



WORKSHOPS FOR MUSICIANS

IMPROVISATION WITH SIGNS

Rodrigo Alberto Matta

INTRODUCTION

This workshop is intended to complement training offered by music institutions. It develops and improves creativity, composition, improvisation and group-auditory skills. It uses an innovative technique known as **Improvisation with Signs**, or **Rhythm and Percussion with Signs**¹.

Through this method a group of persons, independently of their musical skills, can get together to improvise with all kind of instruments in a coordinated, effective and fun way. The process involves individual contribution and creativity that is oriented towards a real-time composition as group achievement.

What is Improvisation with Signs? It is a new way to create music in a group, based in conducted improvisation. Using around 150 hands and body signs, a conductor can coordinate the members' individual ideas-flow into a collective creation oriented towards a common goal. The technique is both a method and a game in which the personal and interpersonal skills necessary for collective cooperation are regarded and trained in a fun and effective way¹.

What are its applications? Beyond its use in musical groups as a live composition technique, Rhythm and Percussion with Signs has rapidly transcended the stages environment, and has become a powerful tool in several contexts due to its learning' simplicity and its results' deepness and immediacy.

Who invented the method and who is teaching it? The language was invented by **Santiago Vázquez**, an Argentinian conductor, composer and percussionist. It has been adopted by a great number of groups in several countries. In Colombia, **La Percumotora** is a pioneer group using the method. **Rodrigo Matta** –La Percumotora's director– is currently the only Colombian trained in this method. He received direct instruction and training in Argentina since 2008 and is currently the workshop facilitator.

Why is the workshop important? It is an innovative, different and unique technique. It is ludic, enjoyable, experiential and highly specialized. It provides tools for improvisation, composition, creation and group auditory training. All together, it gives a new perspective to the way we listen, feel and approach to music.

INTENDED FOR

Music groups, amateur, students or professional with our without previous knowledge of each other.

METHOD

The method requires that each participant invents an idea or rhythmic phrase with an instrument. A phrase that is musical, understandable, repeated and clear.

¹ Vázquez, Santiago. Manual de Ritmo y Percusión con Señas. Ed Atlántida. 2013.



Each instrument belongs to a section and each section has a specific function within the collective creation. Each section has a leader that takes care of accomplishing the section's function and adaptations to other sections. The participants can change roles (in case they play different instruments) by changing section or even conduct the group, so each person gets to experience the different feelings and can identify in which one of them they can potentiate their abilities. To have a specific role implies a big responsibility. Each participant achieves its part by contributing, listening to the others and allowing them to express.

The conductor's role is to coordinate and to potentiate the participants' skills; to correct but also use errors for the common benefit. In general, the groups' ideas are conducted through a sign language executed with hands and body. However in a particular level, each participant is his or her own director, since each one of them must interpret these signals to solve musical situations within a clear rule scheme without losing track of the main objective: to achieve a collective musical composition.

OBJECTIVES

To provide real-time improvisation and composition tools. It contributes to the development of creativity and trains the group-auditory skills of participants. This is achieved through the use of an innovative technique: Rhythm and Percussion with Signs.

This workshop intends to develop several skills:

- To provide tools for the creation of musical phrases in real time
- To introduce a new way of thinking the musical elements
- To trigger own ideas and creation
- To coordinate and potentiate the individual contribution of participants
- To contribute to the development of a personal music language
- To contribute to assimilation of rhythmic, musical and ensemble concepts that are long lasting and useful in any music field
- To train and strengthen music skills such as simultaneous listening of own and others' phrases, memorizing invented phrases, counterpointing, quickly assembling several musical phrases and ideas
- To discover multiple and new ways to handle group improvisation situations in a quick and effective way
- To stimulate internal relations in the group based on communication and trust
- To experience new roles within an ensemble
- To experience the use of errors as an alternative source for problem solving

CONTENT

Contextualization and agreement on objectives and number of sessions: At least one or two weeks in advance, it is recommendable to agree on the specific pedagogic processes that the group is interested in addressing. This would allow the facilitator an adaptation of the content and a stipulation of the number of sessions needed.

Some of the contents included in the workshop are listed below. They can change –from beginners to advanced- according to the music skills and experience of the participants.

- Distribution of roles and sections



- Musical memory
- Dynamics
- Staccato
- Rhythmic reading
- Phrase creation
- Mute and holding of phrase in our head
- Improvised cuts
- Solos
- Subdivisions
- Pulse
- Notion of beat and counting beats
- Heterophony (aleatory, by zones, dictated, by orchestrated phrase)
- Attending conductor without neglecting own beat
- Independence, own and external phrases
- Phrases A, B, C
- Keys (theory of Musotto keys with Vázquez variants for group improvisation)
- Section language related to key, pulse and subdivision
- Irregular and irregular subdivisions: binary, tertiary, pentary and quaver swing.
- Irregular beats (5/4, 6/4, 7/4, 5/8, 7/8, etc)
- Polyrhythmia 2 against 3, 4 against 3
- Phrase adaptation in different subdivisions
- Beat cycles
- Rhythmic modulation and multiple times
- Beats and amalgam conventions
- Change in beats
- Changes in complete and occasional subdivision
- Play without tempo
- Displacements
- Playing by “earth and air”
- Rhythmic Reading in real time
- Free harmony
- Increasing and decreasing tones. Harmonic modulation
- Trying different speeds
- Divide or decrease beat by half

FACILITATOR

Rodrigo Alberto Matta Diaz: Musician, percussionist and specialist in Rhythm and Percussion with Signs. He studied at *Centro de Estudios del Ritmo y Percusión con Señas (CERPS)* and also carried out Jazz studies in *Escuela de Música Contemporánea*, both in Buenos Aires – Argentina. Additionally, he holds a degree in Business Administration from *Universidad Javeriana -Cali* and a specialization degree in Cultural Management and Cultural Policies from *Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales (IDAES), Universidad de San Martín – Argentina*.

Rodrigo has fifteen years of experience as a musician and as a teacher for different educative institutions and companies: *Schule fürs Leben –Frankfurt, Germany; Universidad Javeriana -Cali (Centre for Cultural*



Expression); Hotel Spiwak; BBVA Bank; Escuela para la Vida –Cali, Colombia; Schools: Liceo Francés Paul Valery, Colegio Alas, Instituto Popular de Cultura IPC, Conservatorio de Bellas Artes de Cali, among others.

Additionally, he has experience in administration, management and research for several institutions such as Universidad Javeriana Cali, Proartes, and Arepas del Pilar. His work in these organizations covers areas such as marketing, exports, cultural management, entrepreneurship, design, production, events, market research, competitiveness and public policies.

DURATION

Each session takes around 3 hours. One single session can be done, but is recommended to have more if the group wants to get deep into the method. The number of sessions can be arranged with the group or the institution in accordance with its objectives and the kind of process that is going to be handled with this tool.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **VÁZQUEZ, Santiago**. Manual of Rhythm and Percussion with Signs. Ed Atlántida. 2013.