PRACTICAL TIPS FOR YOUR JAZZ RHYTHM SECTION

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FEATURING STUDENTS FROM THE BUTLER UNIVERSITY JAZZ COMBO PROGRAM

Indiana Music Educators Association Convention
January 20, 2012
Fort Wayne, IN
10:30am
INTRODUCTION

The rhythm section is the engine of the band. Directors who invest time in their rhythm section are rewarded with a band whose potential to groove hard is much higher. Listed below are a few common problems that I have observed in clinic, festival and concert situations. The solutions are a compilation of suggestions from masters on those particular instruments.

These techniques can be helpful in daily teaching situations. However, the techniques should be augmented by regular visits to your school from the best that you can find and afford on each given instrument. Countless technical issues can be solved by a clear visual or aural demonstration.

Helping our students listen to and imitate great music should always be a primary goal as jazz educators. The techniques won’t do much good if your students are not engaged in listening to the music. In a sense, if your rhythm section can have a “garage band” mentality combined with the ability to read music, you have the best of both worlds and the potential for a really swingin’ band.

COMMON ISSUES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

BASS
- Weak tone/attack: Quarter trick (demo), YouTube
- Over-amplification: All acoustic
- Bass line construction: Methodical written approach (example 1), transcription (example 2)

DRUMS
- Poor time: Fixed time source practice (recordings or metronome), Limited kit practice (demo)
- Inconsistent ride pattern: Build from quarter notes and add skips (example 3)
- Limited comping language: Transcription and practice around the kit
PIANO/GUITAR

- Poor voicing construction: methodical written approach (Example 4). Master one set of voicings, then move on.
- Uncomfortable comping rhythms: transcription and practice each unit (Demo).

COLLECTIVE

- Time cohesion: eye contact, proximity, duo rehearsal (Demo). Listen to the same recordings.
- Overplaying: two out of three hold down the fort (Demo), listening.
- Poor balance: all acoustic. Recording rehearsals and listen back.
- Limited comping rhythms: transcription and drill together (Demo).

DIRECTORS

- Lack of attention to your rhythm section: recording rehearsals, guest directors, change your location in rehearsal.
- Lack of rhythm section consideration in repertoire selection: consider what they can do and what you want them to learn, consider what they enjoy.
- Unwillingness to grow with your students: bring in guests and take notes. Record masterclasses.
- Unwillingness to explore modern repertoire/concepts: ????
A FEW GREAT RECORDINGS FOR
RHYTHM SECTION PLAYERS

Rhythm Guitar: Freddie Green on “Moten Swing” Charlie Christian on “Seven Come Eleven”
Comping Rhythms: Bill Evans on “So What”
Ride Pattern (Traditional Artist): Ed Thigpen on “Band Call” Jimmy Cobb on “So What”
Ride Pattern (Modern Artist): Brian Blade on “Like Sonny” and “Night and Day”
Upright Bass Tone and Attack: Dave Santoro on “Like Someone in Love” Christian McBride on “Isfahan”
Shuffle Groove: Mel Lewis on “Don’t Git Sassy” Art Blakey on “Moanin’”

A FEW GREAT RESOURCES FOR
RHYTHM SECTION PLAYERS AND TEACHERS

Bass Resources
• Lindsay, Gary. _Jazz Arranging Techniques from Quartet to Big Band_. Miami: Staff Art Publishing, 2005.

Important Bassists
**Drum Set Resources**

- [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (*this generation of students learns very effectively from visual aids*).

**Important Drummers**


**Guitar Resources**


**Important Guitarists**

Freddie Green, Charlie Christian, Grant Green, Jim Hall, Pat Metheny, John Scofield, John McLaughlin, Wes Montgomery, Joe Pass.

**Piano Resources**


**Important Pianists**

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS?

CONTINUED_DIALOG_AND_COPIES_OF_HANDOUTS?

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THANKS_AND_HAVE_A_GREAT_CONVENTION!

BASS_LINE_CONSTRUCTION (EXAMPLE 1)

1. Root on Downbeat
2. Closed tone on Beat 3
3. Create a melodic line with Scale tones (or chromatic approaches) on beats 2 and 4

\[ \text{F}^7 \quad \text{B}^b7 \quad \text{F}^7 \quad \text{F}^7 \]

\[ \text{G}^-7 \quad \text{C}^7 \quad \text{F}^7 \quad \text{G}^-7 \quad \text{C}^7 \]
Dave Santoro's Walking Bass Line on "Like Someone in Love" (Example 2)

Ride Pattern Evolution (Example 3)

All Quarters (focus on time and even tone)

Add skips every two bars

Add skips every bar

Add skips every beat

Variations
Foursies down from the 5th of root

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
  & F7 & G\flat 7 & F7 & F7 & G7 & G7 \\
\end{array}
\]