

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

# Where's 'Piano Hero?'

**G**uitar *Hero* and *Rock Band* video games have had a monumental influence on our culture's awareness of playing guitar and drums. Why not apply this to pianos and keyboards? "Living On A Prayer," "Smoke On The Water" and "Won't Get Fooled Again" have keyboard parts, so what's the problem?

At Vans Warped Tour 2007, I spoke with kids who quit playing piano because they said it was boring, even after four years of lessons. I asked them if they wanted to learn to play like the pro keyboardists on stage. "Hell, yeah!" they said.

Over the years, we've changed the way we teach guitar but not the way we teach piano. Guitar methods now come with play-along CDs; feature famous rock songs; and show chords, notes and tablature. However, most of us teach piano the way my 90-year-old mom learned it with method, theory and scale books. I recently visited a high school keyboard lab and watched the World War II teaching approach keep boring piano lessons alive and well. The kids hated the class.

## THE RIGHT METHOD FOR THE RIGHT STUDENT

The traditional method still works for the beginning elementary school kid, but what about the *Guitar Hero*-playing age group? And what about the adult who wants to play for fun?

At the recent National Association of School Music Dealers convention in Tucson, Ariz., a guitarist friend of

mine asked about taking piano lessons for fun but wasn't interested in taking "traditional" lessons. I was stumped. We can teach people how to play guitar for fun but not piano? Doesn't every method start with five fingers and the five white notes? So what difference does the musical content make? Why can't we

teach piano and keyboards the same way we teach guitar?

## THE RIGHT STAFF, BOOKS

The *Piano Hero* video game concept can breathe new life into your music lesson program and create new music makers. But you need to get students up and running fast. Do you have teachers with traditional training who play keyboards in bands or worship groups? These teachers are your best bet. A staff of classical pianists probably won't buy this concept. You need teachers who can teach both sides of the street.

You also need to have a method book for this alternative piano student.

The traditional books won't cut it. Check out the Hal Leonard FastTrack series. These books get students playing with a CD and use classic rock songs.

## HOW TO MARKET 'PIANO HERO'

Where can we market this concept? Junior high and high school piano classes are a good place to start. One of your teachers could offer a weekly how-to clinic to a class. The school's piano teacher is probably a band or choir director who got stuck teaching piano and might welcome the outside resource. Help school teachers by introducing fun materials they may not have known existed. Show students that piano is fun, and pick up some new lesson sign-ups along the way.

## THE RIGHT AND WRONG LESSONS

I know arguments about the right and wrong way to teach will surface with a *Piano Hero* teaching method. So, how do I know this will work? In 1964, I wanted to play piano in a rock band. Luckily, I ran into a jazz organ player who gave me lessons the wrong way. I played keyboards all through college to pay for my trumpet degree. I also see in my own teaching how wrong can often be right. **MI**

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