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Best In Show Panel Caps NAMM University Breakfast Sessions at NAMM Show 2007

Some 37 products and services from NAMM Show exhibitors receive Best In Show Honors

First thing in the morning on the final day of the NAMM Show 2007, more than 500 attendees were treated to a glimpse of the best products and services introduced during the music product industry's most important international convention.

The popular Best In Show panel capped NAMM University's free breakfast sessions offered during the NAMM Show, held Jan. 18–21 in Anaheim, Calif. A group of six industry experts were invited to shop the show on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, pick their favorite companies, products and services and present the winners in five categories during the Sunday morning panel.

In the session's final round, each panelist was asked to select their pick for the best product or service they saw at the NAMM Show. Those five Best In Show products and services were: The Fender VG Stratocaster, Taye bass drum pedals, Roland's Vima RK-500 recreational music keyboard, NAMM's new partnership with the Van's Warped Tour, Mel Bay Records and the Boss Legendary Series guitar pedals.

This year's judges were: Zach Phillips, editor of Music Inc. and UpBeat Daily magazines; Victor Salazar, general manager/event coordinator for The Drum Pad, Palatine, Ill.; Pete Gamber, owner of Alta Loma Music, Alta Loma, Calif.; Liane Rockley, co-owner of Rockley Music, Lakewood, Colo.; Ted Eschliman, co-owner of Dietze Music, a three-store chain in Nebraska; and Alan Friedman, gear nut, CPA and partner with Friedman, Kannenberg and Co., West Hartford, Conn.

“This session is always amazing,” said panel moderator Frank Alkyer, publisher of DownBeat, Music Inc. and UpBeat Daily magazines. “While we can’t present every great product exhibited during the NAMM Show, the panelists presented 37 products from six very different viewpoints in a mere 60 minutes. It’s one more great reason to attend every NAMM convention.”

Below are the Best In Show winners, complete with comments from the panelist who selected them.

Round 1: Small Goods Rule

Our panelists were instructed to select a product that’s small in size or small in price.

Zach Phillips: Eventide’s TimeFactor Twin Delay and ModFactor Modulator stomp boxes
“Eventide has been a leader in high-end effects units. Now they’ve put them into smaller pedals. Each one has 10 trademarked Eventide effects in it. This is a really smart idea from Eventide. It’s small, but not necessarily cheap.”

Victor Salazar: D’Addario’s Evans Wing Nut Drum Key
“It comes in a three-pack. It’s a wing nut, but it’s also a drum key that sits on top of your cymbal stand. So, you never have to look around for your drum key again.”

Liane Rockley: Mel Bay’s Reference Chord Poster series
“At \$5.95, it’s a great add-on for people who just bought a guitar or a book. And it’s great for a kid’s bedroom, to give them some identity with music or their instrument.”

Pete Gamber: Maui Xaphoon Intl. Pocket Sax
“The first thing I found down in Hall E was the Pocket Saxophone. It’s a neat little impulse item for band guys, even trumpet guys like me. It’s \$55 list, so it’s cheaper than a mouthpiece. This could be the new hoola-hoop of the music industry.”

Levy’s Leathers guitar straps
“How many guitars do you sell? You can sell even more straps, and Levy’s are my favorite.”

Big Idea Guys’ Hot Picks series
“I sell picks to trumpet players. If they’re cool, anyone will buy them. These include Disney picks, Pirates Of The Caribbean picks, just lots of great choices.

ePad Industries’ Pocket Pad
“It’s a portable practice pad that fits on your pocket and has a chain you can attach to your belt. It’s way cool. Talk about an impulse buy. Drummers hit on something all the time.”

Ted Eschliman: D’Addario’s Planet Waves HumidiPak
“As music stores, we should really thump our chests that we have items that not only make us money, but help take care of the instruments. This is simple. It’s a three-pack, HumidiPak, no need to add water. You put one into a pouch in the sound hole and another near the head stock, and it keeps the humidity in the case at 45 percent. This is great. It says that you’re playing something that’s organic and you need to take care of it.”

Alan Friedman: Drumhead magazine
“It’s a new magazine. You may think this is just another drum magazine. It’s not. Every issue comes with a CD. There’s really a slant toward music education. The CD gets you into the Web site and will eventually unlock some special features online.”

Round 2: Gotta Stock It!

These are products that our panelists wish were in their stores last Christmas, or at least yesterday!

- Zach: Kawai CA91 digital piano
“This digital comes one step closer to truly recreating the sound of an acoustic piano. Kawai has essentially put an acoustic piano sound board in the back of this instrument. Transducers are attached to the sound board. There’s no speaker cone on this, so the transducers actually vibrate the sound board. The sound is more enveloping. It sounds warmer.”
- Victor: Hudson’s Mike Portnoy In Constant Motion DVD
“He’s been compared to the Neil Peart of his generation. This is three discs and seven hours worth of material. It looks great and sounds great. And it’s going to sell because Mike’s first DVD was Hudson’s No. 1 seller.”
- Liane: Hal Leonard’s Play With The CD series
“This is different from a lot of play-alongs because the CD is the actual recording from the original artist. So, it’s like actually going to a record store and buying the CD with the music right along with it.”
Hal Leonard’s Modern Rock, Vol. II DVD
“This is part the best-selling Guitar Play-Along series, and we all know how well those sell.”
- Pete: Tascam MP-GT1 MP3 Guitar Trainer
“What are the kids playing? iPods. What are adults playing? iPods. Kids look at me and say ‘Huh?’ when I talk about CD players. This is what we need to get to kids who want to download their tracks.”
American Sejung’s S101 guitar line
“This guitar is not only your traditional acoustic/electric. This guitar can be played through your radio. It’s way killer.”
- Ted: Toca’s Synergy Hand Drums
“I actually did stock this for Christmas, and we did pretty well with it. Everybody wants to be a drummer, even non-musicians. The devoted hand-drum players are already there. It’s the people who are mildly interested we get to with these drums. These are very beautiful instruments, they sound great and they’re priced right. We’ve had people come up to the counter buying two of them at once.”
- Alan: Furman SPB-8C
“This is my new Holy Grail of floor boards. It has a neat strip across the top with velcro to attach your pedals. It can handle AC, DC, 9 volt, 18 volt, loops. Best of all, it comes with a sturdy plastic top, a handle and wheels. So, it not only handles all your pedals, but also is easy to carry them around.”

Round 3: Companies to Watch

- Zach: Sparrow Guitars
“This is a company that is taking custom-guitar making to China. The initial work on the guitars is done in China. Then, they are shipped to Sparrow in Canada where they disassemble and reassemble them. They do custom work on them. The guitars look great and play well. It’s the next wave in Chinese instruments.”
- Victor: Pro-Mark

“Drumsticks are very important. They are a drummer’s primary tool. The guys over at Pro-Mark have developed a new packaging and navigating system for all of their sticks. All of their new packaging is color coded into five different groups that most people can understand. It takes the guesswork out of selecting a stick.”

Liane: ProSing
“I am so excited about this product, the ProSing Disc-On-Demand system. This system allows you to burn custom CDGs on demand for your customers, which is just huge. The system has a hefty price point, but you’ll make this up right away. We have so many repeat customers coming in to burn CDGs. People will call us up to ask, ‘Hey, is this song on the system?’ We’ve found that these are a perfect add-on for print music purchases. The margin I make on each sale is 67 percent.”

Pete: Dean Markley
“They’ve come out with the Alchemy bass strings in the Randy Jackson series. He’s really popular on TV right now on ‘American Idol.’ They’ve also got the Jimi Hendrix, nickel-plated steel signature series. If you’re selling guitar strings you need a tuner. Dean Markley’s got one. It’s an easy sell. They make the strings. They make the tuner. It makes sense.”

Antigua Winds
“We are competing with Target. We are competing with all these other people to sell band instruments now. Antigua Winds are of an affordable price, but they are professional.”

Ted: Jupiter Band Instruments
“They continually improve the product. Their margins have always been good. Now, they’ve come out with their new XO line of professional instruments. X and O, of course, means hugs and kisses. And that’s what people will have for Jupiter once they try this line. I’m excited about selling step-up horns again.”

Alan: Baden Guitars
“It’s nice to find a guitar line that nobody else is carrying, but it has great sound, great looks. It’s a European design with an American brand name. The guitars are made in Vietnam, but they are hand made. The company is only two years old. If you’re looking for a quality acoustic line that no one else is carrying, this is one I recommend.”

Round 4: Trendsetters

Zach: PianoDisc iQ player system
“You’ve got a cool player system with 127 levels of playback velocity. You can operate it from an iPod, CDs, run things off an iTunes playlist. Player systems are driving the piano market right now. And this is the next wave.”

Victor: Acrylic drums
“We’re seeing so many acrylic drums out there now. GMS, Pacific, Sonor, Tama, ddrum, Peace, Orange County Drum & Percussion, Spaun, Ludwig and Pork Pie all have entries.”

Liane: Alfred Ultimate Vocal Sing-Along series
“My trendsetter marries karaoke CD with print music. These are new books from Alfred with the music and karaoke CD with them. It’s really neat. You can also put the CD in your computer and change the pitch or the tempo. This is a very exciting new product.”

Pete: Michael Kelly Guitars

“This is an amazing guitar. This acoustic has a set neck, unbelievable wood, great tuners, a nice feel. It’s a Korean-made guitar. And it’s affordable. In the ’70s, if you were to get this guitar, it would have been custom made and expensive. Now it’s affordable.”

Dean Guitars

“They’ve got the Dave Mustaine Signature V guitar. These signature models they come out with are killer. It’s fashion. You’ve got to have some exciting stuff in your store.”

Ted: Yamaha training podcasts

“I’ve noticed a lot of companies I’ve been dealing with have introduced podcast training. The best of the best, the Yamaha podcasts. You can find them at yamaha.com/podcasts. In addition to product knowledge that consumers can get there, which helps do the selling for us, the podcasts can also train your staff. It’s a certification program. It’s nice because your salespeople, especially your gunners, can do this on their own time. If they’re serious about making money, they can do this for themselves.”

Alan: Meinl Pickup Cajons

“This is cool because there’s actually a pickup in the cajon. Direct recording, live performance direct through a board, effect boxes. It really opens up all kinds of opportunities.”

Round 5: Best In Show

Zach: Fender VG Stratocaster

“It’s impossible to pass this up. The Fender VG Stratocaster was made through a partnership between Fender and Roland. There have been modeling guitars in the past, but this one is an American series Stratocaster. This is a fantastic modeling guitar. It has 37 classic Fender sounds, very accurate. It sounds like a Telecaster, a 12-string, a humbucking electric, an acoustic. You can also do five different tunings. It’s just great.”

Victor: Taye bass drum pedals

“It’s probably the most versatile bass drum pedal I’ve ever seen.”

Liane: Roland Vima RK-500

“I am so excited about the Roland Vima RK-500 recreational keyboard. It’s one of the first keyboards to place the emphasis on recreational music making. Its keyboard and technology are designed to interact with all of the other media that someone might own—their iPod, CD player, video camera, digital cameras and other components of the home media system. But what sets it apart is that Roland is really content heavy.”

Pete: NAMM, Van’s Warped Tour Partnership

“NAMM is doing something cool, so I’m going to get on my soapbox. NAMM has opportunities for you to go and meet every one of the 600,000 kids who go to the Van’s Warped Tour. I went to Warped last summer. I spent a day and talked to kids. You know what the No. 1 thing they said to me was? ‘You can show me how to do that?’ Get down to Warped. There are a lot of different packages. We should have so many retailers wanting to be part of this that they’ve got a big problem at NAMM.”

Ted: Mel Bay Records

“I see some great artists on this label. I see some great records, some great DVDs. The whole idea is that you’ve got Mel Bay, which is branded in music education. You think Mel Bay, you think records. Now, you’ve got Mel Bay Records, education for records. The guys recording on Mel Bay Records are not only from the Mel Bay roster, but they grew up learning on Mel Bay products.”

Alan:

Boss/Fender Legendary series guitar pedals

“Pedals are back. Pedals are big. It’s easy when you’re the No. 1 guitar company to take a lot of pot shots. But they make great products. Partnering with Fender, Boss came out with these great pedals that emulate classic Fender amps. They have the '59 Bassman. They also have the '65 Reverb Chorus. I couldn’t believe how great they sound.”

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