

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

### CALEB MUTCH

My goal as a teacher of music theory is to open my students' ears and minds to the patterns and relations of musical ideas that are the essence of all music. There are two complementary sides to this, which I believe must be integrated. On the one hand, there are the concepts and vocabulary that enable listeners to identify and communicate about musical events and processes. On the other, there is the actual experience of listening. My task is to bring these together so that each informs and enriches the other.

Part of the power of music theory's concepts and vocabulary is their ability to illuminate commonalities between different pieces. The greater the difference, the more this is the case, so I seek out examples from diverse sources whenever possible. When introducing Neapolitan sixth chords, for instance, G. F. Handel pairs well with the latest album by Spoon. Likewise, popular songs from Renaissance Europe and twentieth-century South Africa are equally effective at demonstrating diatonic harmonic functions. To put art music on the same footing as music from beyond that sphere helps teach concepts more effectively, and it is also more responsive to a diverse student body.

My expertise in the history of music theory has also shown me the value of exposing students to unfamiliar conceptions of music that challenge their assumptions about how music works. By drawing connections between common-practice music and the contrapuntal pedagogy of the preceding centuries, I help undergraduates to become aware of the continuities that underlie much of Western music, and the developments in harmonic practice that distinguish classical music from other styles. When performance students at the upper undergraduate and graduate levels read historical musical writings, foreign conceptions of music can spur them to imagine new interpretational possibilities.

Students learn best when I provide them with enough context for them to comprehend obscure ideas, while still leaving room for them to grapple with the unfamiliar. Inductive and cooperative learning approaches are a fruitful way to cultivate this kind of learning: I encourage students to decipher new material by working together, while turning to me if necessary for strategies and hints. I am dedicated to helping students develop their musicianship and cultivate their abilities to analyze and think critically about music and music theory. Students are thus better able to connect their musical studies to their careers in music.