

- > **Yamaha**  
Donates instruments to fire-damaged middle school  
[PAGE 28](#)
- > **Roland U.S.**  
Partners with global nonprofit Playing For Change  
[PAGE 29](#)
- > **D'Addario**  
Joins forces with Contemporary Youth Orchestra  
[PAGE 32](#)

# SUPPLY

TAYLOR GUITARS | BY ALEX HARRELL

## GUITARS & GIRL POWER

It's not a revolutionary or controversial statement to say that the music industry is male dominated. It's easy to see this at conventions, press conferences, and even on the covers of Music Inc. As Tim Godwin, Taylor Guitars' director of artist and entertainment relations, put it, going to Winter NAMM can feel like "you're living in the 1980s metal world."

Which is why Taylor Guitars took note of an interesting, organic event that transpired about three years ago during Summer NAMM. Godwin and company co-founder Bob Taylor observed something that had never happened before. A handful of tweenage girls, who were total strangers, gathered in Taylor's showroom, grabbed guitars, sat in a circle, and started "jamming on" Taylor Swift songs.

"It was the first time where it was [females]; in the past, it would've been a bunch of guys playing Beatles or Stones songs," Godwin said. "But it was like, wow, there's this whole *world* out there."

So when the opportunity to introduce young girls to playing guitar in an innovative way emerged, Taylor jumped on it.

### PROJECT ALTO

Taylor Guitars and American Girl teamed up to collaborate on a special edition, life-size



Tim Godwin

### Taylor Guitars collaborates with American Girl in attempt to inspire young girls to play guitar

Taylor GS Mini acoustic guitar that matches the custom-decorated artwork on the doll-size version for American Girl's latest contemporary character, Tenney Grant, a singer-songwriter from Nashville, Tennessee. The aim, Godwin explained, is to inspire young girls to make music and play guitar (something they can do for the rest of their lives) through a doll (something they'll grow out).

The collaboration, given the

codename "Project Alto" by Taylor's legal representatives, was a 14-month process that began in the fall of 2015 thanks to Erika Wollam-Nichols of the famous Bluebird Cafe.

When American Girl was crafting its newest contemporary doll, the Mattel-owned company consulted Wollam-Nichols to gain insight on how the singer/songwriter world works in Music City. Wollam-Nichols directed American Girl to Godwin, stating

that Taylor Guitars would be a good place to check out for some authentic gear. After a handful of conversations, Godwin met with founders Bob Taylor and Kurt Listug to double check that this was, in fact, a good idea.

"I wanted to get their thoughts, just to be careful with what we're lending our brand to, even though I felt confident that everyone would agree it's a good partnership," Godwin explained. "Bob was excited because he has two daughters that had American Girl dolls — he even built cases for them."

The bonus, as Godwin put it, was that Taylor's legal team loved the concept as well. A lot of guitar manufacturers are dealing with counterfeit items around the world, he explained, so the more a company can establish its brand and trademarks, the better. Plus, building a repertoire with a major company such as Mattel (which grossed \$6.07 billion last year according to its 2016 annual report) making a toy guitar with all of Taylor's monikers — the headstock, bridge and pickguard — is a sweet deal.

### ONE STEP FURTHER

Taking the collaboration a step further, Godwin thought, why not make an *actual* guitar? American Girl makes scaled-down versions of everything the consumer uses in its real

life for the dolls, so Taylor went backward: scale up. Though American Girl isn't carrying the special edition GS Mini in its stores, Taylor is selling it direct and donating \$100 of each sale to Notes to Notes, a national nonprofit organization that builds studios in Boys and Girls Clubs for after-school programs.

"The important thing was just to have the toy doll out there and the toy guitar," Godwin said. "If we sell some guitars, great, that's an added benefit."

And it's likely that Taylor would do a collaboration like this again in the future, as long as it's a good fit.

"We get calls all the time that we have to turn down, but when this came across, it kind of made sense; I mean, it *does* make sense," Godwin said. "This is right up our alley. American Girl is a good, strong brand. There

aren't a lot of negatives; it's not like we're selling to a whiskey brand."

#### FUTURE FOCUSED

or a company that seems to have a concrete conscience, it's one that doesn't proclaim to have a motto or credo — which is probably just another indicator of said strong morals.

"It's funny; we're doing this thing where there's no real 'mission statement,'" Godwin said. "But the big thing now for us, from Bob's perspective, [is] always looking forward."

Looking forward includes things like hiring guitar builder Andy Powers to be the master luthier to carry the company onward. It includes creating the "director of natural resource sustainability" position filled by environmentalist Scott Paul and partnering with the nonprofit



Tenney Grant with the American Girl GS Mini

group GreenWood Global and buying a sawmill in Cameroon, Africa, to ensure ethical sourcing of ebony wood.

Looking forward includes a lot of eco-conscious initiatives to keep making guitars. But it also includes initiatives to make more guitar players. Specifically, more *types* of players. Making the market more inclusive, expanding it to target underutilized demographics and

inspiring them to pick up an instrument. Of course, females happen to be a part of that category, but they're not the only ones.

"There are so many demographics, and we want to look at all of them," Godwin said. "But I guess the key is that this is an important place for us to put our priorities. There *are* young women out there who want to play guitar." **MI**



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