



# And the band played... Palms?

## Bryan Bogue

By Erin Long-Kytonen ('03)

As technology grows increasingly smaller, many computerized devices are targeting younger age groups – hand-held video games, electronic pets, even personal information managers for kids. And let's face it – most of us know one or two youngsters who have a better grasp on the latest technology than their parents do.

That said, seeing a fifth-grader fully absorbed with his or her hand-held computer probably wouldn't strike you as being particularly unusual. An entire classroom full of such students might not even set off alarms of peculiarity. After all, it's probably an elective gaming class or perhaps a class that explores modern computer technologies. Or so you might think.

But if it's Bryan Bogue's classroom at Spokane's Libby Center, those students are doing something you would probably never guess – they're learning music.

Bogue, who teaches gifted fifth and sixth grade students in the Odyssey program of Spokane School District 81, has developed a curriculum that uses hand-held technology to teach music fundamentals. The connection may not be an obvious one to the average person, but this music educator of 15 years is no stranger to using technology

as a tool for understanding and appreciating music.

The marriage of technology and fine art is something that Bogue first became interested in when he was a percussion student at EWU. "Students could use recording studios for free," he remembers, "and that's where my love for recording and composition really developed."

He graduated from Eastern in 1979 with a bachelor's degree in music and went on to be principal percussionist for the Spokane Symphony before earning his teaching credentials at Whitworth and a master's degree in music education from the University of Washington.

Committed to sharing his interest in recording with students, Bogue designed in-class workstations for his music classes, each consisting of a computer, music software, MIDI keyboard and headphones. He managed to acquire seven of these stations over the years, but with an average class size of 28 students, individual student access to the equipment was limited.

It was a simple software advertisement that would forever change the way his students experienced music. The ad was for a California-based software company – miniMusic – that offers programs for learning abilities such as note reading, rhythm and composition, all designed for use on the Palm platform.

Immediately seeing the potential benefits for his classroom, Bogue wrote and submitted a proposal, appropriately named P.A.L.M. (Potential Artists Learning Music), to Palm, Incorporated. However, when considerable time passed without a response,

it seemed that his vision might not become reality.

Imagine his surprise when he came back from spring break two years ago to find 15 donated Palm computers on his piano.

The hardware secured, Bogue made a deal with miniMusic to use their software in exchange for his own lesson plans. The software takes students through activities that are both interactive and entertaining. The BugBand software, for example, shows animated insects crawling across an on-screen musical staff. Students must tap corresponding notes on the piano keyboard at the bottom of the screen to rid the staff of pesky bugs and progress to the next level. Bugs move faster with each level, and students in turn learn to read music more quickly.

Not only are they learning to read music – they're writing music of their own. Software lets students compose four-part pieces of music, assigning each part with a different instrument. Tone module clips let students hear their MIDI compositions, giving instant feedback. "It lets them experience music in a different way because they're getting *inside* of the music," Bogue says.

And if music theory and composition weren't already impressive enough, his students recently put their Palms to use in yet another way – as musical instruments. When he learned of a college professor who was using Palms with his graduate classes, Bogue was beside himself. "I knew that I had to get in touch with him," he said. A visit was arranged, graduate students and Odyssey students coming together to form a 28-piece Palm orchestra, complete with conductors. "It was amazing," Bogue says of the contemporary ensemble.

However, he also insists that his teaching method is not designed to replace the traditional old piano we all remember so fondly from our music classes. In fact, he hopes that in the future, students will be able to print out their compositions as sheet music that can be played on actual instruments. The goal is to foster a greater appreciation of music and an understanding of music theory and composition.

Bogue's teaching method is not only innovative, but also cost-effective and time-efficient. Roughly \$400 gets all hardware and software, compared with the \$4,000 cost for the workstations he had relied on previously. Palms let everybody work at the same time. "Before, there were always students waiting in line for their turn. Now the kids are 100 percent involved, 100 percent of the time."

Higher quality learning for one-tenth of the cost. That's music to everyone's ears.

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