

# AUDIO

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers,

The last few months have given me an opportunity to introduce you to a few members of our core team that help make GC Pro and Guitar Center the invaluable resources that they are, to the benefit of our customers, vendors and the greater industry. We are continuing that initiative this month, as I introduce you to J.C. Faxas, Director for Live Sound, DJ and Lighting.

J.C. is a 22-year veteran of the Guitar Center family, starting on the sales floor at the Covina location in the early 1990s. After a few years, he was tasked with taking over the high-tech department and moving up to management as assistant buyer. As a working DJ since the late 1970s, J.C. had a unique perspective that helped Guitar Center expand into new markets. He recalls, "When I started at Guitar Center, there was no DJ gear, so I snuck in a couple of pieces and started selling them. It caught somebody's attention in management, which led to some of my early leadership roles at GC. We started bringing in more and more DJ and lighting gear, and the rest is history."

In his current role, his responsibilities include managing what Live Sound, DJ and Lighting products Guitar Center offers, which involves staying equally in-touch with market trends from the perspective of both vendors and customers. He notes, "When a vendor has a new product, they will bring it to our attention, and we will meet with them about it to try to figure out if it's something that will work in our stores or for GC Pro. Mainly, I need to know if it is something that our customers need that we can provide for them at a fair price. I learned to divorce my own personal tastes from these decisions, because it's all about the customer, not necessarily what I would use. We always try to get the best possible products to the market, so our customers can have a good gig and not have to worry about things! And hopefully, our inventory adds up to a strong mix that serves everyone from amateurs to full touring professionals."

J.C. has even directly helped shape some of the more successful live and DJ products on the market today, including voicing and cosmetics decisions for some major live products. He recalls, "A couple of the best-selling controllers are actually our design. I had gotten enough suggestions from end users that I had a really good idea of the design for a new controller. I let the manufacturer know, and they developed a prototype and eventually brought it to market, and now it's one of our best-sellers! We have also helped guide the design of some successful lighting products in recent years. I am glad to be able to serve the customer and help create these new solutions. And with all of our stores, we have at our disposal a huge amount of market feedback, which really helps us advise the manufacturers on market-driven products."

And as you know, J.C. is just one of the hundreds of professionals working together to provide our customers with the best possible experience. Visit our website at [stores.guitarcenter.com/gcpro](https://stores.guitarcenter.com/gcpro) for access to our staff and exclusive content, and drop us a line if you have any needs or recommendations. J.C. might be just the person to help bring it to market on our store shelves and in your personal arsenal.

Rick Plushner  
Vice President, GC Pro



# SOLUTIONS

## GET READY TO GET YOUR SPOOK ON

### GC PRO HELPS OUTFIT DARK HOUR HAUNTED HOUSE IN PLANO, TEXAS



Scaring you is big business. Halloween-themed haunted houses, or “haunts” in industry lingo, have proliferated in recent years. Hauntworld.com, which follows the industry, estimates there are over 2,000 such attractions in the U.S., with annual sales of as much as \$1 billion. Halloween is among the biggest spending holidays of the year here—the National Retail Federation estimates that 158 million Americans celebrate Halloween each year, spending an average of \$75 each, with about a fifth of them visiting a haunt.

Dark Hour Haunted House, a year-old haunt in Plano, Texas, is one of them, and it’s relying on advanced AV technology to set it apart from the rest. Huge QSC sound systems fill the 47,000-square-foot former Sports Authority building with ethereal sound effects, while a QSC line array powers a concert stage; Epson projectors and Samsung LCDs display hair-raising images; lighting fixtures from ETC, Martin and Chauvet create the right mood; and a facility-wide Savant control system allows Dark Hour personnel to make sure visitors have a terrifyingly exciting experience from start to finish. And all of these diverse, sophisticated systems and platforms were sourced and supplied by GC Pro.

Dark Hour aims to become a benchmark in the growing market of haunted-house-themed attractions in the U.S., and the facility’s technology complement easily puts it among the top such destinations. GC Pro-sourced equipment for the project includes a QSC KLA line array system for the main stage (in addition to QSC KW122 for floor monitors on the main stage; QSC S8T powered by QSC CX404 and self-powered K8, K10, KW181 for zone distribution; QSC AP-5102 for the finale “drum circle” scene; and QSC AP-5122 for thunder tacks); QSC Q-Sys System with a Core 500i to control all zones and playlists, mixed through Soundcraft Si Expression 3 console; Shure SLX wireless microphones; Epson Powerlite projectors and Samsung commercial-grade displays; Lutron lighting; a Savant control system that covers security, thermostats, cameras, lighting and other functions; effects lighting from ChamSys, ETC, Dark Light, Martin and Chauvet; and specialized products such as Ruckus networking products, Totem Acoustics Surround Sound and acoustical treatment from Auralex and Primacoustic.

*[continued on page 31]*

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See Bill Evans talk about Dragonfly at [guitarcenter.com](http://guitarcenter.com)



“I’ve spent my whole life creating my sound, so I want people to hear that sound on my records,” says Evans who records exclusively with the Dragonfly. “When I listen back, it sounds like I’m in the room playing. It’s been a breakthrough mic for me.”

Bill Evans’ artistry spans a diversity of musical settings from Miles Davis to the Allman Brothers to Willie Nelson, and his own Grammy-nominated group Soulgrass. To find out the latest about Bill, visit [billevanssax.com](http://billevanssax.com).

Visit your local Guitar Center today to learn more about Dragonfly.



## GET READY TO GET YOUR SPOOK ON



In addition to supplying equipment and systems, and offering consulting and advice based on decades of experience, GC Pro also provided access to its Affiliate Program, which matches certified AV systems integrators with custom installation projects. The program brought Dallas-based firms DJSL and Profound Dimension to the Dark Hour project, assuring seamless installation and integration of all products and systems throughout the facility.

Mike Arties, COO of Dark Hour, says the company was aiming to be the best from the beginning. "From the standpoint of lighting, video and sound, this is likely the premier facility in the country for haunted houses," he says. "It's never been taken to this level before. We're attempting to take it to the level of an art form, and GC Pro was the only place we could go for everything we needed, including systems installation and integration."

#### TECHNOLOGY CHOICES

Even as haunted houses continue to be a growing designation in the live entertainment business, they're still unique environments, and deciding what technology platforms and products to install can be challenging.

By going redundant, it gives our client peace of mind that, in the unlikely event of a system failure, the backup system can kick in.

"We chose Q-Sys technology from QSC because it allowed us to install a redundant system," GC Pro Account Manager Kevin Deal explains, underscoring GC Pro's depth of insight into large projects like this. "Since the venue is a theme park, they cannot afford lost revenues if the system fails. By going redundant, it gives our client peace of mind that, in the unlikely event of a system failure, the backup system can kick in. Also, we found that many theme parks used dated, linear flash memory-based solutions for media playback that did not allow you to change content on the fly. With Q-Sys, we were able to save a considerable amount of time when

designing and implementing the content for shows. Being able to edit a show offline, then upload it in a matter of seconds, is really convenient."

DJSL installed all the sound and lighting components in the venue, and Profound Dimension installed and programmed a Savant control system providing automation and projection and managing the security system and cameras, HVAC and other key system elements. (Cameras include 48 MOBOTIX Camera systems managed with two 60-inch Sharp touchscreen monitors.) DJSL handled the design, installation and programming a QSC Q-Sys system with a Core 500i to control all audio zones and playlists. The entire installation was managed by Troy Gallaher, then employed by DJSL and now working for Profound Dimension.

Shams Mujadded, president of Profound Dimension, says what sets Dark Hour apart from other haunted venues is its depth of technology and its avoidance of horror clichés. "Most other haunts keep their interiors very dark and use animatronics and actors to jump out and shock you," he explains. "At Dark House, ironically, it's not nearly as dark inside and you can see the really elaborate sets they've constructed. And the technology – the sound, the video, the lighting – gives you the sense of being in a cool theme park. You can really sense the level of investment they've made here. It's not just another haunted house."

#### MAKING THE ECONOMICS WORK

Halloween comes once a year but Dark Hour's substantial investment needs to amortize year-round, so part of the automation systems' job is to let Dark Hour be as flexible as possible. Another holiday it caters to is Valentine's Day, as well as six other times during the year. Mujadded says the Savant and Q-Sys systems are programmed in such a way that simply hitting a macro configures each one for that very different mission. The Savant system is also able to be remotely monitored and managed using an iPad, which further enhances productivity and security.

Mujadded says that none of this would have been possible if not for the depth of resources that GC Pro was able to bring to bear on the project. "They were able to source every bit of the equipment and at excellent prices, of course, but the biggest advantage they bring is being able to present all of the design, installation and integration resources in a single package, with a single point of project management," he says. "Normally, a project this complex would have several contractors on it, and that can lead to confusion, time delays and cost overruns. With GC Pro in charge, it all runs smoothly and efficiently, and the customer only sees one point of contact instead of a dozen."

"The amount of equipment we're using here is astounding, and all of it came through GC Pro," observes Arties. "No other company could have made this work as a one-stop. We would have had to go to eight separate sources to get what we got from one GC Pro. We took our vision of all that this could be to GC Pro, and they took it from there, in terms of helping us decide on and source the right technologies and products," says Arties. "They're a great partner to have." ♦



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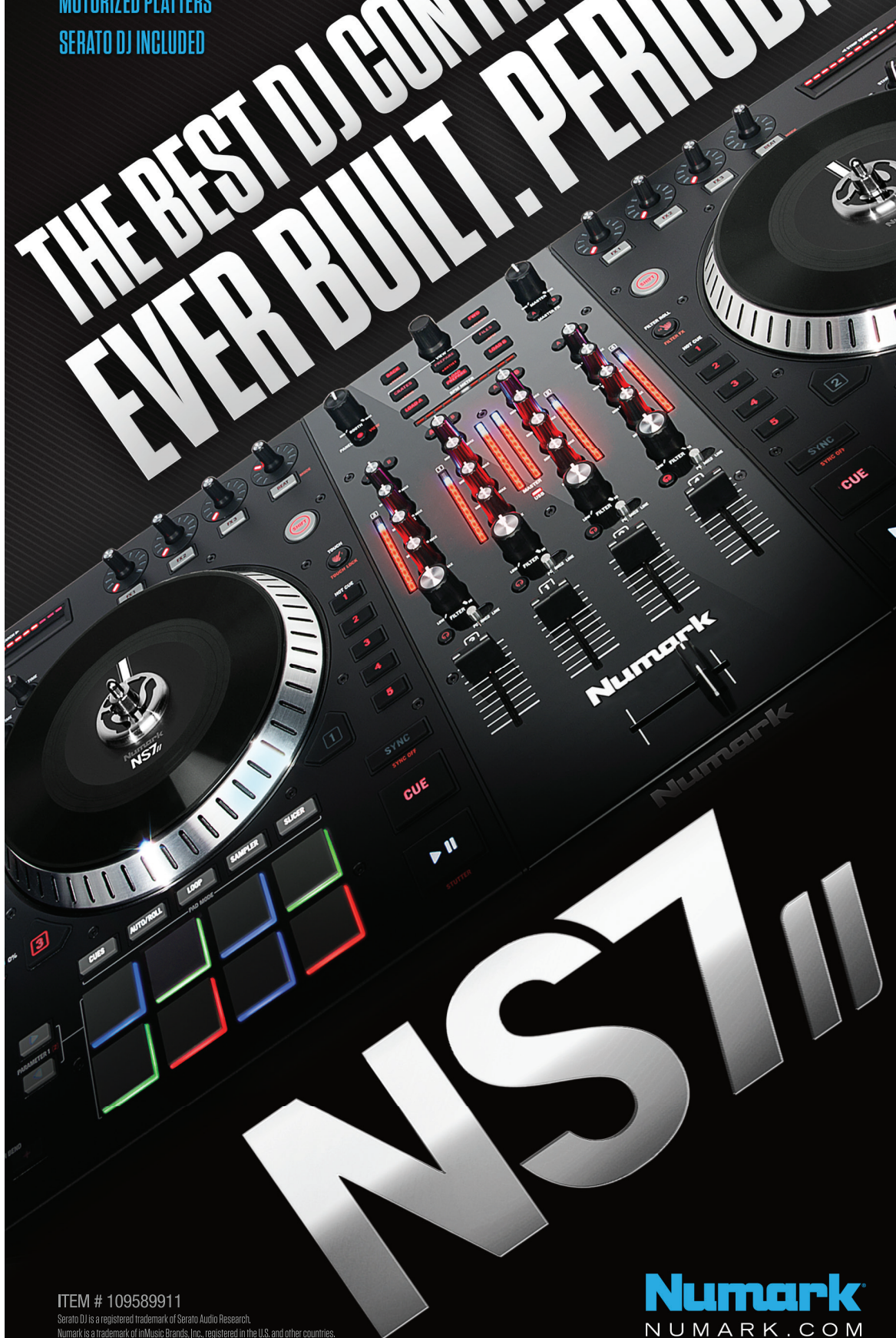
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## PRODUCER'S CORNER / PAT THRALL



Pat Thrall has been an influential and successful figure in the music industry since the late 1970s. As a guitarist, he has played with Pat Travers, Sly & Robbie, Tina Turner, Jack Bruce, Narada Michael Walden, Meat Loaf and many others. He was awarded the prestigious "Best New Guitarist" designation by the readers of *Guitar Player* in 1980, based on his work with Travers. In 1996, Thrall left a huge mark as a producer/engineer as he opened one of the first Pro Tools-based production suites in the USA at Avatar Studios in New York City. Since then, he's worked with artists in all genres of music such as Elton John, Tim Rice, Dave Stewart, Bono and The Edge, Joe Satriani, Dream Theater, Queen, Frank Ocean, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Rihanna, Justin Bieber and others, and has been involved with remixing classic artists such as Miles Davis and Sly Stone, to name a few. He has been nominated for a Grammy three times in the last decade. In addition, he's lent his talent and support behind initiatives such as Nelson Mandela's foundation to fight AIDS in Africa. Thrall was also the driving force behind the famous multitrack drum sample library, Toontrack's Superior Drummer 2.0 and EZDrummer. Thrall, with legendary engineer Neil Dorfman and world class session drummer Nir Z created the default libraries in both programs and have also created additional libraries from some of the most coveted recording drum studios in New York.

**What was the last project you released?**

I'm working with several producers right now so there are always records coming out. With Emanuel Kiriakou, I worked on Demi Lovato's *Demi* and MKTO's self-titled release. With Kuk Harrell, I worked on Cher's *Closer to the Truth*, Lea Michele's *Louder* and the *Annie* movie coming out later this year. I have a lot of records coming out with Ron Fair later this year as well. He has been sending me a ton of work. I have worked with Tricky Stewart and The Dream for years, and they still send me records every so often. Additionally, I produced and mixed an artist out of Las Vegas named Frankie Moreno and released that album last year. He has a live concert DVD that I mixed that we are very excited about; it has already started playing on PBS.

**What is the most challenging aspect of the current business climate from your perspective?**

One of the main challenges for me is scheduling. No one books in advance anymore. Everything is last-minute. The convenience of digital has created a climate of people thinking everything is instant. A good portion of the work that gets sent to me is clients sending a session in the morning and wanting it back by that evening. My wife Zoe runs Studio At The Palms, and clients sometimes make the most outrageous requests for equipment and setups, plus an engineer, and they all want it ready in one hour. And I should add: GC Pro has been hugely accommodating with gear and service for Studio At The Palms, helping Zoe deliver on these otherwise absurd requests on a regular basis.

**How has your production workflow changed in the past few years?**

One thing is I have built up a client base that is happy sending me sessions

over the internet and not requiring my presence in the recording studio. This enables me to work out of my home studio most of the time, which I love and which lets me have a normal life. Aside from that, and I know this will horrify the purists, but I have added a Hart electronic drum kit to my collection of instruments. I've done several libraries for Toontracks Superior Drummer 2. They sound fantastic and you would never know they are MIDI drums. It's great to go into a studio and cut real drums, but if I'm developing a band or working on a shoestring budget, Toontracks is like a miracle. I can have friends come over in the middle of the night and we all put on headphones and it sounds like we are recording in a major studio while my wife sleeps in the other room. There are more records using the Toontrack libraries than you would think.

**Have you discovered any new gear or software this year? If so, what, and why do you like it?**

Of course UAD continues to amaze me. The new Neve 1073 model is scary good. A buddy of mine A/B'ed it with his vintage piece and in a blindfold test could not tell the difference. Additionally, Accusonus Drumatom is an incredible plug-in that can take the drum leakage out of multitrack drum recordings. It gives you so much control. Unfortunately I'm sent poorly recorded drums more often than not. Using Drumatom to isolate the snare, kick, hi-hat and toms makes it so much easier to trigger the Toontrack libraries. I can take a drum kit that sounds like cardboard boxes recorded in a closet and transform them to a first-rate recording in the world's best drum rooms. The drums are the center of the sound of the record. If they are unsatisfactory, then the whole record will pretty much go down the drain with them. ♦



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