

## Lead Sheets

### What is a Lead Sheet?

A lead sheet is a chart that is used in jazz music that contains the main parts of a tune: melody, harmony, style, tempo, and sometimes hits and bass lines among other things.

### Why are they important?

Many jazz tunes are written in the form of a lead sheet. Whether they are standards or originals, it's important to know how to interpret and create your own lead sheets.

### Best Practices For Reading:

#### *Apply Common Reading Strategies*

- Check for key signature, time signature, tempo, style, roadmap, expressive markings, and difficult parts.
- Ask questions if needed.

#### *Listen To the Record*

- At the end of the day, a lead sheet can only communicate so much information. The best thing to do when given a lead sheet is to listen to recordings so that they inform the way that you interpret the lead sheet.

### Best Practices For Creating:

#### *Make Sure That the Melody and Changes Are Accurate*

- It's not uncommon for the melody or harmony of a tune to be slightly inaccurate in different reference books, so take some time to listen to recordings of the tune to make sure that everything is right.

#### *List All People Who Contributed To the Tune*

- Include all composers and lyricists on the lead sheet. Put the composers on the right side and lyricists on the left. When in doubt, put it on the right. This isn't a hard rule. The most important part is that all contributors are listed.

#### *Make It As Easy To Read As Possible*

- When considering which enharmonic spelling to use, make the choice that will make the chart easier to read. Do this even if it breaks conventional spelling-by-harmony rules.
- Beam rhythms so that the beat is not obscured. For example, if you have a series of 16<sup>th</sup> note rhythms, you should be able to see where the beats are as they occur. There are exceptions to this rule (e.g. dotted quarter-note followed by an eighth note).

#### *The Bars Per Staff Should Reflect The Phrasing*

- In an effort to make your chart as easy to read as possible, distribute the measures so that they reflect the phrasing of the tune. For example, if a tune has 4-bar phrases, its lead sheet should have 4 or 8 bars to a staff.

*Have Transpositions Ready*

- Have transpositions in C, Bb, Eb, and Bass Clef ready so that most of everybody who are likely read your chart will be able to play it.

**- Glossary -**

**Chart** – The jazz way of saying “sheet music”.

**Changes** – The jazz way of saying “chords” or “harmony”.