

September 2023

Dear IMTA Teacher of the Year Committee:

I am happy to write in support of my friend and colleague, Ray Kilburn, who has been nominated for the IMTA Teacher of the Year Award.

Ray is an incredible teacher, from the intermediate level music technology student to the graduate student playing major repertoire. His alumni are successful teachers and university instructors in their own right, and they perform and give presentations nationally and internationally. Equally comfortable teaching more “raw talent”, Ray is also successful teaching students at the intermediate levels, giving them the skills they need to succeed in their careers. Community minded, he is fiercely supportive of not only his own students, but of all the students in the piano area. If there were such an award, he would probably win one for ‘Most Doctoral Projects Successfully Advised Each Year’. This activity alone is equivalent to a full time job, but he juggles this among his other activities with apparent ease.

As a performer, Ray’s artistry and technical control are models to envy. When he applied for his current university position, the search committee was less than a minute into listening to his recordings when one member said, “oh definitely, this is the one we want”. His clarity of texture in the complexities of Rachmaninov I find especially dazzling. There is an individual spark and charm to his playing that immediately speaks to the listener. In turn, I find his lyrical sense particularly soulful and compelling. His knowledge of the piano repertoire is vast, and I benefit greatly from our conversations about music and about teaching. He and I occasionally encourage our students to ‘trade teachers for a day’ and I’m so eager for the full report from my students when they return to me, moreover, to hear those results in their playing. His students are so much fun to work with, and I hope they learn from me as much as I learn from them.

Ray is a terrific colleague, both on and off stage. Sadly, we’ve only gotten to play 2-piano rep on one occasion, but I look forward to more opportunities to do that. He’s a fabulous collaborator, especially in the violin and soprano repertoire! Off stage, his contributions of wisdom and elbow grease to the piano area and to the department are of indispensable value. One of my colleagues describes him as ‘whip smart’; and this often serves us as we advocate for our students and our department.

For his sterling track record as a teacher, performer, and general contributor to our profession, I cannot think of a more worthy candidate for IMTA Teacher of the Year than Ray Kilburn.

Sincerely,  
James Helton