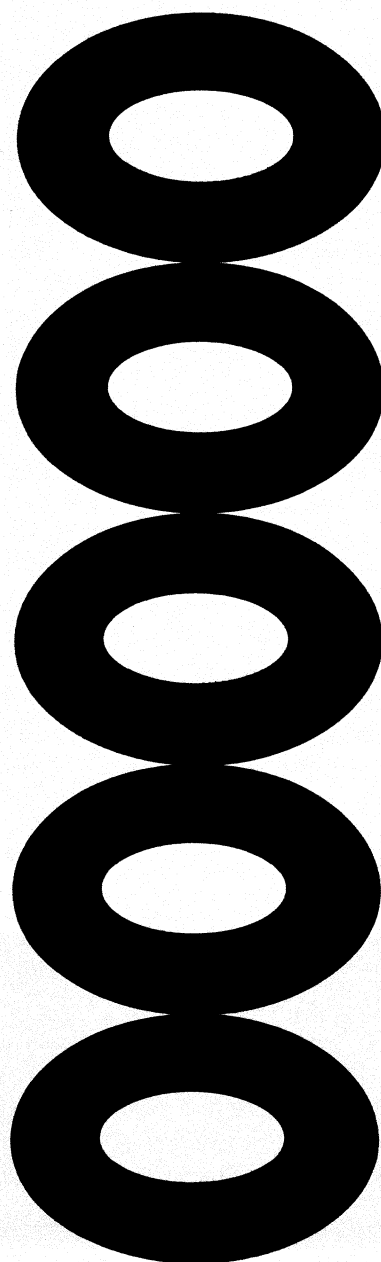


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THE SCAT SINGING DIALECT
AN INTRODUCTION TO VOCAL IMPROVISATION
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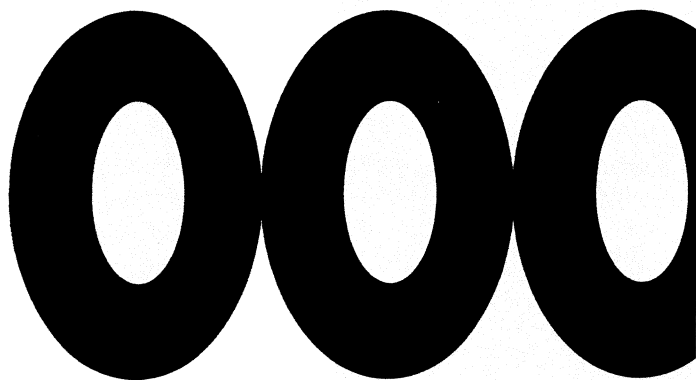


There is a difference between scat singing and scat singing that has musical integrity and sounds good. This article will explore the latter. First, it is important to offer context about jazz pedagogy and scat singing in order to understand and appreciate the historical perspective of this unique genre of music.

Historical Perspective

Among all jazz singer recordings ever made, only a small percentage contain scat singing. Out of those, only a relative few demonstrate the level of artistry of a singer such as the great Ella Fitzgerald. Formal jazz education was introduced in the late 1940s, but it was almost exclusively tailored to instrumentalists and did not fully begin to take wing until the 1970s. Even then, formal *vocal* jazz education was still in its infancy. Today, the number of universities offering an instrumental jazz major far outweighs the number of universities offering a vocal jazz major, and even the ones that do rarely have a dedicated vocal improvisation course. Singers are commonly placed in existing instrumental improvisation courses that are not designed to meet the needs of the vocal improviser.

We must, then, consider the historical perspective of the potential student scat singer: there has been no overabundance of great role models and little or no opportunity in formal education to study and practice vocal improvisation. Additionally, it would be unlikely that the student had much lifetime exposure to *any* jazz music unless his or her parents happened to be jazz buffs. These combined factors may have contributed to a degree of historical underdevelopment in the art as a whole, especially at the educational level. Fortunately, the current outlook for meaningful vocal jazz pedagogy and quality role modeling has steadily improved as a second generation of jazz-trained vocal pedagogues has risen to university positions, where they are able to mentor aspiring jazz singers. Over the past ten years or so, the quality of vocal improvisation and ensemble performance at festivals and conferences has greatly improved.



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What is Vocal Improvisation?

Vocal improvisation is another term for scat singing, or scatting. Vocal jazz improvisation is similar to instrumental jazz improvisation in that the improviser spontaneously invents melodic lines over the chord progression of a song. For both singers and players, the overarching musical goals include:

1. Improvising melodic lines that are inventive and work well within the chord progression (known as the changes).
2. Making the music feel good rhythmically.
3. Sounding conversationally expressive as though the improviser is telling a story that is being conceived in the moment, in real time.

Jazz vocalists and instrumentalists, especially in educational circles, commonly speak of learning the language—that is, the language of jazz and, more specifically, the language that has been by far the most influential and prevalent among jazz musicians dating back from the last seventy years: bebop. Bebop was a style period of the 1940s whose leading proponents were Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. The idiomatic melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic languages of bebop are still prevalent among jazz singers and players today. A primary focus in jazz pedagogy is to become fluent in the language of jazz (bebop) then “say what you want to say” within that language. Scat singing differs from instrumental improvisation in a number of key ways, especially as it pertains to their respective pedagogical needs.

First, scat singers use scat syllables instead of lyrics in their improvisation. Unlike instrumentalists, developing a healthy repertoire of syllables is a required task. The importance of singers

having fluency with syllables should not be understated. Until a singer is completely comfortable with a repertoire of scat syllables, they are handicapped; nothing they sing during improvisation will sound jazz-authentic. If used skillfully, a singer's scat syllable choices will model the style and articulation that is characteristic of their instrumental counterparts.

Second, jazz singers have a much greater need for advanced ear training than instrumentalists; they have no button to push that will manufacture an altered dominant scale. In other words, players can play things that stem from their cognitive understanding and technique, whereas the nature of a singer's instrument requires them to hear everything that they sing.

Third, there is some amount of debate about whether jazz scat singers should universally try to model the content and style of their instrumental counterparts, or whether they should sing in a way that is most true to the nature of their instrument—the voice. It is true that the traditional historical role for jazz singers has been to sing the melody, not to improvise long lines of intricate, highly articulated melodic material woven through fast tempo chord progressions. It is probable that for some singers, an instrumental approach to improvisation is not their forte.

There undoubtedly, however, exists a school of singers (e.g., Darmon Meader from the New York Voices and Jon Hendricks from Lambert, Hendricks & Ross) who are truly impressive in their ability to use an instrumental approach to improvisation. They use their voices with great control to execute the same highly chromatic melodic language as players, maintain control at fast tempos, and navigate the harmony with fantastic fluency, while spontaneously improvising melodic ideas. This illustrates that vocalists can be successful using an instrumental approach to vocal improvisation

if they choose and that the question of which approach a singer should adopt is only a personal preference.

Scatting Overview

The first step in learning to improvise is to listen to improvising role models via recordings. More specifically, saturate the ears with good role models to become intimately familiar with what the genre in its best form is supposed to sound like. The second step is to practice exercises of various kinds repeatedly, essentially drilling musical data that will be later recalled and reinvented in a creative way. The third step is to spend ample time experimenting with and exploring unstructured creative improvising with a recorded jazz accompaniment. All improvisers need time spent on this activity to build a comfort level with the process and to learn through trial and error in a safe climate (i.e., alone or in a supportive classroom environment). The fear of making a mistake that is common to virtually all beginning-level scatters melts away as familiarity and experience with the art form increases.

Quick Start with Melody Variation

Melody variation is an excellent way to begin the practice of vocal improvisation; it is a sure path to getting anyone scatting quickly and easily.

Step 1: Listen, Listen, Listen—Listening is always step one in learning a new musical style. Improvisers need to listen often to recordings to soak in the sound, style, note choices, rhythmic feel, and general flavor of good vocal and instrumental improvisers.

Step 2: Learn a Song—Choose a familiar jazz song such as “Fly Me to the Moon,” “Autumn Leaves,” or “Lullaby of Bird-

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land." Learn the song well and memorize the melody and lyrics. (Figure 1)

Step 3: Substitute Syllables for Lyrics—Sing the melody using syllables instead of lyrics as a recorded accompaniment plays. (If the improviser has spent time listening, he or she should already be familiar with basic syllable options.) Make minor variations in the rhythms of the song. (Figure 2)

Step 4: Improvise around the Melody—Take baby steps at making variations in the melody and continue making variations in the rhythms. Start small and

avoid straying too far from the original melody. (Figure 3)

Step 5: Expand on Your Improvisation—As you become increasingly comfortable, expand your melodic variations by straying further from the original melody in small doses. (Figure 4)

Melodic variation is a useful starting point for the beginning-level vocal improviser. Ultimately, however, the singer will need the skills to be able to construct a solo that is based on a chord progression rather than an existing song. The following sections provide

an examination and methodology for vocal improvisation in each of the major elements of music: rhythm (syllables and articulation), melody, and harmony. Note that most exercises in sections below serve primarily as examples. For continued study and additional materials for practice, refer to page 41.

Rhythm, Syllables, and Articulation

Rhythm, syllables, and articulation are a team; they work together to make improvised melodic lines feel good within a groove (rhythmic feel). Before

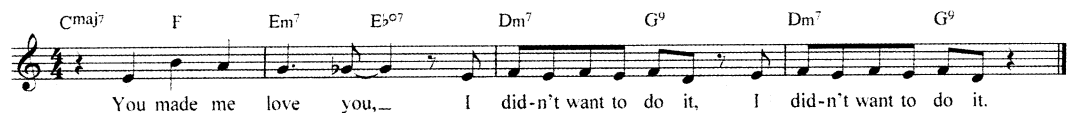


Figure 1. James V. Monaco and Joseph McCarthy, *You Made me Love You*



Figure 2. Substitute Syllables for Lyrics

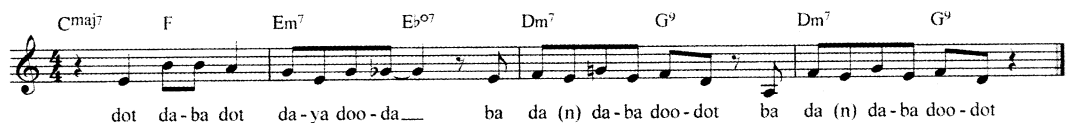


Figure 3. Improvise around the Melody

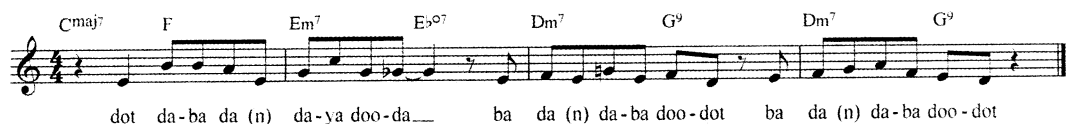


Figure 4. Expand on your improvisation

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delving too deeply into rhythm, syllables, and articulation, core work should be done on internalizing steady pulse. A strong awareness of steady pulse is critical for music in rhythm, because all grooves are felt against a steady beat—it is a relationship. Without first strongly internalizing the steady beat, there is no hope of having a good rhythmic feel for any music that is in a rhythmic style such as swing. As rudimentary as it may seem, time spent in simple exercises such as stepping in strict tempo to a metronome or tapping a steady beat with the hand while speaking or singing in rhythm will be beneficial in preparing to sing rhythmic jazz music. The goal is to develop a rock-solid and pervasive, steady beat awareness.

The River of Eighth Notes

The primary distinguishing characteristic of swing music is swing eighth notes. In swing feel, eighth notes are felt as though they are two notes within a triplet. (Figure 5) Jazz musicians commonly refer to swing eighths to differentiate them from straight eighths, which are normal eighth notes as used in other styles such as bossa nova or rock music. "The River of Eighth Notes," as this author refers to it when teaching, is

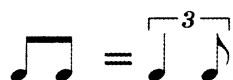


Figure 5



Figure 7

the ongoing, pervasive, steady stream of swing eighths that should be felt at all times when singing swing music. For those who are new to jazz: internalizing "The River of Eighth Notes" is something that needs to be practiced! The exercise in Figure 6 is useful for developing inner rhythm awareness of swing eighth notes. Set a metronome to approximately quarter note = 100 and rhythmically speak the rhythm in Figure 6. Use this as a short warm-up prior to singing anything in swing feel. While doing so, tap or step in tempo and accent the upbeats according to the accents in the example. The goal is for "The River of Eighth Notes" to transfer naturally into the background awareness of the singer while improvising.

Syllables

Most jazz improvisation at medium or faster tempos is eighth-note dense; eighths are the meat and potatoes of

swing feel. For an improviser to accommodate the common consecutive eighth note melodic lines, it is best to use paired syllables such as "doo-ya." Paired syllables allow for more legato than a singular syllable. (Imagine, for example, how awkward a long line of swing eighth notes sung on "doo, doo, doo, doo" would be.) See examples of common paired syllable combinations in Figure 7.

Of course, there are plenty of other rhythmic durations used in swing feel besides swing eighths, and a vocal improviser needs to have a repertoire of syllable choices for each of them. The exercise in Figure 8 is useful for increasing syllabic repertoire. Use a metronome and tap or step while speaking the exercise. Note that a hard "t" should rarely if ever be used in scat singing; instead, use a soft "t." The *staccato* sound of a hard "t" is not stylistically appropriate for jazz music.

Beginning-level scat singers need to have a good comfort level with syllables



Figure 6. The River of Eighth Notes

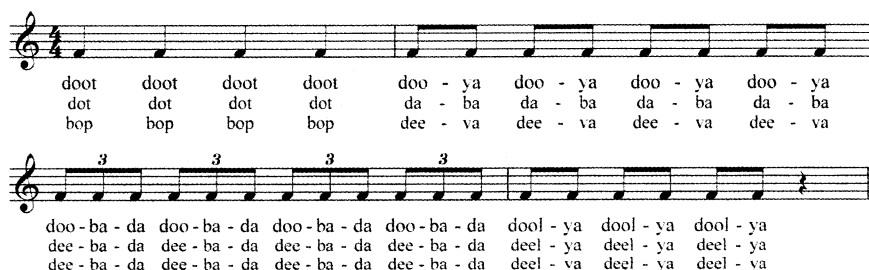


Figure 8

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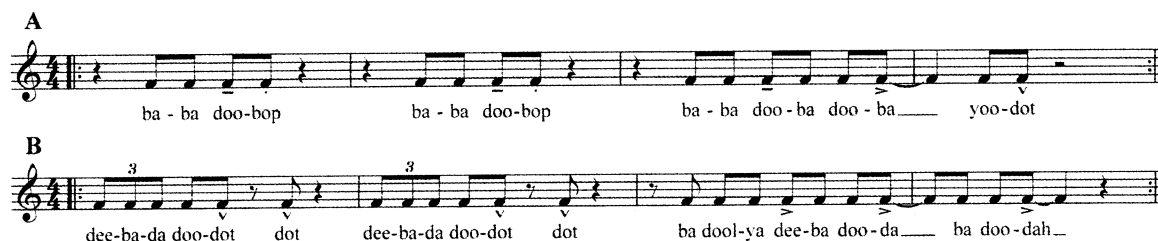


Figure 9

prior to any dedicated work on melody or harmony, and dedicated syllabic exercises can be very helpful. Figure 9 shows typical rhythm/syllable combinations used in jazz improvisation. For this exercise, use a metronome at a medium tempo and tap or step in rhythm while observing the written accents.

Articulation

Articulation is a fundamental aspect of rhythmic feel in jazz, more so than in many other musical styles. The way a jazz player or singer articulates helps to shape their individual sound and style. Without use of articulation, an improviser will not sound jazz-authentic. Articulation is characterized by periodic accents and ghost notes—muted notes with an often indistinct pitch. Ghost

notes are usually sung using a voiced consonant such as "n" and are notated with either a small "x" instead of the note head (with the note head in parenthesis) or in this case with the syllable in parenthesis. (Figure 10)

Jazz articulation is closely related to speech; there is a parallel between the accents and ghost notes of jazz articulation and the natural word stresses occurring in normal conversation. This is one of the reasons that jazz improvisation tends to have a conversational quality. Consider the sentence below if spoken emphatically with a degree of emotional charge. The syllables that are underlined would naturally be spoken with a heavy-weighted word stress:

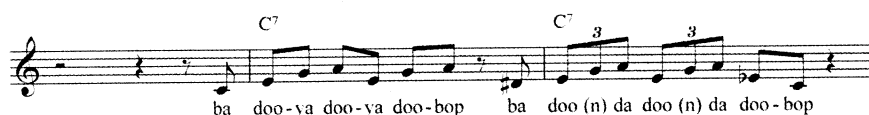


Figure 10

I real-ly need to go now, I'm gon-na be late for the mo-vie.

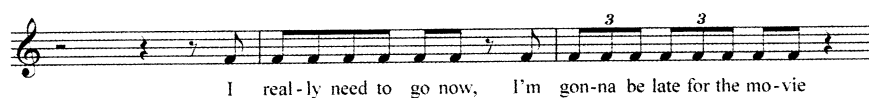


Figure 11



Figure 12

Using the rhythms of normal conversation as a guide, the sentence above could be assigned a rhythm. (Figure 11) Substituting scat syllables in place of the words would result in the phrase seen in Figure 12. Taking it one step further, adding a chord progression and a few simple pitches would result in a very useable, jazz-authentic musical motive, as seen in Figure 13. There are additional factors that come into play with regard to where and how to use articulation during jazz improvisation. Listening to jazz recordings is the best way to discover them.

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The Jazz Layer Cake

To fully complete this discussion of rhythm, syllables, and articulation, it should be noted that in swing feel there are several different layers of rhythmic elements occurring simultaneously. Each layer should ideally be in the awareness of the jazz improviser at all times, either in the background or the foreground. The totality of these rhythmic elements can be illustrated with what this author refers to as the "Jazz Layer Cake." (Figure 14)

1. Off-Beat Syncopation

There is a natural stress on beats two and four in swing music that is always present. It should be in the background awareness of any jazz improviser at all times when in swing feel but not generally explicit in the singing or playing.

2. The River of Eighth Notes

The river of (swing) eighths notes as described previously should also be pervasive in the background awareness

of the jazz improviser.

3. Articulation

Jazz articulation should be in the foreground awareness when used. It is not pervasive because it is a periodic, stylistic element that comes and goes at the discretion of the improviser. Think of articulation as being the rhythmic icing on the cake that contributes to an individual's sound and style.

Melody

Once a scat singer has adopted a healthy repertoire of syllables and has the ability to construct rhythmic motives, the next step is to focus on the task of learning to spontaneously compose melodic lines. Virtually all professional jazz improvisers have spent considerable time practicing short melodic ideas, commonly referred to as licks. Licks (or motives) are one of the building blocks of improvisational solos (although jazz professionals at the most sophisticated level generally try

to avoid using too many standardized licks). Usually a practicing improviser drills various motives repeatedly until they become habit. Once the motives are well established in the improviser's data bank, they flow out naturally in the context of creative, unstructured improvising.

See Figure 15 for examples of building melodic repertoire. Each exercise should be sung twice in every key through the circle of fifths with a recorded accompaniment.

Spontaneously Composing

Of course, there is much more to jazz improvisation than simply regurgitating practiced melodic licks; an improviser must become fluent in the invention of new, improvised melodic and rhythmic material. The new material needs to have structure and form or it will sound meandering and aimless. Consider the process of improvising a melody much like spontaneously composing a song. Songs generally begin with an initial melodic statement that repeats in several varied iterations. The first eight bars of a typical song melody might begin with a short melodic motive that is repeated one or more times with variations such as sequential repetition, transposition, fragmentation, and so on; then continue with a development section or iteration of

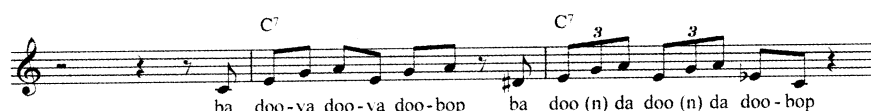


Figure 13

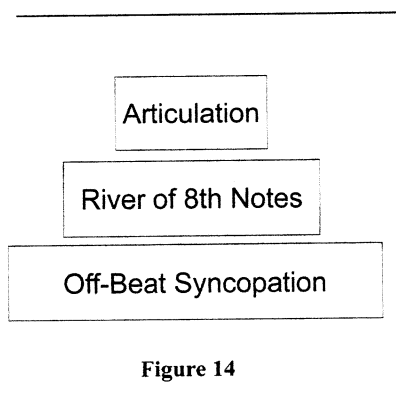


Figure 14

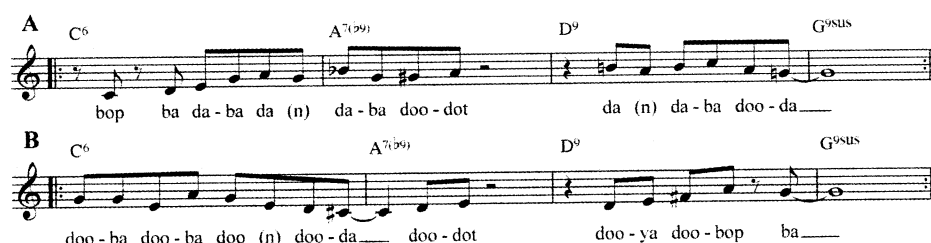


Figure 15

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the first motive and conclude with a motive that has the sense of *end of paragraph*. These principles can be observed in countless songs and musical works, one example being the well-known children's song "Mary Had a Little Lamb." (Figure 16) Motive development as illustrated above can be a very useful tool for structuring improvised solos. See Figure 17 for an example of motive development applied to eight bars of a scat solo.

Sequential shapes are another useful melodic building block for a vocal improviser. In sequential shapes, a short melodic fragment is repeated successively on different starting notes, usually moving diatonically within a scale. See example exercises in Figure 18. Note that although the melodic content in these examples is entirely diatonic, as an improviser matures he or she will need to incorporate more chromaticism into the melodic lines

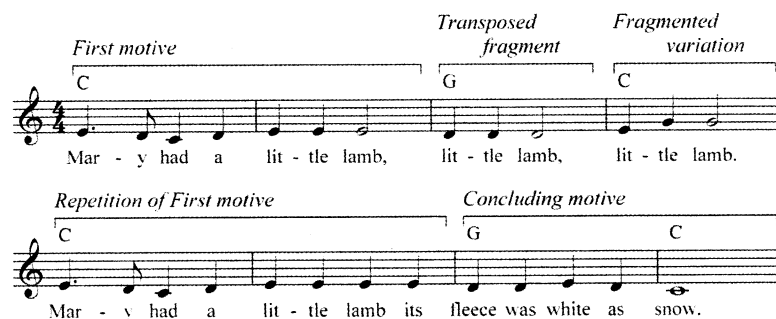


Figure 16

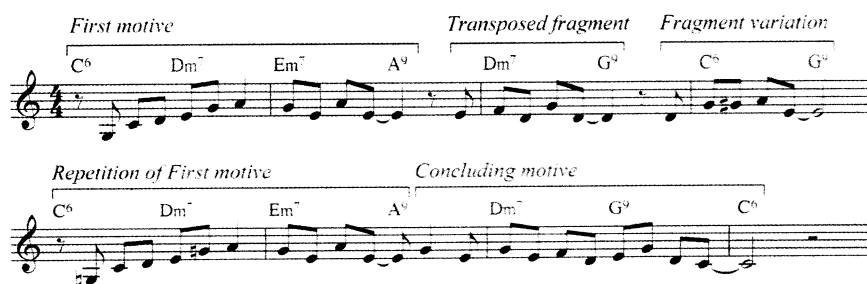
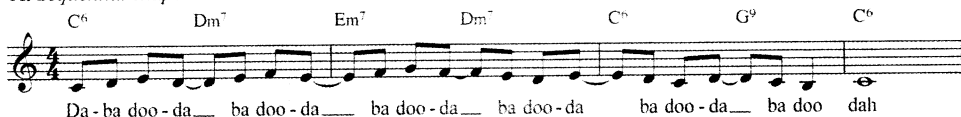


Figure 17

A. Sequential shapes



B. Arpeggiated shapes



Figure 18

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to sound authentic in speaking the language of jazz.

See Figure 19 for exercises of more advanced melodic ideas that reflect the bebop language. Note that after any specific exercise practice session, it is strongly recommended to spend some time with unstructured improvisation over a recorded accompaniment. This is an important part of the process; an improviser must have ample chance to test the waters in actual improvising.

Transcribing

A final note about acquiring melodic fluency: a historical way that instrumental improvisers have honed their craft is to transcribe recorded improvisation solos. Transcribing is extremely beneficial due to the repeated listening required and the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic material that one can soak into his or her awareness during the process. For vocal improvisers, though actual transcribing is worthwhile, it is educationally sufficient to sing along with recorded jazz instrumental or vocal solos, working to replicate them as precisely as possible. The goal is to match not only the notes and rhythms but also to model the subtleties of style, rhythmic feel, articulation, vibrato, phrasing, and even tone color. The process of transcribing (or singing with and matching a solo) may be the single most valuable practice tool available to an improviser.

Harmony

One of the biggest challenges for vocal improvisers is to learn to successfully navigate the chord progression of a song, especially for those who did not grow up listening to jazz. Having cognitive knowledge of the structure of the progression is helpful, and having basic jazz piano skills is extremely helpful, bordering on necessary. While it is outside

the scope of this article to go deeply into jazz standard chord progression theory, it is important to note that jazz standards typically progress through only three to five temporary key centers. This is simply how the harmonic structure of these songs was devised by each respective composer. With improvising students it can be helpful to begin work on a new song by first analyzing the progression to identify the primary key centers. Then students learn to hear those primary key centers, especially the junctures where they shift from one temporary key to another. This process significantly simplifies the task of learning to hear the changes (chord progression), since it means that the singer only needs to hear several primary key centers rather than all thirty-two or more chords of a song! Needless to say, this is good news for most vocal improvisers. Figure 20 identifies the temporary key centers in a typical jazz standard chord progression.

Singing the Changes

Singing the Changes is a method

of learning to better hear a chord progression. All exercises following are designed to train the ear to successfully navigate an improvised melodic line through a chord progression. Each exercise should be sung with a recorded accompaniment.

1. Sing the roots

The first goal is to be able to hear the root (i.e., tonic) of each chord in the progression—a more challenging task than it may seem, as most singers generally have only a low level of awareness of the bass notes in the context of casual listening to jazz. However, the roots of the chords are the most significant defining factor of a chord progression and therefore worthy of time spent in practice. Sing the roots of the chords (along with a recorded accompaniment of the progression) as in Figure 21. Use syllables of your choice and add simple rhythms to make the result more interesting and musical. Repeat the process until your ear is 100 percent reliable in hearing the roots with no guessing about the next root coming up. Your

Figure 19

Figure 20

4. Arpeggios

The final exercise illustrates the arpeggiated triads of each chord in a progression, with the triads sometimes ascending and sometimes descending to keep the vocal range manageable and create a more flowing line. (Figure 24)

Next, add minor melodic variations. Start with baby steps and avoid branching out too far away from the tonic. Little by little, as confidence builds and the ear becomes stronger, branch out more and more via scale or skip to create interesting, root-based motives. (Figure 22)

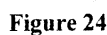
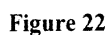
3. Three-note scales

Figure 23 illustrates a motivic idea based on the first three notes of each chord's scale, then repeated through the progression. Learning to hear the difference between a major and a minor third in each chord of a progression goes a long way toward the goal of hearing the overall progression.

Scatting in the Choir or Classroom

Serious practice of vocal improvisation undoubtedly helps to develop better musicianship in a singer. As a

general rule: better musicianship equals a better choir. Though it may seem as though vocal improvisation is strictly an activity for the soloist, it can be easily applied to group practice. Educational materials are available to provide role models and practice exercises with no previous experience required. Scatting activities work well in small doses as part of warm-ups or short lessons that target a specific musical goal. A variety of activity types are described on the following pages, some of which feature group exercises or games and some of which allow for unstructured improvising in a group context.



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Group Activities

1. Call-and-Response

The easiest way to introduce scat singing to a group is through call-and-response. No experience or special preparation is required—the practice is simply to listen to phases sung by a recorded demo singer (on a designated call-and-response practice track) and repeat the singer after each phrase. Call-and-response is generally fun and pain free since no one is put on the spot to perform as a soloist, and there is usually a high success rate. Recordings are available that make the process as simple as pressing play and turning up the volume. A variation in call-and-response is to assign a qualified student (or several, one at a time) to lead the calls. The leader of the calls should keep ideas limited to one-, two-, or four-bar phrases.

2. Exercises

Most of the exercises presented in this article can be easily applied to use with groups by having the class or ensemble sing in unison. Rhythm and syllable exercises, melodic exercises, and singing the changes are all activities that work well in the classroom.

3. Transcribing

Although the actual transcribing of a recorded solo may not be practical for your class, listening to and singing along with a recorded solo is. To facilitate this, have the group listen to approximately eight measures of a solo a day, repeating the passage as many times as necessary until they can sing along with it confidently. On the next class day, review the previously learned eight bars then move on to the next eight. Eventually the group will be able to sing with an entire solo.

Unstructured Improvising

There are a number of ways to provide the opportunity for individual singers to improvise their own unique ideas while in the context of a group. These activities are generally fun, energizing, and very beneficial for improving musicianship. To facilitate unstructured improvising, play an accompaniment track loudly enough for everyone to hear and ask the singers to sit in their chairs and quietly scat to themselves. To an outside observer, it may sound like a cacophony, but from within the group, each individual is able to hear him or herself adequately and explore impro-

visation without the pressure of having to perform in front of others. There are myriad variations to this activity, several of which are outlined below:

1. Ask singers to slowly (meditatively) walk around the room in meandering fashion as they sing. You may need to remind them to avoid interacting with anyone as they meander close to other singers who are doing the same activity. You may also ask them to step in tempo as they walk.

2. Assign each singer to a partner and place each partner group around the room facing each other. Instruct partners to take turns improvising ideas of two-, four-, or eight-bar phrases (depending on tempo and personal preference) while a backing track plays. This is a reasonably safe way for singers to begin improvising in front of another person.

3. Divide the class into small groups (quartets or more) and place them around the room standing in a tight circle. The groups should be as far away from other groups as possible so each can hear itself. Play a recorded backing track as each singer takes a turn at improvising in two-, four-, or eight-bar phrases. It is a good idea to determine the direction of improvisers (clockwise or counterclockwise) ahead of time.

Jam Session Groups

Jam session groups are small groups of four or more singers who meet either in or outside of class to practice improvisation together. They can function just as sectional rehearsals function in a choral or jazz ensemble, meeting regularly as a required activity outside of class, or they can be used as part of in-class warm-ups or breakout activities. The musical benefits of jam session groups

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can be significant, and the activity boosts enthusiasm for improvisation and jazz.

Divide the class into groups of four or more, and if meeting outside of class, determine the time and place. If meeting during class time, send the singers out to practice rooms, nearby classrooms, the hallway, or wherever there is appropriate space, give them a specific assignment, and tell them a specific time to return. Luckily, supplying backing tracks for each group is not a problem, as jazz accompaniment phone apps are now available, and very likely at least one singer in each group will have a smart phone. The key to success with jam session groups is to be very specific with goals and assignments and to require the groups be accountable for their progress.

Example assignments include: "Listen to etude 19 all the way through, three times, then learn the first eight bars of the solo," or, "Sing exercise 12 five times, then trade fours with the backing track for ten minutes, working mostly on scalar ideas." To keep the jam session groups lively and fresh, periodically rotate out just one member of each group for a new member so that new energy is often being infused into the group. To inspire everyone's best practice efforts, have jazz session groups periodically perform for each other in class.

Musical Games

Scat singing is a perfect vehicle for the creation of game-like educational activities that promote the growth and development of the singer. One challenge of working with musical games is for the singers to keep their focus on the music, always carefully listening as they sing and maintaining high musical standards in the process. Musical games can be so much fun for the singers that they are easily distracted from the task

at hand—exploring vocal improvisation with musical integrity. With that said, it is fun to work with musical games, and each game in its own way will have a beneficial effect on different aspects of musicianship and scatting. For example, the question/answer game helps singers learn how to define, confine, and conclusively end a melodic idea rather than allowing it to trail on aimlessly as in a run-on sentence.

For each of the three activities following, the singers can be either sitting or standing in a circle. Use a medium tempo backing track featuring a simple blues, turnaround, or other simple chord progression to serve as the accompaniment for all exercises.

1. Question/answer

This game is played in groups of two at a time. The first person asks a musical question, and the second person provides the answer. (This is all played out through scatting with no words.) Once the first pair of singers has exchanged one or two sets of question/answer, proceed to the next pair of singers in the circle. This activity is most successful if the questions end with the pitch direction going up, and the answers end with the pitch direction going down.

2. Conversation

Assign singers to a three- to four-person jam session group and have them stand in tight circles around the room. With a backing track playing, have each group begin a free-form scatting conversation. Remind the singers to keep their attention on the music and to not get overly preoccupied with the conversational aspect of the activity. One of the purposes of this game is for the singers to stretch their creative horizons, exploring musical avenues to express themselves with clarity in this

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100 THE SCAT SINGING DIALECT

conversational context. It can be helpful to pause the conversations occasionally to give the singers direction—for example, to remind them that silence and listening are important aspects of any conversation. It can also be helpful to offer reminders of, or even assign the specific use of, some of the many musical tools available to them: dynamics; articulation; short, medium, or long phrase lengths; tone; range; and so on.

More structure can be added to the conversational groups by giving them each a scenario to play out. For example, "You are in the car with two good friends on your way to a movie. Suddenly your car starts to have problems, so you pull over to the side of the road. Then you discover that you left your cell phone..." and so on.

3. *Collective story game*

In the collective story game, the entire group of singers collectively tells a story through scatting. The goal is to create sufficient musical structure and dynamic contour to make it sound interesting, evolving, and truly story-like. To facilitate the game, identify a singer to start things off by contributing a clear, well-defined scat motive (a first sentence), then proceed consecutively around the circle with each singer contributing a single sentence to the unfolding storyline. Actual stories are organized by sentences and paragraphs, and the goal of the collective story game is to model the same structure with musical phrases. Sentences are analogous to singular improvised motives, and paragraphs are

analogous to groups of motives working together to define a beginning, development, and conclusive ending. Below is an outline of the step-by-step process for constructing a musical paragraph with a small group of singers:

- The first person sings a short and well-defined motive.
- Then moving around the circle, one or two singers repeat that idea with variation.
- The next one or two singers either continue developing the original idea or introduce new material that serves to build intensity through creative melodic shape, increased dissonance, higher range,



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AN INTRODUCTION TO VOCAL IMPROVISATION

a lengthier motive, etc.

- The final singer concludes the musical paragraph with an idea that may or may not be based on the original idea.

Once a paragraph has concluded, the next person in the circle initiates the first motive of a new paragraph, and the process repeats. The most successful collective story games are made of clear, concise sentences and well-defined paragraphs that contribute to an overall dynamic contour and intensity levels that build and decline. Following are some of the musical tools that can be used to help to shape contour and achieve shifting levels of intensity:

- short, medium, and long phrase lengths
- vocal range
- dynamics
- articulation
- vocal tone
- rhythmic simplicity or complexity
- density of notes (amount of open space)
- melodic shapes and range
- melodic consonance or dissonance

Achieving success at the collective story game will almost certainly require a good amount of time spent experimenting with the process and learning through trial and error. But it is worthwhile time spent; the stronger the group becomes in mastering the concepts necessary to succeed in the game, the stronger each individual improviser will become in replicating the process in

their own improvising. This is the path to learning the scat singing dialect.

Resources

Phone Apps

1. *ScatAbility*
By: Michele Weir/MichMusic
Website: www.michmusic.com
Developer: Leafcutter Studios Ltd.
Date: 2015
Made for iPhone and iPad
Available at the App Store
Features: The world's first app for scatting practice; focus is primarily listening and imitation. Features seven professional singers modeling call-and-response, exercises, and etudes. Mute vocals to scat with backing track only. Record yourself scatting with track and listen back. Includes helpful practice tips and a complete jazz glossary.

2. *iRealPro*
Developer: Technimo LLC
Website: <http://irealpro.com>

Made for iPhone and iPad
Available at the App Store
Features: Backing tracks app for practice. Thousands of tracks available on related forums. Can change to any key, tempo, or groove and read and export chord charts. Backing tracks are midi and do not sound like real instruments. Still, a very versatile and useful app.

Books/CDs

1. *Vocal Improvisation*
Product type: Book/CD
By: Michele Weir
Website: www.michmusic.com
Publisher: Advance Music
Date: 2001
Features: Comprehensive informative and how-to text, beginning- to advanced-level scatting. Covers jazz theory, keyboard basics, vocal improvisation in the classroom, practice suggestions, glossary, singer interviews, recommended listening, and numerous practice exercises. CD includes vocal demos and open tracks for practice.



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Child of Song, SATB, a cappella
Love's Onward Journey, SSAA, a cappella
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2. *Bob Stoloff Materials*

Product type: Book/CD

By: Bob Stoloff

Website: <http://bobstoloffmusic.com/bob-s-books>

Publisher: Various

Date: Various

Features: Bob has six educational book/CDs and digital download materials available. For vocal improvisation, this author recommends "Recipes for Soloing Over Jazz Standards," "Blues Scatitudes," and "Scat!" Books include vocal demonstrations, exercises, and a practice CD.

3. *Hear It and Sing It!*

Product type: Book/CD

By: Judy Niemack

Website: <http://www.judyniemack.com>

Publisher: Second Floor Music/Hal Leonard

Date: 2004

Features: Beautiful vocal demonstrations by Judy, a contemporary approach to scatting with modal jazz. Includes jazz warm-ups and theoretical information and exercises. CD includes call-and-response and open tracks for scatting. Check the website for more CDs and books.

Other Materials

1. Jamey Aebersold Materials

Website: <http://www.jazzbooks.com>

Features: Jamey Aebersold offers two fantastic resources: 1. A series of jazz CD tracks for practice with live jazz-authentic players. Available on his website as Jamey Aebersold Play-Alongs, and individual tracks now available on iTunes. 2. Website jazzbooks.com offers

hundreds of quality jazz materials for all instruments and voice. This catalog is the go-to resource for jazz materials.

2. *CircleSongs: The Method*


Product type: Book/CD

By: Roger Treece

Website: www.rogertreece.com

Publisher: Roger Treece

Date: 2015

Features: CircleSinging is a new concept in choral music that features unaccompanied, spontaneous choral composition. In a CircleSong, repeating musical ideas are created and layered, one at a time, so the members of the ensemble can perceive each idea as it's created and then add and organize other ideas around it. Includes three CDs with sixty-three music-minus-one mixes within it. 



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