



Jack Jarret

Founder, Notion Music, Inc.

“Scientists are constantly doing new things that outmode what was done before. I wanted to find a way to keep art moving forward.”

You’ve probably heard the saying, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” That happens to be the case with Jack Jarrett, founder of music-creation software company NOTION Music. “I wanted something that would allow me to keep growing,” said the musician and software innovator. Earlier in his career, Jack pursued degrees in voice, music composition, and opera conducting and then spent 12 years teaching at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, where he served as chair of the composition department. Along the way, he toyed and tinkered with the tools available to a composer and strove to make something better. Jack kindly took a break from his busy schedule to chat with us on how he made the move from composer to musical techie.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I started singing in a boys’ choir in an Episcopal church when I was nine. We sang a lot of nice music by Mozart and Palestrina; that was my introduction to classical music. When I was about 12, I started writing music and figured that was what I was going to do for the rest of my life.

Why did you transition into technology?

Back in the ‘80’s I was writing music by hand, which is a pretty time-consuming task. I had gotten a music typewriter—a standard typewriter converted to produce musical characters. When computers came out, I became interested in learning how to program something like that musical typewriter. I worked with a software company in Seattle, Washington, and designed a music notation program which had some success.

What motivated you to start your own company?

The company that I worked with in Seattle went out of business, and as a hobby I continued to work on my own notation program because there were things in other programs that I didn’t really like. I thought I could create something better. In 2001, it was my daughter’s idea to form a company and build this product.

What makes your programs unique?

They use very high quality musical samples. For the NOTION program, instead of using MIDI sounds we recorded the sounds of the London Symphony Orchestra

and incorporated them directly into the program. And we didn’t just record them once: we have different dynamic levels of the different instruments playing *staccato*, *legato*, etc. We have other programs that use guitar and more rock and pop sounds. Also, the program actually can be played like it’s an instrument—in an ensemble with live players or as an accompaniment for a soloist.

What is your goal for the software?

I’m pushing for younger students to develop their artistry. We gave a demo to one of my grandson’s friends. After 3 months, he had written a beautifully orchestrated piece based on a theme from the *Harry Potter* movies. He had never had instruction in composition—he was just kind of looking at it like a game, playing with the music until he got it to sound the way he wanted.

What do you currently do at your company?

Right now, I’m the vice president of research and development. My responsibilities include coming up with new ideas and getting feedback from educators and others to see what directions we need to go in.

What do you like most about your job?

I have my own toy to play with. Before this, once I wrote something on paper it was hard to change it. Now, I can continue to change it until it’s the way I want it be. It gives me a whole different way to interact with my music—and that’s been my motivation all along.

—VERONICA DOMINGUEZ-GARCIA



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