

10 JAZZ CHOIR RHYTHM SECTION TOPICS

1. TIME VS. FEEL

Time first, feel second. Steady tempos are most important; style and articulation come second. These are the two most important issues, and the most dependent on each player's skill set. Even when you've got an arrangement with a great rhythm section part, excellence requires that "interlocking" awareness. Break it down into manageable elements (hi-hat, bass and left hand, etc.). Set goals, and build components back in.

2. ENSEMBLE WITHIN AN ENSEMBLE

Learn an easy standard or two as a trio or a quartet. There's nothing better than a rhythm section that can *really* play a tune! It provides an opportunity for piano players to learn and style a head and launch into left hand chord voicing and rhythms. "Real Easy Book" (Chuck Sher publishing) is *the* resource when you're starting from scratch.

3. ...AND ONE BIG ENSEMBLE TOO

Camaraderie with singers is an amazing thing. Sometimes that feeling of being part of the big group just happens; but rhythm sections don't always rehearse as often as singers. Foster those common goals. Feeling "vested" is a great thing!

4. HOW MANY FORMATS EXIST FOR JAZZ CHOIR PIANO PARTS?

A million! Pianists should always also have a copy of the singers' score (whether they want it or not). I use them to see spaces in vocal phrases, where to stay out, and where to contribute. They also provide the rhythm and voicing to double if needed.

5. CHORD SYMBOLS AND VOICINGS

Lots of great jazz choir arrangements provide only chord charts for keyboard or guitar. Where does a novice start? That could be its own semester-long workshop. The early Aebersold volumes and the Chuck Sher books are invaluable for an introduction to this world. It's theory, I know, but it's gotta happen. Just remember: a four note voicing—two left hands notes (3rd and 7th) and two right hand notes—will get you most of the way there.

6. 'COMPING

What rhythms to play? Many rhythm section parts have great piano voicings written as whole notes, leaving rhythm to the player. This should be every beginning pianist's number one priority. It's so incumbent on the "aural" tradition of jazz. Piano players need to listen (and pay attention) to great patterns and articulations in live and recorded examples. Go from Aebersold and 'comping tracks to Youtube performances for a regular dose of guided listening.

7. FINGERINGS

Fingers are an important component of any piano playing, and can make or break a lick. Even those four note two-hand chord voicings can be smoother and easier to play with consistent fingerings.

8. PLAY OUT!

How often does a young piano player new to jazz play too loud? Rarely. Balancing with the rest of a rhythm section and supplying energy to singers is vital. And it's way more fun!

9. IMPROVISATION

Improvisation is a bug you catch. It comes from that moment of inspiration when you hear an improvised phrase and say "I want to play that lick!" Then you write it down, and make up another one and write *that* down. Eventually one of the dozens of intellectual theory-based approaches can make sense. I love the book "The Lobster Theory (and other analogies for jazz improvisation)" by Greg Fishman. It may be a bit corny, but it's given me great ideas for presenting concepts to students.

10. JAZZ VOCABULARY AND JARGON

Jazz vocabulary—names for parts of the form, textures, feels, etc.—allow us to move quickly through contexts. Understanding the language can streamline communication in rehearsal. It also helps with other things, like taking notes of listening projects.



NICK MOORE

Pianist, Groove For Thought