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Bart Noorman's Virtual Music School DVD ROM Performing Musician issue October 2009 - David Etheridge.

Depending on your temperament and those of your teacher(s), learning music can either be a joyful and exciting voyage of discovery, or like pulling teeth. There's a tremendous amount to be learned, understood and then used, but getting the info you want can take time and you may need to look at any number different sources for the learning that you need.

It's taken a while, but finally someone has come up with a computer-based, user-friendly music package that takes advantage of all the currently popular media formats, and uses them together to give you a complete course in practical music. Virtual Music School, the creation of Bart Noorman of Utrecht Conservatory, is now part of the conservatory's first year music course. Once you look further into the DVD it's easy to see why, so let's look at the approach and contents in a little more depth.

What we have here is a complete course for established students (ie. not beginners) in melody, rhythm and harmony, using movies, MP3s and PDFs in a totally integrated way. With 4 hours of video across 47 movies, 75 pages of practical exercises, 11 original songs, and hundreds of MP3s in examples and exercises all over 2 GB of data, you've got the complete package for teachers and students in schools, colleges or for home study and training.

Once you've loaded the DVD onto your hard drive, VMS opens in a browser window. The four sections at the top are Home, Basics, Sections and Services. The Home section tells you all about using the DVD and the files there, and points out that the play-alongs come in different forms for study and practice: complete, no melody (with an 'NM' suffix to the file), no harmony (NH), no bass (NB) and no drums (ND). The PDF scores are available in all 12 keys and there are hints on the scales and improvising, amongst many more useful tips. The Basics section gives you... the basics! This includes music vocabulary (descending cycle of fifths, intervals, chord symbols, docs and PDFs), with FAQs, exercises and ear-training tests.

Now all of this would be enticing enough in itself as source material, but what makes VMS very appealing is the whole method of presentation. The use of video files, so that you can see the music with explanatory annotations while you are listening to it and playing along, gives you the most accessible means of learning currently devised. Much of the more theoretical material is explained in a simple and elegantly presented way that's sure to cut down the time it takes to absorb the material fully. While the material is based on blues, jazz and Latin styles, this is the kind of stuff that you can actually use practically in your playing and understanding of music, regardless of your style and idiom, and there's enough material to keep you absorbed for months, if not longer. A no time you be stumped or confused in your learning, as the cross-references, hyperlinks and FAQs are only one mouse click away.

Updates for the course are available from the VMS website, and you can view an introductory movie all about VMS there. So overall this complete package provides the very best music course for the serious and enquiring student. It's price would represent just a few hours teaching from a tutor, and there are complete packages in formats for both lecturers and students. In summary: unbeatable, student-friendly tuition in an innovative form. It's probably the type of package you wish you had years ago - I know I do!

Bart Noorman's Virtual Music School

A patient and personal music coach who is always at your disposal, to train you to a professional level. That's how you could describe the DVD Virtual Music School best.

Bart Noorman teaches music theory and ear training the conservatory of Utrecht. The training system he developed tested over a period of several years now appears as a package for self study, and is called Virtual Music School. This is a DVD for music students and advanced music school pupils who want to enhance their skills in jazz and pop music and increase their knowledge of the theory behind it. However: the practical aspects (ear training and improvisation) are not forgotten. The material is presented in accessible movies. For reference pdfs are available, summarizing the content of the videos, which you can print if you want to.

Basis

Which subjects does the VMS cover? In the Basics of the program the main musical vocabulary is explained, like the circle of fifths (using scales), intervals (distances between tones), chord symbols and melodic phrasing. Most Western music is based on this and it might open your eyes for things you did not know but already experienced on a subconscious level. After that you get a number of practical assignments (like 'write down this scale in 12 keys') to familiarize the material and bring it into practice. Each chapter in this series ends with a number of ear training tracks. These help you to recognize intervals and chords, an ability you need for making remixes. All ear training tracks are available on the DVD as separate mp3s, so that you can copy them to your mp3 player and practice in the train. In many cases the answers to the exercises are within the audio, so that you don't need papers to check your work.

In-depth material

The so-called Sections treat various musical principles and specific types of chord progressions. To name a few: guide tone lines, diminished chords, tritone substitutions (a somewhat cryptic description of a principle used in jazz and intelligent pop music), rhythm changes, thematic solos, and the meaning of the clave pattern in latin music. Each subject is divided into a consistent series of practical assignments, all of which form an impressive training program you can use for years.

Services

Finally, the material of the program is organized categorically in the Services column, which also hosts additional essays regarding how to practice, melodic shapes, walking bass, guide tone lines and how to use these in chord progressions, alterations (playing 'outside' the chords), and how you can make your lines sound more interesting.

How it works in practice

The way the material is presented in this program is highly effective. Through 46 movies the theory is illustrated directly with musical examples. The cursor line follows the notes, marking the position of the music. You can hardly get more efficient.

The original compositions in this course are all written by Bart Noorman, and are performed with a mixture of real instruments and high quality samples. The rhythm tracks are so well programmed that you never feel that you are working with an instant midi file, partly thanks to the contributions of the multi-talented Bert van den Brink.

A demo version of the VMS is available on www.virtualmusicschool.org. New additions also appear here.

Conclusion

The Virtual Music School is a very complete package for music education for anyone who wants to expand his knowledge of music, train his ears up to a professional level or wants to learn to improvise in jazz, blues, latin and other styles. You should know that this program is not for beginners, and you must be able to read sheet music at a reasonable level. With this package you get an impressive training program at your disposal that has ripened for many years and therefore is very balanced. And all of it in fact, for a ridiculously low price.

Music Maker - October 2008 - Marten Schulp

Bart Noorman's Virtual Music School

The biggest advantage of a real live music teacher is that he/she listens, corrects you and gives you advice on your playing and stumbling blocks. You can hardly imagine better music lessons apart from that than going through Bart Noorman's dvd teaching method Virtual Music School.

The dvd contains two gigabytes of material. You are advised to copy everything to the harddisk for smoother operation. The package is compatible with both Mac and Windows; Virtual Music School simply plays in your internet browser. Through a conveniently arranged menu structure you can access dozens of lessons. They vary from exercises, theoretical and practical chapters, to complete tracks with music notation and textual analyses presented in movies. The package also contains play-along tracks for all instruments, including printable charts. The amount of material is huge, too much to discuss here.

Noorman's method focuses on accompaniment and improvisation. Therefore, most of the material is based on jazz and related styles like blues and latin. In addition to clear lessons in various theoretical areas, the audio tracks especially deserve a big compliment. For each instrument a play-along track is available from which your own part is omitted. Most tracks are midi-based, but everything is well-programmed and mixed with excellent samples. Apart from that, we also are treated to a number of tracks with guests like jazz hero Bert van den Brink on piano.

Beside scale and chord material, one of the other subjects the author handles is phrasing, with elements like motives and construction. Highly clarifying and very original are the 'wrong/right'-tracks. The music is shown in a movie, in which the weak phrases are pointed out with a few words. A better alternative follows, again with clear explanations.

All in all, this package is highly recommended. Virtual Music School offers you a gigantic stack of valuable lessons and practice material, which you can use for months if not years.

Guitarist magazine - November 2008 Michiel Roelse

Bart Noorman's Virtual Music School

The Virtual Music School is an instructional dvd for everyone who is interested in improvisation. The good thing about the chosen format is that virtually all possibilities of multimedia are used. Subjects are explained in movies, and further explored with additional material in mp3 and pdf format. The movies appear to be a great tool: during playback of the excellent example songs you not only follow the melody but also the chords and the applied scales, and you get tips and explanations along the way. Listening to something and seeing what is happening at the same time is, in my opinion, the best way to learn something fast. If you need extra material to practice, you'll find 2 GB of it on this dvd. Struggling with timing? Go to the Rhythm Gym. Finally want to master II-V-I-progressions? Choose the II-V-I-facilities. You think your ears should open up? VMS offers 174 ear training exercises in mp3 format.

Fortunately the author Bart Noorman managed to keep the user interface transparent and intuitive, despite the huge amount of material. Noorman is teaching at the conservatory of Utrecht in Holland. He did not develop the VMS for jazz musicians only, though the material will appeal to them right away; blues, latin and pop lovers can also learn a lot from this dvd. In fact, the Virtual Music School suits anyone who wants to know how music is constructed – music education at its best! More information at www.virtualmusicschool.org. The dvd costs €99, and the optional workbook €25,-. (Michiel Roelse).

Muziekwereld - magazine of NTB, Union for musicians and actors - December 2008 - by Dave Vervegaard

Bart Noorman's Virtual Music School

Learning to improvise and understanding how this works isn't easy. You need to understand scales, chords and chord progressions and you need to develop a "good ear". This takes time, energy and perseverance. As a keyboard teacher, I am reminded daily about how hard it is to keep students motivated towards this aspect of musicianship. There is plenty of material available, but it is often hard for students to work with. This results in them losing track of the big picture.

A while ago NTB asked me to review Bart Noorman's "Virtual Music School". At first I was sceptical about how much one can learn about playing an instrument from a DVD, but soon I found out that it's actually about exploring the world of the music itself. This DVD not only helps a beginner in the world of improvisation get started, it also helps a more advanced student broaden their vocabulary. It covers harmony and scales for chords and chord progressions. Timing and rhythmic phrasing are also handled extensively. I am especially enthusiastic about the movies that are used. They're fun and they really help. Because you hear what you see on the movie, everything is immediately clear. Additional ear training exercises complete the package.

Conclusion

Although I think students still need a teacher's guidance, this DVD is ideal for studying music. It makes a lot of this material more tangible.

Prices excl. VAT - The full version costs €99. The student version costs €45,-. In this version the answers to the written exercises have been omitted... and the price is more conducive to the average student budget. There is also a workbook available (€25,-), in a student version and a teacher version (with answers). Although these books can be printed as a pdf, ordering them saves you the trouble of printing (doublesided) and binding if you want to have the whole package at once.

[Slagwerkkrant \(Dutch drummers magazine\)](#) - December 2008 - by Mark Eeftens

DVD-rom Bart Noorman - Virtual Music School

Should drummers know something about music theory? There are differences of opinion on this, but it is an unwritten law that drummers with a knowledge (even if it is limited) of theory and composition definitely have the advantage. Drummers enrolled at professional music schools must meet the same requirements as the other students. This of course, is much tougher for drummers than it is for guitarists and pianists. Melody and harmony are daily fare for the latter but not for the average drummer.

Bart Noorman's DVD: "Virtual Music School" offers everything you need to improve your theory and ear training skills (even at advanced levels). Using a large number of movies and exercises, the DVD takes you step by step through some pretty tough material. The main advantage is that you can study at your own pace: watching these movies ten times if necessary. Furthermore, the DVD contains extensive ear training material, play-alongs, printable pdf's, and even puzzles that make studying the material more fun. And what to say about his "Rhythm Gym": not only interesting for drummers, but also for those musicians who are rhythmically less endowed. The fact that it is in English, is actually an advantage: so many foreign students study at conservatoria, that English is often the common language. This way, you can join the conversation and you'll know what your fellow student from say, Israel is talking about.

The only disadvantage, namely that the dvd is in English, is an advantage at the same time: many foreign students study at conservatoria, so English is the common language. That way you can join the conversation, and you know what your fellow student from say Israel is talking about.

Structurewise, the dvd works very pleasantly, and it *really* contains a lot of material. If I was in conservatory now, I'd definitely want it. I'd even want it if I was preparing for the entrance exam. Even for those applying as drummers, the ear training and theory entrance requirements at conservatories can be pretty steep. Perhaps conservatories should - if the material appeals to them - consider integrating Virtual Music School in their syllabus. (Mark Eeftens).

[Wusik Sound Magazine](#) - February 2009 - by David Keenum

A 4 page PDF [available here](#)

Bart Noorman's Virtual Music School is available for £99.00 (including VAT & delivery) & can be ordered securely from our sister site [Music in a Jiffy](#)