

***Essentially Ellington* 2009-10 Repertoire: Know Your Band...Choose Your Music!**

Jazz at Lincoln Center has been distributing great, transcribed charts of **Duke Ellington's** music for 15 years through the *Essentially Ellington* High School Jazz Band Program (*EE*) and is now including music of other seminal big band arrangers and composers as well. This year's collection features the music of **Mary Lou Williams** in conjunction with the centennial celebration of her birth. These three Williams charts along with the three Ellington charts provide a diverse repertoire from which to choose. Considering your band's strengths or needs will help you as a director choose which charts may work best for you.

The "shuffle" feel in jazz music is at the core of understanding swing feel. For that reason, Ellington's "**Feet Bone**" has been included in this year's *EE* repertoire. This 1958 arrangement hinges on *everyone in the ensemble* understanding the shuffle feel, starting from the piano introduction. The melodies, in the style of a riff arrangement, are simple and groove with solis for each horn section and plenty of space for inserting solos. This is a great choice for bands that want to work on groove and blues improvisation.

Another chart that is great for working on groove is Williams' "**Roll 'Em.**" Williams wrote this for the Benny Goodman Orchestra, and it remained in his repertory for years. It employs a hard driving boogie-woogie feel and is also based on the blues. The tempo is great for helping students to relate the music to dance. If you have a strong pianist willing to invest some time in learning to play boogie-woogie, this is the right vehicle.

Another vehicle to showcase that pianist could be Ellington and Strayhorn's "**Lady Mac**". The intro is still bluesy but with the added challenge of playing in 3/4 time. This chart is a great vehicle for a rhythm section to show its maturity by creating a good jazz waltz feel. The intricate layering of the ensemble parts makes it a great challenge for the entire band to show off balance, blend and articulation. There is also solo space for alto and flugelhorn.

Speaking of balance and blend, ballads offer wonderful opportunities to show off just that. There is maturity required to effectively play a ballad and if you have a trombonist and alto saxophonist with beautiful sounds who can display that maturity, then Billy Strayhorn's "**After All**" is your vehicle. This chart is also great for working on a rich, sub-tone reed section sound, warm, controlled brass sound and rhythm section 2-feel with brushes on the drums.

Don't let the easy going, medium swing tempo of Williams' "**Walkin' and Swingin'**" be misleading. This chart is still challenging, especially the sax section soli with trumpet. The rhythm section must be able to play a good dance 2-feel and the horn's melodies must dance on the feel. This chart is not "middle of the road" by any means.

Finally, if you have good bebop players in your ensemble, you have a great vehicle in Williams' "**New Musical Express**". Written with the Ellington Orchestra in mind, this fast and furious, altered blues head gives way to several choruses of improvisation featuring tenor sax written into the chart. However, you don't have to stop with tenor; this chart begs to be opened up for blowing. Though this chart is from 1967, it sounds as fresh and contemporary as any of today's music and will be lots of fun for advanced players.

We hope you enjoy playing this year's repertoire as much as we've enjoyed getting it out to you. We look forward to hearing what you and your bands do with the material and hope to see you at the *Essentially Ellington* Competition & Festival in the spring!

-Reggie Thomas, *EE* Consultant