

Nick Vasallo

Music Theory/Music Industry Studies

What interested you in music?

My father. I remember always listening to music in his car and at home. He would blast classic rock and sometimes classical. He was a true audiophile and I was lucky enough to receive his high fidelity hand-me-downs. Because of my father I stayed up at night listening to music. Because of him I am a huge Beatles fan.

What was the first instrument you ever played? How did you acquire it?

Guitar. I grew up in the 90's and I really think that was the last great era of Rock & Roll. The internet didn't really blow up yet so discovering new music was such a monumental thing. I saw Nirvana play live and at the end of their concert--Kurt Cobain smashed his guitar. I immediately asked for a guitar on my 15th birthday.

What is it about this instrument that makes you want to pass it on to students?

The guitar is such a mobile instrument. Most composers I know start off on the guitar writing simple songs. I love the piano as well, but when you're out camping, sitting around the campfire--a guitar is a must. Guitar is also a very friendly instrument. Put two guitarists in a room that have never met and 30 min. later they'll be best friends.

Would you consider ever venturing into another type of instrument?

Yes I would.

Did you continue to pursue music through high school and into college?

Actually, I didn't study music in high school. I was discouraged by my family to study it. They were afraid I would end up as a cliché. Despite this, I continued to write songs and formed a hardcore punk band in high school. After graduating I worked at a bank. One day I realized I was not happy so I went back to college and majored in Business/Computer Science. Again, I was not happy. I finally gave in to my heart's desire and changed my major to Music. Since then I have never been happier.

How long have you been teaching at Cal Poly Pomona?

I began in Fall 2013.

Why did you decide on a teaching career instead of performing?

I got over performing years ago. I've been on the road with my extreme metal band, Antagony, since I was 19 years old. We would go from city to city and sleep on the way to the next town. I loved it but academia took over my priorities as a touring musician. When I started as a music major I wanted to be a film composer (and was a film composer for years). After taking Music Theory with Dr. Frank LaRocca at CSU East Bay--a new vision appeared. I wanted to be a professor of music. I wanted to instill the passion that I felt when learning about music into others. To me, teaching a class IS performing.

Do you ever perform in any concerts or are you interested in doing them?

Yes, I do perform here and there on guitar or vocals. Either new music concerts or an occasional spur-of-the-moment show with one of the bands I'm associated with.

What kind of music do you listen to and who is your favorite artist within that genre?

To be honest, I don't listen to music as much as I used to. My car is usually silent so I can think or compose. Some music I've listened to recently would be Giacinto Scelsi, J.S. Bach, Neurosis, late Beethoven, and Slayer.

Professionally, what is a typical day like for you outside of Cal Poly Pomona?

Sitting in my studio thinking about my current composition. Sketching ideas. Hammering away at the piano if need be. Emailing performers. Talking with colleagues. Keeping up with my social networking.

