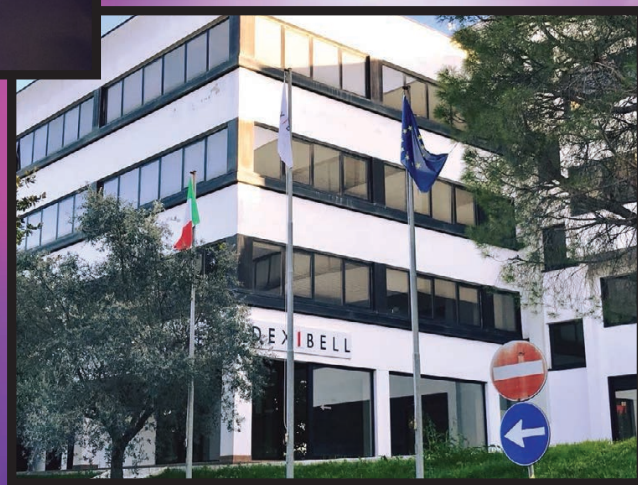


ANTONIO FERRANTI

PRESIDENT,
PROEL NORTH AMERICA INC.



Proel North America, known for the Proel and Dexibell brands, among others, has seen excellent growth in a short amount of time. We talk to the man behind it all, Antonio Ferranti, to explain this growth, the “renaissance of keyboards,” and much more. Enjoy.



By Brian Berk

The Music & Sound Retailer: Please tell us about both Proel and Dexibell. What products does each produce? And tell us a little about the history of each.

Antonio Ferranti: Founded and headquartered in Italy more than 25 years ago, Proel is an exciting and incredibly robust musical instrument and accessories manufacturer with eight internal business units that produce world-class Italian brands that address nearly every facet of the music products industry. From acoustic instruments such as band, orchestra, percussion and guitars, to high-tech digital instruments such as digital pianos, keyboards and organs, to pro audio and stage lighting, Proel brands are known internationally for their “Made In Italy” design, engineering, manufacturing and forward-thinking technology. Proel’s most internationally known brands include Axiom (pro audio), Sagitter (stage lighting), Dexibell (digital pianos, organs and keyboards), Tamburo (drums), and Proel cables and accessories.

Dexibell is among Proel’s newest brands and business units, and produces exciting digital pianos, organs and keyboards, which perfectly represent the handcrafted Italian design, forward-thinking engineering, and best-in-class technology that has earned Italian brands their worldwide reputation for style and substance. From our design studio and factory in central Italy, our Dexibell engineers have more than 40 years of experience developing and designing the industry’s most well known brands. Now, with the support of Proel, our engineers

finally have the freedom and encouragement to express their full creativity and genius, and are pioneering the best instruments and technology in the world. We were honored to be nominated and win in several categories of keyboards and accessories in our very first year in North America, and our 2018 product releases are sure to further showcase the finest digital pianos ever created.

The Retailer: Being Italian-made has definite positive connotations. Tell us about the quality of products and the importance of being Italian-made.

Ferranti: “Made In Italy” is a singular mark that denotes the finest in style and craftsmanship the world has to offer. When you think of any product category that is defined by craftsmanship, technology, taste and design (clothing, cars, food, furniture, architecture and, of course, musical instruments) you think of Italian brands — Alfa Romeo, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Ducati, Fendi, Ferrari, Gucci, Lamborghini, Prada, Stradivarius, Valentino, Vespa, to name a very few. When one further considers the most celebrated inventors, philosophers, writers, painters, chefs, sculptors, architects, composers, singers and musicians, Italy has an incredibly rich legacy that is eternally in a state of rebirth. As a proud Italian manufacturer of musical instruments, completely designed, engineered and manufactured in Italy, it is in our blood to strive for excellence in craftsmanship, invention of technology and style that is truly world-class. As we say, “300 years ago the Italians invented the piano; today we have reinvented it.” And we mean it. Indeed, our instruments represent the highest-quality tone, touch and technology. While our technology is too robust to detail here, know that our digital instruments express the highest-resolution tone in the industry, the widest dynamic range, unlimited polyphony, seamless patch changes, the most responsive touch to a player’s articulation and expressivity, Bluetooth connectivity, and a truly living tone that is characterized by the industry’s most complete sample length in an instrument that models the behavior and nuance of every sound. We call this suite of technologies T2L (True to Life), and our digital piano line is called “VIVO” meaning “alive,” because these digital instruments are truly and acoustically alive.

The Retailer: Please tell us about your background and career. What made you launch the North American distribution company of Proel? Please also add in your roles at Roland and Alfred and what you learned there.

Ferranti: I was born in upstate New York, the son of Italian immigrants. My father was an engineer and organist from a little Italian hill town south of Rome, and my mother was a multi-talented ballerina, fashion model and nurse from Rome, Italy. Music, dance, art, and, of course,



Italian language and culture were always taught and encouraged. I have two sisters and we had a happy home as my mother worked very hard to always ensure we had every opportunity, including attending summer school in Italy throughout the years.

My path in music, piano education and even business started when I was in kindergarten. When I was 5 years old, my sister Diana, then 12 years old, was tragically hit by a car while walking home from school. The accident put her into a coma and devastated our family for many months. When my sister eventually emerged from her coma, the brain surgeon recommended that my mother put her in piano lessons to ensure that her hands were moving and her brain fully engaged. She got piano lessons from a local church pianist, and I instantly became her piano tutor at home. The teacher had assigned her *Alfred's Basic Piano Course* method. I remember helping my sister with her practicing and seeing the name Morton Manus (co-author and president of Alfred Music) on the cover and thinking that I would one day find and thank that man. As fate would have it, after graduating from The Crane School of Music in Potsdam, N.Y., and getting my start in the music products business with Onondaga Music Service, and then in marketing with The FJH Music Co., I eventually went to work for Alfred Music. I worked with Morton Manus and the Manus family, and my career there would grow over the next 13 years until I became vice president of sales.

Alfred Music was a great company to develop my skills and career, as it allowed me to get involved and gain experience in every aspect of the industry: sales, marketing, management, production, artist relations and finance.

In 2015, I joined Roland as product strategy manager for home pianos, keyboards and organs. It was a great opportunity to apply my connections in music education to music instrument manufacturing. Like most music products manufacturers, I noticed there was a need for expanded artist relations with widely known music educators and influencers, and a need to make the connection with instrument manufacturing to teachers and students, so I saw an opportunity to innovate. I reached out to my contacts in music publishing to attract educators such as Randall Faber (whom I had known since working in marketing at The FJH Music Co.) and Jim Brickman (whom I had known since working together at Alfred Music), and also assembled value-added educational piano bundle-packs which included lesson books, videos, lamps, and print and digital sheet music through partnerships with Alfred Music, Hal Leonard, Mighty Bright and more. It was effective product strategy that delivered great growth during my time at Roland.

After leaving Roland, the opportunity of a lifetime presented itself with an emerging digital piano brand from Italy, called Dexibell. Interestingly, Dexibell was formed by leading Italian engineers after the close of Roland Italy, and began getting recognition in Europe for its groundbreaking tone, touch, technology and design. From the moment I saw and heard Dexibell VIVO digital pianos, I knew these were the most exciting digital pianos in the world and that I had to be a part of this story, as it brought all facets of my passion and my past uniquely together. Being fluent in Italian, I wrote to the CEO and executive team in Italy and asked if they had plans to distribute to North America. A week later I was in Italy on the Proel campus and Dexibell design studio and we began strategizing the launch of Proel North America, beginning exclusively with the launch of Dexibell Musical Instruments at the 2017 NAMM Show.

The Retailer: What are some of the most important things you've learned since you became president of Proel North America?

Ferranti: We founded Proel North America in 2017 to distribute these great products to the USA and Canada. The partnership is the greatest thrill of my professional life and, on a daily basis, challenges every skill I have developed in sales, marketing, business development, artist relations, finance and management over the past 25 years.

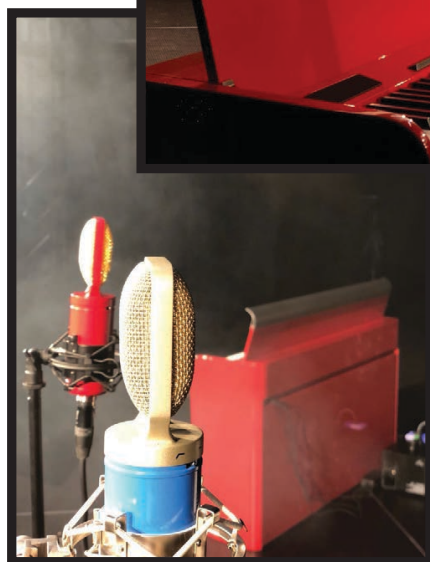
The classroom of entrepreneurship teaches me valuable lessons every single day; most importantly that passion and integrity are the keys to a successful business, and are at the core

of our products and our business model. From the engineers and designers who create our instruments, to the musicians who play our instruments, to the dealers who sell our instruments, it's all about passion and integrity in everything we do and in every partnership we have.

What we are doing is hard. We are introducing innovation to the establishment. This afflicts the comfortable, as they say. So, passion for what we do and the integrity to stay committed is essential. To paraphrase what Steve Jobs once said, "You have to have passion in everything that you do, because it will carry you through the hard days when any sane person would otherwise quit."

The Retailer: What has the growth been like at Proel North America? What are you most proud of so far?

Ferranti: We have just wrapped up our first full year of distribution to North America and the growth and acceptance by artists and dealers has been inspiring. We have "boot strapped" this process, meaning we have let the integrity and high quality of our instruments speak for themselves. Once some of the world's top musicians, including Stevie Wonder, Victoria Theodore (Beyoncé), Sheléa (Quincy Jones, David Foster), Russell Ferrante (The Yellowjackets), two-time Grammy Award winner Kevin Toney, and top piano educators such as Gayle Kowalchyk (Alfred Music) and Jennifer Eklund (Piano Pronto), had heard and played our instruments, then they began evangelizing our products and brands on their own, because of the inspiration these instruments



have brought to their art.

Indeed, we have a lot of passionate evangelists who love what we are doing and what we stand for, and take up the cause of Dexibell on their own. They are proud to be part of a new movement, a renaissance of keyboards. I'm most proud that the passion and integrity for our instruments has attracted many of our industry's most respected artists and retailers.

The Retailer: You hosted a special open house event at Proel's Italian headquarters in April. Please describe in full detail what happened at the event.

Ferranti: In April, we hosted

an international Proel convention, where we invited hundreds of international music products retailers, distributors and press agents to our headquarters in Sant'Omero, Italy, to spend 3 days with us and celebrate 25 years of Proel; and to christen our expanded facilities and newly built artist theater and concert hall. For newer retailers and distributors, it was an eye-opening introduction to how impressive and extensive Proel's catalog of "Made In Italy" products truly is. We hosted lunches, dinners and banquets, presented concerts and new product demonstrations, conducted tours of our beautiful campus and facilities in the foothills of Italy, and took an excursion to a local

early-century castle with wine tasting from our world-famous Montepulciano wine region of Italy. It was an extraordinary weekend in Italy which left all of our retailers and guests with a better sense of our passion, integrity, partnership, hospitality and showmanship, and reminded our partners of the rich legacy of Italian craftsmanship and instrument manufacturing.

On the first evening, everyone arrived at our beachside convention hotel on the Adriatic coast, where we had an opening night banquet with our international retailers and guests, each of whom were seated with their Proel sales and marketing managers. It was a great opportunity to unwind and prepare for the weekend ahead.

The next morning, we brought our guests on a scenic ride along the Adriatic coastline and through the ancient hill town region to our Proel headquarters in Sant'Omero, Italy, in the Abruzzo region, famous for its rich history of instrument manufacturing.

After everyone was checked in, our guests gathered and were seated in our newly built performance theater for an amazing concert and product demonstration that simultaneously introduced the audience to all eight product divisions of Proel including band, orchestra, percussion, piano and organ, pro audio, stage lighting, commercial sound systems, and accessories. It was an impressive concert and company presentation that showcased our world-class products, as well as our team of business leaders, culminating with our founder and president, Fabrizio Sorbi, welcoming everyone to Proel, and demonstrating his passion and pride for our great company.



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We then broke for a buffet lunch at the Proel headquarters cantina (where a complimentary healthy lunch is served every day to our employees), followed by a 1 p.m. tour of our logistics hub where thousands of our “Made In Italy” products are received from our manufacturing units and then packed and shipped to our distributors and retailers worldwide every day. At 2 p.m., we organized our guests into two groups, with one group going to the Dexibell campus for a tour, concert, and product demonstration; and the other group staying on the Proel campus to tour the showrooms of our other Proel divisions, with a hands-on product demonstration and question-and-answer session hosted by each divisional product manager. All groups then met in the evening at a beautiful hotel ballroom on the Adriatic coast for a gala dinner where we presented awards to our top retailers and distributors. I was honored to accept an award on behalf of Proel North America for our breakout year in the USA and Canada with the award-winning launch of Dexibell digital pianos, keyboards and organs.

On the final day, after breakfast, the groups traded places for the opportunity to tour the Dexibell and Proel campuses for demonstrations, performances, and hands-on product experience and Q&A. After regrouping for a banquet lunch at the Proel cantina, the group took a bus ride out Civitella del Tronto for a visit and tour of the centuries-old fortress with wine tasting, while enjoying the most spectacular views of the rolling Italian hillsides. It was an excursion to remember always, and one that all of our guests will be talking about for years to come. We then went back an Adriatic seaside hotel for a final banquet and a cap on this extraordinary Proel convention.

The Retailer: What’s the current state of digital organs and pianos today?

Ferranti: While being a growth leader in the music products industry for several years due mostly to their embedded conveniences, digital pianos and organs themselves have been in a rather stagnated

state of uninspired technological and design atrophy. I call it “The Dark Ages” of keyboard design and technology in search of a “renaissance” (the first renaissance having also been born in Italy). That is, each season, the four or five well known, highly diffuse legacy brands release products which, if the logos were removed, most consumers or dealers couldn’t tell them apart by sight or by sound. Stage pianos have seen the same cookie-cutter slabs coming off production lines for years. In the digital home upright and mini-grand categories, we’ve all heard the same poor-quality digital samples through overly reverbed settings emanating from the same old black and brown acoustic piano design imposters for all too long. This industry is thirsty for disruption and innovation, and that’s what Dexibell is delivering. Dexibell has the industry’s highest-resolution tone. Instead of hearing the same old CD-quality 16-bit truncated digital samples artificially looped ad nauseum, Dexibell delivers a high-definition acoustic realism with unlimited polyphony and seamless sound changes that makes your digital instrument come ALIVE, (translated “VIVO” in Italian); which is why Dexibell’s piano series is called VIVO. What’s more, we’ve partnered with Ferrari’s concept design firm to create stunning, vibrant Italian piano cabinetry and keyboard designs that musicians will love in their homes, studios, classrooms and on their stages. Musicians are vibrant, creative, passionate, expressive and committed to the integrity of their music-making; we believe their instruments should be as well.

The Retailer: What technologies are changing the market and/or could change the market in the future?

Ferranti: With regards to digital instruments, high-speed, high-capacity, state-of-the-art computing is making uncompromising technology such as Dexibell’s patented T2L (True to Life) production possible. By comparison, the limited onboard chips and computing capabilities of many of the legacy brands out there have had to make compromises on everything from their truncated sample length, to their

limited sample quality, to their limited polyphony, inability to change settings without dropping sounds, to their latency between the performer’s touch and the instrument’s response, and a whole range of other limitations. Dexibell has changed the landscape of possibilities by starting with the industry’s most powerful computing capacity and combining that with state-of-the-art tone production, which allows our instruments to make music without compromise.

Other technologies that are changing the way we learn and perform include the emerging application of Bluetooth connectivity. Dexibell instruments are Bluetooth enabled to give students a whole range of ways to conveniently and wirelessly connect to their technology, and give performers new opportunities to connect to their gear and other musicians in ways that previous generations of instruments could not. From intelligent play-along performance apps such as Dexibell’s XMURE app, to educational apps and distance learning platforms, wireless connectivity is a powerful asset to have onboard.

Of particular note, Dexibell just launched a first-of-its-kind operating system on all of our instruments called AQUAVIVA. This groundbreaking technology allows musicians to transmit both

audio and MIDI simultaneously across a single USB line. That’s huge. The applications are numerous; not the least of which is the ability to connect the industry’s highest-quality tones directly to your DAW or computer without an intermediary audio interface, as well as the ability to connect and control other instruments, all with a single USB. These possibilities for interactivity, performance and recording, which were never possible before without a mountain of gear and cables, are now available to everyone with this innovative technology. In fact, this brand new technology, pioneered by Dexibell, will change the way we interface with gear, audio and recording equipment.

The Retailer: Tell us about some recent product launches and what will be coming down the pike?

Ferranti: This is a very prolific period for Dexibell. As far as technology, at The NAMM Show, we announced and premiered our new AQUAVIVA operating system mentioned earlier. We debuted our all-new VIVO S1, the industry’s most powerful compact stage piano. It comes complete with all of the power and technology of our award-winning flagship VIVO S7 model in a beautiful, lightweight, 68-note aluminum

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