

# How to Incorporate Musical Improvisation into Your Life

*for people who don't improvise*

Lin Baird • Western Michigan University • lin.baird@wmich.edu • www.linfolkbaire.org

Add rhythm to your day: while going about your life consider turning your environment into a percussion studio. Tap a catchy rhythm on the steering wheel of your car (please drive safely!) or on your office desk. Tap different rhythms on each foot (polyrhythms are fun...) Add mouth noises (subtle, or not!) or body percussion.

Add singing to your day: use your shower as a studio for your vocal explorations, singing songs, motifs, or other musical ideas that you like (hum quietly or belt it out!) Hum to the drone of an electric toothbrush as you're brushing your teeth. Listen for other "drones" in your environment to work with: refrigerator, oscillating fan, water fountain cooling system, etc.

Practice scales with accents in different places (2+2+3, for instance). Or play major or minor scales with musical grace notes or other ornaments. Practice starting on a beat other than one. Incorporate different modes and pentatonics as well.

Wander on a chromatic scale throughout the range of your instrument, pausing and tonicizing where it feels right. Or move like a snake, playing chromatic motifs up and down the register in a jagged or smooth sliding motion.

Play a familiar tune or an excerpt of a song or piece that you like by ear. Figure out (also by ear) the chord roots or bass line, harmony, countermelody, and variations on the melody.

Pick two chords and go back and forth between them in different inversions and variations. Seek out and collect 2-chord progressions that you really like from all of your musical influences (classical, pop, world, religious, etc.)

Invent music that illustrates a special day or how you feel on this particular day. Limit your piece to 10-30 seconds at first.

Put a recorded song (or piece) that you like on "repeat" (using loudspeakers or headphones) and explore the music with your instrument. Hint: seek out relatively simple music at first (for instance, old country & western, blues, new age, or nursery rhymes are great places to start).

Close the shades, lock your doors, turn out the lights, and turn up some music. Express the music with your body. Also experiment with expressing these (and your own) ideas: flow, staccato, chaos, stillness, swing, elephant, monkey, chicken, etc. Channel your inner 8-year old—what were your favorite moves when you were that age?

---

Remember: There are no wrong notes. Play what feels good and sounds good to you at this moment. While improvising, let go of **Comparison**, **Criticism**, **Competition** or being **Clever**. Operate from a place of *abundance*, instead of scarcity: what **can** you sing or play, right now, to stay in the musical flow and keep the music alive?