The *quality* of one's practice

It is the *quality* of one's practice, not the quantity, which most strongly influences the skill of the performer.
Most everyone knows how to work hard; few know how to work *smart*, though, especially at something as complicated and unnatural as piano playing.
Virtually no one starts at the piano with mystical *a priori* knowledge of how to practice productively and efficiently.
This is the chief benefit of working with a good teacher, whether one's goal is to become a professional or simply to "have a little fun." Some seem to think they don't need real instruction if all they're after is a pleasant diversion.
With few exceptions, these hapless souls get frustrated and quit within a few weeks.

The interface of the piano is percussive and mechanistic, broadly similar to a computer keyboard.
But the pianist is not after the mastery of keystrokes. The paradigm is not "see symbol x, press symbol x in response, receive cookie." It is not about depressing the correct keys at the correct times.
Rather, the pianist is after sounds always *sounds*. The ear is primary, along with its connection to the body. Everything else is secondary. Otherwise the student simply reads without comprehending. It's important to spend a good deal of time not reading at all.
An infant learns to listen very, very carefully before being introduced to reading and writing

LEARNING THEORY

Learning music theory gives you many different approaches for writing melodies other than systematically trying out every possible note combination. For example, you might decide to use scales or arpeggios, or use notes that fit over a predetermined chord progression. Learning theory also gives you some formulas to apply if you have some existing music and you need to figure out additional parts or harmonies. Music theory does not tell you which notes are going to be the best ones in any given situation; it just tells you what the conventional choices are in that situation. You still have to decide for yourself.