

What is the Art of Scat Singing?

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The infamous jazz musician, Jelly Roll Morton (1890 – 1941) once said “scat doesn’t mean anything but just something to give a song flavour.”¹ Scat singing evolved so that jazz vocalists could do more than just sing the lyrics and melody of a song. It is a form of vocal improvisation where a vocalist can imitate an instrument by singing nonsense syllables instead of lyrics and ad lib according to the harmony played underneath the solo. Often the solos will involve scales and arpeggio fragments, like any instrumental improvisation, as well as motifs and different rhythms. Although the definition of scat singing is not debated, its origin, evolution and importance are, prompting the question: what is the art of scat singing?

It is not clear who the first musician to scat was. Many people believe that Louis Armstrong (1901 – 1971) was the first in his recording of ‘Heebie Jeebies’² (1926). Whilst he and his band, the Hot Five³, were recording, Armstrong dropped the lyric sheet so proceeded to scat, singing as though he were playing the trumpet line, to cover his mistake. To his surprise, the band decided to release that version of the song, propelling scat into the spotlight and introducing it to many around the world. Although he can be thanked for making scat well-known, others believe that he was not the first to scat. Some think that Gene Greene (1857 – 1930) was the first to scat with his recording of ‘King of the Bungaloos’⁴ (1911). Greene sang nonsense syllables for two choruses at the end of his signature song and it seems there was no purpose for it other than experimentation and to see how the public reacted to scat on records. It has been suggested that Greene heard scatting from a fellow musician Ben Harney (1872 – 1938) but Harney, unfortunately, never recorded. What is very interesting is that Greene was nicknamed the ‘Ragtime King’ and Harney was also a ragtime singer, suggesting that scat did not originate from jazz but ragtime⁵. Greene’s ragtime style also overlaps with other techniques such as ‘eefing’⁶ once described by the writer Jennifer Sharpe, as “a kind of hiccupping, rhythmic wheeze.”⁷ As his scat singing includes these western bluegrass techniques, it could be said his style of scatting was part of many developments that happened, taking us to the traditional jazz scat as we know it today. Because Greene used bluegrass techniques, from the country genre, it can be argued that Jelly Roll Morton was the first to jazz scat. Though many say this, Morton did pay tribute in the introduction of the ‘Improvised Scat Song’ (1938) to a comedian called Joe Sims from Mississippi who apparently used scat throughout his sketches to create humour. Jelly Roll, as a pioneer of scat, often included it in his performances as a break or bridge between parts of his songs and experimented with syncopation and extreme ranges.

Scat has the broad definition: “improvised jazz singing in which the voice is used in imitation of an instrument”⁸, allowing many vocal techniques to be classed as scat. Recordings and performances of scat vary from artists such as Adelaide Hall (1901 – 1993) and Duke Ellington’s

¹ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNGcczHY7Jo> (8/10/12)

² Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EL7XyME-k8> (8/10/12)

³ The Hot Five was Louis Armstrong’s first jazz recording band led under his own name.

⁴ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpUzYBXcI0M> (8/10/12)

⁵ Ragtime was popular before jazz took over and often played on the piano with distinctive syncopated rhythms. It originated from the Afro-American areas of St Louis and New Orleans in the red-light districts.

⁶ Eefing is an Appalachian vocal technique similar to beat boxing.

⁷ Ref: Sharpe, J (2006) *Jimmie Riddle and the Lost Art of Eefing*. National Public Radio (8/10/12)

⁸ Ref: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/scat--2?q=scat+singing> (8/10/12)

(1899 – 1974) ‘Chicago Stomp Down’⁹ (1928), where similar sounds are made throughout and a smaller range is used, to Ella Fitzgerald’s (1917 – 1996) ‘Blue Skies’¹⁰ (1958), where a more traditional approach to scat singing is taken.

Syllables

One of the most important characteristics of scat singing is syllable use. If the same syllables, for example “du-be” are used too often, they can become repetitive and boring so scat artists must include different types. This is an intricate and integral part of scat and separates the novice scatter from a more seasoned improviser. Adelaide Hall recorded ‘Chicago Stomp Down’ with wordless vocals. The acclaimed critic, Nat Hentoff (1925 - present) described her vocal performance saying “she sounds like a particularly sensitive growl trumpeter”¹¹ due to her harsh timbre and unvaried syllables. From the recordings, it can be heard that the syllables Hall used were all open-ended, for example “huuh” and “vuuuh” rather than the usual, closed “shoo-bap” and “doo-up” that other scatters use. Hall probably used these syllables as they have a close, enabling her to sound like an instrument rather than a singer scatting. Ella Fitzgerald, in ‘Blue Skies’, added scat in between verses of the usual lyrics. Rather than scatting for the whole performance, she scatted for a verse, two bridges and then another verse. Fitzgerald was not trying to impersonate an instrument so she used syllables such as “ba-da-boo” and “shoo-doo-shoo-bee-ooo-bee” which are far more common in scat than Hall’s choice of syllables. Fitzgerald probably chose these syllables as they enable her to differentiate each note and assist her when she goes over her break for example in her quaver runs:

Ex 1: Ella Fitzgerald: ‘Blue Skies’ (March, 1958)¹²

ooh doo un doo un bee ee - ee un doo dee ee un doo da

And triplet patterns:

Ex 2: Ibid.

be do dum dee da be do dum dee do do ya do ya de doo ya dee da

⁹ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXPipzonWvI> (14/10/12)

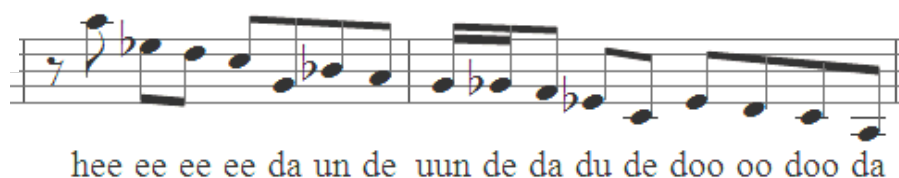
¹⁰ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nB-xqDZbEVQ> (14/10/12)

¹¹ Ref: Perlis, V and Van Cleve, L (2005) *Composer’ Voices from Ives to Ellington: an Oral History of American Music Volume 1*, Yale: Yale University Press.

¹² For full score see Appendix 1.

Fitzgerald could provide more breadth in her scat solos by using a variation of syllables and consonants. Some consonants can be described as soft or hard. For example, if one sang the word ‘ceremony’, the ‘c’ sound would be soft but if one sang ‘coin’, it would be described as hard. Although Fitzgerald obviously does not sing words as she is scatting, she still can vary her soft and hard consonants. She may vary her consonants because of how they affect the larynx, located in the vocal cords. The airflow can be modified depending on which consonant is used, making the sound ‘voiced’ or ‘voiceless’. Fitzgerald might have wanted to use hard consonants as they would not prevent the airflow through her vocal cords, affecting her singing performance. A large amount of air-flow is needed for a warm timbre, long phrases and to reach higher notes, for example:

Ex 3: Ibid.

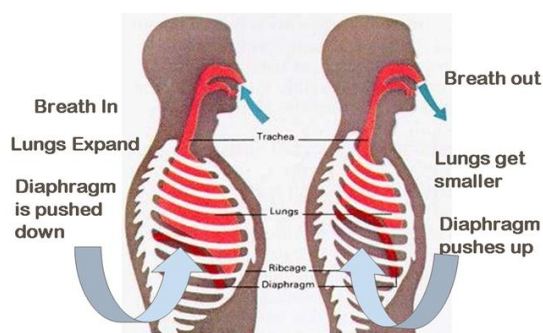


Adelaide Hall may not have used any hard consonants as she was aiming to sound like a brass instrument. This meant that her airflow was not totally cut off whilst singing, as it would be if someone sang ‘cat’ due to the hard ‘c’ (although the airflow does reopen for the vowel). This does not mean that she did not have to think about airflow and her diaphragm though. To enable her to have a harsh timbre and to sound like a brass instrument, Hall ‘growled’ most of the notes she sang. Hall, like Fitzgerald when singing high, needs lots of air because ‘growling’ notes uses more air than singing normally.

Breath Control

To control the airflow and breathe properly, singers need to use their diaphragms. The diaphragm is a dome shaped muscle inserted in the lower ribs which, by expanding and contracting, can increase or decrease the size of the chest cavity.

Ex 4: Diagram of diaphragmatic movement¹³



¹³ Ref: <http://mattotto.org/tag/breathing/> (15/10/12)

The more the diaphragm expands, the more oxygen is breathed in. Breathing using ones diaphragm, as opposed to a quick chest breath, is best for scating because more oxygen can be inhaled and one's airflow can be better controlled, making the sound constant. Because the airflow is then easy to control, dynamics can be contrasting and precise depending on how much air is pushed out by the diaphragm. The throat must be open to allow the air column to pass from the lungs, through the throat and into the mouth. The singer's throat must be opened so wide, it almost feels as though they are yawning. This is very much part of the act of scating because without a large space at the back of the throat, the breath cannot be controlled, preventing high notes from being reached and long phrases being sung. Sarah Vaughan (1924 – 1990) mastered utilising her diaphragm and throat space and thus was able to do long runs whilst exercising the diaphragm to go over her break (from chest register to middle register) and hit high notes such as:

Ex 5: Sarah Vaughan: 'Summertime' (April, 1954)

The image shows a musical score for Sarah Vaughan's 'Summertime'. The notation is on a single staff in G major, 3/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked '13'. The lyrics are: 'di-di-dl-a bu bi du ba du bo di-di-dl-a di ba bi ba-ah dn bi ba-oo dn bi ba,'. Above the staff, the chords are indicated as Dm7, Em7(b5), A7(b9), and Dm7. A red circle highlights a specific note in the melody, which is a G5 (the second line of the staff), occurring on the word 'bi' in the phrase 'di ba bi'. This note is circled because it represents a 'break' in the voice, where the singer transitions from the chest register to the middle register.

Vaughan also helped herself whilst going over the break¹⁴ by singing noises which are closed at the beginning, for example: 'di' and 'ba'. The two notes circled in 'Ex 5' are examples of when Vaughan chose to use those types of consonants. The air-flow must have also been very controlled over this phrase because the high notes need more air than the lower ones and whilst a singer is singing a high note, the diaphragm must feel tight and held. To make her voice sound constant, Vaughan probably used her diaphragm to drive more air from her lungs through the high triplet notes and then relaxed and so less air flowed through for the lower notes.

Breath control is also needed when artists scat to imitate instruments. Instrumentalists have to utilise their diaphragms as often their phrasing is long and, like singers, they need a stronger air-flow for higher notes. When Louis Armstrong scats a chorus in 'Hotter Than That'¹⁵ (1927), it sounds as though he imitates his trumpet playing, using soft consonants such as 'z's and 's's. His trumpet solos are known for being virtuosic and characteristics from his instrumental solos can be found in this scat solo. Although Armstrong's voice is much lower than the pitch of his trumpet, the solos sound similar due to riffs he includes, comparable rips up to high notes and fast vibrato at the end of long notes. Being a trumpeter, Armstrong would have been skilled at breath control for long and short phrases. Using his diaphragm whilst playing and scating, Armstrong was able to extend notes rather than shorten them to create room to breathe. This enabled him to make his solos very diverse as long notes, such as minims, could be contrasted with staccato notes and short, sharp stabs¹⁶. The diaphragm is also used for stabs because they

¹⁴ The break in the voice is between the chest register and the middle register. When singing between the two registers, the voice can crack and this is what is known as the break.

¹⁵ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAlrpx40UnE> (17/10/12)

¹⁶ Stabs are short, precise notes, often accented.

are usually accented. To accent a note, a scatter must push and tense the diaphragm, so the air-flow is forced from the lungs faster, creating a louder and more focussed sound.

Breath control also gives scatters the option to use vibrato¹⁷. Vibrato became popular in the Romantic period of classical music due to the desire to create emotion through song. Since then a few types of vibrato have emerged, giving scatters many options to choose from, for example diaphragmatic (or abdominal) vibrato. Diaphragmatic vibrato is made by pulsations stimulated by the abdominal muscles. In order to begin these pulsations, the abdominal muscles must be firm and taut. The pulses go through the vocal cords, creating slight fluctuation in pitch and volume which can be changed depending on the speed or width of the vibrato generated. This type of vibrato feels effortless on throat muscles and vocal cords so some vocal teachers have claimed that it is natural. This has been disproved though as many singers have the ability to distort and change their vibrato as well as stop it all together on certain notes. Diaphragmatic vibrato is the most common vibrato used by scatters due to its versatility and timbre.

Another type of vibrato is vocal cord vibrato, generally not recommended for most singing. It is achieved by 'fluttering' the vocal cords so much so that the sound produced can be likened to a machine gun due to its rapid 'on and off' quality. This type of vibrato is generally used in Middle Eastern music, making it unusual for scatters to ever include it in solos. Vocal cord vibrato also sounds like a rapid laugh or sheep 'baah-ing', so it could be used for humour in scat solos. Throat vibrato, although not as prevalent as diaphragmatic vibrato, is often used in scatting. The larynx is manipulated by throat muscles to move up and down, creating fluctuations in pitch. The speed of the vibrato can be easily changed by using the muscles; making it a useful type of vibrato for solos. Unfortunately, the throat muscles, when using this vibrato, can become fatigued and the voice can become overworked and hoarse, so scatters choose carefully when they use it. Throat vibrato is most commonly used when scatters imitate instruments during their solos. The renowned vocalist, Billie Holiday (1915 – 1959), used this type of vibrato often and she once said: "I don't feel like I'm singing, I feel like I'm playing the horn."¹⁸ As these types of vibrato are so different many scatters decide to include all three types in their solos, rather than just one type, to create variety and make their solos more interesting to listen to.

Harmony and Improvisation

Scat is usually sung by solo singers. Breaking this trend, the Boswell Sisters, fronted by Connie Boswell (1907 – 1976), scatted in harmony – a highly complex technique to master. The Boswell Sisters were never 'scat singers' but when singing in close harmony, they often imitated horns and other brass instruments using nonsense syllables, a characteristic of scat singing. Scat singing as a group is particularly complicated because all the vowels and syllables must be sung in the same way by each singer. As well as this, they must still sing the right notes so that the harmonies work. The Boswell Sisters employed this technique in their version of 'It Don't Mean A Thing'¹⁹ (1932). Obviously, as the three sisters were singing the same rhythms and syllables, the scat must have been

¹⁷ Ref: <http://borntosing.com/VIBRATO.html> (17/10/12)

¹⁸ Ref: Jones, H (1974) *Big Star Fallin' Mama: Five Women in Black Music*, New York: Viking Juvenile.

notated and learnt before performances; it could not have been improvised. Notated scat poses a problem as the definition of scat clearly states that the solos are made up of “improvised ... syllables”, so can notated scat really be classed as scat at all? It can be argued that it should be, as although the solos are not “improvised”, they are still made up of “meaningless syllables.” Others argue that these notated solos cannot be categorised as scat because they do not fulfil the art’s definition; instead they should just be regarded as jazz singing.

Improvised scatting in a group sounds quite different from notated scat. This is not common because the overall sound can begin to come across as ‘messy’ and uncoordinated. Even Louis Armstrong, who was a great fan of instrumental collective improvisation, never tried to improvise group scatting, suggesting that he did not like its effect. Although others might think improvised group scatting does sound good, it would never have become an integral part of traditional scat because pioneers, such as Armstrong, did not use it. There are situations where scatters include antiphony in their solos, dueting with either another vocalist or an instrumentalist. This means that they know how many bars they will solo for and the structure, but the solos are usually still improvised. An example would be when Armstrong duets with Lonnie Johnson (1899 – 1970), the guitarist, in the third chorus of ‘Hotter Than That’ (1927). The soloists react with each other and sometimes mimic each other’s rhythms or motifs. If a scatter is responding to an instrument, as Armstrong was, they may choose to imitate that instrument’s sound for example Armstrong may have copied the guitarist’s timbre. In some cases though, the scat artist may decide to focus solely on rhythms and melody and not change their timbre. Another example of antiphony is when Mel Torme (1925 – 1999) and Ella Fitzgerald presented an award at the Grammys in 1976 by scatting²⁰. At 2:16 mins in the YouTube video, Fitzgerald sings a descending phrase, straight away copied by Torme who mimics her syllable choice and tone as well as the descending pattern. This is effective because the chords change underneath but the motif still works and it reinforces the antiphony between them.

Obviously harmony is extremely important for scat artists because their solos are based upon the chords accompanying them. Whether scat artists are scatting in a group or as a soloist, knowing and understanding the chords is imperative to the art because without it the notes will clash and the scat will not work or sound musical. Normally, a scat artist will improvise their solo but as this is not an option for groups, especially when scatting in harmony, scat notations are accepted. It is best however, if it still encompasses features such as unexpected syncopated²¹ sections and sounds improvised so that it sounds musically impulsive.

Range

To create diversity in solos and to make their scats different from others, scatters often use extremes of ranges whilst scatting. Sarah Vaughan improvised a scat in the middle of her version of ‘All of Me’²² and experimented utilising her range. Some phrases use a huge range for example:

²⁰ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBBj4df1c-o> (19/10/12)

²¹ To syncopate is to displace the beats or accents in (music or a rhythm) so that strong beats become weak and vice versa.

²² Ref: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_JgVkqrpA4 (19/10/12)

Ex 6: Sarah Vaughan: 'All of Me' (1954)



This phrase's range spans over more than two octaves, allowing Vaughan to demonstrate different timbres. The first and lowest note Vaughan sings is in her chest register, so the sound resonates in her chest. This deep, rich timbre is very different to the timbre of the second note circled. The second circled note is sung in Vaughan's head register, giving it a brighter and warmer sound than the chest voice notes. She may have also used this large range to make the song more exciting for her listeners. The melody of 'All of Me', like many songs, only uses a small range so Vaughan's scat solo is an opportunity for her to create variety in the song and show off her large range as a singer. In contrast to this phrase, Vaughan also includes phrases which only include one or two notes.

Ex 7: Ibid.



These two bars contrast with Ex 6, shown above. Vaughan, like many jazz improvisers, focusses on either interesting rhythms or interesting melodies. Ex 7. is a classic example of interesting rhythms being made the main focus for the listeners with the mix of swung triplets and quavers. Successful scat solos often include similar characteristics to instrumental jazz solos, which Vaughan captures here. Ex 7. shows the two bars before Ex 6. and is a great example of how rhythmically prominent bars can be effectively used when next to virtuosic bars. The simple chromatically descending phrase makes the next phrase a surprise because the listener is not expecting a virtuosic, melodic phrase which uses a totally different range. This is what the two phrases look like together:

Ex 8: Ibid.



When seen as a whole, the contrast is very noticeable. Vaughan was a master of drawing listeners in; she uses the first 2 bars to create suspense whilst emphasising rhythm and then with

the ascending phrase reaching high into the top of her vocal range, she culminates. This type of phrasing is commonly used in scat because it adds diversity and ‘highs and lows’ to solos, important to make them interesting to listen to. Vaughan, in ‘All of Me’, was purely using her voice to make beautiful melodies rather than trying to emulate a particular instrument so solo’s range was dictated by her vocal limitations.

Alternatively, a scat artist can imitate an instrument throughout their solo, so the range used in a solo may depend on the particular instrument being imitated. If a soloist chose to imitate a double bass, then the notes used in the solo would be limited to the lower part of their range but if they tried to mimic a flute, then the range used would be much higher. The instruments imitated most in scat solos are the horn, trumpet or saxophone. This is evident in many of Louis Armstrong’s solos where he emulates a trumpet and the vocal trio Lambert Hendricks and Ross. In one of Lambert Hendrix and Ross’ performances of ‘Airegin’²³ (1958), Hendricks takes a solo and can be seen, in the YouTube footage, to be physically miming playing a saxophone whilst scatting. It is obvious from the footage that miming the instrument helped him mimic the sound of a saxophone whilst he improvised. Embodying the instrument into his solos as much as he did, Hendricks probably stuck rigidly to the range of an alto saxophone, effecting what notes and motifs he used throughout his improvisation.

Whether scat artists dictate the ranges of their solos by phrases of builds and climaxes, imitating an instruments’ range or using extremes to boast their talents, the key to the art is being able to sing all the notes without straining and carefully choose notes which suit the song and create melodic phrases.

Structure

Many scat artists will sing a verse and chorus of the song, scat for a while and then sing the rest of the song. Ella Fitzgerald demonstrates this in ‘Blues Skies’ as she scats two bridges²⁴ worth of material before reverting back to the chorus of the song. This structure is commonly used when singing traditional jazz songs because it differentiates versions from others and adds excitement to songs for listeners who have heard the classics many times before. Another common structure is where the song as a whole is sung normally and then the singer scats the outro²⁵. The scatting is usually more carefree and relaxed than some which may be sung in the middle of a song because the song is calming to the end. Of course, this may not be the case if the singer wants to end the song by a climax. The difference may be the range in which they sing – higher for a climax, lower for gentle, fading ending – or the length and speed of the notes and phrases used. As well as parts of a song involving scat, another option is to scat the entire song. Ella Fitzgerald does this in ‘One Note Samba’²⁶ (1969), improvising around the chords played by pianist Tommy Flanagan (1930 – 2001). The structure is not strict and changes can only be determined through the piano accompaniment which follows the improvising voice. Because the whole song is scat, Fitzgerald varied the structure of her phrasing to create variation so not to bore the listeners. It is clear from the recording that

²³ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UI54NWmwLxs> (24/10/12)

²⁴ A bridge is a contrasting section which prepares for the return of the original material section.

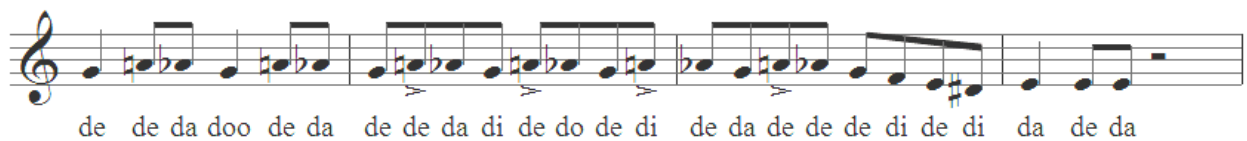
²⁵ An outro is a passage that concludes a piece of music.

²⁶ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbL9vr4Q2LU> (24/10/12)

Fitzgerald hardly stuck to the actual melody of the song but used humour and included phrases and motifs from other songs. An example would be when she sings a quote from ‘A-Tisket, A-Tasket’²⁷ (1938). The listeners recognise it immediately as one of her well-known songs and find it amusing that she included it into this long scat.

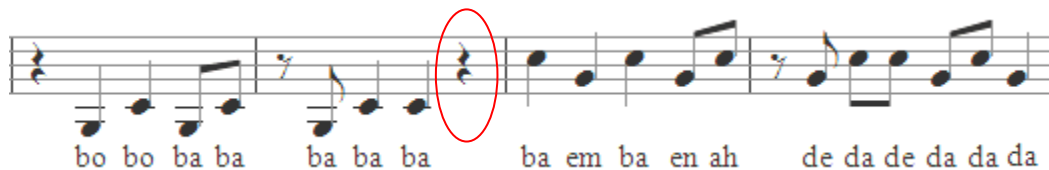
The structure of scat also includes the structure of individual phrases. An obvious factor that contributes to how phrases are formed is breathing and when breaths should be taken. A scat artist may decide to have one long phrase without a breath and then have a longer break of two beats or more to prepare for the next phrase. An example of this type of phrase is:

Ex 9: Ella Fitzgerald: ‘Blue Skies’ (March, 1958)



Of course the actual length of note needed for a breath depends on the tempo of the piece, but in the example shown, the tempo is allegro and so two beats would be needed for a decent intake of oxygen using the diaphragm. In contrast to this, there are phrases in which there is only a small amount of time to breathe and so more breaths need to be taken to compensate meaning there must be more rests. Fitzgerald also has phrases like these in ‘Blue Skies’.

Ex 10: Ibid.



Fitzgerald must ‘snatch’ breaths during the crotchets and quavers. The crotchet rest circled is the crucial breath because Fitzgerald needs to inhale enough air to take her to the higher notes. The other type of structure to be analysed is the structure of each phrase: which notes are used and what rhythms are used. Fitzgerald uses the same two notes in the first two bars and then uses them an octave higher, varying the rhythms and order of the notes. This is a common way scat artists structure their phrasing because it is much easier finding two or three notes that do not clash with the chords being played underneath (the notes will usually be part of the triad) than five or six. As well as this, the repetitiveness of the notes can provide different emphasis depending on whether the notes are on or off the beat, helping build the tension and excitement during a solo. Repetition is embedded in jazz improvisation due to the African-American influence of call and response. Louis Armstrong was one of the first to introduce this into both his trumpet and vocal improvisation and since then it has flourished, becoming an integral part of jazz improvisation. The structure of scat solos often depends on the chord structure of song and

²⁷ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUYpUogn91U> (24/10/12)

where the scat has been inserted in the song. Different scat artists prefer different structures, from strict structures to structures which have no order or repetition, offering a breadth of variety.

Scat in the Modern Era

Scat is often categorised as an art that only featured when jazz was very popular during 1910 – 1970 due to big names such as Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong who thrust it into the spotlight. Once these artists died, many thought scat died along with them but the art continued into modern day? It can be argued that the popular art of beatboxing²⁸ is a modern form of scat because “improvised, meaningless syllables” are used. It can also be argued that they are not related because beatboxing does not include singing a melody, as scat singing does. Naturally 7 is a recent a cappella group that consists only of male voices, who released their first album in 2000. They use their voices to imitate instruments such as a bass or drum kit as well as singing melodies in harmony with lyrics. ‘Fly Baby’²⁹ (2006) is an example of their style and shows how scat is included in their songs. As each member imitates a different instrument, they all use different ranges, syllables and consonants, making their style a form of scat. Their modern approach allows them to scat in a hip-hop style, as well as jazz, and demonstrates how scat can be versatile in the popular music styles of modern day. Scat has also been included in modern music in its traditional, jazz form. The contemporary jazz singer Melody Gardot (1985 – present) scats in her original song ‘Who Will Comfort Me’³⁰ (2009) in a way that most would recognise as regular scat. It is clear from the recordings that she has used techniques that artists, such as Betty Carter (1929 – 1998), used in their work and wanted to reiterate the skills in her own songs. Whether 21st century scat artists have employed the same techniques as older artists or whether they have interpreted these skills to create contemporary works, they will all have been influenced by the first pioneers of scat. Techniques have been passed down to the new generation of scat artists by means of recordings and footage of live performances, shaping how scat is performed in modern day. Even more unconventional forms of scat, for example beatboxing, have been influenced by the Big Band era of scat. Phrase shaping, breath control and motifs have all been used in modern music, keeping the art of scatting relevant today.

Source Evaluation

Throughout my research, YouTube was definitely the most useful source I used. I found it beneficial because it allowed me to access recordings and footage from years ago, which cannot be found anywhere else. Because so many people have uploaded videos of scat singing, I was able to compare the recordings, finding the ones with the best quality and which demonstrated the type or technique of scatting I was discussing under each heading. I was also able to notate scat solos from the recordings on YouTube. I used these diagrams throughout my EPQ in order to help me explain the art better. As well as YouTube, I found the Oxford Dictionary of English

²⁸ Beatboxing is the practice of using one’s mouth, lips, tongue and voice as a percussive instrument to create beats, rhythms and melodies for mainly hip hop music.

²⁹ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNJlhtNpuiU&feature=youtu.be> (26/10/12)

³⁰ Ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKDj-OVJ6hc> (26/10/12)

useful. I had a lot of terminology to explain in footnotes, for example the technique of ‘eefing’, which many are not familiar with. The Oxford Dictionary of English is an extremely reliable source because it is well respected throughout the world, rather than just by the United Kingdom. In contrast to this I found that many of the websites I found, which explained scatting, expressed different views about things such as the history of scat. For example, there were contrasting beliefs about who was first to scat. This became confusing and I had to reason and compare websites to decipher between what was fact from personal opinion. It appears that not many people have studied scat singing before, limiting the amount of books and journals available to me. The books that I found were quite general and did not discuss scat singing in the depth that I needed for this piece of work. This restricted me to primarily using websites and did not allow me to vary my use of sources throughout my EPQ.

Conclusion

Categorising scat singing is challenging because it has many variations and has evolved over decades. Jazz scatting does not seem as precise as other genres of music, such as classical music, so how can it be labelled? It obviously has a definition and there are main techniques, such as nonsense syllables that solos must contain to make them scat, but scat singing has freedom. It allows people to express themselves; categorising it any further would spoil the beauty of the art. Scat singing, therefore, is more complex than the ear perceives. Jazz musicians, validated by the esteemed journal *The Scientist*, use complex brain signals whilst improvising because they must do many things at once. Musicians must work out the notes in the chords, choose rhythms and phrases which complement the accompaniment and form the solo’s structure instantaneously. Scat artists have even more to think about because, unlike instrumentalists, they must also make sure their pitching is right. Mel Torme, whilst being interviewed about scat, said, “Scat singing is a very, very specialised art, because you've got to have musicians' ears ... a singer is always concentrating on intonation ... that's what separates the wheat from the chaff.”³¹ An experienced scat artist like Torme understood that scatting is not just nonsense syllables pieced together randomly, but a difficult skill to acquire because an artist has to accustom their brain receptors to the speed of improvisation as well as their vocal cords. Although this training helps, he also recognised that musicality is essential to become a skilled scat artist. This leads to the conclusion that the art of scat, although very technical, is not simply one that can be learnt in a classroom, but one which needs talent, practise and musicianship to master.

³¹ Ref: <http://www.csmonitor.com/1981/0812/081200.html> (24/10/12)

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