

Music company's CEO innovating to succeed

The new CEO of Zenph Sound Innovations is assembling the pieces the company needs to make some noise in the music industry.

But don't look for Zenph to be an overnight sensation.

"The state of this technology is such that the business plan has never been that you will see a bunch of commercial activity soon," Kip Frey said. "It is going to take a year or two to get to scale."

Zenph's software converts music to data, which up to now has been used to re-create performances by long-dead pianists on a computer-controlled piano. It may sound gimmicky, but the albums of performances by legends such as Art Tatum and Glenn Gould have won critical acclaim.

Now, after raising \$10.7 million in venture capital in November and hiring Frey, Zenph has designs on multiple new revenue streams.

Frey, who most recently was a venture capitalist at Intersouth Partners after a successful career as an entrepreneur, provided an update this week on Zenph's progress:

- Zenph anticipates finishing its virtual bass this year, the next step in its plans to be able to re-create performances with a swath of instruments. Frey also expects the company to make major progress on its virtual saxophone this year.
- Zenph now has a payroll of 15, up from about a half-dozen in November, and expects to have 25 by the end of the year. Many of the new hires are software developers who also hold doctorates in music. "We're getting inbound resumes literally from around the world," said Frey.
- Currently based in Raleigh, the company expects to move into 14,000 square feet of space in the American Tobacco Campus in downtown Durham this summer. The site will include "a full-blown recording studio" that will be used to both record music and as a laboratory for developing its virtual instruments.
- Zenph is in discussions about becoming involved in three movies that include "performances from the past" in the narrative. One of the films would be "a biography of a famous pianist," Frey said.
- Zenph's first software product should be ready for demonstration by the end of the year. The product, aimed at recording studios and musicians, would be for editing high-resolution Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) files.

Meanwhile, Zenph's latest recording, "*Rachmaninoff Plays Rachmaninoff*," continues to win accolades. *Stereophile* magazine recently named it a "Record To Die For," declaring that "this Zenph CD takes your breath away."

Also, Zenph's re-creation of a Rachmaninoff performance with famed violinist Joshua Bell aired last month on PBS's "Live from Lincoln Center."

"We're at the stage where we've proved that the end result of this technology can be artistically important," Frey said. "What we have to do now is go beyond that to [demonstrate] we can make it commercially relevant."

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