

Thad Jones

TOP 10 LIST for High School Jazz Ensembles

Medium-level arrangements by one of the great jazz geniuses.

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In honor of Thad Jones' 100th Birthday, March 28, 2023

1. **All My Yesterdays** – a beautiful, relatively brief arrangement with minimal improvising. This is a rare example of a straight-8ths “Latin” Thad Jones composition. An elegant arrangement with muted brass, beautiful sax lines. (Kendor) [*Also available in simplified SmartChart version]
2. **Big Dipper** – one of Thad’s earlier arrangements, one of “the original seven” intended for the Basie band but instead turned into part of the original Thad Jones/Mel Lewis repertoire. This extended blues progression features dynamic contrast in the Basie style, and a great hard-hitting melody signature that Thad brings back three times. (Kendor Vanguard Jazz Orchestra Series)
3. **Counter Block** – a great arrangement, too little known, written by Thad for the Basie Orchestra, just recently published. It appears on the Basie album *Breakfast Dance and Barbeque*, one of the band’s best live recordings. This is rhythm changes in F; the melody is a “boxing match” between the saxes and brass. There’s a great one-chorus sax soli, and a great shout chorus. (eJazzLines)
4. **The Deacon** – another Thad arrangement for Count Basie, unpublished until recently, appears on the legendary Basie album *Chairman of the Board*. It’s a blues in F, at a bit of a slower, “grownup tempo” that will challenge the band to swing hard, with simple rhythmic figures that allow them to do that. The iconic spot in this is the unaccompanied brass double-time lines. A gem! (eJazzLines)
5. **Groove Merchant** – perhaps Thad’s best-known arrangement, of a composition by his then lead altoist Jerome Richardson. This is classic, hard-swinging shuffle on a gospel progression similar to Horace Silver’s “The Preacher.” Got a good sax section? This features one of the most famous saxophone solis in all of big band jazz. This is challenging, but more in the area of time and sax chops, not a problem in terms of brass range or facility. (Kendor Vanguard Jazz Orchestra Series)
6. **Low Down** – another one of Thad’s “original seven” arrangements originally intended for the Basie band, but instead became a staple of the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis band in the late 1960s. This has the Basie spirit oozing from all its sections, swings hard and not too difficult. (Kendor Vanguard Jazz Orchestra Series) [*Also available in simplified SmartChart version]
7. **Quietude** – A Thad Jones masterpiece that begins with Thad’s flugelhorn over the sax section on the melody, drums on brushes – this opening chorus alone is worth the price of admission. After that memorable melody, it’s more of a “head chart,” with an improvisation section that employs

the type of cycle of fifths progression that Thad loved, and requires someone who knows about chord changes. There is a great shout section after the solo. (eJazzLines)

8. **Three and One** – another one of Thad’s most iconic, well-known pieces, one that began as a small group piece in a quartet with the three Jones brothers – Thad, Hank, and Elvin – and bassist Eddie Jones: three brothers and one unrelated Jones, thus the title. It features trumpet, baritone sax and bass on the melody. This is probably the most challenging piece on this list, not over-the-top difficult but worth the work it takes to put it together. (Kendor) [*Also available in simplified SmartChart version]

9. **Us** – one of Thad’s truly iconic compositions. The entire first section of this piece features the unaccompanied brass section, will show them how to articulate and breathe together. Then, it turns into a rock/funk tune with a layered melody that will challenge your saxes. A tip: this chart originally featured a big baritone sax solo (but could feature anybody) on that 8-bar funk melody – but that solo is not included in this early version of the chart! You can open it up from Letter D-E (minus the trombones) to make it very similar to Thad’s later live version. I imitate the original background parts by slicing up the sax and brass backgrounds at Letter F; contact me for details (email address above) if you are interested! (Kendor)

10. **Walkin’ About** – a Basie-style arrangement that deserves to be better known. The brass section plays the entire 32-bar melody; if they can play this in a unified performance, with its swinging articulation and phrasing, they can play anything. This is a rather brief arrangement, more of a “head chart” with a blowing section and sax/brass backgrounds. (Kendor) [*Also available in simplified SmartChart version]

Notes:

- Thad’s classic ballad “A Child is Born” is not on the list because, although it’s very simple technically and rhythmically, it’s very exposed and features flutes in the entire sax section. Same for his historic ballad “To You” – this hymnlike piece is a huge “blow” for the brass, sustained whole notes around or above the staff for huge stretches! Not recommended for young students.
- *SmartChart arrangements were created by Mike Carubia, a top-level trumpeter, arranger, and educator. These are re-orchestrated and in some cases moved to lower keys to accommodate younger bands. Although some Thad pieces lend themselves to this simplification better than others, the SmartChart re-arrangements are always musical, always playable and deeply in the spirit of Thad.