

the MUSIC & SOUND Retailer

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By Brian Berk

Although we typically have a manufacturer interview in this space, this is a year unlike any other, so why not feature a different type of interview in honor of our drum issue? This month, we offer a special interview with Karl Dustman, executive director of the Percussion Marketing Council (PMC), and Antoinette Follett, PMC communication director. They offer plenty of information about the organization's programs, which are a boon for the entire percussion industry. We will also find out about the future of PMC.

ers who are our members and connect consumers with percussion products and education.

The Retailer: Karl, can you reflect back on your time at the PMC? I do not remember any time when you weren't executive director. Can you tell us about some memories you have had?

Dustman: It's been a wonderful 19-year ride. The industry has changed dramatically over that period of time. The executive committee recently talked about what was going on in the industry in 2020, and I reminded the other board members that



Karl Dustman

KARL DUSTMAN AND

The Music & Sound Retailer: Let's start with an important announcement you would like to make. I am giving you the floor.

Karl Dustman: This year, the PMC celebrated its 25th anniversary. It's been a very successful but challenging year. This also marked the completion of a personal goal for me, thus completing 19 years of leadership of the organization and now stepping down from the executive committee at the end of January. I gave my notice to the board [of directors] over a year ago, indicating that I needed to get back to my professional businesses and concertizing. That's when the search began for a replacement. There was a unanimous decision on the board, and Antoinette accepted that position. She will be taking on the reigns of the Percussion Marketing Council on Feb. 1. I am [now] going to turn the baton over to Antoinette.

Antoinette Follett: It is really an honor. I have worked for the PMC for 15 years since 2005, helping with some of the programs, website and communication pieces. I have known the board all this time and have worked well with them. Finishing the 25th anniversary is exciting. It is going to be challenging. There are a lot of changes that have happened in the last six months that are going to stick around. We are going to be changing and getting back to real-life events eventually. There is a lot to do. We need to make sure we can support the industry and percussion manufactur-

we will get through this as an organization, because we went through it during the economic meltdown of 2008-2009. We went through it previously in 2001. We are used to being challenged. But the universal way out is by creating more drummers, players who are customers that will purchase everything from their first drumsticks to a \$10,000 drum set through a music retailer. We have been fortunate to have the NAMM Foundation support the PMC for 18 of my 19 years. We are grateful for that.

To answer your original question, there is not a textbook or how-to manual on how to run [the PMC] because there are two factions. One is the members who pay dues to belong to this organization and give us the authority with their money to create educational programs to create more customers and drummers. The other side of the coin is the NAMM Foundation, which gives us grateful support financially, and we need to support its missions at the same time, which sometimes are similar and sometimes different.

It is not a negative statement, but when I came into [the job] in early 2001, I was handed one banker's box of file folders and was told, "That's it Karl. See you." The rest I made up along the way. So, there is no manual. The exciting part was seeing all the growth. The early meetings were attended by maybe five people. There was a big room with doughnuts and coffee, and I was all ready to do a major hosting, and maybe five people showed up. Now

we do panel presentations. We had [former Arkansas Gov.] Mike Huckabee as guest speaker. We are really doing things that are making an impact. If we don't do it, along with NAMM, nobody else will, because our members are focused on being competitive in this market, brand recognition and new products. They don't have the time, money or people to think about how to grow the market. So, they delegate that to the Percussion Marketing Council. I think we did a pretty good job of that over the past 25 years. It's been exciting and an honor to work with so many people across the board. It is not just percussion people. We interact with guitar associations, piano associations and band instrument companies. We are involved in everything. Antoinette, I know, will move that forward and even expand upon it more.

The Retailer: Let's now talk about this year. Like everyone, you were blindsided by the pandemic. What changes have you seen in percussion and how have you adjusted?

Follett: Coincidentally, we shifted our International Drum Month promotion to the online Lessons With a Master [before the pandemic]. That decision was made and announced at our NAMM meeting. Instead of a day on site at a concert in May 2020, we decided to give away eight lessons online with professional drummers. When COVID hit, and everything went into lockdown mode in March and April, the industry found that

people were at home, trying new things and getting back into hobbies they had let pass. Our traffic on our website for International Drum Month in May was more than twice as much as it was in 2019. We had a great response in terms of entries regarding Lessons With a Master. It unexpectedly fit in perfectly as a virtual event that was needed this year. Some of the people who won lessons had been playing for 30 years — middle-aged drummers who were interested in lessons. We [also] had as young as 15-year-old drummers being able to connect with our artists like Rick Latham, Rich Redman, Gorden Campbell and Dave



Antoinette Follett

professionally throughout the entire year. I tour with the Mantovani Orchestra as principal percussionist. And I have a publishing deal for writing a book scheduled to be out next year. So, I am on the go constantly. It is not me retiring and going to work on my [Lionel] train layout 24/7. I have a marketing and communications company with all types of clients, and I have an orchestral showroom here in Cleveland, where we sell to the Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic and all the conservatories. I have two full-time jobs. The PMC was supposed to be a spare-time extension of that. So, it allows me to take the time I spent on

ANTOINETTE FOLLETT

PERCUSSION MARKETING COUNCIL

Stanoch, who gave the lessons. There were different styles of drumming. We didn't have to depend on a live event this year.

Dustman: The Get Your Sticks Together program, created in August of last year when we were not anticipating COVID-19, is a [program] where consumers sign up on our website to win 12 free drum lessons at a local retailer of their choice, paid for by the PMC. The intention was to drive beginning drummers into the retail store. When COVID-19 hit, [the program] had to expand to offer those lessons online. For retailers with teaching studios, most were able to adapt to the either/or way. They could do it live when they reopened the store or immediately online with [virtual] lessons. For the most part, it was a 50-50 split regarding customers waiting versus those who have drums at home and [said] "I want my lessons now." This program offering goes through the end of this year. We have 12 months of 12 lessons, so we are giving 144 free lessons by the end of this year, paid for by the PMC.

The Retailer: Another thing you are planning is updates to the PMC website. Can you tell us about that?

Follett: We are going to be doing more with our website to provide new information for our drummers. We are also going to have more Zooms, live events and chats with professional drummers. There are so many great drummers who are also educators and teachers who can supply

the information people are waiting for. They are coming to the website to learn to play drums, not to learn about the PMC. We are hoping to create a channel where more professional drummers can get involved, talk about what they are doing and how they can help new drummers. We can give professional drummers another channel besides their own social media to reach new audiences through playdrums.com.

The Retailer: I have a tough one for you Karl. What advice will you impart to Antoinette?

Dustman: The short answer of that is, we are so busy transitioning and giving her all the tools in her toolbox she will need. I really have not thought about what 17 words of wisdom I can leave behind. It is all about stamina. It is a time-consuming job. You justify it sometimes not in dollars and cents but in passion for the industry and the people who share that passion who you are working with. So, right now, I need to give a raincheck on those 17 words of wisdom. But Antoinette knows it is going to be a stamina issue. It is a long day and long week. And when you think you're done, you're not. It never stops.

The Retailer: Karl, you are retiring from the PMC at the end of January. What are you looking forward to doing?

Dustman: It is not retiring. It is a stepping-down process. I have two other businesses that I run. In addition, I play



the PMC and use it toward those multiple entities. You will still see me around a lot. Just not wearing a PMC hat.

The Retailer: Antoinette, times will still likely be tough when you take over the PMC in February. But looking ahead to post-COVID-19, the economy could pick up nicely, leading to optimism, according to experts. With this said, what do you think is the future of the PMC?

Follett: Obviously, I do not think anyone can say it is business as usual. We are looking at "What do we do now?" "What do we change?" "How do we get back to normal?" I do think next year people are going to get back to live events and concerts. Live music is going to come back. There is no doubt about it. You can't stop music. It gets us through the difficult days. There has been talk already about how many musicians are
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creating new music and putting out albums. There is going to be a flood of touring. And while our audience is not necessarily those professional musicians, they inspire the next generation. And we are looking at how we work with these professional drummers to bring people to playdrums.com to learn how to get engaged in drumming.

Another change in our mission: What I foresee is, we are going to have to get involved more in music education advocacy. We need to make sure school music programs stay funded. Children as young as four or five years old should be


able to get to a music class and bang on a drum and experience and learn what their passion might be. It is going to be an important challenge over the years, as education is shifting. Music advocacy is going to be more important than ever. Yes, schools are going to be focusing on common core, but they need to remember that music and arts are vital to development and education. We are going to have to advocate as musicians and as an industry to keep that in the curriculum for students in the coming generation.

The Retailer: Karl, I would

like to congratulate you on your non-retirement retirement (laughs). Antoinette, I wish you good luck in your new role. Is there anything you would like to add?

Dustman: I just want to add a note of thanks to the percussion industry and their support in the Percussion Marketing Council. These are challenging times. Every penny and every dollar is being watched. I think the term “We are all in this together” is a little overused these days, but the percussion fraternity that we all belong to is probably the most closely knit group of people in the music products industry. I appreci-

ate the opportunity getting to know just about everyone out there who has the passion for percussion that I do and Antoinette does. I think we are in for a challenging ride but will make it through it. We have experienced hard times before. This is nothing new for the PMC leadership and its members.

Follett: As Karl said, we cannot [be successful] without the members and the NAMM community. I look forward to connecting with each of them and exploring how we can make the PMC stronger in the coming year. 

Editor's note: For the Zoom version of this interview, visit msretailer.com/special-reports.