

Jazz Orchestra: Research, Composition, and Performance

SURG | Arts, Humanities, and Performance | *Tags: Group Project, Creative Output*

*This cover page is meant to focus your reading of the sample proposal, summarizing important aspects of proposal writing that the author did well or could have improved. **Review the following sections before reading the sample.** The proposal is also annotated throughout to highlight key elements of the proposal's structure and content.*



Proposal Strengths	Areas for Improvement
The proposal identifies a gap in knowledge and justifies why it should be filled based on field-relevant reasoning.	Most of the background reads like a summary of past work. It is best to include sentences/ framing that interprets past literature in terms of what it means for why your project should be done.
The proposal is framed around specific research questions, though these questions don't appear until the 2 nd page.	Several in-text citations are missing. These are needed to show the evidence that supports the claims being made.
The methods are clear and specific.	Methods could benefit from connecting each step to the particular research question/aim that it is addressing. The final output especially should be connected back to how it addresses the research questions.



Other Key Features to Take Note Of
Students have been de-identified in this sample. In a group project, you should include the names of all group members, and write a separate preparation section for each member. Each group member should have a distinct role in the project. You are allotted 1 additional page (beyond the 2 page limit) for every additional member you have in your group.
It is fine for a summer project to be situated within a larger, more long-term project, but it is important to focus the proposal on what is being accomplished <i>within</i> the grant term. If the project only makes sense in the context of the larger project, clearly delineate what is being proposed for the grant term, and how it relates to what is going on before and after, indicating what specifically will be accomplished before the grant term begins.

Jazz is both a genre and a musical lineage. From its beginnings when African and European musical styles combined, it has been studied and adapted by the greats of each generation since. Not every day can two 19-year-old college students create a band, record a professional album, and be a part of this lineage. As jazz students, we have been studying the history of jazz, the elements that separate this music from other music traditions, and the practical skills that allow us to be effective communicators on our instruments. With jazz composition, the same necessities of understanding history, technique, and practice exist. In order to write this music and record it, we will research and study the elements of compositions by great jazz composers. We feel the need to be a part of this lineage because we have ample experience as performers and writers. Embarking on a project such as this is no different than how any other jazz musician has gotten their careers started: amassing knowledge, getting an idea, finding musicians to play with, and recording. Such a project will both give historical backing to our compositional voices while also preparing us for future careers in music.

Clear research/project statement and justification occurs in 1st paragraph



Throughout its history, jazz music has been performed by various types of ensembles. Perhaps the most enduring is a large jazz ensemble known by names such as big band or jazz orchestra. The typical big band contains 5 saxophones, 3-4 trombones, 4 trumpets, and a rhythm section with drums, bass, piano and sometimes guitar or vibraphone. Big band music differs noticeably from small jazz ensemble music in that each individual part is notated on a score—called a “chart”—as in the Western Classical tradition and use traditional composition techniques. Ensemble passages and section passages are all written down, with improvisatory elements generally designated to solo sections or group improvisatory passages. Notable composers for this medium include Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Quincy Jones, Count Basie, Frank Foster, Gil Evans, Sammy Nestico, Thad Jones, Bob Brookmeyer, Oliver Nelson, Bob Curnow, and Maria Schneider.

In-text citations missing; Needed to support claims

The literature surrounding big band music includes texts on history/composition, scores of big band pieces, musician interviews, music recordings, and oral traditions passed down from generations. Historian Phil Schaap teaches a course with Jazz at Lincoln Center on the evolution of big band music, and points out that big band jazz addresses a constantly evolving answer to the questions, “what are we going to play, and how are we going to interpret it?” (Ellington 0:14). From big band’s beginning as a dance bands, arrangers have been developing instrumentation and composition to turn the big band into an ensemble capable of performing various styles of jazz in various settings, as well as conveying emotion and personal expression through instrumental performance.

Reads like a summary. Interpretive sentences should be added that connect literature to research aim



Composer Don Sebesky points to one of many ways musicians have affected the trajectory of big band over the years. He cites 1952 as a pivotal change in the writing standards of big band music with the creation of the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra. Before this time, big band instrumentation was usually standardized to brass and saxophones, such as the Count Basie Orchestra. When writers Eddie Sauter and Bill Finegan began writing compositions, they pioneered “multiple reed doublings--flutes, piccolos, oboe...” (Sebesky 45) which prompted arrangers to incorporate reed doublings in their music from that point forward. Count Basie in fact began incorporating reed doubling into his arrangements, and Gil Evans and Quincy Jones experimented with the use of the lush-sounding French Horn.

Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis urges that this music be continuously preserved, studied, and developed because music such as Duke Ellington’s reflects a uniquely American experience of growth in the face of adversity. Specifically, in a NAFME interview, he calls on practitioners of

jazz music to “live up to their heritage” through the study and artistic development of their craft (Wynton Marsalis on Music Education).

A vast majority of jazz composers and musicians today hold similar views to Wynton, agreeing that the arts of composition and arranging of currently existing standards are two things that should never die out. Bob Brookmeyer, a leading jazz composer and arranger, never fails to be fascinated by the power he has over the audience he is writing for, noting that “one person playing unaccompanied among 17 persons is different than one person playing for 3,000 people...the dynamic changes all the time.” He references one particular part of an arrangement he did in which the original melody had a silence for four measures, so in his arrangement he “had control of [the audience] for four bars” (Wright 179). The sheer range of stylistic opportunities within composing and arranging for a large jazz ensemble make it inherently a very effective art for the composer to express him or herself to the audience; as Brookmeyer puts it, “hav[ing] a powerful effect on people...[to] flatten out [or] to cheer up the audience.” Aside from its power, flexibility, and rich tradition, Phil Schaap argues that jazz was its most popular when big bands were prevalent, and thus the development and trajectory of big band affects the success of jazz as a genre (Ellington 1:20).

Reads like a summary. Interpretive sentences should be added that connect literature to research aim

We have spent much of our jazz careers studying the work of master big band composers and arrangers, discovering how they utilized the techniques of harmony and instrumentation available to them to make the music that they did. These are some of the following questions we will address through our writing and performance: (1) How did harmony, instrumentation, and style develop across time both between arrangers and within each group itself? How did different composers use these techniques to create a cohesive works, convey emotion and give themselves a unique sound? (2) How do we fit into the trajectory of big band music? Can we take the compositional precedents that have been set by the masters and use them to create original arrangements? Can we use these techniques to inject our own voice into the composition discourse of jazz orchestra music?

Background leads to specific questions

The first part of this project is the research. Reviewing big band history is a necessary starting point for fitting ourselves on this timeline (see Reading List in Appendix). We also will study several books we have on arranging, jazz voicings, and composition in addition to doing extensive study on individual big band scores to directly learn voicing techniques, with and without commentary from the arrangers. This research is essential in answering our two main questions; the first because it will allow us to directly examine, from the music and arrangers themselves, the evolution of harmony and style within our instrumentation, and the second because it will allow us to evaluate our own work in the greater context of the history of big band writing.

Should refer to reading list in appendix

Methods are explicitly justified

The second part of this project is the composition. Between March and June, we will be writing music for this recording. As of now, we have four pieces written. The goal by recording time is to have four to five more written. We will use this time to finish the remaining pieces and then have each of our pieces reviewed by professional composers and arrangers (see Faculty and Professional Consultants in Appendix) for everything from harmony and voice leading to instrument ranges and score layout. This will build significantly off of our research, as we will be considering the opinions of professionals on the stylistic significance of our writing and its place in big band trajectory, some of whom play a significant role in this trajectory themselves. Furthermore, we will compare the pieces we have already written to the pieces we have written that are more heavily informed by our research, and workshop the pieces to make them more developed. By the end of this portion, we plan to put our work into practice.

Focus on what you will accomplish during the grant term but delineate how it fits within the larger timeline

Methods are explicitly justified

The third part of this project is organization of the ensemble to play and record our compositions. What we ultimately strive to learn from this final part of the project is how effectively our compositions translate from the page to the ensemble. This is a common difficulty faced in composition, as music that looks good on paper may not always sound as such when played by a live ensemble.

Methods are explicitly justified 

Every prospective member of this ensemble has now been contacted. By April we will have commitment from each person and officially have a big band. Once this is done, we have to book rehearsal space. Rehearsals will take place over two or three days in August at Michiko Studios in New York City, and the recording will take place at Jazz at Lincoln Center, also in NYC. Once the rehearsing and recording is finished, we will use the remaining time of our summer to publish and promote our work, which will include hiring a graphic designer for our album cover and pressing copies of our CD.

There should be more information about the specific output of the research and an explicit connection back to the research questions 

STUDENT 1 - My preparation for this project began as soon as I started learning jazz saxophone and improvisation back when I was 13. The skill sets that I have developed over this time are necessary skills that apply to jazz composition and arranging. Improvisation as an art requires knowledge of theory, history, and idiomatic jazz vocabulary. Through performance in school jazz ensembles, as well as All-State, All-Eastern, and All-National ensembles, I have had the chance to cultivate this skill with other high-caliber students and directors. Jazz composition has been a consequence of my studies in order to help me inform my own playing. As a result, I began writing smaller pieces for solo or small jazz ensemble settings, particularly when I spent a summer at the Skidmore Jazz Institute. I also studied composition at the Litchfield Jazz Camp with Russ Johnson. Later in high school, I attended the pre-college division at the Manhattan School of Music. In addition to playing, I took a year of jazz theory courses my junior year and a jazz composition/arranging class my senior year, which culminated in writing a piece for jazz orchestra. My saxophone teacher at the time, Jim Saltzman, was also an avid composer and arranger, and thus I was working on composition assignments regularly for our lessons.

 Each group member has a separate preparation section

STUDENT 2 - Like Student 1, I studied composition at the summer jazz camps at Litchfield and Skidmore, and, being my first formal jazz composition training, these camps inspired me to write my first jazz piece. I went on to write several full big band compositions through the rest of high school and in 2014 won the national Downbeat Magazine award for best high school jazz composition. I also applied twice Berklee College of Music's high school jazz festival composition contest, placing 3rd and 2nd in 2014 and 2015, respectively. My entries into these competitions were a product of my interest in composing already, but the competitions themselves were what made me want to write even more, as I saw some of the other winners' pieces. My participation in several different regional, All-State, and national jazz ensembles, even though I wasn't composing in them, also motivated my study of composition and arranging because they exposed me to the more challenging and ambitiously arranged repertoire by the top jazz arrangers of today.

This will be a difficult endeavor, we expect to encounter real-life difficulties that professionals in this field will in counter. We are nevertheless prepared to devote a majority our summer to its completion because we expect it to provide us with sufficient knowledge of the historical trajectory of big band jazz to place ourselves onto it. With a place on this timeline, we will have given ourselves an in on the scene of big band composing and directing, a career path that both of us have envisioned for most of our years as jazz students.

Appendix

Works Cited

- Ellington, Essentially. Phil Schaap on "The Evolution and Development of Big Band Jazz". 27 September 2012. 1 March 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMntH_9j2G0>.
- Sebesky, Don. The Contemporary Arranger. Van Nuys : Alfred, 1979.
- Wright, Rayburn. Inside the Score. New York: Kendor , 1982.
- Wynton Marsalis on Music Education - The NAFME Interview. 7 February 2014. 7 March 2016 <<http://wyntonmarsalis.org/videos/view/wynton-marsalis-on-music-education-the-nafme-interview>>.

Recording List: The following recordings are albums that are both significant to jazz music as well as influences to us personally. These albums are references that will help inform our stylistic decisions writing our own music. This is not intended as a complete list but rather as a starting point for our further listening and research.

- *Miles Ahead*, Miles Davis and Gil Evans (1957)
- *Chairman of the Board*, Count Basie Orchestra (1959)
- *Breakfast Dance and Barbecue*, Count Basie Orchestra (1959)
- *Porgy and Bess*, Miles Davis and Gil Evans (1959)
- *Piano in the Background*, Duke Ellington (1960)
- *The Blues and the Abstract Truth*, Oliver Nelson (1961)
- *The Quintessence* (Wynton Marsalis on Music Education - The NAFME Interview)e, Quincy Jones (1962)
- *Sound Pieces*, Oliver Nelson (1966)
- *Opening Night*, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra (1966)
- *Basie Straight Ahead*, Count Basie Orchestra (1968)
- *Consummation*, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra (1970)
- *They Came to Swing*, Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (1994)
- *Allegresse*, Maria Schneider Orchestra (2000)
- *The Good Feeling*, Christian McBride Big Band (2011)

Scores List: The following list comprises some specific pieces for which we will examine the score.

- *Three in One*, Thad Jones
- *Take the "A" Train*, Duke Ellington
- *Perdido*, Duke Ellington
- *Basie Straight Ahead*, Sammy Nestico
- *All the Things you Are*, arr. Don Sebesky
- *Simone*, Frank Foster
- *Shiny Stockings*, Frank Foster

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Reading List: Some starting points for books on arranging technique. These are formally listed in the works cited.

- *Beyond the Score*, Rayburn Wright
- *The Contemporary Arranger*, Don Sebesky

Faculty and Professional Consultants: The following people will be resources for us in terms of reviewing and revising our music throughout the process of research, writing, and recording. This is not a list of faculty endorsements.

- Victor Goines; Tenor Saxophonist, Member of JALCO, Director of Jazz Studies at Northwestern University
- Jarrard Harris; Alto Saxophonist, Ensemble Director in Jazz Department at Northwestern University
- Joe Clark; Trumpeter, Composer/Arranger, Jazz Composition/Arranging instructor at Northwestern University
- Sherman Irby; Alto Saxophonist, Member of JALCO
- Jim Saltzman; Tenor Saxophonist, Ph.D. Candidate at the Manhattan School of Music