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INSIDE



The Creator Economy, AI, and the Future of Music Making: A Conversation with John Mlynczak – Part 2



Upfront Q&A: Masahiro Minowa on the Historic Opening of Roland's New NYC Retail Location and What the Future Holds for MI



Raising the Beam: Sweetwater Tops Off Its Next Chapter

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CONTENTS

MMR
MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

FEATURES Vol.185 NOVEMBER 2026 No. 11

UPFRONT Q&A
MASAHIRO MINOWA ON THE HISTORIC OPENING OF ROLAND'S NEW NYC RETAIL LOCATION AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR MI 10
With the opening of its first standalone U.S. retail location, Roland Corporation is bringing a new kind of musical experience to the heart of Manhattan. Joining Roland's flagship locations in London and Tokyo, the New York store also reflects a broader vision for the company's future — one that places as much emphasis on inspiring participation in music as it does on developing the instruments themselves. *MMR* visited the grand opening and had the pleasure of speaking with Roland Corporation CEO and representative director Masahiro Minowa about the significance of the New York opening, the evolving role of brick-and-mortar retail, and the technologies and experiences shaping the next generation of music makers.

ROUNDTABLE
BETTER TOGEHTER: THE APPEAL - AND THE ART - OF RECORDING PACKAGES AND BUNDLES 14
It's a lousy time to find out you need another cable. The guitar's tuned, the part is fresh in your head, and you've already spent more of the evening than you meant to figuring out how to hear yourself through the headphones. The whole idea was to record something.
That's the problem a good recording bundle solves. For this month's roundtable, *MMR* spoke with representatives from Audio-Technica, CAD Audio, Fender Studio, and Focusrite about what earns its place in a recording package, how much the included software matters, and what a dealer can learn by asking one question before reaching for a box. "What are you trying to record?"

TRADE SHOW
THE CREATOR ECONOMY, AI, AND THE FUTURE OF MUSIC MAKING: A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN MLYNCZAK, PRESIDENT & CEO OF NAMM 22
A musician's first encounter with a new piece of gear might now come through a creator's video rather than a store visit. And the tools themselves are changing, with advances in music technology and AI raising questions about how musicians will write, record, and perform. In part two of our three-part pre-NAMM Show conversation, NAMM president and CEO John Mlynczak discusses the creator economy's influence on gear discovery and what the next wave of creative tools could mean for musicians, manufacturers, and retailers.

RETAIL
RAISING THE BEAM: SWEETWATER TOPS OFF ITS NEXT CHAPTER 26
Before the final steel beam went up on Sweetwater's distribution center expansion, six of the facility's longest-tenured hourly employees added their signatures — representing more than 115 years of service between them. It was a personal touch on a sizable undertaking: a roughly 170,000-square-foot addition that will enlarge the existing facility by nearly a third. The $36.7 million expansion investment, alongside road and infrastructure improvements, marks another commitment to the company's Fort Wayne home, with completion expected in summer 2027. *MMR* spoke with Jeff Ostermann, Sweetwater's chief people & culture officer, about the project and the employees whose work has helped make that growth possible.



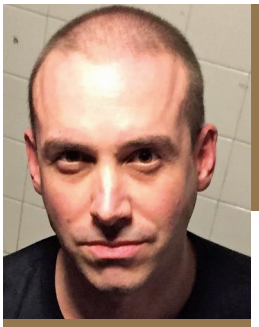




Departments

Editorial 4
UpFront 6
People on the Move 8
Small Business Matters 27
New Products 28

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IS EVERYTHING IN THE BOX?

By Christian Wissmuler

A recording bundle has one job, as far as I'm concerned. If somebody gets home with the box on Saturday afternoon, they ought to be able to record something before dinner. If they're back at the store at 4:45 looking for a cable, somebody bundled the wrong stuff.

I say that as a guitar player who'd rather get a take with the band in the room than spend the night moving a snare hit three pixels to the left. But I'm glad a kid with a laptop and a song can get something down without having to book a room or find a drummer (a process that can take considerably longer than learning to use an interface).

There's a particular kind of misery in hearing yourself perfectly well through the headphones and discovering, when you play the take back, that you've recorded nothing. Or you've recorded the laptop fan because the software was listening to the built-in mic. I'd put a card in the box that gets somebody from plugging in to playing back a ten-second take. They can watch the 38-minute tutorial after they've heard themselves make a noise.

The recording packages in this month's cover story raise a pretty basic question for dealers: What's the customer trying to record? Two inputs make sense for somebody singing and playing guitar at the same time. The person who wants to mic a whole drum kit is going to have a different Saturday. That's the sort of thing a good salesperson can find out in about 30 seconds, and it's worth more than another plug-in the customer may never install.

I'm also curious how much room there is for a store to put together its own packages. Say a customer already has a perfectly good pair of headphones and wants to record vocals in an apartment. I'd rather put that part of the budget toward a mic stand that won't slowly sink during the second verse. Then there's the customer who's already made some demos and wants to bring in a second singer. For that person, an extra headphone output might be the most exciting thing in the whole box.

This is also one of those purchases where the person paying and the person using the gear aren't always the same. A parent shopping for a holiday gift may know their kid wants to record and have no idea whether that means an acoustic guitar or a beat made entirely on a computer. Asking what the kid already has is a decent place to start.

The midterms are behind us, though I doubt we'll be spared much discussion of what they "really" meant. I'm more interested in what happens when the people who won get around to making decisions. If you sell or rent school instruments, a district's budget can matter a whole lot more on a Tuesday morning than whatever the cable news panel spent Monday night arguing about.

A school music director trying to keep a beginner band going has some pretty unglamorous questions to settle. Can we afford to repair the instruments we have? Can we get another section of beginners in the schedule? The dealer who's been servicing those horns can probably tell you which repairs can wait and which ones are going to leave a kid sharing an instrument. That's a conversation I'd like to hear more of once the yard signs come down.

Meanwhile, January is coming up fast. The 2027 NAMM Show runs Jan. 26–30 in Anaheim, with exhibits open Jan. 28–30. I want to see what recording gear gets people to stop in the aisles this year. Better yet, I want to hear which of those things dealers think they can demo back home on an ordinary Saturday, without the person who designed it standing there to explain it.

One thing I'd ask at a booth selling an all-in-one recording package is whether the rep will let me start the demo myself. Hand me the cable. Let me find the right input. If I get stuck, there's your first question for the sales training back home. I'd also like to hear from the people filming those demos. A good thirty-second clip can show a customer exactly where the headphones go. A clip of somebody unboxing the interface and telling me how good it sounds leaves me with more or less the same questions I had when it was still in the box.

Speaking of voting (you knew I'd get there eventually), the 2026 *MMR* Dealers' Choice Awards ballot is open. If you're a current *MMR* subscriber, think about what you kept reordering this year or what you found yourself reaching for when a customer asked, "What would you buy?" You can vote in whichever categories you like, one ballot per person, through 5 p.m. Eastern on Dec. 15. Cast your Dealers' Choice Awards ballot.



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CHRIS MARTIN CELEBRATES GRAM PARSONS' 80TH BIRTHDAY AND ROCK HALL INDUCTION WITH NEW SIGNATURE GUITAR

Chris Martin, Chairman of the Board of C.F. Martin & Co. and sixth-generation owner of the family-run guitar maker, joined the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame for "An Evening with Chris Martin of Martin Guitars" in the museum's Foster Theater. The event celebrated what would have been Gram Parsons' 80th birthday and his 2026 Rock Hall induction. Chris Martin unveiled the Martin 00-21 Gram Parsons signature model. at the event. Andy Leach, the Rock Hall's Senior Director of Museum and Archival Collections, and Brent Kirby of The New Soft Shoe opened the evening with a set of Parsons songs. Martin was then joined onstage by artist and Martin Guitar clinician Craig Thatcher to share artist stories and explore instruments from the Martin Museum, including models associated with Rock Hall inductees. The limited-edition 00-21 Gram Parsons, made in a run of 80, is inspired by Parsons' original 1963 Martin 00-21 and features an old-growth Sitka spruce top with visual wear matched to his guitar, a V-shaped neck profile, and a label bearing his pre-printed signature.



Chris Martin, Chairman of the Board of C.F. Martin & Co.; Craig Thatcher, artist and Martin Guitar clinician; Greg Harris, President and CEO of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame; Andy Leach, Senior Director of Museum and Archival Collections at the Rock Hall; and Mike Nelson, VP of Marketing at Martin Guitar, at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland on Nov. 5. Martin celebrated what would have been Gram Parsons' 80th birthday and his 2026 Rock Hall induction with an evening at the museum, where he unveiled the new limited-edition 00-21 Gram Parsons signature model.

GUITAR CENTER AND AKAI PROFESSIONAL HOST BEAT LAB EVENT IN BROOKLYN

Guitar Center brought beatmaking into focus at its Brooklyn store on October 29, 2026, with Beat Lab, an Akai Professional-sponsored event featuring producer masterclasses, live performances and hands-on music production.

The event gave attendees direct access to working producers and Akai's MPC lineup, with programming covering sampling, MPC workflows and live production. Featured artists included Rashad "Ringo" Smith, Marco Polo, The Heatmakerz, Dibiase and Amadeus.

Smith delivered one of the night's standout moments, sharing behind-the-scenes stories from a career working with artists including The Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, Lil' Kim and DJ Khaled. His masterclass ran 30 minutes beyond its scheduled time as the crowd stayed engaged.

Marco Polo dug into MPC production and sample design, while The Heatmakerz and Dibiase put their process on display through live cook-ups. The Akai NY Live Beat Battle brought competition into the mix, with producers facing off for an Akai MPC Sample.

"Producers and DJs want more than features on a screen. They want to get their hands on the gear, hear what it can do and feel inspired. They want to be with the community of people who are making music every day," said John Vargas, Vice President of Merchandising Technology and Drums at Guitar Center. "Beat Lab brings that experience into Guitar Center, giving creators at every level a place to experiment, sharpen their skills and connect with the music-making community."

"Every producer has their own way of turning an idea into a track," said Andy Mac, Creative A&R Director at Akai Professional. "Beat Lab is about inspiring that creative process and showing artists new ways to bring their ideas to life."

Beat Lab is Guitar Center's dedicated destination for producers, beat-makers, DJs and creators, bringing together hands-on product discovery, education, artist engagement and community. Designed for everyone from experienced producers to those just getting started, Beat Lab gives creators a place to experiment with new gear, learn from working artists and producers, and connect with the music-making community.



L-R (facing audience): Andy Mac, Creative A&R Director at Akai Professional, and featured artist Rashad "Ringo" Smith address the crowd at the recent Beat Lab event in Brooklyn. Photo Credit: Courtesy of Guitar Center

CELEBRATING THE LEGENDS OF THE LOW END: NAMM AND 'BASS MAGAZINE' ANNOUNCE 2027 AWARDS HONOREES

NAMM and *Bass Magazine,* a leading publication dedicated to the instrument and the artists who define its sound, today announced the honorees for the 2027 Bass Magazine Awards Show, returning as part of the official NAMM Show experience.

The 2027 Bass Magazine Awards, with global audio powerhouse RCF serving as title sponsor, will take place on Thursday, January 28, 2027, at the ACC Arena at the Anaheim Convention Center as an official on-campus event during the NAMM Show.

The annual celebration will recognize seven legendary artists whose contributions have transformed the art, innovation and cultural impact of bass: Black Sabbath's Geezer Butler, Flea of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Stone Temple Pilots co-founder Robert DeLeo, funk pioneer Bootsy Collins, Stevie Wonder bassist Nathan Watts, and Grammy-winning bassist, songwriter and composer Meshell Ndegeocello, who will receive the Bass Magazine Lifetime Achievement Award.

Together, these honorees represent the extraordinary range of the instrument, from the foundational riffs of heavy metal and the explosive energy of alternative rock to the sophistication of R&B, soul, funk, jazz and pop. Their playing, songwriting and artistic vision demonstrate the bass' power to drive a song, define a genre and become an unmistakable voice in music history.

"Every one of these honorees has left an unmistakable mark on music," said Jon D'Auria, Editor-in-Chief of *Bass Magazine*. "They are true stewards of our instrument who have blazed a trail all of their own."

"These artists have helped shape the sound of modern music and inspired generations of musicians to pick up an instrument and find their own voice," said John Mlynczak, NAMM President and CEO. "They demonstrate the extraordinary creative possibilities of music making, and celebrating their contributions during The NAMM Show brings our global music community together to honor their legacies and inspire the next generation of music makers."

2027 Bass Magazine Awards Honorees

NATHAN WATTS — STEVIE WONDER

For 52 years, Nathan Watts has been Wonder's bassist, both live and on record — and since 1994, he's been Stevie's musical director, too. As a graduate of what he calls the "School of Wonder," the Detroit-born Watts has created more than his share of beloved bass lines on a dozen albums with Wonder and with artists like Paul McCartney, the Pointer Sisters, the Jacksons, Diana Ross, Gladys Knight, Lionel Richie and Sergio Mendes.

GEEZER BUTLER — BLACK SABBATH

Few musicians have shaped heavy metal as profoundly as Geezer Butler, the pioneering bassist, principal lyricist and founding member of Black Sabbath. Since 1968, his distinctive approach to rhythm, instinctive connection to guitarist Tony Iommi's monumental riffs, iconic songwriting and dark, powerful tone with Sabbath, GZR, Heaven & Hell, Deadland Ritual and Ozzy Osbourne have proved that bass can be as central to a band's identity as any other instrument.

FLEA — RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

Combining funk with punk energy, rock power, jazz sensibility and an unmistakably physical performance style, Flea's signature sound combines explosive slap technique, intricate melodic lines and fearless improvisation. Besides his 13 albums with the Peppers, Flea is renowned for his solo album, Honora; session work with Atoms for Peace, Alanis Morissette and others; and his Silverlake Conservatory of Music, which turned 25 in 2026.

ROBERT DELEO — STONE TEMPLE PILOTS

As bassist, songwriter and co-founder of Stone Temple Pilots, Robert DeLeo is a principal architect of one of the most successful bands to emerge from the alternative rock movement of the 1990s. DeLeo's combination of melodic sophistication, expansive understanding of song structure and playing in service to the song — as well as his deft integration of soul, classic pop and R&B influences — has set a high standard for future bassists.

BOOTSY COLLINS — SOLO ARTIST, PARLIAMENT-FUNKADELIC AND JAMES BROWN

A true original, Bootsy Collins helped establish a new vocabulary



for funk, combining deep, elastic grooves with inventive playing, custom instruments, colorful effects, singular vocals and an outrageous stage persona. His work with James Brown and Parliament-Funkadelic — plus his wide-ranging collaborations and more than a dozen Bootsy, Rubber Band, New Rubber Band and Zillatron releases — are a crucial part of the DNA of modern music.

MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO — LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

A pioneering bassist, songwriter, vocalist, composer and producer, Meshell Ndegeocello has spent more than three decades redefining the boundaries of contemporary music. Her distinctive, deeply melodic bass playing and fearless artistic vision move fluidly across soul, R&B, jazz, hip-hop and rock, establishing her as one of the most influential and original voices in modern music. With a celebrated career marked by genre-defying albums, acclaimed collaborations and multiple Grammy Awards, Ndegeocello has continually expanded the creative possibilities of the bass while inspiring generations of musicians. Her work as a bandleader, composer and recording artist reflects a singular commitment to musical exploration, authenticity and expression, earning her the Bass Magazine Lifetime Achievement Award.

A Global Celebration of Bass at The NAMM Show

"Bootsy, one of the forefathers of funk, brought a revolutionary sound, larger-than-life personality and unmistakable groove to everything he's touched," says D'Auria. "Geezer's one of the legends of metal and his undeniable influence has inspired generations of players. Flea brought a new level of energy and individuality through the music of Red Hot Chili Peppers and redefined what we can do on our instrument. Nathan Watts shows us all what being in the pocket means after five decades of playing some of the most iconic and endearing songs, and Robert DeLeo's songwriting and playing helped define an entire era of alternative rock. Meshell Ndegeocello has continually pushed the boundaries of what the bass and an artist can be, with a career defined by innovation, originality and musical depth. These are artists who have inspired bassists around the world, and we're proud to celebrate their legacies."

The 2027 Bass Magazine Awards will continue the tradition of bringing together legendary musicians, emerging talent, industry leaders and fans to celebrate the instrument's past, present and future. The evening is expected to feature special guests, live performances and surprise collaborations celebrating the global bass community.

The partnership between NAMM and Bass Magazine reinforces The NAMM Show's role as a global gathering place for the music products industry and the artists, performers, creators and communities that bring music to life. By recognizing the musicians who have helped shape popular music, the awards highlight the relationship between artistry, instrument innovation, music making and the industry that supports it.

Previous Bass Magazine Awards honorees have included Sting, Justin Chancellor of Tool, John Patitucci, MonoNeon, Mohini Dey, Les Claypool of Primus, Mike Dirnt of Green Day, Marcus Miller, Laura Lee of Khruangbin and Blu DeTiger. Past celebrations have brought together celebrated bassists and special guests for performances that showcase the instrument's remarkable range across musical styles.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Vader Sound is pleased to announce the appointment of **Grant Henderson** as its new road-based Sales Representative, covering the North of England and Ireland.

Grant brings with him valuable experience and established connections within the music industry, having previously worked for leading UK musical instrument distributor JHS.

Alongside his music industry experience, Grant successfully runs his own recording studio, Loom Studios, giving him an additional perspective on the needs of musicians, recording professionals and the wider music community.

In his new role, Grant will be working directly with music retailers across his territory, developing new business opportunities, supporting existing stockists and introducing dealers to Vader Sound's growing portfolio of musical instrument brands and products.

As an independent UK-based distributor, Vader Sound represents an expanding portfolio of international brands, including Veelah Guitars, LiteJam, Graph Tech and the anime themed Vader Guitars.

Grant's appointment represents another important step in Vader Sound's continued growth and its commitment to building strong relationships with independent music retailers through a more personal, hands-on approach to sales and customer support.



Paul Smith, Founder of Vader Sound, commented:

"I'm really pleased to have Grant joining us. I've known and worked with Grant previously, so I know exactly what he brings to the business. His experience at JHS, combined with his understanding of the music industry and his own work running Loom Studios, makes him a great addition to the team. His personality shines through everything he does, and I know that our customers will appreciate his support."

Grant Henderson, commented "It's very exciting to be on board with the Veelah brand right at the start of its UK roll out. I was bowled over by the amazing build quality and superior sound of the brands' ranges, especially in a recording environment. I'm looking forward to getting out of the road with them".

Grant will be contacting retailers across his territory over the coming weeks and looks forward to meeting both existing and prospective Vader Sound dealers.



NAMM is evolving its organizational structure to advance its strategic priorities, including enhancing the NAMM Show audience experience and strengthening engagement and value for its global membership.

This evolution reflects The NAMM Show's education-forward approach and growth strategy, which creates a strategic focus on growing audience segments, creating engaging experiences, and delivering meaningful value to members and the industry year-round.

As part of this realignment, **Zach Phillips** has been named Director of Audience Experience and Education, leading The NAMM Show's audience growth strategy and education initiatives.

Erin Block has been named Director of Member Services and Data, overseeing membership, data, policy, workforce development and resource center initiatives to support NAMM's global membership.

Together, these leadership roles reinforce NAMM's commitment to growing and engaging its audiences, delivering impactful educational experiences and strengthening member value while advancing the global music products industry.



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Mashairo Minowa

MASAHIRO MINOWA ON THE HISTORIC OPENING OF ROLAND'S NEW NYC RETAIL LOCATION AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR MI

By Christian Wissmuller

> ***The health of our industry depends on continually expanding participation in music. We need to welcome not only aspiring professionals, but also hobbyists, families, lifelong learners and people who may have never considered themselves musicians before.***

With the opening of its first standalone U.S. retail location, Roland Corporation is bringing a new kind of musical experience to the heart of Manhattan. Located at 414 West 14th Street in New York City's Meatpacking District, the more than 9,000-square-foot destination brings Roland, BOSS, and Drum Workshop (DW) together under one roof, offering musicians and aspiring creators opportunities to explore instruments, experiment with new technologies, and connect with product specialists. Joining Roland's flagship locations in London and Tokyo, the New York store also reflects a broader vision for the company's future — one that places as much emphasis on inspiring participation in music as it does on developing the instruments themselves. MMR visited the grand opening and had the pleasure of speaking with Roland Corporation CEO and representative director Masahiro Minowa about the significance of the New York opening, the evolving role of brick-and-mortar retail, and the technologies and experiences shaping the next generation of music makers.

Why was now the right time to make that move, and why was New York the right place to do it?

The opening of our New York store represents an important milestone in Roland's evolution, and reflects how we see our relationship with musicians continuing to develop.

For many years, we have supported musicians across North America through our dealer network and retail partners, and those relationships remain incredibly important to us. At the same time, we recognized an opportunity to create something different — a destination where visitors could experience the full breadth of Roland, BOSS, and DW in an environment designed specifically around discovery, creativity, and personal interaction.

We have learned a great deal from our flagship stores in London and Tokyo. These locations demonstrate the value of giving people opportunities to engage directly with instruments, explore unfamiliar products, and receive guidance from knowledgeable specialists. With New York, we wanted to build on that experience while creating something that reflects the character of the city itself.

New York was a natural choice. It is one of the world's great cultural capitals, with an extraordinary concentration of musicians, producers, educators, artists, and creative communities. It is also a city with a remarkable history of musical innovation, including genres and movements that were shaped in part by Roland instruments.

The timing is particularly meaningful as we mark 10 years since *The Future. Redefined.* and look toward the next chapter of Roland's development. We believe the future of music technology is not simply about introducing new products, but about creating more opportunities for people to discover, learn, and enjoy making music.

Our hope is that the New York store will become a place where those opportunities come to life, whether someone is an experienced professional or is exploring an instrument for the very first time.

What role do you see physical retail playing for Roland at a time when so much product discovery and purchasing happens online?

Digital channels are incredibly important, but music remains a uniquely human and experiential activity.

People can research products online, compare specifications and watch demonstrations, but there is still something special about sitting at a piano, playing through a guitar amplifier or interacting with a new instrument for the first time.

For us, physical retail is increasingly becoming about inspiration rather than transaction. It is a place where people can learn, experiment, connect with other musicians and discover possibilities they may not have considered before.

The New York store was designed around that philosophy. We want it to be a creative destination, not simply a place to purchase equipment.

How important is it to present those brands as parts of a larger Roland ecosystem while still preserving their individual identities?

It is extremely important to achieve both. Roland, BOSS and DW each have unique histories, communities and identities that musicians value deeply. We have no interest in diminishing those differences.

At the same time, today's musicians increasingly move across instruments, technologies and creative disciplines. Bringing these brands together allows us to showcase how they complement one another while maintaining the character that made each successful.

The goal is not to create a single identity. The goal is to create a richer ecosystem that supports more ways of making music.

How important is bringing new people into music making to Roland's strategy over the next decade?

I would say it is essential. The health of our industry depends on continually expanding participation in music. We need to welcome not only aspiring professionals, but also hobbyists, families, lifelong learners and people who may have never considered themselves musicians before.

Technology gives us tremendous opportunities to lower barriers to entry and make music more approachable. If we can help someone experience the joy of expressing oneself via music for the first time, we create opportunities that can last a lifetime.

That mission will remain central to Roland's strategy in the years ahead.

How do you celebrate that legacy without allowing nostalgia to overshadow what Roland is developing now?

I see heritage as a source of inspiration rather than a destination.

Products such as the TR-808 earned their place in music history because they were something that didn't exist before. They challenged expectations and helped musicians create new sounds and genres.

If we want to honor that legacy, we need to embrace the same mindset today. Our responsibility is not simply to preserve the past, but to create the next generation of instruments and experiences that inspire creativity in new ways.

The best tribute to Roland's history is continued innovation.

When you look at those 10 years, what changes in music technology or in the way people enjoy music have surprised you the most?

One of the biggest changes has been the shift from products to ecosystems.

When we introduced *The Future. Redefined.* in 2016, we were focused on new instruments, technologies, and product categories. Looking back, what has evolved even more dramatically is the relationship between musicians and technology.

Today, playing, creation, learning, sharing, and collaboration are increasingly connected. Musicians expect experiences that extend beyond the instrument itself and continue throughout their musical journey. That evolution has fundamentally changed how companies like Roland think about innovation.

As AI becomes a larger part of music technology, where can it genuinely enhance human creativity?

I believe AI is most valuable when it removes barriers and expands possibilities. It can help people discover sounds, learn new skills, overcome creative blocks, and explore ideas they may not have considered on their own. In educational settings, AI can also provide guidance that is personalized and immediately accessible.

At the same time, music is ultimately a human form of expression. Technology should support creativity, not replace it. Our perspective is that musicians must remain at the center of the experience. The role of AI is not to replace artistic intent but to help people realize their creative vision more effectively.

Are you seeing a broader opportunity in people who may not identify themselves as "musicians"?

Absolutely. I think one of the most exciting opportunities for our industry is reaching people who enjoy music and want to participate in making it, but who may not think of themselves as musicians in the traditional sense.

For some people, music is a professional pursuit. For others, it is a personal hobby, a way to relax, or something they enjoyed earlier in life and would like to rediscover. There are also people who are curious about making music but may feel that learning an instrument requires too much time, technical knowledge, or previous experience.

We believe there is tremendous potential in making those first steps easier and more rewarding. Technology can play an important role, not by removing the human element of music-making, but by helping people overcome the barriers that might otherwise discourage them from getting started.

Our new FP-40 Digital Piano with Piano Sphere is one example of this approach. It combines the experience of playing a piano with connected features designed to encourage learning, exploration, and continued enjoyment. The goal is to create an experience that feels welcoming to someone returning to the piano after many years, just as it does to someone beginning for the first time.

This philosophy is also reflected in the New York store. We have created opportunities for visitors to experiment with electronic music, try different instruments, and receive personal guidance without feeling that they need to arrive with a particular level of expertise. The experience should be inviting, whether someone has been playing for decades or has never touched an instrument before.

Ultimately, I believe we should think about the music-making community in the broadest possible terms. If we can help more people discover that making music is something they can enjoy throughout their lives, that represents a meaningful opportunity not only for Roland, but for the entire musical instrument industry.

What responsibility does Roland have beyond simply selling someone their first instrument?

I believe our responsibility begins after the purchase and doesn't end there. Buying an instrument is only the first step in a much longer journey. Manufacturers have a responsibility to help people stay inspired, continue learning, and remain engaged over time.

That is why we are increasingly focused on education, connected experiences, community engagement, and services that deliver ongoing value.

Success should not be measured only by how many instruments we sell, but by how many people continue making music because of those products.

When you think about the "next" Roland, what do you hope will be fundamentally different?

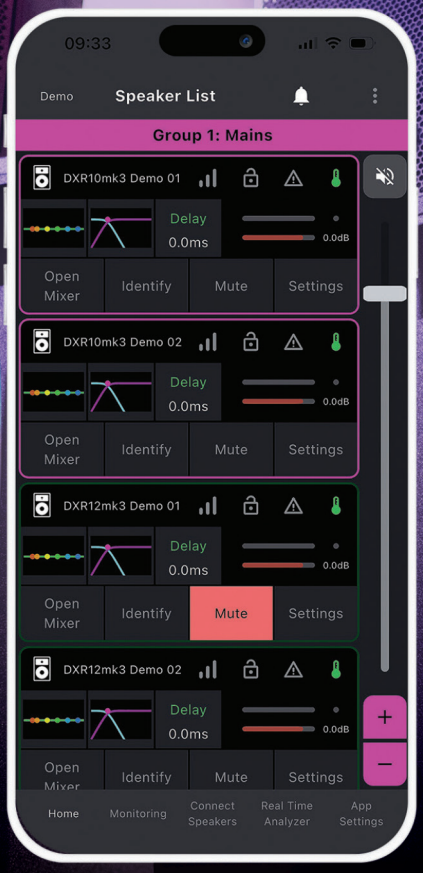
I hope the next Roland will be defined by even deeper connections with musicians. Historically, companies in our industry built great instruments. That will always remain important. But increasingly, we have opportunities to support creativity before, during, and after the moment someone plays.

I believe the future will bring more personalized experiences, more connected ecosystems, and more opportunities for people to learn, create, and collaborate. If, 10 years from now, more people are participating in music, enjoying music, and expressing themselves creatively because of what Roland helped make possible, I would consider that a tremendous success.

The future of Roland is not just about building better instruments. It is about helping more people experience the lifelong joy of making music.

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BETTER TOGETHER:

THE APPEAL – AND THE ART – OF RECORDING PACKAGES AND BUNDLES

By Christian Wissmuller



It's a lousy time to find out you need another cable. The guitar's tuned, the part is fresh in your head, and you've already spent more of the evening than you meant to figuring out how to hear yourself through the headphones. The whole idea was to record something.

That's the problem a good recording bundle solves. What goes in the box depends on who's opening it. A guitarist putting down demos, a podcaster bringing in a guest, and a singer replacing an old interface might all walk into the same store looking for a recording setup. The guitarist may want amp models ready to go. The podcaster needs to know how many mics the interface can handle. The singer might already have a favorite mic and a DAW they know inside out.

For this month's roundtable, *MMR* spoke with representatives from Audio-Technica, CAD Audio, Fender Studio, and Focusrite about what earns its place in a recording package, how much the included software matters, and what a dealer can learn by asking one question before reaching for a box. "What are you trying to record?"

What are your strongest-selling recording packages or bundles right now, and what do you think is driving their success?

Gary Boss: We have created several hardware-focused content creation bundles built around our AT2020, AT2035, and USB microphones. With the continued growth of DIY content creation, these bundles help take the guesswork out of selecting the right microphone and supporting equipment.



Gary Boss, Senior Marketing Manager, Pro Audio & M.I. Retail, Audio-Technica

Gary Byers: Our E100SP studio package is a good example of what works for us. It's built around the E100SX, a microphone customers can continue using as their recording skills develop. We pair it with our CX2 interface, AS10 isolation screen, pop filter, and mic cable, giving customers several essentials in one purchase.

I think the appeal is getting good equipment at an affordable price without having to choose every piece separately. We also see comparable standalone sales of our GXL2000, GXL4000, and M179 studio microphones, along with the CX2 interface. Some customers want a package; others prefer to build their own setup or add to what they already have. We offer options for both.

Adrian Haselhuber: All of the Fender Quantum USB interfaces have seen strong demand, driven by a combination of sound quality, ease of use and the added value of Fender Studio Pro DAW software, which is included with each interface (a $199.99 value). Together, Fender Quantum interfaces bundled with Fender Studio Pro, you get everything you need to create, produce, mix and master your songs.

In addition, the new Fender Motion 16 & 32 controllers, also bundled with Fender Studio Pro, have been a massive hit! Artists and producers love these controllers due to the deep integration into the Studio Pro software, with control over plugins, session navigation, mixing, editing and more. This is on top of the creative songwriting features using the touch pads and encoders.

Daniel Hughley: Focusrite's Scarlett Solo Studio and Scarlett 2i2 Studio bundles continue to be strong performers in our portfolio. Their appeal comes from combining professional recording quality with the convenience of a complete recording package, giving artists confidence that the interface, condenser microphone and headphones are designed to work together.

Both also include Hitmaker Expansion, included free with all Scarlett interfaces, which is a software bundle providing virtual instruments and plug-ins from some of the industry's most respected developers for recording, mixing and mastering. That combination of quality, ease of use and creative tools helps artists move from an idea to a finished track while providing room to grow.

Who is the primary customer for recording packages today? Are you seeing demand mainly from first-time home-recording customers, musicians upgrading existing setups, content creators, podcasters, or other users?

G. Byers: First-time home-recording customers are a natural fit because they often need help figuring out what to buy. But the audience goes beyond beginners. It includes musicians creating a space to write and record, podcasters, and people producing voiceovers or video content.

There's also quite a bit of overlap. The same person might record music, teach online, and make videos. They need equipment that can handle more than one job.

Customers upgrading an existing setup usually have a more specific need. They might want a better microphone or a second setup to use elsewhere. For them, the decision comes down to how much of the package they'll actually use.



Gary Byers, Director of Operations, Owned Brands (CAD Audio), JAM Industries

DH: Musicians looking for an all-in-one solution remain a core audience for our Scarlett Studio bundles, but the appeal extends to artists upgrading their equipment and content creators seeking professional sound. These customers share a desire for a straightforward, complete setup that lets them focus on creating.

For those building a recording setup, the appeal is knowing the essential tools have been chosen to work together. For those upgrading, it's the opportunity to improve recording quality and workflow in one purchase. Across both groups, ease of use matters because it lets them spend more time making music.

AH: Fender Quantum interfaces appeal to a wide range of users, from content creators and producers to artists and musicians, but they're particularly well suited to guitarists

because we've developed features that support the way they work. For instance, the instrument input was custom designed by Fender so that the signal behaves the same way when you plug in directly and use an amp modeling plugin, like the Fender Mustang Native plugin that comes included with Fender Studio Pro. And with the Fender Mustang Native plugin, you get the official, authentic tones of classic Fender guitar and bass amps, as well other popular amplifier models — 57 amps in total!

GB: We have focused our bundles primarily on the podcasting and content creation markets, where customers may not have the same level of familiarity with audio hardware as experienced studio users or musicians.

What components are most important to customers when evaluating a recording package, and how much does included software factor into the purchasing decision?

AH: We saw an opportunity to make the recording process easier and more intuitive, particularly for people building their first setup. When you're starting out, the whole endeavor of recording and producing music can be overwhelming. So for many people looking for their first setup, it makes things a whole lot easier to get an audio interface that comes with music creation software that's integrated with the hardware and works completely seamlessly together. This way they can spend less time navigating technology and more time creating.

What's also important is the sound quality you get from the mic preamps and converters on the box. Not all audio interfaces are created equal and we designed the Fender Quantum products to deliver exceptional performance and sound quality. In fact, some of our customers have compared Fender Quantum to competing interfaces costing three times more and chose ours for better sound quality.

That's one of the reasons Fender Quantum with Fender Studio Pro is a great solution—it checks the boxes on all the things that are most important in a recording solution.



Adrian Haselhuber, VP Product-Hardware, FMIC

DH: Customers want confidence that the core components, including the interface, microphone and headphones, deliver quality results and work well together. Ease and speed of setup also matters, helping them move quickly from opening the box to recording.

Included software can be a deciding factor because it makes the full value of the package clear. Every Scarlett interface includes recording software and Hitmaker Expansion, providing tools to produce, record, mix and master a track. We also continue to support registered customers with additional software and plug-in offers, extending the value beyond the initial purchase.

GB: We focus primarily on the core hardware components, including microphones, headphones, and mounting solutions. As hardware experts, we leave the choice of software to the customer. Because our bundles are geared toward content creation, customers may prefer their own podcasting or production software, while those focused on streaming may not require additional software at all.

G. Byers: I'd put the microphone, interface, and headphones or monitors first. Those are the pieces customers rely on to capture and hear what they're recording. The accessories matter, too. You don't want to get everything home and discover you're missing a cable or don't have a way to mount the microphone.

I think included software carries less weight than it did even a couple of years ago. Powerful recording software is available at no charge, so customers don't have to buy an expensive software package to produce good content.

Home recording has become dramatically more accessible over the past several years. How have customers' expectations for an entry-level or affordable recording setup changed as the technology has improved?

DH: Customers increasingly expect professional recording quality at all price points, alongside ease of use, portability and a straightforward setup. They want to capture an idea while inspiration is fresh, with fewer technical steps interrupting the process.

That expectation extends beyond sound quality to features that help them record confidently. Scarlett 4th Gen's Easy Start guides users through setup, while Auto Gain and Clip Safe on Scarlett 2i2 and above help manage recording levels. Customers expect tools that make recording easier while giving them the quality and flexibility to keep developing their craft.



Daniel Hughley, Director of Marketing, Focusrite

70

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~ K70 ~

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G. Byers: Customers expect affordable equipment to sound good, and they should. Someone buying their first recording setup has heard plenty of professionally produced music and content. They know what they want to achieve, even if they're still learning how to get there.

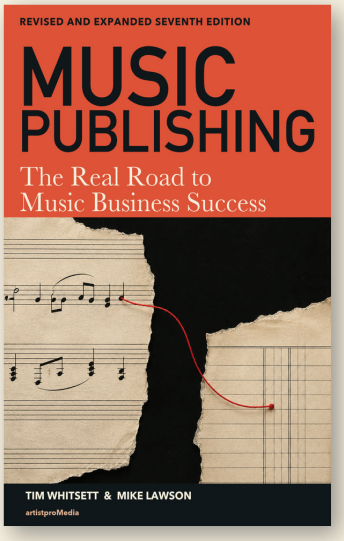
They also expect setup to be fairly easy. They want to connect the equipment and start recording without spending the whole evening troubleshooting.

For us, that means offering equipment that's approachable for beginners and remains useful as they gain experience. Buying at an entry-level price shouldn't mean having to replace everything once you've learned the basics.

GB: As the cost barriers to entry have come down, customers still expect professional-quality results from affordable recording equipment. Fortunately, our cost-effective 20 Series microphones and M-Series headphones are designed to deliver the level of performance customers expect.

AH: As recording technology becomes more sophisticated, ease of use is more important than ever. Artists want tools that support their creative process without getting in the way. We're seeing "tech fatigue" among users as everyone is exposed to screens and technology all day long. If I'm in my creative mindspace I don't want to have to deal with technology or complexities. That's why we're putting such a big emphasis on tight hardware/software integration where our products just work together really well. We're also committed to supporting our community with more information, training, etc. on the new my.Fender platform.





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With so many individual recording products available — and so much information available online — what makes a bundled recording package attractive to today's customer? Is convenience still the primary selling point, or are value and compatibility equally important?

GB: Bundles typically provide cost savings while also offering customers a worry-free, turnkey solution. By bringing together compatible products in one package, we can simplify the buying process and give customers greater confidence that they have what they need to get started.

AH: The value of getting a fully featured, trusted, and industry-leading DAW, like Fender Studio Pro, included with your hardware purchase, along with the confidence that the hardware and software are designed to work seamlessly together, will always be important to artists and content creators.

G. Byers: Having more information doesn't necessarily make buying easier. A beginner can watch ten videos and end up with ten different shopping lists. A good bundle takes some of that uncertainty out of the decision and makes the total cost clearer.

But putting several products in one box isn't enough. The components need to serve the same application, and the price needs to make sense. If customers end up paying for things they don't need, the package loses its appeal.

DH: Convenience is a major draw, but confidence in how the components work together is equally important. With so many products and opinions available, a thoughtfully assembled bundle simplifies the decision and removes much of the guesswork from choosing a recording setup.

Value comes from the usefulness and quality of the whole package. An interface, microphone, headphones and software that complement one another give customers a clear path to recording, with fewer decisions standing between them and making music.

What role can MI retailers play in selling recording packages, particularly to customers who may be intimidated by recording technology or unsure of exactly what they need to get started?

AH: MI retailers play an important role in helping customers navigate recording technology and find the right solutions for their needs. Education is key and we want to make sure our retail partners have the tools, knowledge and support to guide those conversations with confidence. That's why we provide Fender Studio dealers with access to comprehensive product training through Fender Academy, our web- and mobile-accessible training platform. This gives them everything they need to better understand our products and communicate their benefits to customers.

G. Byers: This is where a knowledgeable retailer can make a real difference. Start by asking what the customer wants to record. A singer recording vocals over backing tracks has different needs from someone recording a band or a two-person podcast.

From there, ask about their computer, recording space, and budget. A few questions can prevent a lot of frustration later.

A demonstration helps, too. Let them hear the microphone, show them how to set the recording level, and explain how to listen through headphones while recording. What seemed intimidating can become fairly straightforward in a few minutes.

That advice is a big part of what retailers bring to the sale. Customers remember who helped them get started, especially when it's time to add more equipment.

DH: MI retailers can make recording feel more approachable by asking what customers want to record, what equipment they already own and where they need guidance. That conversation helps turn an overwhelming range of options into a clear recommendation.

Retailer-created bundles should reflect real recording needs at different experience levels, with a clear purpose for every component. A short demonstration of how the setup works can also build confidence. The strongest packages make sense from the customer's perspective, with the right tools and guidance to help them get started.

GB: Because MI retailers are audio specialists, they can play an important role in helping customers understand their options and build a complete recording solution. This expertise can be



especially valuable for customers who are new to recording technology and may not know exactly what they need to get started.

Looking ahead, what trends do you expect to have the greatest impact on the recording-package market? Are developments such as AI-assisted production, mobile recording, creator-focused products, or increasingly sophisticated software changing what customers will expect from these bundles?

G. Byers: I think customers will keep pushing for easier setup and more flexibility. They may want to record music at home one day and take the same equipment elsewhere to record spoken-word or video content the next. Compatibility with the devices they already use will matter.

AI-assisted production could help more people get past some of the technical hurdles of editing and arranging. That may bring new customers into recording, but they'll still need to capture good audio in the first place. The microphone and how it's used will continue to matter.

For manufacturers, the job goes beyond supplying equipment. Clear instructions and support that helps customers work through problems are part of the purchase, too. At CAD, we want customers to spend more time recording and less time figuring out their gear.

DH: I expect intelligent recording features, such as Auto Gain and Clip Safe found in Scarlett 4th Gen models from 2i2 upward, to become increasingly standard. These tools address practical recording challenges, helping artists set levels quickly and protect a great performance from clipping.

As software becomes more sophisticated, customers will expect bundles to make the recording process simpler. The strongest packages will combine professional sound quality with intuitive hardware and software that help artists capture ideas confidently and keep their attention on the performance.

GB: From a hardware perspective, customers will continue to expect professional-quality results from solutions that are increasingly simple, flexible, and accessible. As content creation continues to evolve across podcasting, streaming, mobile recording, and other platforms, recording packages will need to make it easier for customers to choose compatible products and get up and running quickly. At the same time, manufacturers will need to remain mindful of global market conditions and logistics to continue delivering the best possible products at competitive prices.

AH: Artists and content creators will continue to expect ever-increasingly powerful workflows and ease of use. AI-enabled workflows are part of that, but we believe technology should support and enhance human creativity, not replace it. The artist and their creative vision will always remain at the center of the process.

They'll also want to take advantage of new technologies as they emerge, so we'll continue to provide integrations to those, like we did as in industry first with Splice and Moises. And fluid portability between mobile and desktop when creating content will continue to be important so they can capture ideas wherever inspiration strikes. We enable this today with the Fender Studio mobile app, which provides for compatibility and interoperability with Fender Studio Pro.





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THE CREATOR ECONOMY, AI, AND THE FUTURE OF MUSIC MAKING:

A Conversation with John Mlynczak, President & CEO of NAMM

By Christian Wissmuller



John Mlynczak at the 2026 NAMM D.C. Fly-In

A musician's first encounter with a new piece of gear might now come through a creator's video rather than a store visit. And the tools themselves are changing, with advances in music technology and AI raising questions about how musicians will write, record, and perform. In part two of our three-part pre-NAMM Show conversation, NAMM president and CEO John Mlynczak discusses the creator economy's influence on gear discovery and what the next wave of creative tools could mean for musicians, manufacturers, and retailers.

The way musicians discover new instruments and gear has changed dramatically, with YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and individual creators increasingly influencing purchasing decisions. How do you see the creator economy reshaping the music products industry?

NAMM has been on top of this since 2023. That's when we launched the Creator Party at the NAMM Show, which has grown into our constantly evolving Creator Lounge. It's led to massive engagement with creator-led content from the Show, and honestly, it's driving a huge amount of the ROI of the modern NAMM Show.

Here's where this keeps growing for us: as creators increasingly influence purchase decisions, the NAMM Show has become the place where more content gets created for consumers in one week than in the rest of the year combined. That's one of the real values of the Show, period. We didn't just watch the creator economy reshape the industry — we got ahead of it, by reshaping the value of the NAMM Show around what creators can create for brands. Brands see it too. They're now using the NAMM Show as a content-creation engine, because nowhere else do they find this many creators in one place. It's a new kind of value for them, and it's only growing.

For decades, retailers, magazines, trade shows, and word of mouth were central to gear discovery. As creators and social platforms take on a larger role, where do traditional music retailers fit into that discovery process today?

The retailer is absolutely still involved. What I keep coming back to is the symbiotic relationship between retailers and creators and social platforms. Customers want to learn from creators, they want to see influencers talking about a product online — but they still need to see the product for themselves.

And retailers play a big role here, too. We're seeing a lot of them build their own content channels now, and we have retailers showing up at the NAMM Show specifically to create content for those channels. So you've got that symbiotic relationship at work. Traditional retail is definitely still viable today — it's just embracing content creation and influence to relate to customers in a more modern way.

What opportunities does the creator economy present for smaller or emerging music products brands that may not have the marketing resources of the industry's largest manufacturers?

This is a great opportunity, honestly — the creator economy lets smaller brands punch above their weight. It used to be that the big companies with the big marketing budgets had all the power. Now, a smaller brand with the right product can get it into the hands of the right influencer, who sees the potential in it and starts talking about it, and suddenly it's going viral or getting real traction. That's an amazing channel.

Creators and influencers make their calls based on what artists are actually looking for, not on who's spending the most. So a brand of any size can put a product in front of this group, and the group finds the ones with real value. When the product stands on its own and creators start talking about it organically, it's almost free marketing. We see brands of every size investing in making sure creators see that value — and because that access is open to anyone, it really levels the playing field for consumers to find great products from brands of all sizes.

Influencers and content creators can generate enormous enthusiasm around a product, but musicians still often want to get their hands on an instrument before buying it. How do you see digital discovery and the physical, in-person experience working together going forward?

This really goes back to the retailer question. At the end of the day, yes, there's a ton of great influence and cool content around a product — but customers still want to put their hands on it and make sure it works for them. That's why the relationship between the people creating the content and the places where customers can actually get their hands on the product still matters so much.

> ***"That's really what the NAMM Show is for — getting everyone in one room to talk about working together, and to understand how creators, tools, and products all fit in an AI-driven world."***

That's where digital discovery and the in-person experience really work together, when retailers lean into the creator side of things. And I'll say it again — the NAMM Show is where we bring this all together. That's why retail and influencers are both such vital partners of the Show. It's where brands, retailers and influencers all work together to make sure musicians see the product, understand its value, and know exactly where to find it.

NAMM itself has traditionally been one of the places where the industry discovers what's new. How is NAMM evolving as product launches and conversations about new gear increasingly take place year-round and online?

I love this question, because NAMM has really embraced the idea that the Show is a year-round value driver now, not a five-day event in January. We actually open registration in September, with the app and the floor plan launching right alongside it. People can register, see the floor plan, click into booths, see product information — brands have more tools than ever to build out their presence on the map with logos, videos, click-through content, built right into the floor plan. The floor plan itself has become a discovery zone, open in September.

That ramp-up from September to January is where discovery between audience and brand can really start happening. Brands use their January appearance as a lead-up, too — if they've got a Q4 product launch for the holidays, they can point people to the NAMM Show as the place to see it, hear it, and touch

it, whether that's through their retailers, distributors, artists or influencers.

And it doesn't stop in January, either. The follow-through is in the content — 70 million-plus views of content created at the Show, and that creator content keeps driving the value of that product for the rest of the year. It's October right now, and we have brands telling us they're still getting views and value from content created at the Show. So really, we see the NAMM Show as running September to September — it opens in September, builds to January, and the content from January carries all the way through the following year.

AI is quickly becoming part of music creation — from songwriting and production tools to instrument design and music education — and it's also prompted concerns among musicians about authorship, originality, compensation, and the value of human creativity. Where do you see the most meaningful opportunities for AI in the music products industry, and what conversations does our industry need to be having right now?

AI is definitely becoming part of music creation — honestly, it already has. We used to call these things plugins ten years ago. Now it's songwriting, production, instrument design, and more, and we see real value in it. But what we have to do is lean into AI as a tool that lets creative humans create faster. That's all it is — another tool. It just moves and evolves faster than the tools we've had before. Technology has always let humans create faster, and AI is no different. We need to embrace it, but make sure it keeps that human-centric, human-intelligence value at the core.

At the same time, the concerns about authorship and originality are real, and we take them seriously. NAMM works on a number of coalitions with partners from inside and outside our industry to lobby and advocate for ethically trained AI and fair compensation for creators' rights, and we're going to keep going down that path. These are important conversations for anyone building apps, creation tools, or AI-driven products in our space — we're an industry built on supporting each other, and that has to stay true as we think about ethical training and fair compensation.

That's really what the NAMM Show is for — getting everyone in one room to talk about working together, and to understand how creators, tools, and products all fit in an AI-driven world.

We've seen technology repeatedly lower the barriers to making music, from affordable recording equipment and software to mobile apps and increasingly sophisticated AI tools. Do you think the next generation of technology can meaningfully expand the number of people who consider themselves music makers?

I've been following this trend for a long time in my career, back to the days when I was integrating technology into education in ways it wasn't yet being used. And yes, apps and tools have definitely lowered the barrier to entry — that's always a benefit. More people getting the music bug is key.

But here's what I think we need to consider: as that barrier gets lower — say, prompting a song instead of studying an instrument and building it yourself — the distance from that barrier to actually becoming a musician who can create on their own gets bigger, not smaller. So yes, lowering the barrier to entry so more people get the bug is great. I totally agree with that. But if we lower the barrier and don't address that now-bigger gap, we might just end up with more people starting and more people quitting.

So what I think the industry should really focus on isn't the barrier to entry — it's the distance between the barrier and getting people into a lifelong career of making music.

As instruments become increasingly connected to software, subscriptions, cloud services, and AI-powered features, are we beginning to see the definition of a "music product" itself change? What does that mean for manufacturers and retailers?

I'm not sure the music product itself is really changing, but I love this question, because what I think manufacturers and retailers are actually looking at is how the product connects to the community — and how the community connects back. Yes, a product has a subscription now, there's a software component, maybe a cloud community, maybe AI. But what I see is brands wanting to stay connected to their audience, wanting to build a network, a community, an ecosystem.

So when you see a product with an online subscription and a connected community built around it, I think the product itself at its core hasn't changed much. What's changed is that the product maker wants the musician using it to stay connected to them and keep evolving together — that's the real shift.

Looking five or 10 years ahead, what do you think will change most about the way musicians discover, choose, and ultimately create with musical instruments and technology?

Right now, I think we're in the messy, exciting middle of a transition — the fun kind of messy. We spent the last several years figuring out the creator economy: influencers, YouTube, social discovery. We've grown through that, and as an industry we now understand that market and how it connects. Now we're adding agentic AI into consumer habits, and that's kicking off another couple years of that same messy, figuring-it-out period.

If you think about it like storming, norming, performing, I'd say we're in the storming phase with AI right now — a good kind of storming, where we're ping-ponging, exploring, trying different things. I think we'll be norming in about two years and performing in about five, meaning the relationship between the AI agent, the influencer, and the retailer becomes a habit instead of something new to figure out every time. Once we land that symbiotic relationship, I think we move faster as an industry and bring more people into music than ever before.

That same speed shows up on the product side, too. I think we'll prototype faster, test faster, get feedback faster, and fail faster when we need to. That's the speed we're looking for. So five to ten years out, I see AI, retail, and influencer all stabilizing, normalizing, and performing at a higher level — and that's what lets us create and retain more music makers than ever before.

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SWEETWATER TOPS OFF ITS NEXT CHAPTER



Jeff Ostermann

Before the final steel beam went up on Sweetwater's distribution center expansion, six of the facility's longest-tenured hourly employees added their signatures — representing more than 115 years of service between them. It was a personal touch on a sizable undertaking: a roughly 170,000-square-foot addition that will enlarge the existing facility by nearly a third. The $36.7 million expansion investment, alongside road and infrastructure improvements, marks another commitment to the company's Fort Wayne home, with completion expected in summer 2027. *MMR* spoke with Jeff Ostermann, Sweetwater's chief people & culture officer, about the project and the employees whose work has helped make that growth possible.

> ***Not only are we seeing growth across our core music technology and instrument categories but other areas are growing, too — band & orchestra instrument rental, home A/V, cameras and video, and more.***

What drove the decision to expand, and what does it say about future growth?

We've always believed that if you take good care of your customers and do the right thing, good things will follow. More customers are trusting us to help them with their musical and creative dreams, and we want to make sure we have the space and resources to take great care of them. This investment is about being ready for the future while staying true to the values that got us here. We're proud to make that investment in Fort Wayne, where we've built such a special team and company.

How will the additional space improve inventory management, fulfillment, and customer experience?

It really comes down to having the right gear available and getting it to our customers as quickly and reliably as we can. The additional space gives us more room to manage our inventory, offer a great selection, and support our distribution team as we serve more customers. Every order represents someone with a musical or creative goal, and we want to do our part to help make that happen. That's what the Sweetwater Difference is all about.

Will the facility include new technology, automation, or operational improvements?

As we plan for the new space, we're looking at ways to make our operation work better and more efficiently. Some technology enhancements help our team do their jobs even better, but we don't see those things as a replacement for the people who make Sweetwater special. The goal is to give our team even better tools and the environment they need to take great care of our customers.

How will the expansion affect relationships with manufacturers and suppliers?

Our manufacturer and supplier relationships are an important part of how we serve our customers. Additional space gives us more room to manage a broad selection of products and be thoughtful about having the right gear available when customers need it. We want to be a great partner to the brands we work with and make it easier for musicians and creators to find the products that help bring their ideas to life.

How do you balance technology and infrastructure investments with people and culture?

We believe taking care of our employees is a big part of taking care of our customers. That's why recognizing six longtime team members at our topping-out ceremony was so meaningful. Together, they have more than 115 years of experience and service, and that's a pretty remarkable reflection of the people who make Sweetwater what it is. Buildings and equipment are important, but it's the people who come to work every day, care about what they do, and go the extra mile for our customers who make the Sweetwater Difference.

What market trends are you seeing, and how does the investment position Sweetwater to respond?

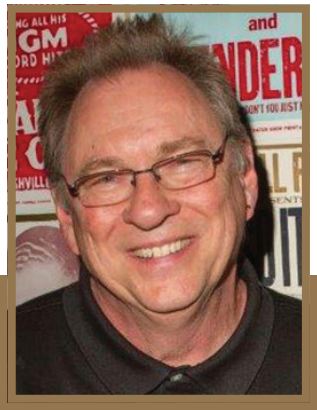
Not only are we seeing growth across our core music technology and instrument categories but other areas are growing, too — band & orchestra instrument rental, home A/V, cameras and video, and more. This investment positions us well to continue to carry the best products across a wide variety of categories that our customers trust us with.

What opportunities will the expansion create, and how does it fit into Sweetwater's long-term vision?

We're excited about having the capacity to serve more customers and help more people pursue their musical and creative dreams. We're also excited for our team and the opportunities this investment creates for us to keep improving how we serve our customers. Chuck built Sweetwater around a simple idea: do the right thing and take care of people. As we look to the future, that's still what guides us. We want to keep growing, keep getting better, and make sure the Sweetwater Difference is here for customers, employees, and vendor partners for many years to come.

THE POWER OF THE MOMENT: AYSEDENIZ AT CARNEGIE HALL

By Menzie Pittman, Author of *The New Musician*



> **"If I have learned one thing from being in the music business, it is to trust that we are all more connected than we realize, and I see that as an incredibly good thing."**

Chance encounters. These unintended meetings occur often in the music industry. As musicians, entrepreneurs or even music educators, associates and colleagues introduce us to new people and new circumstances constantly. Interestingly, we never know exactly how these scenarios will play out. But if I have learned one thing from being in the music business, it is to trust that we are all more connected than we realize, and I see that as an incredibly good thing.

I first met AyseDeniz Gokcin after her performance at a NAMM show a few years ago. To say that her piano performance was magical would be an understatement. Simply put, her artistry is extraordinary. She has also created a "new lane" by blending technology with traditional piano formats, and the combination of her proficiency, technique, and knowledge of music history create a new standard and sets the stage for opportunities for all classical pianists.

After her NAMM performance, I happened to cross paths with her later in the day, and the atmosphere was much less chaotic which allowed us the chance to share civilities and stories about the role music plays in our lives.

Fast forward three years.

I received an email from AyseDeniz with the opening line, "I don't know if you remember me..." That initial remark still makes me chuckle. How could I have ever forgotten such a virtuoso?! It seems that she and her team are working on a special project, and as we later chatted about it, she mentioned she would be performing at Carnegie Hall at the end of October and invited me to attend. I thought about it for perhaps six seconds, and then I began to plan the trip. That's possibly the best musical decision I have ever made.

Carnegie Hall was the perfect setting for her performance. The acoustics are designed for traditional music, and although I had seen AyseDeniz perform at NAMM, at the Carnegie Hall performance she incorporated a string quintet, and truly, the combination of perfect acoustics, inspired musicians, a great artist, and a receptive audience made for a surreal experience.

Virtuosity. It is my guess that anyone reading this article is involved to some level with music performance, whether it is playing, teaching or simply loving music. As players we each have a role in the performance. Drummers love to stomp and wack. I know because that's what I do. Bassists keep the bottom tight with the drummer. However, imagine the pressure of playing Carnegie Hall with a magnificent string quintet that was only able to have one rehearsal with AyseDeniz. If you are a member of the string section, your sight-reading must be impeccable, and your ability to adjust to the other string players must be effortless. Your vibratos must match, and intonation is everything.

However, as the "marquee artist" the expectations are even greater. You are the main attraction, the featured musician, the composer, and the featured soloist. You also make all the major decisions and take any praise or criticism about the performance. You put together the order of the show, while helping the string quintet clearly understand what you expect from them. You are aware that you will get one rehearsal and then play on a world class stage, with national critics hearing your work for the first time. AyseDeniz made all that look effortless.

And as if that role is not enough, AyseDeniz is intimately involved with music education and passionate about the cause. It is not every day you meet someone like her, and the first song that pops into my head, oddly enough, is not a classical piece, but it is a classic.

R E S P E C T !

Fretted

Fender Redefines Heavy with LE Player Fusion Series

Limited Edition Player Fusion Stratocaster® HSS ($1,149.99 USD, £1,049 GBP, €1,249 EUR, $1999.00 AUD, ¥176,000 JPY) The Fusion HSS Stratocaster® cuts between surgical single-coil clarity and full humbucker weight, a high-output bridge humbucker delivers the punch and saturation modern hard rock demands, while noiseless single coils in the middle and neck positions keep things articulate and interference-free when pulling back. The 12" radius ebony fingerboard stays fast and flat across every position, and a 2-point tremolo with black hardware gives players the range they need without sacrificing tuning stability. Available in Black and Olympic Pearl.

Limited Edition Player Fusion Telecaster® HH Floyd Rose® ($1,399.99 USD, £1,149 GBP, €1,349 EUR, $2299.00 AUD, ¥192,500 JPY) The Fusion Telecaster® HH Floyd Rose® is built for the riff, the Telecaster platform gets a full hard rock overhaul here: two high-output humbuckers dig into every chord and cut through even the densest mix, while the all-black Floyd Rose system gives players complete pitch control in both directions without apology. The 12" radius ebony fingerboard keeps bends consistent and technique clean. Available in Black and Aura Metallic.

Limited Edition Player Fusion Jaguar® Baritone ($1,299.99 USD, £1,049 GBP, €1,249 EUR, $2199.00 AUD, ¥181,500 JPY) The Fusion Baritone Jaguar® goes lower, hits harder, and gives extended-range players a Fender platform that boldly keeps up. At 27" scale and tuned B to B, this Jaguar is purpose-built for drop tunings and the kind of low-end that sits at the foundation of a heavy mix. The classic Jaguar rhythm circuit control section gets a meaningful upgrade — it houses a "Spin-a-Split" wiring via Fender roller pots that progressively transform the humbuckers into single coils for a leaner, more cutting tone, while a TBX Tone circuit gives players more powerful tonal sculpting options. High-output humbuckers handle the heavy lifting across a 12" radius ebony fingerboard that keeps runs and bends effortlessly across the extended scale. Available in Black and Silverburst.

Limited Edition Player Fusion Precision Bass® HH ($1,149.99 USD, £1,149 GBP, €1,349 EUR, $1999.00 AUD, ¥176,000 JPY) The P Bass® silhouette brings familiar balance and mass to a hard rock context, loaded with two high-output humbuckers that push deep, tight low end with enough midrange presence to cut through a wall of guitars. A thin Jazz Bass® neck profile and 12" radius ebony fingerboard make the Fusion P Bass as fast and accessible as anything in the series. Available in Black and Halo Metallic.



Taylor Guitars Expands Its Ben Harper Collaboration With New GS Mini-e Special Edition

Building on the successful launch of the Ben Harper Gold Label 512e Special Edition earlier this year, Taylor Guitars, a leading global builder of premium acoustic guitars, announces the Ben Harper GS Mini-e Special Edition — an encore collaboration with the three-time GRAMMY®-winning roots music icon. The new model brings the distinctive look of Harper's Gold Label guitar, including a custom shaded edgeburst top, cream pickguard and cream-and-black rosette, to Taylor's popular GS Mini, pairing bold acoustic tone with compact, go-anywhere comfort. The launch underscores Taylor's commitment to building inspiring instruments alongside the artists who play them, in sizes that go anywhere music does.

"Designing my Gold Label guitar with Andy Powers and the team at Taylor was one of the most inspiring creative experiences I've had as a player, and I didn't want it to end there," Harper says. "The GS Mini is a guitar so many people already know and love. It's comfortable to play, it goes anywhere with you, and sits at an accessible price point for a lot more players. Bringing my guitar into that format means more people get to pick one up and make some music."

The new model marks Harper's second collaboration with Taylor, following the Gold Label 512e Special Edition that he designed with Powers earlier this year. A longtime Taylor player who grew up working on instruments at his family's Folk Music Center in Claremont, California, Harper has a well-known affinity for compact, expressive acoustics, and the GS Mini-e Special Edition carries his visual sensibility into Taylor's most portable full-featured guitar.

Big Sound, GS Mini Comfort

This take on Taylor's beloved GS Mini features a solid torrefied Sitka spruce top, yielding a bold midrange accented by a touch of aged-in warmth and sweetness from Taylor's proprietary roasting process. Medium-gauge strings lend extra sonic heft, helping the guitar deliver a punch well above its modest size, while ES2 electronics provide pro-level amplified tone for live performance or recording. A characteristically slender Taylor neck with an accommodating 1-11/16-inch nut width offers a relaxed fretting feel at any skill level, complementing the guitar's compact, lap-friendly profile.

Ben Harper GS Mini-e Special Edition

This is a guitar built to go wherever the music does. Visually, it references the distinctive look of Harper's Gold Label model with a custom shaded edgeburst top, cream pickguard and three-ring cream-and-black rosette, while a gloss-finish body and satin-finish neck keep it looking sharp and feeling fast. Its scaled-down frame makes it an ideal choice for travel, small gigs, campfire jams and everyday practice or songwriting sessions. Distinctive details include:

- Layered sapele back and sides, solid torrefied Sitka spruce top
- Mahogany neck, Crelicam ebony fretboard
- Custom shaded edgeburst top; full-gloss body
- Cream pickguard with black underlay, three-ring cream/black rosette
- 4mm Italian acrylic dot fretboard inlays
- Die-cast chrome tuners
- ES2 electronics
- Custom Ben Harper interior label
- Tan structured gig bag



"Ben's Gold Label model struck a chord with players, and many of them asked for a way to bring that character with them wherever they go," says Andy Powers, Taylor's Chief Guitar Designer, President and CEO. "The GS Mini is the guitar people reach for most often, so dressing it in Ben's style felt like a natural next chapter for our collaboration."

The Ben Harper GS Mini-e Special Edition is available now at authorized Taylor dealers worldwide for $1,199. The model includes a tan structured gig bag.

Pro Audio

Sontronics Introduces the SOLO W2 Wireless Microphone Capsule

British microphone manufacturer Sontronics is proud to announce the launch of the SOLO W2, a new supercardioid dynamic wireless capsule designed for compatibility with Sennheiser® handheld wireless transmitters.

Building on the success of the SOLO dynamic microphone and the recently announced SOLO W1 wireless capsule, the new SOLO W2 brings the renowned Sontronics live vocal sound to users of Sennheiser® wireless systems, delivering the same clarity and character that has made SOLO a favourite among performers, engineers and venues worldwide.

Designed for live vocals, speech and performance, SOLO W2 delivers a focused, natural sound that cuts through busy stage mixes while maintaining excellent rejection of background noise and monitor bleed. Its supercardioid polar pattern helps isolate the voice effectively, providing clarity and consistency even in demanding live environments.

SOLO W2 has been developed to provide the same confident, mix-ready vocal character users expect from the wired SOLO microphone, while meeting the practical demands of modern wireless systems.

Built to withstand touring and regular live use, SOLO W2 offers dependable performance across concerts, venues, houses of worship, theatres and live production environments. Straightforward integration with compatible Sennheiser® systems also means performers and engineers can upgrade their sound while continuing to use their existing wireless platform.

Following the introduction of the Shure-compatible SOLO W1, the launch of SOLO W2 extends Sontronics' wireless offering to Sennheiser® systems, making the sound of SOLO accessible across two of the world's most widely used professional wireless platforms.

As with all Sontronics microphones, SOLO W2 is covered by the company's Limited Lifetime Warranty program, providing long-term confidence and reinforcing Sontronics' commitment to dependable engineering and build quality.



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Amplification

BOSS Announces Katana-25 Guitar Amplifier

BOSS announces Katana-25, the latest addition to the company's best-selling Katana amplifier lineup for guitar and bass. Offering renowned Katana sound in a compact 25-watt amp for home playing, Katana-25 helps new and returning guitarists get started with confidence. Six unique amp characters and over 60 onboard BOSS effects provide inspiring, studio-grade sounds, while onboard Bluetooth and the companion BOSS Tone Studio app enhance daily sessions with support for song streaming, effects editing, playing with YouTube videos, and downloading new sounds on BOSS Tone Exchange. Plugging into an amplifier for the first time is a defining musical moment, and Katana-25 provides an instantly accessible and motivating experience. Introduced in 2016, the Katana series has been a massive success with players around the globe, thanks to its class-leading sound, ultra-responsive feel, and versatile features. Backed by the trusted Katana pedigree, Katana-25 is the ideal home amplifier for any guitarist looking to get the most from everyday playing. It sounds great straight out of the box, with everything needed to explore different styles, practice, and enjoy playing from day one. Key to the Katana series is the advanced BOSS Tube Logic design philosophy, which delivers the authentic tube sound and feel that's the benchmark among pro players everywhere. Like classic tube designs, Katana-25's speaker and 25-watt reactive analog power section work in harmony to create a highly interactive playing experience with rich bass, sweet high-end detail, and punchy dynamic response.In addition, the Katana-25 cabinet features special BOSS design elements to maximize performance and conjure full tones from its compact profile. The open-back configuration, careful construction, and custom eight-inch speaker come together to produce satisfying sound that brings every playing session to life. Whether chasing the tones of favorite artists or crafting something entirely new, Katana-25 encourages experimentation and creativity without requiring additional gear. Six unique amp characters allow players to take on any musical genre with authority, from pop, blues, and country to classic rock and high-gain metal. One amp character is tuned for acoustic-electric instruments, further increasing the amp's versatility. Users also get access to over 60 effects from the historic BOSS library (up to 5 simultaneously), with detailed sound editing available in BOSS Tone Studio. The Katana-25 panel allows users to save/recall Tone Setting memories and tweak basic preamp and effect parameters without opening the app. The amp includes 20 ready-to-play presets with dialed-in pro sounds, plus 10 empty slots for storing custom setups. There's also a tap tempo button for delay effects and a convenient built-in tuner, an essential tool for every guitarist. Inspired by stage-class Katana models, Katana-25 features a Power Control to achieve expressive, cranked-amp tone at modest volumes. With the flip of a switch, users can toggle between full power punch and a half-watt mode that produces bedroom-friendly levels without sacrificing sound quality or feel.Katana-25 is equipped with onboard Bluetooth connectivity for audio streaming and communication with BOSS Tone Studio, creating an interactive musical experience that makes daily guitar enjoyment more productive and rewarding. Players can connect a mobile device and jam along to songs from their device's library, use the app to edit tones in detail, explore additional sounds on BOSS Tone Exchange, and more. BOSS Tone Studio includes a powerful Session feature that lets users browse and play YouTube content in the app and set up points on a song's timeline to trigger automatic memory changes while playing. Several hardware options are also available for controlling sounds in real time, including an FS-series wired footswitch, the FS-1-WL Wireless Footswitch, or the EV-1-WL Wireless Expression Pedal.

With its friendly interface, versatile tones, and integrated practice tools, Katana-25 is an easy choice for players looking to explore their sound and discover their unique voice, as well as anyone shopping for a gift on their behalf. To learn more about Katana-25 and the entire Katanalineup, visit www.boss.info. Availability & Pricing The Katana-25 is available now at authorized BOSS retailers for $199.99.



Accessories

ADDAC System Unveils its Rotary Exciter and Resonator Clamps

ADDAC System is proud to evolve its 'string revolution' into the world of guitars and other stringed instruments. The new ADDAC006 Rotary Exciter Clamp and the ADDAC007 Resonator Clamps promise to usher in an entirely new way for musicians to evoke tones from guitars and other stringed instruments. Each of these accessories — one designed to be clamped towards the top of the guitar neck near the body, and other on the headstock — open up a new dimension of interacting with stringed instruments and a new frontier of sonic possibilities.

The ADDAC006 Rotary Exciter Clamp features a 7,000 RPM brushless motor that generates a rotating magnetic field, causing strings to vibrate at matching frequencies and harmonics. A dedicated speed knob provides non-linear motor speed control, and is powered by a standard 9V DC guitar pedal adapter. It also includes a 5-meter extension cable for convenient connection to pedalboards. Sonic and tonal variations are created by dialing in the right distance to the strings, choosing the motor speed, and of course guitar tunings.

Meanwhile, the ADDAC007 Resonator Clamp can be attached anywhere on the guitar headstock and oriented in any direction — placement experimentation is encouraged and will yield different sounds and tonal variety. The Resonator Clamp can be used on any headstock up to 20mm thick; ADDAC System makes a variation, the ADDAC007W, which can be used on headstocks and surfaces of up to 45mm thick.

Connections and powering are simple — connect your audio source to the input of the amplifier box, which includes a 1/4" mono jack input with an attenuator knob, and then connect the 1/4" jack output to the Resonator Clamp. A 9v-12V DC 3Amp power adapter provides current to the system, and the input accepts any signal modular/line level.

A new frontier of creative possibilities

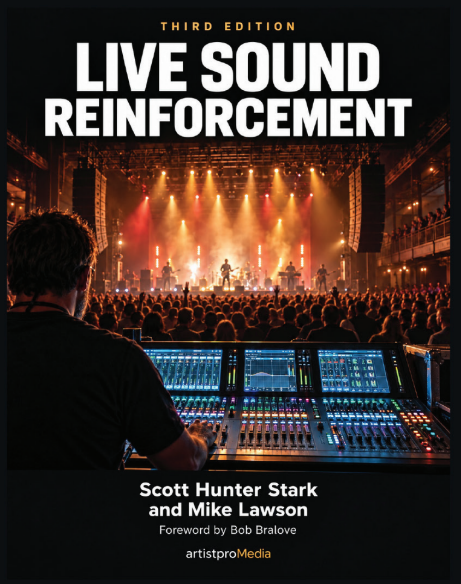
The user manual describes several creative routing possibilities, — including the use of external audio for sound processing (pre and post FX), use with a DAW, guitar amplifiers, and more. In one possible scenario, users can send an external audio source to the input of the Resonator Clamp, and the Resonator Clamp will then produces resonances that respond to the frequencies and harmonics of the original audio source. If the audio source features different frequencies, for example as in a stepped sequence, the Resonator Clamp will cause the stringed instrument to respond to each frequency variation.

As with many ADDAC System tools, experimentation is encouraged. For instance, one can develop pads using the Rotary Exciter Clamp while playing individual notes and melodies on top of that pad. Or, one can turn the knob and vary the speed of the motor while it is emitting resonant textures, evolving its sound characteristic as a filter might impact a VCO.

The ADDAC006 Rotary Exciter and ADDAC007 Resonator Clamps are available now and priced at €120 and €200 respectively.



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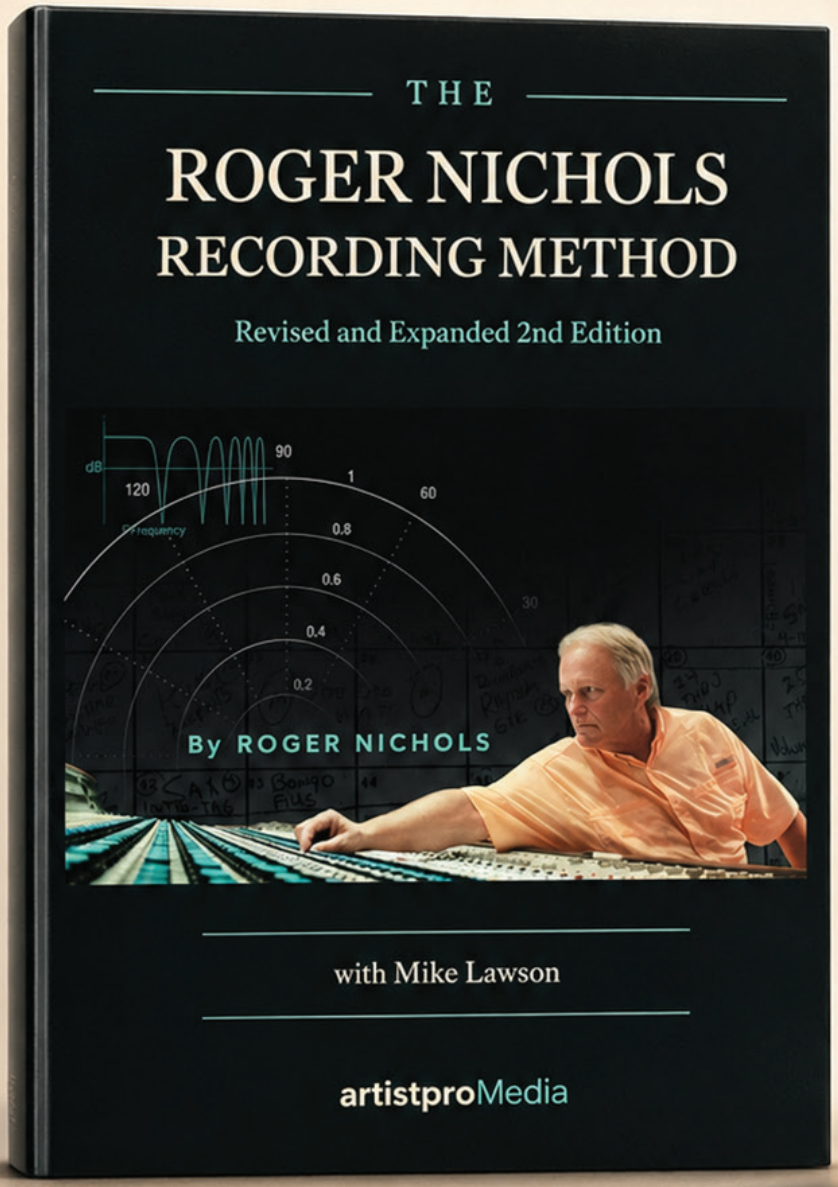
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