

# ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON

High School Jazz Band Program

## Rehearsal Strategies – *Lightnin’* By Ron Carter, Director of Jazz Studies Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois

This is a very exciting chart based on the piano jazz style called stride. Stride piano was very important to the development of jazz as we know it. All of the great jazz pianists studied the stride piano style, including Basie and Ellington. The strong left hand, short heavy quarter notes, and syncopated right hand set the style and articulation for the entire chart. I encourage everyone to take the time to research and listen to the stride piano style. Go to YouTube and listen to great stride pianists as Willie “The Lion “ Smith, Fats Waller, and James P. Johnson.

This is a great chart to feature your pianist. The transcribed solo is written at sections M and N but can be improvised, while maintaining the style of the chart. This is also a chart that helps the rhythm section learn to maintain the integrity of swing at a fast tempo while staying relaxed. I suggest you learn this chart at a slower tempo in four, feeling a triplet pulse but not laying back on the rhythmic feel. Then once the chart is under control, then go to a two feel, feeling a duple subdivision. This is a feel that also translates when students are learning to play bebop styles. I suggest that everyone take the time to listen carefully to the Ellington recording and be able to stylistically sing all melodies and counter melodies. This chart depends on dynamics as well to build each soloist, without overpowering the soloist. Singing each helps with articulation, balance and blend.

### Listening

Listening, feeling the groove, and singing each part is essential to learning the style and rhythmic feel of any chart. I suggest you listen to as many examples of stride influenced big band performance as possible. There is a 1932 recording of Count Basie with Bennie Moten’s Band that is based on the same chord changes and the same stride performance. The actual singing of each melody and theme should use syllables based on the Doodle system in my textbook “Teaching Music Through Performance In Jazz.” A good example would be the brass section articulation at section (S) should be sang: Dot – Doo – Dit- Dah-----Du – Dot – Dot – Doo – Dit – Dah-----

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**S**

Tpts. 1  
2  
3

Tbns. 1  
2  
3

Listen carefully to imitate the feel and dynamics of all the long notes throughout the arrangement. Notice that dynamics are used to create the tension and release behind each soloist. This starts in measures 5-8 of the brass section in section A.

Tpts. 1  
2  
3

Tbns. 1  
2  
3

Make sure as you listen to the recording, as proper articulations are adhered to throughout the arrangement. The spaced quarter notes are used throughout and are derived from the stride feel. There are many opportunities to recreate this exciting arrangement and still use your own ideas. I suggest that each section listen as a group to discover ways to duplicate the excitement in this

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arrangement. This chart builds to the end by using call and response between the winds and the brass section, while the rhythm section drives the stride two feel. Listen carefully to section O as you sing and feel the pulse of the stride two feel.

The image shows a musical score for section O, marked with a circled 'O' at the beginning. The score is arranged for a high school jazz band and includes the following parts:

- Alto Sax:** Four staves, each with a dynamic marking of *f*.
- Sopranos:** One staff with a dynamic marking of *f*.
- Tenors:** One staff with a dynamic marking of *f*.
- Alto Sax:** One staff with a dynamic marking of *f*.
- Trumpets:** Three staves, each with a dynamic marking of *f* and the instruction "Open".
- Trombones:** Three staves, each with a dynamic marking of *f* and the instruction "Open".
- Guitar:** One staff with dynamic markings of *f*, *ff*, and *f*, and chord symbols G7, F#7, G7, A7, and A7.
- Piano:** Two staves with dynamic markings of *f* and *ff*.
- Bass:** One staff with a dynamic marking of *f*.
- Drums:** One staff with dynamic markings of *f* and *ff*, and the instruction "HH".

Listen to the articulations of the brass in measures 5-8 of section O. The quarter notes should be played with accents on beats two and four to create a great swing energy.

## The Rhythm Section

The key to this chart is for the rhythm section to really get inside of the stride piano feel and realize their specific roles. The tendency for young bands is to rush because the tempo is fast. I suggest each person in the section sing and play along with the original recording until the style and feel is internalized. The drums and bass are the engine. Notice that the bass player notes are short and match the left hand stride of the piano. The bass can experiment with using the slap techniques to create proper attack and placement of the quarter note. I suggest the drummer spend time listening and imitating the high hat swing feel technique of Sonny Greer. Also go to YouTube to play along with the great drummer for Basie Orchestra, Papa Joe Jones. The bass drum locks with the bass on beats one and three for a solid two feel.

The guitar plays four quarter notes but accents two and four along with the right hand of the piano for a driving tow feel. I suggest the guitarist go to [www.freddiegreen.org](http://www.freddiegreen.org) to check out the

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tutorial on big band rhythm guitar for voicing, grips and style of attack. The piano continues to use a stride piano feel comping feel that locks with the crisp swing feel of the high hat. Make sure the piano listens for the counterpoint with the baritone sax solo in measures 7-8 of the introduction.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is for Bari Sax, labeled 'Solo' and 'f'. It contains two measures of music in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first measure has a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note A, a quarter note G, and a quarter note F. The second measure has a quarter note E-flat, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, and a quarter note B. The bottom staff is for Piano, labeled 'Solo' and 'f'. It contains two measures of music in the same key signature. The first measure has a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note A, a quarter note G, and a quarter note F. The second measure has a quarter note E-flat, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, and a quarter note B.

The entire rhythm section must take the tempo at a comfortable level in four, feeling the triplet pulse, and gradually go to a faster tempo in two with a duple pulse. Also, record all section rehearsals and full band rehearsals to help the section develop a strong authentic swing feel. Remember the drummer and the rhythm section lead the band through the arrangement with well-orchestrated dynamics.

## Ensemble

Everyone in the ensemble should continually listen and sing their parts along with the original recording until the style and feel is internalized. Articulation and dynamics are a very important part of the ensemble performance throughout the arrangement. Also listen throughout the arrangement to the attack and release of the half notes and the dynamics leading in and out of each section. The quarter notes and syncopation in the charts should have a tap dance feel. The use of dynamics throughout the arrangement on whole notes should crescendo for two measures and decrescendo for two measures except at section H in the winds. Everyone should try to match the vibrato of the lead players.

In section I and K, the brass section should work to synchronize the movement of the plunger/mute.

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The image shows a musical score for a jazz band. It is divided into two main sections: Tpts. (Trumpets) and Tbn. (Tubas). The Tpts. section has three staves (1, 2, 3) and the Tbn. section has three staves (1, 2, 3). The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score includes dynamics such as *mf* (mezzo-forte) and instructions like "Plunger w/mute". The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A box labeled "I" is placed above the first measure of the Tpts. 1 staff.

All these parts should be sang and articulated properly before the pixie and plunger mutes are used. The wind section instrumentation changes at section O with the soprano sax taking the lead, with beats one and three being accented throughout the section. The call and response between the winds and brass section help to build to the final section of the arrangement.

## Putting it all Together

Once the time has been put in to work out all the parts and listened to the recording individually and as a section, start to add all the soloists. All soloists should learned the transcribed solo first, then learn changes and improvise your own solo. Learning to listen to each other and become a great band takes patience, dedication, and hard work.