

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Young Jazz Ensemble

Kansas Music Educators Association

Saturday, July 22, 2017

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Clinic Objectives:

1. Learn to create simple, effective solutions for the rhythm section.
2. Discussion of methods for developing jazz solos for young players.
3. Discover techniques for evaluating and selecting quality jazz charts for young players.

Rhythm Section

Standard instrumentation may not be a viable option in the beginning. From my experience, this is the "order of necessity" (not importance) for creating a rhythm section: Bass, Drums, Piano/Guitar or Guitar/Piano. Since the last two both provide harmony, albeit differently, the order of appearance would seem to be local availability. IF there is simply no students available who play rhythm instruments, there are creative options through the use of Garage Band (on the iPad or laptop), or a number of other simple sequencing programs that contain a nice sound library, such as Band in the Box (PC/MAC). An amplification system would be required.

Bass: It is nearly impossible to create an ensemble of any type without a bass voice. This is certainly true in the jazz ensemble.

Option #1: Standard Electric Bass – most portable, requires standard one-cabinet amplifier (also most portable). Most students will own their bass guitar. However, if the school is to provide the instrument, suitable models are listed below. (Of course, acoustic bass is also used, if available)

Option #2: Keyboard/Synth Bass – many affordable 37 key synths are available today. Mac users can use a very inexpensive keyboard controller to trigger sounds in Garage Band. Also requires amplifier, although it can use a bass amp. Suitable models are listed in the keyboard topic section.

Option #3: Tuba – Most first and second year level jazz charts come with an optional tuba part. If not, tuba part may be created by modifying original bass part (adjusting octaves, simplifying rhythms).

Option #4: Bari Sax – not always an option due to instrument size and expense, but viable in extreme cases.

Option #5: Baritone – very limited, limited to lowest register, major part rewrite would be involved. (See bass rewrite example to illustrate options)

It is important to remember that the last three options place the bass voice at least an octave higher in most cases throughout the chart. *See keyboard notes for one more bass option.

Bass Amplifiers: Fender Rumble150 - \$349; Peavey MAX110 - \$200; MAX112 - \$250; MAX115 - \$300 and many more.

Drums: Drum kits can be expensive, especially with a few nice cymbals. Minimize expense by “order of necessity” when outfitting a kit. Bass Drum and pedal, Snare Drum, one tenor tom, floor tom (opt.), hi-hat cymbals/stand, ride cymbal/stand, throne.

Option #1: standard concert band equipment with two players; player one - ride cymbal and snare; player two – bass drum.

Option #2: pre-program sequence using Garage Band (this is possible using Garage Band on your iPad). It would take some coordination and amplification to work, but it is possible. The tempo would certainly be steady and the players would actually be rehearsing/playing with a metronome. Young people are very comfortable with technology.

Piano/Keyboard: Any argument over regarding acoustic vs. digital has been made mute due to purchase and maintenance costs, portability, and the flexibility of having a variety of keyboard sounds in one device. Performance keyboards and keyboard controllers come in the following sizes: 25, 37, 49, 61, 73, and 88 keys. If you have a laptop with a sound library or General MIDI sounds, you can use an inexpensive controller to access piano sounds. Some performance keyboards are equipped with built in speakers, eliminating the need for amplification.

Regardless of which route you take, you will need a keyboard stand and a sustain pedal.

Performance keyboards: Yamaha – NP11, 61 key, built-in spk., \$159.99; NP31, 77 key, built-in spk. - \$279; Casio Privia PX-150, 88 key, built-in spk. – 599; Korg SP250, 88 key, graded hammer action, built-in spk. - \$699; Korg SV-1–73 (1,499) and SV-88 (\$1699), no built-in spk. There are also many fine comparable Roland models in their RD series.

Keyboard controllers: M-Audio Series – KeyRig49 - \$99; Keystation 61es - \$169; Keystation 88es - \$220. M-Audio also produces an “Oxygen” series that includes more faders and knobs for computer control. Interesting new hybrids are now available that use the iPad for sounds, sequencing, and production with no need for a laptop (although it will also work with any laptop). The best so far is the Akai-SynthStation 49 - \$269. Not included is the Akai iPad app, sold separately (\$2.00). It will also work with any CoreMIDI app, such as Garage Band (\$5.00)

Keyboard amplifiers: Any Peavey KB model (KB2 - \$279; KB3 - \$299; KB4 - \$399); Behringer Ultra-tone series (K450FX - \$199.99; K900FX - \$249.99); Roland KC series (KC60 – 349; KC110 - \$399). Features, mostly wattage, inputs, and effects make the difference in the price.

One more option for bass: if you have a fairly good pianist and a keyboard instrument (or computer program/app) with a “split” feature, rezone the keyboard to use a piano sound from C3 and higher, and a bass guitar (or acoustic bass) sound below C3. Many charts include the bass part in the left hand of the piano part for this reason. You can also create your own hybrid keyboard part easily if it was not included in the original chart.

Guitar: Most guitarists will have their own equipment; complete with an amp that has an eleven on the volume knob. The most important aspect of using guitar is to develop resources in rhythm section playing and chord voicing.

Getting started with the Rhythm Section

Since having a steady rhythm section is imperative for a successful jazz band, there are many charts, books, and other resources that provide suitable, accessible material to getting started. Having them practice playing together on simple styles and changes will provide a ground work for moving ahead. Chances are that each student may have some proficiency on the instrument, but not be accustomed to the role of their instrument in this environment, rhythmically and harmonically. Listening to good examples is equally important as practicing the concepts.

General starting points on performance styles for each rhythm instrument:

(These are VERY general)

Bass:

1. Get the right sound from the instrument and its amplification.
2. Swing, blues charts: typically quarter notes, repeated and waking up/down on scale tones. Avoid the fourth degree of the scale *in the sounding chord* when walking parts. Play the root of the chord on the downbeat of each measure, especially when the harmony changes. Simplified swing bass lines can repeat notes and remain effective while being more accessible for the young student. (see example)
3. Rock music can work by using the root and the fifth of the given chord. Again, sound the root on the downbeat. Don't "give away" the root of a chord change one beat prior to the change (see example). Rock and pop styles may often involve a repeated riff, which allows the young player to focus on locking in a "groove." A basic rock rhythm would be dotted quarter, eighth note, half note in a measure of common time (see example).
4. Latin music in many of its forms can be simplified for young players to a basic half note-two quarter note pattern based on the root and fifth of the given chord (see example).
5. Waltz time bass rhythm is often dotted half notes with occasional walking quarter notes at phrase endings.

Drums:

1. Correct tuning and implements for the right sound.
2. Swing style should start with concentration on steady quarter, two eighths, quarter, two eighths in common time, along with closing the hi-hat with their foot on beats two and four. Don't have the student worry about playing the bass or snare drum until this is stable consistent. In fact, most students will immediately crank out four on the floor bass drum and heavy snare. This is not the most appropriate sound for swing (again, these are very general statements designed as a starting point). As this improves, the student may begin to use the snare, tom, and bass drum for kicks and fills. (see example)

3. Kicks and fills: Again, generally speaking, the snare is used to kick the upper winds (alto saxes, trumpets) and the bass drum is used to kick the trombones, full sax section, and bari sax/bass trombone. Limit fills to the last measure of a full phrase. You do not need or want a drum fill every two or four measures.
4. Rock and Latin tend to be closely related. Eighth note patterns on hi-hat and/or ride cymbal. Bass drum follows bass line or a simplified version of the bass line. Snare on two and four for rock; stick on rim for Latin style in a two measure pattern – mm.1 on beat two and the upbeat of three, mm.2 on beat one, upbeat of two, and four. (See example)
5. Waltz time rhythm provided mostly by ride cymbal pattern of quarter, two eighths (swing), quarter. Bass drum may play downbeats in louder passages. Snare plays on count three. (see example)

Keyboard/Piano

1. Experiment with amplification settings to achieve a natural sound.
2. Swing and Latin “comping” styles should begin with this simple rhythmic rule: play a chord every beat and a half. For example, if you play on the downbeat, you would repeat or play the next chord on the upbeat of two. This could be repeated for each measure with something a little different at the end of the phrase (see example). With regard to voicing the chord properly, these musical styles tend to stay away from tertian harmony by utilizing fourths, tri-tones, and other devices to “hip things up” and avoid 1930-40’s voicings. (see example)
3. Rock and pop music tends to be more triadic in nature. In fact, it can often sound completely wrong and out of place to use extended harmonies or hipper voicings than is called for from the original rock tune. Players tend to follow the rhythms from the original versions of these types of tunes. Quarter/eighth patterns, repeated riffs, etc.

Guitar

1. Get the right sound from the instrument and its amplification.
2. Swing “comping” consists of a tight acoustic sound that plays separated quarter notes on each beat in the measure. The best example of this is Freddie Green with the Count Basie Band. In fact, that style of playing is referred to as the “Freddie Green Style.” Latin “comping” styles can emulate piano rhythmically, overall.
3. Rock and pop are often riff based or incorporate a specific tonal rhythmic repetition. Cool repetitive ideas that appeal to the student musician provide opportunities to focus on establishing a groove with other players to go beyond the printed page.

Introducing Students to Improvisation

The biggest road block to learning improvisation is the fear of playing “wrong notes.” The younger a student is, the less likely they are to be hesitant to engage in developing improve skills. Also, through the active involvement and “pattern contribution,” students will be more eager to share their ideas and enjoy the development through performance. Here is a highly interactive and collaborative method to jump-start your students’ improvisational thinking:

1. After teacher demonstration (see example) of the creating sample three and four note patterns, ask each student to provide a pattern they created.
2. Begin with five (or so) sample patterns from the students and display them on a board or screen.
3. If a pattern is a “major pattern,” show the student how to lower the third for performance over minor chords.
4. Every in class performs the five patterns in major and minor. IF the seventh scale degree is used in the pattern, lower it to work over dominant seventh chords (see example).
5. Create simple rhythm section parts that can be played under the patterns. If you use a blues progression, for example, have the students transpose the pattern to work over the chord changes (see example).
6. You can apply different styles as this develops over time, but start with easy swing style.
7. Teach students how to transpose each pattern to play in every key. Rhythm section can also transpose from basic parts (say, blues progression). In most cases, piano can use the same voicing structures in each new key. Bass can walk over same scale degrees in each new key performed.

Pedagogy and Teaching Materials

Comprehensive Rhythm Section :

Rhythm Section Workshop for Jazz Directors, Shelly Berg, Lou Fischer, Fred Hamilton, and Steve Houghton, Alfred Publishing. Book/CD for Piano, Bass, Drums, Guitar, and Flexible Instrumentation. Score book also available.

Daily Warm-Up Exercises for Jazz Ensemble Level 1, Jack Bullock and Mike Lewis, Alfred Publishing

Directors Guide to the Rhythm Section, Jim Mahaffey, Southern Music

Jazz Steps No. 1, Robb, Alfred Publishing

Alfred Mastertracks Series, Alfred Publishing

Approaching the Standards (Rhythm Section and Combo), w/CD, Willie Hill, Alfred Publishing

Bass: Essential Styles for Drums and Bass, Book 1 and Book 2, Houghton and Warrington, Alfred Publishing (with CD's)

Building Walking Bass Lines (w/CD), Ed Friedland, Hal Leonard

The Evolving Bassist, Rufus Reid, Alfred Publishing

Drums: Essential Styles for Drums and Bass, Book 1 and Book 2, Houghton and Warrington, Alfred Publishing (with CD's)

Drums in the Rhythm Section (w/CD), S. Houghton, Alfred Publishing

Alfred's Beginning Drum Set Method (w/CD/DVD), Feldstein and Black, Alfred Publishing

Drum Essentials Vol. 1, Peter Erskin, Alfred Publishing

Essential Drum Fills, Peter Erskin, Alfred Publishing

Piano: Piano in the Rhythm Section (w/CD), Tom Ranier, Alfred Publishing
Voicings for the Jazz Keyboard, Frank Mantooth
Chord Voicing Handbook, Harris and Jarvis, Kendor Music
Jazz Piano Comping (Harmonies, Voicings, and Grooves-w/CD), Suzanne Davis,
Berklee Press
Cohen Teaches Blues Piano (w/CD), Level 1, David Cohen, Hal Leonard

Guitar: Guitar in the Rhythm Section (w/CD), P. Viapiano, Alfred Publishing
Easy Jazz Guitar: Voicings and Comping, Mike DiLiddo, Jamey Abersold
Jazz Guitar Method Complete, Various, Alfred Publishing
Brazilian Rhythms for Guitar, Carlos Arana, Alfred Publishing

Solo Development Resources

New Approach to Jazz Improvisation (Flex Instrumentation w/CD), Vols. 1, 2, 3 Jamey Abersold
(There are dozens of volumes in this series)
Chop Monster Book 1, Shelley Berg (with CD), Alfred Publishing
Jazz Anyone?, Willie Thomas (with 3 CD's), Alfred Publishing
Patterns for Jazz, David Baker, Alfred Publishing

Beginning and First Year Big Band Charts – Compilations (Budget Savers)

(These are books for an entire ensemble, but are playable with limited and “non-standard”
instrumentation such as flute, clarinet, horn, baritone T.C., and tuba)
First Year Jazz Ensemble Collection, Various, Alfred Publishing
Best of Belwin Jazz: First Year Jazz Ensemble Charts, Various, Alfred Publishing
Easy Jazz Paly-Along Series, Vols. 1, 2, 3
Jamey Abersold Jazz Ensemble Collection Vol 1, Abersold/Blair, Heritage Music Press
Best of Easy Jazz, Various, Hal Leonard
Abersold for Everyone, Abersold/Peter Blair, Heritage Music Press
Best of Discovery Jazz, Various, Hal Leonard

Retailers

Your local/regional music dealer! (equipment/music/resources)
www.sweetwater.com – Sweetwater Sound (equipment)
www.bandhphoto.com – B and H Photo/Video (equipment)

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