

TECHNOLOGY

INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARD RESOURCES

INTERACT: SUPPORTING MUSIC FOR THE FUTURE

MODULES FROM £59.99 TO £89.99

INTERACTUK.NET

In this case, 'interactive' appears to live up to its name “”

Jeana Hopkins, an experienced teacher, has developed Interact (a software package for interactive whiteboard) from her work with Lincolnshire schools, supporting colleagues who feel unsure about classroom music and helping them raise their standards of teaching and learning to Ofsted's explicit satisfaction. The software is available from a growing list of modules; you buy the sections you want rather than a complete package, choosing between subject-specific topics like The Blues, Exploring Types of Notes, and Values and Rhythms – as well as cross-curricular themes such as Victorian Times and What is Christmas? It's accessible right away and easy to enter and use. Children –



the younger ones made welcome by instrument-toting cartoon animals – can comfortably move around the different sections with the touch of a finger on the screen.

The module seen by this reviewer, Learn about Marching Music, is built up through a series of progressive steps. Children hear simple minim-and-crotchet patterns over a steady pulse and play along with them. They then add a C-G ostinato and begin to learn a set of notated semibreves, minims, crotchets and quavers, first by listening, then by clapping along, and finally by playing on a xylophone or keyboard. A march tune slowly grows, line by line, with a treble-clef

score displayed to accompany what they hear and then perform for themselves. There's also a song about Marching Elephants Two By Two, backed with a click track. Clear sounds, large-scale notation and opportunities for any child to start the music, join in the march and conduct the entire piece are attractive and valuable.

Lesson plans provide some historical and cultural background, referring to Roman armies and modern public ceremonies, although these facts are easily available elsewhere on the internet. The practical suggestions are useful, especially where children are encouraged to leave the safety of 'play along with' for the adventure of 'play along without', using their newly acquired sense of pulse to do some pentatonic improvisation and bringing in untuned percussion as they mix and match bars of varied rhythmic units. A small notational error and a typo ('reggie' for 'reggae') need correcting, and schools will need to think hard about the fairly steep price. But the enthusiasm of teachers filmed on the website is persuasive. In this case, 'interactive' appears to live up to its name.

Reviewed by Tom Deveson

SOFTWARE

MIXCRAFT 6

£53.45

ACOUSTICA.COM

Ideal as an introduction to recording in schools “”

When I reviewed an earlier edition of Mixcraft, I was seriously impressed with its affordability, capability and user-friendly operation. I am pleased to see that the new version retains this winning formula.

Mixcraft 6 is a complete, self-contained package offering an extremely generous and wide selection of instruments, effects and loops, together with all the editing tools you might require for quality recording. You can add unlimited audio and MIDI tracks, and it is fully compatible with Virtual Studio Technology instruments and ReWire applications.



The interface is attractive and simple to navigate, making it ideal in a teaching environment. MIDI or audio tracks, complete with output levels and panning, line up on the left of the screen, while the lower section incorporates a media browser for instruments and loops, mixer or editing window, depending on the context. Piano-roll style editing is available, but there is also a music notation editing view. You can mix and master and burn to CD or MP3 direct from Mixcraft, and the program also offers very capable video features, enabling you to create music videos for YouTube or DVD.

Mixcraft 6 is also attractively priced, and

Acoustica offers a range of educational lab pricings, which reduce depending on the number of licences purchased. Educational purchasing of between five and 24 licences, for instance, reduces the price to only £21.73 each, and there are even lower prices for upgrades from earlier versions.

Mixcraft operates on Windows XP, Vista or Windows 7 (32 or 64 bit). While it is simple to operate, it is still a powerful application and is fully ready to use without requiring additional purchases. The excellent on-board instruments, sounds and audio loops and ease of operation make the program an inspiring music tool, ideal as an introduction to recording in schools. Mixcraft 6 represents a bargain at this price and I highly recommend it. There is also a deluxe edition called Mixcraft Pro Studio 6 with an even greater range of on-board instruments and effects available for £95.89. Further information is available from acoustica.com.

Reviewed by Tony Cliff