

Luis Alejandro “Alex” Levy

Musician and Educator

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Teaching Philosophy

I think of myself as an artist first and foremost, but I consider teaching to be a requirement for all artists. We all must share our knowledge so that others may take part in the spiritual and scientific journey of music and art. Making art can be a service to people who connect to it, who learn something from it about themselves and about the world. I find joy in musical expression and I can find inspiration and meditation in the work of practicing music. I teach because of my lifelong call to service. Teaching is just my way to share with others the privilege, joy, beauty, enrichment, and bit of self-actualization that I have been lucky enough to gain through music.

Teaching is never just about the topic of interest, it always includes life lessons and those lessons depend on what stage of development a student is at. My ability to rise to the occasion depends on my ability to remember myself at that stage, empathize with the student, and respond appropriately in the situation while relating it to music.

My two main goals in teaching are 1) to always adapt and never stagnate in my growth as a teacher, and 2) always encourage a student's learning, even if what they learn is that they don't share interests with me.

It has been absolutely necessary for me to learn to adapt to each student I have taught, and I have been lucky that the private lesson setting makes it possible for me to do that. Each student has unique strengths and weaknesses. Their personalities, environment, and natural abilities affect the way they learn, so in order to reach the most students, I have learned to be flexible in my teaching. I have also had to learn how to be true to my values and standards while remaining considerate of a student's limitations. This could entail simply changing the repertoire to encourage inspired practice, but the challenge in that would be finding or sometimes arranging repertoire to provide the student with an appropriate opportunity to learn new skills.

I have found it very important to never give up in finding a way to communicate to a student, and that eventually I can find a way, even if the student is resistant at first. That's why I have created a go-to first-lesson-plan for every instrument I teach. I also have memorized plans for certain common topics for those days when students don't bring their supplies. For my younger students, such topics include introducing the musical alphabet on the keyboard, quarter and half notes using Queen's "We Will Rock You," harmonic analysis using the Beatles' "Let It Be," or using a lesson on the dynamics

piano and *forte* to teach a lesson on the history of keyboard instruments. You can never have too many memorized lesson plans, but being too rigid can kill the flow of a lesson.

Making a lesson plan gives you structure, but spontaneity is necessary to give students the freedom to trust their creativity and intuition. Lessons don't always stick in the order you present them. Many times I have tried to teach students a lesson in one idea only to have them come to understand something completely different. Watching a student learn is a bit like watching a collection of files on a old computer be batch-copied to a new folder, they don't complete in an order that you can predict. Because of this, I have learned to allow a student to learn what they will learn when they do, and to encourage learning any concept, even if it is not the one I intended. As in improvisation, you must give and say "yes" to what your improv partners offer; always go forward with what is given.

I believe it is important to teach students to teach themselves. You never know when a student's life circumstances will change and take them out of your jurisdiction, especially in music. So, I teach with the intention of the student not only understanding one new skill or concept, but for them to be able to use what they have learned to figure out for themselves any further skills related to that concept, should they need to or be inclined to do some self-study. I have done this by asking questions, having students answer their own questions, and teaching students what questions to ask themselves.

If a student asked, "Did I do a good job?" I might reply, "What do you think? How did you do well and how may you improve?" It can never be a simple "good" or "bad" answer and I wish for my students to always practice analysis and not simply to "try it again but better this time." If a student can accurately and fairly self-diagnose their practicing challenges, they can teach themselves and learn faster. However, it is not so easy to get students to do this. Repetition and reminders are always necessary.

I have learned all of these strategies and techniques through teaching beginners of all ages, but mostly elementary school-aged children in the private lesson setting and sometimes in classrooms. Though the technical level of the students will change, and the life lessons will also change with their later stages of development, I will be able to call upon the lessons I have learned from teaching younger people and apply them to young adults. As my elementary principal once said, "adults are just kids with long legs." We all share the human experience, similar cultural environments, and the same challenges. We also share the same dreams, fears, and joys. My hope is that I can always have a positive impact on those I teach and anyone I meet.

Testimonials

Varu Lingeovva - parent of student at US Music Lessons:

“I always wanted my son to learn piano and I was looking for a good and knowledgeable teacher and we both were so lucky to meet Mr. Alex at US Music Lessons.

The first time I met Mr. Alex was when I was in the waiting room, waiting for my son to finish his very first piano lesson. I started a conversation with him thinking he was a parent who is also waiting for his child to finish his class, while talking to him I felt this wonderful feeling for him that he was very polite, soft spoken, and so warm in his communication style. I really liked the way he spoke and I felt his personality really suited my son’s personality. When I learned he was a teacher there, I immediately went and changed my son’s teacher and we started having an awesome experience with Mr. Alex.

Mr. Alex is knowledgeable, energetic, and we believe he can bring any kid to success with the technique he teaches. He is very thorough, extremely professional, he specializes in piano and tailors the lesson to fit to each student needs, which I personally think is amazing. It's been two years that my son has taken piano lessons with Mr. Alex and now he has developed a passion for music and I will give all the credit to Mr. Alex for keeping him on track, being friendly, kind, and thoughtful while teaching him. My son enjoys learning and enthusiastically engages in each lesson. I would definitely recommend Mr. Alex and I promise, you will not be disappointed.”

Kevin Nakagawa - parent of student at US Music Lessons:

“Alex Levy was the piano instructor for our son, Sean, at US Music Lessons. He wasn’t our original instructor but Alex was the substitute when our instructor was absent. One of those times was close to Halloween and he had transcribed a song from “Nightmare Before Christmas” for his students to learn as a treat for them which my son really enjoyed.

I would always sit in the waiting room during lessons and I noticed that Alex was always prepared for his other students by arriving early and was always carrying teaching supplies with him at all times. I noticed at the next recital Alex probably had the most student participation of any instructor. US Music Lessons has a lot of clients, the recitals are not mandatory, and Alex was a relatively new instructor. I’ve been an employer, as I’ve operated my own company for over 20 years, and I can’t seem to avoid noticing patterns for qualities that I value.

It put Alex at the top of my wish list for when our first instructor stopped teaching at the school. After learning more about Alex (after a brief chat with him) I added another tech based class with him in the form of the iPad app GarageBand. From what I could tell, our son was the only one in the school that was probably being taught this but Alex came up with the curriculum for it. Over the next year, when Sean was interested in learning a particular song, Alex would transcribe the song for the level of his student which was quite a luxury. Alex is professional, conscientious, was great with kids at the school, and is one of those people that goes beyond what is required of the job.”