



## Big Band workshop 1

The aim of this workshop is to encourage awareness of diatonic chords and voicing: inversions, open and closed voicing and principles of voice leading. It is also about learning to play long notes on horns; and to introduce dynamic playing including fortissimo and sforzando. Furthermore, it is a way to look at tuning and how the horns interact harmonically. These exercises require at least three horns to enable triads to be played. One idea is to try the exercises out with a section at a time; otherwise to combine them all at once.

**Step 1.** Choose a scale/key – most likely the major or a variant on the Natural Minor scale in whatever key a la the circle of fifths. Make it clear that we are talking in concert terms, so transposing instruments will have to transpose.

**Step 2.** Start with the key chord I in its triadic state. Now assign to various horns what note they are going to play from the chord – with reference to its spelling. So, for major, it is 1 3 5. Depending on how many horns are involved – and in what proportions – the chord notes will spread out across a number of octaves. In any case, the smart move is to have this scored out in advance for the correct number of horns. Note: none of this exercise is written out – the challenge is for each individual player to work out what note they should be playing: 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> – in the right octave and in the right (transposed) key.

**Step 3.** Ask the players to play the chord all at once on the count of 4 then bring it off at the end. Now ask the players to demonstrate different dynamics with said chord; and also crescendo, diminuendo, fortissimo, sforzando etc.

**Step 4.** Next ask the players to move on to the next diatonic chord, simply moving up the correct amount – a full step or half step. They should know what notes belong to the scale/key.

**Step 5.** Continue this with all 7 chords in the scale.

**Step 6.** Repeat the exercise but this time demonstrate the difference between closed and open voiced chords as well as inversions.

**Step 7.** Next go through 7<sup>th</sup> chords in the same manner as above.

**Step 8.** Without reference to scales/keys, simply state a chord symbol in concert terms and assign a particular note to each player with reference to spelling. They have to work out the transposed chord and what each note in the chord is.

**Step 9:** To illustrate good voice leading, choose two chords and have the players move from one chord to the other in accord with good voice leading principles; which is to minimise movement within a given voice from one note to the next. Perhaps this needs some bad examples as well as good ones.

