

THE ART OF ACCOMPANYING THE JAZZ VOCALIST:
A SURVEY OF PIANO STYLES AND TECHNIQUES

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the process of accompanying the jazz vocalist and explains the performance subtleties inherent in the art form from the pianist's perspective. Through interviews of eight pianists, the study specifies differences between instrumental and vocal accompanying and explains how pianists learn and improve upon their accompaniment skills.

The study addresses common issues that arise when working with a vocalist, such as creating appropriate introductions, performing rubato, attention to lyrics, performing in a duo setting, the use of musical texture, chord voicings, avoiding harmonic conflicts with the melody, the improvised solo, transposition and the use of ornamentation with the vocal line. The project examines how an accompanist arranges for and adapts to the each vocalist. Descriptions of musical examples and transcriptions from recordings supplement and illuminate the artist's comments.

This study finds that there is a difference between being a proficient improviser and a proficient accompanist. The preeminent accompanists are, in essence, co-collaborators with vocalists. There is currently sparse academic study in the area of jazz vocal accompaniment and this project seeks to fill that void.

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CHAPTER 1: PROJECT OVERVIEW

I have been a professional jazz accompanist for the last ten years. After completing my Master of Music in Jazz Studies from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, Bloomington in 2000, I moved to Chicago, Illinois to improve my jazz performance skills and teach at the university level. I soon realized that I had a distinct passion for accompanying jazz vocalists. Pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign gave me a research opportunity to further investigate my passion for vocal jazz accompanying. This study examines the techniques, methods and art of accompanying the jazz vocalist. It specifically investigates how the piano accompanist interacts with and supports the jazz vocalist in duo and small ensemble situations.

Though the jazz pianist assumes many roles in an often multi-faceted career, the responsibility of vocal accompaniment is frequently neglected, taken for granted and sometimes even disparaged. Accompanying is a delicate and demanding art. Developing a close rapport with a vocalist takes time. A successful working relationship between the pianist and vocalist is ultimately an act of symbiosis; the best practitioners possess a special ability to work effortlessly in sync. Accompanying improves gradually through trial and error experience on the bandstand and with deep reflective study.

To my knowledge, this subject has not been written about or researched extensively, nor has there been a dissertation or thesis directly devoted to the topic. . This project assembles the disparate pieces of information currently in print about the subject, and draws insights from established artists through personal interviews. As a

vocal accompanist continually striving to improve my own skills, obtaining opinions from extraordinary accompanists added enormously to my understanding of my own musical role with vocalists. Ultimately, I feel the project will be of lasting value to jazz performers and educators alike, and it is my hope that others will continue to write and study the art of jazz vocal accompaniment.

Much has been written about Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald and other outstanding vocalists throughout jazz history. Yet, disproportionately, only a few vocal accompanists are mentioned, such as pianists Tommy Flanagan, George Shearing and Hank Jones. Several current artists may not have the name recognition of these giants, but passionately devote an enormous amount of time and energy to the art of vocal accompaniment. These artists have much to share about their craft. However, until now, their thoughts and ideas have not been documented extensively in print, if at all.

This project investigates how the accompanist learns the art of vocal accompanying through initial musical influences, including listening to recordings, attending live concerts and through hands-on experience. It also examines how accompanists develop their collaborative skills through the attention to lyrics and careful choice of chord voicings. This study also explores the differences between accompanying instrumentalists and vocalists, and points out the commonalities and differences of opinion among the interviewed candidates. My long-term goal is to expand this project into a method book or a more comprehensive study, which incorporates comments, ideas and transcriptions from other established artists.

Several articles in trade magazines have been written about vocal accompaniment (see references and recordings). Jazz artists who feel strongly about this neglected skill

wrote the most enlightening and instructive articles. Laurence Hobgood and Bill Charlap are two accompanists who share similar viewpoints in print regarding the necessity of improving vocal accompaniment skills.¹ Aside from a few articles there are no scholarly books devoted to the topic. The accompaniment of instrumental jazz performance is given much more attention. Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* delves deeply into the subtleties and nuances inherent in instrumental jazz performances, focusing on the infinite art of improvisation, with additional insights on group interaction and arranging practices.² Though it is thoroughly researched and contains many perceptive observations, *Thinking in Jazz* has little to say about the interaction between the jazz vocalist and the accompanist. Nevertheless, Berliner's book was an excellent model for this project and his method of creating a work based primarily on interviews supplemented by transcriptions inspired the format and direction for my paper.

I interviewed eight pianists via e-mail or Skype for this project, occasionally supplementing their ideas with musical transcriptions to further illuminate their points. I feel that these pianists are among the best accompanists in jazz and I was grateful that they were willing to share their ideas and insights about jazz accompanying. These highly accomplished musicians spoke articulately about their art. Their playing styles are unique but it is fascinating to see the issues upon which they agree and differ.

As was Berliner's goal, the artists' viewpoint was the intended focal point rather than a critic's or this author's, yet throughout the work I add my own professional

¹ Laurence Hobgood, "Two For One: Kurt Elling's Pianist and Collaborator Explores the Symbiotic Nature of Accompanying Singers," *JazzTimes* (June 2004): 54-60, and Bill Charlap, "Woodshed: Master Class - Building an Accompanist-Vocalist Partnership," *Down Beat* (December 2005): 106.

² Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

insights. My bibliography includes several books that describe the classical approach to piano accompaniment because of the similarities in jazz and classical accompaniment; the two art forms are not mutually exclusive. Devices such as text painting and thought-provoking preludes and postludes in the lieder of Schubert and Schumann, for example, occur in jazz, though perhaps not often enough. The ideas of noted classical accompanist Gerald Moore remain remarkably relevant to the jazz musician and I quote him liberally. As an aid to aspiring accompanists, this project also includes a chapter of practical advice. Lastly, a chapter presents the vocalist's perspective of the accompanist; the picture would not be complete without some opinion from the other half of the duo.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

The world is over-stocked with brilliant solo pianists, but there are precious few good accompanists in the field.³ – Sir Landon Ronald

The Art of Accompanying

Much has been written about the improvised solo in jazz but relatively few books deal with the fine art of accompanying another musician. However, jazz pianists must often play an accompaniment role. The jazz pianist is expected to orchestrate, support and enhance the soloist's melodic lines, whether the soloist is an instrumentalist or vocalist. Using rhythm and harmony, an accompanist must be suggestive yet never intrusive. According to bassist Chuck Israels, the accompanist must apply “fully 90% of his or her consciousness towards ‘living in the body’ of whomever has the lead voice.”⁴ This attention must be applied in a way that the accompanist experiences every breath, every nuance of muscle tension and timing, and every dynamic change in the music of the ‘lead’ musician.⁵

Moreover, while supporting the soloist, the accompanist should strive to create a part that is intrinsically interesting and also fits into the whole. Pianist Chick Corea summarized this by saying, “a good accompaniment should be able to stand on its own as a melody.”⁶ The same is true of vocal accompanying. The vocal accompanist strives to create an unobtrusive accompaniment that is as melodically interesting as the vocal line.

³ Gerald Moore, *The Unashamed Accompanist* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 1.

⁴ Chuck Israels, “The Piano and the Art of Jazz Accompaniment,” *Jazz Player* (February/March 1995): 26

⁵ Israels, 26.

⁶ Chick Corea, “The Pianist’s Duties, Part II: Accompaniment,” *Contemporary Keyboard* (December 1979): 39.

A good accompanist must also be continually in an alert, focused state. The accompanist must have the ability to listen carefully to the other musicians and sensitively adjust to each musical interaction. John di Martino recognizes this delicate relationship between singer and accompanist, stating, “when accompaniment is at its best, you’re at the highest spiritual state and the most selfless. It’s almost a Zen concept. You really want to give to that other person.”⁷ With all of these factors at play, the accompanist must sublimate the ego to achieve the best results. An accompanist with his or her own agenda will never successfully aid in delivering the musical message of the vocalist.

Forerunners

Before focusing on contemporary vocal accompanists it is important to acknowledge their predecessors. The masterful accompanists can be traced back to several of the great jazz vocalists.⁸ Ella Fitzgerald, Carmen McRae and Sarah Vaughan worked with the finest pianists in jazz. Tommy Flanagan and Hank Jones are often cited as the top-call accompanists who worked with these vocalists. Three lesser-known accompanists also deserve attention: Ellis Larkins, Jimmy Rowles and Paul Smith.

⁷ Bob Bernotas, “Playing for Jazz Singers,” *Piano and Keyboard* (March/April 2000): 15.

⁸ Defining what constitutes being jazz vocalist is problematic. Some singers like Frank Sinatra and Billie Holiday did not improvise using scat soloing but are often referred to as jazz singers. For the purposes of this project, which examines pianists that work with vocalists that sing mostly jazz standards and improvise, a jazz singer is “someone who uses his or her instrument in a disciplined and intelligent manner to sing songs in a jazz setting and who, during performance, will communicate not only a commitment to and love for the music to the audience, but will also, at times, improvise within the framework of the music to create a performance that demonstrates a kind of premeditated spontaneity” (Bruce Crowther and Mike Pinfold, *Singing Jazz- The Singers and Their Styles*. (San Francisco: Miller Freeman, 1997), 14. I would add that the jazz singer has the ability to swing, has a solid time feel, is able to vary their phrasing, has an individual conception, is emotionally involved with the lyrics, is aware of the jazz vocal lineage, has detectable jazz influences and in general takes risks with the music.

Although a fine overall pianist, Larkins was particularly known for his sensitive and tasteful vocal accompaniment abilities. “He has dealt with the whole issue of submergence without it messing up his art, “ remarked Phil Schaap. “You have to just totally delete a lot of your personality and needs and ego – or you’re not an accompanist. It’s an incredibly difficult thing to do. If you only think of it as a subtraction, it will never work.”⁹ Larkins was particularly known for his partnership with Ella Fitzgerald. Ellis and Ella recorded two albums together, *Ella Sings Gershwin* and *Songs in a Mellow Mood*. Both albums demonstrate Larkins’s ability to accompany tastefully and simply. Their duets “brought together two artists who could hear around the same corners, anticipating each other’s subtlest shifts of mood.”¹⁰ Ella was often criticized for showing a lack of emotion and a certain detachment from the meaning of the lyrics she sang, but these two duo albums belie that claim.

An example of this almost telepathic, symbiotic relationship between the Ellis and Ella occurs throughout the track “But Not For Me.” In the first rubato half of the tune Larkins shows support by echoing Ella’s phrases either explicitly, in the right hand after the lyric “but not for me” at 0:26, and “and get that way” at 0:55, or implicitly, by using the same rhythm of her melodic phrase yet changing the notes on “could guarantee” at 0:46. Through a call-and-response procedure the voice and piano seamlessly weave together into a satisfying auditory whole.

Jimmy Rowles was another frequently requested accompanist among vocalists. He polished his craft working with Billie Holiday, Peggy Lee, Carmen McRae, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, the latter whom he felt was the greatest of all the female

⁹ Quoted in Norman David, *The Ella Fitzgerald Companion* (London: Praeger, 2004), 194.

¹⁰ David, 194.

musicians.¹¹ Singers greatly appreciated his use of space and silence. Indeed, Rowles steadfastly believed there were two rules of accompanying: anticipation and subduing oneself. “If you don’t subdue yourself, the listener is going to get confused because the piano part will be competing for the listener’s attention.”¹² It is possible to subdue oneself and not hamper one’s unique voice. As Schaap noted previously, subduing oneself is not merely an act of subtraction, as this would disrupt and alter one’s individual style. By subduing oneself, Rowles means playing less of what one would normally play but still retaining one’s original identity. Finally, depending on the temperament of the vocalist, Rowles’s additional advice is simple and to the point: “Don’t play too much, don’t play too loud, and don’t play the melody.”¹³ These words concisely sum up the accompaniment process, yet they are much easier said than done.

Likewise, lesser-known pianist Paul Smith accompanied many of the great jazz vocalists including Anita O’Day, Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald, with whom he recorded and toured in the 1950’s and 1960’s, later becoming her musical director in the 1980’s. Smith enjoyed working with Fitzgerald but noted, “you could play any chord changes for her, just so you didn’t play a million notes.”¹⁴ The virtuosic Smith made the inimitable Art Tatum imitable on his album *The Art Tatum Touch*, yet when accompanying vocalists like Fitzgerald, he always made them sound at their best without getting in their way. An excellent representation of his duo work with Fitzgerald can be heard on the album *The Intimate Ella*. Here, the two musicians are completely attuned to

¹¹ An excellent video shows his accompaniment work with Holiday on “My Man”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqlehVpcAes>, accessed October 24, 2010.

¹² Len Lyons, *The Great Jazz Pianists* (New York: Da Capo, 1983), 155.

¹³ Lyons, 155.

¹⁴ Phillip D. Atteberry, “Paul Smith: Interview,” *Cadence - The Review of Jazz & Blues - Creative Improvised Music* (June 1994): 5-10.

each other. Smith's restraint and power of subtle suggestion helps to bring Ella's emotional side to the surface, notably on the powerful tracks "Angel Eyes" and "Black Coffee."

Larkins, Rowles and Smith should be more well-known. Their often self-effacing personae and lack of exposure as soloists or as sidemen to major instrumental figures, what Hank Jones achieved with Charlie Parker, and what Tommy Flanagan attained with Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane, could explain their lack of notoriety. In this study these three lesser-known pianists were mentioned by many of the participants. Before their time there were few accompanists so devoted and passionate about the art of vocal accompanying. Those "in the know" are aware of their value and contribution to jazz vocal accompaniment. They set the standard for future vocal accompanists and still provide models of excellence.

CHAPTER 3: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

When people recall their favorite opera singers or classical instrumental soloists, the underlying musical contributors tend to be overlooked. Who, after all, is violinist Itzhak Perlman's regular accompanist?¹⁵ – Paul Hofmann

Influences, inspirations and early development

The eight artists interviewed for this project learned their craft in their own unique ways. Most artists in the study acknowledged the outstanding jazz vocal accompanists of the past as influential in some way. Randy Halberstadt was influenced not only by piano accompanists Ralph Sharon, Bill Evans and Tommy Flanagan, but also by pianists who accompanied themselves, such as Shirley Horn and Diana Krall.¹⁶ David Newton shares with Halberstadt his admiration of Horn, particularly appreciating her use of space on the *Here's to Life* album.¹⁷ Larry Dunlap cites the duo recording of Andre Previn and Doris Day as a favorite, as well as Gary McFarland's recordings with Bill Evans, Stan Getz and Steve Kuhn.¹⁸

Eric Gunnison names three recordings with piano accompanists that were influential in his development: Jimmy Rowles on Carmen McRae's *The Great American Songbook*, Bill Evans on the Tony Bennett duo sessions, and Oscar Peterson on *Ella and*

¹⁵ Paul Hofmann, "Accompanying the Jazz Vocalist,"

<http://www.mhrrecords.com/articlesandessays/essay07.html>, accessed October 25, 2010

¹⁶ Personal interview with author via e-mail on June 11, 2010. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

¹⁷ Personal interview with author via Skype on July 20, 2010. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

¹⁸ Personal interview with author via e-mail on October 18, 2009. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

Oscar.¹⁹ Peterson's busy accompaniment style, contrasted to the more minimal Rowles and Evans, had equal influence on Gunnison's conception of vocal accompaniment.²⁰

John Colianni cites Carlton Drinkard, who accompanied Billie Holiday from around 1948 to the late 1950's, as an early teacher and mentor.²¹ Drinkard wasn't a "notey" player, but Colianni learned a great deal about Drinkard's "restraint and a sparser deployment of notes and chords." Like Halberstadt, Colianni was fascinated by Ralph Sharon's work with Tony Bennett. He described Sharon as "a beautifully tasty and an extremely colorful and inventive player. Like Carlton, he played far fewer notes than a Peterson-fashioned player like me. His substitutions and voicings and rhythmic approach really appealed to me and inspired me. He gave Tony Bennett a terrific musical framework within which to sing."²² Tommy Flanagan is another of Colianni's favorites, particularly his accompaniment on the Ella Fitzgerald recording, *At the Montreux Jazz Festival 1975*: "I thought of his approach as crystalline and elegant and soulful at the same time. I also liked Bobby Short's self-accompaniment for the same reason; it was jazz conscious and swung a lot, but it also captured the mood of whatever material was being sung." These accompanists showed Colianni how versatile and chameleon-like a good accompanist must be.

¹⁹ Personal interview with author via e-mail on October 25, 2009. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

²⁰ Though many consider Peterson to be a "busy" player, his accompaniment on these recordings is never intrusive, perhaps because, like Count Basie, he preferred ornamentation in the higher register of the piano.

²¹ Personal interview with author via e-mail on January 30, 2010. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

²² Colianni notes Sharon "knew how to bring out whatever feeling and emotion is supposed to be portrayed in the song." Several of his favorite Sharon/Bennett tracks include "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square," "I Wish I Were in Love Again," "What Are You Afraid Of," "Why Do People Fall in Love" and "How Do You Keep the Music Playing."

John di Martino's parents introduced him to great Broadway musicals at a young age.²³ He credits his sensitivity to vocal music to this early exposure to the Great American Songbook. He cites June Christy's "Something Cool" and Gloria Lynne's "Folks Who Live on the Hill" as recordings influential to his development. His early models for accompanying were Hank Jones, whom he admired for his "beautiful touch," and later Mike Renzi for his sympathetic rapport with Mel Tormé. He also appreciates the orchestral work of Gil Evans and Claus Ogermann and credits them for his own orchestral approach to accompanying.

Laurence Hobgood, on the other hand, was more immersed in instrumental jazz before he studied vocal accompanists: "I didn't listen to Ralph Sharon, I listened to Herbie Hancock, who is probably the greatest accompanist in jazz in general."²⁴ Though Hancock has recorded with few jazz vocalists, Hobgood still credits much of his accompaniment approach to Hancock's influence.²⁵ Hobgood also indicates a recording of Chick Corea accompanying Nancy Wilson on "My One and Only Love" as particularly inspirational, noting Corea's careful listening and following of Wilson. "The recording was musically extraordinary. That should be the goal of any singer or any pianist. The goal should be to come up with an extraordinary performance," he adds. On this rubato ballad performance, Corea's inventive use of dynamics, space, adventurous harmonic excursions and single note line fills do not interfere with Wilson's vocals.²⁶

²³ Personal interview with author via Skype on August 13, 2010. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

²⁴ Personal interview with author via Skype on July 27, 2010. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

²⁵ Hobgood advises to watch the entire movie "Round Midnight" and to only listen to Hancock's "astounding" accompanying. He believes Hancock is "a master of time and feel."

²⁶ This video is currently available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHJryf42O14>, accessed October 24, 2010. The camera work is excellent, showing several instructional shots of Corea watching Wilson for cues.

Living up to his own assessment of good accompanying, Corea's accompaniment indeed stands on its own as a melody. Like Hobgood, Corea himself was greatly inspired by Herbie Hancock's melodic and sympathetic accompanying of Miles Davis, particularly on the track "My Funny Valentine" from *Four and More*.²⁷

Influences beyond jazz

Stylistic influences outside jazz vary greatly among the participants, but most are influenced by both classical and popular music in some way. From personal experience, I feel that an understanding of other styles of music makes an accompanist more versatile and adaptable, and allows for greater expression while supporting the vocalist. For example, textural and orchestral ideas in the music of composers as diverse as Ravel, Beethoven and the Beatles can be creatively applied to the accompaniment of the jazz vocalist.

Eric Gunnison and John di Martino cite a wide range of musical influences beyond jazz. The vocal music of Charles Ives and some of the early recordings of Aretha Franklin singing standards inspired Gunnison, while Richard Strauss heavily influenced di Martino's concept of orchestration.

Larry Dunlap was highly influenced by Brazilian music, particularly the work of Antonio Carlos Jobim. Popular music of the 1960's such as the Beatles, and folk music of 1960's artists Joni Mitchell, Crosby, Stills and Nash and James Taylor were also early favorites. Dunlap also enjoys Broadway shows, as well as classical composers Shostokovich, Bach, Brahms, Mozart and Copland. Like Dunlap, Halberstadt was also influenced by Brazilian music, particularly Sergio Mendes and Brasil 66.

²⁷ Corea, 39.

John Colianni has had a particularly diverse career, enjoying accompanying in many styles including jazz, pop, rock, country and blues. He backed Mel Tormé for six years and he continues to accompany pop artist Steve Miller. Through rock and soul music, Colianni picked up a taste for harmony that was more guitar-oriented. He enjoyed rock groups like the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Kiss, Led Zeppelin and soul artists such as Earth Wind and Fire, Al Green, Isaac Hayes and Lou Rawls. These soul artists were particular favorites for Colianni, because “the harmony was noticeably much more piano-oriented” with evident jazz origins.

Hobgood’s background is unique since he had a “compositional consciousness” gleaned from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign composition department. In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s his composition teachers Herbert Brün and Salvatore Martirano helped pave the way for his future musical thought: “It was very twentieth century. The abstract nature of that music and the conceptionalization of it that I was exposed to definitely had a big influence on everything and especially on my accompanying.” This compositional thinking also affected the way Hobgood would accompany vocalists, notably the instrumentally-oriented vocalist Kurt Elling.

Growing up in the 1960’s, David Newton was influenced by folk-rock artists Carole King and Joni Mitchell.²⁸ On “What the World Needs Now” from Stacey Kent’s *The Boy Next Door*, Newton brings these influences into his playing, citing that original recordings of songs such as these made by Dionne Warwick and others influenced his approach to the accompaniment.

²⁸ Personal interview with author via Skype on July 20, 2010. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

The factors involved in tracing the lineage and effect of musical influences on a musician are complicated. Influences can work indirectly at the subconscious level. It is no surprise that based on the necessity of versatility and adaptability of the pianists interviewed for this project, a wide variety of musical influences shaped their musicality. Perhaps a desire to sublimate the ego by specializing in the area of accompanying is an inherent trait in one's personality. This psychological question, however interesting, is beyond the scope of this project.

CHAPTER 4: ACCOMPANYING VOCALISTS VS. INSTRUMENTALISTS

A fundamental question in many discussions about jazz vocal accompaniment is: should a pianist accompany a vocalist differently than an instrumentalist? Due to the visceral nature of the voice as opposed to the somewhat mechanical nature of an instrument, an accompanist might respond and react to the two in a different manner.

Pianist Bill Charlap is often asked if there is a difference between playing for a vocalist and playing for an instrumentalist. For Charlap, “there is no difference. You listen for what the music asks, and then react intelligently in a way that gives the singer or soloist the space to express themselves.”²⁹ I partially agree. While it is true that one must react intelligently and musically no matter what the accompaniment situation, other factors such as the awareness of the lyrics and the inherent limitation of breathing while enunciating words come into play while working with a vocalist. A pianist must make different accompaniment decisions when faced with these added elements. The challenge can be extremely rewarding, though, and makes the player a better overall accompanist.

Pianist Tommy Flanagan also saw a difference accompanying instrumentalists and vocalists. Flanagan accompanied many instrumentalists including famous tenor saxophonists Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane but also spent much time with vocalist Ella Fitzgerald. Flanagan once noted, “I couldn’t play behind her the same way I would behind a horn. Horn players would play the changes, but Ella, who is a very good musician, was more into a fixed melody. You get to the point where she expects certain

²⁹ Bill Charlap, “Woodshed: Master Class - Building an Accompanist-Vocalist Partnership,” *Down Beat* (December 2005): 106.

arranged things.”³⁰ On another occasion, Flanagan pointed out that working with Fitzgerald required more subtlety. He was careful not to overplay or provide a musical accompaniment that was not “out of her context. That’s what you have to think about when you accompany.”³¹ Finally, Flanagan conceded that when Ella sang ballads, he couldn’t “go into a lot of alternate changes like you would with a horn . . . When you’re stickin’ to a lyric and melody line, you have to stick pretty close to the pattern of the song.”³²

Most pianists interviewed for this project distinguished between accompanying singers and accompanying instrumentalists. John di Martino asserts that one difference between playing for a vocalist versus an instrumentalist is that, when accompanying a vocalist, a pianist should play more orchestrally: “I’m always thinking of framing the melody in an orchestral way and creating an orchestral environment for the singer.” diMartino also notes that for instrumentalists he plays more rhythmically, depending on the rhythmic activity level of the soloist.

When accompanying vocalists, Randy Halberstadt states he “tends to play more in between their phrases, so as to allow the lyrics to be better heard. But I also try to do that with horn players, just not so much.” John Colianni states that adjusting to the horn and the voice is a conditional process, dependent upon the situation and the singer: “Some vocalists can be great, but still need to be led to cue pitches and rhythms, unlike most good horn players, who shouldn’t need that kind of guidance. Plus, depending on the singer, there is a lot more potential for variation in dynamics - loud to soft.”

³⁰ Bret Primrack and Richard Dubin, “Detroit’s Triple Gift to the Jazz Piano World,” *Contemporary Keyboard* (December 1979): 22.

³¹ Wayne Enstice and Paul Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here: Conversations With Twenty-Two Musicians* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1992), 165.

³² Enstice, 165.

Christian Jacob claims that the disparate natures of the horn and the voice dictate a different approach for each: “A horn plays very differently than a singer. You always want to support what the other is saying or doing. Comping³³ for a horn will often be complementing his groove, or complementing his lyricism. I always wonder: what is he trying to communicate?”³⁴

David Newton mentions horn players are more likely to embellish and develop melodies more than a vocalist. This leaves less room to comp, but if the soloist plays busier ideas, that would influence Newton in a different way than working with the singer, perhaps inspiring him to play more rhythmically and harmonically inventive. Like di Martino, Newton thinks and plays “more orchestrally as opposed to a small group concept” when working with singers.

With vocalists, Eric Gunnison often plays more spread voicings, or voicings with widely-spaced intervals, such as chords with stacked fifths (C-G-D-A-E). This allows more space and breathing room for the vocalist. He also uses fewer clusters³⁵ for the same reason. He comps less aggressively overall. Similarly, Larry Dunlap plays less when accompanying a vocalist than he would with a horn or when playing in an instrumental group. If the vocalist is more experienced Dunlap is more adventurous melodically, but still plays fewer notes than he would for an instrumentalist.

Hobgood does not necessarily divide horn players and singers into two distinct categories. He accompanies a soloist based on timbral considerations instead of the

³³ Comping is an abbreviation for accompanying with chords and for complimenting the soloist and oneself in a jazz setting.

³⁴ Personal interview with author via e-mail on June 2, 2010. All subsequent quotes and ideas from this artist are from the same interview.

³⁵ Clusters are voicings that contain at least three consecutive tones (ie. C,D,Eb,F,G).

nature of the instrument. Hobgood has much to say about the special skills necessary when working with vocalists. These tools are examined in later chapters.

Although their approaches differ, the majority of the pianists interviewed for this project agree that there is a marked difference between accompanying an instrumentalist and accompanying a vocalist. With this established, it is important to identify the specific issues that face the accompanist when working with vocalists that may not arise when working with instrumentalists. The subsequent chapters will attempt to address these issues by investigating specific musical devices a pianist uses with vocalists, and determine if there is a consensus among the participants.

CHAPTER 5: CREATING INTRODUCTIONS FOR THE VOCALIST

The accompanist's playing must not be tentative. If there is an introduction to the song he should deal with it in an authoritative manner.³⁶ – Gerald Moore

A proper introduction establishes the key, style and tempo and sets the appropriate mood for the vocalist's entrance. Even in the most complex of introductions, the vocalist's starting pitch should never be left in doubt. Numerous conventions for introductions are used for both vocalists and instrumentalists. The use of a I-maj7-vi7-ii7-V7 turnaround (ie. Cmaj7, Am7, Dm7, G7 in the key of C major), the last four or eight measures of the song, a rhythmic vamp (I-V7), or some variant of these examples is common. A clear harmonic or melodic signal, such as ending the introduction on the V7 chord for songs beginning on the tonic chord, or making the top note of the final chord the starting pitch for the vocalist is also useful, but not always necessary, depending on the desired arrangement as well as the experience level of the vocalist. Accompanists achieve clarity in their introductions in a variety of ways, and their choices are often dependant on the style and tempo of each piece.

In-tempo introductions on ballads

When creating in-tempo introductions for the vocalist on ballads, the pianist must set the appropriate mood for the piece. In a successful introduction the mood of the accompaniment matches the intent of the lyrics and tone of the vocalist that follows. One effective device is to create a static vamp or rhythmic ostinato. Paul Smith chose this approach for Ella Fitzgerald on "Angel Eyes" on *The Intimate Ella*. Over an E dominant

³⁶ Moore, 28.

pedal in the left hand Smith plays tension-filled chromatically descending triads, based on the melody itself in the right hand, setting a mood that presages the haunting lyrics that follow:

Example 5.1. Paul Smith, “Angel Eyes” (Dennis/Brent, 1953), introduction.

Laurence Hobgood uses a similar ostinato-based technique on “In the Wee Small Hours.”³⁷ Employing a transparent texture with single notes, he minimally implies a conventional harmonic progression on the first two measures of the song, Abmajor7 and Gb7, repeating it twice. The translucent quality fits the nocturnal, wistful lyrics of the song.³⁸ It is simple and pure, almost resembling a children’s song, and could only be achieved, as Hobgood observes, by “understanding the nature of groove – to make something minimal like that work, you’ve got to be deeply invested in time science.” Hobgood acknowledges that this particular introduction evolved as a result of performing the song many times, from communicating with Elling about it as well as reflecting upon it and adding suggestions of his own.

³⁷ This piece is part of the medley “Leaving Again/In the Wee Small Hours” on Kurt Elling’s *Nightmoves*.

³⁸ Though not directly influenced by it, Hobgood’s accompaniment strongly resembles Schumann’s “Hör’ ich das Liedchen klingen” from the song cycle *Dichterliebe*.

Example 5.2. Laurence Hobgood, “In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning”
 (Mann/Hilliard, 1955), introduction.

David Newton maintains that introductions on ballads depend on the song. He will build up “a slight tension before the singer comes in, essentially drawing the listener in.” In his introduction to “In the Wee Small Hours” on *The Tender Trap*, Newton sets up Stacey Kent’s key by hinting at the opening phrase of the actual melody with an improvised melody and soft diatonic chords. This helps foretell the plaintive mood and melody of the song and creates a smooth transition from the introduction to the main melody.

Another effective introduction for a piece in any tempo, but especially a ballad, is to reuse part of the song’s harmony, and add an original melody on top of it. For introductions Eric Gunnison often draws on harmonic, melodic and rhythmic material from the tune itself. Gunnison chose this method when setting up the ballad “Dear Ruby,” based on Thelonious Monk’s “Ruby My Dear,” for Carmen McRae on *Carmen Sings Monk* by starting four measures from the end on the song. Before McRae’s

entrance, Gunnison played the harmony in tempo, adding his own melodic material which resembles the melodic contour of the original.

Out-of-tempo introductions on ballads

Out-of-tempo introductions pose particular challenges. The pianist must think more orchestrally when playing rubato, which opens up more creative harmonic and registral possibilities. One effective method is varying the register during the introduction before the vocalist enters. David Newton sometimes uses a technique of playing in the upper register and gradually descending into a lower register of the piano, creating the musical effect of tension and release. Newton uses this technique in his introduction before Stacey Kent enters on “What the World Needs Now” on *The Boy Next Door*. For Newton, having a progression like this is a basic part of musical language.³⁹

Laurence Hobgood has also used this registral technique in several introductions for Kurt Elling, notably on “Too Young to Go Steady” and “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye” on *This Time It’s Love*. Hobgood acknowledges that he conceived these introductions from an orchestral rather than pianistic standpoint: “When you’re playing the piano you should be thinking beyond the piano. If I start high like that it’s because I’m thinking of violins, violas, flutes and clarinets.” This orchestral approach is an imaginative technique that allows the accompanist to experiment and create fresh voicings for the singer.

³⁹ Newton notes he learned this technique by listening to a Carpenter’s album, noting how each instrumental entrance was layered, which built noticeable tension until the piece began.

On Greta Matassa's version of "Ruby" on *All This and Heaven, Too*, Randy Halberstadt uses a similar registral technique in the introduction. He asserts that it is a useful compositional device for contrast, whether accompanying a vocalist or in any other playing situation. Christian Jacob uses this approach, too, at the start of "Smile" on *On the Other Side*, "I Think of You" on *Dancing in the Dark* and "Two For the Road" on *I'm With the Band*.

Using harmonic material extracted from the first measure of the song as an introduction is another effective device for out-of-tempo introductions, as it was in in-tempo introductions. Accompanists commonly repeat the material once or a number of times until the vocalist's entrance. On "If I Loved You" from *I'm With the Band*, Jacob plays the first two harmonies of the song, Gmaj7 to Gdim7, twice, yet each with the same texture of ascending arpeggiated chords. Jacob maintains this texture when Sutton enters in the fifth measure, successfully creating a seamless link between the introduction and the first A section.

Though introductions are often improvised, sometimes the vocalist feels most comfortable knowing how the tune will be set up each time. Newton recalls that Stacey Kent favored hearing the same introduction each time to "What Are You Doing The Rest of Your Life," a piece with a challenging opening vocal line. An arranged passage provides a solid harmonic foundation and instills comfort in the vocalist.

Introductions on mid to up-tempo pieces

When creating introductions on mid to up-tempo pieces, Halberstadt typically errs on the side of simplicity: "If the singer can hear their key and knows when to come in,

that's the main thing. So I'll use boiler plate techniques like a I-V vamp, the last four bars of the song, or a I-VI-II-V progression, maybe with a V pedal underneath."

At recording sessions or rehearsals, introductions are often worked out ahead of time to provide a solid foundation for up-tempo pieces. On "Cheek to Cheek" on *I'm With The Band*, Christian Jacob uses the melody of the song as the basis for the introduction, creating a vamp that leads Sutton to the melody. Jacob places the starting notes G and F at the top of voicings on parallel major chords, Bb and Ab respectively. After two measures, Sutton enters by lightly scatting over the established harmonic vamp, eventually singing the melody as the vamp continues.

A similar pedal point technique to Smith's "Angel Eyes" introduction can be used on faster tempo introductions. On "Man in the Air" from Kurt Elling's *Man in the Air*, for example, Hobgood uses a single-note repeated figure in the left hand before employing various triads and four-note chords in the right hand to build tension before Elling enters.

Regardless the choice of technique, assistance from the accompanist is beneficial and often essential because vocalists do not have the visual reference points available to instrumentalists, such as keys or strings to aid in starting pitches. An appropriate introduction instills security in the vocalist and ensures trust between the vocalist and pianist.

CHAPTER 6: RUBATO

Rubato – general issues

Half the battle is for the accompanist to know the song, so that he can anticipate this rubato.⁴⁰ – Gerald Moore

Working with vocalists in rubato sections, either in short passages or an entire piece, can be the most challenging aspect of accompanying. The accompanist must make split-second decisions concerning whether to lead by suggestion, to follow or precisely match the vocalist's phrasing. In many cases, decisions are based on the style, preference and experience level of the vocalist. In classical music, rubato sections are ordinarily worked out in advance. This can also be the case in jazz. More often, however, in jazz performance practice rubato is more of a give-and-take affair. Rubato is a constant striving for blend and balance for both the vocalist and accompanist.

Sometimes it is appropriate for the accompanist in rubato sections to move passages along by pressing the tempo ahead at the end of a vocalist's phrase. This allows the singer to finish a phrase without having to take another breath that may destroy the integrity of the melodic line. In *The Art of Accompanying*, Algernon Lindo suggests that such phrases should be played with a "stringendo or agitato effect."⁴¹ To aid the singer, the accompanist may be required "to make a slight accelerando (so slight that it is imperceptible to the listener) as he nears the end of the phrase if he feels that the singer's breath is giving out."⁴² This moves the piece along without drawing too much attention to the piano. In order to do this, the accompanist must learn to judge the breath capacity of the singer.

⁴⁰ Moore, 31.

⁴¹ Algernon H. Lindo, *The Art of Accompanying* (New York: Schirmer, 1916), 32.

⁴² Moore, 29.

The same device can be used in the jazz setting. Though an accompanist can lead by suggestion, following the singer's intentions is common practice more often than not. Bill Charlap suggests "in out-of-tempo playing, it's the accompanist's job to follow. Allow the vocalist to control the pacing." Charlap maintains, however, that there are other times when leading is appropriate: "You must also know when to subtly lead by suggestion. Try to pare down the harmonic rhythm to its essentials. Don't play more than is needed."⁴³

Accompanists must be sensitive to the fact that many jazz vocalists will vary the pace of their phrasing in rubato sections. John di Martino learned a great deal about playing rubato while working with drummer/vocalist Grady Tate. With Tate, he learned the importance of keeping pace with the singer at all times: "He likes you to absolutely mirror him, never get ahead." He learned to "surrender to the moment and shadow" just as Tate at times would hold notes, or sing melismatically on others. di Martino calls this a "conversational approach to rubato."

di Martino stresses that an accompanist will do best by simplifying the chord changes in rubato passages by leaving chords out because a singer may move quickly through a section, as Charlap suggests. di Martino notes that certain vocalists such as Freddy Cole sang quickly through verses, similar to an opera recitative that precedes a aria. For example, in the verse to "I Got Lost in Her Arms" on *Because of You*, di Martino closely follows Cole with solid chords, adding the occasional simple fill. As a

⁴³ Bill Charlap, "Woodshed: Master Class - Building an Accompanist-Vocalist Partnership," *Down Beat* (December 2005): 106.

word of advice, he notes that an effective rubato approach is to “just play a color, with no fills or lines – you can do no wrong.”⁴⁴

From a philosophical standpoint, Halberstadt believes that playing rubato is about following the vocalist. He notes, “The singer should be focusing on the message of the lyrics and how she can pace them most effectively. She doesn’t need me to be ‘suggesting’ pacing by what I play.” However, the process should never equate to dragging: “If the singer wants to rush through a phrase, I’ll be right there with her.” Like di Martino, Halberstadt occasionally pares down the harmonic progression of the song to accommodate the words of the singer: “Sometimes that requires simplifying the chord progression: the melodic phrase may not flow smoothly at a fast clip if I include all six written chords, so I’ll take some out.” At other times, Halberstadt plays the chord changes in between the melodic phrases quickly enough so that the vocalist is not waiting for him to finish, as Gerald Moore suggests. This may again involve removing excess passing chords.

One specific approach for creating a comfortable harmonic environment for the vocalist during rubato passages is to sustain a mid-range chord, then fill with octaves in a higher register at points of rest. A sustained, unobtrusive harmonic carpet is ideal for clarity of the vocalist’s diction. Bill Miller used this approach when he accompanied Frank Sinatra during the rubato verse of “A Foggy Day” on *Songs for Young Lovers*. When the melody is active he tends to hold chords with little or no harmonic motion:

⁴⁴ di Martino notes that pianist Tom Garvin learned this approach from watching Carmen McRae accompany herself during portions of shows.

Example 6.1. Bill Miller, “A Foggy Day” (George and Ira Gershwin, 1937), introduction.

The image shows a musical score for the introduction of "A Foggy Day". It consists of two systems of music. The first system features Sinatra's vocal line and Bill Miller's piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with the lyrics "I was a stran - er in the ci ty, Out of town were the". The piano accompaniment includes chords such as Ebmaj7, Fm7, Ebmaj7, and Eb7. The second system features a voice line starting with the lyrics "pe - ople I knew. I had that fee - ling of self - pity" and a piano accompaniment with chords like Abmaj7, A°, Ebmaj7, and D7.

Many vocalists prefer simplicity during rubato sections, without the clutter of complicated fills. Playing a chord at structurally important times such as at key points in the lyrics is a useful approach, as Bill Miller was inclined to do with Sinatra. During these sections Gunnison states it is important “to know the lyric and the phrasing of the lyric. Carmen and I never discussed this topic but she'd let me know something was wrong by giving me the ‘eye’ on stage.” Gunnison’s rubato accompaniment of Carmen McRae on “Round Midnight” on *Carmen Sings Monk* aptly demonstrates his awareness of the lyrics. McRae takes liberties with her phrasing, but Gunnison is with her at every turn, lining up his chords with the key words in the phrase. His voicings appropriately lie

in a lower register to suit the mood of the song and are never intrusive to the vocal line.

Instead of doubling the melody, the voicings surround it in a supportive way:

Example 6.2. Eric Gunnison, “Round Midnight” (Monk/Hanighen, 1944), rubato accompaniment.⁴⁵

The image shows a musical score for the song "Round Midnight". It consists of two staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, labeled "McRae", and the bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment, labeled "Gunnison". The vocal line has lyrics: "It be - gins to tell at mid - night, 'round mid - night." The piano accompaniment features a series of chords: Am⁹, Am⁷/G, F#m⁷(b5), Dm⁷, and G¹³. The piano part is written in a style that supports the vocal line without doubling it.

Rubato sections can leave the accompaniment particularly exposed. As previously mentioned, Chick Corea noted that the pianist’s part must make musical sense on its own. One way to achieve coherence within the accompaniment is to maintain a sense of melodic integrity within the voicings so that the top note creates a smooth melodic line. In “The Boy Next Door” on *The Boy Next Door*, David Newton provides a pleasing countermelody with the top notes of his chords, all the while closely following vocalist Stacey Kent, whom he states “always led”:

⁴⁵ The vocal phrasing here is approximate - rhythms have been simplified for ease of reading.

Example 6.3. David Newton’s accompaniment on “The Boy Next Door” (Martin/Blaine, 1944), introduction.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line for Kent and the piano accompaniment for Newton. The lyrics are "The mo - ment I saw him smile". The piano accompaniment features chords B \flat maj7, C \sharp omaj7, and Cm7. The second system shows the vocal line for Kent and the piano accompaniment for Newton. The lyrics are "I knew he was just my style". The piano accompaniment features chords F \flat 3, Dm7, C \sharp m7, and Cm7.

While some vocalists like Kent preferred to lead a rubato section, in Hobgood’s experience, some vocalists prefer a combination of leading and following. Hobgood asserts that knowledge of the melody is a tremendous aid; one must know the phrase points where the singer is expecting something from the piano. This sense of anticipation comes from repeated performances or prior knowledge of the song. In the rubato introduction of Kurt Elling on “Nature Boy” on *The Messenger*, Hobgood mainly follows Elling, yet in certain moments such as at 0:25 after the phrase “at sea” Elling waits for Hobgood to provide a harmonic cadence.

Dunlap says the process of following and leading is conditional, and the accompanist should lead only when necessary. For Jacob, rubato playing is “really a question of matching your music flow with the singer’s flow. The singer has to deal with lyric deployment, which you don’t, so you have to let him or her lead, but you have to keep an eye on the flow, and don’t let it die.” A good example of Jacob’s rubato style is

his accompaniment of Tierney Sutton on “Only the Lonely” from *Dancing in the Dark*. Jacob mostly follows Sutton using lightly placed spacious sounding chords with wide intervals. He is never intrusive and matches Sutton’s mood well.

Colianni observes that rubato depends on the style of the singer: “Rubato is hard to predict. Many singers take more or less time to complete a phrase than I might expect. When I’m with a singer whose [time] feel is comfortable for me, it can be like a mutual mind-reading exercise where we’re both responsive and sensitive to one another.” He adds, “Generally, the better the singer, the easier to follow in rubato episodes. A good singer will also allow the give and take that lets them lead and be lead within a few phrases.”

There are times when the accompanist follows the singer so closely that the vocalist’s silences can be felt in the music. The use of silence in music can have a powerful impact. For example, the gap in time after the first flute phrase in Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* seems to last an eternity, thus building enormous expectation and interest. In jazz accompanying, leaving a noticeable space for dramatic emphasis can have the same effect.⁴⁶ In Freddy Cole’s introduction to “I Got Lost in Her Arms” on *Because of You* during the words “and yet,” di Martino releases the chord, leaving a gap that matches the hesitant, reflective tone of the lyric. Much like an orchestra supporting a soloist in a concerto, this creates an effective bond between the soloist and accompanist.

⁴⁶ “Sometimes the accompanist should take his hands off the keyboard and release his sustaining pedal, taking off his tone at the same moment the singer does, thus making a noticeable gap in the music. This should be a rehearsed effect and should be done either for dramatic emphasis or to precede and to ensure a perfectly timed attack from both of them on the next note,” Moore, 29.

Therefore, successful rubato playing involves following the vocalist's pacing, sometimes leading by suggestion, and having an intimate knowledge and awareness of the song. Repeated thoughtful performances yield superior results for each successive performance of rubato sections. In my own experience, it is useful to play minimally while following the vocalist in rubato passages. Sustaining a bass note while the vocalist begins a phrase, then later adding the chord, is an effective way to follow the vocalist's phrasing. An accomplished accompanist can eventually predict the phrasing of the vocalist, but only through careful listening and perhaps months or years of collaborative efforts.

CHAPTER 7: TEXTURE, REGISTER AND VOICINGS

Pianists don't have to put every note in the chord. To find the best possible choice is the thing; four notes can sound like a thousand if they're the right notes.
⁴⁷ – Wynton Marsalis

Chordal texture

The large number of notes available at any given time is both an advantage and a disadvantage to the pianist. Pianists can play chord voicings from small to large in size, with one to ten or more simultaneous notes. In terms of voicing density, the term “chordal texture” describes voicings that are sparse, thin, thick or dense, depending on the number of notes. Accompanists use chordal texture in a variety of ways to sustain the mood of a piece or to adjust to changes of mood as the piece progresses. For example, on “In the Wee Small Hours,” Hobgood employs bare minimum single-note lines rather than solid chords to support Elling. As the piece progresses, Hobgood adds more notes as the lyrics unfold and the musical texture becomes more dense, following the story of the song.

The awareness of register

The accompanist must be aware of register and its proper use in order to avoid disturbing the integrity of the vocal line. Chuck Israels warns that staying in the register above the first F or G above middle C for the lead line of accompanying piano chords can be detrimental, as this crowds the acoustic area that singers usually occupy.⁴⁸ Per Danielson goes further. He feels that in order to fully support the singer, the accompanist

⁴⁷ Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 361.

⁴⁸ Israels, 27.

must know the quality of the particular voice as well as limits of the register. If the singer has a very soft low register, for example, comping can be sparse and in the mid or upper range.⁴⁹

Since some melodies and vocalists have wide ranges, it would be impossible for the accompanist to constantly adjust. Rather than continually responding to the vocalist's register changes, the interviewed pianists adapt a broader approach to register change. Jacob prefers to use register in an orchestral way, implying the register of the instrument(s) he is imagining in order to complement the voice. He also uses it to trigger inspiration: "When I am drawn to play the same way as before, I change register to force a different direction. I believe that newer is fresher."

Larry Dunlap remains aware of range when accompanying a vocalist, and in his opinion, mid-register chords add "a fullness and lushness to the overall sound." Upper register fills "add sparkle and lead listeners to make associations with other music they have heard, such as Count Basie tunes or older orchestral accompaniments like Mancini's where upper register fills were often used."

Hobgood stresses the importance of awareness of register, but also notes that the accompanist may desire to be in the same register as the vocalist depending on which register the vocalist chooses. He notes that higher voicings tend to be intrusive, even when comping behind horn solos.⁵⁰ Gunnison also tries to follow and be aware of the vocalist's register. However, he will sometimes voice a chord so that it surrounds the note being sung, as in the first two chords of "Round Midnight" in Example 5.2.

⁴⁹ Per Danielsson, "Accompanying a Singer," *Creative Keyboard* (February 2002): 1.

⁵⁰ Hobgood, 58.

Colianni varies the register when accompanying, but tries never to do so “in a way that diverts focus or becomes a cheap effect on what we’re trying to convey musically. Sometimes, common sense tells you to get up in the high register for particularly delicate moments; or perhaps to roll thunderously in the lower octaves for muscular endings.” For Colianni, there are many levels of coloring and dynamics that are useable “depending on the mood and material and development of the performance.”

di Martino notes that, due to the piano’s limited coloristic nature, in comparison to the innumerable nuances capable on a saxophone or trumpet for example, the main way to create contrasting timbres on the instrument is through the use of register. He suggests as an example that “the left hand could be trombones, the right hand could be high winds or strings” and adds that “playing rich in the meat of the piano, the lower to middle register, is where you create the most full support for a vocalist to sing over.”

Creating a mood with specific voicings

Accomplished accompanists will adjust their voicings to suit the mood inherent in the song they are performing with the vocalist. Moods shift from moment to moment. The aware pianist uses a variety of harmonic shapes, colors, and voicings to respond to these varying moods. Though tastes are subjective, some of the many available options that produce emotional “colors” include the following:

Example 7.1. Sample voicings that evoke subjective emotional “colors.”

Example 7.1 shows four chord voicings in a grand staff:

- Fm¹¹**: Quartal, spacious
- Am¹¹**: minor, neutral
- G^{13(b9)}**: diminished, tense
- C^{7alt}**: double-diminished, very tense

These voicings may be played at a variety of dynamic levels, and with various textures and touches: broken arpeggios in downward, upward or inward directions, staccato and legato touches are some of the many possibilities. For Halberstadt, specific voicings such as the ones in Example 7.1 yield specific emotional results: “Crunchy” voicings (clusters) versus open voicings, pretty versus dissonant, high versus low, crisp versus sustained, loud versus soft, traditional versus modern, all will vary according to what the tune requires.” Halberstadt has a defined voicing vocabulary when working with vocalists. For example, to evoke a “poignant” mood he might use a variation on what has commonly been called the “Kenny Barron voicing.”⁵¹ Halberstadt notes, “The original Kenny Barron voicing consists of stacks of fifths in each hand, separated by a half-step, to produce a minor 11th chord. For example a K.B. voicing for Cm11 would be:”

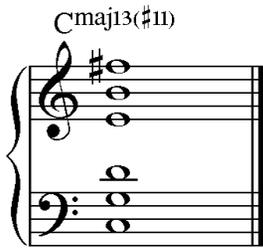
Example 7.2. “Kenny Barron” voicing for Cm11.

Example 7.2 shows the “Kenny Barron” voicing for Cm¹¹ in a grand staff. The voicing consists of stacks of fifths in each hand, separated by a half-step, to produce a minor 11th chord.

⁵¹ Refer to Mark Levine’s *The Jazz Piano Book* (Petaluma, CA: Sher, 1989), 141, for further discussion of the “Kenny Barron” voicing.

Alternatively, Halberstadt likes to separate the fifth-stack by a whole step to produce a “poignant-sounding” major 13#11 voicing:

Example 7.3. Variation on the “Kenny Barron” voicing, Cmaj13(#11).



Eric Gunnison also feels that certain voicings influence the mood or color of a piece. He notes: “Fifth-based voicings open up the sound for me. Voicings with multiple dissonances can give the music a very angular feel and enhance the swing feel.”

Gunnison uses many tension-filled altered dominant chords in his accompaniment of Carmen McRae on the angular melody and saxophone solo of “Get It Straight” on *Carmen Sings Monk*.

According to di Martino, an accompanist must “find the harmonic color that best supports the melody. It’s a close examination that you begin to understand only by playing for a singer.”⁵² di Martino alternates between many kinds of harmonic shapes when accompanying a vocalist. For him this depends on the character of the tune he is performing and the mood of each moment. For example, for folk-type songs he may use open-fifth voicings to create a spacious, transparent sound.

Hobgood categorizes all voicings into open and closed positions. In closed position, chord tones are close together. In open position, however, chord tones are

⁵² Bernotas, 17.

spread apart.⁵³ A chord voicing may only have three or four notes in it, but to Hobgood the challenge lies in playing the best notes that imply the harmony.

Newton summarized his voicing choices by stating: “The song will give you all that information, it will tell you what to do.” Some standards have inherent harmonic qualities that inspire new ideas. He observes that “‘You Go to My Head’ has wonderful possibilities because it changes key so often.” At other times he notes that one can allude to certain harmonies but not necessarily use them overtly. For example, a suspension in a voicing is an effective way to reinforce an unresolved feeling presented by the vocalist. By not directly emphasizing chord tones, tension in the lyrics can be underscored and increased. On “By Myself” from *Let Yourself Go*, at 0:19 on the words “by myself” Newton suspends the 3rd of the chord on C7, emphasizing an F, the fourth of the chord, before resolving to the third. On the word “romance,” Newton surrounds the third entirely before resolving the chord by first playing the F, the 4th, then the D, the Eb, the flatted third, then finally the E natural, or natural third. The feeling of tension and release is fully experienced along with the lyrics, and the song’s story of the end of romance is fully felt.

Like Gunnison, Jacob also uses open or spread-out voicings to reinforce the mood of the vocalist. Christian Jacob favors quintal, fifth-based voicings on the introduction to “You Are My Sunshine” to project the folk-like quality of the tune that vocalist Tierney Sutton conveys on *On the Other Side*. Jacob believes setting a mood is important for eliciting the listener’s attention, and “voicings are an important set of tools for it, along with dynamics, touch-technique and silence.”

⁵³ For further discussion of open and closed voicings refer to Bill Dobbins’s *A Creative Approach to Jazz Piano Harmony* (Rottenburg, Germany: Advance Music, 1994), 11-26.

Colianni notes that arranger Bill Finegan applied the word “plush” to describe certain voicings, noting that “rich, plush voicings are sure to enhance the performance when used right.” In Colianni’s ballad work with Mel Tormé, one can detect frequent and supportive use of rich voicings. For example, he begins the introduction to “A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square” at 0:12 with a rich Eb major 6/9 voicing in the mid-range of the keyboard. This is remarkably similar to Bill Miller’s first chord of “A Foggy Day” in example 6.1.⁵⁴ This rich voicing provides a solid foundation for Tormé.

In order to have many voicing possibilities at their disposal the pianist must be proficient on the instrument. Often, an accompanist’s true virtuosity is hidden when playing a supportive role. Command of the instrument allows for variety of touch, control of dynamics and constant adjustment to the melodic line. In my own experience, experimenting with adding inner voice movement, contrapuntal chord voicings,⁵⁵ emphasizing certain notes of the chord for contrast, and variety in the way a chord is arpeggiated (upward, downward, from the outside in and vice versa) has been helpful. The limitless possibilities of the accomplished pianist can provide the vocalist with beautiful harmonic support.

⁵⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUOi1ogwE8o>, accessed October 24, 2010.

⁵⁵ Refer to Luke Gillespie, *Stylistic II/V7/I Voicings for Keyboardists* (New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, 2000), 73-93.

CHAPTER 8: ORNAMENTATION

Ornamentation – adding fills

At its highest level, the soloist / accompanist relationship is a collaborative effort. A conversational, interactive performance is the norm in jazz. Musicians often achieve a dialogue through call-and-response elements including accompaniment fills and ornamentation of the melody. To achieve variety, accompanists alternate single-note line fills, thirds and other chordal interjections between the vocalist's phrases. Additionally, the accompanist can create countermelodies underneath the vocalist's original melodic phrases. The use of each device is a matter of taste and spontaneity. Yet, as always, the accompanist should continually keep the focus on the vocalist.

In a 2005 interview, Hank Jones pointed out the variety in Jimmy Jones's accompaniment of Sarah Vaughan on "Embraceable You" from *Sarah Vaughan With Clifford Brown*. Hank mentioned Jimmy's use of a soft harmonic background and continuous countermelodies.⁵⁶ He noted that Vaughan probably liked the single-note fills that Jimmy provided.⁵⁷ However in his estimation, Hank Jones observed: "If you do that, you run the risk of interfering with the singer's train of thought. But I think Sarah liked the pianist to lead the train of thought and for her to follow."⁵⁸ Such counter-lines would not distract a seasoned performer like Vaughan, and were hence effective. The following passage illustrates Jimmy Jones's approach:

⁵⁶ Entice, 151.

⁵⁷ Primrack, 22. Hank Jones credited Jimmy Jones with being "the greatest accompanist in the world," adding that in addition to his melodic "one-finger line" approach, his orchestral style was reminiscent of Debussy and Ravel.

⁵⁸ Entice, 151.

Example 8.1. Jimmy Jones’s accompaniment of Sarah Vaughan on “Embraceable You” (George and Ira Gershwin, 1930).

The image displays a musical score for the song "Embraceable You" by George and Ira Gershwin, featuring Sarah Vaughan and Jimmy Jones. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows Vaughan's vocal line with lyrics "You and you a - lone brings out the" and Jones's piano accompaniment with chords G, Bm7, E7, Am7, and D7. The second system shows Vaughan's vocal line with lyrics "gyp - sy in me" and Jones's piano accompaniment with chords G7 and G7. The piano accompaniment consists of a continuous stream of eighth notes, with a focus on the higher register.

Though Jones is playing a virtually continuous stream of eighth notes in this example and throughout much of his accompaniment on this track, his touch is light and the fills are mostly in a higher register. In this unobtrusive way he never obscures Vaughan’s vocal line. This approach also allows for subtle harmonic implications. For example, Jones uses a sharp eleven in Example 8.1 on the chords E7 and D7 to add color to Vaughan’s melody.

Conversely, when asked about his own accompanying of Ella Fitzgerald, Hank Jones noted, “Ella’s preference was for block-chord fills, to make her feel comfortable – never leading, always playing in response to her.”⁵⁹ Ella liked this style because she was a very rhythmic singer, in addition to being a good ballad singer, and “the rhythmic block-chord approach helped her.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Entice, 151.

⁶⁰ Primrack, 22.

The artists in this survey had differing opinions on the subject of ornamentation. Halberstadt listens for holes between the vocal phrases to occasionally add fills. Sometimes he fills using the block-chord approach, and he notes that Milt Buckner conceived the style for piano, essentially importing the concept from the classic Basie saxophone soli style. However, if Halberstadt plays during these points of rest, he does so in a way that does not obscure the melody. He mentions it is unlikely that he would add single-note lines underneath a phrase, as Jimmy Jones did for Sarah Vaughan, because he feels it may distract the vocalist.

John Colianni varies his fills through the use of form. On a standard AABA song like “Blue Skies” or “Sophisticated Lady,” Colianni might deploy single note lines on the second A section after using a chordal approach the first time around. However, in other instances he may sustain the same textures throughout an arrangement in order to maintain a uniform mood.

Depending on the situation, Gunnison uses all of the approaches mentioned. Like Halberstadt, he listens for the holes or points of minimal activity in the vocal line to punctuate the lines in order to complement the singer. Gunnison uses a balanced approach to his accompaniment of Carmen McRae on “Still We Dream” on *Carmen Sings Monk*. At many times on this ballad he holds a chord underneath each vocal phrase, and fill with single note lines, at 0:33, or employ chordal quartal planing, at 0:48.

Jacob acknowledges that each vocalist has different tastes for fills and ornamentation, depending on the song. On the up-tempo rendition of “East of the Sun” on *I’m With the Band*, for example, his accompaniment of Sutton is almost entirely based on block-chord support. In other instances, as on the bluesy “Between the Devil and the

Deep Blue Sea” from the same album, he tends to play more single-note interjections between Sutton’s phrases. In my own experience, block chord support is very effective at faster tempos.

David Newton’s fills also vary according to the style and mood of the piece. On “Under a Blanket of Blue” on *Dreamsville*, he adds fills between Kent’s phrases, using swing-era vocabulary that is reminiscent of Oscar Peterson’s ornamentation behind Louis Armstrong on “Under a Blanket of Blue” on *Ella and Louis*. Though Newton’s style is similar to Peterson’s here, Newton states he was probably thinking more of Teddy Wilson at the time.⁶¹ Due to the exuberant, upbeat mood of the piece and because the guitar had more of a rhythm role, he felt more free to play actively with single note lines between Kent’s phrases. “It was a piece that “everybody knew” and could relax with,” he adds, and stresses, “such interjections must be musical at all times.” Complementing the vocalist’s phrases and lyrics results from careful listening and following. From 0:35 to 0:54 Newton provides a call-and-response dialogue that complements each vocal phrase:

⁶¹ Additionally, Newton speculates that George Shearing and Oscar Peterson were two of the few pianists who could successfully fill in abundant single-note lines behind vocalists.

Example 8.2. David Newton’s fills on “Under a Blanket of Blue” (Livingston/Symes, 1933).

The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line for Kent and a guitar line for Newton. The key signature is two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 4/4. Measure numbers 1, 4, and 6 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The lyrics are: "Un - der a blan - ket of blue let me be thrilled by all your charms. Dar - ling I know my heart will dance with - in your arms." The guitar accompaniment is primarily block-chord based, with specific voicings: Bbm7, Eb7(b9), Abmaj7, Db7(#11), Cm7, F7, Bbm7, Eb13, and Abmaj7. Triplet markings are present in measures 1, 3, 5, and 7.

In contrast to the single-note lines, Newton takes a block-chord accompaniment approach on “They Can’t Take That Away From Me” on *Dreamsville*. Though the tempo is only slightly slower than “Under a Blanket of Blue,” he chooses to play more sustained chords in conjunction with the guitar, adding very few single-note fills. The mood is more subdued, and the guitar plays a more prominent role, so Newton wisely plays with restraint. The guitar has the only solo and later plays the verse rubato with Kent.

Laurence Hobgood notes that one must be careful about adding fills:

Almost all Western music has a top (melody), middle (harmony) and bottom (bass line). People that are accompanying are spending most of their time in the middle. You are composing only part of the whole. You are shaping, building, sustaining, creating for the other two thirds. Anytime you are venturing into the top you better have a strong compositional reason. It shouldn't just be an indulgence. You need to have the right kind of idea to put into that space.

On "Easy Living" from *Flirting With Twilight*, at 1:50 after "maybe I'm a fool but it's fun," Hobgood fills the space with an improvised melody in parallel perfect fourth intervals, thereby complementing the modal harmony of this section of the piece.

In di Martino's opinion, unless used as a special effect, too many fills detract from the focus of the singer. An extended fill, though, can be useful as an instrumental interlude to carry one section to another. The style of the tune affects how di Martino fills. For example, on the ballad "Blame it On My Youth" on *Because of You*, di Martino adds complementary single-note lines, fills in thirds and chordal interjections between Freddy Cole's phrases. However on the bossa nova "All For You (Nuages)" on the same album, di Martino's fills are more chordal and subdued.

Larry Dunlap enjoys adding single-note line fills between vocal phrases, but tries to keep his lines simple and out of the vocalist's range. Per Danielson advises that, above all, fills should be meaningful musical statements, noting that the accompanist must "make sure the phrases have a beginning and an end, and can stand by themselves as a musical phrase."⁶² Furthermore, finding common stylistic elements, the singer's "trademarks," will help you to predict musically what is going to happen.⁶³ In other

⁶² Danielsson, 1.

⁶³ Danielsson, 1.

words, it would be prudent to keep the fills in the style of the vocalist, and in my opinion, David Newton does this consistently well behind Stacey Kent.

Much can be learned about effective ornamentation from the great singer/pianists of the past. Nat “King” Cole had impeccable taste when adding fills behind his own vocals. His fills have a sparkling, singing quality. Cole’s recording of “I Love You For Sentimental Reasons” on *The World of Nat King Cole* is particularly poignant. His rhythmic placement of block chords on “Route 66” and “It’s Only a Paper Moon” on the same album also offer exemplary models for accompaniment. They are sparse and tastefully used at key points of the phrase, and groove rhythmically. Looking beyond pianists, other excellent examples of complementary call-and-response interactions appear in historic recordings of Lester Young with Billie Holiday and John Coltrane with Johnny Hartman. Understanding, emulating and absorbing the various ornamenting styles of these masters should be the goal for the aspiring accompanist.

CHAPTER 9: AWARENESS OF THE MELODY

Avoiding harmonic conflicts with the vocal line

It is especially important that the accompanist voices a chord properly during exposed sections, such as a rubato introduction, so as to avoid cross-relations or harmonic clashes with the melody. When the top note of a chord is a whole or half-step away from the melody, it creates a dissonant “rub.” The timbral mixture of the voice and piano at melodic odds can be displeasing. A classic example of this occurs when a vocalist sings a natural ninth or fifth of the chord and the accompanist emphasizes the flatted ninth or fifth. The resulting sound is a dissonant harmonic clash:

Example 9.1. Harmonic clashes with the melody (x’s indicate vocalist’s note).

The image shows a musical score for piano in two staves (treble and bass clef). The first measure is labeled C13(b9) and contains a chord with notes C4, E4, G4, Bb4, and F5. An 'x' is placed above the Bb4 note, indicating a clash with the vocalist's note. The second measure is labeled C7(#5) and contains a chord with notes C4, E4, G4, B4, and F5. An 'x' is placed above the B4 note, indicating a clash with the vocalist's note.

In the introduction to “A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square,” John Colianni carefully avoids a harmonic clash with Mel Tormé. At 1:00, as Tormé sustains a D, the 13th of the chord on F13, Colianni plays an upward D arpeggio that complements the vocal note.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUOi1ogwE8o>, accessed October 24, 2010.

Halberstadt tries to be conscious of using appropriate voicings that do not conflict with the melody: “If the singer is holding a long note, I generally won’t add a note to my voicing that is a half-step underneath the melody.” He adds, “I’m unlikely to use the Kenny Barron voicing for Cm11 if the chord is functioning as a III in Ab major, especially if the singer has, for example, a melody with a passing Eb down to Db down to C. The D natural in my voicing will likely cause problems for the singer.”

If the pianist is working in tandem with other chordal instruments such as guitar while accompanying, it is also important to avoid harmonic conflicts. On early recordings with Stacey Kent, David Newton discussed and agreed upon chord changes with the guitarist. Newton also acknowledges that knowing the melody and having the melody on a lead sheet is helpful, but there is still “a massive amount of scope as to where it can be taken.”

Reacting to or using the melody as a guide in performance

It is expected that any chordal instrument that is accompanying a vocalist must know the melody of the song in addition to the harmony. “Fundamentally, a pianist who doesn’t know and can’t play the melody of a song will not effectively accompany someone else singing or playing the melody” stresses Halberstadt. Through my own experience, knowing only the harmony of the song will produce mediocre results. Not taking the melody into account inevitably leads to harmonic clashes.

Knowledge of the melody also enhances other aspects of performance. Eric Gunnison notes, “The melody is always available when you are soloing. In fact, it can unify the solo with the rest of the performance. Monk said you could play a better solo if

you play the melody.” On *Pure Ella*, during his solos Ellis Larkins would often stay close to the melody or quote melodic fragments of it, as in the tracks “My One and Only” and “But Not For Me.”⁶⁵ Many vocalists enjoy hearing a melody in an instrumental solo, especially towards the end of the solo to confirm their own entrance point at the top of the form.

In some contexts, an accompanist will respond to the particular style of the vocalist’s melody. If, for instance, the vocalist is singing an angular or more fourth-interval oriented melody, Hobgood notes he responds by comping with voicings that reflect that shape with non-tertian voicings that may have small dissonances to match the sound. On “My Love, Effendi” on *This Time It’s Love*, at 0:28 Hobgood immediately matches the sound of Elling’s angular improvisations with appropriate fourth-oriented voicings.

Use of the melody in chordal voicings

Choosing to include the melody in a chord voicing, particularly as the top note of the chord, or to actually play the melody is a contextual choice. While in classical lieder the melody is often doubled for emphasis, as in the lieder of Schumann, in jazz playing the melody simultaneously with a vocalist is generally avoided. Jimmy Rowles lamented that some singers “want you to play the melody so they know where they’re supposed to be.”⁶⁶ If a less-experienced singer is having difficulty with a certain passage, or if there is an odd key change or a difficult intervallic leap, di Martino will reinforce the melody

⁶⁵ David, 195.

⁶⁶ Lyons, 155.

in his voicings.⁶⁷ He suggests “you should always voice your chords thinking of your top line in a way that the melody can lay very easily and confidently over it.”

Carmen McRae instructed Eric Gunnison not to stress the melody in his comping. Gunnison usually avoids emphasizing the melody in the voicing unless the singer requests it. Randy Halberstadt believes that voicing chords with the melody as the top note is an “old school” technique, but nevertheless a useful tool for beginning or less experienced vocalists to help them find their pitches. Hobgood also avoids this practice unless there is a good musical reason for it.

Newton feels it is “an abomination” to play the melody along with the vocalist unless it is used as part of an arrangement. Sometimes it is unavoidable to play the melody as the top note of a chord voicing, but this occasional reinforcement is not necessarily a clash. He comments, “there’s an art to staying away from the tune, and it is quite difficult to do.” It took him a long time to learn to avoid the tune and start coming up with what Nelson Riddle called “your own private melodies” that would run underneath the original. “The more familiar you are with the original melody, the more freedom you have to think spontaneously of another quality melody that would sit underneath it. Subconsciously, you may even use phrases that appear in the song,” he adds. From 0:34 to 0:52 in “What the World Needs Now” on *The Boy Next Door*, Newton complements the main vocal line by providing a subtle countermelody as the top note in his chord voicings.

⁶⁷ Bernatos, 18. As an example, di Martino notes he may place the melody as the top note of the voicing on the “tricky minor ninth jump” between the second and third notes of Duke Ellington’s “I Got it Bad.” Other examples in the standard repertoire that have challenging intervallic leaps include “Tenderly,” “Stardust,” the bridge to “What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life,” and the bridge to “Sophisticated Lady.”

Finally, Jon Dryden advises that, since the vocalist has control of the melody, the accompanist must remain sensitive to whether his part belongs in the foreground or background, or somewhere in between.⁶⁸ Thus, the potential for creativity and freedom of phrasing increases if the melody is left entirely to the vocalist. This is not always the case in other musical styles like the Broadway musical since melodic phrasing is often worked out ahead of time. In the jazz setting, inevitably rhythmic conflicts will result if accompanists attempt to duplicate the melodic line. Doing so is an act of instrument role duplication, similar to a pianist walking bass lines along with the bassist.

⁶⁸ Jon Dryden, *The Pro Keyboardist's Handbook* (Van Nuys: Alfred, 2001), 60.

CHAPTER 10: LYRICS

The first thing an accompanist should study when he has to play a new song is the words. It is stupid to pretend to play a song with any understanding if he does not know what it is all about. The accompaniment to every good song paints a picture or evokes a mood which is inspired by the words . . . the accompanist and the singer, the one no less than the other, owe all to the words and depend on the words to guide them⁶⁹ – Gerald Moore

Awareness of lyrics is especially important for the accompanist. With knowledge of the words, the accompanist can better support the vocalist. Tenor saxophonist Lester Young valued knowing the lyrics of the songs he performed. While discussing his "dream band" in the 1950's he remarked, "one of the rules of the band would be that everybody would know the lyrics of anything they played."⁷⁰ With a collective knowledge of each piece's meaning, a greater, more overall artistic performance results. Fellow tenor saxophone giant Dexter Gordon also valued internalizing a song's lyrics in order to communicate the full intent of each song. He found it particularly important to memorize the lyrics of the ballads he performed. Pianist Marian McPartland also mentioned the importance of lyrics: "How can one put feeling and understanding into a piece without knowing the words?"⁷¹

As a vocal accompanist it is important and relevant to know song lyrics. Ellis Larkins once remarked, "I prefer to know the lyrics when I play a song, because when you play a tune that has a beautiful lyric it gives you more to work with. You can

⁶⁹ Moore, 8.

⁷⁰ Douglas Henry Daniels, "Lester Young: Master of Jive," *American Music*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Autumn, 1985): 313-328.

⁷¹ Marian McPartland, *Marian McPartland's Jazz World: All in Good Time* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1987), 8.

become a singer.”⁷² Per Danielson suggests that learning the lyrics will help to follow, predict and support the singer.⁷³ Lawrence Hobgood agrees, stating, “As instrumentalists, pianists are naturally more accustomed to relating to tones more than words. However it is important to know the lyrics – you have to know what the song is about.” When possible he prefers to do his research in advance to understand a song by reading through the lyrics before a recording session or performance. Sheet music and “an ultra-credible original recording” are his preferred methods of study rather than the use of often-unreliable fake books. In Hobgood’s opinion, “knowing the template is essential, especially if you are going to change it.” Although it is unnecessary to know every word in a song, he adds that the accompanist should at least be aware of the song’s meaning and able to recognize the words as the vocalist sings them.

Knowledge of lyrics also leads to greater artistic experimentation. When carefully examining lyrics musicians provide new song interpretations, instead of falling into typical performance practices. For example, Diana Krall recorded “Let’s Face the Music and Dance” for her 1998 album *When I Look In Your Eyes* as a slow bossa nova rather than the usual medium swing tempo. Susannah McCorkle’s wistful ballad treatment of “There’s No Business Like Show Business” on *Let’s Face the Music – The Songs of Irving Berlin* also completely reverses expectations. By delving into subtexts, like Krall and McCorkle, the accompanist can help suggest new interpretations for the vocalist. Even the title itself can reveal a great deal about the mood of the song and, like Hobgood, David Newton feels “sometimes it’s not necessary to know every single lyric.”

⁷² David, 194.

⁷³ Danielsson, 3.

The lyrics have an indirect effect on Halberstadt's playing. They affect the mood of the piece, and the mood affects his performance. To add interest and humor to a performance, Halberstadt occasionally responds musically to the lyrics of the song, sometimes in a witty way: "Occasionally the lyrics invite a quote of another tune as a comment, but this should be done with discretion lest it sound too 'cute.'"

Eric Gunnison's work with Carmen McRae made him especially aware of the story behind a lyric. He notes, "Her enunciation and the emphasis she put on certain words or phrases would affect the way the trio played behind her." For example on "It's Over Now" on *Carmen Sings Monk*, after each emphatic word in the melody, the rhythm section adds extra emphasis to their hits, appropriately punctuating and echoing each acerbically pronounced word, such as "sweet," "cheat" and "feet."

di Martino is very sensitive to the lyrics when accompanying vocalists. He notes that while he accompanies he sings the song internally. The lyrics help him understand the meaning of each piece: "What is the general tone of the song - is it happy, sad, or psychologically reflective? The lyrics are very important because that sets the mood for everything." He adds that "singing is first and foremost theater, so the text is *number one*. All musical choices should be informed by the text."

Knowledge of lyrics can thus provide the accompanist with an additional tool to enhance a vocalist's song presentation and match the vocalist's mood. Taken one step further, the musical depiction of lyrics, known as text painting, can further enhance the performance.

Text painting

Word or text painting is the musical illustration of the literal meaning of words. The device has been a part of vocal music from the early days of the Gregorian chant, through the Renaissance madrigal, to today's popular music. The German lieder composers of the nineteenth century such as Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann and especially Hugo Wolf sought to weld together the lyrics and music of their songs.⁷⁴ Schubert was known to imaginatively underscore his text with musically descriptive accompaniments. Special effects such as murmuring brooks, rustling leaves, thunder and wind could be obvious or subtle, yet always effectively added another dimension to the text's meaning. One famous example of text painting occurs in the piano part in Schubert's "Gretchen am Spinnrade." In this well-known lied, the piano accompaniment emphasizes insistent sixteenth notes, playing the role of the whirring spinning wheel.⁷⁵

Example 10.1: Text painting in Schubert's "Gretchen am Spinnrade."

The image shows a musical score for Schubert's "Gretchen am Spinnrade." It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line in G major, 6/8 time, with the lyrics "Mei - ne Ruh ist". The middle staff is the right hand of the piano accompaniment, marked "sempre legato" and "pp", featuring a continuous stream of sixteenth notes. The bottom staff is the left hand, marked "sempre staccato", featuring a steady eighth-note bass line. The lyrics "Mei - ne Ruh ist" are positioned above the vocal line, with "Mei - ne" under the first two measures, "Ruh" under the third, and "ist" under the fourth.

⁷⁴ For exemplary recordings of German Lieder refer to Fischer-Dieskau and Gerald Moore's many collaborations, notably *Schubert: Winterreise* (Deutsche Grammophon, 1985).

⁷⁵ There are many instances of text painting in Schubert's song cycles *Die Winterreise* (The Winter's Journey) and *Die schöne Müllerin* (The Fair Miller-Maid).

Some jazz vocal accompanists incorporate such imaginative devices. Larry Dunlap is not only emphatic about learning the lyrics to the song, but sometimes uses the technique of text painting to musically convey the meaning of the lyrics:

The lyrics are maybe at the highest level of importance to me. I almost always have the lyrics to songs in my head and I am always thinking about them. It is essential to go with the intentions of the lyricists (unless the singer wants specifically to go against these intentions). I tend to color lyrical ideas in an impressionistic way. If the lyric mentions "wind" I might try to convey the idea of wind in my playing. "Lazy" leads me to play slow and restful. "Running" leads me to play more forceful and quick. I am always thinking about how to musically convey what the lyric is stating.

Text painting is an important device for Hobgood as well. Sometimes planned, sometimes spontaneous, it usually occurs as a result of repeated performances of a particular song. On “Lush Life” on Kurt Elling’s *Dedicated to You*, Hobgood reharmonizes the phrase “sad and sullen gray faces” by moving to the relative minor chord Bbm7 of the expected major chord, Dbmaj7, on the words “gray faces,” creating a darker image that faithfully underscores the lyrics:

Example 10.2: Laurence Hobgood’s use of text painting in “Lush Life” (Strayhorn, 1933), m.8-9.

	Original chords	Db6	B9		Dbmaj7	B9
	Hobgood's chords	Db6	B9		Bbm7	F+/A

Elling

The girls I knew had sad and sul - len gray fac - es.

On “Close Your Eyes” from Elling’s *Close Your Eyes*, at 0:11 Hobgood responds to the lyrics “dreamy for dancing” with a light, shimmering, tremolo chord that appropriately complements the vocal phrase. He recalls another instance of text painting on “She’s Funny That Way” on Elling’s *This Time It’s Love*. At 0:25 on the words

“fallen star” he plays a light descending figure in the higher register, portraying the star falling.

Pianists respond to vocal melodies in a manner distinct from instrumental melodies because of the added dimension of lyrics. Words can be enhanced, emphasized and musically portrayed by the pianist. Though the technique works with instrumentalists, the effect is not as strong since only listeners who have prior knowledge of the song’s lyrics would understand the intent. Learning and absorbing the words of the great songwriters such as Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter and Irving Berlin provide enormous potential for depth of expression for the accompanist. The possibilities for text painting are endless, though, if overused, this device can be distracting. Subtlety is key. Through my own experience with vocalists, repeated performances of a song leads to a greater understanding of the piece’s craft. I have a new appreciation for lesser-known lyricists such as Johnny Burke, Mack Gordon and Sammy Cahn that I would not have if I only played or listened to instrumental versions of their songs.

CHAPTER 11: THE IMPROVISED SOLO

In a jazz combo, the pianist frequently fills the role of not only the accompanist but also the soloist. When the pianist temporarily shifts to the being the soloist, an important question often arises: should the approach to an improvised solo differ when playing with the vocalist as opposed to with an instrumentalist? Most of the respondents acknowledged that when playing for a vocalist, solo space is often limited. However, each artist's approach slightly differs depending on the style of the song and vocalist.

Gunnison's concept does not change when soloing for a singer. Halberstadt agrees that there should be no marked difference: "Once my solo starts, I just respond to the harmonies and rhythms of the tune, whether the original melody was presented by a singer or a horn player." Colianni agrees that there is no real difference, but acknowledges that solos on vocal pieces tend to be shorter, depending on the material and style of the vocalist. For him, "any solo is effective because it presents a different musical texture."

For others, soloing with a vocalist differs from soloing with an instrumentalist. Jacob's solos for vocalists are more complementary to the original song: "People are interested in the words when they listen to a vocalist, so my solo will be more related to the song. With an instrumentalist, the approach is more 'show me what you can do', so I will be more open to out-of-context surprises." A good example of this relationship to the original song is on "It's All Right With Me" on *Desire*. Jacob uses the melody and rhythm of the phrase "it's the wrong time" as the basis for his solo, supporting it with

block chords starting at 1:39, and continually returns to it. This motive ties not only his solo but also the entire song together.

Hobgood feels the greatest difference between soloing with a vocalist and an instrumentalist is that “there are fewer, if any, solos with vocalists that are really opened up the way they are with an instrumental group.” In an instrumental situation the emphasis is on soloing, and each participant typically improvises several choruses. For Hobgood, the art of soloing with a singer is remembering that one has a limited amount of time to express something meaningful.

Newton agrees with Hobgood that in an instrumental situation, solo length is given more leeway. With a vocalist, solo space is often more limited so “the art of that is to say something but condense it.” In limited solo space, Newton prefers to begin his solo with a phrase and embellish that phrase as the solo progresses. For example, during “In The Still of the Night” on *The Tender Trap*, Newton begins his solo with a short motive and patiently develops it into the second A section. Like Jacob’s solo on “It’s Alright With Me,” he also creates a meaningful musical statement that relates to the original vocal melody.

di Martino thinks more melodically in his solos with vocalists than with instrumentalists, and may be more apt to end the solo with the melody of the song so it is obvious where the vocalist should enter. On the other hand, with instrumentalists his solos have a propensity to be more abstract.

Dunlap, in contrast to the others interviewed, will often ‘play out more’ and solo more adventurously when working with a vocalist. He believes that a solo spot with a vocalist is an opportunity to ‘shine’ even more so than in an instrumental piece. In a

vocal arrangement the solo chorus “is the one place in the tune where I can cut loose a bit, play more notes and be more adventurous.” In my own experience, some vocalists feel this procedure breaks the flow of the song, while others encourage the creativity. Dunlap’s attitude is more adventurous but for some singers this approach may be appropriate. An adventurous solo could match the mood of the song, or could even contrast a vocalist’s traditional approach. Care, judgment, and good taste should always be kept in mind.

Although the instrumental solo is rarely the focus in a vocal performance, by no means should this area be neglected or underdeveloped. Often vocalists will indeed allow their accompanists to momentarily ‘shine’ in performance. Experience in instrumental performances, where solos are often longer, will be of enormous aid. Training in non-vocally oriented songs such as Wayne Shorter’s “E.S.P.,” “Tom Thumb” and “Children of the Night” may inspire new possibilities when returning to vocal standards.

CHAPTER 12: THE PIANO / VOCAL DUO

Performing alone with a singer is one of the most challenging tasks for an accompanist. Decisions about style, register and ornamentation occur on a more concentrated level. Two historical albums featuring Tony Bennett offer demonstrative examples of how to approach this style. The *Tony Bennett/Bill Evans Album* is often cited as one of the best examples of a successful piano/vocal duo. Evans was hesitant to record in this setting, noting: “It was my idea that we make it only piano, though it kind of scared me. It seemed to be the best way to get that intimate communication going.”⁷⁶ Bennett’s lesser-known and under-appreciated *Tony Sings For Two* shows him in another intimate duo situation, this time with pianist Ralph Sharon. Both albums feature supremely supportive accompaniment and avoid some of the clichés of duo playing that are outlined later in this chapter.

When playing duo with Tierney Sutton, Christian Jacob feels much more inclined to stretch out and be creative than in a larger group setting with a vocalist: “The duo setting offers me a complete freedom that I enjoy taking advantage of by switching keys, tempos, changing intros, endings, etc.” In many of the great German lieder, particularly the works of Schumann, the piano had long solo passages that added to, commented on, or even contradicted the vocal statements in introductions, interludes and codas. Similarly on “Smile,” Jacob adds a brilliant solo interlude passage that modulates frequently and unexpectedly, but adeptly returns to Sutton’s original key.

In a duo setting Hobgood stresses the importance of developing the left hand. As a pianist he believes: “You have to have a total package, including a strong left hand.

⁷⁶ Pettinger, 234.

Your goal is to be at the point of musicianship where your mind invents what needs to happen. In your head you hear music that needs to happen there and then.” On “The Masquerade is Over” from his own album *Left to My Devices*, Hobgood uses a wide variety of accompaniment techniques behind Elling, including a dramatic use of space and silence from 0:00 to 0:13, an Erroll Garner-style on-the-beat accompaniment starting at 0:17, and walking a bass line during the bridge of the song at 1:13 to 1:23 to contrast the other sections of the piece. Hobgood adds that especially in piano/vocal duets the accompanist can freely invent thematically distinctive introductions, inner motifs and codas. During a solo one may improvise over the tune’s regular form with spontaneous, out of form vamps or other contextually appropriate connective material.⁷⁷

di Martino notes that without bass and drums, the pianist has the responsibility of generating the time feel in creative ways that support the vocalist. Stylistically, di Martino prefers a “two-fisted” approach using a stride or “two-beat” pattern, which emphasizes beats one and three instead of all four beats in a measure. This contrasts a walking bass line which emphasizes all four beats in the measure. In rubato passages he feels much freer, as Jacob and Hobgood also note, to experiment with reharmonization. In a duo setting di Martino imagines the melody of the vocalist as a “cantus firmus,” or fixed melody, where much more contrapuntal experimentation happens underneath. For example, on “Don’t Explain” on *Didn’t You Say*, di Martino harmonizes the first two A sections with entirely different chord progressions. He uses pedal point in the first A, similar to Paul Smith’s introduction on *Angel Eyes*, and a descending chromatic bass line in the second A.

⁷⁷ Hobgood, 59.

While performing duo, I occasionally begin a song in an unexpected key, then prepare the vocalist's key with a modulation. I also sometimes change meters for the solo section. Without bass, drums or another instrument, I feel more free to experiment with chord substitutions, rhythmic/metric changes and other musical elements open for interpretation.

In my own accompanying I use these techniques when possible while always trying to keep the overall picture in perspective. Through use of variety, an accompanist can essentially act as a composer, continually striving to connect smaller thematic elements to the whole. A thirty-two bar song form can be treated as a structural vehicle similar to a symphony, with its interconnected ideas, developments and a resolution. Beethoven's famous Fifth Symphony with its four-note motive acting as the connecting thread throughout is an exemplary model.

Establishing the groove on mid to up-tempo pieces in the duo setting

When playing mid to up-tempo grooves, the pianist decides how to simulate the role of other typical rhythm section instruments such as the bass and drums. The accompanist must have an impeccable sense of time and a wide variety of stylistically appropriate voicings. The accompanist must have an awareness of the functions of the bass and drums in order to emulate these instruments and sustain a solid groove.

A common and proven method for accompanying a vocalist on quicker tempos is to simulate the role of the bass by playing walking bass lines in the left-hand underneath mid-range chords in the right hand. For example, the song "It Could Happen to You" is interpreted using this technique in Example 12.1. The accompanist may phrase the right

hand with the melody and match some of the syncopation for emphasis. Using this method, the pianist fulfills the role of a saxophone or brass section in a big band and can also punctuate key lyrics:

Example 12.1. Piano accompaniment of a vocalist with a walking bass line.⁷⁸

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for the voice, with lyrics: "Hide your heart from sight, lock your dreams at night". The bottom staff is for the piano, with a walking bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand. The chords are: Fmaj7, Bb7, Am7(b5), D7, Gm7, Bm7(b5), and E7.

Halberstadt uses this method for certain vocalists but not for others. I personally feel that variety is refreshing and that this approach, although challenging, can be particularly cliché and over-used due to the insistent and repetitious left hand. A more sophisticated approach to playing a swing feel without a bass player is to imply the time without the use of the steady quarter note pulse in the left hand. Pianist Bill Evans used this method effectively in his solo piano playing, on the album *Alone* and on his duo recordings with Jim Hall *Undercurrent* and *Intermodulation*. On these recordings, his accompaniment “made much use of that quietly processional chord technique, which provided complete harmonic information as well as pulse.”⁷⁹ Even without walking a

⁷⁸ Randy Halberstadt, *Metaphors for the Jazz Musician* (Petaluma, CA: Sher, 2001), 238. Halberstadt adds that simple roots in the left hand can be used alternatively to bass lines. The vocal line has been added to the piano example from the book.

⁷⁹ Pettinger, 158.

bass line there was still an abundance of rooted chords.⁸⁰ Evans used this same technique when he accompanied vocalist Tony Bennett.⁸¹ During “The Touch of Your Lips” and “When in Rome” on *The Tony Bennett/Bill Evans Album*, Evans frequently uses a combination of short and sustained left-hand bass notes with mid-range rootless chords. This provides the piece with a buoyant, swinging quality.

Other duo approaches are possible. On “Happy Talk” from the album *On The Other Side*, Sutton and Jacob begin the piece with a dialogue in subtle counterpoint, a conversational *pas de deux*. Jacob’s single note lines and chords weave in and out of the vocal line. When the melody enters at 0:16, Jacob shadows Sutton with block-chord support, occasionally punctuating her phrases with chordal interjections. Jacob stresses many downbeats in order to establish the time and also uses pedal point occasionally for variety. For the majority of his own solo, Jacob contrasts the vocal material by executing rapid right hand single-note lines against a single bass note in his left hand.

Much of my own work in Chicago involves performing duo with vocalists. I have learned through trial-and-error the necessity of variety in the accompaniment. Although it is a useful and often-requested technique, walking bass lines throughout an entire performance can be predictable and tedious. I especially appreciate Jacob’s duo work with Sutton. Like Evans, Jacob demonstrates that the accompanist is not merely a supporter but a collaborator and at times an equal with the vocalist’s creative efforts. The close rapport he has developed with Sutton over the years is an especially instructive model for collaborative jazz piano accompaniment.

⁸⁰ Pettinger, 158.

⁸¹ Lyons, 224.

CHAPTER 13: TEMPERAMENT, ADAPTABILITY AND STAGE PRESENCE

As soon as the voice starts, the interest is at once transferred to the vocalist and the accompanist must proceed to merge his individuality into that of the artist for whom he is playing. It is not merely a question of *being with* the singer, of playing softly or loudly as the vocalist sings softly or loudly. He must project himself into the mood of the singer, must feel the song as he (or she) feels it.

⁸² - Gerald Moore

Temperament and Adaptability

The accompanist strives to not only maintain the integrity of the song but also complement the style of the vocalist. Vocalist's styles can range from cool and laid-back to aggressive, on-top-of-the-beat belting. Pianist Tommy Flanagan had a ten-year stint with Ella Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald was the first vocalist he worked with for an extended period of time, but it took Flanagan awhile to adjust to her vocal approach. According to Flanagan, accompanying Fitzgerald required "not being too adventurous" and "making more sense harmonically."⁸³ Substitute chords, complex polyrhythms, altered harmonies and other audacious musical devices were surely not favored. After Flanagan's tenure with Fitzgerald, he served as accompanist to Tony Bennett for almost a year. Flanagan realized he needed to take a different, even more restricted approach for Bennett: "He had a good choice of material and good arrangements, but since most of the things he did were set, it was hard to really change them up."⁸⁴

Aside from the Tony Bennett duets, Bill Evans unfortunately did not record with many vocalists. A notable exception is his album *Waltz for Debby* with the Swedish singer Monica Zetterlund. Zetterlund had a purity of an almost vibratoless sound, and her

⁸² Moore, 47.

⁸³ Primrack, 22.

⁸⁴ Primrack, 22.

“cool” style, talent and taste appealed to Evans. Evans biographer Peter Pettinger notes “her delicate floating over and around the beat of “Waltz for Debby” . . . had a distinct effect on his own playing.”⁸⁵ On “Some Other Time” Evans’s content is “pared down to almost nothing. Seldom had he been so relaxed.”⁸⁶ In the rubato introduction, chorus and solo on “Lucky to Be Me,” Evans accompanies with minimal, unobtrusive block chords, allowing the focus to be entirely on Zetterlund.

Through his extensive experience working with vocalists, Christian Jacob has learned how to adjust to singers’ needs and preferences. “They all have a different feel of how a song should be driven,” he notes. Jacob lists specific traits of prominent vocalists he has worked with: “Tierney Sutton has a very slow pace and doesn’t like to be rushed, while Ann Hampton Callaway wants the music behind to move along, so she can interpret. Betty Buckley wants the middle register all to herself, while Flora Purim likes to fuse her energy with yours; she likes a full sound behind her.” Jacob concludes that one must play with a vocalist for an extended period of time before developing a close rapport.

David Newton feels comfortable to creatively explore if the singer with whom he is working knows the song well. With that familiarity level established, an accompanist can think orchestrally, or with the instrumentation of a big band in mind. Newton has enjoyed a long career with Stacey Kent and has established a certain comfort level accompanying her. He appreciates her “clear sense of diction” and the fact that “you can hear every lyric.” This clarity allows Newton the freedom to enhance the performance with creative accompaniment.

⁸⁵ Pettinger, 158.

⁸⁶ Pettinger, 158.

When working with a new singer, di Martino's advice is to start minimally, leaving as much space as possible. Once he is more aware of a vocalist's style, di Martino always attempts to change to the context of the vocalist with whom he is working. With Gloria Lynne, for example, he reacts to and matches her gospel influence by performing in a gospel-influenced style.

From my own experience, I feel the key to successfully performing with a vocalist and adjusting to unique preferences is communicating extensively with them off the bandstand. Frequently, I will consult with the singer after a show or listen to a playback of the song if it is available and discuss the performance. Learning through an honest assessment of one's work greatly increases the potential for better future performances. A successful accompanist is open to criticism and suggestions.

Stage presence: awareness of body language, breathing, and eye contact

More so than with instrumentalists, accompanists must be in tune with the body language of vocalists. Subtle visual cues such as snapping or tapping the hand for the starting tempo and signaling the end of the song with hand gestures are common. The accompanist should watch the vocalist for these cues and must be ready for them at any time. However, in John Colianni's experience, the most experienced vocalists give fewer visual cues. Tempos, cut-offs and tags are signaled musically.

Hobgood suggests it is 'accompanying 101' to be sure to watch the singer for phrasing. He feels many pianists have lost work due to not being aware of that element. Hobgood learned from Kurt Elling that, while performing, a singer can imagine two circles that slightly overlap. One circle includes the entire audience and the vocalist. The

other circle includes the musical ensemble and the vocalist. The singer is the pivot point, the common element between the two circles. Energy is aimed at the audience. Due to the fact that the singer has the job of being the conduit to the audience, he or she is understandably sensitive about keeping the ensemble alert and focused.

Breathing is another important element when working with vocalists. Eye contact and awareness of breathing is different with a horn because phrases are often longer. In general, instrumentalists execute longer melodic lines than vocalists because of the mechanical nature of the instrument. Breathing is also more obvious and definitive with vocalists. Paying attention to the vocalist's breathing is especially important when anticipating entrances. Particularly during rubato sections, Newton "can see and hear the singer breathe" which gives a clue as to when the next phrase will start. He believes that listening for and hearing the breath is a helpful guide. He adds if the accompanist "does not have to read a chart for the song and can play from memory, the process is obviously much easier."

Aside from the mechanics of the accompaniment process, the presentation of the art is important. Any musician that is in front of a live audience must present the music in a professional manner. The accompanist must also be respectful to the vocalist. Hobgood agrees, saying: "Part of your obligation to your audience is to demonstrate your engagement to each other. Most audience members would like to see an implied social dynamic." He believes that the responsibility carries on through the vocalist, observing that "great singers make eye contact with the audience. Most instrumentalists don't have that kind of relationship with the audience."

In my own experience, it is essential to watch the vocalist for important cues such as tempo indications, introductions, endings and codas. When working with new vocalists, observation is essential as changes and additions to an arrangement can be sudden and unexpected. The more familiar one is with the vocalist's style, the less the need to watch for cues. Proficient accompanists always appear engaged in the music in some way, and do not give the impression of 'daydreaming.' This lazy and potentially harmful habit detracts from the presentation no matter how accomplished the accompanist. The more I accompany, the more I perceive vocalists as similar to actors onstage. Every gesture, movement and inflection of the voice is part of a narrative, which becomes a dialogue between the musicians and the audience. Disrupting the dialogue by not supporting the intent can ruin a performance.

CHAPTER 14: TRANSPOSITION AND ARRANGING FOR THE VOCALIST

Transposition of the repertoire

Often a vocalist will ask to raise or lower a song's key, typically by a half or whole step, so that the song is more comfortable to sing. Several factors can affect this change of key, including the maturation of the voice over time, experimentation with range expansion, and even the possibility of temporary illness or fatigue. The vocalist may also request a lower key in order to sing a dramatic high note at the end of the piece. Whichever the case, the accompanist must be prepared. A common, although demanding solution, is to practice standard repertoire in "foreign" keys such as E, A and B major (or C#, F# and G# minor), or, time permitting, in all twelve keys.

John di Martino feels that when working with vocalists one must have "a deep intimacy with the standard tunes. You have to really know the repertoire, be able to play it in any key."⁸⁷ As a warm-up exercise, di Martino will play the first chorus of a piece in the original key. In the next chorus he moves up a half step and switches to another style, and so on until all keys have been covered in various styles.⁸⁸ When di Martino is required to transpose, his preferred method is to use Roman numerals rather than intervallic transposition, even when a song is new to him. In other words, rather than attempting to transpose each chord by a certain interval up or down, he will relate each

⁸⁷ Bernotas, 18.

⁸⁸ He may, for example, play a ballad in Eb very simply with right hand melody and left hand roots. Then he would play the next chorus in E with fuller voicings. In F he would play it in the style of George Shearing with block chords. The next chorus (up another half step) he would play it Red Garland style, with left hand rootless voicings and a filled-in octave in the right hand. In the next key he would perform it in Erroll Garner style, which is similar to the Red Garland style, except that the left hand is playing quarter notes. Up another half step, he would play the piece in a stride style, and another half step up he would play the next chorus in a Brazilian style.

chord or set of chords to a key center and transpose phrase by phrase. Using this method, transposition is quicker and more efficient.

I agree with di Martino that this approach is quite useful, however I think it depends on the key and the distance of transposition. If a singer requires moving a song's key by whole or half step, I transpose intervallically. In most cases where the transposition is by fourth or fifth, I use the Roman numeral method. With some songs it is easier to perceive Roman numeral analysis right away, while with others the key centers are not as obvious.

Arranging for the Vocalist

A distinct advantage of arranging music for the vocalist is having the added dimension of lyrics. Words can help dramatically shape and define the mood of each piece, as noted in chapter ten. Of course, arrangements do not have to be faithful to the lyrics. In fact, arrangers sometimes purposely avoid the literal meaning of lyrics. When arranging for the vocalist, Halberstadt will, in some cases, go against the grain by thwarting certain standards and conventional expectations. He notes that in many cases the composer chooses aspects of an arrangement for a tune such as tempo and groove with the lyrics in mind. "There's a reason why Irving Berlin didn't write 'Let Yourself Go' as a ballad," yet he adds, "the lyrics can also suggest some interesting effects. You could choose a tempo for a tune which conflicts with the message of the lyrics." For example, Tierney Sutton's ironic dirge-like tempo on "Get Happy," the first track from *On The Other Side*, greatly reverses expectations. The listener expects to hear an up-beat version that matches the mood of the lyrics. It is not until the end of the album when the

listener's expectations are satisfied with indeed an up-tempo, 'happy,' version of the song.

Accompanists can also enjoy the group collaboration process of arranging. The Tierney Sutton band prides itself on teamwork. After a song selection, group members contribute an idea or germ of an idea. Those ideas then grow into a communal arrangement.⁸⁹ On Tierney Sutton's version of "Skylark" on *Desire*, Jacobs notes that the band "used a very spiritual concept to compare the flight of a bird to spiritual elevation; I then used a very soft carpet sound that, to me, evokes wind in nature." Often the initial idea may not come from Jacob; it might emerge from a bass line, a rhythm groove, or a conceptual idea, like with Skylark.

Hobgood and Elling also collaborate in various ways. In the case of "Beauty of All Things" on *The Messenger*, Hobgood conceived of the entire composition with Elling in mind.⁹⁰ Kurt Elling credits Hobgood with helping create the "floaty" arrangement of "A Time For Love" on *This Time It's Love* and the right mood for "The Best Things Happen" on the same album.⁹¹ Hobgood cites both Kenny Wheeler's *Music For Large and Small Ensembles* with the vocalist Norma Winstone, and Vince Mendoza's writing for Joni Mitchell on *Both Sides Now* and *Travelogue* as strong influences on his writing. Hobgood observes that Mendoza's writing for Mitchell, especially on *Both Sides Now*, was particularly instructive when he arranged for horns and voice on Kurt Elling's *Flirting With Twilight*. On the track "Easy Living," an arrangement that Hobgood is

⁸⁹ Interview with Tierney Sutton: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOf3ZdC49hQ>, accessed October 24, 2010.

⁹⁰ "The Beauty Of All Things" came together because Laurence had a vision of me on a windswept, moonlight coastal night at some festival somewhere laying out that music and that message in such a way that we'd know we were doing what we came on this earth to do." – Kurt Elling, liner notes to *The Messenger*.

⁹¹ Kurt Elling, liner notes, *This Time It's Love*.

particularly proud of, he recast the ballad in a 6/4 setting, feeling the song needed “movement” yet the simultaneous retention of its original “tenderness.” Studying the lyrics, Hobgood realized new implications in the words that state that someone is “crazy in love with someone else and is not afraid to show it.” He believes the song “was meant to sound ‘ennobling and honorable.’” Lastly, Hobgood adds, “The arranger’s art and the accompanist’s art are very closely related.”

Newton suggests that quality arrangements have a sense of progression because development and momentum are basic parts of musical language. Citing a recording of a Carpenters song as an example, Newton noticed the arrangement was layered; the piano and voice began for sixteen measures, then the bass entered, which created a “huge emotional shift.” After the drums entered sixteen measures later the mood shifted again. Newton also observed: “Organ scholars, in all that religious music, knew exactly when to press that low note to stimulate the crowd – everybody gets goosebumps.” He adds that there is a tension by starting up high, and by bringing in the low note there is a resolution, and “suddenly the whole thing makes sense.”

When creating arrangements for vocalists, di Martino often works through the tune at the piano by first singing it himself. Then, he conceives instrumental counterlines against the melody, mindful that they are not obtrusive against the melody. However, he discovered that melodic lines that may work on the piano may not be as effective for other instruments, due to their timbre, range and sound quality. Harmonically, di Martino may arrange a thirty two bar standard with a built-in surprise, such as a modulation at the last A section to “give it new wings.” di Martino also encourages accompanists to be thoroughly familiar with the Great American Songbook. He suggests, like Hobgood, that

acquiring composers' original songbooks is vital because the full harmonic picture is not present in fake books that contain chord symbols and melody alone.

Even more arrangement techniques are possible with a vocalist. The verse can be sung a cappella, making it stand out against the rest of the song, or it could even be included as part of the song's form. I feel the verse works particularly well as an interlude with shorter songs such as "Street of Dreams." The pianist may also 'lay out' at the bridge and let the bass line walk, then return in a later section. This provides an energetic and refreshing lift. If a song is sung through twice, modulating up a half-step the second time through the chorus is a very effective device, particularly in the out head. I have successfully used all of these techniques with vocalists I work with in Chicago. Experimentation, discussion and rehearsal, when possible, are the key.

CHAPTER 15: ADVICE TO BEGINNING VOCAL ACCOMPANISTS

A good compers functions much like that of a good movie score, coaxing the action along and making it infinitely more compelling, often without people consciously aware of the critical function being played. The key is to adjust to the individual, keep your ears open and provide enough support to make everyone shine.⁹² – D.D. Jackson

Aspiring accompanists would do well to study not just vocal accompanists of the past, but also the exceptional instrumental accompanists. Count Basie's minimal approach, Thelonious Monk's highly rhythmic and melodically oriented interjections, Horace Silver's driving comping, Wynton Kelly and Red Garland's tasteful and swinging comping with Miles Davis's group are all inspiring possibilities. The work of solo pianists may also generate ideas; Errol Garner's masterful sense of orchestration and Art Tatum's runs, when integrated tastefully with a vocal performance, can also produce fresh possibilities.

Jazz pianist Paul Hofmann notes that at its highest level, the challenging art of accompanying the jazz vocalist entails more than knowing the usual conventions of standard tunes, trading fours, and an awareness of common introductions and endings: "It also presupposes a fluency in the language of Western music, an ability to swing authentically, and the ability (indeed, the willingness) to 'go with the flow.' As with anything else worthwhile, the process of becoming a successful accompanist usually involves years of maturation ... but the artistic rewards are great."⁹³

In his book, *The Pro Keyboardist's Handbook*, Jon Dryden states that a useful way to learn how to accompany a vocalist is to practice accompanying one's self at a

⁹² D.D. Jackson, "The Beat: Living Jazz - The Art of Comping," *Down Beat* (August 2008): 19.

⁹³ Hofmann, 2.

keyboard. By doing so he notes, “you will hear where your vocal range falls, allowing you to relate yourself to other vocalists of your range and type.”⁹⁴ Additionally, “singing will give you ideas about how to comp better for vocalists, as they need a gentler form of comping, one that lets them hear the harmony clearly and that doesn’t get in their way.”⁹⁵

Jacob advises beginning accompanists to “use your ear to dictate what you should play; nothing is forbidden, but try to be in the same mood as the singer.” Colianni suggests being supportive and sensitive, but “confident in what you do.” He adds, “One must get into the moment of the song. With the singer you should *collaborate* and be part of the delivery of the performance and the emotional wallop of the piece.”

Hobgood recommends that beginning accompanists must, above all, be conscious of the groove. If an accompanist pays too much attention to the singer’s phrasing, is too sensitive and follows the singer’s time, or tries too much to “go with” the singer, then things will inevitably fall apart. He observes: “Singers like to be able to lay back and stretch the time a little bit.” Hence, a solid internal pulse is crucial for success.⁹⁶ Furthermore, he adds that pianists, more than guitarists, the other common comping instrument, have “more information. We have more to dole out.” In other words, space is crucial and overplaying distracts from the performance. Hobgood notes: “You have to be very sensitive to the balance of sustaining and supporting, but also create something unique, that’s fresh.” As a prescription, Hobgood advises that an accompanist should have the ability, discipline and focus to create an original musical introduction and be able to recreate it at the end of the song.

⁹⁴ Dryden, 62.

⁹⁵ Dryden, 62.

⁹⁶ Hobgood, 58-59. Hobgood notes that performances of Dexter Gordon’s “Tanya” felt entirely better when he aligned his time placement with the bass and drums instead of with Elling who tended to lay behind the beat for his vocalese on certain key rhythms.

Most young players that Hobgood hears “have yet to reach the point where they are really thinking about the implications that phrasing has on their harmonic approach.” He worries that less experienced players do not think about chord changes in a larger sense. Rather, they think of a chord progression one chord at a time and as opposed to part of the larger phrase that chords support and represent.⁹⁷ Applied to accompanying, Hobgood’s advice should encourage the pianist to make more informed decisions about leaving less important chords out and emphasizing structurally important ones (see chapter six on rubato playing). Pianists need to build confidence about making such decisions, which “generally results in more fluid, gestural playing.”⁹⁸

In great accompanying, or playing of any kind, Hobgood stresses the importance of an objective ear: “There is always going to be a little bit of detachment, a sense that the player has an ear out there in the fifth row, a relaxed sense of remove. You have to learn how to listen to your own playing in that way.” Pianists have a natural tendency to gravitate towards harmony. Instead he suggests they focus on rhythm and time feel. Feedback from others and careful listening to one’s own recorded performances are also valuable tools for the aspiring accompanist. A sloppy left hand, uneven time, odd harmonic quirks, such a pianist playing a seventh chord always with a flat nine, are a few examples of weaknesses. He believes one must also honestly assess and work on weaknesses: “Most people have the bad habit of practicing what they know instead of removing themselves from their comfort zone. What they play sounds like music and

⁹⁷ Hobgood notes that with most standard tunes, after the first phrase the next harmonic destination point is either going to be right at the end of the first phrase, or the beginning of the next phrase. Sometimes the real harmonic arrival point may not even be until mid-way through the following phrase.

⁹⁸ Hobgood, 58.

gives them immediate gratification. When players practice outside of their comfort zone the rewards on the bandstand will be greater.”

Hobgood also stresses that accompanists, like soloists, must foremost have technical command and understanding of the piano. Facility on the instrument should be a given. Once accompanists gain experience, they must do more than simply play chords. Hobgood argues that “the music is supposed to be reactive, it is supposed to be reciprocal. It is a balance of ingenuity and support.”

di Martino advises young accompanists to listen to many vocal recordings in order to become familiar with a wide variety of styles. Listening to great accompanists such as Hank Jones, Mike Renzi and Ellis Larkins is essential.⁹⁹ Halberstadt suggests one should not only listen to the great accompanists but also the vocalists that accompany themselves, such as Shirley Horn and Diana Krall, and then seek to emulate and internalize those accompaniments by playing along with the recordings. He advises working with many singers, and when possible, taking lessons from experienced vocalists to get tips on what they personally require and expect. He stresses the need to practice playing standards in all twelve keys and to learn many conventional introductions, tags and endings.

Like di Martino, Eric Gunnison advises young accompanists to listen to as much vocal jazz music as possible, but also to critically listen to other genres of vocal music, comparing any similarities and differences. In addition, he advises finding a vocalist to practice with in order to work on introductions, endings, tempos, and comping styles.

⁹⁹ Though di Martino recommends the duo recordings Larkins made with Fitzgerald, he feels the albums he made with Ruby Braff is also worth listening to due to their superior recording quality.

According to Gunnison, an excellent accompanist must have taste, great touch, beautiful voicings, good time feel and a willingness to step back and support the vocalist.

In my own experience, I have found it essential in performance situations to listen carefully at all times for balance issues. The pianist must not overpower the singer. With microphones and amplification this becomes less of an issue, but still remains an important consideration. A combination of observing the vocalist and adjusting to the overall balance is necessary.

Additionally, my own repertoire has grown as a result of working with vocalists. If I do not recognize a song after reading it in a performance, I will attempt to learn it before the next performance. Often this requires learning the song in at least two keys because the original key will likely need transposition.

After much contemplation, I trust that my work ethic and willingness to be flexible have allowed me to continue working with singers. My humility, ability to sightread, versatility in many styles of music and ultimately my understanding of the role of the accompanist have all been important in my career as a vocal accompanist.

CHAPTER 16: THE VOCALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

I don't believe I would have whatever reputation I have today if I had not had any knowledge of the piano¹⁰⁰ – Carmen McRae

The topic of the vocalist's perspective of the accompanist could be another entire thesis and is therefore beyond the scope of my project. However, jazz is a music that encourages democratic group participation and interactive aesthetics, and it would be a mistake not to at least consider what a vocalist expects from the accompanist.

In *Notes and Tones*, Art Taylor asked Carmen McRae what she looks for in an accompanist. Her response is very opinionated and specific about the subject:

Accompanying someone cannot be explained by a singer to a pianist. He either knows what to do or he doesn't. An accompanist and a guy who can play the piano are two different things. You have to find someone who is completely sympathetic to the soloist as a singer and not to the soloist as an instrumentalist. It's a completely different thing. Even if a guy can play his buns off, it does not necessarily mean he can accompany a singer. There are some guys who can accompany a singer and who can't play worth a damn as far as soloing is concerned. That's the difference, and it's a vast difference. A guy must really love to do it. He cannot do it because he has nothing else to do.¹⁰¹

Instrumental jazz musicians sometimes have difficulty understanding the importance of the lyrics of a song, the stories words can relay, the emotional content and/or the sound the singer wants to project and develop.¹⁰² They are not used to thinking of these extra-musical factors. "It takes a long time to learn a song and to understand the song," says Abbey Lincoln. "An accompanist needs to be sensitive to a singer's needs

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 134.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, 144.

¹⁰² Crowther, 47.

and not be simply involved in technique. He must respect the singer's phrasing, inflections, shading and time."¹⁰³

Vocalists enjoy working with accompanists who are versatile and sensitive to their needs. Vea Williams admires pianists who "enhance or let me feed off what they're doing. Good accompanists like Norman Simmons or Albert Dailey know how to let a singer sing. They'll play things that will give you ideas on how to expand a phrase or how to string out a word in a spontaneous and unique way."¹⁰⁴

On Norma Winstone's album *Well Kept Secret*, Jimmy Rowles demonstrates his consistently supportive accompaniment style. Winstone recalls that on the track "Where or When," Rowles knew exactly the right tempo and mood for her even without discussing it.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps Jimmy Rowles was such an empathetic accompanist because he was a singer himself. In a similar manner, the close musical relationship between Ethel Waters and her pianist Pearl Wright in the 1920's was a result of the fact that Wright was a singer herself. Waters said of Wright, "[she was] an accompanist who can sing, knows the effects you seek, and you can feel understanding and help coming out through her fingers, through the piano, to you."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Crowther, 47.

¹⁰⁴ Berliner, 360.

¹⁰⁵ Berliner, 360.

¹⁰⁶ Crowther, 48.

CHAPTER 17: CONCLUSION

This study supports the idea that vocal accompaniment involves many subtleties, nuances and techniques most thoroughly learned through extensive trial-and-error on the bandstand. Contemporary masters have much to offer novice accompanists to help navigate their musical journey. The artists interviewed spent many years honing and perfecting their approach to the challenging art of vocal accompaniment and their insights are extremely valuable.

The survey also supports the fact that there is a distinct difference between accompanying an instrumentalist and a vocalist. Although both can be equally virtuosic and musically proficient, the accompanist must adjust accordingly and with sensitivity. At their creative peak, the artists can together act as a single unit that breathes, thinks, and creates in sync. Indeed, the ideal partnership can be called one of *simpatico*.

Though all great jazz musicians learn primarily through aural means, more educational resources could benefit the jazz vocal accompanist. Books, videos, CDs and computer software could be used to supplement essential bandstand training. Australian jazz pianist Doug McKenzie's website features downloadable videos with annotations and audio mp3s of duo accompaniment techniques with a vocalist (see references and recordings). Since there are quite a number of books on this topic in the classical field, why are there not the same amounts in jazz?

There is definitely a need for more academic study and courses in the field. In the classroom setting, vocal accompanying skills could be improved through coaching and feedback from vocal accompanying experts. In the comfort of a laboratory-like environment, accompaniment techniques and vocal arrangements could be fine-tuned and

tweaked for recitals, concerts and shows. Artist residencies should be prevalent. After all, entire degrees are based on accompanying in the classical world. Many music schools offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in collaborative music, including the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which offers both a Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts in Vocal Accompanying and Coaching. Jazz accompanying should be given this kind of academic attention.

Although this project could only cover a limited amount of material on the subject, I feel that the basic and most significant issues when accompanying a vocalist were addressed. Additional chapters on endings, reharmonization and rehearsal techniques could be included but these will be saved for a larger work.

I have learned a great deal from the eight artists in this study through their words and by transcribing their work with vocalists. I am grateful for their time, willingness and their ability to articulate their techniques. I am beginning to incorporate their ideas and look forward to emulating their approaches. With the combination of their ideas, many of which are new to me, and my own professional experience, I feel I will grow as a better accompanist.

I am sure that there are other expert vocal accompanists in the field today that have much to say about their art. I look forward to expanding this project into a larger work to include these artists' ideas. I foresee a creation of a step-by-step method book as the result of this study. There are already some excellent instructional books on piano accompanying, such as Jim McNeely's *The Art of Comping*. A method book for vocal "comping" could and should be created. The under-appreciated art of jazz vocal accompaniment is in dire need of wider recognition and celebration.

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