

## VOCAL DEPERSONALIZATION IN SCAT SINGING

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**SUMMARY.** The purpose of this paper is to question the amount of personal investment in exploring the voice as an impersonal sound, in scat singing. Jazz singers and jazz voice teachers follow vocal practices that aim to control and distort the vocal timbre, to master microtonal intervals, to push and eventually overcome the voice's limits. In scat singing, the boundaries of gender are subdued to the impulse of improvisation, thus, even though the timbre is a biological and a physical memory, influenced by the singer's culture and experiences, the gender encoding can be reshaped inside the licks and patterns of the improvisation section. The current paper aims to prove that scat singing is the neutral ground where aspects of the voice can blend and disappear into one another: voice gender, vocal timber, technique, individual materiality, experimentation.

**Keywords:** scat, improvisation, jazz, vocalists

### Introduction

When we think of jazz, the first image that we portray in our mind is that of a horn player, or a pianist, or maybe that poster everybody knows of Billie Holiday singing in her vintage diaphragm microphone. The reality is that improvisation is the core of the genre, the focus of the musicians playing it and the "main course" in the jazz concert's menu.

The usual term used for vocal jazz improvisation is scat singing and is defined as vocalists imitating instrumentalists, without the use of words, which means dissociating the line from the verbal meaning, leaving the poetics of the lyrics, and meeting the other musicians on the playground of chord changes (that can also variate under the impulse of improvisation) and exchange of musical ideas.

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Every jazz singer who accepts the challenge of improvising should feel just as much of an instrumentalist as fellow musicians on stage. From the very early days of jazz, scat singers have proven to be as expressive and important to the musical synesthesia as their accompanying jazz musicians.

As important as it is to stand out as a soloist, through timbre, through phrasing, pitch and virtuosity, finding that neutrality in voice that allows a singer to merge into another instrument's sound can be truly amazing. Some jazz singers actually achieve amazement and, in this article, we shall discover how they achieved vocal depersonalization in their scat singing.

## Background

In 1968, Karlheinz Stockhausen wrote a piece for six voices and six microphones, called *Stimmung*. This is the first written piece that uses *overtones as a primary element*<sup>3</sup> and is a highly demanding score for harmonizing singers to read. The precision of fine tuning, the perfect command of the overtones, of the voicings, to create voice mantras that whirl around timelessly.

*Close your eyes, climb into this sound.* The opening words to Stockhausen's wildly innovative work, *Stimmung*, are an invitation to immerse yourself in the pulsating, ringing, swinging sounds.<sup>4</sup>

*Stimmung* is a lucid masterpiece that does not leave room for a vocalist's personality, it's written indications leaving little doubt on his intention to achieve vocal depersonalization in this work that consists of a single harmony, the second to seventh harmonics of the B flat below the bass clef. Instead of personality, the writer calls for detachment from self, from the sense of time and demands focus on the inner self: *Time is suspended. One listens to the inner self of the sound, the inner self of the harmonic spectrum, the inner self of a vowel, the inner self*<sup>5</sup>

While it's form and structure is adaptable to every ensemble performing it, *Stimmung* is a masterpiece in that it requires vocal depersonalization and complete control over sound and technique.

Here is the vowel square diagram that emphasizes the importance of microtonal harmonic tuning in the *Stimmung* piece:

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<sup>3</sup> Pegg, Carole, *Mongolian Music, Dance, & Oral Narrative: Performing Diverse Identities*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> *Stimmung*, The Song Company, The Sidney Morning Herald, April 3, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Wörner, Karl H., *Stockhausen: life and work*, translated and edited by Bill Hopkins. University of California Press, 1973.



There is clear evidence that scat singing originates in the musical tradition of the West African culture, as documented by the late professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia, in his book *The Music of Africa*, page 179: “*In addition to the distinct coloration that language gives to singing style, there are also linguistic features that govern or influence the formal aspects of songs. These include both phonological and grammatical or syntactic features. For example, where the verbal text of a musical phrase is shorter than the basic time span, it may be followed by a phrase which makes up for this. It may also be extended by the means of a nonsense syllable or number of such syllables, or a vowel which can be prolonged to the required duration*”.

Although scat singing is associated with jazz performing, traces of scat-like singing do exist in the traditions of Scottish mouth music (called *puirt-à-beul*). Mouth music is a primarily rhythmic form of singing, with words chosen for their rhythmic qualities and the sounds they make, not for their meaning. The most challenging aspect of singing *puirt-à-beul* is learning when to breathe, because the rhythm can't be broken, which means that voice is used as an instrument, especially considering the purpose of this particular genre, which is music for dancing. After the Jacobite uprising, pipes were banned and Scottish music or Gaelic traditions were forbidden at the time, which meant that the voice was the only instrument that could not be destroyed. Apart from accompanying the dances, *puirt-à-beul* were “waulking songs”, working songs, much like the songs sung in Western Africa, accompanying daily group chores, such as cloth making, and similarities with the West African work songs can be traced in the “call and response” form, or in the gender-oriented verses (women's lyrics were light-hearted, with love themes, gossip themes, whereas men's lyrics focused more on warrior themes). Here is an example of mouth music, from Heather Sparling's *Puirt-à-beul* study: <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sparling, Heather, “*Puirt-a-beul: An Ethnographic Study of Mouth Music in Cape Breton*”, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1999, p.16.

**Dòmhnall Beag an t-Siùcair**

Chorus: Dòmhnall beag an t-siù - cair, an t-siù - cair, an t-siù - cair,  
 Dòmhnall beag an t-siù - cair, is dùil aig - e pòs - adh.

Verse: Cha ghabh a' chlann nigh-ean e, chlann nigh-ean e, chlann nigh-ean e;  
 Cha ghabh a' chlann nigh-ean e bho nach eil e bòidh - each.

**Puirt-à-beul, *Little Donald of the Sugar*, collected by Heather Sparling**

The rhythm of the song is more important than the lyrics, as we can notice in the phrasing of the song. Which is to say that the rhythm incorporates the music structure.

Usually, puirt-à-beul are sung to a 4/4 or 6/8 beat and highlight the mastery of the singer and, to this day, are present as a musical form in the Celtic regions. Since the voice is supposed to replace the fiddle and the bagpipe and the rhythm is more important than the sound of the voice, it is safe to say that depersonalization is an important aspect of puirt singing.

Just like West African hemiola, puirt travelled across the Atlantic Ocean, to start a new life in the Americas and grew inside the jazz movement of the early twentieth century.

## 2. Scat singing and the language idiom

In language, the spoken line is an assembly of voiced and voiceless sounds, with pitch carried by the syllabic nucleus, whereas in scat singing, the melodic line is a continuous sound wave, with pitch susceptible to changes according to the succession of tones. Both language and scat are perpetuated through oral tradition.

Language communicates thoughts and feelings through articulation and a sonority hierarchy, but in scat we find another component, which is the *vibrato*.

The vibrato is an element of style that manipulates the listener's attention, and its speed, its length and its place in the vocal apparatus can be chosen according to the syntax of the scat phrase and the tempo of the music.

In spoken language, the use of vibrato isn't justified, as it only serves as an enhancer of the sustained tone, only applicable in music.

Scat subordinates both language and melody to the pursuit of the inner creative impulse, while the ability to control the speed of the vibrato in scat offers more style options and a timbre contrast in the melodic line.

Language carries comprehensible information, whereas scat uses the syllables as a support for the notes performed, which means that the language used for scat is the verbalized form of instrumental improvisation, where the instrument is the voice. The reason why the simple use of the words defining the notes in a scale don't fit in a scat language is the succession consonant-vowel of every note, whereas the number of syllables used in phrases, both in spoken language and in music, varies.

In the English language, singers have an array of twenty-four consonants and sixteen vowels to choose from, yet during a scat, one singer makes use of only a handful of those, much like a painter deciding to use only a few colors to paint an artwork. The decision of the syllables that are to be used in the vocabulary of a scat solo is usually made in the bars preceding the solo, or in the moments of silence just before the scat.

Scat begins where words can no longer deliver the musical meaning.

Bobby McFerrin dedicated an entire album to the musical journey in the realm of languages, his *VOCABuLarieS* album swapping elements of European, Egyptian, Zulu, Mandarin, Japanese, Sanskrit, in a mélange of living and dead languages on just as heterogeneous a music. For Bobby McFerrin, language is a tool in the service of the voice, and not vice-versa.

## **2.1. Jazz scat syllables**

Even though scat singing is an expression of instant creation, an unpredictable musical expression, the language used, like any other language, implies articulation, rhythm, syllable forming, although each singer can choose their own vocabulary to express their own style. The syllables combine according to the notes the improviser chooses for the melody created, which in turn determines the vowels and the consonants used. Each individual singer can bring a personal note on their scatting technique, but there are

two main categories of sounds that singers can produce, and these two categories depend on whether or not the sounds have definite pitch or not. Voiced sounds include vowels and are produced by sending air through the vocal folds. This category includes various combinations of sounds, depending on the pitch, the place in the melodic line, the intensity, etc. Voiceless sounds are the sounds produced by blocking the airflow, either by using the glottis, or the tongue. Let's see an example:

E.g. 3

The musical score consists of four staves of music in a 4/4 time signature, labeled 'Swing feel'. The lyrics are: 'du ba du dn dwe ba du dn du dn du ba du e a du dn du dn du ba de ya du dn dah du dn du ba du dn dwe ba du dn du dn du ba de ya du dn dah'. The chord symbols are: Dmin7, G7, E-7b5, A7b9, Dmin7, G7#9, CMaj7, Gmin7, C7, A-7b5, D7b9, Gmin7, C7#9, FMaj7, Cmin7, F7, D-7b5, G7b9, Cmin7, F7#9, BbMaj7.

**Voiced sounds and voiceless sounds, example**

Combinations between voiced and voiceless sounds depend on the type of beat they find themselves on, voiceless sounds can't be sung on strong beats, instead, they are used on weak beats, or as predecessors of a strong beat.

Let's take a look at the choices that Louis Armstrong made in his scat singing on the Heebie Jeebies tune, on this phonetic transcription by William Bower<sup>7</sup>:

<sup>7</sup> Bower, F. William, 2002. *Scat Singing: A Timbral and Phonemic Analysis*, Current Musicology, by the Trustees of the Columbia University in the City of New York, p. 308.

1  $E\flat 7$   
 ch iyf gæf æmf diy bæ

3  $A\flat$   
 diy də la bam rip ip di duw diy duwt

5  $E\flat 7$   
 duw duw diy duw də diy də də dow diy

7  $A\flat$   
 dow di dow duw duw bæ duw biy dey də

***Heebie Jeebies*, Louie's Scat, phonetic transcription,  
first 8 bars of the scat solo**

The instant success that *Heebie Jeebies* witnessed led to a short dance craze, of course bearing the same name, the heebie jeebie dance and, even though the true paternity of the jazz scat cannot be determined, Louis Armstrong definitely shaped the method that would later on be explored by other jazz scat singers.

Arguably, there are many syllables in the English language that could be used in scatting, many more than the few actually used during scat singing. The reason for this shortage of syllables used is that scat singing is in fact a vocal imitation of instrumental jazz. Every aspect of the voice performance in a jazz improvisation is a manifestation of an instrument equal to every other in the ensemble.

The alternation between voiced and voiceless sounds is unpredictable, as improvised music always is, but there are singers who choose only one syllable to work with, keeping a strong focus on the notes they sing, as is the case with Bobby McFerrin, one of the most important contemporary jazz scat singers. He makes an astonishing use of his incredible range and imitates sounds in nature, instruments, noises, practically every sound that his voice can reproduce.

To Bobby McFerrin, imitating other instruments is a provocation that he can take, even if that means standing in front of a full orchestra and playing the cello part, without thinking about the exact instrument he is reproducing, but only about the sound itself.

In an interview for *Jazz Notes* magazine in 1981, Bobby McFerrin said: *I don't even think about that when I'm doing sound effects. It's not that I'm thinking, 'Okay, now is a good time to do a trumpet sound.' I just do a sound and then people come to me and say. I like the trombone sound that you get. How do you do it?' And that's not usually the way I think about it at all.*<sup>8</sup>

How the idea of a scat truly is born, is a matter of mystery. Whether it's the hint that one of the instrumentalists is giving, a note, a drum beat, or something much more subtle, like a glance, a smile, a look from the audience, nobody knows. Maybe the first note is simply a leap into the unknown.

*Scat begins with a fall, or so we're told*<sup>9</sup>, professor Brent Edwards Hayes wrote, referring to Louis Armstrong's explanation on the origin of the scat performed on *Heebie Jeebies*. He had stated that the lyric sheet had fallen on the ground while recording the song, but he continued to sing. Whatever the story truly is, that song inspired every jazz singer of Louis' generation and opened the premises for jazz scat singing.

One of the greatest admirers of Louis Armstrong's music was Billie Holiday, who never scatted, but her blurry pronounce of the lyrics and behind-the-beat controversial singing was inspired by Louis Armstrong's phrasing and quiet expressiveness.

In Billie's own words: *I think I copied my style from Louis Armstrong. Because I used to like the big volume and the big sound that Bessie Smith got when she sang ... So, I liked the feeling that Louis got and I wanted the big volume that Bessie Smith got. But I found that it didn't work with me, because I didn't have a big voice. So anyway, between the two of them I sorta got Billie Holiday.*<sup>10</sup>

One can argue that, once you make no important changes in the lyrics or the melody structure, you are not improvising. But Billie Holiday's singing emphasizes the behind-the-rhythm phrasing in Louis' style, as well as his distinctive "growl", his soft, sliding vowels, his distorted lower notes, his rhythm punching, his instrument-like singing. Her intention was always to sound like an instrument, particularly like Louis Armstrong's trumpet. And Louis Armstrong wanted to sound like a trombone when he sang. When Louis put down his trumpet and started singing, it was like a dialogue

<sup>8</sup> Tolleson, Robin, *Bobby McFerrin Sings for the Challenge*, *Jazznotes*, BAM 23, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Hayes Edwards, Brent. "Louis Armstrong and the Syntax of Scat." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 3, The University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 618–49, <https://doi.org/10.1086/343233>.

<sup>10</sup> Holiday, Billie, *Music USA Interview*, conducted Feb.15, 1956.

between two different personalities of the musician. The similarities between his singing and the trombone timber can be found particularly in the “growling” and the down-sliding vowels. This use of voice timber alteration technique is indeed improvisation.

### 3. Improvisation in classical music

Scat may be a unique aspect of improvisation in vocal jazz, but the improvisation can be found in classical music as well. Most concertos contain a *cadenza*, which is a *virtuoso passage inserted near the end of a concerto movement or aria, usually indicated by the appearance of a fermata over an inconclusive chord such as the tonic 6-4*.<sup>11</sup> Cadenzas occur in the first and the last movement, which offers the soloing musicians the opportunity to explore, to demonstrate their virtuosity and their technique in those measures contained in the cadenza section. Before the nineteenth century, the soloists were expected to improvise freely on the cadenza, without any instruction or guideline written by the composer. The orchestra would stop, while the soloist would pour out his imagination on scales and arpeggios, on ideas from the main theme, either prolonging the dominant seventh chord, then pausing and bringing back the orchestra at a sign, or after the fermata over the tonic 6-4 chord, which could indicate a tempo or harmonic change after the cadenza.

Of course, practicing the cadenzas before the concert meant that much of the spontaneous improvisational aspect of the performance was left at home, but the same happens with most of the jazz improvised solos as well, to the benefit of the performer as well as the audience.

The purpose of the cadenzas was to inflict upon the audience the element of surprise, to raise the tension and to reveal the mastery of the soloist.

But, if the melody of the section was based on specific harmonic coordinates, the length of the cadenza before the 18th century was left to the soloist's discretion, performers of the time sacrificing the aesthetics of the piece in its entirety for the benefit of the cadenza moment, which provided them with full spotlight.

Mozart gave the cadenza a more structural purpose, transforming the section from an insertion into an integral part of the movement, balancing the weight between the virtuosity of the soloist and that of the orchestra, and he achieved this balance by quoting material from the theme and by organizing this material into sections:

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<sup>11</sup> Badura-Skoda, Eva, “*Cadenza*,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* - Vol. 3, 1980.

*In almost all Mozart's major cadenzas one can make out a clear division into three; an 'opening' (I), which begins either with one of the themes of the concerto or with virtuoso passage-work.....a middle section (II), which is almost always a sequential development of some important theme or motive from the concerto movement.....This is the starting point for a number of virtuoso runs, arpeggios, etc., which lead to a closing section (III) of the cadenza, usually ending on a trill.<sup>12</sup>*

Let's see an example of this structure in the cadenza for K. 456/i:

**E.g. 5**

The image shows a musical score for the cadenza of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20, K. 456, first movement. The score is divided into four systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system starts with a trill (tr) and a fermata. The second system is marked with 'U' and 'development of T1'. The third system is marked with 'T1' and 'development of T1'. The fourth system is marked with 'U' and 'development of T1'. The score includes various musical notations such as trills, arpeggios, and fermatas.

<sup>12</sup> Badura-Skoda, Eva; Badura-Skoda, Paul, *Interpreting Mozart on the Keyboard*, tr. Leo Black, Barrie and Rockliff, London, 1962, 215-216.



### W.A. Mozart, K 456/I – cadenza – bars 1-25

But, if Mozart structured the cadenza, subjecting the improvisation to scientific principles, while leaving enough space for the imagination of the soloist (all the surviving Mozart's cadenzas were not written in the autograph score of the concertos), Beethoven insisted that the cadenzas would be played exactly as written and even added a note to make sure of that.

In Beethoven's final and most important piano concerto, the Fifth Piano Concerto, each of the four chords in the orchestra, outlining the I-IV-V-I harmonic progression, initiate an expansive false cadenza on the piano on the very beginning of the piece, defying the rules of music-writing thus far. It may sound like a cadenza, but Beethoven indicates in writing: *Non si fa una Cadenza, ma s'attacca subito il seguente* (There is no cadenza; instead, proceed directly with the following). In his previous concerto, the Fourth Piano Concerto, he had already indicated that he didn't tolerate the extensive lengths of the cadenzas played during his time, which was probably why he specified: *La Cadenza sia corta* (The cadenza is to be short).

The length of the improvised section is not left to chance in jazz either. But, if in classical music the cadenza's musical ideas are rooted in the theme or are composed as virtuoso passage-work, in classical jazz, the improvisation is an organic separate piece of music in itself, based on the same chord progressions as the main theme, but with an entire new melody. As a whole, the melody of the improvisation can be an ensemble of blended-together quotes from other recognizable standards, or a cohesive strand of licks and patterns.

Still, this is only valid for the classic jazz improvisation, not the same rules apply for some of the expressionist modernist jazz compositions, for instance, in free jazz, some of the conventions are laid down while others are respected. Musical awareness provides information about what the other instrumentalists are playing and the common musical endeavor can be pursued through individual improvisational experience.

#### 4. Scat singing in modern genres – free jazz, beatbox

Free jazz and atonal music offer the prospect of a collective group improvisation, where common understanding and trust between the group members are a must and the risk of failure is a maybe. Musicians take that risk, because the fear of failure triggers a decision-making response in our brain, which subconsciously leads to musical ideas that are intriguing to the performers themselves. The musicians challenge themselves by leaping into far-related chord changes, or by initiating complicated interval connections in their melodies, using dissonant, compound, augmented or diminished intervals to create necessary premises for resolution, which, in free jazz, doesn't always happen.

Free jazz improvisation is a conscientious attempt to break the rules of classic jazz improvisation. Some of the rules still apply - the expression of emotion, (although the abstract form invites to reasoning above feeling, so the emotions will be filtered through the lens of cognition), solo performing, rhythm (although it's displaced, to intrigue and challenge the listener) - but, for the most part, free jazz improvisation abandons the harmonic patterns and chord changes, the form and the structure of a composition.

One of the first jazz singers to borrow the expressive tools of the free jazz improvisation in her singing was Betty Carter. She was already a successful improviser as a bop singer, but the activist movement and the inner motivation to break down barriers between jazz and free-form music led to her exuberant approach to scat singing.

Here's an excerpt from the scat solo Betty Carter sang on *Thou Swell*<sup>13</sup>:

E.g. 6

up tempo swing      ♩ = 126      (nasal)      F7

*mp* he le dow di dl e ye de hiy - de de ba yow bow ba ba duw be ba biy

#### ***Thou Swell* - Hart/Rogers, Betty Carter scat solo**

Betty Carter's unique scat singing style was built on the work of Billie Holiday, the moans and growls are present in both voices, but Betty Carter's scat is stretched into silence, the little phrases are clipped into more spacious, hanging larger scat numbers. Arguably, her ballad singing wasn't very acclaimed by critics who preferred standards to have recognizable

<sup>13</sup> Bauer, William R, *Thou Swell*, Hart/Rogers, transcription, 2002, p. 251.

themes, since Betty Carter reshaped every song that she tackled. But it is equally undeniable that her scat singing matched the performance of a horn player, her improvisational style, especially on the up-tempo tunes, dazzling the audiences and musicians alike.

In tonal jazz, improvisation is tied to the chord structure that the melody is based on, but in free jazz, these boundaries are lifted.

In the 1960's, along with the free jazz movement, a new shape of scat was born, using noises and sounds that aren't sung, such as laughter, crying, screaming, imitation of noises in nature, etc. This new type of scat singing later evolved into beatboxing, or b-box, a vocal percussion imitation of drum machine.

Beatboxing includes beats, scratching, rhythms and freestyle rap. It is essentially a vocal version of the drum set and, according to the emotional intention, the sounds can be produced glottic, pulmonic and lingual.

One of the differences between beatboxing and scat singing is that beatboxing imitates the drum set with all its characteristics, whereas scat singing imitates other instruments or simply follows a melodic and rhythmic course. Another distinction between the two vocal techniques is that beatboxers make use of inhaled sounds, which means a completely different breathing technique. Also, the role of the microphone is paramount, because of the sound spectrum that modulating the acoustic response offers.

Beatboxing creates the illusion of a non-vocal sound, like depersonalized scat singing, but with a very important difference. In the beginning of this article, we exposed Stockhausen's quest for vocal depersonalization, in a journey to the inner self of the sound, the inner self of the harmonic spectrum, the inner self of a vowel. Considering this affirmation, it is safe to say that beatboxing may very well be a journey to the inner self of the rhythm and the projection of that towards the microphone and the audience.

The human ability to create sounds appears to be just as surprising as the overlapping instincts of music and rhythm.

## **5. Creating vocals while detaching from the voice**

Before we tackle the main subject of this paper, we must first agree that every jazz singer, every jazz voice teacher and every jazz voice student should work continuously on improving their own voice, on finding their personality and their own sound. That studying written scat solos and transcribing, transposing and even writing solos doesn't mean that technical skills are more important than color, that rhythmical exercises are more important than the unity of one's voice.

Paul Berliner, in his *Thinking in Jazz - The Infinite Art of Improvisation* study, reveals that : *many experts advise learners to practice singing tunes initially with nonverbal or scat syllables-to master the melodies aurally without*

*relying on physical expression such as fingering patterns or the visualization of an instrument's layout*<sup>14</sup>.

The work of an improvising scat singer discovering a jazz standard begins with hearing the chord changes, then singing the bass line while listening to the chord changes, then singing the arpeggios, the licks and then the patterns. It's a long process of discovering the right notes to improvise. And then it's important to choose from the right notes those notes that blend perfectly with every other sound in the accompanying background. In other words, it is not enough to know which notes to pick, there have to be notes that are musically correct in the ensemble.

To know when to take a step back is a critical aspect in the improvisation part of a jazz composition.

The added value of a scat sung during a jazz performance is the expressiveness of the timbre, as the voice is the most organic instrument.

So, if the scat singing brings upon a music setting the coordinate of the timbre, of the expressiveness, how does depersonalization work?

In social philosophy, depersonalization means detaching from self, or being a detached observer of oneself. If we apply these fundamentals on the analysis of the scat singing, we are to find that vocal depersonalization means detaching from the voice timber, observing the metrical and melodic structure of the vocal line, while singing it. But this self-analysis and detachment from oneself happens at the same time with the instant invention, which is the improvisation.

Can one detach from self and create at the same time?

If we analyze the most creative singers of all time, the jazz singers we addressed in this paper - Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Betty Carter, Bobby McFerrin - it's not the uniqueness of the voice necessarily that captures the listener, it's the intriguing manner in which voice is used as an instrument, it's the height and weight of the notes that gives the melody its balance, it's the way that the balance of the melody fits into the harmony and the rhythm of the sound.

To achieve this balance, the scat solo cannot be a plethora of notes randomly put together to fit the chord changes. Such balance is achieved by completely detaching from the impulse of impressing.

A good scat singer is focused on every sound played, hearing all the other musicians at the same time with their vocal performing, making sure that they intervene at the right time and that they sit out when they need to.

Passive performing is a term jazz educators use to describe the unnecessary contribution of a musician on stage while another musician is improvising. Unfortunately, singers are recurring passive performers, because

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<sup>14</sup> Berliner, Paul F., *Thinking in Jazz / The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, The University of Chicago Press, aug.1994, p. 66.

of the inner spotlight they forget to switch off when they stop being the headliners in a musical piece.

Depersonalization in scat singing means taking one immense step back, directing the attention away from the ornaments and embellishments of the voice, to attain individual command of microscopic intonation with the purpose of perfectly merging the voice into the sound of the music in its entirety. The superior awareness of the vocal expression, combined with the concentration on the vocal technique, results in an individual vocal personality completely submerged within the rest of the music spectrum.

Vocal depersonalization in scat singing is a process of self-observation and self-awareness, a means of letting go of aspects of vocal personality to attain vocal equilibrium.

It is, basically, a mindfulness technique applied in vocal practice.

This detachment from the vocal personality aspects means an absence of the vibrato, increased attention on the rhythm and the rest values, careful use of the timbre spectrum.

Since scat singing is in itself an instant musical creation, the lack of comprehensible words leaves space for more music, which means that a good practice of the scat syllables helps the improvising singer to focus entirely on the notes they create.

## 6. Conclusion

While every singer's professional pursuit is to become unique, recognizable, to have a voice everyone can pick from the rest, a scat singer's endeavor is to be acknowledged as an outstanding improviser, equal to the fellow musicians improvising alongside.

Whether depersonalization should be a quest in itself or not, every jazz singer should start practicing their scat by tuning their voice to their accompanying musicians, which *implies not only the outward tuning of voices or instruments, but also the inward tuning of one's soul*<sup>15</sup>.

To achieve sound perfection, a singer must first observe the sound, embrace it, submerge inside the simple structure of a single note, without carrying a sense of self in this observation. Creating a scat is creating a sound, which implicates understanding sound energy, sound duration, frequency content, which means that sound creators should be responsible, therefore accountable, for their sound creation.

Improvisation is a complex form of creative expression, which requires immersing in a brain activity while deactivating certain brain areas, which is probably why improvisers feel like their idea "flows".

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<sup>15</sup> Hillier, Paul. *Liner notes to Harmonia Mundi*, CD HMU 807408, 2007.

Much like vocal yoga practices, that aim to achieve a balance between the vocal timbre and the effortless mastery of singing, depersonalization is a process of self-control and self-observation that leads to progress and personal improvement.

Vocal depersonalization in scat singing is imperative, for singers who aim to achieve perfection in sound creation.

Depersonalizing actually means becoming deeply involved in the musical act, participating actively to the artistic moment, and every musician's goal should be to participate, rather than to contribute to music.

If mental health specialists define depersonalization as a detachment from the sense of self, this article initiates the theory that vocal depersonalization in scat singing is the vocal detachment from the features of one's voice – resonance (avoiding the vibrato), pace (adjusting the syllables according to the rhythm, not vice-versa), pitch (imitating other sounds or instruments), resonance (timbre should fit in the sound spectrum).

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