

Seven Essential Competencies for the 21st-Century Musician

All students should:

- 1) Develop aural skills. The act of audiation—of hearing with the mind’s ear—combined with a system for naming and relating those sounds to each other is the heart of musical thought, and it is from this heart that all other musical skills must flow.

- 2) Develop skill as a vocalist. Everyone has a voice, and vocal music is the most universal means of making music. Every skill that can be developed with any other single-line instrument can be developed more readily through singing—this is partly why so much instrumental pedagogy utilizes student vocalization prior to instrumental execution.

- 3) Develop skill with keyboard instruments. Keyboard instruments provide the clearest visual, tactile, and proprioceptive connection to harmonic and melodic concepts and present a low barrier-to-entry for basic technique. Proficiency with keyboard instruments can provide many of the pedagogical benefits of bowed string, percussion, and wind instrument study, as well as near-universal opportunities for collaborative performance and unique support to composing, arranging, and teaching.

- 4) Develop skill as an improviser. To improvise is to perform comprehensively, combining stylistic fluency, technical mastery, aural awareness, creative rhetoric, and expressive intent. Improvisation also engenders flexibility and responsiveness across performance settings.

- 5) Develop skill as a songwriter. The act of songwriting is the single most comprehensive and accessible means of developing fluency with melodic and harmonic elements. Moreover, songwriting is a tremendously empowering discipline, giving voice to each person's unique perspective and experience, and granting material and aesthetic ownership over one's musical expression.

- 6) Develop skill as a producer. Arranging, orchestration, balance, blend, and sound design are the essence of production. These skills readily translate to live sound settings, ensemble music-making, and directing, and when combined with knowledge of recording equipment and proficiency in digital audio workstations, they open the door to true creative autonomy.

- 7) Develop skill as an entrepreneur. An entrepreneurial mindset is the final piece of the complete and self-sufficient 21st-century musician. A musician is their own product, and they must learn understand themselves, their potential contributions to various markets, and how to both protect and profit from their creative labor.