

Jazz In A Box By Eric Ruyle

TMEA February 11, 2022

I have successfully used many of these techniques through my years of working with students on all levels (beginning through college)

Some of the important features of BIAB – change tempo, Styles, Tonal Centers, make as long or short as you want, mixing, notation of what each instrument is doing, Soloist Maker, printing, making mp3s.

1. Jazz Ensemble – Can be used for a lot more than just improvisation practice.
 - a. Generally, one of the biggest weaknesses in school jazz programs is instruction of the rhythm section, especially beginners.
 - i. Piano players
 1. While many may know how to play piano, they are lost when it comes to voicing and comping.
 - a. While Beginning charts may have parts written out for these players, it is usually stock and sometimes not very imaginative.
 - b. For intermediate to Advanced charts, the player just gets a chord chart with no voicings or style of comping.
 - c. A variety of styles available (Fast Bop, Miles' Modal, Latin Jazz), even individual players (Wynton Kelly, Bill Evans, McCoy Tyner, etc)
 - d. Create tracks and mix so the keyboard is “featured”, giving the listener a chance to focus on what the piano is doing.
 - a. Beginners will have problems with “selective hearing” and focusing in on one instrument buried in the mx.
 - e. After typing in the chord progressions, view the notation for the piano track and print.
 - a. For the beginner, it will give them something to read and give them an alternative to the part that come with the piece.
 - b. For the intermediate, have them study the voicings and the types of rhythms used, along with any additional chordal embellishments used (chord above moving to the desired chord)
 - f. You can mute the piano part and have the student play along with the bass and drums to practice their part/chart
 - ii. Bass players
 1. They are in a similar situation as the piano players
 - a. A variety of playing styles are available
 - b. Mix a track so the Bass is “Featured”
 - c. Print the bass parts for your students so they can start to understand how to do a walking bassline and also add embellishments to their line.

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- d. You can mute the bass part and have the student play along with the drums and piano to practice their part/chart
 - iii. Drummers
 - 1. Similar to Bass and piano players
 - a. One of the nice things about the newer versions of BIAB is that they use real players, giving the listener to hear what “Live” players sound like.
 - b. Mix so Drums are “featured” – some of the parts such as bass drum can be hard to hear in the mix otherwise.
 - c. You can set your phrase any length you want (4, 8 12 bars, etc.) so your beginning students can hear/read how to set up phrases
 - d. You can mute the drum part and have the student play along with the bass and piano to practice their part/chart.
 - iv. Absent rhythm section members
 - 1. It is nice to have two players for section instrument in the rhythm section, it is not always possible.
 - 2. When one of these important players is absent, it leaves a big hole in the sound of the ensemble, making rehearsing less productive.
 - 3. Use the mixing feature to have BIAB be the missing student. (mute all the other tracks) Yes, this is far from ideal, but having the ensemble play with a BIAB bass is better than a floundering rehearsal, especially if you have a performance coming up.
- b. Sectionals
 - i. Similar to the Concert Ensemble, having the students playing along to something more than the click of a metronome goes a long way to develop their listening across the group skills.
 - ii. Students will swing better than playing by themselves, especially important with younger players.
 - iii. Having the section play with BIAB is almost like having the rhythm section with you at every sectional. This will help students practice locking into the groove no matter what the tempo.
 - iv. Great way to work on Sax Solis.
 - v. Hearing the chords from the rhythm section will help the brass players when working on their parts
 - 1. Background hits.
 - 2. Trumpets playing the extensions of the chords (#9, #11, b13)
- c. Improvisation – obviously improve, but not the way people normally think
 - i. Soloing
 - 1. Younger players have not developed their jazz vocabulary enough to feel confident soloing.
 - a. Create a solo using the Soloist feature for the student to play
 - a. Use the Soloist feature which enables you to select the soloist style (Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans, etc.)
 - b. Select the rhythmic limitations (sixteenths, eighths, triplets, etc)

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- c. Select how “outside/inside” the solo will be.
- d. Print

2. Transcribing

- a. Transcription is an important process for the budding soloist but often there are little-to-no solos there are on the level that the young players can play/transcribe
- b. Using the method above, create a solo that is on their level.
- c. You can give them a mp3 of the solo and have them transcribe it
- d. You can also give them the printed version to analyze the solo to understand how it is put together.
- e. Increase the difficulty/tempo until they are ready to transcribe actual players.
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- g. This also helps them develop their jazz language.

3. Practicing Soloing

- a. Make practice tracks at various tempos and number of choruses.
- b. Have them practice by alternating play a chorus with written solo, then a chorus of their own solo, written, own. This will help them build the confidence to create their own.
- c. You can create several and let them piece together parts from each to create their own solo.

2. Using Virtually

- a. Using the techniques discussed above, you can create the mp3s of the tracks that will be useful for your situation.
- b. Create mp3s of various tempos and styles for them to use when practicing
- c. Post these mp3s in the access point used (Schoology, Google Classroom, etc)
- d. Be sure to discuss with your students how to use these tracks. Demonstrate to the students by you playing your instrument with the track and explain what you are doing, thinking, and listening for. (An instrumental version of the “read aloud”.)
- e. Have your students submit recordings of them playing along with the tracks and give feedback on how well they are locking in to the track (“did good until measure 7 where you seem not to be playing the sixteenths in time on beat 3”)
- f. Once the student become successful listening to the different parts of the track and play in time with them, they have developed the listening skills that they need to play in an ensemble.