

Incorporating Improvisation In the Classroom/Studio

I. Improvisation -- Be Not Afraid!

- A. Taking chances, but remaining comfortable
- B. Sense of exploration -- be scientific, make observations
- C. Recover ability to play
- D. Use imagination, be aware
- E. Remember: notation is only a roadmap -- sound is music
- F. Improvisation vs. Interpretation

Dive Right In

(adding layers)

OR

Start From Here

(removing layers, creating new from old)

Dive Right In

I. Dive right in -- free play, composition

- A. Solo instant performance
 - i. Totally free, chaotic
 - ii. Make up movie, tv soundtrack
 - iii. Add limiting elements (key, meter, dynamic shapes, etc.)
- B. Duo instant performance
 - i. Totally free, chaotic
 - ii. One after another, still free
 - iii. Add dynamic shape to whole; build dialog
 - iv. Add rhythms of speech to dynamic dialog
 - v. Add key center to rhythms of speech, dynamic shape
 - vi. Add meter to key, rhythms, dynamics

II. Dive right in -- aleatoric graphic organization, composition

- A. Invent graphic notation (proportional, linear, abstract)
- B. Draw imagined sounds and then perform drawing
 - i. Elementary; use percussion instruments or voices
 - ii. Older; use own instruments
 - iii. Older; notate new work in standard notation
 - How well does this work -- does graphic notation have any benefits over standard notation
- C. Diagram a known piece and then perform new version of score

- i. Choose student favorite or one being studied
How is new version of piece similar and different
How could notation be changed to better piece

Start From Here

- I. Start From Here -- learn keys fluently, develop rhythmic flexibility through limiting factors (limited pitch choice, repeated rhythms)
 - A. Choose scale (major, minor, mode, etc) or chord
 - B. Play rhythm on one note of scale and then rhythm on any other note of scale
 - C. Play rhythm using three notes of scale
 - D. Mix up pitch placement with repeated rhythm, 3 notes
 - E. Mix up accent structure and articulation with repeated rhythm, 3 notes
 - F. Extend phrase with longer speech pattern rhythms
 - G. Try same exercises alternation 3 notes of two different scales
 - H. Alternate 4 bars on each scale, then 2, then 1, then 3
 - I. Try POOKing (Polytonal Order of Keys) -- take simple melody and change key center via modal transposition
- II. Start From Here -- technique for strings (vary for winds/brass)
 - A. Bow distribution exercise
 - B. Play the rhythm of the bowing on a single pitch
 - C. Add string crossings (2, then 3, then all strings)
 - D. Invent more complex string crossing patterns (non-adjacent strings)
 - E. Add new fingering for each string (keep in rhythm of bowing)
 - F. Finally add new fingering with old 'pitched rhythm"
- III. Start From Here -- fundamentals of articulation, form, dynamics
 - A. Theme and Variations -- take known theme and decide on number and type of variations
 - i. Articulation
 - a. staccato; two fast short pitches in place of melodic pitches
 - b. legato; double the length of each pitch and slur adjacent beats
 - ii. Form
 - a. Divide section into phrases
 - b. Place phrases in new order (ABA, AABA, etc.)
 - iii. Dynamics
 - a. Assign dynamic shapes numbers
 - b. Mix up numbered dynamic shapes with lettered phrases (1A, 3A, 2B, etc.)
- IV. Start From Here -- phrase shapes
 - A. Diagram desired shape as linear graph on staff paper (could be known or new shape)

- B. Recreate phrase shape with new pitches
- C. Limit pitches to specific key centers

V. Start From Here -- learning repertoire

- A. How to get 'inside' a piece
- B. Set up groove with difficult passages
 - i. Hone down to most important pitches (2-5)
 - ii. Add rhythmic space, invent groove
 - iii. Tape groove and improvise in key around groove using rhythms and phrases similar to piece
- C. Take longer passages and try new rhythms (dotted first, then longer more complicated rhythms, see Galamian)
- D. Analyze harmonic progression, build improvisation from key centers

Start From Here -- take any single idea or combine ideas from any elements of pitch, rhythm, phrase shape, form, dynamics, etc from known works and create new ones.

“Good composers borrow, great ones steal.” Igor Stravinsky

Dive Right In -- create an improvisation, tape the exercise, and then transcribe and steal your own ideas.

“Never turn off that tape machine.” Miles Davis