The evolution of the jazz vocal song: what comes after the Great American Song Book


Abstract

This MA research project was originally motivated by the desire to explain the powerful dominance of standard songs from the Great American Songbook in the repertoire of jazz singers. This term refers to a large body of songs written in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, by Cole Porter, Gershwin, Rogers and Hammerstein, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin and others, often as part of musicals, which have become the standard repertoire for singers in the jazz idiom. After all, many of these songs were written over 70 years ago and both audiences and singers seem happy with that fact. However, given the advance of instrumental jazz into new vehicles, it seems sensible to analyse and explain this domination of the singer’s repertoire, whilst at the same time, come up with some pointers to the future.

Initial findings suggest the following general conclusions.
Initial findings suggest the following general conclusions.
The Great American Songbook is still dominant in the jazz vocal repertoire, but there are a number of trends to show that some singers are keen to develop new ideas. The research has found that there is a richness and variety in the contemporary jazz vocal. Whilst the domination of the Great American Songbook remains strong, there has been a major trend towards using popular songs from the 1960s to the present day, plus a body of original new songs, and lyrics being written for existing jazz tunes. Rock, folk and hip hop elements are present and a move away from a swing emphasis towards a more groove-based approach has been seen. However, in addition to new material, what has been noticed is an innovative approach to the actual performance of the song.

While some very competent exponents of the standard jazz song are filling halls and selling CDs, the flame of innovation is also thriving, in keeping with the great ability of jazz to absorb influences and reinvent itself. The portfolio of songs, submitted as part of the project, reflects this writer’s creative and musical take on the research and attempts to show the direction in which the jazz vocal song may be moving. The CD essentially contains rough demos of songs composed by the writer. They can be seen as frameworks for others to develop and interpret further.
The songs, or standards, known to us today as “The Great American Songbook” flourished from the mid 1920s to about 1950. Singer Carmen McRae popularized. Ben Yagoda, author of The B Side: The Death of Tin Pan Alley and the Rebirth of the Great American Song, believes jazz was key. Ben Yagoda: Most of those composers deeply understood jazz – and once they wrote a song, a great jazz musician could do new things with it. SL: The composition of standards dried up in the years after World War II. The Big-Band era ended, and some jazz artists went in different directions, with a greater focus on instrumental jazz. Yet jazz singers, like Ella Fitzgerald and Carmen McRae, were among those who kept the songs alive. Piano/Vocal Sheet Music. A great resource of 100 classics of American songwriting arranged for piano and voice with guitar chord frames. Songs include: All Blues; Almost Like Being in Love; As Time Goes By; Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea; Billie’s Bounce (Bill’s Bounce); Bluesette; Cherokee (Indian Love Song); Days of Wine and Roses; Django; Embraceable You; Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye; Fascinating Rhythm; Fly Me to the Moon (In Other Words); Giant Steps; How Deep Is the Ocean. (How High Is the Sky); How Long Has This Been Going On?; I Got Rhythm; It Had to Be You; Laura; Love Walked In; Mack the JT vocal jazz columnist blogs on the canon for singers. 0. By. On the society’s website. they aver that the Great American Songbook is “largely composed of songs written between 1920 and 1960 from the Tin Pan Alley era through the Broadway stages and sets of Hollywood musicals. At this point in the evolution of jazz singing, it seems ludicrous to exclude Michel Legrand, Antonio Carlos Jobim and Joni Mitchell, let alone Leonard Cohen, Charles Aznavour and Lennon & McCartney. One listen to Carmen McRae’s “Here There and Everywhere” or Kurt Elling’s “Undun” (written by Canadian Randy Bachman and inspired both by Dylan and jazz guitarist Lenny Breau) should be enough to convince any intelligent listener of the benefits of a borderless Society.