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Saxophone Fundamentals

Embouchure (Round-“whistle”)

- Fold lower lip over bottom teeth
- Place top teeth on the mouthpiece
- Bring in corners towards the centre to produce a round embouchure and avoid biting

Airstream

- Make sure airstream is fast and cold at all times, do not use slow and warm air stream
- Think of eeee vowel to ensure that the tongue position is very high and therefore the air is very fast

OR to combine round whistle embouchure and eeee airstream think of the french vowel ü

Breathing

- Breathe deeply from abdomen (think of water glass, fill from bottom first)
- Breathe from corners of mouth without taking upper teeth off mouthpiece or removing lower lip from mouthpiece

Articulation

- Tongue with the firm part of your tongue, just above tip of tongue
- Think “Tee”
- **Exercise:** on one pitch tongue a bar of quarters followed by a bar of eighths followed by a bar of triplets and then a bar of sixteenths
- For short or staccato notes put the tongue back on reed at the end of the note- think “Teet”

Posture

- Keep hands, fingers and shoulders relaxed
- Do not hold up the saxophone, the neck strap should do all the work and the hands simply balance the instrument
- The alto saxophone can be played either in the center of the body or on the right side
- The tenor and baritone saxophone, because of its size, must be played on the right side
- Keep fingers in a natural “C” shape using the least amount of pressure possible to finger the notes
- Make sure the neck strap brings the saxophone up to you, you should not have to reach down with your neck to get to the saxophone mouthpiece

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Saxophone- Advanced Concepts

Vibrato

- Vibrato is the slight wavering in pitch that is sometimes used on the saxophone and other instruments, mostly in solo passages
- Saxophone vibrato is produced by a slight movement of the jaw, it is very important that the embouchure and air stream remain steady and do not change
- To produce vibrato think of “wa,wa,wa,wa,wa”

Scales

- It is important to learn and memorize all scales full compass. A full compass or full range scale goes up to the highest note in the key, all the way back down to the lowest note in the key and back up to the starting note
- Aim for evenness of rhythm and tone, speed is secondary in importance
- Always practice scales with a metronome increasing the speed slowly over a long period of time

Tone Development- Overtones

- Overtones should be practiced on the low B flat of the saxophone
- Practice isolating and getting a good tone on the fundamental, 1st overtone, 2nd overtone and 3rd overtone (and higher if possible)
- Overtones should be practiced at a mf-f dynamic and can be played with vibrato to increase flexibility and control
- Order of Overtones on low Bb: Bb, Bb, F, Bb, D, F/F#, Ab, Bb, C# etc.
- Practice playing the chromatic scale on the 1st and 2nd overtone

Tone Development- Mouthpiece

- It is beneficial to practice playing on just the mouthpiece
- Aim for straight/pure tone without any shakes or tremors
- Saxophone mouthpieces are capable of producing various pitches
Good ‘home-base’ mouthpiece pitches Alto- A, Tenor- G, Baritone- D, Soprano- C

Extended Techniques

- The saxophone is capable of many non-traditional sounds that are used in contemporary music of various styles (classical, jazz, rock!). Learning these techniques is a great way to explore the vast acoustic possibilities of the saxophone. Some extended techniques are: altissimo notes, flutter tonguing, double tonguing, quarter tones, multiphonics, growling, timbre trills (bisbigliandi), pitch bending/exaggerated vibrato, key clicks, subtone etc. Experiment, explore and have fun!!!