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# CD Track List

A “♫” next to a musical example in the text indicates that it is recorded on the CD.

TRACK	EXAMPLE
1	• 3.1 “Straight” to “swing” (Snap on beats 1 and 3 then 2 and 4)
2	• 3.3A Swing demonstration ( <i>One In A Million</i> excerpt)
3	• 3.4 Bossa nova
4	• 3.5 Samba
5	• 3.6 Samba with “partito alto”
6	• 3.10 Latin feel demonstration ( <i>This Masquerade</i> excerpt)
7	• 3.11 Ballad demonstration ( <i>But Beautiful</i> excerpt)
8	• 3.12 Minimized vibrato
9	• 3.13A Special effects demonstration ( <i>Doctor Blues</i> excerpt)
10	• 4.1 Bach to Take 6 (entire process)
11	• 5.3 Minor seventh chord warm up
12	• 5.3 Dominant seventh chord warm up
13	• 5.4 Vocal jazz ii-V7 warm up
14	• 5.10 Blues in F (Simple to more complex)
15	• 5.12 Blues in F practice track
16	• 5.13 “Rhythm” changes
17	• 5.13 “Rhythm” changes practice track
18	• 6.3 Drums: swing demonstration
	• 6.3 Drums: bossa nova demonstration
	• 6.3 Drums: ballad demonstration
19	• 6.4 “Cluttered” rhythm section ( <i>One In A Million</i> excerpt)
	• 6.5 “Uncluttered” rhythm section ( <i>One In A Million</i> excerpt)
20	• 7.1 <i>But Beautiful</i> excerpt “A to Z” (featuring Sunny Wilkinson)
21	• 7.1 <i>But Beautiful</i> excerpt step by step process (featuring Sunny Wilkinson)
22	• 8.1 <i>Doctor Blues</i> excerpt with scat syllables
23	• 8.2 <i>This Masquerade</i> excerpt using a “newly composed” line
24	• <i>Doctor Blues</i> (full performance)
25	• <i>But Beautiful</i> (full performance)
26	• <i>This Masquerade</i> (full performance)
27	• <i>One In A Million</i> (full performance)

## CHAPTER ONE

# What Is Vocal Jazz?

*It's about the  
music...*

Teachers who wish to pursue the art of vocal jazz most likely fall into one of two categories. The first is the traditionally trained choral director who has extensive expertise in conducting and rehearsing concert choirs, classical solo voice training in the bel canto style of singing, a background in traditional music theory, and little or no exposure to the jazz idiom, jazz styles, and improvisation. The second is an instrumental musician with a jazz background who is probably inexperienced in the areas of traditional vocal and choral technique. Wherever you are in the spectrum between these two categories, it is important to note that anyone who has an interest in self-improvement, growth and development can overcome their deficiencies with focus and some hard work.

Remember: It's okay to admit to *not* knowing something! I hereby give you permission to plead ignorance on any subject, especially if you believe you *should* have knowledge about the subject. For example, I have earned three college degrees in music. Some people think that my keyboard skills are relatively well developed, and that I am a competent vocal jazz ensemble director. And yet, if someone asked me to create a beautiful sound on a violin, I would be utterly incapable. Even though I am a well-educated, gainfully employed professional musician, I cannot play the violin. Moreover, it would be silly of me to think that I could or should be able to play the violin, never having done so previously. If mastering the violin became a priority for me, I would have to first learn how to hold the instrument, and then I would need to establish a regimen of daily practice in order to develop the proper technique. At this point I would also have to be patient, because I would not initially be very accomplished, and the sounds emanating from my instrument would probably not be very satisfying. But after a period of several months (or years!), I would gradually learn the intricacies of the new instrument, and as a result find a new means of musical expression.

*It's okay to admit to not  
knowing something!*

I hope this analogy is not lost on the concert choir director with no previous vocal jazz experience. Initially, you will probably not be very skilled at the idiom, and that is okay! As long as you are willing to admit your inexperience, half the battle is already won.

As teachers, we are placed in the position of being “the source” of all information for our students. As a result, some of us have difficulty admitting to our students that we do not know the answer to a question, or that we have no experience in the area of expertise in question. Please consider “confessing” to your students that you don't have all the answers. Encouraging their involvement in the challenge of learning vocal jazz will allow them to feel a real sense of accomplishment as you reach your goals together.

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Jazz instrumentalists also need to appreciate their skills and abilities, and then proceed on a course to shore up deficiencies. Usually these are in the areas of vocal/choral tone, proper vocal technique and knowledge of the vocal mechanism. One does not necessarily need to be an accomplished singer to be a successful choral conductor (I am living proof of that!), but knowledge of the voice and its mechanics is

essential. Although voice lessons are not required, I strongly recommend them to anyone who would like to direct a choir and who has not studied privately.

### **DEFINING VOCAL JAZZ**

Defining vocal jazz is a challenging prospect. There are many and varied opinions as to what constitutes a vocal jazz group. But in most cases, the vocal jazz ensemble is truly a choral ensemble grounded in the classical concert choir tradition. From a traditional choral perspective, the ensemble should sing fundamentally well, emphasizing healthy vocal technique, blend, balance, diction, intonation, and tone. The jazz aspect comes from the selection of repertoire (jazz compositions or arrangements in the jazz style), improvisation, and application of the appropriate style.

However, we must consider that some elements of jazz style (with West African derivations) and some elements of the Western European classical choral tradition are quite different. Therefore, opinions vary as to which stylistic elements are most important to a vocal jazz ensemble. Many believe the vocal jazz ensemble is simply a vocal extension of the instrumental big band. There are others who believe that vocal jazz is not possible without vocal improvisation. Still others believe vocal jazz can best be represented by a “jazzy sounding” a cappella arrangement that is sung with all of the musical elements that we associate with the traditional concert choir. As they say in Sweden, “vive la difference”! The musical expression will differ significantly in vocal ensembles that reflect these varied opinions, so how can we compare them? It’s like comparing the recordings of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross to those of The Singers Unlimited. Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross were a trio of singers who sang swinging vocalese, improvised and used an instrumental jazz approach to their singing. The Singers Unlimited were a quartet who applied the recording studio technique of over-dubbing to choral arrangements which were beautifully sung using the traditional choral tenants of blend, balance and intonation. Indeed, the sonic differences between these ensembles are obvious, yet both are wonderful groups and both are important to vocal jazz. On a personal note, I absolutely love them both! Once again, it is crucial to get past our (possibly) somewhat limited perspectives and find the value, quality and artistry in every style of music. Again, I urge you to keep an open mind!

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It is important to note that the following section deals primarily in semantics. From my perspective, it does not matter what you call your ensemble, but how well they sing! There are several terms used to describe the types of vocal ensembles that specialize in jazz or “popular” music. They include:

### **VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE**

The term “vocal jazz” is used to describe the genre that generally refers to small choral ensembles that specialize in jazz. These ensembles range from a *vocal combo* of four to nine singers to a *vocal jazz ensemble* of 10 to 24 singers all the way up to a *jazz choir* with 26 to 100 or more voices. Because extra-musical considerations (choreography, etc) are usually not an important part of the presentation, the advanced vocal jazz ensemble can pursue repertoire that presents quite a challenge to the singers’ aural and rhythmic skills. Vocal jazz literature is available for all levels of ability, from children’s choir to professional groups and an increasing number of colleges and universities are developing degree programs in jazz studies that include vocal jazz.

## SHOW CHOIR

The *show choir* typically combines choral music with elaborate choreography and staging. The idiom is more representative of the musical theatre genre and performances can often resemble large production numbers from a Broadway musical, complete with costume changes and elaborate sets. When a group chooses to emphasize choreography over singing, the overall complexity of the choral music is usually decreased, and sometimes the group's blend, balance and intonation can be adversely affected by the physical demands of the dancing. For programming contrast, many show choirs include a ballad or even some vocal jazz repertoire in their program. Usually these pieces are staged, but not choreographed and as a result can highlight the vocal artistry of the ensemble.

Show choirs are most frequently found at the middle school and high school levels. As a result, most choral students will have their peak show choir experience at this level. Most colleges and universities are unwilling to commit the resources required to administer a show choir program, and a show choir has no degree significance in most college music programs. Additionally, serious music students are not willing (nor should they be!) to spend vast amounts of time practicing choreography when they need to be practicing piano, voice, and improving their musical skills. One notable exception is the musical theatre major that indeed needs to develop singing, dancing and acting skills in preparation for a performance career. Many universities offer a degree program in musical theatre, or at least offer opportunities through musical productions so that students can develop and improve their acting, singing and dancing competencies.

## SWING CHOIR

*Swing choir* is a term that describes a vocal group that emphasizes pop literature and probably adds a small amount of motion or choreography to the performance. This term is probably a bit outdated (similar to the term *stage band* to describe the contemporary instrumental jazz ensemble). The swing choir generally performs music that is similar to the repertoire of vocal jazz ensembles and show choirs.

Although there are obvious and distinct differences in vocal jazz ensembles and show choirs, in the interest of time and efficiency, from this point on I will use the term "vocal jazz ensemble" as an all-inclusive term, which includes show choirs, swing choirs and vocal jazz groups of all sizes.

## JUSTIFICATION: WHY VOCAL JAZZ?

Vocal jazz is probably the newest and most dynamic trend in choral music education. Traditional concert choir literature has been sung for over 500 years. Jazz choir literature has been applied in academic settings for only some thirty years, and most choral musicians are still relatively inexperienced in the vocal jazz style. The current evolution of vocal jazz programs in schools is similar to the development of instrumental jazz programs during the late 1970's.

Due in large part to the popularity of touring and recording big bands led by Buddy Rich, Maynard Ferguson, Stan Kenton and Woody Herman during the 1970's and early 80's, many high school and college students were very interested in playing this style of music. Almost overnight, band directors with little or no jazz experience found themselves responsible for a stage band or jazz ensemble. Over the years, with

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