

CHAPTER 6

Arrangement Form

One has a great deal of freedom when choosing what voicings to use, and it often comes down to personal taste. In contrast to voicings, arrangement form for jazz band charts is more standardized on the basic level. However, there is still plenty of room for personal choice at the sub-levels (number of solo choruses, background approach, shout choruses, etc.).

At the basic, macro level, the standard form of a jazz band chart can be closely compared to the classic sonata form. Most charts have three distinct sections. They are, in order (with application regarding jazz charts in parentheses):

- 1) Exposition (Establishing the melody, consisting of at least one chorus)
 - 2) Development (One or more choruses of solos or solis)
 - 3) Recapitulation (the shout chorus or similar restatement of the melody)
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Exposition

In the exposition, the two most important parts of a chart are established: the melody and the chord changes. Much of the material for the remainder of the chart will be derived from those two elements. If you are doing an arrangement of an existing tune, those elements already exist. That is not to say that you must use them exactly as is in the stock form; indeed it is recommended that you make some alterations, since that is what will make your arrangement unique. Your variations can range from the conservative (altering a few chord changes slightly, syncopating the rhythm of the melody a bit), to the middle ground (doing a straight ahead four tune as a jazz waltz), to the extreme (arranging "Here Comes Santa Claus" as a Tibetan chant in retrograde with all the performers suspended from the ceiling of the auditorium upside down wearing clown outfits). If you are arranging your own composition there is less to be worried about since all elements are new and original.

There are many ways to create textural variance during the exposition. Here is a brief description of some that I have used and liked. Keep in mind that you may add an introduction to your chart (usually customary), or you might just want to hit the chart with a blazing melody right off the bat.

The Introduction:

- **Big, in your face aggressive.** One possibility is to use a short (4, 8 bar) theme that you can use in other parts of the chart, such as setting up the solo section, setting up each soloist (if there are more than one), or setting up the shout chorus.
- **Medium intensity, one that sets up the groove of the chart.** You can have the ensemble play or simply have the rhythm section grooving (alone or with sporadic horn punches).
- **Low intensity.** One chart of mine is an up-tempo straight ahead chart that starts out with only the drums playing with brushes for four bars. Then the melody starts with just a trombone solo and the rhythm section playing the changes as whole notes for a while, gradually building to full volume. A variation of this would be to have a very quiet intro followed by a very in your face ensemble statement of the melody.

Establishing the tune:

Here is a kind of stock formula that I like to use for establishing the tune. The individual elements will vary (2-part saxes instead of unison, no counter line, etc.), but I tend to use this general form quite a bit. The following example is for a 32 measure AABA tune – the instrument names in parentheses are some possible options, while the bold instrument names at the right are choices that I might actually make as applied to this format:

A	Unison melody line (saxes, trbns, or combination)	Tenor Saxes and Trombones
A	Unison melody line (saxes, trbns, or combination) Unison counterline (most effective if in an instrument group that is pitched opposite the melody, i.e. trumpets countering trombones)	Tenor Saxes and Trombones Alto Saxes and Trumpets
B	Unison melody line (pitched opposite the first A section) Harmonized rhythmic punch figures	Alto Saxes and Trumpets Trombones
A	Full ensemble section blowing forte	Everyone plays

The basic idea is to get variety by using different textural combinations and density. It is very boring to simply have a fully harmonized ensemble section playing forte for the entire exposition. My approach is to use this initial statement of the tune as a time to play with the different colors that a jazz band has, saving the full blow until the shout chorus. I also feel that it is good to establish a dynamic growth throughout the exposition, starting softer and less complex and building from there.



Development

The development section consists of the solo and/or soli sections. It is also possible to insert a full ensemble section (up to a full chorus, especially if it is a fast chart).

Solos:

There are several different options for solo sections. Here are just a few:

- One chorus with only one soloist.
- Several choruses with only one soloist.
- Several choruses with several soloists.
- Open choruses, where the soloist plays as many choruses as he/she chooses. This is particularly common in blues charts. You can have one or more open sections in a chart.

If there are more than one solo spots in a chart, I will tend to break them up with an ensemble passage (which can be as short as a few bars), or at the very least build the background figures of the first solo section to a forte (to give some contrast between the two solo choruses).

I will often alter one or two chord changes slightly during the solo section to add a bit of variety.

It is also possible to delay the start of the solo until a few bars into the chorus, giving the ensemble a chance to continue blowing and to create a smoother transition from the exposition to the development.

Background parts during solos:

I don't add background parts until well into a solo, usually until at least one chorus has gone by. The idea of backgrounds is to support the soloist harmonically, as well as to give occasional rhythmic contrast. Don't overwrite your backgrounds and avoid unnecessary clutter – remember that the main focus should be on the soloist. I tend to start with static unison lines in the middle register and build from there. You can use motifs from the melody of the tune for source material, or create new melodic material.

Solis:

Solis feature sections of the ensemble. You will most frequently find solis written for the saxes, although you will certainly find many trombone and trumpet solis as well. It is also possible to write a soli for a combination of instruments, such as one trumpet, alto sax, tenor sax, and one trombone, but this is not very common.

Solis are usually newly composed melodies written over the chord changes of the tune. It is possible to incorporate motifs of the melody or to quote other tunes, but I recommend not doing so to excess as it is easy to cross over the corniness line. Keep in mind the basic rules of melody composition – create linear contrast (start out in the mid to low register and build upwards throughout), don't remain too static for too long, look for melodic or rhythmic sequences, and give the melody room to breathe (avoid long stretches of eighth notes).

Sometimes I will add rhythmic punches or question/answer responses in the other sections near the end of a soli, although it is important to remember that you are featuring one section, so don't overdo it. If I write a soli, I will usually put it after the solo section. I will occasionally put it before the solos (immediately after the exposition).

Recapitulation

The recapitulation most commonly consists of a “shout chorus”, which can last for one or more choruses. A shout chorus can be wall to wall full ensemble, or start softly and build to a big climax, or start out big, come down in the middle, and end big – in other words, it can do just about anything.

The one thing that I try to do is restate the original melody of the tune at some point. It doesn't have to be right at the beginning of the shout; in fact, I usually won't restate the melody until halfway through or later. I like to write a new melody for the first part of the shout chorus to avoid overstating the original melody – remember that we have heard it for a full chorus at the beginning of the chart, have possibly heard motifs through the soli or backgrounds, and will hear it again in the shout. An exception is if you are writing a show tune or a vocal piece, where the melody plays a much more vital role. In those cases it is very acceptable, indeed preferable, to use the melody or a variation of the melody for the shout.

Once again, it is important to maintain some dynamic contours. Try to avoid a constant barrage of screaming brass. Using variety makes the louds seem louder and the softs seem softer.

It isn't necessary to voice the saxes as part of the full ensemble. I like to think of the band as being two sections – the brass (trumpets and trombones), which is the power half, and the saxes, which form the more nimble half. I will often give the brass the harmonized melody while having the saxes answer with a unison counter line. It is also possible to mix up the textural form of the shout chorus by having the saxes take the melody and the brass answer with rhythmic punches.

It is often desirable to add a tag to the end of a chart. The tag can consist of the last eight bars played again, or a vamp on III-VI-II-V, or some other form of extension to slightly prolong the ending. This is a nice technique to use to avoid the ending feeling rushed or unnatural.

The best way to study form is to do a lot of score analysis, particularly while listening to a recording of the chart you are studying. It is then that you can really look for tendencies and patterns. I suggest analyzing charts that you like in order to discover what techniques you might want to incorporate into your own arrangements. Most of all, listen, listen, listen!