

# **MAYE CAVALLARO**

**MZJAZZ.COM**

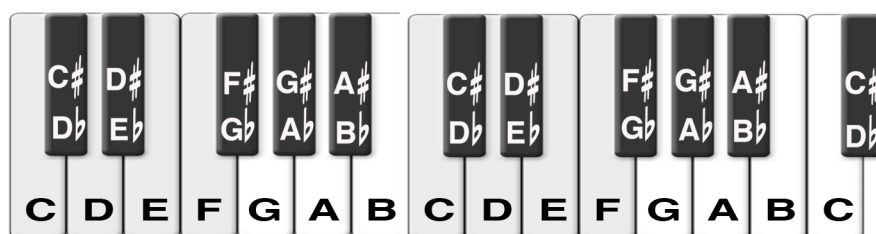
## Choosing a Key

Determining the key for the song that best suits your voice is an important part of preparing your presentation. There is a some controversy among jazz players about what keys are “appropriate” for jazz. Some players believe that whatever key is best for the singer is fine, but when you are using leadsheets and playing with players that are not familiar with your charts there are certain keys that are more familiar and that most jazz players are comfortable with. The most accepted keys for jazz standards are C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab and G. This certainly doesn’t mean that you need to avoid the other keys altogether, just that the more familiar keys would most likely be in most players comfort zone.

Discover some basic information about your voice.

No matter whether you were a soprano or a bass in high school, or if you like to sing along with Celine Dion on your ipod, this is how to find out where your voice is comfortable on its own.

1. Begin by saying “hey” (as if you were greeting someone) in your normal speaking range.
2. Say it and then sing it. Find the note that you are singing on the piano.



3. Sing the notes down from there to your lowest comfortable singing note. Not the lowest note you can breathe out, but the lowest that still has sound. Record that in your notebook along with the date.
4. Now go up the scale from your starting note to your highest comfortable singing note. Record that note also. For now, that is the “range” of your voice.

Although those notes comprise your “range,” the key you choose will also depend on the mood of the song, the style and tempo and where the melody “lays” in your voice. Where the song “lays” is also called the tessitura.

The definition from Wikipedia:

In music, the term tessitura (Italian for texture) generally describes the most musically acceptable and comfortable timbre for a given voice or, less frequently, musical instrument; the range in which a given type of voice presents its best-sounding texture or timbre.)

A very soft romantic ballad might work best in the lower part of your voice, while an up-tempo swing or latin tune might work best in a higher part of your voice.

1. Begin by singing the song on your own without any accompaniment.
2. Raise or lower the pitch until you are singing in a range where the song feels comfortable.
3. Determine the opening or ending note of where you have chosen to sing and check it with your music. If the note on the sheet music is C and you are singing that not as a Ab, then you are singing down (or up) 4 half-steps from the written key.
4. Whatever the key of the written music your key is 4 half steps below. You can make yourself a simple handwritten tranposition chart like the one below.

Old Key	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B
New Key	G# Ab	A	A# Bb	B	C	C# Db	D	D# Eb	E	F	F# Gb	G