



Teacher Resource Guide

Groove Merchant

Jerome Richardson

(1920–2000)

arranged by Thad Jones
(1923–1986)

Unit 1: Composer/Arranger

Jerome Richardson, composer, was born in Oakland, California, on November 15, 1920, and died in Englewood, New Jersey, on June 23, 2000. Primarily known as a gifted alto saxophonist/woodwind doubler, he began playing at age eight and made his professional debut at fourteen. He served briefly as replacement for Willie Smith in Jimmy Lunceford's band and toured throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s with Marshall Royal, Lionel Hampton, Earl Hines, and others. Richardson settled in New York in 1953 and freelanced with Oscar Pettiford, Lucky Millinder, Cootie Williams, Chico Hamilton, Johnny Richards, Gerry Mulligan, Gerald Wilson, Quincy Jones, and many others. He was a charter member of the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, serving as lead alto/soprano saxophonist, 1965–1970. Richardson moved to Hollywood in 1971 and spent the remainder of his career primarily as a very successful studio musician.

Though Richardson was a prolific composer of jazz tunes (his BMI web page lists forty titles), *Groove Merchant* is the only one to have entered the standard jazz canon. Thad Jones's arrangement, as recorded by the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, could certainly be described as a "hit tune" in the jazz world.

Thad Jones, arranger, was born in Pontiac, Michigan, on March 28, 1923, and died in Copenhagen, Denmark, on August 20, 1986. One of the most

renowned trumpet players, arrangers/composers, and band leaders in the history of jazz, he is also from a renowned jazz family, his siblings being pianist Hank (b. 1918) and drummer Elvin (1927–2004). Though largely self-taught as a trumpet player, he began playing professionally at age sixteen in the Detroit area with brother Hank and Sonny Stitt. After a stint in the Army, he performed with Billy Mitchell, Charles Mingus, and, most notably, the Count Basie Orchestra (1954–1963), the latter boasting one of the most laudable trumpet sections in the history of jazz. Jones’s solo on Basie’s hit, *April in Paris*, approaches Bobby Hackett’s on *String of Pearls* in recorded big band jazz solo significance. Jones wrote several arrangements for the Basie band, leading to his success as a freelance arranger after settling in New York in 1963. In the fall of 1965, Jones and drummer Mel Lewis started a “rehearsal band” that took over the Monday night Village Vanguard performance spot previously occupied by Gerry Mulligan. The group evolved to become one of the best and most significant big bands in the history of jazz, primarily due to the unique, harmonically and melodically adventurous (but always swinging!) arrangements of Thad Jones.

In 1979, Jones resigned from the band and settled in Denmark, but returned to the U. S. in 1985 to take over leadership of the Count Basie Orchestra. Unfortunately, ill health forced him to retire and return to Denmark in February 1986.

Unit 2: Composition

Groove Merchant is from the relatively early period of the Jones-Lewis Orchestra, with a copyright date of 1967. It was initially recorded on June 18, 1969, and was included on the band’s fifth album for Solid State, *Central Park North*. It represents one of the very few times Thad arranged one of his musicians’, as opposed to his own, tunes. The music is pure Thad Jones throughout: It swings mightily *a la* Count Basie, but, in terms of melody and harmony, it is more daring and “edgy” than anything encountered in Basie. For example, note the lead trumpet line the first measure of letter H, beat three:

EXAMPLE 1

H First trumpet
(concert pitch)



A \flat 7 D \flat 7 (anticipated)

b9 b5 13 #11

A melodic line of $\flat 9 - \flat 5 - 13 - \sharp 11$ would never be found in the music of Basie, Goodman, Ellington, Miller, etc., and rarely in Herman, Kenton, etc. Such adventurous chord functions are simply too far removed from the basic 1–3–5–7 for the traditional big band arrangement of that time.

Billy Harper, prominent tenor saxophonist with Jones/Lewis (1969–1977), recalls in a personal e-mail to the author: “This tune was usually saved [by Thad] for a special knockout, along with *Fingers* [virtuosic Thad Jones Rhythm changes chart], when putting the strongest set together.”

Unit 3: Historical Perspective

Of course, the big band was *the* popular music medium in the U. S. in the 1930s and 40s, but this quickly changed after World War II because of the emergence in popularity of small group jazz (bebop, etc.), the emergence in popularity of other forms of music, primarily rhythm and blues/rock & roll, but also country & western, etc., and the economic challenge of maintaining a big band, especially in light of decreasing interest by the public. However, big bands did not and have not disappeared totally, but remain in existence today and even flourish in the form of university/high school big bands and “rehearsal bands.”

A rehearsal band, by definition, is an organization that is not a full-time endeavor for any of its participants, but, rather, meets from time-to-time to perform music chosen by its participants, rather than music demanded by the public, dictated by commercial recording needs, etc. Though all rehearsal bands invariably begin with little thought of commercial/popular activity, the best are eventually discovered by the public, and there is no better example than the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra. From its inauspicious beginnings on Monday nights at New York’s Village Vanguard (February, 1966), the band became *immensely* popular and successful, recording many albums (one receiving a Grammy in 1979) and touring internationally (Russia, Japan, Israel, etc.) many times, all the while remaining a part-time activity for all members. Though the co-founders are long deceased, the band still exists in the form of New York’s Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, and *still* plays Monday nights at the Village Vanguard (easily a longevity record!). Given that *Groove Merchant* is one of the most representative arrangements from the prototype for all modern rehearsal bands, it seems especially essential that it be included in any school jazz ensemble’s library.

Unit 4: Technical Considerations

Groove Merchant is rated Grade 5, and the style is “medium shuffle.” The tempo is ♩ = 132, with a duration of approximately 5:30. It could perhaps be taken a bit slower, but certainly no faster, as shuffle beats, by definition, are always laid-back, not too fast, not hurried, etc.

Lead trumpet briefly goes to high F (transposed [f²]) twice (end of intro; climax of chart four bars before the *D. S.*), but otherwise remains mostly below high C. The lead trombone briefly goes to high B \flat (b \flat) twice, but otherwise remains mostly below G (g).

Given that the chart is Grade 5, rhythms and pitches of the brass parts should be within reach of an excellent high school or very good-to-excellent college big band. Brass sectionals will no doubt be in order for two measures before letter D and the entire brass soli at letter H. As with anything especially challenging, the brass should master these passages *at a slow tempo*, then gradually increase to the norm.

First saxophone was originally written for soprano instead of alto, but the publisher provides a substitute first alto part. However, the first saxophonist *really should* play soprano, given that the chart includes one of the best-known sax solis in modern big band jazz (three choruses beginning at letter D), with a virtuosic soprano lead as originally recorded by the composer, Jerome Richardson. (It would seem almost sacrilege to hear this on alto!) Saxes will certainly want to have a sectional (probably several!) over this challenging, but fun, soli, beginning slowly before attempting concert tempo.

In regard to the sax soli, renowned trumpet player Marvin Stamm, who was a prominent member of the Jones/Lewis band, 1966–1973, recently shared the following reminiscence with the author:

“One truly outstanding thing [about playing *Groove Merchant*] was the sax soli with Thad playing in unison with the sax section [i.e., doubling the soprano part]. He just grabbed hold of that soli and took it right out! As effective as the soli was with only the saxes playing, it doubled in feeling and intensity when Thad played lead over them. Extraordinary!”

Now, there would be a challenge for any young high school or college trumpet (flugelhorn) player!

Also, Billy Harper recalls playing the soli under Jerome Richardson, noting “The sax soli was always a ‘swinger,’ in that Jerome knew how to make the sax section ‘lay back’ on the phrasing of the passage.” Note, once again, the use of that term, “lay back!”

In regard to rhythm section parts, the bass part is written out, except for the open solo section (letter G), where chord symbols only are provided. However, the changes are not difficult, so this should not be a problem for any

competent young bassist. Chord symbols only (i.e., no voicings) are provided for piano and guitar. Some resources for aiding with appropriate voicings are suggested in Unit 9, which also includes references to help the drummer with a shuffle beat.

Unit 5: Stylistic Considerations

Given Thad Jones's apprenticeship in the school of Count Basie, it is not surprising that the overall feel of this chart is straight from the Kansas City/Basie/hard groove tradition. The only unique factor is the shuffle beat, fairly rare among big bands, including Basie's. In addition to repeated listening to the original Jones/Lewis recording, students (especially the rhythm section!) should seek out other big band shuffle recordings, for example: Count Basie, *Blues in Hoss' Flat* (composer Frank Foster) or Jones/Lewis, *Don't Get Sassy* (composer Thad Jones).

Also, jazz organ groups tend to play lots of shuffles, so their recordings provide a good opportunity to hear the style "close up." For example: Jimmy Smith's *Back at the Chicken Shack*.

A tip for the first trumpet player (ensemble passages) and soprano player (lead on soli): Approach your parts as a written-out, improvised jazz solo. That is, in addition to playing what's on the page, put a little bit of your personality/individuality into it. That's what all great lead players do, certainly including Snooky Young (lead trumpet) and Jerome Richardson on the original recording of *Groove Merchant*. In regard to Snooky, Marvin Stamm recalls that he was "probably the swingiest lead player ever. His time and feeling were magnificent; drummers still salivate at his time! And when he rode above the band on the shout chorus [letter I of *Groove Merchant*], it was like sailing on a beautiful sea! After it was over, you were just vibrating all over!"

Unit 6: Musical Elements

MELODY:

Groove Merchant is a straightforward mostly-diatonic 16-bar melody in ABCD form:

EXAMPLE 2

Note Richardson’s use of the A \flat blues scale to conclude his melody (measure 15). Also, in the arrangement, note that during the second statement of the melody (letter B), there is a four bar extension (letter C, sometimes called a “tag”) due to Jones repeating measures 13–14 twice; he did not choose to do this elsewhere.

A good idea is for the director and/or students to transpose the melody for the *entire band*, and play through it *tutti* many times. This will help engross *everyone* in the entire arrangement. Also, require all soloists to *memorize* the melody. This will aid in “internalizing” the chord changes, correct pitches, etc., and make it easy to quote from the melody during solos—always a good idea.

HARMONY:

Chord changes are relatively routine, with a lot in common with the blues (I, IV, V, etc.). Tips for soloists are included in the SOLOS section below.

As for ensemble chords, remember that the more complex a chord is, the greater the chance for intonation problems; that is, a pure triad is easier to tune than, for example, a dominant¹³($\sharp 9$ $\sharp 5$).

A good idea: Take a complex chord that is relatively short in the chart (for example, fifth bar of letter I, the second half of beat 2—Caug⁷($\sharp 9$)) and have the band sustain it, *mezzo piano*. Have each section sustain its chord, individuals sustain their notes, etc., with all hearing how they fit into the whole and adjusting their intonation. Obviously, it is not reasonable to do this for every complex chord, but deliberately mastering a few will, hopefully, cause the band to “catch on” and master all.

RHYTHM:

The eighth notes are swung, of course, but are notated “straight,” as is the custom. Be sure that the trombones understand that their intro eighths are swung, matching the drummer’s “shuffle eighths”:

EXAMPLE 3

Written: *f*

Played: *f* 3 3 3 3
 ^ = short and accented

In regard to the rhythm section, as much fun as it is to play a shuffle beat, you’ll probably discover that it gets a bit tiresome chorus after chorus during the solos (letter G, etc.), and also perhaps tiresome for the audience! Try alternating between shuffle and “regular swing” beat behind solos, perhaps at letter H and/or I, etc.

SOLOS:

As stated above, the chord changes are relatively routine; players with some experience should have no problem. Novice improvisers will find it helpful to practice (even memorize!) the following practice patterns:

EXAMPLE 4

1 *A^b6* *D^b7* *A^b9*

5 *C7* *Fm7* *B^b7* *E^b7* *B^b7* *E^b7*

9 *A^b9* *D^b7* *Ddim7*

Diminished (w) scale

13 *A^b/E^b* *E^bdim7* *Fm7* *B7* *B^b7* *E^b7* *A^b* *E^b7* *A^b*

The ninth is a good note on which to end.

Even experienced players should practice measures 11–12 (D \flat ⁷–Ddim⁷); the D diminished scale (beginning with a whole step) is especially useful!

Note that the solo section (letter G) is “open” in terms of instrument(s) and length. The recording features the great pianist, Roland Hanna (note his simplicity: less is more!), but chord changes are provided for first soprano/alto, second trumpet, first trombone, and, of course, piano/guitar/bass. Billy Harper mentioned that he often soloed on *Groove Merchant*, and that he often tried to “take it further out” than one might have expected.

Unit 7: Form and Structure

The basic form is not unlike traditional *sonata allegro*:

SECTION	REHEARSAL LETTER
Intro	
Exposition	A
Development	
Sax soli	D
Solos	G
Brass soli	H
Shout chorus	I
Recapitulation (D.S.)	
Coda	

Unit 8: Suggested Listening

Original recording of *Groove Merchant*: Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, *Central Park North*, Solid State SS-18058 (vinyl), 1969.

Current CD availability:

Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, *Central Park North*, Blue Note.

Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, *The Complete Solid State Recordings*, Mosaic box set. *Don't Get Sassy* is also included

Different recording of same chart: The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, *Thad Jones Legacy*, New World.

Other versions of *Groove Merchant*:

Jerome Richardson Quartet, *Jazz Station Runaway*, TCB.

Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra with Monica Zetterlund, vocalist, *It*

Only Happens Every Time, Inner City (vinyl). NOTE: This album includes an interesting rearrangement of *Groove Merchant* by Jones, featuring the late Swedish vocalist Zetterlund, lyrics by Claude Stephenson. Recorded in Helsinki in 1977, it has apparently not been released on CD.

Supplemental recordings demonstrating the shuffle beat:

Count Basie Orchestra, *Chairman of the Board*, Roulette (includes *Blues in Hoss' Flat*).

Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, *Village Vanguard Live Sessions, Vol. 3*, LRC (includes *Don't Get Sassy*).

Jimmy Smith Quartet, *Back at the Chicken Shack*, Blue Note.

Unit 9: Additional References and Resources

Biographical data on Jones and Richardson:

Bogdanov, Vladimir, et al, editors, *All Music Guide to Jazz*, fourth ed. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002). www.allmusic.com

Kernfield, Barry, editor, *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* (London and New York: Macmillan Press, 1988). www.grovemusic.com

Materials to aid rhythm section with shuffle beat:

Berg, Shelly, Lou Fischer, Fred Hamilton, and Steve Houghton, *Rhythm Section Workshop for Jazz Directors*, book, DVD, CD (Van Nuys: Alfred Publishing, 2006). www.alfred.com

Soph, Ed, *Musical Time*, book, DVD, CD (New York: Carl Fischer Music, 2005). www.carlfischer.com

Materials to aid pianists/guitarists with voicings:

Bay, William, *Deluxe Guitar Chord Encyclopedia* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 1971). www.melbay.com

Christiansen, Corey, *Jazz Guitar Photo Chords* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2006). www.melbay.com

Levine, Mark, *The Jazz Piano Book* (Petaluma, CA: Sher Music Company, 1990). www.shermusic.com

Contributed by:

Robert Morgan
Director of Jazz Studies Emeritus
High School for Performing and Visual Arts
Houston, Texas