

SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT

PG Music

By Andrew King

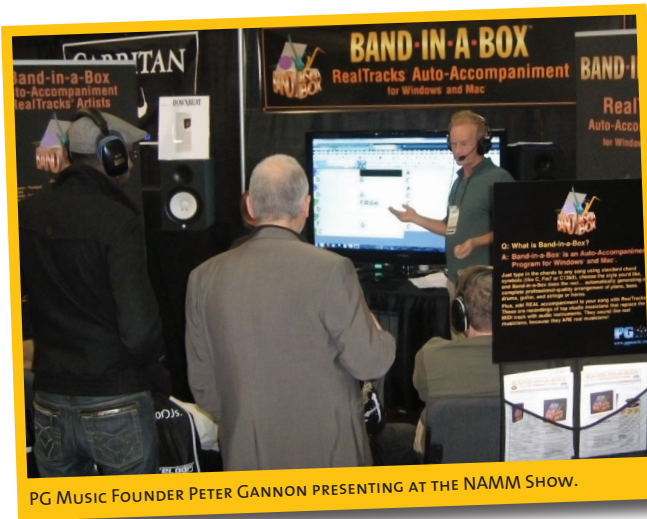
There's a common and fairly new adage that says that, in today's world of fast-paced technological progress, the moment you buy a piece of computer hardware or software, it's virtually obsolete. It's a bit hyperbolic, sure, but captures the basic concept of how quickly newer, faster, simpler, and better versions of computer-based products will hit the mass market. Considering this, it's rather impressive that PG Music's Band-in-a-Box software solution has remained a ubiquitous program for music creators for 25 years.

PG Music was founded in 1988 by its namesake, Dr. Peter Gannon, and over the years has grown into an internationally-recognized brand with more than 30 products on offer for both the Mac and Windows platforms. Band-in-a-Box remains the company's flagship brand – and arguably the world's best-known musical accompaniment software.

For the uninitiated, Band-in-a-Box allows users to type in the chord progression for any song they might be working on, choose the musical style, and the program will automatically generate a complete arrangement using realistic piano, bass, drum, guitar, string, and horn tracks recorded by top session musicians.



THE PG MUSIC TEAM AT THE COMPANY'S VICTORIA, BC HEADQUARTERS.



PG MUSIC FOUNDER PETER GANNON PRESENTING AT THE NAMM SHOW.

Based in Victoria, BC, the company has taken pride in and derived passion from its Canadian roots. "Most of our team – including customer service, technical support, marketing, development, and shipping professionals – reside in Victoria," Gannon prides, and those strong roots extend beyond the company's headquarters. "Canada has always been a great market for us," he continues. "The software appeals to songwriters in various music styles, and there are lots of those in Canada. The Ontario school division [purchased] Band-in-a-Box for every school in the province, and that has really helped with our brand awareness among students and parents."

The typical customer for Band-in-a-Box and PG's other offerings, which include instructional software and RealTrack packages, is more of a musician than a technically-savvy engineer or arranger. "Band-in-a-Box is easy to use, with close to instant results," says Gannon, "so it doesn't require a huge learning curve." Key demographics include students, weekend warrior performers, singers, and songwriters – pretty much every type of stereotypical music store customer.

Never a complacent company, PG Music has adapted its offerings over the years to accommodate the wants and needs of customers in the fast-paced music technologies marketplace. "We started out with Band-in-a-Box as a MIDI program, generating MIDI and synth accompaniments," Gannon shares, though he notes that in recent years, synthetic sounds have decreased in popularity as real audio tracks have become so much easier to record. "For our typical customer, live instruments are preferable to synths, so we developed RealTracks – a no-MIDI solution for this." These are actual recordings of live musicians, offering more realistic results – "a backing track that sounds real because it is real people playing," the founder emphasizes.

While Band-in-a-Box and, subsequently, PG Music have become household names the world over, the company continues on its quest to gain more ground and build its dominance on retail store shelves and in its users' CD-ROM drives. PG Music has a strong presence at major trade events, and initiatives like the pgmusic.com forums and the company's YouTube presence have showcased thousands of original songs created by actual users of the company's products. "This really helps with visibility," Gannon reveals, "because people hear these songs and hear what can be done by a single songwriter using Band-in-a-Box." Word of mouth is reputedly the best form of advertising, after all, and when great songs and real results accompany that word of mouth, it's all the more effective.

"A single singer-songwriter can now produce a professional CD by themselves, especially with the help of Band-in-a-Box playing the instruments along to their chord progression," Gannon says, referring to today's inexpensive and relatively uncomplicated recording technologies and the way the program can be integrated into such environments. "This is still a fast growing segment for us," he reports.

For the foreseeable future, the plan at PG Music is much the same as it's always been – to keep current with technological innovations while continuing to offer products to a varied user base that helps people create music and also progress as performers, writers, and arrangers.

And with that, the future innovations from PG Music are virtually as limitless as the musical ideas the company's software can help its users bring to life.

Andrew King is the Editor of Canadian Music Trade.