



Now you see it, now you don't: ReadAhead, the app developed by faculty members Ken Johansen (left) and Travis Hardaway, relies on a disappearing act to improve sight reading.

New App Aims to Improve Sight Reading Skills

With a \$100,000 grant from TEDCO and the Maryland Innovation Institute, two Peabody music theory instructors have created an iPad app that will make it easier than ever for musicians to hone their sight reading skills.

Adjunct faculty member Travis Hardaway began with the idea of using technology to create musical notation that disappears as you play, forcing the musician to take in a small chunk and be able to focus ahead. When he learned that faculty member Ken Johansen had his own piano-related exercises for sight reading, they decided to combine their concepts—and ReadAhead was born. The end goal for their prototype is to have five levels of difficulty, making the product useful for advanced beginners and up.

“You have to be able to read notes in the bass and treble clef, and understand key signatures, meter, and simple rhythms to use it,” Hardaway says. Users place the iPad on the music stand before playing, getting a half page of music on the screen in landscape position, never having to turn a page, he adds.

“Based on five sessions per week, every day will give you a certain number of pieces and exercises,” explains Johansen, who teaches a Peabody course on sight reading for freshman piano majors.

“An example of a warm-up exercise is one for peripheral vision—you keep your eye on a red dot while things appear above and below the staff. It works on your focus.” These more experimental exercises are designed to help players learn to use a larger field of vision, Hardaway says. “This is primarily useful for learning to recognize rhythmic patterns that are ahead of the notes you are focusing on, but it helps you learn to take in more music with each eye fixation,” he says.

The most important part of the session, Hardaway says, is literally a disappearing act. With 10 seconds to look at one screen of music, the player must scan it and figure out the difficulties. “The exercise metronome goes off,” Hardaway says. “It clicks off two measures, starts, and once you play the downbeat of the first measure, the whole measure disappears. You always have to be one step ahead.”

It’s not a tool that will quickly lose its application. “Sight reading technique is achieved over a number of years because of the difficulty in manner of technique and musical understanding,” Johansen says. “We think this app can make a difference as a person progresses.” The goal is for an early spring rollout.

—Eric Butterman

In Memoriam



Former longtime Peabody Institute faculty member **YONGKU AHN**, founder of Maryland’s Columbia Orchestra, died on August 14, 2013, at the

age of 85. Ahn was a full-time member of the Conservatory violin faculty from September 1968 through June 1993 when he retired. He then continued to teach in the Conservatory on a limited basis from September 1993 through January 2002. He also taught in the Preparatory from July 1978 through June 1985.

In 1978, Ahn launched the Columbia Orchestra in the basement of his home, where he gave lessons to participating musicians to help them learn their parts. The orchestra grew from an initial group of 25 to 30 string players to become a full wind orchestra that is “a pillar of the local arts community,” according to *The Washington Post*.



SIDNEY S. FORREST, an esteemed clarinet teacher who had taught generations of students at Peabody and the Levine School of Music in

Washington, died on August 9, 2013, at the age of 94.

Forrest, who served on the Peabody Conservatory faculty from 1946 to 1985, continued to give private lessons at his home in Kensington, Md., until his death.

Forrest was also a talented performer, who played in recitals and chamber music concerts at the Library of Congress and the National Gallery of Art. A career highlight included his performance of Aaron Copland’s *Clarinet Concerto*, with the composer conducting, at the Pan American Union building in Washington, D.C.