

The Collegiate Vocal Jazz Ensemble:
An Historical and Current Perspective on the Development, Current State,
And Future Direction of the Genre

by

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ABSTRACT

The Vocal Jazz ensemble, a uniquely American choral form, has grown and flourished in the past half century largely through the efforts of professionals and educators throughout the collegiate music community. This document provides historical data as presented through live and published interviews with key individuals involved in the early development of collegiate Vocal Jazz, as well as those who continue this effort currently. It also offers a study of the most influential creative forces that provided the spark for everyone else's fire. A frank discussion on the obstacles encountered and overcome is central to the overall theme of this research into a genre that has moved from a marginalized afterthought to a legitimate, more widely accepted art form. In addition to the perspective provided to future generations of educators in this field, this document also discusses the role of collegiate music academia in preserving and promoting the Vocal Jazz ensemble. The discussion relies on recent data showing the benefits of Vocal Jazz training and the need for authenticity towards its universal integration into college and university vocal performance and music education training.

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PREFACE

What is Vocal Jazz?

As Dr. Stephen Zegree, director of the Vocal Jazz program at Indiana University says, “defining Vocal Jazz is a challenging prospect.”¹ For the purposes of this study, I will use the term Vocal Jazz to include both the structure of the ensemble as well as the type of music and performance practices used within the genre. Depending upon who is consulted, defining that ensemble and its music can yield a variety of responses. For clarity, perhaps it is best to be inclusive rather than selective, and offer a broad definition of the genre, while acknowledging the ongoing debate about that definition that exists among Vocal Jazz enthusiasts, educators, and practitioners.

Vocal Jazz repertoire typically includes the music of the Great American Songbook, that is, music composed by established songwriters from the first half of the twentieth century, such as Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, and Cole Porter, to name just a few. However, many directors, performers, and arrangers include all popular music from the second half of the century forward to the present time as part of the repertoire. Additionally, for the last few decades, more and more original music has been composed specifically for use in professional as well as collegiate groups. Most in the Vocal Jazz world agree there are requirements for a song or arrangement to warrant inclusion within the Vocal Jazz repertoire: harmonies that are extended beyond simple triadic structures to include sevenths, ninths, elevenths and thirteenths (jazz chords), harmonic substitutions (altering a song’s original harmonic support of the melody), elements of improvisation such as scat soloing (composing a new melody spontaneously

¹ Stephen Zegree, *The Complete Guide to Teaching Vocal Jazz* (Dayton, OH: Heritage Press, 2002), 2.

over the chord progressions of a song using nonsense syllables instead of words), changing or embellishing the melody and rhythmic structure of a song, and bending notes to further extend lyrical expression. The rhythms of jazz are derived from West Africa as filtered through the experiences of African Americans blending with Western European-derived cultures, and as such they will vary as well. Most common is swing (big band style of the 1930s-1940s, and bebop music of the 1950s and early 1960s), but also included are Latin forms, Rock, Rhythm & Blues, and Hip Hop.

The sound of a Vocal Jazz ensemble can be distinctly choral, or it can mimic an instrumental ensemble, either big band (horns and rhythm section) or small combo (piano, bass, drums, and guitar). Most directors prefer the use of non-vibrato singing to help bring out the qualities and tuning of the jazz harmonies. However, vibrato is acceptable as an embellishment or when used by a soloist. The size of a Vocal Jazz group may be as few as three singers (like *Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross*, a group that will be discussed in this study), or as many as twelve or even a hundred (in which case it would be called a jazz choir). Some Vocal Jazz directors combine their singers with an instrumental combo while others prefer *a cappella*. Still others may choose a combination of the two, or perhaps even add horns or a big band. It may consist of mixed, male and female voices, only men, or only women.²

The ACDA (American Choral Directors Association) and NAFME (National Association for Music Education) have historically had difficulty with this question as well, sometimes mistaking Vocal Jazz and Show Choir as the same kind of ensemble

² Paris Rutherford, *The Vocal Jazz Ensemble* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2008), 7.

simply because they share similar repertoire.³ I myself have encountered a level of confusion from past students who disagree with my interpretation of Vocal Jazz repertoire as inclusive of many forms of popular American song, not just swing music.

Regardless of one's personal definition, the consensus is that the Vocal Jazz Ensemble, as a defined choral form, is a relative youngster in the musical community (less than 70 years old). Beginning with the late 1960's, college and university music schools played a significant role in determining not only the shape and growth of the genre, but also in becoming the curators of its heart and soul. The Vocal Jazz genre has never enjoyed tremendous commercial success in the music business over a sustained period of time; however, certain professional groups over the last 80 years have often helped significantly determine the direction of the form's development. Throughout its evolution, the professional and collegiate worlds of Vocal Jazz enjoyed a symbiotic relationship that fuels the propulsion of both to this day. Groups like *The Four Freshmen*, *The Ink Spots*, *The Hi-Lo's*, and *Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross* provided the inspiration to young musicians entering the college teaching profession in the middle 1960s. The students they trained were then inspired to create the new wave of professional groups, like *New York Voices*, beginning in the 1980s. Many of these students became educators and are now responsible for the proliferation of collegiate Vocal Jazz Ensembles around the country.

³ Even at some current ACDA divisional and state conferences, reading sessions of these two types of ensembles are often lumped together for expediency, a practice that dates back to the early 1970s, but one that is lessening in great degree due to more clarity from both sides.

Why Vocal Jazz?

Although this is not a study about race in American culture, placing Vocal Jazz in that context is important. Jazz music exists because of this country's racial history. But as many Vocal Jazz musicians will attest, it is often because of our history and the prejudices that persist to this day that Vocal Jazz faced and still faces a significant amount of opposition in the academic world. A theme that emerged from this study was a consensus among the community of Vocal Jazz educators and professionals that Vocal Jazz is truly THE American Choral form, and that Jazz music itself is acknowledged as uniquely American: a national treasure. What also emerged from this study is that this treasure has been, and continues to be marginalized within our own community of music educators and performers, while, at the same time, it is treated with a degree of reverence and respect outside the United States. Bruce Rogers, Vocal Jazz director from Mt. San Antonio College in Pomona, California, boasted recently that he promotes jazz as "America's classical music" in his lectures and presentations, and that when he has visited other countries, "jazz is what audiences want to hear most."⁴ As veteran Vocal Jazz director and arranger Kirby Shaw put it in our interview, "We don't get it in this country."⁵ But rather than delve deeply into this phenomenon, this study examines how Vocal Jazz has developed and continues to prosper despite its relegation to second-class status in its home country.

⁴ Bruce Rogers, interview by author, Scottsdale, AZ, July 12, 2013.

Two of the others interviewed for this paper offered similar insights. Vijay Singh, Vocal Jazz director at Central Washington University, noted how many top groups have begun to emerge in countries like Sweden (*The Real Group*) and England (*The Swingle Singers*) and elsewhere. Jerry Eskelin, founder and former director of the Los Angeles Jazz Choir, also mentioned the *Swingle Singers*, which, although composed of all English singers, was founded by an American, Ward Swingle. Swingle started with a French group inspired by Lambert, Hendricks, and (British born) Ross, called *Double Six of Paris*. Round and round we go.

The irony is that alongside that prejudice exists an overwhelming embrace of Vocal Jazz by audiences and musicians alike. This embrace is beginning to extend to more and more educators who are steeped in traditional, Euro-centric musical training and sensibility. There are, however, still many hearts and minds to win. It is that continuing struggle to win those hearts and minds that is the motivation behind this study. Half the battle is fought by dispelling misinformation and bursting the balloon filled with fear of the unknown and misunderstood. The battle will be won, because Jazz is as expressive of the human spirit as any music ever created, and therein lies its broad appeal. While some of the repertoire is harmonically complicated and, to some ears, not as accessible as more traditional forms, the vast amount of work has something for everyone. More importantly, it is ours. It belongs to our country alone. Yet, there remains reluctance with many in the American music conservatory universe who are either ignorant or indifferent to its inherent value, both as part of our cultural heritage, and as a useful tool with which we may train more well-rounded singers. If this study changes one mind, or helps someone to further the dialogue towards wider acceptance, then it will have been a successful and worthy endeavor.

Chapter 1

FISK JUBILEE SINGERS: WHITE AUDIENCES DISCOVER BLACK MUSIC

Neither the genre nor the construct of the modern Vocal Jazz Ensemble would exist without the historical experience of African Americans. Its musical roots are directly linked to the slave fields and Black churches of the pre- and post-Civil War south. In the year after the war ended, white missionaries in Nashville, Tennessee founded Fisk University with the goal to begin educating many of the newly freed slaves. They had no problem attracting students; however, they did lack the funding necessary to keep the school from shutting its doors almost immediately. One of the staff members who taught music part time, George L. White, decided to try raising money for the school by offering music concerts featuring some its students. The Fisk Singers started modestly, and although the audience reception was at first tepid, White kept at it until the group had developed a more polished sound.⁶ The repertoire was the typical artistic fair of the day, indigenous to white America. The thinking was that they could demonstrate the students' ability to assimilate with the dominant culture and transcend the stereotype of the day, the black-face minstrel, with which white audiences were most familiar. After some local success, White decided to try a road trip to the more liberal-minded northern cities. Again, success was fleeting as the northern audiences could hear the repertoire presented by the Fisk Singers done by any white group of singers. However, the Fisk singers would include, on occasion, an authentic spiritual on their program. Performing these songs always resulted in a much more enthusiastic response. They were presented by singers

⁶ Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry 1890-1919* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 193-194.

who possessed a genuine feeling for the material that was not present in the European choruses and opera excerpts. They were different. They were the songs of a people, and all audiences found sympathetic resonance. Many of these songs, while in print and therefore in the public awareness, had never been performed by a polished ensemble that had such a direct connection to their origins in the slave fields. The newly re-christened Fisk *Jubilee* Singers (invoked by White after he was inspired by the Biblical accounting of the Jewish “Year of the Jubilee,” and their kindred struggle for freedom from slavery with his own race)⁷ had found their niche, and, after two grueling months of touring, barely covering expenses, their popularity began to soar. This, despite minimal support at first from the administration of Fisk University and the American Missionary Association, which was specifically founded to promote the advancement of newly freed slaves through education and spirituality.⁸

They appeared at music festivals, had books written about their phenomenal journey, and even toured Europe, singing for Queen Victoria. Over the next decade of touring, they raised over \$150,000, which helped pay for the construction of the first major building on the campus, Jubilee Hall. Shortly after their final European tour in 1878, the group disbanded, although former members were allowed to occasionally use the name for subsequent ventures. But their exploits would live on in the books, and through the many imitators and emulators that would follow.⁹

⁷ Toni P. Anderson, *Tell Them We Are Singing for Jesus: The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and Christian Reconstruction, 1871-1878* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 43.

⁸ Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 192.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The name Fisk Jubilee Singers gradually faded from public knowledge until the turn of the new century. A young black faculty member at Fisk, John Wesley Work II, rejuvenated the Fisk Jubilee Singers, forming a new official group that began touring. He and his brother Frederick both sang in the group, but also expanded upon and published much of the material the group performed.¹⁰ The inventions of the Victrola and the competing Edison record machine ten years later sparked a new industry, which was eager for material to record, and the Jubilee Singers were ready to fill that need. A



Figure 1 Fisk Singers, Circa 1870s; public domain image from <http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/FISK.HTM>

¹⁰ Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 197.

recording that survives from their first date in the studio reveals a very polished ensemble, with sophisticated arrangements. There is also present the genesis of the sound that would evolve into Vocal Jazz. It included the call-and-response element, a direct descendant of the field songs of their ancestors' captivity, and it demonstrated some of the vocal sounds that are typical of Spirituals, Blues, Gospel, Jazz, and even Rock and Roll today, for instance, the occasional "bent note," the rhythmic vocal bass line, the soaring tenor lead, and upper tertian harmonic structures and voicing. It's all there.¹¹

The end result of these recordings was that the Fisk sound was now finding a broad audience base, bringing a new awareness of these musical ideas and sensibilities to white singers as well as a whole new generation of black singers. That this all sprang from a University is significant. Its students and faculty, trying desperately to find a way for their school to stay financially afloat, found a life raft in the world of the folk music of its people. Necessity is ever the mother of invention, and this invention helped launch a genre of choral music that would evolve and reach popularity in the professional and commercial realms of vaudeville, the fledgling recording industry, and another new invention, radio.

¹¹ Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 200.

Although the ensemble had always featured a larger mixed group, even in the early post-Civil War years of the first Fisk group, that recording featured only a quartet of male singers. This was simply due to acoustics; the studio size and microphones of those days did not yet lend themselves to a more sophisticated set-up, particularly with a large chorus, so the quartet was recorded instead.

Chapter 2

THE EVOLUTION OF THE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Barbershop, Rag, and Tin Pan Alley

In his book, *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Quartet*, Gage Averill documents a movement in the United States that paralleled the efforts of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and their many emulators at other institutions of higher learning. The 1890s (historically nicknamed “The Gay Nineties”), much like the “Roaring Twenties” and the 1960s of the twentieth century, was a decade that featured the displacement of long-accepted cultural norms. In the midst of this, the harmonies of well-established Barbershop Quartets, long the domain of white, middle class, main-street America, were blending with the more soulful sounds and rhythms of black spirituals. The technique called “ragging,” in which one takes certain liberties with the melodic and rhythmic structure of a song, was introduced by black quartets on the vaudeville circuit. This resulted in a more lyrically expressive style, featuring syncopations and accents in between the prevailing beats. The lyrics themselves helped to encourage this as they were becoming more reflective of the changing framework of accepted morality. Thus the music world was becoming more integrated as “ragtime and the related ‘coon’ songs...emerged as the vehicle for all that was brash and modern.”¹² The songs of the emerging collection of composers in the New York area known as Tin Pan Alley were a perfect match for this new harmonic/rhythmic species. They provided the type of complex, chromatic harmonies that worked so well with quartet singing,

¹² Gage Averill, *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Quartet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 54.

featuring secondary seventh chords, and additional upper-tertian alterations, and lyrics that spoke to the younger generation with up-to-the-minute modern themes. For instance, “Hello My Baby,” by Joseph E. Howard and Ida Emerson, was a syncopated celebration of that new-fangled invention, the telephone.¹³ Just as it had done for the regrouped Fisk Singers, the recording industry was playing a key role in popularizing this music to the public as a whole, and white audiences as well as musicians were taking notice.

During this era, and well into the twentieth century, the growth in popularity of the vocal group, more frequently referred to as a “swing” group (jazz not the acceptable moniker yet), would be controlled in the professional world. While most universities had barbershop groups and Glee Clubs that would perform this repertoire, it was an imitation of professional groups, not an innovation, as the Fisk Singers had been. And while the music of both black and white groups was regularly reaching multi-racial audiences, and the repertoire and stylistic cross-influences continued, the audiences and performers still remained largely segregated, as did the recordings they made. The segregation was not just racial, but gender-based as well. A group like the original Fisk Singers, which featured a traditional SATB configuration, was all but absent during the early part of the twentieth century. Groups were either all male or all female, whether white or black, religious or secular. And while these groups were already enormously popular, they would climb to even greater heights through another amazing invention called radio.

¹³ Averill, *Four Parts, No Waiting*, 53.

Radio Killed the Vaudeville Star – Here Comes the Ink Spots

Although radio bolstered the popularity of many vocal groups, one quartet in particular stands out as owing its very survival to radio. In 1936, a group of young black singers from Indiana called the *Four Ink Spots* had just lost one of their founding members. After more than three years of marginal success that included regular radio appearances, international and stateside touring, a small recording contract, and a name change (originally billed as *King, Jack and the Jesters*), founding member Jerry Daniels decided to head back home to Indianapolis. His main complaint was that for all the work they had done, he had little to show for it financially since their manager's cut, general cost of living, and the expenses associated with touring ate up most of the revenue they earned.¹⁴ The sound they cultivated was decidedly "swing," a hybrid of instrumental jazz, vaudeville, and the street corner *a cappella* groups of their native Indianapolis. In addition to singing, they each played an instrument (three guitars and a cello that filled in for stand-up bass), and they were known for high-energy sets that finished with a big, frenetic number, like "Tiger Rag," a selection right out of the fast lane of Dixieland and Hot Jazz with a tempo usually around 200 beats per minute. Daniels traded lead singing duties with Deek Watson, and they were one of the few black singing groups that played regularly to white audiences, but they owed much of their popularity to their weekly radio shows. Still, more established cross-over acts like the Mills Brothers were headlining at \$3,000 per week, while the Spots were under \$200 at the same venues.

¹⁴ Marv Goldberg, *More Than Words Can Say, The Ink Spots and their Music* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 29-30.

They were clearly missing something, and Daniels wanted out.¹⁵ He was replaced by a tall, crooning tenor named Bill Kenney. Kenney was adequate at first, but his strength, a melodic, soaring, soprano-ranged set of vocal chords, was not served well by the current style and repertoire of the group. Their popularity actually dropped, as did many offers for engagements during the first months of Kenney's tenure. They continued plugging away on radio and circuit appearances, sometimes appearing on the same bill with another rising star, Ella Fitzgerald. Radio kept them in the public eye as their newest member began to gel more with the group. During this period, they had signed with a new record label, Decca, one of the few labels to have both white and black acts under the same roof (their biggest name at the time was Bing Crosby).¹⁶ Jive songs like "That



Figure 2: The Classic Ink Spots Line Up from 1939-1942

Downloaded from

<http://www.wyyr.com/South-Florida-Events.html>

¹⁵ Goldberg, *More Than Words Can Say*, 30-31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Cat is High” were still their stock-in-trade and their records sold moderately well.

At the beginning of 1939, their status would change forever with the recording of “If I Didn’t Care.” This recording was a complete departure from their brand up to that moment.¹⁷ It was a romantic ballad, utilizing a basic guitar introduction, both of which were slight departures for the Spots’ regular fare. Most importantly however, it featured Bill Kenney on lead. Kenney’s voice was tailor-made for this new Ink-Spots style as it allowed him the maximum amount of room to explore the melody, pitched in his upper range, fully exposed above the backing harmonies of his fellow Spots. In addition, they added a spoken bridge by bass Hoppy Jones, a feature with which they had experimented in live performance and one that was used by other groups as well. But the synthesis of these elements is what made the song work, and it became their signature formula from that point forward.¹⁸

That formula was the missing link that would make them stars. Although their repertoire didn’t change overnight, they moved rapidly to the top of the list, eventually making top dollar wherever they were booked.¹⁹ Their records would land regularly in the Billboard top ten (three separate records simultaneously on more than one occasion) throughout the next few years, consistently outselling even their old rivals, The Mills Brothers; and their radio gigs were soon replaced by lucrative appearances in Hollywood features. Interestingly, they would continue to perform and record the old jive material alongside pieces with their new romantic sound: Deek Watson alternating on lead for the

¹⁷ Goldberg, *More Than Words Can Say*, 50-51.

¹⁸ As Goldberg notes, the irony of this story is the fact that “If I Didn’t Care” was intended as a “B” side as they needed a song for the back of the intended release, “Knock Kneed Sal,” now remembered (if at all) as just one of the many Ink Spots typical jive staples up to that moment.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

former and Kenney on the latter. This versatility enhanced their popularity and bankability, and would be the very element that would attract the next generation to revive their music, both in the professional and collegiate universes. But perhaps the most lasting contribution of the original Ink Spots was their mass appeal to audiences of all ages, races, religions, and nations. Their music transcended all boundaries, real and imagined. And while they live on through their many recordings and films, it was radio that allowed them to stick around long enough to find that missing ingredient they needed to hit the heights. No group in the Vocal Jazz genre before or since shares that distinction.²⁰

Post-War: A Whole New World

Although vocal groups didn't disappear entirely from the charts, after World War II, the solo singer (an outgrowth of the big bands from the previous decade) became more of the focal point across the board of venues: recordings, radio, programs on the newest medium, television, as well as live concert halls and night clubs. Alongside this shift from bands and vocal groups to soloists, jazz itself was changing. The prevailing post-war style was something new called Bebop, or simply Bop, and was at first strictly limited to the instrumental artists who helped create and develop it, like Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker. It emphasized a more complex form of melodic improvisation that was not as accessible to the general public as its predecessors of the swing era. It was new; it had a different kind of energy, free and dangerous thanks to its unpredictability

²⁰ Goldberg, *More Than Words Can Say*, 24-25.

Note: Although the Ink Spots name and franchise continue to this day, the group that rose to fame in the early 1940s ceased to exist as of 1943 when Deek left the group, Hoppy died suddenly of a brain hemorrhage, and the fourth original member, Charlie Fuqua, was drafted into the army, leaving only Kenney to continue.

and intellectual harmonic foundations. This style of jazz did not easily lend itself to vocal ensemble singing. Groups like the *Four Freshmen*, *The Modernaires*, and *Mel Torme's Meltones* kept the vocal group alive, with the top groups providing background services to or opening acts for soloists, commercial jingles, and even featured recordings and performances. The material of these groups mostly reflected the musical styles of the pre-war era, but a few pioneers began to appear on the scene, ready to blaze new trails. Two examples of this new breed are among the most influential performers/composers of vocal jazz music. An examination of their musical impact provides at least an introduction to the power of Vocal Jazz to reimagine music of all kinds through its filter.

Chapter 3

FOUNDATIONS OF VOCAL JAZZ: THE ART OF RE-IMAGINATION

In the Vocal Jazz world, there are two artists, Jon Hendricks and Gene Puerling, who are considered to be the most influential by educators and performers within the genre. Their innovations sparked a generation of musicians, both instrumentalists and vocalists, to create what we now know as the Vocal Jazz Ensemble. Most believe that without their innovations, Vocal Jazz, as we have come to understand and perform it, would likely not exist. I believe that even a cursory examination of their work shows how it provided a foundation upon which all Vocal Jazz, and arguably much of traditional contemporary choral music, has been built since the middle of the twentieth century.

As an introduction to the mindset and passion behind his innovations, Jon Hendricks in his typical classroom speech to freshmen students enrolled in his jazz studies course at the University of Toledo begins, “This is the only country in the world that systematically degrades its own cultural art form. And while it does that it pays servile attention to all the world's other art forms”. He further elaborates on this by pointing out the millions of dollars spent building “huge, ornate, gaudy opera houses,” as well as cities subsidizing ballet companies, symphony orchestras, theaters, etc. All of these are European constructs that celebrate and maintain our ties to the “old world.” Conversely, he laments that the creations of our own American culture are relegated to “dark cellars, mostly funky bars, where women and drugs are for sale.” The ultimate insult, he notes, is the myth often perpetuated that jazz is the exclusive spawn of the “whorehouses of New Orleans,” when in reality, its roots are more firmly planted in the “secular music of our

Christian church."²¹ As Professor Hendricks clearly attests, Jazz is widely accepted by most experts and laymen alike as a uniquely American art form, equal in its iconic cultural status to George Washington, Apple Pie, and Baseball. His lament at the often second-class status Jazz has received in its homeland goes to the heart of his passion for the music and its legacy.

The impact of Gene Puerling, who died in 2008, is best illustrated in the words of his colleagues and peers. Don Shelton, a member of Puerling's two professional groups, the *Hi-Lo's* and *Singers Unlimited*, was quoted in 1997 on his friend and colleague: "In my opinion, Gene Puerling is the single most significant vocal group arranger of all time. His sheer volume of work done for the *Hi-Lo's* and *Singers Unlimited* puts him in a class by himself."²² Mr. Shelton echoes the opinions of the lovers of Vocal Jazz the world over. Gene Puerling was valued and respected as an innovator, and as Tim Hauser of *Manhattan Transfer* once said: "What we look upon today as the state of the art in vocal harmony is actually a style that was originated by the *Hi-Lo's*, through the arrangements of Gene Puerling."²³ Interestingly though, Puerling himself didn't think of his arrangements as jazz. While acknowledging the influence of jazz in his arranging choices, he said once, "I have never represented them as jazz; the *Hi-Lo's* have never represented them as jazz."²⁴ This reluctance could possibly be tied to the same ideas to which Hendricks attributes the marginalization of jazz, this same mythology that jazz is

²¹ Greg Thomas, "Vocal Ease," Jon Hendricks Interview, April 10, 2008, accessed November 1, 2013, www.allabout.com/php/article.php?id=28904.

²² Don Shelton, quoted in Stephen Zegree, "Gene Puerling: A Tribute." *Jazz Educators Journal* 29/ 4 (1997): 48.

²³ Tim Hauser, quoted in Don Gold, "The Best Vocal Group Ever." Chicago Tribune Online, December 22, 2002, accessed November 1, 2012, <http://www.thehi-los.com/ephemera/content.php?article=14>.

²⁴ Scott Fredrickson, "Interview with Gene Puerling." *Pop, Jazz, and Show Choir* 2, 1985, accessed November 2, 2012, <http://www.thehi-los.com/ephemera/content.php?article=14>.

somehow connected to a lower lifestyle. It's not difficult to imagine that someone like Puerling, with his white, middle-class, Midwestern upbringing, might also fall prey to such cultural misconceptions about jazz. Regardless of this, his music has been embraced and categorized as jazz since the beginning by aficionados and peers the world over.

As contemporaries, both Hendricks and Puerling were heavily influenced by many of the same musical forces. Both are originally from the Midwest and grew up during the years spanning the Great Depression and World War II. Gene Puerling was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Jon Hendricks, a preacher's son, was from a large family of seventeen children that eventually settled in Toledo, Ohio.²⁵ Both are mostly self-taught musicians, having received early, informal training, Puerling from various high school choral and music classes,²⁶ and Hendricks mostly from the culture of his environment, an African-American neighborhood where making music was a part of his daily existence. Also important was his exposure to traveling musicians, including the bands of Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Harry James, Glenn Miller, and groups like The Ink Spots and The Mills Brothers, all of whom would often dine or room at his family's home while in Toledo playing a venue on the jazz circuit. Later, he became the protégé of another local Toledo musician, the highly regarded jazz pianist Art Tatum.²⁷ Both men also site early involvement with church choirs as integral in setting them on the road to appreciation for the power of choral music.²⁸

²⁵ Marc Myer, "Interview with Jon Hendricks, Part 2," July 14, 2009, accessed November 2, 2012, <http://www.thehi-los.com/ephemera/content.php?article=14>.

²⁶ Fredrickson, "Interview with Gen Puerling."

²⁷ Kathryn Reid, "An Examination of the Lineage of Jazz Vocal Improvisation Through the Analysis of Representative Solos" (DMA diss., University of Miami, 2002), 48-49.

²⁸ Fredrickson, "Interview with Gen Puerling." Thomas, "Vocal Ease," Jon Hendricks Interview.

Humble Beginnings to Hollywood-Gene's Journey

Beginning in high school in Madison and into his early twenties in Milwaukee, Puerling formed several vocal groups of his own, including a little Barbershop-style (2 women/2 men) group called the *Honey Bees*.²⁹ During these early years, he taught himself how to arrange by listening to other vocal groups' recordings. Gene was inspired in particular by *The Four Freshmen*, known for their expanded harmonies and perfectly balanced unisons, as well as groups from the big band era. His arranging style evolved from a combination of listening to a variety of recordings: symphonic, contemporary, and everything in between, "blending all of that into his musical pallet."³⁰ Against the advice of *The Four Freshmen*, his idols, with whom he had begun to correspond (they told him it was "too hard" to earn a living in L.A. and he'd be better off staying where he was),³¹ he eventually moved to Los Angeles, and began to get work as a studio singer. He then set his sights on forming his own group. In 2002 Gene recalled: "I had groups in high school, but when I moved to Los Angeles in 1950, I decided that I wanted a male group to do something different, my own type of writing. I did that. And everything else fell into place."³²

²⁹ Don Shelton, phone interview by author, June 12, 2013.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Gene Puerling, cited in Gold, "The Best Vocal Group Ever."



Figure 3

***Hi-Lo's* Members circa 1955 L-R: Gene Puerling,
Bob Strasen, Clark Burroughs, Bob Morse**

Downloaded from <http://www.maartenschild.com/songcatcher/?tag=a-capella>

In 1953, with 3 other men, Bob Strasen (later replaced by Don Shelton), Bob Morse and Clark Burroughs, whom he had met through his various engagements around L.A., Puerling formed *The Hi-Lo's!* (Figure 3). Their name played on the idea of high voices, low voices, and tall singers, short singers. To get them started, Puerling wrote thirty arrangements. They shared a single apartment where they rehearsed constantly for about three months until they felt ready to sing them “for anyone who would listen to us.” Soon, the combination of their seamless blend and Puerling’s bebop-influenced arrangements caught the attention of some very big names. They recorded their first album, toured with Judy Garland, were hired by Rosemary Clooney, appearing as regulars on her weekly TV show, and were seen and heard on almost every major variety show on television between 1954 and 1962. They made dozens of additional recordings, including several on Frank Sinatra’s Reprise label. They are members of the Grammy

Hall of Fame and received three nominations for Grammy awards in the vocal group category.³³

Gene continued to arrange, looking for new outlets, trying his luck, along with Don Shelton, in Chicago as a jingles singer. After frustratingly little success, he moved back to Los Angeles. As Shelton remembers, “I left (Los Angeles) in 1964 after the *Hi-Lo’s* broke up and moved to Chicago, which was where a lot of the commercial jingles were being recorded, and stayed there doing commercial work,”³⁴ where he joined *The J’s with Jaimie*, (along with Bass, Len Dressler, of “The Jolly Green Giant” fame). Things were going well, but two of the members of this group, a husband and wife, moved to New York, leaving behind Shelton and Dresslar, and a void to fill in the commercial jingles category. To create a new team, they decided to call Gene from L.A. and another singer based in Chicago, Bonnie Herman, who just happened to be available, having just ended a contract with a competing jingle group. Puerling arrived with his arrangement of “Shadow of Your Smile” and with only that to record as a demo, they decided on Don’s suggestion for the name *Singers Unlimited* because “we had to cover a lot of ground in the advertising world, like chameleons really,” mirroring the constantly changing variety of popular music. “So we thought unlimited would be a good name since we had to cover a lot of bases musically.”³⁵ According to Shelton, they found they were almost immediately on the same page artistically and technically, so they were able to jell very easily.

³³ Jay Warner, *The Da Capo Book of American Singing Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1992), 224.

³⁴ Shelton interview.

³⁵ Ibid.



Figure 4: *Singers Unlimited* circa 1970: L-R; Bonnie Herman, Gene Puerling, Len Dressler, and Don Shelton (photo downloaded from www.singers.com)

The arrangements Gene wrote for this group filled 14 studio albums between 1972 and 1985. During the 1980s and 1990s, the *Hi-Lo's* re-formed and recorded two additional albums. Their final performance was a benefit concert in 1996. Gene also wrote for other groups as diverse as The Manhattan Transfer and Chanticleer, and towards the end of his life, he became a much sought-after clinician in the choral music education world.³⁶

³⁶ Gold, "The Best Vocal Group Ever."

Vaudeville to Birdland - Jon's Journey

Hendricks started his career by memorizing and performing improvised instrumental solos as a way of earning spending money during his impoverished youth in Depression-era Toledo. He learned all the solos and band parts from the popular records of the day by repeated listening at the local diner's jukebox. He then would sing along with them, note-perfect, when customers would put in their nickels,³⁷ and his act would earn him tips from the appreciative patrons. Jon excelled throughout his life in the subject of English, usually earning an "A," a skill that would serve him well as he developed his lyric-writing abilities.³⁸ "When I was first singing, I would forget the words and then make up ones I thought would fit. I got to the point where when I put in my own words, and I found out that as long as they rhymed, people didn't know the difference."³⁹ He has described this time in his life in various interviews as the origination of his interest in *vocalese*. *Vocalese* is a term actually coined by the famous jazz critic Leonard Feather⁴⁰ in his description of the singing done by Hendricks with his partners Dave Lambert and Annie Ross (more to come on them shortly). Simply put, in the jazz idiom, *vocalese* is the technique of putting words to improvised solo lines and composed instrumental melodies. As a teenager, he began performing extensively on the vaudeville circuits, including engagements with the likes of Louis Armstrong, Al Jolson, and Jack Benny; but World War II and the U.S. Army momentarily interrupted Hendricks' singing career.

³⁷ Reid, "An exploration of the lineage of jazz vocal improvisation," 50.

³⁸ Myer, "Interview with Jon Hendricks, Part 2."

³⁹ Jon Hendricks, quoted in Will Friedwald, *Jazz Singing: America's Great Voices from Bessie Smith to Bebop and Beyond* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 239.

⁴⁰ Sol Foster, "Jon Hendricks, A Rare Artist, An American Original," accessed November 11, 2012, <http://www.harmonyware.com/JonHendricks/vocalese.html>.

It was at the end of his stint in the military that he was first exposed to the music of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, through a recording called “Salt Peanuts,” played over the ship’s radio as he was heading for home, an experience to which he credits some of his greatest inspiration.⁴¹

After the war, and while studying pre-law on the G.I. Bill at the University of Toledo, Hendricks encountered the legendary Charlie “Bird” Parker in person. Parker was playing a local club and invited him to sit in with his combo. Jon’s singing on that set prompted Bird to encourage Jon to move to New York, which he eventually did.⁴² After several years, he teamed up with another singer, Dave Lambert. Both men were adept at “scat singing,” the improvisational component of Vocal Jazz, and they found instant camaraderie as a result. As Jon had also begun experimenting more with *vocalese*, and Lambert possessed keen skills as an arranger, the two men recorded a version of a classic song by the Woody Herman band called “Four Brothers.”⁴³ The recording garnered the attention and accolades of many in the New York jazz scene, and another singer on the “Four Brothers” session, fellow *vocalese* enthusiast Annie Ross,⁴⁴ soon joined them to form *Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross*. This trio recorded seven LPs and performed around the world from 1957 to 1962, when Ross left the group for a solo career. She was replaced briefly by two other singers, first Yolande Bavan and later by Canadian Anne Marie Moss; but they never regained the unique sound or acclaim of the

⁴¹ Ken Burns, *Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns* PBS, Interview with Jon Hendricks.

⁴² Reid, “An exploration of the lineage of jazz vocal improvisation,” 51.

⁴³ Myer, “Interview with Jon Hendricks, Part 2.”

⁴⁴ Annie Ross penned the classic lyrics for “Twisted” to a melody improvised by saxophonist Wardell Gray over a standard blues progression. It is one of the most well-known and covered songs from the *Lambert, Hendricks & Ross* catalogue.

original trio, which had won the Grammy for Best Vocal Group in 1962 and consistently topped *Downbeat Magazine*'s readers' polls in the same category. In 1964, Lambert and Hendricks amiably parted company, each pursuing solo careers. Lambert briefly formed a new group, a quintet, called *The New Dave Lambert Singers* that auditioned for, but failed to get a contract with RCA. Another important area *Lambert, Hendricks & Ross* pioneered was in the personnel of their group. They were integrated. Not only were they a gender-mixed group in an era when all boy and all girl groups were the norm, but they were also the only group of their kind to have both Caucasian and African-American members.⁴⁵



Figure 5: Dave Lambert, Annie Ross, Jon Hendricks from their landmark recording in 1957. Downloaded from <http://potrzebie.blogspot.com/2007/08/dailymotion-blogged-video-every-day.html>

⁴⁵ Interestingly, this is still unique, even fifty years later. We would be hard pressed to find a professional Vocal Jazz group that consists of mixed races, although personal experience suggests it is more common, though still an exception, at the collegiate level. Notably, Lambert's short-lived, post-Hendricks group was also mix-gendered and racially integrated.

After the untimely death of Dave Lambert in a 1966 automobile accident, Hendricks kept the flame alive. He has continued to write and perform as a soloist and with his wife and daughters, spreading his own unique gospel of Vocal Jazz. The *Manhattan Transfer* and *New York Voices*, among others, have recorded his arrangements and, at the ripe age of 92, he is an adjunct lecturer at his alma mater, University of Toledo, where he formed the resident Vocal Jazz ensemble, *Vocalstra*, and was awarded an honorary Doctorate of the Performing Arts by the school.

Re-imagining –Two Approaches

Both Hendricks and Puerling began their careers at a time when jazz itself was undergoing a radical change, moving away from the swing era of the 1930s and '40s to the more urban sound of bebop, exemplified by instrumentalists like Gillespie, Parker, John Coltrane, and Miles Davis. This style of jazz did not easily lend itself to vocal ensemble singing. The vocal groups that still existed continued singing in the now “older” style championed by groups like the Ink Spots and the Andrews Sisters. From this stew of differing brews, Hendricks and Puerling concocted their own recipes which gave birth to a form of arranging popular and jazz standards I call “re-imagining.”

Re-imagining was completely new to the world of vocal groups and swing choirs, which traditionally offered mere harmonization of the music without straying from the songwriter’s original intent. Puerling approached re-imagining through the use of alternative rhythmic and harmonic structures. In 1997, Puerling described his arranging philosophy simply as “taking the basic melody and basic chord structure of the song from the lead sheet, and making something creative. I like to add color by varying the

texture.”⁴⁶ One of the ways he varied texture is through the use of what he called, “wrong chords,” or more accurately, substitute chords that work with both the melody and opposing base line.⁴⁷ Don Shelton spoke of Gene’s background and process as reflecting a real love of the world of vocal groups. He had grown up listening to so many of these groups popular in the 1930s and 1940s on the radio, and it was this soundscape that became his training ground. As Shelton observed, “he was self-taught, and so it really was a gift from on high, like Brahms, it just came down from the sky, and Gene just put it down on paper.”⁴⁸ Puerling always strived for innovation, but very holistically, according to Shelton. “That’s how he heard it, that’s how he envisioned it. He wanted to be different.”⁴⁹ Shelton went on to outline the difference between traditional vocal groups, where the melody might be in different voice parts passed around to the various singers, and in Puerling’s writing for the *Hi-Lo*’s, which would employ cross-voicing by having lead tenor Clark Burroughs stay on the melody, even going below some of the other voices, changing the texture of the sound. Shelton continued, “Even in barbershop the second tenor has the melody and the first high tenor is on top of that, so that’s maybe a little bit where Gene got that.”⁵⁰ However Puerling took this idea further by altering the structure of the chords, resulting in a more sophisticated sound. Barbershop arrangements employ mostly basic triads, using occasional added 6ths and 7ths for color and interest. “Gene got into using the 9ths, 11ths and 13ths, really just extended chords that made it so

⁴⁶ Stephen Zegree, "Gene Puerling: A Tribute," 49.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Shelton interview.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

much more interesting to do.”⁵¹ This extension of the harmonic structure mirrored what instrumental jazz was doing, setting Puerling’s arrangements for the *Hi-Lo’s* completely apart from all his contemporaries.⁵²

But his alterations were not limited to harmonic structure. In Gene’s arrangement of the Gershwin classic, “Fascinating Rhythm,” recorded by the *Hi-Lo’s*, note the changes in the rhythmic and melodic variations that take Gershwin’s original idea of unexpected metric accents even further, as seen in the excerpt of the lead vocal line in comparison with Gershwin’s original (Example 1). Note Puerling’s choice of using all eighth notes in the first and fifth measures of the opening two phrases rather than Gershwin’s quarter note on the third beat of those same two measures. In this way, he expands the already syncopated unevenness of the rhythmic structure. He builds on this expansion in the next phrase similarly by varying the entry points of the lyrics, for example “each” falling on the downbeat of measure nine, whereas in the original this line begins on the second beat as part of a pick-up into measure ten, keeping the listener just off balance with the unfamiliar word emphasis. Again in the next phrase “start-a-hopping,” he begins a beat earlier and continues ascending the scale on “never stopping to find,” extending the phrase and landing ahead of the downbeat once more, while Gershwin’s original choice is to repeat the pattern of a phrase pick-up on beats two, three, and four. This method continues into the next verse, giving the entire arrangement of the song a feeling of improvisation inherent in vocal jazz interpretation.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

Fascinating Rhythm
Original piano/voice sheet

Chord diagrams for Fascinating Rhythm:
 Bb7, Fm7, Bb7, Fm7, Bb7, Fm7, Bb7, Fm7, Bb7, Fm7, Bb7, Fm7
 Bb7, Eb, Bbm7, Eb, Bbm7, Eb, Bbm7, Eb, Bbm7
 Eb, Bbm7, Eb, Bbm7, Eb, A1, Fm7, Bb13, Bb9(45)
 Eb, Ebmaj7, Cm, Cm7, F, F13(9)

Fascinatin' Rhythm

arr. Gene Puerling; Transcribed from Hi-Lo's Recording by Greg Amerind George and Ira Gershwin

♩ = 200 Swing

lead line

Fas-cin-a-tin' rhy-thm you got me on the go, fas-cin - a-tin' rhy-thm I'm all a-
 quiv-er... What a mess you're ma-kin' the neigh - bors wan-na know why I'm
 al-ways sha-kin' just like a fliv-er... Each morn - in' I get up with the
 sun, start a - hop-pin' nev-er stop-pin' to find, find at night no work has been
 done. I I know that once it did-n't mat-ter but now you're do-in' wrong, when you
 start to pat-ter I'm so un-hap py... Take a day off and run a-long, some
 where far a- way off! Oh how I long to be the man I used to be,
 Fasc - in - a-tin' Rhy-thm oh won't ya stop pick-in' on me!

Example 1

Hendricks re-imagined songs by adding lyrics to instrumental “heads”⁵³ and improvised solos; the afore-mentioned *vocalese*. And, unlike Puerling and the *Hi Lo's*, who favored and perfected a smoothly blended choral sound, *Lambert, Hendricks & Ross* emphasized more of a solo style, concerned less with blend than with elements of cool

⁵³ A “head” is a jazz term meaning simply the melody of the song.

jazz. Since they were a trio, their sound had more in common with the wind section of a typical bebop combo, which consisted of two or three horns, usually trumpet and sax, and occasionally a trombone. In essence, they *were* horns; Hendricks' raspy yet flexible tenor had the sound of a tenor sax, Ross' soaring but at times percussive soprano mimicked the trumpet, and Lambert's bopping baritone played the role of either sax or trombone. In a classic performance, from the Newport Jazz Festival on July 2, 1960,⁵⁴ of Sonny Rollin's "Airegin" (lyrics by Hendricks), the trio illustrates their approach much better than any verbal description. As discussed, Ross provides the trumpet to the men's saxophone timbre. Their technique is percussive and their tone is brassy and brash, almost aggressive, as they race through the lyrics and leap with the melody around the musical staff. While scatting, Hendricks even mimes holding and playing a sax, an interpretive choice imitated by French singer Jeannine "Mimi" Perrin (February 2, 1926 – November 16, 2010), the founder of the group *Double Six from Paris*, in the early 1960s, and later, by singers as diverse as Christina Aguilera and Darmon Meader of *New York Voices*, himself a saxophone player.

Throughout their careers, Puerling and Hendricks were keenly aware of each other. "Any vocal group that didn't listen to the *Hi-Lo*'s was remiss. Gene broadened the harmonies, like Bird did with bebop,"⁵⁵ said Hendricks in his comments shortly after Puerling's death, comparing his innovations to Charlie Parker. "The sound of the *Hi-Lo*'s

⁵⁴ Performance of "Airegin" by Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross, Music by Sonny Rollins, Lyrics by Jon Hendricks, accessed November 20, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U154NWmwLxs>.

⁵⁵ Jon Hendricks, quoted in Gene Puerling Obituary, from The San Francisco Chronicle, April 3, 2008, accessed September 2010, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Gene-Puerling-Grammy-winning-arranger-dies-3221307.php>.

was choral, even though there were only four of them. The way the chords were spread out, they sounded like a choir."⁵⁶ He recalled how, in the late 1950s, when the Hi-Lo's were performing at Birdland, the famous jazz club named for Parker in New York, he and his partners Dave Lambert and Annie Ross would sit very close and try to figure out who was singing lead. "Because the blend was so marvelous, we couldn't find the lead half the time."⁵⁷ Shelton discussed the famous *Hi-Lo's* blend in our interview. "That was something we worked on three hours a day. Not the thing worked on the most, because it was an overall situation, but certainly part of it."⁵⁸ As for Puerling's awareness of Hendricks during this time, since both groups were playing the same circuits, clubs, and festivals, and also appearing frequently on television, they no doubt were exposed to each other's music often. There was even a collaboration of sorts, with Hendricks co-writing five of the twelve songs recorded on the *Hi-Lo's* 1963 LP, "The Hi-Los! Happen to Bossa Nova."⁵⁹

New Innovations - Overdubbing

Another innovation with which both Puerling and Hendricks are associated is the use of overdubbing in the recording studio, a technique that would later be employed by *Double Six of Paris* (the idea behind their name references this technique), but which was truly pioneered by guitarist Les Paul.⁶⁰ Hendricks and Lambert had applied this technique on their premier LP, "Sing a Song of Basie." Recorded in multiple sessions between 1955

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Shelton interview.

⁵⁹ Song titles co-written/arranged by Hendricks: "One Note Samba," "The Duck," "Desafinado," "Once Again," and "No More Blues."

⁶⁰ Dave Tianen, "The Wizard of Waukesha," a tribute to Les Paul originally published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, accessed October 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/les-paul/chasing-sound/100>.

and 1957, this re-imagining of classic Count Basie charts is the direct ancestor to the early recordings of the *Manhattan Transfer*, approximately fifteen years later. After trying without success to find a dozen singers needed for the arrangements that could effect the appropriate sound, attitude, and stylistic performance required, the trio did all of the singing themselves with multiple overdubs. It was an innovation that was ahead of the curve; but the resulting voicings provided the foundation for later groups like *Double Six*, *Swingle Singers*, and the *Manhattan Transfer*, as well as inspiring a whole generation of jazz educators that would introduce this new sound to colleges in the late 1960s. The precursor to this landmark recording was a session in which the trio attempted to actualize Hendricks' first attempts at expanding the idea of *vocalese* to include not just a solo line, but all the instrumental parts of a big band arrangement, building on the jukebox-replacement singing of his Toledo youth. Inspired by a recording by The *King Pleasure* big band of "Moody's Mood for Love," he realized that he didn't have to limit himself to just the 32-bar melody. He could actually vocalize an entire big band chart, with all of the extended variations of the head, leading him eventually to write the *vocalese* to "Four Brothers."⁶¹

Another important aspect of *vocalese* is that the lyrics should tell a story, somehow expanding upon the original theme of the music or revealing something about the players on the original creation.⁶² In the case of "Four Brothers," the narrative follows the musical exploits of Woody Herman's saxophone section that made the original 1947 recording: Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Herbie Steward, and Serge Chaloff. During their solo

⁶¹ Terry Perkins, "What's New in Jazz Standards," accessed November 9, 2012, <http://www.jazzstandards.com/what's%20New%20Jon%20Hendricks>.

⁶² Myer, "Interview with Jon Hendricks, Part 2."

breaks, we meet each player individually through the lyrics, while the ensemble sections talk about them in the collective. The first “Four Brothers” vocal session featured Hendricks singing the entire song, ensemble sections as well as solos, with Lambert and Ross assisting live and in overdubs. “Sing a Song of Basie” was a logical next step.

On a side-note, it is vital to not overlook the contributions made by Dave Lambert. The vocal arrangements heard on all of their recordings are mostly from his pen.⁶³ Lambert’s idea of mimicking the voicings of sax soli sections is perfectly in line with the approach of Gene Puerling, and it is unfortunate that his talent was lost to a tragic and untimely death. In fact, Dave Lambert’s endeavors began a decade prior to his permanent teaming with Hendricks and Ross, and provided direct inspiration for the beginnings of collegiate Vocal Jazz (as we will discover later in this narrative), still another decade ahead.⁶⁴ Had he lived longer, there is no doubt more people would know his name, thanks in large part to the Northwest explosion in Vocal Jazz his work helped ignite.

Overdubbing was a fairly new recording technique in the 1950s, often done by using multiple machines or rare and expensive multi-track recorders, a technique that predated even stereo. But in the late 1960s, multi-tracking and true stereo became more commonplace with the introduction of eight-track machines, and later sixteen and twenty-four tracks, recorded first on one-inch then later, two-inch, magnetic tape. The timing of these innovations coincided perfectly with the formation of Gene Puerling’s new group, *Singers Unlimited*. With these new machines, Gene could take the same four singers and

⁶³ Myer, "Interview with Jon Hendricks, Part 2."

⁶⁴ Hal Malcolm, "Genesis in Jazz Vocal Education." Gresham, Oregon: unpublished manuscript Mount Hood Community College, 1997, 3.

overdub as much as necessary, with almost no loss in fidelity, to cover his more complex and harmonically richer arrangements. Now four singers could sound like a large choir, but retain the blend of a quartet. Gene and his new partners made a demo of his arrangement of Lennon and McCartney's "Fool on the Hill" in a small 8-track studio and sent it out to advertising agencies to show what the group could do. It was not intended to be a commercial recording, but, through a friend of a friend, the demo found its way to German recording engineer, Hans Georg Brunner-Schwer. Brunner-Schwer was known for his innovative multi-tracking techniques and state-of-the-art equipment. He liked what he heard and invited the group to record with him for the German label MPS. With Brunner-Schwer at the controls, they perfected the process to the point where they could record an entire LP in about thirty hours, the amount of time it took them to do the original "Fool on the Hill" demo.⁶⁵ It's regrettable that Dave Lambert didn't live long enough to hear these recordings.

Fortunately, some of Puerling's arrangements are still in print, although most are either POP (permanently out of print), or were never published in the first place. Out of the more than two hundred known Gene Puerling arrangements, only twenty-four, or around 10%, are currently available through publishers. Many more are available "off market" as transcriptions. Some are even around in manuscript form. For instance, Phil Matson has a collection that was given to him by Puerling for his collegiate group to sing. However, these were given with the understanding that they could not be shared.⁶⁶ The bulk of the Puerling catalogue resides with his widow Helen. It is hoped that in the future

⁶⁵ Fredrickson, "Interview with Gene Puerling."

⁶⁶ Phil Matson, interview by author, July 1, 2013.

they will all be made available, but in the meantime they can at least be heard and appreciated through the recordings of both the *Hi-Lo's* and *Singers Unlimited*.

The subsequent arrangers of Vocal Jazz owe a major debt of thanks to Gene and Jon. First, they provided a road map to innovation that we are all still traveling, ever expanding the boundaries that define the form and repertoire of the Vocal Jazz ensemble. Second, they introduced a vocabulary to not only Vocal Jazz writing, but also to choral music in general. Thanks to their innovations, we now have a truly American choral form, one that has not only reached from shore to shore, but to countries far and wide. Many universities and high schools across the United States have Vocal Jazz as a standard part of their curricula thanks to the work of these two men and those they inspired over the past 50 years. Artists like *Take 6*, *New York Voices*, and the *Real Group* from Sweden carry on the tradition while adding their own re-imaginings. Both Jon and Gene dedicated their lives to innovate and inspire, through their professional collaborations and through reaching out in the education community. Among those still going strong, creating their own multi-generational following, is the oft-mentioned *Manhattan Transfer*. On their ground-breaking recordings “Extensions” and “Mecca for Modernes,” they introduced two songs that have become classics with Vocal Jazz enthusiasts everywhere. One was a re-imagining of a beloved recording by the group *Weather Report*, with vocalese lyrics by Jon Hendricks, and the other a four-part arrangement by Gene Puerling. The Jon Hendricks lyric pays tribute to “Birdland,” the iconic New York jazz club that is a shrine to all the great jazz innovators of the twentieth century, and where Hendricks once marveled to the blend of the *Hi-Lo's*. But it does so

through the language of Jazz Fusion rather than swing or be-bop, showing that Jon has always been ready and willing to adapt and embrace new forms, while still adhering to his own unique vision.

The arrangement of “A Nightingale Sang in Berkley Square” signaled a new direction for Puerling: writing slightly more accessible charts to reach the growing number of younger singers just discovering Vocal Jazz. Unlike his complex charts for the *Hi-Los!* and *Singers Unlimited*, this one offered a basic, yet tasteful, and still very “Puerling-esque” approach to SATB Vocal Jazz, just what *Manhattan Transfer* needed for their live shows, and a great way to introduce his style and harmonies to a younger audience.

Chapter 4

VOCAL JAZZ GOES TO COLLEGE

The First Wave: Northwest Fever

In the fall of 1967, Mt. Hood Community College in Gresham, Oregon hired a 39-year old jazz drummer and music teacher named Hal Malcolm (1928-2009). At that time, Malcolm had roughly a dozen years of classroom instruction in band, orchestra, and choral ensembles under his belt, and a lifetime devotion to Vocal Jazz. The college was new, so new in fact, that the classrooms and administrative offices were mostly in trailers and tents, with port-o-potties for the necessities. As such, there was a sense of openness amongst the faculty and administrative staff towards exploring the vast possibilities for higher education, particularly in the arts.⁶⁷ Frederick Halsted Malcolm grew up in the Northwest, mostly in foster homes, spending his formative years, like Jon Hendricks, listening to jazz on a jukebox, his located on the corner of First and Pike in downtown Seattle. During and directly after World War II, he was exposed to and sought out the very best in jazz at the time through recordings and live performances when touring musicians were in town. But his personal “genesis” in regards to Vocal Jazz came from none other than Dave Lambert and his “Bop Vocal Chorus,” via their recording of “Always,” heard over a local radio station in late 1947. Malcolm was struck by the sound of a chorus instead of an instrumental ensemble singing with a jazz combo. According to Leonard Feather, a renowned jazz historian, as well as critic and composer, this recording was the first of its kind, although, as Malcolm notes, Lambert had made a previous

⁶⁷ Malcolm, “Genesis in Jazz Vocal Education,” 6.

recording that was similar, a vocal version of Stan Kenton's "After You."⁶⁸ So the seeds for Malcolm's first collegiate group at Mt. Hood were sewn during the late 1940s when, as he notes, the word "jazz" was actually prohibited as part of the title or outline for a college course.⁶⁹ Along with his exposure to Kenton and Lambert, he had the fortune of having a great mentor at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington named Bert Christensen. Christensen started a jazz band at the college in 1947 (it was called "stage band" at first), a rarity in those days, and he instilled in his students, including Malcolm, the idea that a musician could and should "do it all." He advocated the notion that a *total* musician was an accomplished instrumentalist, vocalist, composer, and teacher: very "old school."⁷⁰ While working his way through college and graduate school, by playing gigs and washing dishes (among other menial jobs), he made his first attempt at a Vocal Jazz ensemble of his own. As is true with many great success stories, this one started with failure. The singers were all fine musicians, but their training was primarily classical. His transcription of Dave Lambert's recording of "After You" was primitive, possessing many inaccuracies, and he still had much to learn about running a choral rehearsal. But he turned this first setback into a learning experience, a "very important part of future success."⁷¹ A short stint in the military temporarily halted his forward movement; but upon his discharge, he picked up immediately, forming a band called the *Hi-Fi's*, and did quite well playing local gigs until rock and roll came along in

⁶⁸ Malcolm, "Genesis in Jazz Vocal Education," 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Dave Barduhn, "Some Thoughts on Vocal Jazz Education," Gresham Oregon, unpublished manuscript, Mount Hood Community College, January 2005, 1.

⁷¹ Malcolm, "Genesis in Jazz Vocal Education," 5.

the mid-1950s. The decline of his concert career led him into teaching and, eventually, being in the correct place and time to initiate a genesis at Mt. Hood.

The first class, called “Swing Choir” (as noted, jazz was still a negative word at this time), began fall semester of 1967 with sixteen singers accompanied by several local players on piano and bass, and Malcolm on drums. The name “swing choir,” a familiar label in schools throughout the northwest and therefore possessing a comfort level not enjoyed by “jazz” among its citizens, would gradually morph into stage choir, then finally jazz choir, and vocal jazz ensemble or jazz vocal ensemble.⁷² In those early days, teachers were told explicitly to refrain from using the word “jazz” for any class, event, catalogue, etc. Once the college district was fully funded with a tax bill in 1970, the administrators relaxed enough to allow the word “jazz” as a descriptor from then on.⁷³ Ironic that such a conservative community (the local radio played mostly Country music) would give rise to such a progressive musical movement. And although censoring use of the word was becoming less common, it reflected an ongoing marginalization of the form that continues into the present. That first class gave birth to the school’s ensemble, eventually and aptly named *Genesis*, which existed continuously from that first semester until Dave Barduhn (former student and successor to Hal Malcolm), retired at the end of the 2012 school year. No other program of its kind can even approach its longevity, a true rarity in the collegiate world. Also important to note is the parallel program that started at Seattle’s Roosevelt High School under the direction of Waldo King, a former CWU classmate with Malcolm. Barduhn was a product of Roosevelt under King. The

⁷² Malcolm, “Genesis in Jazz Vocal Education,” 6-7.

⁷³ Ibid.

partnership that developed between Mt. Hood and Roosevelt was integral to the success of both.⁷⁴

Why start a swing choir? According to an account from Dave Barduhn,⁷⁵ interest in traditional choral ensembles, and thus, enrollment, had been in decline for several years. He attributes this largely to the emergence of folk music and rock and roll, much of which possessed a social message that resonated with the younger crowd. Serious concert music was not appealing to younger singers, lacking the fervor, excitement, and fun produced by the world's latest form of popular music. Civil Rights, a war in Southeast Asia that no one really quite understood, and a rapidly changing social culture resulted in, as Barduhn said in 2005, "Brahms (not) playing as well as it was with previous generations."⁷⁶ Some small vocal ensembles began moving away from old, reliable staples like Barbershop or madrigals, experimenting instead with the swing music of the 1940s and 1950s, along with more current music from vocal groups like *The Fifth Dimension*, *The Association*, and *The Mamas and The Papas*. But the arrangements of this music were along the lines of groups like *The Lettermen*, whose songs lacked any real complexity: relatively easy to emulate. However, this exploration of popular, contemporary forms created a desire for more challenging arrangements, leading the explorers to a discovery of arrangements by *The Hi-Lo's* and *The Four Freshmen*. The Freshmen's style aligned well with Stan Kenton's approach, that of "straight-toned" playing and singing, possessing little or no vibrato. The more complex harmonies coming

⁷⁴ Malcolm, "Genesis in Jazz Vocal Education," 7, 9-10.

⁷⁵ Barduhn, "Some Thoughts on Vocal Jazz Education," 1.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

from vocal and instrumental ensembles were much clearer using this technique and the music really came to life in a new way.⁷⁷

The first decade of these programs in the Northwest witnessed a great deal of excitement. Within the first two or three years, Malcolm's group was traveling all over the state, introducing this exciting new sound and winning new converts, much as the Fisk Singers had done nearly a century before. One can clearly find evidence of the success and enthusiasm surrounding Vocal Jazz in an article from the Eugene, Oregon Register-Guard, published March 2, 1978. Just eleven years after Malcolm and King started their programs in Washington, the Eugene-Springfield area boasted that it had become "a center for the style. Indeed, many of the finest practitioners of the Vocal Jazz come from local high schools." Featured in the Register-Guard article were groups from South Eugene, preparing to represent their state at an upcoming festival at the University of Northern Colorado. Already acknowledged as the "Father of Vocal Jazz" among his peers, Malcolm was chosen as spokesperson to explain the genre to uninitiated readers.⁷⁸

In the article, Malcolm reinforces the previously cited reason to introduce Vocal Jazz. "We've never taught young people anything but serious, sacred music. And if we'd start educating kids about good pop music and jazz, maybe they wouldn't be going out and educating themselves at the age of 8 or 10 by buying all that silly stuff, and by the

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Hal Malcolm, quoted in Fred Crafts, "He's Got a Jazzy Cure for the Vocal Blues," *Eugene Register-Guard*, March 2, 1978, 30.

(UNC, now considered a bastion for Vocal Jazz, with UNC Jazz Press one of the largest publishers of Vocal Jazz material, was just getting started at that time under the direction of Gene Aitken. Aitken caught the Vocal Jazz fever while teaching in Eugene at Lane Community College and was now piping its attributes in other states).

time they got to be 18, they might have much better tastes.”⁷⁹ In a statement reminiscent of the scene in “Mr. Holland’s Opus,”⁸⁰ where the iconic music teacher discovers the ability of popular music to turn his kids onto the classics, Malcolm says, “We’ve always put down jazz music as something on the evil side of life. That’s got to stop.”⁸¹

Even with the growing success in small colleges and high schools, at that time, the only major institution in the Northwest offering Vocal Jazz in the curriculum was the University of Oregon in Eugene. Malcolm conceded in the interview the difficulty of starting a Vocal Jazz program and how important it was that he had the encouragement and backing of the administration at Mt. Hood. It would be helpful if more administrators heeded statements from the high school directors of that time, each of whom praised the positive impact of Vocal Jazz on their programs. They cited increased enrollment, especially among male students, and with more students, a larger talent pool. They also mentioned more interest from the students in jazz history and theory, and enthusiasm from parents and audiences.⁸²

Still, Malcolm conceded that there were obstacles and, for some, a reluctance to start a Vocal Jazz program. There was still a lack of challenging arrangements (at that time, publishing had not caught up with the demand). There also was fear, fear that it will hurt a singer’s voice, that it will be more successful than traditional forms, thus rendering a traditional teacher irrelevant.⁸³ In 1978, many Vocal Jazz educators felt optimistic that this music would catch on everywhere. There was a sense of inevitability. One teacher

⁷⁹ Hal Malcolm, quoted in Crafts, “He’s Got a Jazzy Cure for the Vocal Blues.”

⁸⁰ That film was shot at Portland’s Grant High School, another feather in the cap of the Northwest.

⁸¹ Hal Malcolm, quoted in Crafts, “He’s Got a Jazzy Cure for the Vocal Blues.”

⁸² Crafts, “He’s Got a Jazzy Cure for the Vocal Blues.”

⁸³ Ibid.

from South Eugene, Jim DeBusman, went so far as to say, “The universities and colleges are finally going to have to accept the fact that they can’t ignore it anymore. It’s at that level that Vocal Jazz will really come into its own.”⁸⁴ Malcolm’s affirmation at the time was all about raising the bar through education, creating a wider audience for more sophisticated music through more and more participation in the Vocal Jazz medium. “I don’t know whether the public will ever become sophisticated enough to get away from the girl trio-type thing (in soul music) but we can hope. We’re working on it.”⁸⁵ After thirty-five years, a quick scan of the FM radio dial affirms that we are still working on it.

Under the progressive administrative vision of its initial president, Dr. Earl Klapstein, the Mt. Hood music program and its Vocal Jazz components would thrive, ushering in many “firsts” chronicled thoroughly in Malcolm’s 1997, self-published journal, “Genesis in Jazz Vocal Education.” After Klapstein’s retirement in 1976, under his successor’s more conservative and less-enlightened approach, the program would endure a decade of challenges before once again enjoying a rebirth in the mid-1980s. Malcolm was a survivor, having endured a very difficult childhood, and, as a soldier, a grueling twenty-one month stint in Korea. His background doubtlessly prepared him for just about any obstacle, especially college president hijinks. At the height of this struggle, Malcolm recalled a confrontation with the new president, telling him, “the faculty will soon catch on to you – and I’ll be here when you’re history.”⁸⁶ Indeed he was.

Throughout the roller-coaster ride in the administrative carnival, the Northwest Vocal Jazz festival (initiated as the Northwest Swing Choir Festival in 1968) would not

⁸⁴ Jim DeBusman, quoted in Crafts, "He's Got a Jazzy Cure for the Vocal Blues."

⁸⁵ Hal Malcolm, quoted in Crafts, "He's Got a Jazzy Cure for the Vocal Blues."

⁸⁶ Malcolm, "Genesis in Jazz Vocal Education," 23.

only thrive, but become the impetus for many other young educators' introductions to Vocal Jazz, inspiring a number of them to begin their own programs. It was through this festival that Kirby Shaw, newly-ensconced as a choral director at a small college in Weed, California, was first introduced to the possibility of the genre in a college setting. He recalls, "It was in 1968 that Hal Malcolm started the Vocal Jazz festival. Somehow I found out about it, I don't even remember how. I went up to this festival and was blown away by the whole idea of Vocal Jazz ensembles in a school."⁸⁷ He immediately set about starting one of his own at College of the Siskews. Malcolm's festival was only one part of the inspiration that sparked Shaw's interest in the genre: "That was also the year I was going up the chair lift on Mt. Shasta and over this metal speaker heard (mimics the opening brass riff from the song 'Spinning Wheel' by *Blood Sweat and Tears*)."⁸⁸ Shaw now alludes to both of these events with true reverence, often thinking to himself, "I will always remember where I'm sitting and what I was doing when I heard that."⁸⁹

Educator, arranger and choral conductor Phil Matson also attributes his early awareness of Vocal Jazz to his encounter with Malcolm's festival and the program at Mt. Hood.⁹⁰ The movement in the Northwest likewise affected Gerald "Jerry" Eskelin, professor of music at L.A. Pierce college from 1971 to 2002, and founder of the only college-based Vocal Jazz ensemble to be nominated for a Grammy award (L. A. Jazz Choir). Eskelin remembers, "I attended the first performance of Mt. Hood's *Genesis* at

⁸⁷ Kirby Shaw, interview by author, July 3, 2013.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Matson interview.

ACDA – that was my intro to collegiate Vocal Jazz in the early 70s.”⁹¹ Other influential directors who found inspiration from this festival include Dr. Stephen Zegree, who built a highly respected program of his own at Western Michigan University, and who is now beginning a program at Indiana University. In the past two decades, Zegree is directly responsible for training some of the country’s finest Vocal Jazz directors.

Once this *hep cat* was out of the bag, the genre of Vocal Jazz began to spread into California, Texas, the Midwest, across to the eastern seaboard. But it spread more as a gentle stream than a flood. The perfect storm that allowed for a genesis at Mt. Hood was not always present in other waters, and, as noted, even Mt. Hood’s ship didn’t always sail smoothly. Vocal Jazz was catching on with a cult following of sorts. Under the right circumstances, it flourished. Kirby Shaw, Phil Matson, and Jerry Eskelin, like Malcolm, were all trained in traditional music education, discovering Vocal Jazz only after several years of teaching. While each of them was able to build a successful Vocal Jazz program at his respective college, they too, encountered obstacles along the way.

But their passion for the genre seems to be the common thread that propelled them through those obstacles. Shaw says, “It’s hard to describe to you the excitement of the Northwest Vocal Jazz phenomenon. I’ve got to be exaggerating by some, but it’s like, wow, we’re starting this thing, and it’s like every high school, middle school and even elementary school, high percentages of them thought, hey let’s do this.”⁹² He went on to describe the feeling as almost “evangelical.” Everyone wanted to share in the excitement and spirit of being at the ground level of something special, even though almost no one

⁹¹ Gerald Eskelin, interview by author, June 14, 2013.

⁹² Shaw interview.

had any background or training. Elaborating on this point, Shaw notes that Hal Malcolm was a Stan Kenton fan, and because of that his choirs sang without vibrato. (As already noted, with the close harmonies characteristic to the jazz ensemble repertoire, a non-vibrato approach helps to bring out the clarity of those harmonies.) “He (Malcolm) really went for that and he wasn’t even a choir director. He was an instrumental guy.”⁹³

Also common to the early successes of Shaw, Matson, and Eskelin, similar to the early days at Mt. Hood, was each having a supportive administration. All of these directors taught at small community colleges. The groups at every one of these schools were tremendously popular, not only with the student body, but within the local community. They generated revenue and helped with recruitment, both key concerns of most college administrators, especially at the community level. As Phil Matson notes, “Community colleges tend to be more open. They are less restrictive, [and] don’t have a full time voice faculty that creates obstacles.” He attributes this to an “entrepreneurial spirit” which is rare at a four year college.⁹⁴ None of these directors arrived at his college job with any experience teaching Vocal Jazz, although they all had an awareness of the genre. However, once they started, it became an integral part of the development of their programs and personal careers.

Moreover, they all discovered immediately the severe lack of published Vocal Jazz repertoire. Almost none of the material done by professional groups was available. So they, like Malcolm, discovered if you wanted to do it, you had to transcribe it yourself, helping to fuel the entrepreneurial and pioneering spirit of the movement cited

⁹³ Shaw interview.

⁹⁴ Matson interview.

by Matson and Shaw. The early directors would often create their own arrangements. They also utilized students and colleagues to provide charts. At Pierce College in Los Angeles, Jerry Eskelin took advantage of the wealth of musicians available who called the entertainment mecca their home. He used writers like pianist Milcho Leviev, a colleague of big band innovator Don Ellis, who later arranged the Charlie Parker bebop standard, “Confirmation” (with vocalese lyric by Jon Hendricks), for *The Manhattan Transfer*. He often called upon one of Rosemary Clooney’s regular arrangers, Alan Davies. But he also relied on some of the music coming out of the Northwest programs at Mount Hood and Central Washington.⁹⁵ The arrangements of Gene Puerling and Dave Lambert were integral to some of the early directors as they began to explore their own creative endeavors. Matson attributes his beginnings to a clinic done with Puerling early in his tenure at Foothill College. Up until that time, he hadn’t really considered composition.⁹⁶ Kirby Shaw called upon his training as a trumpet player to guide his initial forays into arranging jazz for singers. Thanks to his ski lift epiphany, he gravitated to using a small horn section, emulating the fusion groups of the early ‘70s like *Chicago*, *Blood Sweat & Tears*, and *Earth, Wind & Fire*, but was unable to find published charts with that instrumentation. (Although he was aware of some of the Pop arrangements being done by writers like Ed Lojeski, he felt they didn’t “swing” enough.) Since he had done some big-band arrangements as a high school teacher at Mt. Shasta, he built upon those ideas, substituting voices for some of the horn parts.⁹⁷ In the case of both Shaw and Matson, their efforts translated into a prolific (if not lucrative) publishing career, and

⁹⁵ Eskelin interview.

⁹⁶ Matson interview.

⁹⁷ Shaw interview.

helped begin to fill the void of Vocal Jazz charts available to the masses. By the mid-70s, some of Gene Puerling's arrangements were being published, and Kirby Shaw's early proliferation of charts began to find its way into the collegiate repertoire, along with some of the other writers from the Northwest like Barduhn and Ken Krintz. But these early efforts set a precedent still prevalent today for college groups to provide much of their material from within, something most professional groups have always done.

The Second Wave Breaks On Shore and Still Hits Some Rocks

Here is the rub: if you were not fortunate enough to attend a school run by one of the pioneers in the 1970s or 1980s, chances are you did not receive any instruction in or exposure to Vocal Jazz. Although the information was out there, it would often be through happenstance that discovery was made. Such was the case of Bruce Rogers, current Director of Choral Studies at Mount San Antonio College in Pomona, California. Rogers studied at the University of Connecticut and then moved to California in 1981 immediately after graduating and never went back. Although he was vaguely aware of popular music forms, his training and focus was very traditional. A few years into his teaching career, he took his high school group to New York City. While there, he was told about a group just starting up called *New York Voices*. Having no expectation, he decided to go hear them perform at a club in the city. "I was completely blown away. I thought, 'oh my gosh, I didn't even know this existed.' That's what turned me on to thinking 'maybe I should do this in school.'"⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Rogers interview. (It's significant to note that the members of *New York Voices* met while involved in the Vocal Jazz program at Ithaca College in New York, one of the few on the east coast. Perhaps because of their roots, these singers are constantly involved in promoting Vocal Jazz at colleges everywhere, lending their services as coaches, clinicians, and performers.)

Like his predecessors, one of Rogers' first questions was, "how do I teach this?" Unlike many of them, he had zero training and background in jazz. So he began his journey. He started simply by listening to as much of this type of music as he could find, "because I really enjoyed it, then once I got serious, I thought, 'I want to do this with my students and begin to have a Vocal Jazz group.'"⁹⁹ Throwing himself into study, Rogers determined that, whatever the genre of music, it deserves enough respect to do it correctly, with thorough training and preparation. He didn't want to attempt teaching Vocal Jazz until he really understood the genre and its language. His approach was total and complete immersion. "I just listened and listened to everything I could get my hands on... just really enveloped myself in the language for months and months and months and months, read books, and did everything that I could."¹⁰⁰

He now has one of the most respected choral programs in the country, with an award-winning Vocal Jazz group that he must repopulate every other year or so, since his school is a two-year community college. He attributes his success, at least partially, to possessing something different than most of the other directors. He is a trained singer, rather than an instrumentalist. After some initial recognition, he began to bring his groups to ACDA conventions. It was on one of these occasions that he was approached by veteran Vocal Jazz educator and arranger Paris Rutherford. "He said, 'young man, you're raising the bar for all of us in Vocal Jazz. We all have to change the way we think about Vocal Jazz 'cause of what you're doing now.'"¹⁰¹ Such praise from an "old school guy"

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

prompted Rogers to reflect on the reason for his success, “winning Downbeat Magazine awards every year and getting the response that they got.”¹⁰² His conclusion was simply that up until that time, many of the leading educators, including Rutherford and Malcolm, were not trained as singers. They were piano players, drummers, or other instrumentalists. Although these teachers were gifted and experienced jazz players, they did not have the tools to teach proper voice pedagogy. Rogers thinks this may have contributed to a notion amongst traditionalists that there was bad singing in Vocal Jazz. “They knew how to make a group swing but not sing.”¹⁰³ Using his training as a vocalist, Rogers was able to not only teach proper pedagogy, but also how to present strong, well-staged, visually appealing performances.

Vijay Singh, another educator who has become a major part of the second wave, is a vocalist and an instrumentalist (in line with Christensen’s ideal “complete musician”). His experience differed slightly from that of Rogers, in that he was fortunate enough to study in the Northwest around the founders of the Vocal Jazz movement. He also already had his own foundation in jazz, having studied it throughout his high school and collegiate years. His first encounter with a Vocal Jazz Ensemble was as an undergraduate at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. The recipient of a music scholarship for clarinet and saxophone, he was actually required to participate in both jazz band and the jazz choir. Due to his jazz background, he and some of his fellow students were given the opportunity to act as leaders and soloists within each group. Later, as a graduate student at Portland State University, he had the fortune to be

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

mentored by a passionate Vocal-Jazz enthusiast, who encouraged him to write and arrange for his groups. This training included hours of listening to and transcribing the music of all the great arrangers. He continued writing for his own student groups, usually for lack of funds to purchase music, and gradually came to the attention of other directors looking for material. Many members of the old guard Vocal Jazz community in the Northwest took notice in his abilities, leading to his “second grad school experience: the Grad School of Barduhn/Kenton/Moawad (John Moawad, another product and former director of Central Washington University's jazz program). [It is] unofficially accredited, but what an education!”¹⁰⁴

Even with the mounting success of the many programs in the Northwest and those they spawned in Southern California, Northern Arizona, North Texas, Western Michigan, and Miami, a significant amount of resistance remains towards Vocal Jazz from established music schools and conservatories. Wider acceptance and a general acknowledgement of Vocal Jazz as the American choral form are needed in order to train more educators capable of continuing its growth. This reluctance is deeply embedded throughout music academia. Among many educators, there are still stubborn misconceptions or a limited appreciation of the value of the genre. Opinions vary on the reasons for this phenomenon, ranging from fear of the unknown on the part of music school administrators and faculty, or as Kirby Shaw notes, “an intractable college music curriculum, run by people that think like college professors,” who are “hidebound by tradition, locked into the way things have always been.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Vijay Singh, interview by author, July 8, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Shaw interview.

In particular, he singled out the ACDA as still falling victim to antiquated thinking, giving “lip-service” to the inclusion of Vocal Jazz in their national conventions. Rather than integrating Vocal Jazz into the concert fare at each venue, ACDA typically presents a Vocal Jazz concert, often at a venue not as easily reached as the rest in use during the convention. Although it remains an audience favorite, sought out by many attendees who support it enthusiastically, it still retains an element of separateness. While calling this treatment by the ACDA establishment, “lip service,” Shaw acknowledges that bringing together a Vocal Jazz performance, as opposed to a traditional choral concert, does require more planning and a larger pool of talent. However, he doesn’t think it should be an excuse to not try. “Expertise is hard to find. I don’t know why it’s so tough. Of course it’s a whole lot easier to sing ‘Kumbaya’ than a straight-ahead jazz chart, but it’s not that hard.”¹⁰⁶ Eskelin also remarked at the supportive response from ACDA membership his groups received when performing at the 2000 convention in San Diego when they “packed out the room [to a] standing ovation.”¹⁰⁷ Consistency is also lacking. A recent convention in Chicago was considered by many in attendance as one of the best Vocal Jazz nights ever, with six high school and collegiate groups performing at a very high level. Yet, the very next convention, held in Dallas, went in the opposite direction, something that is not new, as Eskelin attests: “I’ve seen some groups at conventions that were embarrassing and this doesn’t help (promote the genre).”¹⁰⁸ Many in the audience

¹⁰⁶ Shaw interview.

¹⁰⁷ Eskelin interview.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

that night in Dallas were openly embarrassed in acknowledging the relative weakness of the high school and collegiate field.¹⁰⁹

Rogers isn't as ready to condemn the ACDA for not being more progressive in developing higher interest in Vocal Jazz. He sees the problem more as a systemic issue among the choral community in general, where there is still a need for more high-level groups and clinicians, although there are more now than ever. On this point, he concurs with Shaw that there still exists a "snooty" attitude towards popular singing that permeates many musical institutions. He feels some of this is deserved, in that there has been a great deal of "bad singing" done in the various popular genres, thus giving ammunition to traditional pedagogues to write it off as something that is inherently harmful to the voice. While he understands this attitude, he knows through his own experience that jazz singing can be taught in the same way as traditional music has been taught for centuries. In his discussion on this point, he reiterates, "The reason that my groups have succeeded is because I come from vocal training, so I teach my jazz singers to sing as if they were classical and just teach them a different style."¹¹⁰ He is emphatic about this. He insists the singers are not hurting their instrument, singing "just as appropriately as they would if they were at a conservatory."¹¹¹

There is another issue, often overlooked, that may be less systemic to pedagogy and more linked to simple matters of taste. Both Rogers and Shaw agree that much of contemporary jazz has become so sophisticated and "off the wall" that it no longer

¹⁰⁹ The author was in attendance at both conventions. Observations are personal as well as from random samplings and subsequent conversations held with other attendees.

¹¹⁰ Rogers interview.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

appeals to the heart, but is purely an intellectual undertaking, resonating only with its most ardent enthusiasts. The challenge that both these artists (and anyone else attempting to initiate and maintain a Vocal Jazz program) face is how to take this sophisticated form and make it entertaining for audiences. Rogers' approach is to bring some elements of show choir, not choreography per se, but simple, organic movements and other visual ideas that help the music and musicians connect more with the listeners. Making this basic change garnered his group positive notices from the established Vocal Jazz community, leading his program to national recognition, and, as already noted, prompting Paris Rutherford to remark that his program had "raised the bar" for the entire Vocal Jazz genre.¹¹² Shaw sees this disconnect more as a stylistic deficiency in performance practice. He harkens back to the hallowed days of Ellington and Basie, whose bands were known as much for their "smears and shakes" as they were for their straight-ahead approach to swing. He feels that the post-Coltrane world has become too "antiseptic,"¹¹³ and, like Rogers, too intellectual. He particularly singles out some of the instrumental jazz, with a sound "so clean you could do brain surgery on the chart."¹¹⁴ He laments the lack of humanity in the sound, "inflections in it that make it human, like the sentence I just said. You know with rise and fall."¹¹⁵

With Vocal Jazz, there is a great opportunity to overcome this trend, not only by including swing-era stylizations, but by better interpreting the lyrics. At a recent workshop with jazz pianist/singer/arranger Michele Weir, a singer was struggling in her

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Shaw interview.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

interpretation of a well-known standard ballad, focusing intensively on the way her voice sounded. Weir's simple direction to the singer was to focus on the words, not the notes. She was able to demonstrate with this singer how many musical and technical problems will "take care of themselves" by just letting the words dictate.¹¹⁶ Kirby Shaw also illuminates this aspect of Vocal Jazz in his observations of his favorite vocalist, Carmen McCrae. "My go-to song that I use everywhere I go is her rendition of (Cole Porter's) 'Get Out of Town' when she says 'just disappear' (voice fades out with the word to paint the meaning). 'When you are near, *close!*' The way she sings 'close' suggests danger."¹¹⁷

On top of fear-of-the-unknown and taste preferences, Vocal Jazz has an even larger problem, one that all of the interview subjects discussed independently: a lingering shortage in qualified directors, ones who truly understand both how to perform the genre and how to teach others to do the same. This is not necessarily due to a lack of desire on the part of both teachers and students. Like Bruce Rogers, who discovered a life-long love for Vocal Jazz after hearing the *New York Voices* perform, many have no personal Vocal Jazz experience in an educational setting. So even if they want to start a Vocal Jazz group, they must try their best to learn what to do on their own. Unfortunately, the results are not always positive. Don Shelton and his colleague from *Singers Unlimited*, Bonnie Herman, once did a seminar at an ACDA convention where they explained what they do to choral directors mostly unfamiliar with the Vocal Jazz universe. They were at least able to show that what they did as jingles artists was very much related to their audience's world of choral music: good musicianship skills, artistry, and vocal health.

¹¹⁶ Michele Weir, vocal jazz workshop, Mesa Community College, Mesa, AZ, November 6, 2013.

¹¹⁷ Shaw interview.

Shelton and Herman both felt that many in attendance left with a deeper understanding that Vocal Jazz was just another style of choral music. However, having that understanding is only a starting point. The music education community must still possess a commitment to training new teachers for success in the unique aspects of Vocal Jazz. As Shelton was able to determine, “if you hear a group that’s struggling, it’s usually coming from the director.”¹¹⁸ He points out that kids may want it and a director, eager to please his students or anxious to build audience interest, will try to answer that need. But good intentions are never enough, as Shelton concludes. “Even though the kids are clamoring for it, you must have good people out in front who know...how to achieve a good result.”¹¹⁹

Along with all of these issues, there is a final piece of the puzzle to move into place before Vocal Jazz is able to attain the next level of acceptance. Among jazz musicians, choral musicians, and all educators in both camps, Vocal Jazz is often considered, as Vijay Singh describes, the “bastard stepchild.”¹²⁰ The snootiness, attributed by Rogers and Shaw to the traditional set, also applies to many jazz instrumentalists who consider Vocal Jazz a lesser version of instrumental jazz. Singh believes that the aforementioned expertise deficiency, which leads to “lame tunes and arrangements...lame attempts at improvisation/scat singing, [with] little authenticity,” is one source of this disdain.¹²¹ The overwhelming consensus among these educators and professionals is that a lack of training is fundamental to the prevention of further growth

¹¹⁸ Shelton interview.

¹¹⁹ Shelton interview.

¹²⁰ Singh interview.

¹²¹ Ibid.

in the genre. Singh states the obvious solution. “If more degree-granting universities were to invest in promoting Vocal Jazz and pedagogy for their Music Education majors, it might start things rolling in a more positive way.”¹²² This statement, echoed throughout the Vocal Jazz community, provides the perfect segue to the next section of this paper.

¹²² Ibid.

Chapter 5

BENEFITS OF FULLY-INTEGRATED VOCAL JAZZ STUDIES

As shown through the experiences of early pioneers and their progeny, Vocal Jazz has often been marginalized, relegated to elective status, or excluded altogether, as schools favored the historical, canonic music and traditions of Western Europe. Granted, over the past three decades, Malcolm's creation inspired many followers around the country. But many in the mainstream still resist accepting Vocal Jazz studies into the traditional American conservatory and university music school. In 1996, Bruce Bennett and Renee Feinberg conducted a study for the now-defunct International Association for Jazz Education's monthly journal. In the resulting article, they cited a poll conducted among educators from leading degree-granting members of the National Association of Schools of Music. A large number of respondents agreed that "the stance of conservative voice teachers who dominate the voice teaching profession is responsible for the slow acceptance of Vocal Jazz in the academy."¹²³ Thankfully this has become less of an issue in the intervening years since Bennett and Feinberg's report. Recent documented and anecdotal evidence suggests that institutional aversions to a musical style once considered inferior to those traditions have begun to dissipate. University music schools more and more include jazz studies as a primary component of their curricula, and Vocal Jazz, once the unwanted "bastard stepchild," has gained national prominence, resulting in a significant growth of degree offerings in both solo and ensemble performance.

¹²³ Bruce Bennett, Renee Feinberg, "Vocal Jazz: Worlds Apart-Solo Vocal Jazz and the Academy." *Jazz Education Journal* 29/2 (1996): 66-68.

However, in most cases, Vocal Jazz still retains a “separate but equal” status, only pursued as a matter of choice rather than enjoying full integration into the vocal performance curriculum on its own terms, as so many Vocal Jazz educators advocate. The entire musical community of performers, composers, and audiences alike could benefit greatly from a more technically diverse generation of singers who not only are able to attain proficient authenticity in jazz, art song, oratorio, and opera, but who are capable of negotiating the demands of atonal, serial, aleatory, and minimalist forms as well. Mastering these twentieth-century genres requires many of the same skills needed for Vocal Jazz virtuosity. But resistance among many voice teachers and administrators is still high enough that Vocal Jazz proponents must do more to educate the educators regarding the benefits of full integration. In addition, the increasingly dry well of funding at colleges everywhere is playing a role in a lack of forward movement. Recently, as previously stated, the school credited with hosting the first and longest running Vocal Jazz program in the country, Mt. Hood Community College, cut its Vocal Jazz program.¹²⁴ About this development, Kirby Shaw in particular is very vocal. “It’s really tragic. Guys in suits who have no idea of how important this festival is to music education and how it brought attention to that school like nothing else in the entire school. These guys are blissfully unaware; criminally unaware.”¹²⁵

Administrative problems abound, but in order to move forward, Vocal Jazz must continue to win the hearts and minds of educators. In that spirit, this overview of current

¹²⁴ Sadly, a current search of the school website reveals no trace of the Vocal Jazz ensemble *Genesis*, or the Northwest Vocal Jazz Festival that inspired a generation of Vocal Jazz performers and educators, both victims of disappearing funds and changing priorities.

¹²⁵ Shaw interview.

thinking by Vocal Jazz teachers and scholars, as expressed in recently published documents, interviews, and the author's own experience as a cross-over vocalist, is presented to advance the case for Vocal Jazz studies' full integration within the typical vocal performance degree curriculum.

Task One: Dispelling the lingering myths

Myth #1: *Singing jazz/pop will damage the voice.*

Damage to the vocal folds may occur in a variety of ways. First, incorrect speaking, rather than incorrect singing, may more frequently be the culprit. Linda Trotter, an accomplished opera singer and the former voice chair at Western Michigan University, home to one of the most comprehensive and successful Vocal Jazz programs in the United States, had this to say in 2000: "Develop a healthy speaking voice. Most American youth speak in an unhealthy manner, causing damage to the vocal folds (which are less than one inch long) even before they begin to sing,"¹²⁶ says Trotter. She advises students to stay hydrated and eat healthily, avoid trying to talk over noise and loud music, and make sure to always get enough rest. "Your instrument travels with you. You can't pack it away and close the lid."¹²⁷ This common sense approach of course must apply to all singers, regardless of the genre in which they primarily perform. To blame vocal damage or even simple fatigue on the style of music divorces the responsibility of vocal health from the singer and the voice teacher.

Phil Matson adds some wisdom to this line of thinking as well. "The voice has to serve the music, and there is nothing unnatural about singing Vocal Jazz. And there's

¹²⁶ Linda Trotter, quoted in Diana Spradling, "Vocal Jazz and Its Credibility in the University Curriculum," *Jazz Educators Journal* 32/5 (2000): 60.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

nothing natural about singing opera.”¹²⁸ Matson also promotes the same, common sense approach as Trotter. As a result, he says he’s never had an issue with vocal damage in his ensembles, regardless of the genre.

Second, lifestyle is also a major contributor to damage. In this case, the myth has some basis in historical fact. The early performers of African American-derived singing forms (jazz, blues, rock and roll, etc.) were, for the most part, “self-trained,” and often were unaware of even the basics of maintaining vocal health. Contributors to the damaging effects of their performance would most likely be based in lifestyle: long sets in smoke-filled clubs, trying to project expressively over a band using inferior amplification (or none at all), cigarettes and alcohol between and after sets, late nights lasting into the early morning hours, traveling under adverse conditions, unhealthy eating habits, and, in the more extreme cases, drug abuse. These are all accepted characteristics of the life of a jazz singer and musician from the earliest days up to the present. Still, none of the items on this list is directly connected to the actual style of music, and therefore, with care and training, they can be overcome to allow the jazz singer to perform as healthily as the opera star or art song specialist.

The primary cause of vocal fold damage is, most commonly, the absence of good, basic technique. While there are many variations and approaches to developing correct singing technique, commonalities include developing strong breath support, possessing a basic understanding of the structure of the vocal apparatus, employment of vocal exercises to connect and unify the different registers of the voice, and of course good

¹²⁸ Matson interview.

vocal hygiene, all of which are the basic components of any qualified voice studio.¹²⁹ Dr. Rachel Lebon is a voice teacher at University of Miami whose own career has involved frequent work in both the classical and popular genres.¹³⁰ She sums up the importance of technique as the foundation for vocal health by simply saying, "It's not just a matter of style; it's really a matter of the manipulation of your technique to fit the style." In other words, performing an opera aria allows for, and requires more time to, focus on breath, voice mix, and resonance. Conversely, singing an up-tempo jazz piece relies upon quicker, more immediate adjustments, but the underlying technique is consistently sound.¹³¹

Myth #2: Singers cannot move successfully among various musical genres.

Having established that crossing between styles or genres is not inherently damaging to the voice, the question becomes, why do more singers not choose to cross over? It seems a logical conclusion; developing strong facilities and authentic performance practices in a variety of styles lead a vocalist to become that much more marketable, and therefore, employable. In order to be successful in multiple genres, the singer will need to understand and accept the characteristics of those genres. For example, singing a pop song in the same fashion as an aria will sound phony and contrived to the audience, as would be the reverse of that effort. Late in his career, Luciano Pavarotti recorded numerous performances with pop singers singing songs

¹²⁹ Julie Silvera-Jensen, "A Comparison of Stylistic, Technical, and Pedagogical Perspectives in Vocal Instruction Among Classical and Jazz Voice Teachers" (DMA diss., University of Miami, 2005), 14-15, ProQuest (AAT 305416609).

¹³⁰ The University of Miami is one of only a handful of institutions that offers advanced degrees in Vocal Jazz.

¹³¹ Spradling, "Vocal Jazz and Its Credibility in the University Curriculum," 60.

from that genre, but he never made any attempt to alter his style to fit the genre. Likewise, Barbra Streisand recorded an album of classical art songs in the 1970s, performing Fauré and Debussy in the same manner as she would a selection of pop or show tunes.¹³² Other well-known singers have had more success navigating the waters between the classical and pop shores of the musical river. A brief *You Tube* search of long-time celebrity Florence Henderson will reveal her many variety show appearances early in her career. She demonstrated a great ease of crossover ability between opera, musical theater, jazz, and contemporary pop. More recent examples include opera diva Renee Fleming, who has released CDs of jazz and contemporary songs. Her performances were very authentic to the genres, prompting a New York Times reviewer to credit her with beginning “to solve the longtime problems of opera singers’ pop crossovers.”¹³³ There is also the phenomenon known as “Three Mo’ Tenors,” an act which features classically trained African American singers presenting a concert of Opera, Jazz, Blues, and Contemporary favorites, each performed with more-than-passable authenticity.¹³⁴ They prove not only that it is possible to successfully navigate a variety of genres, but they also help expand the awareness of a given audience to include that plethora of styles. No one doubts the technical prowess of either Pavarotti or Streisand, so their lack of authenticity in their crossover endeavors could simply be a

¹³² Barbra Streisand, *Classical Barbra*, with The Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Claus Ogerman (conductor), Sony/B000002549, 1990, compact disc. Recorded 1973, 1976.

¹³³ John Pareles, review of *Dark Hope* (CD release by Renee Fleming), *New York Times*, May 28, 2010, Living Arts Section.

¹³⁴ Claudia La Rocco, review of “Three Mo’ Tenors” concert at The Little Schubert Theater, New York City, October 2007. *New York Times*, October 2, 2007, Living Arts Section.

matter of choice, rather than ability. In the absence of empirical data, one can only speculate.

Members of collegiate vocal faculties are tasked with training their students to be marketable in the professional world,¹³⁵ and to be marketable requires more and more versatility than in the past. Specialized singers may emerge from these programs and attain celebrity status, but, as always, these will remain the rare exceptions. While the public may have accepted the above artists' forays outside their comfort zones simply because of their iconic status, most working-class singers would be criticized for their lack of authenticity, and they would likely be asked to "not give up their day job." Choosing to ignore study within a variety of styles is certainly any student's prerogative, but it will by definition limit their professional choices later. So crossing between genres is not only possible, it is also becoming increasingly desirable for the singer who wishes to earn a steady living as a musician.¹³⁶

Still, in order to choose the crossover route, current vocal performance majors must be motivated either from within, or by their teacher, and it is still more often the latter that must be convinced. As Diana Spradling reports, a Vocal Jazz director or voice teacher may overcome the myths of damage from crossing between genres through dialogue with classically trained vocal instructors, only to find that a cultural rift still remains that may be at the heart of their misperceptions about jazz, or that they simply

¹³⁵ Julie Silvera-Jensen, "A Comparison of Stylistic, Technical, and Pedagogical Perspectives in Vocal Instruction Among Classical and Jazz Voice Teachers," 6.

¹³⁶ Rachel L. Lebon, *The Versatile Vocalist: Authenticity in Contrasting Styles and Idioms* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006), 85.

don't care for it.¹³⁷ One of the biggest misconceptions about jazz with which both vocalists and instrumentalists wrestle is found within its vernacular, in particular, tone quality. Use of bends, slides, growls, register leaps, and a host of other characteristics associated with jazz music (all of the things that Kirby Shaw points out make it "human") can often obstruct classically trained musicians from even trying to perform jazz. Rachel Lebon touches on this in her book *The Versatile Vocalist*. In her interview with classical and jazz violin professor Glenn Basham, speaking of the typical academy musician, Basham notes that they spend hours upon hours in lessons, studios, and ensembles, perfecting their tonal production so that they become unable or unwilling to approach a sound they feel is "unrefined," so they never try or give up after the first attempt because it just "sounds so odd."¹³⁸ So, definition of beauty, which is ultimately subjective, can also be in play, part of which may be overcome through broader education and further dialogue, and the rest through the natural order of a new generation of modernized educators replacing old-school stalwarts.

Myth #3: Singers aren't as well-trained as are instrumentalists.

In recent casual conversations¹³⁹ between myself and instrumental jazz educators at three different universities with a combined 200 years of professional and educational experience upon which to draw, a common complaint emerged: vocalists who sing pop and jazz are often not well-trained musically, falling far below a minimum level of basic musical literacy, relying solely on natural ability as the foundation upon which to build a

¹³⁷ Spradling, "Vocal Jazz and Its Credibility in the University Curriculum," 62.

¹³⁸ Lebon, *The Versatile Vocalist*, 73.

¹³⁹ Conversations occurred at Arizona State University, May 2011, and California State University, Long Beach and California State University, Northridge, October 26, 2011.

professional singing career. While this is not based upon any scientific data, it occurs frequently enough that we have all shared this experience, concluding that singers are often their own worst enemy. A few bad apples, if not spoiling it altogether, will at least cause suspicion about the entire bunch. While most music schools require courses in ear training and theory, this may not be enough for some singers. One way to further develop a vocalist's musical skills is to follow the example of Bruce Rogers. He does not allow his singers to work with a piano in either their jazz or classical ensemble rehearsals. Each singer is allowed only a tuning fork, and must rely strictly upon their sight-reading and ear training to learn music.¹⁴⁰

It follows that in order to prompt a university towards a fully integrated vocal program, the support of not only the voice as well as the instrumental jazz faculty is ideal. After all, it is likely that instrumentalists will provide some of the training of vocalists in the art of jazz, as is the case at the California State Universities in Long Beach and Northridge. Already demonstrated is the fact that many Vocal Jazz Ensembles are lead not by singers, but by instrumentalists.¹⁴¹ By enrolling in jazz theory and improvisation classes alongside their instrumental counterparts, Vocal Jazz students at these and other schools are doing much to dispel the myth of singers having inferior musical skills, and this trend must expand to institutions without a specific Vocal Jazz degree in order to completely dispel this particular myth, whether or not it is based in truth.

¹⁴⁰ Informal observations occurred during a visit to the program of Bruce Rogers at Mount San Antonio College in Pomona, CA, October 27, 2011 and again during a workshop at the Arizona ACDA Conference in Scottsdale, AZ, July 2013.

¹⁴¹ Stephanie Austin Letson, "The Vocal Jazz Ensemble: Systemic Interactions in the Creation of Three University Programs" (EdD diss., Columbia University, 2010), ProQuest (AAT 756389734), 19.

Task Two: Full inclusion - examining potential benefits

Flexibility equals versatility equals marketability. The more authentically varied a singer's training, the more potential there is to obtain professional engagements beyond that singer's individual area of expertise, whether classical or popular. Typically, the advantage has been on the side of a popular singer who has been able to gain authentic versatility through studying classical technique and repertoire, as has been my own personal experience. The full inclusion model would also have to take into account a singer primarily trained in classical acoustical vocal production crossing over into popular, microphone idioms. Rachel Lebon, among the few who have addressed this need in writing, focuses on educating and encouraging both the singer and the voice teacher to explore outside their comfort zones, embracing in particular microphone technique and its requisite kinesthetic adjustments.¹⁴² Additionally, singers and teachers should not confine this exploration only to technique, but should endeavor to expand repertoire as well.

Basic vocal technique is traditionally taught through the use of classical repertoire, beginning often with Baroque-era Italian art songs and arias. In 2001, two voice teachers from Ithaca, New York, Marty Heresniak and Christopher Weitach, turned the idea of a standard classical repertoire approach to all basic singing on its head. Their basic premise states, "It is the *how* of singing, not the *what*, that will improve or undo sound technical practices. Choice of repertory does not make for good or bad technique. There is no inherent quality to a song that guarantees technique will improve by singing

¹⁴² Lebon, *The Versatile Vocalist*, preface.

it. Nor will a specific song necessarily be detrimental to good singing.”¹⁴³ Their repertoire choices are twenty-six American standards, “no arias.” Songs by Gershwin, Berlin, and Kern replace those by Scarlatti, Cesti, and Giordani, which offers an approach to teaching basic technique that places the “Great American Songbook” on equal footing with the tried and true “Italian Anthology.” This approach accomplishes a secondary goal of providing the student with the beginnings of a pragmatic personal song catalogue from which to draw upon in pursuit of professional opportunities.¹⁴⁴

But jazz authenticity also includes an understanding of style, delivery, and the freedom and skill to improvise, taking liberties with tempo and melody. Most jazz educators agree that this skill set will develop only through continued exposure. In his recent PhD dissertation, Christopher Venesile points out that many of the surveyed Vocal Jazz educators in his research agree that listening is one of the fundamental tools needed for success in the idiom. These educators also believe it is ultimately up to the educator to take the lead in encouraging and supporting the student in this endeavor.¹⁴⁵ It follows then that this discussion of “versatility equals marketability” not only involves advantages to the student, but to the educator as well. Given the continued growth towards the acceptance of Vocal Jazz in collegiate curriculum and the desire of students

¹⁴³ Marty Heresniak, Christopher Weitach, “Changing the Standards: Alternative Teaching Materials,” *Journal of Singing - The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing* 58/1 (2001): 29-38.

¹⁴⁴ The only danger in the Heresniak-Weitach approach may be that by “throwing the baby out with the bathwater” one may overlook the traditional benefits of classical art song study. While most of the important singing techniques can be taught with popular American repertoire, building a strong voice must also encompass learning and mastering pure vowel tones, a fundamental that Italian repertoire addresses idiomatically. American speech, as presented in popular song is filled with regionalized diphthongs and glottal onsets. This writer recommends and utilizes a common sense repertoire approach.

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Venesile, “The Acquisition of Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Vocal Jazz Educators,” (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2010), ProQuest (AAT 857033005), 10.

to learn and master it, the teachers of the next generation must themselves possess a larger degree of flexibility and versatility.

Furthermore, versatility need not limit itself to the worlds of traditional classical and popular idioms alone. A need for more singers of modern art music also exists, according to a recent dissertation by Diane Higginbotham. Although she pointedly states in her introduction that the application of skills utilized in twentieth-century vocal music do not include popular genres, a side-by-side comparison of those skills with the requirements for success in Vocal Jazz shows several overlaps. For instance, unusual intervallic relationships, growls, yells, spoken word, and non-traditional harmonics are all identified as important by Higginbotham,¹⁴⁶ and all are typical skills needed by a Vocal Jazz singer as well. One of her stated goals is to increase the pool of available artists capable of performing these works, arguing that this would in turn increase audience awareness and encourage more compositions of this nature, therefore continuing the advance of new forms and works.¹⁴⁷

One of the most important skills of the jazz vocalist, already mentioned several times in this discussion, is the ability to improvise. Altering a melody in form and rhythm or composing a “scat” solo over a specific harmonic progression are both skills that take many hours of practice and “on the job” application to master. In mastering these skills however, there is a natural crossover benefit to that singer when he or she is performing ornamentations in a *da capo* aria from the afore-mentioned Italian Anthology, or negotiating a *cadenza* from a Handel oratorio or a Bach cantata, or even providing a free

¹⁴⁶ Diane Higginbotham, “Performance Problems in Contemporary Vocal Music and Some Suggested Solutions,” (EdD Diss., Columbia University Teachers College, 1994), ProQuest (AAT 304119119), 18.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 18-19.

melody over a medieval *cantus firmus*. Typically, these are pre-determined and notated, often passed from teacher to student, but there was a time when musicians were trained and expected to improvise these efforts.¹⁴⁸ A singer who is comfortable improvising in modern idioms should be able to transfer that skill to an earlier classical form, creating a more authentic and spontaneous approach to a given performance.

¹⁴⁸ Howard Mayer Brown, *Embellishing Sixteenth-Century Music. Early Music Series 1* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 61.

Chapter 6

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Next Step in the Evolution of Collegiate Vocal Jazz

According to proponents of full integration, in order to perpetuate and refine the Collegiate Vocal Jazz Ensemble, and reap the benefits of that endeavor, several steps are needed. First, address immediately the lack of imagination, not only in the choices of repertoire, but in the way Vocal Jazz is taught to young students and presented to audiences. Vocal Jazz works well as a form of entertainment in addition to its sophisticated harmonies and improvisational aspects. In order to achieve this, there must be “buy-in” from all corners, including the administrations at both two and four-year colleges, faculty from all departments, and of course the students themselves. This imagination can manifest in a variety of areas. Kirby Shaw suggests larger ensembles rather than the current trend of small, highly elite, one-per-mic groups of six to twelve singers. “We need bigger groups doing it if it’s going to grow. Anybody that says you can’t go bigger I have a problem with.”¹⁴⁹ A larger group would naturally lead to a more choral sound, but at the same time would expose a larger group of singers to the genre, thus inspiring more well-trained future educators of the form. Shaw also picks up the earlier thread of Bruce Rogers: address a more innovative approach to concert staging. He suggests using risers, platforms, and different areas of the stage to make it more visually interesting.¹⁵⁰ Don Shelton feels the imagination is lacking in the standard curriculum itself. As already discussed at length, he advocates taking off the blinders of

¹⁴⁹ Shaw interview.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

only following classical models. While he acknowledges that model is fine for some students who have the talent and drive to pursue a successful opera career, he agrees that a broader approach will result in a more employable singer. Furthermore, better trained well-rounded singers can be a tide that lifts the entire fleet of boats in an area of music typically populated with lower quality performers and an audience that has mistakenly decided that singing jazz or pop or theater music is somehow not as difficult as opera, therefore settling for that lower quality.¹⁵¹

Second, take this imagination and translate it to a new generation of educators who are, in the words of Jerry Eskelin, “elitely trained teachers.”¹⁵² These elite teachers exist in many musical genres, thanks to a long tradition of one generation “passing the torch” to the next. This should also exist in the Vocal Jazz idiom. Ideally these teachers will not abandon the tried and true of the past, but they will likewise embrace a newer, hipper sound, not continue with an outdated repertoire that is full of “tired” arrangements.¹⁵³ They will also embrace the tried and true standards and practices of good choral singing and interpretation, but not hesitate to push the envelope by understanding the true nature of Vocal Jazz as both a classical and folk form, unique to the American experience. The elite teachers of Vocal Jazz must also remember that it is a genre of both voices and instruments. Vijay Singh expressed a concern that this aspect is in danger of obliteration by the current *a cappella* movement and by a plethora of new arrangements that are really just cover songs with jazz chords. To illustrate this concern, he spoke of festivals where he recently adjudicated. Missing from many of the groups in

¹⁵¹ Shelton interview.

¹⁵² Eskelin interview.

¹⁵³ Singh interview.

attendance were instrumental sections, songs with a swing rhythm, arrangements by noted jazz composers, and improvisation. Instead he heard a more homogenous, “canned” selection of current Pop tunes with very little artistic originality and interpretation. He lamented, “The current trend of recreating so-and-so's recorded version of a chart leaves so little room for interpretation or creativity. Isn't jazz supposed to be CREATIVE?”¹⁵⁴

All of this suggests a need for constant reexamination of the roots of this music. Unlike the choral music tradition of Western Europe that immigrated, along with its people, to the new world, Vocal Jazz, like its spiritual predecessors sung by the Fisk Singers a century earlier, possesses a unique cultural resonance with American performers and audiences. It was the authentic, home grown music of the Fisk students that resonated with white audiences and that catapulted them to fame and financial success, not their renditions of the music of European composers. It was that same authenticity that moved groups like The Ink Spots to the top of the charts, and it is that same authenticity to which audiences respond in a Vocal Jazz concert. It is music that is both within, and transcendent to, the American racial experience. To stray too far from that authenticity may result in a diluted product.

Finally, the next evolutionary step requires a certain amount of patience. As Kirby Shaw has said on more than one occasion, “It’s one teacher at a time.”¹⁵⁵ In winning hearts and minds, it comes down to continuing the dialogue, and to the handful of people who tirelessly and passionately advocate on behalf of the American choral form. To turn the current drizzle into a steady downpour, many more hearts and minds still need to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Shaw interview.

commit to one idea: the exclusion of Vocal Jazz from the collegiate curriculum is more harmful than its inclusion could ever be.

Recommendations and Conclusion

A fully integrated voice performance degree would ideally include at least one semester of participation in a Vocal Jazz ensemble; at least one song set of jazz/pop music on all required recitals; and required courses in jazz theory, improvisation, repertoire, and history. These could be integrated into various degree tracks or done independently, depending upon the overall degree requirements of a given institution. Choral Education majors would have all of the same requirements, plus additional course work in jazz content, jazz piano, and jazz pedagogy. Graduate studies should also be expanded to include these components, with the understanding that graduate students may have a more specialized degree. At the very least, if an institution already offers advanced degrees in both Opera performance and Jazz Studies, they should also include advanced degrees in Vocal Jazz Performance, as some have begun to do. Masters and Doctoral Conducting programs should require at least one semester of mentorship with a Vocal Jazz ensemble, and offer a Jazz cognate alongside the other traditional cognates of Wind Band, Opera, Education, and Orchestra. In order to fulfill these recommendations, administrators should seek out and employ voice teachers who are well-trained in jazz, and who have professional experience in all singing idioms.

In the 1860s, George White at Fisk University saw a need to move his fledgling institution forward. Authentic American music filled that need. In the 1960s Hal Malcolm saw a similar need and found a similar solution in the homegrown music of his time. In

between those two events, America, still in many ways an evolving idea, struggled to overcome the wounds inflicted by slavery. A new musical quilt, pieced together from this struggle through uniquely American experiences, unfurled over the air on radio waves, helping to heal those wounds, and in the process, gave the country its own voice. If the general concurrence is that Jazz is the indigenous American music form, then it deserves a place, not in the back alleys, but as the store front of music education in its homeland. Vocal Jazz is an integral part of that status, earning at least an equal position alongside its Western-European brethren at the American Conservatory.

Likewise, the tastes of audiences are eclectic and professional opportunities reflect that variety. As universities move to keep pace with the needs of the contemporary music student, they must stay relevant to the current culture. Vocal Jazz can and should continue to play a pivotal role in the ongoing evolution of music education. Therefore, a shift towards a more fully integrated degree plan seems inevitable. Programs that are aware of this shift are already taking steps towards that end,¹⁵⁶ but many still play a game of catch up, if they are in the game at all. After viewing the trends presented by the evidence and examining the views of those who have labored within the profession for many years. This writer thinks that everyone must play or risk losing relevance for the future.

¹⁵⁶ Letson, "The Vocal Jazz Ensemble," 44-45.

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APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER TO POTENTIAL INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

The Development of the Collegiate Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Michael Kocour in the Music School, Herberger College of Design and the Arts at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to detail the beginnings, growth and current state of Vocal Jazz ensemble programs at American colleges and universities.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve an interview to collect historical data and your personal experiences with the subject. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. The interview is expected to be from 30-60 minutes long. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. All participants must be 18 or older. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

If you request, your responses will be kept confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used if you expressly wish. However, your selection for this research is based largely on your professional expertise and authority so the use of your name and credentials in any public reporting is greatly appreciated. Please sign below to authorize the use of your name.

Depending upon the circumstances, I would like to audio record this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded electronically; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. The audio files will be kept for reference only in a secured location at ASU until the paper has been completed and filed for publication. The anticipated completion date is December 2013. Please sign below to authorize audio recording of the interview. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact myself or Professor Kocour at michael.kocour@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

Thanks and warmest regards,
Greg Amerind
Chief researcher

By signing below you are agreeing to be quoted with your name.

APPENDIX B

APPROVED PRIMARY QUESTIONS FOR LIVE INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

1. Describe your first encounter with the Vocal Jazz ensemble genre.
2. What made you decide to become a Vocal Jazz educator/performer/composer/arranger?
3. What artists (composers, performers, and arrangers) have had the most influence in your career as a Vocal Jazz artist?
4. Do you agree that Vocal Jazz is a uniquely American choral art form? Please state your reasons why you agree or disagree.
5. What kinds of challenges or obstacles have you encountered in promoting, directing, or implementing a Vocal Jazz program? How have you been able to surmount any obstacles in this endeavor?
6. Describe any contact and interaction you have with the professional/educational world. To the extent that you have interacted, how has this helped in your collegiate/professional experience, if at all?
7. How has the acceptance of the genre changed over the time period in which you have been involved?
8. How have the national music education societies (NAfME – formerly MENC, ACDA, NAJE, etc.) encouraged or discouraged the promotion and development of the Vocal Jazz genre?
9. What do you see as the next step in the evolution of the collegiate Vocal Jazz ensemble towards complete acceptance by the mainstream/traditional education community?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Greg Amerind has been performing since the age of 5, studying piano, trumpet and voice throughout his school years, eventually majoring in music and theater at UCLA and Cal State University, Northridge, and at Arizona State University, where he received the Bachelor's degree in Music Education, and Master of Music degree in Voice Performance. A songwriter and professional singer for many years in Los Angeles, Greg appeared in musical theater; nightclubs; concert venues, most notably with *Pacific Jazz & Electric*, a jazz vocal ensemble he co-founded and for which he wrote and arranged much of the material; and studios, where he was often called upon to record demos for LA songwriters as well as for commercial, TV and Radio, and industrial projects. Greg was a featured soloist with Lionel Hampton and his big band, and has also performed with entertainers such as Ann Jillian, John Astin, and Patrick Duffy in various projects, as well as appearing briefly in the film *The Jazz Singer* with Neil Diamond and Sir Lawrence Olivier. Relocating to Arizona in 1997, Greg has served as soloist, composer/arranger and director of the *SGI-USA Arizona Cactus Chorus*, a lay Buddhist community group devoted to the cause of world peace through music and cultural exchange. He had the honor of conducting a 300-voice interfaith choir singing "We Are One" at Phoenix's Chase Field in commemoration of the September 11 attacks on America. He is currently the Artistic Assistant for the *Phoenix Boys Choir*, and is a performer with the Phoenix-based Vocal Jazz ensemble, *Oasis*. He was the founding director of ASU's Vocal Jazz Ensemble, *Heatwave*, from 2009 to 2013. As a composer, he has a catalogue that includes dozens of choral and jazz vocal ensemble arrangements as well as over 150 songs in the genres of classical, pop, jazz, rock, R & B, and show tunes. His choral arrangements and compositions have been performed by Jr. High, High School and Collegiate choirs; and his solo CD, "Late Boomer," a collection of original jazz vocal compositions is available online at CD Baby and at most digital download sites. Greg has also been a private voice instructor since 1982, currently residing with his wife and daughters in Ahwatukee, Arizona.