

Statement by Ron Westray

Balancing an active performing life with professorial responsibilities has broadened the scope of my goals as both an artist and educator. The stimulus for my research and creative work—as a jazz performer, composer, and educator—stems directly from over three decades of engagement with Western music (i.e., the musical systems of Western Europe and the Americas).

TEACHING

It is both exciting and inspiring to witness the transformative effect of new information on the development of students' abilities—and equally rewarding to experience the impact of teaching on my own growth as an educator and person. Teaching allows me to “be myself,” and I feel fortunate to work in the diverse and innovative music department at York University.

As a jazz educator, I am able to integrate many facets of the jazz canon—including orchestrations, compositions, solo transcriptions, and performance practices—into essential pedagogy. Teaching at the university level fuels my research, supporting the development of an effective and evolving didactic process.

Although jazz curricula have been part of university education for more than fifty years, a unified and comprehensive pedagogy remains elusive. As a result, misnomers and flawed methodologies have crept into the teaching of jazz. My approach emphasizes historical and contemporary context, using tools and references that deepen students' understanding. I never encourage rote memorization of patterns without exploring the harmonic implications and aesthetic considerations. Nor do I offer technical instruction without demonstrating the corresponding manual proficiency.

My focus is always on conveying the most relevant information for each student's analytical, compositional, and improvisational development. The ultimate goal is to help students express their musical ideas with clarity and intent.

In addition to courses in brass pedagogy, jazz improvisation, and composition, I teach Contemporary Black Urban Music (i.e., Hip-Hop). Hip-Hop is the sound of my generation, and I was honored to be asked to teach this course when I first arrived at York. Although the course existed prior to my appointment, I redesigned the syllabus and introduced a fresh, dynamic approach to lecture delivery. The course has been very successful, and due to high student demand, an additional section was added this year. I remain committed to its continued development.

Currently, in addition to my duties as the Oscar Peterson Chair—including committee work, outreach efforts, and administrative responsibilities—I am teaching four major courses in a

single term: African-American Popular Music (MUSC 3510), Jazz Theory IV (4059), Graduate Jazz Composition (MUSC 5007), and the previously mentioned 2520.

SERVICE

Service is built on fostering meaningful relationships—both personal and professional—and I recognize the levels of engagement required for institutional success and innovation. Much of my service to York University involves promoting the Oscar Peterson Scholarship and our music programs while touring, performing, and recording as a national and international jazz artist and educator.

Through participation in department and faculty committees, I've gained deeper insight into the workings of York's administrative systems and developed strong professional relationships with my colleagues. My work on graduate committees has also clarified the scope of my responsibilities and deepened my understanding of students' expectations.

It is a distinguished honor to represent York University as the Oscar Peterson Chair in Jazz Performance. I remain committed to using this role to strengthen our music program, build connections with Canadian and international supporters, and expand the ways we educate all music students.

—Ron Westray, 10/29/13