KS5

OCR AoS2: Popular song – Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra

by Jane Werry

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INTRODUCTION

One of the attractive features of the OCR A level syllabus is the thoroughly enjoyable repertoire covered by this particular Area of Study. However, while the songs themselves have instant appeal, it can be difficult to know where to start in giving students a thorough understanding of the musical style and its historical context.

For Section A of the A level exam, students will listen to an unfamiliar song from the Area of Study, and are asked to comment on its musical features and how it fits into its context. In Section B, they will be asked to compare one of their set works with another recording of the same song, and also answer a more general question about the set works.

These questions require a thorough knowledge of the history of vocal jazz, as well as the ability to identify musical features aurally and describe them accurately using correct terminology. There is a quantity of factual information that students will need readily to hand, and frequent retrieval of that information will be required in order to embed it in the long-term memory. Practical experience of performing the works and manipulating their features through creative work will help with aural identification of stylistic fingerprints.

Presenting the 'big picture' and the bare facts using a knowledge organiser

To assist with the construction of the mental models that students require to build a new topic in their long-term memory, they need to begin with a framework – an idea of the scope of the Area of Study, and an overview of what it is that they will be learning. This will enable them to start to make links with things they have learnt previously, and begin to contextualise their knowledge.

A knowledge organiser is a very effective way of doing this. It compiles the basic facts and terminology that students need to know in one place, and while it doesn't include everything they'll need to know for the Area of Study, it covers the essentials and gives a structure to their thinking.

On a more practical level, it can also be used for regular quizzing and retrieval practice that will consolidate students' knowledge. Simply by blanking out one of the columns, you can provide easy, low-stakes tests to help embed the most important facts. Ideally, quizzes of this kind need to take place frequently, throughout the course: this kind of revisiting of factual information imprints it on students' long-term memories. This minimises the need for revision at the end of the course and enables students to concentrate on applying their knowledge in exam-type situations.

Students will need to get to know their songs very well, so make sure that they have access to audio files of the set works. As time goes by, you can add comparison recordings of the same songs, or other wider repertoire that will help students' understanding of the Area of Study.

Here is a knowledge organiser for AoS2, showing the set works for 2018 and 2019:

Area of Study 2: 2018 – Ella Fitzgerald, Cole Porter Songbook		
Verve records, 1956. Music and lyrics for all songs by Cole Porter. Producer: Norman Granz. Arranger: Buddy Bregman.		
Song	**Composed**	**Musical features**
1. Anything Goes	1934, for musical *Anything Goes* and singer Ethel Merman	32-bar song form in choruses.
2. Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye	1944, for musical revue *Seven Lively Arts*	32-bar song form variant ABA^1B^1, omits introduction from printed version of song.
3. Let's Do It	1928, for musical *Paris.* Became a hit song in the 1920s.	32-bar song form.
4. Too Darn Hot	1948, for musical *Kiss Me, Kate.*	Irregular 20-bar pattern with two melodic ideas and a 16-bar bridge.

Area of Study 2: 2019 – Frank Sinatra, Classic Sinatra 1953-60		
Capitol records, 2000: all songs previously released by Capitol on other Sinatra albums.		
Song	**Composed**	**Recording details, notable features**
1. I've Got The World On A String	**Music:** Harold Arlen. **Lyrics:** Ted Koehler **Written:** 1932 for a show at the **Cotton Club** in New York.	1956 for album ***This Is Sinatra.*** First Sinatra song arranged by **Nelson Riddle** – Capitol were hoping a new sound might increase sales. 32-bar song form.
2. They Can't Take That Away From Me	**Music:** George Gershwin. **Lyrics:** Ira Gershwin **Written:** 1937 for film ***Shall We Dance*****,** featuring **Fred Astaire** and Ginger Rogers.	1954 for album ***Songs For Young Lovers***. Arranged by **George Siravo.** 32-bar song form. A very short arrangement – the album was originally released on 10' disc.
3. I've Got You Under My Skin	**Music & lyrics:** Cole Porter **Written:** 1936 for film ***Born To Dance,*** sung by Virginia Bruce.	1956 for album ***Songs For Swingin' Lovers.*** Arranged by **Nelson Riddle.** Through-composed AAB structure.
4. Come Fly With Me	**Music:** James Van Heusen. **Lyrics:** Sammy Cahn **Written:** 1957, specially for Sinatra's album.	1957 as opening song for album ***Come Fly With Me*** featuring songs about travel. Arranged by **Billy May**. Irregular AA^1BA^2 56-bar structure.

Jazz terminology	
1. Blues, bluesy, blue note	12-bar blues chord pattern, notes characteristic of blues scale.
2. Break	A change in texture from the rest of the song, solo/instrumental.
3. Call and response	Question and answer phrases between musicians.
4. Changes	The chords in a jazz piece.
5. Comping	Rhythmic chords usually played by piano.
6. Doit	Sliding upwards from a note.
7. Fall-off	Sliding downwards from a note.
8. Four-beat	Accompaniment with emphasis on all four beats of bar (contrast **two-beat** with emphasis on 1 and 3).
9. Front line	The melodic instruments in the band, plus any vocalist.
10. Horn	In jazz, any blown instrument.
11. Idiomatic	Particularly characteristic of the instrument, voice or style.
12. Mute	Put in bell of brass instruments to alter sound. **Straight, cup, harmon** and **plunger** are types.
13. Riff	Repeating melodic or rhythmic pattern.

14. Rubato	Expressive changes in tempo within a phrase.
15. Rhythm section	Or **back line.** Drums, bass, piano, guitar/banjo.
16. Scat	Vocal improvisation with nonsense syllables.
17. Smear	Scooping up to a note.
18. Stride	Piano style with alternating bass notes and chords in LH.
19. Stop-time	Reduced accompaniment with chords on first beat and a gap for melody to shine.
20. Swing	Type of jazz; also **swung rhythm** with uneven quavers.
21. Tailgate	Slide played on trombone.
22. Walking bass	Even bass notes outlining notes of chord.
Context: background info	
1. Blues	Style of vocal music from early 20th century, grew out of spirituals originally sung by slaves. **Country blues** includes **Delta blues** with voice and acoustic guitar; **Texas blues** was from 1940s/1950s and closer to jazz; **Memphis blues** was upbeat and for dancing.
2. Vaudeville	Public entertainment in theatres, early 20th century, with songs and dances.
3. Tin Pan Alley	Street in NYC where song publishers tried out, bought and sold songs.
4. Plugger	Someone employed to get songs performed in as many places as possible.
5. Piano roll	**Punched roll of paper** enabling a song to be played on a **player piano**.
6. Radio	Proliferated in US and UK from 1920s, made recordings more important than sheet music.
7. Microphone	Used from late 1920s onwards. Changed singing technique and improved recording quality. Before this, **acoustic recording**.
7. LP	**Long-playing disc**: **12' vinyl** played at **33rpm**, enabling much longer collection of songs than previously possible on **78rpm shellac** discs.
8. 32-bar song form	Most common structure for songs: **AABA** with **8-bar phrases**.
9. Jazz	Grew out of **blues**. Includes **improvisation**, **syncopation**, generally played by a band.
10. Swing	**Big-band jazz** from 1930s and 1940s with emphasis on **swung rhythms** and a **backbeat**. **Count Basie and Glenn Miller**.

The Section A question in the specimen paper asks how the song (Bessie Smith's recording of 'Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out') is characteristic of popular song of the 1920s.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For Section A of the exam, students need to have a good understanding of the historical context of the period. They will listen to an unfamiliar song, and questions may include asking for details about how the song is characteristic of its decade or style. This period is not only fascinating and full of captivating music, but also rich in examples of advances in technology that had a direct effect on the way musicians worked.

Below is a **timeline** of the main events and musical features of our Area of Study. The terms in bold are ones that may need fuller exploration, and could form part of research undertaken by students.

You could present this timeline to students in exactly this format, or leave out all or some of the detail in the right-hand column. Your approach to this depends on students' prior knowledge, and the time available for research. Either way, students will need to do something with this information in order for it to have meaning for them. It would be a good idea to ask them to make it into a multimedia timeline of some sort. This could be in any format, depending on available resources, but could include:

- an Explain Everything video (if you have iPads).
- a PowerPoint presentation with embedded video/audio.
- an Office Sway interactive presentation.
- a Pinterest board (if Pinterest is not blocked in your school).

The idea here is that students need to find audio, video and images to exemplify the content. Going through the process of selecting these will give them a feel for what the era looked, sounded and perhaps even felt like.

1910s	Vaudeville	Variety theatre with actors, dancers, singers and comedians. Popular entertainment from the 1880s until the 1930s - the American equivalent of music hall in the UK.
	Tin Pan Alley	An area on West 28th Street in New York City where songwriters, '**pluggers**' and publishers worked. Many of the songs that are now considered to be part of the **Great American Songbook** were written here.
	The importance of sheet music and the piano roll	The success of a song was judged by the sales of its sheet music. Different arrangements may be published: band arrangements for professional bands, and simple piano arrangements for domestic performance. **Piano rolls** might also be made of hit songs, so they could be played on a **player piano**.
	Acoustic recording	Recording music onto a wax cylinder or disc by capturing sound using a large cone. At the base of the cone a sensitive membrane transferred the vibrations of the sound to the cylinder via a needle. Editing was not possible, so recordings needed to be done in one take. Bass instruments were difficult to record, and the quietest instruments needed to be nearest the cone.
1920s	Blues	Originating from **spirituals**, African music, **work songs** and the folk songs of European immigrants, blues was developed by African-Americans in the southern US states. Early blues was often accompanied by guitar, and songs were often mournful or ironic. The **12-bar blues chord progression**, and variants of it, became very popular. 'Blues queens' – female singers such as **Ma Rainey** and **Bessie Smith** – were immensely popular.
	Dixieland jazz	Instrumental jazz style. Small bands usually led by trumpet, with clarinet and trombone, and a rhythm section featuring drum kit, **sousaphone** or **upright bass**, and sometimes a banjo, guitar or piano. **Two-beat metre** with the emphasis on beats 1 and 3. **Collective improvisation** and **call and response** between **front line** instruments are characteristic features.
	Radio	Radio stations very quickly sprung up all over the USA, and the emphasis for popular music changed from sheet music to recorded songs. This changed the working lives of songwriters and performers.
	Gramophones and 78s	**Gramophones** became popular for listening to music at home, and the availability of records added to the ascendancy of recorded music over printed music. Discs were made from brittle **shellac**, and played at **78rpm**. Each side of a '78' could hold about three minutes of music.
1930s and 1940s	Blues	Blues began to diversify in the 1930s, with some styles becoming more dance-orientated and instrumental. Its adoption by the big bands (orchestras) working in clubs and theatres was the bridge between vocal blues and swing.
	Microphones and electrical recording	Recording progressed rapidly after microphones began to be used for commercial recording in the late 1920s. A microphone converts sound waves into an electrical signal. Electrical recording improved **fidelity** considerably, as a wider range of frequencies could be captured faithfully. Singing technique altered immeasurably, as singers no longer had to project over the accompanying instruments. Singers such as **Bing Crosby** became known as '**crooners**'.
	Film soundtracks	As soon as the technology was developed to run a sound recording in sync with a movie, films began to incorporate songs and instrumental soundtracks. Many of the songs in our Area of Study were originally written for films. Hollywood became a lucrative source of work for composers.
	Swing	**'Big band'** music for large band comprising trumpet, saxophone and trombone sections, piano, upright bass, guitar, drumkit and sometimes strings. Most bands had a featured vocalist, and were named after their band leader, eg The Duke Ellington Orchestra. The bands often had residencies in theatres or clubs such as the **Cotton Club** in New York, from where their shows would be broadcast on the radio. There was an emphasis on the **backbeat** (beats 2 and 4), and it is likely that rhythms would be **swung** over a **shuffle rhythm**. Solo improvisation (for vocalists this was **scat**) and call and response were notable features. Famous bandleaders include Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Glenn Miller.

1950s	LP records	Twelve-inch **vinyl** discs could be played at 33rpm, which allowed for 20 minutes of music to be stored on each side. This new album format opened up new possibilities for collections of songs, and added to the reputation of star singers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra.
	Singles and jukeboxes	Seven-inch records playing at 45rpm could hold one song on each side. Singles soon became the format for hit songs. Singles could be played on **jukeboxes** in bars and diners, and were another channel for hit songs to reach the public.
	Magnetic recording and multi-tracking	Using **magnetic tape** for recording was developed in Germany during World War Two, and became commonplace worldwide shortly afterwards. It allowed for editing, and shortly after it became popular, **multi-track recording** was developed.

To revisit this information regularly, start lessons by playing students different songs from the 1920s to the 1960s, and asking them to identify the decade they feel they are from, and why they think that. As they get to know their set works better, and undertake wider listening, they should get more accurate in their identification. They may also be able to guess as to whether the arrangement was from a Hollywood film, a show such as those at the Cotton Club, or an album by a famous singer. Students could take it in turns to find a song and write questions on it for their classmates to answer as a starter.

TEACHING THE SONGS

It's likely that this will get easier as you work through the four set works: the first one will probably take some time, as there is much to cover with regards to the following:

- song structure.
- how a lead sheet works.
- jazz harmony.
- how different arrangers and singers interpret a lead sheet.
- jazz techniques and terminology.

Once this has been covered, the subsequent songs will get easier and quicker, as students will have built up a bank of background knowledge and will have become familiar with the usual way that songs are put together.

This video is an excellent introduction to 32-bar song form, and how it fits into jazz as a genre.

32-bar song form

Having an understanding of what is the norm, and what is an anomaly, is a crucial part of developing deep understanding of a topic. Because 32-bar song form, and variants of it, was used so extensively in vocal jazz, it makes sense to start with one of the set works that uses it, or even another example of a song that can be seen as an archetypal 32-bar song. 'Let's Do It' (for 2018 candidates) or 'They Can't Take That Away From Me' (for 2019 candidates) would fit the bill perfectly. If you'd like to start with an example that's familiar, but not a set work, then 'Over the Rainbow' or 'I Got Rhythm' are perfect.

Get students to listen to, or perform, the melodies, and identify where the phrases begin and end. Having established that there are four eight-bar phrases, look at which ones are the same as each other, or nearly the same. Where there are differences, look at the harmony, and whether the phrase endings are open (ie finishing on chord V, or moving to a new key) or closed (ending on chord I). Identify harmonic pace, and explore what differences there are in the bridge/middle eight/B section: there may be differences of key, harmonic pace or tessitura.

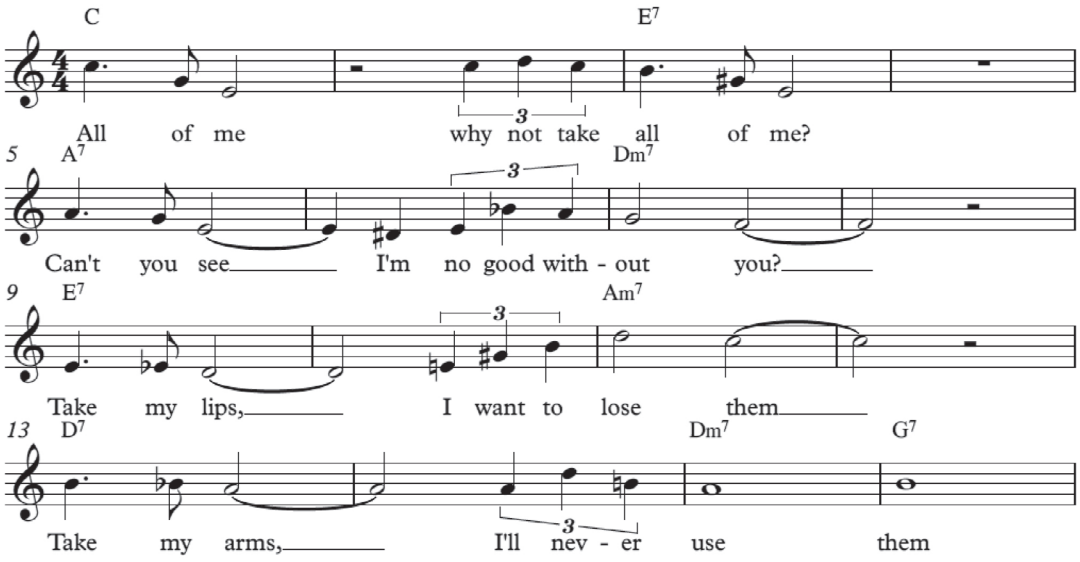
Now students have got something to compare other songs to, understanding the set works will be much more straightforward, as many of them have variants on the 'standard' 32-bar form.

How a lead sheet works

It's always best if students can perform their set works. However, before they can do so, it's essential that they understand how a lead sheet works. Depending on their prior musical experience, they may be used to

working with lead sheets already: if you have any students in your class with jazz experience, capitalise on this and get them to demonstrate for the class. However, if lead sheets are unfamiliar territory, there is a surprising amount to cover.

Many students will need practice of playing basic chords from chord symbols, before you can begin to tackle jazz chord extensions. Something quite straightforward is needed as a starting point – perhaps something like 'All of Me', written by Marks and Simons in 1931. This is just the first part of an AABA structure:



The 7ths could be omitted to begin with, just to get students engaging with the notes of the basic chords. It's worth getting everyone to play the chords on keyboards, whether or not they are pianists: it's the best way to give them a visual way into thinking about inversions, basslines and voice leading.

'All of Me' is a good song to start with as it has a slow harmonic pace of mostly one chord every two bars. Things to draw out from students as they work include:

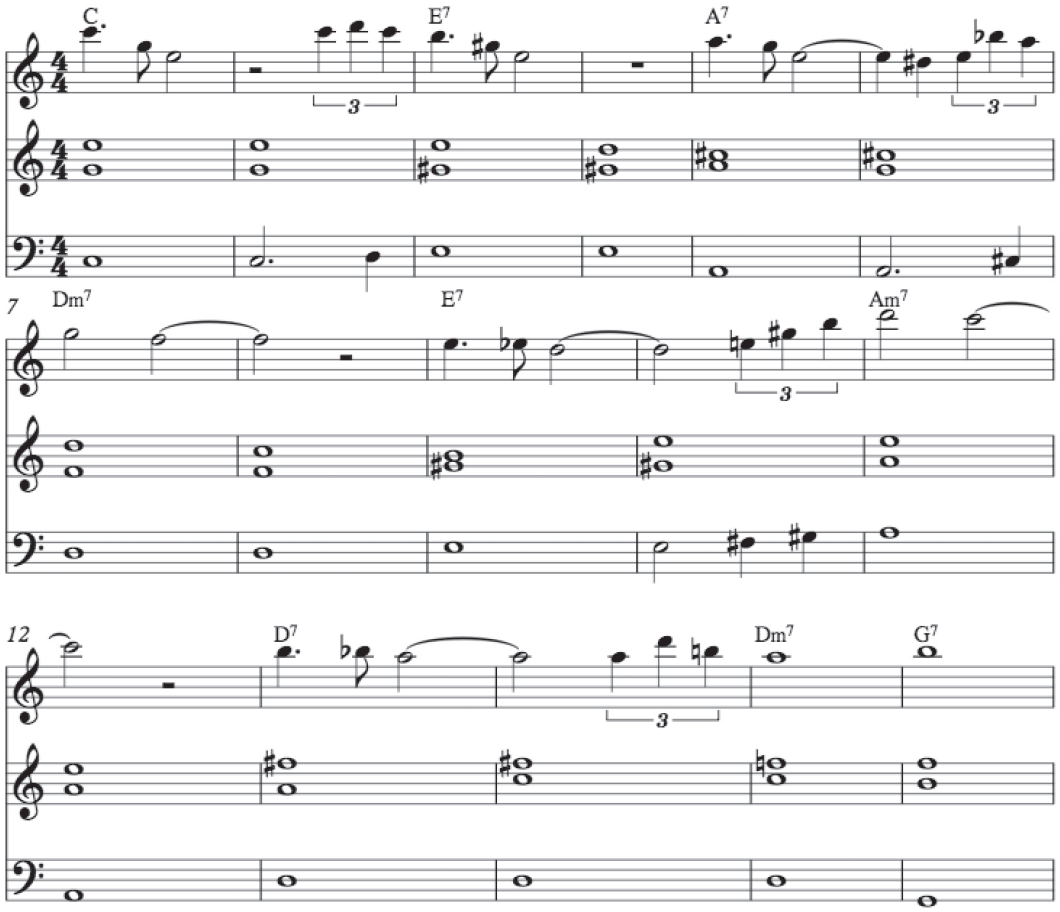
- What is the effect of moving from a C chord to the E7 chord in bar 3? Which note of the E7 chord is the surprising one? Why is this? (Answer: the G sharp, because this note is not part of the C major scale.)
- Why is the progression from E7 to A7 to Dm7 so strong? (Answer: because it is part of a cycle of 5ths. Each chord change is like its own perfect cadence, with all the forward momentum of the dominant-tonic chord relationship.)
- Why does the song finish on a G7 chord? (Answer: to create a 'turnaround' that propels us back to the C major chord at the start of the melody – another dominant-tonic relationship.)

Now would also be a good time to look at voice-leading: not only will this give students good theory knowledge that they'll be able to apply to their own compositions and harmony exercises, but it will also give them an insight into the work of an arranger. Having an appreciation of the impact of the horizontal movement of parts will help them to create great basslines and inner parts that move in a satisfying way.

Students should work their ideas out using notation, but it's essential that they experience the horizontal movement of the parts first-hand, through playing or singing them. The principles that they need to try to put into action are as follows:

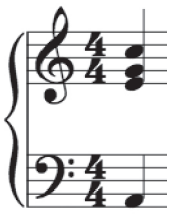
- If consecutive chords have a note in common, keep it in the same part.
- 7ths (of 7th chords) should fall by step.
- Leading notes should rise by step. This includes notes that we can regard as temporary leading-notes in chords with roots a 5th apart, such as the E7 and A7 chords. Both of these act as dominants to the succeeding chord, so their 3rds fulfil the function of a leading-note.

A possible solution might look like this:

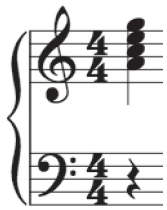


Jazz harmony

While neither section of the exam is likely to include questions that require candidates to identify chords, being able to unravel jazz chords and understand the provenance and function of any added notes is an important part of grasping what jazz is all about. You can teach students to rearrange the notes of a chord so they sit in a neat stack. Take this chord as an example:



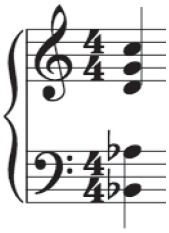
In order to identify what the chord is, we need to rearrange all four notes so that they sit in a neat stack, like this:



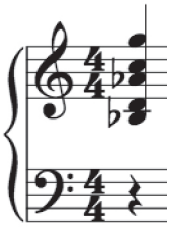
Notice that they are all in the spaces – they *could* all be on the lines, but they would never be a mixture of spaces and lines.

A is at the bottom of the stack, so we know that this is a root position chord, because A was also at the bottom in the original voicing. We can also work out that this is an A minor chord, because there is a minor 3rd between the A and C. The extra note at the top is a 7th higher than the root, telling us that this chord is Am7.

Let's try a more complex example:



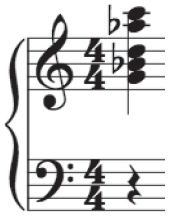
Rearranged into the neatest stack possible, we arrive at this:



You will notice that there are notes missing: this is perfectly usual with more complex chords. It would simply sound too thick if all the notes in the stack were present. The 5th is a particularly common note for omission.

So, B flat is the root, and because of the major 3rd between B flat and D, it is a B flat major chord. B flat was at the bottom of the original voicing, so it is in root position. The added notes that are present are a (minor) 7th, a 9th, and a 13th. So we would take the highest of these to identify the chord, and call it Bb13. Sometimes (simply for ease of reading), 13th chords are named as 6th chords (a 13th and a 6th above B flat are the same pitch), making Bb6 a viable alternative.

It would, of course, be possible to organise this collection of notes in a different stack – we could take G as our root, and write it thus:



With the minor 3rd between G and B flat, this would be a G minor chord, and because B flat was the bass note in the original voicing, it is a first inversion chord, written Gm/Bb. The added notes are a flat 9th and an 11th. It would be perfectly reasonable (and not technically incorrect) to name this chord Gmb9 13/Bb. However, because this is a much more complicated name than Bb13, our original answer is a more elegant solution.

How a lead sheet can be interpreted in different ways

One of the main things that students will encounter through listening to different versions of their set works is the dazzling variety of ways that a lead sheet can be interpreted. In both Section A and Section B of the exam, students will be required to comment on ways in which both jazz singers and arrangers have diverged from a lead sheet.

The first thing to acknowledge is that this is a perfectly acceptable thing to do in jazz. Having your own interpretation of a song is an important part of being a jazz musician. The notes written by the composer are not treated with the same reverence as they are in classical music, and a jazz composer would accept that all kinds of different interpretations would be made from their lead sheet. The lead sheet is a starting-point rather than a definitive guide to what should be played and sung.

Each singer or band would have their own arrangement of a song. The key might be altered to suit the range of a singer's voice, or the tempo changed to make the song more upbeat or soulful. Arrangements might put a lush, romantic spin on a song by adding strings (this was particularly true with arrangements made for Hollywood movies), or made more spare and jazzy.

We have already seen the ways in which chord symbols present arrangers with a multitude of choices just with regard to voice-leading. When you add considerations of texture and figuration, together with idiomatic instrumental writing to the mix, then that infinitely multiplies the options available to an arranger. Then throw in the possibility of changing the chords entirely, and the vastness of what's possible begins to be perceptible.

Revisiting our 16-bar extract from 'All of Me' could be interesting at this point, with students creating arrangements, either for available combinations of instruments, or standard jazz combos. They could even try to capture different moods by creating two contrasting arrangements. The versions of 'All of Me' recorded by Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday could provide a template.

Even a brief listen to the set works demonstrates how jazz singers interpret melodies differently. They might emphasise certain words through changing the contours of a melody, or create a particular effect by making rhythmic alterations. Spotting these, and thinking carefully about how to describe them, in the set works will prepare students for doing the same with unfamiliar recordings in the exam, and requires practice in order to use terminology accurately.

One way to practise this skill is by giving students a list of terminology that they will need to use in order to describe a recording of a jazz song, but without telling them how each one fits in with the music. They can then listen to the track and put together their own description, deciding where and how each term should be used.

Jazz techniques and terminology

Jazz most certainly has its own language – a quick internet search for 'jazz slang' turns up a whole world of entertaining information – and students will need to learn some terminology, especially if they have no practical experience of jazz. The key terms that they will need for answering exam questions are included in the knowledge organiser, but to bring these to life, students will need aural examples.

An excellent way for them to engage with this terminology would be to create a 'dictionary in sound', illustrating each term with an example they have found in a jazz recording: this could be from their set works, or from jazz recordings in general. They could use a sound editing program such as Logic, Cubase or Garageband, or online/downloadable programs such as Soundation or Audacity, to edit the audio and even record a narration in order to create a useful revision resource.