

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD CHART

---Don Zentz---

- >In a scholastic setting, a chart must have educational merit - enough substance and content to develop and hone musicianship skills of students (as per curricular objectives). Engagement with the chart should play a role in taking kids from one level to the next – technically, musically, and motivationally.
- >A chart should represent the fundamental elements of jazz.
- >A chart should “lay well” on all instruments, feel good to play, and be faithful idiomatically to whichever style it belongs. (Chris Sharp)
- >A chart should be thoughtful and creative, inspiring musicians to play their very best and helping them to sound their very best. There should be a blend of the familiar and new.
- >A good chart does not sound contrived or formula-based. There is not a section that sounds musically disjunct or forced into the musical landscape of the whole.
- >A well-crafted chart has contrast in textures, densities, colors, dynamics, and energies.
- >As with any musical ensemble, there has to be clarity for the music to be effective. There has to be evidence that the arranger has made the right assignments and doesn’t have everybody “talking” at the same time all the time just to be playing.
- >Crisp ensemble writing involves voicing the horns where they will “pop” to maximize clarity, definition, and energy within the ensemble. (Many easier charts don’t have the “spark” b/c they are voiced to low to compensate for range.)
- >On a ballad, the melodic solo must be in the singing tessitura of the instrument. (For tenor sax, I like both octaves to be available. Be careful of the “any sax on the solo” options.)
- >A good chart has countermelodies that complement the melody. Countermelodies should not crowd, distract, or steal the spotlight from the melody. They must be musical, not just perfunctory to fill space, and not overly busy or repetitious. (same for improv solo backgrounds)
- >A chart should not become stagnant. It must not stall out. The chart must remain alive and keep heading somewhere with conviction. It must allow for the groove to emanate.
- >The saxophones will be contributing motion, resonance, and luster throughout a good chart, making the ensemble sound full and active from the front line. This is especially important with easier charts. Be careful of charts with too much sax unison! They typically lack luster and sound thin.
- >A good chart “connects” with the players and the audience. It generates a human responsiveness through aesthetic influence.
- >A good chart has something unique and appealing about itself that distinguishes it from the rest. (Chris Sharp) It is memorable and wears well, ultimately becoming time-honored.