

EUROPEAN JOINT MODULE

'IMPROVISATION: FROM SCORE TO CREATION'

DEVELOPED BY THE METRIC PROJECT

Guildhall School of Music & Drama London

Royal Conservatoire The Hague

Royal Conservatoire Antwerp

1. Introduction

The European Joint Module 'Improvisation: from score to creation' deals with tonal music in a broad sense: every scale or mode that refers to a tonal centre can be used. David Dolan (Guildhall School of Music & Drama London), Bert Mooiman & Karst de Jong (Royal Conservatoire The Hague) and Yves Senden (Royal Conservatoire Antwerp) will approach tonality each in a specific way.

The Joint Module Sessions in each institution are organised by the local teacher by means of eight sessions: session 1, 3, 4, 6 will be given by the local teachers, while session 2, 5, 7, 8 will be given by the visiting teachers. Each session will last at least three hours. Depending on infrastructure of the institution and the available time for the teachers a session might be divided in 2 x 1.5 hour, separated by a day. The students will have to possibility for individual coaching for each session.

The assessment (session 8) will be judged by the local teacher and by the guest teachers; the latter will be present 'live', or they will judge the improvisation by means of a (video) recording.

2. Guildhall School of Music and Drama: David Dolan

2.1. Level students

Guildhall students will be 2nd year Masters.

2.2. Content

"I will work with Guildhall students on applying what they will have done in the first post graduate year plus the enrichment elements on performances they prepare for the end of 2nd year final Masters concert/assessments as well as enlarging structures they do, cadenzas in concerti, preludes & fantasias in different styles. For further information about the course, see the description below".

Professor David Dolan,
Head of the Centre for Creative Performance & Classical Improvisation

INTERPRETATION THROUGH IMPROVISATION COURSE

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General background: The course, developed by David Dolan at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, aims to contribute to the revival of the lost art of classical improvisation and enhance creativity in performance. This, by combining the use of know-how (structural, stylistic, textural and harmonic awareness) with real-time flow and creative spontaneity. Active listening, “links” between the inner ear and the actual musical output as well as awareness of emotional expression and body language in the context of musical communication (using video) are also included in the course work. ¶

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The course has been running at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London as well as the Yehudi Menuhin School since 1994, and has seminars in music institutions like the Juilliard School, and the Australian National Academy of Music, as well as international festivals (e.g. Verbier Festival) since 2001. ¶

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Format: Chamber music groups & solo instrumental and vocal students. A fortnightly two-hour session. After a couple of master sessions the work continues with small groups of 3-4 students. ¶

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Course elements in a nutshell: Three main paths are explored in parallel. ¶

The first path: extemporizing in different styles and forms in order to ‘feel them from the inside’ and own them, in addition to understanding the theory. This is usually done with at least one other partner, aiming at encouraging real-time active listening as well as enhancing the ability to lead & follow. Ensemble semi-structured and free improvisations are also taking place, while encouraging active listening, leadership and the ability to respond to the unexpected. ¶

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The second path: Looking for several possible reductions of repertoire works, performing these reductions and later improvising on them as one searches for his/her interpretation. We try to make a journey with the students from the text “downwards” to the ‘basic plan’ and back to the original foreground while exploring different interpretative options. An important part of the work is a juxtaposition of a reduction with the actual text. This is achieved by inviting two players or groups to work simultaneously on the same piece. (E.g. Bach unaccompanied works for stringed instruments). ¶

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The third path: performing and extemporising together with actors in order to encourage spontaneity of emotional expression, stage presence and communication as well as awareness of the musical elements in rhetoric/gestures. (Module runs in collaboration with the Drama Director & Senior Coach Ken Rea in the Drama department of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama). ¶

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Year 1: exchange of simple dialogues (based on periodic phrases), diatonic (later chromatic) counterpoints, theme and variations (always between partners). Improvising on deep structural pulse & harmonic rhythms, body language in the context of pulse, rhythm and listening (using video). Extemporisations on basic elements of Baroque versus classical styles, later adding elements of the romantic, post-romantic and post-tonal styles. Extemporising fermata points, repeats and tangents. ¶

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Year 2: (advanced): Improvising more elaborate forms and stylistic elements (for example: preludes & fantasias, fugues, sonata form movements & movements on sonatas; romantic chromaticism and later polymodalities; tonally-free materials). Following polyphonic modulations while improvising an additional voice. Structure-based transpositions. More elaborate work through hierarchies of reductions. Improvising fantasias and cadenzas. Joint work with actors continues. Students who so wish and achieved 75 or above in Year 1 final assessment can choose to include elements of solo and/or ensemble improvisations in their final Masters public concert assessments and get support from the Centre. ¶

3. Royal Conservatoire The Hague: Bert Mooiman and Karst de Jong

3.1. Level students

Master 1st year. Students who have shown a real interest in improvisation during their BA studies; new MA students will get an entrance test.

3.2. Course content

Each session:

- starts with games and assignments to warm up, open up the ears etc. (30-45 minutes);
- has a thematic middle section;
- finishes with completely ‘free’ improvisations without any prescribed form, model etc., and / or free tonal duos with piano (30-45 minutes).

Summary of thematic middle sections:

- a. improvising on harmonic reductions of scores from the repertoire of the students, preferably from the common practice period;
- b. Continuation of a. // improvising variations on a ground, passacaglia (baroque or later style);
- c. Continuation of b. // improvising a prelude and / or cadenza;
- d. Continuation of c. // modal improvisation (mode as a collection of tones: extremely simple modes of two or three tones, pentatonic, whole tone scale, church modes, octotonic).;
- e. Continuation of d. // ‘melodrama’: designing a plan for a performance with improvised music to illustrate an existing short story / fairy tale etc.; improvisation forms as practised in the previous sessions might find a place here;
- f. Final presentation: performance of the melodrama.

4. Royal Conservatoire Antwerp: Yves Senden

4.1. Level Students

Master 1st year; experience should be at least 2 year (by preference 3 year) of improvisation.

4.2. Global approach: 'theme (in broadest sense) with variations'.

In the sessions I let the students choose a theme (motive (e.g. from a nocturne of Chopin, or from Jaws II of III), melody (a Greek folk melody), picture (this might be slightly more challenging, score reduction structure, whatever, something that could be used en reused throughout the sessions...) and they improvise in a certain tonal/modal style around that theme, using ideas from the previous sessions. In every session I will work with them on a new/different tonal/modal style or deepen the previous one. In the end an improvisation session could present a 'walk through' of the styles dealt with.

This approach would include both diversity (offering 'beginnings' to the student, cf. Karst's approach) and building up (cf. David's and also my concern).

In the assessment the students could choose the style(s) they feel most comfortable with to present their public performance.

4.3. Description of each session

4.3.1. Session 1: Messiaen inspired tools [1]

Modes à transpositions limitées (MATL)

Valeur ajouté

Chord chains

'cantabile' slow movement

>>> first: getting familiar with the tools; in the end: applying the tools to the main theme.

4.3.2. Session 2: 'status quaestionis' + Messiaen inspired tools [2]

Evaluation of Session 1, 2, 3

Adding new Messiaen inspired tools:

Structures based on the concept of addition

'wheel in wheel'

'development by elimination'

Bird sounds

Staccato 'à goutte de l'eau'

>>> first: getting familiar with the tools; in the end: applying the tools to the main theme.

Creating group improvisations in which the elements of Session 1, 2, 3 are integrated in a solid manner.

4.3.3. Session 3: Minimal composer inspired tools [1]

La Monte Young's concept of the *Well tuned Piano*

Riley: approach based on *Persian Surgery Dervishes*, on *in C*

Reich: phase shifting [reminder for YS: use of counterpoint, canon, augmentation, retrograde etc.]

>>> first: getting familiar with the tools; in the end: applying the tools to the main theme, combined with /added to tools mastered in Session 1 and 4, and in the 'guest'sessions 2, 3 .

4.3.4. Session 5: 'status quaestionis' + Minimal composer inspired tools [2] + Arvo Pärt inspired tools

Evaluation of previous sessions

Adding new Minimal composer inspired tools + Arvo Pärt inspired tools

Glass: 'wheel in wheel', addition (cf. *two pages*), chords inspired by *Einstein on the Beach*

Neo-tonal approach: cf. *Tabula rasa*, *Spiegel im Spiegel*

Looking for other neo-tonal approaches

>>> first: getting familiar with the tools; in the end: applying the tools to the main theme.

combined with /added to tools mastered in Session 1, 4, 5, and in the 'guest'sessions 2, 3, and 6, 7.

>>> finally: fine tuning the result: A set of variations on a theme, with tools mastered in Session 1-7.

[source of inspiration: Rzewski's *The People United*]

5. Module description Royal Conservatoire The Hague

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| Course title: | Improvisation: from score to creation. A European Joint Module |
| Course Content: | <p>This module is constructed as a European Joint Module, which means it will be offered in collaboration by three institutions: the Royal Conservatoire The Hague, the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. These institutions have agreed on a joint content and pedagogical approach for this module on improvisation. Teachers in the three institutions will travel supported by the ERASMUS+ programme to the institutions to teach this module throughout the first semester. This module has been developed in the framework of the European METRIC (Modernising European Higher Music Education through Improvisation) project on improvisation (see https://www.aec-music.eu/projects/current-projects/metric-). The module presents multiple approaches to classical improvisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ independently of repertoire▪ in the context of performing specific repertoire works <p>Starting from a reference/stimulus (score, a film, a composition, a musical structure ([ABA etc.])... moving towards an improvised creation, developing extended solo or ensemble interaction.</p> |
| Objectives: | <p>Encouraging creativity and personal voice in Art Music-making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Broadening perspectives as performer.▪ Exploring different performance perspectives by means of improvisation (making the connection between formal insight and expression).▪ Personalising (taking ownership of) tonal/modal languages, forms (e.g. ABA, rondo etc.) and modes of expression (playing in a 'telling' way).▪ Familiarising with different international pedagogical approaches |
| Type of Course: | Elective during the first semester |
| Level: | Master (8 x 3 h + 1 session assessment) |
| Numerus fixus: | 12 students |
| Prerequisites: | Previous experience in classical improvisation recommended. |
| Teachers: | David Dolan (Guildhall School of Music and Drama), Bert Mooiman and Karst De Jong (Royal Conservatoire The Hague), Yves Senden (Royal Conservatoire Antwerp) |
| Credit Points: | 3 EC |
| Literature | See Joint_Modules_Literature.pdf for recommended literature |
| Work forms: | Local teachers: group sessions of (average) 3h Visiting teachers: group sessions of (average) 3h + possibilities for further individual coaching |
| Assessment: | <p>Public performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The students use at least one of the ideas provided in the sessions.▪ Includes solo and group improvisation |
| Sort of grading: | Final assessment in the presence of the 'local' teacher plus one of the visiting teachers + attendance results (80%). The METRIC assessment criteria will be used in the assessment process. |
| Language: | English |
| Schedule/time/venue: | <p>Session 1, 3, 4, 6: given by the local teachers Session 2, 5, 7, 8: given by the visiting teachers Dates: 9/10 (K+B) 17.30 – 20.30, 16/10 (YS) idem, 30/10 (K+B) idem, 13/11 (K+B) idem, 27/11 (YS) idem, 11/12 (K+B) idem, 18 + 19 / 12 DD. On 18 December: 17.30 – 20.30, 19 December: 9.30 – 12.30. Venue t.b.a. via ASIMUT</p> |
| Registration: | Via online form by 17 September |
| Information: | K.deJong@koncon.nl |