

**“The Kind of Music We Play”: A Study of Self-Idiomatic Improvised
Music and Musicians in Boston**

By

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Abstract

This study focuses on the musical life of a community of improvising musicians, both on a local level and on a globally networked level, around the Boston, Massachusetts area between 1996 and 2010. It draws primarily on interviews with the individual participants - both musicians and supporters - who acted as my informants, as well as descriptions of my participant observation as a musician and audience members.

I introduce the term *self-idiomatic music* to describe an approach to musical improvisation born at the nexus of material contingency and the practitioner's management of unpredictability within a range of practical control. Conceptually, self-idiom is simply "you are your own musical idiom." I also take up the term *instrumentalization* to demonstrate that self-idiomatic music develops from a combination of resources.

I start this study with an examination of the term *self-idiomatic music* and how it applies to free improvisation; how self-idiomatic music is influenced by diverse approaches to instruments; and how this music manifests in the work of Boston-area improvisers during this time period, with a focus on several particular individuals.