

Vocal Jazz Singing Assessment Rubrics* <i>(Read remarks below this table for helpful explanatory annotations)</i>	Performance Low 0 points	Performance Basic 1 point	Performance Standard 3 points	Performance Commendable 5 points	Overall Average Score
Tonal Substance (vocal timber, vocal control, intonation, harmonic use, ability to create musical riffs, runs, and chordal changes through either worded or nonsensical vocal sputters with reference to the song's melodic structure; sounding like an instrument)	Score: Remarks:	Score: Remarks:	Score: Remarks:	Score: Remarks:	
Creativity (emotional substance, range variety, scat origin; ability to fuse Blues and Classical and other World music elements; angular, atonal, impressionistic relation between vocals and the accompaniment's notes/chords)	Score: Remarks:	Score: Remarks:	Score: 3 Remarks:	Score: Remarks:	
Rhythm (linguistic variety in reference to scat, originality of scat syllables vis-a-vis varied tempi; ability to mix varied feels-Latin, bossa nova, swing, ragtime)	Score: Remarks:	Score: Remarks:	Score: Remarks:	Score: Remarks:	
Performer (Name): _____					Ave. Score:

Above rubrics mostly based on vocal jazz assessment criteria by Ward-Steinman (2008)

****Explanatory Annotations***

Tonal Substance

- timber (vocal color)- can mean bright, warm, brassy, husky etc.
- ability to create musical riffs, runs, and chordal changes through either worded or nonsensical vocal sputters
- riffs- cycles of notes; may also be referred to as runs, licks, vocal exhibitions, vocal acrobatics
- chordal changes-refers to inversions of or going around, or going off tangent of the existing chord
- nonsensical sputters- can be any onomatopoeic like lalala, papapada or shoobeedoobee

Creativity

- emotional substance, range variety, scat origin; ability to fuse Blues and Classical and other World music (like Indian, Middle Eastern, or Asian musical elements)
- emotional substance: ability to express such emotions as joy, pain, sorrow, happiness, melancholy; ability to employ emotional irony or comedy
- ability to employ scales from Indian, Middle Eastern or world music traditions- refer to this video for more information

Rhythm

- linguistic variety in reference to scat, originality of scat syllables vis-a-vis varied tempi; ability to mix varied feels)
- a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound.with syncopation (accent does not happen on the usual, regular beat; emphasizes the weak beat)
- must swing in different feels (standard swing, bossa, bebop,ragtime)
- Learn more about jazz rhythms at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haD5u_YZ_cY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iu0mOu2UZ9M>

Other helpful videos on YouTube:

Classical and Jazz Vocals (by the Lincoln Center Jazz Academy):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDnGo3ZR69U>

Exploring Jazz Vocals (by the Lincoln Center Jazz Academy):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHcnoQUx_4w

For more clarification, information on the above vocal jazz rubrics/evaluation criteria, you may contact the instructional designer who also happens to be a vocal jazz artist:

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COMMENTARY ON VOCAL JAZZ EVALUATION RUBRICS

The above tabulated rubrics to vocal jazz performance assessment partly stems from a project in my EDS 157 (Introduction to Online Teaching) course. In the said project, I critiqued a syllabus of the Jazz Voice course on Berklee Online, noting the need to modify lessons and assessments following the principles of social-constructivist and social-reconstructionist education (Arinto & Garcia, 2009; Al-Raschid - Arsad, 2020). In my research-based critique, I especially noted that improvisation has to be at the heart of a jazz voice course (Lacdao, 2020) in that jazz is a music that entails spontaneous creativity and the ability to transform a classic song into a new, fresh version of itself in every performance. I also noted the highly collaborative effort and the social interaction between a singer and other participants to a jazz musical performance on the spur of the moment.

As a freelance jazz artist myself, I am very grateful for having had the privilege of joining this year's online master class of the Grammy-winning jazz singer Kurt Elling (Yanow, 2005; [grammy.com](https://www.grammy.com), 2020). As an observer in the master class (mcm@kurtelling.com, personal communication, May 17, 2020), I learned the importance of improvisation and the essence of having peers or mentors in jazz singing even outside formal school.

The specific content to the above tabulated lessons in jazz voice improvisation is largely based on scholarly references I have utilized in critiquing the Berklee Online Jazz Voice course (Lacdao, 2020).

Jazz singers are supposed to make a song their own every single time. Whereas Classical singers sing a song the way it has always been performed, jazz singers render a jazz standard piece of music *anew* each and every time. In an ethnomusicological lens, jazz cannot be as formal as Classical music in so far as cultural influences are concerned. Jazz music has its sociocultural roots in African-American slaves' song from which most of the music developed. Such history dramatizes a people that "were treated worse than the animals they worked with, and had to care for. Despite this horrible life condition, they were able to survive by faith, their cultural inheritance, and sheer will" (Tarver-Mariama, 1999). Jazz nonetheless was a musical expression incorporating aesthetics and experiences from not only African-Americans but also other immigrants to the United States. Jazz was an equal sharing of African-American and European musical traditions.

As a creative procedure, jazz improvisation draws from a solid music theory knowledge base, as well as the ability to circumnavigate harmonic and melodic frameworks (Coss, 2016). A vocal improviser has to think of bars of notes and chords in a certain sequential arrangement, and has to play around that sequence, with the intention of recreating harmonic essences (Marino, 2019).

Logically, following the fact that jazz music is characteristically improvisational, jazz voice instruction has to employ learning activities that are in themselves able to develop creative, improvisatory behaviors. Jazz Voice students have to collaborate and interact with each other in both musical and non-musical learning activities (Coss, 2016).

The importance of improvisation's correlation with creativity is of paramount importance to present times. I have to emphasize that jazz is ideally labeled as a "prototypical expression of creative artistic improvisation" (Eisenberg, 2020). In a recent study among Jazz, Classical, and Folk musicians, jazz musicians were found to achieve the highest forms of

artistic expression and exhibit divergent thinking ability which is quintessential to creative thinking (Benedek et al, 2014). Learning improvisation is learning creativity. Creative people are much in demand in today's largely digital and knowledge-based economy. In the field of ecommerce for example (Chen, 2012), creativity is key to effectively employing computational mobile agents to help consumers make digital purchases. Ecommerce experts combine intricate programming codes, as well as psychologically engaging marketing strategies across a virtual landscape that spans a globe of multifarious cultural texts and practices.

Since vocal jazz performance is mostly psychomotor in nature, where the singer has to use her or his vocal, aural, and mental faculties to creatively produce creative and improvisatory ideas in collaboration with other musicians or singers in the performance, I emphasize creating a rubric in this paper for the assessment of the psychomotor section of this tabulated instructional curriculum. Using the MacGregor (2005) rubric model, I present the following rubrics to qualify and quantify a psychomotor assessment in improvisation:

Jazz singing has to be highly sophisticated, swinging, and improvising. A jazz singer is a balanced and creative amalgam of European Classical music and African tonality and rhythm. Since jazz was born in a multicultural American setting, it's natural for jazz to be inclusive, collaborative, sensitive, accommodating, and most of all improvisational. Jazz gives each one musician (singer included) in the band a chance to be herself or himself, to be free, to be creative. Jazz is democracy in action. And it's thinking in action (Coss, 2016; Marino, 2019; McDonald, 2010; Wadsworth-Walker, 2005)

So when you make an assessment for a vocal jazz student, you have got to have the freedom of jazz in mind. That creative and collaborative kind of freedom.

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