

Course: BG 8050 Independent project, bachelor, jazz, 15 hp  
2023

Bachelor's exam in music performance, 180 hp

Jazz department

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# **Exploring different approaches for vocal improvisation**

Written reflection on independent artistic work

The independent, artistic work is documented in KMH's digital archive.

## **Abstract**

This work consists mostly of written analysis and results on how four freely chosen methods can help a jazz vocalist develop their improvisational skills. These methods are:

- Written licks
- Singing through chord notes
- Experimental scatting syllables
- Kadri Voorand's method

Graduation concert connected to this work was performed on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, 2023, in Tallinn, Estonia. This work also contains reflections and analysis on my graduation concert and transcription of my interview with Kadri Voorand.

***Keywords: jazz, improvisation, vocal, music, singing, practice***

# Table of contents

Preface.....	2
1. Introduction .....	2
1.1. Vocalist might need a different approach.....	2
1.2. Purpose/questions .....	3
2. Exploration of each method.....	4
2.1. Written licks.....	4
2.2. Singing through chord notes.....	5
2.3. Experimental scatting syllables .....	7
2.4 Kadri Voorand's method.....	8
2.4.1 Transcription (with emotions).....	8
2.4.2. Harmony-based improvisation .....	9
2.4.3 Emotion cards.....	12
3. Artistic results.....	13
3.1. Graduation concert .....	13
3.2. My scat solos .....	14
4. Closure .....	15
References.....	17
Attachments .....	17
Appendix (interview with Kadri Voorand).....	18

## Preface

I am a vocalist. Having studied jazz singing as my bachelor's degree I have encountered many methods for practising vocal jazz improvisation but most of them seem to be created for instrumentalists. I have felt confused about which method should I go forward with and therefore I have dedicated my bachelor's work to going in depth with different methods that I've been recommended to practice.

This work has been written during the third year of my bachelor's studies. During that year interesting events took place that shook the idea of what I was about to write. Firstly, I started this work in August 2022 with the idea of focusing entirely on scat syllables but later changed my focus to a wider study of improvisation simply because going into scat syllables would have meant going into linguistics and that went too far away from music. Secondly, I went on an Erasmus+ study exchange at another school in another country and therefore met new teachers and new ideas. I've had an interesting year of many discussions on the topic of (vocal) jazz improvisation. Some of my previous ideas have been challenged and changed. My understanding and comprehension about vocal jazz improvisation has expanded during the process.

My motivation for choosing this topic was to find out which methods are the most effective from my point of view as a singer and by that, I mean mostly two things - which method(s) help to memorize harmony in my inner ear as firmly as possible and which methods guide me to the most authentic and original choices of notes and syllables while improvising.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Vocalist might need a different approach

I have suspected for some time that instrumentalists and singers might need different approaches when it comes to practising improvisation on difficult harmonies. It's due to some elemental differences which are somehow often overlooked. Firstly, a singer cannot see their instrument. Voice is quite an abstract instrument because it cannot be seen unless a doctor sends down a tiny camera into our throat. Many instrumentalists take great help in being able to see their instrument and know how to play the "right" note thanks to the visual aspect or finger positions, but how do you practice jazz improvisation on an invisible instrument that cannot be touched with your fingers?

Secondly, singers can't sing what they can't hear and therefore rely almost entirely on their ears. But notes can also be heard and listened to in silence, in our brains. It's called inner hearing. I am claiming that it's highly beneficial if not even crucial for improvising singers to develop their inner hearing or at least a special type of concentrated hearing to hear chord changes a millisecond before they happen. Singers have no other tools besides their hearing, be it internal or external, to help them reach a specific note, especially a note that's in another key or another mode as it often is in jazz music.

Even further, singers have a whole another field to use for improvisation – letters, syllables, words and all kinds of voice "tricks" and timbres we have in a human voice.

What I am pointing at is that some common methods for practicing jazz do not really take into consideration the standing point where a singer is. I've had several jazz teachers over the years and the advice I've been given often has been something like "just listen and transcribe solos - and you will get it" or "just sing through the chord changes". I have transcribed solos, I have sung through chord notes - and still gotten completely lost in a complex harmony. I've felt like these methods and suggestions were not enough. I know that the methods mentioned above might and probably do work well for instrumentalists, but I started feeling that as a vocalist I need something more, something more "bulletproof" and specific, something measurable.

I chose the focus of this written work to be on analyzing these four different methods for vocal jazz improvisation:

- Written licks
- Singing through chord notes in different levels of complexity
- Experimental scatting syllables
- Kadri Voorand's method

The other big part of my bachelor's work was my graduation concert which took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March in the Estonian Academy of Music in Tallinn, Estonia, where I studied as an Erasmus+ exchange student. Even though arranging for my ensemble was as time consuming as the improvisation part, I chose to focus the written part on different methods for practising vocal improvisation simply because the topic fascinated me so much and because I felt like I needed answers to the following questions about vocal improvisation.

## 1.2. Purpose/questions

I am trying to find out which ways are the most beneficial and efficient for practising vocal improvisation as a singer from the following ideas:

1. Which practice method(s) help to memorize chord changes as firmly as possible?
2. Which practice method(s) develop inner hearing?
3. How much can I change the traditional *scat* syllables without losing the feeling and sound of jazz?

I practiced improvisation according to the chosen practice methods foremost on the harmonies of the songs I knew I was going to make scat solo during my graduation concert. These songs were "Jim" (C. Petrillo, E. Ross/N.Shawn) and "You bring out the savage in me" (Sam Coslow).

My full work, therefore, includes arranging mentioned jazz standards for a band (except for "But beautiful" which was performed in duo); practising improvisation on these jazz standards according to my chosen methods; performing my bachelor's concert; analysing the concert; analysing the benefits of chosen practise methods and finally reflecting and expressing my thoughts on this work process.

## 2. Exploration of each method

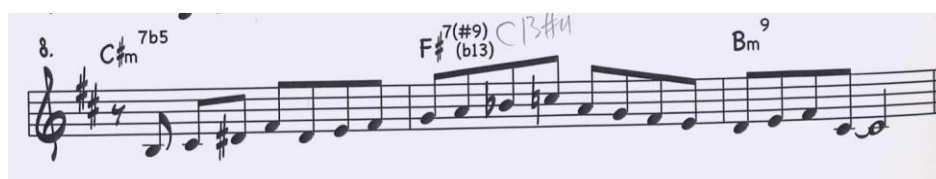
In this chapter, I will describe in which way I worked with each method and then share what happened during the process. I integrated these methods into the solo harmonies that I had chosen for my exam concert as much as I could but some methods were still more general, like the first one I'm about to introduce now.

### 2.1. Written licks<sup>1</sup>

Learning licks and practising them in all twelve keys is very common advice on how to learn and practice jazz improvisation. Some musicians argue that learning licks stays in the classroom and does not present itself in a real improvisation situation because a lick is too tied to its original context.

As a singer I have always been a little bit sceptic towards if licks work as easily for singers as they do for instrumentalists. That is exactly why I chose to work with around 20 jazz licks from the book “Vocal jazz improvisation”<sup>2</sup>.

First I learned the pattern – some examples given below – then transposed and sang them in all twelve keys. Patterns I chose were from chapters “Altered dominant patterns” and “Chromatic patterns”.



Figur 1. Altered dominant pattern.



Figur 2. Chromatic pattern.

<sup>1</sup> A “lick” is a sequence or pattern of notes that a musician has played which sounded so outstandingly great that other musicians learned that specific (usually quite short) sequence of notes.

<sup>2</sup> Meader, Darmon (2016). Ferrimonta: “Vocal jazz improvisation”. Darmon Meader is a singer and a saxophone player living and working in USA. This book was recommended by my voice teacher Anna Jalkeus in Stockholm Royal College of Music. The book contains many topics but currently I chose to focus only on the so-called licks.

## Reflections

Licks are nice things to practice on because they are measurable. I know when I can sing a certain sequence of notes. It feels great to be able to manage something but I shouldn't let myself be fooled by the simplicity because as soon as there is instrumental accompaniment, I still have all the chances of getting lost in harmony (unless I have practised the same harmony in other ways).

In order to find the right beginning note at the right time, I should to start a separate process of practising hearing the starting note from which to execute a specific lick at the right time. My problem with that is that I lose the joy of making music within such a "calculated" process. I might even argue that the idea of improvisation goes missing in that. I become closer to classical musicians who execute what is written in sheet music. In my experience practising licks easily becomes practicing interpretation but not necessarily improvisation.

Executing licks in another new improvisation context at some other time seems more achievable for instrumentalists. Instrumentalists are able to start from the "right" note at the right time more often than a singer is.

There was still something very good about practising altered and chromatical licks. In a way, it developed my inner hearing. "Uncomfortable" notes and alterations became more comfortable after I had spent hours and hours of singing them. I started feeling more at ease physically while singing a note that is "out". For that purpose, I would say practising licks is still beneficial for singers – to get comfortable with alterations and chromaticism. Not to mention that analyzing scales and approach notes can be highly beneficial to the overall understanding of jazz music theory and tradition.

### 2.2. Singing through chord notes

The convention among many singers that I've met is that we need to "know the chord changes" to be able to improvise on a tune. The changes means harmony of the song - chord by chord, note by note. Often singers are given exercises to sing the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th scale degree of every chord, but I would argue that singing it through only a couple of times is not enough in case of complex harmony that changes keys. Besides, what does "singing through" really mean? It all depends on the chosen tempo; on whether I do it *a capella* or with an accompanying instrument; whether I use only guide tones (1st, 3rd and 7<sup>th</sup>) or in case of altered chords, should I sing the alterations as well or leave them out? In other words, it depends on the complexity of the task I give myself. I was interested in understanding to which extent should a singer go with this exercise to fully feel comfortable in a medium complex harmony, such as my chosen songs "Jim" and "You bring out the savage in me" were. Therefore I gave myself some tasks and tried "singing through chord notes" in several increasing levels of complexity:

- Singing chord notes starting from the root of the chord
- Singing only the 1st, 3rd and 7th first with and without accompaniment
- Singing chord notes in "broken" order - 1st-3rd-7th-5th or 3rd-5th-1st-7th and other variations (the task is not to sing the notes in a logical order, but to change the direction in the middle of the chord)
- Arpeggiating chord notes: singing them from one's lowest vocal range to the highest vocal range and then back again, using only the notes that occur in chords

- Singing chord notes *a capella* - sing through all chord notes without any instrumental support.

## Reflections

I would describe this process as very difficult and again very technical. Each new layer of complexity takes hours of practice until it starts feeling comfortable, but it does get eventually easier as the “pattern” of notes becomes more familiar.

To be able to arpeggiate chord notes in tempo I need to know each chord’s sound so well that I’m able to sing it almost automatically, without thinking about the sound. That in a way develops inner ear, which is good. I struggled the most with minor diminished chords. Minor diminished chords somehow carry heavier emotional feeling to it; they feel oppressing and non-symmetrical to me while practicing a minor 7 chord feels easy and nice. I also noticed that arpeggiating chords in my full vocal range was strong training for flexibility and preciseness of vocal cords (and can be done only with sufficiently healthy vocal technique).

There was one level of complexity that stood out - singing the guide tones **without** accompaniment. That was really really hard at unexpected key changes which is probably why it trained my inner quite heavily. I chose different tempos on metronome and tried to manage key changes in my own inner ear. I at least became excited about getting better and better at it. It felt like a game. There’s was still a “threat” of becoming too stuck with only guide tones and forgetting about everything else I could also sing based on free musical choices and emotions.

When I tried to sing all 4 notes of each chord I became frustrated again on two reasons – firstly, it was too hard and secondly, when I already had four notes on my hands, I started hearing all sorts of other melodies but I had to limit myself to the same four notes. I lost the joy of making music in trying to leave out the melodies I heard in myself. I felt like I had to practice like a robot. Perhaps I had set too much boundaries on myself?

Some weeks before my exam I was finally almost able to sing through the chord notes of “Jim” without accompaniment. But just as I was almost able to do it I also dropped the exercise because it was too hard and boring to force myself to sing like a robot, only on some certain notes. I also noticed that when I hadn’t done it for a while, I would lose the fruits of my practice sessions and I had to start training again. I felt like if I had to practice with this method for my whole life then I probably would not be a jazz singer at all.

It’s hard to tell if this is a good method or not in the end. It’s probably beneficial for remembering the changes in my inner ear, especially if done without accompaniment. Generally I would say that practicing this method was a little bit boring and even frustrating at times because it restricted my creativity heavily due to being so tied to only certain notes. I’m realizing that perhaps I didn’t go far enough with this method to find my own personal corner of joy in it. Perhaps I should’ve added more levels of creativity or taken away some of the restrictions I had set on myself.

### 2.3. Syllabic improvisation

Based on my previous knowledge of traditional scat solos I would say that the most traditional scat syllables (from the swing era at least) combine a soft consonant (*b, d, g*) with a vowel (mostly *a, e, i*) resulting in syllables like *doo, da, di, ba, be, bo*. Then also some *š - šaa, šee* - and in some singers' like Ella Fitzgerald's case - a lot of *doodle*-ing. What I have also noticed previously is that traditional jazz scat syllables with soft consonants resemble more to some African languages in their sound than to any European language. The most logical explanation to me is that jazz is after all an African-American tradition.

That realization led me to think about my mother tongue which is Estonian. Syllables like *ba, be, bi, bo, bu, doodle, šee* are not very common in Estonian. My language consists of more strong consonant syllables like *ta, te, ka, pe* varying with long vowels like *ae, ea, jaa, soo* and so forth. I started feeling uneasy that I must put myself into an African linguistic tradition to be able to sound authentic to jazz and I began wondering if I could sound somehow authentic to jazz by using more syllables from my native language. I decided to explore the world of syllabic improvisation and found a doctoral study on this topic – the book “Voice games”<sup>3</sup> written by a singer and choir conductor Anne-Liis Poll.

Even though there are improvisers in this field in almost every country by now, I would still say it's not very common among jazz singers and that improvisation with syllables is still seen as something rather experimental.

In order to not invent a bicycle I decided to practice one of the already existing methods which I found in “Voice games”. I practised how to make up new syllables so fast that eventually I'd be able to speak and/or improvise in a made-up language. Here's an overview of my practice session:

- I prepared a sheet of paper with consonants - K, P, T, B, G, D, L, M, N, S, Š, Q, R - and another sheet of paper with vowels - A, E, I, O, U, Y, Ä, Ö, Ü (the last two being my native language's syllables).
- I put on a metronome and combined consonants and vowels in random order. The difficulty was that my brain got stuck in tempo and/or used the same letters over and over again while forgetting about others. The more I practised this, the faster and more creative I became with finding new combinations.
- After that, I used instrumental accompaniment and I improvised with syllables the way described in the upper point, but not adding melodies yet.
- Eventually, I added musical material such as notes and intentional rhythms to the syllables.

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<sup>3</sup> Poll, Anne-Liis “Häälemängud”, in English “Voice games” (2011). Eesti Muusika- ja Teatriakadeemia. I would like to point out that her book deals with free and atonal vocal improvisation including other sounds and half-sounds a human voice and mouth can produce, but since that goes a bit too far out from the usual jazz stylistics, I chose to explore only a part of her method.

I also added two sounding examples of how I practiced. Practicing syllables with a metronome is audible in Example 1<sup>4</sup> and practicing syllables in musical context is audible in Example 2<sup>5</sup> (see footnotes), the latter being my improvisation on the harmony of “Jim”.

## Reflections

What I discovered during this process is that different songs ask for different syllables. The song “You bring out the savage in me” asked for more wild-sounding syllables or just bare consonants like *šaa, gege, gugu, g, g, g* while the other song “Jim” which has a romantic atmosphere asked for vowels and soft syllables like *lii, luu, šii, faa*. It was interesting to explore and discover what “feeling” each song has and how can I express that with syllables. I noticed that this method had the same principle as with any other practice – the more I practice, the better I become at finding new exciting combinations. The less I practice, the more I fall back into my most comfortable syllables and choices.

## 2.4 Kadri Voorand’s method

During my Erasmus+ study exchange at the Estonian Academy of Music I was assigned a new vocal teacher Kadri Voorand. She has developed her own method of practising improvisation due to the fact that during her career as a singer she’s had a lot of improvising on complex and contemporary (modal) harmony. I found her method extremely fascinating and made an interview with Kadri Voorand to talk about it. The interview took place on the 10th of April at the Estonian Academy of Music. With adding some quotes from the interview, I summarised her ideas as densely as possible with my own words to be able to manage within the scope of this work. Full transcription of the interview can be found in the appendix.

### 2.4.1 Transcription (with emotions)

Transcription is extremely important in Voorand’s eyes. She starts her method with talking about how and what should we transcribe in the first place. She refers to transcription as to collecting ideas into our personal bank of musical and melodic ideas. She suggests that the more authentic and original our idea banks are, the better. Voorand is convinced that we should transcribe mainly or only something that has touched us emotionally, and perhaps not so much of the material that somebody else has suggested. She explains that transcribing from an emotional point of view is necessary to make us into authentic musicians with original choice of notes. In her method we should also pay attention and heavily **filter our own emotions** while choosing and listening to solos.

*“Ask yourself - what does this solo mean to you? What specifically do you like about this solo? It’s a very important part when you choose what to transcribe. In that case, the choice of notes is based on who you are authentically, and we don’t just learn the exact same material analyzed by the same people which leads to somehow producing similar solos which might or might not move a soul.”*

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<sup>4</sup> Available on this link: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hKKVTa2QR6YUN9TH2s6\\_CiC-BYU1Dza/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hKKVTa2QR6YUN9TH2s6_CiC-BYU1Dza/view?usp=sharing)

<sup>5</sup> Available on this link: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1\\_z9zwRiDcXXY2qZp4QR48LWvmXq0bPel/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_z9zwRiDcXXY2qZp4QR48LWvmXq0bPel/view?usp=sharing)

### 2.4.2. Harmony-based improvisation

This part consists of making choices about notes/modes, making it visual by writing the chosen notes down in a specific way and not singing anything before we're absolutely certain in it. What I find fascinating about this method is how Voorand connected it to science by giving our brains more information by adding visual and emotional layers to harmony. It's a step-by-step process and I gave each step a general supporting title with my own words, sometimes added with sentences from Voorand's interview.

#### 1. Learn harmony (chords and modes)

Firstly it's necessary to know what each chord contains - which modes and scales are available and which notes carry more tension than others.

#### 2. Choose a mode for each chord based on your preference and personal taste

*"Each chord has one or several options for modes. You can make a traditional choice, but you could also create your own mode if you wanted to. I usually choose a mode that sounds best to me. I don't do a mathematical choice, but I could alternate something to create more tension for example. You can go with whatever your gut feeling says."*

#### 3. Make your choice of notes and scales **visual** (Figure 3)

Find music paper and pen. Use one line for each chord. Write out the chosen mode for each chord while keeping all the notes under each other - keep a C under a C, a D under a D and so on. If a note changes, for example F turns into F# or Fb, then still keep it under the previous F. Write out some more notes than an octave just to see that the choice of notes is repetitive no matter what register or octave you're in. Make it as clear as possible. If an old mode comes back, create another line for it so that you wouldn't have to jump back and forth, and the harmony can go visually further and further as the song progresses. *"It has to be done with good handwriting, if I may say this! If C becomes a C#, then you see it visually very clearly. If C remains a C, then you see it very clearly - it's a C that didn't change."*

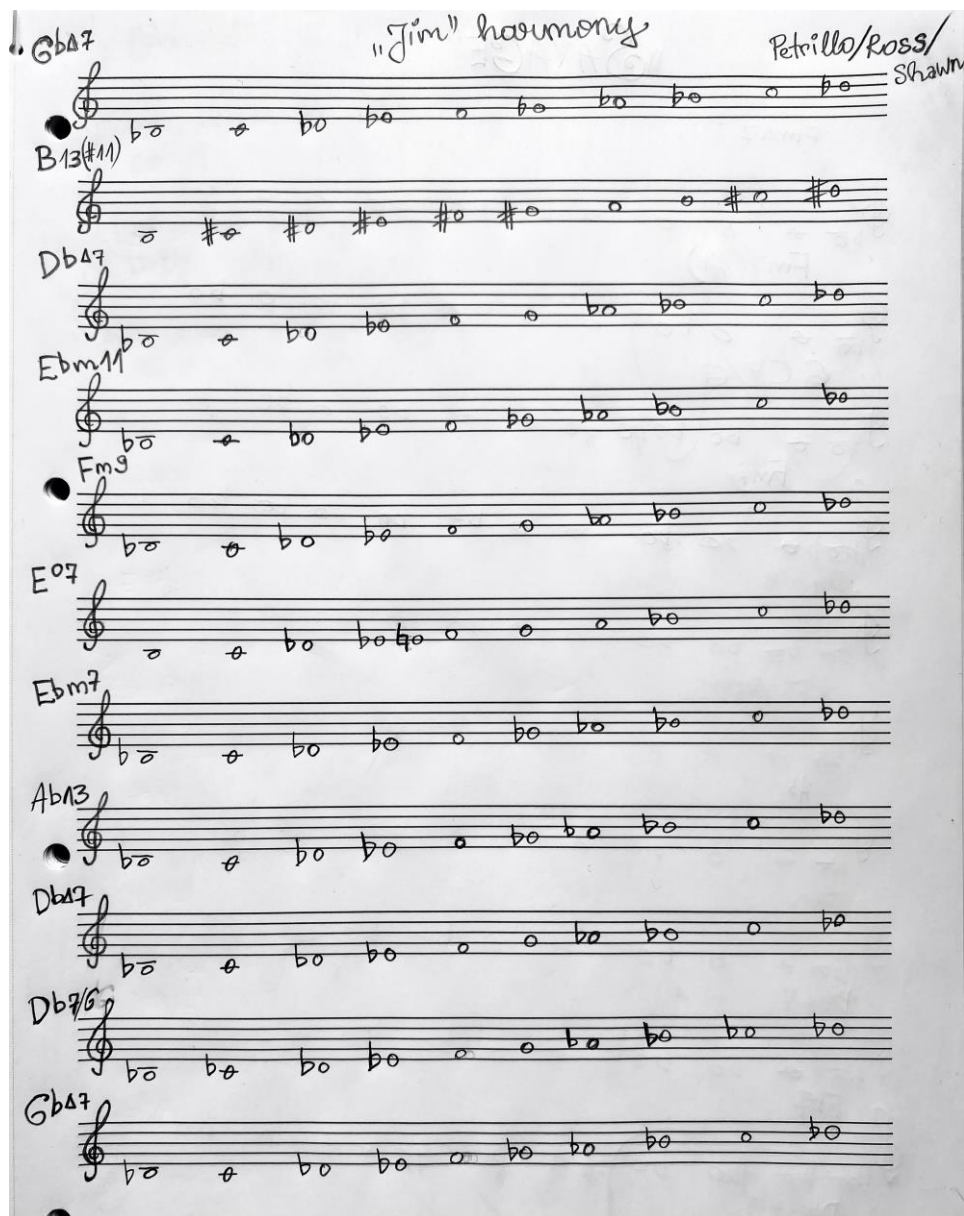


Figure 3. Example of visualising harmony based on Voorand's method

4. The next step is to find common and non-common notes within the modes. Draw a circle around them or point the common notes out in another way (Figure 4).

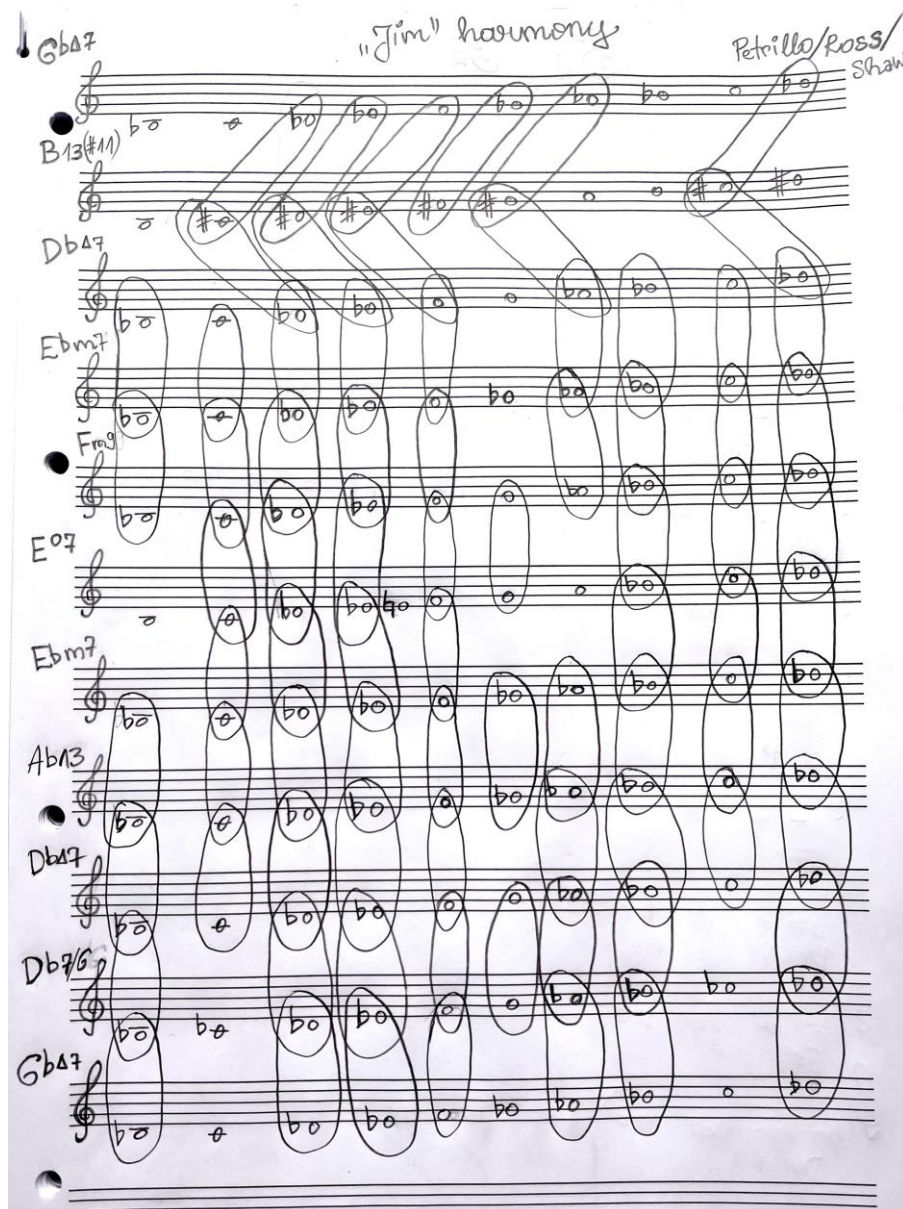


Figure 4. Example of pointing out common notes based on Voorand's method

## 5. Choose a small range of notes and a manageable tempo to practice on

Practice changing your chosen notes (Bb that becomes a B when the chord changes, then goes back to Bb and so forth) first with accompaniment and further on without any accompaniment. Try to make music on a couple of chosen notes.

*"If it's only one note that sometimes changes and sometimes comes back - beautiful music can be created on that one note. Wait until you can completely manage changes within that one note. You can make music with it; don't forget you have phrasing and rhythm information as well."*

## 6. Practice a small range of notes visually and audibly at the same time - point out the note you want to sing and sing it only if you know in your inner ear where it is. Once a small range feels comfortable and manageable, increase the range (and/or tempo).

Don't sing anything before you are absolutely certain which note it's going to be. That way we train to hear only the chosen notes.

The reason for making it visual is that our brain likes visual information. If we relate an idea with visuals then we make that connection stronger for the brain. I would like to personally add that this is where Voorand's method gets exciting - finally we are creating a visible instrument for singers.

*"The visuals have to be so clear that you can point out with your finger which note you are on. The rule is - you don't sing the note if you don't know where it is! If you just randomly sing anything you hear then you don't really train a thing, you only train some jamming by ear."*

### 2.4.3 Emotion cards

Emotion card is a very precisely picked event from your past that brought you a strong enough feeling which you can recall in your body and mind (if you went into it). Feelings are always present in the timbre of a human voice ever since they're born and that is why emotion cards work. Singing through a specific feeling will automatically color our voice and probably even dictate the choice of notes in improvisation.

Creating an emotional layer to a specific chord change is very beneficial for memorizing the harmony because human brains are just very good at remembering emotions and everything tied to them. It's the heaviest combination we could have.

Another good side is that emotional voice timbre and choice of notes will sound believable to the listener. Listeners can relate to emotional voices, whatever emotion it may be. Voorand is suggesting to practice harmony (and any melodies and lyrics too) with different emotional states, different emotion cards, for it creates more authenticity and better musical "feel" for the given material. She suggests to practice telling an emotional story through the given chord changes.

*"Imagine you want to tell a listener how you feel but the only language you have on your hands is three notes and your voice. And I have to hear your story. You have to tell me how you went to the park and met that person that day only with only your chosen notes and syllables and no lyrics. That is doable."*

Adding emotion cards is ideally meant to be done after the previous steps - visualization and inner hearing practice - are done and feel completely comfortable. Emotion card is therefore a third layer of information for our brains – first is audible, second is visual and third is emotional.

## 7. Try the changes with several emotion cards

Perhaps some emotion card doesn't work that well, then find another one. You will probably discover new fascinating combinations which create new type of tension. The good thing is that the more you make emotional connections with these chords and notes, the better your brain will remember these changes.

## Reflections

Voorand's method is by far the widest and deepest method I've encountered when it comes to improvisation for singers. It goes into psychology, music theory and emotions all at the same time. It combines several senses to our voice and memory. If practised the right way by pointing out notes on paper before singing then it also works heavily with our inner ear.

When I practised this method then what happened was that I sat in front of the piano for hours. I felt happy, I cried, I went into different emotional places in myself while singing the chord changes. These changes became dear and personal to me. I still have an emotional connection to especially some of the chord changes that I spent the time on.

It is a pity that I became fully aware of this method only 3 weeks before my graduation concert in March, which meant that I was not able to make the most out of Kadri Voorand's method within my time frame. It is a method that takes time. Nevertheless, her method has stuck with me, and I have already started using it for upcoming performances.

A singer's task next to the musical aspect is also to tell a story and we cannot deny that audiences very often long foremost for an emotional performance from a singer. Therefore this method is taking singers' specific qualities into account more than any other improvisation method I've encountered.

## 3. Artistic results

In this chapter I will analyze what happened on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March during my bachelor's exam concert<sup>6</sup>; also which things from my practice sessions turned up in my solos and which didn't. I will give a short overview of my arranging process too.

Just before the exam my main focus turned towards finishing the arrangements. I was perhaps too ambitious to try to handle two big topics at the same time - arranging for a large ensemble and vocal improvisation, but I would like to point out that these practice methods gave me valuable insights even if not everything necessarily turned up during the solos at my graduation concert. I do believe that much of this work is stored somewhere in me and might show itself during future concerts, but for now, I will keep it in the frame of what happened during my concert.

### 3.1. Graduation concert

The concert consisted of five jazz standards and a seven-piece band. I chose a bigger band because I wanted to practice the arranging principles that were introduced to me in various arrangement courses that I took during my university studies. The band consisted of:

Flute - Kleer Suursild  
Trombone - Artur Kiik  
Trumpet - Raimond Vendla  
Tenor saxophone - Kristers Laurins

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<sup>6</sup> Concert can be seen on the following link: <https://youtu.be/oWBhvO85dpc>

Piano - Eduard Kuzovlev  
Drums - Karl Martin Kirm  
Double bass – Lota-Loviisa Rohtla

Jazz standards that we performed were the following:

1. "Jim" (Caesar Petrillo, Edward Ross/Nelson Shawn)
2. "You bring out the savage in me" (Sam Coslow)
3. "Lazy afternoon" (Jerome Moross/John La Touche. Arrangement heavily inspired by Herb Pomeroy Orchestra)
4. "You're the top" (Cole Porter. Arrangement heavily inspired by Buddy Bregman)
5. "But beautiful" (Jimmy van Heusen/Johnny Burke)

During my arranging process I took a lot of inspiration from previous arrangements done for these standards. I transcribed some melody lines straight from previously existing arrangements, combined them with melodies from other arrangements that I liked and added some of my own ideas.

I think I developed a lot as an arranger during this process since I discovered things like the joy of unison, beautiful upper structure lines, how to orchestrate a long unison note with adding polyphony only at the end and how small and simple rhythmic changes can add lot to the song.

When analyzing my graduation concert the first thing that pops up in my mind and can also be heard in the sound of my voice is my nervousness. I could hardly breathe deeply and therefore almost lost control of my voice at the beginning of my concert. I gained some control a little later but remained still quite nervous throughout the whole concert which resulted in me not taking almost any pauses during my solo and making relatively short solos. Looking back, I think it's funny that I indeed concentrated on only notes in this work and not on rhythms, so the rhythms became a weak part of my solos.

I am happy with my horn arrangements though and the way horn section players played them. In hindsight, I could have perhaps had a smaller horn section to save myself some time from arranging and to have more room for spontaneous improvisations.

### 3.2. My scat solos

During my first solo on "Jim," I started off with a convincing phrase on a minor b5 chord with outlining harmony guide tones well. I then used a #7 on a minor chord which is a very "jazzy" choice for a minor chord and speaks of the bebop scale and/or alternated patterns that I practiced. I did not finish that phrase in a good way though and continued with notes that were less relevant.

What did pop up during my solos was altered notes. There were many of #11 on a dominant chord and a lot of #7 on a minor chord. So just as my practice showed me - learning and practising heavily alternated licks and chromatic patterns helped me to get familiar and comfortable with alterations and chromaticism, **but the lick in its original form never came up.** None of the full licks that I had practiced in all 12 keys, not even half of a lick.

It is sadly too naive to think a lick would pop up during a singer's solo just because it has been practiced in all 12 keys. And I would even take a bold statement to say that I do not believe executing a calculated lick will move a listener on an emotional level. Perhaps only if it's executed with much emotion.

The calculated, emotionless jazz is perhaps not what singers are best at due to how our instrument is built. It's not an instrument that can be easily "calculated". It's an instrument that moves better through emotion. But of course, everything depends on the time factor as well - perhaps if I spent some more years with practicing licks they would indeed start popping up in my solos. But I'm afraid that sort of work would remove joy from making music for me and therefore I would stop doing it at some moment. Perhaps if I would develop the "lick" practice into breaking it down to smaller parts, it could eventually work. I believe that the way how a singer should practice and eventually improvise with licks is something to be further explored.

During the solo on "You bring out the savage in me," I used a little bit more uncommon syllables on purpose. When listening back to it I wasn't entirely fascinated by these sounds. What made me reconsider this topic of completely free syllabic improvisation was a conversation with my jazz theory teacher, who is heavily inspired by bebop and who said that jazz is not entirely improvisation either. It consists of notes, chords, rhythms, and harmonies that are in a specific relationship to one another. Jazz is like a language because there are many structures in jazz. A person who speaks a language knows the structures. We are moving around in a structure while speaking - and also while improvising musically.

That conversation influenced me to give up on the idea that musical improvisation should be complete improvisation. I realized that having absolutely no boundaries and parameters might also lead to... gibberish. It might lead to a point where I am saying something but I don't have a message to convey. On a philosophical level that's not something I am striving towards. If I don't have a point to make through random syllables, then my only message would be my own search and, in that case, it could be also left in the practice room. Having no structures or boundaries at all could work only - as Voorand recommends - if I am telling a story through it, if I am at least trying to deliver a message or a feeling.

## 4. Closure

I was finally able to pinpoint what is in my opinion lacking from most of the "jazz books" and instrumentalist exercises - they are leaving emotions and inner hearing out of the picture. Yet that is exactly what a successful improvising singer needs - emotional performance with abilities for inner hearing.

Therefore not every good practice method is necessarily a good practice for a vocalist. I personally would rather use Voorand's method and sing the chord changes until they become personal to me. I would perhaps sing through guide tones without accompaniment to practice my inner hearing. I know now that I could choose emotion cards even for practicing guide tones. Having emotions involved makes the process more interesting and joyful (or sad or nervous - whatever I choose).

Practising inner hearing is crucial. Even though it can be very difficult at first, it will reward in less mathematical thinking and a more "bulletproof" feel for the given harmony. But what

is also crucial in my opinion is joy. Scat singing is an exciting tradition and I think it's mostly supposed to be fun. That's what the first scat solos came through as - something playful, cheerful and unexpected. Even historically jazz and improvisation are supposed to be about liberation and freedom. I think a singer should also choose methods that make it fun for them or they simply risk falling out of practising improvisation in the long term, because trying to hit challenging notes without any emotions quickly becomes boring and difficult.

I am happy I took on this journey and I'm especially happy to have discovered Voorand's method which is tailor-made for singers. Now I have at least one method that I can truly really rely on since it proved to be most effective for developing my musical memory and inner hearing.

I would like to point out that I do not think the other methods I explored would be useless or a waste of time for singers. I would also like to point out that another singer may have gotten different results from similar work to what I did. Another singer might have found another way of putting emotions into singing through chord notes or practising licks. In the end, it's all about finding a practice method that excites us and that gives us the results we need in a career as a musician and I'm sure these methods can be different for different individuals. If anything, then I hope that Voorand and her method will gain some more recognition among singers, since it is one of the deepest and most efficient methods that I have ever encountered during my years of jazz vocal studies in two countries. I hope that other singers can benefit from it too and stop feeling lost in the complex harmonies that we often find ourselves in jazz music.

## References

### Books

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### Attachments

My graduation concert audio file is uploaded in the DiVa portal. It can be seen and heard in video at the following link:

<https://youtu.be/oWBhvO85dpc>

## **Appendix**

### **Interview with Kadri Voorand**

**Would you please describe your method for practicing improvisation step by step?**

I first have to say that I don't see my method as jazz necessarily. I see it as a method that helps a singer improvise knowingly in any kind of harmony. Harmony in the western musical world has not changed for quite a lot of centuries. The twelve notes have remained. We could go into Asian folklore tradition and other sources too but just to be clear, first we have to decide what we are talking about.

Generally, improvisation for me is a much wider category than improvising on certain western harmony. For me coming from Estonia - which is a very important thing to know if you know music culture history - jazz is a much wider term than it would be in the USA for instance. So if we take jazz as rhythm music that combines improvisation and western jazz based harmony, then in this part of the world it's definitely combined with folklore. It's because of our openness to modern directions and also because of history - we didn't have the traditional jazz here when it was born in America. And also classical music sound world has had input to it. In the classical jazz sense transcription-based stylistic choice of notes may not be the case at all even if we call it jazz improvisation over here. It's more like improvising on modern harmony. So we have to first differentiate what kind of improvisation we are talking about. There is a whole music school world behind teaching the American jazz in the traditional way and teaching how to improvise choosing stylistically traditional melodic movements and choice of notes, but to make it clear - this is not what we are talking about today.

It doesn't mean that I don't use jazz improvisation techniques like transcription - because I do use that very heavily. Transcription is definitely the basics of any kind of creativity no matter what field it is, first collecting ideas and then having something to do with those ideas to create something new. So the first big big chapter is what I like to call the idea bank. The first step in the improvisation world is to collect ideas. The best possible way in improvisational education is transcription. I think it has been like that for as long as humanity has sang. We copied what others sang, we transcribed. I don't necessarily like the word 'copy' - copy means sounding like somebody else which in certain ways sounds negative, but let's call it transcription, then we know what we are talking about. So we are talking about collecting ideas. We have many many melodies in our head. We are collecting melodies our whole life. It starts whenever you hear the first sound. Some ideas that you collect you like more and some ideas you don't. Every song you've ever sung is in your idea bank. Every melody you've ever heard is kind of there as well, but you may not remember it. It might have influenced something you've already created. You might have also been influenced by a melody which at first didn't give you any emotional effect, but after hearing the same melody in a very different version - it might. All the time, even if it's sound based - we collect ideas. But now, becoming a professional - we do it more knowingly, more intensely, which is what we call transcription in the jazz world. It usually means transcribing a jazz solo.

**So now we have narrowed it down to...?**

Rhythm music! Or rhythm music influenced by jazz. Very often in Scandinavia and more and more in eastern Europe we use the term rhythm music instead of jazz because very often it

misses swing and traditional jazz harmony in that sense. So I would say the first thing, the first step is transcription. One of the most important things that I haven't seen much done in the world - I hope that most people are doing it but I know that they are not - is when you choose what to transcribe - besides knowing by a fact that your teacher has told you "This solo is good", - is to also heavily ask yourself - what does this solo that you are transcribing, mean to you? And what specifically do you like about this solo? This is a very important part of the first thing, because if you are authentic then you know what moves you and what doesn't. But also what's very important about this method is not only to choose melodies and solos that only make you feel instantly good - because there is music that makes you feel instantly good, but after listening to it for some more time the emotion doesn't stay. There is certain music like this and we know it by experience. It doesn't mean that the music that doesn't make you instantly feel good is not necessary for your overall well being. It does not also mean that music that doesn't instantly make you feel good is atonal, a-rhythmical or in some way hard to listen to. But it might demand heavier emotions. So when one is choosing a solo, it is important not only to feel good while listening to it, but also to be aware of what kind of emotions it makes you feel. And this is where the emotion card already steps in. It's very important to learn and to practice listening to music with filtering your system at the same time; searching what kind of emotions you feel and hear while listening to a solo and asking a very hard question which is very uncomfortable for a lot of jazz musicians - does my solo move someone? This is where the response may be very different. Some say there's a high energy level, some say that virtuosity is already high energy but it's not necessarily like that. We know for a fact that there can be very virtuous, excellent high-level-academic-choice-of-note-kind-of-solos out there which doesn't move a soul. But it moves a human being anyway because seeing someone strong and beautiful like in a sports competition inspires a person to become stronger and better. So on some level virtuosity is also energy and some kind of emotion movement. But do we want music only to be that? That is for everyone to ask themselves. Can you convince a listener by only being virtuous throughout the whole concert? My personal unproved non-scientific monitoring sort of observing conclusion is that no, you cannot. Just psychological - I like this word *psycho-logic*, there's logic in it - psycho logic says that it's not like this because we are not only combined by those kinds of emotions that we get out of seeing someone very beautiful. It lasts for a short time, like a yellow magazine cover. We like to watch those beautiful covers but it lasts for very very few seconds or minutes. So the thing with idea bank is first collecting as many ideas as possible, but the quality of the idea has to be filtered through - what do I like about it, how does it move me and what kind of emotions do I hear in it? So that's the first and second step altogether. The first is to listen to a lot of music and the second is to filter out what and why I like. And then comes the idea bank step number three - when you have filtered out melodies that really touch you, move you, that make you feel something, even if it's a fun, energetic, overall some joy, then you pick this melody to actually learn it in a very detailed way, in other words to transcribe - how it's phrased, what are the note combinations, what is the rhythmic, how it's related to harmony. That process follows, but the first two steps must be done first. In that case the choice of notes is based on what you are authentically, and we don't produce just similar, the exact same material analyzed by people who somehow produce similar solos. A lot of people in the world might like the same thing - and obviously do, because people are not so different - so if you are the type of person who likes jazz, and this has emotionally touched you already at your vulnerable years - definitely teenage years, maybe also childhood - all those events that made you vulnerable, all the music you listened through these times will affect your taste until the end of your days. If jazz-jazz doesn't move you, it can be left out. It can also be that maybe you like one specific solo by Mahavishnu. It might not be even traditional jazz, but the solo can still give a lot of beautiful melody combinations that move

you or that you need. And now we get to the next part. **Let's call it harmony-based improvisation, maybe that.**

So now what ever kind of harmony you have picked probably the melodies you are going to consciously or subconsciously use are based on your idea bank sources, moves you, what you like. It's not only the choice of notes but also how you phrase it. Now if you go emotionally into an authentic place by using emotion card - which I'm gonna specify - if you're using your emotion and you start to phrase some phrase then it might also make the choice of notes for you. If you start to sing in a certain way then a certain melody might pop up. It's not always knowingly picking note. I think it actually rarely is, if you just let the magic happen. Because all the melodies you have put into your brain are already there. Those melody lines and combinations that move you, they will combine into something very authentic anyway and it will come out. But now let's talk about the challenge for any singer who wants to know how to sing on atonal harmony. If whole harmony is very tonal and the singer has grown up in a western society then probably it's not the hardest challenge but the challenge becomes heavy when tonality centres change, modes change, and we can't stick to the same notes throughout the whole solo (unless we want to create a lot of tension). Harmony-based improvisation now demands knowing what notes create more tension and what notes don't. The first step in harmony based improvisation is to learn harmony and modes. In a way this method works on all harmonies, when we know what mode is used in one or another chord. Each chord has one or more options on chords. Mode can be a traditional choice but mode can also be created by the improvisator.

**There are several modes that can work on a single chord. What do you base your choice of mode on? Is it your personal preference or...?**

My preference is the taste that I have that has grown and developed throughout all my life. I choose a mode that sounds best for me. I don't do a mathematical choice, but I could... Alterate something to create tension for example. But one could also go with whatever their gut feeling says.

**Writing it down. How do you do it?**

Psychologically there is one very important aspect - you can manage what you can measure.

You just have to make your choice. Just choose something and make it work. We want to be so free and so open so we spend so much energy on choosing process. But instead we could already create something. It's the same thing in life. Make a choice and make it the best possible way. The same thing goes with making choices for modes. You can always make any choice possible with an emotion card. Any bad lyric can be filled up with a good emotion card and make it good. You can make things believable by making it work. So even if you don't know what is your style of mode, even if you don't know what is the right thing to do, even if you are an insecure person - like most of us are in this genre - if you are so uncertain that you don't even know what do you like, what kind of sound do you like - someone plays you a mode and you don't know if you like it or not - then just pick any combination of notes and make it your own. But the point is to make a choice of some sort and stick to it in the exercise. You can always change your choice of mode because for let's say a dominant chord there is so many different choices we can make and on top of those choices you could still make a new mode by your own creation.

Now that you have made a choice of which mode to use you will write it down to make it visual. If you have made it visual, write down more notes from the scale. If it's a 7-note scale then don't write down only 7 notes, write down more, even two octaves. Just to see that it's a repetitive thing - if you have a 7-note mode, then the choice of notes remains 7 no matter what the register is.

And why to make it visual is that our brain likes visual information. It's the heaviest and the strongest sense we have (if we have eyesight). If you relate different ideas with visuals then you make information connections in your brain stronger. The more connections you have, the stronger it gets. We jump a little bit ahead - the best possible connection in your brain is emotional.

The heavier the emotion, the more you will remember it. If you listen to some melody during emotionally vulnerable time you are more likely to remember it. Depending on your emotion - if you are suffering under some very hard depression then it's not necessarily the case because then you're not capable of taking in any new information. When we are vulnerable, we are just more likely to open up and feel. This is a different thing from already feeling very heavy emotions and then trying to make a change with music. It might change something, but it also might fail. There's a difference if you know what I mean. It's very important when we talk about authenticity, personal taste and what music you like or you don't. So emotion cards are still events from your life, certain moments. It can also be a whole period and the whole period of some very hard depression is only one card, but it also can have a lot of cards in it, it's very personal. We should keep that in mind that when we talk about emotions - not every emotion card is equal to another by intensity level. And not every emotion card is equally usable. But if you want to know what mode to use besides knowingly or unknowingly then let your heart lead the way on deciding what emotion you want to put into the song. If you feel that you want to use this or that emotion card knowingly then to recognise the right sound - if it feels right or not - comes from having a lot of work to do with your emotion cards because very often people don't know. If you have never worked with your life and emotions and never worked with your body or analysed your body; how does your body feel like when you feel this emotion? How do you sound if you feel this or that emotion from let's say moment nr 1 or nr 2800? If you don't know that, then it's really hard to decide but the work with the mode and the impro are still simultaneously happening. It helps you again to make an authentic choice and make a choice that is good for the exact song. If you want to use more altered scale then it creates more tension that maybe for this song is not necessarily at all. It may be stylistically a good choice, but if by your authentic choice doesn't support the song to deliver better, then this whatever mathematical choice may not work. But again - singers have the greatest advantage of them all - of course instrumentalists have the same, but singers have more - colours in our voices. We can tell a whole story without any lyrics, without even lot of melody, just by varying our tone timbre. The good news is - even if you make not the best choice for mode - you can still repair it with your tone.

### **What is important when writing it down graphically?**

Make it as clear as possible so you don't have to jump anywhere. Write a new line for each new mode and it's very important to keep a C under a C, a D under a D and so on. Whenever a mode changes, create a new line for it. If an old mode comes back, create another line for the old mode because you don't want to jump back and forth, after going back you have to go to a third place which you have never been before. So visually going further and further and further as the song goes on is the easiest. It has to be done with good handwriting, if I may say

this! The same notes have to be under each other. C has to be under C. If C becomes a C#, then you see it visually very clearly. If C remains a C, then you see it very clearly. It's a C that didn't change.

So now we have made the choice of mode in one way or another. We are writing down all the notes under each other. We see what are the common notes and what notes will change. Again - you can manage what you can measure. It also means that now if you start picking notes knowingly, pick only as many notes as you can manage. If it's only one note that sometimes changes and sometimes comes back - beautiful music can be created on that one note. Practice until you can completely manage that one note and making music with it, don't forget phrasing and rhythm information too. You can do beautiful work with one note. The melodies that are you in are going to step in little bit later. So if you practice knowingly maybe two notes, maybe three notes, don't go on further before you feel completely comfortable moving around those couple of notes in the whole harmony that you're going to improvise on. You have to reach a level where you can bring in emotion card system which is knowingly going into authentic life experience with your timbre and when you do that with a very minimal choice of notes - it will help you again to remember that harmony change better because you are going through your emotions.

Let's say you have managed to play little bit more and more notes and adapt to that song's harmony. Now there's a fear that steps in for a lot of singers and that fear should be really written out because it's a myth! The myth is that every song is so different that if I only practice heavily to improvise in one song, I will be doing it for the rest of my life with all the songs. Like I would have to do the work from point 0 with every song - that's a myth. It's not true. **Songs are very similar** even if they look from afar like they're not. If those songs use 12-note western harmony then they are very similar and one should never be afraid of nothing repeating or something like that. Of course combinations of notes are endless. If you think about permutations then 12 notes becomes millions of choices. But the good message here is - even if all the melodies out there seem to be used already then mathematics say it's not like this, you can always be original. But how to survive in this endless world of choices? Yes, you can put them in different choices, but we humans have emotional connections to traditions. So subconsciously you will anyway make your choice based on something that exists already and that's only a good thing because then other people can associate to your music as well.

So the harmony changes. The more one's melodies are based on some kind of true emotional thing - even if they are newly created - then the connection point between two harmonies or two chords is often a very basic relation in all western harmony, also classical. The fear that chord changes don't repeat is a myth, because even emotionally we make very similar choices. Yes, they do repeat.

That doesn't mean that - even if you reach emotion card level while practicing - that it will go with you to the stage. It doesn't have to, and I prefer not to bring that sort of mathematic exercise on stage. The thing is that if you have sung your whole life and you have sung different songs and now you have sung those modes, changing chords - a lot of it will stick with you also by ear. But the work and practice process is one thing and creating melodies and improvisation on stage is another thing. On stage personally I do not want to think about what note am I on, but I know from experience that some very difficult harmony changes still demand it even if I didn't want to. And then it's a good thing that I can actually manage just by knowing where I am if I chose like this. But the more you have knowingly worked - all the

time knowing where you are - the better you will get at knowing which note you have landed at. Technically going back to the visuals where you have written it down - it has to be so clear that you can point out with your finger on what note you are. The rule is - you don't sing the note if you don't know where it is! You can only sing a note when you know what note to point out. The reason for doing that is when you sing only the knowingly chosen notes then you also hear those notes out loud. So now you practice the so-called good notes that you have chosen for this song, the modes you've chosen, and you practice hearing the choice of these notes. If you just randomly sing anything you hear then you don't train a thing, you just train more jamming by your ear.

### **So this is actually training your inner ear?**

Yes! Exactly. And in the meantime the advantage is becoming a better composer for silent composing procedure. You can compose without using an instrument, it also trains that skill. Silent composition for me as an improviser is definitely something that goes together with that method because melodies that are born out of silence are very pure. Our capabilities of writing down things we hear by our inner ear are very low. And even if we reach a high level, we still might face a wall or some physical boundaries. You hear a certain sound but you don't hear how many violins exactly you have there. And then you have to just test it out by writing down something. Maybe you hear cluster chords but you don't know what is that chord. But the more and more you train knowing what notes you are on and hearing them at the same time by your own voice, the more you kind of install the information about the choice of notes to your brain. And your voice is something that you have been living together with since you were born. That is a very strong connection. So connecting those parts in your brain with emotion now - emotion card is the heaviest combination you can have.

### **I think we should stop a little bit longer on the emotion card - how do you put emotion card on the couple of notes that you are practicing?**

If you choose an emotion card which is a very precisely picked memory from your past and you want to share a feeling from your memory - it doesn't have to be sharing facts from your life - but you want to share the feeling, you might use lyrics and words but you also might use only some chosen notes, syllables and your voice. It's like you have to imagine if you were to tell your emotion - if you want to tell the listener how you feel but the only language you have on your hands is those three notes and your voice - and you have to make yourself clear. I have to understand how you feel. I have to hear your story. You have to tell me how you went to the park and met that person that day only with three notes and syllables and no lyrics. That is doable. When you can make me believe that and it's an honest event from your life, then the emotions in it are honest and that's where connecting brain's different paths come in.

So you take the emotion card and you take the three notes as a limit and you test out different melodies by using your voice as a reflector of an emotion you want to share. The question is - I might ask - but how do all the transcribed melodies step in here? They do. Because if you now let your emotions reflect on your inner emotional world then specially as a musician the melodies are very often describing how you feel. That's why we create art. We use art to share our melodies and our melodies can be very limited as well. So if you let your honesty speak for you and if you can already manage very well, you have practised mathematically those changes and now when you take in the emotion card and you are actually honestly using the sound that is sincere, then combining those notes will become a melody that is believable. Your emotion will just make it work. It cannot be that you are singing with an emotionally

honest timbre and it doesn't work at all. When it doesn't work at all then probably you are just not honest yet.

**How many emotion cards should one use in practice? One emotion card for each word or...? How many emotion cards should we pick for a solo?**

As for emotion card system as practice I choose a different emotion card for each word. On stage I never do it. If you do mode practising - the same thing. I try it with one emotion card, then I try it with another. Maybe with one emotion card it really doesn't work. Maybe I'm just not good with this emotion card and those notes. Maybe some inner me doesn't combine those two and that's just me. Then I might take another emotion card and test that one out. And another and another and another. The more I make connections in my brain with those chord and mode changes the stronger I get within that harmony, the stronger the connection gets.

**So when you have done all that work with chords, modes and emotion cards then when do you start feeling ready to go on stage with a particular solo or harmony?**

Never. I never feel that I am ready to go on stage with this harmony. You will never get there, you can write it out in bold. It's not possible, it doesn't happen. You can never have the whole 12 notes so that you can know all the notes, you can know all the harmony changes. There is no limit.

**Let me rephrase my question - do you sometimes feel that you are comfortable enough in a given harmony?**

I'm just a very bad person to answer that question. No, I don't.

**So you still in your career of many years go on stage feeling insecure about the harmonies you have a solo on?**

Yes.

**I'm sad to hear that because I would've thought that at one point you will feel ready. I wonder if for example Veronica Swift feels that she knows the blues harmony so well that she feels so ready to just like shoot...**

Well, there are different types of improvisation. If it is a very easy something, but I guess I'm more the type that takes risks. I always search for new experiences. It doesn't necessarily mean that I search for new music or new combination of modes, but I'm just a different kind of person. Yes, I do things very similarly and specially these days I improvise on very simple harmonies. Of course I feel on very simple harmonies that I don't have to struggle with changing modes and yes, in that sense it is possible to be "over it". You might not get lost in the changes, but it only depends on what risks are you taking. If it's a very simple harmony then I might alterate it and I might play around with it in a wider range. I'm a great risk taker too. I want to go and take risks. The more I'm over the harmony, the more I take risks to kind of blow it. To blow it, really. The thing that changes with years is that you have just more and more courage to fail. If I only stick to a very small range and don't take risks and feel so comfortable with only this range and three notes, then it will be just fine, and I might have very much fun as I've said on those three notes as well, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't

work for anyone else. But people are like this usually - when you have eaten a bite out of a very good cake, you probably want another bite and another one. You play some game and you want to play a bigger game and a bigger game and a bigger game. It's just growing. The positive news is that you can always make some sort of limitations. This is what you can manage - I can understand the blues. If not that many modes change - and the basic blues doesn't change too much - then I can just jam around and I don't think about the harmony at all. It's by now in my blood system, but I can still choose to alterate and sing "out". The thing about having rhythm changes in your blood system and the blues... There are so much easier ways to do it than having this system that we are talking about here. So much easier ways - just learn the licks, then the legendary solos. Sing them through as much as possible and you are there. And no scale work which is very complicated and heavy is needed. But why did I start doing this is because I never started working a lot with that kind of music. When I was 18, I got thrown into modern jazz harmony from the day one. Just by different coincidences. It was never basic II-V-I and blues and basic rhythm changes. Yes, it was connected to some sort of rhythm changes, but I had to survive with very very hardly related - well, related, yes - but very contrasting modes very quickly and survive as an improviser in them. And doing anything by ear and just improvising stylistically something did not make the work happen on stage or anywhere else. I had to survive with very contrasting harmonies as an improviser like instrumentalists. That was my task when I was 18. Just transcribing a jazzy solo by Chet Baker did not help to improvise a solo over "Elegant people" by Wayne Shorter for instance or Pat Metheny songs where the modes change a lot. So this system is created for singers who really want to create good sounding solos for modern heavily-changing harmony. If this is not your cup of tea, then you don't have to struggle only through this.

**I think that this method would still really help a person who does want to a nice jazzy solo if they just choose their jazzy modes and train those into their inner ear very well. I just think it's a quite universal method.**

It's universal, but if you want to only sing jazz then I don't recommend working on that as heavy as I would recommend working on transcription. What I haven't seen during the last let's say 7 years - I haven't seen students who want jazz-jazz-jazz. Very rarely I see people like you who actually enjoy singing swing. And it gets more and more rare seeing it each year with who steps into the school. It doesn't mean that it's lost or gone. What I have seen is interest in modern harmonies and improvising on that, because it also helps one survive if the harmony is not so complicated, but maybe just some little, minor change. I've also seen a question to the answer if I feel ready. Yes, I can go on stage and feel quite comfortable and know where I am and not get lost and so on. Do I feel like I'm completely free with heavily changing harmonies? Do I feel like I can always connect to my emotion card? That's when I sometimes say no. Of course when I have a choice between emotion card or complicated wide-range melody, I choose emotion card, because that's my religion. I believe there's only point of sharing honest sounds rather than sharing mathematically well-picked notes for the melody. I know that yes, I could mathematically survive in some very difficult harmonies if I wanted to, but I personally take the risk of just having mathematics in my rehearsal room. When I'm on stage, I completely just rely on whatever I practised and choose emotion cards and see how far I get with it.

**How important is metronome in this emotion card practice and improvisation practice?**

Metronome should be there every time. Just use a metronome. Rhythm music is based on pulse and getting used to being a part of pulsation is very necessary all the time if you want to

play with other people. No matter what you do, if you use emotion cards or not. It's always a good thing to relate to the pulsation.

### **Is there anything else you would like to point out in regards to tempo?**

Just choose a tempo that is manageable. Especially when you want to practice a song into your system, then the chord change should happen within that same period or time frame as it happens in the song. Even if it's very slow but be aware that not always very slow tempo works. There are some songs that give the sound of it's chord changes more easily at a faster tempo. If you practice very very slowly all the time then yes, you might be able to sing more notes inside one chord but the overall chord change experience will not be there if it's too slow. I'd recommend having two different types of rehearsal process - one is going very slow and going through each chord with as many notes as possible. And the other one is going quite fast but managing with just a few notes, yet getting the changes inside your inner ear.

### **Let's move on to the emotion card technique if you can go over it quickly again?**

Emotion card a very precisely picked event from your past that brought an emotion which you can recall in your body and mind. You know what it felt like if you went into it. You don't have to feel it right away but pick a moment and you remind it to yourself. Imagine yourself into that moment again and if a feeling pops up then that feeling will become audible in your timbre. That's how we, humans, are.

### **How do you use emotion card for lyrics?**

As practice process - find an emotion card or even five emotion cards for each word. That's the first thing you could do. Find one to five emotion cards for each word. Don't worry - you won't have to do it with all the songs for the rest of your life and you haven't lived for 300 years. You will have your favorite emotion cards and they will draw out themselves. Try to pronounce lyrics with all those different emotion cards. See how they sound. First just as speech. Take time for each word, including all the small words like prepositions like *and*, *so*, *but*, *the* and so forth. Find an emotion card for each word. First say it and then sing it. See the difference. See the similarities, that's more important. You will probably find emotion cards that speak to this particular song better than some others. You might have one emotion card picked for only even half of the phrase, sometimes for the whole phrase. Why do I recommend having one to five cards for each word in the practice process is that then you have a choice. The more different emotion cards you have practised, the more you will find them and are capable of using them on stage.

### **Let's say you've done all of this work. Which emotion cards do you keep and which do you leave out?**

I just listen to my stomach feeling what works best for the song.

### **How often does it happen that you have only one emotion card for whole song? Is that rare?**

Yes, it is rare. It's storytelling. If you tell a story, then emotion cards will change. It's like if I start to talk about Prince Charming - how great he was and strong he was and how then something made him furious - I already changed my emotion cards while saying these things

because I reflect on this character I'm talking about. And then how he lost his mother and father and how he was completely sad and devastated, and now I go emotionally close to devastated and sad too while telling another person about this but why does this happen even if I'm talking about another person? The same thing happens in a song. I'm not talking about myself but if I'm a good storyteller then I'm empathetic all the time because humans share the same feelings. I know how it feels to be greatly sad. Now why do I want this work to be done is because of... A lot of reasons.

One reason is that very often vocalists start thinking about **how** they sound instead of **why** they make sound at all. On stage you wanna sound good but whenever you open your mouth and make any sound at all, it's always a message. Is your message "Hey, look, I sound good!" or do you actually have a story to tell? If you are on stage and you think how am I gonna reach this note and that note and how am I gonna sound great to all those jazz fans, then probably you are not telling a story. All those technicalities are good in a rehearsal room, they're gonna prepare you and they are very necessary particles. Definitely they are. Think about how you sound in a rehearsal room, think about what modes to choose in a rehearsal room but on stage think about the emotion cards. If you have practiced them - even if you don't do it consciously on stage anymore - if you have practiced and practiced and practiced certain emotion cards into a certain song, then you will sound believable because you are telling a story. And you have practiced that storytelling component with emotions into your voice at the right place at the right time.

**I would just ask one more question. All these methods are time consuming. So if you have a full concert of 70 minutes then to really work through each word and mode, I would imagine you need several months to prepare everything fully and truly...?**

Well, the good news is that when you have worked on hundreds of emotion cards and let's say you take one song and you have 40 different words or repeating words (which I also want you to have a different emotion card for), if you have done like 4-5 songs with this work - now you already have quite a lot of emotion cards in your pockets. Those emotion cards will start to repeat. Even more, you will find out your favorite emotion cards that will go through different programs, even through different bands. You might use your favorite story through 10 different projects. That story, one each story has so many different emotion cards. You can use one life event throughout very many songs. And keep on telling because even inside one story emotion cards change. And you can always relate to it in a different kind of ways. You could end the story differently. One day you're gonna end up in that story maybe losing a friend. Another day you can change the story, there can be a happy ending.

When you have emotion cards in your pockets then now's time to have fun. You will get used to your voice sounding in certain ways and it gets more rapid. At some point, having done it for a long time, you will know how you sound sad. You don't necessarily have to pick an emotion card to sound sad, you just know how you sound sad. You know how you phrase sad. When we talk about improvisation, you know what melody lines describe **you** as sad. In silent composition I use the same method, emotion card method. I go into the thing what I wanna share and I try to see what melody do I hear with it. That's what I would like the jazz improvisation on stage to look like as well. And also for instrumentalists I have a **high demand** for this. High expectations. If it doesn't follow emotion card even unconsciously, I'm bored. Very often the highest quality players use emotion cards too, even not knowingly of course, I'm sure. But some very very rare players tell a story. It doesn't happen a lot, but when it happens, it's pure magic. And it's the same thing. This is just - share the energy of

some sort. Maybe they had good sex last night and they share the energy of that. Like hey, look, I got this girl, like rawr, it was so good, it was **so good** and they show it on their saxophone. It's so hard to describe all of this in written word, I understand. Usually when I do or show this on workshops, it's so much based on the personal experience by the listener. I always let people to hear their voice and to hear my voice with different emotion cards. With a written word it's just like any other talk about emotions and honesty.

**Thank you.**

Interviewed by Tiina Adamson  
10th of April 2023.