

IDEAS

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THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

NEW MUSIC INSPIRATIONS

In an attempt to keep my forty-something hipness up to date, I watched the 2018 MTV Video Music Awards because I was curious to see rapper Post Malone and Aerosmith perform together for the opener. I haven't heard much of Post Malone's music, but I have to admit I was impressed to see him playing guitar and singing along with Aerosmith.

Like so many in the industry, I've heard the recent proclamations on the death of the guitar, and I thought it would be great if Malone's performance resurrected guitar sales like the Beatles' appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show did for drums. After all, it was refreshing to see Malone actually play a guitar, but I realize times have changed and an artist simply strumming a guitar does not necessarily translate into new sales.

However, is it really that the guitar is dying, or is it more an issue that we're selling products that are no longer at the top of the food chain in popular music? It seems the guitar is not dead but more that it's taken second place to a laptop and some inexpensive recording gear. Bands that were once driven by a guitar are now driven by a turntable. Van Halen



New musicians still need encouragement in a changing industry

may not sell out an arena, but a single DJ can sell out multiple nights in stadiums with nothing more than a few turntables, a great light show and not a single drum, guitar, bass or keyboard on stage. Perceived talent aside, is the microphone, turntable and MacBook the new instrumentation that's making the likes of Post Malone, Skrillex and Kendrick Lamar the new Clapton, Hendrix and Van Halen?

In my shops, my staff and I

often discuss how we relate the changing musical tastes of our customers to the products and services we offer. Although we can stock more turntables and DJ gear and offer more classes on how to use it, there's still not enough of those particular customers and students to replace those that are not buying a guitar or learning to play it.

MAKING MUSIC MAKERS

So how do we gain new customers and music students when society is increasingly listening to acts that don't play a lot of traditional musical instruments? Better yet, how do we grow market share when the acts that do play guitars, drums, keyboards and basses are shrinking? We hear, "I started learning on YouTube" way more than, "I started learning because I went to a concert and wanted to start playing."

During one of our summer camps in July, a band asked to do a mash-up of a Drake tune, which turned out great, and we had several excellent performances of covers from Imagine Dragons, Ed Sheeran and Twenty One Pilots. We currently have several bands in our Rock Academy program that have

excellent hip-hop/rap albums. Check out The Swim Theory's "Uncharted Waters" on Spotify. The album sounds as though it's a full band, but it's two of our 18-year-old music students using a MacBook Pro, a few plug-ins, a microphone and a keyboard. It was recorded in one of the kids' bedrooms and it sounds great.

As a sign of our times, I have a few pictures of Slash and me at our sales counter and a few of our students know who he is and think it's cool, but far more students have no clue who Slash is and really don't seem to care all that much.

On the other hand, one of our teachers has a picture of him with DJ Khaled, and those same kids that care less about Slash go crazy for the rapper. We often hear them ask, "Where'd you meet him?" and "What is he like?" There's a lot of excitement in those students, and we recognize we can build on that energy to create another segment of music makers and customers. Are you making the same connections with those customers and students? **MI**

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