Improvisation as a method of performance crosses disciplines, appearing in narratives describing the creation and presentation of both music and literature. In the late eighteenth century, it also appears as a trope in music, literature, modes of social interaction including casual conversation. For example, Hester Thrale Piozzi wrote of Samuel Johnson that he “did indeed possess an almost Tuscan power of improvisation” (*Anecdotes of the late Samuel Johnson*, 165*)*. She demonstrated this by reproducing a rhymed, trochaic pentameter quatrain that Johnson, overhearing her daughter worrying over which gown to wear, allegedly created on the spot to offer his recommendation. This anecdote, and Piozzi method of relating it, illustrate several cultural associations with improvisational expression in the eighteenth century. When properly performed, its unexpectedness could create a sense of wonder or admiration that prompted reiteration. This urge to replay, retell, and otherwise reiterate was potentially a prompt for composition, by the improviser or by others. Conversely, its ad hoc quality carried associations of frivolousness. For some reporters, improvisation was suspiciously Continental. Throughout the century, it was associated with German and Austrian Baroque, Classical, and Romantic musical performer-composers, with Italian opera and poetry, and ultimately with the German, British, and American musicians, poets, diarists, and salonistes who reported on the improvised performances they experienced, or sought to replicate the excitement of improvised performance after returning home. This panel welcomes papers on aspects of musical, literary, discursive, and cultural improvisation and improvised performance in the eighteenth century.

Paper abstracts of 300 words or fewer on the topic are welcome! Please send them to Gerard Holmes at gholmes@umd.edu.