

Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Improvisation at Coin-du-Banc

Hi everyone,

Having had the pleasure of being an instructor for the first two years of this unique workshop, it is a thrill for me to return to the latest edition of Coin-du-banc-en-folie! I look forward to sharing my experience as an improviser with all of you. Given this cohort's broad range of experience, from beginners to advanced, I have tailored a list of topics to explore. These include elements that I have deemed essential to my growth as a performer and musician in general. I wish to present, discuss, and explore these concepts primarily from a performance-based approach. The sessions will prioritize hands-on playing and interacting, to be complemented by group discussions. There will be plenty of opportunities to get to know each other musically, and to deepen our experience and understanding of improvisation.

François Houle

Topics:

- **Time perception** - Coffin Illusion/out-of-body awareness
- **Games** - various procedures to develop a deeper awareness of musical parameters
- **Parameters** - based on Braxton's language Formings, we will explore the nuts and bolts of the improviser's tool kit
- **Constellations** - from solo to large ensemble, we will discuss and experiment with instrumental groupings, demystifying traditional functions of rhythmic and melodic instruments
- **Peripheral listening** - how/what to listen for in a group context
- **Internal narrative** (negative thoughts) - techniques for freeing the mind from negative thoughts
- **Fundamentals vs anti-virtuosity** - learning to switch between acquired skills and the "unknown"
- **Limitations as opportunities** - how to capitalize on musical strengths
- **Style** - what is it? how to navigate the many types of music from an improviser's perspective
- **Graphic notation** - Visual Scores - creating and understanding the advantages and limitations of this genre
- **Technology / signal processing** - using electronics, recording media in improvisation
- **Intervallic permutations & creative pattern development** - my own little system of pattern generation for creative thinking and instrumental technique

In addition to these topics, we will have the great privilege of working with masters in the field;

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IISCI <https://improvisationinstitute.ca/>

François Houle – clarinetist

CAREER SYNOPSIS

My career as a creative musician spans over three decades, during which I have toured internationally, performing and composing for my original projects, as well as collaborating with a who's who of the music scene. After graduating with a Masters degree in classical performance at Yale University, followed by two years of improvisation studies with Steve Lacy in France, Bill Smith in Seattle, and Evan Parker in the UK, I went on to maintain a very active performing and recording career at the intersection of contemporary music and improvisation. I have since released over 30 recordings as a leader, and participated in over 50 recordings as a sideman, in the spheres of avant-jazz, contemporary new music, and world music. Long term collaborators includes legendary figures such as Evan Parker, Joëlle Léandre, Georg Graewe, Dave Douglas, Benoît Delbecq, Mark Dresser, Myra Melford, amongst many others. I've had the privilege of performing with some of the greatest improvisors on the scene today; John Butcher, Han Bennink, George Lewis, Anthony Braxton, Irène Schweizer, Barry Guy, Barre Phillips, Fred Frith, Joseph Jarman, Ken Vandermark, Mats Gustafsson, to name a few.

In over thirty years I have established a strong presence on the international music scene as one of today's most inventive musicians, in all of the diverse musical spheres I have embraced: classical, jazz, new music, improvised music, and world music. Whether performing Mozart or Messiaen, appearing as a featured soloist with orchestra, or improvising and embracing live, interactive electronics, my goal is always to make the concert going experience an exciting one.

EDUCATION PROFILE

In addition to performances at international jazz, world, and contemporary music festivals, I have presented special seminars, presentations, and performances at BCMEA conferences, International Clarinet Association's ClarinetFest, and at leading music schools regionally, nationally, and internationally. Clinic topics cover clarinet pedagogy, contemporary extended techniques, performance practice, improvisation, the psychology of performing, and the creative process. These activities have heightened my profile in the educational community, making me a sought after clarinet clinician and consultant.

I am a faculty member at the Vancouver Community College School of Music (VCC). Initially hired as a clarinet sessional instructor in 1998, I have seen my teaching portfolio expanded over the last two decades to include improvisation, chamber music and ensemble coaching seminars, lecturing on the history of performance practice, and participating in various faculty committees.

From 2006 to 2009 I served as Artistic Director of the Vancouver Creative Music Institute, a summer program I founded in 2005, dedicated to the advancement of new forms of music, with an emphasis on improvisational practices. This program was created to fill a gap between existing programs at VCC in classical music, new music and jazz. This institute offered young musicians the opportunity to engage in other forms of musical manifestations, including improvised music, electronica, and sound art. My responsibilities as artistic director included recruiting, marketing, budgeting, program scheduling, booking faculty, and working with the VCC Registrar, and the School of Music administration, as well as event planning and coordination with program partners and sponsors. Guest

faculty included George Lewis, Miya Masaoka, Mark Helias, Marilyn Crispell, Evan Parker, Han Bennink, John Butcher, Eugene Chadbourne, Mark Dresser, Joëlle Léandre, Dave Douglas, Taylor Ho Bynum, Harris Eisenstadt, Giorgio Magnanensi, Eyvind Kang, Myra Melford, Barry Guy, Benoît Delbecq, Nicole Mitchell, among many others.

In 2018 I served as faculty for the University of Padova's winter school's "Educating to Silence" improvisation workshop intensive in the Po Delta in Italy.

For two summers (2016-17) I served as faculty and program coordinator for Coin-du-banc-en-folie, a community-based music improvisation workshop intensive supported by the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (Guelph University). My duties included teaching of improvisation and leading and coordinating participants and faculty performances.

In 2015 I was hired as sessional instructor for the graduate clarinet studio at UBC School of Music, following on my work there as interim studio instructor in 2009/10. I have been managing a successful private studio since 1985 in all the cities I have been based in; Montreal, New Haven, Banff/Calgary, and Vancouver. In 2007 I became a Leblanc artist, working with Conn-Selmer Inc., one of North America's leading manufacturer of woodwind instruments. This created an opportunity for me to present clinics and masterclasses at major music schools internationally (notably at Arizona State University, Krakow Conservatory, and Southern Illinois State University). In 2012 I became a Backun Artist, proudly representing this local Canadian instrument manufacturer on the international stage. Other music industry endorsements include Steuer Reeds of France and Légère Reeds of Canada.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I have founded my career as a performer and educator on my ability to translate personal and professional experiences into practical concepts for individual growth. I have endeavoured to learn as I go, to adapt to new ideas, situations and contexts, and to have the confidence and courage to perform and meet the challenges of new situations. This experience is invaluable in communicating the essentials of a strong musical foundation to students; disciplined work ethic, artistic inspiration, and self-confidence. My aspirations are to keep forging ahead artistically, always looking forward to share new musical experiences with colleagues, students, and listeners, and to thrive in the spirit of team work, leadership, and excellence.

In creating programs such as VCMI, and developing my teaching portfolio at VCC School of Music and UBC School of Music, I have acquired significant pedagogical experience. My personal approach to teaching is two-pronged; first is to instil a strong work ethic, with a solid grasp of music fundamentals, such as tone production, technique, to go with a broad knowledge of the history of music (western and non-western) and its repertoires. Second is to foster an attitude of creative thinking in the student, by opening up the traditional curriculum to include the mastery of extended techniques, the acquisition of new contemporary repertoire, and to encourage collaborative work with composers and multi-media practitioners (visual arts, cinema, video art, poetry and dance). At the basis of this philosophy is improvisation, an invaluable tool in fostering creativity and problem solving skills in students. My practice of improvisation has allowed me to develop a unique approach to technical development and musicianship, translating equally in several stylistic arenas such as jazz, world music, classical and new music, embracing new

experimental forms and technology.

My musical practice has taught me about creating a focused identity on the music scene pertaining directly to my instrument, while seeking out as much experience and knowledge in other areas of the music industry, such as self-employed entrepreneurship, working with non-for-profit organizations, media relations and promotion, tour planning, copyright law and digital music distribution. This attitude has provided me with a broad knowledge of all the components necessary to lead a successful artistic life. One of my most significant contributions to VCC school of Music's program has been to introduce career development concepts to enhance the student's awareness of the diverse range of skills necessary to pursue a successful life in music. These concepts touch upon a wide range of topics, from concert presentation, the use of new technology and the psychology of performing, to management, marketing, and grant writing skills. The objective is to inform students about the many facets of today's music industry, and to look at all aspects of performance, from program planning to presentation.

PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE

With over thirty years of professional experience, my extensive touring has led to solo appearances at major festivals across Canada, the United States, Europe and Australia, and the release of more than 30 recordings, earning multiple Juno Award and West Coast Music Award nominations. In 2006, I was the featured soloist in Lutosławski's Dance Preludes with the CBC Radio Orchestra, a performance hailed by the Los Angeles Times. In 2007, I composed and premiered a concerto for clarinet which I went on to record with the Turning Point Ensemble for a 2009 world wide release on the ATMA Classique label. In 2008 I was appointed as "Associate Composer" of the Canadian Music Centre.

Inspired by collaborations with the world's top musical innovators, and studies with luminaries such as Steve Lacy, Evan Parker, and William O. Smith, I have developed a unique improvisational language, virtuosic and rich with sonic embellishment and technical extensions. As a soloist and chamber musician, I have actively expanded the clarinet's repertoire by commissioning some of today's leading Canadian and international composers and premiering over one hundred new works. Since moving to Vancouver in 1990, I have immersed myself in the artistic scene not only as a performer, composer and educator, but also by sitting on various non-profit society boards. I was a founding member of the Standing Wave new music chamber ensemble for 11 years, and a founding member of the Turning Point Ensemble, a chamber orchestra with which I performed with for 20 years. I have been listed for several years by Downbeat magazine as a "Talent Deserving Wider Recognition" and hailed as a "Rising Star" in Downbeat's Readers and Critics' Poll since 2008.

I studied at McGill University, went on to win the National Debut competition, and completed my studies at Yale University. I have been an artist-in-residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts and at the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Umbria, Italy, and was a featured soloist at the International Clarinet Association's 2007 and 2008 ClarinetFests.