App, with 60,000 users, Helps Prepare for Professional Music Exams

[Ta Kung Pao - Hong Kong, 31 Jan 2013] Playnote Limited, a member of Hong Kong Science and Technology Park, has developed music software, AURALBOOK, which helps students prepare for various professional music exams. The company, based on AURALBOOK, has won the grand award of Best Start Award and the merit award of Best eLearning Award in the Asia-Pacific Information and Communication Technology Alliance Awards (APICTA).

AURALBOOK is a music-learning platform software, which helps students to learn aural skills for professional music exams by the Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB), Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) at Canada, etc. AURALBOOK provides questions to analyze clapping, singing and music features recognition. When students finish practicing, the software will analyze the pitches and volume of students' singing, and rhythm and power of students' clapping. It will also point out the errors and provide suggestions for improvement in a real human voice. All singing, clapping and results are saved on a cloud server so that teachers and parents can review them online.

Mr. Eric Yung, CEO of Playnote, said 100,000 students take ABRSM exams in Hong Kong every year. The aural test is one part of the exam, no matter what instrument the student plays. About 10 to 20 percent of the total exam score is from the aural test. "Don't ignore the 10 to 20 percent of the score. This part actually determines whether students can get merit or distinction on the exam," Eric said. "However, not all music teachers know how to teach the aural skill because not all music teachers know how to sing well."

The salary for teaching aural skills is much lower than that for teaching a musical instrument. As a result, some music teachers do not want to teach aural skills. Based on this business opportunity, Eric joined the incubation program of Hong Kong Science and Technology Park (HKSTP) two years ago and developed AURALBOOK with support from HKSTP.

Real human voice response provides feeling of intimacy

Eric said the main difference between AURALBOOK and other music education software is that AURALBOOK provides a feeling of intimacy."Normal software will not chat with users. Suggested other types of software are only displayed on the screen in words. The real human voice response gives students a warmer feeling," Eric said. Eric, a musician himself, said the initial idea was started in 1993. The core idea was to help people with low incomes to still be able to learn to play music. When the iPad was launched in 2010, he developed the idea. "Music can change the world and it is

a universal language. In order to allow everyone to learn and appreciate music, the process must be simplified as much as possible."

Playnote announced the launch of the android version of AURALBOOK yesterday, so that more students can enjoy this advanced technology. Currently, AURALBOOK comes in Cantonese and English version. The Mandarin version will be launched soon (details can be found at www.playnote.com). AURALBOOK provides Grade 1 to Grade 8 versions for students at different levels. The price for an extra 60 questions for Grade 1 is HKD$98. The price for a higher grade costs more.

六萬人APP助考音樂專業試

【本報訊】記者胡家齊報道：香港科技園公司「科技創業培育計劃」成員PLAYNOTE Limited研發的音樂應用程式AURALBOOK助備戰各項專業音樂考試，至今已有逾六萬師生採用。該公司更憑AURALBOOK揚威海外，勇奪亞太資訊及通訊科技獎（APICTA）「最佳創業公司」大獎及「最佳電子學習」優異獎。

AURALBOOK是一個音樂學習平台，協助學生掌握視唱技巧以應付英國皇家音樂學院、澳洲音樂考試委員會及加拿大皇家音樂學院等專業音樂考試。AURALBOOK提供關於拍打節奏、歌唱技巧及音樂辨識等多條練習題目，學生完成問題後程式會即時分析學生音準、音量及打拍子的節奏及力度，以真人發聲的方式即時指出錯誤並提供建議。所有學生的練習錄音及結果都儲存於雲端伺服器，供老師及家長於網上檢查。

PLAYNOTE行政總裁容志偉表示，香港每年都有十萬考生報考英國皇家音樂學院的考試，而視唱為該試的其中一部分，佔總分一至兩成，「別小看這一、兩成分數，很多時拿Merit（良）或Distinction（優）的關鍵就是在這部分。」然而，並不是所有老師可以教導視唱技巧，「因為不是每個老師都懂唱歌。」

此外，教授視唱技巧的堂費遠比教授演奏技巧低，令不少音樂老師不願教授視唱技巧。眼見市場有此需求，容志偉兩年前參加科技園公司的「科技創業培育計劃」，藉科技園的各項支援研發出AURALBOOK。

真人發聲具親切感

談及AURALBOOK與其他音樂學習軟件的分別，容志偉表示AURALBOOK的優勝之處是其親切感，「一般軟件不會有人跟你說話，一切建議都只會在畫面上以文字方式顯示，AURALBOOK以真人發聲提出建議無疑令小朋友更有親切感。」本身是音樂發燒友的他表示，早於1993年已有初步意念，令缺乏時間、金錢的人都可以學習音樂，到2010年iPad面世，便將意念負諸實行。「音樂能夠改變世界，是世界共通語言。要令每個人都有機會欣賞及學習音樂，當中過程必須盡量簡化。」

PLAYNOTE昨天宣布推出AURALBOOK的Android版本，讓更多學生有機會使用這項先進技術。目前AURALBOOK有廣東話及英語兩種版本，稍後將推出普通話版。（詳見www.playnote.com）AURALBOOK分一至八級供不同程度學生使用，下載費用全免，每級內置12條題目，用家可付款購買額外題目。以一級題目為例，下載60條額外題目一級題目的費用為港幣98元，題目程度愈難收費愈高。

▶香港科技園公司企業拓展及科技支援副總裁楊德斌（左）及PLAYNOTE行政總裁容志偉
本報記者胡家齊攝