

Reflections On Our 125th Year

In the premier issue of *The Music Trades*, publisher John C. Freund summed up the purpose of his new publication, writing: “A trade paper is a record of man’s nobler side. It tells the story of his labor, his enterprise, his progress in industry and commerce, and in the arts. The daily paper records his crimes, his failures, his vices, his accidents, and all the corruption of his life.” In the ensuing 125 years, the music industry has evolved from a collection of regional piano makers and instrument artisans into a global enterprise, offering a dizzying array of products, most of which could hardly have been imagined in 1890. We’ve been privileged to have a ringside seat to recount the unfolding drama. (The banner on this issue’s cover dates back to the first issue of *The Music Trades*.) Despite the epochal change of the past 125 years, Freund’s original mission remains as valid today as ever, and we continue to chronicle the noble efforts of all those who serve the art of music by creating better products, making them more affordable, and devising ways to distribute them to a broader audience.

Some discuss progress and the economy as if it’s an impersonal, inevitable force, akin to gravity. Something that just happens. The 125 years of accumulated back issues in our offices tell a very different story. The evolution of our industry has been no more inevitable than a work of art like Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* or Mozart’s *Requiem*. It has been the result of individual ingenuity and effort.

Recorded music can be traced directly to the genius of Thomas Edison. Using electricity to create musical tones? Credit goes to Laurens Hammond. Through dogged persistence, Leo Fender developed a practical electric guitar. Electronic music would be in a very different place if Bob Moog hadn’t invented the synthesizer. In addition to these famous names, a legion of unsung heroes has authored refinements, large and small, that have made music more accessible: the forward thinkers who brought steam-driven engine technology to the factory floor to make pianos more affordable; the retailers who removed barriers to participation by devising the band instrument rental program; the engineers who applied computer-controlled machinery to improve quality and value; the designers who made digital tuners so accessible that no one has an excuse for being out of tune any longer; and countless others that space precludes listing here. Motivated by the straightforward desire to give the customer more, these individuals have improved the human condition. It’s been a privilege to tell these stories over the past 125 years, and we like to think that in some small way the information in our columns has facilitated the progress.

Wisdom is supposed to accrue with age, but one of the few truths that emerge from our archives is that humanity’s grasp of the future is tenuous. Over the past 125 years, sweeping forecasts have been wrong more often than right. In the 1890s there was consensus that local merchants were on the verge of extinction due to the rapid growth of Sears Roebuck. In the ’20s, some of the industry’s best minds were convinced that “active music making” was destined to disappear because “who would strive to master an instrument when they can just flip on a radio or player piano.” In the ’30s, during the height of the Depression, the conventional wisdom was that America would never regain its past prosperity. More recently, the growth of digital technology in the ’80s led many to conclude that guitars, drums, and wind instruments were going the way of the dinosaur. However, here’s one truly bankable forecast. Thanks to the inspired creativity of the people who make up our industry, things have consistently worked out better than anyone ever anticipated. Today’s hardships are destined to become a distant memory in a vibrant future.

The fact that we’re still following John C. Freund’s original mission is due in large part to the continuity of ownership and management at *The Music Trades*. We are, respectively, the fifth editor and the fifth publisher in the magazine’s 125-year run. Freund was the first to record the industry’s progress when he initiated this magazine. Our grandfather, John F. Majeski, went to work for *The Music Trades* in 1910 as an assistant bookkeeper and eventually purchased the business in July 1929, months before the stock market crash and the beginning of the Depression. Through sheer tenacity and willpower he sustained the magazine over two decades of economic hardship. Our father, John F. Majeski Jr., took the helm in the early ’50s, enlivened the publication with his forceful intellect and built a loyal readership worldwide. We’ve been privileged to continue these traditions, and we have been aided in these efforts by an exceptional staff, most notably Rich Watson, longstanding managing editor, Sonia Kanigel, associate editor, and Juanita Hampton, controller.

We try to serve the industry by disseminating useful information, but our rewards have been disproportionate. We are continually humbled and inspired by the talented and dedicated people we cross paths with, and we are grateful to number many of them as friends. It remains an honor to be a part of this dynamic industry.



Brian Majeski, editor, and Paul Majeski, publisher, with senior staff members (l-r) Sonia Kanigel, associate editor; Juanita Hampton, controller; and Rich Watson, managing editor.

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Editor

Paul A. Majeski
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