

## Explanation and Description of Different Line-ups in Libby Hammer Jazz Groups - Solo, Duo, Trio, Quartet, Quintet, Combo and Big Band -

Music is made up of three main elements: harmony, melody and rhythm. Each instrument in a band fulfils one of (or a combination of) these functions. Knowing these will help you to decide which band line-up you need for your event.

### Solo

Libby Hammer is available to be booked without a band. This will usually be because you would like her to be a special guest with a band other than her own. Libby has performed as a special guest with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, The West Australian Youth Jazz Orchestra, Ensemble Vertigo and countless other Western Australian jazz groups such as the Cornerhouse Jazz Band and the Graham Wood Quartet.

However if you require a performance by a single instrument, that instrument will usually be a chordal instrument - that is an instrument that can play chords, or the harmony. The most common examples of these are the piano and the guitar. Piano and guitar are interchangeable in generic jazz line-ups, although there are differences. Piano has a dense, full sound while guitar can play much more percussively and rhythmically. But they can both play melody too, making them 'all rounders'. They can play well in a solo setting because of this. I'll talk more about melody instruments in a minute. In the smaller groups Libby works most often with piano, as is her preference.

#### **Options for Solo Performer (1)**

- **Vocalist** (as a guest with another band)
- **Piano** (instrumental - background only, cocktail)
- **Guitar** (instrumental - background only, cocktail)

### Duo

Now you can go in one of two ways depending on your needs – a melody instrument or the double bass. The double bass provides a mixture of harmony and rhythm. His job is to underpin the harmony that the piano is playing and he also helps to define the rhythmic aspects of the music and frees up the pianist a little. In this modern day, audiences generally like to hear bass frequencies (more on bass frequencies later too). Alternatively, you may prefer a melody instrument such as the voice or saxophone. Melody instruments can only play one note at a time, which is why they're not so good in a solo setting. A melody instrument will be fine on their own for a song or two (such as during a wedding ceremony), but will start to sound 'samey' and empty after a short while. There are differences between the voice and saxophone of course. A vocalist has the added element of lyrics. There are more notes about saxophones below under the **Acoustic Instruments** heading. There are different types of saxophone, the most common being alto and tenor. Many sax players also play flute, clarinet or soprano sax, which brings a nice variation to a performance.

#### **Options for Duo (2)**

- **Piano and double bass** (instrumental - background only, cocktail)
- **Piano and saxophone** (instrumental - background only, cocktail)
- **Piano and voice** (vocal - background only, cocktail, cabaret)

### Trio

The most famous trio line-up in jazz is called the 'piano trio' and consists of piano, bass and drums. Since there's no singer in this line-up, we call it 'instrumental', as are the first two duo line-ups listed above. The piano trio historically has the perfect mix of melody, harmony and rhythm to achieve the greatest variety of dynamic possibilities, so you could conceivably get people dancing with this line-up. If your requirements are just for background music then we can also explore some other trio line-ups.

Again, always starting with piano, we can add the double bass and sax, double bass and voice or even saxophone and voice. This last trio (piano, sax and voice) has two melody instruments however, so is 'top-heavy' and would also be quite hard work for the piano player. Better would be to start with piano and double bass and add either a voice or a saxophone. Incidentally, this last trio option (piano, bass, voice) is the line-up that Libby works in most often when performing cocktail music, or in an intimate cabaret setting where the emphasis is on the performance or lyrics of each song (as opposed to dancing).

#### **Options for Trio (3)**

- **Piano, double bass, drums** (instrumental - background through to dance)
- **Piano, double bass and saxophone** (instrumental - background only, cocktail)
- **Piano, double bass and voice** (vocal - background only, cocktail, cabaret)

## Quartet

The piano and double bass are 'musts' in a quartet. Unless you've chosen a piano trio, then this is the first time you will be considering the drums. Drums only play rhythm, but they do it so much better than any other instrument. If you want dancing at your function, or if you want the music to become 'upbeat' at any stage, you must have drums. Having said that, drums can also play quietly and delicately, so don't be scared of hiring a drummer if you want background music to start with. In fact jazz music tends to sound 'backgroundy' to most people regardless of how many musicians in the band. But the more instruments you have, the more variety in the music, the longer the band can play without it sounding 'samey'. A trio can only play to a certain level of intensity; a quintet can stretch it much further, especially over a period of time.

Sometimes people really want sax and voice, but don't want to stretch to a quintet. This kind of group we call a 'drumless quartet'. Again, it's a little top heavy with the two melody instruments but is fine for background only.

### **Options for Quartet (4)**

- **Piano, double bass, drums and saxophone** (*instrumental - background through to dance*)
- **Piano, double bass, drums and voice** (*vocal - background through to dance*)
- **Piano, double bass, saxophone and voice** (*vocal – background only, cocktail, cabaret*)

## Quintet

The quintet is everyone – piano (harmony), bass (low frequencies), drums (rhythm), voice (melody and lyrics) and saxophone (melody). So why have the saxophone, you might ask? Isn't it just doubling up on the function that the singer plays? Well apart from just having a great jazzy sound, the saxophone fulfils a special function in the quintet. The saxophone can take the music to 'another level'. When the music is really jumpin', the saxophone can come in and make it jump more, an important, if small, point. The saxophone also can play quietly behind the vocalist and fill out the music nicely.

### **Options for Quintet (5)**

- **Piano, double bass, drums, voice and saxophone** (*vocal - background through to dance*)

## Combo

The combo is a 9-piece band consisting of a vocalist, rhythm section (guitar, piano, bass and drums) plus four horn players: in our case, an alto saxophone, a tenor saxophone, a trumpet and a trombone. We have put together this line-up especially for clients who want the sound and look of a big band, but without the cost, and without the large stage space required by a big band. The important distinction between the quintet and the combo is that the combo plays 'arrangements' – that's our sheet music. The smaller groups have arrangements too, but small group arrangements are much more flexible to 'jam' on and easy enough to create on the spot. Combo and big band arrangements on the other hand are time-consuming to write and expensive to buy (but not impossible) so this means the combo and big band (see below) repertoire is much more structured. This is also why we can't just arbitrarily add instruments to a large line-up. Groups larger than the quintet need arrangements written specifically for that line-up otherwise the songs get too long and can sound messy. The combo has instrumental arrangements as well, so can play a fair amount of music without the vocalist if required.

### **Options for Combo (9)**

- **Piano, guitar, double bass, drums, voice, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, trumpet, trombone** (*vocal - background through to dance*)

## Big Band

We also play in a 14-piece line-up, called a big band. Traditional big bands have 18 or more musicians, so we're a 'skeletal' big band – we have just enough musicians to make it sound like a big band, which means it's more cost-effective for you! The big band can play a whole range of dynamic levels, from sophisticated ballroom music through to the punchy swing music we all associate with the classic big band sound. The smaller the room, the more intense the Big Band will seem, and vice versa. Many of the big band arrangements that we use have been adapted from traditional big band arrangements, so it is fairly easy to add musicians to our big band to make it an 18-or 20-piece band for an extra special event.

### **Big Band line-up (14)**

- **Voice, piano, guitar, double bass, drums, 4 saxophones, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones** (*vocal - background through to dance*)

## **Acoustic instruments**

Sometimes venues do not allow bands to use amplification. Firstly, Libby Hammer's solo to quintet groups can play so quietly you won't believe it. Most Perth venues that are notorious for sound restrictions know that we are completely co-operative in this regard and they are happy to have us. Of course, we always abide by sound restrictions so may not be able to 'amp up' the music, even if you want us to. Sometimes the reason you can't have amplifiers is because there is no power at your venue (such as an outdoor wedding ceremony) or you want the musicians to move about while they play (roving). Libby Hammer groups are not really 'roving' musicians, so if this is what you're after, let us recommend someone more suited to that. Here are your options for a situation where no power is available. A piano is an acoustic instrument, but unless you've got a piano out there on the lawn, Libby's pianist will be in fact using a keyboard, which of course needs power and amplification. A guitar however can be acoustic, so this is a situation where the guitar wins over the piano. Saxophone is acoustic and quite portable, so is another good choice. Double bass is acoustic as are drums. The voice is acoustic, but cannot compete with other acoustic instruments in terms of volume, so almost always requires amplification. The only situation where the voice could go without amplification is in a small enclosed space with good acoustics or where there are very few guests who will not be speaking during the performance. The fewer other instruments the voice has to compete with also helps in this situation.

### ***Options for acoustic line-up***

- ***Guitar, saxophone***
- ***Guitar, double bass***
- ***Guitar, double bass, saxophone***
- ***Guitar, double bass, drums***
- ***Guitar, double bass, drums, saxophone***

## **Which PA system to use?**

Every event will have different features which will impact on your PA choice. Your event could be in a big room or a long room, inside or outside (or both) with a quiet or noisy crowd. Each event always needs to be looked at case by case and we are more than happy to do that with you.

Libby Hammer bookings include the hire of a small PA for band use. It amplifies the voice firstly and then the sax, keyboard and bass if required. It does not amplify the drums, so the other instruments can only play as loud as the acoustic drum sound before things start getting unbalanced. The small PA caters for audiences of up to 100 and would generally be sufficient to amplify the music enough for dancing. If only background music is required, this small PA can cover an audience of 200, although if you have a noisy crowd, this PA may be too small. If an audience is stretched over a large area, a more extensive PA may be required, especially if you require the PA to make speeches or announcements.

Now the big question is usually, 'Will the band be able to get people up and dancing with this PA?' (Please also see note on **Jazz Music** below). The unsatisfactory answer to this question is, 'It depends.' We understand that it may be very important to you that people dance at your event. If I may be frank, the biggest decider on whether people will dance at your function is not the band – it's your guests. Sometimes they dance, sometimes they don't, and in our vast experience, there is no way you can *make* dancing happen. All you - the party organiser - can do is get all the ingredients right and then don't worry if they don't. If they don't dance, they are still likely to be having a wonderful time! We have done gigs where 100 people have danced madly all night – to a drumless trio line-up! We've also done gigs where the big band has swung like crazy and the guests have chosen to sit at their tables and chat instead of dance. Here are my thoughts for those of you who don't want to take a chance. Given that you've booked a line-up with a drummer, the next most important thing is bass frequencies. Bass frequencies are best transmitted through bigger PA systems, and subwoofers specifically. Oomph is also added by amplifying the drums. It's a much better idea to amplify the band rather than asking them play louder, as there's a big difference between the sound of a band that's playing comfortably and one that's doing the musical equivalent of shouting. We can put you in touch with production companies who can provide quotes for you, many of whom know the requirements of Libby's groups. The benefit in hiring a production company to provide this kind of equipment is that they can often also provide staging and lighting (a little bit of thought with regards to the lighting can also work wonders for your dancers). Proximity to the band is important too. This is easily organised by making sure the dance floor is right near the band. Some venues like to put the band and the dance floor in a room separate to the rest of the function. We find that this generally discourages dancing.

## **Jazz Music**

Libby Hammer and her band members play jazz music, and it's jazz music that's great to dance to. Some people however don't feel they can dance to jazz music and at performances ask us to change our style of music to something more modern, such as rock or disco. We have a few songs that fall into this category and are happy to play them, but we can never sound like the originals because of our instrumentation (this includes the big band too). If you are dead set on having a packed dance floor and your guests are not jazz fans, you may like to consider having a DJ who can play pop music after the jazz band finishes. Again, we'd be happy to recommend a DJ for you.

Every event is different and we hope that this information has made it easier for you to choose music for your function. We're here to make sure you have the most successful event possible, so don't hesitate to ask if you have any more questions.

Jody Harrison • [jody@solotosymphony.net](mailto:jody@solotosymphony.net) • 0413 610 565

Libby Hammer • [libby@libbyhammer.com](mailto:libby@libbyhammer.com) • 0412 577 229