

## **Dr. James Ogburn – Teaching Philosophy**

As a music educator I prioritize both the intellectual and emotional aspects of music. I believe music communicates in both ways and that our relationship to a specific musical work is constantly evolving. Nurturing the emotional side largely takes place in the practice room, which requires the student's independent motivation and the traditional feedback model of private instruction. The intellectual side, however, can be addressed in the classroom through a careful understanding of how music becomes internalized.

Music is exceptional in that three learning styles can be utilized in multifarious ways. For example, performing musicians simultaneously apply visual learning when reading from their part, auditory learning with the feedback of their instruments as well as through understanding their part within an ensemble, and tactile learning as they apply motor skills specific to their instrument. In many other disciplines, each learning style is engaged but the process is less organic to the structure or is segregated from the others. This fact provides a unique advantage for the classroom music instructor. Of course, I believe that more typical models of reinforcement – lecture, note taking, and outside reading, for example – should still be utilized within most courses of musical study. However, it is essential that a competent music instructor access the inherent advantages of music as part of the curriculum. Practically, this means that many courses in music can and should require at least some performance aspect.

In the interest of invoking all learning styles, I require performance ability and practical facility on both the keyboard and voice as part of the music theory curriculum. I do not view keyboard study as merely a requirement of the discipline or as extrinsic to the theory class, but rather as the greatest asset in addressing the intricacies of the tonal system. The keyboard has served such an important role, not only in the history of the last few centuries but also as it represents the stylistic idiom in its layout – reflective of the Ionian mode – that it can be evidenced for its historical context and practical construction. In addition, it greatly reinforces the

visual and tactile learning styles of most students through the physical layout of the keyboard. To this end, I select short musical examples for the keyboard that demonstrate theoretical concepts and are accessible to the beginning keyboard player. Throughout the term, I dedicate several meetings to short exercises, for which each student must provide an analysis and performance at the keyboard.

The other critical instrument for the study of music is the most ancient of all – the voice. When musicians sing and, especially, sight-sing they engage all of the above learning styles and do so with the body as their instrument. I find the physical relationship between a singer and his/her music to be indispensable. In theory classes, this belief induces group singing of homework exercises. For example, instead of merely analyzing a Bach chorale as an abstraction I believe it is crucial to sing these exercises in four-part harmony during class. The ideal situation involves singing each exercise as it is assigned, then singing it again after discussing it as a class in order to highlight noteworthy elements.

I strive to provide my students with a mastery of the tonal system of the common-practice period because I believe this style system provides the most clearly organized and coherent structure for the arrangement of sound. In addition, it represents the foundation of the music with which most of them are familiar. As a composer, I believe this system represents only one of many viable means of music making. As a performer, I also find music from outside this system indispensable to developing my musicianship. However, as a teacher I recognize the value of the common-practice period as the most studied and highly articulated order of music in the world to date. Simply put, this tradition cannot and should not be ignored as the core course of study for musical education. However, the Western, tonal structure should be complemented with other music, in the interest of engaging with the greatest number of students.

In practical terms, I find that music theory is essential to the mastery of every sub-discipline of music. For performers, competence in theory and analysis has proven essential to the intentional interpretation of musical works. For composers

and musicologists, theory and analysis provide inspiration through the discovery of attributes of a musical work that we find engaging and rewarding as listeners. Obviously, due to the rewards for the performer, composer, and musicologist, music educators must also obtain a thorough knowledge of theory so that they can pass this on to their own students. I strive to foster a new generation of educated musicians who will apply what they have learned about the organization of sound in manifold ways.

I endeavor to encourage in my students a life-long passion for music. Although I have attained a terminal degree, I maintain that I still have much to learn about music and this fact both humbles and inspires me. I strive to pass this boundless inquisitiveness to my students. Since I provide my students with the capacity to think critically about concepts of music theory, they can continue to engage with its unanswerable questions. Through a continued and renewed engagement with the material, the next generation of scholars and musicians can provide new interpretations of old works and create new approaches, styles, and compositions.