

## EXP-0011-F American Experimental Music: Study and Practice

JEFFREY ROBERTS, Instructor

Class Time: TBA

Office: Office hours by appointment

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### Syllabus

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#### COURSE OBJECTIVES

We are doing 3 things in this class: 1) Acting as artists in creating and performing experimental works, 2) Studying and reflecting on our own individual creative processes, and 3) Acting as scholars to study a history of experimental music. This class, like most classes whose subject matter is fairly new, involves a process of discovery: you uncover new concepts and struggle to integrate them into your perspective of the world. This evolution of new ideas and skills, however, is expanded and intensified in a couple of ways. First, you will not only study materials (readings and recordings), you will also create your own materials to be studied and contemplated. This will happen through the class percussion improvisation ensemble weekly meetings. Second, you will use your own creative powers in the service of completing class assignments. In other words, in this part of the class assignment you will study and reflect on your own creative intuition and intellect as it develops in the process of experimental music making.

PREREQUISITES: This class is open to all students regardless of musical ability or background.

#### CLASS STRUCTURE

Each week we will have a lecture-discussion class and an ensemble-performance class. In the **lecture-discussion class**, we will discuss the assigned readings and recordings and talk about how our own experiences in experimentation relate to them.

The **ensemble-performance class** has a more involved procedure. In the ensemble sessions, part of the time will be spent in pure experimentation and discovery of sound. We will also learn about and develop techniques of improvisation and performing as an ensemble. In the second half of the semester, we will begin to learn about concepts of composition and eventually develop our own compositions to be performed at the end of the semester. In addition to the actual improvising and composing, you will be expected to keep a journal/sketchbook and write and reflect on entries at the end of each class. To develop our musical ideas and keep track of our progress, a website will be used to post recordings of our improvisations during our ensemble class as well as ideas and discussions related to specific projects.

#### CLASS REQUIREMENTS

1) **Journal**

The journal is a way for you to reflect on your own creative intuitions as they happen (jotting notes down while in ensemble) or afterwards. It is there to make you more aware of your own intuitions. Often writing about them makes them clearer to you and gives you more confidence in trusting your instincts. Journals will be collected at mid semester and the end of the semester for my review.

2) **Weekly assignments in both the lecture and ensemble class**

Readings will be assigned and participation in discussions will be expected. Also, specific creative assignments for the ensemble will be given to each of you at different times in the

semester. This along with your overall level of participation in developing ideas in the ensemble will be part of your grade.

**3) Semester end Compositions and Concert**

By the end of the semester, we will have a collection of compositions that we will present in a concert. These will be collaborative works created by smaller groups of people in the class.

**4) Term Paper**

A paper on a subject related to the readings will be assigned for you to hand in by the end of the semester. This is your opportunity to explore, for example, a particular concept that developed in experimental or perhaps a ideas of a particular composer. The paper will be 8-10 pages, double spaced.

**5) Grading**

You will be graded on your work as it is reflected in your journal entries, your integration of concepts gleaned from the readings and the creative work in the ensemble-performance class, your participation in the ensemble-performance work, and your final paper. The percentages break down as follows:

25% Weekly Assignments  
20% Class Contribution  
20% Composition Project  
20% Journals  
15% Term Paper

You are allowed 3 excused absences. After 3 excused absences, every 2 absences will result in a reduction in your final grade of ½ a letter grade.

**TEXTS AND MATERIALS**

Nyman, Michael. Experimental Music. Second Edition. Cambridge, England 1999.  
EXP-0011-F Course Reading Packet

On Blackboard

Rich, Alan. American Pioneers. Phaidon Press. 1995.

Johnson, Steven, ed. The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts. Routledge. 2002.

ALL Listening Assignments on Blackboard

**WEBSITE:** [www.improvis.org/walden/](http://www.improvis.org/walden/)

The class website is the central source for much of the course material and also functions as a place where we post our creative projects. Please visit the site regularly for new postings related to assignments as well as updates to the syllabus.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Tufts University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the instructor immediately.

**Week 1: Introduction**

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**Tuesday, 9.6.05**                      **Lecture Class**                      Introduction

**Thursday, 9.8.05**                      **Ensemble Class**                      Introductory Improvisations

**Week 2: Beyond Europe: Unbounded America and Reconnection with Distant Origins**

**Lecture Class**

Primal Roots of American Philosophy

Introduction: Looking Forward to the First Day

Chapter 1: Black Elk, Emerson, Thoreau and Their Aura

Due: *Reading Questions 2*

**Ensemble Class**

Sensitivity in Listening

Due: *Environment Listening Assignment*

**Week 3: Nineteenth Century American Individualism: Emerson, Thoreau and the New England Transcendentalist Spirit**

**Lecture Class**

Self-Reliance, from '*Essays: First Series*' Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sounds, from '*Walden*' Henry David Thoreau

Due: *Reading Questions 1*

**Ensemble Class**

Exploring ideas of Improvisation: Phrasing, Space, Flow

Due: *Single Object Sound Discovery Assignment*

**Week 4 : Intuition, Instinct and Creative Play: From Child to Adult**

**Lecture Class**

Art as Experience, John Dewey

Chapter 2: The Live Creature and 'Etherial Things'

Art, Mind and Brain, Howard Gardner

Chapter 8: Exploring the Mystery of Artistic Creativity

Chapter 9: The Child as Artist

Due: *Reading Questions 3*

**Ensemble Class**

Group Improvisation: Listening, Communication, Dialogue

Due: *Phrasing and Solo Improvisation Assignment*

**Week 5 Early Mavericks: Charles Ives, Experimentation and the Real World in Music**

**Lecture Class**

American Pioneers

Chapter 1: Prelude; Chapter 2: Charles Ives

Due: *Reading Questions 4*

Listening Central Park in the Dark, Unanswered Question

**Ensemble Class**

Continued Group Improvisation: Duos and Trios Assignment

**Week 6: Computers and Sampling: Bringing the Real World into Music**

**Live Environments and Sound Sampling**

Handout on Recording, Sampling and Electro-Acoustic Music

**Ensemble Class**

Working Samples and live playback into experimentation and improvisation.

**Week 7 : New York in the 1940's and 50's: American Experimental Music**

**Lecture Class**

Experimental Music, Michael Nyman

Introduction, Ch1: Defining Experimental, Ch3: Inauguration

Due: *Reading Questions 5*

Listening:	John Cage	Imaginary Landscape No. 1
	Morton Feldman	Projection 1, Durations
	Earle Brown	Available Forms 1

**Ensemble Class**

Continued work with sampling, sound texture and improvisation.

**Week 8 : Graphic Notation and Time Notation**

**Lecture Class**

Continued Listening and Discussion of.

Morton Feldman      Projections 1

Earle Brown          December, 1952

Due: *Reading Questions 6*

**Ensemble Class**

Representing Hypothesis and Experiment in Graphic Score

**Week 9: Composers and Artists 1: Morton Feldman and his Painters**

**Lecture Class**

NYS of Music and Visual Arts: Ch7: Feldman's Painters

Listening: Feldman and scores: Projection 1, Rothko Chapel

Due: *Reading/Listening Questions 7*

**Ensemble Class**

Performing Student's Graphic Scores

**Week 10 : Composers and Artists 2: Earle Brown, Jackson Pollock, Alexander Clader**

**Lecture Class**

New York School of Music and Visual Arts

Introduction, Ch1: Getting Rid of the Glue

Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice

Chapter 3: The Composer, Earle Brown Interview

Due: Reading Questions 8

Listening: Earle Brown: Available Forms I, II; Event: Synergy

Viewing: Pollock Drip Paintings, Calder Mobiles

**Ensemble Class**

Beginning Collaborative Composition Projects

*Developing Compositional/Improvisational Ideas*

**DEADLINE TO SUBMIT PAPER TOPIC****Week 11 : Marcel Duchamp and the Politics of John Cage****Lecture Class**

NYS of Music and Visual Arts

Chapter 4: John Cage and the Aesthetic of Indifference

Listening: John Cage: 4'33", Concerto for Pno and Orch.

Due: *Reading/Listening Questions 9*

**Ensemble Class**

Composition: Textures, Gestures, Contrasts

Due: *Preliminary Sketches: Testing ideas*

**Week 12: American Experimentalism and the Bridge to Other Cultures****Lecture Class**

Handout on American Composers and Non-Western Traditions

*From Transcendentalism to Daoism: Aesthetic and Musical Resonance Between China and America* (Roberts, 2010)

Due: Reading/Listening Questions 10

Listening: Henry Cowell, Terry Reilly, Steve Reich, La Monte Young

**Ensemble Class**

Due: *Continued Rehearsing Compositions*

**Week 13: Finalizing Projects: Score Preparation, Composition Reviews****Scores Due for Review by Class**

Rehearsal of Scores. Work through any final issues, etc.

**Week 14: Concert Week****Dress Rehearsal and Concert (Remis Sculpture Court)**

Term Paper and Journals Due