

These two award-winning programmes by Harmonic Vision Software have been around a few years now. Let's see if they still stack up...

Music Ace is a computer-assisted learning (CAL) programme that is designed to make learning music fun. It contains 24 self-paced sessions that "accelerate development and reinforce fundamental music skills and an understanding of music theory" (<a href="http://www.harmonicvision.com">http://www.harmonicvision.com</a>). Music Ace 2 adds another 24 sessions (see the sidebar below for details).

Each session also has a game to add interest. High scores can even be posted on the Harmonic Vision website. As well as games scores the programme tracks progress through the lessons.

There are several lessons in each session so overall there are more than 100 including the games.

Installation is straightforward and Music Ace will still run on OS9 or OS8. With a memory requirement of a mere 32MB it won't be asking too much of your computer.

On start-up Music Ace plays a lively keyboard version of the Guitar Boogie and it is immediately obvious that a lot of work has gone into animation, with the keys playing in various colours (one colour for each part; melody, chords etc). The notes also pop up on the staff and have eyes, and mouths that open as they play. There is shadowing to provide a 3D effect, though both this and the note "faces" can be turned off if required.

Proceeding through the lessons really is child's-play, with the "Maestro" (tutor) giving simple instructions and feedback by saying 'correct' or 'try again'. It is easy to see why Music Ace has been installed in thousands of classrooms around the world. The programme is pitched (if you'll excuse the pun) at years 3-8 but could be used by a musical novice of any age. Year 1-2 students could even engage with the programme on an entertainment level, and this might encourage them to explore the learning side of it later on.

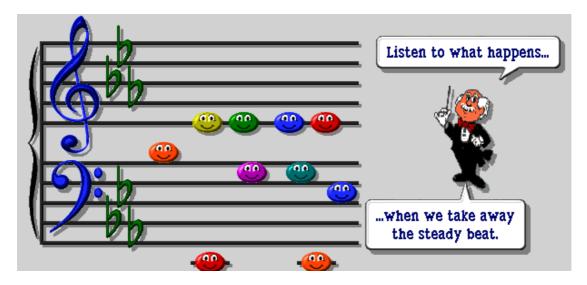


fig. 1 A typical Music Ace window, showing the Maestro and the cute smiley-face notes (they open their mouths and shut their eyes when they sound).

## **Music Ace Lessons**

- Staff & keyboard relationship
- · Pitch identification
- · Note reading
- · Listening skills
- · Sharps & flats
- · Intro to key signature
- · Keyboard basics
- · Major scales
- Octaves
- · Treble, bass & grand staff
- Whole & half steps

Music Ace covers the very basics of music theory – the staff, the notes on the staff, and the notes on a keyboard. The last lesson (24) is on the major scale so it moves slowly enough for even quite young children. Along the way are various activities to allow students to explore and create. This pedagogy sets Music Ace apart from being just an electronic music textbook and/or set of drills. There is also a lesson on timbre: "This reviewer appreciated the early introduction to the concepts of timbre, these ideas are usually left out in most beginning approaches to music and theory" (the Piano Education Page).

In Music Ace 2 the main focus is on rhythmic concepts. It also introduces the minor scales (lesson 19) and intervals (lesson 22) and ends with an introduction to harmony with some basic triads. As you can see, we are talking about the rudiments here – don't expect Music Ace to turn you into Barry Manilow (now there's a scary thought-ed.).

As well as the lessons and games there is a Doodle Pad. This can act as a Jukebox, playing the tunes supplied. These can be used for aural training. Notes here can also be edited. Alternatively, a completely new piece of music can be written and arranged. This sets Music Ace apart from some music tuition software – the student can also create music.

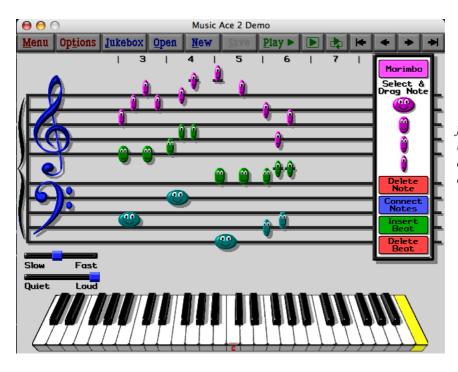


fig. 2 The Doodle Pad allows the student to perform basic composition, arranging, and orchestration.

There are also educator versions of Music Ace and Music Ace 2. These have a helpful educator's guide to help teachers get best use out of the programmes, and include extra resources such as award certificates, progress sheets, and so on. The educator version is also a network version capable of handling 3,600 (yes, that's 3,600) users.

## **Music Ace 2 Lessons**

- Standard Notation
- Tempo
- Comparing Rhythms
- · Rhythmic Dictation
- Echoing
- Counting
- Quarter Notes
- Eighth Notes
- Rests
- Measures
- All Key Signatures
- Hearing Melodies
- Melodic Contour
- Syncopation
- Half Notes & Ties
- Dotted Quarter Notes
- · Sixteenth Notes
- Rhythmic Composition
- Time Signature
- Major & Minor Scales
- Intro to Intervals
- Three Sounds Per Beat
- 6/8 Time
- Intro to Harmony
- Ear Training
- Composing Melodies
- Distinguishing Melodies & Harmonies

## Verdict

Price: \$99 NZ (standard version) Availability: Apple Education Centres

RATINGS (out of 10)

Ease of Use 10
Range of Tasks 9
Fun Factor 9
Value for money 8.5
Reliability 9

**OVERALL RATING** 9.1

## Conclusion

Learning music theory is great fun for about 5% of people (yes- it's that same few who love maths). The rest of us are going to need this pill sugar coated, and Music Ace certainly comes up trumps. It does show a few signs of wear against programmes that are newly written for OS X, but the animations are still great fun for young and old alike (why, I haven't had such a good time on a computer since Thinking Things came out). Underneath this frivolous exterior are two solid sets of music lessons that encompass theory, composition and aural perception. As with all CAL programmes the Music Ace series is designed to compliment class teaching or individual tuition, rather than replace it. Used this way Music Ace will be a card up the sleeve of any school or private music teacher, or parent.