



Ken Smith, the instructor, helps Christina Shay find the lost chord.

Do Re
Mi
... SHHH!

When everyone starts to practice in the beginning piano class, it's so quiet you can almost hear a pin drop. You are aware of a dim medley, as if a dozen people are practicing far away upstairs behind closed doors. You can pick out the scales, chord progressions, and the muted tunes, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" and "London Bridge." But it's all very quiet.

These students are using electric pianos with earphones. They can hear themselves play; the teacher can listen to students individually, talk with them without leaving his piano, and even play for them; the students can play duets or listen to each other.

Before 1968, when the music department bought the electric pianos for a total of \$4,978.50, piano classes were noisy.

In those days, two students shared the keyboard of one piano. There were six pianos in the classroom.

"The din was terrific," Richard L. Morris, professor, says. "The teacher couldn't hear himself think, much less hear the students play. They had to take turns," he says.

"Silent" pianos make the teachers' and students' class time more pleasant. They accomplish more because while the teacher works with one student, the rest can practice. And the class can be taught in almost any building without disturbing neighboring classes.

Piano students have been taught in groups since about 1960. Teaching them individually would be too expensive. Ken Smith, who teaches one of the beginning piano sections, says, "Some people think a group is the only way to teach piano. It is very effective, gives the students a solid music background and teaches them to read music."

Students like the piano class. They have to or they quit. The class meets twice a week, and requires an hour a day of practice — for just one credit hour.

Students are assigned a regular piano in a practice room in the Fine Arts Building. And some actually do practice seven hours a week; most practice less, but try to get in some time every day.

An electric piano sounds pretty much like a regular piano as you listen to yourself through the earphones. The key action, though, feels more like an organ.

The class is a requirement for music majors who have not reached a basic level of proficiency in piano. Some are expert on other instruments, drum or flute, for example. They already know a lot about music. The instructors say they "pick up piano" rather quickly. Some elementary education majors who must be able to play simple songs also are required to take the course.

About three-fourths of the beginners, though, just want to learn to play. Kathy Nail, a freshman in nursing, told a friend that playing the piano was her secret ambition. The friend suggested she take the class.

"You have to pay about \$2.50 for a half hour lesson privately. This is an economical way to learn. I don't feel that I'm getting gypped by the group approach at all. I work all week to be damn good those 10 or 15 minutes that Mr. Smith is listening to me," she says.

Other students think they work harder to keep up with the rest of the class, though everyone can go at his own speed. They like the competition of the group situation.

And one girl takes off her earphones for a minute, smiles and says, "Isn't this what a liberal arts education is all about?" She smiles again, puts on the earphones, and swings into a rousing rendition of "America the Beautiful" — very quietly. □



"You've got to concentrate," Becky Christian says.



No din or discord, yet everybody's playing his own tune. Practice does make perfect, Kathy Nall says.