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# The Secrets of Ad-Libbing

*Is ad-libbing something that singers can just do or not do? Can it be worked on directly? Can people improve?*

The answer to the last two questions is a resounding yes!

## What is it?

'Ad lib' is short for 'ad libitum', being Latin for "at one's liberty".

It's where singers make up spontaneous melodies with "woahs" and "yeahs" or snippets of lyric inspired by the song itself.

It's generally done over a whole section of a song such as a chorus or coda (end section).

It's a standard feature of a lot of different styles of pop music and therefore a lot of lead vocalists need to be able to do it.

## Develop Your Ad-Libbing

As with every field, there are people who are just naturally good at ad-libbing and don't need to work on it.

However, for others, practicing ad-libbing can form part of a regular vocal practice program and also be included in vocal coaching sessions.

Here are some suggestions:

**1. Do your homework.** Listen to and learn from the masters of the ad-libbing world. Analyse the ad-libs of the singers who inspire you. Natalie Weiss has a wonderful YouTube series called “Breaking Down The Riffs” that you may find useful. If a particular ad-lib is too fast to break down, there are apps such as the “Amazing Slow Downer” available to help.

**2. Learn your scales & modes.** The key ones to learn are the Pentatonic scales, as many ad lib lines are based on these. There are many products available (including apps that will be discussed next week) that can help you learn these musical patterns.

**3. Jam, jam, jam!** Get together with other musicians and jam (i.e. improvise). You can test run lots of ideas; some may work, some may not and that’s fine – it’s all part of the learning process. You can also improvise by yourself along with backing tracks. Search on YouTube, Spotify or iTunes.

If ad-libbing makes you a little nervous, start with short, basic ideas and let them become more complex as your skill builds.

Finally, the more regularly you turn on the ad-libbing ‘tap’, the better at it you’ll get.

## My Reactions to This Week’s Peer Review Vids



 [Al Andrew](#)  – “Dreams” (Cover)

You have a natural, effortless, high-set voice that is capable of singing a female song in the original key without sounding strained. However, I’m not convinced of this choice of song to showcase your voice as it’s highly repetitive chordally and therefore needs the beautiful vocal harmonies in the chorus to make it work. Also, because you have such a clear tone, your pitching has to be

absolutely on point, and you need to make sure you get the melody & lyrics completely right on such a well-known song. I'm looking forward to your next video to see what else you can do.



[Mark Flatt](#) – “Down in Flames” (Cover)

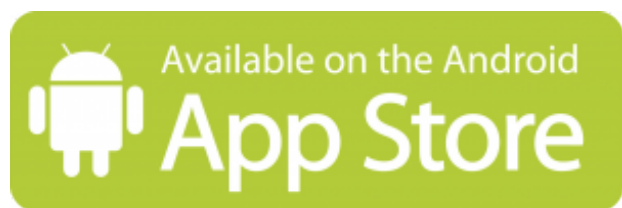
It's good to see that you're out there gigging, but because this footage was taken at a live gig, it's difficult to hear the details of what you're doing because of the sound quality and the audience chat in the background. However, there is no doubt that this style of song suits you, but it came across to me as a somewhat 'safe' option vocally. It doesn't extend you very much (the range of the melody is mostly within the interval of a 6th) and it was a little bland dynamically. So try a slightly more 'stretchy' song choice next time and let's see what you can really do.



[Joao Pedro](#) – “Get Lucky” (Cover)

This is such a popular song to cover! And I applaud that you tried to be adventurous in the arrangement, but this song is all about setting up that groove and this is primarily what your version lacks for me. It may have been easier to sing over a pre-recorded track so that you could concentrate just on the vocal for this video. You have a basically decent vocal timbre but you need to concentrate on the details: accuracy of melody, timing, harmony parts and pronunciation of the lyric (which is know is difficult when English isn't your native language).



***Kim's Voice Cross Trainer App is available now. It's based on her popular "Funky 'n Fun" [vocal training series](#).***



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