

Turn Up THE NOISE

The bright hue can't be missed, and neither can the sound that is emitted from a piece of Orange Amplification equipment.

Images by Ben Lister

In the summer of 1968, musician and electronics designer Cliff Cooper, aka Mr Orange, opened a music shop to support his basement recording studio in London's West End. Little did he realise that his humble business venture would become one of the industry's most recognisable brands in the years that followed. "It was a big shot," Cliff remembers. "I only had about £50 in those days and I was in a band so I decided to sell off the group's equipment to help finance and build the studio." When no one in the district would agree to supply him with any stock, he decided to source second-hand equipment such as guitars and amplifiers to be sold. "Then we had to come up with a name—we called it Orange—and that was how it all started. We painted the shop orange, which was a bit unusual in those days, and we had complaints from

everybody but we overcame that and now I can say that we have been very fortunate with the success we've had."

By the time autumn came around that same year, Cliff had started to design his own range of Orange amplifiers and recruited an external business to produce them. The result was a new type of sound that resonated with guitarists and a product that was easily recognisable thanks to its vivid colours, sci-fi-looking controls, and distinctive crest. Loud-speaker cabinets were soon added to Orange Amplification's repertoire and people started to take notice. Guitar luminaries such as Peter Green and Paul Kossoff plugged into early prototypes, before some of the biggest names in music took Orange equipment to the stage. These included icons such as Fleetwood Mac, Stevie Wonder, and James Brown.

When the 1970s rolled around, Orange Amplification had started to make an impact on a global scale. The warm and crunchy sounds of its amplifiers became popular with blues-inspired rock bands like Led Zeppelin and Free, as well as heavier-style artists such as Black Sabbath. Sales exploded on the back of these influential endorsements.

"We got tremendous promotion and publicity through that," Cliff says. "I quickly realised that was the way forward because I didn't have the money to do paper advertising and promotion. That was a way that we could promote our product without having to make a large investment. To have the likes of Fleetwood Mac using our products was, of course, very fortunate. The meeting with them came about because Peter Green would come into our shop—famous bands would often come and hang ›



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around the shop—and he used the equipment, liked the sound of it, and the whole band decided to use it when they flew over to the US for a tour. That was something that I never expected. They were one of my favourite bands at that time and I was obviously just very lucky they chose to go with us.”

In 2006, Orange Amplification won its first Queen’s Award for Enterprise; in 2009, it was awarded its second; and in 2012, its third. This firmly established its solid position in the music industry. Today, the company has worldwide presence with successful operations in Europe, the US and China. “It has always been our vision to have a global company, and that was really the turning point in our business when that was realised,” Cliff states. “We’re now building our third factory near Shanghai, China, and a larger facility in Atlanta in the US, expanding our representation across the entire country with our own distribution. That’s working very well for us at

present. We’re also pushing and expanding into other areas such as music education, which was a big decision for the company but one that is working well for us.

“Over the past two years we’ve realised that the Asian market is quite different from the US market, and quite different from Europe and other parts of the world. So we develop products especially for the Asian market. We offer these to the US and European markets but they don’t always take us up on those. In the US, people want a different kind of amplifier. They want a much larger and more powerful amplifier and in Europe they want something different. We definitely have to approach each market individually.”

Cliff believes that Orange Amplification has been able to secure its strong position in the world market thanks to its innovative approach. Since the turn of the decade, it has launched many new products such as the Micro Terror, the Rockerverb MKII, and the TH30 series. All have received rave reviews in the press and from the musicians who have used them.

“I think we’re probably one of the most innovative companies in the music business. I think innovation conceives competitiveness and that has been a strong pattern for us. Our vision is to move forward and to have new products—innovative new products. That is definitely one of the things that sets us apart, as well as the fact that our products are very recognisable. Not just because of their colour, but also because of the way they’re designed and the high quality of the equipment. In fact, the quality of our amplifiers is absolutely paramount to us. We have an excellent reputation worldwide for making sure that everything we do is of great quality. Quality control is extremely important.” In addition to that, Cliff says Orange Amplification prides itself on being a caring company: “We want people to believe, and they do believe, that they’re a part of our family.”



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- Cliff Cooper

This is also the philosophy Cliff uses when dealing with staff, suppliers, and other business partners. “Personally, I am very open and easy to address. I think that is absolutely essential. Bringing suppliers into the family is always very important. We have a very close relationship with our suppliers and we understand that they have to make a profit. We try to keep a very open mind and give them interest in what’s happening.”

In recent years, Orange Amplification has extended its product range into the clothing sector, an area that Cliff believes goes hand in hand with the music industry. The aim has been to increase profits and further globalise the brand. It is also making its mark in education with its innovative Orange Musicboard, designed to help school students who are studying music theory. The device is the first teaching tool to make the subject a truly interactive experience and allows students to engage with harmonies, notes, rhythms, and chords in visual and audible ways.

The Musicboard is essentially a whiteboard with staves and five inbuilt microprocessors that communicate with each other. It was developed over four years with the help of 40 international teachers and is being used in

dedicated music schools around the world. When teachers or students touch the board with the special pens or ‘magic’ wands provided, it produces the correlating sound, which is then used to demonstrate an understanding of how melodies and rhythms should sound. It also transposes into any key. Since its conception, it has proved to be an extremely helpful tool.

“We are really looking to expand our place in education,” Cliff says. “We see it as a very worthwhile area to move into. It’s been really good to break into the music education business and come up with something that it wanted and needed. Part of our ethos is to keep within the music business and not brand other products that are not music related. We came up with an idea for the Musicboard to help teach students music theory and to make it more fun because music theory can be a boring subject to learn.”

With a lifespan that extends more than 40 years, Orange Amplification has become a global icon in the music industry, thanks to unique style and great sound. But that’s not where it stops. The brand is also leaving its legacy in the education field as it helps to train up the musicians of tomorrow. •



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CELESTION