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“Simple Steps to a More Swingin’ Jazz Ensemble”

Session Leader

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Demonstration Band

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Session Description and Objectives

Participants will observe the application of concepts taught thus far. Techniques will include large group improvisation, guided listening, riff development and use of guide tones, guided listening, use of syllables to clean articulation, singing, clapping and dancing to internalize swing feel.

Outline

How to start rehearsal

- focus on listening
- listening with a purpose
- transcription
- use of guide tones
- improvisation

Application of concepts to chart rehearsal

- Watch What Happens
- One More for the Count
- I let a Song go out of My Heart

Questions of students?

The Jazz Ensemble Rehearsal

How to start?

- have jazz playing on sound system when students enter the room
- start rehearsal with students creating
- Early in the year, have students identify when chords change by clapping, then discuss the form of the tune (blues would be great early on)
 - Stomp at the beginning of the form
 - More advanced players can listen for subdivision, solo ideas, how does rhythm section build/orchestrate/phrase, what is drummer playing in the bass drum, what “color” is the ride cymbal, is the guitar player comping or “chunking”, are the winds using vibrato – when, where, how fast? Focus listening to just about anything will get the students ears open to the concepts you are about to teach.

Start Rehearsal with a riff tune or ear exercise that students create

- knowing that they are about to create and improvise, puts an immediate purpose to listening and trying to transcribe – they may very well be motivated to start ripping off licks and riffs from the recording playing in the room

Have Rhythm Section play a blues in simple key at first but then explore!

Today we will warm up learning chords, chord tones and riffs to a blues. Each student will also learn the pentatonic scale and guide tones

- then add a two measure riff with two measures for everyone to play and go around the band filling with two measure solos. We will use JJ Johnson “Things Aint What They Used to Be” from the CD - *Things are Getting Better all the Time* - Blues in Db
- Then on to the music
- Step I
 - Play roots, learn form by listening
 - 1353
 - 135b7
 - 1235
 - Guide tones 3-b7, and 7-b3 (smaller intervals move by whole step)
 - Pentatonic using guide tones
 - I chord use Bb, C, D (3 of I)
 - IV chord use Bb, C, Db (b7 of IV)
 - V chord play Bb, C, Eb (whole step to b7 of V)

Then start on 5 of pentatonic

5, 6, 1, 3 on the I chord and alter as above

- Step II
 - Deal with ii-V in the 9th measure
 - first arpeggiate
 - let’s add some language to it
 - arpeggiate all else and then add our “lick” to the ii-V

Other options to “create” at beginning of class - create a riff tune

- Create rhythmic riffs based on
 - Recording ideas at beginning of hour
 - Warm up ideas that we just explored
 - Create last chord with 3, b7, 9 on tonic
- Create a tune on the spot
 - Ex. Start with rhythm section
 - Add sax riff
 - Add complimentary trombone riff
 - Add complimentary trumpet riff
 - Go to a two chorus of solo with background second chorus
 - Repeat original riff and add ending

We will now have the band read, “*Watch What Happens*”

Watch What Happens - Study Guide - sample of good literature

What do you want your literature to do?

What is your philosophy for what students should learn from being a student in jazz ensemble?

The following criteria are *roughly* borrowed from the Comprehensive Musicianship Project (CMP):

Music Selection – great music that teaches (not just entertains) and stands the test of time

Analysis – elements of music, background, heart of the piece

Outcomes – what you want students to achieve in terms of skills, knowledge and the affective

Strategies – how you will get your students there

Assessment - how do you know you got there

Identify what qualities you would like in a piece of music that satisfies all of the above.

Let’s take a look at “**Watch What Happens**” arranged by Bob Lowden, pub. Hal Leonard.

(**Note:** This chart is also available in the Hal Leonard Series, “Easy Jazz Classics” - 15 selections for the young jazz ensemble - playable with reduced instrumentation. Arranged by Michael Sweeney and Bob Lowden).

For a younger or even mid level band, how does this piece fit the music selection model?

Great Music that teaches and stands the test of time

Watch What Happens is a standard that has been performed by Sergio Mendes, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Wes Montgomery, Sonny Stitt and a host of others. It was written by French songwriter, Michel Legrand in 1964 and first released by Tony Bennett in 1965. Born in Paris in 1932, Legrand eventually moved to New York and also wrote for Miles Davis, Ben Webster, John Coltrane, Bill Evans, etc..

Analysis

Style bossa nova

Form of “Watch What Happens” begins with optional piano solo (written out)

AABA

Closer look at the bridge reveals guide tones lead nicely if start on m3 and use enclosures. There are two instances of ii-V-I progression in the bridge as well

Outcomes

- Piano player can transition into soloist coming from written part, using some rubato playing and possible transcription
- Each section of the band has a soli to develop section sounds
- Piano solo in middle can be improvised can teach guide tones, enclosures and ii V in this solo, which could be in any instrument

Rhythm section can get comfortable in straight 8th note feel, they can be encouraged to listen and orchestrate as their parts are not extremely technical and in a style they may be more familiar with (straight 8ths)

Strategies

- Work balance and sing subdivision in rhythm section
- Orchestration in rhythm section how can they change color behind each soli/section
- Use bell tones on a chord in each section to balance all parts
- When do we use vibrato?
- Be sure to match articulation (use of syllables)
- What is the form and where is the biggest part of the piece?
- What is the affect of this arrangement?
- Is it appropriate to ever reach “FF” in this piece?

Students could research: Bossa Nova – what is it and how does it fit into American music? Compare and contrast different recordings - what recording is closest in style to our arrangement

- Transcribe a solo analyze a solo ideas for orchestration in the rhythm section from different recordings

Assessment

- Can be based on the answer to the “outcomes” and strategies listed above
Beyond “ Watch What Happens ”...

One More for the Count (2003)- Mike Lewis, published by Kendor Music

Easy swing chart (quarter note = 104) that is written in the Basie style of the 1960's. The Count Basie Band is one of the pillars of a certain style of big band playing.

In this chart, the ensemble plays rhythmically together from early on. Later there is call and response in the winds and a trombone solo with backgrounds. This chart is playable with three saxophones, three brass and rhythm section.

This chart gives many opportunities to introduce students to playing in the swing/Basie style that are applicable to any other chart in this style. Technically accessible, possibilities are endless for getting deeper into learning style.

Analysis

Form is AABA with short introduction and tag ending

Rhythm section includes guitar and is a 4/4 swing style

Brass are marked often with buckets

There is a shout chorus with an option for a backbeat in the drums and a few drum solo/set ups

There is a Basie piano style ending

Outcomes

Opportunity to study Basie style and listen to recordings

Opportunity to balance the rhythm section acoustically - compare to recordings

Ensemble balance and articulation matching

Call and Response balance

Drums integral part of the architecture of the piece

Piano become familiar with “Basie” ending

Strategies

Students listen to Basie from 1960's on and find a tune that is closest to this one

- The Album, “Basie Straight Ahead” is in this style

Listen to balance in rhythm section from the Basie Band

Establish use of syllables to match articulation in the winds

Watch Video of Basie Orchestra playing, “Fly Me to the Moon” with Frank Sinatra

- from tv show in 1965, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSGUSALBWN8>
- watch Basie foot for “do da la” and how that translates to the performance of the band

How do accents change the style and character of what is being played

Chance for winds to balance 4ths in their sections (see trumpets m. 5)

Work to create the “Bucket” sound in the brass

Further strategies and information on teaching this chart can be found in “Teaching Music Through Performance in Jazz”, vol 1, GIA Publications.

I Let a Song go out of my Heart – (1938 – Ellington)

Rhythm Section, Ellington-piano, Fred Guy – guitar, Billy Taylor & Hayes Alvis – bass, Sonny Greer – drums

Concepts

- **Form** – piano intro, AABA, 4 bar tag ending
 - triplet **sub-division** of beat
 - Brushes in **drums** – how to get that sound
- o What is that sound in snare – shuffle of feet

See Thigpen video

Remember that sectionals and singing melody to shape playing are important

Drums play quarter note but still swing

Bass – length of note and has dual role of time and melodic function

- o Can also become part of a section

Guitar – similar to before – percussive/driving force that fills out sound of the rhythm section

Piano – melodic commentary and harmonic function

Ensemble Section – how to clean

Start at E (1:20 into the tune)

listen to the section on original 1938 Ellington recording

have all sing parts with matching syllables

Stomp/clap/sing to internalize feel (dance music-needs to dance)

Have winds listen for groups

- o Identify group
- o Match style, phrasing volume and intent of most melodic group
- o Rhythm section should vamp the whole time while working groups

Some Thoughts on the Jazz Rhythm Section...

In today's rhythm section we have a variety of responsibilities, but we hold this truth to be self-evident – it is **IMPOSSIBLE** to have a swinging band if the rhythm section doesn't swing. As teachers, this can be difficult for us to achieve, especially if we are “horn player” band directors. We really need to spend more time learning about what is going on in the rhythm section than any other section in the band. We don't have to be great performers on the instruments but we have to know enough to guide our students. The following section will give tips on some of what students need to know to find the groove in the “medium swing” world.

Drums

- **Full kit ride**- basic swing feel
- **Bass Drum** – a straight ahead big band chart will usually play four on the floor or feather the bass drum – optimal sounds I “felt but not heard” – “reverse feather” is an option.
- **Ride Cymbal** – Start with quarter notes to lock in with bass drum and High Hat. (Note: it is very important that the player still think the “do da la” triplet feel when playing quarter notes – it gives them the proper swing feel and places the quarter note in a better spot). When the is solid, the can go to “spang, spang a lang: or Cheese, cut the Cheese” triplet based pattern – be aware of where stick hits the cymbal and the sound the player gets (Ed Thigpen wanted 3-5 sounds out of each of his cymbals, depending on where-how he would strike the cymbal).
- **Hi Hat** – closed on 2 and 4, don't crush it, let it breathe and careful of top cymbal being over tightened or too loose
- **Snare** – can cross-stick on 4, then build and add 2 and 4. There are many other comping options for the snare, it is just the focus here is locking in time within the rhythm section. Overall, be sure to listen to the balance of various elements – is something too loud?
- **Closed Hi Hat** – beginning of a Basie tune or during a bass solo
- Similar to the full kit ride except that there is no ride cymbal or snare drum used. The Hi Hat may be kept totally closed with the left foot of the sound may be varied by loosening the left foot of by letting the cymbal open slightly on 1 and 3. On a closed Hi Hat you can vary the sound by playing in different places on the cymbal and by using your left hand to deaden the sound of the cymbal.

Bass

A big sound and good attack are important here. Be sure the playing is reaching down towards the end of the fingerboard with their right hand. The player will need to use a lot of the “meat “ of the side of their finger to beg a big, full sound. They need to use more than just their fingertips (not and orchestra pizz.) to get sound out of the bass (electric player with amps that go to “11” will struggle with this concept). The left hand needs to press the strings firmly to avoid notes stopping prematurely or sounding thin.

The quarter notes of the bass player must “lock” with the feathered bass drum and the quarter notes of the ride cymbal. It is again important that the bass player think “do da la” while playing quarter notes_ this will make it easier to lock in the quarter notes that the drummer is playing. The low sounds of the bass must balance the high sound of ride cymbal to gain authentic swing sound between the bass and drums. Eye contact between the bass and drums is very helpful as well.

Piano

The piano adds the conversation aspect to the rhythm section. This can be achieved by making **melodic comments** to the band based on the chord changes (thematic ideas can come from recording or the warm up that the big band does each day). Many classically trained pianists will play stacked third voicing's with the root in the bass, Encourage you player to start by using 3rds and 7ths. You could start here in the left hand and then stack fourths in the right hand, beginning on the root or 5th of a dominant chord. Rhythmically, the player should carry their **chordal comping** with the triplet sub-division of the beat – syncopations being place don the “la”. Pianists should leave plenty of space for the other players and don't need to play when the big band is fully orchestrated – careful not to play too much!

Guitar

Freddie Green is the gold standard of rhythm guitar in a big band! As Basie's guitarist for many years, he used simple voicing's (a lot of 3 and 7) and strummed downward with the pick rarely going beyond the width of the neck. He used a slight turn of the wrist to get the “chunk” on all four beats. He could lift his left hand slightly away from the string on the “la” of the beat to get a little space between hi quarter notes and add more attack to the next beat. He played unamplified, acoustic guitar, tilted slightly out at the bottom to aid in his projection of sound. When done properly, the guitar can really fill out the sound of the rhythm section. When using an amp, keep it behind the guitar and use the pick ups closest to the

neck for rhythm playing. An acoustic, arch top guitar is best (Epiphone, arch top, Joe Pass model is good with Labella 800, round wound strings)

Putting it all together – rhythm section

Once the rhythm section is comfortable in laying down this groove there are numerous variations that can be applied. For example, 2-Beat, Broken time, pedal points, breaks, double time, call and response, changes in texture and orchestration and much more!!

One more **important point** – have the rhythm section **play** in rehearsal as much as possible!!!

Directed Listening for the rhythm section

“The Deacon”- from Breakfast, Dance and Barbeque, Basie (used intro only)

-Listen to hear the sub division- “do da la”- lift in the “la” in piano

-Listen to rhythm section intro and “do da la” conversation between the bass drum and hi hat

-Listen to the attack of the guitar and how it balances with the attack of the bass- how long are the notes in the bass- is there space”

-What about the balance in the rhythm section?

-This balance should first be attained acoustically in your rhythm section with minimal amplification of the guitar (or bass for that matter!)

-Some nice plunger ideas in the trombone – melodies and rhythms later in the chart

In conclusion, the rhythm section is the most crucial section in a successful jazz performance of any kind. A better understanding of this section will lead to a more authentic performance that you and your students will enjoy. This article gave just a few ideas on how to approach swing style, but of course, the concepts apply to all styles.

Physical Set up of the Jazz Ensemble

Build from rhythm section

Rhythm Section to the far left of the band as we see them

- piano furthest left
- guitar at end of keyboard to the right of piano player
- Bass in the “nook” of the grand piano and back of instrument ideally in front of bass drum
- Drum set at the end of the trombone section with bass drum behind bass

NOTE: this is base off of traditional “Piano Trio” set up allowing rhythm section sight lines of each other, bass drum filling out the sound of the bass with less amplification necessary

Winds

- Saxes in front, seated left to right
 - o Tenor I, Alto II, Alto I, Tenor II, Bari
- Trombones (L-R)
 - o Bone II, Bone I, Bone III, Bone IV
- Trumpets (L-R)
 - o Trumpet II, I, III, IV

NOTE: this set up allows most common solo players to be near rhythm section and allows the lead players to line up from back to front (ex. Lead Trumpet with lead trombone and lead alto). Good to have soloists come to the front when practical for audio and visual reasons.

Risers – I use 16” high, 4’ x 8’ (6 sections of them) so that the saxes are on the floor, trombones sit at the front of the riser, and trumpets stand behind the trombones. Seems most flexible as 16” risers are fairly standard and not everyone has “stepped” risers. I will put the drums on the riser when possible – if no drums on riser then I can use four sections of risers instead of 6.