

## *Jazz Composition And Arranging*

Text: *Jazz Arranging and Composing (Dobbins)*

- Weeks 1-2 Rhythmic rewriting of various types of melodies.
- Weeks 3-4 Study of and listening to "46 Great Tunes" (instructor's collection). Notation and calligraphy.
- Weeks 5-6 Re-harmonization techniques and techniques of chord substitution. Common aspects of chord progressions (drawn from Appendix D of Coker's *Improvising Jazz*). Begin composing tunes.
- Weeks 7-8 Composing and in-class performances of original tunes (graded).
- Weeks 9-11 (approx.) Study of small ensemble arranging (Dobbins), with short arranging assignments for various instrumentation.
- Weeks 12-15 Original compositions/arrangements by students, to be played in class.

### *Hand-outs/Supplements*

Lead lines (melodies) of standard tunes which are in need of rhythmic rewriting, for the purpose of adding syncopations and a more spontaneous sort of rhythmic phrasing.

Copies of choice tunes to be studied and analyzed for attributes. Hand-outs pertaining to reharmonization and chord substitution methods.

Hand-out listing harmonic and melodic aspects of tunes that cause them to be attractive to the listener.

Alternate Text Possibilities:

*Arranging And Composing For The Small Jazz Ensemble (Baker)*

*Additional Teaching Suggestions*

If students are to learn to tap their creativity and write attractive tunes, they must first be taught to learn more tunes, be exposed to great tunes they've never heard and/or analyzed and be shown what made the tunes successful, learn how to write effective progressions and melodies, and practice composing different kinds of tunes (standard, bebop, modal, blues, contemporary, etc.). In addition to studying the best tunes provided by the instructor, each student should be asked to produce a tape of some of their currently favorite tunes and state why they feel that each is a good tune, being careful not to confuse performer or arrangement with the tune itself (a great tune can be performed badly and a mediocre or weak tune, with a good arrangement and/or performance can sound deceptively good).

With respect to arranging a tune, the student should be made aware of the options they have, with regard to writing for 2-5 voices (unisons, octaves, thirds, sixths, fourths, stacked, open, drop 2, etc.), the various textures possible (homophonic, contrapuntal, harmonization, etc.), and ways to accommodate chromaticism in the melody. Keep the assignments short at first, so that the students have more time to do a better job with it, so that their assignments won't require as much time to play and tape, and so they won't risk the possibility of laboring over a long assignment only to discover that it was all done incorrectly. The assignments can be lengthened later, when the students are more 'on track'.

If the students are knowledgeable about MIDI and the university has the facilities, much class time can be saved if the students prepared their assignments on MIDI rather than having to read, rehearse, and tape them in class.

Be rather strict about the mechanics of arranging, especially at first, such as the quality of the calligraphy, accuracy of transposition for B<sup>b</sup> and E<sup>b</sup> instruments (including the correct octave), numbers of beats

in measures, and other basic skills that pertain to the mechanical preparation of scores and parts. As it was mentioned about beginning improvisers who need to understand that wrong notes are unacceptable, and jazz theory students who need to think in terms of 100% accuracy instead of a passing score, it is also true that young arrangers need to understand the gravity of accuracy in the score and parts.

Many good, even great arrangements have been refused by professional ensembles simply because the parts were inaccurate, unnecessarily complicated (i.e., the inflated use of repeat signs, repeated measures, multiple D.S. and D.C. markings, 3rd and 4th endings, and verbalized short-cuts, like “play same changes as letter A and B, but play an  $A^b7$  instead of the  $D^b-7$  in the third bar, and use the 3rd ending only”), or simply because the parts were, for calligraphic reasons, hard to read. The student must be made to understand that they must produce scores and parts which practically ‘read themselves’. Joseph A. Artis, who was my teacher of classical piano, theory, and arranging when I was fifteen years old, used to say (repeatedly), “Remember, you are always responsible for the other fellow’s mistakes!” While his memory is once again revived, let me add another axiom he used to repeat often to composers and arrangers, this time relating to what they might be choosing to write in their scores. He would say, “What does not sound well should not be written!” It’s easy to see why the memory of him lingers for a lifetime, for those who were fortunate enough to study with him. His axioms, and there were many, were simple, true, and forever valid and helpful.

When arranging students ask for assistance or feedback from you, don’t simply tell them what you think they ought to do, as you want to protect their creativity somewhat, rather than create a clone of yourself. On the other hand, don’t send them away to re-do the assignment without any new input from you. The best thing you can do for them is to trigger their own creativity by mentioning a host of options they may have overlooked, options which could be combined,

and solutions that were used by well-known composers/arrangers on recordings they've heard. By merely triggering their innate creativity they may come back with yet another solution, one that is equal or better than what you might have done, better than any one of the options you mentioned, even better than what the well-known person recorded.

For teaching melodic form, this author uses excerpts from *Jazz Improvisation* (David Baker), or *Arranging And Composing For The Small Jazz Ensemble* (Baker), and *Improvising Jazz* (Coker), all of which contain segments on melodic development.

*Jazz Arranging II*Text: *Inside The Score* (Wright)

- Weeks 1-5 (approx.) Study of the scores and large ensemble writing techniques of Nestico, Jones, and Brookmeyer (text).
- Weeks 6-10 (approx.) Study of the Clare Fischer scores on “Extensions” (provided by instructor). Study (through listening) of other arrangers, to include Charles Mingus, Gil Evans, Ron Miller, and Coker.
- Weeks 11-15 (approx.) Students select tunes, submit ‘plans’, write scores, and copy parts for arrangements for large jazz ensemble, to be played and taped by the Jazz Ensemble.

*Hand-outs/Supplements*

In this author’s course, students are given copies of the scores from the album, *Extensions*, by Clare Fischer. Fischer’s genius as a composer/arranger (especially in the area of harmonies and voicings) are well-known to some of us who write music (Herbie Hancock and Bill Dobbins, for starters!). Because of a long, enduring friendship, this author was fortunate enough to have received copies of *Extensions*, which, by the composer’s own testimony, was some of his finest work. So it was only natural that this material be placed in the hands of young arrangers who could benefit from the many revelatory aspects of Fischer’s mastery of the idiom. However, as these scores are not in a published form, the reader may have to substitute other scores that merit careful investigation.

Alternate Text Possibilities:

*The Contemporary Arranger* (Don Sebesky)

*The Professional Arranger/Composer (Rusell Garcia)*

The Garcia book is about thirty-five years old, but still a fine book for basic arranging techniques. Sebesky's book is a fine book for putting 'polish' on more-advanced writers. The books by Dick Grove and Gordon Delamont should also be investigated as possible texts.

*Additional Teaching Suggestions*

Some time will have to be spent with familiarizing the students with ranges, transpositions, and idiosyncracies of the many instruments for which they will be scoring and preparing parts. Special effects made possible by brass mutings should also be investigated, as well as woodwind doubling possibilities and the chairs to which those doublings should normally be assigned. Have them listen to some Gil Evans scores, with their many hybrid combinations (mixed mutings, high woodwinds with brass, etc.) and challenge them to identify those combinations. Have them listen, also, to some of Duke Ellington's recordings, for the same reason, and to identify which instrument(s) has (have) the lead and where that voice occurs within a stacked chord.

As various scoring possibilities are taken up, in the text or from the instructor's notes, urge the students to keep a list of those techniques, so that they can refer to the list while they are scoring, to remind them of their many options.

When it is time to have their arrangements played by an ensemble, remind the students not to judge themselves too harshly if they're disappointed by what they hear. When you add the performance of a score to what you were hearing as you wrote it, there is often a discrepancy that is not necessarily the arranger's fault. This author has heard great arrangements being sight-read by an ensemble in which the resulting sound was deplorable. The student has to learn to distinguish between performance problems and compositional problems.