

## ODD JOBS

### Summer Music Roundup



New this summer is BopPad, a drum pad that is divided into four programmable quadrants and responds to pressure and style for a naturally nuanced sound.

#### Tools of the Trade

The technological heart of McMillen's creations is a patented "smart fabric." Other smart fabrics are woven with wires, but he embeds nanoparticles and electricity-conducting ink, which gather data from every push, bend, and squeeze.

#### Job Transfer

His smart fabric is being used in other industries,

# Instrument Inventor

Meet the man taking music technology to a new level.

BY LEEANNE JONES

**FROM A BLUETOOTH-ENABLED** sensor bow for violins to a programmable drum pad, Keith McMillen's innovations have been on the cutting edge of music for nearly four decades—and now he's rocking other industries.

#### Early Aptitude

As a child, McMillen learned how to play guitar—then took apart an old phonograph to create an amp. He paid for college by repairing

## Bio

**Name:** Keith McMillen

**Age:** 60

**City of residence:** Berkeley

**Job:** Founder, Keith McMillen Instruments

a Gibson Guitars executive ("I got to meet all of my favorite musicians"), and toured with a trio before launching Keith McMillen Instruments (KMI) about 10 years ago—fueled mostly by a personal desire to make less cumbersome stage equipment.

#### Product Development

KMI makes highly portable electronic instruments and tools that give musicians greater control over their sound. These include sensor bows, foot controllers, mixers, and keyboards.

stringed instruments for other students. "I've probably changed 10,000 sets of guitar strings," he says.

#### Résumé

McMillen started four companies and sold two of them (Zeta Music and Octiv), was

too. KMI spinoff BeBop Sensors is helping develop smart car seats for air-bag deployment, CPR-coaching aids, and virtual-reality gloves. "I never imagined I'd end up here," says McMillen. "But if you study the history of technology, there are lots of things that were made for one purpose and ended up being used for another."

#### Office Space

At KMI and BeBop's Berkeley offices, McMillen's high-ceilinged space has a loft and walls covered in acoustic panels. He used to perform concerts here and hopes to again soon.

#### Mission Statement

"There haven't been any new instruments since the saxophone, so we're kind of set on what we hold or stand in front of to make sound, but we can take those same actions and have them do more," says McMillen. "I want to enable a new music." *keith mcmillen.com.*