



Examining Tori Kelly's Vocal Improvisation on the Song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing"

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE INFO
<p>This study examines the vocal improvisation in the performance of "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" from the movie Sing to improve the general comprehension of vocal methods in popular jazz music. This study aims to fill the vacuum in the current literature on vocal improvisation by studying the song's repertoire, with a particular focus on the vocal components. Researchers utilize a descriptive qualitative approach to observe and analyze the music directly, supplemented by intense listening sessions, to reveal the subtleties of vocal delivery. The goal is to explore the complex vocal improvisations that define the song, emphasizing how these aspects contribute to its overall artistic expression. This study not only provides instructional value for budding musicians but also enhances the general audience's understanding and enjoyment of jazz improvisation. This research offers a helpful update to existing knowledge by providing extensive insights into the vocal improvisation techniques used in "Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing". It addresses the need for more thorough data in this area. The findings emphasize the significance of improvisation in jazz, demonstrating how impromptu voice alterations can augment a song's emotional profundity and dynamic scope. The primary objective of this study is to enhance the comprehension and admiration of vocal improvisation among a broader range of people, promoting a more thorough involvement with jazz music and stimulating the growth of personal musical abilities and expressions.</p> <p>© 2024 Kantor Jurnal dan Publikasi UPI</p>	<p>Article History: <i>Submitted/Received 27 Apr 2024</i> <i>First Revised 27 Apr 2024</i> <i>Accepted 30 Apr 2024</i> <i>First Available online 15 May 2024</i> <i>Publication Date 31 May 2024</i></p> <hr/> <p>Keyword: <i>Popular music,</i> <i>Vocal jazz,</i> <i>Jazz music,</i> <i>Vocal scat,</i> <i>Vocal improvisation</i></p>

1. INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the repertoire of the song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing", especially the vocal part, to increase the wider public's knowledge about vocal improvisation in popular jazz music. Jazz is music from black Americans that emphasizes improvisation, rhythm, and syncopation and is accompanied by special instruments (Dorsey, 2001; Brown, 1991). There is one defining characteristic that is the same among various styles of jazz music, namely improvisation (Kamoche, et al., 2003; Martinez, et al., 2022). Jazz can be described as music that is rooted in improvisation (Elliot, 1995). In vocal jazz music, vocal improvisation (including scat singing) (Suhor, 1986) has been carried out in Indonesia; at least, its existence is recognized as an inseparable element in vocal jazz.

"Don't Worry 'Bout a Thing" is one of the songs used in the 2016 musical animated film "Sing". The film was produced by Illumination Entertainment, which is also known as the studio behind films such as "Despicable Me" and "Minions". "Don't Worry 'Bout a Thing", originally sung by Stevie Wonder, was used in the film "Sing" as part of the soundtrack. In the context of the film's story, this song is sung by a character voiced by Tori Kelly, namely an elephant named Mina. Mina is one of the participants in a singing competition held by Koala Theatre. The owner of this theatre is Buster Moon, whom Matthew McConaughey voices. This song is used as one of the crucial moments in the film, expressing Mina's character's feelings and journey in pursuing her dream in the field of music. With optimistic lyrics, this song conveys that despite challenges and obstacles, there is no need to worry and keep fighting to achieve our goals. Overall, "Don't Worry 'Bout a Thing" adds an emotional and motivational dimension to the context of the story of "Sing" and is one of the memorable moments in the film.

The vocal improvisation on the song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing", developed by Tori Kelly, is a creative way to add a different touch to the song. The following are some ideas for vocal improvisation that Tori Kelly expressed in the song "Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing": alternative melody, vocal play, vocal scales and licks, harmonization, change of style, improvisation on the instrumental part, emotional expression and change of rhythm.

This research aims to fulfil the assignment for a scientific writing course and to increase the wider public's knowledge about vocal improvisation in popular jazz music through the song repertoire "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing". The benefits that researchers provide in making this journal article are to increase the reader's knowledge regarding vocal improvisation, which includes the creativity and expression of a singer in expressing a song, the development of vocal style in a song, musical communication skills, knowledge of harmony and melody, understanding of dynamics, improved musical listening skills, and increased musical awareness. This article was prepared because more data sources about vocal improvisation were needed to update readers and increase knowledge about vocal improvisation, which can help them hone their musical skills and dig deeper into a song's musical expression.

2. METHODS

The research methodology employed in this study is the descriptive qualitative approach, which involves directly observing and assessing the musical elements of the song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" as performed in the film Sing while also paying close attention to the song's audio. *Descriptive qualitative research* is an effective method to acquire a profound comprehension and meticulous depiction of events (Fuster Guillen, 2019). Within the framework of this study, the descriptive qualitative approach entails a methodical analysis of

the vocal improvisation aspects included in the song. We carefully observe many performance factors, such as voice methods, stylistic decisions, and interpretive nuances. This technique enables us to capture the fundamental nature of vocal improvisation, elucidating how the artist's impromptu ingenuity and expressive choices contribute to the overall influence of the song.

Directly listening to the song is an essential element of this approach. The process entails conducting multiple concentrated listening sessions to discern particular occurrences of improvisation, deviations in vocal rendition, and the interaction between the vocalist and the musical accompaniment. Through this approach, researchers can record and analyze the improvisational methods, including scat singing, melodic ornamentation, and rhythmic deviations. The descriptive qualitative method also highlights the significance of the situation in which the improvisation takes place. It entails evaluating the song's position within the film *Sing*, its derivation from the initial composition by Stevie Wonder, and its more significant classification within the popular jazz music genre. By comprehending these contextual aspects, academics may offer a more comprehensive analysis of the improvisational practices exhibited in music. The main objective of a descriptive qualitative approach is to provide a comprehensive and nuanced depiction of the vocal improvisation phenomena. This methodology allows the researchers to emphasize the improvisational components' attributes, essence, and contextual significance, offering valuable perspectives beyond superficial observation. The method generates extensive descriptions that can be used as an instructional resource to enhance the public's awareness and comprehension of vocal improvisation in popular jazz music.

3. RESULTS

Jazz is a music genre that originated in the United States during the early 20th century (Levine, 1989). Jazz music is distinguished by its prominent use of improvisation, intricate rhythms, and harmonies that frequently deviate from the musical norms found in other genres (Bauer, 2014; Palmer, 2016). Jazz has evolved into numerous styles and genres, including ragtime, swing, bebop, cool jazz, modal jazz, fusion, and others. Improvisation is a notable attribute of jazz music. Vocal improvisation is a fundamental component of the jazz music genre (Madura Ward-Steinman, 2008). In jazz, vocal improvisation entails the unrestricted expression of oneself (Torrance & Schumann, 2019). Improvisation in jazz singing allows for the unrestricted expression of one's self, the exploration of many melodic variations, and the creative response to the music performed by the band or ensemble.

Tori Kelly is a renowned vocalist who is noted for her exceptional singing abilities. Tori Kelly, mainly recognized as a pop and R&B vocalist, has showcased her aptitude for spontaneous vocal improvisation, particularly within jazz. Tori Kelly's inventive vocal improvisation on the song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" adds a unique and innovative element to the tune. Tori Kelly demonstrates several vocal improvisation techniques in the song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing," including the use of alternate melodies, vocal play, vocal scales and licks, harmonization, stylistic alterations, improvisation on instrumental sections, emotional expression, and rhythmic variations.

The song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" is included in the animated musical film "Sing". Stevie Wonder initially composed the song and gained popularity when it was included in his 1973 album "Innervisions". However, within the framework of the film "Sing," this particular song is performed by the elephant character, whose voice is provided by Tori Kelly. The song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" prominently features jazz influences, mainly showcased through the fervent scat singing performance. It imparts a unique jazz influence to the tune.

The vocal improvisation on the song "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing", developed by Tori Kelly, is a creative way to add a different touch to the song. Here are some vocal improvisation ideas that Tori Kelly expressed in the song "Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing":

- a. Melody variations by adding small vocal jumps or ornamentation to several/one phrase or sentence
- b. Scat Singing / Scat Vocal, using non-sensical sounds or imitation of instruments as an exploration of singing techniques
- c. Expressing emotions by emphasizing emotional expressions in several words or tones
- d. Varying Dynamics, by reducing and increasing the volume and intensity of the sound in some parts
- e. Playing with rhythm by increasing/decreasing the tempo in the melody she sings
- f. Interact with the accompaniment instruments by playing the same note as the accompaniment / responding to the accompaniment
- g. Using other vocal techniques such as Mix Voice and Riff n Run: (a) *Mix Voice* is a vocal technique in which a singer combines or "mixes" elements from the two central vocal registers: chest voice and head voice (Miller & Schutte, 2005); (b) Riff n Run is complex and often fast melodic variations and vocal playing.
- h. Play notes by adding notes

3.1 Repertoire Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing by Stevie Wonder

The original melody of Stevie Wonder's "Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing" is captivating and complex, incorporating gradual and sudden movements that provide a feeling of unpredictability and enthusiasm. During vocal improvisation, an artist can enhance their performance by experimenting with various melodic variations, including the utilization of nearby tones, passing tones, and embellishments. For example, one could explore diatonic and chromatic techniques, such as inserting grace notes or incorporating melodic sequences that mimic the original yet deviate in surprising manners. An adept improviser may also modify the shape of the melody, accentuating specific tones or establishing new focus points that amplify the emotional resonance of the performance. The harmonic progression of "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" is intricate, showcasing jazz-infused chords that create a lavish foundation for improvisation. Singers can manipulate these harmonies by highlighting specific chord tones or introducing tensions and resolutions that enhance the complexity of the performance. For instance, a vocalist may emphasize the 9ths, 11ths, or 13ths of chords or employ approach notes to generate a feeling of expectation and resolution. In addition, modal interchange can be used to introduce chords from parallel modes, which adds a level of intricacy and unexpectedness. Comprehending the fundamental harmonic framework empowers the vocalist to make well-informed decisions that are in harmony with the emotional and musical context of the song.

incorporating emotive features like growls, cries, or whispers. By accurately perceiving and understanding the emotional trajectory of the song and promptly reacting to it, a singer can generate a compelling and poignant rendition that profoundly affects the audience.

In order to achieve successful vocal improvisation on "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing," it is essential to seamlessly combine and execute these several methods in a unified and impromptu manner. Proficiency in this task necessitates a profound comprehension of the composition's framework and genre and the capacity to adapt to the musical context creatively. An improviser must strike a harmonious equilibrium between premeditation and impromptu actions, utilizing their technical expertise and musical intuition to craft a groundbreaking performance that is faithful to the original composition's essence. Integrating melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and emotive components, a vocalist can convert "Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing" into a distinctive and enthralling musical encounter.

3.2 Repertoire Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing by Tori Kelly

Tori Kelly's vocal improvisation on "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" in the film "Sing" showcases her exceptional vocal range, technical skill, and emotional intensity. Her rendition brings a lively and invigorating interpretation to the timeless song made famous by Stevie Wonder. This comprehensive examination showcases her unique changes and methodologies, illustrating how she revitalizes the piece by incorporating subtle and apparent alterations.

- a. In the opening segment, Tori Kelly incorporates subtle alterations to the original tune, establishing a unique and distinct rendition of her own. By modifying specific notes and phrases, she enhances the performance with a distinct sense of personality. These little modifications in melody distinguish her performance from Stevie Wonder's and highlight her innovative method of interpreting popular tunes. Even slight alterations can significantly impact the listener's experience, adding originality and freshness to the familiar melody.



Figure 2. Varied melodic patterns

- b. Tori Kelly prioritizes emotional expression in her future endeavors. It is apparent in her vocal delivery, as she produces notes that closely resemble the accompanying instruments. This method, called vocal imitation, enables her to merge with the musical background effortlessly, resulting in a unified and melodious auditory environment. While synchronizing her notes with the instruments, the singer's capacity to express emotions through her voice showcases her exceptional technical proficiency and profound musicality.



Figure 3. Emotional expression and instrumental imitation patterns

- c. Tori Kelly's skillful manipulation of rhythm is especially remarkable in the passage where she utilizes the Riff n Run approach, explicitly emphasizing the Run component. In this instance, she diverges from the original rhythmic framework of the song by incorporating syncopation and modifying the speed. The utilization of rhythmic experimentation in the performance imbues it with a feeling of spontaneity and exhilaration. The Riff n Run style, known for its rapid and nimble runs and complicated riffs, demonstrates her vocal agility and skill in performing intricate patterns accurately.



Figure 4. Exploration of rhythm and the riff n run technique

- d. In another segment, Kelly delves deeper into melodic variations, combining them with intensified emotional expression. She utilizes the Mix Chest Voice technique, which combines the strength of the chest voice with the more delicate timbre of the head voice, resulting in a sonorous and vibrant sound. In addition, her utilization of Riff n Run in this section amplifies her performance's emotional intensity. Through the amalgamation of various techniques, she produces a captivating and dynamic rendering that enthralles the listener with its profound expressiveness and intricate technicality.

The image displays three lines of musical notation. The first line is on a treble clef staff and includes lyrics: 'a change___ a chance to take___ out the new_____ year'. The second line is on a bass clef staff and includes lyrics: 'You're the on-ly___ one___ who. sees_____ the chan-ges you take___ your self through_'. The third line is on a treble clef staff, starting with a measure number '60' above the staff, and shows a complex melodic run with many sixteenth notes. The lyrics are not present for this line.

Figure 5. Exploration melodic variations and evoking emotional depth

- e. Kelly demonstrates her expertise in dynamics in the passage, employing the Mix Chest Voice and Riff n Run techniques while modulating the loudness from gentle to loud. This wide range of dynamics enhances the performance by emphasizing her mastery of vocal intensity. Her superior vocal skill and talent are evident in her seamless

transitions between different volumes and her ability to maintain clarity and precision in her runs and riffs. The dynamic shifts not only demonstrate her vocal prowess but also intensify the emotional resonance of the song.



Figure 6. Principles of movement and methods for producing sound with the voice

- f. Scat vocals refer to a singing style in which the vocalist uses improvised vocal sounds and rhythms instead of actual words. This style involves the vocalist interacting with the accompanist, who provides musical support. An exceptionally inventive element of Kelly's improvisation is her use of scat voices. She utilizes incomprehensible words and vowel sounds within this particular segment, imitating. She was identifying the features of musical instruments. Kelly utilizes this approach, known as vocal imitation, to mimic instrumental sounds or create non-lexical vocables, enabling her to explore her vocal powers fully. Her scat singing introduces a jazz improvisational quality to the performance, fostering a dynamic and participatory exchange with the accompanist. This musical and theatrical engagement demonstrates her capacity to engage with other musicians dynamically and spontaneously actively.

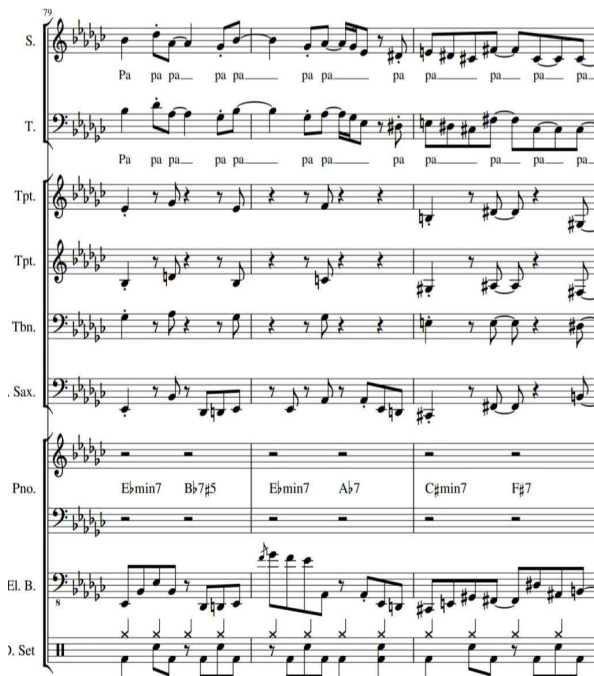


Figure 7. Scat vocals

- g. Tori Kelly skillfully combines all these components at the song's end, resulting in a compelling and heartfelt conclusion. She modifies the melody by incorporating her distinctive embellishments and highlights the intensity of feeling and the changes in loudness, singing at a high decibel level that demands notice. Employing the Mix Chest Voice and Riff n Run techniques, she presents a concluding performance that is technically remarkable and profoundly touching. The breadth of emotions she can express, and her unwavering technical accuracy is a testament to her artistic prowess and vocal aptitude.

The image shows three staves of musical notation for a vocal performance. The first staff (measures 96-98) shows the vocal line with lyrics: "Don't you wor-ry 'bout a thing!". The second staff (measures 92-98) shows a vocal line with lyrics: "Whoah", "Ooh", "Ah", and "Whoah". The third staff (measures 89-91) shows a vocal line with lyrics: "- din' for you" and "Oh". The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 8. Peak with an emotional and dynamic display

4. DISCUSSION

Jazz music is distinguished by its rich tradition of improvisation, setting it apart from other musical genres. Jazz musicians believe that the genre uniquely allows for extensive improvisation without fear of mistakes, granting them the freedom to develop and expand existing themes (Coss, 2018; Oakes, 2009). This sense of freedom is closely tied to creativity and spontaneity. However, jazz improvisation is not merely an instinctual or emotional response; solid principles and techniques underpin it. Improvisation in jazz enhances a song by altering or adding to its melody without disrupting the core structure (Barrett, 2017; Kamoche & Cunha, 2001). This process demands continual novelty, ensuring that each performance of the same song is distinct. The necessity for continuous innovation often sets a high bar for creativity, requiring musicians to distinguish themselves from others and their previous performances. This relentless drive for uniqueness provides jazz musicians with resilience against imitation.

Additional nuances come into play regarding vocal improvisation in jazz. Vocalists must understand the harmonic structure of a song, including its chord progressions. This foundational knowledge is critical for effective improvisation (Bell, 2013). One essential technique for vocal improvisers is crooning—a light, conversational style of singing that requires a swing feel (Lebon, 2006). Swing, a hallmark of jazz, involves a rhythmic lilt that gives the music its groove (Liebhard, 2015). Without this feel, vocal improvisation in jazz lacks authenticity. Another advanced technique in jazz vocal improvisation is scat singing. Scat singing involves vocalizing nonsensical syllables in a rhythmically and melodically inventive manner (Bauer, 2007). This technique transforms the voice into an instrument, mirroring the phrasing and articulation of instruments like trumpets or saxophones. Mastery of scat singing requires a vocalist to possess technical proficiency and a deep sense of musicality and creativity.

Tori Kelly's rendition of "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" in the film *Sing* offers a compelling example of vocal improvisation in jazz. Kelly's performance showcases her ability to navigate the complex terrain of jazz vocal techniques while maintaining the song's infectious energy

and appeal. From the outset, Kelly's interpretation of "Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing" is imbued with spontaneity and creativity. Her vocal lines demonstrate a keen understanding of the song's harmonic structure, allowing her to weave intricate melodic variations into the piece's fabric. This ability to play off the underlying chords while introducing fresh, unexpected melodic turns is a hallmark of effective jazz improvisation.

Kelly employs crooning effectively throughout her performance, particularly in the song's more intimate moments. Her light, conversational delivery captures the essence of this technique, adding a layer of personal expression and nuance to the song. This approach enhances her performance's emotional impact and establishes a sense of rhythmic flexibility crucial for jazz singing. One of the most striking aspects of Kelly's improvisation is her use of scat singing. She seamlessly integrates scat phrases into her performance, demonstrating technical prowess and a profound musical intuition. Kelly's scat passages are rhythmically inventive and melodically engaging, serving as dynamic interludes that enhance the song's overall texture. Her ability to articulate rapid, complex sequences of syllables with precision and musicality highlights her skill as a jazz vocalist. In addition to these technical elements, Kelly's performance is characterized by a strong sense of swing. Her phrasing and rhythmic feel are deeply rooted in the jazz tradition, giving her improvisations an authentic and compelling quality. The swing feel is particularly evident in her treatment of syncopated rhythms and her ability to play with timing and dynamics, creating a lively and sophisticated performance.

Kelly's improvisational approach in "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" also reflects the broader principles of jazz. Her performance is a testament to the genre's emphasis on individuality and creativity. By continually introducing new variations and ideas, she ensures that each song rendition is unique, embodying the spirit of jazz improvisation. This commitment to innovation and personal expression makes jazz a vibrant and enduring art form. Moreover, Kelly's improvisation exemplifies the importance of technical preparation and musical knowledge in jazz. Her understanding of the song's harmonic structure, combined with her mastery of vocal techniques like crooning and scat singing, allows her to navigate the improvisational landscape confidently and creatively. This blend of technical skill and artistic intuition is essential for any jazz musician seeking to push the boundaries of their craft.

5. CONCLUSION

Tori Kelly's vocal improvisation on "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" in the film "Sing" offers a perceptive glimpse into the dynamic and intricate realm of jazz vocal performance. By examining her interpretation, we understand the fundamental elements of jazz improvisation and its importance in mainstream music. Jazz is characterized by its basis in improvisation, rhythm, and syncopation and is frequently accompanied by specialized instruments. Improvisation, a key feature in several jazz genres, enables artists to infuse their performances with originality and personal expression. Improvisation, such as scat singing, is a fundamental component of vocal jazz that has gained worldwide acceptance, especially in Indonesia. This heritage highlights the genre's dedication to ongoing innovation and personal artistic expression. Tori Kelly's rendition of "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" demonstrates her exceptional talent for seamlessly combining technical accuracy with expressive performance. Her improvisations incorporate nuanced melodic alterations, rhythmic exploration, and dynamic transitions, all of which enhance a technically proficient and emotionally evocative performance. Kelly differentiates her rendition from Stevie Wonder's by modifying the melody, imbuing it with her unique approach. The performer's utilization of vocal mimicry, in

which she synchronizes her vocal tones with the instrumental accompaniment, amplifies the unity of the performance. An outstanding feature of Kelly's performance is her adept manipulation of rhythm, explicitly using the Riff n Run approach. This technique, distinguished by fast and intricate sequences of notes, introduces a level of intricacy and exhilaration to the composition. Kelly's adeptness in modulating dynamics, seamlessly transitioning from gentle, personal sections to forceful, resonant belting, showcases her vocal energy and command proficiency. The dynamic adjustments demonstrate her exceptional singing ability and intensify the song's emotional resonance.

In addition, Kelly's utilization of scat vocals introduces a creative and light-hearted aspect to her performance. This method, which employs incoherent phrases and vocal noises to imitate musical instruments, showcases her adaptability and ingenuity as a jazz singer. Through scat singing, her engagement with the accompanist establishes a dynamic and captivating musical dialogue, showcasing her adeptness in navigating the intricacies of jazz improvisation. Tori Kelly's vocal improvisation on "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" exemplifies jazz music's fundamental ideas and techniques. Her performance exemplifies the genre's focus on individuality, inventiveness, and technical proficiency, providing a modern and innovative rendition of a timeless song. This study deepens our comprehension of jazz vocal improvisation and emphasizes its significance in popular music. By examining the subtleties in Kelly's performance, we acquire a valuable understanding of the skill and originality that characterize jazz, enhancing our understanding and admiration of this vibrant and long-lasting kind of music. Kelly's performance not only pays regard to the tradition of jazz but also actively contributes to its continuous development, serving as a source of inspiration for listeners and aspiring musicians.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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