22

Arranging for School Jazz Ensembles

Matthew Clauhs

No Need to Be the Baby Ellington Band

Emily talks about how in the 1970s there was very little (if any) music published specifically for middle school jazz ensembles. Consequently, anything that they played she would have to first transcribe. In those early days, she arranged many Earth, Wind, and Fire tunes for the abilities and instrumentation of her middle school jazz band and was happy to do it because playing these contemporary tunes heard on the radio was worth it for the students:

> They dug it. They loved it. Somebody would get on that ratty set and maybe it was me on piano and we would play a George Benson tune or we would play an Earth, Wind, and Fire tune and they would love it. So, then it becomes motivational—not necessarily educational.

Emily notes that the harder the chart is, the less musicality middle school students can put into it. Consequently, she tries to find charts that are relatively easy but have retained characteristic elements of jazz. She finds that Kendor publishes a lot of literature that fits this description. Sometimes the really characteristic jazz charts are written with ranges outside the ability of middle school students, so she rewrites the parts in a more comfortable range. While she finds many swing charts that work well for middle school jazz ensemble, it is more difficult to find Latin charts that "work" at that level. "There's not a whole lot of literature written on the Latin side that's right—either the clave is wrong or the tune just doesn't work."

> I don't feel the need to be the baby Ellington band at this age. I think that's great, but there's time for that. I'm hoping that the kids aren't going to fall off the banana boat here and never play in another jazz band. I would rather have a tune that's motivational and fun and teaches all those skills, and down the line they can play the real thing. If they're still playing jazz in three years, as a horn player, they can probably play almost any tune that's out there.

School music teachers have a unique opportunity to cultivate creativity and critical thinking in a child's mind. Yet teachers often report that the least amount of classroom time is dedicated to creative activities, including composing, improvising, and arranging music. While much of this book has dealt with ways to implement the second domain (improvisation), this chapter examines ways to make arranging a part of the culture in a school music program. Several published texts already provide guidelines, rules, and suggestions for arranging, so the goal of this chapter is to situate the practice of jazz arranging in a school setting.

Professional musicians, arrangers, educators, and students have been writing for school jazz ensembles for nearly a century, and the study of jazz arranging is now a requirement of many jazz programs in the United States. School jazz ensemble instrumentation has been standardized, and techniques for writing have been codified and improved. While arranging is standard practice among jazz performers, many benefits result from arranging for, and together with, students in a school jazz program. Jazz arranging in a school setting (a) fosters an intrinsic desire among students to create music, (b) allows for a variety of instrumentation best suited for the school, (c) accommodates nontraditional learners, (d) differentiates for the strengths and weaknesses of the ensemble, (e) allows the teacher to assess knowledge through performance-based activities, and (f) increases the school's library of repertoire without breaking the budget.

These benefits are closely aligned with educational research and best practices and may not be obtainable through the performance of published stock arrangements. Learning to arrange takes time and practice, but the benefits are far greater than the costs of such an endeavor. The result is that students feel *ownership* of the music produced in-house, by themselves, a peer, or a teacher, because they feel strongly connected to music that was created from within their own school community.

This chapter examines a variety of fundamental arranging concepts and discusses why arranging for school ensembles is of critical importance for any music educator. It explores (a) considerations before arranging, (b) writing for rhythm sections, (c) writing for winds, and (d) basic harmonization techniques. The goal of this chapter is to demystify the process of writing for a school jazz ensemble and provide educators and their students with the basic tools to get started on a first arrangement.

Considerations Before Arranging

Style. The basic harmonization techniques presented in this chapter can be applied to a variety of contemporary styles and are not limited to jazz. Just as Emily arranged Earth, Wind,

and Fire songs for her jazz band, the reader may find the following techniques useful when arranging for pop/rock, salsa, R&B, funk, etc., in addition to traditional jazz styles.

Instrumentation. This chapter may be useful to teachers wishing to arrange for both small jazz and contemporary ensembles (one to five horns plus a rhythm section) as well as larger jazz ensembles (five saxes plus five bones plus five trumpets plus a rhythm section). While the arranging techniques discussed here are for four to five parts, voices can be doubled and layered to account for additional instruments throughout the band.

Writing for Rhythm Sections

Rhythm sections include keyboard instruments, guitar, vibraphone, bass, drums, and percussion. These parts may be written using standard notation, rhythmic notation, slash notation, percussion notation, or tablature, depending on the instrument and experience of the player. If players are less experienced with reading chord symbols, the arranger should include chord voicings and written bass lines. More advanced players prefer to create their own chord voicings and bass lines whenever possible, especially during solo sections.

Standard notation. Piano, vibraphone, guitar, and bass parts may at times be "written out" (see figures 22.1 and 22.2). This means everything you want the player to perform is notated on the staff. Drum parts should never be fully written out, but may instead convey similar information through four-part drum notation (see chapter 2 in this volume for more information).

Four-part drum notation (cymbal, hi-hat, snare, kick). Typically, parts of the drum that are performed with the feet (kick and hi-hat) are written with stems facing down, and the parts of the drums that are performed with hands (cymbals, snare) are drawn with the stems facing up. This results in a cleaner score that is more likely to be performed correctly. (See figure 22.3.)

Slash notation. Slashes can be used to indicate time in a rhythm section or soloist's part (see figure 22.4). Harmonic information may be presented through chord symbols for a bass, chordal instrument, or soloist, while written directions about style and what is happening in

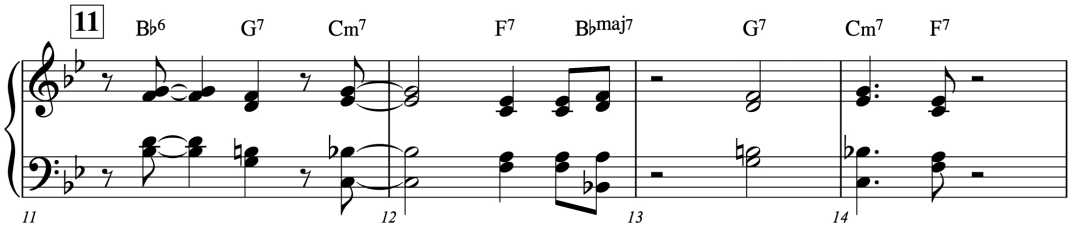

FIGURE 22.1 Standard Notation for Piano

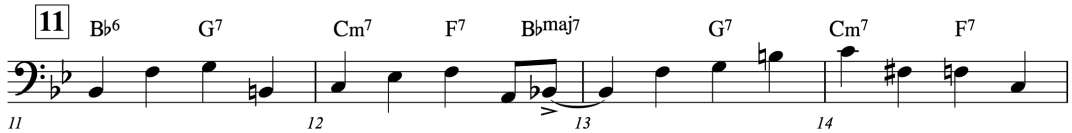

FIGURE 22.2 Standard Notation for Bass

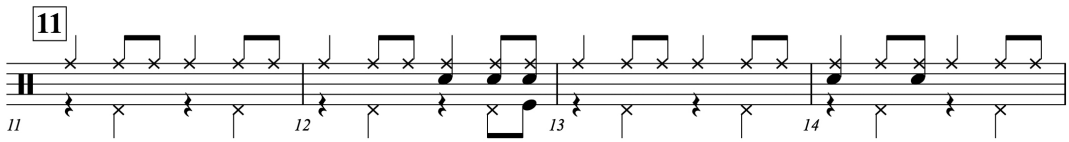

FIGURE 22.3 Four-Part Drum Notation

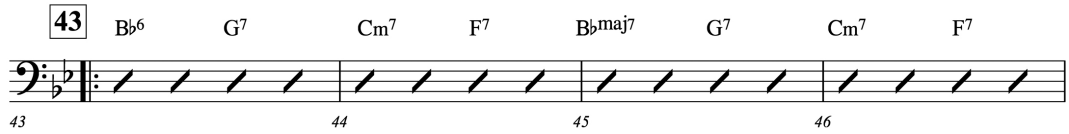

FIGURE 22.4 Slash Notation for a Bass Part

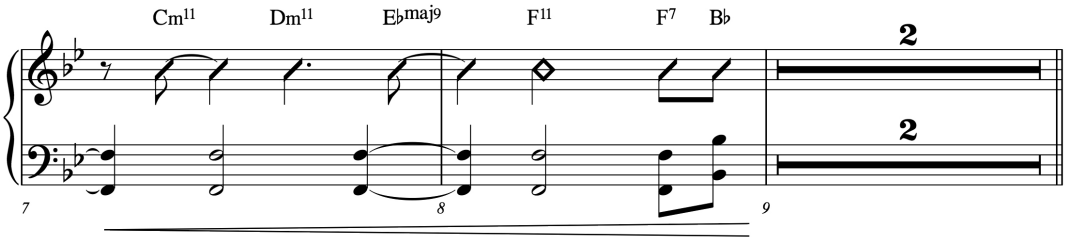

FIGURE 22.5 Rhythmic Notation for a Keyboard Instrument

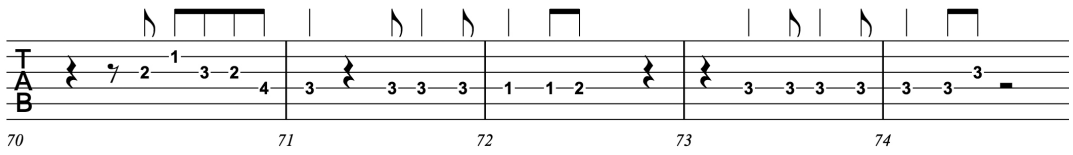

FIGURE 22.6 Guitar Tablature

the piece may be more appropriate for a percussion part. This form of notation allows players the most freedom in determining how to realize the chord symbols and style.

Rhythmic notation. This form of notation provides more information about the underlying rhythm of the music (see figure 22.5). The stems and unique noteheads indicate to the performer that certain rhythms are to be performed together, but still allow players the freedom to create their own voicings and bass lines.

Tablature. Tablature is one of the oldest forms of notation for string instruments and the most ubiquitous form of notation found on the internet today (see figures 22.6 and 22.7). It is easy to understand and provides information about appropriate string and finger position not available through standard notation. While tablature is rarely provided in published jazz ensemble parts, this notation may be useful to less-experienced players.

Chordal instruments. Chordal instruments include keyboard instruments, vibraphone, and guitar. Their job is to provide harmonic support and rhythmic feel and occasionally to perform melodies and counterpoint. These instruments may also perform solos or provide accompaniment (comping) for other soloists. Be careful to avoid having multiple

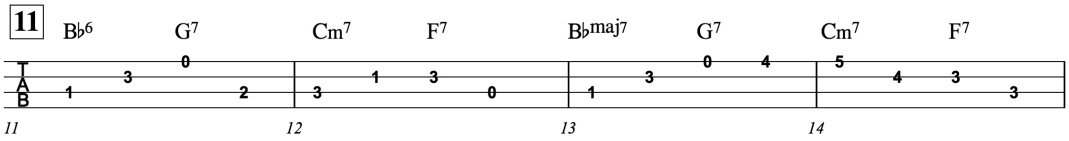

FIGURE 22.7 Bass Tablature

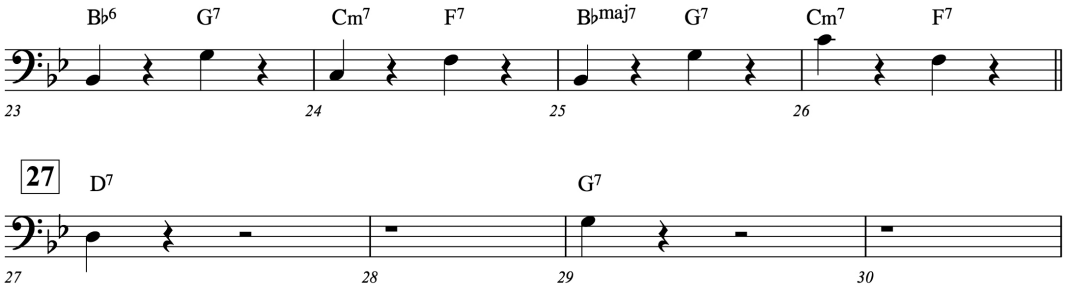

FIGURE 22.8 Scoring Chord Roots

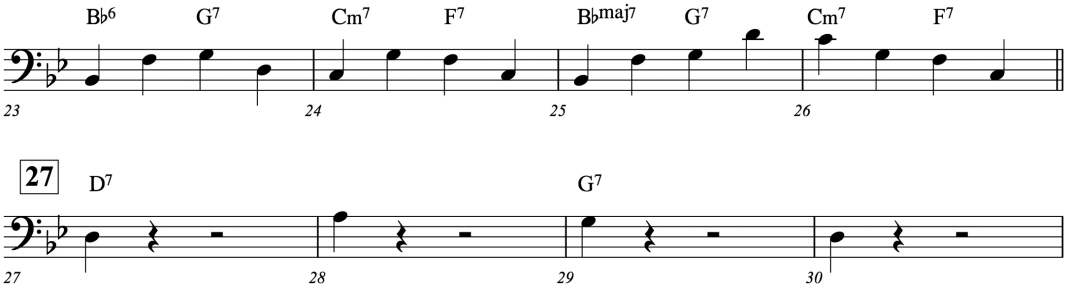

FIGURE 22.9 Scoring 5ths

chordal instruments comp at the same time, or the rhythm section will begin to sound muddy and undefined.[1]

Bass. The bass also provides harmonic and rhythmic support. In traditional jazz arrangements, the bass player often provides a walking bass line by outlining chord tones of the harmonic progression. Refer to chapter 18 in this volume on bass for an extended discussion of creating bass lines and realizing chord progressions. Following is a simple method for beginning to create walking bass lines in the straight-ahead swing style:

1. First, write the roots of the chords on the strong beats (typically, beats 1 and/or 3 of each measure). (See figure 22.8.)
2. Next, add the 5th of the chord on the weaker beats. (See figure 22.9.)
3. Add extended chord tones (e.g., 7ths, 9ths) and stepwise motion to fill out the part. Chromatic notes on weak beats can effectively connect chord tones. (See figure 22.10.)
4. The last note of one chord change should lead to the root of the next chord change by stepwise motion. (See figure 22.11.)

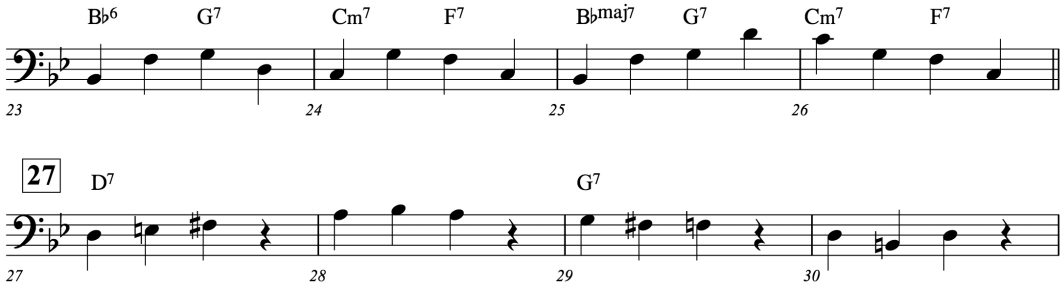

FIGURE 22.10 Adding Chord Tones and Extensions

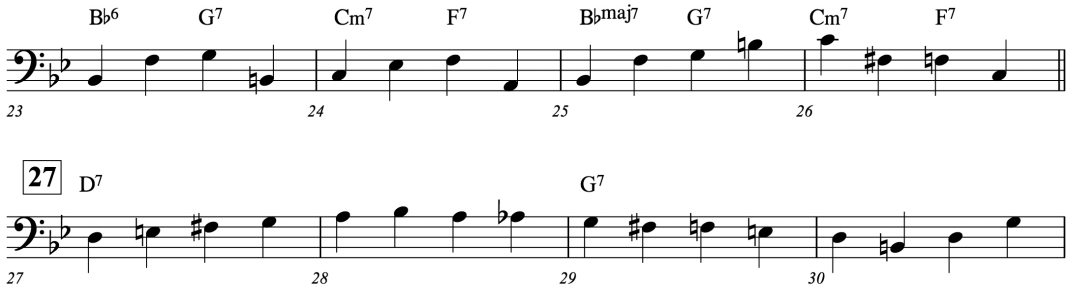

FIGURE 22.11 Voice Leading

Drums and percussion. Less is more when it comes to writing for the drums, and individual parts (for cymbals, hi-hat, snare, toms, bass drum) should not be written for the entire piece but only the first few measures to demonstrate the intended style. Horn cues and figures should be written above the staff to help the drummer keep place and create complementary rhythms to set up and/or emphasize what the horns are playing. No matter what your background, work closely with the rhythm section players for whom you will be writing. No matter how experienced they are, their interpretation of your writing will teach you a great deal about how well you are communicating your ideas through rhythm section parts.

Writing for Winds

When writing for winds it is important to understand the timbre of the instrument and the range of the player. Emily struggled to find published jazz arrangements in an appropriate range for her students and subsequently arranged parts to fit her students' abilities. Music teachers have an advantage here, because many play all of the instruments in the band at least at a rudimentary level. Following are some guidelines to consider when writing for saxophones, trumpets, and trombones.

Saxophone. Saxophone players have the greatest dexterity in the band, since they can change between notes and/or ranges of the instrument with the greatest ease. Young saxophone players generally have the same standard range as more experienced players, although intonation and blend can be problematic at the extreme registers of the horn. Music written in or just above the staff (when transposed) is appropriate for players of any level. Arrangements for young jazz ensembles typically do not include doubles (flute, clarinet); however, separate

flute and clarinet parts can be added to (a) provide more colors and textures in an arrangement, (b) compensate for low numbers in the saxophone section, and (c) allow more students to participate in the school jazz program.

Trumpet. Range and fatigue are important considerations when writing for all brass instruments, including the trumpet. Typically, the 2nd trumpet player is the soloist, because improvisation requires a different set of skills than lead playing, and the lead player needs a chance to rest. Not surprisingly, the lower register of the horn creates a much darker sound than the high register. Anything higher than the G above the staff (when transposed) will really stand out in an arrangement and will be difficult for younger players. Anything written far below the staff may be difficult to project with a good sound.

Trombone. The trombone is heard most clearly at the very top of, and above, the staff. Experienced trombone players are accustomed to reading multiple ledger lines above the staff, and this is a very resonant range on the instrument. An F above the staff is a good limit for the lead trombone player with intermediate experience, although advanced players will have no trouble playing higher. Much like the trumpet, the trombone loses clarity in the lowest register. Certain intervals become particularly muddy below a third line F, so use caution when writing harmonies in this area.

Other brass parts can be added to allow for more participation or compensate for smaller sections. French horns and mellophones can be used to double or replace the 1st trombone part, as notes written above the bass clef are comfortable for horn players. Baritones and euphoniums can double or replace any trombone part, and the tuba can double or replace the bass part (as long as the bass player is not improvising bass lines). Be sure to involve your wind players in the arranging process and pay attention to how comfortable, or uncomfortable, parts may be for certain players and instruments. If working on a published arrangement that has brass parts that exceed the range of your students, use the voicing techniques in this chapter to revoice the arrangement to be more suitable for the players in your band.

Harmonization

While a basic understanding of harmonization is helpful for arranging, the ultimate tool should be the ear. Some of the most interesting colors and textures come from innovative writing, or even "mistakes," that may not be easily classified into a standard arranging technique. That being said, the techniques described in this section are foolproof ways to begin a first arrangement. One does not need an extensive background in orchestration to begin writing for a school jazz ensemble. William Scism, jazz arranging professor at Berklee College of Music, puts it simply: "If you can sing a line, you can write a chart." Assuming you can already sing, here is some helpful information to begin writing your first chart!

Basic chord types. Most jazz chords are constructed using five fundamental qualities: major, dominant, minor, half diminished, and diminished. There are certainly other chord types as well as alterations to these chord qualities, but an understanding of these fundamental structures will help the beginning arranger get started. Demonstration of how these chord types would be spelled in 12 keys is found in chapter 2 in this volume (see figure 2.XX).

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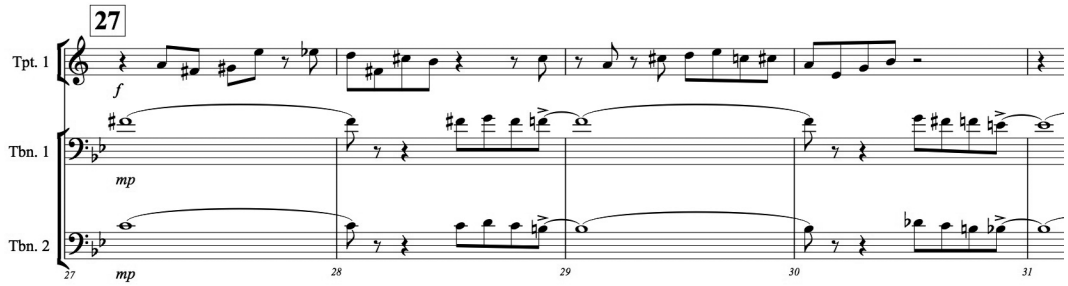

FIGURE 22.12 Independent Lead

Texture. Much jazz arranging is accomplished through four different textures: concerted harmonies (soli), independent lead plus harmony, counterpoint, and melodic subdivision. You may find it useful to change among these textures depending on what is happening in the piece or what sounds best to your ear. Concerted harmonies are similar to block chords, as the top voice is supported by harmonies that "hang" directly below. These harmonies closely follow the same rhythm as the top voice. This kind of texture is typical of soli and shout sections and can be found in nearly every classic jazz arrangement. The soli in Duke Ellington's "Cotton Tail" is one of many examples of this texture (see Audio Example 22.1, Concerted Harmonies).

Independent line plus harmony is a homophonic texture, as a melody is supported by underlying harmonies that do not follow the same rhythm as the melody. This texture is common when featuring a soloist, in ballads, and in many other parts of a standard jazz arrangement (see figure 22.12). (See Audio Example 22.2, Independent Lead.) In counterpoint, a melody is performed in one voice, or a group of voices, while a countermelody is performed by another individual or group. If the melody is harmonized, the countermelody should be scored in unison to avoid an overly dense harmonic texture. If the melody is in unison, the countermelody may be harmonized (see figure 22.13). (See Audio Example 22.3, Counterpoint.) Melodic subdivision is similar to call and response, as one voice, or a group of voices, performs part of a melody, and another individual or group picks up that melody at a later point. There may be some overlap between groups of instruments to retain fluidity in the line (see figure 22.14). (See Audio Example 22.4, Melodic Subdivision.)

Traditional voicing techniques. Next we explore simple voicing techniques that require just a basic understanding of 7th chords and instrument ranges. For a more nuanced explanation of the following voicing techniques, see the following resources:

- *Modern Jazz Voicings: Arranging for Small and Medium Ensembles*, by Ted Pease and Ken Pullig (Hal Leonard Corporation, 2001).
- *Arranging for Large Jazz Ensembles* (chapters 2–5), by Ken Pullig and Dick Lowell (Berklee Press, 2003).
- *The Complete Arranger* (chapter 9), by Sammy Nestico (Fenwood Music, 1993).
- *Arranging & Composing* (chapters 13–16), by David Baker
- *Jazz Arranging & Composing: A Linear Approach* (chapter 1), by Bill Dobbins (Music Exchange, 1986).
- *Inside the Score*, by Ray Wright (Kendor Music, 1982).

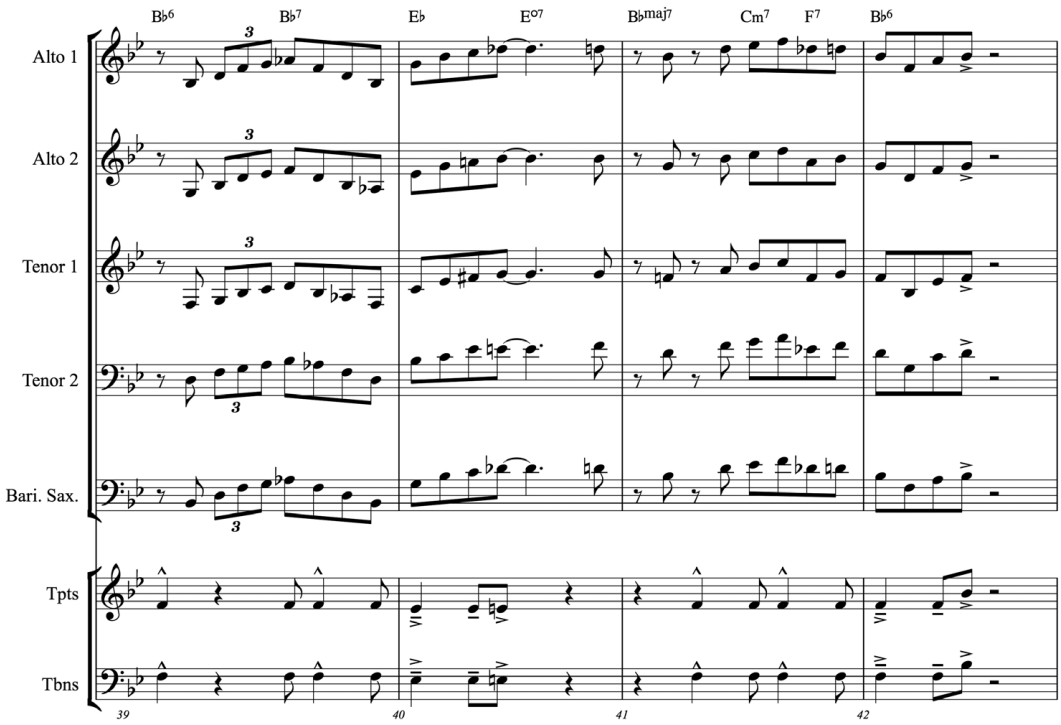

FIGURE 22.13 Counterpoint

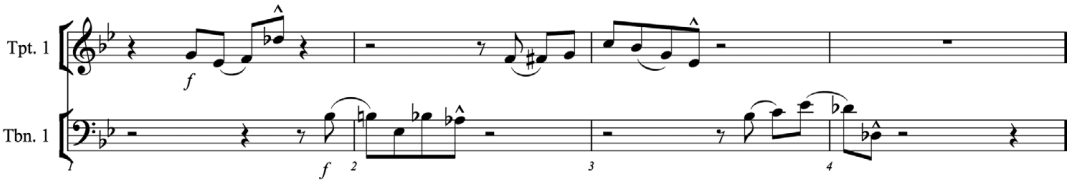

FIGURE 22.14 Melodic Subdivision

Unison and octaves. The arranger should not underestimate the effect of writing in unison and octaves, which produces a powerful sound with melodic clarity. This technique is particularly useful for creating contrast in a piece that is otherwise scored with dense harmonies and when writing lines with melodic subdivision and/or counterpoint passages. Unison and octave writing can be used within an instrument section to add weight to a line or across sections for a uniquely blended sound. Typical unison combinations across sections include alto sax with trumpet, tenor sax with trombone, and left-hand piano with acoustic bass (see figure 22.15). (See Audio Example 22.5, Unison Writing Across Sections.) Octave combinations might include trumpet and trombone or flute and flugelhorn. All of these combinations create new timbres and can be very effective (see figure 22.16). (See Audio Example 22.6, Octave Writing Across Sections.)

Guide tone lines. The most defining notes of any basic jazz chord are the 3rd and 7th. These particular chord tones help identify the quality as major, minor, dominant, or diminished and are referred to as "guide tones" for this reason (see figure 22.17). Some jazz melodies, such as "All the Things You Are" and "Fly Me to the Moon," are composed using guide tone lines. Backgrounds and countermelodies may be created by having groups of instruments play 3rds and 7ths of a chord progression with smooth voice leading (see figure 22.18). (See Audio Example 22.7, Adding Embellishments to the Line.) Following is a guide tone line procedure:

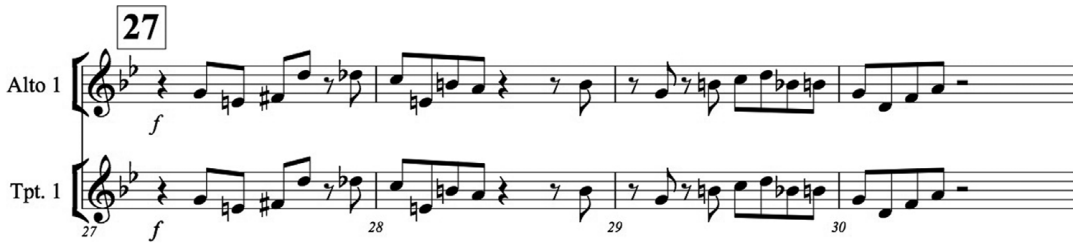

FIGURE 22.15 Unison Writing Across Sections

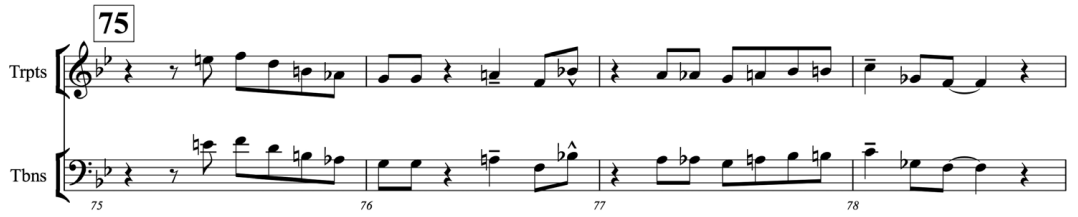

FIGURE 22.16 Octave Writing Across Sections

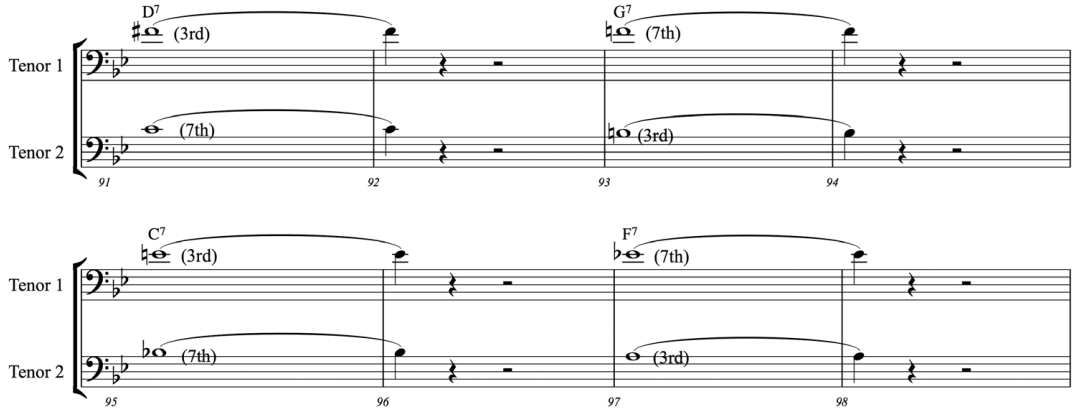

FIGURE 22.17 Creating a Guide Tone Line

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1. Considering the range and starting chord, determine which instrument(s) should start on the 3rd of the chord and which instrument(s) should begin on the 7th of the chord. Use figure 2.XX, in chapter 2 in this volume to identify guide tones if necessary.
2. As the chord progression changes, the instruments continue to play whichever guide tone is nearest to allow for the smoothest transition.
3. Embellish the guide tone line with passing tones and other ornamentations to create interest.

Close voicing technique. In this technique, you are writing for four unique voices within the range of one octave (four-part close). It is also possible to double the lead voice exactly one octave below, to create a five-part close, double lead. (See figures 22.19 and 22.20.) This technique is widely used for saxophone soli writing, where the bari sax player is doubling the 1st alto, one octave lower. Listen to arrangements performed by Supersax for examples of this highly effective technique. Following is close voicing procedure:

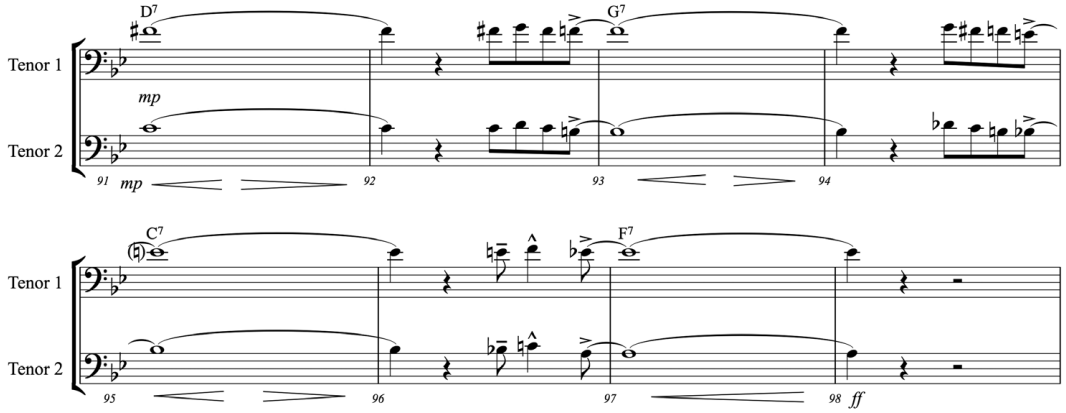

FIGURE 22.18 Adding Embellishments to the Line

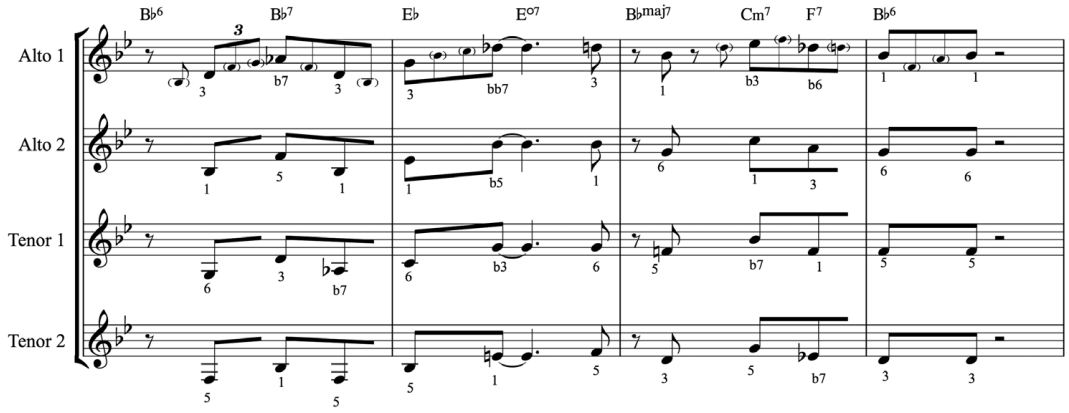

FIGURE 22.19 Placing Chord Tones Directly Below Target Notes

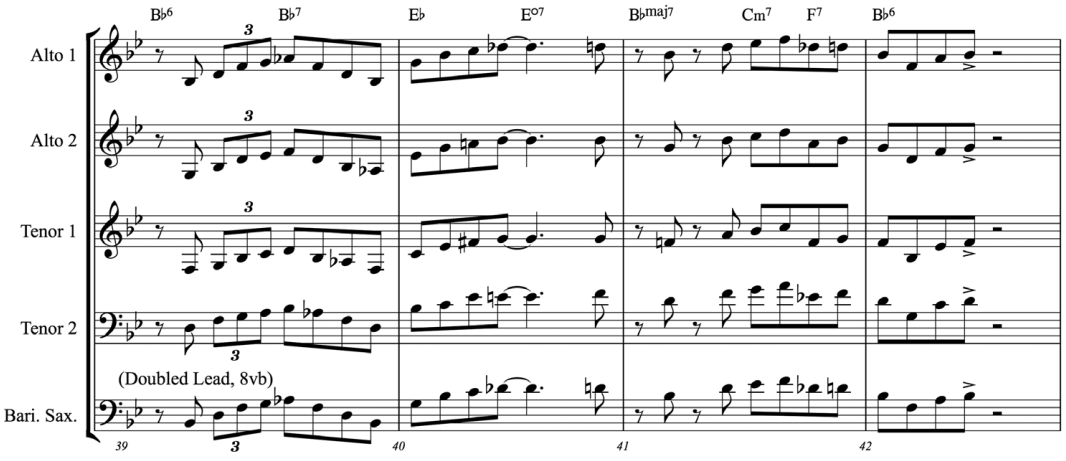

FIGURE 22.20 Close Voicing, Doubled Lead

1. Identify the "target notes" in each measure. These typically occur on the strong beats, downbeats, and/or anticipations, and they should be harmonized first. Using figure 2. XX, in chapter 2 in this volume, label the corresponding chord tone for each of these target notes.

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2. Place the remaining chord tones directly below each target note.
3. Harmonize the remaining notes in the melody using passing tones in between chord tones and/or approach notes (leading to a chord tone) wherever necessary. Use your ear to help you decide how to harmonize these notes. Consult the reference list of jazz arranging texts for further explanation of harmonization.
4. If writing for a saxophone section, double the alto 1 in the bari sax part, transposed down one octave.

There are some special considerations for close voicing technique:

- If the melody note is not a chord tone (1-3-5-7), but falls on a strong beat of the measure, skip the chord tone that would be immediately below the melody note and continue the voicing from that point. For example, if the melody note is an A, and the chord is C^7, skip the next chord tone below the A (which would be a G), use the E, then C, then B♭.
- Avoid an interval of a minor 2nd or minor 9th between the top voice and any other voice. When the melody note is "1" over a major 7th chord, don't use the 7th in the rest of the voicing, but the 6th scale degree instead.
- Avoid repeated notes in the inner voices. Playing repeated notes can be awkward and is problematic for articulation and phrasing. You may wish to cross voices by having two inner voices switch parts for a brief moment, to avoid any one player having to play repeated notes.

Drop 2. In this technique, follow the same procedure and special considerations for four-part close writing, except drop the 2nd voice down one octave (see figure 22.21). You may wish to voice the lowest part first, then score the inner voices with the remaining chord tones. This technique helps the lead stand out by increasing the interval between the top voice and remaining parts.

Drop 2 + 4. This process is the same as drop 2, except you drop both the 2nd and 4th voicing down one octave (see figure 22.22). This helps "open" the voicing by creating more space between parts. You can switch between close, drop 2, and drop 2 + 4 voicings

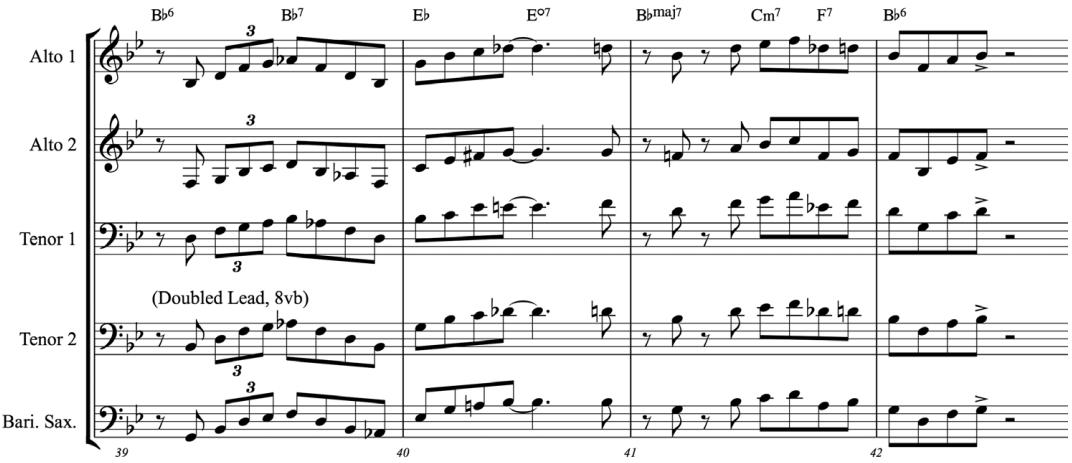

FIGURE 22.21 Drop 2 Voicing Technique

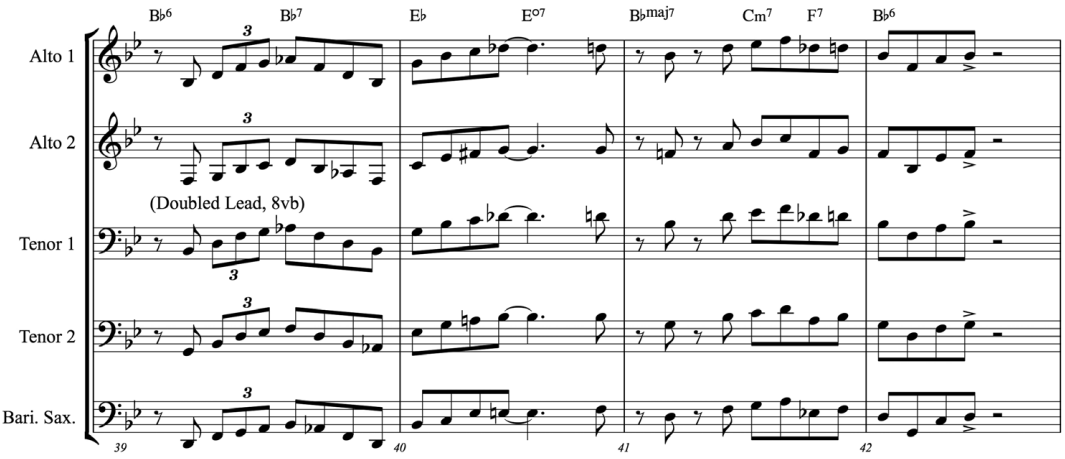

FIGURE 22.22 Drop 2 and 4

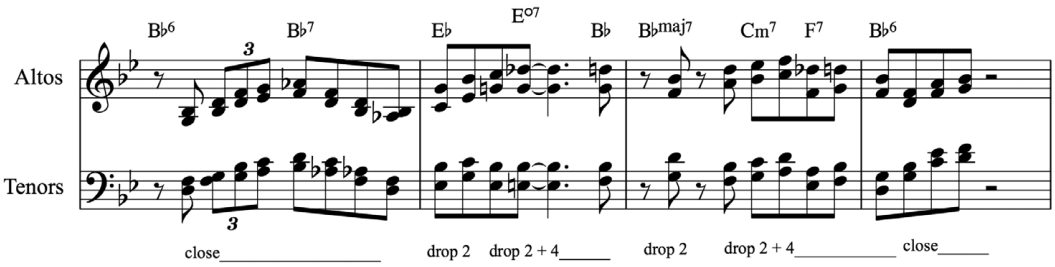

FIGURE 22.23 Combining Close, Drop 2, and Drop 2 + 4 Techniques

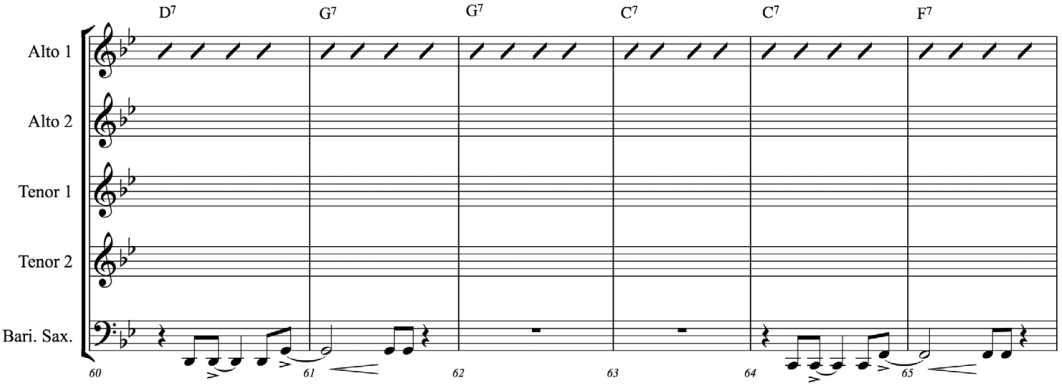

FIGURE 22.24 Chord Roots in the Bottom Voice

throughout a passage. This technique allows the arranger to better navigate instrument ranges, avoid repeated notes, and/or create more interest in a line (see figure 22.23). (See Audio Example 22.8, Combining Close, Drop 2, and Drop 2 + 4 Techniques.)

Spread. The spread voicing technique creates even more space between parts, as there is typically at least an octave separating the lowest voice from the inner parts. (See figures 22.24–22.26.) The result is a much fuller and more clearly defined bottom voice, usually played by the baritone sax or bass trombone. The spread technique is especially effective for ballads, backgrounds, and passages with a slower harmonic rhythm. (See Audio Example 22.9, Five-Part Spread Voicing Technique.) Following is spread technique procedure:

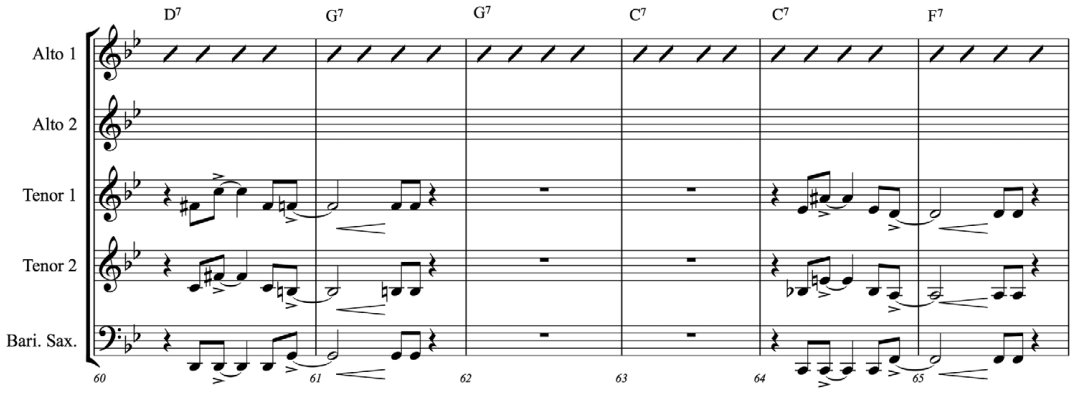

FIGURE 22.25 Guide Tones in Inner Voices

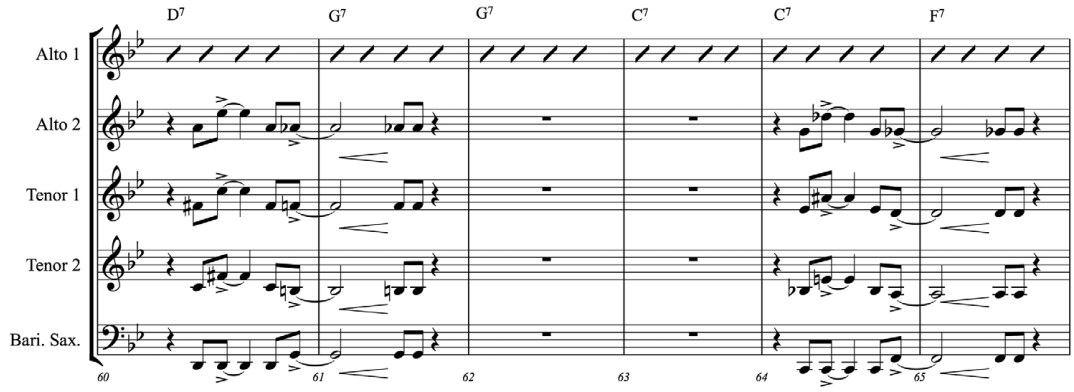

FIGURE 22.26 Five-Part Spread Voicing Technique

1. The melody or lead line is scored in the first part (the highest voice).
2. Place the roots of the chord in the fifth or fourth part (the lowest voice).
3. Place guide tones (3rds and 7ths) in the third and fourth parts.
4. Place any remaining chord tones in the second part (5th, 9th, 13th, etc.).

Voicings in 4ths. If you listen to voicings of some modern jazz pianists, most notably McCoy Tyner, you will hear that many of their voicings are built on quartal structures (using perfect and augmented 4ths), instead of a tertiary structure (using major and minor 3rds). This creates an open sound with more tension. Be careful when using this technique within a single brass section, because the interval between the top and bottom voice is nearly two octaves (4th + 4th + 4th + 4th) when writing four-part harmony. This technique works well within a saxophone section, combined trumpet and trombone sections, or across the band. (See figure 22.27.) Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter played in 4ths, in two-part harmony, throughout the song "Footprints." (See Audio Example 22.10, Saxophones Voiced in 4ths.) Following is a procedure for 4ths voicing:

1. Harmonize the melody, or lead line, with notes that are 4ths apart.
2. Use the interval of a 3rd only if necessary, but avoid using two 3rds in a row.
3. Avoid the interval of a minor 9th, especially with the top voice.

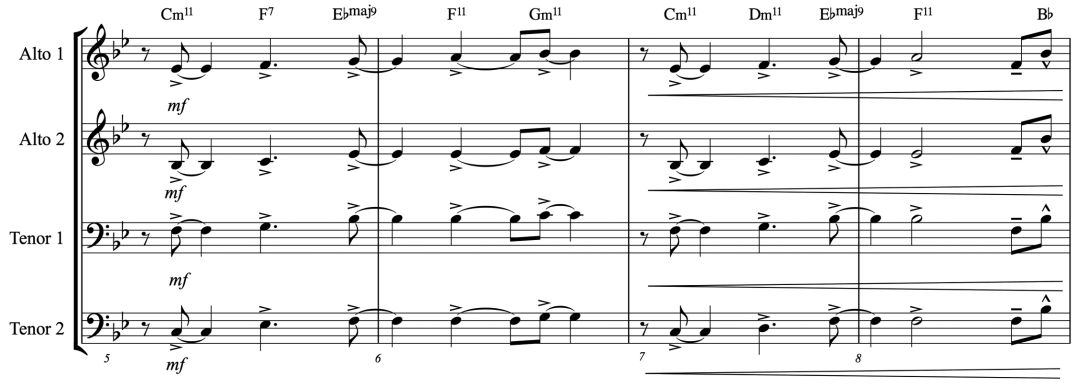

FIGURE 22.27 Saxophones Voiced in 4ths

Charting a Full Arrangement

Now that you have an understanding of standard voicing techniques, it is time to consider mapping out a full arrangement. It is a good idea to review some of your favorite arrangements and identify techniques the arranger is using across the form of the piece. You may be surprised at how effective simple techniques such as unison and octave writing can be! Many large arrangements begin as simple, small group arrangements that are enlarged for full big band sections. If you are new to arranging, it may be wise to listen to examples of classic jazz combos led by Art Blakey, Miles Davis, and Charles Mingus to identify arranging concepts and form on a smaller scale. Many arrangers of school jazz band music have developed their own personal template for arrangements, which allows them to produce arrangements quickly. Standard jazz band arrangements typically follow some version of this basic form:

- Intro: Set the tone of the chart by establishing tempo, style, and key.
- Melody: Feature a single instrument, section of instrument, or combination of instrument types.
- Solo section: Solos typically follow the same chord progression as the melody and often contain background figures.
- Soli section and/or shout, over a similar chord progression yet again,
- Melody: Return to the melody, usually featuring the same group of instruments that performed the melody earlier in the arrangement.
- Outro: Brings closure to the piece.

Conclusion

Many students may be inspired to write arrangements and original compositions for jazz ensemble, and this practice should be encouraged as much as possible. You can point these students to free online notation software, such as noteflight.com or musescore.com, and encourage them to study scores that have already been published. Creating a full arrangement

will be overwhelming to many students, so they should begin with just eight measures of a familiar theme, pop song, or original melody, and go from there. Even if an arrangement doesn't make it on a concert program, the act of arranging a piece, or portion of a piece, and performing it in rehearsal is an invaluable experience and lesson in creative music making that they won't forget, and you should be sure to have the band read anything and everything that your students spend time writing. By normalizing this process, you can create comfortable environments for exploring and creating music together. While these arrangements may not always be appropriate for festivals and concerts, this experience is equally as valuable for the performance of masterworks. Encourage players to identify and circle mistakes or problematic sections on their individual parts and provide feedback on the score that will help student arrangers better understand instrument ranges, texture, and other principles of arranging.

Finally, when writing arrangements by yourself or with students, ask friends and colleagues for help. If you are a horn player, be sure to ask rhythm section colleagues for advice on writing for their instruments, and vice versa. All of this feedback will further the development of a beginning arranger. This information, combined with a fundamental understanding of the arranging concepts presented in this chapter and your ear, is all that you need to get yourself and your students arranging for school jazz ensembles.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some reasons a director would want to arrange a piece for a school jazz ensemble?
2. What are some benefits of having students create their own arrangements?
3. What arranging opportunities can you provide students to help them appreciate this creative process?
4. How might arranging help students better understand their roles and functions in the ensemble? How might the process help them better understand the roles and functions of others in the ensemble?
5. What obstacles might you face when arranging for a school jazz ensemble? How can you overcome these challenges?

Note

1. Refer to chapters 16 and 17 in this volume for examples of comping techniques.