

Justin Bird

Teaching Philosophy

Teaching music forms a vital component of my life. I experience such joy when I practice and perform music, I've made it a big part of my life to unlock this for others. It's beautiful to be a part of the musical growth of a student and I always feel a great responsibility when a new student starts an artistic relationship with me. Over twenty years of teaching I have learned that every student deserves personalized lessons based on their individual goals and potential, and as a mentor - I have an influence on them in more than musical ways.

I consider my piano performing career vital to my success as a teacher, and vice versa. An inspiring pianist is an inspiring piano teacher and I play all repertoire that I teach. As well as using my playing and teaching experience to guide their repertoire choices, I eventually get my students to choose their own repertoire so they fall in love with discovering music. I become an example to my students of a pianist who loves to discover new music, so I encourage their listening in many ways.

In music I emphasize importance of looking beyond the notes on the page. I believe that understanding harmony, structure, historical context, and musical intent of the composer, is as important as the physical training. To apply imagination within the narrative structure of music, and understand how to communicate through one's stage presence to an audience is so important for growing artists of all ages. I talk to my students about their repertoire giving them context, a horizontal understanding of style and interpretation, and relating composer's life stories.

Each lesson is an event taken in a positive, enthusiastic frame of mind, with vigor and spontaneity. Giving praise is extremely important in my teaching, making my students feel intelligent and creative. It is surprisingly constructive, illuminating my ideas of what the student should hold important. Growing up as a Suzuki student, I have lived the immersive style of learning by listening to music, and know the learning advantages it provides. Experience has led me to instead encourage my students to listen to recordings of themselves and others after they finish learning their music, so they have a chance to develop their own ideas of the piece first. In New Zealand I learned to play on Hamburg Steinways, instruments that need care to make a full, round sound when playing loud. This helped me to form and teach a technique grounded in efficient use of arm weight versus muscle. A natural and more relaxed technique not only aims to produce a richer sound, but encourages economic injury-free use of the body.

Another way I help my students grow into performers is organize recitals and group classes often. When students have a short term performance goal to work towards they practice harder, and the camaraderie amongst fellow students is socially important for these future musicians. A student recital is beneficial for both teacher and student, as they not only test the student's abilities and show results of their work, but give me an opportunity to plan my future work with them.

As a technologically savvy teacher I often record my student's performances, encouraging them to enjoy the culmination and fruits of their progress, because I know how different ones perception of how they sound can be to the reality. I also love using tablets with apps like Piano Maestro for younger students to gamify their piano lessons. I teach a small group of students online via tonerow.com and I offer the same technology to my regular students.

Finally, I don't own knowledge, but I teach my students to be hungry for answers. In my lessons I strive to develop independent musical thinking and teach my students how to make their own musical decisions for the right reasons. I show them how to practise and when and why one uses specific practice techniques. Because of this their preparation for each lesson is not only enhanced, but they can continue to learn new music effectively on their own.