



As promised in the last NAJE Educators Journal, the controversial subject of vibrato in the vocal jazz idiom will be addressed. Notice the article does not state, "non-vibrato." Also, it is not possible to address vibrato alone in this article without dealing directly with the concept of sound. I had intended to cover this topic in Vocal Jazz Techniques section, but the sub-section on vibrato kept expanding until it became impossible to work with due to the space constraints. Thus the article as it appears.

VIBRATO – A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Whether to use vibrato or not to use vibrato is not just in the arena of vocal jazz. The Christiansen school of choral singing in the height of its popularity at St. Olaf College was thought to be a non-vibrato approach to singing. Today is not much different for the vocal jazz area, which is considered by many to be a non-vibrato approach to singing jazz. Critics of both camps couldn't be further from the truth.

The choral school of non-vibrato or straight-tone which had its beginning at St. Olaf College under F. Melius Christiansen and later his son, Olaf C. Christiansen, and at Concordia College under Paul Christiansen were not really non-vibrato approaches to choral singing. True, the sopranos sang with little or no vibrato. However, the supporting voices sang with a fairly slow and narrow vibrato, giving the auditory illusion that no vibrato was being used. To this day, there are many educators who believe the Christiansen choirs did not use vibrato although this concept of choral singing was in its prime over 40 years ago. Today, according to Dr. Robert Schultz, Professor of Voice at St. Olaf College, the vibrato concept has changed. At St. Olaf College, the vibrato is one of freedom, except where stylistically inappropriate . . . such as in a Renaissance number, where no vibrato is used, or in a madrigal number where vibrato is used, but in a very controlled sense. Dr. Schultz maintains that vibrato can be absent in vocal sound as long as the volume remains soft and not loud. If one sings loudly without vibrato, this has the potential to negatively affect the healthy voice. This also makes good musical sense since singing classical or jazz music loudly and without vibrato is not stylistically correct.

STUDIO VOICE AND THE CONCERT CHOIR VIBRATO AND SOUND

In the art of classical singing such as the singing of art songs and/or operatic works, a vibrato is produced in such a way as to be usable only by a soloist or perhaps as a singer in an operatic chorus. The voice is full and sometimes on the loud side so as to carry above the volume of the orchestra or accompaniment, with the vibrato being quite wide and fast. In many cases, more attention is given the vowel sound at the sacrifice of the consonant. The result is perhaps a good solo or operatic vocal sound, and in the form of what is considered to be good solo or operatic style, everything else being equal. However, this sound and/or vibrato will not necessarily blend in a concert choir setting. The studio singer who joins the concert choir will have to temper the wide vibrato and in some cases depending on their sound, may have to back-off on their volume. The concert choir director still demands the same breath support and the same process for tone production as the studio teacher including, but not limited to, the subjects of tone placement, posture, position of the larynx, use of the lips in forming vowels, the concept of the open throat, etc. No fundamental change, just less vibrato and less volume. When the studio singer accomplishes this, they have made a musical adjustment so as to sing in what is accepted as good concert choir style.

THE STUDIO VOICE INSTRUCTOR AND THE VOCAL JAZZ CHOIR

Originally when the vocal jazz movement began in the late 60's and 70's, most of the vocal jazz directors were jazz instrumentalists. Although many of these vocal jazz directors dealt effectively with style, they did not know how to work with the voice itself. In that time period, perhaps some of the criticism by applied vocal instructors was just. However, that criticism today does not seem to be warranted. Those that criticize in this day and age are more a reflection of the critics own insecurity in dealing with the subject of vocal jazz and/or the individual vocal jazz director. The vocal jazz director today is a well-educated musician and in most cases, a vocalist who is the product of good vocal music education. This has been extremely beneficial to the vocal

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jazz directors whose backgrounds are primarily instrumental. The vocalists are helping these instrumentalists with good voice fundamentals and the instrumentalists in turn are helping the vocal directors with good jazz style. Tremendous progress has been made in the past few years.

As for the applied vocal instructors who have remained highly critical of vocal jazz in recent years, many of them have based their opinion on dated facts or what they believe is happening in the vocal jazz rehearsal or performance, not what they personally have heard and/or observed. In order to facilitate communication, I would invite the applied voice instructor to take a few minutes to observe a vocal jazz group in a rehearsal or two. On the other hand, it is just as much the responsibility of the vocal jazz instructor to take the time to sincerely solicit the input of the applied vocal instructor. It's a two-way street. They do have input which will help to make the jazz choir a better one, and more importantly, students would benefit and not have to choose between classical and jazz, as some are forced to do. The result would be more students in high school and college who would have the chance to participate in several years of singing in vocal jazz ensembles, concert choirs, and applied lessons, offering students the opportunity to become better teachers, performers, and listeners.

THE VOCAL JAZZ CHOIR SOUND

When applied studio singers sing in the vocal jazz ensemble, they must make the same musical adjustments as when they sing in the concert choir . . . use less vibrato and less volume. One of the most difficult concepts for a vocal jazz director is to get the jazz choir to sing with a full voice . . . not necessarily loud, but full. The applied studio singer can be of great assistance in this situation. There has been so much emphasis placed on blend in vocal jazz groups, that it is almost an automatic function for the singer in a vocal jazz group to sing soft in order to obtain the "magical" blend. Not saying that singing soft is incorrect, as there are times when

the pianissimo style of singing is desirable. In either case, singing full voice or pianissimo, vocal production in vocal jazz is accomplished with good tone production techniques as previously mentioned and with good breath support. Use of the outstanding applied studio singer as an example good sound to non-singers or instrumentalists can be very beneficial.

THE VOCAL JAZZ VIBRATO

Contrary to popular belief, the absence of vibrato in a vocal jazz choir IS NOT a typical jazz characteristic. Vibrato is to be used discretely and in places appropriate to the style and interpretation of jazz. Don't forget, the jazz choir is a mirror of instrumental jazz and what applies stylistically to the instrumental side, must apply to the vocal side. Remember we are talking only a stylistic and interpretative approach. The vocal mechanism is not being altered. In vocal jazz, on medium and up-tempo tunes, vibrato is used on only the very ends of held notes . . . exactly as one would use vibrato in an instrumental jazz ensemble.

MEDIUM GROOVE

Vibrato begins on beat 3 1/2
Release is on beat 4

Another reason one uses delayed vibrato in jazz ensemble and vocal jazz ensemble is due to the complexity of the harmonic structure.

MED. GROOVE

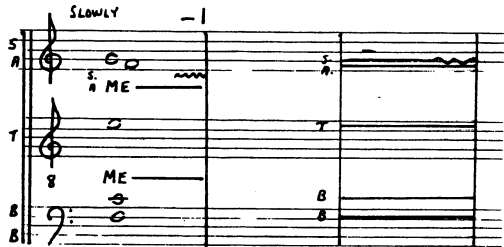
TENSION | RELEASE
NO VIBRATO | VIBRATO
1 2 3 1/2 4



Oakland University - Ron DeRoo, Vocal Director

If vibrato were used all the way through this chord, the beauty of the tension created between the E and the F would be lost. Thus the above chord is held WITHOUT VIBRATO until the very end, creating not only a chord whose sound is solidified, but creating one of the very important elements of jazz . . . tension and release in the music . . . non-vibrato and vibrato. Delayed vibrato and vibrato are stylistically correct in the jazz idiom.

An a cappella ballad, is treated a little differently. In this case, a narrow vibrato is added only to the soprano note and then only at the end of a phrase or a held note. This is quite similar to singing a Renaissance work. It is also the same way a lead trumpet player treats a phrase on a held note in the jazz ensemble. Note that in a similar ballad setting for an instrumental jazz ensemble, no vibrato is used in underneath parts, and only a slight vibrato in the lead part to create warmth at the end of a phrase or held note.



As a jazz soloist, the individual singer has the option of using a varied and individual style of vibrato. The only constraints suggested is that the vibrato be delayed, creating the jazz element of tension in the music. The tension is then released by using vibrato at the end of held notes.

In most educational institutions today, vocal jazz educators are concerned with good vocal health through the use of good tone production techniques and good breath support. Directors have not said, 'no vibrato', as is commonly thought, but they have asked the student to use vibrato in the context of the style of the music being sung . . . the same demands that the applied studio instructor and the concert choir director asks of the student. It does seem that when we teach instrumental or vocal music, be it classical or jazz, and do so with correct style and interpretation, many of the basic fundamentals tend to take care of themselves.

CLUES TO VOCAL MISUSE

I believe it is important for all vocal jazz, concert choir, and applied studio instructors to recognize signs that signal misuse of the voice. The below paragraphs are taken from an article by Martin Cooper, Ph.D., which was published in GREAT SINGERS ON GREAT SINGING, BY JEROME HINES. Martin Cooper, Ph.D. works specifically in vocal rehabilitation in Westwood, California. He has helped many singers including opera singers Jerome Hines and Rita Shane. His clinical experience indicates that many problems with the singing voice are due in fact to the speaking voice . . . not with singing techniques or singing instructors.

"A simple means of identifying vocal misuse and abuse is by negative vocal symptoms. Negative vocal symptoms may be VISUAL, AUDITORY, or SENSORY. Visual negative symptoms may include inflammation or edema of the vocal cords, bowed vocal cords, or growths on the vocal cords such as nodules, polyps, or contact ulcer granuloma. All of these can be seen by a laryngologist.



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Auditory negative vocal symptoms are those heard by the speaker and perhaps by the listener and include acute or chronic hoarseness, a limited or reduced vocal range, an inability to talk at will and at length in variable situations, repeated loss of voice or laryngitis; tone change from a clear voice to a breathy, raspy, squeaky, foggy, or rough voice; voice skips or breaks; and an inability to be heard clearly and easily throughout the day; as well as many other symptoms.

Sensory negative vocal symptoms are those experienced by the individual. These may include repeated throat clearing without relief; progressive vocal fatigue or "tired voice" following brief or extended vocal usage; acute or chronic pain in or about the larynx, a feeling of a foreign substance or "lump" in the throat; repeated sore throats; a tickling, tearing, or burning sensation in the throat; a feeling that talking is an effort; tension or tightness in the throat; frequent mucus formation; and prominent swelling of veins or arteries in the throat during speaking.

Negative vocal symptoms are usually cumulative and progressive, so that inflammation or thickening of the vocal cords may eventuate into growths on the vocal cords. There is also strong indication in the literature that continued vocal misuse and abuse may contribute to premalignant as well as to malignant growths of the vocal cords.

CONCLUSION

I do hope this article has been helpful not only to the vocal jazz director, but to the concert choir director and the applied studio teacher as well. I believe all of us are interested in the students' progress and are capable and mature enough to agree on what is considered "good basic vocal health." There is absolutely no professional or educational justification in keeping students from singing the kind of music that is a reflection of their environment, no matter if they are in high school or college. Be it pop, vocal jazz, or classical style music, the music is only a style and it can be sung correctly and musically. Besides, isn't it more educationally sound for the student to have the vocal jazz director also talking about breath support and good vocal techniques as well as the concert choir director and the studio voice instructor?