EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION

MUSIC
School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design
Music Department
FA / MUSI 3033 3.0 SECTION A
PRIVATE LESSONS IN OPEN-STYLE IMPROV
FALL 2020 / WINTER 2021

Last Modified Date: 09/01/2020

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. Co-requisites: MUSI 1032, 2032, 3032, 4032 at corresponding level, or other ensemble. Open to Music majors and minors only.

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INSTRUCTOR(S)

TBD

SPECIAL FEATURES

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

F/W 2020-21

1. Special Features

Expanded Course Description

This studio course welcomes instrumentalists and vocalists of all musical backgrounds and levels of accomplishment who wish to explore a range of traditional and contemporary improvisational practices, techniques, and styles. Students are encouraged to develop their own creativity, as well as discover ways to bring together musical influences they know and love. To this end, students may learn about different compositional and improvisational forms; enhance their understanding of music theory and their musicianship; and develop the strength of their musical attention, concentration, and memory. Refinement of the skills, strategies, and sensibilities required to achieve fluency in spontaneous solo and ensemble music making provides students with a strong performance foundation. Over time, students learn to play—when they wish to—without any predetermined stylistic agenda in mind and will experience the joy of freely composing in the moment.

Location

For the 2020-2021 academic year, this course depends on remote teaching and learning. At the time of this writing, there are no in-class interactions or activities scheduled on campus. Students are expected to
participate in lessons through video-conferencing (e.g. ZOOM), or an audio-only interaction platform that can range from telephone calls to music software designed for musical collaboration online.

**Organization of the Course**

Private Lessons in Open-Style Improvisation (MUSI X033) comprises either 30 or 60 minutes of individual instruction each week. Since the focus of the lessons concerns creativity and its associated skills, each student and teacher will work together to highlight the areas of greatest need and interest. Consequently, assignments, tests, and other expectations are individualized.

**Technical requirements for MUSI X033 in 2020-21**

In order to engage fully with online lessons, students should have access to the following:

- A stable, high-speed internet connection (ethernet is better than Wi-Fi, if available)
- Personal email address and the ability to receive and submit digital files (e.g. written assignments, compositions, recordings etc.)
- A computer or smart device with webcam, microphone, headphones/ear buds (for videoconferencing)
- An audio and/or video recording device (e.g. computer/phone/tablet)
- Computer notation software or manuscript paper
- A printer or a computer/tablet screen large enough to display musical notation
- Ability to scan/photograph and upload handwritten documents to your instructor if necessary

**2. Topics and Concepts**

With a focus on creative music making, the materials and exercises presented in the lessons embrace a variety of improvisational strategies and practices that encourage the development of an “open-style” approach to improvisation. The format and content of the lessons are unique to each student. Topics are not introduced in a predetermined sequence, and concepts may be revisited throughout the year as students move toward a cumulative integration of skills. Below is a partial list of what may be explored:

- The relationship between musicianship and improvisation
- Solo improvisation (from one’s own imagination, or based on images, poetry etc.)
- Duo improvisation with tutor
- Improvisation based on various forms (e.g. binary, rondo, blues etc.)
- Modes/Modal Harmony
- Polyrhythm/Cross-rhythm/Irregular meters
- Extended technique on traditional instruments and home-made/adapted instruments
- Exercising musical memory, coherency, and compositional thinking
- Creative use of speech and song
- Working with movement and improvisation
- Collaborative work with artists from in other disciplines (e.g. dance/film) - Recording/Internet projects

**3. Learning Outcomes with Examples**

The ability to improvise is a valuable transferable skill that can be applied to diverse musical genres as students pursue their careers. Important learning outcomes include:

- The acquisition of flexible improvisational skills for use in various musical settings
- Increased musical attention, concentration, and memory
- Enhanced performance confidence
- Engagement with course materials through individual creative projects
- The development of each student’s unique musical voice
• Greater freedom of musical expression through spontaneous music making

4. Graded Assessment

The tutor and student will discuss the learning goals and evaluation criteria for the lessons. The expectations and general percentile distribution between the two terms (Fall and Winter) will be documented in writing during the first two weeks and kept on file. Due to the individualized nature of the lessons, the weighting of specific assignments will be determined and documented throughout the year. One example of several possible evaluation models for MUSI X033 lessons is presented below:

EVALUATION MODEL EXAMPLE

• 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 tests/assignments related to lesson content (10% per term)
• 20% Possible major project or other assignments (such as performing/recording improvisations, compositions, etc.)

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

Important Notes:
• Any student with a letter of accommodation from York U’s Student Accessibility Services must submit the letter to their tutor within the first 2 weeks of class. Retroactive accommodations are not usually permitted.

• Due to the nature of the course, the vast majority of evaluation takes place during the actual lessons, including discussing/reflecting upon students’ recorded improvisations and/or written assignments.

REMINDER

Last date to drop a full year (Y) course without receiving a grade is: February 5, 2021

5. Additional Information

Communication

- To facilitate timely communication, students must provide the tutor with their preferred email address and are expected to check their email regularly. Students must inform their tutors promptly of any change in email address or other contact information.

- Students should inform their tutors in very good advance if they cannot attend a scheduled lesson. This means at least 24 hours ahead for a planned absence and as soon as possible in the case of an unexpected illness/emergency.

Improvisation Soirées

Soirées are informal concerts of spontaneous music making that are usually held four times per year on the York campus. They are inclusive participatory gatherings that are open to the community. They provide an
opportunity for MUSI X033 students to perform 
with other students and/or their tutors if they wish. Unfortunately, due to health restrictions related to COVID 
19, improvisations soirées are not scheduled for the 20202021 academic year. If soirées are scheduled at a 
later date, students will be informed.

Further Improvisation Resources

For those students who wish to complement their lessons with further exploration of improvisation, below 
are two recommended books:

• Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art, Stephen Nachmanovitch. Bejo Press. 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.

documents three of the major and still active improvisational traditions in world music—European organ 
tradition, flamenco guitar, Hindustani music—through which it compares the processes of learning, 
practicing and performing. This most recent edition of the book includes many interviews with various 
people professionally engaged as practicing improvisers.

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

Additional information:
• Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
• 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)
• Manage my Academic record
• "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.
Many courses utilize Moodle, York University’s course website system. If your course is using Moodle, click here to access it.

Moodle @ York University