



PATRICIA BARRY LEVY FOR THE CHRONICLE

Doug Snapp, a lab assistant at the U. of Northern Colorado's Music Technology Center: When it comes to music, talking or reading about it alone just won't do.

Computer Brings the 'Aural and Visual' to Jazz History

DOU G SNAPP grabs his mouse and clicks on an item in the "Piano Legends" multimedia program that he has loaded into his computer, and witnesses the technique and sounds of Art Tatum, in a rare film from the 1930's.

Clearly audible, and visible, are the Tatum trademarks—light touch and astonishing nimbleness.

At the same time, Mr. Snapp, a lab assistant at the University of Northern Colorado's just-opened Music Technology Center, can call up text that outlines Tatum's life and career. Among the details noted is the fact that Tatum had only partial vision, due to cataracts.

This biographical detail clearly excites Mr. Snapp, an accomplished jazz trumpeter. "Now they're getting the aural and the visual, and this information rein-

forces it," he says, conjuring up images of students in jazz-history classes using the technology.

EXPERIENCING THE SOUND

Of course, he adds, when it comes to music, talking or reading about it alone just won't do. "If you're in a class and you're discussing music history, well, music is an aural art, you cannot just describe a concept, say, rubato, or tenuto, or an articulation. Really, a student has to experience the sound of it."

The Piano Legends multimedia package was devised by Gene Aitken, director of the Music Technology Center here. To create the program, he "repurposed" a laserdisk, "Piano Legends," produced by Pioneer Artists, which features 20 of the piano greats of jazz.

To repurpose the laserdisk, Mr.

Aitken used "HyperCard" software for the Apple Macintosh computer to create a program that supplements the images on the video-disk with text and graphics. Using a Macintosh connected to a laserdisk player, users can gain access to particular bits of information on the laserdisk, without having to watch the disk from start to finish.

The disk is narrated by Chick Corea, who himself is one of the pianists represented. To place Tatum in historic perspective, Mr. Corea notes that he possessed "a harmonic sensibility that predated the complexities of bebop." As he says this, the film clip is running, and the user hears Tatum's pre-bop elaborations as Mr. Corea draws attention to them.

All that's missing is the smell of smoke from the jazz club that night. —PETER MONAGHAN