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Arranging for Big Band 1-2-3 by Michael Philip Mossman presented by Hal Leonard

Before you start... *Step away from the keyboard and pick up an index card!*

(Don't **waste** time doing an entire chart for the wrong situation. Get the big picture first and set your priorities accordingly!)

1st step: Answer the big questions

Who is going to play this chart?

Who is going to listen to this chart?

What is my goal in writing this chart?

What is the band's goal in commissioning/performing this chart?

Where is the chart going to be performed, and in what context? (Outdoor concert, recording, band festival, etc.)

Does the group have a defined style? Am I familiar with that style?

Do I know this song, or have access to accurate lead sheets/recordings?

Who are the soloists to be featured? What do they like to do? (What are they able to do?)

What can I assume the musicians know how to do? (Allows simpler notation, especially in rhythm section parts)

What special strengths/weaknesses are presented by this band? (range, woodwind and brass doubles, special instruments, such as vibes, strings, and percussion, age and experience)

Is the chart meant to serve as a teaching tool?

2nd step: Plan the form (Write a mission statement for the chart, e.g. "This chart will show off the band's virtuosity, give the drummer a great solo spot to perform his specialty in odd meters and leave the audience guessing about the theme until the out chorus," or "This chart will give our vocalist an uncomplicated setting to her best song. The chart will be an understated modernistic Bossa with chromatic 4th voicings in the bone section behind the vocal theme and will feature a short guitar solo.) By the time I've planned the form of my chart, I usually can hear most of it in my head. In addition, I have an architectural design that makes the rest of the job as simple as painting by numbers!

Form issues include:

What needs to happen in this chart? (Theme, solos, vocal feature, kick butt, humor, drama etc.)

How much time do I have to get it done? (Length of the chart)

What mood(s) do I want to express?

What resources are available to create that mood?

Where will the highpoint of the chart happen?

What will soloists play over and how will they be accompanied?

How do I want to end the chart? (Big, quiet, extended vamp etc.)

The entire roadmap, including intro, theme, interludes, solos, solis, tuttis, recap and coda. Look at the form with respect to the flow of energy (dynamics, density, range, tempo, etc) and see that the chart doesn't "flat line" or stay stagnant (unless that is the point of the chart...)

3rd step: Assess your skills

If you have 3 hours to knock out a chart, don't waste time attempting to use techniques you have not yet developed (extensive reharmonization, solis in 5 part harmony, big, fully orchestrated shout choruses). Write a simple, direct chart using the simplest and most direct techniques. (e.g. unison and octave writing, "lead sheet" harmony, vamps and ostinato bass lines) Practice your skills at another time. If you have well developed skills in harmony, counterpoint and orchestration, you can use these and still keep within your time budget.

4th Step: Find the "thing" of the chart

A successful chart should have identity. Even a simple chart can have some characteristic feature, be it a catchy bass line, counter-melody or accompaniment to the theme that is memorable. Often, the "thing" or a "hook" happens concurrent with the first chorus. Other times the chart's identity can be created in an intro that comes back as an interlude or coda. This identity should be created in fulfillment of your intent to create a mood, or identifiable feeling in the chart.

5th Step: Write your first chorus

I almost always write the setting of the theme first. Writing an intro first is like introducing a guest you don't know anything about. Often, the ideas I use in my intros and interludes come from part of the theme and how I choose to treat it. The greatest identity you can have in your chart is how you treat the melody itself, so getting that right is most of the battle.

Decide on a rhythm section approach that supports the overall mood of your chart. Generic swing notation (chord slashes) can be your quickest option, but if you can create either a customized bass figure or 'comping rhythm, your chart will have more identity.

If short on time, consider conserving time and resources by scoring the theme simply and clearly, perhaps in unison/octaves. You can use one section of the band, e.g. saxes, or write for a colorful combination of instruments, e.g. muted trumpet and alto. If your chart is AABA form, you can then do the same for the second A section, perhaps adding a simple accompaniment or embellishment of the first A. This moves the chart forward and doesn't take much extra time. Write accompanying figures in the band that support your rhythm section feel.

If the tune has a bridge, you would do well to make a real contrast in rhythm or orchestration or both. In this way, if you return to your scoring of the A sections unaltered, it will still sound fresh and that will save you time. If your setting of the first chorus has any unique characteristic rhythmic/melodic elements, you should already have enough thematic material to finish your chart.

6th Step: Reuse your material! Good news! The technique that saves you the most time also gives you a stronger chart. By working and reworking the same thematic material in your chart, you get focus, consistency and you save time by having a ready-to-go source of material for intros, backgrounds, interludes and codas. Keep returning to the most characteristic motives of the melody for source material for lines, rhythms and even chord progressions. "Characteristic" means having a readily identifiable rhythm or intervallic shape, like the opening phrase to "I Love You" or the theme to Star Trek, or the rhythm of the second four bars of "It Don't Mean a Thing..." The trick is to then use classical compositional techniques, such as inversion (turn the lick upside down), diminution (give the lick shorter note values), augmentation (give the lick longer note values), or retrograde (play the lick backwards). This also helps you overcome blocks, as your material is already there for you in raw form to start with. You want the transformation of the themes to be audible, but not too much so, lest the chart sound monotonous or academic. Of course, the greatest reuse of material is using a D.C. or D.S. to repeat whole sections of your chart.

Intro: When pressed for time, the quickest intros to write include vamps, your verbatim orchestration of the last few bars of the chart, a simple four-bar progression (e.g. I-VI-II-V or I-XII-VI-V) with just the rhythm section perhaps embellished with a simple, unison line. I like to use some thematic material of the tune itself, some lick I use later in the chart, or even a part of the bridge of tune for the melodic material. I avoid using weak, generic intros that have no relation to the rest of the chart. It doesn't take any more time to write a simple, relevant intro (and you avoid being labeled a hack). The key is to use your intro to set the mood of the chart, either directly (same mood) or by contrast (surprise). Don't waste time, however, writing an intro for a chart that doesn't really need one! Sometimes, just starting with the theme works just fine.

Interludes: The point of an interlude is to join the sections (theme, solos, solis, etc.) together in an elegant fashion. Think of the way the legs of a piano are attached to the top. The transition from one part to the other is both functional and aesthetic. Here again is an opportunity to place your stamp on the chart. The quickest solution is to reuse material from the intro (think of Nica's Dream by Horace Silver). Your interlude should also either move the action forward by raising or lowering the energy of the chart to provide contrast and set up the next section. This can be as simple as a pedal in the bass, or a rhythmic break by the drummer. In some Slide Hampton charts, the interludes are a complete world unto themselves...but not to be done in 3 hours! You may also consider building an interlude into the beginning solo form. This is called a "send-off" and has the time-saving advantage of being scored over first few bars of the solo changes. You don't, therefore, need to create any new harmonic material for your interlude. That's often where most time is usually spent in arranging.

Solos and backgrounds: Solos are obviously a great way to lengthen your chart with little time investment (as long as you have a good rhythm section and good soloists!) If your rhythm section and soloists are inexperienced, you can compensate by writing simple backgrounds to keep the music moving. Here, again is a great opportunity to transform your thematic material and keep the focus in your chart. Backgrounds are often too busy anyway (ask your soloists if they prefer blowing over a background or with just rhythm section!) so simpler is better. Good backgrounds can increase the energy of a chart and help lead to a smooth transition after the solo into the next section. Simple techniques include snippets of melody in unison, chordal pads with the lead line having some motivic relevance, rhythmic hits or some call and response between sections (with plenty of space for the soloist in between!)

Solis: The point of a soli is to bring the band back into the picture and balance the more open sections, such as improvised solos. Solis do this in such a way as to be virtuosic, humorous, or just plain fun. If time is of the essence, solis **do not** have to involve any harmonization! (Check out Thad Jones trombone/bass soli in Tip Toe.) A nice clean unison trumpet line can make a great soli, if the line is good! Solis often go over a rhythm section playing "blowing changes," so writing a soli can be no more than reusing the solo form and composing an effective (catchy or fun to play) unison line in a comfortable range for whoever will play it. If you have developed voicing skills, of course, the sky (and your band's chops) is the limit. Using notation software, you can literally "play" your soli into your chart as almost as quickly as writing the line itself.

Tutti sections and shout choruses: These can take the most time as they tend to be heavily orchestrated and traditionally involve massive reharmonization. The solution for a quick chart is to use the unaltered chord progression of the song, write a simple, rhythmically based (not to notey) line and use the simplest voicing techniques (e.g. trumpet in close position, trombones complete the chord and saxes support the brass) or even a very rowdy sounding chorus scored in octaves throughout the band. (Don't overuse this one!) Another solution is building a vamp section that repeats as you add sections (like a mambo). Four bars worth of music can stretch into 16 or even 32 bars as you add rhythm, saxes, trombones, trumpets, etc. The power of such a section can match the weight of a shout chorus and leave you ready to take the chart out.

Coda: It's nice to put a real ending on a chart. It's like saying good night to your audience at the end of a show. They are not obligatory, however, or can be as simple as putting a "stinger" on

the end of the last phrase. Simple, time-saving techniques for creating a coda include reusing the intro or an interlude (maybe all three can be the same) or just repeating the last 4 bars of the chart and adding a held chord or closing figure to end the chart. If you have more time later you can fashion something more elaborate, when appropriate, but I often find that simple and direct can work just fine.

Dynamics and articulations: When I have the time, or intend to publish an arrangement, I make certain that the details of the chart are clearly indicated. I include articulation marks for any notes where the interpretation is not obvious, or when the chart is meant as a teaching tool. Dynamics are also very important and can say as much as notes and harmony if used to advantage. The key, in a quickly realized chart, is to know what is not obvious and what is. Save time by writing uncomplicated figures and use a broader dynamic brush. When it comes time to publish the chart, you can re-edit and add the details.

Rhythm section parts: Many of my published charts with Hal Leonard contain completely notated rhythm section parts. This is because the charts are meant to teach performance techniques required to perform the music in an authentic fashion, such as piano montunos, bass tumbaos and percussion rhythms in a Mambo. These are details you might have to elaborate on in later editions of your chart, if time is of the essence. When the bass line or 'comping patterns are essential to the identity of your chart, don't leave them out! You can, however, choose simple patterns and make liberal use of repeat bars. Don't lose time by writing out something if a simple verbal instruction, such as "simile," or "Mambo 2-3" will suffice.

Technique and decision making: Finally, writing a chart in a limited amount of requires you to make good decisions quickly and use the techniques you have to execute your plan. I have found that some of my best charts were written quickly. The chart on "Recordame" I wrote for Joe Henderson's Big Band recording on Verve was done in two days. When you write quickly, you learn to think clearly and use resources efficiently. Often, writing a chart in this way allows you to immerse yourself in the task and generate a "flow" that you might not find if you had more time!

Michael Philip Mossman first came to prominence as the trumpeter in the Blue Note sextet Out of the Blue. He has performed as a member of Dizzy Gillespie's United Nation Orchestra, the Horace Silver Quintet, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, Michel Camilo Sextet, Slide Hampton's Jazz Masters, the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, the Lionel Hampton Band, Toshiko Akiyoshi Band, and many others.

Michael began his career as an arranger with Mario Bauza, the legendary founder, with Dizzy Gillespie, Chano Pozo and Chico O'Farrill of Afro-Cuban Jazz. Michael has since composed and arranged music for Tito Puente, Ray Barretto, Eddie Palmieri, Paquito D'Rivera, the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, the Count Basie Orchestra, the Joe Henderson Big Band, the Mingus Big Band, the WDR Radio Big Band of Cologne, the NDR Big Band of Hamburg, the HR Big Band of Frankfurt, the Danish Radio Big Band, the Sedajazz Big Band of Valencia, the Chicago Jazz Band, Columbus Jazz Orchestra the movie score to Bossa Nova and many others.

Michael is currently the Director of the Jazz Studies at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College/CUNY. He also serves as lead trumpeter and arranger for Jazz at Lincoln Center's Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra. Michael is a staff arranger for the Hal Leonard Corp. Michael Philip Mossman also serves as a clinician for the Yamaha Corp. of America.

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