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Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher, the most vital lesson I could hope to pass on to my students is that a rich and fulfilling life follows the desire to develop one's skills and knowledge. No matter the specific goals – whether the dream is performing on a grand stage or working quietly behind the scenes – an affinity and hunger for learning is the most valuable possession for every student. My approach to this goal is simple in its essence: I try to impart the same drive that I have for obtaining comprehensive musicianship through diligent study of its components.

I enjoy my role as a teacher the most when I can act as a guide for a student's own journey to becoming a complete musician. When I teach, I see myself not as the most informed person in the room who has been tasked with making each of my students as informed as I am. Certainly, there are important concepts to learn, music and resources to become familiar with, scales to be able to play, and so on, but these are the goal of teaching – not the means. Instead, when I teach, I feel as though I am guiding a student down a path which I have traveled well myself and with which I am familiar. I invite my students to explore, discover, and perhaps gain some deeper wisdom about music, themselves, or even their role in the world, at times teaching me something in the process. It is what makes teaching not only meaningful, but ever-changing and dynamic.

Though it is important to me to encourage independence for those reasons, I do not hesitate to employ more direct methods. Specifically, I stress the importance of regular and habitual practice, because I acknowledge that teaching effectively is not simply a matter of being passionate and having an infectious enthusiasm. When it comes down to the weekly lesson, it takes a steady and calculated methodology. I have a very pragmatic view both of how I lead lessons and recommend a warm-up and practice routine for the student based on a concept that I call "playing from the ground up." This concept is based on a daily establishment of each layer of brass performance one at a time, beginning with the fundamental concept of sound production and building up to the technical aspects of the material at hand. "Ground up" playing is also a basic pedagogical tool; for any musical passage a student is struggling to execute fluently, I find that investigating and correcting the fundamental aspects of their playing in turn often corrects the technical issues as well.

I aim also to build each student's abilities in self-evaluation and confidence in teaching themselves. To keep students engaged while we're hard at work, I ask them frequently to evaluate their own performance. Where did we get off track? What needs work? This not only minimizes the allowance of mistakes that may lead to habits; it also promotes an autonomy within the learner and a sense of accomplishment that results only from doing one's own work. If all else fails, it is certainly effective to closely guide a student's performance until they have the skills and experience to reflect and make advances more automatically – this is the practical application of "to teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime."

Any significant progress in the world of music will necessarily begin with the people that make it. By extension, what progress can we hope for if we as teachers do not begin with ourselves? I take very seriously the idea of teaching myself and being the best musician I can be so that I can teach others in their goals of doing the same. Most importantly, I try to impart the basic, yet deeply human love for knowledge and realizing one's potential, and how that can enhance one's experience of life in innumerable ways.