

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”.

Joëlle Léandre

French bassist
(September 12,
1951-)



Léandre on Development of Technique

Léandre: My technique has become fluent in the vocabulary and forms of expression I went for, confirmed throughout my life by the choices I made, the people I met. It's interesting how your appropriate tool becomes a means of expression for the language you cultivate, you explore; it's work in progress. I no longer feel the way I did when I was twenty, excited about velocity, virtuosity. When you're studying, what fascinates, what still fascinates young musicians today, is the rapidity, the virtuosity; it's totally senseless!

Léandre on Improvisation

Léandre: Improvisation is music that's not written, it's played. You practice it on your own or in a group. It's music of the moment, without a pencil or an eraser, an intimate conversation with memory, strong and fragile... Too bad if you fall short, those moments are included... they are part of the performance! It's an adventure, a sharing between musicians, a voyage in the present and in time. In a nutshell, I think improvisation is life itself. Everything in vibration.

Solo. Conversations with Franck Médioni, Joëlle Léandre, kadima collective, 2011, p. 65.

Léandre on Improvisation

Léandre: Improvisation is music of jubilation where the primary driving factor is incarnate liberty. I don't know who said: "A real improviser is someone who prepares for being unprepared." That's exactly how it is, it's so true. He's ready for anything. Instants that are unique. Fugitive, true, in the moment of their emission. Everything is in motion. Even clouds, ourselves, constantly. Our molecules dance, they're agitating continuously.

Solo. Conversations with Franck Médioni, Joëlle Léandre, kadima collective, 2011, p. 66.

Léandre on Improvisation

Léandre: I play who I am. Yes, I play who I am, I've always been like that. What a job! Improvising is accepting this danger, the power of this nothingness, this adventure. First of all, you work to bring everything back to basics, getting rid of all the things you're attached to, "un-learning" things. You then understand that the emptier you are, the richer you are, because you can let things enter you freely. Improvisation first treats what the individual has within himself, without a safety net, like a flash of lightning, a cry. In this sense, it's a perpetual question addressed to the public in arrogance and humility: "That was me, and I was so fucking true, I could die now."

Léandre on Free Improvisation

Léandre: Now there is free improvisation, improvised music beyond styles of idioms, what we call therefore non-idiomatic improvisation. No style, no idiom, no hierarchy, an improvisation free of any predetermined language. Free improvisation is a real language, a vision of a different world. Take what happens in a normal day. Dring, the telephone rings, you answer, then do something else. Ah, the fridge is empty, you go shopping. Then you open your diary...damn! An appointment in two hours, etc. The motions we go through in a day, every day, are a continual series of improvisations, repetitions and imponderables that we organize.

Léandre on the Art of Improvisation

Léandre: The art of improvising is not improvised. It's practiced through listening...Even in the worst cacophony, in chaos, there is meaning, there will be breathing, air, there has to be. I'm very aware of that. Sometimes we speak about an interior score with regard to improvisation. It comes from listening, from listening to the other, from listening to oneself. It's a question of collective and individual responsibility. That's why great improvisers, in jazz as in improvised music, are above all strong personalities, soloists and often virtuosi who found, after a certain number of years, a way, a voice, a sound of their own.

Solo. Conversations with Franck Médioni, Joëlle Léandre, kadima collective, 2011, p. 78-9.

Léandre on Recordings as Relationships

Léandre: A recording is an encounter, a reuniting with friends, with people you feel good with. I also believe it's an act of love. I really believe that: when you play, you improvise, you like being with someone else, you like the other. No need for sex, you just like the other. Something in him pleases us, tempts us, seduces. Later, there's this fun. Seeing each other again, playing together again is a pleasure renewed. Yes, it's not by accident that you play with that musician and not another one... You like the other, you give yourself to him. Yes, you're in a giving mode, a counter-giving mode. The other, you give yourself to him, you trust him. Recording is the adventure of the encounter with the other. I like that.

Solo. Conversations with Franck Médioni, Joëlle Léandre, kadima collective, 2011, p. 99-100.

Léandre on Women in Free Improvisation

Léandre: Women in the field of creative music are often forgotten. They don't get called much. They become known thanks to their work, their anger, their personality.

Léandre on the Way of Being for Artists

Léandre: An artist who does strive, questioning himself, sometimes with fragility, will maybe achieve less recognition than one able to sell himself, with a knowledge of all the ropes and a fat address-book full of powerful friends. Basically, some artists treat their work like a company business. They know how to run it. But I object to that. Yes, I'm angry. It drives me crazy, how corrupt the world is. There's another way of working, of being. Different artists, thinkers, solitary figures maybe, musicians, adventurers, were important examples for me. I think of Derek Bailey, John Cage, or of Irene Schweizer. I think also of poets, writers. I think in particular of Steve Lacy, that highly cultivated man, sober and elegant. You have to be intensively involved to do what you have to do. Too bad if it hurts.

Solo. Conversations with Franck Médioni, Joëlle Léandre, kadima collective, 2011, p. 121.

Léandre on the Objective of Art

Léandre: Music has been turned into a global market, a colossal merchandise...Where's the creation in all this?...The objective of art is to subvert, to overwhelm, to move to reflection. It's a celebration of life. The artist is subversive, disturbing.

Léandre on the Effect of a Consumer Society

Léandre: Consumer society, show biz, mass culture, is that what we want?...Everything gets standardized, we end up with a merchandise, a label. Marketing is full on all the time....The power of the major contributors paying for publicity...There is no more freedom of expression. This glitter culture is wreaking havoc.