2009-05-13

Strategies for Developing a Jazz and Contemporary Vocal Ensemble Sound for the Traditional Chamber Choir

Lisanne Elizabeth Lyons

University of Miami, lisannelyons@earthlink.net

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A doctoral essay submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING A JAZZ AND
CONTEMPORARY VOCAL ENSEMBLE SOUND FOR THE
TRADITIONAL CHAMBER CHOIR

Lisanne Elizabeth Lyons

Approved:

Rachel L. Lebon, Ph.D.
Professor of Jazz Vocal Performance

Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Lawrence Lapin, M.M.
Professor of Studio Music and Jazz
Program Director, Jazz Vocal Performance

Donald Coffman, M.M.
Assistant Chair and Professor
of Studio Music and Jazz

Paul F. Wilson, Ph.D.
Professor of Theory and Composition
LYONS, LISANNE
D.M.A., Jazz Performance
Strategies for Developing a Jazz and Contemporary Vocal Ensemble Sound for the Traditional Chamber Choir
(May 2009)

Abstract of a doctoral essay at the University of Miami.

Doctoral essay supervised by Professor Rachel L. Lebon.
No. of pages in text (121)

A comparison and analysis of existing texts whose focus was jazz and contemporary vocal ensemble techniques, in combination with the information gathered from interviews, as well as the author’s personal teaching and professional experience as a jazz vocal artist, group singer, and jazz vocal ensemble director, served as the basis for developing strategies for a jazz and contemporary vocal ensemble sound. The major elements found to be the most critical for inclusion in sequence include: commonalities and differences, sound system and vocal production, ballad interpretation, swing interpretation, and contemporary interpretation. It is the author’s intention to design an easy-to-follow guideline for the traditional choral director whose desire is to develop a jazz vocal ensemble within the choral program. The strategies presented are intended to introduce basic concepts of vocal production and style that are deemed relevant and idiomatic for the jazz and contemporary vocal ensemble. A compact disc is also included, demonstrating the written examples. A series of interviews were also conducted with Professor Larry Lapin (University of Miami), Dr. Stephen Zegree (Western Michigan
University), Kerry Marsh (Sacramento State University), Janis Seigel (Manhattan Transfer), Lauren Kinhan (New York Voices), Michelle Amato (Yanni/Disney/studio singer), and Julia Dollison (Down Beat Jazz Vocal Winner).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those individuals who took their time to contribute to this paper. Especially to my most respected colleagues Michelle Amato, Janis Seigel, Julia Dollison, Lauren Kinhan, Larry Lapin Kerry Marsh, and Steve Zegree.

To the members of my committee, thank you for your time and efforts, it was greatly appreciated. Special thanks to Dr. Rachel Lebon and Paul Wilson; your support and guidance.

I would also like to thank all the wonderful musicians and vocalists who greatly contributed to the recording. Special thanks to Michelle Amato, Paul Bedal, Chuck Bergeron, Greg Diaz, Rick Harris, Mike Gullo, Neil Kumar, Dr. Rachel Lebon, Wendy Pederson, Eric Roberts, and Rudolfo Zuniga. I couldn’t have done it without you.

Special thanks to my Mom, Steve and family for your unwavering love and support.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF EXAMPLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TRACKS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources for the Jazz Vocal Ensemble</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources on Commercial Singing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal and Magazine Articles</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Reference Books</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL CHAMBER CHOIR AND JAZZ VOCAL ENSEMBLES</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibrato</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight-Tone or Minimal Vibrato</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Concerns of Straight-Tone Singing</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowels and the Vocal Sound</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonants</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breath Management</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matter of Style</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration of Commonalities and Contrasts</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 THE SOUND SYSTEM AND VOCAL PRODUCTION</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Suggestions</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Production</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Vocal Adjustments</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resonation and Resonators</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resonance Descriptors</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 BALLAD INTERPRETATION ................................................................. 45
   Word Articulation ...................................................................... 49
   Timbre and Harmonic Considerations ....................................... 52
   Practice Suggestions ............................................................... 54

7 SWING INTERPRETATION ................................................................. 57
   The Quarter Note ........................................................................ 58
   Straight Eighth Note ................................................................... 61
   Swing Eighth Note ........................................................................ 63
   Syncopation and Inflection ......................................................... 67
   Breath Articulation ....................................................................... 68
   Word Articulation ......................................................................... 74
   Performance Suggestions ............................................................ 76

8 CONTEMPORARY STYLES ................................................................. 78
   The Quarter Note Subdivision ...................................................... 78
   Vibrato ....................................................................................... 79
   Vowel Production and Vowel Sound ............................................ 82
   Practice Suggestions .................................................................... 83

9 DISCUSSION OF INTERVIEWS .......................................................... 85
   Discussion of Interviews with Jazz Vocal Ensemble Directors .......... 85
   Commonalities and Differences Between Traditional Choral and Jazz
   Vocal Ensembles ......................................................................... 86
   Commonalities Shared Between Jazz Instrumental and Jazz Vocal Groups...
   Sound System ........................................................................... 87
   Ideal Vocal Sound........................................................................ 87
   Discussion of Interviews with Vocal Artists .................................... 88
   Classical Training ......................................................................... 89
   Vocal Adjustments and Stylistic Influences for Ensemble Singing .... 90
   Microphone Technique ............................................................... 91
   Jazz Influence and Jazz Articulation ............................................ 91
   Contemporary Interpretation ...................................................... 92

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................... 93

APPENDIX A .................................................................................. 95

APPENDIX B .................................................................................. 97

APPENDIX C .................................................................................. 101
## LIST OF EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example 4.1.</td>
<td>Demonstrations of Commonalities and Contrasts</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 6.1.</td>
<td>Demonstrating Ballad Interpretation</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.1.</td>
<td>Walking Bass Line</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.2.</td>
<td>Classical Quarter-Note Articulation</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.3.</td>
<td>Jazz Quarter Note Articulation</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.4.</td>
<td>Hidden Rests Between Quarter Notes</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.5.</td>
<td>Straight Eighth-Notes</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.6.</td>
<td>Jazz Straight Eighth Notes with Accents</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.7.</td>
<td>Upbeat (or Offbeat) Demonstration</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.8.</td>
<td>Triplet Eighth-Note Groupings</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.9.</td>
<td>First Partial Slurred Eighth-Note Triplets</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.10</td>
<td>Common Swing Eighth-Note Notation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.11.</td>
<td>Swing Quarter Notes</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.12.</td>
<td>Swing Upbeats (Offbeats)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.13.</td>
<td>Syncopation of a Melodic Line</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.14.</td>
<td>Warm Up Demonstration</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.15.</td>
<td>Demonstration of a Vocal Jazz Arrangement</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 7.16.</td>
<td>Demonstration of Phonetic Spelling</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 8.1.</td>
<td>Sixteenth-Note Subdivision With Accents</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 8.2.</td>
<td>Demonstrating Diaphragmatic Vibrato</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 8.3.</td>
<td>Demonstration of an R&amp;B Style</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TRACKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Track 1</td>
<td>“More Than You Know”</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 2</td>
<td>“More Than You Know”</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 3</td>
<td>“More Than You Know”</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 4</td>
<td>“The More I See You”</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 5</td>
<td>“The More I See You”</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 6</td>
<td>Walking Bass Line</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 7</td>
<td>Classical Quarter-Note Articulation</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 8</td>
<td>Jazz Quarter Note Articulation</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 9</td>
<td>Jazz Straight Eighth Notes</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 10</td>
<td>Jazz Straight Eighth Notes With Accents</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 11</td>
<td>Upbeat (or Offbeat) Demonstration</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 12</td>
<td>Triplet Eighth-Note Groupings</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 13</td>
<td>First Partial Slurred Eighth-Note Triplets</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 14</td>
<td>Swing Quarter Notes</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 15</td>
<td>Swing Upbeats (Offbeats)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 16</td>
<td>Warm-Up Demonstration</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track 17</td>
<td>“It’s All Right With Me”</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1. Phonetic Spelling of Diphthongs</th>
<th>48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there have been an increasing number of universities, colleges, high schools, and middle schools interested in implementing a jazz vocal ensemble within their already traditionally (classically) based choral program. It has already been established amongst educators that jazz vocal ensembles should be included and are an asset to a comprehensive choral program. “It is important to create an awareness of the value that jazz music has and its influence on American culture. Jazz has a vital history in our culture and is important for the choral teacher to pass the knowledge on to singers.” 1

It has also been noted that participation in such an ensemble is tremendously appealing to students as well as audiences. It generates more attention for the overall choral program, is an effective recruitment tool, and, more importantly, it greatly improves students’ overall musicianship. It also exposes them to an art form that is indigenous and unique to the American culture.

Colleges and universities are graduating music educators and choral directors with skills specific to their area such as theory, choral conducting, general music, history, etc. According to jazz vocal educator and professional jazz vocalist Vijay Singh, there are only a few institutions of higher learning that offer courses in jazz pedagogy and fewer institutions that require their majors to take classes outside of their genre. It is important to note that the majority of universities and colleges have established jazz bands and jazz

instrumental programs but there are only a few that include jazz vocal programs or jazz vocal ensembles. Singh also states that the view also exists in the choral community the opinion that “beyond textbooks and classes, there is a strong belief in jazz education circles that “jazz is caught, not taught,” and a primary source of inspiration comes from the educator’s own experiences studying, performing, and emulating jazz concepts.”

Still, there are many choral directors who would like to direct a jazz vocal ensemble but have not had the opportunity to study jazz. Therefore, “…many choral educators feel unqualified to teach jazz based on their limited experiences, lack of jazz pedagogy, or ignorance.” Choral directors who wish to implement a jazz vocal ensemble would then have to resort to workshops, method books, and other resources to help fill in the gap.

Historically, many of the jazz vocal ensembles have been founded and directed by educators who come primarily from instrumental backgrounds. In his 1993 study, Russ Baird observed that many of those directors had only a small amount of vocal or choral experience. Many started directing as a passion and service to teach the jazz art form to students who were excited to explore other styles and genres. Baird writes, “…this lack of choral/vocal experience often creates problems, especially in the area of how to use the vocal instrument properly to produce tone. Yet tone is cited as Job1 in vocal jazz by some of our foremost jazz educators…” He also stated that the interviewees agreed about the importance of understanding the voice and the vocal process and learning how to listen for the right sound that is appropriate for the literature.

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3 Ibid., 47.

In another article, Baird conducted a survey of six prominent vocal jazz educators (Frank Gnandt, Jerry Nowak, Phil Mattson, Ward Swingle, John Trepp, and Steve Zegree) in an effort to discover the “right sound” in vocal jazz. He found there was agreement “that the sound is beautiful, resonant, vibrant, open and natural. The right sound moves upward, forward, and horizontally with buoyancy and spin.” Aside from general concepts, observations, and imagery, there were no specific strategies addressing the vocal process or the subtle adjustments a singer needs to make to produce the desired sounds.

It is the author’s opinion that directors who have experience as jazz musicians traditionally have a better understanding of the esthetics and stylistic concepts that are essential for a jazz vocal ensemble sound. This is based on their extensive experience as working musicians with various instrumental ensembles and vocal groups outside the academic arena. It is also the author’s opinion that directors who have a strong academic background in jazz studies combined with experience as a jazz vocal performer have a kinesthetic awareness of the vocal process.

Need for Study

Only within the last several years have students graduated with degrees in jazz studies with a background in jazz vocal performance. Many are currently developing and directing jazz vocal ensembles all over the country. However, to the author’s knowledge, there is little, if any, current literature or articles written by those recent graduates illustrating in-depth concepts on vocal methods needed when making the transition from a traditional choir sound to a jazz vocal ensemble sound.

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While there are many choral directors who will agree that there exist stylistic differences in approach to teaching jazz and traditional vocal ensembles, most directors and singers adhere to the fundamental concepts of healthy vocal techniques and choral blend. However, there are also adjustments that the singer must make with regard to microphone singing. In addition, the jazz vocal idiom, in a way that it affects timbre, vowels, consonants, rhythmic articulations, and inflections, are not identical to the traditional way of singing.

The art of microphone singing has long established techniques and traditions among jazz vocal soloists and group singers. Henry Pleasants writes, “…the popular singer does things, primarily in matters of phrasing, shading, rhythm, enunciation, accentuation and even vocal production, that lie beyond the capabilities and the predilections of most classical singers. It’s not a question of superiority or inferiority. It is a question of musical idiom.” However, the novice jazz vocal ensemble director may not easily detect or identify many of the aforementioned subtleties and concepts. This would seem to support the need for literature that can provide a detailed explanation of the vocal process and “proprioceptive” awareness that one must have when making the transition from a classical vocal sound to a jazz and contemporary vocal sound.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this paper is to design an easy-to-follow guideline introducing basic concepts for achieving a jazz and contemporary vocal ensemble sound. The strategies reflect a logical sequence of important stylistic elements that are recognized by leading jazz vocal educators as important and relevant to the art form. Existing texts that

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focus on the vocal production and aspects of the vocal jazz ensemble techniques have also been referred to for assistance in developing the strategies.

Additional insights and descriptions of these vocal techniques and concepts will also be included from statements offered by selected ensemble directors and professional singers. These have been combined with the author’s experience as a professional jazz vocal soloist and group singer, and university jazz vocal ensemble program director who once faced a similar situation: transforming a traditional show-choir and classical choir into a nationally recognized jazz vocal ensemble.

**Research Questions**

Specific research questions to be addressed by this study include:

1) What are the commonalities and differences shared between jazz vocal ensembles and traditional choirs in terms of vibrato, consonants, breath, management, and style?

2) What are the important idiomatic differences in terms of vocal production (i.e., vowels, consonants, timbre, resonance) between jazz and traditional choirs and particularly their effect on the female voice?

3) How does the use of sound reinforcement (or system) affect the vocal production in terms of dynamics, diction, vowel shapes, resonance, balance, blend, and use of breath?

4) What are the important idiomatic elements of jazz ballad interpretation as it applies to word articulation, resonance, vibrato, diction, intonation, harmonic consideration and phrasing?
5) What are the important idiomatic characteristics of swing interpretation as it applies to the treatment of the quarter note, eighth-note subdivision, syncopation, inflection, breath articulation, diction, and overall time-feel?

6) What are the important idiomatic characteristics of contemporary interpretation as it applies to the treatment of the quarter note, eighth-note and sixteenth-note subdivision, vocal production, and vibrato?

7) Is there a general consensus between vocal ensemble directors and professional jazz/contemporary vocalists in regards to their views about rhythmic articulation, time feel, vocal production, sound system, and microphone technique?
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed for this paper much of the available literature written specifically for jazz and commercial voice and the jazz vocal ensemble. To the author’s knowledge, there exist only three resources that are totally devoted to the development and teaching of jazz vocal ensemble techniques. This paper also reviews reference books, dissertations, journal articles, and books on vocal pedagogy. The information obtained from these sources factors into the strategies applied for developing a healthy jazz and contemporary vocal sound within the traditional choir.

Resources for the Jazz Vocal Ensemble

Doug Anderson wrote one of the first publications that addressed concepts specifically applicable to the jazz vocal ensemble and show choir. The Jazz and Showchoir Handbook II was written for conductors who are unfamiliar with the art form. Examples for the jazz choirs include some phrasing techniques, conducting approaches, articulation exercises, sound reinforcement, rhythm section techniques, literature and discography listings, and presentation. However, it is a general overview and does not illustrate a step-by-step method or approach for his written examples. For study and analysis the book includes a CD of a college group performing various musical styles. However, the book does not include recordings of the author’s written examples.

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Stephen Zegree, director of the Western Michigan University Jazz Vocal Program, has written the most recent publication devoted to the teaching of vocal jazz and contemporary concepts to an ensemble. *The Complete Guide to Teaching Vocal Jazz* serves as a very useful source for the would-be jazz vocal ensemble director. The book focuses on the many elements that contribute to the jazz vocal ensemble sound. However, the chapters serve as a general overview and do not go into great detail about the vocal process in terms of achieving a sound. Some of the concepts discussed that are of interest to this study are the chapters devoted to style, rehearsal techniques, and the sound reinforcement system. Aside from providing information for the vocal musician and ensemble director, the listed appendices serve as a comprehensive guide for books that pertain to jazz solo voice, vocal groups, vocal improvisation, magazines and periodicals, websites, professional organizations, recording sources, and vocal jazz publishers. One of the unique aspects of this book is the inclusion of a CD that clearly illustrates Zegree’s concepts for the written musical examples.

The book *Vocal Jazz Style* by Kirby Shaw, is one of the most comprehensive texts available for jazz vocal ensemble techniques, more specifically, jazz vocal inflections. The book was published in 1987, but the author was only recently made aware of this publication during this research. The book is totally devoted to the art and performance of jazz vocal inflection as it applies to swing. Shaw also emphasizes “standards of tone production, blend and balance upon the same Western European-

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derived choral practices found in the vast majority of American public school choral organizations.”

The book is well organized and moves sequentially from the basic swing feel through seventeen additional examples of jazz inflections. The written exercises are four measures in length and are written for two to four-part choral texture in accessible keys for beginning students. Accompanying the booklet is a professionally recorded vocal/instrumental CD for analysis and imitation. There is some attention to vocal application, but the book does not address a specific vocal sound or clearly define the more basic steps one must take when learning how to swing. However, it is a great book to explore once the basic elements are in place.

**Resources on Commercial Singing**

In 1999, Rachel Lebon released her book *The Professional Vocalist: A Handbook for Commercial Singers and Teachers*. This book attempts to bridge the gap between classical technique and the technique required for the contemporary singer. In this useful book, Lebon guides the singer through the “tools of the trade” for the aspiring contemporary singer and provides sound pedagogical approaches that specifically address the needs of a singer who wishes to perform in the commercial idiom.

In her follow-up, *The Versatile Vocalist: Singing Authentically in Contrasting Styles and Idioms*, Lebon discusses the musical and vocal adjustments a singer needs to make when performing in a variety of musical settings and accompaniments.

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10 Ibid., 3.


The book also devotes many chapters to the technique of microphone singing, as well as describing strategies for crossing over from classical or acoustical singing to microphone singing. Although the focus of the text are techniques used for solo contemporary singing, much of the information can be applied to the jazz vocal ensemble singer.

Stephanie Nakasian’s *It’s Not On the Page* is a guide written for teachers, students, and professional singers. The book’s user-friendly approach is more specifically for the novice jazz singer in regards to basic concepts of swing articulation, improvisation, listening, and solo interpretation. Although geared towards the jazz vocal soloist, many of the book’s concepts can be applied to the jazz vocal ensemble. The book devotes a long chapter to the elements of jazz style as they relate to song form, blues scale and form, and rhythmic interpretation in both swing and straight eighth-note feels. The author found this chapter to be the most comprehensive and informative section. One of the book’s strengths is the fact that the described methods are based on the author’s real-life experience as an acclaimed jazz singer, jazz group singer (with Jon Hendricks), and teacher. Accompanying the book is a CD of the author demonstrating the written examples.

*Born to Sing* is a book written by Howard Austin and Elisabeth Howard is intended for the commercial singer. The book was written by teachers who claim to have had successfully trained singers for Broadway and for solo careers in commercial music. They have a background in voice from the Juilliard School of Music and faculty positions at Hunter College in New York City and at Indiana University.

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14 Howard Austin and Elisabeth Howard, *Born To Sing* (California, Music World: 1985).
University. The present author found valuable information in regards to use of vibrato, resonance description, and creative ways to illustrate phonetically the different vocal sounds for readers who may not understand the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) spelling. There are no references to microphone singing although there are many chapters devoted to style and stylistic inflection for various styles of contemporary singing.

**Journal and Magazine Articles**

Various articles published in *National Association of Teachers of Singing, Journal of Singing, Choral Journal* and *International Association of Jazz Educators* contain material and interviews that focus on jazz vocal ensembles, jazz vocal history, vocal health, solo styles, improvisation, curriculum, literature, selected discography, and interviews of important jazz vocal program directors. Articles written by Russ Baird, Nicholas Isherwood, and Gayle Walker were helpful to the author when designing the strategies.

**Historical Reference Books**

One of the most informative books to date is *The Great American Popular Singers*, by Henry Pleasants.¹⁵ This book, published in 1974, delineates important figures that have made significant contributions towards the art form of popular and jazz vocal performance. It is important to note the author’s awareness of the adjustments singers made once the microphone was invented and employed as an integral part of their performance. He states that this inclusion allowed non-classical

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vocalists to vary their phrasing of a song “as a lyrical extension of speech,” allowing
the microphone to project the voice in a more relaxed, intimate, conversational range
and attitude. The art of jazz singing today would not exist without the aid of the
microphone, and Pleasants makes several comparisons throughout the book between
classical and jazz voice production with well-known artists

16 Ibid., 35.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Delimitations

The purpose of this paper is to develop vocal strategies for the novice jazz vocal ensemble directors and their singers. The paper will focus on vocal production and how it is applied to the performance of three distinct styles: ballad, swing, and contemporary. This is not intended to be a pedagogical study of the voice, although references and terminology may be derived from select vocal pedagogical resources in support of the desired vocal approach.

It is understood that the inclusion of a jazz choir ensemble would supplement the already existing offerings in a choral program. The director should already have a general grasp of concepts related to basic healthy vocal production, harmony, rhythm, melody and musical form. Because most conductors/directors use psychological devices and terms to inspire a vocal performance or vocal color, it may be necessary to include certain descriptive terminology in the written examples.

The essay is also not intended to be a comprehensive study in all the styles of music that contribute immensely to the jazz vocal literature. Latin music is one of those styles that have been excluded from the study. Aside from the various sophisticated rhythmic elements and sounds of Latin music (Bossa Nova, Samba, Salsa, etc.), the vocal production is similar to the aforementioned idioms. However, it is the author’s opinion
that an entire separate study could be devoted to the contributions of Latin music: its language, culture, composers, and compositions. Therefore, this will not be included in this essay.

One of the important elements of the overall sound in a jazz vocal ensemble is the rhythm section accompaniment. The rhythm section usually consists of the following instruments: piano, bass (acoustic or electric), drums, guitar, and sometimes an occasional horn or horn section. Since this paper is devoted to the vocal process, references to the rhythm section are only made within the context of how it inspires the desired particular vocal color, articulation, phrasing, rhythmic feel and attitude.

Improvisation is another very important element in jazz performance. The art of improvisation is much too vast and extensive to include in this paper. Currently, there are a number of valuable resources available for the director and student who may want to explore this challenging and rewarding art form. The scat syllables (nonsense syllables) used in the examples are meant to imitate the phrasing and articulation of a horn player.

Finally, the sound reinforcement system is an integral part of the jazz vocal ensemble sound. It allows the singers to be heard over the rhythm section without having to push their voices. It also allows the individual singer to relax and produce the desired conversational sound. All the suggested vocal adjustments will be oriented for microphone use and can be adapted to any sound system. Several sound systems and brands are available and can be tailor-made to fit the needs of an ensemble of any size. References to specific brand of sound systems and microphones will not be included in this study but can be found in books listed in the Bibliography section.
Organization of Study

The essay has five chapters (following this one) focusing on: differences and commonalities between classical and jazz vocal ensembles, sound system and vocal production, ballad, swing, and contemporary styles. Chapter Four explores the commonalities and differences shared between a traditional chamber choir and a jazz vocal ensemble. The most important elements discussed are in reference to the use of vibrato, vocal sound, treatment of vowels and consonants, breath, and stylistic differences.

Chapter Five is devoted to the production of the voice as it is heard through the sound reinforcement system and the necessary vocal adjustments. The inclusion of the sound system is very much a part of the overall sonic sound of the jazz vocal ensemble. As previously stated, adapting a traditionally based choir for the sound system will be the hardest challenge. Aside from the vocal adjustments required for the intended style, all imperfections will be magnified. Detailed descriptions on microphone singing as it affects the vocal production and the female voice will be explained.

Portions of Chapter Seven and Eight are devoted to time feel and rhythmic articulation as it corresponds to the particular style. The treatment of the eighth note is especially crucial when denoting a jazz swing feel, 12/8 feel, R&B or “groove” in various contemporary styles. The underlying “heartbeat” of a song determines the attitude and articulation the singers will employ during the performance.

The chapters that are devoted to vibrato, ballad, swing, and contemporary interpretation contain examples of specific techniques that can be applied to the specific style. To better illustrate the suggested techniques, the majority of the examples also
appear as recordings on an accompanying audio CD (compact disc) demonstrating the various written exercises, desired vocal sounds, phrasing, and articulation. The author and selected professional singers have performed all notated examples in a combination of solo and SATB (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) form.

Detailed explanations and approaches of the vocal techniques used appear for each example. The purpose of this is an attempt to help inexperienced jazz vocal directors facilitate the teaching process through listening and mimicry. References to vocal pedagogical sources and its applications are included as deemed appropriate to justify certain vocal adjustments. Rhythm section accompaniment will also be included with all the recorded vocal examples that require harmonic support and specific rhythmic phrasing against a steady pulse.

Appendix C will include complete questionnaire transcripts of the selected vocal performers and ensemble directors. The directors were chosen based on their reputations as nationally recognized jazz vocal program directors, arrangers, and conductors. The vocal performers were selected based on their reputations as highly respected jazz vocal soloists and studio singers as well as long-standing members of internationally acclaimed jazz vocal groups.

The subject questionnaires were sent via email or regular mail at the convenience of the subject. Some of the basic questions were designed from the research questions mentioned earlier and relate to the purpose of the paper. Separate sets of questions were written specifically for jazz vocal ensemble directors and for the jazz and contemporary
vocal artists, relating to their areas of expertise. Their input has provided further insight and support for the methods used in designing a strategy for teaching jazz and contemporary concepts to traditional choirs.
Chapter 4

COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL CHAMBER CHOIR AND JAZZ VOCAL ENSEMBLES

In defining choral music, one must be aware of the various combinations and size of the choirs. A chamber choir may consist of a dozen voices (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) and certainly not more than twenty singers. A *jazz vocal ensemble* can be anywhere from twelve to sixteen singers (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) and even contains as many as twenty to twenty-four, but that is exceptional. A *jazz choir* can be anywhere from twenty-six to fifty or more voices and of course there are *vocal jazz groups* that range from four to nine voices but usually with one on a part. For the purpose of this paper, the techniques suggested are for the *jazz vocal ensemble*, but most of the techniques can be transferred to the other groups.

Whether participating in a traditional chamber choir or jazz vocal ensemble, one will find that they share some commonalities and differences in various areas of vocal production, performance and style. Some common general principles apply in that both groups must achieve the vocal goals of blend, tonal production, intonation, vowel unification, proper breath management and communication of the lyric or “story telling.”

It is not necessary that students completely abandon their classical training to participate in a jazz vocal ensemble. It is the author’s experience that jazz singing is strengthened by the use of some basic classical techniques (i.e. breath support, mixing of registers, articulation, etc). It is also the author’s belief that without basic technique
and awareness of how to use the voice, the ability to navigate through the challenging literature in either jazz or classical traditions can be compromised.

**Vibrato**

One of the most distinguishing and contrasting qualities of the traditional and jazz vocal ensembles is vocal production with respect to vibrato. Most of the traditional choirs are usually larger in number and must fill a hall in an acoustic setting. This of course will affect their vocal and tonal production. They are also trained to produce a more self-amplified, vertical sound and employ vowel modification and vibrato for more acoustical projection. The use of the sound system for amplification of the jazz vocal ensemble has eliminated the need for the group to project, and, the presence of vibrato can be overwhelming on the sound system. Since volume and projection is not an issue, the use of group vibrato can be safely taken out or minimized for the desired stylistic effect.

The use of vibrato is one of the most controversial and commonly misunderstood concepts when attempting jazz and contemporary music for the first time. The presence of vibrato is a necessary and natural by-product of healthy singing. Although the presence of a healthy vibrato is a sign of healthy technique, how it is utilized becomes an element of style versus merely vocal production. Regardless of whether the listener or audience is cognizant of the presence of vibrato within the traditional choir or jazz vocal ensemble, the way it is used to will greatly affect the authenticity and acceptance of the style being performed.

Before we move on, it is important to address the definition of vibrato. Many renowned vocal pedagogues, such as William Vennard and Richard Miller, defer to
one of the greatest scientific authorities on the study of vibrato, Carl Seashore. In an early 1930 publication, “Psychology of the Vibrato In Voice and Instrument,” he writes what still remains the classic definition of the vibrato. According to Seashore and his associates: “A good vibrato is a pulsation of pitch, usually accompanied with synchronous pulsations of pitch of loudness and timbre, of such extent and rate as to give pleasing flexibility, tenderness and richness to the tone.”\(^\text{17}\)

Generally speaking, the term “vibrato” is used to describe oscillation or fluctuation of pitch, variation of intensity, and timbre. According to Miller and other authorities, a normal vibrato in singing lies between six and seven cycles per second (cps), though 6.5 may be considered the optimal rate in what is considered characteristic of the better singers. He also states that the normal oscillation of pitch in the voice is a semi-tone or less on either side of the fundamental pitch or frequency.\(^\text{18}\) Vennard believes that the average ear is only capable of hearing the fundamental frequency (pitch) and mistakes the oscillation of pitch (vibrato) for “richness, or resonance, or even overtones.”\(^\text{19}\) It is only when hearing the vibrato rate (oscillation) exceed or fall below the acceptable six to seven cycles per second that the listener may perceive it as obtrusive or undesirable and having no aesthetic value, “other than in uncultivated styles.”\(^\text{20}\) These undesirable vibrato rates are commonly referred to as a wobble (slow rate), or a bleat or tremolo (rapid rate).


\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 183.


\(^\text{20}\) Ibid., 183.
The aforementioned vibrato rate is rooted in Western tradition and has remained the desired way of singing in twentieth and twenty-first-century music. This *bel canto* vibrato (as it is described) “…is aesthetically pleasing to Western ears, which no doubt explains why it still predominates in works composed today.”²¹

As we will discover, certain styles of music, ornamentations, and tempos will determine the different rates of vibrato used for the appropriate, stylistic interpretation. For example, the vibrato employed for R&B and gospel music generally will have a relatively slower rate than for classical music and correspond closely to a particular subdivision of the metronome beat to enhance the pulse or “groove.” In jazz vocal ensembles, the vibrato should never be obtrusive and is mainly used as a color or enhancement.

**Straight-tone or Minimal Vibrato**

Straight-tone singing in the choral arts, classical or jazz, is commonly used and can bring about strikingly beautiful results. The truth is that there is no such thing as a vocal tone without oscillation. In fact, to sing a₂ (A above middle C), the vocal folds need to open and close 440 cycles per second to produce that frequency. Thus the term “straight tone” “refers to an auditory perception rather than an acoustic reality.”²² The term is misleading and some may want to refer to this style of singing as singing with a young or youthful tone, as often found in young children’s voices.

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that have yet to mature. Or they may want to refer to it as “early tone,” or “simple
tone.” For the purposes of this paper, the expression “straight tone” or minimal
vibrato will be used.

Choral music has a long history in European church music. Vibrato is
commonplace in Classical singing, but there was a time prior to 1700 when pure
straight-tone singing was preferred. Straight tone is a sustained tone that contains no
(or very little) vibrato. The use of straight tone can be heard in early music such as
Gregorian Chant (Middle Ages) and in the Renaissance period in music by composers
such as Palestrina, Josquin des Prez, and others. It also can be found in the music of
twentieth-century composers including Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern.

Rinaldo Alessandrini, founder of the Concerto Italian vocal ensemble, also advocates
a decreased vibrato. In his 1999 article for *Early Music*, he states, “with vocal
ensembles it is better to keep vibrato to a minimum in order not to impair
intonation.”23

The concept of using a minimal vibrato or straight tone is also common
practice in most jazz vocal literature and some contemporary choral music. The
reason is because of dissonance that commonly takes place between the inner voices
of the ensemble, as well as the modern use of dissonant intervals such as the tri-tone
and major seventh or minor seconds between voice parts. The use of straight-tone is
meant to improve intonation and eliminate beats when tuning the chords to ensure
pitch accuracy and tonal clarity. It is, however, common practice in jazz vocal
ensembles to have the lead vocal add vibrato at the ends of certain phrases to convey

23 Rinaldo Alessandrini, “Performance Practice in the Seconda Pratica Madrigal,” *Early
Music* 27 (November 2007), 635.
more warmth and personnel expression. The practice of starting a tone straight and ending with a vibrato is called *delayed vibrato*. This will not interfere with the tuning because it happens on the release of the phrase.

**Pedagogical Concerns of Straight-Tone Singing**

It is the author’s belief and experience that straight-tone singing needs to be practiced judiciously, so as not to cause excess vocal fatigue. This is especially true for young singers whose voices and techniques are not fully developed. In less experienced singers, straight tone can be difficult and bring about pressed phonation. Assuming that the students’ vocal technique is average to good, varying the dynamic levels and asking for an overall lightening of their sound will generally reduce the vibrato naturally. It will also be important to remind the singers to maintain energized breath support, proper alignment, keep the tone resonant, and periodically check for laryngeal tension.

According to Dr Ingo Titze, “it has not been scientifically established to date that singing without vibrato, in and of itself, will harm the voice.”  

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**Vowels and the Vocal Sound**

The singing of choral music of any kind is a vertical phenomenon. In other words, the vowel sound in the vertical structure needs to be aligned from top to bottom or bottom to top in order for the chords to balance and tune, and then move together in a linear or horizontal direction to create a vocal line. In order to achieve vowel unification and blend, the singers must agree upon the appropriate vowel shape that will ultimately affect the overall sound. The desired sound for both types of ensembles may vary from conductor to conductor. However, the sound should be variable and relative to the style of music being performed.

Traditional and classical choirs are taught to produce a self-amplified tone usually by lowering the larynx, lifting the soft palate, formalizing the vowels and pronunciation, and opening the throat and mouth for maximum acoustic projection. This is a conception of singing that feels more vertical and spacious then the natural way of speaking (i.e. relaxed palate, higher larynx).

The contemporary and jazz singer makes adjustments in resonance contrary to this by slightly lowering the soft palate and employing a mouth shape that is more horizontal, as in a gentle smile. This process tends to shorten the acoustic space in the mouth opening, creating a brighter vowel. This brighter vowel strengthens the resonant harmonics that are used in order to facilitate tuning and projection.

In the jazz vocal idiom, some directors may prefer a young or youthful sound, which uses a lighter registration with horizontal mouth shape (smile) and bright, energized studio or “jingle singer” sound (Singers Unlimited). Others may prefer less
“smile” in the sound for a warmer, more vertical sound (New York Voices), more akin to that of a classical sound but with more forward resonance.

Whether performing traditional choral music or jazz vocal literature, most choral directors agree that the tone should be flexible and generally reflect the emotional character of the piece. For example, when singing a poignant lyric in a jazz vocal ensemble, an exaggerated bright sound or smile on the face may not be characteristically appropriate for the song. Our bodies, faces and emotional connection tend to reflect the sound we want to make. One should not hesitate to experiment with the enormous palette of timbres available.

Quite often, a jazz vocal ensemble sound is “more instrumental in that the esthetic is much the same as the instrumental jazz ensemble.” The objective is to adapt the stylistic elements of jazz artists (instrumental and vocal) and work to authentically serve the music by seeking out the unique and artistic qualities that define the style. Classical choral music tends to be more exclusively vocal and text-oriented, although choral singers occasionally borrow elements of phrasing and articulation from their instrumental counterparts.

The timbre one prefers is a matter of aesthetics, but one of its most important and distinguishing considerations in jazz singing is the colloquial use of the language. The jazz tradition is historically an American art form and that means straying from the formal British-tinged diction used in the singing of most choral literature. For the example, the “ih” vowel, as in the word “it,” can be problematic. At times it can also be in danger of sounding like the Italian pronunciation, “eat” instead of “iht.”

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25 Larry Lapin, interview by author, email correspondence, Miami, Fla., 7 March 2009.
In traditional choral groups, singers are often trained to sustain the first vowel sound as long as possible and then quickly move through the diphthong on the release of the word. There are, however, a growing number of choir directors who are now employing colloquial diction when performing ethnic pieces, folk songs, spirituals, and other styles. Americans commonly speak with diphthongs and triphthongs, which are combinations of two or three vowel sounds back to back, and they must be sung the same way they are spoken. This means that many times the second sound may be anticipated to help keep the initial vowel smaller, brighter, and more in the vernacular. This technique is also used to facilitate better tuning on dissonant chords.

One should approach interpreting the music of the jazz vocal ensemble in a manner that reflects the art form. A conversational, natural, and unaffected speech-like delivery is the traditional way jazz singers perform repertory. When jazz is sung in a formal manner, it can evoke different reactions from listeners depending on their experience and familiarity with the style. Some may find nothing wrong with it and others may find it odd sounding and humorous. This is very similar to the reaction one may have when hearing a classical singer trying to perform a classic Sinatra song with lots of vibrato, modified vowels, formal diction, and legato phrasing. It may sound beautiful but that’s exactly what it is: a projection or impersonation of the sound and not a well-informed execution of the style.

**Consonants**

If the vowels are responsible for delivering beauty of tone and legato line, the consonants give the sound intelligibility and presence. Traditional choir directors
must have their groups exaggerate and over-emphasize the consonants so that they may be understood in the back of the room. Other times they may slight some consonants so as to not disrupt the flow of the legato line, favoring beautiful tone over text. Jazz vocal ensembles actually learn to sing on and through energized consonants (voiced and non-voiced) without any interruption of melodic line or inhibition of legato. It is interesting to note that jazz vocal ensembles often employ more consonants than classical singers but at times in a more subdued manner. As previously mentioned, jazz vocal ensembles perform on microphones, so at times consonants must be de-emphasized to avoid unpleasant and extraneous noises on the sound system.

Consonants in the jazz style are emphasized or de-emphasized according to the need to be understood. They are also responsible for propelling the sound forward and are used not only for intelligibility, but also for rhythmic articulation and vitality in swing tunes. Consonants can also enhance the delivery of a ballad, adding warmth and intimacy to a poignant lyric.

**Breath Management**

There are two common misconceptions concerning breath management in jazz vocal singing: (1) the tone should have a breathy, airy quality, and (2) breath used in phrasing is too relaxed or un-energized. Breathing for traditional choral and jazz ensembles is essentially the same, especially on ballads. The jazz ensemble generally does employ a lighter registration because of the amplification, but the tone should be pure as opposed to overly breathy. However, it is often the case that some developing young female voices possess a naturally breathy tone.
This is due to anatomical reasons or what is referred to as the *mutational chink*. In some young women’s voices, a gap exists between the *arytenoids*, and “the sound is that of a clear little voice, accompanied by the rustling of ‘wild air’ through the chink.”²⁶ Some directors prefer that young sound, but the author’s believes that pushing excess air through the cords should not be encouraged with the more developed voices.

In jazz vocal ensembles, the breath is more articulated as opposed to the legato breath in the majority of the traditional choral repertoire. When performing a swing tune or any pop and contemporary style idiom, the breath is pulsated, rhythmic, and plays a major role in articulating the “groove” or time feel. This will also be addressed in a later chapter

**Matter of Style**

One of the most important distinguishing and obvious differences between the traditional choral sound and jazz vocal sound is in regards to style. In defining a jazz vocal ensemble, there exist several philosophical viewpoints. In an interview with Larry Lapin, program director of the University of Miami Frost School of Music’s jazz vocal program and ensemble director, he explains that the jazz vocal ensemble should accurately reflect the articulation, inflections, unity, time-feel, and all the elements that make up a good jazz instrumental group. “A jazz vocal group, in my opinion, must *first* be a jazz group…and a vocal group second.”²⁷

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Steve Zegree, director of Western Michigan’s University’s Gold Company, believes that vocal jazz is “simply a style of music within the entire spectrum and long history of choral literature.” He believes that you should approach this music as a particular style as one would when interpreting the unique qualities of a Renaissance or Brahms motet. He does, however, agree that jazz vocal music is interpreted in essentially the same way as jazz instrumental music.

In the previous mentioned survey given by Baird, he concludes from the six respondents that singing this music is more a matter of understanding the voice, and learning how to listen for the right sound and concept within the literature. He also states that the directors “…agree that there is no difference other than stylistic differences in vocal jazz and any traditional choral style.”

Instrumentalists use melody and rhythm to articulate phrases. Although horn players, like singers, must use air to support a musical line, they also must learn to manipulate their vibrato, tongue, lips, jaw, and fingers to attain the desired effect. Of course they have an advantage of being able to change their mouthpiece or other equipment when switching from classical to jazz. Singers utilize melody, rhythm, and the phonetic sounds of language as ways of shaping and articulating a phrase. This is one of the most challenging elements of the process: at times singing, thinking and articulating more like horn players and less like singers. They must do all this while maintaining the integrity of the lyric and natural tone and accent of speech.

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It can be said that an authentic jazz vocal group must combine the elements of healthy, expressive singing with many of the stylistic elements that make up a jazz instrumental group. Although the best jazz vocal groups will borrow many of the stylistic nuances from jazz instrumental groups (swing, be-bop, cool, modal, etc.), one must be careful not to merely imitate horn techniques. The ability to combine these stylistic elements with attention to lyric interpretation and the emotional aspects of singing will be the challenge of the director and the ensemble. One must not lose sight of the special, dramatic advantage that vocalists will always possess over the instrumentalists: the ability to communicate and tell a story with the spoken word.

In jazz vocal style, many instrumental articulations are used, such as fall-offs and slides to order to convey a more horn-like effect. This can be easily related to the portamenti and glissandi in the classical tradition and requires the same technical facility. It is the author’s opinion that when interpreting most swing literature, the jazz vocal ensemble should resemble the big-band instrumental tradition in style, color, and concept. The results could be thought of as instrumental music arranged for voices. Otherwise, like classical music, jazz vocal ensemble singing is a “textual idiom.” The right sound is one that communicates the text authentically and sincerely with regard to proper vocal production and accuracy of style.

**Demonstration of Commonalities and Contrasts**

Example 4.1 demonstrates some of the changes that should gradually occur when making the transition from a classical sound to a more of a jazz vocal sound. Ballads are usually a good place to start because of many of the basic similarities in vocal production between jazz and traditional choral ensembles.

Track 1 demonstrates a typical vocal production for traditional choirs. There exists quite a bit of vibrato, the vowels are more vertical in shape, and certain consonants are more pronounced. The use of the hard dental “t” is evident throughout the performance, reflecting a more formal tonal projection. As witnessed on the recorded example, the vibrato, or the oscillation of pitch, has now obscured the tonal and harmonic clarity. The arrangement has less impact because the dissonance that has been purposely written for an intended dramatic effect has been sacrificed for the sake of beauty of vocal tone. In track 2, the vibrato has been minimized but the vowels still remain in a somewhat formal, vertical position and the hard consonant “t” is still present.

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30 Each track referred to in the text is available on the companion CD for the essay.
Track 3 further demonstrates the contrast in sound from a classical choral sound to a jazz vocal sound. Example 4.1 is now sung with an “inner smile” or horizontal pronunciation, and ending consonants have been softened or de-emphasized to accord with a colloquial speech-like delivery. Consonants have been emphasized at the beginning of certain words for dramatic delivery.
Chapter 5

THE SOUND SYSTEM AND VOCAL PRODUCTION

The sound reinforcement system is an integral part of the jazz vocal ensemble sound. Jazz vocal singing is primarily a microphone idiom, and individual “miking” allows the singers to be heard over the rhythm section without having to push or strain their voices. An over-simplified description of the basic function of the microphone (or mic) is to convert acoustical energy (generated by the vocal-fold vibration) into electrical energy, which in turn moves molecules of air in waves to the audience. 31

Since the invention of the microphone in the early nineteen twenties, its impact has greatly influenced the vocal technique of the jazz or non-classical singer and is ever evolving. Jazz singing would not exist, as we know it, without the invention of the microphone. The microphone liberated non-classical singers from the burden of projecting their voices in such a way as to be heard in the back of a hall or over accompaniment. It also allows the individual singer to produce a relaxed, conversational sound, and convey a sense of intimacy with minute shadings and subtleties of enunciation not afforded to the acoustic singer. The goal, then, is to achieve more of a recorded sound versus an acoustical sound.

There is a misconception that using the microphone will replace proper vocal technique and encourage laziness in production. Quite the contrary, microphone singing exposes all the wonderful and not so wonderful vocal utterances. The microphone adds nothing but volume to what already exists and is not as clearly perceived when a singer is relying on natural projection. Every blemish and virtue is amplified, so special attention to intonation, blend, resonance, articulation, dynamics, and proper vocal technique are even more crucial under the audio-microscope. Learning microphone technique and mastering low-volume singing with support and intensity is the foundation of building a jazz vocal ensemble sound.

Since acoustic projection is no longer a concern with the jazz vocal ensemble, this will allow for that more natural speech-like delivery and colloquial use of language that we have come to expect within this genre. The way vowels and consonants are treated will also be affected. The plosive consonants such as t, p, and b can be problematic and can create a “popping” sound on the mic. The singers will need to learn to soften the sounds and sing them in a more subdued manner. Some sounds will simply be left off entirely or changed. The hard “t” and similar consonants that are frequently used at the ends of words in classical singing will sound affected and overly formal. In swing tunes they will also affect the rhythmic articulation and flow. The use of the dental “t” is more problematic within a phrase but, when appropriate, can be utilized for an energized release at the end of the phrase.

You will also find that if you experiment with singing into the mic at different angles or slightly off axis, you can avoid excess popping and explosion of air. Singing
slightly over the top of the mic will also prevent excess spillage of air into the diaphragm, avoiding a wind-storm effect over the sound system. This is especially noticeable on the “oo” vowel as in the word “soon.”

One will find that the opposite is true when lingering on voiced consonants (l,d,b,m,n,z,g,v,r,j). These can be “buzzed” or sustained slightly longer to help bring the sound forward while maintaining the vocal line and flow. These consonants have also been referred to as “liquid consonants” because the voice still can sustain a pitch while the consonant is being enunciated. “It also enhances intelligibility and presence. Tongue flexibility is important for clarity, especially in soft subtle passages.”

Singing on and through these consonants has been an established technique for most jazz and contemporary singers throughout the years.

Sonically, a microphone hears differently than one’s own ear, and the singer will become aware of the extraneous noises the mic picks up. Some sounds or extraneous noises can be used as coloring devices and will be addressed later. One will also be aware of the proximity effect of the microphone, or the distance of the microphone from the singer’s mouth. These subtle adjustments will also affect the way a voice is heard on the system. This can have some positive results for singers whose voice may be small or for the bass/baritone voice that needs an extra boost on the bottom end of his range.

It is important to experiment with distance of the microphones from the singer’s mouth to find the singer’s most natural sound. Generally an inch or so from the mic works very well. Singing too far from the mic will thin out the sound,

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accentuating the higher partials or frequencies of the voice, making it sound “metallic” and less full. On the other hand, singing too close will reinforce the lows, making the sound too “woofy” or “boomy.” The bass vocalist may sing closer on the mic on occasions when he needs help on very low notes or if he isn’t really a “true” bass.

Basically, one could think of the distance between the singer and the microphone as similar to the distance between the audience and the singer. The sound system allows for that intimacy and sense of immediacy by electronically laying the sound right into the listener’s lap. Or one could think of singing into the microphone as singing into someone’s ear. This imagery may also help singers to lighten their voices and encourage more air mixture or breath upon the vocal cords. In the words of Henry Pleasants, one can think of the microphone as “a vocal and musical auxiliary…a kind of supplemental larynx.”

Since the vocals are amplified, there is no advantage in singing very loudly or forcefully. However, high notes can be difficult to sing softly for young singers, so learning to pull the microphone gradually back during those passages will allow the singer to maintain the appropriate intensity and proper support, without distorting the system. This is especially crucial if there is not a sound engineer monitoring the group. But even sound engineers cannot compensate for sudden bursts of sound or spontaneous changes in dynamics for each individual within a group. Maintaining a moderately normal volume, consistent dynamic levels, and allowing for gradual increase and decrease in dynamics for the required expression is the goal. It will also

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be the singers’ responsibility to anticipate dynamic volume changes and eventually learn how to” self-mix” or “play the mic”.

Experiment back and forth with speaking the text, singing the text, and back again, with a supported but relaxed production. This will allow time for the individual singers to get used to hearing their voices through the monitors and gain confidence in hearing what their natural voices sound like when amplified. Encourage the singers to enjoy and relish in the sound of their voice.

Adjustments in “equalization” (bass, midrange, and treble) and volume control for each individual microphone will also help with the choir’s overall balance and sonority. Unfortunately, or fortunately, not all voices are created equal. Some women who possess a bright, focused tone will benefit from having some lows added to their sound for more warmth. Conversely, a male voice that naturally has a warm sound may want to add some treble or upper midrange for his voice. Ultimately, the amplified voice should closely resemble the natural acoustic qualities of each singer.

Utilizing a sound system is also a helpful tool for choirs who may not have equal numbers of singers on each voice part. Quite often, there are more women than men in choirs, but with a sound system, the balance problem is more easily solved. However, it is then important that after the adjustments have been made, singers should maintain the same proximity from the microphone, except for those previously mentioned exceptions.

It is important that the groups rehearse acoustically and then, when the music is learned and an acoustic vocal balance, blend and desired sound is achieved, the majority of the rehearsals should take place on the sound system. A good monitor
system for the rehearsal is essential and extremely important for the singers to hear exactly what they are producing so that they can make the necessary adjustments. The same equalization and volume adjustments that are set for the monitor system should ideally mirror the sound in the main speakers but at a lower level. What the ensemble hears is what the audience should hear. A good monitor mix also allows the singers to relax and not push their voices. This is also vitally important when the rhythm section is added to the overall mix.

The monitors are usually placed on the floor facing the singers. Ideally, there would be no more than three or, if necessary, four singers per monitor. The monitors should all be of the same model and brand as the speakers for optimal efficiency and clarity. The overall quality is only as good as the worst speaker. If possible, it is desirable to perform with the same speakers and placement you rehearsed with, or else the new ambient sounds may distract the singers and sabotage the performance.

**Practice Suggestions**

It is the author’s experience that singers need to practice on microphones as soon and as often as possible, perhaps even more often than with acoustic singing. Learning to listen for one’s own voice in the mix and its function in the vertical chord structure will take practice. Sometimes you can have them sing into one of their hands slightly off the side of their mouth towards their face, which should then reflect the sound off of the hand to the front of their ear. This will enable them to hear themselves acoustically while still listening to the monitor for the overall blend or mix with the other ear. One can think of it as learning to “hide oneself in the mix.”
Kerry Marsh also speaks of rehearsing primarily on the sound system so that singers can get used to hearing themselves in the monitors. He encourages the singers to “cup their ear, or close it off, to hear their own voice for a moment, and then go back to listening to the monitor mix to find their own voice in the blend without singing louder to locate it.”

Since the ensemble sound is no longer heard acoustically, a director has more options with various standing positions within the group. For visual reasons, some directors may prefer a boy, girl, boy, girl formation. Others may prefer singers standing in their own voice-part section to help blend acoustically and electronically with their partner. This is something that can be changed throughout a performance depending on the song and arrangement. It can add visual variety to the performance, but one must be cognizant of the logistical demands it places on the engineer and singers when switching back and forth between microphones. This is especially true if a mic has been equalized for a particular voice. Unless the microphones are wireless, this can become problematic and create a sort of “spaghetti” mess with the mic cords.

**Vocal Production**

When discussing the technique of commercial or jazz vocal singing, it is necessary to address the confusing, often controversial terms used to describe the various registrations. The three most common terms in describing registration, and terms the author will also use are as follows: chest voice, head voice, and middle or mixed voice. The chest voice is generally referred to as the heavy mechanism or lower

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34 Kerry Marsh, interview by author, email correspondence, Sacramento, Ca., 2 March 2009.
register where the speech voice resides. The head voice (or unused register, as coined by Vennard) is usually referred to as lighter registration or upper register. The middle or mixed voice is where the chest-voice and head voice registers overlap or unite. This is where the female voices be placed throughout the majority of the jazz vocal arrangements, so accessing and strengthening that middle voice will be crucial.

**Female Vocal Adjustments**

It is the author’s opinion that in a jazz vocal ensemble, the soprano voice is chiefly responsible for determining the overall sound of the group. Much like the lead trumpet in a big band, the lead soprano is largely responsible for the stylistic interpretation, phrasing, inflection, intonation, articulation, dynamics, rhythmic feel, and most often the overall timbre (characteristic quality) of the group. Typically, the melody is usually sung in the soprano part with the rest of the voices following suit. If this is the case, many of the vocal techniques and stylistic elements must be addressed and developed in the female voices so that modeling can take place for the other voices.

One of the first issues to address in the vocal production of the female voice is the registration adjustment. The sopranos are often required to cover a range of over two octaves with minimal vowel modification, the exception being the extremely high range. It is important to understand that one technique (classical training) cannot serve all styles, and most of the vocal adjustments suggested are synonymous with the speech-like and mixed-voice qualities of jazz/contemporary female vocalists.

As previously mentioned, in the jazz vocal ensemble, the middle voice is where the female voices will sing. The only exception is when the arrangement
requires the sopranos or altos to sing in the upper and lower extremes of their range. This is similar to classical singing in that they employ a more head-voice-dominant mix in the upper tessitura. The main difference between the classical sound and a jazz sound will be the bright, forward production with minimal vowel modification that is consistent from bottom to top. Vennard writes that when the women discover their “middle” voice, “their vocal development really begins.”

It is important to point out that most of the jazz vocal ensemble literature is written in keys that will sound more conversational in the female voices. This is meant to resemble the warmth, intimacy and range of the solo jazz singer, and of course those keys are more user-friendly keys when sung through a sound system. Extremely high ranges are reserved for dramatic effect or used for more instrumental-like articulations, scat soli or vocalese sections (instrumental solos with lyrics). The majority of the textual singing remains in the middle and upper middle range of the women’s voices, once again, reinforcing the importance of developing a strong and flexible middle or mix voice.

One may ask why the same concerns are not being addressed for the male voice. There is a general consensus among notable vocal pedagogues and technicians that the male voice sings primarily in its chest dominant register with very few register changes. According to voice pedagogue Robert Edwin, the main difference is going from formal (vertical shape) to conversational singing (lateral). And because of

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these adjustments from vertical to lateral or horizontal vowels, male singers have less weight on the cords (vocal folds) and therefore can sing higher.\textsuperscript{36}

Although the male singers will also make adjustments according to the desired vowel shape and resonance, generally they will sing the majority of their musical lines in their speech-level range or chest register. Register adjustments are made in extreme cases, but usually not as often and not as exposed as their female counterparts, serving more as harmonic support in the vertical structure of the chord under the melody. The challenge with classically or traditionally trained male singers will be to focus on developing a lighter, brighter vocal sound and returning to speech-level pronunciation.

**Resonation and Resonators**

The word *resonance* is commonly misused as a descriptor for desirable qualities of timbre in voices. It is usually associated with adjectives and imagery when one speaks of a voice as having “ring,” “depth,” “brilliance,” “warmth,” etc. “To the physicist, *resonance is a relationship that exists between two vibrating bodies of the same pitch*. When one vibrator causes another vibrator to tune with it, the phenomenon is called *resonance*.\textsuperscript{37} Once the tone is emitted from the vibrating vocal folds, the sound is reinforced as it passes through open resonating chambers or *resonators* such as the throat, nose and sinuses, and mouth. The vocal color is also affected by the shape and configuration of the articulators such as: teeth, lips, soft


palate, jaw, and tongue. Lebon states that “when a resonator is united or coupled with an articulator, this alters the size and shape of the cavities and thus influences tone quality.”  

The ability to alter the shape of the mouth, lips, and tongue is especially crucial when singing through a microphone. As previously stated, the microphone acts as an external resonator, and how the sound is shaped and emitted from the mouth will influence the tone quality. This will also be coupled with resonance or the sympathetic vibrations that are sensed in the nasal (or mask), head, and chest area.

For the purpose of this essay, the term “resonance” will refer to the various colors of the voice (from dark to bright resonance) as well as to where one senses the sympathetic vibration (chest, mouth, mask or nasal, and head resonance). Austin and Howard refer to the various resonances “as vocal colors in a continuous spectrum… a resonance track.” In their book Born to Sing, they combine vocal registers (head, middle, and chest) with the resonance or sensed vibration that is most dominant in that particular range. The author has borrowed this approach and adapted it as a way to delineate the desired vocal colors and tonal placements.

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Resonance Descriptors

Head Resonance is referred to as the lighter registration that can be used throughout the range. It is not to be confused with head register or falsetto.

Mouth Resonance is used in the conversational range and is used and often combined with nasal resonance in order to maximize forward resonance, with vibration sensed around the nose and mask area.

Chest Resonance can be thought of as adding power, warmth, and sensuality to the sound. This color can be added to the various registers in order to add depth and fullness to the sound.

Mask or Nasal Resonance is said to be present throughout a well-produced tone with the exception of soft volume singing or pure head tones. Nasal or mask resonance is described as bright, edgy, and sensed in the region around the nose. It should not be sensed in the nose but behind the nose. The mask resonance is often combined with mouth resonance, bringing the sound forward while giving clarity and focus to the voice.
Chapter 6

BALLAD INTERPRETATION

The transfer of vocal technique from traditional choral music into the jazz ballad is a wonderful place to start the jazz vocal journey. Ballad singing is more familiar territory and less intimidating to beginning students and directors who are new to the idiom. Starting with ballads allows the student to slowly process the technical skills of mixing registers, minimizing vibrato, efficient breathing, and learning to sing in the vernacular. Ensuring confidence early on in the process will make the students feel successful from the onset, and provide a solid foundation to build upon.

The performance of the jazz ballad employs many of the same concepts that one experiences in traditional choral repertoire. Both groups must honor the written harmonies and adhere to the basic vocal-production concepts of blend, balance, vowel unification and elision, intonation, diction, and communication of the text. Notice that rhythm is not mentioned in this context. The purpose of this exclusion is to allow the ensemble to discover alternative choices in phrasing, especially if the written rhythms seem awkward and unnatural. If the ballad is a cappella, there should be an “ebb and flow” taking place within the performance.

There may be times that an arranger of a particular piece may not be as sensitive to the natural prosody of speech and will stress unimportant words or syllables with longer held notes. It is the author’s opinion that the written music
should serve as a sort of blueprint, or point of departure to work from so it is common to experiment with alternative phrasing. A method for discovering conversational phrasing is to monologue the text, listening for the natural rise and fall of the words. “Text painting” is also a common expressive tool that is used to color a phrase, based on the inspiration of a particular word or emotion. If there is a strong soloist in the group, allow that person to sing the melody for new ideas of phrasing and then let the rest of the group follow suit with their lines. There are more liberties one can take within an a cappella arrangement, but one can also experiment with alternative phrasing with ballads that have accompaniment.

Sometimes, when singing and concentrating on the inner parts, especially in an a cappella ballad, it is easy to lose sight of the linear or forward direction of the phrase and music’s connection to the text. It is the author’s experience that having everyone sing and internalize the melody line and phrasing together will help facilitate a natural flow and unity when they return to their individual parts. Janis Siegel, who sings alto in Manhattan Transfer, suggests “…to sing every harmony line as if it were a melody. The harmony should flow and have the same emotional thread as the melody.” ⁴⁰ In terms of phrasing, the ensemble should sound like one person interpreting a tune, the same mindset. The goal for ensemble blend is to have the twelve or more singers sound like four to eight, depending on the arrangement of course.

At this point in the journey, the group has learned how to minimize the vibrato and can now focus more attention on phrasing and fine-tuning the sound. The

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⁴⁰ Janis Siegel, interview by author, email correspondence, New York, NY, 16 February 2009.
consonants are “buzzed” or vibrated, and the breath is pulled through all the voiced and non-voiced consonants so as not to inhibit the legato flow. The microphone is sensitive to all these extraneous sounds, and learning this technique will add color and expressiveness to the performance.

Encourage the ensemble to sing every phonetic sound in the words, including diphthongs or triphongs, as the case may be. A good approach is to break down the phonetic sounds by having the singers speak very slowly in a legato fashion, like an old record player that is playing at too slow a speed, hearing the words all stretched out and vowels elongated. This exercise of slowly stretching the words will help them become aware of all the available phonetic possibilities, the necessary elisions between the words, and the subtle tongue adjustments that shape the sound and articulation. The next step is deciding within the phrase and words themselves what sounds to emphasize and de-emphasize. Once again defer to the speech-like delivery.

Table 6.1 is an example of the most commonly used diphthongs in the English language. This is not the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) spelling but the author’s way of writing out the sounds phonetically so they can be understood by those who are not familiar with the IPA format.
### Table 6.1. Phonetic Spelling of Diphthongs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diphthongs</th>
<th>Pronounced (phonetic spelling)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My ( (M/ah/ee) )</td>
<td>((ah/ee) ah (as in far) / ee (as in see))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say ( (S/ch/ee) )</td>
<td>((eh/ee) eh (as in end) / ee (as in see))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toy ( (T/aw/ee) )</td>
<td>((aw/ee)aw (as in dawn) / ee (as in see))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud ( (L/aa/oo) )</td>
<td>((aa/oo) aa (as in cat) / oo (as in soon))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ( (N/uh/oo) )</td>
<td>((uh/oo) uh (as in up) / oo (as in soon))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following example is an excerpt of a classic jazz standard arranged by the author, demonstrating some of the concepts that have been previously mentioned.


In **track 4**, the ensemble adheres pretty closely to the written rhythms of the music. Vibrato is minimal to none, the sound is warm and pronunciation conversational. Attention to balance and blend is crucial when going from unisons to
divisi. Generally, less sound must be employed on unison lines because it is naturally louder when sung by many singers. Conversely, a little more volume is given to the chords coming out of the unison lines because of the obvious shift to fewer singers per part.

Track 5 is an example of altering the rhythms slightly in accord with a more personalized approach and interpretation of the lead sopranos. Some vibrato in the lead sopranos has been added to “warm up” the end of the phrase.

Word Articulation

In the beginning statement, the phrase “the more I see you,” is really felt as one long word. The “th” sound in “the” is buzzed on pitch with the tip of the tongue lying softly between the teeth as the “uh” vowel is being sung. The air is then pulled through quickly to the “m” nasal consonant in “more,” naturally directing the air to the mask and using the sensation to help draw the “or” from the back of the throat towards a more forward placement in the mouth. In classical pronunciation, singing on the “r” is usually avoided. In jazz or contemporary singing, “r” sounds are slightly anticipated by allowing the tongue to get into that retroflex position while still singing on the preceding vowel. This allows for the word to remain in a more spoken formation versus the classical modification of staying primarily on the vowel with a diphthong only on the release of the word.

After the “r” is sounded it is quickly elided to the “ah” sound in the word “I,” but it sounds more like “eye” to give the vowel a brighter shape. This is where we encounter our first word with a diphthong. The “I” is really sung as eye/ee with the “ee” tongue position then pulling through to the “s” in “see” and eliding smoothly to
the “oo” vowel in “you” or ee/oo. If the tongue is allowed to remain in the “ee” position with lips brought forward, this will brighten up the “oo” vowel, which is the way this vowel is generally produced in jazz ensembles. A higher tongue position aids in brightening all the vowels, and the “ee” can be used as a sort of tracking vowel for the rest to follow.

In example 6.1, measure 4, the sopranos demonstrate some jazz vocal styling techniques that are commonly used to shape a melody. Firstly, the “w” sound in the word “want” is initiated with “oo” sound, and in this case is elongated and used as an expressive device to stretch out the sound of the word, giving it more duration and dramatic impact. The word “want” is pronounced more like oo/AH/nt. In the soprano voice, the “oo” sound is also allowed to start on the pitch A and then quickly scoops up towards the Bb, creating more of a “crooning” effect, which is another common stylistic tool in solo jazz singing. The scoop into the word can be used to emphasize the target word, or be used to convey a sense of longing for the person that you are singing about in the story.

The words “want you” are then pronounced more like oo/AAH/nt/ee/oo. The “t” has been softened or de-emphasized, and the “oo” vowel in “you” is bright and forward in the mouth with rounded lips and an “ee” tongue position. It feels more like the bright and forward “oo” sound as in the word “knew”. The “oo” can be problematic and it is tempting to sing it too dark or “hooty”. Experiment with the various shades of brightness and darkness to find a comfortable natural sound.

Measure 6 introduces the first word that contains two syllables. The word “feeling” is an example of “text painting” opportunities. Stressing and vibrating
(teeth on lower lip) the “f” (fricative) consonant conveys a stronger, emotional connection and “feeling” to the lyric and sounds sensual on the mic. The dynamics also follow the natural accent of speech by de-emphasizing the “ing” sound. It is important not only to stress specific words, but to follow the natural accents within the word itself. It is not uncommon to hear singers who are totally unaware of this and will remain “sing-songy,” giving equal weight to all the sounds or accenting the wrong syllables. An example of this can be demonstrated by saying “feELING” or “FEELING.” The latter is more common but nevertheless, not as musical as FEELing, which follows the natural down-up weight of the word. The musical line is also descending and so the dynamics should naturally follow suit. This is an example of a well-written song in which the melody reinforces the accent of speech. If the written rhythm of the melody does not follow the natural accents of the lyric, which is often the case, careful analysis and attention must be given to the emphasis of the syllables and note values, and adjustments made accordingly.

As demonstrated on the recording, certain words are emphasized or stressed, and others are de-emphasized to create a natural speech-like delivery. These choices are subjective but they should make sense if they were spoken in a monologue.

The MORE I SEE YOU States the subject and title at the start
The MORE i WANT you Expresses one’s desire
Somehow this FEELing What is about to get stronger
Just GROWS and GROWS Passion grows more intense
Typically, the nouns, adjectives, or “action” words are given more stress than the unimportant words such as: “and,” “the,” “or,” “of,” “that,” “it,” “if,” and so on. It has been the author’s experience to hear traditional or classical choirs attempt jazz and contemporary music with a beautiful, minimal vibrato sound but with little attention to the syllabic stress that would occur in normal conversation. The performance takes on a sort of flat, monotone, or word-to-word delivery. The attention is drawn to the vocal sound and not to the message or the lyric.

**Timbre and Harmonic Considerations**

The tone quality in ballad singing is generally warm and resonant and has a sense of mask or forward placement. However, there are opportunities to experiment with various resonant colors within the piece as inspired by the contour of the melody, harmonic texture, lyric, idiomatic style, and emotional expression. To convey a sense of intimacy, the overall sound is allowed to have more breath on the vocal cords as experienced in a long, open “ah” sigh from the top of a comfortable range, descending in a yawn-like fashion. The focus strength on the vocal cords (or folds) is more relaxed, and one could think of it as having a cushion of air between the folds. The sopranos can at times be more diffused (airier) than the other voice parts. This is due in part to the natural projection of sopranos singing in their higher tessitura or register. That being the case, the alto, tenor, and bass lines (which most often identify the chord quality) should be sung a little more brightly to help balance the chord.

As previously mentioned, the majority of the dissonance usually occurs in the inner voices, and special care must be given to tuning and balancing these chords. An
example of this occurs in measures 3-4. Firstly, all the voices sing the proceeding unison line in measures 1 and 2 with what the author and fellow studio singer friends refer to as “hushed intensity.” This facilitates a softer but energetic volume and employs more air mixture on the cords, which is necessary when blending with multiple voices on a unison line.

In measures 3-4, vocal color brightens and grows more intense for the desired dramatic effect in the lyric and promoting tonal clarity within the dissonant chords. Generally, the tri-tone (augmented fourth or diminished fifth) that often occurs between the bass and tenor, or other voice parts in a jazz vocal arrangement needs to be sung with a brighter vocal tone. This ensures tonal clarity and “ring” throughout the vertical chord structure when these particular intervals are in tune. It is important to note that the third and seventh identify the qualities of most chords. The author also encourages the singers to “tune to the dissonance” and often isolates and rehearses these problem areas that present harmonic challenges. This can also happen when negotiating between difficult harmonies within the chart. The goal is to eventually develop a stronger aural awareness and familiarity for these new and complex harmonies.

Measure 6 is an example of how a choir could change from a warm sound to a brighter or more focused sound within one word. Generally, the less dissonant a voicing, the warmer and more open the vocal sound can be. In this case, the lyric itself gives the additional color and vitality to the simple voicing. For example, on beat one, the first syllable (“feel”) in the word “feeling” demonstrates the warmer sound on the first-inversion Eb6 voicing. The vocal timbre brightens as it descends to
a more dissonant whole-tone voicing on the “ee” vowel on the “ing” sound, or in this case the second syllable. This brighter sound also aids in projecting the notes that sit in the lower end of the soprano and alto range.

Measure 7 demonstrates a common shift from unison singing to an abrupt four-part divisi. Changes in dynamics must be made accordingly to help balance and smooth out these transitional areas. As previously mentioned, unisons are usually sung with a lower but energized volume, and then the dynamic level is immediately increased to accommodate the divisi within the chord. Ultimately, the dynamic adjustments between unisons and chorded sections should be sensed by the individual singers without being obvious to the listener.

In measures 8-9, the author once again utilizes the “text painting” device. The upward, step-wise movement of the melody in the lower voices, combined with the increasing dynamics and harmonic tension, is meant to imply a sort of growing effect in the word “grows”. The sopranos remain static because they must sustain the melody note. However, they must crescendo and also grow in intensity as if they had a moving line. At times, the timbre in the sopranos is adjusted from the lighter, head mixed tone to more mouth and mask resonance in an effort to support the increasingly brighter chest resonance of the male voices and the overall dramatic implication of the lyric.

*Practice Suggestions*

Generally, there is often more dissonance in the chord voicings used in jazz vocal choirs than in traditional choirs. One must be aware of tuning issues that may occur with voicings that have the third and seventh of dominant chords in the men’s
parts, as in measures 3 and 7. Tuning problems can also occur within the interval of a major seventh between one of the lower notes and one of the upper notes, as in measure 7 between the bass’s F# and the alto’s F natural. It is tempting for the basses to want to drift down a half step to create a consonant octave. Practice isolating major-seventh, minor-second intervals, as well as tri-tones and minor ninths between men’s and women’s parts up and down the scale in half steps on various vowels and in various tempos. With time and practice, the singers will understand this tendency to drift to consonant intervals and be better equipped to sing the dissonance correctly. If tuning problems still persist, listen for vowel unification. Quite often, a vowel that is sung too dark can pull the pitch down. This is common in the lower voice parts, so encourage an inner smile with a lighter, brighter sound.

It is also common to practice the outside (soprano and bass) parts and inner parts (tenor and alto) separately before singing them together. Building chords one voice at a time from bottom up as well as top down will also give the ensemble a chance to grow accustomed to the new harmonies and learn their individual functions within the vertical structure of the chord. It is also the author’s experience that separating the women’s and men’s parts in sectionals will facilitate the music-learning process, trouble-shoot vocal-production issues, and promote sectional blend. The basses and tenors will need to become more comfortable when singing tri-tones and major and minor seventh intervals that are frequently written between their voice parts in jazz vocal arrangements. It will be of great benefit to the ensemble to use some rehearsal time to facilitate a better understanding of the nature of these dissonances.
Unlike traditional choral music, the basses rarely sing the root in the harmony, and learning to hear and sing notes other than the roots will take some practice and repetition. If the song is an accompanied ballad, look at the bass player’s part to help determine the root of the chord and the harmonic function of the bass and tenor parts. Playing the root of the chord on the piano during rehearsal will also help solidify the sound of the rootless voicing. If the arrangement is a cappella, use a combination of your knowledge of chord types and voicing types, and your ear to discern the chords. Look at the chords that come before and after a given chord in question. Be aware that some notes are written enharmonically, and it is also common to encounter chromatic passing chords and notes.
Chapter 7

SWING INTERPRETATION

The most important qualities that differentiate the traditional choir from a jazz vocal ensemble are the “time feel” and, more importantly, the “swing feel.” Even though the elements of vocal balance, blend, intonation, vibrato, and vowel unification are addressed, everything is superficial without the appropriate time feel. Developing a strong unified pulse is essential when performing jazz and contemporary literature. The stronger the time feel, the stronger the musical statement.

In the Western classical tradition, the accent or emphasis of the quarter note in common time usually falls on beats one and three. The derivation of jazz rhythm as well as other rhythmic music can be traced from various parts of Africa. The emphasis or “backbeat” that usually falls on beats two and four is borrowed from their musical tradition and is essential to swing. This emphasis is realized with the drummer in the rhythm section playing the hi-hat (sock) cymbal on beats two and four, as well as the bass player playing a walking bass line, slightly reinforcing the same beats.

A common over-simplification of the swing feel is that it is based on syncopation with a strong emphasis on beats two and four (the “offbeat”), if played in 4/4 time. All beats are played, but jazz musicians tend to place emphasis on beats

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two and four without accenting them. This is sometimes referred to as a four-beat rhythm and is sometimes called a “backbeat” if beats two and four are heavily accented, as is typical in a shuffle rhythm.

**The Quarter Note**

It is important to establish a strong sense of steady quarter notes within the ensemble before introducing the various subdivisions, articulations, or rhythmic “grooves”. Example 7.1 and track 6 illustrate a walking bass line as if sung by a bass voice with emphasis on beats two and four. The consonant “d” combined with the “oo” vowel is slightly imploded to articulate an easy attack and separation between the notes, whereas the voiced consonant “m” sustains the pitch with a hum so as not to interrupt the continuous, smooth line. The notes should ultimately feel long, connected, and slightly pulsed with a sense of forward direction.


Example 7.2 shows the way quarter notes are typically sung in classical music. As demonstrated by the choir on track 7, the notes are sung more legato and connected, as typical of the classical quarter-note articulation. The “l” consonant is utilized because it is voiced and only slightly interrupts the flow of the legato line, giving the pitches a feeling of longer duration.
Example 7.2. Classical Quarter-Note Articulation.

Example 7.3 is an illustration of how quarter notes are typically sung and written in a swing interpretation. As demonstrated in Track 8, the quarter notes are sung more pronounced and “fat” (tenuto), with a slight separation between the notes. The “b” sound initiates a soft attack and then is followed by the “ah” vowel (with an inner smile) where the pitch is actually sustained. The “p” acts as a stopping device by bringing the lips together (eliding the “p” and “b” into one sound) before releasing back to the “ah” and so on. The “b” and “p” are dampened and not overly pronounced and the “ah” is given emphasis. Great care must be given to the release of the word so as not to become “Bop(puh).” The extra “puh” sound (common in traditional pronunciation) can shorten the duration of the quarter note by as much as an eighth note.

The following is an example of what is really felt when interpreting jazz quarter notes. What one sees on the page and what one feels are slightly different. In other words, there are what we call “hidden rests” and they exist between the notes as if there were an eighth-note rest. Mentally singing the space between the “p” and following “b” will give the quarter note the full duration and the stylistic separation. The “ah” is written to replace the “o” vowel because that is how the word is
pronounced when sung. Generally, the written “o” vowel in syllables such as *dot* or *bop* is sung with a bright inner-smile “ah” sound. It is important to maintain a shallow jaw and inner smile in order to sing a brighter vowel “ah” sound. The vowel should not sound too formal (vertical) or dark. In fact, it is common to pronounce all “ah” vowels with the more neutral “uh”.

Example 7.3. Jazz Quarter Note Articulation.

Example 7.4. Hidden Rests Between Quarter Notes.

It is important to practice these examples with a metronome or Dr. Beat (brand of metronome) to assure a steady pulse and cohesive time feel within the ensemble. Feeling the space between the notes will take some concentration, because there is a strong tendency in young jazz musicians to “rush” the figures or downbeats. Some metronomes can be sub-divided into eighth-note triplets and this will be an important tool down the road when interpreting swing eighth notes. As a general rule, quarter notes that occur on the downbeats of one and three are played long, and those occurring on beats two and four are usually played short but emphasized.
Once a steady pulse is solidified, add finger snaps or thigh taps on beats two and four. This will reinforce the necessary emphasis one should feel when performing swing literature. Try going back and forth between snapping on beats one and three and then back to two and four. One may feel a significant difference or awkwardness between the two. Organically, it seems natural for most to snap on two and four, although some may not feel that tendency and will have to work on this.

**Straight Eighth Note**

Eighth notes for classical and jazz music, as illustrated in examples 7.5 and 7.10, are generally notated the same but the implication and interpretation of them are vastly different. Unless otherwise indicated, eighth notes are given equal weight and duration to the downbeat and upbeat. The common interpretation of the classical eighth note is that they have some degree of separation, whereas the jazz straight eighth notes are performed longer and connected (opposite of jazz quarter notes). In jazz, the general tendency is to play long notes shorter and short notes longer.

Example 7.5 and **track 9** illustrates how a jazz straight eighth-note figure is written and performed. This is also referred to as “even eighths”. Once again, the consonants are not overly pronounced and the vowels carry the pitch as evenly connected as possible. These should always be practiced with a metronome at a medium tempo of quarter note $=100-120$ bpm. One may want to keep a steady pulse by tapping the quarter notes somewhere on the body or with the feet. As the level of rhythmic accuracy increases, one should stop tapping and begin to rely on their internal clock. Eventually, it will be necessary to lock into the pulse of the bass player and drummer in the rhythm section.
Example 7.5. Straight Eighth Notes.

The straight eighth-note example and all subsequent examples can be sung on any scale, in any key, and with various syllables, so feel free to experiment or have the singers come up with their own ideas. Once a steady, even eighth-note pulse is secured, it is important to establish the “offbeats” or “ands” of the beat. This is especially crucial because singing “off the beat” and use of syncopation are paramount in the performance of jazz.

Example 7.6. Jazz Straight Eighth Notes with Accents.

Example 7.6 and **track 10** demonstrate straight eighths that employ a slight accent on the offbeat or upbeat. Maintain a steady pulse with a metronome and tap the quarter notes lightly on upper chest near the heart, simulating a “heart beat”, or just tap the feet or thigh. The ensemble should now sing the exercise in octaves between the men and women’s parts in a comfortable range. Once again, do not over-emphasize the “doo” but lightly accent the “ba” and keep the line legato by singing on the vowels and through the consonants.
After the upbeats are established, resume tapping and then only sing the bahp’s on the offbeat on a single pitch as in example 7.7 and track 11, or on a chord voicing as in example 7.11. The use of the imploded “p” (not “puh”) should naturally stop the sound. Once again, mentally singing the rests and adhering to the steady metronome pulse should keep the singers from rushing. If needed, an “m” or ghost note can be lightly hummed on the rests to help ensure a steady, even pulse.

“Ghosted” notes are notes whose articulation is “swallowed” in order to promote the importance of their neighbors in phrasing a swing line (often shown with parentheses or by using x-shaped noteheads). In this case, by employing a ghosted note, one can physically sense the downbeat and then react to the note. This will also help the singers internalize the sub-division without being audible to the listener.

Example 7.7. Upbeat (or Offbeat) Demonstration.

Swing Eighth Note

When people discuss the rhythm in jazz, generally speaking they are referring to the swing feel. A group should ideally be able to swing with or without a rhythm section, and developing a swing feel is essential for the jazz vocal ensemble. It could be argued that the “ability to swing” is the most important ingredient in determining whether the vocal group is in fact a jazz vocal ensemble. How important is this element? It was written that Dizzy Gillespie once said “that he may miss notes on
occasion but never rhythm.” The richness, unpredictability, and complexity of rhythms are perhaps the most important element in jazz, rivaled only by the emphasis of improvisation.

Basically, the swing feel is usually described in terms of the length of eighth notes and how they are performed. Instead of equally divided eighth-note groupings as they appear in published music, the eighth notes are now loosely interpreted as eighth-note triplets with the first two eighth notes tied and the upbeat slightly accented with a breath articulation. The downbeat lasts longer than the upbeat and the upbeat feels as if it wants to move in a buoyant, forward motion towards the next beat or rest. This rolling, forward momentum and drive, combined with the emphasis on beats two and four, are what makes people want to snap their fingers, tap their toes, or, in the case of the swing era, dance.

Example 7.8. Triplet Eighth-Note Groupings.

Example 7.8 and track 12 demonstrate a triplet figure with every note sung. By singing all the notes, the singer becomes more kinesthetically aware of the subdivision and length between the first and last note of the triplet when they become slurred. This example could also be written in 12/8 and would be interpreted the

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same, but jazz literature written in 12/8 would be more cumbersome and difficult to
read, so the triplets are simply implied when eighth notes are written in 4/4 time.

Example 7.9. First Partial Slurred Eighth-Note Triplets.

Example 7.9 and **track 13** demonstrate the triplet with the first two notes
slurred and the last note slightly accented with the “va.” Note that the second note of
the triplet, or the “note in the middle,” is honored mentally. Once again, the
consonant “d” is not dental sounding and is softened by sending more air through the
front of the tongue and teeth. The “v” has been selected to replace the more
commonly sung “b” consonant because it is voiced and sounds less percussive, thus
encouraging a more legato line. Overly pronouncing consonants is a common mistake
for students who are singing syllables for the first time. Generally, the vowels and
pitches will take precedence over the consonants. Syllables are usually written as a
vehicle for singers to execute wordless phrases or simulate instrumental articulation.

Example 7.10. Common Swing Eighth-Note Notation.

Example 7.10 illustrates how swing eighth notes, void of expression marks,
are commonly written. They are interpreted the same as in the preceding example but
now the triplet is implied instead of written. It is important to note that this literal translation of a swing feel is not typical of all jazz musicians. The accents and note lengths will vary depending on style, history, tempo and artist. It is the author’s opinion that jazz is perhaps one of the most abstract of all notated music, due to the fact that many of the rhythmic subtleties and human expressions in swing cannot be accurately notated. Therefore, example 7.9 is not the only basis for interpreting swing literature but a point of departure.

Basically, an exaggerated swing-feel works very well in the slow to medium tempos and even more so in the style known as the *shuffle*. The earlier jazz musicians tend to play an exaggerated swing with a laid-back-feel (slightly behind the metronome pulse), and the modern tendency has usually been to play the eighth notes a little straighter. In faster tempos, the notes are generally played straighter and placed on the beat or closer to the center of the metronome pulse.

Once the eighth-note swing-feel articulation has been introduced, the ensemble can now apply that same triplet sub-division treatment to the quarter notes. Example 7.11 and track 14 show how one can sing and swing a quarter note. Once again the “m” is employed for the singers to feel the hidden rests between the notes and to keep from rushing. Example 7.12 and track 15 demonstrate how one can effectively swing the upbeats by using the “m” as a ghost note.
Example 7.11. Swing Quarter Notes.

\[ \text{Example 7.12. Swing Upbeats (Offbeats).} \]

\[ \text{Syncopation and Inflection} \]

If swing is responsible for propelling the sound forward, *syncopation* has to do with the element of rhythmic surprise and how the notes are accented. Syncopations will also vary with tempos, style, and time period. Most often they take place just before or after a beat, anticipating beats one and three, similarly to classical music. In Western music the accents generally fall on the beats but in swing they often fall between the beats (upbeat of eighth notes) and irregularly. Note the accents in example 7.13 that occur within the melodic line. Not all the upbeats are accented, contributing to the overall rhythmic interest and variety in phrasing.
Another important characteristic of jazz is the use of inflection. In jazz, “inflection connotes the entire gamut of individual phrasing idiosyncrasies developed by jazz artists, such as accenting, holding, bending, flattening of notes, and the manifold combinations thereof.” At this point, the ensemble has learned some of the important characteristics and concepts of swing and some stylistic inflections can now be introduced. For the purpose of this paper, only a few of the more commonly used inflections will be demonstrated.

**Breath Articulation**

One of the most important elements in interpreting swing charts is the ability to manipulate the breath and take breaths “in rhythm.” Quite often, young groups are so fixated on singing the correct pitches that the time-feel suffers and the performance loses rhythmic vitality. The use of a “breath articulation” or “breath release” is also used to initiate a clean rhythmic entrance or energized cutoff. The release of any phrase should be articulated regardless of whether it is a consonant or a vowel. If a rest follows a phrase that ends in a vowel, the expulsion of breath can create the illusion of the sound and energy still being suspended and moving forward. It is

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important that the singers remain rhythmically committed (mentally and physically) between phrases so as not to “drop the ball” and pick it up again every time there is a rest.

Breathing rhythmically also sets up a phrase and is effective when taken on the beat just before the figure: a sort of breath ramp or pickup into the figure. If taken on an eighth-note rest that falls on a downbeat before an entrance, it is important that the breath lasts the length of the first tied partial of an eighth-note triplet. This will help singers pull the time back and resist the temptation to rush the entrance.

As previously mentioned, many jazz musicians refer to the concept of “laying back” on medium swing tempos. For some, the thought of “pulling back the reins” of a horse and enjoying the ride is an effective imagery. The author refers to the laid-back beat as a feeling of sitting on the backside of the metronome pulse or groove and being pulled by the music. Whichever imagery resonates, it is important to understand that energy and drive does not come from pushing or driving the beat, but rather from rhythmic restraint.

Example 7.14 and Track 16 shows an exercise written by the author, demonstrating common syncopations and inflections that exist in jazz swing interpretation. This was written with the intention of introducing the aforementioned basic swing concepts and articulations to an ensemble that is new to the style, or as a basic vocal warm-up for groups that are jazz vocal veterans.

In the example, the eighth notes are performed in a legato style with the implied triplet sub-division, or the first note of each eighth-note pair sung twice as long as the second note. The quarter notes are sung slightly shorter and separated but
are given full value by observing the hidden rests. Syllables are written to suggest different types of articulation and stylistic inflections. Once again, implying the triplet subdivision (inner rhythm) throughout the entire performance with snaps (or taps) on two and four will facilitate a better swing feel.

In measure 1, a *tenuto* and *staccato* inflection is introduced. These inflections are very common in jazz, and often they are implied even when not marked, especially if a rest follows the last two eighth notes in the phrase. *Tenuto* means that the note is sustained for its full value or, in this case, for the first two notes of the eighth-note triplet. The *staccato* note means that it is sung short and light, and is separated from the other notes without losing its forward direction. In this instance, it is sung on the upbeat or on the last note of the triplet.

Generally, when a note lasts longer than a dotted quarter as in measures 2, 3, 6, etc., the note moves dynamically up or down depending on the melodic contour of the phrase. This inflection is reminiscent of the lead trumpet’s (the soprano’s role) in a big band, driving the melodic line and the rest of the band forward to the next phrase or release. Measure 10 is another good example of how a vocal group can
simulate a big-band sound. The downbeat is anticipated with an open chord voicing and is sung with a full sound and a hard “d” for a strong accent. It is then followed by a slow crescendo and breath release on the following beat.

Typically, all breath releases take place on the downbeat of the rest that immediately follows the last written and sung note. They can also be released on the upbeat of the last sung note of the phrase. It all depends on how much time there is before the upcoming phrase and how the release affects the rhythmic sub-division of the line. Consonants and vowels also have to be treated as rhythmic devices as they can either collapse or enhance the swing feel.

In measures 5 and 7, the “breath accent” or a “breath articulation” is introduced. This inflection is rarely notated in the music but is a very effective expressive device when used as a vehicle to articulate an exaggerated triplet feel or to periodically “dig” or “sink” into the groove. It is often placed on dotted quarter notes with a diaphragmatic (activated by the abdominal muscles) push of breath starting on the last one-third of the beat in the bar. A change in dynamics must also accompany the inflection from medium soft to loud. This will often increase naturally just by sending more breath to the cords. This can also be reinforced visually by placing a hand with the palm facing the abdomen and then bringing the hand towards the body at the appropriate time, simulating a gentle inward, upward push of the lower abs. This should only occur on the last one-third of a beat in length.

In measure 5, an “ascending glissando” is written between the women’s parts. This is a common inflection used in big bands and is occasionally used as a dramatic device to connect wide intervallic leaps. In this case, the women have more of a leap
but this should take place with all the voices if the leap is larger than a minor second. The *glissando* consists of an upward slide and usually includes a crescendo. The crescendo is delayed slightly and results in an upward rush of sound to the connecting note right before the downbeat.

Measures 8-10 illustrate the technique known as the *fortepiano/crescendo* and is indicated with an *fp* symbol. This is performed by strongly accenting a note, followed by a sudden drop in dynamics to a soft level or pianissimo. After a brief pause, there should be a gradual increase in dynamics back to the original *forte*, followed by a breath release. This is a commonly used inflection on notes that last longer than two beats. They are not always notated but most often implied in swing charts.

Measure 10-18 demonstrates a sort of “call and response” between the men and women, simulating the trombones and saxophones of a big band. It is also an opportunity to practice tuning unisons, work on blend, and establish a unified swing-feel. This time the men have the melody and once again the *fortepiano/crescendo* is utilized. For extra excitement, a diaphragmatic push can be given on the cutoff. The women have the more active line, but take on a more supportive role. It is not necessary to crescendo their last held note but it should remain energized to the release. Once again, do not overly pronounce the “d” and slightly accent the “ba” with a shallow jaw or inner smile, not a tall, vertical “ah” sound. This piece can be sung in a medium or medium fast tempo. Note that on the slower tempo, the eighth notes can be more exaggerated or “triplety,” and in the faster tempo they should be performed straighter or more even.
In track 16, the choir demonstrate example 7.14 with a rhythm section consisting of piano, bass, and drums. Most often, rhythm sections include a guitar, which can be added if available. The warm-up exercise is sung with a laid-back feel (not dragging) a little behind the pulse of the rhythm section. Generally, when singing swing charts the vocal tone quality is brighter and more resonant, but this can also vary depending on dynamics, mood of the piece, and chord voicings.

**Word Articulation**

As previously mentioned, the sounds (phonetics) of the words can greatly enhance or inhibit the rhythmic vitality of a swing tune, or, for that matter, any song that contains a steady tempo. If the consonants are under-articulated the performance is flat and loses rhythmic intensity. Contrary to this are consonants that are over-enunciated and clipped, interrupting the legato flow and forward direction of the phrase. The consonants and vowels can be problematic if not articulated at the appropriate time in the rhythmic sub-division. The author once read that consonants were “necessary evils,” so learning how utilize them successfully is the key. Many singers of note (i.e. Diana Krall, Peggy Lee, Shirley Horn, Anita O’Day, etc.) who don’t possess especially powerful voices have a very compelling and intense swing feel due to their strategically placed treatment of consonants and vowels within the “groove.”

Example 7.15 is an excerpt from an arrangement written by internationally recognized jazz vocal educator and arranger Larry Lapin. The first example illustrates how a typical swing vocal arrangement is notated. Example 7.16 illustrates what one needs to be cognizant of when singing the words.
Example 7.15. Harry Barris, Ted Koehler, and Billy Moll, “Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams,” mm. 11-16, Demonstration of a Jazz Vocal Arrangement.

Example 7.16. Harry Barris, Ted Koehler, and Billy Moll, Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams, mm. 11-16, Demonstration of Phonetic Spelling (not IPA).

In example 7.16 is a literal transcription of what is sung is notated under the appropriate notes. The vowels written on the second part of the triplet are not sung but honored mentally. As an experiment, sing all the sounds and give a breath accent on all the vowels to physically feel the duration and fatness of the quarter notes and the literal eighth-note sub-division. The downward arrows between the quarter notes denote a separation between the words. The vowels are given full value and the consonants at the end of the words are not elided to the next word. This is intended to separate and give weight to all the quarter notes and does not mean to sing legato. This is a common stylistic treatment for most quarter notes in a medium swing tempo but once again, it must be idiomatically appropriate for the time period it is reflecting.
Performance Suggestions

The singers should always be engaged rhythmically when singing. This applies to the beginnings, middle, and ends of phrases. It also means not rhythmically checking out during rests or when singing long-held notes. The “groove” or inner rhythm can also be reflected in the body. In other words, allow the singers to move their bodies to emphasize the text, but be sure that the idiomatic style is enhanced by this movement. This does not mean you have to use choreography but the body should be involved to produce a rhythmical commitment.

It has been the author’s practice to have the singers physically warm up by walking them in a circle, stepping (on beats 1 and 3) and snapping and bending knees (on beats 2 and 4) to a recording. This can be performed to various styles and tempos or to a recording of the actual song or arrangement the group is working on. Most often, students come into rehearsals tired or occupied with other issues, and moving them in a synchronized fashion helps the singers develop a group synergy and mental focus for the task at hand. It becomes a kind of jazzercise with a musical purpose.

Developing a secure rhythmic feel is essential and paramount to the idiom. It is the author’s opinion that in the learning stages, time-feel and rhythmic articulation take precedence over the notes on swing charts. The vertical chords and individual lines can be individually or collectively introduced once the time-feel is secure. The melody and rhythms can be separated in rehearsal by speaking the words or syllables in time with a metronome. Make sure the speaking voice is legato and the vowels are kept elongated, giving the rhythms full value.
Once in a while, try rehearsing with just the drummer have the singers mimic some of his/her drum fills or set-ups between phrases with percussive syllables. This will help teach the singers to eventually think more like a drummer. With time, one can learn to mentally imagine drum fills or set ups before entrances, very much like playing in a big band. This is an especially effective tool when an entrance comes in on the upbeat after a dotted-quarter rest.

It is important for the director to internalize the tempo by singing the piece mentally and then giving the singers a measure or two in the count-off. This ensures a more accurate time feel and gives the singers a moment to lock into the groove before singing the particular phrase. The typical way of counting a swing tune is to snap on beats 2 and 4 and count out loud beats 1 and 3. For the first measure it is counted in a two-feel (in 4/4 time) with a swing eighth-note pickup sung as a ghosted “uh” into beats 1 and 3, and then all beats are counted out loud in the second measure on all four beats. Over two measures in 4/4 time it would sound like: (uh) one (snap) (uh)two (snap)/ (uh) one two three four (with snaps continuing on beats 2 and 4).
Chapter 8

CONTEMPORARY STYLE

Jazz vocal ensemble singing is considered “Art” music rather than popular music. However, the jazz vocal literature integrates Pop, Rock, R&B (rhythm and blues), Gospel and other styles into its repertoire. This music is also indigenous to American culture, as it is an offspring of the blues, one of the foundations of jazz. Many of the aforementioned rhythmic elements apply such as: syncopation, straight eighth note, swing eighth-notes, and an exaggerated triplet. Also rhythmic feels such as “laid back” (slightly behind the beat), “in the pocket” (in the center of the pulse), or slightly “on top” (front edge of the pulse) are applied. Developing a strong rhythmic awareness is essential for all genres, including a rhythmic sense of the subdivisions and accents that will vary with the style.

Quarter Note Subdivision

For most contemporary music, the subdivision of the quarter note is generally straight eighths or straight sixteenths with a heavy backbeat on two and four. As in swing articulation, accents or syncopation can also vary. The goal is to give full value to evenly placed eighth or sixteenth notes. Contrary to a swing-feel, singing on the backside of the metronome pulse is more rare in contemporary music but not uncommon. Once again it depends on the style, tempo, and whether it is more of a triplet-note versus a sixteenth-note subdivision. Otherwise, “laying back” is more apt to produce a performance that is sensed as lethargic or lazy.
Example 8.1 demonstrates a way to practice sixteenth-note subdivisions and articulation. This is done by tapping steady quarter notes on the body and counting out loud all of the sixteenth-note subdivisions in a medium tempo. The accents are first sung on the downbeat and then every other sixteenth note is accented in a sequential manner. For variety, numbers can be replaced with various syllables and the accents can also be sung in any order. Once the time-feel is secure, sing only the accented notes and the others mentally to check for rhythmic accuracy. Quite often in this idiom accents and entrances fall on the second and the last sixteenth subdivision of a quarter note.

Example 8.1. Sixteenth Note Subdivision With Accents.

Vibrato

As previously stated, singing the correct type of vibrato will greatly enhance the authenticity and acceptance of the style being performed. In some contemporary styles it is appropriate to use more vibrato than as discussed in previous discussed chapters. The vibrato used is more of a *diaphragmatic* vibrato, and vibrato rate is generally pulsed in time with an eighth- note triplet or sixteenth-note subdivision within the established pulse. The slower rate of vibrato is rooted in the black gospel
choir tradition and is indigenous to African American styles of singing. Lebon states that the vibrato used is more of an “amplitude vibrato—that is, an oscillation of breath pressure.”

Generally, the vibrato is on the slower side of the previously mentioned six cycles per second (of classical singers), but it can vary depending on the tempo and groove (pulse) of the piece. Jazz vocal soloists tend to imitate the vibrato of their instrumental counterparts. Pop singers use it but in general sing a straight tone upon initiation of sound and then slowly introduce vibrato at the end of the phrase. R&B singing reflects more of the gospel and blues influence and is allowed to “spin” (using vibrato) at the onset, similar to classical singing but at a slower rate. When used appropriately, a group synchronized vibrato can generate an exciting and energizing sound. Singing in idiomatically different styles is common with the jazz vocal ensemble, and their inclusion adds variety of color to a program and gives the singer’s a chance to open up their sound.

The diaphragmatic (or abdominal) vibrato is produced by pulsations activated by the abdominal muscles while still maintaining a firm breath support. Austin and Howard describe this action as diaphragmatic pulses that “cause the air to flow through the vocal cords in a wave-like motion, creating a slight fluctuation in pitch and volume.” By learning this technique, one can control the speed and width of the vibrato. There should be no feeling of strain or discomfort in the throat and it actually should feel more connected to the body.

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Controlling the rate is important because it needs to be synchronized with the sixteenth-note subdivision of the pulse. When sung together at the appropriate time, the effect is very powerful and compelling, adding rhythmic vitality and “oomph” to the sound. Conversely, if the vibrato rate is allowed to fluctuate at different speeds within the group, the result can collapse the time-feel and sound more legato and classical in nature. Therefore, the exercise should be practiced together as a group in order to experience a more synchronized, rhythmic execution of the vibrato. It can be practiced on various chord structures or on any unison pitch.

Example 8.2. Demonstrating Diaphragmatic Vibrato.

Exercise 8.2 is sung on the word “hey” (as pronounced in “day”), and sung with a firm, supported pulse as if one was calling out to someone across the room. It is a good idea to place hands around the waist below the rib cage and feel for the slight down and out sensation around the back and sides. One should sense gentle pulsations in the abdominal area but not a pulling in. It can feel like a gentle laugh when the abdominal muscles are activated. The next step is to practice with a
metronome at a medium slow to medium tempo for rhythmic accuracy. The “h” is only pronounced on the downbeats and the “ey” vowel is sung smooth and legato, articulated only with the breath. The triplet subdivision vibrato is generally reserved for slower tempos or contemporary ballads.

**Vocal Production and Vowel Sound**

Generally, the vocal quality in contemporary music is brighter, “edgier,” with more mouth/nasal (mask) resonance. For women, accessing the “upper mix” or “upper middle” register will provide a more powerful sound. The contemporary sound tends to be more aggressive but vowels remain conversational. The exception is the R&B or Gospel style, where the vowels can be shaped in a more vertical formation (similar to classical) and the sound can be made fuller by adding more throat space. This can be achieved by sensing just the beginning of a yawn, and then coupling it with a snarl-like feeling across the bridge of the nose and cheek bones for that sensation of mask resonance. When combined with vibrato, the sound is richer, vibrant and more dynamic.

Generally the vibrato is used on notes lasting longer than a quarter note. Once again it depends on the melody, lyric, and chord structure. If the vertical chord structure is harmonically dense, vibrato can obscure the clarity so it is usually sung on chords that have less tension in the voicing or on unison lines. It is interesting to point out that the combination of straight tone to vibrato can also be used as a sort of tension and release. It is difficult to reverse the process, so that combination is normally reserved for the ends of phrases.
Example 8.3 and track 17 is an excerpt taken from the author’s arrangement of Cole Porter’s “It’s All Right With Me.” The arrangement is given a modern treatment with the use of re-harmonization, melodic variation and ornamentation. It is sung with a more R&B stylistic feel by employing a measured sixteenth-note vibrato on the longer held notes. The diaphragmatic vibrato is added to the dotted quarter notes in measures 2, 4, and 5, which also supports the overall dramatic implication of the lyric. The sixteenth notes are also given a breath accent and in measure 4 a scoop inflection is used into the word sound “tempt.”

Example 8.3. Cole Porter, “It’s All Right With Me,” mm. 48-51, Demonstration of an R&B Style.

Practice Suggestions
As previously suggested, the ensemble should be rhythmically engaged from the onset. It is best to feel and tap all the quarter notes on the body and not worry about emphasizing beats two and four, because they will be reinforced by a heavier backbeat in the drums. The main focus is to work towards a steady, evenly distributed
weight on each sixteenth-note subdivision without rushing. Once again always use a metronome and work with it amplified through the sound system as well. The responsibility of maintaining a solid groove and time feel is a group endeavor.

Singers can practice on just a neutral vowel such as “uh” when learning a piece. By taking away the consonants, the singers are forced to accent and move the line with just the breath which enables them to feel the length or “in the pocket” feeling of the notes. This will also help ensure a stronger body/sound connection and make it easier to hook into the diaphragmatic vibrato.
Chapter 9

DISCUSSION OF INTERVIEWS

Discussion of Interviews with Jazz Vocal Ensemble Directors

One of the most practical ways to gather further insight into developing strategies for the jazz vocal sound is to interview tenured faculty who have established reputations as jazz vocal program and ensembles directors, arrangers, and instrumentalists. Although the paper is not solely based on their philosophies or strategies, the author thought it worthwhile to provide a different perspective and/or support for the strategies presented. The questions asked were based on the interviewees' area of expertise primarily as an instrumentalist and director of traditional and jazz vocal groups. The objective was to compare their methods and philosophical viewpoints about the differences and commonalities of directing traditional choral groups and jazz vocal ensembles. The faculty invited to participate in the interview process were Professor Larry Lapin (University of Miami Frost School of Music), Dr. Stephen Zegree (Western Michigan University), and Kerry Marsh (Sacramento State University).

The interviews were conducted in the form of an email questionnaire, which included a total of twelve questions, including four that were specific questions regarding the essential elements that contribute to the jazz vocal sound. The responses elicited from the interviews can be found in their entirety in Appendix C of this essay. As expected, the majority of the respondents shared similar opinions and viewpoints...
regarding the commonalities and differences between traditional choral and jazz vocal groups. The interview questions were categorized into: A) Commonalities and Differences Between Traditional Choral and Jazz Vocal Ensembles, B) Commonalities Shared Between Jazz Instrumental and Vocal Groups, C) Sound System, and D) Ideal Jazz Vocal Sound.

Commonalities and Differences Between Traditional Choral and Jazz Vocal Ensembles

The first category of questions was designed to validate the background and experience of the interviewees with regards to years of teaching, vocal training, and traditional and jazz choral conducting. In response to the next two questions regarding commonalities and differences in traditional choral and jazz vocal ensembles, all interviewees shared similar opinions. All agreed that singing in the appropriate style was the most important element. They were also unanimous in stating that the basic elements shared between the groups are as follows: choral blend, balance, intonation, lyric delivery, and healthy singing.

The response to the question concerning the differences between the ensembles was also similar. The major differences noted are the vocal sounds with regards to diction, vowel shapes, vibrato, timbre, and rhythmic articulation. Two respondents mentioned the importance and impact of sound reinforcement on the vocal production. Both agree that the technique of singing on the microphone resembles more of a recorded sound. Adjustments are made in accordance to a more conversational approach to singing because it is no longer necessary to produce a large or acoustic sound.
Commonalities Shared Between Jazz Instrumental and Vocal Groups

The next category elicited a strong response from one of the interviewees. Although all agree that the stylistic elements and the “sound asthetics” are similar to a big-band sound or a jazz instrumental group, Professor Lapin pointed out important challenges in articulation between horn players and singers. Firstly, he stated his concept of hearing jazz “vocal groups as an emulation of instrumental groups.” He also mentioned that it takes longer for horn players to execute sounds because of the added resistance, enabling them to hold the time back for a better swing-feel. Since singers don’t share the same resistance, the challenge for singers is to not articulate “on top” of the beat and to use the sound of the words in a way that “emulates” the concept of a more instrumental-type articulation in style and time feel. This comparison and concept is a significant one, in that it supports the importance of having an instrumental background or some kind of vocal experience with various jazz instrumental groups in order to develop and understand these concepts.

Sound System

This category also elicited a similar response from the faculty. The entire faculty was in agreement upon the importance and use of the sound system. They were also in agreement that the vocal production and tone remain the same when rehearsing acoustically and electronically, with some adjustments due to volume, range, and consonants. Marsh and Zegree also stressed the importance of the proximity effect or distance between mic and the singers’ mouth. Both agree that the

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46 Larry Lapin, interview by author, email correspondence, Miami, Fla., 7 March 2009.
distance be right on the mic for “sonic presence” and only backing off on the “highest and loudest musical moments.” All respondents rehearse their groups on the sound system about 75% of the time.

**Ideal Vocal Sound**

The final category focuses on what the faculty considers to be the ideal jazz vocal sound and what methods they use to inspire that particular sound. All respondents use a similar approach when trying to inspire a performance by way of vocal modeling, recording examples, and imagery. They were also in agreement that the sound should reflect the members of the group (“sound persona”), and in particular for two of the faculty, the lead soprano. Marsh is unique in the fact that he and his wife Julia Dollison record demos for all his arrangements. Zegree refers to his ideal sound as the “Gold Company Sound.”

Overall, meticulous listening to jazz vocal groups as learning models who are widely recognized as leaders in this vocal jazz idiom is vitally important. The groups mentioned are: Manhattan Transfere, Take Six, Singers Unlimited, Real Group, New York Voices, and The Hi Lo’s. Of course no education would be complete without study and emulation of definitive instrumental and vocal jazz recordings and artists.

**Discussion of Interviews with Vocal Artists**

Another important strategy in learning how to produce a more authentic sound for the jazz vocal ensemble was to interview professional singers who also have established reputations as jazz and contemporary vocal musicians, arrangers, composers, teachers, studio and group singers. Once again, the author thought it worthwhile to include their philosophies, vocal methods, application and approach to
the art of jazz and commercial singing based on their years of study and empirical experience. It is the author’s opinion that singers contribute an important “proprioceptive awareness” with regards to how sound is produced and/or manipulated to achieve the stylistic goals and objectives of a group sound. The inclusion of these interviews for the paper was intended to provide valuable insight as to what adjustments the singer has to make in terms of vowels, breath, articulation, vibrato, registration, phrasing, and timbre.

The vocalists invited to participate in the interview process were Janis Seigel (Manhattan Transfer), Lauren Kinhan (New York Voices), Julia Dollison (Down Beat Jazz Vocal Soloist Winner), and Michelle Amato (Yanni/Disney/studio singer). The interviews were conducted in the form of an email questionnaire, which included a total of ten questions, with eight that were specific questions regarding vocal approach and adjustments for various idioms and styles. The responses elicited from the interviews can be found in their entirety in Appendix C of this paper. The interview questions were categorized into: A) Classical Training, B) Vocal Adjustments and Stylistic Influences from Solo to Ensemble Singing, C) Microphone Technique, D) Jazz Influence and Articulation, and E) Contemporary Interpretation.

Classical Training

The first question was designed to see if there was any correlation between classical training and jazz voice production. Three of the four respondents concur in having had classical training early on in their development. Seigel confesses that she never received training until late in her career. She states that she developed bad habits and has since learned some classical techniques to help preserve and strengthen
her voice, as well as giving her timbre options for the various musical styles. The other three respondents agreed that there is a correlation in production in terms of breath support, breath articulation, vocal facility, and quality of sound. Kinhan writes that she is “a strong believer that both worlds inform and aid one another.”

**Vocal Adjustments and Stylistic Influences for Ensemble Singing**

The next category elicited a variety of responses but most agree on the basic principles of ensemble singing as it applies to blend, intonation, mixing registers, breath, vibrato, phrasing, vowel shapes, unified timbre and quality of tone. All agree that sacrifices and adjustments must be made when making the transfer from solo to group singing. For instance, there does not exist as much “spontaneity” or “freedom of expression” when one sings in a group. However, they all agree that emphasizing certain words and consonants and connecting emotionally to the lyric can reflect personal expression. Of course the smaller the group, the more freedom one has, but the goal is to achieve the same mindset in expression and sound.

Kinhan, a long-time member of the internationally renowned New York Voices, stated

…there are maybe a few more freedoms for us since we are each on our own part, but essentially, the wall of sound is what we are going for... If we are all the same level in volume, we produce a much better overall group sound and the chords and the unisons are much more in tune. When we are pushing the individual sound beyond the group parameters, we run into balance and intonation issues. Learning just how much to give to the group sound in order to attain the group sound goal is a work in progress for every choir. And it’s a moving target, as the voice grows and the repertoire changes, it gets re-evaluated.

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47 Lauren Kinhan, interview by author, email correspondence, New York City, N.Y., 26 February, 2009.
Microphone Technique

The next category asked whether there were vocal adjustments made when transitioning from acoustic to microphone singing. Three of the singers agreed that when singing acoustically, they tend to sing with a fuller sound in order to project over accompaniment. Siegel states that she is not aware of any difference and that her volume adjustment depends on the ability to hear herself in the monitors. However, all the respondents agreed that the microphone allows for many subtleties, nuance, and a softer more conversational approach to singing. Siegel employs an analogy that the author has used in stating that one could compare acoustic and microphone singing as “acting live on a Broadway stage and acting in the movies.”

Jazz Influence and Articulation

The next set of questions had to do with the singers’ musical influences and stylistic articulation. As suspected, the musical influences included important figures in jazz and contemporary idioms. All four cited instrumental and vocal artists that were paramount to their development as jazz and contemporary vocal artists. It is interesting to note that the various musical influences coincide closely with their own jazz and pop contemporaries. Dollison states that she primarily listens to modern jazz and contemporary artists, whereas Siegel is primarily influenced by bebop and mainstream jazz artists. Kinhan, like Amato, mentions the familiar names in jazz as well as earlier pop and crossover artists. Three of the interviewees mentioned being influenced by Ella Fitzgerald.

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In response to articulation, all four mentioned the importance of imitating the articulation of an instrumentalist in regards to: time-feel, accent, phrasing, textures, timbres, inflection, and style. Amato and Seigel talk about at times articulating more like a trumpet. In fact, Seigel writes that she will occasionally “pull out the vocal trumpet bag o’ tricks.” Kinhan and Amato agree that when it comes to group singing, learning to “swing collectively” as an ensemble is a primary goal.

**Contemporary Interpretation**

The final question asked whether the interviewees experienced any differences in vocal production and stylistic approach when making the transition from jazz to the contemporary idiom. Siegel mentioned feeling “…the backbeat of two and four, as opposed to the feeling the ‘swing’ pattern.” She also employs more “nasal sound” and more “melissma” or ornamentation. Kinhan has always been involved with contemporary music and likes “mixing it up” so she doesn’t approach the idiom differently, it’s about the “arrangement and vibe”. Dollison and Amato state that they make adjustments in terms of vibrato and inflection such as “ad-libbing” and the use of more stylistic devices.

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50 Ibid., 96.

51 Janis Seigel, interview by author, email correspondence, New York, NY, 16 February 2009.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

Initial Interview Questions

Questions for Professional Jazz and Commercial Singer:

1) Have you studied classical or “traditional” voice technique, and if so, is there any correlation between classical and jazz vocal production?

2) Do you make any vocal adjustments in production when switching from solo singing to ensemble singing and what adjustments are you cognizant of in order to blend with the group (i.e., mixing registers, timbre, placement, vowel shapes, breath, consonants, vibrato, etc.)?

3) How does your vast experience as a jazz and contemporary solo artist influence your stylistic approach when performing in an ensemble and what elements do you try to incorporate (lyric delivery, phrasing, etc.,)?

4) Are you aware of any vocal adjustments you make when transitioning from acoustic singing to microphone singing?

5) Does your approach to live ensemble or solo singing on a microphone resemble a similar production you would use in a recording studio, if so, what are the similarities and differences?

6) Who were your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and how much do you spend listening to this music?

7) When performing with a vocal jazz ensemble, what elements of jazz instrumental articulation and style do you try to emulate, if any, (time feel, phrasing, etc.)?

8) Do you approach singing pop music differently then when you sing in the jazz idiom (i.e., timbre, time feel, style, use of vibrato, etc.)?

9) What is your musical education (i.e. formal or self-taught)?

10) Any thoughts or comments you would like to contribute?
Questions Professional Jazz Vocal Ensemble Director:

1) How long have you been directing jazz vocal ensembles?

2) Do you have any vocal training or experience as a professional singer and if so, what is your experience?

3) Do you have any experience directing traditional choral groups and do you have classical training?

4) What do you feel are the most important elements that differentiate a classical or traditional choir from a jazz vocal ensemble?

5) What commonalities are shared between traditional choral groups and jazz vocal ensembles?

6) What commonalities are shared between jazz vocal ensembles and jazz instrumental groups?

7) Do you have experience as a professional jazz instrumentalist and if so, on what instrument? If answered yes, how has this experience prepared you for directing jazz vocal ensembles?

8) What affect does the sound system have in the overall sound of the group? What adjustments do you have them make in terms of production on microphone and how often do you rehearse on the sound system?

9) How do you communicate the vocal production you desire from the ensemble (i.e., vocal modeling, use of imagery, recording examples, etc)?

10) Do you have a particular sound that you feel is the “ideal sound” for the group?

11) Who are your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and how much time do you spend listening to this music?

12) Any additional thoughts or comments?
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Strategies For Developing a Jazz and Contemporary Vocal Ensemble Sound for the Traditional Chamber Choir
By Lisanne Lyons

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE:
The goal of this research is to develop a practical system and approach in developing a jazz and contemporary vocal sound for a traditional choir at the college level. Responses to the questionnaire by acknowledged professional jazz and contemporary vocalists are intended to provide valuable insight, justification, and relevancy in support of the strategies suggested for choirs and directors who are new to the genre.

PROCEDURE:
The informed consent form and the question questionnaire will be attached to an email (recruitment letter) and sent out to participants. All participants are asked to answer this document regarding vocal production and style. The participants will be asked to state in their email response whether they agree that their names will be published or not. Each participant acknowledges through his/her responses to the questionnaires (via email) that he/she has read and understood the informed consent form and further agrees to its terms. The responses will be used for research and will be included in the co-investigator’s doctoral essay. Through responding to the questionnaire and editing it as the participant wishes it to appear in the document, each participant also agrees that his/her responses will be published in the essay.

RISKS:
No foreseeable risks or discomfort are anticipated for you by participating. Because this research is being conducted through email, security of your correspondence cannot be guaranteed.

BENEFITS:
Although, no benefits can be promised to you by participating in this study, the information gathered and distributed is intended to provide valuable insight into the thoughts and opinions on jazz ensemble singing from the perspective of a professional jazz singer.
ALTERNATIVES:
You have the alternative to not participate in this study. You may stop participating anytime and can refuse to answer questions that you feel uncomfortable with. There are no repercussions for choosing not to participate.

COSTS:
No costs are anticipated for your participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
The participant’s names and responses will be disclosed in this dissertation, which will be submitted to the faculty of the University of Miami this Spring of 2009 and will be made available for educational purposes unless he/she indicates to the principle researcher that they would like their information to be confidential. Please state your preference whether you allow your permission for your name to be published or not.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:
Your participation is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw from this study.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:
The researcher will answer any questions you have regarding the study. A copy of the consent form will be sent to you after you signed it. If you have any questions about the study please contact Lisanne Lyons co-investigator, at 954-815-9425 or lisannelyons@earthlink.net or Professor Rachel Lebon, at 305-284-5813 RLLebon@aol.com. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office (HSRO) at 305-243-3195.

Please print a copy of this consent document for your records.
Informed Consent Form

Strategies For Developing Jazz and Contemporary Vocal Ensemble Sound for the Traditional Chamber Choir
By Lisanne Lyons

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE:
The goal of this research is to develop a practical system and approach in developing a jazz and contemporary vocal sound for a traditional choir at the college level. Responses to the questionnaire by acknowledged jazz vocal ensemble directors and professional jazz and contemporary vocalists are intended to provide valuable insight, justification, and relevancy in support of the strategies suggested for choirs and directors who are new to the genre.

PROCEDURE:
The informed consent form and the question questionnaire will be attached to an email (recruitment letter) and sent out to participants. All participants are asked to answer this document regarding vocal production and style. The participants will be asked to state in their email response whether they agree that their names will be published or not. Each participant acknowledges through his/her responses to the questionnaires (via email) that he/she has read and understood the informed consent form and further agrees to its terms. The responses will be used for research and will be included in the co-investigator’s doctoral essay. Through responding to the questionnaire and editing it as the participant wishes it to appear in the document, each participant also agrees that his/her responses will be published in the essay.

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Please print a copy of this consent document for your records.
APPENDIX C

Participant Questionnaire Transcripts

JANIS SEIGEL OF MANHATTEN TRANSFER - INTERVEIW
Via Email – February 16, 2009

1) Have you studied classical or “traditional” voice technique, and if so, is there any correlation between classical and jazz vocal production?

I did not study voice production as a young singer, unfortunately. When I started studying voice in 1980, I had to undo a lot of bad habits. I am currently studying with a wonderful teacher in NY. and she was horrified at some of the production techniques and body language I got into. Classical singers tend to stand very straight and still, while jazz singers “get down” and tend to move with the music. Jazz singers also tend to lift their heads up and down and move their jaws, tongue and palate in order to improvise and create sounds. I have been able to learn some classical techniques for voice production and power that have been very helpful in preserving my voice and in creating a range of choices that I can use in live performance instead of pushing. These choices also give me a repertoire of different timbres I can use according to what the stylistic requirements of the music are.

2) Do you make any vocal adjustments in production when switching from solo singing to ensemble singing and what adjustments are you cognizant of in order to blend with the group (i.e., mixing registers, timbre, placement, vowel shapes, breath, consonants, vibrato, etc.)?

When I’m singing harmony, I generally use no vibrato. The chord “sounds” more clearly when minimal vibrato is used. In general, I keep any kind of more expressive techniques to a minimum when I’m singing a harmony part.

3) How does your vast experience as a jazz and contemporary solo artist influence your stylistic approach when performing in an ensemble and what elements do you try to incorporate (lyric delivery, phrasing, etc.)?

My method, and this is what I tell all my students, is to sing every harmony line as if it were a melody. The harmony part should flow and have the same emotional thread as the melody.

4) Are you aware of any vocal adjustments you make when transitioning from acoustic singing to microphone singing?
No really…I think it all has to do with how well you are hearing yourself. If you are singing into a mike, chances are you will either have a stage vocal monitor or in-ear monitors, so you can actually sing more softly.

5)  **Does your approach to live ensemble or solo singing on a microphone resemble a similar production you would use in a recording studio, if so, what are the similarities and differences?**

Firstly, let me say that I prefer studio singing to live. I’ve been recording since I’m 12 years old (a L.O.O.O..O..N…G time, believe me ☺️) and am very comfortable in the studio. I find it is a completely different technique, which I liken to the difference between acting live on a Broadway stage and acting in the movies. In the studio everything has to be smaller. You also have to be comfortable with the fact that you are usually isolated because of leakage concerns, and so you have to sing “as if” you were together in the same space/time as the band. When singing live, the tendency is to work the mike, whereas in the studio you basically have to keep the distance consistent.

6)  **Who were your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and how much do you spend listening to this music?**

My musical influences in jazz were John Coltrane, Clifford Brown, Ella, (for purity of tone and swing) Betty Carter, (for inventiveness in improvisation) Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, Leo Watson (for stream of consciousness improv) Louis Armstrong, (for quarter notes and simplicity) Herbie Hancock, Hi-Los. I listen constantly to this music, as I find it still inspiring and rich.

7)  **When performing with a vocal jazz ensemble, what elements of jazz instrumental articulation and style do you try to emulate, if any, (time feel, phrasing, etc.)?**

I try to approach my improvisations as an instrumentalist, and sometimes even my reading of the head. Occasionally, if it is appropriate, I pull out the vocal trumpet bag o’ tricks. I have listened to all the subtleties inherent in the sounds and styles of my favorite trumpet players, Louis, Miles, Clifford Brown, Bubber Miley (the growl), Freddie Hubbard, Chet Baker, Fats Navarro…and try to emulate them.

8)  **Do you approach singing pop music differently then when you sing in the jazz idiom (i.e., timbre, time feel, style, use of vibrato, etc.)?**

Absolutely. I feel the backbeat of 2 and 4 heavily, as opposed to feeling the “swing” pattern, and I play off that. In pop and R&B singing, I use a little more nasal sound and more melisma.
9) What is your musical education (i.e. formal or self-taught)?

I am self-taught. At an early age, I taught myself guitar and piano. I’ve studied composition (including The Schillinger System and 12 tone rows), alto saxophone, voice and home studio engineering privately.
1) **Have you studied classical or “traditional” voice technique, and if so, is there any correlation between classical and jazz vocal production?**

I trained classically. I found building a strong and healthy voice using a classical approach gave me the vocal facility to move between many styles of music – be it Jazz, Pop, R & B, Classical, etc. The idea is to develop your voice, discover your sound and go from there. If your path is strictly classical then you’ll tend to focus your voice very specifically and not stray from the path. For me, I wanted to be able to move freely between styles and also have my voice emulate instruments. Jazz vocals typically use more speech in the sound, it’s a more conversational approach. Sound vocal technique builds control and quality of tone which leads to a multitude of options for the vocalist. Creating a voice that sounds the same from top to bottom is the goal, always going for quality of tone, accuracy in vocalese, and fluidity. I am a strong believer that both worlds inform and aid one another.

2) **Do you make any vocal adjustments in production when switching from solo singing to ensemble singing and what adjustments are you cognizant of in order to blend with the group (i.e., mixing registers, timbre, placement, vowel shapes, breath, consonants, vibrato, etc.)?**

Being able to wear both hats comfortably, solo vs. ensemble singing, is an art form in and of itself. Yes, the voice plays a different function when stepping outside the group sound to produce solo colors. The solo voice typically has more freedom of expression where the ensemble voice has to adhere to the group sound goals. The function of the ensemble singing depends on the size of the choir. With NYV, there are maybe a few more freedoms for us since we are each on our own part, but essentially, the wall of sound is what we are going for. And when we are working in the group singing mind, all of the above are going on – mixing registers, quality of tone, vowel shapes, breathing together, phrasing, vibrato vs. straight tone, etc. We all typically use a little less volume in the group sections as compared to the lead step outs. We’re always going for quality of tone and really focusing the intonation. If we are all the same level in volume, we produce a much better overall group sound and the chords and the unisons are much more in tune. When we are pushing the individual sound beyond the group parameters, we run into balance and intonation issues. Learning just how much to give to the group sound in order to attain the group sound goal is a work in progress for every choir. And it’s a moving target, as the voice grows and the repertoire changes, it gets re-evaluated.
3) How does your vast experience as a jazz and contemporary solo artist influence your stylistic approach when performing in an ensemble and what elements do you try to incorporate (lyric delivery, phrasing, etc.)?

I like to think that my strong back round as a soloist gives the ensemble mentality a bump in energy and encourages the concept and theories to grow. I like the group sound to be as vital as can be with lots of colors and phrasing nuances that also happen in the solo setting. Finding that balance is important, discussing it is essential. NYV has worked hard to create a sound that feels more emotionally connected, going for subtleties over fancy footwork. We value the lyric and try to stay true to it.

4) Are you aware of any vocal adjustments you make when transitioning from acoustic singing to microphone singing?

When you sing acoustically, you are much more aware of the natural sound and dimension of your voice. You tend to sing fuller if you are singing with a piano or full band due to the need to project and be heard. Often when the microphone is added, there is room for the singer to use more subtleties in volume so not to over sing and ultimately strain their voice – especially when singing long sets over a band on a regular basis. The microphone is there to aid and amplify the healthy voice, it’s not meant to replace healthy singing and the building of a strong voice. You still must use your body and breathing apparatus when using a mic. You must also develop good mic technique.

5) Does your approach to live ensemble or solo singing on a microphone resemble a similar production you would use in a recording studio, if so, what are the similarities and differences?

I believe my approach is similar to live vs. recording studio singing. The thing that the recording studio often allows is even more control of your sound, so you can really do your best work, both in the ensemble and the solo step outs. Headphones often muddy the water as do monitors. There is a big difference between good headphone and monitor mixes and bad ones. When they are good, you can really get into the minutia of your music and voice and that is a very thrilling thing. However, these details aren’t always perfect, so you have to develop a certain inner knowledge of your voice and what should be put out there no matter what the circumstance. That too is something that develops over time and experience. With regard specifically to recording, the voice gets put under a more specific microscope, so it’s easy to become self-conscious. Subtle flaws that pass in live performance become more pronounced in the recording setting. It can highlight some areas of your voice that you need to work on that you might not have been aware of.

6) Who were your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and how much do you spend listening to this music?
The vocalists I grew up listening to and continue to admire are Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Carmen McRae, Billy Holiday, Aretha Franklin, Donny Hathaway, Stevie Wonder, Carole King, Patti Austin, George Benson, Mel Torme’, Joni Mitchell, Rickie Lee Jones, Michael McDonald, Eddie Jefferson, Dianne Reeves, Al Jarreau, Chaka Khan, and Nancy Wilson. Of course this is the abbreviated list, but it is also not just traditional jazz. My interests in music have always been broad. I love rhythm and blues and contemporary pop. Jazz was the pop of its time. So the mix that I have developed is based on the historical as well as the music that was current when I was growing up. And I believe this is what keeps the jazz art form fresh and vital. As far as listening to music, I go through phases. I catch up on my listening when I am on the road or in the car. I am a composer too, so I need the quiet to muse over my ideas.

7) **When performing with a vocal jazz ensemble, what elements of jazz instrumental articulation and style do you try to emulate, if any, (time feel, phrasing, etc.)?**

I think the vocal jazz genre was built out of its desire to use the human voice in both the lyrical setting as well as the instrumental. It functions as a little big band, if you will. So the idea is to pay homage to the instrumental sounds, textures, articulations, phrasing, feel, etc. And depending on the style of the chart, certain rules apply. Being able to swing collectively is an important task for any ensemble. Listening to the great swing bands, both big and small, will help develop your ear and refine your chops. There are many many grooves that vocal jazz groups need to be able to navigate – swing, bossa nova, samba, shuffle, blues, etc, etc. And with each groove, there are subtleties that need to shift to differentiate them from the next feel. For example, with Brazilian jazz there is often much more straight tone involved throughout the piece. And when the group is approaching scat syllables and transcribed instrumental phrases, all the syllables should be chosen to emulate the instrument it’s most like and accents should be used in the tradition of the style. Practice singing along with the instrumental solo, catch all it’s accents and ornamentations, and try doing it with syllables that don’t pull focus, but function as throughways for the entire solo.

8) **Do you approach singing pop music differently then when you sing in the jazz idiom (i.e., timbre, time feel, style, use of vibrato, etc.)?**

Not really. But I think that’s because I like wearing lots of different hats and have a deep love and respect for both genres. I really like mixing it up, but not to the demise of the songbook it comes from. I sing the song based on the treatment created and what seems appropriate. I like to push the envelope, but not so much that it’s gratuitous. I believe I use a healthy sound in both genres, really playing with my mix to help me create the energy and sound I want.
They are both familiar playgrounds for me at this point, so it’s more about the bigger picture – the arrangement and the vibe.

9) **What is your musical education (i.e. formal or self-taught)?**

I came to singing in a more informal setting, as most people do. I began by learning standards and sitting in at jam sessions. From there I found I wanted and needed to learn more. While studying at a liberal arts college in Oregon, I joined their vocal jazz choir. The teacher was great and so was the group. It was my first experience singing in a group with those kinds of dense harmonies. After three years of college, I transferred to Berklee College of Music. I graduated with a BA in vocal performance, but along the way fell in love with composing and writing lyrics. I studied piano off and on my whole life, but have only become a passable player, enough to write and teach myself my music. I still consider myself a student of music and continue to push myself in areas that need work and things I still want to learn.

10) **Any thoughts or comments you would like to contribute?**

Everyone’s journey is personal. The importance of teachers along the way and their integrity can make or break someone’s path. I was often told I needed to choose, but there is value in focusing on certain approaches and still leaving doors open. The human voice changes over time. It needs to be tended to just like anything else. Go in for tune ups with your favorite voice teacher/coach, watch how your diet affects your voice, monitor allergy season and its effects, and know your vocal limits.
1) Have you studied classical or “traditional” voice technique, and if so, is there any correlation between classical and jazz vocal production?

Yes, I have studied classical technique, and I think that there are many correlations between that and producing jazz and most other styles of singing, especially in terms of using similar breath control and muscle support.

2) Do you make any vocal adjustments in production when switching from solo singing to ensemble singing and what adjustments are you cognizant of in order to blend with the group (i.e., mixing registers, timbre, placement, vowel shapes, breath, consonants, vibrato, etc.)?

Yes, the adjustments I make when switching from solo to ensemble singing, respectively, are: more distinct separation between chest voice and head voice in solo singing vs. more use of mixed voice in an ensemble, more dramatic variation of timbre in solo singing vs. fuller and more unified timbre in ensemble, and more frequent breathing and vibrato in solo singing vs. less frequent breathing and vibrato in an ensemble.

3) How does your vast experience as a jazz and contemporary solo artist influence your stylistic approach when performing in an ensemble and what elements do you try to incorporate (lyric delivery, phrasing, etc.)?

When performing in an ensemble setting, I tend to be much more conscious of blending and more cautious of pitch, while leading the way in terms of emphasizing lyric delivery with exaggerated consonants, etc. I’ll also try to move the phrasing along in tempo as much as is natural to do so, since I’m usually the shortest of breath (and spoiled by my own solo singing)!

4) Are you aware of any vocal adjustments you make when transitioning from acoustic singing to microphone singing?

When singing acoustically, I tend to belt more using chest voice in order to project, and I’ll tend to sing in higher keys, since my low range doesn’t always project reliably. On microphone, I’m much more comfortable singing in lower keys and I tend sing with more nuance and subtlety, without having to worry about projection. My tone would also be much fuller acoustically vs. using a thinner, breathier tone when amplified.

5) Does your approach to live ensemble or solo singing on a microphone resemble a similar production you would use in a recording studio, if so, what are the similarities and differences?
As a soloist, I tend to sing on microphone with exactly the same approach whether live or in the studio. As an ensemble singer, however, I’d tend to use the proximity effect of the microphone to self-mix my volume and balance in a live situation, whereas in the studio I would tend to focus solely on my performance and allow the engineer to mix my volume later.

6) Who were your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and how much do you spend listening to this music?

Mostly contemporary jazz artists… Solo vocal jazz: Norma Winstone, Nancy King, Bobby McFerrin, Dianne Reeves, Cassandra Wilson. Ensemble vocal jazz: Singers Unlimited, Take 6, New York Voices. Solo instrumental jazz: Pat Metheny, Kenny Wheeler, Keith Jarrett, John Taylor, Ralph Towner, Miles Davis. Ensemble instrumental jazz: Maria Schneider, Kenny Wheeler. I’ve spent much more time listening to these artists than to any other music – maybe 80 percent of my entire adult listening life.

7) When performing with a vocal jazz ensemble, what elements of jazz instrumental articulation and style do you try to emulate, if any, (time feel, phrasing, etc.)?

It really depends on the style and the original artist’s performance on which the arrangement is based. In any case, I’ll try to notice and emulate as much of the original articulation as I can – specific types and amounts of vibrato, pitch inflection and style, laid back vs. rushed time feel, relaxed vs. aggressive phrasing, timbre, etc.

8) Do you approach singing pop music differently then when you sing in the jazz idiom (i.e., timbre, time feel, style, use of vibrato, etc.)?

When singing jazz, I try to be as varied as possible in all elements mentioned above, even more so when they’re my own personal arrangements of standards or original jazz compositions. When improvising, though, I tend to use a more neutral sound and style that lends itself to greater flexibility and spontaneity. In contemporary or pop-flavored jazz, I’ll increasingly incorporate more stylistic devices, such as pitch inflection and vibrato, and in commercial pop singing (covers, etc.), I’ll try to emulate the original artist’s specific timbre and style as accurately as possible.

9) What is your musical education (i.e. formal or self-taught)?

Formal: I studied classical piano from age 6 to 16 and had vocal ensemble training from elementary through high school, in gospel and classical choirs and musical theater. I began my jazz vocal (and piano) listening, training, and self-study in college.
10) Any thoughts or comments you would like to contribute?

As a college freshman brand new to singing jazz, my first vocal jazz ensemble experience was met with surprise and disbelief on my part when the director (Dave Greennagle, JV2) asked us to sing with horizontal vowel shapes and brighter, breather straight tones, as opposed to using tall vowels and darker, focused tones with vibrato. After years of singing successfully in madrigals, concert and gospel choirs, it was shocking to be given that set of instructions and to trust that it would actually work. But I was also at a disadvantage, having never really listened to much vocal jazz (or jazz of any kind, for that matter!) before attending college, aside from Take 6 and Manhattan Transfer. I probably would have met this challenge with less resistance if the director had us all sit down together and listen to recorded examples on the first day of class, explaining the techniques the groups were using to produce those sounds and how we would achieve those sounds. Even so, I ended up catching on pretty quickly, but I imagine that this might have made for a less confusing first week of rehearsal for someone like me!
MICHELLE AMATO - INTERVIEW
Via Email – March 9, 2009

1) Have you studied classical or “traditional” voice technique, and if so, is there any correlation between classical and jazz vocal production?

Yes, I studied traditional (classical) voice for the entire 6 years that I did my undergrad and Master's. The main correlations I recognized between both kinds of production were as follows:
A. Support - Although the way the air is used differs at times (#4), the preparation with air, and support through the end of a phrase, is vital to any kind of singing. Commitment of sound, from the initial production to the cutoff, is fundamental, and cannot be produced with command without breath support to keep it moving forward.
B. Throat, neck, shoulders, knees, must be relaxed in order to produce optimum sound for the duration of the performance, regardless of style.
C. Pre-conceived idea of sound. One must have an idea, which comes from listening to and familiarity with chosen style, of what to sound like in one's mind before the sound is produced.

2) Do you make any vocal adjustments in production when switching from solo singing to ensemble singing and what adjustments are you cognizant of in order to blend with the group (i.e., mixing registers, timbre, placement, vowel shapes, breath, consonants, vibrato, etc.)?

When singing in a group, all of the adjustments mentioned in the question are connected to listening to the other singers around you, starting with the top voice (1st sop=lead trumpet), and matching what you hear. How this is accomplished varies from singer to singer.

3) How does your vast experience as a jazz and contemporary solo artist influence your stylistic approach when performing in an ensemble and what elements do you try to incorporate (lyric delivery, phrasing, etc.)?

Lyric delivery in a group setting can be accomplished by emphasizing words, (consonants in particular), but the conversational and spontaneous elements that are present in solo singing aren't available to the group singer.

4) Are you aware of any vocal adjustments you make when transitioning from acoustic singing to microphone singing?

The use of air (support) greatly differs from acoustic to mic singing. The velocity involved is greatly reduced even when a singer is not responsible for their own amplification. The intimate, conversational aspect of communication can be fully realized when a mic is used, and this is not possible in an acoustic, self-amplified setting.
5) **Does your approach to live ensemble or solo singing on a microphone resemble a similar production you would use in a recording studio, if so, what are the similarities and differences?**

The studio offers the opportunity to do things in sections, fly in repeated sections, go back and fix - things you can't do in the live setting.

6) **Who were your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and how much do you spend listening to this music?**

I had many vocal influences in my developmental years, not all jazz. A list of some, but not all: Sarah Vaughan, Nancy Wilson, Barbra Streisand, Joan Sutherland, Tony Bennett, Jon Hendricks, Jeri Southern, Mel Torm, Gladys Knight, Earth, Wind and Fire, Billy Joel, Maureen McGovern, & Ella Fitzgerald. I frankly most often listen to music now when I have to learn something for a gig. I do try to listen to pop stations when I'm in the car so I can hear what is going on in, and what my students are listening to.

7) **When performing with a vocal jazz ensemble, what elements of jazz instrumental articulation and style do you try to emulate, if any, (time feel, phrasing, etc.)?**

I become much more rhythmic, and try to articulate like a trumpet, or sax, depending on the register. This effects the duration of notes, particularly downbeat quarter notes, and notes at the end of phrases. The awareness of the ghost note by all members of the vocal ensemble helps to keep the time together.

8) **Do you approach singing pop music differently then when you sing in the jazz idiom (i.e., timbre, time feel, style, use of vibrato, etc.)?**

Pop music is a very broad term, and there are numerous styles and timbres used in pop. I would say very generally that if it's r and b based, the vibrato is more prominent, more ad-libbing is done, and note choices are more basic, and more pentatonic-scale based.

9) **What is your musical education (i.e. formal or self-taught)?**

Formal and self-taught, both equally vital to one's growth.
KERRY MARSH - INTERVIEW
Via Email – March 2, 2009

1) How long have you been directing jazz vocal ensembles?

Ten years.

2) Do you have any vocal training or experience as a professional singer and if so, what is your experience?

I took classical voice lessons for four years in high school and for six years during my undergraduate years at the University of Kansas. At KU, I was a Voice Performance minor. I studied jazz voice with Rosana Eckert for a year while a grad student at the University of North Texas. I've been a very part-time professional singer since 2000, performing around ten to 15 times a year in a club setting, wedding, or similar circumstances. My home recording experience is my principle use for my voice, besides modeling for students in the classroom.

3) Do you have any experience directing traditional choral groups and do you have classical training?

I was a co-director of a men's chorus for three years while an undergraduate, and I studied graduate choral conducting with Simon Carrington for a year at KU. My "related field" during graduate school was in Choral Conducting, and my major professor was Jerry McCoy.

4) What do you feel are the most important elements that differentiate a classical or traditional choir from a jazz vocal ensemble?

Performance practice/technology, vowel shapes, tone color, diction and rhythmic feel are are the most important elements of differentiation between these styles, in my opinion. The performance practice difference between a vocal jazz ensemble using handheld microphones and utilizing sound reinforcement technology differentiates it greatly from the traditional choral performance practice of acoustic performance with choir members stood with proper and uniform posture. Vowel shapes in traditional choral singing are much more vertical and made to sound relatively similar to one another, whereas in jazz they are wider and more conversational. The ideal tone color aesthetic in traditional choral singing is warm, and although there is a wide range of perceptions of "ideal" vocal jazz sound, my personal favorite sound is quite bright and somewhat narrow. Diction in traditional choir, because of the absence of close mic'ing, must be proper, highly uniform, and exaggerated. Diction with vocal jazz ensembles is, again, conversational in nature, and many consonants are dropped, when the lyric
can be understood without them. Vocal Jazz rhythmic feel is more accented, with a greater use of syncopation and shorter notes than in traditional choral music, in general.

5) **What commonalities are shared between traditional choral groups and jazz vocal ensembles?**

These genres/styles share an interest in unity and ensemble blend and balance. "Story-telling" is emphasized in both areas, although this is achieved in far different ways between them. Intonation is key to high-level performance in both areas.

6) **What commonalities are shared between jazz vocal ensembles and jazz instrumental groups?**

In my experience, there is very little difference between vocal jazz ensembles and instrumental jazz ensembles. The sound aesthetics and performance practice are very similar in terms of blend, balance, texture, tone, intonation, dynamics, time-feel/rhythm, and group interaction. The same basic sets of harmonic principles and arranging aesthetics are used for both.

7) **Do you have experience as a professional jazz instrumentalist and if so, on what instrument? If answered yes, how has this experience prepared you for directing jazz vocal ensembles?**

I have performed as a jazz pianist often, although I only obtained these skills through involvement with school groups and through teaching, and I never studied privately nor did I spend a serious amount of dedicated time practicing to become an excellent player. Therefore, I consider myself merely "functional" as a jazz pianist, and certainly not an artist. However, my jazz piano skills are absolutely indispensable to my work as a vocal jazz director. I'm able to accompany my ensembles in rehearsals and efficiently lead them and inspire them in ways that I wouldn't otherwise be able to do through conducting along (even with the help of a rehearsal accompanist). My jazz piano skills have helped me tremendously as an arranger, which has helped me greatly as a teacher.

8) **What affect does the sound system have in the overall sound of the group? What adjustments do you have them make in terms of production on microphone and how often do you rehearse on the sound system?**

The sound system plays a very large role in the sound of a group, although it's true that very talented and experienced ensembles can give an effective performance on a poor sound system, on occasion. Inexperienced jazz choir members must learn to identify their own sound within the overall monitor mix of the ensemble, something not easy to do at first. They must cup their
ear, or close it off, to hear their own voice for a moment, and then go back to
listening to the monitor mix to find their own voice in the blend without
singing louder to locate it. I encourage ensemble jazz singers to keep their
mOUTces close to the microphone nearly all the time, backing off only on the
very loudest and highest of musical moments, and even in that case, they’re
instructed to be sure to back off no more than a few inches. The proximity
effect of most dynamic microphones can cause a singer to get lost in the mix
when he or she pulls off the mic too far, and it can spoil the sound greatly at
key moments. Singers must also know to watch for "popping" consonants (P
and B) as well as airy sustained vowels like "oo". They should sing these "off
axis" by turning the mic at a slight angle (around 30 or 45 degrees) so that
their air is not blown directly into the diaphragm of the microphone.

9) **How do you communicate the vocal production you desire from the
ensemble (i.e., vocal modeling, use of imagery, recording examples, etc)?**

I utilize all of these suggested methods, on a regular basis. Vocal
modeling from either me or my lead soprano is most common, although the
creative and fun use of imagery can be effective and can bring some levity to
a rehearsal. I almost always have a recording of the charts my ensembles are
performing, and these are usually demo recording that my wife Julia
(Dollison) and I have recorded in our home studio.

10) **Do you have a particular sound that you feel is the “ideal sound” for the
group?**

The ideal sound usually comes from whatever the natural sound of the lead
soprano may be, which shows the importance of choosing an excellent lead
soprano with a desirable and pleasant sound. I like a bright and youthful
sound, as differentiated from a dark, warm, mature vocal jazz sound as
displayed by many collegiate vocal jazz ensembles. My preferred sound isn't
the absolute end of the brightness spectrum, and I modify the ideal sound
based on the song to be sung and the specific style called for. Singers
Unlimited and New York Voices provide the best examples of my sound
ideals, as well as my wife's lead soprano singing.

11) **Who are your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and
how much time do you spend listening to this music?**

Maria Schneider, Pat Metheny, New York Voices, Singers Unlimited, Hi-
Lo's,Take 6, Bobby McFerrin, Vince Mendoza, Kurt Elling, Mel Torme,
Kenny Wheeler, Nancy King, John Coltrane, Michael Brecker, Dianne
Reeves, Nando Lauria, The Real Group, Vox One. I listen to music around
ten to fifteen hours per week, on average. Although these influences are
important to me and they consist a one or two hours of my weekly listening, most of my listening tends to be music that I haven't heard yet, as I'm searching for new sounds and influences.

12) **Any additional thoughts or comments?**

I believe in the importance of aggressive and adventuresome repertoire/programming choices with a top-tier collegiate vocal jazz ensemble program, and I often espouse the usefulness of contemporary pop music in contemporary vocal jazz.
1) **How long have you been directing jazz vocal ensembles?**

Plus or minus 35 years.

2) **Do you have any vocal training or experience as a professional singer and if so, what is your experience?**

Very little formal training, but a great deal of professional experience. I always lead or was a member of performing groups in which I sang mostly solo but also in a group situation.

3) **Do you have any experience directing traditional choral groups and do you have classical training?**

Not a lot other than choral conducting classes in school and some experience conducting choirs both in the university setting and in temple/church. However, I did spend ten years co-directing a group at the University of Miami with the head of choral studies, Lee Kjelson. This choir sang in all genres including traditional styles, pop and jazz. I learned a great deal about “classical” choral conducting during that period.

4) **What do you feel are the most important elements that differentiate a classical or traditional choir from a jazz vocal ensemble?**

There are numerous differences: The classical choir employs vocal production and technique that allows for acoustic singing such as “bel canto”, very much like that employed in singing opera, art song and other traditional vocal styles. The esthetic and goal is to produce a large sound that can be heard acoustically. The jazz (vocal) ensemble performs in a way that allows for the sound to be reproduced through microphones and speakers, very much like that which one would hear on a recording. The style is much less “vocal” and more instrumental in that the esthetic is much the same as the instrumental jazz ensemble. In other words, the style requires the members of a jazz vocal group to employ rhythms, articulations, dynamics and phrasing similar to that produced by instrumentalists. There are great differences between the two genres in the use of vibrato, diction, resonance, etc.

5) **What commonalities are shared between traditional choral groups and jazz vocal ensembles?**

Fewer than one would expect. Again, the esthetic is very different between the two. I think that the commonality has to do with healthy singing and vocal techniques that are required by both. There are individual vocal “sacrifices” that a singer needs to make when singing with others in any ensemble. Jazz
groups are usually much smaller which make it more difficult to “bury” the individual vocalist’s sound for the benefit of ensemble sound and blend.

6) **What commonalities are shared between jazz vocal ensembles and jazz instrumental groups?**

Quite a large number. I hear jazz vocal groups as an emulation of instrumental groups. One small example has to do with time feel, or more specifically, the relation of the attack of the articulation to the pulse. It takes longer for the air to get from the player’s mouth through the bell of the horn than it does for it to get through the vocal folds and out of the singer’s mouth. Consequently care must be taken for the singer to not articulate more “on top” of the beat than the player does. Another commonality has to do with the treatment of jazz rhythms in general, ie; swing eighth-notes, accents and again articulations. The jazz vocal group sound is generally brighter than its classical counterpart and modeled somewhat after the sound of trumpets, trombones and saxophones. One issue or challenge however is the singing of lyrics in a way that emulates the above-mentioned instrumental style. This is accomplishable by more attention to attack and decay of the words in time and by attention to diction.

7) **Do you have experience as a professional jazz instrumentalist and if so, on what instrument? If answered yes, how has this experience prepared you for directing jazz vocal ensembles?**

I have been a professional jazz pianist all of my adult life. To me, the term “jazz vocal ensemble” as opposed “vocal jazz ensemble” is the preferred one in that it describes the group as a jazz ensemble first and a vocal ensemble second. Therefore, I feel that my many years of jazz experience in large and small instrumental and vocal groups qualifies and supports my conducting a jazz vocal group. I strongly believe that someone with choral training only is no more qualified to conduct a jazz vocal ensemble than a symphony conductor is to run a jazz band.

8) **What affect does the sound system have in the overall sound of the group? What adjustments do you have them make in terms of production on microphone and how often do you rehearse on the sound system?**

This music really doesn’t exist without amplification. It was born that way and cannot continue to exist without it. For one thing, the sound system allows the group a volume level consistent with that of an instrumental group. That allows for performance with other instruments (particularly the rhythm section) in which all are able to play at a comfortable level. It also duplicates “recorded” sound that, in my opinion, is ideal. I have four rehearsals per week, two with the system and two without. We use the system when we include the rhythm section. The other two days are devoted to part learning,
memorization, style, blend, etc. We don’t make any distinction in vocal production between singing on mic or off.

9) **How do you communicate the vocal production you desire from the ensemble (i.e., vocal modeling, use of imagery, recording examples, etc)?**

I use all three: vocal modeling for individual sound, imagery for concepts of phrasing, rhythm, et., and recorded examples for demonstration of group sound and feel.

10) **Do you have a particular sound that you feel is the “ideal sound” for the group?**

That question requires a lengthy answer but briefly, my thinking is that every group should take on its own ”sound persona”. Of course as learning models, we imitate the groups that are widely accepted in the field as being the best such as The Singers Unlimited, Take Six, New York Voices, Manhattan Transfer and many others. After absorbing and understanding those (and many other) sounds, I find it beneficial to strive for a sound that is unique to the particular group of singers. In a larger group, this is more difficult to do, but generally, the ensemble should reflect the sound of the lead singer(s) regarding timbre and interpretation.

11) **Who are your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and how much time do you spend listening to this music?**

There are far too many to list here. I have been around a long time so there is a rather abundant body of music, performers and groups that have had great impact. I listen to music quite a lot and every day for various amounts of time. Most of what I listen to is jazz, both instrumental and vocal but I have a great love for orchestral and chamber music. I do listen to rock and pop but much more occasionally and not as religiously as I do the other.

12) **Any thoughts or comments?**

From an educational perspective, I feel that in most college curricula, there is not adequate time given or attention paid to jazz in general and particularly to jazz vocal education except in those institutions that offer degrees in those areas. The music education curriculum at most schools are sorely lacking. This trickles down to the public school so that except for some areas of the country, the music curriculum doesn’t include it or if it does, it’s and afterthought at best because of the lack of training of the teachers. Jazz is a serious discipline and an important art form and should be taken much more seriously than it is in this country.
1) How long have you been directing jazz vocal ensembles?
30 years

2) Do you have any vocal training or experience as a professional singer and if so, what is your experience?

My vocal training is as a student, and I have a few professional recording credits as a singer, (background vocals on a Regina Belle CD, and for a soon to be released Nick Lachey CD) though I do not consider myself to be a singer.

3) Do you have any experience directing traditional choral groups and do you have classical training?

Yes

4) What do you feel are the most important elements that differentiate a classical or traditional choir from a jazz vocal ensemble?

I do not believe there are significant differences. Instead I believe it is a matter of singing any repertoire in the appropriate style. One of the basic stylistic differences is the approach to diction.

5) What commonalities are shared between traditional choral groups and jazz vocal ensembles?

They are both simply vocal ensembles. Therefore they have the same rehearsal techniques and the same challenges of achieving great blend, balance, intonation, diction, and appropriate style.

6) What commonalities are shared between jazz vocal ensembles and jazz instrumental groups?

They both have the jazz style in common, and the stylistic elements are the same. The musical approach should also be the same in both instrumental and vocal jazz ensembles. And, in the case of Gold Company, I have 16 singers and an 8 piece instrumental ensemble, so it is really both vocal AND instrumental, no difference. Oftentimes, when singers are on mics, I equate the vocal jazz ensemble to a traditional jazz big band.

7) Do you have experience as a professional jazz instrumentalist and if so, on what instrument? If answered yes, how has this experience prepared you for directing jazz vocal ensembles?
Yes, Piano. I use my keyboard skills in rehearsal, as I conduct vocal jazz ensemble rehearsals from the piano, at least in the initial stages of learning a piece. It is also helpful in preparing the score and knowing how the piece (and individual vocal lines) are supposed to sound.

8) **What affect does the sound system have in the overall sound of the group?** What adjustments do you have them make in terms of production on microphone and how often do you rehearse on the sound system?

My collegiate vocal jazz ensemble rehearses 3 times/week. Two of these are on system, and one off. My preference is to have the ensemble sing with the same vocal/tonal approach whether they are on system or not. When they are on system I ask for the singers mouths to be right on the mic for sonic presence. Of course slight adjustments can be made depending on overall volume and range.

9) **How do you communicate the vocal production you desire from the ensemble (i.e., vocal modeling, use of imagery, recording examples, etc)?**

All of the above.

10) **Do you have a particular sound that you feel is the “ideal sound” for the group?**

Yes.... and it has been referred to as the “Gold Company Sound.”

11) **Who are your musical influences in jazz (vocal and instrumental) and how much time do you spend listening to this music?**

Vocal groups include The Hi-Lo’s, The Singers Unlimited, The Manhattan Transfer, Take 6, New York Voices, The Real Group. Solo singers include Ella, Sarah, Mel, Bobby McFerrin, Carmen, Mark Murphy. Instrumental include (among many others) Red Garland, Wynton Kelly, Herbie Hancock, Miles, Chick, Oscar Peterson, Dave Brubeck. I have spent years listening.

12) **Any additional thoughts or comments?**

Thanks for asking.