

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

**Skoo-Bee-Dee-Boo-Bop-Scat:  
The Impacts of Vocal Jazz Improvisational Techniques on the Secondary Choral Student  
and Secondary Choral Program**

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of the “School of Music”  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
“Doctor of Music Education”

by

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By Sara Beth Carroll

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APPROVED BY

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## **Abstract**

Despite evidence that vocal jazz improvisation techniques are valuable tools for increased ear training and vocal technique knowledge, the specific impacts of vocal jazz training for the secondary school chorister have yet to be fully expressed. The singing and musicianship benefits of improvisational techniques matter because they impact the young choral singer and the individual student experience in and contribution to the school choir program. This study expressed the impacts of vocal jazz improvisational pedagogy for the secondary school vocalist as a member of the school choir program and the individual student musician. Guided by Eisner's model of arts-based research, this qualitative grounded theory research study, as prescribed by Creswell, explored diverse viewpoints concerning the pedagogical and educational benefits of exposing secondary school choir students to vocal jazz improvisational techniques. Perspectives on the benefits of vocal jazz improvisational training have developed through a body of existing literature. To illustrate the benefits of vocal jazz improvisational techniques, this study reflected on the experiences seen in the literature. This study combined a qualitative grounded theory research model including surveys of music educators and bespoke interviews with field experts. The study results showed that students who are given the opportunity to explore vocal jazz improvisation exhibit enhanced musical skills, increased performance bravery, and a broader cultural perspective. In the appendices, the researcher included a collection of vocal jazz improvisational exercise templates for use in the field. Additionally, the researcher also developed a vocal jazz improvisation listening guide for emerging jazz vocalists and a collection of existing instructional videos. These resources are also included in the appendices. This study and appendix resources could advance music education training for future music educators and increase the preparedness of choral teachers through the use of jazz pedagogy.

## **Dedication**

Firstly, I would like to thank my incredible committee chair, Dr. Brian Stiffler, whose patience, prayer, and dedication to research enabled me to complete this project. Secondly, I am very thankful for my reader Dr. Monica Taylor, whose expertise was greatly appreciated throughout this process. Thank you to all my professors in this doctoral program who provided me with excellent instruction, encouragement, and training. Thank you to my graduate cohort for being part of this journey together. Thank you to the Liberty University staff and administration for your work supporting the students in your care. Thank you to my mentors, Dr. Todd Shiver, Dr. Gary Weidenaar, Professor Vijay Singh, Dr. Gayla Blaisdell, and Mrs. Megan Goranson, for always believing that I would one day be Dr. Carroll, and for instilling in me the importance of practice, patience, and passion in my craft as a musician, scholar, and educator. Thank you, Vijay, Stacia, and Brennan, for allowing me to interview you. Thank you, Central Washington University and Liberty University for being the institutions that helped to shape me into the music educator I am today. Thank you to my University of Tennessee School of Music colleagues for supporting me in my work while I finished pursuing this doctorate. Thank you, dear Carroll Family: Paul, SandraLynn, Beckie, Rachel, Emily, and Jonathan. Without all of you standing by me, cheering me on, and constantly pointing me back to the Lord, this would have been impossible. Thank you to all my dear friends and colleagues who have encouraged me along the way. And most importantly, I want to thank my Lord and Savior for stirring in me the desire to pursue this doctorate and follow the path He has set before me. I want to dedicate this doctoral thesis to my students: past, present, and future. I love this work and strongly believe in music education's power. Vocal jazz has enriched my life, and I hope to see it continue to enrich the lives of my students and that of my community.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

The use of vocal jazz improvisational techniques significantly benefits the secondary school choir student when taught carefully and effectively during the rehearsal process. This chapter defines the importance of vocal jazz improvisational techniques for secondary school choir student and the secondary choral program. Improvisation is used regularly in jazz ensembles, but this study examined how improvisational techniques can be used throughout the choral program and in vocal training to improve a voice student's overall musicianship skills, including ear training, sight-reading, creativity, and confidence. While improvisation to the untrained ear or unfamiliar musician may seem like chaotic and useless nonsense, vocal improvisation deeply enhances the skills and creativity of the vocalist. Daniel Healy and his colleagues explain that “[a]t its heart, improvisation first fosters *divergent thinking* (thinking that does not have a clear-cut right/wrong answer but generates many possible solutions) as a creative activity, and second, it is a musical journey toward the student finding his musical personality.”<sup>1</sup> The musician must avoid the pressure to sing perfectly and approach singing with more freedom and personal style. While eager musicians attend concerts to observe techniques, gain ideas, and listen to recordings of great jazz artists, young musicians often learn to approach improvisation in their school music programs. Authors Healy and Ankney assert that improvisation experiences often originate in the school rehearsal space. They explain that “[t]oday, for those who seek to continue developing their skills in jazz improvisation, musicians will gain inimitable

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel J. Healy and Kimberly Lansinger Ankney, *Music Discovery: Improvisation for the Large Ensemble and Music Classroom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 37.

experience beyond the walls of the academic classroom but will likely cultivate their initial proficiencies within the rehearsal room.”<sup>2</sup> The choral classroom is the birthplace of much vocal jazz singing for the young singer, making the choral director responsible for introducing and cultivating this singing style. This “cognitive process of improvisation in jazz—and in life—can be conceived of as a form of inner sense-making, an explorative higher-level making-sense of the direct possibilities of what the situation could be made into.”<sup>3</sup> Music teachers who engage in vocal jazz improvisation invite students into a cognitive process with the potential to increase their exploration.

### **Background of Topic**

Improvisation allows the musician to express those inner thoughts and feelings appropriately and tangibly outwardly. More importantly, Torrance and Schumann say that “at the heart of an improviser’s expertise (and indeed, of day-to-day living) lies the spontaneous creation of novel forms of agentive goal-directedness.”<sup>4</sup> Improvisation may appear to the untrained ear as random nonsense. Still, to the skilled musician, vocal improvisation results from a calculated and disciplined study resulting in a genuinely free expression in the moment. One scholar questions the improvisational phenomenon in this way: “adopting this epistemological perspective can help with the pedagogical challenge of melodic fluency in improvisation—given all the harmonic

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<sup>2</sup> Guro Gravem Johansen, Kari Holdhus, Christina Larsson, and Una MacGlone, eds., *Expanding the Space for Improvisation Pedagogy in Music: A Transdisciplinary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2019), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Torrance and Frank Schumann, “The Spur of the Moment: What Jazz Improvisation Tells Cognitive Science,” *AI & Society* 34, no. 2 (2019): 265.

<sup>4</sup> Torrance and Schumann, “The Spur of the Moment,” 266.

options provided by the changes, how does one sing, what does one choose to say?"<sup>5</sup> From the lens of music education, it is through thorough and strategic curricula of extensive listening, quality ear training, careful transcriptions, and copious vocal practice that young jazz vocalists become more comfortable expressing themselves through scat, or vocal jazz improvisation. Scholar Saraydarian suggests that "[i]mprovised musical performance (as much other human action) is characterized by a tension between "fast" and "slow" thinking processes: in-the-moment composition often requires rapid, pre-conscious, intuitive processing, while players will also need to monitor and control performance using slower, conscious, deliberative, or mindfully engaged processing."<sup>6</sup> Musicians must manage both listening and responding to what they hear in real-time.

### **Statement of Problem**

Choral music students may not have equal opportunities to experience vocal jazz improvisational training, practice, or performance as their instrumental counterparts. Additionally, researchers have yet to discern the benefits of the vocal jazz pedagogical approach in the choral classroom to their full extent. In the current canon of literature, the specific benefits of vocal jazz improvisational techniques for the secondary school vocalist and the secondary school choral program are unknown. Torrance and Schumann remind teachers that "[c]horal pedagogy sources provide a strong foundation on this history of the choral ensemble, philosophy, recruiting, working with adolescent voices, selecting repertoire, classroom management,

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<sup>5</sup> Garo W. Saraydarian, "Space is the Place": Thinking through a Place-Based Pedagogy for Jazz Improvisation," *Jazz Education in Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (Spring, 2021): 157.

<sup>6</sup> Torrance and Schumann, "The Spur of the Moment," 258.

rehearsal technique, and organizing performances."<sup>7</sup> However, researchers need more information regarding vocal jazz pedagogy and the benefits and impacts of improvisational work in the secondary school choir program and the secondary choral educator. Vocal jazz researcher Lara Marie Moline suggests that "[i]t takes teachers' knowledge of pedagogy and content and an ability to respond in the moment to create improvisational experiences to foster musical growth."<sup>8</sup> This study may help teachers ascertain the benefits of vocal jazz pedagogy at the secondary level, the impact on student growth, and the growth of choral activities.

Improvisation highly engages the voice and the brain of the musician. Using Creswell and Creswell's concept of research gap identification, this unique study exhibited a new way of approaching the topic.<sup>9</sup> Some literature referenced the background of vocal jazz improvisation and its impact on the secondary school vocalist and the secondary school choir program. However, researchers have yet to ask this question in this specific manner. The existing research is significant regarding the use of improvisation by the developing musician. This research surveyed the missing link between jazz training and the secondary choir program. This study's research question is compelling because it requests the specific benefits of utilizing vocal jazz improvisational techniques through a music education pedagogy lens and seeks to discern the direct impact of this training on the secondary school choir program.

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<sup>7</sup> Lara Marie Moline. "Vocal Jazz in the Choral Classroom: A Pedagogical Study" (DMA thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2019), 11, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>8</sup> Healy and Ankney, *Music Discovery*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 135.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This qualitative research used a grounded theory research design to explore and understand the impacts of vocal jazz improvisational teaching for the secondary choral student and the secondary choral program. This study was based on a qualitative research framework. In response to the need for increased musicianship skills in secondary choral programs through the use of vocal jazz techniques, this study aimed to serve as a resource to future and current music educators on how to capitalize on specific vocal pedagogical training using vocal jazz improvisational techniques. These techniques are for the benefit of increasing musicianship skills and confidence in secondary school choral students and choral programs.

### **Research Questions**

Central Research Question: What benefits come from teaching choral students how to utilize vocal jazz improvisational techniques in their practice?

Secondary Research Question 1: Do secondary students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational training perform better overall in choir?

Secondary Research Question 2: Do secondary choir teachers possess the necessary training when entering the field to effectively teach these techniques?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher used a qualitative research methodology to examine the broader concept of vocal jazz improvisational techniques and their impact on individuals and programs. Creswell and Creswell explain that the qualitative research method relies "on text and image data, ha[s]

unique steps in data analysis, and draw[s] on diverse designs."<sup>10</sup> This study aimed to determine the impacts of utilizing vocal jazz improvisational techniques in the secondary choral classroom. Specifically, this study gathered data on patterns from professional peer-reviewed material to determine theories around the impacts of exposure to vocal jazz improvisational techniques in the secondary choir program. Additionally, this study presented information regarding the benefits of teaching vocal jazz improvisational techniques to secondary choral students. "This larger picture is not necessarily a linear model of cause and effect but rather a model of multiple factors interacting differently. Qualitative researchers would say this picture mirrors real life and how events operate in the real world."<sup>11</sup> This study mirrors life in the real world as it closely examined the process of improvisational vocal techniques in the secondary classroom and its impact. Using Creswell and Creswell's qualitative method<sup>12</sup>, this data collection establishes the necessary connections between vocal jazz improvisation pedagogy and the benefit of these techniques in the world of secondary music education, contributing to the gap in the research with music education literature and pedagogical practice. This qualitative approach is the most appropriate for this study as it allows for evaluating existing research and shaping the aspect of this design through the research question and process.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, this study used Creswell's grounded theory research design. According to Creswell and Poth, "[t]he intent of a grounded theory study is to move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 135.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>14</sup> John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018), 82.

This study examined the specific impacts of teaching vocal jazz improvisation techniques on the secondary choral student and secondary choral program to determine a theory regarding the use of vocal jazz improvisational techniques in the secondary choral program.

### **Significance of Study**

For several reasons, this study is vital for improving practices within the music education field. Firstly, there are defined improvements or impacts in secondary choral programs due to teaching vocal jazz improvisation techniques. In that case, this information could inspire secondary choral educators to include these techniques in their teaching. Secondly, there is a defined improvement or impact in secondary choral programs due to teaching vocal jazz improvisational techniques. If there is a noticeable improvement, the results of this research may induce university music education preparatory programs to include more vocal jazz training for their music education majors. Thirdly, if there is defined improvement or impact in secondary choral programs as a result of teaching vocal jazz improvisational techniques, more students in more schools may gain exposure to the training and increase their musical and jazz literacy, experience improved ear training, and experience enhanced sight-reading in choral classes.

Vocal jazz improvisation is unique because “jazz improvisation can mean many things to singers. To some, it is simply scat singing. To others, it is making up a new melody on a familiar song, changing the rhythmic phrasing with a melody, or adjusting the timbre of one’s voice to create new textures. Often, it is a combination of all of these elements. In today’s world, this can become confusing to young singers.”<sup>15</sup> The proposed research questions have been answered

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<sup>15</sup> Jan Shapiro, *So You Want to Sing Jazz: A Guide for Professionals* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 129-130, ProQuest Ebook Central.

through a qualitative research method using existing literature to discover accurate information, perspectives, frameworks, ideologies, and implications of the research regarding vocal jazz improvisation in high school choral programs. The researcher examined this material for connecting themes regarding the impact of vocal improvisation training in high school students, such as ear training, sight-reading, musicality, and other impacts, as well as how these direct various systems within music education. The considerations mentioned above are a qualitative collection of data guided by the creation and presentation of improvisation exercises for use by educators and singers. This study's findings further revealed how improvisational exercises directly contribute to the research gap and may provide current and future vocal music educators with information regarding the benefits of vocal jazz improvisational training and specific tools. The goal of this study was to highlight these pedagogical gaps to increase the training and effectiveness in this area of music education.

### **Definitions**

Ensemble – a musical group of multiple musicians directed by a professional director who learn and perform music together.

Improvisation – to make something up on the spot; to sing something brand new; to sing a new melody using words, syllables, or a combination of these sounds.

Pedagogy – the art of teaching; the practice of effectively teaching a specific skill or group of skills.

Scat – nonsense syllables used during jazz improvisation singing; syllables sung by the voice to emulate various instruments, altering the original melodic and rhythmic patterns.<sup>16</sup>

Secondary School – a school intermediate between elementary school and college and usually offering general, technical, vocational, or college-preparatory courses.<sup>17</sup>

Choir – a vocal ensemble consisting of multiple singers, led by a professional director, whether accompanied or unaccompanied by a collaborative pianist.

Vocal Jazz Choir – a vocal ensemble in which students sing jazz arrangements, whether on-mic or off, typically with live accompaniment of a jazz rhythm section consisting of piano, drums, and bass.

Vocalese – a vocal exercise designed to enhance flexibility through the voice; a vocal passage using various syllables to encourage vocal dexterity and even breath support, lyrics are delivered in the style of instrumental solos.<sup>18</sup>

### Chapter Summary

In conclusion, choral music students may not have equal opportunities to experience vocal jazz improvisational training, practice, or performance as their instrumental counterparts. This qualitative research study used a grounded theory research design to explore and understand the benefits of vocal jazz improvisational teaching for the secondary choral student and the secondary choral program. The potential benefits of this study include understanding the impacts

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<sup>16</sup> Shapiro, *So You Want to Sing Jazz*, 130.

<sup>17</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “secondary school,” accessed March 18, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secondary%20school>.

<sup>18</sup> Shapiro, *So You Want to Sing Jazz*, 130.

of vocal jazz improvisation teaching for secondary choral students and programs, increased awareness of these impacts, and increased teaching of these methods in choral classrooms. This chapter identified a gap in the research regarding vocal jazz improvisational techniques as the tool to improve musicianship skills, creativity, and confidence in secondary choral students both in an individual soloist context and in the choral ensemble program context.

While there is undoubtedly a shift toward vocal jazz literacy in today's world as opposed to years past, there is still a great deal of progress to be made in music education, encompassing a more thorough, diverse, and multicultural understanding of music literacy. Torrance and Schumann suggest music education has evolved greatly, saying that, "[t]oday European and North American music departments and conservatoires are much more likely to include improvisation as a core part of the curriculum than they were, say, forty years ago."<sup>19</sup> While this is an excellent step toward jazz literacy and jazz educator preparation, it is only one movement toward music literacy and not a complete solution. Improvisational pedagogical training is needed for choral music educators and the process of including improvisational techniques in the choral program, whether in the vocal jazz ensemble context or the traditional choir context.

Choral music educators need to approach this training with the personal growth of their students in mind. Daniel Healy and his colleagues explain, "[w]hen music teachers aim to see the individual and make a note of her growth, they are better prepared to respond to student learning in meaningful ways."<sup>20</sup> Student growth is significant and increases through vocal jazz improvisational techniques. The process of coaching a student up through the process of building a scat solo, from listening to a tune, humming along to the melody or instrumental solo, moving

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<sup>19</sup> Torrance and Schumann, "The Spur of the Moment," 259.

<sup>20</sup> Healy and Ankney, *Music Discovery*, 38.

into various syllables, listening to the chord progression for context, then eventually creating an entire improvised scat solo provides so much valuable training for the student including strong listening skills, ear training, collaboration, creativity, and confidence. Healy and Ankney further encourage teachers that, “[a]s students are on a road to personal discovery with their musicianship through improvisation, teachers need to keep the students’ unique voices in mind.”<sup>21</sup> That process is crucial for this method of vocal jazz pedagogical techniques to be successful for the choral student and program. One scholar explains that “the pedagogy of improvisation can also develop cognitive improvisational skills that could be applied in a wide range of contexts including the well-established jazz language, the free-improvisation language, and any non-idiomatic improvisation that may apply musical material from various sources such as the vast language of twentieth-century harmony.”<sup>22</sup> Students who possess the tools to improvise may become more musically adept than they would without this pedagogical training.

Based on the background and impacts of vocal jazz improvisational techniques discussed in this chapter, the following problem remains: choral music students need equal opportunities to experience vocal jazz improvisational training, practice, or performance as their instrumental counterparts. This chapter established a qualitative research framework for this study through a grounded theory research design. This study used a qualitative research methodology to examine the broader concept of vocal jazz improvisational techniques and their impact on individuals and programs. The study is significant because its findings may result in further research on the topic, changes in music teacher preparation programs, and increased vocal jazz improvisational

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<sup>21</sup> Healy and Ankney, *Music Discovery*, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Augusto Monk, “The Five Improvisation ‘Brains’: A Pedagogical Model for Jazz Improvisation at High School and the Undergraduate Level,” *International Journal of Music Education* 30, no. 2 (2012): 93.

techniques in the secondary choral classroom. The following chapter two is an extensive literature review.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

This literature review presents a significant number of sources to provide background leading to the foundation for this study on the impacts of vocal jazz improvisational training for the secondary choral student and secondary choral program. The first section opens with an overview of the history of vocal jazz education. Section two narrows the scope, explicitly examining literature regarding the choral music education teacher preparation programs and professional development offerings for teachers in the field. The third section presents literature on the hesitations and concerns of teachers considering vocal jazz. The fourth section provides pedagogical evidence for the effective teaching of jazz vocalists. The fifth and final section discusses literature regarding the impacts of teaching vocal jazz improvisation techniques concerning student growth, student musicianship, student engagement, and student performance competency.

### **History of the Vocal Jazz Ensemble and Vocal Jazz Education**

As it is known today in the context of music in the United States, jazz is a relatively young genre. Jazz music continues to evolve from earlier traditions, transcending cultures and genres. The progression of vocal jazz in a historical context is referenced by Vic Hobson, who explains, “[r]esearchers have for many years explored how and why the tonality of jazz and the blues developed. A widespread assumption, dominant since Winthrop Sargeant’s (1938/1976) ground-breaking jazz *Hot and Hybrid* (1938), is that the harmony of jazz is European in origin.

In contrast, blues melodic inflections and rhythms are derived from African musical practice.”<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, it is essential to note that there are differences between the improvisational and genre-specific styles under the larger jazz umbrella.

Before jazz music existed, gospel music took shape in the south. George articulates that “[t]he roots of African American Gospel music reach back to the 19th century as the slaves sang spirituals while working in the fields to communicate messages from one to another and to help to encourage them as they sang about Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> These working songs historically involved a call-and-response approach. Lewis further explains that “in the African American church, some of the musical selections are planned and rehearsed before their performance in the worship service, and some selections are performed without rehearsal.”<sup>25</sup> This historically significant information provides an essential context to the evolution and fusion of bluegrass blues, allowing improvisational breaks within the song structure. Call and response and improvisation are inherently part of the African American music tradition and have greatly influenced the jazz band and vocal jazz traditions. Today's vocal jazz ensembles and vocal jazz soloists often respond to instrumental themes or solos in an improvisational setting, sometimes in a call-and-response or musical conversation approach.

Susan Cruse asserts that “[t]he history of jazz in American public schools dates back to the late 1930s and early 1940s when instrumental jazz ensembles were called “dance bands.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Vic Hobson, "Historically Informed Jazz Pedagogy: New Orleans Counterpoint and Barbershop Harmony," *Jazz Education in Research and Practice* 1, no. 1 (Spring, 2020): 156.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Lewis George, "A Firm Foundation: Examining the Influence of Black Gospel Music on Jazz Pedagogy" (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 2022), 19, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>25</sup> George, "A Firm Foundation," 80.

During this time, jazz performances in America were gaining notoriety among young audiences and influencing the listening trends of school-aged consumers.<sup>27</sup> Cruse further explains that “[d]espite social obstacles, however, the common desire of many young musicians to perform popular music gave momentum to the jazz ensemble movement in public schools.”<sup>28</sup> Before schools introduced the popular jazz genre in the school day offerings, traditional ensembles were commonplace. Cruse explains, “[j]azz pedagogy in American education has traversed a rocky path of conflict, doubt, and negative opinion on the way to the road of wider acceptance that it enjoys today.”<sup>29</sup> Like any popular style that gains respect in the professional community, the process to acceptance requires time and commitment from those pioneering education of the craft forward.

While vocal jazz's popularity may be unique to the United States, it is a relatively new trend in American music. With the explosion of jazz clubs in the roaring twenties, crooning became a popular vocal style appreciated by the masses. In the decades following, this singing style emerged and evolved into the more pop-infused singing still played today. Researcher Vincent Stephens asserts that “PRCs [pre-rock crooners] began their careers in the big-band or immediate post-World War II solo era. Critics and historians often defined them as jazz singers

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Rhea Cruse, "The Status of Vocal Jazz Ensembles in Texas High Schools and the Impact of Vocal Jazz Instruction on the overall Choral Program," Order No. 9932825, University of Houston, 1999. In ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Cruse, “The Status of Vocal Jazz,” 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

who have periodically conceded to commercial demands of the mid-1950s pop market.”<sup>30</sup> With the increased popularity of vocal jazz soloists, the vocal jazz ensemble was not far behind.

The mid-century brought to center stage a plethora of vocal jazz ensembles. Eva Pisciotta wrote her dissertation on the history of vocal jazz in the United States through the decades. She highlights that “[t]he Signatures, comprised of three women and three men, was formed in the late 1950s. Like the Four Freshmen they combined singing with simultaneous instrumental performance, and like the Mel-Tones they utilized a low bass voice in the texture.”<sup>31</sup> What is noteworthy about this statement of the musical groups in this era is the collaboration between the small amplified vocal ensemble and an instrumental combo or small jazz band ensemble. Pisciotta also asserts that the vocal jazz group The Highlows from the 1960s took this practice to the next level by refining the choral singing itself. She says, “[a]lthough they did not improvise, they contributed further refinement in intonation, blend, and phrasing and gave the vocal jazz ensemble a high level of respect.”<sup>32</sup> This progression of the singer experience from traditional choral singing to vocal improvisation is gradual, both in a historical context as well as in the experience of the individual.

Lara Moline articulates that vocal jazz ensembles have evolved since infancy in the last century. She says, “[t]he history of the vocal jazz ensemble began with popular groups such as The Boswell Sisters, The Pied Pipers, and The Four Freshmen during the late 1920s to 1940s.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Vincent Stephens, “Crooning on the Fault Lines: Theorizing Jazz and Pop Vocal Singing Discourse in the Rock Era, 1955-1978,” *American Music* 26, no. 2 (2008): 159, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071702>.

<sup>31</sup> Eva Mae Prisciotta, “The History of Jazz Choir in the United States” (DMA diss., University of Missouri - Kansas City, 1992), 10, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>32</sup> Pisciotta, “History of Jazz,” 11.

<sup>33</sup> Moline, “Vocal Jazz in the Choral Classroom,” 191.

Many subsequent successful vocal jazz ensembles have followed the examples established by these vocal jazz pioneers and instituted a gold standard for emerging vocal jazz ensembles to follow. Jazz vocalists such as Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald were vital in the growth and development of American culture. Furthermore, this style of music-making holds fast in today's jazz music as well. According to Will Layman, "[t]here's an ever-growing category of recordings that seem to find some "jazz" in new places and in new sounds, not channeling Billie/Ella and also not merely funk up some old standards."<sup>34</sup> Though vocal jazz is still in its infancy as part of every school curriculum, instrumental jazz ensembles are ever-popular in music education programs. Leila T. Heil recounts the history of high school jazz bands, saying, "[i]nstrumental jazz ensembles gained some attention before 1960 but were largely considered a peripheral part of the public-school music program. Instrumental jazz ensembles gained status in the 1960s when societal interest in popular culture prompted music educators to consider incorporating popular music styles into the curriculum."<sup>35</sup> While jazz bands gained popularity in the high school setting, jazz choirs began to gain traction at the collegiate level.

Author Gregory Amerind gives a brief history of vocal jazz of the collegiate vocal jazz ensemble. He says, "[v]ocalese is a term coined by the renowned jazz critic and historian Leonard Feather."<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Amerind explains that Bert Christiansen, a thriving Central Washington University professor, "instilled in his students...the idea that a musician could and

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<sup>34</sup> Will Layman, "Jazz Today: To Sing Or Not to Sing?," *PopMatters*, January 15, 2018, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Leila T. Heil, "The Effects of Two Vocal Jazz Improvisation Methods on High School Choir Students' Attitudes and Performance Achievement" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2005), 12, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>36</sup> Gregory Amerind, "The Collegiate Vocal Jazz Ensemble: A Foundational History," *The Choral Journal* 55, no. 11 (2015): 22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24580543>.

should 'do it all.' He advocated that a total musician was an accomplished instrumentalist, vocalist, composer, and teacher: very 'old school.'<sup>37</sup> This idea that musicians should understand all aspects of music performance and production is particularly important for educators.

Vocal jazz is a reasonably young craft in schools, as evidenced by the research completed by Diana Spralding and Justin Binek, who discuss the history of the vocal jazz movement. They describe that "[p]rograms in colleges and universities for training non-classical singers were not established until two-year colleges began offering vocal jazz group singing experiences in large numbers in the Pacific Northwest in the 1970s - although there were 'pockets' of programs in Washington State and Oregon in the 1960s."<sup>38</sup> Spralding and Binek also explain that the trend in training singers using jazz techniques is quite different from that of training classical singers. The variance in technique training is mainly because classical singers have been performing and therefore taught by professional pedagogues for hundreds of years, while jazz vocalists have only been performing for the past century. Furthermore, they assert that "[u]ntil recently, the majority of teachers of jazz singing have been performers and coaches, not pedagogues."<sup>39</sup> While this idea of vocal jazz pedagogy is relevant, the practice of jazz singing itself is, in fact, relatively new in the world of western music practice. There is a wealth of research within the spectrum of classical singing pedagogy and significantly less concerning vocal jazz pedagogy and vocal jazz improvisational pedagogy.

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<sup>37</sup> Amerind, "Collegiate Vocal Jazz," 22.

<sup>38</sup> Diana Spralding and Justin Binek, "Pedagogy for the Jazz Singer," *The Choral Journal* 55, no. 11 (2015): 10.

<sup>39</sup> Spralding and Binek, "Pedagogy," 10.

## **Choral & Vocal Jazz Education: Teacher Preparation & Professional Development**

Music education programs have specific requirements as dictated by the National Association for Schools of Music (NASM), which grants accreditation to music teacher preparation and music education certification programs across the country. College music education programs must meet specific requirements to maintain this national accreditation and adequately prepare students for state certification exams. Emerging teachers must show competency in theory and practice in the classroom to earn their certification and graduate with a music education degree. However, jazz pedagogy courses are not explicitly required for music education majors under the NASM standards.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Sarin Williams says, "[i]t is clear from research that music teachers in the United States consider jazz—one of the only uniquely-American musical genres—to be important to teach future generations."<sup>41</sup> There is a collective appreciation for the craft but a general hesitation to teach it due to a lack of training for music teachers. However, "[m]usic teachers also know that improvisation is one of the most important components of jazz and that it has an important place in the National Music Standards, yet they feel unprepared to teach such a skill."<sup>42</sup> The uneasiness teachers experience when teaching jazz is partly due to a lack of personal experience in learning and performing the genre, and a lack of pedagogical training available or required at the teacher preparation stage in the emerging teacher process. Lianne Elizabeth Lyons recounts a vocal jazz field expert, featured in chapter four, who speaks to the rarity of vocal jazz training available to students. She says, "[a]ccording to jazz vocal educator and professional jazz vocalist Vijay Singh, there are only a few institutions

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<sup>40</sup> National Association of Schools of Music, NASM Handbook, Last modified 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Sarin Williams, "Consider Getting the Blues," *The Choral Journal* 62, no. 4 (Nov 2021): 53.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, "Consider," 53.

of higher learning that offer courses in jazz pedagogy and fewer institutions that require their majors to take classes outside of their genre."<sup>43</sup> Music education majors may need critical pedagogical training in improvisation, helping them prepare for their own future students.

An essential aspect of teaching improvisation is assessing and guiding students in the pedagogical process. Healy and Ankney explain that "[t]he inherent challenge of assessing a student's improvisation is the balance between the music teacher's knowledge of best skills and practices with the student's situation-specific spontaneous performance."<sup>44</sup> Teacher knowledge is one of the reasons music education professors should teach vocal improvisation teaching strategies in music education preparation programs. Another method for providing this experience to future teachers is to provide professional development opportunities such as summer institutes, conferences, performing arts training, or other professional development settings. Students thrive in vocal jazz and traditional choral ensembles when they benefit from teacher expertise. Teachers gather tools to understand and teach vocal jazz improvisational concepts, especially listening, in preparation programs, professional development clinics, and practice. There is a slow shift toward increasing jazz education in the American school system. However, this shift is still slow. The need for increased resources and training for music educators and their students is apparent in need for more literature regarding vocal jazz improvisational pedagogy. Scholar Garo Saraydarian notes, "the fact is that jazz is very much a part of contemporary academia. Conservatories, music schools, and music departments also share this self-referential circle with instructors reinforcing the study of certain favorite

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<sup>43</sup> Lisanne Elizabeth Lyons. "Strategies for Developing a Jazz and Contemporary Vocal Ensemble Sound for the Traditional Chamber Choir" (DMA diss., University of Miami, 2009), 1, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>44</sup> Healy and Ankney, *Music Discovery*, 37.

musicians, recordings, and improvisational techniques."<sup>45</sup> Music educators must distinguish the impacts of vocal jazz improvisation pedagogy as a specialized study area and consider its benefits for secondary choral students and secondary choir programs.

The study of vocal jazz and jazz improvisation is growing across the country. Additionally, music education professionals recognize the use of improvisational concepts. Author Kevin McDonald states, "[j]azz education in the United States has grown significantly for nearly 80 years. Music educators justify the study of jazz by its status as a symbol of American culture, its intrinsic value as an art form, its relevance to meeting the national standards of music education, and its usefulness in cultivating students' aural skills."<sup>46</sup> However, there needs to be more training for music educators. Moline explains that "[w]hen learning concepts of jazz singing such as tone, articulation, balance, blend, singing on a microphone, etc., it is unlikely that a teacher with limited experience in jazz would introduce the style to students through improvisation."<sup>47</sup> Incorporating jazz singing and vocal improvisational skills requires additional training to impart the knowledge to others effectively. For example, Heil says, "[i]n Western classical music, improvisation has attained varying degrees of importance and has been approached with varying degrees of latitude through the historical periods. It could be argued that early styles of Western music allowed for more creativity and artistic license than later, more formalized styles."<sup>48</sup> It is interesting how improvisation has evolved throughout history.

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<sup>45</sup> Saraydarian, "Space is the Place," 156.

<sup>46</sup> Kevin J McDonald. "The Effect of Vocal Jazz Aural Skill Instruction on Student Sight Singing Achievement" (DMA diss., University of Hartford, 2010), 6, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>47</sup> Moline, "Vocal Jazz in the Choral Classroom," 12.

<sup>48</sup> Heil, "The Effects of Two Vocal Jazz Improvisation Methods," 9.

According to Patrice Ward-Steinman, vocal jazz improvisation is considered a factor in choral student success. She provides the critical historical context that "[j]azz ensembles have existed in school settings since the 1920s. Nevertheless, in the early twenty-first century, improvisation is notably lacking in the training of many music majors at the university level."<sup>49</sup> Ward-Steinman suggests that this effective pedagogy is not emphasized in teacher preparation programs. She also asserts the important issue within music education assessment standards: "[r]esearch indicates repeatedly that the improvisation standard...is the most challenging of the nine standards for music teachers to address in their classrooms."<sup>50</sup> Adding this vocal jazz improvisational pedagogical training to the music teacher preparation canon is vital to this music education sect's survival. Ward-Steinman concludes that "[v]ocal jazz improvisation achievement and the confidence to teach it are important goals as recommended by professional music organizations and standards."<sup>51</sup> Her research suggests that both can be meaningfully improved with teaching based in investigation.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, her work in this research recommends that providing teachers with improvisational pedagogy empowers them to teach these concepts effectively.

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<sup>49</sup> Patrice Ward-Steinman, "Effects of a Vocal Jazz Workshop on Choral Music Education Majors' Achievement in Improvisation and Confidence in Teaching Improvisation," *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 5, no. 1 (Fall, 2014): 2.

<sup>50</sup> Ward-Steinman, "Effects of a Vocal Jazz," 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

### Hesitations for Choral Teachers

Beyond the simple fact that not all school programs, even robust, well-funded, well-supported, and culturally diverse programs, offer jazz choir, and not all music teachers walk into their teaching position equipped to teach jazz, especially vocal jazz improvisation. Jazz presents a host of hesitations for the choir director because jazz is a language unto itself. Author Dylan Bell explains, "[i]n jazz education, it is common to refer to the learning of jazz improvisation as learning the 'jazz language'."<sup>53</sup> Bell asserts that it is inherently more challenging for a vocalist than an instrumentalist to achieve proficiency as a jazz musician. He says, "[f]or a vocalist, their 'instrument' is invisible. A vocalist has no apparent connection between a particular pitch or interval and a physical position for the voice. So how do they find it? They must find it through their ears: If a singer can't 'hear it,' or understand it aurally, they can't sing it."<sup>54</sup> The challenges in teaching a vocalist how to improvise are numerous. These challenges may invoke a choir teacher's hesitancy to add a jazz choir or teach improvisation in the choir rehearsal space. Additionally, Bell says, "[t]he voice is an ear-based instrument, it is "invisible," and has very little clear physical representation in the manner of an instrument. Therefore, advanced ear training is essential to achieve a comparable level of proficiency."<sup>55</sup> Ear training is a colossal undertaking for teachers and their students. Many ear training skills in the traditional choir setting are effective. But the supplementary ear training essential for the jazz singer, such as tight

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<sup>53</sup> Dylan Bell, "What do they Need? Exploring the Art of Teaching Vocal Jazz Improvisation," *The Canadian Music Educator* 55, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 38.

<sup>54</sup> Bell, "What do they Need?," 39.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

cluster chord harmonics and the ability to emulate instruments when soloing, has the potential to intimidate even the most adventurous choir teacher.

Another challenge for teachers is that jazz music is not the most popular form on the average teenager's playlist. Author Michele Weir suggests it is "unlikely that the student had much lifetime exposure to any jazz music unless his or her parents happened to be jazz buffs."<sup>56</sup> Unlike the music students hear on the radio or regularly sing in church or traditional choirs, vocal jazz, and vocal jazz improvisation in particular, is a more foreign genre. Weir explains that many "factors may have contributed to a degree of historical underdevelopment in the art as a whole, especially at the educational level."<sup>57</sup> As jazz developed as a result of several historical influences and established itself in clubs and theaters rather than in educational institutions, jazz's rise to academia came later, and that was primarily instrumental. Muir declares, "Today, the number of universities offering an instrumental jazz major far outweighs the number of universities offering a vocal jazz major, and even the ones that do rarely have a dedicated vocal improvisation course. Singers are commonly placed in existing instrumental improvisation courses that are not designed to meet the needs of the vocal improviser."<sup>58</sup> The pedagogy necessary to properly teach vocal jazz is substantial and may serve as a deterrent to many a confident choir teacher.

While many schools across America offer jazz choir as an elective course among the music offerings, many schools, and therefore many choir teachers, do not. The reasons for the

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<sup>56</sup> Michele Weir, "The Scat Singing Dialect: An Introduction to Vocal Improvisation," *The Choral Journal* 55, no. 11 (June 2015), 29.

<sup>57</sup> Weir, "The Scat Singing Dialect," 29.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

lack of jazz choir offerings are multifaceted. For schools or districts that do not offer jazz choir courses already, teachers must extensively contemplate the challenges and benefits of adding a jazz ensemble to the school course offerings. Kevin Watson explains, “[o]ne of the more difficult decisions that a teacher must make when beginning a jazz program revolves around the issue of student participation. Every educator, based on his or her personal teaching philosophy, must make decisions about which students will be eligible to participate in the jazz program.”<sup>59</sup>

Decisions like these are complex, particularly related to the teacher's music education philosophy. The teacher must consider whether to find a way to include all interested students in a jazz-style course or select only advanced musicians in the ensemble. But teachers generally isolate this training into one jazz ensemble. It is unknown whether teachers tend to isolate vocal improvisation training to jazz choirs because teachers without jazz backgrounds do not feel comfortable teaching improvisation or because teachers with jazz backgrounds feel the only appropriate place to incorporate such activity is in a dedicated jazz class. Author Francis Farrell states, “[i]nvolving choristers to improvise recognizes students as creators by giving them agency over the music they sing.”<sup>60</sup> But jazz choir is not the only setting where teachers can offer students improvisation opportunities. Farrell also reminds teachers that “[i]mprovisation can quickly help to strengthen personal bonds among your choristers, which in turn, serves to enhance the overall sense of community in the choir.”<sup>61</sup> Teachers do not have to isolate improvisation training to one particular ensemble setting. Farrell acknowledges that

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<sup>59</sup> Kevin E. Watson, "Starting a Jazz Program: Examining the Benefits and Challenges," *The Canadian Music Educator* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 41.

<sup>60</sup> Frances Farrell, "In Search of a New Tradition-Improvisation in Choral Settings," *Canadian Music Educator* 58, no. 1 (Fall, 2016): 34.

<sup>61</sup> Farrell, "In Search of a New Tradition," 34.

improvisation is a well-established tradition in school jazz ensembles and that teachers sometimes isolate improvisation in the jazz ensemble setting. Farrell says, "[w]e are more likely to encounter improvisation in instrumental or vocal jazz ensembles than we are in other traditional performance-based ensembles such as choir or band."<sup>62</sup> Improvisation, while a recognized national music education standard, is habitually sequestered to the jazz band or jazz choir environment rather than approached in instrumental or choral ensemble spaces.

Another hesitation voiced by teachers unsure of how to establish a jazz choir or teach improvisation is their uncertainty about the style. Without prior instruction or experience, there is a great deal of insecurity in teaching foreign concepts, not to mention discomfort in directing a rhythm section for a jazz choir. However, individuals learn by doing when it comes to vocal jazz. Watson says, "[t]eachers who lack training in jazz pedagogy are sometimes reluctant to begin a jazz program because they feel uncomfortable with their current level of knowledge regarding jazz."<sup>63</sup> Spoken like an authentic jazz musician, Watson encourages teachers to improvise. He does not discount the concept that this process may be uncomfortable for teachers and students whose areas of expertise lie in traditional choral techniques. But Watson states, "[a] teacher who demonstrates a willingness to learn along with his or her students can foster a very stimulating and motivating learning environment for all involved"<sup>64</sup> Even a little experience can provide teachers with tools to implement improvisation exercises into the rehearsal routine, offering students an opportunity to establish ownership in their practice and confidence in their

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<sup>62</sup> Farrell, "In Search of a New Tradition," 34.

<sup>63</sup> Watson, "Starting a Jazz Program," 41.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

musicianship. But pre-service teachers are not always fully equipped with jazz pedagogy.

Watson says, “[e]ven post-secondary institutions that offer opportunities to pursue a degree in jazz studies are often more focused on performance practice than on pedagogical training.”<sup>65</sup>

Students who participate in choir gain valuable and transferrable skills for other areas of study and even practical settings. Farrell recognizes that “as improvisation is inherent to many styles of music that singers will encounter in choral classrooms, improvising in these contexts underscores a commitment to emulating authentic performance practices.”<sup>66</sup> Students who gain confidence in improvisation may transfer those skills to the real world as they navigate how to think on their feet, monitor and adjust situations in their environment, and process and respond in conversations in personal and professional settings. Improvisation in music is just one manifestation of improvisation within life.

Another hesitation for teachers unsure of how to approach vocal jazz improvisation is the perception of jazz in the musical world and its space in the music education hierarchy.

Improvisation, and jazz as a whole, are viewed differently by each individual and throughout various sects of music education in the country. Some believe that jazz musicians are stellar musicians with phenomenal ears. In contrast, others believe that jazz musicians do not read music as well as their classically trained counterparts and participate in a more feelings-driven genre than technical-driven in practice. Author Helen Russell explains, “[i]n the popular imagination, jazz musicians are often perceived to be musically uneducated in the formal sense, playing “what they feel.” This is of course an unhelpful simplification.”<sup>67</sup> Jazz musicians must

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<sup>65</sup> Watson, “Starting a Jazz Program,” 41.

<sup>66</sup> Farrell, “In Search of a New Tradition,” 37.

recognize the intention behind their playing or singing, or the storytelling element of jazz music, but they must also maintain a sense of the form, chord progression, and phrasing to improvise successfully on a chart. Russell expounds further saying, "[t]he musical community and even the community at large seems to hold a perception that one either plays by ear or doesn't; either reads music or doesn't. In practice, this issue is far more nuanced."<sup>68</sup> Teachers can take comfort in the knowledge that every individual maintains that vocal jazz is unnecessary while another believes it is vital.

Teachers who ignore some musical styles while maintaining partiality toward others prevent their students from grasping specific musical experiences. Author Doug Anderson warns teachers not to view jazz as a lesser-than genre, asserting, "[i]n resisting this style of choral music...the director is denying his students and himself the exposure to an exciting new style that can give renewed vitality to the entire choral program and to that director's interest in teaching."<sup>69</sup> Conversely, teachers who put in the work to learn, understand, and eventually transmit jazz to their students comprehend the importance of bravely forging ahead into the unknown and perhaps learning along the way in preparation to teach a new skill. Doug Anderson appeals to choir teachers' calling in the profession. He says, "[a]s choral directors we have the obligation to allow our students to experience excellence in all styles of choral music."<sup>70</sup> Once a teacher diminishes the voices of those with negative perceptions of vocal jazz, the teacher must

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<sup>67</sup> Helen Russell, "A Cappella Ear Training: Bringing Theory and Aural Skills Together Via Singing in a Jazz Program Environment," *Australian Journal of Music Education* 51, no. 2 (2017): 20.

<sup>68</sup> Russell, "A Capella," 20.

<sup>69</sup> Doug Anderson, "Vocal Jazz for Your Choir - here's how," *The Choral Journal* 17, no. 2 (October 1, 1976): 12.

<sup>70</sup> Anderson, "Vocal Jazz," 12.

seek appropriate guidance in vocal jazz stylistic procedures and improvisational techniques. Anderson elucidates, “[a]fter the director is convinced that vocal jazz deserves a place in his choral program, he needs training to make that addition successful.”<sup>71</sup> Exposure provides appreciation, training includes knowledge, and teaching offers experience.

### **Training Jazz Vocalists**

Notably, for as many teachers as consider improvisation enigmatic, state educational music education standards require teaching improvisation. “Many general music teachers, if not many vocal jazz directors, are uninformed about teaching jazz improvisation, and consider improvisation to be a mysterious talent.”<sup>72</sup> The danger of considering vocal jazz improvisation as such is the number of teachers who do not attempt to expose students to this skill-building. Not all classically trained musicians have been given the opportunity, nor possess the inclination, to produce improvised music as a part of their practice. But, like any musical skill, it can be taught. Patrice Madura states, “[i]t is critical that music educators, especially vocal jazz directors, become informed so that they can provide their students with the opportunity to participate fully in an essential American art form, jazz, whose essence is improvisation.”<sup>73</sup> When considering a career in music education, teachers ought to seek education in this tradition. Like many other aspects of music teaching, practice is the key to success. Moreover, “certain activities, such as

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<sup>71</sup> Anderson, “Vocal Jazz,” 12.

<sup>72</sup> Patrice Dawn Madura, “Relationships among Vocal Jazz Improvisation Achievement, Jazz Theory Knowledge, Imitative Ability, Previous Musical Experience, General Creativity, and Gender” (DME diss., Indiana University, 1992), 213, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>73</sup> Madura, “Relationships among Vocal Jazz Improvisation,” 213.

imitative exercises and jazz experiences, are more appropriate for one age level than another.”<sup>74</sup>

A teacher working with young beginners may have the best success by modeling. In contrast, a teacher of more advanced vocalists may have increased achievement among students through scaffolding modeling, listening sessions, theory-based written exercises, and even improvisation conversation drills between students.

Understanding the elements of vocal jazz is extremely important when considering how to teach those concepts to students. Author Debra Greschner describes the vocal jazz pedagogy techniques of several experts, including Tish Oney, who “identifies its different forms, from ‘scat’ to ‘vocalese,’ a type of vocal jazz improvisation that superimposes lyrics on an instrumental solo.”<sup>75</sup> Students equipped with the knowledge of jazz song elements will be able to approach their own singing confidently. Greschner further reviews Oney’s primary concerns about vocal teachers teaching healthy singing. Greschner echoes Oney’s examination of the importance of auditory anatomy, which he notes is lacking in the research discourse.<sup>76</sup> Vocal health is a primary concern of choir directors, but it is just as important for teachers to consider the health of their singers in the vocal jazz setting. Vocal health is an essential concern for singers of all genres and backgrounds. Within the vocal jazz genre, author Ineke van Dorne says that “proper coordination between breath, voice, and body is important for the developing and efficient breathing technique.”<sup>77</sup> The jazz vocalist can sing more quietly than a vocalist in a rather

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<sup>74</sup> Madura, “Relationships among Vocal Jazz Improvisation,” 212.

<sup>75</sup> Debra Greschner, “Jazz Singing: A Guide to Pedagogy and Performance.” *Journal of Singing* 79, no. 1 (September 2022): 120.

<sup>76</sup> Greschner, “Jazz Singing,” 120.

<sup>77</sup> Ineke Van Doorn, “Breathing Technique for Jazz/Pop Singers.” *Journal of Singing* 78, no. 2 (November 2021): 247.

traditional, classical setting such as choir or opera. However, many of the same techniques, such as proper breathing, are universal.

Beyond core classical training, vocal jazz improvisational techniques are used to increase a plethora of skills missing in many young singers. Researchers Steve Torrance and Frank Schumann wrote an article exploring how jazz improvisation informs cognitive science. The study brings forth evidence supporting the concept that “given the importance of playing within a musical language, a form of mindful embodied-enactive suitedness, allowing for meaningful intentional action within the domain of music, is perhaps even more central to the improviser’s efforts to spontaneous musical creation.”<sup>78</sup> Pitch recognition, aural skills, and musical creativity are the three points of focus for evidence of increased musical literacy within secondary choral students and overall secondary choir programs in this study. Additionally, secondary choir directors need more resources and professional development training in the area of vocal jazz improvisation literacy in order to effectively teach these concepts.

Choral teachers looking to educate voice students in the vocal jazz genre may walk into the high school setting with or without prior experience or much knowledge of the field. In many parts of the country, vocal jazz ensembles are not standard at the high school or university level. Researcher Christopher Venesile presents extensive research on the acquisition of pedagogical knowledge concerning vocal jazz educators. He explains that “[i]t would seem that to be capable of teaching jazz concepts to students, instrumental or vocal, educators should familiarize themselves with the basic idiomatic elements of the genre. An immersion period in the

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<sup>78</sup> Torrance and Schumann, "The Spur of the Moment," 264.

fundamentals of jazz theory, vocal pedagogy, and the evolution of various styles appears necessary for educators to function with confidence.”<sup>79</sup>

Venesile’s research presents data supporting the notion that some experience, or immersion, as he states, is indispensable for the vocal jazz teacher. He also suggests that learning by doing is perhaps the most efficient method of learning vocal jazz techniques. Venesile notes that “[i]t appears that despite all of the available formal and semi-formal types of educational opportunities, a consistent and determined amount of self-study has been beneficial to study participants’ acquisition of these understandings.”<sup>80</sup> The scholar of vocal jazz may attend master classes, read books, and follow directives from a coach, but the excellent method for attaining proficiency is the practice of the skill. This emphasis on practice is vital for the instructor of the craft first. The teacher then passes the technique to the student. The vocal jazz teaching process is ideal if choral teachers can immerse themselves in the art of vocal jazz before taking on a choral education position that requires jazz choir experience. If, however, the choral teachers can only immerse in vocal jazz after teaching, they should seek out opportunities to do so on the job to provide students with as much quality training as possible. The responsibilities of the jazz choir teacher extend beyond vocal techniques or even improvisational training. Venesile says, “[o]ne of the more confounding aspects of learning vocal jazz is the necessity of learning about the pedagogy of the rhythm section instruments.”<sup>81</sup> The choir director must coach the rhythm section and ask for particular outcomes within a jazz chart. Additionally, the singers in a vocal

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<sup>79</sup> Christopher John Venesile, “The Acquisition of Pedagogical Content Knowledge by Vocal Jazz Educators” (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, 2010), 106.

<sup>80</sup> Venesile, “Acquisition,” 108.

<sup>81</sup> Venesile, “Acquisition,” 108-109.

jazz setting must learn to communicate with the rhythm section for improvisational exchanges.

The jazz choir teacher should set up an expectation for the singers to listen and seek to understand directions given to the rhythm section throughout the rehearsal process.

Listening is one of the oldest and most effective techniques for learning vocal jazz improvisation. Scholar Michelle English collected data from an extensive assemblage of teachers who affirmed her theory that “[l]istening to instrumental jazz can be of equal if not greater value to the learner, I believe, as when we are singing vocal jazz, our fundamental goal is to emulate an instrument.”<sup>82</sup> English evaluated the data collected from her various music educator interviews and her own experiences to illustrate the vital importance of listening as the foundation for vocal jazz improvisation. Furthermore, English admits that not all young singers beginning a journey with jazz will understand every facet of the genre musically or theoretically. She says, “[t]his listening may begin, as in the case of the professional jazz singers, as simply sounds that are entering the ears; however, with more theoretical education on which one can draw, the listening can become more analytical in nature.”<sup>83</sup> As students grow in their craft as musicians, they will gain the understanding and skills to analyze the patterns and structures within jazz theory. The process of listening will graduate from a practice of copying into a practice of analyzing and then creating. Nonetheless, this procedure arguably all commences with active listening.

Jazz requires intense listening and responding. In her extensive research, author Cherilee Wadsworth Walker determines that “[m]odeling and mimicry were seen as the continuation of a longstanding tradition of oral and aural transmission in jazz and an important enhancement and

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<sup>82</sup> Michelle N. G. English, “Perspectives of Professional Vocal Jazz Singers and Jazz Educators: Implications for High School Vocal Jazz Pedagogy” (Master’s Thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 2004), 91.

<sup>83</sup> English, “Perspectives of Professional Vocal Jazz Singers,” 92.

acceleration of the learning process through applied experience.”<sup>84</sup> In classical settings, teachers profess to approach the learning by rote method with caution. It is common practice in the contrasting jazz setting to follow this tradition of passing ideas orally. One concern within the sphere of music education is the common drawback that "many jazz vocalists have not had as much formal training as their instrumental counterparts and therefore may not be as articulate about their habits or as technically and idiomatically adept in their improvised solos.”<sup>85</sup> A vocalist may be able to transcend beautifully in a masterful improvisational expression vocally, but need more technical awareness of how they achieve this vocally and maintain knowledge of the musical techniques used in the process. In contrast, an instrumentalist may possess the ability to comprehend the specific musical techniques articulated by the ensemble director without needing a modeling example. The added steps, such as modeling or unequivocal clarifications needed by the vocalist, may slow down the rehearsal process, so it would behoove the jazz choir teacher to not only promote listening but also teach jazz-specific terminology and techniques for the benefit of the vocalists.

Choral directors have many demands when entering the choral rehearsal space, least of all the charge of providing a safe, healthy, and proper understanding of vocal pedagogy, using the best pedagogical techniques. Monica Bertrand maintains that "[o]ne of the many responsibilities of a choir director is giving adequate voice instruction to their ensemble. The choir director might be the only voice instructor that a singer will ever have if they do not take

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<sup>84</sup> Cherilee Wadsworth Walker, "Pedagogical Practices in Vocal Jazz Improvisation," (Ph.D. diss., The University of Oklahoma, 2005), 132, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>85</sup> Walker, "Pedagogical Practices in Vocal Jazz," 120.

private voice instruction.”<sup>86</sup> Because choir directors often serve as the sole voice instructor to high school students, the modern choir director needs to advance their understanding of proper vocal pedagogy related to various styles and genres. Vocal jazz singing is more strategic, demanding, and technical, as skilled singers may utilize an extensive vocal range on a given tune based solely on improvisational choices. In many ways, jazz singing may feel more natural to some students, as the tunes are closer to popular music widely heard today.

The jazz style, exemplified by the amplification, makes jazz different from classical singing. Ineke Van Doorn articulates that “using a microphone gives a singer a great amount of vocal freedom; it is easy to sing in a whisper as a scream.”<sup>87</sup> The jazz vocalist can utilize techniques otherwise forbidden by the classical singer. The microphone not only provides amplification over the accompanying instrumentation for the singer, and it also enhances the vocalist's stylistic choices through the volume and reverberation. Greshner quotes Oney’s assertion that “the microphone represents half the jazz singer’s instrument.”<sup>88</sup> Learning to healthily and adequately implement the amplification techniques using microphones is a crucial step in the safe singing process for the jazz vocalist.

Training vocalists to shift healthily throughout their various registers within one style and between their classical and jazz vocal techniques is essential for voice and choral teachers. Sebastian Dippold, Daniel Voigt, Bernhard Richter, and Matthias Echternach provide research on this very challenging prospect. Dippold and his colleagues stress that “[v]ocal registers and

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<sup>86</sup> Monica Bertrand, "Vocal Pedagogy in the Choral Rehearsal: A Multiple Case Study," (MMEd thesis., Western Illinois University, 2022), 21, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>87</sup> Van Doorn, “Breathing Technique,” 247.

<sup>88</sup> Greschner, "Jazz Singing," 120.

transitions between them are an important aspect of singing technique. Being able to deal with register transitions is a precondition for the optimal use of the total voice range.”<sup>89</sup> While secondary school singers are relatively inexperienced in the entire voice range, this concept that they ought to healthily deal with their register transition is essential, as it necessitates the teacher's use of vocal pedagogy in the choral classroom, regardless of the singing taught. Dippold and his fellow researchers also enlighten their readers about the reality of vocal register occurrences, stating that “[i]t has been hypothesized that vocal fold oscillation patterns are more regular during register transition in classically trained singers than in jazz-trained singers.”<sup>90</sup> Vocalists practicing singing in a more regulated, classical style are known to experience a smooth, regular transition between their registers as opposed to those vocalists practicing in a less-regulated jazz style. Furthermore, “[i]t should be kept in mind that audible register differences are not as noticeable in a whole choir as they are during solo singing, since individual register differences may be covered by other singers in the group.”<sup>91</sup> Much like coaching a classical soloist in a traditional choral ensemble setting differs from directing the whole choir, directing the vocal jazz ensemble contrasts with coaching jazz improvisation solos. While the group must work to match their neighbor's timbre and vowel shapes, the soloist may choose to shape the melody any particular way and may even choose to utilize distinct vowel shapes, phrasing, or other stylistic choices.

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<sup>89</sup> Sebastian Dippold, Daniel Voigt, Bernhard Richter, and Matthias Echternach, "High-Speed Imaging Analysis of Register Transitions in Classically and Jazz-Trained Male Voices," *Folia Phoniatrica Et Logopaedica* 67, no. 1 (July 2015): 21.

<sup>90</sup> Dippold, Voigt, Richter, and Echternach, "High-Speed Imaging Analysis," 26.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Growing the choir student's ear is a considerable gap in secondary choral studies and is often a professional development topic at music educator conferences. Vocal jazz can aid in this learning process pedagogically. Jan Shapiro asserts that "[f]or a jazz vocalist, improvisation and scat are more than just singing a jazz song and using scat syllables in the second chorus. To scat well is to learn how to listen differently."<sup>92</sup> Improvisation is an art that can be explored in various ways and requires a good deal of listening to get started. Students may feel intimidated by the idea of "performing" improvisation solos in front of an entire class, so there are several techniques teachers can use to help students get started alone or in small groups using techniques they have learned in the larger group. According to William Coppola, "[w]hile learning to improvise, soloists often spend a significant amount of time practicing various melodic and harmonic exercises in private, gaining facility by playing through scales and chords that eventually develop into original musical ideas."<sup>93</sup> Collegiate-level music choral education professors must equip music education majors with the skills to provide appropriate improvisational training in the rehearsal space. There are geographical areas where jazz choir is popular in high schools, so the expectation of providing a vocal jazz experience is expected of choir teachers.

Dan Schnee displays that all improvisation training starts with listening to the chord progression and the form of the tune, then perhaps listening for "a "pickup" that sets the flow and feeling of the "main melody," which soloists might use.<sup>94</sup> Listening to instrumental soloists can

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<sup>92</sup> Shapiro, *So You Want to Sing Jazz*, 130.

<sup>93</sup> William J. Coppola, "Jazz In the United States," in *Expanding the Space for Improvisational Pedagogy in Music: A transdisciplinary Approach*, edited by G.G. Johansen, K. Holdhus, C. Larsson, & U. MacGlone, (London: Routledge, 2019), 18.

<sup>94</sup> Dan Schnee, "Vocal Ornamentation," *Canadian Musician* 39, no. 4 (July 2017), 29.

also provide ideas and cues. Listening is perhaps the most critical step in learning to improvise. Furthermore, listening to instrumental improvisation can help the vocalist consider lyrical ideas without the distraction of another vocalist's syllable stresses or scat choices. Jan Shapiro stresses that "[i]n the jazz idiom, an improvised solo is based on the same chord progressions of a standard jazz song. Listening to jazz instrumentalists can help us understand more about improvisation and help you with your own vocal improvisation."<sup>95</sup> Jacobson's assessment supports this concept of the intense impact through listening; he says, "[a] necessary and valuable part of the learning and creative process is listening to great soloists and their development through recordings. The development of any jazz improviser reflects a large degree the development of jazz music itself."<sup>96</sup> The development of jazz music has been mainly about developing and growing the three skills established in the hypotheses: pitch recognition, aural skills, and musical creativity.

Ear training is a necessary skill developed in a traditional choir, but ear training gained through vocal jazz improvisation in the secondary school choral program is perhaps even more valuable. Secondary vocal jazz education in the United States is somewhat new. This gap in the current research informed the accompanying set of vocal jazz improvisation exercises found at the end of this project. In her article regarding the flexibility and range gained through vocal jazz training, Jenna McLean gathers quotes from several jazz vocalists and jazz voice teachers. She quotes Sara Gazarek, who says, "I find that many of my altos have a challenging time feeling comfort and flexibility in their head voice—and conversely, many of my sopranos have a

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<sup>95</sup> Shapiro, *So You Want to Sing Jazz*, 88.

<sup>96</sup> Allen Jacobson, "Jazz Improvisation: The Basics." *Canadian Winds: The Journal of the Canadian Band Association* 15, no. 1 (Fall 2016), 21.

challenging time trusting that their chest voice is a viable and healthy place to vocalize. So integration of registers can be a hurdle."<sup>97</sup> Students need specific, strategic training on their instruments based on their biological growth process and psychological growth. Much change occurs in these formative high school years. Teachers are responsible for teaching healthy singing first, regardless of age, while balancing the teen student's physical, hormonal, and vocal changes.

In her article on vocal jazz improvisation, author Suzanne Pittson emphasizes the importance of developing a linear vocabulary for the jazz vocalist. She declares that the vocalist's tendency "to separate the theoretical understanding from the actual performance, which leads to reliance on the right brain, is often what leaves vocalists feeling frustrated and insecure about their improvisation skills"<sup>98</sup> and suggests that singers work with pianists to learn and identify the chord changes in the tunes they learn and perform. She further explains that "[t]his training, namely to sing musical lines while hearing and identifying the progressions, helps vocalists learn to sing confidently through a phrase."<sup>99</sup> Providing singers with confidence is a vital step in the vocal jazz improvisational process, as improvisation necessitates at least a basic understanding of the chord progression in the chart.

Researchers Sollis Matthias and his colleagues explain that aural expression of ideas helps the jazz singer internalize the rhythmic and melodic idea. They say, "[w]hereas much pedagogic literature on playing improvisational jazz focuses on the instrument and only

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<sup>97</sup> Jenna McLean, "Flexibility in Range and Registration in Jazz Singing," *Voice and Speech Review*, (2022): DOI: 10.1080/23268263.2022.2054093

<sup>98</sup> Suzanne Pittson, "Developing Linear Vocabulary for Jazz Vocal Improvisation: Utilizing the Melodic Language of Chet Baker," *Jazz Education in Research and Practice* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 187.

<sup>99</sup> Pittson, "Developing Linear Vocabulary," 187.

indirectly on the ability to hear the musical sense, outspoken aural musicians underline the need to think with their ear first. As Galper states, the idea that the musical instrument is the instrument is an illusion: ‘You are the instrument. Everything you are working on is internal to you.’ The body proper is the instrument.”<sup>100</sup> The developing vocalists learn to utilize their body as an instrument and must reconcile this connectivity between the self and the voice.

Improvisation allows for more freedom for the singer. Author Coppela explains that “[t]oday, young students’ first experiences with jazz often occur in the academic rehearsal room, usually beginning in secondary school.”<sup>101</sup> Some schools and community programs provide improvisational opportunities for younger students, but that is not the widely offered and accessible option in most sectors. Teachers can model, guide, then assess student comprehension. Furthermore, Coppela says, “[t]he challenge for the teacher is to find the balance between emphasizing exact imitation, technique, and virtuosity, and freeing the creative powers of the novice musician to encourage the imagination to flourish.”<sup>102</sup> Students need quality modeling of improvisation and clear critical feedback to improve and become more confident with the concept.

Students given the freedom to create sounds freely, without concern for perfection, can create sounds they otherwise might not. Chris Tonelli asserts that “[f]ree jazz singing offers a rare public space where we can allow our bodies and voices to be informed by the speeds and

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<sup>100</sup> Mattias, Sollis, Erling Aksdal, and John Pål Inderberg, "Learning Jazz Language by Aural Imitation: A Usage-Based Communicative Jazz Theory (Part 2)," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 56, no. 1 (2022): 94-123.

<sup>101</sup> Johansen, Holdhus, Larsson, & MacGlone, 2019, *Expanding the Space for Improvisation Pedagogy in Music*, 20.

<sup>102</sup> Johansen, Holdhus, Larsson, & MacGlone, *Expanding the Space*, 18.

slownesses, the timbres and tempos of a broadened range of the dynamisms in the world around us.”<sup>103</sup> This flexibility in style, dynamics, and stylistic approach provides freedom to students otherwise unavailable in the music ensemble setting. Improvisation provides the opportunity for intense creativity and unique musicality, and one cannot ignore that the physical body plays a crucial role in the process.

Leila Heil and Ron McCurdy emphasize the importance of breath when instructing vocal jazz. They explain that “[f]ocusing on breathing in the jazz rehearsal will help singers to maintain a core to their sound when amplified through a sound system,”<sup>104</sup> Technical skills must be taught regarding the sound equipment, such as “[m]icrophones are the jazz singers' tool for projection and allow for an expanded concept of the use of the voice.”<sup>105</sup> The skills necessary for running a successful vocal jazz ensemble reach beyond the scope of classical choral teaching methods. As evidenced by Heil and McCurdy's work, breath is an integral element in jazz singing, just as in any other singing style. Classical choral educators need to keep the essentials of healthy voice pedagogy, but vocal jazz techniques require additional training with technology. Of course, the microphone is optional for a single vocalist to practice singing in the style of jazz. However, amplification is necessary for the context of a jazz choir accompanied by a rhythm section. Therefore, a basic understanding of a microphone's mechanics is required of the instructor to pass along this training to the jazz student.

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<sup>103</sup> Chris Tonelli, *Voices Found: Free Jazz and Singing* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 74, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4324/9780429440427>

<sup>104</sup> Leila Heil, and Ron McCurdy, "Building Vocal Technique and Aural Acuity in the Vocal Jazz Ensemble," *The Choral Journal* 57, no. 4 (November 2016): 67.

<sup>105</sup> Heil and McCurdy, "Building Vocal Technique," 67.

Unlike band and orchestra teachers at the high school level, choral directors often need help with brand-new musicians in their choral rehearsal spaces. Because choral directors constantly play a game of catch-up with musicianship skills, they need to address some sight-reading and music theory competencies more consistently. Sight-reading improvement can occur as a result of doing it in a vocal jazz setting. Kirk Marcy explains the importance of teachers taking time to train students in the basics of music theory. Marcy establishes an environment in which students adhere to an expectation of regular sight-reading, saying that “[c]onductors can be amazed at how many students struggle to find musical information on the printed page. Have the students sight-read a portion of the piece. Remember, we only get to sight-read something once. After that, we are already into the refining stages.”<sup>106</sup> Students may need to perfect their output before sharing it out loud, but true sight-reading allows them to try singing the music in real-time, mistakes included, and improve their abilities each time through those same mistakes.

### **Impacts of Vocal Jazz Improvisational Techniques on Student Engagement & Growth**

Students bring a plethora of experiences, both musical and non-musical, into the choral classroom and the choral program as a whole. The experiences, training, and backgrounds of choral students are as diverse as the number of students enrolled in the school program. What is significant is the consideration of how students with vocal jazz improvisational training experiences impact the choral classroom space. Author Susan Cruse shares substantial collective evidence for the importance of vocal jazz ensembles in successful choral programs. She says,

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<sup>106</sup> Kirk Marcy, "Vocal Jazz," *The Choral Journal* 49, no. 5 (November 2008): 47. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/vocal-jazz/docview/222317763/se-2>.

“[o]ver time several writers have addressed the educational validity of vocal jazz in choral music education. Many articles have been written endorsing jazz choirs as a necessary part of all outstanding choral programs.”<sup>107</sup> This literature review section explores the collective belief that vocal jazz training improves the performance of choral students in the secondary choir program.

Jazz-style singing is one of many anxiety-inducing forms of singing. Authors Ajhriahna Henshaw and Sarah Collyer suggest that classical singers “are likely to experience greater MPA [Music Performance Anxiety] than their jazz, popular, or folk colleagues.”<sup>108</sup> They expose many reasons for this phenomenon, including the concept that classical singing requires a particular and perfect technique. “Root tongue tension, breathiness, shaky, under articulated, or overly breathy sounds can add character and emotional weight to a performance”<sup>109</sup> in non-classical settings. Students who learn to bring the sense of freedom from jazz singing into their traditional choir classroom will likely experience less performance anxiety in that classical setting.

Leila Heil and Ron McCurdy’s prescription for healthy jazz choir singing suggests that the techniques used in classical choral singing and vocal jazz ensemble are quite easily transferable. The educators enlighten their readers on how to introduce healthy singing by explaining: “[t]o encourage a healthy tone while reducing the use of vibrato, encourage singers to lighten and brighten their sound, free the tongue of tension, and maintain strong breath connection.”<sup>110</sup> Additionally, they explain that the ear training possibilities for students involved

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<sup>107</sup> Cruse, "The Status of Vocal Jazz," 20.

<sup>108</sup> Ajhriahna Henshaw, and Sarah Collyer, "Under Pressure: Reports of Performance Anxiety Across Multiple Singing Genres," *Journal of Singing* 78, no. 5 (May 2022): 584.

<sup>109</sup>Henshaw and Collyer, "Under Pressure," 584.

<sup>110</sup> Heil and McCurdy, "Building Vocal Technique," 69.

in a vocal jazz choir setting are incredibly beneficial. “The unique harmonic structures found in vocal jazz literature require both conductor and singers to expand their ability to hear and understand the technical aspects of chord structures.”<sup>111</sup> Students who have stretched their capacity to recognize pitches concerning other pitches are quicker to correct incorrect pitches when reading music in a choir setting.

The freedom students experience in a jazz setting is considered by many to be unique and compelling. Melissa Forbes and Kate Cantrell explain that “the process of improvisation is governed by principles of connection and heterogeneity, both of which allow the singer to move beyond linearity to points of overlap and convergence.”<sup>112</sup> Students participating in vocal jazz ensemble rehearsals have opportunities to participate in entirely improvised exercises with total creative freedom. While this may occur in other classes and even other music rehearsals, the unique improvisational nature of jazz allows for moments of complete artistic freedom for the student participant. Forbes and Cantrell also state that “[t]his conceptual metaphor, improvisation is an adventure, is suggestive of the singer’s expert sensorimotor capacity to fully evaluate and capitalize on the affordances or possibilities for action as presented in the moment to, and by, the singer herself, other musical agents, and their surroundings.”<sup>113</sup> The freedom students can experience from vocal jazz training can be a full-body experience that gives students musical and artistic confidence.

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<sup>111</sup> Heil and McCurdy, “Building Vocal Technique,” 70.

<sup>112</sup> Melissa Forbes and Kate Cantrell, “Choose Your Own Adventure: Vocal Jazz Improvisation, Conceptual Metaphor, and Cognitive Embodiment,” *Musicae scientiae : the journal of the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music*. (2021).

<sup>113</sup> Forbes and Cantrell, “Choose Your Own Adventure,” (2021).

Researcher Augusto Monk wrote what he calls a Pedagogical Model for Jazz Improvisation using his coined “Five Improvisation Brains.”<sup>114</sup> In his research, Monk shows his readers that while many important skills can certainly be obtained through classical practice techniques, vocal jazz pedagogy allows for a special, imaginative process in the young singer in ways that classical training alone do not address outright. Monk says that “[c]ognition in music improvisation differs considerably from cognition in other musical activities.”<sup>115</sup> Classical training is invaluable in its ability to provide musicians with safe and healthy vocal technique, quality sound production, an understanding of vocal pedagogy through the comprehension of human anatomy and the physics of musical sound in the human body, and the basic understanding of vocal diction, vowel placement, and phrasing.

The practical implications of teaching students to sing in the jazz style are numerous by those in the music education field. Furthermore, teaching students to utilize vocal jazz improvisational techniques provides a unique set of skills for singers they might not otherwise obtain studying classical voice. For example, Mathias Benedek, Barbara Borovnjak, Aljoscha C. Neubauer, Silke Kruse-Weber researched the variation in personality and creative expression between classical, jazz, and folk musicians. Benedek and his colleagues describe the most notable difference among singers who perform these genres, saying, “[c]lassical musicians practice a lot and participate in a high number of competitions, but do not publish as many music productions as non-classical musicians. In contrast, jazz musicians perform a larger number of

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<sup>114</sup> Monk, “The Five Improvisation ‘Brains,” 90.

<sup>115</sup> Monk, “The Five Improvisation ‘Brains,” 90.

concerts per year but do not participate as often in music competitions.”<sup>116</sup> These researchers assert that one of the primary focuses of the classical singer is to perfect the classical craft and compete, while the priority for jazz singers is to perform. Perhaps this is because the jazz genre is a more widely accepted popular genre enjoyed in dinner theaters, clubs, concert settings, and other casual venues. In contrast, classical singing is a more particular and formal musical genre and, for many consumers, an acquired taste. Additionally, Benedek and his fellow researchers concluded from their research that “[j]azz musicians showed higher divergent thinking ability (i.e., creative cognitive potential) in terms of ideational creativity than classical and folk musicians.”<sup>117</sup> The opportunity allowed in the jazz genre for singers to tap into their creativity and produce a unique sound at the moment is standard in practice, while a very rehearsed, precise, and meticulous performance is expected and required in the classical realm. Benedek asserts that “[t]he ability to fluently generate original ideas can be considered highly compatible with the improvisational skills that are required and trained in jazz music, and they may be of relatively lower significance in classical music or folk music.”<sup>118</sup> Singers develop a distinctive set of skills when studying jazz, most especially when engaging in vocal improvisation.

Students who take advantage of exploring the musical style of improvisation tap into an inherently creative practice. Additionally, music educators have the opportunity to explain the social-emotional importance, the technical process of improvisation, and popular cultural

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<sup>116</sup> Mathias Benedek, Barbara Borovnjak, Aljoscha C. Neubauer, Silke Kruse-Weber, “Creativity and personality in classical, jazz and folk musicians,” *Personality and Individual Differences*, 63 (June 2014): 120, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.064>.

<sup>117</sup> Benedek, et al., “Creativity,” 120.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

relevance to students. Researchers Michael Weiss and Isabelle Peretz explain, “improvisation represents a unique chance to uncover the rules acquired by the general population in everyday music—for example, the use of a limited number of discrete pitches, or integer ratios between tone onsets—just as speech does for language.”<sup>119</sup> Teachers train students and help them discover effective improvisational methods. Students who may otherwise struggle in traditional music settings may embrace a freedom in improvisation practice. Weiss and Peretz say, “[f]ortunately, improvisation can bypass individual limitations in learning and is arguably the most suitable method to capture individual variation in musical knowledge representations.”<sup>120</sup> Beyond studies exposing the ease and relatability of improvisation, studies indicate that vocal improvisation is fun. Weiss and Peretz completed an “evaluation of smiling.”<sup>121</sup> As part of their research on improvising, without telling their participants they would measure the joy observed throughout the study, they observed how much singers smiled while performing vocal improvisation.

The reach of vocal jazz's benefits extends beyond the specific musical enhancement. Researcher Mary-Lynn Sauve says, “[i]n a therapeutic context, the improvising voice becomes an instrument of authentic self-expression. The vocalization is not restricted by strict idiomatic boundaries. Rather, singers can express their inner-landscape through the sounds that come intuitively.”<sup>122</sup> The personal, internal, and spiritual impacts of creating music with one's body and instrument are an interesting sub-genre of study within the greater singing research canon.

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<sup>119</sup> Michael W. Weiss and Isabelle Peretz, “Improvisation is a Novel Tool to Study Musicality,” *Scientific Reports (Nature Publisher Group)* 12, no. 1 (2022), 1.

<sup>120</sup> Weiss and Peretz, “Improvisation is a Novel Tool to Study Musicality,” 10.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>122</sup> Marie-Lynne Sauve, “The Therapeutic Effects of Vocal Improvisation” (MA thes., Carleton University, Canada, 2004), 1, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Students may experience an unexplainable joy when singing improvisation. Sauve explains, “[i]t does seem that the spiritual effects are an integral part of the experience of vocal improvisation.”<sup>123</sup> While not excluding instrumentalists, this soul-body connection maintains a unique relationship for a vocalist. Additionally, the element of vocal jazz improvisation that extends beyond soloing is fascinating. Jazz choir allows for a union between singers who must lock in exceedingly tight harmonies to create compulsory jazz chords. Furthermore, the vocal jazz solo appears in diverse forms, including one vocalist improvising over a rhythm section, jazz choir underlay, or combining these two underlays. Multiple soloists can also improvise in an exchange scheme, either one vocalist in exchange with an instrumental soloist or two vocalists in conversation with each other. This opportunity for an interactive solo experience only adds to the spiritual soul connectivity to which Sauve refers. “This sense of connection in the world could be tied to the sense of interpersonal connectedness that seems to occur in a group context when singers synchronize together through entertainment.”<sup>124</sup> Sauve submits that many believe the act of creating allows the creator to taste the beauty of God as the ultimate Creator and insinuates that this is perhaps a reason for the enigmatic delight that results from improvisation as creation. Students benefit from the opportunity to create, experiment, and practice art; vocal jazz improvisation is one vehicle for this expression.

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<sup>123</sup> Sauve, “The Therapeutic Effects,” 124.

<sup>124</sup> Sauve, “The Therapeutic Effects,” 128.

## Chapter Summary

In summary, there is a significant amount of research in existence regarding the impacts of vocal jazz. However, the literature available speaks to methods rather than presenting specific benefits of the education. The literature review presented a significant number of sources regarding vocal jazz improvisational training on the secondary choral student and secondary choral program. The sections of this literature review included literature regarding the history of vocal jazz education, choral music education teacher preparation programs and professional development offerings for teachers in the field, hesitations and concerns of high school choir teachers considering vocal jazz, effective methods for teaching vocal jazz, and the impacts of teaching vocal jazz improvisation techniques concerning student growth, student musicianship, student engagement, and student performance competency. Each source citation contributed to the comprehensive examination of vocal jazz improvisational techniques and their impact on secondary school choristers and secondary choral programs as a whole. The goal of chapter three is to display the methodology used in this grounded theory study to gather a saturation of data for this research supported by the literature reviewed in chapter two.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative grounded theory research on the impact of the utilization of vocal jazz improvisational techniques on the secondary choral student and secondary choral program. The data collected was used to analyze the implications of using vocal jazz improvisational techniques in secondary choral students and secondary choral programs and examine those students' preparedness for collegiate-level music program participation, as well as consider the existing teacher preparation available.

The researcher presents grounded theory research design principles at length in this chapter. The other principal components of this chapter include the research questions and hypotheses, the study participants, data collection and survey process, procedure, and data analysis, considerations for credibility and trustworthiness, and the ethical concerns of the study. The method of this study utilized all components required in a grounded theory study, though it is essential to consider that this process is somewhat fluid due to the nature of the research. Nowell and her fellow scholars reminded the researcher that "[i]n qualitative research, the process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not always distinct steps; they are often interrelated and coincide throughout the research process."<sup>125</sup> The researcher collected and analyzed data findings, then processed the data piece by piece and collectively, resulting in a rich, comprehensive examination and understanding of the collected data.

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<sup>125</sup> Lorelli, S Nowell., Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules, "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteri," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 4.

## Research Design

This study used a grounded theory research design. Researcher Ciarán Dunne defines this well-established methodology by saying, “[g]rounded theory, a research methodology primarily associated with qualitative research, was first proposed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967.”<sup>126</sup> The grounded theory methodology allows the researcher to collect data and establish a theoretical saturation regarding the theory in question. The research questions within the grounded theory approach linked directly to the research process. Dunne further asserts, “[g]rounded theory comprises several unique methodological elements – such as constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling – which differentiate it from other research methodologies.”<sup>127</sup> The constant comparative analysis indicated the study style and was a theme throughout this detailed research. The researcher put a scrupulous emphasis on exhaustive theoretical sampling within the surveys for this study.

As defined by Creswell, “the development of the theory might help explain practice or provide a framework for further research.”<sup>128</sup> This study fulfilled part of the current research gap regarding vocal jazz improvisation training in secondary choir programs. Additionally, this research developed a theory regarding the impact of vocal jazz improvisational training in secondary choir programs. In her article denoting the importance grounded theory, author Ciarán Dunne says, “[a] grounded theory research study has ‘movement’ or some action that the

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<sup>126</sup> Ciarán Dunne, “The place of the literature review in grounded theory research,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 14, no. 2 (March 2011): 111.

<sup>127</sup> Ciarán Dunne, “The place of the literature review,” 111.

<sup>128</sup> John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018), 82.

researcher is attempting to explain.”<sup>129</sup> The researcher explains the impacts of using vocal jazz improvisational techniques in these secondary choral programs in this study. One boundary to this study is that the study itself utilized information from current research regarding collegiate vocal jazz and collegiate teacher preparation programs, as well as professional vocal jazz ensembles, in addition to the primary focus of the study: secondary vocal jazz and secondary choir programs. This variance is in place to consider the inspiration for the vocal jazz practice and the programming that prepares future choral educators to teach at the secondary level.

### **Grounded Theory Methodology**

This strategy within this grounded theory research design study is qualitative. The researcher used a grounded theory design method to collect and analyze data and develop a theory regarding the impact of vocal jazz improvisational techniques in secondary choral students and secondary choral programs. The researcher worked in music education for ten years and holds a Bachelor of Music Education and a Master of Science in Public Administration. None of the research study participants had a relationship with the researcher representing a conflict of interest which may have resulted in any bias in the study. The researcher's training and experience prepared her for the requirements of this research study.

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<sup>129</sup> Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative*, 83.

## **Research Questions**

The researcher examined the use of vocal jazz improvisational techniques in the secondary choral education setting and collegiate music education setting. The research questions for this study were:

Central Research Question: What benefits come from teaching choral students how to utilize vocal jazz improvisational techniques in their practice?

Secondary Research Question 1: Do secondary students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational training perform better overall in choir?

Secondary Research Question 2: Do secondary choir teachers possess the necessary training when entering the field to effectively teach these techniques?

## **Study Participants**

The researcher followed the guidelines for properly and effectively identifying participants for the study. As prescribed by Creswell and Poth, "[t]he grounded theorist starts with a homogeneous sample and individuals who have commonly experienced the action or process."<sup>130</sup> The researcher identified dozens of high school choral teachers and collegiate music education, choral, voice, and jazz professors across the United States, representing each region of the country. These two panels of participants, secondary teachers, and collegiate professors answered a survey of questions regarding the impacts of vocal jazz improvisational techniques. The researcher then invited a small sub-group of these survey participants to participate in interviews.

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<sup>130</sup> Creswell and Poth, "Qualitative Inquiry," 156.

Notably, “[a]n important step in the process is to find people or places to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide good data. A closely interrelated step in the process involves determining a strategy for the purposeful sampling of individuals.”<sup>131</sup> The research carefully and meticulously sampled the individuals for both the survey process and the subsequent interview and focus group procedure. The researcher used official school websites to research high school programs nationwide. The researcher identified a diverse grouping of schools from each state, collected the music teachers' contact information, and sent the survey to the music teachers at these schools for completion. Upon completion, the researcher selected several participants for interviews. The researcher asked these educators to discuss their experiences teaching jazz choir, the use of vocal jazz improvisational techniques in the choral classroom, and the impacts they have observed of these strategies respective to their students and their programs overall. Contrasts considered include teachers who have class periods dedicated to vocal jazz as opposed to teachers who do not have class periods devoted to vocal jazz. All information was recorded and stored in a secure google drive on a password-protected computer.

### **Instrumentation & Procedures**

The researcher developed the questions for the surveys by considering the central research question and secondary research questions. The central research question references the benefits of teachers who train choral students in vocal jazz improvisation. The secondary research questions center around the results of student participation in vocal jazz improvisational

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<sup>131</sup> Creswell and Poth, “Qualitative Inquiry,” 148.

training and the preparation for choir teachers with vocal jazz improvisation instruction and pedagogy. The researcher developed questions for the survey participants through consideration of the central and secondary research questions. The researcher then asked several open-ended questions regarding the benefits of the use of vocal jazz improvisational training on high school students, the impacts of the use of vocal jazz improvisation training within the choir program, and the pedagogical preparation provided to choral music education students at the collegiate level. The research also provided participants with an option for a follow-up interview with additional, more in-depth questions. The researcher selected a small number of survey participants for follow-up interviews.

Creswell and Poth counsel researchers to practice full transparency and adequate permission when collecting data for the purposes of research. They explain that “[i]n a grounded theory study, the participants need to provide permission to be studied, while the researcher should have established rapport with the participants so that they will disclose detailed perspectives about responding to an action or a process.”<sup>132</sup> The researcher created a short, confidential survey. There were five preliminary questions pertaining to the survey-takers contact information, followed by eleven survey questions. The researcher designed survey questions using a combination of Semantic Differential Scales, including the matrix rating scale and open-ended questions. After completing the survey, participants were allowed to participate in an interview with the researcher. All survey results were kept confidential and stored on a password-protected computer accessed only by the researcher.

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<sup>132</sup> Creswell and Poth, "Qualitative Inquiry," 156.

### **Data Analysis**

Google Forms was the electronic cloud database used to collect the survey data. All data was collected and stored on a Google Sheets spreadsheet in the researcher's private, password-protected account. The researcher sent a Google Forms survey link via email to secondary choir teachers and collegiate music education, choral, voice, and jazz professors across the country. The researcher then used the Google sheets spreadsheet download feature through Google Forms to organize and analyze the data. Emerging themes discovered by the researcher were determined through a systematic coding process using open coding, followed by selective coding, and concluded by theoretical coding. As explained by Nowell and her colleagues, "[w]hat is important is that the process of data collection, coding, organizing, and analysis is described in sufficient detail to enable the reader to judge whether the final outcome is rooted in the data generated."<sup>133</sup> The theoretical saturation from the data collection and analysis supported the researcher's grounded theory approach and endorsed the study.

### **Trustworthiness**

As stated by scholars Nowell and her research colleagues on the topic of trust within research, "[t]he trustworthiness of the process will be determined by how the researcher uses the data to support the main points, building toward a convincing explanation."<sup>134</sup> The trustworthiness of the research conducted for this study was of paramount concern to the researcher. The researcher asked each participant to respond honestly to the survey questions.

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<sup>133</sup> Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis," 8.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 11.

Participants were ensured confidentiality in their responses and were encouraged to share unabashed answers, including details about their university preparation or lack thereof, their experiences with the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of systems within the curriculum, and other pertinent information relevant to this study. Data collected by the researcher was used to support the main points of this study and indeed supported a convincing argument.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Ethical concerns concerning this study were a top priority for the researcher. Before this study, the researcher submitted a request for approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB granted permission for the researcher to conduct this qualitative study using a Grounded Theory research design, the study, procedure, survey, and all documents necessary. The Institutional Review Board also granted permission to the chair and reader as research participants. All participants were required to provide informed consent to the researcher.

The researcher considered ethical concerns and ensured that all procedures prescribed by the IRB, expertise from scholars in the field of research ethics, and the standards of Liberty University were adhered to throughout the research process. Creswell and Poth contend that “[p]lanning and conducting an ethical study means that the researcher considers and addresses all anticipated and emergent ethical issues in the study.”<sup>135</sup> The researcher followed the guidelines of the IRB and used the Letter of Invitation to participate in the research process, as shown in Appendix A, and the Letter of Informed Consent to participate in the research process, as shown in Appendix B. The risks to the human subjects surveyed and interviewed in this study were

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<sup>135</sup> Creswell and Poth, “Qualitative Inquiry,” 149.

minimal. All participants were over the age of 18 and did not demonstrate any other risks, such as impaired mental capacity or in any way maintaining a power-dynamic relationship with the researcher. To minimize future risks to participant confidentiality, all data collected for this research, including survey results and recorded materials, will be erased after a period of five years.

### **Chapter Summary**

In summary, the primary goal of this chapter was to outline the grounded theory research design used to answer the research questions. This chapter contained the principles of the grounded theory research design as well as research questions and hypotheses, the study participants, data collection and survey process, procedure, and data analysis, considerations for credibility and trustworthiness, and the ethical concerns of the study. The researcher used a qualitative grounded theory research design to establish a theory on the impacts of vocal jazz improvisational techniques on the secondary choral student and in the secondary choral program. The goal of chapter four is to share the study results and exhibit how the researcher observed a grounded theory methodology illustrated throughout chapter three.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the grounded theory methodological survey used to answer the following research questions of this study:

Central Research Question: What benefits come from teaching choral students how to utilize vocal jazz improvisational techniques as part of their practice?

Secondary Research Question 1: Do secondary students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational training perform better overall in choir?

Secondary Research Question 2: Do secondary choir teachers possess the necessary training when entering the field to teach these techniques effectively?

This chapter presents an overview of the research findings using grounded theory methodology, connects the analysis to chapter two's literature review. There were three steps in the analysis: (1) open coding, (2) selective coding, and (3) theoretical coding.

### **Sample**

Twenty-five participants were surveyed for this study. All of the participants identified as secondary or higher education music educators. Specifically, the study participants identified as high school choir teachers or higher education music professors. The secondary identifiers represented within the participant pool were public high school music teachers, private high school music teachers, four-year university music teachers, and two-year college music teachers. Participants in the survey process represented schools across the United States. From this survey participant pool, a total of five secondary and post-secondary choir directors were individually

interviewed to collect additional, more detailed data. These participant pool interviews were in addition to the three extensive interviews at the end of chapter three.

### **Data Collection**

This study used both a dichotomous scale and a semantic differential scale in surveying participants. The survey submitted to participants contained a combination of yes or no questions as well as open-ended questions. In the dichotomous scale questions section of the survey, participants indicated whether or not they offered vocal jazz improvisational training to their students and in what settings. In the semantic differential scale questions section of the survey, participants were given space to write about their experiences in their own words. The dichotomous questions gave the researcher an opportunity to carefully analyze specific data points unique to the study.

### **Employment**

Fifteen of the survey participants indicated that they were employed as secondary choir directors. Ten of these teachers indicated that jazz choir is offered at their high school and five of these teachers indicated that jazz choir is not offered at their high school. Of the ten teachers who indicated that jazz choir is offered at their high school, five teachers indicated that they integrate vocal jazz improvisational techniques in their jazz choir ensemble; four teachers indicated that they integrate vocal jazz improvisational techniques in all of their choir classes in some capacity; and one teacher indicated that as they just took over a program following a teacher who did not utilize vocal jazz improvisation, they have not yet been able to integrate vocal jazz improvisational techniques into the jazz choir or other choir settings. Of the five teachers who indicated that jazz choir is not offered at their high school, two of these teachers indicated that

they do not implement vocal jazz improvisational techniques at all; three teachers indicated that they integrate vocal jazz improvisational techniques in their traditional choir settings.

Ten of the survey participants indicated that they were employed higher education music professors. Seven of these professors indicated that they taught in a public or private four-year university or college, while four of these professors indicated that they taught in a public community college (offering both two-year associate degrees and four-year bachelor degrees). Six of the professors indicated that their college does offer jazz choir and four of the professors indicated that their college does not offer vocal jazz. Two of these four professors who indicated that their college does not offer jazz choir indicated that their college does, however, offer some jazz courses. Of the six professors who indicated that their college does offer jazz choir, two of the professors indicated that they teach vocal jazz improvisational techniques in all of their choral classes; three professors indicated that they teach vocal jazz improvisational techniques in their jazz choir ensemble only; one professor indicated that they do not specifically teach vocal jazz improvisation in their course load as they do not conduct the choral ensembles, but teach studio voice only.

#### Course Offerings

Of the twenty-five survey participants, eighteen indicated that they do implement vocal jazz improvisation (including, but not limited to scatting) in their vocal ensembles. Nine of those eighteen participants indicated that they only implement vocal jazz improvisation in jazz-specific classes, while the remaining nine participants indicated they implement improvisational techniques in all choral settings, in both jazz and non-jazz specific settings. Seven of the survey participants indicated that they do not incorporate vocal jazz improvisational training at all in their practice as a music educator.

### Impacts of Improvisation

Of the twenty-five survey participants, twenty-three indicated that they believe there is some positive impact on choral students who are given vocal jazz improvisational training; two participants indicated that they are unsure whether there is a definitive impact on choral students who are given vocal jazz improvisational training. Of the fifteen survey participants who indicated that they are high school choir teachers, twelve participants indicated that they have observed that students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational experiences are more equipped in vocal/aural skills/theory/musicianship as evidenced in their classical choir settings or other ensemble settings; three participants indicated that they were not sure or had not personally observed whether students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational experiences are in any way more equipped in vocal/aural skills/theory/musicianship as evidenced in their classical choir settings or other ensemble settings. Of the ten survey participants who indicated that they were employed as music education professors, eight of them indicated that they observed that students who enter university with previous vocal jazz improvisational experience are in some way more prepared for vocal/aural skills/theory/musicianship training at the collegiate level. The remaining two professors indicated that they had not observed whether students who enter university with previous vocal jazz improvisational experience are in some way more prepared for vocal/aural skills/theory/musicianship training at the collegiate level.

### Data & Analysis

There are several benefits to qualitative coding. According to Johnny Saldana, “the purpose and outcome of data analysis is to reveal to others through fresh insights what we’ve

observed and discovered about the human condition.”<sup>136</sup> This study used a three-step coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The open coding process turns data into “small, discrete components of data,”<sup>137</sup> then codes “each discrete piece of data with a descriptive label.”<sup>138</sup> The second stage of coding following open coding is called axial coding and is used to “draw connections between codes.”<sup>139</sup> The final stage of coding, selective coding, exposes the result of connectivity between the open codes and selective codes. All surveys and interviews were coded manually during the first stage of data analysis coding through open coding. Transcripts were uploaded into online computer software, Delve Tool®, for further analysis. According to the research experts who developed the Delve Tool® coding software, the four core benefits of qualitative coding are increased validity, decreased bias, accurately represented participants, and enabled transparency.<sup>140</sup> Using inductive coding, an approach that allows one to stem codes from data,<sup>141</sup> the researcher used open coding, followed by axial coding, and then selective coding, all derived from the data collection.

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<sup>136</sup> Johnny Saldana, *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=665394>.

<sup>137</sup> LaiYee Ho and Alex Limpaecher, “How To Do Open, Axial, & Selective Coding in Grounded Theory,” *Delve* (blog), February 8, 2022, <https://delvetool.com/blog/openaxialselective>.

<sup>138</sup> Ho and Limpaecher, “How To,” 2022.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 2022.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 2022.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 2022.

### Open, Axial, and Selective Coding

Open coding is the first step in the coding process for this study. The Delve Tool creators, LaiYee Ho and Alex Limpaecher, explain that “[t]he purpose of breaking up your data and labeling them with codes is to enable...the researcher to continuously compare and contrast similar events in [the] data. [The researcher does] this by collating all pieces of data (such as quotes) that were labeled with a particular code.”<sup>142</sup> The researcher assembled each piece of data and organized that data into themes including (1) Improved Audiation, (2) Increased Confidence, and (3) Cultural Relevance. Axial coding is the second step in the coding process for the study. The second stage of data analysis coding, axial coding, the researcher looked for emerging groupings from the open coding process. Ho and Limpaecher say that “[i]n contrast to open coding where you break the data into discrete parts, with axial coding [the researcher begins] to draw connections between codes.”<sup>143</sup> The final stage of data analysis coding, selective coding was the result of connectivity between the open codes and selective codes. Ho and Limpaecher further explain that “[s]elective coding is the culmination of the grounded theory process and its purpose is to either define a new theory or modify an existing theory based on your research.”<sup>144</sup> Each of these steps provided the researcher with opportunities to develop codes using inductive coding. “Inductive coding is a ground-up approach where...[the researcher] allow[s] the narrative or theory to emerge from the raw data itself”<sup>145</sup> according to Ho

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<sup>142</sup> Ho and Limpaecher, “How To,” 2022.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 2022.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 2022.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 2022.

and Limpaecher. The researcher explored the data and discerned a new theory from the survey results and the codes that materialized from that research.

### Improved Audiation

The theme (1) Improved Audiation included the codes Theory Skills, with sub-categories Improved Sight-Reading and Increased Melody Understanding; Aural Skills, with sub-categories Harmonization, Aural Retention, Intonation, and Chord Change Recognition. The term *Improved Audiation* is an all-encompassing term used in this thesis used to describe audiation as well as reflects the aforementioned sub-categories. Several individuals identified improved student skills such as aural recognition, rhythmic understanding, and increased proficiency in hearing or creating harmonies.

One participant said that vocal jazz participants are specifically better equipped in aural skills than their counterparts without any vocal jazz improvisational experiences.

*I have found students who improvise are able to harmonize more quickly and better, to learn by ear more quickly and display more musicality in solos whether improvised or not. I notice students with improvisation training can harmonize by ear better, they are more courageous executing any free style vocalizations in jazz, classical, and solo or small ensembles. They can navigate between traditional choral, vocal jazz, pop, and gospel/worship styles. (Participant 1)*

One participant expressed a notable difference in specific aural skills including harmonic and rhythmic recognition in students with vocal jazz improvisational training.

*Students grow in their ear training and ability to identify intervals, as well as freedom of movement and rhythmic identification abilities. (Participant 4)*

Another participant shared that the improved aural skills component extends beyond hearing and transcends to more accurate singing upon hearing.

*Students definitely have improved audiation. (Participant 12)*

One participant explained that he uses the twelve-bar blues to build the necessary theory knowledge for students to understand chord changes over which they should improvise. He observed that his students succeed when given the foundational building blocks of the music first.

*In our vocal jazz ensembles, I usually begin with twelve-bar blues. We go over how to build a triad off of a root note and work on singing the root of each chord in the progression first. We then do call-and-response exercises where I lead by singing two bars and the kids parrot it back. We then discuss scat syllables and I limit their choices to a handful of syllables first to prevent them from feeling overwhelmed. We then work our way up to improvising over the changes in one of their jazz charts. I usually make a backing track and then we take turns improvising over the changes. I give loads of support and feedback in real-time. (Participant 17)*

Another participant noted that his secondary students who participated in jazz and learned jazz improvisation performed at a higher level than their counterparts who did not participate in jazz or learn jazz improvisation. This concept translated beyond the high school classroom and impacted student progression in the college and community settings as well.

*When I taught middle school and high school, we did a ton of ear training and improvisation to prepare for "next-level" singing, whether that was in college or a community group. Students who continued on to college were further ahead than*

*most students from what they've told me. Better at hearing chord progressions, notes within a chord, etc. (Participant 23)*

One participant connected listening skills to the vocal creation process. This participant also noted a high value in teaching students the written theory behind jazz so students can both visualize and hear the chord structures in written jazz music.

*Improvisation for singers is highly connected to 'hearing' what you are creating. I choose to teach jazz theory as a part of my vocal jazz ensemble curriculum. Part of that includes ear training. (Participant 6)*

Another participant observed the holistic music literacy that comes from skilled vocal improvisation. Some amount of musicality must be in place to hear and immediately respond to the intricacies of performance including rhythm and tonality.

*I think of [this skillset] as an aspect music literacy. The ability to improvise shows a level of understanding of rhythm/tonal literacy as part of being a musician. (Participant 19)*

### Increased Confidence

The theme (2) Increased Confidence included the codes Self-Efficacy, Consistency, Stage Presence, Bravery in Rehearsal, and Musicality. The term *Increased Confidence* is an all-encompassing term used in this thesis to describe student confidence as a musician and performer. Several individuals identified increased student confidence in performance as a notable impact of vocal jazz improvisational training in areas such as singing with decreased anxiety, trying new skills, and volunteering to solo rather than being asked.

One participant shared her thoughts on this phenomenon.

*I have found students who improvise are able to harmonize more quickly and better, to learn by ear more quickly and display more musicality in solos whether improvised or not. (Participant 3)*

Another participant shared more regarding student attitude as a result of improvisational experiences.

*Students who participate in improvisational experiences are usually more confident performers. They are also less perfectionistic, willing to make mistakes, and learn from them. (Participant 10)*

One participant who taught both in the secondary choir setting and the collegiate choir setting indicated that students who entered college with previous high school experience were more adequately prepared.

*I taught college for 13 years and would agree that students with improv experience essentially had better ears. (Participant 1)*

Another participant observed when students have established trust in the choir program and with their peers and director show a willingness to attempt soloing.

*These students tend to be more "brave" when I ask them to try new things, whether it be related to jazz or vocalizing in general. They trust the process and realize that they have done this type of thing before, it is not so bad, and the outcome can be really amazing... they find that they can have fun making that kind of music with their peers in a non-judgmental environment. (Participant 10)*

Beyond the confidence boost, one participant observed his students ability to phrase and truly tell a story through a vocal jazz improvisation solo increased as they gained experience with the practice.

*In our jazz ensemble we work on improvisational techniques from the standpoint of confidence building, then from theory, and teaching different jazz licks as well as phrasing/storytelling in solos. Students who have gone through vocal jazz improv training tend to be more outgoing and braver in their singing, willing to sing out with confidence and take chances in sight reading as opposed to being timid in passages they are unsure about. (Participant 9)*

One participant noted that the comfort level with vocal jazz improvisation may not be the causation of success, rather that students with a strong affinity for musical prowess and expression may result in the bravery to try improvisation. Students who are already gifted musically and have experience with performing music may be more likely to attempt improvisation.

*I cannot say that it is the result of vocal jazz improvisation experience. Instead, it could be that those students who are comfortable interacting with music in this way choose to try jazz. (Participant 11)*

One individual acknowledged that the skills students learn in jazz are useful beyond the choral rehearsal space.

*I believe in the benefits of vocal jazz, including student self-efficacy in musical skills and performance in general. (Participant 10)*

### Cultural Relevance

The theme (3) Cultural Relevance included the codes Connection to Popular Music, Regional Popularity, and Festivals, Contests, and Concerts with the sub-categories Peer Recognition and Faculty Recognition. The term *Cultural Relevance* is an all-encompassing term used in this thesis to describe the relevance of jazz improvisation to the student musician and

performer. Several individuals identified cultural relevance as a notable factor in the reception of vocal jazz improvisational training for students in areas such as whether a given region or district offers vocal jazz festivals, whether local colleges and professional groups perform vocal jazz improvisation, and whether vocal jazz improvisation is part of the local musical community's vernacular.

One participant noticed a significant difference between students who are surrounded by peers and mentors who participate in and perform vocal jazz are better equipped to grow in the vocal jazz improvisation skill set. This brings up the important consideration that specific schools offer vocal jazz experiences while others do not. This also emphasizes the fact that students who are raised in a family or community culture of jazz music or jazz-inspired music may have a different affinity for vocal jazz improvisation.

*I used to teach in an area where vocal jazz festivals and contests were common and a fair number of them. I relocated to an area where there are no festivals or contests nearby. When students see other students their same age improvising, see them getting accolades, see and hear exemplary improvisation, it motivates them to get better. Because my students have little to compare themselves too, and not much experience, they have no idea how much improvement they can make. It is a much slower process when not surrounded by other jazz choirs and festivals or competitions. It was quite surprising to me as I relocated within thirty minutes of one of the most amazing university vocal and instrumental jazz programs in the country. (Participant 1)*

Another participant noted that teacher investment is extremely important to the success of students.

*It can be scary for teachers without an improv background to attempt improv themselves as they tend to have the same hesitation as students do. I encourage them to learn with their students and grow as improvisers themselves, to show your students it is ok to take chances and grow as improvisers with them.*

*(Participant 10)*

One participant remarked that if scheduling constraints, student interest, and community support were in place, the interest for a vocal jazz ensemble in her school would likely be well-received by teachers and students.

*If there were an established jazz ensemble, I believe that there would be an impact. (Participant 10)*

Another participant mentioned how important it is to meet students where they are with the process of vocal jazz improvisation. This participant recognized that placement deeply impacts the reception of the training. Students who are surrounded by vocal jazz in the local community culture or within the school culture are accustomed to the style and may view the practice much differently from peers in a community or school environment in which vocal jazz is not established or popular.

*I have been teaching jazz choirs for a total of thirty-six years, my second year at this school. I teach jazz students how to improvise by using Scat and lyric scat. I have developed a method that works well for me. At my new school they are new to improvisation, and they are at a very beginning level. (Participant 1)*

The participants in this study contributed significant information for the researcher to dissect. All of the information volunteered contributed to the establishment of new themes.

Additionally, the following section presents the transcripts of three interviews which also contribute to the collection of data for this study.

### **Vocal Jazz Perspectives: Three Interviews from Across the Spectrum**

The researcher was fortunate to interview three music education experts across the vocal jazz spectrum: first: a high school choir director who intentionally chose to avoid vocal jazz in her high school choir program; second: an experienced college jazz teacher who spent his career arranging vocal jazz music and advocating for improvisation and other jazz techniques in music education; and third: a professional performer and music producer whose experience across genres and styles and time in the choral classroom influenced his career in the field of music performance.

#### **The High School Traditional Choir Perspective**

Staica Cammarano, a seventh-year high school choir teacher who grew up singing in a select treble choir known for its rigor and commitment to choral excellence, testifies that while her extensive experience in traditional choir techniques adequately equipped her for a successful career as a choral educator, the style of jazz-specific improvisation is not a concept with which she feels a particular aptitude or affinity. Her experience directly impacts her reasoning for not adding jazz choir to the offerings in her high school choir program. Cammarano is dedicated to the training of her students and takes that role extremely seriously, incorporating as many best practices as possible.

### Improvisation in the Non-Jazz Setting

Vocal improvisation, while typically seen in the jazz choir setting is not exclusive to jazz. When a choir teacher provides a space for students to improvise in choir rehearsal, students can experiment. This does require some instruction, an understanding of basic music theory, and a comfort level with experimentation, however. Cammarano explains:

*I have had some experience with improvisation over a chord progression which was solfege based, part of a graduate music theory class, and was with an entire ensemble. I have theoretical knowledge of how it works and how to implement it, but lack the classroom time of testing it out and experiencing it with students. I have no experience implementing it in a jazz setting- so in that case, yes, I am uncomfortable since I have no experience in practicing or teaching that particular skill. A few years ago, I tested out an improv exercise with a concert choir where students could choose a solfege syllable to sing over a chord progression. I wrote out the progression using solfege syllables, so students would only need to choose one solfege from each chord option. The activity went well, but was a little over the head of students who did not understand the music theory behind it. And, students were really hesitant to take a chance and choose a pitch even when moving at a slow tempo. Finally, many students did not have the vocal confidence with solfege to know how to just jump to the next pitch. The activity would be better attempted in a more advanced group that had more vocal confidence in their own abilities and in solfege.<sup>146</sup>*

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<sup>146</sup> Stacia Cammarano, interviewed by author, Spokane, WA, February 12, 2023.

### Hesitation Due to Unfamiliarity with Jazz

Cammarano's reasons for adhering to a more traditional approach with choral techniques is multifaceted. She explains that she did grow up with jazz influences in her own musicianship experiences, and she would have felt uncomfortable teaching concepts she'd not been taught herself. She also explained that when she began her first job as a high school choir teacher, jazz choir was technically on the schedule for her teaching load, but her predecessor had not established a jazz tradition and the students were not actually comfortable with or excited about jazz choir.

*I did not grow up in my choral setting with vocal jazz. I never sang it, never listened to it. It was also not a part of my collegiate music education degree so there was truly no exposure to singing jazz, let alone teaching it, before I got to my school. And when I arrived at my high school, I learned that their "jazz choir" was really a show choir and the students had no idea what jazz even was. It was easy to change that ensemble to a chamber choir because the students didn't want to sing jazz, they wanted to sing more challenging music than the concert choir. So making that switch in my program was easy since there was no history of real vocal jazz anyway. Since that change, I have not had students request that we add a jazz choir. The three ensembles I have are different enough that it works as is and at this time, adding a jazz choir is not of interest from students. But, it could be in the future if the program continues to grow in numbers.<sup>147</sup>*

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<sup>147</sup> Stacia Cammarano, interviewed by author, Spokane, WA, February 12, 2023.

Cammarano says that while she is open to incorporating more improvisation in her advanced traditional choirs in an attempt to improve students' aural skills and pitch recognition, she recognizes that jazz is not a genre she feels particularly prepared to teach. One reason for this decision is technology. An element often taken for granted in the world of jazz performance is the necessity for electronics for amplification. Jazz choirs are typically chamber ensembles accompanied by rhythm sections. The nature of the ensemble make-up requires microphones for the vocalists to be heard over the instrumentalists.

*I would probably not teach vocal jazz improvisation. If it is not required by the repertoire I choose, then I do not see a way to incorporate it. Also, I do not have the sound system to successfully pull off even one jazz piece in my most advanced choir. So, selecting even just one jazz piece probably wouldn't work for a concert and therefore, students would have the repertoire opportunity to explore jazz improvisation. As I mentioned before, I think a more "classical" improv activity with solfege (sung chords underneath and student soloists improvising a simple melody over the top) would work in an advanced group but at this time, my students would not be ready for that, but it is something I will keep in my back pocket.<sup>148</sup>*

#### Recognition of the Benefits

While Cammarano is not necessarily prepared to transition any of the ensembles in her high school choral program into a vocal jazz choir, she does see the benefits of such choirs in the right settings where the teacher has the experience and desire to teach jazz, and the students have

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<sup>148</sup> Stacia Cammarano, interviewed by author, Spokane, WA, February 12, 2023.

the affinity for music theory comprehension, aural skills retention, and confidence to perform improvisation.

*Vocal jazz improvisation builds huge vocal confidence and is such a good way to experience almost a more “hands on” way of singing the music. Improvisation is one of the only ways students can create and make a piece their own when so often, we are training them to read what is exactly on the page. Both skills (reading and improv) are of course incredibly important, but improv is that whole other world of experiencing a song that students rarely get to dig into. Also, so many of us teachers try to encourage making mistakes in class and that making mistakes and taking risks is totally fine. But in a choral classroom, there are not a lot of activities that encourage that. Vocal jazz improv is one of the few that does which means it’s one of the few ways that maybe traditionally “perfect” choir kids can practice that risk-taking in an appropriate setting.<sup>149</sup>*

#### Needed Training for Teachers

Camaranno says that given the notable benefits of vocal jazz improvisation for students, more training ought to be provided for choir teachers. She suggests that there are ample opportunities for professional development within the field and that in her area in particular, unlike many areas throughout the country, there are a plethora of programs that offer vocal jazz opportunities. If teachers want to gain exposure to this art form and learn the pedagogy behind how to teach jazz these concepts to students, they need only seek assistance from knowledgeable colleagues.

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<sup>149</sup> Stacia Cammarano, interviewed by author, Spokane, WA, February 12, 2023.

*I think jazz is a great genre for students to experience. A teacher without a background in jazz likely has many great colleagues in their district with whom they could collaborate if they needed help getting a jazz program started. Especially in my state of Washington. Not starting a jazz program at my school stemmed from lack of student interest and my rigid personal background of no-jazz. I hope that other teachers can take that leap and introduce jazz to their choral ensembles if the numbers and interest is there! It is such a great genre for building skills, risk-taking, and confidence amongst young vocalists that sometimes, I wish that it had been a part of my musical upbringing.<sup>150</sup>*

Stacia Cammarano has established herself as an emerging authority on secondary choral music. Her experience as a choral educator and classical musician has influenced and strengthened her expertise in the field. Her ensembles regularly receive top ratings at regional festivals and competitions. Additionally, her insight into vocal pedagogy deeply influenced her research as a master's student and established a foundation for the professional development she shares with her colleagues. Her understanding of healthy choral singing and recognition of the challenges inherent within young, developing choirs is a credit to the profession. This establishes substantial reasoning for her hesitations with incorporating vocal jazz techniques in her program. Her experience is felt by many other educators and provides insight for the disinclination of many choral education peers.

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<sup>150</sup> Stacia Cammarano, interviewed by author, Spokane, WA, February 12, 2023.

### **The High School & Collegiate Vocal Jazz Perspective**

Vijay Singh, a prolific choral composer, and vocal jazz arranger, and expert in the field of vocal jazz and choral training participated in an interview with the researcher. Singh has written and arranged over 110 choral and vocal jazz pieces of music and is world-renowned for his craft. He is also an accomplished performer, conductor, and clinician and bestowed his knowledge on hundreds if not thousands of musicians. Singh has worked as a vocal music educator for over three decades. His start in vocal jazz, and voice in general, began not in the K-12 setting but in college.

*I never sang in a vocal jazz ensemble in HS (my first choral experience was my senior year in HS...I was always more into band). My college scholarship required me to be in band/wind ensemble, jazz band, concert choir, and the fledgling vocal jazz ensemble (which had just started the year before I arrived) so that was my first vocal jazz experience; however, I had played in jazz bands all throughout Jr. High and HS and was in a jazz combo that was already gigging. At that time my major instruments were clarinet, saxophone, piano, and percussion. I definitely did not think of myself as a vocalist, and the first voice lessons I ever had were during my undergrad years. When I graduated and started teaching public school music at the MS/HS levels I was assigned a vocal jazz choir (much to my chagrin!)....I did not know any repertoire for choirs/vocal jazz.<sup>151</sup>*

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<sup>151</sup> Vijay Singh, interviewed by author, Ellensburg, WA, January 25, 2023.

### Experience with Instrumental Jazz and Exposure to Vocal Jazz

Singh recognizes that his experience with the jazz genre as an instrumentalist certainly influenced his understanding of the craft and ameliorated his success as a vocalist. He asserts that when starting his career as a secondary music teacher, he succeeded because of the mentors in his life and his undergraduate training. Singh teaches a wide variety of voice classes now and attributes that expertise to years of training in his own education and performance experience.

*I teach both 'Classical' and Vocal jazz. In my opinion, there are similarities and differences to both. Much of my opinions have been shaped by my own performing experiences, both as a vocalist and instrumentalist and as a solo versus an ensemble artist. Most folks in the traditional music world have always been specialists; they tend to focus on one area or style almost exclusively. For example, classical singers and instrumentalists who spend years in school learning specific repertoire and are uncomfortable with any other styles. They also prefer to 're-create' music as opposed to create or improvise and this has been part of the academic culture in music schools and in academia for decades. The music business has radically changed in the past forty years. It is very difficult nowadays to be exclusively a 'specialist' in only one area or style. If you want to make a living as a musician now, you must be comfortable with multiple styles including Pop/Rock, Jazz, Country, Modern, Classical, Musical Theatre, Folk, etc. and have the ability/chops to perform at high levels, do your own promos and bookings, manage your contacts, network, communicate well and be highly organized. My career has always been one of being eclectic in multiple styles at high levels and being consistent. I was considered a 'rare breed' for many years because I could sing as a soloist and ensemble singer in*

*Classical venues, in multiple languages and classical and operatic styles, yet also perform at the highest level of jazz and contemporary music. I often would be doing this literally in the same week or even day! And, I could read! I learned some of these skills in school but much more of it by doing it in the real world and educating myself. I gave a presentation years ago at a National ACDA conference about this topic of 'Similarities vs. Differences in Choral and Vocal Jazz Music.' I look at both styles and the ways they different or are similar based on vocal technique, styles, repertoire, etc.<sup>152</sup>*

### Vocal Jazz: The New Style in Schools

Singh explains that the concept of a vocal jazz ensemble is relatively new to school settings. He elicits some history of the institution at which he has been teaching for over three decades, “Central Washington University was one of the first institutions in the US to include jazz in their music curriculum dating back to 1947. Vocal jazz specifically appeared in the late 60s/early 70s and the legendary John “Coach” Moawad built the ongoing nationally renowned jazz program which included a vocal jazz component.”<sup>153</sup> Vijay recalls the beginnings of vocal jazz in the United States collegiate sphere and credits its success to the teachers who pioneered the instructing.

### The Differences Between Jazz & Other Singing Styles

When asked to compare traditional choir and vocal jazz and the significance of learning jazz, Singh provides several categories, including historical and genre categories, and then compares jazz against various genres and historical styles. Below are Singh's observations about

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<sup>152</sup> Vijay Singh, interviewed by author, Ellensburg, WA, January 25, 2023.

<sup>153</sup> Vijay Singh, interviewed by author, Ellensburg, WA, January 25, 2023.

each musical character in historical contexts, musical characters in genre contexts, and the primary similarities and differences between what is widely considered classical music compared to jazz music.

#### Musical Characteristics in Historical Contexts

Singh expounds on the various characteristics throughout history, saying, *Renaissance music has a lighter approach to tone, minimal vibrato, clarity, and use of falsetto; Baroque is ornamented, bright, light, rhythmically tight, has frequent sub-divisions, and requires vocal agility and terraced dynamics; Classical uses more instrumentation requiring bigger tone projection, includes the addition of consistent vibrato, and is overall a richer sound quality; Romantic stylizes a richer, darker tone, includes lush harmonies, long extended phrases, and is marked by vibrato, operatic influences, and wide dynamics; 20th century uses increased chromaticism, harmonic explorations, a wide variety of textures, and ethnic influences; and finally with regards to Contemporary music, anything goes.*<sup>154</sup>

#### Musical Characteristics in Genre Contexts

Singh compares a plethora of popular music singing styles, saying, *Blues are distinguishable by an earthy quality, use of belt tone and chest voice, repetition of lines, and a full range of dynamics; Gospel is known for a full throaty tone, full vibrato, wide dynamics, and use of chest voice; Swing/Big Band can be identified by a smooth delivery, the use of syncopated/swung*

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<sup>154</sup> Vijay Singh, interviewed by author, Ellensburg, WA, January 25, 2023.

*8<sup>th</sup> notes/triplet-feel subdivisions, a lyric, blended, and relaxed approach to the lines, and that vibrato is used to “feather” ends of phrases; Bebop is known for its aggressive or visceral bright tone, highly improvised, use of chromatics and dissonance, and is often more individualistic; Latin Styles are known for their use of polyrhythms, straight 8<sup>th</sup> notes, melodic lines, Brazilian (samba, bossa nova) vs. Afro-Cuban (Afro 6/8, Son, ChaCha, etc.), lighter vocal tone, minimal vibrato; and Pop/Rock is identified by its use of belt voice and falsettop, register exploitation, simple harmonics, melodic lines, and earthy, and use of chest voice.<sup>155</sup>*

#### Similarities and Differences Between Classical and Jazz Music

Singh explains several similarities and differences between singing styles traditionally considered classical against the contemporary styles under the jazz umbrella. Singh asserts, *The tone quality and vocal textures observed in vocal jazz vary across the types of charts written. A lighter tone quality or vocal texture is appropriate for accompanied ballads as well as cappella ballads, while minimal vibrato is used for dense jazz harmonies, a brighter, brassy tone is used for swing and big band jazz, and finally a richer tone with vibrato is perfect for Gospel. Resonance ought to be lighter for jazz and Latin styles, more like speech on pitch, as opposed to darker and richer for Gospel and blues tunes. Singh also considers vibrato and straight-tone approaches for the styles in jazz singing. He says denser harmonies in jazz require minimal vibrato and fluctuations of pitch to tune chords correctly,*

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<sup>155</sup> Vijay Singh, interviewed by author, Ellensburg, WA, January 25, 2023.

*vibrato use at ends of phrases to “feather” tone are appropriate in some styles, whereas tighter voicings in chord clusters require minimal vibrato for clarity. Lastly, the concept of power as opposed to finesse adds tremendously to the stylistic choices in jazz singing. Singh asserts that a full sound for Big Band style “Shout choruses” is appropriate, a bright and brassy, fuller sound for Blues and Gospel is suitable, a lighter tone approach should be used for ballads, and that for a cappella pieces, Latin styles, relaxed Swing, the lyrics ought to be used to guide the interpretation and stylistic choices.*<sup>156</sup>

#### Jazz for a Modern Musician

With regard to preparing students for success as a musician in the modern world, Singh emphasizes the importance of multiplicity in performance styles. When asked about the significance of singing jazz specifically, Singh says,

*The music business has radically changed in the past 40 years....it is very difficult nowadays to be exclusively a "specialist" in only one area or style. If you want to make a living as a musician now, you must be comfortable with multiple styles (Pop/Rock, Jazz, Country, Modern, Classical, Musical Theatre, Folk, etc.) and have the ability/chops to perform at high levels, do your own promos and bookings, manage your contacts, network, communicate well and be highly organized.*<sup>157</sup>

Vijay Singh has deeply influenced vocal jazz education as a performer, arranger, director, clinician, and educator. His experience as a choral educator and classical musician has influenced and strengthened his performance. His impact as a jazz educator and his

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<sup>156</sup> Vijay Singh, interviewed by author, Ellensburg, WA, January 25, 2023.

<sup>157</sup> Vijay Singh, interviewed by author, Ellensburg, WA, January 25, 2023.

award-winning, nationally recognized vocal jazz ensembles, strengthened only by the improvisational training he provides to the students in his ensembles, is immense. Furthermore, his insight into the pedagogy of vocal jazz and vocal jazz improvisation has impacted musicians and music educators across the country over the past several decades. Many educators have inherited Singh's pedagogical techniques and now train more students in improvisation and stylistic interpretations within vocal jazz. The idea seen in this study that vocal jazz training requires some specialized knowledge and that vocal jazz improvisation supports healthy, vibrant singing, delivers opportunities for active listening and ear training, and promotes a well-rounded musician is all supported by Singh's interview. His understanding of this style and its impact is invaluable to the field of music education.

### **The Professional Jazz Performer & Producer Perspective**

Brennan Baglio, a professional vocalist, arranger, choral educator and clinician, and producer participated in an interview with the researcher. Baglio was a member of a professional vocal jazz ensemble for over a decade and has performed on stages around the country and even on season one of the popular a capella competition television show *The Sing Off*. He is also an accomplished conductor, clinician, and producer who splits his time between Seattle and Nashville due to his popular demand in these professional arenas. Baglio's start in vocal jazz started when he was in high school, but he says singing has been a large part of his life since he was a child.

*I have been singing jazz for eighteen years, since my senior year of high school.*

*I was first introduced to music as a child while singing in a children's choir. I began a serious interest in the study of music in high school and college. Much of my experience with music has been through choral ensembles, both "traditional" and vocal jazz or contemporary ensembles, in an educational setting, first as a student and later as a teacher. I was also fortunate to have the opportunity to perform professionally in a touring vocal jazz ensemble for nearly ten years.<sup>158</sup>*

#### A Personal Journey with Improvisation

Baglio recalls learning improvise as a vocalist as part of the choral ensemble. He asserts that vocal jazz improvisation has evolved for him in many ways throughout the various facets of his experience. Specifically, Baglio credits his breadth of knowledge to a dedicated study of jazz artists throughout history. He also recognizes the importance of identifying improvisation as a special type of communication, its own language.

*Most of my formal education with improvisation was as a member of an ensemble. My high school and college vocal jazz directors placed emphasis on exploring improvisation, though there was no rigorous study specifically in the field of improvisation. Later in my musical development, I began to take on more of an interest in developing a thorough understanding of jazz improvisation, mostly from the position of an educator/director. I wanted to be able to incorporate improvisation into my teaching. As I developed as an educator, I began to more consistently study improvisation, specifically studying both instrumental and vocal artists with historical influence in the development of improvisational*

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<sup>158</sup> Brennan Baglio, interviewed by author, Nashville, TN, February 28, 2023.

*language. This self-study included transcribing and emulating these artists as well as utilizing educational materials on improvisation in order to develop a deeper understanding of improvisation as a language.*<sup>159</sup>

#### Improvisations Impacts on the Performer

With regards to the impact of learning and perfecting the art of vocal jazz improvisation, Baglio says that improvisation has the power to improve musicianship overall, beyond what one might consider when thinking about vocal jazz.

*While I do not consider myself a particularly strong improviser, I do feel that improvisation (and the study of it) has deepened my knowledge and understanding of jazz as an idiom as well as expanded my understanding of jazz as a language. This includes not only improvisation specifically, but also the broader harmonic and rhythmic elements of jazz. Improvisation has also had an impact on developing my ear, not only in a jazz context, but also in a broader musical sense.*<sup>160</sup>

#### How Vocal Jazz In High School Prepares Students for What Is Next

Baglio notes the differences in the students who entered his community college vocal jazz program with prior high school vocal jazz improvisational experience compared to those who entered your program without prior high school vocal jazz experience.

*Generally speaking, I have found that students who enter with prior experience improvising do have a bit stronger of a foundation in improvisation and jazz language as well as their overall understanding of jazz as an idiom. I have found*

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<sup>159</sup> Brennan Baglio, interviewed by author, Nashville, TN, February 28, 2023.

<sup>160</sup> Brennan Baglio, interviewed by author, Nashville, TN, February 28, 2023.

*that this is the case whether their past experience was largely improvising by ear or if past experience included more formalized training (transcriptions, etc.). Lastly, and maybe most importantly, I have found that singers entering college with a background in improvisation are generally more willing to continue to try to improvise. Singers without this background often are more intimidated by the thought of improvising. I have found that it is therefore important to introduce and work on improvisation in a way that feels approachable, enjoyable, and in which students can experience success quickly.<sup>161</sup>*

#### The Music Industry and Its Connection to Improvisation

Baglio explains the current stage of his career and describes how his work spans a plethora of facets across the music industry and in music education. He also observes his experience working with professional recording artists in the field and relates their high school singing experiences to their current work.

*I am a freelance artist, educator, engineer, and producer. I am the artistic director for a community vocal jazz ensemble in the Seattle area called Last Call. I work as an adjudicator or guest artist for various festivals and educational events. I also maintain a recording studio in my home in Nashville and work as a producer and engineer for various types of recording projects in multiple genres. I think largely the singers I work with outside of the world of education do have some background in music. Most were members of a high school choir or other ensemble. Not all have studied music formally outside of high school, however.*

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<sup>161</sup> Brennan Baglio, interviewed by author, Nashville, TN, February 28, 2023.

*Much of the time I spend working with singers now is outside of a jazz context.*

*Interestingly, I have found that in many cases, these artists are very improvisatory and creative in nature, even though the genre is quite different and they certainly aren't improvising in a jazz sense.<sup>162</sup>*

The Relevance of Jazz and Vocal Jazz Improvisation for Singers and Consumers

Today Vocal jazz, while considered by many to be an all-American performing art, and while relatively new in the western music canon, may be thought of by some as old-fashioned. But Baglio argues that while the genre has evolved and fused with other art forms, it is still a foundational genre and extremely relevant today, both as a performing art and as an educational tool.

*I believe vocal jazz is certainly still relevant, though there is no doubt the genre has changed and incorporates more styles of music than just straight ahead "jazz." From an educational perspective, however, there is no doubt that singing in a vocal jazz or contemporary ensemble provides unique opportunities for students' musical development and therefore should be encouraged.<sup>163</sup>*

Brennan Baglio's diverse experience in the field of music education, professional performance, and studio production spans music education and the recording industry, giving him a unique perspective on the practicality of what happens in the choral classroom in relation to what creates success with labels, radio stations, and ticket sales. His understanding of music as an art, as well as music as a product, provides his students, fellow musicians, and clients a balanced perspective. Baglio approaches his work with a passion for the art form and a realistic

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<sup>162</sup> Brennan Baglio, interviewed by author, Nashville, TN, February 28, 2023.

<sup>163</sup> Brennan Baglio, interviewed by author, Nashville, TN, February 28, 2023.

expectation of the ever-changing industry, while maintaining a respect for the work of his many jazz improvising predecessors.

### **Interview Summary**

Each of these professionals' testimonials provides a unique perspective on vocal jazz education, pedagogy, and impact. Cammarano's extensive experience with the classical choral tradition and lack of exposure to vocal jazz training, and specifically improvisational pedagogy, prevented her from introducing the practice to her students. She wanted to provide her students with expert training. Singh's exposure to jazz band and jazz choir, as well as his multiple mentors in the field of vocal jazz, allowed him to feel comfortable bringing this art form to his students. Baglio's experience with vocal jazz and a capella singing gave him the confidence to perform and teach improvisation and to coach singers as a producer.

These interviews displayed some reasons for and against including vocal jazz improvisation, specifically in the choral rehearsal space, are valid and founded in best-practice pedagogy. The factors in choosing to incorporate vocal jazz improvisation are rooted in exposure, experience, and passion. Teachers exposed to jazz, gain experience with jazz and are passionate about the art form often pass this instruction to their students, while teachers who do not have jazz training choose against it.

In summary, the three interviews displayed a wide spectrum of experiences: a high school choir director who does not teach jazz; an experienced college jazz teacher who dedicated his career to building jazz music for high school and college students; and a professional vocal jazz performer and music producer. The various insights of the above music education professionals from three distinct perspectives provided a broad continuum of ideas regarding vocal jazz

education and vocal jazz improvisational pedagogy. Stacia Cammarano's musical upbringing and specific music education training prepared her to teach in the traditional choir setting. It gave her the confidence to use conventional voice pedagogy techniques in rehearsals. Similarly, Vijay Singh's vocal and instrumental background gave him a foundation for teaching choir at the high school and later college level. But conversely, Vijay's experience in high school jazz band and exposure to vocal jazz during his college career provided him with the necessary tools to jazz choir and introduce vocal jazz improvisation to his students throughout his career as a high school director and a college director. Finally, Brennan Baglio's experience with both traditional vocal music, as well as jazz techniques provided him with the necessary expertise to perform as a live-performing artist and recording artist in a vocal jazz a capella ensemble, to gain experience as a jazz choir director, clinician, and arranger, and to work as a professional music producer to many vocal artists.

### **Summary of Results**

This chapter presented the results of analysis in accordance with grounded theory methodology, connecting the analysis to the study's research questions. The researcher assembled each piece of data and organized that data into themes that served as codes for the research: (1) Improved Audiation, (2) Confidence, and (3) Cultural Relevance. The themes found within the code (1) Improved Audiation included Improved Theory Skills and Improved Aural Skills, and the sub-categories of Intonation, Intervals, Sight-Reading, and Harmonization. The themes uncovered within the code (2) Confidence included Self-Efficacy, Stage-Presence, and Bravery in Rehearsal. Finally, the themes discovered within the code (3)

Cultural Relevance included Peer Recognition, Connection to Popular Music, Regional Popularity, and Festivals and Concerts.

There were three steps within the analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This study sought to answer the central research question which asked about the impacts that come from teaching choral students how to utilize vocal jazz improvisational techniques as part of their practice. The data collected from survey participant research indicated three central themes from the coding process: students experience improved audiation, students exude enhanced confidence when performing, and the practice provides students with a broader understanding of the cultural relevance of the uniquely American art form. This study also sought to answer the secondary research questions: (1) Do secondary students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational training perform better overall in choir? And (2) Do secondary choir teachers possess the necessary training when entering the field to teach these techniques effectively?

There were several themes discovered in the gathering of data from high school choir directors and higher education music education professors. Analysis of the impacts of the use of teaching vocal jazz improvisation were explained in this chapter. Secondary students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational training show improved audiation, increased confidence, and an understanding of the cultural relevance of the musical style. All of these outcomes from participating in vocal jazz improvisational activities are positive, musical, and social-emotional responses to education and can only enhance the student performance in choir, and perhaps in other courses as well. While some vocal music education majors are well-equipped to enter into the high school choir room and teach vocal jazz improvisational techniques, many are not prepared. Not all high schools in the country offer jazz choir and not all colleges and universities

offer jazz choir or vocal jazz training for future vocal music educators. The existing literature explored in chapter two, combined with the survey results and interviews across the spectrum of pedagogical scenarios in chapter four provided a rich contextual framework for this study. The goal of chapter five is to summarize the research question, literature review, methodology, and a discussion of the themes from the research findings of the entire study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

This study demonstrated the benefits for students who participate in vocal jazz improvisation. The research determined that through vocal jazz improvisation, students experience improved audiation, students exude enhanced confidence when performing, and the practice provides students with a broader understanding of the cultural relevance of the uniquely American art form. When speaking of free improvisation in choral settings, researcher Eeva Siljamäki explains that [i]mprovising together in a choir afforded the participants opportunities for developing the ability to let go of fixed control, moving toward what could be theorized as a type of process-focused pedagogical thinking and mindset of growth.”<sup>164</sup> While music educators have incorporated vocal jazz improvisational techniques into the jazz choir practice, not every choir program offers jazz choir nor incorporates those vocal jazz improvisational exercises into the classical setting. “Although improvisation has been argued to enhance creative ability, musical growth and musicianship, it is still regarded as the least important skill, and improvisatory music is often seen as ‘not real’ music.”<sup>165</sup> This research explored how vocal jazz improvisation explicitly impacts the experience of the high school chorister and subsequently impacts the progress and proficiency of the secondary school choir program. This study explored existing literature that supported the idea that vocal jazz improvisation techniques provide several benefits to secondary choir students in the secondary choir program. Vocal jazz

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<sup>164</sup> Eeva Siljamäki, “Free Improvisation in Choral Settings: An Ecological Perspective,” *Research Studies in Music Education* 44, no. 1 (April 2022): 248.

<sup>165</sup> Siljamäki, “Free Improvisation in Choral Settings,” 236.

improvisation pedagogy, when used effectively, positively impacts individual students and the overall scope of the choir program.

### **Significance of Results**

The significance of this study's results is extraordinary. Vocal jazz improvisation pedagogy for secondary school vocalists is standard in many secondary school choir programs, and the techniques taught through singing improvisation have influenced the success of jazz choirs. Despite this practice, much of the existing literature does not denote whether a direct impact on students working through music improvisation connects to those students' successes and proficiencies in more classical choral ensembles and their overall secondary school musician experience.

This study demonstrated several advantages for students who participate in vocal jazz improvisation. The improved audiation, enhanced confidence when performing, and broader understanding of the cultural relevance of the uniquely American art form all deeply impact students. Due to these musical literacy benefits, this study shows that secondary students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational training perform better in choir overall and contribute their added skillset to their choir program. However, not all secondary choir teachers possess the necessary training when entering the field to teach these techniques effectively and would benefit from additional jazz-specific training in music education teacher preparation programs.

The improved audiation, enhanced confidence when performing, and broader understanding of jazz's cultural relevance all have the potential to impact the entire choral program and body of singers. Another researcher explains, “[s]oloists demonstrate compositional skill by improvising a coherent solo; coherent in terms of motive, theme, voice leading, or form

(qualities also prized in classical music).”<sup>166</sup> Vocal jazz improvisation provides students with opportunities to listen, consider what they hear, and respond vocally. Furthermore, students crave encouragement in their musical pursuits, whether from an educational and recreational standpoint, or to prepare them for future professional success. Students need to feel safe in their choir room space to cultivate this growth through improvisation. Vocal improvisation: developing an idea and then singing that idea, can be somewhat intimidating for a high school student. When suggesting how to begin teaching vocal jazz fundamentals, Craig Arnold and his colleagues say, “[t]hat's the number-one goal in jazz education for beginners, whether they are age eight or eighty: have them want to learn more and not be scared away.”<sup>167</sup> Students benefit significantly from an unthreatening environment within the vocal jazz setting, and this study exposed several of those benefits.

### **Limitations of Study**

The limitations of this study include administrative and scheduling supports, regional popularity, and the financial investment of the enterprise. This study did not specifically explore the limits of the impacts of various levels of administrative supports for choir teachers who want to add jazz choir to the school schedule or the scheduling limitations of adding another course to the school day. Some administrators support facilitating additional classes outside or inside the school day, but must consider teaching load, facilities, scheduling, and other factors. Furthermore, some schools offering jazz choir offer the course during the school day, while

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<sup>166</sup> Stefan Caris Love, “The Jazz Solo as Virtuous Act,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74, no. 1 (2016): 66.

<sup>167</sup> Craig Arnold and Tony Baker, Antonio García, and Bill Holmes, “Getting Started with Jazz Improvisation,” *ITA Journal* (2017): 19.

others provide the ensemble as a zero hour (before school day) or post-school day class.

Furthermore, other schools offer jazz choir as a club or activity only.

The popularity of vocal jazz ensembles in secondary choral programs varies across the country and even within some districts. Many schools do not offer a specialized jazz choir course. While teachers can teach improvisation in the choral classroom and use jazz pedagogy as the vehicle for building that skill without a specific separate jazz choir class, a designated jazz class allows the teacher to dedicate time and energy to vocal jazz and vocal jazz improvisation. If teachers work in a district surrounded by other jazz programs, there may be a more significant investment from students to participate.

The financial investment of vocal jazz training is not in and of itself significant; however, teachers who wish to implement equipment use and develop a fully functioning jazz choir must purchase sound equipment, including a mixing board, microphones and XLR cords, monitors, and amps for the instrumentalists, as well as instruments not already in possession of the choir or music program such as drum set or upright string bass. The equipment investment is long-term and requires a significant onset of cost. However, instrumental programs purchase and maintain many instruments, so this choir program investment aligns with its instrumental counterparts.

### **Recommendations**

As a result of this study, there are several recommendations for supplementary research, including further study on available vocal jazz training for music education students at the collegiate level or in professional development organizations and supplementary research on the interdisciplinary benefits of vocal jazz improvisation. Further research beyond this study could

address these two areas of study: teacher preparation training and professional development for teachers and the interdisciplinary benefits for students.

#### Recommendation for Further Study: Teacher Preparation Training & Professional Development

College preparatory programs have a vast amount of work already. What needs further investigation is how higher education programs and professional development organizations can, do, and ought to provide opportunities for future choral educators. The process of teaching improvisation skills with the goal of student mastery requires patience and perseverance for both the teacher and the student. Shapiro suggests that “A[a]quiring improvisational skills is a process and very individualistic. Jazz singers utilize rhythmic phrasing, scatting, and improvising melodically while singing the lyrics.”<sup>168</sup> With so many improvisational techniques, the teacher must develop personal proficiencies in these various approaches to effectively teach the techniques to a room full of hopeful secondary school choristers. In many ways, this concept for the classroom is new. Tonelli points out that “[f]ree jazz vocalists have been largely ignored in jazz studies, voice studies, and experimental music literature. However, free jazz vocal practices have made an important contribution to the body of practices referred to by ‘singing,’ by ‘jazz,’ and by ‘experimental music.’”<sup>169</sup> This idea that improvisation, or free singing, is unscholarly is changing in music education.

#### Recommendation for Further Study: Interdisciplinary Benefits

School constituents must understand the value of jazz and improvisation from a holistic student experience perspective to secure the community and school administrative support for

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<sup>168</sup> Shapiro, *So You Want to Sing Jazz*, 131.

<sup>169</sup> Tonelli, *Voices Found*, 16.

the addition of a jazz choir. One recommendation for further study is an exploration of the benefits of vocal jazz improvisation in an interdisciplinary context. Love reminds educators that “[i]n jazz, despite these qualities' apparent abstraction, their value depends on the soloist and the improvisational context.”<sup>170</sup> Every student will understand and interpret these improvisational concepts differently, creating many opportunities for diversity within the choral context, which also allows for differentiation in understanding ability, comfort level, and musicianship skills. It is also essential to consider the impacts of improvisation training on the program and how the individuals bring that training and methodology to their other choir ensemble rehearsals. Additionally, one should consider how improvisation requires a specialized focus from the rest of the ensemble in the jazz choir setting. When presenting musical choices observed in group free improvisation, authors Graeme Wilson and Raymond MacDonald note that “[i]mprovising has been seen to require a balance of attention between individual and group processes.”<sup>171</sup> Singers must learn how to support the singer improvising while the singer improvising must balance their choices with the ensemble. The improvisation exchange between musicians builds collaboration, trust, and harmonious balance between the individuals and the ensemble. This concept of skill building within the vocal jazz improvisational process begs the question, does proficiency in improvisation enhance or complement other academic arenas and extracurricular activities? In other words, is there a benefit in an interdisciplinary context for students who gain skills in vocal jazz improvisation? This area could be further explored in future research.

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<sup>170</sup> Love, “The Jazz Solo as Virtuous Act,” 66.

<sup>171</sup> Graeme B. Wilson and Raymond A. R. MacDonald, “Musical Choices during Group Free Improvisation: A Qualitative Psychological Investigation,” *Psychology of Music* 44, no. 5 (September 2016): 1030.

## Summary

In summary, the researcher stated the problem, surveyed and interviewed experts in the field, and analyzed the study results. However, researchers have yet to discern all of the benefits of this pedagogical approach to the choral program to their full extent. This study used a Grounded Theory research design to seek to answer the central research question: What benefits come from teaching choral students how to utilize vocal jazz improvisational techniques as part of their practice? This study sought to answer the secondary research questions: (1) do secondary students who participate in vocal jazz improvisational training perform better overall in choir?; and (2) do secondary choir teachers possess the necessary training when entering the field to teach these techniques effectively?

This study involved a collection of existing literature, bespoke interviews, and new research in the form of surveys and analysis through qualitative coding. The literature review presented a rich contextual survey of source material spanning journal articles and books covering concepts including an overview of the history of vocal jazz education, choral music education teacher preparation programs, and professional development offerings for teachers in the field, the hesitations, and concerns of teachers considering vocal jazz, effective teaching of jazz vocalists, and the impacts of teaching vocal jazz improvisation techniques.

The data collected from survey participant research indicated three central themes from the coding process: students experience improved audiation, students exude enhanced confidence when performing, and the practice provides students with a broader understanding of the cultural relevance of the uniquely American art form. The data collection section closed with a compilation of three bespoke interviews across a broad spectrum: a high school choir director who does not teach jazz, an experienced college jazz teacher who dedicated his career to building

jazz music for high school and college students, and a professional vocal jazz performer and music producer.

This research exposed several implications. In addition to the lack of preparation for future music educators in the realm of specific vocal jazz training, there is currently a lack of resources available for secondary choral teachers to learn techniques on vocal jazz rehearsal and performance fundamentals, then teach students using those techniques which would increase proficiency in the themes discerned from this grounded theory study: improved audiation, enhanced confidence, and a broader understanding of vocal jazz's cultural relevance. Collegiate music education preparatory programs generally focus on traditional ensemble pedagogical techniques. But, "[e]ffective teacher-education programs are crucial to developing students' musicianship skills and developing diverse students who may be future teachers. Studies that surveyed private voice teachers demonstrated a need for reform in classical teacher education to include an understanding of jazz pedagogy, technique and style."<sup>172</sup> The data gathered in this study included sources including theses, dissertations, scholarly journal articles, newspaper articles, books, and scholarly websites; audio recordings were examined and used for inspiration to create improvisational guides and exercises. This research served as a foundation for guiding this study in understanding the literature regarding the impacts of vocal jazz improvisation on the secondary school vocalist as a member of the school choir program as a whole and for the individual student musician. It was essential to establish a foundational understanding of current best practices and gaps in the current practices, as "the question of how to facilitate free

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<sup>172</sup> Julie Silvera-Jense, "A Comparison of Stylistic, Technical and Pedagogical Perspectives in Vocal Instruction among Classical and Jazz Voice Teachers" (DMA essay, University of Miami, 2005), 18, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

improvisation with beginner level skills in music is left unanswered,"<sup>173</sup> in the current canon of current research.

There is a gap in the research regarding the impacts of vocal jazz improvisation training on the high school choir student and high school choir programs and the pedagogical techniques used to teach these concepts effectively. "Jazz pedagogues have begun to acclaim the benefits of a classical background in helping to maintain strong technique and vocal health. Many jazz pedagogues have studied classical vocal styles and apply this training in their jazz studio lessons, allowing the student the benefits of both idioms and both stylistic techniques."<sup>174</sup> The chasm between classical choir and jazz choir seems to be the willingness of the teacher to bridge that musical style gap through healthy pedagogy.

The final implication of this study is a response by the researcher. In response to the gaps in existing resources and in an attempt to create functional materials for use by music educators, music education practicum students, and emerging jazz vocal students, the researcher developed a set of vocal jazz improvisation exercises. Educators can use these exercises in both a jazz choir setting and a traditional classical choir setting to develop improvisational proficiencies. These exercises are found in Appendix C. Additionally, to increase the awareness of available music and to grow the ears of the listeners, the researcher curated a listening list of solo jazz vocal artists and vocal jazz, found in appendix D, which includes a specific recording showcasing their vocal jazz improvisation skills. Teachers can use these recordings for pure exposure or practical

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<sup>173</sup> Siljamäki, "Free Improvisation in Choral Settings," 237.

<sup>174</sup> McLean, "Flexibility in Range and Registration in Jazz Singing," 18.

transcription training. Finally, the researcher collected a short library of instructional vocal jazz improvisation videos, found in appendix E.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: IRB Letter of Recruitment

[Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a student in the School of Music at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to brief summary of research questions, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, licensed secondary vocal/choral music educators or college-level music professors. Participants, if willing, will be asked to fill out a survey. It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click here:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd9tAiNIOZLH9ZIjsJwqSi0B\\_LMoH1b2XWHrdeQBoPM8DeDJQ/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd9tAiNIOZLH9ZIjsJwqSi0B_LMoH1b2XWHrdeQBoPM8DeDJQ/viewform?usp=sf_link)

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link above to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey. The first question on the survey asks if you agree to the consent document.

Sincerely,

Sara Carroll  
Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

## **Appendix B: IRB Consent Form**

**Title of the Project:** Skoo-Bee-Dee-Boo-Bop-Scat: The Benefits of Vocal Jazz Improvisational Techniques on the Secondary Choral Student and Secondary Choral Program

**Principal Investigator:** Sara Carroll, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University, School of Music

### **Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and a certified k12 music educator or college-level music professor. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### **What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of the study is to determine the impacts and/or benefits of vocal jazz improvisational training on secondary choral students and secondary choral programs.

### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in the online survey which will take about 15 minutes.
2. Possibly participate in a phone interview which will take about 30-45 minutes.
3. Possibly participate in a focus group interview which will take about 45 minutes to an hour.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include the knowledge of contributing to research regarding the benefits of vocal jazz opportunities for secondary students.

Benefits to society include possible increased appreciation for and demand for vocal jazz opportunities for secondary students.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and/or stored in a locked drawer. After seven years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for seven years and then deleted. The researcher/the researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

### **What are the costs to you to be part of the study?**

To participate in the research, you will not need to pay anything.

### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be

included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study, Sara Carroll, may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at s Carroll@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Brian Stiffler at bstiffler@liberty.edu.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

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Signature & Date

## Appendix C: Vocal Jazz Exercises

The following exercises can be scaled down for emerging choirs using a scaffolded approach. All exercises can be done without a rhythm section, so choir teachers can implement these exercises in the traditional choral classroom as part of the daily warm-up routine. The first rule with improvisation is: choir is a safe space for all students to try new things. Train your students to celebrate every improvisation attempt to encourage free expression from all choir members. *These exercises are a combination of learned concepts from professional development opportunities and colleague collaboration, as well as the researcher's own classroom experiences. These exercises have elements of both borrowed and original ideas from time spent in the field of music education over the course of many years.*

### Exercise #1: Chromatic Scale

#### Part 1:

Ask singers to sing up and down the chromatic scale with a swing. Play piano for them, two hands, two octaves, and demonstrate the exercise using solfege or La La La. (If you have a rhythm section, have them play instead.)

*Emerging Choir: Start the exercise straight and ensure students grasp before moving to swing.*

#### Part 2:

Ask students to sing the scale in unison ascending. Then have them choose one of a few specific choice syllables on the descending scale. You can assign different syllables to specific students or let them choose. For example, to create a major triad, you can have group 1 hold the Do, have group 2 stop and hold Sol, and have group 3 stop and hold Mi. Ask students to move to a specific vowel to unify the chord. You can also allow students to choose any syllable they want on the descending scale for added fun and for an ear challenge! Time to improvise!

#### Part 3:

Number students 1-2-1-2 and have 1's start at the bottom of the scale while 2's start at the top of the scale simultaneously. For an added challenge, ask them to stop and hold at various points in the exercise. Next, number students 1-2-3, etc. and have each group start at the bottom of the scale, but in a round: group 1 sings Do, Di, Re, Ri, then group 2 begins when group 1 reaches Mi, etc.

## Exercise #2: 12 Bar Blues

### Part 1:

Choose a key that is comfortable for the singers in your ensemble. Write the 12 bars on the board with the bass note (or give them a worksheet instead). Choose a backing track on youtube, play the changes on piano, or if you have a rhythm section, ask them to play in the key you choose. Have students sing the bass line along with the 12 bars. You can instruct students to sing quarter notes, half, notes, whole notes, etc. For example, in the Key of C, using quarter notes, students should sing: “C C C C, C C C C, C C C C, C C C C, F F F F, G G G G, C C C C, C C C C, G G G G, F F F F, C C C C, G G G G.”

### Part 2:

Once students are comfortable finding and following the bass line, encourage them to try various rhythmic patterns. If you have microphones, students can sing into their mics. If not, they can cup one hand over one ear and cup the other hand over their mouth creating the “private studio.”

*Emerging Choir: Give students rhythmic pattern options, either written or through your own demonstration.*

### Part 3:

Allow students to use that “private studio” method or microphones to try expanding away from the bass line using a few specific notes they can sing (maybe the tonic and the fifth, for example.) This is still over the backing track or chord changes on the piano.

### Part 4:

It’s time to improvise! Give students free reign to try anything they want. Ask them afterwards to share out if they did anything they liked and celebrate that win with them. Continue to play with this exercise and, eventually, ask for volunteers to try four bars at a time, then maybe all twelve bars.

### Exercise #3: I Do, You Do, We Do

#### Part 1:

With a rhythm section or backing track, have students listen to a chart several times to get comfortable with the chord changes. Choose a basic swing tune with a repetitive chord change structure. If you are working on a tune in a jazz choir, this is a great opportunity to give them something familiar, and if this exercise goes well, you could add a solo section to your chart on the concert.

#### Part 2:

Now it's time to have some fun! Choose an increment of time, whether that be one bar, two bars, four bars, etc. Sing a short improv solo and ask the whole group respond to your solo by repeating it back to you. Then repeat the exercise, but this time, sing a short improv solo and choose one student to repeat your solo by singing it back to you. Continue this exercise until all willing students have had a turn.

#### Part 3:

This next part may feel a bit chaotic at first, but the process allows for some anonymity for students who may experience some social anxiety in this process. Copy Part 2, but this time everyone will have a chance to respond with an original improv solo but not feel alone. Choose an increment of time, whether that be one bar, two bars, four bars, etc. Sing your solo and ask all students to sing back simultaneously. You can go back to that Exercise 2 concept of skipping mics and using that "private studio" method if that is less scary to your group of students.

#### Part 4:

Now it is time to have some fun! Choose an increment of time, whether that be one bar, two bars, four bars, etc. Sing a short improv solo and choose one student to respond to your solo with their own solo. Exchange back and forth. Or try passing the solo around the room, each student taking their turn with however many bars you previously set as the solo length. Eventually, work students up to keeping the solo for longer and longer. For the next step, as for two volunteers to exchange. First, have them each take an assigned number of bars for their "scat conversation", whether they each get two bars at a time, four bars at a time, etc. Then, encourage them to forget about how long each solo should be but "feel" it out like a true improvised conversation. Finally ask for some volunteers to exchange! It might feel a bit awkward at first, but as the students get more comfortable, they will also gain freedom of creativity. For an added challenge, invite one vocalist to exchange with an instrumentalist. For example, if you have a brave singer who is willing to "have a conversation" with one of your rhythm section students, tell them to go for it!

*This entire process should take weeks of rehearsals. Avoid skipping straight to Step 4 if your students are new to this improvisation concept. Be patient, provide your students with a safe space to try new things, and guide them every step of the way. Before you know it, you will have students begging to solo on their favorite charts!*

## Appendix D: Jazz Artists Who Scat, A Listening List for Teachers and Students

This list serves as a listening guide for teachers and students who want to hear quality vocal jazz improvisation examples to get familiar with the style or even transcribe for practice.

### JAZZ COMBOS & BANDS FEATURING SOLOIST EXAMPLES:

Ella Fitzgerald

*It Don't Mean a Thing*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myRc-3oF1d0>

Veronica Swift

*You're Gonna Hear from Me*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLJiGeL-WN4>

Sara Gazarek

*Cacoon*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvgQx\\_W702Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvgQx_W702Q)

Aubrey Logan

*Fascinating Rhythm*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpDhOsbyYZqI>

Emmet Cohen Trio feat. Jazzmeia Horn

*On the Sunny Side of the Street*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cy2AgagRtrQ>

Samara Joy & Edwin Rутten

*Scat Duet*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEr7u6bJUno>

Patti Austin

*How High The Moon*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9R10QVjfvIE>

### VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLES FEATURING SOLOIST EXAMPLES:

Folsom High School Jazz Choir, directed by Curtis Gaesser, Next Generation Jazz Festival

*Title, featuring bass vocal improvisation exchange with string bass solo*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvMGyeLMKYk>

Central Washington University Vocal Jazz I, Director Vijay Singh, National ACDA Conference

*Rhythm Machine, arr. Norman Wallen, featuring baritone vocal improvisation*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QlaEpP5LL4>

### Appendix E: Vocal Jazz Improvisation Scat, Videos that Explain the Process

This list serves as a resource for vocal jazz improvisation solo instruction and tips. These videos can serve as guides for teachers and students alike. Each video includes some educational explanation, singing examples, and instructions on how to try the particular method of vocal jazz improvisation.

Aubrey Logan, *Professional Jazz Trombone and Vocalist*  
*Scat Singing Explained - example with Dexter Gordon transcription*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGO99aQL-Gg>

Jazz at Lincoln Center's JAZZ ACADEMY, Michael Mwenso and Brianna Thomas  
*Exploring Jazz Vocals and Scat Singing*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHcnoQUx\\_4w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHcnoQUx_4w)

Library of Congress, Kandace Springs Trio  
*Kandace Springs Trio: Jazz Vocal Improvisation (Part 1)*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0MLthDJH40>

NPR Music, Jazzmeia Horn  
*Ella Fitzgerald's Signature Singing Style, Explained By Jazzmeia Horn*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GT15vKJWhpE>

Tak Iwasaki, Jazz Teacher  
*The Most Efficient way to Practice JAZZ VOCAL IMPROVISATION - Call&Response #1*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KY0IyC2VeA0>

North Sea Round Town, Patty Austin  
*Patti Austin Teaches How to Scat @ Edison Jazz/World 2019, Lantaren Venster*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obxaffhwbWI>

Jazz a Lincoln Center's Jazz Academy,  
*Vocal Improv and Warm Ups for Singers, Marion Cowings*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yp0cap-um3Q&t=95s>