

“Closing the Book” Including Improvisation in the Private Piano Lesson

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This presentation is given in partial fulfillment of the Master of Music Degree at Kansas State University. Nicole Lemoine is a student of Dr. Virginia Houser.

Wednesday, February 25, 2015
7:30 P.M.,
Kirmser Hall

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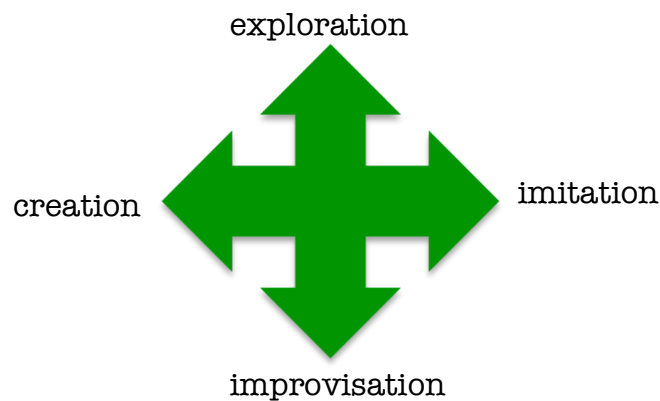
- The art of thinking and performing music simultaneously
- Making music in the moment without the intent to revise
- The spontaneous expression of musical images and ideas that directly reflect the immediate ideas, emotions, and sensations of the improviser

Methods that include improvisation:

Orff Schulwerk

- Developed by German composer Carl Orff (1895-1982)
- Guides students through several phases of musical development:

Fun Fact: Carl Orff was the composer of Carmina Burana.



Orff pedagogy takes what the students know, and continuously moves it into a new arena; it takes their already formed concepts of what they know about music and by the teacher's questioning, they are encouraged to explore the concept just a little bit further each time.

Improvisation in Orff

- Employs fundamental improvisatory techniques such as imitation • echo • ostinato • cannon
- These techniques are developed to considerable depth and complexity as students grow in their musical knowledge

"the experience of improvisation is at the heart of the matter".- Doug Goodkin, well-known Orff teacher trainer

Fun Fact: Dalcroze developed the concept of eurhythmics for musicians and dancers alike.

The Dalcroze Method

- Created by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze
- Threefold focus on eurhythmics, solfège, and improvisation.

Eurhythmics: the internalization of music and rhythms as demonstrated through movement

Dalcroze begins by having students react to what they are hearing rhythmically through improvised movements and gestures

Solfège (do•re•mi)

The Dalcroze Method uses solfège to enhance the sense of musical pitch, as well as the ability to distinguish tone qualities. It also helps students to develop the ability to listen and retain tonal memory, and is used to prepare the student for note reading

Improvisation

The purpose of improvisation in the Dalcroze method is to allow students the freedom to express musical ideas without the need to think about prior musical material

[Notes here:]

Why do it?

Culture ↔ Connection

- Improvisation was a common tradition among musicians of Western cultures until the mid-nineteenth century. Similarly, music of most non-Western cultures has always incorporated improvisation
- The shift away from improvisation began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, due to the increase of literal performance
- Improvisation is an important link to our musical past

Just a Note: Many works by our famous composers such as Brahms, Chopin, Franck, and Stravinsky, probably began as improvisations on the keyboard.

“Our general neglect of improvisation as a creative discipline stands in direct contrast to the rest of the world, where improvisation has thrived in virtually every cultural region”. -Bill Dobbins, professor of jazz studies and contemporary media at the Eastman School of Music

[Notes here:]

Self-Expression

- Improvisation is an avenue that gives students the tools to creatively express themselves in a way that is unique to them
- Improvisation allows students to express music in the moment that is uniquely theirs
- This self expression leads to musical autonomy, a sense of ownership in something that is completely theirs
- It places a different value on the music they are creating

Just a Note: When students value what they are accomplishing and are allowed to be creative, they are motivated to learn.

“Improvisation can provide the student with a sense of ownership and pride in his or her work. When a student improvises, all the lights are on— thinking, hearing, feeling, and doing. Because they’re so completely engaged, most students love to improvise”-Doug Goodkin

[Notes here:]

Musical Interaction and Group Participation

- Students learn so much from each other, and improvisation is a great way to encourage this learning
- In a improvisation exercise, students are encouraged to listen to a partner or another group of performers and react to what they hear

Group improvisation helps students enhance their listening skills because they're required to listen to one another to make music.

Benefits of group improvisation

- (1) collective decision-making takes place
- (2) group identities and relationships develop
- (3) musical participation is favored over competition
- (4) risk-taking is celebrated
- (5) being musical together with the group is valued overall

[Notes here:]

Improved Technical, Aural, and Music-Reading Ability

- Students who improvise may develop improved technical skills, enhance their aural skills, and sharpen their music-reading ability
- Improvising encourages students to rely more on their ears to create music, and less on the notated music
- Through this reliance on the ear, improvisation helps students to understand music at a deeper level
- Studies show that students whose instruction includes improvisation have improved music reading skills than students whose instruction does not include improvisation
- The ability to improvise seems to be related to a student's deeper comprehension of the tonal, rhythmic, and expressive elements of written music

Speaking and conversing help prepare us for reading language and enhance our understanding of the written word. Similarly, improvisation enhances our performance of notated music because it prepares us for learning how to comprehend music notation.

[Notes here:]

Assessment of Musical Skills

- Improvisation is a way to assess a student's understanding of a new concept or skill
- By observing a student's use of a musical concept in improvisation, the teacher can follow up with questions about the student's musical intent, and assess what still needs to be covered about that concept

The ability to incorporate a new concept into an improvisation “means that an individual has internalized a music vocabulary and is able to understand and to express musical ideas spontaneously”. -Christopher D. Azzara, Eastman School of Music

[Notes here:]

The Teaching Breakdown As outlined by John Kratus

Exploration: Try out different sounds and combinations in a loosely structured environment

Process-Oriented: Begin to audiate and produce/repeat patterns

Product-Oriented: Become conscious and able to operate in certain external constraints

Fluid: Performance technique is more relaxed and fluid. Manipulation of the instrument becomes automatic

Structural: Become aware of the overall structure and shape of the improvisation

Stylistic: Skillfully work within a given style, with characteristic elements

Personal: Transcend recognized styles to develop a new style

Demonstration of Current Methods

American Popular Piano, by Scott McBride-Smith and Christopher Norton

[Notes here:]

Pattern Play, by Forrest Kinney

[Notes here:]