

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy Andre Kahil Myers

*"Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer."*- from *Howard's End*, by E.M. Forster

College and University Learning are undergoing a crisis of conscience. Escalating tuition and fees make students and parents increasingly anxious for a direct, causal relationship between a university or college degree, and a viable career trajectory upon graduation. This anxiety, coupled with the recent economic downturn, places the enterprise of college learning under increasing scrutiny, and especially calls into question the merits of a university education in the arts. While this disquiet is not new, it is brought into stark relief in the digital age, where ubiquitous access to information online imperils the discipline, patience, and fortitude necessary to accrue wisdom.

Any responsible approach to teaching in this environment should be mindful, therefore, of the abstract, network-driven nature of thriving in the information age, and temper its breadth with the tactile, slow, and sensory depth cultivated by time-honored, best practices in pedagogy. Breadth and depth are both vital.

My teaching philosophy is continental in nature. In practice, it celebrates students' drive to intellectually *connect* with the world around them as the principal agent of, and empowering virtue in, their search for meaningful, musical citizenship. It is supported by the following.

**Counterpoint:** Continental thinking in teaching cultivates breadth and depth by creating symbiosis between academic rigor and playful inventiveness. Learning tools, when used contrapuntally, create a harmony of elements greater than the sum of their parts. In teaching tonal music theory & practice, for example, this means that textbook study, in-class group work, integrated repertoire study, Bach chorale arrangement study, workbook assignments, and class projects all work together in concert to place different learning modalities in dialogue with each other. In teaching electronic music, (where, due to the breakneck speed of innovation in musical technology, proficiency with some software/hardware does not guarantee mastery of the art) contrapuntal thinking considers aesthetics, cognitive sciences, and film editing practices as gateways to abiding musical insights. Contrapuntal teaching is heterophonic; its beauty is constantly on the move.

**Community:** Continental thinking in teaching furthers depth and breadth of student learning by cultivating musical communities. Musical communities encourage classroom environments where students feel accountable not just to their instructor, but to each other. It means that each member of a class is interested and invested in the success of her peers. For my senior seminar on 20<sup>th</sup> century string quartets, for example, each student prepared a fifteen-minute presentation on a quartet or musical artist for a group of sixth-graders at a local arts charter school. Seminar students aided each other with audio/visual equipment, and drew common themes between their presentations. For composers, I have organized new music festivals featuring works by student composers, and, in concert with chamber music and student orchestra programs, had students perform and conduct new work. Student musicians and composers bonded with each other, and each participant became a better musical citizen by virtue of their working together.

**Transparency:** Effective communities seek out the best from each member in their group. For this reason, continental practice in teaching is transparent in its grading criteria, assignment prompts, pedagogical method, and instruction. It engenders trust and respect from my students, and encourages their best work through the provision of clear guidelines and feedback. My grading rubrics are clearly outlined on my syllabi, and discussed at the beginning of each term. Throughout the course, feedback is anchored within the rubrics, and informs the corrections/suggestions I make to their work. To clearly explicate an assignment's parameters allows for students and instructors to engage them fully. And to keep my grading books online allows for a student to always know where he stands in our learning community.

**Conclusion:** In summary, the above three tenets invite my classroom communities to responsibly question the nature of authoritative musical knowledge while surrounded by noise and wonder from the information age, and thus requires my musical instincts and abilities be subject to the same attention and scrutiny I would afford to my students. We teach what we are, not what we aspire to be.