

# MMR

## MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW



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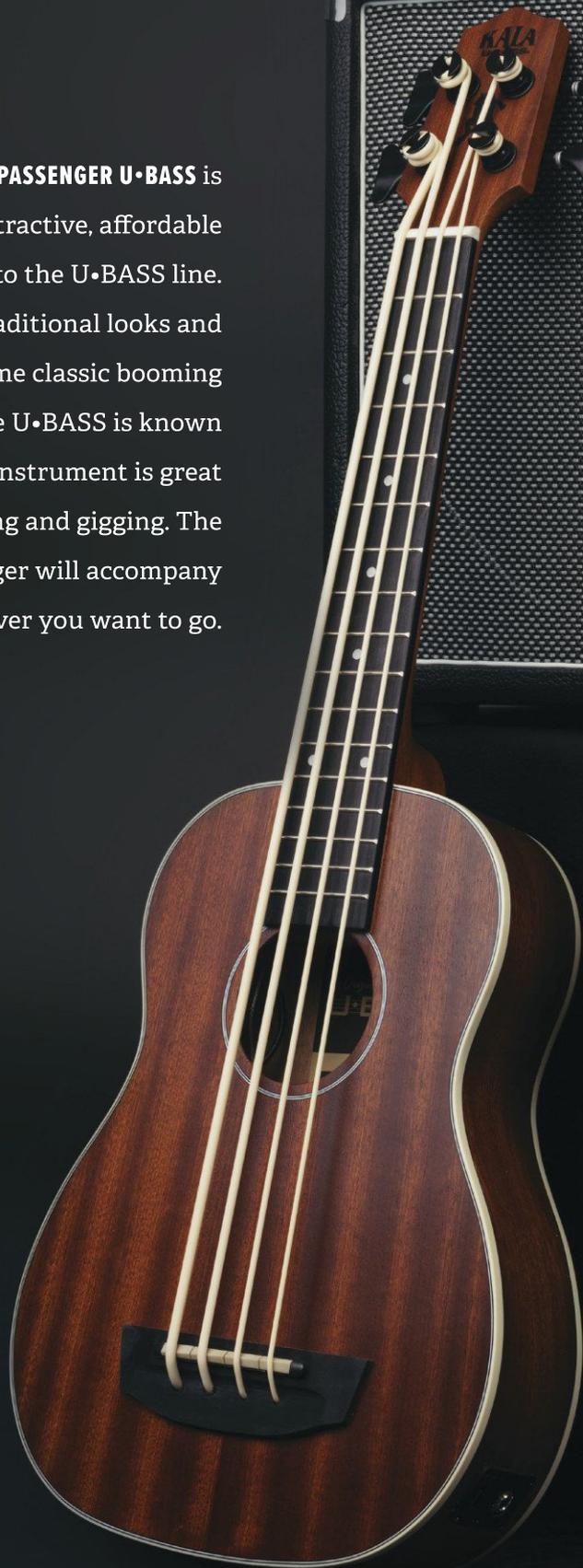
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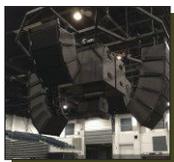
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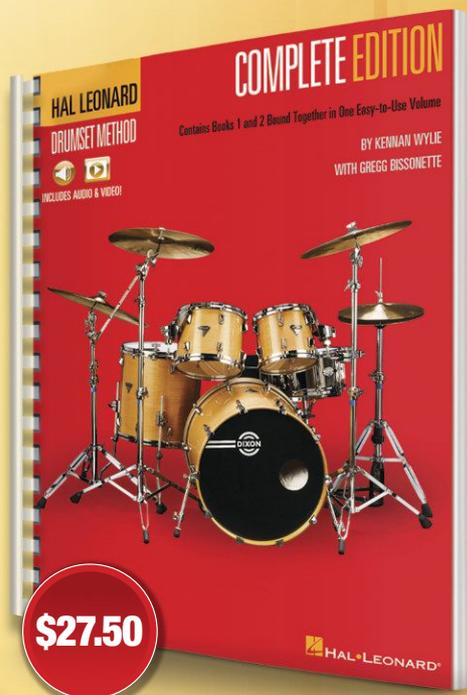
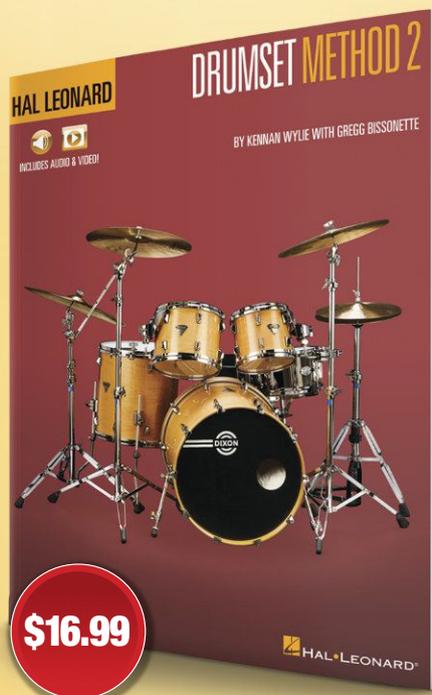
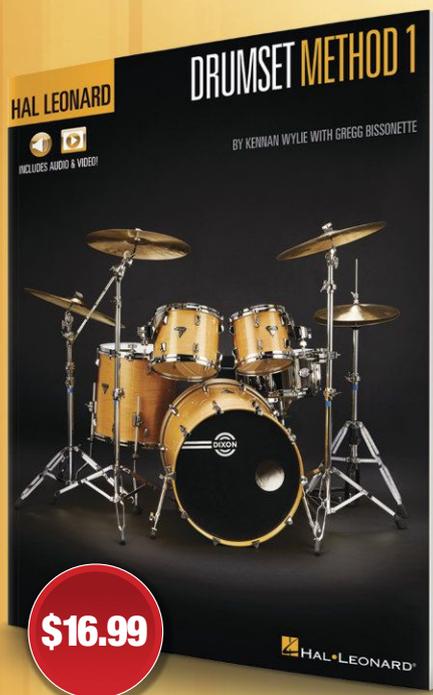


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# Sustainability Getting the Green Light



by Christian Wissmuller

In mid-March, NPR reported that the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has stricken “climate change” and related terminology from its strategic plan – this after one of the (perhaps *the*) most costly years of natural disasters in our nation’s history. Previous reports in the past year indicate that officials at other national agencies such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are being discouraged from describing ecological and environmental developments as byproducts of that same term or, worse (and inaccurate, for what it’s worth), “global warming.”

It would be incredibly convenient if we could, by erasing certain verbiage, also delete the very real threats presented by climate change (uh oh – there’s that phrase again. I guess my chances of landing a government job are out the window). Unfortunately, it’s just not that simple.

With certain Obama-era (and Bush, and Clinton-era) environmental policies being pushed back or outright repealed, it’s increasingly up to businesses to lead the way, navigating a path to a future that is both profitable and livable.

MI also faces challenges related to the, in many cases, dwindling supply of natural resources. What do we do when the materials used for decades and even centuries to craft musical instruments are simply no longer available, or in such limited numbers that import and use is illegal or heavily sanctioned?

Happily ours is an industry that – in this instance, at least – is remarkably resourceful and responsible.

This annual “Green Issue” puts the spot-

light on some major guitar suppliers who are developing and embracing ways in which they can enact sustainable practices and reduce their own carbon footprints. From alternative tonewoods to environmentally sensitive methods of delivery, production, and management, these companies are setting a standard for creativity and responsibility that hopefully will serve as an example for others to follow.

While hardly the only players in the world of MI to take these sorts of steps, head over to page 26 to read about what Bedell Guitars, Yamaha, Flaxwood, Martin, and Taylor are doing in this important area (and what ISP Technologies is up to on page 46).

As previous “Green Issue” articles have outlined, such efforts can be (and are, by many) enacted on the retail level as well. Whether it’s something as small as swapping out your old incandescent bulbs for LED units or as large as building a LEED-certified storefront, every little bit does, in fact, help. And the additionally good news is that these days taking steps to reduce your own contributions to global pollution and resource depletion is not merely good PR; it often represents an overall cost-saving measure.

Good for your image, good for the environment, and good for your bottom-line – who can argue with that?

Christian Wissmuller  
cwissmuller@timelesscom.com



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- PRESIDENT**  
Terry Lowe .....tlowe@timelesscom.com
- GROUP PUBLISHER**  
Greg Gallardo .....gregg@timelesscom.com
- EXECUTIVE EDITOR**  
Christian Wissmuller ..... cwissmuller@timelesscom.com
- ASSOCIATE EDITOR**  
Victoria Wasylak ..... victoria@timelesscom.com
- ASSOCIATE EDITOR**  
Mike Lawson .....mlawson@timelesscom.com
- AUDIO / MI ADVISOR**  
George Petersen ..... george@timelesscom.com
- LIGHTING / STAGING ADVISOR**  
Nook Schoenfeld .....nook@timelesscom.com
- CONTRIBUTING EDITOR**  
Dan Daley ..... ddaley@timelesscom.com
- WEB DESIGNER**  
Mike Hoff .....mike@mikehoff.com
- ADVERTISING / MARKETING DIRECTORS**  
Mike Devine ..... md@timelesscom.com  
Matt Huber ..... mh@timelesscom.com  
Dave Jeans ..... djeans@timelesscom.com  
Matt King ..... mking@timelesscom.com
- GREATER CHINA**  
Judy Wang, Worldwide Focus Media  
C: 0086-13810325171 E: judy@timelesscom.com
- ART DIRECTOR**  
Garret Petrov ..... gpetrov@timelesscom.com
- PRODUCTION MANAGER**  
Mike Street ..... mstreet@timelesscom.com
- GRAPHIC DESIGNER**  
Angela Marlett ..... amarlett@timelesscom.com
- VICE PRESIDENT**  
William Hamilton Vanyo ..... wvanyo@timelesscom.com
- OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR / CIRCULATION**  
Naomi Crews ..... ncrews@timelesscom.com

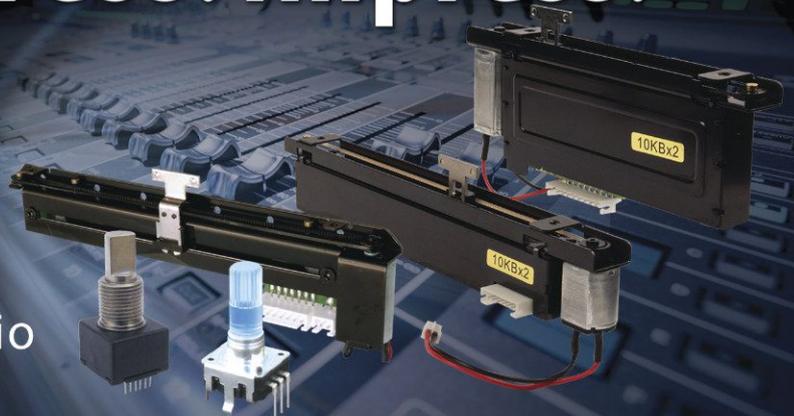
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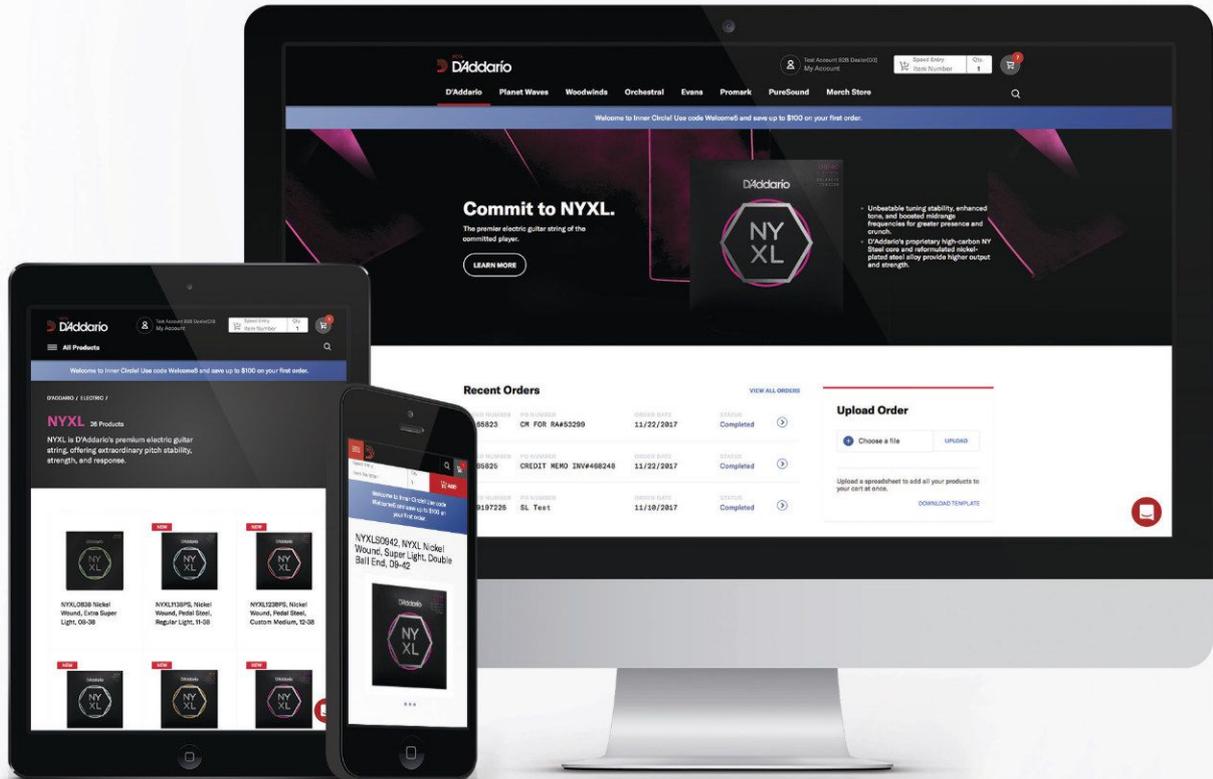
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# Industry News

## GHS Strings Becomes U.S. Distributor for Bassics

GHS Strings has become the U.S. distributor for the Bassics range of bass amplification products.

Bassics is the latest range of products to be released by British pro-audio designer Malcom Toft. He has applied his unique experience in the recording industry and developed a range of pre-amps, amps and pedals specifically for bass guitarists.

"Bassics are pleased GHS has become the U.S distributor for its range of bass amplification products," says Toft. "GHS is a great fit for us, they are in the same market and it comes at the right time because we have significantly increased our product range with four new pedals and two high power compact amplifiers. The



new products were extremely well received at their 2018 NAMM launch and with GHS onboard, this year looks set to be a period of real growth for us."

The agreement to distribute the Bassics range of bass amplification products is a complement to GHS Strings' commitment to great sounding products for guitarists, under the Rocktron moniker. Jonathan Moody, manager of product development at GHS Strings, states, "As a working bassist, having a high-quality preamp that is easy to use and understand is vital. I'm extremely excited to be able to help more bassists like myself find products that will fit their gigging and recording needs."

- Industry News
- Supplier Scene
- MMR Global
- People on the Move
- Trade Regrets
- Letters

## Sumner to Succeed Hitoshi Fukutome as YCA President

Tom Sumner has been named president of Yamaha Corporation of America (YCA) effective April 1, 2018.

This is the first time that the world's largest musical instrument manufacturer, Hamamatsu-based Yamaha Corporation (YJ) has named an American executive to the top position in the United States. YCA was founded in 1960.

Sumner succeeds Hitoshi Fukutome, who will return to Yamaha Corporation Headquarters in Hamamatsu, Japan as senior general manager of Asia-Pacific Sales.

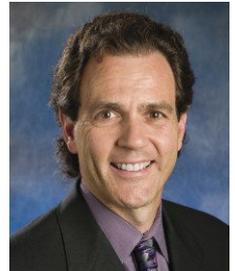
Fukutome has served as president of YCA since March 2013. Under his leadership, YCA has enjoyed significant growth in sales, operating income, and brand awareness.

"It has been my deep privilege and honor to lead YCA for the past five years, and I am extremely grateful to our exceptional team for their support and dedication," said Fukutome. "I am particularly proud of our company's business performance during

my tenure, and I know that Tom will bring continued success to YCA."

In his new role, Sumner will lead Yamaha operations in the United States and oversee the Americas. He is a 30-year veteran of YCA and has most recently served as senior vice president of the company since June 2008. For nearly 10 years, he has led or co-led sales and marketing including the in-house creative agency- the Customer Experience Group - Corporate Marketing, Artist Relations, and End-User Support. The Keyboard division, AV division, Professional Audio division, and Car Parts division also reported to him.

Sumner has led the way to make Yama-



Tom Sumner

*continued on page 13*

## Music & Arts Adds Eight New Locations for Strong Q1

Music & Arts has had a strong start to 2018 with the opening of several new locations and the acquisition of five music stores in Q1.

These new stores bring the retailer's service-driven model into 164 communities across the U.S. and provide additional opportunities for aspiring musicians of all ages to explore and develop their musical skills.

In January and February, new stores debuted in Ft. Collins, Colorado, and Scottsdale, Arizona. These were complemented by the acquisition of three existing affiliates: Clark Baker Music in El Centro, California; Great Southern Music in Gainesville, Florida; and Ponier Music in West Cobb, Georgia, along with the acquisition of independent dealer Motter's Music in both Lyndhurst and Canfield, Ohio. The Motter's Music acquisition marks Music & Arts' official entrance into

the greater Cleveland area, with more locations planned in the future. In addition, Music & Arts recently re-located their Waldorf, Maryland store, which was formerly Hot Licks Music.

In addition to opening new stores, Music & Arts also works with their independent affiliates in certain communities to bring them on board as official Music & Arts locations in order to continue providing high-quality music education to those towns and their school districts. "It's been shown that kids who develop a firm foundation in the arts do better in other areas of life, and so we're proud to be bringing music education to communities across the U.S. In doing so, we also hope to bring up our industry's next generation of musicians," notes Music & Arts president Steve Zapf.





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## LETTERS

Christian,

Over 110 years ago, my grandfather, Manuel Rodríguez I, driven by his vocation and perfectionistic ambition, started the hand-crafted manufacturing of the most beautiful Spanish guitars which my father, Manuel Rodríguez (II) then continued, both during his long-term residency in the U.S and also in Spain. Bearing witness to this, we as children inherited his love for the guitar-making profession as well as being let into the secrets that would enable us to continue manufacturing guitars of the utmost quality.

### Looking for passionate investors that care.

No one is able to take over this tradition which spans three generations of the Rodríguez family, nor are they able to deprive us of our pride about the fact that our instruments have been used and played by artists of incredibly high caliber: Andrés Segovia, Narciso Yepes, and Carlos Santana, to name a few. Neither are they able to deny us the honor and pride that it was, and has been, to be able to present guitars to none other than the Queen of Spain herself, former President Jimmy Carter, and 44 other Heads of State from other parts of the world – encounters of which you are all well aware due to the photos that I have been sending over the past 15 years.

### The challenge to go on with a family tradition

Three years ago, the desire to enlarge our family business led me to enter into the Capital Group 'SOSTENIBLE' under the premise that I would always be the one to continue focusing on the design and, above all, the quality control of the guitar manufacturing so that the guitars would always carry the unmistakable stamp of the Manuel Rodríguez dynasty.

This collaboration, however, has not worked as well as we had all hoped, and as time has gone on, there have been rather serious discrepancies between us. It has reached the point where the "GUITARRAS MANUEL RODRIGUEZ & SOIS, S.A. Society" will disappear as such, being consumed by the "GRUPO SOSTENIBLE, S. A society that has bound together courses of action of a most diverse nature by means of a business policy with which I cannot agree. The build-up of such courses of action has resulted in my complete disconnection from the company, although it is able to continue using the "GUITARRAS MANUEL RODRIGUEZ" brand (against my wishes), for a certain period of time until I am able to recover it as its owner and licensee. It makes no sense that they would continue to use my name (and the name of my father and grandfather) if I am not longer present in the company – a matter which I hope to resolve as soon as possible.

### Admitting the defeat and taking actions

I want to thank all distributors, clients, and providers – and, definitively, friends have kept in touch over the years – for the warm reception you have always given me as well as the trust that has always been granted. I want to assure you that it is my intention, wherever possible, to restart the family tradition and to begin manufacturing the genuine "MANUEL RODRIGUEZ" guitars once more; the main reason being due to the fact that, based on everything my father learnt from my grandfather, it could even be said that the knowledge of the matter at hand is something inherently genetic belonging to our deepest roots and no-one will ever be able to take that over under the guise of mere denomination.

- Luthier Manuel Rodríguez III

## Blizzard Lighting Handling Stateside Distribution of LightShark

Blizzard Lighting has announced that it recently became the U.S. distributor for LightShark.

The LightShark LS-1 Console unites the deep feature set of software lighting control with an elegant, user-friendly hardware control surface, while LS-Core keeps it simple for those seeking a software-only setup. Both products offer 2 physical DMX outputs plus ArtNet/sACN for eight total universes of control. Blizzard Lighting stopped at nothing to become the exclusive U.S. distributor of this powerful and innovative line of lighting consoles.

"Ever since we saw these sexy beasts, we've done pretty much everything to secure the line except camp out at the Equipson / WorkPro facility in Spain," says Will Komassa, CEO of Blizzard Lighting. "And we considered that too... We love tapas. Who doesn't?"

"The LS-1 is one of those rare tools that makes you want to go further and work harder, and we're thrilled to 'boldly go... where no one has gone—' well, you get it," says Komassa. "And



let's face it, this is a shot across the bow of our competitors. Eh? See what we did there?"

Blizzard thrives on offering innovative lighting technologies and unprecedented levels of sophomoric antics for the entertainment, theater, house of worship and architectural markets. By deploying LightShark consoles stateside, Blizzard gives existing and prospective customers exclusive access to a control product every bit as gorgeous and fun-to-be-around as they are.

"Blizzard Lighting's enthusiasm for LightShark was surpassed only by their ability to consume copious amounts of paella. We're looking forward to their help building the U.S. market for LightShark," says chief sales officer Juan Jose Vila. "LightShark's versatility, software, ergonomics, built-in interfacing, and physical usability are undeniable. And no, we're not discussing the rumors about their technological origin."

The LS-1 will retail for \$1,499.99 and the LS-Core will retail for \$649.99 in the United States.

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**TEC Awards Announces Call for Entries**

Fresh off a multitude of pro audio product debuts and new innovations at the 2018 NAMM Show, the NAMM TEC Awards council has announced a call for entries to be honored at The 2019 NAMM Show.

As of now, companies are encouraged to enter their products and/or projects in one of 23 Technical Achievement and eight Creative Achievement categories at [www.tecawards.org/call-for-entries](http://www.tecawards.org/call-for-entries). A full list of categories for submissions is available at [www.tecawards.org](http://www.tecawards.org). Products that were submitted, but not nominated for last year's TEC Awards, introduced in July or August 2017, are eligible for re-entry. The call for entries period will close at 11:59 p.m. PT May 28, 2018.

In June 2018, the nominating panel, a group of industry experts from all facets of the pro audio and sound production industries, will review the products and projects submitted in each category to create the final slate of nominees. Final nominees are those products and projects that, in the opinion of the nominating panel, represent superior accomplishment in their respective fields.

The nominees for all TEC Award categories will be announced at a special event at the 2018 Summer NAMM Show, being held in Nashville, Tennessee (June 28-30). Regis-

tration for the show is now open at [www.namm.org/summer/2018/attend](http://www.namm.org/summer/2018/attend).

Presented annually during The NAMM Show by the NAMM Foundation, the TEC Awards recognize the individuals, companies and technical innovations behind the sound of recordings, live performances, films, television, video games and multi-media. At the ceremony, the Les Paul Innovation Award, honoring musical artists whose work has exemplified the creative application of audio technology, and the Hall of Fame Award, recognizing audio masters and engineers, are both awarded. Earlier in the day, a presentation of historic inventions of the past are inducted into NAMM's TEC-Technology Hall of Fame.

The voting period will commence on November 14 and continue through December 31, 2018. Additional information on the voting period and eligibility will be announced in November.

The TEC Awards will return to The 2019 NAMM Show on January 26, 2019 at the Hilton Anaheim Pacific ballroom. Nominees and their colleagues and friends are invited to attend a networking happy hour, dinner, great entertainment, and the chance to be a TEC Awards winner. Ticket sales for the annual event will open in September.



**Vandoren Partners with STL Community Arts**

Vandoren has partnered with St. Louis' Art Educator of the Year, Harvey Lockhart, band director at Riverview Gardens School District and the founder of St. Louis' HEAL Center for the Arts.

The HEAL Center for the Arts program is designed to bring array of quality arts programming to students from underserved low-income communities in St. Louis.

"I am humbled and honored that Vandoren sees the value in the programs that I am developing in St. Louis urban low-income communities," commented Lockhart. "HEAL Center for the Arts is committed to developing young intellectual artists whom we believe will positively influence the way in which our society thinks and feels by creating and presenting meaningful art. Our students are taught with love, fervor, and dedication.

They are learning what it means to be disciplined, structured, and most importantly, they are being taught to rise above the nefarious and complicit behaviors that continue to plague their communities."

"We have so much respect for what Harvey has done not only with HEAL Center for the Arts, but also at Riverview Gardens Schools," says Vandoren brand manager, Michael Fenoglio. "Taking a program from 10 students to one of the most highly-respected programs in his area is truly something to admire. These students are very lucky to have Harvey on their side and we are thrilled to be a supporting partner of change via the arts in St. Louis."



**Harvey Lockhart**

## Yamaha Announces Formation of U.S.-Based Yamaha Guitar Group

Yamaha has announced the formation of a new U.S.-based wholly owned subsidiary, Yamaha Guitar Group, Inc., which will bring together the intercompany teams that have been focused on serving the needs of guitarists worldwide.

Building on a long history as a leading guitar company, Yamaha demonstrated their commitment to the future of the global guitar market when they acquired Line 6 in 2014. As a leader in tech-forward segments of the guitar industry, Line 6 brought with it a family of digital electric guitars, amps, and effects to complement the extensive line-up of acoustic and electric guitars, basses, and amps that Yamaha has offered customers for over half a century.

Since the acquisition, the growing collaboration between the two complementary brands led to the formation of a dedicated Guitar Division headquartered in Japan at Yamaha Corporation in April 2017, with Line 6, Inc. being included within this division. Shoji Mita, based in Japan, and Marcus Ryle, based in the U.S., were named co-general managers of this new division. Throughout 2017, this new formation led to expanded collaboration in strategy, development, sales, marketing, and artist relations, including the relocation of Yamaha Artist Services, Los Angeles to the same California campus as Line 6.

With the formation of Yamaha Guitar Group, Inc. (YGG), effective April 1, 2018,



Yamaha Guitar Group co-presidents Marcus Ryle and Shoji Mita

the natural evolution of these collaborative efforts becomes formalized within one multi-brand organization, with a dedicated team committed to producing and marketing the very best products and services for guitarists under both the Yamaha and Line 6 brands. The YGG U.S. headquarters will also serve as the strategic base for Yamaha guitar business worldwide. In addition to their current roles as Guitar Division GMs, Marcus Ryle and Shoji Mita will serve as co-presidents of YGG, and Mr. Mita will relocate to the U.S. YGG and the Japan-based Guitar Division team members will work together as one under common leadership.

Yamaha Guitar Group, Inc. will be headquartered at the Calabasas, California, campus where Line 6 and Yamaha Artist Services, Los Angeles have been located. Although an independent U.S. entity, YGG will be working closely with Yamaha Corporation of America, and all other Yamaha sales subsidiaries around the world, to continue providing retail partners and end users with the excellence that Yamaha has been known for worldwide.

## Sumner/Yamaha *continued from page 8*

has a customer-centric company, brought a marketing discipline to the company, and worked to streamline operations and eliminate internal conflicts and redundancies.

"I am so humbled by the opportunity to lead the talented YCA team here in the United States," said Sumner. "Hitoshi has set a high standard of excellence, and I look forward to building upon his success and strengthening our team and our brand, our dealer base and our focus on, and dedication to, our customers."

Sumner started his career as a consumer electronics buyer for Macy's California, and joined Yamaha in 1988 as national account manager for the Consumer Products division (CPD). He was named national sales manager for multimedia products in

1995 and promoted to general manager of the CPD division in 2000.

Sumner was promoted to general manager of the company's Pro Audio & Combo division in 2002 and to vice president/general manager in 2004. He served as president of Yamaha Electronics Corporation (YEC) from 2007 to 2012, and was named senior vice president of the then newly formed Customer Sales and Marketing Group in 2008.

The National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) named Sumner to its board of directors in July 2017, where he serves on the executive committee as secretary. He is also a member of the audio board of the Consumer Technology Association.

## Game Changing Repairs. **DONE!**



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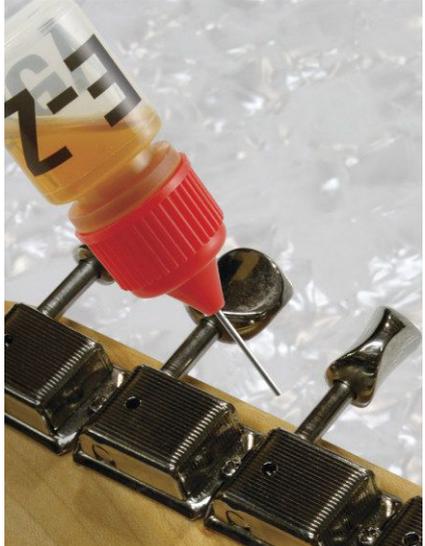
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# Supplier Scene

## Orange Amplification To Raise Funds For The Strawberry Field Campaign

Orange Amplification is helping to raise funds for the Salvation Army's Strawberry Field campaign.

Cliff Cooper, CEO and founder of Orange Amplification, has been appointed an honorary patron of the campaign to help raise funds for this project. He will be working alongside Lady Martin OBE, also an honorary patron and widow of the legendary Beatles producer, the late Sir George Martin.

Those who donate £6 or more will be sent a "limited edition" picture postcard of the Strawberry Field gates with a signed printed signature of Lady Martin and Cliff Cooper as a special "thank you" for the donation. Everyone who donates on the website below will also be entered into a free prize draw to win one of two 50th anniversary *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* CDs signed by the producer who digitally remastered the album, Giles Martin. Orange Amplification has also announced the Strawberry Field campaign will be its nominated charity for 2018, its 50th anniversary.



Cliff Cooper, Lady Judy Martin OBE, Major Drew McCombe

## D'Addario Orchestral Adds The Verona Quartet And Sirena Huang To Artist Family

D'Addario Orchestral has welcomed the Verona Quartet and Sirena Huang to their artist family.

The Verona Quartet quickly earned a stellar reputation as one of the most compelling young quartets in chamber music today. The group has garnered worldwide recognition with top awards at international competitions spanning four continents, and has been selected by New York's Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts for its prestigious Ernst Stiefel String Quartet Residency, encompassing performances, educational residencies as well as a concert at the 2018 Caramoor Summer Festival.

The Verona Quartet's members hail from the USA, UK, Canada and Singapore. The Quartet has collaborated with artists such as Cho-Liang Lin, David Shifrin, Renee Fleming, and has worked with members of the Alban Berg, American, Brentano, Cavani, Cleveland, Guarneri, Juilliard, Tokyo and Vermeer Quartets.

Sirena Huang is one of her generation's most celebrated violinists – not only does she bring technical brilliance and powerful artistry to the stage, but also a profound sense



The Verona Quartet

views. Motivated by a deep wish to inspire peace and harmony with her music, Sirena has performed before world leaders, thinkers and humanitarians, including President Obama and Elie Wiesel. In 2006, she received the honor of playing for His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and thirty Nobel Prize Laureates at the World Peace Conference held in Petra. In 2007, under the invitation of former Czech Republic President Havel, she played in the Opening Ceremony of the "Forum 2000 World Conference" in Prague.

In 2008, she was invited to perform during the ceremony in which the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity presented its Humanitarian Award to President Sarkozy of France. In 2017, Huang was named the first-prize winner of the inaugural Elmar Oliveira International Violin Competition as well as a New York Concert Artist.



Sirena Huang

of connection to her audience. Huang made her first solo debut at the age of nine with the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra (2004). At age eleven, she gave a TED talk that garnered more than 2.5 million

"D'Addario strings are impressively fast when it comes to tuning stability," Huang says. "The responsiveness and warmth in the sound make these strings unlike any other!"

# JodyJazz Acquires Chedeville Company

JodyJazz Inc has announced their acquisition of the Chedeville Company, the world-renowned brand of clarinet and saxophone mouthpieces.

“For the past two years we have been developing a new range of Clarinet and Saxophone mouthpieces specifically for the classical and concert band world,” says Jody Espina, president of JodyJazz Inc. “Having studied clarinet extensively at the University of South Florida, I was well aware of the Chedeville name and its peerless reputation in clarinet mouthpieces, and in particular the distinctive tonal properties of the legendary ‘Chedeville Rubber.’ When I became aware that they had replicated the original Chedeville Rubber formula and that the company might become available, I jumped at the opportunity. Not only does this acquisition provide us with a famous brand around which to build our classical and concert band offerings, it also provides access to the propriety rubber formula that made the Chedeville mouthpieces so popular in the first place.”

“Chedeville has been a dream vocation for me as it has allowed me to combine my professional skills as a chemist with my passion for playing the clarinet. I have dedicated many years of my life and used every ounce of my training, expertise and experience to make the sound of the legendary mouthpieces from the 20s and 30s available once again to today’s players,” said Dr. L. Omar Henderson Ph.D, the current owner of Chedeville. “Without an heir interested in taking over the business, it was time for me to plan for the next step in the revival of Chedeville. It was most important to me to ensure it would be in the hands of someone who both shared my respect for the legacy of the brand and my passion for authenticity in mouthpiece making. I was of course already well aware of the stellar reputation for quality and consistency of JodyJazz mouthpieces but it was only after I spent some with Jody Espina personally that I knew that Chedeville had found its new home. Witnessing Jody’s personal dedication and passion for mouthpiece making first hand, I knew that the Chedeville name would not only be safe but would thrive under his



Jody Espina, president of JodyJazz, Inc., and Omar Henderson of Chedeville

leadership. This is a new and exciting chapter in the Chedeville story and I know that Jody will only take it to even greater heights.”

All Chedeville mouthpiece production will transfer to the JodyJazz factory in Savannah, Georgia. The company plans to combine the many classical mouthpiece designs currently in development with the very best of the Chedeville mouthpiece designs, us-

ing the proprietary Chedeville rubber as appropriate. All its classical clarinet and saxophone mouthpieces will be consolidated under the Chedeville brand and the company will be hiring a dedicated product manager. Work is already underway developing a full line, which will also include clarinet barrels, to be launched at NAMM 2019 and the new Chedeville.com website is currently under construction.

“In order to make the finest quality woodwind mouthpieces for the classical world, deserving of the Chedeville name, we will seek out some of the greatest talent in the world as advisors and testers of the products,” said Espina. “The guiding principle for the Chedeville brand will be to take advantage of everything we have learned at JodyJazz about design, quality, consistency, and state of the art technology over the past 18 years while honoring the traditions of the past.”



# Yamaha Cares Raises \$142,000 for CHOC Children's

For the 10th consecutive year, Yamaha Cares participated in the Southern California Half Marathon and 5K races to raise money for Type 1 juvenile diabetes research at CHOC Children's (CHOC).

With the help of Yamaha Cares, the event raised \$32,000, bringing the grand total of overall donations to more than \$142,000.

"This fundraising effort was our most successful ever," said David Jewell, marketing communications manager, Yamaha Corporation of America. "It is wonderful to have so much participation from our community, supporting such a worthy cause."

Jewell is personally invested in the cause as his daughter Katrina was diagnosed with Type 1 juvenile diabetes when she was just 13. He wanted to do something grassroots to raise money for research, so he asked his running pals and some industry people to join

him in the race.

A concurrent CrowdRise campaign, KatrinaKures, was conducted to encourage online donations, while more than 100 people attended a post-race celebration. Local merchants The Corner Bakery in Anaheim Hills and Tempo Urban Kitchen in Brea

donated the food for the event. Mannheim Car Auction in Anaheim was a new sponsor this year and raised more than \$8,000. For the silent auction, Inspire



Yamaha presents their donation to CHOC Children's

Fitness donated a home gym and three high-end swing sets for adults that raised \$5,500. All the money raised for CHOC goes directly to research.

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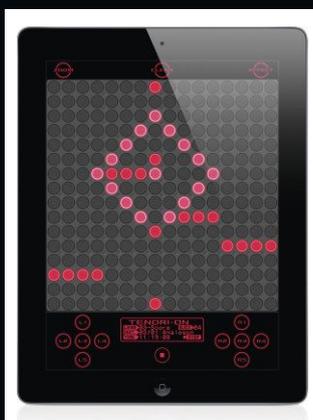
## Yamaha Partners With Allihoopa

Yamaha has partnered with social network Allihoopa, empowering users of the Yamaha TNR mobile music-making apps to share their work and collaborate online.

The two iOS apps make up the mobile version of the Yamaha TENORI-ON, the electronic musical instrument. These apps allow intuitive music creation via a simple, user-friendly interface, without the need for specialized training.

The Allihoopa partnership allows musicians to collaborate with the world using a mobile device. TNR-iOS users create music using the original TNR-i and its electronic-music counterpart, TNR-e. Once they have a finished piece, they can "Drop" it and share directly with the Allihoopa community. From there, others can "Pick Up" the track, add recording elements of their choosing and "Drop" it back to Allihoopa for further collaboration.

"TNR-i and TNR-e users now have a new way to share and collaborate with others," says Nate Tschetter, marketing manager, Music Production, Yamaha Corporation of America. "Yamaha and Allihoopa encourage creativity by helping music-makers around the world share ideas and inspire each other."



## Sweetwater Sound Develops Degree Program with University of Saint Francis

In 2007, Sweetwater Sound began a partnership with Fort Wayne, Indiana's University of Saint Francis — providing funds for scholarships, gear purchase and installation, and other music-related projects — to help create a four-year degree program in Music Technology.

Today, that program has blossomed into a major feature of the university's School of Creative Arts Music Technology program, and has a new home in the \$5-million renovated USF Music Technology Center in the heart of downtown Fort Wayne. The program has been extremely popular for many years with 50 bachelor-level students enrolled this year, who were recruited locally, regionally, and nationally. The program's six faculty members teach three areas of concentration: Recording Engineering and Production; Audio for the Creative Arts; and Music Technology Sales. The gear to outfit the various aspects of the program was purchased by special arrangement from Sweetwater. Also, Sweetwater sales engineers were involved as consultants on everything from gear to acoustics from the very beginning of the program.

For years, Sweetwater has been providing internships for students and hiring the program's graduates as sales engineers and to work in Sweetwater Studios. Sweetwater founder and president Chuck Surack and his wife Lisa, have donated \$420,000 in scholarships, plus \$250,000 toward renovation of the downtown campus and concert venue, in addition to \$100,000 to fund the creation of the university's first marching band.

"Helping the University of Saint Francis to build a great program in a first-rate facility has been a dream of mine for decades," said Chuck Surack. "Students are receiving the best possible education in music technology, as professional as any in the country, which benefits the music business, the community, and Sweetwater."

"The University of Saint Francis is very grateful for the financial and technical support from Chuck and Lisa Surack and Sweetwater that enabled us to develop the state-of-the-art studios, classrooms, and practice spaces now available in our new Music Technology Center in downtown Fort Wayne," said the university's president, Sister Elise Kriss. "We believe the design and quality of these learning spaces is unique, and will benefit our students, faculty, and alumni for years to come. More and more of our graduates are being hired by Sweetwater because

of their high-quality education and career preparation."

"From the very beginning, Sweetwater has been a major supporter and helped guide us in creating a nationally recognized state-of-the-art Music Technology program and facility," said Rick Cartwright, Dean Emeritus of the School of Creative Arts.



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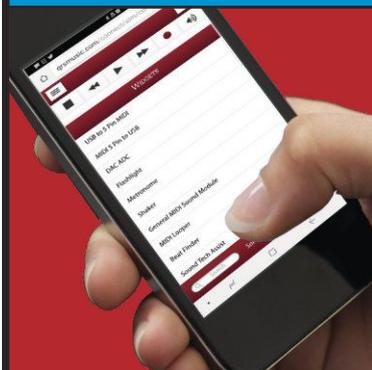


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Note From Causby

## Lemonade and Fireworks

“Growing up in a small town in Oklahoma, summers always started with lemons. My lemonade stand wasn’t elaborate. I simply sold cold lemonade, earning enough money each year to buy fireworks to enjoy with my cousins at our family farm.”

More than just a cherished memory, these early summers offered a simple but important lesson in retail that I would later see illustrated over and over again throughout our association’s membership at NAMM—when life gives you lemons, make lemonade, and the results can be explosive!

One such perfect example is Larry Noto of Music Land in Bel Air, Maryland. When his father passed away in 2015, he was faced with the decision to either close down the store or keep his father’s legacy alive. Larry had no industry experience; but he didn’t let that stop him. He resigned from his current job and took over the family business.

Shortly after, Larry attended Summer NAMM and soaked up every last piece of advice he could get at the NAMM U Idea Center and Retail Boot Camp. More importantly, he went back home and applied what he learned to his business.

Never in his wildest dreams did Larry anticipate winning “Best Store Turnaround” at the Top 100 Dealer Awards, just 12 months later. Talk about turning a sour situation into a firecracker year!

Summer NAMM is just a few months away. As you read this, many NAMM members have finalized their 2018 Top 100 Dealer Awards submissions.

Now in its eighth year, the entries continue to get stronger, inspiring greatness in our industry and giving our retail

members the opportunity to learn from one another. Through shared innovation, new approaches and evolving business models, this awards show has truly cultivated a trusted network and supportive retail community.

Already, 293 companies from 44 states and 11 countries have been honored. In fact, 11 stores have been recognized on the Top 100 Dealer list all seven years! If your store is among this impressive list of retailers, congratulations and THANK YOU. Your retail success has fired up an entire industry and illuminated a path for our 2018 nominees.

Maybe 2018 is going perfectly for you so far— but if it isn’t, there are ways to increase profits, generate customer loyalty or make a positive, lasting impact in your community that you have yet to tap into.

Summer NAMM, and in particular the Top 100 Dealer Awards, will ignite your passion, imagination and know-how in these areas and more.

I hope to see you at this year’s Top 100 Dealer Awards on Friday, June 29 at 7 pm. As always, there will be some regular standouts and surprise winners. But I promise you, there will be plenty of lemonade on hand and the fireworks will be spectacular.

*See you in Nashville!*

As your trade association, it is NAMM’s honor to bring the retail community together for one night and honor the passion that ignites our industry.

**Causby Challacombe, CAE**  
NAMM Director, Membership



*"My first week on the job after taking over the business from my father was attending NAMM U. The lessons and classes helped me learn the music retail business. It's amazing that 12 months later I'd be accepting the award for 'Best Store Turnaround' at the Top 100 Dealer Awards!"*

Larry Noto, Music Land  
2016 Best Store Turnaround

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**MMR GLOBAL**by **Ronnie Dungan**

## JHS Seals Benelux Distribution Deal

JHS has signed a new distribution partnership in the Benelux region with Voerman Amersfoort.

The collaboration covers distribution rights in Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg for JHS brands Vintage guitars, Encore guitars, Santos Martinez classical guitars, Pilgrim folk instruments, Laka ukuleles, Odyssey brass and woodwind, and Performance Percussion drums and hardware.

Voerman Amersfoort B.V. is a wholesale company/distributor of instruments and electronics. Specialising in guitars, amplification, effects, keyboards, pianos, synthesizers and DJ equipment, Voerman has a reputation for brand and product development through the use of 'guerrilla marketing', social media promotion and artist endorsements. The firm works actively with 170 musical instrument retailers, and enjoys extended relationships with a number of brands.

Announcing the collaboration, JHS export sales manager, Adam Butterworth said, "All at JHS are delighted to begin working with Voerman in the Benelux for our main guitar brands. We strongly believe this is an excellent appointment for Vintage guitars, along with the numerous class-leading JHS brands, which Voerman will now take forward. Voerman have an outstanding reputation in the market and we look forward to working with Johannes and his team."

Voerman MD Johannes Voerman, added: "We're honored that JHS has appointed Voerman as their Benelux distributor. Both JHS and Voerman are very well established companies and with our combined expertise and synergies we will serve the Benelux market for JHS brands to our best ability."

## Make the Most of Messe

As I prepare for another Musikmesse, which I haven't personally been to for a couple of years now, I wonder what awaits me this year after all the changes the show has been forced to undertake in its efforts to stay relevant to the market.

Am I heading to a pro-audio show with a bit of MI mixed in, or is the old Musikmesse still there in all its noisy, passive-smoking, slap-bass, Drum Hall Migraine glory? Will I now have to rub shoulders with Euro-teens or can I get out of there before they open the doors to the public?

It has to be said that no one puts on an expo quite like the Germans do. The facilities are second to none, the organization at both the venue and in the host city, with free or discounted travel to the Messe for example, is always faultless. And that applies to events I've been to in other German cities too, Nuremberg and Munich for instance.

Also to be applauded is the way in which the show has responded to changes in the market, and changes in what its exhibitors want. Musikmesse is a big beast, two big beasts in fact, when you factor in Prolight + Sound as well, but it has been nimble enough and brave enough to

make significant alterations to its offering, in order to stay in touch with the market.

Show organizers know that there are no right answers when it comes to giving exhibitors what they want. You simply cannot please everyone. Not changing things means you are aloof and are not listening to your customers and changing things means you are meddling with a winning formula.

You listen to one group of exhibitors and they will say the show is too big now. Others will say the opposite. As with canvassing public opinion, sometimes it's really best not to know what people think. Sometimes you just have to trust people who know what they're doing.

So I expect a different experience from my last Musikmesse outing, because the market is different. It's struggling in a lot of ways, but the fact that it is still able to put on a major show on each continent should give cause for optimism.

It will be different, no doubt, but Musikmesse organizers have made those changes to avoid the kind of different in which there is no major European trade show.

And you know full well you would miss it.

## Musikmesse Academy Returns

Musikmesse's Business Academy inspired by SOMM, a professional development program especially for the musical-instrument sector, is returning to the show for the third time this year.

Throughout the fair, from April 11 to 14, the program in Hall 11.1 will offer workshops, impulse lectures and keynote addresses by speakers from the worlds of business, law, science, politics and media. Thanks to simultaneous translations, all lectures will be available in English and German.

The highlights of the lecture program include "Blockchain or block flute – about the sense or nonsense of Blockchain technology in the music instrument market" (Steffen Holly, Fraunhofer Institute for Digital Media Technology), "Trade in CITES protected woods for music instruments" (Dr. habil. Gerald Koch, Thünen Institute) and "The new EU Data Protection Regulation – what companies need to consider" (Benjamin Spallek, Creditreform Compliance Services).

"The developments driving the musical-instrument sector are many and varied. Together with our partners, we offer a first-class opportunity at Musikmesse for participants to imbibe ideas for their own business model and to exchange ideas and information face-to-face with experts and competitors about challenges and solutions", said Michael Biwer, group show director of the Entertainment, Media & Creative Industries Business Unit of Messe Frankfurt Exhibition.

"This year's program at the 'Business Academy inspired by SOMM' comprises a balanced and topical spectrum of subjects relevant to the musical-instrument sector – with the aim of offering trade visitors strategic and artisanal knowledge on a very high, comprehensible and practical level", said SOMM CEO Daniel Knöll.

Detailed information about the individual workshops and the experts can be found at [here](#) or on the SOMM-Akademie website.

# Lunastone Adds to International Network

Danish guitar pedal company Lunastone has added to its worldwide distribution network with new partnerships in the U.S. and Germany.

The firm has seen significant growth over the past year and found the need to appoint partners in its key markets. Building on the good experience with Japanese distributor, T. Kurosawa who bought in on Lunastone Pedals after the NAMM Show in 2017 and successfully introduced the brand in Japan, the firm has chosen D&A Guitar Gear as its sole distributor in the US and Rooftop Guitars for the German market.

Lunastone will soon be shipping four new pedals: Smooth Drive 1, Blue Drive 1, Distortion 1 and Red Fuzz 1. All of these new pedals will be introduced by the new distributors in their respective markets this spring.

"D&A Guitar Gear is a manufacturer of high-quality, innovative Guitar Stands and Accessories, which makes them the perfect partner for us in the U.S. Just like us, D&A Guitar Gear is focused more than anything on making great products with a view to great design, functionality and reliability, making the lives of musicians easier, better and more fun," said Allan Strand, CEO of Lunastone Pedals.

Barry Mitchell, president of D&A Guitar Gear commented: "Lunastone Pedals offer musicians an impressive range of inspiring tone tools, built by an incredible team of passionate Guitar

players who are committed to delivering great products. We are thrilled to be distributing Lunastone Pedals in the U.S. and are excited to get Lunastone Pedals into the hands of our dealers who love to introduce new, hot products to their customers."

For the German market, Lunastone has now appointed Rooftop Guitars as its distributor. Frank Skygge, the founder of Rooftop Guitars, is also behind a chain of dedicated high-end and vintage guitar stores in Denmark, but runs a distribution company in parallel in Germany.

"We looked into getting the Lunastone pedals in our own stores in Denmark and immediately loved the sound of them so when the opportunity arose, it was an easy decision to take the partnership to the next level and add the pedals to our distribution portfolio in Germany," Skygge commented.

"We are very pleased to expand our partnership with Rooftop Guitars, as we have had nothing but great experiences dealing with them and have full confidence that they will be the perfect distributor for growing the German market for us," Allan Strand added.



Allan Strand



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## Warwick Overhauls RockBoard Range



### Rockboard's TRES 3.1 model

Warwick has redesigned the 2018 RockBoard pedalboard series.

Based on only one folded, cold-rolled aluminum sheet for the board frame, the design needs no welded seams, creating more pedalboard space.

U-shaped vertical support braces offer additional stability without adding too much weight. The slot-based design works equally well with standard mounting solutions as with the new RockBoard Quick Mount pedal mounting plates (sold separately). The slots also let you easily hide cables underneath the surface for a neat and tidy setup. Additionally, any power supply can either be mounted underneath the board surface, or using the optional RockBoard The Tray universal power supply mounting solution.

All RockBoard 2018 Series models (except Duo 2.1) are compatible with the RockBoard Module patch bays. With seven sizes ranging from 46 cm (18 1/8") to 102 cm (40 3/16") in width. All sizes are avail-



### The new QUAD 4.2

able with either gig bag or flight case.

The RockBoard Duo 2.1 is the most compact pedal board in the new RockBoard family, ideal for small performances. The Duo 2.1 offers enough space for all the essential effects pedals. As well as its big brothers, it benefits from the new high stable structure made of folded aluminum

RockBoard TRES 3.1 also offers space for larger digital and multi-effects pedals. With his design of three struts and micro / mini pedals can be fixed on the TRES 3.1.

The QUAD 4.1 & QUAD 4.2 also offer space for large wah and volume pedals etc. Thanks to the four-strut design, mini and micro pedals can also be attached absolutely reliably. Every pedal will find its optimum place. There is no need to worry about the power supply. The new Rockboard mounting tray will accommodate almost all multi power supply requirements

For international pricing, please contact your local distributor or dealer.

## Gamechanger Plugs in Plasma Pedal

Audio effects innovators and creators of Plus Pedal, Gamechanger Audio has made what it says is the world's first online platform where anyone can take a guitar pedal for a test-drive.

Plasma Robot is a part of the firm's Indiegogo campaign and allows anyone to upload a sound sample, dial in their desired settings using a set of remote controlled electric motors, and hear and see their track being turned into distortion via a YouTube Livestream. The Plasma Pedal campaign started earlier in March when it reached the fixed goal in less than four minutes and raised over \$100,000 in the first day.



"We know how hard decision making can be, especially if it's gear you're buying. It is our belief that the best description of Plasma Pedal is actually getting to play the pedal. We think that Plasma Robot gives you a pretty close impression of what the pedal sounds like in real life and also it's just lots of fun!" explained Ilya Krumin, CGO of Gamechanger Audio.

Instead of using traditional LED circuits, transistors or vacuum tubes to produce overdrive, the PLASMA Pedal transforms the instrument's live signal into a series of continuous high-voltage discharges within a xenon-filled tube. In essence, says the firm, you are playing a bolt of electricity, and the electrical discharges produced by your instrument are instantly converted back into an analogue audio signal, producing a quick, responsive, and extremely heavy distortion.

The first plasma Pedal batches are scheduled to ship in August 2018. This will be the second crowdfunding campaign created by Gamechanger Audio, following the success of Plus Pedal.

*William F. Ludwig III*

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## Trade Regrets

On March 12, we received the following message from NAMM's Dan Del Fiorentino:

*It is with a heavy heart that I announce the passing of Kustom Amp founder, **Bud Ross**. Bud was a pioneer in our industry as well as a strong supporter of the NAMM Oral History program over the years.*

*Bud made his first amplifier for his own band in 1958 to save a little money. Within 5 years he had established Kustom Amps, a leader in product design and innovations. The powerful speakers within the amps were as much a selling point to rock and rollers as the tuck and roll design of the cabinet. The success of the amplifiers allowed Bud to focus on other products for which he was equally innovative, such as radar and car monitors for law enforcement. Bud formed Ross Musical, Road Amps and Bird-view among many ventures in and outside of the music industry.*

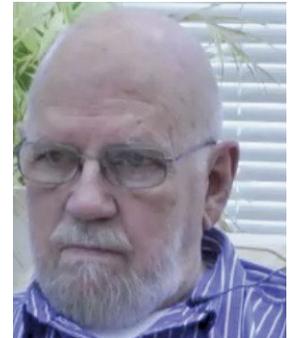
*Bud passed away on Saturday at the age of 77. I remember fondly the day of our interview and how he cleared his calendar when our 40-minute interview turned into two hours. He then drove me over to his old house to show me the garage where he built his first amp. Since that day Bud has gone out of his way to introduce me to several people that I have since interviewed. And, I'm proud to say, a strong friendship developed.*



On March 9, we received the following from NAMM's Dan Del Fiorentino:

*I am sorry to report that our industry has lost a pioneer and many (including the NAMM family) have lost a dear friend. **David Leed** passed away on March 7.*

*David was born in the United Kingdom where he was hired by Boosey & Hawkes, which sent him to South Africa. While there, David became the General Manager for the Hammond Organ Company, which had a factory for Hammond – In fact the fourth largest operation for the company in the world. While backstage for a concert where he played in the orchestra and she sang in the choir, David met his wife. After having four children they moved back to Europe where David was hired by Chicago Musical Instruments (CMI), which later became Norlin. In the late 1970s he and his wife established their own accessory wholesale company called Leed Representation.*



## D'Addario Takes Control of Irish Sales

D'Addario UK will begin direct sales and marketing activity in the Republic of Ireland from April 1, 2018. The decision means the end of D'Addario's long-standing relationship with Keynote Music Sales which has been the brand's exclusive distributor in Ireland for over 30 years.



Simon Turnbull, managing director of D'Addario Europe, explained: "With the formation of D'Addario Europe that will see us begin direct operations in Germany, Austria, France and Benelux by opening offices in France and Germany, in addition to the existing office in the UK, it made sense to make this change as we consolidate our direct operations across the three main markets and regions of Europe. Keynote has been a close friend and partner of D'Addario for many years."

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# ON THE MOVE

**DANSR** has announced the addition of **Alicia Coulter** as customer service manager.



Coulter grew up in Indianapolis and has spent the last four years in customer service and sales with Woodwind & Brasswind, most recently as a Contact Center supervisor at their call center in Frederick, Maryland.

"Alicia holds a great deal of experience in the music industry, especially on the customer service side," commented Gary Winder, EVP Sales & Marketing. "Her role here is customer service manager and she is well underway working directly with a cross section of DANSR direct accounts and coordinating product fulfillment for Vandoren Artist events."

**Korg USA, Inc.** has hired **Hugh Dungey** as the company's new distribution operations manager.



Dungey will coordinate the day-to-day operations and procedures of the East Coast warehouse including all shipping, receiving, and inventory of the numerous brands housed under Korg USA, Inc.

Prior to his new position, Dungey was employed at Dynatech International in a variety of positions over a 26-year span. Starting as an inspector for the Aerospace parts company, he worked his way through various supervisory roles, before being promoted to operations manager, overseeing all managerial aspects of their shipping department.

**Guitar Center** (GC) has appointed industry veteran **Donny Gruendler** vice president of Music Education.



In this role, Gruendler will help expand Guitar Center's focus on music education programs to provide more individuals with the tools and resources needed to learn the craft of music. Gruendler will spearhead Guitar Center's Lessons programs nationwide, in addition to further engaging with music educators around the country.

Gruendler has a Master of Music from

Wayne State University and a Bachelor of Music from Berklee College of Music. He is currently a Doctoral Candidate in the Ed.D track (ABD) for Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership and Global Change from Pepperdine University, with his degree being awarded this May. Since 2016, he has served as president of the MI College of Contemporary Music, where he has helped shape the direction of the organization in terms of growth, operations, academic vision, pedagogy, program development, curriculum, interdepartmental communication, budgeting and resource allocation, and more.

Covering the topics of musical instruction, leadership and business, Gruendler has penned over 25 periodicals and 10 textbooks, for a wide range of domestic and international publishers in addition to creating several music instructional DVDs and iOS applications.

**Hal Leonard MGB** has announced the promotion of **Tom Vennell** to the position of sales director.



In this expanded role, Vennell will oversee all aspects of the company's sales operations throughout the UK and rest of Europe.

As a graduate of Bristol University with a degree in law, he joined the Hal Leonard-De Haske company group in 2011 and became a member of the UK sales team. In 2015 he was promoted to Trade Sales & Marketing manager – Europe, at Hal Leonard MGB.

Vennell has played an increasingly active role in contributing to the company's sales and marketing strategy in Europe which has led to an expansion of its trade distribution, the successful launch of European retail racking programs, new sales channels and a significant increase in the sales of Hal Leonard publications throughout all territories. His expanded role will build on this and include direct responsibility for all sales and marketing related functions.

Vennell will continue to be based in Hal Leonard's London office, working closely with the Company's sales and distribution teams at locations in Belgium, France, Germany, Holland and Italy, as well as connecting with Hal Leonard's sales operations in the U.S., Australia, and elsewhere in the world.

With both parents as music teachers, he is also a musician with a rich and di-

verse musical background, participating in a variety of musical activities as a French horn player, singer, and drummer.

**L-Acoustics** has announced the recent appointment of **Franck Fabry** to the position of regional sales manager.



Reporting directly to Michael Palmer, L-Acoustics' new head of sales for USA and Canada, Fabry's primary responsibility is to look after all of the manufacturer's Canadian territories.

Raised and educated in Switzerland, France, and the United States, with additional cross-cultural knowledge gained while doing business across six continents, Fabry brings more than 17 years of experience serving the Canadian market for companies like Bosch/Telex and Meyer Sound Laboratories, the latter of which he spent the past four years with as sales manager, Canada.

**Buffet Crampon USA** has announced the appointment of **Jack Dring** as division manager for Canada,



and Declan Lynch as Central Plains division manager effective March 1, 2018.

Dring began with Buffet Crampon USA in April 2017 as division manager for the Central Plains and Central Canada territories. He is a graduate of the Music Business program at the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam and plays the trumpet. He will be the first division manager living in Canada for Buffet Crampon in over 12 years and will be based in Toronto, Ontario where his responsibilities will include working with the music retailers, educators, and artists throughout the country to further the growth of all Buffet Crampon brands.

**Declan Lynch** will be the new division manager for the Central Plains territory and is also a Music Business graduate of the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam.



A tuba player, originally from New Suffolk, New York he will relocate to Minneapolis, Minnesota to begin his tenure as division manager for Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas.

# We Take Full Responsibility

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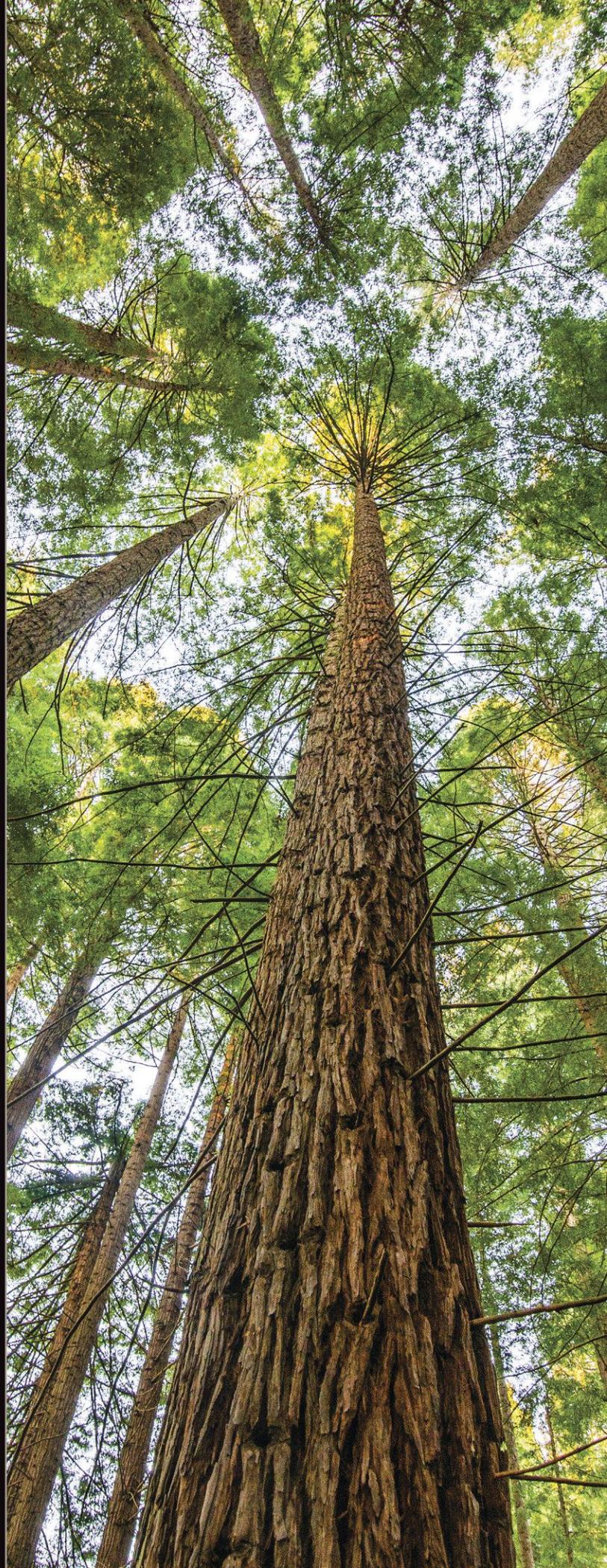
Like you, Yamaha employees around the world want to live in an environment with clean air and water. So we created a wide range of initiatives that embrace our corporate responsibility and address vital issues, like global warming and biodiversity. For instance, we recycle and reuse factory waste water, plant trees in growing forests, build instruments from eco-friendly materials, cut emissions of greenhouse gases from manufacturing and shipping, and employ ISO 14001 environmental management systems worldwide. We thought you'd like to know because we don't just work together, we all live together.



*Planting new trees is one of many Yamaha eco initiatives.*



@YamahaMusicUSA



# Guitars Going Green

By Bryan Reesman



**T**he imperative to go green has increased steadily among musical instrument manufacturers over the years, and one area in which this the impact is certainly being felt is the realm of guitars.

A big challenge to guitar manufacturers is that the fact that players want their guitars to have the tone and playability they seek, regardless of the elements used to create the instrument. The consumer guitar market includes a large number of traditionalists, so manufacturers seek to create the sounds they want. If a newer type of wood or composite material pro-

duces the same sound it can be accepted; if not, it's back to the familiar, which is translating into diminishing natural resources. In other words, customers can support being green, but they also want the sounds they crave.

What can be done to keep supplies going or to find alternatives and keep consumers happy? Guitar manufacturers are grappling with that question, and the answers include newer materials, alternative resources, and reforestation efforts to maintain and even grow our natural supply of wood.

## C.F. Martin & Co.

The guitar manufacturer with 185 years under its belt, Martin Guitars has long been aware of the environmental impact that their operations have had. They have long been leaders in the green movement before such a concept even existed.

"Believe it or not, as early as 1915 we started to change materials on our guitars with sustainability and being a good steward of the land and animals in mind," says Chris Thomas, Martin's director of marketing. "We stopped using real tortoise shell. The tortoise that's spacked on guitars nowadays is obviously a synthetic, but originally on guitars tortoise meant tortoise shell. So we stopped using turtles, and then three years after that we started to phase out the use of elephant ivory, which was also a big component of vintage instruments – pianos and guitars."

Thomas asserts that the company has set the standard as far as moving away from traditional wood elements including synthetic things. In the 90s, they stopped purchasing Brazilian rosewood. "We have a pretty good stash," he reports, "but we stopped consuming it by purchasing it, which changed the industry a little bit in terms of pricing."

While the company started contemplating product design and sustainability as far back as 1915, in 1997 they gained chain of custody certification from the Forest Stewardship Council to create FSC certified guitars. "It is sort of like the equivalent of organic produce, but for wood," clarifies Thomas. "Chris Martin was a huge advocate and pioneered that approach to guitar building." In 1997, the company partnered with Sting, who raised their awareness about FSC woods, which led to Martin's certification and a couple of Sting-endorsed guitar models in 1998.

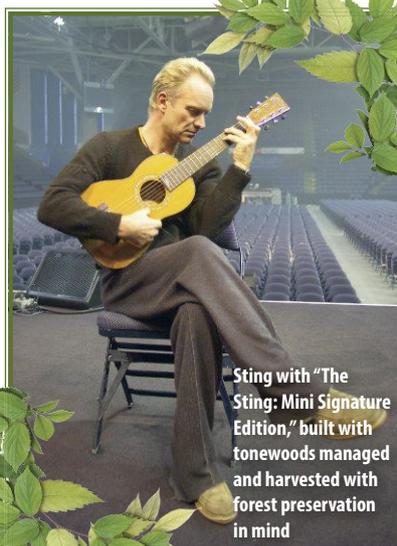
"Although we had used them prior, he made it a marketing issue with his guitars and bass so that Martin, Sting, and the Rainforest received equal attention," says Thomas. "Incredibly passionate about sustainability, Sting was the right artist at the right time for Martin, a sleeping giant of sustainability. We do much more and talk about it more than we did in the '90s. Thank you, Sting!" Martin also has a popular Jeff Tweedy model, and Thomas says that Maroon 5 guitarist James Valentine "is a huge

advocate. He's gone to Guatemala to see where the wood actually comes from. It's a growing movement."

When it comes to balancing commerce with sustainability, notes Thomas, most of their new models do not feature the traditional tone woods that Martin and their competitors are known for. He says it has been an interesting experiment over the last couple decades to introduce models with different elements and let people hear for themselves. "They can genuinely sound great just because it is a change to the basic guitar – [from] the traditional materials of rosewood, ebony, mahogany, and spruce – [to] using things like cherry, machiche, catalox [pronounced *catalosh*], and things that aren't normally associated with acoustics."

Martin has also partnered with various organizations to raise awareness of green initiatives. "The Rainforest Alliance does a lot of great stuff with their Follow The Frog campaign where they have the frog initiative stamped on certain products," says Thomas. "That certification of a product gives people the acknowledgment that it is certified and living up to a certain standard. We did a Follow the Frog guitar with James Valentine. There's an organization that we partner with called Reverb, an environmental organization started by Adam Gardner from Guster. They partner with huge tours like Dave Matthews, John Mayer, and Pink, and focus on the sustainability of the tour itself – zero carbon footprint, trying to keep all of the energies that a tour uses to a minimum." Reverb raises awareness about the "blood wood" that is harvested illegally by forced labor in an unsustainable manner. "Adam has even testified before Congress to change laws."

Martin is also sponsoring the Clean Cruiser Project, in which participants will drive the first land cruisers completely fueled by bio-diesel from California to Panama in 2019. The goal is to plant 10,000 trees along the way as well as raise awareness about bio-fuel and serious environmental concerns. They hope to play some guitar music and film a documentary on this trek. "We wanted to get involved with more mainstream cultural changes and become a part of the movement," says Thomas. "It's really, really important, especially in the times we live in with the political climate and the policies that are not necessarily working in Mother Earth's favor. We need to bond together in industry and community to do the best we can and be doing the right thing."



Sting with "The Sting: Mini Signature Edition," built with tonewoods managed and harvested with forest preservation in mind

### Yamaha Corporation of America

As one of the world's largest manufacturers of musical instruments, Yamaha certainly consumes its fair share of wood in their creation, being the largest purchaser of it in the industry. They make everything from pianos to xylophones to drums – and a million guitars per year. “We have very trusted wood suppliers,” says Dennis Webster, product marketing manager for Yamaha. “We want to make sure that we’re good stewards of the environment and make sure that we reinvest with them in reforestation still.”

Webster says that Yamaha is constantly looking for different woods to use that are not becoming less accessible. Given the CITES regulations passed last November which place regulations on the import and export of rosewood, the company is looking into rosewood alternatives, which they began previously. “We’ve looked at alternatives – more abundant supplies of different species of mahogany,” says Webster. “We were the first ones to go and utilize nato in production, and it’s something we’ve been using for quite a while. It’s very similar to mahogany. As a matter of fact, other companies that use it call it western mahogany.”

Given how Yamaha consumes so much wood, they have many people importing and exporting it for them. “Having that expertise and knowledge – and Yamaha’s always been environmentally friendly even before it was cool – we definitely work together very closely with our wood vendors,” says Webster. “Are we out there looking for alternatives to wood to use in guitar manufacturing? I’m going to say right now, not really. We’re still focused on using sustainable wood. It takes a long time for a tree to grow to make a guitar or a house.”

Webster observes there is a challenge because while consumers want them to be green, they also often want traditional pieces. “Though many customers are concerned for the environment and support environmental efforts, they still want their traditional and iconic guitars to have the look, feel, and sound they know and expect from these guitars,” explains Webster. “Yamaha faces this scenario with our traditional L Series and FG Series of acoustic guitars. We are looking ahead to the future and researching alternative and sustainable woods that deliver the Yamaha sound for generations to come.”

The company has been involved in reforestation efforts, a highly



Tree-planting by employees of Yamaha Indonesia



Yamaha reps investigate timber resources in Tanzania

notable one being the Yamaha Forest that was created in December 2005 in Indonesia. According to the company, between 2005 and 2009 they planted over 115,000 trees (mahogany, teak, and sengon laut among them) over 120 hectares of land in Purabuharratu County, Sukabumi Regency in West Java. Much of that area was stripped through excess logging in the area. Another Yamaha forest project took place between 2010 and 2014 at Chiremei Mountain National Park, Chirimusu County, Kuningan Regency in West Java. Nearly 53,000 trees were planted. Yamaha has also support reforestation through vendors that the company purchases wood from.

Another green effort from Yamaha comes through their guitar cases. All of their cases in the United States are manufactured by Access Bags and Cases, and together they have created cases that have been deemed Global Green. All of the Access Cases are REACH and RoHS compliant in Europe and have passed every Japanese compliancy test. “And here in the States they are Prop 65 compliant and CARB compliant, which are the toughest laws in the U.S.,” says Webster. “We’ve gone even as far as our cases being global green.”

Yamaha will continue with their Global Green line and seek to expand it internationally. Some of their guitar cases are already being exported to different parts of the world. “We’re constantly looking and moving forward with more sustainable wood to use for our manufacturing,” says Webster. “We work very closely with our wood suppliers to make sure that we’re just not taking but also giving back and making sure that reforestation does happen.”

### Flaxwood Guitars

A young player in the guitar market, Flaxwood was formed in 2005 and immediately focused on sustainability. They launched their own material, Flaxwood – “a mixture of wood fibers, cellulose fiber from pulp mill, and acoustically active polymers,” explains J-P Karpinen, managing director & CEO of Flaxwood. It is interesting considering that, as he notes, their home base of Finland is dense with forest land where trees are growing all the time, mostly of the spruce and pine variety. But their green imperative is of a different nature.

“From the beginning, our material was sustainable because we don’t need to use any rainforest-based wood,” explains Karpinen. “Our idea in the beginning with sustainability was that the material can replace the woods that are getting rarer and rarer in the world. The forests in Finland are now FSC certified, and last year we gained the FSC certification for the material. Now we can supply FSC ap-

proved components. Our guitars are not 100 percent FSC approved because we still have some parts that are made out of older composite materials. We’re getting closer and closer to being able to supply FSC approved, certified guitars. That’s one of the latest improvements we’ve done in the sustainable sector.”

Rick Nelson, sales director of Flaxwood USA Inc., says that the company has enough years and experience behind them to know that their material and process works. The arrival of their unique material coincided “with new difficulties that other manufacturers are having obtaining the rainforest-type hardwoods that have always traditionally been used in instrument making,” says Nelson. “The timing couldn’t be better as everybody is having a problem obtaining raw materials for instruments. Flaxwood has been able to provide the material and the process and also get the FSC certification, so they’ll be able to step in and fill a potential void in the industry for tone-

woods with a very, very friendly and sustainable material."

Karppinen says that Flaxwood can produce one WFC body in less than 10 minutes. "Note that the molded body already has many details ready such as overall body shapes, neck pocket, pickup cavities, potentiometer holes, and bridge post holes," he remarks. "Our WFC guitar neck is produced identically and it is one piece construction [with] no separate fingerboard." He adds that they can dye the WFC material in their guitars "to imitate rare and endangered wood species like ebony, Brazilian rosewood, rosewood, and granadilla, and replace them in the future." Further, he reports that waste of material is very low – less than 3% in the injection molding process less, and less than 5% overall. "If comparing this to traditional wood body production, where a blank of wood will be CNC-machined to final shape, the waste is approximately 50-60%."

Around 2012, Flaxwood established their Hybrid line, which featured guitars that had a standard European Alder wood body with a composite neck on the guitar. There were four different models with two different body types, Stratocaster and Telecaster. The bodies were made in the Czech Republic, with the necks and final assembly done at their factory in Finland. "We actually dropped that line last year," says Karppinen. "It was a bit cheaper in the price point, but we still sold the full composite guitars more than the Hybrid line with the wooden body and composite neck." While the Hybrids ultimately did not work so well commercially, the company at least gained some experience in that sector.



The Flaxwood assembly process

"On the side of the guitar line, we are also developing our component business so we have already customers for composite components, fingerboards, guitar fingerboard, and bridge blanks – things like that," reports Karppinen. "So the technology side of the business is also growing, and we are developing it right now. That's one side of the business that we believe will grow faster than the guitar business itself because the Flaxwood guitar is a good reference for using the material."

"There are a couple of other companies now that have already experimented with this material, either with components that Flaxwood produced or components that these companies produced using their own technology, but with the material," adds Nelson. "So far it's looking very, very promising."

"The people who are more involved in the composite [side] – let's say different composite technologies and developments – from time to time they ask if we can produce a composite that has wood fibers and polymer in the material," says Karppinen. "That might be something that we will develop in the future. We are not the material developer. We actually purchase our materials, so in that sense we are not doing the material development on our own. But if you think about the sustainability in the long run, let's say in five to 10 years, the plastic polymer part of our material could turn to be something else that is a naturally based polymer. It's not really an issue and nobody thinks about it now, but people [on the development side] are talking about bio-composites."



Bob Taylor (left) and team members at their mill in Cameroon

### Taylor Guitars

With factories in the United States and Mexico and a distribution center in Holland, Taylor Guitars is highly invested in their business. They are also aware of dwindling resources and are working to combat that problem. As Scott Paul, Taylor's director of natural resource sustainability, notes, an acoustic guitar can be any conceivable combinations of wood from around the globe. "You get forests from the four corners of the world coming together in different combinations to make an instrument that is ultimately an instrument designed to tell stories, to touch the kind of human spirit," says Paul. "Of all the instruments, it's really representative of the planet."

Taylor Guitars co-founder Bob Taylor asserts that his company has perennially been aware of the need to be green, and along each step of the way they have practiced the idea of, "finding the guitar in the



Taylor Guitars has been spearheading sustainability since the 1990s wood, not wasting any wood," he says. "People might think that that's not a great effort, but it's a huge effort. Other guitar companies reject this, reject that, send it back, won't use it. We use kind of everything, and we've managed to become a market leader, even though we use wood that is troublesome, hard to use."

"There's one great commonality between sustainability and profitability, and that's really efficiencies," notes Paul. "The more efficient you can be, the less strain on the resource and the more you're getting out of the resources that you do have. Bob has always said your wealth is in your waste. Sometimes people look at sustainability and profitability as mutually exclusive, and very commonly they're not. Just one example that really personifies Taylor is the issue of efficiencies and not wasting time, wood, and resources. That drives the bottom line for both profitability and sustainability."



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Taylor has always tried to run his company at a high profit level to ensure continuous instrument innovation, as well as the chance to engage green initiatives. He says that they have surpassed what would be appropriate for the company to take, so he has personally been funding many initiatives from the personal profits he has amassed. "I'm leaving behind [money] not in the form of numbers in a bank account but in the form of trees on the ground," he says. "A lot of what we're doing is a combination of Bob Taylor, himself, and Taylor Guitars."

Taylor Guitars also initiated the Ebony Project. In 2011, the company became co-owners of an ebony mill called Crelicam in Cameroon, Africa. Taylor says, "I went for the ebony and stayed for the people." Through this undertaking, the company oversees where their wood comes from. The mill supports 75 direct employees (and 300 indirect suppliers and vendors), for whom they are improving working conditions in a country where good jobs are hard to come by. Also, as Paul says, "The concept of vertical integration gives us much greater control and insight into assuring the public and ourselves where the wood came from. We've also become very emotionally attached to our workforce because they're teaching us and we're learning a lot. It's very sincere. We have a social responsibility as profound as our environmental and, hopefully, our economic responsibility when we're becoming vertically integrated in places like Cameroon."

Paul previously worked 14 years at Greenpeace, and he says that Taylor's self-funded initiatives are based on a business model rather than relying on limited grants from governments or the World Bank, or from the changing whims of philanthropists. They can maintain re-

sources for conservation, restoration, and reforestation, "so you really have an opportunity to build a sustainability model as opposed to a temporary, project-based sustainability model," says Paul.

Taylor himself recently purchased 560 acres of property in Hawaii where he plans to grow at least 160,000 koa trees. He estimates it will take 40 to 50 years to get a return on investment on that, but it will be worth it. "At the end of 50 years, that property will produce ten times our current use of koa every single year, forever," declares Taylor. "It's amazing. One of the things that we want to demonstrate in Hawaii is that can grow wood for guitars, that you don't need to be having a big conversation about switching to some kind of synthetic material. This is the type of thing that we're trying to demonstrate in both places."

As Taylor observes, his 560 acres may be a lot of property, but on Google Earth it is literally a dot, as is Hawaii when you look at the Pacific Ocean. He believes that little speck of property, over time, could provide enough wood possibly for the whole guitar industry.

"Right now in our factory, I have a warehouse full of mahogany," he says. "We make guitars every day out of mahogany that was grown in Fiji and planted by the British some 50 to 75 years ago. That actually caused a point of inflection with me in looking for inspiration. I realize that I'm using wood that people planted whom I don't know and no longer own the wood. By the way, we don't own one stick of that wood that we planted in Cameroon. It's a combination of planting wood on other people's property and now we have a piece of our own to call our own. But here I am using wood that somebody planted – why shouldn't I be planting wood for somebody else to use?"

### Bedell Guitars

Tom Bedell has always sought to do things his way ever since he founded Bedell Guitars in 1964 at the age of 14. He started importing guitars from overseas and selling them in his hometown of Spirit Lake, Iowa, "basically outfitting a lot of the different traveling bands and players in that region during that time period when people were playing in coffee shops and touring," explains RA Beattie, marketing director for Two Old Hippies. But at the age of 18, the young entrepreneur, who then owned two guitar stores, left the business, went to college, and became immersed in the fishing industry. After he retired and sold his fishing tackle business four decades later, he returned to his original passion, guitars.

In 2009, Bedell and his wife Molly bought the local music store in Aspen, Colorado, rechristening it Two Old Hippies and selling both his musical instruments and her boutique items, and he bought back the Bedell Guitar brand. Other companies that would come to fall under the Two Old Hippies company umbrella would include Great Divide Guitars, Breedlove Stringed Instruments, Weber Fine Acoustic Instruments, and the flagship Two Old Hippies store in Nashville, which opened in 2011.

At the time Bedell Guitars started up anew, their products were being manufactured in China, but then in 2010 Tom had the opportunity to bring those jobs here. Plus he wanted to design his own guitars. "When the opportunity presented itself where he could purchase Breedlove, it gave him the opportunity to have the manufacturing of Bedell also in the USA," says Beattie. "We actually produce Weber Mandolins, Bedell Guitars, and Breedlove all under one roof. They're different departments, but it's all the same factory."

On the guitar side, Bedell and Breedlove do not use any clear cut woods in their product lines now, and both lines

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have their own tonewood certification projects that specify how their selected trees are individually harvested so as not to damage the ecosystem they are in, and to verify that they come from a collection of “treasured tonewood” and are fully compliant with international regulations.

“All of our USA manufacturing is clear-cut free,” states Beattie. “Regarding the import products for Breedlove, our goal is to be 100% clear cut free and we are working hard to achieve this, but there’s a small chance that some of the woods in the import category might not meet that criteria. We don’t have complete control over that supply-chain yet, thus my reluctance to make that claim 100%. But it’s one of our goals and we will certainly get there.”

Bedell takes their edict very seriously, even taking media trips to other countries to source and confirm where their wood comes from. “The most noteworthy would be when we went to Madagascar,” recalls Beattie. “We went to the source to really dig into that issue about Madagascar rosewood. I was with Tom on that trip documenting all the media stuff, and the outcome of that trip was that we did not feel comfortable building with that wood anymore. We did not feel comfortable with that fact that there wasn’t legal, sustainable wood coming out of there, so we made the decision not to use it anymore. They’re basically pulling it out of the national parks. It’s pretty bad stuff.”

Bedell and his company are so specific about their wood that they handle it on a case-by-case basis. For example, Beattie mentions that for mahogany they will go directly to the source in Guatemala and work with groups selectively harvesting trees, even picking the ones they want to use. Further, they are also using technology to find a way to increase the potential of alternative wood choices.

“We have a process called Sound Optimization where we use proprietary software and can really understand the density and the variability in all different types of wood to really maximize their tonal qualities,” explains Beattie. “Rosewood might be the holy grail for a lot of builders in terms of sound and a lot of qualities, but if we can find a different wood and make it sound just as good as rosewood, that opens up the door in a lot of ways and can take pressure off of different species. We build a lot with Myrtlewood, which basically grows from the bottom half of the Oregon coast down through Northern California. That’s a very small region, but it’s a very sustainable and fast-growing wood.”

Beattie adds that Bedell is the only builder to use Myrtlewood, and through their Sound Optimization process they maximize its tonal qualities “and get amazing results, and that can take some heat off of other species. There’s a ton of different types of wood that are incredibly beautiful and amazing and the tonal qualities are great, so understanding how to use different woods opens up the palette for people that are looking for something different. I love the look of Myrtlewood.”

For Bedell, their anti-clear-cut initiative is their most important priority. Beattie says he finds interesting differences between an old growth tree and a new growth one. “It is fundamentally different from many different standpoints, but if you look at the qualities of an old growth board compared to new growth they’re pretty astounding,” he remarks. “We need the old growth forest and old growth type of lumber to make the best guitars. For us, no clear cutting is super important for the long term sustainability of what we’re doing.”



Tom Bedell (right) is one of the industry’s most staunch supporters of “green” practices

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**House of Troy** 

# BRACED for the Best

**A**ndy Powers' contributions to Taylor Guitars have varied over the years, but for his most recent innovation – this time around, the invention of V-Class bracing for flat-top acoustic guitars – came from an unlikely source: Powers' West Coast penchant for catching a wave.

"My whole life, I've been an avid ocean enthusiast and guitarmaker, so here's what I have to draw from," Powers says. "For me, most of the interesting thoughts I've had about guitars actually come from surfing. I'm not the only person interested in acoustics who's taken inspiration from the ocean."

After comparing the choppy ocean waters after a storm to the serene lull of the tide once the weather had cleared up, a new idea nestled in the back of Powers' brain for how to approach a new kind of bracing for acoustic guitars.

"In some ways, this is still kind of what my guitars are doing," Powers says of watching the choppy water. "I can see the particular way these waves want to move, but there's still a bit of interference, kind of confusion here."

The next day, however, proved to be a different story, and that's precisely when Powers had his pivotal "aha" guitar moment.

"The waves are perfectly ordered, they're breaking around this jetty, the weather is beautiful, the ocean surface is super calm – those particular waves look totally musical. This is what I'm after. This is what I want to accomplish in a guitar form," Powers says of his thought process that day. "I was looking at the structure of this jetty, thinking about other instruments that I've built – the solid body electric guitars, the arch-top guitars, the mandolins, and all these things – [and I thought] 'what if I approach a flat-top guitar from a totally different direction?' That's where the guitars came from. I basically duplicated this funny jetty that happened on a really good surf day, and turned that into a guitar."

Powers lugged back to his workshop, and halfway through, realized his idea was actually going to work. The result – a guitar with more volume, better projection, and a more robust presence – has been four years in the making ever since – and Taylor Guitars owner Bob Taylor can tell the difference.

"I got that first guitar done, and Bob Taylor and I started talking about it more, and I was building a lot more versions of it after that," Powers recalls. "He heard me playing the first guitar and immediately just stopped in his tracks and said 'okay, something changed. What have you done here?'"

Finally, the V-Class bracing makes its debut this year in four Taylor Grand Auditorium models, including a new Builder's Edition mode.

Looking back at all of his prior contributions to the Taylor world, Powers sees each step as a refinement of what Taylor had already worked to create – great steps forward, but ultimately a stumbling block when it came to further, more novel improvements to the guitar itself as an instrument.

"In the wake of our 800 series that we relaunched in early 2014 – we put everything that we could possibly do into these guitars



With V-Class Bracing,  
Taylor Guitars Preps for a  
New Era of Guitarmaking  
By Victoria Wasylak

and as exciting as that is sort of terrifying to go back to the workshop and go, 'Great, we just did everything we could think to do. Now what? How do we do an even better job than that? What's left?'" Powers notes.

The answer – this time around, at least – lies in something other than solving a basic and obvious problem.

"We want the instruments that we make to be better than they've ever been," Powers says. "Sometimes that means eliminating problems that we're familiar with, sometimes that means improving what you've already done. I've got a workshop here at the Taylor campus where I design and build our prototype guitars and work on projects, and I have a shop built behind my house for the midnight projects. A lot of these guitars, I started building them, in a way, in secret, because they

are just so different than how acoustic flat-top guitars have been done in the past."

"I've built a lot guitars, I've restored a lot of guitars, I've repaired a lot of guitars, I've been studying the guitar my whole life. I've haven't actually seen any design quite like this," he adds. "There haven't actually – as far as I know – been other guitars built this way. In hindsight, it seemed like such an obvious way to do it."

The novelty of both the bracing and situation is what Powers says separates his latest work with Taylor from his contributions to Taylor's 800 series.

"Those are all really unique guitars, but in many ways, those are the refinements of an existing idea," Powers says of the 800 series. "That was like fine-tuning to get the last bit out of it. This is a whole different mechanism for us. It's not the last page of chapter one anymore, it's the first page of chapter two."

According to Powers, some musicians who pick up the new models with the V-Class bracing will think the tone simply sounds nicer – and for others, it will totally change their lives and the way they play. Taylor Guitars says that the V-Class bracing offers louder, more consistent notes with more sustain, a more pure and solid pitch, and fewer "sour" sonic qualities with chords.

"I got halfway through building this first guitar and realized, I'm seeing all of these musical benefits come from just designing and building the initial parts of the guitar, and I thought 'okay, this is something musicians are going to need. They're going to want these flavors,'" Powers elaborates. "For most players, they're gonna notice something's different. It'll open up a whole new world of opportunities for them."

When deciding which Taylor models would include the new bracing in their four-year development of the invention, Powers and Taylor took retailers into consideration. As a result, the new bracing – for now, at least – appears only in four Taylor Grand Auditorium guitars to prevent other models that don't offer the new bracing from becoming obsolete.

"With something like this, we had to start somewhere. We build a lot of guitars, and there's a lot of guitars in the inventory of dealers, there's a lot of instruments out there, and those guitars are just as good as they were yesterday or a month ago," Powers says.

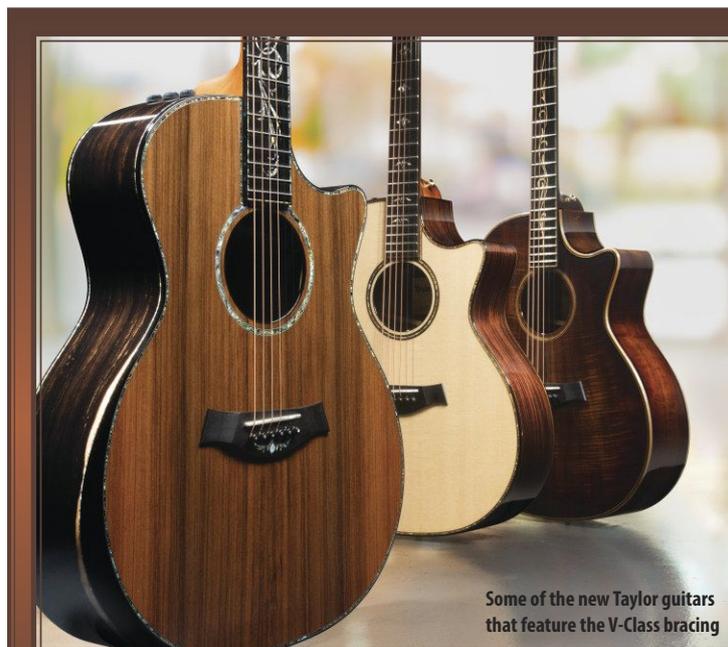
"I don't want to make those inventories obsolete, so we wanted to start in a relatively small number and that there be time for the idea to keep developing we can develop more capacity and capability in building these guitars so that we can broaden it out to more models in the future, and at the same time, protect the inventories of dealers. We decided to go with the most expensive guitars first - the more expensive, most difficult guitars should be the best-sounding ones, so let's make those the best. And the side benefit is there are the fewest of them that we make. So, we'll start with those ones so it gives everyone a chance to get ready for these new designs to come out."

As for what the future holds for the V-Class bracing, Powers remains unsure about how many models it will eventually be incorporated into.

"I expect that it's going to spread to a lot more models, I don't know that it will spread to every model," he notes. "We're building everything from a baby Taylor to our GS mini to our Presentation Guitars. I think it's okay for those different instruments to have different levels of performance, but at the same time, I love to make everything better."

With regards to the V-Class bracing spreading over to guitars at other companies, Powers has patented his exact version of the bracing, mainly to thwart any potential issues with counterfeit Taylor Guitars. As for exploring new ways to implement bracing in guitars, however, Powers remains eager to see what other manufacturers can come up with, spring-boarding off his new way at approaching the ordeal.

"In many ways, as a guitarmaker, I love to encourage other builders to try things," Powers says. "I want to know what their experience is like. There are some folks I would prefer to not see copying ideas. We've had some issues with counterfeit Taylor Guitars lately - so in those regards, I don't want to welcome copying. We've patented the exact versions that we're building to help mostly against the counterfeiting. That doesn't really benefit anybody. I imagine - at least my hope is - a lot of other makers will see this idea and feel bold enough to try some of their own unique ideas, because I don't think that the convention of the guitar is done, or that it's at its highest and best form."



Some of the new Taylor guitars that feature the V-Class bracing

"...my hope is a lot of other makers will see this idea and feel bold enough to try some of their own unique ideas, because I don't think that the convention of the guitar is done..."

Considering that this new V-Class bracing epiphany came to him on a whim, what's possible going forward for other designers in the industry is limitless.

"When it comes to the steel-string flat-top guitar, largely as a guitar-making community we've been working off the same X-brace idea for a long time, so I'd love to see what happens when more and more builders feel emboldened to try some new things," Powers concludes. "I don't think the guitar is anywhere close to being done."

V-Class bracing inventor Andy Powers in his workshop





House of Musical Traditions store managers Brennan Kuhns and Justin Heath jamming on mandolin and bamboo flute



# Musica Exotica

MI Retailers Find Success with Unusual instruments

By Dan Daley

It's not easy to get musicians to try new types of instruments. Axes like the Chapman Stick remain the purview of a small cohort of intensely left-brain aesthetes, while true musical oddballs like the Harpejji or the Eigenharp are almost museum pieces. Then you've got Pat Metheny and his insane Orchestrion.

On the other hand, more antique types of instruments, like zithers, autoharps, and dulcimers periodically poke their noses out of the past. They're currently enjoying a bit of a renaissance, buoyed by the surging interest in vinyl, Americana music, and beard-grooming products. They may be getting airplay now, but one wrinkle of the collective nose of EDM-happy millennials and they may quickly be placed back on a wall peg in a craft burger shop.

But in between, there is a world of exotic instruments, and a small but robust cohort of retailers who have made these their specialty, creating a strong niche supported by adventurous musicians and the country's growing ethnic diversity. In the process, they reveal a market sector other retailers might consider investigating.

## Rockin' The House

The House of Musical Tradition, in Takoma Park, Maryland is named like an O. Henry short story, and its inventory has a similar number of twists. These include 11-string Turkish ouds, a Chinese Sanxian, and a Japanese Taishokoto. The store, which was voted "Best Place To Buy Instruments" in Washington D.C. *City Paper's* Reader Poll in 2016 and 2017, like its website, is a constant tussle between curio shop and earnest retailer, a common problem in this interesting niche. Its origins reflect that: owner David Eisner bought out the retail side of dulcimer maker Musical Traditions in 1972 to establish his store; that American folk instrument then became the thread that led much more deeply into an entire universe of unfamiliar instruments.

"The roots of this go back to when musicians in the 1960s and '70s were experimenting with instruments from other cultures, like the Beatles and the sitar, Led Zeppelin and lutes, and Joni



House of Musical Traditions' sea of Djembes, Bougarabous, doumbeks, and other hand drums

Mitchell and the lap dulcimer," explains Brennan Kuhns, the store's manager. Since then, the House of Musical Traditions has become home to a curated array of exotic instruments, some of which are one of a kind, such as a banjo and mandolin mounted back to back and that can be flipped over mid song; others are examples of MI manufacturing industries in Africa and Asia that are almost parallel universes to conventional ones, such as djembe drums from Ghana that come to the store through equally exotic though

often unpredictable alternate supply chains. Store staff bring their own knowledge base – for instance, sales associate Stream Ohrstrom has been its resident flute specialist since 1978 and is an expert on the Japanese shakuhachi flute, a four-holed instrument that's a challenge to simply make a sound with, much less master. "We become experts through immersion therapy," Kuhns says matter-of-factly. "We're simply around these instruments all the time."

It means that staff will spend considerable time on the phone answering abstruse questions about obscure instruments, but he adds, that tends to further deepen the store's own knowledge base. And the curiosity is infectious; Facebook and other social portals are sending a growing number of inquisitive musicians their way, split between walk-ins (their location near Washington, D.C. assures plenty of cultural diversity) and online visitors. They'll also get referrals from nearby MI retailers, like Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center and Potter's Violins, when those stores get asked about Scottish bagpipes or a Senegalese kora.

Kuhns says nearly three quarters of the store's revenues still come from relatively conventional instrument sales – the "big four" there are acoustic guitars, banjos, ukuleles and mandolins, the last category also including related instruments like Greek bouzoukis – but that the margins on the more exotic instruments are healthy, especially as the uniqueness, quality and scarcity of an instrument increases in relation to demand for it. Nonetheless, they are careful to make distinctions between mass-produced instruments and more crafted ones; for instance, as African drums

have increased in popularity, inexpensive, mass-produced models of lower quality have proliferated. But that category hasn't reached the point that more popular conventional instruments have, where even entry-level instruments can meet a certain quality minimum. "You can get a decent starter guitar for \$200, but for a set of [beginner] bagpipes you're starting at closer to \$800 to \$1,200," he says.

### A World Of Music

The website for Todaro Music, in the Philadelphia suburb of Lansdowne, Pennsylvania is filled with instruments that test one's ability to sound out new words. Stringed instruments such as the cavaquino, the baglama, and the charango, and wind instruments like the quena, the quenacho and the moseno inspire the imagination as much as they challenge the tongue, though, which is why storeowner Joseph Todaro got into MI retail in 1988. "When I was a kid I listened to the music programs on WXPB, the University of Pennsylvania's radio station, all the time," he recalls. "They played world music, and that planted the seed of ethnic and folkloric music in me."

Todaro Music began with conventional instruments, which it still sells plenty of, but the owner's curiosity took him to Bolivia and elsewhere in South America, where he researched exotic instruments, established local sources for importing them, and brought a constantly flowing collection through the store. The strategy has proven practical as well as intellectually and emotionally satisfying – as sales of guitars, his main product, began to wane in the last decade, exotic stringed instruments helped pick up the slack, as interest in ethnic music genres increased in the U.S. What's helping keep business strong, he says, is a willingness to source directly when possible, bringing in high-quality instruments that are palpably better than ones that are mass produced as demand for them grows.

A key relationship in this process for Todaro was a friendship he developed with Daniel Mari, the patriarch of a leading string manufacturer for Flamenco, classical and other types of traditional guitars. He has shared a booth with Mari at NAMM Shows for the last 15 years, which allowed him to roam the furthest reaches of the expo halls in search of unique instruments.

Another epiphany occurred when he noticed that music stores tended to be designed for males. "I used to get lots of posters from manufacturers that showed girls in bikinis," he recalls. "It didn't offend me personally but I saw how it could be offensive [to some]. So I wanted to find ways to make my store look and feel more comfortable for everyone, and the exotic instruments really do help with that – they help make the store an experience. And they help get conversations started more easily: if someone comes in for a piano book and sees something interesting on the wall, it can turn them in a completely different direction."

Interestingly, the Philadelphia area's own ethnic enclaves aren't necessarily a major source of customers; Todaro says that local multicultural musicians tend to have their own sources for their instruments. Instead, he says, his diverse collection will bring in repeat customers from far and wide when they're in the area. "My store used to be a travel agency, and when

they closed they left a world map up on the wall," he says. "Now, when some customers come in from overseas, it becomes part of a shared experience between us. It's the magic of the instruments that really make the bond."

### A Musical Petting Zoo

While exotic instruments share the store with conventional ones in most cases, at Lark In The Morning they are center stage all the time. Chulus and chajchas (single goat-toenail rattles) share space with Romanian spruce top, maple body, beech neck balalaikas and Norwegian hardanger fiddles at the compact 400-square-foot storefront in Berkeley in the Bay Area (another 2,000-plus square feet is used for inventory for online sales). These also reflect the store's price spread, from barely double digits to several thousands of dollars; for instance, an Indonesian Gamelan xylophone will set someone back \$5,000.

Owner Eric Azumi took over the store last year, continuing a presence that began in 1974 with an ethnomusicology aficionado who grew it to three locations, including Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco and the Pike Place Market in Seattle. The shop went online only for several years before Azumi took it on and gave it a physical space once again, one he playfully characterizes as "a musical petting zoo," where customers can become acquainted with rare instruments. While some customers still buy on impulse – the store is across the street from an auto repair shop and gets some walk-ins from those waiting for their cars – most are dedicated musicians looking for a challenge, a third or fourth instrument to master. Another cohort are sound designers for film and television – Pixar and other media-production studios are in the area – looking for new sound effects, such as the \$440 ocean harp that can be struck or played with a bow.

Azumi says the real challenge for him is the supply chain. With nearly 3,000 SKUs in his inventory, sourcing a wide variety of instruments means balancing online wholesale suppliers with serendipitous arrivals from individuals selling unique instruments from estate sales and other avenues, sometimes taking them on consignment. The end game is to keep as much diverse inventory on hand as possible, to let buyers touch and feel the instruments first hand, and hopefully encounter something unexpectedly that changes their lives or careers. "People come to the shop because they want to be able to touch an instrument they've never seen or even heard," he says. "That's something they could never do on the internet."

Exotic instruments aren't for every retailer, but even a small collection can create a connection point. Joseph Todaro suggests watching for cultural events that might create an opportunity. For instance, the 2010 World Cup event in South Africa put a spotlight on the African vuvuzela, a two-foot-long plastic horn that emits a loud (120 dB, at the threshold of pain), low (typically around B<sub>♭</sub> below middle C) note, and its indigenous Australian counterpart, the didgeridoo, which is longer and made from wood, and generates more nuanced overtones. Even a single unique instrument on a wall or in a window can be enough to get a conversation – and a relationship – started.



Lark In The Morning's compact 400-square-foot storefront in Berkeley in the Bay Area

# The Keys to the Kingdom?

Synthesizer Module Market a Tough Nut to Crack

By Christian **Wissmuller**

**T**he synth market in 2018 is an interesting segment. You've got old-school purists embracing (or re-embracing) analog modules that broke the scene in the first place, older semi-pros and pros who appreciate the power and versatility of today's tech, and then younger users who see upside in the lower-priced yet feature-rich models out there.

In fact, a great many who participated in this month's poll (over 400 MI dealers) noted that a lot of today's synth customers come from that latter group. "Teenaged, financially challenged," as Ron Shuff of Shuff's Music in Franklin, Tennessee categorized the "typical" synthesizer module customer.

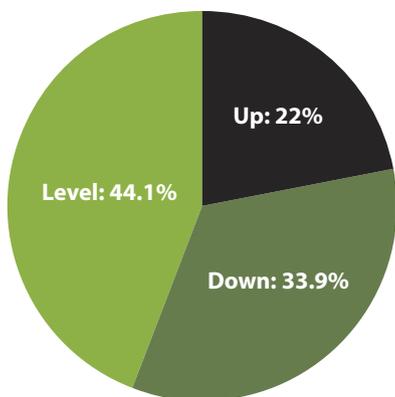
While it's seemingly a fairly static market – with 44.1 percent of those who took part in April's survey citing "level" sales compared

to last year – it's worth noting that nearly six percent of respondents said that synth sales account for over 75 percent of their overall business. Not too shabby.

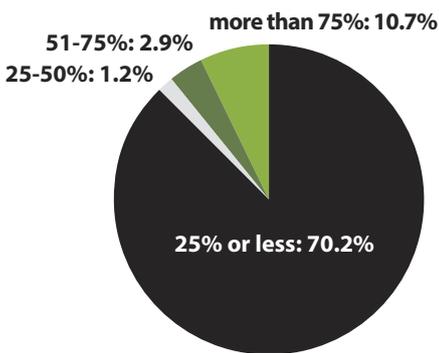
The resurgence of interest in analog synthesizers is also clearly a "real thing." While only just under 11 percent (10.7) polled this month claimed those instruments comprised a majority of synth sales, essentially all agreed that analogs represent a *far* greater profit margin, so that's nothing to sneeze at – and I think we'd all agree that a decade or so ago, those analog instruments would have represented a far, far smaller number of overall sales.

It's a wacky, weird instrument segment. Read on to see what trends are shaping reality these days on the retail level...

## Compared to spring of 2017, sales of synths at your store are...



## Synthesizer module sales represent what percentage of overall instrument sales for your business?



## How would you describe the "typical" synth customer at your store (age, income bracket, experience level, intended usage, et cetera)?

*"30-50 years old, £15,000-20,000 annual income, with a home studio."*

David Hopkins  
K G Music LTD  
Dundee, Angus  
UNITED KINGDOM

*"19-38 years old."*

Woody Kilough  
Kilough's Music  
Marion, North Carolina

*"Generally [they're] synth lovers from the first days of synths – 1965 through the 1970s."*

Jeff Hashbarger  
Jeff's Morrell Music Shop  
Kingsport, Tennessee

*"Above 40 and not really 'MIDI-hip.' We sell a drawbar clone product, so it's a really narrow market."*

Tom Tuson  
Diversi Musical Products, Inc.  
Woodlyn, Pennsylvania

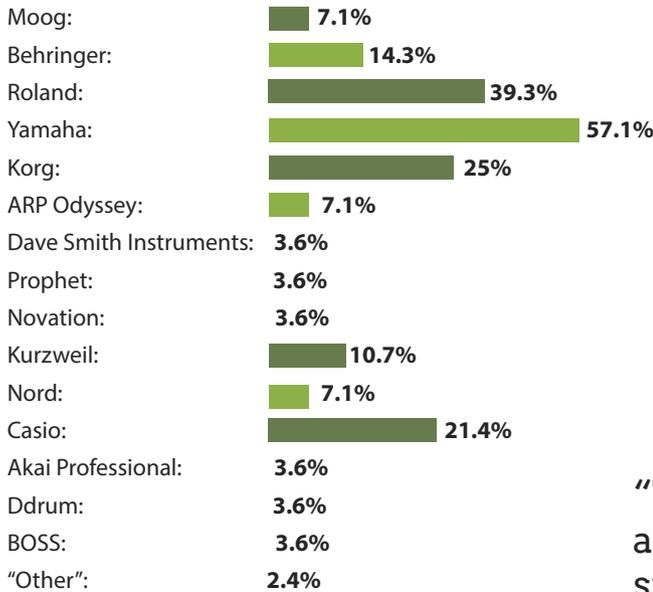
*"20ish years old, poor, weekender players. 'Wish I had the money.'"*

John Sherwin  
Mid Rivers Music  
St. Peters, Missouri

*"Late teens to mid-twenties. Mid-income bracket that plays small clubs and parties."*

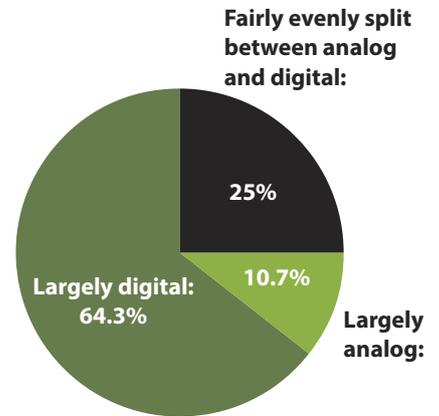
David St. John  
Gard's Music, LLC  
Glendora, California

**What brands of synthesizer modules generate the most profit for your store?**



(For those selecting "other," the brands most commonly mentioned were, in order: Keyboard Partners of Germany and Oria)

**At your store, sales of synths are...**



**"Today's customer is able to purchase a goldmine of sounds and features on a small budget."**

**– Mike Guillot, Mississippi Music Inc.**

**What are the biggest recent or emerging trends when it comes to synthesizers and sound modules – either on the supplier or consumer side?**

*"Nord started making noise in South Africa."*  
 J. Feldtmann  
 Jean Village Music  
 Centurion, Gateng  
 SOUTH AFRICA

*"Extreme value for the price paid. Today's customer is able to purchase a goldmine of sounds and features on a small budget."*  
 Mike Guillot  
 Mississippi Music Inc.  
 Thibodaux, Louisiana

*"Tabletop synthesizer modules and Eurorack modules."*  
 Sam Masuko  
 Three Wave Music  
 Hawthorne, New Jersey

*"Probably the 'Moog' copy analog synths from a few companies for way less money and perhaps lower costs and new products from co-op products like the OB-6."*  
 Randall Robert Platt  
 Plattsounds  
 Lenexa, Kansas

*"Synth people are going the way of the DJs: Getting excited by what they see on YouTube, buying it from you, and then returning it the next day because getting better requires learning and work!"*  
 Anthony Mantova  
 Mantova's Two Street Music  
 Eureka, California

*"Customers are preferring new technology of sounds over time-tested, used synths."*  
 John Clontz  
 Greensboro Music Co.  
 Greensboro, North Carolina

*"The market is saturated – way too many models."*  
 Dan Patterson  
 Roger's Pawn & Music  
 Ft. Payne, Alabama

*"USB & MIDI connectivity."*  
 Michael Virok  
 Bordentown Guitar Rescue, LLC  
 Bordentown, New Jersey

*"Most synths are wanted for electronic music, with step sequencers and percussion on board. Sound modules are rarely asked for, except by the occasional older, experienced keyboardist. Software synths and looping on the computers have become the favorite habits of the 'kids.' It's easier, and on a platform they are comfortable with."*  
 Frank Karnes  
 Lynchburg Music Center  
 Lynchburg, Virginia

*"Roland's Juno DS 61 and 88 have been the hottest sellers – a workstation at \$999."*  
 Justin Sims  
 Sims Music  
 Columbia, South Carolina

## At a Glance

## Very Impressive So Far, with More To Come

Having used high end analog and digital wireless from multiple manufacturers, I feel that Axient Digital competes with the highest end digital wireless on the market.

As an ecosystem, Shure has a comprehensive line of transmitters, receivers, access points, capsules, headsets, lavs, control software and educational resources to support the Axient line.

With the ADX line of transmitters hitting the market in 2018, and the ability of Axient Digital to optimize and take full advantage of the shrinking RF spectrum, Axient Digital is bound to be a staple wireless product in the live production industry for years to come.

## Shure Axient Digital

## ▲ PROS

Superb sound quality, comprehensive control and monitoring, complete audio connectivity (Analog, AES3, Dante, AES67).

## ▼ CONS

Pricey — definitely beyond the reach of the casual user. No Ethercon connectors for Dante. ADX transmitters not available until mid-2018.

## PRICING (MSRP)

Axient Digital AD4D Two-Channel Receiver	\$2,300
AD1 Bodypack	\$799
KSM9 Capsule	\$699
AD2/KSM9 Combo	\$1,649
WA302 Guitar System Cable	\$18
ShurePlus Channels Mobile App (iOS)	Free
Manufacturer	Shure
More Info	shure.com

## Shure Axient Digital

By Vince Lepore

Shure's Axient Digital is the latest addition to the Axient line of high-end, robust wireless systems from the industry leader in wireless microphone and in-ear monitoring. Building on a tremendous wealth of experience with both analog and digital wireless, and coupled with an array of available microphone capsules and accessories, Shure is the most well-positioned company during a transitional time for the U.S. wireless spectrum. Having recently lost a large portion of the 600Mhz band to the FCC incentive auction, Axient Digital is as timely as it is powerful. Digital wireless systems are spectrally efficient compared to their analog counterparts. In standard operating mode, Axient Digital can tune 17 channels in a 6Mhz TV band. In "high density" mode, it can tune a whopping 47 channels into 6Mhz, allowing RF technicians to manage even the most complex wireless demands.

Shure sent me a demo system that consisted of an AD4D dual channel receiver, along with an AD1 bodypack transmitter and an AD2 handheld transmitter with a KSM9 capsule. For such a high-end system, when I unboxed the components, I found

that the packaging was rather bland. I know it is superficial to even consider, and maybe I'll be the only Axient Digital user to ever think about this, but I felt that Shure could have spruced up the packaging a bit.

Setting the boring packaging aside, I was quickly singing a different tune when I held the AD2 handheld transmitter in my hand. It's a beautiful transmitter from top to bottom. Fitted with a KSM9 capsule, it is a thing of beauty. The AD1 bodypack transmitter, while not as attractive as its handheld counterpart, feels top of the line in your hand. Finally, upon unboxing the AD4D receiver, I knew that Axient Digital was truly something special. The front panel controls ooze quality, from the recessed power switch to the tactile feedback of the buttons. Everything about this system felt like top of the line gear.

## » The AD1 and AD2 Transmitters

Both the AD1 bodypack and AD2 handheld transmitter are rugged, high quality transmitters packed with useful features. The AD1 bodypack receiver (*See images 1, 2 and 3*) is available with either TA4 or Lemo connectors.



Image 4: The AD2 handheld transmitter is available with a black or nickel finish.



Image 1: Shure Axient Digital AD1 bodypack



Image 2: AD1 receiver with TA4 connector



Image 3: AD1 receiver with Lemo connector



Image 5: The AD4D Dual Channel Receiver



Image 6: The AD4Q Quad Channel Receiver

My demo unit came with a TA4 connector and an accompanying TA4 to ¼-inch TS instrument cable for guitar. Looking over the bodypack, I noticed a few nice features before I even powered the unit on. First, the antenna is easily removable and replaceable, and the belt clip on the back is reversible, so the antenna can be oriented pointing up or down. Powering the AD1 can be achieved by either regular double AA batteries or a Shure rechargeable battery pack option. When using the rechargeable battery pack, the transmitter can be docked into one of Shure's recharging stations, which is a nice convenience.

Aside from the typical features you would find on any wireless bodypack transmitter, the AD1 has a few unique and useful tools. First, there is a tone generator that can generate either 400Hz or 1kHz back to the receiver. This could be useful for walk-testing the transmitter's range and looking for dropouts or problem areas without having someone talk into a mic continuously for minutes on end. The pack can also create markers in Wireless Workbench's RF timeline, so dropout events can be marked and later examined in the software.

The AD2 handheld transmitter (*Image 4*) was the piece that I was really interested in. A wireless handheld, especially one that costs this much money, should feel just right in your hand. The AD2 was a pleasure to hold. It feels robust without feeling too heavy. My demo AD2 was fitted with a KSM9 capsule and came with a black finish, but it is also available in nickel as well if you are looking for something a bit more conspicuous. Like the AD1 bodypack, the AD2 handheld can be powered with regular AA's or Shure rechargeable batteries, and it has many of the same features as the AD1, including the tone generator.

In mid-2018, Shure will release the ADX transmitter series, the most advanced set of transmitters for Axient Digital. The ADX line will include the ADX1M micro-bodypack, the ADX1 standard sized bodypack, and two handheld transmitters, the ADX2 and the ADX2FD. The review obviously does not include a prod-

uct that has not been released yet, but it is worth noting the main differences between the AD and ADX series. ADX adds ShowLink control and frequency diversity to Axient Digital. This enables the transmitters to be controlled remotely and to provide interference avoidance by switching frequencies automatically in case of interference. The ADX2FD even allows for a single handheld to transmit on two separate carriers simultaneously. If ADX lives up to the currently available information, it promises to be the most advanced set of transmitters on the market.

#### » The AD4D Dual Channel Receiver

The AD4D dual channel receiver (*See top of page 41*) is a sight to behold. If you have used Shure wireless over the last decade, it will feel familiar, yet new, all at the same time. Once plugged in, the receiver powers up via a recessed power switch on the right side of the 1RU face panel. Moving to the left, there is a large knob that acts as both a scroll and push-to-click for the adjacent screen, where all the receiver's menus reside. Continuing across the face of the unit, each channel of the dual channel receiver has their own dedicated RF and audio metering, as well as dedicated buttons labeled "1" and "2" that allow each channel to be selected and then controlled in the menu. Finally, a ¼-inch headphone jack and volume control sit next to the unit's infrared blaster, which is of course used for syncing frequencies to the transmitters.

The back panel of the AD4D has many interesting features as well, as the unit boasts a veritable smorgasbord of audio, RF, control and power connectivity. For audio output, the receiver has just about everything you could ever ask for, including transformer-balanced analog outputs on XLR and TRS (each with mic/line and ground lift switches), an AES3 output on a single XLR, and Dante/AES67 outputs on a pair of RJ45s.

I was a bit disappointed that the Dante connections were not Ethercon, but if you look at the four-channel version of the receiver (the AD4Q), there wouldn't be enough room, so I'm guessing that Shure opted to keep everything consistent

across the platform and use RJ45 for all network connectivity. Antennas are connected via BNC connectors, and there are also BNC cascade connections for looping RF through to multiple units. On the AD4Q, which is the four-channel version of the of two-channel AD4D, the antenna cascade ports can be configured as "Quadversity" ports, allowing four antennas to be connected for better RF reception and stability (more on this below). To remotely control the AD4D, there are two RJ45 ports that can be used for networking Shure's Wireless Workbench or ShurePlus Channels iOS monitoring application (*See Images 7 and 8, page 42*). Should you need to clock the AD4D to an external word clock source, there is a pair of BNC connectors for Word Clock in and thru. Finally, to power the AD4D, there is a locking IEC input, as well as an IEC output for conveniently powering another receiver.

#### » Quadversity

With the Axient Digital line, Shure has introduced a new technology they are calling Quadversity. If you are familiar with diversity antennas on most current wireless systems, then the term Quadversity should be somewhat obvious to you. Yes, Quadversity allows four antennas to be connected to a single receiver. I was anxious to try Quadversity, but disappointed to find that it is only supported on the AD4Q four channel receiver. Nonetheless, Quadversity looks to be a compelling feature that could extend the usable range of an Axient system into another zone, such as backstage during a theater performance or to a B stage area that's geographically separated from a main stage. Shure also notes that Quadversity can improve reception and coverage on a single stage where one would typically only use a pair of antennas.

#### » Channel Quality Metering

New on the Axient Digital line is the helpful Channel Quality Meter. This meter measures the receiver's signal-to-noise ratio and displays the quality of the channel's RF on a 5-segment display. This is, in fact, different than the RF signal strength meter on most Shure (and other manufacturers)

products. The Channel Quality Meter isn't just measuring signal strength, but signal strength relative to the RF noise floor. For example, if there were an interference frequency (an intermodulation frequency or other source of interference) close to the frequency the receiver is tuned to, the Channel Quality Meter might display only two bars, indicating the potential for interference or dropouts. This really is a helpful tool when used in conjunction with the customary RF signal strength meter.

### » Dante Features

Shure is no stranger to the Dante world, as the digital audio networking protocol is integrated into many Shure products. Axient Digital incorporates Dante features that you would expect from any high end digital wireless, but it also incorporates some unique Dante features as well. The first is called "Dante Cue." The feature allows a technician to cue any Axient Digital channel on the Dante network to a single receiver's headphone jack. Imagine sitting in front of a rack containing 16 channels of Axient Digital. If you want to cue and monitor these 16 channels into your headphones, you'd have to move your headphones from receiver to receiver. Dante Cue allows you to plug headphones into a single receiver, and cue any Axient Digital channel to that receiver over the network. That's a very handy usability feature. The second Dante implementation is called "Dante Browse." The feature allows an Axient Digital receiver to scan the entire Dante network and cue any Dante channel into that receiver's headphone jack. It can even pull channel names from the Dante network and it is not limited to Shure hardware. While the feature is interesting, it could get cumbersome scrolling through long lists of devices and channels, even on a small Dante network.

### » Controlling Axient Digital

Wireless systems can be cumbersome to program and monitor from the front panel. Axient Digital has a very nice faceplate, and the menus are bright, clear and easy to navigate. I performed a group scan to find clear frequencies, deploy frequencies to the receiver channels and sync the frequencies out to the transmitters in under a minute. Of course, I was working with a two-channel receiver. On a larger system, control and monitoring via a com-

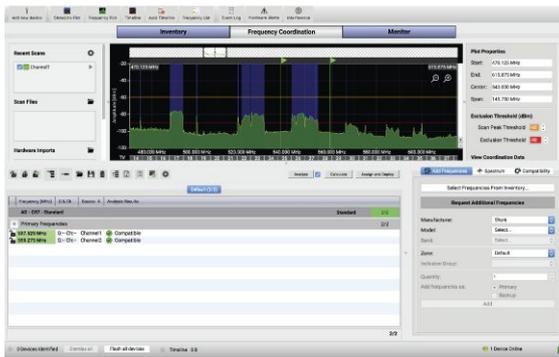


Image 7: Shure Wireless Workbench screenshot

puter is essential. Shure leads the industry in this regard with Wireless Workbench.

In addition to frequency coordination, spectrum plotting and system monitoring in Wireless Workbench, I took this opportunity to try out ShurePlus Channels iOS application for the first time (*See Images 7 and 8*).

If you are not familiar with ShurePlus Channels, it is an iOS application for monitoring and control of networked receivers. Just the freedom of monitoring RF channels on my iPhone was a nice convenience, and the fact that the app allows you to change channel settings makes it even more powerful. The combination of Wireless Workbench, ShurePlus Channels and the AD4D receiver's menu system makes configuring and monitoring Axient Digital a breeze.

### » In Practice

I integrated Axient Digital into an existing wireless system consisting of 16 channels of mics and 4 channels of IEMs from another leading wireless manufacturer. This system is not comparable to Axient Digital in terms of price or quality, so I was bound to favor the Axient because it is so feature rich. I have however had the opportunity to design and use this same manufacturer's top of the line digital wireless system, so I have something to compare Axient Digital to. Getting Axient integrated into my day-to-day wireless rig was rather easy. I performed a group scan on the AD4D receiver with all my other transmitters turned on and Axient identified plenty of clean frequencies. I live in Orlando, Florida so I'm hardly in a hostile RF environment. The frequencies were deployed to the two Axient channels in a matter of seconds, and the IR sync to the transmitters was lightning fast. On my existing system, I would describe the IR sync as a bit unreliable. Axient synced frequencies to the transmitters immedi-

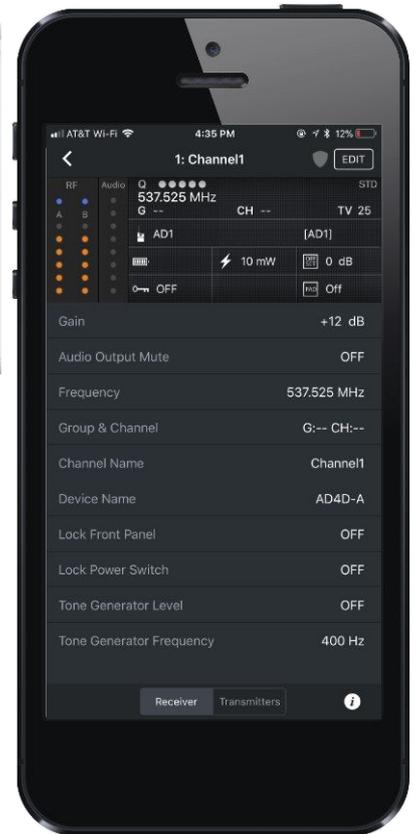


Image 8: The ShurePlus Channels iOS app

ately with virtually no lag. The sound of the AD2/KSM9 handheld transmitter was a stunning improvement over my existing wireless handhelds. On other digital wireless systems, I've experienced some weird artifacts when the transmitter was near clipping. Axient Digital was transparent and smooth at low and extremely high levels. After our worship service that Sunday morning, I overheard the vocalist commenting to one of our audio engineers how much he liked the sound of the "new handheld." I didn't have the heart to break the news that it was only a demo system. Although my AD1 bodypack transmitter came with a 1/4" cable for guitar, I ended up testing it with a headset mic instead. This gave me a more direct, one for one comparison with what I use every day. While the difference was subtler with the AD1, the Axient was still a notable improvement in sound quality over my existing system.

Overall, I found Axient Digital to be among the best wireless I have ever used. The sound of the product is truly second to none, and it is likely the best sounding wireless that Shure has ever produced. 🎧🎧

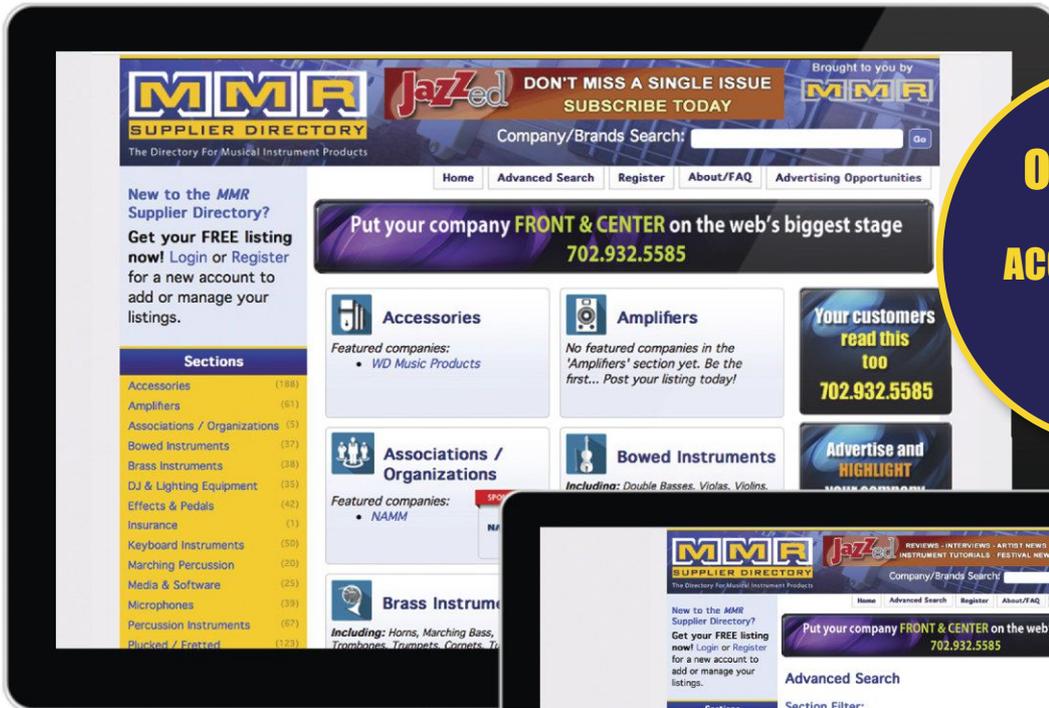
*This Road Test originally appeared in the November, 2017 issue of MMR's sister magazine, Front of House.*

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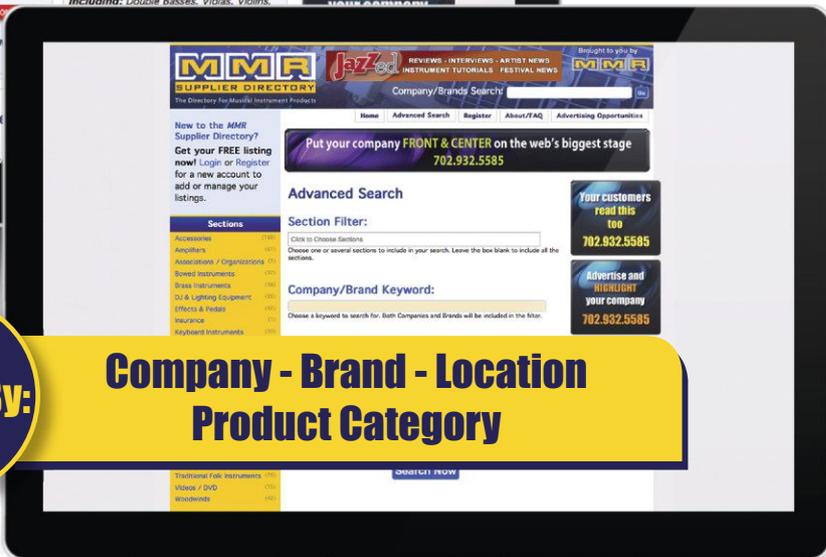
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## SUPPLIER DIRECTORY

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# QSC K.2 Series Speakers

By Steve Savanyu

Powered loudspeakers have become the mainstay for many applications. Compact and easy to set up, they eliminated issues with amplifier racks, impedance matching and speaker cabling. Simply plug them in, provide audio signal and away you go.

QSC, a recognized name in power amplification entered the powered speaker market with their K-Series, which soon became a popular choice of musicians, sound companies and AV rental houses.

The compact K's had 1,000-watt amplifiers, multiple inputs with mixing and basic DSP. Rear panel switches allowed the user to configure the speakers to their needs.

So, if the K's are good, what could be better? Enter the new QSC K.2 models.

### » Starting Out

I had the opportunity to put the new K.2's through their paces at series of gigs ranging from simple vocal accompaniment to outdoor concerts and festival stages. I currently own several of the original K-series models, allowing me to do some basic side-by-side comparisons. So, when a large pallet of speakers arrived at my doorstep, I unpacked them and set them up in my shop to do some basic listening tests. I played several styles of pre-recorded music through different combinations of subs and tops, trying out the built-in DSP presets to get a feel for how they sounded. By the way, kudos to QSC for heavy-duty packaging!

Like the original K's, the K.2's are clear, clean and loud. (Annoying the neighbors, of course.) QSC markets them as 2000-watt speakers. But they are using peak power designations as opposed to RMS values. In reality, QSC reconfigured the K.2 amplifier modules to supply more power to the woofers, without sacrificing level to the HF drivers. Based on published specs, they do have a bit more bottom end and slightly higher output than the original K's. (But we all know, doubling the output power does not make it twice as loud!)

### » Looks Can Be Deceiving

Like the original K's, the K.2's are available in three sizes: K-8.2, K10.2 and K12.2. I also received a pair of KW181 subs, which QSC recommended instead of K-sub subs for use with the K12.2. From the front,

the speakers look almost identical. I did notice the K.2's now have foam material behind the steel front grille. I presume this keeps rain spray or other liquids from hitting the speakers, because we all have been caught in the rain.

K.2's have hang points covered by plastic caps and integrated handles like the originals. The other big difference was the pole mount socket.

On the original K's, you would rotate the mount to change from vertical to 7.5-degree downward tilt and lock the mount to the pole. The K.2s have dual pole mount with ribs inside the mount, which, to me, seems to fit better on a pole.

QSC also changed the cabinet shape on the K8.2, adding the angle tilt similar to its big brothers. Since I use K8's as stage monitors for jazz and folk groups, this was a welcome change.

Moving around to the backside, the physical changes are far more obvious. First and foremost is the large heat sink, which takes up about half of the rear panel.

Unlike the original K's, these now use convection cooling, making use of a low-noise, variable-speed fan. I used the K.2's outside in the hot sun with no overheating issues or loud fan noise.

Below the heat sink is a "multi-function digital display" and menu buttons for setting up the built-in DSP, which replaces the original slide-switches. I like this a lot, as it minimizes unnecessary and accidental switch changes, especially the "Mic/Line" selector on input one. You also can save and recall up to five "User Preset" DSP configurations.

Because of the space needed for the heat sink, "multi-function digital display" and menu buttons, QSC shrank the gain control knobs, which made them a bit harder to see. They also eliminated the "Remote Gain" connector, which I never used. Each gain control has two nearby LEDs indicating input signal (green) and input type selected (yellow). I especially like the yellow warning LED for the mic/line setting on input #1!

QSC also added a third mixable input, replacing the stereo RCA jacks with a 1/8-inch TRS input having its own level control. For a singer songwriter, they now can mix a mic input, guitar (Hi-Z) input and backing tracks via the 1/8-inch TRS.

## And the Verdict Is...

I have been a happy QSC amplifier and K-series user for several years. All in all, QSC has hit a home run with the K.2's, and they obviously listened to their user base on product suggestions. I really like the new menu-driven DSP and the elimination of the rear panel switches, especially the "Mic/Line" selector. The DSP presets are more intuitive, and for some applications I don't even need a mixer! The new form-factor on the K8.2 is long desired. And, of course, you can't beat the clear, clean QSC sound.

## K.2 Series Speakers

### ▲ PROS

- Clean, clear punchy sound
- Easy to use DSP settings
- Tilt angle on K8.2
- Better pole mount (dual socket)
- Robust build quality

### ▼ CONS

- Power cords are somewhat stiff
- Small gain controls can be hard to see in low light
- Power-up time is longer, when compared to traditional (non DSP) powered speaker
- Loss of remote control and RCA input connector (not a biggie)
- Peak output power specs vs. familiar RMS specs

### OPTIONS

<b>K-8.2:</b> A 2000W speaker with 8" low-frequency driver and 1.4" high-frequency driver	\$649.99
<b>K-10.2:</b> A 2000W speaker with 10" low-frequency driver and 1.4" high-frequency driver	\$699.99
<b>K-12.2:</b> A 2000W speaker with 12" low-frequency driver and 1.4" high-frequency driver	\$799.99
<b>Manufacturer</b>	QSC
<b>More Info</b>	qsc.com



Each of the two main inputs has a Neutrik combo XLR and male XLR loop out. Additionally, a third male XLR is provided, labeled Mix Out (post gain), which can be used to send the mix to another speaker.

#### » Menu-Driven DSP

The original K's provided selector switches for setting the speakers DSP. I was never fond of the switches, as they could be accidentally changed. With the new K.2's, all of the DSP is menu driven, controlled via the multi-function display.

Along with a default (basic voicing) setting, choices are available for "Live, Live-Bright, Dance, Hand Mic, Head Mic, Acoustic Guitar/Vox, Bass Guitar" and two types of "Stage Monitor." The manual offers an explanation of each one. I experimented with the settings and, for most applications, I kept them set for default.

I selected the "Sub Menu" and found that three crossover point settings were offered (80, 100 and 125 Hz), for more flexibility when using external subs. Additionally, a four band EQ was available to custom tune the speaker if desired. All of these settings could be saved into one of five available user presets.

Finally like all of the QSC K-series, the K.2's had a locking IEC power connector, rear-panel power switch and configurable front panel Blue LED. Each speaker came with an eight-foot-long power cord. Although the length is more than adequate, the cords are not very flexible.

I noticed that the K.2's take several seconds to turn on compared to a traditional powered speaker. I'm guessing this is due to onboard DSP loading and system "self-checks."

#### » The Gigs

Putting them through their paces — or on to Gig-land...

It was gigs galore for the month of August, with a wide variety of musical styles and venue sizes allowing me to try out several different combinations of K.2s and subs.

The first gig was a Jimmy Buffett tribute band at a brand-new community amphitheater. I put K12.2's over KW181 subs on adjustable poles. The rig easily covered the 500 seat "bowl" with intelligible vocals, clean steel drums and bass. Because the stage was small, I used the K8.2s for monitors with the Monitor-1 Preset. At first I was getting some low-end feedback in the monitors. Found out that the back wall stage "acoustic treatment" was actually stainless steel with holes drilled into it! Repositioned the K8.2s and selected "Monitor Preset-2," and the problem went away.

Next up was my weekly big-band jazz gig, outdoors in my hometown. I used K10.2's on poles over my K-Subs. I set the DSP preset for "Live" and selected the crossover point for "100 Hz K-KW-KLA." Even with the entire band miked, the K10.2s/K-Subs easily covered the audience area with plenty of headroom out front, and the sound was clear and lifelike. The K8.2's were used for monitors again. I used the "Monitor-1" DSP setting with good results, as the vocalist wanted more low-end in their monitors.

On occasion, I provide sound for a wedding band, which prefers another brand of P.A. I put K8.2s on poles over the KSubs and set the K8.2's for "Live Bright." The system covered the 200-person danc-

ing crowd easily, and both vocalists said that it was the best they had ever heard themselves sound. The system even handled the DJ during the band breaks with ease. Even the band's sound diva was impressed.

One of the most interesting gigs I did was a 17-piece big band playing on a tiny stage in a very small black-box theatre. For the vocalist, I used a single K8.2 set to "Live with No Sub," then selected Mic-level for input one. I really liked the "Switch To Mic Are You Sure" message to confirm my choice, and used the built-in EQ to tailor the sound for the room. Gave the vocalist a mic with a switch and sat back to enjoy the show.

Finally I took the entire set of K.2's out for a multi-stage food/music festival. I used K12.2's over KW181 Subs for a stage, which featured a blues-rock band, folk group, jazz fusion band and two cover bands. Because I had elevated sound wings on the stage, I stacked the K12.2's directly on the subs. I set everything for default on the DSP and the crossover point for "100 Hz K-KW-KLA."

I personally felt that the K12.2's coupled better this way than when using poles. This configuration also covered the audience area with ease, and the setup was loud enough to annoy the jugglers, superheros and clowns on the nearby children's stage. I also combined my existing K8's with the K8.2's for monitors. When set to the default position, they all played well together. **QSC**

*This Road Test originally appeared in the November, 2017 issue of MMR's sister magazine, Front of House.*

# Pulling POWER

ISP's HDL3112 line arrays with two of the XMAX218 subwoofers installed

## How ISP Technologies' New Power Amps are Bringing Efficiency and Eco-Friendliness to the Pro Audio World

By Victoria **Wasylak**

**F**or every instance of going green and slapping an eco-friendly sticker on a product, there's a product that makes the change far less obvious.

Plug in and switch on any new device from ISP Technologies that has a power amplifier built in and you'll automatically pull roughly third less electricity out of your wall socket. The change is invisible, but the cumulative effect adds up quickly - for both the environment and your wallet.

The technology, which stems from three patents from ISP owner Buck Waller, is ISP's next vault towards getting an energy star sticker on their products, which Waller is confident that the new tech will satisfy the requirements. Appropriately named Dynamic Adaptive Amplifier Technology, the devices with his new patents work to use less electricity.

"Starting January 1, every product we ship out the door that has a power amplifier in it is based on this technology," Waller says. "Even the guitar-based products that have amplifiers built in. We have three of our most recent patents issued in the last year, the most recent one I believe being December, for our power amplifier technology. One of the highlights of this design is that it pulls considerably less current off the line, versus the power output that you get at the output of the speaker."

ISP Technologies, known for their range of cabs, cabinets, pedals and preamps, to name a few, now incorporates Waller's technology in every product applicable, from the obvious application in speakers, to the guitar branch of ISP products that use power amps.

Like many inventions, the technology started in an entirely different world altogether - the entire concept formed after Waller got a proposal to work on similar technology for cars.

ISP investor Richard Kughn, an avid car collector with upwards of 300 in his possession and as seen on *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, asked Waller about possible technology that could be applied in the automobile world, specifically for after-market power amplifiers for cars.

"He said to me one day in a business meeting, why can't we come up with something for the cars? Is there a way we can take our technology and steer it towards the automobiles?" Waller explains. "I said, 'what if we did a power amp design where we could take the 12 volts from the car and rather than doing it from switching power supplies?' All the current cars have so much electronics in the car, including almost all of them have transitioned over to Class D power amps."

The model ultimately worked, but was never implemented when Ford opted to go with technology from Sony instead. Thus, Waller took matters into his own hands and applied the technology to products in the music world.

"We had a request at the time from Ford Motor Company to evaluate this new power amp technology we had developed that allowed us to take the 12 volts and with zero RF energy we could generate 300-plus watts off the 12-volt car battery," he explains. "No one else had this technology available, and so that was really that catalyst for that."

From there, the possibilities back in the music world for Waller came rushing back in. With much of the necessary re-



“The beauty of the design is, number one, it pulls considerably less current off the line, and number two, we are very close to the efficiency of Class D, where Class D is typically 80 to 90 percent efficient.”

—Buck Waller

search in place, the ISP CEO switched gears and went back to focusing on power amps for pro audio and guitar gear. Even more incredible is the fact that Waller, a self-taught engineer, worked on all three patents himself after never going to college for engineering and struggling with dyslexia for a vast portion of his life.

“It probably took the better part of a year to perfect the technology,” he notes. “I had it working prior to that, but to migrate it into higher and higher power levels and [so that it] still retains the advantages of the stored energy aspects of thing.”

In the end, the technology lent itself more to items that plug into a wall socket because they pull from an unlimited power supply.

“I looked at what we had developed and said ‘let me transition this over to the pro side,’ and it didn’t occur to me until I started looking at this [technology in this context] that I realized in the car you’re limited to only 12 volts, but on the pro side you’ve got 120 RMS coming off the wall socket, which is where your power supply starts,” Waller explains. “It occurred to me that if I keep that voltage low on the power supply rails and store the energy in capacitors and dynamically lift the rail, we end up pulling considerably less current off the line - so it was kind of an interesting twist how the concept for this design came about.”

The result is a new wave of power amps that consume far less power, making these amps close to being considered class D. The difference between Class D and Class AB amplifiers, of course, lies in matters of efficiency, with Class D amps being the more efficient of the two.

“The beauty of the design is, number one, it pulls considerably less current off the line, and number two, we are very close to the efficiency of Class D, where Class D is typically 80 to 90 percent efficient,” Waller says. “We’re right around the 80 percent point. We can technically pull one third of the power of the line since we’re using reserve power in capacitors in order to produce that output voltage swing. The net result is, where some of these amplifiers require 18 or 20 amps of current for their output power, we can do that with almost one third of that energy off the line, which makes us feel very strongly about moving forward with green certification, because I truly believe we have without question we have the most efficient power amplifier for wattage out versus power in.”

Waller breaks down the nitty-gritty of the process in the patent paperwork:

“The ISP Technologies DAA amplifier uses stored energy to lift the rail voltages not direct power off the line. With fixed low voltage rails ranging from +/- 15 to +/-33 volts, and a peak

current of 25 amps in both positive and negative swing, we now only need 825 VA of power off the AC line not the 2500 VA in the above example. By storing the low voltage high current energy for use when peak signal swings are required we can reduce the power consumption off the AC line by about one third to one half of the typical amplifier through the use of stored energy.”

As a result, Waller says users will notice a significant boost in reliability throughout ISP products that use the Dynamic Adaptive Amplifier Technology.

“The reliability aspects of this amp will go up tremendously because we never have more than 15 volts across the output transistors,” he adds.

The new technology also seeks to remedy the fact that many companies do not provide accurate specifications for their products – something that Waller says he sees permeating the entire industry.

“Recent years have seen a proliferation in what is called specmanship at a minimum and outright fabrication of misleading specifications at worst,” he notes in the patent paperwork for the Dynamic Adaptive Amplifier Technology. “The bottom line is power amplifier ratings are virtually meaningless today since there is no standard measurement system in use. This leads to confusion and serious misunderstanding in the audio community. ISP Technologies has for years rated the D-CAT power amplifiers in true RMS output power and as a result have shown modest performance specifications when compared with competitive amplifiers or self-powered speakers.”

Waller, whose career boasts more than 40 patents, said that he’s never seen one be approved so quickly by the patent office, which points to the novelty of his design. Ordinarily, the process including comparing and contrasting the proposed invention to similar models, but for Waller, the OK for his third patent in particular came in a speedy six months.

“I’ve probably got upwards of 40-plus patents that have been issued, but in all my years of filing patents, I have never filed for a patent and had it take less than a year and a half, that’s the fastest it’s ever issued,” he notes. “This last patent was filed July 13 of 2017 and issued December 26 the same year.”

The feat remains a testament to the pulling power of Waller’s innovation with ISP, a force that’s sure to not slow down anytime soon.

“We never stop thinking about innovation here,” Waller says. And with so many ways to make technology green – whether you can see the changes or not – there’s really no reason to. 



ISP's HDL Line Array



# Advancing the Traditional

By Victoria Wasylak

**I**n 2018, many musicians and retailers have complex feelings about guitar sales and their relevance in today's market, while ukuleles continue to have an epic moment and are surging in popularity. So where do mandolins fit into the equation?

As it turns out, the answer is "perfectly."

Weber Mandolins, now under the Two Old Hippies brand roof with Breedlove Guitars and Bedell Guitars, relocated from Logan, Montana to Bend, Oregon in 2013, and has been especially thriving ever since.

"We produce in a month what any individual builder would do in a whole year," says Tom Bedell, owner of Two Old Hippies. "We've sold more than twice the number of mandolins in January and February than we did last year [in January and February]."

"We've got as much work as we can handle, basically," says RA Beattie, marketing director of Weber Mandolins. "Order-wise, if you look at our sales numbers, we're cranking production-wise, so it's not like the guys are sitting around waiting for orders to come in."

Made up of a team of seven luthiers, the company's output of handcrafted mandolins, often with custom options, averages from 5 to ten per week. And while the mandolin is rooted in tradition – perhaps more so than guitars themselves – the market isn't limited to a bunch of strict traditionalists. If anything, it's expanding, and taking mandolas and mandocellos with it.

## Changing Demographics

While mandolins conjure up a sense of traditionalism, their appeal has spread far beyond folk and country music, and their broadened horizons show in the range of artists on the Weber Mandolin roster.

From touring musicians with who work with George Strait, to Dropkick Murphys and The Decemberists, the mandolin now extends from country to punk and all the indie music in between.

"It's a pretty versatile instrument," says Beattie, and that versatility is what's attracting a new generation of musicians to this niche instrument.

"It's the same tuning as the violin, so I know folks who play vio-



lins who grew up playing classical [music] in high school, and as they mature, maybe the violin's not something they're going to play as much socially, so naturally, they jump over to the mandolin that way," Beattie explains. "There are a bunch of session players from Nashville – they basically said 'I was a guitar player and I was really good, but I was trying to stand out' – so being a mandolin

player, you got a lot more gigs and a lot more opportunities."

"I just think the demographics and the products are changing a little bit," he adds. "There are collectors that are aging and essentially selling their collections, and maybe you're seeing the market sweep with old, electric, vintage, used, high-end stuff – maybe that market is getting a little softer. There's definitely a lot of young people coming into it in different genres. What people are looking for is changing."

And while senior luthier Ryan Fish says that the Weber line has traditionally honed in on custom orders, the brand has recently fine-tuned their standard models

"You're going to see different results and higher quality if you produce more standard offerings," Fish says. "That's where you can really start to dig in and get a better sound and tone and a higher quality instrument."

## The Complete Weber History

Like many MI companies, Weber has seen its share of transitions and title changes over the years. With roots in Flatiron Mandolin and Banjo Company in Bozeman, Montana, Flatiron was soon purchased by Gibson Guitars, quickly earning a reputation for high-quality traditional eight-stringed instruments.

When Gibson elected to move their mandolin production to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1996, Bruce Weber, the general manager and head luthier of the Gibson Mandolin Division at the time, chose to not relocate, and instead founded Sound to Earth, Ltd. With his new company, he would go on to continue making traditional instruments in Montana.

A year later, Weber, Joe Schneider, Bob McMurray, Steve Birch and Paula Lewis created the Sound to Earth shop in Weber's barn, and were later joined by Helen Beausoleil and Vern Brekke.

As the orders poured in, Weber moved the shop to a larger facil-



Luthiers working in Weber's Bend, Oregon workshop

ity in Belgrade, Montana in 1998, where the company would go on to create around 20 different models of mandolins, as well as mandolas, octave mandolins, and mandocellos, all of which covered the range of traditional eight-string instrument design.

The company moved again in 2004 to the old Logan school, located 25 miles west of Bozeman. Again, the new space allowed for more creativity, with Weber adding the Archtop and Shallow Carved Guitars introduced in 2005, and a line of resonator guitars in 2007.

Weber was introduced to Two Old Hippies owner Tom Bedell in 2011, and a year later, Weber officially joined the Two Old Hippies family, while Weber kept his role overseeing instrument development and the build processes like the “patriarch” of all Weber instruments.

The final move took place in 2013 when Weber moved from Logan, Montana to Bend, Oregon.

“Our ability to create amazing and unique instruments has expanded incredibly with the capabilities of Tom’s new facility and the resources that are now available to us,” Bruce Weber said at the time of the move. “I’m honored to be included in Tom’s dream and admire his dedication to assembling a great team in a great location to build awesome acoustic instruments.”

And while Bruce Weber retired in March 2016, the team at Weber hasn’t been lacking in the innovation department.

Recently, deflection testing, new dovetail neck joints on premium models, and an enhanced finishing process have all been additions to the Weber standard of quality instrument making.

### Advancing the Traditional

With the onset of 2018, Weber has seen a handful of advancements in their process of instrument-making, with deflection testing at the forefront.

Deflection testing, a mechanical tuning process that measures

the stiffness properties of every instrument top, ensures that the stiffness of the wood will allow for the proper sound quality and stability in the instrument going forward – something that’s especially important to test because wood from the same species or same tree can have different properties.

“Deflection tuning gives us the optimal relationship between the strings load and the top’s resistance to the load,” Weber Mandolins notes of the process.

For deflection testing, Weber tests each instrument in two stages, first measuring the stiffness when the instrument top has been glued to the rim structure, and again before the final 400 grit sanding, the final step before the instrument is sent to finish.

For the test, luthiers align the instrument in the deflection jig with the bridge feet positioned at the location of final bridge placement. Attaching two bridges to dial indicators to measure deflection independently on the bass and treble side, they then attach a scale to the lever to apply 25 pounds of pressure to the bridge feet, which simulates string tension on the top. Dial indicators then measure the thousandths of an inch a top deflects under the simulated string load, and the top is then sanded to achieve tight tolerances.

According to Weber, “executing precise measurements on the bass and treble sides to within a few thousandths of an inch can make a significant difference in achieving the proper stiffness of the top. This gives us consistent, repeatable results in the tone quality of every instrument.”

Along with this new process, Weber has also perfected a lighter finish for their instruments, which senior luthier Ryan Fish says will improve the general sound of their instruments.

“The thinner the finish, the more energy is going to transfer, and the instrument will be more alive and more responsive with less finish,” Fish says. “It just really improves the sound and the tone of the instrument overall.”

Also new to Weber are dovetail neck joints, which Weber describes as a “more traditional” neck joint, and three new colors, all variations of Weber’s classic amber bursts: gallation amber, bitter-root faded amber, and yellowstone burnt amber.

“They’re kind of building the new Weber, if you could call it that. When Ryan’s talking about this deflection testing, or modifications to the finish, the dovetail [neck joints], they’re really pushing the limits of building a traditional instrument,” says Beattie.

While Bedell and Two old Hippies acquired the company from Bruce in 2012, Bruce Weber remained the head honcho of Weber until his retirement in 2016. With that change, Weber Mandolins has ushered in a new era for the company, tweaking some features with the aforementioned changes.

“When [Bruce Weber] chose to retire, then I had the opportunity to step in and really get active with the Weber team,” adds Bedell. “What we like to think is we created ‘the new Weber.’ We’ve really made Weber our own, and that feels just terrific. And we’ve improved everything, so it’s not like we just made it different to be different, or we cut corners, we did just the opposite.”

“We want to make the best mandolins in the world – that’s our goal,” Bedell says. “We don’t want to look at ‘how do we build them less expensive?’, ‘how do we build them more gimmicky?’, we just want to build the very best mandolins we can.”

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A peek at some of the in-progress mandolins that are hand-crafted at the Weber workshop

# The Death of Geoffrey the Giraffe

By Menzie Pittman

## The Daily 'News' Cycle

Every day we are bombarded with news stories. Add to that social media splatter chatter, and it's hard to stay focused on which stories could really affect us. We once gathered news from trusted sources that vetted sources and data. Now we are flooded with disconnected bits of information, and those bits are flying around like debris. We are so inundated with information that we have become "Comfortably Numb." But quietly, though the sedation, if you listen closely, you can hear a Giraffe weeping in the stuffed animal jungle.

Does it even Matter that Toys "R" Us has announced it will close all remaining 735 stores? They're not in the music business, right? Well, I'll confess when I heard the announcement, I really reflected on it. So much so that I reached out to a longtime friend Neil McPhail, who has been a major player in big box retail all his life. I wanted to get his thoughts on the landscape and what the future of retail may look like. Humorously, we have very similar beliefs.

## Experience vs. Expedience

The first idea we discussed was the "new truth," which is that local retail will be judged by the quality of the customer's experience. And the ones who will survive are those that adapt to that idea.

The other day after the announcement from Toys "R" Us, I actually heard a financial guru on the news patently claim, "That's the cost of convenience – who wants to schlep out to a store when you can just click and get what you want?" But when we forgo a local shopping experience, the trickle-down has more of an effect than people think. I am an "experience" kind of shopper, and I believe we are entering the phase of true customer reconsideration.

Let's push out a bit, and ask ourselves how convenient it would be to have no available local retail. What happens to all the developed real estate and malls? McPhail quickly pointed out that REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts) are buying up malls for pennies on the dollar, with repurposing in mind. Their idea is creating a new model of mixed-use development, with homes centered around a retail and entertainment-based core – a very urban concept. Think about that experience versus encountering no one at a big box station to check you out.

Many big box retailers such as Walmart, Target, and Home Depot, et cetera are excited about the "expedient, disengaged tech culture" because they can cut wages via developments like self-checkout stands. However, less wages are never good for a local economy, and empty storefronts hurt all property values. How long will an area remain desirable with empty storefronts popping up all over?

## Some Things to Think About

If labor isn't necessary, customer service is nonexistent, retailers close down, and consumers make the choice of clicking for their shopping, who then pays for the roads,

parks, and all the other community facilities and services? Where do the tax dollars come from? Who pays for the area schools? Business and real estate taxes fund a great deal of services. With the Toys "R" Us closings alone, analysts say 100,000 jobs will be lost. So, consumer dollars are not recycled in the region when all of these retailers close up shop after shop. There were over 5,000 store closings in 2017, and 3,600 so far in 2018. Neil and I are both of the belief that the tax structure of the web will be restructured.

Most everyone realizes that at the local big boxes, the customer experience is less than desirable. Recently, I visited a major sporting goods store. It was 80,000 square feet in size (I was told that is "small" compared to their average stores of 200,000 square feet). They had 15 retail zones, a "wow factor" to die for, and at least 10 checkout stations. These stations were staffed correctly, but they only had eight staffers at the 15 retail zones. And the one really ugly phrase I heard repeated constantly was, "Sorry, that's not my area. You will have to ask someone else." This is a leader in sporting retail! At other large stores such as Home Depot or Lowes, it's the same or worse. That's enough to make anybody go online.

## So what can we expect going forward?

Do we dare talk about what is honestly happening, or do we let the 800-pound dinosaur in the living room sleep? Is there any hope for smaller local retail?

Here's my take:

Go back up to the word *experiential*. But even with that approach in retailing, I have concerns. Providing a unique experience in your store is expensive, and the industry is out of phase with partnering. The squeeze falls on the local retailer, as it should, but supply companies are reviewing whether channel partners are still a viable formula. Add to that the fact that school music directors are beginning to go directly to manufacturers or online, and they are directing their students to do the same – that definitely puts a hefty burden on local music stores. What those directors overlook is the degree of assistance in specialized knowledge we provide our communities. They also overlook the educational support we provide the schools, themselves.

## So Here's the Outro:

Just like a musician, you have to play better. You can't just be good; you have to be great. You have to anticipate needs and trends. You have to have a standard of excellence that is inspiring, and you need to read a measure ahead. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, you must exploit the weaknesses in box formulas. It is essential that you study, become savvy, and have style and – most of all – provide an experience that is unique to your business.

In Nashville there is a small chain of coffee shops called The Frothy Monkey. When you go to the Summer NAMM show this year, stop in one. You will never again go to those other guys while you are in Nashville. *That's experiential, and that's your answer.*



# Measuring Customer Perceptions

By Jaimie Blackman

“Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art.” – Andy Warhol

**Y**ou’re probably tired of hearing retail gurus tell you the importance of customer experience, especially if you’re a brick and mortar store trying to find your competitive edge against the box pushers.

Yet while the need for exceptional customer experience is a truism, few gurus talk about the tools required to measure and quantify the impact of customer experience to the bottom line.

MI retailers have access to a wide variety of tools to measure and manage their tangible assets such as their music inventory via inventory management and POS systems. Finding access to the right tools to measure intangible assets is not as easy.

In my March *MMR* column titled “Masters of Intangibles” – intangible assets are 80 percent people and 20 percent enabling technology – I wrote about the challenges MI retailers have when trying to measure untouchable assets like customer experience and customer satisfaction.

As a non-financial asset, you’re not going to see your intangibles on your balance sheet, yet the impact of being able to measure customer experience is huge! According to an article published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 2014, customers who had the best past experiences spend 140 percent more compared to those who had the poorest past experience.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are the tools business owners use to measure whether their business is progressing according to plan. It’s kind of like comparing an orchestral score to the musician’s performance. If there are mistakes, the music score will be the arbiter of truth. And likewise, your KPIs will tell you what needs fixing.

The challenge for the MI owner is to understand and identify which KPIs to measure. For example, there are financial KPIs (tangible assets) and non-financial KPIs (intangible assets). As an example, financial KPIs try to measure working capital, operating cash flow, and inventory turnover.

While business owners are awash in financial data from statements like balance sheets and profit and loss reports from their accounting team and POS systems, measuring non-financial KPIs takes a bit more creativity to develop.

Stage right enters Mr. Tom Hemphill, marketing manager for Yamaha’s Music Education System at Winter NAMM’s Idea Center. His talk this past January was designed to help operators grow their lesson programs.

Tom was extolling the merits of using a SWOT analysis – an acronym for Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threat – an example of a key non-financial KPI to better navigate your business.

In a follow-up interview with Hemphill, here’s what he told me:

“I encourage the schools to do a SWOT analysis. I ask them to identify five competitors, and then list why their particular music education program is stronger, or weaker, and how the strengths and weaknesses stack up to their challengers. Always be looking for competitive opportunities and potential threats.”

The concept is simple. Measure feedback from your customers and take a hard look at your competitors and see what they excel in, and where you need improvement. A recognition of the latter is your doorway to more business.

Tom also introduced me to the “Net Promoter Score,” a free tool the MI community can use to gauge the loyalty of a firm’s customer relationships.

For example, try asking your customers the following question:

*On a scale of 1-10 (highest) how likely are you to promote our business to a friend?*

Assign the following classifications to the numerical answers.

Customers that give you a score of 6 or below are your **DETRACTORS**

A score of 7 or 8 are your **PASSIVES**, while a score of 9 or 10 are your **PROMOTERS**.

I took the example below from [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com).

Let’s assume you asked 100 of your customers this question and they answered as follows:

10 responses were in the 0-6 range, Detractors

20 responses were in the 7-8 range, Passives

70 responses were in the 9-10 range, Promoters.

To finish up, subtract 10 Detractors (who wants them anyway?) from 70 Promoters, which equals 60. Your net Promoter Score is 60 out of a possible range from -100 to + 100.

The whole concept is about being able to measure customer loyalty. That’s important because what you can’t measure, you can’t manage, and what you can’t manage, you can’t grow.

Once you go down this path you’ll find that one question alone won’t do all the work. NPS will tell you *how* you are doing, but won’t necessarily tell you *why* your customers responded the way they did. The good news is, there are plenty of resources to help you get started measuring your customer perceptions.

Another free resource is published by CGMA, Chartered Global Management Accountant, entitled *How to develop non-financial KPIs*.

The white paper talks about a wide variety of value-building activities designed to increase the value of your business-like mystery shopping, external assessments, focus groups, and peer-to-peer evaluation.

Another fantastic resource readily available to every MI retailer is your knowledgeable and friendly vendor wholesaler. Just ask him or her, “How am I doing compared to my competitors?” and start writing down some great free advice.

If you’re a Yamaha dealer, ask your wholesaler about the resources Hemphill’s team brings to the MI/Education world. If you’re not, there are plenty of resources available on the internet, including my website.



*Jaimie Blackman – a former music educator & retailer – is a certified wealth strategist and creator of Value-Builder | MoneyCapsules, which capsule value-building activities into 90-day sprints. Blackman helps music retailers accelerate business value now and maximize value when it’s time to exit.*

*Blackman is a frequent speaker at NAMM’s Idea Center. Visit [jaimieblackman.com](http://jaimieblackman.com) to subscribe to his newsletter and webcasts.*

## FRETTED

### New Models from D'Angelico Guitars

The Ludlow guitar from D'Angelico Guitars offers a unique body shape that allows for effortless access to the highest frets, while a slim C-shape neck guarantees comfort. Seymour Duncan 59 humbuckers and coil-tapping push/pull tone knobs bring the versatility, allowing the Ludlow to offer a remarkable range of sounds and sweet sustain from its oversized body shape.

Strapped with two Seymour Duncan 59 humbuckers and two push/pull tone knobs for coil-tapping, the Deluxe Atlantic is a powerful single-cutaway solid-body. A deep belly cut and thinner body depth keep the Atlantic lightweight, while the slim-C neck shape guarantees playability. Available in vintage white, black, and hunter green.



[www.dangelicoguitars.com](http://www.dangelicoguitars.com)

### New from Beard Guitars

The new Beard Guitars MPS line of solid body electric guitars feature a hand finished solid mahogany body and neck with 12" radius ebony fingerboard and 25.5" scale for consistent intonation. The bolt-on neck is affixed using a unique method that transfers the resonant tone the entire length of the instrument. Gotoh mini tuning keys provide accurate tuning while a dual action truss rod provides easy stable adjustment. The MPS line features dual Lollar P-90 pickups with an option for humbucking installation. Controls include single volume and tone fed by a three-way pickup selector switch. The MPS guitars can be ordered in any of Beard Guitars' finishes. All guitars include straplocks and a hardshell case.



[www.beardguitars.com](http://www.beardguitars.com)

### Cort Gold A6 Guitar

The Cort Gold A6 with a Grand Auditorium body from Cort Guitars delivers a full-bodied, well-balanced tone that suits virtually any musical style and taste. It features a 45mm genuine bone nut and saddle, ideal for fingerstyle playing. Cort's premium materials are showcased in softer melodies. The Fishman Flex Blend System combines an under-saddle pickup with a condenser mic to provide even the most demanding acoustic players the tones they desire.



[www.cortguitars.com](http://www.cortguitars.com)

### New Guitars from Ibanez

The semi-hollow AS83 guitar from Ibanez features maple top, back, and sides, and handsome ivory binding on the body, headstock, and fingerboard. An expertly crafted three piece maple/mahogany set-in neck ensures body liveliness and is fitted with a rich ebony fretboard with silky contrasting pearl block inlays. The tortoise shell colored pickguard provides a gorgeous accent piece. The Ibanez-original Quick Change III tailpiece enables fast and easy string changing. The guitar also boasts a steel blue finish, gold hardware, and medium frets. List price is \$826.65.



The SR670 & SR675 basses from Ibanez feature ash tops with a stunning black and silver finish on a mahogany body, as well as the new Accu-cast B500 & B505 bridges. The ash top offers superior tonal clarity and attack, while the mahogany body delivers a warm and fat low end. The principal feature of the new bridge is the saddles can be adjusted for various string spacing. The bridge was developed in an effort to meet the needs of various players who enjoy different string spacing. The saddles can be easily adjusted to widen or tighten the string spacing by +/- 1.5mm. It also allows for precise intonation and delivers excellent string-to-body vibration.



The thin, sturdy, and stable jatoba/walnut neck offers superior playability when combined with the extended neck joint, making the upper frets easily accessible. The truss rod adjustment at the neck pocket allows you to easily fine-tune the neck without loosening the strings. The Ibanez Custom 3-band electronics and 3-way mid-frequency switch allow for precise tonal control with selectable mid-range EQ points at 250 Hz, 450 Hz, and 700 Hz. The Bartolini.BH2 dual-coil pickups, with their lower resonant frequency, provide a balanced warm response, tighter bottom end, and a fuller midrange. List price is \$866.65

The PBN14E-OPN short scale parlor acoustic bass is similar in feel to a regular guitar, making it more comfortable for both guitarists and electric bassists to play than a full size acoustic bass. The shorter scale and compact parlor body also make it a more user-friendly platform for beginners. Despite the compact body size, the PBN14E has an impressively powerful acoustic volume. The "open pore" finish as well as the mahogany top, back, and sides contribute greatly to the overall tone. The neck joint being located at the 12th fret means the bridge connects at the center of the lower bout, which maximizes sonic resonance.



The "open pore" finish creates a more vintage feel, allowing the natural texture of the wood to be felt. The satin finish of the mahogany neck helps facilitate fast and smooth position changes. The Ibanez Under Saddle Pickup accurately reproduces the acoustic nature of the bass, while the Ibanez AEQ-SP2 preamp provides the extra punch of on-board EQ, and the convenience of an easy-to-read digital tuner located on the upper bout. List price is \$374.99

[www.ibanez.com](http://www.ibanez.com)

## FRETTED



## New CLF Research L-2000 Bass

The new CLF Research L-2000 bass is a fully modern "2k" that pays homage to its roots with classic details including the early CLF/G&L headstock and neck profile, reproduced CLF knobs and '81 control plate, and color-coded mini toggle switch tips. Thin urethane finish choices are Candy Apple Red or Jet Black over basswood, Natural Ash, and faded 3-Tone Sunburst over okoume.

[www.glguitars.com](http://www.glguitars.com)

## New Guitars from Art & Lutherie

The Roadhouse Denim Blue Q-Discrete and the Legacy Denim Blue Q-Discrete are new parlour and concert hall acoustic guitars from Art & Lutherie. The Roadhouse Denim Blue offers entirely new playability and style for players looking for a compact, stylish, and resonant parlor acoustic. The Legacy Denim Blue is a massively powerful acoustic packaged in a comfortable, easy-to-play concert hall shape. Both models come with a Q-Discrete preamp with volume and tone controls placed conveniently on the body.



[www.artandlutherieguitars.com](http://www.artandlutherieguitars.com)

## PRO AUDIO

## Spire Studio from Izotope

Spire Studio is a wireless, portable, multi-track recording system that can go anywhere with musicians. Working together with the free, integrated iOS Spire app, this versatile system makes it easy to capture and develop your music in professional-quality. Built with a long-lasting, rechargeable battery, Spire Studio is ready for hours of recording time with its built-in, studio-quality mic and wealth of creative effects like amp models, reverbs, and delays. Spire Studio also simplifies the multi-track recording process, making it easy to layer and mix up to eight individual parts to create a polished song that can be shared with audio editing software, cloud storage services, or collaborators and bandmates anywhere in the world.



[www.izotope.com](http://www.izotope.com)

## ACCESSORIES

## Floyd Rose FR-360 Pro Series Wireless Sport Earbuds

Floyd Rose FR-360 Pro Series Wireless Sport Earbuds deliver true balanced highs and lows for superior audiophile sound. The combination delivers flawless sound clarity and comfort for an amazing sound experience in personal audio. The driver offers a full 20-20K Hz frequency range and offers a warm and articulate recreation of sound. Cushioned earbuds offer superior comfort by contouring a comfortable in-ear experience, delivering isolation from outside noise without adding bulk. Each pair of Floyd Rose FR-360 Earbuds come in black or white and include a USB charging cable, Power Bank Charger and small, medium, and large ear tips.



[www.floydrose.com](http://www.floydrose.com)

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ACCESSORIES

#1020 Manhasset Lamp

The Manhasset Lamp is now available with an LED bulb. The #1020 Manhasset Lamp with tubular LED bulb offers the cool performance of LED technology along with the savings that this technology offers as compared to incandescent bulbs. Other features include a glare-free full-width, audience-shielded illumination, and dual clips that provide that attach securely to music stands. The Manhasset Lamp is a 110 watt lamp, designed with an eight foot cord and on-off switch and features a baked-on durable black finish. All Manhasset Lamps are rigorously inspected and tested, this lamp is designed for years of trouble-free service, ETL and CSA approved. The MSRP is \$59.99.



[www.manhasset-specialty.com](http://www.manhasset-specialty.com)

New Potentiometer Design Kits from Bourns

The Bourns Model H-1202-1 and Model H-1202-2 design kits includes a collection of guitar potentiometer (pot) part numbers allowing guitar designers to select the right potentiometer products from a variety of mini guitar pots, blend-balance pots, mini guitar pots with push-pull switches and mini guitar pots with push-latching switches. Both guitar pot design kits can be used in both electric guitars and bass guitars, or any other electric instrument where space is a constraint. The Model H-1202-1 kit is priced at \$13.20 and the Model H-1202-2 kit is priced at \$31.23.



[www.bourns.com](http://www.bourns.com)

Cordial's New Silent Cords

Cordial has added six new versions of their silent cables. In case of having to change instruments, the patented Neutrik silentPLUG allows guitar and bass players to connect or disconnect their instruments without causing any loud or crackling noise even if the respective amp is at full throttle. Cordial offers cable models CSI METAL, CXI SKY, and CRI with straight as well as angled silent plugs. The available lengths for the cables are three, six, and nine meters.



[www.cordial.eu/en](http://www.cordial.eu/en)

Pedal Steel Strings from GHS Strings

The new Pedal Steel string sets from GHS Strings include revised gauging and updated packaging. The design team revisited their pedal steel string sets, updating them to reflect this updated tuning. Now the E9 Tuning sets include a 012 string (previously 013) and the C6 Tuning sets feature a 015 string (previously 012). The revised string sets are supplied in GHS' Nitro-Pack airtight packaging, which carries the anti-corrosion guarantee.



[www.ghsstrings.com](http://www.ghsstrings.com)

Morley's New Mini Pedals

Morley's three new mini pedals are designed to save space on crowded pedal boards while maintaining tone, features and durability. All the new minis are suitable for use with guitar, bass, keys or any other instrument you can plug into it. The first three are Mini Volume Plus, Mini Power Wah Volume and Mini Maverick Switchless Wah. All three are mini versions of their large pedal counterparts but measure 6.85" in length, 4.5" wide and only 2.75" in height. Mini Volume Plus is equipped with foot-selectable Minimum Volume. Mini Power Wah Volume is combo Wah and Volume Pedal with Wah Level control. Mini Maverick Switchless Wah is an optically switched Wah. The new mini line will also contain Pedal Glow treadle grip and toe-end logo. All three pedals are all electro-optical, housed in cold rolled steel chassis, equipped with LED indication, our Quick Clip battery door and our no-hassle warranty.



[www.morleypedals.com](http://www.morleypedals.com)

New Products from HarpArm

HarpArm's new neck rack, EZ Rack Pro, incorporates their patented magnetic harmonica holding system. The EZ Rack Pro also goes around the neck, but unlike other neck racks, it uses a magnet to hold the harmonica, instead of the springs found on other units, which results in the player being able to change harps almost instantly with just one hand.



The HarpFlight is a magnetic harp holder that can be attached to any existing neck rack, so players can avoid having to use the springs on their current rack to hold the harmonica.



[www.harparm.com](http://www.harparm.com)

## ACCESSORIES

Lounsberry Pedals'  
Tall & Fat Pedal

When added to a digital organ setup, the Tall & Fat pedal provides the compression, second order harmonics, and dynamic drive characteristics of the famous tube preamp. It is a three-stage FET preamp with gain staging. The onset of overdrive is gradual and can be easily controlled with the swell pedal. It adds compression and second order harmonics. With its drive and transparency, it works extremely well when overdriven, even with complex chord shapes.



[www.mjpsales.com](http://www.mjpsales.com)

Chromatics Special Edition  
Cymbal Washers from Cympad

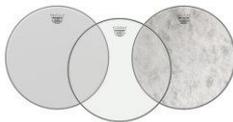
Cympad's new Chromatics SE (Special Edition) cymbal washers are now available in a camouflage special edition. Developed to reveal the sound of cymbals and enhance the look of your drum sets, the Camouflage Chromatics are 40x15mm and come in convenient 5-packs.



[www.cympad.com](http://www.cympad.com)

## Remo Classic Fit Drumheads

Remo has developed the Classic Fit Drumhead for oversized drums made prior to the mid 60s. The Classic Fit batter drumheads have a slightly narrower flesh hoop and step design yet maintains a standard outside diameter that does not interfere with the counter hoop. Available with Ambassador Coated, Clear or Fiberskyn film in sizes 12", 13", 14", 16", and 18". Also available in a Snare Side Ambassador Hazy, sizes 13" and 14".



[www.remo.com](http://www.remo.com)

Accessory Packs from  
Alvarez Guitars

These two new accessory packs from Alvarez Guitars - The Artist Accessory Pack and the Masterworks Accessory Pack - feature a spectrum of tools that will aide any player in their day-to-day guitar needs. The Artist Accessory pack comes complete with an Alvarez tuner, capo, and polishing cloth and retails at \$40. The Masterworks Accessory Pack also features an Alvarez aluminum folding stand, tuner, capo, and polishing cloth and retails at \$70 MSRP.



[www.alvarezguitars.com](http://www.alvarezguitars.com)

## DJ &amp; LIGHTING

New Fixtures from Chauvet  
Professional

Chauvet Professional's new bright and bold moving spots, the 300W LED Rogue R2X Spot and 170W LED Rogue R1X Spot, both offer impressive output (11,000 lumens for the R2X Spot and 6700 lumens for the R1X Spot).



The R2X Spot features a 16.5° beam angle, two variable scrolling color wheels with seven colors and split color capability, as well as a 3-facet prism and smooth gobo morphing between its dual gobo wheels.

The Rogue R1X Spot is also a creative powerhouse, with its motorized iris and focus for beam shaping, 16° beam angle for crisp gobo projections and a color wheel that features eight colors, split color ability, and continuous variable-speed scrolling. Adding to its versatility are its dual gobo wheels with seven interchangeable gobos, as well as its 3-facet prism for stunning aerial effects and 16-bit dimming for smooth fades.

Both fixtures are RDM enabled for remote addressing and trouble-shooting, and both feature: Neutrik powerCO power input/output connections for power linking; simple and complex DMX channel profiles for programming versatility; 3- and 5-pin DMX input/output connections; and selectable PWM settings for flicker-free operation on camera.

[www.chauvetprofessional.com](http://www.chauvetprofessional.com)

## PIANO &amp; KEYBOARD

D-05 Linear Synthesizer from  
Roland

The D-05 Linear Synthesizer from Roland is a compact reproduction of Roland's D-50 Linear Synthesizer from the late 1980s, one of the most influential synthesizers ever produced. Combining the newly developed Digital Circuit Behavior (DCB) sound generator with the actual samples used in the original instrument, the D-05 delivers the D-50's iconic, highly recognizable sounds with complete authenticity, backed by all the modern conveniences of the compact and affordable Roland Boutique module format.



The D-05 also includes many modern enhancements not available with the original D-50. The 64-step polyphonic sequencer is ideal for performance and music creation and offers the ability to sequence shuffle and gate timing along with tempo and patch changes. There's also a built-in arpeggiator for adding movement to the D-05's already evocative LA Synthesis sounds. The D-05 is extremely portable, runs on USB bus power or batteries, and functions as a USB audio/MIDI interface.

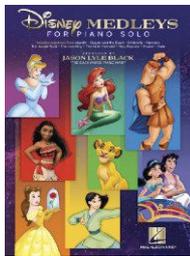
[www.roland.com](http://www.roland.com)

PRINT & DIGITAL

New Releases from Hal Leonard

Award-winning pianist, composer and entertainer Jason Lyle Black has been commissioned to arrange a series of medleys in his distinctive style for a new Hal Leonard songbook, *Disney Medleys for Piano Solo*.

Featuring over 35 songs from 10 classic Disney films, *Disney Medleys* contains many of the iconic songs that have helped Disney become one of the most dominating forces in movies. From medleys from the recent Disney hit movie "Moana," featuring the songs "How Far I'll Go," "We Know the Way," and "You're Welcome," to a medley featuring "The Bare Necessities" and "I Wanna Be Like You (The Monkey Song)" from the classic hit "The Jungle Book, *Disney Medleys*" has everything needed to enjoy Disney tunes. Additional medleys include songs from: "Aladdin," "Beauty and the Beast," "Cinderella," "Hercules," "The Lion King," "The Little Mermaid," "Mary Poppins," and "Mulan." In addition to the 10 medleys featured in the book, arranger notes from Black are also included. The piano solo arrangements are available for \$16.99.



The Fretboard Roadmaps App for Guitar aims to help bring practical music theory information explained in a way that the layperson can understand. The app displays the fretboard diagrams from Fretboard Roadmaps, while also giving access to grids, tablature/music and licks. Additionally, video and audio samples can be accessed through the app to show how Roadmaps can be used to play chords and progressions anywhere on the fretboard and in any key, play lead and rhythm anywhere on the fretboard in any key, play a variety of lead guitar styles, expand chord vocabulary and understand different chord types, and learn to think musically the way the pros do. It is available for iOS. A lite version is available for free, and the full version is available for \$15.99.



[www.halleonard.com](http://www.halleonard.com)

**Piano Styles for Beginners by Mark Harrison**

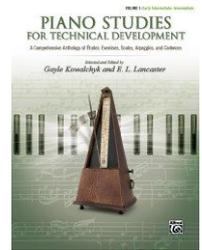
*Piano Styles for Beginners* is a perfect introduction to playing in blues, boogie-woogie, gospel, funk, and pop ballad styles. You will start playing authentic chordal patterns and rhythmic grooves right away, enhanced by the downloadable play-along audio tracks. Each track features a piano demo (performed by Mark himself) and a rhythm section recorded on separate channels so that you can play along with the band. The tracks, in combination with Mark's easy to follow instruction, give the player a great foundation for improvising in each style.



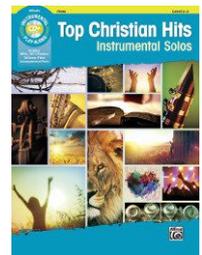
[www.harrisonmusic.com](http://www.harrisonmusic.com)

New Releases from Alfred Music

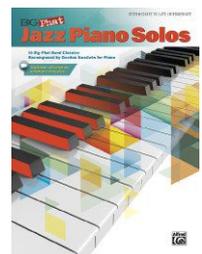
Volume 2 of *Piano Studies for Technical Development* from Alfred Music is a new comprehensive anthology of études, exercises, scales, arpeggios, and cadences. Selected and edited by Gayle Kowalchyk and E. L. Lancaster, *Piano Studies for Technical Development, Volume 2* is designed for pianists who are moving into late intermediate to early advanced levels of study and features three sections. The first section includes études for the development of specific skills. The second section features selected Hanon exercises. Reference pages for scales, arpeggios, and cadences make up the final section. The book is especially useful for college and university piano students who are not piano performance majors (secondary pianists). Price: \$14.99.



*Top Christian Hits Instrumental Solos* offers a versatile selection of today's top Christian hits for flute, clarinet, alto sax, tenor sax, trumpet, horn in F, trombone, violin, viola, and cello. Each book contains carefully edited arrangements appropriate to each instrument, and well suited for level 2–3 students. The CD includes a fully orchestrated demo track of each song, which features a live instrumental solo performance, followed by a play-along track. Also included are PDFs of piano accompaniments, and Alfred's Tempo Changer Software. Titles include "In Christ Alone (My Hope Is Found)," "O Come to the Altar," "Even If," "What a Beautiful Name," "Oh My Soul," "Great Are You Lord," "Good Good Father," "The Lion and the Lamb," "Glorious Day," "Home," "I Can Only Imagine," "This Is Amazing Grace," "Thy Will," "Trust in You," and "Clean." Price: \$14.99.



*Big Phat Jazz Piano Solos* is a new intermediate / late intermediate jazz piano book by Gordon Goodwin. It contains piano solo adaptations of jazz band composer Gordon Goodwin's most popular Big Phat Band titles. Musically challenging but technically accessible, these 10 Big Phat Band classics, recomposed by Gordon Goodwin, capture the essence of the Big Phat Band versions. They reflect Goodwin's ability to combine jazz excellence with a variety of musical styles—including Latin, rock, and funk. The spirit of each composition can be heard in videos of Gordon Goodwin playing each piece, available online at [alfred.com/BigPhatJazzVideos](http://alfred.com/BigPhatJazzVideos). In each video, Goodwin plays through the entire piece, then highlights concepts or skills to practice, providing learning and performance tips specific to that piece. Titles include "Settle Down," "Everlasting," "Samba del Gringo," "The Jazz Police," "I Remember," "Maynard & Waynard," "Backrow Politics," "An American Elegy," "Brother Bones," and "Hunting Wabbits." Price: \$9.50.



[www.alfred.com](http://www.alfred.com)

## DRUMS & PERCUSSION

### New Products from Wuhan

Wuhan Flat Chau Gongs are the newest addition to Wuhan's gong assortment. These gongs are a new hybrid version that looks like are a new version of Wuhan's Wind Gongs. The sound is darker than a traditional wind gong with controlled overtones and a quicker decay.

The 457 Heavy Metal (box sets) from Wuhan get their name from their unique blend of molybdenum, manganese, chromium, and carbon steel alloy – a composition specifically created for heavy hitters. Each cymbal is triple plated in a beautiful gold-colored brilliant finish that won't transfer to drums or other cymbals. Retail price for box set of 14" hh, 16" crash and 20" ride is \$140.



[www.wuhancymbalsandgongs.com](http://www.wuhancymbalsandgongs.com)



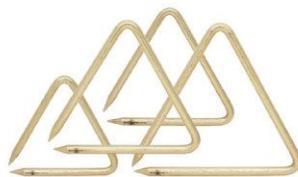
### Tollspire Chimes from Sabian

The Tollspire Chimes are a set of 5 conically-shaped micro-splashes, sized in quarter-inch increments from 4.75" to 5.75". Crafted from Sabian B20 Bronze, they are rolled and tempered from splash thickness blanks, then formed into a cupless, conical shape. Sabian Tollspire Chimes include a mini-tree mount with universal multi-clamp to fit most common cymbal and percussion stands.

[www.sabian.com](http://www.sabian.com)

### Legacy Bronze Triangles from Black Swamp Percussion

These Legacy Bronze triangles produce a refined musical sound full of overtones and lush sonorities. The triangles are designed to retain shimmer at more delicate dynamics, and each one is handcrafted individually using the highest-grade bronze available. Available in four sizes: 5" model LBT5, 6" model LBT6, 7" model LBT7, and 8" model LBT8.



[www.blackswamp.com](http://www.blackswamp.com)

## CASES & STANDS



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Whirlwind's Cyclone Cases are built using the finest Col-so Encore series 4"x2" casters, each with a 480-lb. capacity; UL94, marine-grade UHMW polyethylene panels; proprietary box joint construction for maximum rigidity; custom 5052-H32 marine-grade aluminum corner guards; and MOL recessed latches, stainless hardware. The Cyclone Case designs result in a roadworthy, incredibly sturdy road case. These cases won't soak up water, are easily cleanable, and won't rot like traditional plywood cases. The Cyclone Utility Cases come with customizable dividers, making them ideal for organizing, and transporting all of your stage gear. They come in three convenient sizes: 22" x 30" x 30"; 24" x 30" x 45"; and 30" x 30" x 45"; Truck-pack outer dimensions, ideal for 90-100" trailer widths; and are also available in custom sizes.

[www.whirlwindusa.com](http://www.whirlwindusa.com)

### The Max Protect from Sabian

The Max Protect from Sabian is a tour-grade ABS plastic case that takes cymbals from gig to gig quickly, easily, and safely. From the smallest splash up to a 22" ride, nearly any cymbal fits safely inside the Max Protect. In addition to the rock-hard ABS plastic, the Max Protect has a wide wheelbase to ensure stability when rolling and a telescoping handle for easy transport and storage.



[www.sabian.com](http://www.sabian.com)

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By Dan Daley

## Funny Stuff – Comedy Can be Serious for MI Retail

**H**ow many people in your band? Five – four musicians and a drummer.

**How do you get a drummer off of your porch?** Pay him 10 bucks for the pizza.

**What do you say to a drummer in a three-piece suit?** “Will the defendant please rise?”

Drummer jokes have been with us since cavemen put two sticks together (and if that’s not a setup for another punch line I don’t know what is). But the irony is that most one-liners like that benefit from the badda-bing of a lounge drummer who didn’t get to go to the bar for a beer while the MC was delivering desperate comedy before the show starts. Comedy and drums simply go together, elegantly or otherwise. Fred Armisen, an *SNL* alumnus and the deadpan straight man of the irony-laden IFC series “Portlandia,” very recently finally put the two together in a slapdash documentary. His Netflix special, “Standup For Drummers,” is a sly nod to the *For Dummies* how-to book series, a reminder that to get the joke you have to be one of us, and a dog whistle for percussionists weary of being the butt of way too many gags.

But comedy and music – drums and otherwise – also go together well at retail, too. Scan the wasteland of the internet and you’ll find hundreds of forums and articles that advise comedians, aspiring and otherwise, about how to pick the best microphones for their style of comedy. I once interviewed the front of house mixer for Gabriel “Fluffy” Iglesias, the antic Hispanic jokester who made \$9.5 million lampooning his own porculence, according to *Forbes’* 2015 ranking of media and entertainment earners. I was surprised how much went into the process of mixing one person on stage – how quickly the mic can flip towards the audience, creating howls of feedback instead of laughter; the physical impact of jamming a microphone virtually down a throat in search of a rude sound effect; and of course, what happens during a triumphant mic drop.

Any MI retailer who can answer those questions will make a customer for life, in what *Billboard* estimated has become a \$300 million industry annually. You don’t even need to carry a full line of pro audio equipment, just the microphones and stands. Oh, and mic adaptors – the small but critical plastic pieces that

break with alarming but predictable regularity on amateur nights. They are to comedy microphones what strings are to guitars – recurring revenue.

Interestingly, many comedians prefer wired microphones – World Music Nashville store manager Corey Terrell says Shure’s SM57s and SM58s are the overwhelming mic of choice for stand up – because they give them something to do with their other hand, and because it’s one more way to catch the mic before it hits the floor. (In fact, comedy club owners would prefer that comedians not touch the microphones at all.)

Like musicians, comedians are paying far more attention to how they sound these days. Console manufacturer Digico is putting them in press releases;

they trade advice on which handheld recorders will best capture their performances for later dissection at the bar; a leading Pro Tools blog goes into the same level of detail about miking a club room for laughter as another might for,



“For stores with performance areas, an otherwise dark night is easily turned into an opportunity for an amateur stand-up night.”

well, miking a drum kit. Microphones, stands, adaptors, mixers, PA systems, monitors – and let’s not forget musicians from Steve Martin and his banjo and the Henny Youngman and his violin to Adam Sandler (guitar, sort of) and Judy Tenuta (accordion, which is its own punch line) who bring their axes on stage with them – everything they need is already in almost every MI retail store, except the rubber chickens. These are relationships just waiting to be cultivated.

For MI retailers who are moving tentatively into AV systems installation – putting sound systems in music venues, for instance – the boom in comedy clubs could be manna from heaven. Data-cruncher Statista contends that number of people who visited comedy clubs within the last 12 months went from 14 million in 2008 to over 18 million last year. For stores with performance areas, an otherwise dark night is easily turned into an opportunity for an amateur stand-up night.

Tens of thousands of comedians and hundreds of comedy clubs, and they all need microphones, at the very least. The first store in each market to reach out to them wins. Badda-BOOM! 

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