EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION
MUSIC
School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design
Music Department
FA / MUSI 2033 6.0 SECTION A
PRIVATE LESSONS IN OPEN-STYLE IMPROV
FALL 2019 / WINTER 2020

Last Modified Date: 09/16/2019

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION

Students learn to improvise freely—from their own imagination—and work towards developing their own
approaches to ‘free’ improvisation. Skill acquisition in technique, theory, harmony, rhythm, composition and
listening will foster students’ confidence, creativity, and personal voice both as soloists and ensemble players.
Prerequisites: Audition and permission of instructor. Open to Non-Majors

These lessons are intended for vocalists and instrumentalists of all backgrounds and levels of
accomplishment who want to explore many different traditional and contemporary improvisational practices,
techniques and styles. Students learn to develop their creativity—their own sense of originality and
expression—and to discover ways to bring together all the musical influences they know and love. To this end
they will learn about different compositional and improvisational forms; they will enhance their
understanding of music theory and their musicianship skills; they will develop the strength of their musical
attention, concentration and memory. In general, students in the private lessons will develop a stronger
conceptual and technical foundation, greater freedom of musical expression, and more confidence in practice
and performance. Prerequisites: Audition and permission of instructor. Open to Non-Majors

INSTRUCTOR(S)
TBD

SPECIAL FEATURES

MUSI 1033-2033-3033-4033:  Private Lessons in Open-Style Improvisation

1. Special Features

This studio course is designed to provide private instruction in a special area of improvisation study—one
that is closely allied to “fixed” composition, but of a spontaneous nature: students learn how to compose
spontaneously, in the moment, embracing styles that they have a strong interest in and moving towards the
development of an individual voice. This kind of study requires an intensive integration of advanced
musicianship training with an understanding of compositional and improvisational process and structure, and
an intimate capacity for inner freedom. Thus the refinement of the skills, strategies and sensibilities required
in achieving fluency in spontaneous solo and ensemble music making and the development and refinement of
one’s own musical voice are among the main course objectives.

These lessons are intended for instrumentalists and vocalists of all backgrounds and levels of
accomplishment that wish to explore different traditional and contemporary improvisational practices,
techniques and styles. Students learn to develop their creativity—their own sense of originality and
expression—and to discover ways to bring together musical influences they know and love. To this end,
students learn about different compositional and improvisational forms; they enhance their understanding of
music theory and their musicianship skills; they develop the strength of their musical attention, concentration
and memory. Students develop a stronger conceptual and technical foundation, greater freedom of musical expression, and, in general, more confidence in practice and performance.

The course comprises either 30 or 60 minutes of individual instruction each week. Private Lessons in Open-Style Improvisation (X033 3.0 or 6.0) is associated with the curriculum of MUSI X031 (Piano Improvisation and Contemporary Styles) and X032 (Contemporary Musicianship and Improvisation) and students are strongly encouraged to take one (or both) of these courses before taking private lessons, or at the same time they are taking the private improvisation lessons. All these courses compliment each other and the serious student of Improvisation will gain much by being involved in the varied aspects of the stream (including the improvisation soirees that happen throughout the year (see soiree dates under category 5. “Additional Information” in this document).

Typical of most of the department’s private lessons, the format and content of lessons in open improvisation is unique to each student and is necessarily informed by the relationship between teacher and student. The teacher and student formulate a program of study, in the manner of an independent study course.

2. Topics and Concepts

Since the focus of the course concerns creativity and the skills that support its manifestation, the topics below are not necessarily introduced in a predetermined sequence, nor is it possible for any student to address all of them. Each student and teacher will highlight the areas of greatest need and interest, so no two students’ lessons will comprise the identical content. Therefore assignments, tests, projects, readings, and all expectations are individualized. They are presented here generically, without specific dates for their introduction to the student. Topics and concepts are typically revisited periodically throughout the year, with a cumulative integration of all previous topics and concepts. The course will explore some of the following units and activities, and very possibly different one’s, depending on both the students’ interests and what the teacher feels is necessary at a particular juncture:

- Solo improvisation from one’s own imagination
- Solo improvisation based on images, live dance, art, poetry, storytelling etc.
- Improvisation based on various forms (e.g. Binary, Rondo etc.)
- Improvisational conducting
- Modes/Modal Harmony
- Sustaining an improvised performances
- Polyrhythm/Cross-rhythm
- Exercising musical memory
- Improvised harmonization of melody
- Exercising coherency
- Tonal/Atonal/Twelve-Tone improvisation
- Improvising on found objects
- Working with home made instruments and extended techniques
- Creative use of speech and song
- The relationship between musicianship and improvisation
- Working with movement and improvisation
Working with compositional exercises and structures for improvisation (e.g. improvising counterpoint)
Engaging in collaborative work with artists working in other media (e.g., digital media, dance classes)
Environmental and site-specific music
Contemporary repertoire and practice techniques and application to improvisational work
Concert and soiree presentations. Critical writing about recorded improvisation (commercial and one’s own recordings). Recording project
Internet projects
Remapping: taking values from external sources (scores, environment, sports) and translating them into musical values

* There is a great emphasis in the course on developing the ability to integrate one’s various functions and influences, and to stay in one’s very centre amid all required perceptions and actions: thinking, feeling, moving, sensing, empathizing, remembering, planning, evaluating—all to be undertaken with a deep relaxation, a focused intensity, an easy sense of humour, a seriousness of purpose, a genuine curiosity, a heightened sense of discrimination, and freedom from unnecessary judgment.

Recommended texts (others will be noted by each instructor):

1. Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art, Stephen Nachmanovitch. Bejo Press. (SMIL and York bookstore). 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 behavior.

3. Learning Outcomes

The essential aim of the course is to provide the materials for development towards a personal approach to improvisational music-making and to foster a learning environment which will best facilitate the kind of open exploration conducive to this aim. The intention is to develop one’s skills and sensibilities as both a solo and ensemble player. The aim of the course is about a certain freedom in creative music making, and while the student learns and embraces playing within certain parameters/styles, an ultimate goal of the course is to perform music without the support of any predetermined agenda—one’s own music of the moment.

The course objectives are not presented one at a time in successive weeks but are rather continuously addressed, revisiting and renewing the study at successively more sophisticated levels with increasingly nuanced levels of integration, as they recur throughout the year.

Throughout their years of study in the program, students have ample opportunities to perform their in-the-moment creations solo and in ensemble at soirees, with their teachers, peers, and in concerts at the university and beyond. Via their accumulated skill sets from the course(s), extensive performing experience, written personal reflections as well as feedback from their peers and teachers, successful graduating students who have invested a good number of years in the program have acquired the necessary means to move towards careers as improvising performance artists.

4. Graded Assessment
Each student, in consultation with their teacher will draw up a specific distribution of requirements for the grading. The distribution of grades will be documented in writing in the first two weeks and kept on file with the teacher and area coordinator; due to the nature of the course, it is subject to change during the course of the year as long as it is agreed upon by both parties and documented in writing. Expectations concerning every assignment will also be clearly documented, explained, and kept on file by the teacher. The following represents one of several possible evaluation models:

30% Fall semester participation: attendance, punctuality, preparedness, overall engagement, evidence of practice, progress, effort and attitude.

30% Winter semester participation: attendance, punctuality, preparedness, overall engagement, evidence of practice, progress, effort and attitude.

20% Performance exams (10% per term; constructing and notating particular patterns or variations to be employed in an improvisation etc.)

20% Possible major project (such as a recording, sketch compositions for improvisations; performing/recording improvisations to a silent short film or story etc.).

Late Penalties for any submitted work: TBD by each instructor.

Important Note: Due to the nature of the course, the vast majority of the evaluation will occur during the actual lessons including reading about/discussing/reflecting upon students’ recorded improvisations.

5. Additional Information

* Important Dates:

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

* There are a number of opportunities for performing outside of the lesson format.

Improvisation Soirées: informal community participation concerts of spontaneous music making.

York University improvisation soirees 2019/20:

Thursday, October 10, 2019
Thursday, November 14, 2019
Thursday, February 6, 2020
Thursday, March 5, 2020

All soirees will be held in 235ACE between the hours of 8PM-11:30PM unless otherwise relayed in good advance via email/facebook etc.
PLEASE NOTE ALL THE SOIREE DATES IN YOUR CALENDAR’S. It is expected (though not required) that all students in the improv stream involve themselves in the soirees, a very important part of your development.

* 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 d

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

Moodle @ York University