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Title: Jazz Sound for Classical Saxophonists.
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Source: Teaching Music; Apr2005, Vol. 12 Issue 5, p34-39, 6p, 3 Black and White Photographs

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: SAXOPHONISTS
INSTRUMENTALISTS
MUSIC -- Instruction & study
MIDDLE schools
JAZZ
AFRICAN Americans -- Music
POPULAR music & classical music

Abstract: In this article, the author presents suggestions to help student saxophonists practice and perform both classical and jazz music. Middle school and high school saxophonists will use a classical style for concert band, but jazz band opens up a whole new realm of sound and style that is often unfamiliar. Teachers can help students understand the differences between classical and jazz performance styles by sharing techniques and tips relating to sound production, mouthpieces and reeds, phrasing, and articulation.

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Full Text Word Count: 2297

ISSN: 10697446

Accession Number: 16557274

Database: Music Index

Full Text Database: **Section:** Band

Jazz Sound for Classical Saxophonists

Young saxophonists often find themselves in a quandary over what to practice or how to learn the various styles required for school ensembles. Middle school and high school saxophonists will use a classical style for concert band, but jazz band opens up a whole new realm of sound and style that is often unfamiliar. Teachers can help students understand the differences between classical and jazz performance styles by sharing techniques and tips relating to sound production, mouthpieces and reeds, phrasing, and articulation. The type of classical saxophone playing

described here would be appropriate for playing a classical solo or playing in a wind ensemble, concert band, or chamber group, such as a saxophone quartet. Students participating in the school jazz band or a small combo must develop a different sound. Here are some ideas to help student saxophonists practice and perform both classical and jazz music.

Early jazz musicians were noted for their rough timbres, a characteristic of African music carried over into African-American music. Listen to recordings of early Dixieland jazz players such as clarinetist Johnny Dodds, trumpeter and singer Louis Armstrong (especially his singing), Delta blues singer Robert Johnson, and rock performers like Mick Jagger. All these performers have a rough timbre. This becomes evident when recordings of classical performers on the same instrument are juxtaposed with those of jazz and pop musicians like those listed above. The differences between a clear classical tone and the rough timbres of pop and jazz artists have been discussed by music critics and historians since the birth of jazz more than one hundred years ago. Mark Gridley, in his book *Jazz Styles* (Prentice Hall, 2002), describes how jazz musicians, particularly saxophonists, incorporate rough sounds. Other texts addressing the difference between jazz and classical saxophone sound are Larry Teals *The Art of Saxophone Playing* (Summy-Birchard, 1963) and *The Cambridge Companion to the Saxophone* edited by Richard Ingham (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Sound Production

Generally, the classical saxophonist needs an even tone and timbre in all registers. The student should strive for a timbre that is round and relatively dark. The embouchure should be basically unchanged in all registers. To help achieve this, the saxophonist should keep his or her head erect and the saxophone neck strap high enough to support the weight of the instrument. Although there are some variations, a good classical saxophone embouchure has a bottom lip that is curled over the bottom teeth; the top teeth should rest lightly on the mouthpiece with the top lip turned out and the corners pulled in. In effect, the embouchure is formed like pronouncing "oo" with the bottom lip rolled over the bottom teeth. Some classical saxophonists that young players should listen to are Marcel Mule, Sigurd Rascher, Eugene Rousseau, Donald Sinta, and Fred Hemke. Their tones are usually clear, ringy, and even in all registers. There are some variations in sound among the schools of saxophone playing (French, German, and American), but they are not drastically different. Mule's playing is an example of the French style; his sound is vibrant, and his vibrato is fast and wide. Rascher's playing is an example of the German and American schools; his sound is somewhat brighter than Mule's, and he pioneered the use of altissimo (notes played above the theoretical range of the instrument.)

Jazz musicians strive to attain timbre changes in different registers. The low register tends to be fuzzier, the middle is clearer, and the high register is thinner and ringier. If you watch jazz musicians play, you will often see them adjust their embouchure to change the timbre as they

move from one register to another. Often the jazz player drops the jaw slightly and lowers the neck strap so that the mouthpiece comes out of the mouth at a slightly upturned angle. When dropping the jaw, the saxophonist can also drop the lower teeth away from the reed to produce a fuzzier, fluffy tone. This is called subtoning.

In general, the jazz saxophonist will also overblow. The classical saxophonist plays with a restrained and refined tone. The jazz player tends to increase the airflow and push the boundaries of volume beyond what is usually accepted in a concert band or orchestral setting. The result is a tone with a rougher and louder sound that has a much brighter edge. Overblowing has historical precedent: the rough timbres of African and African-American music were carried over into early jazz. Overblowing is one way for saxophonists to achieve this characteristic rough tone.

It is difficult to make generalizations about jazz saxophone tone production since accepted timbres vary greatly. If you listen to the edgy, raspy tone produced by David Sanborn and then compare that to the light, dry sound of Paul Desmond, you will realize that one set of characteristics will not apply to all jazz saxophonists' sounds. This is why it is so important for aspiring jazz musicians to listen to different players; they need to explore the possibilities, pick favorite players, and emulate their sound. Most students do not have the opportunity or privilege to work with professional saxophone players. However, they should be encouraged to listen to and evaluate every saxophonist they hear, both live and recorded, to develop a concept of what good saxophone playing sounds like. (See Classical and Jazz Recordings for Young Saxophonists on page 36.)

Mouthpieces and Reeds

Any discussion about saxophone sound needs to include mouthpieces and reeds. Mouthpiece selection should be based on personal taste, preference of sound produced, and the physical makeup of the student. While selection of mouthpieces and reeds is a matter best dealt with in conjunction with a good private instructor, there are some basic components of saxophone mouthpiece construction that you should be familiar with. These include the lay and facing of the mouthpiece, the size and shape of the chamber, and the thickness of the rails. The facing is the distance between the tip of the reed and mouthpiece, and the lay is the length of the tip opening where the mouthpiece meets the reed. A larger opening allows the reed to vibrate more, while a smaller tip opening means the reed will vibrate less.

Classical saxophonists tend to choose mouthpieces that help provide evenness of tone in all registers, quick articulation response, and dark timbre. Usually the classical saxophonist will choose to play on a mouthpiece made of hard rubber with a relatively close lay. The close lay allows the player greater control in extreme registers (above high C and below low D). The Seimer S-80 C[*] comes to mind as a typical example.

The typical jazz mouthpiece often has a larger tip opening for brighter, more open sounds.

However, mouthpieces with larger tip openings are much more difficult to play softly in the low register, and the upper register can be thin. If the mouthpiece produces a thin sound in the upper register, the player may alter the sound with embouchure adjustments by bringing in the corners of the mouth or adjusting the tension of the lower lip. Sometimes professionals will have a mouthpiece specialist make alterations to their mouthpiece using files and other tools. These specialists can alter some of the mouthpiece's dimensions to improve sound, intonation, and responsiveness. One mouthpiece with a larger tip opening is the Meyer 5M or 6M (the M stands for medium chamber). Many tenor (and some alto) saxophone players opt for mouthpieces made of metal because they provide more sound projection (louder), are more responsive, and are more free blowing. Lack of control can become an issue with these mouthpieces, especially for younger players.

Each manufacturer uses a different number or letter system to denote the different mouthpiece facings. There is no industry standard when it comes to labeling mouthpiece configurations. Most lower numbers (3 or 4) or lower letters (C or C[*]) correspond to a mouthpiece with a closer tip opening. Larger numbers correspond to greater tip opening (5 or 6, D or E). Each mouthpiece maker has its own unique way of denoting its various facings.

It may be impractical to expect your middle or high school saxophonists to own both a classical and jazz mouthpiece, so most students and teachers have to compromise. They search for a mouthpiece that allows students to play both jazz and classical styles. If this is what your students are doing, then perhaps changing reeds can help them achieve the desired timbre changes. To get that overblown, lead alto sound and projection, have the students play on a harder reed — up a half or whole strength. This will give them more of the zip they need when playing jazz. But when playing in an orchestra or wind ensemble or preparing for a classical sax audition, put on a softer reed to allow playing very softly in the low register.

Phrasing

In the classical style, the typical shape of the phrase is like an arch. The player starts a phrase softer, builds to the climax of the phrase, and then tapers the volume to the end of the phrase. The shape is often symmetrical. Dynamic shading is usually gradual and subtle.

Not so with phrasing in jazz. In jazz, most held notes are attacked with a *sforzando* and crescendoed, regardless of where they fall within the phrase. Charlie Parker was a master of improvising asymmetrical phrases. If you listen closely to his phrases, they seem to end abruptly in surprising places or are accented in a way that makes the line feel syncopated, even though the line may be made up of eighth notes and not technically syncopated. In jazz, accents are generally heavier than in classical and are peppered throughout the phrase, giving the line a jaunty, jagged feel. Typical bebop lines require the peaks (top notes) of melodies to be accented and the lowest notes in a line to be swallowed, or ghosted. The music example in figure 1 shows how a bebop

player like Parker might typically play a jazz phrase. The notes in parentheses are ghosted. The result of such technique is a highly syncopated line that sounds unpredictable and asymmetrical. To the ear accustomed to hearing classical phrasing, this line seems unnatural and perhaps unmusical. To the ear accustomed to jazz, the line "swings."

Articulation

Articulation is an extension of the sound and phrasing differences between classical and jazz. In good classical articulation, the tongue should interrupt the sound, but the actual sound of the tongue should not be audible. In jazz, articulation is often exaggerated. Just as the sound is often overblown, the articulations in jazz are heavier and rougher. These differences can be readily heard when you compare a recording of Marcel Mule with one by Cannonball Adderley. Mule's tongue is light, agile, and nonobtrusive. Adderley uses the tongue percussively to help create rhythmic intensity.

Articulation is also affected by the asymmetrical idiosyncrasies of phrasing. Many jazz players use a technique called half-tonguing to ghost the notes in a bebop line. Half-tonguing or damping involves placing the tongue over half of the reed without stopping the air, allowing the other half to still vibrate. This technique is often used by David Sanborn. The result is a muffled or dampened tone. When the tongue is released, it produces an accent. This technique allows the saxophonist to play accented and ghosted pitches with the tongue rather than by changing airflow or support from the diaphragm. This type of articulation was developed in conjunction with bebop in the 1940s. Artists like alto saxophonist Charlie Parker used this type of tonguing when playing very fast passages; the unusually placed accents and dropped or ghosted notes characteristic of bebop music were executed easier at breakneck speeds with the tongue than with variations of the diaphragm.

A good classical musician will taper the end note of phrases gracefully, usually without stopping the air with the tongue. (Think "taaaaahh — ." See figure 2.) Jazz musicians, on the other hand, will stop the air on the final note of a phrase abruptly with the tongue. (Think "daaaaahht." See figure 3.) Understanding the proper articulation for a piece can be easier for students if they say or sing their phrases using appropriate articulation syllables before playing them.

THROUGH INSTRUCTION IN

particular areas such as basic tone production, phrasing, and articulation, students will begin to realize what they should listen for and decide what and how to practice. But this is just the beginning for them. To really develop a good, classical or jazz sound, students need to hear saxophone performances, whether live or recorded. By listening, young players will learn how to internalize and execute proper stylistic variations.

Classical and Jazz Recordings for Young Saxophonists

CLASSICAL RECORDINGS

Title

Le Patron Saxophone
Saxophone Masterpieces
Ward Saxophone Concerto
Classical Bouquet
Excursions

Artist

Marcel Mule
Eugene Rousseau
James Houlik (tenor sax)
Steve Mauk (soprano sax)
Clifford Leaman

Label

Clarinet Classics CC0013
Wax RICA-1001
Albany Records AR001
Open Loop 008
Equilibrium EQ55

JAZZ RECORDINGS

Title

Kind of Blue
A Love Supreme
Time Out
The Essential Charlie Parker
Pearls
Body and Soul
A Musical Romance
Tales from the Hudson

Featured Artist

Miles Davis
John Coltrane
Dave Brubeck
Charlie Parker
David Sanborn
Coleman Hawkins
Lester Young
Michael Brecker

Saxophonists (if not the leader)

Cannonball Adderley, John Coltrane

Paul Desmond

Label

Columbia 40579

MCA 29017

Columbia CL 1397

Verve V/V6 8409

Elektra 61759

RCA Bluebird ND 85717

Columbia JG/JGA-34837

Impulse IMP 11912

Jazz and Classical Saxophone Comparison Chart

Sound production

Mouthpieces and reeds

Phrasing

Articulation

Classical

Evenness of tone and timbre in all registers

Mouthpieces have closer tip opening, which allows more control in low and high registers

Softer strength reed

Symmetrical phrasing

Light, agile tongue

Tongue is unobtrusive

Jazz

Subtone in low register

Bright and edgy, especially in upper register

Often overblown

Mouthpieces tend to be more open Harder strength reed

Asymmetrical phrasing

Exaggerated dynamics

Heavy tongue

Ghosted and heavy accented notes

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Figure 1: How a jazz phrase would be played.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Figure 2: Typical classical phrasing.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Figure 3: Typical jazz phrasing.

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By Neil Wetzel

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