

Saxophone playing tips

I) Sound - your most important asset

Sound is 20% equipment, 80% YOU, the player

A) Fixing player problems

1) Mouthpiece exercises

- i) Notes to shoot for (classical):
 - soprano = C (concert)
 - alto = A (concert)
 - tenor = G (concert)
 - bari = D (concert)
- ii) Jazz notes are all 3 half-steps lower than classical (e.g. alto = F#)
- iii) 5 minutes' worth of long tones
- iv) Move on to short notes, then add dynamics
- v) Expand mouthpiece range: goal is one octave
- vi) Play melodies on m.piece (Twinkle twinkle, Happy Birthday, etc.)

2) Long Tones

- i) Always play with a tuner
- ii) Play loud at first to exercise diaphragm
- iii) Move on to adding dynamics and vibrato (see below)
- iv) Exercise: 2" Bb, 6" A; 2" Bb, 6" Ab, etc. and repeat for high range
- v) Many exercises are possible, but the important thing is to practice in ALL ranges (low, middle, high)
- vi) Play slow melodies as a more interesting way to get in long tone practice (Bozza's *Aria*, Still's *Romance*, Ibert's *Aria*, etc.)

3) Vibrato

- i) Done with jaw, not diaphragm
- ii) "Ya-ya" sensation
- iii) Fastest tempo - 4-5 squiggles per second
- iv) Exercise - set metronome to mm.=60 and do 1,2,3,4,5,4,3,2,1 squiggles
- v) Be careful not to overuse, especially in jazz!

4) Overtones

- i) Good for developing flexibility, high register, intonation
- ii) Practice getting octaves & 5ths on low Bb, B, C, C#, and D
- iii) Work up and add three octaves' worth of overtones to low notes
- iv) Play scales and melodies using overtones
- v) Strive for intonation and "pretty" overtones

B) Fixing equipment problems

1) Instrument not working

- i) Horn should have yearly checkups, just like people
- ii) Common problems - spring loose, screw loose, G# valve leaking
- iii) Pads and corks should not be ripped

2) Reeds

- i) Old reeds can be too soft
- ii) Soak occasionally in hot water and/or hydrogen peroxide
- iii) If reed is too hard, it can be sanded (450 grit or smoother)
- iv) Good brands of reeds for jazz: Vandoren V16
Rico Jazz
Alexander Superial
Vandoren Java
Vandoren regular (better for class.)
Peter Ponzol

3) Mouthpieces

- i) Good mouthpieces for classical: Selmer S80 or S90 (C* facing)
Eugene Rousseau NC4 or NC5
- ii) Good mouthpieces for jazz: Meyer (rubber or metal)
Otto link (rubber or metal)
Morgan
SR Technologies
Berg Larsen

4) Horns (yes, believe it or not, horns are 4th on the list!)

- i) Don't bother with intermediate horns
- ii) Good student horns: Yamaha, Keilwerth, Selmer
- iii) Good Pro horns: Yamaha Custom or 675
Selmer Super-Action Series II or Series III
Keilwerth SX90R or Shadow
Yanagisawa #991 or higher
- iv) Good used pro horns: King
Conn
Martin
Selmer Mark VI or Balanced Action
- v) Be careful with used horns - you don't always know what you get!

II) Technique

Flawless technique will help you have great time, which is your next most important asset after a beautiful sound

A) Scales

- 1) Major, harmonic minor, melodic minor, modes, chromatic, whole-tone, diminished, augmented, pentatonic, blues
 - i) Practice all of the above one octave, then full range
 - ii) Practice in all 12 keys
 - iii) ALWAYS practice scales with a metronome
 - iv) Practice scales straight, then in broken 3rds and 4ths, then in diatonic triads and 7th chords

B) Arpeggios

- 2) Triads: major, minor, diminished, augmented
 - i) Practice the above one octave, then full range in all 12 keys
ALWAYS using a metronome
 - ii) Practice them straight, then in inversions and broken intervals
- 3) Seventh chords: Major, dominant, minor, half-diminished, fully diminished

- i) One octave, then full range in 12 keys with metronome
- ii) Straight, then in inversions and broken intervals

C) Etudes

- 1) Good, musical ways to build reading, technique, and musical skills
- 2) Good etude books:
 - Rubank Selected Studies
 - J.L Small - Rhythmic and Melodious studies
 - W. Ferling - 48 Famous Studies
 - M. Mule - 53 etudes (3 volumes)
 - Guy Lacour - 50 Etudes Faciles (2 volumes)
- 3) Good jazz etudes:
 - Jim Snidero - jazz conception (w/ CD)
 - Fred Lipsius - reading key jazz rhythms (w/CD)
 - L. Niehaus - Jazz conception for the saxophone
 - Bob Mintzer - 14 Etudes
 - Any solo transcription book

D) Transcribing solos

- 1) Great not just for technique, but for learning the jazz language quickly
- 2) Good players to start with: Paul Desmond (alto), Lee Konitz (alto), Stan Getz (tenor), Dexter Gordon (tenor), Gerry Mulligan (bari)

E) Classical Literature: Sonata (P. Creston), Concerto (A. Glazunov), Tableaux de Provence (P. Maurice), Sonata (P. Hindemith), Solo (B. Heiden)

III) Articulation

- A) Articulation should be done with the middle, NOT the tip of the tongue
- B) Practice mostly legato tonguing (which is hardest), but strive to have a range of articulations from very hard to very soft
- C) "Jazz" tonguing is tonguing the first note, then every upbeat after that (slur all downbeats)
- D) The best source for learning articulation - transcribing solos!

IV) Special effects

A) Altissimo range

- 1) Saxophone really has a range of well over three octaves
- 2) Notes above high F or F# will come as a natural byproduct of successful overtone production (see above)
- 3) Practice first as long tones, then add to scales, melodies, and solos

B) Scooping

- 1) Done with both jaw and voicing (i.e. tongue position)
- 2) Basically, a very large vibrato "squiggle" at the start of the note
- 3) Be careful not to overuse scoops!

C) "Dead tonguing"

- 1) Also called "ghosting notes"
- 2) Put tongue on the reed but have the sound still speak
- 3) Practice first on one note, then expand to include scales, melodies, solos
- 4) The best place to learn how to appropriately use dead tonguing (and all special effects): You guessed it - transcribing solos!

V) Concluding thoughts

A) Sightreading

- 1) Extremely important - musicians who can't sightread never get called to play professionally
- 2) Practice reading a few minutes (or more) every day using whatever music is handy

B) Doubling

- 1) Next to sightreading, this is what gets me the most gigs
- 2) Start with either flute or clarinet, add the other one later
- 3) Find yourself a good teacher - preferably a specialist, not a doubler

C) Ear Training

- 1) Jazz is an aural language, so the better ears you have, the better player you will be
- 2) Jamey Aebersold has many great books on the subject
- 3) A great way to train the ears - transcribe solos!

D) Theory

- 1) Goes hand-in-hand with ear training
- 2) Will make you a better reader, a better improviser, and better composer