

Improvisation for Classical Musicians
Spring 2012

Logbook Tips

Keeping a logbook of ideas, thoughts, reflections, and being asked to respond creatively – as well as recording time spent practicing – is an essential part of your learning experience in this class (it's also an important part of your grade). Since this may be a new experience for some, below are some tips and information on the process.

- Keep **two** notebooks – respectively entitled Black & Gold (they may be any color you like – these are just titles) – and hand them in alternating each week.

Put your name and “Black” or “Gold” on the cover!

Please write legibly!

Leave some space in the margins so I have room to add comments.

DATE all entries.

It's also a good idea to keep a small, fit-in-the-pocket spiral notebook to record ideas when you don't have one of the big notebooks with you. *See the Assignment List sheet for exact due dates.*

What to include:

For improvisations:

- Give the name of the game – underline the title
 - Your ensemble partners – names and instruments
 - Time (duration).
 - A detailed record of what happened
 - Discoveries you might have made along the way: What worked? What didn't? What might you do next time to make it better? What contributed to unity? Variety?
- What not to include: whether you liked it or not. This is about memory, analysis, and learning something to improve next time, i.e. listening and understanding.

Readings:

- Notes on *Free Play* plus your reactions, ideas, thoughts, questions, etc. Anything that is assigned reading should have notes and reactions recorded in your logbook.
(NB: Do **not** copy out whole articles in the logbook except for selected quotes)

Other:

- Patterns, licks, composition ideas that you're working on or that you discover. What pattern (171, 123, 1234, 13, etc.) did you work on? How long did you practice? Did you vary rhythms, articulations, dynamics, re
- Insights, ideas, thoughts, quotes, epiphanies, future plans, dreams, etc.
- Realizations – from the quotes, readings, course pack readings, or – especially – from your playing/practice
- How do you feel when you improvise?
- Do you hear differently now? How so? What are you doing differently?
- Try random games from the text (*Improv Games...*); invent your own! Regularly!

- Experiment! With sounds – how many noises (extended techniques!) of all kinds can you make? Compile a very long list of your discoveries and continually add to it.
- Everyone, but especially pianists: experiment with chords – start with a triad and try adding (one at a time) every other chromatic note, both above, below, and in the middle of the triad – which of these 4 note chords do you like? Make a note of them! Use them in your playing! Try also this: do the same experiment with 3 note chords – use just 1 & 5 (e.g. C & G in the key of C) and add every other chromatic tone – make a note, etc.
- Vocalists: improvise melodies with 1) scat syllables or 2) text (this can be made up on the spot or use a poem or use any piece of text anywhere – a tabloid, a textbook, a quote, etc.). Greet each other in recitative in the hallway. Improvise melody and text on a theme (e.g. cruciferous vegetables, kinds of bats, engine parts, etc.).
- Pianists (i.e. everyone): play a drone (the tonic in octaves or 1-5) and improvise a melody over it – the Dorian mode (1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7) works well for this.
- Did you use anything from improv in your warm-ups this week? Scale practice? Teaching? Tell all about it.
- Experiment with rhythm! Work on your rhythmic ‘domain skills.’ Be able to add accents at will. Be able to improvise with one note – just creating interesting rhythms. Document your efforts in the Logbook.
- Improvise outside of the practice room. Improvise on the way to class, even if it is just whistling or tapping rhythms. Improvise with a friend while walking somewhere. And document your experiments in the Logbook.
- When you’re not improvising – think about improvising. Think about Free Play, about the Quotes, Principles. Ruminant. Cogitate. React. Extrapolate. Develop ideas, concepts, plans, ideas, schemes. Whistle new stuff. Tap captivating rhythms. Imagine new games. Every other class you’ll take at the university is about what somebody else said or did. This class is about what you come up with. It’s a strange feeling at first – having the power and the permission to generate ideas and music. It can be scary. It takes some getting used to. You have to learn to turn off the internal critic and editor and just cut loose. Go for quantity! Just do it! More, more! Dream, experiment, discover. Do it in pairs, trios, quartets, Inspire each other. Start bands. Make up songs (record and write down the best ones). Laugh. Have fun. Be outrageous. Get out of the box, go galumphing. Enjoy!
- Remember, the reason we do the Logbook is to make you think – think about what you read and what you do. It also keeps you honest and responsible to do the work all the way along in the absence of a lot of tests, papers, etc.
- Final tip: read the book. There is a ton of information here, a lot of ideas that you can use in your improvising (and your thinking about improvising) and hence in the logbook. It doesn’t matter if we haven’t come to it yet in class.