

**The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation:
Modern Traditions in American Creative Music**
FYS 129

Syllabus

Tickle Engineering 402
Thursday 3:40 pm - 4:55 pm

Prof. David J. Keffer
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A. Course Details

FYS 129 The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation: Modern Traditions in Creative Music

This seminar examines both the motivations for and expressions of creativity in unconventional directions as present in freely improvised music. The first purpose of the course is to introduce students to the music and musicians of free improvisation, across and between genres, and artists including Derek Bailey, Pauline Oliveros, Keiji Haino, Peter Brötzmann, Anthony Braxton, Cecil Taylor, John Zorn, Nicole Mitchell and many others. The second purpose of the course is to think critically about what drives practitioners of free improvisation to abandon conventional expressions of creativity (and therefore all hopes of broad appeal and/or significant commercial gain) in exchange for an “undiluted” artistic vision in the cultural margin. We will also discuss relevant topics such as social forces that led to non-idiomatic improvisation, the esthetic limits of music, the development of an ear for “difficult” music, the validity of various measures of success or merit, where popularity is largely irrelevant, and the essential presence of failure in experimental art forms. Hands-on experimentation with idiophonic instruments is part of the course.

Meeting Place: Tickle Engineering 402
Meeting Time: Thursday 3:40 pm - 4:55 pm

Instructor: Prof. David Keffer, room 301 Ferris Hall, dkeffer@utk.edu

Course Website:
<http://utkstair.org/clausius/docs/fys129/index.html>

B. Course Objectives:

At the conclusion of this course, the student should be able

1. to demonstrate an awareness of free improvisation and its notable practitioners
2. to discuss motivations for and evaluations of creativity outside conventional directions
3. to articulate the role of social tension in the generation of new forms of creative expression

C. Grading Policy

C.1. Attendance and Participation

This course is graded based exclusively on attendance and participation. If a student has more than two (2) unexcused absences, they will not receive credit for the course.

C.2. Homework

- Students have one hour of listening homework each week.
- The location of the music files is given on the password-protected blackboard website.
- Student discussion leaders will prepare talking points for the week in which they are leading the discussion.

D. Getting Help

The best way to contact the instructor is via email.

- Any questions regarding course content, grading of homeworks or any other topic should be sent via email to the Instructor.
- To guarantee that the email is read promptly, make the subject of the email “FYS 129” Emails with the subject “Help Me!” or similar subjects are identified as spam and deleted without being opened.

E. Course Schedule:

The schedule for this course is provided in a separate document located at

<http://utkstair.org/clausius/docs/fys129/text/schedule.html>

F. Copyright Information:

The Instructor and the University of Tennessee are committed to upholding copyright law. As a student enrolled in this music class, you may be provided with access to copyrighted music or texts that are directly related to the content of this course. It is our expectation that you will utilize these materials during the course of the semester that you are enrolled in this class, and will delete them after the close of the course. The purpose and character under which these materials are being provided to you is for nonprofit educational purposes only.