

Dear PMEA All-State Jazz Band Member,

Congratulations on your successful audition and being selected for the 2023 PMEA All-State Jazz Band! I am very excited to get to know you and work together with you to create a great performance!

A little background information about me (I will try to be brief!): I grew up outside of Scranton PA in a small town called Chinchilla. I was surrounded by music from a young age as my mom is the music director at the University of Scranton. Wynton Marsalis mentored me from the age of 13 and I would travel to NYC regularly to take lessons and join him on the road to sit in on concerts. I was very involved in PMEA festivals throughout high school and they had a huge impact on my continuing love for music. I eventually went to the Juilliard School of Music and got my Bachelors Degree. I then freelanced playing around NYC for a while and eventually ended up as the lead trumpet player in the Grammy Award winning ensemble, Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks, an 11-piece band which specializes in the music of the 1920's and 30's.

My reasoning for programming these specific pieces (aside from them being tons of fun to listen to and play) is to demonstrate the evolution of big-band music from the early 30's, and show how, throughout all of its changes, certain key elements remained essential in maintaining the music's esthetic and spiritual continuity.

I am very passionate about the selections I've programmed for this concert; through my years of playing in high school and college, they were some of my favorites and I hope they will become yours too!

Ok, now down to business...

Please, please, PLEASE listen to these tracks in addition to practicing your parts. You cannot learn to play jazz without listening; it would be like trying to speak a language without ever hearing a word spoken. Always start with listening, then move on to your instruments and the written music. Pay attention to the details and inflections; Try to get the right "accent".

**-Symphony in Riffs** (Benny Carter- 1933)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3CAuw5QZqY>

This tune is PEPPY! It's all about that bounce and lightness, and keeping the beat moving forward. DO NOT DRAG THE TIME! Fast vibrato is a MUST on this chart.

Saxes- Note the juxtaposition between slurring and articulating. This is very important to get the style right.

Trumpets- Take note of how short the staccato is. The brass are the artillery of the band on this one!

Trombones- (same as trumpets)

Rhythm section- 2-beat, play "on top" of the beat. Listen to the recording and try to capture that propulsive feeling that the horns can ride on top of. Think "perpetual motion machine"!

Solos- try to capture the "language" and "accent" of the era; Practice along with the recording!

**-Harlem Air Shaft** (Duke Ellington- 1940)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-j7SD9juw14>

CONTRAST is the theme of this tune. Dynamics, vibrato, articulation, INTENSITY, the interplay between sections (when your section is leading vs supporting).

Saxes- Really bring out the difference between "hot" and relaxed moments. VIBRATO!

Trumpets- Very bouncy and light with rhythms, but intense at all dynamic ranges.

Trombones- You are often independent from the trumpets and have your own moments to shine on this one. Bring them out!

Rhythm section- 4-beat but still play with forward motion to the beat. Set up the horns for the contrasting sections, especially with dynamic shifts.

Solos- Think of yourself almost as a “co-composer” to the piece; play in a way that works well and contributes with the structure and the backgrounds. Don’t just play “whatever”, or treat the chord changes as a separate thing from the surrounding music.

\* Most if not all of the section notes above are relevant to all the charts. LISTEN! \*

**-Blues in Hoss Flat** (Frank Foster- 1958)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjflL1ZJoB8>

This one has a different, more “laid back” feeling and style, but don’t be misled. There’s a swagger to the rhythm, but it is still very important to not let the beat feel stagnant or like it’s falling behind. The rhythm section needs to create that constant propulsive groove for the band to ride on top of so as to keep it dancing feeling. Horns should note which moments have no vibrato, slower/wider vibrato, and fast vibrato, and how they are used to create different textures and feelings in the music.

**-Dont Git Sassy** (Thad Jones- 1968)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjAt9AfHQrE>

Thad Jones originally played in and wrote for Count Basie’s band, so there are a lot of similarities to the way the Basie band played esthetically and rhythmically. Thad developed a very unique harmonic concept, using thick and dissonant chord voicings with a more shuffle/heavy swing oriented rhythmic feeling. Mainly no/slower and wider vibrato used here.

**-Chelsea Bridge** (Billy Strayhorn- 1941)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKRRH1BtWQY>

BALANCE! This is a beautiful walking ballad; Very sophisticated and complex harmonic ideas requiring subtle yet expressive control from the band. Work on being able to play SOFT but powerful. Notice the impact that vibrato, dynamics, and phrasing can have and utilize it to create a dramatic and emotional performance.

**-The Lady in the Window** (Nate Sparks): ~5:00

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzknL7b9kJ8>

Nate was a student at Juilliard with me and is a genius writer and arranger. He was very influenced by Duke Ellington, so it is important to keep that influence in mind when interpreting this piece.

**-Purple Gazelle** (Duke Ellington 1963)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnBaSZnNbZA>

This tune is my favorite, it incorporates a little bit of everything from the whole history of jazz (and all the notes I’ve given thus far...). Listen intently, interpret thoughtfully, and HAVE FUN!

**-It Don’t Mean A Thing** (Arr. Mike Carubia)

This is our combined number we’ll be performing with All-State Jazz Choir. Bring the same energy as you brought to the other charts. Play with the same style as an original Duke Ellington chart to bring that extra “life” to the music!

-Joseph Boga  
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