

Integrating Technique, Musicality and Self Expression One Note at a Time

Experience the Art of Improvisation With Techniques Developed by Music For People CEGEP/College/University Music Majors or Minors

We are born all artists - the challenge is remaining one as we grow up.

Pablo Picasso

The College Music Society (CMS) recently published on its website a task-force report entitled “Transforming Music Study from its Foundations: A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation for Music Majors.” In an effort to further students’ potential for professional participation and leadership in today’s rapidly evolving musical culture, the task force created a detailed rationale and list of recommendations that center around creativity, diversity and integration. This workshop supports one of the key points put forth by the task force: The inclusion of improvisation in the music curriculum provides a stronger basis for educating musicians today than the prevailing model of training musicians solely in the interpretation of existing works. More specifically, the question of how musicians can integrate improvisation in daily practice is experientially explored in depth.

Why improvise? Musicians often feel stiff, blocked and frustrated when they conscientiously *try* to perform expressively. The author’s personal experiences with improvisation over the last three years reveal that daily practice alone and with others enhances technical and musical development, sight-reading ability, interpretation skills, and overall self confidence.

How can it be that improvisation accomplishes all of this?

Improvisation enhances musical development because it requires one to creatively use the resources he has at that very moment. One learns to calm the mind chatter, listen deeply both inwardly and outwardly to others, and to trust musical intuition and feeling, which are often overlooked in the midst of formal musical training. Improvising is an open skill. Open skills require one to evaluate and react to unpredictable circumstances. In improvisation, there are “no wrong notes”, only opportunities to creatively transform a perceived “wrong note” into an unexpected and exciting form of expression that one can choose to develop and/or resolve.

Technique is developed as one learns what it is to be *ready* mentally and physically to play/sing a phrase. This is because one is free to play *when*, and *what* one chooses, instead of following the written score. Creative exploration also allows one to stretch the boundaries of their instrumental playing or singing. By going to the extremes of range, dynamics, tempo, articulation or texture, one overcomes stiffness and unnecessary tension that are generally the result of trying to do something *right*.

Score reading can be meaningless if one does not fully understand what one is playing from the page. Music is a language, and the ability to listen to others and

communicate ideas is essential to linguistic development. Musicians need to overcome the fear of expressing themselves spontaneously as it will enhance the way they perceive the music of others.

Interpretation requires one to go far beyond intellectually playing the right notes. Improvisation teaches one to have an individual musical voice. Playing music in the moment brings us face to face with our own self-limiting beliefs but it inevitably brings out the best in individuals as they begin to trust their own problem-solving abilities.

The materials created over the last thirty years by teachers and members of *Music for People* (founded in 1986 by cellist David Darling and flutist Bonnie Insull) make spontaneous music making accessible to all musicians, regardless of level of experience.

In this workshop, participants are introduced to the art of improvisation, a seemingly insurmountable challenge for many, through platforms that are immediately accessible. Although these platforms may seem rudimentary at first, they demand focus as well as deep listening, self-awareness and awareness of others, skills that are all-too-often overlooked in daily practice and rehearsal. Through this experience, participants will also gain insight into how to initiate and facilitate improvisation activities.

Irene Feher combines over 23 years of experience teaching singing with three years of training in *Music For People's* MLP (musicianship Leadership Program).

Event Description:

- Events can last 2 hours or a full 2 days!
- The recommended length for an introductory session is 3 hours as this allows enough time for participants to immerse themselves without feeling overwhelmed
- Events can be tailored to include the following: singing, movement, drumming, large and small instrumental ensembles
- All instruments and voices are welcome