Music teachers have been using robust computer applications like SmartMusic and Finale with great success for a long time. Yet now, our students are walking around with tiny computers in their pockets that can power complex apps. So, rather than ban smartphones and tablets, applied instructors can put them to good use as one-stop shops for myriad resources.

Of course, metronome and tuner apps have been in wide use for a while now, and everyone has their favorites (we do, too!). But there are dozens of these apps available, not to mention the thousands of other music apps with potential benefit. Rather than compile a long list of such apps here, we would like to focus instead on specific apps that appropriately address these basic objectives: to easily document student work inside and outside their lessons, effectively assess that work, use the results to make improvements, and conveniently share work between student and teacher.

Before you employ any apps to help support these objectives, you should spend time testing to determine their usefulness and structuring the use of the ones you select. We believe it is generally best not to use more than four or five apps for your teaching and administrative purposes. More apps tend to overly complicate use and don’t enhance productivity.

**Hardware Features**

The camera on digital devices can function far better than a mirror, since a camera has the capacity to document posture and playing position from many angles. The ability to capture an improved position for performance from the student’s viewpoint is surprisingly effective. Our students respond better to coaching when we use photos and video of them instead of just teacher demonstrations. Students appear to consistently adapt to instruction with greater rapidity, consistency, and completeness.

Capturing and posting video of student performances in both formative and summative stages can be enhanced by creating a private Facebook group for the studio where peer critiques can be shared. Sharing videos between individual students and teachers can be simplified via Dropbox, Google Drive, or iCloud access. Additionally, when students record and critique themselves performing, they are usually more consistent in addressing changes to specific parameters via this process. We have found it’s best not to assign more than one or two elements for students to critique while watching the video, and they should be annotating the score while the video is played. Students become more aware of what they are (or aren’t) doing through this process.

**Studio Management**

When we took applied lessons in our undergraduate and graduate degree programs, our teachers wrote our assignments on small sheets of scratch paper. And, as conscientious as we were, we still occasionally lost those pieces of paper. Also, carrying around several etude books, daily warm-ups, and other music was a chore. Mobile apps can help with these issues and in other aspects of managing the studio. The trick is finding something that does what you need and that is affordable.

There are several studio management apps for the commercial market, but these tend to focus on billing and tracking student payments—all unnecessary for a university or high school applied studio. One can use these and ignore the business features, but they are expensive and many have limitations. There are some less expensive apps, but you have to be cautious about their viability (or even whether they are safe to download).

We instead turned to traditional classroom management apps for our applied studios, several of which are capable and affordable. We like eBackpack, a K–12 app that costs $40 per year for up to 50 students. While eBackpack has many features that are unnecessary for a music studio, those features can easily be ignored and teachers can use only the bits they need.

Using the teacher version of the app, we push assignments and course materials to our students’ mobile devices. These include task lists, daily maintenance exercises, annotated musical excerpts, public domain scores and tutors, and even recorded audio and video files. Students then work with the scores and
Exercises in music-reading apps, or they print them. Students also make audio and video recordings with their devices and send those files to us through eBackpack, allowing for easy assessment and feedback.

Practice Management

At the start of each lesson we ask students to open a practice report graphic that reflects the work accomplished over the previous week. We can quickly see the total amount of practice and the devotion to each assigned area. Often this provides opportunities for honest discussions during lessons, leading to improved practice tactics. Using the practice management app also seems to reduce stress associated with practice, and the app allows students to accomplish more regular practice in a greater number of necessary areas. Our students divide practice into warm-up/maintenance, technique, functional skills, new repertoire, solo performing, repertoire review, and ensemble. Specific duration, technical, and conceptual goals are set for each category and new repertoire is assigned the largest block of practice time. The app is used in lessons almost every week to adjust practice routines and targets (much more than anticipated).

After about three weeks utilizing this technology, students found this type of practice management to be helpful, especially in consistently attending to what they practiced, how much they practiced, and the manner of practice. Music Journal works best for our purposes, but it is an iOS-only app. Simple practice apps using Android work adequately, however several are unstable when lots of data is loaded. There are also personal time tracking/management apps that can be adapted for rudimentary practice documentation, though we are still beta testing their use. We recommend that teachers repeatedly instruct students to turn off all notifications on the device while using them for instructional purposes.

Score Management

In our experience using apps to analyze scores, take notes, and more, Mobile Sheets Pro is a good choice for Android (although we haven’t fully tested it in our teaching environment). We found piaScore to be the most stable and productive score management app on iOS. The markup features provide easy tools to analyze scores in multiple ways, plus scores can be saved and shared as PDFs. It is very easy to capture scores as PDFs with the device camera. Students use this app to take practice notes, to analyze the score, for interpretation mapping, and for lesson notes. This app is particularly effective for score analysis assignments. Files can be shared/stored to Google Drive, Dropbox, and iCloud.

Music Technology Preconference

Learn more about using technology in your music instruction and program administration during this one-day preconference hosted by Ti:ME, the Technology Institute for Music Educators. The preconference will be held during the TMEA convention on Wednesday, February 14, in San Antonio.

Ti:ME preconference registration is $50 and can be paid when you register online for the TMEA Clinic/Convention.

Apps, Apps, Everywhere

In addition to the ones we discussed here, many other types of apps can be beneficial to private music instructors. For these and additional app suggestions, go to www.tmea.org/studioapps.

As of May 2017, there were over two million apps in the Apple App Store alone, and this number grows daily. Faced with these numbers, it may seem like a daunting task to stay ahead of the changes. Regardless, we encourage you to explore and examine music apps that are available for the mobile devices you and your students use, and in the process, turn your applied studios into digital music studios that offer advantages over the traditional model.

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