

# A Jazz Festival Preparation Checklist

By Jack Mason and Dr. Warren Balfour

Quite often, when we judge at a festival, we find a number of groups and directors who have not given their entire attention to some of the basics of festival preparation resulting in a performance that could have shown marked improvement if a few details had not been overlooked.

Much of the information we present here is of a logical nature and should take little of your time to put into effect. However, there are some items that might need your constant attention throughout the year. And this checklist should not be considered to apply only to the inexperienced groups or directors. In addition, those directors preparing their groups for B&O Festivals might well look over and apply some of the items below.

## FIRST, THE PRE-FESTIVAL LOGISTICS:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Performance/festival calendar prepared?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clear the date(s) with ALL in your group(s) and have enough time to deal with conflicts. (How many times have I observed an incomplete section because one of the students was more committed to participating in a sports event rather than a festival or performance.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Festival app(s) received, read thoroughly, filled out and sent to festival ASAP? (Preferable scheduling for your group may depend on your early entry.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Transportation needs to be ordered early?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Administrative approval forms submitted early?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have you made any attempt to have your group rehearse in a venue other than your bandroom? (This is more important than you might imagine.)

## NEXT, YOUR MUSICAL AND LOGISTICAL PREPARATION/REHEARSAL

- \_\_\_\_\_ Charts chosen and purchased?  
This is VERY critical. Your choice of literature will be the determining factor of your group's success during the year. If the music is too easy, the group will not feel challenged. If it is too difficult, there will be little or no sense of accomplishment. DO select a number of charts to read through to match your group's capabilities and potential. Don't pick three tunes from the fall reading clinic that "sound great" and then have to force them on your group with the attitude that "Give me enough time and I'll get it out of them". Too many times have I heard a group barely playing the notes and rhythms but never having the confidence to play with musicality. Ideally, you should have combinations of tunes in mind for festival and then choose your set a short time before each event. Multiple festivals? Why not make a change or two from one to another? Lacking a few instruments on a regular basis? Don't buy full band charts and expect them to sound good. Buy smaller-ensemble charts.

\_\_\_\_\_ Appropriate set-up?

Bass = amp elevated and angled towards lead alto and next to trumpet section with the player at the corner or front of the amp and directly adjacent to the drum hi-hat.

Drums = slightly angled towards the horn sections, next to the trombones with hi-hat on the left.

Piano = keyboard at a slight angle to enable player to SEE the entire ensemble and director. (My pet peeve with pianists is overuse of the sustaining pedal.)

Guitar = SEATED, next to piano with amp behind player and taking care not to block drums and bass.

Vibes = could be fronting piano but should not block drums or bass. (See comment above concerning sustaining pedal.)

Auxilliary percussion = behind drums. (Don't use on every tune unless entire set is made up of Latin charts.)

Trumpets = standing in rehearsal as well as performance. Bells up and with stands lowered - reading down.

Trombones = seated with bells up and out. Stands should not interfere with the sound projection.

(Suggestion: purchase some  $\frac{3}{4}$  height stools for rehearsal and performance.)

Saxes = seated with no one player fronting the drums. (We like to see a sax section automatically raise their stands 3" to 4" when first seated at a festival to enable bells to project the sound.)

Lead players = centered in section and in a vertical row.

\_\_\_\_\_ Multiple players in any section? (For festival We suggest you stick to one-on-a-part. Alternate players from tune to tune to accommodate everyone. Rehearse that way also. At home concerts use everyone on every tune if you wish.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Have all soloists stand in rehearsal.

\_\_\_\_\_ Use a dead mike in rehearsal and make sure your soloists are using good microphone techniques.

\_\_\_\_\_ Give some thought to the dress onstage for the performances. (And snap-brimmed hats are NOT cool.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Start early in the year with harmon mutes for the trumpets and bucket mutes for all brass. (Do some musical editing to provide necessary contrast.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Have you timed your set? (Include the timing for your set-up and exit and rehearse it.)

## AT THE EVENT

\_\_\_\_\_ Orient your group to the performance day agenda. (We suggest you make sure your group is prepared to benefit from the visit. Get there early enough to facilitate this. If clinics are offered why not stay long enough for your group to attend?)

\_\_\_\_\_ Are you prepared to assess the acoustics and any physical peculiarities of the venue before your group performs? (See the comment above about preferable scheduling.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Check for potential bass boom.

\_\_\_\_\_ Are you prepared to go into the audience area for a short time to check the acoustics during the first few measures of your opening tune? (Bass boom? - Drums too loud? - etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Have you prepared your soloists sufficiently to adjust to the house sound system?

\_\_\_\_\_ Do you KNOW what you are going to say at the microphone between tunes? (I suggest you keep it short.)

AFTER THE EVENT

\_\_\_\_\_ Read your sheets and listen to your tapes! Find a constructive way to present them to the students. Be creative about how to use to your best advantage with your administration.

\_\_\_\_\_ A thank-you note to your festival host might be in order. He/she should be able to take this to THEIR administration to help validate the existence of the event in the first place. Constructive criticism? Write this in a separate note. Unhappy about a particular adjudicator? Cool down and send a more-composed note on Monday that shows your maturity rather than having your thoughts tossed, valid though they may be !

We have only touched on the entire process leaving a great deal of the musical preparation to the director and the group, but if you can look at this list of concerns and suggestions and respond appropriately, we think that you will find that your festival visit will be more rewarding than you may have experienced in the past.

We have two booklets available to anyone who might wish to contact us that go into more detail about all the information in this article as well as approaching rehearsal and interpretive suggestions. All you need do is send an e-mail to request a free copy.

*"GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR JAZZ FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE"*

*-and-*

*"A BASIC APPROACH TO A SUCCESSFUL JAZZ PROGRAM".*

These booklets are the basis for a number of clinics that we have given around the US and in Europe, Great Britain and the Far East as well.

Keep swingin'.

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