

MUS 231, Open Improvisation Seminar, Fall 2008
Michael Dessen, University of California, Irvine
Syllabus

Course meets: Tues/Thurs, 2:00-3:20, location TBA
Course webpage: <http://music.arts.uci.edu/mdessen>
My office: 105 Music and Media
Phone: (949) 824-0386
Office hours: Thursday 11:30am-1:30pm, and by **appointment**
Email: mdessen@uci.edu

Course description

As our new graduate program attests, various forms of "improvised music" have found a place in the academy during recent decades, often despite their non-academic origins. The goal of this course is to help each of us further develop a practice as improvisors, both through collaborative performance and discussion, and through exposure to the work of influential improvising musicians from the past and present. Listening and reading assignments, including many writings by musicians themselves, will introduce some of the currents in Western fields of improvised music since 1950, and you will also be required to complete a research paper on a topic of your choice. However, this is not a comprehensive historical survey. Reading, listening, and writing assignments are intended as sparks for creative work and reflection, and seeds for future studies.

Coursework

1. In-class performance: We will use the bulk of our class meeting time for performance and critique. The initial classes will include mostly performance with little or no discussion, but that will change. We will begin with trio formats, and later include duos and larger ensembles. We may also explore some formats such as graphic scores or conduction later in the quarter if there is time.

2. Reading, listening, and responses: Most weekly readings and recordings will be specified, but at times you will be asked to seek out relevant materials on your own. Each week you will also be asked to post a brief response to the reading and listening on the (private) class notebook on **EEE**, between Tuesday's and Thursday's class. I expect you to spend roughly 2-3 hours per week on the reading/listening/response assignments. Assignments will be announced in class and through the class listserv, and available through either **EEE** or the Arts Media Center reserves.

3. Solo performance project: Each student will develop a 5-minute solo piece and perform it in class during the 5th full week of classes. It should evolve out of a regular practice of improvisation on your instrument, which is considered part of the workload for this course.

4. Class concert: We will perform a class concert during 8th week. Each student will be in at least one duo or trio that will meet outside of class to prepare for the concert. After the concert has taken place, we'll use one or two class sessions to discuss it.

5. Research paper: Each student will devise a research topic and submit a one-paragraph proposal with preliminary bibliography by the beginning of 6th week. The paper should be roughly 10 pages, double spaced, and is due by Wednesday of exam week at 5 pm. If you would like suggestions for topics, please speak to me early.

Grading

Participation in class performances/discussion and in class concert: 30%
Reading/listening and posting responses (weekly pass/fail grade): 30%
Completion of solo performance project: 20%
Research paper: 20%

Late/makeup/absence policy

Makeups (solo pieces), paper extensions, etc. are only acceptable in cases of severe illness or emergency. Repeated absences or failure to come to class prepared will naturally lower your participation grade.

Special needs

If you have a disability that affects your ability to complete the assignments or tests on time, you must come see me at the beginning of the semester to make advance arrangements.

Office hours and getting help

If you have any trouble with the course, it is important to seek help early rather than wait until the end of the quarter. If you want to meet but cannot make my office hours, please [email me](#) some times you are free.