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MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

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Willis Music's
Kevin Cranley



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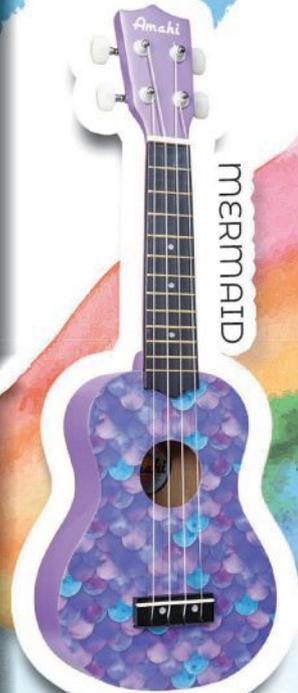
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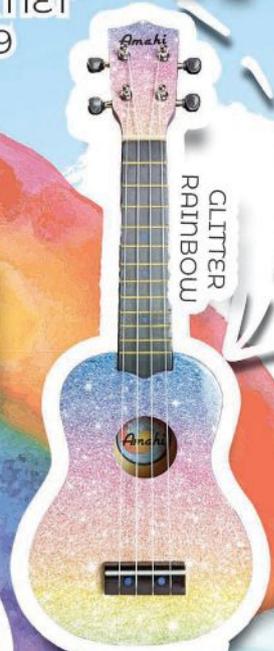
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MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

FEATURES

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Upfront Q&A

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Earlier this summer, Willis Music Company acquired Buddy Roger's Music, strengthening and enhancing Willis' ability to serve the greater Cincinnati, Ohio area. We checked in with president and owner, Kevin Cranley, to learn about this significant move.

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By
Christian
Wissmuller

The 'Boom' That Won't Die

The number of ukuleles sold in the U.S. exceeded 1.7 million in 2021 – up 14.5 percent over the previous year and just shy of the 2018 peak of 1.765 million, according to *Statista Research Department*. All of this occurring well past what was seen at the time as a “boom” in uke sales back in 2009 (501,000ish that year).

“In 2020, when lockdown first hit, ukulele sales soared around the world, at one point, taking over the guitar,” observed *The New Indian Express* in a report from April of this year. “People between 20 and 60 were giving the instrument a try to beat the lockdown blues... The ukulele is easy to play and carry during weekend getaways. It comes as no surprise that its sales grew by 300 percent during the pandemic, as it is one of the most adaptable instruments that will continue to have its place even otherwise.”

Those factors, of course, are key to the instrument’s popularity stateside, as well. In this issue’s cover feature (page 10) on the ukulele market, KHS America’s Rock Clouser offers this assessment of the uke’s appeal: “From the outset, it is so player friendly, encouraging players to continue. Additionally, ukuleles offer a comparatively low entry cost for consumers. The small size allows for easy transport and convenient storage. The ukulele is a social instrument easily shared with others at any level.”

Or, as Amahi Ukulele’s Autumn Lambert succinctly explains, “The ukulele is the happiest and easiest instrument to play!”

“Whatever your source for market analysis re: ukuleles, the term ‘fun’ comes up remarkably often in even the most otherwise dry, clinical, statistic-based reports – and therein lies a key to successfully marketing and selling these items in your stores.”

Whatever your source for market analysis re: ukuleles, the term “fun” comes up remarkably often in even the most otherwise dry, clinical, statistic-based reports – and therein lies an angle to successfully marketing and selling these items in your stores. Sure, “serious” musicians are likely to be impressed by feature-rich, handcrafted, fine instruments and willing to pony up some equivalently “serious” cash to purchase them, but for the newbie or casual/limited musician, what they’re looking for when not plodding away at their day-jobs, dealing with family responsibilities, or navigating financial challenges is something easy, non-intimidating, and *fun* to provide a welcome counterpoint.

Aside from the entertainment value and relatively forgiving learning curve, ukuleles also appeal to folks outside of the “serious musician” sphere because of *price*. In November of 2021 *Indie Pulse Music* posted “5 Reasons You Should Learn to Play the Ukulele” and what was the very first reason listed? “Ukuleles Are Relatively Inexpensive.” The article continued, “Money is usually a significant factor standing in the way of many people who would like to pick up a musical instrument. However, with the ukulele, this isn’t really a concern. Ukes are renowned for being pretty cheap... For anyone beginning to experiment with their interest in music, the ukulele will undoubtedly be an excellent investment.”

Of course, for the vast majority of *MMR* readers, none of this is exactly “breaking news” (Gee, thanks Christian – “Ukuleles are popular.” What’s the next big news story? Breaking: Water is Wet; Fire, Hot!). But, for those who’ve yet to take the plunge into the uke market, check out what suppliers have to say in this issue. You may want to consider adding this relatively low-risk (and potentially high-profit) instrument family to your inventory.

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Excelcia Music Announces Acquisition of Kendor Music

Excelcia Music Publishing has announced its acquisition of prominent music publisher, Kendor Music. Kendor Music is a well-established leader in publishing educational editions for Jazz Ensemble, String Orchestra, instrumental solo & ensembles, and text/method books. Excelcia Music Publishing will maintain the brand and continue to robustly publish editions throughout all of Kendor Music's core educational product lines. Through this acquisition, Excelcia Music Publishing plans to expand and amplify the presence of – and access to – all that Kendor Music offers for the music education community. Kendor will continue to serve as the distributor for Doug Beach Music and Sammy Nestico Music.



"We are thrilled to be adding Kendor Music, now Kendor Music Publishing to our roster of exemplary publishing brands," states Excelcia Music Publishing president, Larry Clark. "As an established leader in Jazz Ensemble and String Orchestra music, Kendor Music has a long history of publishing quality, educational and accessible pieces from highly-talented composers. We are excited to carry that legacy forward and expand Kendor's reach to more students, teachers, directors and audiences."

In addition to Kendor Music Publishing, Excelcia Music Publishing also owns Wingert-Jones Publications and RBC Publications. Excelcia Music Publishing will continue to publish, market and sell each of the four brands separately to emphasize their unique offerings to the music community.

New Armadillo Enterprises CEO Pam Rubinson Addresses Concerns

In a letter dated July 29, 2022 (but released to the media on August 1), Armadillo Enterprises owner Pam Rubinson, wife of the late Elliott Rubinson, shares that her son, Evan Rubinson has been, "removed from his role as CEO/President of Armadillo Enterprises."

The Tampa, Florida-based Armadillo Enterprises is the manufacturer and owner of the Dean Guitars, Luna Guitars, and ddrum brands.

In the days leading up to the release of this letter, multiple news outlets and social media sites had reported that Evan Rubinson was facing legal action due to Pam Rubinson's accusations that her son

had embezzled in excess of \$420,000 from his late father's company, Thoroughbred Music, Inc. Evan has "vehemently and wholeheartedly" denied all aspects of the lawsuit, according to Guitar.com. His Twitter profile currently lists him as "Founder & CEO of ERA Brands. Co-owner of Concordia: Dean Guitars, Luna Guitars, ddrum."

Pam Rubinson's letter concludes, "Our team is committed to continuing the legacy of Dean, ddrum and Luna created by Elliott Rubinson, our founder, and my husband. For Elliott, and for us all, this is our life's work and our passion."

Hal Leonard to Distribute DrumnBase Rugs to U.S. and Canada

Hal Leonard announced that effective immediately, it is the U.S. and Canadian distributor of DrumnBase Stage/Studio/Practice Room Rugs. These stylish rugs will immediately bring new excitement, style, and function to any stage or practice area.

DrumnBase Belgian-made rugs (www.drum-n-base.com) were launched in Europe in 2019 to much success thanks to their realistic "Vintage Persian" and "Vegan Cow" designs, non-slip rubber backing, thick/plush comfort, waterproof fabric, and affordability. The rugs come in two

sizes convenient for all musicians: 4.25-feet x 3-feet and 6-feet x 5.25-feet.

Brad Smith, Hal Leonard's VP – MI Products, said, "Although these are perfect for drummers, these rugs can also be used to define space for a guitarist's pedalboard, a keyboard stand, or even a vocalist's mic. They give any stage, studio, or rehearsal space a professional look that inspires a better performance."

Any retailers interested in ordering DrumnBase Rugs can call the Hal Leonard E-Z Order Line at 1-800-554-0626.

People on the Move

Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC) has announced the appointment of **Aarash Darroodi** as the new president



of Fender Play Foundation (FPF), the brand's 501(c)(3) public charitable organization. Darroodi succeeds co-presidents Evan Jones, CMO and Ed Magee, EVP operations who have moved to new roles on FPF's Board of Directors. Effective immediately, Darroodi will be supporting the organization in its mission to expand access to music education, putting instruments into the hands of students and empowering self-expression using the power of music.

Pat McConnell has been appointed national sales manager for **Allen & Heath USA**. McConnell's background spans 30 years of music technology sales experience, most recently a highly successful tenure as the central regional sales manager for the Allen & Heath USA sales team.



With Allen & Heath sales experience at a manufacturers' representative firm and the lessons learned managing the Central U.S. territory for the last five years, McConnell is uniquely qualified to expand upon the company's amazing sales growth while strengthening existing relationships across the United States.

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- USB Output (USB-B port)
- 5 Pin MIDI IN & OUT
- 30 Preset Kits (5 are ddrum series kits)
- 20 User Kits
- 512 MB of Storage for Loading Sounds or Loops



Willis Music Company's *Kevin Cranley*

By Christian Wissmuller



In a deal that was finalized on June 20 of this year, Willis Music Company acquired Buddy Roger's Music. The former competitors complement one another nicely, as Buddy Roger's began focusing exclusively on school band a number of years ago, while Willis fields a full line of instruments and gear of all types.

MMR recently touched base with Willis Music's president and owner, Kevin Cranley, about this significant move which strengthens and enhances the longstanding (since 1899!) MI retail icon's ability to serve the greater Cincinnati, Ohio area.

Prior to the acquisition, had Willis Music and Buddy Roger's been friendly or in any way collaborators in the past?

Kevin Cranley: Yeah, we've been friendly for sure. But we've been competitors the whole time – and we were in the same markets. We were fighting for the same accounts and, when they were in combo, we were very strong in combo, too. I think the important thing is that we always operated as competitors with honesty and integrity and that doesn't always happen.

With that in mind, what was the catalyst behind this recent acquisition? Did they approach you?

I've personally made a point to always stay in touch with our competitors and we've been looking to expand specifically in band and orchestra. You know, "Hey, if you're ever looking to retire or sell, please keep us in mind and we love to talk to you, I admire your business." And Bill and I have had that kind of relationship when we've just talked many times over the past few years because I knew he had been thinking about retirement for a number of years. I just wanted to make sure he knew that I would love the opportunity to talk to him because they were our biggest competitor in the band side. They're so well established in greater Cincinnati. We're thrilled to be now joining with their team.

As I understand it, the existing staff at Buddy Rogers will all remain. Is that correct?

We had one person who left, but it was already known they were leaving. Other than that, everybody's intact, everybody's excited. I think the cool thing was that Bill wanted to keep it very quiet, because when you're talking to your competitor, a deal can fall through. And for the company buying, it's no big deal, but for the company selling, that's a big deal if it falls through. Right after the closing, Bill spoke to the employees and then I came back and talked to our people, and I think everybody felt really good about it.

Two of my senior executive team – my CFO and Paul Finke, [vice president – Ed.] who's been with me 35 years – they've been spending almost every day, part of the day, at Buddy Roger's. It's going very well.

So personnel will essentially stay the same – and that's great – but there have been plenty instances where an acquisition like this happens and the boilerplate spin is, "Everything's going to stay the same, including the name of the store." Then, cut to eight months later and they've changed the name. Along those lines, do you see somewhere down the line re-branding the Buddy Roger's location as Willis Music?

Our first goal has been: don't touch anything. Let's get through the rental season, let's just have a great rental season with Willis Music and with Buddy Roger's music. So that was the number one goal, but we've been through this before, so we bought another company back in, gosh, I think 2015. We kept their name for quite a while, but we transitioned it, and I can see this happening over

time, but we wouldn't make a sudden change.

Buddy Roger's has long been recognized as a superior B&O retailer, but up until a while back, they did have a foothold in the combo world. Do you have any plans to re-energize that aspect of the business or will you be keeping that aspect of the business exclusively school band focused?

They will stay exclusively band and orchestra because they transitioned out a few years back and I thought it was just a great move on their part. We know that part of the business is just very strong and that's why honestly we were looking to expand in that area. It's funny you asked that. I was speaking with their employees on the day that we closed and that was one of the questions that came up right away. But as far as transitioning, there will be a time down the road when it's probably Buddy Roger's, a division of Willis Music. I think that's the way of letting the public know that, yeah, it's still Buddy Roger's, but Willis is the overlying company and is operating in the same region.

Obviously this is huge news and if Willis Music does nothing more than just sort of ride out the transition that would, in and of itself, represent a huge year for the business. Having said that, is there anything else on the horizon that you'd like to share with MMR readers?

We always joked, as we've been talking to Bill for a while about this, that the day after we close somebody else will call, be looking to retire or something. So that has not happened. We have some breathing room here, but we continue to look to expand. We want to remain strong with a family-owned business in our industry, in our markets, and just stay strong that way because I think that's the future of our business, the future of music education, and staying strong in the schools.

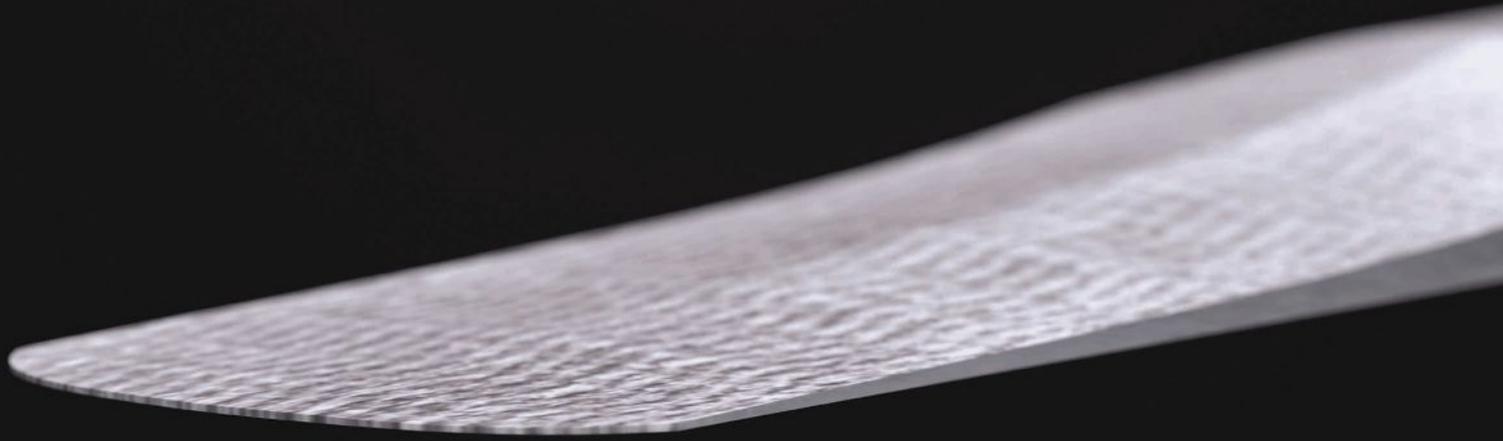
Speaking of that, we're talking here in mid-summer, creeping up real quickly on back to school season. As we've been discussing, Buddy Roger's is uniquely positioned to cater to that crowd. Do you have any plans for back to school sales, celebrations, initiatives, promotions, or anything along those lines?

We were told years ago – I can't remember, but I think it was George Quinlan who said this – that they spend 48 weeks a year preparing for four weeks of the back to school season. And we approach it that way. And I know Buddy Roger's has always done that, also. We feel like we're ready. I mean, the sooner the better right now. It's just great when it starts. We love the season and, you know, you gotta be ready and make everything work. You only get one shot at it.

Absolutely. Every year you really have to make that last week in July, first three weeks in August work.

Yeah. And, you know, COVID, it was just such a major thing because it hit in March [2020] – hit strongly; we had to close our stores for two months. Then we came back and schools never really started that year. Then we thought 2021 would be a banner year... and then the Delta variant came in at the last minute. Luckily, we finished very strongly and had a good year in '21. But we're looking for this year to just be great. Let's hope for no more variants! 🙏

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The Ukulele Market Stays Strong in 2022

By ChristianWissmuller

Supply chain disruptions have challenged ukulele brands, just as nearly every other segment of MI – or, really, any and all types of manufactured, distributed products these past few years. The uke’s enduring popularity and suppliers’ abilities to be strategic and nimble, however, have buoyed these instruments amidst a sometimes unstable retail landscape.

We recently connected with reps from five major players in the design and production of ukuleles to get a feel for what trends are driving sales and what specific models are being embraced by players in 2022.

For your brand, what ukulele models are currently the hottest sellers?

Rock Clouser: Lanikai offers a wide range of prices and models, but our current best sellers include our quilted maple series in transparent colors – especially our purple, blue and black. Natural flame maple and our wide grained oak series are also very popular due to the striking wood grain patterns. Naturally, our mahogany and acacia wood models continue to be steady sellers with more traditional styling.

Mike George: Strictly in terms of volume, the Martin Guitar C1K is always a popular model. Solid Hawaiian koa, in a concert size, with very traditional specs seems to cover a large demand.

In terms of growing interest, the T1 Streetmaster takes our ever-popular finish package into the uke world, and we’ve had great success with it.

Autumn Lemberg: Our top sellers are our UK210, UK445, and our DDUK 12 Mermaid design.

Billy Martinez: Our Artist Signature Ukuleles are always some of our best sellers but more recently we refreshed our California Coast Ukes and added new colors and a new Tenor model added to the line and that has been really well received.

Leanne McClellon: Consistently for Kala, our best sellers are excellent, high-quality entry level instruments. At the top have been some classics like our KA-15S and Learn to Play Soprano. Some new comers have been our 20 Series, as well as the Teak Tri-Top Tenor with Cutaway and EQ.

When the “uke craze” really began to pick up steam in about 2008 or thereabouts, many figured it was just a passing trend and yet here we are in 2022 and ukuleles are still selling at a fast clip. To what do you attribute the enduring appeal of these instruments?

AL: The Ukulele is the happiest and easiest instrument to play!

“Shutdowns in China have really affected our industry.”

– Autumn Lemberg
Executive Director

Amati’s Fine Instruments, Amahi Ukulele





“Ukuleles are fun and they can go wherever your journeys take you. They also offer a beginner solution that, for some, doesn't feel overwhelming.”

- Billy Martinez

VP Category Management, Acoustics, FMIC



LM: Basically, what's not to love about a ukulele? It is a small, portable instrument that can do so many things. It is accessible to entry level players and is not intimidating, but it's also an instrument a seasoned musician can pick up. It is extremely versatile and the audience is still growing.

BM: For our brand it really comes down to the easy-to-play nature, as well as the lifestyle component that ukuleles offer the consumer. Ukuleles are fun and they can go wherever your journeys take you. They also offer a beginner solution that, for some, doesn't feel overwhelming. That is why ukulele lessons are a big part of Fender PLAY. It's an enjoyable experience that can be very rewarding for beginners.

MG: We can't deny the influence of video posting and cover versions of songs being played on ukuleles. They really are the most approachable stringed instrument and add to that the options for consumers being so vast, it's really ingrained in our culture. They are fun instruments!

RC: Ukuleles have ongoing popularity for several reasons. Obviously, we live in a fast-paced world and the playing ease and simplicity of ukulele allows first-time players to experience music quickly. From the outset, it is so player friendly, encouraging players to continue. Additionally, ukuleles offer a comparatively low entry cost for consumers. The small size allows for easy transport and convenient storage. The ukulele is a social instrument easily shared with others at any level. It easily supports a solo singer's voice and blends well with other instruments. Also, there is a vast amount of online ukulele content and tutorials available for players to share and discover from all over the world. Finally, the ukulele is a true instrument with a rich tonality complex enough to challenge dedicated players to explore and develop their playing to advanced levels. Few musical instruments have all of those attributes.

Have you been noticing any trends in this market segment? Any particular features or types of ukes being favored by players, developments or production techniques that are impacting the



“We live in a fast-paced world and the playing ease and simplicity of ukulele allows first-time players to experience music quickly.”

- Rock Clouser

KHS String Instrument Brand Manager
Lanikai / Kohala ukuleles, H. Jimenez Latin instruments
and Walden guitars, KHS America



supplier side of the equation?

RC: We have noticed more players trending toward our larger instruments such as tenors, baritones, guitaleles, and even our bass ukulele. This is likely due to guitarists of all genres are discovering the ukulele as a distinctive sound texture. Also, as the market matures and seeks other ukulele possibilities, our multi-string instruments (5, 6, and 8 strings) are becoming more popular. The ukulele is no longer considered a “novelty” instrument but rather a useful sound layer and a unique voice in the mix of a recording or live performance.

AL: People are interested in non-classic looks, exotics, new and different designs, different kinds at woods. EQs are far more popular for stage players.

The true costs of COVID, and the length of time for shipments. Shutdowns in China have really affected our industry – shipping and porting at new locations. We are having to do some very roundabout methods, which, in a former world, wouldn't make any sense, but today saves us the most money.

BM: There are a few things we have noticed in recent years for the Fender brand. The first is the move to a higher price point, even for beginners. People are willing to spend upwards of \$200 USD for a Uke, especially if the aesthetics fit the player's desires and fit their personality. The other thing we have noticed is that the Tenor body shape has really taken the front seat with our brand. People used to lean more towards a Soprano, but we are seeing a shift to the Tenor body shapes at all price points.

LM: Ukuleles are still being picked up at a fast pace by beginners. However, there are also those who have been playing for a while, or are collectors, and they have been looking for unique items and those with incredible tone.

MG: Similar to what we have seen in guitars there are interesting trends in unique and wild body shapes and new and interesting aesthetic appointments. Product lines seem to be spreading wide in terms of variety. I'm seeing a lot of interest in colors and subtle nods to guitar design, so we're always exploring what's possible in those arenas. One interesting thing

■ roundtable



“One interesting thing about our production techniques is that we are able to utilize wood that is too small for making our guitars.”

– Mike George

Associate Product Manager – Accessories and Ukuleles, C.F. Martin & Co., Inc.



about our production techniques is that we are able to utilize wood that is too small for making our guitars, for example reclaiming the beautiful sinker mahogany and koa fine veneer on our 0 Tenor and C1Uke-03.

To what degree have supply chain issues been negatively impacting your brand since COVID?

LM: The supply chain issues seem to be evening out. From our perspective, it just took more initial planning. Once we realized how things would be going, we started ordering modified quantities on the presumption that it will take product longer to get here. Diversification has also been helpful in staggering arrival times. Being more thoughtful and strategic has helped us have inventory to offer to our dealers.

BM: Like many other manufacturers around the world, supply chain issues have posed many problems. However, we have taken great measures to ensure we have what our dealer base needs whenever possible. It has been challenging, and while it is getting better, there are still obstacles we have to overcome, but we feel confident it will continue to get better in time.

MG: I interface with our supply chain group on nearly a daily basis, and they're working harder than ever to keep a steady supply of raw materials flowing. When we can't get certain items, we either hold production or must pivot to an alternative, which is another challenge to find. Our logistics/shipping team is struggling with port and transportation issues every day. We're up for the challenge.

RC: Clearly, supply chain issues have been troublesome in many ways. Providing the market with products to meet the demand is no longer a matter of ordering in quantities to allow for production lead time. Factory production can be on schedule but can then stall waiting for parts to complete the instruments. If ships have a delay at any port that affects everything exponentially down the line. The challenge continues and while we are seeing improvements, it will take longer to recover and smooth the issues completely.

AL: 10,000%. At times we ran out of product, caus-

ing us major stresses. We couldn't do our jobs. We didn't have product to sell. Having zero product caused us to scramble with our warehouse employees to find things to sell to just keep the doors open and the lights on.

It seems like as a company, we're trying to pivot, trying to figure out when we can get off this rollercoaster ride that the pandemic forced us onto – essentially, finding ways to change with the market. Even going so far as to contact our state representative and bring our issues to their attention.

Have you noticed any particular marketing or in-store display strategies being employed by dealers who are particularly successful selling ukuleles?

RC: As the ukulele market advances, many stores have adapted their strategies. Since players are savvy to what they are seeking in their next ukuleles, some dealers don't use stock image photos, but instead they take pictures of each particular ukulele so consumers can see the exact instrument (wood, color et cetera) they are getting. Some even provide sound clips of the ukuleles. Also, since the ukulele is so widely recognized and supported now, it is no longer sequestered in the back of the music store with the mysterious group of odd instruments known as "other". There is typically a ukulele section in most stores with a ukulele expert to field detailed questions and they are often a ukulele instructor as well.

AL: Ukulele trees! Our dealers will always buy back from us if they get the tree. Your display is everything!

LM: Yes. As a matter of fact, this has come up recently in conversation regarding stores that are successful versus those who come up short. Ukulele is an instrument that is genderless and ageless. It appeals to a large cross section of people. Making sure that the ukuleles are in a place to be touched and played helps to create more sales. We have POP displays that can assist with this. Some stores that do well even put some outside the store to draw people in! Stores with lesson programs tend to do well, because they get a built in audience, and new players into their store. Stores with a modern website, as well as fun and interesting social media also connect better with customers.

MG: Sure, like our Martin walls for guitars. Large, detailed

“The supply chain issues seem to be evening out. From our perspective, it just took more initial planning.”

– Leanne McClellon

Director of Sales
Kala Brand Music Co.



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roundtable

displays to house ukuleles draw attention and invite you into the brand, while having the added benefit of keeping your instruments grouped, where they often get dispersed.

BM: Every dealer has a consumer market base that they cater towards and do a great job identifying that and ensuring they display accordingly. Our brand has a unique opportunity in that all of our ukuleles have the iconic Fender headstocks which allow for unique ways to merchandise them in our dealer's stores and online.

Does your brand have any recent or upcoming ukulele model introductions of note that you'd like to draw MMR readers' attention to?

MG: Absolutely! I'd like to touch on the three we launched at NAMM 2022, all utilizing Graph Tech's ratio tuners: 0 Tenor Uke – Features neck, top, back and sides from sinker mahogany. It offers such a complex and resonant tone; C1UKE-03 – Featuring fine veneer Hawaiian koa top, back and sides in concert size. This uses a unique laser-etched rosette; T1FSC – Featuring 100 percent FSC sustainable materials throughout, sapele top, back, and sides. The instrument also comes with an awesome gig bag made from recycled water bottles recovered from the ocean, meeting the global recycled standard.

LM: For over a year we worked on bringing an excellent solid body ukulele to the market at a price point that is within reach for our target audience. This is a "must have" for a lot of players and will offer versatility to playing. As with most of our products, it was a collaboration between sales, marketing, and product to get it just right before it goes to market. It is a great

ukulele for players who like to record or just want to expand their repertoire. And, it's available now!

BM: We recently relaunched our California Coast Ukuleles with new tenor models and new exotic wood options as well as more onboard electronics across the new models. They have been a refreshing welcome to the ukulele space for our dealers.

AL: We now have new upgraded tuners on all our student ukuleles. We have decided to start adding a gloss varnish to some ukulele lines to see if the paint last longer. This is just something we are experimenting with. So far, some people really like the gloss, others think the matte is nicer! It's about personal preference, and we want to offer the choice! We also have two new products, the DDUK23, and DDUK25. Unicorn Dreams and Glitter Rainbow! Fun, vibrant designs for musicians of all ages!

RC: We always have a lot going on at Lanikai, but two launches stand out as particularly exciting. First is the return of our iconic LU series. This very popular entry series was an instrumental (pun intended) part of the early ukulele revolution. This year, we brought the LU series back with many upgraded features found on our upper level Lanikai models. I encourage any first-time player or educator to try an LU series. Our new series of bass ukuleles has also been incredibly well-received. They have a larger size, great feel and deliver a warm low punch. They sound great acoustically but even better through a bass rig. Any bass player looking for a great stage bass, a recording go-to or a practice bass should try one of our Lanikai bass ukuleles. 

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KAWAI *more performance*

2022 Holiday Buying Guide

Gear to Stock Up on in Advance of this Winter's Holiday Season

Under \$50

Alfred Music Releases Suzuki Voice

Alfred Music and The International Suzuki Voice committee are pleased to present *Suzuki Voice School Volume One*.

From the International Suzuki Association's Voice Committee: "We want to thank all Suzuki Voice students and teachers who have been involved with Suzuki Voice since 1986. The songs have been tested and sung in over twenty countries. The repertoire has been internationally approved since 2006 yet we faced many challenges with publishing due to copyright issues and including three languages. We thank all Suzuki Voice teachers and language advisors who have checked and corrected translations. We also thank all the accompanists who have played the repertoire especially Marjaana Merikanto whose accompaniment CD is published by Alfred Music with Volume One."

The cooperative effort of the International Suzuki Voice Committee and Dr. Päivi Kukkamäki, it's the culmination of many years of dedication and support from teachers across the world. Singing together in many languages is a unique experience and allows so much more than music to foster – it crosses cultural divides and brings us together through singing. This publication is of the utmost importance to the Suzuki Voice community; the voice is our first instrument – we grow through singing individually and as a community. We hope this book will help students, teachers, families, and communities honor Dr. Suzuki's wish for a 'beautiful tone, beautiful heart.' The recordings will be available as: Voice Part Book, Piano Accompaniment Book, Voice Part Book & CD Kit, and CD only. Piano accompaniment recordings can be downloaded on Alfred Media. They will be available on Amazon and iTunes in fall 2022. Vocal Book – MSRP: \$9.99; Vocal Book & CD – MSRP: \$19.99; Accompaniment Book – MSRP: \$9.99; Accompaniment CD – MSRP: \$15.99

www.alfred.com



XS Strings from D'Addario

XS is breathing new life into coated strings. With its ultra-thin film coating on every wound string and unique polymer treatment on the plain steels, XS offers our highest level of protection for maximum life with an uncommonly smooth feel, making it the most innovative coated string ever created. XS is now available for acoustic guitar in phosphor bronze and 80/20 bronze in the most popular gauges and electric guitar.

XS Acoustic – MSRP: \$34.00; XS Electric – MSRP: \$28.90

www.daddario.com



The Tremolo Buddy

The Tremolo Buddy is a lightweight, durable, and easy-to-use tool designed to simplify necessary maintenance tasks on a Floyd Rose or other tremolo systems! This unique design offers a simple solution to tackling the "BIG FIVE" problematic maintenance areas of a tremolo-equipped guitar by helping to keep tension on the bridge: string changes, intonation adjustments, bridge height adjustments, spring claw adjustments, and truss rod adjustments.

Using two simple clamps, the Tremolo Buddy allows you to keep the strings on the instrument without having to loosen tension or place blocks under the bridge. This design also works as a stand to flip the guitar on to conveniently work on spring tension adjustments in an upright position. The tool is quickly unclamped by using easy-off triggers, so you can get back to tuning or playing in a matter of mere seconds. A durable glass-reinforced nylon body provides lightweight strength, while the rubber TPE foot pads protect the guitar's body. MSRP: \$34.99

www.floydrose.com

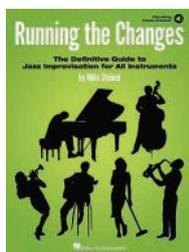


Running the Changes from Hal Leonard

The world of jazz improvisation can be complex and intimidating to navigate for beginning and intermediate players. Renowned performer, arranger/composer, author, and educator Mike Steinel (University of North Texas) has written *Running the Changes* to guide musicians of all levels through the essentials of improvising over chord changes, giving a concise and thorough approach that's easy to comprehend, regardless of instrument or voice. The book includes play-along tracks for use in practice sessions. The tracks cover all major parts in the ensemble, including charts for C, B \flat , E \flat , and bass clef instruments, along with lead sheets for vocalists. The tracks are accessed online for download or streaming and include Hal Leonard's exclusive PLAYBACK+ multi-functional audio player that enables musicians to slow down the audio without changing pitch, set loop points, change keys, and pan left or right.

Running the Changes covers: Melodic paraphrase and quotation; using riffs; basic chord theory; ornamentation; chord tone soloing; scalar/modal soloing; bebop scales; advanced soloing with color tones and altered harmonies; exploring pentatonic and hexatonic scales (triad pairs); history and practice of jazz, post-Bebop era to the present; and more. 144 pages. MSRP: \$29.99

www.halleonard.com



Under \$250

Hosa Introduces New 4K HDMI Cables

HDMI has long been the connection for high-definition video and graphics commonly used in televisions, computers, and gaming consoles. Up to this point, most HDMI cables are iteration 1.4, that support up to 30fps (frames per second). However, with televisions, computers, and gaming consoles moving to Ultra HD 4K, HDMI 2.0 supports up to 60fps, which provides greater overall detail even at lower video resolution.

Built to HDMI 2.0 specs, the new Hosa HAOC-400 Series High Speed HDMI Active Optical Cables' increased bandwidth supports 3D 4K and even dual HD video streams, allowing you to stream the big game while watching the newest episode of your favorite show, or being the hero in Call of Duty while peeking at Netflix reruns. Using the same HDMI 1.4 connector, Hosa HAOC-400 Series Cables are backwards-compatible with older devices using an HDMI port, allowing you to get the highest video quality available. Likewise, Hosa HAOC-400 Series Cables also support ultrawide 21:9 aspect ratio, featured in some computer monitors and cinema televisions. Available in two lengths, 10ft and 16ft.

10ft – MSRP: \$134.95; 16ft – MSRP: \$137.95

www.hosatech.com



holidaybuyingguide

Electro-Harmonix J Mascis Ram's Head Big Muff PI

Electro-Harmonix introduces a J Mascis artist signature fuzz/sustainer pedal based on the celebrated 1973 Electro-Harmonix V2 Violet Ram's Head Big Muff Pi. The J Mascis Ram's Head Big Muff Pi produces the indulgent fuzz tone of equal parts thickness and clarity that J has utilized as his sonic center for decades. The special edition pedal is housed in a die-cast chassis with a white and violet finish and includes true bypass switching, a 9V battery and the option of being powered by a 9V AC adapter. U.S. MAP: \$131.50

www.ehx.com



Darkglass Microtubes B1K

Smaller and more straight forward, the Microtubes B1K brings Darkglass' legendary distortion circuit into a portable and functional form factor. It is the first of its kind from an all-new lineup, with intuitive controls and easy access to secondary internal controls. Designed by mechanical and electronics engineers hungry to piece together a rugged and reliable piece of equipment, this mini pedal is affordable without sacrificing the high quality Darkglass is known for. MAP: \$149.99

www.darkglass.com



KORG volcafm2

volcafm2 is a compact, linkable, fun, and affordable polyphonic digital synthesizer with unique sounds, effects, and an easy-to-use sequencer – with more features and power than the original. MAP: \$169.99

www.korg.com



JodyJazz Introduces New Power Ring with Cap Packs

JodyJazz's popular Power Ring Ligatures will now come packaged with a matching cap. Because of the distinctive size and shape of the Power Ring Ligature, a larger cap is normally required for the players' mouthpiece setup. The attractive new boxes feature a QR code that provides a direct link to JodyJazz's new Power Ring Ligature Fit Charts. These charts provide a comprehensive guide to help players find the right ligature that fits their mouthpiece. There are five separate charts for alto, tenor, soprano, baritone, and clarinet mouthpieces.

The JodyJazz Power Ring Ligatures provide an elegant solution to the problem with ligatures that dampen vibration of the reed. Power Rings feature a concave inner design which reduces the touch points on the reed thereby maximizing reed vibration. There are no moving or added parts, thereby further increasing the efficiency of vibration. Because the Power Rings allow the most freedom and vibration of the reed, this in turn increases the amount of harmonics present, allowing the fullest saxophone sound containing high, mid, and low frequencies. Available in either gold- or silver-plated finish.

Gold w/Cap: MSRP; MAP: \$104.95 • Silver w/Cap: MSRP; MAP: \$84.95

www.jodyjazz.com



Chedeville Launches New SAV Series Clarinet Mouthpieces

Chedeville's new Chedeville SAV mouthpieces are less expensive than the top-of-the range Chedeville Umbra and Elite models and are targeted towards students looking for a more affordably priced Chedeville mouthpiece option. The new model has been named the "SAV" series in tribute to its Savannah, GA birthplace. The Chedeville SAV B \flat Clarinet Mouthpiece is available in a comprehensive selection of tip openings (1/100 MM): 1 (100), 2 (107), 3 (115), 4 (125), 5 (135). The company starts with rod rubber and then they manufacture them from beginning to end using state of the art CNC



machines and expert mouthpiece artisans on the crucial and indispensable handwork. The company has made consistency its number one priority and as a result has instituted the most extensive series of mandatory measurements and play testing in the industry. MAP: \$189

www.chedeville.com

Jensen 10" Blackbird 40 Watt

The 10" Blackbird 40 is the smaller sibling of the 12" Blackbird 40, famous for its exclusive "Reinforced ALNiCo" magnet, and the 1 3/4" (32mm) copper-wound voice coil. The power rating of this smaller speaker mirrors the larger 12" at 40W, with a very similar efficiency - delivering more than 96dB with ease. The tonal qualities of this speaker are also very close; the 10" Blackbird 40 is distinctively vintage-voiced, with a warm-yet-solid bass range, the classic sparkle and chime that are associated with ALNiCo speakers, and all the immediacy and forwardness that are expected from a high quality 10" speaker.

Available at CE Distribution November 2022. MAP: \$195

www.jensentone.com



Under \$500

Rousseau Mouthpieces Celebrates 50 Years with New ER50 models

In celebration of its 50th Anniversary, Rousseau Mouthpieces has announced the introduction of the all new ER50 Series mouthpieces. The first new Rousseau mouthpiece models to be introduced in almost a decade, the new ER50 series features two new alto saxophone models, the ER50 Classic and the ER50 Custom. The Rousseau ER50 Classic Alto Saxophone Mouthpiece is designed to give increased projection and freedom. The free blowing nature of this mouthpiece allows the player to explore a diverse tonal palette with increased nuance. The ER50 Classic allows for more freedom and expansion on the lower range of the instrument. It offers enhanced warmth of the sound while still retaining the classic singing saxophone sound that Dr. Rousseau is famous for.

The Rousseau ER50 Custom Alto Saxophone Mouthpiece provides focus without restriction, allowing players to achieve a flexible sound with great warmth and shimmering tone color. The increased resistance of this mouthpiece allows for great control, especially in the altissimo register. The tonal stability and clarity this mouthpiece provides is unmatched.

The new ER50 series mouthpieces are constructed from JodyJazz's proprietary Chedeville Rubber which is a softer hard rubber producing a more beautiful sound. The tapered gold-plated brass ring on the shank gives the sound more warmth, beauty, and subtleness. Two distinct facing curves were designed to achieve the different feeling between the ER50 Classic and the ER50 Custom. Both models measure .064" / 1.63mm tip opening.

Rousseau ER50 Classic and ER50 Custom – MSRP: \$465

www.rousseaumouthpieces.com



VOX Mini Go

The VOX Mini Go amps re-imagine the Mini series amps with the ability to be powered by any portable USB battery. A revamped rhythm function and looper have been added as well as updated amp models and effects.

MAP: MiniGo3 - \$199.99; MiniGo10 - \$279.99; MiniGo50 - \$349.99

www.voxamps.com



Allen & Heath XONE:23C

The Xone:23C brings together the best of digital DJing and conventional mixing in a compact accessible format. This high performance DJ mixer is equipped with a premium quality, 4 stereo channel 96kHz

24bit internal sound card and offers plug 'n' play connection via X:LINK to Xone:K series



contollers, making it perfect for performers looking to combine the convenience of digital DJing and recording with the hands-on control and visual appeal of a real mixer.

Xone:23C includes an enhanced version of the legendary Xone filter with resonance control, VCA faders, 3 band total kill EQ, illuminated switches, crossfader curve selector and styling inspired by the flagship Xone:DB4. At the heart of the mixer is the renowned analog Voltage Control Filter (VCF) system offering Low-Pass and High-Pass filters, frequency sweep and 'mild to wild' resonance control. There is also an FX loop to connect to third party FX units, which route back in through the filter system.

Xone:23C features 2+2 stereo channels with dual levels for phono and line inputs, allowing four music sources to be connected at the same time, including turntables and CD/media players. Additionally, the internal soundcard enables replay and recording from DJ software, offering users all the benefits of digital DJing whilst using hands-on mixer controls. MAP: \$449

www.allen-heath.com

The Woman Tone from Aclam

A tribute to Eric Clapton's namesake sound that made him a legend during Cream's



years. Following its lineage of effect pedals recreating specific tones of the '60's bands, Aclam has developed the ultimate overdrive pedal for those fans of Cream and Eric Clapton's fabulous sound heard on songs like "Sunshine Of Your Love," "I Feel Free," or "SWLABR" just to name a few. The Woman Tone features an extremely touch sensitive plexi style overdrive, designed with F.E.T transistors and tuned to roar like the 100W Marshall full stacks Cream used, but definitely the cherry on the cake of this pedal is the Woman Tone knob. By turning it counter-clockwise you'll gradually get that silky sound he attained with his Gibson while soloing. It is engaged via a footswitch so the guitar players can switch from on sound to the other without the need to reach any control with their hands.

The Woman Tone's artwork is signed by the one and only Marijke Koger, the artist who hand-painted Eric's famous Gibson SG nicknamed "The Fool" in recognition of the artistic collective she was part of. MAP: \$339

www.aclamguitars.com

Phil Jones X4 Nanobass

Nanotechnology breaks the sound barrier with the X4 Nanobass, which is the most compact and portable combo amplifier ever designed by Phil Jones Bass for practice and desktop applications. It is a highly efficient mini engineering marvel that redefines portability and "Tone To Go." It is a 35 Watt amplifier with a 4" speaker and 3 Band EQ that not only rocks with bass; it also provides dazzling tone for other stringed and electric instruments including guitar, ukulele, violin, and electronic drums. The practical and versatile design includes an auxiliary input compatible with iPads, iPods and drum machines, and is

Bluetooth equipped for music listening enjoyment and other applications. PJB's proprietary NeoPower 4-inch speaker delivers full frequency range that achieves ultimate tonal clarity and transparency for instruments as well as high-fidelity sound to any source fed into the auxiliary and Bluetooth inputs. The X4 weighs just over 5 lbs. and is small enough to fit in a backpack. It is available in black, red, and white colors and features a built-in world-wide AC voltage input. MSRP: \$359.99

www.pjbworld.com



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Gator Frameworks ID Series All-In-One Content Creator Tree with Light, Mic, & Camera Attachments

If you're the creative type, then we'll bet you've lost a great idea or two before you could find your camera, mic or light source and hit "record" to capture that revelation. Meet the content creator's lifesaver, the ID Series Creator Tree by Gator Frameworks.

Speed and convenience are key to getting your content created and posted in a competitive content market. The Creator Tree organizes the vital components of your content creation station, right there within easy reach!

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www.gatorco.com



Under \$2,000

SONOR AQX Stage & Studio and AQ1 Stage & Studio

The expansion of the AQX lineup and introduction of the AQ1 were conceived with younger and less experienced drummers in mind. SONOR is confident these kits are destined to reignite the entry-level with player-centric package setups solving challenges for many first time and step-up drum kit buyers.

AQX Stage & Studio The AQX series expands beyond the popular traveler configurations already on the market with Stage and Studio configurations complete with hardware pedals and cymbals from Sabian. This package offers 100% poplar shells in authentic sizes with all the essentials included in one purchase for any young drummer looking to get started.

AQ1 Stage & Studio The AQ1 series feature 100% birch shells, appointed with Remo pinstripe heads. Standard SONOR Stage and Studio configurations paired with 2000 series hardware give this step-up kit a unique position in the market. Taking the mystery away from any drummer wondering what to do next, the AQ1 is the perfect next step on any player's SONOR journey.

MSRP: \$1,979-1,999; MAP: \$1,089-1,099 (depending on configuration)

www.sonor.com



Under \$1,000

New Limited Edition 14"x4.5" S.L.P. G-Hickory Snare from TAMA

New for 2022, TAMA has unveiled a limited edition 14"x4.5" S.L.P. G-Hickory snare drum. This new, limited snare drum features an 11mm, 12-ply hickory shell, with a nicely-figured outer ply of elm. Hickory is a wood more commonly used for drumsticks, but it provides a bright, crisp tone when used as a shell material. The thick shell combined with a shallower 4.5" depth, results in a powerful and responsive sound. The die-cast hoop offers punchy attack, a focused sound, and precise tuning, while the carbon steel snare wires afford a crisp rasp and solid crack. While versatile, like a maple shell, hickory possesses a dry character that makes it ideal for an auxiliary snare and this particular drum's wide tuning range affords an additional layer of tonal flexibility. List: \$666.65

www.tama.com



Blackstar St. James

Developed after months of forensic examination of vintage valve amps, the St. James series offers valve amplifiers that are truly lightweight and portable. Available in two formats, a classic EL34 design and a higher gain 6L6 model, these amps are simple to use but highly versatile; the intuitive two-channel set-up delivers Blackstar's best ever cleans and overdrives.

MAP: Combo - \$1,299.99; Head - \$1,199.99; Cabinet - \$749.99

www.blackstaramps.com



Mapex Launches the All-New Venus Series Complete Drum Kit

The all-new Mapex Venus Series complete drum kit presents an all-inclusive setup for the first-time player ready to start the "Drummer for Life" adventure. The kit includes a 5-piece shell pack complete with matching snare drum outfitted with a complete set of stands and pedals, cymbals, a drummer's throne and even a first pair of drumsticks. The Venus Series is available in Rock and Fusion setups in a choice of four sparkle colors black galaxy, blue sky, aqua blue, and crimson red.

The Venus series returns with 100% poplar shell construction producing a legit drum sound huge on tone and easy on the price tag. Most entry level kits skimp on the sound, but Venus kits are appointed with the same Mapex SONIClear bearing edge technology and attention to detail as pro-level Mapex drums producing rich tones from the toms, a robust crack from the snare drum, and a punchy low thump from the bass drum. Including the perfect collection of stands, pedals, cymbals, throne, and drumsticks makes the purchase experience complete and easy with one simple price.

Venus 5-Piece Rock Complete Setup - MAP: \$699

www.mapexdrums.com/us



Ibanez Redesigned RG Premiums Featuring Neck-Thru Construction

Ibanez has announced three revamped RG Premium models. All three feature American Basswood bodies with Poplar Burl tops, 7-piece Maple/Walnut necks, Ebony fretboards, and neck-through construction for improved sustain and upper fret access. Other high-end features include Acrylic/Abalone block inlays, luminescent side dot inlays, and jumbo stainless steel frets with the Ibanez Premium fret edge treatment. The pickup configurations vary between HH and HSH. The RGT1220PB & RGT1221PB are equipped with two DiMarzio Humbuckers paired with the dyna-MIX10 switching system, while the RGT1270PB is outfitted with an HSH DiMarzio set wired to a five-way switch. The bridge selections include the Edge tremolo or a Mono-rail hardtail setup, and the available finishes are Deep Twilight flat or Antique Brown Stained.

RGT1220PB - Street: \$1,499.99

RGT1221PB - Street: \$1,399.99

RGT1270PB - Street: \$1,499.99

www.ibanez.com



Over \$2,000

Kawai CN29

The Kawai CN29 digital piano gives you best-in-class touch and tone and is the perfect companion for musical enjoyment and expression. With Kawai's Responsive Hammer III keyboard action, considered by many to be the best available, the CN29 delivers unrivaled touch response. Incredible piano tone is meticulously reproduced with our Progressive Harmonic Imaging technology and our high-performance amplification and speaker system delivers incredibly authentic and satisfying musical tones.

The CN29's built-in lesson function allows aspiring pianists to learn piano using classical Czerny, Burgmüller, Beyer, and Chopin etudes as well as songs from the popular Alfred's Piano course books.

Features like the sound of the renowned Shigeru Kawai SK-EX Concert Grand Piano and a total of 19 exceptional instrument sounds create a wide variety of musical possibilities. Modern OLED graphic display, Ivory Touch key surfaces, SHS Headphone settings, our Grand Feel Pedal System and wireless Bluetooth MIDI make the CN29 a superior piano experience for all players. Available in rosewood, satin black, and satin white. Matching bench included. MSRP: \$2,699

www.kawaius.com



Spector NS Dimension

The NS Dimension is Spector's first-ever multi-scale instrument and features a fully-contoured body, exotic woods, and Fishman Electronics.

MAP: 4 String - \$2,099.99; 5 String - \$2,199.99

www.spectorbass.com



D'Angelico Deluxe SS

Incorporating select specifications previously offered only in limited edition collections, the all-new standard Deluxe Series semi-hollows are seated at the top of the D'Angelico line. Unique from its Premier and Excel Series counterparts, the new Deluxe SS features satin, semi-transparent finishes over a variety of body woods including maple, mahogany, and dao. Equipped with either two Seymour Duncan Seth Lover A4 Humbuckers with coil splitting capabilities or two Seymour Duncan Stacked P90s, the SS covers more tonal range than ever before, offering everything from warm, round jazz tones to shimmering, crystalline rock tones. A thin neck shape allows for exceptional playability, while an ebony fingerboard and premium fretwire from Jescar offer singing tone. Available in three new colors: satin honey, satin trans wine, and satin brown burst. MAP: \$2,199.99

www.dangelicoguitars.com



LOVE AT FIRST CLICK.

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Plugging Along

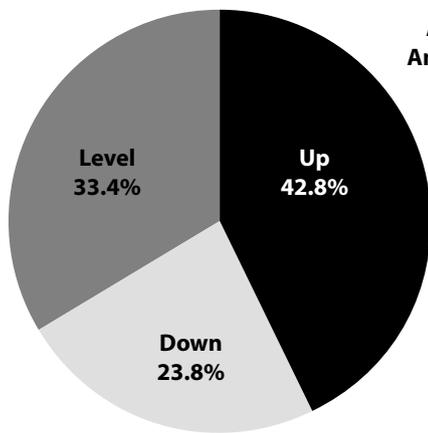
Guitar and Instrument Cables By Christian Wissmuller

One thing is absolutely agreed upon when it comes to ¼" guitar and instrument cables: it's a very crowded field. Aside from the sheer number of brands competing for dealers' and customers' affections, this has also been a market segment especially impacted by shipping and manufacturing delays, according to the participants in this month's survey. As Davin Odegaard of Minneapolis' Twin Town Guitars observes, "Supply chain issues hit cables hard. Many manufacturers are still trying to catch up."

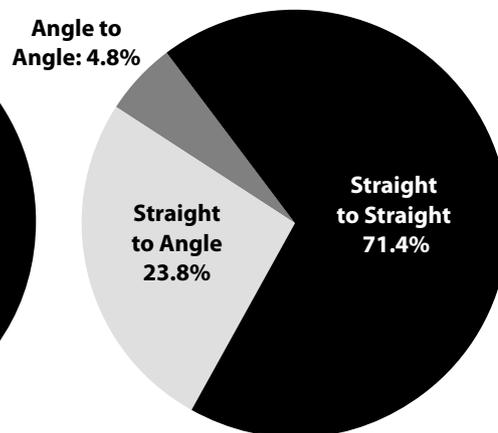
Another frequently expressed sentiment in this month's dealer survey was the growing trend towards more expensive product. "While still not the biggest sellers, there has been an uptick in higher quality cables," says Music Street's (Marshall, Minnesota) Zach Haltvick. "More customers are prioritizing longevity, gravitating towards higher-end, cloth-covered cables especially."

Read on to learn more about this important segment of accessory sales in the world of MI retail.

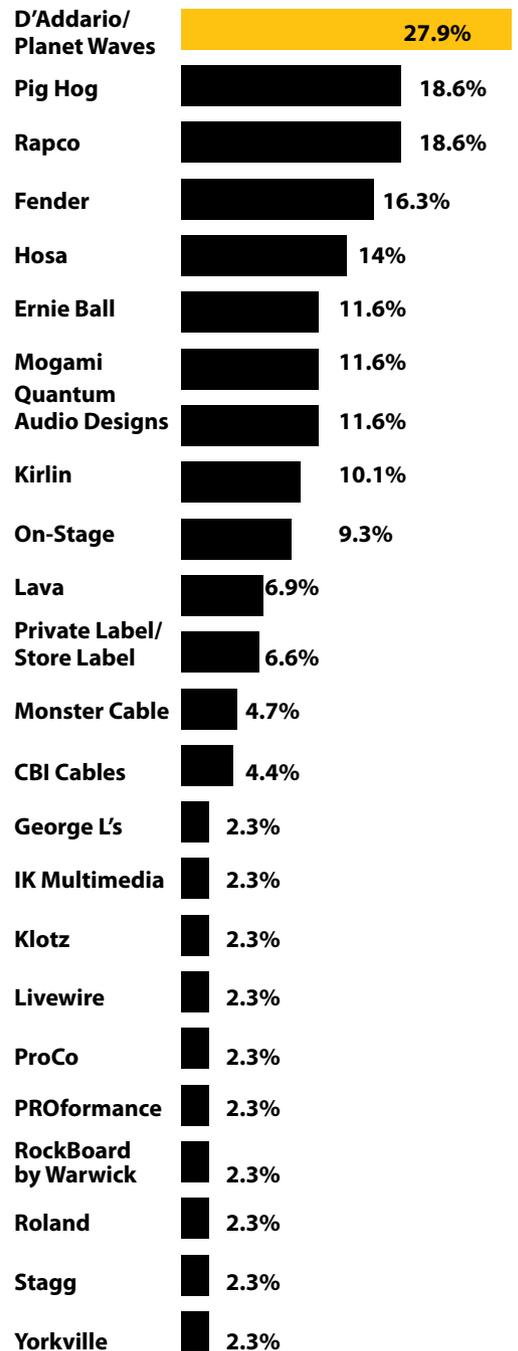
When compared to this time in 2021, sales of guitar/instrument cables at your store are...



What types of cables are favored by your customers?



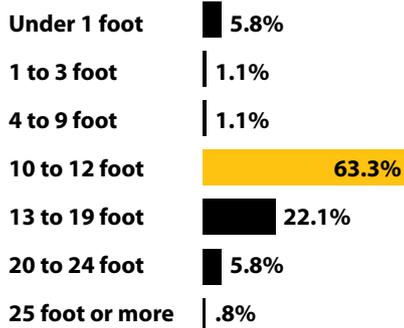
Which brands are the top sellers for your store?



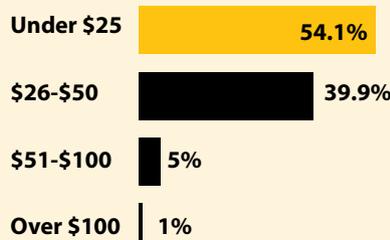
"Cables have always been a significant part of our overall accessory business. With margins typically being 45% to 55% GPM, cable sales are very important to our bottom line."

— Ed Intagliata, Cassell's Music

What length of guitar/instrument cables is most popular?



What's the most popular price range for these types of cables?



Have you been observing any significant trends in this market segment?

"Cable sales have been noticeably up over the past year. As more musicians are working live again, accessories are being replaced and upgraded."

David St. John
Music & Arts
Glendora, California

"Over the years we've noticed that the trend has always been skewed toward the ends of the bell curve; customers seek either inexpensive but durable cables or they want high-end cables."

Nick DuBaldo
DuBaldo Music Center
Manchester, Connecticut

"We devote a good deal of display space to our private label product. We have consistently done well against 'name' brands and offer a lifetime guarantee. Even discounted, our margins are generally higher on these cables and on the rare occasion when we n/c a replacement, the COG is usually offset with additional purchases. Most importantly, however, is the constant reminder of our store. Priceless."

Jerry Vesely
Vesely Music Co.
Parowan, Utah

"Lots of the cables we've been selling have been for 'bedroom players' – just something long enough for basic, at-home needs."

Mike Celmer
Mike's Brass & Woodwind
Johnsburg, Illinois

"More use of 1/8" or 3.5 mm connectors and adapters for connecting consumer computer devices to pro XLR, TRS, and 1/4."

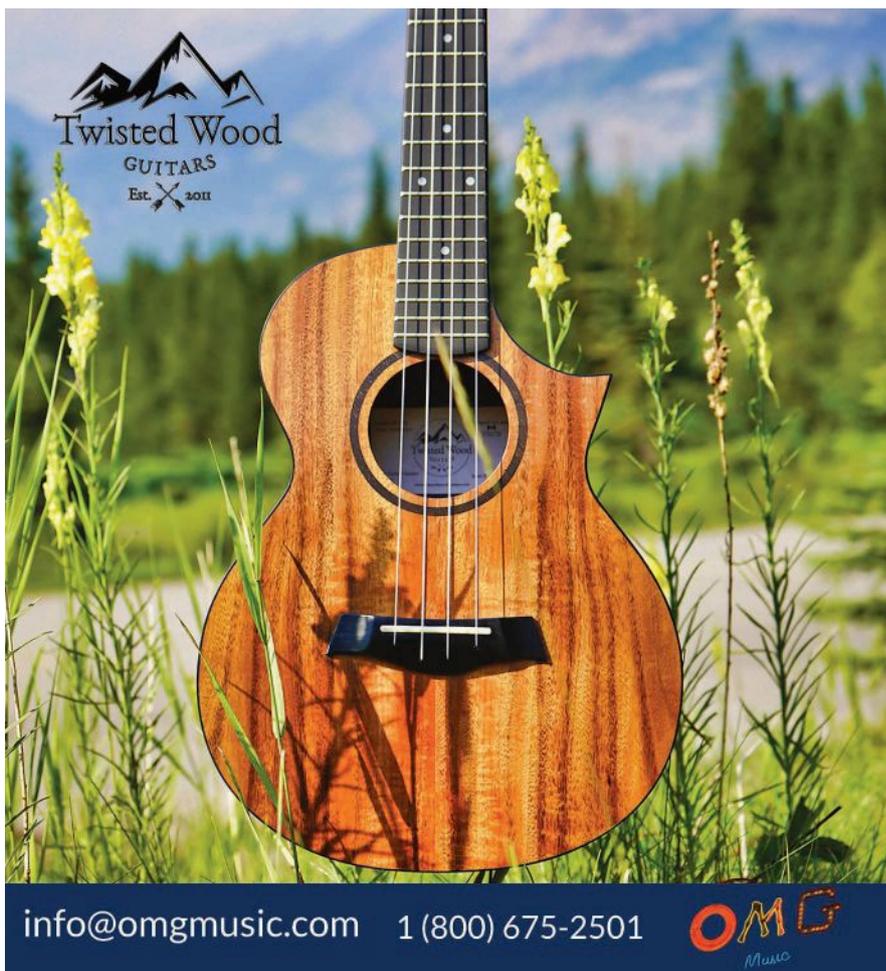
Jeff Elias
Interesting Music Shoppe
Wilfrid, Ontario
Canada

"Cables have always been a significant part of our overall accessory business. With margins typically being 45% to 55% GPM, cable sales are very important to our bottom line."

Ed Intagliata
Cassell's Music
San Francisco, California

"The instrument and accessories market is still cool. I think people are still trying to recover from the financial stress of COVID. I am confident that the sales will start to recover, but I think that it will be slow."

Karl Markl
South County Vintage Instruments
St. Louis, Missouri



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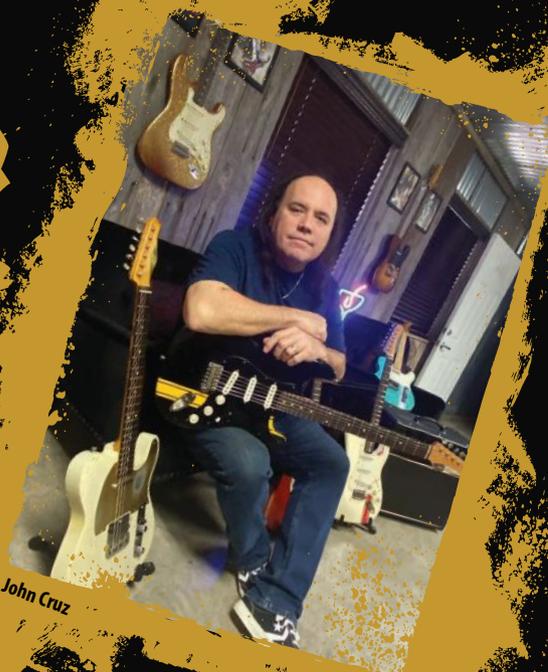
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'Quality Instruments for the World to Create With'

By Christian Wissmuller

John Cruz



CUSTOM GUITARS

John Cruz



“I used to take apart all my own guitars just to see what was going on underneath,” says renowned luthier John Cruz. “Of course, I forgot how to put them back together and ruined a couple in the process, but that was definitely the part that piqued my interest early on.”

A casual, lighthearted summary of the early days of a storied career that has seen Cruz fashion instruments for rock legends, local bar-busters, weekend warriors, and every other type of six-string aficionado there is.

“Nothing ever came easy for me,” he says. “I had to pay my dues everywhere I landed on the way up, which includes sweeping the floors and cleaning out sawdust-packed machinery. I didn’t care, I just wanted to be part of a team. Anytime another job would open up, I would apply. I would get passed over by someone else that had been working for a while longer than me. I would be bummed, but kept honing-in on what I was being taught. I wanted to be the best at everything I learned.”

John’s tenacity and talent eventually led him to the Fender Custom Shop in 1993 where he further honed his skills. “I distinctly remember I was told to forget pretty much everything I learned on the production line at the time, but I never did,” he recalls. “I’m pretty sure I raised a few eyebrows and possibly changed the way certain processes were being done. I was a leader, and nobody was going to take that away from me. It was definitely hard work, but I really loved what I was doing and couldn’t wait to get the opportunity to show management what I could do.”

In 2003, Cruz got that chance when he was appointed to a Master Builder position. “It was the dream job for me, and I was not going to disappoint,” he says. “I met a lot of great people along the way that I learned from and will never forget that.” But, as the saying goes, all good things do usually come to an end and, after 33 years, John Cruz moved on, launching John Cruz Custom Guitars in late 2020. “I knew I had the chops to continue, so I packed up my wife and pets and headed off to Tennessee to set up shop and have a go at it. Again, a lot of hard work and learning all over again, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

You’ve likely heard of some of the luminaries Cruz has crafted guitars for – Jeff Beck, Santana, Brad Whitford from Aerosmith, Slash – but of all his high-profile clients and many projects for players of all types, what stands out most to him in hindsight? “It’s always been an extreme honor to build instruments for some of the biggest stars in the world,” he offers. “I loved every minute of it and made some great friends through it all, but I really enjoyed traveling all over the world and meeting the customers who saved their entire lives just to buy one of my guitars. That really hits home with me more than anything else because I know what it’s like to want something so much, but really have to work hard and save to get it. And I still believe that today, because without them I don’t know where I would have ended up.”

Noble sentiments, to be sure, but a few “superstar” builds still resonate to this day. “The best ones for me were the Yngwie Malmsteen ‘Duck’ project and then getting to build two of my biggest idols’ (Thin Lizzy’s Phil Lynott and Gary Moore) guitars that I pitched to the company were the highlights of my career, as well as complete passion projects to be a part of.”

While Cruz has contributed to the development and refinement of multiple luthiery techniques and approaches, his unique finishes are particular standout achievements. "I can't say I am the first to do this kind of work, but I think I did find a way to be very detail oriented on the overall look as though it was 60 years old, including paint colors, thicknesses, and aging hardware," he explains. "I've always loved the look and feel of vintage guitars, but could never afford one, so I figured I would study the vintage ones and try to give the customer something they could feel they spent their kid's entire college fund on at a fraction of the cost. Now that I'm out on my own, I'm kind of rethinking the whole heavily distressed look thing, which is still cool, but I'd rather give the guitar a nice jumpstart so to speak and let the customer take it on a journey and unfold the story on their own."

John Cruz Custom Guitars currently fields two lines/models — the Crossville ST and the Crossville TL.

"The Crossville series are basically my own versions of two of my favorite guitar styles in the world, what the industry commonly refers to as 'S' and 'T' models," explains Cruz. "I feel my guitars cater more to the newer generation of players these days, but still please the vintage style players out there. I originally wanted to do an entirely new design of guitar, which by the way I am still working on, but after taking a consensus from dealers, artists, and customers, they were asking me if I would still build modified 'S'- and 'T'-style Guitars, so that's what I did. We're working very hard to build a company that can deliver quality instruments for the world to create with. I don't plan to flood the market with tons of new products; I'd rather concentrate on doing what I love to build best. But there will be new products coming in the future when the time is right.

"It's been a challenging couple of years for all industries all over the world, but the music industry always seems to keep their heads above water. I feel grateful to be a small part of this. I also feel MI will continue to get stronger than ever. We expect to grow the business and attract new customers around the world, but will continue to concentrate on making the finest creative tools for artists, working, and novice players at the same time."

Interested dealers – the number of which has been growing steadily since John Cruz Custom Guitars was launched in late 2020 – can reach out to the company's sales and marketing team through www.johncruzcustomguitars.com.   

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The Daily Piñata

You Can't Be Everything to Everybody All of the Time



By
Menzie
Pittman

Dana Perino coined the quotable term “The Daily Piñata,” when describing the position of a press secretary – and if you think about it, it’s also an accurate way to describe the job of a small business owner, or a top-quality manager as well. Another quote I recently stumbled across is from psychologist Gary Kline: “Good Ideas and Insights are fragile.” So let’s juxtapose these ideas, because oddly they are connected.

Delving into the idea of The Daily Piñata first... When visualizing this, think about a manager or store owner opening their store for daily business. As you step into your day, it crescendos like a well written song. There are phone messages waiting for you, and overnight emails to address, but the piñata syndrome is when – spontaneous events start to popcorn.

As the day unfolds we find a number of unexpected issues beginning to rear their ugly heads. Some examples might be, a surge in customer traffic, or students that need immediate attention for a multitude of reasons; and of course my personal favorites; teachers that need you to look something up for them, because at the moment they don’t have access to their computer files. Salesman cold calling, or legitimate music directors calling with a problem they needed fixed yesterday.

It goes on from there, and the pace only accelerates. Keep in mind most professionals and your close friends in the music industry know the back channels to contact you, even if you’re not on the sales floor. So that can be a space and time where the cell phone is not necessarily your friend, because interruptions eat a lot of clock.

But here’s the main problem with playing the role of the daily piñata. Most business leaders walk into their day with a ton of stuff already needing to be addressed, and of course there is always a hangover of unaddressed issues from days before, and that scenario is never ending.

If you are established in your industry as a problem solver to even the slightest level, people will seek you out, and no matter what, they WILL find you! Once the cell phone became our main communication tool, privacy left the conversation – forever!

The convenience of having that little device in your pocket brings you both good and bad interruptions: spam calls, texts, emails, personal calendar, business calendar, personal notes, business notes, bot-texts, even people selling vacations – and it’s only Monday!

Recently I read that interruptions cost the U.S. economy almost \$1 trillion annually, and eat up to 28 billion hours each year. You really have to duck and cover, and there’s a reason for that. If you

are considered “Captain Solution” what that really means is that all problems attempt to park themselves on your desk. Granted, there are some productive tricks to protect you from early morning or late evening time poachers, but sometimes it’s that “one unique call” that moves an opportunity in a good direction. So, as much as we need privacy, tolerating unexpected interruptions can also be productive, and many times you should say yes and make yourself quickly available.

It’s just a fact that problems and opportunities have no regard for the clock, and the bigger the problem, or the bigger the opportunity, the less respect your privacy garners. Yup, it’s “piñata time.”

Managers are just one call back on the phone tree, which means they’re not immune either. So the reality is, the higher you climb, the louder it gets, and so that reality is the piñata. The ongoing daily barrage of calls and problems and responsibilities is the stick hitting the piñata, over and over. So, here are some thoughts on how you can address the punishment of being The Daily Piñata and still keep your sense of humor.

First, let’s revisit the quote from Gary Kline, “Good Ideas and Insights are fragile.” When we are pummeled everyday by the noise of handling the task of managing “daily business,” our creativity suffers. And the truth is, no one ever really wants to admit that.

But that’s my gift to you - I will say it for us!

Fourteen-day weeks although exciting, sooner or later, have their cost; and that cost will be paid in full - one way or another. When we are burned out, or simply exhausted by playing the role of The Daily Piñata, we shatter the chance for good ideas and insights to express themselves to us.

So here are my “Tips of the Day:”

- Get outside, and out of the office.
- Silence your phone in the morning until you are ready to open the door to your day.
- Start your day with personal time, finding methods of renewal and self-connection.
- Wake up thirty minutes earlier, and keep that time for yourself.
- Turn off all the noise, when possible.

The truth is: You can’t be everything to everybody all of the time. ☹️

Menzie Pittman is the owner and director of education at Contemporary Music Center in Virginia (CMC). Following a performance and teaching career spanning more than 32 years, he founded CMC in 1989 and continues to perform, teach, and oversee daily operations. He has 50 years of musical experience as a drummer and drum instructor. Menzie is a frequent speaker at NAMM’s Idea Center, and a freelance writer for MMR’s “Small Business Matters.”

“Once the cell phone became our main communication tool, privacy left the conversation – forever!”

'My Domain Has Been Hacked'

The Story of Fox Music House



By
Jaimie
Blackman

For the last week, my emails to Joseph Fox, owner of Fox Music House, were returned to with the following message:

The original message was received at Fri, 12 Aug 2022 08:18:46 -0700

----- The following addresses had permanent fatal errors -----

<joseph@foxmusichouse.com>

When I messaged Joseph Fox, fourth generation owner of the South Carolina business, he texted me the following:

"We had a massive hosting issue Monday and Google listed our domain for spam. It's a wreck." A difficult way to begin one's day.

For Joseph Fox and company it all started on Monday, August 8th, 2022, when the music store opened for business. At first, it appeared to be like any other Monday – the way it's always been for the organization which is nearing its 100-year old history. When Fox Music called a customer to follow up on a sales quote sent out by email, they were surprised to learn that the customer never received the quote. Upon further discussion, the company was even more surprised when they discovered that their email ended up in the long-term customer's spam folder.

If that wasn't enough, a second problem was discovered. The domain for the organization's website, Foxmusichouse.com, was down. Users simply received the 404 status code that tells a web user that the requested page was not available.

The initial thought of the leadership team was that their domain had been hijacked. After all, what does one do when there is a technology failure of this magnitude? With multiple suppliers, it gets even more complicated. Is your first call to the email provider, or perhaps the group responsible for your domain integrity and website support, or in an extreme case, was your domain hijacked and now sending out spam to your customer list as was original consideration. Regardless of what the thoughts were, the technology professionals had to be notified for restoration of the website and email. Fast.

Fox was gracious enough to share his experience with the readers of *MMR*:

MMR: What date was the problem first discovered and by whom?

Fox: On Monday, August 8, our customers were telling us that our emails were going to their spam folder. Then I was notified by our delivery coordinator at 8 am and thought it was a flag with the way we sent our quote, and images from our POS. We updated this internally and thought it would adjust the spam filters in a day.

MMR: Did you lose your email and website as a result of the domain loss?

Fox: We have three tiers for our web services. PairNetwork hosts our domain, DealerWeb design manages our site, and Google Business is our email provider.

After speaking with PairNetwork, they indicated that after an update we lost our website and any email sent outside of our domain.

This made it very hard to track the cause since we could still send internal emails and until 8/10 were still receiving replies when responding to previous chains sent.

MMR: What other parts of your business technology were impacted?

Fox: We contacted our web designer, first thinking it might be two separate issues. Spam and the 404 error. Quickly we reached out to PairNetwork and got our website back up. This was a relatively quick solution. Google Business took almost a full day to resolve our email.

MMR: Were you able to set up any temporary re-directs?

Fox: By the time we realized the whole picture, a solution was in the works.

MMR: Were you financially compensated in any way by the technology company that caused the problem?

Fox: No. PairNetwork was very quick to respond once the issue was identified.

MMR: What was the narrative for the problem?

Fox: We were lucky we didn't lose more business opportunities. Many customers reached out a day after the problem was discovered on 8/9 and were able to get things sorted out for daily transactions. If we had a school bid due it would have been a different case.

MMR: What date was complete service restored?

Fox: 8/11 with full email capabilities by 8/12.

MMR: Four days without business email must have felt like a lifetime. In the end, what was the cause of the problem?

Fox: This was a fluke issue with PairNetwork's update.

MMR: Did you find that your phone service handled most of the incoming emails?

Fox: Yes. We have a strong in-store presence and continually train our counter staff. We experienced a much larger volume of calls, but something we were ready to handle.

MMR: What else would you like to share with the readers of *MMR*?

Fox: Have regular IT talks thru your team and vendor partners. Make sure they know each other.

MMR: What if any new procedures have been put in place to mitigate future problems of this nature?

Fox: We have improved the "handshake" between DealerWeb and PairNetwork. A new process by our tech team now includes regular update checks that should help ward off similar situations in the future. There's one more tip I'd like to share. Four years ago we had the link in our email signature with directions to our new location. Because spammers were hitting that link, and sending us more spam, after two months we had to remove it.

Lessons to be learned, indeed. ☹️🙏

Jaimie Blackman – a former music educator & retailer – is co-founder of BH Wealth Management. The organization offers 401(k), insurance, and succession planning services. Download your complimentary copy of End Your War With Money at bhwealth.com/moneycapsules Registered Representative, First Allied Securities, Inc. Member FINRA/SIPC

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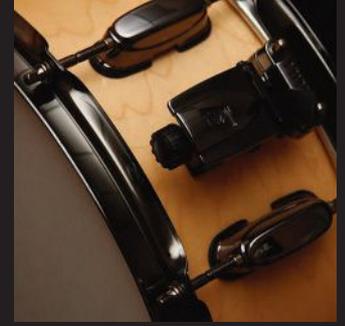
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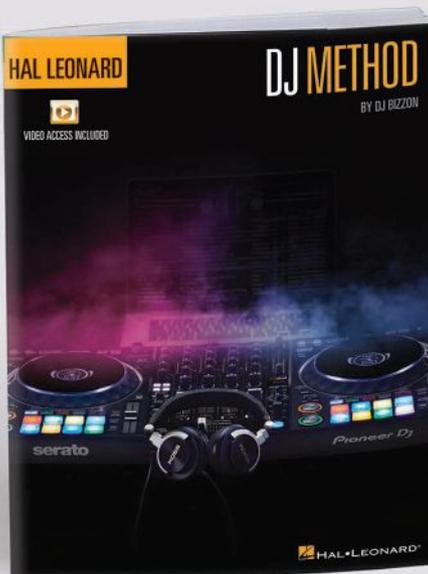
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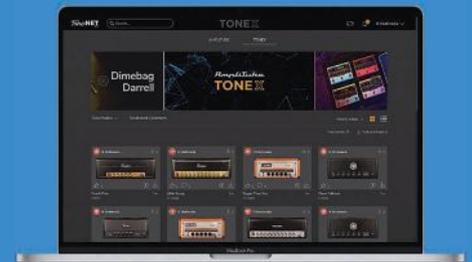
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