

## TALKING TECH

## Predictions

BY EDWIN MCLEAN

## Keyboards

We live in a technological society. Many inventions which seem so indispensable today hardly existed before 1980: the CD player, the microwave oven, the home computer. Indeed, one hallmark of our society is that we are becoming increasingly technological—a seemingly irreversible process.

As pianists we are primarily engaged with a technology that is over 300 years old—the mechanical piano. The acoustic piano reflects a high level of craftsmanship, creating sonorous tones which cannot be duplicated electronically.

Despite their compromised sound, digital keyboards have improved dramatically in recent years. Not only do they sound more realistic, but new keyboard actions are becoming more like the “real thing.” And ... digital pianos never go out of tune.

Piano teachers are often asked by students and their parents what kind of instrument to buy. For those on a budget, a digital piano has become an ever more attractive option: It is affordable, stays in tune, is compact in size, and its volume can be adjusted to a level that doesn't disturb family or neighbors. Though digital pianos are a compromise, some may be preferable to the inexpensive or used acoustic piano. What kind of piano will you recommend for your students? The more you know about pianos and keyboards, the better your advice will be.

## Prediction

Digital pianos will continue to grow in popularity and improve in quality.

## The Internet

Perhaps one of the most surprising technological developments has been the explosive growth of the Internet. It's hard to believe, but soon most of our students will have used the Internet their entire lives. This is a generation for whom e-mail, MP3s, and Websurfing are routine.

## Prediction

The Internet will continue to grow in popularity, serving as an important transmission medium for recorded and printed music.

## Emerging Technologies

The typical 21st-century piano student uses computers at school, e-mails his/her friends, downloads music from the Web, and may already own a digital keyboard. This is the technological picture of today. We cannot predict what new technological innovations—already in development—will burst on the scene

and become pervasive. Superior technologies quickly crowd out and supplant previous technologies. In 1980, no one could have predicted how quickly the compact disc would render phonograph recordings obsolete. Cassette tape is on the way out, supplanted by CD burners. DVDs are replacing VCR tape. Quality acoustic pianos are already beyond the budget of many students.

## Prediction

New technologies will continue to render past technologies obsolete.

## Coping with Change

Teachers need to keep an eye on emerging technologies, but it is not necessary to rush out and buy every new gadget that comes along. However, the marketplace has its own driving power. Technology can achieve an unstoppable momentum. Accepting the pervasiveness of a successful technology involves a realistic rapprochement with the world around us. With this in mind, I recommend that you become familiar with technologies that have proven to be mainstream:

## ◆ Computers

e-mail  
MP3 files  
music software

## ◆ Digital keyboards and MIDI players

## ◆ Digital audio and video

CD burners  
DVD

Remember, most of these technologies are already an integral part of many students' lifestyle and classroom education. While the traditional paradigm of acoustic piano, paper and pencil, and oral instruction has not lost—and may never lose—its relevance, as teachers we need to confront the challenge of mainstream technology in order to stay relevant.

In subsequent columns, we will examine some of these existing technologies and offer strategies for incorporating technology in the traditional piano lesson. ■■■

Edwin McLean is a free-lance composer who also enjoys a busy career in music publishing. As Senior Piano Editor for The FJH Music Company, he currently divides his time between editing and MIDI orchestration, as well as creating educational keyboard works, many of which are published by The FJH Music Company.