



Big Band Arrangements for Reduced or Unique Instrumentations

Dr. Michael Kearns

Example: All Blues (Miles Davis, 1959), Man in the Mirror (Garrett & Ballard, 1988)

Leading big bands at the elementary or high school level is challenging. The fixed instrumentation of many charts can be problematic. Being able to adapt or create arrangements to fit your ensemble is invaluable. This seminar will look at both ways of acquiring suitable repertoire for your band.

1. Originally a 5 horn chart in 1995 (alto, tenor, baritone, trumpet, trombone), with three-part rhythm section (piano, bass, drums), it is expanded to a full big band arrangement with guitar.

Keeping young and aspiring ensembles in mind, I doubled up all the horn parts, making it a “concert” jazz arrangement, i.e., the alto saxophones played the same line, the tenor saxophones played the same line etc. Doubling-up parts increases the confidence of young or inexperienced players and gives the conductor piece of mind when absences are a possibility. Matching these paired/doubled lines with the original five-horn chart left me with an extra pair of “high” and “low” brass for which to assign or write new lines. This was very manageable, whether the original was a three-horn or five-horn arrangement. The takeaway: You can shop for small ensemble charts and flesh them out into big band arrangements. Your pocketbook will thank you.

2. Two choices: thicken the harmony of existing lines or create a new line.

Trumpet 3 & 4 and Trombone 3 & 4 (the two new pairings) thickened the harmony in the introduction. Remember that the original Trombone line = Trombone 1 & 2 and the original Trumpet line = Trumpet 1 & 2. (examples in concert pitch)

Musical score for a 7-piece big band arrangement of "All Blues". The score is in 3/4 time with a tempo of 138 BPM. The instruments are: ALTO 1 & 2, TENOR 1 & 2, BARI. SAX., TRUMPET 1 & 2, TRUMPET 3 & 4, TROMBONE 1 & 2, and TROMBONE 3 & 4. The score shows the first few measures of the introduction, with dynamics ranging from *f* to *fp*.

Ex. 1

Musical notation for Example 1, showing two staves. The upper staff has a descending melody, and the lower staff has a riff. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

In the opening vamp section (Ex. 1), I assign the original riff to Trombone 3 & 4 (lower line) and write a new descending melody for Trombone 1 & 2 (upper line) in the key of G minor.

For the melody at C, I add Trombone 1 & 2 to the original alto saxophone and trumpet duet, assign Trombone 3 & 4 to the original background shots by the trombone and finally, thicken the line/shots with Trumpet 3 & 4. The baritone saxophone is doubling the bass line, as it was in the original.

Musical score for measures 61-68, labeled "FULL SCORE". The score includes parts for Alto 1 & 2, Tenor 1 & 2, Baritone Sax., Trumpet 1 & 2, Trumpet 3 & 4, Trombone 1 & 2, and Trombone 3 & 4. A circled "C" is above the first measure.

Second time at D, the "head" (the melody) is harmonized. The chord was already thick enough, so instead of adding more notes, I taceted Trumpet 3 & 4 and Trombone 3 & 4. I did not change the original arrangement. Not everyone has to play all the time.

Musical score for measures 69-72, labeled "FULL SCORE". The score includes parts for Alto 1 & 2, Tenor 1 & 2, Baritone Sax., Trumpet 1 & 2, Trumpet 3 & 4, Trombone 1 & 2, and Trombone 3 & 4. A circled "D" is above the first measure.

For the bass solo (E), I added new background shots and was therefore liberated to write whatever I wanted. However, I still kept the instrumental pairings with one exception: Alto 1 and Alto 2 had separate notes to give the voicings a little more “bite” (a tone or semi-tone between the altos). A model solo is written out for young bass players.

For the shout chorus (F, above and to the right), Trumpet 3 & 4 (playing unique notes) and Trombone 3 & 4 joined the rhythm section in “response” to the band’s “call.” This is still thickening the line but the rhythm section line in this case.

In the Coda, Trumpet 3 & 4 and Trombone 3 & 4 add a counter line to create polyphony and tension, pushing to the musical conclusion.

Wrote "Man in the Mirror" for the unique instrumentation of the After Hours Big Band: six saxophones (two baritones), five trumpets, four trombones, full rhythm section and two singers.

1. Even with a *big* band, the introduction captured the flavour of the original recording, featuring the rhythm section. I wrote a descending bass line to introduce a new sound into a classic arrangement.

Musical score for the introduction of "Man in the Mirror". The score is in 4/4 time and features four staves: Jazz Guitar, Piano, Acoustic Bass, and Drum Set. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 88. The dynamics are marked as *mf*. The Piano part includes a "SOLO" marking. The Drum Set part shows a pattern of eighth notes and rests.

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2. I cannot take credit for the vocal duet. This was written by Ed Lojeski and it came from a lead sheet purchased from musicnotes.com.

3. As it is a pop/swing arrangement, the horn voicings are pretty straight forward. For instance, in the first verse, the saxophones have triad "shots," voiced in thirds, with the baritone saxophones playing the root of the chord in octaves.

Musical score for the first verse of "Man in the Mirror". The score is in 4/4 time and features six staves: two voices and four saxophones (Alto 1, Alto 2, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, Baritone Sax 1, Baritone Sax 2). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 88. The dynamics are marked as *mf*. The score includes a section marked with a circled 'B' and a page number '3' in the top right corner. The lyrics are: "AS I TURN UP THE COL-LAR ON MY FAV-RITE WIN-TER COAT. THIS WIND IS BLOW-IN' MY MIND. I SEE THE KIDS".

4. In the bridge, the “Oh, yeah” sung by the background vocalists is replaced by the band. The brass voicings are shown here. Once again, the voicings are simple: the trumpets are in 1st and 2nd inversion with the top note being doubled and the trombones finish in root position.

5. By the second pre-chorus, I am starting to write counter lines to complement the vocal melody. The first one is a major bebop scale distributed between the sections. It is in unison (and octaves), so there are no complications (additional work) for six saxophones and five trumpets.



6. The high point of the chart comes in a later chorus when there are multiple background lines. Arguably, this is stepped-up again when the arrangement modulates up a half-step at J.

87 (3)

VOICE
MIND! THAT MAN THAT MAN THAT MAN... OH YEAH THAT MAN THAT MAN THAT MAN BET-TER

VOICE
MIND! WITH THAT MAN... IN THE MIR-ROR THAT MAN I'M ASK-ING HIM TO CHANG... HIS WAYS... YOU

ALTO 1

ALTO 2

TENOR 1

TENOR 2

SAX. 1

SAX. 2

TRP. 1

TRP. 2

TRP. 3

TRP. 4

TRP. 5

TBN. 1

Summary

- You are able to efficiently and simply tailor any arrangement to fit your ensemble
 - You may need to do this out of fiscal restraint or unique instrumentation
 - It will take some effort on your first attempt but each consecutive project will become easier
- At JW Pepper, there is an abundance of 3 horn arrangements of jazz standards. With your new skill, you will expose your students to a better quality of repertoire and save money in the process. In addition, you can have a hand in tailoring the arrangement to the skill level of your students.
- While this task may seem daunting, you will not know the challenges and rewards until you try, so get started!