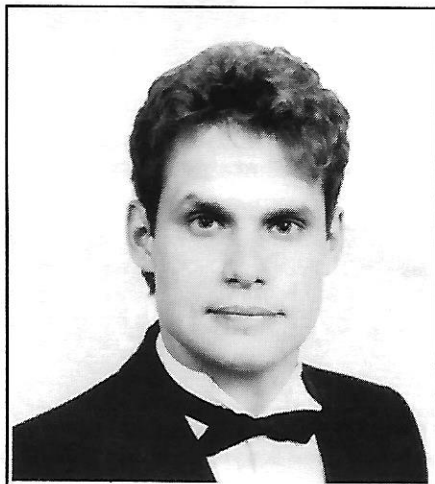


Programming For Middle School Jazz Bands

by Anthony Susi



listen the great masters. Your students are more likely to pick up a jazz record of Benny Goodman to listen to if they're currently rehearsing one of his charts. I've compiled a list of some classic jazz arrangements that I have found to work very well at the middle school level. If you haven't already tried these picks, I guarantee you and your students will enjoy playing them. Not only will your ensemble and soloists sound mature but I think you'll find that you begin to have a greater impact on your students' CD and tape collections.

A well balanced jazz diet should include selections from the four major jazz food groups: Swing, Latin, Ballads and Rock. To keep my recommendations to a reasonable length, I restricted to my favorite three in these categories with some specific subsets thrown in for good measure. The first category is Big Band Swing:

BIG NOISE FROM WINNETKA	arr. P. Lavendar	Jenson , Gr. 2
HOW HIGH THE MOON	arr. M. Sweeney	Hal Leonard , Gr.2
JUMPIN' AT THE WOODSIDE	arr. S. Nestico	Jenson, Gr. 3

It goes without saying that if you want to have a great sounding jazz band then you have to play real jazz music. What I mean by "real" is not contrived tunes written for middle school stage bands but arrangements of the standards. Why play a tune mimicking Count Basie's style, for example, when they are so many good arrangements of authentic Count Basie tunes accessible to young bands? The standards have achieved their status because of there inherent influence to jazz literature. That's not to say that new jazz charts written for middle school bands are not worthwhile because I've enjoyed teaching several myself (particularly Kendor & William Allen writers). The point is that it's important to include the "Real McCoys" if you want to provide a complete jazz education for your students as well as your audience. If you ask your average middle school student who Babe Ruth or Mickey Mantle was, they probably could tell you. If you ask your band members who Duke Ellington or Charlie Parker was, would they know? I'm sure you'll agree that the best approach to learning various jazz styles and improvisation is to

If you've got a hot sax section you want to feature, you can't go wrong with these shuffle/swing charts:

GROOVIN' HARD	arr. D. Barduhn	Jenson, Gr. 3
GROOVE MERCHANT	arr. D. Barduhn	Jenson , Gr. 3
THAT'S ALL	arr. D. Barduhn	Jenson, Gr. 3

If you're looking to spotlight your keyboard players, here are three swing selections that will make them shine:

GEORGIA ON MY MIND	arr. M. Taylor	Jenson, Gr. 2+
BASIN STREET BLUES	arr. P. Jennings	Jenson ,Gr. 2+
OPUS ONE	arr. J. Nowak	Hal Leonard, Gr.2+

As we all know, the blues scale is the easiest way to introduce young musicians to improvisation. The following three blues swing charts follow a traditional twelve bar progression: **C-JAM BLUES**

C-JAM BLUES	arr. Paul Cook	CPP Belwin Gr. 2
ST. LOUIS BLUES	arr. Jerry Nowak	Kendor, Gr. 3
NOW IS THE TIME	arr. D. Barduhn	Jenson, Gr. 3
SWINGING SHEPHERD BLUES	arr. M. Taylor	Jenson ,Gr. 3
NIGHT TRAIN	arr. J. Higgins	Jenson, Gr. 3

For a taste South of the Border, try these Latin favorites:

TIGER OF SAN PEDRO	arr. P. Lavendar	Jenson ,Gr. 3
MARKET PLACE	arr. B. Lowden	Hal Leonard, Gr. 3
GRENADA SMOOTHIE	arr. M. Taylor	Jenson, Gr. 3

It's always a challenge to your rhythm section to play a chart that switches between Latin and Swing grooves. Try these cross-overs for added interest:

A NIGHT IN TUNISIA	arr. M. Sweeney	Hal Leonard, Gr. 2+
ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE	arr. M. Sweeney	Hal Leonard, Gr. 2+
CARAVAN	arr. M. Sweeney	Hal Leonard, Gr. 2+

The following Ballads provide a great change of pace from the previous honorable mentions:

LIL' DARLIN	Neal Hefti	Hal Leonard, Gr. 2+
SEND IN THE CLOWNS	arr. D. Barduhn	Jenson, Gr. 3
'ROUND MIDNIGHT	arr. J. Higgins & M. Taylor	Jenson, Gr. 3

A good jazz-rock chart can serve as an excellent opener or closer on a program. My students have really enjoyed performing the following classics:

BIRDLAND	arr. J. Higgins	Jenson, Gr. 3
CHAMELEON	arr. M. Sweeney	Hal Leonard, Gr. 2+
GOSPEL JOHN	arr. B. Lowden	Hal Leonard, Gr. 2

If you're searching for some good holiday numbers, these are sure winners:

JINGLE BELLS	arr. D. Wolpe	CPP Belwin, Gr. 3
HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY...	arr. P. Jennings	Jenson, Gr. 2
EASY JAZZ-PAK No. 20	arr. J. Nowak	Hal Leonard, Gr. 2

For first year jazz ensembles, the following charts are easy to put together but sound impressive and will give your beginners a solid foundation:


CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS	arr. M. Sweeney	Hal Leonard, Gr. 1+
TRACES	arr. S. Nestico	Hal Leonard, Gr. 1+
MERCY, MERCY, MERCY	arr. J. Edmondson	Hal Leonard, Gr. 1+

I hope these arrangements will provide you and your ensemble the rewarding and inspirational experiences that they have brought to me and my students.

Tony Susi is the Director of the Bennett Middle School Bands in Manchester. His groups have performed at state and national conferences.

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