

An Interview With Py Kolb...President and founder of Pygraphics and developer of Pyware 3D Java Interactive Drill Design Software.



Bandfo.com: Py, how was it that your parents arrived at the name of Py?

I was named after my father, George Pyatt Kolb. Pyatt was my great grandmother's maiden name. Everyone has always called me "Py". In school I would to sign my papers 3.14.

Bandfo.com: Py, I knew you were a trombone player in college. "Go Texas Longhorns". What were some of the things that kept you in music?

In both grade school and college, marching band was my extra-curricular and social activity. I feel very strongly that a young person develops skills that they will use for a lifetime through their experiences such as marching band much more than through the classroom. Mark Twain once wrote "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education."

Bandfo.com: Were you planning on a career in music as a performer, drill designer, and/or band director?

I wanted to give something back to music educators in return for what I was given. I was never talented musically but I'm good with technology. I planned on doing something with computers and music education after college.

Bandfo.com: When did you realize there was a need to develop the world's first computerized drill design application?

In 1981 I started a business to provide pre-written marching drills to band directors. I wrote a computer program that would re-write a pre-written drill for any number of performers. We introduced the business at a convention in Texas.(TBA) The very first day, we discovered that the directors were much more interested in the software that was used to re-write and print the drill than the drill itself. By that afternoon we had removed all of the drills from the booth and we were selling drill design software.

Bandfo.com: What was your reaction when you first realized band directors and drill designers throughout the world were taking Pyware seriously and actually implementing Pyware Drill Design software as their primary tool for the creation, evaluation, and presentation of visual design?

It was strange when I first realized that we were truly international. One of our technicians used to say "Every day, somewhere in the world there is a Pyware seminar being presented in some foreign language." Now we hear how Pyware is being used everywhere and some unusual places such as Broadway, the movies such as "Drumline", Super Bowls, and Olympics opening and closing ceremonies.

Bandfo.com: What were some of the challenges and hurdles you have had to face during these past 25 years?

We have always been proud that our company makes software based on customer requests. Our most difficult task has been adding new features requested from users while still keeping the program from growing into a monster. To keep our user interface current with the software's increasing capabilities it has undergone several complete rewrites. Our drill design software has evolved through three generations of total rewrites, starting with Charting Aid, then 3D (Dynamic Drill Design), and currently 3D Java Interactive.

Bandfo.com: I know many in "the business" may not know of other music education technological advances you and Pygraphics have made. Can you elaborate a little on those?

We started developing pitch recognition hardware in the late 80's and have continued to the present. We now have a popular assessment software used worldwide with Standard of Excellence from Kjos Publishing. Most recently, we developed the 3D Performance Simulator that uses a March Pad like the "Dance, Dance Revolution" game pad. Performers compete online while practicing their drills using the Simulator.

Bandfo.com: Besides yourself as the driving force, who or what can you say could share in helping develop advances in Pygraphics?

Our business is structured using a three sided scheme to encourage and promote advancing technology from within Pygraphics. From the technical side, our head technician and "guru" Dustin Merrell collects requests and suggestions from our users and our other Pyware technicians. We meet on a daily basis to determine what enhancements and changes should be made and when. From the application side, Craig Harms, "Director of Product Education" regularly submits update requests that he collects as he works with our users on "how to" create drill using Pyware. From the marketing side, Cayleen Kolb meets regularly with our dealers and distributors to determine the best way to offer new features and enhancements to better serve our customers. Often a software change or enhancement can be done immediately with our full time programmers and released the same day through our automatic online update services.

Bandfo.com: Now we've talked a little about the company. I know your family is very important in not only your personal life, but a powerful force in the growth of Pygraphics. Would it be asking too much for you to share a little about them?

My family is deeply involved in the business. My wife, Cayleen is the Pygraphics Marketing Director. She has been our director for 25 years and is much respected in the music business for her vast knowledge of the music market and its needs. My nephew, Dustin Merrell, is the best technical support "guru" I have had. He will work patiently with a user for as long as it takes to solve any problem whether the problem is related to Pyware or not. My father in law, Fred, directs incoming phone calls during our peak times, and is a great help. My daughter, Barbara-Scott, helps on the shipping line during the busy season.

Bandfo.com: What are some personal interests that take you away from the monitor and keyboard?

We are a very close family and we actually enjoy spending time together. We are either going out together to eat, going to weekend basketball tournaments, or staying at home and cooking something together. In addition to

family activities, I do bodybuilding. I workout four times a week and compete in state and regional bodybuilding shows once every 3 to 4 years. I typically workout during the business day and everyone at work calls it my "holy" hour because I don't skip it very often.

Bandfo.com: What is a humorous episode you could share with those of us, in "the business" who loves to tell stories?

Several years ago I was in one of our booths at a trade show and a person came up to me and said: "I know Mr. Py very well! Mr. Py told me to come by and say Hi if I had a chance." I stood there for a second and then I said: "I would be happy to tell him you said Hi, the next time I see him." Several days later Cayleen gave me a personalized license plate that said "Mr. Py" and the name has now stuck.

Bandfo.com: I know that the business of technology is somewhat "hush...hush", however, are there some exciting new future plans for Pygraphics you could share?

There are two types of technology businesses. One type invents products, ideas, and concepts. The other type copies the innovations. Over the years, we have learned to be very quiet about what we are doing. I advise people to check on our web site www.pyware.com. ; We are always announcing new products, features and offers, and there is something big coming out in the next few months.

Bandfo.com: Reflecting back on all the years you have listened to us wishing to express how "Pyware would be perfect if...", also, being recently accepted into the ABA as an associate member...I think it befitting you have a chance to express as to how, "Music Education would be perfect if..."

The biggest change that needs to be made in music education is the awareness of how important music is to our educational system. As I said in a recent speech: "In my youth, music education did not develop me as a musician, it developed me as a person." Speaking in business terms; music educators must create a "demand" in their community for youth music programs. Now more than ever, music educators must be prepared to "market" the importance of what they do. Today, music educators must think of themselves as marketing directors and "sell" their programs to their school and community. It isn't fair that no other teacher in education has to deal with this issue, but the fact is, music educators would be well served to develop their marketing skills so they will be more equipped to handle today's assault on music education.

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