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Pedagogies for scat singing

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PEDAGOGIES FOR SCAT SINGING

A Project Report

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Music

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Diane Pauline Bock

May 2000

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ABSTRACT

PEDAGOGIES FOR SCAT SINGING

by Diane Pauline Bock

This project report explores pedagogies for vocal improvisation published from 1977-1999. Following an introduction, chapter two presents different approaches to teaching scat singing. Chapter three examines the musical elements and fundamental skills that are an integral part of scat singing and discusses how different educators teach them. In chapter four, lessons that focus on each area are presented and evaluated by the author. An application of certain lessons and concepts is discussed within the context of two tunes in chapter five.

Research on this subject reveals that most educators support a theoretical approach to teaching scat singing rather than a purely oral/imitative approach. They agree that vocal improvisers should be taught in the same manner as instrumentalists and should be expected to develop the same skills.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for supporting me in this adventure. My husband Ryan created the musical examples in this paper and read more than his share of drafts. I would also like to thank my mother for her wise words and honest approach in editing my writing. Your patience and understanding has been a true gift.

Thank you to each of my committee members, Dr. Katharine Cartwright, Dr. Brian Belet, and Mr. Daniel Sabanovich. I will always be grateful for your time, dedication and high expectations.

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Chapter One

Introduction

An ability to improvise is imperative for the jazz performer. Although a significant amount has been written about jazz and jazz artists, prior to 1975 little had been published concerning teaching improvisation. Materials specific to vocal jazz improvisation are still not readily available and are mostly geared toward the jazz choir. As a jazz singer, I too have struggled with the art of scat.

This paper focuses on methods for learning/teaching scat singing that have been published from 1977 to 1999. There are varying philosophies regarding the most effective approach to teaching vocal improvisation. This is evident in the views represented in articles and workbooks by jazz educators. While the purpose of this research is to assist the solo jazz vocalist, ideas and lessons originally intended for the jazz choir will be included when applicable to the soloist.

This paper is organized by musical elements (rhythm, melody, chord progressions, scales) and fundamental skills (working with non-semantic syllables, ear training, and transcribing exercises). These basics are addressed in the majority of sources researched. Approaches to learning, however, differ among the educators.

Lessons that target specific musical elements and skills are included in chapter 4. While there are many possible lessons, I have chosen to present one for each area discussed.

In my own studies, I found that certain strategies are particularly helpful in learning to improvise on specific songs, while others help in learning any song. Lessons within the context of specific songs are discussed in chapter 5.

Chapter Two

Scat Singing Pedagogies

There are many techniques for teaching students to scat sing. In general, however, the writers qualify their methods as either “instrumental” or “vocal.” Educators who support an instrumental approach tend to emphasize a theoretical understanding of the music. Singers are expected to analyze the chord changes and learn root progressions, chord-scales, and scale patterns. These techniques have traditionally been used primarily for teaching instrumentalists, not singers. Educators who describe their method as vocal focus more on imitation through repetition than theory. Singers learn by memorizing patterns or phrases that the teacher models. While many favor one term or the other, most effective educators incorporate aspects of both into their teaching. It is important to emphasize that the educators have created the distinction between the two approaches. The implication is that the instrumentalists need to learn music theory, while the singers do not. In my view, all jazz musicians need to practice elements of both methods to become strong improvisers.

Such jazz educators as Gene Aitken and Jamey Aebersold propose that jazz vocalists practice and develop the same skills as instrumentalists. “They need to practice scales, chords, and exercises and sharpen their ears almost a degree sharper than

instrumentalists. They have no button or key to push with a guaranteed note sounding.”¹ Because of the absence of mechanical aides, singers must internally master intervallic relationships in scales and chords in order to sing pitches accurately. Singers carry their instrument with them; their bodies are their instruments.

Patty Coker and David Baker share a similar philosophy. “The key is for the singer to study and practice improvisation in much the same way that a developing instrumentalist prepares.”² Many scat singers rely on their ears only and react to the chord changes as they are played. Students who have a thorough understanding of jazz theory will be better able to experiment with all the possibilities and be more creative. An improvising vocalist must know which pitches are appropriate to use over a harmonic progression. They must also be able to hear the pitches with their inner ear before singing them.

Doug Anderson categorizes his approach as instrumental as well. He believes that it is important for students to improvise based on their understanding of chord structures and chord changes. He encourages students to learn to identify roots, other chord tones, and altered notes.³ The ability to recognize the roots and chord qualities helps students understand and hear harmonic progressions. As students become more comfortable using these tools, they begin to hear familiar patterns from one song to another.

¹ “Sharp” in this context means precise. Gene Aitken and Jamey Aebersold, “Vocal Jazz Improvisation: An Instrumental Approach,” *Jazz Educators Journal* 17, no. 1 (1983): 8.

² Patty Coker and David Baker, *Vocal Improvisation: An Instrumental Approach* (Miami: CPP Belwin, Inc., 1981), 9.

³ Doug Anderson, “Improvisation for Vocal Jazz Ensembles,” *Music Educators Journal* 66, no. 5 (1980): 89.

The vocal approach is slightly different. Jazz educator Scott Fredrickson has created a scat singing method based on what he describes as an aural/melodic approach rather than a theoretical approach.⁴ Students listen to the words, melodies, rhythms, and phrases, and imitate the examples on the accompanying cassette. Fredrickson views this as a principle step in the learning process. He believes that this aural foundation must be in place before students can effectively learn and apply the theoretical relationships that exist between the melodic and harmonic material. Paul Berliner explains that many seasoned musicians encourage beginning improvisers to imitate solos and styles of great jazz improvisers.⁵ These musicians, however, caution that this process can be ultimately limiting if it prevents students from developing their own style.

In summary, while instrumentalists are generally trained in theory as well as aurally (ear-training), approaches to vocal improvisation may be categorized as either 'vocal' or 'instrumental.' 'Instrumental' approaches emphasize theory and internal hearing while 'vocal' approaches rely primarily on imitation.

⁴ Scott Fredrickson, *Scat Singing Method* (Sherman Oaks: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), 6.

⁵ Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 120.

Chapter Three

Areas of Focus in Learning to Improvise

There are many ways to improvise, many ways to learn to improvise, and many forms of improvisation both for vocalists and instrumentalists. This chapter focuses on processes that are particularly pertinent to scat singing. Paul Berliner defines “scat” as, “improvisation using non-semantic syllables.”⁶ Non-semantic syllables can include rhythm syllables, articulation syllables, and solfège.

A large part of the process is pre-improvisational. This includes listening to recorded solos and transcribing them, practicing scales and scale patterns, and many others. While the act of improvising itself involves a lot of listening, this paper focuses on listening as part of the learning process.

Melody-Based Improvisation

Some educators teach students to improvise primarily by working with the melody of the tune, adding new notes, articulations, changes in meter, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics. In my view, while the melody can provide the skeleton for the improvisers, they must also understand the theoretical supporting structures (scales, and

⁶ Berliner, 66. *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* defines scat singing as, “the use of onomatopoeic or nonsense syllables sung to improvised melodies.” Onomatopoeia in this case implies the imitation of instrument sounds. *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, s.v. “scat singing.”

chord progressions) of the song. These, too, are essential tools for melodic improvisation.

Other educators work with the melody in a different manner. Patrice Madura recommends that students imitate recorded performances of melodies with absolute accuracy. She feels this strengthens their ability to listen. She begins by asking students to sing back short melodies she has improvised.⁷ Students progress to imitating complete vocal and instrumental solos. Dr. Katharine Cartwright also incorporates imitation into her approach.⁸ Students not only memorize pitches, but also copy the phrasing and timbre of the soloist. Once internalized, students improvise several more choruses continuing in the same style.

Madura integrates more than just the melody as a vehicle for improvisation, while Anderson suggests that the melody alone can be used as the foundation of an entire improvised solo. He emphasizes melody to the exclusion of scales and chord changes for beginning improvisers. Anderson points out that this type of solo will make more sense to the average listener.⁹ In my view, the listener might be better able to recognize the familiar melody in the solo. However, this approach can be very limiting for the improviser. The solos can become little more than slightly altered versions of the original melody. If the improviser is hearing nothing but the melody internally, there is little room for original development of the solo.

⁷ Patrice Madura, "Chorus: Jazz Improvisation for the Vocal Student," *Teaching Music* 4, no. 6 (1997): 28.

⁸ Katharine Cartwright, lesson with author, 17 March 1999.

⁹ Anderson, 92.

I have had a similar experience. As a beginning improviser, I based my solos on the melody alone. I quickly found it limiting in terms of rhythm and phrasing, and kept getting stuck because I was not sure where else to go.

Cartwright, Madura and many others encourage students to practice tunes, exercises, and progressions in as many different ways as they can think of. Some examples include: at the piano, slowly, in time, out of time, pausing on one chord, and playing short progressions with and without accompaniment. Some educators incorporate pre-recorded rhythm section accompaniments in their teaching programs. They have found that working with a pre-recorded rhythm section can be a very helpful technique for students. A rhythm section accompaniment might include piano, bass, and drums. Students can then practice melodies, scales, patterns, and solos over the accompaniment.

Jamie Aebersold has created an extensive collection of such resources commonly known as *Play-A-Long Book and Recording Sets*.¹⁰ These have become extremely popular among students and educators today. The rhythmic accompaniment for each recording is separated into two channels. Bass and drums are recorded on one channel; piano and drums on the other. Each set also provides recordings and charts of song in the original keys for C, Bb and Eb instruments. I have found Aebersold's books to be very useful provided one can adjust to the range and tessitura of the original key of a song.

¹⁰ Jamie Aebersold, *Play-A-Long Book & Recording Set: A New Approach to Jazz Improvisation* (New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, Inc., 1967).

Applications of Non-Semantic Syllables

Many educators incorporate non-semantic syllables in their approaches and apply them in different manners. Some teach jazz choirs, which require consistency in articulation. Some syllables are used to emphasize accents and phrasing issues, while others have strict meanings in terms of rhythm. Solfège is another approach that incorporates their use. These areas are discussed in the sections below.

While prescribed syllables are part of the learning process, their primary usefulness is as a learning aid. Many educators agree that the most effective scatting is accomplished when syllables are chosen in the moment. According to Bob Stoloff, “Scat syllables should be the unpredictable result of spontaneous musical expression rather than the primary focus of vocal improvisation.”¹¹ Most scat singers have their own vocabulary of syllables; a systematic set of prescribed syllables is not used in the jazz community.

While prescribed non-semantic syllables can be a useful tool for developing rhythmic articulation in jazz, educators caution that they should not replace the natural flow of improvisation. Students of vocal improvisation must also develop their own style and vocabulary.

Rhythm

Most educators state the importance of a strong foundation in rhythm, yet do not address it as an isolated element. Patty Coker and David Baker, however, devote a

¹¹ Bob Stoloff, *Scat! Vocal Improvisation Techniques* (Brooklyn: Gerard and Sarzin), 15.

section of their book to a review of basic rhythms and rhythmic notation as well as simple and compound meter. A few educators present lessons that teach rhythmic concepts and notation. Most integrate specific scat syllables to represent rhythmic values and phrasing.

Stoloff notes that effective phrasing requires rhythmic balance. He suggests that one way to achieve this is to integrate duple and triple rhythmic figures, ties, rests, articulation markings, and accents. He points out the importance of carefully choosing vowel sequences. He recommends using caution when singing syllable combinations with two vowels (in the form of eighths or sixteenths) and suggests combining two-syllable rhythms with triplets such as “du-ee-a.”¹² His point is to be careful not to create awkward syllabic combinations, but strive for a smooth syllabic phrase for the singer to articulate. If the combination of vowels and consonants is awkward, the musical line will not flow.

Dan Sabanovich incorporates scat syllables in his teaching method to emphasize specific rhythmic articulations. In a pattern comprised of a series of eighth notes, he assigns “du” to the downbeat and “bah” to the upbeat of each eighth note pair. He assigns “dit” to staccato notes and “dot” to accented notes, as illustrated in Example 1. This helps students articulate patterns with a swing feel.¹³

¹² Stoloff, 16.

¹³ This example is taken from class notes. Dan Sabanovich, *Improvisation Techniques* (Music 140B), San José State University, 10 October 1996.

Example 1

Antonio Garcia assigns the syllable “doo” to all full-value down beats, “bah” to full value upbeats (in duple divisions of the beat) and “dah” to all full value final eighths in a triple division of the beat. For short value notes, he assigns “dit” to downbeats, “bop” to upbeats (duple division) and “dop” to final eighths in a triple division as shown in Example 2.¹⁴

Example 2

Reprinted, by permission, Garcia, *Pedagogical Scat*, 30

Fredrickson also uses scat syllables to teach rhythm. He introduces “du” for longer values and “dut” for shorter values.¹⁵ These scat syllables assist the student in developing a sense of rhythmic articulation in a phrase. In his view, a consistent set of

¹⁴ Antonio Garcia, “Pedagogical Scat,” *Music Educators Journal* 77, no.1 (1990): 29-34.

¹⁵ Fredrickson, 10.

rhythmic scat syllables provides a rhythmic vocabulary for students. They can then apply the syllables to a transcribed solo or an improvised chorus.

Working with Progressions

Many educators, including Cartwright, believe that one of the first steps towards learning to improvise on a song is to memorize and sing the root progression. The root progression is the series of root tones of each chord in the harmonic progression of a tune. The roots become one of many starting points for creating solos. Cartwright recommends using chromatic fixed-do solfège as a tool in this process.¹⁶ In this system, each note corresponds to a letter and a fixed solfège name. Example 3 presents the ascending and descending scale and its corresponding syllables.

Example 3

C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C
do	di	re	ri	mi	fa	fi	sol	si	la	li	ti	do

C	B	Bb	A	Ab	G	Gb	F	E	Eb	D	Db	C
do	ti	te	la	le	sol	se	fa	mi	me	re	ra	do

Cartwright learned about the idea of incorporating solfège in improvisation from Khyal, a form of North Indian Classical vocal improvisation. Khyal singers use a form of solfège called Sargam. Singers in the Carnatic or South Indian Classical tradition also

¹⁶ Dr. Cartwright recommends fixed-do solfège as one of several approaches for learning melodies without text. The application is outlined in a handout as part of her improvisation classes.

use a form of solfège, which is similar to Sargam (Svara names). I had an experience that confirmed my belief that the use of solfège is an excellent aide in pitch recognition. My Carnatic singing teacher, Preetha Srinivasan Sheshadri, uses an electric tanpura to provide the drone in our class together. One day the box was broken, yet she was still able to sing the correct notes (exact fixed pitch) in the raga without accompaniment.

This method is extremely helpful for me as a singer. I memorize the root progression of a song in solfège. The combination of root names and pitch sounds become one tool for improvising. I have connected the syllable pattern “fi-ti-mi” in “All the Things Your Are” with the sound for an F sharp-B natural-E natural progression and am able to sing those notes when I am away from the piano. The process becomes absolute pitch recognition. For me, solfège creates a connection between the sound of each note and its name. This can be compared to an instrumentalist’s ability to “feel” finger positions for certain notes without actually touching the keys.

After learning the root progression, the next step is to study and memorize the chord progression of a song. Most educators agree that singers and instrumentalists should always know where they are in the chord progression and need to know what note of the chord they are singing. Some teachers recommend visualization of a keyboard or other instrument to assist with pitch recognition.

Cartwright incorporates an approach similar to a guide-tone approach. Cartwright defines guide-tone lines as “conjunct melody backgrounds in harmonic rhythm.”¹⁷

¹⁷ This process is outlined in Dr. Cartwright’s notes as one of many exercises in improvisation. Hal Crook also addresses the use of guide-tone melodies in his method. He has students create melodies using guide-tones, 3rds, 7ths and altered 5ths only. They then add chord tones to their melodies and finally incorporate

Students begin by singing a series of choruses of guide-tone line melodies in harmonic rhythm. The intervals in the new melodies can be no greater than a major second and the melody should incorporate a mixture of chord-tones (scale degrees 1, 3 5, 7) and “color-tones” (scale degrees 9, 11, 13). Once the students are confident with the process, they improvise by moving away from and returning to the pitches in the guide-tone melody. This becomes one way to begin improvising. They start by singing neighboring tones and gradually move further away from the original pitch. The goal is to create a new melody over the chord changes.

Coker and Baker, among others, instruct students to isolate particular chord patterns including turnarounds, ii-V-I, as well as the cycle of fourths. These are very common harmonic phrases in jazz tunes. Others teach scale patterns over chord progressions and within the context of tunes. Cartwright teaches students to sing melodic patterns such as scale degrees 1-2-3-5 through the chord progressions. This pattern includes the root and the third, so the quality of the chord becomes internalized. Stoloff includes a series of specific patterns to be sung over ii-V7 progressions as part of his book. I began incorporating a few of his patterns in my solos. They are effective exercises for working through chords patterns. Cartwright and others also recommend taking patterns out of solos and tunes (licks) to practice and apply to different progressions. Numerous jazz songs incorporate similar chord progressions including ii-V7. Once singers have internalized the sound of a pattern, they can use it over any ii-V7.

tension tones. Hal Crook, *How to Improvise: An Approach to Practicing Improvisation* (Boston: Advance Music, 1991).

By memorizing the construction and internalizing the sound, singers gain ideas for improvising.

Berliner notes that the blues is commonly the first in a series of forms that the improviser learns.¹⁸ Anderson begins by teaching root progressions over the C blues, and E.S. Meadows uses this same progression to introduce C major and C pentatonic scales.¹⁹ The form is shorter and the sound of the progression is more easily internalized. The student can practice root progressions, scales, and exercises in a more predictable context. A basic blues progression is outlined in Example 4.

Example 4

I	I	I	I
IV	IV	I	I
V7	V7	I	I

Chords

Many sources agree that a fundamental understanding of chords and their function is a prerequisite for learning to improvise. Fredrickson and other educators who expect students to rely upon their ears alone have little to say about developing this skill.

In jazz, most chords are seventh-chords (root-3-5-7) and many include chord extensions (9, 11, 13). Aitken, Aebersold, Anderson and others encourage singers to work through all twelve keys and to sing roots, thirds, fifths, sevenths and ninths. Aitken,

¹⁸ Berliner, 76.

¹⁹ E.S. Meadows, "Improvising Jazz: A Beginner's Guide," *Music Educator's Journal* 78 (1991): 42.

Aebersold and others believe that vocalists can learn to hear more complex chords and the altered sounds (e.g., scale degrees #11, b13, b9) more rapidly than instrumentalists because singers don't have to figure out what the actual note is in a given key in order to sing it.²⁰ In this respect, once vocalists learn to hear a chord quality, they can more quickly recognize and sing the chord in any key. Once this skill has been mastered, students can improvise based on their understanding of chord structure and chord changes as well as their ability to hear pitches.

Gene Grier emphasizes intervals in his discussion. He includes major and minor seconds, thirds, sevenths, ninths, and thirteenths in improvisation.²¹ These intervals become the building blocks of the chords and help students hear and analyze the harmonic progressions. Learning to identify and sing intervals is an important preliminary step for all musicians.

Chord-Scales

Chord-scales are a basic part of the vocabulary for improvising over harmonic progressions. They can be organized into five basic categories: major (Imaj7 type), minor (IIm7 or VI type), dominant (V7 type), diminished (VII dim type), and half diminished (VII half-diminished type). The church modes are included in many methods, particularly the Dorian, Lydian, and Mixolydian scales. Some educators include whole tone scales, blues scales, and various other hybrid scales in their discussion.

²⁰ Aitken and Aebersold, 9.

²¹ Gene Grier, "Teaching Vocal Jazz Improvisation and Scat-Singing, Part 2," *Choral Journal* 18, no. 4 (1977): 29.

Coker and Baker begin their lessons by introducing the major scale in the key of C. They recommend singing with scale-degree numbers beginning with “1” for the root of the scale. Coker suggests that students explore their vocal range above and below middle C (C⁴) using scale degrees. Scale degree numbers are useful as a beginning step; however, I found this approach quickly limiting. The harmonic progression in a jazz song often moves through several key areas, therefore scale degree “1” can change. Solfège not only facilitates learning scales in all keys, but also is easier for dealing with the changing key areas of jazz compositions.

While educators, including Grier, teach scales in isolation, most have students practice scales in isolation as well as in the context of harmonic progressions. When Cartwright introduces a diminished scale (W-H-W-H-W-H-W-H), we learn to sing it away from the piano and while playing a V7 chord at the piano.²² This way we can hear the color tones (extensions) against the notes in the chord. I also practice a Dorian-diminished-major chord scale combination (IIm: 1-2-b3-4, V: b9-#9-3-#11, I: 9-7-5-3-2-1) in the context of a ii7-V7-Imaj7 progression. Most teachers have students sing and write out their scales in all keys.

A working knowledge of scales helps the improviser know which notes are appropriate to use over different chords. Most educators agree that improvisers must have scales internalized in order to be able to apply them spontaneously to the correct harmonic situation.

²² The construction of this diminished scale is as follows: whole step, followed by a half step, whole, half, whole, half, whole and half.

Listening and Transcribing

Listening is emphasized in most jazz pedagogies. Many educators state that listening is a key element in developing improvisation skills, concepts and style. Students are encouraged to listen to recordings as well as live performances. An academic foundation in jazz theory is in itself not enough. Berliner explains that, “Artists’ aural understanding and appreciation of music guide interpretation of theoretical material and drive its applications.”²³ Both theoretical knowledge and aural experience are essential elements for every jazz improviser.

Most jazz educators, including García and Cartwright, encourage singers to listen to great instrumentalists as well as vocalists. Cartwright notes that Ella Fitzgerald listened to and quoted from many tenor players including Dexter Gordon, Lester Young, and Arnett Cobb as well as trumpeters, including Louie Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie.²⁴

Meadows, Cartwright, and others suggest that students listen to as many different musicians’ solos on a given composition as possible. In addition, there are many songs based on the same harmonic structure. “I Got Rhythm” is one example. Over fifty songs have been written based on its chord progression, commonly referred to as “rhythm changes.”

Jamey Aebersold presents an extensive list in his Play-A-Long book entitled *I Got Rhythm: Changes in All Keys*.²⁵ Some titles include: “Anthropology,” “Apple Honey,” “Cottontail,” “Dexterity,” “Down for the Double,” “Flying Home,” “Jay Jay,” “Jumpin’

²³ Berliner, 168.

²⁴ Katharine Cartwright, “Quotation and Reference in Jazz Performance: Ella Fitzgerald’s ‘St. Louis Blues,’ 1957-1979” (Ph.D. diss., The City University of New York, 1998), 224-225.

²⁵ Jamey Aebersold, *I Got Rhythm: Changes in All Keys* (New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, Inc., 1991), 22.

at the Woodside,” “Lemon Drop,” “Lester Leaps In,” “Moose the Mooch,” “Oleo,” “One Bass Hit,” “Passport,” “Rhythm-A-Ning,” “Salt Peanuts,” “Shaw Nuff,” “Sonny’side,” “The Serpents’s Tooth,” “Tuxedo Junction,” and “Webb City.”

Studying many compositions based on the same or similar chord progression enables improvisers to gain ideas for melodic as well as harmonic improvisation. Students explore the different notes and extensions other musicians use and gain new ideas.

Many resources and articles include recommended listening guides or discographies. García recommends beginning with The Count Basie and Woody Herman Orchestras, followed by Miles Davis’ *Kind of Blue* album, Sonny Rollins’ sax recordings, Bill Evans’ piano recordings, and, Ella Fitzgerald.²⁶ Aitken and Aebersold’s list of recommended instrumentalists includes Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Cannonball Adderly, and Blue Mitchell. Jazz vocalists include Ella Fitzgerald, Dave Lambert, Chet Baker, Betty Carter, Eddie Jefferson, Al Jarreau, Mel Tormé, and Roy Eldridge.²⁷ Berliner reminds us that instrumentalists such as Melba Liston sang and memorized solos in order to learn them.²⁸ As Patricia Barber explains,

The history of the masters and the absorption of their sound is the starting point. One must first and foremost be humble to Ella Fitzgerald, Betty Carter, Carmen McRae, Sheila Jordan, Johnny Hartman, Bobby McFerrin and Sarah Vaughan among others. Learn and know their styles and understand what element of their style makes them so unique. Imitate them and then move on to discover the unique aspects of your own voice. Create a sound and delivery that is uniquely yours.²⁹

²⁶ García, 13.

²⁷ Aitken and Aebersold, 10.

²⁸ Berliner, 96.

²⁹ Patricia Barber, “The Jazz Vocalist in the Postmodern Age,” *Jazz Educators Journal* 29, no. 3 (1996): 73.

While most educators emphasize listening to great soloists, few extend the process to include the role of imitation and transcription in learning to improvise. Imitating great soloists provides insight into their approach to improvisation. One can learn about melodic and rhythmic phrasing, use of range and dynamics, shape, and tone. These are all qualities that give musicians their own style. Phrases or gestures that really stand out can be imitated and incorporated into new solos. It is very important, however, to learn a solo and then “make it your own.” Otherwise, there is the potential to sing the exact same solo as the original artist, which is not improvising. I find myself getting stuck in this place sometimes. One technique is to start my improvised chorus with a different idea than the original soloist’s opening gesture. This method forces me to truly improvise from the beginning.

While imitation on its own presents an opportunity for aural learning, transcribing adds another dimension of understanding. Once a solo is transcribed, it becomes a visual tool. I have found that the written “score” helps me understand the ideas and concepts the soloist is incorporating. For example, I can analyze a melodic phrase and discover what scale it comes from and how it is being used. I can look at a rhythmic figure and practice it out of time, if necessary, until I can sing it smoothly. Then it is easier to analyze what chord extensions are creating tension in a phrase. I present an example of a transcribed solo in chapter 5. Once I understand what another musician is doing, I can begin to incorporate those ideas into my own improvisation.

Chapter Four

Lesson Examples

This chapter presents one lesson for each of the elements and concepts presented in chapter 3. These are selected from the methods studied in this survey. Many lessons address more than one element simultaneously. The aspects of the lesson that directly relate to the specific area are emphasized in the discussion.

Lesson in Melodic Improvisation

Fredrickson has developed a comprehensive approach to scat singing based on an aural/melodic approach rather than a theoretical approach to improvisation.³⁰ The goal in Fredrickson's method is to enable singers to improvise almost immediately. He advocates introducing theoretical issues only after singers have gained confidence improvising in this manner. Fredrickson's process is illustrated in Examples 5a-5d.

Fredrickson begins by creating scat syllables over a given melody, as illustrated in Example 5a. He articulates longer note values with "du" and shorter note values with "dut." Student substitute other syllables once they are comfortable with these. He suggests: "vu," "du," "su," "wee," "vee," "zee," "bee," "vah," "dwee," and "skwee" for long sounds, and "dop," "bop," "vop," "dot," "bot," "zot," and "dit" for short sounds. In all cases, the melody remains unchanged.

³⁰ Fredrickson, 7-26.

The second step in Fredrickson's method involves altering and embellishing the melody by substituting or adding notes (Example 5b). Students are encouraged to change some of the notes, but are also reminded to keep the original melody in their ears. During this step only the melody is altered; the syllables and rhythm remains unchanged.

In the next step (Example 5c), students start with the original melody and create a few of their own rhythms. Fredrickson reminds students to begin by making simple rhythmic changes and to use the original syllables.

The fourth step is to slowly integrate the previously isolated concepts (Example 5d). Students use the original syllable names, but begin to add more of their own melody notes and rhythms. Once comfortable integrating these two skills, they can proceed to change a few of the melody notes and add a few new syllables while keeping the rhythm the same. Finally students put all three concepts together by incorporating a small amount of each at a time.

Fredrickson cautions students against becoming too confident too quickly. He emphasizes that students should master each concept in the order presented before advancing to the next step. This approach demands great discipline on the part of the student because it forces the student to focus on one aspect of improvisation at a time.

Example 5a.

Example 5b.

Example 5c

Example 5d

Reprinted, by permission, from Fredrickson, *Scat Singing Method*, 7-26

In my view, this method is limited. The entire process is based on the melody alone. No time is spent analyzing how the melody fits into the harmonic progression of the song. Students must depend entirely on their ears. This can limit vocalists' ability to alter the melody beyond simple variations.

Lesson Incorporating Non-Semantic Syllables

While using scat syllables to imitate instrument sounds was mentioned in some resources, only one source I reviewed presents exercises for imitating different drum sounds as well as drum patterns. Stoloff introduces scat syllables and rhythmic exercises

for vocal drum articulations.³¹ He begins with the basic elements of the drum set, the bass drum, snare, and hi-hat. For the closed hi-hat he suggests the single letter syllable “t” (pronounced tih). For a looser hi-hat sound, “tss” or “tsh” works well. For the bass drum, he suggests the syllables “doon” and “dn,” and for the snare, he suggests “ka.” Example 6 illustrates the different sound/syllable combinations.

Example 6

Reprinted, by permission, from Stoloff, *Scat! Vocal Improvisation Techniques*, 107

Stoloff also presents syllables and exercises to assist the vocalist in imitating the acoustic bass.³² He suggests “di-ga-ba” for triplets, and “doon-ga-doon” for dotted eighth-sixteenth-quarter note phrases as shown in Example 7.

Example 7

Reprinted, by permission, from Stoloff, *Scat! Vocal Improvisation Techniques*, 98

³¹ Stoloff, 107.

³² Stoloff, 98.

These non-semantic syllables can extend the scat singer's palette. They provide an opportunity to imitate and internalize the role of the different instruments in the rhythm section.

Rhythm Lesson

Stoloff's book includes a series of etudes that focus on rhythm and rhythmic phrasing. The purpose of the exercises is to strengthen the articulation of duple and triple syllable combination. He suggests that the student start at a tempo of M.M. quarter note =96 and gradually increase the tempo until all four etudes can be articulated clearly and precisely at a tempo of M.M. quarter note =160. Example 8 is an excerpt from the fourth etude.³³

Example 8

Reprinted, by permission, from Stoloff, *Scat! Vocal Improvisation Techniques*, 23

Many singers, myself included, are not as proficient at working with rhythmic articulation and phrasing as with melodic issues. I work with Stoloff's etudes as well as Sabanovich's exercises and find both extremely beneficial.

³³ Stoloff, 23.

Chord Progression Lesson

Doug Anderson compares the process of creating an improvised solo to the steps involved in building a house.³⁴ In both cases, steps are taken toward a larger goal. He begins with a twelve bar blues form and recommends using a pre-recorded rhythm section accompaniment throughout all the lessons.

In the first lesson, students sing the root of each chord. The roots represent the foundation of the house. The importance of a strong foundation is self-evident. In the next lesson, he incorporates rhythm. Using the roots progressions, students create an interesting, simple rhythm for each chord change. Once the students are comfortable with the rhythmic alterations, they have to put trimmings on the house by creating more complex rhythms. He instructs students to leave room for the windows (rests). In this manner, he incorporates the concept of space, which is important and often forgotten. He reminds the students that what they don't sing is as important as what they do sing.

Before moving on to the third lesson, he reviews the construction process so far. He then tells the students that it is time to let the neighbors know about the new home. He instructs the students to go to the neighboring notes above and below the root of the chord, but to remember to come home quite often. Home in this sense refers to the roots of the chords. Now the students are singing the roots, rhythms, and near neighbor tones.

In the fourth lesson, students tell the whole town about their new home. They use full range but are reminded to come "home" (to the root) at least twice a day to eat and sleep. By the fifth lesson, the students travel near and far telling the whole world about

³⁴ Doug Anderson, "You Can Teach Improvisation," *The Choral Journal* 21, no. 3 (1980): 17-18.

their new home. The teacher cautions them to think of home while they are gone and call, write, and visit often. He concludes by reminding them to think of home even if they are not there.

This approach allows students to increase the complexity of their solos in a gradual manner. The root progression provides a consistent reference throughout the process and functions as a strong foundation for the soloist. The analogy to the process of building a house is an effective tool for perceiving the parts of the process as leading to the whole solo.

Chord-Scale Lesson

Aebersold presents a comprehensive lesson for learning any chord-scale.³⁵ He suggests playing the scale ascending and descending from the root to the ninth scale degree. He recommends beginning slowly at first and gradually increasing the tempo. The next steps are to play the first five notes followed by the triad, seventh chord, and ninth chord in the same manner. This approach is effective for singers as well as instrumentalists. If the singers function as the accompanists as well, the lesson becomes more effective. The singers can see and hear the appropriate notes at the piano and feel the chords under their fingers.

Cartwright recommends using solfège to internalize the name and sound for each pitch. The syllables are much easier to say and more melodious to articulate than scale-

³⁵ Jamey Aebersold, *How to Play Jazz and Improvise* (New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, Inc., 1992), 7.

degree numbers. This form of solfège is taught mostly in Europe (especially France); American educators tend to teach “movable do.”

The three forms of solfège Cartwright has developed for learning scales and patterns are presented in examples 9a-c. In “Chromatic” solfège, illustrated in Example 9a, students articulate each note with its syllable. This form helps singers increase their sense of absolute pitch and develop skills in syllabic articulation. Example 6b illustrates the same phrase sung in “melodic” solfège, which combines some chromatic solfège with some melisma. This approach articulates only the main notes of a scale pattern; the remaining pitches are sung as a melismatic passage. The most important notes of the pattern are emphasized without disrupting up the flow of the phrase. “Harmonic” solfège (Example 9c), is another effective approach. In harmonic solfège, the singer articulates only the syllable of the chord root. The rest of the notes in the scale are sung as a melismatic phrase. Cartwright points out that this approach develops the vowel-consonant palette for scat-singing and enhances one’s ability to hear root and key notes as tonal centers.³⁶

Example 9a
C7

Example 9b
C7

Example 9c
C7

³⁶Katharine Cartwright, lesson with author, 15 February 2000.

Transcribing Lesson

Cartwright has developed a comprehensive approach to transcribing choruses from recordings.³⁷ Listening is the first and most important element in the process. Her approach involves memorizing the solo before beginning to transcribe. She suggests listening to the recording several times while looking at the score to become familiar with the overall structure. Students then become actively involved in the process by learning the root progression and playing the chord progression at the piano.

The next step involves shadowing the soloist as closely as possible for whole choruses. Once students have practiced imitating the entire solo without stopping, they break up the performance and focus on difficult passages. The final step is to once again work with the whole solo and learn to sing simultaneously with the improviser. Students strive for rhythmic and melodic unison and finally attempt to duplicate articulation, ornamentation, and dynamics.

The transcription process follows. The initial step is to determine the degree of rhythmic detail to be notated. She recommends that students focus on catching the main notes first and then think about symbols for notating articulations. Cartwright stresses the importance of working away from the piano as much as possible in order to develop good listening skills. The piano should only be used to check a note or phrase.

For rapid and challenging melodic passages, students can pause the tape immediately following the difficult note in order to capture the sound while the note is

³⁷ This process is presented in Dr. Cartwright's handout, "Learning and Transcribing Choruses From Recordings." Dr. Cartwright, *Improvisation Techniques* (Music 140A-C), San José State University, 16 December 1999.

still ringing. They can also tap their fingers to keep the main pulse while listening or singing difficult rhythmic passages. The same process can be used at the ends of measures where passages cross over the bar line once the melodic and rhythmic skeleton of the solo is transcribed. Cartwright recommends capturing the “middle ground” rhythmic motion in faster performances and shorter forms using black and white note heads to represent long and short durations. Notes should be written as closely as possible to where they sound in the measure.

Jazz musicians generally agree that transcribing is a very important tool in learning to improvise.³⁸ In my view, it should be incorporated into all singers’ studies. The process develops listening skills and the transcription helps students understand what musical elements improvisers are incorporating in their solos.

³⁸ Berliner, 99.

Chapter 5

Putting It All Together

There are many concepts to practice and just as many methods for doing so. This chapter draws from those lessons that I found most useful, and presents them in the order I use when learning a new song. This is not to imply that there is one right way; each is an important part of a practice routine.

I like to begin by listening. I find several recordings, both instrumental and vocal, of each tune. After getting an overall sense of the song, I focus on melody, lyrics, chord progressions, phrasing, beginnings, and endings. I look at the music, follow the contour of the melody, and listen to how it fits in with the chords. I listen for any unexpected harmonic changes in the progression. These might be the challenging areas for improvising.

The next thing I do is to memorize the root progression in solfège in order to learn the pitches and the intervals between them. This becomes a jumping off point for improvising and an anchor if I get lost. It is especially important in songs where there are slippery areas. For example, in “All the Things You Are,” the root progression basically moves in fourths.³⁹ There are a few areas, however where the bass moves a m2 to tonicize a new key area. This happens between mm. 5-6, 13-14, and 20-21. Memorizing the root progression helps me know where these areas are in the song. I practice with and

³⁹ A lead sheet of “All the Things You Are” is included in the Appendix.

without the music or a pre-recorded rhythm section to be sure I have the progression internalized.

A pre-recorded rhythm section is very useful for practice. The Aebersold *Play-A-Long* sets are an excellent resource. One drawback for the singer is that the arrangements are only provided in standard keys. There are several computer programs that allow the user to create a rhythm section in any key. I use *Band in a Box* from PG Music to practice and create lead sheets. This allows me to input chords, choose a style, transpose keys and work with different tempos. The program has a looping function that I find helpful for focusing on difficult passages. While a computer can be a useful tool for practice, I try to keep in mind that it does not replace playing the chords myself and working with other musicians. Sometimes I get lazy and realize that several days have gone by, and I haven't touched the piano. I then unplug the computer for a while.

I practice chords, scales, and patterns. These are the basic vocabulary for improvising that Baker, Anderson, Aitken, Aebersold, and others emphasize in their approaches. Cartwright emphasizes that each should be practiced with a rhythm section accompaniment, out of time, and at the piano. I try to sing the correct notes before checking them at the piano. This way a practice session becomes an ear-training lesson as well. If there is a difficult passage in the song, I isolate and practice the melody, root progression, and scales over that part (out of time as well as in time). Then I sing leading into and out of the area. One challenging area is in the bridge of "All the Things You Are." The last chord is a C7augmented. This implies that the fifth degree of the chord is raised from a G-natural to a G-sharp. The G-sharp is very important because it is the

final melody note in the bridge, m. 24 and the first melody note in the last section of the song, m. 25. The scale degree pattern 1-2-3-5 incorporates the G-sharp so I have to hear that note internally to connect these sections of the song.

I also memorize and transcribe solos, as recommended by Cartwright. This process enables me to work with another musician's ideas. I listen, not only to what notes are played, but also to how they are being articulated. I imitate the phrasing, dynamics, tone, and rhythm. Cartwright suggests that students imagine themselves to be that musician and improvise their own choruses as s/he would. I sing several of my own choruses. This is one way to help develop a musical "style." Most improvisers cite many other musicians who have had a tremendous influence upon their playing.

Memorizing Nate Pruitt's solo on "Autumn Leaves" has helped me become more conscious of rhythm.⁴⁰ His solo is very rhythmic. He chooses scat syllables that begin with a "b," or "d" fairly consistently and incorporates very little melisma. He also scats in short rhythmic phrases that move around a chosen note in mm. 5-8, 17-18, and 21-22. The range of Pruitt's scat is not that extensive, although at the peak of a chromatic phrase he reaches higher notes in his range.

His bluesy style is clearly expressed in mm. 11-12, and 23-24. There is a descending chromatic bass line in mm. 27-28. Pruitt creates a fast (sixteenth note) run to quarter note motivic passage where beats one and three descend chromatically with the bass line. By memorizing his solo, I can imitate and incorporate some of his ideas into my own scat on this and other songs.

⁴⁰ A transcription of Nate Pruitt's scat solo is included in the Appendix.

Transcribing a solo gives me even more ideas for scatting. Analyzing Pruitt's solo helps me visualize what I hear and understand what musical ideas he draws upon. For example, he sings chromatic passages at mm. 11-12, 23-24, and 30-31. There is tension in the sound he creates. He incorporates notes from the blues scale over major seventh chords. He also incorporates repetition in mm. 9, 10, and 18. He sings around the fifth of the chord in m. 9 that becomes the ninth of the chord in m. 10. The repeated root to the flat ninth in m. 18 is like an ending point before building chromatically to the last four measures of the song.

As an improviser, I can incorporate blues scales into my singing. I also realize that a solo doesn't have to be that busy (in number of pitches and range) in order to be creative. It does however need to be rhythmically interesting. Pruitt also incorporates space into his scat. Each phrase feels like a thought has a beginning and an ending. The space feels natural between ideas in his solo.

I find all of the approaches I discuss above to be very useful. Some I use with all the songs I am learning while others I use more often with certain material.

Conclusions

While there are an increasing number of methods for learning improvisation geared to instrumentalists, there are still limited resources for the solo jazz vocalist in the area of improvisation. Jazz educators are beginning to explore this issue and have come to several conclusions. Mike Campbell explains that many jazz choir directors themselves are really instrumentalists who have fallen in love with jazz singing but have never performed as solo jazz singers.⁴¹ Patricia Madura and others point to the fact that some teachers may have had limited training as jazz vocalists and may not know how to improvise themselves. Cartwright, Grier, Anderson, and others suggest that singers have been trained apart from instrumentalists due to a belief that singers must be taught differently. As a result, singers are not learning the same basic material and developing the same skills as instrumentalists.

Of the two proclaimed schools of teaching, the instrumental approach is by far the most comprehensive. Vocalists are required to become proficient in jazz theory as well as develop “big ears.” The vocal approach relies predominantly on imitation, which is useful in the moment, but may not assist the vocalist in improvising in different settings. Imitation is an element of the instrumental approach, but is not the only resource for a

⁴¹ Mike Campbell, “Where are the Student Solo Jazz Singers?” *Jazz Educators Journal* 29, no. 3 (1996): 72.

singer. I agree with David Baker and others who have found that the jazz singer needs it all: great analytical and great aural skills.

While most resources emphasize the importance of listening to jazz and hearing live jazz performances, few articulated the importance of actually getting out there and improvising. In the academic environment, it is very easy to spend time preparing to improvise by practicing scales, arpeggios, and exercises. The other half of the learning process can only happen when students are actually improvising. While the tools for improvisation are very important, they cannot fully prepare the student. As Dieter Glawischning points out,

Jazz education pedagogy should not be the ends but simply the means to developing creativity. The very steps taken and diligence given to learning scales and chords in preparation for the moment of spontaneous creativity can become a trap in the moment of creativity...and that moment may become no more than a reproduction of learned habits.⁴²

The art of scat is a combination of knowledge, listening, and creativity. As in any improvisatory art form, you must take what you have spent a lifetime studying and practicing and, while in the moment, let it all go and trust your sense of creativity and heart.

⁴² Dieter Glawischning, "Present Boom In Jazz Education- A Trap for Creativity?" *Jazzforschung* 28 (1996): 77.

Appendix

All The Things You Are

Jerome Kern & Oscar Hammerstein II

Fm7 Bbm7 Eb7 AbΔ7
 You are the prom-ised kiss of spring-time that

5 DbΔ7 Dm7 G7 CΔ7 CΔ7
 makes the lone-ly win-ter seem-long.

9 Cm7 Fm7 Bb7 EbΔ7
 You are the breath-less hush of eve-ning that

13 AbΔ7 Aø D7 GΔ7 GΔ7
 trem-bles on the brink of a love-ly song. You are the

17 Aø D7 GΔ7 GΔ7
 an-gel glow that lights a star. The dear-est

21 F#ø B7 EΔ7 C7b13
 things I know are what you are.

25 Fm7 Bbm7 Eb7 AbΔ7

Some day my hap - py arms will hold you, and

29 DbΔ7 Dbm7 Gb7 Cm7 B°

some day I'll know that 3 mo - ment di - vine. when

33 Bbm7 Eb7 AbΔ7 Gø C7b9

all the things you are are mine.

Autumn Leaves

Joseph Kosma & Johnny Mercer

Melody

The fall - ing leaves _____ drift by my

Scat Solo

Mel.

win - dow, _____ The au - tumn leaves _____ of red and

SS

Mel.

gold; I see your lips, _____ the sum - mer

SS

Chords: Dm7, G7, CΔ7, FΔ7, Bø, E7, Am, Dm7, G7

Triplets: 3, 3, 3

The musical score is written for a vocal instrument, likely a voice or saxophone. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a 'Melody' line and a 'Scat Solo' (SS) line. The first system covers the lyrics 'The fall - ing leaves _____ drift by my'. The second system covers 'win - dow, _____ The au - tumn leaves _____ of red and'. The third system covers 'gold; I see your lips, _____ the sum - mer'. Chords are indicated above the melody lines: Dm7 and G7 in the first system; CΔ7, FΔ7, Bø, and E7 in the second; and Am, Dm7, and G7 in the third. There are three triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over a bracket) in the SS lines: one at the beginning of the second system, and two in the third system. The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are written below the melody lines, with blank lines indicating where the melody continues.

Mel. CΔ7 FΔ7 B^ø E7

11 kiss - es, _____ The sun - burned hands _____ I used to

SS

Mel. Am B^ø E7

15 hold. _____ Since you went a - way _____ the days grow

SS

Mel. Am Am Dm7 G7

19 long, _____ And soon I'll hear _____ old win - ter's

SS

Mel. CΔ7 CΔ7 B^ø

23 song, _____ But I miss you most of

SS

26 E7 Am7 Ab7

Mel. all, my dar - - - ling,

SS

28 Gm7 F#7 FΔ7 E7

Mel. When au - - - turn leaves start to

SS

31 Am Am

Mel. fall.

SS

ScottMusicPublications

March 15, 1999

Diane Bock
3065 Manda Dr.
San Jose, CA 95124

Dear Diane,

This will serve as your permission to use examples from the *Scat Singing Method* in your thesis. Let us know if you need anything else. Good luck.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Dr. Scott Fredrickson
President

4319 Perrier St.
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Mr. Stubbs Music ASCAP

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Antonio J. García, Associate Professor
Jazz Studies & Integrated Arts

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March 17, 2000

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to cite any of my published articles, including "Pedagogical Scat,"
within her thesis project.**

Sincerely,

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To Whom It May Concern,

I hereby grant Diane Bock permission to use my seat example in her thesis project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Nate Pruitt", followed by a horizontal line.

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