

Jazz Comp/Theory
Mus 198
Class notes

Rhythm Section Instruments Function and Notation

Piano, Electric or Acoustic Guitar (other chordal instruments)

Primary Role:

- Provide harmonic backdrop congruent with bass, horns, vocals etc
- Comp behind soloists and written melodies, countermelodies
- Play improvised solos
- Occasionally play written melodies and accompaniment
- Provide rhythmic impetus and propulsion together with bass and drums

Recommended Notation Methods

- Indicate tempo, style and dynamics at beginning of part
- Chord symbols with slashes or slash noteheads (rhythmic notation)
- Indicate precise tension/altered tones in chord symbol
- Write out chord voicings when there could be ambiguity interpreting chord symbols
- When horn voicings are complex or dense often it's best to tacet chordal instrument parts
- Write out solo melodic lines or specific chord voicings when desired
- Sometimes write a desired comping pattern/style in first 1 or 2 measures (with rhythmic notation or specific voicings or lead note) followed by slashes & chord symbols and the term 'simile'
- When writing for guitar indicate which type of guitar (acoustic nylon or steel string or electric & any effects if desired.
- Sometimes can indicate the melody and chord symbol and the term 'comp' leaving the specific comping rhythm and voicing up to the discretion of the player
- Sometimes you can just write the melody with 'voice chords under melody' (be precise with your chord nomenclature especially when there are countermelodies or multiple hn voicings already)
- Avoid rhythmic and harmonic clashes with horn parts and other chordal instrument parts
- Pno and Gtr need to listen carefully to avoid harmonic and rhythmic clashes (try having one sustain voicing while other comps rhythmically or have only one play at a time

- Guitarists tune to piano not tuning device
- Note guitars parts are written up an octave from where they sound

Bass (electric and acoustic)

Primary Role:

- Provide harmonic foundation by emphasizing chord roots (mainly) & 5ths (sometimes other chord tones too) and stringing them together in a melodic fashion
- Provide basic rhythmic pulse working congruently with drums and piano/gtr parts.

Recommended Notation Methods:

- Bass parts are written up an octave from where they sound.
- Indicate which bass, (acoustic/electric) tempo, style and dynamics at beginning of part
- Chord symbols with slashes or slash note-heads (rhythmic notation) are standard
- Indicate precise tension/altered tones in chord symbol
- Consider matching some key rhythmic syncopations by horns and other chordal instruments (can be overdone). Sometimes nice to just have bass lay the groove down while horns or chordal instruments play (other) syncopated rhythms.
- Indicate precise tension/altered tones in chord symbol (don't overcomplicate chord symbols though when all you want from bass is roots)
- Write specific bass-lines for harmonic and rhythmic purpose when necessary
- One can also score melody (w/o other instruments) for contrast

Drum-set (other non-pitched persuasion)

Primary Role:

- Provide rhythmic propulsion, groove
- Support rhythmic figures played by rest of ensemble
- Play rhythmic fills where needed
- Occasionally play improvised solos
- Provide one of the main sources of dynamic contrast

Recommended Notation Methods:

- Use standard rhythmic notation/note-heads
- Use Percussion or Bass clef
- Indicate tempo, style, feel, dynamics etc at beginning of part EG- Quarternote = 116 SWING/FUNK/EVEN 8ths etc
- Usually sufficient to write quarternotes in first measure followed by slashes and the term 'simile'
- Indicate where specific accents or fills are needed to support horn figures etc, by copying their rhythms into the dm part
- For fills write FILL above rhythmic slashes to indicate duration of fill
- When specific dm part is required write BD on bottom space, SD on middle space, cymbals on top line or line above staff, and toms anywhere in the middle. To write open hi hats put an 'o' above the notehead and to return to closed hi hat put a + above the notehead. Drummers assume the hi hats are closed unless otherwise indicated.
- Usually when writing specific drum parts you do so for one or two bars only then follow in the next measures with slashes and the term 'simile'
- Acceptable to write one drum line in top space with X noteheads indicating rhythmic hits
- Or slashes with X noteheads as cues above stave, indicating the drummer should continue playing time.
- Sometimes indicate number of measures when just requiring the drummer to play time.

Never give a drummer a part where every detail is notated. Instead provide an outline of the desired part to be played with tempo, style, dynamics, along with important rhythmic accents and fills where necessary.