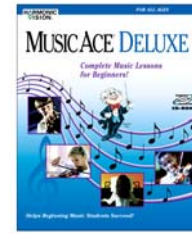


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Music Ace Starter/Music Ace Deluxe

by Tricia Goyer

We've all read about the benefits of music education, yet the task of teaching fundamentals may seem daunting to those (like me!) who are musically challenged. Yet through Music Ace Starter the most basic music theory instruction is offered for less than \$30. Music Ace Deluxe is available for less than \$50.

Music Ace Starter claims that beginners can learn fundamentals in a fast and fun way. When I installed the program for my 10-year-old who has no music training, it seemed too good to be true. After all, could learning about music be fun?

I quickly installed Music Ace Starter and stepped out of the way. My son began the first lesson and had no problem navigating the program. Soon sounds of "Great!" in a chipper voice bellowed from the computer. The voice came from Maestro Max. Under the guidance of this animated tutor, students are led through a carefully sequenced series of music lessons that they can follow at their own pace.

But that wasn't the only sound I heard. Before long Nathan was immersed in the program, giving himself kudos for the progress he was making. Hmmm. Was he having fun?

Music Ace Starter focuses on the basics of music: rhythm, pitch, listening, and the keyboard. Twelve topics are covered:

- The staff
- The piano keyboard
- Beat and tempo
- Hearing rhythms
- Playing with pitch
- Basic rhythm notation
- ABCs of piano keyboard
- ABCs of the staff
- The quarter rest
- ABCs of the treble staff
- The measure
- Notes longer than a beat.

For example, in "Hearing rhythms" one assignment was to listen to two rhythms and then click on "Same" or "Different." In each lesson and game, there is great visual animation such as music notes with happy faces that bounce around. If the correct answer is given, an enthusiastic Maestro Max shouts out praises such as "You did it!" or "Great job!" He's encouraging and fun,

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and he gives specific helps for when an answer was wrong, such as: "You were close. You started that note a little late."

While my son enjoyed the lessons, he did get frustrated when he couldn't get some of the rhythm sections correct. He was ready to give up for the day until I encouraged him to try the Doodle Pad. The Music Doodle Pad allows kids to compose and play their own music. This was the most entertaining part of the program. My son loved playing around with the notes to see what he could create with a variety of instrumental sounds. Included in the Doodle Pad are over 100 sample musical pieces. Kids can listen to and modify these pieces. They can also save their creations.

After completing each lesson, students are challenged to demonstrate what they've learned in the lessons by playing an arcade-like game. The games aren't fancy, but they are fun.

Music Ace Deluxe is similar to Music Ace Starter, but much more in-depth. It's newly released and combines Music Ace and Music Ace II, providing beginning and intermediate music lessons to students ages five and above. Again the goal is to teach the basics regardless of instrument. This deluxe version has 36 lessons-the first dozen or so are the same as the Music Ace Starter program. The lessons on Starter and Deluxe aren't exactly the same-the sequences of Deluxe's lessons have been rearranged to follow today's traditional music education. Music Ace Deluxe also insures that their lessons are the basic skills recommended by the National Standards for Music Education. Topics of Music Ace Deluxe include music theory, note reading, ear training, notation, keyboard, scales, rhythm, melody, key signatures, time signatures and harmony.

I asked my 12-year-old daughter, who has taken two years of piano, to try out the program. While she was able to quickly move past the beginning sections, she found the lessons to be both entertaining and educational. Each lesson builds upon each other, and she was able to return to any lesson at any time. But her favorite part was also the Doodle Pad, which she used to compose unique music. She was thrilled!

These programs also have built-in record-keeping systems that keep track of up to ten family members, which is a nice bonus for homeschooling families. Both Music Ace and Music Ace Deluxe are super easy to navigate. My kids never felt lost or unsure about what to do next.

When researching this product I also discovered that Music Ace programs are used by more than 5,000 school districts in North America. They've also received more than 30 awards for excellence. I have to say that if I could grant an award, I'd give these programs one too! Before reviewing Music Ace Starter and Music Ace Deluxe, I had never related a computer program to learning music theory or learning to play a musical instrument . . . yet, I have to say these programs will help with both! This is a definite must-try for parents whose students don't enjoy music lessons-and a special treat for those who do!



For Grades K-12. Suggested Retail Pricing - \$79.95 (Music Ace Deluxe). \$49.95 (Music Ace or Music Ace 2). All products available from music dealers throughout the United States and Canada; from home school specialists Timberdoodle and Rainbow Resources; and from Amazon.com. Music Ace Starter available through Amazon.com for \$29.95. Windows 95/98/ 2000/Me/NT4/XP and Mac OS 8.1-9x and OS X. General MIDI keyboard optional. Free demos available for download at www.harmonicvision.com.

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