

IOSFS Resonances Vocal Jazz - Scat Singing March 26, 2022

Scat singing is the use of meaningless syllables or sounds to convey personal expression and add flavor to a tune. The style varies depending on the musical genre at a particular time, e.g. trad jazz, swing, bop, cool jazz. Scatting is vocal improvisation that follows a harmonic structure and uses the ear rather than the eye. The sounds that imitate different instruments may be used as well as musical quotes from nursery rhymes to classical music. Although Louis Armstrong is generally credited with “originating” scat in 1926 on “Hotter Than Hot”, the technique was used and recorded earlier in the 1900s.

Vocalese, on the other hand, uses lyrics that are sung to already existing instrumental solos. Since most vocalese lyrics are syllabic, many words can be sung quickly in a given phrase. Eddie Jefferson was the inventor of vocalese with his rendition of Coleman Hawkins’ solo on “Body and Soul”. King Pleasure and his rendition of “Moody’s Mood for Love” is another example of vocalese. The best known vocalese performers are Dave Lambert, Jon Hendricks and Annie Ross [Lambert, Hendricks and Ross] later Lambert, Hendricks and Bavan when Yolande Bavan replaced Ross. They are closely followed by The Manhattan Transfer.

These are the jazz singers/scat singers who have most influenced my singing: Carmen McRae, Betty “Bebop” Carter, Sarah “The Divine One” Vaughn, Anita O’Day, Ella Fitzgerald, Shirley Horn, Mel Torme, Bobby McFerrin and Al Jarreau.

For reference, check out:

Joe Sims, Adelaide Hall, Gertrude “Baby” Cox, the Boswell Sisters (Connee), Scatman Crothers, Chet Baker, Mark Murphy, Clark Terry (“Mumbles”), Ward Swingle and The Swingle Singers, Louis Prima.

<https://archive.org/details/jazzsingersgreat0000unse> Jazz singers: the great song stylists in their own words

<https://archive.org/details/singingjazzsinge0000crow> Singing jazz : the singers and their styles

Lisa Yves. Jazz for Kids: Everybody’s Boppin’ and Jazz for Kids:Vocalese (On Amazon)
Excellent resource for the elementary music classroom.

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