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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

As a theorist who is also a professional organist, I know how powerfully analysis and performance can inform one another. Sharing these synergistic experiences with my students is central to my pedagogical mission. In my view, the process of learning to play a piece leads naturally to the sort of theoretical questions we pose in the classroom. On the other hand, I try to frame analytical questions in terms of their effects on interpretation, and I can attest personally to their utility when it comes to shaping a phrase or memorizing a recital. In this way, I strive to model through my own example how generalized theoretical knowledge interacts with the specialized knowledge students develop on their instruments. In combining theoretical and practical instrumental knowledge, students gain an active understanding which lasts because they continue to return to similar concepts in the next piece they learn.

I believe an active understanding requires that students engage deeply with a topic. Textbooks keep getting longer, but semesters don't. For many of us, the urge is often to "cover" ever more material in the same period of time. But we err, I think, to view our task in terms of information *input*. Rather, we should focus on *output*, or the long-term change we hope to effect in students. One of my output goals in the written theory classroom is for students to understand the high level of craft that the best composers put into their compositions, and this process takes time. In my view, it is better to spend a week exploring every conceivable facet of a single piece—harmony, melody, form, rhythm, history, comparison of recordings—than to "cover" more pieces in less detail. This way, students learn to expect that there is much more to be discovered under the surface in great music.

In the aural classroom, my primary output goal is to facilitate fluency in "translating" between sounds and symbols—dictation works from sound to symbol, while singing moves from symbol to sound. Ultimately, my goal is that students can "hear" mentally just by looking at the page, and visualize the score after only hearing a passage. But this is a lifelong process of continual improvement, which means that students need to develop good practice habits and effective tools for self-study. Tools and habits are therefore equally important as skills. Aural skills tools may include referencing back to the tonic triad or grouping a dictation into phrases rather than individual notes. If there is one practice habit I hope to instill in my students, it is to think before doing. Thought precedes action, which has a variety of ramifications, including slower practice, emphasis on identifying and fixing mistakes, and the fundamental concept that theoretical understanding—of the music, one's body, or one's instrument—

informs technical ability. This is just one of the synergistic beliefs I try to instill in my students. This belief also privileges a personal interpretation of a piece over virtuosity as an end in itself.

Not all students want to become instrumental virtuosos, though—some may be composers, conductors, or educators. I aim to accommodate students' diverse backgrounds and career goals. I believe good pedagogy meets students where they are and builds a ladder to where they want to go. Just as an instrumental teacher would not present a piece beyond the student's technical level, so too must music theory concepts be graduated carefully. Therefore, one of the first tasks is to effectively assess student competencies at the beginning of the semester. Armed with this knowledge, I aim to build pedagogical systems which utilize incremental steps toward higher tasks. For example, when I teach form, I introduce progressively larger units, beginning with phrase and cadence types, then binary and variation forms, and culminating with sonata and rondo forms. Subjectivity increases as formal units increase in size and complexity—whereas music fundamentals has objectively correct answers, the intricacies of thematic transformation, for instance, embrace a wider range of readings. Thus, in the written theory classroom, one of my output goals is interpretation based on normative models. Such departures from (idealized) expectations often have performative implications, which is another synergistic combination of analysis and performance.

I have had the opportunity to teach every undergraduate core theory and aural course during my time as a graduate student at Eastman. I have also had the privilege of attending the music theory pedagogy courses of Steven Laitz and Betsy Marvin, authors of the two most popular undergraduate texts in use today. This led to a professional relationship with Dr. Laitz, who engaged me to prepare summary questions for each chapter in the fourth edition of his textbook, as well as to select and record examples of organ repertoire for the accompanying CD. My work with Dr. Laitz, combined with my experience at Eastman, has given me a sense of the broad arc we aim for in the undergraduate theory classroom. For instance, by knowing that I intend to arrive at complex chromatic harmony by the final semester, I can begin to connect musical events and personas into a meaningful historical narrative beginning on day one. In this way, students conceptualize knowledge as a network of causal relationships, rather than disconnected facts. Concepts are more interesting and memorable when they are personalized in this way. Thus, I try to show that history is the result of individuals making decisions in a specific context with specific goals in mind.

While at Eastman, I also took a theory pedagogy class with Seth Monahan where I learned some of the ways technology can improve effectiveness in the classroom. For instance, computer-assisted slide shows

are useful for presenting scores, recordings, and explanatory text in class, as shown in my teaching demonstration videos. When combined with a worksheet to guide students, these presentations are effective because they combine visual and aural media efficiently without allowing the students to observe passively. I have also experienced the advantages of the flipped classroom model, where basic introductory concepts are delivered through videos before class, enabling time with the teacher to be spent on more advanced extension activities. Alternatively, I deliver course content before class via my professional website. As a visual and aural medium, a webpage shares many advantages with slide shows, while remaining available for review at all times. In addition, I use my website to compile pedagogical materials. For example, I have amassed over 200 audio files from classical repertoire for use as dictation examples in the aural skills classroom. The password-protected collection includes a topical index, blank exercises, answers, original scores for reference, and audio files by great performers edited for length. This wealth of material is ready at a moment's notice.

Another strategy I learned at Eastman is to ask students for informal anonymous feedback periodically throughout the semester. While student surveys at the end of the semester are valuable, they can only be applied after the fact with a new group of students. In contrast, occasional questionnaires throughout the semester allow for smaller and therefore more manageable “course corrections.” They also have an additional indirect advantage—asking for students’ feedback signals that I respect their opinion and gives them a modicum of control over the course. In turn, students are likely to be more invested in the class because it has been tailored to their unique needs and interests. This relates to my overarching pedagogical goals of meeting students where they are and modeling by example: I hope they will treat me with respect because I do the same to them.

To teach is to enter into a social contract with my students. My responsibilities include selection of interesting and relevant course content, organized and engaging presentation of concepts, and impartiality in assessment. But the best pedagogy requires much more than this—it involves modeling the types of behavior I wish to cultivate in my students: enthusiasm, the vulnerability of an open mind, and the humility and grit necessary for continual self-reflection and growth. Quite simply, I must become what I want my students to be. This requires a degree of faith—faith that I have something of value to share and faith that it won't fall on deaf ears. In my experience thus far as a teacher, I have had my faith rewarded many times over by seeing my students grow, through meaningful relationships with my colleagues, my most of all, in the knowledge that I am a better person because of my students.