audio positioning.

The latest immersive enhancements also enable creators to work across multiple formats within a single session, simplifying workflows and eliminating the need to manage separate projects.

To support accurate monitoring of these immersive mixes, Pro Tools 2026.4 introduces Dolby Headphone Personalization for Dolby Atmos® workflows, enabling more precise mixing on headphones. Through a custom-measured Head Related Transfer Function, creators can generate a tailored listening profile that improves spatial accuracy and ensures better translation between headphone and speaker-based immersive systems. Users capture their ear and head shape using their smartphone cameras and the free SoundID Tools mobile app by Sonarworks and load the profile directly onto Pro Tools.

Unlocking new creative possibilities

For music creators, Pro Tools 2026.4 introduces powerful new instruments and sound content to inspire creativity.

The release includes:

- Massive X Player from Native Instruments, delivering the powerful and iconic synth engine directly within Pro Tools
- Exclusive Pro Tools Massive X Essentials expansion pack for all users
- Lo-fi & Chill Plucks and Haze expansion packs from Native Instruments for active subscribers and perpetual license holders

These additions enable creators to design everything from basses and leads to cinematic textures without leaving the Pro Tools environment.

Pro Tools 2026.4 also delivers new Inner Circle rewards, giving annual subscribers and customers with active perpetual upgrade plans access to premium creative tools, including:

- Ampknob BDH III by Bogren Digital, offering high-gain guitar amplifier tones
- Bad Math by Cut Classic, a powerful multiband distortion plugin

Pro Tools® 2026.4 is available now. Track Pin and Massive X Player are available to all customers, while the new immersive capabilities, Dolby Headphone Personalization, and Speech-to-Text enhancements are available to Pro Tools Studio and Ultimate users.

HERE COMES THE SUN



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