

# All Things Saxophone- for beginners, advanced students and professionals

*with Navy Band Principal Saxophonist MUC Jonathan Yanik*

## TOPICS:

- Instrument Assembly and care
- Hand and instrument positioning
- Reed Tips
- Embouchure basics
- Tongue/throat positioning and articulation
- Using effective air
- Equipment suggestions
- Practical Exercises to improve fundamentals
- Basic repertoire for concert and jazz saxophone
- If time, extended techniques!
- Q and A

## Saxophone Basics

- Easy to play, hard to master.
- Equipment matters!
- Ability to play multiple styles is expected.
- Top focus should be on playing with a beautiful sound!

## Instrument Assembly and Care

- Solid case is crucial.
- Grab saxophone by the body when taking it out of the case (not the bell or palm keys).
- Center the neck.
- Mouthpiece on neck, ligature on mouthpiece, reed under ligature (in that order!)

## Reeds

- Soak or moisten your reeds before playing.
- Place the reed under ligature, avoid ligature over reed.
- Good reed positioning is huge!
- Reed hard? – move down. Reed soft? Move up.

## Saxophone Care

- Silk swabs are always preferable to other types of swab.
- Safely store mouthpiece.
- Proper reed storage is very important- humidity controlled is best.

## Playing Position

- A properly fitted and comfortable neck strap is very important!
- Mouthpiece should position comfortably on the lower lip with the correct neck strap adjustment/height.

- Thumbs= stabilizers for the instrument. Can also use the right arm to stabilize on the top of the hip.
- Hands in a C position with fingers on center or edge of the pearls.
- Soprano/Alto in center when seated, Tenor and Bari on the right thigh.

#### Embouchure and tongue/throat positioning

- Embouchure shape, embouchure positioning on the reed/mouthpiece, and tongue position have a huge impact on your sound!
- Lower lip should rest where the mouthpiece and reed meet.
- Mouthpiece patches on top can help stabilize.

#### Concert/Classical Saxophone Embouchure Fundamentals

- Step 1- teeth firmly on the top.
- Step 2- lower lip rolls/firms up over teeth.
- Step 3- Corners in to make a 'drawstring bag' supported circle around the mouthpiece and reed. Can also think of whistling for the right shape.
- Think of singing or saying "OOOO" for lip position.

#### Concert/Classical Tongue position fundamentals.

- Mouthpiece pitch is critical for the right position!
- Alto=A2-B2, Soprano=C3-D3, Tenor =G2-A2, baritone=D2-E2.
- Practice mouthpiece ONLY control with scales, arpeggios, or simple songs.
- Tongue should be slightly rolled back in the mouth with the tip of the tongue near the tip of the reed.
- Back of the tongue out of the way of the air column from the throat
- Sides of the tongue spread to touch the molars (train on tracks). "Hiss/Heee"
- Evenness of sound through registers is the goal.
- Syllables like yah/haaa /hee you can use for positioning.

#### Jazz/Pop Saxophone Embouchure Fundamentals

- Step 1- teeth on the top, take more mouthpiece than classical.
- Step 2- leave lip relaxed, fleshy and perhaps even rolled out a bit.
- Step 3- Corners in, leave room for reed to vibrate!
- Think of singing or saying "HOOOO" for lip position.

#### Jazz/Pop Tongue position fundamentals.

- Mouthpiece pitch 2nd-4th lower than classical pitches, e.g. Alto G-E.
- Tongue strikes the reed below the tip= more percussive sound.
- Back of the tongue WAY out of the way of the air column from the throat.
- FLEXIBILITY and COLOR CHANGES between registers is good here.
- Syllable HA= warm but very fast and supported air.

#### Breathing

- Don't overlook this for saxophonists!

- Low airstream, supported- watch for shallow air!
- Breathing noise says a lot and the quality of the breath support.
- Mouthpiece/neck alone exercises help to focus on air quality.

#### Some equipment suggestions:

- *Concert Saxophone Reeds*- Vandoren Blue Box, D'Addario Reserves/VENN (plastic), Legere Signature (plastic). Typically between sizes 3-4.
- *Jazz Saxophone Reeds*- Vandoren Java/Red Java or V16s, D'Addario Select Jazz, Rigotti Golds, and any plastic options work too. Typically 2.5-3.5 range.
- *Concert Mouthpieces*- Selmer Concept/S90s/C Star, Vandoren Optimum/Profile/V5 Series, D'Addario Reserve, Eugene Rousseau, etc.
- *Jazz Mouthpieces*- Otto Link, Meyer, Vandoren V16/Java Series, D'Addario Select Jazz, Jody Jazz (many models), List goes on and on!
- *Good Saxophone brands*- Yamaha, Selmer, Yanagisawa, Keilwerth, Cannonball, etc.

#### Practical Exercises

- 1) Overtones. \*EXTREMELY IMPORTANT
- 2) Mouthpiece pitch exercises
- 3) Voicing/Pitch Bends
- 4) Longtones
- 5) Scales, all forms
- 6) Articulation exercises
- 7) Technique drills

#### Standard method books/etudes:

- 1) One of the following altissimo/overtone studies- *Voicing-Sinta, Top Tones*- Rascher, *Saxophone hightones*- Rousseau, etc.
- 2) Complete study books- *Chops*- Dan Graser, Trent Kyanson *Daily Studies*, Taffenel/Gaubert *17 Daily Exercises*, Teal *Daily Studies*
- 3) Beginner-Intermediate etudes- Klose *Daily Studies*, Voxman *Selected Studies*, Lenny Niehaus *Basic Jazz Conception*
- 4) Intermediate Etudes- Ferling *48 studies*, Mule- *Berbiguier/53/Etude Variees*, Bozza- *12 Caprices*, Lenny Niehaus *Intermediate-Advanced Jazz Conception*, Jim Snidero *Jazz Conception*
- 5) Advanced Etudes- *Nouvelles Etudes por Saxophone*-Londeix, Karg-Elert *Etudes*, Greg Fishman *Jazz Saxophone Etudes*

## Repertoire

- The easiest way to check for repertoire is to look at these places:
  - 1) Beginner-Intermediate- solo and ensemble lists, such as in Texas, Virginia, Illinois.
  - 2) Advanced repertoire- Check major saxophone school websites such as Michigan, Indiana, Northwestern, or Eastman to name a few.
  - 3) Jazz repertoire- transcribe the greats' solos in order to understand all there is to know about the feel and structure- Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Sonny Stitt, Sonny Rollins, Cannonball Adderley, the list goes on!