THOUGHTS ON PLANNING AN ARRANGEMENT

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David Baker

"Determine ahead of time how many choruses the arrangement has. This allows you to set climaxes, control tension and decide how many choruses soloists will play, placement of backgrounds, etc. A balance between written material and improvised solos must be struck so that the arrangement doesn't sound like a string of solos with a handle on each end. Will there be an introduction? If so, where will the material come from?"

John Cacavas

How many times have we all had a great idea for a score; then started it, only to leave it unfinished for eternity? I have found a way to help eradicate this situation. First of all, figure out how long the score is going to be. Then, number all the pages and make sure the line-up and signatures are on each page. Then write out the melody line, put in chord symbols. You are now on your way because, in one respect, the arrangement is complete.

I usually make a 2-line sketch in concert first. It looks less formidable and it's a great way to experiment. Also, unlike a full score which may only have 4 bars to a page, it can be scanned more quickly and is easier to check. In all honesty though, I must admit I have a lot of 2-line scores that are unfinished! It is advisable not to cram the staves too closely; paper is cheap but eyesight is not.

Gordon Delamont

"Since each chorus of an arrangement is likely to follow the form of the melody being arranged, an entirely formless arrangement is impossible. However, even when using the established framework of the melody to work with, it is surprising how many novice arrangers will come close to chaos. Specific directions providing a foolproof guide to the retention of form and the avoidance of aimlessness are not, unfortunately, available. The concept of form is linked to all other considerations of music. Here a few pointers which may be helpful:

Before writing a note, decide on:

a. The length of the arrangement

b. The key, or keys, to be used

c. The tone colors and the general location of each

d. The position of the climax or climaxes

e. The general mood, viewpoint, style, and function of the arrangement

That is, conceive the arrangement as much as possible as an **Entity**, as a **Unified Whole**, rather than as a series of four, eight, or sixteen bar statements.

It is quite in order to sketch out a basic plan. The following is a sample:

Key F - Six Bar Introduction - Clarinets and Muted Brass

First Chorus

A. 16 bars muted brass lead,clarinet background

B. 8 bars unison clarinets

C. 8 bars muted brass (clarinets change to saxes)

D. 4 bar modulation to the key of E ***etc***.....

Whether a plan is established in one of these, or any other ways, it is of utmost importance to visualize the complete work from the outset. Only in this way can the arrangement be expected to have continuity and coherence. NOTHING IS MORE DETRIMENTAL TO THE FORM OF AN ARRANGEMENT THAN A SITUATION WHICH FINDS THE ARRANGER AT THE END OF THE FIRST CHORUS WITHOUT ANY IDEA OF WHAT HE IS GOING TO DO THE SECOND!"

Bill Dobbins

"The following ideas may be helpful in thinking about form and development.

1. Begin with a plan, no matter how basic. The plan may be altered as the work progresses but it will help to stimulate creative thinking in the early stages of work.

2. Work on any part of the piece which is of interest at the moment. Take advantage of spontaneous interest to achieve positive results.

3. Write much more than that which is actually needed for the piece. If you find ten good solutions for every compositional or harmonic problem, the solution you finally choose will probably be imaginative and musically convincing. The solutions you discard will always be of help in future pieces.

4. Try to allow the music to develop in a way in which everything is related to the opening musical ideas. Try to develop these ideas, however, in a way which does not become either too predictable or too technically self-conscious.

5. Try not to overwrite, either in relation to the number of notes or the length of the piece. A short clear piece is preferable to a long vague piece. Don't use all the instruments all the time.

6. Use the listed recordings in the discographies of this book to find the kinds of pieces you are most interested in writing. The works on these recordings can serve as excellent models for the study of form, development, melody harmonization and orchestration.

Any aspiring jazz writer should be thoroughly familiar with the work of great jazz composers, just as any aspiring symphonic writer should be thoroughly familiar with the work of Debussy, Ravel, Messiaen, Scriabin, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Prokofiev, Shostakovitch, Stravinsky and Bartok....."

Russ Garcia

"Don't think in notes. Hear the instruments playing in your imagination. Then translate these

sounds into notes as nearly as you possibly can.

If you get stuck, go back to the phrase before and sing out loud and when you come to the spot you were stuck you can't help but sing right on. Then all you have to do is write down what you sang.

Think first rhythmically, then the general melodic curve of the melody or countermelody. Then the actual notes and harmonies are simple to put in. (*Rhythmic Curves*)

With this system you can block out the whole arrangement much faster and keep the picture of the whole, which makes for better continuity and consistency. So many arrangers get so wrapped up in each little voicing or harmony, they lose the flow, and tempo, and the picture of the arrangement as a whole. (A painter sketches the general outline of his picture before he goes back and puts in all the details.)

When Writing a New Composition or Arranging an Existing Piece:

1, Sketch two or three bars in as many ways as you can, using different orchestration, various harmonies, styles and techniques.

2. Pick the interesting fragments (melodic and rhythmic) from your theme, turn them upside down (inversion), and backwards (retrograde), or both (retrograde inversion). Try permutation (changing the order of the notes of your fragment). Don't forget to sing out loud and write what you sing. If you just cannot sing play it on an instrument.

3. Think in rhythmic curves, sketching the rhythm and directions of your melodies or counterpoints, as an artist would roughly sketch before he paints a picture.....Once you have your rhythmic curves, it is very easy to find the notes you want and harmonies you need.

4. Now you really know your theme and its possibilities intimately and your composition (or arrangement) will fall together like an easy jigsaw puzzle. One idea you have sketched will obviously be a good first presentation (exposition), or a good way to start the first chorus. Do not write an introduction until you have sketched some of your piece. You cannot introduce someone or something you know nothing about. Out of the two or three bars you have sketched, find an idea that will work later for the climax of your piece.

5. Now sketch the whole piece. (Most often a two-line sketch is enough, though some prefer four-line or six-line sketches.) Write in the main lines all the way through, then go back and fill it in. With your wonderful sense of form, you will throw away most of your two-or three bar sketches and build your composition (arrangement) out of just two or three ideas.

6. Score your piece, changing and adding ideas as you write. It takes a little experience and taste to know when to stop polishing and changing your piece. Hopefully, you stop pol-

ishing before the original inspiration is buried or lost."

Dick Grove

"One of the most dangerous obstacles to good writing is the fact that beginning writers have a tendency to approach one note of a chart at a time. This is largely due to inexperience and uncertainty about what to do, how will it sound, etc. The result of this is that the new writer seldom evaluates his writing from an overall perspective.

The first pre-requisite for writing a flowing, logical cohesive chart is to deal with melody lines first. One huge advantage of the "sketching procedure" is that, in sketch form you can easily lay out your lead line or top melody note. This enables you to make clear, uncluttered evaluations of your phrasing, articulation and rhythmic patterns. Judge your phrases by singing or playing IN TEMPO, reacting to YOUR OWN writing as if it were someone else. Be an intelligent and uncompromising critic. Develop the habit of working and polishing your lead line in four and/or eight measure phrases. DO NOT GO ON TILL YOU LIKE IT THE THIRD TIME YOU CHECK IT!

Tom Hoffman

"Verbal Arrangement": Our next step is that of organizing our thoughts into an arrangement of that composition. What will happen at what point? What will be featured where? What backgrounds will be used and where will they be used? What types of introduction, interlude and coda work best for the tune, if any? What will happen at each rehearsal letter? Thoughts of articulation, phrasing and dynamics begin to take shape.

This is the step with which you can hear the whole arrangement by looking at the outline you have created. It is also the step that gives you the ability to think in broad, large ideas not having to be concerned with each note of each instrument. Think in terms of the <u>whole</u> arrangement at this point from start to finish."

John La Barbera

"Planning is the most important component of the whole process of arranging music. A complete mental picture of the entire arrangement is one of the most difficult parts of scoring. However, if done properly, it can eliminate hours of indecision and trial and error.

The challenge is to outline one's complete arrangement in the shortest possible time-frame. If it takes two to three days to sketch out an arrangement, it has less continuity than one completed in a day or less. The longer it takes the more likelihood the chart will sound segmented. For every minute that passes we grow or decline musically (depending on your outlook) and the ideas we started with yesterday will not always be consistent with what we hear today. Strive to complete the outline in as short a time as possible.

Hear it in your head. Get away from your principal instru-

ment... especially if you play piano. Pianists seem to have the most difficulty in arranging for ensembles. Sing the lines in your mind! Get away from your normal work environment and find a quiet spot where you can be undisturbed. After years on the road, I found that going to the airport coffee-shop to write was the easiest way to be alone....(oh what habits we pick up on the road). Don't worry about actual pitches or chord changes. Plan what instruments will play on the introduction, who will state the melody, what happens after the first complete statement of the song, how many solos, what backgrounds are appropriate,etc. This is the stuff of the masters. Physically commit your plan to paper and make sure to be specific. In other words, make sure to write your plan in a way that can be easily translated later. A thorough outline of all musical events is the secret to arranging

EVERYTHING ELSE WILL FALL INTO PLACE.

Just like an architectural blueprint, the finished product will always need some departure from the original plan but, overall, the end result is fundamentally what we started out to create."

Henry Mancini

When approaching an instrumental, do a little ground work before you start filling in. Lightly pencil in your leads and spot your solos on the score paper from beginning to end if possible. This simplified sketching gives you a general conception of the over-form of your score.

Bill Mathieu

"Now comes the most important step: planning the arrangement in detail.

By this time the arranger knows enough about the tune and its possible developments to hear many combinations in his head. The job now is to select and organize. This mental planning is the most creative, the most musical process an arranger goes through, but it is often omitted by students who are satisfied to leave their ideas in the same order that they think of them. Ideas are cheap; the higher organization of ideas is dear.

At this point it often helps to verbalize the shape and texture of the arrangement. Write down what you plan on a piece of scratch paper: the sounds in your head somehow become more clear."

Sammy Nestico

"....the initial planning of an arrangement should be very deliberate. It is the most important step, and is instrumental in making the music flow. If you abandon this technique, the music wanders aimlessly and doesn't relate to the audience as one cohesive thought.

The inquisitive orchestrator should attempt to feel the music, and then find the colors, sounds, rhythms and dynamics that will give the familiar melody a new and fresh personality...an old friend with a new face.

Plan the arrangement, and rework or change it as you proceed. During the course of writing when you come to a trouble spot, skip over it and press forward. Return later to work on the place that needs more attention. The least amount of interruption in the creative flow, the better.

Form is simply organizing the music through the use of the material you'll be using. It takes a bit of a balancing act to decide how much repetition versus variety you should employ in order to make the arrangement attractive to the listener. Both of these elements are important.

"...I start by writing the vocal part, (music and lyrics) page and bar numbers before anything else. I then proceed with a comprehensive design for the complete arrangement. It can be in the form of a mental plan or written sketch."

"Try to limit yourself to a few melodic ideas and let them grow. There is always the temptation of getting too busy, a pitfall that plagues every arranger. This is especially true when your resources are bountiful and the orchestra is large.."

Nelson Riddle

"Like the blueprint for a building, the planning of an arrangement is the most important step to be taken and requires your best thinking and effort. Do not rush this particular step, and try to find the time to make yourself a sketch, which can be revised and reworked if necessary without tearing up several sheets of fully orchestrated score paper. It's a lot less frustrating to make a plan **before** proceeding.

Bill Russo

"The second aspect of the Principal Jazz Form for which I can suggest improvement is the middle section, which is often sprawling and lacking in focus. The chief defect here, it seems to me, is the uncontrolled use of improvised solos. I have no intention at this point of discussing my views on improvisation, except to say that (a) improvisation in jazz needs some re-thinking, and (b) my own feelings about improvisation are much less restrictive than they are usually represented to be. By all means leave room for the improviser--especially if he is a first-rate player--but:

1. Maintain a balance between the length of the improvised and composed portions: that is, avoid forms in which the composed portions take up, say, only a tenth of the work, the remainder being given over to improvised solos.

2. Take advantage, in the accompaniment figurations, of material drawn from other portions of the piece; at the very least construct accompaniment figurations that in themselves have a musical continuity.

3. Consider the possibility of employing the same bass line for both the first section and the improvised portions, a process which is

enormously helpful in binding together a piece.

4. Use improvised solos as an *addition* to the composed portions."

Jeff Steinberg

"This technique (verbal sketch) will help you get a clear idea of where you want the chart to go. You're always free to change it later, but if you take a few minutes and prepare a verbal outline, you'll feel confident that you've created a balanced piece. As your writing-skills increase, you'll probably skip this step, but don't be hasty in underestimating its value. I still use it occasionally on extended works, and some big band charts.

OTHER THOUGHTS....

Brahms

"It isn't hard to compose, but it is wonderfully hard to let the superfluous notes fall under the table.

Carlos Chaves (from *MUSICAL THOUGHT)*

"Music should never come from the conscious application of laws, rules, or "techniques," but has to be first heard in the head; from there it should be transposed to the paper. In fact, laws should be made *ex post facto* and applied subconsciously."

"Somehow the pre-eminence of prefabricated techniques has led composers to write down notes on paper, whereas the composer should have to write down the sounds in his heart."

"There is no doubt that certain given procedures can lead to very attractive results; it is true that the most remarkable and unexpected music can come out of pre-established compositional devices manipulated with ingenuity. But it is my belief that if anything of real beauty comes out, it is not due to the compositional procedures so ingeniously manipulated, but to something more. which can not be codified, which comes from the specifically musical genius of the composer."

"Many people are inclined to think that technique is everything: it is a general belief that in order to become a composer you learn a technique and you learn to compose. In a sense of course, that is true. But the technique that one gets from books is another man's technique. That is all right as a way to start. At the beginning of his career Beethoven used Haydn's techniques, but from that point on he developed his own. A composer wants to make his own music, and that can only be achieved by developing his own technique. We have to know the particular techniques of all the great masters well; first, to learn from them and, second, to avoid them consistently."

Machlis

Music's basic law of structure is repetition and contrast---unity and variety.

Elie Siegmeister

"My day starts with improvising at the piano. I start by writing a line or 2 of a melody; or a group of chords, or some mere fragments of music. After 3 or 4 pages 1 idea suddenly seems fresh and interesting."

"Stimulus: writing for some specific event."

"Much of a composers work is thinking, organizing, and planning what to do with his material."

"By concentrating on one feature at a time, you sharpen your listening and deepen your understanding of music as a whole."

Stravinsky

"All music is nothing more than a succession of impulses that converge towards a definite point of repose."

"As for myself, I experience a sort of terror when, at the moment of setting to work and finding myself before the infinitude of possibilities that present themselves, I have the feeling that everything is permissible to me, the best and the worst; if nothing offers me any resistance, then any effort is inconceivable, and I cannot use anything as a basis, and consequently every undertaking becomes futile.....I shall overcome my terror and shall be reassured by the thought that I have the seven notes of the scale and its chromatic intervals at my disposal, that strong and weak accents are within my reach, and that in all of these I possess solid and concrete elements which offer me a field of experience just as vast as the upsetting and dizzy infinitude that had just frightened me.. It is into this field that I shall sink my roots, fully convinced that the combinations which have at their disposal twelve sounds in each octave and all possible rhythmic varieties promise me riches that all the activity of human genius will never exhaust."

Virgil Thompson

"The only real problem involved in musical rhetoric is how to make a piece last some time without getting vague. It must hold the auditor's interest without confusing him. And it must do this, as the movies do it, by continuity."

"Coherence, in any piece of time requires a continuity plan. Music made to be heard must be very simple indeed, must repeat its chief material over and over. It is not like a book, where the reader can stop and turn back and get the plot straightened out if he forgets. It must have such a simple layout or build-up that nobody can fail to follow it." 11/7/94.

INNER EAR -- by Bill Mathieu (Down Beat) July 19, 1962

"I want to write an arrangement, and I have a lot of ideas, but where to begin?" asks the young arranger long on talent but short on knowing what makes an arrangement click.

There is no correct procedure for writing an arrangement, just as there is no correct way of signing your name. What works best for you becomes correct. But there are some suggestions which may arm the student for the battle against the blank page.

When writing an arrangement of a tune, first learn perfectly the melody on your instrument. Learn everything about the song: the harmonic construction, the rhythmic quality, the over-all construction of the melody. Change some notes of the melody. Does the tune improve or not? Can you figure out why? Are there other than the standard harmonic possibilities? Familiarity with the *other* composer's thought will clarify your own.

A good operating procedure would be to organize your thoughts: "The piece should be between 3 1/2 and 4 minutes long, and go at a moderate tempo (say, a quarter note = 120). At this tempo there is room for a short introduction, three 32-bar choruses with perhaps an interlude somewhere in the middle, and maybe some sort of extension at the end."

At the beginning stage, also give some thought to the prevailing mood of the arrangement. The last preliminary question to decide is the approximate location of the arrangement's high point, and how high should it be in relation to the rest of the piece?

Once these questions have been asked, the shape of the arrangement begins to emerge. Now the note writing can begin.

First, explore every facet of the material at your disposal. Several aspects of the tune, whether they are rhythmic,harmonic or melodic, should divulge numerous possibilities for development. Experiment with a dozen. If one of these "developments" strikes your fancy, it can serve as the groundwork for the whole work.

Here are some examples.

In the ballad *The Thrill Is Gone* the simple melodic motif (see Example #1)
offers enough possibilities for variation and extension to generate a whole arrangement.

A similar motif (see Example #2) generates the entire *Third Symphony* of Beethoven.

In *Jordu, one of the distinctive rhythms of the tune is (see Example #3).*

Such a figure can be used to glue together all of the pieces of an arrangement.

Now comes the most important step: planning the arrangement in detail.

By this time the arranger knows enough about the tune and its possible development to hear many combinations in his head. The job now is to select and organize. This mental planning is the most creative,

the most musical process an arranger goes through, but it is often omitted by students who are satisfied to leave their ideas in the order that they think of them. Ideas are cheap; the higher organization of ideas is dear.

Arrangements in a bright tempo can be broken down to eight-bar segments to facilitate the organization of ideas. Ballads can be thought of in four-bar sections.

At this point it often helps to verbalize the shape and texture of the arrangement. Write down what you plan on a piece of scratch paper; the sounds in your head somehow become more clear.

Now the sweat begins; note-by-note construction over the skeleton. This work depends more on technique, less on creativity, and you will find it easy or difficult depending on how well you have mastered your craft.

Should you work at the piano? It doesn't hurt to do the working-out part of the arrangement at the keyboard as long as the more creative thought preceding this does not depend on an instrument. The orchestra is your instrument.

It's a good idea to write out the first draft at concert pitch, on two or three staves, with all instruments indicated. Next comes the actual score, with all the parts written out in full at their transposed pitches.

These are suggestions, not rules. But I believe the basic thought is true: once you can hear the rough organization in your head before the bar-by-bar working out is complete arranging becomes less of a task and more of an art.