

The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

FYS 129

David Keffer, Professor
Dept. of Materials Science & Engineering
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-2100
dkeffer@utk.edu
<http://clausius.engr.utk.edu/>

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”.



Lê Quan Ninh

**French percussionist
(date unknown,
1961 -)**

Lê on the seriousness of Improvisation

Lê: I'm sorry to say that to improvise is not really something fun for me.
But this serious activity makes me happy, just happy to be alive.

Lê on playing solo

Lê: When I play solo, I feel that I have to summon spirits (yes, I'm sorry...). I don't know who they are but I need a sort of ritual, the ritual of my solitude. And as a ritual, I have to repeat things that have been inscribed in me, little by little, during all these years of doing, even if doing is so often close to removing. I call these repetitions my figures obligées, some patterns that appeared once and that I remember. Why these ones and not some others? I don't know but I take the opportunity of playing alone to question these patterns and to feel how they move and how they are moved by the changing times. It's not exactly interpreting them because, finally, they are not so important : what is important is the transitions between them, the chink where inhabits the core of improvisation. I feel a tension towards being got rid of the figures obligées, where only the transitions would remain. Then the states can be very short, they even could disappear or being merged with the transitions themselves.

Interview with Petr Vrba, in the Czech magazine, *His Voice*, 2007.

Lê on playing with others

Lê: Playing with somebody else or with a group of people is a representation of an ephemeral circumstance - a human circumstance, a sound circumstance - and I must adapt myself to it within this particular oscillation of also being a part of it.

Lê on Anarchism and Improvisation

Lê: I've always been an anarchist. The only authority I admit and respect is the authority of competence. I don't trust relationships that are not a share of experiences. Within life in general and within the practice of improvisation in particular, I can't accept any attitude of power, of stealing somebody else's creativity, of leading. I maybe felt, when I began to improvise, that improvisation was a territory - the territory of my imaginary origins - where new relationships could be developed. Anyway, it's a daily labor.

Interview with Petr Vrba, in the Czech magazine, *His Voice*, 2007.

Lê on the counter-intuitive time scale of Improvisation

Lê: But it took time, I mean time spending is the thing, time spending, we have to practice, practice, practice, year after year, month after month something can appear, it takes time, it takes time, I said maybe in the panel, a composer can be really fast; usually people say “the improviser has a really fast ...” because they can make an instant composition in ten minutes, for me that’s absolutely wrong. “But the composer for the ten minutes he spent six months, that’s too long”, it is absolutely the contrary, six months is so short time, and an improviser needs maybe ten years to reach the same regions of dealing with the elements and a composer can do it very quickly, because he can see everything on the paper and he can go back and forth in the composition. An improviser to change something in him or her, it is so slow, it is very slow; that’s why he needs a daily practice, a discipline, we talk about freedom and our risk our talk is always about the discipline of being free. It is really discipline.

Interview with Sevket Akinci, Michal Libera and Volkan Terzioglu , Istanbul, June 23, 2006.

Lê on Memory and Improvisation

Lê: But maybe it is also an attitude, I have a very bad memory, in terms of ..., I already can not say what happened yesterday night. It is already gone. Of course I have few images but I can not say how it began or something like that, it is already gone except when I have to play notated music or to play this music by heart of course I have the memory of the score, but when I improvise I have a very, very short memory of what happened, so of course it is not the right thing to have a very strong sense of form because the form is gone so quickly and because I have a very bad memory, it is also very difficult to think “ok, maybe, I can do this, that”, it is not like that, it is step by step, it is instant after instant but I am sure that it is a kind of to be immature.

Interview with Sevket Akinci, Michal Libera and Volkan Terzioglu , Istanbul, June 23, 2006.

Lê on Recording Improvisation

Lê: I don't mind when people record if I have to do this all the time, I don't feel good. I really prefer, ok it's gone but, this moment I hope is now written me in the memories of the people, in the memories of the walls, in the memories of the roof, in the memories of the floor and of course this memory is not very perfect, the memory we change that moment and it is still alive because it is changing, for me life is always changing it is not something always the same. I hope so.