

2) Improvising as a Jazz Singer

A Jazz vocalist has many possibilities for improvising over a music piece or over a song. When melodic material (written melody and chords) constitutes the form of a song/ music piece and no lyrics are included, you could approach an improvisation by primarily focusing on melodic-rhythmic aspects as, for instance, a saxophonist does. Therefore you'll need to learn the musical language (melody, chords, rhythmic feel, form and style of the music piece) just like a saxophonist has to (this alone, depending on the level of complexity you may want to achieve, can take up to several years and/ or up to a lifetime). Playing a harmony instrument such as the piano may be of considerable help in learning the musical language. In addition, you will need to work on vocal technique and sound, both of which may depend on the aesthetic and artistic vision(s) you may have.

Now as a singer, the language (also for improvising) does not solely have to be bound to the musical language and technical aspects as described above. The language of a singer traditionally also contains working with text, which - put in a musical setting- also relates to the musical material.

Composing a piece for a Jazz singer may start with writing the musical material or your own text (or using one already written by someone else). When text appears with music it is often referred to as "lyrics," whereas the whole musical piece is a "song." Text is normally intended to be sung by a singer, although in the past many previously sung "songs" have been played by instrumentalists, substituting for the singer. Jazz composers have had the instrumentalists play their instruments and sing/ speak text, and in many musical genres there are compositions for instrumentalists to be played and spoken/ sung at the same time, so:

Why should Jazz singers only stick to singing the head themes with lyrics, while melody instrumentalists may play from a chart and improvise over notes and chords?

Why should it be too difficult for singers to learn sight- reading, scales and chords in order to play and improvise like melody instrumentalists do, when there is living evidence it is possible and there are more and more methods nowadays for learning to do these things?

Why are instrumentalists so often ashamed of incorporating the use of their voices in music making?

Shouldn't all musicians discover and learn how to work with their voice, body and instrument(s), with improvisation, composition, interpretation, as well as with musical language and also text?

In Jazz music practice there is often a distinction made between singers and instrumentalists (the latter referred to as "musicians" although, technically speaking, singers are musicians as well!), especially if they have accomplished a high level of proficiency in musical language and technique. This may have to do with the role commonly attributed to a singer, which can be

seen as one of a storyteller or as a singing actor narrating through the use of words. It also may have to do with the (in earlier times non- existent) musical education of Jazz singers, since they often didn't study music- as opposed to instrumentalists- and had other jobs, singing only as a hobby.

Whether you prefer to be more of a narrator expressing sth. directly through words or consider yourself more like an instrument expressing something through musical language: in both cases you need to create an idea of what you want to express and decide on which of the musical or narrative components you want to emphasize. When working with text, create an idea of the possible meanings/ perspectives/ interpretations that come into question for you- the exercise "Working with Language, Text, Literature" is intended as an aid for that. You may also analyze the context out of which a song or Jazz standard arose, listen to existing versions of it and define your version and improvisation according to this information.

When melodic material constitutes the form of a music piece and no lyrics are included, you can decide to add some text - whether as main content (for example as lyrics for the head theme) or as a part of your improvisation. How you do that may also be up to the style/ genre of the music and/ or the function the text should have, as well as depending on your artistic style.

Mastering the more traditional ways in vocal Jazz (how to narrate a Jazz standard song playing the role of a storyteller, how to improvise over a II-V-I- progression, etc.) as well as exploring sounds, body percussion, instruments, spontaneous ideas- alone and with others- are all together valid approaches for improvising as a Jazz singer.