



OMEA JAZZ COLUMN

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Welcome back to what may prove to be the most challenging year we have encountered. Many are facing challenges related to the pandemic, unemployment, depression, uncertainty and frustration. The jazz world has experienced a significant loss in artists and venues due to COVID-19. In addition to that, we are faced with the challenge of adjusting our pedagogical delivery in a new platform. It is easy to find ourselves exhausted and overwhelmed. It is easy to find ourselves grieving the loss of our traditional band rehearsals and wondering what our programs will look like post-COVID.

The good news, however, is that there are ways to navigate through these challenges and find a successful path that allows you and your students to continue to learn, expand, and be inspired. Each program is unique. Each district places different restrictions on distant learning. The path to success is not a one-size-fits-all remedy. It must reflect what you are comfortable doing. There are a lot of new resources flooding our inboxes and minds, from software to flex band arrangements. Focus on learning one new thing rather than ten. Do not feel like you need to absorb every new virtual tool or do the same activities and lessons as others. Find the path that works best for you, your students, and your program.

I believe that we will hit roadblocks when we try to recreate the traditional rehearsals of the Pre-COVID Period and insert it into this new virtual world. In order to be successful, we need to think outside of the box and consider how we might teach our objectives in new ways. We have an opportunity to reshape music education, perhaps for the better. Our field has not experienced such a drastic change in recent times. Perhaps our post-COVID pedagogical delivery includes more technology and proves more valuable to administrators by reaching a larger percentage of the student body. How can we teach music and inspire at the next level?

They say that our ensembles are only as strong as our weakest player. This may be a wonderful opportunity to focus on individual musicianship, building solid foundations and challenging even our weakest players to improve drastically. Your students could gain perspective in recording, microphone placement, home studio setups and more where they would otherwise never develop these skillsets. Presenting music education in a new way may be enlightening for you and for your students and it will save your program!

My approach in all of this is guided by these two questions:

- What was I doing that I can still do?
- What was I doing that I need to adjust?

I will share my plan with you based on these questions. Please take what you can from it and customize it to fit your program.

Synchronous Ensembles

I will be meeting with my student ensembles through Zoom. While there is no way to play simultaneously in this format, there are still ways to address many ensemble skills.

- **Warm Ups:** With the entire band muted, I will be able to guide them through warm ups for jazz ensembles that focus on technique building, articulation, subdivision/feel, scales, arpeggios, and releases. You could even do chorale-type exercises by playing the chords on a piano or keyboard while they play their part and hear it in context with the harmonic structure (time to break out the piano technique books from undergrad!).
- **Break-Out Sectionals:** My lead players/section leaders will conduct sectionals where they can listen individually to each student. They will be able to address articulation, phrasing, interpretation, feel and timing against a metronome or drum track. This will also help further develop relationships between the students, which will be the key to your program surviving on the other end of this pandemic!
- **Guided Listening:** As a full ensemble, I will conduct guided listening sessions of the original recordings for each chart we are studying. We will study each phrase and students will dictate inflection, phrasing and articulation patterns into their music. This will guide their work in sectionals as well as their individual practice for assignments.
- **Improvisation:** Every student will improvise! This is your opportunity to connect the scale and arpeggio warm ups you do with the harmonic structures of the tunes you are studying. Dedicate at least one assignment per chart to improvising on that structure.
- **Assignments:** I am using SoundTrap with my ensemble courses. This is a web-based digital audio workstation (DAW), similar to GarageBand, where students can access it through their web browser or mobile app. They are able to record themselves easily and use a filter to enhance computer or mobile phone microphones. My individual assignments will include the selection of a chart that we are studying. I will place the original recording of that section on track 1 and the students will record their parts along with it. Essentially, they will be playing with the professionals! This is an opportunity for them to audibly capture the feel and groove. At the end of the term, we will do a full recording of the chart in SoundTrap with the same approach. Once all of the students have recorded their part, I will delete the original track and then hopefully be happy with what I hear.

Chamber Jazz Ensembles

If you have chamber jazz ensembles/combo, or would like to explore this as an option with your big band students, there is a plethora of ways to develop your curriculum. I strongly recommend you go to www.learnjazzstandards.com. If your students are new to this, pick a few blues tunes to start. This website provides multiple recordings of each standard, chord sheets in C, Bb and Eb (no melodies – that’s important), and a play-along track. If you start with something simple, like *Bags Groove* or *Sonnymoon for Two*, assign the students to figure out the melody themselves by listening to the recordings. Everyone should learn the melody, even the rhythm section players! Build assignments based on the following guidelines:

- **Chorus 1:** Play the melody, mimicking the original recordings. Drummers should sing the melody while playing the appropriate groove.
- **Chorus 2:** Embellish the melody by changing rhythms, adding notes, deleting notes, elongating notes, shortening notes, bending pitches, etc. Drummers should play the melody on their drumset (consider pitch, rhythm, etc.).
- **Chorus 3:** Improvise an original melody. It can be inspired by the melody of the tune, but should be your own.
- **Chorus 4:** Play the melody again for the “Out Chorus.” Drummer should sing the melody.
- Use play-along tracks to make your recording.

Masterclasses with Guests

This pandemic has left so many artists and freelance musicians looking for work in new ways. Take advantage of their knowledge and skills by inviting them to do Zoom masterclasses with your students. If you do not have a budget for it, reach out to friends or colleagues who would be willing to help you for no charge.

I have some resources for directors available on my website (danieldavey.net) that include basic scale/arpeggio warm ups, basic jazz piano techniques, style and articulation information and more. Please feel free to use these!

We obviously have no idea what the future holds for education during this pandemic or when we can expect life to resemble any form of normalcy. While many of us are virtual for a short-term basis, I would recommend you also plan for a potential extension of remote teaching. Artists have been creating music from a distance for years and it is time we teach our students to do the same! The silver lining in all of this is that students may learn a skillset that they otherwise would never develop. They may develop an independence that drives them to research a composer or artist that they connect with in ways they never have. How can we use this opportunity to keep our students engaged and inquisitive?

I wish each of you much success in your teaching as well as health of mind and body. These are challenging times, but we are not alone in this. Let us be a community of educators that continuously support one another to keep all ships rising.



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