

Philosophy for Private Composition Lessons

Musicians who dabble in composition are often afraid to take lessons in composition. “I don’t want anyone telling me how to write,” “I’m afraid they’ll make me write like them,” or “I don’t want them to change my style,” are all concerns that I have heard and have felt myself. As someone who had six different composition teachers in six years, none of my teachers have substantiated any of these worries, and I don’t plan on being an exception. There are many compositional concepts that transcend style. Things like pacing, form, pitch content, orchestration, audience expectations, and predictability are all ideas that play a role in music of almost any style. My goal is to help students be the best at whatever style they choose.

Just like playing an instrument, composition has fundamentals. Knowledge of theory is crucial to good writing. While a composer may not specifically use every theoretical concepts in their music, you need to know the rules before you can break them. Depending on how much theory a student knows, a portion of composition lessons are dedicated to theory.

Another important part of the learning process is listening to music. Lots and lots of music. You’re writing a piece for string quartet? Nothing will be more valuable than listening to string quartet pieces already in existence. Looking at pieces that have withstood the test of time informs you of what has been done, and what you can do with the medium. It also gives you knowledge of what *hasn’t* been done. Having knowledge of both what has and hasn’t been done can be a source of inspiration and effective writing.