

# Improvisation for Classical Musicians

## MUS 2650 (Aural Skills IV) • Fall 2017

Tuesdays/Thursdays 11-11:50 am • Room 1209 • 1 credit  
Western Michigan University • School of Music  
Dr. Lin Foulk • lin.foulk@wmich.edu • 269-387-4692 • office hours TBA

*A creature that plays is more readily adaptable to changing contexts and conditions. Play as improvisation sharpens our capacity to deal with a changing world.*

—Stephen Nachmanovitch in *Free Play*

### Course Goals

- Develop confidence and courage to create and perform music that you invent in the moment.
- Gain a practical and philosophical understanding of the benefits of improvising for classically-trained musicians.
- Practice teaching improvisation by leading students through improvisation activities.

### Learning Outcomes

In this course you will use your three semesters of traditional aural skills training to spontaneously create music. Over the course of the semester you will demonstrate a proficiency of the following skills through assignments and in-class performances and demonstrations, using your major instrument:

- invent rhythmic and melodic musical ideas
- develop, ornament, and elaborate upon melodies and motifs
- improvise in a soloistic as well as an accompanimental role
- effectively imitate other musicians during performance
- use silence as an effective musical device
- explore different timbres and extended techniques on your major instrument
- develop an awareness of the scholarship regarding the value of spontaneously creating music and listen to professional musicians who engage in this kind of music-making.

More specifically, at the end of the semester, you will demonstrate the following in final exams:

- Lead the class in improvisation activities that are pertinent to your major.
- Create a one-minute solo improvisation, demonstrating both instrumental competence and compelling musical form.
- Create compelling three-five minute chamber music pieces with lab groups, based on predetermined concepts.

### Course Expectations

You are expected to attend the class sessions with your major instrument; participate in class activities; and complete listening, reading, and practice assignments outside of class. A detailed schedule is listed below. Attendance is an essential, fundamental component of this course. Regular attendance is critical

for your success in this class. If you must miss a class, please send a message by email to Dr. Foulk at least 24 hours in advance or you will receive an unexcused absence for the day. Student illness accompanied by an official doctor's note will be considered an excused absence. All other absences (including absences due to the illness of friends or family members) will be considered "unexcused". Unexcused absences will count against your grade. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed (preferably from other students). ALL CELL PHONES MUST BE PUT AWAY DURING CLASS!!

### **Required Textbook**

*Free Play*, by Stephen Nachmanovitch

### **Recommended Course Material**

*Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians*, by Jeffrey Agrell

### **Grading**

60% Assignments  
30% Attendance, Attitude, Participation  
10% Final Presentation(s)

### **Assignments**

All assignments are taken from the required textbook (see above), materials on reserve at the Harper C. Maybee Music and Dance Library, the shared googledrive folder, or the class webpage:

[www.linfoulk.org](http://www.linfoulk.org) (click on "improvisation")

After the first week, written responses are due by class time every Tuesday. For each week, please write a response for each category:

- 1). *Reading/Viewing Assignments*
- 2). *Listening Assignments*
- 3). *Practicing Assignments*

A detailed schedule is outlined below. Written responses to the assignments will be kept in a private file on googledrive shared with Dr. Foulk (a link will be sent to you during the first week of class). Please complete or paste assignment responses into a "googledoc" in googledrive (double click on the folder with your name and then click the blue button marked "new"). For *Reading/Viewing Assignments*, read/view EVERY item listed for each class week. In five-ten sentences, **briefly summarize the main points of the material** and respond to it by relating it to your own musical experience. Questions or prompts for your responses may sometimes be sent by Dr. Foulk in advance by email (please check your "wmich" email account often).

For *Listening Assignments*, please find a list of classically-trained improvising musicians approved for this class (with links) here: [www.linfoulk.org](http://www.linfoulk.org) (click on "improvisation" then click on "musicians"). Explore a

couple links for each category each week (see schedule below) and describe the performance and your reaction to it in a couple sentences.

It is expected that you will practice improvisation techniques with your major instrument on your own each week. Start by practicing suggestions outlined in Dr. Foulk’s handout called “Improvisation Basics” on the “Links & Resources” page on the class website (see above). Other activities to practice include those learned in class as well as Jeff Agrell’s books on reserve in the library. For *Practicing Assignments* responses, please write a couple sentences about what you learned in your solo practice and/or how improvisation is influencing your traditional solo practice. Practicing improvisation techniques outside of class *every day* and with classmates in duos, trios, or quartets is encouraged.

**Assignment Schedule (please review ALL the links listed below)**

Due date	Reading/Viewing	Listening	Practicing
TH September 7	<a href="#">Nachmanovitch “Introduction”</a> (pgs. 4-13) <a href="#">Agrell Improvisation... “Introduction: Why Improvise?”</a> (pgs. 1-3, on reserve)	<a href="#">mixed ensemble</a> (scroll down to “mixed ensemble” heading)	Set timer for 5 minutes
September 12	<b>Nachmanovitch</b> “Practice” (pgs. 66-77) <b>Brockmann</b> “Improvise, what for?” (pgs. 1-14, on reserve)	<a href="#">mixed ensemble</a>	<a href="#">Rhiannon Long Tones</a> (sound file)
September 19	<b>Nachmanovitch</b> “The Power of Mistakes” & “Playing Together” (pgs. 88-101) <a href="#">Kanack “Dealing with Fear and Ego”</a> (pdf) <a href="#">Dub FX Beat Boxing basics</a> (video, 5:10)	<a href="#">string quartet</a>	Ornament with voice and instrument with <a href="#">Heinavanker</a>
September 26	<b>Nachmanovitch</b> “Quality” & “Art for Life’s Sake” (pgs. 170-190)	<a href="#">voice</a>	<a href="#">Foulk Improvisation Basics</a>
October 3	<a href="#">Hill “Improvise Intentionally”</a>	<a href="#">percussion</a>	<a href="#">Two notes</a>

	(pdf)		
October 10	<a href="#">Rumi “Two Kinds of Intelligence”</a> (pdf) <a href="#">Robinson “How Schools Kill Creativity”</a> (video, 19:25)	<a href="#">piano</a>	Explore class activities on your own
October 17	<b>Agrell</b> <i>Improvisation...</i> “Musical Training for Improvisation” & “Introduction to the Games” (pgs. 30-32 & 41-44, on reserve) <a href="#">Wigram Improvisation “Foreword”</a> (pdf)	<a href="#">cello</a> + deep listening	Explore class activities on your own
October 24	<a href="#">benefits of improv (Stevens, Goodman, Olson)</a> (3 pdf files)	<a href="#">viola, &amp; double bass, or harp</a>	Explore class activities on your own
October 31	<a href="#">Best “Music Curricula in the Future”</a> (pdf) <a href="#">Baikal ice drumming</a> (video, 4:27) <a href="#">IKEA Kitchen rhythms</a> (video, 1:43) <a href="#">Vienna Vegetable Orchestra</a> (video, 5:56) <a href="#">Carrot clarinet</a> (video, 5:52)	<a href="#">violin</a>	Explore class activities on your own
November 7	<a href="#">Brown “The Importance of Play”</a> (video, 22:26)	<a href="#">trumpet, trombone, &amp; tuba</a>	Explore class activities on your own
November 14	<a href="#">Small “Musicking: A Ritual in Social Space”</a> (link – please read to the paragraph that starts “I want to make it clear what I mean...”) <a href="#">Thomas Manhattanville Music Curriculum Program Synthesis</a> (pdf)	<a href="#">horn</a>	Explore class activities on your own
November	<a href="#">Patton “Lifemusic: Putting the</a>	<a href="#">flute &amp;</a>	Explore class activities on your own

21	<a href="#">hum into human!</a> " (video, 16:02)	<a href="#">clarinet</a>	
November 28	<a href="#">Godin <i>The Icarus Deception</i></a> (pdf) <a href="#">Godin <i>Linchpin</i></a> (pdf) <a href="#">Cahn "Questions, Questions, Questions!"</a> (pdf)	<a href="#">oboe,</a> <a href="#">saxophone,</a> <a href="#">&amp; bassoon</a>	Prepare for presentation(s) + explore class activities on your own
December 5	<a href="#">Sarath "The Music School of the Future"</a> (pdf) <b>Agrell <i>Improvisation...</i></b> "Improvisation Principles" & "Constructing Improvisation Compositions" (pgs. 271-272 & 278-280, on reserve)	<i>your choice</i>	Prepare for presentation(s) + explore class activities on your own

### Accommodation for Disabilities

Students with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who need to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact [Disability Services for Students](#) at the beginning of the semester. A disability determination must be made by this office before any accommodations are provided by the instructor. Any student with a documented disability should inform Dr. Foulk during the first week of classes. For more information, contact DSS (269) 387-2116.

### University Policies

*Students are responsible for making themselves aware of and understanding the University policies and procedures that pertain to Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity and computer misuse. The academic policies addressing Student Rights and Responsibilities can be found in the Undergraduate Catalog at <http://catalog.wmich.edu/content.php?catoid=24&navoid=974> and the Graduate Catalog at <http://catalog.wmich.edu/content.php?catoid=25&navoid=1030>. If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s) and if you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with your instructor if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment or test.*

*Students and instructors are responsible for making themselves aware of and abiding by the "Western Michigan University Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking Policy and Procedures" related to prohibited sexual misconduct under Title IX, the Clery Act and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Campus Safe. Under this policy, responsible employees (including instructors) are required to report claims of sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator or designee (located in the Office of Institutional Equity). Responsible employees are not confidential resources. For a complete list of resources and more information about the policy see [www.wmich.edu/sexualmisconduct](http://www.wmich.edu/sexualmisconduct).*

*In addition, students are encouraged to access the Code of Conduct, as well as resources and general academic policies on such issues as diversity, religious observance, and student disabilities:*

- Office of Student Conduct [www.wmich.edu/conduct](http://www.wmich.edu/conduct)
- Division of Student Affairs [www.wmich.edu/students/diversity](http://www.wmich.edu/students/diversity)
- University Relations Office <http://www.wmich.edu/registrar/calendars/interfaith>
- Disability Services for Students [www.wmich.edu/disabilityservices](http://www.wmich.edu/disabilityservices)

This syllabus is subject to change.