Saxophone Master Class
Otis Murphy
Otis Murphy
Associate Professor of Music (Saxophone)
Jacobs School of Music
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47405
Tel: (812) 856-0413
Email: omurphy@indiana.edu
Homepage: www.otismurphy.com

2010 Music For All Summer Symposium

Saxophone Master Class Topics

A Brief History of the Saxophone

Equipment
- The Instrument
- The Mouthpiece
- Reeds
- Ligature
- Care of the Saxophone

Tone Production
- Breathing
  - Posture
  - Inhalation
    - Silent Inhalation
  - Exhalation
  - Catch Breath
- Embouchure
  - Formation/Position
  - Mouthpiece & Neck Exercises
  - Troubleshooting
- Tone Quality
  - Tonal Focus
  - Tonal Balance
  - Intonation
  - Resonance
- Vibrato
  - Producing the Vibrato
  - Exercises for Vibrato
Articulation
- Kinds of Articulation
  - Tip-To-Tip Tonguing & Anchor Tonguing
- Articulation Exercises
  - Articulation 0 (Londeix)
  - Stop Tonguing (Hester)
  - Speed Exercises
  - Breath Attacks
  - Note Releases
  - Low Register/High Register Note Attacks
- Articulation Problems

Technique
- Hand & Finger Positions
  - Playing Posture (Standing & Sitting)
  - Saxophone Keyboard
  - Octave Key
- Finger Coordination
- Wide Intervals
- Combining Technique & Articulation
- Basic Technique: Scales & Arpeggios
- Alternate & Advanced Fingerings
- Trouble Shooting

Practicing & Performing

Extended Techniques
- Circular Breathing
- Quarter Tones
- Multiphonics
- Double Tonguing
Saxophone Maintenance Suggestions

EQUIPMENT

Cleaning paper
Cork grease
End cap
Handkerchief/polishing cloth
ID tag for instrument
Key oil
Leak light
Pipe cleaners
Pouch for mouthpiece and neck
Powder paper
Q-tips
Saxophone swab (neck/body/mouthpiece)
Screw drivers
Small paint brush or makeup blush brush
Spring hook (crochet hook)

TROUBLESHOOTING

Adjustment of key above middle C key
Sticky pads
Metallic clicks
G# key adjustment, 1-4 & 1-5 adjustment
Key rollers
Low B-C# adjustment
Octave key/neck adjustment
Front F key adjustment
Protection of mouthpiece tip
Saxophone Scale Exercises: Breaking All the Rules

The classical saxophone has an ever-growing body of contemporary repertoire, employing unusual harmonic language and requiring the use of extended performance techniques on the instrument. In my performing and teaching, I have found it very beneficial to incorporate unusual twists to some of my daily practice exercises to better prepare for the demands of the contemporary saxophone.

Scales are the foundation of my technical practice. When focusing on technique on the saxophone, I focus on three areas in my playing: efficient use of my airstream, an accurate and fluid coordination of my fingers paired with a variety articulation drills, and exercises to improve my concentration and focus. When practicing scales for technical development, I play each scale at least three times with one breath of air over the full range of the saxophone. This approach encourages me to take in a larger quantity of air and to use this air more efficiently. In addition, playing each scale three or more times with one breath of air requires that I play at a tempo that is brisk enough to allow the scales to be fluid and smooth. From here, I further customize my scale practice.

Bb/A# is a note that causes many problems for saxophonists. As young saxophonists we are taught to use specific Bb fingerings for certain kinds of technical passages. Under most circumstances, these rules work well; however under other circumstances, particularly when encountering some of the demands of contemporary saxophone music, it can be more beneficial to break these rules. We can find easier, more natural ways to execute these passages and techniques on the saxophone. I would like to cover the various fingerings that I use for Bb/A# before continuing:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
A#/Bb & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\
p & 2 & 5 & 4 & 2 \\
Ta & 3 \\
G# & \\
Ta & 
\end{array}
\]

The first two fingerings above are commonly called “bis” and “side” respectively. The fifth fingering above is one that I use sparingly because of its stuffy and unstable sound, but it is a fingering that I have found quite useful in certain types of rapid passages in which G#-A#-B are played. My “Golden Rule” regarding fingering choices in the normal range of the saxophone is that when determining which fingering to use in a passage, there are only three notes that I need to be concerned with. They are the problematic note itself, the one note that comes before that problematic note, and the one note that comes after that problematic note. This approach sometimes helps me to play awkward passages more easily (Note: When choosing fingerings in the altissimo register, we must sometimes consider fingerings for several notes before and/or after the actual altissimo note that is posing the problem.).

In my scale practice I incorporate different combinations of Bb/A# fingerings. They serve to improve my overall technical foundation, to help my technique become more flexible and responsive when I encounter unexpected passages, to build a foundation for the unusual and sometimes
unorthodox technical demands that we encounter in contemporary saxophone music, and to improve my concentration and focus.

These exercises should be practiced with every kind of scale (major, minor, diminished, etc.) that employs A# or Bb. For practical reasons, we will focus on major scales in this article. There are seven major scales that have A# or Bb in the key signature: F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db/C#, Gb/F#, and Cb/B. My exercise is to play each of these scales throughout the full range of the saxophone three times in one breath while incorporating different Bb/A# fingerings with each repetition of that scale. On the first time of playing the scale, I use the bis fingering for Bb/A# for both the ascending and descending portions. On the second time, I use the side fingering for Bb/A# for the ascending and descending portions of the scale. The third time of playing the scale is a combination of the first two scales, using the bis fingering as the scale ascends and the side fingering as the scale descends.

What makes this a useful exercise is that, since many of us have been taught to use specific Bb/A# fingerings for certain kinds of technical passages, we will find the Bb fingering in only one of the three scales to be comfortable while the remaining two scales will be awkward and less natural at first. With regular practice of this exercise, we will become more comfortable with varied fingering combinations, and I believe that the benefits gained through this exercise in our focus and concentration can help us have a more solid technical foundation in general.

Coordination in technical passages between the fingers and tongue is another area that requires careful practice. I strive to improve my finger/tongue coordination by adding articulation patterns when playing the exercises outlined above. In my practice, I like to use three different four-note articulation patterns. For the sake of convenience, we will think of this pattern as a quarter-note beat made up of four sixteenth notes. On the first time I play the scale over the saxophone’s full range using a slur two notes/tongue two notes pattern of articulations, and on the second time I play an articulation pattern of tongue two notes/slur two notes. The third time of playing the scale blends the first two articulation patterns, becoming a pattern of tongue one note/slur two notes/tongue one note. These three articulation patterns allow us to improve our physical endurance by playing these repetitive articulation drills in close succession. Moreover, playing all twelve of our major scales three times in one breath with these shifting articulation patterns makes this drill a physical workout for the tongue, in particular.

The final component of these exercises is to create eight-note articulation patterns divided into two quarter-note beats. With these two-beat (eight-note) patterns, we must concentrate more because these patterns change in less predictable ways. In addition, when playing the scale three times in a row over the saxophone’s full range, the patterns’ orders change on the second scale. Here, the first-beat group becomes the second beat, with the second-beat group becoming the new downbeat. With the return of the third scale, the articulation pattern returns to its original form.

Building technique on the saxophone takes a great deal of time and patience. This article is intended for advanced saxophonists who already have a strong technical foundation. These are only a few exercises designed to expand our technical abilities and to prepare us to meet the demands of contemporary saxophone music. All of these exercises can be developed further. For example, using six-note patterns instead of four-note patterns will allow the saxophonist to practice in compound meter (3/8, 6/8, etc), not only in simple meters (2/4, 4/4, etc). Happy practicing!
HOW TO CIRCULAR BREATHE

The Mental Side of Circular Breathing
When the author began learning how to circular breathe, he realized that the most important element in the whole process is the mind. The mind must accept that it is possible to exhale through the mouth while inhaling simultaneously through the nose.

Preliminary Exercise (Before incorporating the instrument)
1. Practice by filling the oral cavity with air, holding this air in the mouth while breathing through the nose. The purpose of this exercise is to become aware of the muscles that allow, as well as prohibit, air to pass into the lungs.
   - Fill oral cavity (mouth) with air, allowing cheeks to puff outward. Force air out of the mouth by using the facial muscles only.

The Cheeks
The development of the facial muscles that constrict the cheeks is an important element of circular breathing. Puffing the cheeks is a normal part of circular breathing (Although many people circular breath without puffing their cheeks). As beginning saxophone players, we were taught not to puff our cheeks. In circular breathing, this rule is broken. The oral cavity is filled with a large quantity of air. Puffing the cheeks allows the saxophonist to take in more air, but more importantly, it allows him/her to expel the air out of the mouth, using the facial muscles only.

Exercises
- Fill the mouth with water and try to spit out water in a steady stream, using the facial muscles to deflate the water-filled cheeks
- To simulate the resistance of the saxophone mouthpiece, repeat the above exercise but use a drinking straw to force water out of the mouth in a continual stream
- Fill the mouth with water and push the water out of the mouth while inhaling simultaneously through the nose (Caution: There is a chance of gagging since water may inadvertently travel down the windpipe).

With the Instrument
Due to the saxophone’s conical bore, the instrument offers differing resistance in its different registers. Moreover, playing the saxophone requires different amounts of air for its different registers. When adding the instrument at this stage, the author recommends that one begin in the middle of the range. The author recommends middle F (fifth-line of the music staff) because he believes that this note offers ample resistance for one who is beginning to circular breathe.

1. Begin by playing F at a mp dynamic level, trying to play with one’s very best tone quality. The performer should allow the cheeks to expand outward and return to their normal “correct” position. The most important consideration is that the tone should not be affected by the changing facial structure. In other words, as one expands and contracts the cheeks, the changing size and shape of the oral cavity should not affect the tone quality. We must try to
minimize changes in the tone so that a smooth circular breathing technique may be developed.

2. Once this procedure is mastered, the performer should play F again. While playing, he/she should fill the cheeks with air and close the glottis, thus stopping the flow of air into the oral cavity (one may identify the glottis by pronouncing the un-voiced consonant sound “g”). When the glottis is closed, the facial muscles should constrict, causing the cheeks to deflate, thus forcing air from the mouth into the mouthpiece. One discovers that the mouth’s small amount of air is quickly expended to keep the tone maintained. Note: One does not inhale yet. After the air is expelled through the mouth, this step is complete.

3. The next step repeats the above procedure, except at this time, one tries to inhale through the nose while expelling air through the mouth. This may take a great deal of practice to master.

4. The most difficult element of circular breathing is the transition from the usage of air in the oral cavity (that which is expelled by the contracting cheeks) back to the use of air in the lungs (air expelled by the diaphragm). In the author’s observation, mastery of this step takes the greatest effort in the process of circular breathing. The point at which this switch occurs causes a noticeable “bump” of the tone for many people. This must be overcome with diligent practice. The author recommends that the performer play at soft and moderately soft dynamic levels to acquire. Circular breathing is easier at these dynamic levels.

5. Another way to incorporate the instrument into one’s circular breathing exercises is to attempt to circular breathe while trilling between two notes, such as a half-step or whole-step trill. During the author’s study with Jean-Yves Fourmeau, he recommended this technique to students hoping to circular breathe. Often, the results were positive.
Finger Twisters and Mind Teasers

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Otis Murphy
Saxophone Professor
Jacobs School of Music
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana USA

Email: omurphy@indiana.edu
Website: www.otismurphy.com