

It's a Swing Thing

presented by

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with the

Oak Prairie Junior High School Jazz Band

under the direction of William Rank

The Midwest Clinic: An International Band & Orchestra Conference

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W-196, McCormick Place West, Chicago, Illinois

Thank you for coming today! The Oak Prairie Junior High School Jazz Band, under the direction of William Rank, will perform a swing selection, followed by advice from José for the rhythm section, Tony on improvisation, and Dick regarding overall ensemble style. The session will close with the band performing that selection again. Junior high and middle school directors are especially encouraged to consider these suggestions towards applying their ensembles to present at a future Midwest Clinic.

José Diaz: The Swing-Style Rhythm Section

It is important that the director know the rhythm section as a whole as well as each instrument in the section individually. Piano, bass, drum set, and guitar players often have little structured ensemble experience; so they may need extra guidance. Always keep in mind that every player in a jazz ensemble benefits from a listening program that identifies musical role models. Listening to recorded examples by outstanding professional rhythm section players is particularly important for the rhythm players.

Bass and drums

- The bass and drums must work closely together to keep a steady pulse and play in the appropriate style.
- When the bassist and drummer are locked in (which means musically together), the rhythm section will sound precise and provide a steady pulse for the entire ensemble.
- In swing style the bass usually plays a quarter note on each beat of the measure. This is called a walking bass line.
- The walking bass line is one of the most important ingredients of the swing style rhythm section.
- This bass line establishes the fundamental note or the root of the harmony.
- A goal for the bass player is to make the bass line move smoothly from note to note.
- The drummer should be aware that playing the ride cymbal and the hi-hat cymbals are the most important aspects of the swing style.
- The ride cymbal is used primarily for playing the basic swing rhythm pattern.
- The hi-hat is played on beats two and four with the foot pedal.

Piano and guitar

- The piano and guitar should focus on comping and providing the harmonic structure.
- Comping means to accompany and complement.
- Perhaps the most common mistake made by the inexperienced piano and guitar players is to play too much and too many notes, which can create musical clutter.
- Having the piano and guitar take turns comping is a basic solution to this problem.

Drums

- The drummer's responsibility is to keep steady time pulse and play in the appropriate style.
- The most important elements of the drums for swing are the ride cymbal (20" or 22" in diameter) and the hi-hat cymbals (14" or 15" in diameter) as they establish the pulse and feel of swing style.
- The drums should play a swing beat with the ride pattern on the ride cymbal. The ride cymbal brings a brighter sound to the overall sound of the drum set.
- The ride cymbal and the hi-hat should be balanced in volume. Usually the hi-hat needs to be played louder.
- If the drummer is experienced in jazz, consider adding a cross-stick on beat four, which will solidify the time.

Bass

- The bass player has two very important jobs in a jazz group: to provide a steady pulse (time) and to establish the fundamental notes of the chords.
- The ensemble should listen to the bass for tuning; therefore bass intonation is critical.
- The walking bass line is crucial to the authentic swing rhythm section sound. Playing a quarter note on each beat helps keep the pulse steady.

Bass sound

- The sound of the bass should be clear and not muddy. Adjust the tone controls on the amplifier as follows: the treble control is a little higher than the midpoint and the bass control is a little lower than the midpoint. The mid-range setting should be midway (5 on a 10 point) and should be adjusted only as needed to make the sound clearer. If the treble control is set too high the sound will be thin, and there will be lots of string noise. If the bass control is set too high the sound will be muddy. The volume controls should be set at a reasonable level for the bass to be heard distinctly.

Piano

- The piano player's role is to accompany by playing chords and jazz rhythms. These rhythms should be simple and should coincide with or complement the rhythms of the ensemble.
- Chord voicings must include the third and seventh of the chord because they identify the harmony or the quality of the chord. The quality of the chord refers to what the chord sounds like—major, minor, or dominant.
- Piano chords are played in the range between the C below middle C and the C above middle C. Above this range the sound is too thin, and below this range the sound is too muddy.

- Do not use the sustain pedal for comping.

Guitar

Right-Hand Technique...

- For the best sound use medium-thickness picks. They give the sound a very bright, acoustic quality.
- Hold the pick loosely between the thumb and index finger. Don't grip it too tightly.
- For the best effect simply strum quarter notes with each note being a down stroke.
- Strum from the elbow not from the wrist or fingers. Playing from the wrist or fingers tends to create a very forced sound and also tends to drag instead of propel the rhythm. Playing from the elbow helps to keep the sound relaxed, but steady and in sync with the rest of the rhythm section.
- The bass player is playing a walking bass line; so quarter note strumming should line up directly with the quarter notes of the bass player.

Left-Hand Technique...

- To capture the classic swing sound, the guitarist should use only three-note chord voicings. Freddie Green perfected the three-note chord style. These chords are perfect for this style because they provide the necessary harmonic information and have a very clear quality that cuts through the sound of the band.

Guitar sound...

- The "Freddie Green" (Count Basie's rhythm guitarist) guitar sound is either un-amplified or very lightly amplified. It is usually just loud enough to add some rhythmic attack and basic harmony to the bass line.
- Use the "rhythm" pickup on the guitar, the one closer to the neck.
- Set the amp volume just loud enough to be heard.
- Turn the treble control on the guitar down to below the midpoint so that the sound is not too bright. Set the amplifier controls "flat" (all in the middle) then add or subtract bass or treble as needed to get a good acoustic-sounding tone.

Antonio García: Jazz Improvisation

Many standard tunes have 30-40 chord changes within a typical 32-bar lead sheet but can be viewed in several major-scale keys or even in as few as one! The following information is adapted from the book/play-along *Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers* by Antonio García (Neil A. Kjos Music Company), used by permission.

There are 16 chord changes within the 16 bars of *S'Wonderful* that are designated for soloing, and 9 of those chords are different! If the soloist reads every chord symbol literally, she can only play 28% of the measures using the tonic F major scale. And in addition to her Ionian (major) scale, she'd have to know her Dorian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, and perhaps Altered or Diminished scales. *AND* she'd have to be able to create lyrical solo lines out of them while keeping her place in a tune where the chords change almost every measure if not two beats!

Why start there? Instead, see how far the tonic major scale will get the beginning improviser. And the answer is: *REALLY FAR!* I recommend *the biggest picture and least distraction:*

In whose shoes would you rather be: the student who faces 16 chord symbols in 16 bars, or the one who sees 1 or 2 major keys? Besides, many of your students already know their F, Bb, and A major scales. And think about it: which student will *enjoy* improv and thus remain interested enough to eventually learn more about chord symbols, scales, and lyrical improvisation?

What if the director wants to extend the solo into the bridge past m. 57 and through the last A section? She could tacet the sax soli for the soloist to complete the form and then have the band repeat back to m. 41 for 16 more bars' soloing before picking up the sax soli the second time at m. 57. As shown above, the student who would have faced 30 chord symbols in 32 bars now sees only 5 major keys—good for your students who know their F, Bb, A, D, and G major scales. Plus, students who improvise using these major scales will then be stronger when performing written passages in those keys in concert band and other ensembles.

I've also offered an "Option Two" above:

- Use the Bb major scale for the D⁷ measures in the A sections (mm. 43-44, 51-52, and 67-68). Why Bb major? The D⁷ is a dominant chord to the Gm⁷ that follows, and the relative major of Gm is Bb major. Check it out! Sure, you miss the F#; but you gain an F, A# (Bb), and Eb; so it sounds as though the soloist is implying a D⁷ (#5 #9 b9)!

So if the tonic scale was good enough for the *composer* of the tune over so many different chords, why shouldn't you explore it as one of your first avenues for improvisation? I'm not suggesting that you should forever express yourself entirely via the tonic scale, but isn't it great to know how useful and how dependable it can be for you? Relax and improvise a good melody!

The major-scale key-center approach is also particularly valuable for jazz vocalists, who lack other instruments' valves or keypads for assistance in technical accuracy. Aspiring jazz singers can often relate to the major scales over a given progression.

I believe we should reverse the typical order of focus in jazz education—away from the "micro" of the chord symbols and back to the "macro" of the larger key centers they represent—to pass on to our students the perspective that every experienced improviser already has: the "big picture" of the tune's key centers. This workshop session simply places the material in the order that "street" musicians have experienced for as long as jazz has existed.

Dick Dunscomb: Ensemble Style

The following materials are reprinted from *Jazz Pedagogy: The Jazz Educator's Handbook and Resource Guide* with permission from Alfred Music Publishing/Belwin Jazz.

Some Suggested Jazz Ensemble Recordings

Count Basie, *Basie Straight Ahead, April in Paris*

Duke Ellington, *The London Concerts*

Bob Florence, *With All the Bells and Whistles*

Gordon Goodwin, *Swingin' for the Fences*

Woody Herman, *The Three Herds*

Bill Holman, *A View from the Side*

Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, *A Touch of Class*

Quincy Jones- Sammy Nestico, *Basie and Beyond*

Bob Mintzer, *Incredible Journey*

Bill Watrous, *A Time for Love*

Patrick Williams, *Sinatraland*

Swing-style Basics

- Listen, repeatedly, to professional jazz recordings to identify and understand jazz styles.
- Identify the jazz sound, both in that of the entire ensemble and in developing an understanding of individual players' and section roles. The rhythm section is particularly important in this regard. Strive for clarity of sound throughout.
- Identify the steady beat or time and know how to make it work.
- Understand the swing eighth-note concept.
- Identify characteristic jazz nuances, shapes, and musical language.
- Be able to sing confidently with jazz syllables, connecting visual and aural skills.
- Learn to phrase in a jazz style.
- Mark the music.

Director's Checklist Of Rehearsal And Performance Techniques

- Kicking off a tune. The manner in which you start a tune is very important. Use different emotional devices in your count off which correspond with the type of chart being played. For example a count off for an up tempo barn burner would be not only fast but aggressive in volume. On the other hand, a ballad would be less emotional and softer in the count off.
- Avoid beating time during the chart, unless the music will be enhanced by it. The jazz band conductor's main responsibility lies in rehearsing the music - during the actual performance don't get in the way.
- Have a rehearsal plan for each rehearsal. Schedule charts in an order that will be most effective. Start and end with good sounding charts.
- Program with variety in mind - ballad, rock/fusion, swing, shuffle, Latin, etc. Have emotional peaks in the concert and try to leave the audience wanting more. Use as many soloists as possible.
- Sing it baby! Understand jazz articulation and phrasing. Learn how to interpret jazz figures, sing them to the band. Teach the band to sing the figures too with appropriate jazz syllables.
- Listen for the pulse in the music and sub-divide the pulse.
- Encourage your lead trumpet, lead trombone and lead alto to establish a constant line of communication with each other concerning articulation and phrasing. Establish musical rules and abide by them.
- Work on release points for phrases and notes, mark them when necessary.
- Decide the length of a fall and notate the release point.
- A ff is only effective if contrasted with softer dynamics. Constantly strive for dynamic contrast
- Understand proper set up for the band.
- Keep the bells out of the stands.
- Accent the following – syncopated notes - high notes within a figure – eighth notes that end a phrase.
- Lower notes within a phrase are played softer or ghosted than higher notes.

- When a musical line rises – crescendo, when a musical line falls – decrescendo.
- Horn players should alter their volume, and often times their articulation, when going from unison to a passage voiced in harmony.
- Rehearse without the rhythm section at times so the horn players develop time by themselves.
- Consider rehearsing the band with the drummer using only the snare drum, hi-hat and ride cymbals.
- Encourage students to study privately, listen to recordings and attend clinics and workshops.

We hope that this workshop has provided you with practical information you can consider applying *today!* If we can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact us. Our sincere thanks go to the Oak Prairie Junior High School Jazz Band under the direction of William Rank; to Columbia College Chicago; to Peter BarenBregge, Instrumental Jazz Editor of Alfred Music Publishing/Belwin Jazz, to the George Gershwin Estate; to The Neil A. Kjos Music Company; and to Conn-Selmer, Inc. for their assistance in making today's presentation possible.

José Antonio Diaz is the Artistic Director for Diaz Music Institute and in his 27th year as Director of Bands at MacArthur High School in Houston, Texas. His band has performed with such artists as Jon Faddis, Eddie Palmieri, Poncho Sanchez, Nestor Torres, and Arturo Sandoval and performed for IAJE, JEN, TMEA, OMEA, MENC, and The Midwest Clinic. His success with the MacArthur High School Jazz Program was a featured cover story in *School Band and Orchestra* and *Band Director's Guide* magazines. He received a *Down Beat* Award for Achievement in Jazz Education and was selected by FOX 26 and Univision Television stations as a Hispanic Hero. Recently José was inducted into the Texas Christian University Band of Fame, and he has received the prestigious Jefferson Award for his work with Diaz Music Institute. He is a Midwest Clinic Board member and Secretary for the Jazz Education Network. E-mail him at <jdiaz@aldine.k12.tx.us>.

Antonio J. García has performed as trombonist, bass trombonist, or pianist with 70 major artists including Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Eckstine, Louie Bellson, Dave Brubeck, and Phil Collins. He is author of *Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers* (Kjos) and contributing author of *Teaching Jazz: A Course of Study*, with music published by Kjos, Kendor, Doug Beach, Walrus, UNC Jazz Press, Three-Two Music, and <www.garciamusic.com>. He was interviewed within *Bonanza: Insights and Wisdom from Professional Jazz Trombonists* (Advance Music). A Conn-Selmer clinician and avid scat-singer, Tony is Director of Jazz Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, Associate Jazz Editor for the *International Trombone Association Journal*, a Network Expert for the Jazz Education Network, Past Editor of the *IAJE Jazz Education Journal*, Past President of IAJE-IL, and a Midwest Clinic Board member. E-mail him at <ajgarcia@vcu.edu>.

J. Richard Dunscomb is recognized nationally and internationally as a conductor, author, adjudicator, clinician, and consultant. Honors received include the International Association of Jazz Educators Hall of Fame, The Midwest Clinic Medal of Honor, and an Elkhart Jazz Festival Lifetime Achievement Award. His most recent publications include, with Dr. Willie Hill, Jr., *Jazz Pedagogy: The Jazz Educator's Handbook and Resource Guide*. Professor Dunscomb is chair of the music department at Columbia College Chicago and is currently forging new paths with his SymphonicJazz International project as he conducts symphony orchestras worldwide: an exciting combination of traditional symphony orchestra instrumentation with jazz music. He served as North American coordinator for the Montreux (Switzerland) International Jazz Festival for 18 years and is on the Board of Directors of The Midwest Clinic. E-mail him at <rdunscomb@colum.edu>.

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