Joan Panetti ’74 MusAD, the Sylvia and Leonard Marx, Jr. Class of 1954 Adjunct Professor of Music, brings a unique sensibility and an abiding passion to her teaching. A pianist and composer, she relies on both talents in a series of courses for master’s students she calls Hearing.

“The goal,” she said, “is to strengthen students’ musical instincts by engaging them in great compositions from different time periods.” All sections of the Hearing program come together on a weekly basis to sing choral works as well as transcriptions of instrumental works. Students also compose a choral piece, which is then sung by the large group. Panetti added, “Musical analysis is thorough; each pitch and non-pitch element is heard and discussed. And using adjectives is required so that the musical language is not ‘cold.’” By taking a composition apart and then reassembling it, students become more aware of musical choices.

Panetti finds that hearing is especially useful in chamber music: “Without a conductor, the musical decisions are up to the performers, and each colleague has to be totally aware of each partner.” It is a form she has been especially drawn to throughout her career, as a composer, performer, and longtime director of the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival from 1981 to 2003. “I enjoy the intimacy of chamber music and the opportunity it gives you to connect with the other performers as well as with audiences,” she said.

Panetti earned her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in 1974 and began teaching at Yale, first in the Department of Music and later in the School of Music. She also taught at Swarthmore and Princeton. Her approach has earned her a number of prestigious teaching awards, including her appointment in 2004 to the inaugural Marx chair. “This appointment is a particularly meaningful honor, due to the musical, warm, and generous spirit of the Marx family,” she said.

Endowed professorships are an important resource at Yale, providing the essential tools to recruit and retain faculty members like Joan Panetti. To learn more about ways to support Yale’s faculty, please visit giving.yale.edu or call 800.395.7646.