



Singing & Swinging: Making choral jazz arrangements work for you

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Guess what?

Most choral jazz arrangements are viewed by jazz aficionados as fairly 'straight', or simple at best – at worst, downright unstylistic and amateur attempts at their art. It is our job to turn these arrangements into something that exemplifies the qualities of this style of music – with the same care and precision that we would approach the music of JS Bach if we were attempting to create a reasonably authentic performance.

- You need to listen to a variety of jazz styles and players/singers to understand the 'feel' of the particular idiom in which you are performing. Imitation is **essential** in learning to understand jazz, rather than being seen as plagiarism (eg. Charlie Parker solo transcriptions).
- As with some compositions in the 'classical' world, jazz interpretation is open to interpretation and artistic licence – just much more so! There are fewer 'rights and wrongs', and more possibilities to express a personal style.



- Jazz almost always includes some form of improvisation, which is fine in a more traditional setting (solo instruments in a big band or combo, singers who can scat, etc), but difficult to incorporate in a choral jazz arrangement. However, there are a number of other ways to help the arrangement sound more stylistic.
- Most big band arrangements are extensively marked in terms of articulation and dynamics; for some unknown reason this does not seem to have transferred into choral jazz arrangements. The result of this is many choral directors not making the most of the implied jazz feel available (but not marked) within the score.

- When learning the arrangement, try a 'call and response' technique – this reinforces an understanding of the whole phrase being taught: rhythm, feel, dynamics, articulation, etc.
- In swing charts (the majority of choral jazz arrangements), the swing aspect of the rhythm needs to be maintained throughout the arrangement (unless told otherwise).
- Swing feel places emphasis on the syncopated quavers rather than the downbeats – mastering this will help the arrangement to sound more authentic.
- Many jazz standards have verses, but these are often omitted in performance – restoring these adds a fresh dimension to the piece.

- Don't be afraid to tweak the score in order to create something stylistic, including more simple aspects (eg. dynamics, articulation) and more complex aspects (eg. repeating sections, altering harmonies, adding solos).
- Scat singing the phrases is a really good way of understanding the rhythm and articulation – anyone in the choir can learn to do this! "Dee dat dee dah dat".
- Make sure scat sections in choral arrangements sound instrumental rather than vocal – no hard t's on the ends of "dat", for example! It's just a close of sound.
- Add 'shimmer' to long notes.

COMMON JAZZ STYLES

- Swing – quavers become 'tripletised', and emphasis is more on 2nd quaver
- Straight – even quavers (used in a lot of rock and Latin arrangements)
- Latin - jazz music with its origins in Latin America or South America. Usually rhythmically complex with a straight beat (eg. Bossa Nova, Samba)
- Ballad – slower, lyrical, half-time beats, sits somewhere between straight & swing

The Standardization of Stage Band Articulations

International Association of Jazz Educators

	HEAVY ACCENT Hold full value.		WAH Full tone—not muffled (Plunger open).
	HEAVY ACCENT Hold less than full value.		SHORT GLISS UP Slide into note from below (usually one to three steps). No individual notes are heard in a gliss.
	HEAVY ACCENT Short as possible.		LONG GLISS UP Same as above except longer entrance.
	STACCATO Short—not heavy.		SHORT GLISS DOWN The reverse of the short gliss up.
	LEGATO TONGUE Hold full value.		LONG GLISS DOWN The reverse of the long gliss up.
	THE SHAKE A variation of the tone upwards—much like a trill.		SHORT LIFT Enter note via chromatic or diatonic scale beginning about a third below.
	LIP TRILL Similar to shake but slower and with more lip control.		LONG LIFT Same as above except longer entrance.
	WIDE LIP TRILL Same as above except slower with wider interval.		SHORT SPILL Rapid diatonic or chromatic drop. The reverse of the short lift.
	THE FLIP Sound note, raise pitch, drop into following note (done with lip on brass).		LONG SPILL Same as above except longer exit.
	THE SMEAR Slide into note from below and reach correct pitch just before next note. Do not rob preceding note.		THE PLOP A rapid slide down harmonic or diatonic scale before sounding note.
	THE DOIT Sound note then gliss upwards from one to five steps.		INDEFINITE SOUND (Ghosted or Swallowed notes) Deadened tone—indefinite pitch.
	DU False or muffled tone (Plunger closed).		

I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANYTHING BUT LOVE

for S.A.T.B. voices and piano
with optional instrumental packet and CD*

Arranged by
DAVE RILEY and JAY ALTHOUSE

Words by DOROTHY FIELDS
Music by JIMMY McHUGH

Light swing (♩ = ca. 112) (♩ = ♯♩)

The image shows a page of a musical score for the song 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love'. It is arranged for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass voices, and Piano. The score includes a piano introduction, followed by vocal entries for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: 'I can't give you an-y - thing - but love, ba - by. ... That's the on - ly thing I've plen - ty of, ...'. The piano accompaniment features chords such as F6, Gm7, Am7, Ab7-5, Gm7, Gm, G#m, C6, F6, Gm7, Am7, Dm7, and Gm7. The tempo is marked as 'Light swing' with a quarter note equal to approximately 112 beats per minute. The score is in 4/4 time and the key signature has one flat (Bb).

Overall: get the technique accurate and stylistic, then relax & make it sound effortless!

Audio examples

- 'I Found You' (performed by Mel Torme & the Buddy Rich Big Band)
- 'My Favourite Things' (performed by Al Jarreau & Kathleen Battle)
- 'Winter Wonderland' (performed by V8 Vocal Ensemble)
- 'Sing, Sing, Sing' (performed by BYU Vocal Point)

Video examples

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8IS4mtmPAw> (boys choir singing 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love')
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8jlSAs09Y0> (USA school jazz choir singing 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love')
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLC5CynsIlo> (Fundamentals from Rangitoto College singing 'Ain't Misbehavin')

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