

Jazz Vocal Interpretation: A Philosophical Analysis

[forthcoming *JAAC* 2012, special issue on 'Song']

Jerrold Levinson

1. I begin with the most straightforward question that one could frame on this topic, namely, what is it for a singer to *interpret* a song in a jazz context? Clearly, it is for the singer to *sing* it, rather than, say, to *discourse* on it. But just as clearly, it is to do so in a particular way, with a range of freedoms to depart from the chart or score of the song. Moreover, if the singer fails to avail herself of any of those freedoms, it is arguably not a jazz interpretation at all.

The freedom of a singer in a jazz context to modify the standard chosen for interpretation is much greater than that afforded singers of songs in the classical repertoire, such as German *lieder* or French *mélodies*. These freedoms include, but are not restricted to changes of meter; substitutions of melodic notes; substitutions of words; rearrangement of stanzas; alteration of rhythms; shifts of accent; recasting of style, such as from ballad to swing or bossa; shifts of styles mid-song; variations in tempo; and whether or not to sing the introductory, usually *parlando*, verse that many of these standards contain in their original form. Moreover, such freedoms are engaged in to a degree greater than is generally found in versions, sometimes called "covers", that pop and rock musicians do of each other's songs.

Singing a song in a jazz manner, characterized in part by a high degree of the freedoms just noted, is an instance of what can usefully be labeled *performative* as

opposed to *critical* interpretation of a song.ⁱ The singer of a jazz standard performatively interprets that standard precisely in singing it a particular way, a way that she normally hopes is distinctively hers.

2. What, then, are some important *dimensions* of jazz vocal interpretation, understood as the performative interpretation of vocal standards in a jazz manner? Surely all the following: choice of basic musical style; tempo, timbre, rhythmic alteration, melodic variation; metrical recasting; textual alteration, including excisions, additions, interpolations, elaborations; playing with the time, including “laying back” or singing behind the beat, and “pushing forward” or singing ahead of the beat; turns, slides, and other standard vocal ornaments; scatting and other non-verbal vocalizing.

3. Next, what are the various *background factors* an audience needs to take into account in order to get a sense of or a handle on the content of a particular performative interpretation? Well, apart from the singer’s particular way of singing the song, at least these three things seem crucial: a) the song in its straight version, or as originally composed; b) the usual ways of singing the song in a jazz context; c) the singer’s public persona, including the singer’s gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical appearance, as well as certain publically known features of the singer’s personal history.ⁱⁱ

As regards the first of these factors, its relevance is obvious. Someone

unfamiliar with the original composition has little way of gauging what the singer is doing with the song, that is, what the singer is adding to, subtracting from, or altering in, the song as written or as standardly taken.ⁱⁱⁱ As regards the second of these factors, the usual ways of performing a given vocal standard also serve as crucial context to a given singer's interpretation, and need to be kept in mind by a listener seeking to correctly interpret the given interpretation. An obvious example is where an interpretation is an *homage* to an earlier famous rendition of a song, and should thus be understood with reference to that earlier rendition as respectfully acknowledging it, but neither aping nor affecting oblivion of it. The same goes for an interpretation that is a *parody* of an earlier famous rendition. An homage might be either slavish or creative, and a parody either appreciative or dismissive, but in either case proper understanding on the part of a listener requires awareness of what is either being honored or made fun of. More generally, in assessing what a given interpretation might convey about how a singer regards a song, it clearly matters whether we refer the interpretation only to the straight version of the song as represented in a standard chart, or also to existing performative renditions with which the singer can be assumed to have been acquainted.

As regards the third of these factors, the singer's public persona or publicly available face, an obvious example of its relevance is provided by a song such as Cole Porter's "My Heart Belongs to Daddy", in which the singer affirms and embraces her status as the kept woman of an affluent older man.^{iv} It clearly

matters whether the singer is a young woman, so that her persona is roughly a match for that internal to the song, rather than, say, a straight middle-aged man. For sung by the latter, the song inevitably takes on in performance a campy or ironic character. And sung by a gay man the song no doubt acquires yet another character in performance. These differences in what is conveyed, moreover, would manifest themselves even if--what is admittedly a highly unlikely state of affairs--the audible musical features of each singer's rendition, that is, the key and all the subtle inflections of melody, rhythm, accent and timbre brought to the basic tune, were precisely the same, so that the renditions were aurally indiscernible. In terms that will make more sense as discussion proceeds, what one can say is that a singer's way of singing a song is not reducible to or wholly contained in the purely sonic profile of what the singer produces, even confining ourselves to what can be heard, as opposed to seen.^v

4. Consider next how jazz *vocal* interpretation of a given standard is importantly different from jazz *instrumental* interpretation of the same standard. The most salient difference is that jazz vocal interpretation invariably involves *some* acknowledgment of the song's text and textual meaning, whereas jazz instrumental interpretation may dispense with *any* such acknowledgment.^{vi} Though the vocal treatment of a jazz standard is importantly different from the reciting of a poem, it remains at least a relative of that activity, in that it involves putting across a text with an articulate content, and not just an exploration in musical sound.

Almost as salient is the fact that jazz vocal interpretation only rarely strays very far from a song's melody, and never so far as to be unrecognizable as that song, whereas jazz instrumental interpretation notoriously often does so, cleaving only to a song's chord progressions or changes, and sometimes altering even those. For jazz vocal interpretation, the melody of a standard is not sacrosanct, but it must be clearly in evidence, whatever modifications the vocalist subjects it to.

It is significant that a number of standards often played by jazz instrumentalists, though in fact they are songs with words, are not especially rewarding for singers. This is possibly because they lack sufficient melodic, verbal, thematic, or emotional interest, despite containing chord progressions capable of inspiring instrumental improvisers. Examples might be "Cherokee", "I've Got Rhythm", "Lady Be Good", "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "Take the A Train". Of course some of the preceding have been successfully interpreted by some vocalists, such as Ella Fitzgerald, but then she could probably make something musically rewarding out of a page from the phone book.

5. In this section I begin to consider claims about the content of jazz vocal interpretations, formulating these claims in terms of what such performative interpretations *convey*, rather than what they *communicate*. That is because conveying can arguably occur without being intended by a singer, whereas communicating arguably cannot. For instance, what may be conveyed about a singer by her interpretation includes what her manner of performing *tells* us or

allows us to *infer* about the singer, but not necessarily what she *intends* us to learn about her. What is conveyed by a performance, unlike what is communicated, at least as I propose to use the terms here, is a matter of what is revealed in or manifested by the performance, and need not be brought about purposely.

Let me now ask what a given jazz vocal interpretation of a standard might convey about *the song* that is its subject. Can such a performative interpretation, in other words, do more than simply make the song available for appreciation, and if desired, critical interpretation?

The most minimal position regarding what a jazz vocal interpretation conveys about a standard, I suppose, is just that it *can* be sung in that manner, or that it is musically *effective* to sing it in that manner, or perhaps, going just a bit further, that the singer implicitly *endorses* that manner of singing it. On such a position it is largely futile, or at least misguided, to ask what a singer might be conveying about a song by singing it a given way. The departures from the straight version of the song, on this perspective, or from the usual ways of doing the song, are there simply for musical variety. They are just meant to answer to the listener's interest in hearing something different, while also serving, of course, as a display of the singer's skill, ingenuity, and taste.

Though there is something to be said for taking the minimalist position on what performative interpretation of a standard can convey—it has at least the virtue of cautiousness—I'm inclined to think that one can advance beyond that position to a certain degree. But before I do so, I respond to two further questions and then

offer a preliminary caution.

First, can one sing a jazz standard *without* interpreting it? Might one convey *nothing* about a song, or about one's view of a song, through how one sings it? This strikes me as unlikely. For consider what would seem to be the only way to achieve that somewhat dubious goal, namely, singing the song in a way that hewed as closely as possible to the song as originally conceived. Rather than conveying nothing about the singer's view of the song, in a jazz context this would likely convey either the singer's overwhelming admiration or respect for the original composition, inducing her to present it as purely as possible, or else her intimidation by or insecurity about the composition, causing her to venture no alterations in it.

Second, does a singer *convey something about a song* in virtue of features of her singing voice that she cannot control, such as her basic timbre or basic range? Perhaps not. But a singer will nevertheless still *impart a character to the song in performance* in virtue of her timbre and range. A character imparted to a song *through* concrete performance aspects does not automatically amount to something conveyed *about* the song through such performance aspects. For it is only imparting a character to a song in performance *through dimensions under the singer's control* that can play a role in the singer's conveying something about a song by singing it as she does. None of that is to deny, however, that a singer might convey something about a song through how she *manages* or *deploys* her basic timbre or range, through how she works with or against her basic vocal

endowment.

Finally, when I say that a jazz vocal interpretation might convey thoughts or propositions about the song being interpreted I do not mean to say, of course, that a listener who grasps such an interpretation necessarily, or even normally, *articulates* to himself such thoughts or propositions. What I mean, at most, is that such a listener registers the interpretation in such manner as to be disposed to consent to such propositions as what is conveyed by the performance *were* those propositions to be articulated to him.

6. Consider what might be conveyed by a singer's elongation, accentuation, or salient modification of particular words in a song, clearly an important part of what we mean by the singer's interpreting the song. Does doing so convey that the singer regards those words as especially *important* thematically? Though it seems reasonable in general to take it that emphasis placed by a singer on a given word suggests that the singer views that word as particularly significant thematically, and that lack of emphasis suggests the reverse, an interpretive rule of that sort can be no more than a rule of thumb, and would certainly lead one astray if regarded as universally valid. I illustrate this with a somewhat unusual example, the standard "My One and Only Love", perhaps best known in the version of vocalist Johnny Hartman and saxophonist John Coltrane.

The text of this song plausibly contains a slight infelicity, in that the word 'give' occurs twice in close succession in the last stanza: the line 'every kiss you

give sets my soul on fire’ is followed immediately by the line ‘I give myself in sweet surrender’^{vii}. Accordingly, in interpreting those lines a sensitive singer should not dwell on either occurrence of ‘give’, should call as little attention as possible to the repetition, which betrays, I suggest, a small failure of inspiration on the lyricist’s part. However, insofar as he does so the singer clearly should *not* be understood to be slighting the idea of ‘giving’ as it figures in the song’s message.^{viii}

7. In general, we may say that in singing a song a particular way, employing particular inflections of rhythm, pitch, phrasing, pronunciation and so on, a singer conveys her *feeling* about the song, or expresses her *attitude* toward the song, or presents the song in a certain *light*. These are fairly obvious and commonsense observations, though none the less true for all that.

Deserving perhaps more notice, though if anything an even more familiar phenomenon, is the fact that a singer’s way of singing a song on a given occasion may manifest or reflect, not how the singer *feels about* the song, but more simply, how the singer is *feeling*. In other words, a singer’s interpretation of a standard can sometimes be a window into the singer’s emotional state at that time, whatever the basic tenor or thrust of the standard in question. Thus, a singer in the grip of profound melancholy might make even “The Sunny Side of the Street” sound sad, and a singer in a highly elated condition might succeed in making even “Angel Eyes” seem full of cheer.

But I am more interested in a further thing that seems to be communicated

by a singer's interpretation of a standard, something that operates when the singer's emotional state may be presumed to be in its normal range, and that testifies to something about the singer that is both less transient than occurrent emotion and more characteristic of the singer as an artist. And that is the singer's *personality*, at least as that manifests itself in performance. For a singer, through her particular way of singing a song, invariably displays her *personality*, coming across as, say, cool, or excitable, or seductive, or insouciant, or vulnerable, or matronly, or earthy or aristocratic.

8. And so I come now to the question about jazz vocal interpretation that most interests me, namely, how can one distinguish between what a singer, in interpreting a given song, is conveying *about the song*, and what the singer is conveying *about herself*? The former might be glossed, along hypotheticalist lines, as the view of a *song* that an appropriately informed listener would be most justified in attributing to the singer on the basis of the specific interpretation offered. The latter might be glossed, along similar lines, as the view of a *singer's personality* that an appropriately informed listener would be most justified in adopting on the basis of the specific interpretation offered.^{ix}

The former sort of conveying seems akin to the phenomenon of *conversational implicature* identified by the philosopher Paul Grice. In Gricean terms, a particular singer's way of singing a given standard may be said to conversationally implicate certain beliefs about a song if it affords strong evidence

that the singer held such beliefs, or alternatively, if the holding of such beliefs would best account for why the singer sings the song as she does. By contrast the latter sort of conveying, as regards the singer's personality, does not seem a matter of conversational implicature, since not likely operating through a plausible conjecture as to the singer's beliefs.

In any event, whatever the differences in the mechanism of conveying involved, I suspect it may often be *indeterminate* whether to interpret a distinctive feature of a singer's interpretation of a song as conveying something about the song or as conveying something about the singer, because often either hypothesis would make good sense of the singer's particular way of treating the song. And in some cases it may be that something is conveyed *both* about the song *and* about the singer, precisely because a hypothesis of double import makes most sense of the features of the interpretation taken as a whole. Still, my hunch is that in most cases a jazz singer's interpretation of a standard conveys more about the *singer* than it does about the *song*, putting aside the minimal implication of any successful performative interpretation, to the effect that the song *can* effectively be sung that way.

Most likely, each musical choice or inflection in a jazz vocal interpretation is heard or received by a listener in two ways, or from two perspectives. The first is embodied in the question, What does that choice or inflection suggest about the *song*?, and the second is embodied in the question, What does that choice or inflection suggest about the *singer*? The answers with respect to the first question

will be more or less constant, having the force that, so sung, the song sounds good or is musically satisfying. But the answers with respect to the second question will vary, spanning the gamut of personality traits that can be exhibited through the sort of behavior that performing involves.

Furthermore, in many cases, a singer's phrasing may convey something about the singer *through* conveying something about the song. For example, when Ella Fitzgerald scats lengthily and inventively on her famous recording of "How High the Moon", she demonstrates the almost infinite potential of that song's straightforward melody and uncomplicated changes. But she also reveals, and precisely through that musical demonstration, her warm persona and impeccable taste. Or when Diane Schuur exploits to the maximum the manic potential of the large leaps and insistent chromaticism of "Invitation" in her recording of that standard, she also provides a window into her wild musical persona and incredible vocal virtuosity.

I should note that in the foregoing discussion I abstracted entirely from what may be conveyed by a jazz vocal interpretation in a *live venue*, such as a club or theater, where the singer is physically present to the audience, and where the singer's visual appearance, hand gestures, facial expressions and body language can play an important role in her interpretation of a song. In other words, for reasons of simplicity I have treated the singer's performative interpretation of a standard narrowly as something *heard*, as what a good sound recording of the performance in question will preserve. Clearly, if one takes those other factors, accessible in the

live setting, into account, the process of inferring a performing personality or grasping aspects of conveyed content from the interpretation on offer becomes a more complicated affair, though given how much more one has to work with, one that is likely to yield more definite results.

9. As these examples show, some of what is suggested about a singer by her performance will be narrowly musical traits, those which make up what we can label the performer's *musical personality*, such as a tendency toward metrical alteration, or timbral modulation, or harmonically adventurous melodic substitutions, and some will be nonmusical traits that enter into what we can label, more broadly, the performer's *performing personality*, roughly, the personality as it exhibits itself in performing, which includes the performer's musical personality but is not restricted to that.

But what, though, of personality without qualification? Might a performance of a standard be said to express the performer's *real personality*? Suppose, by analogy with a plausible analysis of the behavioral expression of emotion, that for a jazz vocal performance to express a performer's real personality: a) the performance must be such as to *ground a reasonable inference* on the part of listeners that the performer has personality P; b) the performer must actually *have* personality P; and c) the performance must have the distinctive features it does partly *because* the performer has personality P. If that is so, then although a given performance certainly *might* express, or perceptibly manifest, the performer's real personality,

we won't be in a position to affirm that unless we know the performer outside the performing context, and hence know whether he or she *in fact* has personality P, and thus whether condition b) is satisfied and condition c) at least possibly satisfied.

In light of that, we are on safer ground affirming that a given performance of a standard expresses a singer's *performing personality*, since that is more or less analytic, a singer's performing personality being, again, roughly the singer's personality as it comes across in and through a given way of singing. Of course the singer's performing personality may not be particularly representative of the singer's real personality as it exists outside the context of performance, but that is generally of little concern to us as listeners. For our aesthetic interest in jazz vocal performance is in the *projection* of personality by a manner of performing, and not in the singer's personality as a matter of fact.

As already noted, a singer reveals how she regards a song by her way of singing it. But she also shows how the song can be used to express her *personality*, or more cautiously, how the song can be used to exhibit her *performing personality*, both musical and non-musical.

10. It seems that there are generally two basic approaches to interpreting a vocal standard: (1) treating the song as an intimate communication--for example, as a whispered confession, a heartfelt plea, or an avowal of love--directed to one other person; and (2) treating the song as a public pronouncement, meant for anyone and everyone to hear, even if textually addressed to a particular individual. Which of

these approaches a singer adopts may itself be an expression of her personality or, more cautiously, contribute to the emergence of the singer's *performing* personality. But apart from that, it seems important to grasp which of these contrasting global approaches is in effect in order to adequately gauge both the aptness and the import of what the singer is doing on the small-scale level of specific inflections of rhythm, melody, timbre and so on.

Of course, not every standard lends itself easily or naturally to both of these approaches, which we may label, respectively, *intimist* and *publicist*. Some standards would seem to work only one way, for instance, the intimist approach for "My Funny Valentine" or "Darn That Dream" or "One for My Baby", the publicist approach for "My Way" or "I've Got the World on a String" or "The Lady Is a Tramp". Certain songs seem to demand one approach but not the other; those that cry out for publicist treatment, in particular, are often songs that seem to have the idea of an audience of many built into them, that are conceived as having a message for all the world to hear, and not just one special person. Of course it is not always evident at first blush which approach works best for a given song, if in fact it is amenable to both. For example, one might think that the standard "You Don't Know What Love Is"^x, probably the most poignant and wrenching in the whole canon of jazz ballads, must, in virtue of that character, call for an intimist approach on the part of the singer. But it would, in fact, be odd to think of the song as directed toward the person who has ostensibly broken the heart of the song's despairing protagonist. A more natural take on the song, rather, is that its gloomy

heartbreak is something the singer wants, even needs, others to hear and to acknowledge, so as to afford the amorous sufferer some sort of consoling sympathy.

11. So far I have said little about whether in singing a jazz standard a particular way the singer can communicate something, not about *herself*, nor about the *content* of the song, but about the *music* of the song narrowly construed, something going beyond the minimal suggestion that the song is musically effective when so sung. I suppose that, as with classical performance, some ways of phrasing a song in jazz context will make its melodic, rhythmic, thematic or implied harmonic structure clearer than others, or will draw attention more than others to unifying structural features.

As an example, consider Cole Porter's "All of You". This short song is cleverly constructed out of motivic cells, namely, pairs of repeated notes and rising seconds, and the repeating verbal motto 'of you', which permeate the song and give it a singular coherence.^{xi} A singer might very well sing this song so as to underline this fact of its construction, though he would have to take care not to overdo it in order to avoid falling into didacticism.

Such an interpretation might thus perhaps be said to *affirm* a song's having the structural features it does. But note that a jazz reading of a song might achieve that sort of effect, of affirming a song's structure, not by emphasizing the features in question, but instead by deliberately downplaying them, so that listeners familiar with the song were made more conscious of those features through their having

been made less prominent in the reading at hand.

12. Consider, finally, a question about interpretation on the listener's rather than the performer's part. To what extent is the audience of a jazz vocal interpretation engaged in *interpreting* the singer's interpretation? If we allow that appreciating such an interpretation requires interpreting it in turn, what does such appreciative interpreting amount to? Is there anything special about the appreciative interpreting that is involved when one seeks to understand a performative *interpretation* of a song, as opposed to seeking to understand the song *itself*, apart from particular performances, by critically interpreting it? Such appreciative interpreting is clearly not a species of *performative* interpreting--one doesn't *sing* the singer's rendition of a song in understanding or appreciating it--but neither does it seem entirely assimilable to *critical* interpreting, with its plausible hypotheses of intent to convey articulate meanings.

So exactly what sort of interpreting is it? Despite my leaning earlier on an inferential model of what a performer's interpretation of a standard might be said to convey, the listener's interpretation of a singer's interpretation seems, on reflection, more akin to finely backgrounded *perceiving* of a performance than it does to explicit *hypothesizing* about the performance on the basis of evidence. The truth may be that it is a perceiving pervaded and inflected by subconscious, or deeply backgrounded, hypothesizing, which hypothesizing may, however, be brought to light in subsequent reflection on one's perception, in an attempt to justify the

rightness of that perception.

13. To illustrate in more detail some of my observations I now take a close look at a particular standard, Cole Porter's "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To". This song has a straightforward 32-bar form, consisting of two 16-bar strains, the second being a simple variant of the first.

Though tempo choice is always a crucial factor in a singer's rendition of a standard, with this song choice of tempo is of more than usual significance. Taken at a fast swing tempo, a singer of this song can readily convey an impression of hipness and cool, while taken at a slow swing tempo, a singer of the song can readily convey an impression of warmth and vulnerability. As suggested earlier, such impressions might be referred by the listener either to the *song*, in which case they would be understood as indicative of different potentials the song affords for convincing realization; or else to the *singer*, in which case they would be understood as indicative of the singer's performing personality; or they might be understood in *both* ways.

Consider next some instances of small-scale performative interpretive choices a singer might make in singing this song. (i) In the very opening, measures 1-4, syncopating the phrase by putting a strong accent on 'be', holding 'be', 'so', and 'nice' for two beats each, could be said to impart a punchy, masculine character to the phrase, as does a similar treatment of 'au', 'gust', and 'moon' in measure 21. It also serves, in that opening phrase, to emphasize the thematically

unimportant word ‘be’, which could be said to put some distance between the singer and the song’s sentiment, or at least to suggest a view of that sentiment that’s more on the “outside” than the “inside”. (ii) By contrast, in that same opening phrase, holding ‘so’ for six beats boosts the amplificatory force of the adverb, imparting a sort of swoony tenderness to the phrase. (iii) In the second phrase, measures 4-8, entering two beats late, or “laying back”, conveys something like nonchalance or languorousness. (iv) And in the fifth phrase, measures 16-19, interpolating the words ‘that were’ before ‘chilled’, in addition to producing more musical motion, conveys a touch of confidence, of someone at ease with what he has to say and willing to depart from his script.

It is instructive to note the divergent characters that different singers impart to this song in performance through both the individual musical choices they make and the basic features of their voices, and to witness the performing personalities that emerge as a result.^{xiii} Helen Merrill, for instance, in her reading of this standard, regularly lays back, beginning phrases after the beat, and stretching out long notes; together with her singular timbre, this produces the image of a warm, confident, and sincere personality. Anita O’Day’s rendition, by contrast, a product of her distinctive voice quality and singular diction, is seductive, flirty, devil-may-care, suggesting a woman on the verge of inebriation, only just suppressing a wicked laugh. Sarah Vaughan’s traversal of the song, from a live performance, unmistakably exudes confidence, but also a romantic vulnerability, due in part to her extended vibrato at the ends of many phrases. Diane Schuur’s interpretation is

rather complex, her opening and closing choruses exhibiting a marked contrast: the persona of the first is honest and straight-talking, the kind of woman who could never deceive you, while that of the second is rather more volatile, capable of flights of fancy, as suggested by the singer's exploitation of her powerful upper register. Finally, Cheryl Bentley's performance, the most recent of the five, with its fast tempo, smooth, slightly clipped delivery, and seamlessly integrated bits of scat, gives the impression of a cool, professional, unflappable personality.

In many modes of artmaking it may be possible for the artist to more or less hide from his or her audience. That is, it may be possible for viewers or listeners to understand and appreciate what is offered artistically, and yet form little idea of the personality, or at any rate the persona, of the artist. But jazz singing, I venture to suggest in closing, is not one of those modes.

14. In conclusion, a few further observations.

First, it should be underlined that the performing personality manifested in a vocalist's interpretation of a *given* standard will not necessarily be that which is manifested in her performance of *another* standard, nor even that manifested in her performance of the same standard on a different *occasion*. The manifesting of performing personality on which I have focused attention is a performance-and-occasion specific phenomenon. That said, it would be surprising if the performing personality that manifested itself through one performance of a given singer did not bear a significant resemblance to that manifested through another such

performance.

Second, jazz singers in their interpretations of standards often quite naturally assume a role, in effect impersonating the protagonist internal to the standard in question, a protagonist who may very well not square with the singer's real personality or situation. In such cases, our sense of the personality that the singer projects through her interpretation—our sense of what I have labeled the singer's *performing personality* as conveyed by her interpretation—is mediated by the way the singer inhabits and presents the song's internal persona. This was illustrated earlier in my discussion of "My Heart Belongs to Daddy", a song that has a clearly defined protagonist, one that as it happens will not match up with any male singer.^{xiii}

Third, in considering what is conveyed about her performing personality by a vocalist's interpretation of a song, I have focused entirely on the vocalist's *vocal* interpretation of the song, that is to say, her manner of *singing* it. But, of course, a vocalist's interpretation of a song is not necessarily confined to that. To the extent that the singer has exerted control over, or influence upon, the total musical arrangement, that might also be said to enter into her interpretation of a given standard in a *broad* sense, if not into her narrowly *vocal* interpretation of it. But whereas the singer's *vocal* interpretation is immediately accessible to a listener passably familiar with the standard in question, a singer's *broad* interpretation of a standard, in the sense just sketched, remains largely opaque to listeners, since it is not generally evident to what extent the singer has chosen or endorsed the non-

vocal aspects of the version of a song she presents.

Fourth, until now I have not taken any note of that aspect of a singer's interpretation of a standard which resides in how she *reacts to* and *interacts with* the other members of the ensemble—that is, her sidemen—an aspect in which her musical sensitivity and improvisational skill are very much to the fore. And the way in which the singer shows awareness of and responds musically to what her sidemen are doing can certainly manifest something of her performing personality in the sense I have been underlining. Still, although the singer's interaction with her sidemen during their solos--through overlaid phrases, echoed figures, superimposed scatting, and the like--as well as any reflections of their solos in her later choruses, is naturally an important part of her overall jazz *performance*, it is not, I think, a central part of her *interpretation* of the standard as such. That is to say, it is normally not a primary vehicle of how she views or feels the standard, of how it speaks to her or how it strikes her. Hence my justification for having mostly neglected that aspect of jazz singing in the present study.^{xiv}

ENDNOTES

i. For more on this distinction, see my “Performative versus Critical Interpretation in Music”, in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

ii. See Jeanette Bicknell, “Just a Song? Exploring the Aesthetics of Popular Song Performance”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63 (2005): 261-70, for some observations on the relevance of the last-mentioned factors.

iii. Of course someone unfamiliar with a given song may form a reasonable conjecture as to a singer's departure from the song as written, especially if it is in a familiar style, but that will fall short of *knowledge* of what is or isn't a feature of the song in its official or standard version.

iv. The same point could be made using another Cole Porter song, “Love for Sale”, whose protagonist is implied to be a young female prostitute.

v. I address the issue of non-audible dimensions of a singer’s interpretation of a standard at the end of section 8.

vi. This is not to deny that the best instrumental jazz players often *do* keep the text and its meaning in mind and, moreover, claim that their improvisations indeed *reflect* that.

vii. The last stanza in its entirety is as follows: “You fill my eager heart with such desire/Every kiss you give, sets my soul on fire/I give myself in sweet surrender/My one and only love.”

viii. In a jazz club in Washington I once heard this song performed by a singer who must have been sensitive to this problem in the text. His solution was to alter, perhaps unthinkingly, the first occurrence of ‘give’ to ‘bring’, so that that line went “Every kiss you bring, sets my soul on fire”.

ix. See my “Performative versus Critical Interpretation in Music”.

x. Some of the character of this song can be gleaned from how it ends: “until you’ve faced each dawn with sleepless eyes, you don’t know what love is”, but of course much of the sad import is also carried by the music apart from the lyrics.

^{xi} This motto occurs no less than nine times in the song’s scant eight lines.

xii. Details on the recordings commented on are as follows: Helen Merrill, New York, 1954, with C. Brown, J. Jones, B. Galbraith, M. Hinton, O. Johnson [EmArcy 814 643-2]; Anita O’Day, New York, 1959, with Billy May and His Orchestra [Verve 849 266-2]; Sarah Vaughan, Chicago, 1958, with W. Culley, T. Jones, F. Wess, R. Bright, R. Davis, R. Haynes [Verve 314 516986-2]; Diane Schuur, Los Angeles, 1999, with N. Tempo, E. Richards, A. Broadbent, C. Borghofer, L. Marable [Atlantic 83150-2]; Cheryl Bentley, New York, 2002, with K. Barron, L. Nash, J. Patitucci [Telarc 83583].

^{xiii} Thus in such cases there are at least three sorts of “personality” in play: a) the singer’s *real*, or at least publically accessible, personality; b) the singer’s *performing* personality as manifested on that occasion; c) the *persona* internal to a standard that the singer must assume in performing that standard. As I have already indicated, there may sometimes be significant tension between a) and c), whose relationship is a crucial factor in the generation of b). Unsurprisingly, such tension may sometimes issue in an unsatisfactory interpretation, one that fails to hold up or hang together. But other times it may issue in comic or poignant effects, or simply impart an ironic or knowing cast to the singer’s interpretation of the song.

xiv. Thanks to audiences in Prague, Paris, Chicoutimi, Nancy, Amherst, Baltimore, Ithaca and Hong Kong, and to the editors of this special issue, for valuable comments on this essay at various stages of its development.