

Independent the MUSIC & SOUND Retailer



A Great Way to Appraise Success

By Brian Berk

You never know who will walk into Rebecca Apodaca's store, A&D Music, located in Laguna Hills, Calif. The Dreyer's ice cream family comes in to rent instruments. As does the family of the creator of the Family Circle comic book. And even executives from Pillsbury, sans the Dough Boy, walk past her doors. A&D Music even rents instruments for use as props to theater, motion picture, and television companies.

But that's not the story of A&D Music. Not even close. A&D, celebrating its 30th anniversary, is all about Apodaca, who originally opened the store with her now ex-husband, and staying competitive in a tough marketplace.

When Guitar Center moved into A&D's neighborhood, several independent stores did not survive. Apodaca took a stunning approach. She befriended her chain adversary. "When Guitar Center moved in, I called other local stores and asked if they had gone into the store," she said. "It had been two weeks and nobody had. So I walked into the store with a box of chocolates and welcomed them to the neighborhood. They were very shocked. But I wanted it to be at a point where they would recommend cus-

tomers visit my store for certain items and I would do the same for them. You can't beat them, but you can make friends with them. We get so much business from Guitar Center. We've created an alliance as opposed to an adversarial relationship. Be friendly with your competition. It's a much better way to do business."

Apodaca, who is a large Conn-Selmer dealer, runs her store differently. And that is a monumental understatement. To start, she not only repairs instruments. Repairs evolved into artwork. "I file copyrights on the art pieces," said Apodaca. "I've been making art pieces for several years. I showed them to someone at the Sawdust Festival in Laguna Beach. He was so impressed he offered me a show at their gallery. I had 10 pieces at the show. The artwork is musical instruments or parts of a musical instrument that have been made into an art piece. What I'd like to do with them is sell them not only for individuals, but I could see them in manufacturers' lobbies, concert venues, and more. That could be rented out for events. We even make pieces that look like musicians. We actually have one that looks like Steve Kupka of Tower of Power. To me, the life never goes out of a musical instrument. It just transcends to another form. I searched the Internet and art galleries throughout the world and could not find anyone else who is doing this."

Also an unusual thing for a dealer to do is restore instruments. "I do restorations on woodwinds, brass, orchestral, and fretted instruments. My goal is to bring the instrument back to the way the manufacturer first

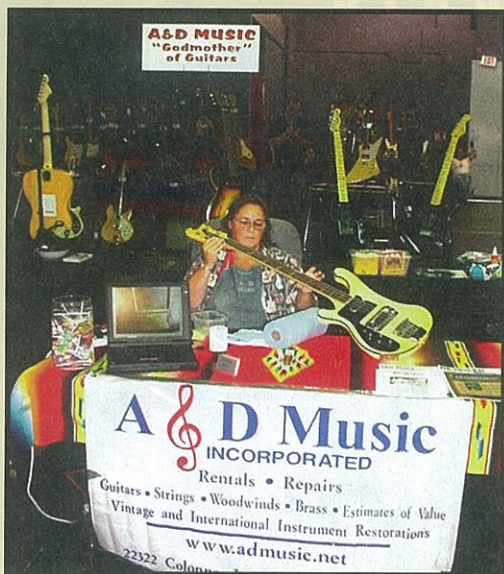
turned it out without refinishing it," said Apodaca. "Sometimes, instruments are the only [memento] people have left from a grandfather, aunt, or uncle. I've worked on 300-year-old instruments to make them playable."

In fact, Apodaca restored a 300-year-old harp that had tuning pegs crumbling, and a face that was split off. For certain instruments, Apodaca hand-makes the parts. To increase Apodaca's level of difficulty, A&D Music not only restores common North American instruments. She enjoys restoring international instruments from places such as Indonesia. "I've had two Guzles in," Apodaca said. "Those are Mesopotamian instruments. Most times, if a customer would ask a dealer if they repair Guzles, most would say, 'I have no idea,' and hang up. I don't. If I don't know the instrument, I try to relate it to a modern day instrument. I enjoy the challenge."

OK, so perhaps restoring or repairing a Guzle is not for you. Apodaca does something else to earn her more money that isn't common either. And she recom-



Rebecca Apodaca



mends you look into it. She is certified to appraise instruments. "It's the biggest new thing we do," she said. "When I do repairs, in the process of finding out what parts are needed, I have collected 500 books and magazines on musical instruments. People often ask me what the instruments are worth. So I started doing more research into values of them. So I just completed a certification program at the University of California at Irvine in the studies of fine and decorative arts. I joined the American Society For Appraisers. What I found out was they did not have a category for musical instruments. So I approached them about creating a category for musical instruments. I enlisted the help of Joe Lamond, [president and CEO] of NAMM, to inform them of the value of musical instruments. I also enlisted the help of Bill Matthews, director of NAPBIRT, the professional band instruments guild. They both wrote letters supporting what I told the Appraisers Society. Because of this, they're creating a new category, and I'm writing the test for the nation."

How does Apodaca appraise instruments? "You look at sales, but of course, you have to look at the source. So we have subscriptions with [auctioneers] Sotheby's, Christie's, and vintage guitar shows. We travel to the shows and look at what prices the guitars sell for. Also, since I've been in business for 30 years, I know a lot of vintage dealers I keep in touch with. And we do have industry price guides.

"The IRS has just ruled that for tax donations or estate settlements, a report must be turned in by 'a qualified appraiser,' who is someone who has the appraisal background and is affiliated with an appraisal organization. The insurance companies are following suit. We know musical instruments better than anybody else. So people want us to perform instrument appraisals. Appraisals are the future of A&D Music."

Appraising isn't a simple process. It requires schooling and certification. But Apodaca collects a fee each time she appraises an instrument for collectors or insurance companies. There's another good profit opportunity as well. "We're also trained as an expert witness for litigation purposes," she said. "So for example, if a music store got flooded, they would file a claim with an insurance company. The insurance company might say they don't want to pay the store. An outside appraiser would be brought in to determine

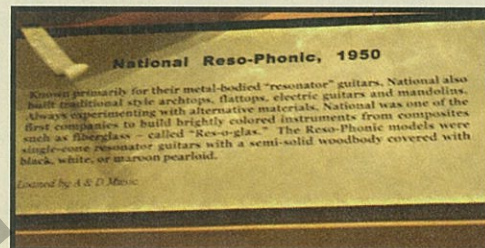
the value of the instruments. There are a variety of different litigation situations where an appraiser is also needed. We turn out legal documents. So part of the education we get involves the legal system."

Although Apodaca has not expanded beyond her one store during the past 30 years, she had some "concessions," when A&D Music sold instruments via seven other stores. "It was a way to sell instruments without going through the expense of a lot of overhead," said Apodaca. "But during the past few years, we've been slowly closing those concessions and liquidating the instruments. [As for our location], we have about 800 square feet total. We employ a few part-time people, as well as our operations manager, Ryan Fawley, who handles all of the operations full time. He's my right-hand man. At the same time, he's also learning the appraisal and restoration trades."

And don't forget about Apodaca's daughter, Micaela Apodaca Davis, who has been involved with musical instruments almost since

she was an infant. Davis serves as vice president of the store, is a private music teacher, and is the bass player in NAMM's Ferdinand L. Petiot Band.

Apodaca's daughter was a natural fit as an employee. But how about for other employees? Finding the right people at the right price is always a tremendous balancing act. "We do hire teenagers for the summer time," Apodaca said. "We go to band directors and ask them, 'Who's your best student? Who's your second best? Would they be



Faceplate that describes an A&D instrument being displayed at the Museum of Making Music.

interested in working in a music store.' If that student's final task is to vacuum the case and polish the instrument, I always tell them they are the most important person here. No matter how well I repair an instrument, when they get that instrument and open that case, that's what they see first." R

Coalition Forms with Merger of IMRA and MSO

By Chris Lovell

History was made Feb. 27 when the directors of MSO (MusicStoreOwners.com), the popular Web forum for indie music merchants, joined the Board of IMRA (Independent Music Retailers Association).

The agreement was sealed by an unanimous vote. Gordy Wilcher of Owensboro Music Center was voted president of IMRA. "We are the music industry's best bet for growing the community of music makers," said Wilcher.

Harry Gillum of Showtime Music was voted vice president. Pat Oliver of Treble Clef, and I were voted treasurer and secretary respectively.

The new board voted unanimously to make the MSO Web forum IMRA's public discussion forum for indie retailers.

IMRA currently manages the "NATIONAL VENDOR/SUPPLIER SURVEY," an important

tool for indies to offer feedback. The National Vendor/Supplier Survey will benefit from increased participation by MSO members. That will make it all the more valid as THE tool for judging and rating suppliers on their business practices and policies...specifically as they relate to the indie music retailer.

The IMRA board also voted to set dues for membership at \$25 for 2008. Membership dues are used to pay insurance, meeting costs, and other expenses. Neither IMRA nor MSO have any paid staff.

A meeting at Summer NAMM in Nashville is scheduled for

Friday June 20 from 4 to 6 p.m. in the convention center in Room 201A.

Other Board members elected at the Feb. 27 meeting are: Dave Byers (DC Music), Frank Hayhurst (Zone Music), Bob Campbell (Campbell's Music Service), Maureen Johnson (Johnson Music), Bill Wagoner (Wagoner's Music Shop), Peter Hix (Hix Brothers Music), Jeff Simons (Watermelon Music), and Don Ulrich (Yenney Music Company).

The new organization's mission statement highlights the positive and proactive approach that is the mandate for change that independent dealers seek. R

Correction: In last month's issue a photo was incorrectly labeled "LRB". It should have said "Daddy O's Music Shack's Slingshot Monkey." We apologize for any inconvenience.