

Guided Improvisation: Exploring in Every Practice Room

Gloria Yehilevsky

What is improvisation?

“Improvisation is a particularly natural condition. It is what we do every day as we move from point A to point B. It is what infants do as they explore their world. It is what we do every time we have a conversation with another person... It seems therefore silly and unnecessary to exclude improvisation from musical practice. When one considers the range of musical traditions today and historically—whether it is hot jazz or a mother making up a song for her baby—improvisation is not only valuable but conventional” – Mark Applebaum, email correspondence

Why do we need to improvise?

Christopher Lamb – “Improvisation is the road to discovery”

Independent thought and individual creativity are what help a musician stand out from the rest, whether that be in an orchestral audition, or in any and every creative and artistic endeavor. These things can only be achieved and fostered through creative practice.

Tools for Practice

Mindful Repetition – Using one’s current repertoire to explore variations in sound and technique

“Rather than practicing with a single goal in mind, one should engage in practice that encourages the creative processes meant to connect past experiences with the current activity, thus creating an ever-evolving, fully-engaged artist” (Di Sanza).

Creating/Writing Music – Rewrite a snare drum etude on a keyboard, or vice versa. Write a work in the style of another composer... etc.

Tools for Performance

Guided Improvisation – composed pieces with some elements of improvisation, so every performance is different, see attached list of solo percussion works

Benefits of including improvisation in practice:

- Engages different parts of the brain, stretches the creative outlet (TED talk: “Charles Limb: Your brain on improv”)
- Ability to improvise in the style of a prepared piece can ease pressure of “messing up”
- Ability to play on the spot (as opposed to having to have music to be able to play)
- Learning more about our instruments, discovering new sounds
- Enhanced technical ability and facility – ability to incorporate various techniques at any given moment rather than only when prepared in a specific context
- Heightened listening ability, interpretive ability, and musical creativity

Solo Percussion Works with Guided Improvisation

*denotes PASIC 2018 Performance

Abe, Keiko <i>Michi</i>	Mellnäs, Arne <i>Fragile</i>
Akiho, Andy <i>Karakurenai</i>	Molenhof, Bill (<i>Almost</i>) <i>The Amazing Spiderman</i>
Alvarez, Javier <i>Temazcal</i>	Molenhof, Bill <i>Foreign Films</i>
Applebaum, Mark <i>Aphasia: Dialect</i>	Molenhof, Bill <i>So Far To Go</i>
Astrand, Anders <i>Rauk</i> (accompanied)	Molenhof, Bill <i>Up From the Ashes</i>
*Berg, Daniel <i>Fantasia and Toccata</i>	Munson, Jordan <i>Those That I Fight I Do Not Hate</i>
Bergamo, John <i>Tanka</i>	Nörgård, Per <i>Waves</i>
Bergamo, John <i>Three Pieces for the Winter Solstice</i>	Offermans, Will <i>The Improvisation Calendar</i>
Bunk, Lou <i>Etude: Being and Becoming</i>	O'Hara, Thomas <i>Six Impressions for Solo Snare Drum</i> (mvmt. IV, V)
Burtner, Matthew <i>Ecotones</i>	Perez, Francisco <i>Tesseract</i>
Cage, John <i>Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum</i>	Price, William <i>Sans Titre IV</i>
Cahn, William <i>Nara</i>	Ridley, Stephen <i>Animism</i>
Dietz, Brett <i>Percussion Concerto with Wind Band</i>	Séjourné, Emmanuel <i>Concerto for Vibraphone</i>
Dietz, Brett <i>William Spin Cycle</i> (12 solos)	Serry, John <i>Therapy</i>
Forsthoff, Kyle <i>Parampara</i>	Smith, Stuart Saunders ... <i>And Points North</i> (mvmt. II)
Forsthoff, Kyle <i>Riq Roll'd</i>	Smith, Stuart Saunders <i>Songs I-IX, VI.</i>
*Glass, Philip <i>1+1</i>	Stensgaard, Kai <i>Spanish Dance</i>
Herriott, Jeff <i>Ancient Caves</i>	Stockhausen, Karleinz <i>Tierkreis</i>
Herriott, Jeff <i>At the Whim of the Current</i>	Swendsen, Peter V. <i>Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is</i>
Herriott, Jeff <i>Hollow</i>	Tompkins, Joseph <i>To Varese</i>
Herriott, Jeff <i>Swarms of Light in Metal</i>	Tonkin, Christopher <i>In</i>
Higdon, Jennifer <i>Percussion Concerto</i>	Treuting, Jason <i>Thank You</i>
*Howley, Alex <i>Persistence</i>	Wahlund, Ben <i>The Whimsical Nature of Small Particle Physics</i>
Kotche, Glenn <i>Monkey Chant</i>	Whitmarsh, Jamie <i>Wind Aqueous Transfusion</i>
Ledroit, Christien <i>Night Chill</i>	Whitmarsh, Jamie <i>Wind Concerto for Drumset and Percussion Ensemble</i>
Lewis, George <i>North Star Boogaloo</i>	*Williams, Chalcedony <i>Released</i>
Lindholm, Ingvar <i>The Stamp</i>	Zivkovic, Nebojsa <i>Castle of the Mad King</i>
Little, David <i>Modi-fications</i>	
Lucier, Alvin <i>Silver Streetcar</i>	

Contributors:

Berg, Daniel

Bliss, Andrew

Cangelosi, Casey

D'Ambrosio, Mark

Feeney, Timothy

Forsthoff, Kyle

Geiger, Matthew

Herriott, Jeff

Munson, Jordan\

Perez, Francisco

Sharp, Jonathan

Spiesser, Philippe

Truesdell, Mike

Whitmarsh, Jamie

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