

Spontaneous Factory: An Approach to Improvisation and Composition for Large Instrumental Ensembles

The 2016 Midwest Clinic (McCormick Place, room W183)

Friday, December 16 (3:00 - 4:00 p.m.)

Jason Caslor, DMA

Associate Director of Bands and Orchestras, Arizona State University

Herberger Institute for the Design and the Arts, Tempe, AZ

jaslor@asu.edu www.jasoncaslor.com

Introduction

By the end of this session, I hope at least three things will become truths. You will:

1. Relax when you hear the word improvisation
2. Revisit less conventional repertoire
3. Reimagine your performance spaces

DISCLAIMER Very little of this is new. Artists have been exploring sounds and spaces for as long as there have been sounds and spaces.

ACT I Improvisation

What Does Improvisation Mean To You?

What Does Improvisation Mean To Me?

“Being aware of your surroundings and responding to those surroundings in the moment through sound.”

Why Improvisation?

Community Everything happens in the moment. It allows people to interact with each other in real time, often without the barrier of notation.

Confidence Not knowing exactly what comes next can be a little like walking a tightrope without a safety net.

Creativity We allow our students to explore the edges of their imagination, musicianship, and technique.

Ford or Google?

1. Ford = An assembly line where each person is one part of the whole. Each member is an integral part of the team, but has a very narrow set of duties (ie. 3rd clarinet syndrome).
2. Google = A company so dedicated to their employee's creativity that they allow them to spend 20% of their week working on anything they want.¹

Where Do I Begin?

1. Concert Bb / A Different Note
2. Home Sweet Home
 - Bb Different Note Bb
 - Try with and without a conductor.
3. Chorale
 - Specify a key. Or not!
 - Be mindful of good tone.
 - Sensitize the ensemble to your gestures.
4. Chaos to Groove
5. Shapeline²
 - The ensemble interprets your gestures through sound.
 - Have students conduct.
 - Great way to evaluate how clear we are ☺
 - Very effective with undergraduate conducting class.

Things to Remember

1. Avoid too many rules.
2. You can determine the parameters Ex. 1st 5 notes of Bb scale (Beginners).
3. Fight the urge to control or pre-determine ☺.
4. Encourage good tone, technique, and habits.
5. Avoid rote learning.
6. The importance of silence.
7. Be open to what you are presented with.

Possible Performance Structure

- I. Shapeline
- II. Chorale (I IV V I)
- III. Chaos to Groove

¹ Gmail was one of the ideas that came from that 20%.

² Walter Thompson, Soundpainting: The Art of Live Composition (New York: Walter Thompson, 2006), 34.

ACT II Repertoire

“Who’s uncomfortable, you or your students?”

1. Go to www.jasoncaslor.com.
2. Click on “Midwest Clinic”.
3. Explore and Suggest.³

ACT III Architecture

“If Your Band Plays A Concert, Does Anyone (New) Hear it?”

1. Reimagine current spaces.
2. Explore new spaces.
3. Performance of *Slipstream* by Jordan Nobles.

Postlude

“Evolve or Dissolve”

Suggested Resources

Books

Agrell, Jeffrey. *Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians*. Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2008.

Agrell, Jeffrey. *Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians, Volume 2*. Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2016.

Caslor, Jason. “Spontaneous Improvisation with Large, Public School Instrumental Ensembles.” DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2010.

Nachmanovitch, Stephen. *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*. Los Angeles: Jeffrey P. Tarcher, Inc., 1990.

Thompson, Walter. *Soundpainting: The Art of Live Composition: Workbook I*. New York: Walter Thompson, 2006.

Articles

Hopkins: “Interview with the Soundpainter, Walter Thompson” *Canadian Winds* (Fall 2016)

Allen: “Teaching Large Ensemble Music Improvisation.” *Radical Pedagogy* (Winter 2002)

³Thank you to Dr. Anthony Pursell, currently Director of Bands at Tarleton State University, who in 2007 created a list of over 100 aleatoric titles in the band repertoire with assistance from other members of the College Band Directors National Association.

Online

www.soundpainting.com (Walter Thompson)

<https://jordannobles.com>

<http://jeffreyagrell.com>

<http://improvinsights.com>

<http://www.conduction.us> (Lawrence “Butch” Morris)

<http://www.freeplay.com> (Stephen Nachmanovitch)

<http://paulineoliveros.us> (Pauline Oliveros)

Thank you

Thompson Junior High School 8th Grade Symphonic Band

Dan Harrison and Chris Werve, conductors

Shannon Lueders, principal

Charlie Menghini, Vandercook College

Jordan Nobles, composer

Arizona State University School of Music (Heather Landes, Director)

Arizona State University Department of Bands (Gary Hill, Director of Bands)

About the Clinician

Jason Caslor was appointed Associate Director of Bands and Orchestras at Arizona State University in 2015. From 2010-2015, Caslor served as Assistant Professor of Instrumental Conducting at Memorial University where he conducted the Wind Ensemble and oversaw the undergraduate and graduate instrumental conducting programs. Prior to that, Jason spent three seasons as Resident Conductor with the Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra (TBSO). During his tenure with the TBSO, he conducted over 75 concerts (including a CBC Radio national broadcast) and recorded a full-length, internationally distributed CD with Canadian blues artist Rita Chiarelli.

Recipient of an “Excellence in Teaching Award” from the Memorial University Students’ Union in 2012, Caslor also spent several years teaching in the public school system as an instrumental and choral instructor.

In addition to numerous regional engagements, he has conducted the National Youth Band of Canada and has presented his research at the College Band Directors National Association National Conference and the World Association of Symphonic Bands and Ensembles International Conference. His current research interests include developing a user-friendly iPad application that will allow for the transmission of high quality audio over the internet for the purposes of internet-based rehearsals/clinics and spontaneous improvisation as it pertains to both conducting pedagogy and large ensembles.

More information can be found at www.jasoncaslor.com.