

SYLLABUS FOR ADVANCED JAZZ IMPROVISATION 5490

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 – 10:50, Lab West

Davy Mooney, instructor

Office hours: by appointment

Course Objectives:

- 1) To improve your skills as an improviser and hone your ability to perform contemporary modern jazz at the highest level
- 2) To apply specific examples of jazz vocabulary, provided by instructor, over the primary repertoire
- 3) To learn seven jazz compositions (primary repertoire list) in depth, and to transcribe two full solos from definitive recordings of the compositions
- 4) To perform a complementary repertoire of standards in a quasi-jam session format, wherein you will experiment with feel, meter, and harmony
- 5) To perform two mini-set in class, made up of primary and secondary repertoire, that demonstrates your mastery of the semester's material

Primary and Secondary Repertoire:

This class will consist of a primary repertoire of seven tunes, that we will learn from specific recordings, and a secondary repertoire of six standards that you need to know as a working musician (perhaps you already know them), and that we can jam and experiment on. The “experimentation” will include key and feel changes, and odd meters: five and seven, primarily, but we may experiment with nines, elevens, and thirteens. I will provide basic lead sheets, but we will also explore various recordings to glean details that don't appear on simplified lead sheets. The two graded transcriptions that you will do should be chosen from the primary repertoire's suggested recordings, although I'm open to suggestions regarding solos you wish to transcribe from other recordings (as long as they are approved). The primary repertoire (with recordings) is:

Satellite (John Coltrane)

John Coltrane: “Coltrane's Sound”

Peter Beets Trio with Kurt Rosenwinkel (live):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTTQUNN1PoM>

Magnolia Triangle (James Black)

Ellis Marsalis: “Whistle Stop”

Mark Turner: “Mark Turner”

Ana Maria (Wayne Shorter)

Wayne Shorter: “Native Dancer”

Kenny Kirkland: “Kenny Kirkland”

Off Minor (Thelonious Monk)

Thelonious Monk: “Genius of Modern Music, Vol. 1”

Thelonious Monk: “The Thelonious Monk Orchestra at Town Hall”

Blood Count (Billy Strayhorn)

Joe Henderson: “Lush Life”

Duke Ellington: “...And His Mother Called Him Bill”

Stablemates (Benny Golson)

Miles Davis: “Miles: The New Miles Davis Quintet”

Benny Golson: “Benny Golson and the Philadelphians”

Nobody Else But Me (Jerome Kern)

Peter Bernstein: “Signs of Life”

Joe Pass: “Simplicity”

Brad Mehldau: “Art of the Trio Vol. 1”

Tony Bennett with the Ralph Sharon Trio: “When Lights Are Low” (vocal reference)

Playing Evaluations:

We will devote three class periods to each of these tunes. **You must be able to play the melody correctly by the second class, and you must have the tune memorized by the third class.** On this third day I will film you playing the melody and one to two choruses of the tune, and give you detailed feedback and a grade on your performance. These seven playing evaluations will constitute 30% of your grade. You will be assessed on the accuracy playing the melody, your accuracy playing the chord changes, and your artistry.

The secondary repertoire is:

All the Things You Are, September in the Rain, I’ll Remember April, Almost Like Being in Love, Stella by Starlight, How Deep Is the Ocean?

We may call other tunes during class (blues and rhythm changes are always fair game), but I want you to know these tunes. You need to. As they come up on the syllabus, I will allow you to read each tune the first time, but not after that.

Applying Jazz Vocabulary:

On the first day of playing each tune in the primary repertoire, you will be given an example of a chorus or two with written material in select areas. We will play through this material and analyze it, and on the second day of playing each tune you will be required to incorporate these examples into an improvised solo, and to play them *exactly*. This exercise helps you to know exactly where you are in the tune at all times, and to learn to switch from the improvising and non-improvising parts of your brain, in real time.

Readings:

I will handout several readings over the course of the semester, as well as assign readings

from my book “Personalizing Jazz Vocabulary.” **You must write a 250-word response paper for each reading, which must be emailed to David.Mooney@unt.edu by 5pm the day before the reading is set to be “discussed in class.”** These response papers, and your participation in the class discussion, accounts for 10% of your grade.

Textbook:

My book “Personalizing Jazz Vocabulary,” from Mel Bay, is required for the class. You can get the hard copy or the e-book. I have tried to distill my philosophy on teaching improvisation into this book, and while it is guitar-specific in some ways (fingerings and octave, specifically), it contains vocabulary that can be applied to any instrument. Hopefully the book will not only help you as an improviser, but as a teacher of improvisation.

Transcription:

You will be required to transcribe two **full** solos, from the definitive recordings of primary repertoire, one at midterm, and one for the final of the class. The transcriptions must be computer notated. **You will perform both transcriptions in class, along with the recordings, turn in the written transcription the day of your performance, and email the instructor a pdf of the transcription, with appropriate chord changes above the written notes. Both the turned in and emailed transcription should be in concert pitch,** although you may read off of transposed notes if you wish. In assessing these transcriptions, I will look for accuracy of notes and rhythms (on the written page as well as the performance), as well as the ability of the student to emulate the feel, articulation, sound, etc, of the original solo. Drummers may transcribe the **full** drum accompaniment to another soloist or **full** drum solos. 25% of grade (12.5% each).

Mini-gigs:

Each student will perform two mini-gigs over the course of the semester, with an ensemble of fellow class members of the student’s choice. The first mini-gig, which will take place around mid-semester, will consist of ONE piece from the primary repertoire and ONE piece from the secondary repertoire. **I will choose the primary repertoire piece for you, you may choose the secondary repertoire piece.** For the secondary repertoire choice, students are encouraged to come up with an interesting arrangement, utilizing one or more of the techniques discussed in class. The second mini-gig will take place towards the end of the semester, and will consist of TWO pieces from the primary repertoire and ONE piece from the secondary repertoire. **For this mini-gig I will choose one of the primary repertoire tunes, you may choose the second primary repertoire tune, as well as the secondary repertoire tune. You cannot repeat tunes on the second mini-gig that you did on the first.** These mini-sets will be graded on mastery of improvisation of the material—particularly in terms of accuracy of melody and playing of chord changes—as well as artistry and the effectiveness of the mini-sets as two and three-song presentations. In other words, try to vary tempos and grooves, solo order, etc, over the course of the set. This is of course even more important with the final, three-song mini-set. These

performances will be filmed. We will talk more about this over the semester. 35% of grade—10% for two-song set, 25% for three-song set.

Attendance/Tardiness:

You are allowed one unexcused absence, after that your grade will decrease by one letter for each unexcused absence. As always, I am understanding of illness and unavoidable conflict, but there is no excuse for not communicating via email, especially in this day and age. **Three instances of unexcused tardiness will constitute an unexcused absence. Tardiness means you are not setup and ready to play at 9:30.**

Cell Phones:

Don't play with your cell phones during class, even when you're not playing. I know it's hard, in this day and age, and I'm as addicted as everyone else, but even if I'm commenting on something that doesn't directly involve you, I might say something that you can use in the future when you teach your own improv class! Or not, but don't start playing with your phone in class.

Grading:

Transcriptions (mid-term and final): 25%

Mini-gigs: 35%

Seven Playing Evaluations: 30%

Six response papers for readings: 10%

Class Schedule:

Tuesday, August 18:

Introduction, explanation of syllabus, PowerPoints on chord-scales and "Personalizing Jazz Vocabulary"

Thursday, August 20:

PowerPoints continued; questions answered

Tuesday, August 25:

Primary repertoire: **Satellite**. Analysis of written vocabulary.

Thursday, August 27:

Primary and secondary repertoire: **Satellite, All the Things You Are**. Demonstrate correct melody, application of written vocabulary in your improvised solo.

Tuesday, September 1:

Playing evaluation 1: Satellite.

Thursday, September 3:

Primary repertoire: **Magnolia Triangle. Reading for Tuesday (response paper must be in my inbox by 5pm, Monday, 9/7):** “Personalizing Jazz Vocabulary,” Chapters 1 and 2.

Tuesday, September 8:

Primary and secondary repertoire: **Magnolia Triangle, September in the Rain.**

Demonstrate correct melody, application of written vocabulary in your improvised solo.
Discuss Reading.

Thursday, September 10:

Playing Evaluation 2: Magnolia Triangle.

Tuesday, September 15:

Primary repertoire: **Ana Maria.** Analysis of written vocabulary.

Thursday, September 17:

Primary and secondary repertoire: **Ana Maria, I’ll Remember April.** Demonstrate correct melody, application of written vocabulary in your improvised solo.

Tuesday, September 22:

Playing evaluation 3: Ana Maria. Reading for Thursday (response paper must be in my inbox by 5pm, Wednesday, 9/23): “Ideology, Burgers, and Beer” by Brad Mehldau.

Thursday, September 24:

Primary repertoire: **Off Minor.** Analysis of written vocabulary. Discuss Reading.

Tuesday, September 29:

Primary and secondary repertoire: **Off Minor, Almost Like Being in Love.** Demonstrate correct melody, application of written vocabulary in your improvised solo.

Thursday, October 1:

Playing evaluation 4: Off Minor.

Tuesday, October 6:

MID-TERM TRANSCRIPTIONS DUE! Perform in class

Thursday, October 8:

MID-TERM MINI-SETS! Perform in class

Tuesday, October 13:

Primary repertoire: **Blood Count.** Analysis of written vocabulary. **Reading for Thursday (response paper must be in my inbox by 5pm, Wednesday, 10/14):** “The Myth of Improvisation” by Chick Corea.

Thursday, October 15:

Primary and secondary repertoire: **Blood Count, Stella by Starlight.** Discuss reading. Demonstrate correct melody, application of written vocabulary in your improvised solo.

Tuesday, October 20:

Playing evaluation 5: Blood Count.

Thursday, October 22:

Primary repertoire: **Stablemates.** Analysis of written vocabulary. **Reading for Thursday (response paper must be in my inbox by 5pm, Monday, 10/26):** Excerpt from “Letters to a Young Poet,” by Rilke.

Tuesday, October 27:

Primary and secondary repertoire: **Stablemates, How Deep Is the Ocean?** Demonstrate correct melody, application of written vocabulary in your improvised solo.

Thursday, October 29:

Playing evaluation 6: Stablemates.

Tuesday, November 3:

Primary repertoire: **Nobody Else But Me.** Analysis of written vocabulary. **Reading for Thursday (response paper must be in my inbox by 5pm, Monday, 11/9):** “Three Quotes.”

Thursday, November 5:

Primary and secondary repertoire: **Nobody Else But Me, (anything from secondary repertoire).** Discuss Reading. Demonstrate correct melody, application of written vocabulary in your improvised solo.

Tuesday, November 10:

Playing evaluation 7: Nobody Else But Me.

Thursday, November 12:

Final Transcriptions due (perform in class)

Tuesday, November 17:

Final mini-gigs

Thursday, November 19:

Final mini-gigs, continued

Tuesday, December 1:

Jury week/clean-up day: let’s see what needs doing...

Thursday, December 3:

Jury week/clean-up day: let’s see what needs doing...

DEFIBRILLATORS IN THE COLLEGE OF MUSIC

- Music Building: Across from the west side of the Music Commons, directly across from the elevator
- Music Building: Third floor hallway, across from the staircase that comes up from the Copy Room. Next to Room 322
- Music Building: Across from the Copy Room next to Room 293
- Music Building: Voertman Lobby by the big double set of doors that lead out to the courtyard
- Music Building: Main Office (247) under the student worker's desk
- Music Annex: Next to room MA117, near the triple set of doors on the east side of the building
- Music Practice Building North: First floor on the Avenue C side
- Music Practice Building South: First floor on the Avenue C side
- Bain Hall: First floor by the restrooms
- Murchison Performing Arts Center: Located off the main lobby, beyond the grand staircase, across from the single occupancy restroom (next to the public water fountains)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam [or specify alternative sanction, such as course failure]. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students (Office of Academic Integrity), who may impose further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

See: [Academic Integrity](#)

LINK: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>

STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and

disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

See: [Student Code of Conduct](#)

Link: <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>

ACCESS TO INFORMATION – EAGLE CONNECT

Your access point for business and academic services at UNT occurs at my.unt.edu. All official communication from the university will be delivered to your Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect.

See: [Eagle Connect](#)

LINK: eagleconnect.unt.edu/

ODA STATEMENT

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter. You can now request your Letters of Accommodation ONLINE and ODA will mail your Letters of Accommodation to your instructors. You may wish to begin a private discussion with your professors regarding your specific needs in a course. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access.

See: [ODA](#)

LINK: disability.unt.edu. (Phone: (940) 565-4323)

Health and Safety Information

Students can access information about health and safety at:

<https://music.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness>

Registration Information for Students

See: [Fall Academic Calendar Information](#)

Link: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>

Semester Calendar, Fall 2026

See: [Fall Semester Calendar](#)

Link: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>

Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress

Undergraduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total hours registered. Students cannot exceed attempted credit hours above 150% of their required degree plan. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

Students holding music scholarships must maintain a minimum 2.5 overall cumulative GPA and 3.0 cumulative GPA in music courses.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended that you to schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course before doing so.

See: [Financial Aid](#)

LINK: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

Graduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total registered hours per term. Music scholarships require a 3.5 cumulative GPA. Students cannot exceed maximum timeframes established based on the published length of the graduate program. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended you schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college, an advisor in UNT-International or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course.

See: [Financial Aid](#)

LINK: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

COUNSELING AND TESTING

UNT's Center for Counseling and Testing has an available counselor for students in need. Please visit the Center's website for further information:

See: [Counseling and Testing](#)

Link: <http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>.

For more information on mental health resources, please visit:

See: [Mental Health Resources](#)

Link: <https://disparities.unt.edu/mental-health-resources>

ADD/DROP POLICY

Please be reminded that dropping classes or failing to complete and pass registered hours may make you ineligible for financial aid. In addition, if you drop below half-time enrollment you may be required to begin paying back your student loans. See Academic Calendar (listed above) for additional add/drop Information.

Drop Information: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-academic-calendar.html>

STUDENT RESOURCES

The University of North Texas has many resources available to students. For a complete list, go to:

See: [Student Resources](#)

Link: <https://success.unt.edu/aa-sa-resources>

CARE TEAM

The Care Team is a collaborative interdisciplinary committee of university officials that meets regularly to provide a response to student, staff, and faculty whose behavior could be harmful to themselves or others.

See: [Care Team](#)

Link: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team>

Additional Resources for Faculty

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (including sample statement for syllabi)

See: [Faculty Guide for the Use of AI](#)

Link: <https://guides.library.unt.edu/artificial-intelligence/AIfaculty>

RETENTION OF STUDENT RECORDS

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion.

Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the university's policy in accordance with those mandates.

See: [FERPA](#)

Link: <http://ferpa.unt.edu/>