

Habit vs Nothing as a Starting Point for Improvisation

Improvising musicians always discuss their wishes concerning the quality and spontaneity of their play, as well as the ability to connect seamlessly with the here and now. When we improvise, what is our starting point? Is it nothing? Or is it certain habits we have developed as musicians? Which foundation do we choose for the impulses we get from the present moment? Do certain habits dominate the way we play, or are we independent enough to tap into an endless universe of possibilities?

As an improvising musician and Feldenkrais practitioner I asked myself the question: What do I have to practice to prepare myself for the unpredictability of improvisation? How can I be sure not to fall back on habits only because they seemed appropriate to deal with certain situations in the past?

A lot of improvising musicians are afraid to practice because they do not want to establish new habits. Instead, they prefer to play with varying combinations of other musicians without rehearsing. As a classically trained, professional musician I am used to practicing every day. Therefore, during improvisation classes, I wanted to create scenarios with my students in which we could practice listening, reacting to, and dealing with unusual musical situations. In the beginning I noticed that practicing difficult contemporary pieces, which included a lot of unusual challenges always improved my improvisational play. I began to create exercises in which I faced the same type of challenges without having to practice a particular piece.

Improvising musicians can learn a lot from professional athletes like soccer or tennis players. For them, it is perfectly normal to train in a way that helps them react quickly and professionally during an actual game. Rather than being afraid of developing new habits, improvising musicians should find practicing strategies that help them improve their play.

My idea is to introduce a number of useful ways people can use to practice on their own, and demonstrate how I start a class at the University of Music in Hannover. This workshop brings free improvisation in the context of our actual musicworld.

Corinna Eikmeier (Germany) studied Violoncello, Contemporary Music, Improvisation and did a Feldenkrais training.

She takes part in several interdisciplinary projects and teaches Feldenkrais and Improvisation at University of Music Hannover.

She was a Dorothea Erxleben scholar, working on a project about feldenkrais and improvisation and continued this as her PHD project. Titel of her dissertation is: Movement quality and music practis. About the relationship between feldenkrais-method and musical improvisation. Further information: www.corinna-eikmeier.de

Format: Workshop