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Adjudicating a Jazz Performance by Brian Lillos

I have some advice about adjudicating. Many of the ensembles that you will hear at a festival rehearse co-curricularly. Some as infrequently as once per week. (Jazz studies programs are rare at the high school level.) Students will often have a director that knows more about Concert Band than Jazz Band.

Sometimes the teacher will be insecure about their skills and, when provoked, quite defensive. **BE POSITIVE!** Be an advocate for the art form. Do not patronize or be sarcastic. Share your knowledge and expertise in an enthusiastic, energetic and honest manner. Your twenty minutes with a group of young people can significantly influence them and their artistic careers or how they perceive art and creativity for the rest of their lives. However, don't let being nice change your grade. An ensemble that has earned a 75% is still a 75% ensemble. The ensemble deserves a great clinic from you and deserve to know how to become an 85% band. But, today they are a 75%.

This is a serious tight-rope on which to walk. To reinforce the aforementioned, I employ two more rules: for every negative I find a positive (that is, when I criticize something, I have to also say something I liked about their performance); when I criticize something about their performance, I have to show them how to fix it. With some ensembles this is very easy and with some it can be a challenge. But if I try and balance the positives and the negatives it tends to lead to more learning and jazz advocacy. I also include a handout to each group which tries to explain some of the things I'm listening for (my frame of reference.)

Lastly, when you are at the adjudicating table please be discreet - you are in full view of the parents, teachers, performers, school administrators, chaperones, and the press. In these situations context is everything. Your body language can be interpreted positively or negatively. Don't tell the joke about the Siamese twins and the trombone player because if you laugh, the honoured guests and the students may think you're laughing at their performance. Context is everything. Be professional, be discreet, and remember what it was like when you were on the other side of the table. Save all that for the "hang" after.

I have enclosed the handout I use when adjudicating. You may find it helpful to develop your own criteria. I've also enclosed adjudication forms from our National Festival. Please make 10 copies of each. When we attend the regional festivals in February and March you will be expected to do 10 adjudications for the instrumental jazz festival and 10 for the vocal jazz festival.

Lastly, when adjudicating, make it a positive "vibe". The days are usually long. You are hired because you have magical ears and are a respected professional performer, composer, and educator. Hearing 10 hours of sound can exhaust you. The ensembles you'll hear are in a developmental stage and hearing that much development can be exhausting. Keep it positive!



Dear Colleague:

Please find attached a list of criteria I use when listening to a jazz ensemble (Big Band). While it is by no means complete it should provide my frame of reference and place my comments in a better context.

I enjoyed hearing your group and hope you gained something worthwhile from my adjudication. If I can be of further assistance explaining my adjudication, please don't hesitate to contact me at brianlillos.com

Sincerely,

Brian Lillos, Professor
Jazz Studies
Humber College, Toronto, Canada

ADJUDICATION CRITERIA

Ensemble

1. Quality of Sound

- tone (level of development and maturity)

2. Balance

- overall
- within sections (horns)
- within rhythm section
- between sections
- between R.S. and horns
- concept of Δ
- are extreme dimensions of ensemble audible and in tune?
- are inside voices of ensemble audible and in tune?
- are the players staying inside the dimensions of band Δ
- does the balance stay intact or is it distorted when moved through different volume levels?
- concept of ensemble "sparkle"



3. Blend

- match sounds
- section "Ring"

4. Intonation

- individual
- by section
- full ensemble
- at different dynamic levels
- unison/octaves/chords

5. Dynamics - musical use of dynamics re: shaping phrases, climax of chart contrasting sections

- are dynamics misused: overdone, beyond context of piece, superficially imposed rather than musically enhance?
- shading, expression, sensitivity behind soloist
- energy level of band at different dynamic levels
- time of band at different dynamic levels

6. Precision

- attacks
- releases +, -
- articulation
- rhythmic figures

7. Technique

- facility (individual)
- facility (ensemble)
- level of development

8. Is the Ensemble Listening to One Another?

9. Is the Ensemble Sound (Δ) Understood?

10. Control

Interpretation of Style

1. Phrasing -

- concept of style: does it swing, bop, rock, funk, bossa, etc. (is the jazz language understood?)
- are phrases connected?
- are phrases smooth and flowing? Ei, a concept of forward motion is place
- are phrases stiff and vertical?

2. Time

- rushing
- dragging

3. Rhythm Section - drum feel

- drum support, preparation and fills
- guitar and piano fills and punctuation
- bass kicks, punctuation, turnarounds
- R.S. punctuation
- R.S. energy behind band
- R.S. energy behind solos
- R.S. communication with horns
- R.S. communication with one another
- Horns playing off R.S.
- Textures
- R.S. Musical Leadership

4. Shape of ensemble Pyramid

- does shape of Δ suit composer's style

5. Musical Emotion

- feel
- groove
- intensity
- energy
- spontaneity
- is the soul or spirit of the music understood?

Soloists

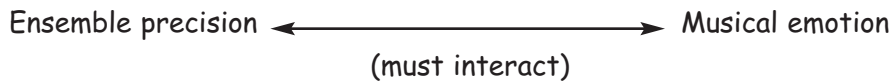
- style
- tone quality
- rhythmic drive and energy
- projection
- musical confidence
- written solo
- improvised solo
- inside changes
- quality of melodic/motivic development
- quality of rhythmic/motivic development
- level of harmonic understanding
- Structure : cadence points; climax; tells a story

- emotion (mood)
- energy level
- spontaneity
- excitement
- communication with audience
- communication and interaction with R.S.

Musical Confidence and Presentation

- body language
- smiles
- can the band visually display some of its musical emotion (energy)
- and heighten the musical excitement

Summary of Synthesis



- Usually a band is technically correct (notes) or emotionally correct (jazz spirit). Seldom does an ensemble do both, even at the PROFESSIONAL LEVEL.
- Seldom does an entire band become one (an organism) and get far enough past the notes to express its musical emotion artistically.



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INSTRUMENTAL JAZZ DIVISION

SELECTIONS:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

ADJUDICATOR: _____

STANDARD: _____

Weak Strong

ENSEMBLE	OVERALL MUSICALITY			
	PHRASING			
	DYNAMICS			
	STYLE			
	BLEND			
	BALANCE			
	INTONATION			
	NUANCES			
ACCURACY	RHYTHM			
	ATTACKS			
	RELEASES			
	TEMPO			
RHYTHM SECTION	TEMPO			
	STYLE			
	COMPING			
	HARMONIES			
	VOICINGS			
SOLOISTS	IMPROVISATION			
	STYLE			
	PHRASING			
	ORIGINALITY			
REPERTOIRE	CHOICE			
	LEVEL			

INSTRUMENTAL JAZZ DIVISION 2005

COMMENTS / SUGGESTIONS:

SELECTION #1:

SELECTION #2:

SELECTION #3:

Overall Rating

Adjudicator

100 Historically Significant Recordings

A

Adderley, Cannonball - Cannonball & Coltrane
Adderley, Cannonball - Something Else
Ammond, Gene - Boss Tenors

B

Basie, Count - Kansas City 7
Blakey, Art - A Night at Birdland Volume I
Blakey, Art - A Night at Birdland Volume II
Blakey, Art - Moanin
Blakey, Art - Ugetsu
Brown, Clifford - Study in Brown
Brown, Clifford - Brown Roach Inc.
Brown, Clifford - More Study in Brown
Brubeck, David - Time Out
Burrell, Kenny - Kenny Burrell and John Coltrane

C

Christy, June - The Misty Miss Christy
Christy, June - Something Cool
Clark, Sonny - Leapin' and Lopin'
Coltrane, John - Blue Train
Coltrane, John - Giant Steps
Coltrane, John - A Love Supreme
Coltrane, John - Ballads
Coltrane, John - John Coltrane & Johnny Hartman
Coltrane, John - Mainstream 1958
Corea, Chick - Now He Sings Now He Sobs

D

Davis, Miles - Kind of Blue
Davis, Miles - Cookin'
Davis, Miles - Milestones
Davis, Miles - Relaxin' With Miles
Davis, Miles - Rond About Midnight
Davis, Miles - Steamin' With Miles Davis
Dolphy, Eric - Out to Lunch
Dorham, Kenny - Una Mas

E

Elington, Duke - Money Jungle
Evans, Bill - Intermodulation
Evans, Bill - Sunday at The Village Vanguard
Evans, Bill - Undercurrent
Evans, Bill - WaltzFor Debby

F

Farmer, Art - Modern Art
Fitzgerald, Ella - At The Opera House
Fontana, Carl - 5 Star Ed
Fontana, Carl - The Great Fontana

G

Garland, Red - Groovy
Garner, Erroll - Concert by the Sea
Getz, Stan - For Musician's Only
Getz, Stan - Stan Getz & Bill Evans
Gillespie, Dizzy - Duets
Gillespie, Dizzy - Groovin High
Gillespie, Dizzy - Jazz At Massey Hall
Gillespie, Dizzy - Sony Side Up
Golson, Benny - New York Scene
Gordon, Dexter - Ballads
Green, Grant - Idle Moments
Green, Grant - Born to be Blue
Green, Grant - Feelin' the Spirit
Griffin, Johnny - A Brown Session
Griffin, Johnny - Introducing

H/I

Hampton, Slide - World of Trombones
Hancock, Herbie - Maiden Voyage
Hartman, Johnny - I just Dropped By To Say Hello
Henderson, Joe - Inner Urge
Henderson, Joe - In 'n Out
Henderson, Joe - Lush Life, The Music of Billy Strayhorn
Henderson, Joe - Mode For Joe
Henderson, Joe - Page One

Herman, Woody - Keeper of the Flame
Hubbard, Freddie - Hub Tones
Hubbard, Freddie - Red Clay

J

Jackson, Milt - Bags Meets Wes
Johnson, J.J. - The Eminent J.J. Johnson Volume I

K /L

Kenton, Stan - Duet
Konitz, Lee - Subconsscious - Lee

M

Mitchell, Blue - The Thing To Do
Mobley, Hank - Soul Station
Mobley, Hank - The Turnaround
Mon, Thelonious - With John Coltrane
Montgomery, Wes - Smokin at the Half Note
Montgomery, Wes - Full House
Montgomery, Wes - Incredible Jazz Guitar
Morgan, Lee - Cornbread
Morgan, Lee - The Sidewinder

N/O

Nelson, Oliver - Blues and the Abstract Truth

P/Q

Parker, Charlie - Bird & Diz
Parker, Charlie - Now's The Time
Peterson, Oscar - Plays Cont Basie
Powell, Bud - The Amazing Volume I
Powell, Bud - The Genius Of

R

Rollins, Sonny - Plus Four
Rollins, Sonny - Saxophone Collossus
Rollins, Sonny - Tenor Madness
Rosolino, Frank - Free For All

S

Shorter, Wayne - Speak No Evil
Silver, Horace - Song for My Father
Silver, Horace - Blowin' The Blues Away
Smith, Johnny - Moonlight in Vermont
Smith, Johnny - Back The Chicken Shack
Stitt, Sonny - Constellation
Stitt, Sonny - Stitt/Powell/Johnson

T/U/V

Turrentine, Stanley - Sugar
Tyner, McCoy - The Real McCoy

W/X

Wilson, Nancy - With Cannonball Adderley

Y/Z

Young, Lester - The President Plays With The Oscar Peterson Trio

*Brian Lillos can be reached at
www.brianlillos.com*