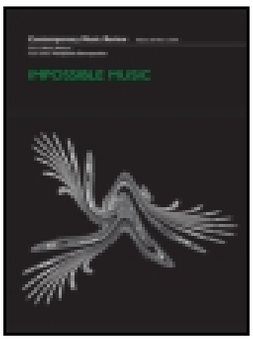

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INTRODUCTION

Music Improvisation and Social Inclusion

Franziska Schroeder, Koichi Samuels and Rebecca Caines

> The improviser abandons self to the moment; abandons momentarily the world of necessity and causality for a world of possibility and free will. Things do not happen by necessity, nor by chance. They simply happen. Listening is the primary act. Performing is the secondary act. Every sound that one makes is a response to a sound one has heard. A solo improviser must respond to sounds made by self, as though made by another person. There is no solo without a group. In improvising we must momentarily suspend the sense of self, and of our own identity. This is a game which can be dangerous if not played under controlled conditions. Under uncontrolled conditions, it can lead to insanity. Identity is learned. It is useful for survival. It is essential to remember who we are and what we are doing while we are crossing a street. At the same time, it is important not to think about every movement we make. We must trust the unconscious. When we act, we momentarily free ourselves from reflection. We simply act. (Rzewski 2006)

13 years ago, in 2006 (volume 25, issues 5–6 of *Contemporary Music Review*), Frances-Marie Uitti, 'musicienne extraordinaire', improviser and femme fatale of the cello, issued one of the cornerstone publications of musical improvisation, published by Taylor & Francis. For that double issue Uitti, famous for having made a musical career out of demolishing musical boundaries and inventing a unique technique of playing her cello with two bows simultaneously, had interviewed many of the 'big' names working in the musical improv scene at the time. Articles included views on improvisation by experimental vocalist Joan La Barbara, by British saxophonist Evan Parker, American trombonist and composer George E. Lewis, Dutch percussionist Han Bennink and Dutch jazz pianist and composer Misha Mengelberg, as well words by much loved improviser and deep listener Pauline Oliveros and American composer and vocalist Meredith Monk, amongst many others.

Uitti's issue shone a particular light onto the flourishing Dutch improv scene bourgeoning at the time, but she also celebrated improvisation scenes from around the world, focusing on musicians working in different genres of music and the performing arts.

In her introduction (2006) Uitti spoke of the Dutch expression 'lekker spelen', that joyous, humour-filled playfulness that is often present in improvised music making, and which, according to Uitti, seems almost impossible to translate. It might, however, be described as 'delicious playing' and we would like to use this expression of playing with joy, with humour, that act of playing 'deliciously' as a continuation and introduction to this special issue (commissioned by *CMR*) on music improvisation and social inclusion.

In particular, in this issue we are bringing together delicious writings from both practitioners and theorists working in an ever-growing field of improvisation studies, a field which over the last 15 years has emphasised improvisation as much more than music; as a performance practice that has led to and has activated different energies of critiques and diverse ways of thinking about social, cultural and political issues.

One of the main reasons for this issue was our belief that there was a lack of thinking around the topic of improvisation and inclusion, specifically the ways in which improvisation might be used in inclusive practices, with marginalised groups, with people of varying abilities and for enhancing well-being and social cohesion.

We understand 'inclusion' in a very broad sense and as we are coming from the view that improvisation can enable us to explore new modes of social organisation; thus, challenging hierarchical structures and emphasising inclusive, egalitarian relationships between collaborators; we wanted to elicit responses of people working with the potential inherent in improvisation practices towards inclusion. This also included those musicians and writers who were thinking of improvisation practices as reinforcing *exclusive* identities, those who were using improvisational forms of knowledge and behaviours in other disciplines, as well as those thinkers who investigate the social and political impact of improvisation on people's lives.

'Inclusion' is always a thorny concept, as the term signifies a desire to remove barriers to access in order to find ways of being together, but to offer to 'include' can also act to re-inscribe centre/margin binaries that keep certain people and practices at the edges. For some, it can mean holding onto certain disciplinary approaches or histories, ready to add 'diversity' or some 'new technique' when it is offered (like some kind of exotic sauce to flavour the meal), but not always being ready to move aside, or to radically reimagine the entire situation. (To push the food metaphor a little: one remains unwilling to reimagine the dish despite repeated comments to its flavourlessness.) This is a risky business.

As Dunne puts it, the discourse of inclusion can surface 'as a technicised process that identifies, fixes, cures or makes normal that which is "other". The explicit naming and identification of particular groups or individuals to demonstrate inclusion, functions

both to locate or point out perceived difference and to naturalise perceived "normalised" ways of being' (Dunne 2008, 12).

Many of the authors in this issue show how musical improvisation and other related improvisatory practices can provide new pathways across this difficult terrain, taking artists, players, composers, teachers, instrument makers, communities, and institutions into flavoursome territories, where subject positions and categories blur, resist, and deliciously misbehave. As improvisation scholar Ajay Heble suggests (quoted in this issue by Caines), improvisation then becomes 'not … simply a creative form, but … a complex social phenomenon that mediates transcultural inter-artistic exchanges that produce new conceptions of identity, community, history, and the body' (Heble 2009).

The connections between improvisation, community, well-being and social inclusion are touched upon by all of the authors included in this issue. **Lauren Hayes** discusses live electronic musical improvisation as an exemplary model for an enactive framework of music cognition in its ability to demonstrate the importance of participatory, relational, emergent, and embodied musical activities and processes. Her study likewise raises musical ontological questions about understandings of meaningful musical activity, what counts as improvisation, and who can be included as an improviser.

Using critical theory to think through improvisation and inclusion is another overlapping area cutting across our curated selection. **Wendy Eisenberg** writes on how riffs act as techniques of post-modernity, functioning in the modernist languages and landscapes of jazz and improvised music. She concludes that free improvisation provides a language that resists ideological demarcation and thus allows for an inclusive, heterogeneous approach to non-traditional socio-cultural influences.

Editor **Franziska Schroeder** and co-editor **Koichi Samuels** discuss the critical thinking behind their research, which draws together the social and connective functions of music making, the open and relational practice of music improvisation, and technological solutions using open, adaptable and accessible digital technologies. Using three case studies they show that activities in music improvisation have inclusive potential for opening constructive dialogues between performers, their instruments, and people of different backgrounds and abilities.

Research into improvisation as a response to othering and exclusion also feature across this issue, with co-editor, **Rebecca Caines**, reflecting on using improvisation approaches in teaching sound art, in socially-engaged art projects, and in tertiary classrooms. She suggests that incorporating improvisation might be one way to push back against the binary of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion', where power seems to rest with those doing the 'including'. Instead she suggests how teachers can use improvisation to make room for unique cultural formations to thrive, in a climate marked by resonating differences.

Simon H. Fell, making use of unprecedented access to Derek Bailey's archive of unpublished writings and correspondences, reflects upon the developments that

have taken place in improvisation studies in the 13 years since Bailey's death. Fell investigates the wariness with which some practising improvisors view the activity of the theorists and critical commentators, and he considers Bailey's positing of the improvising 'demonstrator'.

From the perspectives of community music practice, **Sofia Vougioukalou et al.,** in their study on refugees and integration through community music workshops in Wales, show how music improvisation is more than a 'tool' to deliver benefits. Rather, they describe a collaborative, inclusive process that creates a shared space in which a diverse group of performers can engage in cross-cultural dialogue and foster a sense of well-being and social inclusion.

As a final garnish, we hope you enjoy a collection of short review articles on workshops and compositions which are infused with improvisation practice and inclusive approaches. These include **Stefano Kalonaris and Dan Scott's** reflections on monthly workshops for exploring improvised sound, inspired by a dialogic model of listening, as well as **Nico Mangifesta's** workshop-concerts project that explores ways to promote intercultural integration through the practice of improvised music in Europe. His workshops have involved more than two thousand economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees from Africa, Syria, Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent. **Tomlinson and Gleeson** provide an excellent insight into their Brighton-based New Note Orchestra (NNO), specifically their performance piece *Solace*, which was generated through collaborative improvisation. They show the positive effects of music improvisation for people who are dealing with addiction. Finally, there is a report on **Julian Day's** participatory sound project *24 Hour Choir* in which one hundred members of the public sustained the human voice over an entire day.

We believe that we have managed to combine a rich palette of flavours on music improvisation and inclusion, approached from different and often overlapping aesthetic, technological, health, social and political perspectives. We hope that this collection of articles represents the important conversations that surround the topic of music improvisation and inclusion—the complexity and risks embedded in discourses of inclusion and accessibility, music performance and difference, health, well-being and the general benefits of music improvisation; and conversely, the challenges and resistances to exclusionary or hegemonic social structures and modalities that improvisation can encounter and attempts to push back against.

We wish that you, the reader, will find something stimulating, meaningful and tasty in what we think is a multi-faceted and multi-layered topic on music improvisation and social inclusion.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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