

# Breaking sound barriers: new perspectives on effective big band development and rehearsal

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## Abstract

Jazz big band is a common extra-curricular musical activity in Western Australian secondary schools. Jazz big band offers important fundamentals that can help expand a student's musical understanding. However, the teaching of conventions associated with big band jazz has often been haphazard and can be daunting and frightening, especially for classically trained music teachers. In order to maximise results within extra-curricular rehearsal time constraints, this article synthesizes current literature into big band development from Australia and overseas, designed to ensure positive outcomes, especially for teachers with little or no jazz background. In order to 'break sound barriers', it is important to consider the pre-rehearsal preparation, as well as the face to face rehearsal and performance situation. The article contextualises jazz education and attendant issues in secondary schools in Western Australia before outlining current literature into strategies designed to maximise rehearsal efficiency prior to, during rehearsals and after performances. It then presents a model, based around the fundamentals of set-up, instrument roles, sound and repertoire, designed to build a motivated and musically competent jazz big band. By summarising the literature, the article ultimately aims to equip directors with the knowledge to maximise the potential of jazz big bands in secondary schools throughout Australia.

**Key words:** Jazz education, big band instrumentation and roles, big band repertoire, big band ensemble development model

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## Background

Many Western Australian (WA) secondary schools run jazz big bands (SIM, 2012). Big bands offer students unique musical experiences (Lincoln Center, 2011; Cowan, 2007; Dunscomb & Hill, 2002; Baker, 1989) but specialist pre-service teacher training in jazz pedagogy has been lacking in the past in WA and while research into jazz practices exists in Australia (Dipnall, 2013; Nikolsky, 2013; Freeman, 2007; Lowe, 2006), literature relating to jazz big band training and development is largely absent.

While organisations such as the Australian Jazz Education Association (AJEA) have published articles on jazz big band roles (AJEA, 2013), this information does not appear to have been widely disseminated. Lack of specialist pre-service teacher training for largely classically trained teachers makes jazz big band a potentially daunting and frightening undertaking (Baker, 1989). In their roles as adjudicators, the authors note that this has resulted in a rather haphazard approach to jazz education in WA schools, with relatively few school big bands playing with genuine understanding of the jazz idiom or

knowledge of the big band as an ensemble. With the addition of a jazz stream option to the Western Australian Certificate of Music (WACE) courses (Curriculum Council, 2010) and the potential for jazz to assume a greater portion of the curriculum, it is timely that jazz big band practices in WA are examined. Accordingly, this article looks at the state of jazz big bands in WA, particularly as the ensemble often sits at the core of a school jazz program. The article then synthesises the current literature on jazz big band development and training from Australia and overseas with information presented at the Lincoln Centre Big Band Director's Academy in 2011 (Lincoln Center, 2011) as a basis for understanding, planning and rehearsing big bands in a meaningful way. The authors then present this in a model for guiding big band development Australia-wide.

## Introduction

The formation of secondary school big bands in Western Australia dates from the early 1980s. Instrumental music programs were introduced into government secondary schools in a systematic way from the late 1960s as part of a concert band based program, and the formation of big bands was undertaken by a few hardy pioneering music teachers usually with some jazz background. In 1993, the then Music Branch of the Education Department instituted an annual Schools Jazz Festival, open to government and private schools, with 12 bands first taking part (SIM, 2012). Shortly after, a 'show band' section was added to the Catholic Education Performing Arts Festival.

Jazz education for pre-service teachers was formalised in 1993 by the establishment of a Jazz teacher training course at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), and in 2006, the School of Education at Edith Cowan University began offering Jazz Education as a major area of study in the music education undergraduate degree. The opportunity to embed jazz in

secondary schools was further strengthened in 2011 by the establishment of the WACE Jazz stream for Year 11 and 12 students (Curriculum Council, 2010).

Despite these advances, impediments to effective Jazz education remain. Uptake into specialist jazz teacher training courses has been low, and most graduating music teachers in WA still tend to come from classical or contemporary music backgrounds (ECU, 2012). Their knowledge and understanding of jazz, in particular big bands, is limited. While still in its infancy, student numbers studying the WACE Jazz stream are small (SCSA, 2013), and well-rounded jazz programs are still restricted to a handful of specialist schools. Examination of the WA Schools Jazz Festival programs offer valuable insights into the more recent state of big bands in WA schools. Table 1 presents the number of bands performing at the festival per year from 2000 to 2010, and the type of repertoire presented (SIM, 2012). The participation rate increased only marginally over this time, and limitations in regard to traditional swing repertoire, the fundamental jazz feel, are evident.

Examination of repertoire selection can provide a window into music teacher knowledge and expertise. Teachers are less likely to experiment with unfamiliar styles of music, and this may account for the disproportionately high levels of rock, funk, and latin repertoire (charts) over traditional swing charts. Reticence to engage with swing charts may in part relate to lack of familiarity with swing and its conventions on the part of many directors.

In 2011, one of the authors spent time at the Lincoln Center in New York as part of the Jazz at Lincoln Center's Twelfth Annual Band Director's Academy program, and noted certain rehearsal procedures and knowledge that the authors feel can be of benefit to Australian music teachers, and ultimately their students. By combining the Lincoln Centre principles with the existing literature, the authors have created a model designed to guide teachers in the development and preparation

of school-based big bands. Through application of the model, it is anticipated that big band jazz education can be greatly enhanced, not only in WA, but throughout Australia. Quality big band programs can become the domain of all school music programs, and not just the specialist few.

### Approaching the sound barrier - Pre-rehearsal considerations

The Lincoln Center (2011), Sandon (2009), Kelly (2009), Greig (2009), Luebbers (2009), Cowan (2007, 2008), Dunscomb and Hill (2002) and Baker (1989) describe the fundamental knowledge of the workings of a big band required by a director. For the purposes of this article, knowledge has been coded and categorised under the following headings:

- big band setup and instrumentation,
- understanding of the roles of each instrument,
- sound and balance, and
- repertoire.

### Big band setup and instrumentation

The Lincoln Center (2011), Dunscomb and Hill (2002) and Baker (1989) note that the placement

of instruments is essential to ensemble balance. The lead players (trumpet 1, trombone 1, and alto saxophone 1) should be in line with each other as the aim is to achieve evenness of sound and unity within these instruments. These players must not only be in tune with each other, but must phrase together. To this end, all lead players should defer to the lead trumpet player as the prominent voice in the ensemble. Accordingly, the Lincoln Center (2011), Ingram (2008) and Kelly (2009) state that the lead trumpet player be the most experienced and aurally aware member of the trumpet section, and not necessarily the one who can play the highest, although both traits are desirable. They note that other instruments also in alignment should include trumpet 2, trombone 2, and alto saxophone 2, and trumpet 3, trombone 3, and tenor 2, because they often play similar voicing or intervals above the root or 'fundamental' of the chord. Greig (2009) notes that the bass trombone and baritone saxophone often work in unison with the bass, playing the root note, so are best aligned in a student ensemble. Locating the bass instruments together ensures better intonation and aids player security. However, the bass trombone and baritone saxophone can be placed at the

**Table 1. WA Schools Jazz Festival big band enrolments and repertoire analysis, 2000 - 2010.**

Year	Number of songs performed	Type of repertoire
2000	26	Rock/Funk/other = 38 Latin = 11 Swing = 24
2001	27	Rock/Funk/other = 43 Latin = 9 Swing = 25
2002	38	Rock/Funk/other = 51 Latin = 15 Swing = 33
2003	30	Rock/Funk/other = 44 Latin = 13 Swing = 30
2004	32	Rock/Funk/other = 48 Latin = 14 Swing = 31
2005	28	Rock/Funk/other = 45 Latin = 11 Swing = 25
2006	31	Rock/Funk/other = 67 Latin = 12 Swing = 30
2007	32	Rock/Funk/other = 54 Latin = 18 Swing = 24
2008	31	Rock/Funk/other = 55 Latin = 17 Swing = 28
2009	25	Rock/Funk/other = 38 Latin = 10 Swing = 23
2010	26	Rock/Funk/other = 45 Latin = 9 Swing = 20

Source: School of Instrumental Music (SIM) programs archive

opposite end of the band, creating a 'mirror image'. Either placement works, and can be at the discretion of the director (Lincoln Center, 2011; Greig, 2009). Figure 1 illustrates a typical recommended school big band set-up, based upon the literature.

### Understanding of the role of each instrument

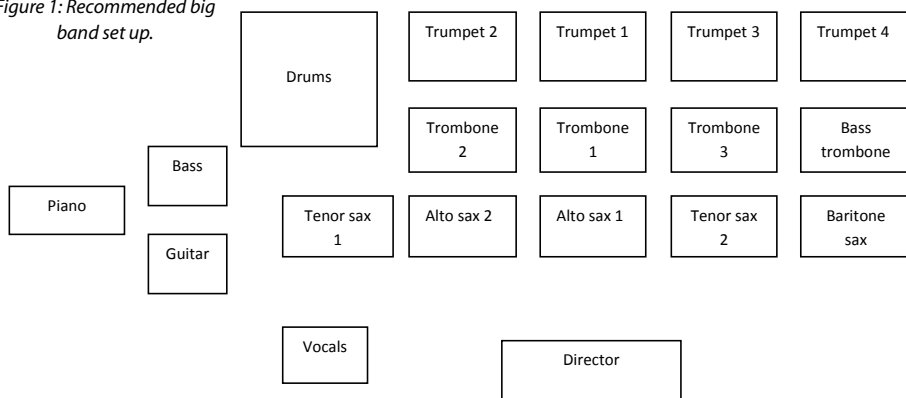
Understanding of the role of each instrument is essential (Lincoln Center, 2011; Ingram, 2008; Sandon, 2009, Kelly, 2009; Greig, 2009; Luebbers, 2009). They describe the band as being subdivided into two sections: the 'front-line' instruments, comprising trumpets, trombones and saxophones, and the rhythm section, comprising drums, bass, piano and guitar. The front-line instruments are also known as the 'horn' section. Many novice big band directors are unsure of the role of rhythm section or the front-line instruments. Accordingly, the literature describing the roles of each instrument is summarised below:

Ingram (2008) and Kelly (2009) states that the lead trumpet (1st trumpet) is responsible for leading the ensemble in style, dynamics, time-feel and sound in collaboration with the lead alto saxophone and trombone, and the drummer.

The lead trumpet's ability to play high should be secondary to being able to phrase stylistically, and they should possess a large, projecting sound. Trumpet 2, described by Ingram (2008) and Kelly (2009) as the jazz chair, is responsible for securing the intonation of the section. This player should be the best improviser in the section, with most trumpet solos being written for this chair. Trumpet 3 is responsible for applying the dynamic contrast of the section. This player should have a strong middle register that compliments the lead player as their parts are often written in octaves. Trumpet 4 must have a strong low register, and good intonation and aural ability. This player is responsible for tonally linking the trumpet section to the trombone section, and therefore unifying the brass section's sound (Ingram, 2008; Kelly, 2009).

Greig (2009) describes at length the role of each trombone within the ensemble. He notes the responsibility of the lead trombone to match the lead trumpet's phrasing, and where appropriate, the lead alto saxophone. Where there is a soli (trombone) section, the lead player's role is to establish the style and phrasing, and act as the section leader. Finally, the lead trombone should have the highest range as they will be playing consistently in the high register. Trombone 2 must

Figure 1: Recommended big band set up.



be able to take stylistic cues and blend with the lead trombone. This player often plays similar lines to trumpet 3 and 4, and a tenor saxophone, and must blend accordingly. They can hear the trumpet player behind them clearly but the trumpet player cannot necessarily hear this player, so trombone 2 plays a linking role. Trombone 2 can also take solos, and these are usually shared with the lead player. The range of the second player is not usually too challenging (Greig, 2009; Lincoln Center, 2011).

Trombone 3 is the part which may be 'left out' when a school big band lacks four trombone players as it often doubles with the tenor saxophone and trumpet 4 (Greig, 2009). The trombone 3 part is often a difficult part to play, as the part requires a lot of rapid slide movement in lower registers. This player usually needs to play louder, as the lower register can create blending difficulties if too soft. Greig (2009) argues that the bass trombone (trombone 4) is as important as the lead trombone, and where possible, a specialist instrument (bass trombone) should be used. This is easily distinguishable from a Bb/F (or commonly referred to as a trigger) trombone as it has 2 triggers (valves) and is generally larger. The bass trombone can generally be rehearsed with the bass and baritone saxophone. In order to maximise the balance within the trombone section, the bass trombonist should be encouraged to play louder in order to be heard. Finally, the bass trombone often plays the fundamental (root) of a chord, so must be able to play in tune. Good intonation is paramount for this position (Greig, 2009; Lincoln Center, 2011).

The saxophone section traditionally consists of two alto saxophones, two tenor saxophones, and a baritone saxophone. According to Sandon (2009), alto saxophone 1 (lead alto) has responsibility for ensuring consistent style, pitch, and rhythmic feel with the other lead players. Quite often playing the melody, the lead alto player has to 'lead' not only the saxophone section, but accommodate the feel and style of the lead trumpet. As a pair, the alto saxophones often work with the trumpets,

doubling parts or playing melodies with them (Sandon, 2009; Lincoln Center, 2011).

As their pitch is lower, the tenor saxophones often play similar parts to the trombones (Sandon, 2009; Lincoln Center, 2011). Depending on the type and style of the chart, the tenor saxophone is often the feature soloist due to its versatile sound, range, and style options. However, Sandon (2009) states that the tenor saxophones should defer to the lead alto player for sound, rhythm, and pitch except when they are playing different parts to the alto saxophones. In this instance, the lead tenor saxophonist (sometimes called tenor 1, or saxophone 3) should lead the section and work on ensuring a blend with trombones as required. The baritone saxophone shares the bass note responsibilities with the bass and the bass trombone. Like the bass trombone, it often has a different part to play from the rest of the saxophone section, and its responsibility is to lay the pitch foundation for the section (Sandon, 2009; Lincoln Center, 2011; Dunscomb & Hill, 2002).

Within the rhythm section, the bass has a responsibility to establish the feel or 'groove'. The groove is the rhythmic interpretation of the pulse between players. Both Spiers (2009) and the Lincoln Center (2011) note that a good bass player will often play each quarter note pulse slightly ahead of the metronomic quarter note to assist in propelling the band along. In addition, the bass is also responsible for the harmonic foundation. The Lincoln Center (2011) also states that it is desirable to employ an acoustic bass as the sound of the string attack gives the band an authentic feel, unless a bass guitar is specified. Walking lines (quarter notes) should be legato and full in length in order to avoid a disjointed sound. Finally, they note the importance of the bass player having good intonation to lay a foundation for the bass trombone, baritone saxophone, and the rest of the band.

The drummer's role is primarily timekeeping. For beginner drummers, understanding balance within a swing beat pattern is paramount, as beginners

tend to overlay the off-beat with the snare and bass drum. The Lincoln Center (2011) states that the dominant voice within the jazz drum rhythm should be the ride cymbal synchronising with the pulse of the bass, as well as a crisp hi-hat sound played tightly on beats 2 and 4 (in common time). The drummer also has the ability to shape phrases and dynamics, and control the performance for the rest of the band (Cowan, 2008).

The role of the piano is varied. Many piano parts simply contain chords and offer the pianist the freedom to 'comp' (accompany) the rest of the band, while others have specified parts that need to be played. Often there is a combination of the two where the pianist outlines the harmonic structure of the music. Both the Lincoln Center (2011) and Luebbers (2009) stress the importance of not 'over comping' as this can lead to harmonic instability. In terms of variation, they recommend anticipating chords by playing on the half beats of two and four to help propel the harmony and rhythmic feel.

The final rhythm section instrument is the guitar. The Lincoln Center (2011) and Cowan (2008) maintain that the model big band guitarist should be Count Basie's guitarist, Freddie Green. In Green's style, guitarists play crotchets chords on each beat in a minimalist approach. Often only the third and seventh of a chord are played to allow for a more open sound, and the desirable sound is a percussive 'chunk' that is heard from the body of the instrument and not through the amplifier.

Putting the rhythm section instruments together can be a daunting task. The literature recommends working with the rhythm section on their own occasionally, rehearsing the swing feel to imitate recordings, practicing concepts such as 2 feel (playing '2' to the bar), 4 feel (playing '4' to the bar), and identifying dynamics and 'hit' or 'fill' locations (Dunscorn & Hill, 2002; Lincoln Center, 2011; Cowan, 2008; Spiers, 2009; Luebbers, 2009). A summary of the roles and desirable attributes of all instruments within the ensemble is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Roles and desirable attributes of each instrument in a school big band.**

Instrument	Role	Desirable attributes
Trumpet 1	Section leader	Experience, high range, accuracy and understanding of style
Trumpet 2	Soloist	Good intonation and ability to improvise
Trumpet 3	Support player	Strong middle register and good dynamic variation
Trumpet 4	Link player	Strong low register and ability to match low brass tone
Trombone 1	Section player	Understanding of style and ability to match lead trumpet and alto
Trombone 2	Support player	Ability to blend
Trombone 3	Support player	Least important but ability to blend with trumpet 4
Trombone 4	Specialist bass player	Independence, good intonation and strong sound
Alto saxophone 1	Section leader	Ability to lead, improvise and understanding of style
Alto saxophone 2	Support player	Ability to blend and support lead alto
Tenor saxophone 1	Lead player	Ability to lead, improvise and understanding of style
Tenor saxophone 2	Support player	Ability to blend and support lead tenor
Baritone saxophone	Specialist bass player	Independence, good intonation and strong sound
Bass	Specialist bass player	Establish the groove, hold tempo and play legato
Drums	Lead player	Timekeeping, balance within the kit, dynamic control of ensemble
Piano	Support player	Ability to comp, subtlety
Guitar	Support player	Higher voicings, rhythmic and percussive

## Sound and balance

The literature notes that sound and balance can be difficult to achieve for the inexperienced director. For example, the sound of the Stan Kenton Orchestra is lush, full and brassy, and very different to the sound of the Buddy Rich Band, which is punchy, aggressive and often explosive. Dunscomb and Hill (2002) in particular emphasise that, regardless of the standard of the band, directors should be aware of the history and familiarise themselves with the sounds of various leading bands. Recordings of Duke Ellington and Count Basie are recommended as a listening starting point for the untrained director (Lincoln Center, 2011; Cowan, 2007; Dunscomb & Hill, 2002).

## Repertoire

Repertoire selection is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the band director. The Lincoln Center clinic posed a series of questions including: "Should I choose repertoire to educate my players? Should I choose repertoire that challenges and motivates? Should I select repertoire that my band can play?" The answer to these three seemingly disparate questions is yes (Lincoln Center, 2011).

When selecting repertoire, the Lincoln Center (2011) and Dunscomb and Hill (2002) emphasise that repertoire needs to be motivating and challenging. Much has been written about the nature of challenge and its link with achievement motivation in the wider research literature, particularly the importance of achievable challenge across the research fields of self-efficacy, expectancies, goals and self-determination (Bandura, 1987; Eccles, 2005; Merrick, 2006; McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Elliott & Dweck, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Schiefele, 1996). In summary, individuals can lose motivation when the repertoire is not challenging enough. Conversely, individuals can lose motivation if repertoire is too challenging, and therefore seemingly unattainable and 'too hard', presented in

ways that do not encourage mastery of the music, or emphasise ability over effort. In drawing the wider motivation research recommendations into the Jazz ensemble setting, the literature appears to advocate the notion of 'conservative challenge'. This involves choosing repertoire that will stretch the band, but can be played competently after intensive rehearsing. 'Conservative challenge' therefore involves a director having a realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their ensemble, the ensemble's capacity for growth and its work ethic (effort and persistence), and the technical ability of the individual players to reach predetermined goals. Repertoire is then chosen to realistically challenge the ensemble and individual players based upon their playing potential, and not just whether the director likes the piece. Carter (2011b) states "The selection of music is often *the* motivating factor in programme growth" (p.1). If students enjoy the music (Lowe, 2008; Eccles, 2005; Schiefele, 1996), are realistically challenged, understand and can play the music, then there is no reason why any band, regardless of skill level, cannot be successful.

The educational benefits of concept-based repertoire (i.e., riff-based, varied forms, swing feel, dynamically contrasting) is stressed by the Lincoln Center (2011) as it equips students with the necessary tools to tackle more challenging works. Once concepts are established, the Lincoln Center (2011) states that the director may be surprised at the ease and speed at which a band develops.

Swing is at the heart of understanding jazz style (Lincoln Center, 2011; Liebman, 2014; Dunscomb & Hill, 2002). However, as Table 1 indicated, the lack of swing charts presented at the WA Schools Jazz Festival is of concern. The Lincoln Center (2011), Cowan (2007) and Massey (1999) state that the swing music of Count Basie and Duke Ellington should account for the majority of a bands repertoire because in both cases, the simple riffs and 'hard swing' of Basie and Ellington define the style. Any music by Sammy Nestico (Count Basie's arranger), or by Duke Ellington available through

the *Essentially Ellington* series can lay a solid stylistic foundation, and excellent arrangements of the music of these composers for junior bands are readily available (Massey, 1999; Cowan, 2007; Lincoln Center, 2011).

If affordable, both the Lincoln Center (2011) and Baker (1989) recommend the commissioning of new works as a way to generate interest and ownership. They state that students develop a sense of pride when performing works composed specifically for them and their school. When commissioning a work, directors can consult directly with the composer in relation to the type and style of the composition, as well as have it written to the strengths and weaknesses of the band (Lincoln Centre, 2011).

For inexperienced band directors, Cowan (2007) emphasises the importance of score preparation, especially comparing recordings with the written score. Thomas (2011) states that “Music is the best teacher of music” (p. 1). He also stresses the importance of knowing the score. He does not advocate memorizing the score but stresses the need to be familiar with who plays which part, particularly in relation to the roles of the various instruments within the ensemble.

However, central to the literature is the role of listening before students approach the rehearsal room. In order to play big band jazz, all authors agree that students must be familiar with the sound of it. Jazz is essentially an interpretive aural art form (Dunscob & Hill, 2002; Cowan, 2007; Lincoln Center, 2011). The Lincoln Center states that creating a jazz listening subculture that operates outside the rehearsal is central to the success of a program, and can ease the director’s sense of sole responsibility for the success of the band. This can be done in a number of simple ways:

- Relevant recorded examples
- Recommended listening lists
- Mentorship programmes

The Lincoln Center (2011) recommends compiling a general list of relevant songs / artists / bands for students to listen in their own time to immerse them in the sound, style and feel of big band jazz. Creating a borrowing library of recordings for students can also help promote awareness and stylistic understanding, as well as build a jazz subculture that operates outside the rehearsal venue.

In addition, the Lincoln Center (2011) advocates compiling listening lists specific to particular instruments. This can be particularly valuable for rhythm section players who may not have a strong swing feel or stylistic knowledge of the music. The director can source recordings which demonstrate the appropriate sound and encourage after hours ‘listening sessions’ where students get together and collectively listen to bands and players that are new to them. Rhythm section players in particular can be encouraged, where possible or practical, to play along with recordings and mimic every nuance and inflection they hear.

Often younger students will admire the older and more experienced players within the band, especially those who are more proficient improvisers (Lincoln Center, 2011). They observe that the creation of an active culture of listening and ‘jamming’ between members of the band can have positive results. Often older players feel empowered by mentoring programmes, as they take ownership of the musical development of younger players and the jazz program in general. Strategies involving the use of older players as mentors can relieve the pressure on the music director and lead to the development of a self-regulating ensemble whereby motivation to achieve comes from within the ensemble (Merrick, 2002). By utilising many of the fore-mentioned strategies, the literature suggests that much can be achieved before rehearsals start. Students bring a level of stylistic understanding born from listening and jamming to the rehearsal, allowing the director to focus on the chart and not just the style.



## Hitting the sound barrier - the rehearsal

### The importance of verbalising and shaping the phrase

Listening to recordings in rehearsals is also stressed (Lincoln Center, 2011; Dunscomb & Hill, 2002). They recommend listening to recordings that best demonstrate the style for the band to imitate at the start of rehearsals. If the recorded band is playing the same version of a piece, they suggest playing along after the first listening.

The authors note that there is a very distinctive shape to jazz swing phrasing. This is most evident in the improvisations of Charlie (Bird) Parker. Parker's phrasing and swing concept helped revolutionise the jazz language. When Parker improvised, there was a symmetry consistent in almost every idea he played. Parker used smooth, legato phrasing. However he often accented syncopated rhythms (off beats) with harder articulations. Also accented were the high-pitched notes of a phrase, with occasional unexpected 'pops' within phrases to create an air of unpredictability (Tanner, Megill & Greow, 1997). Figure 2 presents an excerpt in the style of a fast Parker solo, where the accents illustrate the unexpected 'pops' within the steady melodic line.

Figure 3 presents the same techniques in a slower context in the style of a slow Parker solo.

Big band phrasing is similar to the bebop music that succeeded it. Even though Parker's examples are from a different jazz era, big band music did not cease with the advent of bebop (Tanner, Megill & Gerow, 1997).

In rehearsal, Thomas (2011) and Carter (2011a) strongly advocate vocalisation of individual parts to ensure that each section within the big band phrases similarly. To this end, sung or spoken syllables and their articulation from the members of the horn section (trumpets, trombones, and saxophones) can play a huge part in the band's stylistic understanding. The Lincoln Center clinic stressed that knowledge of the subdivision and beat placement as well as understanding swing feel is essential. The clinic posed a question as to whether horn players were responsible for the rhythm or whether they were they responsible for the articulation of the rhythm, and emphasised that each member of the ensemble has a rhythmic responsibility. Liebman (2014), Thomas (2011) and Carter (2011a) also state that it is up to the horn players to determine note lengths and style based on their choice of articulation by emphasising note lengths (short and long) in a unified manner when undertaking section playing.

Thomas (2011) and Carter (2011a) recommend playing recordings to the band and asking members to sing their parts using jazz syllables, often referred to as 'scat singing'. Many students tend to express hard sounding first consonants (i.e., Ta ta, Ti ti, Tu tu, Ba ba, Be bop, etc) followed by vowels. 'Hard sounds' refers to consonants that need mouth formation in order to be expressed. They advocate using articulations relevant to the specific instrument. In jazz, this often equates to syllables which begin with the letter D. i.e. Du dat, Du de, du di, du dot, du dle, and du uh depending on the length of the note and how it should be articulated. Thomas (2011) summarises: "If you

Figure 2: Excerpt in the style of a fast Parker solo.



Figure 3: Excerpt in the style of a slow Parker solo.



can sing it, you can play it". Liebman (2014) notes an important feature of jazz articulation is that swing phrasing is frequently legato. Rarely will a professional improviser attack each swing phrase with hard articulation on every note. Figure 4 illustrates a typical jazz rhythm that a student may sing using hard consonants on downbeats.

Figure 5 presents the same example using softer consonants on the downbeats, with more articulate consonants on the upbeat, or 'and' of the beat.

Figure 4 highlights hard sounding consonants that require a lot of mouth movement to articulate. At a fast tempo, this can hinder the feel and length of each note. Not only does figure 5 allow for a smoother articulation style, it also accents the syncopated note on beat 1 'and' (dat) in the first bar, which is often a characteristic of jazz syncopation. This example also allows for a change in vowel sound at the end (wah) that indicates the end of the phrase. Thomas (2011) and Carter (2011a) both advocate teaching the syllables in a call and response style. Here, it is important for the director to over-emphasise the accented notes so that the horn players can sense the swing. Understanding swing is essential

to interpreting style. Loosely defined, swing is a product of two written eighth notes played as if they were triplets with the first two notes tied together, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Arguably the most difficult concept in jazz to teach, swing is its most important element (Lincoln Center, 2011; Liebman, 2014; Carter, 2011). One of Duke Ellington's famous compositions has become the mantra of jazz musicians, "It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing". Composed in 1931, this song was played in dance halls and 'swinging' (dancing) was its primary objective (Tanner, Megill & Gerow, 1997). The swing music tradition is so strong in this area that students performing it need to understand its dance origins. Carter (2011) maintains that in order for student musicians to be able to interpret and 'feel' the music, they must be able to move to it. To be able to move their body in time while playing is not necessarily a difficult concept to grasp. Carter (2011a) states it can be as simple as tapping the foot on the floor to the quarter note (crotchet) pulse, or using the entire body to move freely and move in time to the music whilst sitting or standing. He describes a valuable activity, which also enables the loosening of inhibitions, is having students stand and dance on

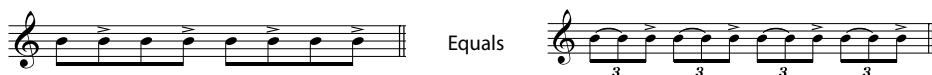
Figure 4: Typical student jazz phrase sung with hard consonants.



Figure 5: Same student big band phrase with softer consonants.



Figure 6: Traditional 'swing' interpretation for a traditionally trained director.



the spot' to the swing feel on a recording. He also advocates asking students to click their fingers on beats 2 and 4 while walking on the quarter note beat, and swinging the hips in a kind of 'relaxed march'. He states that this helps students realise the importance of the weak harmonic beats which give jazz its momentum.

## **Breaking the sound barrier - The Performance**

The literature describes the importance in performance of the stage being set the same way as it was during rehearsal (Lincoln Center, 2011; Dunscomb & Hill, 2002; Baker, 1989). Seemingly trivial, they stress the importance of keeping the same distance between musicians as it was during rehearsals to maintain eye contact and maximise interaction. In particular, the Lincoln Center (2011) notes that well-meaning stage managers can set the big band up to maximise stage layout in proportion to the stage and to create a visual display for the audience. This becomes problematic because the musicians tend to be spread out too far in order to hear and see each other properly. To compensate, well-meaning directors and audio technicians then amplify the band, taking balance and dynamics out of the band and the director's hands and into the hands of a sound technician potentially unfamiliar with big band sound reproduction.

The Lincoln Center (2011) also recommends that big bands perform with minimal or no sound amplification. In a best case scenario, the piano should be heard over the band; taking the top off the piano or directing the lid opening of a grand piano to the audience as well as to the horn section is recommended (Lincoln Center, 2011). Spiers (2009) states that if the bass player is competent, different grade strings can be used to achieve volume and depth of sound. In the case of electric bass, it is imperative that graphic equaliser (EQ) settings are not set too muddy (too much lower and middle range frequencies) and that the volume is not overpowering. With

regards the horn section, a solo microphone either out the front (which soloists walk to and solo into) or one in each section in which they stand and play into is enough (Lincoln Centre, 2011). If musicians are aware of the sound balance and mix in rehearsals then an effective balance on stage should be attainable. It must be remembered that big band jazz in its heyday contained minimal or no amplification.

The performance represents a 'coming together' of all the pre-rehearsal and rehearsal techniques. As one of the essences of jazz performance is the feel or 'groove', the Lincoln Center (2011) stresses the importance of the director being relaxed so the musicians can focus on and enjoy their performance. A key difference between the jazz director and other large ensembles is that the director should not conduct the band, unless it is a ballad or contains a rubato section. Each musician should be responsible for time keeping, and by this stage, the rhythm section should be cohesive and confident at delivering the groove. The Lincoln Center (2011), Cowan (2007) and Dunscomb and Hill (2002) state the director should count the band in and be confident in the ability of the players to deliver.

## **Aftermath - The Hang**

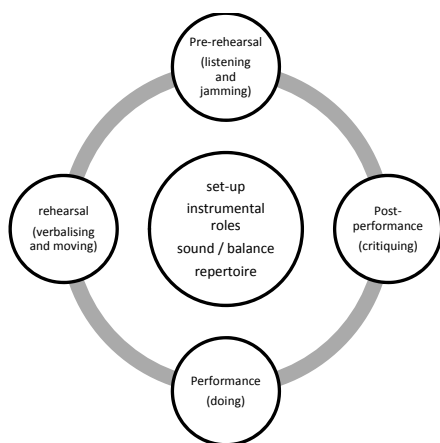
An essential part of the process is the analysis of the performance (Lincoln Center, 2011). Thomas (2011) and Carter (2011a) recommend not being overly critical, as this can undermine student confidence. Rather, they advocate recording performances, then sitting with the band at the first rehearsal after the performance and listening to it. They recommend asking the players to critique their own performance, listening for strengths as well as areas for improvement. The director's role is to remind players of how much they have progressed. Structurally, the authors recommend using the four fundamental elements: set-up, instrumental roles, sound and balance, and repertoire as starting points for performance critiquing.

## The jazz big band ensemble development model

The broad-ranging knowledge, strategies and approaches referred to in this review of the jazz big band educational literature are summarised in the model presented in figure 7. The model attempts to incorporate the diverse elements associated with pre-rehearsal, rehearsal, performance and post-performance into a simple coherent visualisation illustrating the interactions at each stage.

At the top of the model are the listening experiences students bring to the rehearsal through pre-rehearsal directed listening and mentored jamming, along with the director's understanding guided by their own directed listening and knowledge of big bands. The rehearsal process emphasises the importance of verbalising and moving as teaching strategies, leading to the performance and post-performance self-critiquing as part of an ongoing developmental cycle.

Central to the cycle is the director and student understanding the rationale behind the band set-up, the role of each instrument within the ensemble, the importance of correct sound and



balance, and the selection of repertoire, particularly quality swing-based charts. Given their emphasis in the literature, these concepts sit at the centre of the model as they are core to program development at all stages. Further, the literature notes the importance of explicitly communicating these concepts to students so they are aware not just of what they are doing, but why they are doing it.

The model is presented for both musical directors and students. Understanding the interrelationship between each component of the model gives a sense of purpose to the ensemble. When students are aware of their role within the ensemble and what they need to bring to the rehearsal, the burden is lessened on the musical director, leading to the potential for a self-regulated ensemble while maximising rehearsal time.

## Summary

In summary, this article has attempted to synthesize the diverse and somewhat sparse educational literature on school-based big bands with Lincoln Center clinic principles. In preparing the article, the authors were surprised by how little formal writing exists into jazz big band development. Despite this, they have been able to identify and describe four fundamentals on effective jazz band development, rehearsal and performance. Firstly, the article has summarised the literature surrounding band configuration. By getting this basic element correct, the director maximises the potential of the set-up, and by explaining each player's place in the ensemble, the players know who to listen out for and work with.

Secondly, the article has summarised the literature describing the role of each instrument within the ensemble. This may arguably be the most important point of all. A jazz big band is a relatively small ensemble. The literature recommends that directors take the time to explain to players their exact role within the ensemble, so students are aware and take responsibility for what they play.

Thirdly, the literature notes the importance of sound and balance. Players need to know the sound they should be aiming for, as jazz big band is a specialised ensemble. The literature recommends the creation of a listening library for both directors and students, and finally, the literature has highlighted the importance of repertoire with regard to 'conservative challenge'. Central to repertoire selection is an understanding that swing is at the core of the jazz idiom. Accordingly, swing should be an integral part of repertoire selection process, not peripheral, as it appears to be in many WA schools. Time needs to be taken to help students understand and develop the swing feel.

Further, the article has identified distinctive teaching strategies for big bands, through movement activities designed to help with understanding of the swing feel, through to vocalisation using softer 'D' syllables. Helping students understand swing feel and phrasing is key to an authentic sound.

This article has not considered the role of individual skill building within the ensemble such as the ability to improvise, but the authors recommend interested readers access John Kratus's (1995) seminal article. Nor has the article considered the structuring and interactions within the rehearsal itself. However, with adherence to the general principles drawn from the literature and set out in this article, the authors are confident that Jazz big band can become a valid educational experience rather than an ad hoc and sometimes musically unfulfilled extra in the school music program.

## Conclusion

In the authors' experience, most secondary schools in Western Australia have a jazz big band but few bands genuinely play jazz. Often the directors do the best they can but through no fault of their own may lack fundamental knowledge of the ensemble, its function, appropriate repertoire and performance conventions. Further, the ensemble is often a peripheral part of the extra-curricular school

music program. However, it appears an opportune time with the creation of the WACE Jazz Stream to build upon what already exists in schools. By utilising the principles outlined in this article and formalised in the model, and harnessing the willingness of the students, pressure can actually be taken off the musical director. The creation of student-lead listening groups and mentoring can free up time to concentrate the more 'important' aspects in rehearsal and ultimately lead to the development of a high quality, self-regulated and authentic sounding jazz big band.

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