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Piano Wizard offers the right notes

By Michelle Mills, Staff Writer

Piano Wizard is an innovative resource which, with the help of your home computer and a keyboard, teaches you how to play piano and read music. The system allows you to learn at your own pace, playing music that you enjoy. Its approach turns your practice sessions into games as it advances you through four steps.

The first step gets you familiar with the keyboard by presenting it like a video game. You can select one of four "worlds"- dinosaurs, sealife, space or futuristic city scenes, to serve as your backdrop. A color-coded keyboard is displayed across the top of your computer screen, which corresponds to the color-coded keyboard you play to destroy encroaching "invaders" as they make their way up the screen.

If you "hit" the invader, you will hear the note of the song you are playing, if you miss or hit the incorrect key, no sound is heard. The invaders move at the correct time, as if you were playing real notes from sheet music. You can adjust the speed as you become more competent and soon you will be ready for the next phase.

The video game aspect remains, but now the keyboard is shown along the side of your computer screen so you can begin to see how notes are organized on the keyboard in reference as to where they appear on the music staff. During these sessions, you will absorb notation patterns and how to better follow the notes in a song.

Step three shuts down the video game and replaces it with color-coded notes. Lines for both left and right hands are added, and you are starting to read real music notation. You complete the learning process with the final phase, where the color-coding has been replaced by traditional keyboard and notation displays.

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During each step, you select the songs you wish to practice and can control the speed you play. The music is always presented in the proper time, just at the pace you desire. Any "error notes" continue to be silent, which is a benefit, as it lessens the distractions adding to your focus on playing correctly.

In testing Piano Wizard, several of us who had never played keyboard before were able to plunk out a song slowly, but successfully within 15 minutes. Children tend to pick up on this method of instruction quite well and enjoy the process. You can also download and play songs from the Internet (many for free) for use with Piano Wizard, so the learning never truly ends.

Piano Wizard is geared for personal computers with Windows and there are two packages available. The Premier Piano Wizard Package comes with software, a MIDI piano keyboard, a USB cable and stickers for \$200. If you have a keyboard, you may prefer the Premier and USB/Midi Combo that contains software, a USB/MIDI cable and stickers for \$140. To order or for more information, call (877) 742-6604 or visit www.pianowizard.com.



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Piano Wizard is a computer application designed to make it fun and easy for kids - and adults - to learn how to play piano. Pictured is the USB powered keyboard, which connects to a PC. The notes on the computer monitor glide across the screen over colored keys that represent the notes on the keyboard. (Tim Berger / Staff Photo)