



## Pennsylvania Music Educators Association

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Dear PMEA All-State Jazz Ensemble Member,

Congratulations on being selected to perform in the 2026 PMEA All-State Jazz Ensemble, April 22-25, 2026, in the Poconos. This is an honor to be selected and is a testament to your hard work and dedication throughout your musical journey. I am very much looking forward to the opportunity to work with you this year.

My name is Dr. Paul Bratcher, and I am originally from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I was a band kid who caught the jazz bug in high school. Since then, Jazz has become a large part of my professional life, taking me all over the world and giving me opportunities to share this music with others and have lots of fun along the way. I am very much looking forward to working with the PMEA All-State students. Conductor expectations of the Ensemble, including student commitment and dedication to music excellence, to ensure the music is prepared before you arrive for rehearsal.

I'd like to share a bit about the pieces I've chosen and any changes or reference points I have in mind as you prepare. [Jody Grind](#) is a groovy [Horace Silver tune](#). Horace Silver was an original member of the Jazz Messengers and had a talent for writing tuneful and memorable melodies. This arrangement was done by the great John Clayton, a master in his own right. It has a lot of space for solos over a pretty hip Boogaloo groove. If you play trombone, plan to have some space to solo on this one. For the rhythm section, consider this groove a starting point. We will talk more about variations and ways to open up the feel while still staying true to the style. Some other places to listen would be [Oliver Nelson's Critics' Choice](#) and [Joe Henderson's Mamacita](#). All of these are coming from the same space rhythmically, but show the wide range of avenues you can take on the tune like this.

Groove is a swinging original written by Oliver Nelson. The tune opens with a sax figure led by the bari sax. The key to this tune is to swing and listen to the note lengths in the record, paying close attention to the back sides of the beat. What type of cut-off is happening, and how do I get it to sound that way? The arrangement we are playing was made famous on this [Maynard Ferguson recording](#). I'd like to play this slightly slower than him, but with the same bounce and spirit. The tune is loosely based on rhythm changes with a slightly different bridge. While this was a feature for Maynard, we will also spread around solos on this one. The background and shout choruses are great places to start for insights on how the harmony is approached as an improviser and phrases that could make their way into a good solo. For more guidance on blowing over rhythm changes, here are two of my favorites. There are obviously many different options and players. I think these two do a good job of demonstrating how rhythm and simplicity can work together to make some great lines over a tune like this. [Barry Harris, Moose the Mooche](#), and [Sonny Stitt on Lester Leaps In](#).

[Tell Me a Bedtime Story](#) by Herbie Hancock was one of the first pieces I heard from Herbie Hancock after Watermelon Man. It is from his album Fat Albert Rotunda. The music was originally used in an old tv show called Fat Albert. It is groovy and lends itself to the sounds of the 70s. [This Alan Baylock arrangement](#) does the original justice. If you have time, I'd also check out Herbie's prior record, [The Prisoner](#). Harmonically and rhythmically, this is the direction that Herbie was headed in, so it will give your playing a bit more context as you play. While the Baylock recording I sent gives you an idea of the arrangement, don't lock too hard into how the drummer is playing. Our groove is going to live somewhere between the arrangement and the original, which is why the best way to prepare is to listen to the [Fat Albert Rotunda](#) and the Prisoner. Watch

out for the 5/4 bars in this piece. The background figure is not difficult, but it is a part of the solo section as well, so you'll want to practice improvising over it. I'd also recommend playing over the original track as a way to prepare.

[Bayou Farewell](#) is a piece written by a good friend of mine, and trumpet player in the U.S. Army Blues Band, Graham Breedlove. He wrote the tune as a tribute to Louisiana after the devastating floods from Hurricane Katrina. The piece opens with a piano solo upfront and features the flugelhorn. Our arrangement will change the groove slightly. Rhythm Section, instead of the power ballad you hear in the live recording above, I'd like you to focus on a different feel. This is called a Poinciana, which comes from the famous recording by [Ahamad Jamal's Live at the Pershing](#). It is still inspired by the New Orleans second line but updated. **This version of [Taking a Chance on Love by Terrell Stafford](#) is where we will get our groove from.** Please be sure to check out the first section as well as the variation that happens on the bridge and in the solo sections. For this groove to work, bass and drums have to be on the same page.

The final piece will be Tiger Rag another piece from New Orleans. Our arrangement is based on Nicholas Payton's recording on Dear Luis, which is his tribute to his hometown hero, Luis Armstrong. This piece is considered a staple in Traditional Jazz Repertoire bands. Here is an example of the original in a Trad Jazz style by the [Original Dixie Land Jazz Band](#). Listen for how the different instruments work together in a polyphonic way, especially the front line. Here is [Nicholas Payton's arrangement](#). I'd like to do the opening call from Nick, this will not be in the music. The lead trumpet will have to learn that section by ear, the rest I'll teach when we get there. The trombone 4 part is responsible for the tuba line you hear on the recording. I'd like to double the tuba part in the bass. Bass will receive both the part for the tuba and bass. You'll primarily play the tuba part and can switch back to the bass part just for the trombone solo section (second solo section). My recommendation would be if you are comfortable improvising a bass line, write the solos section changes in the tuba part, and know you'll have some flexibility there. Instead of the tuba acrobatics you hear after the trombone solo at 4:30, this will be an open drum solo in a New Orleans style. From here, we will build it back, bringing everyone in the way you hear on the recording.

I am looking forward to working with you all and hope you can find something in the program that resonates with you. If you have questions, please let me know. I am happy to help clarify things if needed.

Keep Swingin,



Dr. Paul Bratcher