

LYON & HEALY RECLAIMS ITS HERITAGE

Once offering “Everything Known In Music,” 155-year-old firm augments its famous harps with a portfolio of premium European and U.S. lines

Founded in 1864, Lyon & Healy is one of the oldest and most storied names in the music products arena, with a history that traces the U.S. industry’s early evolution. In its dominance of the American music retail scene, Lyon & Healy was the “Guitar Center” of the first half of the 20th century. But for a time it also wielded significant clout as a supplier, manufacturing not only its still-world-renowned harps, but also pianos, reed and pipe organs, guitars, mandolins, banjos, ukuleles, and brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments. Unrivaled in scope and true to its slogan, its vast product range offered “Everything Known in Music.”

Outlining their very ambitious goals for the company, current management speaks of restoring Lyon & Healy’s past glory as a leading source of musical products. In today’s market, where value is often defined, and product development shaped, by price point, Lyon & Healy has chosen a decidedly non-standard approach to distribution, with products whose unassailable quality is matched only by their distinctive, even category-defining innovation. If there is a unifying theme to Lyon & Healy’s brands, it could be described as “outside the mainstream.”

Part of a business group including Italy’s Salvi Harps and Lyon & Healy Harps, today’s more focused Lyon & Healy Corporation, still based in Chicago, is the exclusive North American distributor for products made by Relish Guitars, Acus Sound Engineering amplifiers, Paoletti Guitars, Delta, and SIM1 Sound Imprinting effects pedals. It distributes products by the two brands that it owns, Batson Guitars and Lyon & Healy guitars, worldwide. The following is an overview of its brands.

RELISH GUITARS

Even within Lyon & Healy’s constellation of non-conformist brands, Relish Guitars stands out as the biggest rebel. Designed and manufactured in Lucerne, Switzerland, its instruments defy tradition in both form and function. Their construction involves an aluminum “chassis” sandwiched by top and bottom veneers, no neck joint bolts, and no cavity. Attached with

strong magnets, the entire back cover can be removed to facilitate instant—as in *within* a song—solderless and tool-free pickup swapping. A single instrument, with the same feel, weight, and comfortable playability, equips the guitarist with the broadest possible tone palette.

Beneath their radical design, Relish guitars are crafted with the fastidious attention to detail and the precision



Relish Guitars is one of Lyon & Healy's super-distinctive brands.

LYON & HEALY REINVENTED

of, well, a Swiss watch. The aluminum core and bolt-on neck deliver “massive piano-like” sustain. The headstock and neck are constructed from a single piece of wood for superior headstock stability. And the patented bamboo fretboard is 60% harder than rosewood, highly durable, and eco-friendly.

The Relish Touch Pad accesses 17 pickup positions, complemented by a two-finger coil split function. The Ghost piezo bridge pickup delivers acoustic guitar tone through a separate, dedicated output, and a toggle switch can direct the stereo piezo and coil pickup signals to separate amplifiers. Other features include a pull pot for a piezo midrange boost, pickup angle adjustment by Allen key, and a figured maple headstock and top.

“When they see the pickup swapping and innovative designs, even my old-school customers are blown away,” says Brendan Smyth, owner of Heartbreaker Guitars in Las Vegas. The store carries Lyon & Healy’s Relish, Batson, Paoletti, and Acus product lines. He adds, “Since Relish came out with the pickup swapping, we’ve been doing incredible numbers with them.”

BATSON GUITARS

Nashville luthier Cory Batson clearly wasn’t hewing to convention when he unveiled his namesake custom guitars in 1998, and their conspicuous lack of a center soundhole was only the beginning. This design element enabled a departure from standard X bracing, allowing the larger-area soundboard to vibrate more freely. Instead, the oversized side soundhole projects sound up to the player like a monitor and helps eliminate soundhole feedback from microphones. Less apparent but equally distinctive is the cantilevered fretboard, which hovers free of contact with the top past the 14th fret, and the patented ShorTail tailpiece, also suspended above the soundboard to promote top vibration. Cory Batson personally hand-builds a very limited number of custom guitars in Nashville each year, but in 2017 Lyon & Healy launched a new line of Batson guitars that are crafted in Korea. Replicating his designs exactly, these instruments are available more readily and at a much more affordable price: under \$2,000. The line comprises four all-solid-wood



Swiss-made Relish guitars feature an aluminum “chassis” for exceptional sustain and a removable back that enables the player to instantly swap pickups.



The Delta Harp blends tradition with a cutting-edge pickup system and a bridge that enables pitch bending and slides.



Batson guitars feature a proprietary bracing system and “floating” neck for enhanced resonance.



Paoletti guitar bodies are crafted with wood from century-old wine barrels (right). With eye-catching leather covering, the company’s amps boast a distinctive Italian flair (below).



models: The Americana, with a Sitka spruce soundboard and mahogany back and sides; The Troubadour, with a Sitka spruce soundboard and East Indian rosewood back and sides; The Gypsy, with a Western red cedar soundboard and East Indian rosewood back and sides; and The Raven, with a striking black lacquer-finished Sitka spruce soundboard and mahogany back and sides. All models feature a Venetian cutaway, a sleek Honduran mahogany neck, flamed maple binding, a comfortable armrest bevel. Other highlights include Batson Clear Voice piezo UST system; bone nut and saddle; ebony fretboard, bridge, and tailpiece; gloss finish; 21:1 tuners; and a hardshell case.

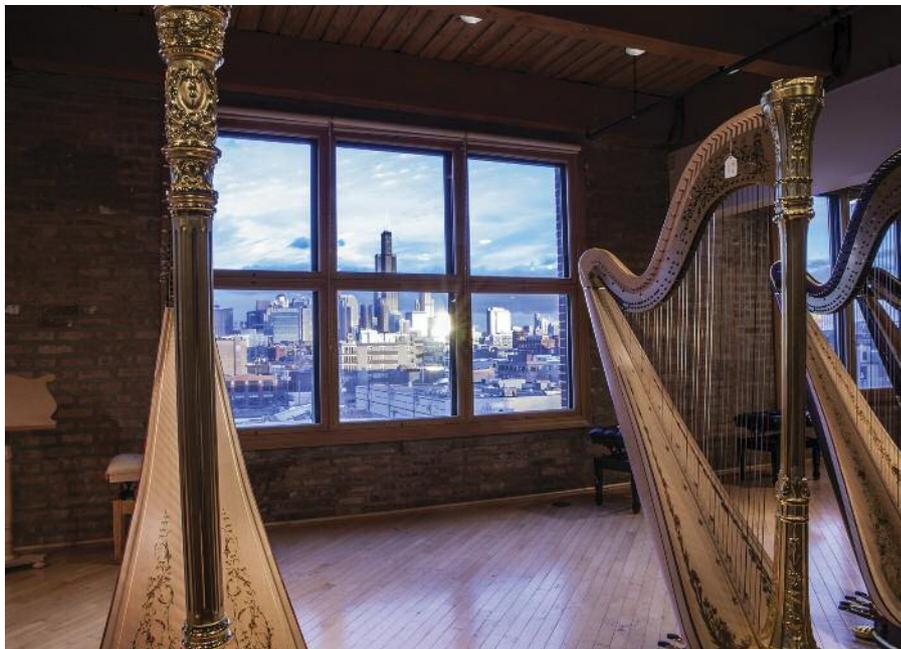
PAOLETTI GUITARS

Built by hand in Italy, Paoletti electric guitars are constructed with bodies made of 150-year-old chestnut reclaimed from Tuscan chianti wine barrels, giving them a unique look and sound. Other premium features include a mahogany neck, teak fretboard, brass pickguard, and proprietary Paoletti pickups. The company's four main series pay respect to classic electric guitar body shapes, but the instruments' macho and rustic materials and finishes, with lots of distressed wood and figured leather, are unlike anything else on the market. The brand also offers a small, similarly styled selection of Paoletti Brutale guitar amplifiers and a pair of Christopher Ameruoso four-string "Guitarbox" models.

Paoletti recently collaborated with Guns n' Roses guitarist Richard Fortus on a new signature model. Along with the brand's defining features, its appointments include an aged nickel pickguard, a white croc pattern Italian leather top, a roasted Canadian maple neck with the "4tus" logo laser-engraved onto the headstock, and patented handmade pickups and custom electronics personally designed by Fortus.

LYON & HEALY GUITARS

At the 2019 winter NAMM show, Lyon & Healy soft-launched its own brand of classical guitars, and it has since been exploring the most advantageous paths into the market. In addition to the attention to detail and uncompromising quality associated with its harps, the line's signature



The Lyon & Healy Harps showroom above the factory where the instruments are made in Chicago.

feature is its tops, made of Val di Fiemme spruce, the tonewood that Antonio Stradivari used to make the world's most venerated violins 350 years ago. Being that they're Spanish classical guitars, Lyon & Healy is making them...in Spain. This raises another defining characteristic of Lyon & Healy's profile as a supplier. In an industry where most products are made in China, and where it isn't uncommon for multiple brands to share the same factories and workers, most of the brands and products represented by Lyon & Healy retain their distinct, non-homogenized character and the national pride of the individuals who conceived, designed, and handcrafted them.

ACUS SOUND ENGINEERING

Family founded and managed, Acus Sound Engineering manufactures amplification systems specifically for acoustic stringed instruments. All Acus products are conceived, designed, and hand-built in Recanati, Italy, long a mecca of European musical instrument development and manufacture. Brand hallmarks include: bi-amplified power sections with high bandwidth and slew-rate; class A preamp output stages for warm, valve-like tone associated with world-class studio amps; and dedicated channels, preamps, and monitors providing sepa-

rate equalization to all instruments.

Acus sound cabinets are hand-built in the company's custom shop on an individual basis with sophisticated variations in design and choice of base materials. Their loudspeakers are produced to Acus's specifications for superior fidelity, transparency, and fast transient response.

Heartbreaker Guitars' Brendan Smyth rates Acus amplifiers "as good or better" than the oft-cited best acoustic instrument amps on the market—"and they're more portable. They're small, but they deliver pro-level sound."

SIMI SOUND IMPRINTING

Based in Forli, Italy, SIM1 Sound Imprinting manufactures the XT-1 Guitar Profiler and XT-B Bass Profiler effect pedals. Introduced in 2018, the XT-1 won The NAMM Show's Best in Show recognition in the Add-on or Accessory category. Both feature SIM1's patented Smart Tone Shaping technology (STS), which allows the user to perfectly emulate the tone of any guitar with no latency or digital artifacts. Involving neither MIDI nor sampling, STS can be used to create miked acoustic profiles with either an electric or acoustic-electric guitar whose authenticity is further enhanced with the company's Body Resonance Modeling (BRM) technology. For electric

“Everything Known in Music”

BEFORE THE END OF THE Civil War, Bostonian George W. Lyon and Irish immigrant Patrick J. Healy were sent to Chicago, Illinois by leading Boston music publisher Oliver Ditson and charged with establishing a sheet music outlet for his publications. Opening on October 14, 1864, the small shop quickly exceeded Ditson’s expectations, encouraging the pair to explore instrument sales as well.

Still in its formative years, the business survived two devastating fires. While rebuilding after the second, the Great Fire of 1871, Lyon & Healy acquired the piano business of another retailer and became the Chicago territory’s sole representative of Steinway & Sons pianos. This development marked the beginning of a personal and professional relationship with Steinway that would be a significant driver of business for decades to come.

By the mid-1870s, Lyon & Healy expanded again into instrument manufacture at its factories in Chicago. Joined later by its Leland, Lakeside, and American Conservatory brands, Lyon & Healy’s hugely successful Washburn fretted instrument line offered

guitars, mandolins, banjos, and zithers. Reed organs and pianos, including the cottage upright patented by Lyon in 1878, were sold bearing the Lyon & Healy brand. Around the same time, noting the steady flow of imported harps brought into the store for repair, Healy resolved to build “the finest harp the world had ever seen.” Requiring substantial investment and years of R&D, pursuit of that goal was finally rewarded as the first Lyon & Healy harp was completed in 1889. (That instrument was played daily at Morgan Park High School in Chicago until it was returned to Lyon & Healy in 1979, and it is currently on display at the Museo Dell’Arpa Victor Salvi.) The company’s 1892 catalog boasted production of 100,000 instruments annually.

Within ten years of its inception, Lyon & Healy’s retail operation was one of the largest in the country. As early as the 1870s, Healy pioneered the use of an illustrated catalog to help promote sales. The store was among the first to sell Edison’s hand-wound gramophone and wax cylinder “records.” Later, when Victrola phonographs were all the rage, Lyon & Healy sold them too. It stocked and displayed numerous piano brands, and revered violinists from around the globe chose rare old instruments from its vast selection. In 1922, Lyon & Healy became one of the first Chicago companies to sponsor a commercial radio broadcast.

When the Great Depression drove many to live in smaller homes and apartments, the piano industry developed a more compact vertical piano to suit smaller rooms

and smaller budgets. Lyon & Healy was the first retailer in the world to show, stock, and sell the instrument, which some credit with helping to revitalize the piano industry.

In 1980, CBS purchased Lyon & Healy and subsequently shuttered all of

its retail stores to focus on harp production. But a harp company was hardly the broadcaster’s focus, and CBS began divesting itself of its musical instrument brands, including Fender in 1985. In 1987, Lyon & Healy found its perfect home, when Salvi Harps founder Victor Salvi acquired the brand, adding it to his Italy-based business group. Why would Salvi grant his major competitor a second life? It reflected his genuine respect for brand’s history and contributions to the craft. But it also afforded him broader control and dominance of the category. In 2015, Janet Harrell, a Lyon & Healy veteran since 1984, became CEO. Marco Salvi, son of the late Victor Salvi, serves as president.



The Lyon & Healy plant in Chicago at the turn of the 20th century.

guitar and bass sounds, XT pedals can be used to emulate the market’s most iconic models, through a wide selection of free guitar profiles downloadable from the SIM1 website, or the user’s own (or ideal) Target Guitar Profile. SIM1 pedals can also read MIDI program change commands via MIDI-to-USB adapter and reroute program changes as a MIDI-through feature. The XT-1 can even be configured as a MIDI master mini pedalboard to control other devices.

SIM1 developed a custom app to expand the pedals’ functionality, via Wi-Fi, with smartphone or tablet. Available for iOS and Android devices, the app can be used to change the tones’ position in the pedal, share tones and download other users’ tone for free, test and purchase new sounds from the SIM1 Guitar Store, and transfer these sounds to the pedal.

DELTA BY SALVI HARPS

Winner in 2017 of the prestigious and internationally recognized Red Dot Design Award, the solid-body electric Delta Harp combines centuries of traditional harp making expertise with cutting-edge audio technology in a unique hybrid instrument. Offering unexpected playability and performance versatility, the strings of the Delta run over a bridge, facilitating guitar-associated playing techniques such as pitch bending and slides. Its bridge pickup system delivers a clean sound across the frequency spectrum from crisp highs to pure bass tones. With its pins and levers arrayed in unconventional straight lines, the Delta is small enough to be played while worn, somewhat guitar-like, by the player despite its extended bass range (down to 6th octave C). Compatible with all effects processors, recording equipment, and p.a. systems, the Delta is suited to stage, home, and studio use.

LYON & HEALY HARPS

As other product categories waxed, waned, and even disappeared—for example, Lyon & Healy sold its brasswind manufacturing operation in the late 1920s—the brand was forever associated with harps. Lyon & Healy Harps’ signature Style 23 model, resplendent with ornately hand-carved designs throughout, set an aesthetic benchmark that survives today. Other significant introductions over the years include: the Art Deco-

LYON & HEALY REINVENTED

influenced Salzedo model (1928); the stately and modern Style 30 (1959); the smaller and more affordable Troubador (1961) for hobbyists and beginners; the contemporary Model 100 (1964), marking the company's centennial; the small, non-pedal Folk harp and affordable Style 85 (both 1985); and the Silhouette (2003), a sleekly designed electric lever harp that allows for both stationary and mobile performances. Today, Lyon & Healy's product range includes lever harps, petite pedal harps, semi-grande pedal harps, and concert grand harps. Retail prices for its orchestral harps range from approximately \$30,000 to \$100,000.

Nearly since the brand's emergence, Lyon & Healy harps have been sold all over the world, acclaimed, and placed in great symphony orchestras, which today include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, and The Metropolitan Opera in New York. The company supports the harp community by providing prizes for such prestigious competitions as the USA International Harp Competition and the International Harp Contest in Israel, as well as promoting concerts, commissions, and the publishing of harp music. Responding to strong demand in the Asian market, in 2004 the company established a factory in China to produce component parts. However, it continues to offer many world-class instruments that are handmade in Chicago by highly skilled craftspeople.

Much of the guitar market—which represents the core of the company's product portfolio—is dictated by tradition. In both acoustics and electrics, it's dominated by designs created 50 or more years ago. And arguably, guitarists have been resistant to change. Yet, to varying degrees, Relish, Paoletti, and Batson defy tradition. How do Lyon & Healy and each of these manufacturers hope to capture the guitar community's attention, interest, and ultimately, discretionary income?

"Over the last decade," says Lyon & Healy Corporation Sales Director Massimo Dolce, "we've seen the boutique guitar shops moving away from the me-too brands and seeking out new, more in-



Acus Sound Engineering manufactures amplification systems specifically for acoustic stringed instruments. All of its products are conceived, designed, and hand-built in Recanati, Italy.

novative brands. And for Relish and Paoletti, also because of their price points, those are the kinds of shops we're targeting. Obviously we want to expand our dealer network, but we believe this is the best way to start. With Acus, because it's an acoustic instrument amplifier, it will fit into many types of retailers right now across the United States."

Recognizing that promotion of such rar-



The handcraftsmanship and attention to detail lavished on Lyon & Healy harps are hallmarks of all of the company's brands.

efied product lines requires strong advocates behind the counter, Dolce emphasizes that the entire Lyon & Healy team "stand behind our dealers 100%."

"I love dealing with Lyon & Healy," says Smyth. "Massimo is a real pro. He knows his [guitars], he's cool to deal with, and no email or phone call goes unreturned.... He's even sent artists [to my store] to help with demos and record videos. That's huge for us. Not only is it a new face on our YouTube channel, but anytime we have an opportunity to use pro artists, it's a plus."

George Lyon and Patrick Healy took risks in establishing a business in a new territory, challenging convention on instrument construction, entering new product categories as both a manufacturer and a retailer, embracing new technologies, and developing the world's largest music products store. Today's Lyon & Healy is taking risks too, with brands and products that clearly don't represent the quickest, easiest, or safest path to success. But the company is confident that the market, and musicians, are ready for change.

"There's too much competition among the me-too brands," Dolce explains. "We want to bring something fresh to the musicians' community. We want the innovations our brands create to inspire them and help them create different or better music. We want them to see our products and think that sometimes looking beyond tradition is a good thing. Quality and innovation will differentiate us."

www.lyonhealycorporation.com