



The Switched-On Market, How To Turn Up Your Volume

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Who Are the Buyers?

Figures just released by the American Music Conference show that the increase in the number of amateur musicians in the U.S. crawled along at a one million annual pace from 1950 to 1961, speeded up to an average of 1.8 million between 1962 and 1966. But 1965 and 1966 together bred six million beginners! In 1950, one of every 7.2 American played an instrument. In 1966 one of every 4.8 Americans played an instrument. The golden-growth instrument has, of course, been the guitar.

How Big Is the Market?

Sales of instruments and accessories hit \$955 million in 1966. This surpassed the dollar volume for record sales. It was greater than the combined dollar volumes of all spectator sports, still and movie cameras, comic books and playing cards. Instruments also outsold the entire hobby industry. Retail volume is 10 times what it was in 1940; four times what it was in 1950.

While the sale of traditional band and orchestral instruments has remained static over the past decade, the paraphernalia of pop has brought the music industry out of the doldrums in dramatic fashion. In 1955, 245,000 guitars were sold at retail. The figure for last year was 1,430,000. (Only 607,000 band instruments were sold last year and that includes all woodwinds and brass. Orchestral strings – violins, cellos, violas and basses – registered 80,000 units in 1966!)

Guitar growth started to take on dramatic proportion in 1963 with acoustics. (And recorded folk music comes to mind.) In 1962, 400,000 guitars were sold; in 1963 the total jumped to 700,000. Then came 1964, and the top blew off. (And one immediately thinks of the Beatles.) That year, 1.1 million guitars were sold at retail. The figure climbed to 1.5 million in 1965.

Trends

Of the 41,600,000 amateur musicians in the U.S. 15,400,000 are between the ages of 4 and 21. This represents an increase of more than 410 per cent since 1950, when there were only 3 million school-age kids playing instruments. And the population of that age group has increased only 80 per cent during the period.

More stuffed-shirt school music administrators accepted pop paraphernalia as legitimate parts of their educational programs. The guitar, for example, is beginning to replace the piano in teaching the fundamentals of music.

How Long Will It Last?

What about all these teen-age guitar buyers? Do they represent any kind of continuing, trade-up market? Yes, says the American Music Conference, which recently surveyed teen-age guitar buyers...

"After playing the guitar for six years," said 17-year-old Pat Barkley of North Little Rock, Ark., "I certainly wouldn't want to give up. I feel that the longer a person plays, the more he enjoys it." The survey showed that the kids practice an average of nine hours per week. Two-thirds take formal lessons, and 85 per cent paid at least part of the cost of the instruments.

Perhaps the most significant comment in the survey came from Bill McMillin, 17, of Idaho Falls, Idaho. "The guitar," he said, "is the instrument of our time. Bach had his piano; our generation plays the guitar. Young people can express themselves through the guitar. What they can't say, they can play."

Jerry King, vice-president of Harmony Guitar Co., Chicago, agrees. "People follow the tenor of their times with song. And the guitar is the easiest instrument to sing to. It is America's basic instrument."