

All-State Jazz Recordings: Tips and Tricks Interview.

By Kyle Engelhardt, JEI President

Last year David Lang, band director at Independence HS, had seven students make recordings for the 3A all-state jazz band. All seven students were selected by blind, recorded auditions. I sat down with him recently and asked him to share his tips and tricks for making a successful all-state jazz tape. Recordings for the 2015 Iowa All-State Jazz Band are due on March 2.

KE: How do you get students interested in the all-state jazz process?

DL: I start early – students are given a link to the website (www.jeiowa.org), and then they are encouraged to download the sheet music files and mp3s as soon as the music comes out (*KE: music was released mid-November this year*). I like to get kids going right away.

KE: How do you work with them- one on one, or in a big band group?

DL: We work on the etudes in lessons sometimes, and I will play along with them. The other thing we do is to take the original example from the audio file on the JEI website, put it in Audacity (www.audacity.sourceforge.net) and slow it down using the “change tempo” function on one of the pull down menus. I’ve even just used my phone to play a phrase or two myself, record it, and email it to the student to listen for style, articulation, rhythm.

KE: Any tips for the required elements of the audition?

DL: You have to decide if it’s worth it for 1A/2A/3A to play either both pages or just one page. Most of my kids are just doing one page. For the lead players to audition, you are required to record a scale to demonstrate range (trumpet/trombone). I have the kids do multiple takes. I’ll turn on the recorder and let it run and just leave the room. I tell the students to go until they get it, then come get me. They usually have fewer nerves that way. Using audacity, I’ll pick the best take and delete the others.

KE: Do you have any tips for recording the etudes?

DL: Sometimes we will have students put one earbud in, and use a metronome for accurate time, or use the supplied etude for winds and horns and play along with it. For soloing, the improvisation is optional but encouraged.

KE: What tips do you have for recording your wind players’ improvisation sections?

DL: We have used solo sections from our jazz charts with a live combo, or we have also used iRealPro (app store) for a computer-generated background rhythm section. Aebersold’s work, too. You can record a blues, a standard, something from your jazz charts...anything that demonstrates a student’s ability to improvise.

KE: What about drum recordings?

DL: Drum recordings are a bit different. I like to have the drummer play with a click track in the headphones, and do multiple takes. For the solo component, I have them play a style that they’re best at, then have them play time for a little bit and figure out a form. Pretend that the band cuts out, solo, then come back to the time and form, then go solo. If you have access to a combo, play a head, then have the drummer solo in the middle, then come back to it. It lets them solo and demonstrates a groove.

KE: What do you use for recording equipment?

DL: Edirol mp3 recorder, on a mic stand, 15-20 feet back, 7-8 feet high. If you’re using the stereo (iRealPro, Aebersold Cd, etc), you want a balanced mix between soloist and speakers. (*KE: other people have used Zoom Recorders, or a USB mic going into the computer with Audacity, or a Superscope with a couple of mics, or any other mp3 recorder. Generally, if it sounds good, use it.*)

KE: Any other tips?

DL: Remember to get a check from the school ahead of time. If you know how many students are going to audition, have it for that amount. If you have a student back out, you can still submit that check, and JEI will refund you the amount of a missed audition, or apply the fee to any accepted students.