

Teaching Philosophy

When I teach, I often think of the teachers who made what once felt impossible, possible. As the only child of Vietnamese immigrants, I grew up believing that a life in music was out of reach. It was through the generosity of institutions and mentors, people who saw potential in me before I could name it myself, that I found my path. That experience grounds everything I do as a teacher. My goal is to create those same gateways for my students: to help them discover that music is not a privilege reserved for the few, but a language belonging to everyone.

I believe the deepest lessons that music teaches extend far beyond the notes. In every rehearsal and lesson, I see how music cultivates discipline, empathy, and community. When students learn to shape a phrase with care, they are also learning to listen to themselves, to others, and to the world around them. My studio is a space where those values are lived daily.

At the heart of my teaching is the conviction that if you can hear it, you can do it. Whether in a clarinet lesson or a theory classroom, I use ear training as the foundation for musical understanding. I encourage students to connect analytical awareness with embodied experience and to internalize phrasing and rhythm through movement and breath. Influenced by Dalcroze principles, I guide students to feel musical architecture in their bodies before articulating it with their instruments or voices. This approach fosters both artistic sensitivity and physical ease.

My function as a teacher is to find what I can say that opens the most doors for a student. Sometimes that means addressing a technical habit; other times, reframing how a student listens, perceives, or trusts themselves. I believe in teaching the person before the instrument, meeting each student where they are and nurturing the awareness and confidence that make real artistry possible.

Accessibility and inclusivity are not abstract ideals for me; they are personal imperatives. My teaching has reached a wide range of communities — from leading sectionals for Title I schools and coaching youth orchestras to working with conservatory students in international settings. Across all of these experiences, I've learned that every student, regardless of background or circumstance, deserves to feel seen and capable of artistry. In community, we learn that the act of creating music is also an act of creating belonging.

At its core, I teach to cultivate musicians who think, listen, and feel deeply — artists who bring compassion and clarity to every phrase they play. Through our shared work, students grow both as musicians and whole people, empowered to carry the empathy and attentiveness of music into every phrase, and every corner of their lives.

Artist Statement

For as long as I can remember, music has been my way of understanding love, memory, and faith. I grew up in a home where my father's guitar carried stories across oceans — songs of his homeland that filled our small apartment with warmth and longing. Those sounds became my first language of prayer, long before I had the words for gratitude or hope.

As a clarinetist, I am drawn to music that reveals the humanity within sound: the moments where vulnerability becomes strength. Whether I am performing Brahms or Berg, teaching a young student their first scale, or improvising on a Vietnamese folk melody, I am always searching for that point of connection where music speaks what words cannot.

I believe that artistry begins in deep listening: to the score, to the self, and to others. Every phrase holds the potential for empathy, an opportunity to honor both the composer's voice and the performer's truth. My work seeks to bridge these worlds, finding beauty not just in perfection, but in honesty.

My identity as the child of Vietnamese immigrants has shaped how I see music's purpose. For my family, art was not a luxury but a source of survival and joy. That legacy fuels my commitment to accessibility and representation in classical music. I am passionate about creating spaces where diverse voices can thrive, and where students feel empowered to see themselves reflected in the music they play.

Ultimately, I see music as an act of communion between cultures, generations, and spirits. My faith reminds me that every note, every gesture, can be a form of offering. Through performance and teaching alike, I hope to give back what music has given me: belonging, healing, and a glimpse of the divine.

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Statement

Music has always been more than art for me: it's been a lifeline, a source of community, and a space of belonging. Growing up as the child of Vietnamese immigrants, I saw firsthand how economic hardship, cultural distance, and lack of resources can make music feel out of reach. Yet I also saw what happens when someone believes in you before you believe in yourself — when a mentor, a program, or simply a kind teacher opens a door. Those moments shaped me, and they ground every choice I make as an educator and musician.

I believe that diversity is not just about representation, but about honoring the richness in our histories, voices, and traditions. Inclusion is more than welcoming someone in; it's letting them lead with their authentic selves. Equity means recognizing that not everyone starts from the same place, and working concretely to remove barriers — financial, cultural, institutional — so that every student has the opportunity to grow.

Over my teaching and performing career, I have tried to live out these values in concrete ways. In my private studio, I have worked with students of many backgrounds, ages, and skill levels, many of whom lacked early access to strong musical training. While teaching with the Northern Ohio Youth Orchestra, I saw how removing financial and logistical obstacles for students could really unlock potential and change outlooks. Overseas, at the Tianjin Orchestral Art Festival and Qingdao Clarinet Seminar, I have encountered talented young musicians who bring cultural perspectives that bring new light to classical repertoire, and I strive to honor that by listening, adapting, and staying culturally sensitive in my repertoire choices, teaching style, and expectations.

Looking ahead, I commit to continuing this work in the following ways:

- ❖ Making my studio and classroom as accessible as possible, offering sliding scales or scholarships if feasible, being flexible in scheduling, offering remote options for students who cannot travel or commit to traditional in-person lessons.
- ❖ Expanding repertoire beyond Western classical norms to include Vietnamese folk, world music, more works by underrepresented composers, and making space for student-chosen music so that they feel seen in the materials they study.
- ❖ Mentoring marginalized students intentionally, not only in technique and artistry, but helping them navigate institutional pathways (auditions, scholarships, professional networks), including advocating for them, connecting them, writing recommendation letters, guiding applications.
- ❖ Continuing my own growth: staying aware of my own privileges and blind spots, seeking out training in culturally responsive pedagogy, and listening deeply to my students' experiences.

I do not see DEI as a checkbox but as the very heart of what it means to teach well. When every student can bring their full self to music, the whole musical community becomes richer, more alive, and more just. I am committed to using my gifts, voice, and role to help make that possible.