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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My goal whenever I teach a student, whether it is in a classroom setting or one on one in a tutoring situation, is to answer the question “why” as well as “what”. It is so easy to program students to regurgitate information, especially when it comes to the formulas of theory, the dates and facts of history, or the individual practices and techniques of composers, but my goal is to urge students to understand why and how this information is important to their development as performers or composers.

In undergraduate theory courses, I am often asked by students, “Why do I need to know this?” In response to this question, and often in preparation for this type of questioning, I try to show to the students practical applications for the concepts that we cover. For instance, an understanding of form will aid a performer in phrasing and memorization of a piece. In the classroom, I not only ask the students to read and cover the assigned text but I also ask that we take another step in understanding where these notational and compositional conventions come from. Therefore, there is time in class to discuss deeper levels of structure, counterpoint, and voice leading.

When teaching history I believe it is important that students not only be able to give the facts and dates of significant composers and events, but also how all of music history is connected to itself and to the development of Western culture as a whole. I will often refer students to large scale timelines of music history that encompass not only important composers but also significant developments in culture, art, and philosophy. I believe with an understanding of how all of these elements intersect it becomes much easier to understand the changes and development of music, especially in the 20th and 21st centuries.

When teaching a student, or group of students, in the area of composition it is important to keep a light touch. The best experiences in my academic career have been when my professor provides perspective and knowledge of repertoire that I may not have been familiar with. A guiding hand with specific notation and keeping up with modern notational practice is essential. Yet, I believe that each composer should be allowed to develop their own style and technique. This is achieved by making them aware and hungry for the work of others, diving veraciously into the scores and recordings of other composers to see what has been done and how one can respond to it.

One of the main purposes of teaching any musical course is to show the ever evolving state of art and music. There is no one inevitable course of history or practice, it is a living story of individuals and events that shape, compound, and evolve. I urge students to create their own individual timelines, usually in a document, where they can place the dates, facts, important events in specific chronological order. I also invite the students to engage with sources outside of their text books. Primary documents, memoirs, letters, speeches, journals, poetry, novels, films, plays, etc, all to help to give the students an understanding of context. The goal of these readings is to allow the students to construct their own understanding of how history and practice has progressed and where they are in the continuum.

I believe in practical application of information. Whether I am teaching a student how to normalize a waveform in Logic, program a patch in Max/MSP, how to spell a German augmented

6th chord, or how Baron Gottfried van Swieten influenced the music of Mozart, I am concerned with showing how a student can apply this information to their artistic development as a performer or a composer.

Possible Course Offerings

Music Theory – fundamentals, diatonic, chromatic, form and analysis, counterpoint, 20th Century techniques

Music History – undergraduate survey, the development of western music, the development of 20th and 21st century music

Music Technology – practical uses of Sibelius and Finale, Introduction to Logic, Introduction to programming Max/MSP/Jitter, Recording techniques

Music Composition – Seminar, One on one individual lessons