

Teaching Philosophy

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Teaching is a uniquely ethical obligation. Music is what I teach because I have spent long years developing an expertise and body of knowledge that I bring to bear in my own personal practice as a performer and researcher. However, the act of teaching itself, and the responsibility thereto, is a natural and necessary part of life. I am committed to a sense of teaching that considers the development of the student and the teacher as an ethical relationship with the world around them, both the wider circles of human interaction, but also the total context of our life and our interaction with the web of influences with which we come into contact. We have the opportunity to develop our capacities for critical thinking and engagement, and it is our obligation to do so in order to live responsively and responsibly in our surroundings.

Music is one of an endless myriad of studies that can develop these human attributes, but it is also one of the best. The attainment of skills necessary for a rewarding engagement with music are extremely extrapolable to our ethical engagement with the world. Music itself is wholly an ethical act: the confrontation of an instrument as an extension of the self, the interaction with scores and composers who act upon the musician, and the endless mine of interactive learning that is chamber music and ensemble performance--all of these elements contribute to a field of study that is exceptionally integrated into the development of the person and their ability to act, interact, and react critically and mindfully.

As a teacher, these abstract ideals guide every task, assignment and goal. My own personal interactions with my students are informed constantly by the interrogation of my methods, so that I am always reacting personally to every student and situation, and am being as responsive as possible to their needs. These ideals also inform what I ask of the student. Whether it be the assignment of a technical etude, a rhythmic exercise in a lesson, the preparation of a full recital or chamber music program, or a classroom discussion, I am always asking the student first and foremost to respond curiously, critically, and thoughtfully to the material. I don't want them to learn an etude, I want them to learn how to learn an etude. I don't want them to learn about the chordal analysis of a piece, I want them to learn how to analyze. These skills are the only skills that are ultimately viable in the professional musical life I know. There is always a new skill to develop, a new piece to learn, or a new composer to study, and the accumulation of knowledge is only useful when it can come to bear on the development and extension of that knowledge in the course of practicing our craft. Ultimately, these are also skills that apply to all different ages and levels of student. The goals of a beginner and the goals of an expert are unified and identical. It is my job as a teacher to facilitate the student in identifying what actually constitutes learning and how to do so constructively.

In summary, my experience as a musician, teacher, and human being has informed my teaching practice to focus on these ethical ideals that allow all levels of students to be involved fully in their craft. I consider it my duty to explore the knowledge and skills that I have developed with my students so that they can learn to engage critically with their environment and to be involved in music in a mindful, inquisitive manner. I consider teaching an obligation and a privilege, and I know that I cannot truly draw a line between my performing, researching, and teaching practices if I am truly committed to any of them.