

Improvisation // Dr. Paul Miller // Office: 223 // millerp3@duq.edu // Fall 2015

Course Description, Grading, Assignments

In 2009, Gabriel Solis proposed that "a focus on improvisation can make music making central to the ways we study all music." Taking Solis's words as our inspiration, this course focuses on several moments in Western music history where improvisation was of paramount importance. By reading and analyzing texts and through focused musical exercises, we will gain knowledge and skill at improvisation. We will take a broad approach, beginning in the 11th century with simple organum and subsequently examining improvisatory styles and practices in Playford, Corelli, C. P. E. Bach, bel canto opera, the 19th-century French organ music, and some jazz. The semester concludes with more speculative improvisatory practices such as intuitive music and the growing phenomenon of live coding (students are not required to have computer coding skills). Most weeks, participants will be assigned a reading and asked to prepare a brief improvised piece or fragment in a particular style. A final project allows students to focus on their individual strengths and includes a brief informal recital required of all participants.

For classes in which an assignment is listed, a subset of students should: (1) make a sketch or plan for the improvisation (do **not** write out every note that you intend to perform,) and (2) prepare the actual improvisation to perform in class. You do not need to present a "perfect" improvisation (if there even is such a thing,) but you should prepare something that mostly holds together and has a beginning, middle and end. Then, we can discuss your performance constructively. We will decide together on who performs in what class. The intent of the improvisation activity is to build skills, deepen historical awareness, and gain ability in constructively and positively critiquing other students' performances. You may use whatever instrument is most familiar to you. Some weeks tend to orient themselves better to instrumentalists or singers; this will obviously be taken into account. Grades will be assigned based on the aesthetic merits of the improvisation, the usefulness of improvisational sketches, and class participation.

In addition, there are **three short written summaries** due at various points in the semester. Under no circumstances should these summaries be more than five pages long. They should demonstrate familiarity with the material in the readings. Grading will be determined through flow of thought, content, and grammar. All grades will be posted on Blackboard.

Since this is the first time I'm teaching this course, some small adjustments on the syllabus will inevitably be necessary. I do not intend to change any of the weekly topics, however.

Proposed Reading & Activity Schedule

Week	Topic	Reading	To Hand In and/or perform in class
1 8/25	Introduction; <i>Werktreue</i>	Benson 2003, chapter 1, "Between Composition and Performance"	Nothing to hand in
2 9/1	Chant ornamentation: Organum and Fauxbourdon	<i>Ad Organum Faciendum</i> and <i>Item de Organo</i> (11 th century), Scott 1971	Two-part organum improvisations on a given chant melody; fauxbourdon.
3 9/8	Divisions in Renaissance music	Ganassi 1535, Ortiz 1553, Dalla Casa 1584: selections	Divisions on a Renaissance tune
4 9/15	Variations in the late 17 th century	Playford, <i>The Division Violin</i> , 1684	Variations on a tune from Playford
5 9/22	Corelli's op. 5 violin sonatas	Corelli 1700; Hogwood 2013, Handel/Ledbetter, Renwick 2001.	Ornaments to Corelli op. 5/6/iii and the Partimento Summary No. 1
6 9/29	CPE Bach -- sonatas with altered reprises	CPE Bach 1753, 1760; Gjerdingen 2007	Ornaments to Mozart, K. 570 (B-flat major sonata), exposition only.
7 10/6	Classical instrumental cadenza	Quantz 1752; Swain 1988; possibly Zaslav 2008 as well	Cadenza to an assigned classical concerto
8 10/13	Vocal improvisation and cadenzas in bel canto opera	Garcia 1894, pp. 68-70 ("The Cadenza"); 1847/1872, chapter 3 ("Alternations"); Czerny 1829	Vocal cadenzas to a bel canto aria
9 10/20	French organ improvisation in 19 th century	Ochse 1994, Dupré 1925, etc.	Meet together with Prof. Ann Steele in room 314 (organ room). No performance today? Summary No. 2
10 10/27	Jazz (Blues)	Gushee 1988, Smith 1998	Blues improvisations
11 11/3	Jazz (Modal)	Russell 1953; Slonimsky 1947	Modal improvisations

12 11/10	Intuitive Music	Stockhausen 1989, 1993	Group intuitive piece – <i>Treffpunkt</i>
13 11/17	Electronic Music and live coding	Ge 2004, etc.	Summary No. 3
14 12/1	Class cancelled – At Cornell		Work on final projects
15 12/8	Final projects & recital?	(Immaculate conception?)	

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