



Dick Dunscomb's
JAZZ ZONE
LESSON BRIEFS
PART TWO

Jazz Zone Author, Dick Dunscomb has assembled these lesson briefs especially for your jazz ensemble.

They will help your jazz band get to the next level of jazz performance.

Working through this series of lessons will prepare you to move directly into his new jazz ensemble method,
JAZZ ZONE...THE BEGINNING

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JAZZ ZONE...THE BEGINNING

Hi, it's Dick Dunscomb. My career in jazz education has covered 40 plus years. That includes hundreds of judging events as well as working with thousands of middle school, high school, university and professional jazz bands. Over that span of time, I have developed methods and techniques that work. It is my pleasure to share some of these with you here. Enjoy this quick and easy guide that provides you many tips to assure your great success in your performances.

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PART ONE

1. How we look affects how we sound
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6. IMPROVISATION AND MORE

After the students begin to understand the jazz language, expand their listening to small group recordings. The small group or combo will help them focus intently on interpretation, sound, expression, concept, style, articulation, and balance – all are ingredients of jazz.

Begin this process by selecting one jazz recording to use as a model for your students. Listening to classic recordings will help you set evaluation standards for your students. Esteemed jazz artist-educator Shelly Berg offers this list of recordings as a great place to start.

Miles Davis – Kind of Blue, Seven Steps to Heaven

Charlie Parker – Yardbird Suite

Chick Corea – Light as a Feather

Dexter Gordon – Go

Wayne Shorter – Speak No Evil

Art Blakey – Art Blakey and the Jazz Messenger’s

Oscar Peterson – The Trio

Ella Fitzgerald – any recording by this master

Bill Evans – Bill Evans and Tony Bennett

To begin to learn how to improvise and/or teach jazz improvisation, you and your students must study jazz vocabulary and language. By developing acute jazz aural skills, students will be able to internalize the jazz language. This skill cannot result from an overnight process, having one lesson or using one jazz method or book is not going to make a great jazz player. The process needs to include listening, practicing, playing, transcribing, copying, and analyzing.

Why do directors who have significant jazz experience (with jazz as their focus and performance area) know how to explain and demonstrate the jazz feel, articulation, and improvisation?

Because they have jazz vocabulary “under their belt.” Music educators with limited experience can easily grasp these concepts.

To begin select any one of the above great recordings. Remember two critical skills to focus on are developing aural skills-listening productively and building jazz vocabulary – scales, chords, patterns, modes, sequences, riffs, quotes, snippets, melodies, and so on. You can do it and so can your students.

7. CREATING A “GROOVE”

ESTABLISHING A “GROOVE” – A groove is the sense of propulsive rhythmic “feel” or sense of “swing”. In jazz, it can be felt as a persistently repeated pattern. It can be created by the interaction of the music played first by a band’s rhythm section (e.g. drums, electric bass or double bass, guitar, and keyboards). “In the pocket”

Try first establishing a groove with the rhythm section. When that is solid adding the winds becomes easier than ever before. It’s like how many professional Latin musicians work on establishing the clave before adding anything else.

The essential elements of a groove include balanced volume, sound, and time. Using a metronome in the beginning is important to establish the steady time necessary. Play a recording for the students of an even eighth note selection that represents this concept.

Once they understand this select a swinging jazz chart that also represents the concept. The swinging groove must have the same elements as described above. Almost any straight-ahead driving jazz chart will work. If necessary, use a metronome to solidify the groove.

8. ABOUT THE SECTIONS OF THE BAND

THE RHYTHM SECTION is often the least understood. Keeping a steady beat is such an important element of jazz music that I recommend that all players own and practice with a metronome. One of the most immediate goals is to achieve clarity of sound in the rhythm section. All players should listen to professional recordings of top players on their respective instruments.

The rhythm section is divided into two segments. While every member of the ensemble is responsible for steady time, the bass and drums and the primary time-keepers; the piano and guitar are the harmonic voices responsible for comping. The bass is the heartbeat of the band, and the drums show the style.

When the bass player is playing a walking bass line the notes should create a smooth feel and lock in with the ride cymbal. The drums must be able to practice a balance between the ride cymbal and the hi-hats at various tempos.

A hollow body guitar is the most appropriate for most jazz styles. If not available adjust so the proper guitar sound is warm fat, mellow and full-bodied with very little treble. Also be sure the student is using the upper pickup switch on the instrument.

The sound of the acoustic piano should serve as the basis for setting the volume level of the entire rhythm section. The best comping range is from C below middle C to C two octaves above middle C. The pianist should avoid doubling the bass in the left hand.

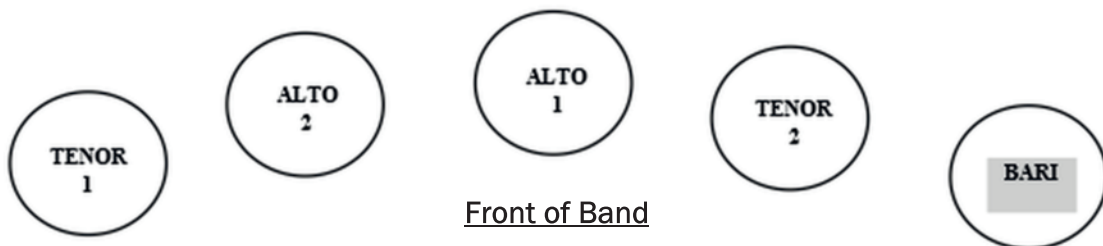
[For Rhythm Section Setup refer to Lesson Brief 1](#)

[Lesson Brief 8 continues on next page](#)

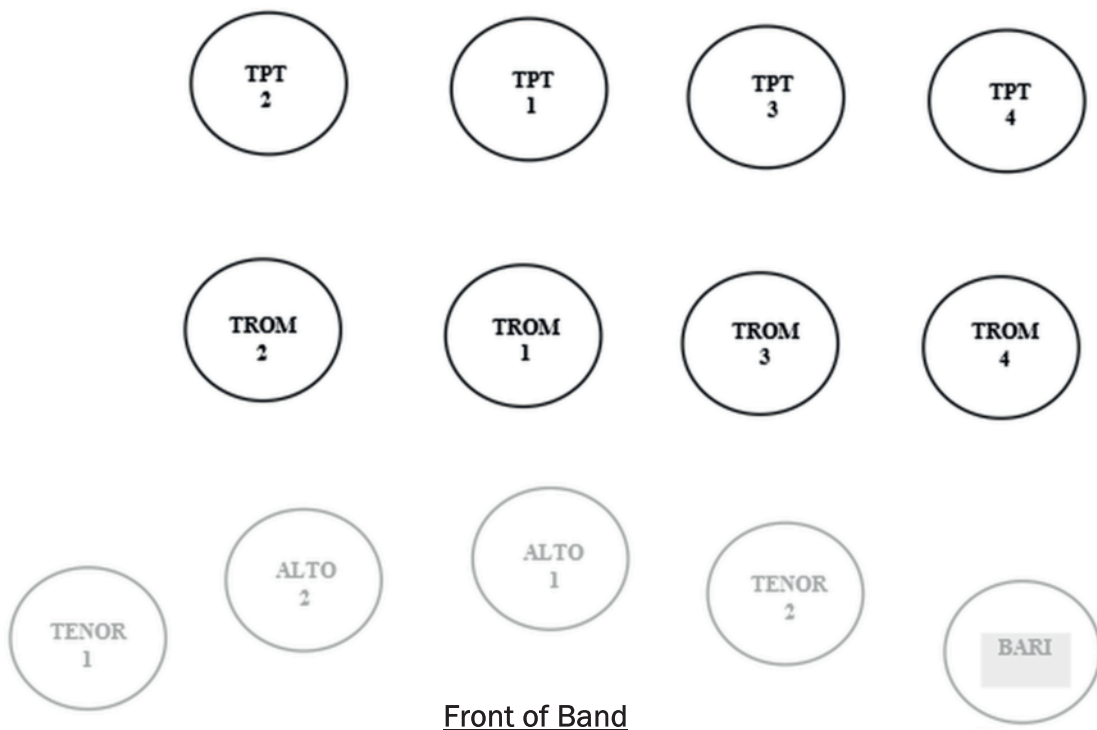
8. ABOUT THE SECTIONS OF THE BAND

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THE SAXOPHONE SECTION must be able to balance with a brass section that is typically twice its size. In addition, it must balance with a rhythm section. In other words, survival may depend on the strength of all the players in the section. Be sure that the players are in the right set-up (see standard set-up 1). Saxophone players have an entirely different role in the jazz ensemble from the concert band. Therefore, adjustment need to be made. In general, a medium mouthpiece chamber with a medium-hard reed with a medium tip opening is a good place to start. Listening to a professional saxophone section is essential to see the goal needed for sound.



THE BRASS SECTION consists of four trumpets and four trombones. While each section has its own uniqueness let's consider what both should do equally. Always think as a section. Balance is dependent on listening. Are dynamics being played equally? Listen for pitch and quality of sound. Listen for accurate articulation. Intonation means listening to the other players and tuning to the bass player. Time must be felt by the entire section.



9. REHEARSING THE JAZZ ENSEMBLE

1. The unique sound of the jazz ensemble results greatly from the fact there is only one player on a part. Therefore, doubling parts will produce an unbalanced and uncharacteristic sound. At no time should lead parts be doubled. If you decide to double parts in rehearsal so more students can participate in the program, remember it is not acceptable to do so in a performance.
2. Have a plan for each rehearsal. Start and end with charts that sound good.
3. Identify who has the melody and be sure everyone can hear it.
4. When the entire ensemble is playing, the two outside voices should be distinguishable but not dominant – the lead trumpet and the baritone sax/bass bone.
5. Keep the bells out of the stands.
6. Pay particular attention to balance within sections by having lower parts play up to the lead player's volume to support the blend, but not overpower the lead line.
7. Use proper jazz articulations with all instruments.
8. Unison lines can always be played softer than lines that are harmonized, and players should never use vibrato when playing unison or octave lines.
9. Fast passages are always played more accurately when played lightly.
10. Bring out moving lines.
11. Think and play in four-bar phrases whenever possible.
12. Play all dynamic levels. Exaggerate dynamics.
13. Understand the proper balance within the rhythm section, as well as the tone quality that is appropriate for the style. Continually keep the rhythm section aware of the balance with the wind sections.
14. The rhythm section should automatically play softer in two places: the head and the solo section.

10. THE PATH TO THE PERFORMANCE STAGE

The path obviously begins in the rehearsal room. Always have a rehearsal plan. Don't waste time in rehearsals. One of my heroes Dr. Harry Begin said he learned from great symphony conductors to "Identify the problem, address the problem, and move on."

Positive rehearsals lead toward next steps. Once your band has begun to sound decent ask a trusted colleague to come and hear them. A set of fresh ears will hear things you might not.

On the bus to the event is a good time to relax and help the band do the same. Once in the warm-up room keep the atmosphere positive. I've seen performances suffer from a negative vibe in the warm-up room.


On stage, scan the stage set-up in its entirety and make the necessary adjustments to be as close as possible mirror the set-up you have been using all along. Minor adjustments at this time can be beneficial to the performance. Then, it's time to show the audience and judges what you have. HAVE FUN!

Take time to explore our new Jazz Ensemble Method - Jazz Zone...The Beginning



Check our incredible array of video interviews



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