

DEREK KELLER  
STATEMENT ON TEACHING:  
INTEREST, EXPERIENCE, AND PHILOSOPHY

Over the last twelve years, I have taught professionally in a wide range of settings: research institutions, conservatories, religious schools, community colleges, and master classes. While working in this diverse array of settings, I have not forgotten whom I am teaching. I have been able to teach *and reach* a wide variety of learners from an equally wide array of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. I strive to be sensitive to *how* my students learn, whether they are one with a learning disability filling a GE requirement at a community college or a prize-winning conservatory student that has had every privilege provided them. To reach the gamut of learners I have encountered in my career, I have a three-pronged approach: 1) I accommodate their learning patterns and backgrounds, 2) I motivate them to be resourceful and self-reliant, and 3) I generate productive classroom/studio dynamics. Moreover, I have designed ways to convey course materials that call attention to the historical, cultural, and social contexts relevant to making music. I approach teaching as a practice through my continuing education for professors, participating in regular student and faculty teaching evaluations, and informal open classroom conversations with my students about my teaching. As an educator, I strive to impart to my students ways in which they can use their developing musical skills as a tools for social transformation within their communities, in partnership with local businesses, and entering a world stage, whether it be literally on stage or online.

Skills in musical mechanics are only relevant to students' lives when those skills are connected to history and culture. To illustrate, I bring alive rules, dates, and names, through active learning. For example, I might have the students transcribe the hook to the latest hit by Beyoncé – students find these exercises fun, and I find them effective. Further, I incorporate rigorous and current computer assisted ear training environments, because two days of class drill is not enough. My devotion to effective instruction is leading to a forthcoming aural skills book, which will provide instructors two-years worth of weekly training lesson plans (w/ downloadable audio clips), cross-referenced with current sight-singing texts. This book is a result of my extensive teaching in musicianship and ear training. It covers the gamut of necessary skill development for students to acquire skills in hearing and transcription applicable to a wide array musical style, from 'old' music to music of our present.

In my seminars and composition studio, I strive to instill in my students a sense of self-reliance, versatility, community engagement and entrepreneurialism that goes beyond composing a piece and expecting someone else to play it. I urge them to conduct and even perform their own work, if the instrumentation includes their own instrument, whether it be their own voice, an instrument, or some form of music technology. As a student develops their portfolio, I help them create a timeline of preparedness based on a proposed performance dates: when the score and parts need to be delivered, scheduling rehearsals, arranging for and audio/visual recording, etc. After the performance, I encourage my students to build their own website to make their portfolio available - which takes technological and self-promotional know-how. I make it very clear that if a student wants to 'get the gig' in this artistic climate, they have to be versatile and have an entrepreneurial spirit that takes them and their music making into their communities. This entrepreneurial spirit must also have a collaborative component whereby students learn how to work with different kinds of artists, business people, and community members. I strive to impart to them that art that changes lives does not happen without community engagement.

When teaching composition seminars, I take care to adjust my teaching strategies with respect to the students' varied levels of experience in composing. My composition seminars vary widely in scope and aesthetic topics that manifest in subjects including but not limited to: notation, instrumentation, orchestration, counterpoint, electronic/computer/interactive music and critical listening sessions reviewing compositions

from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. I design these seminars to challenge the students' individual levels of creativity; to combine inherent musical interests with ways of musical thinking that are unfamiliar; to learn how to collaborate and develop musical ideas with performers; and to learn how to prepare a composition for performance. Depending on the size of the seminar and the instrumental ability of the students, I often encourage my students to either conduct or perform their own work in some capacity. In the former case, they need to engage performer-colleagues to play the piece. In the latter case, I encourage them to engage another classmate to conduct the work. This approach has made it possible for every student to successfully design, compose, and have a new work performed at the end of the term, whether it is a chamber work for 3 or 4 mixed instruments, or violin and turntable (truth!). Additionally, the students learn the collaborative nature of music making and appreciate all the different phases of creating a work of art.

While a Visiting Assistant Professor of Composition at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, my studio was comprised of undergraduate students who were pursuing majors in Composition as well as those who were pursuing a major with the dual concentration in Composition and TIMARA (Technology in Music and Related Arts). While I find the enthusiasm and discovery process of lower division students to be inspiring, I also enjoy working upper division students who are committed to learning how to refine their craft, prepare themselves for graduate study, and start coming to terms with their responsibilities as artists in our contemporary moment (which is also directly applicable to guiding graduate students). For example, one of my students produced interdisciplinary work for interactive computer media, electro-acoustic instruments, dance, and projected images. I helped him synthesize his content for sound, movement and images; acquire the logistical know-how to put together a multi-media work (i.e., time management, task delegation, and research); and develop interpersonal skills needed to work in a collaborative environment. Through this project he discovered an interdisciplinary path that harnessed his artistic voice in what is seemingly an endless sea of aesthetic possibilities.

In addition to the aforementioned educational settings, I enjoy teaching social, historical, and cultural aspects of music. I have taught courses in music of the western tradition, world music, 20<sup>th</sup>-century concert music, and various subgenres of popular music. In these courses, music is the means to examine cultures and musical traditions within their socially, politically, and historically specific contexts. The students not only become familiar with the music through lectures, reading, and listening assignments, they often learn how to identify and articulate politics of race, class, gender, and economics through research and writing. Teaching these kinds of courses affords me the chance to acquire and practice different approaches to delivering course materials and preparing strategies of framing and balancing the historical, theoretical (both in the cultural and musical sense), and aural components of the course.

My dedication to teaching has been recognized by the University of Georgia through the Outstanding Teacher Assistant Award, my induction to the Phi Beta Kappa Society (beta tau chapter, UGA 1996), and by the University of California San Diego through the Summer Teaching Fellows program. Through my emphasis that *hearing* is not just a natural or physical sense that can be learned, honed and used to perceive the mechanics of music. I reinforce that hearing is a way of becoming attuned to music's social, cultural and political contexts in order to expose other and, perhaps, more radical meanings. Teaching in these diverse settings has enabled me to emphasize the importance of both practical musical skills as well as the cultural, social and political contexts in which music is imagined, created and produced. Because musical knowledge and ability is intertwined with one's personality, I understand that every student I teach in these settings needs a slightly different approach from another, a different kind of attention, and perhaps a different kind of coaching.