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Singers and Jazz Instrumentalists As Interpreters of the Popular Song

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By

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BROADWAY/MOVIE SINGERS

Barbra Streisand	On A Clear Day	Joe Henderson/ Wynton Kelly Trio
Ethel Merman	I Get A Kick Out of You	Clifford Brown (1954)
Fred Astaire	Night and Day	Charlie Parker (1952)
Bette Midler	I Remember You	Sonny Stitt/Oscar Peterson
Judy Garland	But Not For Me	Modern Jazz Quartet (1955)
Robert Goulet	Almost Like Being In Love	Red Garland (1956)
Doris Day	I've Never Been In Love Before	Chet Baker (1956)
Peggy Lee	What Is This Thing Called Love	Don Grolnick

CABARET

Mabel Mercer	It's All Right With Me (1954)	Erroll Garner (1955)
Michael Feinstein	Our Love Is Here To Stay	Dexter Gordon
Bobby Short	Spring Is Here	Count Basie (1958)
Josephine Baker	Bye Bye Blackbird (1926)	
Margaret Whiting	This Can't Be Love	Ahmad Jamal (1958)
Jo Stafford	Just Squeeze Me	Dave Grusin (1993)

JAZZ SINGERS

Anita O'Day	Four Brothers	Woody Herman (1947)
Billie Holiday	Yesterdays	Wynton Marsalis
Billy Eckstine	In A Sentimental Mood	Steps Ahead
Cab Calloway	It Ain't Necessarily So	Grant Green (1961)
Carmen McRae	Satin Doll	Dave Grusin (1993)
Ella Fitzgerald	Come Rain Or Come Shine	Art Blakey (1958)
Johnny Hartmann	Charade	With John Coltrane
Louis Armstrong	A Kiss To Build A Dream On	Louis Armstrong (1951)
Nat King Cole	It's Only A Paper Moon	Nat King Cole
Sarah Vaughan (1958)	Summertime	John Coltrane (1960)
Diana Krall	Let's Fall In Love	Diana Krall
Lena Horne	It's Just One of Those Things	Bud Powell (1951)
Dick Haymes and Helen Forrest	Long Ago and Far Away	Dave McKenna (1973)
Dinah Washington	If I Were A Bell	Miles Davis (1956)
Frank Sinatra	Just Friends	Sonny Rollins (1963)
Bing Crosby	September Song	Art Pepper
Joe Williams	On The Sunny Side of the Street	Jimmy Smith (1960)
Mel Torme	My Foolish Heart	Bill Evans (1961)
Nancy Wilson	My Shining Hour (1963)	

Good afternoon! My portion will focus on a look at how singers of the popular song differ in their approach from that of jazz musicians. I'm sure we all know there are differences but what in their approach creates the contrast?

First there is the original sheet music given by the songwriter. All singers are well known for "taking liberties"; however, Broadway singers, for example, are generally likely to change considerably less in developing their presentation of a song than jazz singers who consider the original only to be a point of departure. The end result is that the score becomes most important in the former case; the performer most important in the latter. It is well known, for instance, that Jerome Kern did not really like jazz musicians very much since they were always "changing" his melodies. Or, Dave Brubeck once wrote a tune called "In Your Own Sweet Way" that Miles Davis, in a later rendition, changed (the last note of the A section was changed from F to E); next thing you know everyone was playing it that way, including Dave Brubeck himself. One cannot blame the great tunesmiths of the past for having a little resentment towards those who don't always treat their work with total reverence. There are, of course, many other more subtle differences so let's listen to some recordings and discuss them. My handout gives a list of singers that is somewhat arbitrary. It is by no means complete and some important singers and/or jazz musicians are missing. Having said that, we will select a few songs from this list and first listen to someone sing; then follow that with a jazz musician's interpretation. I have categorized the singers to further illustrate that there are different styles of singing, too. And it is most interesting to perhaps sense the difference between a popular singer and a jazz singer.

Let's begin with a Broadway singer:

I Get A Kick Out of You (1934 Johnny Green directs the orchestra). Merman presents the verse before going into a more bouncy style of the chorus. Her voice is very much in the Broadway style of lots of vibrato and clear diction; designed to project in theaters without sound reinforcement. Clifford Brown's version, recorded 20 years later, creates an unusually fast tempo with heavy emphasis on arrangement (lots of starts and stops). Then he launches into a solo that features top speed improvisation with lots of support from his drummer, Max Roach. The original melody is virtually dropped and the chord progression is provides the structure for his improvisation.

Night and Day (1932 Leo Reisman and His Orchestra). Astaire begins with the verse after a complete instrumental statement of the chorus. Interesting that the verse is presented in steady tempo rather than the usual rubato, freer style. His style features scoops to select notes with little vibrato. It's a pleasant sound but doesn't seem to be particularly dramatic. Charlie Parker is featured here with strings and big band – it's very telling to hear how he is capable of stating the melody with tremendous finesse while adding his own flourishes along the way. Around 1:42 we hear how he can create be bop lines in the context of this large group arrangement; certainly an easier said than done task for most people but he makes it seem a natural process.

But Not For Me (1943 Georgie Stoll dir.). Garland begins with a lengthy verse which then leads into the chorus. There is a hint of society orchestra in the arrangement, a slight lilt to which people could perhaps dance. Notice how Garland's vibrato is almost immediate. She is able to get to every note with little adjusting – anytime there is a slight scoop, it gets maximum emotional effect since it is not overdone or necessary to cover any vocal weakness. The Modern

Jazz Quartet's version was most likely arranged by pianist John Lewis, it loses some of the spontaneity but of many jazz recordings but makes up for it in the cleverness of the presentation. It features a dialogue between the vibraphone and piano with soft brush technique in the background. Then Milt Jackson launches into an improvisation with only light percussion accompaniment. His improvisation creates an entire new melody and eventually it makes reference to only the first two notes of the melody.

Almost Like Being in Love (1966 Irwin Kostal, arr. & dir.). Goulet has one of the best voices designed for the Broadway stage. He has power in all ranges but knows how to use it most effectively. His delivery is most convincing in both the verse and the chorus. He has an almost athletic approach to this tune, in the sound of his voice, one already knows the mood he is putting across. He takes liberties here and there but never to the extent of a jazz musician. As a pianist, Red Garland has to rely on different aspects to deliver a melody as if it were being sung or played by a horn. Listen to his imitations of scoops (with little chromatic grace notes), how he paraphrases the melody rather than delivering it verbatim. Then near the end of the chorus, to created more intensity he adds notes and harmonic support to the melody. Then he launches into a typical jazz improvisation.

I Remember You (unknown). Midler has her own style of delivery putting influences from many past singers together in one package. She implements moving the melody away from the beat, changing the melody from the original, vibrato at the end of long notes, lots of scoops. The verse is put in the middle of this arrangement and sung by small vocal ensemble. Sonny Stitt states the melody in a typical jazz fashion including small ornamentations between the original. Mostly he states the melody verbatim but occasionally he changes a note here and there. His improvisation continues along the lines of Charlie Parker (he was hailed as the "New Bird" . . .)

I've Never Been In Love Before (1950). Doris Day has a fast vibrato (almost nervous). She likes to scoop up to lots of notes. Her voice is a pure sound; probably one reason for her success. Her arrangement is most definitely the epitome of society orchestra – we can picture people dancing dressed in black tie and long gowns. Chet Baker, on the other hand, uses no vibrato except for sometimes at the ends of long notes (a trait of jazz instrumentalists). In other words, he sings as if he is playing an instrument. Listen to how his trumpet solo takes the same approach as he paraphrases the melody.

What Is This Thing Called Love (unknown). Peggy Lee is really a jazz singer. One can tell by her more declamatory style. She tends not to hold notes for very long and vibrato is minimal. One senses that she knows how to play an instrument is thinking about that when she sings. She uses only part of her voice to get an understated effect. Her delivery seems simple and detached. All of these traits tend to take us away from the original intention of the song in its Broadway context. Now, to go quite a few steps further, here is what pianist Don Grolnick did with this tune. Try to count the meter, it is quite complicated. The melody is given a different context with regard to meter, harmony, and even some notes are changed yet it is not hard to recognize it or the quote from "The Man That Got Away" in the middle.

It's All Right With Me (1954). Mabel Mercer was one of the great cabaret singers of the 1940s and '50s, Frank Sinatra cited her as a significant influence. Known for her ability to put across convincing interpretations of less known tunes by well-known songwriters, especially Cole Porter. She usually sang at posh hotels in New York City sitting in a chair. Here she is

accompanied by two pianists (Cy Walter and Stan Freeman), a common format that has since been lost. Her diction is perfect and her ability to move to notes within her range effortless. Erroll Garner gives this song his own stamp creating an appropriate yet original introduction; then launching into an accurate rendition of the melody with frequent interpolations from other registers of the piano. All this while he is somehow able to keep a steady rhythm happening with repeated chords. The drummer and bass player, while I'm sure very competent, don't seem to play a major role; probably they are very talented at knowing how to stay out of the way.

Our Love Is Here To Stay (1985). Feinstein learned his craft in Los Angeles while running errands for various song writers including Harry Warren and Ira Gershwin. One can hear the Broadway influence in his delivery, with long notes that are extended and use lots of vibrato. One senses that his voice has its limitations yet he is convincing due to his unique delivery. Although it's a jazz trio instrumentation, the style is clearly high society with the easy going background bass and drums while the piano has more of a classical approach. Dexter Gordon is on the opposite side of the pendulum here, long notes are minimal and one becomes especially aware of how important a role articulation plays in his delivery. The beginnings and ends of notes provide an interesting extra dimension. There is not much paraphrasing until close to the end of the first chorus when he is already releasing into his improvised solo.

Four Brothers (1958 Marty Paich's Orchestra). Woody Herman we will hear first since it will be better to understand what this is about. This selection was originally conceived to show off four wonderful saxophonists who fit together so seamlessly when playing in Herman's band, they were nicknamed the "Four Brothers." One of them, Stan Getz, went on to have a significant jazz career. About 10 years after the Woody Herman, Anita O'Day did this recording amazing people with her ability to sound like all of the "brothers."

This Can't Be Love (1947 Frank DeVol Orchestra). It wouldn't be right not to include something from Margaret Whiting since Johnny Mercer was like a second father. Richard Whiting, (Mercer collaborated with him on many songs including "Hooray for Hollywood"), died when she was 13 years old. She became a very popular due to her recordings Mercer arranged that were released on the Capitol label. She has clear, distinct sound and she seems to understand how to use devices such as scoops without being excessive. She allows her voice to not get in the way of the content of the song, the vibrato comes out of a straight pure sound. Ahmad Jamal takes a similar approach to that of Red Garland (in fact, Miles Davis asked Garland to listen to Jamal and emulate that style). However, Jamal uses even less notes to get his point across and his use of space (that is not playing) is especially unique to him and not very common for jazz musicians.

Yesterdays (1930s). Billie Holiday is one of the most legendary jazz singers of all time due to many things including the circumstances of her life. What made her a jazz singer rather than just a singer? She had a way of making any song she sang her own. One knows it's her in less than a second. But her delivery has more in common with instrumentalists than singers. She moves the melody away from the beat almost speaking it; in so doing she creates the effect of telling a story. She is not obligated to sing all melody notes as originally written; she paraphrases the melody instead. As a result she has influenced not only singers but instrumentalists. One of the leaders of today's jazz world is Wynton Marsalis. He has all the tools to play the trumpet and since he has won awards for his classical playing as well, he has the ability to create any style.

Listen to his control of tone, pitch, and timbre in his rendition. The vibrato seems totally natural and effortless. Has he listened to Holiday's version of this song?

On A Clear Day (1970 arranged by Nelson Riddle) - Barbra has a clear voice with a wide range and great control of timbre. The arrangement is full orchestral with little reference to jazz and no significant percussive aspects. Joe Henderson and Wynton Kelly create an up tempo swing arrangement. This excerpt begins at the end of the statement of the melody and goes into Joe Henderson's solo. He makes very little reference to the original melody and seems to show the wide range of his instrument and his ability to create patterns at rapid speeds. At the end of his solo, however, he makes reference to the original melody. Kelly's solo, in contrast, makes clear reference to the original melody in the first chorus; then he gets further away putting more of his own earthy/bluesy style in.

A Kiss To Build A Dream On (1951 All Stars). Louis Armstrong is among the first great jazz instrumentalists AND singers. He pioneered new territory in jazz in the 1920s influencing all that came afterwards. It seems appropriate we listen to how his voice and trumpet come from the same place. Many expressive tools are the same: the vibrato (notice how it is faster than later period jazz players or singers), the attack and release of notes, and the impeccable rhythm we came to know as swing.