FIRST ARRANGEMENT: Single Melodic Line + Rhythm Section

The first major assignment is to write an arrangement of a standard tune with one melodic line and rhythm section. No introduction is required. The ending does not have to be elaborate or extended, just conclusive. Pairs or groups of instruments in unison or in octaves can play the single line. No part writing or harmonized parts are necessary. Contrapuntal ideas will be generated through juxtaposition of the single melodic with the rhythm section accompaniment. When writing for an ensemble of four horns, or a big band, or an orchestra, individual lines will still carry the musical interest. Students usually try to focus on the vertical structures on their first attempts at arranging, worrying about voicing every single note of the melody lines. Concentrate on the linear aspect and the type of accompaniment. The skills you learn by handling a single line and accompaniment with rhythm section will be applicable when arrangement for more instruments. The accompaniment in this first assignment will just be the rhythm section. In later assignments other groups of instruments may be used to provide accompaniment.

Accompaniment Patterns

When asked how many accompaniment patterns exist in music, students usually reply, “∞”. I can only think of three: independent, dialog, and homorhythmic. There may be an infinite number of variations under those primary headings.

Independent

An independent accompaniment does not have to rhythmically correspond with every melodic figure. When you ask the rhythm section to play a certain beat, like swing or Latin, that establishes the basic rhythmic setting, it may be independent from some of the rhythmic characteristics implied by the melody. Any repeated figure like an Alberti bass, “Charleston” Rhythm (the main rhythm from the tune Charleston), or an ostinato figure might be the perfect choice for a phrase or section.

Independent Charleston rhythm works as an accompaniment here although it contradicts melodic rhythm

A two-measure repeated ostinato bass line
A four measure ostinato line independent of the melody

![Musical notation]

Many melodic lines would work over this independent accompaniment

![Musical notation]

Dialog

Dialog is conversational, as the name implies. One part answers another. Dialog could be like two parts in a Baroque counterpoint—when one is active, the other is passive. Any kind of call and response idea is dialog. Dialog can create a bit of tension as one or more parts are in “disagreement” with each other.

“Amen” dialog accompaniment for this soulful setting

![Musical notation]
Dialog with more intricate involvement between the melody and accompaniment

Homorhythmic

When everyone is playing the same or similar rhythms, the music is homorhythmic. Imagine a choral setting where all parts have the same rhythm or the climactic section of an orchestra or big band piece where finally, all the parts play the same rhythms. An interesting piece usually has parts that are polyphonic and polyrhythmic and parts that are homophonic or homorhythmic. Contrasts are important to create interest.

Homorhythmic sections, where all parts play together can be very emphatic. It may be a good idea to use homorhythmic accompaniment as part of the climax of an arrangement. It would be difficult to start with homorhythmic ideas and keep it up and still build to an effective climax.

Mixture

Any good arrangement needs a mixture of accompaniment approaches. An independent accompaniment may set the groove; dialog can create some polyphonic and polyrhythmic conflicts; homorhythmic textures may be quite emphatic and may help establish the climax of the piece. But none of these approaches should be depended on for the entire arrangement. Do not just write slashes for the rhythm section to play a basic groove while your melody spins out. Do not write thirty-two measures of dialog rhythmic hits and interesting kicks for the rhythm section. Do not have the rhythm section emphatically stress every single rhythm of the primary melody. Model it on other interactions. Sometimes be supportive in a conversation by listening and staying out of the way, sometimes interject some dialog and maybe contrary opinions. Be careful about shouting or emailing in ALL CAPS. A little can go a long way. An arrangement will have a combination of places where there may be no accompaniment, some independent accompaniment, some dialog, and some areas of homorhythmic accompaniment.
Here is a 12 measure blues with a variety of accompaniment ideas.

MM.1-3 – independent *Charleston* rhythm. M.4 – dialog, in the hole left by the melody.

Keep a balance of approaches to each element of your arrangement. Your melodies can be highly embellished or quite simple. Your harmonization can be rich, challenging, and full of mystery chords, or could be simple and direct. Your accompaniment patterns can challenge and contradict the melody, can simply groove underneath the melody, and can stress strategic points when needed. Some arrangers find it helpful to make a list, or agenda in simple English, outlining the structure of an arrangement. Working from this outline, your work as an arranger is more like filling in the appropriate material from an already well-conceived plan, following your own directions. It can make the work go much faster. Instead of sitting and wondering what to write, you have a set of directions. Write something, even if it is not the best idea. Any and everything can be reviewed and improved if you have written something on the page. If you are spinning your wheels waiting for inspiration or the waiting for the best musical idea the world has ever known, you may end up with a blank page. Make a list, do the work, edit and rewrite.
OTHER ACCOMPANIMENT PATTERNS

1. Independent: “Charleston Rhythm” establishes the groove/may agree or not with melodic rhythm

2. Independent: Guitar-like accompaniment pattern establishes the groove.


4. Dialog: Rhythmic harmonic response. Contrast to straight time keeping with the rhythm section

The last line of the piece is “tagged,” voiced very open with augmented rhythm
Recurring blues riff staggered entrance & one last melodic quote at the end
CHART ONE

Here is a possible first arrangement for one horn line plus rhythm section. I have shown three horns (alto sax, trumpet, and trombone an octave lower) playing the line. Guitar could read the piano part or you could write out a guitar part to play in unison with the trombone.

I have shown two piano, bass and drum parts. The top part is the way I would actually write it on the page, the bottom part is what someone might play reading the shorthand version. There are several different roles taken by the rhythm section. The piano sets it up with an excerpt from the end of the piece. Notice where the rhythm section is playing independent patterns (often shown with slashes) and when they have dialog or play rhythms with the horn line. The drum part is mainly shown with slashes and the primary rhythmic material is shown on the top line. When the drummer should primarily play the rhythmic figure the measure is shown with rhythm notation.

"She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain"
One Horn + Rhythm Section

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SHE'LL BE COMIN' ROUND THE MOUNTAIN
Score SHE'LL BE COMIN ROUND THE MOUNTAIN

ALTO

TRUMPET

TROMBONE

PIANO

WRITTEN

AS PLAYED

DRUMS

WRITTEN

AS PLAYED

29 30 31 32
Score

SHE'LL BE COMIN' ROUND THE MOUNTAIN

ALTO

TRUMPET

TROMBONE

PIANO

WRITTEN

AS PLAYED

PIANO

WRITTEN

AS PLAYED

BASS

WRITTEN

AS PLAYED

DRUMS

WRITTEN

AS PLAYED

16—ONE HORN ARRANGEMENT