

# *Saxophone Tips*

## *Sax history*

Belgian inventor Adolphe Sax invented the saxophone in 1841. Sax originally envisioned a family of seven instruments. In common use today are the Eb baritone, Bb tenor, Eb alto, and Bb soprano. For a really riveting account of the saxophone's history (including assassination attempts on Sax and bans on the instrument's sexy sound from the Pope himself), check out the book *The Devil's Horn* by Michael Segell.

## *How does it work?*

Sound is caused by vibration – of a string, say, or in the sax's case a column of air. On the saxophone, the source of the air column's vibration is the reed against the mouthpiece. Pitch is raised or lowered by opening or closing the tone holes along the body of the horn, shortening or lengthening the air column.

## *Assembling your horn*

- ★ Reed in your mouth (or a jar of water) to moisten it.
- ★ Neck strap on.
- ★ Mouthpiece onto neck, table (flat side) down. If it's hard to get on, apply cork grease to the neck cork.
- ★ Ligature onto mouthpiece, fat end first, loosened screws on table side.
- ★ Slide moistened reed butt-first under ligature.
- ★ Centre reed on table and line up tip with the mouthpiece tip. Reed placement is very important.
- ★ Top of ligature just below cut part of reed. Tighten screws firmly but not too tight.
- ★ Body of sax on neck strap. NEVER trust your neck strap alone.
- ★ Neck onto body. Line up ridge under neck with octave key mechanism. Tighten neck screw.

# *How to get a great sound*

## 1. Breathing

- ★ Sit or stand with great posture
- ★ Drop your jaw and inhale through the mouth
- ★ Fill lungs from bottom up, as a pitcher fills with water
- ★ Exhale from top to bottom
- ★ (See exercises below)

## 2. Embouchure

- ★ Say “vee”. The spot on your lower lip where your teeth touch the lip is where the reed should touch it, too.
- ★ Pretend your thumb is the mouthpiece: insert until cuticle reaches lower lip, gently rest top teeth on thumb.
- ★ Now, frown the corners of the mouth until the lips are sealed around the thumb/mouthpiece. Squeeze. Relax. Become as relaxed as you can while still sealing.
- ★ Drop the jaw to inhale deeply. Close the embouchure and exhale. Try to blow your thumb out of your mouth, but use just enough embouchure pressure to keep it in.
- ★ Try the same procedure with just the neck and mouthpiece: create the embouchure the same way. Inhale deeply. Exhale HOT AIR into the horn.
- ★ Keep cheeks relaxed but firm.

## 3. Articulation (using the tongue)

- ★ Always begin a note with the tongue unless it is contained by a slur.
- ★ Inhale. Exhale and say “tee tee tee”, keeping a steady air stream. This is the concept you want with the horn.
- ★ Contact the reed near the tip. There is no need to seal off the opening, simply touch the reed to stop the vibration.
- ★ Once you get the hang of the embouchure and articulation on the neck and mouthpiece, add the body of the sax.

## **Sax Warm-up**

This warm up will only take 5 minutes and it is critical to your development as a wind player. If you only have 5 minutes to practice some days (how could you not?), do this.

1. Breathing (see exercises below). You can soak your reed in water while you do this so it will be ready for step 2.
2. Long tones on mouthpiece and neck only. Play “tee - - - ” for a full breath. Continue this until the embouchure feels right and the sound is steady. Then “tee - tee -”. Then “tee tee tee tee,” keeping the sound steady as you tongue.
3. Grab the sax and do step 2 on a middle B. Now do it on middle D. Now do it on low G. High G.

Done. That wasn't so bad, was it?

## **Breathing Exercises**

1.
  - ★ Lie on your back on the floor
  - ★ Place a book on your stomach
  - ★ Inhale, lifting the book
  - ★ Exhale with a “hissss”, keeping the book up as long as possible
  - ★ Repeat 3 times
2. Inhale deeply. Exhale “ha ha ha ha ha ha ha” with hot air. Repeat 3 times.
3. Inhale deeply. Exhale “tee - - -” with hot air as though to fog up a mirror. Repeat 3 times.