RESONANCES:

EXPLORING IMPROVISATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is centred on explaining and understanding musical improvisation. By developing a philosophical view of improvisation I hope to show how improvisation is different from other kinds of music making that we generally encounter in educational settings, why it should become an integral part of all music learning, and how we can approach the teaching of improvisation. The bulk of my research on this subject is both an investigative reflection on my own performing experiences as an improvisor and my ongoing thinking about how I can best teach people to improvise.

In order to help explain what I believe is happening when people improvise music together and what this means for music education, I draw on resources from philosophy, religion, aesthetics, psychology, and cultural theory. Because scholarly writings on improvisation are few, I have also chosen to make extensive use of excerpts from interviews with four musicians with whom I perform improvised music. Since my playing has been profoundly influenced and altered through my musical interactions with them, I thought it only fitting and consistent that I allow their voices to mingle with mine in the writing of this thesis in a creative dialogue of ideas.

Chapter 1 presents a general outline of my philosophy of music as well as pointing out some of the problems I see in current music educational practice. Chapter 2 investigates how understanding improvisation presents some solutions to persistent aesthetic questions around music's relationship with language. Chapter 3 is concerned with helping non-improvisors understand what free improvisation is and to understand its place in the larger musical world. Chapter 4 presents various theories of possible social and cognitive musical processes at play in free improvisation. Chapters 5 and 6 provide both a philosophical rationale and a general outline for a pedagogy of free improvisation.

It is my hope that readers of this thesis, especially music educators, will come to understand and appreciate the value of improvised music and the activity of improvisation and that they will begin to think about ways to incorporate it into their teaching and performance.

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Prelude

I am a musician. I have lived in and with the activity of making music since I was a child. Music is my central means of understanding the world and the complex web of human (inter)actions, physical phenomena, and spiritual mysteries which make up my life. Over the past few years, I have been frequently confronted by the impracticality, perhaps even foolishness, of choosing music as a 'career' and the difficulties that come from living a life that is primarily concerned with making art. It may be a bit cliché and self-indulgent to say so, but few people on the outside understand the life of the artist and, as my friend, Eric Wu, has often reminded me, no one cares about the art until it is made and is needed for something. But there are many and substantial rewards for treading this path, for knowing how to create music from silence and how to give external, sonic form to my interior needs and imaginations. And when I do this in improvised collaboration with fellow musical travellers, there is a kind of magic that happens, a kind of quickening of the soul, a human interaction which is uniquely beautiful and exciting.

Why have I written a thesis about improvisation? Many of my musician friends have asked me this with some doubt in their voices, for they know that the improvisational process has in it something of the sacred. They worry that, in

talking and analysing and theorizing about this phenomenon, something valuable may be lost or damaged in transit between process and paper. I too am concerned about this potential problem, but I believe that the reluctance of many of my fellow improvisors to talk and write about what they do has led to some problems. One problem is that many people are not listening to improvised music. The sounds of improvised music and the activity of free musical creativity and interaction are not mainstream cultural values imparted by Western society. I have written a thesis about improvisation because I believe that if people understood what was going on, they *would* listen. This is the task of the first few chapters of this work: to help people understand what is going on. To that end I have tried to keep the text accessible to the non-musician, though at times I have been forced to use specific musical terms. I want people to have access to the kinds of satisfaction and enjoyment that come from participating in this music as listeners and, even better, as performers. This thesis is an invitation to understand, to listen, and most importantly to try improvising for oneself.

This work is also about teaching improvisation. I am a musician, but I am also a teacher of music. Perhaps every musician is in some way a 'teacher' of music insofar she communicates a love for the art and a desire to involve the listener in an exploratory process; but I am also talking about teaching in a rather more formal sense where a student wants to *know how* to make music and calls on a teacher to help her accomplish this.

I believe that improvisation is an extremely useful and valuable musical skill that should be taught to all music students and that improvising is one of the most exciting and satisfying ways of making music. At the moment, there is very little activity related to free improvisation in most of the diverse institutions involved in music teaching. I think this should change, but in order for change to happen there must be an understanding of why it should occur and how to proceed with the change. I hope that this work presents, at least in part, a justification for such change.

As I mentioned earlier, very few improvising musicians, confronted by the seemingly intractable difficulties of putting sound-ideas into word-ideas, choose to write about this music. I don't pretend to speak for any of them. This is not about giving voice to the voiceless, because they have *musical* voices and they are using them. I admit that I too would likely be happier using my musical voice and playing these ideas for you rather than writing them out if such a thing were possible. But words afford different kinds of expressions and understandings which I believe are of value. I feel I have a certain responsibility to myself and to my music to use my writer's voice for a while and I have tried in this thesis to bring to bear all the skills I have for the purpose of explaining and advocating for the music that I love so much.

Music Education: the Rational and Irrational

1

The Problems of Instrumental Justification

Traditional music education has been focused on the teaching of craft in the service of certain narrowly defined creative ends. The teacher mandates certain technical standards based on the kinds of repertoire and performing in which the student is involved. The student works to achieve these standards and is rewarded by a 'successful' performance. This is a fairly straightforward process. The teaching of craft has never been much of a problem in music. There are more than enough methods, exercises, and books available to teachers and students. Many teachers have great success in achieving the kind of ends they hope for in this regard. Indeed, it seems that the level of technical proficiency among student musicians in Canadian universities has never been higher. The problem with this approach is that for many educators and students the creative and spiritual aspects of music are eclipsed by the teaching and learning of certain elements of musical craft. I have argued elsewhere (Burrows, 2003) that the elements of self-expression and the development of an individual creative voice have been pushed to the periphery of the educational process. The creative application of musical skills is often reserved for a time when the student has 'mastered' certain elements of craft. This has occurred for a number of reasons. The first is that self-expression and creativity seem very difficult to

teach. It is certainly a simpler proposition to teach the craft and leave the creative application of the craft up to the student. For the diligent student who has a love of craft and practice, the rewards are not insubstantial. Hard-working and proficient students gain the satisfaction that comes from a difficult job well done. For the teacher, there is a similar satisfaction at having helped the student along a difficult path. The struggle to achieve is eventually rewarded by a kind of straightforward, measurable, achievement.

Many music educators and students seem to be quite happy with this way of teaching and learning. It seems to provide clear ends and well-defined means. This highly rational[1] approach is a product of our society's current views on education. Many people and the governments that they elect see the purpose of higher education as providing students with skills for the 'real world' after university. I am well aware of the efforts being made to make music study seem practical and useful for the 'job market'. Exactly what jobs there are, I am not sure. I certainly know a great many underemployed musicians. There are many who feel that music education is very useful for any number of things in this regard, from increasing brain mass to fostering the kind of 'creative problem solving' skills which large information technology firms claim to demand from their

[1] I use the term rational here as a sociological term in the Weberian sense. Freund (1968) defines this as "the organization of life through a division and coordination of activities on the basis of exact study of men's relations with each other." According to Max Weber, the process of rationalization is marked by an increase in both the production and distribution of goods and services but, more importantly, it is also associated with secularization, depersonalization, and oppressive routine. Increasingly, human behavior is guided by observation, experiment and reason (*zweckrational*) to master the natural and social environment in order to achieve a desired end. Weber referred to these negative effects as the "iron cage" of rationality.

workers. In my view, these are simply ill-conceived attempts at 'justifying' the continuing place of music in educational institutions in the face of increasing financial pressure to produce graduates who will be useful grist for the corporate job mills.

Perhaps a little story will illustrate the problem more clearly. I recently heard the Dean of a large, well-known school of music at a major U.S. research university giving an address to a community group. The address was broadcast on National Public Radio on a statewide network. The Dean's purpose was to let the community know what a wonderful job the school of music was doing, show some of the accomplishments of its graduates, and to push for a little more financial support from the community. The Dean spoke for nearly fifteen minutes about students who had become prominent local business people, chartered accountants, computer programmers for large firms, lawyers, others who had gone on to prestigious graduate schools, and a host of other respectable and esteemed careers. At the very end of this portion of the speech, the Dean said something to the effect of, "And we even had two graduates who became musicians." This last comment provoked a round of slightly uncomfortable laughter from the audience. The Dean went on to cite recent studies showing how music learning increases brain growth, develops critical thinking and problem solving skills, improves computer programming ability, and a host of other 'benefits' which had nothing to do with actually performing or listening to

music. The Dean systematically ignored the more substantial spiritual and personal benefits and purposes of pursuing a musical education. Such attempts at justification in rationalized corporate terms will *not* ensure the future security of music in education. In fact, they can only serve to damage what good is left in institutionalized music education.

The more we try to clarify the ends of music education and music making in terms that will satisfy the perceived demands of the marketplace, the further away we will move from the real purposes of music. Like it or not, music is really not a particularly 'practical' job skill, except for the tiny percentage of music school graduates who find or create employment as full-time performers and composers or find positions in music-related industries like education. If a student wants to be a computer programmer or chartered accountant we are doing them a profound disservice by convincing them that music school is the way to achieve this goal.

The real problem with the kind of rationalized struggle/achievement process I have been describing is that it ignores the kinds of intrinsically non-material rewards that music provides. I know very few musicians who make a career out of performing simply because they like the hard work, unreasonable hours, and limited financial rewards. There must be other motivating factors, other more profound benefits available to the dedicated performer. If we can understand

what these other musical rewards and purposes for music making are, then we can truly begin to show why music and music education are so vitally important.

Terry and Michael

Terry and Michael are two of my favorite young guitar students.[2] Terry just turned eight years old and is full of energy and ideas. He is not an accomplished technician on the guitar by any means, but he has a *lot* of fun with the guitar, music and life in general. Michael is twelve years old and is a little more reserved than Terry; he is far more aware of what is cool and what is not and is very concerned about achievement and doing things 'right'. He can read music well and is developing a good technical grasp of the instrument. I have included a little story about an experience with the two of them. This is far from an empirical study of any kind. I simply think that the story illustrates the way that socialization and our educational system tends to discourage people from embracing their own innately original thinking and taking responsibility for their creative actions.

I often try to introduce students to improvisation by playing the blues with them. The 'blues scale' is easy to play on the guitar and it sounds like a lot of the pop and rock guitar playing that so many of them have already heard and enjoy. My initial approach usually consists of showing students how to play four or five

[2] Fictional names have been used for reasons of privacy.

notes from the scale on the guitar fingerboard and telling them they can use any of these notes in any way they like. Then I play a little shuffling blues accompaniment pattern and they try 'soloing', improvising, with their notes. When I first introduced this idea to Terry he was pretty excited. The following is a paraphrase of our conversation about improvising.

Terry: You mean I can play anything I want?

Jared: Yes, use any of those notes that I showed you.

Terry: What about these ones? (loudly and energetically plays some other notes which I did not show him)

Jared: Sure, why not.

Terry: How about these low strings here? Can I use those ones? We haven't used those ones much before. (plucks the low E and A strings very hard)

Jared: Ok. I'm sure those ones will work too. Shall we start now?

Terry: But I want this song to have words!

Jared: Ok. Blues tunes often have words. What will we sing about?

Terry: A frog that gets squished when he tries to cross the highway!

Jared: uhhh... I guess that would be ok. Lets play now.

After this little exchange, we played a twelve bar blues in 'A' for a few minutes. Terry improvised an amazing array of sounds as part of his 'solo' and even played little fills after each verse of improvised lyrics about the frog crossing the

highway. This led to a series of such songs and a lot of productive work on the guitar for Terry. I was completely amazed at how he took the small creative license of a few notes to improvise with and took complete artistic control of the situation. He had a profound musical vision for our guitar lesson far beyond mine.

My session with Michael (the next student that afternoon) was a little different. It went something like this:

Jared: So let's try improvising with those notes that I showed you.

Michael: How do I know which ones to play first?

Jared: It doesn't matter which ones you play first. Anything you decide will be good.

Michael: I don't think so.

Jared: Trust me. Let's try it.

(we try playing for a minute or two…)

Michael: I don't think that sounds very good.

Jared: Really? I thought it was great. You did very well.

Michael: It didn't come out the way I wanted. It sounded bad.

Jared: Well, this is the first time you've ever tried to do this. It'll get better. Let's try again.

Michael: just let me work out what I'm going to do first.

Jared: No. I'd like for you to make it up as we go along.

Michael: It'll sound better if I figure it out before.

Jared: Maybe, but I really want you to make it up as you go along. Let's try it again.

(we play for a few more minutes...)

Jared: That sounded terrific Mike! You are a good improvisor.

Michael: I still thought it sounded bad. I'm going to figure out some stuff to play for next time so it will sound better.

I think there are a number of reasons why Michael reacted so differently to the same activity which Terry enjoyed so much. He is older and has a more developed personal aesthetic about what sounds good, what he likes and expects. He also listens to more music and has his own CD collection (while Terry has only one or two CDs of his own) and thus has been exposed to what music is 'supposed to' sound like. Unlike Terry, Michael felt very uncomfortable about being asked to make something up without prior preparation. I believe that a key difference in the two student's reactions is that Michael has been in school for 4 years longer than Terry and he has learned from sad experience that there are rigidly defined 'right' and 'wrong' ways of doing things in most of his educational activities.

Michael has also been taking music lessons for a long while (though not always with me) and has been taught in his school band class that musical performance

is a very exacting and controlled thing with very little room for improvising. He has frequently reported that his band teacher shouts at people who play wrong notes and has observed that many of his friends in the band simply don't play at all but cleverly fake their playing in order to avoid the teacher's wrath. He once brought the music book from his band class to show me. After a quick glance through the first few pages it was clear what was being taught in class was not creativity and joy in music making, but strict, rational conformity. As we have continued to work on improvising, Michael has loosened up considerably, though he is still somewhat guarded in his attempts. After playing a phrase he still glances over at me for approval. I can see that he is still waiting for me to tell him that what he did was 'wrong' and to do it properly this time.

My Music Education

I have been playing music for a long time. Since I was about twelve years old, music has been a central and unifying force in my life. When I was growing up, there was always music in our home. Dad played the guitar and sang (mostly folk tunes and old blues) and Mom played the piano and sang (mostly hymns). Dad also had a pretty interesting collection of LPs which he played frequently. I am certain that a day never passed in our house without music. But I didn't always want to be a musician, and certainly never imagined I would become a music teacher.

I can remember from my childhood two or three piano lessons in someone's basement and accordion lessons with Joe Fenger, whose studio always smelled of the pickled herring he loved to eat. I was never very good about practicing and wasn't a very good student (perhaps this is still true!). I don't remember getting much enjoyment out of formal music lessons but I do remember feeling that the trite little ditties that showed up in the Leila Fletcher music books were not much like the kinds of music I heard at home. Even then I felt confused about music education. How could really interesting music—like Bukka White's blues guitar playing that I heard on records or the Woody Guthrie songs that my dad sang—be related to "Three Blind Mice" or "Ten Little Indians"? This 'music-lesson-music' seemed to be of a different species entirely. Even when I played the pieces right they sounded dull and uninteresting. Besides that, I knew instinctively that the accordion was NOT a cool instrument. My parent's encouraged me to continue my lessons but I just couldn't do it. When high school rolled around, my mother got me a clarinet. I wanted a tenor sax, but it was thirty dollars a month to rent—too much money for a family on the wrong side of town. Unfortunately, clarinets were only ten dollars a month. I complained bitterly about playing such a 'sissy' instrument and I was alarmed to find that the tunes we were playing in band class were not much better than those in Leila Fletcher's piano books. Again, I was confused about the relationship between such banal stuff and the other kinds of music that excited and intrigued me.

It wasn't until later on in high school that I picked up my dad's guitar and began teaching myself how to play Beatles tunes and blues things and began playing guitar with my dad that I started to feel like I was making music. The guitar was definitely 'cooler' than the clarinet and the experience of playing with my dad, a real musician, awoke in me a sense of the emotional draw and fulfillment which music can provide. I started to feel a personal stake and interest in the music I was making. I enjoyed every aspect of the guitar. I loved the feel of the strings, the colour of the woods, practicing scales, the stretching feeling in my hand when learning a difficult chord, the pain in my fingers.

My decision to go to music school after high school graduation was almost a second thought. I was good at many 'academic' subjects and got a lot of 'A's. Schoolwork was easy for me and most of the teacher's thought I would go on to a very sensible profession like law or medicine. This seemed a clear and easy course to follow. Music was very difficult for me. I couldn't read and play scales like a lot of my friends who had music lessons and expensive instruments. I had to spend hours learning to do what the other guys in our high school jazz quartet seemed to do without thinking. But I loved the sense of accomplishment I got when I mastered some sequence or arpeggio, the satisfaction of a successful performance. The feeling of being a musician, of being surrounded by music was something which I knew I had to have every day.

My first years of college music school were exciting times. I was fortunate to find a wonderful group of likeminded, jazz-crazed compatriots from Quebec City who were all as enthusiastic and driven as I was. We went to music classes all day and played all night. After a few years I began to feel fairly competent as a player. I had what I thought were solid technical and theoretical skills, a decent repertoire, and I was sometimes even getting paid to play. I was pretty happy with the way things were going and felt that I had 'arrived' as a musician.

Everything changed one evening at the Glass Slipper, a very important Vancouver jazz club at the time. I was performing with "Sound and Fury" which was a jazz sextet that my alto sax-playing friend, Len Aruliah, and I had put together to perform our compositions. We were coming to the end of one of my pieces. It had been a good performance of the tune. As the band arrived at the final E minor chord and finished the tune, I felt a sudden welling-up of emotion and continued to play by myself. I suppose the other member of the group thought I must have omitted something from their charts, but as I played I became vaguely aware of the fact that tears were appearing in my eyes and that I was improvising with an inventiveness and intensity that I had never before experienced. Only vaguely aware of my surroundings and the other players on stage, I felt a powerful creative energy surging through me, manifesting itself as the music coming from my guitar. When I finished playing (I think the time was

probably less than two minutes) I was exhausted and had tears in my eyes. I felt as though my very soul had been laid bare for the other people in the room. Dennis, the trombone player in the band (a much more experienced player about ten years my senior) simple smiled knowingly at me with raised eyebrows and said "Yeah. That was good." This was the turning point in my thinking about music. I knew then that music was more than playing the right scales and chords, getting a gig that paid lots of money, hanging out with interesting people, or generally having fun. I realized that music had allowed me to connect with something far beyond, or perhaps deep within myself which I didn't know was there.

I have never forgotten that first experience of the transcendent power that lies within music and music making. I knew then that I wanted to have that feeling as often as possible. As I have progressed and developed as a musician, I have found that freely improvised music has provided me with the greatest opportunites for such experiences. My aim in writing this thesis is not to show that other forms of music are inferior, but simply to explore what I think is happening when people improvise, how free improvisation can be a means of making, learning about, and understanding music and its relationship with the self, and how these ideas might influence thinking about music education. As a student, my experience of music education has been that there is little or no acknowledgement of the kinds of life-changing and self-defining experiences

which are possible through music making. My music education as an undergraduate and graduate student has been almost exclusively concerned with repertoire, theory, history and technical knowledge of various kinds. It was my frustration with the highly rationalized, inflexible, and narrow environment of formal music education that caused me to abandon my doctoral work as a composition student and start thinking more about how and why we play music and why I should bother with teaching it.

As I have become more and more involved in music education, I have tried to be a different kind of music teacher. I want my students to have the kind of beautiful and powerfully transformative musical experiences that I have had. I want them to know that such things are possible. I want my students to strive to transcend the technical and theoretical concerns which seem to be the only concern in academe. I want them to know that they can make music which has meaning for them, music which lives and breathes and speaks of who they are and how they see themselves in the world. I have found that improvised music is one of the best ways for people to achieve this. I suppose this is my way of trying to change things and it is my hope that in reading this thesis people will re-think and (re)imagine what music can be for them. After a dozen years in music school, and even longer as a performer I still often feel like my student Michael, a little afraid of what people might say or think. But I am trying to, and hope I will be, more like Terry every day.

The Edge and Beyond

As I have just related, there have been in my experience (and also in that of many other musicians with whom I perform) certain moments in music performance which could be characterized as achievement of a higher consciousness or state of ecstatic being-in-the-moment which transcends the person's everyday experience of the world. It is these moments that bring me back to performing again and again. In these moments, the music seems to come effortlessly; the contingent world falls away and is obscured in the intensity of musical creation. There are many terms describing the state of being I am trying to explain. Enlightenment, transcendence, rapture, ecstasy, higher consciousness, and communion with the divine may seem too lofty and abstract to discuss in relation to music. Perhaps there are many musicians who would not characterize their experience in such terms. For those who are shy of such metaphysics, terms like 'flow' and 'peak experience' seem to point to similar ideas.

Whatever terms we choose to use, we seem to be referring to a crossing of a boundary between everyday thinking and acting and an altered state of consciousness in which our own thoughts and actions become subsumed in something greater—a clearly different state of being. In any case, there seems to be an edge, a veil, a membrane, or a limit to be transcended in order to

achieve this state. There is everyday consciousness and then there is a consciousness which is distinctly different that can be achieved through music making. It seems to me that these moments when a musician travels beyond this edge can be roughly described in two ways, depending on one's philosophical conception of the nature of self. For some, going past the edge is a movement beyond normal consciousness, an outward journey beyond the self and into a state of enlightenment or communion with the divine. Others may describe the journey as more inward; perhaps an achievement of deeper consciousness rooted in a hyper-awareness and discovery of the true self. In either case, I believe we are trying to describe the same experience in terms that are simply rooted in different theological or philosophical terms.

For me, musical creation is a realization of the human potential to transcend the contingent world and tap into something greater, something beyond. My music making is improvised music making, and so I will explore these ideas from the perspective of improvisation and argue for improvisational practice as a very important way of learning, exploring, and creating in music. This is a kind of personal reflection, based in large part on my experiences performing with the Knotty Ensemble, an improvising ensemble with whom I have worked for nearly four years. In performances with this group, the other ensemble members and I regularly experience inexplicable moments of musical unity in which the music seems to flow effortlessly from an unseen source. We never speak of or plan the

way a performance will unfold, yet we know that the music will be there and that it will be great (at least *we* think it is great!). Despite the fact that the group members are separated by hundreds of miles of geography and even an international border, we do manage to get together to perform fairly regularly. We will often travel in cars and trains for hours with little chance of financial reward (sometimes even canceling other musical engagements) to perform for tiny audiences in sometimes questionable venues, all for the excitement of one short performance together. The musical ecstasy that we have come to expect from our musical encounters draws us back again and again. For us, music is intoxicating and addictive. I know that this kind of feeling is common for a great many creative and sincere musicians and practitioners in other art disciplines, though of course they may not describe the experience in the spiritual, essentially metaphysical terms I have chosen here. The great British drummer and improvisor Edwin Prévost (1999) describes well this state of being as it occurs in improvised music.

> In the midst of performing you can only wait for the sounds to arrive. All thoughts about structure and emotional content become inadequate to the task of improvising once the first note has been sounded. Thereafter the total being of the musician is involved; involuntary responses meld with technique; the mind scurries unsuccessfully to keep up with the unconscious. The musician, if he is lucky, is reduced/devolved to an observer while the music flows. He can only watch hands move across keys-frets-skins. He is possessed...The trick is to get beyond oneself. The mystery of art is in becoming—in transcending all thought and finding nourishment for and from the performance. (p.123)

Paul Berliner (1994) has painstakingly documented interviews[3] with literally hundreds of well-known improvising musicians who express very similar feelings about the transcendent possibilities of music as one of the greatest possibilities and rewards of musical achievement. For those who are not musicians this may all seem a bit vague, but I think it is common for most lay-listeners to have very similar experiences with music. Most people can recall a time listening to music when they lost track of time, experienced wild flights of imagination, extremes of emotion, or felt like the music was speaking or communicating something profound to them. For me, such experiences are one of the main reasons for continuing in the path of music. They are sacred moments of communion with my fellow beings and with a greater, unseen force. In these moments I am truly alive and awake, fully embodied yet beyond the body. If there is anything I want to share with students in my role as a music educator, it is that such experiences are possible through musical practice and that such experiences are at the core of the best music making.

The Mystical Dance

Many of the world's religions believe that music is a possible path to enlightenment, or at the least an aid in the search for it. The Sufis see music as one of the most important paths to communion with the Divine and in realizing the human soul's full potential. In Sufi tradition, the embodied, ritual acts of

[3] Berliner's work inspired me to do my own interviews with players. The depth of insight and real relevance

music making and *samā,* or the mystical dance, bring the soul closer to the Divine. Annamarie Schimmel (1992) relates an appropriate story about the well-known Sufi poet, Jelaluddin Rumi

> He once said to his visitors, "Music is the creaking of the doors of Paradise." A sober, critical, and according to Maulana [Rumi] rather unpleasant man responded, "But I don't like the creaking of doors!" Whereupon Maulana said, "I hear the doors as they open; as for you, you hear them when they close!" (p.200)

Though this story reveals a very specific theological perspective, there is something here which is of more general value to our discussion here. Rumi points to the idea that there is something about music making and listening which is essential to what it means to be fully human. For the Sufis music is more than simple enjoyment; it is a path to salvation, a manifestation of a universal life force. There is something in music which is beyond the body, beyond the contingent world, which is of great spiritual value. In its most profound and deeply felt moments, music reveals a glimpse of the infinite potential of human consciousness and existence. In fact, the Persian word *parda*, or veil also means musical modes or scales and in the first lines of Rumi's great work *Mathnawī*, he describes how "the reed flute's musical modes (*parda*) have torn the veils (*parda*) that hide Reality from human eyes." (as quoted in Schimmel, 1992, p.199) Music can give us a sense that paradise, however defined, is available to us in the world. Rumi (as translated in Barks, 1995, p.34) was particularly adept at describing this state where the physical body and being blur

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which results from the interview process convinced me that this interpersonal mode of research was an essential means of understanding the complexities of the improvisational process.

with the metaphysical divine. As usual, poetry is here more effective than prose in getting to the heart of the matter, because like improvisation, the best poetry is an exploratory and revelatory thing that relies on experience and participation.

Don't worry about saving these songs!
And if one of our instruments breaks,
it doesn't matter.

We have fallen into the place,
where everything is music.

The strumming and the flute notes
rise into the atmosphere,
and even if the whole world's harp
should burn up, there will still be
hidden instruments playing.

So the candle flickers and goes out.
We have a piece of flint, and a spark.

This singing art is sea foam.
The graceful movements come from a pearl
somewhere on the ocean floor.

Poems reach up like spindrift and the edge
of driftwood along the beach, wanting!

They derive
from a slow powerful root
That we can't see.

Stop the words now.
Open the window in the center of your chest,
And let the spirits fly in and out.

Here Rumi speaks of an unseen force, a deep root, a primal ocean from which human beings may draw creative power. For him, the music is already somewhere *out there* (or *in there* depending on your point of view). The feeling of tapping into a pre-existing, universal musical source is one that I have discussed frequently with other musicians. Very inspiring performances seem to revolve around this experience of surrendering to a greater music than that which can be imagined by the individual alone. Here again, Berliner's (1994) interviews with musicians also provide extensive documentation on this subject. In approaching this kind of greater music, Rumi claims, the instruments don't matter because they are simply tools that we use. They are part of the musical method which we employ in approaching the edge. If the transcendent musical moment passes, we can get there again.

Rumi speaks not only of the ability to draw on this vast reservoir of creative power, but also of the kind of interpersonal interactions that are so much a part of the process of searching for enlightenment through music. The amazing thing about music as a spiritual path or journey is that we rarely travel the path alone. When we perform with other musicians, we depend on them for our sustenance and support on the journey. Traveling to the edge we have been discussing is best accomplished through musical interaction with others.

As Prévost (1994) explains very clearly, improvisation holds the idea of interpersonal interaction, which he refers to as dialogue, as one of its key elements, and inevitably focuses the musician's attention on the understanding and welcoming of the musical contributions of others. This interaction must be free and open, without reservation. In order to open the 'window in our chests' that Rumi describes, we need trust and confidence in our fellow travelers. We also need to know the way. How do we get there from here?

Rumi Meets Lao-Tzu on the Way to Carnegie Hall

If music allows us to approach and pass through the barrier between ordinary consciousness and altered states, then what do we need to know about music to use it in this fashion? Clearly we do not experience a brush with immortality every time we pick up an instrument. It seems therefore that there must be certain necessary conditions which prevail and which assist in or facilitate this kind of sublime experience. Some of these conditions are found in the physical world and are very straightforward to control and manipulate in the search for musical peak experiences. These conditions may include technical preparation or what might be described as a certain level of mastery of craft as well as favorable circumstances or environment in which practice and performance take place. Practice and preparation seem fairly clear, but other conditions—including mental, spiritual, interpersonal states—are more abstract and difficult to understand and control. Understanding what these conditions are will, I hope, help us to more regularly experience those intoxicating, intense, musical moments.

Let us begin with the physical. The most obvious requirements for making music lie in what might be termed craft. The heading of this section of course refers to the old joke: A young musician asks an older professional, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" and the answer is, "Practice, practice, practice." As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, music schools are generally doing a good job of teaching craft even if they don't always make clear the real nature and purposes

of learning such skills. There are unavoidable mechanical skills that must be gained in order to manipulate a musical instrument of any kind. Scales, arpeggios, standard repertoire, and exercises are all a part of gaining some control over the physical instrument. It is quite difficult (though perhaps not impossible) to have a profound spiritual experience when you are trying to remember the fingering for a D major scale. This has been the standard excuse for not addressing the emotional and spiritual aspects of music when working with beginning students; the teacher feels they aren't ready for such things yet. I would argue that, due to technical constraints, though they may not be as *likely* to experience such things at an early stage, they are no less capable of doing so.

Schimmel (1992) describes how neophyte mystics in 13th-century Sufi monasteries would spend hours a day in a small cell with an iron peg in the centre of the floor. The peg was placed between the first and second toes of the right foot and the student 'practiced' for hours on end the characteristic whirling motion which is so much a part of the Sufi *samā* dancing/music ritual. The idea was not just to teach the student how to whirl around expertly on the spot (although clearly this was part of the training) but rather for the student to begin experiencing the transcendent spiritual effects of intense physical effort. When the students were finally asked to join the group dance in the actual ceremony, they knew exactly what it felt like to reach an ecstatic state through the whirling dance and could achieve this state very quickly; now a part of the group, their

initial solitary experience was heightened by participating with the other dancers and listening to the musical accompaniment.

In this tradition, as in improvisation, there is no real separation or difference in kind between the practicing and the performance. We don't often do quite as well in music education. For some students, having the instructor insist that they must do as they are told 'just because' may work as a motivation and they dutifully head for their own practice room 'cell'. For others—especially those raised in the apathetic, 'everything for nothing' North American consumer culture—this is not sufficient motivation. So should we be providing students with better 'reasons' for work and struggle in learning musical craft? Or perhaps it is this very Western sense of the logical progression of goal, struggle, and achievement that leads us astray from the very beginning?

The traditional system of classical music training relies on a set of works in the standard repertoire as tests of achievement and success. It sets up a strong distinction between practicing and performing. In this system, all efforts are directed towards the goal of producing correct interpretations of an existing score. The end of the process is very clearly defined, and thus the means to reach the end are of little importance in and of themselves. If musicians simply see the acquisition of technical skills as a means to an end, they will be rather frustrated when the end is a long time coming or if it comes irregularly. If there is

anything we can know for sure about learning music, it is that the road is long and hard and the rewards can often seem few and far between. Learning to play a musical instrument with a high degree of control is difficult and time consuming and the transcendent moments about which I have been speaking do not happen every day. This is especially true when music education is focused on learning standard repertoire. In this traditional method, success and achievement only come when a piece has been performed to the satisfaction of the teacher. The *Tao Te Ching* suggests a different perspective on struggle and achievement.

> Map difficult through easy
> Approach great through narrow
>
> The most difficult things in the world
> Must be accomplished through the easiest
> The greatest things in the world
> Must be accomplished by the smallest
>
> (Lao-Tzu, trans. 1993, p.63)

On the surface Lao-Tzu may seem to have little to do with my earlier citations of Rumi and Sufi tradition, but I feel there is an important relationship here. The *Tao Te Ching* speaks extensively about a possible *way* to get to the place which Rumi is so good at describing. From the Taoist perspective, pursuit of a goal is a false pursuit. Simple engagement with the materials at hand is the *way*. As Lao-

Tzu says, "Pursue knowledge, gain daily. Pursue Tao, lose daily." (p.48). In other words, for students to really benefit from and understand their practice and struggle in achieving technical mastery, they must be content with their everyday efforts or they will never realize the kind of experience which transcends technique.

Craft is not a means to a metaphysical end, it is inseparable from that end. The mundane tasks of daily practice may seem trivial in relation to the lofty goals of self-liberation and transcendence through music, yet one cannot exist without the other. Lao-tzu teaches us that all such dichotomies are false. The sensual, emotional, and mental enjoyment (if one can separate such things) that can come in surrendering to the seemingly banal acquisition of craft are an essential part of the transcendent experience when it finally comes. Enjoying the sensation of the strings under the fingers or the reed in the mouth is fundamental. As these sensations become treasured and precious to the musician, the division between person and instrument increasingly blurs. The seamless joining of body and instrument, creative impulse and technique are at the core of profound musical practice. Such joining is only accomplished through time spent with the instrument and in endless exploration of its creative uses through both practice *and* performance.

In the end, what we think of as the mere physical attributes necessary for performance can become intensely spiritual. For me, this is the reason why improvisational practice provides the student musician with a more internally consistent method of learning. With improvised music, there is no predetermined end for which to strive. Rudimentary sound-making and exploration are not just a means to acquire skills or to produce music, they *are* the music. Improvisational practice teaches the student that even the simplest engagement with music making can be significant, important, and rewarding. Improvisation helps to show the musician that the goal, even the kind of transcendent experience that I am arguing is so valuable, is not achieved through striving towards that goal. The goal can only be achieved by steadfastly treading the path of experimentation and full mental and physical engagement with the materials of music.

On the path of music, performances are the key moments at which all the musician's faculties and efforts are most clearly focused. I have spoken about the necessity of physical preparation. This preparation comprises continual commitment to using, exploring, and manipulating an instrument, and in recognizing that a seamless connection between mind and body, hand and creative intellect can only be produced through long practice, dedication, work, and above all, a love for these processes as part of the creative journey. In addition to these preparatory factors related to technique and craft, there are also

spiritual or psychological conditions which must be in place in order for a performance to reach the greatest possible heights.

First, there must be openness, trust and easy communication between the musicians. Since making music in a group depends on focused listening, purposeful interaction, and careful attunement to the group and the emerging music, interpersonal conflict of any kind is detrimental. Emotional tension and conflict are harmful to the process because full concentration on the music is required. It is certainly possible to achieve a coherent musical performance despite such difficulties. In the classical performance tradition, there are rules, guidelines and an ideal performance model which already exist. The players can simply obey the instructions of the score and apply the 'correct' technical elements in order to produce a performance which meets in some respects the requirements of the ideal of the score. Even in improvised music making, it is possible to apply certain techniques and to respond to the contributions of others in an intellectual and calculating way. Regardless of genre, such cold and hollow creative practices are dishonest and in my experience preclude the achievement of transcendent creative potential.

Needless to say, I don't have easy answers for solving such interpersonal difficulties. I have a personal rule which helps me to avoid such creatively unhealthy situations and that is to only perform with people who I love and trust

or with whom I feel I will be able to create a meaningful creative relationship. The more I have adhered to this rule, the happier I am with the musical results. "Wonderful. Isn't that nice for you," some people may say, yet I believe there is something very practical and useful here that is worth passing on to students. In traditional music education, we have excluded the idea of personal choice of creative partnerships from the process. The teacher throws together a huge group of students into an ensemble of one kind or another and simply expects and demands that they work well together. While trying hard to work together, or an enforced 'getting along' may be a worthy goal, the unfortunate result of this highly rational process is that young musicians rarely get to work with people with whom they feel some kind of close personal relationship. Consequently, they may not feel safe or motivated to share their real musical intentions. Nevertheless, in allowing students to make such important choices about the people with whom they choose to work, we must be careful to make sure that some individuals are not ostracized and excluded through this process, and students are encouraged to work with others who they may not know very well; discovering new musical relationships is as important as cementing and exploring existing ones. Difficulties in this regard could easily occur at any level of instruction from primary school to university. It seems to me that an experienced and responsible educator would at least attempt to be aware of such potential difficulties in the classroom or within an ensemble and would work to suggest and implement possible remedies.

The key thing to keep in mind here is that the kind of ecstatic spiritual experience described by Rumi's poetry is not for sharing with people who you mistrust or fear; I am reminded again of poor Michael's shouting band director. If we recognize that the sharing of music and other creative acts are intensely personal and sacred experiences, we can work to help students explore their full creative potential through creative musical interaction and help them to see how music can help to build real trust and understanding between musicians. As I hope to show in subsequent chapters, I believe that improvisation relies on this trust and communication more than any other form of music.

The Bottomless Tao and Rumi's Ocean

Related to the importance of safety and trust in personal relationships is the idea that the musician must be open to receive the musical contributions of others and to freely offer their own musical ideas. The *Tao Te Ching* here provides another critical insight.

> Thirty spokes join one hub.
> The wheel's use comes from emptiness.
>
> Clay is fired to make a pot.
> The pot's use comes from emptiness.

Windows and doors are cut to make a room.

The room's use comes from emptiness. (p.11)

Related to this idea of emptiness is an idea which, interestingly, ties Lao-Tzu's thinking closely to Rumi's idea of a primal source of creative power.

Tao is empty—

Its use is never exhausted.

Bottomless—

The origin of all things. (p.11)

In terms of musical performance, what is the emptiness to which Lao-Tzu refers? It is a way of approaching a performance. In my experience of improvising and other kinds of music making, it is critical at the moment of performance to empty the mind of all preconceived notions of how the music will proceed. The more one is concerned with directing or controlling the musical proceedings, the less one is listening to what is really going on. This is the 'doing without doing' or *wei wu wei*, which one finds in the *Tao Te Ching* and to which Prévost's previously cited comments refer. If the musician is truly engaged with the physical, mental and spiritual activity of music making, there is no room for distracting intentions. In the case of classical repertoire performance, this means that all the work is done in the practice and rehearsal stage. Any experienced performer will tell you that the final performance is rarely substantially better than the best practicing

and rehearsing that came before (except perhaps that it feels better or more exciting to play in front of people). If you've never hit that high F in rehearsal, you are not likely to get it in performance. Here, 'emptiness' is a fairly practical matter and means allowing what has been rehearsed to come out as it will, without forcing or unnecessary concern. Worrying and panicking is unlikely to help the performance. In the case of improvised music, emptiness is a little more abstract (if emptiness could be more abstract!). For the improvisor, emptiness means being open to going wherever the music leads. It also means being open to accepting the contributions of the other musicians, open to accepting the physical, interpersonal, and psychological conditions which surround the performance. All of these factors are part of the improvisational process and cannot be controlled without damaging the emerging music. The more one tries to control or subvert such things, the less time one spends listening and being part of the music and the less chance there is that the musicians will achieve the kind of unity and focus that brings about transcendental musical experiences. Real emptiness allows the musician to receive music from its source, to become a kind of conduit for the divine creative force that both Rumi and Lao-Tzu acknowledge.

Sufi mystical traditions and the *Tao Te Ching* are only two possible sources of wisdom in pursuit of spiritual experience through music. There are certainly others sources to be discovered and explored, other terms to describe the

transcendent musical experiences that I have been talking about. I have suggested improvisation as a practice that would help us to begin this process of musical self-discovery, but there are certainly other ways of playing and teaching which would be effective. However we choose to approach the spiritual, emotional, and psychological aspects of music, it is critical that we begin to think and talk about such things as important and necessary parts of music education and begin to include pedagogical ideas and values beyond the simple mechanics of music making.

The Practical and the Impractical: Some Early Conclusions

Schools have avoided acknowledging the spiritual aspects of music and its practice for two reasons. First, few music teachers ever spend enough time as musicians to realize the kind of profoundly personal spiritual benefits that a life in music can bring. For such people, it is very difficult, perhaps even impossible to effectively teach students about such benefits. In the public school system we require very little of our music teachers in terms of actual musical experience. They spend lots of time in classes that describe methodologies, technical aspects of various instruments, conducting, and classroom management techniques. They complete a practicum which aims to help them apply this knowledge and to model themselves on other music teachers who, not surprisingly, also have lots of experience *teaching* music and not much experience *making* music. The

university system seems a bit better in this regard, occasionally appointing very fine musicians to faculty positions.

How can a music teacher with only a basic grasp of the processes and results of musical practice communicate that which is truly essential and important about music? They cannot and do not. But there is hope. Fortunately, there are increasing numbers of practicing musicians entering the teaching profession. This is partly due to the fact that economic conditions for musicians are more miserable than ever before, but I also like to think that some musicians are beginning to realize the value and rewards of teaching others about what is so important to them. I know of several wonderful musicians in my own city who have recently become part-time or full-time teachers in the public school system. They are quickly becoming known as some of the finest music teachers in the region. Because they have an experience of music making as a way of life, they know instinctively what is important to teach and communicate about music.

The second reason that schools at all levels have avoided the spiritual aspects of music making in the schools is that intense and profound spiritual experience is not in the corporate interest. There is no practical money-making skill to be gained in these pursuits. There is no money to be made in a spiritual quest. (Unless perhaps you run a New Age bookstore.) In fact, the more people pursue music as a spiritual way of life, the more they distance themselves from the

economic and political situations perpetuated by corporate interests. Corporate engines continually strive to influence government policy on public education—as well as university policies on development and research—by selectively doling out minuscule portions of profit in order to push educational institutions to provide the kind of 'useful' workers they need. Administrators are frequently swayed by such instrumental reasoning and some educators may feel pressured to teach students 'real-life' skills. But spiritual awareness gained through music is subversive! Dedicated and creative musicians and music educators are not motivated by profit and pragmatism. They are motivated by the love of the creative act and the profound personal rewards it brings.

Music is more than learning a set of techniques for manipulating an instrument and applying them in prescribed situations. It is essentially a way of discovering the true potential of the human consciousness and spirit. Music, can be a profound interaction with our fellow beings, an ecstatic celebration of the transcendent potential of human creative action within a community. If we can become aware of the sources of music and the ways in which we can prepare ourselves to access those sources through music making, then we will be better able to communicate to students, through our actions, the importance of acknowledging the spiritual side of musical practice. I will argue throughout this thesis that improvised music making is one of the best ways to accomplish this. In the human search for meaning and spiritual understanding, improvisational

practice teaches us to trust and rely on our fellow beings and to value the unique perspectives and ideas that they bring to a musical dialogue.

The continued place of music in every level of education does not depend on showing how it can be useful and effective in economic terms or even how it can improve performance in other academic disciplines. If we are honest in our defense of the value of music—and I think we must be honest in order for our defense to stand against the substantial forces which threaten—we must acknowledge its true nature as a spiritual pursuit. The only way to show why music is truly important to education is to show students that music making is essentially a spiritual practice that can help people achieve their full potential as intelligent and creative beings. In the face of rationalization and instrumental reason, we must embrace the intensely irrational, profoundly rewarding, spiritual practice of music. I believe that improvisational practice holds the key to helping students get in touch with this way of understanding music.

Confusions of Music and Language in Education: Communication, Expression, Understanding

2

The Music-as-Language Metaphor

The use of language as a metaphor for understanding music is one of the central issues in music philosophy and aesthetics. The popular phrase "music is the universal language" seems to be at the root of this problem. Fundamental misunderstandings about what and how music means are at the core of many of the educational problems which I identified in the previous chapter. While music does display some of the qualities of language, there are substantial differences between them which cause serious misunderstandings when we use language as a metaphor or analogy by which we understand the effects and meanings of music. On the other hand, recent ideas about how language works may provide useful ways of understanding how people can acquire musical abilities and how they use music to communicate; both are key issues in music education. As this chapter will show, the fact that many musicians often use language metaphors to explain musical concepts further muddies the waters. In this chapter I will try and show both the problems which arise from the use of this metaphor and the possible educational benefits which can come from understanding the metaphor in a more profound way.

This music-as-language metaphor is not simply a philosophical or aesthetic problem; it is a central issue in music education and the reason for this is simple. Our understanding of how music works and what it is for must of necessity affect the things we decide are of value in music and how they will be taught. If we intend to teach people about music we must have a durable philosophical and aesthetic foundation on which to base our teaching. I do not mean to suggest that there is only one way of understanding what music is and what it means to human beings, but rather that there are properties of both music and language that we can readily identify that can help us to understand their similarities and differences. An understanding of these properties can help us to structure music teaching in a way which is more consistent with the way that we use and understand music.

Differing Properties of Music and Language

Language is generally very good at communicating information. If my wife is looking for the novel she has been reading and I say, "The book is on the table.", she has a good idea about the object to which I refer and its location. While the kind of book and table may vary to some degree, the information communicated can be used readily and with little confusion about meaning or context. I can also use language to describe properties of objects and ideas for example "The tea is very hot." or "I'd like to have more time off from work." Again, there could be subtle variations in meaning (how hot is the tea? What kind of tea?) but we

frequently depend upon language to allow us to communicate information to other people in a reliable and straightforward way. Music does not do this kind of thing well at all; it is essentially non-discursive in nature. No matter how skillful a musician I may be, I simply cannot use music to say "Please go to the store and buy a litre of milk." This is a fairly obvious but important discrepancy to point out, but of course language is not always so simple. Derrida (1978) and Gadamer (1975) have both suggested that the standard semiotic explanation of language as relationships of sign and signified does not stand up under scrutiny and that language is not always the objective and dependable system we would like it to be. In their views, language is an extremely flexible medium of communication in which meaning is dependent on a whole range of social and personal contextual factors and not on simple one to one relationships. Gadamer also suggests that the construction of meaning in language is a form of intersubjective play between human minds, texts, and social conditions.

Philpott (2001) points out that this makes the idea of music as a language more plausible. He also suggests that an understanding of music as a kind of language may serve to help us see music as a way of knowing, a way of holding knowledge. I am not sure that music needs such 'help' in this area, but at any rate, this argument for subjectivity in our understanding of the function of language seems intended to make language more like music, not the other way around. Philpott fails to recognize that Derrida and Gadamer are speaking

chiefly about the ways in which language communicates abstract ideas and meaning through metaphor.[1] In this respect, this postmodern view of language *does* make the music/language analogy more plausible and more useful. One can easily entertain ideas about subjectivity when discussing language as used in literature or poetry, but language clearly also exists on a more functional, mundane, every-day level of usage which music does not. The ways of knowing which come through this more objective use of language (science especially relies on the relatively stable properties of language to observe and describe things in the world) are very different from ways of knowing through visual art, dance, and music. Philpott and others seem overly concerned with *justifying* the place of music as one among other more accepted ways of knowing, particularly the scientific or rational mode. I see little need for this since, despite all the talk of technology and rationality in the contemporary world, people seem to need to listen to music as much as ever.

To say that music is not a language is not at all to reduce its value to human beings or to suggest that musical knowledge is not valuable knowledge. Indeed, it seems more reasonable to argue that musical and other artistic ways of knowing are valuable not because of their similarity to rational uses language and the ways of knowing which are attached to these uses, but rather because of their *difference* from these kinds of knowledge. Regardless of what Gadamer

[1] See Yaroslav Senyshyn (2003) for a discussion of the ways in which understandings and uses of music and language inform each other.

and Derrida may say about the subjectivity of language, we do rely from day to day upon a series of relatively stable relationships between words and ideas and objects. When conversing with other people who speak our language, we rely on a common vocabulary to communicate. But music lacks the communicative stability and reliability of a linguistic vocabulary. Cooke (1959), Bernstein (1976), and Graham (1997) have all made attempts at explaining a vocabulary for music, all using only the very narrow idiom of Western classical music. Even within this clearly defined musical system, the reasoning of all these authors relies on the very tenuous, if not outright ridiculous, premise that readers will all come from a very homogenous cultural heritage (white, educated, upper-class, European) and that they will hear and understand certain combinations of melody, harmony, and rhythm in the same way. For this reason I will simply ignore this particular view in our discussion here.

Expression and Interpretation

Why do we need to use language as a metaphor to understand music anyway? Most people are perfectly happy to listen to and enjoy music without elaborate treatises on whether or not it is possible for music to display irony or humour (see Graham, 1997 for a good example of this). For me the real difficulty in distinguishing between the properties of music and language comes when we begin to talk about expression and meaning. Whatever one's position on post-modern semiotics and hermeneutics, most people would agree that we can

use both language and music to *express* ideas. That is to say, we seem to feel that both language and music can help us to bring outside what is inside, to share and make public that which is essentially internal and personal in nature. This is especially true of improvised music because it relies so heavily on the original creative act of the individual.

We use language to do this in many ways. Language has the ability to be either quite specific and objective (because of its ability to communicate detailed information) or to be more poetic and subjective. For example, if I say to someone, "I am feeling really depressed because I lost my job and have been able to find another one.", that person has a general idea of what it means to be depressed and a good grasp of my reasons for feeling that way. If instead of speaking I take out my guitar and begin to pour all my feelings on the loss of my job into a performance, the effect on the individual listening will be quite different. I might *feel* that I have bared my soul through the performance, but no matter how much sadness and depression I may feel that I express through my guitar playing, there is no musical way of saying (short of including lyrics of course) that I have lost my job and can't find another one. The problem here is not that musical expression is inferior to language; I could easily have written a poem which was equally vague in meaning. The problem is that music lacks the kind of stable relationships which are essential to language.[2] Music does not contain

[2] See Senyshyn and Vezina (2002) for further discussion of this problem as explored by Kierkegaard, Collingwood, and Wittgenstein.

recognizable signs which can reliably point to other things. It lacks a vocabulary.[3] There is no way for my listener to know for sure what the music is really *about*. Even if my listener suspects that the music I am playing is 'sad' in some way, they might just as easily think that my wife had left me or that my dog had died. They might not even suspect that I am sad in any way at all. After all, I can play 'sad' sounding music without really being sad. I can also get pleasure from hearing music which I know to be an expression of someone else's sadness without feeling the slightest pang of guilt. For example, a composer writes a symphony which she dedicates to her husband who is dying of cancer. For the composer, the piece may be the expression of her deepest pain and anguish and she may feel that she has expressed her innermost feelings. Yet an audience can hear this piece and not feel truly sad. It would even be considered appropriate for the audience members to *enjoy* such a listening experience and to applaud at the end. The situation would be radically different if the composer had instead sat on the stage and described in detail the grief and pain she felt from watching the progression of her husband's illness. It would be considered morally reprehensible and inhumane to take pleasure from this kind of performance and certainly inappropriate to applaud it.

When speaking of expression we must distinguish between the intentions of the musician and the perceptions of the listener. We must also distinguish between

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[3] The idea of vocabulary is a particularly difficult one. As you will see in subsequent chapters, despite the philosophical problems with this word, it has many uses which can help students understand the importance

the cathartic process of personal artistic expression and the communication of that expression to an audience. In this excerpt from our interview, the trumpeter Bill Clark (2003, July 6) explains what musical communication means to him.

> Ultimately, when I play music, it comes from a place in me that goes so far back into my childhood that...I've questioned a lot of things intellectually, but I don't question that. I don't question my initial urge and desire to play music as being one of personal expression. Now that has become, I grant you, an old-fashioned thing that's been brought into question in the last sixty years or so, *but I don't question it.* I just decide not to because it's just too honest and real for me. *I* know that I get great *spiritual* fulfillment from it. I know that when I'm playing at my most honest and most sincere, that I get the greatest reaction in terms of my relationship with other musicians and with the audience. That's the triangle we're working with. For me that's what's worked the best. Sometimes, when I'm trying to be somebody else, that's when it's not working. The more I'm trying to play like someone else or the more I'm trying to impress upon people that I know a particular idiom well, the less interesting it ends up being for me, the rest of the musicians in the band, and the audience. So I think there's this personal journey that music allows you to have that ends up being about your own personal growth and you can actually track your personal growth through your growth in music that way. I find that to be really

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of acquiring technical performing resources and repertoire in the service of improvisation.

fulfilling and I think the audience and the community does too. I think that's part of the equation.

Music and language are alike in that we can use them both to discover and 'play' with our own innermost feelings. The difference is that, no matter how well we may feel we have expressed ourselves in music, the way that others interpret our expressions simply cannot be as specific or consistent as with language. On the other hand, it is possible that music invites a much greater degree of play with the ideas expressed. Because music does not have a vocabulary, listeners can do with my musical ideas as they please with a greater range of interpretation and perhaps, because of music's very subjectivity, construct personal meanings with far greater emotional immediacy.

The Problem of Music as Object

All of this kind of talk about expression and interpretation assumes that there is a meaning behind the sound, that there is a *something* which we need to understand in order for music to have done its job. Christopher Small (1998) points out that this is really an odd preoccupation of Western thought and that such concerns derive from the notion that music is a fixed, stable object for contemplation. Small argues that, because music in the Western classical tradition relies on the score to produce relatively similar, repeatable performances of a fixed, composed work, an idea of music as a concrete

'thing' or musical 'work' has developed. This 'thingness' of music seems to be in contradiction with the very simple fact that music exists as a transitory aural experience in time and, even more importantly, as a complex web of relationships between sounds, instruments, performers, listeners, and environments. Focusing on exploring the meaning of those relationships is distinctly different from thinking about the musical work as an entity to be observed, decoded, or interpreted. In examining such relationships, we move away from trivial semantic arguments to a more profound understanding of music's role in human life. Small explains his view of this role (note that Small often uses 'music' as a verb and 'musicking' as its gerund):

> When we take part in a musical performance, when we music, we engage in a process of exploring the nature of the pattern which connects, we are affirming the validity of its nature as we perceive it to be, and we are celebrating our relation to it. Through the relationships that are established in the course of performance we are empowered not only to learn about the pattern and our relationship to it but actually to experience it in all its complexities, in a way that words would never allow us to do. (p. 142)

This suggests that music is a way of becoming more fully ourselves, of understanding our relationships with others, with ourselves, and with the world. In this sense, the possible meanings of music (and perhaps all other fine arts) are still important, but are clearly and necessarily subjective. It is this very subjectivity and flexibility, this invitation to explore and experiment with ideas of experience and existence that separates VCR programming instructions from poetry, marching from dancing, or stop signs from painting. In light of these

ideas, deciding that one kind of music making is the only kind of music making acceptable in schools is a kind of totalitarianism. It is worth remembering that nearly all the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century were quick to restrict the range of artistic expression and make pronouncements on the range of acceptable meanings for art.

The Problem of the Language Metaphor in Music Education

Unfortunately, the traditional approach to music education has been somewhat totalitarian and largely based on two false ideas. The first is that there is a *standard* musical vocabulary and a stable range of musical meanings which can be attached to certain sounds within that vocabulary and the second is that music exists primarily not as sounds and human relationships in performance but as a musical 'work'—the score. Music teaching often begins with an introduction to musical notation. Beginning music students learn to make sounds on their instruments which correspond (more or less...) to the notes on the page. The range of notes and the complexity of their interrelationships increase gradually as students progress through a series of books and classes. There is a strong similarity to language teaching in this method. Teachers believe that they are teaching elements of musical 'vocabulary' which will be assembled into musical statements. They are teaching students to 'read music' as though they were reading words. Because they spend so much time learning to read and write

their spoken language, children easily accommodate musical notation as simply another system or code.

This system may in fact teach some students to become proficient note-readers, but it is seriously flawed in a number of respects. In language education, we assume that even very young students in kindergarten already have a good grasp of at least one native language. They learn to speak before they read and write. Once they learn to read and write, they will use these skills nearly every day of their lives. In music education, the opposite occurs. Students learn to read music (writing is rarely part of the process) before they have what could be considered a rudimentary grasp of sound production and technical facility on their instruments. Even though they will probably go on listening to music nearly every day of their lives, it is highly unlikely that they will ever have need of musical notation once they leave school. The system teaches that music is simply a set of symbols on a page which correspond with certain sounds and that the sounds have standard, predictable functions. In other words, they believe they are learning a kind of musical vocabulary and that music is a 'thing', not a process or experience.

The range of musical expression that relies on notation for its existence is relatively narrow, yet this is the only kind of music taught. If music students were only going to hear music written in a simplified, Western, tonal idiom for the rest

of their lives, this kind of music education would suffice. The aural reality is that most of the music that students have heard or will hear throughout their lives does not involve notation as part of the creative process or rely on 19th century European harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic standards. In addition, it is unlikely that students will listen to much music which uses standard band instruments like the clarinet, trombone, french horn, oboe, or tuba. There is an increasing diversity in the kinds of music to which people are exposed over the course of their lives which is in conflict with the very narrow range of musical practice which is included in music education. There is a fundamental separation between what students hear around them and what they are taught in music classes. I am not suggesting that music notation should not be a part of music education or that we should do away with oboes, but simply that we have got the whole process backwards. We need to acknowledge that our pedagogical practice in music has thus far been based on incorrect assumptions about what music is and the way it works in our lives.

Another Side of the Problem

Whatever we may say about Derrida and Gadamer and things postmodern, the fact remains that musicians frequently use the metaphor of language to describe their learning and performing processes. There certainly seem to be ways of using the language metaphor, and even words like 'vocabulary', without raising some of the difficulties we have investigated thus far. I think that having a

closer look at how these metaphors are used by musicians might shed some light on the problem as a whole. When I asked the well-known bassist, Clyde Reed, some questions about improvisation and education he frequently responded with statements based in a very interesting use of the language metaphor (2003, July 16).

> **Jared:** What I would like to know is if you can imagine what you might think of as an ideal training or background for an improvisor and what might be included in that background or training?

> **Clyde:** Ok. I think that there are two dimensions to it. One dimension is building the vocabulary, and I think for that you have to do the normal things—take music lessons, somehow learn how to get sounds out of your instruments, sounds that you like, and develop a vocabulary that you want to tell a story with. The second part is having a story to tell. How do you get a story to tell once you've got the vocabulary? I think the problem with most music education is that it just concentrates on giving you vocabulary and doesn't really have a pedagogy to tell you, once you have a vocabulary, how do you tell a story with it? And so you get these people with *huge* vocabularies. And if they spent less time building the vocabulary and more time telling the story they would be much deeper, more significant musicians. So how do you learn how to tell the story? I don't

really know, but I think that experiencing nature, having great conversations, having great personal relationships, reading great books, watching great movies, listening to a lot of great music—I think these are all part of it. And I think that walking in nature and having great conversations and reading great books is *at least* as important as listening to great music.

Jared: I'd like to press you on the vocabulary idea if you don't mind. Do you think there is a way of acquiring that vocabulary which would lead to people being able to use it better to tell the story?

Clyde: I think that this happens to me, I bet it happens to everybody and it will continue to happen to everybody, and it will continue to happen to me, and that is that I get the means to the end and the end confused. So why do I want to learn to play fast? Its because I like that vocabulary and I want to use it to tell a story. But then after a while playing fast becomes an end in itself. It's *not* an end! Nobody cares about fast unless it's in the context of telling a story. Fundamentals of music—having great time, playing in tune, being able to hear— as important as those are, I don't think those are the ends. The end is can you tell a story with those things. I think its critical to keep reminding people that this is a way to the end, but the end is actually in the story and I, speaking a little out of ignorance, I think one

> of the problems with music that is categorized is that the things that are easy to measure are the means to the end. Can you play fast, have you memorized a bunch of music, can you play in tune? Those are the ones that are easy to measure. Did you tell a story that moved me and transformed me in some way? We don't have a metric for that one! And so I think a lot of music education and the music establishment, rather than concentrating on the real end—which is, is this an important story?—they concentrate on the means to the end and I think then people get totally caught up in that. So I think that balance has to be really carefully looked at and worked on all the time.

Clyde uses the word vocabulary here to describe the sounds and techniques which go into making music. Clearly, in order to produce any kind of music using an instrument, a person must acquire a technical grasp of the mechanics of the instrument and a knowledge of how the pitches, rhythms, melodies, sonorities, and harmonies can be combined to create a coherent music structure. This is the 'vocabulary' that Clyde is talking about and it is important to note that he doesn't believe that elements in this vocabulary have any kind of fixed or standardized meanings. But he effectively points out that the real knowledge to be learned is not *rational* information about scales, composers, scores, notations (although he effectively explains why such things are important) but rather an embodied, subjective, feelingful knowing about sounds, their properties and

interrelationships, and an idea about how such things will be of use to the musician and audience. This is the "story" to which he refers. In Clyde's use of the metaphor, there can be no meaningful sequence of musical vocabulary or coherent combination of musical sounds without an intimate, feelingful knowledge of what those sounds do for the individual musician. The grammar and meanings associated with this vocabulary are very loose, subjective, emotional systems which are learned and constructed by each improvisor.

Music, Meaning, and Metaphysics

Clyde's idea about telling stories draws us back into the problem of what and how music means. In Chapter 4, I explore further the ways in which improvised music is related to this idea of narrative. Music presents the ear and the mind with a rich, complex, varied array of sounds which are connected and related by virtue of their proximity in time. Victor Bateman (2001, unpublished) defines music as the times at which the "act of listening produces a special relationship with sound". This relationship is very much like Gadamer's (1975) idea of cognitive play in the interpretation of language. In language, signs have a range of possible meanings for every individual. The durability and accuracy of these signs as carriers of meaning relies on things such as knowledge of the language, variations in dialect, associated feelings, environments, and experiences. As I have mentioned before, language has identifiable systems and features such as syntax, vocabulary, deep structure, semantics etc.. which do not have true

analogs in music. But perhaps there are similar cognitive processes at work in the construction of meaning from sound and in the activity of improvising. After all, both language and music are aural in nature and the best example of improvisation outside of music that I can think of is conversation. If the mind produces meaning from language through a kind of cognitive play between signifiers and signified, then perhaps we create musical meaning in a similar way by relating one sound with another. In order for us to make sense of sound as music, we must create relationships between the sounds. We identify pitch, timbre, sequence, volume, duration and a host of other qualities and assign these qualities to the sounds we hear. We compare and contrast, group together and separate sounds based on these kinds of qualities. Small (1998) goes further to suggest that such sonic relationships link human beings together in a kind of deeply-felt metaphor for ideals of human interaction.

What we choose to take as the meaning of music is a result of the kinds of qualities we attach to these sounds and the kinds of relationships which we value. Here are some possible examples of ways that meaning could be associated in very different ways with the same musical sounds:

- My mother-in-law somehow associates louder sounds of high pitch with feelings of anxiety and so, regardless of my intentions, whatever I play on my penny-whistle produces feelings of irritation in her. My wife on the other hand likes Irish music and is pleased and relieved that, for once, I am not playing

jazz tunes from the 1940s.

- Certain combinations of pitches and rhythms have associations for various cultural groups. For instance, Bulgarian wedding songs have patterns of sound (identifiable to Bulgarians) which makes them distinct from funeral songs. Hearing a wedding song would likely produce happier feelings and associations than hearing a funeral song. For the uninitiated listener, the two songs may be completely indistinguishable.
- For experienced listeners of Mozart's music (like me), the introduction of a lowered leading tone indicates a modulation to the IV chord and that the second theme of the development section is about to arrive. I eagerly anticipate the sound of the clarinet coming in with this theme. On the other hand, my father (not a classical music fan) may interpret this very same sound as a sure sign that this piece is going to go on much longer than he hoped.
- Subtle variations in the tempo of hip-hop drumbeats can tell the experienced listener whether the music comes from New York or Los Angeles and whether or not the music is aesthetically acceptable for dancing.
- Because I am offended by her crass commercialism and use of sex as a marketing tool, hearing the latest Britney Spears song at the mall makes me tense and I leave without buying a new pair of pants. On the other hand, my twelve-year old niece happily sings along and giggles with her friends about her 'uncool' uncle.

It is not difficult to think of a hundred such examples of how the same music, heard at the same time, can be interpreted so differently. Given the diversity of opinion, taste, aesthetic values, cultural, psychological, and emotional associations that music can have, even for people from the same family, it is obvious that there is no possible way to select even one piece of music which will have universally stable, clearly identifiable meanings. This is a result of the different kinds of cognitive play which go on in each individual's response to sounds.

There are many possible ways of characterizing and describing the kinds of cognitive processes and deeper currents of human experience which go far beyond the simple connotations of the word 'play'. Clyde Reed (2003, July 16) sees musical meaning as having a very practical emotional benefit to the player and the listener, yet he also suggests that music must have some connection to a greater force to which all people have access.

> **Jared:** What do you believe about musical meaning? Do you believe that musical ideas really *carry* meaning? And if so how do they do that?

> **Clyde:** I think, and this is a standard view in Indian music, is what music does better than anything is to control your *own* emotions. If you want to

> have a joyous feeling with a little touch of melancholy, and a little bit of deliciousness—there's an infinite variety of emotions—there's some music that can dial that up in you. And I think that music is about controlling your emotions. If you get in the right emotional space, it changes your body chemistry. I think it does real physical, mental, emotional things to you through a kind of body-chemistry emotional reaction. And at its best, you know, it really uplifts you. It can certainly cure headaches! I've had that experience. I think it's a transforming through the emotions, a transforming tool to make life a lot better. And even in a bigger picture, there's changing the vibration of the world. I remember talking with the great bass player Charlie Haden, and he says that if you approach your music properly with thankfulness and reverence and put your heart in it as much as you can—practicing in your house where no one can hear it—it stops the guy down the street from beating his wife. It stops the kids from being mean to each other. It puts out a vibration into the world, into the physical reality, that changes things. And I think there's something to that.

Small (1998) suggests that music may well function as a kind of metaphor for a person's experience of pattern, relationship, and order in the universe and each person will necessarily perceive such things quite differently and subjectively. This diversity is similar to the range of opinions one might find in a group of people reading the same novel: the characters are the same, the words are the

same, but individual views of meaning and values will differ. Listening to music together is very similar. We all hear the same sounds (hearing impairments and acoustic problems aside) yet make very different connections between them. Daniel Heila (2003, July 12) spoke of this very phenomena when I spoke to him in our interview.

> **Jared:** Do you think musical ideas carry meaning that is communicated to other players or to audience members?
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> **Daniel:** The way I understand that is that there is an enormous, vast reservoir of response that exists...perhaps in a different perceptual realm along the lines of collective consciousness. For instance, when I write my music I work to open a door between the listener and that reservoir. So in that sense the music is a vector for that experience, bringing those two elements together to create an experience. But the music is *not* solely responsible for that experience and that introduces something that I find so powerfully *satisfying* about composing and improvising is that every person in the audience has the potential of having a totally different experience of what's going on and yet everyone together can very confidently say they have experienced the same thing. So I think in an improvisation what's happening there is that vectors are flying in abundance and the access for the audience *and* the players to that

reservoir of meaning and response and feeling and all of those triggers...there are many more opportunities for those vectors and so there are many more opportunities for different meaning and response.

Rob Kohler (2003, July 12) explains very well Small's idea of the meaning of music as an experience of order and pattern in the universe.

Jared: You talked about dialogue. You raised the idea of dialogue, which raises the idea of communication, and communication necessarily involves *some* meaning, whether specific or otherwise. So what is the nature of that?

Rob: I think the great drummer, Billy Higgins put it the best when he said that, "You have to remember that you're like a doctor. People come to hear music and you fix them all up and they didn't even know they was broke!" I think that music itself is a much larger thing than we can even fathom and that it's always an honour and a privilege to play music and to be part of the process of playing music. The audience forgets—and I think musicians forget when they're in the audience—what an astounding, amazing process it is and that when they participate as a listener its just as important as participating as a performer...Another thing about music—I always like to say this—when you watch an orchestra play you're

watching one hundred individual people agreeing on something and making something, creating something that is beautiful and that is beyond all the individual and can only happen because those individuals are there. I think that's another important aspect of music. If you bring your one-hundred-percent individualness to it, and everybody else does too, that makes it even greater. In the free improvisation aspect of it...I think when musicians really listen to that moment and react to that moment and have a dialogue with each other within that moment...that newness, that spontaneity, that absolute in the moment is what I consider to be the best part of being alive! That's when you sit around and have a conversation with your family and you laugh and have inside jokes with one another, or when you see an old friend and you have the same conversation you had twenty years ago and it is just as understanding and deep and you say more like, "Yeah! That's right!" more than actually have ideas but you know you each understand. Those kind of things are realized in a free improvisational concert or session, even if there is no audience except for the musicians themselves.

Jared: So you think that if there is a meaning, it's in the process or in the phenomenon that is the event? Just like when you talk with your family it almost doesn't matter what you are talking about—you could be talking about the cat going to the vet, or you could talk about what you had for

dinner—but it's the fact that you are there with your family or your friend.

Rob: Yeah. The process is everything! So much of the time we stop ourselves from producing because we can imagine the end result, but we don't know how to get there. I can't remember the old saying but...its like its the journey more than the destination, right? It's the journey itself is what we are doing. I think that music, the process of playing music...you never arrive but you can have the incredible moments in your life when the music is there and you're participating in it and that's the most important thing. Like this concert we played the other night. We created an experience. We created an experience for people that, even though they found some of it to be unpleasant, the experience itself will be a part of their conversations and their life. And when they're walking down the street they're going to be thinking about that concert, you know?

Jared: But they won't remember the exact musical events...

Rob: No, but it affected them in a very positive way! And if the least that they do is to go home and put on their favorite Mozart recording or whatever it is they want to hear, or Louis Armstrong, or whatever...their *re*connection with what that original combination or organization of sound did for them will be even more meaningful because of how that free

> improvisation kind of blew...I always think of it as an ear cleaner you know? Like a big, giant Q-Tip you know? (laughter)

I think Rob is saying here that the very process of listening and playing creates the meaning and I think it is interesting to note that Rob, like Clyde, uses the idea of conversation and narrative as a fundamental metaphor. The profound social interactions which occur in our family and personal relationships, the social interactions that give meaning, understanding, and pattern to our lives, like conversation and communication with loved ones, are mirrored in the production of improvised music. The coming together to hear and be a part of music is the essential thing that makes it valuable to people. The music itself will come and go; even though the people at the concert he described won't remember what notes or rhythms were played, they will take the meaning of that ritual experience of the concert into their everyday lives. The improvised music concert experience becomes a reference point for their understanding of order and pattern in their lives. Even if they were only confused and upset by the music, as Rob suggests, their listening to other kinds of music will stand in relationship to that very real and palpable concert experience. With reference to Daniel's "vectors flying in abundance" and Rob's "giant Q-tip", there is something about improvised music which allows people to experience a wider array of possibilities than with other forms of music. I believe that this is because the music is created and conceived in the same moment it is heard. There is an immediacy and

urgency to a concert of improvised music because the listeners and players are very much in the same position—no one knows what is going to happen! A concert of such music requires of listeners and musicians a deep trust in a force beyond themselves; the force of music.

Back to Education

Given all that we have just discussed and facing the reality that the music-as-language metaphor is in common usage among some very intelligent musicians, perhaps we can now feel safe enough to risk the wrath of philosophers and return to the language metaphor (or at least to a modified, more benign version of the one which seemed so difficult in the beginning). In language education, it has long been known that if we expect students to learn and understand language well they must learn to experiment and express themselves with it. No one would dare say that I really understand German particularly well because I can read a few dozen words or that I can tell when someone else is speaking German. Language mastery must involve an ability to engage in real cognitive play with the signs and symbols presented by the language. This cognitive play is primarily evidenced in the ability to speak and communicate with other speakers of the language.

If music utilizes similar cognitive processes to create meaning, then we might well take language education as our example. I would like to suggest that if the true nature of listening is the subjective perception and organization of sounds through cognitive play[4], then it follows that music education must be an education principally involved with the very materials of music. In other words, a music education is an education in sounds, their use, production and creation. A true music education must develop not only each person's ability to hear and interpret sounds for themselves, but also to make those sounds, to create music on their own, and to express themselves through sound. This is what improvisation is all about.

Traditional music education has not addressed these fundamental issues for two primary reasons. First its emphasis on reading and interpreting music notation can severely restrict the ability of students to create music of their own. Secondly, traditional music education relies heavily on idiomatically restrictive repertoire (whether classical or popular material). Both of these problems are centered in a very narrow view of the language/music analogy. With notated music, the sounds are always subservient to the page and the student learns that music is a language expressed with notation. By focusing on narrow musical idioms, the student learns that sounds always come in the same kinds of orders and organizations and that music has a vocabulary of stable signs and symbols

[4] As I will attempt to show later on, the very idea of cognition as a function only of the mind is problematic. Any kind of cognitive play with musical ideas necessarily involves the body in complex system of embodied

expressed within those idioms. A musical education which incorporates free improvisation as a core practice can more easily accommodate the need for students to make music as an expressive and creative act and avoids these two central problems. Prévost (1999) describes the improvisational process as an essentially heuristic musical practice.

> Finding a new sound, mastering its production, and then projecting it: this is the work of a meta-musician. It is commitment to this investigative ethos which sets him apart from the technocratic ideal: he is not concerned with the production of perfect examples of a given form. Certainty comes only in the constant search for a sound to meet the need of the meta-musical context. Sensing, evaluating and acting, in creative dialogue are the medium of the meta-musician."(p.3)

Prévost here refers to free playing as 'meta-music'. The 'technocratic ideal' is the standard musical practice in education these days: that of reading and interpreting the musical instructions of another musician. Clearly, the problems presented by a musical education focused on notation are avoided in improvisation. Free playing of necessity focuses on the creative contributions of the individual and requires that all players take responsibility for their creative acts. Rather than being told the order in which the sounds should occur, the players are required to find their own order and organization and to determine every aspect of the sonic content of the music. The musical language is invented on the spot and the meanings that are created come as a result of interplay between the cognitive and kinesthetic processes of the individuals involved. If we are to continue to use the music/language analogy, then this kind of music

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and abstract interrelationships.

making is much closer to the kinds of cognitive play that happen in the most creative and interesting uses of language.

Music, Language, Improvisation

We began with the question of whether or not music is a language. Music clearly lacks many of the features and uses of language while sharing a similar creative potential and perhaps a similar cognitive process in the creation of meaning. The language/music analogy has been a problem in music education chiefly because of a narrow view of the nature of language and an even more narrow view of musical options open to music teachers. Postmodern philosophers have argued convincingly that a clear-cut sign/signified relationship is an incomplete explanation of the cognitive processes involved in language communication. As evidenced by the enlightening ideas of the musicians I spoke with, a more open view of the language metaphor invites a more rich and diverse range of possibilities and invites multiple perspectives, interpretations, and meanings. Since musical sounds and structures lack even the moderate degree of stability and predictability we attribute to signs and symbols in language, it seems all the more important that we open our minds to musical possibilities beyond the standard notation-based curriculum.

Free improvisation clearly teaches students to explore and question sound and its uses and to construct and explore, in cooperation with others, new webs of sonic meaning. In essence, free playing gives music learners a more direct and honest connection with the materials of music and draws them into a much richer kind of exploration of music's potential and with a richer range of interpersonal relationships. Free playing as a music method leaves open the questions of musical vocabulary, structure, and meaning, and allows the musician to express and create music which is unique and personal. The music that is created is relevant and valuable because it comes from within the musician. Improvised music provides a real opportunity for musical expression and for the sharing of expression with others in a creative dialogue.

What is Free Improvisation?

3

I have been writing about free improvisation for a while now as if it were a commonplace thing that everyone understood.[1] The fact is that few people, including many musicians, have any idea what it is or what it might sound like. Improvisation in general has developed at the margins of Western musical practice in this century and free improvisation has developed at the margins of the margins, so to speak, usually in the shadow of Jazz. This is changing rapidly. Improvisational practice is quickly becoming the *lingua franca* of the contemporary musical world. As musical cultures mix and mingle in hitherto unimaginable ways, I believe that it will become even more important. I was thinking about this yesterday as I drove home from the music school where I teach guitar lessons. I heard a fascinating concert on the SRC (the Francophone CBC radio). The ensemble consisted of *bandura* (a kind of Ukrainian zither), *pi'pa* (Chinese instrument of the lute family), *tabla* drums (a pair of small, tunable North Indian drums), and a slide guitar played by a North Indian musician. Following the concert, I heard a Tuvan throat singer performing with a blues guitarist from the Mississippi Delta. In both cases the music was beautiful and was clearly improvised. In both cases there were combinations of musical

[1] In order to understand what improvised music is, you need to listen to some. Appendix B is a compact disc recording of some freely improvised music.

traditions and ideas that I had never heard or imagined before. Without the benefit of shared traditions, notation, idioms or musical systems how could the players conceive of such music? Improvisation provides the common language and the aesthetic framework for this kind of innovative musical activity. A standard music school education simply does not prepare people for these kinds of musical encounters.

The Roots of Free Improvisation

In order to produce a useful definition of free improvisation, it is necessary to have a brief account of its roots and development as a musical movement and of its place in the larger musical world. Many musical cultures rely on improvisation as a means of producing music. In the traditional music of the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent, improvisation is a central and essential practice. Improvisation also plays various roles in other kinds of music including: Flamenco, Cuban Rumba, many kinds of Sub-Saharan African music, Bluegrass, Irish traditional music, and the folk and popular musics of Bulgaria and Romania. In the Western European musical tradition, improvisation was an important part of musical practice well into the 19th century when, for various social and economic reasons, it began to be overshadowed by a fixed composition as the central means of musical production.[2]

[2] Improvisation as an important musical skill in this 'classical' tradition has survived only in the training of church organists. Improvisation has always been a necessary skill for musicians who work in the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church traditions. Most organists who play at large or important churches are capable

African-American musicians of the first half of the 20th century were largely responsible for bringing improvisation back into Western musical practice in the related forms of jazz and blues and today these are the idioms with which improvisation is most strongly associated. Free improvisation as a distinct musical practice initially developed as an extension of the jazz avant-garde of 1960's America through the work of American musicians such as John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, Muhal Richard Abrams, Albert Ayler, Ornette Coleman, Paul Bley, Charlie Haden, Wadada Leo Smith, and Don Cherry. Driven by intense reactions to and critical personal stakes in the social and political problems and struggles of 1960s America, these musicians began to break the harmonic, rhythmic, and structural boundaries which had defined the genre of jazz. This music was often chaotic, loud, and emotionally intense, reflecting the cultural and ideological upheaval surrounding the struggle for civil rights. By the late 1960s, many 'free' musicians were producing music with no audible relationship to the jazz which had come before.

Inspired by the musical (and occasionally political) events in America, musicians in the UK and Western Europe such as Derek Bailey, Cornelius Cardew, Edwin

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of improvising on well-known hymn tunes and even improvising pieces in various classical forms. See Bailey's *Improvisation:Its Nature and Practice in Music* (1993) for a good discussion of this. It is also important to note that even in the 19th century the best-loved and most popular composers including Liszt, Chopin, Schubert, and Beethoven were all master improvisors. Because we don't have recordings of what they improvised, we often think of their works as fixed and monolithic when in reality they would have been dynamic and spontaneous.

Prévost, Frederick Rzewski, Tony Oxley, Evan Parker, Peter Brotzmann, Louis Andriessen, and Misha Mengelberg began to construct their own versions of this music. During the 1970's, the European influence changed the focus of free music from the radical expressionism pioneered by African-American musicians to a more abstract way of playing which often drew on European avant-garde sources such as the music of Pierre Boulez, and Karlheinz Stockhausen. In addition, the European players began to develop a strong philosophical approach to improvised music which centered on the ideas that improvised music should be (as far as possible) free of stylistic and genre-based features and that the total freedom of the musician should be of paramount importance. The cross-pollination of these musical ideas resulted in the musical movement that we now refer to as free improvisation.

Today, there seem to be a few identifiable 'camps' in free improvisation, loosely attached to national scenes. In North America, there remains a substantial (but shrinking) group of what we might call the 'original' free players who began the free jazz movement in the 1960s. Among these are Ornette Coleman, Muhal Richard Abrams, Wadada Leo Smith, Paul Bley, Cecil Taylor, John Tchicai, Pharoah Sanders, and Charlie Haden. The newer generation of North American free improvisors, while respectful of the contributions of these individuals, seems to be more attracted to the sounds and aesthetic values produced by European players. Musicians in the Netherlands such as Bennink, Mengelberg, Tristan

Honsinger, Wilbert de Joode, and others tend to incorporate a strong sense of humour, playfulness, and tongue-in-cheek satire in their music. The number of players is relatively small and they generally enjoy a fairly good (amazingly high by North American standards) level of government support for their work. Improvisors based in Germany, such as Brotzman, Alex Schlippenbach, and Paul Lovens seem to be more closely tied to the angry, chaotic, avant-garde tradition of Afro-American players. They too receive some government support for their work and perhaps a larger audience also. As one might expect, the greater geographic area and population of Germany have produced a less unified, more diverse group of players, though Berlin is quickly developing as a center for improvising players.

The English scene probably falls somewhere between these two countries in terms of environment and aesthetics. The players there receive little or no government funding for their work and struggle with very small audiences and difficult performing conditions, this despite the fact that many of the players in the UK, including Bailey, Prévost, Oxley, Lol Coxhill, Lou Gare, Evan Parker, and John Stevens were among the pioneers of improvised music in Europe. The Scandanavian countries, Italy and France too are beginning to produce many fine improvisors and are developing audiences. Italy in particular has substantial audiences and excellent venues for improvised music and very inventive and original players. All in all, there is a vibrant and burgeoning movement around

free improvisation in Europe and North America. A vast network of 'jazz' festivals across both continents has served to bring together players from the various countries and to expose new audiences to this music. The folk and world music circuits also provide opportunities for players from various regions and musical cultures of the world to interact on the stage. Improvisation is, by necessity, usually at the core of such collaborations. Whether or not there is a stable audience for this music outside of the festival circuit is an open question at the moment, but it does seems that there have never been so many players in so many places around the world improvising.

Towards a Definition of Free Improvisation

Freely improvised music is a music in which there are no preconceived systems for melody, harmony, or rhythm. In this kind of music making, musicians simply begin playing when they choose and stop when they are finished. The great English guitarist, Derek Bailey (1993) suggests a tentative, yet curiously complete definition for improvised music.

> Freely improvised music, variously called 'total improvisation', 'open improvisation', 'free music', or perhaps most often simply 'improvised music' suffers from—and enjoys—the confused identity which its resistance to labeling indicates. It is a logical situation: freely improvised music is an activity which encompasses too many different kinds of players, too many different attitudes to music, too many different concepts of what improvisation is, even, for it all to be subsumed under one name. ...Diversity is its most consistent characteristic. It has no prescribed idiomatic sound. The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it. (p.83)

In a sense, free improvisation is the oldest kind of music making, as improvisation would necessarily pre-date any system or genre of music. Idiomatic forms of improvisation such as Jazz, Hindustani Classical Music, or Persian music depend upon a complex but generally well-defined series of musical boundaries which define them as genres or idioms. In the case of Jazz there are traditions of instrumentation, harmonic and melodic expectations, and standard rhythmic practices upon which players of this music rely in order to produce improvisations which have certain stable idiomatic characteristics.

In Persian and Hindustani Classical Musics, there are vast traditions of melodic and rhythmic practices, as well as religious and philosophical connections which musicians hold as an essential structural backdrop against which their music is created. In all of these kinds of music (and most other improvised musics), there is a period of apprenticeship and learning where younger players are gradually trained and initiated into complex and beautiful musical traditions. Free improvisation is a very different, though related, way of making music. A compatriot of Derek Bailey's, the improvising drummer Edwin Prévost (1999), has called free improvisation 'meta-music' and is very good at describing the way that free playing works.

> Finding a new sound, mastering its production, and then projecting it: this is the work of a meta-musician. It is commitment to this investigative ethos which sets him apart from the technocratic ideal: he is not concerned with the production of perfect examples of a given form. Certainty comes only in the constant search for a sound to meet the need

> of the meta-musical context. Sensing, evaluating and acting, in creative dialogue are the medium of the meta-musician. (p.3)

As we see here, Prévost's ideas about free improvisation expose a political and social message that many people feel is essentially tied to improvised music[3]. People involved in traditional improvisational musical systems generally have very clear ideas about who are the masters and who are the pupils, what is required to attain 'status' as a practitioner in the idiom, and what constitutes a successful performance. These social and aesthetic boundaries are not an essential part of improvised music performance. The idea that any sound is acceptable, that all contributions to the group music are equally valuable, is a powerfully different social ideal. Standard musical hierarchies involving teachers, composers, traditions, conductors, promoters etc., quickly lose their significance. Since nobody can predict the way an improvisation will unfold or what it will sound like, the music is difficult to commodify. It is difficult to sell to the public and thus its value in our society—especially its value in our education system—is called into question.

But free improvisation is not simply a negation and rejection of traditional values. It is important to recognize that the idea of freedom is a difficult one to use in the

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[3] This deeply-rooted sense of political struggle manifested in music is a heritage of the African-American origins of the music. Free playing was an important part of the Black Power and other civil rights movement in the USA. The political connections and implications of this music were further strengthened by European players of the 1970's (notably the avowed communists Cornelius Cardew and Frederick Rzewski), many of whom were also political activists. In both America and Europe, the more overt, party-oriented political connections eventually served to alienate the more socially radical players from the mainstream who felt that their music should be free from restrictive political entanglements and allegiances.

definition of a musical movement. There are, of necessity, always bounds and values which govern and define freedom. Charles Ford (1995) suggests that, "The search for unfettered freedom for the individual will lead to unhappiness if it blocks the reciprocal relationships with other people through which we come to know ourselves."(p.104). In other words, meta-musicians must be committed to the ideal of group freedom in order to ensure their own.

Within these bounds, Ford suggests that a kind of 'group mind' can occur in which players not only contribute their own musical materials, but react to and are informed by the collective efforts of the group. The music in performance seems to take on a life of its own. Many players often speak of 'following the music' or of a kind of musical 'channeling' experience. Ford describes this relationship further:

> Each player listens and contributes to the formation of a collective sound, which is in a constant state of becoming music, and this sound-becoming-music in turn shows the way for each player to proceed. The movement from individual to collective and back to individual music is really not cyclic or processual....when collective freedom finds its voice in musical freedom, the relationship between individual and collective becomes a static, though modulating, unity. Individual freedom may be lost, but what is promised is the most extraordinary union of minds in music, a union that dissolves and assumes ethics, pleasure, and aesthetic experience into itself. (p.106)

Seen in such terms, improvisation offers more than just musical satisfaction or enjoyment, it is a phenomenon which encompasses a world of social and (unavoidably) political desires for unity and human interaction. This is a kind of

utilitarian commitment to making musical contributions which will bring the greatest musical good to the group's improvisation. Of course, what is 'good for the music' is determined by individual players who, in some cases, may have radically different aesthetic viewpoints.

As each player listens and evaluates and reacts to the sounds produced by other members of the group, a dialogue of music values and identities develops. Each musician chooses whether to acknowledge or ignore the contributions of others in the group, to build on them or possibly to try and subvert what they feel are the intentions of the other players. There is a constant effort to interpret and understand the meaning of the musical gestures of each contributor and to determine how each gesture will fit into the emerging musical narrative. For me this is the primary benefit of engaging in the activity of free improvisation. Improvising with other musicians creates a community of true equality and equanimity in which the contributions of all are recognized and valued in the process of creation. For as long as the music lasts, the players are completely dependent on listening to and trying to understand each other in service of a creative goal beyond their own personal desires. This true liberation of the creative self is not a lonely search for meaning but, in the ritual of free group improvisation, can be an ecstatic endowment of creative strength and power which can only exist when supported and enabled by the actions of others.

Improvisation and Composition

Many people have referred to improvisation as instant or spontaneous composition. On the surface, this seems plausible, but a closer look shows that improvisation differs from the compositional process in several important respects. Composition is a laborious and time-consuming process which relies on the composer to refine, edit, and organize musical ideas into a form which will be reproduced by other musicians. In improvisation there is no time for editing, ruminating, planning, or revision and there is no division of labour between those who produce the musical ideas and those who produce the actual music that is heard. Improvised music grows from an *immediate* aural and physical experience and a subsequent series of reactions and interpersonal-musical relationships. Composition may indeed reflect upon such interactions, but there is always a period of time, usually a long period, between the hearing/experiencing musical stimuli and the actually composing of a musical response. Composition is distinguished by discrete stages of musical creation. These stages occur in various orders (some might even be omitted) depending on the intentions of composer:

- the initial creation and notation of rough ideas or themes
- various kinds of pre-compositional planning
- refinement and editing of ideas
- placing raw ideas in some kind of larger structure
- refining notation to enable efficient, accurate performance

- engraving and printing of the score
- rehearsing players for performance
- performing the music
- editing and revising the music following the first performance

Free improvisation is a much simpler proposition and its strength lies in this simplicity. The player plays and listens in cooperation with others. Free improvisation is a kind of music making where there are no pre-determined stylistic or structural musical limits. The players simply begin playing and construct music based on the aural reality of the moment. They rely on their ability to hear, make sense of, and react to aural stimuli and to organize these sounds into music, whether by themselves or in collaboration with other players. This is very different from the musical activity of performing from a score where the players are essentially there to fulfill the expectations of another musician. In score-based performance, all aspects of listening and reacting to aural stimuli are essentially focused on reproducing the instructions of the score and its accompanying aesthetic framework with the greatest possible accuracy and fidelity.

On the other hand, these processes do have certain things in common, or at least many players see and experience them as inextricably connected phenomena. I asked two musicians who both compose and improvise about their ideas on improvisation and composition. First we will hear from Daniel Heila

(2003, July 12). Daniel came to improvising by way of composition, popular songwriting, and classical training as a flautist.

Jared: Since you're a composer, I'll ask you another question that I've been asking people who both compose and improvise. Can you describe what you think are the similarities and/or differences between improvisation and composition?

Daniel: I actually think they are pretty much the same experience for me and it's a matter of scale, time, temporal scale. Because when I compose, I'm working to remain as open minded as I am when I improvise. And perhaps that's one reason why I enjoy improvising as much as I do. It gives me an opportunity to hone that skill, that intuitive response, because then when I am alone and I'm working, I can sustain it; that openness and that receptivity to intuitive response. Because I'm an intuitive composer as well it has to be sustained of longer periods of time and then it is captured in one form or another and distilled in one form or another, although my work doesn't necessarily have the same sort of ultimate final product as a score for a string quartet.

Jared: You work with some open notations.

Daniel: Absolutely. I feel that one is very much like...they're like different ends of a spectrum.

Jared: So it's a similar phenomena that you're looking at from different perspectives?

Daniel: Yeah. And when I compose I'm alone and I'm trying to work these things out. I have more influence on the outcome but I still have the same struggle to remain receptive and open as when I'm with a group of people and trying to keep my mind open and be receptive and responsive, in a fruitful way, to what is happening around me, the sounds around me. And its funny too, because you can even take that analogy to the relationships in our free improv situation where there are interpersonal relationships and the issues there are very much sped up as well. When you take a composition into rehearsal those very same issues are stretched out and slowed down and so there's much more of a personnel management side to the composition, going into a rehearsal and performance. But I feel they are the same issues that are happening quickly in a quick-fire way within a free improv.

It seems that Daniel's experience as an improvisor informs his compositional practice in some very important ways. He describes, as I did earlier, the way that

the different time scales inherent in these two processes influence musical creation, but he also speaks of a significant similarity in terms of his personal struggle to remain "receptive and responsive" to his musical impulses and intuition. This is not necessarily common among composers; many composers are more concerned with an intellectual working and re-working of ideas within a framework. Daniel has learned to use his experience of improvising as a model which guides his compositional process. Remaining open and responsive to musical impulses is not necessary for the compositional process to work. It is easy to find many examples of composers in the 20th century—Babbit, Riley, Cage to name a few—who have used very constructed, calculated processes to create their work. Though inspiration and intuition obviously come into play in the initial conception and framing of a work, the bulk of compositional work can simply be a matter of following an idea to its logical and inevitable conclusion. Calculation and long-term planning are more or less deleted in the process of improvising and the ability to remain open and receptive to intuitive change becomes the very focus of the activity. Daniel has learned that his composing is much better when he employs a kind of improvisational work ethic and aesthetic.

Daniel also makes an interesting point about the way that interpersonal relationships play into the two processes. He describes the process of rehearsing a composition as "personnel management". As anyone who has ever tried to have a composition performed will attest, the logistical problems of getting

a large group of musicians into a room at the same time to work together on a new piece are enormous. The difficulties arise because of the very nature of score-based performance; all the musicians must be united and focused on the same task under the direction of one person. The interpersonal tensions and dynamics of trying to get a bunch of artists to conform to a single aesthetic view are at the heart of the problem. As Daniel suggests, there are certainly logistical and interpersonal difficulties which arise in the performance of improvised music, but these must be dealt with speedily because there is no rehearsal, no preparatory time to work things out. In improvised music, there is no need for the group to subscribe to the same view of how the music should proceed, since that remains to be worked out in the process itself and the interpersonal issues that may arise simply become fuel for the musical interplay at hand.

Bill Clark (2003, July 6) sheds further light on these same issues. Unlike Daniel, Bill came to composing by way of being a jazz trumpet player and improvisor.

> **Jared:** Since you are also a composer I'll ask you this question. Can you how explain how you think the creative process is different from composition? You know there's a lot of talk, especially in pedagogical circles, about improvisation being sped-up composition and composition being slowed-down improvisation. What do you think about that?

Bill: Well, I believe that and I don't. They've got their fingers on *part* of the process but that metaphor can't explain the whole process of composition. I don't think its quite true. Once we're in the space of you and me doing a duet together, I can't stop and say, "I thought that was really working. And I don't like that you went on with that one line too long. When I went to that other thing, why didn't you do exactly what *I* was hearing?" You know when we're improvising we just have to work together and we might go to places that aren't as 'compositional', for lack of a better term, or if it is compositional it is a group composition, unless I'm playing a solo trumpet piece. If you are playing a solo improvisation, that *may* be the place where that metaphor works the most, like when you're listening to Keith Jarrett play a solo piano concert. But *even then* I think something different happens. What composition allows that improvisation doesn't is a *way* different process of editing. So when I'm composing, the impulse might come from an improvisation...sometimes the impulse just comes from a thought; its more preconceived. Like if I go down to the park and I get an idea for a piece...this piece will go together like this—a game piece or something—that doesn't have anything to do with improvisation *at all*. When I get an idea for a piece, it's just an idea and the idea speaks for itself, but its not about improvisation. If I'm sitting there at the piano going (sings complex rhythmic riff)...that's this neat thing! I'm going to make something of that. Stop. Write it down. Think

about now what's going to work with that. Is this going to be a forward layer? Is this going to be foreground or background? Is this going to be a bass guitar with bassoon line? So the editing process... I never stop. That's a long-winded way of saying I never stop when I improvise. I just start improvising and keep improvising and that *part of your brain is really being worked.* That compositional part of your brain is being worked. It's like you're *practicing* composing. But you don't have that great, glorious ability to stop and to sort. Once you're improvising, you're improvising. There's a second thing that comes into play which is your writer-mind... I think of my wife who is a writer and the way she works...the cutting and pasting and "This is a way better introduction or this should come later in the chapter." That's something that we *don't* do so much as improvisors, but I definitely think that's part of the writing process, of the compositional process... the construction part. It's there. But it's a smaller part of improvisation and a less controllable part of improvisation.

Jared: ...and you might have other people involved in improvisation.

Bill: As soon as you have a duet or a trio or a quartet, there is this completely different dynamic because you're working with other people's improvisations happening at the same time.

Jared: And sometimes your ideas get pushed aside or destroyed.

Bill: And you allow them to be! You say, "Yeah I was searching there wasn't I? And you've really got something here. I'm going to go with you." Or you had a really good idea that you loved and you're like "Aw geez, I wish they'd stuck with my idea!" But you know you have to...the give and take is immediate, and it's powerful and it's beautiful and its like a conversation and that's what's really great about improvisation.

Bill reiterates here the idea that the compositional process allows for construction, editing and revision. He also points out a critical difference between improvisation and composition and that is the role which other musicians play in the process. The compositional process is solitary by nature and the improvisational process is public and interactive. A group improvisation is a negotiation of ideas and values. Using the idea of a group composition may seem appealing here, but again we find that there are too many key differences in the process. As Bill and Daniel both suggest, improvisation and composition may be part of the same spectrum of mental activities and exercise of creativity in each discipline may inform a musician's practice in the other, but there are very important differences which separate the two activities.

The Aesthetics of Improvised Music

Since improvisation seems to reject any preset musical boundaries and lacks predictable musical characteristics, judging the aesthetic quality of improvised performance can be extremely difficult. Indeed, many people find it difficult to listen to improvised music for this very reason. The sense of familiarity and expectation that one has when listening to more comfortable idiomatic musical genres is denied in listening to improvised music. In meta-music, the only constant is change and the only predictable element is surprise. Nevertheless, we can approach an aesthetic evaluation of improvised music by beginning with the simple tenets of the musical philosophy embedded in the practice of improvisation.

As I mentioned earlier, the 'freedom' of meta-music relies, as do all kinds of human freedom, on certain conditions. These conditions seem to be:

- dedication to improvised music making as an investigative, heuristic process in which the experimental discovery of new sounds and ways of playing is central
- commitment to making music in and for the moment and to 'follow' the music where it leads
- commitment to listening and reacting to the musical contributions of others in creative and open dialogue

There must be a strong desire to find one's own music and to find it in a different place every time. The more a player relies on the production of familiar and well-used musical ideas, the more they create a closed musical system which cannot fully react to the contributions of others and which cannot react to the musical needs of the moment. The minute an improvisor becomes content with recycling the same materials for every performance, they have begun to define a new idiom from which other players are excluded. Prévost (1999) elaborates poetically on this idea:

> Each time meta-musicians look to each other and then outward to their audience, before the meta-music is commenced, they feel the ominous presence of fixed expectation drawing them into familiar landscapes, tempting them to produce familiar handscapes. Each time the solutions seem polarised. Form or chaos? Confirmation or confusion?...Only by approaching the unknown or the confused image or expectation can the meta-musician hope to find new explanations. (p.161)

But musical exploration and experimentation have little purpose if there is no one to listen and react. In order for musical meaning to develop, improvisors must be willing to put their own ideas into play with those of others and see what happens. It is in this group arena of play where the real meaning and significance of the individual's musical ideas becomes clear. Improvisors produce sonic gestures with the intention of generating musical responses from other listener-players and the music is generated by a series of these responses, actions, and reactions. Playing and listening are inextricably linked and players must depend upon each other to produce coherent music. If listening stops, chaos ensues and there is no point in continuing to play.

According to these underlying principles, the ideally successful improvised performance is one where:

- players experiment and try new sounds, combinations, and ways of playing
- players react to the musical contributions of others and experiment with and explore new sounds in the context of the group
- players play in and for the moment by becoming attentive to the particular qualities and conditions of the performance space and time and the personal dynamics of the people present.
- players listen carefully and respectfully to each other and to the emergent sonic qualities of the group music
- players feel free to try anything and everything

In real-life playing there will be many variations on these themes. Producing music according to these principles is extremely demanding and requires that players take a large share of the responsibility for their musical actions. This can be an uncomfortable proposition for the simple reason that musicians always bring to a performance musical expectations and values which are very important and personal to them. In our daily spoken conversations we are often reluctant to let our true feelings and ideas be committed to the rigours of debate and discussion. We worry about offending, being misunderstood, being shut out of the dialogue, being unable to follow the conversation, forgetting something

important that we wanted to say, and being rejected. I have found that musical ideas are often much more personal and closely held than the things that people put into words and for that reason, throwing musical ideas into dialogue with those of others to see what they will do or what will be done to them is a daunting challenge.

But the rewards are commensurate with the challenge. The essence of judging the success of an improvised performance lies in observing this complex ratio of musical risks and rewards and in observing the extent to which players remain true to the investigative and dialogic processes of improvisation. If meta-musicians are not willing to contribute their most valued and closely held musical feelings and to respect the contributions of others, the results are not likely to be rewarding. In surrendering personal musical needs and expectations to the will of the group there comes a sense of a greater musical force which is there to take care of things, a trusting of music to provide for our needs and a finding out that there was nothing to fear in the first place. As vague as that might seem, in a sense aesthetic evaluation of improvised music comes down to how much of this kind of 'magic' happens. Some of my greatest personal rewards in a life devoted to music have come from the moments when I played something that I thought was small, uninteresting, and insignificant and watched it bloom into something glorious and profound in the hands of other musicians who were dedicated enough to listen, respond and share their creativity with me. I firmly

believe that this kind of deep personal trust in other people, this commitment to listening and working together towards a common goal is not only valuable in a musical sense, but also that it can provide people with a powerful metaphor and example for human interaction in the world.

Theories of Improvisation

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After a concert of improvised music, the most common questions I get are "Was that *all* improvised?" and "How do you do that?" The first question is easily answered with a simple "Yes." The second question is much more difficult and much more interesting to answer. What is it that happens when a group of musicians improvises together? How do they do it? I began in Chapter 1 to explore the idea that, as in many activities of an artistic nature, there is a mystical element to musical improvisation. This mystical element is sometimes enhanced by the artist's own desire to be seen as a kind of isolated genius with an exclusive access to the Muse. There is obviously no empirical way of discovering or describing this process, but perhaps it is less mysterious than we generally believe. As C.G Jung (1933) put it in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*,

> In dealing with the psychological mode of artistic creation, we never need ask ourselves what the material consists of or what it means. But this question forces itself upon us as soon as we come to the visionary mode of creation. We are astonished, taken aback, confused, put on our guard, or even disgusted—and we demand commentaries and explanations....The obscurity as to the sources of the material in visionary creation is very strange, and the exact opposite of what we find in the psychological mode of creation. We are even led to believe that this obscurity is not unintentional. (p.158)

By 'psychological mode' Jung means creation at the level of craftsmanship or manipulation of elements within a pre-defined system—the conscious construction of the art work. 'Visionary creation' refers to the inexplicable core of

artistic endeavour—what is expressed and why. My research on this topic of visionary creation consists of many years of performing as an improvising musician and a lot of thinking about what it is that I do. By applying the ideas of cognitive distribution and activity theory (Engeström et al., 1999) to my own performance experience and those of other musicians, I hope to gain some insight into the questions of how improvisation produces music and what goes on within and between improvisors.

Cognitive Distribution

Now that we have an idea of the subject in hand, let us turn to the form of analysis. The concept of cognitive distribution as pioneered in the early 20th century by G.H. Mead, Wilhelm Wundt and L.S.Vygotsky helps us understand that human cognition occurs not solely in the mind of the individual but rather that objects and environment play a critical role in thinking and feeling. Wundt (trans.1973) suggests that it is impossible to account for complex mental functions without examining social, mythological, and historical factors which form the background and structure for such functions. Through his experiments with children's problem solving skills, Vygotsky (trans. 1978) tried to show how the development of what we consider to be purely mental processes like problem solving or imagining a work of art can only develop through, and are in fact dependent on, physical processes. This is a radical notion that has generally been taken to mean that social interactions, and interactions with objects and

symbols, significantly affect and are integral to cognition. On a deeper level, there is imbedded another more metaphysical notion that cognition may literally be shared among individuals through the mediation of objects, tools, symbols, and signs. This way of thinking about distributed cognition is most intriguing for considering improvisation and corresponds and interacts intimately with the metaphysical conception of transcendence which I explored earlier. To say that cognition is distributed between mind and object or between two or more minds is to imply that there is some unexplainable connection at play, that there is a *something* there which defies quantitative descriptions but which is essential. I will refer to this something as the collective conscious.

A group improvisation is a complex social phenomenon. During a performance, there is a subtle, web-like interplay of individual psychological needs and intentions, technical tasks and difficulties associated with playing musical instruments, awareness of the audience (if the performance is public) and, most centrally, conscious and unconscious reactions to sound stimuli. Cognitive distributions in this context occur between musician and instrument, between or among two or more musicians, and between musicians and the music itself. Vygotsky (trans. 1978) developed a model, which showed the dialectical relationships among mediational artifacts, stimulus, response, and action. It was he who first demonstrated how higher intellectual functions are dependent on and develop from social and physical environments, gradually becoming what we

often think of as purely mental processes. Beyond notions of development, Vygotsky's research suggests that any activity, such as making music, which involves the intellect in conjunction with physical processes is essentially connected to and inseparable from operations in the physical and social world. Engeström and Cole (in Salomon, 1993) show how such cognitive distributions may be mapped on a 'mediational triangle', as in Figure 1 below, in order to represent how mind is thought to interact with various elements of the activity system. The lines represent connections and interrelationships among aspects of the activity.

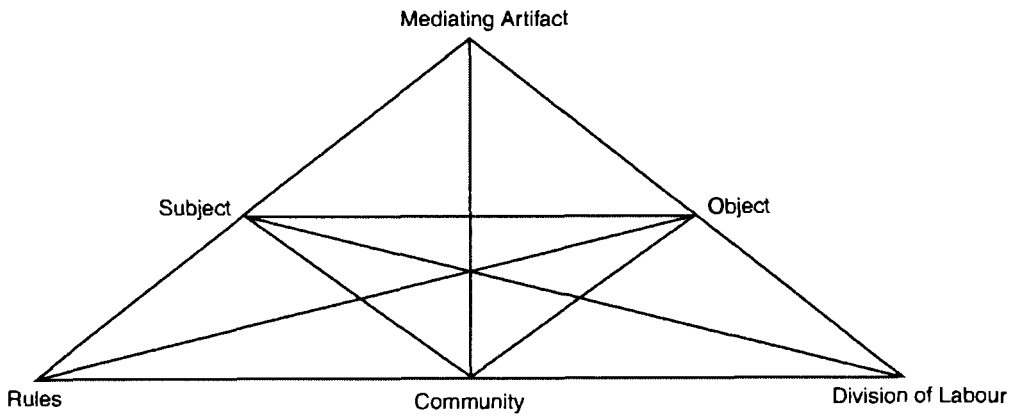

Figure 1 Mediational Triangle

The mediational triangle in figure 1 expands on Vygotsky's initial research with mediational artifact, stimulus, and response to include social factors such as rules, community and division of labour. This helps us to understand cognitive distributions within more complex social interactions. The kind of analysis represented by figure 1 has come to be called activity theory. This model has proved itself valuable in analyzing a wide variety of activities and with some qualifications and modifications we can use it to help understand the elements at play in a musical improvisation.

Improvisation and the Mediational Triangle

As my friend, Eric Wu, pointed out to me, the triangle model (or any kind of diagram really) is based on a rational conception of knowledge and as such is problematic in a discussion of something as elusive as music. I think this is quite true, but I will say in my defense that I have no interest rationalizing the distinctly 'irrational' activity of music making, nor do I think it is possible to understand improvisation through identifying its constituent parts. Jung, said (1933) of religion, "Whoever chooses to ignore this aspect of the human psyche is blind and whoever chooses to explain it away, or to 'enlighten' it away has no sense of reality." In the same way, I feel that anyone who tries to rationally quantify musical meaning or music making is blind to its essentially spiritual nature. Nevertheless, there are some questions and problems that arise through the highly rational diagramming process which help to show the complexity of

improvisation and give us certain insights which will increase our understanding of it.

If we take the Subject to be an individual musician and the Object of the activity to improvise a piece of music, a first attempt at mapping a mediational triangle for improvisation might look like Figure 2. The improvising quartet with which I perform, and which will be the subject of this analysis, consists of Rob Kohler (string bass), Sonya Lawson (viola), Alex Kelly (cello), and me (guitar). All members of the group would comfortably categorize the music we produce as free improvisation. With this ensemble in mind, let us begin asking questions about the mediational triangle.

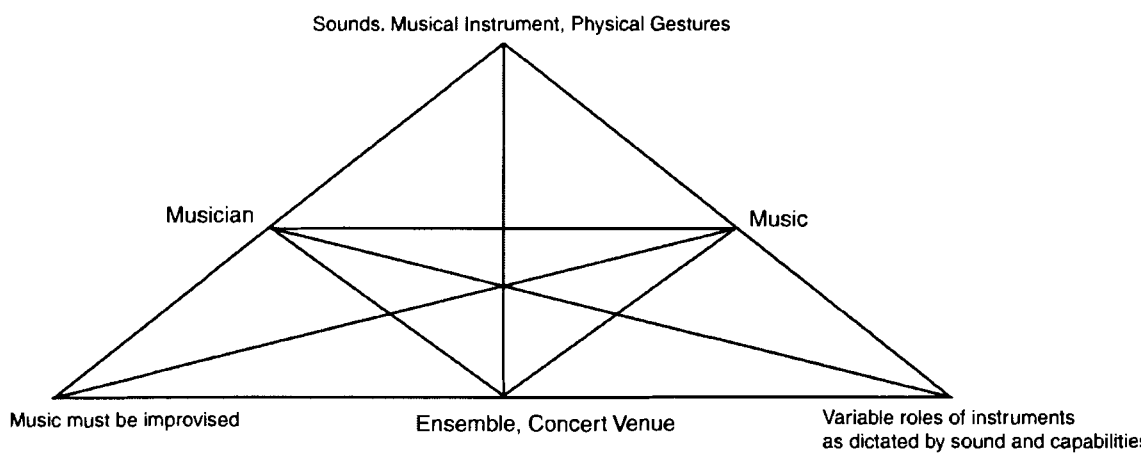

Figure 2 Modified Mediational Triangle

First of all, what is the mediating artifact? On the simplest level, the artifact is the musical instrument itself. The instrument is the immediate link between the mind of the musician and the community outside. A musician's thinking is intimately tied to the instrument simply because it is the thing which produces sound. The limitations of the instrument and the performer's ability are central in determining what is expressed to the community. The musical background of the player is obviously key in determining how they understand and use the instrument. Each instrument may also have unique sonic characteristics which cause the player to use it in a different way from other instruments of the same type.

The instrument is also of central importance in determining the division of labour in the activity since each instrument has distinctive features that make it more suited for certain tasks. For instance, in our group the cello is more capable of long sustained tones than the guitar, so I assume that Alex will use this quality while I make more use of the guitar's inherent harmonic capabilities. Similarly, Sonya is limited by how low she can play given the viola's natural range. This limits her cognition in the sense that she knows that there is no point in thinking about notes that are lower than the ones she can play. Of course, any of us is quite likely to try and subvert these qualities in order to produce a musical effect, but in that case the fundamental division of labour is a point of reference against which to push.

There is a small problem with placing 'instrument' where I have in Fig.2. The problem is the obvious fact that the instrument is an intermediary between mind and sound. The triangle does not do a very good job of showing hierarchical relationships such as the one present here—especially since we usually think of the items at the top of the triangle as being more important and this is clearly not the case here. The *sound* produced by the instrument is clearly the most significant mediating factor in the overall activity. Music is made up of sound and sound is the central medium of cognitive interaction among musicians. What we learn about the triangle model here is that even elements of the activity which we group together at one 'point' are as interdependent as the other elements whose connections are shown by lines. We could quite easily continue by drawing several other triangles, or flipping this one onto its various sides to show interrelationships between elements or further levels of complexity at each point of Fig. 2. Upon closer consideration, we can see another hierarchical relationship that is problematic. Is music really the object or could the object simply be the production of sound? Is there a difference? Could music be *both* object and artifact?

The rules in this case seem to quite simple. The most basic one is that all the music must be improvised. We also might include a few more obvious rules such as:

- the musicians should have instruments (including their voices)

- the musicians should play together in the same room
- the musicians should listen to one another and use the listening as a basis for the creation of further sounds

These rules are generally held and determined by the community of four performers which we are discussing. The community may include an audience if the performance is public. There would be other rules imposed by the presence of an audience which might possibly include:

- the performance will last about one hour (or some other specific time).
- the musicians will play more or less continuously with a few short breaks
- the musicians are the performers and the audience members are the spectators (though it is equally possible that some artists may view the audience as participants)
- the audience will listen and sit quietly

Let us try the model by examining a 'script' of a brief moment of an imaginary performance. The script is written from the perspective of one of the group members, let's choose Sonya, the violist, as the subject.

THOUGHT/FEELING: the idea (or perhaps the feeling of a need) for a loud, screeching sound orginates in Sonya's mind. Of course, in order for her to imagine a sound on the viola, she must have come across this sound in some kind of experimentation—a previous physical process. This demonstrates that

we cannot even begin to describe improvisation as a purely mental activity. Improvisation is of necessity rooted in the nature of the sound-producing tool.

ACTION: Sonya begins the piece by violently drawing her bow across the strings, creating a loud, high, screeching sound.

MEDIATIONAL EXPERIENCE: The sound is created by the instrument (mediators of the idea or feeling), hence becoming part of the music (the object of the activity).

COMMUNITY REACTION: The sound is perceived as loud and harsh by other group members. Sonya may be indicating that she wants this to be the overall feeling or direction of the piece — hoping to elicit similar sounds from members of the group — or it could be that she is inviting others to present some kind of contrast. Rob and Jared both choose to play low and quiet sounds to contrast with Sonya's screeching. Jared chooses the contrast because it would be really difficult to make his acoustic guitar screech. Rob could make pretty good screeching sounds on his bass through utilization of certain techniques but can't be bothered. He is tired and would rather play gentle low sounds. Alex likes Sonya's opening gesture and chooses to add some screeching sounds of his own.

SONYA'S REACTION: she is pleased by the sound – she realizes that it was louder and even more obnoxious than she hoped. She was hoping the whole group would get into loud, harsh sounds and is somewhat disappointed that Rob and Jared have decided to go in another direction. Nevertheless, she also likes the contrasting sounds which make her idea seem quite wild.

MUSICAL RESULT: the music now consists of two contrasting types of sounds. The group now reacts not only to Sonya's initial gesture (it is subsumed in the overall object of producing a piece of music), but also the interesting textural contrast that has occurred. This becomes a kind of musical sign and a stimulus against which further reactions take place.

Obviously, these events listed in such a linear fashion would happen more or less simultaneously and similar chain of actions and reactions would occur for each person in the group. A cognitive distribution has occurred; initially a simple distribution of Sonya's opening gesture to the group, but then a much more complicated set of distributive interactions among members of group and the music itself. This process then proceeds with various players adding their contributions. As each new element is added, it becomes subsumed in the overall tapestry of aural stimuli, and these stimuli form the basis for further thought and action. Because all members of the group both react and contribute to the same set of stimuli, their cognition is linked in a profound fashion. Once

certain sound-actions have been brought into play, the players construct a kind of group meaning from those actions.

Vygotsky (1978) described a similar process when he observed that many young children are not able to name exactly what they are drawing (a house, or a cat etc.) until after the drawing is finished. He suggests that the process of drawing is distributed between the external materials and activity of drawing and the internal, mental desire to make the work of art. In this case, the mind produces its own stimuli through interaction with crayon and paper, reacts to the resulting visual stimuli, and then produces another set of stimuli based on the new information—a recycling of action and reaction. The child gradually forms those experiences into a kind of catalog of activities or cognitive tools based on the effects they produce. These cognitive tools form the basis for more abstract planning and reasoning about art. The child's drawing proficiency increases with her experience of cause and effect interactions with the materials. Of course, we know that if the child continues to draw, perhaps becoming a great artist, this process of discovery though doing may *seem* more and more deliberate and calculated. While people are capable of building a wide repertoire of drawing skills and ideas related to the activity, it is the actual act of drawing and seeing the results which is most central to the activity. The drawing can be planned or conceptualized in the mind, but it must always be realized in the physical world; the art in the mind cannot exist without mediating tools of pen and paper.

Mead saw the development and implementation of such higher mental functions as rooted in just this kind of social interaction. He describes (as cited in Montiel and Huguet, 1999) the nature of what might be termed social cognition in this way, "Thought not only involves communication, but also the production in the individual of the very reaction he provokes in others. One partakes in the process that the other individual carries out, and one guides one's actions from this participation."(p.126). The centrality of the physical act is more clearly demonstrated when other participants are brought into the activity. A dramatically slowed-down, visual analogy might be a group of weavers improvising the weaving of a tapestry with no pre-determined design or pattern. All the participants can see the total result of their efforts, but none can be sure of what the contributions of the others will be. Similarly, there is no group idea of what the sound of an improvisation will be until after it is begun, at which point each player defines the sound in terms that make musical sense to them. No matter how carefully the players plan or think about the sounds they would like to make, no matter how skillful they may be, they cannot escape the fact that sound must be produced in the physical world and perceived with the ear.

An Alternative Model

An alternative to the mediational triangle might be useful in showing the kind of relationships we have just described. Figure 3 shows the relationships among

players and music through the kinds of mediational artifacts we have been discussing.

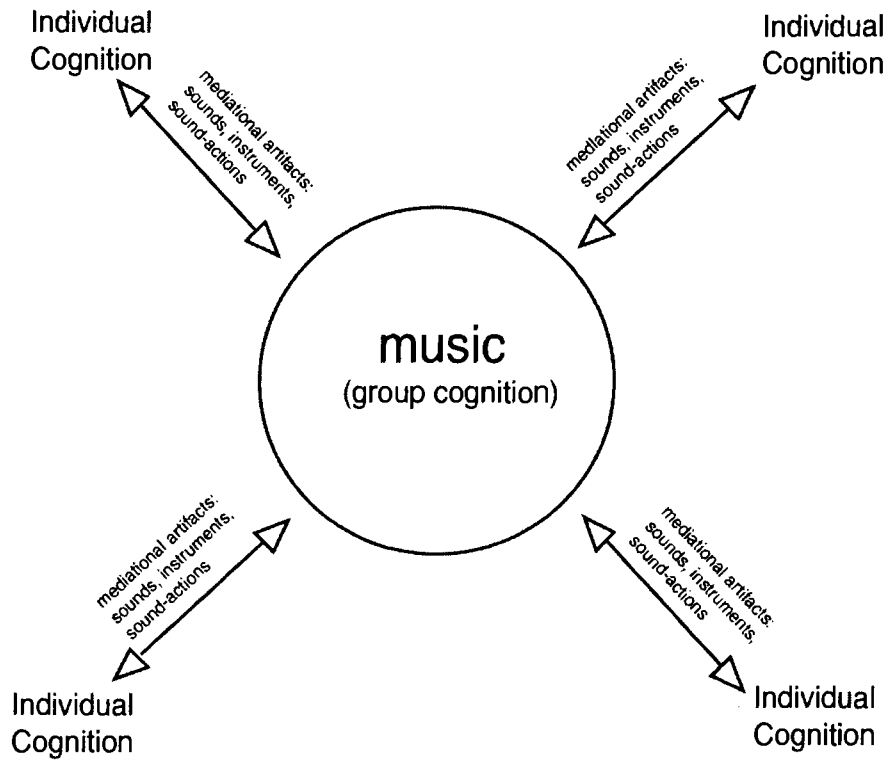

Figure 3 Group Cognition

Figure 3 shows a kind of hierarchy of mediations which is a bit more accurate than the triangle. Both arrows and circles represent mediational relationships of different kinds. The two-way arrows show the contribution and interchange of musical ideas between individuals—through the mediating influences of instruments and sounds—to the central circle, the aural tapestry which is a kind

of nexus for distributing cognition. Unlike the triangular model, figure 3 shows that music is not just the object of the group activity, but is also the mediational artifact central to the activity.

To continue with the idea of the drawing child and the model in figure 3, proficiency as an improvisor must comprise the ability of the performer to react to aural stimuli and contribute her own ideas and sounds while weighing the complex range of possibilities presented by the group of players and instruments. The experienced improvisor often makes certain musical gestures with the intention of directing the outcome of the musical performance by altering the aural tapestry in ways which they hope will suggest actions to the other members (as in Sonya's initial gesture in our example). Improvisational skill is also based on the ability to *predict* the musical result of personal sound-actions or the actions of others based on previous sound-actions manifest in the remembered aural tapestry. These predictions may be subverted or confirmed by the actual outcomes of group interplay.

This model of improvisation does account for the some of the ways in which group members interact, at least, it describes a kind of musical 'mechanics' of the activity, but it also exposes some fundamental questions. What is it that allows the musician to interpret his sound-actions or those of others in a way that allows for the production of a coherent, musical, group statement? Do certain sound-

actions function as signs which can be universally interpreted? After a recent concert, Rob was speaking to an audience member about our performance. They had asked something along the lines of our initial 'How do you do it?' question. Rob told the person that our playing was like "a conversation with an old friend." I have already explored the many dangers of using a language analogy as a way of understanding how music creates meaning. So is Rob wrong? Since Rob is a very fine musician and a very experienced improvisor, I am reluctant to dismiss his comments. Also, he is not alone in making this comparison; I have heard it from a great many fine performers who work together in close-knit musical groups.

In good conversations with old friends, one does not have to think about when to stop or how to proceed. In a conversation, such matters seemingly take care of themselves. The dialogue proceeds not by planning or conscious direction, but through a complex set of conscious and unconscious signals between conversants. Despite its essentially dialectically negotiated nature, a good conversation generally develops an overall narrative structure, usually around certain issues that seem important at the time (relationships, children, money problems, etc.). Certain comments or subjects provoke ideas, feeling, or directions in the conversation. As with Vygotsky's drawing child, we don't know what the conversation will be like until we are finished. If we have known our conversant for a long time, there will be many things such as shared

experiences, knowledge, or previous conversations which we do not need to discuss or explain. In fact, the literal syntax of the conversation may be almost peripheral to the real emotional substance of the interpersonal exchange. There is an essentially spiritual element to communication between friends. We'll hear more from Rob later, but let's keep his analogy in mind as we continue with our exploration.

Musical Archetypes

Thinking of musical gestures as signs or elements of a musical vocabulary is an attractive idea on the surface. It suggests that musicians could learn a repertoire of these signs and formulate actions or reactions based on durable meanings. Analysis of even a small number of recordings will quickly produce evidence that this cannot be the case. The same sounds can have radically different effects in different contexts. Sounds cannot hold consistent meanings outside of predetermined and highly organized tonal or rhythmic systems. We could *construct* an arbitrary system, such as the Western tonal harmonic system, where sounds stood for certain meanings, or demanded certain outcomes (see Berliner (1994) for a discussion of meaning and system in jazz.) but such a system is not *essential* to making music. Such a system could not be present in a group improvisation among players of divergent backgrounds who have never

played together before, yet they could still make music together.[1] After a performance, an audience member will often ask, "How do you know when to stop?" I usually respond, somewhat cheekily and to the obvious chagrin of the well-intentioned inquirer, by saying, "We stop when it is finished." This is a seemingly simple, yet critical exchange of information which goes to the heart of the matter; it reminds us of the conversation once again.

If we follow the activity theory of improvisation we have just produced, there must be present some sound or sound-action, either produced by one player or an emergent quality of the aural tapestry, which suggests that a piece of music should stop. Yet, as in the example of the child not naming her drawing until it is finished, the players really don't know how it will end until it seems complete. What is it that completes the piece? In a tonal harmonic system, there are specific root movements and voice-leading events which indicate stopping or coming to rest at a certain point. In the Indian *tala* system, the performance derives its distinct shape and structure from the agreed-upon rhythmic cycle in use and the piece inevitably ends at the beginning of a repetition of the cycle. Without such predetermined systems, the array of possibilities for 'ending gestures' becomes infinitely large. For example, let us imagine the ending of a group improvisation from our quartet. A very quiet, sustained sound is produced,

[1] For instance, I recently performed in a group with a Persian *tar* player, a Puerto Rican percussionist, and a Brazilian guitarist. There is no system of harmony in Persian music, nor is there a tempered tuning system such as governs my instrument, the guitar. To make things even more difficult, the *tar* player was used to playing within certain rhythmic structures which I did not understand (though perhaps the percussionist did). Nevertheless, we were able to play a very successful one-hour concert together.

sustained by the cello, bass, and viola playing with their bows while the guitar quietly and slowly plucks a single note. How do we know when or if the piece should end? Perhaps the sound will simply fade out, perhaps one player will stop playing and others will decide to stop in turn, perhaps someone will make a single loud contrasting sound that will shatter the mood and stop the piece. We could go on imagining possibilities for a very long time and would find that there cannot be a single gesture linked to the idea of ending, yet somehow we do come to the end.

Whatever occurs to end the piece, the 'ending gesture' must be cognitively distributed from one or more players to the rest of the group, or collectively produced as an emergent 'ending quality' in the medium of the music; communicated through the perceived aural tapestry to other group members. In this case, an activity theory model, a system of stimuli, actions, reactions, and interactions, does not adequately explain what occurs. Indeed, activity theory fails in this respect because its logic is derived from an essentially scientific viewpoint. It is concerned with describing the qualities of an observable process, and there are many aspects of improvisation which are simply not observable.

In our 'how do we end' example, there is clearly a deep level of connection which allows improvisors to come to collective decisions about the direction and general harmonic, rhythmic, textural, and timbral features of an improvisation. As I

mentioned before, the very notion that cognition can be distributed implies a connection that goes somewhat deeper than a simple stimulus-reaction explanation, but if we follow some of the directions suggested by our activity theory model we may discover something of more significance. I would like to suggest that the process of hearing and making constructs its own time-dependent meanings—lets call them short-term archetypes—specific to each improvisation.

Terms such as 'language' or 'vocabulary' have more specific and durable meanings and relate to a system of signs and symbols which is far too specific for music (see Graham, 1997; Hanslick, trans1986; Treitler and Walton in Robinson, 1997). In his use of archetypes in interpreting dreams (1933), Jung wholeheartedly embraced the irrational worlds of religion and myth as central metaphors for understanding human consciousness. For Jung, archetypes are recurrent thematic elements of the unconscious which help explain the general currents and directions of unconscious thought. Jungian archetypes help us construct meanings in a flexible and general way. Similarly, the musical archetype is any kind of generative or recurrent thematic element which helps to explain the structure or emergent qualities of a piece of improvised music.

In our quartet performance script, Sonya makes an initial sound-action (the loud screeching sound). The players immediately perceive and, more importantly,

remember the sound. They *interpret* the sound in various ways and Sonya's screeching sound becomes part of a temporary set of meanings specific to the improvisation at hand; it is a mini-archetype representing different ideas to different players. Each player now relates further sounds in terms of similarity to or difference from that archetype, perhaps associating other screeching, harsh, or loud sounds with Sonya's initial gesture. Some players may graft certain emotional or intellectual reactions onto this archetype. For instance, Alex associates the sound with his own predilection for noisy and jarring sounds which he feels provide the music with excitement. Rob and Jared classify this sound as contrary to their mood, something against which to react. In this sense, the sound acquires a general character which is created and remembered by each individual and becomes part of what Gordon Graham (1997) poetically calls 'a vocabulary without grammar'. Sonya's screeching sound thus acquires a kind of meaning which will hold for a period of time determined by the memory of each player in the group. The meaning is further defined by the kind of emergent qualities it tends to produce in the aural tapestry—if you make sound *x* then *y* is likely to occur. In this respect, the archetypal sound-action has a collective as well as an individual meaning. The collective, more general meaning is *negotiated* in the aural tapestry while the individual meaning is *constructed* in the mind.

Because sounds acquire this kind of time-specific archetypal meaning, improvisors can use these meanings to form a structure in which the sound-action archetypes are key elements. Because the retention and cataloging of sounds and their meanings is dependent on memory, stronger, more obviously different and distinct sound-actions are more likely to be retained. Because they are retained in memory, these stronger, more distinctive musical gestures are also likely to acquire the strongest and most durable meanings. A very short list of some distinctive sound-actions sorted by category might include:

- Contrasting sounds - very loud or soft sounds, very short or long sounds
- Unusual sounds - unexpected timbres, particularly dense harmonies, unconventional use of instruments
- Highly organized sounds - recognizable melodic, harmonic or rhythmic relationships such as drones or ostinatos, tonal tendencies
- Sounds with idiomatic character: habanera rhythm, Alberti bass figurations, waltz rhythms, Charleston rhythm , popular melodies, blues licks

The success and coherence of our quartet improvisation then relies on the fact that each player in our group has a highly distinctive musical 'signature' and that each makes consistently strong and imaginative musical gestures. Curiously, this creates a kind of structure that is both dialectical and narrative. It is narrative because the sound-action archetypes form a kind of 'collective conscious', a

developing story or, more broadly, a narrative arc which is understood as the background against which events take place. At the same time the structure is dialectical because new archetypes can be introduced and meanings and archetypal roles may shift. The structure will also be dialectical in the sense that the kinds of archetypal meanings that may arise and the kinds of reactions to or manipulations thereof are fundamentally dependent on the cumulative experience of the individuals involved, as well as the divisions of labour and community which we discussed earlier.

In the conclusion to their extensive studies of social cognition, Monteil and Huguet suggest that "to adopt the point of view of a social psychology of cognition entails the recognition of others as elements of individuals' personal histories and, hence, as one of the determinants of cognitive expressions and functionings."(1999, p.144). Thus, the act of improvisation simultaneously creates and is created by a dialectical negotiation of archetypal meanings. In a sense, the narrative formed by the group becomes a part of any future improvising activity—a kind of musical cycle in which new ideas are subsumed and recycled in ongoing acts of musical creation.

Mead and Vygotsky were primarily concerned with the *development* of higher mental functions in a social milieu. My use of their work depends on the idea that not only do higher mental functions develop through social interaction, but that

they also work through social mechanisms on an ongoing basis. I do not believe that higher mental functions ever exist in the mind of the individual independently of the situations which created them; the idea of purely 'internal' cognitive processes is an illusion. If certain forms of cognition develop socially then it follows that ongoing use of such faculties will depend on or will be triggered by similar social interactions. In the case of the improvisor, this means that the kinds of musical cognition which develop through group improvisation are permanently and inextricably linked to the activity of improvisation. This is not to say that the improvisor might not make conscious use of ideas gained through improvising for later use in other musical activities. I am simply suggesting that the kinds of meanings and associations attached to certain musical gestures in an improvisation have specific associations unique to the context in which they arose. Removing such musical ideas from their original context changes their fundamental meaning.

For example, in the course of improvising with the group, Alex discovers a new harmonic combination of notes which he had never heard before and later he composes a piece of music which develops that discovery in various ways. The new harmony has distinctly different functions in the improvisation and the composition. In the improvisation, the new harmony is produced in direct response to certain aural stimuli produced by Alex and the group. In that context it also serves to provoke responses from others in the ensemble. Other group

members continue with their improvisation by attaching short-term archetypal meanings to Alex's gesture. This may or may not affect the overall direction of the group improvisation. In the context of the composition, the new harmony becomes a central organizing factor in the music (this *might* also happen in the improvisation). Because he can write down the new idea on paper, he can carefully construct a series of associations and meanings based on the implications of his discovery. Whatever he chooses to do with his discovery, the musical result will be Alex's alone. The archetypal meanings ascribed by other group members could not possibly be a factor in Alex's composition (unless he records and transcribes the improvisation) and so the musical ideas which develop will be distinctly different from the results of the group improvisation.

Of course, within a group like ours that performs together over a long period of time, more durable archetypal meanings may emerge at conscious or unconscious levels. So, if we continue with our Jungian analogy, the collective consciousness produced 'in the moment' and applicable to a single improvisation may move into the collective *un*consciousness of the group over time. This musical collective unconscious would then consist of musical archetypes which have more or less consistently produced similar results in the course of improvising. This suggests that, even without thinking, members of the group can make musical gestures that direct the course of an improvisation. This was evident in Rob's idea of a conversation between old friends. It is also possible

that other unconscious musical archetypes may factor into the group's interactions. For example, if all members of the group are schooled in the Western tonal harmonic system (as the members of our quartet are), they may unconsciously react to notes which produce harmonic tension by unconsciously moving to release that tension. There are many other variables, far beyond the scope of this chapter to describe, that might contribute to the attachment of meaning to elements of music. It should be emphasized again that the archetypal meanings we are discussing are completely subjective to the individual's interpretation or, through the mediation of music to the individual's interpretation of total aural tapestry produced by a group of players.

Musical archetypes are useful in helping us make sense of the process of improvising. They allow us to attach roles and significance to what may seem to be randomly thrown together musical gestures. Nevertheless, this kind of labeling is only a way of interpreting the interplay of sonic elements. And music is much more than a combination of sounds. Almost all musicians that I know will describe their musical interactions in emotional rather than purely musical terms. There is something emotionally and spiritually satisfying, perhaps even cathartic about the process of improvising. In a very small measure, musical archetypes help us understand *how* music means—or at least how meanings may be constructed for improvising musicians. *What* music means and why is beyond the scope of this or perhaps any other theoretical explanation. While I think the

circular model I proposed in figure 3 is superior to some of the others we have looked at, it is still essentially inadequate in showing what really happens in an improvisation. Nevertheless, as an heuristic device, it does point us in the direction of further questioning and discussion. It helps us understand the kind of connections we are looking for in thinking about musical group interaction.

In the same way that Jungian archetypes help us understand the social and mythic origins of feelings and unconscious states, musical archetypes are a way of understanding deeper interactions in the collective consciousness of a performing group; they point to the way in which emotional and spiritual elements interact. According to this idea, musical archetypes don't just have structural and narrative significance in musical terms, they stand for emotional states or conditions of the psyche. Of course, it is impossible to point to durable, universal meanings for musical archetypes; the dialectical nature of the improvisational process and the essentially subjective nature of musical perception deny such associations. At the same time, most experienced improvisors often feel a sense of unity of purpose and even emotional state with their fellow players. This unity of purpose and emotional state is the collective conscious, the essentially metaphysical quality in improvised music. There is at the center of improvised playing, and other kinds of music making as well, a spiritual core. The kind of deep interpersonal connection that can occur in the process of creating music with others is about *being* and *becoming* together.

The collective consciousness achieved by improvisors is a higher state of consciousness which can be shared through an intense focus on the medium of sound and the activity of listening. Although we can achieve through analysis a sense of deeper understanding of the activity of music making, all of our work at labeling and deconstructing the improvisational process leads us in the end to the fundamentally mysterious power of improvised music to consciously and unconsciously connect the thinking and feeling of musicians. This is as it should be. In Sufi philosophical traditions, real knowing about music comes only through intense experience of music making and listening, leading to a revelation of sound as an aspect of the oneness of God and the universe. Great musicians know music this way. Jelaluddin Rumi (as translated in Barks, 1995) said it all much more succinctly and beautifully back in the 13th century. Let us return again to his poem for understanding.

> Don't worry about saving these songs!
> And if one of our instruments breaks,
> it doesn't matter.
>
> We have fallen into the place,
> where everything is music.

The strumming and the flute notes
rise into the atmosphere,
and even if the whole world's harp
should burn up, there will still be
hidden instruments playing.

So the candle flickers and goes out.
We have a piece of flint, and a spark.

This singing art is sea foam.
The graceful movements come from a pearl
somewhere on the ocean floor.

Poems reach up like spindrift and the edge
of driftwood along the beach, wanting!

They derive
from a slow powerful root
That we can't see.

Stop the words now.
Open the window in the center of your chest,
And let the spirits fly in and out.

Embodied Playing

It is no accident that this chapter has been moving gradually away from a traditional conception of cognition and creativity. After thinking carefully about what I do when I improvise, it became clear to me that there is more than just conscious thought going on. As I wondered about the nature of this conscious thought, I realized that there were unconscious elements of the process which were equally important. As I thought more about the unconscious elements of the process, I realized that our traditional, Western ideas of the conscious and unconscious didn't fully explain what was happening either. As I meditated on my own improvisational process, and as I re-imagined what it is like to begin an improvised performance, I had a third important realization. There is more to me than thinking. I live in, I am, a body as much as I am a mind. My body makes the music audible.

I recently asked my friend, Victor Bateman (a fine bassist from Toronto), what he thought about the role of body in improvised performance. In his typically dry style, he said something to the effect of, "Well, if I hold the neck of the bass with my right hand instead of my left, I can't play." This might seem fairly obvious, but it does point out an essential aspect of music making; a huge portion of creative activity in music relies on the body. Despite this fact, music education tends to focus on intellectual activities, particularly on reading music notation. Dalcroze (trans. 1921) identified this problem long ago:

> The trouble with most educational practice is that children are not made to experience things themselves until the very point at which they are expected to learn from what they do, instead of having active experience right at the start of their studies when body and brain are developing in parallel and are constantly communicating their impression and feelings to one another. (p.5)

In other words, we ask students to read and understand music before they have had a chance to actually make sounds. Because the focus of most performance education is on reading and interpreting the musical score, it is clear that the composer, the maker of the score, is at the top of the musical hierarchy and that the compositional process is the highest ideal of music making.

The compositional process is essentially solitary, intellectual, and abstract. In contrast to this, the primary activity experienced by most student musicians playing in an orchestra or band is a communal one that relies not on an intellectual process, but on the essentially physical activities of making sounds with instruments and hearing them with their ears. This can result in a social distinction between the upper class of musicians who produce the scores and the lower class of musicians who read them. In this educational system, the bulk of creative activity is left to the composer who produces the musical object or 'work' and the conductor who directs the musicians in realizing the composer's vision and directions with the greatest possible degree of accuracy. While it is quite *possible* to perform and interpret scores in a creative fashion, the majority of

players are better behaved and are quite happy to simply follow orders like dutiful footsoldiers (Small 1998, Prévost 1999)[2].

By handing over the creative part of music making to composers and relinquishing interpretive and aesthetic decision-making to conductors, music educators have systematically denied the creative potential of performing musicians and have denied the key role of the body in the creative processes of creating and hearing sound. They have even denied the composer any real creative interaction with other musicians. My own experience as a composer in a doctoral program in composition was essentially dull for this very reason. I sat by myself for hundreds of hours creating a piece and then had my 10 minutes of 'fame' in performance. In the best of performances, the music would sound like what I heard in my head. But the performance, the actual hearing of the sounds was in many ways the *end* of my musical creative process. Here were dozens of musicians doing my bidding, bringing music from my inner world to the real, physical world of sound, and yet I felt no creative interaction or dialogue with any of them. There was no interaction, no surprises, nothing further to be done except a few revisions. It was all very abstract and lifeless. No one had an intense, real, bodily interest or stake in the music. I believe that performers not only possess creative potential equal to that of most composers, but that they also have something more to offer; they have a deeply embodied knowledge of

[2] Some performers go so far as to see themselves as co-authors with the composer of the score. See Senyshyn and Vezina (2002) for a more thorough exploration of this idea.

music which comes from thousands of hours spent with the instrument, bathed in its sound. A musical pedagogy based on improvisation has the potential to help musicians realize their full creative potential by acknowledging and utilizing this embodied knowing about music.

Improvisation is essentially a physical and kinesthetic process. Improvising musicians are engaged in an activity which requires split-second decisions and judgments of musical value. Whatever sound is produced must be acceptable for the music at hand. It must be used and developed. Each idea must flow from the previous in a continuous flow of sound. There is simply no time in the course of an improvisation to deliberate or ponder what should come next. Hesitation might cause an irreparable rift in the structural fabric of the music. The improvisor holds as the highest ideal a direct, instantaneous link between thought and action, idea and sound. In learning to play an instrument, the improvisor trains the body to produce sounds and to explore their relationships.

Though I am not fond of analogies in talking about music, this is one instance where I think there are useful comparisons to be made. A tennis player intent on returning a serve doesn't think about where the ball is or think about what is required to make it go in a certain direction. The tennis player's body has learned from the repetition of thousands of strokes precisely the angle of attack and degree of force necessary to return the ball in the direction of choice. The

player relies on her body to 'know' how to hit the ball. In this activity, the athlete relies on the body to know what to do and how to proceed. Though we rely on similar forms of training in music education (especially with regard to repetition of physical tasks with an instrument), we deny the true potential of embodied, creative musical action by dictating and restricting the course of musical action through the score. Though there is clearly a kind of embodied, near-automated process at play in the reading of notation, the range of possible action is severely limited by the score.

Improvisation, on the other hand, opens the possibility of an infinite range of bodily and intellectual reactions to essentially aural, rather than written stimuli. How is this kind of musical skill developed? It seems very unlikely that improvising musicians have super-brains that work faster than those of other musicians or that 'anything goes' and they simply don't care what happens in the course of an improvisation. I believe that improvising musicians rely on their bodies to make many important musical decisions. I have recently been observing this process in my own improvised performances and have been discussing this with musicians with whom I work. In the subsequent passages, I would like to relate some observations of my own practice which illustrate what I mean by 'embodied knowing' as it relates to musical improvisation and also to bring into the discussion some very insightful descriptions of this phenomenon from my musical partners Bill, Daniel, Clyde, Rob, and Lao-Tzu.

Resonating: Musicians in Dialogue

Not too long ago, after a concert of improvised music, one of the audience members asked "How do you know what to play first?" This is a very simple question (which I wasn't able to answer) but it caused me to think very carefully about what exactly was going on at the moment an improvisation begins. At that moment, I am not *thinking* of anything. The silence that proceeds the music is a time of waiting to hear what will happen, not planning the course of musical events. Let us return to the poem from the *Tao Te Ching* which I introduced in Chapter 1. It provides a beautifully poetic and telling description of this stage of performance.

> Thirty spokes join one hub.
> The wheel's use comes from emptiness.
>
> Clay is fired to make a pot.
> The pot's use comes from emptiness.
>
> Windows and doors are cut to make a room.
> The room's use comes from emptiness. (p.11)

I learned long ago that trying to imagine what will happen or to predict the actions of the other musicians is futile.[3] When I do try to plan what will happen or to

[3] I am speaking here of the beginning of a performance. Once people begin to play, it becomes easier (though still uncertain) to predict what will happen next.

anticipate the initial musical actions of others, my expectations are almost always wrong. In addition, the period of time it takes to readjust to the change of musical direction is usually detrimental to the overall 'flow' of the performance that follows. In expecting a certain kind of music to occur, I set up subconscious emotional, intellectual and physical parameters for the performance which may have no relationship to what will actually happen. As Lao-Tzu observes in the preceding passage, if I am full of preconceptions and expectations, my ability to make music is severely limited. My musical usefulness and effectiveness comes from listening. Even if I were performing solo and could dictate fully the way a performance would proceed without regard to musical input from other musicians, prior planning has a way of confounding the improvisational process. Planning the music ahead of time is essentially a compositional process, not an improvisational one. The more one is concerned with directing or affecting the musical proceedings in an improvisation, the less one is listening to what is really going on. If one remains open, flexible, and ready to listen, the music will come. This is *wei wu wei*, 'doing without doing' of the *Tao Te Ching* (Lao Tzu, 1993).

Prompted by my own difficulty in answering, "How do you know what to play first?", I put the question to my friend Bill Clark (2003, July 6).

> **Jared:** When you are approaching...when say you are starting a piece or you're in the midst of a piece and you're reacting to something, musically

speaking, do you rely on bodily reflexes to a certain degree or are you more intellectually aware of it as it goes on?

Bill: There's a relationship and it goes left-right, it goes back and forth, it goes... At my very best my body is saying, "I hear a sound" and I just go for that sound and my body does everything...on a very good day my body is doing some pretty extreme things to get that sound, but I'm nowhere near conscious of it. Then on a day when making music is a bit more of a struggle and I'm not as 'in tune', I'm not as 'at one', then I have consciously tell my body to do certain things to get that sound. That's just if I'm blowing straight-ahead on a jazz thing. On a good day of trumpet playing, I'm not thinking physically at all, but that's *because* I'm so physically in touch that day. It's sort of like a circle. If everything is feeling really great physically then I don't have to think about the physical stuff. If everything's *not*...if I'm having one of those days when I'm having some shoulder or back problems, then all of a sudden I find myself having to say "I'm gonna squeak out this high B. That means I have to lift my diaphragm this way or I have to use this much pressure." That's usually not as good a day of playing. That's why I think it's really important. This is just strictly mechanics, but that's why it is important for me since I'm in my forties, to make sure that for the next twenty years I'm doing things that will make

me feel physically pretty good. Because things that used to be pretty innate...now sometimes I don't have that kind of a day.

At this point, Bill is describing the critical importance of a solid technical foundation, including things like posture and exercise, in the mechanics of playing the instrument. It is interesting that he uses the idea of a circular relationship between physical and mental aspects of playing. The circle suggests a very intimate and complex relationship which stands in stark contrast to the philosophical notions of mind/body dualism which underlie most music education today. Rob Kohler (2003, July 12) relates a very similar experience of the way that seemingly unrelated physical conditions can affect his playing.

Jared: I've been thinking a lot about the role that the body plays in improvising. A lot of times we think of music as a very intellectual process, or a technical process or a compositional process. But it seems to me that when we are improvising that the body plays a major role. I'm talking about beyond the mechanics of playing your instrument. What is that like for you? Do you think that things like reflexes or trained responses or muscle memory, or any other bodily condition that you're experiencing...does that have an effect your improvising? Or what kind of role do you think your own body plays in your creative process.

Rob: Whenever I play music I try to have the mental...I'm trying to set myself up in a very specific mental space where, if I have physical discomfort or its too cold or too hot out or whatever, *that* cannot have a conscious effect on what the music sounds like even though it will have a subtle influence on the music. In other words, my physical body...I want my chops to be up, I want my mental capacities to be up and when I step into the role of musician its time to make it happen. It's time to give it one hundred and ten percent to what's happening in that moment. So to say that my shoulder hurts, or that my big toe hurts diminishes that hundred-and-ten percent effort. So theoretically, that is my first response to that. My physical body is not...that I have to be beyond what my physical capabilities are. I think I see that all the time especially as players get older and so on. But then at the same time there are specific physical things that *happen*.. I have a tendency when I'm standing that my knees give in every now and then; they do a weird little thing. I find that there is a very specific stance that I get into when I'm *really hearing* music. I have a tendency to put my head up in the air and I kind of make my body rigid and it helps focus an energy into my hands in a very specific way that allows me to physically do certain things. In other words, I have to put my body in a certain motion to make very fine detail things happen, which is bizarre because it has *nothing* to do with those fine detail things. But for some reason there's like...back to your first statement, the *less* conscious

I am of my physical being I've noticed that these certain physical things happen as I'm getting out of the way physically to let the music come through my body. Music is physical, the sound is physical, everything about music is physical...but if I try to control the physicalness of it—outside of just trying to be relaxed, that's pretty much all the consciousness I will allow myself to have...theoretically still—is just to relax, to loosen up, to not be tight. You know, those kind of things. Another aspect of it is that I like to stand because I can physically move—sometimes music can be painful if someone hits a cymbal too hard or if the guitar is too loud or those kinds of things—I will physically move and the music will sound completely different and I will react that way so that my body moving in and out of the sounds of the music...I have a tendency to find a place where I can hear everything and stay there. I don't like to move around the stage so much because my *tone* sounds different because I'm playing through an amplifier most of the time. And then the physical dancing part [Rob 'dances' a bit when he plays]...I don't feel like I dance like a dancer when I'm playing music—even like latin rhythms or really specific dance rhythms—but I'm constantly...the music *itself* is constantly making me *move* and making me *feel* it. I try to move spontaneously. I'm trying *not* to be conscious of what I look like or what physical movements I'm actually making, but I know that I do move around and I *am* conscious of the fact that I'm standing there on stage.

Like Bill, Rob is very practical in his views about the effects of the body on his playing and despite my obvious prompting in the phrasing of the question to talk about more abstract ideas, he hones in on factors which are first and foremost in his mind—the practical concerns of playing the instrument. Rob and Bill are both keenly aware of exactly what they need to do to make the music happen in the way that they would like and it is practical concerns which first spring to mind. I think this is likely due to the fact that both musicians have put in many thousands of miles on the road as touring players where performance conditions can often be very adverse to the creation of profound musical experiences.

Clyde Reed (2003, July 16) also cites some very concrete physical conditions which need to be met in order for improvising to proceed smoothly. Like Bill and Rob, Clyde is a veteran of many performance tours.

> **Clyde:** Now the bass is a very physical instrument and if you're tensing up and all of a sudden you have blisters and your muscles are tightening up so you can't really execute, your back starts to hurt. All of those things will take you out of the music. When the music is happening your total concentration is not in, "How am I physically?" You kind of want to be able to kind of ignore the body. So to be able to do that you have to prepare yourself to do it. So you have to have played enough that your fingers

aren't going to hurt. You have to consciously, over and over again, practice playing with relaxation even when it gets really exciting. You can be excited throughout your whole body, but don't be excited in any of the muscles you're using to play your instrument! That's a real discipline to do that. I try not to eat before I play. I never drink alcohol before I play. Sometimes I'm sleepy and I'll have something with caffeine to perk me up, but I find that when I don't do that the music will wake me up so that's kind of stupid.

Though such practicalities are not to be taken lightly, in the second half of his response to this same question it is clear that there are even more important things at stake for Bill in improvising.

Bill (continued): There's something that happens on the most ethereal level, to go to the farthest end of that question, where... I feel your body is almost resonating with the music. Your body is almost singing the song. It reminds me of that Weather Report album title, *I Sing the Body Electric.* You know, where you feel like you're putting the trumpet up to your face and you're *singing*. Now that's at its best. That's a very physical thing. It's a physically unconscious thing, but really what's going on is it's a very advanced physical thing where feel like you just feel like your body is resonating the notes that you're playing. It's just *singing* out of you and

doing all the right stuff. Going back to your question, that does come from muscle memory and repetitive practice. I don't think its that much different from really standard practice techniques. If I've been here enough times before...I've meditated on it in a way. I've been here enough times before ...I might be doing something different with it, but I've been here before and my body is hearing it. It's my body that's hearing it, it's my body that's singing it and my trumpet is just there. My trumpet is just an amplifier.

Jared: That's a great phrase, your "trumpet is an amplifier." What's it amplifying?

Bill: That sound! That's inside my head and my body. At my best its not inside my head, it's inside my body and my head. At the very best you're just resonating this sound and because you're a trumpet player you know that sound on the trumpet. Your trumpet *is* the way your voice sings. At the very best it's amplifying my musical idea. And if it was a saxophone I put there, it would be similar but it would be altered in a way because there is an intermediary kind of thing that happens. But because I've played the trumpet so long...the two of us when we are really feeling good—like I say I wish it was more often than not but—there's just no kind

> of editing that goes on. That's at its best...when I know I don't need to question anything. I just need to play.

Like Bill, I rely on a *feeling* or *hearing* in my body to make the initial musical gesture of an improvisation and to respond to the subsequent musical (re)actions of other musicians. In the silence that precedes the improvisation, I wait for my body to make the first move. I rely on it to know what to do and to do it well. Perhaps I feel a sudden violent motion which produces a strident, clanging sound, or perhaps I feel a need to slowly pluck one soft and gentle note. There is a connection between a kind of subconscious musical feeling and the movement of my body in relation to the guitar. This connection is, in the best performances, free from intellectual entanglements and conscious effort and has a kind of psychic and emotional immediacy. I feel a kind of short circuit happening between my subconscious mind and my embodied action, completely bypassing and subsuming expectations, aesthetics, and judgments. My conscious mind observes the action from without, watching my own performance unfold. Clyde Reed (2003, July 16)describes a similar experience.

> **Jared:** Since your body is trained to perform all these really complex activities and since you're often mentally occupied (if there is a distinction between mind and body) at some stage with observing what is going on, listening, aurally observing what's going on...

Clyde: I always play with my eyes closed actually. Its just through hearing and feeling. That's it.

Jared: So you're aware of all these other things…is there a kind of trust of your body there? Do you ever trust it to produce musical ideas unconsciously?

Clyde: Yeah! I don't think it's a calculating brain that I use when I play music. I use lots of calculating analytical brain when I'm being an economist, but when I'm a musician I don't find that part of my brain that useful. The great gigs, the really transcendent playing is… I can't remember it afterwards very well. It was effortless going through it and there was no conscious thinking going on at all. Things just happen. I just played certain things. I just reacted in a certain way or instigated in a certain way.

Jared: Since we're talking about that duality, do you believe in your playing that there is any duality or is it more of a whole mind-body connection for you?

> **Clyde:** I think that that it's a little holistic for me. Or at least I can't consciously separate it out. I want to not be aware of my body. I don't want it to be giving me any trouble. I want it to do what my emotions tell it to do and I don't want to be thinking too much when I'm playing. At least not thinking in an analytic kind of way...

Does this mean that there are no aesthetic judgments, no values or expectations present in improvised music? Of course not. In the process of improvisation, such things are entrusted to the body, or to that connection between the subconscious and the body which produces the musical impulse. Here, as we can see from what I have written thus far and from what Clyde says about his improvising, we run into a problem with the English language and the bulk of Western philosophy, which is essentially dualistic in the labeling of mind and body as distinct entities.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) suggest that it is impossible to describe any aspect of mind without reference to the physical body. They believe that even processes and ideas that we consider to be most abstract (including musical ones) are rooted in and are understood as metaphorical references to bodily experience. The words 'conscious' and 'subconscious' refer to states of mind, not states of body. In my description of a link between subconscious thought and physical action I am trying to point to a third state of being, a state in which the two are

fused into a kind of uniquely musical consciousness—a seamless, embodied, aesthetic sense which provides both creative motive and action. In a sense, the idea of 'resonating' as I have used it in the title of this current section, is a bodily metaphor rooted in the understanding of musical creation and the physical phenomenon of musical vibration. Improvising is an essentially musical way of being in and interacting with the world and other people which requires the musician to cultivate this third, resonating state of consciousness to the greatest extent possible. In our interview, Daniel (2003, July 12) described in detail his experience of mind/body dualism in his improvising.

> **Jared:** You talked about a collective consciousness or collective unconsciousness, however you want to view it. When you are talking about that it seems like you are viewing that as a musical source in a way. Do you think that your body and your intellect—if you separate those— do you think they have different kinds of access to that source?
>
> **Daniel:** Oh, absolutely! Yeah, because if you dig around in that reservoir I was talking about you're gonna pull out some dance steps, absolutely, and some particular body movements. There's a whole repertoire of physical gesture that can come up in response to music. So I feel that perhaps that's the body responding. I don't think you can have one without the other; so it's very difficult for me to separate them. I think you

> can have instances where the tapping into the reservoir is being drawn more into the mind less into the body or more into the body less into the mind, but I don't think you can have a separation. Theoretically we can talk about it for convenience's sake, but I think in reality its not actually attainable, that separation. Also when you talk about mind...I tend to separate mind and brain. Brain is a body function; mind is an occupying alien! (laughs)

All jokes aside, Daniel points out an important aspect of the circular relationship between body and mind which Bill brought up in his interview. It seems that for both of these musicians, there is a continual movement of focus between the intellectual and the physical aspects of improvising and that the shifts can be caused by a wide range of factors and conditions. Yet as Bill and I have suggested there are moments when even this cycling seems to merge into an indistinguishably unified phenomena.

> **Jared:** What about in a kind of peak musical experience? You know these kind of really special moments that come up in improvising, or the compositional process, or in some kind of performative process of some kind going on where you have these peak experiences? In the moments when you are having some kind of peak musical experience, do you find that it's more of a bodily experience or more of an intellectual experience?

Daniel: Oh, I see what you're getting at. I think I understand where you're coming from. When those experiences happen to me it's a giving up; it's a surrender. And quite often, since I'm talking about intuition and remaining opened, that surrender is of my intellectual faculties, right? So yeah, absolutely, when that peak experience occurs it's that resolution of a dynamic tension. Its what the meditation inside folks go for— the people who sit and meditate for hours at a time forcing themselves through their physical pain—they get to the point where they are just a channel of energy going. I think that's a similar experience. Everything is surrendered to the experience and you become a channel. *I* become a channel. I become something which is part of it but also having it move though me. In a sense that's a very physical experience. It's like a *vibrating* body.

Daniel describes here the moment at which the tension between mind and body, between intellectual conception of sound-ideas and physical production of sounds, is resolved into a harmonious vibration. Bill and Daniel both characterize the experience as vibrating or resonating with the music. They also both describe a resulting effect of that vibrating—Daniel's 'channel' and Bill's 'amplifier'—in which they seem to be responding to something greater than themselves, a transcendence of normal experience. They are resonating with the

music. I find this especially profound because the oscillation of the metaphorical mind-body cycle and resulting vibrations are perfectly in accord with the actual physical processes of sound production and hearing.

As I have said before, this kind of transcendent musical experience is what is most important about improvising. As satisfying as it was to hear other musicians echo my enthusiasm for such rarified phenomena, Rob, in his typically pragmatic Montana style, brought me back down to earth and provided another perspective with a very keen observation of his own experience as a working musician.

Jared: Can I probe you on something?

Rob: Yeah.

Jared: You said something about getting out of the way so that the music can come through you. Does that mean that you are helping your consciousness or your intellectual side to get out of the way so that the music comes though? And in that case is your body acting like some kind of conduit then? Do you trust your body to take care of things on its own?

Rob: Yes and no. I've heard many great musicians talk about that very thing in great detail. And I agree with it...you know that you are kind of an

antenna. Another idea I like is that music never really ends but just every now and then you kind of step into music and you can hear it where you stepped in and when you decide to you can step out but it just keeps going anyway. From my own personal experiences of it, there's definitely a lot of mental chatter in my brain when I'm playing. When the band is happening and I'm participating in a high level of concentration, the mental chatter is not there...as much. When I'm playing with lesser musicians or inexperienced musicians, or musicians that really don't understand how to play a specific idiom, then my mental chatter is on full tilt and I am self-consciously aware of what is happening around. In both extreme instances...well there's two ways of looking at it. I've had experiences where I felt like I wasn't even *there*, like I don't even remember what happened, but I know it was awesome and I felt that I participated—not that I was physically out of my body, but that kind of feeling—and I've had tape recorders running and when you listen back you don't even remember what happened. You know that kind of thing. And then I've had experiences where I've been so consciously aware of the *struggle* of it, of trying to make I happen...and that usually has to do with how the audience is participating. Sometimes when you struggle with the mental energy of calculating chord symbols or maintaining a 7/4 rhythm or things like that...sometimes that's actually a *peak* mental state that actually... actually the struggle is what the audience is picking up on...the

effort...that actually creates a more interesting kind of 'over the top' music. The other extreme is when you're just feeling great and everybody's having fun and the concentration is there and you can't make a mistake because everybody is 'picking up'...but the music doesn't come out as strong because you're so comfortable or something. So there's a whole complicated array of mental energies. I don't know which one is better. I obviously prefer to be in a situation where everyone's mental state is similar and on and in the room and trying to make it happen. But I also enjoy the times when you're struggling with somebody and trying to keep it together and push the envelope. When you say...to get out of the way of that process...it's a combination for me because...I'm not convinced that being separated from that process mentally is always the best way to do it as far as the quality of the actual music. What I've tried to do is find a state of mind or a mental position that creates the best music. So when I enter into a musical situation the idea is...the most important thing I'm doing is trying to make music. I've found that that is...the idea that I'm trying to make music out of the chaos, or that I'm trying to make it a musically happening thing, or that I'm trying to be musical is a more important state than just trying to be there and be a conduit.

It seems that although Rob echoes the ideas of the other musicians I talked with regarding transcendent possibilities of music making, he feels it important to admit that this does not happen all the time. In fact, he suggests that there are many other, perhaps more common, states of performative consciousness which can be very satisfying musically; or at least that are necessary in order to produce a successful performance.

The 'mental chatter' Rob describes is something which I believe most musicians experience. This is a kind of split consciousness where one part of the mind—and the body too of course—is attending to the tasks involved in playing while another part of the mind deals with important distractions arising in the course of the performance. These distractions are many and varied: other players playing too loudly or too softly, making an audible mistake of some kind, an audience member coughing loudly or rustling a candy wrapper; or it might be a difficult passage of music which requires careful attention to execute, or strings slipping out of tune. All of these things could potentially distract the musician from the kind of transcendent peak experiences described so well by the musicians in their interviews.

As Rob suggests, at times this may even be a preferred way of working. I believe that this ability to assess a musical situation and to decide on the kind of mental and physical state required by the situation is one of the qualities that

makes Rob such a fine musician with whom to collaborate. Interestingly, the ability to assess ones own involvement, including the state of the relationship of mind and body in the course of musical performance, suggests yet another layer of mind or consciousness at play. Rob seems to have little trouble conceiving many layers of conscious and unconscious thought working simultaneously through the body and interacting with the audience. This is another kind of circular metaphor which brings us back to the mediational triangle and circle diagrams which I proposed earlier in this chapter.

Ultimately, there is no one way to describe the phenomenon of improvisation. Individual musicians seem to have similar experiences, though they characterize and relate to the experiences in unique ways. In speaking with the musicians I interviewed, my original way of thinking about improvisation was confirmed and yet opened and expanded to a much broader conception of the creative process. I was most impressed by the way in which different musicians, from different musical and personal backgrounds, all spoke passionately and articulately about the importance of the process of musical creation in their lives. Each obviously had a very strong personal stake in music making and in improvising in particular.

What does all this have to do with education? It seems quite clear to me. There is more going on in music education than just learning how to manipulate an instrument or translate symbols on a page into sounds and there is more to it

than learning music history and theory or idiomatic performance practices. Music educators need to begin thinking about and teaching with the idea that music, and for reasons I have discussed at length in this chapter, *especially* improvised music, is a tool of self-discovery and self-transformation which draws human beings into a unique kind of relationship with one another and with forces beyond themselves. I'm always pleased to leave the last note in an improvised concert to Rob Kohler, so I'll leave the last word in this chapter to him too (2003, July 12).

> **Rob:** I think that music itself is a much larger thing than we can even fathom and that it's always an honour and a privilege to play music and to be part of the process of playing music. If you bring your one-hundred-percent individualness to it, and everybody else does too, that makes it even greater. In the free improvisation aspect of it...I think when musicians really listen to that moment and react to that moment and have a dialogue with each other within that moment...that newness, that spontaneity, that absolute-in-the-moment is what I consider to be the best part of being alive!

Towards a Pedagogy of Improvisation

5

Who should teach improvisation? Who should learn to improvise?

Thus far I have avoided two key issues for improvisation in music education, namely, who should be taught and who should do the teaching. It may seem unusual in a document which in the end is concerned with music education not to state at the outset which age group or type of student I envision as the target of my ideas, but there are reasons for this. First, I think that most of what I have said concerning music education, and my vision of the place of improvisation within it, has no necessary connection with any particular age group or level of musical experience. Because I view improvisation as an heuristic process for learning about music and its relationship to the self and community as well as a distinct form of music making activity, there is no point in a person's educational development when improvisation would cease to be of use or of value and no point at which it would be too early too begin the process of improvising.

Improvisation is not simply a musical skill to be learned and mastered; the act of improvising embodies a whole constellation of values and philosophies about the purposes and uses of playing music and the search for pattern and meaning in human life. I don't want to deny the possible benefits of improvisation to any

group of people by suggesting it either as an exclusive diversion for an elite class of accomplished musicians, a kind of generic and accessible free-play for beginners, or a social activity for arty dilettantes who are trying to be part of a 'scene', though improvisation could easily be all of these things. So who should learn to improvise? All musicians who want to understand music more richly and fully and to explore the limits of their creative abilities.

There are many benefits of incorporating improvisation into musical practice of any kind. I see some of the benefits (in no particular order) as:

- ability to imbue performance with greater personal conviction, commitment and original creative vision
- deepened experience of real creativity and artistic commitment to a goal
- 'opening' of ears to different sounds and musical ideas
- increased self-confidence in performance
- a development of personal aesthetic values around music and performance
- access to collaboration with other cultures where improvisation is found
- increased awareness of the process of musical communication among musicians and listeners
- increased interpersonal awareness and interaction within an ensemble

For musicians who already experienced performers within a traditional idiom, there are additional benefits:

- improved aural skills (ability to hear and understand complex series or groupings of pitches, harmonies, structures, and rhythms)
- expanded technical resources discovered and learned from necessity of improvised performance
- understanding of the individual's place within musical structure and form
- increased awareness of the need for a philosophical balance between structured and unstructured musical practice
- increased potential for self-guided growth and change in music over a lifetime.

There is a very practical reason why the ideas which preceded and those which will follow this chapter have not been directed at a specific group of musicians or at a specific level of schooling. The reason is that music education and music curriculum in schools that I have seen from kindergarten to university undergraduate studies, is in such a state of disrepair that it would be impossible to identify any group of students who possessed similar sets of musical skills and abilities. Depending on the school district and the individual school and teacher, music programs in elementary schools range widely in their level of musical activity—that is if there is a music program at all! For example, these are some

of the kinds of curricula of which I have personal knowledge in the Vancouver School District alone:

- 'music appreciation' programs where generalist teachers play recordings and ask students to write in their journals about music they like
- programs which deal with any of the orff/kodaly/recorder/ukelele based 'music-for-children' sorts of curricula
- programs which use software to help children 'compose' with a computer
- schools in which the only music heard by students is selected and played by the principal over the PA system at recess and lunch hours
- one school African and Brazilian drumming program in which students learn from a master drummer in the aural tradition. (lucky kids at that school!)
- wind band and string orchestra classes

High school programs show a similarly wide range of good and bad possibilities. One secondary school in a wealthy area of the Lower Mainland has four music teachers (three of whom have had careers as professional musicians), a recording studio, multiple practice rooms, a computer music lab, and a curriculum which offers band, orchestra, jazz ensembles and a variety of choirs. The teachers even set up performances for the jazz ensembles in downtown clubs. Students from this school regularly go on to the elite American university music schools on full scholarship. By contrast, I know another school in a less-affluent area where there is only one band and one choir on offer, where

students from all grades play together in the same group regardless of ability, and where the teacher is barely able to play an instrument. There are similar disparities in levels of music education in Canadian universities, though this seems to be generally acceptable; certain Universities will, of necessity, have various specialties and students will go where they need to go to get the music education they think they want and which the universities tell them they need in order to function in the 'music industry'.

It should be clear from the examples I have given here that there seems to be very few standards for teacher preparation in place in our public schools. Many schools and districts struggle to keep what small music programs they have in the face of government cuts and misguided societal pressure to teach only 'useful' and 'practical' subjects like math and language skills. Of course it is far beyond the scope of this writing to even begin to deal with the problems of curriculum and instruction, funding and politics, that exist in our schools and in our music education systems. I raise these issues in order to show that there is no way to establish a specific program or curriculum aimed at a specific age group or grade level. My suggestions for a pedagogy of improvisation therefore attempt to establish a general set of principles and philosophies to be followed in establishing a curriculum for teaching improvisors or for weaving improvisation into an existing curriculum.

This brings us around to the second half of our initial question: Who should teach improvisation? The answer is obvious and simple: experienced improvising musicians. As the kinds of political, social, and economic pressures I have just discussed have been trying to drive music (and creative arts in general) out of the curriculum, there has been a greater call for the music generalist or worse, someone who teaches an 'important' subject like biology who can do music 'on the side'. I simply don't believe that someone who has a 'general' knowledge of music can teach it as effectively as a musician, and this problem is only increased when we are talking about the teaching of a complex subject like improvising. This belief, however impractical it may seem, is rooted in a philosophical position and in practical experience. If I am to stick with the initial assertion of this thesis—that a musical education through improvisation is fundamentally a means of exploring, discovering, and understanding both music and the self—then I must follow through with the idea that *only* a person who has experienced the joys and difficulties of this process in a deep and meaningful way will be able to teach and guide students on their own journey.

A little story will illustrate better my beliefs in this regard. I recently had an interesting discussion with a student of mine who had decided she wanted to be a 'generalist' teacher and that music would simply be one of the many things she would teach. As far as I was able to discover, she had never been particularly good at, or interested in, any of the disciplines she had studied in university.

Each subject was simply of passing interest to her. A little distressed at the prospect of such a person attempting to 'teach' music (I was especially worried as she was planning to teach young children) I suggested that if she really wanted to include music as part of her teaching practice she should take some music lessons on an instrument or take some introductory classes—in other words, she needed to put in some serious effort. I was not trying to discourage her from teaching and I certainly do not mean to suggest that only professional musicians should even make an attempt at teaching any aspect of music. I simply wanted to help her understand that music is not simply a pleasant diversion, but rather a subject as worthy of study as mathematics or history. It is not something you can 'fake' as you go along.

Her response to my concerns was one which I have found to be all too common. She explained that she wanted to be the kind of teacher who acted as a kind of 'guide' for her students and that the fact that she had no deep and intimate knowledge of any of the subjects she intended to teach was of no concern since she wouldn't need to get to far into the details with such young children. She had decided it was fine to know a little about everything and nothing in particular about anything. I responded with an analogy using her idea of the guide. "Ok." I said, "Imagine you are a mountain guide up in Jasper National Park and I am a tourist from the city. You offer to take me for a three day hike into the mountains. You think you know all about hiking in the wilderness. You have a

map, good hiking boots, and lots of camping gear and you know just where you would like to take me. There are a few problems though. You don't know how to use a map and compass. Your boots are too new and you get huge blisters after the first hour. You don't know how to light your portable stove, so we have no food. When we reach our high-altitude campsite you realize that the lake we were going get water from is frozen, and the sleeping bags we brought are much too thin to keep us warm at the high elevation. You might have known this if you had ever climbed a mountain before. One of the other people on the tour cuts his leg and you don't know anything about first aid, so he is bleeding to death on the trail. A bear, attracted by the smell of blood, comes along to see what is going on and eats all of us for lunch. If you had ever been to the mountains before you would have been prepared for these things."

I don't know whether or not my story had any effect on this person. She was well-meaning and kind and loving and sincere...and completely inexperienced and unprepared to teach anyone anything meaningful about music. Of course there are no bears in the music classroom. What could be the harm in leading some music students astray, or leading them nowhere? I could have just as easily told a less dramatic, *but equally unfortunate* story about a hike that simply never left the parking lot at the park entrance. This is one of the reasons why music education is being eroded away so rapidly; people seem to feel that it simply isn't important, that a poor musical education is acceptable in a way that a

poor science education is not. "Wait a minute," you say, "You pointed out earlier in this thesis the idea that improvisation, in its very nature as an heuristic and dialogic process, makes the teacher a lot more like a student and gives the student a unique opportunity to claim personal creative authority and confront existential questions through their musical process of discovery." All this is true, but there is no way to guide students into the wilderness of music without having been there yourself. How can such a teacher be aware of the possibilities and problems, the joys and heartbreaks of learning to play music.

It *might* be possible for a generalist to shepherd a group of students through a band method book successfully or have them listen to and compare recordings of various musical styles, but any learning about the real nature of music making will be incidental. In the case of teaching from band method book, the non-musician music teacher has a clear idea of what the music will sound like and will be able to discern, at least at a rudimentary level, when success has been achieved. Improvised music is quite different from this because the music itself, especially the complex and frequently obscure musical relationships produced by beginning improvisors can seem like chaos to the uninitiated. How does the non-musician teacher know when a good performance has been produced if the music simply sounds to him like a chaotic collection of sounds? I frequently record the musical performances of my children (aged three and five years old) when they play around the house and I get tremendous satisfaction from

listening to both the original sessions and the recordings. Some of this, of course, is due to a father's admiration and love of his children, but I also hear a lot of great music in what they play. The sounds produced may seem like childish racket to a non-musician (or hapless house guests who are subjected to the recordings), but my trained ear discerns interesting musical relationships and impulses, even in what may seem to my mother-in-law like random banging on the piano and scrapings on the violin. My ears and mind are trained to look for patterns, order, expression, and relationships in sound and to make musical sense of these and so I am able to discern the music from the noise. This is not an ability that the generalist possesses, nor is it a common trait in many otherwise accomplished musicians and music teachers. This is an ability that is taught and acquired through much experience as a improvisor and which I can bring to bear on my music teaching. I can hear the music my children, or my beginning students are trying to make and can work with the musical ideas that they are already expressing. I suppose it might even be possible for a generalist to get students started in the improvisational process, but there is no method book or map to show them where to go from there.

My ideas about a pedagogy for improvisation are meant as a guide for people who *know* music and who have experienced and understand in significant measure its value and meaning in their lives. Nevertheless, as I have said before, 'knowing' music doesn't necessarily require that a musician be a great

improvisor or be able to explain the mysteries of the universe in four sentences, but it does require that a teacher have a depth and breadth of experience in music which makes their guidance meaningful and useful to students. This is not the kind of knowledge gained by dabbling or casual investigation of theory and history; it requires years of musical commitment and experience. While I clearly believe it is best for improvisation to be taught by competent improvisors, I recognize that this may not always be possible and I certainly don't want to suggest that a person should avoid trying to improvise or avoid trying to teach improvisation just because they are not experienced improvisors. You're not going to be eaten by a bear if something unexpected happens, but you do need to keep an eye, and more importantly an ear, out for the unexpected! In a sense this thesis, and especially this chapter, is a map for the experienced mountain guide. Just as an experienced, competent, cautious, guide with a good map could effectively guide a group into an area where she has never been before, I think experienced, competent musician-teachers can guides themselves and their students through the process of improvising.

The Hulk Versus Jackie Chan

The idea that there could be a pedagogy of improvisation does not negate the value of more traditional forms of music making and music training. Musical literacy (writing and reading notation) and familiarity with traditional idioms and forms have always had an important place in music education and I think this

should continue. Indeed, a focus on improvisation alone would be as narrow as a focus on learning only notated music. Nevertheless, I do think learning through improvisation can help musicians to gain a stronger sense of identity and purpose as creative beings as well as helping to build a strong awareness of an embodied relationship with music and the kinds of (inter/intra)personal relationships it represents. Improvising is a logical place to begin an exploration of music because it begins by engaging students with an exploration of the fundamental elements of music and teaches students to value the musician's key attributes of listening to others and listening to the self. It might serve simply as introductory experience to other kinds of music making, or it might hold sufficient fascination to absorb a person's entire life in music. Improvising as a central creative musical practice, by its very nature, teaches musicians to rely upon their bodies not only as mechanical tools but also as important sources of creative power, motivation, and energy. The purpose of this chapter is not to delineate a strict curriculum for learning to improvise; I don't think such a thing is necessary.

My thinking on how a pedagogy of improvised music should be structured draws heavily on the work of John Stevens, a brilliant improvising drummer and pioneering teacher of freely improvised music. His book, *Search and Reflect* (1985), written to accompany his courses for Community Music of London, outlines an excellent curriculum for learning to improvise for players with little or no experience. But I don't think that a music education which deals strictly with

improvising is sufficient to provide students with the kind of breadth and depth of musical experience which I believe to be important. Indeed, a narrow focus on improvising as a musical process would be as limiting and damaging as a narrow and exclusive focus on any other form of music making. In our interview, Daniel Heila (2003, July 12) gave a fabulous analogy which clarified my thinking about the kind of results I would like to see from a good musical education which includes improvising.

> **Daniel:** I think an over-focus in an idiom for instance—and I see that definitely having done improvisation with our ensemble and working with classical musicians—there is definitely certain rigidity there (with classical musicians). You spend a life knowing music to be the reading of notes off a page, though there is room for interpretation and things like that, you do introduce a kind of...its just like you work a specific muscle too much. You build up mass and you get these fabulously formed muscles but then you're stiff and you're not very agile. I always think about who's gonna survive longer, Jackie Chan or the Hulk, if you drop them into the middle of a wilderness mountain area? (hearty laughter) I mean it's pretty obvious right? You know, the lithe, beautifully fully-toned body that's toned by moving all its muscles at once in a harmonious way is gonna be able to adapt to the environment more than that pumped-up, stiff, muscle-bound thing. I don't know if that's really relevant...

This and the others ideas which follow assume a certain level of physical skill with an instrument. There is no way to experiment with music if the student is distracted by the simple task of getting a satisfactory sound from the instrument. There is no getting around the fact that making music with an instrument requires a substantial amount of preparatory work and it seems to me that the teaching of simple sound production and technical skills is largely unproblematic and is taken care of very well by those teachers primarily involved in this kind of activity.

On the other hand, there are many ways of making this kind of preparatory experience musically satisfying. A multitude of method books, programs and curricula have been carefully designed with the purpose of teaching basic instrumental technical skills and many of these seem to be quite successful in achieving a *kind* of technical ability. I think there is no reason to throw out many of these carefully researched and prepared methods, but I would like to suggest that none of them are even close to being sufficient for producing the kind of musical abilities and awareness which I believe are possible and desirable. It is certainly not very likely that improvisation will be very helpful in teaching someone how to form a good embouchure for playing the alto saxophone, or how to hold a violin bow correctly; indeed it might be quite detrimental in such an enterprise. It is clear that some things are best taught and learned in a very straightforward and traditional fashion and I am not interested in abolishing such

traditional modes of knowledge transmission. In four hundred years of violin or keyboard pedagogy and great musical repertoire there are a great many things of lasting value to be learned and treasured. Despite this, I think there is no reason why improvisation can't be included from the very beginning of any musical education, regardless of other curricular goals, with the purpose of helping students to gain a more feelingful, meaningful, personal relationship with the materials of music and their creative power over these materials.

The Role of Conditioning

I asked my musician friends about what they thought about an ideal curriculum for improvisation. Interestingly, rather than focusing on a pedagogy of improvisation, they all spoke of music education in more general terms but with a common view that improvisation can be a central practice and means of exploring and understanding new musical materials and ideas and in acquiring musical skills.

> **Jared:** What do you think would be an ideal training for an improvising musician?
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> **Daniel:** I think it's important to have a technical discipline with an instrument. I don't believe that mastery is necessary for improvisation, but I do think that having a very intimate relationship with working and

disciplining yourself to learn an instrument is important for improvisation. I think an openness to many different sounds and sources of sounds, a willingness to listen, and an openness in the mind across genres. Because sometimes there are times when I have been building something with my hands and I'll have tried to wrap my mind around a little problem and in the course of solving that problem of how to get this angle to fit properly, I'll solve some little musical problem I've had in the past. So there's a willingness to allow that kind of cross-genre problem solving to happen. So the technical experience of learning an instrument, of taking that to a fairly advanced level, and then also maybe some experience with the whole concept of writing music or how music fits together in a certain way... perhaps a theoretical understanding of some level. And then probably foremost is the ability to let go of all of that and trust your intuition. There's something about all of that that really is just putting meat on a framework for conditioning your mind, right? So you choose...I'm going to study this instrument and I'm going to study classical music and I'm gonna get to know the theory and maybe I'll learn how to write some fugues and that's all very consuming and you learn so much when you do that. *I* learned so much when *I* did that. But then when I come to improvisation, I try to clear my mind of all that. Not because I think it's extraneous or doesn't relate, but because it's served its purpose right?

Jared: Sorry, I'm going to interrupt you there. What was the purpose it served?

Daniel: A conditioning of the mind. Because I really do feel that there needs to be a certain conditioning in the creative spheres. Everybody can hike, everybody can run, everybody can climb given certain limitations of physical ability of course. But not everybody can run a marathon, not everybody can hike the Appalachian Trail, not everybody can climb a huge mountain. So there's different level of achievement and in order to progress through these levels of achievement you need to condition your body, right? I feel like though everybody can improvise, even someone for instance who has just picked up a hammered dulcimer for the first time, I think the experience gets richer and more multifaceted when the mind of the person improvising has been more fully conditioned. Is that making sense? I think there's this idea that if we all tune our minds to the egalitarian wavelength and just suddenly and spontaneously become an unfettered musician we can spew out this fabulous improvisatory genius; but I think that's a bit of a myth. It's got to come from *somewhere*. But it's that openness. It's being able to *retain* that openness through all the steps of the conditioning of the mind so that there is a tremendous receptivity, I guess.

Of course this makes a lot of sense, though from the point of view of traditional music education, Daniel's ideas here are somewhat heretical. Though jazz improvisation has become widely accepted, free improvisation is usually treated as a trivialized fringe activity in music education. It is subordinate and seen as a colorful adjunct to other, more important activities like composing, music reading, theory, and history. Daniel, by contrast, is suggesting that all of these other activities, as valuable as they are, may serve the purpose of enriching a person's experience of improvising and that all of these other kinds of musical skills were a preparation for his meta-musical process of improvisation. I think Daniel's idea of conditioning is very important here. He uses the word in a very inclusive and rich way to include a huge range of activities from note-reading to writing counterpoint to building something with wood. The concept of musical conditioning here is a very general one; he advocates a wide range of musical experiences and skills which may be put to a wide range of uses, but *all* of which are brought to bear in improvising and in producing a musically agile and adaptable musician.

Preparation and Freedom

Daniel's point of view on conditioning is very close to the classical Confucian connection between work, preparation, and freedom. Confucian philosophy, provides us with a very solid and coherent view of the intimate relationship between conditioning and freedom in a very simple and straightforward manner. In *The Doctrine of the Mean* 7:2 (trans.1870), Confucius makes several statements which describe very well the nature of music and performance.

> Common men and women may meddle with the knowledge of it (the Mean), yet in its utmost reaches there is that which even the sage does not know. Common men and women, however much below the ordinary standard of character can carry it into practice, yet in its utmost reaches, there is that which even the sage is not able to carry into practice.

This statement describes both the central problem and the great joy of learning about music. We can derive great enjoyment in the practice of music as beginners with little knowledge, yet as we gain more knowledge and ability, we find that there is always another level of understanding or ability that is just out of reach. Thus, the path toward balance, naturalness, or the Mean, which is of utmost value to the Confucian worthy, is parallel to the path to becoming a great musician. What Confucius has to say on how to travel the path will therefore be of worth and interest to musicians. In *The Doctrine of the Mean* 1:1, Confucius describes the central elements of his philosophy.

> What Heaven has conferred is called The Nature.
> An accordance with this nature is called The Path.
> The regulation of this path is called instruction.

As teachers of improvisation, we are trying to help students along a path guided by instruction, allowing the inner nature of the student to develop and be expressed. Confucius provides some insight into the nature of spontaneity and freedom which would be helpful for the student to understand. Consider the following statement on preparation and rules from *The Doctrine of the Mean* 20:16.

> In all things success depends on previous preparation, and without preparation there is sure to be failure. If what is to be spoken be previously determined, there will be no stumbling. If affairs be previously determined, there will be no difficulty with them. If one's actions have been previously determined, there will be no sorrow in connection with them. If principles of conduct have been previously determined, the practice of them will be inexhaustible.

This idea is also explained earlier in *The Doctrine of the Mean* 1:3.

> There is nothing more visible than that which is secret, and nothing more manifest than what is minute. Therefore the superior man is watchful over himself when he is alone.

A surface reading of the first passage might give us the impression that Confucius is afraid of anything unexpected or unregulated, but if we look at the last sentence in the passage, we find the key to a deeper reading. "If principles of conduct have been previously determined, the practice of them will be inexhaustible." This describes exactly what Daniel was talking about earlier. Successful improvisation is impossible without long detailed, and specific preparation for the musical task at hand. In the second statement, Confucius insists that detail is important. If details are left unattended, they become major stumbling blocks in the course of performance. Personal attention and dedication

to improving every aspect of performance is critical. For the student, these are useful statements. For many beginners, the practice and preparation that goes into a successful performance by one of their musical idols is not readily apparent. They only see the act of improvisation in performance, unaware of the 'behind-the-scenes' efforts necessary to make it all happen, as Confucius puts it, "without stumbling".

Daniel suggests that musicians who have prepared carefully, or who have conditioned their musical selves in the way that Confucius describes will find greater freedom, flexibility and richness of meaning in their improvising. If the preparation has been thorough, the applications of previously determined ways of playing are inexhaustible. Preparation allows the mind to combine previously determined ways of playing into something truly different and new.

> **Jared:** Given that this conditioning is very important, do you think that that kind of technical training and conditioning...do you think that that is best achieved through working in some idiom such as bluegrass, classical music, Malagasy guitar playing or whatever, or do you think that there could be a relatively abstract way of achieving that mastery outside of an idiom? You talked about fugue writing, which is a very specific kind of mental conditioning, or fugue playing which is another specific kind of physical conditioning, but

that's all within an idiom. Do you think that's the best way to achieve those things?

Daniel: I think just for practical purposes and for not running the risk of overwhelming a young person just coming into learning music, I think its convenient and practical to choose an idiom. I don't think one idiom is better than another. I think its practical to choose an idiom to start out with, just to enter into the realm of music, organized sound. And then, since we're talking about a person who is some point arriving at free improvisation, they are going to feel themselves moving in that direction. Again, that I think applies to the willingness to be open minded about stuff. So though they are focusing on a particular idiom they 're willing to open up and allow an excursion into another idiom, experience that for a time, and allow their experience there to either totally transform their initial focus or just to influence their continual focus on that initial idiom. But then again...no I'll stick with that. I think you've got to have a starting point.

Jared: But you're not saying at all that improvisation should be left for later.

> **Daniel:** No, oh no! In fact it's a fabulous way to teach people early on what form is, without being shackled to trying to read notes. Like for instance, ok today we're going to improvise a three-part form. And then you just do it and they don't have to worry about the content because they still know what form is. And I've done that with high-school players of varying levels of proficiency on their instruments and you know the result is very satisfying. No, I don't think improvisation needs to be left for a later time. *But* I'll qualify that. Again it's that conditioning and the further along that has gone... I believe then the experience for the player—the person participating in the improvisation and the audience— has a greater potential for treading new ground or opening doors or just for having a more expansive experience for everybody involved.

The precise method one chooses to develop this kind of musical agility seems not to matter very much so long as the goal is kept in mind; a long-range vision is needed in order to keep the means consistent with the desired ends. Incorporating improvisation into the kind of conditioning Daniel advocates can help to provide the kind of flexibility and openness which we both feel is important in music education.

Clyde Reed (2003, July 16) shines light on another facet of Daniel's thinking about training and conditioning and brings us around to investigating how it might be possible to make learning a little more like creating.

Jared: Can you imagine what you might think of as an ideal training or background for an improvisor and what might be included in that background or training?

Clyde: Ok. I think that there are two dimensions to it. One dimension is building the vocabulary, and I think for that you have to do the normal things—take music lessons, somehow learn how to get sounds out of your instruments, sounds that you like, and develop a vocabulary that you want to tell a story with. The second part is having a story to tell. How do you get a story to tell once you've got the vocabulary? I think the problem with most music education is that it just concentrates on giving you vocabulary and doesn't really have a pedagogy to tell you, once you have a vocabulary, how do you tell a story with it? And so you get these people with *huge* vocabularies. And if they spent less time building the vocabulary and more time telling the story they would be much deeper, more significant musicians. So how do you learn how to tell the story? I don't really know, but I think that experiencing nature, having great conversations, having great personal relationships, reading great books,

watching great movies, listening to a lot of great music—I think these are all part of it. And I think that walking in nature and having great conversations and reading great books is *at least* as important as listening to great music.

Jared: I want to press you a little more on the vocabulary issue.

Clyde: Go ahead! I can talk about it forever! (laughs)And I want to say this is not to denigrate vocabulary. It's *essential*! You can't tell the story at all if you've got no vocabulary.

Jared: Do you think, in terms of acquiring that vocabulary, that vocabulary is best acquired in the context of a well-defined music idiom like Mozart, or Japanese Koto playing, or bluegrass fiddle music or whatever?

Clyde: I don't have a comparison to make. I developed my vocabulary by taking classical lessons, both on piano and bass, and playing in a jazz context. So there were a lot of very specific ways to learn vocabulary that I was exposed to. I *wish* that in learning that vocabulary I had been more exposed to the joy of music. I don't think its...unless there are certain people who really, really disciplined...but the problem in learning vocabulary is that it can be a non-musical experience and some people

> have more tolerance than others for not making music, *working* at music. I don't have a real high tolerance for it. If I was forced to go through a program in which I had to spend a lot of time not being musical but just being technique-oriented....unless I had a way to make that musical I don't know if I could continue in it. Friends of mine know one of the 'monster' bass players in the classical world, Joel Quarrington, and they were at Banff and walked by a practice room and Joel listened and he said, "That's not practicing, that's playing." Ten hours a day on purely technical exercise for fifteen years or something like that. The guy could do it and still be musical! And I couldn't.

So Clyde also feels that a breadth of experience is necessary to improvise effectively and he expands on Daniel's requirement of general musical skills to include other extra-musical kinds of conditioning. But Clyde puts the emphasis not on the conditioning itself, but on the uses of the conditioned musical self. This is, of course, a very important point to make, but it does not contradict Daniel's ideas at all; as an improvisor, the 'Jackie Chan musician' is going to be a much better musical storyteller than 'The Hulk'. The point Clyde is making here is a very important one: *working* at music and *making* music are two different things. It is all too easy to leave improvising out of a curriculum by reasoning that there is musical work to be done first—the kind of conditioning that Daniel talked about. But working at music and making music don't really have to be such

separate activities. As Clyde suggests, there are ways of having the *working* happen at the same time as the *playing*, of experiencing the joy of creating musical while learning the skills necessary to be musically productive and creative. Clyde spoke in a very general way about how he acquired his vocabulary—taking music lessons on various instruments and playing—but this doesn't get us very far in terms of understanding exactly how improvisation could figure in the process of learning 'vocabulary'. Bill Clark (2003, July 6) gives us more detailed information on how he was able to go from simply working at music to making music while learning simple skills.

> **Bill:** Well, that's where the jazz tradition came in for me. When I practiced scales as a kid I practiced them right out of the Arban's book and that's how I learned to practice scales. But as soon as someone explained to me that I could look at scales as a kind of vocabulary, it changed the whole way I thought about music. And that came from the jazz tradition. I don't think it has to come from the jazz tradition, I just don't think there are that many classical teachers that teach that way but they could certainly... It's more of a philosophical leap than a technical leap to just say "Hey you know this material you've been playing up and down in thirds..." (Bill sings a short scalar exercise in thirds) You can make as many patterns as you want with your scales and make that part of your vocabulary and mix and match and changes keys, and look at vocabulary from the point of view

that jazz does teach...this is now a harmonic and melodic arena for you to play around with ... just pick a scale, run it up and down, play the arpeggios that exist within it and then just improvise with that scale for five minutes. That should be standard practice in any idiom—and I know it isn't—but I think that it can be and should be amongst any musicians. That should be something you do; run up and down the scales in thirds and fourths and fifths and do it just the way it is in the books because that's just harmonic material. But don't think of it as something you are reading off the written page, think of it as something you're *hearing*. Think of it as something that one day you can just use freely. Then after you're in that arena aurally, you're hearing that scale. Write down some of the ideas that come out of your head that you've never heard before; you'll probably find there's a pattern involved and you can practice that pattern the next day. To make improvisation an integral part of everyday practice, then I think you end up knowing that scale better.

Jared: So you're saying that by incorporating improvisational practice into any kind of music you're learning, you're making that music more personal to you?

Bill: Thanks for putting it better than I did. (laughs) I suppose that was my long-winded way of saying that as soon as you start playing around with

> that scale that's not written in a book somewhere, you're allowing your ear to take you places. That's what improvisation is. So you practice your patterns and things...now the big leap that you've made is...all that is vocabulary that is allowing me to make leaps to where my ear is taking me rather than having it be decided for me. As soon as you make that leap you are making personal choices. As soon as you start making those choices, you're personalizing the scale, you're personalizing the sound, you're personalizing the rhythm and you're finding you *inner voice* in whatever idiom. And that will only re-inform your performance of repertoire or whatever.

Bill begins with a very practical example of how improvising is a part of his practicing. Rather than simply play scales up and down, each scale, arpeggio or pattern can be immediately used in a creative way. The student can utilize the materials at hand to improvise melodies and exercises which explore a wide range of musical possibilities which may or may not be presented in a method or etude book. Bill suggests here not only that improvising should be a fundamental part of technical practicing, but also that it brings the student into a completely different kind of relationship with the materials of music—a personal relationship where the materials of music become a part of the students feeling and thinking.

When I am teaching students about a particular scale, I typically have them invent their own patterns and studies to practice. This allows them to take a personal interest in a seemingly mundane activity and, I hope, this make it a bit more enjoyable. While my role in this case is not to dictate which patterns should be practiced, I do monitor what the student is doing to ensure that what they come up with covers a sufficiently wide range and variety, that the students ideas for practicing will not restrict their future ability to apply their knowledge of that scale. In addition to giving them a personal stake in the preparatory process, I believe this also helps the student to more carefully think about the materials with which they are working since they must deal with the inner workings of the scale in designing their practice routine. Of course if a student is learning scales and patterns with a view toward a certain idiomatic music—let's say Baroque continuo playing at the harpsichord—then there will certainly be agreed-upon standards for this kind of practicing that will prepare the student for what they will encounter in that specific idiom, but where improvising is the end in mind, the means must necessarily reflect this end. Since improvising centrally involves personal creativity and expression, practicing must allow for an individual's ideas to be present and to develop as part of the preparatory work.

Bill's example draws from his experience of learning to improvise within the jazz tradition, and while the pedagogy of jazz improvisation is a highly developed one, I want to continue to think about improvising in a more general sense beyond its

applications in a particular idiom. This can be a difficult thing to do as Rob Kohler (2003, July 12) suggests.

Jared: Do you think that some kind of background or training in another kind of idiomatic music—say Bluegrass or Mozart, or South African guitar playing—do you think that is a necessary part of becoming an improvisor? Or could you just go at it by being an improvisor?

Rob: Well, idiomatic music comes from culture and culture surrounds us. So on one hand you can't escape that unless you're living in a bubble or a vacuum. An idiomatic music such as Bluegrass has very specific parameters and specifications which make it Bluegrass, which again is what I feel creates that anxiety in somebody that says "I want to be able to improvise, but I feel like I can't." I think that's where I'm coming from.

Jared: So you think it could be really helpful, but maybe it could be a hindrance too? It could be a hang-up for people who are trying to work towards becoming improvisors?

Rob: I think that when you have rules and definitions on what it is that you're playing, that does become a hang-up for a lot of people, including myself. I've found, as far as free improvisation, which I've later brought

> into more controlled improvisation—playing jazz standards and so on, or bluegrass or 20th century music even—the idea of freedom was something that I had to negotiate philosophically, that it was okay to makes these sounds and that it was okay to turn my instrument around and bang on it like a six-year old. I think an idiomatic music such as bluegrass doesn't...even though there is a little bit of banging on the instrument to keep time, that there are specific...when you say you want to play bluegrass there are very specific channels that you go down. So to come from something like that and say that I want to play free improvisation requires a whole new set of philosophical ideas before a player is able to freely improvise. One important thing that I think I tell students is that they actually have to find that philosophy and apply it to their Bluegrass or just to them as musicians. That's one of the most healthy things that they can do for themselves as continuing, growing musicians.

As Rob suggests, the whole notion of imagining improvisation as a kind of music making which is separate from other kinds of music is something which is negotiated on a personal philosophical level. The simple reality is that most people who decide they want to improvise have already started with some other kind of music and are trying to reconcile the rules and pre-existing sound patterns of that idiom with what they need to do as creative improvisors—making their

own rules and discovering their own patterns and logic. In my own teaching, I have observed that this inability to see beyond the boundaries of familiar musical territory is the biggest obstacle to students' creativity and growth as musicians. I think this is why it is so important to develop musical skills which are not so tied to an idiom, but which are useful in a variety of contexts. Improvising can play a large role in this kind of learning. Rob describes here how he draws a student musician into the improvisational process.

Jared: Do you think in the context of what you were talking about with fundamentals...do you think there is a way to teach those fundamentals which is relatively removed from an idiomatic background? or do you think that would be a good way to approach becoming an improvising player?

Rob: The first half of the question is one of my things that I do with all kind of level of players, including symphony level players that feel hung up—I'll set them down at the piano and have them just play the white notes, for example. The way the piano is set up, if you just play on the white notes—which is very easy to do because you have to make an effort to hit a black key—you are playing in a C major tonal center and all the modes of that tonal center. Pretty much any combination of notes that you hit, including just laying your whole forearm onto the white notes, you're still playing within the key of C which I find, for musicians that actually know about

scales and so on, coming from *there* that's liberating in that I can pretty much just put my hands on this instrument and play any combination of these notes and I can still say I'm playing in the key of C. I think that's an important thing because of that *correctness*, that they are concerned "If I improvise I feel like I'm playing the wrong notes." Or playing over a jazz standard for example "It always feels like I'm playing the wrong notes." So if you start with the white notes on the piano with the intent to create melody, it seems that that is a liberating thing for people that know about harmony. And it's also a very liberating thing for beginning piano students. They say "Oh, if I just wiggle my fingers around on these white keys I can play melodies." So from that end, fundamentals...that's where I usually start. I start with major scales and then go into the modes that are associated with those major scales and then with the piano you can add just the F# and you have the key of G, then you can go back to the key of C and add just a Bb and you've got the key F. That way you're just dealing with white keys and adding one foreign note into the mix. Then by the time they get to two or three sharps or flats, the lesson is learned and they're able to improvise in any of the twelve key centers. And within each one of those...as soon as you add an F# into all the white keys then you have all these other things...A minor seventh, G major seventh, and all these different very specific tonal centers and harmonic definitions and sounds that relate specifically to jazz and bluegrass and classical music

because a lot of them are diatonic in nature. (pauses) I'm trying to remember the exact wording of your question!

Jared: You've actually been addressing it very well. So what you're saying is that you come from where the player is at and that you can get around the fact that they're a classical player? There are certain ways of getting through the hang-ups and that the idiom can be there or not and that you keep heading towards the same materials anyway, almost regardless of where they are coming from.

Rob: Exactly. Right. To know the fundamentals...anybody can read that in a book and recite it...but to actually be able to hear harmony move and to hear a pitch and for you to relate to a pitch or to react with a pitch of your own is really what learning about the fundamentals is all about...so that you can do it in a musical way. By the time they get to that point it's just a matter of confidence and of listening and reacting and all of these other problems go away. And then you're on the road to defining it however you want to define it.

A student who goes through this kind of learning process, where improvisation is at the core, learns not only to be an improvisor, but also to relate to other kinds of

music making in a more personal and profound way. They learn that they are primarily responsible for generating the musical ideas and that they are ultimately responsible for the way those ideas do or do not cohere in a performance. The result of this kind of deep sense of responsibility and personal involvement are categorized by Bill Clark as musical 'depth'.

Jared: if we're talking about that really 'happening' state that you described where the trumpet is an amplifier or your entire body and the instrument are resonating together with the music...Do you think improvising provides the best way of getting there? Is that one of the better ways of getting there?

Bill: I think it's whatever gets you deep. For me it's that. For me it's definitely that. That's just what I've always heard. I remember when I was a kid they had these songbooks "A hundred and one popular tunes for trumpet". The sooner I started getting off the written page and started interpreting for myself and putting a plunger on it, putting vibrato on it, or started loosening the phrasing up, the sooner it started getting to that state, even as a kid. I don't know that I can speak for everyone. I can think of listening to Yehudi Menuin, and I know *he* gets there. You can hear it in his playing. It's the depth to which he understands this thing that he has played *thousands* of times. He's gotten there by going deeper and

deeper and deeper into the same piece, whereas I get there by going deeper and deeper and deeper into my own improvisational voice.

So I think there is more than one way. But in education, what's great about adding improvisation into it right away is that it starts steering you there. That's what I think a lot of classical music education is missing, going to that *depth.* And I think that's where jazz education is missing the point; it's not about that *depth.* It's about understanding an idiom and being able to repeat that idiom, whereas all of that music regardless of the idiom is about that *other* thing. So in education I think that having improvisation right from the get go in a bachelor's degree—for classical musicians, for world music musicians, for future teachers...with improvisation that's the whole point, to try and get to that place. That idea is right at the surface of the music. I think that having a truly free improvisational thing going on at any school in any kind of music is a really positive kind of thing because it lifts all... Do you know Eric Barber from when you were at Oregon? He has a great way of putting it. He says, "Practicing beyond idiom. Practicing beyond genre." So when he is practicing harmonic or rhythmic materials he's not practicing towards a genre, he's practicing vocabulary for playing in any genre, but also free.

Jared: So there is a way to do that you think?

Bill: Yeah, because I think that goes back to one of the first questions, to always have improvisation as part of your practice - it doesn't have to swing. Scales, chords, rhythms: those are the key things which we all use. It's just material for me to put under my fingers so that when you play a chord on the guitar in the midst of an improvisation I can say, "Oh yeah, there's *that.*" I've seen this work where these classical players who have never improvised in their life finally figure out that *all this amazing stuff* they practiced towards a genre can be separated completely from that genre and be used. If their ears are working right and they haven't been just running their scales with muscle memory, if they've been practicing with their ears involved and they're improvising with a group of people they can put that to use right away! (snaps fingers) I mean right away if they make the philosophical leap that it's all grist for the mill. That's the other thing; just having an environment where that happens. The most important thing is having an environment where people are improvising without genre...without jazz or classical being the thing. Where the idea of trying to find yourself and your own voice is not just *part of it* as it would be with someone playing a cadenza from a Mozart piano concerto, but that's not the idea here, no. It's everything! It's the goal to get to this place where you are finding you own voice and really singing through your own voice and hearing stuff that's coming directly out of you...where that is the

> absolute goal. I think that's what makes it the most important thing in an educational practice.

Bill echoes here the idea which I have been talking about since the beginning of this thesis. Improvisation is not just a kind of music or music making, it is a distinctly personal way of understanding what music is and what it means to the person playing. On the surface, this make the discussion of a pedagogy for improvising a very simple proposition; one simply has to be sure that the musical means of preparation are in agreement with the ends. On the other hand a central complexity remains because the end and the means are so intimately related in the improvisational process. Just as the simple practicing of scales can be an exploratory endeavour, improvised music itself is an essentially an heuristic process, not a finished product. What I find most exciting for me as a teacher and performer is the idea that for the committed improvisor with a solid grasp of the philosophical roots of both preparation and practice, there may be no difference between the learning process and creative act itself. But this is not an attempt, as attractive as such a prospect might be, to sidestep the question of pedagogy. So I continue feeling my way forward toward a methodology, a creative means which does not violate the ends.

Teaching Improvisation

6

In my view, teaching improvisation is quite a different proposition from teaching other kinds of music for the simple reason that, at its core, improvisation is about creativity and exploration. If, as I suggested in Chapter 4, the creative connection between subconscious musical impulses and physical actions is at the core of improvisation, how can such a link, or third state of musical consciousness be developed or cultivated? My answer to this question consists of a set of general principles to be followed in learning and teaching improvisation.[1] If a thoroughly embodied 'third state' of musical being is at the core of improvisation, then the teaching of improvisation must be essentially concerned with the production of sound in the conditions which approximate those of performance; the means must be, as much as possible in perfect accord with the ends. This implies a very different process from the usual mode of music education which focuses not on sound production, but rather sound *re*production—a kind of aiming for a mythical ideal of music imagined by someone else. The practice room is traditionally very different, if not opposite from the concert hall. Exploration and the possible mistakes which follow it are generally confined to the practice room where the musical 'product' is gradually refined and finished for the concert hall. Such politically and socially motivated

[1] This chapter might be viewed as a kind of 'curriculum for improvisation', but I am somewhat concerned about the use of this particular term since to many teachers 'curriculum' can seem very inflexible and fixed.

distinctions must be blurred and eventually eliminated where improvisation is the goal. Thus in a pedagogy of improvisation, the boundaries between practice and performance, thinking and doing, working and playing, exploration and discovery, are always shifting. It is on this shifting ground that the exciting work of improvisation occurs. To improvise well you need not only to get used to uncertainty, but to cherish it as the only condition on which you can rely.

General Principles

Any pedagogy of improvised music must require the student to begin by playing their own sounds into existence in response to a deep musical need. The need for music is a response to silence. I believe that a sound pedagogical approach to improvisation must begin with silence (or whatever passes for silence and quiet in our world today). Perhaps one might more productively think of this silence as the space before the music happens, a time of waiting for music to begin. Quiet and listening, the emptiness to which Lao-tzu refers, are precursors to beginning that special relationship with sound that we call music. Yaroslav Senyshyn (2003) suggests that there are even more far-reaching reasons for beginning with silence. [2]

> Sound and silence as potentiation of music precedes human existence. If music precedes existence then it can never be defined in absolute terms of thought. It remains thus even if nothingness were an all pervasive, encompassing silence; i.e., the silence of music or music as silence. But silence as music in our culture may be perceived to be music by some and not necessarily by all in any given culture. But as the sound and silence that preceded our being - it is indeed music - in everlasting potentiation. In this sense it can only be philosophically inferred as the 'other', outside music, which the pre-Socratic philosophers referred to mystically and metaphorically as "the music of the spheres"; it is that music outside of us and finds its origins in sounds indirectly related to us. It is what I prefer to call the Sound and Silence that define and are defined by each other in their potentiation for music. (p. 5)

Silence is the container which holds the music. Without the container, without boundaries to distinguish the music from other sounds, it is impossible to proceed with the creation of music. Silence provides a space for listening to the self, a span of time for focusing the conscious and subconscious mind on the dual embodied tasks of making and hearing sound as music. A time of quiet and restfulness allows the musician to become aware of musical feelings in the body and to be open to responding to these feelings.

Proceeding from silence, rhythm is the next necessary step in the exploration of music. Dalcroze (1921) explains the important link between rhythm and movement in this way:

> Rhythm, like dynamics, depends entirely on movement, and finds its nearest prototype in our muscular system. All nuances of time—allegro, andante, accelerando, ritenuto—all the nuances of energy—forte, piano, crescendo, diminuendo—can be *realised* by our bodies, and the

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[2] It was the great composer-philosopher, John Cage, who really began to explore the musical possibilities of silence. See Cage and Kostelanetz (1991) for some of Cage's ideas about silence.

> acuteness of our musical feeling will depend on the acuteness of our bodily sensations. (p.60)

The body is a naturally rhythmic entity. Our bodies are full of rhythms—breathing, circulation, neural and muscular activity, patterns of eating and sleeping—which are necessary for life to exist. Events in our lives are always measured in proximity to previous and future events; we live concentric rhythmic cycles measured in seconds, hours, weeks, seasons. All sounds occur in a rhythmic context and all music actions and reactions must be understood in terms of their proximity in time, their rhythmic relationships to one another. This is a fundamental principle of music. As such, it is important to begin learning to improvise by learning to recognize and manipulate elements of rhythm: duration, tempo, and the space between sonic events. A focus on simple rhythmic units and clear divisions of tempo and duration would proceed to rhythmic expression of greater complexity. The students should learn to interact with other musicians to produce a variety of tempos and metric subdivisions. In the context of exploring rhythm, the improvisation becomes part of rhythmic play as the students learn to manipulate and explore rhythmic relationships between themselves and others in the group. Underlying all rhythmic activity should be the goal of listening to the contributions of others: recognizing simultaneously the location of the self and the other in the continuum of musical time and the space of musical performance. This kind of rhythmic listening is absolutely necessary if improvisors wish to coordinate their musical efforts. As students spend time focused on rhythmic relationships between musical events and between

themselves as co-contributors to the emerging rhythmic soundscape, it is important for them to begin building and to rely upon a bodily sense of tempo and meter. There is a distinct difference in *feeling* between producing a steady, regular rhythm or producing erratic, random rhythms. Slowing down feels different from speeding up. The student must train the body to act and react to sounds rhythmically, observing, learning, and remembering the way various rhythmic gestures feel in the body.

As the rhythmic abilities of students increase, elements of pitch and timbre should be introduced. Specific sets of pitches are not necessary. There is no need to define harmonic rules or to have students comply with pre-established pitch selections in the early stages. Rather, it is most important to have students explore a wide range of possible pitch selections and combinations, choosing their own sounds and observing those sounds in relation to the choices of others. In connection with pitch choices and combinations, timbral possibilities could be explored. Manipulating pitch by matching or contrasting individual pitch selections with those of other players is an essential part of improvisation. The range and possibilities of pitch combinations is as unlimited as that of rhythmic combinations. It is the teacher's job at this stage to ensure:

- that students try as many different sounds as possible,
- that they listen to the way their own sounds affect and are affected by the group,

- that they learn to control and shape their dynamic level to blend or contrast with other musicians.
- That they explore pitches in sequence (melody) and in conjunction (harmony)

As with rhythm, the body must be trained to feel the difference between high and low pitches and how they sound and feel at various dynamic levels. High, loud sounds *feel* different from high, soft ones. If one is playing a wind instrument, high notes require greater air velocity and more muscle tension in the embouchure than lower ones. For string players, the notes are further apart on the low end of the neck than they are on the high end and louder notes require more physical strength from the right hand. These are physical aspects of playing which become inseparably connected with affective values and musical ideas and forms. This bodily kind of knowing and feeling is the essence of playing an instrument well and improvising with it. A trumpet player doesn't *think* about how to play an F#, the F# is a feeling in the lips, diaphragm, and jaw. A good musician relies on 'body-memory' to remember pitches and to react creatively to the pitch choices of others. A successful pedagogy of improvisation must focus not only on the link between the physical memory of how to play a note, but also help the student make an embodied, immediate, feelingful connection to that note.

Even though pure experimentation with sound can be a very enjoyable musical activity, it will rarely lead to musical results which are aesthetically satisfying in

the long term unless the sounds produced can be perceived as a coherent structural entity. Exploration of the possibilities of pitch and rhythm naturally leads to a discovery of simple principles of musical structure. Some degree of coordination or organization between elements of pitch and rhythm over the course of time is necessary in order to produce a musical structure which can be remembered or understood as meaningful. In order to produce coherent contrasting musical movements as a group and to coordinate these movements over time, the body must learn to feel intuitively:

- when a particular 'section' of music should end
- how much to coordinate or 'imitate' the actions of others in order to produce a degree of homogeneity in musical gesture
- when to introduce a novel, varying, or contrasting pitch or rhythm
- when to repeat previous musical ideas in order to produce thematic, harmonic, or rhythmic continuity. This often relies on a kind of bodily memory and recall of a passage which has already been played.

Here the body is still very important, but perhaps it can be trained by the more 'intellectual' (hard to get away from that Cartesian dualism!) methods. Instant reactions are not as necessary in this aspect of improvising since elements of larger musical structure are observed over a longer period of time and can be observed more 'intellectually' or from a more compositional standpoint. With that said, one must realize that it is still the kind of bodily musical consciousness and action upon which one relies to produce the actual musical content that fills the

structural container. There are many ways to help develop this sense of musical structure, some of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Structuring a Method for Improvisation

If the aforementioned general principles are sound, we still need to decide what musical materials we should be dealing with in the teaching of improvisation. I am reluctant to go too far beyond the general principles I have just outlined for three reasons. First, because improvisation is simply too large a musical phenomena for me to make suggestions which would provide adequate preparation for the wide range of activities which commonly come under the heading of 'improvised music'. Second, I felt that any musician-teacher who understands the philosophical principles I have been talking about should by now already know what to do. Third and perhaps most important, I am not convinced that my approach is better than any other and it certainly can't be proven to be so. This last reason is not an attempt to slip out from my responsibilities as the author of a thesis about improvisation, it is a recognition of the fact that I have played with improvising musicians from a huge range of backgrounds, many of whom have strong roots in various other musical traditions and who clearly haven't needed a pedagogy of improvisation in order to be great improvisors. These players with non-improvising backgrounds often prove to make great contributions as improvisors and I am not interested in convincing everyone that they should abandon other musical traditions in favour of improvising. Indeed,

improvised music would be much the poorer and less interesting if this happened. People who come to improvisation from other musical traditions are making a philosophical shift in their understanding of the way music is made. It is for this reason that I have focused my thesis on understanding what improvisation is, how it is done, and what it means for musicians rather than on learning how to improvise. Nevertheless, I would like to offer some guidance here for those who may want to embark on the path. What follows is a sort of outline in three parts for a very general improvising method that must be fleshed out and taught by someone who is an accomplished musician and improvisor. By 'accomplished improvisor' I simply mean a musician who has experience, ability, and confidence in improvisation (This experience could be in any style, genre or tradition) and who would be able to execute, understand and teach the kinds of musical tasks and activities which I outline in the following sections.

I. Listening

Careful listening is the most important ability for any musician, but it is especially important in improvised music. I have found no better resource for listening 'exercises' than John Stevens' book, *Search and Reflect* (1985). This is the place to start for any teacher of improvisation looking for simple, practical methods. An overview of Stevens' work is presented later in this chapter. The most important factor in developing the students listening ability is the teacher. The teacher, as an experienced listener, can observe students' interactions with

one another and point out problems in listening among group members. Careful listening to recordings is also critical. Through recordings, students are exposed to a variety of possible models for sound production and musical 'vocabulary'. Recordings provide an opportunity to repeat and review previous listening experiences in a context where they are not involved in the complexities of manipulating an instrument of their own. In a sense, through recordings they can listen to the way great musicians listen. Recordings of student improvisations can also help in this process as outlined later in this chapter.

II. Building a Musical Vocabulary

In Chapter 2, I addressed the complexity of using words like vocabulary in relation to music, but for the purposes of this chapter I will be treating it as unproblematic and mean for it to refer to a repertoire of musical techniques and resources. 'Vocabulary' is not only more concise than 'repertoire of musical techniques and resources' but, as we also discovered in Chapter 2, in many ways it makes a lot of sense—provided one can hang up the philosopher's hat for a while. In speaking to the musicians I interviewed I was reminded of the importance of developing a musical vocabulary for the purposes of free improvisation. The reason for developing a musical vocabulary is quite simple; it is impossible in the heat of the musical moment to come up with a completely novel and different musical response to a given problem. There simply isn't time in the course of an improvisation to say to yourself, "I'd like to play an idea consisting of a connected series of notes separated by half steps and whole

steps." But there is time to play a part of a scale which you already know and which your fingers can execute without hesitation. Developing a musical vocabulary is simply developing and practicing a wide variety of ideas which can be put into use without too much planning and forethought, ideas which you can rely on the body to produce and to feel in response to an as yet unknown musical situation.

For the sake of clarity in method I have decided to divide elements of musical vocabulary into several somewhat distinct fields (in no particular order): scales, chords or harmonies, rhythms, timbres, and structural or formal concepts. It should be obvious, and always remembered that all of these things happen simultaneously in actual music making; you can't play a scale without rhythm or timbre for instance. Nevertheless, I think it helps to think of them separately for the purpose of focusing the mind and body on one kind of idea at a time. It is also important to keep in mind what I said before about means and ends; there is no reason why practicing rhythms can't be musical and interesting, no reason why your practicing can't be a piece of music on its own. Also, one could easily 'practice' any of these ideas while playing or improvising in a group—the teacher might suggest that the group improvised with a specific scale, rhythmic idea, structure or harmony for instance.

Scales

There are hundreds of possible scales to learn and each musical culture of the world seems to have its own. Some which are important to learn are:

- the major scale and its modes (which includes natural minor),
- harmonic minor and its modes
- melodic minor scale
- minor and major pentatonic
- the two common octatonic scales (also called halfstep-wholestep, wholestep-halfstep, or diminished)
- 'jazz' melodic minor (12b34567 ascending and descending) and its modes

Of course there are many others. The most important thing in learning any of these is to try as many different sequences, groupings, and patterns as possible. Indian and Persian classical musics (among others) have highly developed scale systems which are also more than worthy of study. Irish and Indonesian musics also have interesting and very different approaches to scalar materials. Slonimsky's (1947) *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* is an excellent resource for research this subject.

Rhythms

Unlike scales, rhythms usually don't come in preclassified categories and groupings, but there is as much (maybe more) to learn about rhythms and their possibilities. Ways of organizing rhythmic information for study include:

- playing a steady pulse at all tempos
- playing in various time signatures
- playing and feeling varied rhythmic subdivisions within a time signature
- playing rhythmic 'feels' or common rhythmic classifications within various idioms: rumba clave, waltz, swing, jig, reel, march, hip-hop, tango, etc.

Indian classical music has an incredibly complicated and developed system of rhythmic knowledge which would be quite worthwhile for any musician to study if you know someone available to teach it.

Traditional musics of Indonesia and West Africa also have profound conceptions of rhythmic cooperation within groups.

Timbres

Timbre refers to the tone quality of a sound. There are three principle areas to be considered here:

- Various idiomatic musical traditions generally have carefully developed and narrowly defined standards for 'good tone', but for the improvisor this is a relative thing. The goal for an improvisor is to find an individual and possibly unique sound. I believe the various traditions provide an excellent point of departure in developing a personal sound. The important thing is to try out other possibilities wherever you begin.
- 'Extended techniques' refer to sounds outside of the standard sounds suggested by a tradition. Some examples might be playing high-order harmonics on a double bass, squealing sounds on a saxophone, use of a plunger mute on a trombone, detuning of strings or use of electronic effects on a guitar, or scraping on a cymbal. The very idea of 'extended techniques' is foreign to improvising (though some instrumental techniques may require extraordinary effort to produce and master) because there is no standard sound for improvising players and, presumably, any sound might well find a use in improvised music. It is extremely important for an improvisor to cultivate the production of the widest possible

range of sounds and effects from a given instrument and to find creative uses for as many of these sounds as possible.

- Many improvising musicians choose to use instruments that they make or find themselves or seriously modify existing instruments in order to find new sounds or to better produce sounds that they like. This is something that should be explored by any student of improvisation.

Harmonies

Jazz and classical music of the 19th and 20th centuries have clearly been the idioms most concerned with harmony[3] and both of these idioms have highly developed and useful methods of understanding and teaching harmony. I think that it matters little which perspective you choose so long as the student is clearly able to hear, recognize, and play the qualities of various combinations of notes and gains a firm knowledge of the ways in which various harmonic entities commonly react within tonal harmonic progressions. Of course improvisation does not require any particular harmonic system, and may not include one at all, nevertheless I think that learning to hear tonal harmony is useful as an example of the ways in which various kinds of pitch relationships can be developed. The study of atonal music or other harmonic systems might well be of use to the

[3] For the purposes of this discussion, I will consider counterpoint to be a subcategory of harmony, though clearly there are other considerations beyond the harmonic which contribute to counterpoint.

improvisor, but I don't think these can be adequately understood without a firm grounding in basic tonal harmony.

Structures

All music has a structure of some kind, even if we may have difficulty in perceiving it. A good improvisor has a strong grasp of kinds of musical structure and should be familiar with and be able to improvise various kinds of forms and structures.[4] Some of these might include:

- Strophic form
- Theme and variations
- Sonata form(exposition - development - recapitulation)
- Circular forms (as in Indonesian gamelan music or Indian *tala*)

A number of composers have been successful in breaking down the old creative hierarchies, relinquishing their absolute control, and creating various kinds of structures and games which provide a context in which to explore the sonic possibilities of improvisation. These are excellent ways of learning some possible ways of structuring an improvisation. Examples follow:

- Poetic or text-based instructions for improvising:

  Aus Den Sieben Tagen by Karlheinz Stockhausen

[4] I use some terminology derived from Western classical music traditions here not because I think these kinds of structure are superior, but rather because they are useful names for things which occur in a variety of musical cultures and situations.

The Great Learning by Cornelius Cardew

- Pieces with game-like rules for play:

  John Zorn's 'game' pieces such as *Cobra* and *Archery*

  Various games by John Stevens in his book *"Search and Reflect"*

  Ripple/Eddy/Rapid by Daniel Heila

- Pieces involving indeterminate notation

  Earle Brown's and Frederick Rzewski's various pieces involving indeterminate notations

  Mandala by Jeffrey Radcliffe

Idiomatic Repertoire

As I explored in Chapter 5, although not all performance practices within musical idioms or genres allow for improvisation, this does not make them any less worthy of study. Indeed, I believe it would be tragic if a student of improvisation never explored other kinds of music. Musical idioms provide a relatively stable framework in which to develop very specific musical skills and valuable harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic materials. There is obviously a good deal of discipline involved in learning to play any style of music and this kind of discipline is equally valuable and useful to the improvisor. I don't believe that any particular genre is any more valuable to the improvisor than others. Of course many students of improvisation will already play some other kind of music to some degree or another and

this should not be discouraged; in fact it is my experience that the most interesting improvisors come to the music from extensive backgrounds in other idioms. It may well be possible to study the piano music of Mozart and utilize that information and those techniques in improvisation. This is really a matter for the teacher. If the teacher has great expertise in a certain genre, then it seems the best bet would be to proceed from that expertise and venture into the unknown area of improvisation from safe ground. As always, the thing is to avoid being caught in idiomatic prejudices and preconceptions about what will count as freely improvised music. To continue with our Mozart piano music example, it would be fine to begin the study from this base of knowledge, but the teacher should not demand that the student's improvisations sound precisely like 18th-century piano repertoire or that they improvise in strict sonata form.

III. Free Playing

This may seem obvious, but it is important to remember that the only real way to learn to improvise is to do it. In the course of developing musical vocabulary it would be easy to get too involved in exercises directed at developing very specific abilities, but this must be avoided at all costs. In addition, a teacher's ideas about how things should proceed can naturally begin to have an inordinate influence over the students' playing. Just sitting down and playing with other musicians without any prior discussion is whole point of improvisation. It is

important for the teacher to remember that this kind of *playing is working* and is at least as useful as other kinds of more directed musical activity.

IV. Analysis, Discussion, Recording

It is critical to allow a period of evaluation following improvised performances where students can reflect on the structure and character of the musical events they have just heard and what they liked or didn't like about what happened. This is very important for developing a sense that improvising musicians are working on making music, not simply chaotic sound experiments which have no durable aesthetic value beyond the moment of creation. It is important for players to have an opinion about what happened and what they would like to have done differently or better. This understanding can develop and be altered by interaction with a group in discussion. Recognizing and discussing how particular improvisations were structured and why events unfolded as they did is a way of training a kind of automatic aesthetic response which can later be called upon to help structure and direct improvising.

Recording technology can be extremely helpful in discussion and analysis. A good recording allows students to hear precisely, discuss specific events, examine the quality of their sounds and ideas, to look at what happened and to think about why. They can begin to hear in a more detailed way the kinds of musical interactions taking place among group members. One must be aware

that recording can be a little dangerous for the developing player. Improvised music often feels better in the making than it sounds on the recording and this can make young or inexperienced players feel very self-conscious and anxious about their playing. On the other hand, it may help them realize and diagnose a problem with playing in tune, keeping a steady beat, or lack of listening and response to other members of the group. Always remember that improvising is about *feeling* and a recording device captures only sounds, not feelings and temporally connected psychological states. The recording is merely an electronic document, *evidence* that an improvisation took place and what it sounded like; it should be treated as such and no more. Perhaps it would be best to record only every second or third session and let the others go 'into the air' and into the players' memories. The temptation to memorize and build on ideas from previous recordings is to be avoided. In my experience, this makes at best the improvising more like composition and at worst it seriously hinders the player's attempts to find and create new sounds and ideas.

Other Methods

The purpose of this chapter is not to present a comprehensive curriculum or methodology for learning to improvise. I have argued all throughout this thesis that such a curriculum or methodology must remain to a large degree, improvised. General principles and outlines are all very well, but in the end it is up to the individual musician and teacher to decide what musical vocabulary is important and what kind of music to make with it. With this in mind, I think it would be useful at this final stage to briefly review some other approaches to teaching improvisation. Some are very specifically targeted at developing certain skills over others and have closely prescribed curricula, while others are more conceptually oriented in nature. I have tried to look at each resource from the philosophical perspective that I developed in the earlier parts of this thesis and have made no apologies for pointing out what I feel are inadequacies and inconsistencies in method or philosophy. While I don't completely agree with many of the authors, I certainly thank them for helping me to form my own ideas about how to teach and apologize to them for occasional rough handling. There are many other excellent books and articles available and more are being written every day; my purpose here is not to make an exhaustive list but to show a broad cross section of useful and varied approaches to improvisation.

Jamey Aebersold play-along recordings

Aebersold could easily be considered the father of jazz improvisation pedagogy. His enormous catalogue of books and accompanying play-along recordings have been the guide for literally thousands of jazz improvisors today. Each book presents songs and common chord progressions from the standard jazz repertoire along with a recording of a 'rhythm section' (usually piano, bass, and drum kit) playing rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment. The student is presented with scales and arpeggios to fit with each chord in the progression and plays along with the pre-recorded 'rhythm track'. Each book in the catalogue is graded to give the student or teacher an idea of where to begin and where to go next. Whether or not the student is interested in jazz as an idiomatic performance practice, the books and recordings provide a very useful tool for practicing scales, patterns, arpeggios and other melodic material in a creative and improvisational way. The recordings are certainly no substitute for interaction with real musicians, but they do provide a way to practice basic skills creatively. While Aebersold presents no specific methodology for apprehending the materials contained in the books, there is an implicit idea—very common in the world of jazz pedagogy—that improvisation chiefly involves 'plugging in' scales in the right place in a chord progression. A great number of jazz theory and improvisation methods have followed this format and logic. Obviously, I hope that any teacher would expand their views about improvisation beyond this simplistic concept, though I do feel there is substantial value in Aebersold's attempt to help make 'practicing' more like performing.

Creative Improvisation

This is a book written for musicians who already have a performing and theoretical background in classical music or jazz. Roger Dean (1988), who is an accomplished improvising bassist living in Australia, presents a huge variety of exercises, studies, game pieces, and structures for improvisation. All of these are aimed at providing the student with what might be termed 'vocabulary' for improvisation. In other words, the book attempts to guide the student of improvisation through a wide range of sonic and technical possibilities and ideas which can be applied in a 'free' improvising context. If there is a problem with this book, it is that most of the harmonic, melodic and rhythmic material presented is derived from 20th century concert music and the structure of the exercises reflects a mid-20th century composer's aesthetic; an almost obsessive focus on detail and abstraction. Despite this, any creative player should be able to loosen up some of the overly restrictive tendencies and adapt the concepts and ideas to diverse playing situations. This is certainly a very useful book that could provide almost limitless fodder for the practice room, even for a very accomplished musician.

Music Improvisation as a Classroom Method

This is one of the earliest books which treats improvisation as a viable and valid activity for classroom instruction. Konowitz (1973) clearly draws musical inspiration from experimental composers of the 50s and 60s such as Cage, Young, Stockhausen, the Fluxus group and others. Perhaps the most valuable statement in the book comes from the first page where the author defines improvisation as "the spontaneous act of organizing, varying, creating, and performing." The fact that this definition does not make the ubiquitous 'instant composition' reference is notable. The book is aimed largely at elementary and secondary school students but its ideas could easily be adapted to any age or ability level. It is organized in three sections which the author calls phases. These phases are sequenced according to the complexity of the tasks and activities and according to the level of instrumental proficiency of the student. Activities in each phase are in turn organized according to "creativity sources"(p.3) which refer vocal, keyboard, or other instrumental sources for sound making and experimentation. Despite this clear and logical sequence, the activities in the book needn't be done in sequence; each would stand well on its own and could easily be adapted to suit other instruments or ability levels.

Phase one consists of exploratory activity where students and teachers "loosen up...freely explore and experiment through improvisation."(p.3) Activities in this

phase are based around word play, following a conductors directions with improvised sounds, games involving attempts to 'translate' emotion or ideas in musical form, and simple call and response interactions between students and teacher. This phase also focuses on obtaining the widest variety of possible sounds from instruments and voices. At this stage, students begin to work together in groups at the keyboard or using similar instruments.

In phase two, more traditional musical materials are introduced and the students begin to experiment with simple triadic materials and variations on simple rhythmic ostinatos. The author suggests performing and composing some simple graphic scores for students to interpret and perform. Games using specific groups of pitches or full scales are also introduced and students begin to experiment with genre-specific sounds such as waltz, oom-pah, and alberti bass patterns.

Phase three is dedicated towards expanding the students', awareness of a variety of genres and musical styles though recordings and classroom games. Konowitz delineates various aspects of music available for study: music and theatre, music and innovation (contemporary composition and jazz), music of tradition, music of the media, and music and movement. The idea is for students to critically examine music's role in their lives and to open themselves up to new musical experiences. The author suggest that students become more focused

on listening and composition at this stage, including creating scores which use similar principles to the various experimental composers of the 20th century. It seems illogical to restrict the students actual music-making at this point, since they have, we assume, been working towards greater ability as improvisors. While score-making and composition are wonderful activities, they are fundamentally different activities from the act of improvising music. In fact these activities do not fall under the author's own definition of improvisation.

The greatest strength of the book is in its wide variety of musical activities and ideas for further experimentation. Rather than using the activities suggested in the book, most teachers would (and probably should) modify them to fit the needs and background of their own students. Unfortunately, the author's examples of popular and ethnic musics are dreadfully inaccurate and in many cases show ignorance and lack of respect for the very types of music to which he intends to 'expose' the students. The contemporary teacher using this book as a reference would have to use these activities as guidelines only, adding more appropriate, culturally sensitive, music and historically accurate examples. The greatest weakness of the book lies in its failure to carry through the idea with which it began—that improvisation is a valid and independent way of creating, experiencing and learning about music. As the author progresses to phase three, one is left with the impression that he would prefer to guide the students into being very creative, experimental composers and open-minded listeners

rather than committed and accomplished improvisors. In addition, there is strong sense that improvisation and all the other genres of music covered are simply there to enhance the student's understanding and ability to perform in the classical tradition. Rather than being a real source of classroom activities for the contemporary teacher of improvisation, this book should serve as an inspiration for teachers to do for themselves what the author has done; to make an attempt to broaden and expand views on music education.

Search and Reflect

During the 1960s, 70s and early 80s, drummer John Stevens was a major player on the London improvised music scene, performing with players such as Tony Oxley, Derek Bailey, Hugh Metcalf, Gavin Bryars, and many others. In association with Community music of London, he was one of the first of this generation of musicians to begin teaching about improvised music. Community Music of London was a rather enlightened organization which existed to provide music lessons and classes for the working class people of London and area who otherwise would not have access to music instruction. Stevens' classes provided people with little or no musical experience to begin improvising. Following the early success of Stevens' classes, *Search and Reflect* (1982) was developed as a kind of guidebook for other teachers in C.M.L. who wanted to utilize some of the techniques that Stevens pioneered. Designed as a series of lessons or musical activities through which the teacher and student discover improvisation together, this book was the first of its kind and remains unique as a teaching

resource. Nearly all of the musical activities in the book can be approached by someone with any level (or no level) of musical training. The exercises would be equally challenging for the professional player or a person with a casual curiosity. The exercises and games in the book are described in prose form rather than with musical notation so that people with any degree of musical literacy can use and understand them. To have designed an entire book of such activities is no mean feat and its logical and clear structuring and progression of musical ideas profoundly influenced my thinking about teaching, playing, and writing about music.

After a brief introduction describing the author's views on the nature of music, the activities outlined in the book are divided roughly into two broad sections: rhythm and improvisation. The musical activities would be appropriate for large or small groups of students. Stevens explains that he feels that rhythm is the basis of all music and so begins teaching improvisation through simple rhythmic games involving counting and clapping. These rhythmic exercises are designed to build a strong personal sense of time and pulse and to develop ensemble listening and interdependence. The exercises progress from simple 2-beat time signatures through to complex subdivisions and polyrhythms. Interestingly, Stevens avoids discussion of time signatures and rhythmic notation in favour of a simpler, yet more profound understanding of rhythm based on aural experience and simple counting to keep track of beats. The exercises progress in a very gradual way,

developing variations and layers of complexity over the initial simple activities. By introducing the variations in a logical and gradual way, the author makes it clear that, by following his process, any instructor could make her own games along the same lines. Throughout the rhythmic exercises, improvisation is introduced and plays a greater and greater role as the level of complexity rises. Though any of the activities could be done simply using voices and clapping, Stevens does make suggestions about how to introduce and include instruments at every stage. Having tried some of the rhythmic exercises with my students, I found that they had the effect of building a strong aural understanding of how complex rhythms work and that they help develop a strong sense of pulse and rhythmic independence.

The second section of the book deals with 'games' for improvising. The lessons from the earlier part of the book play a strong role in laying the groundwork for this second section. Stevens claims that the purpose of this section of the book is to develop a strong sense of "aural sight", by which he means a detailed aural awareness of the other sounds made by members of the group. Though the activities in this section do not rely on standard notational techniques or harmonic devices, they do teach fundamental principles of music making and especially of ensemble playing. Various pieces in this part of the book are designed to help with problems that may arise in a free group improvisation such as balance problems, lack of listening to other players etc. The pieces also help the student

to explore a wide range of techniques, freeing them from the traditional roles associated with their instruments as well as exposing them to a wide range of sounds and formal possibilities. As with the first section, games and compositions develop sequentially with techniques from early exercises showing up in later ones. The final pages of the book offer more complex compositions which require the use of many layers of techniques explored in earlier games.

Search and Reflect is unique in its commitment to the principle that anyone can and should make music. Stevens is able to cover a wide range of musical activity without requiring that students adopt a specific genre or devote themselves to a study of theory. The chief strength of the book lies in its capacity to provoke ideas in the teacher and student for further musical development variation and invention. Stevens doesn't just leave the door open to further experimentation, he pushes one vigorously through it. The author is able to provide a useful structure and a deliberate, detailed process to follow, while allowing and encouraging the student and teacher to be extremely free and loose in the application of that process.

Teaching improvisation outside of jazz settings.

This article presents suggestions for teaching improvisation in the high-school classroom by utilizing a variety of genres other than jazz (which is most often associated with improvisation). Bitz (1997) suggests the technical and aesthetic demands of jazz may be too daunting for beginning improvisors and that such

students would be better served by beginning their exploration of improvisation through other popular genres such as: bluegrass, rap, reggae, blues, rock, klezmer, and ska. Bitz provides a good list of listening examples for each of the various genres and gives examples of how improvisation is used in each case.

The author's ideas are based on the assumption that various students will already be familiar with one or more of the genres selected. While most students would certainly have some experience of at least one of these genres, the teacher is left with the problem that not all students will like, relate to, or understand the genre chosen by the teacher. In this sense, the problem is not really that much different from the one presented by trying to teach jazz—some students will still be dissatisfied and confused. In addition, I don't think that learning to play the blues or klezmer music is inherently simpler than jazz—the techniques and aesthetic demands are just different, not simpler. This aside, Bitz does make a good case for these other genres as starting points for beginning improvisors and some of the genres like rap, reggae, and rock, will certainly be more familiar to the majority of students and, hence, student interest and motivation may be piqued.

Bitz provides a practical framework for the teacher by suggesting a series of steps for teachers. In short, these steps are:

1. choose a genre
2. research the genre
3. gather resources
4. introduce the genre and explain the role of improvisation
5. encourage group improvisation
6. encourage student musical exploration

Overall, Bitz provides good advice for teachers looking for direction as to how to incorporate improvisation. It is odd, however, that in all his talk of genres he doesn't mention the fact that improvisation can be its own genre and that teaching non-idiomatic improvisation could be simplest beginning of all for students and thus would be a good first step.

Improvisation and comprehensive musicianship.

This is an odd article which begins with great promise and ends in disaster. Bradshaw (1980) begins by presenting a very thoughtful discussion of the benefits of improvisation for college-level students. He extols the virtues of improvisation in encouraging creativity, self-confidence, critical listening, and improving ensemble playing. Bradshaw presents a very interesting diagram of

common music classroom activities ordered according to types of stimulus and response.

Stimulus	***Response***	***Activity***
words	words	talking about music
words	notes	doing theory exercises
words	sounds	lesson in performance practice
notes	words	analysis
notes	notes	theory exercises
notes	sounds	learning a work from a score
sounds	words	criticism/appreciation
sounds	notes	ear training, dictation, composition
sounds	sounds	improvisation

I don't quite understand the distinction between notes and sounds in all the examples, but I do like the fact that the table shows improvisation to be the most direct and music-oriented of all the activities: sound+sound=improvisation. Bradshaw provides some useful ideas about how to overcome student's apprehension about improvising and recounts some of his successful attempts at getting students to improvise.

Unfortunately, after a very enlightening article about improvisation and its benefits and virtues, Bradshaw informs us that "Improvisation is at best a tool for

helping students... it cannot substitute for solid understanding of the principles of music nor...for experiencing music's substance." (1980, p.115) In short, the preacher is not himself a believer! Like so many others, Bradshaw seems to see improvisation as a useful pedagogical tool, but not a valid musical form in itself.

Improvisation in the aural curriculum: an imperative.

This is an extremely well written and effective article which advocates for the incorporation of improvisation into aural training. Though primarily oriented towards post-secondary aural training curricula, many of the ideas could be easily applied to other levels of music education. Throughout the article, Covington (1993) cites the necessity of learning improvisation for performers in a broad range of contexts including jazz, popular music, church organ playing, and early music. She also does a good job of explaining the benefits of improvising in areas where it is not usually considered important like composition and classical performance.

Covington begins by defining her position in relation to contemporary educational theory. She advocates situated knowledge and learning—which she terms 'constructivist'—as the most effective kind of learning. In this kind of learning, skills and ideas are presented in a way which replicates real-world situations and contexts. She points out that much of traditional aural training is constructed on an inferior 'objectivist' model, one in which knowledge is removed from its natural

setting and context and is sterilized and made 'safe' for the learner. Covington sees improvisation as a way of music making which incorporates a large variety of necessary musical skills required in everyday musical practice in a variety of genres and contexts. According to the author, improvisation brings together composition, performance, theory and critical listening in the act of spontaneous creation. Covington cites David Merril's ideas on learning (in his 1991 article in *Educational Technology* "Constructivism and Instructional Design") as evidence that improvisation is a highly effective tool for learning aural skills in music. Merril's four assumptions about learning are:

1. Knowledge is constructed from experience
2. Learning is a personal interpretation of one's experience
3. Learning is active and need to be based on experience rather than observation; it should occur in realistic settings
4. Meaning is accomplished through multiple perspectives or dimensions; it reflects the acquisition of an understanding of the integration of the parameters or aspects of the discipline.

The author effectively applies current thinking on constructivist learning environments as she argues for the use of improvisation in creating REALs (rich environments for active learning).

Covington's definition of aural training is broad, incorporating all aspects of pitch, melody and harmony, rhythm, timbre, articulation, and dynamics. She presents a number of musical activities which could be used in bringing improvisation into the aural skills class including experiments with free improvisation, non-pitched rhythmic improvisation with phrases and motives, and a wide variety of melodic and harmonic possibilities both within and without set forms. She also provides a few ideas for incorporating improvisation into the teaching of music theory.

Despite the specific focus of the article on improvisation as a pedagogical tool, the author is unusually open-minded in presenting improvisation as more than just a way of learning. She recognizes that it is a valid musical end in itself. Covington advocates the use of improvisation in the aural skills curriculum not because it helps students with other kinds of tasks and music making and in critical listening (although it certainly does help with these things), but because she realizes that improvisation is a central musical activity for many musicians in a variety of genres and that preparation for this real-world activity is crucial for music students.

Free collective improvisation in higher education.

As I explained in Chapter 3, free collective improvisation has been an important part of the British and European music scene since the late 1960's. During the 1960s, jazz players in America pursued musical freedom within the Afro-American tradition. While European players were aware of jazz practice and made attempts to assimilate its style and conventions, they were also highly influenced by serialism and other kinds of high-modern musical complexity which came from the composer's world. This allowed European improvised music to develop a sound distinct from that of North American 'free' players. During the 70s and 80s, some players in the British avant-garde, including Derek Bailey, Cornelius Cardew, Gavin Bryars, and John Stevens, made attempt to teach the music students, and occasionally the general public about this music. Ford's (1995) article discusses the philosophy of performing freely improvised music and his own attempts at carrying on the tradition of teaching free improvisation at Thames Valley University.

The author's classes are designed for students from a variety of disciplines in music and other areas of study. His approach is loosely based on the musical games and exercises pioneered by John Stevens. (Several of his own similar exercises/activities are included in an appendix to the article.) Following a class improvisation, Ford discusses the musical results and the improvising process with the students, who are invited to make judgments and observations. In the

course of discussion, students often observe a variety of complex social interactions which occur in parallel with the musical interactions. Ford feels that such discussion is very useful for musicians and non-musicians alike. By exploring in more depth the processes at play in the activity of improvisation, musicians gain a greater understanding of why they make music and what kinds of ideas they are unconsciously bringing to the performance process. This is a positive result in musical, social, and existentially personal terms. In closing, Ford outlines what he sees as 'vocational' outcomes which he has observed as results for course participants. Though these points may be seen as 'extramusical', they certainly have important applications for performers of all kinds.

1. group management and collective decision making
2. sensitivity and imagination
3. sustained concentration
4. communication skills and innovative forms of representation
5. ability to deal with constant change

This is one of the few articles extant which discusses free improvisation on its own terms, as a musical genre of worth and importance, while at the same time showing musical, pedagogical and practical 'life skills' benefits which can result from its inclusion in the curriculum.

Integrated music learning and improvisation: teaching musicianship and theory through menus, maps, and models.

There seem to be two general approaches to assigning a value to improvisational practice in the curriculum. First, that improvisation will be useful as a skill for certain musical idioms such as jazz or church organ playing. Second, that improvisation helps reinforce other kinds of music learning and skills. In this article, Larson (1995) tries both approaches with some success.

Above all, Larson argues for 'integrated music learning', which for him means that all aspects of theory, performance and history, the physical, emotional and mental activities of music learning are not treated as separate subjects or disciplines but rather as facets or aspects of a core practice - the creation of music. The author's list of reasons for including improvisation as part of the standard music curriculum may be summarized as follows:

- Great composers whose music forms the canon of music-school repertoire were also great improvisers. Hence, if we wish to emulate them, we must not exclude improvisation.
- Players or composers who have improvisational skills seem to have a quality of artistic freedom within traditional constraints.
- For many students, improvisation is already a part of musical practice.
- Improvisation is a required skill for many professional careers within music: jazz/pop/studio musicians, church organists, choir/music theatre

accompanists, music educators who wish to give spontaneous examples of certain concepts in theory or history.

Most importantly, in addition to these reasons, Larson believes that "Knowing facts about music (or about a foreign language or riding a bicycle) is only useful if those facts can be brought to bear as quickly as a musical situation...requires." He also reminds the reader that NASM guidelines require the development of 'improvisational' skills. Unfortunately, the NASM guidelines are quite vague on what these skills might be or how they would be defined and taught.

In order to show how improvisation might be important for comprehension of ideas in a music theory class, Larson uses the example of what he calls 'model progressions'. He is referring to standard tonal harmonic motion or progression which he views as "purposeful action within a dynamic field of musical forces". Since such model progressions form a large part of the tonal system, it is important for students not just to understand these progressions, but also to be able to manipulate them in a spontaneous fashion; to improvise with them.

Larson's technique for teaching these model progressions involves 'maps' or visual diagrams (using arrows etc..) of common ways in which harmonic motion occurs. For instance, a I^6 chord often moves to IV, ii often moves to V^7. By memorizing these maps, Larson hopes that the students will have a quick reference in mind when, in a compositional or improvisational setting, they find themselves on one chord wishing to move to another. By using the reference

stored as visual and, we hope, aural information, the student will be able to move effortlessly and correctly to the next chord in a variety of different ways. This has obvious applications for composition, transcription, sight-reading, continuo playing, accompanying and other musical activities. The author hopes that students will learn that chords are not just a set of tones, but rather that they have specific functions which can be anticipated, recognized and used in real-life musical situations. This is the essence of Larson's idea of 'integrated music learning'; that all theoretical information will be practical and applied and that everything learned in practice will be understood in theory. Of course, this idea is not a new one. Jazz musicians have always learned theory this way. Jazz musicians also have a much 'freer' approach to 'standard models' because their repertoire includes much more harmonic movement and variation than that of the 18th and 19th century harmonic repertoire to which Larson refers.

This all seems an excellent way to teach music theory and indeed to integrate practical and theoretical aspects of the music curriculum. Nevertheless, I wonder what it all really has to do with improvisation. There surely must be a difference between applying theoretical principles in daily musical activity and the process of improvisation. Applying previously learned patterns and models in a new situation has something of an improvisational quality, but seems to lack the real gist of the activity - the creative spark of discovering new patterns and combinations which never existed before.

I took a graduate class in Shenkerian Analysis class with Larson in 1998 and found that this approach was very effective for me and other members of the class—at least we learned a lot about Schenkerian analysis—yet, as an experienced improvisor, I found little in the class activities that reminded me of the cathartic musical excitement, interaction, and discovery which improvisation provides for me. At the same time, he does make a good argument which would be understood by non-improvisors for at least an introduction to the improvisational process in very traditional settings.

Improvisation: an aesthetic framework for the twenty-first century.

This article tackles the issue of improvisation in the 'classical' tradition. Of the lack of improvisational instruction in the area of classical music, Priest (1994) writes:

> Besides ignoring the improvisatory practices of baroque and classical eras, a greater price has been paid for not exploring this art. We have limited our aural imaginations to react to what is seen on the printed page rather than to react to what is heard. ..we have repressed the production and process of creating chamber music since musicians have not been encouraged to creatively or imaginatively lead an ensemble...by ignoring improvisatory studies, we have limited musician's imaginations.

I believe that this is an accurate assessment of the status quo. Priest recounts a brief history of improvisational practice in Western Art Music, showing how

improvisational practice was largely abandoned by the mid 19th century. The author suggests that at the very least, the contemporary performer of chamber and symphonic music should be able to improvise preludes and cadenzas in the manner that great performers and composers of those eras.

Priest outlines a simple approach by which students may be exposed to the process of improvisation, stressing that notated musical directions are unnecessary and that students should really on their own ears guided by their aural experience alone. The author suggests that a simple 'concept' first be chosen for an improvisation. For example, the student may chose to improvise using only short staccato sounds, or only in one mode or scale, or choose a particular feeling or idea which they will try to express. A list of some such possible concepts is provided as follows:

- **Musical Concepts**

  Tonalities: major, minor, dorian, phrygian, lydian etc.

  Pitch sets: dodecaphonic, whole-tone, octatonic, intervallic groupings

  Meters: twos, threes, fours, fives, sixes, sevens

  Articulations: staccato, legato, sostenuto

  Tempos: presto, adagio, accelerando, ritardando

  Timbre: tone quality, flutter tonguing, special effects

- **Life Concepts**

  Feeling/sensations: joy, satisfaction, frustration, hot, cold, wet etc

Colours: blue, green, red, brown

Tastes: salty, sweet, bitter, sour

Shapes: curves, lines, circles, angles, tall, wide, short, long

Secondly, a goal should be set for the improvisation. Priest is not quite clear about what such a goal might be. Perhaps he means that the goal should be fulfillment of the concept chosen to guide the improvisation. The author also suggests using practice materials such as scales, arpeggios or other technical exercises as the basis for improvising and that improvisation should be used as a way of exploring such materials. The teacher is not left out of the process. Priest suggests that the teacher use call and response activities as well as improvising with the student in the context of one of the 'concepts'. He sees modeling by the teacher as the prime educational tool.

The list of concepts is a bit vague, (particularly the 'life concepts') but perhaps usefully so in its tendency to provoke unusual musical thought (how do we play 'salty'?). The author also ignores that fact that improvising is not about 'translating' ideas from other domains into music, but rather that the improvisational process first and foremost deals directly with musical ideas and materials. It strikes the reader that the author is probably not a very accomplished improvisor, but perhaps this is useful in that it is critical to understand the thinking of the neophyte in order to instruct effectively. The strength of the article lies not in the author's handful of suggestions for learning to

improvise, but rather in the strong case he makes for the re-introduction of improvisatory practice into contemporary performance pedagogy for chamber and symphonic musicians.

Composition, improvisation, and the undergraduate preparation of musicians--Improvisation and composition--synthesis and integration into the music curriculum.

David Rosenboom teaches at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles, an institution which is widely considered to be at the forefront of university music schools which have accepted contemporary art practice as the core of their programs. In this article prepared for the National Association of School of Music meeting in 1995, Rosenboom explains (1996) what he sees as the necessary changes which music schools must make in order to remain a vital part of musical creation for the future. At the core of his beliefs, is the idea that improvisation can be a way of building awareness of music as a living aural tradition that students can be a part of creating and in this sense our views are very similar.

The author begins with a tentative definition of composition and improvisation: "A composer is simply, a creative music maker. Improvisation is simply, composition that is immediately heard, rather than subsequently heard". This is definitely an imprecise way of thinking of the two activities which makes some artificial distinctions while leaving other differences unrevealed. However, it quickly becomes clear that is not the author's intention to cause or illustrate divisions

between these two practices, but rather to give improvisation some importance in the mind of traditional, non-improvising musicians. Rosenboom then proceeds to discuss his views of the compositional method and to point out that improvisation uses many of the same processes, only in a shorter time scale. Again, I do not think this does improvisation justice at all, but the author's intentions seem to be in the right place.

As a background for his argument for the inclusion of improvisation in the university curriculum, the author outlines what he sees as the six essential attributes that must be in place in order for a music school to be a place where music is living and evolves.

- Preservation/history
- Performance
- Research in new materials
- Skills development
- Theory of musical languages
- Composition

Such attributes are critical so that "those who study in our schools will be most prepared to participate in what is sure to be a multi-dimensional environment of the coming decades." and, most importantly, because they all support the fundamental activity of spontaneous music making. Viewing the disciplines as interrelated is critical in combating what the author sees as a fragmenting of

musical endeavour into many parts which are often seen as unrelated by both students and teachers. Rosenboom sees improvisation as the central point around which the other disciplines revolve, each informing and being informed by the other. All are essential for educating the 'total musician' as defined by the author. According to Rosenboom, the main difficulties with the study of improvisation in universities so far has been in the rigid codification of tradition (particularly within jazz), a concretizing of the standard practice, an ostracizing of those who follow their creative impulses outside the bounds set by such practices. In order to teach and use improvisation effectively, it must be seen in a dialectical relationship with other disciplines within the curriculum. The author makes several concrete suggestions for encouraging this dialogue and developing an integrated curriculum design which encourages the creation of new and original music.

1. Use improvisation in teaching composition and composition in teaching improvisation
2. Make room for creative projects which require students to synthesize skills in a spontaneous, improvisatory way
3. Ensure that students can improvise with materials learned in aural skills and theory courses
4. Encourage the development of individual artistic vision as a goal of

parallel importance with the development of traditional skills (reading, technique etc)

5. Hire faculty who have an integrated view of musical disciplines and who are capable of teaching his by example.
6. Teachers should perform with and model for their students continually, developing music teaching as an aural dialogue between teacher and student.
7. Include improvisation at the beginning of musical training rather than as a sideline for advanced players with a specific interest in improvisation.
8. Encourage flexibility in accommodating the individual artistic visions of students.
9. Promote artistic collaboration between students of various backgrounds and levels
10. Teach musicianship skills using the students' instruments rather than in a class where everyone sings
11. Students should play and experiment with everything they learn in theory classes.
12. Increase time available for practicing improvisation and musicianship skills

13. Utilize technology where possible to facilitate practice and understanding of concepts – using MIDI to realize compositions, using software to create backing tracks for practicing etc..
14. Use improvisation and performance as ways to supplement studies of history and theory.

This is an extensive list to be sure and the author acknowledges that it appears on the surface to be a very complicated and costly program to implement. While this may be true to an extent, I think many of the suggestions may easily be implemented using existing resources in most universities. An exception to this is the acquisition of qualified faculty to teach improvisation or who are qualified to show how performance and improvisation can be integrated into other aspects of the curriculum. This is certainly the case for many departments and schools who are chronically cash-poor and in the position of trying to justify low faculty-student ratios to administrators. Nevertheless, many of Rosenboom's ideas require a simple shift in thinking on the part of the music educator—a shift from seeing music education as a passive process of transmission of knowledge and skills to an active process which encourages the student to take an active part in integrating all aspects of their study with real-life musical practice and creativity. Such a shift in thinking would not be expensive, but would require substantial investment of will and re-education for faculty members and administration.

Means and End(ing)s

This chapter presents only a skeletal kind of methodology or curriculum. My aim has been to open up a variety of possible avenues and ways to proceed guided by general principles. The most important of these principles are not musical or technical in nature, but philosophical. I have tried to keep the means in harmony with the ends in the sense that, if improvised music has no fixed vocabulary or repertoire, no standard set of techniques and devices, then it would be ridiculous to mandate such things in any discussion of teaching methods. If a teacher fully embraces the idea of creative freedom in collective music making and understands the necessary conditions which must be in place for this freedom to flourish, then I have no doubt that some great improvised music can be made. This is not to say that total musical and pedagogical relativism must prevail. I have never advocated a complete and continuous free-for-all (although obviously this might ensue at times) but rather have suggested a way to keep educational goals and objectives in harmony with the principle of individual artistic freedom. A teacher must always choose to impose certain restrictions and offer tasks to be completed even when the goal is free improvisation. The trick is to structure such tasks and restrictions in such a way that allows for the student to have a *voice* in how the tasks are accomplished and an *understanding* of how the restrictions will help them to develop certain aspects of their musical abilities. The activity of free improvisation is an exploratory process and thus the teaching of improvisation must also be exploratory in some respects. As I have mentioned before, while the teacher must certainly be a fellow traveler in the discovery

process and experience, they must also be experienced guides who understand music and have a sincere desire not only to *try* free improvisation but also an openness to accepting what musical truths may be found in its practice. It should be obvious from the ideas I have presented here that I don't pretend to have the definitive method or curriculum for learning to improvise. My aim has always been to present possibilities and suggest directions. I would feel truly successful in my writing if I have been able to convince anyone to ***try*** this way of making music and to **think** about what it means for their understanding of music and its place in human life.

CODA

In music, a coda is a kind of little ending which is tacked on to the larger structure of a piece. It is common to find at the end of a piece of written music the Italian instructions *Da Capo al Coda* which is a musician's shorthand way of saying, "go back and play the bit at the beginning and then take the coda to finish." This reference to the beginning is what I am about here. In addition, the coda provides a closing statement without being essential to the formal structure, and so I thought 'coda' might be better than 'conclusions' for my purposes here. In the initial stages of this work I tried to present my ideas about improvisation in a structure which discussed some important issues and problems in music philosophy and education in a general sense. I remain satisfied that the central issues in music education revolve around understanding the place of music in society, and more particularly in schooling. We really need to look at what is going on in music education at every level and ask what kind of social and political values are being perpetuated. I remain alarmed and upset by the fact that the majority of music teachers (and other kinds of teachers too!) I encounter have not questioned the social, psychological and spiritual implications of what they do. If music has the kind of potential for individual transformation and self-discovery which I suggest it has, then we have never needed music more than we do now as we feel our way into the 21st century. More importantly, the kind of

music which we need is a music which acknowledges the diversity of voices which are present in Canadian culture today. I don't think recycling music from 18th and 19th century Europe—as *glorious* as some of that music is—is the answer. Nor is relying, as some teachers are beginning to do, on pop music manufactured by the corporate interest. We cannot rely on historical constructions or profit-driven musical trends to give voice to diverse ideas.

I believe that improvised music has the potential to allow us to begin letting those other voices be heard and that it has the potential to form a model for a kind of human interaction which is free of the weight of history and popular expectation. For someone who doesn't really believe in the power of music to change and expand human experience, that might seem a rash or naïve thing to say. But I *do* believe that improvised music has that potential. Of course it is not the only solution to the ills of the world, but then again, we haven't given music much of a chance to show what it can do have we? I am not imagining a utopian vision of improvising children in every school and politicians jamming in the House of Commons, but I *am* imagining many people dissatisfied with the familiar musical landscapes and inherited dead aesthetics trying something new, allowing themselves to see where their creativity and openness might lead.

After everything else I have written about philosophy, aesthetics, theories, and methodologies of improvised music I keep returning to what this music has done

for me. I know it has changed me and I hope it has caused me to grow into a better person. I have learned through improvising to have more faith and trust in the goodness and intelligence of other people and to value their contributions to my understanding and my being. I have more faith than ever in the creative potential of human beings and in the potential of creative communion with others to change the self. I am not imagining an ideal world full of musicians and philosopher-kings, but I *am* imagining the possibility of people allowing their ideas to freely combine with those of others in an improvising musical group, being willing to work together, to feel together, towards an unknown goal, trusting in each other and in the transformative power of music to take them someplace they have never been. I know that if they do this persistently and with an open heart and mind, they too will be changed. They will understand themselves, their relationships with others, and the world in an exciting and profoundly different way. Music can do this.

Appendix A

Biographies of Musicians Interviewed

Because I made such extensive use of interview research in this thesis, I thought it fitting to include some rudimentary biographical information about the very fine musicians who I was able to interview. It has been my great privilege to perform often with these individuals over the last few years in many different situations. It should be clear from their responses to my questions that they are more than just performers; they are also very accomplished philosophers.

Rob Kohler

Bassist Rob Kohler is a Montana native who has performed improvised music, jazz, classical, and pop music all over the world. His playing, compositions and skills as a producer have been documented on many recordings with groups such as the Alice DiMicele Band, Three Form, This World, and the Platt/Kohler Trio. Rob has also toured and performed with such artists as Danny Gottlieb, Nancy King, Brian Bromberg, Madelaine Eastman, John Stowell, and Art Lande, and is a regular performer at the Bozeman Bass Bash. Rob is on the faculty of the Stanford University Jazz Workshop and has just released a solo CD titled, A Thousand Faces. He resides in Eugene, Oregon where he performs regularly with many of Oregon's finest musicians and teaches elementary and secondary school music at Oak Hill School.

Daniel Heila

Daniel Heila is a composer, flutist and video artist living in the Pacific Northwest. Much of his music is written for improvising ensembles of unspecified instrumentation. Bringing years of experience performing as a folk/pop musician and classically trained flutist to his composition efforts yields work that is both accessible and challenging – spoken in a musical language of our time. His current projects include an orchestral collage based on the flight patterns of Vaux's Swifts, a documentary video opera about death in Central New York State gorges, and a series of chamber works for unspecified instrumentation and video. Daniel joined the Knotty Ensemble in 2001 and has quickly become well known as an improvisor on the Pacific Northwest music scene. He holds a Master of Music degree in Composition from the University of Oregon.

Clyde Reed

Clyde Reed is one of Canada's foremost improvising bassists and is a vital part of the improvised music scene in Vancouver, BC. He currently performs with the Rich Halley Trio, Bruce Freedman Trio and the NOW Orchestra and has also collaborated with improvising players of international stature including Barry Guy, Wadada Leo Smith, George Lewis, and Peter Brotzmann. In addition to his musical endeavours, Clyde has been a Professor of economics at Simon Fraser University since 1972 and has research interests including Canadian and European economic history; theories of culture; religious prohibitions against

usury; cultural fetishism; and the persistence of open fields in agrarian England during the 13th century.

Bill Clark

Trumpeter and composer Bill Clark has been an essential part of the Vancouver improvised music scene since the early 1980s performing in many important and pioneering ensembles including Talking Pictures, Primal Orbit, the Hard Rubber Orchestra, Vancouver Ensemble of Jazz Improvisation, Chief Feature, New Orchestra Workshop, Grupo Jazz Tumbao, the Bill Clark sextet, and Clark/Burrows/Taylor. He has also composed extensively for film and theatre projects. Bill holds a Master of Music degree in improvisation from the California Institute of the Arts where he studied under Wadada Leo Smith.

Appendix B

Index of Tracks on CD Recording

In order to understand anything I have written in this thesis, you must listen to some improvised music. The selection of pieces on the CD recording (which can be found on the inside back cover of this thesis) is by no means a complete representation of what you might encounter in the realm of improvised music, but all of these examples are music I am very proud and pleased to have taken part in; they represent some of my favorite improvising experiences of the past few years. All music on the CD is copyright material and is included by kind permission of the artists.

TRACKS 1-7

These tracks are a recording of part of a concert performed by the Knotty Ensemble at Foolscap Books in Eugene, Oregon on February 22, 2002. Rob Kohler - bass and violin, Daniel Heila - flute, slide whistle, tupan, and other percussion, Jared Burrows - guitar and accordion. The Knotty Ensemble is usually a quartet, but our cellist, Alex Kelly, was playing for a Handel oratorio a mile down the road. Only a handful of people turned up to hear us on that very rainy night, but I wasn't at all upset because the acoustics of the room were exceptionally fine and the musical communication between the players was of the highest calibre. This was Daniel's first concert with Rob and me.

TRACK 8

This one was recorded March 18, 2003 at Simon Fraser University and was one of a series of concerts in the Freedom Festival of Improvised Music that I had organized that week. Bruce Freedman - alto saxophone, Daniel Heila - pan flute, Jared Burrows - guitar. Bruce and Daniel had met for the first time just ten minutes before we played, but they got musically acquainted in a hurry.

TRACK 9

This is a short excerpt from a concert performed by the Knotty Ensemble on June 19, 2000. The concert was the occasion of our first CD release and we were fortunate to have a very receptive and enthusiastic audience in a very fine old Lutheran church. Sonya Lawson - viola, Alex Kelly - cello, Rob Kohler - bass, Jared Burrows - guitar. The concert was so satisfying that we made our second CD, *Knotty Ensemble Live*, from the recording.

TRACK 10

In late 2001 Bill Clark, Stan Taylor, and I formed Clark/Burrows/Taylor for the purpose of doing a show at the Vancouver International Jazz Festival. Stan and Bill and I had played in many different bands together over the years but we thought the trio might be a nice change from some of the more jazz-oriented

projects we had been involved with in the past. The trio met regularly for improvising sessions of the course of a few months and I simply recorded the proceedings. This track is the second from our CD, *Scenes from...?* Bill Clark - trumpet, Stan Taylor - drums, Jared Burrows - accordion. Recorded in December 2001 at Simon Fraser University.

TRACK 11

This is a short excerpt of the very long final concert of the 2003 Freedom Festival. The Freedom Festival orchestra consisted of Randal Schmidt - guitar and electronics, Vivian Houle - voice, Stan Taylor -drums, J.P. Carter - trumpet, Brad Muirhead - bass trombone, Daniel Heila - flute, Rob Kohler and Clyde Reed -basses, Stefan Smulovitz - viola, Karen Graves - tenor and soprano saxophones, Bruce Freedman and Kevin Hoferer - alto saxophones, and Jared Burrows - guitar and clarinet. Half of the players met the other half as we were setting up for the concert at 1067 Granville, an artist-run space in downtown Vancouver. On the drive home from the concert we were all still trying to remember all the players names! The FFO got a little rowdy and chaotic at times, but it was an amazing experience to improvise in a group of that size and to find moments of sublime coherence and unity of purpose in equal proportion to the chaos. We plan to make the Freedom Festival an annual event.

TRACK 12

Brad Muirhead and I have known each other for many years and had occasionally performed together in various contexts, usually in a larger ensemble. We both though the idea of an accordion and tuba duo was a little odd and perhaps even perverse—and so we had to try it. Brad is a very powerful and inventive player and we have since collaborated often and put together a number of concert series featuring improvised music. Recorded January 2001, at Simon Fraser University. Brad Muirhead - tuba and Jared Burrows - accordion.

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