

# **Coach Agrell's Random Suggestions to the Improv Team on Game Day**

## **Read it! (all!)**

1. Go for it, especially in Soundpainting. Don't be tentative. Dare to be outrageous. Nothing succeeds like excess.
2. On the other hand, don't forget to keep it simple. Simple motifs are easy to decorate, to remember, to imitate, to play backwards, to transpose, to pass around.
3. Leave space; don't play too much, especially when more people play. Silence is golden!
4. Repetition, repetition, repetition. Imitate, imitate, imitate.
5. Tell a story: pieces need a beginning, middle, and end. Don't tell a story that is all Kansas - tell the Rocky Mountains! Make something happen - make it go somewhere! Build up to something! Build tension, then release. Use variations in timbre, dynamics, density, extended techniques, and so on to build interest.
6. Listen for the right time for an ending. Make it definite. Try to catch others' glance to coordinate the timing. If you stop but someone else keeps going, let them go; now they are responsible for figuring out the ending.
7. If you're soloing: start simple. Build in complexity, dynamics. Stick to one (simple) idea - repeat it, develop it, vary it.
8. Consider the power of rhythm (rhythmic improv) to give your solos interest rather than many notes. Also, rhythmic displacement is a handy device for motivic development.
9. Don't forget extended techniques (and: mutes, body percussion, movement, singing).
10. The ostinato is your friend - it's a quick and easy way to construct music on the spot.
11. Use clear body language (and/or Soundpainting gestures) to help structure improvised pieces. Don't rely on your foot to establish the beat. Establish a clear beat with the music itself, and reinforce it with

movements of your eyes, head, and whole body. Sway with the music! Feel it! Nod and relate to your playing partners.

12. Create and/or listen for strong ideas. Go with the idea, develop it. Bounce the idea back and forth in the group. When it's time create or listen for a new strong idea (motif, etc).

13. Sometimes it's nice to start a solo on a really 'wrong' note (mild dissonance: 2, 4, 6, 7; strong dissonance: b2, #2, #4, b6). Resolve it up or down for that wonderful 'ahhhh!' feeling.

14. Take advantage of the special techniques and sounds that are unique and idiomatic to your instrument. Especially extended techniques.

15. Be alert and flexible to assuming either a foreground (solo) role or background (accompaniment). Be ready to move in and out of either role (as well as to be silent) very quickly - sometimes you're only one or the other for a second or one note!

16. Unity/variety. Ideal is 50% each. Be predictable part of the time. Set up expectations; meet them for a while, then do something unexpected.

17. In scan, point to point, play/don't play, etc - play something **different** each time - don't get stuck on one note. Ditto for vocalists - don't get stuck on one word - find many different words or phrases that relate to the theme (if you don't have a theme, it makes it easier to invent your own).