

Study on the Synchronous Performance of Vocal Music and Piano

Jiayi Zhu

Wuhan University of Engineering Science, Wuhan, Hubei, 430200, China

Abstract: *The study discusses how singers can maintain and enhance their ability to simultaneously offer supportive and expressive piano accompaniment. We'll explore the negatives and positives of self-accompanied on the piano for singers, including Alicia Keys & John Mayer's 'If I Ain't Got You' at Times Square in 2016. While some may find the piano sound limited in its colouristic nature, I personally find the variety of the simultaneous vocal/piano arrangement in Alicia Keys' live performance of 'If I Ain't Got You' refreshing. In addition, she strikes a reasonable balance between the technique of the piano/voice and the expression of emotion in the music. More specifically, I will be exploring and analysing 'If I Ain't Got You' from the point of view of musical and physical considerations, musical conception and the relation between voice and piano.*

Keywords: *Singers, Vocalist, Self-accompanied*

1. Introduction

In recent years there has been an increasing demand for singers to play either guitar or piano accompaniment. Students of singing at conservatoires therefore need to develop the skill of self-accompaniment. In addition, it is through observation that such a skill becomes worthy of study. While studying music, students must simultaneously develop their own singing and playing skills. will achieve better results as self-accompanied singers if they have enthusiasm and confidence in music. In addition, an increasing number of singers, including Lady Gaga, Alicia Keys and Bruno Mars, have chosen to accompany their own performances on piano. Lady Gaga's 2018 Grammys performance of Joanne/ Million Reason.

The effect of celebrity cannot be ignored either. On YouTube, there are now a large number of artists performing simultaneous vocal/piano covers of a wide variety of songs in different styles. There are many videos to be found, including solo covers as well as original songs. Because it is an extremely fast and convenient platform for music lovers, billions of users who are already familiar with YouTube's recommendation features listen to songs directly^[9]. But most importantly, it is almost free to upload covers. Even I have uploaded some covers to the site. Self-accompanied singing has become more popular than before, as it has become a trend for many artists. Therefore, it should be an integral part of daily practice to develop skills in both singing and piano playing. In addition, some artists tend to be stronger as either pianists or vocalists, although many singers are completely adept at simultaneous vocal/piano performances. Many artists considered simultaneous vocal/piano performances to be challenging for them when asked whether they were pianist first, vocalist second (P/V) or vocalist first, pianist second (V/P)^[11-13]. I can relate to this as I have encountered problems such as the difference between accompanied and self-accompanied vocalists, the challenge of 'splitting the brain' (doing two things at the same time) and arranging rehearsal time for simultaneous vocal/piano performances from my personal experience of accompanying myself on the piano while singing.

2. Key Challenges and Benefits

According to Knight, Austin^[12], 'Vocal stance is one of the most easily observed qualities of singing and is widely believed to influence not only vocal production but also the perception of the vocalist by the audience'. As a singer and a piano player, I agree, because I pay more attention to my voice when I sing and play simultaneously. Sitting down is more difficult than standing up, though, when you compare it with standing up and singing with a band or someone else. There is enough research to demonstrate that we need to readjust our posture by experiencing the various parts of our feet under the

floor before we start performing^[8]. Above all, you need to adjust your body to achieve the best possible balance when practising singing. Furthermore, many music learners/singers seem to know that the first step to vocal practice is to stand with your heels at shoulder's width when you are singing. It is suggested, for example, that you "take a minute to evaluate how you're positioned when you sing, and ask yourself: Are my feet firmly planted? Are my shoulders lifted? Is my spinal column straight? If your answer to these three questions is yes, you're off to a good start. But when you sit down and practice for an hour, you can't hold your breath. However, a prolonged heat cycle may help. When I asked my boyfriend to help me record the video for the cover, an important insight came to me: the head and spinal column are tilted. In particular, when singing in a relatively high-pitched or emotional voice, there is a tendency for my head and spine to change position slowly and unconsciously. In contrast, my abdomen can maintain a gentle flow of air if I consciously focus on my sitting position. Also, when singing with simultaneous voice and piano, the most practical method is to imagine a wall behind me. I noticed that Jamie Foxx's back practically does not move when I was studying "I Got Women"^[10]. However, even some of these movements would affect the vocalist's breathing, considering that expression during musical performing requires singers or performers to communicate with their audience, whether through eye contact or body language. Small movements and facial expressions are essential. Since musical performance is not only for our own pleasure, but also for the audience, expression has a great influence on the perception of quality and spontaneity^[16]. Davidson ^[5]says: "Performers are also social actors, and whether real or virtual (in the recording studio), audiences are crucial in shaping what happens. Co-performers also have an influence on the way a performance is negotiated and presented to that audience.

However, there is a potential vulnerability for the singer when performing with simultaneous vocal/piano accompaniment. Sponcia^[15] argues that "the vocalist/pianist's physical position and proximity to the audience also affects performance outcomes by limiting physical movement across the performance space and the amount of performer/audience eye contact". I completely agree with this statement. However, communicating with the audience during a simultaneous vocal/piano performance is a challenge for me. In short, multitasking puts a lot of physical and psychological pressure on the body. From my own experience, and especially during performances in our class, i have no idea of the audience's reaction because there is a huge piano. Secondly, i often tend not to interact with the audience when i am concentrating during a performance. This includes not looking at them, not gesturing, not even using body language, and not even bothering to talk. The last reason is that moving your body, especially your head, will cause great resistance in your sound and breathing. As Knight and Austin^[12] show, "several studies associate head posture with vocal issues, specifically affecting airflow, resonance, and pitch control." but even worse, when you lift your head to sing higher, you tend to produce an odd and exaggerated glottal. This behaviour, if i continued to sing in this way for a long time, would eventually cause me to injure my throat. this problem manifests itself by over-tightening other muscles, as described by Lehmann^[14]: "a false pressure of the muscles, a false movement of the tongue (raising the tip, for example), trying to increase the power of the sound, all these things quickly extinguish and for all time the little light of the miracle singer.

However, when I am singing with a band or with original instrumentals, I would like to have communication with the audience during the performance. Playing the piano is more demanding than singing because I have to concentrate all the time. As a singer first and a pianist second, playing the piano is more challenging than singing because my mind is focused on one thing: the variety of beginnings and endings, the volume of the piano (balance between left, right and voice), rhythmic flexibility (rubato), melodic fills and chord transitions during the accompaniment. Having to play while performing, rather than having to perform with the voice and piano at the same time, would reduce the pressure. Another factor would be an increase in my confidence to be singing alone during the performance. As Churchill^[4] states, "Self-affirming interventions should be aimed at reminding students of other important sources of self-esteem, helping students gain perspective, and having concomitant positive effects upon self-regulation". An artist would not be aware of pressure for a number of reasons. Firstly, I can stand up to sing and swing to the music because my voice and body are balanced and relaxed. Secondly, I see that some of the audience respond in the same way when I move my body in synchrony with the meaning of the lyrics.

However, it can't be denied that, despite the psychological benefits of singing with a band, our rehearsing time is detrimental when working with other musicians. This means that when I sing and play at the same time, I can arrange all the details of melodic and rhythmic variation, phrasing, articulation, sense of time and groove, and lyrical emphasis. For me, there is no communication barrier between the singer and the pianist when it comes to interpretive decisions. I think everyone has their

own unique way of feeling and interpreting. But you will perform better and the atmosphere will be much better if you're backed by a highly technical band. The downside of this is that more time is spent discussing and collaborating with the other musicians to get the unspoken understanding right than it is to rehearse and adjust the vocals and piano at the same time (Figure1).



Figure 1: Alicia Keys' performance of If I Ain't Got You

Some singers can perform more exquisitely and effectively than others, although there are some negative and positive aspects to simultaneous vocal/piano performance. Therefore, from the experience of professional singers, it is essential to study and analyse the details thoroughly.

Firstly, she invites John Mayer and the band to accompany her from the second verse to the end of the song, which is why she chose this version in Times Square in 2016. Secondly, she uses a self-accompaniment on the piano for the first verse and the first chorus. It is an exciting performance for the audience. To put it another way, I can study and compare two situations-self-accompanied singing and band singing. So this version would be more varied in terms of arrangement and expression than the other version.



Figure 2: Alicia Keys and John Mayer

Alicia Keys and John Mayer is shown in Figure 2.

As Juslin and Lindstrom^[16] note, "the single criterion of aesthetic value for both audience and performer is emotional expression". Alicia Keys touches the listener's emotional, visual and auditory senses in her simultaneous vocal/piano performance by utilising physiological and psychological techniques.

From my point of view, the fact that Alicia Keys stands and sings throughout the song is the first

reason why she is able to combine voice and piano so effectively. Posture is very important when you sing and play at the same time. Therefore, her breathing is better supported when she stands up to sing. The piano would also suit her standing. The other detail is that she sometimes has a slight shake of her legs during the music. I have the feeling that she is very relaxed and has a lot of fun with her performance. She also looks attractive and seems to be listening. She seems to try to communicate with the audience and seems to look up almost constantly in verse 1. Most importantly, she performs with a band starting on verse 2, which creates a fantastic chemistry. This will help you to understand their mood and to feel the songs in the same way they feel them. As Christopher^[15-18] says: "A good accompanist also needs to be in a state of alertness and concentration at all times. He or she needs to be able to listen carefully to other musicians and to adapt sensitively to each musical interplay. This adds to the fascination and interest of this live show.

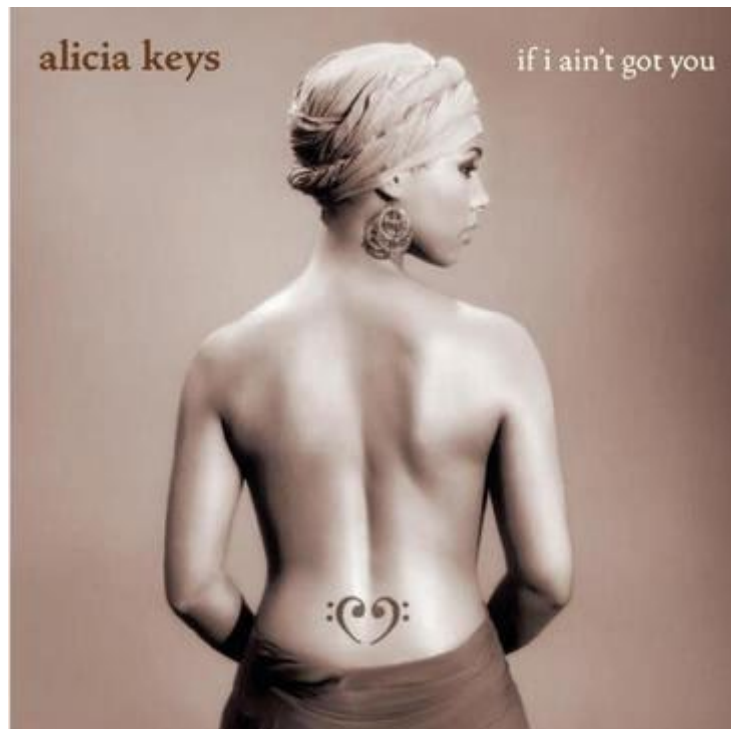


Figure 3: Alicia Keys--- If i ain't got you

3. My Personal Experience

I also performed if i ain't got you for my final exam as a beginner in simultaneous vocal/piano performances. An honest assessment of my performance after watching the video shows that there is a lack of variation and "Surprise" For the audience, such as the same tempo, simple chords or similar dynamic shape. From my point of view, posture, psychology, articulation and dynamics are all challenges for me. There are some obvious differences between me and alicia keys when i look at my own performance. First, i sit down to sing and my neck does not seem to relax. As a result of this, my shoulders and my head are too rigid and i am making too much effort. Relaxation is therefore an essential prerequisite and one of considerable importance. The second is that i do not see how alicia keys is using the pedal. Nevertheless, i forget to change the pedal during my performance. Even though i usually practise it. Therefore, it will cause "Missing" And "Losing" In performance if we do not pay attention to what is happening through our ear. Finally, because i concentrate only on my singing and playing, i have no facial expression at all. Then i was nervous on the day of the performance. Alicia keys, on the other hand, seems completely relaxed and enjoying what she is doing. The live show is also made more colourful by the sudden appearance of john mayer and other accompanists. However, most of the time there will be no co-operation with me. I'm only going to be performing a piano instrumental, which requires more technique to play. I think the most important difference between alicia keys and me when singing and playing at the same time is the different tempos. I sing and play at a strict beat, while she plays at a more relaxed pace

4. Creating Variation in Tempo

By contrast, when i perform, i only play a "Two-bar" Pattern, emphasizing beats one and three or all four beats of a bar. This would not be entertaining for the audience. By analysing the original score, this chapter examines how Alicia keys uses 'rubato' to vary her performance.

She uses rubato, which is the prolongation of one or more notes at the expense of others. This allows for a freer rhythmic treatment. The use of rubato for self-accompaniment on the piano seems to be a characteristic of Alicia keys' style. Indeed, some qualitative observations from the studies suggested that certain structural features of the music did indeed 'allow' the body to reveal its expressivity with greater clarity, e.g. Pauses that allowed the hand to be free to show the qualities of motion, and rubato sections that allowed more time to show the qualities of motion"^[5]. I agree with this statement. In fact, i have not used rubato at all when playing with accompaniment on the piano. This is because it is difficult to change the rhythm in the groove, and i am used to playing the notes completely in time. But using "Rubato" Is like a delicious dessert that will make your piece shine more brightly. Sometimes, it makes the piece organic and natural to rush the notes a bit and pull them back. I sing only one kind of tempo, which makes it monotonous for the audience, especially when singing and playing the piano at the same time. Some people live for happiness' is an example. Similarly, in "Fame" she is supposed to be playing D 7 in the original, but in her rendition she is playing D 7 with a little hurry. A single tempo can lead to monotony, especially if you sing and play the piano simultaneously.

5. Practice

Although many factors influence the quality of a simultaneous vocal/piano performance, it's important to know how we can improve and strengthen our skills by practising. As mentioned in Blom^[1-2], "The staff-selected rehearsal process criteria were the soft skills, participation, and the soft and hard combined, preparation; and for the performance result, the hard skills, musical quality (that is, technique, pitch accuracy/attention to tune, groove/rhythmic accuracy and precision, tone colour, balance) plus the hard and soft combined, presentation (that is, presence, confidence, communication, and production/stagecraft)". From a physiological and psychological point of view, we need to focus on many skills. However, for most artists, i do not think that playing and singing separately is a challenge. Undoubtedly, how to practice piano/voice at the same time is the big problem for singers who use self-accompaniment on the piano. In addition, it would also be a challenge to have the practice method together and to have a reasonable use of it. This chapter first examines each practice mode, including vocal, piano and expressive aspects, and then discusses how singers optimise these skills together through the results of the research case study, if i ain't got you is shown in Figure3.

We should prepare some necessities for singing and playing at the same time before starting any training. These include a relaxed mood, a healthy body and throat, warm water, a voice recording device and a large mirror. I also have my personal practice methods as a v/p. Falcão^[6-7] argues, "Warming up vocals, based on a hierarchical sequence, allows for greater mucous flexibility, producing more acute and intense sounds at a better quality and reducing vocal fatigue, aspects essential for singing". So you have to warm up your voice about 30 minutes before you sing. However, the difference between this method and normal practice is that i do the warm-up sitting down. After i have warmed up, i am not going to sing the song right away. In the second step, without singing the lyrics and playing the piano, i sit down to sing the song using either the "Z-z-z-z" Or "V-v-v-v" Sound. My breathing control would improve with this practice. Like Fisher, Kayes^[13] says: "The physiology of this prototype is a firm closure of the vocal fold which is resistant to the incoming respiratory flow. After this, i continue to sit with my head, shoulders and back in a relaxed position. In addition to this, i keep my sitting posture at a 90 degree angle. This is because of the posture needed to be able to sing. Then i slowly sing the words of the song without playing the piano instrument. Next, i play the piano instrumentally with a slow "V-v-v-v" Sound. Finally, i do the singing and piano playing at the same time. This way of practicing might stem from the idea that practicing at a slow tempo while singing or performing creates a muscle memory that lasts.

As i said before, the quality of our simultaneous vocal/piano performance is improved by high playing techniques and various arrangements. The piano is a great challenge for me from my own experience. However, i still insist on trying some kind of practice method. As Bosler and Greene^[3] note, "Effective practice is consistent, intensely focused, and targets content and weakness where you are currently competent." Furthermore, i have a couple of effective practice methods for improvement.

First, i usually metronome the piano from slow to fast. Playing the piano at a slower pace (around 50 bpm) from the start gives you more time to get used to chords and dynamics. As my skills improve, it will be possible for me to play piano with original instruments with no vocals. The second thing i will do is to record my piano playing with a soft and low sound. Only my piano accompaniment and sounds are used. This is the most difficult step for me. So i usually write down the note or rhythm i am worried about if i always play it with the same mistake. The next step is to have a look at the bars that are in error. Finally, i will do some foot tapping in time to the playing without singing. After this, i will slowly change the rhythm and sing it out loud.

There's a huge difference between me and Alicia keys when you compare the performance of if i ain't got you. I communicate with the audience. Even mimicry is absent. The reason why i am afraid to have eye contact with the audience is because i am afraid that head shaking will affect my breathing support. However, after watching 50 videos of different singers performing vocals and piano at the same time, i found that most of them communicate with the public only at certain points, such as low pitches, short or long pauses, meaningful lyrics or some special and new arrangements. In other words, the quality of simultaneous vocal/piano performances will be greatly improved as long as we reasonably plan and deal with every meaning of gestures or facial expressions in front of the mirror.

I conclude that singing and playing piano at the same time may be a bit dull and uninspiring for the audience unless the musical arrangement is surprising and varied. However, it will depend on a kind of technical skill and musical expression to achieve "Changeability" And "Colourfulness". However, in the case of simultaneous vocal and piano performance, the feasible method will be to first solve each problem separately. Then we will be able to put all the skills together.

6. Mixed Together

For simultaneous vocal/piano performances, phonation from regular practice and smooth piano playing are both prerequisites. But what can i do next once i have become more skilled and adept at singing/piano? Through case studies, i have found a number of practice methods that i can use and incorporate into my daily practice - for example, in if i ain't got you, Alicia keys tends to stop playing or moving when she is singing in a falsetto or high pitched voice. This is probably the reason for her use of 'rubato' as an accompaniment to the performance. So when we practice our "Z-z-z-z" Or "V-v-v-v", we also need to check which note is challenging us and then plan accordingly when accompanying ourselves on the piano. For example, if the high c is the most difficult note in the song for me, i need to arrange the notes so that they can be played without any movement of the body, including playing the piano or shaking my head. I need to concentrate on what i am trying to sing. In the same way, posture is crucial. The piano is at an appropriate height for Alicia keys, even though she stands up to sing and play. The body becomes relaxed and the legs can move in time. So while we are starting to practice on the piano, we also need to keep our physical body in a balanced position. In addition, mirror checks for facial expressions and body language would be other possible methods. It is also important to look at the way a song feels, its dynamic arrangement and the way it is articulated, according to Alicia keys. I might then be able to start to design and decide how to go about doing this.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, as a v/p, there are many potential challenges and problems. However, it is through constant practice and experience on the stage of simultaneous vocal/piano performance that all the nuances and techniques can be most completely learned. In addition, the analysis of case studies can also be an effective means of improvement. This research showed that vocalists accompanying themselves on the piano could choose the most appropriate method to practice. In fact, we should do research on a method that is suitable to us. However, there would be fewer studies in piano accompaniment. In comparison with case studies, we can only use our own experience. There should be more recognition and concern for simultaneous vocal/piano performance.

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