



Gene Aitkin
Nat'l. Vocal Jazz Chm.

VOCAL JAZZ

Rehearsal Techniques

This article will deal with some rehearsal techniques that will help make your groups sound a little bit more polished. These ideas are by no means original as they have been used for years in instrumental jazz, especially in large jazz ensembles. As in any situation, overuse, misinterpretation, or an unmusical use of any of these techniques can have a negative effect on the vocal jazz ensemble. In addition to employing these suggested techniques, it is just as important to listen to both large and small instrumental jazz ensembles in order to hear how these techniques are used in context. Also, while you listen, be aware of the basic musical elements

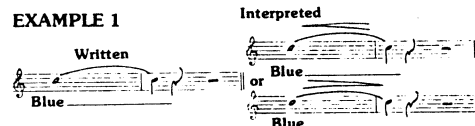
used in jazz improvisation and in rhythm section playing.

In many instances a technique may have several interpretations. Explore them all. There is normally one way to notate the music in order to provide some consistency when students mark their parts.

NOTES OF DURATION

A held note, whether it be a whole note or a whole note tied to a half, must have musical direction. This usually means that musically the note must crescendo or decrescendo. A held note is usually a note having a duration of a dotted-half note or longer. If the tempo is slower, $\text{♩} = +76$, then half-notes could be included in this category. Musical movement can also help the choir in terms of maintaining good pitch.

EXAMPLE 1



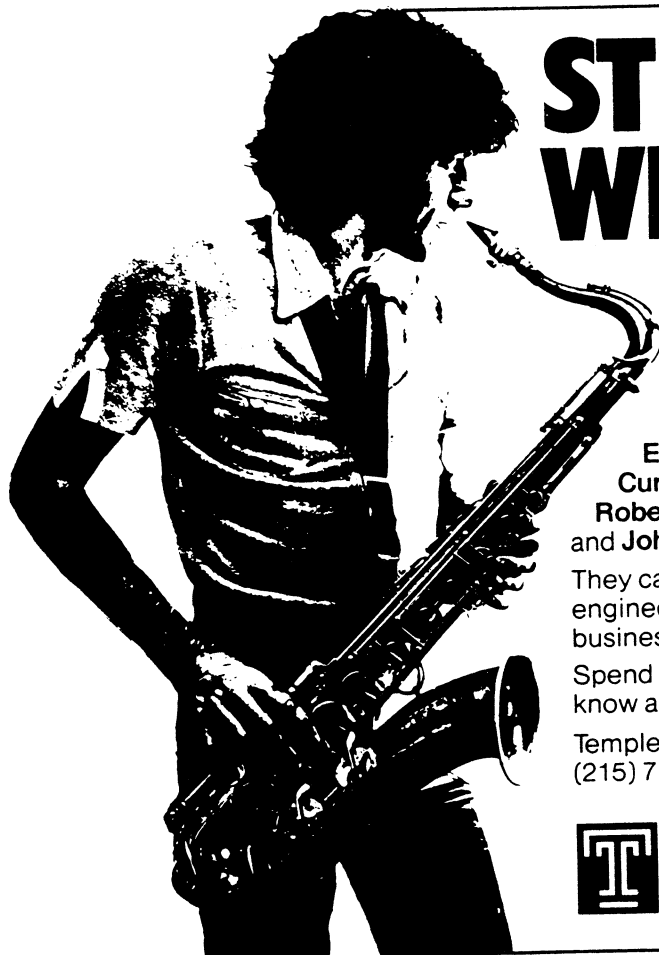
Another idea that can enhance held notes is the use of the *sfz* (*sforzando*) with the crescendo. It is important that the release of the note with the *sfz* must be at the height of the crescendo. Be careful when making the crescendo not to sacrifice a good, controlled vocal sound. Using this technique at the beginning of held notes will also help to conserve the air, and give a certain lift to the note.

EXAMPLE 2



The exception to a crescendo or decrescendo of a held note is the note that has direction only with an implied dynamic. These notes are usually at ends of sections of a tune, or at the end of the tune itself.

EXAMPLE 3



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RELEASES

It seems to make sense that if a group starts a note together, then the note should logically end together . . . especially at the end of a phrase. A rule of thumb is that in ballads, notes are released on a beat or on an upbeat. Medium groove to medium-up tempo tunes are released on beats only, and up-tempo tunes are released on beats 1 or 2 in cut time. There are, of course, exceptions to each case.

First of all, music publishers or composers usually do not indicate any of the releases. This is due primarily to a cost factor and is somewhat understandable. Whether a note is released on $4\frac{1}{2}$ or 1, the publisher will only provide you with a whole note. You have to determine from your musical experience and education the exact moment at which the release will be made. This musical decision can be made only after answering a few questions. Is there another part beginning before the held note ends? Is the held note at the end of a phrase where there is obviously no time to breathe before the next phrase begins? Is the tune slow enough such that the

release could be on beat $4\frac{1}{2}$? Does the release on $4\frac{1}{2}$ feel natural . . . and musical? And, the most important question . . . What happens musically before and after the release? These and other questions must be taken into consideration before marking releases. After each decision is made, the release marking (-1, -2, etc.) should be placed above the note in the approximate place where the beat would occur. The note is then held right to the beginning of that beat which is marked.

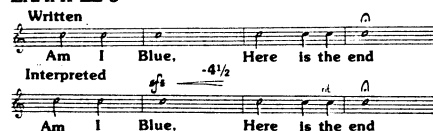
Let's take one each of the three basic tempos, and using 4/4 meter, write-out a couple of examples so that we may visualize how releases can vary.

First, is a ballad with several different release options including a -1, a $-4\frac{1}{2}$, and a -2 in the following measure.

EXAMPLE 4



EXAMPLE 5



EXAMPLE 6



Don't forget to subdivide in each of the above examples. Notice the different treatment of the same phrase in example 5 and example 6. Example 6 is similar in some respects to the old Kenton standard arrangement of **Here's That Rainy Day**.

For medium groove to medium up-tempo tunes, the release is usually on the beat. The reason for this is that it feels awkward to release on the upbeat, plus, at that tempo, it is difficult to be exact on the upbeat releases. If we add the sfz, it will help give the note some direction. When a sfz is added, then a < should also be added. As mentioned earlier the release of the < accompanying the sfz should be at the height of the < and not before. It will take a few rehearsals before releases begin to feel natural and before the group will begin to apply releases to other music.



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EXAMPLE 7

Written
 $d = 120$
 Is Blue Here I go —
Interpreted
 Is Blue Here I go —

EXAMPLE 8

Written
 $d = 120$
 Is Blue Here I
Interpreted
 Is Blue Here I

In example 8, the release on beat 1 helps define the accented half-note coming in on beat 2.

Up-tempo tunes ($d = 120$ or more) are usually felt in 2, not in 4. The faster the tempo, the more the meter should be simplified. The opposite is true also. The slower the tempo, the more complex the meter needs to be (i.e. subdivision). In up tempo tunes it feels awkward and unnatural releasing on 2 or 4, as the tempo is too quick. Thus, releases are on 1 or 2 . . . in cut-time.

EXAMPLE 9

Written
 $d = 120$
 DA
Interpreted
 DA
 1- 2 1- 2 1- 2

BREATH ACCENTS

Breath accents, used sparsely, can add a great deal of individual style to an otherwise bland phrase. Although the breath accent is not normally printed in published music, it can be written in . . . on an upbeat. The breath accent is a vowel sound preceded by the consonant, "h."

EXAMPLE 10

Written
 Interpreted Go ing to the ol'
 Go ing to-(h)o the ol'

EXAMPLE 11

Written **Interpreted**
 Times TI (h)imes

PROGRAMMING

Equally as important as learning rehearsal techniques, directors should be aware of the importance of programming techniques. If a concert is programmed where there is an opportunity to perform 5 or 6 selections, it is important to perform a variety of selections so that the students are exposed to several musical styles. This variety also keeps the audience interested.

Employing jazz improvisation is not necessary on every tune. If a tape is being sent in for an audition, or the vocal jazz group is performing at a vocal jazz festival with a limit of three or four tunes, then music must be selected that represents a variety of styles, plus demonstrates the use of improvisation.

EXAMPLE 12

Six tunes

Up tempo (solid ending)
 Medium-groove
 Ballad
 Contemporary or pop
 Funk
 Up tempo, medium-up
 (strongest ending)

Three tunes

Up tempo or medium-up
 Ballad
 Funk

Four tunes

Up tempo
 Medium-groove
 Ballad
 Funk

Consideration should be given to how you treat your audience psychologically. Don't start or end a program with a ballad, unless it has a really strong ending. Better to begin with a funk, up-tempo, or a strong medium groove. Wake your audience up, then psychologically drop them and

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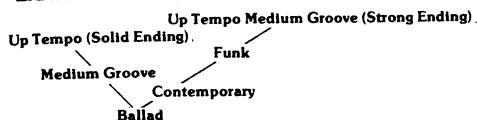
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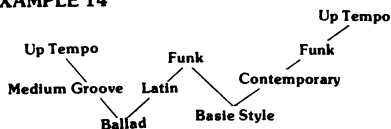
then build them back up toward the end of the program. Your best and strongest tune should be last, and your second strongest tune should be first. If one were to draw a graph, it would look like this:

EXAMPLE 13



If a longer concert is being presented, say 45 minutes to an hour, then you must drop them twice and bring them back up twice.

EXAMPLE 14



The director has a dual responsibility . . . to perform literature that is of educational value to the student, and to provide the audience with an enjoyable, entertaining, and musical concert. Both can be accomplished with proper planning.

RECORDING REHEARSALS

The last rehearsal technique recommended in this particular is for the director to record rehearsals. The reason for this is that even the best director can miss hearing obvious musical problems in rehearsals unless he/she learns to hear the Gestalt. When one is just beginning to rehearse a vocal jazz group, they may hear only certain things . . . the choir flattening, the repetitious sound of the same pattern on the ride cymbal, the bass player playing unmusical lines, problems with diction, etc. By recording the rehearsal, the director has the opportunity to listen to certain phrases over and over again in order to determine what needs to be corrected. Also, by listening to different problem areas over and over, the director's analytical skills begin to improve. Analytical listening and rehearsing as it relates to musicianship is a goal we all strive to reach.

The next several articles will address diction, separated notes, ghost notes, back-accent phrasing, and the controversial issue of vibrato versus non-vibrato. If you would like to see additional areas or techniques discussed, please write me in care of the Jazz Studies Program, University of Nor-

thern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado 80639.

Gene Aitken, Director of the Jazz Studies Program at the University of Northern Colorado, is one of the most exciting, energetic clinicians available today. His enthusiasm never fails to captivate both performers and audiences.

Gene has extensive background as a professional musician, including appearances with performers such as Vicki Carr, Accidentals II, Four Freshmen and Henry Mancini. He has taught in Seattle and Renton, Washington, and Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon, where he was manager of the Eugene Symphony and administrative consultant to the Oregon Arts Commission. Active in numerous professional and

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