



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

First Year Studies 129, Fall 2024

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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

Syllabus

Ferris Hall 501
Mondays 1:50 pm – 2:40 pm

Prof. David J. Keffer
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Course Description:

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 Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Derek Bailey, Pauline Oliveros, George Lewis, Susan Alcorn, 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.

Learning Objectives:

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

1. to demonstrate an awareness of free improvisation and some 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
4. to continue to the next semester at UTK in good academic standing

Attendance Policy

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. All illnesses are considered excused absences but a note from a physician is required. Please let the instructor know when you are unable to attend class for any reason. **DO NOT COME TO CLASS IF YOU ARE SICK!**

Homework

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

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.

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.

Course Schedule:

#	date	artists	topic
1	8/19/2024	Course Introduction	
2	8/26/2024	Ornette Coleman (American, saxophone, 1930-2015)	self-determination through harmolodics
3	9/2/2024	Labor Day (No Classes)	
4	9/9/2024	Cecil Taylor (American, piano, 1929-2018)	restructuring tradition
5	9/16/2024	Derek Bailey (British, guitar, 1930-2005)	improvisation: its nature and meaning
6	9/23/2024	Amina Claudine Myers (American, piano, 1942-)	the invisible woman
7	9/30/2024	Pauline Oliveros (American, electronics & accordion, 1932-2016)	deep listening: music as meditation
8	10/7/2024	Fall Break (No Classes)	
9	10/14/2024	George Lewis (American, trombone, 1952-)	music as a trigger for ubiquitous creativity
10	10/21/2024	Pi Recordings (various)	the AACM and its legacy
11	10/28/2024	Evan Parker (British, saxophone, 1944-)	music as a mechanism for biofeedback
12	11/4/2024	Susan Alcorn (American, pedal steel guitar, 1953-)	moving between traditions
13	11/11/2024	Nicole Mitchell (American, flute, 1967-)	a modern-day superhero
14	11/18/2024	Alexandra Grimal (French, saxophone, 1980-)	the efficient thought-opener of joy
15	11/25/2024	Maria Dybbroe (Danish, saxophone, 1993-)	what comes next?
16	12/2/2024	Relative Pitch Records (various)	a continuing tradition

Key Campus Resources for Students:

- [Center for Career Development and Academic Exploration](#) (Career counseling and resources; Handshake job search system)
- [Course Catalogs](#) (Listing of academic programs, courses, and policies)
- [Hilltopics](#) (Campus and academic policies, procedures and standards of conduct)
- [OIT HelpDesk](#) (865) 974-9900
- [Schedule of Classes/Timetable](#)
- [Student Health Center](#) (visit the site for a list of services)
- [Academic Success Center](#) (Academic support resources)
- [Undergraduate Academic Advising](#) (Advising resources, course requirements, and major guides)
- [University Libraries](#) (Access to library resources, databases, course reserves, and services)
- [First Year Programs](#): firstyear@utk.edu; (865)974-4546

The Campus Syllabus

Dear Student,

The purpose of this **Campus Syllabus** is to provide you with important information that applies to all UTK courses. Please observe the following policies and familiarize yourself with the university resources listed below. At UT, we are committed to providing you with a high-quality learning experience. I want to wish you the best for a successful and productive semester.

–Dr. John Zomchick, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Each student is responsible for their personal integrity in academic life and for adhering to UT's Honor Statement. The Honor Statement reads: "An essential feature of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is a commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of intellectual integrity and academic honesty. As a student of the university, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity."

YOUR ROLE IN IMPROVING THE COURSE THROUGH ASSESSMENT

At UT, it is our collective responsibility to improve the state of teaching and learning. During the semester you may be requested to assess aspects of this course, either during class or at the completion of the class, and through the TNVoice course evaluation. Please take the few moments needed to respond to these requests as they are used by instructors, department heads, deans and others to improve the quality of your UT learning experience.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES – <http://sds.utk.edu>

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is committed to providing an inclusive learning environment for all students. If you anticipate or experience a barrier in this course due to a chronic health condition, a learning, hearing, neurological, mental health, vision, physical, or other kind of disability, or a temporary injury, you are encouraged to contact [Student Disability Services](#) (SDS) at 865-974-6087 or sds@utk.edu. An SDS Coordinator will meet with you to develop a plan to ensure you have equitable access to this course. If you are already registered with SDS, please contact your instructor to discuss implementing accommodations included in your course access letter.

ACCESSIBILITY POLICY AND TRAINING – <http://accessibility.utk.edu>

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, provides reasonable accommodations for individual students with disabilities through its office of [Student Disability Services](#). The university is also committed to making information and materials accessible, when possible. Resources and assistance to support these efforts can be found at <http://accessibility.utk.edu/>.

WELLNESS – <http://wellness.utk.edu/> and <http://counselingcenter.utk.edu/>

The [Center for Health Education and Wellness](#) empowers all Volunteers to thrive by cultivating personal and community well-being. The Center can answer questions about general wellness, substance use, sexual health, healthy relationships, and sexual assault prevention. The [Student Counseling Center](#) is the university's primary facility for personal counseling, psychotherapy, and psychological outreach and consultation services.

Any student who has difficulty affording hygiene products, groceries, or accessing sufficient food to eat every day is urged to contact the [Big Orange Pantry](#) for support. The Big Orange Pantry, located in Greve Hall, is a free resource for all students, faculty, and staff, no matter how great or small their need is. Students who need emergency financial assistance can also request funding from the [Student Emergency Fund](#).

Students who are experiencing non-academic difficulty or distress and need assistance should call 974-HELP or [submit an online referral](#). The 974-HELP team specializes in aligning resources and support to students experiencing mental health distress.

EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM – <http://safety.utk.edu/>

The University of Tennessee is committed to providing a safe environment to learn and work. When you are alerted to an emergency, please take appropriate action. Learn more about what to do in an emergency and sign up for [UT Alerts](#). Check the emergency posters near exits and elevators for building specific information. In the event of an emergency, the course schedule and assignments may be subject to change. If changes to graded activities are required, reasonable adjustments will be made, and you will be responsible for meeting revised deadlines.