

AS PRESCRIBED WORK 2017

Sammy Davis Jr.

Sammy Davis Jr. (1925–1990) spent his whole life in show business. He toured as a child entertainer with his father in the Will Mastin Trio.

During World War Two he joined an integrated army unit, in which white and black soldiers served together. In his autobiographies he writes at length about encountering racism for the first time. He realised that when he was a child his father had protected him from the racist attitudes that were common at the time.

Rejoining the Will Mastin Trio after the war, he developed as a versatile performer who could sing, dance and act. He lost an eye in a serious car accident in 1954. During his recovery he was introduced to Judaism and he converted a few years later. In the 1950s and 1960s he appeared in leading roles in Broadway shows. Movie roles included *Ocean's 11* (1960), made with fellow members of the 'Rat Pack', a group of singer-actors which included Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin.



Davis's singing was influenced by Frank Sinatra's style. From his recordings certain characteristics stand out:

- Davis has a warm, powerful voice, with a wide range. He is able to sustain his tone and sing sensitively and strongly.
- He has a very good sense of timing. He is able to judge phrasing, knowing when to delay or anticipate a phrase, or interpret a melody to suit his own vocal range.
- He communicates well through the lyrics. He is fully engaged in his performance, colouring the notes to reflect the meaning and holding the audience's attention.

GREATEST HITS, LIVE (1977)

The three prescribed songs for AS Level 2017 were recorded live by RCA Victor in two concerts at the Sydney Opera House, Australia in August 1977. They were released by Warner Bros. on the album *Greatest Hits, Live*. The conductor and arranger was George Rhodes, Davis's musical director for 30 years. When Davis launched *The Sammy Davis Jr. Show* on NBC in 1966, Rhodes became the first black musical director on a major American TV network.

By the 1970s Davis was recording more popular numbers in an attempt to appeal to a younger audience. He continued to sing his earlier hits, and he was particularly associated with ‘Mr Bojangles’, ‘What Kind Of Fool Am I?’ and ‘The Birth Of The Blues’. He made studio recordings of them, but the live performances show his affinity with the audience, as well as his intensity and his ability to take risks during performances.

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‘Mr Bojangles’

This song references two people who went by the same name: Bojangles was the nickname of Bill Robinson, a black entertainer and dancer. Sammy Davis Jr. credited Robinson as having taught him to tap dance. Robinson broke down some of the colour barriers that existed in vaudeville and became the highest earning black performer before the war.

Jerry Jeff Walker, the song’s original singer, wrote the song after a chance encounter in a New Orleans jail with a white street performer who used the name Bojangles (presumably as a tribute to Bill Robinson). In the song Bojangles is an alcoholic; he performs in local fairs and mourns the loss of his dog. This is quite different from the biography of Bill Robinson (who died almost 20 years prior to the song’s composition).

This version is sung in E \flat major.

The original song had five verses and a chorus, as in the Neil Diamond and Jerry Jeff Walker versions discussed later. Davis sang the full version often, but for the Sydney performance he cut the song down to three verses, with the chorus sung twice at the end.

The verse is an **AAB** form. Each section ends on a dominant chord (with a IV-V imperfect cadence), so there is always a feeling of wanting to move on to the next section.

Chord progression for the first section (AA): E \flat , B \flat /D, Cm, B \flat , A \flat maj7, B \flat 7.

AA - 4 bars (x2)

Chord progression for the second section (B): A \flat maj7, Gm7, G7, Cm, Cm7/B \flat , Am7(b5), B \flat sus4, B \flat 7.

B - 6 bars

The chorus is eight bars long. It repeats the phrase ‘Mister Bojangles’ in three two-bar phrases (Cm–B \flat chords), finally arriving at the tonic chord (E \flat) on ‘dance’.

Sammy Davis Jr.: ‘Mr Bojangles’

0:00	Davis begins with a bar of vocalised rhythm, then the guitar and bass introduction begins, playing over the two-bar pattern five times. The audience recognises the song immediately and applauds in anticipation. Davis adds a whistled counter melody.
0:30	Applause again as Davis begins to sing. He tells the story simply, in short phrases, as if remembering what happened. The phrasing is smoother on ‘He jumped so high’, accompanied by soft strings. He delays ‘touched down’ as long as he can, making his picture of the dancer more enthralling.
1:10	Another storytelling effect comes with the hesitation and repetitions of ‘with’ and ‘how his’ to suggest a spontaneous narrative. The accompaniment is fuller: the cymbal is added in the drums and there is a piano counter melody in 3rds and 6ths. At the B section there are soft brass chords and a counter melody in the saxophones, with a crescendo as the song tells of the death of the dog.
1:49	Bojangles tells his story in his own words, characterised by Davis in a hoarse voice. The texture is reduced for the story, building up again from the B section. This time the crescendo continues into the chorus.
2:26	The bass and drums break into quavers for the chorus. Davis is quite free with the lyrics in the interests of storytelling: ‘That’s Mr Bojangles. Call him Mr Bojangles.’
2:47	The repeat of the chorus allows Davis to improvise, going into the top of his range (touching B \flat on the first ‘Mister Bojangles’ and a sustained A \flat on the second).
3:08	The Outro reduces the band and returns to the mood of the opening over the guitar accompaniment. Davis repeats phrases from the chorus: ‘Come back and dance again’, ‘Please Mister Bojangles’. He ends with the whistled melody of the introduction.

Discuss the effectiveness of Davis’s version.

- His performance is emotionally charged. It covers a wide range: the understated, narrative feeling of the opening, the energy and power of the chorus, and the wistful sadness of the ending.
- How effective is the arrangement of the song? Compare this with longer versions. Why did Davis opt for the shorter version for this performance? Discuss the use of the extended introduction and outro.
- Some find the song exploitative and insensitive in its attitude to Mr Bojangles and his alcoholism. Discuss whether Davis manages to avoid this.

- Did Davis’s personal connection with Bill Robinson – like him the most famous black singer and tap dancer of his day – allow him to show empathy and understanding for the subject of the song? Or is his approach sentimental and overdone? Or is this song nothing to do with Robinson at all?

Comparative versions

Neil Diamond

From *Touching You, Touching Me* (Uni, 1969). Arranged by Lee Holdridge. Key: C major.

Singer-songwriter Neil Diamond included ‘Mr Bojangles’ on his fifth album, which otherwise mostly included his own songs. Brought up in New York, he left college for a 16-week job writing songs for a publishing company. Although the job did not work out, he went on to a highly successful career, selling over 100 million records worldwide.

His version of ‘Mr Bojangles’ is notable for the following:

- Full version in five verses, with the chorus after Verses 2, 4 and 5.
- Instrumental introduction (two guitars, bass).
- Faster tempo, more direct performance, longer phrases in the verses.
- Neil Diamond’s singing is a natural, folk style, linking with the country music origins of the song.
- Chorus is simpler in rhythm, less movement, bass only on the first beat of the bar: guitar countermelody to ‘Mister Bojangles’, repeated with second guitar in 6ths, cymbal rhythm.
- Organ chords are added in Verse 2, strings in Verse 3.
- Full orchestra in Verse 4, including trumpets. Suddenly softer, brass drops out, at the dog’s death.
- Outro features a ‘dah lah’ vocal line with violin countermelody. Fade out at the end.

Jerry Jeff Walker

From *Gypsy Songman* (Ryko, 1986). Walker first recorded his song in 1968, but this is a later recorded version. Key: D major.

His recording displays:

- Brisk tempo, faster than Davis and Diamond.
- Full five verses, with the chorus after Verses 1, 3 and 5.
- Guitar solo between the second chorus and Verse 4; also in the Outro.
- Walker’s vocal performance is characteristic of country and western style, clear story-telling, melodic and rhythmic, clipped ends of phrases with few sustained notes. Occasional use of yodelling (a quick shift to falsetto) for a few notes, e.g., at the end of the final chorus.
- Consistent in mood and expression; maintains an even pace and volume, e.g., the episode of the dog is little different in style and expression from the other verses.
- Strong, regular rhythm in bass and drums, decorated chords and countermelodies from guitars (with country ‘twang’ of steel strings).

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‘What Kind Of Fool Am I?’

Words and music by Leslie Bricusse & Anthony Newley.

Davis sang many songs by the British songwriting duo, Bricusse and Newley. ‘What Kind Of Fool Am I?’ is from their first musical *Stop The World - I Want To Get Off*, which had a successful Broadway run in 1962. Davis recorded the song in the same year, released as a hit single and in an album, *What Kind Of Fool Am I And Other Showstoppers*. The song was popular with other artists from the beginning.

Londoner Anthony Newley (1931-1999) left school at the age of 14 and worked as an office boy while he learnt to act. He was cast as the Artful Dodger in David Lean’s film of *Oliver Twist* (1948). He developed a career as a singer and teamed up with lyricist and composer Leslie Bricusse (b. 1931) so that he could star in his own stage musical.

Newley sang ‘What Kind Of Fool Am I?’, the closing song of the show, in the original British and American productions. He played the role of Littlechap, who enjoys a lifetime of success before he realises his own selfishness. You can hear his brisk, Cockney-accented version of the song for Decca on the Original Broadway Cast album. The line ‘I don’t give a damn’ could not be broadcast, so he later made a further version that was suitable for radio.

Let’s look at the ‘standard’ version of the song. This is in the key of B \flat major.

Moderately slow

Gm7 Ebmaj7 Cm7 Bbmaj7 Gm7 Bbmaj7 Gm7 F7

1 Bbmaj7 Cm7 F7 What kind of Bbmaj7
fool am I? Who nev-er fell in love, it seems that I'm the on-ly

6 G7 Cm7 F7 B \flat Gm7
one that I have been think-ing of. What kind of man is this? An emp-ty
(life)

11 C7 F/A Dm7 Gm7 C7 FSus4 F7
shell, a lone-ly cell in which an emp-ty heart must dwell. What kind of



17 $B\flat$ maj7 Dm7 F7 $B\flat$ maj7

{ lips are these that lied with ev - 'ry kiss? That whis-pered emp - ty words of
clown am I? What do I know of life? Why can't I cast a - way the

22 $Fm/A\flat$ G7 $Fm7$ $B\flat7$ $E\flat6$

love that left me a - lone like this? Why can't I fall in love
mask of play and live my life? Why can't I fall in love

26 $Cm7(b5)$ $B\flat/D$ C7 $Cm7$ $E\flat m$ F7

— like an - y oth - er man } and may-be then I'll know what kind of fool I
— 'til I don't give a damn

31 1. $B\flat$ $B\flat$ maj7 Gm7 $E\flat$ maj7 F7 2. $B\flat$ $B\flat$ maj7 Gm7 $E\flat$ maj7 Cm7 $B\flat$ maj7

am. What kind of am.

Sammy Davis Jr.: 'What Kind Of Fool Am I?'

Bars	Phrasing	Shape of melody	Harmony
1-8	2+2+4	Low register. Each phrase climbs higher than the previous one.	Ends with imperfect cadence.
9-16	2+2+4	Ascending shape. 'Shell' on the leading note of the new key (A), reaches the $B\flat$ on the last note 'dwell'.	Modulates to the dominant (F).
17-24	2+2+4	Repeats bars 1-8. Changes last two bars to go higher.	Modulating to subdominant ($E\flat$). Imperfect cadence to end on $B\flat7$.
25-32	2+2+4	Highest part of the melody. Alternates between tonic and supertonic ($B\flat$ and C).	Return to tonic, using chromatic chords.

In the final section (bars 25–32) the melody is very simple – in the printed version it is only two notes. Davis is much freer in arranging the vocal line to suit his vocal qualities, such as choosing higher notes or whole phrases instead of continuing in a low register. The piano accompaniment is richer and more elaborate than the original.

Much of the expressive effect of this passage comes from the chromatic movement in the strong original harmonies (see the upper note of each chord):

Each section has broadly the same rhythm and phrasing (two short phrases of two bars, followed by an extended four-bar phrase). The similarity between the four sections of the song makes it difficult to label the structure in the usual A, B method.

For example, each of these tells you something about the structure of the song:

AAAA

A-A¹-A-A²

ABAC

A¹-A²-A³-A⁴

Discuss how clear and useful these are. Are there better alternatives? The following section uses **A¹-A²-A³-A⁴**.

Now let's look at our prescribed work, the live version of the song taken from Sammy Davis Jr.'s album, *Greatest Hits, Live*.

Sammy Davis Jr.: 'What Kind Of Fool Am I?'

0:00	A ¹ A ²	<p>There is no introduction. In the Sydney performances the song formed part of a medley with another Bricusse & Newley song, 'The Candy Man', which it followed without a break. The first three notes are sung unaccompanied.</p> <p>The romantic piano textures, with decorative arpeggios and countermelodies, keep the music moving. The piano fills in between phrases and during longer notes in the voice. Davis pauses for a quip with the audience. His singing is light in tone, relaxed and conversational, as if in a club or cabaret. The pianist is used to adjusting to the singer's spontaneity: after Davis's 'Excuse me' the piano repeats a few notes of the accompaniment so that the song continues without a break.</p>
0:58	A ³ A ⁴ 'What kind of lips are these...'	<p>The second half of the song continues with the piano accompaniment. The singing is more concentrated, with more expressive treatment of the words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A break (a pause in both voice and piano) before 'empty' makes the word sound more bitter. ■ A diminuendo and straight tone (without vibrato) on 'alone'. ■ A decoration on 'other', then continuing into the next phrase ('and maybe then I'll know') with a crescendo in one breath.

1:52	<p>A³A⁴</p> <p>‘What kind of clown am I?’</p>	<p>A tone higher, in C major, repeating the music of the second half to new words. The full orchestra enters, with even quavers in the cymbals. The first five bars have a tonic pedal C in the bass, with a rich, reharmonised texture of high piano chords (C–C(#5)–Am/C) and sustained notes in reeds and brass. A³ keeps mostly in tempo, with a clear rhythmic pattern in the bass and clear countermelodies in unison saxophones.</p> <p>A⁴ is freer in rhythm, with the band following Davis as the music slows. He extends some notes with pauses, e.g., the high A on ‘til’. He takes the melody up to a high G to finish the song, with a slow dramatic slide to repeat the pitch. The brisk fanfares in the tag bring the music to a rousing conclusion.</p>
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Comparative versions

Nancy Wilson

From *Today, Tomorrow, Forever* (Capitol, 1964). Arrangements by Kenny Dennis (drums).

Key: B \flat major.

Born in Ohio in 1937, Nancy Wilson began as a jazz singer. She moved to New York at the suggestion of alto saxophonist Julian ‘Cannonball’ Adderley. In the 1960s she recorded a succession of R&B and jazz albums for Capitol Records. *Today, Tomorrow, Forever*, recorded in only two days with her husband Kenny Dennis, is a selection of best-selling songs of the period.

Her version of ‘What Kind Of Fool Am I?’ includes:

- Light, fast moving, jazz waltz version, $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature.
- The celesta takes the role of the piano, adding playfulness and grace to the dance feel of this version. Plays the melody in the introduction and then a jazzy countermelody in the first half of the song (**A¹** and **A²**).
- Pizzicato bass, drums and guitar.
- Similar structure to Davis: **A¹ – A² – A³ – A⁴ – A³ – A⁴**.
- Guitar has quietly strummed syncopated chords, then takes over the solo countermelody at **A³**.
- Longer note values for the last line, but keeps the tempo until the end.

Regine Velasquez

From *Listen Without Prejudice* (PolyGram/Mercury, 1994). Key: B \flat major.

Regine Velasquez (b. 1970) is one of the most successful singers from the Phillipines. *Listen Without Prejudice* was her first album with a major international label and became a best-selling album on the Asian market. Although less popular in America and Europe, she has sold millions of albums in Asia, appeared in films and sponsored charitable causes.

Her version of ‘What Kind Of Fool Am I?’ includes:

- A very slow, hesitant and soft beginning, with phrases broken up to create a breathless, vulnerable picture.
- The full melody sung twice through.
- Dynamic contrast, with the first time very quietly, synth strings added for **A³** and a crescendo to forte on the final note.

- A key change to E \flat major the second time. Strings play the **A**¹ melody. The voice returns for **A**², the orchestra drops out. She sings to piano accompaniment only, suddenly softer. She crescendos to forte on ‘dwell’.
- A sharp contrast at **A**³: change of key to C major, voice in power ballad style – strong, forceful, highly charged with emotion.
- A leap to F on ‘then’ and ‘kind’. Long pause on ‘fool’ (with fill in the accompaniment). Leap up to E for the final note.

AS PRESCRIBED WORK 2017

‘The Birth Of The Blues’

Words by B. G. DeSylva & Lew Brown. Music by Ray Henderson.

‘The Birth Of The Blues’ was published in 1926 and first performed in George White’s *Scandals*, a Broadway comedy revue. Its composer and lyricists were responsible for updating the songs in the show as the script changed from year to year.

The words offer an idealised version of the origins of the blues, suitable for a white New York audience rather than a true historical account. Its inventors are ‘some people long ago’ (or an alternative offensive version of this line). The notes and ‘weird melodies’ are taken from the breeze, the poor and imprisoned, and the sound of a whippoorwill – a North American bird with a distinctive, musical call that sounds like its name.

The song has an introduction and a 32-bar **AABA** structure: the **BA** is repeated and the final **A** extended into a coda.

Davis’s version is sung in C major. The harmony of the eight-bar **A** sections has a chromatic ascending bass, moving in 3rds with the voice and the harmony (in the strings). This creates a strong progression from tonic to dominant chords in the first four bars. Below is the published version of the song – notice how Davis alters both the pitch and rhythm of the melody.

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four staves: Melody, Harmony, Saxes, and Bass. The lyrics are: 'We heard the breeze through the trees.' The melody starts with a half note 'We', followed by quarter notes 'heard', 'the', and 'breeze', and ends with a triplet of eighth notes 'through the trees'. The harmony consists of two chords: C major and C \sharp dim⁷. The saxophone part features two triplet eighth notes. The bass line consists of quarter notes: C, E, G, and C \sharp .

4 Dm7 D#dim7 C/E C(#5)

sing-ing weird me-lo-dies,...

6 F6 D7 G7

and we named that

Sammy Davis Jr.: ‘The Birth Of The Blues’

0:00	Introduction	<p>Voice and piano. 16 bars. Sammy Davis Jr. takes ownership of the song, changing ‘some people’ to ‘my people’ and ‘they’ to ‘we’. The piano plays a decorative blues accompaniment. Davis takes the introduction at a moderate tempo, with some rubato when he wants to bring out the expression in a line (e.g., ‘swayin’ to and fro’). He adds semi-improvised interjections to the original melody:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ‘We didn’t have nothin’ but some soul’ ■ ‘I said the blues’ ■ ‘Oh yeah’ – an octave leap down to C at the very bottom of his range, a deliberately amusing touch.
0:56	AA	<p>The band enters for the song, with a strong crotchet beat in the bass and drums. The saxophone’s four-note figure answers the voice in an ascending sequence. Note Davis’s expressive treatment of ‘weird’: a break before the word and a sudden leap up to a high register A.</p>

1:33	BA	<p>The B ('bridge') section has a new riff on E7 (see example), moving to A7 for the second half. The piano has high repeated triplets. The voice sings mostly repeated high Es (going up to G# for 'high'), descending on "til it was worn'. Syncopated hits in the brass and drums punctuate the ends of phrases (after 'horn' and 'worn'). The saxophone ascending riff returns for the A section:</p> 
2:07	BA	<p>The full band leads a repeat of the B section, swinging the riff louder and harder than before. Davis breaks off after the first line to encourage the audience to clap along ('like we did in the old days'). The final return of A features a call and response between trumpets and trombones, repeating a two-note minor 3rd figure (C descending to A), at first at every half bar, then speeding up to every beat. In the stereo recording the trumpets are in the right channel and the trombones in the left to reproduce the antiphonal effect of the live performance.</p> <p>An interrupted cadence (G7-A13, with a blues-style clash of C\flat and C#) leads into a coda.</p>
2:42	Coda	<p>The last line is repeated. The final chord (played three times) is C13(#11) - a tonic 13th chord with B\flat and F#.</p>
3:11	BA (reprise)	<p>The reprise of the final section begins during the applause. Davis encourages the audience to keep clapping ('Don't let me down now!'). He varies the vocal line, adding more exciting ideas as the song comes to an end.</p>
3:44	Coda (reprise)	<p>The final three chords are more extended, separated by Davis's improvised lines.</p>

Comparative versions

Frank Sinatra

78rpm version, for Columbia (1952) released in *Frank Sinatra Sings His Greatest Hits* (Sony, 1997). Conducted by Axel Stordahl. Key: B major.

In Sinatra's version:

- Six bars are added before the introduction ('These Are The Blues').
- It begins with a forceful big band sound, full chords with trumpet shake on sustained notes. Accompaniment reduces for the main introduction and song.

- Sinatra is slower than Davis with this song. A steady, moderate pulse throughout, including both introductions.
- Sinatra draws out each note leading to the A section (‘They heard the...’) with a ritardando. He does the same later after the bridge (**B**) section (‘And then they...’)
- The main 16-bar introduction has strummed guitar and bass keeping time in crotchets.
- The solo alto saxophone answers the voice in the introduction. The reed section continues the dialogue after ‘They heard the breeze’.
- A solo trumpet (with a **plunger** mute) takes over for the second **A** section (‘And from a jail came the wail...’).
- Sinatra’s vocal performance is smoothly phrased, and consistent in tone and expression, allowing the melody and words to come through naturally.
- The **AABA** is sung once only, followed by the coda.

Shirley Bassey

From *Born To Sing The Blues* (Philips, 1957), released in *The Complete 1950s Masters* (NFM, 2011). Key: A major.

Dame Shirley Bassey (b. 1937) is one of the best loved of popular British singers. *Born To Sing The Blues* was her first album, released when she was only 20 years old. Born in Cardiff, she had worked in a factory, sung in clubs and had a child. Obviously talented, producers did not quite know what to do with her and tried her on blues arrangements by Wally Stott.

These were released as a 10-inch LP, with four songs on each side. Her version of this song highlights:

- Brief lead-in for full band, followed by introduction with piano only.
- Free tempo in the introduction. Bassey sings pairs of quavers as short-long (e.g., the first line: ‘say some’, ‘people’) – a **Scotch snap/Lombard** rhythm, giving character to her delivery of the words.
- Piano, accompanying in block chords (e.g., parallel 9th chords), with some arpeggio fills. Only limited use of idiomatic blues style, more conventional song features (e.g., descending straight quavers and a mordent on the final note to the end of each section).
- Same tempo as Sinatra, same structure as Davis: **AABABA** (coda). Trumpet solo for the second **B** section.
- Clear, powerful tone. Controlled phrasing (e.g., ‘breeze’ is delayed to the second beat, then sung with ‘through the trees’ in one breath. Goes up to C# in the **B** section (‘from a whippoorwill’) without breaking into head voice.

Discussion points

Which of these versions do you prefer? Sinatra and Bassey were recorded early in their careers. Davis is the performance of a mature and experienced artist, recording a song that he had performed many times. How does the presence of an audience influence the performance? Does performing the song slowly give it depth and meaning? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Davis’s approach? Compare the three arrangements of the song.