

# Analytic Encounters in Melodic Improvisation and Rhythm Globally, Spring 24

MUH 7938 - Musicology Seminar  
Fridays: 9:35am-12:35am, MUB 0232

## Instructor

Dr. Payam Yousefi

Office Hours: Mon. 9am-12pm Thur. 1-4pm

[Office Hour Sign Up Sheet](#)

Email: [payam.yousefi@ufl.edu](mailto:payam.yousefi@ufl.edu)

## Course Description

MUH 7938, Musicology Seminar

**Analytic Encounters in Melodic Improvisation and Rhythm Globally**

Grading Scheme: Letter grade

This course both intensively and comparatively examines multiple musical traditions through the lens of melodic improvisation and rhythmic structures. In each session we actively listen to and collectively analyze diverse approaches, methods, and procedures to improvisatory and rhythmic phenomena found across the world. As a class we will survey scholarship on improvisation and rhythm in order to broaden our analytical toolkits and move towards building a pluralist approach to theoretic inquiry broadly defined. By the end of the first two units (9 weeks), we will have covered the musical concepts, important figures, and cultural contexts of practices in Arab maqam performance, Hindustani music, transnational jazz, classical Persian music, Japanese shakuhachi performance, gospel, Karnatak music, Ghanaian drumming ensembles, and classical Turkish music. In unit three, we will shift to intensive case studies of the creative practices of contemporary artists—tentatively, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Amir ElSaffar, and Kayhan Kalhor—to probe the innovative ways that their compositional approaches draw on and disrupt the musical concepts we have covered.

## Course Objectives:

- To comprehend the different approaches to improvisation and rhythm within various traditions while engaging with the theoretical scholarship written about them.
- To gain an awareness of the broader concepts, frameworks, and theoretic lexicons that have been used to discuss rhythm and improvisation across the globe.
- To listen closely to culturally distinct musical phenomenon with comprehension.
- To analyze diverse musics with nuanced understanding of cultural contexts.

## Assessment:

- Participation (10%): Students are expected to take an active role in discussions. Students are responsible for reading all the week's materials and coming to class prepared to meaningfully contribute their impressions, reactions, and ideas. Weekly attendance is required and is of paramount importance.
- Weekly Assignments (30%): Students are required to write a two-paragraph description and response to one of the readings each week. Each week's readings will be distributed among the students in class.
- Midterm (20%): In week 8 students will be asked to give an analytical presentation of an improvisatory moment within a musical example. The example does not need to be from a tradition we have covered however it should attempt to describe the underlying structures and processes that enable the improvisation, and/or engage critically with various assumptions of improvisation.
- Final Project (40%): A 20-page paper that analyzes a tradition/repertoire/piece by engaging with the frameworks and concepts presented in class. The music does not need to be something we covered in class. 20 pages of text, double spaced, not including bibliography.

- Proposal due week five / Outlines due week 9 / Revised outline due week 13 / Final paper due April 26.

**\*\*\*Syllabus is Subject to Change, Consult Canvas for Updates\*\*\***

Additions will be made to the readings and listening examples for select weeks.

## **Week 1 (1/12): Introduction to Approaching Pluralist Approaches to Analysis**

**Research Question:** Over the years space has continuously opened to bridge the subdisciplines of music. More recently, the discussions in music theory calling for a more global or pluralist approach to music theory have made more space for thinking across ethnomusicology, theory, and musicology. What have the discussions centered on theory been and what nuances must we be sensitive to in our pursuit of a global approach to theory?

### Readings:

- Blum, Stephen. 2023. *Music Theory in Ethnomusicology*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. (selections in canvas)
- Wolf, Richard. 2009. *Theorizing the Local*. New York: Oxford University Press. (selections in canvas)
- Tenzer, Michael. 2006. *Analytical Studies in World Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (intro)
- Everett, Yayoi U. 2021. "From Exoticism to Interculturalism: Counterframing the East–West Binary." *Music Theory Spectrum* 43 (2)

## **Unit One: Improvisation**

## **Week 2 (1/19): Introduction to Musical Improvisation**

**Research Question:** What do we mean by improvisation and what are the various forms of improvisation we encounter in the world today? In this unit we explore the diverse approaches to repetition, sequencing, variation, rhythm, and accompaniment across various improvisatory traditions and within their cultural/musicological contexts.

### Readings:

- Solis, Gabriel. 2009. "Introduction." In *Musical Improvisation: Art, Education, and Society*, edited by Gabriel Solis & Nettl, Bruno, 1-17. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Blum, Stephen. 1998. "Recognizing Improvisation." In *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Read 27-28 and 3-40)
- Nettl, Bruno 1998. "An Art Neglected in Scholarship," In *In The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell, 1-23. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Nettle, Bruno. 1974. "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach." *The Musical Quarterly* 60:1-19. (Optional reading)
- Skim Through the Various Sections of *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies* volumes 1 and 2 in order to get a sense of different discourses within improvisation studies. Pay special attention to the music section.

Introductory Listening and Viewing Examples:

- \* Amir ElSaffar, "[Embubum](#)"
- \* Mohammad Reza Shajarian, "[Rast Panjgah](#)"
- \* Um Kulthum, "[Nazra](#)"
- \* Jennifer Hudson, "[Amazing Graze](#)"

## Week 3 (1/26): Templates and Structures within Improvisational Traditions

**Research Question:** What are the different processes, driving forces, and structures that underpin various improvisatory practices in the world?

**Case Studies:** Improvisation in the Arab World and Iran

**Learning Outcomes:** Understand the basic modal, structural, and formal elements of improvisation in Arab and Persian music

**Key Musical Terms and concepts:** maqām, taqsim, tarab, saltanah, qafrah, ecstasy  
āvāz, ghazal, aruz dastgāh, gusheh,

Readings:

### First Half

- Racy, A.J. 1998. "Improvisation, Ecstasy and Performance Dynamics in Arabic Music" In *In The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Nettle and Melinda Russell, 96-112. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Racy, A.J., 2003. *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. (Read 104-105, 126-130, 212-220)
- Nettle, Bruno, and Ronald Riddle. 1972. "Taqsim Nahawand: The Musicianship of Ali Jihad Racy." *Yearbook of the International Council for Traditional Music.* 5:11-50. (Skim when listening to "Taqsim Nahawand")
- Nettle, Bruno and Ronald Riddle. 1998. "Taqsim Nahawand Revisited," *In The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Nettle and Melinda Russell, 369-393. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Optional Reading)

### Second Half

- Nettle, Bruno. 1987. *The Radif Of Persian Music: Studies of Structure and Cultural Context*. Champaign: Elephant and Cat. (Read 18-20)
- Nooshin, Laudan. 1998. "The Song of the Nightingale: Processes of Improvisation in Dastgāh Segāh (Iranian Classical Music)." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 7:69-117. (Skim 69-72 and 76-86—focus on transcriptions)

Listening Examples:

- \* AJ Racy, “Taqsim Nahawand”
- \* Um Kulthum “Ana fi intizarak”
- \* Mohammad Reza Shajarian “Homayoun Masnavi”

## Week 4 (2/2): Templates and Structures within Improvisational Traditions (Part 2)

**Research Question:** As we continue exploring the structures that underpin improvisatory practice we ask, what techniques and collaborative conventions enable improvisation in jazz performance? What are the different ways that improvisation is collaborative and what is the role of accompaniment in different traditions? In our second meeting of the week, we explore the musical system and frameworks for improvisation in Hindustani Music.

**Case Studies:** Improvisation within Jazz and North Indian music.

**Key Terms and concepts:** comping, vamping, standards, pedal points, riffing, rāga tāla, tār, ālāp, jor, gat, vistār, and tihāī

Readings:

### First Half

- Berliner, Paul. 1994. *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Introduction and scanned sections)
- Monson, Ingrid. 1996. "Grooving and Feeling," In *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, 26-72. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. (Read 26-29 and use the transcriptions from 30-42 to accompany “Blues for Duane” listening example.)

### Second Half

- Ruckert, George and Richard Widdess. 1999. “Issues and Processes: Hindustani Raga.” In *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 5 (The United States and Canada), edited by Alison Arnold, 90-113. New York: Routledge.
- Slawek, Stephen. 1974. “Keeping it Going: Terms, Practices, and Processes of Improvisation in Hindustani Music.” In *The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell, 335-367. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Read 335-358)

Listening Examples:

- \* Freddie Hubbard, [“Blues for Duane”](#)
- \* Charles Mingus, [“Parkeriana”](#)
- \* Vilayat Khan, [“Rag Yaman--gat in teen tal”](#)

## Week 5 (2/9): Examining Trends and Distinctions (Review)

**Research Question:** What trends have we observed in our examples thus far? What are the distinguishing elements within each tradition that are musically meaningful to its practitioners? Let us also consider this week how structures are also intentionally negated abstracted by some practitioners.

**Case Studies:** Reviewing Arabic taqsim, Hindustani ālāp, and Persian avaz comparatively. Looking to the avant-garde.

**Key Terms:** ostinato, underlying structure, sequencing, variation, accompaniment

\*\*\*Final Project Proposals Due\*\*\*

## **Unit Two: Rhythmic Practices and Temporality**

### **Week 6 (2/16): Thinking About Rhythm**

**Class goals:** This week we will consider broadening our theoretical frameworks for examining rhythm and rethinking our definitions. We overview various rhythmic labels and go over examples in class.

**Key Terms:** isochrony, additive rhythms, cyclic, polyrhythm, free rhythm, elasticity.

Readings:

- Powers, Harold S. 1986. *Rhythm*. In *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, edited by Don M. Randel, 700-705. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wolf, Richard K., Stephen Blum, and Christopher Hasty. 2019. *Thought and Play in Musical Rhythm: Asian, African, and Euro-American Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University (Read Introduction)
- Hasty, Chris. 2019. "Thinking With and About Rhythm," *Thought and Play in Musical Rhythm: Asian, African, and Euro-American Perspectives*, edited by Richard K. Wolf, Stephen Blum, and Christopher Hasty New York: Oxford University
- London, Justin. (2004). *Hearing in Time: Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter*. Oxford University Press.

### **Week 7 (2/23): Rhythmic Cycles**

**Learning Objective:** Today we examine transcriptions of rhythmic cycles in South India, Turkey, and the Arab world and learn to clap along and sustain these cycles within performance.

**Case Studies:** Turkish classical cycles (usul), Arab iqa'at, and Karnatak talam

**Key Terms and concepts:** usul, iqa, samai, tala

Readings:

- Bektaş, Tolga. 2005. "Relationships between Prosodic and Musical Meters in the Beste Form of Classical Turkish Music." *Asian Music* 36(1):1-26.
- Nelson, David Paul. 1999. "Karnatak Tala." In *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Vol. 5 (The United States and Canada)*, edited by Alison Arnold, 90-113. New York: Routledge.

- Kippen, James. 2006. "Hindustani Rhythmic Theory." In *Gurudev's Drumming Legacy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Nelson, David. 200. "Karnatak Tala." In *Garland Encyclopedia*. (See canvas)

\*\*\* See week 6 online module for supplementary transcriptions of rhythmic cycles\*\*\*

Listening Examples:

- \* "Karatabak Peşrev" in hafif usul 32/4
- \* Samai' Bayati in 10/8 cycle
- \* Ādi Tala example

## Week 8 (3/1): Polyrhythm

**Learning Objectives:** Comprehend the different ways polyrhythm is understood, embodied, and discussed in Ewe drumming of Ghana. Develop an understanding of the context, processes and collective procedures that lead to polyrhythmic textures in our examples. As a site of comparison, we will examine similar timekeeping functions in jazz in our second session.

**Case Studies:** Ghanaian Agbekor performance, drumming

**Key Terms and concepts:** gestalt, interlocking, hemiola, cross rhythm, time keeping bell patterns, gankogui, axatse, totodzi, kloboto, kagan, kidi

Readings:

### First Half

- Agawu, Kofi. 1995. "The Invention of African Rhythm." *Journal of the American Musicology Society*, 48(3): 380-395.
- Locke, David. 1982. "Principles of Offbeat Timing and Cross-Rhythm in Southern Ewe Dance Drumming." *Ethnomusicology* 26 (2): 217-246. (Skim transcriptions and explanations from 217-236—we will review in class)
- Chernoff, J. 1997. "'Hearing" in West African Idioms." *World of Music* 39 (2): 19–25. (Optional reading)
- Polak, Rainer, Justin London, and Nori Jacoby. "Both Isochronous and Non-Isochronous Metrical Subdivision Afford Precise and Stable Ensemble Entrainment: A Corpus Study of Malian Jembe Drumming." *Frontiers in neuroscience* 10 (2016): 285–285.
- Stone, Ruth. 1985. "In Search of Time in African Music." *Music Theory Spectrum* Vol. 7, Time and Rhythm in Music, 139-148. (Optional reading)

### Second Half

\*\*\*MIDTERM Presentations\*\*\*

- Butterfield, Matthew W. 2010. “Variant Timekeeping Patterns and Their Effects in Jazz Drumming.” *Music Theory Online* 16(4). (6 pages, gives analysis of timekeeping in listening example, “Pent up House”)
- Ziporyn and Tenzer. 2011. “Thelonious Monk’s Harmony, Rhythm, and Pianism.” *Analytical and Cross-Cultural Studies in World Music*, edited by Michael Tenzer and John Roeder. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Optional reading, the chapter presents analysis of cyclic structure adjacent to this week’s topics)

Listening Examples:

- \* Slow and fast Agbekor (Ewe, Ghana)
- \* Max Roach and Clifford Brown [“Pent up House”](#)

## Week 9 (3/8): How “Free” is Free Rhythm?

**Research Question:** How do we discuss and comprehend the rhythmic structures within musical styles that do not use equal beats we can snap our fingers to? How is time measured, felt, and understood in such formats?

**Case Studies:** Karnatak ālāpana, Persian āvāz,

**Key Terms and concepts:** aruz, āvaz, free-meter, elastic rhythm

Readings:

### First Half

- Clayton, Martin R. L. 1996. “Free Rhythm: Ethnomusicology and the Study of Music Without Metre.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59 (2): 323–32.
- Tsuge, Gen’ichi. 1970. “Rhythmic Aspect of the Avaz in Persian Music. *Ethnomusicology* 14(2): 205-228. (Read 205-219, focusing on the transcriptions of poetic meter and skim the remainder)
- Roeder, John. 2019. “Formative Processes of Durational Projection in ‘Free Rhythm’ World Music,” *Thought and Play in Musical Rhythm: Asian, African, and Euro-American Perspectives*, edited by Richard K. Wolf, Stephen Blum, and Christopher Hasty New York: Oxford University (Optional reading)

### Second Half

- Wolf, Richard. 2019. “‘Rhythm,’ ‘Beat,’ and ‘Freedom’ in South Asian Musical Traditions,” In *Thought and Play in Musical Rhythm: Asian, African, and Euro-American Perspectives*, edited by Richard K. Wolf, Stephen Blum, and Christopher Hasty New York: Oxford University
- 

Listening Examples:

- \* Mohammad Reza Shajarian, “bidād āvāz”
- \* vina alapana

**Week 10: \*\*\*Spring Break from March 9-16\*\*\***

## Week 11 (3/22): How “Free” is Free Rhythm? (Part 2)

**Case Studies:** Hindustani ālāp,

**Key Terms and concepts:** aruz, free-meter, elastic rhythm, “Ma” cadential silence

Readings:

### First Half

- Clayton, Martin. 2008. “Theoretical Perspectives: Musical Time in Indian Theoretical Perspectives.” *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rāg Performance*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
(Read only the short section on time measurement)
- Widdess, Richard. 1995. “‘Free Rhythm’ in Indian Music.” *EM: Annuario degli Archivi di Etnomusicologia. Dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia* 3: 77-95.
- Tsuge, Gen'ichi. 1970. “Rhythmic Aspects of the Âvâz in Persian Music.” *Ethnomusicology* 14 (2): 205–27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/849797>.
- Jankowsky, Richard C. “Sounding Spirits.” *Stambeli: Music, Trance, and Alterity in Tunisia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. (Focus on concept of Elasticity)
- Widdess, Richard. 1994. “Involving the Performers in Transcription and Analysis: A Collaborative Approach to Dhrupad.” *Ethnomusicology* 38 (1): 59–79. (Optional reading, recommended to skim transcriptions)
- Shimosako, Man. 2001. “Part 4 Japan: Philosophy and Aesthetics,” In *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 7, edited by Robert C. Provine, Yoshiko Tokumaru, and Lawrence Witzelben

Listening Examples:

- \* Ali Akbar Khan [“Dhrupad in Sankara Bharan”](#) \* Kojiro Umezaki, [“Lullaby from Itsuki”](#)
- \* Mohammad Reza Shajarian Chaharbagh Example.

## Week 12 (3/29): Gonzalo Rubalcaba Week

- Materials in Canvas Module

## Week 13 (4/5): Amir ElSaffar Week

- Materials in Canvas Module

## Week 14 (4/12): Kayhan Kalhor Week

- Materials in Canvas Module

## Week 15 (4/19): Final Presentations

**\*\*\*Syllabus is Subject to Change, Consult Canvas for Updates\*\*\***