

2026 Super Saturday!

High School Jazz Audition Tips



Overview

Recording Requirements

- Etudes
- Improvisation
- FAQ's

Steps to Learning a Tune

- Melody
- Roots
- Patterns
- Navigating Harmony
- Vocabulary & Transcription
- Improvise!

Tips & Recommendations

- Suggestions
- Recording Recommendations

Recording Requirements

*Winds have different instructions than Rhythm Section

Read your specific instrument's instructions carefully HERE

Recording Requirements (Winds)

- **THREE** Etudes
 - One Swing, one Ballad, and One “Latin”
- Improvisation on “**Days of Wine and Roses**”
 - Play head (melody) ONCE only
 - Not needed after improv either
 - Improvise for TWO TO FOUR choruses
 - 150bpm is tempo minimum
 - This is not strict, but we don’t desire to hear this as a ballad!
- Chromatic **Scale**
 - Demonstrate YOUR full functional range of your instrument
 - Legato, eighth notes, 120bpm or faster (choose most proficient!)
- Note the differences for Section, Lead, or Bass Bone consideration

Recording Requirements (Chair Consideration)

- **Lead Trumpet Consideration:** perform the Lead Trumpet Etude Swing (Summertime) *in addition to* the 3 Etudes.
 - ***Lead Trumpet applicants ONLY are not required to submit an improv, however, submission is strongly encouraged.
- **Lead Trombone Consideration:** perform the Lead Trombone Etude Swing (Summertime) *in addition to* the 3 Etudes.
 - Students wishing to be considered for Lead Trombone must select "Lead Trombone" in the audition portal.
 - This selection will generate an additional upload field. Upload the Lead Trombone Etude (Summertime) in the Lead Trombone field and the Swing Etude (Just Friends) in Etude Upload #1.
- **BASS TROMBONES can perform the following octave displacements as noted to distinguish their consideration for this seat:**
 - **Swing (Just Friends):**
 - 8VB pickups to measure 5 through measure 15
 - Pickups to measure 21 through measure 28, return to written octave pickups to measure 29 through the end
 - **Ballad (Skylark):**
 - Recommended 8VB entire etude, minimum displacement 8VB of last 3 notes of etude
 - Latin (No More Blues)
 - 8VB measure 12 through measure 16
 - Optional 8VB measure 24 to end

Recording Requirements (Piano, Guitar, Vibes, Bass)

- **THREE** Etudes
 - One Swing, one Ballad, and One “Latin”
 - Vibraphonists perform Top Line of Piano etudes
- Improvisation on “**Days of Wine and Roses**”
 - Play head (melody) ONCE only
 - Not needed after improv either
 - Comp for ONE chorus
 - Bass players walk (play bass line) for a chorus
 - Improvise for TWO TO THREE choruses
 - 150bpm is tempo minimum
 - This is not strict, but we don’t desire to hear this as a ballad!
- **Rhythm Section** folks do not submit a scale

Recording Requirements (Drummers)

- **THREE** Etudes
 - One Swing, one Ballad, and One “Latin”
- Drummers do not play Days of Wine and Roses, they play “**Grooves**”
 - Swing!
 - Trade fours at quarter note = 160.
 - Alternate four measures of swing time with four measures of soloing for a total of 32 measures.
 - Samba!
 - Trade fours at half note = 100.
 - Alternate four measures of samba time with four measures of soloing for a total of 32 measures.



FAQ's on Recordings

Are the tempi for real?

Put your best foot forward.

We desire to hear you at your most proficient performance tempo. This may be slightly slower than the suggested tempo, this is ok!

Can I submit a Classical AND a Jazz audition?

YES

With their director approval, students may submit auditions for BOTH classical and jazz!

- In the event a student makes both, the student is typically placed in Jazz.

Where do I find a backtrack for the standard?

You have many options.

YouTube tracks from independent users are fine, iReal Pro or RealPlay tracks at your present tempo with a “click” countoff is ok too! Live rhythm section is great but not required. Aebersold recordings are also great!

FAQ's on Recordings CONTINUED

What key do I play the standard in?

As long as you play “Days of Wine and Roses” we are ok hearing it any key.

This tune is often called in Concert F or Eb Major. Regardless of your key choice, be sure that the melody's opening interval lands on the 3rd of your first chord.

Where do I find a lead sheet or a material to learn the standard?

Lead sheets for this tune are available through “The Real Book”, Aebersold Vol. 40, or...

A really effective way of learning the melody is to “steal” it from a recording by ear and stylize it as they did.

- Frank Sinatra's version is straightforward, as is Wes Montgomery's. There are MANY MORE!
- If learning the tune by **transcribing** a recording, be sure that if you decide to perform the tune in a different key that you **transpose** it properly.
- If learning the tune from a **lead sheet**, be sure it is in the key you intend to perform it in, or that you **transpose** it properly!

FAQ's on Recordings CONTINUED

Why are there so many different version of these chord changes and melody?

Jazz is much more “fluid” and flexible with interpretations and substitutions with harmony. Select what you are capable of navigating and stay consistent.

Many lead sheets and backtracks from different sources may play different harmony or chord changes. While this is typical with jazz standards, don't let it scare you away or deter your efforts!

- Be sure you can generate or find a backtrack reflecting the harmony you are practicing.
- Make the melody your own! Performing it directly as written on a lead sheet is not a recommended practice, though it is a great springboard to use to get started in learning a tune!
- As you embellish the melody and practice improvising, be sure to stay aligned with harmonic rhythm (how fast or slow the chords change) so you navigate the tune successfully.



Steps to Learning a Tune

Learn the Melody. Sing the words! Listen to many recordings from different musicians (vocal and instrumental) to internalize it.

Play common digital patterns (like arpeggiations) with chord tones in time to better recall key areas and navigate harmony. (ex: 1-2-3, 1-2-3-5, up and down!)

Vocabulary refers to “common phrases” that you can “copy” from others to use in your own way when soloing! We learn through listening, transcription, & various study.



Play the chord roots (big chord letters) in time to get comfortable with the tune's harmonic rhythm (how fast or slow chords move). Identify the form, and harmonic “nuggets” like ii-V's!

The 3rd and 7th of each chord is the “DNA” of sound. Isolate all 3rds, all 7ths, and then weave them together by moving to the next closest pitch to learn voice leading that you can land on and embellish in your solo!

Don't forget to practice improvising a ton!

★ Same as when practicing your etudes, play with a metronome/in-time and remember to try it down-tempo before increasing speed for accuracy.



Demo of some “practice steps”



Video Demo of a head and chorus



Tips and Recommendations

For Etudes and Improv,
and in general.

Tune your instrument before you
record!

Tips and Recommendations - ETUDES

- The George Stone Cycle (2027 Cycle B Etudes) lists the jazz standard the etude is written off of harmonically.
 - Grab a backtrack in the appropriate key/style of that tune for each etude, and try practicing with that instead of just a metronome!
 - You can also play along with drum grooves or loops in time to help dig into the time-feel better.
- Its ok to record slightly under tempo if it means you're more successful.
 - Mastery of skill is based on ability to recall. If you're trying to recall too fast and not able to do so clearly, re-evaluate your process!
 - Aim to demonstrate the highest mastery closest to/at given tempo.
- Etudes are a measure of how well you can play your part in the band.
 - Be sure to play all written dynamics and articulations as they appear.



Tips and Recommendations - IMPROV

- Try making “improv games” with “rules” to prevent decision fatigue or overwhelm as you practice improvising over chord changes.
 - “Rules” are restrictions that guide your impulses. Try playing a chorus where you choose to use only the first 3 notes of each chord sound, or only improvise with the melody, or a 3-note cell that can get adjusted by whole or half step as you move through harmony.
- The number of choruses is a range recommendation.
 - Submitting 2 really good choruses is better than 4 average ones!
- Avoid playing a pre-written or memorized solo.
 - This can sound unnatural, and adjudicators will be able to tell!
- Use 2 devices to record your improvisation component.
 - One to play backtrack, one to record (for balance and quality)



Tips and Recommendations - GENERAL

- Jazz is a language - listen a TON so you build familiarity & connection with style, & the tunes mentioned in the audition cycle.
 - Listen to some of the same tunes MANY TIMES! Get obsessed!
- Pay close attention to how you start & end each note.
 - Stylistic inflections are typically welcome, however excessive “scoops” may be fined (kidding...)
 - Don't let inflections get in the way of the rhythm or basic musicianship.
- Practice with a metronome or time in the background.
 - A drum loop or backtrack works like a metronome!
- Keep a good distance between your recording device & your instrument/backtrack.
- Record yourself BEFORE recording for submission, well before the deadline.
 - Practicing recording helps with self-review and adjusting your efforts.
- Play with good time & good tone. **Always.**