

## WHY MUSIC PRODUCTS NEVER DIE

One of the distinctive qualities of musical products is the fact that they never seem to die. Their fortunes may wax and wane, but they never go away completely. A century-old Sears & Roebuck catalogue is filled with scores of items, like spats, corsets, butter churns, and horse-drawn ploughs, that no longer exist. (Where would you go to buy them?) By contrast, the musical instrument section in the same catalogue features nothing but products that are readily available in any music store today: pianos, guitars, violins, harmonicas, recorders, clarinets, and trumpets.

The creation of a new musical instrument is analogous to a painter adding a new color to his palette. The new color doesn't replace an old color, it simply enriches finished work. Historic examples abound. The invention of the saxophone 100 years ago didn't eliminate the need for the clarinet. Laurens Hammond's electric organ, which debuted in 1935, didn't replace either the piano or the pipe organ. Leo Fender's electric guitar didn't displace the acoustic guitar. And, more significantly, samplers and synthesizers, capable of accurately reproducing virtually any sound, have not rendered the broad family of acoustic instruments obsolete.

The unique properties of each instrument serves a specific aesthetic function that just can't be replaced by a "new and improved" model; hence the incredible longevity. If this weren't the case, you'd probably see ads with headlines like "Throw out that old Stradivarius and trade up to a new X-2000 sampling keyboard," or "Tired of being seen with a that Pre-War Martin D-45? For just \$25 per month, you could be the owner of a Supremo Heavy Metal electric."

From a commercial standpoint the longevity of musical products holds great promise for the industry. Every time the industry adds a new product to its portfolio, the business expands. New products invariably lead to some market cannibalization, i.e. an electric guitar is sold at the expense of an acoustic guitar, or the kid who was going to start on drums opts for a synthesizer instead. However, new products are the industry's best hope for

expanding the number of music makers. Data presented last month in our Music Industry Census dramatically underscores this fact.

Over the past ten years the market for traditional products, like band and orchestral instruments, pianos, and percussion products, has either remained flat or declined slightly. On balance, though, whatever declines that have occurred in these product categories have more than been offset by gains in the sale of new products like digital pianos, multi-track recorders, portable keyboards, and the entire family of MIDI products. We are not dealing with a "zero-sum" situation by any means. New sounds, new technologies, and new approaches to making music attract new customers.

Having said this, the music and sound industry is currently on the verge of what could be the biggest and most dramatic sales breakthrough in decades. Ever since the development of MIDI ten years ago, personal computers and music have become increasingly intertwined. Recent events reported in these columns underscore the depth of this relationship. Creative Technologies, maker of the SoundBlaster card found in millions of PC clones, recently purchased E-mu Systems and its library of quality sounds for \$53 million. Yamaha does an enormous business selling tone-generating chips to computer makers around the world. Ensoniq, Korg, and Roland have added staff to pursue a similar venture.

What we are seeing is a growing number of individuals and manufacturers gearing up for the development of, for lack of a better phrase, "desk-top music." The computers already exist, as does the computer-literate population, not to mention the public passion for music. All that remains is for someone to package the elements together in a workable format. No less an authority than Ikaturou Kakehashi, founder of Roland Corp. in Japan, predicts that this emerging category holds the promise of doubling the size of the industry in the next ten years. Who are we to disagree?

We can't predict how and when desk-top music will become a substantial commercial reality; however, if the past is any precedent, it's safe to say that new technology will continue to add dimensions to the industry in the coming years. While "desk-top" may very well attract an entirely new group of music makers, it's also safe to say that the extraordinarily diverse family of products currently available are in no danger of extinction.

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