

Gordon Beeferman, Department of Music — Teaching Statement

I believe it is essential to teach students that they can and should make and explore their own path through music. The diversity of human experience is and should be reflected in a diversity of human artistic and cultural expression. My own particular musical career, training, and aesthetic worldview are eclectic, and I am inspired to provide a welcoming and equitable environment to students of all backgrounds and identities.

Additionally, I always ask students to consider *why* we are listening to or making certain music, and *what* it all might mean in the context in which we are living. Ultimately, my goal is to help them explore musical possibilities, build confidence in their individual voices, sharpen the skills they need to express their ideas, and grow as musicians and human beings.

I strive to live out my beliefs in fairness, equity, inclusion, and justice in my daily life and in my work as a teacher. In my courses at NYU, I work towards that goal by including diverse musical traditions and perspectives. In “The Art of Listening,” I build my syllabi around the theme of dance and song, allowing me to lead the class in an exploration of a wide range of music. I keep a special focus on African-American and Western European musical traditions, and how they interacted to create some of the most important music of U.S. culture. My goal is to show students that they can apply fundamental listening skills and musical concepts, combined with historical context, to make connections between different kinds of music. For example, we study the repetitive harmonic structure of blues in parallel with that of the *passacaglia*, a typical form of the Baroque era. We study dance roots of concert music, looking at how swing influenced bebop and later styles of jazz, and then the dance roots of the classical minuet.

When teaching core music theory courses, my goals are similar: to help students gain fundamental skills, and to understand how they might apply those skills in *any* musical context. First, I assess their existing knowledge and accordingly adjust the scope of the material I plan to cover. Then, I make sure students are aware that Western European common practice, while highly valuable to study, is not a universal system but only one of many musical traditions, and that notated music is only one way of studying and transmitting music. I integrate study of the Western tradition with that of jazz, blues, and various kinds of popular music, to show their differences, commonalities, and how they are intertwined.

As a professor, it is my responsibility to set a tone of mutual care, curiosity, and support, and establish an environment in which everyone feels welcome, seen, and heard, and is assured of their intrinsic worth. I seek to convey, through my teaching and the example of my own work and career, a sense of excitement, cooperation, and respect — and ultimately a sense of possibility — to my students.