

FOR THE LOVE OF JAZZ AND JAZZ EDUCATION !

Randy Lee r99lee@gmail.com MN Music Educators' Association Mid-Winter Convention, Th Feb. 14, 3:30 pm

-A historical and “philosophical” look -Being a fan! -Jazz teaching tips

JAZZ - WHAT IS IT?

The short and easy definition-

Jazz formed in America, mainly from a unique blending of African rhythms and European harmonies, becoming widely recognized by the early 20th century.

A more thorough description-

“Jazz is really the best music to represent America because:

It is partly planned and partly spontaneous; that is, as the musicians perform a pre-determined tune, they have the opportunity to create their own interpretations within that tune in response to the other musicians' performances and whatever else may occur "in the moment" -- this is called improvisation and is the defining element of jazz.

In everything from regular conversation, to basketball, to everyday life, Americans are constantly improvising.

Improvisation is the key element of jazz.

There is no better example of democracy than a jazz ensemble: individual freedom but with responsibility to the group. In other words, individual musicians have the freedom to express themselves on their instrument as long as they maintain their responsibility to the other musicians by adhering to the overall framework and structure of the tune.” -from “Jazz in America”

Jazz is seen by many as "America's classical music". Since the 1920s Jazz Age, jazz has become recognized as a major form of musical expression. It then emerged in the form of independent traditional and popular musical styles, all linked by the common bonds of African-American and European-American musical parentage with a performance orientation. Jazz is characterized by swing and blue notes, call and response vocals, polyrhythms and improvisation.

ART “the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination”

So Jazz is an art form. But because it has, at times, been a popular and commercial music it creates that duality as an entertainment **and** an art. (Some would argue that rock and other styles are art forms. Those are worthy considerations but jazz really started all that “expressive” type of music. Without jazz we wouldn’t have modern pop, rock music, etc.)

We’ve got:

Ragtime

Blues

Dixieland

Swing

Bop

Latin American jazz

Hard bop

Funk

“Fusion” is really happening all the time and in any and many combinations

Jazz/rock

“World music” (broader ethnic) influence

Electronic

And within all those can be shuffles and pop music influence, dance influence, etc

Teaching jazz allows for great opportunities, and some challenges.

The two extremes?

ART

- new expressions
- alternate expressions
- sound/tone/timbre exploration
- creating new music (composing, arranging, improv)
- paying tribute to historical music
- etc.

ENTERTAINMENT

- “pleasing a crowd”
- “mood” music
- competition
- often as much about visuals or props
- attempting to create excitement, etc

NATIONAL SUPPORT and POLICY December 15, 2009

House Unanimously Passes H. Res. 894, reaffirming Jazz as a National Treasure.

WASHINGTON D.C. – “Today, the House of Representatives passed H. Res. 894, a resolution honoring the 50th anniversary of the recording of the album ‘Kind of Blue’ and reaffirming jazz as a national treasure with a unanimous vote. The resolution was introduced by Representative John Conyers, Jr. of Michigan.

The following can be attributed to Representative Conyers:

‘Twenty-two years ago, I introduced H. Con. Res 57 designating jazz a national treasure. Since then the efforts to preserve jazz have been successful in keeping this great American art form alive.’

“By recognizing the 50th anniversary of Kind of Blue, the House took another step in solidifying the importance of jazz in American culture. Kind of Blue is jazz’s greatest album; its style, composition

‘This vote today shows the commitment the House has to preserving and celebrating American music and culture. As a lifelong jazz enthusiast, I was pleased to introduce this resolution on behalf of the Miles Davis Sextet and jazz fans across the world.’ “

Our national and state standards certainly support the creativity that jazz celebrates. But that doesn’t allow us to only use those skills/standards with “jazz” students.

TEACHING JAZZ

Let’s look at some potential settings of jazz instruction-

Starting from nothing? Don’t have much knowledge or experience in jazz?

-talk to the kids in your concert band about starting a jazz band. When could you rehearse? Have a sign up sheet for the various instruments. Ask for Rhythm Section instruments - drums, piano, bass, and maybe even guitar. Literally tell the kids you don’t have a lot of experience and you’ll have to learn together.

-can your principal help you, or a community member or business, or parents pool money to buy a set like the “Jazz Ensemble Method” or “Jazz Combo Session” by Dean Sorenson and Kjos publications?

-can you find two pianists, one to play bass parts on piano or keyboard?

-can someone donate, or can you borrow, a bass and bass amp, etc?

-many arrangements have "flex" instrumentation so you can often make something work with a small band

-tell the kids you want to learn jazz with them. Just be honest and let them know you'll help and guide them and you'll all learn jazz playing together.

-just have a handful of kids interested? Let's talk. It can be done!

SOME EASY "JAMMING" ACTIVITIES:

- Have a small portion of your band (concert band, too) play just a major scale in whole notes and have students volunteer to be the soloist who can just make up rhythms to each measure or to go ahead and jam away
- Don't worry about chord "changes", how about just a chord (as opposed to chord "changes")? Use the minor dominant chord/dorian mode. It's using the major scale as a reference but then "shifting them all" up to the second note as the "home tone/home base". Then teach an easy chord to the pianist, have the bass player walk 1,2 b3, 5 as a vamp (repeated pattern) and kids will volunteer to jam to it. It has a "hipper," darker sound to it and the kids like it. AND TO ENCOURAGE THOSE ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO EASY ONE, TWO OR THREE NOTE CALL AND RESPONSE. YES, YOU PLAY WITH THEM! And then have a student do "the call".

Some rules of thumb for jazz-

-keep in mind that **SWING** is just one style in jazz. For each song, or section of a song, you must determine whether it is in even eighths or swing eighths. Swing, and the shuffle style, are often characterized by the:

Laid back, "uneven" eighth notes, based off triple meter. The first eighth of a pair is generally $\frac{2}{3}$ of a beat (based on triple meter). The "doo-dle-a" game (triplets)

"Walking" bass line (ongoing quarter note) feel. Although many classic swing tunes have the "two beat feel" (sometimes confusingly marked as cut time) which often will inter-mix with walking lines.

Drummer playing familiar swing ride cymbal pattern/hi-hat pattern:

"Ting ting KA ting ting KA" etc (Shuffle is a busier swing - "ting ka ting ka ting ka ting ka")

-There are many "even eighth" styles including most rock related styles and Latin American music.

-teaching jazz will include most of the same musical ideas as any style - making notes come alive, etc.

- it's often NOT about "higher faster, louder!" And it's not about sunglasses and fedoras and about "being cool".

-for early improv, the less said the better - "would anyone jam on this song?" That's it. Let them do it! If someone starts to ask for ideas - then you start talking melody, key sig, motives, etc. Or have entire sections improvise at the same time.

Some differences from playing in the concert band?

I tell my jazz students that we often need to be a “power small ensemble”.

A sax section trying to keep up with brass can be a challenge. So sometimes a larger tip opening on a mouthpiece, and/or alternative baffle, throat, and/or chamber can give a bigger and/or more projecting sound.

You often have amplified instruments in the group and that needs to be dealt with and balanced.

Yes, articulations are often different including more housetop accents (“daht”!) and some tongue-stop playing.

IDEAS AND MATERIALS FOR MORE INDIVIDUAL JAZZ INSTRUCTION

FIRST AND FOREMOST, your students must HEAR great jazz players on their instrument! Recordings! Youtube! Playing jazz will not all come from a book. A proper role model(s) is/are necessary. Ideally a student is way into a certain player and spends time pursuing that sound/concept. Transcribing good jazz is the most profound way to learn it, and often the most challenging and time consuming!

ETUDE BOOKS like the Lennie Niehaus Jazz books (duets as well) and the Charlie Parker Omnibook (very difficult) are amazing. (duets as well) and the Charlie Parker Omnibook (very difficult)

PLAY ALONGS Jamie Aebersold series Ireal book

Jim Snidero “Jazz Conception” series (“I also think the stuff on his web site and the things he said when we had him here were outstanding and really easy to understand for the younger player.” Dr. Tom Pfothenauer)

WHAT DOES HIGHER LEVEL JAZZ TEACHING “LOOK LIKE”?

-naturally, plenty of instruction time

-kids talking about, and working on, chord changes, scales, style questions, etc.

-helping kids practice “in a jazz way” - becoming fluent on the instrument in “preparing the improvisational side” of a person. Scales, scales, but with intent on style and proper context: scales (and patterns) in the key cycle (“cycle 5 down”) to the 9th (“break that octave”), with **jazz articulation**. Get horn players on a piano to SHOW chords, then inversions. Get EVERYONE thinking of bass lines.

-kids writing and arranging!

“NEW” INSTRUMENTS TO TEACH?

-Yes, it's often built on a drum set, a bass, and a chordal instrument like piano and/ or guitar and/or vibraphone (vibes).

-if you can't teach them yourself then you need to arrange for their development

-Bass seems to be the most challenging element to nurture. We often have percussionists who can play drum set and pianists and maybe a guitarist in our concert bands but we don't typically have a bassist around. Or maybe you have two or more guitarists in your concert bands and one might try bass guitar! Use a keyboard bass if you must. Even a sturdy tuba player could be “the bassist”. For swing music, bass is usually quarter note driven - playing roots and fives can work. The walking bass line is an art in itself.

Me, thinking out loud-

-Can we think of jazz as a cousin of concert band? (WC Handy - early “jazz” proponent - marches converted into Dixie, use of blues, etc.)

-Be careful not to say “jazz” and only think of swing.

-you can start a school jazz combo with three kids

-wonderful quotes of high level jazz playing-

“Imitate, Assimilate, Innovate” Clark Terry.

“You can't sound like yourself until you can sound like everybody else”.

-A good improviser is an amazing, on the spot, composer!

-small group jazz is the more creative avenue but “big band jazz” is an efficient way for us to reach more kids in teaching “America's music”

-Where is jazz now? The current sounds, the “younger” creators? Where does the art “reside”: Dave Douglas, Esperanza Spalding, Mark Turner, Ben Wendell, Chris Potter, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Darcy James Argue Band, the RadioHead Jazz Project through Sierra Music, Gordon Goodwin and the Big Phat Band, Snarky Puppies, Lettuce, Soulive, The Bad Plus, Happy Apple, Christine Tobin, Sons of Kemet, Kenny Garrett, Courtney Pine, Marius Neset, just to name a few.

Jazz can be-

electric

a soft and lovely flute and piano duet

a romping 19 member big band

a mellow singer with a somber trio in a smoky bar

an expressive, organic, out of tune cacophony

yes, it can be “higher, faster, louder” - but it can be gentle, mixed woodwinds

ethnically influenced, like Latin jazz and so many others

Check out the array of supplemental sheets, ideas, and teaching methods following. We are all forever grateful to my friends and colleagues who have contributed to this wealth of experience and knowledge.