EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION
MUSIC
School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design
Music Department
FA / MUSI 1032 6.0 SECTION A
CONTEMPORARY MUSICIANSHIP & IMPROV.
FALL 2019 / WINTER 2020

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION
Designed to integrate musicianship training with work in composition and improvisation. Development of the skills, strategies and sensibilities required to achieve fluency in spontaneous solo and ensemble music making, and the development and refining of one’s own musical voice are among the main course objectives. Admission is by audition in September. Permission of Instructor, by audition.

INSTRUCTOR(S)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Section / Format / Term</th>
<th>Contact Email</th>
<th>Contact Phone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brubeck, Charles</td>
<td>Sec. A / STDO / Y</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mattbru@yorku.ca">mattbru@yorku.ca</a></td>
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<td>Matthew</td>
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SPECIAL FEATURES

- **Course:** MUSI X032  6.0 – *Contemporary Musicianship and Improvisation*
- **Term:** Fall-Winter 2019-2020
- **Course Director:** Matt Brubeck
- **Time and Location:** Thursday 11:30 - 2:20 ACE 252
  
mattbru@yorku.ca
  
Office: Accolade East Room 354A Office Hours: By Appointment

1. Special Features

Expanded Course Description

This studio course is designed to integrate advanced musicianship training with work in improvisation and composition. Development of the skills, strategies and sensibilities required to achieve fluency in spontaneous solo and ensemble music-making (e.g. “free” or “open” improvisation) and the refining of one’s own musical voice are among the main goals. Rather than employing materials that direct the student into specific styles and practices, the concepts/exercises presented in this course are typically oriented toward a “generic” understanding of improvisational strategies and practices as well as a more compositional orientation to improvisation. The classroom environment is designed to be relaxed and non-competitive, so that students are free to experiment, take risks, make “mistakes”, and share in the mutual support necessary
for creative undertaking.

Class meetings will focus on musicianship work and improvisation-related techniques. We will spend time examining a variety of improvisation ideas through classroom exercises, listening, discussion of readings and, of course, hands-on practice. Students will be encouraged to utilize a variety of materials and experiences as a starting point from which creative action can arise, whether originating in the domain of dance, poetry, theatre, story, graphic arts, film, or simply one’s own imagination. Students may also have the opportunity to consolidate these activities into a stable “work” such as a composition or recording. As improvisation and composition are interrelated creative practices, some portion of class may be dedicated to workshopping student compositions that include an improvisational component.

This course emphasizes experiential education. While theoretical concepts are introduced and examined, much learning takes place by “doing”. Through participation in classroom activities, working on creative take-home assignments, and reflective journaling, students will gain insights into their personal creative process, which will promote their ongoing musical development. We work diligently, but we also have fun.

Prerequisite / Co-requisite:
Open to qualified non-majors/minors with permission (pending September audition).
Appropriate lower level required for upper level enrollment, or permission of instructor.

Please note:
1. Class assignments and updates are communicated to students via email. Students are expected to check their email regularly. To facilitate timely communication, all students are required to provide the Course Director with their preferred email address and update it as needed. The easiest way to achieve this is to email the Course Director (mattbru@yorku.ca) from the email address that you check every day.
2. Any student with an official letter of accommodation from York U’s Student Accessibility Services must submit it to the Course Director within the first 2 weeks of class. Retroactive accommodations are not usually permitted.

2. Topics and Concepts

Some activities that may be encountered in this course:

- Improvisational conducting
- Improvisation with text and spoken word
- Movement and improvisation
- Compositional exercises and structures for improvisation
- Collaborative work with artists working in other media and disciplines (e.g., dance, film)
- Environmental and site-specific music
- Contemporary repertoire and rehearsal techniques
- Non-traditional notation and graphic scores
- Transcription of improvised performance
- Concert and soiree presentations
- Recording projects
- Extended technique on traditional instruments and home-made/adapted instruments
Course Readings

Required text (for Winter semester)

*Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, Derek Bailey. This book compares the processes of learning, practicing and performing in several improvisational traditions. Additionally, the most recent edition includes interviews with various people professionally engaged as practicing improvisers.

Recommended Readings

*Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*, Stephen Nachmanovitch. This is a remarkably coherent essay on creativity in its most general meaning and application. It also gives a great deal of insight into the psychology of creative behaviour.

Other reading:
Additional readings/listenings/videos may be suggested throughout the year.

3. Learning Outcomes with Examples

Learning Objectives

- To develop a strong conceptual foundation for improvisational behaviour
- To interact creatively with other musicians, improvising “in the moment” (e.g. learning to listen in different ways and to develop sufficient attention to conceive, play, listen, think, anticipate, etc., all as a complex and integrated action)
- To achieve basic competence in a variety of traditional and contemporary improvisation contexts, techniques and strategies (e.g. working with modes and modal harmony, diatonic and modal sequence, variation, intervallic structures, imitative counterpoint etc.)
- To achieve a reasonable level of competence in a variety of musicianship skills (e.g. real-time recognition, modes, intervals, chords, rhythms, meters, etc.)
- To develop an understanding of the hierarchal and dynamic relationship between different layers of rhythm, meter, cross-rhythm, phasing, and the like.
- To acquire the ability to document notate improvisational material and gain facility in composition
- To engage in the description and critique of improvised music through both written and oral communication
- To make connections between classroom experiences and one’s growth as a creative musician through reflection in an ongoing journal
- To increase musical attention, concentration, and memory

4. Graded Assessment

*The final grade for the course will be based on the following items weighted as indicated:*

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<th>Weight</th>
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<td>Participation (attendance, punctuality, preparation, engagement in class activities)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance tests</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Composition assignments/small recording projects</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Journaling (reflective/directed)  20%
Final Project (recordings and/or compositions)  20%
Total 100%

**REMINDER:**
Last date to drop a full year (Y) course without receiving a grade:
February 3, 2020

**Assignment Submission/Lateness Penalty:**
Proper academic performance depends on students following assignment directions, completing their work, and submitting it on time. Accordingly, the assignments required for this course must be received on the due date. Late assignments will be penalized one-half letter grade per day (e.g. from a B+ down to a B) for each day past the due date (including weekends). Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., may be considered by the Course Instructor but will require supporting documentation (e.g., a doctor’s letter). Strictness in this regard is not meant to be punitive but is intended to:
1. Encourage members of the class to keep pace as a whole – leaving no one without adequate and timely feedback
2. To provide the Course Director with sufficient time to go through all the work

**Missed Tests:** Students with a valid reason for missing a test, such as illness, personal difficulties, etc., and which is confirmed by supporting documentation (e.g., doctor’s letter) may request accommodation from the Course Instructor. Arrangements for make-up tests are made on a case-by-case basis.

**Attendance Policy**

Regular attendance and engaged participation are vital for success in the course. Tardiness and absenteeism are not tolerated in the real world (“the show must go on”) and are therefore strongly discouraged in performance training. In this way, students can develop the work ethic of the professional musical community. Students are permitted two unexcused absences per year for unpredictable life events like minor illnesses (e.g. having a bad cold). After two unexcused absences, each additional unexcused absence will result in a 5-point deduction from the student’s total grade. Late arrivals or early departures (10 minutes grace) are disruptive to the class and will negatively affect the Participation mark.

Attendance will be checked at the beginning of each class. If you are unable to attend a class for any reason, please inform the Course Director in advance by email. If you do not know until the morning of the class, leave a message for the Course Director regarding your absence with the music office. **Excused absences are typically based on the following circumstances:**
1) Serious illness 2) Non-movable appt., 3) family tragedy, 4) weather events that make it impossible to get to the York Campus, and 5) off campus auditions or performances related to another York course. Such absences will be excused, provided they are either arranged in advance with the Course Director, or communicated via email when they occur, as long as the claims are supported by relevant documentation (e.g. a note signed by the MD that proves the student had a medical appt. that prevented him/her from attending class).

**5. Additional Information**

The Improvisation Studio
ACE 252 houses the necessary equipment for the teaching of the course: recording equipment, two matched grand pianos, drum kit, amplifiers, microphones and stands, a mixing board, P.A. equipment for playback of live and pre-recorded music, assorted hand percussion, etc. Therefore, the students are provided with a properly equipped venue for practice, rehearsal, study and recording. Each registered student will have access to the studio with a key housed in a nearby locker. Students will be able reserve the studio for work on course projects, including evenings and weekends.

**Performance opportunities outside of class:**

Students have performance opportunities at the improv soirees, which are scheduled on four Thursday nights, two in the Fall term and two in the Winter term. They are participatory, spontaneous concerts where anyone may play (or not play). The soirees are inclusive and open to the community. There are quite a few people e.g. alumni, friends, other students, dancers, visual artists, poets etc. who attend from time to time. The soirees take place in ACE 235 from 8:00-11:00 p.m. All students are strongly encouraged to attend. Please note the soiree dates in your calendars:

- **Fall Term**
  - October 10
  - November 14
- **Winter Term**
  - February 6
  - March 5

**Local performances of improvised Music**

There are many venues for improvised music in and around Toronto. You may wish to subscribe to the “Soundlist,” which will inform you about experimental, improvised, and otherwise interesting concerts.

http://www.soundlist.ca/

The Wholenote magazine is another valuable resource, as it provides listings of many musical events throughout the GTA and beyond:

https://www.thewholenote.com/

**Academic Policies / Information**

The Senate Academic Standards, Curriculum and Pedagogy Committee (ASCP) provides a Student Information Sheet that includes:

- York's Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures / Academic Integrity Web site
- Access/Disability
- Ethics Review Process for Research Involving Human Participants
- Religious Observance Accommodation
- Student Code of Conduct

http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/CourseInformationForStudentsAugust20121.pdf Additional information:

- Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
- Alternate Exam and Test Scheduling
- Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy

The Senate Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy stipulates that (a) the grading scheme (i.e. kinds and weights of assignments, essays, exams, etc.) be announced, and be available in writing, within the first two weeks of class, and that, (b) under normal circumstances, graded feedback worth at least 15% of the final grade for Fall, Winter or Summer Term, and 30% for ‘full year’ courses offered in the Fall/Winter Term be received by students in all courses prior to the final withdrawal date from a course without receiving a grade.
• Important University Sessional Dates (you will find classes and exams start/end dates, reading/co-curricular week, add/drop deadlines, holidays, University closings and more. http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/enrol/dates/index.htm
• Manage my Academic record http://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/

• "20% Rule"

No examinations or tests collectively worth more than 20% of the final grade in a course will be given during the final 14 calendar days of classes in a term. The exceptions to the rule are classes which regularly meet Friday evenings or on Saturday and/or Sunday at any time, and courses offered in the compressed summer terms.

Final course grades may be adjusted to conform to Program or Faculty grades distribution profiles.

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Many courses utilize Moodle, York University’s course website system. If your course is using Moodle, click here to access it.
Moodle @ York University