

Scat Like That

Museum Connection: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will gather information about vocal improvisation by listening to Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, and others who contributed to this jazz style. Using what they have learned, students will perform vocal improvisation or “scat singing” within the framework of jazz music.

Course: High School Vocal Ensemble, Chorus

Time Frame: (2-4 class periods needed to complete lesson) -- This lesson includes several activities, which can be used together or separately as coursework dictates.

High School Vocal Music ELOs:

I. Perceiving and Responding –Aesthetic Education

A. The student will describe the characteristics of musical sounds.

3. The student will describe differences in interpretation of two or more performances of the same musical selection.

4. The student will identify and explain compositional techniques used to provide unity and variety, tension and release in musical works.

7. The student will analyze and describe uses of the elements of music in a given work that make it unique, interesting, and expressive.

II. Historical, Cultural, and Social Context

A. The student will demonstrate an understanding of music as an essential aspect of history and human experience.

4. The student will identify sources of American music genres, trace the evolution of those genres, and cite well-known musicians associated with them.

III. Creative Expression and Production

A. The student will perform musical improvisations using traditional and original techniques.

1. The student will improvise vocal music based on student-generated graphic notation.
3. The student will improvise original melodies over given chord progressions, each in a consistent style, meter, and tonality.

IV. Aesthetic Criticism

B. The student will formulate, apply, and communicate criteria for evaluating their own performances and those of others.

4. The student will evaluate recorded and live performances of individual voices or instruments and ensembles using established criteria to make qualitative judgments.

Objective(s):

After creating listening maps for performances of noted scat singers, students will perform an improvised section of a jazz standard demonstrating scat singing and will evaluate performances of their peers in order to offer suggestions and give positive feedback in written form.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Scat singing	improvised vocalizations using vocables (nonsense syllables).
Improvisation	spontaneous instrumental or vocal performance.
Listening map	a visual representation of a listening example.
Vocables	nonsense syllables i.e. bop, doo, wop.
Repertoire	a list of musical selections to perform.

Materials:

For the Teacher:

Teacher Resource Sheet 1: Three-group-tiered reading activity

For the Student:

Student Resource Sheet 1: Historical Background Resource (a, b, & c versions for differing reading abilities)

Student Resource Sheet 2: List of Scat Singers

Student Resource Sheet 3: Create a Listening Map

Student Resource Sheet 4: Compare/Contrast “Lady Be Good” and “How High the Moon” by Ella Fitzgerald

Student Resource Sheet 5: *Scat Like That*

Resources:

Publications

Berliner, Paul. *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Friedwald, W. *Jazz Singing*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1996.

Kamien, R. *Music: An Appreciation*. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishers, 2008.

Fowler, C. *Music! Its Role and Importance in Our Lives*. New York: Glencoe, 1994.

Machlis, J and Forney, K. *The Enjoyment of Music* (9th edition) New York: Norton & Company, 2003.

Nicholson, Stuart [*Ella Fitzgerald: A Biography of the First Lady of Jazz*](#), New York: Da Capo Press, 1993.

Stewart, Milton L. (1987). "Stylistic Environment and the Scat Singing Styles of Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan", <http://www.jazzresearch.org/1/1/node/166/> 19: 61–76

Web Sites:

Robinson, J. Bradford, "[Scat Singing](#)", in Macy, L., [*New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*](#), <http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?from=az§ion=music.24717>.

Accessed March 30, 2010.

Shuffle Along: The Eubie Blake Collection - www.mdhs.org/eubieblake

Explore the sheet music, letters, biography, and photos of Eubie Blake, a Baltimore native and pioneering composer of ragtime, jazz and popular music.

Sound & Stories: The Musical Life of Maryland's African-American Communities

- www.peabody.jhu.edu/sas

The Storm is Passing Over: Celebrating the Musical Life of Maryland's African-American Community from Emancipation to Civil Rights - www.peabody.jhu.edu/archives/storm

Both websites listed above explore the musical heritage of Maryland African Americans in jazz, gospel, blues and symphonic music.

Examples of Listening Maps can be found at <http://www.pinterest.com/wilkid/music-listening-maps/>

Historical Background:

In West African music, it is typical to convert drum rhythms into vocal melodies; common rhythmic patterns are assigned specific syllabic translation. Some writers have proposed the theory that scat has its roots in African music traditions. In much African music, "human voice and instruments assume a kind of musical parity" and are "at times so close in timbre and so inextricably interwoven within the music's fabric as to be nearly indistinguishable" (Robinson, 2010).

However, this theory fails to account for the existence, even in the earliest recorded examples of scatting, of free improvisation by the vocalist. It is therefore more likely that scat singing evolved independently in the United States (Stewart, 1987).

Louis Armstrong "complemented his instrumental improvisations with spontaneous singing on nonsense syllables. This scat singing, a form of vocal improvisation, became a characteristic that many jazz singers adopted." (Fowler, 1994) Generally, the chorus of a song would be sung; then it would be followed with an improvised scat chorus.

"Armstrong popularized scat singing, vocalization of a melodic line with nonsense syllables like dat-a bat-a dip-da." (Kamien, 2008)

"Scat singing became a form of creative expression in jazz, but the singing, too, was different—more rhythmic and hard-edged than the prevailing gentle and mellow crooning of the time." (Fowler, 1994) During the 1920s, jazz evolved into a sectional form with the full ensemble alternating with solo sections. If the jazz composition were built on a blues tune, it might be segmented into 12- or 16-bar sections. Many of the tunes that were created maintained a basic 32-bar length. When an instrument improvised a chorus, it was usually 32 bars long, often including a two-bar break just before the next 32-bar section began. These short breaks were

cadenza-like improvisations by an instrumentalist or singer that were inserted between the ensemble passages. Being able to distinguish these breaks allows the listener to anticipate the beginning of a new 32-bar section. The breaks added an interesting textural variety to the composition.” One of Armstrong’s performance creations was “Hotter Than That” (1927), known as “hot” jazz. It was composed by Lil Hardin Armstrong, who was the pianist in Louis Armstrong’s Hot Sevens band (she was also Armstrong’s wife). In the third A section, guitarist Lonnie Johnson maintains the steady 4/4 pulse while Armstrong improvises vocally in what is essentially a $\frac{3}{4}$ rhythm. (Fowler, 1994)

Louis Armstrong’s 1926 recording of “Heebie Jeebies” introduced scat singing, in which syllables without literal meaning (vocables) are set to an improvised vocal line. Ella Fitzgerald (1918-1996) later brought this technique to a truly virtuosic level. Armstrong’s instrumental-like approach to singing, his distinctive inflections, and his improvisatory style were highly influential to jazz vocalists, paramount among them Billie Holiday, one of the leading female singers in jazz history. (Machlis & Forney, 2003)

Lesson Development:

Motivation: As students enter the class, have playing Louis Armstrong’s “Hotter Than That.” Teacher will ask the class if they can **identify** a particular vocal technique in this selection. (*Scat singing*)

1. **Read** a short historical background on scat singing (Student Resource Sheet 1 and Teacher Resource Sheet 1). Divide the class into three groups with their respective reading selections. Small groups should **read, discuss** and **write** notes to report what they learned from their reading selection. Classes will then join together and **discuss** their reading selection with the whole class.
2. **Listen** to several examples of scat singing. Select recording from the suggested list using recordings from the Listening library of the **Reginald F. Lewis Museum**, the local library, or the internet. (Teacher Resource Sheet 2)
3. **Identify** improvisation in Louis Armstrong’s performance of “Hotter than That”. **Discuss** the *elements and structural characteristics including the unique style features.*
4. **Create** a listening map for Louis Armstrong’s “Hotter than That” and **identify** each section in which you hear vocal improvisation/scat singing. *This listening map will serve as a model for an original graphic notation, which will be utilized to improvise original music.* (Student Resource Sheet 3). Good examples of listening maps for music can be found at <http://www.pinterest.com/wilkid/music-listening-maps/>

5. **Listen** to recordings of Ella Fitzgerald singing “Lady Be Good” and “How High the Moon”. **Analyze** and **compare** the qualities of each performance that make it unique, interesting and expressive. (Student Resource Sheet 4)
6. **Create** a list of scat syllables used by the great Ella Fitzgerald. Add scat syllables of your own and **practice** mixing the syllables using a variety of rhythms. (Student Resource Sheet 5)
7. **Research and create** a repertoire list of jazz song possibilities.
8. **Practice** scat singing in small groups by improvising on the refrain section of familiar songs within the group’s repertoire. Continue to rehearse your scat singing until you’re ready for assessment.

Assessment: **Perform** an improvised section of a jazz standard demonstrating scat singing. *Students will listen to performances of their peers and offer suggestions and positive feedback in written form.* (Student Resource Sheet 6)

Closure: Students will **review** the development of scat singing and **plan** a concert or performance venue to **demonstrate** their new scat singing abilities.

Thoughtful Application:

This lesson could also be featured in a unit on jazz, stylistic vocal timbres, and/or improvisation. Find out from other music teachers in the school if there might be a chance to visit another class (band, orchestra, guitar, piano, theory, music technology, etc.) in order to have students demonstrate their knowledge and skills in scat singing.

Lesson Extension:

Research how scat singing influenced the development of *doo-wop* and rap and *hip hop* styles.

Team up with an instrumentalist and take turns improvising. Be sure to solidify your performance by singing and playing the melody as written before improvising.

Roger Emerson’s arrangement of “Blue Skies” by Irving Berlin (available from Hal Leonard) includes opportunity for two soloists to improvise scat within the traditional choral setting. This song can be a great choice for concert or festival, and can highlight the learning done in this lesson.

The Reginald F. Lewis Museum offers several school programs that connect to the curriculum lessons.

- *Journey in History Theater* provides living history and theatrical performances which highlight African Americans in the museum's gallery.
 - Take the theme tour, *Heritage* and experience the rich, cultural heritage of Maryland's African American community. Learn how African Americans established and influence Maryland's historic communities, social organizations, work traditions and artistic customs.
 - Contact group reservations for schedule updates.
 - Visit the *Pennsylvania Avenue* exhibit in the *Strength of the Mind* gallery to learn about other Maryland musicians who were trendsetters in the music industry.
 - Research musicians such as Bobby McFerrin who currently use vocal improvisations in their music. Watch some of McFerrin's vocal performances such as Bobby McFerrin Live at the White House on YouTube.

Teacher Resource Sheet 1

Historical Background

Coordinate with Student Resource Sheet 1 (Three-Group-Tiered reading activity). Divide the class into three groups with their respective reading selections. Small groups will **read, discuss** and **write** notes to report what they learned from their reading selection. Classes will then join together and **discuss** their reading selection with the whole class.

Reading ability: Group 1 (average) Group 2 (low) Group 3 (high)

Group 1

In West African music, it is typical to convert drum rhythms into vocal melodies; common rhythmic patterns are assigned specific syllabic translations. Some writers have proposed that scat has its roots in African music traditions. In much African music, "human voice and instruments assume a kind of musical parity" and are "at times so close in timbre and so inextricably interwoven within the music's fabric as to be nearly indistinguishable" (Robinson, 2010). However, this theory fails to account for the existence—even in the earliest recorded examples of scatting—of free improvisation by the vocalist. It is therefore more likely that scat singing evolved independently in the United States (Stewart, 1987).

Group 2

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Group 3

"Scat singing became a form of creative expression in jazz, but the singing, too, was different—more rhythmic and hard-edged than the prevailing gentle and mellow crooning of the time. " (Fowler, 1994) During the 1920s, jazz evolved into a sectional form with the full ensemble alternating with solo sections. If the jazz composition was built on a blues tune, it might be segmented into 12 or 16 bar sections. Many of the tunes that were created maintained a basic 32-bar length. When an instrument improvised a chorus, it was usually 32 bars long, often including a two-bar break just before the next 32 bar section began. These short breaks were cadenza-like improvisations by an instrumentalist or singer that were inserted between the

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Teacher Resource Sheet 2

List of Recommended Recordings

“Hotter Than That” by Louis Armstrong www.redhotjazz.com/hot5.html

“Heebie Jeebies” by Louis Armstrong www.redhotjazz.com/hot5.html

“Lady Be Good” By Ella Fitzgerald

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwEsq31wKcI&feature=Playlist&p=AC5021F065F90E8A&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=43

“How High the Moon” by Ella Fitzgerald http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2d-17_TGnIE

<http://pbskids.org/jazz/nowthen/louis.html> Great website for jazz information

<http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/scat-singing/notable-scat-singers.html> Quick references for short biographies of scat singers.

<http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/class/armstrong/kit/kit.asp> Wonderful resource with media player and real audio for listening clips.

Student Resource Sheet 1(c)

Historical Background Resource

Tiered Reading Selections: Please read and discuss within your group. Make notes on what to present to the whole class during our group discussion.

Group 3 Reading Selection:

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Notes:

Notes may continue on the back of this page

Student Resource Sheet 2

Representative Chronological List of Scat Singers

Research the Reginald F. Lewis Listening Library, local library or the internet for recordings of these great scat singers.

Gene Greene

Scatman Crothers

Louis Armstrong

Bing Crosby

Cab Calloway

Dizzy Gillespie

Ella Fitzgerald

Anita O'Day

Carmen McRae

Sarah Vaughan

Aretha Franklin

Bobby McFerrin

Cleo Laine

Your Favorites:



Student Resource Sheet 3

Create a Listening Map

Use your artistic skills to draw a representation of Louis Armstrong’s “Hotter than That” and **identify** each section in which you hear vocal improvisation/scat singing.

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Student Resource Sheet 4

Compare/Contrast

Listen to “Lady Be Good” and “How High the Moon” by Ella Fitzgerald. **Analyze** and **Compare** the qualities of each performance that make it unique, interesting, and expressive.

“Lady Be Good”



“How High the Moon”



Student Resource Sheet 5

Scat Like That !

Create a list of scat syllables used by the great Ella Fitzgerald. Add scat syllables of your own and **practice** mixing the syllables using a variety of rhythms.