

SPARK Teaching Innovation Grant Proposal:

“Helping DMA Pianists Develop Truly Diverse Musical Skills Through Chamber Music”

This proposal seeks funding to launch a pilot project, whereby doctoral piano students have the opportunity to work directly with professional string and wind players in the learning and preparation of landmark works of the chamber music repertoire.

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PROPOSAL

This proposal seeks to create a new model for MUSC 735i at the University of South Carolina School of Music. This is the section under which graduate piano students (MM and DMA) enroll to fulfill their chamber music requirement. In recent years, between 7 and 10 graduate pianists register in a given semester for this credit. Chamber music is required of both master's and doctoral piano students at the School of Music.

For this initial pilot project, the funding requested by this proposal would be used to engage the services of professional musicians from the greater geographic area surrounding the USC School of Music. These musicians would come into the classroom setting late in the semester to work directly with the DMA piano students in the rehearsal, preparation, and performance of movements from major works in the chamber music repertoire. In the first incarnation of this pilot project, these professionals will be Mary Lee Taylor Kinosian, concertmaster of the South Carolina Philharmonic, and Dusan Vukajlovic, principal cellist of the South Carolina Philharmonic. In later incarnations of the project, we hope to bring in the concertmaster and principal cellist of the Charlotte Symphony (Calin Lupanu and Alan Black).

Because our School of Music has a fundamental and quite pronounced imbalance between the undergraduate/graduate enrollments as exists in the piano department versus instrumental (strings and winds), it has proven extremely difficult if not impossible to provide the graduate pianists with the training and experiences necessary to help them become the diversely-skilled musicians they need to be upon leaving school and entering the professional world.

Why is this so? Simply put, the piano department at our School of Music is heavily dominated numerically by graduate students, with relatively few undergraduate performance majors. This situation is exactly reversed in the instrumental fields, where there are comparatively few graduate students compared to a much larger pool of undergraduate students. Accordingly, in matching up student groups (where one pianist will need two or more instrumentalists to work with) there simply are not the numbers available to find all the graduate piano students collaborators for their chamber music groups.

This proposal hopes to turn this problem into a strength, a disadvantage to an advantage. Since graduate pianists (especially DMA students) are closer to actually

entering the professional music world than undergraduates, why not find a means by which they can both obtain meaningful chamber music experience that diversifies their musical skills *and* begin a process of networking and establishing professional contacts outside the halls of the School? Those graduate piano students who constitute the "surplus" of registered chamber music students (i.e., for whom there are no more instrumental students available to be matched up with for groups) will undertake intensive studio class study of one or two major piano trios from the standard repertoire with Mr. Bush. He will work closely with them not only in the preparation of their actual piano part, but in all the facets of true chamber music skills: score-reading, internalizing the other parts (e.g., by singing other parts while playing one's own), thorough analysis of the score, cueing and reacting to cues from other players, increasing comfort level of playing while looking away from both score and keyboard, and comprehending the physical nuances of string or wind playing such as the mechanics of bow changes or breathing.

Towards the latter part of the semester of such study, the professional musicians (in the initial pilot project, Ms. Taylor-Kinosian and Mr. Vukajlovic) will come into the studio class setting on two or more occasions to play the works in question with the graduate piano students. In these sessions, students will have the opportunity to put into practice that which they have learned. Mr. Bush will be present to provide further instruction and guidance to the pianists, but they will also receive comments and advice from the guest string players. In fact, the professionals will be asked to treat the sessions to some degree as true professional rehearsal situations, making suggestions and recommendations to the group as they would in any "real-world" setting.

Moreover, the piano students will be encouraged beforehand to also treat these as professional rehearsal situations, as though they were assembling performances quickly for a festival setting (where one typically has perhaps two or three days to put together large-scale chamber works). Encouraging the piano students to also make suggestions or propose musical ideas to the group is central to this process (the professional musicians will be briefed beforehand to be as "magnanimous" and tolerant as possible of this aspect, bearing in mind that this is a laboratory process for the benefit of the budding professional pianist and that not all the ideas may be ones with which they agree).

This last point relates to what is perhaps the most crucial aspect of collaborative music-making: the art of human interaction. How do you express your disagreement with a colleague's musical point of view, or your desire for them to explore another musical option in a given passage, in a constructive and articulate fashion? Conversely, how do you react to your colleagues' comments along the same lines that are directed at you? What if you disagree with their ideas? Can you find compelling musical/structural arguments to defend your point of view? Are you musically malleable, able to adapt to a different approach to a particular passage even though it was not your original idea?

These are vitally important parts of the whole process of collaborative music making, absolutely central to the idea of being a "diversely skilled" musician. The proposed modification of MUSC 735i, bringing together DMA-level piano students with experienced professionals in the field, will actually give the students a greater opportunity to understand what the rehearsal process in the "real world" is like than they would have had if they'd only been working with fellow students in the academic setting. And all of this process will culminate in a performance opportunity for the students, in collaboration with the professional musicians.

In summary, the proposed pilot project for this modification of MUSC 735i has two major benefits to the School of Music: it helps mitigate the effects of a very real structural imbalance of enrollment that exists at the School, and it does so in a way that provides an extra educational benefit to the very students who would normally be adversely affected by that imbalance. It helps fulfill our School's call to send out into the world "diversely skilled musicians," important for all students at the School of Music but perhaps even more so for pianists, who do not have the route of orchestral positions or orchestral free-lancing available to them.

Pilot Project for two semesters

Guest Violinist (Mary Lee Taylor Kinosian) fees: \$375 per semester (\$750 total for two semesters)

Guest Cellist (Dusan Vukajlovic) fees: \$375 per semester (\$750 total for two semesters)

Breakdown of fee for each in a given semester:

3 hours of guest's individual part preparation at \$30/hour (\$90)

4 hours of in-class time rehearsing/coaching members of studio class at \$50/hour (200)

1 hour of public performance with student participants at \$85/hour (\$85)

TOTAL fee for each of the two guest artists for the semester project: \$375

Pilot project total cost for one semester=\$750, for two semesters=\$1500