

IF YOU CAN'T IMPROVISE, THEN JUST FAKE IT: IMPROV 101
A 45-MINUTE CLASSROOM WORKSHOP
FOR Fourth and Fifth grade Students
For musicians and non-musicians (ideal group: 20-30 students)

PERFORMER: Dr. Tina Chancey
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Activities ---Students will:

- **Participate in four group exercises to build skills needed for improvisation:**
 - i. Improving mental reflexes
 - ii. Memory and concentration
 - iii. Observation and creativity
 - iv. Spontaneity and group interaction
- **Improvise a group story (using the MadLibs format) and sing it over a repeating ground bass pattern (the Bergamasca).**

Approach---The workshop leader will:

- Play and sing some blues to demonstrate that it's possible to make up music on the spur of the moment with the right skills (with a discussion identifying those skills).
- Compare the process of music **improvisation** to conversation (everyone improvises in conversation); and compare the skills needed to those of players on a sports team.
- Spotlight the three differences between improvising and playing written music; improv focuses on process not content, it's collaborative not solo, and it's fluid not fixed.
- Take the students through four exercises designed to build necessary improv skills.
- Describe how guidelines such as **ground basses** like Heart and Soul help you improvise.
- Lead students through a short 'MadLibs'-style story where they replace key words spontaneously, which they sing over a simple ground bass.

Results for Students--Students will:

- Become aware of and more comfortable with being in the moment.
- Acquire confidence and the foundations of a technique improvising with others.
- Approach future improvisation activities with enthusiasm and understanding.

Rationale

Many of the skills needed to be a good improviser are not necessarily the ones taught in school. In the classroom, concentration and creativity are paired with preparation, deliberateness and thoroughness. Memory is used to remember facts and procedures. Cooperation is stressed as a social mediation. **Group improvisation** repurposes some of those skills—concentration and memory are used to focus on process; cooperation is a tool for creation. This workshop hooks verbal and musical improvisation in a manner that doesn't require particular musical skills, though standard musical instruments can be incorporated if desired.

Student Exercises:

- 1) **Fractured storybook**—students take turns telling a story, each saying only one word.
- 2) **Big Bubba**—a circle game where eight numbered students and Big Bubba trade their numbers back and forth, out of order, over a rhythmic beat.

- 3) **Mirrors**—in pairs, students alternately lead and follow each other; then they do the 'opposite' of the leader.
- 4) **I went to New York**—the first student 'brings back' three things; the next one must drop the first item, list the next two and add one more of his own.

Exercises may be adjusted or substituted according to the background and interests of the students.

Workshop Requirements:

Black or white board, room large enough for students to sit facing each other in pairs.

Sample Musical Repertoire:

B.B. King, 'The Thrill is Gone'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fk2prKnYnI>

Bobby McFerrin, 'Don't Worry be Happy'

<http://bobbymcferrin.com/sing-and-play-with-bobby/>

Pauline Oliveros, 'Tuning Meditation'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaLHfhJSFK8>

Victor Borge, 'Hungarian Dance'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvUbrbFdJ8g>

Ravi Shankar, 'Raga'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKceywea5T8>

Workshop Leader's Background

Tina Chancey is a performer, educator and scholar. A former chair of the Early Music America Education Committee, Dr. Chancey has been a presenter at Orff-Schulwerk, ASTA, MENC, and Chamber Music America national conferences. Since 1985, she has given workshops and assemblies in the DC public schools through the Washington Performing Arts Society's "Concerts in Schools" program and Young Audiences Maryland. A participant in the Kennedy Center Education Department's seminar, **Artists as Educators: Creating Teachers' Workshops**, Dr. Chancey recently presented a day-long teachers' workshop integrating music, literature and art on *Fame and Folly* with Rebecca Arkenberg at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She was selected to represent the Smithsonian Institution in a week-long educational residency in Long Beach, CA.

A founding member and co-director of HESPERUS, an early/traditional music ensemble that tours nationally and internationally, she is also a former member of the Folger Consort and the Ensemble for Early Music. A multi-instrumentalist, she plays early and traditional bowed strings and has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts to support debut performances on the French baroque pardessus de viole at the Kennedy Center and Weil Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Dr. Chancey attended Oberlin College, received Masters degrees from Queens College and New York University, and a PhD from the Union Institute. Her articles on early and traditional music appear in scholarly and popular publications, and she has recorded for a score of labels from Arabesque to Windham Hill. She also produces recordings for others and runs the SoundCatcher: Play by Ear workshop. Dr. Chancey has received a lifetime education achievement award from Early Music America. She will be a visiting professor at Oberlin Conservatory, teaching improvisation for the month of January, 2013.