

# JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER'S ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON LIBRARY

Wynton Marsalis, Managing and Artistic Director, Jazz at Lincoln Center

## Straw Boss

Benny Golson

As performed by The Benny Golson Big Band  
Edited by Christopher Crenshaw for Jazz at Lincoln Center

Full Score

This transcription was made especially for Jazz at Lincoln Center's 2018-19  
Twenty-Fourth Annual *Essentially Ellington* High School Jazz Band Program.

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## NOTES ON PLAYING ELLINGTON

At least 95% of modern-day large ensemble jazz playing comes out of three traditions: Count Basie's band, Duke Ellington's band, and the orchestrations of small groups. Those young players interested in jazz will be drawn to small groups for the opportunity to improvise and for practical reasons (it is much easier to organize 4 or 5 people than it is 15). Schools have taken over the task (formerly performed by dance bands) of training musicians to be ensemble players. Due to the Basie Band's popularity and its simplicity of style and emphasis on blues and swing, the better educators have almost exclusively adopted this tradition for teaching jazz ensemble playing. As wonderful as Count Basie's style is, it doesn't address many of the important styles developed under the great musical umbrella we call jazz. Duke Ellington's comprehensive and eclectic approach to music offers an alternative.

The stylistic richness of Ellington's music presents a great challenge to educators and performers alike. In Basie's music, the conventions are very nearly consistent. In Ellington's music there are many more exceptions to the rules. This calls for greater knowledge of the language of jazz. Clark Terry, who left Count Basie's band to join Duke Ellington, said, "Count Basie was college, but Duke Ellington was graduate school." Knowledge of Ellington's music prepares you to play any big band music.

The following is a list of performance conventions for the great majority of Ellington's music. Any deviations or additions will be spelled out in the individual performance notes which follow.

1. Listen carefully many times to the Ellington recording of these pieces. There are many subtleties that will elude even the most sophisticated listener at first. Although it was never Ellington's wish to have his recordings imitated, knowledge of these definitive versions will lead musicians to make more educated choices when creating new performances. Ellington's music, though written for specific individuals, is designed to inspire all musicians to express themselves. In addition, you will hear slight note differences in the recording and the transcriptions. This is intentional, as there are mistakes and alterations from the original intent of the music in the recording. You should have your players play what's in the score.
2. General use of swing phrasing. The triplet feel prevails except for ballads or where notations such as even eighths or Latin appear. In these cases, eighth notes are given equal value.
3. There is a chain of command in ensemble playing. The lead players in each section determine the phrasing and volume for their own section, and their section-mates must conform to the lead. When the saxes and / or trombones play with the trumpets, the lead trumpet is the boss. The lead alto and trombone must listen to the first trumpet and follow him. In turn, the other saxes and trombones must follow their lead players. When the clarinet leads the brass section, the brass should not overblow him. That means that the first trumpet is actually playing "second." If this is done effectively, there will be very little balancing work left for the conductor.

4. In Ellington's music, each player should express the individuality of his own line. He must find a musical balance of supporting and following the section leader and bringing out the character of the underpart. Each player should be encouraged to express his or her personality through the music. In this music, the underparts are played at the same volume and with the same conviction as the lead.
5. Blues inflection should permeate all parts at all times, not just when these opportunities occur in the lead.
6. Vibrato is used quite a bit to warm up the sound. Saxes (who most frequently represent the sensual side of things) usually employ vibrato on harmonized passages and no vibrato on unisons. The vibrato can be either heavy or light depending on the context. Occasionally saxes use a light vibrato on unisons. Trumpets (who very often are used for heat and power) use a little vibrato on harmonized passages and no vibrato on unisons. Trombones (who are usually noble) do not use slide vibrato. A little lip vibrato is good on harmonized passages at times. Try to match the speed of vibrato. In general unisons are played with no vibrato.
7. Crescendo as you ascend and diminuendo as you descend. The upper notes of phrases receive a natural accent and the lower notes are ghosted. Alto and tenor saxophones need to use sub-tone in the lower part of their range in order to blend properly with the rest of the section. This music was originally written with no dynamics. It pretty much follows the natural tendencies of the instruments; play loud in the loud part of the instrument and soft in the soft part of the instrument. For instance, a high C for a trumpet will be loud and a low C will be soft.
8. Quarter notes are generally played short unless otherwise notated. Long marks above or below a pitch indicate full value: not just long, but full value. Eighth notes are played full value except when followed by a rest or otherwise notated. All notes longer than a quarter note are played full value, which means if it is followed by a rest, release the note where the rest appears. For example, a half note occurring on beat one of a measure would be released on beat three.
9. Unless they are part of a legato background figure, long notes should be played somewhat *fp* (forte-piano); accent then diminish the volume. This is important so that the moving parts can be heard over the sustained notes. Don't just hold out the long notes, but give them life and personality: that is, vibrato, inflection, crescendo, or diminuendo. There is a great deal of inflection in this music, and much of this is highly interpretive. Straight or curved lines imply non-pitched glisses, and wavy lines mean scalar (chromatic or diatonic) glisses. In general, all rhythmic figures need to be accented. Accents give the music life and swing. This is very important.
10. Ellington's music is about individuality: one person per part—do not double up because you have extra players or need more strength.

More than one on a part makes it sound more like a concert band and less like a jazz band.

11. This is acoustic music. Keep amplification to an absolute minimum; in the best halls, almost no amplification should be necessary. Everyone needs to develop a big sound. It is the conductor's job to balance the band. When a guitar is used, it should be a hollow-body, unamplified rhythm guitar. Simple three-note voicings should be used throughout. An acoustic string bass is a must. In mediocre or poorly designed halls, the bass and piano may need a bit of a boost. I recommend miking them and putting them through the house sound system. This should provide a much better tone than an amplifier. Keep in mind that the rhythm section's primary function is to accompany. The bass should not be as loud as a trumpet. That is unnatural and leads to over-amplification, bad tone, and limited dynamics. Stay away from monitors. They provide a false sense of balance.
12. We have included chord changes on all rhythm section parts so that students can better understand the overall form of each composition. It is incumbent upon the director to make clear what is a composed part versus a part to be improvised. The recordings should make this clear but in instances where it is not; use your best judgment and play something that sounds good, is swinging, and is stylistically appropriate to the piece. Sometimes, a student may not have the technical skill to perform a difficult transcription, especially in the case of one of Duke's solos, in that case, it is best to have the student work something out that is appropriate. Written passages should be studied and earned when possible, as they are an important part of our jazz heritage and help the player understand the function of his particular solo or accompaniment. All soloists should learn the chord changes. Solos should be looked at as an opportunity to further develop the interesting thematic material that Ellington has provided.
13. The notation of plungers for the brass means a rubber toilet plunger bought in a hardware store. Kirkhill is a very good brand (especially if you can find one of their old hard rubber ones, like the one I loaned Wynton and he lost). Trumpets use 5" diameter and trombones use 6" diameter. Where Plunger/Mute is notated, insert a pixie mute in the bell and use the plunger over the mute. Pixies are available from Humes & Berg in Chicago. Tricky Sam Nanton and his successors in the Ellington plunger trombone chair did not use pixies. Rather, each of them employed a Nonpareil (that's the brand name) trumpet straight mute. Nonpareil has gone out of business, but the Tom Crown Nonpareil trumpet straight mute is very close to the same thing. These mute/plunger combinations create a wonderful sound (very close to the human voice), but they also can create some intonation problems which must be corrected by the lip or by using alternate slide positions. It would be easier to move the tuning slide, but part of the sound is in the struggle to correct the pitch. If this proves too much, stick with the pixie—it's pretty close.

14. The drummer is the de facto leader of the band. He establishes the beat and controls the volume of the ensemble. For big band playing, the drummer needs to use a larger bass drum than he would for small group drumming. A 22" or 24" is preferred. The bass drum is played softly (nearly inaudible) on each beat. This is called feathering the bass drum. It provides a very important bottom to the band. The bass drum sound is not a boom and not a thud—it's in between. The larger size drum is necessary for the kicks; a smaller drum just won't be heard. The key to this style is to just keep time. A rim knock on two and four (chopping wood) is used to lock in the swing. When it comes to playing fills, the fewer, the better.
15. The horn players should stand for their solos and solis. Brass players should come down front for moderate to long solos, surrounding rests permitting. The same applies to the pep section (two trumpets and one trombone in plunger/mutes).
16. Horns should pay close attention to attacks and releases. Everyone should hit together and release together.
17. Above all, everyone's focus should remain at all times on the swing. As the great bassist Chuck Israels says, "The three most important things in jazz are rhythm, rhythm, and rhythm, in that order." Or as Bubber Miley (Ellington's first star trumpeter) said, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."

## GLOSSARY

The following are terms which describe conventions of jazz performance, from traditional New Orleans to the present avant garde.

**Break** • within the context of an ongoing time feel, the rhythm section stops for one, two, or four bars. Very often a soloist will improvise during a break.

**Call and response** • repetitive pattern of contrasting exchanges (derived from the church procedure of the minister making a statement and the congregation answering with "amen"). Call-and-response patterns usually pit one group of instruments against another. Sometimes we call this "trading fours," "trading twos," etc., especially when it involves improvisation. The numbers denote the amount of measures each soloist or group plays. Another term frequently used is "swapping fours."

**Coda** • also known as the "outro." "Tags" or "tag endings" are outgrowths of vaudeville bows that are frequently used as codas. They most often use deceptive cadences that finally resolve to the tonic or they go from the sub-dominant and cycle back to the tonic.

**Comp** • improvise accompaniment (for piano or guitar).

**Groove** • the composite rhythm. This generally refers to the combined repetitive rhythmic patterns of the drums, bass, piano, and guitar, but may also include repetitive patterns in the horns. Some grooves are standard (i.e., swing, bossa nova, samba), while others are manufactured (original combinations of rhythms).

**Head** • melody chorus.

**Interlude** • a different form (of relatively short length) sandwiched between two chorus forms. Interludes that set up a key change are simply called modulations.

**Intro** • short for introduction.

**Ride pattern** • the most common repetitive figure played by the drummer's right hand on the ride cymbal or hi-hat.



**Riff** • a repeated melodic figure. Very often, riffs repeat verbatim or with slight alterations while the harmonies change underneath them.

**Shout chorus** • also known as the "out chorus," the "sock chorus," or sometimes shortened to just "the shout." It is the final ensemble passage of most big band charts and where the climax most often happens.

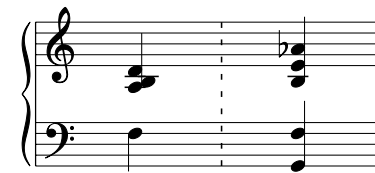
**Soli** • a harmonized passage for two or more instruments playing the same rhythm. It is customary for horn players to stand up or even move in front of the band when playing these passages. This is done so that the audience can hear them better and to provide the audience with some visual interest. A soli sound particular to Ellington's music combines two trumpets and trombone in plungers/mutes in triadic harmony. This is called the "pep section."

**Stop time** • a regular pattern of short breaks (usually filled in by a soloist).

**Swing** • the perfect confluence of rhythmic tension and relaxation in music creating a feeling euphoria and characterized by accented weak beats (a democratization of the beat) and eighth notes that are played as the first and third eighth notes of an eighth-note triplet. Duke Ellington's definition of swing: when the music feels like it is getting faster, but it isn't.

**Vamp** • a repeated two- or four-bar chord progression. Very often, there may be a riff or riffs played on the vamp.

**Voicing** • the specific spacing, inversion, and choice of notes that make up a chord. For instance, two voicings for G7 could be:



Note that the first voicing includes a 9th and the second voicing includes a 9th and a 13th. The addition of 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, and alterations are up to the discretion of the pianist and soloist.

## THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

The following are placed in their order of importance in jazz. We should never lose perspective on this order of priority.

**Rhythm** • meter, tempo, groove, and form, including both melodic rhythm and harmonic rhythm (the speed and regularity of the chord changes).

**Melody** • a tune or series of pitches.

**Harmony** • chords and voicings.

**Orchestration** • instrumentation and tone colors.

—David Berger

## STRAW BOSS • INSTRUMENTATION

Solo Tenor Sax

Reed 1 — Alto Sax

Reed 2 — Alto Sax

Reed 3 — Tenor Sax

Reed 4 — Tenor Sax

Reed 5 — Bari Sax

Trumpet 1

Trumpet 2

Trumpet 3

Trumpet 4

Trumpet 5

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Trombone 3

Bass Trombone

Acoustic and Electric Guitar

Piano

Bass

Drums

## ORIGINAL RECORDING INFORMATION

**Composer** • Benny Golson

**Recorded** • March 3, 2001 in New York at Alice Tully Hall  
("The Magic of Benny Golson")

**Currently available on the *Essentially Ellington* website**

**Personnel** • Lew Soloff, Virgil Jones, Alan Rubin, Valery Ponomarev, Jimmy Owens (trumpet); Steve Turre, Wycliffe Gordon, Jim Pugh, Dave Taylor (trombone); Brad Leali, Jerry Dodgion (alto sax); Benny Golson, Bobby LaVell, Ron Blake (tenor sax); Ronnie Cuber (baritone sax); Bill Mays (piano); Ron Carter (bass); Carl Allen (drums)

**Soloists** • Jimmy Owens (trumpet/flugelhorn); Benny Golson (tenor sax); Bill Mays (piano); Ron Carter (bass)

## REHEARSAL NOTES

- Whereas most of Benny Golson's big band music has a lot for the ensemble to do, this piece is one where the soloists rule. Commissioned for and produced by Jazz at Lincoln Center in 2001, **Straw Boss** reveals Golson's command of large structures that don't lose the spontaneity of the best small group jazz.
- The form of the piece is simple: a 32-bar chorus revolving essentially around two chords: Bb and Gb, and Eb and Cb. There are a handful of interludes and transitions, but the essence of this piece lives in how much the soloists can make out of the harmonic structure. To make the piece come off at its best, the soloists should pace themselves over the long solos. It helps to think about telling a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and the end does not always have to be the most intense part of the story. Study extended solos performed by jazz masters and take note of how they structure particularly long ones.
- The unison piano/bass lines are crucial to making the piece sound as intended. As simple as they appear to be, they call for great concentration. The same goes for the band with respect to the backgrounds. They are the glue that makes the music come together in this performance, and if the conductor chooses to open the piece up for more soloists, be sure to keep the ratio of backgrounds as Golson intended in the written score.
- Note the two measures before letter L, where the band (horn and rhythm sections) makes a crescendo from *mp* to *fff*. This is not easy to do while also making it sound natural. This calls for a lot of rehearsal: *mp* is not *p*, and *fff* is not *ff*, and you can use this as a lesson in establishing finite dynamic boundaries for an ensemble. It is all too common for jazz big bands to lose sight of the relative dynamics between *p* and *f*, and ultimately everything winds up being played in a very small dynamic range.

—Loren Schoenberg

To listen to original recordings, view interactive videos of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra in rehearsals, and obtain rehearsal guides for the *Essentially Ellington* 2018–19 repertoire please visit [jazz.org/EE](http://jazz.org/EE).

CONDUCTOR

Jazz at Lincoln Center Library - Essentially Ellington

# STRAW BOSS

Benny Golson  
Edited by Christopher Crenshaw

Medium-Up Swing  $\text{♩} = 160$

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout. It includes staves for Solo Tenor Sax, Reeds I (Alto Sax), Reeds 2 (Alto Sax), Reeds 3 (Tenor Sax), Reeds 4 (Tenor Sax), Reeds 5 (Bari Sax), Trumpets I (5 parts), Trombones I (3 parts), Bass Trombone, Acoustic Guitar, Piano (Grand staff), Bass (with a melodic line starting on the first measure and a *mf* dynamic marking), and Drums. The score is currently blank, with only the first measure of the Bass line containing notes.

Straw Boss

A

Musical score for 'Straw Boss' featuring various instruments including Solo T. Sax., Alto, Tenor, Bari, Tpts. 1-5, Tbn. 1-3, Ac. Gtr., Pno., Bs., and Drs. The score is in 4/4 time and includes a section labeled 'A'. The Acoustic Guitar part includes the following chord progression: Bb7, Gb7, Bb7, Cm7, Bb7, Gb7, Bb7, Cm7. The Piano part includes the instruction 'mp' and 'Lighly (a la Freddie Green)'. The Bass and Drums parts provide a steady accompaniment.

Straw Boss

**B**

Solo T. Sax.

Alto

Alto

Tenor

Tenor

Bari

Tpts. 1

2

3

4

5

Tbns. 1

2

3

Bs. Tbn.

Ac. Gtr.

Pno.

Bs.

Drs.