

FIX MY SAXOPHONES! Inventive and Creative Teaching Techniques for Improving Young Saxophonists

2005 Midwest Clinic

59th Annual Conference

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Gold Room, Congress Plaza, 11:00 a.m.

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ABSTRACT: The saxophone is one of the easiest instruments to play...incorrectly! This interactive clinic uses visualization, physics (the fun kind!) and a bit of humor to help you teach your saxophonists to improve their tone, technique and musicality.

1. Introduction

- a. Expressive quality of saxophone
- b. Understanding why our saxophones sound so bad
 - i. What is their role in band
 - ii. The saxophone is NOT a clarinet
 - iii. Easiest instrument to play...poorly
- c. Defining a solution to the problem
 - i. Identifying how our students learn best
 - ii. Utilizing our students "talent" for learning
 - iii. Determine if "traditional" pedagogy is always helpful

2. Playing Position

- a. The saxophone triangle and the tension tree
- b. The highs and lows of "marching band"
- c. Growing into your saxophone
- d. Easy fixes to improve hand and playing position
 - i. "Tell me your address"
 - ii. PLAY BALL!
 - iii. The purpose of the thumb hook?

3. Tone Production

- a. Air
 - i. Temperature
 1. Fogging a mirror
 2. Go ahead...blow your horn!
 3. The balloon trick

- ii. Speed, Volume and Dynamics
 - 1. Planes, trains and automobiles
 - b. Rethinking the “traditional” embouchure
 - i. Draw string bag vs. the wedge
 - 1. The purpose of the top lip
 - c. Embouchure vs. Throat Position
 - i. Who is in charge?
 - ii. The “lease breaker”
 - d. Tension in the face
 - i. How much is necessary
 - ii. Puff your cheeks...ARE YOU KIDDING?
- 4. Technique Development
 - a. Hand and finger motion
 - i. The wonders of “tickey tack”
 - ii. “Snap, crackle and pop”
 - b. Articulation
 - i. Wasted motion and anchor tonguing
 - ii. Using the tip of the tongue
 - 1. Having a “flair” for articulating
 - 2. The three-hole punch
 - 3. Using visualization
 - 4. We already know how to articulate
- 5. Postlude
 - a. Equipment questions
 - i. The perfect mouthpiece
 - ii. Reed needs
 - iii. Ligatures
 - iv. Saxophones
 - b. Open questions from the audience

Middle of the Pitch

The purpose of this exercise is to improve the overall saxophone tone by finding the ideal tonal placement within a pitch. Since the saxophone is a conical instrument and it has such tremendous flexibility in pitch (on any particular note), it is important that the player identify and reproduce the correct placement of each pitch on the saxophone.

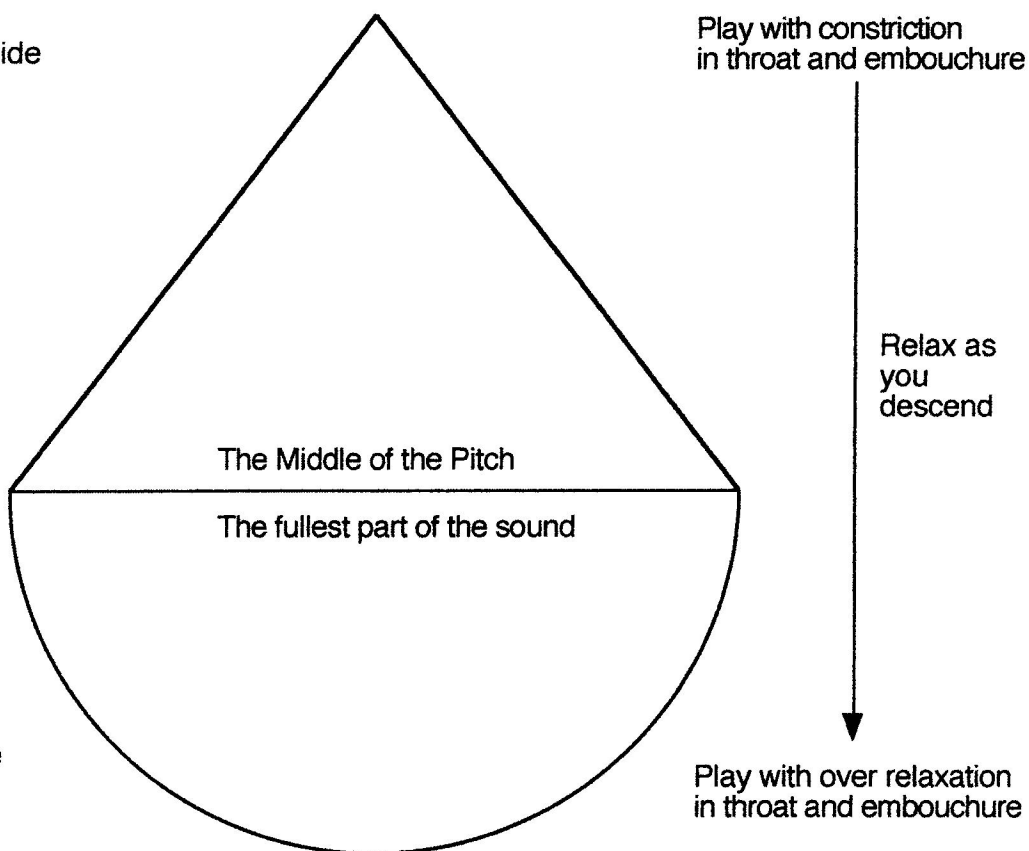
Ideally, this process should become intuitive, through the listening process, where the saxophonist begins to equate a feeling with a tone color.

A pitch has both a sharp side (+) and a flat side (-), In-between is what we refer to as "the middle of the pitch". It is in this area that the great amount of overtones occurs, creating the fullest, most colorful sound possible.

THE PITCH:

The Sharp Side

The Flat Side



Rules:

1. Perform exercise at forte or fortissimo volume
2. Perform exercise slowly enough to hear timbral/pitch change
3. Once you have found the M.O.P. on a given note try to duplicate that quality immediately by repeating the tone, this time with no M.O.P

Basic Embouchure

The establishment of a good embouchure is the most basic, yet most important aspect in the construction of a quality saxophone tone.



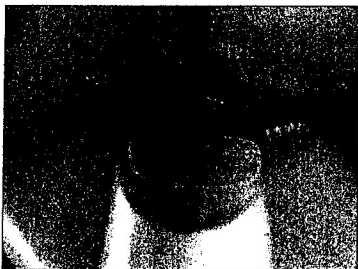
The mouth, when at rest, is not round it is flat. Notice how the top and bottom lip form a relatively straight line. By recognizing how the human face is constructed and utilizing its inherent qualities, the saxophonist is capable of constructing a relaxed embouchure.



Notice how the muscles around the mouth contract when forming the "traditional" saxophone embouchure. Creating this embouchure uses more muscles than when at rest, thus the player expends more energy and effort to create it. Additionally, notice how the bottom lip is curved creating a "U" shape.



Simply placing the bottom lip over the bottom teeth (where flesh tone meet skin tone) we use the least amount of energy and more closely resemble the mouth at its relaxed state. Additionally, notice how the bottom lip maintains a straight line that will be parallel to the reed.



Here the mouthpiece is placed on the flat bottom lip. The top lip drops to form a seal with the mouthpiece. Not only is the face more relaxed (thus less wasted energy) it allows more the reed to vibrate, thus allowing more overtones, creating a fuller sound.

Articulation

Articulation is one of the most expressive tools the saxophonist can use to create tone color. It is simply not enough to execute articulations in the abstract, one must be aware of the stylistic application of this technique when applied various musical styles as well as understanding how to reproduce articulations to interact with other instruments.

"Lay" Articulation "Day" Articulation "Tay" Articulation "Tot" Articulation

Least amount of tongue on reed → Greatest amount of tongue on reed

The image shows a musical staff with four groups of notes. Above each group are symbols representing articulation: horizontal dashes for 'Lay', zig-zag lines for 'Day', dots for 'Tay', and upward-pointing triangles for 'Tot'. Below the staff, an arrow points from left to right, indicating that the amount of tongue on the reed increases from the first group to the last.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. Place the tongue in the correct position by saying the word "LAY".
 - Tongue should be relaxed
 - Tongue should be wide and flat
 - Use only the tip of the tongue to articulate (paper trick)
2. Remember that the tongue interrupts the vibration of the reed not the air column
3. Vocalize the above articulation without the saxophone to judge the duration of the tongue on the reed (hard pallet).
4. Focus on the tongue bouncing on a column of air. Air is still present even though the reeds vibration is being interrupted.