



Listening Around the Bandstand

Florida State University Jazz Faculty



Role of the Drum Set

- The drummer has a defining role in jazz. As part of the rhythm section, the drummer establishes the rhythmic feel of a tune, solidifies the groove, participates in the energy of the ensemble, and helps create dynamic contrast.
- The **ride cymbal's** quarter note pulse (inside of the swing pattern) should be the dominant voice on the drum kit that everything else is balanced against. It works in tandem with the walking “quarter note” basslines of the bassist.
- **Hi-Hat** helps to solidify the pocket, beats 2 and 4 (in most situations).
- The **bass drum** sits underneath everything and provides the quarter note foundation. It should be “felt” but not necessarily “heard,” unless one is playing a purposeful accent.
- The **snare drum** usually plays unpredictable patterns (comping patterns) that can work in tandem with rhythms from the piano, rhythmic figures from the soloist, or even the bassist. The snare drum can be very conversational, full of call and response within the kit (snare drum/bass drum) or with other members of the ensemble.
- The drummer should also develop superior listening skills (as to not clutter the music with busy random ideas) to understand when to leave space, accent where the music allows, and let the music come to them.

Leon Anderson, Rodney Jordan, Bill Peterson, Scotty Barnhart, Kevin Jones, David Detweiler



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Role of the Bass

- The role of the bass in the jazz combo setting is to provide harmonic and rhythmic support while inventing creative melodic material (walking bass lines and two-beat grooves etc.) that shapes the direction and flow of the music.
- The entire band must feel the pulse of the bass.
- The bassist and drummer work together to provide a synchronized groove. Managing space between the notes is the key to success.
- The bassist must work with the pianist to play the harmonies that work well with the melody and arrangement.
- There should be some creative space for the bassist and pianist to create alternate harmonies and rhythms within a piece to keep it interesting and to support what the soloists are playing.
- Bass players must also listen to every instrumentalist and choose the best notes and rhythms to support everyone in the band.

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Role of the Piano

- The pianist provides harmonic and rhythmic support for horn solos, the bass and drums, and should be well versed in chord voicings that provide the harmonic background for solos.
- The pianist should listen to the drummer (particularly his snare drum rhythms) in order to interact with the rhythm section and should seek to balance his volume with the bass and drums.
- The pianist must know the melody, chord changes and bass notes of every tune.
- The pianist can use all registers of the instrument when “comping” (accompanying) and soloing but should not play constantly when comping. Good comping includes musical contrasts and variety of sound, dynamics and intensity.
- Leaving space is essential and it often works well to play in the space that the other players leave open.
- Above all, the pianist should always be listening to and supporting the other members of the group.

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Role of the Trumpet

- The trumpet should be sure that the blend (volume) is good so as to hear each of the other instruments clearly.
- The trumpet should not play in such a way as to smother the rhythm section.
- Interaction with the rhythm section is key as this is a group setting.
- Study of the material should be thorough so there is freedom to alter any chords or rhythms in the song and also respond to the same from any member of the rhythm section.

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Role of the Saxophone

- The saxophonist should listen to the trumpet for phrasing and articulation of the melody as well as other horn players in the group. If the trumpet is not present and the saxophone is playing the melody, then it is important to match the melodic line with the trombone, alto sax, etc.
- It is very important to have good rhythmic time and be able to “lock in” with the time of the rhythm section. Practice with a metronome!
- The saxophonist should know the melodic and harmonic structure of a song just as well as the rhythm section.
- The improvised solo should convey the melodic and harmonic structure of the song and not be dependent on the rhythm section. It is important to study the jazz masters of the saxophone and other instruments to learn the jazz language.
- Within the improvised solo, it is important to also listen to the harmonic and rhythmic information of the rhythm section so as to have a “conversation” with the rhythm section.

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Role of the Trombone

- Style, balance and blend should defer to the horn playing the melody.
- The rhythm section will set the style for the horns to play over.
- As a soloist, listen for opportunities for interaction with the rhythm section. These could be rhythmic or harmonic cues.
- The soloist can also create opportunities for interaction with the rhythm section via harmony, sequence, rhythmic cues, or other devices (volume/extreme range, etc.).
- Rehearsal will allow members of the combo to learn more about each other's playing styles, allowing the interplay between performers to become more nuanced and less stereotypical.

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