

**2nd Edition**

# The Jazz

## Educator's Handbook

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**MP3 audio examples  
are available at  
[kendormusic.com](http://kendormusic.com)**

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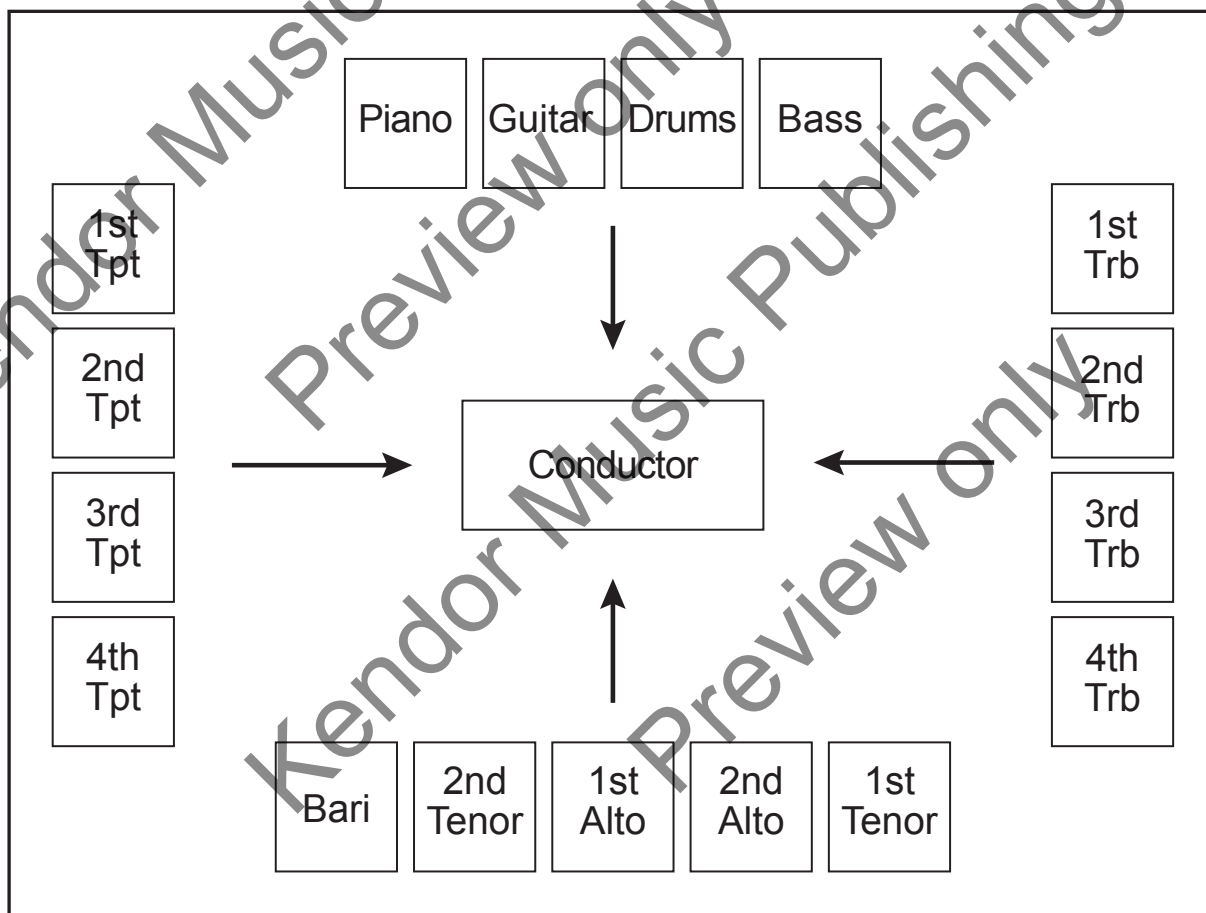
Vocalists should always rehearse with sound reinforcement. Trying to compete with the volume of a large jazz ensemble without sound reinforcement can damage the voice. There are numerous published charts for vocalist with big band. Take care to select charts in appropriate keys for the vocalist.

## BIG BAND SET-UP CONFIGURATIONS

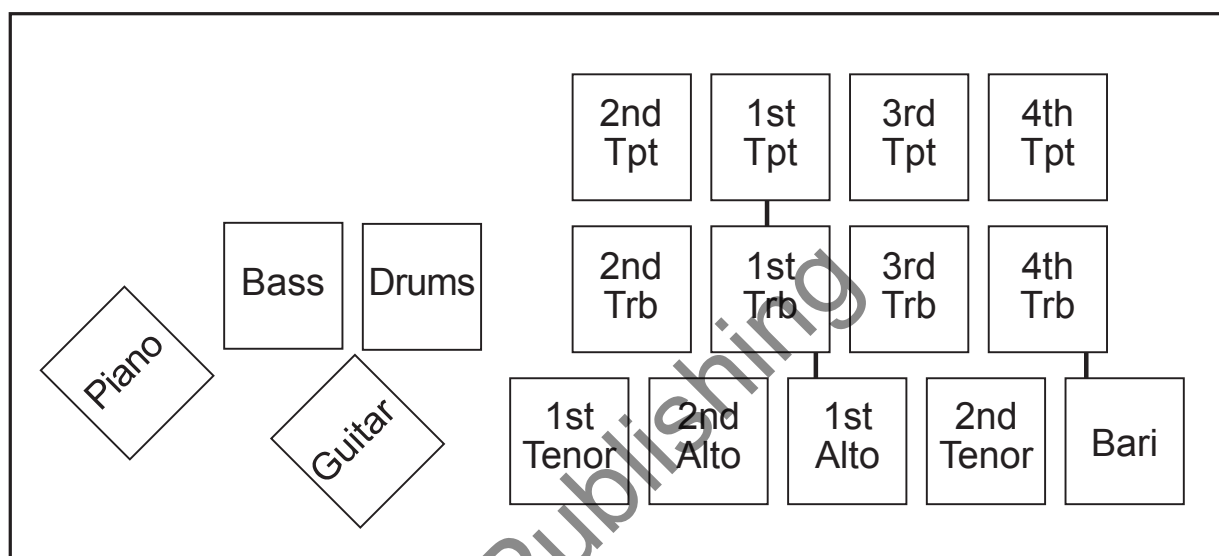
There are a variety of big band set-up configurations, some of which affect less experienced musicians' tempo, balance, blend, phrasing, and intonation. Let's examine some rehearsal and performance set-ups, considering the pros and cons of each. Our recommendations will focus on commonly used stage plots designed to make developing jazz bands sound their best.

### Rehearsal Squares

Rehearsing in a square configuration helps the players to hear other sections of the band. While this sectional isolation is valuable in rehearsal settings, conduct your last few rehearsals in the configuration you will use during the performance. Here is a sample rehearsal square set-up:



## Block Set-Up (for Rehearsal and Performance)

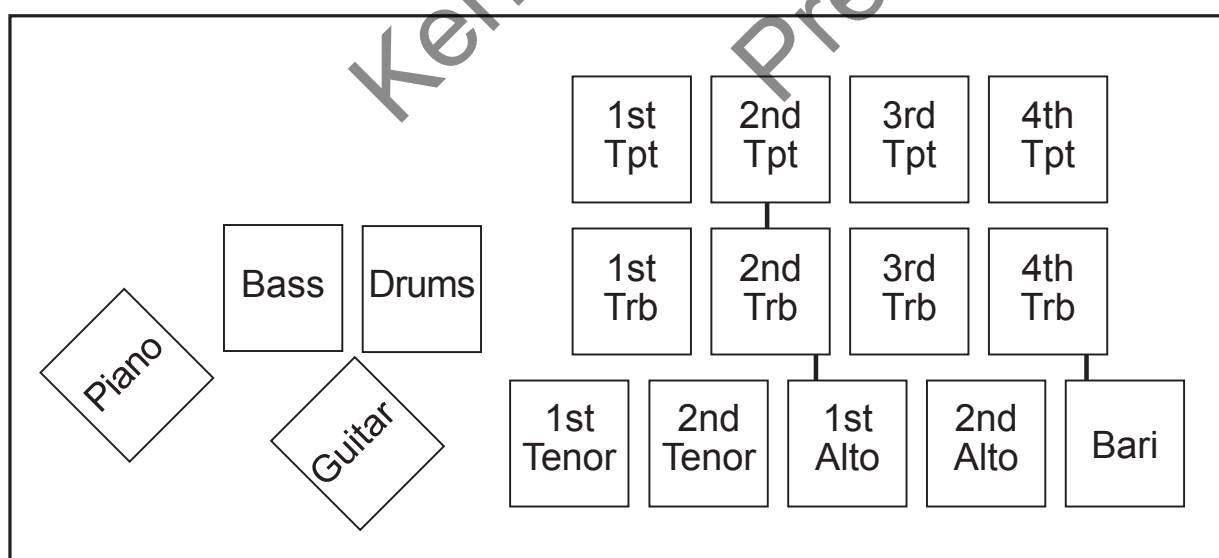


Saxes should be seated at floor level. Trombones should be seated on 8-12” risers (never standing) behind the sax section. Trumpets should be standing on 8-12” risers or seated on 16-24” risers. If risers are not available, a tiered set-up can be achieved with saxes seated at floor level, trombones seated on high stools, and trumpets standing behind the trombones.

This set-up configuration aligns the lead players for tighter phrasing. It also positions your soloists close to the rhythm section. Place the rhythm section close to the horns to promote a good time feel. Angle guitar and piano toward the ensemble with the piano lid opening toward the horns. We recommend positioning the bass between the drummer and pianist to create a “bridge” between the time and the harmony – both functions of the bassist. If possible, position the bass amp so that the lead trumpeter can hear it. This can be accomplished by placing the amp on a chair or stand, tilting it slightly toward the horn sections. When lead trumpet players hear the pulse, they convey a better time feel to the other horn sections.

### Incorrect Block Set-Up #1

The following set-up positions alto saxes together, and tenor saxes together. Less experienced alto saxophonists will find it difficult to achieve a good balance with the sound intensity of the two tenors seated together. The tenors may also experience intonation difficulties since their parts are frequently a half step or one step apart during harmonized passages.



# Chapter 5

## Choosing Charts

*Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.*

Samuel Johnson

Selecting level-appropriate music is an important aspect of leading a school big band. The music should have educational value, but also be enjoyable for the audience. Here are some suggestions and reminders for choosing suitable music for your jazz ensemble:

- Visit publisher websites to listen to and download full performances of their publications. Sample score pages are often available for review online so you can check for difficulty level, instrument ranges, rhythm section notation, etc. Some publishers offer downloadable backing tracks for solo sections of their accessible charts so improvisers can practice the solos with rhythm section accompaniment.
- Program stylistically diverse charts that showcase the strengths of the band. Regular sight-reading sessions will address the band's weaknesses, while also teaching them to assimilate music more efficiently. More on this later.
- Select charts that challenge your students, but do not overwhelm them. Conversely, choosing music that is too easy may result in boredom and complacency. So, how can you tell if a chart is level-appropriate for your band? Your students should experience some success during the first reading, but still have plenty to work on during future rehearsals.
- Accessible jazz arrangements frequently offer repetitious, accessible chord changes designed for less experienced improvisers. If there is an open solo section, chord changes are frequently provided for additional soloists.
- If your trumpet section struggles with unison lines that extend into the upper register, have the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> trumpeters play the passages down an octave.
- Big band charts are typically written for 5 saxes (AATTB), 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, and 4 rhythm, (guitar, piano, bass, and drums). Parts for 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet and 5<sup>th</sup> trombone are sometimes included in more advanced works. Published charts for less experienced bands typically include optional parts for flute, clarinet, French horn, tuba, vibraphone, and sometimes auxiliary percussion. These parts are optional since they typically double instruments already in the arrangement. For example, the French horn part is usually a transposed 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> trombone part. The clarinet is usually a transposed 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet part, and so on. The charts will sound complete if the optional parts are not played.
- If your jazz ensemble is undersized, many accessible charts have flexible instrumentation requirements. (See Chapter 3 "Undersized Big Bands")

# Chapter 7

## Phrasing, Articulations, and Dynamics


### PHRASING

Uniform phrasing is contingent upon several factors, one being an appropriate set-up configuration that aligns the lead players of the wind sections. When properly positioned, the lead trumpeter's phrasing is heard by the 1<sup>st</sup> trombonist and 1<sup>st</sup> alto saxophonist. Subsequently, the section players can listen inward to their respective lead players to match the articulations, dynamics, releases, etc. Even in a correct set-up configuration, phrasing, balance and blend issues may occur for the following reasons:

- Air management during long phrases
- Use of vibrato during ensemble passages
- Color of sound (bright vs. dark tones)
- Poor instrument position (bells pointed down)
- Trombones standing (blocking the trumpet section)
- Mismatched instruments and/or mouthpieces
- Oversized, undersized, or unbalanced instrumentation
- Microphone technique
- Improper use of the sound system

### Achieving a proper swing feel

Students typically perform Latin, rock, and funk music with better accuracy and conviction since these musical styles are closer to their sphere of influence. But when students perform swing charts, they need more guidance to achieve stylistic authenticity.

 The notation of swing eighth notes can be confusing. Years ago, some writers notated certain swing eighth figures as dotted eighths and sixteenths. Another obsolete notation of swing figures is alternating eighth notes and dotted-eighth-sixteenth figures within the same phrase.

When developing players interpret swing eighth notes as dotted eighth and sixteenths, the result is a rigid, disjunct feel.

– TRACK 16 –



Unlike dotted eighth and sixteenth figures, swing eighth notes sound like quarter note-eighth note triplets. To avoid unnecessary clutter on the page, regular eighth notes are used, but interpreted using the triplet subdivisions, as in the next example.

– TRACK 17 –

WRITTEN:  
PLAYED:

The triplet subdivision works well at slow to medium tempi, but developing jazz musicians sometimes apply the triplet subdivisions to faster tempos, resulting in a choppy effect.

– TRACK 18 –

In the next recorded example, you’ll hear how the triplet subdivisions transition to even 8<sup>th</sup> notes as the tempo gets brighter.

– TRACK 19 –

Aspiring jazz musicians should also avoid accenting every upbeat.

– TRACK 20 –

$Bb7$   $F+7(\#9)$   $Bb7$   $F+7(\#9)$   $Bb7$

In addition to the accented upbeats, some students shorten the upbeats.

– TRACK 21 –

$Bb7$   $F+7(\#9)$   $Bb7$   $F+7(\#9)$   $Bb7$

Here’s a variation on the last example, demonstrating how students may shorten all the notes.

– TRACK 22 –

$Bb7$   $F+7(\#9)$   $Bb7$   $F+7(\#9)$   $Bb7$

In his book, *Jazz Nuances For Trumpet*, Dr. John Davis explains that swing “is a legato style and the instrumentalist should connect the notes into smooth, comfortable phrases.” Wind players should use a “dah” tonguing, as opposed to “tah” tonguing. And the brighter the tempo, the harder it becomes for wind players to tongue every note, especially during eighth or sixteenth note passages. Experienced players arbitrarily alternate legato tonguing and slurs to maintain a connected feel. ♪♪



# Chapter 9

## Coaching The Rhythm Section

Big bands are built from the ground up, with the rhythm section serving as the foundation that supports the rest of the ensemble. Logic suggests these players should receive the most guidance, but ensemble directors who are wind specialists may feel less comfortable coaching rhythm section players. This chapter has been written with those directors in mind. We also recommend attending rhythm section clinics at music education conferences.

### THE ROLE OF THE RHYTHM SECTION

Perceiving the rhythm section as a timekeeper undervalues their function since all bandmembers are responsible for maintaining a solid time feel. The rhythm section is better described as the engine of the big band. Collectively, they control the excitement level while the pianist, guitarist and bassist also provide harmony. Additionally, these three instrumentalists are assigned melodic functions during some arrangements.

Interaction between rhythm section players adds spontaneity to any jazz performance. One player may introduce an idea or rhythmic motive, followed by a reaction from one or more of the others – much like a conversation. The combination of repetition and interaction makes the music feel good. This is referred to as the “groove”.

Rhythm section music for more advanced charts may consist of chord symbols and rhythm slashes, thus requiring the players to devise their own voicings and comping rhythms. Big band charts for developing players usually have completely notated rhythm section parts. This chapter will offer suggestions for helping less experienced rhythm sections achieve their purpose.

### COMPING

When accompanying soloists, the rhythm section provides an appropriate groove and harmonic information. They can influence the soloists’ excitement level, phrasing, and creativity. While an experienced soloist may skillfully lead the rhythm section through different moods during the solo, a novice improviser may not be up to this task. When a less experienced player is vague about the shape of the solo, an attentive rhythm section can come to the rescue and inspire the soloist by introducing rhythmic ideas, dynamic contrasts, and changes in feel to the accompaniment.

### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before addressing the roles of each rhythm section player, here are some overall suggestions:

- Position the rhythm section in a configuration with good sight lines. These players need to see and hear each other clearly.
- Do not instruct the rhythm section to play softly when accompanying soloists. The solo section is an opportunity for the rhythm section to have a musical conversation with the improviser. Making everyone “whisper” during that conversation reduces the excitement level and weakens the groove.

# Chapter 11

## Improvisation

*Creativity is allowing oneself to make mistakes.*

*Art is knowing which ones to keep.*

Scott Adams

Though creative intuition differs from person to person, everyone can enjoy the fun and satisfaction of performing solos they spontaneously compose. While a comprehensive treatise on jazz improvisation is beyond the scope of this handbook, this chapter examines ways to guide your students as they begin their creative adventure.

### **The Apprehensive Student**

Some students may appear disinterested in learning to improvise when they are actually self-conscious about making mistakes in front of their peers. In these cases, introduce them to some basic improvisation concepts in a more private setting.

### **The Confident Student**

You may encounter students who boldly step up to the microphone and play a flurry of notes that imitate the sound and activity of a jazz solo.

– *TRACK 111* –

While praising their willingness to try, guide these students toward a systematic approach of learning basic jazz vocabulary, thus enabling them to construct solos that relate to the chords and the time feel.

### **Keep It Simple**

Even after achieving some mastery of the jazz language, flashy technique is not always the answer. While musicians understand and appreciate a lightning-fast jazz solo, casual listeners react favorably to a melodic approach.

– *TRACK 112* –

This explains the widespread popularity of jazz greats like Miles Davis, Chet Baker, Paul Desmond, Coleman Hawkins, and Ben Webster. These players improvised with a strong sense of melody, appealing to people's emotions as well as their intellect.

## **SOME THOUGHTS FOR STUDENTS**

- Allow yourself to be a learner. Do you remember when you first rode a bicycle or drove a car? You probably felt awkward, but now these skills seem second nature.
- Ask for help in a private setting.
- Seek help from qualified instructors or improvisers.
- There is no ideal time to explore improvisation; the best time is now. As the saying goes, "First you jump off the cliff, then you build your wings on the way down."

## Here are the basic needs for learning improvisation:

### *Skill*

- The improviser must possess a reasonable command of the instrument.
- The improviser must possess a vocabulary of scales, modes, and arpeggios.
- The improviser must understand basic chord construction.
- The improviser must understand melodic integrity.

### *Opportunity*

- The improviser needs the opportunity to learn from a caring teacher.
- The improviser needs the opportunity to perform jazz in public.

### *Listening*

- The improviser needs an understanding of jazz vocabulary.
- The improviser needs an awareness and appreciation of jazz history.
- The improviser needs to analyze accomplished jazz musicians.

### *Originality*

- The improviser needs to combine the jazz language with personal style.

## SOME THOUGHTS FOR DIRECTORS

Written or memorized solos are an excellent way to introduce novice soloists to solid jazz vocabulary. However, continued reliance on prepared solos delays progress. Creativity cannot flourish in an environment that protects students from making mistakes. Learning any new skill involves a trial-and-error process. Share this inspiring anecdote: Thomas Edison's laboratory journals documented 10,000 failed attempts at inventing the light bulb. When an interviewer asked Edison if he had actually failed 10,000 times, the inventor replied, "I have not failed 10,000 times. I have successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work."

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM EDUCATORS

*Can anyone improvise?*

Yes. Everyone possesses some degree of creative intuition, though some improvisers will progress faster than others. You can help by provide a nurturing environment that promotes listening, imitation, and experimentation.

*When should I introduce improvisation to my students?*

Introduce improvisation as soon as possible. Younger students are less affected by peer pressure and more willing to try new things. Some believe students should not be introduced to jazz improvisation until they have learned all their scales, arpeggios, and have adopted a stable practice regimen. On the contrary, students can develop creativity and basic performance skills concurrently. For example, the famed Suzuki and Orff methods introduce beginning musicians and singers to improvisation, ear training, and confidence-building. As students develop scale and arpeggio fluency, their jazz vocabulary will expand through listening and experimentation.