

A Quick Guide to Repertoire Selection for *Essentially Ellington '10-11*

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Welcome to the Jazz at Lincoln Center 2010-11 *Essentially Ellington* program. We are proud to continue the tradition of distributing great, transcribed charts by **Duke Ellington** and other seminal big bands, arrangers and composers. We are so excited because this year's collection features the music of **The Count Basie Orchestra**. These three charts from the Basie band along with the three Ellington charts provide a diverse repertoire from which to choose. Here are some tips to help you as a director choose which charts may work best given your band's strengths or needs.

Harlem Speaks (1932) by Duke Ellington

This early swing chart evokes the joy of other Ellington favorites such as *Jump for Joy*, *Ring Dem Bells* or *Old Man Blues*. Though the chord changes and ensemble parts are relatively simple, the challenge presented to your ensemble will be to create joyous energy even when playing whole notes and half notes. This is a great chart for a developing band that needs to work on improvisation but does not have a lot of experienced players. There are several solos but they are all relatively short and demonstrate the use of embellishing the melody, allowing for many students to get valuable playing experience. This is also a great chart for rhythm sections to work on playing a driving 2-beat feel while the ensemble works on playing strong, danceable figures.

Portrait of Mahalia Jackson (1970) by Duke Ellington

It is often times important for us as educators to meet our students where they are in order to take them to where we want them to go. Some of our students have entered jazz music by way of gospel music having grown up playing in the church. This *Portrait of Mahalia Jackson* from "New Orleans Suite" celebrates the queen of gospel by invoking a Sunday morning devotion service. This chart allows for the student to bring all of the elements of that background into their jazz experiences. Though a bit less "hard-driving", this chart uses the same 12/8 meter approach in the drums as *The Shepherd* (another Ellington classic) to create that gospel feel while the horn background is reminiscent of a beautiful choir. Each solo voice has the freedom of expression of a testifying congregation member, allowing for as much soul and feeling as is desired. Though not as technically demanding, there is much to work on here in terms of pitch, balance, blend and musical expression.

Prelude to a Kiss (1957) by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn

In much the same way as *Portrait of Mahalia Jackson*, Billy Strayhorn's sophisticated arrangement for alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges on *Prelude to a Kiss* allows the ensemble to work on intonation, balance, blend and musical expression. If your group needs to work on these basics, an exposed ballad such as this will serve as a magnifying glass under which they can see to clean up their section playing. This chart is also a great vehicle to feature a mature soloist and accompanist; though it is written for alto, the room for piano as a soloist at the beginning and throughout dialoguing with the soloist makes for a great feature for two strong players. Rhythm sections always benefit from the requirements of establishing a groove and directing

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the motion of the arrangement on ballads. Don't be fooled by the seeming simplicity of the ensemble parts; there is much to be gained from playing this chart.

Every Day (I Have the Blues) (1955) by Memphis Slim and Ernie Wilkins

There was no harder swinging band than **The Count Basie Orchestra** of the 1950's and this Ernie Wilkins' classic blues vocal arrangement for Joe Williams showcased the band's ability to groove. The introduction sets the stage for excitement immediately. If you want to showcase a strong brass section sound with a great lead player, this chart will allow you to do so. Your students will also have the opportunity to work on the art of laying back where appropriate, creating a much different feel than some of the Ellington charts they have been playing. However, this chart will still serve the purposes of featuring a great vocalist who understands blues feeling and phrasing. If you have a strong, swinging rhythm section, they will shine nicely here and have the opportunity to propel the ensemble to higher heights as the riffs build.

Swingin' The Blues (1938) by Count Basie and Eddie Durham

Speaking of riffs and blues, Eddie Durham's Kansas City style, riff-based blues from the *Old Testament* Basie band is another great vehicle for working on groove. However, whereas *Every Day* is to feature a great vocalist, ***Swingin' The Blues*** is a vehicle to feature great soloists. If you have the horses in your group that you want to shine, this may be your vehicle. Not only will the ensemble learn this chart, but they can also learn the art of *creating* riff arrangements. There are several sections that can be opened up for blowing and interludes are injected to allow for the ensemble to transition to each solo section, creating a new atmosphere for each soloist or solo section. The ensemble parts are not difficult making this chart suited to bands of any level. This chart definitely jumps and swings and makes a great opener or closer!

Tippin' on the Q.T. (1952) by Buck Clayton

This Buck Clayton medium tempo swinger bridges the gap between the *Old* and *New Testament* Basie eras. It is very accessible and shows the riff approach applied to another form besides blues. This tempo will allow for a band to show great maturity by establishing a strong groove and holding it there. The melody is like a swing-able nursery rhyme. A soloist with great sense of humor could take advantage of this type of approach in blowing on this one. Trumpet soloists have an opportunity to work on a good lyrical muted sound while saxophonists will be able to work on a rich, full-bodied tone quality. The rhythm section gets to work on the textbook Basie band rhythm section sound, balancing to the Freddie Green guitar sound. Basie's band was masterful at the use of terraced dynamics, and this chart is ripe for some wonderful dynamic treatment allowing any band to make it its own.

I hope this music and this guide help you to feed your group what it needs to grow and allow you to showcase them in the best light. We look forward to hearing what you and your bands do with the material and hope to see you at the 16th Annual ***Essentially Ellington Competition & Festival*** in the spring!