

ARRANGING

(Here are some basic hints about arranging, designed for someone who has little or no experience in the matter.)

STYLE

Decide initially what style you want, eg. Dixieland, Mainstream, Bebop, Modal, Funk, Symphonic, Hillbilly, Ethnic, etc etc.

TEMPO/RHYTHM

It's often refreshing to try something different, eg. a fast tune as a ballad, or vice versa, a 4/4 as a 3/4, or vice versa. Swing into straight 8's, or vice versa, is another possibility. Indulge in a few vices!

HARMONY

Standards are not written with jazz in mind, so harmonic changes are often necessary. In busking / faking, the changes are pretty standard. But in writing arrangements, you are at liberty to completely restructure the harmonic base if need be. (Except in MY tunes.) You can get a boppish sound by having a different chord every two beats, whereas more modern styles tend to reduce the number of changes. Ballads can be rewritten so that the melody line falls on many of the higher extensions of chords. Mancini's tunes already do this and they are worth studying. Use devices such as the cycle of fifths, II V Is or II V's, chromatic passages and unresolved chords - your ear should always guide you.

TUNE

Most standards, particularly show tunes, need to be modified to get better jazz phrasing. Don't be tempted to change the melodic line though, unless absolutely necessary.

INSTRUMENTATION

There are 3 basic choice with regard to the melody itself.

- a) The tune can be played by a solo instrument (good for ballads) - see that it is in a suitable key and range for the instrument concerned;
- b) It can be played in unison, which makes it much more powerful;
- c) It can be played in block harmony (best for rhythmic tunes which don't dart about too much in range.) This option can be subdivided into ensemble harmony, eg. big band type of phrasing, or section harmony, or harmony using instruments drawn from different sections.

Saxophone harmony is particularly good for legato passages and for bluesy-sounding chords, but do watch the vibrato to avoid it becoming too saccharine. Clarinet lead in place of alto lead will give you a Glen Miller sound. Soprano sax lead is more modern and ideal for really squirmy passages.

Trombone harmony is rich-sounding over a very wide area, but trumpet harmony by itself may noticeably lack bottom, so very often the trombones are added to give a wider, spread, punchy sound. Note that a baritone sax may occasionally be used in conjunction with the trombone section, or the whole of the brass. In very low passages which need to be emphasized may see the baritone (and bass trombone) in unison with the bass and piano. Use brass mutes to change the sound and to reduce the volume.

It is possible sometimes to think in terms of high and low - thus, the trumpets play with the altos (and flute / clarinet), while the trombones play with the tenors and baritone. This is useful for contrapuntal two-part writing.

BACKGROUND

It is possible to impose different layers on top of each other, eg. the tune plus an accompaniment, which itself may be split up between different instruments playing different parts. With just two levels, you can choose between the following: harmony-unison, harmony-harmony, unison-unison, soloist-harmony, soloist-unison, soloist-another solo voice. These variations can be changed every so often, say, every 8 bars to give variety. Loud ensemble passages can be used for building a climax or for a shout chorus, so treat this as a trump card.

OTHER POINTS

- The bass may play in 4 (4 notes to a bar in 4/4 tempo) or in a skipping 2-feel, which can sound nice on the first and sometimes last chorus of a piece. It can also play a more broken-up line but you need to choose the right band for this to work.
- The drums can play with sticks or brushes (usually best for quieter numbers). Also, the time can be played on ride cymbal or on the high-hat. Don't write every note for the drummer - leave him/her some freedom to manoeuvre.
- The piano can play in unison with other instruments, but can easily be drowned out in louder passages. Where the band is playing block chords, it is best to give the piano some indication of the rhythm played by the rest of the band. Piano solos can be used as fillers, introductions or as a relief from the horns.
- Introductions: these can be taken from a rhythmic, melodic or harmonic characteristic of the tune, or can be a vamp, a pedal, or whatever else strikes you. Sometimes you can contrast the introduction with the entry of the tune - rhythm section / horns, brass / reeds - or you can build up on the foundation laid down in the introduction.
- Endings: sometimes the last 4 bars of a tune are repeated twice, or the last few notes can be played with a longer value, or you can end up with a vamp and then a chord.

