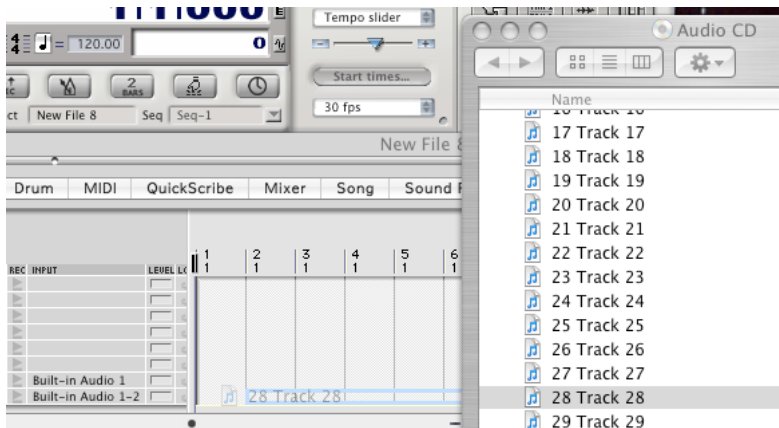


Seven Applications of Digital Audio in the Elementary Classroom

Ken Peters

1. Teaching music understanding can be a real challenge for the younger grades. One way is to teach chord roots to songs. There are many two-chord songs to which the children can sing and play the chord roots. First, import the song from your series CD into your sequencer program.



In Digital Performer, this is easily accomplished by having Digital Performer's tracks window and the CD's song list both visible on the screen. You drag and drop the CD track onto a blank stereo track.

While listening to the recording, I record a xylophone bass part (I use the GM marimba sound however). You do not have to worry that the song does not line up with the measures of the sequencer. The class learns and sings the song with the bass part turned off. I then turn on the bass part and play my "air" xylophone. Students try to figure out the pattern. We sing the letter names* and play our "air" xylophones. (Playing "air" xylophones is better than hitting their legs because many times if they hit their legs they leave their hand on their legs instead of tapping their legs) I have four or five instruments set up in the front of the room with students in rows behind them. The first and second person in line have a pair of mallets. After the first verse is sung, the person who just played gives the mallets to the third person in their row so that each person can start their verse from beat one. All students sing the chord roots as the song plays. The ultimate goal is to have the students hear and sing the roots of the progression of a new song. Some two chord songs: Sandy Land; One, Two, Three Alary; Shoe Fly; Polly Wolly Doodle. It is always enjoyable to watch the students who realize that the first two songs (as well as the A section of Shoe Fly) all have the same chord progression. We then 'test' whether these songs can be sung at the same time. That is when I introduce the concept of partner songs because **they** have discovered why it works.

2. The best way to make your midi sequences sound better is to add at least one track of a real instrument. I will always add an acoustic or electric guitar playing chords, as that is one of the harder instruments to program correctly into a sequence. A saxophone is also an excellent choice because it is very hard for midi to reproduce the subtle timbre changes that a real saxophone produces. On occasion, I perform songs up a half or whole step from the original notation so I don't record the digital audio until I am certain what key we are going to perform the song.

3. Another use of digital audio with midi is to give directions to a dance. Before we learn a dance, I add an audio track to my midi sequence and record myself giving the directions to the dance on that track. (This helps my voice, as I am normally too loud giving directions while the music is playing and it is also helpful to me because I don't have to look up the directions each time I want to teach it!) As we learn and repeat the steps, I turn down the volume of the directions. Because the music is midi, I can also make the dance as long as I want. (If you take your time, you can also copy and paste digital audio to make a song longer or use the loop feature on your sequencer.)

4. With my recorder students, I usually start at a very slow speed and have one track were a student or I sing the letter names* of the melody. As we master the song, I turn this track off and then speed up the song. I do not re-record the letter names for the faster or finished tempos, however. By then they have the melody memorized.

*In my classes, we always use Solfege names not letter names.

5. Whenever I do a round, I usually have some digital audio tracks recorded. I might record the class, a student or myself singing the song. I copy and paste that track to another track and pan the tracks hard left and hard right. Now students can have a leader for their group. Don't overlook the loop feature here also. Most of the time prerecorded rounds (or dances for that matter) don't go long enough for my purposes. I loop everything!

6. Digital audio is also fun to teach augmentation and diminution. While listening to a click track, record yourself reading "Miss White". Copy and paste it to another track and shrink or stretch the audio. In Digital Performer you would highlight the audio and from the Region menu choose Scale Time ... Select 50%. Copy and paste the original to another track and do the above directions but change to 200%. Pan one hard left, the other hard right and leave the original in the middle.

7. Finally, record students singing. Students love to hear themselves and it is a great time for you evaluate their voices. After my concert in the spring, I record some of my best singers singing their chorus songs. In a few years if I want to use a song again, the chorus will modeling one of their classmates.