



*Beginner
Saxophone*

*Clinician:
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Sponsor: Texas Bandmasters Association

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Beginner Saxophone Clinic
Texas Bandmasters Association
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I. Introduction

Include some time (5 minutes) on piano in first few lessons if at all possible. Whole steps, half-steps, enharmonics, and scales can be introduced visually right away and then applied to saxophone instruction along the way.

II. Equipment

- A. Instruments: Yamaha, Selmer, Yanigisawa, Jupiter, Unison
- B. Mouthpieces, Ligatures, and Reeds
 - 1. Selmer C* or C**; Rousseau NC 4; Yamaha 4C; Jody Jazz HR; Clark Fobes; Optima
 - 2. Standard Ligs, pricey ligs---beginners need something that works, not something that's expensive
 - 3. Vandoren Traditional 2 ½ or 3; Rico Royal 2 ½ or 3; Hemke 3
 - 4. Why jazz reeds? What's the difference?
- C. Accessories---Mouthpiece patches (clear vs. rubber), Swabs (fuzzy thingy vs. pull through---like Charles Bay the best)

III. Mouthpiece Basics and Tone Production

- A. Sweet Spot and Embouchure Shape (distinguishing this repeatedly)
 - 1. Corners drawing in; creating a round shape
 - 2. Not too much, not too little reed in the mouth (Sweet Spot)
- B. Mouthpiece crowing (remember its value, despite its initial sound!)
 - 1. Alto = Concert A
 - 2. Tenor = Concert G
- C. Articulation is done with the tip of the tongue touching the tip of the reed (imagine 3 taste buds), lightly and firmly; Pitch of mouthpiece stays steady when tonguing is done correctly; May take several days, weeks or months
- D. Marking the mouthpiece position on neck with pencil only after tuning the instrument on a concert A and/or concert Bb

IV. Assembly Sequence

- A. Neckstrap
- B. Reed in mouth
- C. Neck in hand
- D. Cork grease on neck-cork
- E. Mouthpiece placed on neck
- F. Ligature on mouthpiece
- G. Reed on mouthpiece---back end first---thin black line showing at tip
- H. Ligature firm, not tight---back screw tighter than front screw
- I. Body hooked to neckstrap
- J. Neck in body

V. Posture and Horn Position

- A. Sitting (or standing)---use the string puppet analogy: “pull your head string” up and the spine stretches to a full length and shoulders relax naturally
- B. Neckstrap brings mouthpiece into embouchure with weight of instrument off bottom lip; instead, weight of head resting on top of mouthpiece (top teeth)
- C. Right hand (thumb)---pushing saxophone forward without lifting
- D. Left hand (thumb)---hopefully the saxophone has an appropriate octave key placement. This will allow the left thumb to rest the knuckle-crease on the thumb rest and flex slightly to operate the octave key. NO Side-to-side motion.

VI. First Sounds for Saxophone

- A. D Melodic Minor Scale
- B. C# first then B, and on down
- C. This teaches students to take a successively larger (sufficient) breath each time and also gives them an immediate goal in the first few minutes of getting to the lowest note: **D**. No matter how low they get, pump them up with the achievement of great posture, finger technique, awesome sound, good breath support, good memory (keep asking them to name the notes before they play), etc.
- D. Getting a good low tone initially will mean that students are using lots of air and will be able to support higher notes later

VII. Satisfying Saxophone Sounds Made Simple

- A. In successive lessons, encourage students to repeat the routines of saxophone assembly exactly with praise for grace and awareness (no clumsy mistakes)
- B. Posture---“Pull your head string up”
- C. Sweet Spot is the mantra for mouthpiece crowing, “Q: What are you trying to find? A: The Sweet Spot!”
- D. Use the descending warm-up from number VI above to improve breath support
- E. Use long tones from beginner book, create your own or have students suggest some

VIII. Beginner Repertoire and Standards (11-12 year old Beginner Ranges)

- A. Use a contemporary beginner book; supplement with a good fingering chart that makes sense
- B. 8 Major Scales---4 Sharps through 3 Flats (E, A, D, G, C, F, Bb, Eb)
- C. “Minuet in G” by Bach; “Minuet” by Kuhlau; “Now’s the Time” by Charlie Parker

IX. Finishing Touches

- A. Reed care and rotation---Rico Reed Vault or Vitalizer (hey! It works, but nothing's perfect)
- B. Instrument Maintenance---(do you have a screw loose?)
- C. Beginner Routines and Exercises---Keep them playing and keep asking simple questions over and over again to assure students are internalizing
- D. Have Fun! Sonny Rollins story (play under a bridge...in a safe area!), play outdoors, walk around class, take students to the gym to play when no one else is there...it just sounds cool in big open rooms!

Thank you and Good luck!

Ponder East has taught in Texas public schools for 10 years. A graduate from the University of North Texas in 1997 (Bachelors in Music), he earned his teaching certificate and began teaching in January of 1998 at Wylie Intermediate School in Wylie ISD. In the fall of 1998, he began a 3 year assistant band directing position at Grapevine Middle School in Grapevine-Colleyville ISD. In 2001, he left middle school band directing to pursue playing opportunities and began a successful private lesson studio in Austin, TX. After teaching between 30-55 students per week in the Austin area for two years, he then took over Jazz Band Director duties for LBJ High School in the fall of 2003 while continuing a somewhat smaller studio. In 2006, he returned to middle school band directing as an assistant at KIPP Austin College Prep, a public charter school; he stayed there for two years. He has recommitted himself to the art of saxophone study and practice and to leading the jazz program at LBJ.

He is a co-founder of The Austin Jazz Project, a week-long jazz improvisation camp for middle- and high school aged students, now in its 6th year. He has performed and recorded with several groups in Austin, including EAST, Creeker, Global Soul, Funk Shui, The Bright Lights Society, Austin Knights Brass Band, and the Concordia University Jazz Ensemble. He has a wife, Cristine, a dog (Merlin), three cats (Rita, Zoe, and Tut) and a tortoise named Fred. When he's not being a musician and teacher, he plays disc golf.

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