

PREFACE

This is the first part of a saxophone method in two volumes, aimed at beginning to intermediate level players. My aims in writing these two books were to give you a thorough grounding in basic saxophone technique; to help you to develop good general musicianship and knowledge of music theory; and to introduce you to music in a wide variety of styles, from all over the world and from many different historical periods. While it stands alone as a complete method, it is also designed to complement my *Jazz Method For Saxophone*. I hope that those who are familiar with that book will find much to enjoy here, and similarly, that users of this book will wish to explore the *Jazz Method*.

The backing tracks are intended to give you the feeling of playing with a band from the very beginning. Make sure you **download the audio tracks** so that you can enjoy them. The Richard Bolton (guitar and cello), Simon Woolf (bass) and Andy Licino (percussion) play-along and demonstration audio tracks are available from our partners Musician's Choice at www.schott-music.com/the-saxophone-method. Here you will also find an interesting link to John O'Neill's video courses and tutorials.

One feature of this method is that the foundation techniques of breath support, posture, tone production and tonguing are discussed in detail in the first part of the book. Mastery of these techniques is the key to playing the saxophone well, and every saxophonist must take care of them from the beginning or risk acquiring bad habits that are difficult to rectify. It is therefore essential that you feel comfortable with the exercises in Part One before you start Part Two.

This book sets out to give you a systematic approach to learning to read music, covering the most common rhythms that a musician is likely to encounter. The early tunes have deliberately been kept as simple as possible, allowing you to focus on developing a good sense of pulse and to become accustomed to the feel of playing phrases. Playing each of the tunes with the MP3 accompaniment is the goal, but you should start slowly at first, using a metronome if possible.

It is important to develop your sight-reading skills as well as your technique and reading skills, especially if you want to play in styles such as jazz and rock, where bands often do not refer to printed music. It is also important to be able to play from memory. With this in mind, try to spend a good proportion of your practice time playing the tunes by ear. More adventurous students should also try to improvise their own endings.

Students looking for additional material, or who at their progress may wish to explore *The Saxophone Method: Book 1* (order number ED 13921), which runs parallel to this book in its level of difficulty.

Learning to play music is an endless process, which is what makes it such an absorbing activity. It is important that you should want to set yourself goals, such as playing in a band, but do not become so focused on the destination that you forget to enjoy the journey.

Have fun!
John O'Neill

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INTRODUCTION

About the saxophone

The saxophone was invented in the early 1840s by Adolphe Sax, a Belgian instrument maker who was experimenting with the idea of fitting a reed mouthpiece to a brass instrument. The resultant hybrid soon found favour in marching bands as an instrument which combined the flexibility of the woodwind family with the carrying power of the brass.

The saxophone has never really established itself as a permanent member of the orchestra, although an impressive list of composers have written for it, including Bartók, Berg, Beethoven, Copland, Gershwin, Hindemith, Kodály, Milhaud, Penderecki, Prokofiev, Ravel, Schoenberg, Shostakovich, Strauss, Vaughan Williams, Villa-Lobos, Webern and Stravinsky.

However, it is in the jazz world that the saxophone has achieved its greatest popularity, particularly since the 1930s and the advent of the great big bands, where the instrument's versatility was used to great effect by arrangers like Fletcher Henderson, Count Basie and Duke Ellington. It was during this period that the great soloists like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie began to emerge, and the potential of the saxophone to express an individual personality in tone quality began to be appreciated.

There are many different types of saxophone, but four in most use – soprano, alto, tenor and baritone. All of the saxophones are fingered in exactly the same way but they are pitched in different keys – the soprano and tenor in B \flat and the alto and baritone in E \flat . This book is designed for players of E \flat saxophones.

Some thoughts about practice

- Try to make the environment in which you practise as pleasant as possible. The room should be bright and well ventilated. It should also preferably not be too cluttered – if there is a lack of bare wall space, your sound will resonate and your sound will be deadened. Soft furnishings like thick carpets and curtains are particularly muffled. On the other hand, this might be an advantage if you live in a noisy area to disturb your neighbours!
- It is a common mistake to practise only once a day – every day is possible! There is no minimum! Many students make the mistake of thinking that if they cannot practise for half an hour then it is not worth practising at all. Even five minutes of practice is worthwhile, and a small amount every day is much more valuable than one or two longer sessions a week. If you do practise, be interested in it, rather than just going through the motions. It is more effective to play for short periods of twenty minutes to half an hour with breaks in between than to play for hours at a stretch.
- Always practise properly: first the breath, with some long notes; then the tongue, by tonguing soft notes; and finally the fingers, for example by playing scales and arpeggios.
- Do not expect to progress at a uniform rate, however hard you practise. The foundation techniques in particular can take a long time to master. You may sometimes feel that you are not progressing at all, but you should not be discouraged. Such periods are nearly always followed by a dramatic leap forward.
- You can do a lot of valuable work without the instrument in your hands – for example singing, tapping out rhythms or listening to music.
- Avoid becoming obsessed by any one aspect of your playing – there are many different skills to acquire.

PART ONE: THE FOUNDATION TECHNIQUES

Breathing

The saxophone is a wind instrument, which means that the breath you use to play is your most important resource. You must first learn to control your breath.

EXERCISE 1

Lie on the floor on your back with an average-sized hardback book on your abdomen and relax, observing the natural breathing process. Notice that the book rises as you breathe in and falls as you breathe out. In other words, your abdomen expands and contracts as you exhale.

Fig. 1



EXERCISE 2

Still lying on the floor as in exercise 1, breathe in through the mouth, holding the book for a moment in the raised position, then breathe out very slowly through the mouth, making a loud, whispered 'ah' sound, and keeping the throat open and relaxed. The book should move down in a slow, controlled way, so that the core muscles squeeze gently at first, and then gradually harder until they are fully contracted. Aim to sustain the sound at the same volume and intensity for 15 seconds.

This is exercise 2, but in the seated position.

Place your hands on the abdomen (Fig. 2).

Breathe in without lifting the chest or shoulders. The hands should be pushed out slightly.

Exhale, making the same whispered 'ah' sound as in exercise 2.

Fig. 2





Fig. 3

EXERCISE 3B

This is like exercise 3a, but with the hands positioned as in Fig. 3.



EXERCISE 3C

This is like exercise 3a, but with the hands positioned as in Fig. 4.

Assembling the instrument

- Put the neck-strap around your neck and hook it onto the ring which is positioned halfway down the main body of the saxophone (see Fig. 5).
- Check that the neck-screw has been loosened and then insert the crook. The crook should point in the same direction as the neck-strap ring. The neck-screw should be tightened to ensure that the crook does not move.
- Push the mouthpiece onto the cork making sure that the cork is facing towards the floor. If the fit between mouthpiece and cork is too tight, you may need to apply a little cork grease (see p. 78). Tuning will determine the exact position of the mouthpiece on the crook, but as a rough guide approximately 1/3 of the cork should be visible.
- The positioning of the reed on the mouthpiece is extremely important. Reeds must always be handled with great care since they are brittle and easily damaged. The reed should be thoroughly moistened by placing the blade (the flattened part, in your mouth, or in a glass of water. This can be done while you are putting the rest of the instrument together.
- With the flat part of the reed resting low in the slot, insert it, the thickest part first (to minimize risk of damage to the reed) behind the ligature and the mouthpiece.¹ Once the reed is in an approximate right position, tighten the ligature so that it is just behind the scraped part of the reed and centred on the mouthpiece (see Fig. 6). Make sure that the ligature does not overhang the sloped part of the reed. If the ligature is the correct size, the screw threads will be visible through the window. The key to this task is to undo the ligature screw completely, so that it holds the reed in place while you make the final adjustments, by wiggling the reed up and down, and from side to side, using the thumbs and fingers. The tip of the reed should be level with the tip of the mouthpiece when viewed from sideways on (see Fig. 7). Take great care over this, since one millimetre too high or too low can make playing much more difficult. Check also that the reed is straight in relation to the mouthpiece (see Fig. 8). Once you are satisfied that the reed is in the right position, tighten the ligature a little more, just enough so that the reed cannot move. Do not over-tighten the ligature.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

¹ It may be easier, especially for beginners or young children, to remove the crook to perform this task.