



**Style & Articulation**  
**in the**  
**Big Band**

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# Developing a Concept-Based Rehearsal

Do you approach your jazz rehearsals as a curriculum designed to teach concepts or simply a rehearsal to learn a bunch of tunes for the next concert? Teaching through concept-based rehearsals allows your student musicians to apply concepts regarding style, articulation, balance, blend, improvisation and more to any piece of music placed in front of them. Using a curricular repertoire that teaches these concepts, your students will be able to quickly make musical sense out of new music.

## **Jazz Concepts**

Articulation

Dynamics

Inflection

Pulse

Style

Blend

Balance

Rhythm Section playing

Phrasing

*\*Note: these are not all of the concepts, just those covered in this session.*

# Swing: Pulse vs. Feel

## The Pulse

Most music has a pulse! This is the beat (often in quarter notes) that the metronome dictates to the musician. The pulse gives us the tempo or rate of speed that a piece of music should be played at. The pulse gives us no information about what type of song it is or how the feel/style should be interpreted.

## The Feel

The feel is the **subdivision** of the pulse. The subdivision is what gives us the style of the piece.

*For Example:*

- Latin, rock, pop, and classical music get their style from an even-eighth note subdivision.
- Funk gets its style from a sixteenth-note subdivision.
- Swing gets its style from a swung-eighth note subdivision.

How often do we tell our students they need to listen to avoiding rushing or dragging. Do we point their ears towards what to listen for? Do we teach the subdivision for each tune as a measuring tool to keep the pulse evenly spaced?

*“Meter is the organization of the quarter note pulse; rhythm is what occurs between those pulses.”  
- James Chirillo, jazz guitarist*

## Swing Subdivision - The Breakdown

The subdivision for swing is derived from the African bembé rhythm, which is based on 8th note triplets. The first two notes of the triplet combine to be the first 8th note - the downbeat - in a swing feel. The last 8th note of the triplet is the upbeat of the swing subdivision.



With each new piece you hand to your band, teach your students how to sing, internalize, feel, and move to the subdivision.

# Articulations

## Tonguing

One large difference with jazz articulations is that the “t” articulation is never used! Instead, jazz articulations use a “d” at the start of each note.

### UNACCENTED, FULL VALUED NOTE - “TENUTO”

A full-valued note that is unaccented should be articulated as “Do.” With this articulation, the attack of the note is the same volume as the sustain and the release.



### ACCENTED, FULL VALUED NOTE

A full-valued note that is accented should be articulated as “Dah.” The attack of this note is louder than the sustain and release. Usually, any note longer than a quarter note will be accented.



### ACCENTED & SHORT - “ROOFTOP ACCENTS”

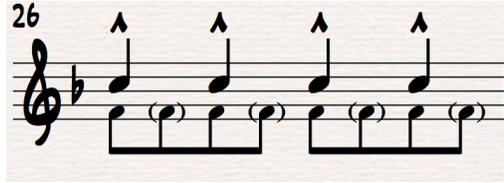
An accented short note is articulated as “Duht” or “Daht.” How many times does your tongue touch the roof of your mouth when you say this syllable? Your tongue attacks the start AND end of these notes.

NOTE: DO NOT TRY THIS IN CONCERT BAND!



## SUBDIVIDING A SHORT QUARTER NOTE

Quarter notes are often played short and detached in swing. The space can be subdivided to equal the third triplet in the subdivision.



## UNACCENTED & SHORT - STACCATO

An unaccented short note is articulated as “dit.” These are short and delicate but the pitch itself needs to be heard and not pinched.



## GHOSTED NOTES

A ghosted note is so unaccented that it is hardly heard. These are articulated as “n” which pauses the airflow or vibration of the reed so there is no strong tone or pitch. Usually, the lowest notes in a phrase or between two higher notes will be ghosted.



## SWING EIGHTH NOTES

Typically, unless otherwise indicated, eighth notes are played long and connected. “Back-tonguing” is a technique where you tongue the upbeats and slur into the downbeats to avoid placing emphasis on downbeats. Trombones will need to articulate the downbeats with a softer “d” on the downbeats and use their air to create a similar sound.



## STYLE & ARTICULATION IN THE BIG BAND

It is crucial to keep the air moving *through* these phrases to avoid the tendency to place unwanted space on the downbeats. An unnecessary “T” is placed at the end of the downbeat syllable and stopping the flow of the air.



### SWING EIGHTH NOTES - FAST TEMPOS

At faster tempos, the swing feel diminishes to near-even 8th notes. The back-tonguing is usually abandoned then and an articulation that better suits the phrase is used.



Certain phrases may lend themselves to a different, smoother way to articulate the eighth notes.



### SINGING ARTICULATIONS - “THE QUEEN BEE,” SAMMY NESTICO

Musical notation for the song "The Queen Bee" by Sammy Nestico, in 4/4 time, treble clef, key of B-flat. The notation is divided into five measures labeled A through E. Measure A is marked "BUCKET MUTE" and contains a whole note B-flat. Measure B is marked "SOFTLY" and contains a half note B-flat followed by a half note A. Measure C is marked "f" and contains a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note A, a quarter note G, and a quarter note F. Measure D is marked "B" and contains a whole note B-flat. Measure E is marked "1" and contains a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note A, and a quarter note G. The notation includes various articulation marks such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

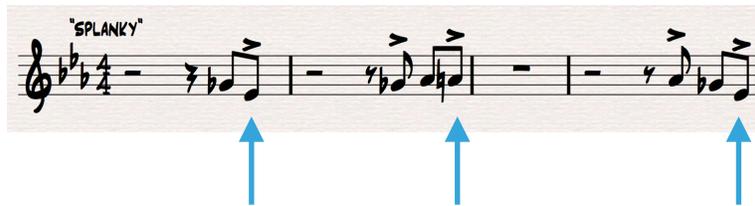
# Phrasing

## Accenting: 3 Rules

1. Accent the first, last, and highest notes in a phrase. Between alternating notes (higher & lower), emphasize the higher ones.



2. Accent short notes that are on an upbeat. Usually these are followed by a rest. These should be played as rooftop accents regardless of how they are notated. These would also be accents that the drummer should kick.



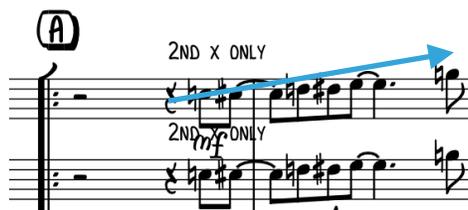
3. Accent long notes that are on an upbeat. Usually these are tied notes or notated as dotted quarter notes (or something similar).



## The Remaining Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, notes should be shaped according to the contour of the melody. Play “connect the dots” with the note heads to discover the shape and direction of the phrase.

- As notes ascend - crescendo



STYLE & ARTICULATION IN THE BIG BAND

- As notes descend - decrescendo



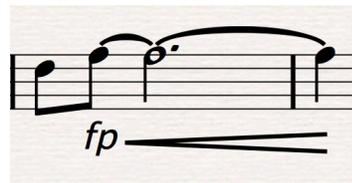
- Shape harmonized parts in accordance with the melody it accompanies.

Two scenarios aren't included in those two concepts:

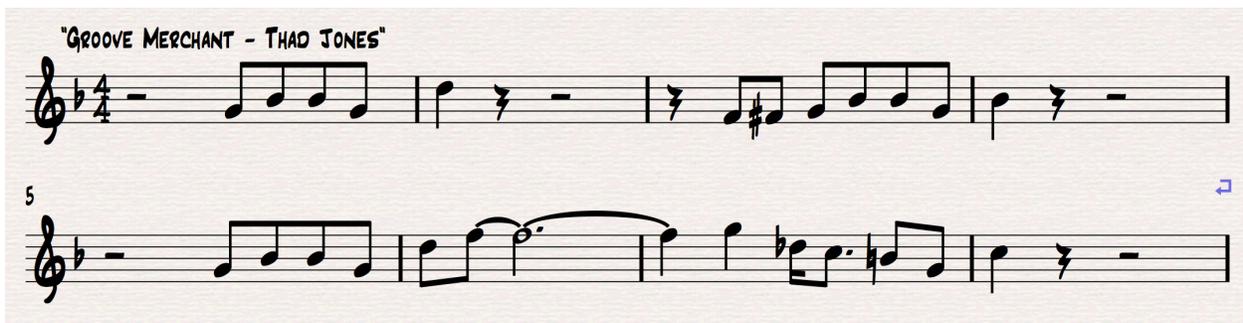
- Repeated notes
- Sustained notes

In these situations, consider that every note has direction - either moving towards a larger moment or event or coming from a larger moment or event. Decide on the function of the note or phrase in the bigger picture. Very few times will a note sustain without shape.

Often times, notes longer than a quarter note are accented and shaped with a  $fp<$ . Combine this with a drum kick.

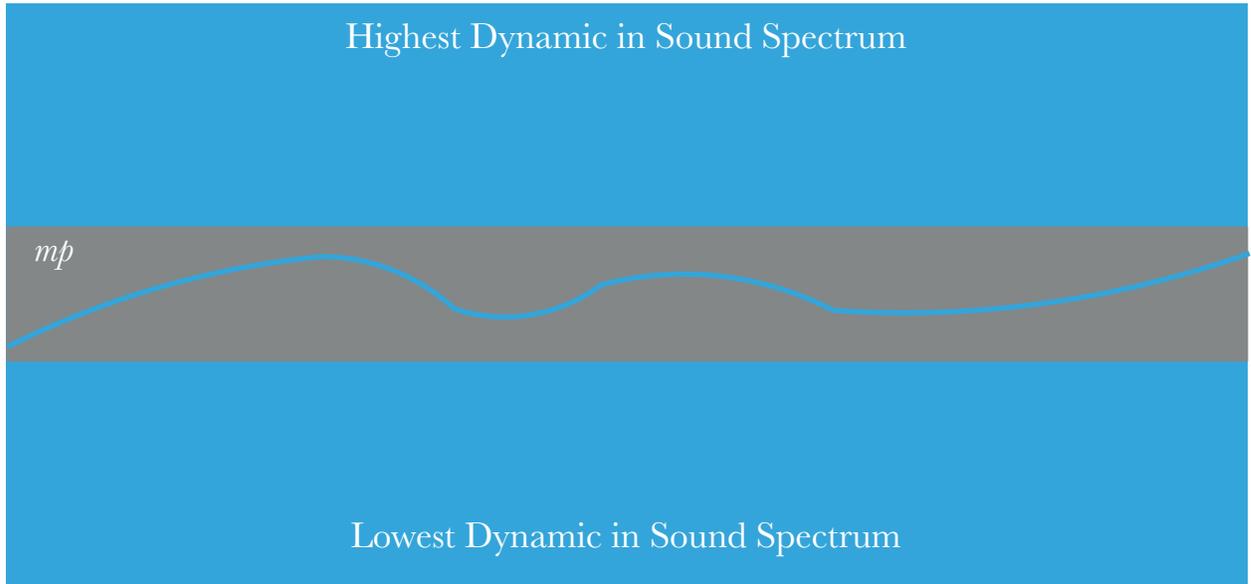


Often times, the lowest note in a phrase is usually “ghosted” or barely heard. This often happens when the melody leaps down and then ascends. In the following example, which notes are effected by that rule?



## The Dynamic Tunnel of Inflection

Dynamics are not linear. Often times, the dynamics mark volumes in relationship. Approaching dynamics as a tunnel allows for inflection of phrases within the dynamic.



## Balance & Blend

### Inside A Section

All players within a section should play at equal volumes, especially if you have more than one player per part. If you have one player per part, the lead players should play slightly louder than the section.

### Which Parts Should Be Doubled?

Most charts are designed to have one player per part. Many school big bands have more players than parts. Carefully choosing which parts to double is important in maintaining successful balance/blend.

- Double the inside voices rather than the lead voices.

- Suggested doublings: alto 2, tenor 2, trombone 2, trombone 3, trumpet 3, trumpet 4
- “Specialty” parts that don’t double as easily: trumpet 1, alto 1, trombone 1, bass trombone, bari sax

## Listening to the Leads

With independent writing, each horn section should listen to the lead voice to match phrasing, articulation, inflection, volume, and pitch. In block writing, all horns listen back to the lead trumpet for the same information. Place your lead trumpet **IN** the section rather than on the end, creating a straight line of lead players down the band.

## Within Sections

All members of each horn section should play at equal volumes - especially if you have multiple players per part. With one player per part, the lead should play one volume above the section.

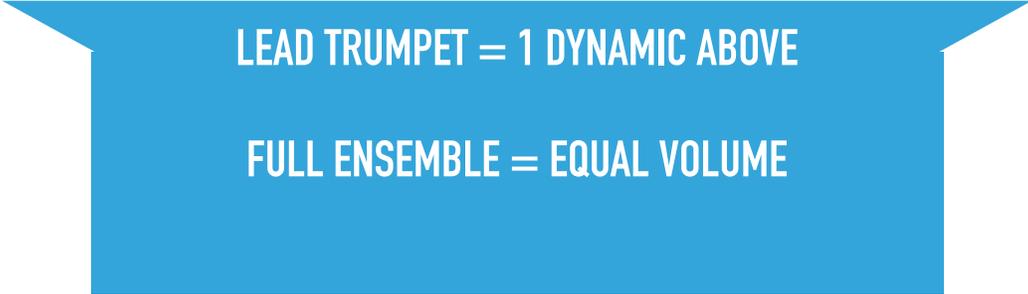
**LEAD PART = 1 DYNAMIC ABOVE**

**ALL PARTS = EQUAL VOLUME**

## Between Sections - Block Writing

When the entire band is playing in block writing, it is usually harmonized down from the lead trumpet part. This is most likely where you will find the melody. In balancing a concert ensemble, we often teach our students about the Balance Pyramid of Sound (unless performing Sousa, etc.). When a jazz ensemble plays in block writing, each part is to be played equally with the lead trumpet voice and perhaps the bari sax (sometimes bass bone) parts having a greater presence in the balance.

In block writing, ensemble dynamics are pulled up and pushed down by the lead trumpet voice. It is NOT lead by the lower voicings as in the Pyramid method.



**LEAD TRUMPET = 1 DYNAMIC ABOVE**  
**FULL ENSEMBLE = EQUAL VOLUME**

### Between Sections - Independent Writing

Find the melody and protect it! All other parts support and yield to the melody. Play passages with denser rhythms lightly.

Balancing independent material:

1. Primary melody
2. Secondary melody
3. Supporting material (rhythmic)
4. Supporting material (sustained)

### Between Sections - Unison vs. Harmonized Lines

Unison lines should be played softer with no vibrato. Have lower instruments play unison lines with more volume than higher instruments to strengthen the line.

Harmonized textures should be played full with equal volume from all parts.

Moving parts have the right-of-way against sustained notes.

### Between Sections - Pairings

- When Tenor Saxes are paired with Trombones - balance trombones in the forefront.
- When Trumpets are paired with Altos - balance trumpets in the forefront.

# The Rhythm Section

## Dynamics

- Outline the arrangement - if you recorded your band and deleted the horn tracks, you should still hear the arrangement!
- Unless there is a subito, establish dynamic changes a few beats ahead of the band.
- Start softer on the main melody and on solos. Match energy as needed.
- Consider large ensemble writing when the full band is playing verses small ensemble writing when one section or soloist is playing with the rhythm section. Adjust playing accordingly by augmenting horn parts or adjusting energy levels to match or inspire soloist.
- Play in phrases - use the last measure of a phrase to set up the next phrase with a fill.

## The Drum Set

- Kicks that accompany short notes should be played on parts of the kit that have no sustain (Ex: snare drum, closed hi-hat, bass drum).
- Kicks that accompany longer notes should be played on parts of the kit that have a sustain (Ex: crash cymbal, ride cymbal). These kicks should ALWAYS be coupled with the bass drum and a cymbal.
- The setup should match the intensity of the kick.
- Your drummer should coordinate the instruments of the drum set with the appropriate sound required. Match the pitch of the drum with the section being set up - snare for trumpets, rack tom for saxes, floor tom for trombones, etc.
- Use jazz drum sticks - lighter with a smaller wooden tip
- The ride cymbal generally has a large washed sound that is good for accompanying the full band. Smaller rides (perhaps with rivets) are more appropriate for smaller settings - solos, etc.

## The Drum Set - Bass Drum

- The “four on the floor” technique comes from an augmentation of the bass line prior to amplification.
- If you use this technique, balance the bass drum under the volume of the bass with a light feathering technique.

## The Drummer

The drummer is the director of the band. Your drummer should play the equivalent of the score, outlining sections, inspiring dynamic changes, and setting up kicks.

A kick written in a drum part represents the horn part they need to accent. Play on the downbeat prior to the kick with the snare drum and then accent the kick with crash cymbal and bass drum.

## Multiple Comping Instruments

Several instruments comping simultaneously can create a heavy feel. A guitarist and a pianist will often yield to each other - one playing more rhythmic and one more sustained. You may outline sections of the chart or solos where one player “lays out” while the other comps. This can become an arranging tool to employ.

## The Pianist

Pianos are meant to be played with both hands. When the piano part includes a walking bass line in the left hand, have the pianist double the right hand with both hands OR pick one note from the chord to play in octaves in the right hand. My Jazz Piano Basics handout is available at [www.danieldavey.net](http://www.danieldavey.net).

## The Most Important Relationship In Your Band

The Bass player and the Drummer serve as the core of the band’s sound. Use the tune’s subdivision to align their quarter note pulse. Place emphasis on beats 2 & 4

to swing the quarter notes. Create a visual line of sight so they can see each other's hands. You may choose a placement near the ride cymbal or the hi-hat. Balance the bass drum under the bass' sound. Amps should be placed behind the musician and used only to augment the acoustic sound of the instrument.

## Playing Behind Soloists

When the rhythm section is playing behind a single soloist, your big band becomes a combo. The playing is less dictated by the arrangement of the horns and more by the energy of the soloist. Identify ways that your rhythm section can increase/decrease energy levels to create movement and structure.

Energy can be altered by adjusting these concepts:

- Dynamics - soft to loud
- Range - low to high
- Articulation
- Note Density - ratio of notes to rests
- Rhythmic Values - how quickly notes are passing
- Texture - single notes vs. clusters

# Empowering Your Students

## Sectionals

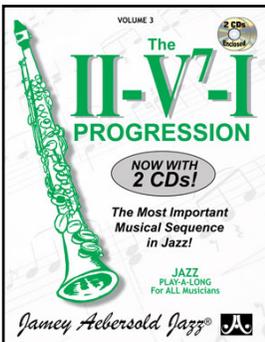
As your students grasp the concepts, give them sectional time to isolate each phrase. Have section leaders (or full sections) identify how the concepts of articulation, phrasing, and subdivision/feel are applied to each phrase. Teach them to aurally recognize a uniformed approach to these concepts verses the opposite. Allow them to make musical decisions on their own.

# Resources

## JAZZ ENSEMBLE CHARTS

Marina Music	marinamusic.com
Kendor Music, Inc.	kendormusic.com
Penders Music, Co.	penders.com
Kjos Music, Co.	kjos.com
Sierra Music Publications	sierramusicstore.com
Alfred Music Publishing	alfred.com
Hal Leonard Corp.	halleonard.com
Jamie Aebersold Jazz	aebersold.com
Sher Music Co.	shermusic.com
J.W. Pepper Co.	jwpepper.com
FJH Music Company	fjhmusic.com
UNC Jazz Press	uncjazzpress.com

## IMPROVISATION MATERIALS



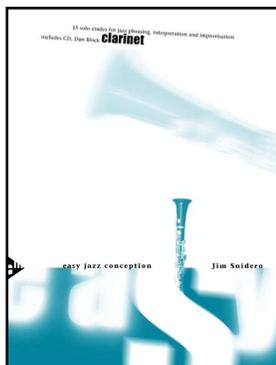
Jamie Aebersold Play Along Series



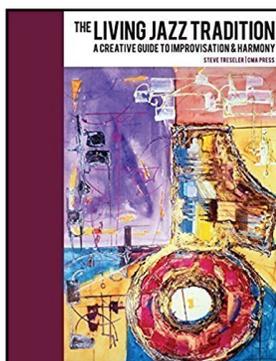
### Jazz Conception

Jim Snidero

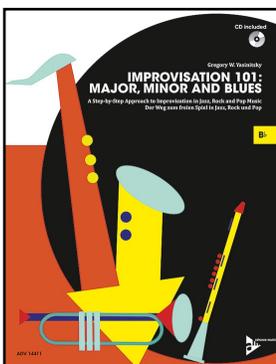
*jazz etude books using changes from legit jazz standards*



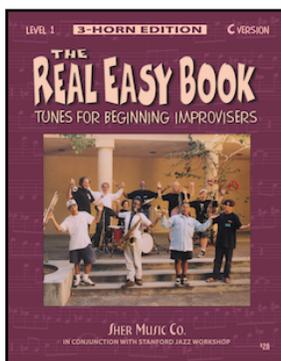
**Easy Jazz Conception**  
Jim Snidero



**The Living Jazz Tradition**  
Steve Tressler

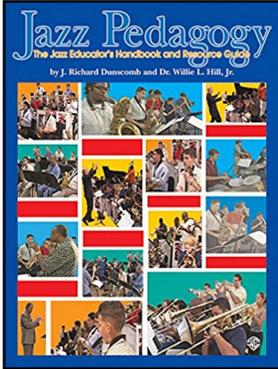


**Improvisation 101: Major, Minor, and Blues**  
Greg Yasinitsky



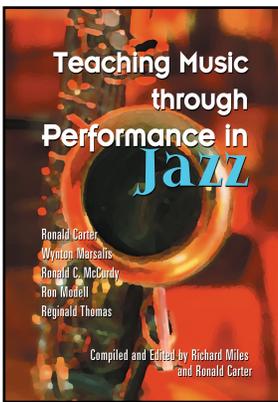
**The Real Easy Book**  
Sher Music Company

## JAZZ PEDAGOGY



### **The Jazz Educator's Handbook and Resource Guide**

Richard Dunscomb & Dr. Willie Hill



### **Teaching Music Through Performance in Jazz**

Wynton Marsalis, Ronald Carter, Ron McCurdy, Reginald Thomas, and Ron Modell

Compiled and edited by Richard Miles and Ronald Carter  
(Volumes 1 & 2)

## Citations & Input

Thanks to the following jazz educators for lending insight into this presentation: Mike Kamuf, Vern Sielert, Vanessa Sielert, Paul Krueger, Steve Owen, and Bob Krueger.

## Please Contact Me!

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Visit [www.danieldavey.net/resources](http://www.danieldavey.net/resources) for workshop handouts from this presentation and more!