

TALKING TECH

The Video Camera: A Teacher's Best Friend

BY MARY TOY

Students today are more informed and more open to innovations than in previous generations. Their lives are also more fragmented. Time for music study has become a valuable commodity. To ensure that practice is efficient and productive, the teacher needs to utilize and take advantage of every available tool, including technology.

One tool we can use is the video camera, which puts the teacher by the student's side during the practice session and enables the student to progress more quickly. However, it must be used correctly to be effective. Only basic concepts presented in the lesson should be taped. Too much taping will discourage students from using the tape.

Students learn differently. The teacher must decide whether the student is a visual, aural, or tactile learner and make sure the presentation takes this into account. Most young people are more visually, than aurally, oriented. The video camera allows for watching as well as listening to correct practice procedures. Listening will reinforce visual learning, just as seeing will reinforce listening. A tactile learner will need the teacher's "hands on" experience to feel the physical aspect, and this, too, is reinforced by the camera's visual and aural capacities.

Remember How It Feels and Sounds

Recall is another important way in which the video camera is helpful. When students watch the tape, they often recall the feel of the motion, such as a phrase that needs to have arm movement as well as lift at the end. One of the ways I like to teach touch is by having students feel my weight drop on their arms; then they do the same to me. The camera makes it possible for them to see, hear, and remember how this feels. Learning weight transfer then becomes easier and faster. The camera is also invaluable for capturing correct motions for scales, arpeggios, chords, voicing, teacher demonstrations, and much more.

Besides recalling "feel," students learn to listen to tone production and to what kind of tone quality is necessary for a particular piece. Debussy does not sound like Beethoven, nor Chopin like Copland. Students can listen to CDs, but it's the combination of seeing, listening, and recall from the videotape that can vastly alter a student's approach to interpretation.

Practicing with the Videotape

Are there drawbacks to videotaping? Yes, if the student is not taught how to use the tape. Only one concept should be listened to at a time. To play a tape from beginning to end is of little consequence. A student must practice what s/he has just listened to. If it is scale work, for example, students should view only that portion of the tape, then proceed to practice the scale. Encourage students to rewind and review a section to

make sure they follow directions and successfully complete that assignment. From there, they should continue to the next taped assignment, perhaps an etude. Ask them to listen carefully, and to watch the correct practice procedure.

On the "Plus" Side

Are there advantages to using a video camera? Absolutely, if for no other reason than that it gives parents the opportunity to watch and know what is going on at the lesson. For younger students, it allows parents to help with the practice session, and to become a learning partner with the child. This, in turn, builds a musical bond between the child and parent that can last a lifetime. It is a nurturing process. Parents appreciate knowing how to relate to the music and to the concepts being taught, and the teacher receives greater respect and appreciation.

Is there an advantage for the teacher? Yes! All corrections and learning styles are accommodated and reinforced when seeing, listening to, and recalling what has been taped. Directions and teacher demonstrations are more easily assimilated. The student progresses more quickly. Most of all, it helps students learn proper practice procedures, and it saves time. Using a video camera is enormously helpful. Give it a try! ■■■

Mary Toy has a busy studio in Kirkland, Washington. For many years she has adjudicated auditions and festivals and conducted workshops and masterclasses throughout the United States and Canada. She has reviewed materials for *American Music Teacher* and served as an MTNA board member at the state and national levels. For seven years she was division chairman for the national high school piano competition. Her students have won awards at the local, division, and national levels.

Smiles from the Studio

For the holiday recital, one teacher asked students to play their favorite carol and, before playing, to announce the reason for the choice. Both teacher and audience were surprised and amused when one six-year-old said proudly, "I'm going to play Hark, the Herald Angels Sing because my Dad's name is Harold!"

Don't forget to send your own special "smiles" to muszler@pianoteaching.com