

▽ BPA REPRINTED FROM: February 2000

# VENDING TIMES

The Newsmonthly of Vending, Coffee Service, Feeding and Recreational Services

## Hot In Japan, Music Machines Look To Find American Niche

U.S.A. — The ingredients for success are there.

They're already wildly popular in Japan, they offer operators a non-violent, family friendly alternative and consumers can't play them at home.

At least on the surface, musical amusements — which require players to dance, play instruments, or scratch turntables in unison with today's most popular hits — would seem to present a convincing argument for an industry that has been screaming for "something new" for years.

Most importantly, however, is the fact that musical amusements have nothing



**KEEPING UP:** Guitar and drumming enthusiasts put Namco's "Quest For Fame" music machine through paces during a recent industry trade show.

by Kevin Kenyon, Music & Games Editor

in common with the coin-op video game category's big four: shooting, driving, fighting and sports games. While these games have been, and still are, the undeniable backbone of the coin-op amusement sector, it could be argued that their success has both limited the industry's customer base and left little room for innovation and creativity.

Realizing that such a void exists today, a number of manufacturers — most notably Konami, which offers the "Bemani" series, Devecka Enterprises with "Drumscape" and, to a lesser extent, Namco America — have been looking to develop music-themed games that can satisfy both experienced and new gamers alike.

Like anything new, however, musical amusements face a difficult challenge moving forward. They have to prove themselves in the field, which often boils down to earnings reports; and there are questions as to whether the category's incredible success abroad will translate with American consumers.

So how are musical amusements doing so far?

By most accounts, they are doing extremely well in markets that have significant Asian populations, but are still largely unproven with American consumers, the great majority of whom are unfamiliar with the games.

Frank Cosentino, Namco's vice president of sales and marketing, told VENDING TIMES that operators are often reluctant to try new types of

games, preferring instead to rely on known commodities such as driving, shooting, and fighting games.

"It's become a self-fulfilling prophecy," he said. "Operators don't buy the machines because there isn't a sufficient player base, and there isn't a sufficient player base because not enough people have been exposed to the games."

Namco, for its part, has been testing several coin-operated music machines in the U.S. over the past year with particular success among ethnic consumers. Its "Quest for Fame" features guitar and drum interfaces in which one or two players attempt to follow along

with one of several Aerosmith songs. The game was shown during November's International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions trade show in Atlanta.

While Namco has not yet decided on a U.S. rollout, Cosentino has learned over the years that successful products in Japan do not always take off in the United States.

"There are inherent cultural differences that need to be addressed," he said. "Americans are much more concerned with being 'cool' in public while Asians seem to be less inhibited."

The concept, he explained, is similar to what happened with Karaoke, which

*(Continued on Page 2)*



**BCA ROLLOUT:** Broadway City Arcade (New York) is one of the newest "Drumscape" venues. Here, from left, Devecka's Aldrin Roque and Eric Berkowitz update BCA's Dick Simon on latest playlist.

# LBE Operators See Growing Public Interest In Musical Amusements

U.S.A. — Although the category is still relatively new, the growing availability of musical amusements is already helping site-based operators in their quest to expand venues beyond the traditional staples of fighting, shooting, driving and sports video games.

Such was the case at the Playdium, a 50,000-square foot location-based entertainment facility which opened in November in Toronto.

With an eye on appealing to a broader demographic, Ian Moorhead, the facility's senior director of concept development, said the decision was made to create a Music Zone attraction, which now features two of Devecka Entertainment's drum simulator "Drumscape," and Konami's "Bemani" series of "Dance Dance Revolution," "Hiphopmania," and "Guitar Freaks."

"One of the positive aspects of what we do in terms of merchandising our game floor is we have developed very

well-themed zones: Speed for racing games, Sports for traditional sports games, Extreme Sports, "Target and Contact for fighting," he said, noting that the interiors are decorated accordingly with carpets, walls, and graphics all conveying the particular theme.

"We had seen Devecka's 'Drumscape' at a recent show and liked it, and we also started hearing from some of our other sites that a lot of people were asking for music simulators like 'Guitar Freaks,' 'Hiphopmania,' and 'Dance Dance Revolution,' he explained. "It's difficult for us to just grab one game and just stick it in, especially a music game because it has to fit in a zone, so we decided to create a whole zone after discovering that there were quite a few of them out there."

The Music zone has been so successful both in terms of return on investment and player appeal that Playdium

officials decided to retrofit its other three LBEs with similar zones, a process which is already complete, Moorhead told VENDING TIMES.

"First of all they make money, they offer something different than your stereotypical arcade program and they're satisfying a new demographic," he said. "People are surprised when they discover it's not just shooting and driving, and many people have told me that they didn't realize games were so diverse."

Because Playdium attracts people who generally wouldn't come into an arcade, Moorhead emphasized that every effort is made to offer something for everyone, not just traditional gamers.

"Every arcade owner-operator is looking for game content that doesn't necessarily appeal to the demographic of a 14-year old boy," he explained. "The reason we've themed up zones is to create a broader appeal to a larger demographic,

particularly women, and the Music zone is something that they can definitely relate to and enjoy."

Although musical amusements can sometimes be intimidating for first-timers, often requiring them to dance or play instruments in front of large crowds of people, Moorhead reported no such problems. That may have something to do with Playdium's strong customer service program, which employs "gamemasters" who traverse the game floor encouraging and teaching people to try new games.

Although they have only been in operation for a relatively short period of time, Moorhead said the Music zone now rivals each of the other zones in terms of popularity. Devecka's "Drumscape," he explained, has been particularly successful, attracting "basement" drummers and first-timers alike. "There's a certain community that is

*(Continued on Page 4)*

## MUSICAL AMUSEMENTS ATTEMPT TO MAKE AMERICAN MARK

*(Continued from Page 1)*

took Japan by storm but was more of a fad in America, mainly because most people only get the courage to try it after several drinks at the local watering hole.

That said, Cosentino noted that musical amusements have proven to be

---

**Namco's Cosentino says manufacturer and operator commitment is key to new category's success**

---

successful when they receive marketing support, which he believes has not hap-

pened in the U.S. to this point.

"Like any new product they need support," he said. "The industry really needs an alternative beyond what is currently out there, and music would seem to fit that well, but you can't just throw these things out there."

Another manufacturer looking to jump-start the musical amusement category in the U.S. is Konami Amusements of America, which offers a number of music-themed games in its "Bemani" series, which consists of "Dance Dance Revolution," "Guitar Freaks" and "Hiphopmania."

The games encourage players to dance, play guitar or be a DJ.

In "Dance Dance Revolution," players choose their own songs, ranging from slow to extremely fast, and use their feet to step on arrows (right, left,

front, and back) on a floor pad. A monitor in front of the players shows a pattern of arrows, which scroll up the screen. When the arrows match the gauge on top, the player steps on the corresponding arrow on the footpad in unison with the music.

In "Guitar Freaks," up to two players control their own guitars while watching a video monitor. Each guitar has three colored buttons and a picking lever. Players hold down the corresponding colored buttons on the guitar and flick the picking lever when the notes hit a timing bar. There is a variety of original songs — rock, blues, heavy metal, jazz, and techno — from which to choose.

In "Hiphopmania," each player controls a five-key keyboard and a turntable. The object of the game is to

complete songs by pressing the keys and scratching with the turntable in time with the notes on the screen. Players can choose original songs in various music genres, including house, soul, techno, reggae, and hip hop.

According to Mike Rudowicz, Konami's president of coin-op sales, the "Bemani" series has been an unquestionable success in Japan and other Asian countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan.

Since its introduction three years ago, "Hiphopmania" (called "Beatmania" in Japan) and its updated mixes have held the number one position in Japan. Together with different versions of "Dance Dance Revolution," which has alternated the top spot with "Beatmania," and the more recently released "Guitar

*(Continued on Page 3)*

# MUSIC MACHINES: 'DRUMSCAPE' MEETS AMERICAN TASTES

(Continued from Page 2)

Freaks," Konami's "Bemani" series has dominated Japan's list of top performing games, boasting six of the top ten, Rudowicz said, adding that the music category is such a phenomenon in Japan that a console version of one of the games sold out almost immediately after it was released last year.

"It's developed such a following that contests are held constantly," he said. "And players who are locals in one arcade will practice down the street so they won't be seen, and then they go to their own arcade to show off what they've learned; everybody wants to compete."

Konami, which is now looking to duplicate its success with the "Bemani" series in North America, has been conducting a national test program that



**MUSIC MACHINE:** Devecka Enterprises' "Drumscape" system, which employs real electronic drums, has been reduced to a 60-in. width and sports new graphics and 10 drums. Viewing windows also have been added to both sides, in addition to the front.

has already reached the West Coast and parts of Canada.

So far, the games have performed well, with each developing a loyal following, Rudowicz reported.

"We've found that anywhere there's any type of Asian population, it seems to be the number one attraction among coin-op games," he said. "We have between 40 and 50 units in California and another 20 to 30 in Canada, and some of the national chains have also started putting them in."

At least for now, Rudowicz said "Dance Dance Revolution" is getting the most play, followed closely by "Hiphopmania" and "Guitar Freaks."

"With "Hiphopmania," we have Internet rankings, where a player can play on an Internet mode, get his score in a code, and then go home and enter it on the web for a ranking, which has sparked tremendous interest in the game," he said, noting that the company plans to do the same with "Dance Dance Revolution" and "Guitar Freaks."

"The games are a 'no brainer' if you have any type of Asian population, because they're popular to the extent that players communicate over the Internet," he said. "We get many hits on our website of people trying to find different locations where the games are so they can practice and play."

But because California has a large Asian population base, Rudowicz knows the real challenge will be getting American consumers acclimated with the games.

"There are cultural differences," Rudowicz said, agreeing with the observations made by Cosentino. "So it's kind of difficult to have the American player get up there to play any of the games because they feel somewhat intimidated, but after they see all the people playing, we've noticed that they start to feel more comfortable. It's just something

that builds up over time.

"It obviously hasn't been the immediate success that it was in Japan," he added, "and we never expected that to happen ...but as they start filtering out into the marketplace we see that improving."

To that end, Konami plans to introduce music-themed games for the consumer market later this year, most likely for the Sony "Playstation," which Rudowicz believes will help market the games and get more players involved. The next step will be testing and promoting the games on the East Coast and through national chains like GameWorks, followed by a rollout in the Midwest, Rudowicz said optimistically.

"Once the people who operate them see that it's constantly steady income, that it doesn't decline or take away from any of the other games and just adds to the overall income, I think they'll be

pleased."

While Konami and Namco officials are attempting to bring music-style games from Japan to the U.S., officials at Devecka Enterprises have developed an interactive drumming simulator — "Drumscape" — that was specifically designed for American tastes.

"Drumscape" players have the opportunity to jam on real electronic drums in a stage-like environment featuring "crowd cheering" effects. Players can also play theme-based sets like steel drums or timbales. Other drum sets generate guitar, keyboard and vocal sounds. The operator purchases the CDs — as would a jukebox operator — and changes them out according to the musical requirements of each location.

When the Carlstadt, N.J.-based company introduced "Drumscape" at the AMOA show in September 1998, opera-

(Continued on Page 4)



**STRUMMING:** Rock musicians provide a demonstration of an earlier version of Konami's popular "Guitar Freaks" music machine.

## OPERATORS FIND STEADY, STRONG ENTHUSIASM FOR MUSIC GAMES

(Continued from Page 2)

quite fanatical about it, and it's not uncommon to see crowds around the machine," he said.

Konami's "Bemani" series, which has been touted as the next "Karaoke" in Southeast Asia in relation to the loyal following it received, also is popular with Playdium players.

"I wouldn't say it's as fanatical in North America as it is in Japan," Morehead noted, "but certainly when you look at it in comparison to some of the more popular staples, like driving games, gun games, and fighting games, they're right up there."

Grand Prix-O-Rama, a 900-game LBE in Dania, Fla., also is exploring musical amusements, and arcade manager Jeff Condon reported that "Drumscape" has been doing extremely well,

averaging \$1,000 a week.

"We've had it for about 40 weeks and people just go nuts for it. I literally get crowds of people around it jumping and bobbing with whatever music is playing, while some guy inside is making a horrible attempt to play drums," he explained. "I actually get a bunch of complaints when the unit is down from people saying they came here just to play it."

Condon said he had less success with some of the open dance games, which may be attributed to a customer base with few Asians.

"I know that 'Dance Dance Revolution' is doing between \$1,100, and \$1,300 a week in arcades in California, but those locations have very heavy Asian populations, and those are the people who are playing it for

the most part," he said.

"It just wasn't right for our market, but that's not to say it doesn't have its place.

"Anywhere that I've seen or heard of those Konami machines going into Asian markets they do great, especially 'Dance Dance Revolution.'"

To appeal to American consumers, Condon says manufacturers need to develop games that allow for more creativity, not just copying a sequence on a screen.

"If somebody comes out with an instrument-based game where the person plays and can be more creative, I think it would work well in the U.S.," he said.

As far as the music category's future, Condon said he believes it has the potential to be more than just a fad.

"I think they can be long term games

— I don't think they're going to go away — because if you keep changing the music it's kind of like a jukebox," he observed.

Mike Getlan, director of enthusiasm and opportunity for New Rochelle, N.Y.-based Amusement Consultants, which operates 24 LBEs nationwide, said that musical amusements provide a great alternative for operators in their attempt to differentiate themselves.

"The challenge today is to be able to bring things into the arcade that people can't get in their homes, and musical amusements are something that really fits into that well," he said. "Drumscape is a perfect example — if mom doesn't want you to bang on the drums at home, now you can go to the arcade and bang on them to your heart's content."

## MUSIC MACHINE MAKERS ADDRESS DESIRES OF U.S. CULTURE

(Continued from Page 3)

tors were initially puzzled by the new concept, with many doubting it would work, according to Devecka's Eric Berkowitz.

Since that time, however, the company, hoping to alleviate those fears, tested "Drumscape" through the support of major equipment distributors like Betson Enterprises, Brady Distributing and Shaffer Distributing.

"The earnings reports on 'Drumscape' have been excellent in all venues," he explained. "There are now units all over the U.S. in large and small arcades, boardwalks, casinos and family entertainment centers."

To the surprise of many, "Drumscape" has been a consistent top five to 10 earner in most cases, Berkowitz reported. "Last season at our first boardwalk location, Surfside Arcade (Delaware), Bill McAlure reported to us that 'Drumscape' was the number

one earning game all summer long, producing an average of \$1,200 per week."

More importantly, the game's earnings have remained strong in locations that are more than a year old, he added.

The reason for the long-term earnings, he explained, is simple: kids see that the concept is new, the game is addictive and players can never master an instrument. "You can play for an hour and it seems like you played for five minutes."

Although the game was originally designed to attract males between 12 and 35 years old, Devecka officials were surprised to learn during testing that women and older adult males also were playing the units.

"We found that the world is full of 'drummer wannabes,' and we get many repeat players who actually learn to play drums on Drumscape," he said. More seasoned drummers, Berkowitz

added, often come to play when the arcades are slow, to practice, or compete with other experienced drummers, often attracting "huge crowds."

In terms of the coin-op industry's acceptance of game concepts, Berkowitz pointed out that Konami's success in Japan is evidence that it can be done even under less than desirable circumstances.

"Konami had tremendous success with music games in Japan even when the amusement market was in poor shape, which means that if a product is truly unique and earns well, operators will buy," he said.

Although establishing music as a viable new category in the U.S. will be a challenge, Devecka officials are optimistic that it's only a matter of time.

"We have no doubt that musical amusements will be a successful format similar to driving and sports games in the U.S. over the next several years," he

predicted. "It's already happening to some extent today — operators now have music game sections, new player bases for music games are being created — it's an exciting time."

Based on "Drumscape's" success, Devecka officials are currently developing similar games that will include guitar, bass, keyboard, and DJ. But like Namco's Cosentino, Berkowitz realizes that such innovations can only occur if the industry fully embraces musical amusements as a new category.

"Musical amusements have incredible potential to attract new players and help revive the industry," Berkowitz believes. "But operators need to be more proactive in supporting new games," he added, noting that manufacturers and operators need to work together.

"If operators support musical amusements, manufacturers will continue to spend money on further development," he said, "and both will benefit."