

## **KBB Music Festival 2021, Jazz Band Category**

Adjudication Summary from Gwyn Reynolds and Rodger Fox:

### **To the Band Leaders.**

Thanks so much for all your hard work! Rodger and I loved being a part of this festival.

I hope the audio commentary worked out ok! Long-time judge at competitions, including KBB, Tauranga, Southern Jam, Christchurch, Invercargill, but first-time using audio commentary, so please forgive an old-dog learning a new trick. There are pauses while I'm just sitting enjoying the music, and a few times when I stop talking altogether when the band stops, as the public were very close and self-consciousness kicked in.

Rodger Fox: I did the hand written notes which I hope you find valuable.

After a while we felt we were repeating a few common themes over and over. They include;

**Exaggerating dynamics** – Gwyn: We were seated around 50 feet away in a large space. Dynamics needed to be over-exaggerated to have any tangible effect in such a voluminous space and distance. In particular – soft dynamic markings should be extremely soft, and when the band is finally instructed to unleash, then go for it! Often horns were playing good dynamics, but the rhythm sections were often playing much fewer dynamic contrasts, to the detriment of the final product. Rodger Fox: Totally agree with this. I would also add that the saxophone and brass need to practise over doing the dynamics within the lines played. A starting point at rehearsal would be to have them overplay up to the note get louder and down to a note get softer. In this way the students get a feeling for what it takes to deliver these dynamics in a rhythmic groove.

**Saxophones** – in most bands, the saxophones were underpowered in volume. If your saxophone players are using the stock mouthpieces that are supplied with saxophones, then it is recommended they investigate purchasing a mouthpiece with a larger tip opening in order to successfully navigate this style of music, where increased volume is required. Your itinerant sax teacher usually has a selection of mouthpieces the student can try in order to inform their purchase, and I'm sure the staff at KBB can also assist. The stock mouthpieces are usually simply unable to produce volumes that can compete with the brass – most of the time it's not the players' fault!

**Set-up** – ensure the horns are set up so the players and bells of each row are visible and not hidden behind others. Often the trombones were seated on the floor behind the saxophones which muffled their sound. They simply needed to stand up on the floor which the trumpets standing on the riser behind them. Bells up please when playing, not pointed at the floor. It does make a difference!

Rodger Fox: In this setup trombones standing just made good sense to achieve a good balance and blend across the three horn sections. I know the trombone students may not be used to standing but for most part the groups were only playing 4-5 charts with about 20 minute playing time.

**Tempos** – Apologies, but I became a bit fixated on this as the competition progressed. A significant number of tempos were counted in too fast for where the chart was written/arranged, which affected the performance. If a chart is arranged for example – shuffle at 120 BPM, then having the band play it at 140 BPM is not advised, as the writing does not suit that tempo, and the players often cannot play it correctly. Choose a song that is arranged for that tempo. I would encourage you to go back with a metronome and check out the tempo you count the band in at. (I suspect the tempos have slowly crept up over the rehearsal period as the band has become familiar with the piece. Hold them back!)

Rodger Fox: This is a hard one in the heat of the performance battle and I know it has taken me a very long time to learn to relax at a performance and take my time to set the tempo. Relax is the key factor I feel so do not rush from one chart to the next. Ah there is always something....and I'm still learning.

**Feel/Phrasing** – in general the horns should be placing their notes as close as possible to the pulse generated by the rhythm section (if the tune is rock/funk), or, slightly behind the beat if it's a swing tune (how far behind the beat is determined by the tempo and style). The brass should never be placing their notes in front of the beat – as it feels like they're rushing and the feel is compromised. When the brass/saxes place their notes in the correct spot – it's such an amazing feel and sound.

**Solo Microphones** – ensure you design your soloist order (if there are multiple solos) for you to not have to scramble between players. There were some disconcerting moments with band leaders pushing through sections to attempt to reach players in time, or standing directly in front of the soloist, blocking the view of the public.

**Solos** – great to see/hear lots of students giving improvising a crack. I know it's an easy solution, but please resist letting your players read the written solos. They could use the written notes so they don't necessarily need to understand the chord/scale relationships, but they should mix up the order, duration and rhythms, so they can start to experience improvising on the spot.

Solos should be of a good length in order for the rhythm section to explore different waves of energy and intensity. The band should come down at the start of each solo, and should have enough time to develop the groove and forward momentum. In the groove/funk pieces, rhythm sections should attempt to change the grooves under the solos to mix up the overall vibe. Often rhythm sections felt trapped playing the same one or two bar groove ad infinitum. A subtle change to the groove can make all the difference.

Thanks so much for all your hard work! Rodger and I loved being a part of this festival.

Rodger Fox: **Rhythm section** - this part of the bands require further development, I feel, because in a lot of performances the Rhythm sections held the bands back from achieving a good overall groove. After many years of adjudicating and presenting workshop/clinics this is the area a lot of band directors feel the most uncomfortable with. I was lucky in some part that at an early stage I played a lot of bass in various bands in Wellington which gave me a small amount of idea of what it took to make a rhythm groove. After that I attended as many rhythm section workshops as I could and I have had the opportunity of sitting in on various artists I have been touring while they present workshops - Steve Gadd, Greg Bissonette, Tom Warrington, Bill Cunliffe, Joe LaBarbara etc etc. In my written notes I tried to signal this as much as I could. A lot of times I didn't really discuss the Horns section perform as I knew Gwyn was covering that. As a starting point for a basic playing a swing charts I would suggest this is where to start:

**Bass** - As most of the band are using electric bass we are trying to get the vibe of a acoustic bass so: play longer notes but still with a point to the beginning of the note,

**Guitar** part: playing the Freddie Green style (4 to the bar) play the comping short , one of the guitarists I had in NZ described it and the word "chop",

**Drums:** start with 4 beat to the bar on the bass drum (Lightly) - Crisp Hi Hat sound - Ride Cymbal - for the most part this was a problem as the drummers didn't attack the cymbal and letting the stick rebound off the cymbal - several of the touring drummers I have had in NZ talked about playing through the cymbal. Many of the rhythm sections played the rock / funk charts with a lot of energy and then it seemed they thought to get a swing feel they play with less energy - my suggestion is to get them to play the swing charts with the same energy.

I can only stress that this is all just a starting point - but it will get things on the right to development the swing groove further.