

## **Some Basic Vocal Jazz Rehearsal Techniques**

**by**

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### **Improvisation**

There are NO shortcuts!

Lift solos – commit to memory!

You must learn to speak the language!

Soloists are given an opportunity – they must accept the responsibility.

Soloists should be able to play changes on piano!

Improvise in the style of the tune being sung.

Let soloists be vocalists– NOT piano or horns.

Limit the number of scat syllables for beginners– use soft consonants

Can you sing the melody of the tune as your solo? Use as basis for improvisation.

Use syllables that reflect the ‘horn’ sounds and articulation.

### **Musicianship**

Use of ghost notes (de-emphasized words) and back-accenting (vowels on down

beats - consonants on off-beats) concept when singing scat syllables. This

is an important stylistic issue.

If three or more eighth or sixteenth notes of scat syllables in a row...need to look

at that section very carefully.

NOT what a great choir, but what a GREAT piece of music!

Music phrases MUST have an attitude!

Shape phrases – make music!

Important words in phrases need to be brought out.

Use full range of dynamics

Lines must have musical direction.

Alter charts to fit your group. Most charts were written for some group-

usually not yours! If a section is too difficult, CHANGE IT! Make the  
chart work for your group. That is not an insult to a composer or arranger.

Long notes must have direction! And releases!

You are auditioning 100% of every day! Students be prepared for every  
rehearsal.

Take 10 minutes at the beginning of each rehearsal to teach basic fundamentals-

NOT rehearsing charts!

Latin music needs to be played correctly with the correct instrumentation:

Brazilian (non-clave) – transparent sound

Shaker/cabasa

Triangle

Agogo Bells

Afro-cuban (clave)

Congas

Bongo bell

Bongos

Timbales

A good CHORAL SOUND is a must!

The vocal jazz sound is not a covered sound!

Focused sound.

Keep your sound forward!

Concepts for producing a good concert choir sound are the same for jazz.

Match vowel sounds.

Know what a good vocal sound is!

### **Time**

The most important concept in jazz!

Speak phrases for teaching time.

Use good jazz articulation to help with time.

Listen to pro groups that have good time (Oscar Peterson Trio, Count Basie, etc.)

### **Techniques**

Releases relate to count-offs – the faster the tempo the simpler the count-off and  
the

slower the tempo the more complex the count off.

Bring out chordal notes (3-5-7-9)-lighten alterations (#5, b5, #9, b9, #11, b13).

Microphone technique:

Rehearse with mikes ONLY when you have learned (not necessarily memorized) the music.

Place microphone about 1"-2" from mouth – geometric relationship in sound increase/decrease when you move mic.

Go 'off-axis' when singing 'plosives' and 'oo's.

Use mic technique to help with dynamics.

Don't use microphone stands!

Use separate solo microphone(s) if possible.

Rehearse section slowly so students have the chance to hear vertically.

Make students rhythm section tapes of all charts.

Soloists need to be selected early so they can prepare – no 'on the spot' solos as it is not good education unless all students have prepared equally.

In a vocal jazz set up, place vocalists in a single line vs. two lines

Place students in quartet-quintets-sextets vs. the traditional choir set up – in groups

of sopranos, altos, tenors and basses.

Match voices – thicker sounds in middle, lighter sounds to outside.

Sing words as they are spoken (vernacular) – Win-TER vs. WIN-ter...this example may mean a change in the rhythm of the chart at this point.

Need to hear the soprano lead.

Control vibrato – use tension/release-sing note, delay vibrato, then add.

Be able to sing non-vibrato if needed.

Rehearse outer voice parts, then inner voice parts, then variations of parts

Everyone has pencil...mark all parts!!!!

Rehearse in a circle...everyone can hear. Piano outside the circle with accompanist

rehearsal accompanist have direct visual contact with director.

The lower the part, the more energy and focus you must have.

Video tape your group-is it a reflection of what the audience wants to see?

Listen, listen, listen to each other.

### **Rhythm Section**

Rehearse the vocal jazz ensemble without rhythm section and vice versa.

Bring in bass & piano first to rehearse with group – then in a rehearsal or two, add the drums.

Need to play together outside of class.

Need to listen to great rhythm sections (Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown Trio, Hal Galper Trio, Keith Jarrett Trio, Red Garland Trio, et al)

Give rhythm section a tune out front before you bring on the vocalists.

Rhythm sections must play musically and use dynamics.

### **Piano:**

Piano usually does not double melodic notes of soloists.

Piano does not need to play all the changes during tutti sections.

Piano part must reflect alterations of vocal chart.

In static and moving chord changes, piano player thinks and moves melodically.

Piano – limited, if any, use of sustain pedal.

Learn correct voicings (Voicings by Frank Mantooth-Hal Leonard) a start.

Levine

books for the more advanced

**Bass:**

Bass lines – Must have length.

Use in-line tuner. Fundamental of pitch must be correct.

Use acoustic bass (if player plays in tune) and/or electric bass, depending on the styles of charts.

Use ‘kickers’ in quarter-note bass lines.

**Drums:**

Ends of charts – Four types for drum set player:

Long loud

Long soft

Short loud (Fat)

Short soft

Long notes in ensembles must be long on drum set - short must be short.

Bass drum sound must have length – it needs to have a ring to it, otherwise the sound will not carry.

Set-up tutti ensemble figures.

Play non-repetitive cymbal pattern.

Ask for 'colors' (cymbals and subdivision when singing ballads).

Don't ask drummers to play lighter on up tempo tunes – have them choke up on sticks.

On slow groove tunes, have the drummer accent the third note of the triplet, not the down beats.

### **Director Preparation**

Programming – it can make or break a performance. Just because the chart is good

doesn't mean it will program correctly.

Variety helps the audience as well as the students:

Latin

Be-bop (slow, medium, up)

Fusion

Funk

Pop/Cover

Contemporary

World Music

A cappella (slow, medium, up – any style)

Standards (slow, medium, up)

Others

Encourage students to write for the ensemble.

Memorize vocal jazz scores – do not conduct using music.

Be able to sing or play on piano, all parts individually of the tunes you are singing.

Use digital media to record rehearsals – you will not hear in rehearsal what you hear

on the recording – study your scores and go to rehearsals prepared.

Let students know what is expected of them at the next rehearsal...Cute from C to

D. The choir should be able to sing the program at least two weeks before

the concert. That means the director needs to generate a rehearsal schedule from that point backwards. It is counterproductive when the director says, “have Cute learned by tomorrow!” Plan, plan, plan!

Provide students with rhythm section tapes of the tunes your are programming! It will facilitate memorization, intonation, et al.

Use a metronome at rehearsals to count of tunes AND to check to see if certain parts of a chart is rushing or dragging.

Use a warm-up for your group

Know what a good vocal sound is!

Conductor should be at side of jazz choir, not in front...except when conducting ballads.

Director should not leave the stage when choir is singing...they need your support.

Use music technology aids to help such as Band In A Box and various sequencer

programs.

When tuning a note, know what notes of the chord you are tuning...it WILL help!

**Thank you!**

# **Basic Vocal Jazz Rehearsal Techniques**

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