Take the “A” Train

Words and Music by BILLY STRAYHORN

Arranged by VICTOR LOPEZ

INSTRUMENTATION

Conductor

Vocal Solo

Solo Bb Part (Substitute for Vocal)

Solo Eb Part (Substitute for Vocal)

Solo Bass Clef Part (Substitute for Vocal)

1st Eb Alto Saxophone

2nd Eb Alto Saxophone

1st Eb Tenor Saxophone

2nd Eb Tenor Saxophone

Eb Baritone Saxophone

1st Bb Trumpet

2nd Bb Trumpet

3rd Bb Trumpet

4th Bb Trumpet

1st Trombone

2nd Trombone

3rd Trombone

4th Trombone

Guitar Chords

Guitar

Piano

Bass

Drums
NOTES TO THE CONDUCTOR

Billy Strayhorn (1915–1967), an American composer, pianist, and arranger, composed *Take the “A” Train* in 1939. Duke Ellington had offered Strayhorn a job in his orchestra and gave him money to travel from Pittsburg to New York City. Ellington wrote directions for Strayhorn to get to his house by subway. The note started, “Take the ‘A’ train…” and Strayhorn used it as the title for his composition which was to become the theme song of Duke Ellington and his orchestra, one of their biggest hits, and one of the masterpieces of jazz repertoire. Billy Strayhorn is known as the prodigy behind much of Duke Ellington’s music.

The chart is a vocal chart with flexibility. In lieu of a female or male vocalist, the chart can be performed as an instrumental solo using the included solo parts. Notice that the vocal part has been cued in many of the wind parts which provides the director with additional flexibility to include the cued parts.

At the beginning, the harmony is somewhat dense and correct intonation is extremely important. Young players sometimes forget to listen to one another and make proper adjustments in order to attain good intonation. Strive to encourage each wind player to practice their part to the point of memorization so that he or she may concentrate on playing in tune. Direct the students to always listen to their section and the ensemble sound.

Make certain that the rhythm section establishes a smooth transition from the 2-feel and the 4-feel with the walking bass. The difference is in the 2-feel—the pulse is only on beats 1 and 3. The 4-feel with the walking bass line has a 4-beat pulse. For the drummer, note that in the walking bass section, the bass drum (play it lightly) is written on beats 1 and 3 and the hi-hat is played on beats 2 and 4 (with the foot, to avoid a double bass effect).

Articulations are of the utmost importance when playing the swing style and to facilitate the teaching and learning, accurate concepts should be introduced as quickly as possible. Marcato or rooftop accents (^) are played accented, and detached with a fat interior. Say the word “daht” and you’ll emulate the appropriate sound. When playing swing eighth-note passages, all up-beats are to be articulated and lightly accented, and except for the very first and last eighth notes, all other notes are articulated softly, almost “ghosted.” This is often referred to as “up-beat” articulations. To understand this concept, it would be of great help if students listen to professional recordings of the swing style and specifically of this tune. Additional, Alfred Music provides a promotional sound file of this arrangement that can be listened to or downloaded from alfred.com/downloads.

Starting with the sax soli break in measure 37, each wind section has a unison soli. The goal in these unison sections is to play as one. I recommend sectionals if time permits to lock in articulation, intonation, and interpretation. Depending on the technical ability of the ensemble, a soloist or any other group combination thereof may be substituted in these solis. Make certain the rhythm section as well as backgrounds are kept under the winds’ dynamically at all times.

As is the case with all vocal performances, the vocalist should know that just standing and singing well on stage will rarely keep the audience engaged in the performance. So, the young vocalist needs to (1) love the song—get into it as if he or she had written it; (2) convey a smile and sell the song; and (3) move around the stage a bit to avoid standing in a stationary location. Check out YouTube for ideas.

For the rhythm section, the piano, guitar, bass, and drum parts should be well-notated.

Enjoy!

—Victor López

Victor López is a highly acclaimed educator, composer, arranger, and adjudicator. He holds music degrees from the University of Florida and Florida International University, with an Ed.D. in Educational Administration and Supervision. He has served as director of bands at the middle and senior high school levels and as an administrator in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. He has recorded and performed with various artists and has appeared in numerous music videos. He has over 450 compositions/arrangements published as an exclusive composer, arranger and clinician for Alfred Music.
TAKE THE “A” TRAIN

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TAKE THE "A" TRAIN

Vocal Solo
1st & 2nd Alto Saxophone
3rd & 4th Alto Saxophone
1st & 2nd Tenor Saxophone
3rd & 4th Tenor Saxophone
1st Baritone Saxophone
2nd Trumpet
3rd Trumpet
1st Trumpet
2nd Trombone
3rd Trombone
1st Trombone
Vocal Solo

Drums
Guitar
Piano
Bass

Medium swing = 152-160

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PREVIEW REQUIRES PURCHASE
You must take the "A" Train
to go to Bug hill up on her knee.

You must take the "A" Train
to go to Bug hill up on her knee.
Take the 'A' Train
Hurry, get on, now it's coming.

Listen to those right a humming.
All a -
Conductor 20 The feel

Take the 'A' Train

board get on the 'A' Train
soon go to Bug and way up in Harlem.

sooner go to Sugar Hill way up in Harlem.
Take the "A" Train

Swing

Conductor

Vocal

Alto 1

Alto 2

Trom. 1

Trom. 2

Trom. 3

Tuba

Drums

Bass

Pno.

Sax.

Trumpet

Find you've missed the quickest way to Harlem!

You'll find you've missed the quickest way to Harlem!

Scat singing ad lib.

Fill until...

Fill until...