

# MMR

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# ON THE ROAD AGAIN

*Acoustic Travel Guitars Take Off*



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# C O N T E N T S

# MMR

MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

**FEATURES** Vol.179 MARCH 2020 No. 3



### Roundtable

#### On the Road Again: Acoustic Travel Guitars Take Off 26

This month, we focused on travel guitars and spoke with reps from five suppliers who've made significant impacts within this market segment. Read on to learn who these instruments appeal to, how clever dealers display and promote them, and what to expect in the coming months and years

### Survey

#### Dissention in the Ranks: Acoustic Guitar Strings 30

Possibly the one and only thing this month's dealer survey made clear is this: if you want to start a fight between two fretted instrument store owners, put them in a room and have them discuss acoustic guitar strings

#### 'Designed to be Different':

#### South Carolina's Musical Innovations celebrates 10 years of serving music schools 35

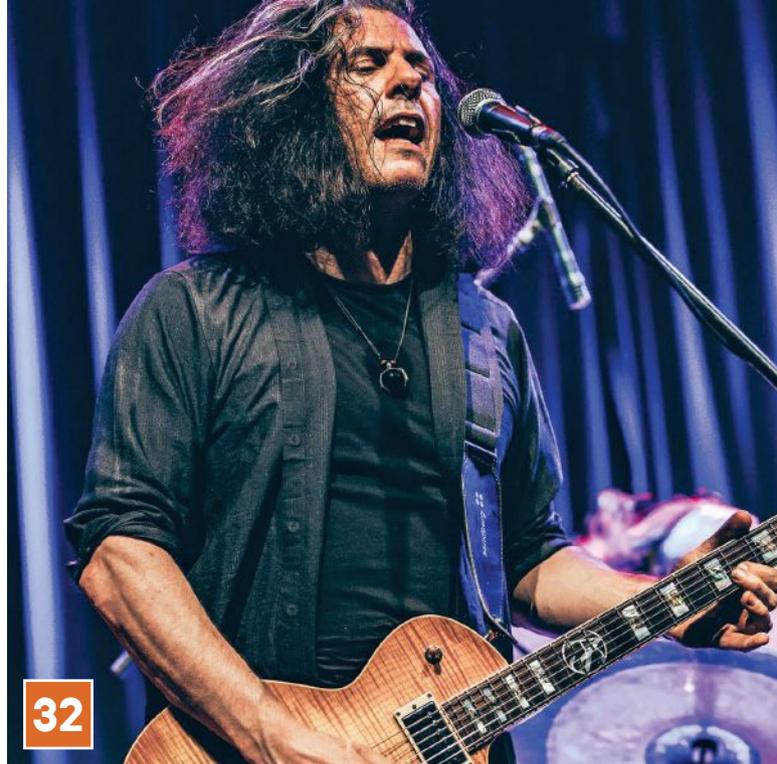
When it comes to serving schools, Musical Innovations of Greenville, South Carolina is grooming a reputation that's potentially unmatched



### Anniversary

#### Defining the Classic Capo: Kyser at 40 36

Since the formative days of Milton Kyser's early capo-making, the faces at Kyser have changed a bit, but the foundation of the company remains the same: classic Texas craftsmanship and providing the accessory that makes music happen



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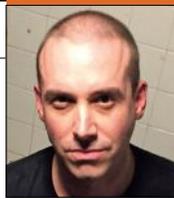
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# The Kids Are All Right

By Christian Wissmuller

**I**n my May 2019 editorial, I wrote the following: “Are you familiar with Billie Eilish? If not, don’t feel too bad. While millions of high-schoolers consider the singer/songwriter to be amongst the most significant artists of their lifetimes, many (most?) over the age of 25 have never heard of her.”

Cut to February 2020 and there are now very few, indeed, who haven’t at least heard of Billie Eilish. Winning five Grammy Awards (she was nominated for six), including the “Big Four” – Best New Artist, Best Album, Best Record, and Song of the Year – does that. There’s lots to unpack about Eilish and her success (that Editorial last year focused on how her breakthrough album was

“There is – happily – quite a lot for MI dealers to feel optimistic about when considering younger artists today.”

recorded and how she “broke” without traditional PR or label support), but what she perhaps embodies more than anything is the *speed* at which musical and cultural shifts can take place – and how essential it is for those in MI to pay close attention.

Menzie Pittman’s “Small Business Matters” column in this issue also discusses Billie Eilish, her brother and musical partner FINNEAS, and the importance of keeping one’s ear to the ground. As he concludes, “The takeaway here is simple. If you are in retail or education, listen to the youth.”

Instead of ringing hands, wondering when the next artist will come along that matches a familiar paradigm from the past and will boost instrument and musical gear sales in a similar fashion, there is – happily – quite a lot for MI dealers to feel optimistic about when considering younger artists today. Camila Cabello, Flipp Dinero, Normani, Blueface, Lewis Capaldi, Kodak Black, Sheck Wes, Khalid, Shawn Mendes, YNW Melly, Polo G, Lil Nas X, Lil Tecca, and Billie Eilish all scored Top-20 *Billboard* singles in 2019 – each of these individuals 23 years old or younger.

True, other than Mendes, most of these musicians aren’t guitar-playing pop/folk/rock artists that resemble the acts which largely drove MI retail from the ‘60s onward, but that doesn’t mean they have no bearing on potential sales. With the decline of the record industry (maybe you’ve heard?), touring is *the* bread-and-butter for most acts and when many of the musicians listed above – whether they’re R&B, pop, hip-hop, or whatever else – go on tour, they hit the road with a band playing actual instruments. Passionate younger fans with an inclination towards music performance, themselves, take note of this.

“Listen to the youth,” indeed.

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## Industry News

### FWS Launches Online Portal for Master File Permits

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) has launched a new, online application portal making it possible to apply and pay for a limited number of FWS Master File permits.

The following permit application forms may now be accessed via the FWS website, at [www.fws.gov/international/permits/how-to-apply.html](http://www.fws.gov/international/permits/how-to-apply.html)

#### Online Permits:

- 3-200-29 – Establish a Master File of Wildlife Samples and/or Biomedical Samples under CITES
- 3-200-32 – Establish a Master File Export/ Re-Export of Plants and Plant Products under CITES
- 3-200-33 – Establish a Master File Export of Artificially Propagated Plants under CITES
- 3-200-34 – Establish a Master File of American Ginseng under CITES
- 3-200-74 – Partially Complete Certification under a Master File or an Annual Program File under CITES
- 3-200-75 – Registration of a Production Facility for Export of Certain Native Species under CITES

The application portal also includes special guidance on a number of materials and guidance on best practices for submitting applications online.

NAMM will continue to urge FWS to expand the system to encompass more forms, including those for single shipments of musical instruments containing CITES-listed species and will work with both FWS and CITES officials to expand e-permitting worldwide.

Further information can be obtained at [www.fws.gov/international/permits/how-to-apply.html](http://www.fws.gov/international/permits/how-to-apply.html)

For additional updates on CITIES and other regulatory issues, visit [www.namm.org/issues-and-advocacy/regulatory-compliance/cites](http://www.namm.org/issues-and-advocacy/regulatory-compliance/cites)

- Industry News
- People on the Move
- Supplier Scene
- Trade Regrets

## Reverb Names Mandelbrot Chief Executive Officer

Reverb has named David Mandelbrot chief executive officer, effective January 28, 2020. Mandelbrot has more than two decades of leadership experience within the technology, media, and entertainment industries.

Under Mandelbrot's leadership, Reverb will focus on driving growth by improving the tools that enable music makers all over the world to find the perfect instrument and expanding the services that help sellers of all sizes connect with more buyers. Mandelbrot will also be focused on continuing Reverb's international growth. Reverb – which operates as a standalone business following its recent acquisition by the global unique and creative goods marketplace Etsy – plans continued expansion of its teams in Chicago and Amsterdam.

Etsy's CEO Josh Silverman commented, "We are excited to have David take the helm at Reverb to guide its continued growth. His experience with successfully leading innovative companies across the technology and entertainment industries, and his passion for music, make him ide-

ally suited for the role. We believe Reverb has a long runway for continued growth, and I'm confident David is the right leader to maximize its position in the musical instruments space."



"As a long-time guitar enthusiast, I've been an active Reverb user since shortly after it was founded – I have sold several items and spent countless hours exploring the wonderful instruments uniquely available on Reverb. To join a company that combines my passion for music with my marketplace and technology experience is truly a dream come true. Plus, what could be a better way to find the perfect fingerstyle blues guitar than joining Reverb?" said Mandelbrot.

Mandelbrot brings to Reverb extensive leadership experience in both tech marketplaces and entertainment. Most recently, Mandelbrot was CEO of Indiegogo, where he led the crowdfunding platform

See **REVERB** page 9

## PMC Launches New Market Development Programs for 2020

This year's annual Percussion Marketing Council (PMC) Membership Meeting and Percussion Industry Gathering launched the PMC's 25th Anniversary celebration and provided a roadmap of market expansion initiatives for 2020. Three new creative market development programs have been designed for 2020 to create new players while motivating existing drummers and connecting them with PMC members, percussion retailers, and instructors.

A year-long campaign called "Get Your Sticks Together" aims to create new drum studio students for retailers who offer active in-store private drum lessons. Starting in February, the PMC will give 12 free drum lessons to one randomly selected winner each month during 2020. Percussion retailers in-

terested in participating can receive free national exposure for their studio lesson-program offerings by signing-up at [www.PlayDrums.com](http://www.PlayDrums.com), thereby increasing visibility for their lesson programs. Each of the 12 percussion retailers that provide the private drum lessons to the contest winners will be recognized at next year's PMC Members Meeting in January 2021.

The annual May International Drum Month campaign gets a complete makeover with the "Lesson with a Master" promotion, offering existing players a chance to win a one-hour live video drum lesson with an internationally recognized celebrity artists: Gordon Campbell, Rick Latham, Rich Redmond, and David Stanoch. Special

See **PMC** page 8

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## PMC *continued from page 7*

recognition was made for the Master Artists Campbell, Latham and Stanoch in attendance at the meet and greet portion of the January Membership Meeting in Anaheim.

Drawing even further attention to the PMC's 25th anniversary, a selection of commemorative-edition snare drums, cymbals, hand-drums, electronic pad, and instruction book collections have been donated by 18 PMC members. Each product has a special 25th anniversary commemorative badge, indicating the significance of the one-of-kind product offering. Consumers will enter the contest through [www.PlayDrums.com](http://www.PlayDrums.com) website and monthly winners will be randomly chosen beginning in May, supporting International Drum Month, and continuing through all of the 25th anniversary celebration year.

The Members Meeting included special recognition for Brad Smith for his many years of service to the PMC and his decade-long membership on the Executive Committee. While he steps off the Executive Committee platform, he continues his service as "special counsel" to the four officers. Karl Dustman was recognized by Percussive Arts Society executive director Joshua Simmons for his term of years and contributions to the PAS Advisory Board 2014-2019.

As a regular part of the members meeting, the executive officers touch on the various campaigns, events and programs that continue to grow the organization for the future. Executive

officer Karl Dustman explained the 2020 expansion of the following programs: "Hand Drumming For Life," created by Remo's John Fitzgerald, builds upon the growing interest of percussion in health and wellness based upon the successes in music therapy; "Percussion in the Library," geared towards creating first-time percussion experiences during the summer months when libraries look for educational connections to attract and engage all-age audiences; and "March to Your Own Drum" works with local marching percussion and drum corps facilitators to bring positive first-time marching percussion experiences at regional festivals and competitions where the public can play, learn, and experience marching percussion instruments and performance requirement off-the-field, up close and personal.

"Over the past 25 year years, the PMC has connected thousands of wanna-play and existing drummers with the PMC mission and nationwide retailer network through a series of educational programs and free online promotions that have consistently grown in scope, participation and impact throughout the organization's tenure," states PMC executive officer David Jewell. "We are fortunate to have internationally recognized drummers and educators like Gordon Campbell, Rick Latham, Rich Redmond, and David Stanoch helping the PMC promote and create more nationwide awareness for these one-of-a-kind online contests and market development initiatives. The 'Lesson with a Master' will be a life-changing drum-lesson experience for each winner."

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# Meyer Music's 'Band of Angels' Supports Music Education

Meyer Music and Fox 4 TV in Kansas City hosted their ninth annual Band of Angels Heart Strings Gala on February 1.

Band of Angels was formed in 2010 with a mission to help students in need find music through the generosity of others. The organization collects used music instruments from the community and makes them available free of charge to those students with financial barriers that

would prevent them from participating in school music programs. "Each year the community and many from within the music industry continue to open their heart to support these kids and music education. We are so proud to be able to help these kids in need find music through the generosity of others," said Mike Meyer of Meyer Music, and chairman of Band of Angels.

The ninth annual Heart Strings Gala

featured professional saxophonist Kat Rodriguez, former longtime sax player for Beyoncé and New York professional drummer Shirazette Tinnin. In addition, three students from the Kansas City area who have benefitted from the program were selected to perform with these incredible musicians.

This year's event was the most successful to date, raising over \$80,000 to support the mission of Band of Angels. Representatives from Yamaha, Conn-Selmer, DANSR, Amati, Gemeinhardt, and Harris Teller, were among those in attendance at the event. School music directors from the area were also invited to attend compliments from these companies for this wonderful night of music and celebration. Additionally, guests were also entertained by KC legends, The William Arthur Smith Marching Cobras drum line and drill team, which was awarded an entire new drumline from Band of Angels this year for the 50th anniversary. The \$20,000 donation was the largest gift ever received by the iconic group. The Marching Cobras were formed by Smith in 1960 to keep inner city youth off the streets and out of trouble.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the first college scholarship offered by the organization. Chris Heard, a freshman at Langston University and recipient of a professional trumpet from BOA three years ago, was presented with a check to cover the remaining balance left after he earned many merit and music scholarships to college. "We are so thrilled to have Chris receive this scholarship, and help him pursue his dream of becoming a music educator," said Carrie Hibbeler from Fox 4 TV. Helping kids with a college education has long been a dream of Band of Angels and this year they got to see that dream come to fruition. "We knew this day would come at some point, and it is just amazing to see the effect that we can have on these students' future," said Meyer.

For more information about Band of Angels contact Mike Meyer at Meyer Music: (913) 491-6636.

## Reverb *continued from page 7*

as it helped users raise more than \$1 billion for hundreds of thousands of projects.

Mandelbrot will report to Etsy CEO Josh Silverman and succeeds Reverb's founder and former CEO, David Kalt, as part of the previously announced transition plan.



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STRAIGHT OR ANGLED



On the last evening of NAMM 2020, **Lloyd Schwartz** passed away. He served as Tech 21's "Solutions Architect" for just over 27 years. Lloyd's unique combination of knowledge, humor, patience, and loyalty contributed to the love and respect he garnered from everyone who crossed his path.



According to Dale Krevens, vice president of Tech 21, "We take some comfort in knowing that Lloyd's last days were spent not only doing what he loved most, but also in the fact that he had the opportunity to see so many of his friends and colleagues one last time. In fact, he relayed sadness over the show ending because he was having such a good time. As a company, we are shell-shocked to lose such an incredible and valued employee. As individuals, we are each shattered to lose such an amazing co-worker and friend."

A Tech 21 memorial is in the planning stages for the spring. Details will be post-



ed on social media when confirmed.

**Ron Vater** passed away on January 25 at the age of 63. A portion of the memorial post on Vater.com read:

*It is with great sadness that we announce the untimely passing of Ron Vater.*

*Ron Vater's life was immersed in drumming and drumsticks from childhood. He spent many days of his youth at his grandfather's store, Boston's legendary Jack's Drum Shop. Jack Adams (Joan Vater's father) would bring Ron and his brother Alan along with him to see many of his friends' concerts when they came through Boston including, Buddy Rich, Louie Bellson, Elvin Jones, and many more.*

*His late teens and early twenties saw Ron working at C. Vater Music Center in*

Norwood, Massachusetts where Ron was a lifelong resident. Ron, along with Alan, would help run the store with their father, the late Clarence "Clarry" Vater. It was while working at this store that the Vater drumstick business was essentially conceived. They experienced a drumstick supply issue from a well-known manufacturer at the time, and Ron and Alan took it upon themselves to rent machine time locally and start turning their own drumsticks for the store, just as Jack Adams had done at his store in the early 1950s.

The Vater brothers made their drumstick manufacturing a full time endeavor in the mid 1980s. They were soon working with leading brands in the industry, producing drumsticks for Pearl, Tama, countless drum shops across the USA, and so on. It was at that time that Vic Firth himself asked the Vater family to manufacture hickory drumsticks for his own brand. Ron and Alan worked closely with Vic, side by side, at their factory designing many of Vic Firth's models that still exist in the market today. That then lead to the design and manufacturing of Zildjian drumsticks and many other's brands, until the proper Vater brand was launched in 1991. While the family continued to manufacture for others, as they still do today, the Vater brand became their main focus.

Being naturally mechanically inclined, Ron Vater oversaw the happenings on the Vater factory floor every day. He would troubleshoot, maintain, set up and operate the machines, all while teaching other workers along the way, including working alongside his son, Dante. Ron would sharpen the knives for the lathes and keep an eye on the quality control portion of the factory floor production process while surrounded by Vater's employees, many of whom have been with the company for decades.

Ron loved Vater Percussion. He loved his high school sweetheart and wife of many years, Susan. He loved their boys, Eric and Dante Vater. He loved cars, fishing, spending time with friends, and the many Vater artists that became part of his extended family over these years. He loved that the drumsticks Vater Percussion made were being used around the world by passionate musicians.

Ron Vater will be missed by all those who knew him and worked with him. His passion and commitment to manufacturing the best drumsticks in the world will be carried on by the Vater Family, the many dedicated Vater Percussion employees and by all of you who create music and express your percussive passion with Vater products.

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# Supplier Scene

## Gator Co. Celebrates 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with New Logos

To kick off its 20th anniversary year, Gator Co. launched two new logos for Gator Co. and Gator Cases to celebrate its growth and evolution since 2020.

"We wanted a sleek and modern logo that reflects our innovative spirit and the high-quality, savvy nature of our products," said Crystal Morris, founder and CEO of Gator. "Our fans and customers trust and expect our products to be strong to protect their valued possessions and our logos should convey that strength. The logo upgrades are a great reflection of how much and how fast Gator has grown and improved.



"2020 is a meaningful number for us – 20/20 perfect vision and outlook. We have over 2020 products to celebrate. We've enjoyed 20 great years of growth, friendship, teamwork and fans and we look forward to another outstanding 20 and more."

Gator Co. was founded in 2000 by father-daughter team Jerry Freed and Crystal Morris in Tampa, Florida. Initially, they launched with a small offering of molded plastic guitar cases at the Summer NAMM show in Nashville, Tennessee. From there, they expanded the product line to include case and bag solutions, accessories, gear and stands for multiple markets and industries. Gator Co. has now grown to be the parent company of multiple successful brands – GatorCases, Gator Frameworks, Gator Rackworks, Levy's, Protechtor Cases, and Slappa.

# Yamaha Names Piano 'Dealer of the Year' Honorees

Yamaha Corporation of America has announced its 2019 piano "Dealer of the Year" awards, which recognize exceptional retailers nationally and in five U.S. regions, as well as for Major and Small markets.

These dealers have not only shown remarkable success in sales and growth, but also demonstrated special attention to customer service and dedication to the Yamaha principle of inspiring people to explore music-making.

Dealers earning this prestigious award on the overall, national level are Cunningham Piano Company of Philadelphia, Yamaha Piano Channel Dealer of the Year; and Classic Pianos of Portland, Oregon, Bösendorfer Dealer of the Year. Bösendorfer, a Yamaha company, has epitomized piano-building mastery in the Viennese tradition since 1828, making it the world's oldest premium piano manufacturer.

Dealers honored by Yamaha with similar awards on the regional level include:

- Music Exchange; Walnut Creek, California (Western region)
- Fox Music House; North Charleston, South Carolina (Southeastern region)
- Fort Bend Music Center; Stafford, Texas (South Central region)
- Solich Piano and Music Company; Boardman, Ohio (Midwestern region)
- My First Piano; Gilbert, Arizona (Southwestern region)
- Classic Pianos; Portland, Oregon (Major Market category)
- Piano Gallery; Murray, Utah (Small Market category)

Major Market and Small Market Dealer of the Year awards are given to dealers serving markets greater and smaller than 5 million people, respectively.

"On my own behalf and that of Yamaha, congratulations to all of these outstanding dealers for this hard-earned recognition," said Travis Mitchell, director, piano channel sales, Yamaha Corporation of America. "These store owners

see YAMAHA on page 16

# iConic Solutions Joins Group One Network

Farmingdale, New York-based Group One Limited, the U.S. distributor for a number of premium professional audio and lighting brands, has named iConic Solutions Group as its newest independent manufacturers representative firm for DiGiCo, KLANG, XTA, and MC 2. The announcement comes from Group One executive vice president of Audio Matt Larson, to whom the firm reports.

Headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota, iConic Solutions Group is under the direction of principal partners Tim Von Barga and Kyle Curtis, who established the company in 2018 by combining their two previous firms, Audio One Marketing and Clarity Sales & Marketing. Effective immediately, iConic is now servicing the territories of Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Western Wisconsin for the four pro audio brands.

"With the merger of Audio One and Clarity, iConic grew two good rep firms



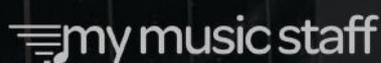
into one great one with the technical expertise, industry knowledge, and necessary resources to deliver exceptional service to the Midwestern region," says Larson. "Tim, Kyle, and their team are keenly focused on providing the best solutions and experiences for the dealers and customers in their territory, and they are already quickly proving to

be a valuable partner for DiGiCo, KLANG, XTA, and MC 2."

"We are proud to work with Group One, both for the exceptional quality of their products and for their firm commitment to education and training," Von Barga shares. "Already, in our short time with the company, it is clear to us why DiGiCo has grown in popularity on all fronts. The Group One team has built a 'family' vibe that really separates them from the pack. When you buy a DiGiCo, you know are buying a world-class mixer with world-class support."



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## Sleek Design and Mobile Optimization Debut in New Randall Website

Potential buyers can browse and buy the best selection of Randall amplifiers and guitar cabinets with ease, thanks to the launch of an entirely new brand website. The new site features a sleek interface that's guaranteed to simplify the customer experience.

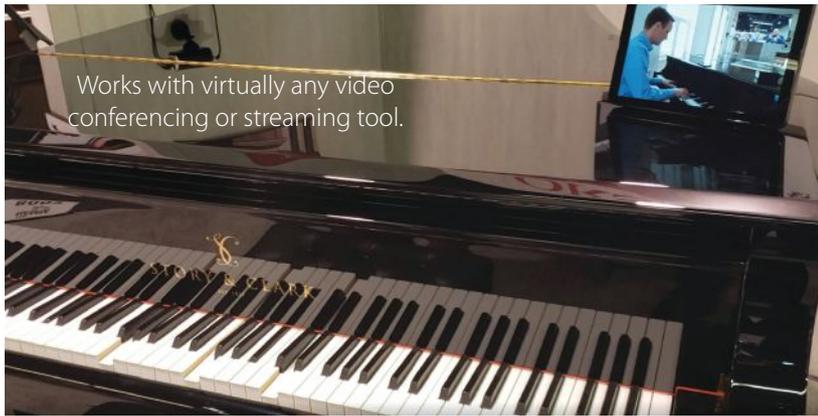
"The new Randall website represents a complete redesign of the architecture, functionality and content of the previous

site," Randall vice president of sales James Tsaptinos said. "It features a strong new look that highlights our products with glossy photos and an easy-to-browse arrangement – plus mobile device optimization that is vital to reach and engage with today's mobile-centric buyer audience."

According to Tsaptinos, about half of the site's traffic comes from mobile



## Q-SYNC LIVE DEBUTED A NEW QRS-CONNECTOR FEATURE



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Shown above QRS Artist Mike Jones is interacting with NAMM attendees while playing in New York, as the Story & Clark piano at the NAMM show plays along in – PERFECT SYNC.

Using the Amazon "Drop In" Feature on the Echo Show, a remote piano can play without the receiver even touching a screen, logging in or remembering passwords, all without complicated hookups.



Shown here using Skype and PianoMarvel on the multi-touch workstation

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phones, underlying the need to adapt the site for this new market reality. "This new site allows us to hammer home what is most important and unique about each Randall product in a way that mobile users have never experienced before with the Randall site," he adds.

The new site also eliminates clutter through displaying products by model and routinely updating the "featured products" section on the homepage. "With every addition we make," Tsaptinos emphasized, "the new Randall website lives up to the standard of excellence that consumers have come to demand from Randall amplifiers and accessories. With the launch of the new site, Randall is better prepared to help a new generation of players find the product that best suits their desires."

## Yamaha continued from page 12

and their talented staff exemplify the philosophy we at Yamaha strive every day to uphold: encouraging a creativity and passion in budding and seasoned musicians alike that will not only help them grow artistically, but also spark the same instinct in others."

The Yamaha Dealer of the Year honors are awarded by the company based on a wide variety of factors, including but not limited to sales growth, overall customer experience and positive feedback, knowledgeability and helpfulness of store staff, participation in outreach to the local community and much more. Yamaha expanded the evaluation process for Dealer of the Year this year to cover a much more extensive set of criteria reaching beyond sales performance.



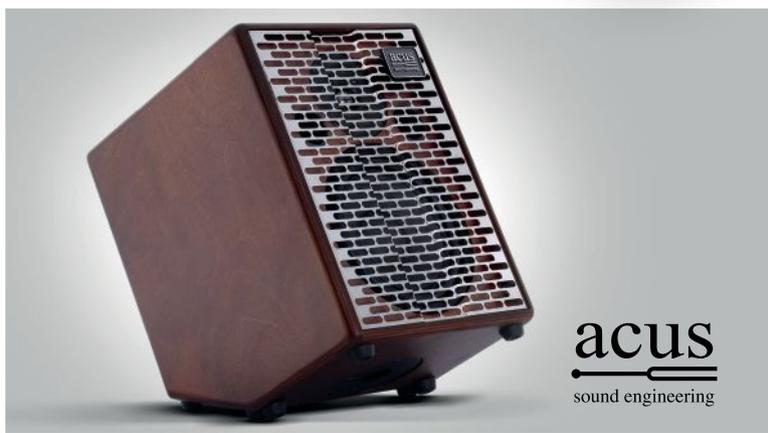
  
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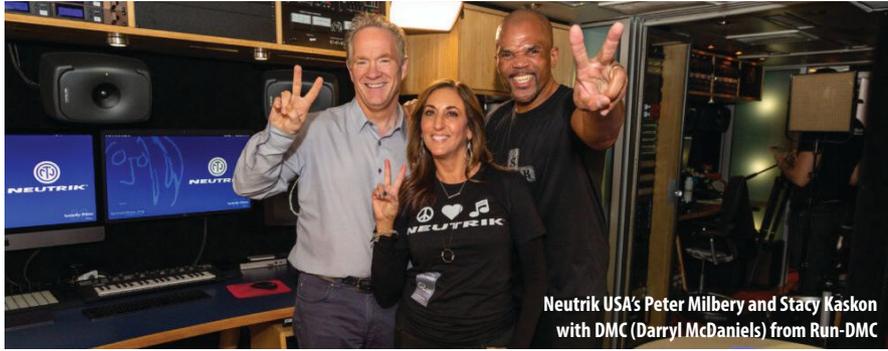
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Neutrik USA's Peter Milbery and Stacy Kaskon with DMC (Darryl McDaniels) from Run-DMC

## Neutrik and The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus Create a Positive Influence During Grammy Week

There was much more to the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards ceremony on January 26th than the general public saw on television. As part of the festivities, The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus (JLB), a non-profit mobile audio and HD video recording and production studio, parked next to the Staples Center to further its cause of advocating music education. In association with the Grammy Music Education Coalition (GMEC), students from the Los Angeles Unified School District spent time writing and producing songs, assisted and encouraged by the JLB staff and celebrities including Bootsy Collins and DMC (Run-DMC). The JLB also presented numerous additional performances, tours and activities. Neutrik is a long-term sponsor of the JLB, which uses Neutrik exclusively. This sponsorship of the JLB, plus the fact that the company's connectivity products are used extensively at the Grammy Awards, made Neutrik ideally situated to share its knowledge and experience throughout the JLB's stopover in Los Angeles.

The JLB teamed up with GMEC – a non-profit organization dedicated to building universal music education participation in elementary and secondary schools nationwide – to present a roundtable discussion addressing music from the perspectives of performance, education, production, and live event engineering. Neutrik USA's Peter Milbery, president, and Stacy Kaskon, director of Business Development, participated in the discussion along with Brian Rothschild, co-founder and executive director of the Lennon Bus, along with the mobile studio's creative technology officer, Jeff Sobel.

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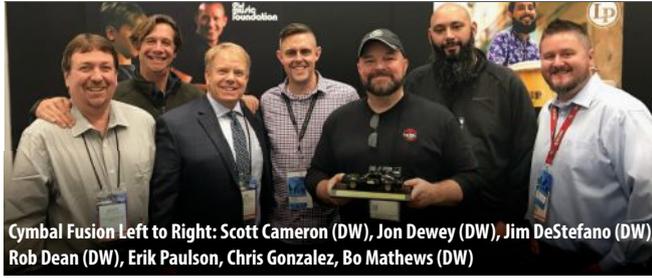
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Cymbal Fusion Left to Right: Scott Cameron (DW), Jon Dewey (DW), Jim DeStefano (DW), Rob Dean (DW), Erik Paulson, Chris Gonzalez, Bo Mathews (DW)

## DW Announces The PDP 2020 Dealer Awards

Drum Workshop Inc. (DW) announced its PDP dealers of the year at NAMM 2020. The awards recognized the best dealers for sales, growth and brand champion.

Cymbal Fusion, awarded Top Sales, has been providing drummers with top-quality products and service since 2005. Focusing on the goals of their marketing strategy for the PDP brand was a major factor in their sales achievements.

For more than 25 years, Chicago Drum Exchange have been serving drummers with expertise and great first-hand knowledge. To receive the Growth Award, they transformed their customer experience, making the PDP brand highly accessible through online and mobile channels, as well as offering an enhanced in-store experience.

Ken Stanton Music is the largest independent music retailer in the American southeast. They are the proud recipients of the Brand Champion Award after their very effective social media campaign and choosing to carry a large stock of PDP products.

Rob Dean, PDP brand manager, said "Congratulations to all our winners on their achievements. They have represented PDP with enthusiasm and professionalism, contributing to a hugely successful year for themselves and the PDP brand."

## Lightpower Collection Presents Donation to NAMM Foundation to Advance Music Making

At the annual gathering of the global music products, pro audio and entertainment technology industry, The 2020 NAMM Show, the Lightpower Collection gifted The NAMM Foundation a donation of \$10,000. The donation check was presented at the annual Grand Rally for Music Education to the Foundation on Saturday, January 18 and will help the Foundation advance music-making opportunities for people around the world.

"We are so grateful for this remarkable and generous donation from the Lightpower Collection that will amplify the vision and mission of the NAMM Foundation to advance music learning and making opportunities for people of all ages," said Mary Luehrsen, NAMM Foundation executive director. "Together, all NAMM Show participants and NAMM members are helping to advance a more musical and creative world, and we are so honored by the Lightpower Collective for this leadership gift."

"Lightpower is more than thankful to be in the lucky position to be able to support The NAMM Foundation and its fabulous work," shared Ralph-Jörg Wezorke, founder of the Lightpower Collection. "We ourselves want to thank the photographers we work with for passionately supporting the Lightpower Collection and especially Neal Preston, who from the beginning has always been at our side."

The check was presented by famed rock 'n' roll photographer

## Waves Audio Announces Plugin Subscription Service

Waves Audio has announced Waves Music Maker Access, its new and affordable plugin subscription plan.

Waves Music Maker Access offers monthly or annual subscriptions for Waves' best-selling, award-winning plugin bundles Silver, Gold and Platinum. These bundles include the most popular pro-quality plugin bundles in the music and audio industry, used by millions of music makers, from home producers to GRAMMY winners.

Waves Music Maker Access subscriptions plans start from just \$6.99/month, and all plans begin with a one month free trial. Subscribers also receive unlimited lifetime plugin updates and premium customer service. Subscribers can cancel any time, no strings attached.

In addition, subscribers to gold or platinum are eligible to choose a bonus custom 5-Pack subscription for just an extra \$7.99/month. Custom 5-Pack subscribers can choose five extra plugins from the massive Waves catalog (including popular plugins such as Waves Tune Real-Time, Vocal Rider, SSL, and many more), to create their own custom subscription bundle.

With Waves Music Maker Access, every music producer can now afford the award-winning, gold-standard plugins used by countless GRAMMY-winning producers, mixers and musicians in chart-topping sessions for Billie Eilish, Beyoncé, Kendrick Lamar, Drake, Taylor Swift, and countless more.

To learn more, visit <https://www.waves.com/subscriptions>.



The Lightpower Collection present the \$10,000 check to the NAMM Foundation

Neal Preston, Lightpower executives Giulia Calani and Andreas Witt to Luehrsen and Joe Lamond, NAMM president and CEO.

At The NAMM Show, the Lightpower Collection presented coveted images from Neal Preston's extensive body of work, featuring more than 80 of his iconic pictures spanning legendary album covers, views behind the scenes, moments that made history – the essence of rock 'n' roll and concert touring. The works are available as fine art prints through the Lightpower Collection with all proceeds going to charities.

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## PreSonus Announces River City Sessions

In celebration of their 25th anniversary, PreSonus has announced the new River City Sessions performance series. The online series features artists performing in PreSonus' world-class, Walters-Storyk Design Group-designed River City Studio at PreSonus HQ in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The first episode debuted this week, featuring Justin Garner, as recorded by Eric Welch.

The monthly, online series will feature hand-picked up-and-coming artists from Louisiana and beyond, offering them a chance to record a few songs and a video in exceptional fidelity – for free. Each episode is intended to capture the live, performative spirit of the artists, with minimal attention to overdubs and layering.



Each performance concludes with a brief Q&A with each session's engineer about the recording techniques and creative approach employed. Like the featured artists, engineers will be different with every episode.

"This is something we've wanted to do for a long time," said Wesley DeVore, PreSonus' product marketing manager. "Independent artists are the lifeblood of PreSonus. The River City Sessions give us a chance to support the kind of musicians that help build our company and share their work with a global audience."

Performances will be published via PreSonus' YouTube and Facebook accounts monthly. Currently-scheduled performers include Justin Garner, Kimberly Meadowlark, Korgy and Bass, Molly Taylor, Palimino Darling, Quin Quartet, and somebody called "The Big Burly Man."

## ON THE MOVE

**Reverb** announced that it has appointed **Jason Wain** as chief technology officer. Wain has more than a decade of technology and leadership experience, most recently serving as senior director of engineering at Etsy.



Wain's team will focus on improving the tools that enable music makers all over the world to find the perfect instrument and expanding the services that help musical instrument sellers of all sizes connect with more buyers. Under Wain's leadership, Reverb plans to continue expanding its product and engineering teams, with a focus on adding engineering managers, engineers, and data analysts to the team.

**St. Louis Music (SLM)** has announced that **Todd Schweinbold** has been appointed sales manager for Alvarez Guitars and Combo. Schweinbold will be handling all aspects of sales and brand adoption on a global scale with a focus on domestic National/Key Accounts and international distributors.



He commented on his new position, "I am excited for the opportunity to work closely with our Alvarez partners domestically and internationally to position the brand as one of the top acoustic guitar brands. I look forward to developing and executing brand strategies to maximize Alvarez Guitars and Combo products in the marketplace."

**SABIAN** has announced that industry veteran **Mark Reynolds** has accepted the position of national sales director, School Music Division.



Reynolds' extensive teaching career spans almost 30 years. He has served as percussion director for the Ohio State University Marching Band, and has designed and written for many top U.S. High School marching bands, indoor percussion ensembles, and college marching bands. His music design and teaching has led multiple WGI indoor drum lines to world championships, medals, and finals performances.

**Fishman** is pleased to announce the promotion of **Matt Schow** to engineering

manager. Schow started at Fishman in 2006 as a co-op while going to school full time at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. In 2010, he was promoted to mechanical engineer and four years later he became the mechanical engineering manager.



In his new role, he will oversee Fishman's entire Engineering team and manage multiple projects across the company's electrical and mechanical engineering divisions.

**Timeless Communications** announced that **Jeff Donnenwerth** has joined the sales team as an executive advertising account manager. "Timeless continues to grow, and serving our clients exceptionally well means we need to grow our team from time to time," says president and publisher Terry Lowe. "Jeff is a long-time industry expert, known and respected throughout the business, and we are looking forward to his presence and expertise."



"This is a homecoming for me of sorts, as I have already been working with many of the clients that I'll be serving now with Timeless," Donnenwerth says. "But I'm also looking forward to the challenges, as Timeless today is a dynamic, progressive company with multi-digital and print platforms that offer dynamic possibilities for companies to message to the right audience. [I am] very much looking forward to all of that."

Donnenwerth was most recently an account executive at Informa Markets, where he was responsible for exhibit and sponsorship sales for the Worship Facilities Conference & Expo. Additional duties included exhibit sales for LDI. Prior to that he was advertising director for New Bay Media/Future PLC for eight years managing print/digital media and event sales for *Guitar Player*, *Guitar World*, *Bass Player*, and other instrument-centric consumer magazines. For six years in the aughts he was advertising sales manager for *Electronic Musician*, *Mix*, and *Music Education Technology* magazines, among others. He's a graduate of St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, and today is based in Atlanta.

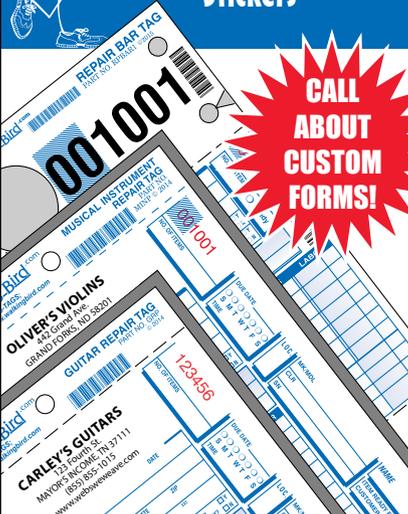
Donnenwerth can be reached at (678) 427-1535 and JDonnenwerth@timeless-com.com.

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Note From Mary

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## NAMM: Advocating for Our Members' Pocketbook Issues

As your trade association, NAMM monitors and informs membership on policy and compliance issues. These are complex matters; compliance with federal and state laws and regulations is not optional and likely impacts your bottom line. These are “pocketbook” realities. Building on the success of our music education advocacy efforts of the past two decades, NAMM is investing more resources to represent the interests of our members in regulatory policies and to ensure that our members are heard by our elected officials and policy makers. Collectively and collaboratively, NAMM fights for the needs of its members.

**Mary Luehrsen, Director of Public Affairs and Government Relations**



### Free and Fair Trade / Tariffs

NAMM supports free and fair trade. Visit [namm.org](http://namm.org) to review the recent informational webinar, including exemption-filing procedures and ongoing updates about the impact of the 2020 Chinese trade agreement.



### E-Commerce

NAMM supports simple and reliable state sales tax collection and reporting requirements under the new “Post-Wayfair” Supreme Court decision. [Namm.org](http://Namm.org) likewise hosts an informational webinar on resources to simplify sales tax collection requirements.



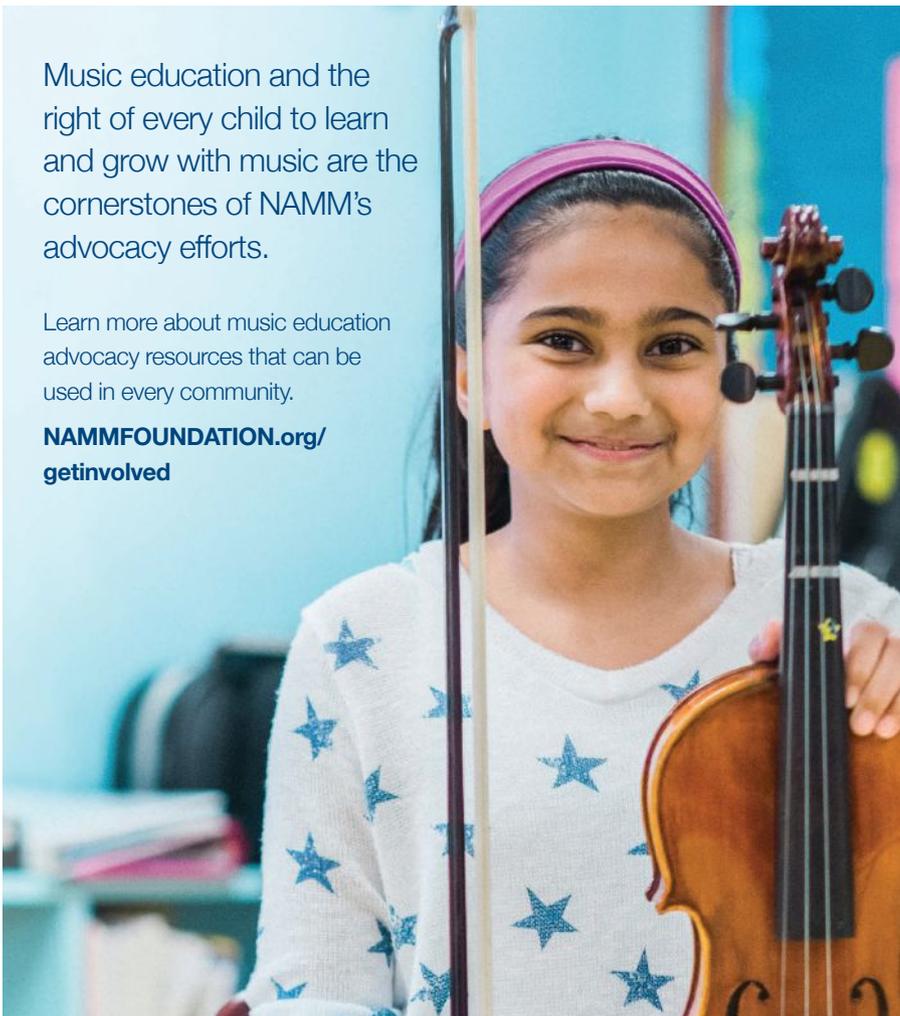
### AB-5 Worker Status

NAMM, along with other professional musician organizations and the California Chamber of Commerce, supports changes to California's AB-5 employment law to accommodate employment realities of musicians and entertainment technology professionals.

Music education and the right of every child to learn and grow with music are the cornerstones of NAMM's advocacy efforts.

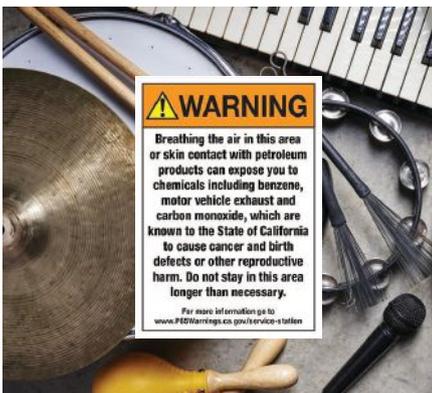
Learn more about music education advocacy resources that can be used in every community.

**NAMMFOUNDATION.org/  
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## New NAMM Lobbyist Advocating for Change

Chris Cushing has 30 years of experience in government, politics and corporate public policy issues, and is an experienced political advisor and strategist, having served in leadership positions on winning presidential campaigns on three continents. Mr. Cushing has lectured at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, the Institute of Management & Administration, the Public Forum Institute, and is a speaker in the United States and abroad. Chris will help guide our efforts, coordinating the resources and expertise of Nelson Mullins, to maximize the industry's voice for "pocketbook" and other issues.



## Prop 65

NAMM supports resolution to the "background noise" realities of Prop 65 labeling requirements. NAMM is participating in the Coalition for Accurate Product Labels, with pending federal legislation outlining clear compliance and enforcement for product components.



## CITES and Sustainability

NAMM and a global coalition achieved revisions to CITES wood listing (2019 Conference of the Parties) and has established a forum concerning sustainability in the music industry.



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[namm.org/issues-and-advocacy](http://namm.org/issues-and-advocacy)

# On the Road Again

## Acoustic Travel Guitars Take Off

By Christian **Wissmuller**



**S**mall-scale acoustic travel guitars are physically smaller and lighter instruments, but still generally with a full – or nearly full – scale length. The appeal of these guitars has been bolstered in recent years by high-profile usage by megastar artists, relative ease of play for newer musicians or young (or petite) guitarists, and the fact that travel guitars are specifically designed to (wait for it...) accompany you on the road.

While there are certainly electric guitars that qualify as “travel-sized,” for this Roundtable feature we kept the focus on acoustic six-strings and spoke with reps from five suppliers who’ve made significant impacts within this market segment. Read on to learn who these guitars appeal to, how clever dealers display and promote them, and what to expect in the coming months and years.

**For your brand, what are currently some hot sellers in the category of travel-sized, small bodied acoustics?**

**Andy Winston:** Through best-sellers like the steel-string JR2 and APXT2 and the nylon-string ½-size CGS102A and ¾-size CGS103A, Yamaha has always offered a wide variety of short-scale instruments. A few years ago, Yamaha re-entered the parlor guitar market with the CSF1M and the all-solid wood CSF3M guitars, which feature scalloped bracing and passive electronics. Last year, we added TransAcoustic technology to the CSF family to bring the CSF-TA to our customers. Imagine sitting and playing with your new CSF-TA and having reverb and chorus come from inside of the guitar. So cool!

**Mitchell Nollman:** Our travel guitars are gaining popularity in the marketplace. Martin offers a full line of travel guitars including our LX and Junior instruments. We launched a 000 shape and a cutaway at last Summer NAMM and all are selling well. Additionally, our smaller body guitars 0, 00, 000, and OM are all performing well across our line and are trending up.

**Monte Montefusco:** Taylor is fortunate to have made an enduring impact on the travel guitar category with our Baby Taylor. We’ve crafted thousands of these guitars every year since it was introduced in 1996. Bob Taylor reinvented the travel segment in 2010 with the award-winning GS Mini. In any airport around the world, it will only take a few minutes before you’ll spot a GS Mini gig bag strapped to the back of a traveling musician.

**Taylor Buck:** We’ve had an incredible response to our Cordoba Mini Series travel guitars. These are nylon string guitars with full-size feel and playability. The Mini is a 20” scale length – tuned up a fifth from standard guitar (ADGCEA). While the Mini II is a 22.9” scale, tuned to standard E tuning. Both of these models are competitively priced and provide crisp acoustic tones thanks to Cordoba’s expertise in nylon strings and small bodied instruments.

**Adam Gomes:** Many of our hot sellers in this category live in the Safari Series – hands-down, these are successful sellers for our dealers. These guitars are lightweight, ¾ size of a full body acoustic, and make comfortable travel companions for the seasoned musician as well as the beginner player. The main thing fueling the popularity of this series is the wide variety offered, leaving the window open to gain the interest of players of all skill levels.

From creative designs and laser-etching, to wood selection and feature options, the Safari Series has something for all playing styles. Just like the Luna brand, if you want design focused to inspire you, I would suggest the Safari Starry Night, laser-etched Safari Tattoo, or maybe something with a unique wood sibling, the Safari Bamboo. There’s something for everyone.



“Travel guitars are practical because of portability, but they also make great gifts! What player doesn’t want to have a guitar-to-go?”

– **Taylor Buck**, marketing director, Cordoba Music

“The most successful dealers offer a wide selection of guitars that allow their customers to test drive different sizes and styles within select price points.”

– **Mitchell Nollman,**

VP of global sales and marketing, C.F. Martin



**What types of customers are drawn to these kinds of guitars?**

**MN:** We find that seasoned players and new players are drawn to smaller bodied guitars and travel sized guitars. Seasoned players may just be looking at a different body size for a

new sound or a travel guitar that they can take on the road. Smaller bodied guitars are also generally easier to play, so new guitar students gravitate toward them as well.

**MM:** Our original Baby Taylor appealed to frequent travelers and young players seeking a quality instrument to strum. When the GS Mini arrived, professional musicians started taking it on stage. The GS Mini delivers performance that keeps players inspired from the campfire to the concert hall. We've sold hundreds of thousands of them during the last decade.

**AG:** Customers and players alike are drawn to the Safari Series due to its universal appeal and because it fits many purposes. These guitar bodies are small enough for kids and the perfect size for up-and-coming guitar players wanting to learn and develop an identity as a player. At the same time, I work with several songwriters that prefer to set aside their full-body Luna acoustics and take their Safaris to every writer's round. There are those musicians that simply prefer playing live gigs and recording with a smaller guitar. In the case of one artist that joined the Luna Artist roster recently, he won't leave home without his Safari Koa Supreme Solid-Top with the round back and Fishman electronics.

**TB:** Honestly, these Minis are a fit for all guitar players. They make it possible to always have a guitar around at all times. Young musicians may also find the smaller-bodied guitars a bit easier to hold.

**AW:** The beginning player is one we always hold dear to our mission, so creating new musicians by crafting the finest guitars at all price points has long since been a calling for Yamaha. But now, with the growth of our CSF series, we are seeing the recreational player and hobbyist adding this intermediate-size guitar to their collections. Our customers have sent us photos of our travel-size guitars in boardrooms and even at campsites!

**Are there any particular challenges specific to these smaller acoustics when it comes to design and construction?**

**AG:** Not even in the slightest bit. The Safari Series proves we can build a small-body travel guitar with a variety of design options and features, and it will still produce the almost identical boisterous sound you'd hear from its dreadnought sibling. And at a fraction of the cost.

**MM:** Most consumers assume that a travel-size guitar should cost less than a full-size instrument. However, there are no design or production shortcuts to manufacture a smaller guitar. For an instrument to sound great and hold up to environmental change, additional investment must be made in the development process. It's challenging to deliver the winning combination of performance and value to meet customer expectations.

**TB:** Regarding the Cordoba Minis, the design and construction is completely unique to the size. It's not as easy as scaling down a full-body into a smaller frame – the sound response is completely different. So, the construction of the instrument needs to be completely redesigned and optimized to match the smaller interior. It was also a major focus for our Mini line to find a scale length that was small enough to be portable, but still be able to hold E tuning. During our development we found that many guitarists preferred their travel instrument to be in the same tuning as their full size guitars, so landing on the 22.9" scale length for the Mini II was the perfect answer to this need.

**AW:** The biggest hurdle any manufacturer faces is getting smaller instruments to sound as full and rich as their larger counterparts. At Yamaha, we met this challenge by building our parlor-sized CSF series in the same manner as our full-size FG and A Series guitars. Every CSF guitar has a solid Sitka spruce top and the same scalloped interior bracing that makes our other

guitars balanced in tone and rich in depth.

**MN:** Martin has been making small body guitars since 1833 and selling them successfully. Regardless of size, tonewoods, bracing, and overall instrument design are critical to a guitar's performance.

**What are some "best practices" adopted by dealers who are especially successful selling travel-sized acoustic guitars?**

**TB:** Travel guitars are practical because of portability, but they also make great gifts! What player doesn't want to have a guitar-to-go?

**MN:** The most successful dealers offer a wide selection of guitars that allow their customers to test drive different sizes and styles within select price points. Our dealers know their customer base and typically try to of-





“There are those musicians that simply prefer playing live gigs and recording with a smaller guitar.”  
– **Adam Gomes**,  
director of marketing & artist relations, Luna Guitars

for a selection that will most appeal to their customers. For travel guitars, we offer two great design options: the LX and Junior Series. LX guitars have high pressure laminate back and sides and are very durable and scratch resistant. Our Junior series guitars are solid wood construction and have no compromise when it comes to tone.

**AG:** There are many crafty approaches adopted by dealers that help them sell travel acoustics. In many cases, travel guitars are a great transitional guitar. From uke players that eventually may want to play guitar, to full-time musicians looking for an acoustic that's more practical to fit their needs. Keep this in mind when placing travel guitars on the showroom floor.

**AW:** As with any instrument consultation, the dealer should always find out who is going to be playing the guitar and in what environment the guitar will be played. To Yamaha, the “who” question is very important since it determines what size (½, ¾, parlor) instrument they'll recommend. And remember, if you find out the guitar will be used by a beginner or child, offer to restring the guitar with a more beginner-friendly gauge or type of string. I like starting kids with the “silk & steel” set of strings since those bass strings are under less pressure and much easier for tender fingers to press down to the fingerboard.

**MM:** Having a wide assortment of models is a must. Travel-size guitars appeal to seasoned players as well as budding musicians starting their journey. All of these players have a variety of aesthetic and sonic tastes. Ensuring your store has a selection of color, finish, tonewood, and plug-in options is key to earning travel guitar business. The cost of offering a robust selection is relatively low compared to stocking full-size guitars. The small guitar category easily provides the best opportunity to acquire new customers.

**Have you been noticing any particular shifts of note when it comes to these sorts of acoustics – either on the vendor or consumer side?**

**AW:** We are now seeing almost every manufacturer offering short- to mid-scale guitars to service this portion of the buying public. This year's trade show saw many exotic wood offerings, as well as a lot of different composite and man-made materials coming into the category. However, our focus and reputa-

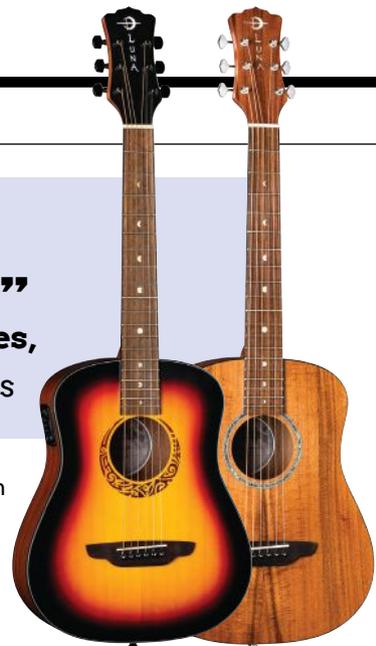
tion at Yamaha have always been built on quality, durability and innovation. We'll always deliver products boasting cutting-edge technology that no other brand can offer.

**MM:** Customers are discerning and willing to spend more on an instrument that fits their needs. We have seen the average sale price of travel guitars increase over the past few years. Musicians are seeking pro-level quality in their smaller guitars and are expanding their budgets to meet these requirements.

**MN:** Since Ed Sheeran burst onto the music scene in 2011 playing his Martin LX, we've seen an increase in interest in our travel guitars. Many artists have followed. Some of our travel guitars come with onboard electronics making them easy to plug in and get a much bigger sound than the typical small-bodied guitar.

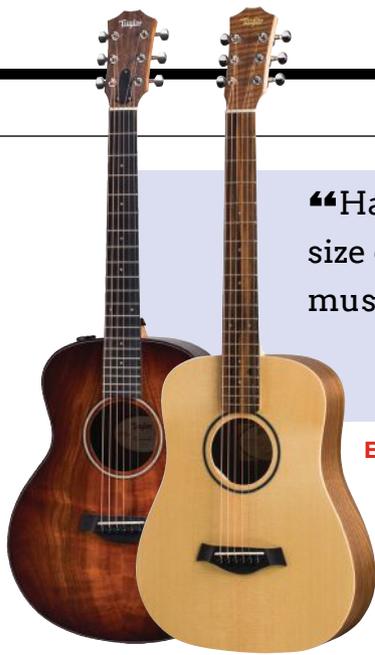
**TB:** The demand for a good-sounding mini guitar has been around for a while, but it hasn't been until the last few years that the craftsmanship could hold up and produce good sound. Many of the past mini guitars were cheaply-built and sounded tinny. Now with mini-sized guitars such as the Cordoba Mini Series and steel string variations like the Guild Jumbo Junior, the technology has allowed for well-built, incredible-sounding instruments.

**AG:** The Luna brand has a strong presence. Dealers and consumers (and the #LunaTribe) have grown to expect each instrument to embody some level of creativity that will inspire them. In 2020, we introduced two unique new models with electronics, which has been anticipated for some time. The Safari Koa Supreme Solid-Top features a Sonitone Fishman Preamp system, located underneath the sound hole, making the guitar sound plush through an amp (\$329 USD). The Safari Tribal Tobacco Sunburst features a basic preamp (\$199 USD), both come with branded gig bags. These two Safaris give our players an up-scale or a basic option, with the ability to amplify your sound.



“The biggest hurdle any manufacturer faces is getting smaller instruments to sound as full and rich as their larger counterparts.”  
– **Andy Winston**,  
technical sales specialist, Yamaha Guitars





“Having a wide assortment of models is a must. Travel-size guitars appeal to seasoned players as well as budding musicians starting their journey.”

– Monte Montefusco,  
vice president of sales, Taylor Guitars



**Expectations for this market segment in 2020?**

**MM:** Guitarists will push the upward boundaries of what they desire from travel instruments. We'll continue to craft guitars that push the category forward. Our new GS Mini-e Koa

Plus was introduced to rave reviews

at the NAMM Show. This model is our most feature-laden travel guitar to date, and dealer response was tremendous. Taylor master guitar designer Andy Powers has endless ideas about further advancing our small guitar designs for the future that will surpass the wishes of today's player.

**AG:** According to statistics and feedback from our dealers, it's safe to say the small guitar market will keep growing. The past few years we've seen smaller acoustics increase in popularity. Safaris went from being a cool travel guitar, to becoming

a household name among smaller-body acoustics. In the world we live in, people are always searching for practically. Same goes for musicians – not to mention they are less expensive to own!

**MN:** Martin is committed to offering a full line of travel guitars and smaller bodied instruments. We'd encourage anyone to play our travel and small bodied instruments and compare them to any brand in the market.

**TB:** The trend will grow as more and more musicians seek out ways to create quality music on-the-go. Travel guitars are the perfect musical companion. Get out and play!

**AW:** More growth! Parlor-size instruments are too much fun for everyone not to want one for themselves. At Yamaha, we continue our quest to be the best guitar available at any size, for any customer. The CSF series is no different. From exemplary build-quality to balanced tone, our CSF guitars keep Yamaha at the front of the stage, no matter where in the world that stage might be. ©2020 Yamaha

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-Eddie Van Halen

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when it comes to ligatures.”

~Christian Wissmuller  
Executive Editor, MMR  
Clarinet Ligature Sales Poll, January 2020

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# Dissent in the Ranks

## Acoustic Guitar Strings

By Christian Wissmuller

**P**ossibly the one and only thing this month's dealer survey (sent out to over 300 MI retailers) made clear is this: if you want to start a fight between two fretted instrument store owners, put them in a room and have them discuss acoustic guitar strings.

It's par for the course for these polls to have some variety with responses – geographic, financial, and cultural differences come into play, as well as plain old subjective points of view, but this issue's took "variety" to a whole new level.

Today's players are savvier, say many. Consumers today don't know anything about what they're purchasing, claim others. End-users are willing to pay more for nicer strings is the trend of 2020... unless you listen to the equally large number of folks who say customers just want whatever's cheapest. Phosphor bronze is king – no, 80/20 is what's big nowadays.

However, no topic within the larger subject of acoustic guitar strings is (apparently) more polarizing than coated strings. When

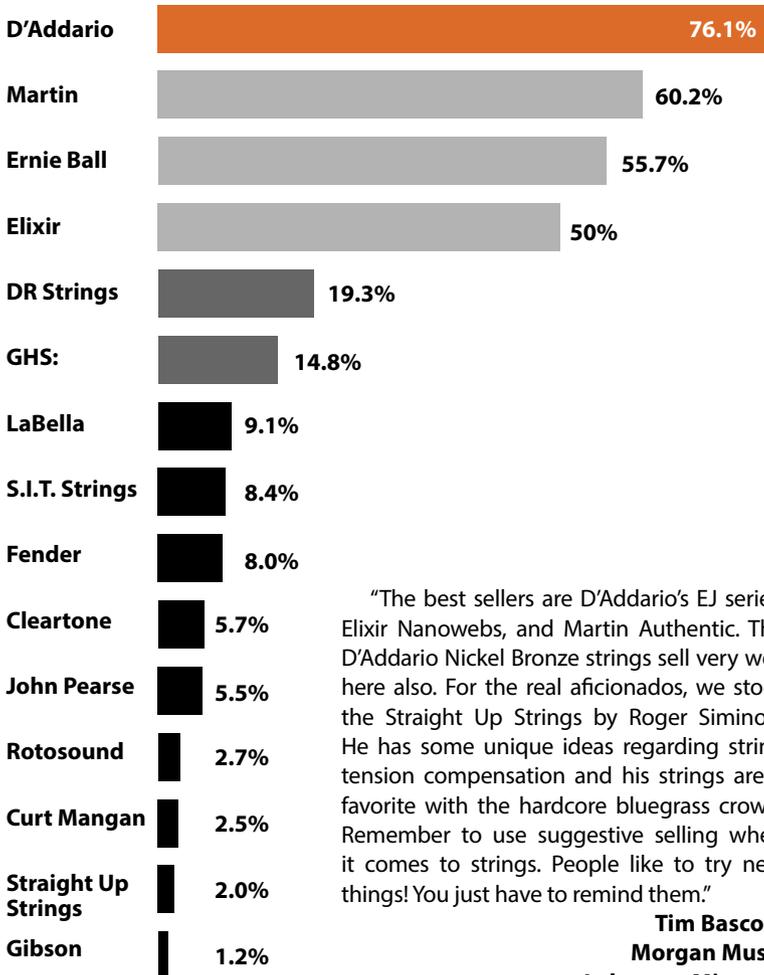
asked about current trends of note in this market segment, Big Apple Music's (New Hartford, New York) Mark Bolos offered the following: "Less people are asking for coated strings." Responding to the same question, Mike Trombley of Burlington, Vermont's Advance Music Center asserted, "More and more people are moving to coated strings."

Elixir – not surprisingly – is "ground zero" for the coated strings debate. "I can't sell Elixirs at any price," claims John Diffley of Stewartville, Minnesota's Diffley Guitar, whereas Music & Arts' (Glendora, California) David St. John asserts, "Coated strings have become extremely popular with all manufacturers... Elixir outsells all others by a good ten to one margin."

Well, that clears things up!

Regardless, acoustic strings of *some* variety are a mainstay for virtually all dealers. As Ted Parrish of Viroqua, Wisconsin observes, "Strings are always a steady seller, whether instruments are selling or not. Every player needs them!"

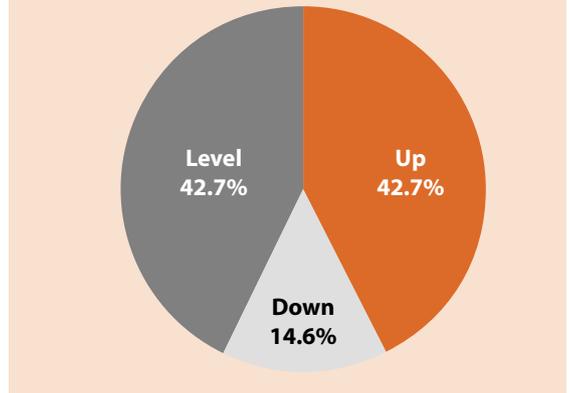
### What brands of acoustic guitar strings generate the most profit for your operation?



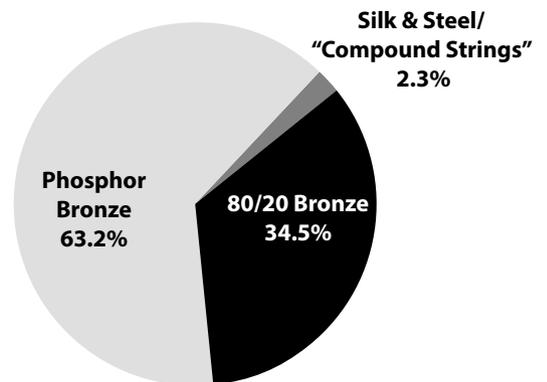
"The best sellers are D'Addario's EJ series, Elixir Nanowebbs, and Martin Authentic. The D'Addario Nickel Bronze strings sell very well here also. For the real aficionados, we stock the Straight Up Strings by Roger Siminoff. He has some unique ideas regarding string tension compensation and his strings are a favorite with the hardcore bluegrass crowd. Remember to use suggestive selling when it comes to strings. People like to try new things! You just have to remind them."

**Tim Bascom**  
Morgan Music  
Lebanon, Missouri

### Compared to last winter, sales of acoustic guitar strings for your business are...



### In terms of volume (number of units sold), which type of acoustic guitar strings sells most for your store?



## Have you noticed any significant shifts or trends when it comes to acoustic guitar strings – on either the end-user or supplier sides?

"What used to be a great margin item is now a drop in the bucket, since big box two-fers and now low-ball online selling. We remain vigilant and price competitively, but keep a leg up by offering free installation. Our goal is two-fold. When customers wait for their axe to be restrung, they peruse and sample instruments and browse other accessories. If necessary, we will recommend neck, nut, or saddle adjustments to improve action or intonation for an additional charge. We also polish the guitar and treat the fingerboard. It's called customer service and they love it."

**Jerry Vesely**  
Vesely Music  
Parowan, Utah

"80/20 [is] selling better than Phosphor."

**Steve Burgess**  
St. Pete Guitars  
St. Pete Beach, Florida

"Phosphor Bronze is the new 'IT' string, after years of 80/20."

**Larry Gosch**  
Encore Music Center  
Auburn, California

"Customers are buying more expensive sets like Elixir, D'Addario NY, or EXP?"

**Stephen Zampino**  
Jupiter Music  
Jupiter, Florida

"We have noticed a move away from coated strings. Many of the working players in the area tend to want to change their strings often."

**Steve Patterson**  
Full Score Music  
Toledo, Ohio

"All the string companies are trying to reintroduce Monel steel acoustic strings. I find this funny, in the fact that Monel steel was all there was before bronze and brass alloyed strings."

**Jeff Hashbarger**  
Jeff's Morrell Music Shop  
Kingsport, Tennessee

"Martin's decision to sell direct to Canada ended our supply and support of our best-selling acoustic string line for the last 25 years."

**Jeff Elias**  
Interesting Music Shoppe  
Cannington, Ontario  
Canada

"More premium strings are on the market. People are willing to spend a little more if the quality is there."

**Spidey Mulrooney**  
The Music Shop  
Southington, Connecticut



"Most shoppers don't seem to have a favorite brand or even know their string brand preferences, but it gives us an opportunity to make a connection with them by giving recommendations!"

**Karen Janiszewski**  
Music Room  
Buffalo, New York

"Since Martin changed from the color-coded box to the envelope Martin sales [have] dropped by 80 percent."

**Ray Noguera**  
Laconia Music Center  
New Hyde Park, New York

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# THE GEAR

## Alex Skolnick

By Bryan Reesman

**G**uitarist Alex Skolnick leads a musical double life. He made his name as a skilled shredder in Bay Area thrash metal band Testament, which has been rocking steadily since the early 1980s, and then shorter stints with Savatage and Ozzy Osbourne in the 1990s. But he took some time away from heavy rock in the mid-'90s through the mid-'00s to explore his jazz and fusion side, including forming the Alex Skolnick Trio which has recorded and performs a mixture of original tunes and multi-genre covers. Skolnick now straddles both realms and has other projects including Metal Allegiance and a world acoustic project called Planetary Coalition that released an album in 2014. The guitarist loves to push his own boundaries. *MMR* spoke to him about the rigs for his two main musical endeavors.

**Obviously you're working with different gear for the Alex Skolnick Trio and then Testament. First off, what's your main rig for Testament?**

For Testament lately, it's the Kemper which is a modeling amplifier. I was never a big fan of those types of things before, any kind of digital amp, but these sound really great. They're very portable and very easy for the front of house person to mix. Each one of us, both guitars and bass, use the **Kemper Profiler**. Then my cabinets are made by **Budda**, which is a boutique amp company owned by **Peavey**. My cables are **D'Addario Planet Waves**.

I also have a custom Budda amp that I use for non-Testament metal projects like Metal Allegiance, for example. Or just for recording. Usually for tracking, I'll use the Budda. It's got three chan-

nels, and it sounds like a classic amp but it's very powerful. You can make it overdriven enough for modern sounding music without destroying it like an old Marshall.

### And guitars?

My main electric guitars are **ESP**. I have a signature Alex Skolnick model ESP also available as an **LTD**, which is a more budget conscious version of it. It's still very good. I use that version as well.

I want the tone of a great Les Paul because I loved the Les Paul, and I have a couple Les Pauls that don't leave the house. Les Pauls can be tough to play, especially for post-Eddie Van Halen playing. Like Van Halen and Randy Rhoads and Yngwie, all the shred lead guitar stuff has mostly been done on either a Stratocaster or a guitar in the style of the Stratocaster. I wanted more of a Les Paul style but that is easier to play. So if you're more a fan of Strat type of guitars, it'll work for you. It's got that feel.

It also has some options to sound like a Stratocaster, what's called a coil tap. I have a signature pickup made by **Seymour Duncan**. It's double, but you can turn it into a single coil. Just by pulling on the tone knob, you can make it sound like a single coil.

### And the Trio?

For the Trio, I use that guitar sometimes, but the main sound comes from a hollow body guitar which is made by **Godin**. The guitar is called the Montreal Premiere. With the Trio, I use a classic 50 watt amp made by Peavey, and then I use a lot of pedals. Some of them are made by a company called JAM Pedals in Greece, and TC Electronics, which is a Danish company but very, very well known. [See sidebar.]

### How many pedals do you use in Testament?

Not many because most of the effects are self-contained in the Kemper. I do use an additional overdrive pedal just to spice up the tone, which is made by JAM Pedals. Picks are made by Jim Dunlop. I have a couple pedals made by Jim Dunlop. I think that's it.

### Is there any pedal sound you're particularly fond of?

I'd say the Wahcko has a very unique wah sound, and it works especially great for blues and funk sounds.

**As far as your playing, thrash is more overtly physical. You need speed and dexterity and precision from both types of music, but there's much more subtlety in the jazz stuff.**

Right.

### How do you navigate that?

Oh, it took years to be able to do that, just to not have to play with the same energy that I do with Testament.

### How has playing jazz affected your playing in Testament?

It's a different situation, so I've learned to control it. It's like playing two different sports. If I was playing tackle football, that's more like playing with Testament, and if I was playing golf or tennis, that's more like playing the instrumental stuff. It's just very different going back and forth.

**Has your playing in one genre influenced the other?**

Sonically, not really. There are moments, sure. Mostly, it's really different.

**Technologically, is it the same or is it pretty separate?**

It's pretty separate. I use a couple of the same pedals that I'll use with the Trio in Testament. But the set up with Testament, I wouldn't do my instrumental stuff with that. It's just a different atmosphere and doesn't apply. Occasionally, even during sound-check, I might even try playing a couple of my Trio ideas, and it doesn't work.

**Do you usually play with less distortion for the non-Testament stuff?**

Yeah, and you need a different setup for that. The response is very different. And if at a Trio gig during soundtrack, let's say, I hit all my distortion and play some Testament riffs, it might sound okay, but it's not going to sound good enough for a Testament concert.

**But people are welcome to headbang at Trio shows anyway.**

If they want, sure. 

**PEDALS**



FOTOGOLAB

**ALEX'S**

**Jam Pedals**

- Tubedreamer 88 (distortion)
- Wahcko (wah wah)

**Tone Concepts**

- The Distillery (equalization/compression)

**TC Electronic**

- Flashback (delay)

**Crazy Tubes Circuits**

- Splash (reverb)

**Jim Dunlop**

- MXR Phase 90 (phase)
- Volume Pedal

**Electro-Harmonix**

- Micro-Synth (pitch effect, occasional use only)

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## Washburn P33S Royal Sapphire

**W**hat a lovely little acoustic! It's not actually *that* little, but as a parlor guitar this model is comfortable to play, handle, and transport.

"Royal Sapphire" refers to the deep indigo stained Sapele back and sides of the instrument – a subtle, classy visual touch that works surprisingly well. It wasn't until having played my review copy for two days that I realized the true color (I figured it was black) during a particularly bright and sunny afternoon. The guitar's gloss spruce top is punctuated by a delicate wood-and-abalone rosette – a feature mirrored by the laurel bridge and inlaid fingerboard. Rounding out the "classic parlor" appearance are open-gear tuners and a slotted headstock.

As for how the P33S Royal Sapphire plays and sounds, it quite lives up to the top-tier aesthetics. The 12-fret Okoume neck allows a full playing range and the overall sound could perhaps best be described as, "deceptively punchy midrange with warmth." Part of the appeal of parlor guitars, as noted in the first sentence of this review, is portability, but these six-strings have unique and appealing voices of their own, as well. There's no pickup or built-in tuner – it's a classic, old-school acoustic.

This Washburn is an intimate, easy-playing joy and ideal if you're not someone who *needs* the booming volume and range of a jumbo or dreadnaught. Strumming on the couch, at the beach, camping, entertaining a group of friends – these are settings where this guitar would shine. Which is not to say it wouldn't fare equally well mic'd up and played onstage or in the studio.

Visually, sonically, and from a performance standpoint, the P33S Royal Sapphire is an unqualified home-run. At a reasonable price-point given all of the elegant, opulent details (around \$449, retail), dealers would be well-served to consider stocking this one. (Christian Wissmuller)



## SonoTone Premium Strings (Vintage, 10-46)

**S**o here's one thing with guitar strings: much like picks, it can be very easily argued that there's not *really* that much of a difference between types, brands, materials – and on the surface, that may be true enough. So long as a string produces tone and, in the case of electrics, interacts with pickups in a manner that allows that tone to be amplified, then it's doing its job.



Another thing about strings, though (again very much like plectrums), is that nearly all serious guitarists have "their" brand. Feel, packaging, playability, and personal idiosyncrasies are just a few of the many factors that can come into play when adopting a particular string type, but once that decision has been made, for many it's pretty well a permanent choice.

I've been steadfastly loyal to one particular brand and gauge of electric guitar string for over 25 years, but SonoTone has me rethinking things.

The "Vintage" hand-wound SonoTone strings that I tried out have a hex core with a pure nickel wrap, resulting in a full, warm sound – noticeably more so than "my" brand, which honestly threw me for a loop. These are the same gauge I always play, but somehow it feels easier to bend notes and run up and down the fretboard. I didn't bust out an oscilloscope or anything, but I'd swear I'm hearing a broader harmonic range than I'm used to.

Simply put: wow. (Christian Wissmuller)

## IK Multimedia iRig Mic Cast HD

**A**s "smart" as today's smartphones may be, they're still not all that great at capturing audio. Maybe if narcissism was as easily satisfied by posting phone-captured MP3s to social media sites as it is via selfies, manufacturers would spend as much time on improving microphone performance as they do on the built-in cameras (It's a "triple camera!" It can take photos in the dark! Panoramas! Timer! Expanded field of view!).



Until that time, however, there's this absolutely genius dual-sided digital voice microphone from IK Multimedia.

Connecting via the lightning port on an iPhone (it also comes with USB-C and Micro-USB cables), the iRig Mic Cast HD represents a *massive* improvement over the built-in mic. You get selectable front/rear/bi-directional recording and the unit features snap-on magnetic mounting that works even with a case (even managed to connect through my chunky, rubber Vans case). So far I've used it on recordings captured both inside and outside (there's a windscreen included) and haven't had any issues at all. Additionally, there's a headphone-out with selectable direct/processed signal.

At roughly \$80, this represents an affordable means by which to create podcasts, songs, vlogs, or to record events or interviews. Anyone aiming to improve mobile recordings without breaking the bank would be well served to give the iRig Mic Cast HD a shot and nearly any MI retailer could do way worse than stocking this very cleverly designed and executed audio accessory. (Christian Wissmuller)

**W**hen it comes to serving schools, Musical Innovations of Greenville, South Carolina is grooming a reputation that's potentially unmatched.

The store recently toasted to 10 years in operation, with owner Tracy Leenman at the helm of the celebration. Founded in 2009 by Leenman herself, the store has been destined to be distinguished from the start.

After earning three music degrees from Syracuse University and the Eastman School of Music, working with an area high school band, and climbing up the ladder of a different local music store, Leenman had crafted a specific vision for her own endeavor.

"Our company was designed to be different - customer-focused, with honest, affordable prices," she tells *MMR*. "We look for innovative ways to meet peoples' needs, whether through new products, different rental/purchase options, or extensive product knowledge training for our staff."

Before hitting the 10-year mark, Musical Innovations also doubled in size in 2012, expanding the square footage from 1,300 square feet to 3,900. A small staff of 12 manages the business, but their dedication to music education shines through every aspect of Musical Innovations – namely through their music education specialists, who are all former band directors who work with students, parents, and educators on a daily basis. In South Carolina, Leenman describes the musical environment as flourishing, which Musical Innovations nourishes with their efforts.

"Our schools have, for the most part, excellent elementary music programs and also some very fine secondary music programs. The SC Coalition for Music Education, which we support, is active," she adds. "We see primarily students and parents, and professional musicians – we house the only custom flute shop in South Carolina, Carolina Flutes. Because we are exclusively school music dealers, we are able to provide each customer focused, professional service by a specialist on his/her instrument."

Also unique to Musical Innovations are their preferred accounts: clients who get extra-special treatment for sending the majority of their students to the store, even if they have a small circle of students to begin with.

"If an educator gives us the bulk of his/her business, whether it's a huge budget or small, and supports us, we consider them a 'preferred account.' Some schools have only a dozen beginners, but they spend 100 percent of what they have to spend with us," Leenman says. "And they 'talk us up' among their friends. I'd rather have ten of these than one account with 150 beginners where we have to split a rental program with another company. The theory that parents 'should have a choice' is ridiculous – parents always have a choice. But a director who studies all the companies' offerings, and chooses us, and stands by us, will get the absolute red-carpet treatment from us, year-round."

Outside of their store, Musical Innovations has two affiliates in state: Rice House of Music in Columbia, and Fox Music House in

# 'Designed to be Different'

 Musical Innovations

South Carolina's Musical Innovations celebrates 10 years of serving music schools

By Victoria Wasylak



Charleston. Their advocacy extends ever further, as valiant proponents of the NAMM Fly-In.

There's also some troubling trends in the education that need to be curbed, according to Leenman's eagle eye. Also concerning is parents' unwillingness to provide their children with quality instruments to use for lessons and practice. Looking back at the past decade, she says that rentals are ever-growing, yet many students are being pressured to put their time and energy into advanced coursework or sports instead of music.

"While our rentals are still increasing by leaps and bounds each year, we have seen a huge increase in families who are unable to rent instruments for their children. We also see a huge increase in parents who encourage sports and other things like AP classes in place of music," Leenman says. "While these things are certainly valuable, parents need to understand that their child has a 75 percent better chance of getting a music scholarship than an athletic scholarship. Also, parents seem to have trouble setting down guidelines for homework (i.e., practice) that will enable their children to succeed in music. When children don't practice, they don't improve. When they

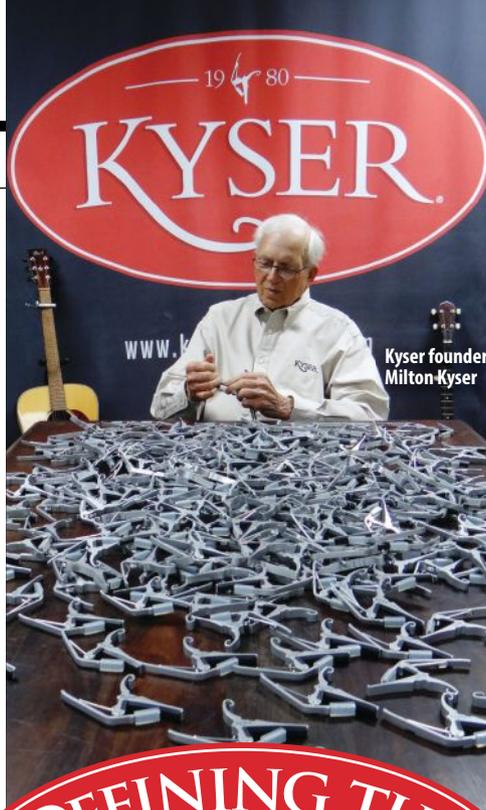
don't improve, they get frustrated and leave the music program. And that's sad."

She continues: "In the last year or so, all these trends have escalated exponentially, along with an increasing number of parents who think it's fine to start their child on a \$100 ISO (instrument-shaped object) to 'see if they like it' – not realizing that the instrument itself is the very reason they won't like it. It's like telling your child, 'You can drive in the Indy 500 in this VW bug – and if you win, I'll buy you a real race car.' It's just not fair to the children, their chance of success is virtually nil."

Where Leenman sees this issue with relationships, she tries to flip the script at Musical Innovations, stressing how much the customers and the local economy benefits: "We try to emphasize the value, the extras, the reason to use a local company – the emergency services, the free delivery, the support for the local economy and school programs. Our challenge is to take customers beyond 'loyal' to 'exclusive,' meaning they won't go anywhere else, pretty much no matter what."

Still, even with a solid customer base, the South Carolina shop has more plans for the coming years, aiming to expand their current storefront if a space opens up in the strip center and also add more subdealers to the picture. At this point, retirement isn't even on the table for Leenman.

"The next 10 years? Well, I'm excited. We have a super staff, mostly young people who will be with us for a while. That gives us continuity and reliability in addition to our passion and expertise," she says. "But we never want to grow so fast that we can't continue to offer the same level exemplary service. Too much growth, especially financed growth, can be a trap for school music dealers. We prefer a slow and steady growth, one that's sustainable. Even though I'm 63, I have no plans to retire any time soon, so in 10 years, I may well be right here!" 



## DEFINING THE Kyser at 40 CLASSIC CAPO

By Victoria Wasylak

If Kyser Capos founder Milton Kyser were alive to see his company turn 40 years old, he'd be beaming with pride and handing out his anniversary edition capos to everyone he encountered. A jolly capo Santa Claus, if you will.

At least, that's how his successor and great niece Meredith McClung pictures the hypothetical scene, as the storied accessory brand toasts to four decades.

"His chest would be so pumped up, he would be beaming with pride, and he would be carrying his signature capos around and just giving him to everybody," she says. "You couldn't be around him when he didn't have a capo in his pockets. He had a second-grade education, [was from a] family of sharecroppers in East Texas. And to see what we have, how far we've come, he would be bursting with pride."

Since those formative days of Milton's early capo-making, the faces at Kyser have changed a bit, but the foundation of the company remains the same: classic Texas craftsmanship and the providing the accessory that makes music happen. Scott Attebery is just helping steer the ship alongside McClung now, instead of her sole leadership at the company following Milton's passing.

Attebery, who joined the Kyser team in 2018 as an executive consultant, was named CEO last fall, while former CEO Meredith maintains the titles of president and owner of the company.

"It was professionally and personally the best time for me," McClung says. "I'm a single parent now. After my uncle passed away, I was left in charge of his estate. I haven't been able to give my full attention to the company, and I realized that I've got this fantastic team of coworkers in leadership that were getting no leadership for me. I'm still very active, I'm just able to hand over a lot of the big decisions to Scott."

While Attebery isn't related to the Kyser family, his relationship with Meredith goes back years, starting when the two met through his work in ministry. Looking back on his original career choices, Attebery says he "would have laughed" had his 20-year-old self been told that he'd be a MI CEO one day.

"I was the executive director of a ministry where we were serving 1,200 churches. We had to make business decisions, but we were a nonprofit," Attebery explains. "I pastored for several years, and then most recently worked at a ministry where we were providing resources to churches. It was everything from curriculum to use at churches, to consulting with struggling churches. We produced conferences for all different age groups. We even had a summer camp for kids."

In a twist of fate, McClung grew up attending one of the conferences that Attebery's ministry was producing. As an adult, she came to sponsor concerts for one of Attebery's conferences multiple years in a row via Kyser.

"Before you know it, she had sponsored the concert multi-

ple years and we had become good friends," Attebery says. With his unique business background and recent relocation to East Texas, McClung offered him the original position in 2018.

"I do have two family members on my [Kyser] board. It was a double-thumbs-up from everybody," McClung says of Attebery's promotion to CEO. "The reason that I really wanted to bring an outsider in is he gives us a fresh perspective. Our family – we have a culture. He came from a different culture and we definitely needed something fresh. And Scott's definitely brought that to the company and really to the culture of the company. Scott came in and he has time and he has the energy and he has brains to take everything that I had already put together and make it work."

She adds: "I had to put aside my pride and realize I'm not getting the job done 100 percent. We were getting by, but I wasn't satisfied. I wanted it to be better. You have to put aside your pride and realize I can't do it all. That's why I stepped aside and let Scott come in and lead. And it's been one of the best decisions I've made since I started working here."

Although, to McClung's credit, she passed on quite the iron-clad team for Attebery to manage.

"Meredith put together an incredible team - she knows how to identify talent and to attract talent," Attebery says. "I think I would have been terrified [taking on the CEO title] if it wasn't for the fact that the team is so strong. In putting together the team here, she has brought in some incredible female leadership. I don't think she did that just for the sake of bringing in women; I think she did it because they were the best for the job. It's really been an honor for me to get to work with some incredible female leaders in the music industry, and they are just top-notch. I think that's a compliment to Meredith and her leadership. She has attracted that."

### Expanding the Brand

Of all the things that McClung and Attebery are proud of upon the 40th anniversary of Kyser, there's one particular feat that stands above the rest: The Kyser capo has hardly changed – or needed to change – in over four decades.

"The thing that I think speaks volumes about Milton is that that original design, for the most part, is exactly what we're still producing," says Attebery. "It was such a phenomenal invention that it hasn't required hardly any change at all. Obviously we can change the color. We can change the tension on the spring to try to accommodate different action all guitars. We might even change the rubber. But I cannot imagine a scenario in which the capo still isn't the same capo that Milton created."

"The capo is still our bread and butter," McClung adds. "We haven't brought in new products that have completely taken over."

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– Scott Attebery



I love that the capo is still what keeps us running as a company. And that capo, that’s Milton’s legacy, 100 percent. We can bring in new products and they can be successful. But I love that this was his gift really to the music industry, to the company, and this is what keeps our doors open and our lights on.”

Customers are attached to Kyser’s perfected model of the capo, too; McClung says it’s not uncommon for the company to receive years-old beat-up capos from customers asking for a repair. For an accessory that would cost less than \$20 to replace, their buyers’ attachment to Kyser products speaks volumes.

Equally impressive is the company’s dedication to keeping Texas craftsmanship front and center. Known for a gritty, tough, and detail-oriented work ethic, the “Don’t mess with Texas” state motto still shines through the quality of every Kyser product, all made in the United States.

“We’re still making our capos in the USA, in Texas. That’s a milestone,” McClung says. “All of our raw materials, everything that we sourced for our products – we just haven’t had to go outside of the United States to source anything.”

“To be honest, if we wanted to get by cheap, we could probably bend some rules and cut corners, but that’s not who we are,” Attebery adds.

Still, as a major MI accessory company, Kyser feels the pressure to roll out items that are new, updated, and exciting to consumers in general. But how you can reinvent an already-perfected capo? The answer is that you simply don’t – you just expand into new markets and introduce new accessories.

“I have been through those periods where I’m like, ‘What are we going to do next?’” McClung shares. “That’s why we have an R&D guy that he’s constantly looking and seeing what other good products that we can add. So we do strings. We do things other than capos. We have a pretty decent product line, and Milton was

thinking forward when he started to bring on strings and care products because we started selling overseas.”

“What we do to grow as a company is we thoughtfully look at either introducing new guitar accessories to the market,” she adds. “Another thing that we would love to do is buy other companies that would complement what we already do. But that’s it, we want to be thoughtful about that. We don’t want to just go find a company that’s barely making ends meet and just for the sake of it. We just want to make sure everything fits with our culture and our brand.”

Recently, Kyser has enlisted Frederick Export of Denver, Colorado, as the company’s export partner, helping Kyser to expand their global footprint. While Kyser already has some sort of presence in roughly 50 countries, they look forward to expanding their reputation in new parts of the globe.

“In the United States, we’re a fixture. People recognize us - and we believe we can build on that,” Attebery explains. “There’s no reason that people shouldn’t be able to recognize and find a Kyser capo in their local music store no matter where they are around the globe.”

Also on deck for 2020 is more R&D, which will go hopefully in hand with more global growth. In the meantime, to celebrate Kyser’s special anniversary, the company has rolled out special edition capos for sale. In a special initiative, the Kyser team is also gifting the capo to 40 up-and-coming musicians – just like Milton would do if he were still around.

“In honor of Milton’s love for live music, we’ve identified or are identifying 40 emerging artists to give a capo to just in honor of the spirit of Milton,” says Attebery. “[We’re] trying to just do some things there that really echo what he was all about.”

Clearly, some leaders come and go, and titles change over time, but Kyser capos – and the craftsmanship and tradition that comes with them – are simply forever. 



“I love that the capo is still what keeps us running as a company. And that capo, that’s Milton’s legacy, 100 percent. We can bring in new products and they can be successful. But I love that this was his gift really to the music industry, to the company, and this is what keeps our doors open and our lights on.”

– Meredith McClung

# Smoke Signals

## Fifth Beatles and FINNEAS



By Menzie Pittman

**A**lthough you may be late to the “What’s Hip Now” party, I’m assuming by now you know about Billie Eilish. If not, get “Googling,” or at least turn on the TV set. What’s a TV you ask? TV is short for television. It’s that thing (device) in the living room – that thing on which many watched the Beatles debut on “The Ed Sullivan Show” 56 years ago. It is slightly larger than your smartphone! So, really, who’s Billie Eilish? Just get your phone out and Google her.

My point is the music business has changed, and there are disrupters everywhere. Some we may like, and some we may not. Initially, when I first encountered the music of Billie Eilish, I was less than enthusiastic, but Billie Eilish was going to have no part of my aloof, elitist musical snobbery.

### Smoke Signals

Whether you are in the music retail business or you are in the field of music education, your chances for success live and die with your ability to recognize trends and traditions early. A while back, I wrote on the topic “Bottom-Up Trends,” a subject that focused on the understanding that trends generally start from unexpected places. The reason for that is simple: the trendsetter approaches things with a fresh, different, or unique approach. Billie Eilish and her brother FINNEAS have certainly done that.

Where were you this time on the scale of recognition? When or how did you first come into the awareness of Billie Eilish’s music? Where you ahead, in step with, or behind the trend? In my business we have a system that allows us to cheat and recognize trends early. At CMC we call it “smoke signals,” and we are always on the lookout for these signals.

I was first introduced to Eilish’s music at a CMC Open Mic Night when several respected, young female performers sang her music. If you face what you instinctively knew when you were young, it’s that the youth write most of the stories in our musical history book. They are tomorrow before we are. We may have written some of the previous chapters of this book and we may have paved the highway these kids now travel on, but they are the drivers. That night I saw the smoke signals rise up. Not one, but several singers were covering quite a few of Billie’s songs. That is when it hit me – WHAM! – a trend! How did I know it would immediately stick? That’s a no-brainer: with things like this, teens are never, ever wrong!

### The Higher Authority Test

Because I suffer from the dreaded disease of “musical snobbery,” I immediately sought clarity and reinforcement on the topic of Billie Eilish from an expert in trends. I sought the highest possible authority I know. I sought out “The Zen Master of Trend Validation” – my daughter.

I asked her for her take on the music of Billie Eilish. Of course, the master clarified for me Eilish’s meteoric rising popularity, and further enlightened me about FINNEAS, Billie’s brother and producer of her record. I also learned the backstory of how these two home-schooled kids made the record in their small two-bedroom house in L.A. and uploaded it to Sound Cloud.

If you don’t know the story, there’s a great video on YouTube entitled “Spaces.” It’s really worth your time, a truly great story. For my two cents, FINNEAS is clearly a musical force. In the “Spaces” video FINNEAS discusses how he made percussive loops with Billie by striking matches in a bathroom, recording the different sounds, and creating multiple percussion loops. He is off-the-chain creative when generating special effects sounds. To create a hi-hat sound, he has used the sound of an Australian pedestrian crossing, and for a general sound effect, has used the high pitch wine of a dentist’s drill. Finneas is very George Martin.

Once I gained clarity, I began to understand where I was missing the connection. However, in typical snob fashion, I had already made one fatal error. Early on I had quipped to my daughter, “It’s trendy, but I’m not sure Billie has staying power.” Those words would come back to haunt me, and though I swear I don’t remember saying them, I never doubt the Zen Master of Trends, because ZMOT’s have uncanny memories.

“The takeaway here is simple. If you are in retail or education, listen to the youth.”

After watching Eilish and FINNEAS take home 10 combined Grammys, my daughter texted me one simple question... “Do you think she has staying power now?”

My text back... “Ouch!”

I had been defeated by the Zen master, and I would have to admit my defeat. However, by doing so, my daughter admitted that at first, she didn’t totally connect with the music either. So, there was some redemption, but not too much.

The takeaway here is simple. If you are in retail or education, listen to the youth. Then work your way back, and find the back-story threads, or as I like to say, “find the Fifth Beatle.”

### What Exactly is a Fifth Beatle?

George Martin was a special force for the Beatles. He was a genius producer, who is recognized as the Fifth Beatle, a major contributor to the wonderful music we all know and love so much.

So, let’s call “Fifth Beatles” anyone who dramatically impacts results but remains one step in the background. You could use the term “unsung heroes.” I believe FINNEAS falls in that category.

But more importantly for music retailers and music educators, the fifth Beatles in this tale are the music students who are defining the trends. If you don’t pay attention, you will overlook what may be standing right in front of you. We often overlook the obvious, but when we learn the back stories about today’s rising stars, the youth see us as more relatable and believe it or not, that’s our number one job. My advice then, is to learn to read their “smoke signals.” And give Billie Eilish and FINNEAS a round of applause for winning 10 Grammys. 🎶



# The Inheritance Taboo

By Jaimie Blackman

Let's say you're 50-plus. Your parents are 80-plus. You're concerned about your parents' financial health and curious about any potential inheritance. So, you pop a money question, and then you're slammed. Responses such as, "In good time you'll know" or "Don't be in such a rush to get my money," or "I'm not ready to give up control of my money" are all common financial show-stoppers. The result: A two-way emotional meltdown.

Picture your brain as a pot of water that's simmering under a low flame. As long as the water is in simmer mode, you have access to the upper portion of your brain, which empowers you to pause, reflect, and to use reason to make better decisions. If the heat is turned up and the water boils, the amygdala – an almond shaped section of the lower brain responsible for emotions, survival instinct, and memory – goes out of control and reasonable thought is impossible. We call this boiling point "amygdala hijack," a term first coined by psychologist Daniel Goleman, the originator of emotional intelligence. Money conversations often ignite this meltdown.

In many parent-child relationships, the details of family wealth is a topic filled with struggles and sacrifices, which result in a resistance to discuss. As a result, conversation avoidance is common. The control of wealth is embedded in one's identity. Your curiosity feels like an invasion, and they are not ready to let you in. As your parents age, there does come a point where deferring the conversation is no longer practical. Your parents are running out of time. You are running out of time to help them.

Whether you're power of attorney for your parents, or a devoted son or daughter, you're obligated to understand the physical, emotional, and financial risks parents are facing.

Years before my dad turned 90, I suggested that he stop driving. He laughed at me. Only after he got into an accident did he agree to sell the car. It was the same with his financial life. Only after he recognized that he was no longer capable of making financial decisions, and made a few blunders did he ask for help. Shortly after, I was appointed his power of attorney. The day he passed the financial baton to me as power of attorney was a solemn moment. We were in front of his banker, and with tears in his eyes, cracking a light smile, dad said, "Now it's my son's turn to take care of me." This was a painful moment. Watching him lose control over his finances was equally painful for both father and son. Yet when a child steps in, it's usually with the best intentions.

During these moments, it's essential that you tune up your listening skills, to stay connected to what your parents are feeling.

Here are some tips from Mark Goulston, author of *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone*.

"The effectiveness of making a person 'feel felt' lies in the mirror of neurons," Goulston writes. "Say, 'I understand what you're feeling,' and the other person will feel grateful and spontaneously express that gratitude with a desire to understand you in return."

Here are Goulston's six steps to making another person feel "felt"

- Attach an emotion to what you think the other person is feeling, such as "frustrated," "angry," or "afraid."
- Say, "I'm trying to get a sense of what you're feeling and I think it's \_\_\_\_\_..." and fill in the emotion. "Is that correct? If it's not, then what are you feeling?" Wait for the person to agree or correct you.
- Then say, "How frustrated (angry, upset, et cetera) are you?" Give the person time to respond. Don't fight back.
- Next, say, "And the reason you're so frustrated (angry, upset, et cetera) is because...?" Listen.
- Then say, "Tell me: what needs to happen for that feeling to feel better?"
- Next, say, "What part can I play in making that happen? What part can you play in making that happen?"

**“In many parent-child relationships, the details of family wealth is a topic filled with struggles and sacrifices, which result in a resistance to discuss.”**

To de-risk an emotional meltdown when initiating an inheritance conversation, try using the "what would make it possible" formula. Let's face it. Your parents are scared about their own mortality and losing control. As a result, the walls go up. It's an understandable response. Using the question, "What would make it possible to? [explore the details of your financial health]?" can be a good starting point as it allows parents to feel they have conversation control.

When you're trying to engage in the inheritance conversation, so you can plan properly, or to simply help your parents when they are physically or cognitively unable, effective listening skills are key.

On average, people speak about 150 words a minute. But, the average number of words you're able to listen to is 450-plus. What do most people during this gap? Thinking about the past, and the future. An effective remedy is to spotlight your breathing to stay present. © JAIMIE BLACKMAN



*Jaimie Blackman – a former music educator & retailer – is a financial advisor, succession planner, and certified business advisor. Blackman is a frequent speaker at NAMM's Idea Center. Visit [jaimieblackman.com](http://jaimieblackman.com) to subscribe to newsletter and webinars. For business or personal retirement & insurance planning, visit their sister company at [bhwealth.com](http://bhwealth.com)*

## Print & Digital

### Adaptable Trios Books from Excelcia Music

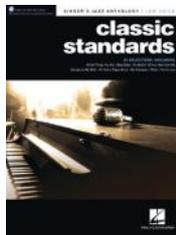
*Adaptable Trios*, the newest series from Excelcia Music Publishing, contains 25 newly-composed or arranged trios that can be flexibly used with any combination of wind and percussion instruments (in the wind/percussion series) or with any combination of string instruments (in the strings series). Written at accessible 1.5 through 3 grade levels, *Adaptable Trios* exponentially expands the options for music educators by providing the flexibility of unique instrument trio groupings. Books in the series for wind and percussion are available for flute, oboe, B $\flat$  clarinet/bass clarinet, B $\flat$  trumpet/baritone T.C., alto saxophone/baritone saxophone, tenor saxophone, horn in F, trombone/euphonium, tuba, and percussion. Books for strings are available for violin, viola, cello, and bass. \$14.99



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

### Hal Leonard's Singer's Jazz Anthology

Hal Leonard's new *Singer's Jazz Anthology* series features vocal lines with piano accompaniments. The singer's portion, matching the original sheet music, is paired with piano accompaniments arranged in an authentic yet accessible jazz style designed to enable the singer to sound like they're being backed by an accomplished jazz pianist. The *Singer's Jazz Anthology* debuts with four books in the series: *Classic Standards*, *Pop Standards*, *George Gershwin*, and *Cole Porter*. Each book is arranged by Brent Edstrom and is available in both high and low voice. Each publication includes access to professionally recorded piano accompaniments online, available for download or streaming. \$19.99



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

### New Suzuki Violin Recordings by Hilary Hahn

The International Suzuki Association, in conjunction with Alfred Music, has released the recordings of the *Suzuki Violin School, Volumes 1-3*, by internationally renowned violinist, Hilary Hahn in collaboration with pianist Natalie Zhu. The new recordings will replace all existing ones associated with the Suzuki Violin School International Editions, available as: Violin Part Book, Piano Accompaniment Book, Violin Part Book & CD, and CD only. Listening tracks that include violin and piano appear first on the CD followed by piano accompaniment only tracks for play-along purposes. Upon release, recordings will also be available for teaching and practice purposes on SmartMusic.



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

## Accessories

### Whirlwind's Power Link TLT Line Cord Testers

The Whirlwind Power Link TLT (Tester Line-True) is a dedicated test device for Neutrik True One three wire power cords. It's a battery-powered continuity tester that conveniently verifies the condition of power cables that are difficult to test without applying dangerous line voltage. Each of the three conductors is tested for continuity, shorts, and incorrect connections. Testing cables is as easy as plugging them in. The TLT has three green and one red LED that indicate correct wiring or any fault conditions. A properly wired line cord will show all three green LEDs illuminated. The earth LED light comes on before the Neutral and Line LEDs to confirm the Earth connection making first and breaking last. The Whirlwind TLP is powered by a single 9V battery located inside the unit and has a test function. Also launched is the TLP (Tester Line-Pcon) for Neutrik powerCON three wire power cords.



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

### Jim Root 'Daemonum' Signature Pickup Set from EMG Pickups

The Jim Root "Daemonum" Signature Set from EMG Pickups features solderless wiring that is manufactured in California and is available in both Zebra & Black. Unlike traditional open coil pickups, both the bridge and neck pickups utilize stud poles in both coils. The fingerboard pickup uses ceramic studs, giving it a clean high-end tone and percussive response. The bridge pickup has black steel poles and also features a ceramic magnet, similar to the EMG 81. Both pickups feature custom Ret-ro Active preamps exclusive to the Root set.



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

### Black Swamp Percussion's ArchThrow Strainer

Black Swamp Percussion's new ArchThrow strainer is designed to be smooth, quiet, and highly durable. The ArchThrow has a sleek design matching Black Swamp's exclusive arch-style lugs. The strainer is chrome plated, fits drums 5" deep or larger, and features an indexing knob for smooth consistent tensioning. The ArchThrow can be purchased as a pair with a matching butt plate. MSRP: \$99.



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

### Fishman's The Mike Inez Legacy Pickup Set

The Mike Inez Legacy pickup set from Fishman is Multi Voice and free from the hum, noise and frustrating inductance issues that plague even the most coveted wire-wound pickups. It is designed to appeal to rock, metal and jazz players, and is a retro-fit replacement for most 4 and 5-string soapbar-equipped basses. It is available for 4 or 5-string instruments, as a single pickup or in a set with a standard Fluence soapbar bass. MSRP: \$350.58 (sets) and \$185.04 (single).



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

## Accessories

### ReedGeek's Universal "Special ZR" Tool

The ReedGeek Universal "Special ZR" is the latest addition to ReedGeek's line of reed adjustment and maintenance tools. Using the company's most advanced wear alloys and ceramic forming Zirc. wear finish, the Universal "Special ZR" is great for all single and double reed players and excels in the adjustment of both natural cane and synthetic polymer reeds. The "Special ZR" offers the player an option to employ two removable handles for added leverage, control and chatter-free reed balancing. Includes a hand-sewn proprietary neoprene bag with a built-in microfiber cleaning cloth and ReedGeek clear classic multi-use storage case. Street retail \$95-\$100.



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

### V256 Vocoder from Electro-Harmonix

The Electro-Harmonix V256 Vocoder is a versatile, easy-to-use vocoder in a compact pedal format. It offers Reflex Tune, EHX's automatic pitch correction, as well as three Robotic voices and single, major and minor drones, all with pitch control. Additional features include instrument control for monophonic pitch replacement, Vocoder band adjustments from 8-256 bands, an XLR microphone connector with phantom power, and transposition for pitch shifting. Street price: \$228



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

## Accessories

### D'Addario's Reserve Tenor Saxophone Mouthpiece

D'Addario Woodwinds' Reserve Tenor Saxophone Mouthpieces were designed for the most demanding, modern classical saxophonist. The Reserve Tenor Saxophone Mouthpiece is made in the USA from foreign materials by a team of top musicians and engineers. It is milled from solid rod rubber, using D'Addario's precise computer-controlled mouthpiece making technology. The mouthpiece is not hand-finished and has a medium chamber. The mouthpiece provides exceptional intonation across all registers of the saxophone and exceptional response and range of dynamic flexibility.



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

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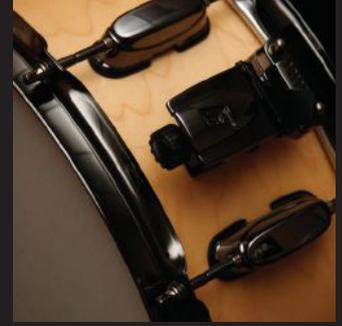
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By **Dan Daley**

# Shootout in the Parking Lot

**P**arking and retail have always been closely linked issues. Unless you live in a city like Manhattan or San Francisco, customers usually drive to go shopping, and it's nice to have a trunk or a big back seat to put a new kick drum or guitar amp in.

But some musicians really have to fight to get close to their destination. The ones who play in the noisy corridor of clubs along Nashville's downtown Broadway strip of honky-tonks – a familiar sight to visitors to the Summer NAMM Show across the street – have been struggling with the problem of finding curbside space to unload and load in for going on three years now. At first, it was police ticketing their cars as they ran into the club lugging their gear, with Metro Nashville Police rivaling the NYPD's parking enforcement agents for how quickly they could write up a summons. AFM Local 257 negotiated a truce with the cops back in 2017, giving musicians dedicated loading space and times.

But more recently, the loading zones that were part of the arrangement have been usurped by local taxis, who see the spots near the clubs as a bulwark against the wave of Uber and Lyft cars that have decimated the cab business in Nashville like they have elsewhere. They have a lot in common, honky-tonk musicians and taxi drivers: both work largely for tips, but not only are they not making any more curbside space downtown, they're actually losing some of what little they have to relentless construction as the city adds new businesses there. Suddenly, a spot at the curb is Omaha Beach, a strategic place to be taken and held at all costs.

Parking has also become a problem for those musicians. It can cost as much as \$40 a night to park downtown on nights when one of the major venues hosts a big concert, and when you're hauling an amp, two guitars and a pedalboard, or a drum kit, parking a mile away isn't an option.

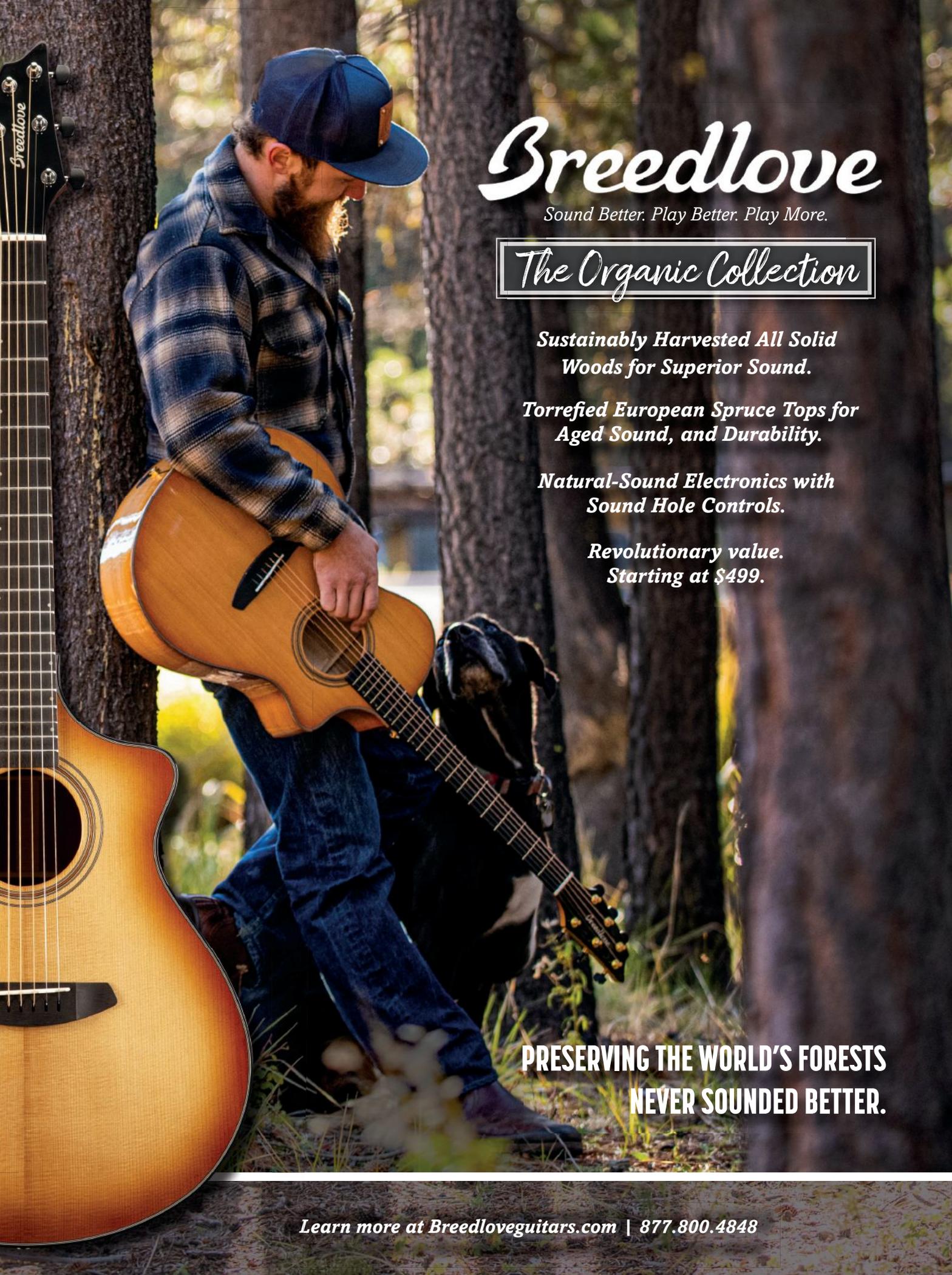
In a busy, hectic and increasingly dense urban area like Nashville's Broadway, there aren't many options. A few local musicians have created a change.org petition in an attempt to address the loading-zone situation, though the best it can really do is just call more attention to it. The clubs, which usually guarantee a minimal base pay of between \$25 and \$50 per night per musician against tips, aren't going to up their rates; they're enmeshed in a club war between long-estab-

lished joints like Tootsie's Orchid Lounge and Roberts Western Wear, and a slew of newer star-branded clubs by artists like Luke Bryan and John Rich, pulling patrons from each other with deeper and deeper discounts and louder PA systems. Meanwhile, the area is becoming more dangerous late at night, especially for musicians. As one told a local television news outlet after being robbed on a nearby street, "Everybody knows that we work off tips, everybody knows that we carry cash on us. If you're a musician, they know you've got gear. It's like having a target on your back."

**“When you're hauling an amp, two guitars and a pedalboard, or a drum kit, parking a mile away isn't an option.”**

Possible solutions are as few and far between as parking spots. The union local negotiated several deals for members, such as a \$5 voucher with one parking company and 30 percent discount with others, as well as 10 percent discount with Lyft. The union president, bassist Dave Pomeroy, told me that meetings with the police and mayor's office were pending. But it's a classic case of how musicians are being squeezed from above by corporate forces. It's just that this time, it's not a Swedish streaming company or a major record label; instead, it's real estate developers and the transportation industry.

It's very much a Nashville story, but it's also a problem musicians are encountering in other cities where the downtowns have been renovated and rejuvenated, like Kansas City and Denver, where concentrations of new clubs and concert venues are pulling in thousands of patrons – and their cars – and where the musicians who are the fuel for these entertainment districts are also working for tips and scouring for parking spots. Musicians – MI retail's core customers – are finding that new opportunities to play live for pay are coming with the same urban-density challenges that plague all cities and towns these days, ones that can't be fixed as easily and quickly as a broken string. 



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