

PhD Programme Description: *Improvisational Languages in Contemporary Music*

Name of the PhD programme	<i>Improvisational Languages in Contemporary Music</i>
Type	Joint PhD programme. Affiliated institutions: - Siena Jazz – Accademia Nazionale del Jazz (leading proponent); - “G. Frescobaldi” Music Conservatory – Ferrara; - CPM Music Institute – Milano
Cultural organizations and co-financing enterprises	- Fondazione Accademia Chigiana – Siena - Fondazione Monte dei Paschi di Siena
Duration	3 years
Study start date	December 1 st , 2024
Languages	Italian/English
PhD Coordinator	Prof. Francesco Bigoni bigonifrancesco@sienajazz.it
Available positions	5 (4 with scholarship)
Admission requirements	Evaluation of qualifications and artistic portfolio, evaluation of research project proposals, interview

The programme encompasses disciplinary and thematic areas with the goal of providing high-level training to qualified professionals, oriented to meet the national need for innovation as referred to in the PNRR; specifically, the proposal aims to:

1. Implement the PhD programme (courses, training, research and evaluation) at the administrative and operational offices of the AFAM Institutions of the consortium, except the periods of study and research at Accademia Chigiana and abroad, scheduled in accordance with the aforementioned research activities;
2. Allow periods of study and research within industry partner organizations from a minimum of six (6) months to a maximum of twelve (12) months over the three-year period; such study periods need not be continuous.
3. Offer study and research periods abroad, also in a non-continuous manner, from a minimum of six months to a maximum of twelve months within the three-year period (Ministerial Decree 630/2024, Article 7, paragraph 1, letter d);
4. Ensure that the PhD student(s) can make use of qualified and specific operational and scientific facilities, in accordance with the law, for study and research activities;
5. Provide for the implementation of educational activities for language and computer skills training, for research management and knowledge of European and international research systems, for the dissemination of research results with respect to intellectual property rights;
6. Encourage (without infringing intellectual property rights), the sharing of research results, both with co-funding organizations (including technology transfer) and in the scientific domain, through adequate dissemination of the research results, always in accordance with the “Open Science” and “FAIR Data” principles; write, through the appropriate online platform (<http://dottorati.mur.gov.it>) a report every 6 months detailing the time commitment (articulated in months in the organization, onsite and abroad) and a summary of the main research achievements, validated by the PhD Coordinator.

Programme Description

The PhD Programme *Improvisational Languages in Contemporary Music* is a three-year study and research programme, aimed at performers coming from different fields and musical traditions (jazz, *new music*, rock, pop, folk musics), with a particular focus on candidates whose artistic practice is inclined to a transversal attitude on languages and approaches.

The goal of the programme is the production of high-level artistic research of international relevance, as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are in line with the national objectives of a third-cycle education with regard to research impact and methodological rigor. The research project requires reflection and the development of a methodology which culminates in a conclusive concert/performance which will be the result of the working practice and vision matured over the course of the programme. The concert will be accompanied by a written thesis presenting the research results to the relevant community of scholars and practitioners.

The programme offers a series of training activities to support the research project: individual supervision, lectures, seminars, participation in conferences, critical listening and discussion sessions, masterclasses and skill training (language, computer, academic writing, enhancement of research results and intellectual property). Candidates will have access to the infrastructure of the consortium partners: Accademia di Siena Jazz – Fortezza Medicea (Siena), Centro Studi Arrigo Polillo (Siena), Accademia Chigiana – Palazzo Chigi Saracini (Siena), CPM Music Institute (Milano). It includes a period of study and research from a minimum of 6 months to a maximum of 12 months (including non-continuous study periods) over the three-year programme. It gives the possibility of carrying out mentoring and third mission activities (publications, organization of symposia).

At the end of the three-year programme, the candidate should:

- have acquired high level knowledge of relevant improvisational practices, together with the ability to navigate the field of cross-pollination with other art forms;
- have acquired knowledge of significant theories and practices in the context of contemporary improvisation;
- have acquired the ability to reflect on her/his own artistic practice with methodological rigor and to discuss it in relation to a relevant context;
- be able to develop and describe relevant methods and practices in the context of improvisational studies;
- be able to address relevant artistic, ethical, and professional issues with respect to one's own artistic practice with integrity and insight;
- be able to disseminate her/his research work through appropriate channels (articles, presentations, lecture-concerts, performances, ...);
- have developed a distinctive artistic practice and contribute to theoretical-practical innovation in the field of contemporary improvisation.

The research project proposals, evaluated at the admission exam by the Examination Board along with artistic portfolio and Curriculum Vitae et Studiorum, may pertain to the following topics (however, the list is not exhaustive and the candidate is encouraged to propose additional research topics):

- **The impact of technology on improvisational practices**
The relationship between technology and mankind, which pervades contemporary society and thereby artistic practices, carries the possibility of an inquiry into the implementation of (and the practice with) techno-social artifacts (interfaces, tools, hardware and software

environments) in the context of the values of expressive urgency, honesty, and presence which are traditionally shared in the communities of improvising performers. Research on this topic could address the understanding of (and relationship to) the *affordance* embedded in the materiality of the medium itself; the problem of interaction mediated by a first-person, co-design approach with the performer; the dialectic between the improvising performer, who is possibly following a non-idiomatic approach, and the machine, which is conditioned by what Andrew McPherson calls “idiomatic patterns”: think, among others, of music notation software; Midi instruments; implicit adherence to tuning systems and interaction modalities that are culturally conditioned by centuries of musical instrument design.

- **Non-idiomatic improvisation**

Free (i.e., in this context, completely improvised) performance “without a net” is the abandonment of acquired styles and patterns in favor of a path of collective resonance with spontaneously generated musical material, possibly mediated by the concept of improvisation as *instantaneous composition*. In this sense, free improvisation can be seen as the gateway to a path of profound adherence to languages and traditions of the past, sheltered from expressive detachment and expectations tied to established canons, or, alternatively, to a path of non-idiomatic improvisation, which, following Derek Bailey’s definition in his seminal essay, continually redefines itself in relation to a newly-acquired knowledge, in the moment of the performance. A research project on this topic could attempt to investigate the meaning of these experiences from a contemporary perspective, both by collecting concepts, practices and experiences through an ethnographic approach and by engaging them from an exquisitely performative angle.

- **Composition/improvisation dialectics**

Much of the concepts and practices related to improvisation – improvisation as a variation on a theme/canvas, improvisation as instantaneous composition, improvisation as flow and state of consciousness, ... – imply a comparison with compositional approaches, alternately emphasizing aspects of analogy or contrast between these processes. A research project devoted to this theme could engage with those experiences that, in the context of a variety of traditions (jazz and *new music* above all) try to blur the boundary between composition and improvisation through notation tools, elaboration of practices and systems, and *conduction* techniques in the broad sense of the term; it could propose, also through performance, a personal point of view on such experiences; finally, it could discuss the theme of authorship in such a context.

- **Relationship between musical improvisation and other improvisational practices**

The practice of improvisation crosses (and traverses) languages and artistic forms, geographies and communities. If a principle of universality can be invoked in comparing musical improvisation and (among others) dance and theatrical improvisation in relation to gestalt, expressive urgency and body, the same cannot be done in relation to narrative techniques, sense of space or values of authenticity and uniqueness. A research on this topic could establish a theoretical-conceptual field with respect to these (or other) disciplines and investigate their different degrees of interaction in the context of interdisciplinary performance – from juxtaposition to hybridization within a common ground.

- **Improvisation and *embodied cognition***

Many improvisational practices – not only in the music field – emphasize the awareness of breath, proprioception and the relationship with our own voice. These are individual expressions of the “embodied thought” that is dear to the phenomenological tradition, from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to Richard Shusterman. A course of research on this topic could

investigate the integration of musical improvisation and bodily practices within established frameworks (from Pauline Oliveros' *Deep Listening* to Milford Graves' research) and formulate a performative approach that takes into account the candidate's own path and philosophical-cultural coordinates.