

# "TAKE YOUR IMPROVISATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL"

## • 10 SIMPLE TIPS •

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### 1. Where am I right now?

Be honest with yourself, covering the basics. strengths & weaknesses.

### 2. Where do I want to be in the future? Timetables/Goals...

### 3. How do I get there? Developing lifelong practice habits.

### 4. Tradition...imitation vs. individuality. ("Follow the line, not the style.")

### 5. Transcriptions and how to approach them.

### 6. Actively listening to music. How to do it. (see listening sheet)

### 7. Having your instrument be the piano/bass/drums and more!!!

### 8. Don't limit yourself to one style of playing or listening.

### 9. Using unusual expressive devices: multi-phonics, growling, alt. articulations, slap tongue etc.

### 10. Limitless Wonder. ("Can I really do *that*?")

**...THE GREATEST GIFT ANY TEACHER CAN GIVE YOU IS  
THE GIFT OF HOW TO TEACH YOURSELF...**

### **REMEMBER...**

You will not improve overnight in the way you wish you could. You will however have sudden bursts of inspiration along the way which will change the way you play. It is my belief that you must experience life to be able to express it. *Being a better person will help you become a better musician.* By examining and working hard on these ideas and concepts, you will become a better improvising musician. Keep working and striving toward something and *through repetition comes magic.*

"You are never given a wish without also being given the power to make it come true,  
you may have to work for it however." – Richard Bach/Illusions

### **a great resource:**

Jamey Aebersold • Play-a-Long CD's

**www.jameyaegersold.com**

More jazz related books than you could ever use! A great resource!

# "LISTENING TIPS"

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**As with anything, you must practice the Art of Listening to get better at it...**

**Pick one instrument and listen to it all the way through a tune.  
Listen to the same tune and listen to another instrument all the way thru.  
Pick one part of the drums, i.e. the hi-hat or ride cymbal and do the same...**

**I think of it as Active (= the act of) Listening.**

**Listening with other people can be helpful because  
others will hear different things than you do.**

**Go to the local library and check out some CDs etc....  
The library has funds they HAVE to spend each year...  
so, you can request music/DVD's, etc... to be purchased.**

**Take chances with listening by listening to something you know NOTHING about.**

**Go to a concert at a mosque, temple, festival or cultural center.**

**Do some research about the music you are checking out  
and you'll find you hear it with different ears.**

**Listen for the form (or non-form) of a tune.**

**Listen to the mood/emotion a piece of music invokes.  
Be aware of your own experience when listening...  
(...do you experience colors, taste, visuals, etc...)**

**Listen to the space BETWEEN the notes**

**Listen to something other than the solo or vocal line.**

**Listen beneath, above, through, around, behind, and under the music.  
(Think about this.)**

# "SAXOPHONE EQUIPMENT TIPS"

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*(some of these apply to other instruments as well)*

- Have a few goods reeds ready to play at all times.  
Break them in a few at a time.
- Keep your horn in good repair.
- Get a small bottle of key oil and oil the key joints regularly...put a towel under the horn when you do this.
- Choose a mouthpiece because it works for you and is comfortable and easy to play, not because a "name" player plays the same kind.
- Keep the neck clean inside at all times...use a swab or neck brush.
- Keep your mouthpiece clean. **NEVER USE BOILING WATER!**  
You can let it sit in a cool basin of water for a few minutes and use a **SOFT** toothbrush with paste to clean it out. A swab will work as well.
- Soak your reeds for 5 minutes in lukewarm water before you play so they are uniformly wet. (this really can make a difference).
- Be careful. The saxophone is a delicate instrument and can be damaged easily.
- Wash your neckstrap in Woolite every now and then. They get smelly!
- Keep a small eyeglasses screwdriver in a small bag in your case. The screws will loosen themselves over time so check them every now and then.
- Do NOT use brasso or any kind of "polish" on your horn. EVER!
- Don't try to do any repairs on your horn by yourself. Have a trained professional do it. Repairing is as much an art as playing the horn.
- When your pads are sticky, you can use a dollar bill and place it between the pad and the tone hole, gently push the key down and pull the bill from the horn.

# "TIPS FOR SAXOPHONISTS"

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## SAXOPHONISTS YOU NEED TO CHECK OUT IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY:

Coleman Hawkins/Lester Young/Ben Webster  
Benny Carter/Charlie Parker/Marshall Royal (Count Basie's band)  
Dexter Gordon/Johnny Griffin/Sonny Rollins  
Stan Getz/Eddie Harris/Hank Mobley  
Julian "Cannonball" Adderly/Paul Desmond/Lee Konitz  
John Coltrane/Wayne Shorter/John Gilmore/Joe Henderson  
Eric Dolphy/Ornette Coleman/Dewey Redman  
Yusef Lateef/"Rahsaan" Roland Kirk/Albert Ayler/Pharoah Sanders  
Michael Brecker/Joe Lovano/Branford Marsalis/Chris Potter/Seamus Blake  
Ravi Coltrane/Mark Turner  
...check the internet or library to find some recordings of these people.....

## -tone PRODUCTION:

LONG TONES...10 minutes DAILY...with a tuner!!!  
(not much to ask for a *guaranteed better tone!*)

## TECHNIQUE:

PRACTICE SLOWLY & DELIBERATELY...use a metronome!!!  
Don't move on until you have really gotten something together.  
Work on scales/patterns/arpeggios/transcriptions/all 12 keys/etc...

## MOUTHPIECE SELECTION:

\*Find something that plays easily for you. It shouldn't be difficult to produce a good tone.  
Remember to play a piece that works for you, NOT because a "name" player does!

## WHAT I PLAY FOR THOSE INTERESTED:

Yamaha Z Series Alto & Tenor Sax, unlacquered body with gold plated "G" necks  
Yamaha YBS-62 Bari Sax  
Yamaha YFL-681 Flute (gold/brass model)  
Alto Mouthpiece: Vandoren hard rubber V16 A95  
Tenor Mouthpiece: custom hard rubber Freddie Gregory  
Soprano Mouthpiece: customized Selmer C\* from Theo Wanne  
([www.mouthpieceheaven.com](http://www.mouthpieceheaven.com))

[www.vandoren.com](http://www.vandoren.com)  
[www.saxophonemouthpieceheaven.com](http://www.saxophonemouthpieceheaven.com)  
[www.freddiegregory.com](http://www.freddiegregory.com)

# INFLUENCES

These days I listen to lots of world music and field recordings. Some of my favorite stuff is from Africa, in particular, Mali. Oumou Sangare is the Diva of Mali and sounds like a bird. There are lots of field recordings from Africa available as well as great studio recordings. I would also recommend the field recordings of Alan Lomax. Let me know if you think there is something I should check out too!

Here is a partial list of some jazz to check out...

- \* Duke Ellington - ANYTHING
- \* Thelonius Monk - ANYTHING
- \* Miles Davis - ANYTHING
- \* Count Basie - ANYTHING
- \* John Coltrane - anything. but some in particular... A Love Supreme, Ballads, Crescent, Giant Steps, Blue Train. Soultrane, Africa Brass, Live @ the Village Vanguard, w/Johnny Hartman, w/Duke Ellington, again I feel the same about Trane as I do about Miles. If you are new to Trane, start with something like Ballads.
- \* Ornette Coleman - my favorite stuff in on Atlantic
- \* Johnny Griffin - A Blowing Session (w/Trane, Hank Mobley, Art Blakey, Lee Morgan etc...), Intro. Johnny Griffin
- \* Alice Coltrane - Translinear Light (new in 2004!), lots of great music from the 60's & 70's too
- \* Cannonball Adderley - most of his earlier stuff for me.
- \* Lee Morgan - The Gigolo, Sidewinder. Etc...
- \* Eric Dolphy - Out to Lunch, Live at the Five Spot, stuff with Mingus
- \* Kenny Dorham - Whistle Stop (great trumpet sound), etc...
- \* Bill Frisell - This Land, etc...
- \* Stan Getz - pretty much anything. what a sound!!!
- \* Dexter Gordon - Biting the Apple, Gettin Around, Homecoming, Our Man in Paris, GO!, etc...
- \* Elvin Jones - Live at the Lighthouse, all his stuff with Trane.
- \* Coleman Hawkins - anything, esp. Body & Soul
- \* Lester Young - anything, esp. The Aladdin Sessions
- \* Joe Henderson - anything
- \* Keith Jarrett - Standards Live, My Song, Belonging, the Koln Concert, etc... a true geunius.
- \* Rahsaan Roland Kirk - The Inflated Tear, etc... anything!
- \* Joe Lovano - From the Soul, Live at the Village Vanguard, Landmarks
- \* John Scofield - Time on My Hands, Meant to Be, What We Do
- \* Charles Mingus - Oh Yeah, Ah Um, Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus, etc... pretty much anything.
- \* Hank Mobley - Soul Station
- \* Charlie Parker - anything!!! the Verve Sessions, the Savoy Sessions, Bird & Diz, Jazz at Massey Hall, etc..
- \* Chris Potter - most anything - one of the great young players.
- \* Joshua Redman - Wish, etc...
- \* Pharoah Sanders - w/Trane, The Trance of Seven Colors, etc...beautiful expressive musician
- \* Sonny Rollins - ANYTHING
- \* Wayne Shorter - Speak No Evil, The Soothsayer, Footprints LIVE, Alegria, Adams Apple, JuJu,
- \* Horace Silver - Song For My Father, Horace Silver Trio, etc...
- \* Billie Holiday - anything
- \* Nat Cole - the Trio Recordings
- \* Nancy Wilson - w/Cannonball Adderley
- \* Michael Brecker - Heavy Metal Be-Bop, Michael Brecker/solo recordings, w/Steps Ahead
- \* Ray Charles - the Genius of Ray Charles, etc...
- \* Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers - Live at Birdland, Live at Cafe Bohemia, Indestructible, Three Blind Mice, w/Thelonius Monk, etc...
- \* John Zorn - Naked City, Masada, etc...
- \* Jimmy Smith - Chicken Shack, the Sermon
- \* Albert Ayler - anything
- \* Milford Graves - anything you can find (an amazing drummer and much more)
- \* Kenny Garrett - Pursuance, Songbook, Black Hope
- \* Hariprasad Chaurasia - Indian Flute (Bansauri) Player
- \* Shrinivas - Indian Mandolin Player

... this just scratches the surface of what has influenced me. There are still MANY recordings I haven't checked out. My listening is not limited to just jazz either. I actively listen to music of other cultures and time periods in order to stay open to new possibilities. I strongly suggest you do the same.

...listen...

**HOW** do you listen to music?

**WHEN** do you listen to music?

**WHY** do you listen to music?

**What is your favorite instrument to listen to?**

**Why?**

**What is your least favorite?**

**Why?**

**What is your favorite style/genre of music to listen to?**

**Why?**

**What is your *least* favorite style/genre of music to listen to?**

**Why?**

***Listen carefully to the music of silence.***

**Listen to the sounds of nature....the birds, frogs, owls, crickets, etc... NEVER get in the way of each other...nature's sounds sit in strata, or levels...does the music you are listening to contain the same "transparency of sound?" Can you listen THRU the sounds?**

# PRACTICING: The “How To”

- Decide what you need to work on (strengths & weaknesses/5 of each)
  - Make a game plan on how to get it done
  - Start with mapping out 1 hour of practice time
- Multiply it by the number of hours you have to practice
- your warm up is NOT included in the hour of practice time
- Give yourself a 10-15 min. warmup...VERY important!
- LONG TONES are an essential part of developing your tone...do them for 10 minutes/day from *p* to *ff* back to *p* with a tuner.

~ PRACTICE WHEEL ~

## example practice hour\*

15 mins. Scales (w/metronome)

15 mins. Transcribe Solo

15 mins. Pattern Memorization (ii/V/I's or whatever)

15 mins. Play tunes/freely improvise - *YOUR* time to explore

...It is extremely important to use a metronome when you practice.

*We are ALL responsible for keeping the time, not the drummer or the bass player...everyone.* Practice slowly and take breaks when you need to or when you are feeling overly distracted. Practicing should be challenging but also enjoyable...you'll get out of this what you put into it. Try keeping a practice log to keep track of what you have been working on.

Work hard and stay focused! Good luck...

\* your practice routine will vary from others because you have different strengths and weaknesses and, therefore, you will have different things to work on. Don't be afraid to sound bad sometimes...it's PRACTICE time!



The only choice—Yamaha. Why? We have world class designers, state-of-the-art manufacturing techniques and are committed to producing the industry's most consistent, superior-sounding instruments available. Just three of the many reasons Yamaha is unparalleled in providing artists with the world's premier line of musical instruments.

## JEFF COFFIN PLAYS YAMAHA.

*"My 82Z alto and tenor saxophones have stood up very well to over 200 dates a year on the road. They have a beautiful, warm tone with a lot of character to the sound."*

*—Jeff Coffin, Belá Fleck & the Flecktones*