

Starting a Jazz Program from Ground Zero

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This session is designed to assist and inspire music educators with little to no experience in jazz or other popular/contemporary styles to start a program for their young students. Although the level presented today is geared toward young (upper elementary or middle school) students, these concepts can easily be adapted for older and more experienced students.

All students and instruments including voice, strings, double reeds and horn can and should perform in the jazz dialect. You may have to spend time transposing your materials and thinking outside the box, but including everyone in your jazz program enriches their musical education and provides an important outlet for independent playing, learning the historic roots of jazz and is a fun opportunity which will keep students motivated and involved in your overall program.

CAVEAT: Unless you are providing an outlet for IMPROVISATION you do not have a “jazz” program. Improvising can be taught via ANY style of music. If you are not willing to have your students improvise, please find another name for your group—but without improvising it simply isn’t a jazz program.

Preparing yourself to teach jazz and improvisation: If you have extremely limited experience in listening to jazz, treat yourself to the recordings of Ella Fitzgerald—especially her “Song Book” albums. ***Jazz emerged from popular and folk music and by its nature is closely related to vocalizing.*** There is no need to feel that you need to have a comprehensive knowledge of the entire canon of jazz in a short period of time—start with Ella—revel in her perfect time, feel, intonation, expression and sheer joy of performing and go where it leads you.

How to find/create a rhythm section: It may be pretty easy to find a student in your school who has/had experience in piano, drum and bass/guitar private lessons—even if they are not in your current ensemble program. Please don’t exclude anyone from this extra opportunity to get to know you and perhaps be inspired to join your regular ensemble. ***Strategy:*** Ask your administration send out a school-wide announcement (to parents and to the student body) seeking these students for your jazz program. Also contact your local music store/community music school to find rhythm section candidates. However, starting someone from Ground Zero is possible and can be EXTREMELY successful!

Where to begin? Before meeting your students for the first time, at minimum, you will need a BASS PLAYER (can be a student playing keyboard bass lines) and a SET DRUMMER. It is possible to have a band with completely inexperienced players as you can scaffold their progress by having them play along with a professional background track.

What should the new, inexperienced bass player play? Have the bass player play quarter notes on the chord roots of the progression along with your professional recording. Or whole notes. They will be doing this many, many times throughout the choruses and will naturally want to expand their vocabulary as they become skilled with the root progression. The second step would be to do the root and 5th of the chord, and so on. There are MANY resources for standard bass lines. Keep it simple. It’s a nice touch in a swing feel to have beats 2 and 4 emphasized.

Adam Elmore's bass equipment recommendations:

Bass: Fender Squier is a good budget choice for an instrument.

The things you should be looking for in an amp:

- Wattage between 200-500 amps to play with a live drummer and support the band
- Tone controls: Most bass amps provide control over bass, middle, and treble frequencies to help you dial in a pleasing sound.
- Direct output: Usually on the amp's back panel, it allows the amp to be connected directly to a mixer or recording gear, sometimes using an XLR output.
- Passive/active inputs: If you play different basses with passive and active pickups, this option is important.
- Mute switch: It allows you to silence the amp while tuning, switching instruments, or taking a break.
- A "Combo" amp that has everything all in one box, so that none of the extra parts can "Walk away", get damaged or lost on a bus.

Most amps will work just fine, but here are some that will work great for any group that shouldn't break the bank:

- Gallien-Krueger MB212-II 2x12" 500-watt Bass Combo Amp
- Fender Rumble 500 2x10" 500-watt Bass Combo Amp
- Hartke HD500 2x10" 500-watt Bass Combo Amp

What should the new, inexperienced drummer play? Below is a chart of the basic elements of drum patterns for swing, Latin, rock and jazz waltz. Please don't try a jazz waltz until your students are very skilled! Start with ONE element (for instance, high-hat on 2 and 4) as your drummer plays along with the pro recording. Add in elements as they gain confidence.

The ABC's of Drumming—from drummer Gary Newmark.

These are the very, very basic steps to these drumming styles. Youtube is your friend. This is enough to get your new drummers started—have a professional play-along track amplified to scaffold time and feel. Isolate the elements and then put them together as skill and coordination increase.

Swing—start with ride cymbal quarter notes, locking in. Then high hat 2/4, then bass drum quarter notes. Snare drum rim click on four (stick on the rim). Don't pound the feet—use a light touch—known as feathering. Avoid having the high hat too open/stomping. Open it slightly to get a "chick" sound. As time goes on try to think triplets to increase authentic swing style.

Latin—start with ride cymbal eighth notes. Play high hat on 2/4. Bass drum and 1/and 3. Snare drum rim click 1 and 3.

Rock—start with 1/3 bass, 2/4 snare in quarter notes. High hat completely, closed eighth notes.

How to explain: 1. Right left/right left walking bass and high hat. 2. When you think about it—you're either playing something by itself or together. 3. Difference between swing and rock: Right hand triplet on the ride cymbal. Leave some out.

Bass player and drummer need to be a team. Drummer imagines the tip of the stick is the tip of the bass player's finger. Practice quarter notes together.

Basic Drum Patterns

Swing

(ride cym.)
(snare dr. sidestick)
(hi-hat w/ foot)

To expand: try playing light quarter notes on the bass, or try improvising different comping rhythms on the snare.

Latin/Bossa Nova

(ride cym.)
(snare dr. sidestick)
(bs. dr./hi-hat w/ foot)

To expand: play the ride cymbal pattern on the (closed) hi-hat.

Rock/Funk

(closed hi-hat)
(snare dr.)
(bs. dr.)

You can try varying the bass drum pattern, opening and closing the hi-hat, or playing the hi-hat pattern on the ride cymbal when appropriate.

Gary Newmark's Equipment Recommendations:

- 18" or 20" Bass Drum
- 10" or 12" tom on bass drum.
- 14" floor tom (or bigger if used for plate of shrimp/beer :))
- 1 or 2 crash cymbals, 20"-22" ride. Cymbals should be good quality if possible and thin - not the thick rock cymbals. Set of high-hat cymbals.
- Lighter stands are better, but probably heavy duty for student (ab)use. Yamaha is a good brand - they sound good and I think they are built to withstand student use.
- Thinner heads for jazz sound, with higher tuning, & coated snare head for brushes. Remo coated Ambassadors.

How about guitar? It can be a challenge to avoid a musical traffic jam if you have both a pianist and guitarist chording in your young jazz band. A good beginning concept (don't stick with this forever...) is to have the guitarist play more like a percussion part (short sounds) while the pianist is playing with more sustained sounds—IN GENERAL. This is what is known as the Count Basie Band style/Freddie Green guitarist. Be welcoming to musicians who come from a background where ear playing is their reality. Learn how to interpret tab.

Guitar Recommendations from Mike Dana:

Method book for beginning jazz guitar: "Jazz Guitar for the Absolute Beginner" Alfred Music.

Equipment:

- Instrument: Ibanez model Artcore AG75G (\$500)
- Speaker 1 12" will do
- Controls you really need: volume, treble, mid, bass, reverb.
- Avoid: "modeling" amps (too complicated for directors!) 😊
- It's nice if there is an XLR (mic cable) direct out
- Solid brands: Fender, Peavey, Roland/Boss

OK, you've got the players—what do you play? There are MANY resources available for beginning jazz repertoire. As you begin, keep your tune list SHORT and VERY EASY. Because you are using your tunes as a basis for developing improvisation, students will not become bored by playing the same song over an extended period of time. I suggest that you NOT start with big band instrumentation (5 each of saxes, trombones, trumpets + rhythm section) as you may not have all the players necessary AND teaching the ensemble aspects will take time away from...improvisation.

Any type/style of music can be played in a jazz band: Today I am using a swing tune to demonstrate beginning improvisation strategies, but it actually may be EASIER for your students to begin with “straight” eighth note styles, such as Latin or Rock.

BUT ANNE, WHAT DO I PLAY? JUST TELL ME WHAT TO PLAY!!!!: To start your jazz group, your task will be made easier by using a “Head Chart”.

The basic form of a head chart is playing through the melody (head) twice, then opening up for solo improv choruses (a complete trip through the head by the rhythm section without the melody) then playing the melody twice again.

I highly recommend the following resource for head charts:

The Real Easy Book—Tunes for Beginning Improvisers/Sher Music Co. This has everything you need to start your group. Concepts are extremely well-explained and easy to understand.

Need more scaffolding in teaching correct style? Standard of Excellence Jazz Ensemble Method/Kjos Music Company—This book comes with GREAT play/sing exercises and also has some good basic charts in every style—even Reggae! Excellent play/sing exercises and the arrangements are great for younger students. Has books for all wind instruments.

When you are ready to expand your group into a standard big band, look to the many, many arrangements for young ensembles. Especially notable are the Doug Beach “Chili Pepper” tunes. My all-time favorite teaching piece? Blues Machine by Michael Sweeney. *Remember to have improvisation in EVERY piece.* Exception to the rule: It is extremely challenging for any except the most advanced student to improvise on a ballad. You have my permission to program a slow tune without an improvised section! 😊

But Anne--I'VE NEVER IMPROVISED AND I'M SCARED! That's ok—learn with your students. LIMIT the number of notes upon which to improvise—start with one, then add another, and so on. The listen/play exercises in the SoE Jazz Book are a great way to develop the vocabulary.

Gender issues: I have observed over the years that students who identify as female tend to lose their willingness to “make mistakes” in front of others as physical development begins. Yes, it is seen in males as well, but if you look at the percentage of professional jazz musicians tallying gender you will see many more players who identify as male. If you can encourage your female and other shy/reticent students to take chances in a safe place before the hormones take over it is likely they won't have the crippling fear of being wrong as adolescents. How do I know this? I am the poster child for this situation. It's taken a lifetime of anxiety to move past feeling so self-conscious. One of my early music teachers actually said to me: “Girls don't play solos.”

THE EASIEST SWING STYLE HEAD TO PLAY IS “C JAM BLUES”. However, your young students may have MORE success if you play it in Concert F since their note range is limited. The notes are 5 and 1. Select ANY standard Blues in F play along track. Here's one.... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OLN1X-UGDw>

Let's sing—use “doo daht”

74
(MED. SWING) **C-JAM BLUES** -DUKE ELLINGTON

C7
F7 C7
D-7 G7 C7
AFTER SOUNDS, D.C. AL

Congratulations—YOU'RE A JAZZER! Another great, easy jazz head is Bag's Groove. You may want to simplify the triplet figure to two eighth notes, using the first note of the triplet and the attached 8th note.

(MED. SWING) **BAGS' GROOVE** -MILT JACKSON

F7 Bb7 F7
Bb7
F7 D7 G-7
C7 F7
1.
2.

THE SAME PLAY ALONG TRACK WILL WORK JUST FINE WITH ANY BLUES HEAD!

Improvisation Grid (for young students I usually write the instruments instead of the concert pitch.)

| F Blues Improv Scale | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | b7 | 1 | 4 | b5 | 5 |
| <i>C Instruments</i> | <i>E\flat</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>B\flat</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>C</i> |
| <i>B\flat Instruments</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>G</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>C\sharp</i> | <i>D</i> |
| <i>E\flat Instruments</i> | <i>C</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>G</i> | <i>G\sharp</i> | <i>A</i> |

Start your play along track. Do call and response starting on ONE number, a four-beat pattern, have the students echo you first vocally then on their instrument. Add more numbers gradually. Need inspiration for patterns? *Study the SoE play/sing exercises.* Don't be concerned too much with the chord changes at this point. Work toward students playing melodically.

Why did I start with flat 7? To me, the *b7* belongs to 1 more than to 5. It's one of the juicy notes—having it at the beginning makes it easier to incorporate in to your patterns.

Why numbers instead of notes? This way students can choose the note they are the most comfortable playing, range-wise.

Finally, allow students to improvise with limited note choices for an entire chorus or two. **Voilà! You're an improvisation teacher!**

Straight 8th Note Tunes: Young musicians may relate to Latin and rock styles easier at the beginning stages. Herbie Hancock's "Cantaloupe Island" is an uncluttered tune to start with. This can be a great starting place to begin "making the changes."

Cantaloupe Island
Herbie Hancock

The musical score for "Cantaloupe Island" is presented in four systems. Each system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system is labeled "Intro" and features an Fm7 chord. The second system is labeled "Tema" and also features an Fm7 chord. The third system features a Db7 chord. The fourth system features a Dm7 chord. The piano accompaniment includes chords and a bass line, with some measures marked with a slash to indicate improvisation.

| Canteloupe Island Improv Scales | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|----------|
| | Chord 1 | Chord 2 | Chord 3 |
| <i>C Instruments</i> | F G Ab Bb | Db Eb F Gb | D E F G |
| <i>Bb Instruments</i> | G A Bb C | Eb F G Ab | E F G A |
| <i>Eb Instruments</i> | D E F G | Bb C D Eb | B C# D E |

Here's a more traditional way improvisation notes are indicated.

SOLOS

F BLUES SCALE

Ending fades on F-

NOTE: In soloing, the second chord/scale could be Db7+4 (Db Eb F G| Ab Bb Cb Db).

Should you work on jazz with your large concert ensembles? Of course! These same techniques can and should be incorporated in to your routine. They will become better listeners and have more freedom on their instrument.

Concert Band arrangement—La Torta. Special thanks to Classroom Composers—check out their website at <https://classroomcomposers.com/> I like this arrangement because ALL of the articulations are written in.

Should you open up large ensemble arrangements for improvisation? Of course! Maybe not for concert festival, but this is an excellent strategy to open the ears of your students and your audience. During the lockdown, many educators created “outside the box” materials incorporating a wider range of materials/instrumentation to bridge the engagement gap in their ensembles.

Guess what! The improvisation grid on this arrangement is your *Bb* concert scale! Win-win!

| La Torta Improv Scale | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----|---|---|----|---|---|----|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | High 1 |
| <i>C Instruments</i> | Bb | C | D | Eb | F | G | A | Bb |
| <i>Bb Instruments</i> | C | D | E | F | G | A | B | C |
| <i>Eb Instruments</i> | G | A | B | C | D | E | F# | G |

FLUTE



FULL RECORDING

LA TORTA

Latin Jazz for Flex Band



PRACTICE TRACKS

JESSE ROGERS

LADY BACK LATIN $\text{♩} = 130$

The musical score is written for a flute in 4/4 time with a tempo of 130. It consists of 70 measures across seven staves. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The score includes various musical notations such as accents (^), slurs, and dynamic markings (mf, f, mp). Measure numbers 1 through 70 are indicated above the notes. A solo section is marked with a box containing 'X' and 'SOLO NOTES' at measure 30. A first ending is marked with a box containing 'X1' at measure 42. A second ending is marked with a box containing '8' at measure 61. The score concludes with a double bar line at measure 70.

Using the Bb concert scale throughout the solo section is not as elegant-sounding as changing the scale at the chord change, but we are working toward building confidence within a limited range of notes at this point. Baby steps...

Final thoughts... Don't be rushed to make your jazz program competitive. The most important thing is that your students are exposed to jazz and are encouraged to improvise as a part of their developing musicianship. Trophies and scores, if that is what you desire, can come later when you are confident as a jazz educator and a tradition of jazz groups are well-established at your school.