

# The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

FYS 129

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## Various Quotes

These slides contain a collection of some of the quotes largely from the musicians that are studied during the course.

The idea is to present “musicians in their own words”.

# Susie Ibarra



**American drummer  
(November 15, 1970–)**

## Ibarra on Characteristics of Experimental Music

R: What are some defining characteristics of the musical scene you would fit yourself into? What elements of your scene differentiate it from what has come before, or what is happening now?

**Ibarra:** The continuous evolvement of a need to investigate unknown coupled with reinterpretations and homages of ancient traditions are some characteristics in experimental music that I gravitate to. Its interesting to see how social cultures and environments are reflected.

interview, Susie Ibarra, interview by plwn for Roulette, 2009.

## Ibarra on an Influential Experience

Sakash: When did you first become interested in jazz?

**Ibarra:** Well, I had been listening to people like John Coltrane, Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk around the time when I first started taking drumming lessons. So I went to my teacher and asked him to put on some jazz records. He put on all this pop and commercial music and said this is jazz. And I said what? And he said well isn't this what you wanted to listen to? I walked out very devastated. It wasn't until a year and a half later [1988] when I heard the Sun Ra Arkestra at Sweet Basil's in New York that I first got turned onto real jazz. They were swinging so hard, and it hit me really strong. And I got to talk to some of the musicians and started studying with the drummer Buster Smith. So it just kind of happened.

Susie Ibarra, interview by Susan Sakash for Wesleyan Music Journal, 1998.

## Ibarra on Learning in New York

Sakash: What percussive groups are you talking about?

**Ibarra:** For the first 4 or 5 years that I was in New York, I played the Javanese and Balinese Gamelan, the Filipino Kulintang and in several Afro-Cuban and Latin ensembles. These experiences exposed me to the more percussive elements of drumming, rather than the snare and bass combo of rock music.

Sakash: How did your experience in these groups lead you towards a career in free jazz drumming?

**Ibarra:** Studying these musics led me to call Milford Graves. He grew up playing a lot of percussion before he went to the trap set so his whole idea approaching the trap set is very percussive... He taught a lot about integrating that percussive stuff onto the set tonally and melodically. I really liked his idea of muting the drum or just playing them as hand drums and combining a lot of rhythms in a different way, polymeters and all those different tones talking from a lot of traditions and mixing them to hear different sounds.

Susie Ibarra, interview by Susan Sakash for Wesleyan Music Journal, 1998.

## Ibarra on Female Biology in Drumming

Sakash: Do you feel that your style of playing has anything to do with the biological construction of your female body?

**Ibarra:** Individually, I would argue yes that it would matter, but, then again, another woman drummer could play and get a totally different sound.

Susie Ibarra, interview by Susan Sakash for Wesleyan Music Journal, 1998.

## Ibarra on the role of Ethnicity in Music

Sakash: I feel like some of the groups you play with, the Little Huey Creative Orchestra in particular, have a very mixed ethnic make-up. Do you feel that your Filipino heritage has influenced your musical career?

**Ibarra:** Sure, my ethnicity is very important to me. Ethnicity doesn't make you more this or less that...you can't hide who you are because it is going to come out naturally in the music...All different aspects of people and life and cultures come out because that's there, that's the truth. I mean, art reflects life and how could it reflect life if it wasn't so many types of people?

Susie Ibarra, interview by Susan Sakash for Wesleyan Music Journal, 1998.



## Ibarra on the Improvisation in Traditional Pieces

**Azine:** I read in an interview that you have a love for improvisation – it's what made you fall in love with jazz. When you played in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, I noticed that your work on the two kulintang seemed very improvisatory. Is that how it's played traditionally, or is that an element you added?

**Ibarra:** Kulintang music, is an oral tradition, like jazz, and was later transcribed into cipher notation or number notation through ethnomusicology. It has a linear approach, having 8 rowed gongs, but it also has syncopation in the ensemble playing. Improvisation and embellishments on the melodies bring out the individuality of each musician. And then, when I play it, I bring probably a more modern improvisational approach to the traditional pieces.

Susie Ibarra, interview by Todd Lee for the Asian American Movement Ezine, 2007.

## Ibarra on the role of Ethnicity in Music (again)

Azine: Some of your pieces like “Lakbay” and “Bangka” (evocative of Filipino immigrants to the U.S. and the boats people use to go from island to island in the Philippines), and the sound clips of everyday sounds from the Philippines woven into the music seem very evocative of Filipino life. How does your Filipino background impact your music?

**Ibarra:** My personal life experiences have had a profound impact on my life. And culturally who I am, also being Filipina- American is a part of who I am , and is expressed. I also enjoy as I said earlier developing , mixing and creating contemporary music folk language . Also I have had an interest in many of my compositions to include various types of field recordings. I like cinematic sound, and the blend of visual and audio experience.

Susie Ibarra, interview by Todd Lee for the Asian American Movement Ezine, 2007.