

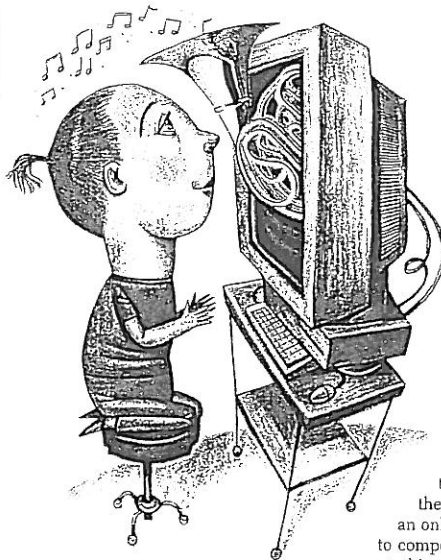
MIDDLE EAST: BUSH'S BIG GAMBLE



THE LEARNING CORNER

Arts Smarts

Cultural institutions can't beat the Internet, so they've decided to join it



By EVAN LEVY

NEXT TIME YOUR KIDS SIT down at the computer to zap some aliens or instant-message a friend, consider this: they could instead be composing an octet or viewing a Renoir.

As the Internet increasingly battles for our leisure time, arts organizations have decided that if they can't beat it, perhaps they can join it. Many cultural institutions list programs and general information on their websites, but some—from symphony orchestras to museums—are upping the artistic ante with interactive features designed to engage the youngest potential members of their audience.

For some arts organizations, like the San Francisco Symphony, which launched its kids' website (*SFSKids.com*) last month, turning to the Web represents the next step in their educational outreach and is particularly useful at a time when schools have cut their art and music courses. "We have a long tradition of providing education programs to the community," notes Ron Gallman, direc-

tor of education. "This was a logical extension of what we do." The site includes such features as Music Lab, which serenades kids with appropriate sound effects to teach them the basic components of music, from tempo to harmony. Within the lab is the Performalator, an online tool that enables kids to compose and play music. "The great thing is that this is both for someone who has some musical experience—and for someone with no musical background at all," Callman says.

Arts institutions see the Internet as a way to keep pace with the modern world, to shed the lingering perception that they are highbrow or isolationist. The Web, the ultimate in egalitarian communication, serves as a leveler, reaching people within the neighborhood or across the country. It offers arts institutions a chance to hook kids right at their keyboard, enticing the next generation of museumgoers or symphony attendees to discover the wonders of the arts. "We want to get kids when they're young, get them excited," says Michael Cassin, curator of education at the Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Mass. (*www.clarkart.edu*). Explaining the move from old masters to webmaster,

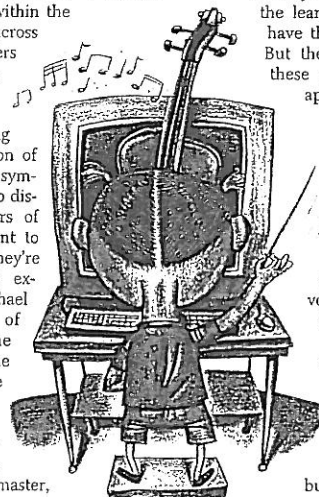
Cassin says, "With the Web, we can give people a taste of what they might experience here, not just tell them." The kids' section of the museum's site is being expanded, and it is hoped that by this summer it will include sound bites and video clips of kids in the galleries as well as age-appropriate activities, such as one in which they replicate patterns. Cassin points out that while the Web can't duplicate the gallery experience, it can offer things that a trip to the museum can't. His example: the expanded site will let kids "lift off" the top layer of a painting to see an image underneath that has been painted out.

On the New York Philharmonic site (*Kidzone at NYPhilkids.org*), "you can do the things you always wanted to do, such as go backstage, visit a dressing room or try out an instrument," says Thomas Cabaniss, the orchestra's director of education. "If people are going to visit the site anyway, we'd like to extend

the learning process, not just have them purchase tickets."

But the real test of most of these sites is whether they appeal to kids. Simone Crew, 10, served on the panel of kids that tested the SFSKids site before its launch. She gives it a resounding thumbs-up and has returned to the site several times—voluntarily. "It's not just facts, which can be really boring to kids," she observes. "This has animation, and it's really colorful."

Moreover, she says, not only is it "really cool for kids," but her dad likes it too. ■



Illustrations for TIME by Glynis Sweeney