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Microtrends: Piano-playing cats

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Mean vs Cute: While the [mean](#) internet was working itself into a frenzy over [Britney Spears's](#) haircut, the [cute](#) internet was all about Nora, the piano-playing cat. In one weekend, half a million people [watched her on YouTube](#) as she played something halfway between Philip Glass and free jazz. She's now been watched more than 1.5 million times.

The cult builds: If you thought that YouTube was only used by happy slapping 13-year-olds, you'll be delighted to learn that [Nora's owners](#), an artist called Burnell Yow! and his partner, piano teacher Betsy Alexander, are rather different. Nora, for example, was named after the surrealist painter [Leonora Carrington](#). Mr Yow! and Betsy have been quick to capitalise on her fame, opening an [online shop](#) selling fridge magnets, signed photos and "Practice makes Purr-fect" hoodies for \$26.99. Almost a thousand blogs have [linked to](#) the video. Intellectual discussions started over at [violinist.com](#) and [catsynth.com](#), the website for cats and synthesizers: "Detractors of atonal music often argue that 'their five-year old could do that' but perhaps the fact that it captures childlike and cat-like innocence is part of the charm."

The wannabes: Suddenly, the floodgates opened and YouTube was deluged with [dozens](#) of [piano-playingcats](#) from France to [Argentina](#). The heir to Nora's throne is [Merlin](#), an enormously fat ginger cat who sits on all the keys while his owner plays.

The dark side: Obviously, the mean internet hasn't gone away. Cult New York history site Proceedings of the Athanasius Kircher Society uncovered [the cat piano from 1650](#), when an Italian musician "selected cats whose natural voices were at different pitches and arranged them in cages side by side, so that when a key on the piano was depressed, a mechanism drove a sharp spike into the appropriate cat's tail".

Extras: The motherlode of all cute animal action is [Cute Overload](#), with it's hideous evil twin [Ugly Overload](#) (don't click that link if you're put off by giant praying mantises and really nasty-looking bats). Still want more? There are a great many more cat stories and videos in [this post at Boing Boing](#).

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