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That's My Style

Finding Your Own Personal Sound as a Jazz Vocalist

Musicians are often asked to find and develop their sound, but rarely find strategies for doing so in academic or other structured learning environments for musical training. Most voice training is either centered on technique and the precise control of the instrument or the acquisition of quantifiable style characteristics such as chord/scale relationships and learning to sing melo-

dies in the style of “(fill in the blank).” While these approaches may be essential components of training, strategies for developing the most crucial part, *the singer's unique expression*, are often omitted. This article provides an entry point to exploring artist development from three components: the sound of you, the intention of your story and the development of style.

The Sound of You

The voice is an incredible instrument. The number of variations and combinations of colors, textures, qualities and dynamic levels possible from the human voice is immeasurable. The wildest part of our instrument is that we are born with it. Our instrument is our body, and our ability to create sound is merely a neurological response.

A healthy infant comes out of the womb already knowing how to cry; this is considered a primal sound. In a matter of months, the baby recognizes that it can make other sounds. When we teach a baby to talk through imitation, we are not actually teaching them to create the sound. We are simply guiding their ability to shape the sound. Generally, babies are allowed to “sound” the way they sound when they speak or sustain other expressive utterances (i.e., laugh, cry, giggle, yell, etc.).

As the baby evolves into an adult, the sound/timbre and frequency of these utterances develop based on the physical growth of the body and vocal instrument, personality, and the cultural and social expectations for self-expression to which an individual is exposed. Yet through all of the possible variables that can influence one's unique sound, their sound and their manner of expression are still unique to them.

The sound of jazz, like many other styles of music that grew out of folk traditions, is the collective reflection of the people and culture the music represents, their personalities and expressive nuances. The singer's individuality, the genuineness of their sound and the subtleties of their nuanced expression, as determined by their personality, make an artist compelling and unique. Therefore, developing and enhancing your unique sound during musical expression starts first with recognizing and developing the sound of your natural self during emotional expression.

When we talk with our friends and tell them about our joys and concerns, we don't stop to think about the “placement of our voice.” We don't think about if we're breathy or clear in our sound, we don't even think about how much breath we have to take to finish the phrase. We don't even think about how loud or soft we are unless we're in a public space and trying to be mindful of our surroundings. We don't think about these things because it's not the point at that moment in communication. We say what we have to say, with the expectation of some response in return. We allow our sound, intensity and phrasing to be determined by our current