

Rehearsal Strategies – *Blood Count*
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I would suggest that every alto saxophonist in the world get an opportunity to perform **Bloodcount** at least once in their lifetime. The melody is constructed in a very comfortable range of the alto saxophone that would allow a younger player to learn the basic melody and slowly add the creative embellishments of Johnny Hodges. Because of the example set by Johnny Hodges, this chart also challenges the experienced player to be exceptionally creative with the melody. It truly shows the genius of Billy Strayhorn as a composer and arranger, even on his death bed. This piece also demonstrates the composer's ability to write for the genius of a specific musician. Johnny Hodges, tone quality, dynamic control, subtone, vibrato, and ability to convey emotion through music is a special talent all musicians should strive to achieve. I suggest that first endeavor should be to get the entire band to listen to the original recording until they are able to sing the entire melody with intensity, style and feel similar to Johnny Hodges. The capturing of the emotion of the melody through careful listening is needed.

This chart is also great to help all bands work on balance, blend and dynamic control. Even though the piano is not used, the orchestration and voice leading allows everyone to hear the chord progressions and textures very clearly. Also this chart is written within a comfortable range for all the brass section, and allows all the players to work on tone quality and control in the lower range of the instruments. Through my many years of teaching, intonation is always an important concern. Through careful listening and singing, this chart will help your band develop better intonation and tonal blend. The ability of bands to hear altered notes in the chord progressions, such as the sharp eleven and flat nine is apparent throughout the chart.

I have always preached to directors to select music that allows you to teach concepts in the rehearsal that help your band become better. This chart is one that will allow your band to be much better after the listening and study have been put in to achieve a great performance experience.

Listening

I have often heard directors tell their students to listen, but rarely are students told specifically *how* to listen and *what* to listen for. I encourage students be directed to listen to the melody first, and make singing and matching, vocal inflections, vibrato, dynamic contrasts part of the process. Also, finding the groove or pulse of the quarter note is very important. This chart follows the

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traditional ballad feel in the beginning A section of the form. Therefore students should be instructed to find the downbeat of the quarter note while feeling a straight eighth note duple feel with the heel of the foot (see chapter in my textbook – “Teaching Music Through Performance In Jazz” www.giamusic.com). Also listen carefully to make a smooth transition to the bridge at section E of the chart. It actually goes to a driving swing feel that is based on the quarter note having a triplet pulse swing feel. I encourage students to be open to finding other recordings of the chart. Of course, the first recording to check out would be the Duke Ellington recording with Johnny Hodges. Also check out the rehearsal recording made by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Sherman Irby continues the tradition and mastery of the alto saxophone in his rendition.

I also encourage students to groove and sing the bass line throughout, using Dune as the quarter note sound. This allows them to start to hear the chord progressions and also internalize the form of the chart. Listen very carefully to the importance of dynamics and tonal control play on delivering the emotional intent of this composition. As students listen, they should pay close attention not only to the sadness that is obviously conveyed by Johnny Hodges, but also by the entire ensemble. The A section of the chart is almost like a mourning for something about to happen. Listen carefully to section E and the range of dynamic contrast and depth of swing feel that happens. This is almost like the last great dance before the quiet and subdued ending. Listen to the first four bars of section A as the baritone sax does a call and response with the soloist.

The image shows a musical score for the A section of a jazz piece. The score is written for five parts: Alto (as-played), alt. Alto (as-written), Alto, Tenor, and Bari. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The Alto (as-played) part starts with a melodic line in the first bar, marked *mp*, and includes triplet markings. The alt. Alto (as-written) part follows a similar melodic line. The Alto, Tenor, and Bari parts are mostly silent in this section, with the Bari part playing a bass line starting in the second bar, marked *p*.

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Listen to the subtle vibrato of the saxes at sections A and B, as well as the contrast of vibrato and dynamics at section E to build emotion. Saxes have to respond to the soloist at section C with a forecast of the contrast to come at section E. Listen carefully to how the trombone section takes the role of the comping instrument and call and response in measures 5-8 of section A and 1-4 of section B.

The image shows a musical score for three trombone parts, labeled 'Tbns. 1', '2', and '3'. The music is written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor). It consists of four measures. The first three measures feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs and accents, while the fourth measure features a sustained note with a vibrato effect. The parts are arranged in a three-staff system.

Listen carefully to the leading tone resolutions of the lead trombone throughout the composition. This begins in the first four measures. It sounds like a masterful choir singing behind a great soloist. Listening is the only true way to learn this great art form we call jazz. Always have students listen to who is doubling their note in unison or octaves. I still encourage everyone to spend time at the piano to hear how their note fits in the chord progressions. Remember that singing parts helps a great deal with intonation and tonal blend.

Rhythm Section

The two feel is one of the most difficult feels in jazz, especially for young rhythm sections. I encourage everyone to continue to feel all four quarter notes per measure, even though the bass drum is felt on one and three during the two feel section. The drummer using mallets adds an almost tympani effect to the composition, and a very unique approach to creating emotion. The feel should still be danceable and not too slow. The bass and bass drum maintain the quarter notes on one and three, while the high hat maintains the two and four during the two feel sections. It is important to re-emphasize the importance of feeling a duple pulse for each quarter during the straight eight sections (Su-ga-da-dy). The cymbals are used as color and do not have to be played exactly as the written part, but find ways to compliment the soloist. Make sure all rolls used to build intensity are rudimentarily sound. The entire rhythm section should find time to listen to original recording individually and as a section. The use of triplets in the bass part really helps to keep the time feel moving forward. I encourage you to maintain the rhythm section as written because a specific mood was created by not using piano, guitar or vibes.

The E section of the chart builds to a grand eruption of swing feel and dynamic contrast. This section has to be the final dance before the calm to the ending section. The entire rhythm section

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should feel the triplet pulse on each quarter note (Doo-od-la – per “Teaching Music Through Performance In Jazz” textbook). The snare is turned on, and the drummer leads the band through this section. The bass player should feel an anticipation of each quarter so that the time feel doesn’t drag. (In other words, ah-1 ah-2 ah-3 ah-4.)

It is important to realize that since there is no piano or comping instrument in this arrangement, it is imperative that each section of the band realize when their part is either call and response, chordal support or a comping section. Careful listening to the original recording will help guide the entire ensemble, including the rhythm section.

Ensemble

The range of this chart is very reasonable for everyone, so endurance should not be a problem. Every section should listen carefully to the recording and sing their individual part along with the recording using appropriate doodle tongue syllables. Ex: Doo or DU for long quarter notes, Dit for staccato quarter notes, Dot for marcato quarter notes, Dah for accented notes. If you sing it the same, you will play it the same.

Balance with the lead player on all long notes and following the dynamic direction of the soloist is very important. Also remember to match the lead players tone, vibrato, inflections, and dynamics as much as possible. Make sure everyone takes a breath, and phrases the same throughout the arrangement. The bari sax (Harry Carney) part is just as important as the soloist at times. In section B, measures 5-8, trombones have to listen to the bari sax for the lead and balance.

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The image displays a musical score for a jazz band. The score is arranged in a system with the following parts from top to bottom:

- Alto (as-played)**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), playing a melodic line with eighth notes and slurs.
- alt. Alto (as-written)**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), playing a melodic line with eighth notes and slurs.
- Alto**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), with a whole rest.
- Tenor**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), with a whole rest.
- Tenor**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), with a whole rest.
- Bari.**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), with a whole rest.
- Tpts. 1**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), with a whole rest.
- 2**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), with a whole rest.
- 3**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), with a whole rest.
- 4**: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), with a whole rest.
- Tbns. 1**: Bass clef, key signature of one flat (Bb), with a whole note.
- 2**: Bass clef, key signature of one flat (Bb), with a whole note.
- 3**: Bass clef, key signature of one flat (Bb), with a whole note.
- Bass**: Bass clef, key signature of one flat (Bb), playing a melodic line with eighth notes and slurs.
- Drs.**: Drum set, playing a rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and slurs.

The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp* (mezzo-piano) and articulation marks like slurs and accents. The key signature is one sharp (F#) for the upper parts and one flat (Bb) for the lower parts.

There are many times when everyone should listen carefully and create a melodic push

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whenever your notes move and the rest of the section holds a long note across the measure. A good example would be the lead trombone in measures 5-8 of section B and 5-7 in section D. Everyone should sing and find the triplet pulse swing at section E until the style, feel and

articulation is internalized. The lead trumpet has the lead during this section and balance is very important.

Soloist

The soloist really has to internalize, sing and find meaning in every phrase of the melody. I would like to encourage the soloist to research the importance of the composition. This has been stated to be the last composition of Billy Strayhorn on his deathbed. Whether specifically true or not, the composition conveys a great deal of emotion and sorrow throughout. Learn the basic melody, learn the Johnny Hodges version, then work to create your own version. There is no reason to feel you have to play it exactly as the recorded version, but there are many aspects of the recording that can guide you to a personal interpretation of the arrangement. The tone color, dynamics, phrasing control and attention to detail are very important. I encourage the soloist to sing as many different versions of the composition as possible to find your voice.

Putting it all together

After all is said and done, it is important to make this arrangement your own and make it a personal expression of your soloist and your band. I encourage everyone to record all section rehearsals, and big band rehearsals each day to continually work toward a great performance. Listening to each other and making correction each day is as important as listening to the original recording.