

Statement of Teaching Philosophy - Vince Peterson

My teaching career spans over a decade. Time flies when you're having fun! Fortunately, I am a lifelong learner and will never stop searching or digging deeper into all that I do. This is the main reason why I am a teacher. That being said, my fire as a performer also burns brightly because my own "real world" experiences are certainly a source of fuel for my teaching. If there was one definitive thing I could do for any student, it would be to instill in them a healthy and positive sense of self awareness that would enable them to constantly grow and evolve in their musicianship and their life in general - drawing from real experiences with real people.

I firmly believe that the best motivation a student can find for taking on a new musical challenge is provided by that student's *joyful curiosity* and their desire to dig into the material in front of them, whether it be their own or someone else's. It is my job to embody this curiosity and my aim to instill it in them. The type of motivation I speak of comes mainly from a student's personal decision to serve the best interests of whatever music is at hand. In other words, we don't simply do drills and exercises from a textbook for the sake of "bettering our technique." We desire to learn one new technique at a time because a real piece of music has asked us to do so. Although I cannot force a student to be *joyfully curious*, I can at least inspire them through my own personal example and fortify them for the journey they must take to get there. I'll use myself as the example:

I learned scales on the piano with great drive and momentum because I wanted so badly to play a certain Mozart sonata and feel it alive under my hands. There could not have been a stronger motivation than that for me at that time.

As a teacher, I am doing my job best when I can ignite that kind of drive via that kind of source in my students.

A good conductor desires to learn how to render scores at the piano, to transpose, to audiate and read multiple lines of music simultaneously because s/he knows that the conductor's own cognitive and visceral relationship with the music at hand informs every aspect of the work: the preparation, the gesture, the verbal communication, the facial expressions, the rehearsal technique, and so on. It also influences the relationship of each player or singer to the work.

A good composer desires to translate what s/he hears internally to the written page so that the music can be experienced by others in the same way that it is being experienced within the mind. S/he wishes to cause a musical idea to become its truest and most authentic self, and therefore s/he must possess a keen ability to recognize and crystalize what is being heard, as well as the technique of communicating it as clearly as possible on the page with as little room as possible for questioning what needs to be done to make it come alive.

On another personal note, I am captivated daily by my students' reactions to music - both the joyful and the somber. No matter the style or genre at hand, I consider it a great privilege to go on each student's journey with them and watch them grow, explore, and ultimately rise to new plateaus of understanding. I aim to open new artistic capillaries for them, to celebrate their successes with them, and to support them through the challenges they inevitably face throughout the process.

To me, as a working artist, *teaching is a completely separate art unto itself*. Although a person might be an excellent musician, this does not guarantee that person will also be an excellent teacher of music. For me, the art of teaching has always come naturally. For others, it may not. I'm quite comfortable in the classroom and in other alternative and practical teaching environments. I know that teaching is one of the most effective ways I can positively impact the world, and so I continue to do it with fervor and excitement.

The Hallmarks of a Good Teacher:

A good teacher has the inherent capacity to act from love, even when disciplining students. He teaches in a manner which achieves targeted learning goals effectively, but does not allow students to feel “like they are being taught.” He knows that as much as he deserves the respect of his students, he must earn it. Above all, he views them first as human beings. He understands that learning is not relegated to a classroom. He draws from his own observance of real life experiences, also using analogy and metaphor to illustrate his teaching points. He gives meaningful assignments and not just busy work. He is patient, but firm. He never asks his students to do anything he can’t do himself. He is realistic, but optimistic at the same time.

I know that I have consistently achieved these hallmarks in my teaching career thus far. I feel that they are universal and have applied both to my high school and my college teaching. I have found them to be not only effective, but profound in how they affect students, leaving a lasting positive impact on them. I have an excellent track record of extremely positive relationships with students.

The Role of the Conductor - Vince’s “Credo”

I see the role of the conductor as one that is two-fold. First, the conductor is a collaborator in the sense that s/he must evoke an environment of collaboration during rehearsals and performance. This environment must be one of discovery, of awe and wonder in the music. It is the job of the conductor to invite the singers or players into the music. This is done less from a pedagogical standpoint and more from a standpoint of agreement between the conductor and the players or singers about what the music itself is asking of them. I truly believe that good technique, clarity of sound and intonation and excellent synchronization are all byproducts of an inherent love for, and a deeply rooted relationship with whatever music is at hand. This is to say that the conductor must create this sense of emotion not only in his or her gestures, facial expressions and other body language; but in the way that he or she communicates verbally about the piece as well. If the players or singers love what they are performing, their labors will be ones that are not done for the conductor or for the audience, but for the motivation of sharing what they love in a true and profound way. Particularly in professional situations but also in others, I don’t feel that it is effective for a conductor to begin from a place of “note-accuracy” and pedagogy. This is not to say that these matters aren’t of extreme importance, but rather that accuracy and precision are born out of the desire on the part of the conductor and (by default) the players or singers to serve the best interests of the music. Although a conductor is a leader by default, s/he is also very much a servant of music and his or her musical choices must be governed by this notion first and foremost.

Secondly, conductors must be chameleons. They must adapt to whatever environment they are working in. Realistically, the world is not full of professional grade top-notch ensembles. Conductors may find themselves in a wide variety of rehearsal and performance situations. Conductors must possess a *sixth sense* about this which would help them to work in the most efficient way possible while still accomplishing what is outlined above with any ensemble they may lead. Additionally, choral conductors must not be strangers to the orchestra and orchestral conductors must not be strangers to the chorus. I say this because the idea of musicality is universal and separate from the specific pedagogy of instruments versus that of singers. Hearing counterpoint and hearing harmony as a “chance occurrence” in polyphonic texture is paramount to a conductor’s success. *Counterpoint is also universal.* No matter the situation a conductor may be in, they must always present themselves as leaders, while remaining ever involved with the demands of the music. They must place the score at the center of their process. I know from my own experience that all the answers a conductor may search for are found right there.

The Budding Conductor

The beginning conductor is usually full of great enthusiasm and excitement...for all the wrong reasons. As I move forward in my life, I've found myself wishing from time to time that there were better ways for my wonderful teachers to have prepared me for the —real life and work— of a conductor.

When I started conducting, I had one idea in my mind about “what a conductor does” and “why a conductor gets to be a conductor.” Now, I'm singing a different tune!

Having said what I said above, the personal value system of a budding conductor must be examined in earnest. So, too, should a person's self awareness (both mentally and physically). Beginning conductors must examine their musicianship picture and all that comprises it: aural and theoretical abilities, keyboard skills, personal sense of intonation, ability to musically-multitask, organizational and people skills. They must be taught to look for answers to their questions first and foremost in the score at hand, no matter what type of score that may be.

Fundamentally, a conductor's job is universal. The same important musical skills applied by great conductors like Daniel Barenboim and Otto Werner Mueller in the world's concert halls can be observed in the work of George Martin and Quincy Jones in their studio recordings. They share profoundly deep roots. The work of Bach, Beethoven, and Debussy informs the work of Brad Mehldau, Michael Jackson, and Jamiroquai. Therefore, there are doors of entry into the understanding and practice of conducting that can easily be opened from any angle, no matter where a student may be coming from.

A beginning conducting class should:

- be a collaborative environment in which students rotate to the podium; and when they are not conducting, should support their colleagues by playing and/or singing the parts of whatever score is at hand.
- focus on musicianship skills such as score reading, transposition, and developing strong rhythmic awareness.
- provide a cursory experience of both instrumental and choral conducting techniques including:
 - gesture patterns
 - proprioceptive movement technique
 - an understanding of bodily kinesthetics
 - rehearsal planning and execution
- be comprised of music of a wealth of varied styles and genres
- include discussions of the conductor's role as well as reflection prompts given to students for self examination
- require students to observe other conductors outside of the classroom and write critically about live concert performances as a means of personal growth.