

“But It Sounded Great On My Computer!”
Arranging considerations for
the young jazz ensemble

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Key Elements to Great Jazz Ensemble Charts

- Memorable melodies, counter-melodies and/or hooks
- Room for soloist(s)
- Development
- “Peak” moment
- Harmony
- You want to play the chart - regardless of “the grade”

Appropriate Instrument Ranges (grade 2-3)

- Alto Saxophone – concert F3-F5; written D (space below staff) to D above staff
- Tenor Saxophone – concert C3-C5; written D (space below staff) to D above staff
- Baritone Saxophone – concert C2-F4; written A below staff to D above the staff
- Trumpet – concert G3-F5; written A below staff to G above staff
- Trombone – concert G2 – F4
- Guitar – sounds an octave lower than written

- Bass -sounds an octave lower than written

Please note that grade 1 charts will use a slightly more narrow range especially saxes and brass.

Basic Voicing Concepts

Block Writing - is ensemble chordal writing. This term is applied to soli, sectional and full ensemble harmony.

Linear Writing - the use of two or more melodic lines. Lines can happen simultaneously (overlap) or in a call and response or conversational format.

Closed Voicings vs. Open Voicings

Rhythm Section Notation

Guitar – uses slash notation for comping, rhythmic notation for rhythmic comping, and/or melodic material.

Bass - repetition is key for beginning and younger players to learn their parts - especially “walking lines”. Students learn the material much faster and easier when there are patterns to grab on to.

Piano – write suggested parts out with chord changes when comping is called for. Voicings throughout should not be overly complicated. 3 and 4 note comping voicings are suggested.

Drums - parts for younger players are often written with a lot of information. Make sure you are notating parts of the kit in a consistent manner. Usually, feet(bass & hi-hat) are written stems down while hands (snare, toms, cymbals, & hits/ensemble figures) are notated stems up.

With chords: be consistent with how each chord suffix (ex. min7) is notated with each part and within the chart.

The Tune Itself

- Standard lead sheet

- Key Center – will the key center & chord structure work with young players?
- Chordal structure considerations (complexity of chord changes, harmonic rhythm, original changes vs. re-harmonization)
- Study historically significant recordings
- Create new lead sheet

Structuring the Arrangement

Develop a plan for the arrangement on paper using **words**. The plan should include:

- an outline of the form of the chart (number of choruses, soloists, intro, ending, etc.)
- technical considerations of the ensemble
- orchestration notes (full ensemble, vs. small group, etc.)
- ideas for development (rhythmic & melodic)

Constructing the Arrangement

Putting the **word** plan in notation in two phases:

- The actual orchestration of the tune using the overall form/structure, voicings and technical considerations.
- Carefully notating the details: dynamics, articulations, phrase markings, rehearsal markings, text directions, etc.

Final Phase

- generate score & parts
- have the arrangement read
- revisions
- performance

Improvisation & Guide Solos

- Guide solos are important for younger players
- Guide solos should be written in the style of the tune
- Use non-symmetrical phrasing
- Outline the 3rd & 7th of chords in the solos
- Encourage students to use the guide solos as a springboard to begin improvising by embellishing the written solos

And.....Encourage Listening!