



## Shine On:

# Timothy Swartz

## A Sound Factory This Man Is

>>> **“Legendary:”** a word like this, especially in the music business, is tossed around to just about anyone that has made anything notable to even the smallest audience. However, when applied to Timothy Swartz of Digital Sound Factory, using the term legendary is almost an understatement. Music, even beyond the musician, is about sound, and Timothy Swartz is all about the sound. His ear, and his supervision during the recording sessions with E-MU in development of the various Proteus modules have found their way onto almost everything we have heard on the radio for almost twenty years.

Getting his start with E-MU in 1986, he was first hired on as customer and technical support staff. He was quickly moved in position to oversee one of the greatest expansions that E-MU had ever ventured in terms of sound development. This endeavor was to take the Proteus concept to the next level. From the Vintage Keys module forward, he was the man in charge of all the content that would fill the various sound and genre-specific modules in the E-MU rack module line. The results of that endeavor are clearly evident, and the sounds from all that work are and will continue to be heard in music productions for a long time to come.

Recently, Timothy has ventured into his own company, Digital Sound Factory ([www.digitalsoundfactory.com](http://www.digitalsoundfactory.com)), and he is selling the fruits of his labor with E-MU in the popular SoundFont format, as well in the format of E-MU's Emulator and Proteus X software format. Not one to settle in the work of the past, he is still creating new sound banks for software instruments, most notably for Dimension Pro with Cakewalk, and it is a good bet that other formats and sound content offerings will follow in the future.

second grade, it was my turn. I had a difficult time because I did not like my teacher or the music she made me play. I kept with it until high school and then took up the trumpet. This was due to my grandma's insight that playing in the marching band would keep me off the front lines of any war that would be coming. My junior year in high school a friend gave me a Farfisa organ and asked me to play in his band. That was it, the turning point that started it all. I went on to study and graduate with a Bachelors of Music in classical and jazz. After college I toured the U.S. with many different bands lugging

If you ask any sound designer, they will tell you that the work that goes into crafting the sound sets, for either hardware or software, is a huge effort, and Timothy is among the best of the best. In any musical genre, from electronica to Rock to Hip-Hop (and everything in between), we have our favorite musicians that we like to refer to as legends. However, it is important to remember that there are also legends, with meticulous attention to the details of sound that make the music we hear possible. It is a privilege to be able to get a glimpse into such a legend as Timothy Swartz.

**WSM: Greetings: and thank you for taking the time for this interview.**

**Timothy Swartz:** Thank you, Trusty, for allowing me to share some of my experiences as a sound designer.

**WSM: The first questions I have to ask, is what is your musical background, and how did you go from being in customer and tech support to heading up one of the largest production endeavors at E-MU?**

**Timothy Swartz:** Mom was a great piano player and insisted the kid's take lessons. So when I started

around all my keyboards – including my B-3 and 122 Leslie. I joined E-MU as customer support manager to get my foot in the door and get familiar with what they were doing.

**WSM: Everyone in music production is familiar with the sounds, and it is a fair bet that everyone that has no idea what an E-MU rack mount module is also has also heard the sounds. When you are in the studio doing the recording sessions, what is it that you are listening for that you choose to include on a sound set and what is it that you listen for to exclude from a sound set?**

**Timothy Swartz:** Before we book studio time, we decide what we want to accomplish by gathering examples of playing techniques and/or musical styles. Next we compile a list and consult with the people out there making the music. I learned a long time ago to seek out the experts and rely on them to show us what works. And then there is the magic of the unplanned things that happen during the session. What may have been brushed off as a mistake during the recording can turn into a really nice, useful waveform.

**WSM: To me, I think that the thing that makes all those E-MU**

sound sets continue to endure is that they have a certain character. I mean, any company can make a bland, nondescript flute patch, but there is something about a bland E-MU flute patch that stands out against the competition. We know that sometimes a plain sounding patch is what is needed, especially for the bread and butter modules, but what is it that gives the E-MU bread and butter sounds that edge?

**Timothy Swartz:** E-MU founded sampling with the advent of the Emulator Samplers. I think it has

would never use that”, to “That’s going on my next album”. A lot of the versatility comes in the programming of the sample set. Starting with the basic key maps and applying the various synth parameters, regular sounds take on a new identity. You always need to cover the basic bread and butter sounds, but the “Wow, I got to have those sounds” is what sells products.

**WSM: Is there a particular E-MU module you are most fond of, not necessarily in terms of just the content, but the whole experience? In a video for Cakewalk demonstrating the**



twenty minutes of explaining that there is no way we could ever make her harp sound as good as her playing, she signed. Best sounding harp I ever recorded. She also gave us tons of glissandos.

always been our mentality to provide the best sample content possible, no matter what were the size requirements. Adding advanced synthesizer parameters, Z-plane filters, and real-time controllers can really take the source content to a new level.

**WSM: When you were in the studio for E-MU, dealing with the specific content or genre sound sets constituted the bulk of your tenure. What are the goals? How do you find the balance of providing the widest range of sounds possible to please everyone and at the same time follow your instincts to include those unique sounds that usually, in the end, define the module and make it stand out from the rest of the market? I mean, there are usually 512 sounds, but there are always that 100 or so that are a cut above the rest that pleasantly surprise the user.**

**Timothy Swartz:** As I mentioned previously, defining the session with the pro’s who work in the industry helps narrow down the selection process. Building the initial sample content from the sessions is a long process with many people’s intervention: everything from, “I

**Proteus Collection for Dimension Pro, you spoke of some crazy experiences ranging from dealing with rain drops to session musicians performing naked. There must be plenty of good stories to tell.**

**Timothy Swartz:** There’s always a story when musicians are involved! Too numerous for this interview, but one of my favorites was recording the Seattle Symphony. We were creating the sound set for Virtuoso and made many trips from California to Seattle over the course of a year. We recorded every instrument in numerous size groups, solo, and multiple playing techniques. The symphony gang has a whole different flavor of humor and they would crack me up all the time. The jokes between takes were worth the entire process!!! Anyway, after recording over 150 people, we got to the last instrument, the harp. Before we would start a session, we required the musicians to sign a release form for us to use the content. From the control room I hear, “I’m not signing that”. What? 150 other people signed it with no hesitation. “The other night I was out for dinner and heard a harp coming out of a keyboard. I will never let that happen to my harp”. After about

**WSM: What is your process of taking gigs and gigs of recorded sounds and crafting them into a workable sound set?**

**Timothy Swartz:** Having enough source content for selection is imperative. You need to capture the right samples in the session. We always record multiple takes of the same note or groove so that we have an adequate selection. After sifting through the source, we build up the sound set. Difficult choices need to be made on what samples remain, the sample rate, and the looping techniques.

**WSM: Do you enjoy the whole process, or is it the recording, or is it designing the presets with a sound engine after all the excess is on the cutting room floor? I can't imagine sifting through the sounds and cutting them down is enjoyable at all...or am I wrong?**

**Timothy Swartz:** I enjoy the entire development process. Knowing each step helps me to plan the project and envision the final output. Recording is very satisfying, provided we don’t get bogged down in technical issues. Logging and getting the right samples makes the processing steps flow smoother.





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interview

## Timothy Swartz

whole new sound and inspiration... really works well for selecting what kit to use. It's easy to do when you have 1000's of sounds ready to go.

### WSM: How did Digital Sound Factory come about?

**Timothy Swartz:** After negotiating a license agreement for the E-MU sound library, I started Digital Sound Factory with a mission to make the E-MU sound library available to anyone with a computer and soft synth. We chose SoundFont as the initial format due to the fact that just about every soft synth will import the format. We are

Over the next six months we developed the E-MU Proteus Pack consisting of Proteus 2000, Mo' Phatt, Xtreme Lead-1, Planet Earth, Virtuoso, and PX-7 Drums, over 3,500 programs. This month we are releasing Digital Sound Factory Volume 2 Classic Keys. With over 300 programs, this sound set features an array of authentic analog keyboards and synths. Using Dimension, we took the authentic waveforms to yet another level creating new never heard before synths. The expansion pack was sampled at 24 bit resolution from the finest instruments and even includes a really nice Yamaha C7

Preset design allows for much creativity based on the synthesizer engine.

**WSM: Recently, E-MU released a free download of the Proteus XV software rompler with the entire Proteus 2000 sound set. In a year that has seen freebie releases from Native Instruments with the Kore Player, Yellow Tools Independence Free, and others, it was this release that has exploded with extremely positive cheers from all around the software musician community. It even prompted a well respected freelance TV and Film score composer and music producer Dansgold to claim "...that's like the freebee of the decade." In light of all that is out there these days, free or not, hardware or software, what do you think is the reason that these sounds continue to be heralded as much today as they were since at their release? What makes them endure?**

**Timothy Swartz:** Due to the vast amount of sounds available, it's very easy to get inspired by the Proteus and its sound selection. I've watched people record MIDI for one instrument, and then switch presets playing back the same MIDI for a

now offering Cakewalk Dimension, Reason Refills, and Emulator VX/PX/EX sound libraries. Check us out at [www.DigitalSoundFactory.com](http://www.DigitalSoundFactory.com). We offer free examples and downloads available 24/7.

**WSM: You have not simply traded on your previous work with DSF. You recently have been working back in the studio producing new sound sets for Cakewalk's Dimension Pro. We know why Cakewalk would want you to create sound sets for it, but what attracted you to that synth and what were your goals in the studio coming up with these new volumes for Dimension Pro?**

**Timothy Swartz:** After deciding to start with the SoundFont format, I found out about the Cakewalk SFZ player and how accurate it is importing SoundFont libraries. I approached Cakewalk with the idea of creating a Proteus Pack for their synth. That is when I first found out about Dimension. They were in immediate need of a new expansion pack and I was in the studio recording pianos. Digital Sound Factory Volume 1 came about featuring a Yamaha C5 grand piano and over 300 new programs. This was a 'getting to know you' project.

grand piano. Volume 2 is included with Sonar 8 and can also be purchased as a standalone.

**WSM: Do you find the process more enjoyable working in the studio for creating sounds for software instruments over hardware instruments? Is it easier in some ways?**

**Timothy Swartz:** Working with software instruments is a real pleasure. There are so many options available and it's a lot easier to visualize the parameters. Back in the early days of the Proteus, sound designers had very few parameter options and programmed in Unix. Software has opened the door to vast creativity.

**WSM: In the era of massive gigabyte sound sets for software instruments, you choose to keep your newer sound sets relatively small in comparison...without sacrificing quality I may add...but is this just a result of years of tailoring massive amounts of recorded material into large preset banks that have a 32 Megabyte limit from the hardware days, or is it intentional for other reasons as well? And a follow-up question: taking for granted that some breathing room is a welcome**

change, but in your experience with some of these instruments, do you think that these multi-gigabyte collections, more often than not, demonstrate clear examples of laziness in the editing process because current computer specs allow for it?

**Timothy Swartz:** When we record, we always capture more than we need so there are choices of what the final size will be. Many of the compression techniques used for the smaller libraries can be applied to larger ones with stunning results. Recording large libraries is great, but has its own set of issues. Each

in the studio to move beyond your previous work with E-MU, to stand out and make the same lasting impression with the new sounds as with the older ones? Dimension Pro certainly has a sizable following, but in this current market, and with the increasingly cynical and jaded attitudes of the musical software user community, did you feel any extra pressure since you aren't just dealing with competition from three or four other companies, but rather hundreds?



**WSM:** Everyone appreciates you taking the time to talk with us.

**Timothy Swartz:** Trusty and all, again thank you for the opportunity

note recorded needs to perfectly match the others. In the smaller libraries, we get rid of the bad samples and stretch the good ones in place.

**WSM:** Are there any other software instruments, like, say, Wusikstation for instance, that you would like to develop sounds for? Anything in particular that has caught your attention? It seems that the market for sound sets for software instruments is bigger than the market for software instruments themselves these days.

**Timothy Swartz:** - We are working closely with many of the synth manufacturers. Developing in the SoundFont format allows our content to import to a large range of soft synths. We would like to eventually support everyone's native format, but that's a large undertaking.

**WSM:** Some of your current products are being reviewed in this issue, and honestly, your products are always well received. However, because of the saturated software market, did you feel any extra pressure in creating the new sound sets

**Timothy Swartz:** I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to be involved in providing sound content to help inspire the creativity of musicians. Sound design opportunities are endless. There will always be the need for basic recording, but it's the technology that is paving the way for future sound content. Digital Sound Factory has allowed me to work with all the soft synth formats and discover the best tools for modern sound design. Each new project we are involved with, whether in the studio or mining through E-MU and Ensoniq source content, new software plug-ins allow for amazing results.

**WSM:** Anything you wish to mention that we can look forward to in the future from your company Digital Sound Factory?

**Timothy Swartz:** Yes, we have quite a lot in the works. We have access to the entire E-MU and Ensoniq source recordings and, believe me, there are quite a few gems. The two libraries represent over 30 years of sound content. We have also been in the studio recording for future products. Please stay tuned.

to share some of my sound design experience with you and thanks for your support. Best Regards, Tim.

There it is. A goldmine of insight into sample content design. This is how the sausage gets made, so to speak, and many, many electronic musicians and bands of all genres out there have benefited and will continue to benefit from all the hard and meticulous work he has put into his career for us, the musicians. As an experienced musician himself, it is obvious that his passion for all angles in approach to his work shines through in the content he delivers. It is easy to see why "legendary" is both appropriate and almost an understatement for Timothy Swartz.

I highly recommend going to [www.digitalsoundfactory.com](http://www.digitalsoundfactory.com) to check out their offerings. Be sure to check out the reviews for the Proteus Pack, and the Digital Sound Factory Vol. 1 and 2 for Dimension Pro in this issue. In the next issue, Wusik Sound Magazine will be reviewing the infamous Ensoniq ZR and MR collections, and perhaps some others. Be sure to download the freebies, they are plentiful, and demonstrate the range and quality of their collections.

