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Microsoft Musical Instruments. Microsoft Corporation and Dorling Kindersley, 1993. CD-ROM, in Windows and Macintosh versions. \$59.95.

There have been six major developments in genus Homo's ways of learning about things not directly before our eyes; speech, image-making, writing, printing, and electronic transmission came to us, always with shorter time spans from one to the next. Telegraph and telephone came into being before any present lifetimes, but it is our privilege to be present at the latest revolution, the interactive phase of electronic information technology, manifested most notably in the computer user's acquisition of material from online sources and from CD-ROMs. Although the CD-ROM has been around for several years, its explosive proliferation came precisely in 1993.

The CD-ROMs that I most admire offer their content in almost perfect plasticity: the recipient chooses, puts in order, browses, skims, skips, lingers, ponders, broadens, or narrows the context. At every point of repose the user can choose among a few or many directions in which to proceed, including retracing one or more steps. The result is an acquisition of information that is different in kind from that offered by all the old technologies, notably in being shaped by the recipient. The effect is maybe a little like immediate experience of the matter but most closely resembles primal human learning, in which the bodily present teacher talks, demonstrates, answers questions, and perfects the learner's understanding.

Among the very best CD-ROM issues to date, *Microsoft Musical Instruments* strikes me as an almost perfect realization of the potential of this brave (like Miranda, I mean no irony) new world. It is easy to use, fast, and packed with information. *Musical Instruments* opens with a title screen; the speakers present a bit of a percussion flourish, followed by twenty seconds of Weber's Clarinet Concerto No. 1, at the end of which the four-part Contents screen is displayed: "Families of Instruments," "Instruments of the World," "Musical Ensembles," "A-Z of Instruments." One simply clicks on the appropriate heading or picture, and the next screen appears.

"Families of Instruments" is divided into Brass, Strings, Woodwind, Keyboard, and Percussion. Selecting, for example, the "Brass" family brings up a screen with a little text and five pictures of basic types, from which one may make the next selection. Similarly, the other families are

represented by from four to thirteen subtypes; selecting any of these leads to still further subdivisions.

Choosing "Instruments of the World" brings up a map of the world; clicking on any of nine regions brings up an enlarged map with pictures of all the folk or traditional instruments that are covered in that area; one may select a sound sample or go to the screen for any instrument depicted. "Musical Ensembles" focuses on several standard ensemble categories and their subtypes; all are Western except the gamelan. A recorded example of each can be called up. "A-Z of Instruments" invites you to click on a letter of the alphabet and then choose from small photos of instruments whose names begin with that letter. The "Index" button brings you a space to type anything you are looking for and alternatively a list from which you may select: instrument names and other terms, ensembles, composers of the examples, instrument families. At the top of all screens is a row of buttons that offer further opportunities for choice: Contents, Index, Back, Next, and Random, the last of which jumps among instruments, automatically playing an example of the sound of each.

Any of the four Contents categories leads quickly to the heart of *Musical Instruments*, the presentations of some two hundred instrument types. When the display for any instrument has been called up, one may click on an icon for the pronunciation of its name, one to play a usually fifteen-second recorded example, one for additional facts, one for Types that goes back to the broader family; sometimes there are points on which to click for facts about parts of the instrument. The Facts box gives additional brief text and often more icons, for example, for a recorded demonstration of the complete range. There is sometimes a Sound Box, with which you can choose to hear any note of a scale as played by the instrument and even play a tune, if you're adept with the mouse.

In comparison with other CD-ROMs, *Microsoft Musical Instruments* is more than user-friendly. Interactions and cross-references are remarkably rich; moving around is extremely easy. The speed of responses to the user's commands is impressive; the longer musical examples take three or four seconds to begin, but all other responses are satisfactorily close to instantaneous.

The color photos are of excellent quality. As adjuncts to the main photos, there are quite a few small photos and drawings—players,

instrument varieties, old depictions. Any screen can be printed. The results on a black-and-white laser printer are usable, but not elegant: the text as well as the pictures are reproduced in a rather coarse-screened halftone. A good color printer probably produces very satisfactory results. The recorded examples appear to be mono, but the quality is good. Most of those of specific instruments were recorded especially for the CD-ROM. Credits can be called up with "About Musical Instruments" on the Apple menu (in the Macintosh version).

Most of the staff writers are not known to me as organologists, but Jeremy Montagu and Peter Cooke are listed as the consultants. The research has been carried out with care, so that it is difficult to find anything to quibble about. The spoken pronunciations of instrument names are occasionally the standard mispronunciations, e.g., of tabla, sarangi, celesta. The Jew's harp, long recognized as an aerophone, is classified as an idiophone and even more contrarily as a percussion instrument. The African linguaphone is called *mbira*, only one of its many names. About the only thing that might have been added to good effect would be some short motion pictures to demonstrate such sequences as playing techniques and keyboard and valve actions.

Those of us for whom the book is the model for information sources might be taken aback by one aspect of *Musical Instruments*: the number of words about each instrument or ensemble is very small, corresponding in toto perhaps to half a column in the *New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*. But to complain about the brevity of text would be like asking a peacock to be a parrot. What this CD-ROM offers is quite marvelous in its own way; if one wants more words, one can open a book.

Who might benefit from working with *Microsoft Musical Instruments*? Recognizing what it omits (ancient and medieval instruments, and many types of folk and non-Western instruments), I still feel it to be an almost ideal text for classroom or self-instruction, above all for the attractiveness of its presentation and its ready accommodation of the user's preferred paths of exploration. Most musicians experienced in the Western musical world will not learn much that is new to them about the standard instruments; most persons knowledgeable about world music will be familiar with the ethnic instruments. But anyone at all will enjoy spending some time with *Musical Instruments*.

Most recently purchased multimedia or audiovisual computers will accept *Musical Instruments*. The Windows version requires a multimedia

compliant 386 or higher, four megabytes of RAM, a hard drive, an audio board, headphones or speakers, a VGA display, and either Windows or DOS 3.1 or higher. The Macintosh version requires a color monitor, System 6.0.7 or later, four megabytes of RAM, and a hard drive. Both versions require a CD-ROM drive and a mouse. The lucky buyer may find a discount price as low as \$36.95.

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