

# What is Scat Singing?

From Michele Weir's book *Vocal Improvisation* and Michelle Mailhot

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“I stole everything I heard, but mostly, I stole from the horns.” –Ella Fitzgerald

- Scat singing, scattling and vocal improvisation are all the same thing.
- It is the spontaneous invention of melody, rhythm, and syllables over a given chord progression.
- Primary task is to learn the vocabulary and the “sentence structure” of the jazz language. This begins to really happen when a singers “puts in their time” listening to the great jazz instrumentalists and scat singers like Ella Fitzgerald, Mel Tormé, and Jon Hendricks, as well as transcribing and learning to sing their solos.
- Improvisation is an artful interaction between musicians. The vocal improviser is not alone. It is the synergy between the members of the band that helps the creativity.
- Jazz Fundamentals: Each song has its own set of chord changes. Learning them is a big step in learning how to improvise around them. Try using these basic steps to help your ears “digest” chord changes.
  - ✓ Sing roots of each chord
  - ✓ Root & 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - ✓ Root, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>
  - ✓ Root, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>
  - ✓ Sing entire scale for each chord
    - major chords use a major scale
    - dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords use Mixolydian mode
    - minor 7<sup>th</sup> chords use Dorian mode
- Typical Song Forms: AABA, ABAC, 12-Bar Blues. Don't get lost in the form!
- Syllable ideas-1. *doo-vah-doo-dat*, 2. *dah-bah-dah-dat*, 3. *lay-dul-dee-dat*.
- Try scattling with all kinds of songs: classical music, pop music, musical theatre. Get used to improvising with songs you know or styles you are more used to.
- Start with small ideas- 2, 3 or 4 note phrases. Allow space between phrases. Listen to the band. Be in the moment. Smile and breathe!