



Teaching Your Ensemble to Swing: Learn From the Greats!

Midwest Clinic
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Peter Sampson
Director of Bands
Whiteland Community High School
NAfME Jazz Council – Member
Indiana State Jazz Chair - IMEA

SESSION HANDOUT

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TEACHING YOUR ENSEMBLE TO SWING:

Learn From The Greats!

01

THE FACTS AND
FICTION OF SWING

02

THE “ROYAL”
LINEAGE OF BIG
BAND MUSIC

03

TRANSFERRABLE
CONCEPTS

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WHAT TO LEARN
AND WHERE TO
FIND IT

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THE HISTORY AND
LISTENING IS KEY!!



01

THE FACTS AND FICTION
OF SWING

THE FACTS

Triplets are at the heart of the swing style. Subdivision at the triplet level is essential

Style and tempo are different (although linked) things

Tempo is found in the bass line

Style is found in the drum set.

Tempo affects the approach to swing.
Slow is metric while fast is based in how we articulate.



THE FICTION

Swing is more difficult than rock or Latin music
...it is NOT!

“Laying Back” is about tempo
...it is NOT!

Playing the music exactly as it is published is enough
...it is NOT!

Tempo comes from the director
...it does NOT!

All swing is created equal and performed the same
...NOT true!



02

THE “ROYAL” LINEAGE
OF BIG BAND MUSIC

COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA?

- “All-American” rhythm section
- The quintessential ensemble sound
- Inclusion of flute in the jazz ensemble
- Amazing staff composers and arrangers

COUNT BASIE “ALL-AMERICAN” RHYTHM SECTION



Count Basie
PIANO

Known for impeccable timing and delicate piano fills. He always chose the right place to put the right notes.



Walter Page
BASS

As steady a bass player that can be found. He was known for his amazing steady pulse and filling every beat with a full tone.



Freddie Green
GUITAR

Wrote the book on section swing rhythm guitar style. His technique and style is concerning the gold standard on rhythm guitar comping.



“Papa” Jo Jones
DRUMS

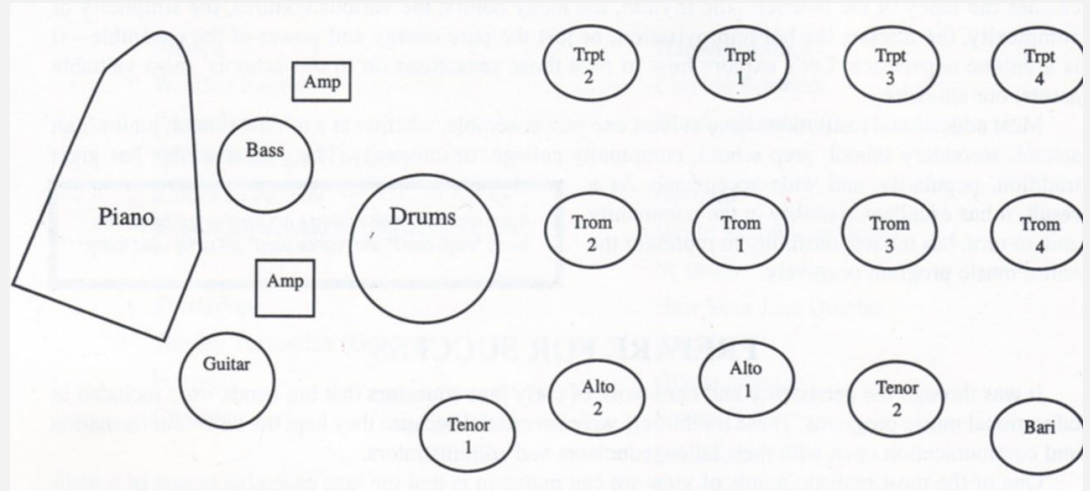
Not the most flashy of drum set players, but his ability to focus on amazing cymbal usage is a big reason why early Count Basie Orchestra are so stylistic.

THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA

ENSEMBLE SOUND

The Count Basie Orchestra was/is known for their amazing ensemble sound. No matter the style, tempo, or orchestration, the CBO always focused on section and ensemble sound.

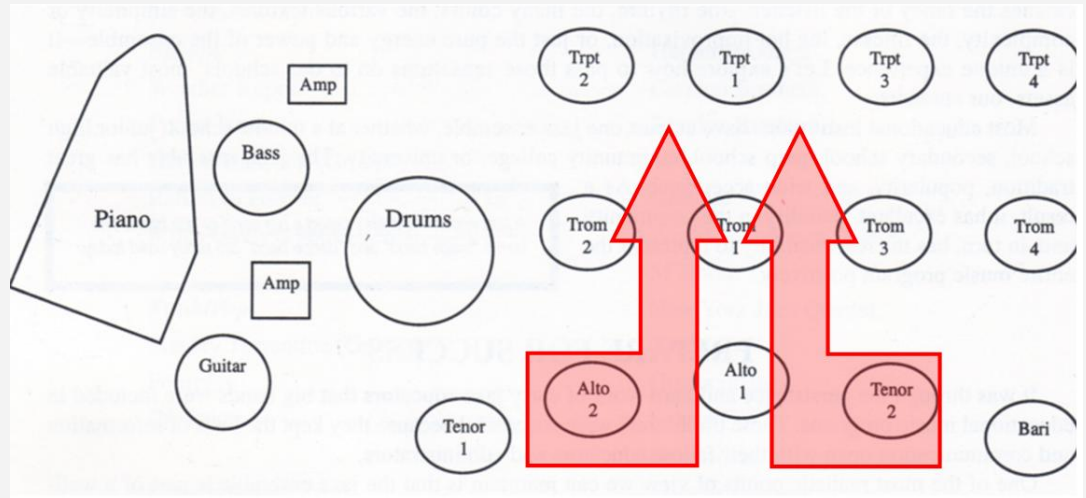
Please notice the order of the instruments and parts in their standard setup. “Jazz” chairs next to the rhythm section and lead players in the center of the ensemble.



THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA

WINDS LISTENING ENVIRONMENT

Simply put, the wind players need to listen in and back. Focus your listening to the lead players in the center of your section and then back to the lead trumpet. That lead trumpet player should be the focus of listening in full ensemble playing.

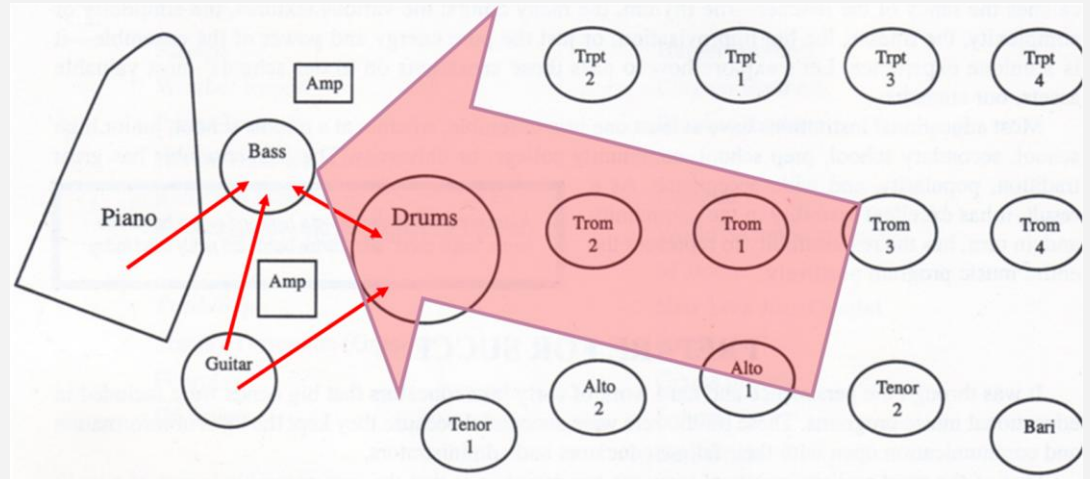


THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA

RHYTHM SECTION LISTENING ENVIRONMENT

Part of the reason that the Count Basie Orchestra rhythm section was so great is that all players knew their role and how to listen.

Tempo is in the bass, style in the drum set cymbals, chord tones being played on every beat by guitar and piano filling all of the gaps in the orchestration.





SAXOPHONE SOLI BALANCE

Count Basie's saxophone section is known for its incredibly warm and full sound. It sounds like a warm blanket because each of the players contributes to the overall sound.

Players should treat a saxophone soli as "Alto One and Friends". The melody is always in the Alto I part and each of the other parts is in support of this sound. Marshall Royal was one of the most famous lead altos for Count Basie and he lead the section with beautiful tone and vibrato that is a hallmark of the Sammy Nestico saxophone soli.

USE OF FLUTE IN JAZZ ORCHESTRA

Composers/Arrangers for the Count Basie Orchestra such as Sammy Nestico, Neal Hefti, and Frank Foster used flute quite often in their orchestrations.

Sometimes these parts are included in published versions of Basie tunes, but sometimes a quick transcription would be necessary.

These opportunities are amazing for flute players to join the jazz band, but also a great way to get your players to learn how to double

Frank Wess playing flute on Neal Hefti's "Cute"





SAMMY NESTICO

Sammy Nestico is widely considered one of the most consistently excellent big band composers. Before writing for the Count Basie Orchestra, Sammy was a writer for both the “Airmen of Note” and the United States Marine Band. The most famous Nestico Basie album is “Straight Ahead”.

Count Basie compositions of note:

- The Queen Bee
- Basie-Straight Ahead
- The Magic Flea
- Fly Me To The Moon
- Sweet Georgia Brown
- Hayburner

AMAZING COMPOSER/ARRANGERS

Neal Hefti first had a career as a trumpeter with the Woody Herman before he started writing for the Count Basie Orchestra. He started writing for Count Basie in the 1950's and his most famous album is “The Atomic Mr. Basie”.

Count Basie compositions of note:

- Lil' Darlin
- Cute
- Splanky
- Teddy The Toad
- Bag-a' Bones

NEAL HEFTI



FRANK FOSTER

Frank Foster joined the Count Basie Orchestra in 1953 after just finishing his military service. He wrote many classic compositions that are still played by the Count Basie Orchestra today. He returned to the band in 1986 to become the band's leader leading to winning two Grammys for his recordings with the group.

Count Basie compositions of note:

- Shiny Stockings
- Down for the Count
- Blues in Hoss Flat
- Back to the Apple

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA?

DUKE ELLINGTON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

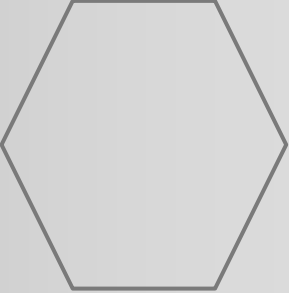
- Hexagon Jazz music can be complex and programmatic
- Hexagon He featured his top players often
- Hexagon Every member of the ensemble matters
- Hexagon Backgrounds are not “just” backgrounds





Early Ellington Music of the 1920-30's

- **Mood Indigo**
- **It Don't Mean A Thing**
- **Sophisticated Lady**
- **The Mooche**



Transitional Ellington Music of the 1940-50's

- **Cottontail**
- **Sugarhill Penthouse**
- **Take the "A" Train**
- **Perdido**



Later Ellington Music of the 1950-60's

- **Isfahan**
- **Oclupaca**
- **Flirtibird**
- **Portrait of Louis Armstrong**

ELLINGTON MUSIC CHANGED OVER TIME

The music of the Ellington Orchestra changed dramatically over the course of their career.

The comfort of success made Duke feel confident that he could write music of greater complexity.

He wanted his music to stand the test of time as musical compositions of depth and sophistication.

Commercial dance music played in small dance clubs made way for multi-movement and programmatic multi-cultural works in the forms of suites to be played in concert halls such as Carnegie Hall in New York City.

DUKE ELLINGTON FEATURED SOLOISTS

Duke Ellington's Orchestra was filled with a fleet of phenomenal soloists. Therefore, Duke wrote and had others write a good number of features to allow those players to shine. These features are a great way to feature your top players while playing challenging music for the rest of the ensemble.



Johnny Hodges
ALTO SAX

Rockabye River
Flirtibird
Bloodcount
The Star-Crossed Lovers



Cootie Williams
TRUMPET

Concerto for Cootie
Echoes of Harlem
Harlem Airshaft
Take the "A" Train



Jimmy Blanton
BASS

Jack The Bear
Koko
Sepia Panorama



Harry Carney
BARI SAX

Sugar Hill Penthouse
Sophisticated Lady
Solitude
Frustration

EVERYONE MATTERS

In Duke's band, every player was a master at their instrument and therefore his music was written knowing every part was in good hands

- Part assignments didn't always follow tradition
 - 3rd and 4th brass parts sometimes written higher than 1st and 2nd.
 - Not all parts present in every tune.
- Any part could be written to be a feature or have a solo
- Guitar parts not always written (because Basie had the best guitarist)
- Clarinet was a regular instrument and assigned to any of the saxophone parts. Used as a featured instrument regularly.



***“Count Basie was College,
Duke Ellington was Graduate School”***
- Clark Terry (played in both bands)

NOWHERE TO HIDE

SOLO BACKGROUNDS ARE NOT “JUST BACKGROUNDS”

Solo backgrounds in the music of Duke Ellington are often unique and beautiful melodies

Sometimes backgrounds were repetitive, but not always. He also loved to introduce new melodic content in solo backgrounds

Often played in complete unison, so every player has to pull their weight and listen for balance and blend

Balancing to the soloist is key



YOUNGER ARRANGMENTS OF BASIE/ELLINGTON MUSIC

Since a majority of school ensembles will not be ready for the full versions of this music, finding a quality arrangement is key.

There are a number of great arrangements of both Basie and Ellington charts available through a number of publishers.



LISTEN AND STUDY BEFORE YOU BUY

Not all arrangements are created equal and not every arrangement will fit best for your ensemble. Be sure to listen through and look at a score before you decide to purchase.

State lists are a great resource

Included in the handout for this session is a list of arrangements of Basie and Ellington music for younger ensembles that have been played a number of times and **work!**

03

TRANSFERRABLE CONCEPTS



TEACHING TRANSFERRABLE CONCEPTS THROUGH LITERATURE

The teaching of concepts instead of just teaching the chart allows the ensemble to understand the similarities between music of this genre. Starting the year with concept building will allow you to teach more efficiently and effectively!

There is no better music to teach concepts from than the masterworks of Basie and Ellington!



Rhythm section unity and role



Ensemble balance



Not rushing repeated short quarter notes



Running eighth note swing articulation



Saxophone soli balance and blend



Brass mute technique



04

WHERE TO FIND
THESE CONCEPTS

RHYTHM SECTION UNITY AND ROLE

BASIE

Freddie Green “chunking” style on the guitar is the gold standard of swing rhythm guitar technique.

Visit www.freddiegreen.com for tutorials and lessons. There are many YouTube video tutorials available for this as well.

HAY BURNER Sammy Nestico



ELLINGTON

Duke Ellington was a master at piano interjection and trade-offs.

A lot of the Ellington music available (especially from JALC) are transcriptions of Duke's live performance.

FLIRTIBIRD Duke Ellington



ENSEMBLE BALANCE

BASIE

The Basie band is known for their ensemble sound. Every part is heard and how so many of their arrangements are written to show off the band's ability to sound so good as a unit at all volume levels. Some great music to allow your students to work on balance and blend as well as dynamics.

SHINY STOCKINGS Frank Foster



ELLINGTON

Music written for the Ellington band features a lot of soloists. Therefore there are also a lot of background to be played. However, the backgrounds in Ellington music are often melodies on their own and therefore balance is key!

SUGAR HILL PENTHOUSE Duke Ellington



NOT RUSHING REPEATED SHORT QUARTER NOTES

"Taking steps backwards"

BASIE

There may be no better composition to teach slow swing style than *Lil' Darlin'*. It takes an immense amount of subdivision and concentration to perform a slower swing tune.

This piece is easy to play, and VERY hard to play well!

LIL' DARLIN' Neal Hefti



ELLINGTON

From the suite *Black, Brown, and Beige*, this beautiful ballad has been arranged by Rick Hirsch as a Grade 2-2.5 straight-eighth ballad. This a great arrangement to teach both repeated marcato quarter note style and the Ellington jungle groove.

COME SUNDAY Duke Ellington / arr. Rick Hirsch



RUNNING EIGHTH NOTE SWING ARTICULATION

BASIE

Learning how to articulate running eighth note lines is a learning process. It is never done the way that it is printing in the publication. Making sure that the whole section is in agreement on how to articulate each running line is essential.

CORNER POCKET Freddie Green



ELLINGTON

Duke Ellington arranged a wonderful latin composition by Juan Tizol in a swing style for his band. While there are multiple versions in multiple tempos recorded, this version from 1940 is a great exercise in running eighth note articulations.

PERDIDO Juan Tizol / arr. Duke Ellington



SAXOPHONE SOLI BALANCE AND BLEND

BASIE

Sammy Nestico is widely considered to be one of the best saxophone soli composer/arrangers ever. His ability to voice saxophone sections to sound thick and full is part of the identity of the Count Basie Orchestra.

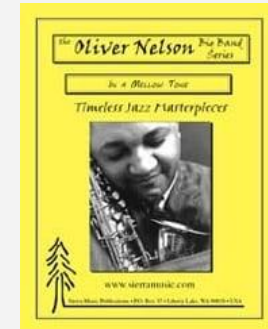
TALL COTTON Sammy Nestico



ELLINGTON

A great example of Duke Ellington music being used by a different big band. This arrangement done by Oliver Nelson was recorded by the Buddy Rich Big Band in the late 1970's. A great example of running and wonderful alto-led saxophone section soli.

IN A MELLOW TONE Duke Ellington / arr. Oliver Nelson



BRASS MUTE TECHNIQUE

BASIE

The Basie band arrangers often used mutes to change the color of the ensemble. *The Queen Bee* is a great example of the use of bucket mutes and hats. This allowed the brass to stay behind the saxophones in balance but maintain a full tone.

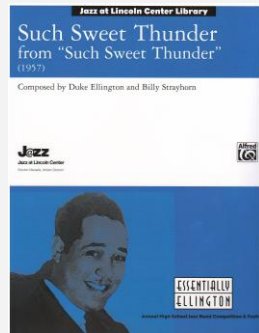
THE QUEEN BEE Sammy Nestico



ELLINGTON

With the exotic and multi-cultural music that Ellington compositions portrayed, he often has heavy mute usage. The unique sound of the pixie/plunger combination is used in *Such Sweet Thunder* in both trumpet and trombone.

SUCH SWEET THUNDER Duke Ellington



05

HISTORY AND
LISTENING IS KEY



THE HISTORY OF THE ART FORM

RELATING

A lot of students don't understand the history behind this music and the artis that made it famous

Many students are playing music from a culture far removed from their everyday life.

THE STORY

Especially in Ellington's music, relate the story being told to the cultural and historical events of the time.

This can actually get pretty deep and create a real bond with the music for the students.

ROLE PLAYING

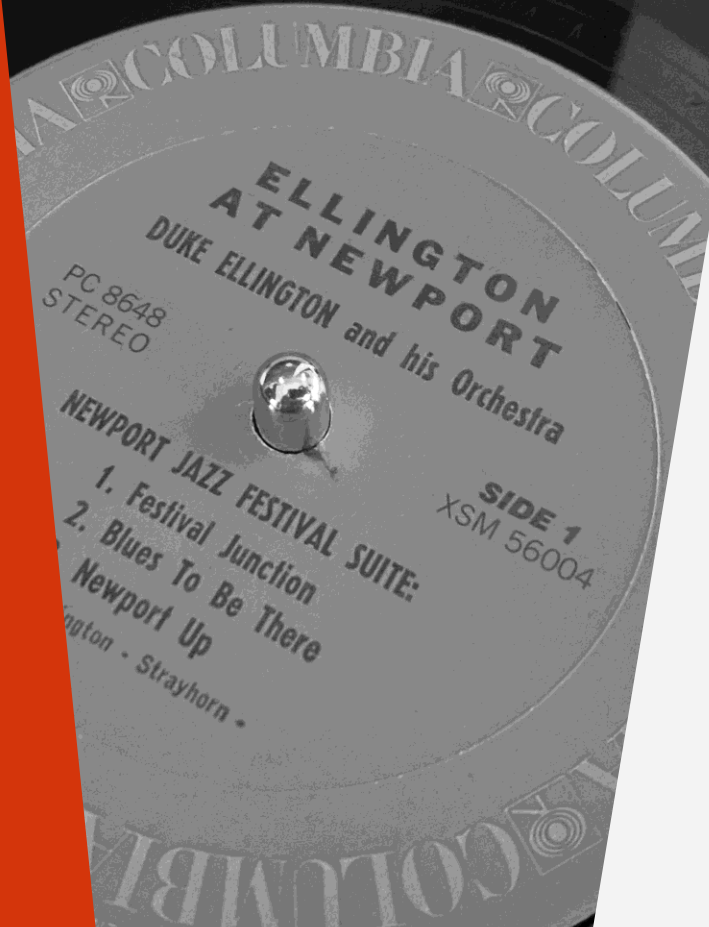
Do the students know the name of the player in the Basie/Ellington band that played their parts in the recording?

Have the students listen to these artists as individuals and section players.

INITIAL LISTENING SESSIONS

- Unlike in the concert band classroom, listening prior to playing is essential
- The students are not listening for notes and rhythms
- They are **actively** listening for style and interpretation
- Listening for rhythm section choices and options
- Take time between concert preps to just read new music. Even if not for a concert...the more they read the faster they start to recognize patterns.

LISTENING IS KEY!!!



RELISTENING SESSIONS

- If playing an arrangement, have the students listen to both the arrangement and the original
- Drum set players should listen to and practice the setups and fills in the recordings to understand their function.
- Students playing solos should listen to and steal ideas from the recorded solos. Don't play the written or recorded solo, but take an idea or two

The Jazz Classroom is the only class in school where plagiarism is encouraged!

EXPANDED LISTENING SESSIONS

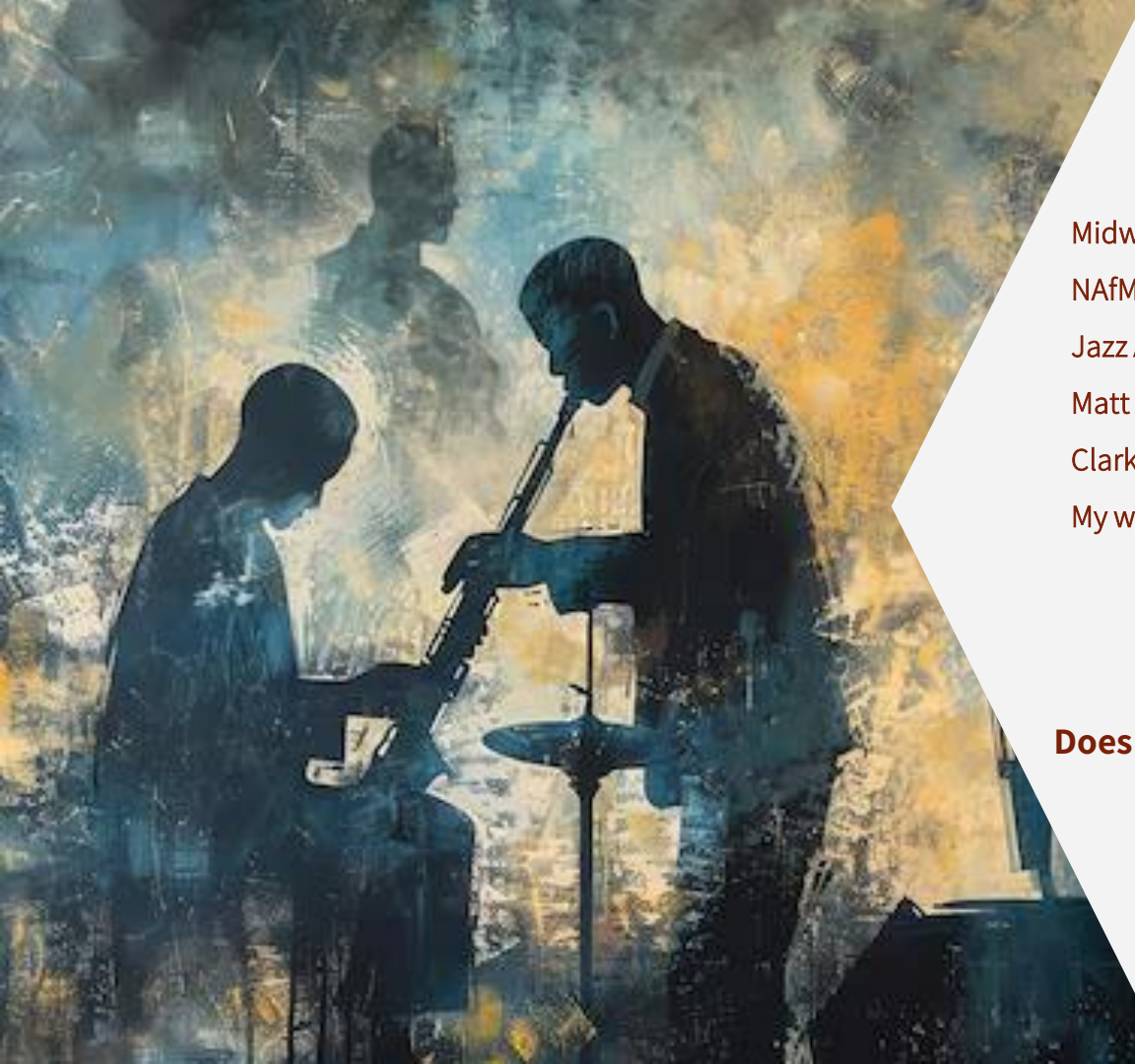
- Encourage students to listen to more music by the composer/band.
- Encourage students to find more music of that style.
- Have students report back with what they listened to for all to share
- Ask students to tell you their favorite player on their instrument and why they chose that player.
- Daily classroom listening and/or listening logs can be a great tool.



MORE RESOURCES

The QR Code below will bring you to a folder of resources including listening lists and specific literature suggestions for teaching the concepts covered in today's session:



An abstract painting in a dark, moody style. It depicts two figures in silhouette against a background of swirling, textured colors in shades of blue, green, and yellow. One figure is seated on the left, and the other is standing on the right, holding a long, thin instrument, possibly a saxophone. The overall composition is dynamic and expressive.

THANK YOU

Midwest Clinic – Kelly Bell

NAfME Jazz Council – Bethany Robinson

Jazz At Lincoln Center – Todd Stoll

Matt Pivec – Butler University

Clark-Pleasant Schools

My wife Julie and our boys

Does anyone have any questions?

psampson@cpcsc.k12.in.us