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Developing A Middle School and High School Jazz Curriculum

**CLINICIAN:
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HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER - SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

Developing A Middle School and High School Jazz Curriculum

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Time: 11:00 AM

Room: CC Bridge Hall

Jazz is deeply rooted in the auditory tradition of African music. The African approach of master/student relationship is one of observation and imitation. Music was taught by rote and the master insisted that the student imitated in a verbatim manner the exact phrase with the same feeling and nuances of the performance. Generations of jazz musicians learned from their mentors by copying, imitating, and learning their vocabulary – very much like learning to speak a language.

Jazz is a verbatim language and the language of jazz must be learned to help create the feeling of swing. Traditionally the jazz language was taught on the bandstand or in jam sessions with the masters performing while students of the music listened, observed, and imitated what they heard. The challenge is presenting information that was passed to generations of musicians in a non-formal setting.

Developing a lesson for your jazz rehearsal provides an opportunity to teach your students the essential aspects of the medium rather than just randomly playing through charts. When creating a lesson plan consider including the following elements:

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Vocabulary
- Modeling
- Assessments
- Guided Practice
- Independent Practice
- Review
- Closure

Lesson 1

Objective:

The student will discover an understanding of the auditory approach to jazz by listening and imitating the prescribed syllables.

Vocabulary

Jazz Rhythm Dialect – the musical pronunciation of the jazz genre. The pronunciation of the jazz language is acquired through the use of syllables that help create the natural rhythmic feel of swing.

Swing – a form of jazz music where the rhythmic pulse and interpretation of melodic and harmonic material creates a feeling of rocking back and forth.

Rhythm – The melodic and harmonic pattern of regular and irregular pulse in music caused by the occurrence of strong and weak beats.

Introduction

An Aural Approach

Jazz like all other music genre gets its momentum from the interpretation of its rhythm. Rhythm is fundamental to creating the feeling for swing. With that in mind let's begin our journey by developing the jazz language and understanding the rhythmic feel of swing. Developing a jazz rhythm dialect naturally creates a rhythmic understanding through feeling the pulse of the music. The conceptual approach of this jazz rhythm dialect is rooted in the feel of the rhythm of spoken syllables. This approach can help develop a natural feel to swing and help young players understand the concept of swing.

Lesson Development

Rhythmic Coordination

The following exercise is intended to teach rhythmic coordination that any instrumentalist or vocalist can use to start the journey of developing the concept of swing by listening, observing, and imitating the language of jazz. **NOTE:** *Our purpose is to listen to the cohesiveness of the players and their ability to perform as one unit while performing with individual freedom.*

Play a recording of a medium swing chart and ask the students to snap their fingers on beats 2 and 4.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for a finger snap exercise in 4/4 time. The first staff is labeled '1' in a box and 'FINGER SNAP' to its left. It begins with a double bar line and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The first measure contains a Dm7 chord and a quarter note. The subsequent measures contain eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating finger snaps on beats 2 and 4. The second staff is labeled '5' in a box and begins with a Dm7 chord and a quarter note, followed by eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating finger snaps on beats 2 and 4. Both staves end with a double bar line.

Exercise 5: A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The exercise consists of a single melodic line of eighth notes. The notes and their fingerings are: G4 (1), A4 (2), B4 (3), C5 (4), D5 (5), E5 (1), F#5 (2), G5 (3), A5 (4), B5 (5), C6 (1), D6 (2), E6 (3), F#6 (4), G6 (5). The staff is divided into four measures of four notes each, with a double bar line at the end.

BY JOSE ANTONIO DIAZ

1 SNAP

5

1 SNAP

5

Warm Up

- individual warm-up
- scales in a swing pattern
- rhythmic and melodic dictation

Improvisation

Integrate improvisation into the rehearsal every day.

Improvisation is like having a conversation with others; there is listening and responding in the jazz vernacular.

Ensemble Technique

Understanding of rhythm and phrasing; how to speak the language. Address it every day as we have to remind students daily. We must be proactive and insistent about the music being played a certain way or excellence is not achieved. Encourage students to individually be proactive about tuning, balance, style and interpretation.

Style and Interpretation

Play the recordings of various jazz genres standards.

Teach literature in various jazz genres.

The student and director must do a lot of intense listening.

Literature and Listening

There is an abundant selection of jazz materials that will meet the needs of virtually every conceivable configuration of instrumentation of school jazz ensembles from middle school to high school. I'm a firm believer that every student in the jazz program should learn jazz standards. Play riff tunes with the entire ensemble learning the melody. This is a great way to start all students; it easily fits all instrumentation, and it's a great way to make sure that all musicians in the program learn the melody of songs. These standard chart arrangements are available for every level from easy to advanced. There are also several great books available, including the following:

- *Approaching the Standards* (Volumes 1, 2, and 3) by Willie Hill, Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.
- *Approaching the Standards for Jazz Vocalists* by Ron McCurdy and Willie Hill, Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.
- *Essentials of Jazz Theory* (Books 1, 2, and 3) by Shelton Berg, Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.
- *Jazz Improvisation: The Goal Note Method* by Shelton Berg, Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.
- *The Jazz Theory Book* by Mark Levine, Sher Music Co.
- *The Real Easy Book* (Volumes 1, 2, and 3) edited by Chuck Sher, Sher Music Co.
- *The New Real Book* (Volumes 1, 2, and 3) edited by Chuck Sher, Sher Music Co.