

# Teaching Philosophy

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**My Teaching Concept is built upon four intertwining pillars:**

Nature, Nurture, Knowledge, Necessity.

The interaction and individual command of these elements is essential in fully developing a young musician's talent and potential and in preparing each and every one of them for their own successful, productive, multifaceted and fulfilling life in music and society.

## 1. Nature

Approaching and understanding the nature, or the naturalness, of playing the violin prioritizes awareness of the mechanical and physical playing requirements of the instrument itself, combined with each individual's unique physiological, intellectual, emotional, and psychological ability and development. I believe it is essential to give great attention and concentration to early stages of work with a new student on acquiring maximum comfort and security with the most basic elements of approaching the violin. This specifically includes:

- naturalness in acquiring a healthy, comfortable, and a reliably relaxed physical stance
- naturalness in holding the instrument and bow in relation to individuals' size variants
- flexibility, freedom, and coordination of arm-back-joint relationships and motion
- self-command in focusing concentration on specific technical challenges.

I spend great attention in developing these basic elements with each violinist I teach, building a common language and communicative exchange between us in an atmosphere of trust and deepening understanding of new aspects and of personal discovery within the great traditions of violin playing. Guiding a young violinist in developing their own most natural path to the technical nature of our instrument, in relation to the physics of the instrument and their own framework, is for many the first step on a new path to virtuosity, reliability, beauty, and self-assurance.

Heightening and fine-tuning these abilities is certainly essential at all periods in a violinist's life, but my experience has shown a special need for clarity, depth, and deeper learning during the time and age of Graduate work. It is during this period that human and artistic focus can and needs to be brought together most effectively, with maturity and sustainability, in support of clear professional goals and endeavors.

## 2. Nurture

In structuring my nurturing method I have developed a concise program of basic technical elements that develop the physical necessities for control of the instrument and for the control of body and mind. This detailed systematic study develops the acoustical expressions needed to meet all musical demands required of us in our performance and teaching careers. Every element of both traditional and modern technique is addressed in an interconnected and historically-informed approach. For a detailed reference to my teaching method and process I attach my essential personal teaching documents: "Building Blocks of Technical Development" (see following appendix). Further supplemental pedagogical documentation, initiatives compiled by my previous Master's and Professional Artist Certificate graduates, can be found on my homepage. This nurturing process forms an ever widening foundation for developing young musicians' abilities, self-awareness, beneficial self-criticism, emotional and physical endurance, with inspired enthusiasm for the versatility of our necessary skills.

The intensive and continuous study and performance of correlating and contrasting selected repertoire incorporates these newly accomplished skills and development, bringing musical and artistic challenges to the forefront with greater flexibility and knowledgeable means of execution. I structure solo repertoire requirements and challenges with respect to furthering artistic and historical distinction, developing performance taste and style, understanding musical structure and rhythmic continuity, and advancing virtuosic abilities, character and brilliance. A typical semester of repertoire study and performance requirements would include:

- Major Solo Works from the Baroque
- Major Concerti or Sonatas from the Classical Period
- Major Concerti from the Romantic, 20th and 21st Centuries
- Major Virtuosic, Character or Recital Works from the 20th or 21st Centuries
- Etudes/Caprices/Technical Studies

Enormously beneficial and supportive of the intensive work which I require in my studios are the weekly internal, public and/or virtual studio classes. These masterclass situations provide exceptional performance platforms and encourage personal development and artistic challenges in an open, supportive, and caring atmosphere. I encourage constructive thought and criticism with written expression and review, creative exchange, and open discussion. This weekly event is not only a goal for bringing a higher level of performance expertise to a new piece of repertoire, but provides invaluable experience in preparing to undertake audition/competitive challenges, solidifying ideas, and encouraging open social engagement and collegiality.

I have promoted online masterclass engagement and individual teaching in support of my full time in-person lesson plans for the past ten years. Guiding three full studios in different countries encouraged me to utilize new technology effectively. This has allowed me to be available to my students for all their additional needs: lessons, open office hours, spontaneous questions, special concerns, and advice. Telework has also enabled me to reach out to gifted young artists worldwide, helping guide them into other international studies and in many cases into my own studios and schools of music. Please see the "International Online Forum" on my homepage. A most inspiring experience has taken place during our COVID-19 pandemic. Being thrown full time into telework during this crisis, I supplemented regular lessons and masterclasses in each studio with a combined Performance/Masterclass Weekly Platform. This proved an enormous stimulus and creative exchange for students and guests as well, and created not only higher standards and goals for individuals but brought a sense of togetherness among professionals facing important challenges in their present work during a crisis and in their future endeavors. It was a marvelous enhancement that I will continue and expand upon in my teaching.

### **3. Knowledge**

Expanding young musicians' intellectual, artistic, and creative horizons remains a never ending treasure trove of exploration, inspiration, research, discovery and passion. While a young artist's musical foundation and education can be, to varying degrees, discernible in introductory and audition performances, we as artist-educators truly uncover and re-discover the innate passion, absorption, determination, devotion, curiosity and creativity in each person throughout the committed years we support and inspire their individuality.

I structure students' purposeful and lifelong venture in their "Building of Knowledge," by actively incorporating the study of masterworks for other genre and instrumentations by composers being explored in studio work. Suggestions for my students as further familiarization and discussion of parallel compositions:

- Discovering Bach's great instrumental cycles, English and French Suites, Preludes and Fugues, Cello Suites, etc., when studying our "Sei Soli" Sonatas and Partitas
- Digging into Mozart's Operatic Masterworks when approaching his works for solo violin
- Juxtaposing Brahms' Chamber Music for piano and strings when learning his Sonatas for Violin and Piano, and many others.

I require specific assignments of related or contrasting works for presentation as lectures in studio classes. For example:

- The relationship and influence of Beethoven's Violin Concerto on Brahms' magnificent creation in this oeuvre
  - Beethoven's influence on Mendelssohn's string quartet composition
- Encouraging the study of historical and cultural developments which influenced composition and musical styles is of topical importance. This includes the development and changes in our instruments in more than four centuries of history. Delving into early writings and treatises of monumental Baroque and Classical musicians provides awareness and first-hand information on violin technique for modern historically informed performances, for example:
- Geminiani's "The Art of Playing on the Violin" (1751)
  - Tartini's work on *Terzo Suono*, commonly referred to today as combination tones, and his treatise on ornamentation in "Traité des Agréments" (1770)
  - Leopold Mozart's "A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing" (1756)

A vital element of my own interpretive basis, as well as my ideals in teaching, is connecting the understanding of compositional process, structural awareness, harmonic sensitivity, rhythmic complexity and vitality with melodic nuance as the heart of our interpretive standards. I encourage uniting all we study in theoretical subjects into active focus to underpin our artistic motivation and am convinced that only through intellectual and emotional depth can we serve and bring once again, a masterpiece to true life. Lastly in this quest for knowledge, I support research, study, involvement, and inclusion of lesser-known composers and compositions for our instrument, especially from diverse musical spectrum and background. Encouraging study of avant-garde composition and music-making contributes to new avenues of understanding, growth and performance, and is essential in rounding students' development and stylistic individualism.

#### 4. Necessity

During Graduate studies, a musician must begin seriously and pragmatically viewing diverse career options and opportunities within the world of music. First understanding specialized necessities, effective preparation, unique skills and paths required to successfully attain a desired goal, and thereafter become a valued, trusted, and respected professional within the chosen area, is often for the young artist unclear, unknown or blurred in a sea of options, indecision and anxiety. Experience has shown me that young musicians at all levels of their education benefit from advice and guidance in understanding the specific skills required in diverse positions and functions.

#### **Solo initiative**

A violinist who is motivated highly for the extreme demands and conditions of a solo career must have a secure virtuosic technical ability, stage and varied performance experience, secure repertoire, and the ability to rise to continuously challenging expectations. Often in a lonely environment. I train my students in these areas, but always look for special exposure for those persons most gifted and determined in this direction. International competition participation is a useful, instructive training ground for the demands of a career centered around solo performance. I greet this form of challenge as a strongly effective medium for the performer to discover their special strengths and effectiveness as an artist. Throughout a student's study time with me, I select appropriate

competitive goals, as well as concert performances of variety to train and develop each individual's abilities in presenting music and their own artistic persona to the public. I steer my students towards acoustical and video recording as an artistic need for themselves and our cultural landscape. The perfection and artistic expertise that is required in this work can only be developed through constant encouragement, beneficial criticism and productive reiteration.

### **Orchestral challenges**

A violinist motivated to orchestral and large ensemble work will confront a different set of parameters that must be understood and embraced. Large ensemble involvement is essential throughout the professional studies of a violinist in developing necessary ensemble skills, a trained reflex in following a conductor, a working knowledge of repertoire, and the social acumen to join together with multiple artists striving towards one united goal. I encourage my

students to be avid participants in all orchestral work opportunities and to discuss openly their concerns, their feelings of insecurity or their sense of delight!

In Europe, we have numerous orchestral academies connected to most of the major orchestras. These positions are won and held, usually for one to two years, by highly qualified students during their years of study. This model is enormously beneficial in providing first class orchestral training before young artists face professional orchestral auditions. I work intensely with students in their preparation and in their ability to efficiently deal with the massive amounts of music they will be confronting in these academies. Wagner's complete "Ring of the Nibelung" in one season is a project to be approached with awe and respect for any musician at any age!

We are also confronted with two more vital aspects in respect to orchestral audition preparation, especially concerning our instrument:

- there is no international norm or consensus concerning audition practice and requirements
- taste and tradition can dictate diverse expectations and requirements for the different positions held within the violin sections.
- To aid my students in understanding and preparing for what they may be facing, I include the study of major orchestral excerpts and major orchestral soli from both the symphonic and operatic literature in our both private and studio class work. I encourage open thought and perspectives on:
  - the expectations and responsibilities of leadership positions, Concertmaster or Principal Second
  - assisting leadership roles: associate concert master or associate principal second
  - integration and harmony in the tutti group
  - the strength and artistic involvement necessary from performers in back positions

### **Chamber ensemble careers**

One of the most essential elements in developing a string quartet, piano trio or other chamber music ensemble formation into a successful, functioning, stable, and viable professional endeavor is tenacity! Along with that follows love and devotion to the genre and repertoire, strength of character, determination, patience, and the ability to compromise in the face of strife for the betterment of all. Often a tall order, but ultimately inevitable. I feel that no amount of study and performance of chamber music repertoire and experience in different ensembles is too much to truly prepare a young instrumentalist or ensemble for building a career as a stable unit in the music marketplace. The challenge artistically, commercially, and socially is exceptional, and one must understand that

this musical life-dream will require a multitude of sacrifice, commitment, and work, but will bring deep rewards.

It is clear to most young musicians looking in this artistic direction, that chamber ensembles performing on a high level require intensive study, rehearsal, and the facing of artistic challenges and competitive initiatives together. I have tried in my long years of teaching chamber music to instill a sense of responsibility and realistic pragmatism in young people building a future as a group. In my role as artistic director of chamber music festivals over many years, as well as for the Chrysalis Chamber Music Institute at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, I regularly give lectures and lead discussion on challenges, experiences, and social responsibility needed within ensembles to build and remain successful in this most challenging area of musical endeavor. A lecture example:

"Survival in Wonderland"

Unity and Controversy in the Looking-Glass

A CCMI Chamber Music Seminar illuminating Ensemble Challenges, Personal and Professional Relationships, Rehearsal Techniques, Ethics, Business, Promotion and Presentation.

### **Pedagogy**

Another area I would like to touch upon is the role of pedagogy in musicians' professional lives and the need and relevance it entails in social responsibility. When I received my first full professorship in Frankfurt, Germany, I was given the responsibility of creating an instrumental pedagogical structure and course for the entire Violin department. There, I laid the groundwork for what proved later to become the Vivaldi Program/Project, a hands-on teacher-training program aimed at educating underprivileged children.

At the Robert Schumann Hochschule Düsseldorf, I was able to initiate and expand this program through the social services of the City of Düsseldorf in cooperation with the Clara Schumann Music Conservatory of Düsseldorf and the RSH. This proved to develop into an inspiring "triumvirate of benefit." Bachelor and Graduate students were effectively educated and given hands-on teaching experience with instructional help, underprivileged children in care-centers were given their first chance to play the violin with individual instruction and in group activity. After graduating from the two-year VP program, children were encouraged to continue violin studies at the Clara Schumann Conservatory on scholarships from donors and the city of Düsseldorf. I am convinced that pedagogical and direct hands-on experience is essential for building teaching skills and developing social and community consciousness in young artists.

I was moved and delighted by the enthusiasm, motivation, and awakening passion from our Hochschule and university teacher-students, most of whom have continued into [successful performance and teaching positions](#) in Europe; some even founding private music schools in disadvantaged communities. My initiative won Germany's top educational award, "Ideen für die Bildungsrepublik," in 2011. Since this time, I have brought the VP program to UNCSA with, again, astounding success, helping college students to become involved in the societies around them as well as giving them clear know-how on early stages of pedagogy. This project now supports a larger social initiative, ArtistCorps at UNCSA, and is proving of fundamental benefit in the surrounding community.

I believe that performing artists benefit from and need the direct community and social contact that teaching provides. Although we understand well the enormous cultural benefits of musical experience in our society and of our roles in "giving" through our performing lives, nothing brings

the exchange of *Menschlichkeit*, humanity, with such personal involvement and depth as in teaching and helping one another. I personally feel deeply that this is our special “medicine of good,” using our universal language of music to communicate, build human bridges, and focus thoughts to beauty, peace, and harmony.

### **Coda**

In closing I would like to additionally comment that I have presented my teaching philosophy and experience here as well as possible in a methodical and systematic fashion. I hope to have successfully demonstrated my holistic approach to building a young musician’s capabilities and concepts into their fundament for creating future viable and successful careers.

What I find almost impossible to relay effectively within this “Method” is my unflagging concern, flexibility, creative innovation, and personal motivation in effectively responding to each and every student’s varying and ever-changing levels of need, knowledge, and support. Fulfilling, guiding, and plying these needs into strengths is my deepest goal, my personal gratification, and my greatest joy.