

change the sounds, then throw a beat behind it, then record it. Loop it. And add other instruments to it.

At seven years old, she knows how to use the 12-track recording system and has put together a few tunes of her own.

When she's tired of playing, she plugs in the microphone and sings karaoke. When her friends come over, they always spend time playing the piano, singing songs and dancing around the living room.

My wife sits down from time to time and works out a tune from the sheet music. And, I'll make up and record songs using six tracks just to lay down the drum beats. I'm not coordinated enough to do two things at once, so, even something like "cowbell" gets its own, personal track.

For all of us, the instrument is a blast.

Observations from the Hood

Here's a bit of added informal research. In our neighborhood,

we're the only family that I know of that has a digital keyboard. Most of my daughter's friends study piano. There's a great culture in our suburb that steers parents to get their kids into music.

I can think of seven of my daughter's neighborhood friends who study piano. And they all have acoustic pianos in their homes. Two bought new. The rest got one free from a relative or friend or went the classified ad route.

The parents who don't play tend to look at our keyboard like it's from outer space. They think it's a great idea, but it's more technology than they can deal with. Parents with a musical background think it's the coolest thing they've ever seen.

I love acoustic pianos. I believe they are works of art. But a digital piano is a work of play. We went with the digital solely because I thought it would get more use in our home. I was right.

One other point, if I didn't work in the industry and had no

interest in music, I'm sure the purchasing decision would have fallen squarely on my wife.

I am also sure that she would have bought a \$75 garage-sale piano with really bad action. I say that because many of our parental peers have gone that route.

Here's the catch. I'm also beginning to hear grumblings from a few of those buyers that maybe their child won't take lessons next year—that they are losing interest. I know it's because they're playing on an inferior instrument.

As for my family, we're happy with our keyboard. It was worth the time, effort and investment.

But, my wife's beginning to talk about getting a new car. I'm not sure my heart can take it. 