Jazz at Lincoln Center Library

SYMPHONY IN RIFFS

BY BENNY CARTER

Edited by David Berger for Jazz at Lincoln Center

FULL SCOR 🗲

This transcription was made especially for Jazz at Lincoln Center's 2008-09 Fourteenth Annual *Essentially Ellington* High School Jazz Band Program.

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NOTES ON PLAYING BENNY CARTER

- Benny Carter's approach is much closer to the New Testament Basie Band than to Duke Ellington. I hear a lot of Benny's influence in both Neal Hefti's and Sammy Nestico's writing. Compared to Ellington there are simpler harmonies, much less counterpoint, standard brass versus reed scoring and less complicated rhythms.
- 2. The general approach that most bands take in performance is clean and straightforward. Not much personality; very little in the way of inflections, vibrato, etc. Since little care was taken in the consideration of inner parts, they don't really hold up as interesting melodies in themselves and as such should not be brought out. Basically the lead players set the phrasing and dynamics and the under-players follow. No vibrato on unisons, slight vibrato on harmonized passages. No slide vibrato for trombones -lip vibrato or no vibrato.
- 3. Keep it light and flowing. The horns (especially the saxes) should slur the eighth-note lines as much as possible to create smoothness. The same notation applies for these charts as for Ellington's music: short quarters, release long notes on the next beat, accent the upper notes and syncopations and short notes, ghost the lower notes, contour the dynamics to go with the lines (crescendo when you ascend and diminuendo when you descend).
- 4. Benny Carter was known for his idiomatic sax solis. I recommend that the saxes stand for these and create some special dynamics. *Subito piano, subito f, crescendi, diminuendi,* etc. This is very effective and stylistically appropriate.
- Keep it simple and swinging. Less is more. The rhythm section's role is basically timekeeping with occasional fills from the drummer.

- 6. Like Ellington's music, this is acoustic swing music. One person per part. Stay away from amplifiers and microphones and the music will balance itself. Use an acoustic hollow body rhythm guitar and play 4 quarter-note chords per bar (Freddie Green). The piano can comp in call and response with the horns or quietly play 2 hand stride (oom pah oom pah). Quarter notes for the bassist. The drummer needs to concentrate on swinging. Come to think of it, all the musicians should first and foremost concentrate on the time. Everyone in the band needs to focus in on the beat and play with exactly the same feeling of the pulse. Listen to the drummer's hi hat snapping on beats 2 and 4. Fit your rhythms into that framework and stick to the lead players like glue. The lead players have a great responsibility to play authentic swing phrasing. Learn the language by listening to classic records over and over and internalizing the way the great players approached rhythm and lines.
- 7. Benny Carter's music is lighthearted and swinging. Make sure you keep it feeling light. Don't hold out notes with full volume. Make sure that the bass clef instruments aren't too heavy. Balance the dynamics with your bassist. If you can't hear him, the answer isn't to plug him into an amplifier, try getting the drums to play softer and the horns to play with more accent and less volume.
- 8. Listen to Benny Carter's recordings with Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Count Basie and his own groups. Listen with your students and direct them to listen for the nuances in the music.
- 9. Remember to always keep it light, swinging and fun.

-David Berger



GLOSSARY

The following are terms that describe conventions of jazz performance, from traditional New Orleans to the present avant garde.

Break: within the context of an ongoing time feel, the rhythm section stops for one, two, or four bars. Very often a soloist will improvise during a break.

Call-and-Response: repetitive pattern of contrasting exchanges (derived from the church procedure of the minister making a statement and the congregation answering with "amen"). Call-and-response patterns usually pit one group of instruments against another. Sometimes we call this "trading fours," "trading twos," etc., especially when it involves improvisation. The numbers denote the amount of measures each soloist or group plays. Another term frequently used is "swapping fours."

Coda: also known as the "outro." "Tags" or "tag endings" are outgrowths of vaudeville bows that are frequently used as codas. They most often use deceptive cadences that finally resolve to the tonic, or they go from the tonic to the sub-dominant and cycle back to the tonic: I V/IV IV *IVO* I (second inversion) V/II V/V V I.

Comp: improvise accompaniment (for piano or guitar).

Groove: the composite rhythm. This generally refers to the combined repetitive rhythmic patterns of the drums, bass, piano, and guitar, but may also include repetitive patterns in the horns. Some grooves are standard (i.e., swing, bossa nova, samba), while others are manufactured (original combinations of rhythms).

Head: melody chorus.

Interlude: a different form (of relatively short length) sandwiched between two chorus forms. Interludes that set up a key change are simply called "modulations."

Intro: short for "introduction."

Ride Pattern: the most common repetitive figure played by the drummer's right hand on the ride cymbal or hi-hat.



Riff: a repeated melodic figure. Very often, riffs repeat verbatim or with slight alterations while the harmonies change underneath them.

Shout Chorus: also known as the "out chorus," the "sock chorus," or sometimes shortened to just "the shout." It is the final ensemble passage of most big band charts and is where the climax most often happens.

Soli: a harmonized passage for two or more instruments playing the same rhythm. It is customary for horn players to stand up or even move in front of the band when playing these passages. This is done so that the audience can hear them better and to provide the audience with some visual interest. A soli sound particular to Ellington's music combines two trumpets and a trombone in plungers/mutes in triadic harmony. This is called the "pep section."

Stop Time: a regular pattern of short breaks (usually filled in by a soloist).

Swing: the perfect confluence of rhythmic tension and relaxation in music creating a feeling of euphoria and characterized by accented weak beats (a democratization of the beat) and eighth notes that are played as the first and third eighth notes of an eighth-note triplet. Duke Ellington's definition of swing: when the music feels like it is getting faster, but it isn't.

Vamp: a repeated two- or four-bar chord progression. Very often, there may be a riff or riffs played on the vamp.

Voicing: the specific spacing inversion, and choice of notes that make up a chord. For instance, two voicings for G7 could be:



Note that the first voicing includes a 9th and the second voicing includes a $\flat 9$ and a 13. The addition of 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, and alterations are up to the discretion of the pianist and soloist.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

The following are placed in their order of importance in jazz. We should never lose perspective on this order of priority.

RHYTHM: meter, tempo, groove, and form, including both melodic rhythm and harmonic rhythm (the speed and regularity of the chord changes).

MELODY: what players play: a tune or series of notes.

HARMONY: chords and voicings.

ORCHESTRATION: instrumentation and tone colors.

-David Berger

Special thanks to Ryan Keberle for editing the score.

SYMPHONY IN RIFFS

INSTRUMENTATION:

Reed 1 Alto Sax Trombone 1 Trombone 2 Reed 2 Alto Sax Reed 3 Tenor Sax Trombone 3 Reed 4 Tenor Sax Trombone 4 Baritone Sax Reed 5 Guitar Piano Trumpet 1

Trumpet 1 Piano
Trumpet 2 Bass
Trumpet 3 Drums

Trumpet 4

ORIGINAL RECORDING INFORMATION:

Composer: Benny Carter **Arranger:** Benny Carter **Recorded:** October 16, 1933

Time: 3:08

Master Number: 265162-1
Original Issue: Columbia 2898D

Currently Available on CD:

"Spike Hughes and His Negro Orchestra - 1933" B000005R5K "Devil's Holiday: Benny Carter," B000006KOL

Personnel: Benny Carter and his Club Harlem Orchestra - Benny Carter, alto saxophone; Eddie Mallory, Bill Dillard, Dick Clark, trumpets; J.C. Higginbotham, Fred Robinson, Keg Johnson, trombones; Wayman Carver, Glyn Paque, Johnny Russell, reeds; Teddy Wilson, piano; Ernest Hill, bass; Sid Catlett, drums.

REHEARSAL NOTES

- Symphony In Riffs is Benny Carter's most famous piece. Originally composed and arranged in the 1930's for 4 reeds and 5 brass, Benny re-scored this version for a larger band some 50 years later. Benny was known for his idiomatic saxophone writing and this chart is a great example of that. Just when you think that the soli chorus at **D** is as good as his saxophone writing can get, he modulates and tops it with the brilliant new section at **I**.
- This is a transitional piece between the pre-swing of the 1920s and the mid-'30s swing. The first section is 2 AABA choruses in F major with the bass and drums playing in 2. The first chorus is ensemble, and the second is sax soli. This has a decidedly late '20s/early '30s feel. At H the rhythm section switches to 4. The great 8-bar modulation immediately sounds very modern in comparison. At I we are in Db and get one chorus of the CD form with the saxes playing the melody followed by 5 choruses of solos and one chorus of shout followed by a 4-bar coda. This multi-themed form was common before 1935 and is perfect for contrasting the older style with the newer.

- At the top of the piece, the brass are choppy and the saxes are smooth. This set of opposites is central to the entire piece. Something to keep in mind is that the Swing Era players slurred more than their bebop and post-bop descendents. When slurring, use breath accents for the upper notes and ghost the lower notes to create shape and rhythm in the lines.
- Do not overplay the dynamics. Use plenty of accents and a little vibrato on harmonized long notes.
- The guitarist should use a hollow-body acoustic rhythm guitar and play simple 3-note voicings on each beat with a slight accent on beats 2 and 4. Amplifying the guitar will force the bassist to amplify, the pianist to use a mike, the drummer to play louder and the horns to play f-ff only. This takes away the dynamic range that is necessary to communicate swing music. Swing is acoustic music.
- I wrote out a typical stride piano part that fits this style. Unless the pianist is soloing, the quarter
 notes on the beats should be played softly and the syncopations should be accented. We want to
 feel the compahs but not hear them. Notice how the voicings center around middle C except for
 rhythmic interjections.
- The bass and drums need to keep it simple. Remember, this was dance music. It should be smooth and regular. If played well, the listeners should feel an irresistible impulse to stand up and dance. Before Ken Burn's Jazz documentary aired on PBS, I was invited to a screening of several segments. I sat next to my buddy. Jon Hendricks. We watched Louis Armstrong and then there was some footage from the mid-'30s of Benny Goodman's band playing Riding High and swinging with tremendous force. This was shot at a dance and there were hundreds of jitterbuggers dancing like crazy. I turned to Jon and said, "I used to wonder how our music got popular, but when I watch this, I wonder how anyone could have resisted it."
- When I was in junior high and high school, I played in the dance band. We didn't call it the jazz band, because our main function was to play swing music for the school dances. This was an important part of American culture that I hope will one day return. Swing dancing, like jazz music is a part of our heritage and a part of who we are. I hope that one day swing dancing will be taught in public schools (possibly as part of gym class—the way social dancing used to be) and that the students in the school jazz bands will learn to play swing music for their classmates to dance to. This would engender respect amongst the students as well as forming a connection with one of the great (and fun) American traditions. When you play your first dance, could there be a better piece of music to start with than **Symphony In Riffs**?

-David Berger

NOTES FROM WYNTON MARSALIS

Why did you pick Benny Carter to be the first composer and arranger outside of Duke Ellington to be included in the *Essentially Ellington* library and what can students and directors learn from studying his music?

W.M. Benny Carter is the first composer we picked to add to Duke Ellington's canon of pieces that we present. He was called "The King." He played saxophone and trumpet unbelievably well. He taught us how to write for the saxophone. The saxophone functions in the jazz orchestra the way violins function in the symphonic orchestra. We felt that his music would give our students, especially our saxophone players, a chance to develop their virtuosity playing in a section. We feel that it will allow them to interface with the work of another master whose career spans sixty-something years and we have chosen an early piece, "Symphony in Riffs" that he wrote in the early 1930's and it's bookended with a piece that he wrote, actually for the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra in the 1990's, called "Movin' Uptown."

Are there similarities between Carter's and Ellington's music?

W.M. Of course. There are similarities between Benny Carter and Duke Ellington because there are going to be similarities between Duke Ellington and anybody who writes for the American orchestra. He's one of the fathers of the development of the orchestra. Benny also is, but Duke set the rhythm section way of playing, the way of writing New Orleans counterpoint, the way of introducing solo voices, and he picked up on things from Don Redman and Fletcher Henderson, and all of these musicians who were around each other at the same time. They developed a style that is the American style of writing. In the same way that Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven have a lot of common. They are from that same kind of period. Haydn established the orchestra but Beethoven and Mozart gave another understanding of it and developed it in another way.

What suggestions do you have for band directors leading ensembles in this music and paying both Ellington's and Carter's music?

W.M. I think for band directors one of the most important things is to listen to the music. Listen to Duke's music. Listen to Benny's music. Get a feeling and understanding of their music, not just these pieces. Find a way to find your voice in their sound. Both of them were very hip. Benny was one of the hippest musicians in the world. He would be tickled by the fact that we are playing his music and he's very relaxed about his music. So I think that band directors: It's important to let the student's know you enjoy the music, and you enjoy hearing them play the music, and that will teach them more than a lot of the technical advice that we give them. Many times we teach them much more with just our feeling and our enjoyment of the music and the students playing of it.







































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Essentially Ellington

The Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Program (EE) is one of the most unique curriculum resources for high school jazz bands in the United States, Canada, and American schools abroad. EE extends the legacy of Duke Ellington and other seminal big band composers and arrangers by widely disseminating music, in its original arrangements, to high school musicians for study and performance. Utilizing this music challenges students to increase their musical proficiency and knowledge of the jazz language. EE consists of the following initiatives and services:

- Supplying the Music: Each year Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) transcribes, publishes, and distributes original transcriptions and arrangements, along with additional educational materials including recordings and teaching guides, to high school bands in the U.S., Canada, and American schools abroad.
- Talking about the Music: Throughout the school year, band directors and students correspond with professional clinicians who answer questions regarding the *EE* music. *EE* strives to foster mentoring relationships through email correspondence, various conference presentations, and the festival weekend.
- Sharing Experiences: Students are encouraged to enter an essay contest by writing about an experience they have had with jazz music. The first place winner earns the honor of naming a seat in Frederick P. Rose Hall, the home of Jazz at Lincoln Center.
- Professional Feedback: Bands are invited to submit a recording of their performance of the charts either for entry in the competition or for comments only. Every submission receives a thorough written assessment. Bands are also invited to attend *EE* Regional Festivals for an opportunity to perform and receive a workshop.

- Finalists and In-School Workshops: Fifteen bands are selected from competition entries to attend the annual Competition & Festival in New York City. To prepare, each finalist band receives an in-school workshop led by a professional musician. Local *EE* members are also invited to attend these workshops.
- Competition & Festival: The EE year culminates in a three-day festival at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Frederick P. Rose Hall. Students, teachers, and musicians participate in workshops, rehearsals, and performances. The festival concludes with an evening concert at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall that features the three top-placing bands, joining the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis in concert previewing next year's EE repertoire.
- Jazz at Lincoln Center Band Director Academy: This professional development session for band directors is designed to enhance their ability to teach and conduct the music of Duke Ellington and other big band composers. Led by prominent jazz educators each summer this companion program to *EE* integrates performance, history, pedagogy, and discussion into an intensive educational experience for band directors at all levels.

As of May 2008, *EE* has distributed scores to more than 4,500 schools in all 50 U.S. states, Canadian provinces, and American schools abroad.

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