

Exploring Style in Different Genres

Different genres have different musical values. Different artists place emphasis on different components of the music.

Help your student (and yourself) increase your understanding and appreciation of different musical styles. By listening in this way you'll also influence your own ability to use style in your singing.

Things you can listen for + discuss:

Your clients, and maybe even you, tend to listen to music as either:

- a unified whole, or
- the lyric and melody (our part 😊) and "that other stuff" that's *not* the lyric and the melody.

You want to help your client discover that much of the magic of style is *in that stuff* that the instruments are contributing!

That process starts with some listening sessions. Help your client parse out the different components. You don't have to take a long time with this during any single lesson. Every time you do it you'll be investing in your client's more informed listening.

Some elements of Style

Vocal color:

Generally happening at the level of the vocal tract, vocal color can refer to:

- the way a singer shapes their vowels
- how bright or dark their sound is,
- how "twangy" or "rounded" they sound at any given point.

Embellishments or riffs:

These can come in the middle or at the end of a phrase, and can be as simple as a couple of added pitches or as florid as the singer is capable of!

Vocal texture:

Generally happening at the level of the larynx, vocal texture refers to the way a singer uses registration:

- where is it coordinated and where are they leaning into the characteristics of a register?
- Onsets with plosives vocal fry or fricatives (an "h" sound)
- yodels
- airy sounds
- straight tone
- vibrato
- "Screamo" (false vocal folds) would also fall in this category.

Melodic or rhythmic alterations:

How is the singer interpreting the melody?

- Are there little things like scoops, fall-offs, bends or vocal "flips?"
- Is the singer adding notes, stretching them out, or choosing a different melodic shape?
- Where are the changes to the established melody?

Ask your client about any of these:

- How loud or quiet are certain instruments ?
- How loud/quiet are they compared to the lead vocals?
- How rhythmic is the singing? Does the singer use the way they sing to dig into the rhythms, or to provide contrast?
- Diction is one way that singers emphasise the rhythmic elements of their melody. Where is the singer using diction to emphasis the rhythms?
- How important are the lyrics to the singer? Is the singer making sure you understand the lyrics, or not?
- What kind of melody is representative of this genre? Is the singer using a big range, or is the melody more narrative or speech-like?
- How important is the emotional content of the song(s)? Is the artist speaking to your emotions or your intellect?
- What is the instrumentation, and how is it used? For instance...
- Is the rhythmic information crucial to the song or the genre?
- Does the rhythm guitar make you want to get up and dance?
- Do the drums drive the lyrical message home? Does the piano make you want to relax in an easy chair?

Help your client understand that there is no one right answer for any any of these! Our listening changes as we become more able to differentiate musical elements. It's an exciting process!

As we become better at hearing, copying and integrating becomes possible. Copying is the best way to acquire new "vocabulary" for style.

Picking things apart

Using the discussion suggestions from page 2, what can you hear in the music of different artists? Some musical values to listen for are:

Diction: Is it important to the artist that you understand the lyric?

Rhythm: Is the artist locking their phrasing into the rhythms, or creating rhythmically looser phrases?

Groove: The word for "rhythms + musical genre," the groove often dictates how the singer presents the song. Is the singer working well with the groove? How do you know?

Keys: How is the key influencing the singer's interpretation? Are they low and gravelly, low and breathy, in their sweet spot, high and edgy, high and soaring... why?

Tempos: What does the tempo do tfor the message of the song?

Embellish-ments: Is the singer choosing a narrative delivery? What types of styling are they using? Are they riffing? Where or how much?

Having thought about the elements on page 3, you'll notice that different artists make different choices. Sometimes the choices are deliberate, and sometimes intuitive.

Listen to some artists to consider what some of their musical values might be.

What's Important to...

- John Mayor (blues/rock)
- Rhianna (hiphop)
- Justin Timberlake (dance/pop)
- Billie Eilish (singer/songwriter)
- Kaycee Musgraves (country)
- Diana Krall (jazz)
- OK Go (pop/rock)
- Pink (edgy rock)
- Alicia Keys (pop ballads)
- Chance the Rapper (rap/hiphop)

Integrating skills

Get next to rhythm

Ideas:

Sing the melody without lyrics; either a single sound like "da," nonsense, or scat. Pay attention to the rhythm of the melody.

- Is the melody syncopated?
- Do important words land squarely on beats?
- What else can you notice?

Practice physically tapping out the beat while:

- Level 1: Sing a simple melody - either nonsense syllables or the actual lyrics.
- Level 2: Sing something more difficult. Uptown Funk can be used for this exercise. You can start on the outro to get the hang of it, and/or use the spoken section.

Tiny Bits of Copying

Select 2-8 measures of a particular performance of a song and learn to copy it as closely as you can. This will take a while. It's like putting the singer under a microscope.

Take the time to learn the things that do not come naturally to you.

Listen for every little thing:

- How does the artist *start* each phrase?
- What registration are they using (low head register is really breathy)?
- Where are the scoops?
- Where is there straight tone and where is there vibrato?
- Melodic embellishments? Break them down and then loop them until they're easy (something between 10 and 200 times).
- Are there slides or fall-offs?
- Where is the singer loud and where are they quiet?
- Is the diction crisp, sloppy, or both?

If there are things you just can't get your voice to do for now, that's ok. Get as much as you can, then apply your skills to another phrase.

Most of all.. *have fun!*