

TALKING TECH

Videotaping—Location, Location, Location

BY RICHARD WEISE

Location, we are told, is the primary consideration when purchasing real estate. The same holds true for videotaping piano lessons—not the location of the piano lesson, though that can be a factor, but the location or position of the camera. Camera placement is the most important decision you make when videotaping a lesson.

How often have you watched videotapes of lessons in which you could neither clearly hear nor see interactions between teacher and student nor clearly see the student play? All of these problems go away, however, by carefully choosing the location of the camera:

- Distance from the piano
- Horizontal position relative to the keyboard axis
- Height above (or below) the keyboard
- Placement of the subject(s) in the viewfinder.

Though the rules don't change if there is someone operating the camera, I'm assuming here that you will attach the camera to a tripod and leave it unattended while taping.

Location—Distance from the Piano

Distance of the camera from the teacher, the student, and the piano is the primary limitation to the quality of sound that the video camera records—the closer the camera microphone, the better the sound. The quality of the camera's microphone pales in importance to its proximity to the sound source. Even the most expensive microphone will poorly capture the desired sound if it is too far from the source.

Location—Horizontal Position

There are two activities we want viewers to see, the interactions between teacher and student, and the student performance. If you place the head of the tripod on the invisible line that extends out from the key cover (as viewed from above), you will be able to see the faces of both student and teacher and the hands of the student on the keys.

Place the camera on the student's, rather than the teacher's, side of the pair, because this allows you to see the teacher's face when talking to the student and to see the student's hands clearly if they play a duet.

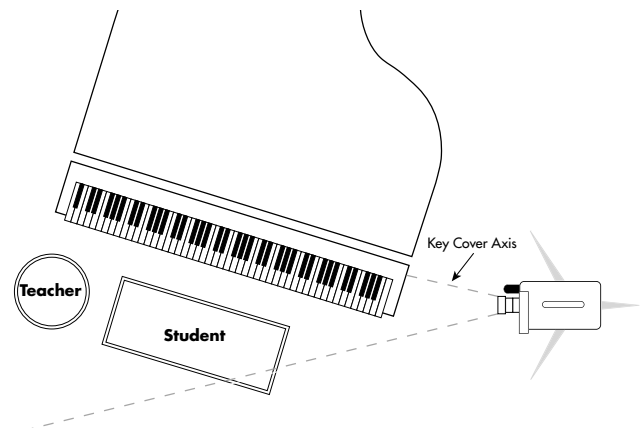
Location—Height Above the Keyboard

Camera height should be low enough to see the position of the student's hands and high enough to see the first and last keys of the keyboard. Adjust the camera height by extending the tripod legs, which increases stability, not by extending the tripod center post, which decreases stability.

Location—Subjects in the Viewfinder

Now, put it all together. Setting up the camera can be time con-

Camera Setup



suming, especially the first time, even for an expert, so set up well in advance of the student's arrival. Changing one element (e.g., distance of the camera from the piano) can mean changing another (e.g., the height of the camera). Your goal is to get as close as possible while still being able to see the tops of the subjects' heads and both ends of the keyboard.

Focus your attention on the edges of the viewfinder to see that you include everything that is necessary and as little visual detritus as possible. A wide-angle lens attachment for the camera is very useful in getting the camera close to the piano while still seeing the whole keyboard and the subjects' heads. You have now completed the first and most important step to capturing high-quality images and sound. ■■■

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Smiles from the Studio

It's always fun to uncover new student definitions. Here are a few taken from recent theory certification tests given by the Music Teachers Association of California.

Toccata ... light and machine-like
 Con brio ... with beat
 Tranquillo ... tranquilized
 Diminuendo ... disappear slowly
 Three sections of a sonata ... theme, chorus, refrain

Don't forget to send your own special "smiles" to muszler@pianoteaching.com