

# Art of the Big Band- Part 1

## The Jazz Rhythm Section

Aaron W. Bush, Foxboro Public Schools

Email: [busha@foxborough.k12.ma.us](mailto:busha@foxborough.k12.ma.us)

### Concepts:

- 1.) The rhythm section is the most challenging to teach due to perceived lack of conceptual knowledge from the teachers - *embrace the study of these instruments, you can do it! i.e - string bass*
- 2.) The rhythm section often sounds the most exposed and 'young' due to each player being forced to improvise the majority of the time - *embrace improvisation in your rehearsals!*
- 3.) The rhythm section must always be 10 steps ahead of the rest of the band in terms of tune preparation, form/style knowledge, improvisation concepts - *embrace the need to rehearse them separately*

### I. Blues - main vehicle for rhythm section concept, soloing strategies

- Drums - swing style, feel
  - Kit balance - volume from loudest - softest: ride, hi-hat, snare, bass
  - Start with quarter notes - *they can swing just as hard!* The skip-beat derives from the jazz triplet
  - Perceive the kit as a full band - multiple sounds from one instrument - drummers orchestrate arrangements in accompaniment
  - To develop snare fills, use *Progressive Steps to Syncopation for the Modern Drummer* by Ted Reed
- Bass - TIME FIRST, then harmonic reinforcement
  - Start with solid time on chord roots - percussive upper hand, one/two finger strum
  - Move to playing root on beat 1, chord-tone/connecting scale tone on 2, strong chordal function on 3, preparation of 1 on beat 4 - (1, 2, 3, 5 works well)
  - Avoid notes - ½ step above guide tone, tritone of guide tone
  - Force bass players to use the 'skip-beat' eighth-note walking technique to develop the concept of swing
  -
- Piano - see attached voicings/comping rhythms
  - Know chord, voice-lead, create voicings
  - Tensions - enhancement of harmonic structure - **keep tensions above chord tones!**
  - Avoid piano & guitar comping at same time - alternate choruses

- While substituting:
  - 5 = 13, b13, 11, #11
  - Root = 9, b9, #9
- Guitar
  - Freddie Green Style
  - Early comping had fuller chords (3 or 4 note voicings) due to smaller groups - Kansas City Six. With larger big bands, there's more voices to compete with, and he honed his style into giving the band what they needed - music in 20s-50s was all *dance music!* Dancers shift weight on beats 1 and 3
  - 1 or 2 notes - tenor harmony line against bass line
  - Hollow body arch-top guitars have most tension on 3rd and 4th string - 1 or 2 note voicings on 4th string preferably
  - **If bass gives roots or 5ths, we need to play 3rds/6ths/7ths on 4th string to compliment**
  - Add lower chromatic neighbor chords occasionally on beat 2 or 4
- Multiple styles of the blues - progression of harmonic function
- As mastery evolves, have students transpose into different keys by ear
- All instruments in the rhythm section solo!

## II. II/V/I - most common chord form in popular music

- By learning this common chord progression, you're providing harmonic material for the majority of charts
- Learn in all 12 keys - major first, then minor
- Vary styles - swing, shuffle, Brazilian samba, Afro-Cuban mambo, jazz waltz, New Orleans street beat, 2-feel, brushes, etc.
- All rhythm section members solo over the 4 bar progression
- Solo improvisation material - minor pentatonic rows
- See attached voicing & bass line suggestions
- For minor - Dm7b5/G7b9b13(alt)/Cm6/9 (in minor 2, include root/flat 5)

## III. Learn Tunes - take them from accompanists to SOLOISTS

- Teach your rhythm section standards - start with simple forms and develop
- All members learn head by ear and develop their own arrangement (intro/head/soloing/backgrounds/trading/harmony/vamp)
- ALL MEMBERS improvise over changes!
- Ex. Solar, There is No Greater Love, All the Things You Are, Green Dolphin Street

# Supplemental Voicings / Bass lines

## Piano Blues

Handwritten piano blues chord voicings for  $Bb^7$ ,  $E^b7$ , and  $F^7$ . The notation shows two staves: the upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. Brackets indicate intervals: 4ths and Tritone. Arrows and text like "same" and "1/2" show relationships between voicings.

## Piano comping rhythm

Handwritten piano comping rhythm notation on a single staff, divided into three measures labeled ①, ②, and ③. Measure 1 shows a quarter note followed by two eighth notes. Measure 2 shows a quarter note followed by three eighth notes. Measure 3 shows a quarter note followed by two eighth notes.

## Piano II/V/I voicings

Handwritten piano II/V/I voicings for  $C-7$ ,  $F^7$ , and  $Bb^{maj7}$ . The notation shows a treble clef staff with chord voicings for each chord. The  $Bb^{maj7}$  chord is followed by a double bar line and four slanted lines, indicating a continuation or a specific voicing style.

## Sample Bass Line

Handwritten sample bass line notation on a single bass clef staff. The line consists of several notes, some with accidentals, representing a typical blues bass line.

Progressive Steps to Syncopation for the  
Modern Drummer Ted Reed

JAZZ Rhythms

27  
29

The page contains 12 staves of handwritten musical notation. The notation is in 4/4 time and shows a progression of syncopated rhythms. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The music consists of various note values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, arranged in a way that demonstrates syncopation. The notation is written in black ink on a white background. The page is numbered 29 in the top right corner.

Handwritten text in the top right corner, possibly a page number or reference code.

Musical score for 12 staves, numbered 13 to 24. The score includes a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and various musical notations such as notes, rests, and beams. The notation is dense, with many notes and rests, and some beams connecting notes. The staves are numbered 13 through 24 on the left side.

# Basic Blues

B<sup>b7</sup>

E<sup>b7</sup>

B<sup>b7</sup>

I7

IV7

I7

E<sup>b7</sup>

B<sup>b7</sup>

IV7

I7

F7

E<sup>b7</sup>

B<sup>b7</sup>

(F7)

V

IV7

I7

V

# Basic with Alteration

B<sup>b7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup>

I7 IV7 I7

E<sup>b7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> G7

IV7 I7 VI

C<sup>MIN7</sup> F7 B<sup>b7</sup> (C<sup>MIN7</sup> F7)

ii V I7 V

# Common Additions

Handwritten musical notation on a grand staff showing chord progressions and their common additions. The notation includes chord symbols and circled additions:

- Staff 1:  $B^{b7}$ ,  $E^{b7}$ ,  $B^{b7}$ ,  $F^{min7}$ ,  $B^{b7}$
- Staff 2:  $I^7$ ,  $IV^7$ ,  $I^7$ ,  $E^{dim7}$ ,  $B^{b7}$ ,  $D^{min7}$ ,  $G^7$ ,  $ii-V$  of  $IV^7$
- Staff 3:  $IV^7$ ,  $\#ivdim$ ,  $I^7$ ,  $VI$ ,  $III$ ,  $VI$
- Staff 4:  $C^{min7}$ ,  $F^7$ ,  $B^{b7}$ ,  $(G^7)$ ,  $C^{min7}$ ,  $F^7$ ,  $II$ ,  $V$ ,  $VI$ ,  $I^7$ ,  $ii$ ,  $VI$ ,  $V$ ,  $ii$



# Bird Blues

$B^b_{MAJ7}$

$A_{MIN7(b5)}$

$D7$

$G_{MIN7}$

$F_{MIN7}$   $B^b7$

I ii-V of vi vi ii-V of IV7

$E^b7$

$E^b_{MIN7}$

$A^b7$

$D_{MIN7}$

$G7$

$D^b_{MIN7}$

$G^b7$

Cycling chromatic ii-V's to the ii

IV7

$F7$

$C_{MIN7}$

$B^b_{MAJ7}$

$(G7)$

$C_{MIN7}$

$F7$

ii V I vi ii V

