



Phrasing

For

Singers

Billie Eilish to Billie Holiday

By Gina Saputo

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What is phrasing?

What styles and genres give the vocalist freedom what which elements of phrasing?

What is going through your
* MIND *
as you perform?

Which of these elements listed above do you intentionally practice and implement in your performances?

Phrasing

A 'phrase' means a musical sentence or expression. It has a complete musical sense of its own, built from figures and combining to form melodies and larger sections, or the length in which a singer or instrumentalist can play in one breath. The term "phrase" can be used with the words "sentence" or "verse." This is an ambiguous definition, as it has no distinct defining features, but phrasing has more to do with how the vocalist delivers the musical passage.

Usually a singer's phrasing can be distinguished by their use of breath, inflection, delivery and syllabic emphasis. Phrasing can be learned by practicing natural speech, proper use of the grouping of words, emotional content, word rhythms and speech inflections. When a singer is well versed in these techniques, the words will be sung with emotional truth. The singer may often alter the note values and rhythm from the written music. The result is a more genuine interpretation, because it is coming from the expression of *the vocalist's interpretation in that moment.*
* feelings * *which vary based on perspective.*

Altered phrasing may include licks, added to the original melody as well as new improvised melodies, and rhythms for variation of the original written melody. The altered phrasing may be similar to the original or quite different. Improvisation must be harmonically compatible with the chord progression that accompanies the phrase. In all areas of contemporary music, the artist has great freedom to vary from the written note values and rhythms. The written notes may be used as a basic framework on which to build the vocalist's interpretation.

To Alter Phrasing: First, establish the original melody and phrasing, as written. Then change or embellish the phrasing to suit your own style and taste.

- Note: When singing a familiar song, the listener expects to hear, at minimum, the opening phrase in a recognizable form. Then, clever melodic variations chosen by the singer will be more appreciated if they first establish the knowledge of the original melody.

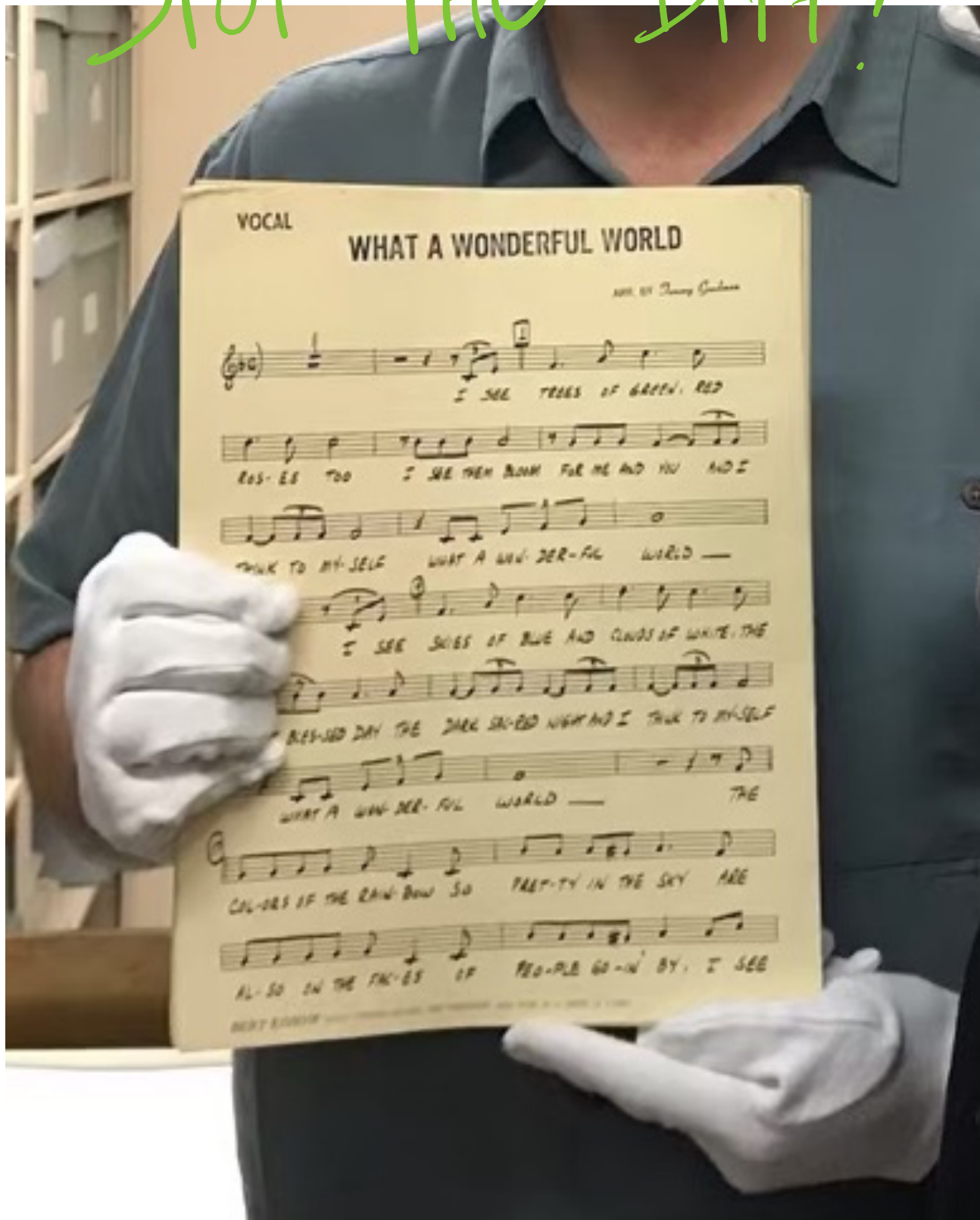
WHY Learn the original melody?

Producer Tony Guerrero, "Here's where I stand with this kind of thing - the first recording tends to "teach" the song to everyone. It becomes the sheet music, per se. So, as such I like to stick pretty close to the original sheet music for much of the 'first time through'. More interpretation is welcome on the last half once the song is established. Of course, I don't mean exact stiff rhythms and no little color, but you know what I mean. Here's an example..."

My experience finding New Originals for Composers...

Let's play a game called

SPOT THE DIFF!



That's the original sheet music to "What A Wonderful World", the very page Louis held as he recorded it. He totally sang the first two bars different than the composer intended. HIS rendition became gospel, and now all sheet music presents it Louis' way.

Now, his way may be better, but can you imagine the frustration for the composer?

I had that happen with my biggest worship song. The guy who popularized it learned it wrong and now everyone does it his way."

as a Jazz Singer
I was taught to learn the melody from the **original** sheet music, this takes research and practice. Then once that was down you can tastefully embellish the melody and you have more freedom to interpret the second half, or sing a lyric based improvisation in place of a scat solo, but always state the melody first to show respect to the original composer.

Don't underestimate the importance of great phrasing. Singers without superb voices can become successful through the use of good phrasing, and great singers develop their own distinct style of phrasing. It is phrasing that turns a melody into a memorable performance.

Incorporate the following devices, where stylistically appropriate, to improve phrasing:

- Linger over a long note
- Change the inflection on certain words
- Syllabic emphasis
- Staccato/legato interjections
- Battered/punctuated diction
- Use of grunts, screams, whispers, fragility, vocal fry and other emotive sounds.
- Use vibrato sparingly on long notes, straight tone, wobble, various vibrato alterations.
- Incorporate falsetto or yodel
- Use a throaty huskiness for appropriate phrases
- Front Phrasing and Back Phrasing
- Awareness of vocal trends, use of or avoidance of (current trends like swallowed onsets, chewed diphthongs, vocal fry, etc.)

~~X~~ MORE

Phrasing without adding notes or rhythms is an ART!

NUANCE

Practice

We are told that 'Practice makes perfect'...but nobody ever tells us exactly how. In fact, practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect! Learning solid practice techniques can help a musician learn more efficiently and create stronger focus, where learning becomes easier and more effective. Don't expect polished results without polished practice. You are building awareness, and to get that awareness you need to analyze what the pros are doing and reflect on your own performances.

Musicians who know how to practice effectively and efficiently make the most progress. They are not necessarily the musicians who practice for the longest. It's quality versus quantity. If a musician practices with intent and focus, utilizing effective and efficient techniques, they will learn the material faster and with more attention to detail thus improving their phrasing.

"If I don't practice the way I should, then I won't play the way I know I can" *Ivan Lendl - champion tennis player*

tenacity : the quality or fact of being very determined; determination.

Supplies to Analyze and Practice Phrasing:

To begin practicing, you will need:

- **Pencil:** Always practice with a pencil nearby. If you are using a device for reading music be sure that you import it into an app that allows you to mark onto the lyrics or sheet music. If you can't do that, go old school: print it or write it out by hand. You need to take notes while you practice.
- **Water:** Always have water nearby to hydrate your vocal cords and maintain vocal health.
- **Metronome:** A singer's time is as important as their tone. Practice with a metronome to improve your time and create accountability to the beat.
- **Pitch source:** Have a fixed pitch instrument handy, preferably a guitar or piano, to provide starting notes and check yourself for pitch. Accountability to pitch is something you must work at, but it can't be done if you are practicing without a pitch source. You won't know when you are wrong. Always check.
- **Mirror or video:** Look at yourself either in a mirror or in a video. Look at your posture, vowel shapes and look for tension. Identify where you are making those mistakes and address it.
- **Recording device:** Everyone hates listening to themselves at first. Get over it fast. Record your practice sessions and listen back to it as you practice. You will hear things that you can

fix as you listen back. Take notes as you listen back and re-record once your improvements are made. (I cannot recommend this enough!)

How to approach a song

How you approach a song is largely determined by whether the song is an original or a cover. For songwriters, it would be more common to perform your own music, but from a vocal standpoint, it will serve you well to learn to do both.

Singing a song through will not necessarily make you sing it better. There needs to be a structured focus, a strategy and some form of accountability in order to make the practice session fruitful. Have all the necessary materials in place and warm up the voice before approaching any song.

Cover Songs

If the song is a cover song there are added steps to the process. It's important that your version of the song be yours and not a cover of a cover of a cover. The further away from the original version that the song goes, the less of the original song remains. You must have respect for the original composer to maintain the song's integrity. The first step to approaching a cover song is research.



1. **Research:** Find the wiki page for the song and read it through. Look for any articles, commentary, blogs and reviews to see how the song was received and talked about by the artist or composer. Learn about the history of the song. When was it written? What is its cultural significance? What mindset was the composer in? What does it mean? How many versions have been recorded?

All of these factors will give you insight on how the song should be played, approached and presented. Also, it will tell you if this is an appropriate song for you to sing. If the subject or language is not something that you can speak to, or should speak to, then choose something else. If you have to change the lyrics in order to sing it, it's probably not a good song for you. There are enough amazing and wonderful songs out there that you shouldn't offend anyone, audience or composer, to sing it. Choose wisely.

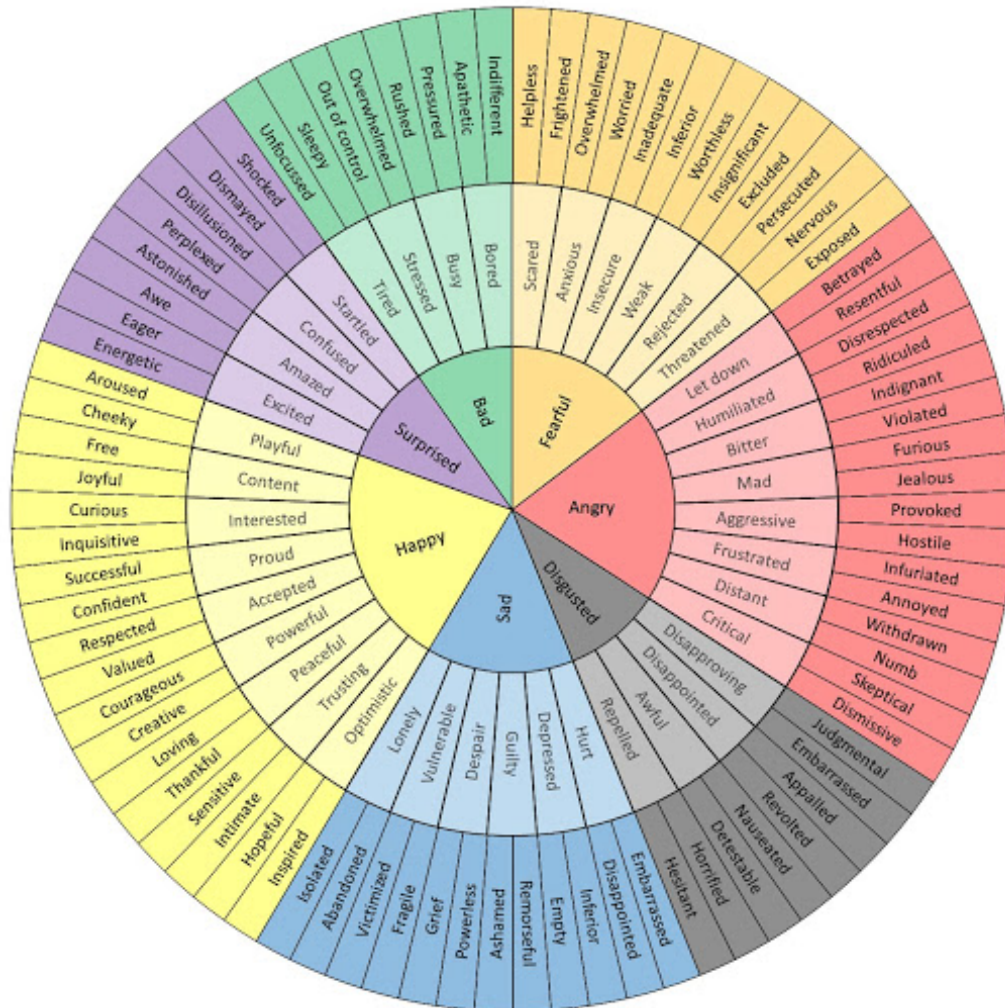
2. **Prepare:** Print/find the lyrics or sheet music. Make sure you find a version that is the original or as close to the original as possible.
3. **Listen:** Find the original recording and listen carefully. Then listen to as many versions of the song as you can find. How does each artist approach the song? Did they sing it different than the original? Take notes on your music according to what you hear and what you like.
4. **Analyze:** What is the song form? Mood shifts between sections? Style? Dynamics? Bpm? etc. Then follow the same steps as you would for 'Practice a song' below.

Original Song

If the song is an original, the process becomes more focused on honing your intentions in the composition so that it's ready to perform. It's important that your version of the song be genuine and precise, rhythmically and melodically, so the listener knows exactly what you meant. The first step to approaching a cover song is to think about how the song came about and establish your intentions.

1. **Establish Mood and Meaning:** When was it written? Why? What is its personal significance? What mindset were you in? What does it mean? How do you want to see this song performed? How do you want this song perceived? All of these factors will give you insight on how the song should be played, approached and presented.
2. **Prepare:** Print/find the lyrics or sheet music. Make sure you can take notes on the music.
3. **Analyze:** What is the song form? Mood shifts between sections? Style? Dynamics? Bpm? etc.

Set the storyline and emotional shifts from section to section.



Bob Dylan *Make You feel my love*

Setting the scene

When the rain
Is blowing in your face
And the whole world
Is on your case
I could offer you
A warm embrace
To make you feel my love

more intensify insightful tender

When the evening shadows
And the stars appear
And there is no one there
To dry your tears
I could hold you
For a million years
To make you feel my love

Matter of fact

I know you
Haven't made
Your mind up yet
But I would never
Do you wrong
I've known it
From the moment
That we met
No doubt in my mind
Where you belong

Pulled back

Tender warm

I'd go hungry
I'd go black and blue
I'd go crawling
Down the avenue
No, there's nothing
That I wouldn't do
To make you feel my love

Word painting

The storms are raging
On the rolling sea
And on the highway of regret
Though winds of change
Are blowing wild and free
You ain't seen nothing
Like me yet

Forceful Resolved Comin'ing

I could make you happy
Make your dreams come true
Nothing that I wouldn't do
Go to the ends
Of the Earth for you
To make you feel my love
To make you feel my love

<https://youtu.be/9TmlGRB718>

Adele

4 bar intro

Somber

When the rain
Is blowing in your face
And the whole world
Is on your case
I could offer you
A warm embrace
To make you feel my love

buttery

When the evening shadows
And the stars appear
And there is no one there
To dry your tears
I could hold you
For a million years
To make you feel my love

Reflective

I know you
Haven't made
Your mind up yet
But I would never
Do you wrong
I've known it
From the moment
That we met
No doubt in my mind
Where you belong

Always Soft / reflective

I'd go hungry
I'd go black and blue
I'd go crawling
Down the avenue
No, there's nothing
That I wouldn't do
To make you feel my love

Solo

Somewhat

The storms are raging
On the rolling sea
And on the highway of regret
Though winds of change
Are throwing wild and free
You ain't seen nothing
Like me yet

Somber but hopeful

I could make you happy
Make your dreams come true
Nothing that I wouldn't do
Go to the ends
Of the Earth for you
To make you feel my love
To make you feel my love

Punctuation

One of the greatest indicators of phrasing can be found in the punctuation. As you read the punctuation in a phrase, naturally your voice reacts by inflecting. Think about how this should be interpreted while singing, sing the punctuation. The punctuation can indicate where a singer should take a breath and how the phrase should be inflected.

- **Period [.]** A final statement. The voice inflects downward. example: "I don't care."
- **Question Mark [?]** A question. The voice inflects upward. example: "I don't care?"
- **Comma [,]** A natural pause. The voice should breath, or pause. It is an upward middle inflection which creates momentum into the next phrase. example: "I don't care, do you?"

Mark the breath in your music and look for excess breaths that can be eliminated. The breath pattern should not look regular and predictable. If it does, the listener may become bored or uninterested. try moving the breath around to create unpredictable patterns and irregularity. This creates more interest for the listener.

Front Phrasing

A stylistic technique where the singer is intentionally ahead of the beat.

Back Phrasing

A stylistic technique where the singer is intentionally behind the beat.

SPEAK THE LYRICS

Billie Holiday- Summertime

<https://youtu.be/uYUqbnk7tCY>



Back Phrasing & Foot Phrasing

Summertime and the livin' is easy'
Fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high'

Oh your Daddy's rich, ^{BF} and your ma is good lookin'
So hush little baby, don't ^{BF} you cry

^{BF} One of these mornings
You're goin' to rise up singing
Then you'll spread your wings Laid back
And you'll take the sky
But till that morning
There's a nothin' can harm you
With daddy and mammy standin' by

solos

One of these mornings
You're goin' to rise up singing
Then you'll spread your wings
And you'll take the sky
But till that morning
There's a nothin' can harm you
With daddy and mammy standin' by

Vocal Tone

Singing with an open throat also produces balance, coordination, evenness and consistency of tone, which prevents the voice from sounding overly bright, thin or shrill. Additionally, if performed with an open and relaxed acoustical voice.

Some singer's voices are recognized as breathy and heady, while others may be referred to as full, smokey and deep. The list of tonal adjectives is long and subjective, but it can be helpful to describe the individual colors of one's voice. It can also be helpful to use these descriptors to help develop the sound you are looking for on a specific song to fit its meaning and vibe.

As a metaphor, singers consider sound in the same manner that painters consider 'color', hence the term 'tonal color'. Vocalists use the manipulation of resonance chambers, placement and vowel production to change the vocal sound, as much the same as a painter responds to the mixing of oils.

Every voice has an individual tonal quality that is determined by its harmonic profile. Tonal colors contribute greatly to the overall effect of the mood in the music.

Tonal Colors

- bright
 - dark
 - brilliant
 - pure
 - pointed
 - airy
 - smokey
 - honeyed
 - gravelly
 - light
 - harsh
 - brassy
 - strong
 - harsh
 - thin
 - silvery
 - warm
 - round
 - full
 - nasal
 - breathy
 - airy
 - wobbly
 - twangy
 - heavy
 - Rich
 - focused
 - raspy
 - metallic
 - creaky
 - squeezed
 - forward
 - strained
 - shimmery
 - buzzy
 - gruff
 - husky
 - whispery
 - ringing
 - throaty
 - strident
 - casual
 - poppy
 - aspirated
 - young
 - shrill
 - sweet
 - pinched
-

Billie Eilish

Bad Guy

Breath (?)
Tonal Color

buttery
legato / Strucato
aspirated
Quiet intensity
Momentum

White shirt now red, my bloody nose
Sleepin' you're on your tippy toes
Creepin' around like no one knows
Think you're so criminal

mp
mf

More Breath

Bruises on both my knees for you
Don't say thank you or please
I do what I want when I'm wanting to
My soul? So cynical

more of
fruity

Cynical

Quiet intensity

So you're a tough guy
Like it really rough guy
Just can't get enough guy
Chest always so puffed guy
I'm that bad type
Make your mama sad type
Make your girlfriend mad tight
Might seduce your dad type
I'm the bad guy, duh
I'm the bad guy

mf

Minimal
Breath

Flange

Crossing
The
Baseline

I like it when you take control
Even if you know that you don't
Own me, I'll let you play the role
I'll be your animal

My mommy likes to sing along with me
But she won't sing this song
If she reads all the lyrics
She'll pity the men I know

Cynical

So you're a tough guy
Like it really rough guy
Just can't get enough guy
Chest always so puffed guy
I'm that bad type
Make your mama sad type
Make your girlfriend mad tight
Might seduce your dad type
I'm the bad guy, duh
I'm the bad guy, duh

Light Components

More open
legato
Spoken

I'm only good at being bad, bad
I like when you get mad
I guess I'm pretty glad that you're alone
You said she's scared of me
I mean, I don't see what she sees
But maybe it's 'cause I'm wearing your cologne

Interlude
Question
Contrast

whispered

I'm a bad guy
I'm, I'm a bad guy
Bad guy, bad guy
I'm a bad

aspirated

Analyze and Identifying and Various Styles

Each genre has a different style of rhythm and phrasing. It is important to learn the basic stylistic idiom of as many musical genres as possible. A great way to learn to identify and learn new styles is to listen to the drums. Each genre has different drumming patterns and styles of groove. The groove relates to the feel of the song and can be felt in the rhythmic structure. Learning the basics of a two-and-four backbeat versus a samba, etc., will help to correctly identify the style of the songs.

Many performers cannot be defined in any one specific genre, yet they have their own style. Singer Eva Cassidy is a perfect example of creative vocal licks and phrasing that established her own style. Cassidy recorded older, familiar songs, but she put an incredibly original spin on them vocally, using riffs, phrasing and interesting changes of the melody. Record companies would not sign her because they could not identify the genre that she was singing. They could not classify her style, yet her style is incredibly identifiable. This may be great for a solo artist's career but may cause them to stay in obscurity. To maximize exposure and versatility it is important for a commercial artist to know the stylistic traits of musical genres.

- **Pop:** Pop and contemporary singers have freedom within the melody of a song, typically happening more at the ends of phrases and the last chorus.
- **Jazz:** A common practice for jazz improvisers is to change the melody of the tune and improvise a new melody while developing the rhythmic structure. Jazz singing can be highly improvised and extremely flexible with the rhythm and phrasing.
- **Musical Theater & Classical:** The Broadway and classical genres do not usually have the same improvisational freedom as contemporary genres. The singer typically must adhere more closely, if not exactly, to the written notes of the composer.
- **Blues, R&B and Gospel:** These singers typically have endless freedom with the rhythm and melody of a song. The melody may become secondary to the expression of the artist.
- **Folk:** Folk music typically adheres to the melody more closely but will integrate small vocal ad libs and a gentle “push and pull” of the rhythmic phrasing.

The best way to learn the stylistic traits of phrasing is to:

LISTEN to many artists in all genres.

Observe what they are doing in each style.

Any noticeable differences?

LISTEN
~~~~~



Analyze / Study

\* Experiment \* TRY IT OUT

Solidify

EXPRESSIVE  
FREEDOM

\* Break The mold \*

Chaire

Mark :  
Breath  
Vibrato  
Any other phrasing Notes

## Somewhere Over the Rainbow

E.Y. Harburg & Harold Arlen

Andante ♩ = 80

C G F C  
Some - where o - ver the rain - bow, way up high,

5 F G C Am F G C  
there's a land that I dreamed of once in a lul - la - by.

9 C G F C  
Some - where o - ver the rain - bow skies are blue,

13 F G C Am F G C  
and the dreams that I dare to dream real-ly do come true. Some

17 C F C G F F G  
*Bridge* day I'll wish up-on a star and wake up where the clouds are far be-hind me. Where

21 C D G G7  
trou-bles melt like lem-on drops a - way a - bove the chim-ney tops, that's where you'll find me.

25 C G F C  
Some - where o - ver the rain - bow, blue - birds fly.

29 F G C Am F G C  
Birds fly o - ver the rain - bow, why then, O why can't I?

# Judy Garland

## Somewhere Over the Rainbow

E.Y. Harburg & Harold Arlen

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day I'll wish up-on a star and wake up where the clouds are far be-hind me. Where  
trou-bles melt like lem-on drops a - way a -bove the chim-ney tops, that's where you'll find me.  
Some - where o - ver the rain - bow, blue - birds fly.  
Birds fly o - ver the rain - bow, why then, O why can't I?

Handwritten annotations include: orange question marks above notes; blue slurs and accents; red 'FF' markings; green 'BF' marking; orange 'rit.' markings; and an orange box containing a handwritten 'M' at the bottom.

1:10  
Ella Fitzgerald

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Aniara Grande

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9 Some - where o - ver the rain - bow skies **FF** are blue,

13 and **FF** the dreams that I dare to dream real-ly do come true. Some

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**EVA Cassidy**

Fun Lab Day

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ME

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Birds fly o - ver the rain - bow, why then, O why can't I?

you

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