

UDC 784.011.26.03

DOI <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/66-3-10>**Sun YUAN,**orcid.org/0009-0002-0359-8960

Graduate student at the Department of Musicology and Cultural Studies
Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A.S. Makarenko
(Sumy, Ukraine) sumyuan@ukr.net

VOCAL IMPROVISATION IN POP MUSIC: THE CASE OF ROCK AND ROLL

The article is devoted to the problem of vocal improvisation in pop music, in particular in the genre of rock and roll. The purpose of the article is to highlight the peculiarities of vocal improvisation in the genre of popular music rock and roll. To achieve this goal, a set of methods was used, including general scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, generalization, systematization), which were used to determine the state of development of the problem and specific scientific methods (biographical analysis, historical and genetic, retrospective, comparative and contrastive analysis), which allowed to characterize the work of famous representatives of rock and roll (Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly), to highlight the historical aspects of rock and roll and the peculiarities of vocal improvisation in rock and roll.

The study proves that the founders of rock and roll were Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, whose vocal improvisation gave rock and roll a special style and uniqueness. It has been established that Chuck Berry's vocal improvisation is characterized by blues performance and melody manipulation. Instead, Little Richard endowed his vocal improvisation with shouts and exclamations that enhanced the dynamics of the song. Based on the comparative analysis, it was found that thanks to vocal improvisation, Elvis Presley, known as the «King of Rock and Roll», became famous for his deep and emotional performance. Experimenting with his voice, Presley created dynamic transitions from whispers to loud expressions. The use of simple riffs and melodies has become the key to Buddy Holly's vocals.

Vocal improvisation in rock and roll has been proven to be characterized by spontaneity and allows singers to experiment with different vocal techniques and deeply convey the mood of the music. By improvising with words, melodies, and vocal sounds, rock and roll performers create a unique and inimitable impression.

Key words: vocal improvisation, pop music, rock and roll, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly.

Сунь ЮАНЬ,orcid.org/0009-0002-0359-8960

аспірантка кафедри музикознавства та культурології
Сумського державного педагогічного університету імені А.С. Макаренка
(Суми, Україна) sumyuan@ukr.net

ВОКАЛЬНА ІМПРОВІЗАЦІЯ В ПОП-МУЗИЦІ: НА ПРИКЛАДІ РОК-Н-РОЛУ

Стаття присвячена проблемі вокальної імпровізації в поп-музиці, зокрема в жанрі рок-н-рол. Мета статті передбачає висвітлення особливостей вокальної імпровізації в жанрі популярної музики рок-н-рол. Для досягнення поставленої мети використано комплекс методів, зокрема загальнонаукові (аналіз, синтез, узагальнення, систематизація), які застосовувалися з метою з'ясування стану розробленості проблеми та конкретно-наукові (біографічний аналіз, історико-генетичний, ретроспективний, порівняльно-зіставний аналіз), що дозволили охарактеризувати творчість відомих представників рок-н-ролу (Чак Беррі, Літл Річард, Елвіс Преслі, Бадді Голлі), висвітлити історичні аспекти рок-н-ролу та особливості вокальної імпровізації в рок-н-ролі.

За результатами дослідження було доведено, основоположниками рок-н-ролу були Чак Беррі, Літл Річард, Елвіс Преслі, Бадді Голлі, вокальна імпровізація яких додала рок-н-ролу особливого стилю та неповторності. Встановлено, для вокальної імпровізації Чака Беррі характерне блюзове виконання та маніпуляція мелодією. Натомість, Літл Річард наділив вокальну імпровізацію криками та вигуками, які підсилювали динаміку пісні. На основі порівняльно-зіставного аналізу було з'ясовано, завдяки вокальній імпровізації, Елвіс Преслі, відомий як «Король рок-н-ролу», прославився глибоким і емоційним виконанням. Експерименти зі своїм голосом, стали результатом створення Преслі динамічних переходів від шепоту до гучних проявів. Використання простих рифів та мелодій стало ключовим у вокалі Бадді Голлі.

Доведено, вокальна імпровізація в рок-н-ролі характеризується спонтанністю і дозволяє співакам експериментувати з різними вокальними техніками та глибоко передавати настрій музики. Імпровізуючи зі словами, мелодіями та вокальними звуками, рок-н-рол виконавці створюють неповторне та унікальне враження.

Ключові слова: вокальна імпровізація, поп-музика, рок-н-рол, Чак Беррі, Літл Річард, Елвіс Преслі, Бадді Голлі.

Relevance of the research topic. Vocal improvisation is an important and exciting part of musical creativity, providing performers with the opportunity to express their emotions, reveal their personality and create an unpredictable soundscape. This musical element is of great importance in various genres, including pop music. One of the living examples of the use of vocal improvisation is rock and roll, a genre that is able to add a lot of energy and drive to its performances thanks to this technique. In general, vocal improvisation is an important part of the rock and roll heritage. It helps preserve the spirit and style of the genre and pass it on to a new generation of musicians and listeners.

Analysis of research and publications. The works of domestic scholars who address the problem of musical improvisation (B. Stetsiuk) are of great value for understanding the phenomenon under study. The works of A. Bozhenskyi, A. Dushnyi, and T. Kablova, whose focus is on the study of academic vocal art, are also important. Aspectually related to the problem of vocal improvisation in pop music, in particular in the genre of rock and roll, are the studies of H. Artemieva and S. Humeniuk, who study the problems of rock and roll in sports. Of considerable interest in the context of this problem is the work of A. Voloshyna, who introduces the peculiarities of vocal improvisation in contemporary vocal works. However, given the small number of works that focus on related issues to the proposed research, it is relevant to consider the problem of vocal improvisation in pop music, in particular in rock and roll.

The purpose of the study. To highlight the peculiarities of vocal improvisation in the genre of popular rock and roll music.

The research methodology is based on general scientific (analysis, synthesis, generalization, systematization) research methods used to determine the state of development of the problem. A separate spectrum includes specific scientific methods, in particular: biographical, which was used to substantiate the work of famous representatives of rock and roll (Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly); historical-genetic and retrospective analysis, which allowed to highlight the historical aspects of rock and roll; comparative and contrastive analysis, which was used to outline the features and characteristics of vocal improvisation in rock and roll.

Presenting main material. Historical, genetic and retrospective analysis makes it possible to emphasize that rock and roll is a musical genre that emerged in the mid XX century and became a real revolutionary phenomenon in the history of music.

Characterized by energy, frankness, and rebellion, rock and roll has become a unique space for creative expression. It has been established that the origins of rock and roll were made by prominent artists, including Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, and Buddy Holly. Their vocal talent became a source of creativity for subsequent generations of singers. It should be noted that vocal improvisation is an important component of rock and roll. It makes every performance unpredictable and special. Thus, in the context of highlighting the problem of our study and applying the biographical method, it is advisable to turn to the life and vocal activities of the creators of rock and roll music and find out the specifics of the latter's vocal improvisation (Артем'єва, 2007: 11; Гумєн'юк, 2019: 15).

Chuck Berry (1926–2017) was an American rock and roll singer, musician, guitarist and songwriter. He was born on October 18, 1926 in St. Louis, Missouri. Chuck Berry showed interest in music since childhood. He played guitar and sang in the gospel choir of the church he attended. Later, Chuck Berry honed his vocal skills at various parties that filled the lives of Americans.

His acquaintance with Leonard Chess (1917–1969), a prominent figure in the American music industry, was the result of Chuck Berry's first hit, «Maybellene», which topped the music charts and marked his popularity. During the 1950s and 1960s, Chuck Berry presented a number of songs to the public, including «Roll Over Beethoven», «Rock and Roll Music», «Johnny B. Goode», «Sweet Little Sixteen», «School Days» and others. As the founder of rock and roll, Chuck Berry became one of the first African-American musicians to gain wide popularity among the «white» audience.

It should be noted that Chuck Berry had an unsurpassed and unique vocal style, which was expressed in a powerful and emotional voice that was embodied in rock and roll compositions. Moreover, he had a vocal range that allowed the singer to easily move from low to high notes, which added expressiveness to his performance. Chuck Berry's vocals were synthesized with the rhythm of his music. He used a variety of rhythmic figures and varied the melodies. These actions added dynamics and a peculiar energy to his performances. Creating a powerful improvisation, Chuck Berry presented his own style, characterized by energy, liveliness, expressiveness, charisma, which became one of the key aspects of his success and influence on rock and roll music (Волошина, 2022).

The American singer, musician, composer, and pianist Little Richard (1932–2020), who was influenced

by gospel and rhythm and blues, added innovative performance to rock and roll music. He began his vocal career by singing in a church choir. Little Richard also demonstrated skillful piano playing. In 1951, the singer began collaborating with the American record label Peacock Records and released several compositions, which had limited success. However, when he signed a contract with Specialty Records in 1955, a real breakthrough in his vocal career took place.

An analysis of Little Richard's work leads to the conclusion that, thanks to his extraordinary voice, dynamic performance, frank and eccentric images, he became a rock and roll superstar. Thus, his songs «Tutti Frutti», «Long Tall Sally», «Good Golly Miss Molly» have become classics of pop music, in particular of the rock and roll genre (Stoloff, 2021: 47).

The use of the biographical method allows us to emphasize that in the late 1950s, Little Richard took an unexpected pause in his career. He turned to gospel music and dedicated his life to religious service. However, Richard's return to the stage took place during the 1960s and 1970s.

It is worth noting that the defining aspect of Little Richard's work in rock and roll was vocal improvisation, which was expressed in a powerful voice, expressive performance, and the ability to freely and creatively use vocal elements to create emotional and dynamic performances. Little Richard's vocals conveyed a wide range of feelings. Thus, he easily demonstrated joy and freely moved to melancholy and nostalgia. By manipulating the rhythmic structures of his songs, Little Richard played with the rhythm and enhanced it with screaming. Possessing a vocal range, Little Richard demonstrated loud, high notes. Moreover, he could easily move from high to low tones, creating dynamics and giving a spectacular character to his performances.

Little Richard was particularly skilled at improvisation, and added the latter to a number of his songs. For example, at the beginning of the song «Tutti Frutti» Little Richard demonstrated screaming and the improvised phrase «A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-lop-bam-boom!», which became his trademark. Instead, in the song «Long Tall Sally» the singer prefers expressive performance and improvised screaming, which make it one of the most incendiary songs. Improvised performance, in particular, screaming and spontaneous melody changes characterize Little Richard's song «Good Golly Miss Molly». Moreover, Richard demonstrated his vocal abilities and talent for improvisation in the songs «Lucille», «Rip It Up», «Keep A Knockin» (Баско, 2020: 70).

It is worth noting that Little Richard performed a number of songs that contained improvisational

elements. His energetic and expressive performances, along with his improvisational vocals, established Richard as one of the most influential singers of the rock and roll period (Стецюк, 2020: 184).

A successful performer of XX century popular music was an American singer, actor, and musician known as the «King of Rock and Roll» Elvis Presley (1935–1977). He was born on January 8, 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi. His life began to be showered with fame from the moment he signed a contract with Sun Records in Memphis, Tennessee in 1954. His first success was the song «That's All Right», which marked a breakthrough for rock and roll music. Combining the rhythms of African-American blues, country, rhythm and blues, Elvis Presley created a unique sound.

During the 1950s and 1970s, Presley became one of the most prominent personalities in the music industry. His success on the charts, television appearances, and concert shows aroused unprecedented interest among audiences of all ages. In 1956, Elvis Presley signed a contract with Columbia Pictures and began his acting career. As a rule, he played roles mainly in musical films. In total, Elvis Presley sold over 600 million records during his career and became the best-selling solo artist in the history of music. He has won numerous awards, including three Grammy Awards. As a result, we can say that Elvis Presley forever changed the imagination of popular music, bringing new elements and style. He made rock and roll a recognized musical form, and we can see his influence not only in music, but also in fashion, cinema, dance and culture in general (Guralnick, 1999: 50; Presley, 2005: 63).

Based on the generalization and application of the biographical method, it was found that Elvis Presley was a master of vocal improvisation, especially in the rock and roll genre. He often made changes to original compositions, adding vocal touches and changing melodic lines during performances. A key aspect of Presley's vocal improvisation is his ability to convey strong emotions through his voice and manner of performance. He easily switched from energetic and lively compositions to gentle and emotional songs. Elvis systematically added vocal parts that were outside the original recording of the song. His famous call «Uh-huh-huh» was used as a kind of response to melodic lines and musical chords.

We have established that Elvis Presley's vocal style was characterized by changes in the lyrics. Thus, the singer added or, conversely, dropped words. He varied the melody. Comparative and contrastive analysis made it possible to single out Elvis Presley's compositions in which he most embodied his improvisational skills.

For example, the song «Jailhouse Rock» was one of Presley's most recognizable hits and contained vocal improvisational exclamations («Uh-huh-huh»). At the same time, Elvis Presley's vocal improvisation was manifested in the rock and roll song «Hound Dog», especially in concert. Presley added his vocal freedom and improvisation to the song «Can't Help Falling in Love». In addition, vocal sophistication is characteristic of the songs «Blue Suede Shoes», «Heartbreak Hotel», «Suspicious Minds», «Are You Lonesome Tonight?», where Elvis Presley, through the inclusion of long vocal sounds and improvisational phrases, complemented them with a peculiar dynamics. From this perspective, we can say that Elvis Presley's talent and creativity allowed him to create unique performances that remain recognized among music fans (Presley, 2005: 72).

Buddy Holly was an influential figure in the history of rock and roll, an American singer, composer, and guitarist. He was born on September 7, 1936 in Lubbock, Texas. He died at the age of just 22 in a plane crash that occurred on February 3, 1959. Buddy Holly showed a love for music from an early age. He quickly and skillfully mastered the guitar and piano. In 1955, he signed his first contract with Decca Records. His music combined elements of rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and country. One of Buddy Holly's most famous songs, «That'll Be the Day», became a national hit (1957) and brought him worldwide fame.

Turning to the work of Buddy Holly, we can say that he was a talented songwriter. However, his life was tragically cut short. Together with Richie Valens (American singer, composer, guitarist, one of the founders of American-Mexican rock and roll) and Jisl Perry, known as «The Big Bopper», he was in the legendary plane that crashed on February 3, 1959 in the fields of Iowa. This tragedy went down in music history as The Day the Music Died (Каблова, 2018: 74).

However, despite the fact that Buddy Holly's career was rather short, he left a memorable mark on the world of rock and roll music, where the singer's vocal improvisation was imprinted in a number of compositions. For example, in the song «That'll Be the Day», Holly used vocal improvisation to give his vocal lines additional expression and a sense of freedom. At the same time, in «Oh Boy!» Buddy Holly embodied the spirit of rock and roll with vocal exclamations and transitions. The song «Not Fade Away» featured vocal improvisation, which added uniqueness, dynamics, and emotionality.

Considering the work of famous vocalists, the creators of rock and roll, we can say that in rock

and roll, vocal improvisation provides performers with the opportunity for additional self-expression. During improvisation, the singer experiments with different vocal techniques, feels the music in a different key and reproduces the deepest emotions. Moreover, one of the most important advantages of vocal improvisation is its spontaneity. This feature is extremely relevant in rock and roll, as live performances are always different from studio recordings. The vocalist can freely improvise with words, melodies, and vocal sounds, giving the impression that each performance is unique and inimitable (Боженський, 2017: 20).

Today, singers of various genres continue to turn to vocal improvisation. It adds uniqueness and originality to performances. Rock and roll, as the originator of vocal improvisation, inspires younger generations of musicians and preserves this traditional element in their work.

Conclusion. Based on the application of general scientific and specific scientific research methods, the article highlights the features of vocal improvisation in the genre of popular music rock and roll and finds out that the vocal improvisation of Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly is of great value and influence on rock and roll as a genre of popular music. It has been established that each of the performers added their own unique style and technique of vocal improvisation, which contributed to the development and dissemination of the studied musical technique. Thus, the musical improvisation of Chuck Berry, one of the founders of rock and roll, is characterized by an excellent combination of rhythm and blues influences. He used vocal improvisation to enhance the rhythm and energy of his performances. Chuck Berry freely manipulated melodies and riffs, adding drive and unpredictability to his performances.

An extravagant and energetic vocal style is proven to be characteristic of Little Richard. His improvisation was filled with shouts aimed at enhancing the dynamics of the songs. Moreover, he added challenges to his vocals through high notes, creating the impression of great emotional intensity. At the same time, deep and emotional vocals are characteristic of Elvis Presley, who skillfully used improvisation to give his performances a special style and expressiveness. Elvis Presley experimented with his voice, creating dynamic transitions from whispers to loud vocalizations. Buddy Holly had an innovative and authentic performance style. His improvisation was distinguished by an approach in which he used simple riffs and melodies to create a memorable and distinctive vocal line.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Артем'єва Г. Критерії відбору та прогнозування спортивного удосконалювання в акробатичному рок-н-ролі. Харків: ХДАФК, 2007. 20 с.
2. Баско О. Техніка джазової вокальної імпровізації в процесі підготовки естрадних співаків. Суми, 2020. 89 с.
3. Боженський А., Душний А. Наукові пріоритети вокального мистецтва ХХІ століття в контексті української академічної школи. *Вісник Луганського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка : Педагогічні науки*, 2017. №2 (307). №. 1. С. 17–25.
4. Волошина А. Особливості вокальної імпровізації в сучасних вокальних творах. *Věda a perspektivy*, 2022. № 12 (19). URL: <http://perspectives.pp.ua/index.php/vp/article/view/3184> .
5. Гуменюк С. Вдосконалення спеціальної фізичної і технічної підготовленості спортсменів з акробатичного рок-н-ролу. Харків: ХДАФК, 2019. 23 с.
6. Каблова Т. Специфіка академічного вокального мистецтва в сучасному дискурсі культури. Альманах «Культура і сучасність», 2018. № 1. С. 73–77.
7. Стецюк Б. Види музичної імпровізації: класифікаційний дискурс. Проблеми взаємодії мистецтва, педагогіки та теорії і практики освіти, 2020. Випуск 57. С. 178–196.
8. Guralnick P., Jorgensen E. *Elvis Day by Day*. NY: Ballantine Books, 1999. 68 p.
9. Presley P. *Presley by the Presleys*. NY: Crown, 2005. 97 p.
10. Stoloff B. *Vocal Improvisation: An Instru-Vocal Approach for Soloists*. Boston, 2021. 96 p.

REFERENCES

1. Artyeva H. Kryteriyi vidboru ta prohnozuvannya sportyvnoho udoskonalyuvannya v akrobatychnomu rok-n-rolі. [Selection criteria and forecasting of sports improvement in acrobatic rock and roll]. Kharkiv: KHDAFK, 2007. 20 s. [in Ukrainian].
2. Basko O. Tekhnika dzhazovoyi vokalnoyi improvizatsiyi v protsesi pidhotovky estradnykh spivakiv. [The technique of jazz vocal improvisation in the process of training pop singers]. Sumy, 2020. 89 s. [in Ukrainian].
3. Bozhenskyy A., Dushnyy A. Naukovi priorytety vokal'noho mystetstva XXI stolittya v konteksti ukrayinskoyi akademichnoyi shkoly. [Scientific priorities of vocal art of the 21st century in the context of the Ukrainian academic school]. *Visnyk Luhanskoho natsionalnoho universytetu imeni Tarasa Shevchenka: Pedahohichni nauky*, 2017. №2 (307). №. 1. S. 17–25. [in Ukrainian].
4. Voloshyna A. Osoblyvosti vokalnoyi improvizatsiyi v suchasnykh vokalnykh tvorakh. [Peculiarities of vocal improvisation in modern vocal works.]. *Věda a perspektivy*, 2022. № 12 (19). URL: <http://perspectives.pp.ua/index.php/vp/article/view/3184> . [in Ukrainian].
5. Humenyuk S. Vdoskonalennya spetsialnoyi fizychnoyi i tekhnichnoyi pidhotovlenosti sport-smeniv z akrobatychnoho rok-n-rolu. [Improvement of special physical and technical training of acrobatic rock and roll athletes]. Kharkiv: KHDAFK, 2019. 23 s. [in Ukrainian].
6. Kablova T. Spetsyfika akademichnoho vokalnoho mystetstva v suchasnomu dyskursi kultury. [The specificity of academic vocal art in the modern discourse of culture.]. *Almanakh «Kultura i suchasnist»*, 2018. № 1. S. 73–77. [in Ukrainian].
7. Stetsyuk B. Vydy muzychnoyi improvizatsiyi: klasyfikatsiyyny dyskurs. [Types of musical improvisation: classification discourse]. *Problemy vzayemodiyi mystetstva, pedahohiky ta teoriyi i praktyky osvity*, 2020. Vypusk 57. S. 178–196. [in Ukrainian].
8. Guralnick P., Jorgensen E. *Elvis Day by Day*. NY: Ballantine Books, 1999. 68 p.
9. Presley P. *Presley by the Presleys*. NY: Crown, 2005. 97 p.
10. Stoloff B. *Vocal Improvisation: An Instru-Vocal Approach for Soloists*. Boston, 2021. 96 p.