

You Can Learn To Scat Sing

by

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*Techniques and concepts to enhance the
learning of beginning vocal improvisation*

From The Book

Scat Singing Method

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Have you ever forgotten the words or melody of a song while you were singing it and eventually made up something on the spot? Have you ever noticed that some people are better at it than others? Now, with a few simple concepts and a little practice, you can learn vocal improvisation.

The key to scat singing is using the musical concept of theme and variation. By isolating the basic elements of a song: syllables (lyrics), melody, and rhythm and learning to alter each of them, you can develop the basic skills to become a scat singer.

Step One - Syllables

Select a song of your choice and toss out the lyrics. Sing the song using only the syllable *du* on the longer notes and the syllable *dut* on the shorter notes. When you become proficient using *du* and *dut*, select other syllables (combinations of vowels and consonants) from this list:

Example:

- Long Notes: *vu, du shu, wee, zee, bee, dwee, skwee.*
- Short Notes: *dop, bop, vop, dot, bot, zot, dit.*

Practice using these and others you may invent until you have created a new set of “nonsense” lyrics for the song.

Step Two - Melody

Start singing the song using only the syllables *du* and *dut* and change a note or two of the melody. Keep expanding your variations by adding more of your own notes until the song begins to sound like another song based on the original version.

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Example:

- Instead of a melody note going up, change it to go down and vice versa. Make sure you do not change any of the rhythms at this point.

If you change too much of the original version you have become a “composer” and not a scat singer improvising “with” a particular song. Your alterations must wrap around the original song - not replace it.

Step Three - Rhythm

Go back to the original song on the syllables *du* and *dut* and change a rhythm or two.

Example:

- Make a short note longer, a long note shorter or leave out notes altogether. Do not add any new notes at this time. You are only altering the original version at this time.

Step Four - Pairs

This is where you begin to put together the three previously isolated musical concepts. Start by adding two together at one time.

Example:

- **Melody and Rhythm**
Start singing the original song using only the syllables *du* and *dut* and change a few notes and one or rhythms. Remember, the syllables are the original *du* and *dut*.

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- Syllables and Melody

Start singing the original song using only the syllables *du* and *dut* and add a few new syllables and change a few melody notes. Remember, do not change any of the rhythms at this point.

- Syllables and Rhythm

Start singing the original song using only the syllables *du* and *dut* and add a few new syllables and change a few of the rhythms. Remember, do not change any of the melody notes at this point.

Step Five - All Three

After you have become proficient at combining any two of the three isolated concepts, try a small amount of each as you start singing the melody on *du* and *dut*. Gradually increase the amount of new material as you sing the original melody.

If you isolate the individual musical elements (syllables, melody, and rhythm) and practice them separately, you are more likely to achieve the proficiency that you desire in vocal improvisation

Conclusion

- Keep the original melody in your mind at all times and use it as the foundation of your improvisation.
- At first, keep your solo simple and near the original melody.
- Listen to jazz singers and compare their improvisation to the concepts you have just learned.
- Good luck and good scatting.

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