

## **MUS 201B/131 – Contemporary Improvisation Ensemble**

Winter 2008

University of California, San Diego  
Wednesdays 2-4:50pm, Mandeville B210

Instructor: David Borgo, Ph.D. (dborgo@ucsd.edu)  
Office: B140, 858-822-4957, hours by appointment

### **Class Description**

201B is devoted to an exploration of issues, aesthetics, and practicum related to improvisation. The class is run as a combination of performance workshop and seminar, providing a critical space in which playing and discussion can proceed in parallel.

### **Class Objective**

Our collective goal is to explore a variety of ways to experience and theorize improvised music along any number of axes: for example, methodological and pedagogical considerations; cultural, historical, and stylistic dimensions; gender, class and race perspectives; or the relationship between contemporary music, science and technology, and issues of globalization. Students, regardless of their individual background or discipline, will ideally come away with a better understanding of themselves and their work, as well as of the fluidity of boundaries between improvisation, non-improvisatory performance, composition, and theorizing.

### **Class Procedures**

Our meetings will involve a fairly equitable balance between “thinking about music” (learning how to learn), “talking about music,” and “communicating musically.” Along the way we will all strive to improve our verbal, non-verbal, and musical communication skills. Since this class privileges improvisatory immediacy, I tend to encourage music making that does not rely on the abstractions and concretions of scores. However, scoring devices (both conventional and unconventional) and ensemble organizing tactics can certainly be discussed and explored. In fact, each student in the class will, at some point, be invited to devise and present their own tactics for structured improvisation.

Rather than assign specific readings or recordings to explore in a “top-down fashion,” I prefer to use a more emergent form of organization. For each week, each of us (or perhaps a subset of us each time) will bring in recordings, readings, and/or multimedia resources to share with, or recommend to, the class. Often these choices will be shaped by a particular question that I will pose to the class. Though we won’t have time to review all of these materials in class together, they should provide an impetus for discussion and a reference list of things each of us can pursue on our own. I also strongly recommend that students get together outside of class to continue the discussions and playing!

Given the size of the class I may at times divide the group into two sections. One group performs an exercise; the other group listens and then gives a critique of the performance based on its success in achieving its aims. We will also record many of our class improvisations and listen back to them for critical analysis and discussion. All of this is meant in the spirit of creating group solidarity and a group identity. A successful improvisation, much like a successful class, will hinge on our collective ability to invite and engage with multiple perspectives and to establish a bond of trust and collegiality.

### **Attendance**

Students may miss one class without a need for permission from the instructor. Beyond this any additional absences will directly affect the student’s course grade.

### **Class Concert**

Friday, February 29, 2004