

Daily Routines for the Jazz Ensemble

Roland Sandoval

Whether you are fortunate enough to see your jazz students every day or meet once a week...a routine for your students is a must. When your students walk into your jazz rehearsal they should expect a logical, musical, and challenging curriculum that teaches the art form. The challenge is not to just rehearse the tunes, but rather develop a system that stresses variety and musicianship to learn the song. If you use this approach, the tunes will fall into place because of all the great routines you have established in rehearsal to build up to them. A little of this and a little of that from the information below will lead to GREAT BANDS!

So let's talk the basics. The jazz language is as complex as any musical art form. What is important is to try to find ways to make the jazz language simple for all. The first step is to TALK THE SAME way. No matter what you use to vocalize articulations, make sure your students know your school's system and use it all the time. The jazz students must vocalize all the time so the starts and stops of every note are the same. For example, what works for me is to use five basic articulations: DOO- / DAH> / DOT^ / DIT• and an fp effect for note direction.

Use these articulations on different scales, patterns and of course in the context of the music. The kids must talk jazz—DOO DOT DOO DIT DAH—as it appears over the notes. The more they talk the same way, the more the music becomes “tight”. Vocalize, then play, phrase by phrase. This is the first routine for your students. They should know they are going to vocalize and work on style and uniformity through jazz articulations everyday.

The next routine offers variety and has many elements. Teach jazz vocabulary every time you see your students. I teach EVERYTHING IN ONE KEY (Bb) first, then guide the students to start transferring to other keys. This can be taught over a full year—a little every day if you can, but in order: **A.** Teach major scales and everything that goes with it (whole steps, half steps, etc.)

B. Teach basic intervals of a major scale everyday even if only playing and identifying 1-5 a day (“old fashion ear training”).

C. Teach basic rhythmic and melodic dictation everyday. Use very simple rhythms and just a few measures per exercise. Students can write it down or play it back.

D. Teach simple diatonic songs for students to play by ear like *Mary Had a Little Lamb* and *Twinkle Little Star*. Teach one key first, then transfer around the circle of 5^{ths}.

E. Start teaching the modes through concert Bb. First

teach MIXOLYDIAN then DORIAN (ii, V, I emphasis). PLEASE start by teaching the manipulation of the major scale (lower the 7th, then lower the 3rd and 7th etc.)

F. Start teaching minor intervals for ear training. Teach in this order: m2, m3, m6, m7. When you add the minor interval, only play and

The Daily Routine:

- Vocalize the jazz language in the same way
- Teach students jazz vocabulary
- Drummers should learn all the styles
- Rehearse phrase to phrase
- Then put the pieces into context
- Emphasize dynamics
- Look at connect points and solos
- Listen to recordings
- Run the song

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compare those intervals (M3 or m3? M2 or m2? etc.) Then put them in the mix with the major intervals.

G. Now teach the four basic triads: major, minor, diminished and augmented. Teach by lowering the 3rd, then lower the 5th etc. Explain how these will be used and found in the next step, the 7th chords.

H. Teach the 7th chords: Major, minor, half-diminished—or in the jazz world “m7b5”—and fully diminished.

I. Teach some “Universal Scales”: major and minor pentatonic and blues . . . all in concert Bb.

J. PUT IT ALL TOGETHER. Ready for SCALE BREAK DOWN in concert Bb:

play Major/Ionian, Major triad, Major 7th, Major pentatonic, Mixolydian, Dominant 7th chord, Dorian, minor triad, minor 7th chord, minor pentatonic, blues scale, diminished triad, augmented triad, m7b5, dim 7. Then play all the modes in that key. Remember to teach all in one key (concert Bb to start). Advanced students can now move to the circle of 5^{ths}.

K. Call and response to Aebersold’s *Band In A Box/ Live Rhythm Section*...especially with blues scale or universals. You play it first and they copy. Use short simple sentences just like when you learned to talk.

L. Start improvising a lot once they can start doing SCALE BREAK DOWN. Use changes in songs. Invest in Aebersold’s *Band In A Box* or any Combo Books, State Text of Standards (Red Book). A jazz band needs a rhythm section recording.

M. Start teaching SONG FORMS, beginning with blues. Use STANDS AND COLORS, then move onto AABA etc. POINT AS YOU GO.

N. Teach how to play a standard in small combo settings: head 2x, solo, head 2x, etc. Teach the students how to interact on stage.

O. Advanced students can actually start using transcribed solos and circling all the “PARTS OF THE SANDWICH OR CHORD TONES” in every measure.

P. Teach everybody the changes to a song you are playing even if many will NEVER solo in public.

Use Aebersold’s steps to memorizing changes:

play root, play triad, play 1st 5 notes, play full 7th chord, etc.

Q. The students who will solo should write out a guide tone lead sheet using the “SANDWICH

PARTS / CHORD TONES ONLY” for the changes they are learning.

R. Start teaching more advanced concepts to students who are ready to move to next level. This may mean spending outside time with them. Teach tritone substitutions, alt chords (will also do with all students teaching as a sandwich with a lot of add ons...pickles, lettuce, onions) etc...

The next routine is for your drummers. We want to make sure they can play all kinds of grooves. So every time you teach any of the above, the drummer(s) are playing along with the band. Sometimes I will call out the groove. When we have “Latin Day”, we ask the drummer(s) to play a bossa nova over the major scale, then move to swing over the triad, and then funk over the 7th chord as the band is playing. So the drummer knows part of their routine is to come prepared to play and learn as many grooves as possible. When we get to charts, they are much more prepared to play stylistically any music we would like.

It is now time to get to the routine for rehearsing the song. I strongly encourage you to always write



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out unison rhythm sheets of the song you are playing. This is especially effective for younger jazz ensembles. For more experienced bands, students can just look at the tune and play the rhythms they see on one note. So they are working on making the rhythms sound exactly the same as each other—just like the articulations. They play rhythms on one note first, THEN add the actual pitches. Combine the vocalization of the articulations with the rhythms and the band really starts to swing. This is part of the daily routine.

There is a time and place for playing a song top to bottom, but routinely play phrase to phrase first. This is a great way to break it down. If we are working a tune, we hit the major phrases first and play:

- Lead trumpet to lead trombone to lead alto
- Then add second parts
- Then add 3rds
- Then full winds
- Add rhythm section to winds

This is time consuming; but when you add this to the routine of vocalization and unison rhythm isolation, the band moves to another level of “tight”. It also TRULY develops real lead players.

After you work phrase to phrase, make a part of your routine putting those small chunks into context. Add the section before and after what you were working on. The kids know they will always put it into what I call a living performance. I say “OK, let’s put that in context.” as part of our daily routine.

Every time I see my band, I make sure we cover

all the jazz symbols in the songs. Jazz falls are a good example. I teach them to play the chord first, then the fall. I explain how to follow the length of the note so every chord is heard before a fall. So part of my routine is to look for falls, bends, glissandos, doits and

cover them every time we rehearse. Don’t neglect the jazz symbols. Detail them as much as any other fundamental.

I want the jazz ensemble to be musical, so dynamics will be my next daily emphasis. Just like in our marching and concert worlds, setting levels works great. Keep it simple like 1 for p and 5 for mf and so on. The challenge is to apply and insist. There are many loud jazz ensembles in the world. Great ones play great dynamics. Emphasize dynamics in jazz everyday.

As mentioned above, great emphasis is spent on jazz vocabulary so use it in the songs you are playing. Call and response is helpful when using universal scales. Everyone will not solo in public, but everyone should learn the solo changes in all songs played. Break down one chord at a time

and teach like notes chord to chord. Technology is a must here especially if your rhythm section is young. Record the solo section, create mp3s and make sure those who are going to solo have a rhythm section recording to use for practice at home.

The next daily routine is to look at the connect points of the song in your rehearsal. Make sure the kids understand the road maps and transitions. Isolate the section features and section solis. I strongly suggest

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always establishing a solo order for the students so they all know who the last soloist is before the band moves on. Establish solo backgrounds (if any) and where they will be played. There should never be any guessing. Spend a few minutes on these elements.

If you can, listen to the tune you are playing before you put it all together. Use the publisher's recording or any version that is close to it. Use YouTube performances or download the original versions to play for your students.

NOW RUN THE SONG! By now your kids are skilled, trained, detailed and accurate jazz musicians. They can be confident because emphasis has been placed on being a great musician in the jazz world they are now living.

Have a system and make it routine.

Roland Sandoval is currently serving as Director of Bands at Sandra Day O'Connor High School in Helotes, Texas. Since 2003 he has been the Organizer for the TMEA All State Jazz Ensemble and currently serves as both Jazz Division Chairman and President of Region 11. From 2003-2009 Mr. Sandoval was the Vice President of the Texas Chapter of the IAJE and now serves as a Director on the State Board of the TJEA.

Concert bands, jazz ensembles and marching bands that Mr. Sandoval has been associated with have consistently earned UIL "Sweepstakes" honors including superior ratings and Best In Class Honors at various festivals throughout Texas and Colorado. Significant honors include the 2007 and the 2009 OHS Jazz Ensemble I & Combo being invited and featured at the North Texas Jazz Festival in Addison, Texas; the 2008 O'Connor Symphonic Winds being selected as the TMEA Region 11 Honor Band winner and Area Finalist; and the 2008 & 2010 O'Connor "Panther" Marching Band qualifying for the UIL 5A Texas State Marching Band Contest. Mr. Sandoval's professional affiliations include TMEA, TBA, TMAA, TJEA, PASIC, Who's Who Among American Teachers, and Kappa Kappa Psi Honorary Band Fraternity. He is a proud 2009 Inductee of Phi Beta Mu.