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MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

Est. 1879



'A Company with Heart and Great People'

New CEO Mike Clem Discusses What's Next for Sweetwater Sound

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2023 MMR Dealers' Choice Award Nominee

2022 MMR Dealers' Choice Award Product of the Year

2021 MMR Dealers' Choice Award Product of the Year

2020 MMR Dealers' Choice Award Product of the Year

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2018 MMR Dealers' Choice Award Product of the Year

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Avantis: Winner—2020, 2021, 2022
SQ: Winner—2018, 2019

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18

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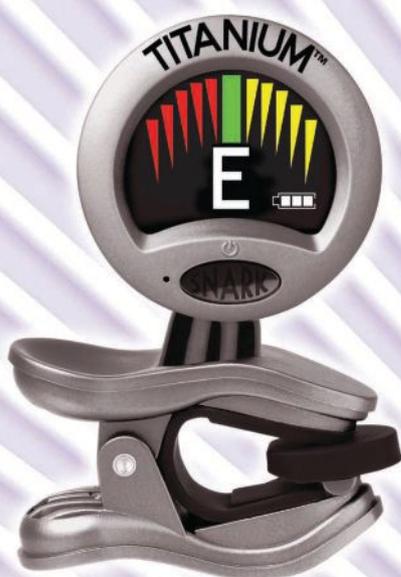
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And They're Off!

By
**Christian
Wissmuller**

Even though it certainly still feels like summer in much of the country (It's 81 degrees in Boston as I type this on what is, according to the calendar, very much a "fall day"), we here at *MMR* – along with many of you reading this column – have already been focused on events and seasons distinctly hibernial in nature:

- In our September issue, we included the 2023 Holiday Buying Guide, outlining new and notable instruments and gear to stock in advance of the soon-to-arrive busy shopping season.

- Many have already registered to attend and/or exhibit and booked flights and hotels for the upcoming NAMM Show in January, with more names and brands being added to the list daily.

- Now, in this issue of *MMR*, we share the official nominees for the 31st Annual Dealers' Choice Awards (DCAs), with winners to be announced in our final issue of 2023.

This last bullet-point represents the penultimate stage in a yearly process that, for us, begins in early summer and, for *MMR* readers, starts only a few weeks afterwards. For the majority of the summer, we invited anyone to suggest the specific instruments, or brands/lines that really shone brightest this year – gear that was "flying off the shelves," as the saying goes. In late September, the nomination process was closed and we tallied up the results (shared here on page 18) and prepared the online ballot for the "real" DCA voting.

“In addition to the DCA's impressive legacy, we're all very proud of not only what the Dealers' Choice Awards have represented to the nominees and winners throughout the decades, but also the way in which these honors are determined.”

A refresher for anyone new to these awards: *Only* current *MMR* subscribers are allowed to vote for DCA winners (one ballot per subscriber) and the ballot will remain live until 5pm (ET) on Friday, November 17.

In addition to the DCA's impressive legacy (31 years – even I haven't been at *MMR* for that whole stretch!), we're all very proud of not only what the Dealers' Choice Awards have represented to the nominees and winners throughout the decades, but also the way in which these honors are determined. Unlike how things go down at many other publications and organizations (I speak from experience...), there's no assemblage of vaguely defined "experts" who decide the winners. The senior company officers don't sit around a conference table, cross-referencing nominees with current advertising contracts and then – ever so conveniently – decide that the victors are all active business partners with *MMR*. Neither I nor anyone else on our masthead has anything whatsoever to do with any of this. They are called the *Dealers' Choice Awards* for a reason – MI retailers are the primary voting body for these awards, because who else is better equipped to accurately comment on what products are driving sales in this industry, or which suppliers are active, helpful collaborators?

So, if you're an *MMR* subscriber, please take a moment to share your thoughts on what instruments and equipment led the way in the past year. We want to hear from you because you're the true experts!

The link to vote is under the AWARDS tab at mrmagazine.com, as well as pinned to our Facebook page. If you're the type who enjoys manually entering long-ish web addresses, you can also just go here: <https://mrmagazine.com/site/2023-mmr-dealers-choice-awards-ballot/>

Best of luck to the 2023 nominees!

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DPA Microphones Announces New Headquarters

DPA Microphones has opened a new headquarters in Kokkedal, Denmark, a convenient suburb of Copenhagen. The modernized space will put an emphasis on the brand's research and development (R&D) facilities, with significant upgrades and new studio spaces that encourage more creativity.

The new facility offers significant upgrades for R&D, which will soon have access to a full anechoic chamber that will aid in the creation of DPA's precisely accurate mics. Additionally, a planned multi-room space will feature a video studio and controlled listening area for live and recorded demonstrations. The new location, which will have members from sales and marketing, finance, customer service and management, offers an improved climate, as well as an architectural and interior design style that better aligns with the DPA brand.

Jody Espina Inducted into the Savannah Jazz Hall of Fame

Jody Espina, founder and president of JodyJazz, Inc., has been inducted into the Savannah Jazz Hall of Fame. Recognized for his significant contributions to the jazz landscape in Savannah, Espina became the 47th inductee into the Hall of Fame taking his place alongside such Jazz giants as Joe King Oliver, Johnny Mercer, Ben Tucker, James Moody, and more. The official induction took place during the recent Savannah Jazz Festival where Espina was congratulated on stage by Van Johnson, mayor of Savannah.

Espina founded JodyJazz Inc. in New

York City in 2000 and moved it to Savannah in 2008 where he now employs 24 people. A renowned educator and world-class saxophonist, Espina still tours the world today as a performer and clinician while running his mouthpiece business in Savannah, GA. Espina is a regular performer in many Savannah venues, and also performs with the Savannah Jazz Orchestra.

As a member of the Savannah Jazz Hall of Fame, Espina will now be featured in the new Savannah Jazz History & Hall of Fame Exhibit located in the Savannah History Museum.

people on the move

Allen & Heath USA announces that **Tom Der** has been appointed to fill the director of market development role. Along with market development activities,



the director of market development directs Allen & Heath USA product segment managers and provides guidance for company-wide product training programs, on-site training, and commissioning. Der is a graduate of Memphis State University (commercial music with emphasis in recording engineering) and in his formative years worked in Nashville as an assistant engineer on many major label records including REM's *Document* and Lyle Lovett's first album. During this time he was also active in Nashville's burgeoning underground rock scene as a recording and FOH engineer.

Since then, he has worked for mixing console manufacturers serving as global sales director for the Neotek Corporation, and for the past 27 years as national sales and brand manager for Soundcraft USA where he was involved in all aspects of the company's business.

C.F. Martin & Co. announces that **Rachel K. McDevitt** has joined the company as their new vice president of human resources. McDevitt will succeed Jane Dailey, who plans to retire at the end of the year.



McDevitt is a creative, senior-level HR professional with extensive experience driving strategic HR initiatives to improve operations, attract and retain talent, enhance engagement, and impact bottom-line results. As an executive with MillerKnoll and most recently Enviva, Inc., McDevitt provided strategic consultation and progressive approaches to implementing human resources and talent management processes and initiatives. She has outstanding problem-solving skills and a proven ability to drive execution and deliver results.

McDevitt holds an M.S. in human resources and industrial relations from West Virginia University and is a member of the Society for Human Resource Management.

trade regrets

Sammy Ash, longtime COO of **Sam Ash Music**, the largest family-owned music retail company in America, passed away on September 16, after battling melanoma since his diagnosis in 2022. He was 65.



Sammy Ash is presented the 2019 MMR Don Johnson Industry Service Award by MMR executive editor Christian Wissmuller

As a primary steward of the MI retail giant (44 outlets across 16 U.S. states) founded by his grandfather, Sam, in 1924. Ash was a widely respected figure in, and spokesperson for, the industry. In addition to his many achievement directly related to Sam Ash Music Corp., Sammy's reach extended throughout music making culture in a myriad of other ways (he named the iconic Tube Screamer pedal, for one).

The following is a portion of what was posted on the Sam Ash website in tribute. Sammy Ash will be deeply missed and not soon forgotten:

Sammy Ash passed peacefully in his sleep at 4 AM on Saturday, Sept 16 at the age of 65. Last year, he was diagnosed with advanced stage 4 metastatic melanoma which he quietly but courageously battled. Sam is survived by his wife, Rachel, and his four children: Ben, Max, Alex, and Jason.

Sammy spent his entire life devoted to his loving family and the musical instrument business. Sam worked tirelessly and pridefully for 50 years to help grow his family's company, Sam Ash Music, to the household name it is today. Thanks to Sam's guidance and leadership, the company is about to reach its 100th year in business.... Sammy was incredibly grateful for all current and former employees of Sam Ash Music. He knew every individual, no matter what title they were or location they were from, was integral to make his company one of the best in the world. He was proud of everyone and celebrated their achievements regularly. Sammy rested easy knowing the company he helped build was in great hands. He was most proud to have three of his sons be a part of his family's legacy and carry it onward to the 100th Anniversary and beyond.



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'A Company with Heart and Great People'

Sweetwater



New CEO Mike Clem Discusses What's Next for Sweetwater Sound

by Christian Wissmuller

In early September of this year, Sweetwater announced the promotion of Mike Clem to CEO and president, succeeding outgoing CEO John Hopkins. Clem's tenure at Sweetwater began in 2003, initially holding a number of leadership roles in marketing and eCommerce. Prior to his new joint-roles, he had served as president since January 2023 and, before that, chief growth officer.

At the time of Clem's appointment this fall, Sweetwater founder and chairman of the board Chuck Surack asserted, "I firmly believe in Mike's ability to lead the company into the future. Not only does he understand and value the principles that have guided me at Sweetwater for the past four decades, but he has a true heart for ensuring that we continue to take care of our customers, our employees and their families, and our vendor partners."

MMR recently chatted with Mike Clem about his professional

background, his history in MI, how the largest MI retailer in the world competes and coexists with smaller brick-and-mortar dealers, and his vision for Sweetwater Sound's future.

Let's start prior to your time at Sweetwater, which began in 2003. What was your own personal and professional background in music and management prior to Sweetwater? I know you're a musician – what instrument, or instruments, do you play? What, if any, specific background in the MI industry did you have before joining Sweetwater?

I have been a musician from an early age. I play several instruments, primarily drums. I've played in many bands and many shows. I have written and recorded. I still play in church. So I have a great passion for this industry and I understand our customers and products very well.

My background is in technology and marketing. I have been building and managing eCommerce businesses since the pioneering days in the 1990s. Back then, you had to build all of your own technology from scratch, which allows you to have a much deeper understanding of what makes great customer experiences.

Can you talk a little about your previous positions at Sweetwater, working in marketing and eCommerce? What are some key achievements and events in your prior roles that you view as having been pivotal in your evolution at the company, leading up to this recent appointment as president and CEO? And, on a personal level, as an area native who even attended college in Indiana, how important to you was it – and is it – to have landed at a Fort Wayne-based institution such as Sweetwater?

I came to Sweetwater in 2003 when Sweetwater was only doing about \$4 million in online sales. Over the next few years, I built our online experience to what it is today. Our focus was less on shopping and more on demonstrating our value and expertise in tangible ways: videos, product reviews, newsletters, tips and tricks, et cetera. We saw the Internet as a funnel – as a way to meet new customers and invite them into a relationship with our sales engineers who would then nurture those 1-to-1 relationships and help customers along their musical journeys. It still works that way today.

Yes, I grew up near Fort Wayne and I am very proud of this community. There is a wonderful energy and resurgence in Fort Wayne right now. Sweetwater is excited to be part of that momentum by hosting concerts, events, artist workshops, and music camps for kids, et cetera. We have hired hundreds of great musicians into town, so it is hard to go into a bar or a church without finding fantastic music!

What has been your relationship with previous leadership officers at Sweetwater, particularly Chuck Surack and your immediate predecessor John Hopkins? How closely have you worked with either/both and to what extent have they been

"My first focus is to ensure that we stay true to who we are and continue providing over-the-top experiences for customers."



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“Ours is a high-passion industry and music making has always been more resilient in tough conditions than other retail sectors.”

helpful in transitioning to your new position as president and CEO?

Chuck and John are both inspiring business leaders, but then you find out that they are both wonderful human beings – very caring and giving men. Chuck taught us a lot about serving customers with white-glove experiences, adding more value than expected, and obsessing over details. John taught us about integrity, creating win-win partnerships, and enjoying life together.

In your new role, do you have any immediate or short-term “action items,” or is your main goal – for the time being – to just ensure a steady transition and “stay the course” to assure both employee and customer confidence?

Sweetwater is a company with a heart and great people. My first focus is to ensure that we stay true to who we are and continue providing over-the-top experiences for customers. Period. I am also excited about the growth we are finding from things like our new Arizona distribution center which is now serving our West Coast customers with 1-2 day deliveries, and serving new markets like content creators, K12 educators, instrument rentals, and used gear.

The retail landscape, for MI in particular, has changed drastically in the past couple of decades. In broad stroke terms, what challenges do you feel face the industry and Sweetwater, specifically, going forward and what further changes do you foresee?

There are three things that really excite me about our industry right now. Over the last three years, we have seen a surge in first-time players and musicians re-engaging with the hobby. Many of these players continue to stay engaged, which is very encouraging. Second, as music-making continues to become more tech-enabled, and now especially with genAI, it is creating an easier entry point for people to interact with music making. This is good for growing the industry. And finally, I’m excited to see a renewed focus on getting music and modern music growing in schools again. This is something we can all get behind together.

A commonly cited concern amongst more traditional brick-and-mortar MI dealers has been the perception of a looming threat represented by big-box outlets and online commerce. As the largest online retailer in MI, how would you describe Sweetwater’s relationship to those smaller, independent brick-

and-mortar stores and how do you see the co-existence and evolution of MI retail in terms of in-person versus online (or mail-order, phone, et cetera) shopping experiences?

We honestly try to focus more on growing the whole industry than competing. My hope is that all music retailers would win more and fill the Earth with more music makers. Brick-and-mortar plays an important role in creating those emotional, in-person experiences with the gear. Sweetwater provides a different angle of value to the industry with expertise, consultations, and unique values like two-year warranties, free tech support, guitar inspections, et cetera, Amazon, Guitar Center, and others play their unique role...

I also think it is an interesting moment in time. Marketplaces like Reverb, Amazon, and eBay have made it easier than ever for independent stores to have online visibility and reach, and we know many store owners who are enjoying growth that way. And new advertising products from Google and others are very much focused on “leveling the playing field” for all sized companies. I would encourage everyone to be exploring these opportunities. It is clearly better for all of us when musicians buy their gear from specialty retailers who share in the passion, as opposed to more transactional experiences.

Are there any upcoming Sweetwater events or developments of note that you’d like to draw MMR readers’ attention to?

Many people have asked if Chuck is still involved, and the answer is “yes!” – he very much still has a heart for Sweetwater and our partners, he is the chair of our board, and he and I exchange emails on a nearly daily basis. But in addition, he is now able to pursue some other things on his heart from philanthropy to community development. He is having such a huge impact on Fort Wayne and our region. It is fun to watch.

Expectations and hopes for Sweetwater and the MI industry as a whole in the coming months?

This uncertain economy is going to create a challenging season that will last into next year. But we know that ours is a high-passion industry and music making has always been more resilient in tough conditions than other retail sectors. I am encouraged by the level of engagement we are seeing with new musicians and the creativity that will be unlocked with this next generation of technology and instruments. ©2023 Sweetwater



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'We're in Good Shape, But the Shape is a Bit Different'

The State of the DJ Market — in Particular Multi-Channel Mixers — in 2023

by Christian Wissmuller

The larger DJ market was one that — understandably — took a sizable hit during pandemic-related shutdowns and subsequent supply chain challenges. As live gatherings continue to rebound and production and shipment channels recover from the strain, sales of one of a DJ's most vital tools, multi-channel mixers, are also on the rise.

We connected with some of the most significant brands in this market segment to learn about the overall health of this realm of MI, as well as what specific DJ mixers are ringing the registers as performers and fans return to clubs and arenas.

What's your perception of the overall state of the DJ market in 2023? Have things fully rebounded from COVID-era challenges and supply chain issues?

Jake Hill: Yes, I think we can safely say things have rebounded quite well. Supply chain issues still happen from time to time, but for the most part, we are able to produce enough gear and equipment without issue and meet the needs of our DJ communities.

Jeff Hawley: This is a tricky one to answer. We certainly are seeing a bump in sales velocity as live DJ events have generally rebounded post-COVID. That's great. Supply chains were certainly strained in various ways during the depths of COVID and they have also recovered in most cases. If I had to summarize the state of the union for the market overall vs. say three years ago, it is likely about the same size overall, but different in important ways. Where we might have some shifts in the live event space as far

as which venues have recovered, there are definitely changes in the "bedroom DJ" and home studio production space that open up new opportunities. Overall, we're in good shape, but the shape is a bit different.

Matt Pekmazian: 2023 has been a rebound year overall. The DJ category from our dealers' perspective has been a true outlier within the MI category. For Pioneer DJ, the supply chain has been improving month over month and continues to show improvement as the year progresses.

For your brand, what model, or models, of Multi-Channel DJ Mixers is (are) the top seller(s)?

J Hawley: American Music & Sound (AM&S) distributes a number of DJ mixer and DJ accessory lines — Xone (from Allen & Heath), Hercules, PLAYdifferently, Reloop, et cetera. Lots of top sellers across different DJ segments, but XONE:96 and PLAYdif-



"If I had to summarize the state of the union for the market overall vs. say three years ago, it is likely about the same size overall, but different in important ways."
— Jeff Hawley, Marketing Director, Allen & Heath USA / American Music & Sound

“Users are looking for the highest quality in sound and construction. They want a mixer that will hold up to the rigors of the road.”

— Jake Hill, Senior Marketing Manager
inMusic, DJ Brands: Denon DJ, RANE, Numark, Stanton



ferently MODEL 1 / MODEL 1.4 are a few multi-channel DJ mixers I'd highlight that top our sales and overall buzz charts.

MP: For Pioneer DJ, the two mixers that are leading the way in demand and sales are the DJM-A9, 4 channel mixer and the DJM-S11, 2 channel mixer.

JH: The RANE SEVENTY-TWO MKII and the DENON DJ X1850 are our top selling mixers.

In your observation, what features – functionality, materials, size, portability, price-points, et cetera – are end-users considering most when shopping for Multi-Channel DJ Mixers?

MP: Both the DJM-A9 and DMJ-S11 are club standard mixers that are a staple from festivals to clubs, bars as well as scratch DJ battles. These two mixers offer huge functionality and most importantly reliability in many different environments.

JH: Users are looking for the highest quality in sound and construction. They want a mixer that will hold up to the rigors of the road. Also FX options and intuitive workflow are extremely important to professional DJs.

J Hawley: We are seeing the analog side of things continue to thrive. For the die-hard analog folks out there, MODEL 1 leverages analog technology normally found in the finest studio consoles, such as a fully balanced mix buss, zero crossing detection for seamless filter and master EQ routing along high voltage differential power rails. Xone:96 draws on Allen & Heath's rich heritage to present an advanced analog mixer, engineered from the ground up to deliver the legendary Xone analog sound in a flexible, powerful format. From a dealer standpoint, I think the appeal of AM&S is that we offer products that can span the full analog to digital spectrum.

How do the most effective MI retailers connect DJ customers with the “best fit” DJ Mixers for them in terms of in-store display, promotion, staff knowledge, and so on?

J Hawley: Just as with many different sectors of the MI and pro audio space it is important to get customer needs flat first. Too often the gear or one particular spec that the customer happened to read about on a web forum becomes outsized in the conversation and sales process – which can make things tricky and/or result in a suboptimal experience for everyone. Remembering the basics and getting back to “What problem are you trying to solve?” or “What does success look like?” is important. Knowing the 129 bullet points specs about a DJ mixer is

great, but knowing why you'd grab it off the shelf to solve a particular customer's needs is even better. The retailers that really excel in the DJ space let customer requirements start (and guide) the conversation. Make sure you are training not only the “what” and “how” of the spec sheet, but also the “why” as it relates to different customer segments. Grabbing an analog DJ mixer for someone who would be best served with a digital DJ controller isn't going to work out well, no matter how awesome the mixer may be!

MP: When DJs are looking to purchase a mixer a majority have already done their research and have a pretty good idea of what they would like, prior to shopping and purchasing. However, the main “technique” for connecting a DJ customer to the “best fit” DJ mixer would be qualifying the customer to understand their needs and how they plan to use the mixer. Pioneer DJ has a mixer for any DJ. Whether they mix house, EDM, open format or scratch, there is a mixer suited to their style.

At Pioneer DJ, we feel the best experience for a customer is to touch and try our products. We incentivize and work with our retail partners to have our units out on display. We have seen that products that are on display have a 36 percent better chance of selling as compared to products that are in stock, but not on display.

JH: Retailer staff knowledge is key. If someone in the store is well-versed in all of the advanced features of DJ mixers (and there a quite a few), it's much easier for them to match the product with the unique needs and DJ style of the customer.

Does your brand have any recently released or upcoming Multi-Channel DJ Mixers you'd like to shine a light on for MMR readers?

JH: The RANE SEVENTY A-TRAK SIGNATURE EDITION mixer is an absolute stunner



“We have seen that products that are on display have a 36 percent better chance of selling as compared to products that are in stock, but not on display.”

— Matt Pekmazian, VP Sales & Marketing, Pioneer DJ

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THANK YOU.

American Music & Sound proudly represents several 2023 MMR Dealers' Choice Awards nominees. We thank you all for your support and partnership through the years. It is truly an honor to be considered among the brands and products that exemplify our industry's best.

Allen & Heath Avantis V1.2 – Product of the Year *Nominee*
Nord Stage 4 88 – Home Digital Keyboard of the Year *Nominee*
Nord – Pro Digital Piano Line of the Year *Nominee*
Focusrite – Recording Equipment Line of the Year *Nominee*
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Hap Kuffner from Kuffner International Inc. and IBC-Music's Iain Wilson at Music China in 2013



Iain Wilson and Riversong Guitar's Mike Miltimore at NAMM in 2022

IBC-Music at 30

Iain Wilson on Three Decades
of MI 'Matchmaking'
by Christian Wissmuller

For the past 30 years, Belfast-based IBC-Music has been a globally recognized MI sourcing partner, working with brands, distributors, retailers, and suppliers. Providing well regarded consultancy services in international sales, sourcing, and marketing, the organization has become a vital business collaborator for many.

We recently connected with IBC-Music CEO, Iain Wilson, to learn more about the evolution of the company and the services offered, and to discuss events of note during this 30th-anniversary year – including recently being honored by King Charles with the King's Award for Enterprise.

In broad stroke terms, IBC-Music provides consultancy services relating to distribution, sourcing, marketing, et cetera, but for any MMR readers not fully clear, can you outline specifically what IBC-Music does?

IBC is effectively an international "matchmaker" – like a dating agency for MI brands. In particular we specialise in guitars, ukuleles, amps, gig bags, stands, and all guitar-related accessories.

There are two distinctive sides to IBC-MUSIC. First, there's matching brands with the correct OEM manufacturing partners. That can be in USA, UK, Europe, China, Indonesia, S. Korea, Vietnam, India, Mexico, and an ever-increasing number of countries, as brands seek to spread the risk from being wholly invested in China. We manage the entire production process on behalf of the brands and then ship the products either to the brand's HQ or drop ship to their distribution partners.

The second area is matching brands with the correct worldwide distribution partners. In the past this used to be through traditional distribution, but as the world and markets have changed, we've developed an omni-channel approach that includes distributors, direct to retail, e-tail, mass market or a combination of all of the above.

Our team helps brands develop their international sales around the world. We've worked with brands like Fishman, G7th Capos, Larrivee Guitars, Breedlove Guitars, Lowden Guitars, Parker Guitars, F-Zone, and many others. Some customers retain us just for sourcing, some for international sales, some for both.

Going back a bit, what was the catalyst for launching IBC 30 years ago? In those early days who were the principal figures involved?

IBC was initially set up on September 1, 1993 to develop international sales for MI brands, so this year we celebrate 30 years in the

business. Our first customer was Lowden Guitars from Northern Ireland. I was born in Belfast and had bought my first Lowden guitar in 1986 using insurance money after a serious car wreck. I had to give up golf due to a back injury, but this was replaced with a love for guitars.

In 1989, some of the principles of Lowden asked me to carry out research at Musik Messe and in French and German markets. This formed part of my business degree and ultimately led to a job role being created to sell and market Lowden Guitars worldwide.

I held this post until 2006, when I decided to set up the sourcing side of the business. My own expertise lay in international sales, so in order to underpin the sourcing business I employed David Ingham who had been the production manager at Lowden for 12 years.

What guided the decision to focus on musical instruments/gear and the MI industry?

We wanted to bring our expertise in high end guitars to customers seeking alternative sources of manufacturing. At the time, this was mainly in China. However, things have changed dramatically and we now source from many countries across the world. Starting this type of business in 2006 became a massive upward struggle when the crisis hit in 2008. However, we had already secured a number of key customers and managed to survive that period. This experience is helping us to carve a path through the current "crisis."

During the early period of the company, we did flirt with other product lines and we attended the Canton Fair in Guangzhou many times. We looked at massage chairs, solar panels, white goods, and a full range of other products. However, in the end we decided to stick with what we knew best – guitars, ukuleles and related products.

If you ask us about other stringed instruments, brass or woodwind, we'll be honest and tell you we're not the right partner. We want our customers to have a long, fruitful partnership with us.

Cue to the present day, who are the senior officers at IBC-Music?

Myself and Dave are still the key people in IBC, supported by Connie Wilson, my wife who is Chinese and brings amazing insight and perspective to our customers. Our key team is supported by an admin team in Ireland, plus QC teams to support our client's needs.

As the company developed, about 10 years ago, IBC formed a strong alliance and partnership with Hap Kuffner from Kuffner International Inc. Hap is an industry veteran and legend. Hap has enormous connections across the industry and was one of the pioneer

sourcing agents in the early '80s and highly experienced in S. Korea, Indonesia and China. Clients would phone Kuffner International, then phone IBC, trying to play us off against each other. One day at NAMM I joked to Hap, "when will you give me your famous hat?" That led to a partnership that is now heading into its 10th year.

IBC had younger blood in the company and was making six-to-nine trips a year to Asia. We'd quickly become the "China Experts," while Hap had key contacts in S. Korea and Indonesia. We put our hats together and became a formidable team. As things changed and companies looked to spread the risk from working solely in China (especially after the additional tariffs in the USA), we were able to pivot our contacts in other countries to expand the offering to our customers.

With such an international footprint – teams in America, Asia, UK – to what degree has IBC been impacted by recent and ongoing travel restrictions, and supply chain challenges?

Like everyone else, we were unable to travel during COVID. However, the entire time we still had our teams based and working in Asia. This gave us a major advantage during the COVID years, as we could still offer an effective service to our customers. So, we grew dramatically during the pandemic.

We supported our customers and suppliers as much as possible, often paying for parts upfront to get us to the top of the line, building on our relationships going back over 20 years in Asia. Factories don't forget when you helped them through the good and bad times. Now things are looking very bleak post COVID, with many brands cancelling large orders, resulting in workers leaving, some factories closing, and ongoing quality issues. Frankly without a team on the ground right now you don't know what you're dealing with in terms of the factory stability, their staff and what type of quality you'll get when goods arrive. At the same time, we watched the traditional distribution channels crumble, brands struggling to get supply and now over-supply in the market for certain products. IBC is nimble and the old adage, "adapt or die" has been our mantle during the last four years.

Again, speaking to the international reach of IBC, I'd imagine that's allowed you to be nimble in ways that other such organizations cannot in terms of reacting to changes in global markets, particularly in the past few years.

There is no doubt things have changed in the supply chain, countries of manufacturing and routes to market – the new omni-channel approach. In both sourcing and international sales, we have to adapt quickly to stay ahead of the changes and offer effective services to our customers.

Instead of relying on China as the only country of origin, we have also been helping some companies bring manufacturing back to the USA or Europe. These days we are manufacturing guitars and ukuleles in China, Indonesia, S. Korea, India, and Eastern Europe. Gig bags and cases have expanded into Indonesia, India and Vietnam. Amps and PA into Indonesia, Vietnam, and now Mexico. We expect amps and PA out of Mexico to be a large part of our business going forward. The proximity, FTA agreement, and skilled workers there offer a great alternative, especially to U.S. customers.

The team at IBC is always investing in finding new solutions for our customers. While many customers just hope their supply chain will be suitable post COVID, in reality as many still have a fear of travel and have no idea what is going on in Asia right now.

As well as having a team on the ground, I have just spent a month in Asia, getting a real-time post-COVID overview at factories, across a wide spectrum of suppliers and products. While business is somewhat challenging right now, the goal is that IBC will become the go-to sourcing partner as demand increases again. In reality, no brand, distributor, or retailer can afford to have someone on the ground in Asia doing all that kind of research for a month. Our knowledge is



Speaking from Buckingham Palace on the night of the Award Ceremony, founder of IBC Iain Wilson stated, "This Award is a true honour. It's amazing that a small team from Northern Ireland can offer a world-renowned service and build up such an international client base. Our expertise is being used by more and more brands. Tonight, the King recognised our international achievements, clients, customers and partners across the world, even mentioning Brexit in our conversation. We expect great additional business to result from this Award too and look forward to continuing to boost the UK economy."

The King's Awards for Enterprise was previously known as The Queen's Awards for Enterprise, and the new name reflects His Majesty The King's desire to continue the legacy of HM Queen Elizabeth II's by recognising outstanding UK businesses. The Award programme, now in its 57th year, is the most prestigious business award in the country, with successful businesses able to use the esteemed King's Awards Emblem for the next five years.

now even more precious than before.

Who are some of the more well-known brands, retailers, and manufacturers who have partnered with IBC-Music?

IBC tends to work under NDAs which limits us from naming brands. However, it'd be accurate to say that we work for leading U.S. guitar and ukulele brands. In addition, we supply a range of distributors and major retailers with their house brands, stands, gig bags, cases, and accessories.

We have customers across the USA, Canada, Europe, Southeast Asia, and South America. We trust this will continue to grow, especially in the USA as companies look to reduce risk and diversify into new territories to mitigate the "Trump Tax" and any political uncertainty.

IBC recently was honored with the first ever King's Award for Enterprise. Can you talk about what being a recipient of such an award represents for you, personally, and for the company?

To be recognized by King Charles with the most prestigious Business Award in the UK was both a major surprise and honour. IBC won the King's Award for Enterprise for International Trade. I had the pleasure of meeting the King at Buckingham Palace in June 2023, along with other recipients across the UK.

Are there any recent or upcoming events, developments, product introductions, or initiatives you'd like to draw our readers' attention to?

Our month in Asia has been an eye opener. I've been coming here for 20 years and things have changed forever. We're working on several new products right now that are exciting and will launch at NAMM 2024. As we under NDA, all we can say is, "Watch this space," but you won't be disappointed. Regarding moving to new markets, I'd say don't let your competitors there first. As demand rises again, supply will be very limited and if you are not in, you can't win.

How would interested parties best go about exploring a partnership with IBC-Music?

To find out more about our services they can check out www.ibc-music.com or email iain@ibc-music.com. We'll then set up a famous Zoom or Teams call to discuss if and how we can help develop an effective partnership. It's the same for both sourcing and international sales projects. 🎸🎸🎸

CASES & STANDS

No More Messy Cables! 3 Cable Organizer Bag Options Now Available From Pig Hog



Pig Hog officially announces the expansion of the brand's best-selling Cable Organizer Bag series, now including 3 sizes to accommodate virtually any cable organizational need. Built to stand up to the most grueling tour conditions imaginable, Pig Hog cable organizer bags are crafted using the most durable materials, with thoughtful and functional design details to exceed the expectations of even the most particular musician.

All models feature sturdy 600D polyester exteriors, with strong webbed, padded handles and removable padded shoulder straps for comfortable everyday transport. Bold red interiors keep cables and other gear easily identifiable and accessible, while spacious front pockets keep adapters and other accessories tidy, and readily on hand with zippered mesh pockets, expanding Velcro flap pockets and 3 pen slots. Custom molded zipper pulls add a touch of Pig Hog flair, and rigid bottom panels reinforce the bag's shape, while providing added protection for peace of mind.

For quick trips and local shows, the smallest of the 3 size options, model PHCOB-SM offers 5 separate slots for cables, with a large center compartment for stowing larger accessories and components. Standard size model PHCOB includes 12 slots, for a perfect balance of size and functionality for optimal versatility. For those with extended cable transportation needs, the large cable organizer bag, model PHCOB-LG delivers with 11 removable Velcro dividers, for the ultimate in space customization.

Whether transporting cables alone, or cables, interfaces, pedals, microphones, camera gear, personal items, Pig Hog has a cable organizer bag for you.

www.acedealerportal.com

Ultimate Support Systems' UTH-100 Universal Tablet Holder

Designed as a professional solution for those who rely on large tablets for performances and presentations, Ultimate Support Systems' new UTH-100 Universal Tablet Holder offers flexible support for a wide variety of tablet types and sizes.



The UTH-100 was conceived with "professional" tablet designs in mind but works equally as well with common, consumer-level models – including those that might be a bit older. The tablet holder utilizes spring loaded side clamps to firmly grip any device, offering support for larger models such as the Apple iPad Pro Series. Adjustable tightening side clips also address tablets of different thicknesses and allow for further security. Adding to the durability and security of the holder is a rugged yet lightweight glass polycarbonate housing built to endure the rigors of the road, studio or conference center.

In addition to its support capabilities, it also features an adjustable pole clamp that securely attaches to mic stands and other similarly sized poles, as well as high-tension adjustable arms, which provide a firm extension for positioning the tablet conveniently. Fully extended, the tablet holder can reach up to 9.75 inches from the base. A flexible ball joint design at the heart of the tablet holder maximizes the available sweet spots for fine tuning the tablet's positioning. The UTH-100 is a perfect solution for performers, streamers, and creators who need a durable, flexible tool to help bring their tablet to stage and studio environments alike. MSRP: \$69.99

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PreSonus Eris Studio

In 2023, PreSonus Audio Electronics, Inc. unveiled the new Eris Studio Monitors which offer three distinct tiers that serve creators committed to producing quality audio: Essential, Studio and Pro. This tiered offering ensures that any creator, from casual bedroom creators to professional audiophiles working in top of the line studios will be able to utilize this new product line to further their craft. Whether recording, producing, or mixing, Eris Studio monitors provide a premium monitoring solution for creators at every level. Eris Studio-series monitors deliver radically honest sound and a broader sweet spot for marathon sessions without the ear fatigue. MSRP from \$149.99



www.presonus.com

FRETTED

Godin Guitars Launches the Stadium Pro

The new Godin Stadium Pro builds upon the best features of previous Stadium models by adding several high-end treats to create an incredibly versatile guitar that excels at everything from country fingerstyle licks to hard rock barre chords!

The TV Jones Starwood at the neck produces a fat, warm tone with a dynamic and transparent top end and just the right amount of spank! The Lollar T Special at the bridge is punchy and powerful. These pickups are controlled by a plate-mounted three-way switch and volume and tone controls. Together, this combo serves up a delicious tone and is hum-free in the middle switch position. Rounding out the package is the Godin Custom-T Bridge with brass saddles that are fully adjustable for precise intonation.

Made in Canada, the Stadium Pro features a Laurentian Basswood body paired with a Rock Maple neck. The choice of wood, combined with Godin's signature custom high-gloss finish, provides a natural acoustic tone and allows the instrument to breathe. The guitar is available in high gloss finishes of Ozark Cream or Sunset Burst, with either Rosewood or Maple fretboards.

A Limited Edition Pacific Blue MN is available until the end of 2023, each signed by Simon Godin himself.

USA MSRP: \$ 1,715; USA MAP: \$ 1,399

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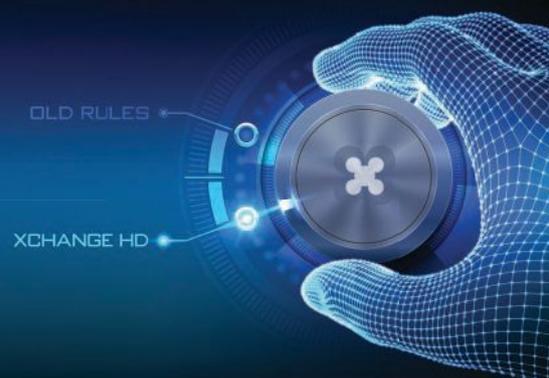


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