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"Piano Wizard Premier" helps kids learn how to play the piano by playing a video game.

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Learning is child's play with 'Piano Wizard Premier'

Allegro Rainbow has created a novel way of teaching kids (and adults) how to play the piano. With "Piano Wizard Premier," kids learn how to play the piano by playing a video game on the computer using an attached keyboard as the controller.

The "Piano Wizard" approach is very different from traditional music programs, which usually start by teaching kids how to read music. In this game, kids play music first and then learn musical notation.

You start by hooking the included digital piano keyboard to your computer, using a USB port. Next, you select a song from the 200 offered. When the song starts, game characters glide up from the bottom of the computer screen into a "target zone," which looks like a virtual keyboard with colored keys. When a character passes over a colored key on the screen's virtual keyboard, you push the corresponding colored key on your keyboard. If your timing is right, you hear a tone and earn points.

For Kids

Jinny **Gudmundsen**

You can choose songs from a wide range of music, including children's favorites, classical, folk, and pop; or you can download favorite songs from the Internet. You can select to practice the right hand, left hand or both.

The software breaks down the learning process into four steps. The first is the one described above, where you match moving characters to colored keys. In step two, the virtual keyboard is moved to the left side of the screen and the characters move sideways to reach the colored virtual keyboard. In the third step, colored musical notes replace the characters. And in step four, the notes appear on a musical staff without colors. In all

of these steps, you can control the speed of the moving characters (or notes), and can have fingering suggestions present.

As you progress through the steps, you learn to read music while playing. The video game aspect of trying to improve your score really motivates you to practice and is an exciting way to interest kids in music. Tweens and teens will love that they can learn to play piano by practicing music that they have downloaded into the game.

But while this product is fascinating to play, it would be better if it offered a suggested path of game play for the beginner. It has an "Easy Mode," but many of these songs are too challenging for kids new to the piano.

Rating: 4 stars (out of 5)
Best for ages 5 and up
From Allegro Rainbow, www.pianowizard.com, $199.95, Windows.