

USING *STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE* JAZZ COMBO SESSION

INTRODUCTION

Standard of Excellence Jazz Combo Session is a collection of jazz compositions that can be played in a wide variety of “combo” settings. While much music published for young jazz players is written for the traditional jazz ensemble (a.k.a. big band), this collection addresses a need for materials that cut to the core of the jazz experience – playing in a combo.

A jazz combo can take on many different forms, but usually includes a **rhythm section** (piano and/or guitar, bass, drums, and sometimes vibes and/or auxiliary percussion) plus one or more woodwind, brass, or string instruments. The combination of instruments is left to your creativity and that of the players.

Historically, jazz combos have usually included between one and five instruments in addition to the rhythm section. Those instrument positions have traditionally been dominated by players of alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, and trumpet. This is unfortunate, since all instruments are capable and deserving of a place in a jazz combo. For this reason, *Standard of Excellence Jazz Combo Session* includes parts for all woodwind, brass, and string instruments, in addition to guitar, piano, bass, drums, and vibes.

REASONS FOR INCLUDING JAZZ COMBOS IN THE MUSIC CURRICULUM

In recent years, inclusion of the jazz ensemble as a part of the music curriculum has become more commonplace, especially at the high school and college levels. Unfortunately, the value and importance of jazz combos has gone relatively unrecognized, and their place in the curriculum has been far less frequently endorsed. There are several reasons that the pattern of overlooking the jazz combo should change:

- ◆ Jazz combos allow all instrumentalists to effectively experience and participate in jazz. Traditionally, the school jazz curriculum has consisted primarily of rehearsing and performing charts with a full jazz ensemble. Only students playing saxophone, trumpet, trombone, or a rhythm section instrument could easily participate. Combos eliminate this bias against certain instruments.
- ◆ Throughout its history, jazz has been performed and recorded more often in a combo setting than any other. Including combos in the curriculum gives students the opportunity to experience jazz in a historically significant context at its most basic, core level.
- ◆ The importance of improvisation as a part of every student’s musical experience is becoming increasingly recognized. Jazz combo playing relies heavily on improvisation. Even limited listening to combo recordings reveals that the majority of a performance consists of improvised solos. Jazz combos are flexible by design, making them the perfect environment for teaching improvisation to every student.
- ◆ Much like playing in any other chamber music ensemble, playing in a jazz combo develops students’ confidence, self-esteem, independence, and creativity in ways impossible to capture in larger ensembles.
- ◆ Jazz combos provide an effective means of teaching jazz in settings where full jazz ensemble classes are impractical, whether it be due to limited or unbalanced instrumentation, uncommon instrument combinations, uneven levels of student proficiency, or other restrictions relating to space, budget, or schedule.
- ◆ Jazz combos provide an exceptional public relations/outreach vehicle for a music and arts programs. They are highly “portable” and can function in a wide range of social and performance environments, providing outstanding music and arts exposure, both within the school and in the greater community.

PREREQUISITES

Standard of Excellence Jazz Combo Session is designed to be used by students who have completed at least a Book 2 of a comprehensive method for their particular instrument, and who are comfortable playing in concert keys with up to four flats, as well as Concert C major. Neither familiarity with jazz theory nor previous jazz performance experience is required of students. All necessary jazz information is provided within *Jazz Combo Session*. In addition, throughout *Jazz Combo Session*, supplemental tutorial references are made to the *Standard of Excellence Jazz Ensemble Method*, by Dean Sorenson and Bruce Pearson, providing a wealth of additional jazz-related insight, knowledge, and advice.

While students with no jazz experience may successfully perform the *Jazz Combo Session* tunes, the book is also an ideal supplement to any beginning jazz method or stand-alone jazz performance literature, and is a valuable tool for any intermediate player wishing to sharpen his or her individual jazz performance skills, particularly in the arena of improvisation.

As is the case with students, directors need not possess any particular jazz knowledge or experience to successfully teach the *Jazz Combo Session* materials. Director tips, Rehearsal Suggestions, and Activities for Excellence are included throughout the score, providing materials designed to help you enrich students' jazz experience and better utilize the material included in *Jazz Combo Session*.

TUNE ELEMENTS AND ORGANIZATION

The form of each *Jazz Combo Session* tune provides an accurate model of the performance practices used by jazz combo musicians. Typically in a jam session, the melody, or **head**, is played, sometimes accompanied by a harmony part. An open solo section follows the head. When all players wishing to improvise have completed their solos, the head is played again. Even with the addition of an introduction and/or **extended** (lengthened) ending, the basic **head-solo-head form** is retained. This same form is used for each *Jazz Combo Session* tune.

Only a single scale is required for improvisation during the open solo sections in *Jazz Combo Session*. The scale provides the pitch set to which students can apply rhythms, articulations, and dynamics. By limiting the improvisation pitch set for each tune to a single scale, students can concentrate on using their ears, rather than jazz theory, to create interesting, musical solos. The required scale is included in the first measure of each solo section.

The basic style, harmonic structure, and rhythm section groove of each *Jazz Combo Session* tune is drawn from a particular selection in the *Standard of Excellence Jazz Ensemble Method*. As in the *Jazz Ensemble Method*, the tunes are sequenced according to style: rock, swing, and Latin. Inexperienced jazz students will typically be most comfortable and have the greatest initial success with the rock style and its even subdivisions of the beat. Therefore, when playing the tunes with students relatively new to jazz, studying and performing the *Jazz Combo Session* tunes sequentially may prove beneficial.

Mix A 5

Rhythm section with
right channel MELODY
left channel HARMONY

Mix B 6

Rhythm section only

MILO ON THE MIDWAY

Rock $\text{♩} = 120-126$

MELODY

HARMONY

MELODY

HARMONY

ACCOMPANIMENT

QUIAR

PIANO

BASS

DRUMS

MELODY

HARMONY

MELODY

HARMONY

ACCOMPANIMENT

QUIAR

PIANO

BASS

DRUMS

Chords: Cmi7, Bb, Cmi, Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Cmi, Bb

Chords: Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Cmi, Bb/D

Chords: Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Cmi, Bb/D

Chords: Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Bb, Cmi, Cmi, Bb/D

Drums: CLOSED H.H., FILL

Performance markings: SIMILE, FILL