

# Free Improvisation

## A Practical Guide

by Tom Hall





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## FIVE

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# Duets The Art of Relationship



## Choosing and Committing

The initial offerings in every improvisation contain the potential for many different relationships. An improvisation starts to take shape and make sense once the players have made a choice about which of those potential relationships they are going to explore. This idea of making and committing to a choice has already been in play in some of the exercises above, but consciously focusing on it will clarify the players' understanding.

### Exercise 17: Staying in a Relationship

**Step 1:** Two players start playing at the same time. Whatever occurs in the first few seconds of the duet will be the only materials and relationship they can use in the improvisation.

### Exercise 18: The Same, But Different

**Step 1:** Two players start playing at the same time. Whatever occurs in the first few seconds of the duet will be the only materials and relationship they can use in the improvisation.

**Step 2:** The same two players improvise another duet with the same kind of material and/or relationship as the first. Try using the same materials but creating a different relationship with them. Try improvising the same relationship with different materials. Try using both the materials and relationship from the first duet. Notice how these duets are the same or different from the initial improvisation.



**Tip:** If you want to improvise in any other manner besides stream of consciousness, it is essential to be aware of the choices being made. Without a group awareness of these choices it's difficult to develop them, improvise with them, or refer back to them. In order to improvise with something, you have to establish it in your own awareness, in the awareness of the group, and in the awareness of the audience. This requires both choosing and committing to those choices.



**Tip:** Understanding how to make a strong choice and commit to it is an essential skill for every improviser. However, one of the beautiful paradoxes of improvisation is that every individual choice is simultaneously of the greatest importance and not important at all. At every moment you must be both completely committed to what you are playing, and completely willing to let go of it if the music demands it.