

ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON

High School Jazz Band Program

A Guide to the Essentially Ellington Library (PART I)

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The *Essentially Ellington* Library contains 96 original transcriptions of recordings by Duke Ellington and other seminal big band arrangers and composers. Each tune has its own unique qualities and can be a great fit your band, if you know what to look for. With this guide, you can quickly reference difficulty levels, main concepts and notes on each tune in the library. You can view the complete list of titles and listen to original recordings at jalc.org/EssentiallyEllington.

1. *Almost Cried*

by Duke Ellington

This trumpet feature from “Anatomy of a Murder” was written for Shorty Baker, one of the greatest ballad players in jazz. The understated, heart-wrenching solo along with the soft, muted accompaniment of the saxes and trombones really do make one “almost cry.”

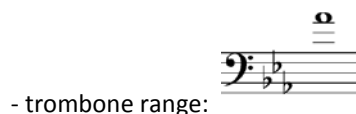
Level: Intermediate

Main Concepts:

- Dynamics, ensemble blend and intonation, ballad playing, swinging at a slow to medium tempo.

Notes:

- style = medium swing ballad (quarter note =65)
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, tenor 1, tenor 2, bari, 1 trumpet solo/1 flugelhorn, 3 trombones, bass and drums
- featured soloists: flugal horn (trumpet 2)



2. *Anitra's Dance*

by Edvard Crieg, Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn

The fifth movement from *Peer Gynt Suite*, “Anitra’s Dance” represents the whirlwind romance between Peer and Anitra. The clarinet is Anitra’s siren song and the playful ensemble sections echo her deviousness. Exaggerated dynamics and heavily accented notes are essential in conveying the tone of this piece.

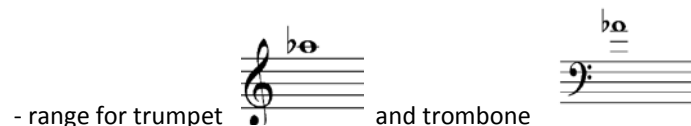
Level: Difficult

Main Concepts:

- Ensemble balance, dynamics, swing feel, refined section playing
- medium swing featuring soloist on alto saxophone, tenor sax, clarinet
- This is a great chart if you have a good clarinet player in the section and gives you the opportunity to teach the concept of swing feel and balanced section playing.

Notes:

- instrumentation: 5 woodwinds, alto 1, alto 2, clarinet, tenor, bari sax, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones bass and drums (NO piano or guitar)
- clarinet and tenor saxophone have extended transcribed solos



- range is reasonable while allowing an opportunity to work on swing style and ensemble section instrumentation

3. *Bli-Blip*

by Duke Ellington

Spooning and crooning are the order of the day with “Bli-Blip,” from the 1941 musical *Jump for Joy*. The melody was originally sung by Ray Nance, and also features solos on trumpet and bass.

Level: Advanced Beginner

Main Concepts: swing phrasing and style, ensemble balance and blend

Notes:

- call and response with vocalist
- medium swing – vocal
- great chart to work on playing AABA form
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, clarinet, tenor, bari sax, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, guitar, piano, bass drums
- vocal feature, trumpet solo

- range is very reasonable for trumpet



- range for trombone is more difficult



4. *Blue Feeling*

by Duke Ellington

“Blue Feeling” demonstrates Ellington’s uncanny ability to create a three-minute masterpiece from the smallest bit of material – in this case, one eight bar theme flanked by 12-bar blues choruses. Solis for all wind sections and solos for trumpet, trombone and clarinet make this a well-round ensemble piece.

Level: Advanced Beginner

Main Concepts:

- swing feel, ensemble blend, balance, improvising on the blues, blues style
- This would be a great chart to work in slow swing feel, blues inflections and improvisation, and ensemble balance and blend.

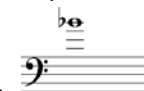
Notes:

- slow swing blues chart
- instrumentation: 4 woodwinds (alto 1, alto 2, tenor sax/clarinet, bari sax), 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, guitar, piano, bass, orchestra bells, and drums
- soloists: trumpet, trombone, clarinet

- brass range is very reasonable for trumpet



- range more difficult for trombones



5. Blue Cellophane

by Duke Ellington

This virtuoso piece is a solo feature that remains fully integrated with the ensemble. It requires great endurance, flexibility and technique in both the soloist and the ensemble sections, with no room for shyness or introspection.

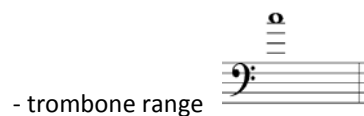
Level: Difficult

Main Concepts:

- brass range is challenging for trumpet and trombone soloist in section
- great chart for working on soloist, band interaction, ensemble blend and balance, ensemble blend with soloist, swing style and feel
- This is a great virtuoso feature if you have a great trombonist in the section

Notes:

- instrumentation: 5 woodwinds (alto 1, alto 2, tenor 1, tenor 2, bari sax), 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, guitar, bass, drums
- soloist: Trombone



6. Boy Meets Horn

by Duke Ellington, Irving Mills, and Rex Stewart

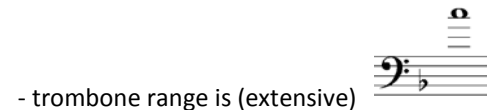
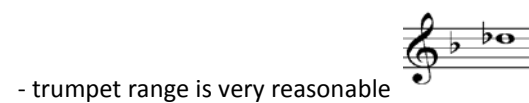
Level: Intermediate

Main Concepts:

- ensemble balance and blend with soloists, swing feel, dynamic control, piano comping, swing phrasing and articulations
- This is a great chart to feature your outstanding trumpet player. It is also a great showcase for call and response with the soloist and the ensemble. This is a hard swinging chart, and through careful listening, it is a chart to truly learn the Ellington style.

Notes:

- style = medium swing, quarter note = 120
- instrumentation: 4 saxes (no doubles), alto 1, alto 2, tenor sax, bari sax, 3 trumpets (including solo part), 3 trombones
- soloist: trumpet solo feature



7. Braggin' in Brass

by Duke Ellington

The trumpets and trombones earn their braggin' rights as they tear through this chart's breakneck soli sections. You'll surely be impressed by the brass section's virtuosity on display throughout the tune's entirety.

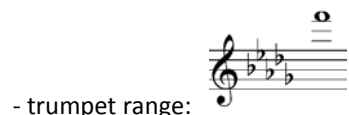
Level: Difficult

Main Concepts:

- Early jazz style (ragtime feel) and articulations, ensemble balance and blend, dynamics, swinging hard at fast tempo, part independence in the brass sections. This is truly a piece to feature an outstanding brass section.
- A great chart to feature an outstanding trumpet section and trombone section soloists. Also a great feature for outstanding trombone and trumpet soloists.

Notes:

- style = fast swing (quarter note = 159)
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, tenor, bari, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, guitar, bass, drums
- soloists: trumpet, trombone



9. *Diminuendo and Crescendo In Blue*

by Duke Ellington

“Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue” consists of two separate tunes swung together by a tenor solo known as “The Wailing Interval,” which was made famous by Paul Gonsalves at Newport. Diminuendo in Blue and Crescendo in Blue remind us of how hard a big band can truly swing, and why we love being there to hear it.

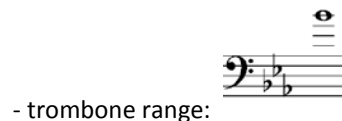
Level: Difficult

Main Concepts:

- dynamic contrasts, swing feel, swing articulations, ensemble balance and blend, blues improvisation in various keys, rhythm section balance and maintaining intensity, jazz counterpoint!
- Great chart to feature the entire band and each section with outstanding counterpoint and plenty of room for soloists. Great for showcasing your jazz band while demonstrating outstanding technique.

Notes:

- style = medium swing (quarter note = 195)
- instrumentation: alto/clarinet, alto/clarinet, tenor/clarinet, bari/clarinet, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, guitar, piano, bass, drums
- soloists: piano, trumpet, bari, clarinet, (others may be added)



10. *Flaming Sword*

by Duke Ellington

Ellington starts this tune with a fanfare led by the fiery brass section. The band really displays their verve in this swinging conga dance. Filled with blistering brass solos, this adventurous Latin romp is complete with strong section solis, unison and musical pyramids that show off the orchestra’s virtuosity.

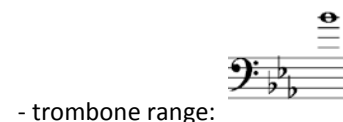
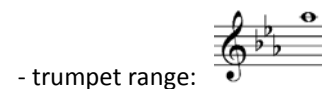
Level: Difficult

Main Concepts:

- Conga Latin jazz dance feel, straight eighth-note time feel, clarinet doubles for entire section ensemble balance blend, dance articulations
- Great chart as a change of pace straight eighth conga Latin jazz feel, and also great to work on clarinet doubles for entire reed section. Great feature for an outstanding trumpet section because of the style and writing, not because of difficulty of range.

Notes:

- style = fast conga (Latin)
- instrumentation: alto 1/clarinet, alto 2/clarinet, tenor sax 1/clarinet, tenor 2/clarinet, Bari-(alto/clarinet), 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, guitar, piano, bass, drums
- soloists: piano, trombone 3, tenor sax, trumpet 1, clarinet 2



11. *Half The Fun*

by Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington

Level: Intermediate

Main Concepts:

- Ostinato bass line and percussion playing, plunger technique for brass, dynamic control, ensemble balance and blend, and even eighth-note subdivision feel
- This would be a great contrast selection for a concert because it is a straight eighth quasi beguine. The rhythm section will learn to establish a groove feel and keep it there. It is a showcase for the drums and the alto soloist.

Notes:

- style = quasi beguine, quarter note = 192 (straight eighth-note groove)
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, tenor 1 (clarinet double), tenor 2, bari sax, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, piano, bass, drums
- soloists: alto saxophone, piano



- trumpet range:



- trombone range:

12. *Happy-Go-Lucky Local*

by Duke Ellington

Written as the fourth and final movement of the *Deep South Suite*, “Happy-Go-Lucky Local” makes all the stops in alluding to the clatter of a locomotive. Pay attention to the ostinato rhythm and drive of the coal-powered engine, the bells, the whistles, the brakes, and the crashing together of couplings, all within the context of an amazing and thoroughly swinging groove.

Level: Difficult

Main Concepts:

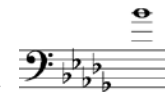
- Great chart to teach the swing shuffle, improvisation, ensemble balance/blend, jazz articulations, blues phrasing, and inflections.
- This is a great vehicle to work on improvisation for the entire group, and a feature for many soloists. It also is a great example of how Ellington was able to use the orchestra to produce and represent his love for trains! If you have a drummer that can shuffle and an outstanding bassist, this is the one.

Notes:

- style = medium swing shuffle (blues)
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, tenor 1 (clarinet doubles), tenor sax, bari sax, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, piano, bass, drums
- soloists: alto sax, bari sax, tenor sax, piano, bass, drums



- trumpet range is reasonable



- trombone range is more challenging

13. *I Didn't Know About You*

composed by Duke Ellington, arranged by Ellington and Billy Strayhorn

Originally written as a Johnny Hodges feature, Strayhorn rearranged this beautiful ballad for a record date with the great Ella Fitzgerald. Quiet but intensely romantic, this challenging tune is handled with much aplomb by the sultry chanteuse and the equally tender alto saxophone.

Level: Intermediate

Main Concepts:

- swing ballad featuring vocalist (alto voice) and alto sax soloist, brief piano introduction
- This is a great chart for teaching the ballad feel, maintaining a constant dance feel on a slow ballad, ensemble balance and blend with vocalist, rhythm section interaction with vocalist
- This is a great chart for your lead alto and female vocalist. Even though not an easy vocal part because of the intervals, it is great to feature your vocalist and have them work on being creative as the melody is repeated.

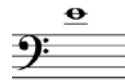
Notes:

- instrumentation: 5 saxes (clarinet double for 1st tenor sax), 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, piano, bass, drums, vocal

- easy brass ranges: trumpet



- trombone range:



14. *I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)*

composed by Duke Ellington, arranged by Billy Strayhorn

Level: Advanced Beginner

Main Concepts:

- this is a great chart for teaching ensemble blend and balance, ballad playing, balance with vocals, playing soft while maintaining intensity for trumpet players, it develops the ability to play using a pixie and plunger mute
- This is a great feature for your vocalist and alto saxophone soloist. This chart allows the vocalist and sax soloist to develop the ability to tell a story through musical expressions

Notes:

- style = medium swing ballad
- instrumentation: 5 saxes (alto 1, alto 2, tenor 1 (clarinet) tenor sax 2, Bari), 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, piano, guitar, bass, drums, vocalist
- soloists: 2nd alto, vocalist (alto voice), lead trombone

- trumpet range reasonable



- trombone solo range is difficult



15. I Let A Song Go Out of My Heart

by Duke Ellington, Irving Mills, Henry Nemo and John Redmond

This chart is deceptively simple. Attention needs to be given to the mute techniques called for in the brass and the understated dynamics and light style called for in the ensemble tutti section. A call-and-response duet between the alto and bari saxophones also makes for an interesting moment.

Level: Intermediate

Main Concepts:

- This is a great chart to teach plunger technique to your brass section, dance swing feel, ensemble playing and jazz articulations.
- The chart would be a great chart to feature a great number of soloists with interaction and strong swing feel and attitude. The plunger sections for the brass add intensity and swing appeal to this chart.

Notes:

- style = medium swing
- instrumentation: 4 saxes (alto 1, alto 2, tenor sax (clarinet doubles), bari sax, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, guitar, piano, bass, drums
- soloists: alto 2, bari sax, trombone 1, tenor 1, clarinet

- trumpet range is reasonable



-trombone range is more difficult



16. I've Just Seen Her

composed by Charles Strouse, arranged by Billy Strayhorn

This lesser known ballad is from the musical *All-American*, and was written for Ellington's long-time tenor saxophonist, Paul Gonsalves. The piece paints a picture of alluring beauty with touches of color that range from the light and sensual tenor solo to the bright and brassy ensemble sound.

Level: Intermediate

Main Concepts:

- This is a great chart to teach ensemble blend, balance and intonation. Because there is no chordal rhythm section instrument, each section has to learn to listen carefully. Dynamic contrast is another concept that is taught when learning this chart.
- This chart is a must for your outstanding tenor saxophonist. This chart also teaches overall ballad playing and great bass/drum coordination.

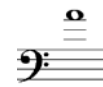
Notes:

- style = straight eighth-note ballad
- instrumentation: 5 saxes (no doubles), 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, bass, drums
- soloists: virtuoso tenor sax feature, trumpet solo (brief)

- trumpet range is reasonable



- trombone range is reasonable



17. "Isfahan" from The Far East Suite

by Billy Strayhorn

Understatement and simplicity are key for this piece from *The Far East Suite*, also known as *Impressions of the Far East*. There's no piano or guitar, but the lean instrumentation shows off Strayhorn's counterpoint in the horns and unique understanding of tonal colors.

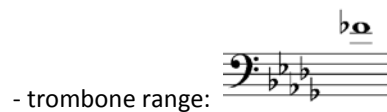
Level: Intermediate

Main Concepts:

- Ballad style, maintaining slow swing triplet pulse and feel without dragging, ensemble balance, blend, intonation; dynamics, rhythm section technique for bass and drum.
- Proper playing of legato style. (No piano or guitar)
- This is an outstanding chart to feature the alto saxophone soloist. This also is a great chart to feature a mature rhythm section of only bass and drums.

Notes:

- style = slow swing ballad, quarter note = 61
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, tenor 1, tenor 2, bari, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, bass and drums
- featured soloists: alto saxophone



18. Jump For Joy

by Duke Ellington

"Jump for Joy" is the title number of a 1941 musical composed by Duke Ellington. The show centers on the death of "Jim Crow," and celebrates the freedom of expression that would be granted to African-Americans in a post-segregation America. This vocal feature is sure to cause some jumping with its bouncy swing feel.

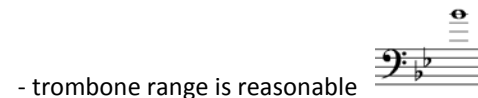
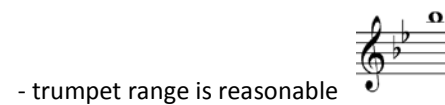
Level: Advanced Beginner

Main Concepts:

- dynamics, ensemble balance and blend with vocalist, call and response, and stride swing feel
- This is a great chart to feature your vocalist and several soloists. It also showcases a band's control and ability to articulate and play good dynamics.

Notes:

- style = medium fast swing, quarter note = 190
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, clarinet, tenor sax, bari sax, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, guitar, piano, bass, drums, vocals
- soloists: trombone, vocalist, tenor sax, alto sax



19. Tutti for Cootie

by Duke Ellington and Jimmy Hamilton

“Tutti for Cootie” is an up-tempo, swinging blues written for Ellington trumpeter Cootie Williams. This trumpet feature showcases both the growl/plunger style of soloing as well as the Armstrong-influenced declaratory style. Intensity builds throughout the chart up to the huge shout chorus at the end.

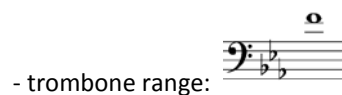
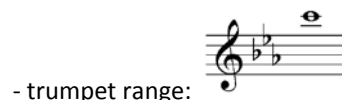
Level: Difficult

Main Concepts:

- Shuffle swing triplet feel, early trumpet style with plunger technique, ensemble balance and blend, blues style and form.
- This chart is one of the swinging-est charts written by Duke. It is a must to showcase the outstanding and serious jazz trumpet student.

Notes:

- style = medium shuffle
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, tenor 1, tenor 2, bari, 4 trumpets + 1 trumpet soloist, 3 trombones, piano, bass, drums
- soloists: piano, trumpet, trombone



20. Zweet Zursday from “Suite Thursday”

by Duke Ellington

“Zweet Zursday” is the third movement of “Suite Thursday,” a four movement work commissioned by the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1960. The piano solo has all the style and sophistication of Duke Ellington’s own mastery, and the graceful clarinet solo leads to an intense trombone solo.

Level: Intermediate

Main Concepts:

- Latin style (straight eighth-notes), rhythmic feel, ensemble balance, blend and intonation, legato and lyrical playing, the proper use of trombone mutes
- This is a great chart as a change of pace and stylistic programming. An outstanding feature for the grooving pseudo Latin rhythmic section; also features an outstanding piano solo part and virtuosic trombone solo.

Notes:

- Latin style, quarter note = 110
- instrumentation: alto 1, alto 2, clarinet, tenor , bari, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, piano, bass, drums
- soloists: piano, tenor, trombone

