

Jim Novak

Discussion 10: 10.27.20

DUNSCOMB & HILL, Chapter 11 - 12

I anticipate this discussion centering mostly around small group jazz and teaching these groups. Do you have experience teaching or playing in a small jazz group? For some of you, this may be the only way to introduce your students to jazz. Does it have to be standard jazz instruments? How would you fit this in your schedule?

Jazz Combos are such a valuable ensemble for our students, and really give them an opportunity to perform more independently, and exhibit some leadership skills that no other ensemble can provide. I don't have much experience at all with jazz combos, either as a student or teacher. The opportunity to perform in one never presented itself in high school or college, and while I've worked with jazz bands over my career, I've just never thought to introduce that to my program. I would love to hear from other middle school band directors who have jazz combos fit into their programs.

The challenges I would face in bringing them to my school would be scheduling and personnel. For scheduling, any combos would need to meet before school or after school, but the bigger issue I would see is having enough rhythm section personnel to make any groups work. I could see combos working with literally any combination of wind instruments, but I feel like the rhythm section would need to be somewhat traditional and complete in order to make a combo work. I have always struggled to an extent to get enough players to fill out my single jazz band rhythm section, so I would that presenting a big challenge if I were to add some combos to the program.

Given the inherent improvisatory nature of the jazz combo, I think the natural progression would be to start with a bigger jazz ensemble to get the largest number of students involved and exposed to jazz as a genre. Once the large ensemble is established, I would start by approaching the rhythm section to make sure they are on board, or make an announcement for any interested drum set, piano, guitar and bass players. Once I knew I had a functional rhythm section, I would open it up to the winds and see where the general interest was.