

# Composing for the Jazz Orchestra: A Guide for Beginners and Seasoned Composers



## Composing for the Jazz Orchestra by William Russo

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The jazz orchestra is a large ensemble that typically consists of 12 to 20 musicians. It is a versatile ensemble that can play a wide variety of music, from swing to bebop to modern jazz. Composing for the jazz orchestra can be a challenging but rewarding experience. Here is a guide to help you get started.

## Instrumentation

The jazz orchestra is typically made up of the following instruments:

- Saxophones (alto, tenor, baritone)
- Trumpets (2-4)
- Trombones (2-4)
- Piano

- Bass
- Drums
- Optional instruments: guitar, vibes, flute, clarinet

The instrumentation of the jazz orchestra can vary depending on the size of the ensemble and the style of music being played. For example, a big band may have a larger number of trumpets and trombones, while a small jazz ensemble may have only a few saxophones and a rhythm section.

## **Orchestration**

Orchestration is the art of writing music for a specific ensemble. When orchestrating for the jazz orchestra, it is important to consider the range, timbre, and articulation of each instrument. You also need to think about how the instruments will sound together and how they will interact with each other.

Here are some tips for orchestrating for the jazz orchestra:

- Use a variety of voicings and textures.
- Don't be afraid to experiment with different instrument combinations.
- Pay attention to the balance between the different sections of the orchestra.
- Use dynamics and articulation to create interest and contrast.

## **Arranging**

Arranging is the process of adapting existing music for a specific ensemble. When arranging for the jazz orchestra, you need to consider the same

factors that you would when orchestrating, but you also need to think about how the music will flow and how it will be interpreted by the musicians.

Here are some tips for arranging for the jazz orchestra:

- Start with a strong melody.
- Use a variety of harmonic colors and rhythms.
- Create a clear and concise arrangement.
- Leave room for improvisation.

## **Composing**

Once you have a good understanding of instrumentation, orchestration, and arranging, you can start composing for the jazz orchestra. The following are some tips to help you get started:

- Write for the instruments that you know best.
- Start with simple melodies and harmonies.
- Experiment with different rhythms and textures.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes.
- Get feedback from other musicians.

## **Exercises**

Here are some exercises to help you practice composing for the jazz orchestra:

1. Write a simple melody for the saxophone section.

2. Harmonize the melody using basic chords.
3. Add a countermelody for the trumpet section.
4. Arrange the piece for the full jazz orchestra.
5. Transpose the piece into a different key.

## Examples

Here are some examples of jazz orchestra compositions:

- Duke Ellington - "Take the 'A' Train"
- Count Basie - "One O'Clock Jump"
- Gil Evans - "Sketches of Spain"
- Bob Brookmeyer - "Suite for Jazz Orchestra No. 1"
- Maria Schneider - "All Our Yesterdays"

Composing for the jazz orchestra can be a challenging but rewarding experience. By following the tips in this guide, you can start writing beautiful and effective jazz compositions.



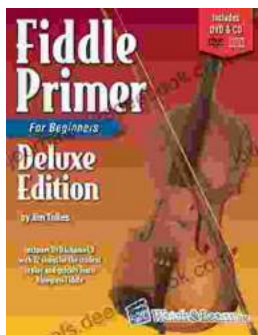
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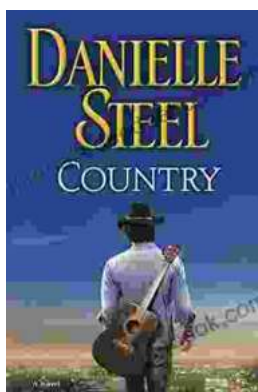
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