



COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE VOCAL TECHNIQUES OF JAZZ AND CLASSICAL MUSIC

Research Masters Special Project



This research will highlight some of the main vocal and performance techniques found within the two fields of classical and jazz music. I will start with a brief history on the two genres of music, showing the social differences and journeys that the two had to take to get to the prominent position they both still hold today. I will then go on to explain the commonly used vocal techniques, various methods of teaching and performance practices that both jazz and classical music maintain before then showing how similar they are at base value. I also aim to show that some of the techniques used within both genres are interchangeable, exploring the idea that once the skills are solidified for one genre, a vocalist is already equipped with some of the basic skills to perform the other. Having been a chorister within a cathedral choir since a young age and a classically trained tenor for many years that has also been a member of popular and jazz music ensembles, this is a topic that has always interested me. Through my years of performing at both classical recitals and jazz gigs, I have always been aware that there have been physical changes in my singing technique to offer a convincing and true performance in both genres. However, I wanted to use this opportunity of research to highlight what exactly is done differently, whilst also analysing the similarities in these differing vocal styles.

A Brief History of Classical Vocal Music

It is important to note straight away that when I use the term ‘classical singing’ this predominantly focuses on the time periods from the early baroque and classical eras through to the more recent romantic and 20th century eras, focusing mainly on the traditions seen within Europe. At these times this was when singing, as a unique art form, began to be understood and reformed into what we hear today.¹ Classical singing has a long and prestigious history, having gone from the popular music of its time to the art music we see it as today.² Starting even before the Baroque era, in the early days of plainchant singing in a church, although it is still common for singers to sing with just a piano accompaniment, the classical voice has had to adapt with the progression of its accompanying music with the introduction of large orchestras and grander spaces to fill.³

The 16th Century saw the arrival of the Baroque era, a time when music was mainly funded either by the church or the rich.⁴ Baroque music welcomed the first real sign of music as an art and gave the singer the opportunity to truly explore their voice. This came with the introduction of compositions

¹ Hans-Peter Schmitz and Dominique-René de Lerma, “Baroque Music and Jazz,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 7/1 (1979): 78.

² James Parakilas, “Classical Music as Popular Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 3/1 (1984): 1.

³ Matthew Edwards, “So you want to sing rock ‘n’ roll,” 1 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 141.

⁴ Emma Torry, “A History of Music for Singers – The Baroque Era” (2013), <https://www.discoversinging.co.uk/2013/08/07/a-history-of-music-for-singers-the-baroque-era/> (accessed 25/08/23).

such as a 'masque', which was a very early form of opera, an 'oratorio', such as Handel's Messiah, and a 'monody' which was a single vocal line with an accompaniment that usually contained a 'continuo' bass line which, much like today's jazz lead sheets, contained only the outline of the harmony, allowing the accompanist to improvise a suitable backing for the singer.⁵

Once we'd reached the last half of the 18th Century, people began to leave the traditions of church music and flood to the concert halls with the arrival of the era of classical music. With the introduction of grand operas such as Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, based on Greek mythology and other dramatic tales, the role of the operatic soloist that we see today had been born.⁶ Alongside this, the role of art songs came into popularity with the introduction of 'serenades', a song that a composer would dedicate to a specific person. An example of this is Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.⁷

The 19th Century brought along with it the far more emotive and dramatic style of the romantic era. It was at this time when the idea of the voice being its own musical instrument really flourished, with the introduction of English song, German Lieder, and French Chanson's.⁸ These were all forms of art song that were usually set to poems which commonly described love or nature. Opera also grew to be the far more dramatic and intense style that we see it as today and this is evident when listening to Wagner's *Die Walküre*.⁹ The end of the romantic era then took us up to the early 20th century, where composers experimented with atonalism and modernism.¹⁰ The mid-20th century also saw the change of classical music as the 'popular' genre of music become 'art' music, thanks to the introduction of the increasingly popular jazz and ragtime.¹¹ Today, the likes of Luciano Pavarotti, Bryn Terfel and Renée Fleming are much treasured for their performances of Italian arias, English song, German Lieder or French Chanson that were loved just as much at the time that they were written.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Emma Torry, "A History of Music for Singers – The Classical Era" (2013), <https://www.discoversinging.co.uk/2013/09/11/a-history-of-music-for-singers-the-classical-era/> (accessed 25/08/23).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Emma Torry, "A History of Music for Singers – The Romantic Era" (2013), <https://www.discoversinging.co.uk/2013/09/25/a-history-of-music-for-singers-the-romantic-era/> (accessed 26/08/23).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Emma Torry, "A History of Music for Singers – The 20th Century Beyond" (2013), <https://www.discoversinging.co.uk/2013/10/02/a-history-of-music-for-singers-the-20th-century-beyond/> (accessed 26/08/23).

¹¹ Ibid.

A Brief History of Jazz Vocal Music

Jazz was derived originally from the blues, which in turn originated from the field songs of the African slaves in America, however jazz has always been a hybrid of various different musical origins.¹² In early 20th century New Orleans, musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton took great influence from classical music, as well as blues and ragtime, to create their new musical style of jazz.¹³

This same style of jazz was adapted and reformed by the time we reached the 1920s with the likes of Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson's big bands playing in New York City.¹⁴ The 1940s saw the change to be-bop jazz with the help of musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk, and which moved this genre into a far quicker and harmonically more complex sub-genre of jazz, especially when it came to improvisation.¹⁵ Jazz music has always been sure to learn from and recognise the pioneering composers that founded it, as well as always moving forward with the times, adapting with the newest forms of popular music.¹⁶ This is also exhibited when looking at the roles of the singer within jazz. Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald were perhaps some of the first to popularise and truly master the craft of scat singing, the art of using the voice as a soloing instrument. This is a technique which, to many, is the epitome of jazz vocals. More popular, mainstream jazz singers such as Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra, however, found themselves within the big band swing and crooner styles of jazz music.¹⁷ Both types of singing have their place in the history of jazz music, and both contain some of the vital techniques needed when wanting to learn how to sing jazz for yourself.

The Singing Voice

The human voice acts just the same as all other musical instruments through the way it contains a power source, a vibrator, a resonator, and a way of articulating.¹⁸ For a singer, the power source is the respiratory system - it comes from the breath that you hold in your lungs and the support that should come from the diaphragm and abdominal muscles. For a singer, the ability to control and rely on your breath is the most important skill you can acquire.¹⁹ The sound that a singer produces comes

¹² Matthew Edwards, "So you want to sing rock 'n' roll," 1 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 4.

¹³ Terry Teachout, "Jazz," *The Wilson Quarterly* 12/3 (1988): 67.

¹⁴ Masterclass, "What Is Jazz? A Guide to the History and Sound of Jazz" (2021), <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-jazz> (accessed 21/07/23)

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jenna McLean, "Flexibility in Range and Registration in Jazz Singing," *Routledge* (2022): 11.

¹⁷ Mathew Bahl, "Vocal Jazz: 1917-1950," (2015), <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/vocal-jazz-1917-1950-by-mathew-bahl> (accessed 12/08/23).

¹⁸ Matthew Edwards, "So you want to sing rock 'n' roll," 1 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 41.

¹⁹ Luisa Tetrazzini & Enrico Caruso, "The art of singing," 1 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 11.

from the vocal cords, primarily at the glottis, which is made up of two tissue folds and when paired with the vocal tract, we begin to hear the different types of vocal timbre along with the resonance that is added.²⁰ The mouth is where a singer finds most of their articulation tools and the way in which one positions their larynx and palate can determine which style of music they are singing. For example, a classically trained singer would typically keep their palate up as the larynx stays down whereas its often quite the opposite for a jazz singer, especially when singing the blues.²¹ Articulation is arguably harder for a singer than that of any other instrumentalist as they have to alter everything such as dynamic ranges and note lengths by altering the amount of power they put into the notes, much like any other instrumentalist would.²² However, a singer also has the challenge of having to do this whilst also altering the articulation with lyrics.

All vocalists have the ability to use two different sections of their voice, their chest voice and their head voice, and usually there is an awareness to use these two voices to sing in many other styles and voices within them both.²³ The chest voice is the same voice that we all typically use to talk with and when singing in the normal register. The head voice however is different to our 'normal' chest voice through the way the vocal folds vibrate slightly higher.²⁴ This effect usually means that the voice is slightly breathier and lighter in tone, and for men, this voice is usually described as falsetto which allows the singer to use a far higher register than that of the chest voice. However, within the chest voice there is a technique that singers can use to help reach a lot of the notes with the head voice register and this is called belting.²⁵ To belt, the singer must raise the larynx and use far more power from the breath than when normally singing at a comfortable register.²⁶ This creates a far louder and stimulating tone that we often hear in the climax of songs both in jazz and classical music.

Research in general about the singing voice has been mainly focused on the classical tradition, due to the sheer longevity of it, and therefore because there is less research on the jazz voice this means it's harder to find out the fundamentals of how it works.²⁷ Thankfully, when stripped back, a lot of the core techniques share a lot in common with traditional classical vocal technique. When it comes

²⁰ Matthew Edwards, "So you want to sing rock 'n' roll," 1 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 47.

²¹ Ibid. 56

²² Ibid. 55

²³ Ibid. 104

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. 105

²⁶ Brad Wells, "On the Voice: Belt Technique: Research, Acoustics, and Possible World Music Applications," *The Choral Journal* 46/9 (2006): 65.

²⁷ Margareta Thalen & Johan Sundberg "Describing different styles of singing: A comparison of a female singer's voice source in "Classical", "Pop", "Jazz" and "Blues"," *Logopedics Phoniatics Vocology* 26/2 (2001): 26.

to teaching the art of singing there are many different approaches but typically when a popular singer, be that classical or jazz, is asked to explain the method in which they sing and how they used their voice to grant them success, very few are able to describe so.²⁸ This is perhaps because the human voice is so personal and technical that it is extremely difficult to try and replicate or even describe a certain method of approaching singing.

One of the most important things for a student to learn, no matter what method of teaching they choose to take, is how to attack and support a note properly.²⁹ Unfortunately, it is all too common for singers to be seen singing from the chest or the throat instead of the favoured position of the diaphragm and this is perhaps why it's becoming increasingly common for singers that show such a promising future at a young age having to give up singing only a few years later, or completely adapt the way they sing (sing lower than they originally could have).³⁰ To be able to maintain a healthy and long-lasting singing voice, the singer must be able to not only support the sound from their diaphragm but also be able to open their throat both from in front but also behind, in order to allow as much of a full and round vocal sound through as possible.³¹ Another very common way in which a singer can maintain a healthy voice is through proper warm up exercises. Warming up as a singer is vital to help get the voice moving, as well as helping to gently stretch the entire body and mind to the registers they will be using, instead of forcing the notes straight into the performance.³² Warmups could be as simple as singing up some scales and following breathing exercises before you sing, to any form of gentle approach to help the body prepare for a performance and these are all crucial to vocal health.

Common Classical Vocal Techniques

Everyone's voice is unique to themselves, however, within classical music every singer falls into a certain bracket in terms of voice register. Traditionally, if you are a low-voiced male then you are a 'bass', a medium voiced male then you are a 'baritone', a high voiced male then you are a 'tenor', a low-voiced female then you are an 'alto', a medium voiced female then you are a 'mezzo-soprano', and if you are a high voiced female then you are a 'soprano'.³³ These are the common brackets that a classical singer will fall into, however it isn't uncommon to see a male that can sing as high as alto or even higher by using his falsetto voice. This is described as 'countertenor' and sometimes we even see women that can sing lower than a tenor - the subcategories do not stop there. Over the history

²⁸ Luisa Tetrazzini & Enrico Caruso, "The art of singing," 1 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 50.

²⁹ Ibid. 52

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Matthew Edwards, "So you want to sing rock 'n' roll," 1 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 73.

³³ Ibid. 101.

of classical singing there have been numerous names for types of singers that sing in a specific style, such as a 'Basso profondo', 'Basso cantate', 'Baritono drammatico', 'Heldentenor' and 'Tenor Spinto' and this only solidifies that every voice is unique, and it is a struggle at times within classical repertoire to categorize them.³⁴ One thing that appears relatively clear from teachers of classical singing, including Luisa Tetrazzini as she states in her book "The Art of Singing", is that falsetto as a vocal technique should not be used by a tenor, and this is one thing that classical singing does not share with jazz.³⁵ According to Tetrazzini, if a tenor is to sing a note that is too high for his chest range, he is to use *mezza voce*, a vocal technique which is very hard to master, as you must focus on only using half of your voice.³⁶ To use falsetto, as Richard Miller states in his book "English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing", is to be seen as a tenor of lower quality.³⁷

The *bel canto* teaching method, which simply means in Italian 'beautiful singing', has been the preferred method of classical singing since its development in the 17th Century.³⁸ Although it was initially used by the Italian operatic school, *bel canto* is used across Europe, particularly by Italy, Germany, France, and England. However, although all four countries have a very similar method of singing, they have still developed their own unique cultural sound, and this is primarily due to language.³⁹

Generally, the language that you are singing in will affect the tone that you create, and this is called prosodic singing.⁴⁰ This is certainly the case when singing in the German language, due to the harsh consonants and natural gutturals found within their language.⁴¹ This tends to create the powerful and dramatic tone we commonly hear with German singers. The German sound, that we often hear when singing lieder, is also created with a far wider space being created within the throat whilst focusing the voice rather far back within the mask and breathing from the lower belly.⁴²

Typically, the French singing sound is thought to be rather nasal, and this is because they focus more on the resonance within the cheeks and nose.⁴³ This is also because of the tendency for French

³⁴ Richard Miller, "English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing," 1 (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), 129.

³⁵ Luisa Tetrazzini & Enrico Caruso, "The art of singing," 1 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 54.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Richard Miller, "English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing," 1 (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1977) 108.

³⁸ Ibid. – 76.

³⁹ Luisa Tetrazzini & Enrico Caruso, "The art of singing," 1 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 63.

⁴⁰ Luisa Tetrazzini, "How to sing," 1 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975) 85.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Joshua J. Whitener, "The German School of Singing: A Compendium of German Treatises 1848-1965," *Journal of Singing* 75/5 (2019): 589.

⁴³ Richard Miller, "English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing," 1 (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1977) 76.

singers to cover their vowel sounds, making them sound flatter by focusing them down the nose and as far into the front of the mask as possible.⁴⁴

Many singers believe that the Italian language is the best language to sing with due to its common use of open vowels which allow for the singer to widen their mouth properly and therefore use a better, healthier technique.⁴⁵ The Italian school focuses on forward placement of the voice, although not as much as you would find when singing in the French language, and requires as much opening up within the throat as possible.⁴⁶ The Italian sound also comes from *appoggio*, which is their method of breathing and holding posture. *Appoggio* teaches you to push the upper part of your chest out, allowing more room for the lungs to expand with air for breathing.⁴⁷

The English vocal tradition tends to share a lot of its methods with that of the Italian School in terms of placement of the voice and the German in terms of the use of language.⁴⁸ However, it is found that sometimes, especially when singing earlier music from the baroque era, that a tone without vibrato is preferable when creating a sense of purity within the voice.⁴⁹

Another common technique used within *bel canto* is *messa di voce*, which is to sustain a long note and gradually make it crescendo and then diminuendo.⁵⁰ This technique is used as a tool, not necessarily making the sustained note louder and quieter, but instead more and less intense by increasing and decreasing the size of the gap within the throat that the singer had to force the breath through.⁵¹

Vibrato is the vocal technique heard when the singer wavers on a certain note, rapidly going slightly above and below the given note to intensify it. The use of vibrato which is so commonly associated with the operatic singers of today was also used within *bel canto*, however it was used more sparingly, only to accent certain notes and intensify ends of phrases within operas by the likes of Mozart and Haydn.⁵² Since the mid-19th Century, with the introduction of grand operas, vibrato has been a tool that has become more and more common due to the enlargement of both the accompanying music and the buildings. The tone that is created alongside the use of vibrato allows

⁴⁴ Luisa Tetrazzini & Enrico Caruso, "The art of singing," 1 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 62.

⁴⁵ Richard Miller, "English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing," 1 (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1977) 174.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 78

⁴⁷ Matthew Edwards, "So you want to sing rock 'n' roll," 1 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 240.

⁴⁸ Richard Miller, "English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing," 1 (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1977) 78.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Singing," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2023) <https://www.britannica.com/art/singing> (accessed 1/09/23).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Matthew Edwards, "So you want to sing rock 'n' roll," 1 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 149.

for the tone to pierce through the sound and fill the theatre.⁵³ This is why, for example, when listening to singers such as Maria Callas, we hear so much vibrato, and perhaps it could be conceived as too intense, but it allows her to be heard throughout the opera house and carries her voice over the orchestra.

A classical vocal technique that is perhaps a little less popular but still definitely worth mentioning is *sprechgesang*, which is German for speech-singing. First properly used in the 20th century by the expressionistic composers Schoenberg, seen especially in his *Pierrot Lunaire* and Berg's opera *Wozzeck*, *sprechgesang* is the technique of attacking the note indirectly as if you were talking through the music but still maintaining the same melodic shape with your voice.⁵⁴

The vocal technique that perhaps brings us closest to the improvisation that we commonly see within jazz singing is the *cadenza*. A *cadenza* is an unaccompanied passage that commonly comes towards the end of an aria and allows the singer to exhibit their technical skill and imagination. Up until the mid-19th century performers were expected to improvise these passages or at least compose them themselves, however, today it is common for a composer to use one that a previous performer has created or one that the composer has written.⁵⁵ Within my lecture recital I will be performing *Una furtiva lagrima*, the aria by Gaetano Donizetti, to exhibit many of the vocal techniques discussed within this section as well as primarily the *cadenza* found at the end of this piece.

Common Jazz Vocal Techniques

As I have said previously, the research into the teaching of jazz singing is something that has said to be covered only recently but what does seem somewhat apparent in research are the techniques used to create the sounds we all associate with vocal jazz.⁵⁶ Although many jazz singers adopt their own unique way of singing and creating tones, some of the common characteristics found within the jazz voice include a slightly lifted voice box and a focus of resonance within the mask for a bright sound. There is also not as much focus on the opening up of the throat to project high notes, especially not as much as is found within classical singing.⁵⁷ Generally, it appears that there is a

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Oxford Reference, "Sprechgesang, Sprechstimme," <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100525335> (accessed 01/09/23).

⁵⁵ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "cadenza," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2021) <https://www.britannica.com/art/cadanza> (accessed 28/08/23).

⁵⁶ Leila Heil and Ron McCurdy, "Building Vocal Technique and Aural Acuity in the Vocal Jazz Ensemble," *The Choral Journal* 57/4 (2016): 65.

⁵⁷ Diana R. Spradling, "Pedagogy and Vocal Jazz," *The Choral Journal* 27/4 (1986): 27.

greater focus on the notes that are sung rather than diction itself, with consonants and vowels often showing the endings of words being left out in order to emphasise the tune.⁵⁸ Also, because most jazz singers sing with an American accent, even when they're not American themselves, glottal stops are commonly used when singing words such as 'cotton', turning it into 'co'on', and this is something that we would very rarely, if ever, see within classical singing.⁵⁹ In terms of articulation, there are numerous different types of vocal techniques used to decorate a melody such as shakes, growls and smears that do not feature within a classical vocal toolkit. Vibrato is used much like a classical singer would have done before the 19th century - very controlled, used sparingly and typically only ever heard at the ends of phrases. It is uncommon for a jazz vocalist to be found using as much vibrato as we hear from operatic singers today due to the close harmonies used with jazz music, which would make the rapidly changing note often sound out of tune and the fluctuation on a note would in turn create some dissonance within the chord.⁶⁰

In terms of registration, jazz singers are very rarely given a specific name for their voice, rather they either have a low voice or a high voice and, in some cases, both.⁶¹ It is also very common for jazz vocalists to simply change the key of a standard they're singing, if the original did not suit their voice, a luxury that classical singers very rarely get.⁶² This means that a popular singer such as Billie Holiday, who only had a range of around an octave and a half, could sing most standards by simply changing the key to suit her range.⁶³ However, because of the common abilities to use falsetto for men and whistle notes for women, it is common for a jazz singer to have a far wider vocal range than that of a classical singer as they are not confined to a particular voice bracket. Take Minnie Riperton as an extreme example who had an incredible range of over five octaves.⁶⁴

One of the key differences that can be found when comparing a classical and a jazz vocalist is the difference in projection levels. Whilst classical singers, especially those who are operatic, are expected to project enough volume to be heard over an orchestra and round an entire theatre, jazz

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Leila Heil and Ron McCurdy, "Building Vocal Technique and Aural Acuity in the Vocal Jazz Ensemble," *The Choral Journal* 57/4 (2016): 67.

⁶¹ Diana R. Spradling, "Pedagogy and Vocal Jazz," *The Choral Journal* 27/4 (1986): 27.

⁶² Jenna McLean, "Flexibility in Range and Registration in Jazz Singing," *Routledge* (2022): 2.

⁶³ Lizz Bolaji, "Why we're drawn to Billie Holiday's story," *PBS News Hour*, (2021)

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/why-were-drawn-to-billie-holidays-story#:~:text=Swzed%20also%20said%20Holiday%20had,to%20sing%2C%E2%80%9D%20he%20said> (accessed 15/06/23).

⁶⁴ PopularSong.org. "Minnie Riperton". (2023). <https://popularsong.org/wp/artistsperformers/artists-of-the-modern-era-1960-present/minnie-riperton/#:~:text=She%20was%20a%20woman%20ahead,theorists%20call%20the%207th%20octave> (accessed 02/09/23).

singers have less of a need to worry about being heard, as they can often rely on a microphone as their source of projection.⁶⁵ Singers first started using microphones in the 1920s with the introduction of the radio and although many seem to see the microphone as a fix for a weak singing voice, it in fact allows the singer to use more subtle vocal techniques and embellishments that would not necessarily be heard in a large room acoustically and opens up a new world of creative microphone techniques and softer tones. The introduction of the microphone also meant generally being able to hear a vocalist without them having to risk damaging or straining the voice.⁶⁶ Due to this, alongside the vocal technique itself, a jazz singer also must learn microphone technique and how to perform correctly with it. Naturally, it takes a while getting used to singing with a mic as you quickly realise the small amount of projection needed to be heard. When it comes to singing loud notes, you have to learn where to pull the microphone away in order to not overpower the microphone for example and in terms of diction, where to cover the sounds of final consonants in order to not make it 'pop'.⁶⁷

As well as various vocal techniques, it is important for jazz singers to have a deep understanding of the music that is accompanying them and be able to hear the necessary harmony to allow them not only to produce the written melody but also to improvise over it.⁶⁸ Jazz music typically includes extended harmonies and voicings that are not commonly found within classical music such as ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords as well as sharpened and flattened ninths and fifths and of course the blues scale, which commonly test musicians that have not trained with jazz music.⁶⁹ This deeper understanding of how the harmony of the accompaniment works enables the singer to provide a better improvised solo and to further engage with and create their own interpretation of the written melody. Much like how we'd see a trumpeter, or a saxophonist play an improvised solo within a jazz band, a singer has the same capability through the technique of scatting. Scatting was popularised by Louis Armstrong in the 1920's and it is a vocal technique that has been used by countless jazz artists ever since.⁷⁰ Scat singing is where a singer decides to improvise over a standard, taking on the role of an instrument and without using actual words but instead random made-up sounds such as 'beep', 'bop', and 'boop'. Some of the most important elements needed for an effective scat solo are an awareness of the chord progression that the accompanying band are playing in order to know

⁶⁵ Paula Lockheart, "A History of Early Microphone Singing, 1925-1939: American Mainstream Popular Singing at the Advent of Electronic Microphone Amplification," *Popular Music and Society* 26/3 (2003): 367.

⁶⁶ Henry Pleasants, "Bel Canto in Jazz and Pop Singing," *Music Educators Journal* 59/9 (1973): 57.

⁶⁷ Matthew Edwards, "So you want to sing rock 'n' roll," 1 (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 189.

⁶⁸ Leila Heil and Ron McCurdy, "Building Vocal Technique and Aural Acuity in the Vocal Jazz Ensemble," *The Choral Journal* 57/4 (2016): 68.

⁶⁹ Ibid.- 69

⁷⁰ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Scat." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (2012).
<https://www.britannica.com/art/scat-music> (accessed 06/07/23).

which chords and which notes to pick out, as well as an ability to identify the right scales from the corresponding chord changes, whether they're major, minor, modal or blues.⁷¹ It is also important to have a thorough understanding of the original melody that you are improvising over, in order to allow the improvisation to grow in the same areas where the original tune would, or to add an artistic interpretation to completely transform the melody itself. An example of how you can help the scat solo grow in interest and intensity would be to use different rhythmic features such as triplets and dotted semiquavers instead of always using straight crotchets or minims. This can also be enhanced by choosing the right sounds to scat over and showing the extreme limits of the singer's vocal range as well as flexibility with vocal runs and slides.⁷²

Jazz singers in general are given far more freedom with their music than that of a classical singer, as I've just highlighted, through the fact that the culture of jazz music urges the soloist to find new and creative paths to take the music. Jazz singers are not only able to improvise with scat solo but also can create their own version of standards, changing them in many of the ways that I just stated above. This is not something you would find a classical singer doing with an aria or lied.⁷³ A jazz singer has the freedom to experiment, for example, with changing the tempo and metre, changing the style from a ballad to a bossa, rearranging the structure or even altering the melody and rhythms.⁷⁴ Within my lecture recital I will be performing *All of Me* by Gerald Marks and Seymour Simons in an attempt to showcase most of the vocal techniques shown within this section, particularly drawing on the technique of improvisatory scat singing.

The Similarities of Jazz and Classical Vocal Technique

Throughout this commentary I have attempted to highlight many of the key vocal techniques that strongly belong to the individual arts of classical and jazz singing. However, I have found that they in fact have more in common than I originally thought before I started to research this topic.

I have already shown how the voice works and described that both types of singing come from the same basic vocal technique of good breath control, correct posture and focusing the voice in different areas in order to create different types of resonance. However, both genres also require an

⁷¹ Doug Anderson, "Improvisation for Vocal Jazz Ensembles," *Music Educators Journal* 66/5 (1980): 89.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jerrold Levinson, "Jazz Vocal Interpretation: A Philosophical Analysis," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71/1 (2013): 35.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

understanding of supporting the sound properly and ensuring that the support comes from the right place to endure a healthy singing style.⁷⁵

I have found that there are also strong similarities between the performance of a jazz standard and a baroque composition. Commonly with a baroque song such as *Music for a While* by Henry Purcell, the singer would start by singing the melodic line as written but would then do a repeat with embellishments of the vocal line such as trills and runs, much like you would find in a normal performance of a vocal jazz standard.⁷⁶ It is also common for a jazz pianist to play without using the pedal, creating a similar sound to that of the harpsichord. I've already mentioned previously how the continuo bass line given to a baroque pianist would have given a similar type of information that jazz musicians would get from a lead sheet today. Alongside this, there is also the common use of portamento, glissando and staccato techniques which are more commonly named slides or whips and accents within jazz singing, both used frequently to embellish the melodic line.⁷⁷

There are also many more similarities shared between jazz singing and bel canto. For example, it is common for classical singers to use rubato to constantly speed up and slow down the tempo of the song, which is also common within jazz music, especially within slower ballads or towards the end of songs.⁷⁸

Conclusion

*"If I were a teacher trying to demonstrate Baroque practices, conventions and criteria to my students, I would begin with jazz and particularly with the popular singers. To demonstrate what an appoggiatura is, for example, I would use a recording by Frank Sinatra or Sarah Vaughan. To teach the concept of tempo rubato, I would again choose Sinatra. And for the slur, glide, or portamento, there are numerous examples in the singing of Sinatra, Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Ethel Waters, and others. Many devices these singers use were common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."*⁷⁹

The above statement by music critic Henry Pleasants highlights the similarities in the way classical and jazz vocalists sing. Through researching this topic, I have come to understand the obvious

⁷⁵ Leila Heil and Ron McCurdy, "Building Vocal Technique and Aural Acuity in the Vocal Jazz Ensemble," *The Choral Journal* 57/4 (2016): 65.

⁷⁶ Hans-Peter Schmitz and Dominique-René de Lerma, "Baroque Music and Jazz," *The Black Perspective in Music* 7/1 (1979): 78.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 79

⁷⁸ Henry Pleasants, "Bel Canto in Jazz and Pop Singing," *Music Educators Journal* 59/9 (1973): 54.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

cultural and social differences that the two genres of music have encountered, and I have also realised that there are important vocal techniques and stylistic choices that only lend themselves to one. For example, I feel the greatest difference between the arts for me is the search for perfection with classical music against the almost limitless freedom you get from jazz, showing that the neatness and discipline needed to sing classical music is somewhat absent within jazz and the experimental and adventurous characteristics would be often frowned upon within the classical world. Having said that, as a singer of both genres myself I find a craving for both and being able to perform both with a concreate understanding of the technique required for both styles brings me great pleasure and allows me to sing classical and jazz music with more ease.

At the end of my lecture recital, I will be performing the song *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square* by Manning Sherwin. I will first start singing it in a classical style, incorporating many of the classical vocal techniques discussed in this commentary before singing the second verse in a jazz style, again showing many of the techniques I have discussed here.

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