



ELEMENTS OF JAZZ VOCALS

WELCOME SINGERS!

Hello and welcome to Elements of Jazz Vocals, where I begin to examine a few of the ways that jazz singers approach learning and performing a song.

We will talk about learning lyrics and the importance of their meaning. We will also explore the phrasing of words and melody and how you can use certain methods to shape the story that a song tells. Then we will touch upon how singers approach improvisation from both melodic and harmonic perspectives.

This course will hopefully give you some tools for developing your own style and finding your unique voice. It's important work for every singer to do, but most of all, don't forget to have fun and experiment! As you build your musical knowledge and put in the practice, telling a story through song in your own way will become second nature.

Gillian Margot

ABOUT GILLIAN



Having an exquisite voice, a disarmingly wide range and a style that is deeply rooted in the tradition of the great jazz vocalists, **Gillian Margot** possesses a gift of storytelling and stunning lyrical delivery. A native of Toronto, Canada, Margot studied under a generation of jazz legends including **Oscar Peterson**, **Freddy Cole**, **Carol Welsman**, and Norman Simmons. Equally at home in the musical worlds of jazz, R&B, chamber, and pop, she has been invited to perform in major venues worldwide with a long list of top-tier talent, including rock icon **Sting**, famed soprano Kathleen Battle, jazz stars **Jeremy Pelt** and **Chris Botti**, and GRAMMY® artists **Robert Glasper** and **Geoffrey Keezer**. Additionally, her voice can be heard in commercials, feature films, and television programs including *Jane Goodall's Wild Chimpanzees*, *New Year*, *Lethal Weapon*, *The Young and The Restless*, and *One Good Reason*.

"...a rich, clear and earthy voice, both rhythmic and free... strong in voice yet vulnerable in spirit, conversant and still melodic... this lady needs to be heard!"

L.A. Jazz Weekly

"Margot's smoky contralto, solid pitch and warm delivery might remind some listeners of Dianne Reeves and the multi-tracked background voices are a creative plus."

New York City Jazz Record

"Gillian has a love for song and the storytelling aspect of musical performance. The tone and sincerity of her voice, her remarkable presence and knowledge, use of phrasing, and ability to communicate with an audience make her relatable and personable. She has a penchant for hard work and a tendency to win over an audience."

Jeremy Pelt (Recording Artist/ Producer)

"Gillian Margot's a jazz singer, and clearly has a fantastic ability to use her voice with the dexterity of an instrument – but she also brings in some nice currents of soul to this standout set [on *Power Flower*]."

Dusty Groove, Chicago

PHRASING LYRICS

Exercise 1

Check out the lyrics to the jazz standards “Blue Skies”.

1. Recite the lyrics out loud, thinking of them like poetry or conversation. Notice how you phrase them. Which words do you emphasize? Where do you naturally pause?
2. Print the lyrics and use a pencil to mark the places you pause. You can use a comma for a small pause and a slash for a big pause or stop.
3. Underline or circle the words that you emphasize most.
4. Now try singing it (even better by memory), using the pauses and emphases you marked.



Reference Recordings

- Nat King Cole Trio (1938)
- Dinah Washington - *After Hours With Miss D* (1954)
- Ella Fitzgerald - *Sings the Irving Berlin Songbook* (1958)
- Cassandra Wilson - *Sings Standards* (1988)

Follow-up questions

What do you notice about the phrasing?

What stylistic differences do you notice in the performances between singers?

What stylistic differences do you notice between time periods?

Blue Skies

Composed by Irving Berlin (1926)

[A1]

Blue skies smilin' at me
Nothin' but blue skies do I see

[A2]

Bluebirds singin' a song
Nothin' but blue skies from now on

[B]

I never saw the sun shinin' so bright
Never saw things goin' so right
Noticing the days hurrying by
When you're in love, my how they fly

[A3]

Blue days, all of them gone
Nothin' but blue skies from now on

Fun Fact

Did you know that Thelonious Monk's "In Walked Bud" is based on the chord changes of Blue Skies?

SING THROUGH THE ROOT MOVEMENT

EXERCISE 1

- Learn to sing these root notes from the basic chord changes of Blue Skies.
- Once you know it, can you sing the root movement while listening to a chorus of it played by your favorite jazz musicians?

Am Am(maj7)/G# Am7/G Am6/F#

C A7(b13) Dm7 G7(b13) Em7 A7(b13) Dm7 Bø7 E7

Am Am(maj7)/G# Am7/G Am6/F# Fm

Em7 A7(b13) Dm7 G7(b13) Cmaj7

Cmaj7 Fm6 Cmaj7 Fm6 Cmaj7 G7 C6

Cmaj7 Fm6 Cmaj7 Fm6 Cmaj7 Bø7 E7(b9)

Am Am(maj7)/G# Am7/G Am6/F#

C A7(b13) Dm7 G7(b13) Cmaj7 Bø7 E7

PHRASING LYRICS

EXERCISE 2

Review the lyrics to the jazz standards “How High The Moon”.

1. Recite the lyrics out loud, thinking of them like poetry or conversation. Notice how you phrase them. Which words do you emphasize? Where do you naturally pause?
2. Print this page and use a pencil to mark the places you pause. You can use a comma for a small pause and a slash for a big pause or stop.
3. Underline or circle the words that you emphasize most.
4. Now try singing it (even better by memory), using the pauses and emphases you marked.



Gillian's Fun Fact:

Ella Fitzgerald's most famous (1960) recording of How High the Moon was inducted into the GRAMMY Hall of Fame in 2002. Her scat solo includes a transcription of Charlie Parker's Ornithology (which is based on the chord changes of How High the Moon).

How High The Moon

Composed (1940) by Morgan Lewis (m)
and Nancy Hamilton (w)

[A]

Somewhere there's music
How faint the tune
Somewhere there's heaven
How high the moon
There is no moon above
When love is far away too
Till it comes true
That you love me as I love you

[B]

Somewhere there's music
How near, how far
Somewhere there's heaven
It's where you are
The darkest night would shine
If you would come to me soon
Until you will, how still my heart
How high the moon

“ ”

“They say some of the most
brilliant moments come out of
mistakes”

SOME LISTENING

- Dinah Shore - Dinah's Showtime '44 - '47 (Hep, 1994)
- Betty Carter - Live at Carnegie Hall 1994
- Mel Torme - Swingin' On the Moon (Verve, 1960)
- Karrin Allyson - Azure Te (Concord, 1995)
- Ella Fitzgerald - The Complete Ella in Berlin (Verve, 1960)

- What do you notice about the phrasing?
- Who mostly back-phrases?
- Who sings it mostly straight ahead?
- Does anyone fore-phrase?

MOVING ON

Once you decide how you want to emphasize certain notes or words or whole phrases, you can start to shape your performance of a song. For example: hold out or maybe shorten a note, embellish a long tone, maybe paraphrase the melody or ad lib, change the dynamics (get softer or louder).

Knowledge of the melody and root movement gives you a start at learning the harmony of a tune, which will help you learn to improvise.

Next step: Can you learn and sing through the chord changes?

BLUES LYRIC EXERCISE

- Research and listen to some blues singers (Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Alberta Hunter, Ma Rainey, Jimmy Rushing).
- Check out the pattern or meter of the lyric.
- Note the form (how many bars in the form?). How are the lyrics placed over that form?
- Write your own Blues lyric. Write about something you know. Keep it simple. Have fun!



TAKE IT FURTHER

- Sing through the root movement of the songs you sing.
- A great exercise in jazz is to start with some standard forms:
 - 12-bar Blues (example: Aaron and Milton Sparks' Everyday I Have The Blues)
 - Rhythm Changes (Gershwin's I Got Rhythm)
 - Honeysuckle Rose (Fats Waller)
 - In A Mellow Tone (Duke Ellington)
 - Ain't Misbehavin' (Fats Waller)
- Sing through the arpeggiations of each chord change.

Root Movement

Root Movement exercises in 4/4 time:

- Exercise 1: Eb7 (ONE), Eb7 (FOUR), Bb7 (ONE), Bb7 (ONE)
- Exercise 2: Eb7 (FOUR), Eb7 (FOUR), Bb7 (ONE), Bb7 (ONE)
- Exercise 3: Cm7 (TWO), F7 (FIVE), Bb7 (ONE), Bb7 (ONE)

Chord Arpeggio

Chord Arpeggio exercises in 4/4 time:

- Exercise 1: Eb7, Eb7, Bb7, Bb7
- Exercise 2: Eb7, Eb7, Bb7, Bb7
- Exercise 3: Cm7, F7, Bb7