The Rhythm Section: Basics

- All players are “timekeepers”
- Each instrument needs to know its role & typical function
- Flexibility to function as part of a combo or a big band
- In general, the rhythm section dynamics are the cornerstone for the ensemble
- Use proper rhythm section set-up to facilitate eye/ear contact for all
- As always, listening is important, not only for solos, but also the art of comping
Rhythm Section: Set-up

Amp

Trumpets...

Amp

Trombones...

Amp

Saxophones...
The Rhythm Section: Piano Basics

- Reading parts & chord symbols
- Provide harmony, color, rhythmic interest
- All chords on the chart are not necessarily meant to be played all the time
- Generally speaking, do not use the pedal, unless indicated or for specific sustain use
- Piano establishes rhythm section volume
The Rhythm Section: Piano Comping

- Avoid root position chords, use shell voicings at first, for example:
  - Voicing chords using 3rd and 7th in l.h.
  - Adding root, fifth, root (roots & fifths are optional) or use color tone substitutions (9 or 6) in r.h.
  - Open voicings that span over an octave
  - Generally, stay within an octave of middle C
  - Move from chord to chord as efficiently as possible

- Leave space for ensemble and soloist
- Begin with pre-conceived rhythmic patterns that are idiomatic, then devise your own
The Rhythm Section: Piano Players for Comping

- Red Garland
- Herbie Hancock
- Chick Corea
- Bill Evans
- Duke or Count
- Wynton Kelly
- McCoy Tyner
The Rhythm Section: Basic Bass

- Establish rhythm (groove), time, and harmony
- Reading parts & chord symbols
- Pulse vs. feel or tempo vs. momentum
- Keep lines legato, except early swing style
- Lines are usually played in step-wise fashion for “swing” styles
- Play chord tones for each new chord, and/or use chord tones on 1 & 3 with any other note (i.e., chromatic or diatonic) on 2 & 4
The Rhythm Section: Basic Bass

- Must be “in the pocket” rhythmically with drummer (e.g., flat 4 and ride cymbal)
- Should play electric as well as acoustic

Equipment
- Hartke, Polytone, Trace Elliott, GK amps
- Barcus-Berry pick-up

Bass players: Ray Brown, Paul Chambers, Eddie Gomez, Jimmy Blanton, Slam Stewart, Jimmy Garrison, Jaco Pastorius
The Rhythm Section: Drum Basics

- Reading drum charts, playing and/or not playing what is written or not written
- Big band charts are minimally written. Recommend looking at score or lead trumpet part for kicks
- Bass drum can either be used on every beat to “feather” the bass line in flat four tunes, or used only to “drop bombs”
- Hi-hat on 2 & 4 is good starting point for beginners (all-four on Latin tunes)
- Ride cymbal and pattern needs to establish style as well as tempo
The Rhythm Section: 
Drum Parts

- Bass drum: needs clear sound, not dead; 20” drum is good, 18” for combo; needs some sustain; used for certain feels and accents
- Snare drum: 14” is good; snares need to be correct tension; used for comping and certain accents (e.g., high brass)
- Toms (floor or other): good tom size is 10” and 14” for floor toms; tune tighter in jazz than other styles (not too tight), and with some ring; used effectively for styles (Latin) and accents with middle voices (e.g., trombones)
- Ride cymbal: needs “ring & ping”; thin causes too much wash while heavy too dry; best location for ride pattern is somewhere between crown and edge
- Crash cymbals: higher sounds will usually penetrate big band sound
- Hi-hat: needs good “chick” sound; 14” work well all-around; thinner good for recording, thicker for live
The Rhythm Section:
Drums working w/others

- Music stand needs to be placed to see director and have eye contact with others in rhythm section
- Must be a team player
- Bass and drums must have the tightest rapport
- Interaction w/piano or guitar must allow for dialogue and interplay
- Drummer should support the soloist
  - Assist with the outline of form
  - Use dynamics and activity to create interest
  - Be unique for every soloist
- Dynamics play an important part in the ensemble
- Players: Buddy Rich, Mel Lewis, Elvin Jones, Jo Jones, Philly Jo Jones, Tony Williams
The Rhythm Section: Guitar

- Read parts and chord symbols
- Very consistent with role of piano
- Must work with piano to complement one another
- Rarely plays/comps with piano unless for a specific style (e.g., certain Latin rhythms, Freddie Green style)
- Avoid bar chords and chord with roots in low sounding strings
- Keep it simple and sparse
- Equipment and tone are important for different styles (Latin, Fusion, Swing)
- Equipment: Ibanez, Gibson; solid body vs. hollow
- People: Freddie Green, Wes Montgomery, Charlie Byrd, Mike Stern…
### Ensemble Set-Up (Block)

**Pros**
- Close-knit, cohesive, audience center
- Allow players to hear each other well
- Less stage area

**Cons**
- Saxes hear wall of brass, but can be alleviated with brass risers
- Brass, especially trumpets, cannot hear saxophones
- Players on opposite sides hear delays (solutions: internal time, monitors)
Ensemble Set-Up
(Straight Wings)

Pros
- No brass behind saxes
- Audience hears stereo of winds
- Sound is directed straight in hall

Cons
- Hard for end players to see director
- Much distance between bass trombone and baritone, and takes a lot of stage
- Saxes and brass cannot hear each other as well
Ensemble Set-Up (Angled Wings)

Pros
- Players can see director
- Saxes are free of brass and can hear each other

Cons
- Brass sounds are directional, therefore going stage left
- Distance between bass trombone and baritone, and takes a lot of stage
Ensemble Set-Up
(Kenton Wings)

Pros
- Players can see director
- Saxes are free of brass and can hear each other
- Trombones are independent and can hear all

Cons
- Brass sounds are directional, therefore trombone sound is going stage left
- Distance between bass trombone and baritone, and takes a lot of stage
- All winds are separated from one another, making it more difficult for cohesion
Ensemble Set-Up
(Rehearsal Square)

Pros
- Players can see director
- All sections can hear one another
- Key dividends: balance, blend, dynamic control
- Also ideal for recording for mic separation

Cons
- Not suitable for performance
- Return to performance set-up prior to performance
Ensemble Set-Up
(Risers)

- Needed for block formation
- Trumpets on “double” riser and standing
- Trombones on a single riser and sitting
  - Stands can be placed on the ground in front of the riser
  - Stands are placed on right side w/bells on left side
  - Trombone bells should be pointed between heads of saxophonists in front
- Saxophones sit stage level (stage fronts or stands)