

Aural Skills Observation Follow-Up

I observed Mike Callahan's Freshman Intensive Aural Skills class on Thursday, March 22nd as well as Tuesday, March 27th. The most impressive thing that struck me was Mike's ability to squeeze a lot of different topics and activities into one class period without it seeming rushed. Mike had a natural flow from one topic to another while still keeping the activities focused and distinct from one another. As well, he was able to get a lot of detail to and performances out of the students on a single subject but never lingered too long such that they would have a chance to get bored. In a single class, Mike was able to target warm-up exercises, sight-singing, some theory and analysis tie-ins, harmonic paradigms, a Dalcroze-type rhythm activity, and a sight-reading on scale degrees of a jazz standard. I also noticed that Mike used note cards on a key ring to help organize the class time and activities; that small memory aid also made a big difference in class continuity.

I admired the way Mike had trained the students to expect certain routines within the class. Even in the mere two class periods that I observed, I got a sense of patterns and ways of working. From little administrative things like having a dedicated space on the board to write down homework assignments to more practical things such as always having a warm-up in any new key in which the students would sing, these routines helped move the class quickly forward without Mike having to do a lot of unnecessary explaining or repetition.

Mike also seemed to do a good job of seamlessly mixing in reviews of written theory while on aural skills topics, often using the written theory concepts to aid the students in their aural skills activities. For example, while going over sight-singing excerpts that modulated from tonic to dominant, Mike would help students develop strategies for where to switch scale degree numbering systems, i.e. where does one switch over from *fi* in the tonic to ⁷ in the dominant key. He also incorporated analysis into the melodic dictation exercise, thereby making the dictation activity itself hopefully easier for the student as well as helping to move analysis from the realm of the brain to that of the ear.

Finally, Mike had a generally positive disposition, which the students seemed to respond well to. When Mike brought in the jazz standard to sing, many students became even more excited, so his efforts to broaden the scope of repertoire in the class and connect more with what the students may listen to was certainly appreciated. I also admired Mike's ability to perform the jazz standard smoothly on the piano. Mike is definitely an admirable instructor.