

Jazz Styles: Free Jazz and the Avant Garde

JS 481T/JS 581T

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Office hours: Mondays (4 pm) and Wednesdays by appointment. Please email, call, or ask after class for an appointment.

Class meetings: Mondays, 2 to 3:50 p.m., St. Botolph G01 (*and* Tuesday, February 6th, 7:30-10 pm, TBA)

Required Texts:

•Free Jazz, Ekkehard Jost (NY: Da Capo, 1981) (available at Music Espresso, 295 Huntington Ave.)

•JS 581T/IMPRV 481T Course Packet (available at Toshiba Copy Center, 295 Huntington Avenue)

Please bring the Jost book and course packet to each regular class meeting.

Recommended Text: The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958, John Litweiler (NY: Da Capo, 1984) (available at Music Espresso, 295 Huntington Avenue)

Required supplies, etc.: Recordings for transcription assignments; 9- or 10-stave 8 1/2 x 11" music paper or a computer notation program. Students will be required to make photocopies of three transcription or composition assignments for each member of the class (about 25 copies) at their own expense.

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for graduate students. Undergraduates should have taken or tested out of Jazz Theory and all required ear training, Solfège, and Tonal Practice courses. Successful completion of the course requires knowledge of tonal harmony and jazz history and the ability to accurately transcribe jazz solos, piano chords, and bass lines from recordings.

Course objectives: To increase students' knowledge of the musical choices, issues, and possibilities they face as jazz musicians through study of the work of improvisers and composers working in "free jazz" and the avant-garde jazz styles of 1955 to the present. To teach selected topics in the recent history of jazz improvisation through listening, transcription, analysis, and composition. To foster a greater understanding of the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, timbral, and structural characteristics of the styles of jazz improvisers from various eras. To learn about the musicians in the free jazz and avant-garde movements, their philosophies, practices, creation of musical meaning, and the contexts in which their works were created and received. To improve the ear and to develop skills in transcription and analysis, with the goal of gaining a greater command of musical materials for use in the students' own music. To critically examine received ideas about jazz history, including stylistic boundaries, categories, distinctions, and definitions, musical meanings, values, and notions of artistic progress and evolution.

The following weekly syllabus is tentative and subject to change depending on the needs and interests of the students in the class. A few smaller assignments and/or quizzes may be added at the discretion of the instructor.

Syllabus, Spring 2007

*NOTE: This replaces the 2005 syllabus in the course packet. Please use **this** one!*

M 1/22: Introduction to course. Discussion of the elements of jazz style, musical parameters, and dimensions of performance. A working definition of free jazz. Precursors of free jazz: timbral variation and expression, melodic freedom and the blues tradition; Duke Ellington, bebop, and modern jazz and the expanded use of dissonance. Early free-form improvisations in jazz: Coleman Hawkins, Lennie Tristano, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, and others. Related movements in the other arts of the 1950s and '60s.

Concert Report assignment: Attend a free jazz, avant-garde jazz/improvisation, or free improvisation concert away from NEC. Write a short report including the exact time and place, the artists' names and instruments, and a concise but accurate description of the music, plus a brief statement of your reaction, thoughts, or questions. The report should be one to two pages long. It is **due by 4/30**, but can be turned in any time during the semester.

Information on concerts is available at:

- <http://www.jazzboston.org>
- <http://www.twistedvillage.com/bostonimprov.asp> (a general listing of improvised music events)
- <http://www.lily-pad.net/>
- <http://www.zeitgeist-gallery.org>
- <http://www.myspace.com/musicworkshop>
- <http://www.brooklinetaichi.com/music.htm>
- <http://www.timfeeney.com/opensound.html>
- <http://www.boston.com>
- <http://www.thephoenix.com>

(Additional listening assignments and reading assignments [from required and reserve texts, handouts and websites] may be given in separate handouts and/or announcements in class from week to week, and will be tested on the Midterm and Final Exams.)

M 1/29: Sun Ra's music, 1955-1961

Read (before class): Course packet on Sun Ra; Jost, chapters 1, 2, 10; Litweiler, chapters 1-6 (especially 1, 2, and 6; you can skim chapters 3, 4 and 5) Note: Litweiler readings are recommended for those who haven't covered these artists in previous jazz history classes and/or their own reading. They are intended to provide background and context for those who are less familiar with the artists and their music.

Listen (before class): CD 1 on reserve, Precursors and Early Sun Ra (1956-61)

Assignment 1: Due 2/12. Transcribe a complete solo by Ornette Coleman or a member of one of his groups recorded during 1957-71. On a photocopy, analyze it melodically, labeling sequences, motives and their recurrences or transformations, high and low points, implied keys and modulations, and other important formal features. Make enough copies of the transcription for the entire class. See "The Rules" at the end of this syllabus for further instructions on notation and format.

M 2/5: Ornette Coleman's music, 1957-61. Tonality, modulation, melodic structure, the role of the composed theme, and freely improvised form. Comparison of Eric Dolphy and Ornette Coleman as melodic improvisers.

Read (before class): Course packet on Ornette Coleman; Jost, chapter 3

Listen (before class): CD 2 on reserve, Ornette Coleman, 1958-95

Tu 2/6: Extra class meeting, **7:30 to 10:00 p.m.**, room TBA, **Sun Ra films:** portions of *A Joyful Noise*, *Space is the Place*, and video excerpts. Attendance is required. Those with excused or unexcused absences must watch the films in Firestone Library and write about them as instructed.

M 2/12: Presentations and discussion of **Assignment 1** in class.

M 2/19: Presidents' Day holiday; no class

M 2/26: Cecil Taylor's music, 1956-61. Free time. Albert Ayler and New York free jazz in the early 1960s. Timbre, texture, density, and group dynamics.

Read (before class): Course packet on Cecil Taylor and Albert Ayler; Jost, chapters 4 and 7; Litweiler, chapters 7 and 9 (continued below)

Listen (before class): CD 3 on reserve, Cecil Taylor and Albert Ayler

Assignment 2: Due 3/12. Analyze a Cecil Taylor piece (from any period) or any New York City avant-garde jazz ensemble piece in free time (non-metered, not steadily pulsed rhythm) recorded between 1961 and 1967, using graphic representation of texture, density, tessitura, dynamics, tempi, and/or other musical parameters other than pitch and metric rhythm, and an essay. You may present the information in any kind of graph you wish, as long as it shows time along one axis (usually horizontal, left to right) and one or more of the other significant musical parameters along another axis. The graph should refer to specific musical events by description and exact time (using a CD). Give a key or explanation of symbols and a short written statement of what you observed or learned from making the graph. See "The Rules" at the end of this syllabus for further instructions on notation and format of assignments.

M 3/5: New York free jazz in the 1960s, continued. The Jazz Composers' Guild, Bill Dixon, Paul Bley & Jimmy Giuffre, Sun Ra's New York period, Archie Shepp, Marion Brown, Sunny Murray, Milford Graves, John Tchicai, Roswell Rudd, Steve Lacy, Don Cherry, and others.

Read (before class): Course packet on NY Free Jazz in the 1960s; Jost, chapters 6 and 8

Listen (before class): CD 4 on reserve, New York Free Jazz in the 1960s

Assignment 3: Due 4/9. Transcribe a theme (including melody, bass line, piano chords, and an indication of drum set texture and style) and a brief passage from an improvised solo from a John Coltrane recording made between June 1965 and July 1967. Make enough copies of the transcriptions for the entire class. Annotate a copy of the transcription, showing your analytical observations. See "The Rules" at the end of this syllabus for further instructions on notation and format.

M 3/12: John Coltrane's music of 1965-67, its relationship to his earlier styles, and its influence after 1967. Pharoah Sanders, Alice Coltrane, Rashied Ali. **Assignment 2 due.**

Read (before class): Course packet on John Coltrane; Jost, chapter 5

Listen (before class): CD 5 on reserve, John Coltrane 1965-67

M 3/19: Spring Break, no class.

M 3/26: Midterm Listening Exam on CD's 1-5. Midterm quiz on readings and lectures.

M 4/2: The music of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) in Chicago, 1965-1979. Muhal Richard Abrams, Roscoe Mitchell, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins, the Revolutionary Ensemble, Leo Smith, Henry Threadgill, and George Lewis.

Read (before class): Course packet on AACM; Jost, chapter 9; Litweiler, chapters 8 and 12

Listen (before class): CD 6 on reserve, AACM, part 1

M 4/9: Music from the Midwest and California in the 1960s and '70s. Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, and the Black Artists Group (BAG) in St. Louis. The World Saxophone Quartet. Horace Tapscott, John Carter and Bobby Bradford in Los Angeles. Other U.S. regional styles and groups. **Assignment 3 due.**

Read (before class): Course packet on BAG, Julius Hemphill.

Listen (before class): CD 7 on reserve, AACM, part 2 and BAG

M 4/16: Free jazz in Europe. Regional styles and artists in England, Germany, and the Netherlands, 1965-1990. **Listening Quiz on CDs 6 & 7 and questions on readings.**

Read (before class): Course packet on European free jazz and improvisation; Litweiler, chapter 11

Listen (before class): CD 8 on reserve, Free jazz and new improvised music in Europe and Japan

M 4/23: Downtown New York improvisation and composition, 1975-1990. Mixtures of new music composition, free jazz improvisation, and world music and popular music elements. ROVA saxophone quartet.

Read (before class): Course packet on Downtown NY scene; Litweiler, chapter 13

Listen (before class): CD 9, The Downtown NY Scene, 1975-1990. Optional listening: CD 10.

Assignment #4: Final project. Due on 5/7 (Final Exam Week).

Choose one:

(1) Choose a composition (or more than one composition) by one of the artists covered in class (or a related artist, with instructor's permission) and use it as a model for a composition of your own. Your composition should include improvisation. Write a short essay (one or two pages) explaining how you used the model, and commenting on the similarities and differences between the two pieces. Turn in the score and a recording of your composition, plus a recording of the model piece you chose (if not a reserve item for this course).

Or: (2) Using the instructions for one of the three previous assignments, transcribe and analyze (or graph and analyze) a piece by an artist covered in class (or in the readings or listening materials) from April 2nd to the present (or a related artist with the instructor's prior permission).

Make enough copies of your composition, transcription, or graphic analysis for the entire class.

M 4/30: Recent trends in free jazz and the avant-garde. Debates about the definition of jazz, its qualities and values, and its role in culture and society. Audiences, the press, record companies, and the music business and their relation to free jazz and the avant-garde. The idea of the avant-garde as a historical period. The idea of progress in the arts, modernism, post-modernism, and anti-postmodern reactions.

Final Exam period, the week of M 5/7 (date, time and place subject to change until exams are scheduled): **Listening quiz on CDs 8 and 9 and questions on readings.** Presentation of Assignment 4 in class.

Grading: Course grades will be determined as follows:

Assignment #1	20%	Ornette Coleman transcription, due 2/12
Assignment #2	10%	Cecil Taylor or NY Free Jazz graphic analysis, 3/12
Midterm Listening Exam	15%	CDs 1-5, 3/26
Midterm quiz	5%	On readings, lectures, listening, and videos 3/26
Assignment #3	15%	John Coltrane transcription, 4/9
Listening quiz on CDs 6 & 7	10%	4/16; includes questions on readings
Listening quiz on CDs 8 & 9	10%	5/7; includes questions on readings
Assignment #4	15%	Final project – your choice, 5/7
Concert Report	-5%	if not done
		Deadline 4/30

The Rules

- Notation of assignments should be correct, neat, well-spaced with beats lined up vertically, dark enough to photocopy clearly, and easy to read. Leave sufficient space for analysis (use 9- or 10-stave paper, not 12-stave). Give measure numbers at least every eight bars (or use rehearsal letters or timings if bar lines are not used), and use double bars at the beginning of each chorus or section. Music in free time can be notated without bar lines; give CD timings every 10 seconds or so, and use double bars or rehearsal letters or numbers at significant points in the form.
- Clearly identify the CD or LP, artist(s), recording date, title, composer, and starting time (if from a CD) at the beginning of all transcriptions.
- Type or computer-print essays. Handwritten essays are not acceptable.
- Grades for transcription and analysis assignments will be based mainly on the accuracy and clarity of the transcription and analysis, not on their length or complexity (as long as they meet the minimum requirements).
- Regular, punctual attendance and class participation are expected and required. More than two absences will result in a lower grade, possibly a failing grade, unless the absences are excused due to illness or family emergency. Absences which are unexplained the week of the absence will be considered unexcused in any case.
- One full letter grade will be deducted from late homework (including partially finished homework, or homework that cannot be presented in class because copies or recordings aren't ready). No late work will be accepted after the beginning of the last class meeting, 2:00 pm on Monday, April 30th.
- Incompletes will not be given except in cases of medical or family emergency, with approval of the Dean of Students and in accordance with the NEC catalog.
- The midterm exam and two listening quizzes cannot be postponed or made up except in case of documented medical or family emergency. An unexcused absence from the midterm exam or either quiz will result in a grade of zero for the exam.
- Plagiarism of transcriptions or compositions from published sources, other students, or anyone else, or recycling of work done previously for other courses, lessons, or ensembles at NEC or elsewhere is a very serious violation of academic integrity, and will result in a grade of F for the course and disciplinary action by the conservatory, possibly including suspension.
- It is O.K. to get help from someone else if you are stuck on a short passage, pitch, rhythm, or chord while doing a transcription, as long as you do the great majority of the work yourself to the best of your ability, and provided you acknowledge any help you received in your paper. If you have a question about how much help is appropriate and acceptable, please ask. Credit anyone who helped you by name and describe how they helped in your paper.

Some books available in Spaulding Library and recommended for further reading:

Robert Campbell, The Earthly Recordings of Sun Ra, Volume 2
John Litweiler, Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life
Graham Lock, Forces in Motion: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton
A. B. Spellman, Four Lives in the Bebop Business (chapters on Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman)
John F. Szwed, Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra