

Looking Forward To The Next 100

One hundred years ago the U.S. Army was in the midst of the last major battle of the Indian Wars, subduing the Sioux tribe at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. The Census Department calculated the national population at 62 million, and the fastest means of crossing the country was on the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe railroad, which had a locomotive with a top speed of 78 miles per hour. Basketball was a year away from being invented, and it would be another two years before a gasoline-powered automobile was built in the U.S.

Against this backdrop, a young Englishman named John C. Freund launched *The Music Trades* magazine. In 1890 the music business represented one of the United States' larger and more visible industries. Riding the crest of a surging wave of prosperity, some 250 piano makers produced 75,000 instruments annually; 150 reed organs makers generated a comparable output; 200 musical instrument makers, primarily brass instrument concerns, supplied the roughly 30,000 community bands that existed across the country; and printed music was supplied to the country's growing number of musicians by some 225 publishing houses. There were 5,000 firms engaged exclusively in the sale of musical products, not to mention thousands of dry goods stores that stocked printed music and a few guitars or concertinas. All told, some 15,000 firms between Denver and Boston were engaged in the manufacture and sale of musical products.

Observing this dynamic growth, John C. Freund concluded that the music industry was in need of its own publication. Today, an estimated 5,000 trade papers serve every known branch of commerce in the U.S. One hundred years ago, however, the idea of a specialized magazine devoted to a single industry was still a novel concept. Two developments in the prior decade had paved the way for Freund's venture and for trade papers in general. "Second Class" mail, which offered economical postage rates for publications, had been instituted in 1884 under the administration of President Chester Alan Arthur, and high-speed, steam-driven printing presses had become widely available in 1883. With the means of production and distribution in place, *Music Trades* commenced publication as a modest 16-page weekly. One hundred years later, we can boast of never having missed an issue, despite numerous wars, depressions, and industry

crises. More significantly, the size and scope of the publication has been continuously expanded, with 1989 representing the largest and most successful year in history.

Last month, at the International Music & Sound Expo, the National Association of Music Merchants paid tribute to this unbroken record of service, presenting *Music Trades* with the proclamation reprinted on this page. Recognition on passing an important milestone is always gratifying, and it prompts reflection. But rather than look backwards at this moment, we choose to ponder coming events. In other words, we're proud of our past, but we prefer not to live in it.

Looking to the future, it's hard not to be highly bullish. Over the past century the industry has steadily progressed in size and stature. Granted, difficulties have been caused by war-time shortages and economic catastrophes. However, if one were to quantify overall industry growth over 100 years, the chart would show an almost unbroken upward curve.

Given the many advantages the industry enjoys today, it's almost a sure thing that the growth curve will continue to advance. First, consider the extraordinary diversity of products available. Musical products like the harpsichord and the accordion may wane in popularity, but they never go away completely. So over the past 50 years we have continuously augmented the industry's traditional products with new technological marvels that broaden the appeal of music making. In terms of value, traditional and electronic products alike continue to set new standards. In the days when \$5,000 represented a lavish salary, a student trumpet cost \$189. Today, when an income of \$13,500 is at the poverty level, an even better horn can be had for \$300. Finally, our customers are more prosperous, better educated, and obviously enamored of music.

Unfortunately, a market rich with potential is no guarantee of easy prosperity. (As the saying goes, if it were easy, anyone could do it.) In years past our columns have been filled with stories of those who failed in good times and those who prospered in depressions. However, for those with the commitment, the coming years should be great ones. At *Music Trades*, we look forward to chronicling a bright future.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor

