



JB Dyas (left) works with the big band at Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts.

# Jazzing up Jazz Band

By JB Dyas, Ph.D.

Presenting jazz workshops across the country on behalf of the Thelonious Monk Institute, it's been my experience that too many high school jazz bands, although often sounding quite impressive, are really playing very little jazz. On any given tune, few students are able improvise—arguably jazz's most important element.

Most of the band members don't know the chord progression, the form, or even what a chorus is—essentials for the jazz musician. And all too often they haven't listened to the definitive recordings—a must in learning how to perform this predominantly aural art form—or

know who the key players are. They're just reading the music that's put in front of them, certainly not what jazz is all about. What they're doing really has little relation to this music's sensibility; it's more like "concert band with a swing beat."

The teaching and learning of jazz can and should be an integral component of every high school jazz band rehearsal. Since most high schools don't have the luxury of offering separate jazz theory, improvisation and history classes, jazz band needs to be a "one stop shop." Therefore, repertoire is key, meaning the repertoire chosen for the school year and

the order in which it is presented should be such that it is conducive to the learning of jazz theory and improvisation in a natural, understandable and playable unfolding of material. Beginning with relatively easy tunes on which to improvise, each subsequent tune should be a catalyst and vehicle for new improvisatory instruction while reinforcing concepts and skills learned on the previous tunes (see Suggested Big Band Arrangements sidebar on the following page).

As jazz musicians, every band member should know the form and chord progression of the tunes they're working on. Most impor-

tantly, the students need to listen to the definitive recordings of the tunes they're learning (as well as jazz in general) in order to know what the music is supposed to sound and feel like. To this end, I offer the following step-by-step rehearsal methodology for current and future high school band directors.

### Form and Listening

Begin by passing out lead sheets (C, B-flat, E-flat and bass clef versions) of the tune on which you are about to embark, letting the students know that you will be distributing their individual big band parts subsequently.

Listen to the definitive recording together in class, identifying the key players and insisting your students memorize their names and respective instruments.

Then teach, discuss and have the students memorize the form (e.g., AABA, ABAC, 16-bar tune, 12-bar blues, etc.). Play the definitive recording again, pointing out the sections as they go by and having the students say aloud where they are on the first beat of each section (e.g., "top, second A, bridge, last A").

### Theoretic Trilogy

Next, teach the tune's theoretic trilogy, that is, roots, chords and scales. Begin with the root movement, having the students play the roots along with the definitive recording as shown in Example 1 on page 88 (Horace Silver's "Song For My Father"). Drummers should do this on vibes.

Then move on to the chord qualities, having the students arpeggiate the chords as indicated along with the definitive recording (see Example 2):

- 1-3-5-7-9 for chords lasting two bars (have the 9th sustain for the second bar).
- 1-3-5-7 for chords lasting one bar.
- 1-3 for chords lasting two beats.
- for II-V-I's in major, play Example 3.
- for II-V-I's in minor, play Example 4.

This is also a good time to show your pianist and guitarist authentic jazz voicings for these chords (see Recommended Rhythm Section Resources sidebar on page 86).

Finally, teach the chords' related scales, having the students play them along with the definitive recording as in Example 5.

Note that at this point your students have listened to the definitive record-

## SUGGESTED BIG BAND ARRANGEMENTS

Following is a list of big band arrangements of "must know" jazz standards. Beginning with easier tunes on which to improvise, they are sequenced in a logical order of chord/scale theory knowledge and improvisation skill acquisition. The list also contains must-know staples like blues in B-flat and F, minor blues and "Rhythm" changes. Rehearsing the charts in this order will provide constant reinforcement of skills/knowledge attained on the previous tune(s) while acquiring new skills/knowledge on each subsequent tune. Most can be found in Jamey Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 54 (*Maiden Voyage*) and 70 (*Killer Joe*). To listen to arrangements free online, go to [listeninglab.stantons.com](http://listeninglab.stantons.com). To order arrangements, go to [ejazzlines.com/jazz-big-band-arrangements-c932.html](http://ejazzlines.com/jazz-big-band-arrangements-c932.html).

Title	Arranger	Aebersold Play-A-Long
"Watermelon Man"	Mike Kamuf	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Song For My Father"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"So What"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Impressions"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Maiden Voyage"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Cantaloupe Island"	Mike Kamuf	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Lady Bird"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 70 ( <i>Killer Joe</i> )
"Satin Doll"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Blue Bossa"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Summertime"	Calvin Custer	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Autumn Leaves"	Peter Blair	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Doxy"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"Tenor Madness" (B-flat blues)	Mark Taylor	Vol. 1 ( <i>How to Play Jazz</i> )
"Now's the Time" (F blues)	Allen Gray	Vol. 1 ( <i>How to Play Jazz</i> )
"Straight No Chaser" (F blues)	Mark Taylor	Vol. 1 ( <i>How to Play Jazz</i> )
"Mr. PC" (minor blues)	Terry White	Vol. 70 ( <i>Killer Joe</i> )
"Footprints"	John Berry	Vol. 54 ( <i>Maiden Voyage</i> )
"St. Thomas"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 8 ( <i>Sonny Rollins</i> )
"Sugar"	Mark Taylor	Vol. 70 ( <i>Killer Joe</i> )
"Sweet Georgia Brown"	Jerry Nowak	Vol. 70 ( <i>Killer Joe</i> )
"You Stepped Out of a Dream"	Jerry Sheppard	Vol. 70 ( <i>Killer Joe</i> )
"I Got Rhythm" ("Rhythm" changes)	Jimmy Lally	Vol. 47 ( <i>Rhythm Changes</i> )
"Oleo" ("Rhythm" changes)	Mark Taylor	Vol. 47 ( <i>Rhythm Changes</i> )

## RHYTHM SECTION RESOURCES

### Everyone

- Jamey Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 1, 54 and 70
- "Methods for Fighting the Epidemic of Tune Illiteracy" (JB Dyas), Part 1, *DownBeat*, May 2010; Part 2, *DownBeat*, August 2010

### Piano

- *Jazz Piano Voicings for the Non-Pianist* (Mike Tracy)
- *Transcribed Piano Voicings for Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 1, 54 and 70*

### Bass

- "Linear Bass Line Construction" (JB Dyas), Part 1, *DownBeat*, August 2006; Part 2, *DownBeat*, August 2007
- *Transcribed Bass Lines for Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 1, 54 and 70*

### Drums

- *Drum Styles and Analysis for Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 54 and 70* (Steve Davis)

### Guitar

- *Easy Jazz Guitar-Voicings and Comping* (Michael DiLiddo)
- *Maiden Voyage-Guitar Voicings* (Michael DiLiddo)

ing an additional three times, being active all the while.

### The Melody

Now that your students know the form, root movement, chord qualities and related scales, it's time to teach them the head,

pointing out the melody's relation to the chords and scales they just learned. While they can refer to the lead sheet, ask them to play as much as they can by ear, especially with regard to the rhythms and feel they've just been listening to.

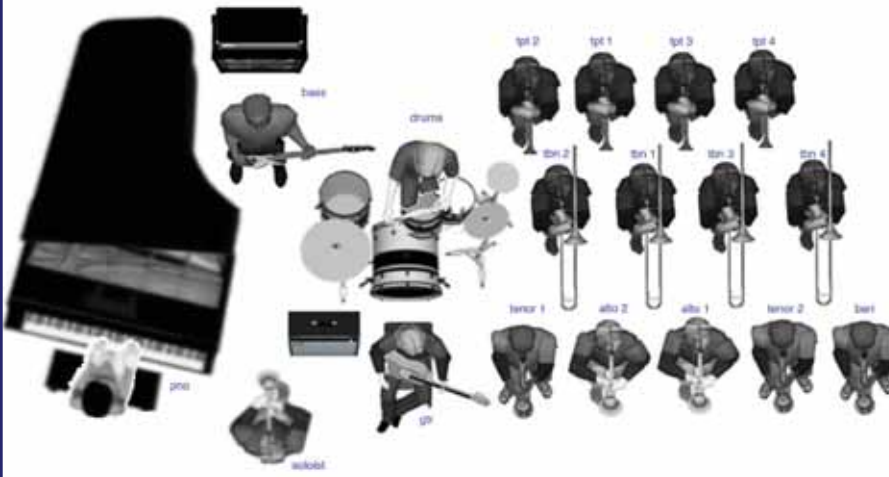
Then have everyone play the head along

with the definitive recording, matching and blending with the players thereon as closely as they can.

### Improvisation

Next, it's time to improvise. Using what they know—chords, scales, head—have each

## SETUP FOR SUCCESS



Educators should set up their high school jazz band as a bona fide jazz ensemble (see diagram above), with everyone as close to one another as possible. Since most high school band rooms are multipurpose music rooms, assign each student a setup job so they can quickly set up the band immediately before rehearsal and return the room to how it was immediately afterwards. Make sure you have long enough extension cords to put the guitar and bass amps in their respective proper places (as opposed to where the closest electrical outlets are).

Have your soloists take their solos in front of the rhythm section, facing it during rehearsal. This allows soloist and accompanists to have eye contact and better

hear and react to one another. It also encourages them to memorize the chord progressions.

Have the piano tuned as least once a month. As this costs about \$100 per tuning (\$1,000 for the school year) and is not in the budget of most high schools, you'll probably have to fundraise for this. Do it; it's worth it. Playing with an out-of-tune piano is mis-educative. Meticulously tune up the band before every session, beginning with tuning by ear and then checking each instrument one after another with an electric tuner. Emphasize the importance of good intonation throughout rehearsal, insisting your students intensely listen to each other and adjust their embouchures as need be.

Regarding improvisation, urge your students to utilize phrases of the masters that they've transcribed on previous tunes when soloing on subsequent tunes, transposing where need be. Also, encourage them to quote from heads they know, increasing their understanding of jazz vocabulary all the while.

Start a combo comprising your big band's rhythm section and best two or three horn players, even if it means meeting before and/or after school a couple of days per week. Work on the same tunes that you're doing in the big band, giving the students further instruction and experience soloing on this repertoire. Bring in increasingly difficult tunes as well as diverse tune types as the combo improves. As the small group gets better, so will the big band as inevitable peer-to-peer inspiring, teaching and learning kick in. A rising tide lifts all boats.

Encourage your drummer to delineate the form by playing small fills between sections, big fills between choruses and bigger fills between soloists. He or she can further delineate by changing cymbals for each new soloist, playing the bridge differently, using brushes for the piano solo, etc.

On swing tunes, encourage your bassist to construct his or her own walking bass lines based on the chord symbols, rather than just playing the written quarter note lines.

Suggest to your lead trumpet, trombone, and alto players that they, on their own, schedule a weekly sectional with their respective sections. Here they can work on solidifying their parts, blending, articulation and intonation, as well as rehearse any difficult solis they might have in the big band.

—JB Dyas

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**Example 1**

Example 1 shows two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff has chords F-, Eb7, Db7, G-/C, and F- above the notes. The second staff has chords Eb7, F-, Eb7, Db7, G-/C, and F- above the notes. The melody consists of quarter and half notes.

**Example 2**

Example 2 shows two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff has chords F-, Eb7, Db7, G-/C, and F- above the notes. The second staff has chords Eb7, F-, Eb7, Db7, G-/C, and F- above the notes. The melody is more complex, featuring eighth and sixteenth notes.

**Example 3**

Example 3 shows a single staff of music in 4/4 time with chords D-, G7, and CA. Below the staff is a fretboard diagram: R b3 5 b7 3 | R 3 5 b7 3 | R 3 5 7 9.

**Example 4**

Example 4 shows a single staff of music in 4/4 time with chords D#, G7alt, and C-. Below the staff is a fretboard diagram: R b3 b5 b7 3 | R 3 #5 b7 #9 b9 5 | R b3 5 b7 9.

**Example 5**

Example 5 shows four staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff has chords F- and Eb7. The second staff has chords Db7, G-/C, and F-. The third staff has chords Eb7 and F-. The fourth staff has chords Eb7, Db7, G-/C, and F-. The melody is a continuous eighth-note line.

student, in turn, improvise with the rhythm section for eight measures a piece (or four bars a piece if it's a blues), everyone keeping the form.

Emphasize the use of jazz rhythms, and let everyone know that paraphrasing the head for a couple of bars every once in a while is always cool. Keep all the students engaged when they're not soloing by teaching and having them play simple backgrounds based on the chords, thus continually reinforcing the chord progression in their minds and ears.

After everyone has experienced soloing (for better or worse), it's time to talk about learning from the masters. Transcribe a phrase or two from a solo on the definitive recording, demonstrating to the students how you do this. Then teach your students those phrases, relating them to the chords/scales of the moment. (Make sure the phrases you select are not beyond the students' technical capability.)

Have everyone improvise again, this time incorporating the lines they just learned. Doing this on each new tune will not only increase their interest, listening skills and jazz vocabulary, it will give them more credibility to informed listeners (such as high school jazz festival adjudicators) when they quote those phrases.

### Big Band Arrangement

Clued in to what jazz is about and how it works, your students are now prepared to rehearse a big band arrangement of the same tune, understanding from whence it came. It's no longer just notes on a page.

Upon distributing the individual parts, discuss the "roadmap," relating the big band arrangement to the tune's form and pointing out any repeats, multiple endings, *dal segnos* and *codas*. Then have the band sight-read the tune from beginning to end, stopping only if there's a train wreck.

After that, have the students go over the parts they missed, individually and silently, fingering only (not blowing) so everyone can be in their own space. Then run the chart again, giving everybody another opportunity to work on their sight reading skills.

Next, go back and teach your students how to count any tricky rhythms the chart contains, slowing down the tempo where necessary. Follow this up by rehearsing various sections of the piece, focusing on phrasing, blend, feel, time, dynamics, intonation, articulation, rhythmic interpretation and the like. Give extra attention to the intro and ending, the first and last things the listener hears.

Lastly, play the arrangement again from beginning to end—featuring as many soloists within reason as time permits—and enjoy playing jazz.

### Post Rehearsal Reminders

At the end of rehearsal, insist that your students download and continually listen to the definitive recordings of the tunes they are (and will be) rehearsing in the big band. With the advent of YouTube and other online sources, checking out the masters performing this music has never been easier.

Finally, remind everyone that one of the most fundamental aspects of being a jazz musician is being hip, that is, being in the know, aware, up to date, clued in—knowing what's up, what's going on. For every tune they play, this means knowing the form, changes, head, definitive recordings and seminal players—not just the second alto part. **DB**

Dr. JB Dyas has taught jazz to students of all levels in a wide variety of venues, including middle and high schools, performing arts high schools, summer jazz camps, colleges and universities, jazz institutes and more. His "How to Teach Jazz to High School and College Students" video series can be found free online at [artistshousemusic.org](http://artistshousemusic.org). Formerly the executive director of the Brubeck Institute, Dr. Dyas currently serves as Vice President for Education and Curriculum Development at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz at UCLA. He has contributed several educational articles to DownBeat's Woodshed department.

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