

Yes! Saxophonists Can Double Tongue

Dr. Joe Compeán, III

For many, multiple tonguing on the saxophone has long been thought of as a novelty or “show off” technique that only a few could master. Yet, there are pieces in the U.I.L. saxophone solo and concert band repertoire that are almost impossible to single tongue, and consequently, they would be more easily double or triple tongued. Saxophone auditions for some of the United States service bands require scales to be double tongued. Evidence that early 20th century vaudeville and jazz saxophonists multiple tongued certainly allows the possibility for every student to engage in mastering the technique. Thus, just as with brass and other woodwind instruments, multiple tonguing on the saxophone should be considered necessary when performing technically challenging repertoire.

Historical Background

Early in the 20th century, saxophonists such as Jimmy Dorsey, Frank Trumbauer and Alfred Gallodoro championed the technique in popular dance band American music.

Among many virtuosic solos, Dorsey can be heard triple tonguing on *Tail Spin* that he

recorded on his 1935 album *Stop, Look, and Listen*. One can hear Frankie Trumbauer racing away on *Wild Cat* (ca.1930) and Al Gallodoro continues to astound everyone with his album entitled *Saxophone Contrasts* which includes multiple tonguing showpieces like Cszardas and Del Staiger’s arrangement of *Carnival of Venice*. Further, several saxophone method books were written that included exercises on double tonguing. Books such as Walter Eby’s *Scientific Method for Saxophone* published in 1922, *The Business Saxophonist* by J. Beach Cragun (1923), and *Sax Acrobatix* by Henry Weber (1926) all contain sections on multiple tonguing. In 1940, Jimmy Dorsey published his saxophone method entitled *A School of Modern Rhythmic Saxophone Playing* which presented studies on double and triple tonguing; and in 1963, Larry Teal included exercises in *The Art of Saxophone Playing*.

How To Do It

So, how did these saxophone virtuosi multiple tongue so well? In all my years of success with performing and teaching songs that contain multiple tonguing,

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I have found it helpful for my students to visualize and have a true anatomical understanding of how the tongue moves. Unlike brass and flute players, saxophonists must insert a mouthpiece

inside the mouth, therefore making it a little different to articulate. The illustrations on the following page provide detailed movement of the tongue.

Figure 1a depicts the initial step of the single tongue articulation as the tongue is placed on the reed. Figure 1b then illustrates the tongue moving away from the reed by utilizing the syllable, *du* (dü), allowing the airflow to produce the tone. As for the double tongue, Figure 1c shows the tongue arching up against the roof of the mouth as it cuts off the air stream and vibration of the reed. Figure 1d illustrates the tongue moving away from the roof of the

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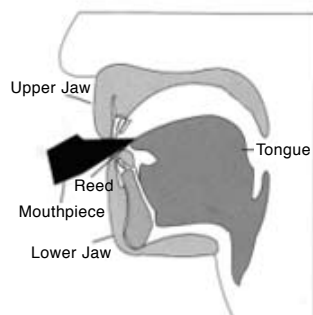


Figure 1a

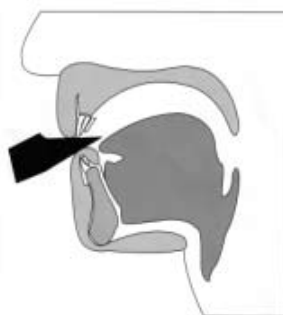


Figure 1b

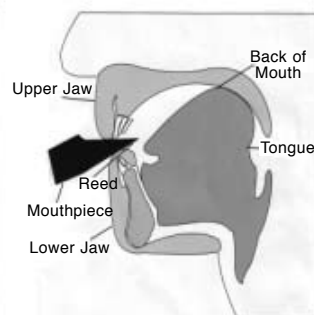


Figure 1c

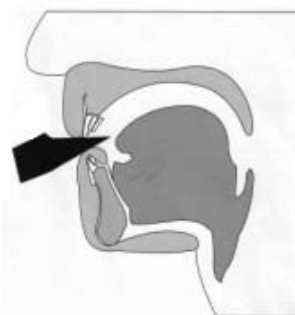


Figure 1d

mouth by pronouncing the syllable, *gu* (gü), allowing the air to vibrate the reed and produce the second articulation. Thus, the ideal syllables for saxophonists to use when learning to double tongue are *du-gu*. This syllable combination allows for a smoother articulation as opposed to *ta-ka* that tends to make a harsher sound on the saxophone.

Double Tonguing

Since some of the orchestral transcriptions favored by most high school bands require the technique, students should learn to multiple tongue beginning in high school or even as early as middle school. When first attempting the technique, one must use a reed with a good heart that allows for the production of a resonant tone and responds evenly from the top to the bottom of the saxophone range. Using a reed without a good heart will result in uneven articulation and poor tone quality. Exercise 1 (below) contains

repeated notes based on the C Major scale (middle C through high C) and is in the ideal tessitura for students to start practicing their double tongue:

This exercise should be practiced with a metronome, beginning with a metronomic marking of 60 (quarter note). Ultimately, one should strive to produce evenness between the single and double tongue articulations and use a legato tongue. A staccato articulation with a t-tongue or *tu-ku* articulation will often result in a harsh uncharacteristic sound. Further, it is essential to keep a fast and intense air stream flowing through the instrument in order to produce an even alternation between the single and double tongue syllables so that the rhythm doesn't have swing feel. Once an even and characteristic articulation has been achieved, students should then increase the tempo in reasonable increments and strive to reach tempi in excess of 160. Everyone is different. Just as when

Exercise 1



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Exercise 2



learning to produce an altissimo register that is in tune and even in tone quality with the rest of the saxophone range, developing one's double tongue can be a tedious and slow process. With consistent practice and adherence to the above-mentioned, one will ultimately achieve success.

Triple Tonguing

Triple tonguing can be done with the combination of two single tongue articulations followed by the double tongue articulation or the alternation of the single and double tongue in triplet figures. I prefer the latter, since it allows for my tongue to maximize its effort and not waste two repeated motions. Exercise 2 (above) illustrates the combination of these syllables.

Much like learning to double tongue, one should begin practicing triple tonguing on a C Major scale exercise and at a steady tempo of 60 (quarter note). All in all, these multiple tonguing exercises are introductory studies that will provide a foundation for the technique. Students are encouraged to incorporate multiple tonguing exercises on arpeggiated, major, minor, harmonic, and melodic scales. Also, I find it beneficial to play through all of the one hundred forty-five exercises and etudes in Jean Baptiste Arban's *Method for Cornet* since the range of the cornet is very similar to the saxophone tessitura.

Repertoire

As for the music that calls for multiple tonguing, the following are some of many pieces in the U.I.L. repertoire that students can perform more effectively by using the technique. *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Concert Band* by Paul Creston contains sixteenth note articulated passages in the third movement. Set at a tempo of 144 (quarter note), the performer must double tongue throughout the first theme from mm. 3 through 21. In addition, interjections of first theme material re-occur in mm. 48 through 59 with the same articulated motifs. Of course, the performer must again double tongue in the recapitulation (mm. 121-141). Lastly, in the closing section of the work, Creston sets the tempo at 152 with articulated sixteenth note motifs that must be accelerated (mm.176-177).

Fantasia for Soprano Saxophone and Chamber Orchestra by Heitor Villa-Lobos also contains double tonguing in the third movement. Entitled *Trés Anime*, the performer must articulate continuous arrays of sixteenth notes at a metronomic marking of 152 beginning at mm. 9 through 13, and then again at rehearsal 4 through one measure before 5. In the coda, one must double tongue the melodic material two measures after rehearsal 10 through one after 11.

Tango Etudes for Alto Saxophone by Astor Piazzolla contain groupings of sixteenth notes that appear primarily throughout etudes No.1, 3, and 6. These

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studies are set at tempi from 132 through 138 that are more efficiently performed double tongued.

Some pieces that require the technique in the U.I.L concert band repertoire include *Scheherazade* Mvt. IV *Festival at Baghdad* and *Festive Overture*.

Arranged by Mark Hindsley, *Festival at Baghdad* contains an excerpt beginning two measures before rehearsal 12 that the tenor saxophonist must triple tongue in order to effectively execute the continuous sixteenth note triplets. *Festive Overture*, arranged by Donald Hunsberger, has a section where the 1st and 2nd alto saxophone players must double tongue beginning at rehearsal 26. Although there are slurs over the notes that serve as phrase groupings, the saxophonists must articulate the notes in this passage, just like the strings do in the orchestral version.

Closing Thoughts

For enrichment, high school students should explore other repertoire that includes over 23,000 original works for classical saxophone. Solos such as *Concerto for Saxophone and Concert Band* by

Karel Husa, *Quartet for Saxophone* by Aldemaro Romero, *Danza Capriccio for Alto Saxophone and Concert Band* by Ron Neslon, and *Excursions for Alto Saxophone and Marimba* by Charles Rochester Young are a few of many works where multiple tonguing facilitates successful performance.

Just as saxophonists deemed it necessary to multiple tongue early in the 20th century, classical saxophonists of the 21st century must have a command over the technique. Like performing in the altissimo register and with circular breathing, multiple tonguing adds another dimension for saxophonists to entertain and astound their audience.

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Dr. Joe Compeán, III enjoyed an early career in saxophone with prestigious accolades such as ranking among the top alto saxophonists in the Texas All-State Band three consecutive times and earning four consecutive TSSEC Outstanding Performer awards. He received his degrees from the University of Texas at Austin and performed with the All-Star Disney College Show Band. Compeán has taught award-winning Texas public school programs and master classes. He performs recitals throughout Central and South Texas. Aside from working with regional orchestras and big bands, he has received praise from and has premiered works by illustrious 21st century composers such as John Anthony Lennon and John Corigliano. Dr. Compeán's primary teachers have included Tony Campise, Alfred Esquivel and Harvey Pittel. Questions regarding double tonguing for saxophone may be sent to jcompean@austin.rr.com.