วิธีการพัฒนาการอ่านโน้ตสำหรับมือเบส ในวงดนตรีแจ๊สขนาดใหญ่

DEVELOPING SIGHT-READING SKILLS IN BIG BAND CHARTS FOR BASS PLAYERS

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ABSTRACT

Reading music can be a new challenge to any beginner. Fluent music reading requires every player to spend time practicing. As jazz bassists, we often spend time sight-reading a chord progression more than than music notations compared with a brass player or a horn player. By dexterously reading music, the player will understand the basics of writing music as well. To develop sight-reading, the players may have to practice the skill frequently, similar to reading a book. So it is necessary for them to learn from productive books or exercises.

Keywords : Sight-Reading, Big Band

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บทคัดย่อ

การอ่านโน้ตดนตรีสากลเป็นเรื่องที่ท้าทายสำหรับผู้ที่ไม่มีประสบการณ์ โดยปกติแล้วจะขึ้นอยู่กับผู้เล่นที่จะใช้เวลามากน้อยเท่าไหร่ในการฝึกใช้ทักษะนี้ ในฐานะมือเบส ส่วนใหญ่แล้วจะใช้เวลาในการอ่านทางเดินของคอร์ดมากกว่าอ่านโน้ตดนตรีสากล สำหรับผู้ที่มีความรู้ความเชี่ยวชาญในการอ่านโน้ตสากลก็มักจะมีความสามารถในการเขียนและจดโน้ตเขียนในดนตรีชนิดนี้ได้อย่างดีเช่นเดียวกัน ทักษะความเข้าใจในการอ่านโน้ตนี้ เป็นพื้นฐานจำเป็นสำหรับมือเบส เพราะฉะนั้นผู้เขียนจึงตั้งใจที่จะทำแบบฝึกหัดและวิธีการสาธิตต่างๆ เพื่อให้ผู้เรียนเกิดความชำนาญในทักษะนี้ได้ง่ายขึ้น

คำสำคัญ : การอ่านโน้ต วงดนตรีแจ๊สขนาดใหญ่

Introduction

I sometimes have a problem reading music. A common one is that I do not concentrate enough to count the beats or get into the music. While reading, it is important for a player to be very concentrated on their part and pay attention to the band and the conductor. In reading jazz, a player usually struggles in many syncopated rhythms and complicated passages such as sequences, licks, and unison pattens. Sometimes, reading in medium swings or moderate tempos may not cause a serious problem to the reader compared to reading in a fast swing or up tempo. These styles can cause many problems for a beginner. One thing that I discovered which is quite useful to new apprentices is looking ahead while reading music and always paying attention to other band members and listening to them. For a jazz bassist, most big band charts in the swing period, especially

those by Court Basie or Duke Ellington, usually contain a written bass line for us to sight-read the chord progression (see Figure 1). To understanding basic sight-reading in big band charts, the players should know the following: (1) The common basic rhythm notation which are utilized in a normal jazz big band chart may consist of quarter notes, half notes, eighth notes, and quarter-note or eighth-note triplets. (2) Sometimes, the bass lines in jazz standards may have notes that do not occur in the scale or chord. Notes such as passing tones or chromatic approach notes commonly occur in bass lines, and to prepare for sight-reading, the player must (1) scan and analyze the chart before performing and (2) always look for basic information in the chart, such as time signature, key signature, and song form. Thus, the particular sections will be in four parts:

I. Searching for basic information
II. Learning to read two-feel parts and a walking bass line
III. Reading specific bass lines for the vamp section
IV. Understanding the basic notation pattern for nonswing style
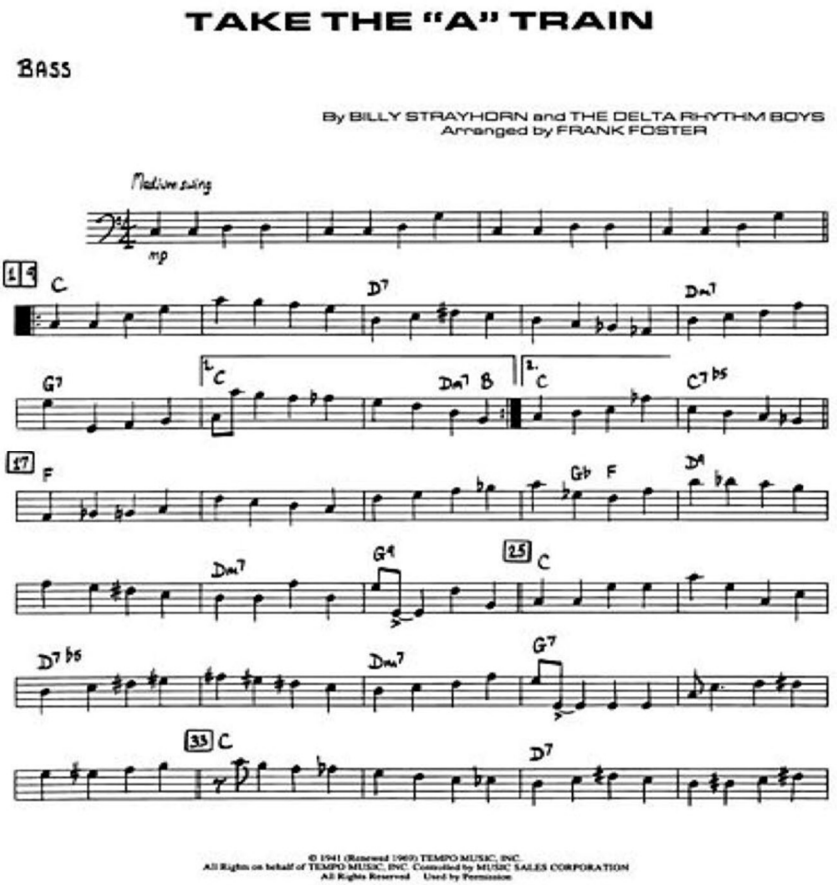


Figure 1. The demonstration of bass parts on "Take the A Train"
By Billy Strayhorn
Photo credit : https://store.gogustaf.com/en/article/AF-175ed507796fc24d/Take-the-A-Train-String-Bass-The-Delta-Rhythm-Boys-Jazz-Band-Frank-Foster

Literature Review

1. Sight-reading

According to Richard Chronister (1977) and Ristad (1982) explain the characterize of sight- reading as ; Fingers that can simulate a fast running passage and unwind the passage on the right beat with a flourish, an ear that refuses to shudder at notes missed, and a mind that is more intent on arriving on time than it is on enjoying the scenery of each measure. It needs a lot of 'ham', the ability to pretend all is well even when it is lousy going. So, after reading the sentence, it may concludes that a sight reading is an ability when musicians emotionally and musically performed the music by virtually sight to the passage of music. Fluency facilitate sight reading skill allow the player access to a wide variety of music and a more through knowledge of specific composers and style characteristic; it builds tactile, aural and kinetic memory, which increase the player's confidence, and it provide training for many professions in music. (Hardy, 1996). Consequently, the literature review has thus led the researcher to conduct the study in order to improve a quality of sight reading for pupils.

2. Bigband

Bigband is a definition of a large jazz ensemble which consist of more than ten persons. it is noticeable that the primary role of big band ensemble was to performed for dancing and entertaining. The emergence of the big band idiom, with its subtle interweaving of four sections which are saxophone, trumpet, trombone, and rhythm. This band may seems,

with the benefit of hindsight and inevitable development in the evolution of jazz music (Gioia, 2011). The prosperity of big bands begun to thrive in the early 1930 and rapidly decreased during the world war II. However, some of big bands continue to exist and start to develop their own original style of writing in particular arrangements and compositions which we can refer as progressive jazz and modern jazz big band.

Methods

I. Searching for basic information and using basic music theory

It is necessary for the player to spend at least 15–20 seconds quickly searching the music chart for the coda, repeat signs, rehearsal letters, style, and other locations. This method can help them perceive general ideas on the composition and know correctly where they should attempt to go on the music. Next, understanding the basics of chord progressions such as II-V-I or I-VI-II-V could potentially help them recognize the fundamentals of harmony in a composition and in an arrangement. Next, searching for turnaround sections and cadences could be helpful in case they get confused and lost in the rhythm section. They should always pay attention to the music chart and presume the song form in the arrangement. Consequently, by obtaining these general ideas, the bassist will know how the arrangement should be narrated.

II. Learn to read two-feel parts and a walking bass line

A two-feel part is a section where the bassist usually performs in the melody section during the first chorus and the last chorus. This section consists of many half notes, six whole notes, or even some tie notes which the bassist needs to read. This part, especially in contemporary jazz big band charts, may cause trouble for a bassist while they are sight-reading. The first common problem that I usually find concerns tie notes. In a big band chart, a tie note could be often played on the up beat or with syncopated rhythm, so it is important for the bassist to count the beat to play the rhythm precisely. Mostly in two-feel parts, the bass notes are usually played on the 1st and 3rd beats using roots and perfect fifths. Sometimes the arranger may write a passing note on the 4th beat as well. Always pay attention to any rest notes. When reading a rest note, students should know exactly where the beat should stop. It can only be on the up beat or on the down beat (see Figure 2).
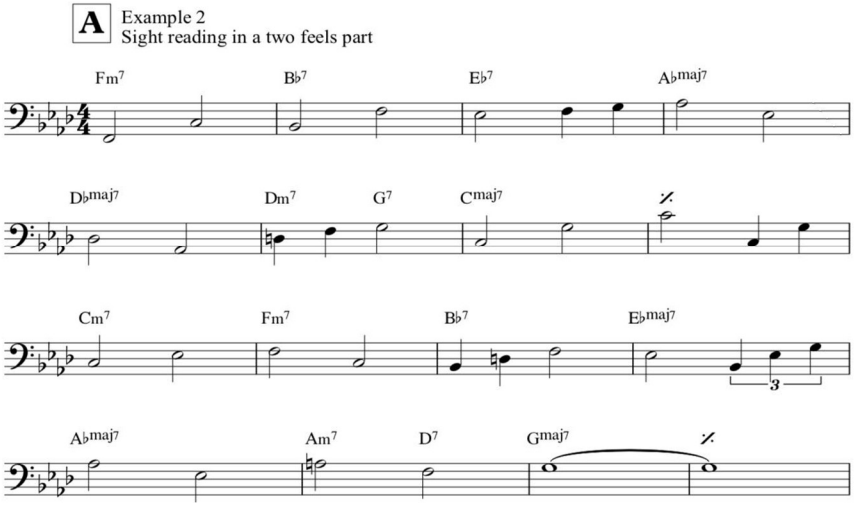


Figure 2. Two-feel parts

To improve sight-reading in a walking bass line in a big band chart, students may select some jazz standards and then start writing the bass line on music paper by themselves. (Optional: they should write at least two to three choruses in AABA form or up to five or six choruses on a 12-bar blues progression). After that, they should practice with a metronome and then start reading the bass line, gradually increasing the tempo when comfortable. By reading a bass line often, students can improve and read music naturally. Also, there are music resources like those of Ray Brown, Ron Carter, and Rufus Reid containing many walking bass lines to assist students with their sight-reading skills.

III. Reading specific bass lines for the vamp section

The vamp section could be either in unison or not in unison with other rhythm section parts. To develop sight-reading in the vamp section, the player may look to the bass line and try to find out the scale, mode, or chord tone the arranger utilized in the intro section. Next, the player may try to understand the basic structure for the bass line; for example, if a group of notes does not skip in a line, the player may guess that the bass line could be a scale or a chromatic scale, but if it repeatedly skips in a line, the passage could be chord tones or intervals (see Figure 3). Also, the player must know how to separate a phrasing. By spreading a phrase, students may easily recognize or understand the context of the bass line. The ending of a phrase is usually located where the bass line changes from the previous chord to the next chord. After understanding the first phase, move to the next one and try to remember the fingering and hand postures. These could help the player quickly develop muscle memory. The best advice is students may read it slowly first if they are not comfortable with up tempos.

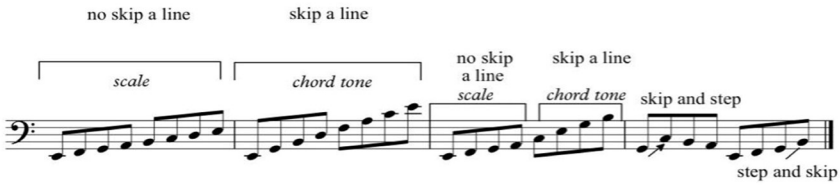


Figure 3. Understanding the basic structure on a bass line

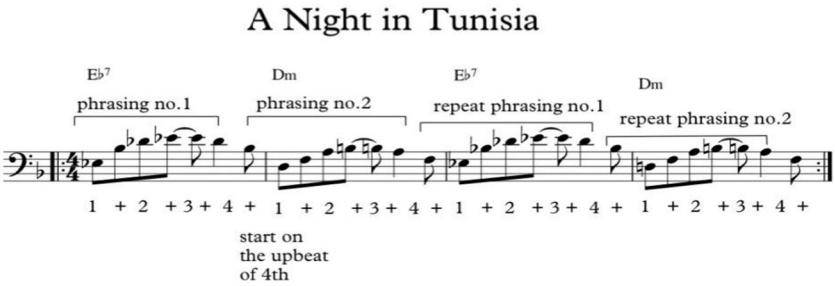


Figure 4. Demonstration of the notable bass line in a jazz standard: "A Night in Tunisia" composed by Dizzy Gillespie

IV. Understanding the basic notation patterns for nonswing style

Latin music, such as Cuban and Brazilian music, is usually performed in a big band as well. It is important for the bassist to understand the basic bass patterns in these music styles. First, it is noticeable that when attempting sight-reading on Cuban rhythms, the composer or arranger usually writes the time signature by using cut time. In cut time, the player may tap their feet only on beats 1 and 3. In Cuban music, students should understand the basic pattern of bass line known as "tumbao." The tumbao consists of many tie notes which are normally located on the last up beat of the measure (see Figure 5). Other Cuban rhythms such as son, bolero, cha-cha-cha, rumba, and mambo are necessary for the bassist to recognize and understand basic patterns too. Always tapping a foot will easily help the students develop concentration, as well as looking at a conductor or listening to the rhythm section in case you lose the forms or measures.

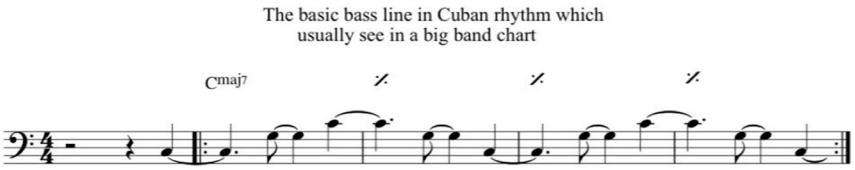


Figure 5. The basic pattern known as tumbao in Cuban music

Next, Brazilian styles are favored in big band arrangements as well. Standards such as “Desafinado,” “Corcovado,” “The Girl from Ipanema,” “How Insensitive,” and “One Note Samba” are often performed by many professional jazz orchestral bands. Occasionally, the arranger may write a specific bass pattern for the bassist. A basic bass line in Brazilian style, such as bossa nova, is mostly simple. The arranger also may write in cut time signature in a fast tempo, particularly in samba. The Brazilian bass line usually plays in the same pattern. To improve sight-reading, the bassist should understand the basic rhythm in Brazilian style. Mostly, the bass lines in Brazilian music are performed by root and fifth intervals. The basic pattern usually combines a dotted quarter note and eighth notes. The accent beat also occurs on the 3rd beat (see Figure 6). Thus, understanding the basics of this pattern helps the player hear the bass line and minimize time reading it.

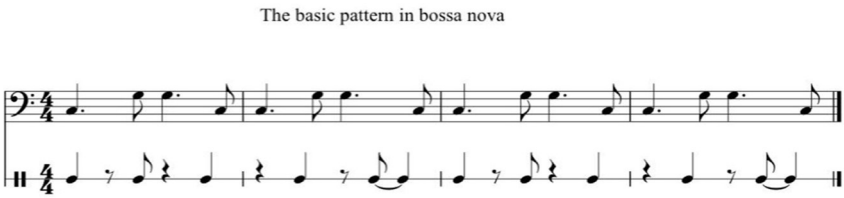
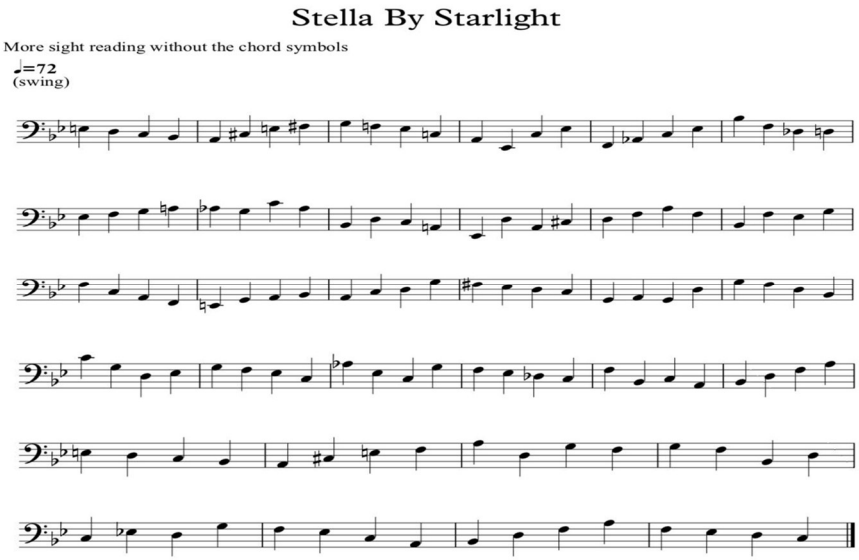


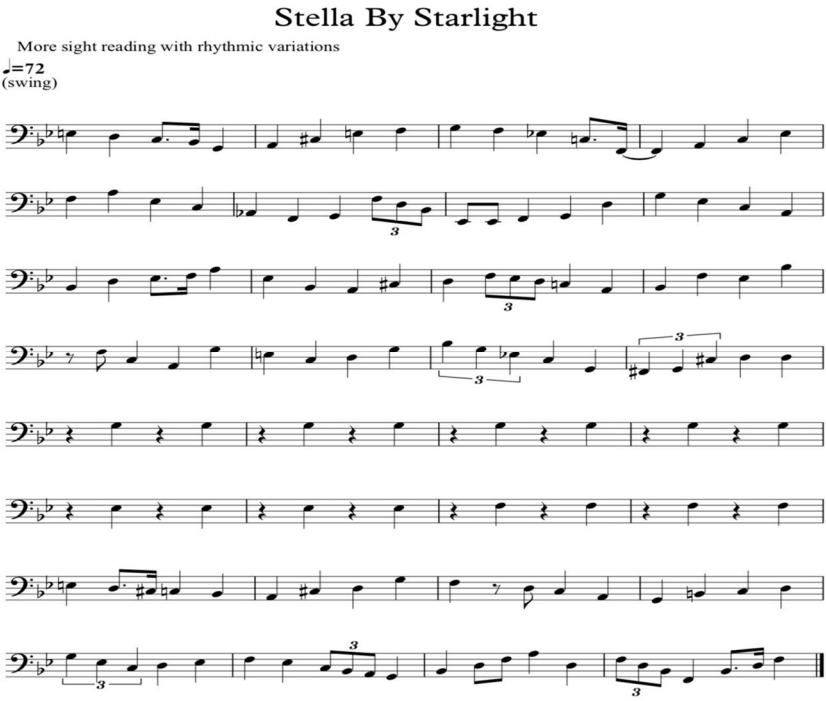
Figure 6. The fundamental bass line and clave pattern in bossa nova

Results
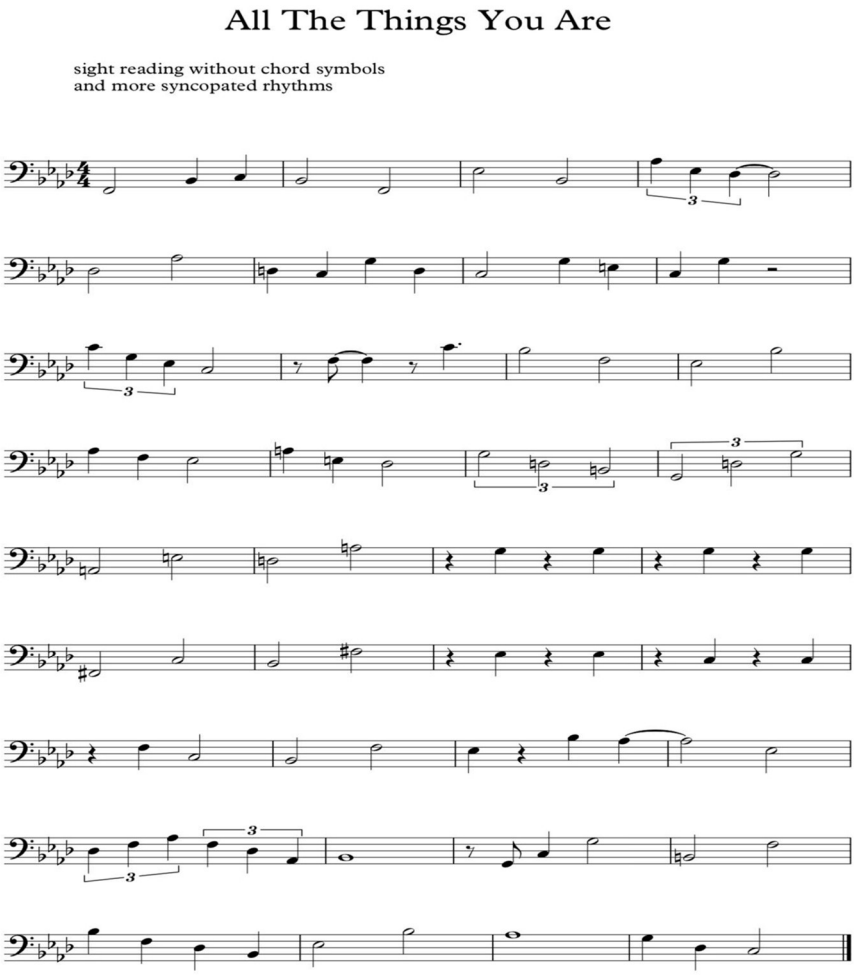
After spending one month utilizing the methods, the author had the students take a short examination on sight-reading. By presenting a bass part which the students have not seen before, the author has discovered that students can develop proper sight-reading skills within a short period. Over 70 percent of the parts were correctly performed. Most of the sight-reading methods were taught to the students 30 minutes per week in addition to their private lessons, and most of the students who engaged in this circumstance were inefficient and inexperienced in sight-reading big band charts. It is thus noticeable that the methods could easily help them improve and develop techniques to handle sight-reading. Methods such as understanding vamps and introduction parts can potentially help the students reduce their time reading bass parts. However, common problems such as intonation can occur on the bass line while they are sight-reading. This happens because they cannot perceive a posture well. In some cases, reading music can still be quite difficult for some students, who will probably need more time to practice and improve this skill.

Demonstration of exercises presented to the students for instructing the methods





Exercise 7. Sight-reading walking bass lines without chord symbols



Exercise 8. Sight-reading two feels without chord symbols

Conclusion

Sight-reading is a skill that requires every player to spend time reading and practicing. It could be difficult and challenge for a new player when they try to read a music chart. Always scan the lead sheet before you start sight-reading. Search complex rhythms which can cause trouble, and be mindful of basic information such as key signatures, time signatures, rehearsal letters, accidentals, and dynamics. Use music theory to understand the scale or mode that is utilized in the passage, and analyze which fingering should be performed. For improving sight-reading in sophisticated music notation, the player may do the following: (1) Pay attention to the up beats, rest, tie, and dot notes. (2) By reading sixteenth notes, students may separate a phrasing or passage in the bass line. When practicing sight-reading, the player should play it slow first; they can also start reading a rhythm by clapping. (3) They may also use a metronome for the first time, turn it off, and then try to read music again without it. (4) The player may create their own exercises by writing music notation on a paper and then attempting to read it. (5) Transcribing a bass line can also help students understand the concept of writing music. It will improve their sight-reading as well. Sight-reading can be difficult and challenging for a beginner, so students should be optimistic and keep practicing at least 30 minutes per day. Improving sight-reading can help students get more opportunities in their music careers. It is the required skill for a professional player.

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