

Keefe Ismael, trombone

Teaching Philosophy

I see my responsibility as a teacher to apply in facilitating development in three broad areas with each building upon the other: instrumental facility, musical intention and expression, and connecting with humanity.

Instrumental Facility

Without the ability to operate one's instrument, no cohesive music can be made. As such, my job as a teacher is to help students operate their instruments in not only the easiest, but also the healthiest way possible as a means of reducing both the effort required to communicate their message and the likelihood of injury down the line.

The strongest instrument that a musician has is their ears. I am a proponent of the belief that a musician can only consistently produce what they are able to consistently sing in their head as they play. One of the biggest ways I advocate this in my teaching is through the use of singing in their practice. The voice is the first instrument we learn to use, and is the most immediate connection between what we hear in our heads and the sounds we put out into the world. I encourage my students to sing their instrumental lines themselves as a means of clarifying exactly what it is they seek to produce with their instrument. If students have the time and the means, I also encourage them to take a vocal class, join a local choir, or even sing their favorite songs regularly. The more we can get connected with our voice, the more we can get connected with our inner ear. I also encourage students to frequently record themselves and listen back, and by having them come up with a balanced perspective about areas of excellence and areas of growth, I hope to encourage the habit of mindful awareness in the operation of their instrument.

Musical Intention and Expression

Though instrumental operation is an essential part of being a musician, they are primarily a building block for fostering musical intention and expression within my students. My hope is that I can take students beyond instrument operation and help cultivate their musical tastes and consciousness. I take interest in the music that my students listen to and actively challenge students to consider why they do and don't like the music they listen to.

When it comes to musical expression, much of my own music making is inspired by the practices of great actors. Their performances are much more than remembering their lines: it is also learning everyone else's lines, determining their character's backstory, figuring out the character's mannerisms, and more. In music, this is paralleled by learning the other parts of other players in the ensemble, learning the historical context the music was written in, and interpreting what the composer was trying to communicate to us through sheet music. These skills and more are what I believe truly bring a performance to life.

Connecting With Humanity

Though the most challenging part to nurture within the student, having a student feel more human is perhaps the most important thing I hope to impart. The study of a musical instrument can be a lifelong journey, and as such, it almost inevitably becomes an incredibly personal process. I am committed to supporting students in both their successes and their struggles in not only their music making, but in their lives (and if they go on to study their instrument long enough, the line between two can become quite fine). I am committed to creating a safe space for students to discover their most authentic selves. I am committed to cultivating a culture of hard work, vulnerability, and community within my studio.

Above all, I know that my students are people before they are musicians. Through a holistic music making process, it is my hope that students' lives are enriched by engaging with not only their own humanity, but with the world around them, through the medium of music.