

Observation of William McNally**Music 74, Basic Keyboard Skills****Monday, October 3, 2011
1:40-2:30 p.m.****Room 363, Music Building****Observer: Mark Anson-Cartwright**

Due to electrical outage in Room 363, Mr. McNally had to move the class to Room 353. When the class began (about 1:45), nine students were present. Mr. McNally took attendance, and soon asked students to “place your hands in position to perform an A-flat major scale.” He then circulated to check each student’s hands, making necessary corrections as he went around the room. Then he and the class reviewed the fingering rules for major keys with two to four flats, with important attention to the use of fingers (never the thumb) on black keys, and what finger to start the A-flat scale with. Then he tested students in groups of three; this went fairly well, though some students struggle a bit. Further advice from Mr. McNally ensued: “don’t skip fingers,” and so forth. For the next seven minutes, he asked the class to practice with headphones on, and during that time, he circulated the room, checking each student’s work and giving them feedback and tips as appropriate. After this brief practice session, he discussed the importance of “planning ahead” with regard to fingering. This issue loomed large in the next part of the lesson, which was devoted to review of a cadential progression (I-IV6/4-I-V6/5-I), which was drawn from the *New Approach to Keyboard Harmony* (which every student evidently owned).

Mr. McNally called on pairs to demonstrate this progression in D major. After some modest performances by students, he went to the board (and later used the piano) to illustrate and reinforce issues of voice leading as they relate to fingering. The main point he made throughout much of the lesson was “move as little as possible,” meaning (roughly), “don’t make unnecessary twists of the arm or hand, when a smaller movement can achieve the right effect.”

Next, he passed out a handout (one page from the Berkowitz book) for the purpose of sight reading. The exercise to be done “at sight” in class was #2 from p. 268. It involved mostly scalar activity in the RH part and a slower, simpler LH part that required much less mental preparation. This was a good choice for the level of these students, and Mr. McNally was able to “piggy-back,” so to speak, on the scale-work the class had been doing: he suggested that, once you identify the scale in the RH part (which ascended and descended) you can “use your knowledge of how to play (and correctly finger) the scale.” The RH part ended with an arpeggiated E-flat triad (up and down) that required planning, especially because it happened right after a scalar descent. The right fingering, in this case, would be 2-1-4-2. Mr. McNally guided the discussion from the piano, illustrating both at the piano, and with clear verbal explanations. The whole class played this item slowly at sight in two 4-measure segments. Although there were one or two students who played out of synch, there was marked improvement the second time through each segment.

Mr. McNally concluded the lesson by asking students to have a Bartók piece ready to play in two keys for Wednesday, and to keep working on scales (flat keys through A flat), and cadential progressions.


Overall Impression and Assessment

Mr. McNally is a calm, effective, and musical teacher who has an excellent rapport with the class. Indeed, the size (9 or 10, depending on attendance) is ideal. He has a clear idea about keyboard pedagogy, and is teaching precisely the kind of exercises these students need to learn in order to cope with the keyboard component of the theory classes they will eventually take.

I have just one suggestion, and that is to be a bit more demanding—not in terms of the level of difficulty of the material, but with regard to the way exercises are done during class time. Some of the group performances were ragged, as they so often are in introductory classes such as this. To counter any student’s inclination to “hide among the crowd,” I would occasionally ask individuals to play (yes, even with the whole class listening and scrutinizing!). This will create a greater aura of seriousness, and the group will, I think, benefit from this. But other than this, I think Mr. McNally is doing a fine job. This observation is positive.

Duly submitted on October 5, 2011.

NOTE: By signing below, the observed faculty member acknowledges having read this report.


Mark Anson-Cartwright
(observer)
William McNally
(observed instructor)

Evaluation for William McNally
October 20, 2010, Wed., 3:40 p.m.
Music 074—Basic Musicianship/Keyboard

Music 74 is a remedial keyboard class, necessary for students who will be taking the Copland School music-theory sequence and who have little or no experience playing keyboard instruments. This skill is justifiably required for a music theory class. What follows is a positive appraisal of Mr. McNally's teaching during this class session.

The class began promptly at 3:40 pm. Of the eighteen students registered for the class, fifteen were present. In the classroom, Room 363, there are fifteen electronic keyboard instruments, one acoustic upright and the "teacher's" baby grand in front of the room. The class began with a "pop" quiz that concerned the categories in which the fifteen major scales can be placed based on their fingering patterns. The students were also asked to write out a chord progression, I - IV^{6/4} - I - V^{6/5} - I, in both hands, which they apparently play on their keyboards in all keys. The same notes are played simultaneously with both hands. After the quiz, Mr. McNally handed out a nicely detailed single-page description of what students need to study for the midterm.

I will avoid getting into a detailed discussion of Mr. McNally's fingering categories. There are many ways of accomplishing this and I find this organization and division a successful way to impart the information to keyboard beginners. The students appeared to understand why certain scales were assigned to this category and others to that. After a review of the material on the quiz, the students then took out their *New Approaches to Keyboard Harmony* books, a text that is used in the regular theory sequence. The two compositions they were asked to play were a Handel canon and a Bartok composition from *Mikrokosmos*, volume 1. Mr. McNally had not only asked the students to play the works, but also to transpose them to a number of keys. As the class ended, students were given the opportunity to stay after class with Mr. McNally for a little while allowing him to address issues that had been discussed in class that required some extra reinforcement. After all the scale finger-position talk earlier, I was very happy to hear Mr. McNally say that they should not be concerned with the use of their thumbs on black keys during the transposition exercises.

Mr. McNally's demeanor indicated to me that he is not yet fully comfortable standing in front of a class; however, I also believe he will become a "natural" soon enough since he is anxious to impart information and does so quite well. The students take to him nicely. He should consider calling on students who are NOT raising their hands to answer questions. As for the physical environment, it is next to unconscionable that a remedial keyboard class take place in a classroom where each student may not have a keyboard, or needs to double up

with another student. Having to use a piece of a keyboard is a very bad way to learn to play a musical instrument. I suppose, if Mr. McNally is lucky, he will never have 100% attendance. As usual, the temperature in the room was uncomfortable, but not quite unbearable on this occasion.

I believe that this is exactly the kind of class Music 74 ought to be. I very much appreciated seeing Mr. McNally's use of the *New Approaches* text; his emphasis on transposition will work very much in the students' favor once they enter the regular theory sequence. And, although I am new to using "pop" quizzes, having always resented them as a student, I increasingly favor their use.

My only quibble with the class is a small one and is not specifically directed at the instructor of this class. Mr. McNally referred to his keyboard progression above as a "cadence" on two occasions and, if I remember correctly, such term use is closer to German than to English. I have no problem with the term itself, but it may cause some confusion for the students sometime in the future. The progression, which lacks root motion from V to I at its end, is not sufficiently qualified to be called a cadence in any language. Also, Mr. McNally used the term "inversion" to refer to the "IV^{6/4}" and V^{6/5} chords. First, the "IV^{6/4}" chord is not a IV chord (only an "amen" extension of tonic harmony—there is no harmonic motion here and the chord is in root position). Second, I would recommend that the use of the term "inversion" be discontinued in all Basic Musicianship classes (including theory, ear training and keyboard), mostly because of its Pistonian baggage. One of the most difficult jobs I have while teaching theory to undergraduates involves having to explain (over and over again!) that a cadential 6/4 chord is, in fact, in root position—yes, another root-position 6/4 chord. I think that it is time we began to solve this problem with our entering freshmen and not impose upon them information which their theory teachers will later have to contradict. It is bad enough that students entering Queens College, after having taken AP classes in high school, need to unlearn the "cadential I^{6/4} chord."

This is a positive evaluation.



Roy Nitzberg, Music Theory Lecturer



William McNally, Grad Teaching Fellow

OBSERVATION REPORT

Instructor: Mr. William McNally
Class: Music 74, Basic Musicianship (Keyboard Techniques)
Date and time of observation: February 16, 2011 at 3:40

This is a positive report, as Mr. McNally is doing very good work with his class. In fact I am surprised by how quickly the students are moving through the curriculum as stated in the syllabus. It may be that Mr. McNally's overall plan is to quickly expose his students to the range of techniques they are expected to acquire and then return later to the material studied during the first weeks, insisting then that each class member meet the requirements with greater accuracy.

In this section of Music 74 the students are already playing scales beyond four sharps and four flats and studying the I-IV-V7 chord progression. Of course not everyone is succeeding equally well but considering the fact that this was only the sixth meeting the achievements are very promising. The piano piece being studied, #23 from Bartok's Mikrokosmos, Bk. 1, poses challenges to non-pianists, requiring as it does legato and control of the weaker fingers. However, if the students work hard enough and intelligently enough they can succeed, first in mastering this piece and even in transposing it, as is already being assigned.

This course is very like Music 50, The Rudiments of Music, offered many years ago and required of all Education (not Mus. Ed.) majors. As I taught many sections of Music 50 and worked with my colleagues John Castellini, David Walker and Lawrence Eisman to develop a workbook that complemented Professor Castellini's text, also entitled The Rudiments of Music, I would like to make some suggestions to Mr. McNally; they are intended to supplement the methods he is already using effectively:

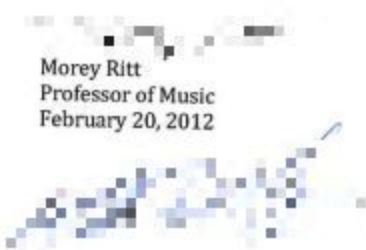
- 1) Assign a student (I noticed one) who is comfortable with this material to sit next to the least able of his colleagues, asking him to assist;
- 2) At each meeting a different student should be asked to do his work at the Steinway. Students will try even harder while there and the instructor sees more clearly how each is doing;
- 3) There must be a firm rule: pianos are turned off except when students are asked to turn them on. Mr. McNally reminded students several times to refrain from playing out of turn but the noise level was occasionally distracting;

- 4) There can be a "grande finale" in many meetings, with some students singing while others play a chordal accompaniment. It is also possible to encourage singing while playing, as many will go on to do in the sight singing courses. I might add here that in Music 50 we decided to teach students to play chords in the right hand and a single bass line in the left. It was then easy to develop rhythmic patterns to suit different melodies.
- 5) Schedule a class recital, with students playing solo pieces or duets or accompanying each other. Printed programs make the events more meaningful for the students.

In his syllabus Mr. McNally wrote seriously about lateness but said nothing when a student arrived thirty minutes late. Of course he would not have wanted to interrupt his work but a short "Please see me after class" would have supported his firm warning.

William McNally is doing very well indeed, having found a good balance between authority and informality. I hope that some of my suggestions serve to enhance an already good approach.

For the Personnel and Budget Committee,



Morey Ritt
Professor of Music
February 20, 2012

Observation and Evaluation Conference Form

William McNally, Graduate Teaching Fellow
Private Individual Instruction in Piano for B.A. Music Majors
Thursday, March 24, 2011 / 2:30-3:00 p.m., Room 335 (two-piano studio)

The lesson began with the student, Peter Thomas, playing through a Chopin Mazurka in A-flat from memory. The performance was competent at a basic level but generally mechanical and without any pedal or dynamic contrast.

Mr. McNally responded: "Critique yourself." Mr. Thomas summarized his own playing as "choppy."

WM: Don't let the arpeggiated stretch of an eleventh (an A-flat major chord in 6/4 position) lock up your hand with tension.... What is meant by the lack of a dynamic at the beginning of the score?

PT: "Mezzo-forte?"

WM: Not necessarily. "Link it to the character of the piece."

Surprisingly, Mr. Thomas did not bring a score to the lesson, but Mr. McNally was able to locate one quickly via the Web with his laptop. He used this technology to his advantage, but also was momentarily distracted by his cell phone going off in a quite audible "vibrate" mode.

Mr. McNally demonstrated each passage beautifully from memory at the second piano. This spacious studio was of great benefit to the lesson, as it eliminated the time-consuming necessity of having the student get up and down, and the instructor was free to demonstrate from his own instrument, rather than having to lean over the student or play passages an octave higher or lower because of physical space limitations.

He devised a pedal exercise to help his student overcome the peculiar dryness of his initial performance: Play a staccato chord, first completely dry, then gradually depressing the pedal to catch increasing amounts of resonance. "The pedal is a delicate mechanism, as opposed to an on/off switch," he concluded. Through imitation, the student caught the gist of the exercise.

Mr. McNally described the problem of voicing in this way: Many intermediate-level pianists think that "bringing out the melody" means a slight differentiation in dynamic between the main theme and the accompaniment, but the contrast needs to be much greater... What is "visible" to us is subtle to them [the audience]; what is subtle to us is invisible to them. We must "hand it to them."

Mr. McNally gave his student a reading assignment for the following week: *The Art of the Piano* by David Duval.

Discussion and evaluation

The lesson began and ended punctually, which is an accomplishment in itself, given the difficulty of teaching an effective lesson in just 30 minutes. The key to its success was Mr. McNally's musicality, demonstrated both in his playing and in his thoughtful comments to the student.

It is sometimes harder for an accomplished artist to teach an elementary- to intermediate-level student than an advanced one, but Mr. McNally was able to relate to the problems faced by a pianist at Mr. Thomas's level, and he suggested practical solutions to both the technical and interpretive issues.

The reading assignment reflected his interest in a broad-based approach to teaching the instrument, an opportunity many instructors might overlook.

I have no criticisms to speak of, though perhaps he could state in more detail his expectations for the student's progress, both for the next lesson and for the performance jury at the end of the term.

This lesson reflected Mr. McNally's fine musicianship and his effectiveness as a pedagogue. This is a positive observation.



I have read this observation report.
William McNally



David Schober

Baruch College
Department of Fine and Performing Arts

Report of Teaching Observation

Name: William McNally
Rank: Adjunct Lecturer
Course/Section: MSC 1003 FMW
Date of Observation: September 15, 2014
Rating: Satisfactory
Name of Observer: Anne Swartz

Mr. McNally's class focused on the elements of music. The instructor began by taking the attendance and it was gratifying to note that even though it was early in the semester, he knew the names of the students in this 50-seat introductory class. Mr. McNally began the class with a brief review of timbre and meter from the previous class session and asked students if they had any questions about the material. The review was focused and effective, drawing on the significant points from the previous lecture. From the piano Mr. McNally played several examples of duple and triple meter and asked students to clap on the weak and strong beats in order to identify the specific meters. This exercise was extremely successful. Every student in the class was actively engaged with the music and the instructor. Students were responsive and respectful of Mr. McNally's talents as a pianist. He then played an excerpt from Sousa's march, *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. Throughout the review session, Mr. McNally carefully guided the questions so that students received maximum benefit from this helpful review sessions at the beginning of the class. He also played sections from Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, and asked students to identify the instruments and meter that represented several of the characters in this musical fairy tale. He also asked students to conduct these selections using basic conducting techniques. Again, he actively engaged the students in music and students were attentive and responsive to the instructor's teaching methods.

Mr. McNally then turned to a discussion of Tempo, Dynamics, and Pitch, and he began a discussion of Texture. He wrote the terms and definitions on the white board, illustrating the specific points he wanted students to incorporate in their discussions on music. He played an example from Lully and asked students to talk about what they just heard. As a suggestion, it might have reinforced the musical language if musical examples had been played immediately after presenting the definitions. Mr. McNally discussed a future assignment which entailed organizing the class into smaller groups of students for a 10-minute group presentation on a specific work by a composer to be chosen by the instructor and the individual student groups. The instructor announced that he had posted details of the assignment and names of composers on Blackboard. Students were clearly eager to go to work on this project. They organized themselves quickly and efficiently (after Mr. McNally called the names of participants in each group). I noted that several students had already assumed leadership roles within the groups.

Mr. McNally is a talented pianist and a compassionate teacher. Students were extremely respectful and attentive throughout the class. The class was focused and the lesson was presented clearly and thoughtfully. Student response was excellent, in large part because Mr. McNally's presentation showed a great deal of preparation and planning. He elicited responses through his carefully crafted questions and through his playing of the examples on the piano.

Observer's signature: _____

Sept. 17, 2014

I understand that my signature means only that I have read this memorandum and that I may attach any comments I wish.

Staff member's signature: _____

Date: 9/17/14