

# ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON

High School Jazz Band Program

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

Duke Ellington is arguably our greatest American composer. He wrote over two thousand compositions and contributed endlessly to the music of our country. **Flirtibird** is used in Otto Priminger's "**Anatomy of a Murder**," Duke Ellington's first full movie score. This was the first significant Hollywood film score written by African Americans and starred Academy Award winner, James Stewart, George C. Scott, and Lee Remick. The sultry, sexy theme written by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn was played every time Lee Remick (Laura) was shown on the big screen. Johnny Hodges, a master of the saxophone, expressed sensuality through the instrument at the highest level. The recording, released by Columbia in 1959, received varied reviews by the critics, but won three Grammy Awards for Duke Ellington. In order to give a convincing performance of this composition, I suggest that the entire band do a great deal of listening and singing along with the original recording. I would also encourage you to watch the entire movie on YouTube.

### **Listening to the Soloists:**

The melody has to be the major focus of any improvisation in the composition. I encourage each featured soloist to listen, sing and learn the melody by memory. I always encourage everyone to learn the transcribed solos to have a much better idea of the style and intent. Duke Ellington used Johnny Hodges as the featured soloist in this composition because he was a master of transmitting emotion through the instrument. It is important to not only learn the notes of the transcribed solo, but master the many devices the soloists used to transmit emotion, blues, and sensuality. There are opportunities throughout to make sure the melody is obvious, while finding ways to make the improvisation your own.

### **Ensemble:**

The composition is written in the standard form of *AABA*, with a great deal of call and response to the sultry melody. The phrasing involves swing style and double time bebop phrasing. I talked with Clark Terry on his birthday a few weeks ago, and neglected to ask him about the composition and the recording session. The phrasing in the double time bebop counter melody sections B and C have the styling and attitude of Clark. He is a master of both styles and a mentor for many years. I encourage everyone to listen carefully individually and as a full section to the phrasing and style used throughout the original recording.

Ellington has always been able to use the distinguishing genius of his members of Orchestra to make great music. This composition features the trumpet in mute (Clark Terry) leading the melody with the saxophone section at section A. This is also a challenge for the sax section because the saxes have to follow melody with the trumpet, then play a call and response with the trombones. The answer phrase should be accented as a comping line, adding rhythmic integrity. Everyone should sing and play along with the original recording.

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The image shows a musical score for Section A of 'Essentially Ellington'. It features five staves: Alto 1, Alto 2, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, and Bass. The Alto 1 staff is marked with a box containing the letter 'A' and the word 'Solo' above it. The music is in 4/4 time and begins with a dynamic marking of *f*. The Alto 1 part features a complex melodic line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The other staves provide harmonic support with various rhythmic patterns. Chord symbols are placed above the staff: D7, C#7, C7, B7, and Eb7. Dynamic markings include *mf*, *f*, *pp*, and *p*.

The third trumpet leads the melody at section **A**, and the second alto sax leads the countermelody. Listen carefully to balance the sections and match vibrato, and articulations of the lead players. In section **B**, the piano has the melody, but the countermelody led by the third trumpet is very important, but has to balance the melody. Listen and sing along with the original recording until the style and feel is internalized.

The lead alto (**Johnny Hodges**) takes the melody at section **C**, while the saxes and trumpet still have the counter melody. In section **D**, the **B** section of the form, is a **12/8** hard driving swing supporting the lead alto soloist. Section **E** returns to trumpet and saxes playing the melody, while the saxes and trombones play the counter melody. Careful listening to the original recording is very important.

## Rhythm Section:

All the rhythm section parts were improvised, therefore you do not have to play exactly what is written. However, using the written parts as starting point in preparing your performance is very important. Bass player need to sing and play along with the original recording, while feeling the triplet pulse of each quarter note. Make sure section **G** is much more aggressive and the piano plays the triplets as written. The rhythm section has to listen to the original recording until the feel and style is internalized.