

# Grow Your Jazz Students with Structured Listening

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**Introduction** – All jazz directors have probably told their students, “You need to listen more.”

- This session will demonstrate various examples of how to use listening for greater growth. You can be structured with your approach, and efficient with your use of time.
- This session will also give you some information about a new resource, *Listening Excerpts to Develop Jazz Musicianship*, which will make teaching jazz easier for new and experienced instructors.

**About the resource** – *Listening Excerpts to Develop Jazz Musicianship* contains numerous tables of listening excerpts, grouped by teaching concepts and topics. It has a similar set-up to my first book, *Listening Excerpts to Develop Band Musicianship*, except I included teaching advice for novice teachers.

- I know there are many directors out there who feel the need to teach jazz, but did not play jazz as a student. Please encourage them.
- Playlists on **Spotify** and **YouTube** for every table to help all directors find music quickly, and supply links to students.
- My resource book can save you a lot of time by providing an organized listing of excerpts that you do not have to search for yourself. However, there are many more great recordings. I left blank rows at the end of each table for you to add excerpts. The far-right column is there for your comments.

**Find your voice** – A large consideration for jazz performers is their voice or sound, and their approach to improvisation. There is a noticeable difference between certain icon artists. So, how can you use listening to help your students find their voice?

- The first tables within the resource are for saxes of all sizes, trumpets/flugelhorns, trombones, and rhythm section players. For saxophonists, there are examples by Jay Beckenstein, Stan Getz, Branford Marsalis and more.
- Saxophone example - You could share a variety of links to recordings by many artists for your students to listen to on their time. However, I recommend isolating and contrasting two artists. For example, Art Pepper versus Cannonball Adderley.
- The amount of listening time to do this is longer. So, it will save rehearsal time if they listen to these at home.

- In a rehearsal, play a short excerpt of each artist to remind them of their unique sound. Then have a brief discussion of how they are different, and which approach they prefer.
- This will start and/or facilitate the process of your students finding their voice.
- Will they listen? Model enthusiasm. If they taste listening, they will develop an appetite.

### **Organizational and set-up issues**

- You have a limited amount of time to devote to listening in rehearsals. So, have a method to share links. (Google contacts labels for emailing. Google Classroom.)
- If you have music saved in Apple Music App, you can attach pieces directly without using Spotify or YouTube.
- How about when you want to listen in a rehearsal or lesson. The set-up in my room uses a nice stereo system with 100+ watt speakers. I have music uploaded into the Apple Music App on my MacBook. Everything is close to my podium.
- I have a small system in my office with Presonus stereo monitors. It is affordable, and could work in an average sized band room.

### **3 STEPS TO EFFICIENT LISTENING** (especially in rehearsals)

- o Tell them what to listen for.
- o Use gestures or verbal cueing during listening.
- o You may want to discuss technical or performance issues after listening.

**Optional additional examples for finding your voice** – Some might ask, “Why do the saxes get all of the attention?” We could do the exercise with trumpets.

- Compare Clark Terry to Clifford Brown.

**Rhythm Section** – Another example of structured listening that would best be done by sharing links, is helping rhythm section players understand their role. Discussion with listening is the most beneficial.

- It would be great to have each student in the rhythm section listen to many artists who play their instrument.
- This can be done for vocalists also, if you incorporate them into your program.

- Shorter excerpts can be used in rehearsal to facilitate discussion after students have done their listening.

**Related example is drum comping** – An essential part of making your rhythm section sound authentic and effective is teaching your set player about fills, kicks and comping.

- I use those 3 terms to differentiate between the function and placement of drum insertions. My terminology in rehearsals is;
  - o Fills are usually between phrases or during sizable gaps.
  - o Kicks are short gestures that help prominent entrances or accents.
  - o Comping can be a general term for all drum insertions, but specifically are interactions with melodies, soloists or soli groups.
- You don't have to agree with my use of terminology, but you will want to have conversations with your drummers, and you will need terms that they can understand.
- Listening in rehearsals can be used to grow their conceptualization. As the students are listening, I would point out comps that the artist used. I even pause and repeat parts of excerpts to make sure my drummer hears the comps.

**Comparing genres** – Students cannot play the various genres of jazz with the same approach. Listening will help, but structured listening combined with instruction will help your students make the transition from genre to genre.

- You can send links of pieces in different genres to your students ahead of time so they can listen to them for a longer period of time. You can tell them to compare and contrast the different genres. In a rehearsal, you can play brief reminders, and discuss what makes each genre distinct.
- Do you ever hear your students playing a shuffle and think, "Why is that so heavy?" By listening and comparing swing tunes to a shuffle, you can illustrate the difference in the subdivision, and the speed and intensity of the off-beat notes.
- While playing Latin charts, your students need to adjust the length of short notes and maybe the amount of emphasis, depending on the Latin genre.
- They may instinctively get it, but you may have to discuss what they need to do with their technique.
- To play Latin charts well, you may need to listen to and discuss the clave accent pattern with your rhythm section players.

**Various teaching concepts** – Not all structured listening will or should start with links sent home. There are many performance aspects that will arise in a rehearsal, and you

will want to deal with them while the issue is at the forefront. Check the table of contents to see the various teaching concepts I have included.

- To help your students sound more authentic as jazz performers you will want them to incorporate **jazz tricks** or effects into their playing. You might be satisfied if they just add some scoops or bends. You will probably want them to attempt some more challenging tricks.
  - o **Squeeze**
  - o **Doit (Play Dolphin Dance, 2:43)**
  - o **Rips**
  - o **Turns**
- **Fall-offs** are not as easy as you might think. Students need to let the written note sound briefly before they fall. The fall-off should disappear like a shooting star, not land on a specific pitch.
- **Growls**. Let them hear some. Describing a growl with mere words is not the best way to teach that trick.
- **Fat notes**. They have to flip the switch on their concert band articulations.
- **Soft shout choruses**. Often students will lose all of the stylistic energy when attempting a soft shout chorus. **(Play Moten Swing, 3:00)**
- **Wailing**. Is it done with great power, presence and pleasing effect, or do your students sound like a tacky, out of control pep band? **(Play Splanky, 1:47)**

**Closing remarks** – We have only scratched the surface. Hopefully you can see the possibilities, and hopefully the resource will make your job easier. I know you all believe listening to great jazz artists is critical. Give that listening some structure. Put, right in front of them, what you know to be great recordings. Don't just hope they find them. Make it happen, and discuss what is noteworthy. (Pun intended) Thank you for your time and attention. I will be available and excited to talk with you after the session.

## **Listening Excerpts to Develop Jazz Musicianship**

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*Art Pepper Meets the Rhythm Section*  
*The Art Pepper Quartet*  
*Basie Straight Ahead*, Count Basie  
*The Beginning and the End*, Clifford Brown  
*The Best of Spyro Gyra; The First Ten Years*  
*Big Band Basie*, DePaul University Jazz Ensemble 1 with Clark Terry and Frank Wess  
*Big Swing Face*, The Buddy Rich Big Band  
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*'Bone Straight Ahead*, Bill Watrous with Danny Stiles  
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*Empyrean Isles*, Herbie Hancock  
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*Got the Magic*, Spyro Gyra  
*The Great Kai and J.J.*  
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Chucho Valdés  
*Jazz at Lincoln Center Presents; The Fire of the Fundamentals*  
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*Teaching Music through Performance in Jazz*, for Beginning Ensembles,  
 Bryan Carter Big Band  
*Teaching Music through Performance in Jazz*, Volume 2, Bryan Carter  
 Big Band  
*Tower of Power Live*  
*The Trumpet Summit Meets the Oscar Peterson Big Four*  
*The Very Best of Spyro Gyra*  
*Woody Herman, The New Thundering Herd, Featuring Stan Getz*  
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