making the scene

contemporary new york city big band jazz

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Chapter 1

New York City Big Band Scenes

Monday night is musicians' night. With Broadway theaters dark, the weekend club dates finished, and many residencies at nightclubs running Tuesday through Sunday, on Monday nights jazz musicians gather to perform and listen to the music that interests *them*. Though a thriving tourist industry may supply clubs with a stream of foreign and domestic visitors, on Mondays the venues are much freer of "amateur" clubgoers than later in the week. In an atmosphere of camaraderie and release from the week's accumulated frustrations, jazz musicians cram themselves onto tiny bandstands to play in big bands.

A cool Monday evening, October 1997. A friend and I decide to take a walk around Greenwich Village to check out a few of these big bands.[1] Within a radius of a few blocks, half a dozen bands are performing in a wide range of styles. Beyond the Village, more than we can possibly visit in a single night, an even more astounding variety of bands are performing in the downtown and midtown scenes.

We begin our big band tour at the Village Vanguard, where the journeyman Vanguard Jazz Orchestra (formerly the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra) has appeared weekly for more than forty years. Even on Monday night the club is packed with tourists (mostly European and Japanese), and musicians and friends of the band congregate in the back near the bar. The leader, John Mosca, counts off a Thad Jones classic, "Big Dipper." After an eight-bar intro played by the saxes and trombones, an extended piano solo by Jim McNeely launches the evening's opening number. For several minutes, while the rest of the band sits idly by and the rhythm section warms up, the audience waits in suspense. When the brass and reeds finally enter, the crowd explodes in approval. We stay for the first set, an interesting mix of

classic material from the band's library and brand-new arrangements written for the band by McNeely.

Just down the street at Sweet Basil, a predominantly black thirteen-piece group, the Spirit of Life Ensemble, though maybe not, strictly speaking, a big band, plays "creative jazz with a world beat." The group includes several percussionists and a singer. Though only a few doors away, the music seems to come from a completely different world. Instead of complex, hard-swinging, expertly rendered arrangements, we hear mostly Latin-flavored pieces, rather minimally arranged but played with enthusiasm.

A few blocks away, at Visiones, Maria Schneider guides her band through her intensely personal compositions. Her unique style of conducting has captivated the small crowd gathered there. As we enter she is talking about growing up in Minnesota. She describes her fears associated with a bomb shelter that was in her parents' house (the door to which was beside her bed) and shares intimate details about her life. The band then launches into "Bomb-shelter Beast," the first part of an extended suite based on Schneider's childhood memories.

We stay for only one piece so that we can race downtown to the Knitting Factory in time to hear the Oliver Lake Big Band. When Lake is not playing alto saxophone sideways to the audience, he makes strange gestures and hand signs to the band. Apparently the band has learned a secret code, for they respond with glissandos, staccato blips and blaps, long drones, and other unusual effects. A singer joins the band, her intonation somewhat unsettling to our ears. In one of the most memorable performances of the evening, Ku-umba Frank Lacy takes a wild solo, at one point removing parts of his trombone.

After several pieces we take a cab uptown to Times Square to catch another composer, Toshiko Akiyoshi, and her orchestra at Birdland. This spacious and comfortable new jazz club has instituted a big band policy featuring Chico O'Farrill's Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra on Sunday nights and Duke Ellington's Famous Orchestra—under the direction of Duke's grandson Paul Mercer Ellington—on Tuesday nights. Along with her husband, the tenor saxophonist and flutist Lew Tabackin, Akiyoshi has been leading her own band since 1974. Though not sharing intimate details of her life, Akiyoshi draws on her background by incorporating elements from traditional Japanese music. Her music reminds us of the VJO in the bop-styled lines and virtuosic demands made on the players. But, unlike the VJO, most of whose members solo in the course of an evening, Akiyoshi features Tabackin on most of the solos. Her band, made up of some of the best young Broadway pit players and jazzmen in town, glides through her difficult arrangements with apparent ease.

We do not have time (and would not have been able to get tickets anyway), but a little farther uptown at Lincoln Center, far removed from the crowded stages and dingy clubs of the Village, the tuxedo-clad Lincoln Center Jazz Or-

chestra (LCJO), under the direction of Wynton Marsalis and hosted by Ed Bradley, is performing for Vice President Al Gore and his wife and a host of other luminaries—raising a million dollars for Jazz at Lincoln Center in the process. Later we hear that after the concert the LCJO played another set for the assembled socialites and dignitaries on the terrace of the State Theater, proving that a jazz big band can still fulfill one of its original functions, providing social dance music.

We end our tour back in the Village, around the corner from where we started, at another subterranean club, aptly named Small's. Remembering that Small's serves only tea and fruit juice, we pick up a bottle of wine. In this late-night, bohemian atmosphere, the Jason Lindner Big Band, a group made up of young European Americans, African Americans, Israelis, and a female trombonist, performs for an equally youthful, enthusiastic audience. The contrast with the Akiyoshi, Schneider, and Vanguard bands is pronounced. Here the emphasis is on the soloists; the arrangements, though interesting, occupy relatively little performance time.

We have to save for a future Monday tour Howard Williams at the Garage and the Chuck Clark Little Big Band at the Internet Café. And while Monday evenings remain the prime time for big band activity, numerous other big bands, some with international reputations (such as the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, the Mingus Big Band, Chico O'Farrill's Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra, and bands led by John Fedchock, Bobby Watson, and Frank Foster), appear around town, some regularly, others sporadically. Although they do not perform frequently in their home city, two all-women big bands are also based in New York: Diva (No Man's Band) and the Kit McClure Band. All week long a procession of big bands can be found rehearsing in the Local 802 Union Hall or uptown at Boys Harbor.[2] In October 1997, the month of our tour, nineteen bands rehearsed at the hall.

NEW YORKESTRAS

New Yorkers' imaginations operate on a large scale. At gatherings of the city's social elite, the size of the band remains a measure of status and wealth. New York club date agencies continue to sell bands by the number of pieces; the ballrooms of posh hotels have rather large minimums negotiated with the musicians union, Local 802.[3] The abundance of musicians, capacious venues such as grand ballrooms and concert halls, and demands of the entertainment industry for arranged and elaborate music have stimulated the appetite for large ensembles.

"There's far more of everything in New York City," says David Berger, who has been active as a player, composer, and leader since the early 1970s. "It's much easier to fill them [big bands] in New York because there are so many players." Bill Kirchner hardly exaggerates when he states, "Only in New York

is it possible to have big bands from certain apartment buildings." Jazz musicians have taken over buildings in Brooklyn, and in Manhattan 350 West 55th Street has long been occupied by musicians, and Manhattan Plaza has provided subsidized housing for hundreds of people in the arts since the mid-1970s. The number of big bands in Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Los Angeles, the only other cities with enough jazz musicians to support a fair number of bands, is dwarfed by the number in New York. The appendix gives a far from exhaustive list (omitting many dance and nostalgia bands) of big bands active in New York in 1997–98.

New York is also distinguished by its players' high level of musicianship. The intensely competitive environment pushes players to improve. A "New York caliber" band, according to Kirchner, has "killers in every chair," not just in a few featured positions. Every horn player is likely to be an accomplished soloist and improviser as well as a proficient section or lead player. Bandleaders can draw from a large pool of solid and imaginative rhythm section players. To unify the members of a band in a common conception of swing, the drummer and bass player must provide a strong foundation and intense groove. A good big band drummer not only reads proficiently but also is strong enough to pull everyone together, a much more difficult task than in a small group. Too much activity from the rhythm section can throw the band off balance or obscure the arrangement's figures.

As might be expected, New Yorkers have a highly developed sense of place. The frequency with which jazz musicians invoke "New York" in their band names and album titles indicates the extent to which they associate the city's name with excellence. A few examples are John Fedchock's New York Big Band, the Manhattan Symphony Jazz Orchestra, the BMI New York Jazz Orchestra, Clem DeRosa's New York City Big Band, Bill Watrous's Manhattan Wildlife Refuge, CDs titled *Latin from Manhattan* by Bob Mintzer and *New York City Jazz* by Bill Warfield. Some big band aficionados outside of New York may question the city's big band hegemony, but these challenges do little to temper New Yorkers' sense of superiority.[4]

Many jazz musicians in New York feel joined to an orchestral tradition that encompasses a wide range of styles, nationalities, ethnicities, and performance contexts. Sam Burtis, veteran trombonist with many repertory orchestras and other big bands, thinks big bands are "a repository of the New York tradition," and his remarks reflect the awe felt by many musicians for the rich and diverse legacy of the city:

> I've been in New York since 1970 or '71 and I feel like I'm the beneficiary of a playing tradition that goes back to the early 1900s, maybe even earlier, an ensemble playing tradition with the Sousa/Goldman kind of band, theater players, all of the Italians that came over and the German bands, and the black bands, the Spanish bands all of which were large ensembles playing entirely

> different music. But the cream of those bands became the studio players of the teens, the twenties and thirties, which then became the jazz players of the thirties, forties, and fifties. Artie Shaw and Tommy Dorsey were in the studio before they started their bands, Glenn Miller and most of those cats in New York. . . . And all these musicians have come to New York, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and they've all left a little spore. A little vibrato from [lead trumpeter] Conrad Gozzo, high range from [trombonist] Urbie Green, triplets from [trumpeter] Joe Wilder; there's this amazing performance tradition. It's so joyous to play that people form bands and do it for free, although they would rather be paid!

From the concert bands mentioned by Burtis to the prejazz "syncopated orchestras" of James Reese Europe in the early years of the twentieth century through the bands of Paul Whiteman, Fletcher Henderson, and Duke Ellington in the 1920s, large ensembles thrived in New York. As jazz moved from small New Orleans–style groups into larger dance bands, arrangers coordinated the larger number of players. By the time Whiteman came to New York in 1920, he had already engaged Ferde Grofé to provide "symphonic jazz" arrangements. Whiteman's phenomenal success prompted others to follow suit: Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Jean Goldkette, and others formed dance bands playing arranged jazz. The dance bands gradually grew in size and, with some exceptions, became standardized in instrumentation. By the 1930s and the legendary competitions at Harlem's Savoy Ballroom between Chick Webb, Cab Calloway, and Benny Goodman, the big band had arrived at what remains its standard format: fifteen to eighteen pieces divided into trumpet, trombone, reed, and rhythm sections.

Louis Armstrong's arrival in New York in 1924 to join the Fletcher Henderson band helped to transplant the rhythmic principles of jazz into the early big band as the soloists and rhythm section absorbed Armstrong's intense but relaxed New Orleans swing feel. Don Redman, working in Henderson's band, and others successfully incorporated these "hotter" rhythms in their arrangements for large ensembles. Duke Ellington performed at the Hollywood and Kentucky clubs on Broadway (1923–27) and entertained the segregated audience at Harlem's Cotton Club (1927–31), where he developed his "jungle-style" music in addition to playing revues by white songwriters such as Jimmy McHugh and Harold Arlen. As the popularity of dance bands rose, even Armstrong appeared exclusively with big bands from about 1929 on, until he formed the first of his "all-star" sextets in 1947.

To audiences, orchestral jazz remained bifurcated between "sweeter," sentimental bands, which some swing era writers derisively referred to as "Mickey Mouse" bands, and the hotter swing-oriented dance bands. In reality, most bands played at least a little of both styles. Ellington composed gentle mood pieces as well as torrid dance charts. In live performances, Jean Goldkette's orchestra, despite the lack of evidence in their recordings, played

in a hotter style. According to some witnesses, Goldkette's ensemble outplayed the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra in a battle of the bands in New York's Roseland Ballroom in 1926.[5] Goldkette also helped to organize both black and white orchestras. He hired Redman away from Henderson to form McKinney's Cotton Pickers, an important black dance band, and he founded the Orange Blossoms, which evolved into the influential white band, the Casa Loma Orchestra.

In the late 1920s the once-thriving music scene in Chicago was dying. A crackdown on speakeasies and the closing of cabarets and theaters in that city, along with the installation of Vitaphones and other new sound technologies in theaters across the country, put many musicians out of work. The growth of radio and the emergence of national booking agencies based in New York led many to migrate to New York in search of employment. Eddie Condon, Gene Krupa, and Joe Sullivan were among an influx of white midwesterners who had cultivated the hot style. Other musicians came to town with touring bands. Ben Pollack and his "Californians" arrived in New York in early 1928. Pollack, who had picked up much of his band in Chicago, brought Benny Goodman (clarinet) and his brother, Harry (bass), Jimmy McPartland (cornet), Glenn Miller (trombone), Bud Freeman (tenor), and other top players. The trombonist Jack Teagarden soon joined Pollack for an engagement at the Park Central Hotel, where the band was billed as Ben Pollack's Park Central Orchestra. In a move that anticipated his work for Goodman several years later, Redman provided some hot arrangements for Pollack's band.[6] Audiences in Harlem in the early 1930s danced frenetically to the Cab Calloway and Jimmie Lunceford bands. Lunceford's band, billed as the "Perfect Swing Band," relied on the first-trumpet playing and superior arranging talents of Sy Oliver.

As Linda Dahl made clear in her groundbreaking book *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazz Women,* not only did women have a greater presence as sidepersons in all-male groups than is generally recognized, but all-women bands have existed from the earliest years of jazz, perhaps an outgrowth of "all-girl" minstrel and vaudeville groups.[7] In the 1920s groups such as the Parisian Redheads (also known as the Bricktops) headlined theaters like New York's Palace, and the trombonist, pianist, arranger, and conductor Marie Lucas led various female groups at the Lafayette Theater. In the swing era leading dance bands such as Ina Ray Hutton (the Blonde Bombshell) and the Melodears, Phil Spitalny's "Hour of Charm" Orchestra, and the International Sweethearts of Rhythm performed and occasionally auditioned members in New York. In 1943 the Darlings of Rhythm, a black "all-girl" big band was formed in Harlem, by a former member of the Sweethearts, the saxophonist Lorraine Brown.[8]

Latin big bands began to emerge as a major force in New York during the 1930s after "The Peanut Vendor" (1931) became a national hit and incited

the "rhumba" craze.[9] Don Azpiazú appeared with his Havana Casino Orchestra on Broadway and Xavier Cugat opened at the Waldorf Astoria. The growth of Latin bands brought Latino musicians to New York and led to a productive exchange of jobs and ideas between them and North American musicians. For example, working together in Cab Calloway's Orchestra, Dizzy Gillespie and Mario Bauzá established a relationship that helped to lay the groundwork for the first important jazz fusion, Latin jazz, in the 1940s.[10]

Because New York was the center for music publishers, booking agencies, and broadcasting industries, many big bands were based there. Leaders recruited and auditioned players, recorded in studios, and broadcast on radio shows in the city. New York attracted regional bands that wanted to become national bands. The city had large venues: the Savoy, Roseland, the Paramount, movie theaters (which featured big bands between movies), and major hotels. During extended engagements, which came as a welcome relief after weeks of road travel, bands could record there, broadcast live on radio (and later television), and be reviewed in newspapers and magazines.

For example, following its debut at Roseland after coming from Kansas City via Chicago in 1936, the Count Basie Orchestra kept New York as its home base throughout the ensuing decades of constant touring. Ambitious to raise his orchestra's status above that of a regional or "territory band," perhaps at the impresario John Hammond's urging, Basie expanded the band. He and the band also performed "stock arrangements" of popular songs, played shows, and acquired more intricate arrangements from New Yorkers such as Jimmy Mundy. But the more economical style of southwestern, blues-infused jazz and an emphasis on exciting solos gave the band its distinctive style. Reviews and live broadcasts over the CBS radio network during the band's residency at the Famous Door on Fifty-second Street in 1938, propelled Basie to international prominence.[11]

Although bands playing in a sweet style retained more mass appeal, the hot bands gathered increasing support, as was made resoundingly clear in Benny Goodman's reception at the Palomar in 1935. The greater commercial rewards reaped by white bands raised issues over white appropriation of black styles, despite the inclusion of a few African American players in the Goodman, Charlie Barnet, and other bands. Still, as Kirchner points out, big band jazz was an outgrowth of "much cross-pollination between the black and white orchestras."[12]

With the collapse of the market for touring bands in the late 1940s, big bands continued to be assembled for studio recording sessions. In New York Gil Evans, Manny Albam, Benny Carter, J. J. Johnson, John Lewis, and others recorded their arrangements with all-star big bands. Record companies featured their leading musicians with large ensembles. For example, Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane recorded with brass sections and Thelonious

Monk recorded with a ten-piece band.[13] Between 1957 and 1962, the collaboration of Gil Evans and Miles Davis produced some of the most venerated orchestral jazz in the jazz canon: *Miles Ahead, Porgy and Bess,* and *Sketches of Spain.* Another great Latin dance "invasion" in the 1950s, the mambo, brought bands led by Pérez Prado, Tito Rodriguez, Machito, Tito Puente, and others.

Over the decades many New York musicians found work and gained valuable experience in the orchestras of Lionel Hampton and Illinois Jacquet until the leaders' deaths in the early 2000s. Gerry Mulligan's Concert Jazz Band (1960–64) featured the arrangements of Bob Brookmeyer and included among its principal soloists Clark Terry. Terry founded his own ensemble, which became known as the Big B-A-D Band, in the late 1960s, which continued until 1987. The broadcasting networks maintained several full-time bands in New York until 1972, when the last of them, the NBC Orchestra, moved with the *Tonight Show* to Los Angeles. The trumpeter Thad Jones and the drummer Mel Lewis founded the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra in 1965. Determined to establish a viable working and touring band, they called on some of the leading studio and broadcasting musicians of the day. The ensemble went on to become the most influential big band of the 1970s and continues (as the VJO) to play a central role among New York big bands.

In the mid-1960s the Jazz Composers Guild Orchestra, led by the composers Mike Mantler and Carla Bley, performed and recorded avant-garde orchestral jazz, and in 1968 Bley wrote and arranged much of the politically oriented music for Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra. In the 1970s jazz lofts such as Sam Rivers's Studio Rivbea and James Dubois's Studio We provided outlets for creative jazz composition. From 1972 to 1984 "experimental" musicians found sanctuary at Karl Berger's Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, New York, about two hours from the city. Visiting teachers such as Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton, and George Lewis held workshops to discuss their compositions. Instrumentation of ensembles tended to be haphazard, and students wrote for whatever players were enrolled. The pianist Muhal Richard Abrams, founder of the Chicago-based collective of avant-garde musicians, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), moved to New York in 1977 and led and composed for both small and large groups. Beginning in the early 1980s Cecil Taylor led an influential big band.

The 1960s and 1970s also saw the first stirrings of the repertory movement with Orchestra U.S.A., Ron Roullier's New York Jazz Repertory Orchestra, George Wein's New York Jazz Repertory Company, and Chuck Israels's National Jazz Ensemble. Through all this activity and beneath the public's radar, musicians formed rehearsal bands simply for a chance to play great arrangements, meet other players, or keep up their chops. Burtis, who participated in the repertory movement early on by way of the National Jazz Ensemble, says that

big bands have remained vital in New York precisely because they provide a connection to its rich performance traditions:

> It has do with the fact that those rehearsal bands, those big bands, those Monday night gigs and by extension the repertory bands are the only place where you can learn that tradition in a concentrated manner. I mean you can go out and play club dates and you'll get a drib here and a drab there and there are working big bands—Machito's band, the Latin bands, some of the swing bands, some of the Monday night bands that have gone on to be more than that—but if I want to I can rehearse with a big band every day of the week here.

Like many other established jazz musicians in New York City, Burtis has actively participated in big bands, even when receiving little or no pay for his services. He explains that musicians of all levels benefit from big bands:

> It's the place where young musicians learn their craft and more experienced musicians keep it sharp. All the time that I've spent playing $40 gigs and $100 gigs and no-dollar gigs are the things that enabled me to go into a recording session.

The presence of many gifted players, the relative ease with which they could be organized into big bands, and the opportunities for media exposure also attracted composers and arrangers—the central figures in orchestral jazz. Aspiring arrangers could apprentice or study with established masters. Work in film, television, or radio provided valuable experience. Writers heard their music played by musicians who were able to make it sound as good as it could. As composers were inspired to write more challenging music, they pushed musicians to greater creative and technical heights.

SIZE AND INSTRUMENTATION

In contrast to the tremendous variation typical of classical orchestras, big bands seem remarkably consistent in size and instrumentation. By adhering to convention, composers and arrangers render their music more widely playable. Perhaps most important, the instruments traditionally taken up by jazz musicians have remained relatively limited: trumpets, trombones, and saxophones (often doubling on other woodwinds); and in the rhythm section, piano, bass, drums, and guitar.

Within the norm of fifteen to eighteen players, the brass is split into two groups of four (rarely five) trumpets and three or four trombones (two or three tenor and usually one bass).[14] The reed section has five players (two alto, two tenor, and one baritone saxophonist, sometimes doubling on clarinets or flutes). Piano, bass, drums, and, sometimes, guitar make up the rhythm section. The players in each section of winds follow a principal player, known as the "lead," who generally plays the top voice in the harmony and determines

dynamics, phrasing, articulation, and other stylistic matters. Along with drummers, many of whom became bandleaders (Chick Webb, Ray McKinley, Buddy Rich, Louie Bellson, Mel Lewis, and others), these highly skilled section leaders are the most important and "in demand" players of the big band.

Though the minimum number of instruments for a big band is subject to some debate, Andy Farber, saxophonist and arranger, states assuredly, "A big band is anything above a dectet." While this limit may result from the fact that few people know the Latin prefixes for the numbers eleven and above (a hendectet?), historically, nonets and dectets have been identified as distinct from big bands. Musically speaking, a band of eleven with three in the rhythm section (piano, bass, drums) leaves eight slots for horns, which can be divided equally into four brass (three trumpets and one trombone, or two of each) and four saxophones—voices sufficient for four-part writing in each section. The Ellington Orchestra of the early 1930s included eight horns (five brass and three reeds), and Ellington frequently added a trombone (usually Juan Tizol on valve trombone) to his saxophones to get four voices (for example, "It Don't Mean a Thing," 1932).

A unit of only eleven pieces will not be as powerful as a more conventional big band that consists of at least six brass and five saxophones. Moreover, the three added pieces enable the arranger to score for three autonomous sections (three trumpets, three trombones, and five saxophones), spread harmonies over a wider compass (from bass trombone or baritone sax on the bottom to high trumpets on top), and write sax solis in either five-part harmony or the traditional four-part, double-the-lead voicings (as in the group Supersax, which specialized in such harmonizations of transcribed Charlie Parker solos).[15]

Very often financial resources dictate band size. Elimination of only a few pieces can make a group economically viable. After leaving Stan Kenton in 1953, the trumpeter Maynard Ferguson experimented with various instrumental configurations, eventually settling on two fewer trombones than the standard four and eliminating one alto sax but keeping the trumpet section intact. This favoritism to his own instrument had musical reasons: his stratospheric playing required support from a full battery of trumpets voiced in their upper registers. Today, even with further cuts in his band (now only two saxes and one trombone remain), he still carries three trumpets.

For the arranger Don Sebesky, who played trombone in the original Ferguson band, the challenge was "trying to make the band, given the limitations of the instrumentation, sound bigger." He explains, "Maynard only had two trombones and that was a severe limitation. Kenton had demonstrated that the trombone was the heart of the big band, that's what gives it the substance, the inner heart. Since we only had two, we lost a lot of body that way. Everything was very trebly and upper register. We had a hard time grounding it. . . . We had to do all these tricks with orchestration that you normally wouldn't have to do with more horns at your disposal."[16] Slide Hampton, who also

played trombone and arranged for the band, found that the instrumentation provided a sufficient number of voices for him to express his ideas harmonically: "When you have three trumpets [not including Ferguson], two trombones, and four saxes, you have as many notes as you would use if you were using a full ensemble." Fewer horns eliminated some of the parts-doubling that often occurs between sections in the band's midrange. "Sometimes a big band can sound kind of heavy," Hampton says, "but Maynard's ensemble was the right size to be able to achieve everything I wanted musically. . . . [A]lthough it was small, the result sounded big. And exciting!"[17]

When Bill Warfield accepted a regular job at the Metropolitan Café in 1995 he cut several pieces from his band because of budget and space limitations. As a model for his new instrumentation, he chose the Ferguson orchestra, a favorite band of his youth. The change in band size forced him to rearrange his charts. When he wanted a "trombone" section, he voiced the baritone sax and one of the tenor saxes with the two remaining trombones. Sax solis that had been voiced in five-part harmony lost one part, and those that had been in four parts with the lead doubled at the octave simply had the doubled part eliminated.

Mike Mantler's Jazz Composer's Orchestra in the 1960s was one of the few jazz orchestras to depart radically from conventional instrumentation. According to Carla Bley, Mantler staffed the band using a "Noah's Ark" principle: "Two of each. . . . That was Mike Mantler's orchestrating thing. It was two trumpets and two tenors and two altos and two flutes and two French horns and two trombones and, I don't know, just two of everything." In putting together his eleven-piece band (twelve, if you include his occasional trombone playing), Joey Sellers also thought in pairs of instruments. He delights in the band's symmetry, explaining that it builds outward from a core of two tenor trombones to two lower instruments (bass trombone and baritone sax) to two midrange instruments (alto and tenor sax), up to two higher instruments (trumpets). His writing does not always keep these pairs intact; he actually prefers cross-sectional pairings (trumpet and sax, baritone sax and flute, trombone and sax, etc.). His original concept grew out of instrumental limitations he faced as a young writer when he was in high school.

Although most leaders would prefer full-sized bands, they do not necessarily want their ensembles always to sound, feel, or behave like a large ensemble. Contemporary big band composers and leaders often extol a small-group aesthetic of lighter textures and subtle rhythms. After all, for extended periods during solos, a big band actually *is* a small group. The saxophonist-composer Oliver Lake says, "I take the same attitude about arranging for big bands as I do in the smaller groups. I'm just tryin' to approach it as openly as I can, and not feel like I have to follow any kind of big band formula or format because that's been done so much, and done well." Laughing, he adds, "Using my original music, that means automatically it's gonna turn out

sounding different than a traditional big band." For a big band album with the Bill Warfield band, the guitarist Dave Stryker replaced the regular drummer with Jeff Hirshfield immediately before the studio date because he wanted a "lighter" touch. On the CD *Treasure Island,* Bob Belden also used Hirshfield to try to make his "big band swing like a small group."[18]

In his Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra, William Parker seeks to preserve some of the freedom of the small group. For *Mayor of Punkville,* a CD recorded in 1999, he organized his ensemble into seven sections, or "stations": (1) trombones, (2) trumpets, (3) baritone sax and tuba, (4) soprano sax and tenor sax, (5) alto saxes, (6) drums, and (7) bass. The number of players varies; on his 1997 CD, *Sunrise in the Tone World* (recorded in 1995 at the Knitting Factory), some pieces have as many as twenty-five musicians. The saxophone players may double on flutes or clarinets, and occasionally he adds piano and a vocalist. Parker explains that "these sections can be compared to the branches of a tree, branches that lead back to a main body that is rooted in the soil called sound." Players in each station have "the freedom to create their own part if they feel the part they would create is better than the written part at that moment."[19]

Instruments not traditional to jazz occasionally have figured prominently in an arranger's sonic identity. Drawing on his early experience writing for the Claude Thornhill Orchestra, Evans expanded his sonic palette through unusual voicings and combinations of instruments. "It was essentially a French horn band," said Evans of the Thornhill group. "Trumpets and trombones would play in derby-hats to avoid vibrato" and were combined with the French horns and reeds, often clarinets, to produce a variety of distinctive sonorities.[20] In his later work for Miles Davis, he added tuba and expanded the woodwind section, using double reeds and alto and bass flutes. His protégée, Maria Schneider, has managed to tease new timbral dimensions out of the big band format by "trying to make it sound orchestral instead of sectional." In 1997 she had an opportunity to write for the Metropole Orchestra in Europe. "It felt great, not having to try so hard to create varied colors. The many instruments, including strings, were like a 'super' set of Crayola crayons."[21] The reed players in her own band double on oboe, English horn, flutes (including alto and bass), clarinets (including bass and contrabass), and other woodwinds.

Strings remain a largely unexplored resource in jazz (with a few notable exceptions: recordings of Charlie Parker and Clifford Brown with strings, Stan Kenton's forty-three-piece Innovations in Modern Music Orchestra, and, more recently, Wynton Marsalis's *The Midnight Blues,* etc.). In the past, strings in jazz arrangements worked ineffectively because the string players couldn't swing. Arrangers restricted their string parts to long-value notes ("footballs" or "pads"). With jazz and classical programs coexisting in many conservatories and music departments, perhaps more string players will become experienced in swing rhythms.

The pianist Hank Jones, who has had a long-standing interest in performing with strings, appeared with a thirty-two-piece orchestra at Lincoln Center in September 1998. Wynton Marsalis has pursued collaborations with his fellow Lincoln Center constituent, the New York Philharmonic. Though the big band will remain the favored outlet of expression for orchestral jazz, other possibilities of instrumentation likely will be explored, especially with the funding available to Lincoln Center. Nevertheless, the inherent problem for strings and other orchestral instruments is that they are not loud enough. The large sections needed to compete with jazz instruments, such as saxophones, brass, and drum sets, run counter to the jazz aesthetic of one musician to a part. Necessary volume can be achieved with the use of microphones, but amplification causes blending problems with other, nonamplified instruments.

Some of these problems were apparent when Sue Mingus unveiled her new ensemble at Birdland dedicated to exploring the "compositional" side of Mingus's music on 2 March 1999. Billed as an alternative to the "boisterous, bluesy bebop" played by her "downtown" band, the Mingus Orchestra features "acoustic instruments you don't ordinarily hear in jazz."[22] This "orchestra-in-the-making" (Sue's words), like many of Charles's projects, and like the Mingus Big Band, is an ongoing public experiment. The instrumentation of this group (including bassoon, bass clarinet, and, in the beginning, cello) raised issues of balance and blend that rarely confront the big band. For example, the bass clarinetist, Roger Rosenberg, voiced his frustrations to me about not being heard during the group's initial performances. The challenge, in one musician's words, has been to retain the energy of Mingus's music without "cutting the balls off it."[23] Microphones have been added and subtracted, drummers have been put on brushes instead of sticks, and instrumentation has been changed.

When writers depart too far from convention they risk difficulty hearing their works performed or obtaining a publisher. Such considerations constrain even those musicians most open to experimentation. Inspired by Eric Dolphy's arrangements for John Coltrane's *Africa Brass* album, Oliver Lake included two French horns in his earliest compositions for big band. He was forced to reconsider the instrumentation when he "couldn't find the French horn players all the time." He also realized that if he wanted other bands to play his music he would have to "write for what was there." The AACM, as Lewis Porter notes, "developed an aesthetic that involved openness to a whole range of sounds and instruments [and] rebelled against the restrictions of bebop instrumentation."[24] Very few other groups have followed suit. In my interviews, some musicians with avant-garde leanings seem perplexed by the issue. "It's a good question," says the saxophonist Jorge Silvester. "There should be more ways of getting a big band, I mean with a different instrumentation. . . . I guess it's just traditional."

Many forces conspire to keep the size of bands small. There are few incentives for enlarging them. Although bands occasionally deploy five trumpets (the LCJO has often used five since Marsalis resumed his place in the trumpet section), virtually no bands follow the Stan Kenton model of five trombones. More than five players in each of the wind sections would require continual doubling of parts.

Adding percussion to an existing band is another story. Most often conga, timbale, and other percussion parts are unnotated, and the players simply add another layer of density to the groove and learn the breaks and hits of the arrangements aurally. Dizzy Gillespie receives credit for being the first to incorporate a conga player (Chano Pozo) in a traditional big band. Latin big bands—in the tradition begun by Don Azpiazú and Xavier Cugat and continued by Beny Moré, Tito Puente, and others—always include additional percussionists. Bob Mintzer and Sue Mingus supplemented their bands with percussionists for their albums *Latin from Manhattan* and *¡Que Viva Mingus!* respectively. Oliver Lake is considering doing some concerts with added African and Latin percussion players.

In big bands every musician retains a degree of autonomy not always found in large ensembles in other idioms. Although each player is part of the larger unit, each chair also has a clearly defined space within the band. This independence has contributed to what Charles Mingus described as "the kind of [distinctive] musicianship that has developed from each instrument [in jazz]."[25]

Players must nonetheless surrender a portion of their individuality to the section leaders, especially the lead trumpeter. Along with the drummer, this player is the central musician in the band, perhaps even more important than the concertmaster in a symphony orchestra. Many musicians would agree with the bandleader and trumpeter Dean Pratt "that in order to put together a great big band you must start with a lead trumpeter with both stamina and leadership, a drummer who can not only swing but has the instinctive ability to propel the band, and then everything else will take care of itself."[26] Some big band authorities, such as Kirchner, consider the bass equally important. Because they typically remain very much in the background, the bassists' contribution often goes unrecognized. Of course, the foundation in pulse and intonation they provide is not unique to big bands, but it is fundamental to virtually all jazz groups. Next in importance to these players are the other section leaders, the lead alto sax and the lead trombone, and the low instruments, the baritone sax and bass trombone (if present). Ultimately, to field a "New York caliber" big band, *all* chairs must be occupied by musicians who are not only expert on their instruments but also cognizant of their differing roles.

During the big band era, the art of ensemble playing was highly respected by musicians and audiences. Fans knew the personnel of their favorite bands

as well as they knew the rosters of their major league baseball teams, and they followed the movement of stars from band to band much as they would trades between ball clubs. Tommy Dorsey carried this analogy further, comparing "a dance band to a football team. In the backfield he put the soloists, the obvious stars. And in the line he put his lead men—first trumpet, first sax, and first trombone—along with the four men in his rhythm section—the pianist, guitarist, bassist, and drummer." As this description makes clear, the rest of the band, the nonimprovising, lower section players, went unrecognized. "These were strictly supportive players," says the jazz writer George T. Simon, "their lives filled with little glamour and seldom any overt appreciation."[27] Because few of these musicians were adept at improvisation, they had little hope of becoming hot players. Their only chance for stardom was to become section leaders. This ambition drove the players to develop their sound, sight-reading ability, and other skills as they jockeyed for these positions. Sitting next to an accomplished lead player was a valuable apprenticeship for an aspiring player. Nevertheless, these lesser-known musicians had to understand and play their supportive roles well, or the section leaders could have them replaced.

In most contemporary New York City big bands, nearly *all* players are accomplished improvisers. During a typical performance, almost everyone is featured on at least one arrangement. Because players have this outlet, they are less driven to become section leaders. The sharp division between soloists and lead players and the rest of the band is much less pronounced today because many players are able to adapt to different roles. Chapter 4 examines some of these roles in detail in the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. But first we look at the traditions behind New York's rehearsal and working bands and the development of repertory orchestras.