South African Jazz Big Band: Methodological approaches from selected composers, arrangers and directors

By

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BTNMUR001

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Saxophone Section:
Alto 1 Gilson Amaral
Alto 2 Max Nattrass
Tenor 1 Jed Petersen
Tenor 2 Dillon Manley
Baritone Emilie Walters

Trombone Section:
Trombone 1 Tamzyn Freeks
Trombone 2 Aviwe Macutwana
Trombone 3 Hope Hadebe
Trombone 4 Sisipho Mangete

Trumpet Section:
Trumpet 1 Bonga Mosola
Trumpet 2 Lebo Komane
Trumpet 3 Katy Racionzer
Trumpet 4 Neo Mathebula

Rhythm Section:
Piano Joshua Wheatley
Guitar Lizo Ntloko
Bass Joshua Nemaire
Drum Set Joshua Roelofse

Abstract

The purpose of this creative research project is to document the processes of directing a jazz big band for successful performance within a South African context. The initial research conducted proved fruitful from an international perspective in that several interviews were held and texts were written; however, not much could be said from a South African viewpoint. The wealth of knowledge and experience from some of our leading big band directors has not been archived and this study aims to rectify this vacuum. The main objective was to interview four South African directors, rehearse and perform a composition/arrangement of theirs with the UCT Big Band and to better understand the intricacies of big band direction. No challenges were evident in the overall process, this standing testament to the professionalism of both the University and the interviewees.

This study consisted of a number of processes. The first of which was to identify appropriate repertoire that would provide some challenge while also affording ease of access to the musicians involved given the amount of rehearsal time available. It was also important that the repertoire selected showcased South African jazz in the big band idiom to the greatest possible extent and that the composer/arranger is an experienced director available to be interviewed. The second process involved the interviews themselves. This study focused primarily on interviewing the following well-known individuals in the genre: Shannon Mowday, Darryl Andrews, Mike Campbell and Marcus Wyatt. A questionnaire was prepared ahead of time and interviews were conducted in person and online. All interviews were video recorded for archival purposes and used within the documentary portion of this study. The third process involved the rehearsal of the UCT Big Band for performance at the South African College of Music Jazz Festival. This performance was held on 21 September 2023 and was also video recorded for the documentary.

Throughout the creative process, my primary aim was to better understand South African jazz big band directing and its role in shaping the musicians for successful performance.

Methodological approaches from selected composers, arrangers and directors: Documentary Link

This written explication accompanies the video of the project, and it is intended to be read after viewing the video documentary.

The documentary consists of both the recorded interviews and the performance itself.

To watch the documentary, click on the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxr4HZhZe5o

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Big Band	A large jazz ensemble, otherwise known as a jazz orchestra.
Box layout	Please refer to Figure 2, Appendix A.
CTBBJF	Cape Town Big Band Jazz Festival
Director/Conductor	For the purposes of this study, these terms are interchangeable.
Groove	The rhythmic style determined by the work being performed.
Horn Section	A section of the big band consisting of woodwinds and brass.
NYJF	National Youth Jazz Festival
Pad	A collection of sheet music that a musician performs from.
Rhythm Section	This consists of piano, guitar, bass and drum set.
SACM	South African College of Music. Music department at UCT.
Sectionals	This refers to each section of the band rehearsing separately.
Setlist	The order of music to be performed.
Soli	A harmonised melody performed by a group of instruments.
Tiered layout	Please refer to Figure 1, Appendix A.
UCT	University of Cape Town

Introduction

This creative project arose from my nine years of big band directing experience, as well as my observations of directors with their bands, both in education and in professional environments. As will be discussed during the course of this study, big band ensembles play a crucial role in South African jazz education, and the approaches used therein are not always well developed. Several professional big bands exist within the country, however their performance schedules are often sporadic and often the big band is considered an *ad hoc* ensemble by the musicians themselves, assembled for specific performances and events. This, as opposed to a permanent, professional big band, which rehearses and performs on a regular basis using the same core players. The research in this study primarily investigates the methodological approaches that can be adapted by amateur directors, but is not limited to educational circles. The approaches compared, as well as the findings detailed, can be used as a guide within all levels of big band ensemble playing and directing.

Throughout the initial planning period, it became clear that very limited archival footage and documentation had been recorded of prominent South African directors. The methods they have instilled through mentorship, have, however, shaped multiple generations of South African musicians, and in so doing, have also influenced future directors. Their knowledge of large ensemble arrangement and the varying sub-styles of South African jazz have led to a solid understanding of effective ensemble methods for performance. With such limitations evident in existing resources, I recognised this as an opportunity to actively contribute to the body of knowledge of South African jazz by identifying four influential directors and documenting their responses.

Inspiration

Over the past twelve years of my professional music career, I have had the privilege of spending a considerable amount of time performing with some of the most prominent big bands of South Africa. Of this period, the past nine years have been spent directing both secondary and tertiary level bands as well as professional big bands. My musical foundation has become firmly rooted in the big band idiom, and as a result, this shapes the way I believe such an ensemble of this nature should operate. The National Youth Jazz Festival (NYJF) held annually in Makhanda portrays a more progressive use of the big band tradition as an access point for young musicians to further their skills through musical collaboration. My greatest inspiration lies within the education of young minds and the NYJF has always been at the forefront of this in South Africa.

Big bands, directors and arrangers that have inspired this process include:

International:

- Count Basie
- Sammy Nestico
- Quincy Jones
- Maria Schneider
- Bill Holman
- University of North Texas' One O'clock Lab Band
- WDR Big Band
- Stockholm Jazz Orchestra

Local:

- Mike Campbell
- Amanda Tiffin
- Shannon Mowday
- Marcus Wyatt
- Darryl Andrews
- Lady Day Big Band
- ZAR Jazz Orchestra

Both opportunity and necessity exist to further develop methodology concerning big band direction in South African institutions. Western Classical music students are offered studies in conducting orchestras, chamber ensembles etc. It therefore follows that similar studies should be made available in the jazz stream.

Focal Research Question

The primary focal research of this study is to investigate, collate and compare methodological approaches to big band direction from four prominent South African band leaders. The intention was to do this by means of interviews. Big band direction contains multiple intricacies that could be considered. However, this study focuses specifically on three principal areas, namely: instrumentation, rehearsal techniques and conducting practices.

On instrumentation:
The questions asked did not pertain to what instruments are found in a typical jazz big band but rather on how they operate best alongside each other. Focal areas were kept to layout in a performance setting, musical communication (both verbal and non-verbal), and leadership within sections.

On rehearsal technique:
This area of the study primarily focuses on the importance of layout, audio recording listening, dynamic balance and the use of sectionals. Some of the results produced additional findings. Further questions were asked for the purpose of elaboration.

On conducting:
The interviewees were asked questions primarily on their conducting style. More specifically, they were asked whether they prefer a more hands-on approach, in which they are involved in every musical decision, or rather that conducting takes the form of a general guide.

For the list of questions asked in the interviews, please refer to Appendix D.

Rationale/Aims

As highlighted earlier, big bands play a fundamental role in South African jazz education circles but, unfortunately, there is a lack of consensus on how these ensembles should be directed. While there are well documented procedures from international perspectives, local methodologies are almost non-existent. The reason for this seems to be mostly because the knowledge of reputable directors is largely undocumented. While there remain many similarities between traditional and South African big bands, a number of differences do exist. This creative research project aims to identify such differences, consider them against traditional methods and to add to the body of knowledge of South African jazz by informing future aspiring directors on the best approaches to big band direction.

Literature Review

Brief Overview: Origins and Roles of Big Bands in America

Within the jazz timeline, big bands enjoyed their peak popularity during the swing era of the 1930s. In the 1973 BBC documentary “Born to Swing” by John Jeremy, the narrator refers to the early ambassadors of swing, arising in the late 1920s from the northern and southern territories of Kansas City, otherwise known as ‘territory bands’ (Jeremy, 1973). Interviewed in the documentary, Andy Kirk, who led the popular group ‘Twelve Clouds of Joy’, speaks of bands being hired for their specific style in performances. Jazz trombonist Snub Mosley, also interviewed, stated that these bands from Texas and Kansas were some of the first big bands. In the video “When Big Bands Were Dance Bands”, upright bassist Ari Roland describes the early origins of big bands:

> *The big bands were originally for dancing. In the 1930s, everyone in America was dancing to swing music, big band music. That meant that if you were rich or poor or whatever community you belonged to, everybody was working all week so that you could go out on a Friday and Saturday night and go dancing.* (Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Jazz Academy, 2014)

He further elaborates that the primary focus for the early big band was to make audiences dance even though the music was more sophisticated in its arrangements. This was achieved by establishing a constant, firm beat. Roland further compares early big band roles to contemporary times:

> *Nowadays you go to hear a big band and it's for listening. You sit in an auditorium and you have a concert programme and you just listen.*

He further expresses that, despite modern big bands being more for listening, the fundamental dance role should still be prevalent.

Big bands are also recognized for their role in breaking down racial barriers in America. In the video “History Brief: Big Bands & Swing Music in the 1930s” the narrator states:

> *White audiences were enjoying the music of African American performers and musicians of various races were taking the stage to perform together.* (Reading Through History, 2018)

The video also refers to the famous 1938 Carnegie Hall concert ‘Benny Goodman and His Swing Orchestra’ and its relevance in further popularising jazz and swing music in America. The Caucasian-led show included African American musicians such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Freddie Green, highlighting the importance and willingness for musicians of varying racial and social backgrounds to work together.

Brief Overview: Origins and Roles of Big Bands in South Africa

South African big band jazz and its influence on the local music environment dates back to the 1930s. In his paper “Tracing the Development of the South African Alto Saxophone Style”, Christopher Linn Merz points out that big bands became more of a defining sound in the South African jazz scene than the solo saxophone:

> *The saxophone wasn't always the dominating, defining voice of jazz in South Africa. In its early days in the 1930s and '40s, jazz music was music to be danced to, and that meant big bands. To be sure, saxophones were necessary to the big band sound, but American Swing was the craze, and most bands performed from stock arrangements imported from the U.S., complete with written-out solos.* (Merz, 2016:31)

South African jazz traditions have followed closely to those of the United States, owing to the import of recordings and, in later years, the rise in commercial radio stations. One of the early South African instrumental styles that would go on to influence the local jazz industry was that of *Marabi*. In his article “A brief history of South African popular music” (Ballantine, 1989), Christopher Ballantine notes a similarity between *Marabi* and the *blues* as both styles are based on a repeated cyclic harmonic pattern. With this repeated harmonic pattern, he correlates that both styles highlight their roots in traditional African music whilst retaining their own identities. Ballantine further notes that many of the early Marabi musicians were left unrecorded due to the oppressive political regime of the time, and because the recording industry was held mostly under white leadership. With the introduction of gramophones and incoming American recordings, the popularisation of black dance bands arose. Ballantine notes that this movement was a catalyst for the fusion of American swing and Marabi (known as *Mbaqanga*) with groups such as the Merry Blackbirds and the Jazz Maniacs at the forefront.

One other influence on South African big band composers and arrangers was that of the *Ghoema* rhythm. This is a syncopated underlying rhythm found in several Western Cape musical practices, played on a two headed barrel drum with the left hand marking the beat and the right hand playing the syncopated rhythm (Bruinders, 2010:74).

Chris McGregor's influence in combining traditional American jazz styles and modern sounds with South African styles is notable, particularly within his group the Blue Notes and later, Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath. McGregor described the style of their original repertoire as follows:

> *It was our version of hard bop, if you like. It was an African hard bop - there you go! - coming in part from our Mbaqanga and big-band experience, but influenced by and tending towards the outputs of Americans we felt close to: John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy.* (Ballantine, 2013:41)

Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath further highlighted the fusion of American and South African styles within the big band ensemble format. In his brief column for "Jazziz Magazine", Ed Hazell described the ensemble and their music as follows:

> *They charged at the barriers between tradition and innovation with jubilant vitality and unquenchable fire. In the multicultural conflagration of their music, South African high life and Kwela rhythms ignited traditional big-band elements (especially Ellington) and free-jazz explorations into viscerally exciting music.* (Hazell, 2004:74)

Big band music saw a decline in popularity in the 1950s when solo improvisation began to become prioritised in styles like *Bebop* and (locally) *Kwela*. As is the case for both, there was a greater focus on the soloist as well as the expression of identity found in jazz improvisation. In spite of its American-inspired roots, the South African big band arrangers would have to adapt specific local styles in their repertoires. One such modern arranger that adapted these styles is Dr Mike Campbell. Examples of this can be found in the compositions and arrangements of *CT Kwela*[1] and *Snoektown*.[2]

Large ensembles have played a crucial role in African and Southern African music, not only in the context of community and social interaction but also in the expression of cultural identity (Wyatt, 2023). In Wyatt's paper on the South African big band jazz aesthetic, he also notes the historical importance that large ensembles played in cultural institutions and political spheres, particularly during the years of apartheid. Given its political potency, big band music remains a relevant vehicle for public protest and expression even in South Africa in the 2020s.

[1] Campbell, 2012
[2] Campbell, 2013

The Presence of Big Bands in South African Jazz Education

To assess the importance of big band direction, it is necessary to consider the state of music education and participation at the high school level in South Africa. While not every school maintains a robust music program, those that do often feature a jazz stream. Among these schools, those with high instrumental participation rates tend to encourage larger ensembles, ranging from the typical wind/concert band to the big band. The late Brian Thusi in 2001 stated:

> *Where jazz as a performance activity does feature in secondary schools, the focus is on the development of a proficient jazz ensemble, a 'big band' if possible, where the emphasis is more on playing written swing music than on developing improvisational skills.* (Thusi, 2001:24)

He further noted that while improvisation development is increasing due to a growing number of qualified educators, the emphasis on big bands remains prevalent at the high school level in South Africa.

South African music learners study the early South African jazz styles in their CAPS syllabus (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2020), and high school band directors often wish to explore these styles in their ensemble repertoire. It is essential for learners to experience these styles and sounds in a practical way – they need to play them to make them relevant and real. School ensemble directors are increasingly turning to established South African big band arrangers/composers to supply medium to large ensemble versions of South African jazz pieces for their groups. Many ensemble directors arrange the pieces for their own ensembles based on their needs. Big bands in schools are both vehicles for learning the basics of playing music, but also are important conduits through which young musicians experience South African music, and jazz specifically.

In addition, the increasing demand for large and medium ensemble arrangements of South African jazz and contemporary repertoire has led to a resource of such arrangements available around the country, where written versions of many of the classic South African pieces did not previously exist. Indeed, the WH Bell Music Library at the SACM, UCT has purposefully purchased entire catalogues of South African jazz arrangements for big band and medium ensemble from several established composers/arrangers with the express purpose of creating a score archive for future generations to access and play. (Tiffin, 2024)

To further understand the importance of big bands in South Africa, it is worth examining two noteworthy festivals that promote the use of such ensembles in a jazz education setting.

National Youth Jazz Festival (NYJF)

Held annually in Makhanda, Eastern Cape, the NYJF has steadfastly promoted jazz education in South Africa for over thirty two years. The week-long youth program attracts a diverse mix of schools, universities, and professionals, all of whom engage in an intensive program of workshops, rehearsals, and performances. Brian Thusi, himself a participating professional, wrote about the NYJF's impact on jazz education in South Africa and its methods for nurturing young students' understanding of the music:

> *The primary method it employs to this end is the placement of each participant in a jazz ensemble led by a qualified jazz educator (generally a respected jazz artist) which follows a rigorous rehearsal schedule and performs at least once. Placement is determined on the basis of a short audition and top students are chosen for one of three select ensembles.* (Thusi, 2001:28)

The ensembles he refers to are the ‘National Bands’ selected at the festival. Selected annually, these ensembles feature the top young jazz musicians of the country, split into secondary and tertiary ensembles. For the majority of the festivals’ lifespan, this has always included a big band component at the secondary education phase, typically referred to as the National Schools Big Band. At its core, the festival utilises the large jazz ensemble format as an educational tool, as well as a showcase of young talent. Students not chosen for the National Bands join "festival bands" - large to smaller big bands. These ensembles, previously integrating both secondary and tertiary students, typically number around eight. However, since 2022, the festival has separated the groups into six secondary and two tertiary bands, allowing for more focused attention on each level's development (National Youth Jazz Festival [NYJF], 2024).

NYJF director, Alan Webster[3], has broadened student exposure to professional big bands by incorporating their performances into the festival programme almost every year, leading to an increase in big band interest. Marcus Wyatt, a frequent artist at the festival, cites the inclusion of an increasing number of professional musicians and band leaders into the programme:

> *James Morrison, Nils Landgren, Steve Turre and Tutu Puoane’s big band performances, Standard Bank National Jazz Festival, Makhanda, featuring several key South African musicians. (2014 – 2019, Makhanda)* (Wyatt, 2023: 3)

[3] Deputy Principal and director of the Stirling High school Jazz Band, East London. Director of the National Youth Jazz Festival.

Cape Town Big Band Jazz Festival (CTBBJF)

Cape Town hosts an annual music festival organised by Ann Barr[4]. The CTBBJF showcases young jazz talent from across the city's schools, from junior to tertiary levels. Running for nearly a week, the festival features approximately twenty ensembles. Dr Mike Rossi, a retired Professor Emeritus of Jazz and woodwinds at UCT's South African College of Music, has been involved with the CTBBJF for thirteen years, both as spectator and performer. He notes the increasing interest from schools:

> *Now in its 13th year, the festival continues to grow from strength to strength and has traditionally included ensembles from community-based, school-based, and higher education. This year, twenty big bands performed over three days to sold out audiences at the Baxter Concert Hall, University of Cape Town.* (Rossi, 2013)

Both festivals highlight South Africa's ever-increasing interest and engagement in big bands, evident in both the professional and educational sectors. This surge in interest at the various academic levels necessitates a greater emphasis on the methodological approach to directing from an academic point of view.

[4] Director and organiser of the Cape Town Big Band Jazz Festival.

Methodology

This creative research project is aimed at exploring the approaches to direction within the context of South African big band music. The main vehicle for this exploration was the preparation of a public performance with the UCT Big Band. Several methods were employed to investigate the various aspects and considerations necessary for the preparation of a big band performance, and to thoroughly interrogate what approaches to direction would be appropriate in a South African context.

Interviews

I conducted interviews with selected South African directors based on their involvement and experience within the big band idiom. Although there are a variety of individuals involved in both the secondary and tertiary spheres available, it was imperative that those selected covered the broadest possible scope in terms of experience and arrangement output.

Repertoire Selection

It was important to select contrasting arrangements from each director that represents the diversity in South African jazz for the performance. One arrangement was selected from each director, showcasing a style of big band jazz and writing techniques typical of that composer/arranger.

The Rehearsal Process

The rehearsal process with the UCT Big Band over a six-week period for performance at the SACM jazz festival was important. It was necessary for me to prepare the band for a performance of an entire evening's worth of music, however this study only focuses on four arrangements, one from each of the four directors interviewed.

Filming of the performance and the interviews

The filming of the performance together with the interviews was vitally important as a means of showcasing the creative processes involved in this research project.

Interviews and Analysis

My research in local archives yielded limited results, as the existing body of knowledge has largely been undocumented. This necessitated a more direct approach, involving interviews with well-respected practitioners of big bands in South Africa. I selected four directors who are renowned both locally and internationally. These include Dr Mike Campbell, former head of Jazz Studies at the University of Cape Town; Darryl Andrews, former lecturer at the University of Cape Town; Shannon Mowday, director and writer for Akershus og Oslo Ungdomsjazzorkester in Oslo, Norway; and Marcus Wyatt, director, composer, and arranger of the ZAR Jazz Orchestra in Johannesburg. A list of questions was drawn up and sent to the interviewees ahead of the scheduled interviews. The primary goal was to collect information about three spheres of big band direction: instrumentation, rehearsal technique, and conducting practices. This was done in order to compare and contrast any similarities and differences between these elements, with the goal of identifying the best approaches to big band directing of South African jazz repertoire.

Interview Analysis: Instrumentation

(Andrews, 2023; Campbell, 2023; Mowday, 2023; Wyatt, 2023)

As is the case in any music ensemble setting, instrumentation plays a vital role in achieving the overall effect of the music, and thus defines the ensemble in its entirety. Jazz orchestras or big bands typically have a set formula in their instrument make up. My research in this area primarily focuses on the interactions between instruments in the ensemble by examining ensemble layout, communication and leadership within the ensemble and its various sections.

Understanding traditional layouts and modern adaptive layouts

Layout in the big band setting has traditionally followed a specific tiered formula in its setup approach. From the conductor's perspective this would position the rhythm section on the left with the horn section on the right. Typically, the horn section would be arranged with saxophones in front, the trombone section behind them and finally the trumpet section at the back on the highest tier (refer to figure 1, Appendix A). Of the four directors interviewed, most follow this approach for a variety of reasons.

Andrews justifies his preference of the traditional tiered layout because of the impact it has on the harmonic function and on how the musicians of a section hear their own voice part against others. He specifically referenced the trumpet section with trumpet

two on the left, followed by trumpet one, trumpet three and then trumpet four on the far right:

> *If you write a G minor 9th chord, ascending F, A, Bb and D, when you give it to that section, the first trumpet is playing the D, the second trumpet is playing Bb, the third trumpet is playing A and the fourth is playing F. The first trumpet is hearing a consonant interval [indicates left and right], yet the chord has a minor second in it. In jazz writing a minor second will usually occur in the middle of a chord or at the bottom, never at the top around the melody.*

He further states that the same principle exists within the trombone section, but for the saxophone section, voices should be swapped if a minor second appears between any two voice parts. This is largely due to the uneven numbers in a saxophone section as opposed to that of the even trombone and trumpet sections. Traditionally, the bass instruments of the horn section would typically be on the far right, furthest from the rhythm section. Wyatt, who also prefers a tiered system, indicated one key difference in layout according to the way he writes his music:

> *The way that I write music for big bands, I like to have the horn section quite close to the rhythm section. More akin to a traditional layout but then having the bass trombone and baritone saxophone on the inside of the horn section because they are often doubling bass lines. What's important is that the musicians playing together in the arrangements are close to each other.*

This approach can be seen in more modern big bands, such as the current Jazz at the Lincoln Center Orchestra (JLCO) with Wynton Marsalis. This ensemble often features only three trombones and commonly has the baritone saxophonist placed on the inside.

Campbell, who also prefers the traditional tiered layout, indicated the importance of connection between all musicians in an ensemble during rehearsal and performance. He specifically highlighted the aural connection between rhythm and horn sections stating:

> *The most important aspect with regards to layout in a rehearsal and performance is to ensure that there is an internal resonance within the band and that there is an aural connection between the rhythm section, particularly the drum set and the rest of the band.*

Campbell elaborates further on this statement by making a comparison between other layouts he has experienced in the past. He draws an example of a horn section that

forms a front line with the rhythm section behind them and concludes that the connection between horn and rhythm sections do not work as effectively because, he argues, they are not able to hear each other properly. He also makes a point of noting that the further away the various sections of an ensemble are from one another, the more musicians have to rely on quality monitoring systems.

Mowday states her preference for the box layout, where the rhythm section is set up in the middle with the horns behind and on the left and right flanks (refer to figure 2, Appendix A). She indicates a variety of points and elaborates on her reasoning for this layout:

> *My reason for doing so is that I get better audio. I can hear each part individually. As far as the musicians are concerned, it's not healthy to have trombones and trumpets blowing into the saxophones. Also from a sound point of view, the bleeding into the woodwind microphones from the brass. You can't get a clean sound.*

She further reiterates that layout is also dependent on the music being played and that traditional methods are not necessarily the best solutions for more modern and contemporary arrangements. From a director's perspective, her attention to balance within the rehearsal and performance space is reinforced as follows:

> *In terms of me as a leader, I'm always considering the space I'm in when rehearsing and how strong the different sections are. Sometimes if you put the saxophones on the heavy side of the rhythm section, you don't hear them as much as if you put them on the light side. Often I switch around and sometimes put everybody in one big rectangle with me in the middle because I want to walk around and listen. When we perform, I put the rhythm section in the middle with the horns on risers at the back [indicates a semi-circle].*

All four interviewees indicated that the layout is largely governed by the music being performed. If one considers early big bands of the 1930's, there were less dependencies on sound technology due to its limitations in that era. Sound production was purely acoustic, and perhaps the tiered system best lent itself to that. With modern sound technology comes the increase in volume and overall intensity in performance. Considering this in conjunction with modern big band arrangements, it follows that adaptive layouts may be more pleasing to the listener as well as to the musicians involved.

Communication and leadership within the ensemble
Big band success hinges on clear communication within and between sections. Amateur ensemble members often simply read the music, neglecting their surrounding musicians. While this fulfils the task of playing the arrangement, it hinders the fluidity, musicality and overall quality of the work.

Campbell indicates that despite layout being a factor in communication, the role of leadership is equally important, as is the attitude of the players in the section. He notes a hypothetical culture of communication that is prevalent within professional bands, but seems to be lacking in more amateur ensembles:

> *In school and college ensembles, players are not necessarily aware of the responsibility that they have to play within a section. They sit down, open up their pad and play the music [indicates focus towards the music stand]. They are not giving their attention to the music in general and to what is going on around them.*

Mowday identifies a similar issue to the one expressed above by mentioning her experience in music education:

> *What I've found a lot in my teaching over the years is that when people are good ear players and you put something in front of them [indicates sheet music], suddenly they stop listening. The focus becomes here [indicates sheet music], you lose sight of the music, of the bigger picture.*

She further elaborates that listening is at the very core of ensemble playing, and stresses that something that doesn't sound good to the player won't sound good to anyone else.
Andrews concurs with this by saying that sectional communication is only as good as the amount of time musicians have had rehearsing and performing with one another. He uses the example of the rhythm section locking in and getting the groove together through the use of sectionals.

Campbell points out some pertinent communication methods involving the section leader and players by providing a number of examples:

> *Looking at the lead player through the corner of your eye while you are playing. Being aware of the fact that the section leader is giving a cutoff or is taking a breath. In some very nuanced, small way [indicates section leader] giving direction, micro leadership if you like, within a section.*

Andrews further emphasises the importance of section musicians playing up to the section leader. In *tutti* sections of an arrangement, the lead player sets the volume and the others play up to that level, creating a natural balance. Beyond these specific examples, Campbell underscores the value of section leaders in freeing the director up from managing the technical intricacies of individual sections. He also emphasises the personality profile demanded for this role, the need for both encouragement and, when necessary, assertiveness.

Wyatt, who shares a similar viewpoint to Campbell adds that this can also vary depending on the music being played. He gives the example of ensembles that have played the same arrangements over time and speaks of section leaders quietly taking charge of phrasing and articulation. In addition, he notes that in some music the traditional section leader role may not be as clearly defined, as the lead register may have moved to another player of the section, or that arrangements may possibly have been written for specific musicians in mind. This correlates with Mowday's statement on how the roles have changed in modern arrangements and ensembles:

> *In Norway, a lot of the time, we as composers, we write for the musicians we have.*

She further gives the example of a saxophonist needing to fill the roles of both alto, tenor and baritone parts and the responsibility of a musician at such a time, rather than that of a traditionally defined role. Due to the varying strengths and weaknesses of the musicians that she may have at her disposal to work with, she will often adjust the music accordingly. She further states that when moments of traditional writing are present, the more defined sectional roles exist, but that the responsibility of phrasing is left for the sections to work out by themselves.

Interview Analysis: Rehearsal Technique

(Andrews, 2023; Campbell, 2023; Mowday, 2023; Wyatt, 2023)

An area of successful big band performance lies within the director's ability to rehearse the ensemble. This aspect is often neglected or disregarded within amateur bands, but when good rehearsal habits can be adapted, it results in a more pleasing outcome. The questions asked in this section are primarily focused on four areas, namely: layout in the rehearsal setting, listening to audio recordings, importance of sectionals, and then the balance of volume within and between sections of a big band.

Layout in rehearsals

Previously, in the instrumentation section of the interviews, I raised the question of layout. This focused primarily on performance aspects, but did not address the rehearsal setting. It is important to consider the layout of the rehearsal space in order to provide a more natural transition to the performance setting. A layout that is identical in both environments creates what I would refer to as a more natural habitat, a comfortable space where musicians are accustomed to their surroundings both aurally and visually. In my interview with Andrews, he recalled his time spent with trumpeter John Thomas who performed lead trumpet in the Count Basie Orchestra:

> *He [indicates John Thomas] was the one to tell me that the Basie band would meet in January of every year, handed their new pad in order [indicates setlist] and they rehearsed for nine weeks from 09h00 to 17h00 with a lunch break, like a day job. The setup, the way they sat was the same as the Basie stage, same distance apart, same tiering that they used for their live concerts, same monitoring. Basie would rehearse those tunes in the same order for nine weeks every day.*

After the Basie band rehearsed for nine weeks, they would go on tour, playing the tunes in the exact same order and setup as they had rehearsed. Andrews highlights this process as one that underscores the importance of a musicians' muscle memory within an ensemble. Campbell, Mowday, and Wyatt all concur that rehearsal and performance layouts should be identical. However, Wyatt points out that the rehearsal space can also play a role, and when performing in a difficult venue acoustically, rehearsals should, ideally, take place in that same venue, if possible.

Listening to audio recordings

One of the most effective tools I have found for improving my secondary and tertiary-level ensembles is the use of audio recordings. Recordings help young musicians develop a sense of style, articulation, phrasing, and attain an understanding of the overall mood of the piece being performed. Mowday addressed the use of recordings in two distinct ways. Firstly, she emphasises the importance of understanding the stylistic nuances of traditional works, like Basie's music, for all musicians involved. She recalls her past efforts of meticulously transcribing every nuance of phrasing from recordings, arguing that if the goal is to replicate a specific style, it should be done accurately. Secondly, when considering more original or contemporary works, Mowday recommends using available recordings as a starting point for the musicians, allowing them to familiarise themselves with the musical expectations of the piece without being completely lost:

> *What I expect from my musicians is to go check it out, make sure you are on top of the notes and rhythms, then we can start with the music.*

She emphasises that while recordings of original music serve as valuable tools, they should not be treated as the ultimate product. Instead, they should pave the way for diverse interpretations and artistic expression.

Wyatt describes an ideal rehearsal scenario as being one where musicians arrive with the music's sound already ingrained in their ears. In such a scenario, the rehearsal itself is mainly dedicated to correcting minor issues like articulation, while the primary focus shifts from technical execution to bringing the music to life. Both Campbell and Andrews share similar sentiments with Wyatt and Mowday. Campbell further emphasises the importance of individual study for musicians. He encourages them to read their parts while listening to recordings, and, if possible, to explore different interpretations. He also highlights the value of audio listening during rehearsals. This active engagement, in turn, fosters productive discussions about interpretations and challenges within sections, often leading to positive outcomes.

The importance of sectionals

The use of sectionals in the big band rehearsal scenario can be highly relevant, especially when certain moments in the music require accurate synchronised playing. All four interviewees agreed that sectionals are important in smoothing out notes, articulation and phrasing but also as an opportunity for discussion on how certain phrases should be played. Traditionally, sectionals have always followed the defined roles of the big band, with section leaders identifying segments that need work in the main rehearsal. Section leaders take on more of a leadership role, to realise the musical vision entrusted by the director. However, all four interviewees mentioned that should the section leader be the only voice, this can result in less inclusion of varying ideas that may lead to better results. Wyatt emphasises the importance of maturity in section musicians. He provides an example of their rehearsals for the first ZAR Jazz Orchestra recording and when they broke up into sectionals:

> *If you have four musicians in a section who are mature and are musical, then the sectional is more about four people all working towards getting the same result.*

He further describes this process as an opportunity for musicians (other than the section leader) to provide ideas on how a particular phrase or difficult *soli* section could be approached.

It is important to use sectionals on a need and supplementary basis, to enhance the main rehearsal, rather than as a focal method in big band rehearsals. Campbell notes that sectionals are important but should never supplant the enjoyment that musicians have when coming together to make music. He states:

> *The joy of playing music in a band is when the band plays together. You gotta have that, to make somebody look forward to coming to a rehearsal.*

In tertiary and particularly secondary level ensembles, it is important to consider Campbell's statement about the link between enjoyment and improvement. Sectionals at such levels can often be seen as undesirable aspects of the rehearsal space, but when used more conservatively and with proper intent, they can even lead to overall enjoyment.

Balance of volume within and between sections

Achieving the full effect of a big band performance requires careful balancing of volume both within and between sections. Mowday states that In South Africa there is a tendency to overplay, where the focus is much more egoistic as opposed to displaying the maturity to understand one's role within the greater ensemble. She sees this as a potent metaphor for the local struggle for survival, a constant pressure to prove oneself. Wyatt equates it to human nature, a social dynamic that arises when you place many musicians in the same room together.

All four interviewees emphasise that balance between sections is determined by the arrangement and where the melody lies at any given point in time. They stress the importance of musicians listening to each other during rehearsals and performances, understanding the greater context and establishing how they fit into it throughout. Wyatt provides an example of talking to a trumpet section during a specific section of an arrangement:

> *Trumpets, just be aware that the tenors have the melody here, so you want to be able to hear them when you are playing that part.*

In addition, he notes the director's role in providing context, ensuring musicians understand the complete perspective and desired effect beyond simple commands like "play softer/louder." Mowday echoed this point, stressing not only the responsibility of musicians, but also the liability they bear when they don't act as a team player, making clear that fault does not solely lie with the director.

Balance within a section is determined by the lead player or, in more contemporary arrangements, whoever has the lead voice part at the time. Campbell highlights this by stating:

> *There is a rule of thumb that says: 'if you can't hear the lead then you are playing too loud.'*

Andrews sees the use of sectionals as a method to help musicians listen to and understand their role within the section:

> *You get used to listening to what your section sounds like. If you are playing third trombone, you know what it sounds like when you play because it's matching one and two [indicates trombone one and two on the right] and you've got the bass trombone on the left. You feel it fitting in there [indicates trombone 3].*

There is a further point to be made about how the rhythm section influences volume within the horn sections. Campbell refers to this by specifically mentioning the influence of the electric bass guitar:

> *When the rhythm section has an electric bass with an amplifier, the electric bass can play louder than three big bands together, all playing double forte.*

He highlights the challenges of directing school and college big bands, where the electric bass often drowns out dynamic variation and subtlety:

> *If you are sitting and playing in front of an amplifier, you are not necessarily aware of how loud or ambient it actually is. You need to be sitting far away from it for that, but it is not practical [indicating layout and setup].*

He further states that musicians get used to these loud volumes, they don't fully realise the effect and ambience that the music is trying to achieve because of the overshadowing effect of the electric bass. Campbell's example can be translated to the drum set of the rhythm section, to a specific section such as the trumpet section or even to a particular voice part within a section. When high volume persists, there can be a tendency for everyone around to follow suit.

Interview Analysis: Conducting

(Andrews, 2023; Campbell, 2023; Mowday, 2023; Wyatt, 2023)

The topic of conducting in the world of big band jazz is one of opinion amongst local musicians and directors alike, and is, therefore, very subjective. Exploring the various videos on the Cape Town Big Band Jazz Festivals' YouTube channel showcases a range of approaches to conducting across different stages of the educational process. This research aims to discover the conducting methods used by the four interviewees, and to investigate how they shaped their directing styles. For purposes of comparison, there are two distinct approaches that I employed in my question to them, namely:

- General guide - i.e., only paying attention to important cues: volume cues, style cues, changes in tempo etc.
- Hands on approach - i.e., being involved in every musical decision during a performance.

For the purposes of comparison, I asked each interviewee to elaborate on their preferred method to better understand the approach in its entirety.

Dr Mike Campbell

Campbell argues that minimal conducting is ideal for big bands, emphasising the crucial role of the rhythm and horn sections in maintaining a good *tempo*. He uses the example of young ensembles that develop excessive dependence on their conductors, neglecting the inherent timekeeping function of the rhythm section.

> *I have seen many inexperienced, younger band directors frantically conducting four [indicating four beats in the bar] to their band when it's not necessary. Not only is it unnecessary, but it's counter-productive.*

Campbell draws a parallel between big band conducting and the approach of great symphony conductors. He highlights that even these maestros don't strictly adhere to the time signature in their conducting patterns. Instead, they rely on a theatrical interplay of gestures to communicate the musical essence.

Campbell also notes that the effectiveness of conducting depends on the music itself, and a combination of approaches may be necessary. Arrangements of a more complex nature may require a more active conducting style, particularly when navigating tempo changes, time signature changes, pauses, and rubato sections. In such cases, he

emphasises that classical conducting techniques become more effective in ensuring clarity and cohesion.

He further describes the importance of focused conducting by providing an example taught by his conducting teacher at the University of North Texas:

> *You've got to think of a box in front of you, where everything happens within that box. If you are flailing your arms around, visually it doesn't mean that much.*

Such focused conducting, whether it be gestures or time keeping, provides visual ease to musicians who are both reading the music and watching the conductor.

Darryl Andrews

Andrews shares a similar approach to Campbell in that he sees no clear need to conduct for common time signatures, especially when a rhythm section is holding the beat. Just like Campbell, Andrews emphasises the importance of conducting for a few bars before changes in time signature, as well as afterwards, when returning to the original time signature. Beyond time keeping, he further elaborates on other gestures that he uses:

- Cueing entries for the sections of the big band

  > *I'll just show them four bars [indicates four bars with four fingers].*

- Conducting volume or energy

  > *Your body language is what they [indicates ensemble] are going to follow.*

Furthermore, Andrews highlights that a more hands-on approach may be more necessary within the rehearsal context than at performances. He adds, however, that stricter conducting may be used as a means of dealing with any challenges and difficult sections of an arrangement.

Shannon Mowday

For Mowday, conducting is about stepping back and letting the music take the lead and flow. She embraces a more intuitive approach, asking herself: "Should I step in to support the music here?", when a solo section takes an unexpected turn. This willingness to adapt reflects her belief that the music itself holds the key to its optimal expression.

> *For instance, if a soloist is not strong, or their sound is not strong, I will just drop the backgrounds. In that way I allow for the flexibility of where the music is going right now. Sometimes, I just take the rhythm section out to change the dynamics of what is going on, because I want something out of the music.*

In addition, Mowday reiterates that her role is to keep the music alive. The responsibility of managing the typical musical cues - entries, repeated sections, and volume - falls to her, but she emphasises the importance of minimal interference. She further highlights the distracting nature of cueing gestures, such as showing entries after an open solo section. Ideally, such gestures should be kept to just before the change:

> *If there is a free solo and you go four, three, two, one [indicates cues with hand], you've taken away from what that person [soloist] is doing and everyone is waiting for the next section. I try to make the cues compact.*

Mowday adds that musicians run the risk of missing cues with this method, but that the peak and flow of the music should dictate movement onto the next section.

Marcus Wyatt

Wyatt echoes the conducting approaches of Campbell, Andrews, and Mowday. He emphasises the effectiveness of active involvement when musical cues arise but argues that strict adherence to conducting time becomes less important when a rhythm section is present. He also emphasises the freedom that a conductor should have, allowing the music and energy of the performance to take the lead.

> *If the engine [the band] is running and it's steaming, I'm just standing there enjoying it.*

Furthermore, Wyatt emphasises the importance of a director understanding the moments of an arrangement where musicians will seek visual cues, and he emphasises that this will lead to greater clarity, particularly in key moments of the music.

Taking the four interviews conducted into account, it is clear that, of the two conducting methods, a general guide approach is favoured for the outcome of ensemble cohesion and musicality. The interviewees discussed their approaches within a tertiary, semi-professional and professional setting. However, there was consensus that for amateur bands, particularly those with less experienced rhythm sections, a more hands-on approach may be necessary.

The Selected Arrangements

Of the four directors interviewed, it was important to select an arrangement from each one that showcased both the multiple styles of South African jazz and the UCT Big Band in various scenarios. Each director has a broad library of their own arrangements, so selection involves considering several factors, such as stylistic elements (*tempo*, mood), soloist focus (featured soloist, open solo sections), *soli* sections and the arrangement's degree of difficulty within the allotted rehearsal time. The following is a brief overview of each selected arrangement:

African Eyes
Composed and arranged by Shannon Mowday

One of the first big band arrangements by Mowday, the work features the South African Ghoema style at a medium tempo, recognizable by the energetic, syncopated rhythms laid down by the rhythm section, alongside the prominent melodies of the horn sections.

The arrangement adopts a more interlinked focus in which horns that are not playing the melody play groove-focused rhythms, which are supplemented by the rhythm section. The melody starts with a call and response between the lead alto saxophone and baritone saxophone, trumpet 1 and trombone 1, then moves to ensemble melodic playing which interchanges between the saxophone and trumpet sections. After the open solo section, the arrangement moves to a brief saxophone *soli* that is joined by the trombones and trumpets. This large horn *soli* showcases clever melodic and rhythmic interplay between the sections and further drives the energy of the Ghoema style back to the main theme and finally to the end of the work.

Blue Natural
Composed and arranged by Darryl Andrews

Of the four arrangements selected, *Blue Natural* encompasses traditional swing arrangement methods to the greatest extent with the style indicative of hard bop-era swing. The composition follows the twelve bar minor blues form, with the melody based on a Cm9(natural 7) chord structure. Its difficulty lies within the harmonic structure of the last four bars, where typically a II V would be present. Instead, Andrews wrote the progression moving from Cm9(natural 7) to F9#11 followed by Em11, A13#11, Abm9, Db9#11 finally ending on the Cm9(natural 7) chord. This can be viewed as an opportunity of aural challenge for the band, both in sectional playing as well as within improvisation.

The arrangement starts with the melody played in unison by tenor saxophone 1 and guitar, backed by rhythms in the trumpet and trombone sections, which goes to further enhance the swing. The saxophone section joins in for the next cycle of twelve bars, with the complete ensemble gently increasing dynamic effects to the open solo section. The most noteworthy challenge to ensemble playing falls within the *soli* section. Following a brief, call-and-response exchange between the saxophone and trumpet sections in *mezzo piano*, the saxophones launch into a flurry of eighth and triplet rhythms, counterpointed by the trombone section's sustained tones. This culminates in a dramatic crescendo for the entire ensemble, leading to the saxophone section's intense sixteenth-note phrases. The *soli* section concludes with a resounding double *forte*, highlighting a variation of the melody before the music eases back to the main theme, and ultimately to a decisive end.

Bantu
Composed by Zim Ngqawana
Arranged by Marcus Wyatt

Bantu was chosen to showcase a big band accompanying a featured soloist. As an alto saxophonist himself, the composer, Zim Ngqawana, originally played on this recording, so Wyatt retained the solo for alto 2. The arrangement itself blends two distinct styles: swing and Dixieland. While pinpointing the exact definition of each within this context may be challenging, the swing elements are heavily influenced by South African jazz styles like Mbaqanga, while the drum part specifically references a "Tain Watts" groove[5]. The Dixieland sections, with their marching elements, also show traces of Ghoema.

Wyatt mostly kept this arrangement simple by following closely to the original recording, but by adapting the work for a big band format. The emphasis is given to rhythmic groove and horn sections accompanying the soloist, rather than in large expansive *soli* sections and shout choruses. In the Dixieland sections, the bass trombone or tuba as well as the baritone saxophone share unison lines with the bass part. This, in tandem with the banjo-like strumming style in the guitar, further reinforces the marching groove. The solo section is quite large for the featured soloist in that it is one hundred and nine bars long with a six bar interlude at the end, connecting to a piano solo. The main theme then returns, followed by horn phrases that back brief improvisation bursts from the soloist. This eventually escalates into a climatic *forte* that leads to the concluding cadenza by the soloist. The arrangement ends contrastingly calmly by resolving to an Eb major triad in a *mezzo piano* dynamic.

[5] Jeff “Tain” Watts - American Jazz drummer, known for his use of polyrhythmic patterns played within a modern swing groove.

Sermon
Composed and arranged by Mike Campbell

The style of *Sermon* can best be identified as funk, with gospel elements within a harmonic structure typical of South African jazz. As one of Campbell's first arrangements using elements of indigenous South African jazz, the driving force behind this work lies within the groove of the rhythm section as well as the connection between improvisation and the contrapuntal phrases played by the ensemble. Additionally, there is a greater focus placed on dynamic variation as a tool used to build colour and mood. It is interesting to note that the arrangement does not feature a single soloist, but there are three specific moments for improvisation, namely, for guitar, tenor saxophone 1 and trombone 1.

The opening eight bar introduction serves as a foundation for the drumset to lay the groove, while the horn section performs short phrases that build in dynamic energy to bar 8's final beat, introducing the main melody of the work. The melody is predominantly performed by the saxophone section, with the trombone and trumpet sections performing rhythmic bursts or sustained tones. The first solo belongs to the guitarist who is later joined by background cues from the horn sections. This, in turn, is followed by a brief eight bar interlude that features a call and response structure between the brass and woodwinds that builds in dynamic energy up to the tenor saxophone solo. Similarly, as for the guitar, the tenor solo has a cued background that then leads to a key change. The modulation from C to Eb major serves as an increase in intensity of energy and demands improvisational skill in order to follow the band. The ensemble takes over and performs a shortened and embellished variation of the melody before moving into a breakdown of the groove, containing an eight bar trombone *soli*. A brief 16 bar trombone solo continues within the stripped-down groove before finally reaching the closing section. A quick return to the original groove, with similar rhythms between trombones and trumpets answered by the saxophone section, concludes with a calm resolution of the original melody.

The Rehearsal Process

Rehearsals with the UCT Big Band were crucial as a means of further understanding and confirming the processes discovered in the interviews. In addition, this was a valuable opportunity for the purposes of experimentation. When interviewees differed in their approaches, experimentation proved crucial in finding the approach that brought out the best in the musicians. Rehearsals took place twice a week, for two hours each, over a six-week period. The performance at the SACM Jazz Festival took place on 21 September 2023 and ran for approximately ninety minutes with a brief intermission.

My approach to rehearsals from the outset stemmed from my interview with Shannon Mowday, in which she stressed the importance of constantly talking to and receiving feedback from the musicians involved. This philosophy proved effective in that feedback during rehearsals was meaningful and could be implemented almost immediately.

Despite the approaches discussed in the interview analysis, there were a number of additional considerations that were taken into account:

- Timely distribution of parts and audio recordings. Setting the musicians up for success, and in turn, saving valuable time within the limited rehearsal window.

- Rehearsal venue versus performance venue: Most rehearsals took place in the Chisholm Recital room (C7) at SACM, UCT, while the performance took place in the concert hall at the Baxter Theatre. Because of this, the two rehearsals in the concert hall were critical, allowing the ensemble to adapt visually and aurally to the performance venue.

- Technical aspects. The SACM boasts a versatile technical team, readily accommodating to most technical requirements. We ensured the big band was comfortable, despite the unfamiliar performance venue, by discussing the predetermined layout (e.g. horn section risers, rhythm section placement) and key technical details (i.e. sound check and monitoring) well in advance.

Overview of the Filming and Editing Process

To complement this written explication, I created a documentary video featuring both the excerpts from the interviews as well as the performances of the selected arrangements. This video highlights the culmination of the approaches used in rehearsals.

Filming involved two distinct settings: interviews and a performance. Mike Campbell and Darryl Andrews participated in live interviews at SACM, UCT, filmed by Charles Potgieter from the technical team. Shannon Mowday from Norway and Marcus Wyatt in Johannesburg were only available to be interviewed via video call, which I then captured using OBS Studio. At the performance, multiple members of the technical team, each operating a different camera, filmed from various angles. Izan Greyling edited the footage alongside the audio he had captured.

I edited the video in DaVinci Resolve 18. It featured the four selected arrangements, noteworthy interview snippets from each participant, and a closing credits sequence showcasing an additional work performed that evening, together with photographs taken by Michael Salzwedel during rehearsals.

Findings

During my time directing the UCT Big Band, I was fortunate enough to work with a group of young musicians who approached their ensemble playing with enthusiasm, dedication and with a professional attitude. Alongside this, they also displayed an interest in my research project and an openness for experimenting with different methods. This very positive attitude they demonstrated towards the project allowed me to experiment with various approaches to both layout and rehearsal techniques with a measure of ease, but without losing any of the crucial rehearsal time available. It very quickly became evident that open communication was key in this exercise; talking and listening to the musicians became the driving force behind the band's progress, resulting in significant improvements in both technical skill and musicality.

For the first rehearsal I attempted more of a box layout (see Figure 2, Appendix A) as the band had recently performed a show in this format. The rehearsal ran smoothly, but there seemed to be a measure of disconnect between the horn sections and the musicians in the rhythm section. Having given this some thought, I attributed this to a ‘green first rehearsal’ where the band was playing the music for the first time, concentrating mostly on their own parts. For the second rehearsal I followed a more traditional tiered layout. As was the case with the first rehearsal, the session ran without any major concerns, but a stronger connection between the sections was evident. In the context of open communication with the musicians, I asked them for their preference

between the two layouts. The response was an overwhelming agreement in favour of the tiered layout. The opinions expressed were mostly towards a positive aural environment where parts playing rhythms together could hear one another clearly.

Once the tiered system had been decided upon, my focus shifted to the placement of the rhythm section. A number of different scenarios were attempted, from larger spacing between musicians of the section, to the drumset placed behind the trumpet section. Ultimately, I decided on a closer placement between the musicians of the rhythm section and the horn sections, placing them alongside one another, (see Figure 1, Appendix A). Although it was evident that at first the horn sections were put off by the louder dynamic from the drum set, as time passed, however, and with the rhythm section now able to hear the horn sections more clearly, a natural dynamic balance seemed to be achieved.

It then occurred to me that it is possible to compare the rhythm section of a big band to that of a smaller jazz ensemble. In a big band scenario, the horn sections are simply an expansion of the formula while the roles of rhythm section musicians stay relatively the same. When the rhythm section is in close proximity to the horns, there is less of a tendency to overplay, and more effective musical clarity is achieved. This, of course, is dependent upon the musicians sharing an eagerness to listen to their role within the context of the ensemble.

Even though the musicians received their sheet music and recordings beforehand, listening to the original recordings in rehearsal itself proved valuable. Collective listening stimulated the rehearsal process as it allowed the musicians to read through their parts whilst paying attention to style, dynamics, groove and rhythms. Collective listening also provided discussion amongst section players and a desire to replicate the recording as far as possible. This illustrated a willingness of the musicians to work together, all united by the same goal.

The traditional roles of the big band were seemingly less obvious during the six-week rehearsal period. Musicians tended to follow their section leaders' phrasing, articulation and dynamic control, but traditional leadership practices dependent upon a single individual was limited. Instead, collective leadership through discussion took place where needed, almost indicative of a hive or group mindset. Balance within sections mostly focused on the advances of the section leader while balance between sections fell to the director. It was evident that minimal interference from the director allowed for the opportunity for musical creativity to take place within the sections. Such freedom within sections also resulted in a matureness in that section leaders had the freedom to set up their own sectional rehearsals. Only on one occasion did I call for a minor

sectional rehearsal and even when such a rehearsal took place, a greater measure of cohesiveness was achieved. I should mention again that I was fortunate to direct a group of musicians where no overarching ego seemed present.

Concerning South African jazz repertoire versus traditional American big band works, it was clear that many of the preparation and rehearsal requirements were similar in nature. One key difference that required more attention pertained to the various South African jazz styles and their particular groove requirements, particularly within the rhythm section and the various horn sections' approach to phrasing. With this tertiary band, I was fortunate to direct a group of musicians that already had a strong sense of most of the South African styles. Where issues arose, the use of various recording examples of the style allowed a better understanding of what was required from them.

My approach to conducting was focused more on a hybrid of hands-on conducting and that of a general guide. However, as the rehearsal period progressed, there was a greater shift towards the general guide approach. Once the rhythm section tied into the *tempo* and groove of each arrangement, there was less of a need for timekeeping. Gestures pertaining to volume and the building of intensity were more effective, which is evidence of a less-is-more approach. Where constant conducting occurs, musical gestures may be lost and go unnoticed by the musicians. It was also evident that I kept my internal metronome going consistently despite not conducting every beat. On two or three occasions in the rehearsal and performance there were a few brief moments of *tempo* anomalies. In such cases, I made sure to catch the eye of the drummer or section leader and to clearly indicate the correct time, returning to the proper tempo. The ensemble also constantly kept an eye on the conductor, highlighting the importance of accurate entry cues, particularly after repeated sections. For this, I found that showing four bars with my hand and conducting the bar before the entry was most effective, while also serving to reassure the musicians without intruding on the musicality of solo or arranged sections.

Finally, there is an important point to be made about the director-musician relationship. Throughout the past nine years I have directed multiple secondary and tertiary big bands. In all my experience I have found that a calm, focused and enjoyable environment has always achieved the desired goals. When a director shows passion for the music being rehearsed, the musicians will most likely follow suit. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the director to set the tone from the very start, thereby leading to successful rehearsals, performances and ultimately, a positive overall experience.

Conclusion

The objectives of this creative research project were successfully achieved by exploring and comparing approaches to big band jazz direction by the four interviewees. Their willingness to take part in this study facilitated straightforward comparisons of the similar and varying approaches. Additionally, the rehearsal and performance process with the UCT Big Band served as a suitable platform for experimentation to take place, the culmination of which was successfully presented in the style of a documentary video. With the information gathered, together with my time with the UCT Big Band, I was able to successfully gain new insights which I could then contribute to the documented knowledge in this field. In addition, I was able to further improve my own personal understanding of directorship approaches, and have experienced a measure of personal growth as a result.

It is important to recognize that this study had its foundation in a tertiary environment, with students at an undergraduate level. The findings highlighted are specific to the level of this particular ensemble and may not necessarily be appropriate for secondary education ensembles. For example, bands with less developed rhythm sections may need more hands-on conducting. Similarly, in professional big bands, musicians may already have mastered many of the techniques, rendering some implementations as unnecessary. I perceive this study to be a prelude for further research in this field: comparing directing approaches across secondary, tertiary and professional ensemble settings and examining variations in technique based on ensemble experience and skill level.

Furthermore, it is important to note that careful considerations for the music chosen as well as the selection of the rehearsal and performance venue is vital. While more contemporary arrangements may call for different approaches (such as variation in layout), these should be implemented within the limitations of the venue. When variations in style exist (South African vs. American), it is crucial that the performing musicians have a well-grounded understanding of the groove requirements for each style. For Big band directors working with less experienced players (for example a high school band), it would be imperative to spend a considerable amount of time examining, listening to, and playing the specific rhythmic patterns associated with these South African jazz styles. Each player would need to learn the phrasing and articulation approaches and rhythmic feel needed to play these styles authentically. Ultimately, the director’s responsibility is to study the setlist and decide on the best approaches for a successful performance.

As previously highlighted, big bands play a vital role in secondary and tertiary jazz education circles of South Africa. Therefore, it is important that directors continue to nurture their students' minds with effective big band practices. The specific approaches explored in this study do not advocate for a one-size-fits-all ideology. Rather, it serves as a guide to, and provides deeper understanding for future generations of big band directors in South African jazz.

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Appendix A: Layout Examples

Figure 1: Tiered layout example

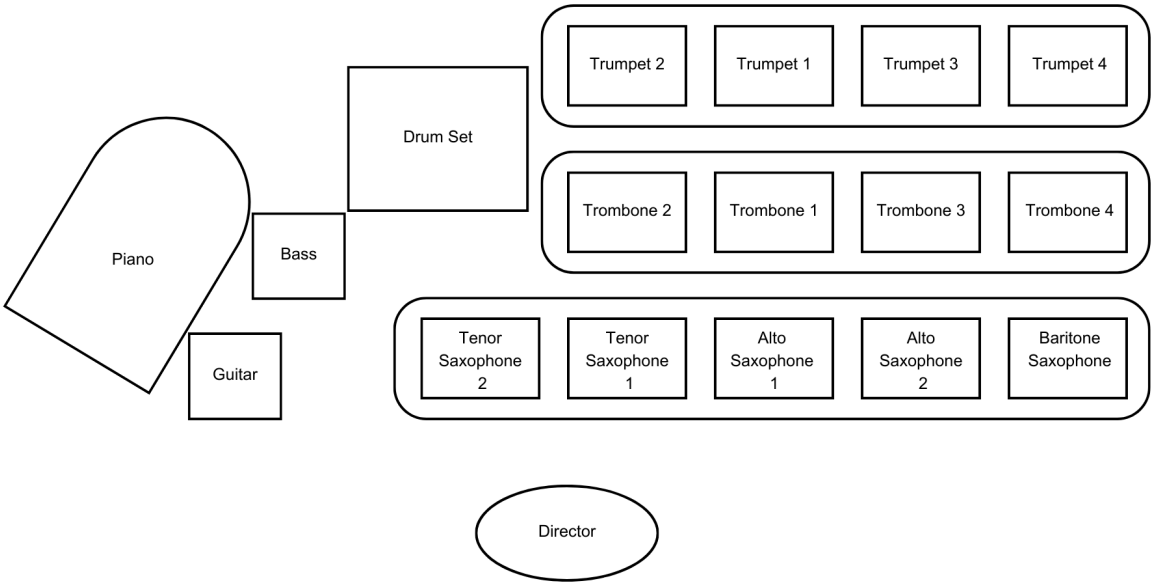
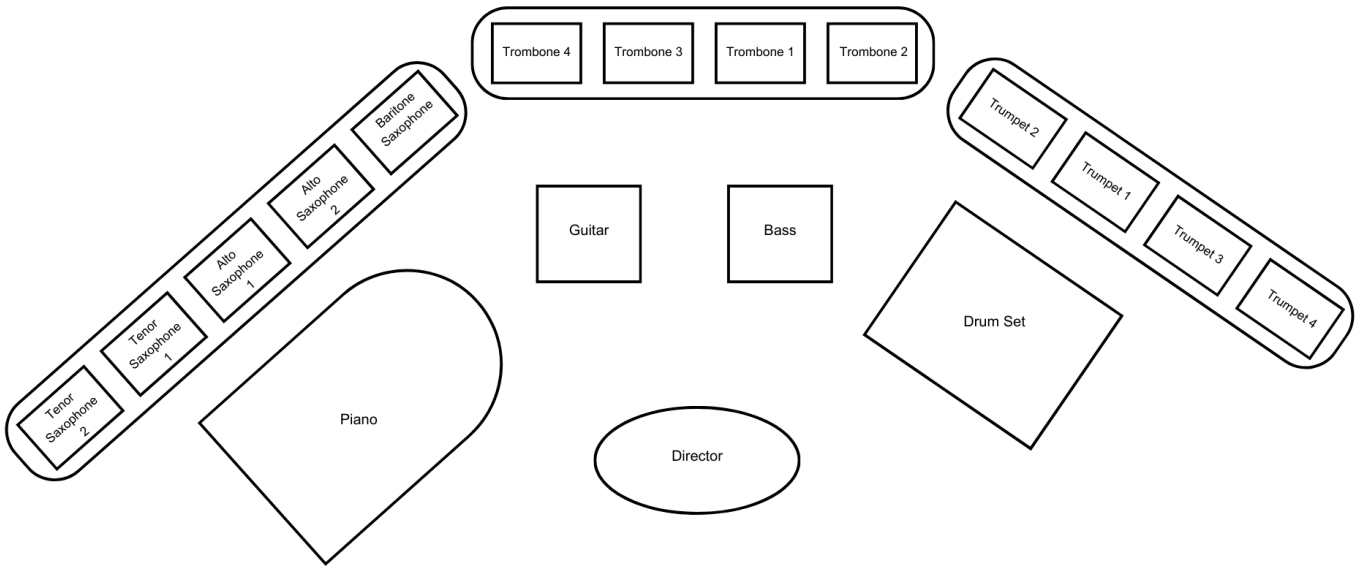


Figure 2: Box layout example



Appendix B: Rehearsal Photographs


NATIONAL SCHOOLS

Appendix C: Ethics Clearance Letter

South African College of Music

University of Cape Town
Private Bag
Rondebosch
7701

Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 2626 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 2627
E-mail:
http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/sacm

SACM
THE SOUTH AFRICAN COLLEGE OF MUSIC
Founded 1910

7 August 2023

HDC REF: 04/2023

Dear Murray

Project title: South African Jazz Big Band: Methodological approaches from selected composers, arrangers and directors

Thank you for your ethics application dated 6 August 2023. It is my pleasure to inform you that the above-mentioned study has been formally approved.

The completed forms should be submitted to Sheila Taylor for record keeping.

Approval is granted for 3 years.

Please submit a brief progress report if the study continues beyond the approval time frame.

The on-going ethical conduct remains the responsibility of the principal investigator.

Please quote the reference number in all your ethics related correspondences.

Yours sincerely

Signed by candidate

Associate Professor Anri Herbst

Ethics representative
Higher Degrees Committee
FREC Committee member
IFREC Committee member

Appendix D: Interview Questions

General Questions

1. Who has influenced you mostly with regards to big band directing and in what ways?

2. In shaping your approach to big band direction, are there:

2.a any influences you have been taught by or watched live?
2.b any big bands that you have performed with?

3. On instrumentation:

3.a What is your opinion on ensemble layout when performing? More traditional 'Basie' layout or modern adaptive layouts?

3.b What are your thoughts on musical communication between the rhythm section musicians?
3.c Is non verbal communication between the musicians of a specific horn section vital to successful performance?

3.d How important is communication between the various horn sections? I.e saxophones - trombones - trumpets

3.e How Important is communication between the rhythm section and horn section?
3.f How do you prioritize these various levels of communication?
3.g What are your thoughts on the role of the section leader? I.e trumpet 1; trombone 1 etc.

4. Rehearsal techniques:

4.a What is your opinion on ensemble layout in a rehearsal setting? Performance layout, box layout (studio) etc.

4.b How important is listening to audio recordings (song being rehearsed) in a rehearsal setting?

4.c How important are sectional rehearsals?
4.d How often do you incorporate sectionals?
4.e Are sectionals a good opportunity for section leaders to assume more of s leadership role?
4.f How do you deal with balance (volume) between sections?
4.g How do you deal with balance within the sections themselves?

5. On conducting:

5.a As a conductor, do you prefer to act as a general guide - only paying attention to important cues: volume cues, style cues, changes in tempo etc - or do you prefer a more precise, hands on approach - to be involved with every musical decision during a performance?

5.b Briefly explain why you use your method of conducting.

Specific Questions for each interviewee

1. Briefly describe the style of your arrangement (Example: Kwela, Marabi, etc)
2. Is there a specific section or instrument of the big band that is vital to laying the foundation of this style?
3. Does your arrangement contain any important musical cues that should be emphasized?
4. Does your arrangement feature a soloist that should be emphasized above the rest of the ensemble?
5. How does the rehearsal and performance of your arrangement differ from standard big band practice (if any)?