New Music Therapy Faculty Member Comes Full Circle

BY WIATT CARIVEAU
(B.M. 2018, M.A. 2020)

Returning to her alma mater as a professor in the music therapy program was a dream come true for Dr. Abbey Dvorak.

After receiving her M.A. and Ph.D. in music therapy from Iowa, she went on work in the Department of Rehabilitation Therapies at the UI Hospitals and Clinics before moving on to teach at Shenandoah University and the University of Kansas.

She returned to Iowa because of the strong program and faculty. “I am so impressed with the music therapy program [here], especially the faculty. They are a fabulous group of people…I really wanted to come back and have the opportunity to work with them.”

Dr. Dvorak’s publications exemplify her curiosity and research-driven mindset. One facet of her research is the impact of research-oriented curricula for undergraduate students. To be an effective music therapist, Dvorak maintains, one must be able to read, quickly understand, and apply the best research in the field to their own clients. By looking at other science curricula, Dr. Dvorak determined that embedding research into music therapy curricula could improve students’ abilities to conduct and understand research.

Students get excited by having real life authentic research experience, and it’s clear that she’s able to deliver—several of her courses have culminated in publications with student collaborators.

Dvorak loves having students involved in everything. “If students are interested in research, I love bringing them aboard and helping them realize how much fun and excitement can happen with it…I’ve found that you can do a lot more, and ask very big questions, when you’re working with a collaborative team, so I really believe in team science.”

In addition to her research focused on the outcomes of these courses, Dvorak is also interested in including music therapy support groups for cancer patients and their caregivers. Her publications are found in a broad selection of journals, and she is on the editorial board or served as peer reviewer for numerous journals.

Eventually, Dvorak hopes to bring even more research into her courses, but for now, she’s focused on her first year at a new institution.

“I’m beginning new courses for me and getting my feet wet this year,” she says, “figuring out what I’m teaching, how I’m teaching it, the program as a whole and the curriculum, and how it fits into the music therapy program as a whole and the School of Music. Eventually, I hope to embed more of the research into my curriculum, but for the moment I’m dipping my toe in.”
Jazz Area Welcomes Dr. William Menefield

The School of Music welcomed pianist, performer, and composer Dr. William Menefield to the jazz faculty this fall.

After being offered the position as assistant professor of jazz studies, Menefield was pleased to accept. He felt that not only was he a good fit for the University, but was impressed that Iowa made sure it was a good fit for him as well. “Ultimately there’s a really good spirit and a really good vibe here,” said Menefield.

Dr. Menefield’s varied musical experiences began in his childhood: his father is a saxophonist, and his mother a violinist and a singer. “The first time I saw an opera, my mother was a student at the conservatory in Cincinnati, singing in the chorus of The Magic Flute.”

William’s own journey in music composition began at the age of eight in response to his mother’s removal of all televisions from their home. He began his professional jazz piano career at age 12 and released his first album, Big Will Leaps In (1999) with J-Curve Records, right out of high school. His passion for composing inspired him to earn composition degrees from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (B.M., 2005) and The University of Texas at Austin (D.M.A., 2011).

Underneath his relaxed demeanor lies an intense musical passion. A cursory glance at Menefield’s musical output displays a rare breadth of versatility and virtuosity. He has two jazz albums, has performed as a soloist with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Cincinnati Opera, and has received commissions from the Cincinnati Opera and other musicians.

Dr. Menefield’s perspective on musical styles is illuminating. He spoke at length about the relationship between jazz and classical styles, delving into their shared history of improvisation.

“We often think of classical and jazz as being opposites of each other, as opponents, which is definitely not the case,” says Menefield. “When you dig deeper into their histories, it becomes clearer that classical composers were also superior improvisers.”

The similarities between the two genres come out in his music. “In both a very organic and intentional way, it is a mission of mine to show how these worlds can coexist.”

William’s commitment to his craft is apparent in his expertly executed and engaging performance and teaching style. He is dedicated to both educating and mentoring young musicians, and is clearly motivated by sharing the power of music.