

# The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

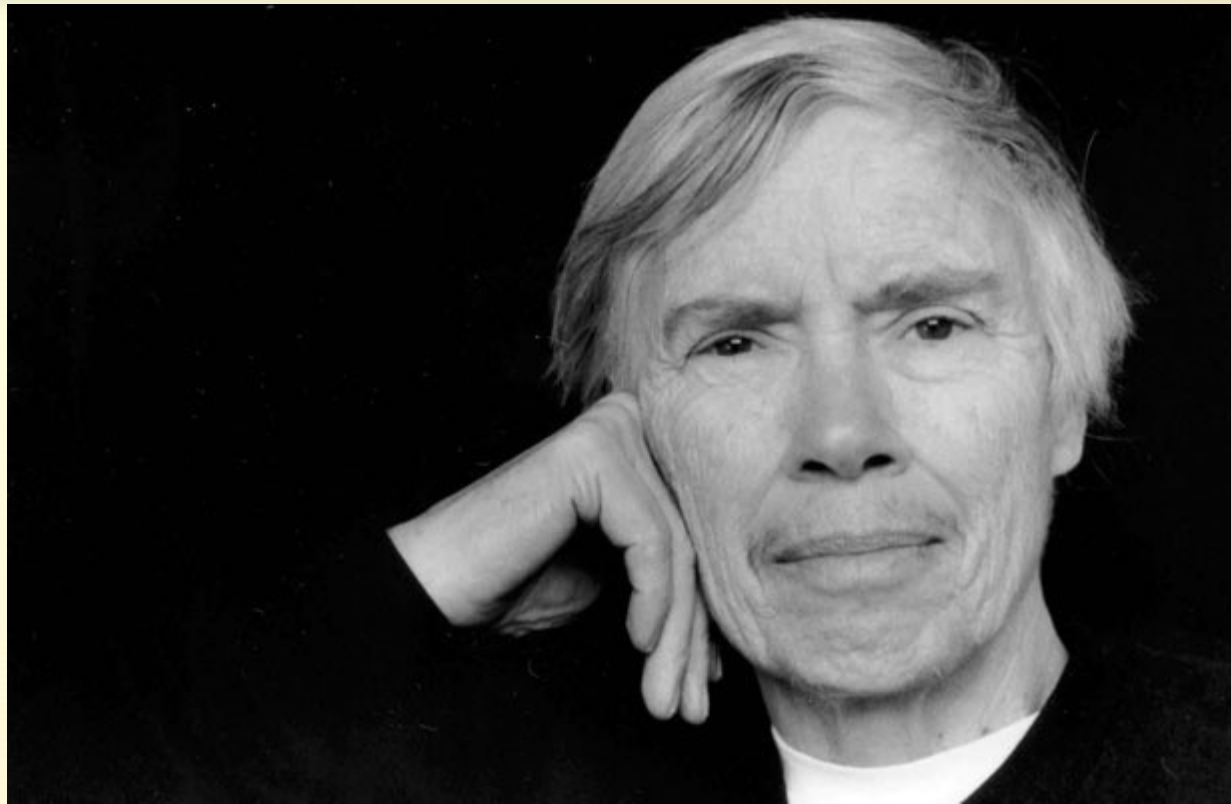
FYS 129

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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”.



# Pauline Oliveros

American electronics player and accordionist  
(May 30, 1932–November 24, 2016)

## Oliveros on Risks

**Oliveros:** I am something akin to a high wire artist. The audience is with you, because they perceive the risks and the dangers.

Arcana V: Music, Magic and Mysticism edited by John Zorn, Granary Books/Hips Road, New York, 2010 p. 296.

## A Fragment of a Musical Score from Oliveros

Dissolving your ear plugs:

For classically trained musicians and anyone else interested

1. Take some time—no matter where you are—sit down and close your eyes for a while and just listen. When you open your eyes consider what you heard as the “music”. Later try to remember what you heard and express it with your instrument or voice. Do this practice often until you begin to hear the world as music.

Arcana V: Music, Magic and Mysticism edited by John Zorn, Granary Books/Hips Road, New York, 2010 p. 296.

## Oliveros on Music Improvisation

### **Oliveros:**

Creative music improvisation communicates collective musical intelligence as an energy field. Whether an individual soloist or ensemble is improvising, there is a mining of musical information stored deeply in the collective consciousness of humanity.

Intelligence is the ability to utilize and purpose detectable information or data from inner or outer sources.

Creative music offers new patterns and combinations spontaneously.

Improvisation is the ability to create spontaneously with or without pre-planning—within or without a plan of action.

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## Oliveros on Deep Listening

**Oliveros:** I keep trying to explain what I mean by 'Deep Listening'. Here is a try.

"The key to multi-level existence is deep listening. Deep listening includes language and its syntax, the nature of its sound, atmosphere and environmental context. This is essential to the process of unlocking layer after layer of imagination, meaning and memory down to the cellular level of human experience.

Listening is the key to performance. Responses, whatever the discipline, that originate from deep listening are connected in resonance with being and inform the artist, art and audience in an effortless harmony.

"Deep Listening is a life time practice."

Interview from <http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/oliveros.html>, ca. 1997.



## Oliveros on Deep Listening (version 2)

**Oliveros:** Well in general there are two forms of listening: focused listening and open, global, and receptive listening. This is also true of eyesight, you can focus on something for detail and you can have a peripheral vision of the field. Then, you can also defocus your eyes so that you take in more of the 180° that you can see, and thus you become quite sensitive to motion. The same applies to hearing. You can in a way defocus your ears so you're taking in all of the sounds around you, inside of you, in your memory or imagination all at once. The best image or metaphor I can give for it is a tapestry of sound: threads of sound that come and go and some that stay. Trying to expand oneself to include more and more of the field, I call inclusive listening. And then when something attracts your attention to focus in on, that's exclusive listening. You can do both at once, actually. I have a lot of exercises and pieces that try to expose these different forms. And this is what we do in the Deep Listening retreat. Deep Listening is a process. I guess the best definition I could give is listening to everything all the time and reminding yourself when you're not listening. You also have to understand that there's a difference between hearing and listening. In hearing, the ears take in all the sound waves and particles and deliver them to the audio cortex where the listening takes place. We cannot turn off our ears--the ears are always taking in sound information--but we can turn off our listening. I feel that listening is the basis of creativity and culture. How you're listening, is how you develop a culture and how a community of people listens, is what creates their culture. So that's the theory in kind of a nutshell.

Interview by Alan Baker, American Public Media, January 2003.



## Oliveros on Conveying Ideas

**Oliveros:** It's certainly not easy to work in an abstract way that doesn't convey ideas directly to the listener, but it can be done. For instance, I recently took part in a meeting in the Catskills organized by activists who want to protect the watershed there from corporations that want to hydrofrack-- drill through the shale for natural gas, which will surely contaminate the watershed. They invited a lot of artists because they felt we would have a way of conveying the ideas to the people. I played a solo piece. The first part was called "Let's Get the Frack Out of Here," and it was pretty rousing and menacing. The second was called "Let's Keep Our Water Pure", and you could hear the water in the way that I was playing. So those are ideas that convey feeling. It's important to get to the heart and feeling of things like that, and music can do that. It can do it without words.

Interview by Marc Masters and Grayson Currin, March 2011.

## Oliveros on Collaborating with Women

**Oliveros:** Improvising with women brings about a feeling of kinship, collaboration and cooperative listening. The music is about inclusion rather than exclusion. There is less emphasis on technical mastery and more concern for sounds weaving into shared textures. I feel that I have been heard and included in consciousness as a collaborator rather than regarded as an intrusive competitor.

Pauline Oliveros, "Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation", in The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation and Communities in Dialogue, edited by Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown Connecticut, 2004, p. 55.

## Oliveros on Women In Improvisation

**Oliveros:** [I]mprovisation groups in the various "scenes" that exist throughout the Western world still seem to consist exclusively of men unless there is a singer or a token woman included. This is true of most genres in Western music. This situation is clearly expressed in the makeup of most concert programs, festivals and touring groups now at the beginning of the twenty-first century...

If a music group consisting exclusively of women turns up (and one *does* from time to time), it may be viewed as an oddity and taken less seriously by audiences, presenters and critics than a male group. Otherwise female groups would sustain themselves and proliferate as readily as male groups do and receive more critical attention...

Improvisational music, as well as composition, appears to remain the province of men. Perhaps in a field that is already difficult for men, women don't see any future for themselves as improvisers or composers. Women see few if any role models or mentors, few performance opportunities in the field, and relatively no financial support to launch or sustain a career. The socialization of women continues to reinforce the role for them of spectators, supporters, and administrators where men hold forth as participants in the art.

Pauline Oliveros, "Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation", in The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation and Communities in Dialogue, edited by Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown Connecticut, 2004, p. 57.

## Oliveros: The Moment of Empowerment (1/3)

**Oliveros:** There are so many ways in which people, particularly women, feel the sense of little or no power in their lives. This may be the result of childhood, marriage, or just their own inner voices telling them they do not have the right to do or be this or that. I have discovered a new way to walk through the dense entanglement of vines that appear to bind me to a previous way of thinking. This tool is the gift of being in the moment-or improvisation.

As a girl growing up in Mississippi I was taught that children are to be seen and not heard. This taught me early on not to have a voice. This training continued as I was traumatized in school, for not being like everyone else. I was slower physically and did not wear the latest styles, and did not know how to socialize very well. I had this ever present thought that no one would ever want to hear anything I had to say. One of the things I loved to do was sing. Even that was a source of pain. I participated in a small Southern Baptist Church and was constantly taunted by a group of boys and even the person who led the choir. He had given me a name that he thought was fitting for me: Gorilla. First, he would say, "you look like a monkey and sound like one too," and then he would just laugh and laugh. As an adolescent these ideas took root in my being like a kudzu vine, unwilling to let my true being come forth.

Pauline Oliveros, "Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation", in The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation and Communities in Dialogue, edited by Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown Connecticut, 2004, pp. 69-70.



## Oliveros: The Moment of Empowerment (2/3)

**Oliveros:** From that path I entered marriage and chose what was familiar to me. A person who had to control me, and tell me that I could not do anything right, and for sure the voicing of my opinions was not honored. I entered the deep wells of depression, constantly wanting and wishing for some waters of renewal. Years passed and I continued to exist.

I was not living. I was maintaining. I had survived only by medication and psychotherapy. If I had a dollar for every time the therapist told me, "You have choices," I would be a millionaire. It took me close to eight years to know that I really did have choices. Then I began to make some better choices for my life. I chose to get out of my marriage, and began a journey of discovery and exploration of new ideas and new ways.

Pauline Oliveros, "Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation", in The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation and Communities in Dialogue, edited by Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown Connecticut, 2004, pp. 69-70.

## Oliveros: The Moment of Empowerment (3/3)

**Oliveros:** I stumbled into a community of arts, and then into a smaller community of improvisational musicians. My spirit felt like a feather floating in the wind, instead of one confined and pressured to be something it was not. It did not take me long to realize that even though I could not "read music" the community not only allowed me to have a voice, they actually encouraged and celebrated it. Amazing, the joy and new life that rose up in me like a geyser, springing up from the very core of the earth. The old shackles of having to be a certain way have slowly fallen off, and the new wings of being in the moment as I am, without judgment, either internally or externally, at last allow me flight.

As the gift of improvisation enters into society, and the life of women, I believe that paradigms will shift. Those who have never experienced power in their being, can know and discover this, and have a voice to speak for themselves without hesitation or reserve. So, the next time you hand a woman a rattle, a drum, tambourine or just invite her to make a sound, remember that you are enabling her to make choices and changes in her life by learning to be in the moment. To be who she really is, instead of what someone else has demanded that she be. May the spirit of freedom embraced by the art of improvisation change the world from one that confines to one that offers choices.

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