



ASSOCIATION OF ATLANTIC UNIVERSITIES
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITÉS DE L'ATLANTIQUE

Award for Excellence in Teaching
2014
Distinguished Teaching Award

DR. MARTÍN KUTNOWSKI

Dr. Martín Kutnowski, associate professor of music and director of the Fine Arts Program at St. Thomas University, is a composer, performer, and, from the age of 16, he has been a teacher. Martín's approach to teaching is rooted in mutual respect, aesthetic freedom, and technical rigour. Given the right conditions, Martín believes that everyone can learn so he fosters a pedagogy of inclusion and social negotiation, one where every member of the classroom—including himself—is a learner and where communication flows in every direction. He has inspired many students to continue in his footsteps and become teachers themselves.

One of his students said Dr. Kutnowski's "mastery of pedagogical techniques is enhanced by his ability to create a nurturing and encouraging environment in the classroom and beyond." The student adds that he "teaches with a contagious enthusiasm about the course material and it is nearly impossible not to get engrossed in the subject because of the passion with which he teaches."

A particular gift is Martín's ability to help students master technical skills with an emotional connection that is both aesthetic and intellectual. He understands that concepts must be perceived, deconstructed, understood, and mastered by the student while they experience the emotion of the music.

How does he achieve this high standard of teaching? Many of Martín's practices are novel. He meets his learners where they are, rather than where he expects them to be. For example, if they fail to match pitch, he will play a note that they can sing, to allow them to hear it in unison, two souls into the sound of one, and work from there. To build strength when playing a difficult piano excerpt, he'll challenge the student to master the work wearing gloves; after removing the gloves, the excerpt becomes easier. He also uses visual metaphors to help students picture music literacy concepts and further inspires them to appreciate classical music with reference to contemporaries such as Lady Gaga and *The Simpsons*.

Martín's teaching extends well beyond the St. Thomas University classrooms as he often spends summers teaching around the world. Last year he completed a five-city teaching and performing tour in Argentina. In addition, he has presented workshops at the Aspen Music Festival and delivered residential workshops to students in Portugal, Taiwan, the US, China and Estonia. He has published numerous short compositions specifically for young musicians and has shared his thoughts on music teaching through presentations and in publications such as *Canadian Music Teacher*.

Teaching is a vocation for Martín. It is his passion, an intrinsic part of his identity, and his *raison d'être*. It is in recognition of this dedication to teaching that the Association of Atlantic Universities has named Dr. Martín Kutnowski a 2014 recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award.