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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Musicians today face a much different landscape and work arena than our predecessors who entered the market as little as twenty years before us. Not only are we tasked with building the solid technique required of any successful performer, but we also must serve as marketer, finance manager, event producer, web designer, community engager, writer, editor and agent for our own brand. As a musician who struggled to find his place in this landscape, I seek to serve the students in a unique way that understands the necessity for foundational training while acknowledging the requirements of today's musician. I seek to do this by equipping them with knowledge, grounding them in tradition, celebrating their individuality, and preparing them for work in their communities.

As a vocal coach, a majority of the time spent with students is about connecting the work they do in the classroom – musicianship, diction, history and studio work – to their performances. Whether song or aria, the foundations of rhythm, pitch accuracy, and language must first be addressed. When cracks in the foundation show, I point them out, and work alongside the student to address the causes of the cracks, rather than merely correcting the mistake. One of my great passions as a teacher lies in offering students as many tools as possible to independently correct similar mistakes in the future. The independence of students not only gives them more ownership over their art, but also forces responsibility and accountability for their own work. This ultimately offers students an opportunity to take more pride in the work they create.

While tradition more and more becomes a word to stray away from, I am a firm believer that to be an effective musician, you must first have an understanding of who and what has come before. To understand the implementation of a rolled-, versus flipped-, versus uvular “R” in French repertoire, for example, is to understand the trends in poetry, the artists who incited the change, and those who resisted. Talking about these changes in the studio allows me to engage the student on topics of performers, repertoire, and historical practices. This works to deepen their understanding and equip them with the knowledge to make independent artistic choices outside the studio.

My greatest joy as a teacher has come in celebrating students' individual artistry. This can only be accomplished by creating an environment of mutual respect, upholding high standards for both the student and myself, and by celebrating small victories along the way. Success for every student looks different; I take pride in, and am energized by adapting my approach to accommodate the learning styles of every student. I have worked with a broad spectrum of talents, and find the best way to engage and excite any student is to be engaged and excited along with them. Whether that is in the correct execution of a mixed vowel, the progress of memorization, or the completion of a performance, these successes build on each other. Positive experiences for students result in positive attitudes towards themselves and their own artistry.

Finally, amidst the IPA quizzes, repertoire lists and jury requirements, I ask students to think about their work as something beyond the studio. Asking them to discuss their repertoire within a historical context can create ties from a work's origin to today's culture and lead students to find a personal relevance. How was this work received? What was written before it? Does it remind you of other works, or other themes? How might you re-imagine the text for today's audience? Does it need re-imagining? Where could this piece be performed? Who should hear this piece? Why? These types of questions, and hundreds more, allow the student to step away from the vowels and consonants, away from placement and resonance, and view their work as part of something larger: something relevant for the communities they find themselves in. Studying music isn't simply about making beautiful sounds anymore. As Karl Paulnak wrote in his now-famous address to freshmen at Boston Conservatory: “Frankly, ladies and gentlemen, I expect you not only to master music; I expect you to save the planet.”