

# JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER'S ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON LIBRARY

WYNTON MARSALIS, MANAGING AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

## TOPSY

Composed by Edgar William Battle and Eddie Durham

Arranged by Eddie Durham

Transcribed by Christopher Crenshaw

As performed by Count Basie Orchestra

### FULL SCORE

This transcription was made especially for Jazz at Lincoln Center's  
2021–22 *Essentially Ellington* High School Jazz Band Program.

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JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

## 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

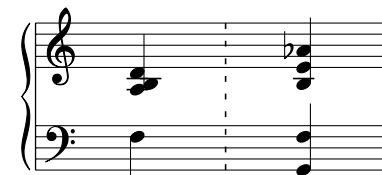
so that the audience can hear them better and to provide the audience with some visual interest. A soli sound particular to Ellington's music combines two trumpets and trombone in plungers/mutes in triadic harmony. This is called the "pep section."

**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

## TOPSY • INSTRUMENTATION

Reed 1 – Alto Sax

Reed 2 – Tenor Sax

Reed 3 – Tenor Sax

Reed 4 – Baritone Sax

Alto Sax (Optional)

Trumpet 1

Trumpet 2

Trumpet 3

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Trombone 3

Guitar

Piano

Bass

Drums

## ORIGINAL RECORDING INFORMATION

**Composer** • Edgar William Battle and Eddie Durham

**Arranger** • Eddie Durham

**Recorded** • August 9, 1937 in New York City

**Original issue** • Decca 1538 62514

**Currently available as digital download** • Amazon, iTunes (Count Basie, *The Complete Decca Recordings*)

**Personnel** • Buck Clayton, Joe Keyes, Carl Smith (trumpets); Eddie Durham, George Hunt, Dan Minor (trombones); Lester Young, Herschel Evans (tenor sax); Caughey Roberts (alto sax); Jack Washington (baritone sax); Claude Williams (guitar); Count Basie (piano); Walter Page (bass); Jo Jones (drums)

**Soloists** • Buck Clayton (trumpet), Jack Washington (baritone sax), Count Basie (piano), Herschel Evans (tenor sax)

## REHEARSAL NOTES

- In “Topsy,” the guitar is the unsung hero. Right away, the guitar should be felt as well as heard. Play with more of a percussive quality stroke to help the bass and sock pattern lock in and play with a bounce. The quarter notes need to be stingy so the piano’s upbeats can have purpose in the response.
- Papa Jo Jones plays a “shimmy beat” or “press roll” groove in letters **A**, **B**, and **D** with the bass drum on beats one and three. Baby Dodds has a great demonstration of this groove; search for it sometime.
- The reeds can follow the shape as they moan their backgrounds behind the trumpet solo. Buck Clayton plays with a drive that’s contagious. Even though there’s syncopation, the downbeat is present throughout. Trombones should open the plungers rather quickly to get the “wahs” to sound comical yet responsive.
- Follow the dynamics carefully throughout the tune. The drums can help with this as they are the de facto conductor of the band.
- It’s interesting how the lead-in to letter **C** by the reeds connect with the figures the brass have at **C**. Find more areas where the composite rhythms occur between or among sections.
- Letter **E** has the baritone sax Jack Washington play a solo while the trombones moan with the trumpet “wahs.” This is clever orchestration by Eddie Durham as he re-arranges the instrumentation inside the form. At the bridge at **G**, start soft and build up to the first true statement of the melody at letter **H**. Although it’s the melody at letter **H**, there is still a solo happening, so the dynamic should be relative to the soloist. Play with intensity, but with common sense as well. Beat three in the last bar of **H** should be accented and played rather long, especially trumpet 3.
- The piano solo is typical Basie style: the reeds and rhythm section are Basie’s left hand while Basie controls the right hand. It’s more of an interpretation of the melody than a solo. Letter **K** has the brass in cup mute. Blow through the mute to get the shimmering sound the Basie Orchestra gets, and follow the lead trumpet to make the sforzando happen. The drums should have an impactful, yet clear lead-in to the shout chorus.
- Letter **M** is the shout chorus with responses by the tenor sax of Herschel Evans. These tutti figures are a riff-based variation of the melody. Put rhythm in the upbeat on the ‘and’ of one to carry onto beat three. Play the phrases so the tenor sax can respond in kind. It’s best to think of the big beats one and three throughout.
- Letter **O** is a variation of letter **C** with the reeds in harmony and up an octave, and the brass start their figures on a downbeat. It’s important that the reeds play their upbeats every other measure like they’re exclamation points (akin to a snare drum’s rimshot).

- I like the answer from the reeds in measures three and four of letter **P**. Follow the shape to make this effective.
- The brass should have the plungers nearby for the figures at **Q** and **R**. Work on the upbeat hook to assure that the timing is on point, the dynamics are where they should be, and the intensity is consistent. After all these upbeats, the trombones and reeds end with downbeats while the piano finishes the recap of the intro, another great device used by Eddie Durham.
- The feeling of the last note played by the orchestra is very important. Follow lead trumpet here, and listen to the piano’s last figure so everyone lands together.
- It will be good for you to check out Benny Goodman’s version of “Topsy” from 1938 to compare and contrast Basie’s version from 1937. There are subtle differences in the shuffle pattern, the feeling, and the dynamics.

—Christopher Crenshaw

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

CONDUCTOR

Jazz at Lincoln Center Library - Essentially Ellington

# TOPSY

Edgar William Battle and Eddie Durham

Arranged by Eddie Durham

Transcribed by Christopher Crenshaw

Medium Swing ♩ = 200

Alto Sax

Reeds 1

Tenor Sax

2

Tenor Sax

3

Baritone Sax

4

Trumpets 1

2

3

Trombones 1

2

3

Guitar

B♭m E♭m D♭° E♭m B♭m B♭m/A♭ G♯9 F7(♯5) B♭m E♭m D♭° E♭m B♭m B♭m/A♭ G♯9 F7(♯5)

Piano

Bass

Drums

sock cymbal

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

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Topsy

A

Alto *p*

Tenor *p*

Tenor *p*

Bari *p*

Tpts. 1

2 *mp* Solo cup mute Cm Fm Eb° Fm Cm Cm/Bb Ab9 G7(#5) Cm Fm Eb° Fm Cm Cm/Bb Ab9 G7(#5) F#9

3

Tbns. 1 plunger *p* +o +o +o

2 plunger *p* +o +o +o

3 plunger *p* +o +o +o

Gtr. Bbm Ebm Db° Ebm Bbm Bbm/Ab Gb9 F7(#5) Bbm Ebm Db° Ebm Bbm Bbm/Ab Gb9 F7(#5) E9

Pno.

Bs.

Drs.

9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Topsy

**B**

The musical score for 'Topsy' includes the following parts and details:

- Vocal Parts:** Alto, Tenor, and Bari parts with lyrics and musical notation. Dynamics include *mf*.
- Tpts. 1-3:** Trumpet parts with various chord symbols: Fm, Bbm, F°, Bbm, Fm, C#9, Cm, Fm, Eb°, Fm, Cm, Cm/Bb, Ab9, G7(#5).
- Tbns. 1-3:** Trombone parts with various chord symbols: Ebm, Abm, Eb°, Abm, Ebm, B9, Bbm, Ebm, Db°, Ebm, Bbm, Bbm/Ab, Gb9, F7(#5).
- Gtr.:** Guitar part with various chord symbols: Ebm, Abm, Eb°, Abm, Ebm, B9, Bbm, Ebm, Db°, Ebm, Bbm, Bbm/Ab, Gb9, F7(#5).
- Pno.:** Piano part with various chord symbols: Ebm, Abm, Eb°, Abm, Ebm, B9, Bbm, Ebm, Db°, Ebm, Bbm, Bbm/Ab, Gb9, F7(#5).
- Bs.:** Bass part with various chord symbols: Ebm, Abm, Eb°, Abm, Ebm, B9, Bbm, Ebm, Db°, Ebm, Bbm, Bbm/Ab, Gb9, F7(#5).
- Drs.:** Drums part with various chord symbols: Ebm, Abm, Eb°, Abm, Ebm, B9, Bbm, Ebm, Db°, Ebm, Bbm, Bbm/Ab, Gb9, F7(#5).