

TALKING TECH

The Video Camera: What Students Say

BY MARY TOY

Editor's Note: The first part of this article presents the teacher's point-of-view. (See "The Video Camera: A Teacher's Best Friend," The Piano Adventures® Teacher, December 2003, page 13.) In it you'll find advice on how and what to tape, and how to assign the video for home use.

There are always pros and cons about the use of the video camera in the studio. While the teacher usually sees the most improvement, students also admit to its usefulness.

Students who are having difficulty in a technical area feel they benefit greatly by being able to see a visual demonstration of movements. They appreciate the chance to observe their tensions and see how the teacher presents a solution for relaxation. This enables them to recall the feeling of relaxation, as well as to study the correct approach to the problem. Many students are not aware of their tensions until these are pointed out to them. Often a correction at the lesson does not carry over into the practice session, and this is where the video can perform magic.

Various motions such as horizontal, rotary, wrist, and arm movements are more easily learned when they can be observed during the week of practice. The camera can zoom in to show problems and corrections for these at close range. This is particularly useful for hand position, fingering, "flying off the keys" fingers, and even pedaling. The camera can also zoom out for correction on body alignment and posture. The student can view him or herself as the public does.

A Student Survey

When I took a survey of my students, I found that students felt they received the most benefit from being able to review exactly what went on at the lesson. As Elisa put it, "You can stop the tape and work on an area in depth. A reminder is there to show you how to practice for success. You listen more to your performance, and you can correct mistakes more easily." Alex felt that the video lets her listen with different ears, and teaches her how to listen to herself better when performing.

There is also the element of interpretation. While lengthy discussions on this subject are not suitable for taping, final decisions by the student as to how they wish to convey their intent and a comment or two by the teacher are enough to stimulate more thoughtful ideas during the week. Phrasing is a good example since there are numerous ways to explore shaping possibilities. Balance and voicing are also done through listening. Students can often detect immediately through playback what needs to be corrected. This saves endless time and frustration. Often the self-listening at the lesson or in practice is not focused or intense enough to perceive what needs to be corrected because the student's concentration is on other aspects of performance.

What They Didn't Like

The criticism that came from all students was the time element involved in using the video. They felt that it took time to rewind the tape and to find certain areas that they wished to review.

Some felt that the TV was not always available to them or in another room, and that it took away from practice time, "especially if there is too much unnecessary information", as Quincy put it. Christina solves the problem by taking notes from the video. She then uses them in conjunction with the tape. Quincy does the opposite. She likes not having to take notes.

What I Learned from the Survey

I can see I need to be more careful about what and how much I record. We have spoken before (see the December, 2003 issue) about the fact that young people have little tolerance or patience for listening to a great deal of instruction on the video. This goes back to the teacher talking too much and forgetting to turn the record button off! With self-examination on the part of the teacher, improvements can be made to the satisfaction of all.

The student list of pros, however, far outnumbered the cons. All seemed to feel that using a videotape is a worthwhile project. Perhaps one of the biggest assets is teaching students how to listen to themselves. How often when we ask, "Do you hear how you would like this to sound?" or "Did you hear how beautifully you shaped that phrase?" the answer is, "Not really".

Jeff, who is not only very musical but also has a keen sense of humor, gets the final word. "The tape is one more thing to remember to put in your bag. Specific details from the lesson are available for application during practice. Maybe when Mrs. Toy is about to make a key point, she could do a dance or something and we could stop, watch, and listen to it. With the video you have your own portable Mary Toy for the week!" ■■■

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

When my nephew Cubby was three, I gave him Composer Baseball Cards, and I made personalized tapes for him that would play music by each composer. For example, when he heard *The New World Symphony*, he would dig through his cards, find Dvořák, and triumphantly announce the correct composer.

When he was four, Cubby's parents took him to a Yankees game. Giant video screens were showing the players and their stats. Suddenly, Cubby exclaimed, "Copland, Mommy. That's Copland!" "No," she said. "That's the right fielder." Cubby persisted. "Copland!" His Dad shook his head. "That's a Yankee baseball player." Cubby got stubborn. "COPLAND." Suddenly his Mom understood. Underscoring the player profiles was *Fanfare for the Common Man*!

Eric Rockwell (Via E-Mail)