

## IMPROVISATION ENSEMBLES

Richard Boukas, director

Two credits

SYLLABUS Fall 2014/Spring 2015

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**Course Objective:** to develop improvisational and ensemble skills through existing repertoire and (when appropriate) original student compositions. Other skills developed include sightreading, phrasing and articulation, consistent time, vocabulary for interaction between soloist and rhythm section, playing in odd meters and grooves, efficient rehearsal techniques and relevant arranging/composition skills for original pieces. Each semester there is a "**composer of note**" where the ensemble must include at least one of their pieces in the **ensemble showcase** and **recording session**.

**The following is expected of you when you walk into ensemble:**

- **this is a professional rehearsal situation, NOT A JAM SESSION.** We work as a team.
- be set up with all necessary equipment, tuned up and **ready to play at 325pm SHARP. Lateness is not tolerated.**
- prepare all music thoroughly for the following session, addressing all technical, stylistic and improvisational aspects.
- all the music for the ensemble is in hand, on your music stand. Keep an **extra copy** in your locker for you and your subs.
- be willing to follow my musical and technical direction, accept individual and collective constructive criticism.

**Grading Criteria**

- **individual progress, thorough preparation of the music, strong work ethic**
- **quality of participation and ability to work with others**
- **Attendance record**

**NOTE: 3 or more unexcused absences and/or chronic lateness can constitute failing the course. You must produce documentation for an absence to be excused for professional, medical or legitimate personal reasons.**

**Ensemble Showcase, Recording, Composer of Note, Original material**

- you are encouraged to **record ensemble sessions** to facilitate your preparation of new repertoire. Composers also will benefit from hearing their pieces to finalize decisions about content, form, solos, and arranging issues.
- you are encouraged to **schedule additional ensemble meetings** between class meetings, especially as the **ensemble showcase and recording are approaching.**- For a cohesive group sound, nothing can replace more quality playing time.

• **Composer of Note:** Every semester the Jazz Program features a reknown composer (Jazz or American Songbook). We are obligated to perform and record a minimum of one composition by that composer. Student arrangements are welcome.

• **original repertoire** requires extra dedication and commitment to achieve each composer's vision. Here I assume a role of *facilitator* rather than director, offering constructive suggestions for the composition's form, arrangement, and other key aspects. Pieces should be written for the ensemble's instrumentation and take into account the skill level of individual players and the ensemble as a whole. All pieces should be in **legible notated form** (individual and transposed parts when necessary) and at a point where *most of the key compositional decisions and details have already been addressed*. Pieces that are incomplete, ambiguous, or have notational problems are not ready to play until a more complete version is finished. The composer should be able to take over the rehearsal, talk down the piece's form, road map, groove(s), solo order, etc. Use of **notation software** is strongly suggested, especially when numerous revisions occur.

**Break:** There is a mid-session break of **10 minutes. This duration is strictly observed.** By mutual agreement of the instructor and ensemble, sometimes the break will be skipped and ensemble will end 10 minutes earlier. This is to maintain continuity of working on a certain piece.

• **SUBS Policy:** **You are responsible to send in a competent SUB for any classes you miss and provide them with copies of all the music** we are playing. Keep an **extra updated copy of the book in your locker** where your sub can access it. **Notify me by cell/text or email AS SOON AS you know that you will have to miss a class. It is recommended that you line up a sub who is usually free during our session time and near or at the school.**

**Listening Session and Recording:** These are the two main showcases of our work for the semester. The listening session occurs about 8 weeks into the semester. The recording date can occur anytime in the last 5 weeks.

**Repertoire:** Varies with level of students comprising the ensemble and the amount of original material submitted by **student composers**. Existing repertoire can range from staple Jazz improvisational forms (Blues, Rhythm Changes and their derivatives), standards, mainstream Jazz composers (Horace Silver, Wayne Shorter, Miles Davis, Joe Henderson). We will work on getting the rhythm section to groove, different approaches to improvising including linear, harmonic and rhythmic development, improving sense of form and time, building and pacing of solos, developing interactive language between soloist and rhythm section, within the rhythm section, phrasing/articulation and balance. I most often will critique individual players on the fly while playing or just after a solo. This has shown to be very effective. We will cover much ground together.