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MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

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BUILT TO BREATHE: HOLLOW AND SEMI-HOLLOW BODY ELECTRIC GUITARS

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Upfront Q&A:
Walt Straiton of Korg USA



Guest Editorial:
The Old Man at the Music Store was Right!



Small Business Matters:
The World Finally Agrees on Something: Dolly!

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MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

FEATURES

Vol.185 SEPTEMBER 2026 No. 9

UPFRONT Q&A

WALT STRAITON, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, KORG USA

.....11

Music education is changing — and, according to Walt Straiton, that presents the music products industry with as much opportunity as it does challenge. As director of education for Korg USA, Straiton sees a future in which traditional band, orchestra, and choir programs coexist with songwriting, recording, production, DJing, and other technology-driven forms of music-making. MMR recently spoke with Straiton about expanding participation, strengthening industry-education partnerships, preparing teachers for a changing musical landscape, and ensuring that today's students remain tomorrow's musicians.

ROUNDTABLE

BUILT TO BREATHE: HOLLOW AND SEMI-HOLLOW BODY ELECTRIC GUITARS

.....15

Hollow and semi-hollow guitars are increasingly turning up in the hands of indie, alternative, R&B, neo-soul, country, punk, and other players who may have little interest in observing the traditional boundaries of the category. And manufacturers have responded accordingly. Classic silhouettes and old-school visual appeal remain very much part of the equation, but increasingly they're being paired with modern electronics, more comfortable dimensions, improved feedback resistance, lighter weight, and an expanding range of tonal options.

GUEST EDITORIAL

THE OLD MAN AT THE MUSIC STORE WAS RIGHT!

.....25
Professor of low brass at the University of Mississippi, principal trombonist for the North Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, and tubist in the Mississippi Brass Quintet Micah Everett shares his thoughts on the enduring community importance of neighborhood brick-and-mortar MI retailers.

SMALL BUSINESS MATTERS

THE WORLD FINALLY AGREES ON SOMETHING: DOLLY!

.....26

Award-winning MI retailer, author, and music educator Menzie Pittman reflects on the profound impact of one of the most beloved performers, songwriters, and philanthropists — not just of the recent era, but all time: Dolly Parton.

11



15



27



Departments

Editorial	4
Letters	6
UpFront	8
People on the Move	10
Trade Regrets	10
New Products	27

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By Christian
Wissmuller

OLD SHAPES, NEW SOUNDS — AND YOUR CHANCE TO BE HEARD

One of the more interesting things about covering the musical instrument industry for any

length of time is watching supposedly established categories refuse to stay put.

This month's Roundtable on hollow and semi-hollow body electric guitars is a pretty good example.

There are few electric guitar designs more immediately evocative of a particular time, place, and sound. You see a big hollowbody with a pair of f-holes and certain associations come pretty quickly: jazz, blues, rockabilly, early rock 'n' roll. Even semi-hollows, for all their versatility, carry a visual and musical history that's impossible to separate from the instruments themselves.

Except, increasingly, players are separating them.

As the folks from Yamaha, Guild, PRS, and Ibanez make clear in this month's "Built to Breathe" Roundtable, these guitars are showing up just about everywhere. Indie and alternative rock, R&B, neo-soul, country, punk, pop — players who might once have automatically reached for a solidbody are finding reasons to pick up something with a little more air inside it.

And manufacturers are giving them more reasons to do so.

What I found particularly interesting in putting the feature together was how often essentially the same idea surfaced in different forms: Players still want the character. They just don't necessarily want all of the limitations that traditionally came with it.

They want the classic silhouette, but maybe in a smaller, lighter package. They like the warmth and resonance, but also want electronics that give them more options. They appreciate the visual connection to instruments from the '50s and '60s, but they're perfectly happy to plug those instruments into a modern pedalboard, modeling rig, or recording setup that would have looked like something out of science fiction to the players who originally made these guitars famous.

That's not abandoning tradition. If anything, it's probably one of the better ways of keeping tradition alive.

There's a tendency with legacy instrument designs to treat authenticity and evolution as opposing forces. Change too much and you risk losing the thing that made the instrument appealing in the first place. Change too little and you can wind up preserving something that an ever-smaller group of players actually wants to use.

The sweet spot is somewhere between the two.

That dynamic certainly isn't unique to guitars. It's happening across virtually every corner of the MI industry. The products that endure are rarely the ones that remain completely frozen in time. They're the ones manufacturers continue to rethink without losing sight of why musicians cared about them to begin with.

Which brings us, somewhat conveniently, to another annual *MMR* tradition.

It's time to start thinking about the Dealers' Choice

Awards. (Hopefully you have been for a while)

For more than three decades, the DCAs have given MI retailers the opportunity to recognize the products, brands, and services that have made a genuine impact on their businesses and their customers. Before we get to the actual voting later this year, though, we need to determine who and what winds up on the ballot.

That part is up to you.

The nomination form for the 2026 *MMR* Dealers' Choice Awards is still live through the end of September, and we're asking our readers to tell us which products and companies deserve consideration across this year's categories.

And this isn't a request to simply type in the first big brand name that comes to mind.

Think about what's actually been working in your store. What product surprised you? What instrument has customers repeatedly asked about? What line has performed better than expected? What piece of gear did your staff initially overlook and then discover they couldn't keep on the floor? What company has been especially good to work with? What new product genuinely brought something useful to the market rather than simply adding another SKU to an already crowded category?

Those are the kinds of nominations that make the Dealers' Choice Awards meaningful.

There are plenty of industry awards that reflect sales volume, critical opinion, artist visibility, or popularity with consumers. All of those perspectives have value. The DCAs, however, are intended to reflect the viewpoint of the people who occupy a particularly important spot in the chain: the dealers who actually have to sell this stuff.

You know what customers pick up.

You know what they put back down.

You know what they come in asking for, what requires an explanation, what sells itself, what generates repeat business, and what winds up gathering dust despite everybody insisting it was going to be the Next Big Thing.

We want that perspective.

So before you move on to the rest of this issue, take a few minutes and consider which products, lines, and companies you think belong on the 2026 ballot. You don't need to nominate something in every category, and you certainly don't need to overthink it. We're simply looking for an accurate reflection of what the people working in music retail believe deserves recognition this year.

Submit your nominations using *MMR*'s online Dealers' Choice Awards form:

<https://mmrmag.com/dealers-choice-awards-2026-nominations.php>

And then get back to selling some guitars — hollow, semi-hollow, solid, or otherwise.

Christian Wissmuller
christian@mmrmagazine.com

MMR
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PUBLISHER
Mike Lawson
mike@artistpro.com

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Christian Wissmuller
christian@mmrmagazine.com

CONTRIBUTORS
Menzie Pittman, Jaimie Blackman

ART DIRECTOR/PRODUCTION MANAGER
Produce Shop Design

ACCOUNTING
Shannon Kebschull Lawson
accounting@artistpro.com

ADVERTISING SALES
Isaac Lawson
isaac@artistpro.com

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artistpro
PUBLISHING

artistpro, LLC
7012 City Center Way, Suite 207
Fairview, TN 37062
(800) 682-8114

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AFTER SEVENTY YEARS, IT'S AS IF THE MUSIC IS JUST BEGINNING.

In 1956, a group of Chinese craftsmen gathered in a Guangzhou side street shed no larger than a single-car garage to pursue a dream. Their ambition was considered impossible: building a piano from scratch that would someday compete with the best in the world. By the end of the first year, these brave entrepreneurs had sold thirteen instruments, and Pearl River would soon become one of China's first domestic piano manufacturers.

Today, the Pearl River Piano Group has grown to be the world's largest piano manufacturer and one of the world's largest musical instrument makers. Besides our 3.2 million-square-foot facility, where Pearl River, Ritmüller, and Kayserburg pianos are crafted, we have expanded into producing guitars, violins, drums, brass, and woodwinds. Seventy years later, Pearl River is still guided by the same belief that started it all: the next great instrument is always ahead of us.



1956



**PEARL RIVER
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Celebrating Our 70th Anniversary



2026

Hi Christian,

I read your “We Can’t Afford To Wait For the ‘Good Old Days’” with interest and agree with much of it, but I think we’re all (as the MI Retail industry) overlooking some huge opportunities and being a bit too myopic.

You briefly come up with practices with successful MI retailers like selling lessons, repairs, creating performance opportunities, etc. And you’re right — these DO build relationships... but these relationship builders have been around in MI at least a century. They’re nothing new.

Our problem is that we focus ONLY on people who are musicians already, were once and want to be again, or who are just getting started because they got signed up by their parents in the school program.

Our solution is to start focusing on those that haven’t even begun to get started.

Approximately 80% or more of the population LOVES music — they listen to it, follow it, enjoy going to live music events, et cetera. Only about 25% perform, play or practice an instrument — student, pro, or amateur.

Why on earth do we in MI retail keep going after that measly 25% when there are dang few other retailers satisfying that 80%? Hot Topic, Spencer’s... they aren’t as focused on music licensed goods anymore. There are no larger record store chains anymore (but more on that below). MI retailers should expand their focus beyond people who want to make music... to people that just plain LOVE music. If they want to make music, great, they’ll graduate from level one to level two. MI now starts at level two (or higher) . They should be starting at level one.

That will turn more of the 80% into 25%-ers, perhaps making them 30% or more.

I see this quite often: Weekend warrior comes into the “Joe’s Guitar Shop” to try a new guitar or amp. His hot girlfriend tags along, and sits her cute butt over in the corner and files her nails. Most MI retailers fail one of the #1 rules of retail in general with this episode: EVERYONE that comes into your store is a potential customer. What are the associates in “Joe’s Guitar Shop” doing to make the hot girlfriend a customer? Nothing. She’s not ready or even thinking about playing an instrument. But she LOVES music because she’s dating a musician. And her cute butt is IN THE STORE! Why not get her browsing in an apparel section of the store with concert shirts in addition to the shirts with Fender, Gibson, Zildjian, Marshall logos? Why not some colorful picks housed in jewelry? How about a Beatles lunch box to use as a purse? Hot Topic isn’t doing as much of this anymore. Their focus is Marvel, Anime, et cetera

An MI retailer who expands into becoming the MUSIC CENTER, not just the “Musical Instrument Center” of the community, could very well RETAIN a huge customer base (80%ers) that just might take up playing an instrument later. Instead, MI retailers leave it all to chance, and maybe to local schools, to get someone to that level. This is called marketing and it’s something that’s not being done in MI retail. Successful marketing starts at level one and prepares the mindset of the customer so that when the time comes to buy — you’re the merchant who wins. And marketing keeps that mindset of thinking of the winning retailer so that the customer is a customer for life — beyond just selling an instrument, it could be for everything related to music.

Consider my own family as an example. We had our two kids in music lessons at school good and early. My son: trumpet; my daughter: flute. We also had a friend who taught piano so my wife put my daughter in piano lessons, and eventually the teacher taught my wife to play too. So they all got started via the schools or private lessons. My son eventually got an electric bass, and my daughter got a little flute scholarship. My wife got good enough to herself giving level A piano lessons to students our friend could not take on herself. OK, now here’s your humble correspondent, Dad. I play the following in various levels of expertise: Hurdy gurdy, harmonica, Jews-harp (those 3 semi pro in a band of about 10-12 members), then occasionally mandolin, fiddle, dulcimer, autoharp, quills (pan flute), cigar box guitars and regular 6 string guitars, uke, kalimba, all of those last 9 just foolin’ around... but if my band needed me to play one of them, I could probably wing it. I’ve never had a lesson in my life. And guess which member of the family patronizes musical instrument stores most often? My earliest harmonicas were bought in record shops and other musical lifestyle stores. In other words, I was an 80%er for a long time before getting back to playing harmonica (which I’d given up) and getting into all those other instruments — and frequenting MI more often as the years progressed. I would say 1/3 to 1/2 of my bandmates are of the same type. But... We’re good enough to gig at the Ft Worth Stockyards regularly — the second biggest tourist attraction in the state.

The record stores are starting to get back into this merchandising, going beyond their core product (records, CDs) and into licensed goods, apparel, gifts, accessories, et cetera. Margins in recorded music have never been that good, and you can say same thing for musical instruments. Savvy retail record merchants in the late ‘70s to early ‘80s expanded into this kind of product mix to gain more margins. Those stores that did so lasted far longer than those that did not. The record store world now has no chains, just indie stores, and those who are savvy are starting to repeat history and stock a wider product mix to gain margins. Alliance Entertainment, the biggest distributor of recorded music, has started offering the kinds of product I’m talking about (and full disclosure, I sell to MI and record stores, as well as to Alliance) with positive results for all involved. Alliance particularly mentions the strength this product has during Record Store Days which have become the biggest sales events of the year for those stores.

But MI Retail, by and large, is not taking advantage of this type of action. Indeed — do you know what May 22 is each year? Have you ever heard of “Buy a Musical Instrument Day”? It’s each May 22, and it apparently has been for over 70 years! Yet when I found out about it and made my usual phone calls to follow up from my newsletter email, I found only one customer among 500-600 that was aware of May 22 and took advantage of it the last few years. It’s an online/mail order account. Think of what a day like this would do for brick and mortar MI retail! One doesn’t need to worry about having to SELL an instrument that day — but what they should be doing is finding ways to simply get MORE FEET in the store and if they buy a \$25 shirt or a kazoo for less than \$5, well, that’s a start. (And, as you mention, the store should be creating performance opportunities” on that day and at least 1-2 times monthly IMHO-as well. Why should coffee shops and bars get all the “open mic” business?????)

The hot girlfriend, the family, the group of teen kids, the elderly couple — all of whom aren’t frequenting the local MI retailer, here’s a way they can and should. It’s a new way to attract new customers and redefine what we’re doing. The Good New Days.

- Will Cornell, AMV Sales & Consultation LLC

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FENDER LAUNCHES FILM CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF THE TELECASTER

Fender is closing out its year-long celebration of 75 years of the Telecaster with the launch of "The One That Started It All," a new celebration film honoring the guitar that helped shape modern music. According to mia.org.uk, this production highlights the artists who continue to redefine what the instrument can sound like. The release marks the conclusion of the manufacturer's anniversary activities for this specific model.

The film features interviews with Keith Richards, Bruce Springsteen, Vince Gill, Sheryl Crow, Andy Summers, Joe Bonamassa, John 5, and Julien Baker. These conversations bring together generations of musicians who have each made the Telecaster entirely their own. The footage captures the remarkable range of sounds and styles emerging from one essential design, spanning rock, soul, country, and Americana genres. Bruce Springsteen discusses how the guitar covered everything from rock music to soul music and rockabilly.

Beyond the performers, the film looks at the people and craftsmanship behind the instrument. It specifically includes Abigail Ybarra, Fender's legendary master pickup winder who worked directly with Leo Fender. She helped shape the sound of countless iconic instruments during her tenure. The project serves as a celebration not simply of where the Telecaster has been, but of the artists continuing to take it somewhere new in the current musical landscape.

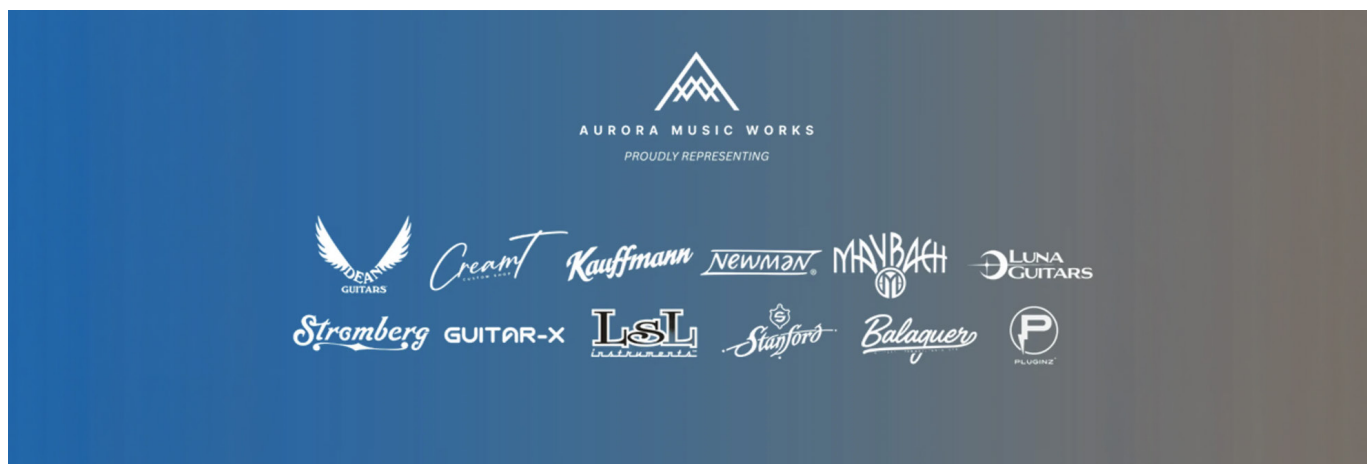


AURORA MUSIC WORKS LAUNCHES U.S. DISTRIBUTION ARM WITH NEWMAN GUITARS

Aurora Music Works has revealed the creation of AMW Aurora Music Works USA, a new entity formed alongside Jeff Smith of Newman Guitars to serve the North American market. According to mia.org.uk, this expansion represents a major milestone for the European distributor by establishing a dedicated operational footprint in the United States. The report indicates that the venture merges the distribution network and brand-building expertise of Aurora Music Works with the extensive experience, knowledge, and market positioning held by Smith. This collaboration aims to provide seamless service to independent guitar dealers and musicians seeking premium quality guitars and accessories throughout the region.

Smith operates Newman Guitars, a seminal brand founded in 1977 by renowned

luthier Ted Newman-Jones. Over the past decade, he has engaged in guitar manufacture and distribution, building a strong reputation as a custodian for the Newman brand while supplying retailers across the USA and Europe. Through this new partnership, AMW USA will deliver the full range of both Cream T and Newman guitars directly to retailers, dealers, and guitarists across North America and Canada. By integrating these brands under a unified local entity, the companies intend to strengthen their market presence and streamline logistics for stockists. This strategic move ensures that independent dealers receive direct support while expanding access to high-quality instruments for musicians throughout the continent.



PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Cort Guitars has appointed **Steve Araujo** as head of Strategic Sales and Product Relations for all the Americas, bringing more than a decade of experience in sales, marketing, and artist relations within the musical instrument industry to the role.

Araujo joins Cort following his tenure at G&L Guitars, where he served as Director of Sales, Marketing & Artist Relations and led a range of national and international initiatives spanning revenue growth, product launches, and brand engagement. In his new position, Araujo will focus on strengthening Cort's sales strategy and product positioning across North, Central, and South America, while also collaborating closely with artists and partners to support brand development and market presence.

His background combines direct experience in

sales operations with a track record of managing cross-functional projects and executing campaigns designed to expand visibility and engagement. During his time at G&L Guitars, Araujo directed sales and marketing efforts that supported revenue growth through coordinated campaign management, sales enablement, and product launch execution. He also oversaw artist relations, securing partnerships that contributed to broader brand exposure, and managed end-to-end project execution for media production, tradeshows, and digital initiatives.

His work included producing more than 100 product demo videos, contributing to increased online engagement, and leading website and digital marketing efforts. Beyond his corporate experience, Araujo brings a strong background in media and community building. He is the founder of The Bass

Hang, an online musician platform that has generated more than 2 million video views through original content and industry collaborations. He also serves as a television host for programs including Beyond 11 and Take the Lead, where he manages production and connects audiences with music industry professionals.

Araujo's combined experience in sales strategy, content development, and artist engagement reflects a multifaceted approach to modern brand building in the musical instrument industry. His bilingual capabilities in English and Spanish further support Cort's ability to engage with a diverse market across the Americas. With this appointment, Cort Guitars continues to invest in experienced leadership to support its evolving sales and product strategies in key global markets.

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PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

The Guitar Center Music Foundation (GCMF) today has announced the appointment of Valeisha Butterfield as CEO & executive director, effective immediately.

An award-winning executive whose career has spanned music, technology and philanthropy, Butterfield will lead the Foundation's next chapter with an eye on expanding access and opportunity to the instruments, tools, education and resources that empower people to discover, create and thrive through music. Butterfield currently serves on the GRAMMYS Television Committee and previously served as Co-President of the Recording Academy/GRAMMYS and Vice President of Global Partnerships at Google, leading organizations, teams and partnerships through periods of significant growth and transformation. She is also the founder of SEED Media.

Earlier in her career, Butterfield served as Executive Director of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, where she led national initiatives with musicians to advance financial literacy programs for young adults. Her appointment comes during an extraordinary time for music around the world. New technologies, platforms and creative tools are opening new possibilities for how music is discovered, created, shared and experienced.

Artists and musicians are reaching audiences in new ways, emerging creators are finding new pathways into the industry, and music continues to transcend geography and generations as one of the world's most powerful tools. "Music is a universal language and the most powerful tool in the world to connect people across generations," said Ms. Butterfield.

"Guitar Center sits at the center of that extraordinary ecosystem, and this is truly a full circle moment as I help lead this next chapter of the Guitar Center Music Foundation and, together, we reimagine its influence, impact and legacy. At its core, this work is about unlocking opportunities, fueling dreams and expanding what music can make possible for the next generation." "Valeisha brings the rare combination of nonprofit leadership, music industry experience and operational expertise that GCMF needs for its next stage of growth," said Curtis Heath, Board President and Chair, Guitar Center Music Foundation. "She has spent her career building organizations, developing partnerships and bringing people together around a shared purpose.

We're excited to have her leadership as we expand the Foundation's reach and create more opportunities for people to experience the power of music." As CEO & Executive Director, Ms. Butterfield will work closely with GCMF's Board of Directors, led by Board President and Chair Curtis Heath, to advance



the Foundation's strategic plan, grow fundraising and donor engagement, develop partnerships with schools and community organizations and strengthen the reach and visibility of its programs. Ms. Butterfield's appointment builds on GCMF's expanded leadership structure announced in December 2025, when Heath was named Board president and chair and Guitar Center executives Greg Glaser and Jerry Brandehoff joined the Board.

TRADE REGRETS

Larry R. "Link" Linkin — 87 years old and still one "slick dude" to the end — passed away peacefully on Aug. 26, 2026, at his home at Westminster Village in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Link was born May 29, 1939, in Burlington, Iowa, where he began his passion for the clarinet at the age of 7. It was at Burlington high school that music teacher Maurice Wright set him on his path toward a love of music. As a young student, Link stood at the foot of the stage at the Memorial Auditorium soaking up the Big Bands passing through town and later played many evenings in Crapo Park with the Burlington Municipal Band. He considered it a true honor to return "home" as a soloist with the Southeast Iowa Symphony.

Link's talents as a musician were so well known that University of Iowa's Hall of Fame football coach, Forest Evashevski, awarded Link a football scholarship to enhance the Rose Bowl-bound Hawkeye's football squad with a "slick" marching band. His talents continued after college as the United States Airforce recruited him for membership in the NORAD international band that made dozens of recordings for Capitol Records and three concerts at Carnegie Hall.

Link met his wife, Peggy, in the Concert Band at the University of Iowa, and together they raised a daughter and a son, making homes over the years in Chicago; Escondido, Calif.; and the Phoenix area. Music was more than a business for this "faboo" master clarinetist — it was his way of life,

and for more than 30 years, he devoted himself to the global promotion of music education. His involvement with NAMM began in 1970 as director of planning and development; he was promoted to staff vice president before leaving in 1977 to serve as president of Slingerland/Deagan and later vice president of C.G. Conn Ltd. Link rejoined NAMM in 1980 as president and CEO and led it until his 2001 retirement, growing the organization from a small, grassroots operation into a global association of more than 7,700 members in over 100 countries — proof that when it came to music advocacy, there truly was none other than "whoelsebut" Link. Along the way he earned an honorary doctor of music from Berklee College of Music and an honorary doctor of music education from Duquesne University. He served as a commencement speaker at both ceremonies, and in 1999, he was listed in Who's Who in America, Who's Who Worldwide and the Global Registry of Business Leaders.

An accomplished clarinetist and self-described "cool cat" to the very end, Link soloed in concert halls around the world, including New York's Carnegie Hall, later traveling the globe as a featured performer aboard Holland America Cruise Lines and appearing in Las Vegas as part of the variety show "Tap, Swing and Laugh" alongside Arthur Duncan and Paul Lennon. He performed across the United States and Canada, sharing his gift for music until the very end of his life.

Link was preceded in death by his wife of 56 years,



Peggy Sue (Jones) Linkin, and by his parents, Ross and Nell (Timmerman) Linkin. He is survived by his partner, Barbara Sullivan; his daughter, Lisa Linkin, and Lisa's boyfriend Ron LeMieux; his son, Brent Linkin, and Brent's fiancée, Margie Maka; and his three beloved grandchildren, Annika, Jake and Camilla. He will be remembered as a devoted husband, father, grandfather, teacher and friend to musicians and music-lovers around the world — a life lived, quite literally, in music.

The music-products market lost a specialized manufacturer and supplier with the death of **Ronny Bennett**, a lap steel guitar builder and former country music performer. Mark Pugh, founder of UK retailer Stones Music, confirmed Bennett passed away on August 21, 2026, following a period of ill health, according to a report by Music Instrument News. Pugh first met Bennett about 25 years ago while seeking a supplier for lap steel guitars, eventually coming to know him as a gentle and humble man who had been a quiet star of country music from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Bennett provided hundreds of lap steel guitars to Stones Music over the years. He also used his engineering mind to make his own instruments, creating incredibly complex mechanisms including a keyless tuning system in his workshops on the Wirral and later near Inverness. His facility served as a place for making, repairing, fixing, and tweaking instruments sent to him from all over the world. Pugh noted that Bennett performed with The Hillsiders, the first British country act to play the Grand Ol' Opry. Pugh stated he will miss Bennett's chats and quiet wisdom, but knows the last decades of his life were happy ones filled with hospitality and generosity.



WALT STRAITON, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, KORG USA

By Christian Wissmuller

Music education is changing — and, according to Walt Stratton, that presents the music products industry with as much opportunity as it does challenge. As director of education for Korg USA, Stratton sees a future in which traditional band, orchestra, and choir programs coexist with songwriting, recording, production, DJing, and other technology-driven forms of music-making. MMR recently spoke with Stratton about expanding participation, strengthening industry-education partnerships, preparing teachers for a changing musical landscape, and ensuring that today's students remain tomorrow's musicians.

What do you see as the biggest opportunities — and the biggest challenges — for music education today, and how can the music products industry play a more meaningful role in addressing them?

The biggest opportunity for music education is to expand the definition of what it means to be a musician. Today's students are creating music through performance, composition, recording, production, songwriting, DJing, and technology. By embracing these pathways alongside traditional ensembles, we can engage a broader and more diverse group of students while preserving the excellence of band, orchestra, and choir.

The biggest challenge is maintaining music's relevance in an increasingly competitive educational landscape — both in terms of curriculum and funding — while also addressing the integration of AI into music education. With growing emphasis on STEM, career readiness, testing, and limited budgets, music programs must continually demonstrate their value not only as an art form, but as a powerful driver of creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and student well-being, both within schools and throughout the community. Our future depends on showing that music education is essential, not optional.

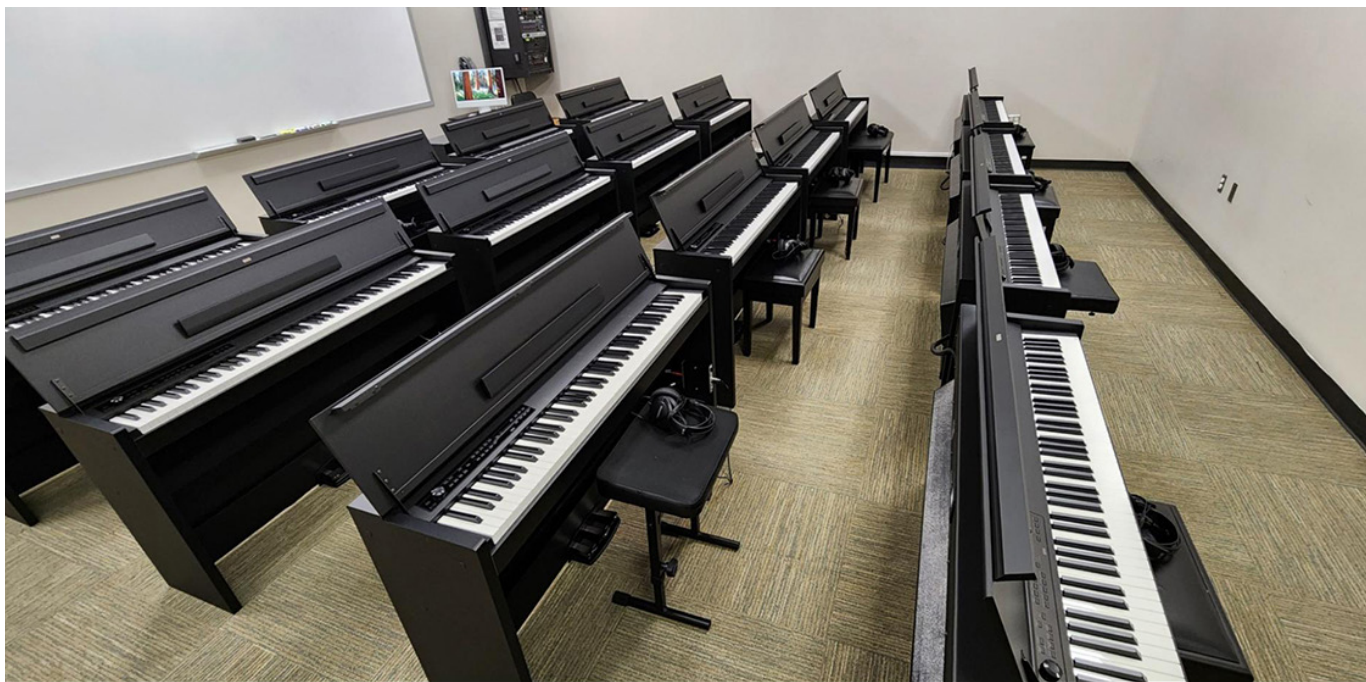


Walt Stratton

How can retailers, suppliers, and organizations such as NAMM and NAFME work together more effectively to support school music programs beyond simply providing instruments and equipment?

The most successful partnerships begin with a shared mission. Retailers, manufacturers, schools, and organizations such as NAMM and NAFME each bring unique strengths, but the greatest impact comes when we collectively leverage those strengths to increase participation in school music.





That collaboration can expand access to instruments and technology, support teacher professional development, identify best practices, and help create and implement innovative programs that reflect how today's students learn and make music. When the entire industry speaks with one voice and measures success by student participation — rather than simply expanding individual market share — everyone benefits, most importantly the students.

As school districts continue to face budget constraints and changing educational priorities, what innovative partnerships or programs have you seen successfully expand access to music education, and what lessons can the industry learn from them?

If imitation is the highest form of flattery, we should first look at the multifaceted successes of organizations such as the NAMM Foundation, Save The Music, Mr. Holland's Opus, the CMA Foundation, Music Will, TI:ME, Education Through Music, GAMA, and APME. While these organizations have national — and, in some cases, international — footprints, equally effective organizations are driving local community impact, including Music For Everyone in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; School of Beats in Atlanta; and The Roots of Music in New Orleans.

How can the MI industry better engage students, parents, and educators to foster a lifelong culture of music-making — not just participation in school ensembles, but continued musical engagement beyond graduation?

The opportunity in front of us is to extend K-12 musical thinking beyond graduation and collectively create a seamless pathway from school music programs to lifelong music-making. That means helping students and families discover the many ways music can remain part of their lives — through community bands and orchestras, worship ensembles, songwriting, recording, recreational music-making, and emerging creative technologies.

Retailers, manufacturers, educators, and advocacy organizations all have a role to play by connecting students with local musical opportunities, offering affordable instruments and continuing education, and identifying community mentors. When parents see music as a lifelong pursuit rather than simply a school activity, and students leave school knowing there is a place for them to keep making music, we build not only stronger musicians but stronger communities.

Technology is reshaping both education and music-making. How should retailers, manufacturers, and educators balance traditional music education with emerging technologies, digital tools, and new ways students create and learn music?

There should never be a choice between traditional music education and technology. Our focus — and our opportunity — is helping introduce students to the full spectrum of music-making. Band, orchestra, choir, and piano can and absolutely should retain their place as foundations of musical excellence. At the same time, there are incredible technological tools that can enhance those traditional “analog” ensembles through recording, assisted practice, and assessment.

Digital audio workstations, composition, production, DJing, and other creative technologies are also expanding access and inspiring the nontraditional music student. Initial research is beginning to show that one feeds the other rather than competing with it.

The industry's role is to help schools integrate these approaches. When students can perform, create, record, and collaborate, they develop a broader set of musical skills and are more likely to continue making music throughout their lives. The future of music education is built on both tradition and innovation.



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Looking ahead five to 10 years, what actions should the music products industry prioritize today to ensure school music programs remain relevant, accessible, and sustainable for future generations of students?

Our industry's top priority should be growing participation by making music education more relevant, accessible, and inclusive than ever before. That means supporting outstanding traditional programs while also embracing emerging approaches that reflect how today's students learn, create, and connect with music.

A less obvious need is expanding professional development for practicing K-12 educators while also helping degree-granting institutions incorporate music technology competencies into teacher-training curricula. As an adjunct orchestra faculty member at a regional university here in Pennsylvania, I've been part of extensive conversations about how to "bake" advanced music-tech skills into an already credit-heavy traditional music education degree.

Beyond the traditional four-year college track, several forward-thinking software companies and a growing number of colleges and universities are offering workshops in areas such as DAWs, podcasting, and Modern Band, along with asynchronous software certifications and platform-specific training opportunities that can help bridge this gap.

Ultimately, success will require sustained investment in teacher

development, advocacy, technology, and strong partnerships among schools, retailers, manufacturers, and community organizations. If we focus on expanding opportunities for every student to experience the joy of making music, we won't just preserve music education — we'll ensure it continues to thrive for generations to come.

If every stakeholder in the music education ecosystem — retailers, manufacturers, educators, advocacy organizations, and schools — could commit to one collaborative initiative over the next year, what would have the greatest impact on growing participation in music education and strengthening the pipeline of future musicians?

Job number one for all of us is to expand access to music-making for every student. Together, retailers, manufacturers, educators, advocacy organizations, and community partners can combine resources — money, time, and influence — to remove barriers through affordable instruments, innovative technologies, teacher support, and pathways that connect students with lifelong opportunities to make music.

Our industry is strongest when we work together toward a common goal. If we can collectively focus on growing participation rather than simply competing for market share, we won't just strengthen music education — we'll inspire the next generation of musicians, audiences, educators, and advocates. At the end of the day, everybody wins: students, schools, communities, and our industry.



BUILT TO BREATHE: HOLLOW AND SEMI-HOLLOW BODY ELECTRIC GUITARS

By Christian Wissmuller

There was a time when the sight of a hollowbody electric guitar onstage offered a pretty good clue as to what was about to come out of the speakers. Jazz? Sure. Blues? Absolutely. Rockabilly? Almost certainly. Today, all bets are off.

Hollow and semi-hollow guitars are increasingly turning up in the hands of indie, alternative, R&B, neo-soul, country, punk, and other players who may have little interest in observing the traditional boundaries of the category. And manufacturers have responded accordingly. Classic silhouettes and old-school visual appeal remain very much part of the equation, but increasingly they're being paired with modern electronics, more comfortable dimensions, improved feedback resistance, lighter weight, and an expanding range of tonal options.

In other words, the things that have always made these instruments distinctive haven't gone away. Guitar makers are simply finding new ways to make those qualities relevant to a broader group of musicians.

For this month's Roundtable, MMR checked in with representatives from Yamaha, Guild, PRS Guitars, and Ibanez to discuss what's selling, who's buying, what today's players expect from a hollow or semi-hollow guitar, and where this enduring corner of the guitar market goes next.



What is currently your top-selling model of hollow or semi-hollow body guitar?

Cain German, Product Marketing Specialist, Guitars, Yamaha: The SA2200. It is our flagship semi-hollow double cutaway, featuring our own Yamaha-designed Alnico V humbuckers, a 3-position toggle switch, volume and tone controls, and coil-splitting for each pickup — covering a wide range of tonal ground. This guitar also features our Initial Response Acceleration (I.R.A) treatment, which releases stresses between the wood to give the guitar that “played in” sound and feel while increasing guitar volume and resonance.

Caleb Bigler, Marketing Manager, Guild: It's the Guild Starfire I-12 12-string guitar.

Jim Cullen, Director of Sales, PRS Guitars: Our bestselling model is currently the Special Semi-Hollow. Over the past 6+ years, it has become a staple in the PRS Guitars assortment. Adding it to SE & S2 will only continue that trajectory.

Thomas Appleton, Sales Strategist – Strategic Accounts / Guitars & Electronics, Ibanez: Obviously, affordable price range products will make up the largest quantity. The AF55TF full hollow has been a great seller for years along with the AS53TKF. That being said, one of our biggest hits this year is the solid top ASH300TBC. With its gorgeous aesthetic, solid top and flamed maple top priced at \$1,799.99 this hits far above its price range. Another big hit this year is the AS7328TBC.

What trends are you seeing in the hollow and semi-hollow guitar category? Are players' preferences changing in terms of body styles, features, finishes, or specifications?

CG: We're seeing a lot of nods to vintage and legacy shapes with updated hardware or pickups. Whether guitars use old body styles with new electronics or slightly offset-style bodies with new hardware, players seem to love that blend of old and new. Even things like a simple hardware color change on tuners or a bridge can add a bit of pizzazz to the instrument. These simple changes make the hardware and the guitar as a whole “pop.”



Cain German, Product Marketing Specialist, Guitars, Yamaha



Caleb Bigler, Marketing Manager, Guild

CB: For Guild, we're seeing players gravitate toward more traditional aesthetics and finishes while looking for more modern specifications in pickups, features, and playability. Guild has such a strong legacy in the semi-hollow space, with iconic players like Buddy Guy, Jerry Garcia, Tom Fogerty, and many others associated with Starfire guitars throughout the 1960s and '70s. We definitely lean into that heritage, and we continue to see players drawn to the models and designs that those artists helped make iconic. At the same time, today's players want

those classic looks and character paired with the versatility and playability of a modern instrument.

JC: We only have a handful of semi-hollow or hollowbody models, which are mostly the same shape. We recently introduced the DGT Semi-Hollow, which is also a variation of a staple Core model. The semi-hollow model is performing well. It's a very functional tool for guitar players, combining two volume controls, a push/pull tone control, and three-way toggle paired with our Gen II tremolo. It just works. That said, the Vela Semi-Hollow is a solid seller. Its offset waist and simple design really set it apart within the PRS Guitars lineup.

TA: Value seems to be the biggest trend of late. In the present economy, players have a lot of competition for their dollar so they are looking to get the most bang for the buck that they can. Many players are gravitating towards smaller bodies, which offer more comfort, lighter weights and feedback resistance. We have addressed that by adding a few quilted Ash top models to our Artcore Expressionist series (AM93QA). They are also looking for unique specs; we are seeing a lot of traction on our new baritone model - the 28" Scale AS7328 affordably priced at \$629.99.

While traditionally associated with jazz, blues, and classic rock, hollow and semi-hollow guitars appeal to a wide range of players today. What genres or types of musicians are driving demand for these instruments?

CG: It's not uncommon to see hollow and semi-hollow guitars in Indie rock, alternative rock, and Americana-adjacent genres such as rockabilly and country. The guitars have such a different feel and inspire players differently than a solid body. They also

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take up a different frequency spectrum than what our ears may be used to, and because some of these guitars were designed in different eras, the way they hit the front end of modern amps can produce some cool tones! Hollow and semi-hollow guitars generally have a softer attack than a solid body, but it is cool to have that as a different tool in the shed when writing and recording.

CB: We're seeing a lot of variety in terms of musical styles, but some of the most notable growth is coming from R&B, neo-soul, and even indie rock players, in addition to the jazz, blues, and classic rock musicians traditionally associated with these instruments.

JC: All types. To me, instruments are tools to create with, so putting a label on what can or can't be played on them would be limiting. The semi-hollow feature adds a very musical midrange to the guitars. Plus, they tend to be lighter in weight, making them comfortable for hours on stage.

characters in movies and said, "I want to be that person!" or "Oh, that's me!", I think players, whether consciously or subconsciously, seek that piece of gear that not only allows them to stay in the flow of their creativity, but is also an extension of their personality and music. With that said, I think players are enjoying all the legacy aesthetics with modern appointments, or vice versa. It has opened the door for semi-hollow and hollow-body guitars to show up in more genres than you would expect.

CB: Construction and aesthetics are definitely two of the first things that draw players to a hollow or semi-hollow guitar. The Starfire is a visually striking instrument, and that initial connection is important. Once players pick one up, the weight, construction, and overall feel really stand out. Playability is obviously a major factor, but we're also seeing a growing demand for versatility, particularly when it comes to pickups and electronics.



Thomas Appleton, Sales Strategist – Strategic Accounts / Guitars & Electronics, Ibanez

TA: While normally associated with jazz, classic rock and rockabilly, we see a lot more alternative, punk, and alt-rock players gravitating towards hollow bodies. We are also seeing more country artists using hollow bodies as well.

What are some of the key features that today's players are looking for when purchasing a hollow or semi-hollow body guitar?

CG: Players today are looking for a guitar that looks unique, stands out from the norm, and allows them to see themselves in it. Similar to when we were all kids and watched our favorite



Jim Cullen, Director of Sales, PRS Guitars

JC: I'd imagine all of your examples plus more play an important role in the decision-making process: pickups, electronics, construction, playability, weight, aesthetics, versatility, neck shape, sound, and most importantly... what it inspires!

TA: Buyers are more aware than ever when it comes to specs nowadays. They look at everything from playability to feedback resistance, pickup configurations, body size, weight, and the ability to use in both a live and studio setting.

How has the role of hollow and semi-hollow guitars evolved in modern music, and how are manufacturers responding to the changing needs of players?

CG: It's exciting to see semi-hollow and hollow body guitars evolve without ever changing their essence. Pickups and hardware have come such a long way. Guitars now offer more tonal options than previous generations, and many players want instruments that cover most tones while being more reliable for modern performance and recording situations. Manufacturers are responding by building more versatile instruments with higher-quality components, while also collaborating with artists and designers to create unique and inspiring offerings that resonate with today's players.

CB: I think players are becoming more aware of the tonal possibilities that hollow and semi-hollow guitars offer beyond their traditional genres. Their naturally resonant tonal foundation can be incredibly appealing across a wide range of styles, from R&B and neo-soul to indie and alternative music. And, of course, they're just beautiful instruments. Manufacturers are responding by pairing that traditional character with more modern pickups, electronics, neck profiles, and playability.

JC: That's a great question. The chambered or fully hollow body should provide the ability for the guitar to resonate a little more, particularly when using an amplifier at volume. Combine that with all the interesting pedals out there on the market and you have yourself a pretty darn interesting synth controller. The same would be true with today's modeling tech ... textures for days. Acoustically or clean, they also sparkle on the top end with very organic mid-range, and a smooth [not woofy] bottom end, or at least that is my experience with our semi-hollow and hollowbody guitars. They are drivers of the creative process

TA: Once the signature of blues, bop and big bands the jazz box has evolved over the years to encompass many forms of music. From pop to alt rock, punk and country you can see hollow body guitars everywhere. Older traditional hollow body guitars were very big and bulky which definitely led to a lot of feedback and unwanted noise. We have worked with our artists like George Benson, Pat Metheny and John Scofield over the years to develop guitars to ensure they have the proper tool for the job. This has given us a lot of experience, which we have utilized in our more standard models. Speaking of artist guitars, we're doing quite well with the new Pat Metheny model, the PMC3. Its unique PM Special single coil pickup embraces a well-balanced classic jazz tone essential to Pat's playing style.

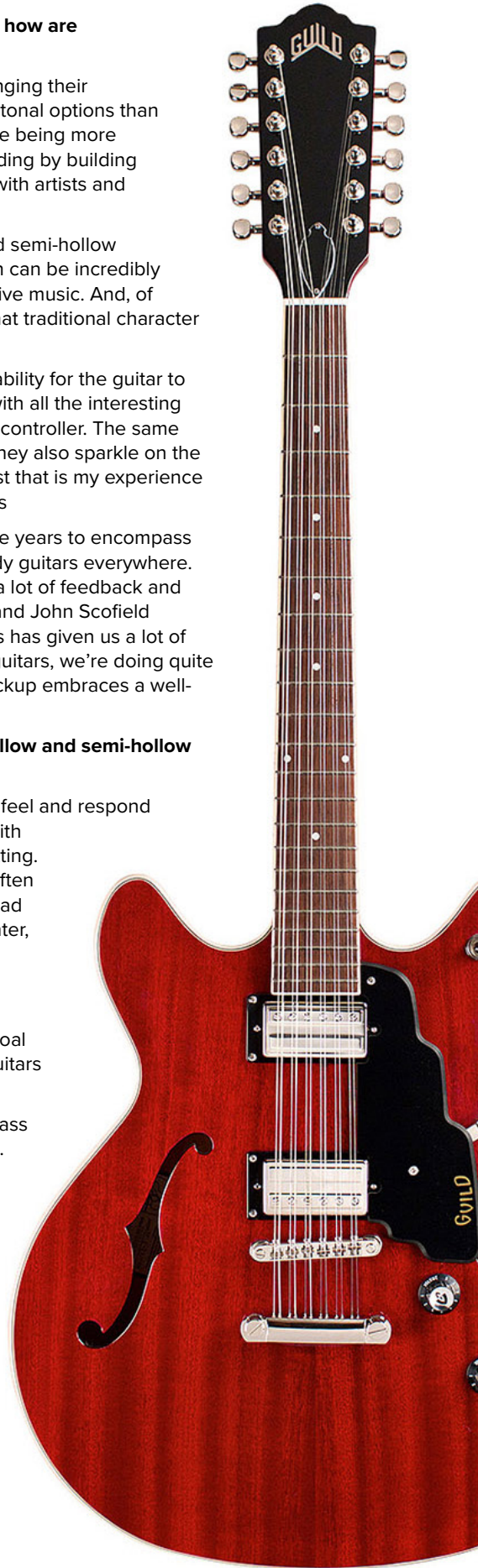
What innovations or design approaches has your company introduced to make hollow and semi-hollow guitars more versatile, accessible, or appealing to today's guitarists?

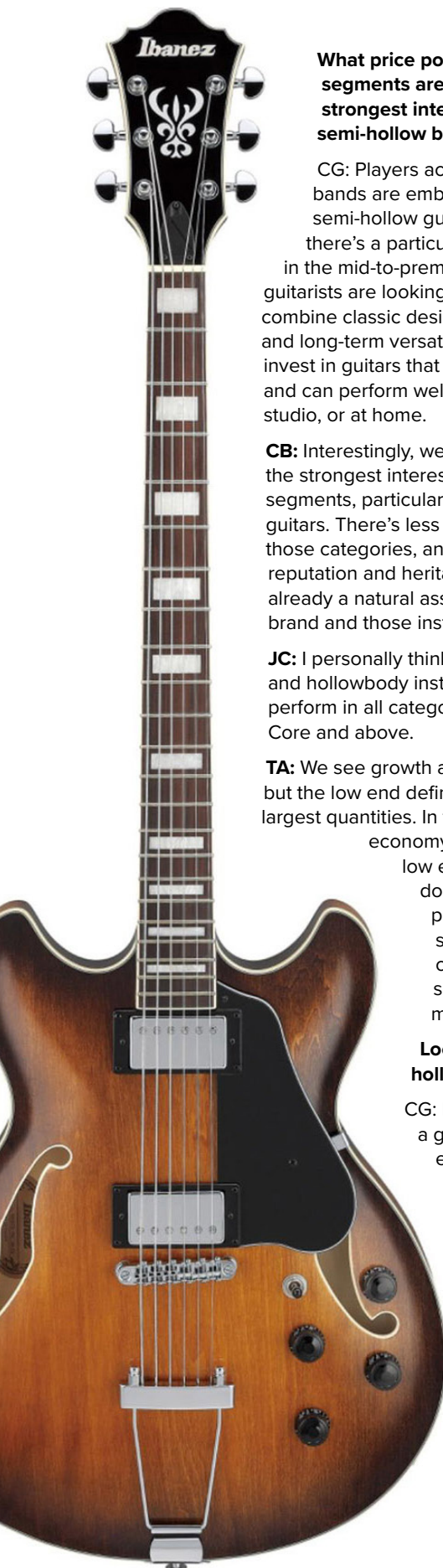
CG: Our Initial Response Acceleration (I.R.A.) is a great example! I.R.A.-treated guitars feel and respond like they've been played for years, delivering that comfortable broken-in feel along with increased resonance and a more open, vibrant voice. Another key feature is coil-splitting. It's not something you commonly find on hollow and semi-hollow guitars, which are often known for their warmer, darker tonal character. We wanted the SA2200 to offer a broad sonic palette, giving players access to everything from rich humbucker tones to brighter, more articulate sounds. Beyond that, exceptional playability is simply the baseline. Players should never have to fight their instrument to express themselves creatively.

CB: We've focused on bringing more modern pickups and electronics, updated neck shapes, improved playability and a wider range of price points to the category. The goal is to preserve the character and aesthetic that make Guild hollow and semi-hollow guitars distinctive while making them more versatile and accessible to today's players.

JC: First, I'll tackle versatility. The Special Semi-Hollow features a humbucker in the bass position, a narrow field in the middle position, and a humbucker in the treble position. Those are paired with a five-way blade and two mini-toggle coil-split switches so the number of sounds you can dial in are pretty endless. Quite versatile and comfy. Next, I'll tackle accessible & appealing. The PRS Hollowbody II Piezo and McCarty 594 Hollowbody II are appealing because they are sized like normal electric guitars but are fully hollow with a solid sound post connecting the top to the back where the bridge attaches to the guitar. It feels like home but provides sonic textures only a hollowbody can bring to the table.

TA: Smaller bodies, lightweight, more comfort, and great playing necks are some of the characteristics that set Ibanez hollow bodies apart from the crowd. Center blocks to help eliminate feedback while letting the top resonate are a hallmark of our semi-hollow-body instruments. We also utilize custom electronics on several of our hollow bodies with our Tri-sound switch, which allows the player to go between parallel wiring to coil tap to standard wiring for their pickups producing a wider variety of tones.





What price points or market segments are showing the strongest interest in hollow and semi-hollow body guitars?

CG: Players across many price bands are embracing hollow and semi-hollow guitars, but it seems like there's a particularly strong interest in the mid-to-premium market. Many guitarists are looking for instruments that combine classic design, modern reliability, and long-term versatility. They're willing to invest in guitars that inspire them creatively and can perform well on stage, in the studio, or at home.

CB: Interestingly, we're seeing some of the strongest interest in the more niche segments, particularly bass and 12-string guitars. There's less competition in those categories, and Guild has a strong reputation and heritage in both, so there's already a natural association between the brand and those instruments.

JC: I personally think we do semi-hollow and hollowbody instruments well, so they perform in all categories from SE to S2 into Core and above.

TA: We see growth across the board, but the low end definitely moves the largest quantities. In the current K-shaped economy, we are seeing the low end and high end doing very well. Middle price points have suffered a bit, but some of our current strongest sellers are right in the middle.



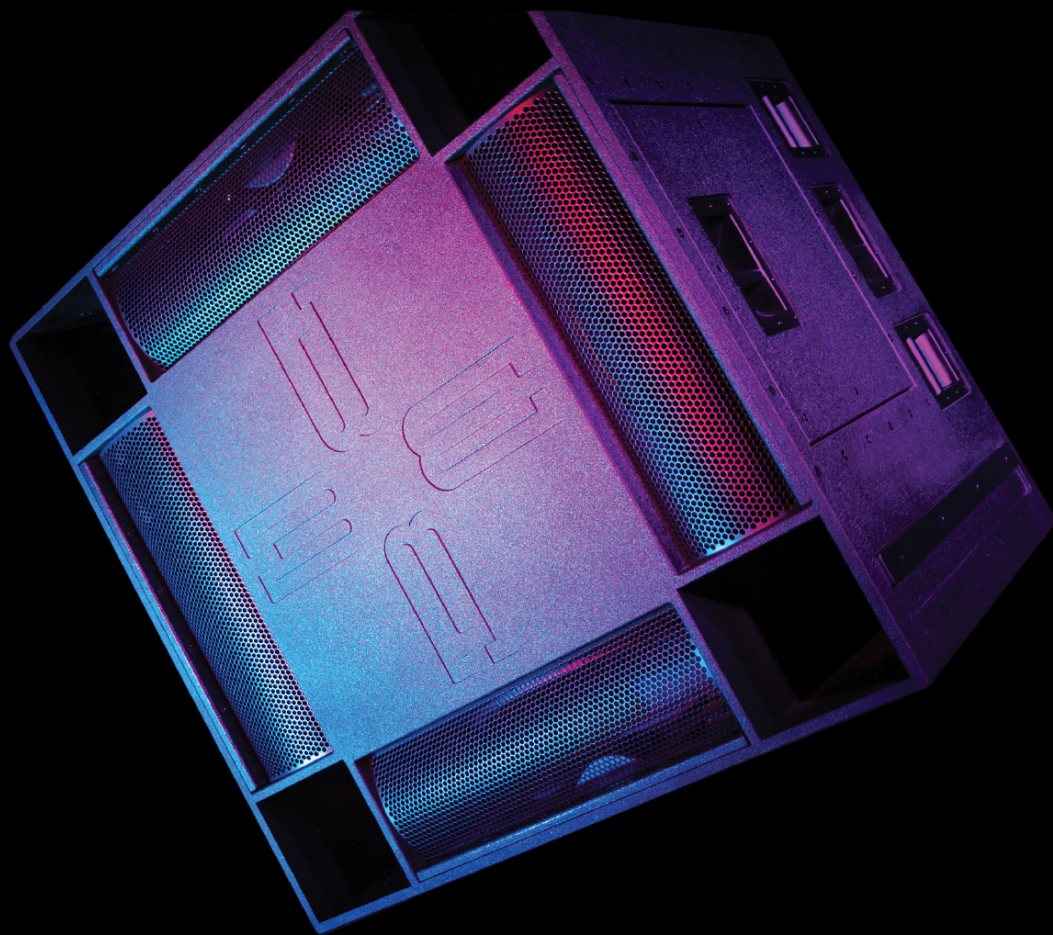
Looking ahead, what do you see as the biggest opportunities for growth in the hollow and semi-hollow guitar category?

CG: I think the guitar industry is in a bit of a renaissance right now - it's a great time to be a guitarist. The biggest opportunities for growth are delivering more than what a player expects, and that's in any price range. Overdelivering creates a memorable playing experience and gets players talking, creates a community around a product, and ultimately, those communities become the think tank for improvement.

CB: I think one of the biggest opportunities is in the premium segment, particularly with instruments that bring back some of the more iconic Guild specifications and design elements. Features like Dynasonic pickups and V-block inlays are deeply connected to Guild's history, and there's a real opportunity to reintroduce those details to a new generation of players.

JC: For us, I think there is some good opportunity to horizontally expand our hollowbody and semi-hollow guitars in the S2 category. There is much fun to be had there, which will offer more choices for guitar players of all ages.

TA: I think we will continue to see a move towards sleeker designs and improved ergonomics as well as more versatile electronics.



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THE VIEW FROM THE SALES FLOOR

Guitar Center CEO Gabe Dalporto weighs in on what's selling, where players are spending, and why hollow and semi-hollow guitars are reaching well beyond their traditional audience.

The evolution of the hollow and semi-hollow category isn't just showing up in manufacturers' product lines — it's playing out at retail. From approachable models driving volume to growing interest in premium instruments, Guitar Center CEO Gabe Dalporto sees a market expanding in multiple directions at once. MMR asked Dalporto what players are buying, which features are moving the needle, and where he sees the biggest opportunities ahead.

TOP-SELLERS AND TRENDS

Our top-selling model right now is the Gretsch G2420T Streamliner Hollowbody in Walnut Stain, which has generated six figures in sales year-to-date.

Its performance is a great example of what we're seeing in the category. Players want the look, feel and character of a hollowbody, but they also want it at an approachable price point. The G2420T delivers both and gives more players a way into the category.

We're seeing something really interesting happen at both ends of the market. Accessible models continue to be important volume drivers, but at the same time, we're seeing strong sales-dollar growth and a meaningful shift toward higher-end instruments.

That doesn't mean players are moving away from accessible guitars — the strength of models like the Gretsch G2420T shows quite the opposite. Rather, the category is expanding at both ends of the market: approachable models are bringing players into the category, while enthusiasts and more experienced players are increasingly willing to invest in premium instruments.

We're also seeing strong momentum around semi-hollow and center-block designs, smaller and more ergonomic bodies, expanded electronics and more distinctive finishes. Players still appreciate the heritage of these guitars, but they increasingly want instruments that can do much more than traditional jazz or blues.

We're seeing healthy demand across multiple price points, but there are two distinct dynamics.

The \$500–\$750 range remains an important volume sweet spot. Instruments like Gretsch Streamliners and Epiphone semi-hollows give players an accessible entry point into the category.

At the same time, we're seeing encouraging momentum farther upmarket, particularly in the \$1,000–\$1,500 range and with premium instruments above \$2,500.

So the opportunity isn't limited to one customer. Accessible models continue to drive interest, while enthusiasts and experienced players are showing they're willing to invest significantly when they find the right instrument.

Broadening Appeal and Must-have Features

This category has become much less genre-specific, and I think that's one of the most exciting things about it. Jazz, blues, rockabilly and classic rock are still important, but we're increasingly seeing hollow and semi-hollow guitars embraced by indie and alternative players, modern rock musicians, singer-songwriters, worship players and pop artists.

Look at the artists associated with these instruments today: Dave Grohl, Alex Lifeson, Gary Clark Jr., Zach Myers, and Ed Sheeran. That's an incredibly diverse group of musicians.

Players increasingly see these as versatile electric guitars first, rather than specialty instruments designed for one particular genre. That opens up the category to a much broader audience.

Versatility is probably number one. Players want a guitar that sounds great clean but can also handle pedals, gain and higher stage volumes.

Traditional humbuckers are still incredibly important, but players are exploring a much wider range of electronics, including piezo systems, coil-splitting, Filter'Tron-style pickups and other expanded configurations.

Comfort and playability matter a lot too. Smaller bodies, reduced weight, slimmer neck profiles and better upper-fret access make these guitars accessible to players who might have found a traditional hollowbody cumbersome.

And you can't overlook aesthetics. These guitars have always had a strong visual identity, but

today's player is much more open to modern colors, metallic finishes, unique hardware combinations and artist-inspired designs alongside the classics.

The biggest shift is that these guitars have evolved from specialty instruments into incredibly versatile platforms.

Historically, you might have bought a hollow or semi-hollow guitar because you were chasing a very specific jazz, blues, or classic rock sound. Today, manufacturers are designing them to compete much more directly with solidbody electrics.

Center-block construction, smaller bodies, deeper cutaways, contemporary neck profiles, higher-output pickups, tremolo systems and piezo electronics are all expanding what these instruments can do.

The best modern designs preserve the resonance, feel and visual character that make hollow and semi-hollow guitars special while giving players the versatility they expect from a modern electric guitar.

Give the Players What they Want

For us, it starts with understanding what the customer wants and where there may be a gap in the market. There isn't one formula for a Guitar Center exclusive. We can take a proven platform and make thoughtful changes to the finish, pickups, fretboard woods, hardware or feature set to create something distinctive for our customers.

We've seen particularly strong response to Guitar Center-exclusive Gibson and Gretsch hollow and semi-hollow models. What works is combining a recognizable, proven design with appointments, finishes or configurations that players can't find in the standard assortment.

The goal isn't to make something different just for the sake of being different. It's to give players a compelling reason to pick up that guitar and discover something they connect with.

The biggest opportunity is continuing to break down the idea that hollow and semi-hollow guitars belong to a handful of traditional genres. They don't.

Potential and Opportunity

We see a lot of potential in modern semi-hollow designs, smaller and lighter instruments, expanded electronics like piezo systems, and guitars that can comfortably handle higher-gain applications.

There's also a real opportunity in the middle of the market. Players who are ready to step up from an entry-level instrument but aren't ready to spend \$3,000-plus represent an important audience, and we're seeing encouraging momentum in that segment.

Ultimately, growth will come from preserving what players love about these guitars — the character, resonance and heritage — while continuing to make them more versatile, comfortable and individual. If we can do that, there's no reason this category can't appeal to an entirely new generation of players.



THE OLD MAN AT THE MUSIC STORE WAS RIGHT!

By Micah Everett

One practice that greatly contributed to my musical development as a teenager was driving to nearby music stores and looking through the available sheet music. Back then Mississippi was still granting drivers licenses to fifteen-year-olds, so I started doing this just before my sophomore year in high school and continued through college and beyond, at least until most sheet music shopping moved online. Wright Music Company in Jackson had by far the best collection of advanced materials for low brass among the local stores in those days, and I still have the copies of the Hindemith Sonata and Creston Fantasy that I purchased after thumbing through the file drawer of trombone solos and finding them there. Both pieces were far beyond me then but in subsequent years I performed both using those same copies I bought from Mr. Wright. Mississippi Music had a respectable selection of sheet music back then in the old store on Robinson Road, and Ball Music in Pearl always kept a few things in stock, particularly method books.

One visit to Ball Music remains a very powerful memory over thirty years later. Although I can't remember exactly when it occurred, I remember what I bought, what Mr. Ball said to me, and what I was thinking at the time. I also remember how foolish I was, and how right Mr. Ball was. My teacher had sent me there with instructions to purchase my first copy of Arban's Famous Method for Trombone, that hefty volume originally for cornet that will be familiar to readers of SBO+. The Arban book is a treasure trove of exercises that provides endless resources for developing technical skills in serious brass players, and has been held in high regard since its first publication in 1864.

"Teenager Micah" didn't know any of that, though. I had been instructed to get this book (and warned that it was large and somewhat expensive), so I set about getting a copy. When I walked in and asked Mr. Ball about the book, he walked over to the display where it was, handed me a copy, and said to me "Young man, you will use this book for the rest of your life." My first thought was full of teenage bravado: "Yeah, right, old man. I'm gonna pass this one off just like I did all of the other method books I've had." Happily, I was a polite teenager who had been taught to show respect to adults, so I didn't voice that thought aloud. I thanked Mr. Ball, paid for the book, and went home to practice using my ill-fated folding music stand, which did not long survive having such a massive tome placed on it.

In my defense, my experience with method books to that point was limited to the old First Division Band Method, the Rubank Elementary Method, the two volumes of Gerald Bordner's Practical Studies for Trombone, and exercises we played during band rehearsals. With all of these I would simply pass off exercises and move ahead. Repeating exercises was rare, and seemed unnecessary. I simply didn't have a category for



practice materials that would yield benefits from repeated study over many years. I soon would, though, as Mr. Ball's words to me have proven to be profoundly correct since that evening in his little store. Not only has repeated practice of the Arban book been beneficial for my trombone playing, but its studies were a big part of helping me to develop my doubling chops on euphonium, then bass trombone, and finally tuba. When I was preparing to record my first bass trombone album I spent hours playing Arban exercises down one and two octaves, both to strengthen my low register and to build stamina in my left arm for holding up that heavy instrument during long recording sessions. While I vary the amount of playing along with students that I do during their weekly lessons, I rarely leave my instrument on its stand when Arban is on the agenda. I almost always play along, not only to provide an example for the student but also for the benefit I will gain from another trip through those exercises.

These days few brick-and-mortar music stores keep substantial amounts of sheet music in stock. To be sure, the online stores have both better selection and better pricing than local businesses could ever match, and the efficiency and convenience of a quick online catalog search to find and purchase (and even download!) a desired item is wonderful. Still, there's something about thumbing through filing cabinets in the back corner of a store and discovering great music that my students today will never know in the way that I did, and that is a loss worth mourning.

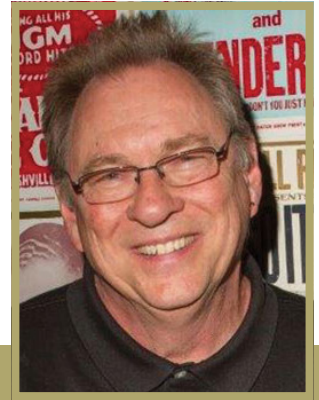
And so is the loss of wise words spoken by an experienced music store owner to an ignorant kid who has no idea what a great treasure he has just acquired.

Micah Everett is Professor of Low Brass at the University of Mississippi, Principal Trombonist of the North Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, and Tubist in the Mississippi Brass Quintet. He holds Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music degrees from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the Bachelor of Music Education degree from Delta State University.

THE WORLD FINALLY AGREES ON SOMETHING: DOLLY!

On The Loss And Legacy of The Queen of Country

By Menzie Pittman, Author of *The New Musician*



Like the rest of the world, on August 25th I heard the tragic news of Dolly Parton's passing. These are the few words I managed to muster up for a social media post:

"If you tried to use the word 'Legend' in reference to Dolly Parton, it would seem puny. She is probably one of the only people that received a standing ovation when they got to Heaven."

So, what struck you most about Dolly? This is the question I've been asking myself, my daughter, and my friends — both musicians and non-musicians alike. For me, of course, it was a number of things. Firstly, the obvious: her voice was one of a kind, her stage presence was unparalleled. Similar to her contemporaries in comedy like Carol Burnett (who Parton filmed a television special with in the late 1970s), Dolly was quick-witted and spontaneous, traits that truly make a star.

When Dolly got the chance to join "The Porter Wagoner Show" in 1967, she had to win the nod from Wagoner over country heavyweights Dottie West, Connie Smith, and Tammy Wynette, but she did. Though Porter and Dolly's relationship famously had its ups and downs, "The Porter Wagoner Show" was known to provide a major trajectory for country artists, and for the next seven years, Dolly would build the launching pad for her own solo career.

While on "The Wagoner show," Dolly wrote her iconic song "Jolene." The song's catalyst was a story Parton herself shared often: Early in her marriage to Carl Dean, Parton noticed a striking red-haired bank clerk who paid Carl particular attention whenever he visited the local branch. Dolly humorously teased Carl about how much time he was spending at the bank. While it was mostly a running joke between them rather than a serious rift, it sparked a seed of jealousy within Dolly that inspired the song's now legendary lyrics.

It was when Dolly was planning to leave the show that she wrote her massive hit "I Will Always Love

You" to help ease the tension that had developed between her and Wagoner. The heartfelt ballad about knowing when to say goodbye went to Number 1 on the charts, then had an entire second life when Kevin Costner suggested it be used for the movie "The Bodyguard" (1992) starring himself and Whitney Houston. Houston's arrangement, produced by industry titan David Foster, became an epic, soaring ballad that also reached number one. Though it is completely different from Dolly's original recording, it still highlights her storytelling and songwriting prowess.

At this point in her career, Dolly's business skills were kicking into overdrive. As a business person myself, I often admire her humble beginnings, and her truly one of a kind rags to riches story. Being one of twelve children in small quarters, you can see where Dolly got her unrelenting drive and passion to succeed. In many interviews, she credited her father for instilling a strong work ethic in her, and her mother for sharing a love of music at a young age. Parton's mother was also a singer who taught her both church music and traditional folk songs.

Dolly's career flourished for decades with more music, films, the opening of her theme park Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and possibly her greatest achievement — Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which launched in 1995.

In the 30+ years since Dolly founded The Imagination Library, the organization has gifted upwards of 330,000,000 books entirely free of charge to children up to age 5. Parton's mission was to "foster a love of reading among her county's preschool children and their families," but it soon outgrew Sevier County, Tennessee and became a global phenomenon, as all her endeavors tended to do.

Dolly herself was quoted as saying that she always knew her dreams would come true. Perhaps with her passing, we can remind ourselves to believe in our own dreams, and lift one another up as Dolly uplifted others her whole life.

Fretted

PRS Guitars Dany Villarreal Astrix Limited Edition

PRS Guitars has introduced the Astrix Limited Edition, the first signature model for Dany Villarreal, guitarist and lead vocalist of The Warning. Built on the Custom 24 platform, the 200-piece limited run pairs a figured maple 10-Top and mahogany back with a 24-fret, 25-inch-scale Pattern Thin mahogany neck and ebony fingerboard. A pair of PRS DMO humbuckers is controlled by volume and tone knobs and a five-way blade switch, while a Gen III tremolo and Phase III locking tuners round out the hardware package. Visual details include Villarreal's Solecito ("little sun") fretboard inlay, signature truss-rod cover and the Ocaso finish, a purple-to-yellow sunset fade. Each guitar includes an autographed backplate and PRS ATA molded case.



Taylor Guitars Next Generation 512ce and 712ce

Taylor Guitars has updated two of its Grand Concert mainstays with the Next Generation 512ce and 712ce. Both models incorporate three elements of Taylor's latest acoustic platform: scalloped V-Class bracing, the Action Control Neck and the Claria acoustic pickup system. The compact Grand Concert format is intended to combine comfortable dimensions with a responsive, articulate voice, while the new platform is designed to increase warmth, resonance and sustain and simplify action adjustment. The Claria system pairs an undersaddle piezo pickup with a proprietary preamp and soundhole-mounted Volume, Mid-Contour and Tone controls. The 512ce and 712ce give dealers two premium acoustic-electric options built around familiar Taylor designs while adding the company's newest playability and amplified-performance features.

Drums & Percussion

NUVO Zip-Kit Packable Acoustic Drum Set

KHS America and NUVO have brought the Zip-Kit to the U.S. market, offering an acoustic drum set designed around portability and compact storage. The kit collapses into a backpack-sized package, giving students, educators, street performers and space-conscious players an alternative to a conventional full-size setup. Despite the travel-oriented design, the Zip-Kit is an acoustic instrument rather than an electronic practice kit. Its modular construction is intended to make setup, breakdown and transport straightforward, while keeping the basic playing experience familiar to drummers. For retailers, the concept creates an unusual entry point into the drum category: a kit aimed not only at beginners, but also at customers whose available space or transportation needs may have kept them from considering an acoustic set.

Pro Audio

Audix DP7X Drum Microphone Package

Audix has introduced the DP7X, a professional drum microphone package for stage and studio applications. The new collection builds on the company's established DP-series drum-miking systems and packages purpose-selected microphones for capturing a complete kit. Designed as an all-in-one solution for drummers, engineers, venues and production companies, the DP7X gives users a coordinated microphone set rather than requiring individual mic selection for kick, snare, toms and overhead duties. The package also fits neatly into the growing crossover between percussion and pro audio at retail, where recording, content creation and live-sound applications increasingly influence drum-related purchases. Audix positions the DP7X as a ready-to-deploy system for professional drum capture in both live and recording environments.



Focusrite ISA C8X Audio Interface

Focusrite has expanded its ISA line with the ISA C8X, the company's first ISA-branded audio interface. The 2U rackmount unit combines eight remotely controlled preamps with USB-C connectivity and is positioned as a studio centerpiece for professional recording applications. The interface provides a broad I/O complement, including digital connectivity and monitoring functions, while Focusrite Control 2 software enables remote adjustment and recall. The front-panel design gives engineers direct access to preamp and monitoring controls, with the ISA heritage serving as the product's central point of differentiation. For dealers, the C8X brings the long-running ISA name into the modern audio-interface category, targeting customers who want traditional Focusrite preamp character integrated with contemporary computer-based recording and control.



Reason Studios Reason Free

Reason Studios has launched Reason Free, a permanent no-cost version of its virtual Rack designed to run inside third-party DAWs. Available as a VST3, AU or AAX plug-in, Reason Free gives users an entry point into the company's rack-based production environment without requiring a paid Reason license or subscription. MMR reports that the free release includes 15 devices, giving producers a selection of instruments and effects while also serving as an introduction to the wider Reason ecosystem. The move puts a recognizable music-production platform in front of a larger pool of potential users and gives retailers, educators and content creators a zero-cost software option to recommend to customers beginning to explore computer-based recording and production.



Keyboards

Pittsburgh Modular Lifeforms SV-2

Pittsburgh Modular has released the Lifeforms SV-2, a complete analog synthesizer keyboard designed for both stage and studio. The instrument combines a fixed internal signal path with extensive patching capability, allowing it to function as a self-contained synth or as a more open-ended modular environment. Features include two oscillators, dual state-variable filters, a 37-key keyboard with pitch and modulation wheels, an 84-point patch bay and a 24hp Eurorack expansion bay. The SV-2 also provides spring reverb with EQ, two analog ADSR envelope generators, an arpeggiator with randomized functions and multiple saturation and overdrive stages. It supports monophonic, paraphonic and duophonic performance. MMR reported a U.S. price of \$1,499.99.



Print & Digital

Hal Leonard Beginning Guitar and Beyond

Hal Leonard has released Beginning Guitar and Beyond, adding a new instructional title to its guitar-education catalog. The method is designed to take developing players beyond the first stages of learning the instrument, extending the value of a beginner-focused purchase with material intended to support continued progress. For MI retailers, method books remain an important companion sale with starter instruments, lesson programs and back-to-school traffic, and a title that bridges introductory instruction and the next stage of development can help keep new players engaged after the initial purchase. The release also underscores the continued role of print and digital educational content in the broader guitar ecosystem, where structured instruction can complement lessons, online video and self-directed learning.

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