

ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON

High School Jazz Band Program

Rehearsal Strategies – *Royal Garden Blues* By Ron Carter, Director of Jazz Studies Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois

This composition is one of the first classic jazz charts I learned with my high school band in East St. Louis, IL. This is a great chart to work on swing feel, articulating, and blues improvisation. This Strayhorn arrangement is a great chart to work on balance within the section as well as between sections of the jazz ensemble. The first thing I would ask everyone do is find plenty of time to listen to the original and the JLCO recordings. As you will hear there are similar approaches taken to playing the arrangement, but there are also minor stylistic differences. The JLCO takes more of a traditional approach to the melody at section A. The quarter notes in the Ellington recording were longer and more relaxed. The main concept is that the entire section takes the same approach to the melody and articulations. The Strayhorn arrangement uses the idea of adding more instruments to the orchestration as the charts build in intensity. You will also notice that the melody is played at one time or other by the entire jazz ensemble. Listen carefully to how the counterpoint, and countermelody works throughout the arrangement. Also, I encourage all soloists to listen, sing, and learn the original jazz soloists first so to have a starting point for style and language.

Listening

There is a great need to start every rehearsal with a listening activity. This arrangement is great, but I would also like to encourage students to listen to a few other recording of this composition., especially the recording by Louis Armstrong & His All Stars. This group includes Louis Armstrong, trumpet; Jack Teagarden, trombone; Barney Bigard, clarinet; and Sid Catlett on drums. This recording will also give students ideas and language for improvisation. As students listen, make sure they feel the triplet swing pulse (Doo-do-la), while finding each quarter note with the heel of the foot. This allows students to feel the forward motion of the swing feel.

The clarinet has the lead in sections, A, B and D. Everyone should listen, sing the clarinet melody along with the recording until you agree on style, phrasing and articulation. Remember if you sing it the same, you will have a greater chance of playing the same. I also encourage everyone to listen, groove, and sing their individual parts along with the original recording. Singing the parts helps with intonation, tonal blend and clarity of the style and articulations. Listen carefully to the melodic break at section C. The clarinet starts the melody and the baritone sax ends the phrase. Make sure that this section is balanced and sounds like one long continuous phrase.

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C

Alto

Tenor

Bari.

Tpts. 1

2

3

4

5

Tbn. 1

2

3

Gtr.

Pno.

Bass

Drs.

Solo

Solo

Solo

Tutti

F

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Make sure the brass section listens and feels the triplet swing pulse in measures 4-5 of section C to feel the syncopated rhythm. The tendency of most bands is to rush this type of phrase.

The image shows a musical score for a jazz band, specifically for the trumpet and trombone sections. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system is for Trumpets (Tpts.) and the second is for Trombones (Tbns.). Each system has five staves. The first three staves in each system are numbered 1, 2, and 3. The fourth and fifth staves are blank. The music is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first system shows a triplet of eighth notes in measures 4 and 5, which is the focus of the instruction. The second system shows a similar triplet pattern in measures 4 and 5.

Saxes listen carefully to section D for style articulation and phrasing. Make sure the clarinet has the lead and the section is balanced. The trumpet solo at section E is a call and response with the trumpet section itself. Listen, groove and sing until the feel, style and phrasing is internalized. Everyone listen carefully to how the melody goes through the entire band from section G to the end building in intensity.

Rhythm Section

The important aspect for a good rhythm section is to agree on the quarter note placement and length. The Ellington version allows the chart to really swing in a danceable way. The triplet pulse is constantly driving forward with Sonny Greer doing a masterful job with the brushes. I encourage everyone to feel the triplet pulse on each quarter note. (Doo-od-la; per textbook "Teaching Music Through Performance In Jazz" www.giamusic.com). You will also hear the quarter note being short and spaced thus allowing the feel to be totally authentic throughout. The bass player should listen and sing the bass line along with the original recording until the feel and style is internalized.

The use of brushes is usually a challenge for young players. Listen to Sonny Greer of course, but also check out Papa Jo Jones and my mentor, Ed Thigpen. Go to Youtube and check out the Ed Thigpen tutorial videos online. They are great and allow each student to see the proper technique and hear it as well. Also, I suggest the drummer use brushes with wire brushes with a

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plastic handle. The drums should feather the bass drum on all four quarter notes, but make sure it does not overpower the bass.

The piano has a traditional 4 bar introduction. I encourage the pianist to learn the original Ellington solo then work to create their own improvised solo. Listen to the entire recording to hear the type of comping used by Ellington and try to be creative on the upbeats. The rhythm guitar of Fred Guy throughout the arrangement is very similar to that of the great Freddie Greene of the Count Basie Orchestra. Each guitarist should go to YouTube and check out the great Freddie Greene playing rhythm guitar. There is also a web page dedicated to a tutorial of true big band rhythm guitar www.freddiegreen.org.

Ensemble

Remember this entire chart should have a four-beat swing dance feel. It is important that everyone make a conscious effort to feel the triplet pulse on each quarter note. Again, the entire ensemble should listen and sing the melody to the composition as recorded by Duke Ellington. Use the proper doodle syllables as referenced in "Teaching Music Through Performance In Jazz." Everyone gets an opportunity to play the melody eventually. Saxes: make sure you use classic swing articulations throughout and not bebop phrasing with ghost eighth notes. Brass sections: make sure the entire section is in balance with the lead trumpet player, as in measures 11-12 in section A, shown below.

The image shows a musical score for the Brass section, consisting of five staves for Trumpets (Tpts. 1-5) and three staves for Trombones (Tbns. 1-3). The music is in 4/4 time and features a triplet pulse on each quarter note. The score is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The notation includes various notes and rests, with some notes marked with a double accent (f^{..}). The score is divided into two measures, with the first measure containing the triplet pulse and the second measure containing a similar pattern.

Sax section: make sure you recognize that the markings in measures 7-11 at section C are phrase markings and not slurs. It is very important to keep the time feel moving forward.

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Make sure the entire ensemble listens for the dynamics throughout the arrangement. Most are not written in the chart, but it is up to you to create the emotion in the chart, especially leading in and out of sections and at section D in the woodwinds. There are many sections throughout that propel the melody and the soloist from section G to the end. Have everyone sing and learn each other's part from section G to the end. This helps with clarity of articulation and also to know how the parts fit together. The tendency is for the eighth rest to the dotted quarter note to rush. Look at the score and listen to the saxes at section G.

G



Musical score for saxophones (Alto, Tenor, Bari) in section G. The score is written in 4/4 time and features a melody with eighth and dotted quarter notes. The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) for all parts.

Trumpet section: at letter H, work on all muted passages without the mutes first, then add them after clarity is achieved. Listen, groove and sing along with the recording until the style, articulation and sound is internalized.

H G7



Musical score for trumpets (Tpts. 1-5) in section H. The score is written in 4/4 time and features a melody with eighth and dotted quarter notes. The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) for all parts. The score includes a solo line for Tpt. 1 and a rhythmic accompaniment for the other four trumpets.

Make sure the trumpet soloist at section I is a call and response to the saxophone section at section I. Listen to the lead player and use control and balance as you build to the end of the

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arrangement. The soloists are also responsible for building to the ending section and swinging hard!

Putting It All Together

This a great chart to get the juices flowing and swinging hard. It would even be okay to give the pianist a full twelve bar introduction as well as add more solos in the Bb blues section at section G. There are many opportunities to be creative with the many riffs on the end and allow the best soloists to improvise into the ending section. I still encourage directors and students to record all section rehearsals and full band rehearsals to listen to help clarify and improve the performance each day. Remember: It don't mean a thing without that swing!