

# BASIE, BEBOP, BALLADS & BLUES

## Selecting Literature for the Middle School and High School Jazz Ensemble

Mike Parkinson

KHS America Education Artist and XO Professional Brass Artist

For the school band director, an annual challenge and opportunity is selecting worthy jazz ensemble literature for students to perform. As an educator I have gained from the recommendations of others, the research I completed, and most importantly from listening to great bands in person, via recordings or videos. With the loss of most “brick and mortar” music stores and the transfer of the listening experience to internet based sound and video services, “things ain’t what they used to be.” However, countless recordings with scores are available online from various publishers, as well as recordings by famous artists and bands. I make use of the internet, music and record stores, on-line ordering resources, as well as libraries. **The listening experience remains paramount to success in teaching and playing jazz at all levels.** Jazz is a hybrid music derived from the African-American experience combined with elements borrowed from blues, folk, rock, gospel, world music, Latin American, Broadway, Tin Pan Alley, classical, and other styles. Jazz has been called “the sound of surprise” by author **Whitney Balliett** due to the importance of improvisation, interpretation, and interaction among performers. With the **BASIE, BEBOP, BALLADS & BLUES** repertoire guide, I have provided a list of publishers and retail sources to help in the decision making process. The more familiar you are with the information that follows, the easier it will be to select literature for your students that will be historically valid, musically rewarding, stylistically varied, and technically challenging, and fun to play!

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO SELECTING JAZZ ENSEMBLE LITERATURE:**

- What is the performance philosophy guiding you in selecting literature?
- Who are the composers, arrangers, artists or bands whose works and styles appeal to you or have worked well for your ensembles?
- What is your sonic concept of the jazz ensemble/big band, what is your favorite band and why? I view the jazz ensemble as a sonic prism with a focus determined by the director’s and students’ abilities to get the music off the page. *What do you want it to sound like?*
- What are the strong points of works you have on hand, how many new pieces will you purchase, how many performances will your band present, how many works per performance will you present, and will the ensemble participate in competitions or clinics?
- What are the grade levels of jazz literature performed by your band on a 1-6 scale?
- What do you anticipate to be the strengths and issues with your ensemble and how will you deal with them?

### **THE RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY PROCESS – looking at specific works:**

- What is the origin of the piece: an original or an arrangement of a jazz piece, show, folk or pop tune?
- Why are you interested in performing this particular piece?
- How will it balance stylistically and technically with other works under consideration?
- What is the degree of difficulty (grades 1-6), length and tempo, and what immediately strikes you as the strengths and weaknesses of the arrangement?
- What are the primary improvising instruments (tenor sax, alto sax, trombone, piano, trumpet, guitar, etc.), and do you have those players?
- Brass: lead trumpet range, bass trombone or flugelhorn required, mutes you may/may not own – time needed to put in and remove mutes, 8 brass or are 10 brass required, with/without optional or required horn and tuba parts.
- Saxes: woodwind doubles (flute/clarinet/bass clarinet), soprano saxophone as lead, baritone saxophone scored with trombones & sax sections as the bass voice.
- Rhythm section: how sophisticated is the scoring for piano/guitar/bass (electric or acoustic)/drums, with or without use of vibes, auxiliary percussion, two keyboards, and so forth.
- How familiar are you with works by this arranger, composer, performing artist, or band?

- Are high quality recordings available of this work or other works by this arranger, composer, artist or band?
- How familiar are you with works from this publisher?
- How familiar are you with works in this rhythmic style (reggae, funk ballad,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , bossa nova, fast swing, samba, shuffle and so forth)?
- How much time do you have to rehearse the ensemble when planning for a performance?
- Considering the degree of difficulty, how much time will be needed to rehearse each work on a rotating basis?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your band in meeting the requirements of this piece?
- How difficult will it be for “one line players” to grasp what you see from a full score?

### **ARRANGING TECHNIQUES FOUND IN MANY BIG BAND WORKS:**

- Introduction: full or building ensemble or rhythm section leading to ensemble
- 4-way/5 way/7<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> chord voicing, polytonality, multiple harmonic extensions, polychords, quartal scoring.
- Interlocked voices, octave doubling in trumpets/trombones and lower saxophones.
- Melodic dominance by the saxophones with rhythmic dominance by the brass.
- Tutti passages – how many and for how long?
- Ensemble send-off figures for soloists with backgrounds by the opposite horn section during the solo sections.
- Common form types: blues, blues with a bridge, AABA, AAB, ABAB, ABAC, and so forth.
- Form variances: vamps, backgrounds, interludes, modulations, and solo breaks for variety.
- The “shout chorus:” returning to the theme via a DS to a Coda, or straight to an ending. (Consider repetition as a possible detriment.)
- Counterpoint: small band/combo, unison melodic lines in sections or cross-sections in call and response figures or in simple harmony, for send-off figures or set ups to full ensemble passages.
- Call and response figures via sax or brass solis, syncopated punch figures, band and drum interludes, and so forth.
- Reflection of the jazz vernacular: the vocal basis of the music and the sounds associated with jazz.
- Where is the GOLDEN MEAN if it exists?
- Unaccompanied horn sections, which can be very effective in counterpoint and call-response sections.
- The ending: a fermata or short note, a riff figure, an abrupt surprise, full or part of the ensemble on the last chord or unison, tight range, low range, mid-range, dynamic and rhythmic impact and attitude, loud or soft, use of a crescendo or decrescendo, or ritard, and “closing the door.”

### **“WHAT DO YOU WANT IT DO SOUND LIKE?”**

#### **1. What are the key musical and technical attributes for jazz in each of the following eras?**

- 1920s-30s: New Orleans & Chicago styles, “Dixieland” jazz.
- 30s-40s: Swing from New York, Kansas City, and “Tin Pan Alley” literature.
- 40s-50s: Bebop, cool, third stream, and “West Coast” jazz.
- 50s-60s: Hard bop, funky, blues and gospel influenced jazz.
- 50s present: the world of Latin styles from the Caribbean and South America.
- 60s present: Pop or rock styles, primarily from Detroit, Philadelphia, New York and California.
- 60s-70s: Modal, free, avant garde styles and Afro-centric styles.
- 70s-present: The ECM sound and the European musical aesthetic.
- 80s-90s: the “Young Lion” post-bop traditions via the Marsalis brothers and others.
- 80s-present: World Music influences – India, the Middle East, Asia, Scandinavia, Poland, etc.
- 2000-present: Electronic music, introduction of computers, EDM, hip-hop, rap, and other “pop” music styles.
- The continuing importance of the blues, gospel, and African traditions throughout the history of jazz.

#### **2. What are some of the defining stylistic and technical differences in these big bands, arrangers, and composers, composers, or your favorites:**

Toshiko Akiyoshi, Count Basie, Kris Berg, Bob Brookmeyer, David Caffey, Benny Carter, Jack Cooper, Robert Curnow, Duke Ellington, Don Ellis, Gil Evans, John Fedchock, Maynard Ferguson, Clare Fischer, Frank Foster, Socrates Garcia, Gordon Goodwin, Tim Hagans, Matt Harris, Woody Herman, Bill Holman, Les Hooper, Thad

Jones, Stan Kenton, John LaBarbera, Victor Lopez, Charles Mingus, Bob Mintzer, Gerry Mulligan, Lennie Niehaus, Oliver Nelson, Sammy Nestico, Buddy Rich, Eric Richards, Kim Richmond, Maria Schneider, Jamey Simmons, Rick Stitzel, Fred Sturm, Mark Taylor, Mike Tomaro, Bob Washut, Steve Wiest, Ernie Wilkins, Gerald Wilson, Phil Woods, and Dave Zoller.

### 3. How do you present this information to your students?

II: LISTENING/VIEWING, PRACTICING/REPEATING, LISTENING/APPLICATION/ASSESSMENT to MASTERY! :II

#### **OTHER ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN SELECTING JAZZ ENSEMBLE LITERATURE:**

- The degree of difficulty for the ensemble **and** the soloists.
  - The style, era, basic scoring procedures for all sections, rhythmic complexity, range issues, tempo, form and harmonic scheme, uniformity or variance in demands.
  - Rhythmic style, tempo, and a number or lettering system placed accurately in the score and parts. (I prefer numbers though I frequently use both.)
  - Does the score make sense and/or agree with the parts and vice versa?
  - What is the basic formal layout of the arrangement and do the various “parts” add up to a worthwhile “whole?”
  - Instrumentation: 5/4/4/4, 5/5/5/4, 5/4/3/3, or a variance if it is a historical work written for a specific band.
  - The duration is/is not indicated on the score and is/is not accurate.
  - Balanced percentages of scoring (tutti, section, cross section, improvisation) for the ensemble and soloists.
  - Intonation issues in unisons, octaves, cross section scoring, harmonic blocks – and how to deal with them.
  - **Timing**: do the woodwind and brass have adequate time to change instruments, use mutes (in/ out) and adjust tuning slides for harmon mutes?
  - Total range considerations for saxophones, trumpets, and trombones.
  - Breathing issues and “face time” for the saxophone and brass sections: inadequate time for resting or release, known as the “*andthensaid/ohbytheway/Iforgottotellyou*” scoring syndrome.
  - Rhythm section: acoustic or electric based sound, auxiliary percussion, vibes, with effective scoring for all parts; sophisticated scoring or simplistic chord based writing for harmony instruments using slash notation only.
  - Drums: clear indications/cues for set ups, play throughs (long notes), seal offs, kicks, dynamics, fills.
  - Harmony and form: key centers, modulations, substitute harmony, form type, modal, ii-V function, and so forth.
  - **CLEARLY INDICATED**: D.C., D.S., Coda, endings, key changes, articulations/phrasing devices (note lengths, accent patterns, legato/staccato, dynamics (crescendo, decrescendo and timing), and releases (the long note rule).
  - Page turn issues and unclear indications for a D.C. or D.S. to Coda – I use **red pencils** to mark these and I rehearse these segments to make them seamless with no surprises for the performers.
  - **Use of the jazz vernacular** in providing the stylistic understanding for accurate rhythmic and melodic execution.
- EXPECT INTERPRETATION.**
- Syncopation – the lifeblood in call and response rhythms, themes, riffs, and background figures – dating from the Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie bands in the 1930s and still used today. .
  - Permanent information: long notes lead to short notes; short notes lead to long notes.
  - **DYNAMICS**: Volume is your enemy, intensity is your friend, and dynamic variety is the spice of life!
  - “Long Notes” – *the Four D Rule*, from William D. Revelli and Mike Parkinson:
    - **Duration** – long notes played as events in time, expecting accurate energy, lengths and releases
    - **Dynamic** – static, active, passive, which direction is the music going?
    - **Direction** – always forward in TIME to a release, the next long or short note.
    - **Deliberate** – the repetition factor, doing it right over and over, and enjoying it!
    - **Long Notes lead to short notes & short notes lead to long notes** – especially in swing rhythms
  - Finding the **RIGHT** tempo with a metronome for the piece for your band regardless of what the score says.
  - Breathing concerns: time to react **BEFORE TIME** and **IN TIME** to the music, breathing **FOR** entrances instead of **AT** entrances regardless of tempo, style and volume.
  - Articulations: tempo & style determine how short a note is to be played in an ensemble passage.
  - Articulation & phrasing indications: helping the music to move **horizontally** in time and **vertically** in balance

- Tutti passages: saxes/brass as extensions of the lead trumpet, lead alto or lead trombone (depending on scoring) in loud, soft, slow, fast, full harmony or unison sections.
- **Where's the melody?** Melodic interpretation is directly related to breathing, rhythmic agility, accurate stylistic understanding, volume control, vocal/vernacular and long note concepts.

**And finally..... "WHAT DO YOU WANT IT DO SOUND LIKE?"**

©2023 Mike Parkinson - all rights reserved.

For permission to duplicate or distribute this document **AT NO CHARGE** please contact Mike Parkinson  
TrinityJazzEnsemble2021@gmail.com, 1.740.274.2334

- Trinity Jazz Ensemble: <https://trinityjazz.weebly.com/>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/williammichaelparkinson/>
- All About Jazz: <https://musicians.allaboutjazz.com/michaelparkinson>
- KHS America/XO Brass: <https://www.xobrass.com/us/artists/mike-parkinson>
- Nottelmann Music: <https://nottelmannmusic.com/music-educators/clinicians/>



XO Professional Brass

