

SECTIONS, PADS AND OTHER BACKGROUND FIGURES

When you plan an arrangement you have an idea about what instruments you want in different parts of the chart. This will suggest what contribution the other instruments can play. It is not always necessary to plan the whole thing before you start - you may choose to leave certain things till later so in effect you are playing it by ear as things develop. Being too rigid and over-precise in the planning can leave no room for spontaneous inspiration. Writing an arrangement is a bit like improvisation in this respect.

Here I want to talk about the role of things other than the full ensemble - section work, chordal backing to a solo instrument, riffs and anything else which you may want to include.

For the tune itself, you may want a **solo instrument** or a section in unison or harmony for at least a part of it. If you choose a solo instrument, the backing may come purely from the rhythm section. Of course it is possible that you may want the piano, guitar or bass to play the tune. As far as the dynamic level is concerned, this is at its lowest if all the horns are tacit. This means that it might be good for the very beginning of a piece but to build at all you will need the addition of some of the horns.

Let's say you want the start of an AABA 32-bar tune to be played by an alto sax with just rhythm section. Looking backwards, the intro (unless you want to go straight in) can either be the rhythm section or an unaccompanied alto solo. Conversely you may want to contrast the small group start of the tune with a much fuller sound - various sections or even full ensemble. Now the 1st 8 bars or so have been planned for, you'll need to start adding things, for example the trombones in harmony, or a unison line, perhaps the trombones or other saxes. This can last for the next 8 bars.

In the bridge/middle 8, you can continue to have the solo alto playing the tune, or you could add some of the other saxes to it in unison or harmony or you could add the brass. Alternatively you could have another instrument or section play the tune here. In the final 8 bars, you could revert to the solo alto with various other instruments as backing or you could give the rest of the tune to other instruments but making it more powerful than the rest of the tune to create a mini-climax.

Before going further, a word about **climaxes**. An arrangement is built up of a series of climaxes. Often the initial statement of the entire tune builds up to a minor climax, then hands things over to a solo instrument or to various sections which start again at a low ebb. Over the course of the solo or the section work, the tension again rises and peaks at the end of the chorus or wherever you end this particular passage. If the solo carries on for several choruses, you will need to take things easy and gradually build up.

You may follow this by an ensemble passage which builds up again. If this is to be a shout chorus in which all the horns are involved, it will lead up to the biggest climax of all. The tune or part of the tune will then follow - don't make this too long as it will be an anticlimax. If it is a particularly long tune, only part of it, say the last 8 bars will be sufficient. Sometimes though you may wish to end an arrangement on a high point. For this to happen, you may omit the tune at the end or incorporate part of the tune within the shout chorus. Another option would be to use a vamp (a few bars repeated over and over again) building up the tension by adding more instruments for a rousing finish. It's your baby and you can do what you want with it.

An important thing to remember is the notion of **contrast**. If the first part of a solo or tune is played by one instrument with just rhythm section backing, wait a time, say 8 bars, before bringing in some of the horns as a backing. If you want you can again cut the horns for a while afterwards before resuming the backing. Having to compete with the other horns for a while will gear up the soloist and when they cut out the soloist will be in fighting form and will have lost any initial inhibitions. If the solo is by a trombonist, the backing is best not left to the remaining trombonists but another section such as the saxes. The same applies in the case of a trumpet soloist although it is rare to have just a trumpet backing unless it is unison. For saxes this can sometimes also be the case - best to contrast soloist with another section but it is not quite so important as each of the saxes has a slightly different sound. Be very wary about having one of the backing instruments play an individual line

even for just a few notes as it distracts from the soloist's line.

A common feature of many arrangements is having **riffs** behind soloists. A riff is usually a short phrase that is repeated several times. It is usually a unison phrase but it can be harmonised too. Several riffs can be used, adding each one after the other one has had time to make an impact. For this reason it is best if they are kept simple and don't obscure the soloist or he may not buy you a drink afterwards, or ever after!

Pads are harmonised backing which can be rhythmic or consist mainly of long notes. They are usually played by a whole section. Trombone pads are very common. It is not necessary to put the lowest note on the root note of a chord so use various inversions to compliment the lead line. Trombones occupy a very resonant area and therefore can sound very full. Sax pads tend to be more slithery with lots of glisses and bent notes. They tend to be more rhythmic too. As noted before trumpet pads are rare but you can use the whole brass as a pad. If the solo instrument is a trumpet or trombone and it is a fairly quiet piece you can put the brass in mutes as a contrast.

Something to bear in mind is that horn players need to **breath**. You can help them do this by including rests. Another way to cope with this, which I have done a lot of, is to intersperse sections so that each has a few bars to play and is immediately followed (or maybe there is a short overlap) by another section. This also creates contrast which will mean that the piece will be more interesting to listen to and to play.

A held chord by one section can be contrasted with moving chords weaving in and out of that chord played by another section. Provided you end up or start on roughly the same chord there will not be a clash.

Finally, groups of players can be taken from **different sections**. For instance you could have 2 trumpets and 2 trombones in 1 section and 2 trumpets (muted or on flugelhorns) and 2 trombones in another section. Various saxes can also be mixed with some of the brass to form new units. Also, flutes and clarinets can form a unique section in contrast to the remaining saxes.