

TEACHING STATEMENT

I find joy in my role as a teacher and a nurturing mentor, connecting meaningfully with my students in order to guide them towards their musical and professional goals. After many years of teaching in varied contexts – from private and group piano classes, to coaching college students for presentations and interviews, to training new teachers in nonprofit community programs – I have come to realize that my role as a mentor is malleable, constantly evolving, and serves different needs for each environment. It is my commitment to my students that I always listen deeply, observe without judgment, and determine how I can best serve their needs. My goal for students is that they may remember and reflect upon their experiences studying with me, and continue to pursue rich, lifelong creative practices beyond our time together. As I embrace these values as a teacher and mentor, I also hope to instill them in my mentees.

I was presented with my first teaching opportunity as a high school student. A local parent had called my school's music department, asked if there were any advanced pianists interested in teaching her 8-year-old twin boys, and I was tapped for the job. As with many memories, the details of how exactly that all happened are hazy, but the intense feelings of imposter syndrome I felt prior to my first lessons with the twins are vividly cemented in my mind. I fondly remember reaching out to my first piano teacher, who appeased my fears and guided me through a few beginner activities, books, and pieces to use with my new students. I realize now how crucial it was that I had a mentor to encourage and guide me, and how privileged I was to have someone like that. Her support truly made it feel as though I had "permission" to teach. Now, I feel a duty to pay that forward to other new teachers as they embark on their pedagogical journeys.

In teaching, I strive to approach excellence by nurturing a disciplined practice along with a holistic understanding of music. In the private lesson, I explore many different facets of study and performance, including (though certainly not limited to) technical development, injury prevention, musical literacy, ear training, voicing, harmony, and theory. I give repertoire listening assignments, but also encourage students to seek out and discover new repertoire on their own. I ask students to make and study recordings of themselves in video and audio formats, not only to learn from, but also to document their own development to reflect upon as a personal and professional archive. I host seasonal studio recitals in traditional performance venues, but also create opportunities to perform in spaces like libraries and retirement communities. My students are also encouraged to perform frequently, as I believe there is no better experience than performing itself.

In group classes, regardless of whether the course is for music majors or community populations, the largest challenge lies in managing vastly different backgrounds, abilities, and levels of interest and commitment. It requires adaptability in the form of language that accommodates all of these variances while making class appropriately accessible, challenging, and enjoyable. In required piano for music majors, I make an effort to familiarize myself with each student's degree program and instrument so that I can look for opportunities to relate their learning to their other areas of study and interest. For example, while my curriculum in these courses has sequenced successions of technical skills like 5-finger patterns, intervals, scales, and arpeggios, I may introduce resources on major and minor chords earlier to musical theater and jazz students. Historically, these students have

responded enthusiastically by seeing opportunities to use these skills in the music they study outside of piano class and bringing in examples to share with me. While I believe sequencing is important, I also believe in offering students small, selective challenges and “stretch” goals to look forward to in the future.

In recreational groups, I get to know my students through icebreakers and improvisation and will frequently incorporate their favorite songs into the curriculum by creating simple arrangements for collaborative playing in the classroom. I will also create more difficult variations of those pieces for those who are self-directed and seek more challenges outside of the time we have in class.

Regardless of background, I always welcome students to be brave and ask questions aloud. Not only could this process help others who might be wondering about similar issues, but it alerts me when certain topics need extra attention or re-explanation. Even more importantly, this helps build community within the classroom and comradery between classmates. I also strive to ask a balance of convergent and divergent questions to the class at large. In asking questions with direct, straight forward answers, like “What is this note?” students can build their confidence as new and continuing learners. With broader open-ended questions, like “What do you think might be an effective way to practice this passage?” my intent is to have the class think critically while engaging with one another in developing creative solutions and sharing advice.

While my background and education as a pedagogue are primarily in piano, my broader experiences as a leader in nonprofit arts management with a vested interest in social justice education has led me to inextricably tie the theories I’ve learned navigating these spaces to my own teaching. I believe in creating “brave spaces”¹ for students and teachers in private lessons, studio classes, group piano contexts, the pedagogy classroom, and performance. Brave spaces are distinctly different from the more commonly known term, “safe spaces,” because they do not suggest that learning environments will always feel safe and comfortable. Instead, discomfort is embraced; uncomfortability in making mistakes is an important and unavoidable part of the learning process. With these values, I can help normalize and value process over results and encourage sharing performances and experiences at all stages of development. I believe that by owning missteps in our individual musical and pedagogical journeys, it can lead us towards curious introspection, rewiring our brains to see challenges as opportunities for change – and sometimes – innovation. In studio class, a brave space is one where a student is encouraged to play their piece before they feel truly “ready.” In a private lesson or classroom, a student should feel comfortable in offering an educated guess when they do not know the answer to a question. In performance on stage, it could mean swiftly acknowledging and moving on from a memory slip or sloppy passage without dwelling on the mistake.

I believe that having the courage to take risks and challenge conventions can result in innovation. In 2016, I gave a recital that included multimedia for the first time. I created a silent film experience with archival 1940s circus films being played during my performance of Schumann’s *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*. I projected livestream images of my hands plucking and strumming strings inside of the piano, demystifying the strange sounds of Crumb and Cowell. I invited dancers to visually illustrate the musical differences in tango compositions by Nazareth and Stravinsky. While these ideas originally came out of a simple desire of wanting to connect with audience members with little to no

¹ The term “brave space” was first popularized by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens in the chapter “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” of their book *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators* (2013).

musical background, I realize now that this was a direct result of my experiences as a teacher. Moreover, the experience of creating these performances and showcasing my original artistic interpretations of these pieces allowed me to feel a unique ownership and understanding of the music itself. Performance has become an integral part of my language as a pedagogue; how I engage my audience is directly informed by how I engage my students. This concept is something I am continually exploring through cross-modal exploration of music in the private lesson and group piano classroom. It means that I am interested in hearing my 12-year-old intermediate student share about her gymnastics meet because it might mean we can compare her favorite events to how we use our wrists effectively during technical exercises. I am interested in the 70-year-old beginner's knitting project because it might help in the conceptualization of repetition and musical patterns.

I believe that my greatest strength as a pedagogue lies within my ability to connect with students from all walks of life and encourage them wholeheartedly towards their goals and interests. These connections have organically fostered so much more than music; they have resulted in creativity, bravery, vulnerability, laughter, and so many lasting memories with students. I know that every one of my piano students – no matter if they are an elementary school beginner, a serious performer, or an adult that only wants to play alone for fun in the evenings – has experienced the pride of overcoming some sort of difficulty in music. It brings me immense satisfaction as their teacher to acknowledge and celebrate those achievements with them. My hope is that those memories will resonate with them and that the willpower and perseverance gained during their musical studies will transfer into other facets of their lives.