

PRODUCT reviews

Children's Music Journey

By Savilla Banister

Children's Music Journey (CMJ) is a software collection that allows PK–5 students to take beginning music lessons from the experts—famous composers from the past several centuries.

To interact with the program, students play a musical instrument digital interface (MIDI) keyboard. I used an M-Audio Keyrig-49 MIDI keyboard to explore the collection's three volumes of music lessons and found that the program interfaced immediately with the keyboard's USB connector.

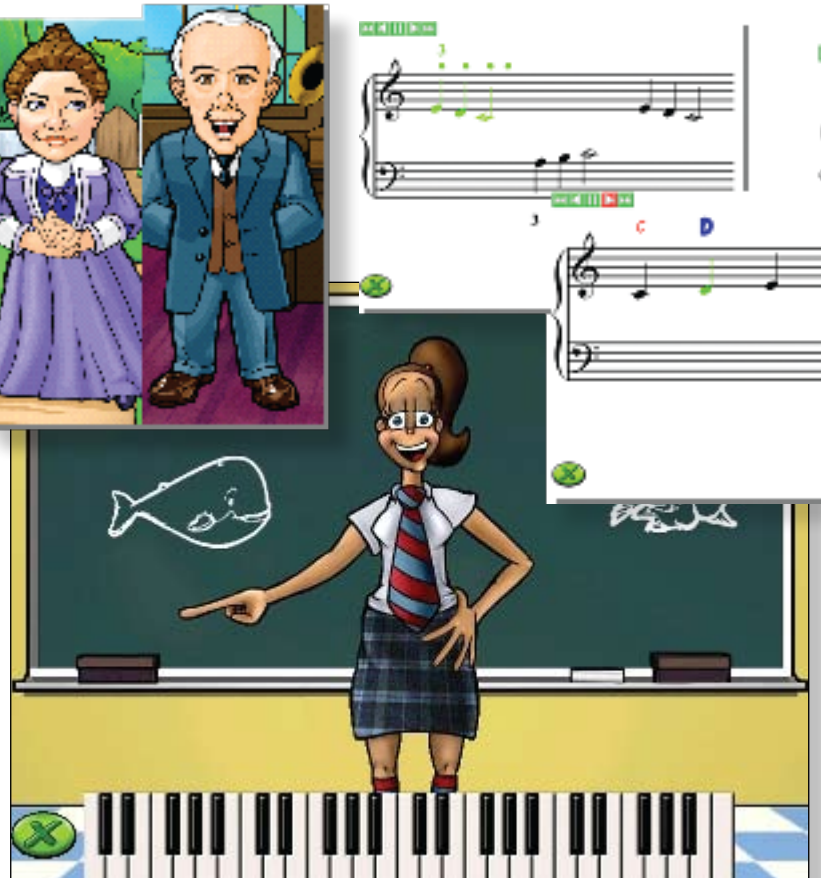
Once connected, users log in for lessons from such luminaries as Ludwig van Beethoven, Scott Joplin, and Fanny Mendelssohn. The selection of characters is refreshingly diverse and includes women and minorities as well as composers from many different musical styles.

Users begin each session by taking a piano lesson from one of the composers. The first segment of each lesson includes a short listening exercise featuring the composer's music, which provides incremental music history and piques the student's interest in actively listening to and commenting on the piece.

After the exercise, the composer/instructor introduces the piano lesson material and regularly asks for specific student feedback. Students drive navigation through each session with a pause/rewind/fast-forward/play controller (positioned in the upper left-hand corner of the screen) and



Students learn from a diverse selection of composers of different genders, ethnic backgrounds, and musical traditions.



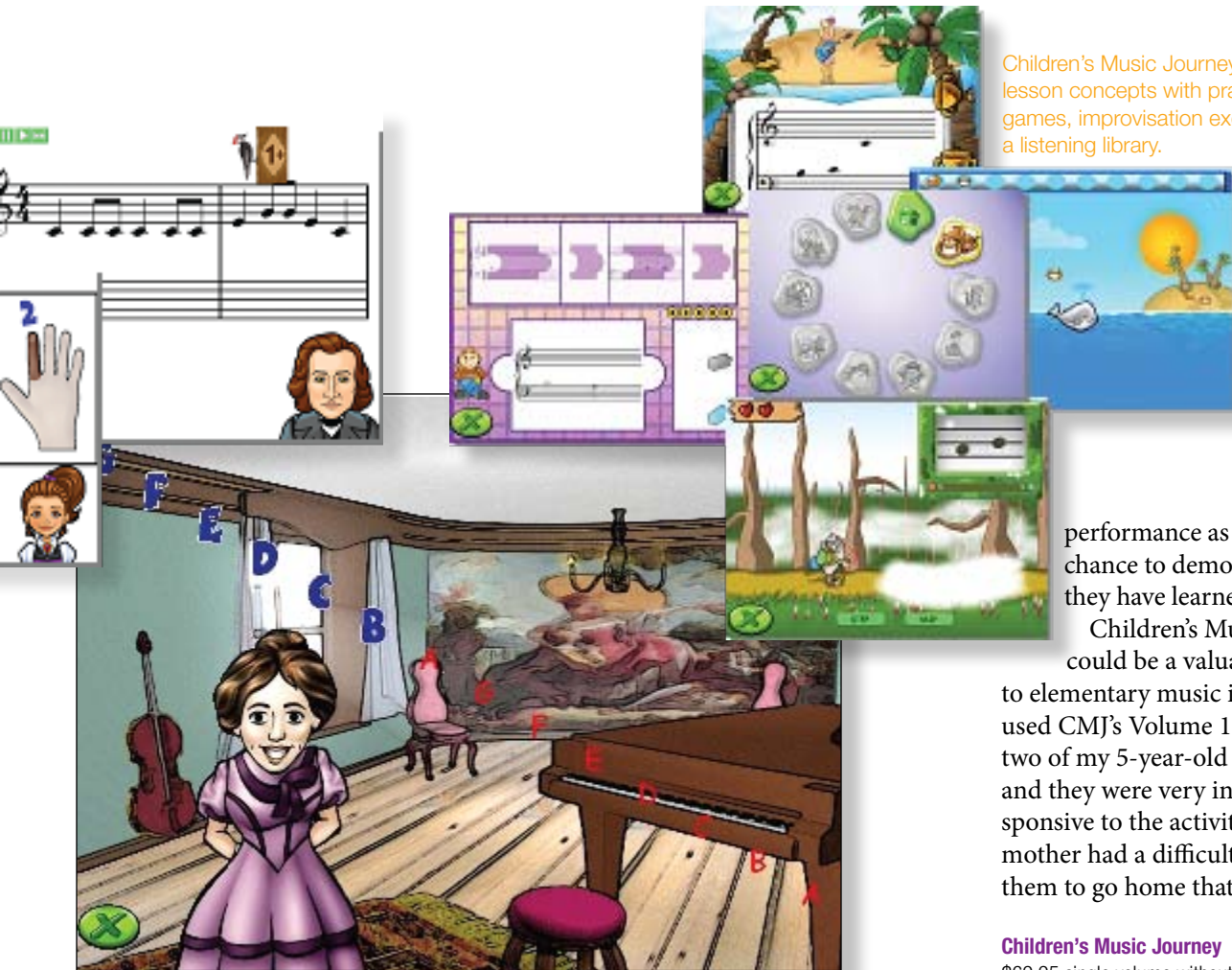
Instructors guide students through musical notation and piano fingering with positive verbal feedback.

play along on the MIDI keyboard. The composer gives immediate feedback on the appropriateness of their input with positive verbal comments such as “Good job,” “Careful,” or “I’m sure it will be better next time,” to guide students through such concepts as music notation. At the end of each lesson, the program encourages students to explore the curriculum through additional reinforcement venues, including practice rooms, games, composition

and improvisation exercises, and a listening library.

CMJ's Volume 1 contains 25 lesson sessions, and Volumes 2 and 3 each contain 35 lessons, for a total of 95 lessons, plus five opportunities for students to demonstrate successive accomplishments in recitals.

Teachers could effectively use CMJ in elementary school music classrooms, private piano studios, or homes. For classrooms with only a few



Children's Music Journey reinforces lesson concepts with practice rooms, games, improvisation exercises, and a listening library.

performance as well as the chance to demonstrate what they have learned.

Children's Music Journey could be a valuable addition to elementary music instruction. I used CMJ's Volume 1 materials with two of my 5-year-old piano students, and they were very interested and responsive to the activities. In fact, their mother had a difficult time convincing them to go home that day!

Children's Music Journey

\$69.95 single volume without keyboard
 \$179.95 single volume with keyboard
 \$174.85 box set (Volumes 1–3) without keyboard
 \$274.85 box set with keyboard
 Adventus Inc., www.adventus.com/products/cmj.php

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computer/MIDI keyboard stations for a class of 25–30 students, the teacher's manual provides materials for face-to-face group activities that correlate with software activities. Teachers would need to systematically rotate students to work stations during class sessions

so that all students would get time with the CMJ software over several days. Student assessment checklists provide a good method for tracking student progress, and suggested regular recitals would give students the valuable experience of public



Savilla Banister has been a piano teacher for more than 30 years and has taught elementary school music. She is an associate professor of classroom technology at Bowling Green State University, where she helps K–12 teachers integrate multimedia technologies. She also serves as L&L's curriculum specialist for the visual and performing arts.