

„ ... when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.“
Henry David Thoreau, *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*

COMMANDMENTS OF ANARCHY

In free improvised music the relation between musicians is "anarchic" in the original meaning of the word "without authority, without a leader": every musician is at the same time "composer" and "interpreter" – and these functions also place the corresponding responsibilities on their shoulders.

First commandment of Anarchy:

Thou shalt feel responsible for the whole process.

Purposely I do not speak of "freedom" here, but of "responsibility". A musical anarchy seen from this angle mirrors an (utopian) attitude to society in which everyone decides in which way he or she can use personal resources to make the common task succeed. This presupposes that the musician perceives not only his or her own resources, but those of the fellow players as well.

Second commandment of Anarchy:

Thou shalt honour thy fellow players like your self.

This statement has to be differently formulated for shy fellow players: thou shalt honour thyself just as much as thy fellow players. Independence is an absolute necessity for group improvisation. However, just like in other life, one should also follow up on others' impulses from time to time.

Third commandment of Anarchy:

Thou shalt seek out a middle course between individualism and opportunism.

In order to have one's own profile, some improvisors keep to a personal style.

But that entails the same danger as does also the following of melodic or rhythmic patterns in so-called idiomatic improvisation. It consists of concentrating more on caring for the idiom (and, consequently, for self-expression) than on the "depth dimension of the moment".

And the possibility in every moment of changing the direction is what makes improvisation alive.

Fourth commandment of Anarchy:

Thou shalt not abide by the belief that humans and things continue to be like the way they are.

When a set group of musicians has played together for a long time its members may easily tend to incorporate certain musical ways of behaviour, like that of a ritualised life of old couples. But one should as well welcome the unexpected for its own sake, changes for their own sake.

Essentially this speaks against the idea of forming schools of improvisation. It is of course OK to reflect on what happens and the reasons why something felt more or less successful.

One should, however, be open and remain so, when good music arises in spite of all didactic opinions.

Fifth and last commandment of Anarchy:

Thou shalt not erect a fortress of value judgements.

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