

ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON

High School Jazz Band Program

Rehearsal Strategies: *Chinoiserie* by Duke Ellington By Prof. Ronald Carter – Northern Illinois University

This is my 18th year working with the *Essentially Ellington* Program and I have had the opportunity to listen, review, and perform most of the music used in the program over its 19-year history. I am also Director of Jazz Studies at Northern Illinois University, where Duke Ellington performed his last full concert in the ballroom in 1974 (now named in his honor as the Duke Ellington Ballroom). I have developed a strong relationship with the music and genius of Duke Ellington.

Duke was prolific as a composer, arranger and pianist. He not only set the foundation for all the big band music we perform today, but also wrote several jazz suites, including *Afro – Eurasian Eclipse*, recorded in 1971. The Suite included eight parts and truly showcased the versatility of Duke Ellington to include melody, harmonies, and rhythm of other styles of music but still maintained its own identity.

Chinoiserie is the opener and the longest movement in the suite, which the Ellington Orchestra performed by itself on many occasions in the early seventies. The title is actually French and literally means “*Chinese influence*.”

Several musicologists have concluded that the perfect fourth voicing of the melody, and phrasing of the melody is Asian influenced. Ellington even stated in his introduction on the Fantasy released recording and other live performances that this was definitely an effort to showcase the globalization of the world. I encourage everyone to listen and sing along with the original Fantasy recording until the melody and countermelodies are internalized. You are not trying to sound just like the Ellington recording, but trying to internalize the intent of the Ellington recording. Listening to learn is very important.

The form of the composition is *AABC*, with the *A* section being 10 measures long. I actually hear the measures being divided according to phrasing of the melody, **4 + 2 + 4**. Sing the *A* section with the entire band until the phrasing is the same throughout the ensemble. The *B* section is 8 measures and the *C* section is 8 measures with a 4 measure extension on the melody. However, on the tenor solo, the *C* section is only 8 measures.

Everyone is encouraged to find and locate other recordings and performances on Youtube of the Duke Ellington Orchestra performing *Chinoiserie*. Make sure you check out the 1973 live video on YouTube in Winnipeg Canada. The bass line is much easier for younger players to master, even though the written bass line from the studio recording is much more exciting and creative.

Listening to the Soloists:

The piano solo in the beginning performed by Duke is an open four measure vamp in c minor. This opens up many options for the soloist, whether piano or some other part of the rhythm section. I still encourage the pianist to listen and learn the original solo on the recording then get an idea of the intent of the style. The solo has to build until the melody enters at D (can be cued).

The transcribed tenor solo is Harold Ashby, who replaced Jimmy Hamilton in the Ellington Orchestra in 1968. Ashby’s style was very similar to Ben Webster, and he even recorded with Ben Webster in 1958.

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Listen, sing and learn the original recording to get an idea of style and the jazz language. Also, check out the 1973 live recording on YouTube to get an idea of how even Harold Ashby used some of his same ideas on both recordings. Also, there is an additional *A* section at section R before the soloist returns to *B*. Do not be afraid to give other soloists an opportunity to improvise on the solo section. You can open up section L to section P. Have all students learn the changes at the piano as well as create a bass line to each section of the form. You will hear the term, make the solo yours, but the written is a very good starting point to hear how Mr. Ashby builds the solo to the open vamp at section *B*.

Ensemble:

This chart offers an opportunity to be very creative with dynamics throughout the arrangement. The *A* section is a C minor vamp, and once the melody is internalized, everything makes sense to groove hard with the drums and ostinato bass line. There is also a good opportunity to listen for the call and response between the brass and the winds on the *B* section. Make sure there is a gradual crescendo in the brass section in the straight ahead swing in the *B* section rehearsal mark F. Also, the eighth note line should be sung and articulated, **doo - dot** or **du - dot**, with the last eighth being the loudest.

The C section of the form at rehearsal mark G offers another opportunity to listen to the call and response between the brass and the wind section. Make sure the brass section follows the lead of the 1st trumpet and crescendo as well as accent each long note during this 8 measure section. The 4 bar extension in the sax line at this section can seem confusing for the section. There should be a specific type of aggressive approach in the lead alto and followed by the entire section. Also, even though the notes are descending at the end of this phrase, the saxes should crescendo.

Rehearsal mark H is a battle between the saxes (octave unisons) and the brass, with the brass playing the melody, but the saxes are just as important. Make sure everyone exaggerates the articulations and the dynamics throughout this section.

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The image shows a musical score for a jazz band. It consists of ten staves. The top two staves are for Tenor and Bari saxophones. The next four staves are for Trumpets 1, 2, 3, and 4. The bottom three staves are for Trombones 1, 2, and 3. The score is written in 4/4 time and features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Dynamics markings like 'f' (forte) are present throughout the score.

The tenor sax, bari sax and brass section and have very important backgrounds parts at this section to help build the tenor sax solo. The articulation is a heavier accent on beat three.

Example: This part should be sung as a section until there is agreement on the style of articulation and dynamics. *(rest) dot-Daht -Dah.....*

Also, the tenor and bari sax need to accent their entrance to propel the brass on the *and* of beat four.

Section T should be a gradual crescendo, but must stay balanced and in control for eight full measures. Make sure the fall off at U is cut off together so that the saxes and trombones start the downbeat at the vamp together. Have fun!

Rhythm Section:

The rhythm section is the heart and soul of this composition and arrangement. It would be great to learn all the rhythm section parts as written, and then work to create a personal groove for your ensemble. The drums and bass are the key components to any outstanding jazz ensemble. The bass line is basically a 4 measure repeated bass line in the A section of the melody. Sing and play the bass line along with the ORIGINAL RECORDING TO GET THE FEEL AND GROOVE CONSISTANT. The **B** and **C** sections of the form are straight ahead hard bop swing. Listen to how the piano, bass and drums play together to keep the triplet pulse fell and a driving feel throughout each section of the form. I always encourage everyone in the rhythm section to be able to sing all melodies and counter melodies throughout the arrangement. You

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should also listen, sing and play along with the original recording until the feel and style is internalized. You do not have to play exactly what is written. Remember all these parts were improvised and not written. Ellington sets the mood with his driving piano ***“RIKI TIKI”*** introduction and can be phrased any multiple of four measures. The drum part really requires study through careful listening and singing all fills and set ups. Again, you do not have to play what is written, but should start with original recording, then lead the band through each section and make sure you exaggerate dynamics. Also, there are several sections where the drummer sets up the brass parts as in sections G, H, I and S. The hippest part of the chart is the open vamp at section V where the drum adds a back-beat, the bass play a two measure ostinato line and the section builds with the soloist. You have to create your own meaning and intent for each section. I hear my old Baptist Church in Naylor, GA. Maybe James Brown grooving on a hot night? Anyway, make it personal and have fun.