

Perdido Rehearsal Strategies

Listen, Dance, Sing & Play!

Though these words may seem like a mantra for a happy life, they actually represent an approach to engaging students in the jazz language. Duke Ellington's "Perdido" arrangement is all about one simple thing – *Swing!* There are many other Duke pieces that are far more intricate but don't necessarily swing harder. This is because the rhythms he writes here have an inherent *swing* to them. Even groups with little experience can have a certain amount of instant gratification with this chart because the rhythms already swing. Still, this arrangement will be a great vehicle to take your students to an even deeper understanding of swing and groove.

Listening

Before starting into rehearsal the director must first get prepared. This will mean making sure that not only the Duke and Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (JLCO) renditions included on the *Essentially Ellington* CD have been investigated but other recordings (such as the slower 1942 recording) have been explored as well. Find several recordings that can be referenced for different reasons – solo ideas, rhythms sections, articulations, interpretations, etc. It is not necessary to play all of versions that have been collected for the first listening session. Choose one example to start from and use the others down the road in later rehearsals. Also, be sure to read through the rehearsal notes at the beginning of the score; these notes will help the director to guide the students' listening experience. Ask the students leading questions about what it is they should be hearing – *who has the melody? What is the form of the tune? Where is the climax of the arrangement? How simple or busy is the rhythm section comping?* Ask basic questions that will draw the students into the music.

Listen first to the recording without the music in front of the students and encourage them from the beginning to listen with their bodies. ***Dancing*** simply means that students should move to the music they are hearing. Have all the students tap their heel to the quarter note pulse and find beats 2 *and* 4 by clapping or snapping – or find other ways of

Perdido Rehearsal Strategies

displaying the pulse with their bodies. This will be crucial in helping students “feel” what it is like to swing. Some students may be resistant to moving to the music but it is extremely important that they do so because playing “time” is a physical activity. Also, we want the student to have a visceral connection to the music. Remember that your willingness as a director to move to the music and have fun will connect with the students and ease their fears of looking silly. Move with the music and let the students model you. If you feel self-conscious about moving then your students will as well. Get in front of a mirror and find a movement that feels and looks natural to you. This could be simply moving your head to the pulse or a simple two-step from side to side. You don’t have to be a great dancer but you should display the time with your body.

Next, have the students *sing* along with sections of the recording. This can be done with the music in front of the students; however, this does not mean that the students should sing only their individual parts. Have all students sing the melody to learn the form of the tune (*AABA*) and specific section parts. This will get the students to listen to the other sections of the band and hear the arrangement as a whole. This is especially important for the rhythm section, which will be comping throughout. As the students sing, have them find syllables that match the sounds that they are hearing, such as examples below. It is important that the sound matches the articulation to be played. This will be discussed more later on.

Let’s Play

When starting to actually play the chart, remind the students to try to recreate the physical sensation in their bodies (*dance*) and match the articulations that were sung when listening to the original. Play the arrangement from beginning to end without stopping unless absolutely necessary; this is to allow the students to get a sense of how the chart develops. After playing the chart through, go back and work section at a time those places where the articulation and feel are not in sync. For example, the brass figures at letter **A** may not feel the way you would like; the plunger work written in the part may be troublesome. Have the students sing the articulation again singing: *dah, dot doot dot doo-wop*, giving the most emphasis to *dah*.

Perdido Rehearsal Strategies

WA

dah dot doot dot doo wop

Once the students can sing the figure with the correct articulation, have them try it on the instruments without the mutes making a loop of those 2 bars. When the articulation matches the vocalization, add the mutes. When adding the mutes the students must be careful not to close the bell off too much. If there is any question as to what the articulation should sound like, go back to the recording. What's most important is that the section plays together, everyone matching the sound of the lead player.

Do the same with other sections of the chart. Have the students write the articulations onto their music (the syllables too, if needed). The saxophones at letter C should sing:

doo da doot dot doo dah dot dah yah da dot doo dot

Added to the challenge of the articulation of the saxophones is the concept of sound needed by the section. The saxes must create a warm sound with vibrato that is consistent throughout the section. Again, if there is a question about the sound, refer back to the recording, sing the part, then play it.

This practice routine should be encouraged for students when practicing at home, but it is also vital in sectional rehearsals. Singing should remain a consistent part of *all* rehearsals. Here are some vocalizations of other sections of this arrangement:

Saxes at letter E:

da doo doo doo da doo doo dot da doo dah da doo dot dah

Saxes at letter L:

dee yah doo dot da dool - ya doo dot

Perdido Rehearsal Strategies

The brass figures at letter **U** require that the students sing the *effect* as well as the articulation. Though the part is marked *ff*, there should be an *fp* with a crescendo that the students should vocalize together then play. Again, play the effect first without the mutes then add them after the effect has been accomplished.



Rhythm Section

Though much of this discussion has focused on the ensemble figures, the role of the rhythm section should not be diminished. As stated earlier, the rhythm section should be singing the parts with the rest of the ensemble matching feel and articulation. The rhythm section should know the melody and all background parts. Further, the rhythm section should know how the arrangement builds and where the climatic sections are because it will be their job to guide and lead the band to that climax. Still, the first goal of the rhythm section must be to create a groove. This harkens back to the first listening exercise of dancing to the music and creating a habit of displaying the pulse with their body. Have the students listen to the original and while moving to the music make note of how the bass and drums work to establish the quarter note pulse. It is also important for the pianist to notice where the piano does not play on the original recording. This is where the multiple recordings will come in handy in that the rhythm section's comping will be different on each recording. Though the harmony is specific, rhythm section parts are not specific to the noted parts; they are simply transcribed from a particular recording. For the music to sound spontaneous, the rhythm section must respond in the moment to what is being played.

In the rhythm section sectional rehearsal, have the students learn the “tune” (letter **A** through letter **D**) memorizing the harmony. This is to get the students away from the written page as soon as possible. Once this section of music is learned, have the students repeat it over and over changing something each time – play through with and without piano comping, change cymbals, move the bass line in different directions and registers,

Perdido Rehearsal Strategies

have the piano comp with different voicings, have the drums play a cross-stick on beats 2 and 4 (or just beat 4), etc. This is to let the students find out how their sound will effect the overall sound of the ensemble. Again have them listen to the recordings to notice how the pro rhythm section changes sounds to guide the arrangement. A specific example is the piano and drum comping at letter **M**, making note of the trading with the solo:

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Trumpet (Tpt.), Piano (Pno.), and Drums (Drs.). The score is divided into two measures. The first measure shows the Trumpet part with a melodic line and the instruction 'f Dbl. tongue'. The Piano part has a bass line with a '7' indicating a seventh chord. The Drums part has a simple rhythmic pattern with cross-sticks on beats 2 and 4. The second measure shows the Trumpet part with a melodic line and the instruction 'f'. The Piano part has a bass line with a '7' indicating a seventh chord. The Drums part has a more complex rhythmic pattern with cross-sticks on beats 2 and 4.

There will be plenty of space for the rhythm section to interact but it still remains crucial for the section players to note where the dialogue occurs with the other sections of the band as well. Remember that the rhythm section will direct the overall dynamic motion.

The rhythm section must see the chart in its largest scheme:

Letter **A** through letter **D** – statement of the melody

Letter **E** through letter **H** – first solo chorus with sax background

Letter **I** through letter **L** – second solo chorus with sax background

Letter **M** through letter **P** – third solo chorus with rhythm section only

Letter **Q** through letter **T** – fourth solo chorus with bone background

Letter **U** through end – melody with brass shout

One of the biggest challenges remains the ability to be patient and not climax too soon.

The solo should build from the first solo chorus through the second. The third chorus will take on a different dialogue because only the rhythm section is comping, but the fourth chorus will again build. Even as the solo builds, the intensity is highest at letters **U**, **V** and **X**. Remember also that this scheme will change again if more solos are added.

Soloist(s)

As has been noted, Perdido has a simple **AABA** form. The **A** section is essentially made up of two ii-V-I turnarounds. Depending on the experience level of the soloist, different practice strategies can be employed. For younger players especially, learning a few ii-V-I

Perdido Rehearsal Strategies

ideas will be helpful. The following example shows how melodies can be created over this progression through simple arpeggiation of chord tones. It is vital that this is done in a rhythmic, melodic way:

Musical notation showing a progression of chords: ii ($Dm7$), V ($G7$), and I ($Cmaj7$). The melody is written in 4/4 time. Fingering is indicated below the notes: Root (2) 3 5 7 for $Dm7$, 3 5 7 for $G7$, and 3 5 5 for $Cmaj7$.

Though this idea starts with a simple *root*, 3^{rd} , 5^{th} , 7^{th} arpeggio, have the students take note of the rhythm. Students should understand that melodies are not made up of just quarter notes or just eighth notes but should have the same rhythmic variety as the music they are performing. They should also note that arpeggios don't have to start from the root as evidenced in bar 2 of the above example. As younger students develop more of these types of ideas they increase their vocabulary. This removes the randomness that can occur when students simply run up and down scale tones. More advanced students may want to start to focus on sounds that lead into these ii-V-I ideas. The use of a *secondary dominant* (dominant chords that lead to anything other than I) can not only provide more harmonic motion but also change the phrasing of the ideas. The melodic idea will lead into the *A* section or the ii-V rather than starting right on it:

Musical notation showing a progression of chords: $V7/ii$ ($A7$), ii ($Dm7$), $V7$ ($G7$), and I ($Cmaj7$). The melody is written in 4/4 time. Fingering is indicated below the notes: 5 7 5 3 2 2 5 for $A7$, 5 3 2 7 3 5 7 9 2 for $G7$, and 7 5 3 2 7 5 6 for $Cmaj7$.

This example is still derived from arpeggiations of the chords but includes some diatonic passing tones as well (shown in bar 1). If the $Dm7$ chord marks the beginning of a phrase, students should see from this example that the solo idea leads into that phrase. Have students play solo ex 1 and ex 2 as one complete idea to get a sense of starting on the top of the phrase verses leading into it. When students think this way (ii-V-I ideas and leading into them) they start to think in larger phrases rather than from chord to chord. To give more ideas and examples make use of the solos on the recordings that you have been referencing. The transcribed Clark Terry solo in the trumpet part should also be referenced. Have the soloist learn that solo then model it paying attention not only to the

Perdido Rehearsal Strategies

notes, but to the phrasing and rhythmic language as well. Just as the ensemble did with the parts, the soloist should sing this solo with the appropriate syllables to bring out Clark's articulation. It is important most of all that the solo swings!

Finally, listening, dancing, singing and playing all involve having *fun*. Whatever decisions are made about articulation and feel must be done by all, and the few strategies that have been laid out here will require hard work on the part of the director and students to create that groove together. But your band plays with purpose together and with everyone contributing, it will be more fun for the ensemble and listeners alike.

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