



YAMAHA

Educator Series

WIND INSTRUMENTS



Kenneth Fischer

Regarded as one of today's leading saxophonists, Kenneth Fischer has served as Professor of Saxophone at the University of Georgia School of Music since 1979 and as Visiting Professor of Saxophone at the Indiana University School of Music during the 2000-2001 academic year. Fischer was awarded the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in Saxophone Performance from Indiana University, studying with Dr. Eugene Rousseau. Dr. Fischer has appeared as soloist, chamber musician, and master teacher throughout the United States, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain. He has performed as soloist and with the Kenneth Fischer Saxophone Quartet at numerous meetings of the World Saxophone Congress and the North American Saxophone Alliance. Dr. Fischer's students teach at many colleges and universities throughout the United States.

Fischer is a champion of new music for the saxophone. Many notable American composers have dedicated works to Kenneth Fischer, including Frederick Fox, Fisher Tull, Tommy Joe Anderson, Jerry Sieg, Lewis Nielson, and William Davis. He has recorded on numerous labels including ACA, Centaur, Musicians Showcase, Arizona University Recordings, Coronet Records, and Roncorp. Kenneth Fischer is a Yamaha Performing Artist. He plays the YSS-875GP, YAS-875GP, YTS-875, and the YBS-62.

Playing the Saxophone: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, & Baritone

By Kenneth Fischer

The four basic saxophones – soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone – should be enjoyable to play and fun to hear. These instruments are the core sound of any concert band and jazz ensemble. In addition, they comprise one of the great chamber music ensembles of our time – the saxophone quartet. As with any instrument, the saxophone may be played poorly or with great artistry. The following concepts of performance and teaching will bring your students closer to the artistic level of performance that we all desire.

Beautiful tone quality is one of the most difficult aspects of performance for all instrumentalists. The following concepts should be followed for proper tone production:

EMBOUCHURE FORMATION – Form the mouth in the shape of an “O” by saying the syllable “ooh.” Carefully roll the lower lip over the lower teeth with the mouthpiece, reed, and ligature combination, placing the top teeth on the top of the mouthpiece. Bring the lips completely around the mouthpiece, creating a seal. Be certain to maintain a thick lower lip. Do not smile.

THROAT POSITION – The throat is a tube carrying the air directly from the lungs to the saxophone. It is best to relax the throat muscles, as they would be during normal breathing, striving for a “bottomless pit” sensation, using the syllable “Ahh.”

BREATH SUPPORT – Two areas of concern must be addressed: 1) Breathing in – Inhale quickly and deeply, through the corners of the mouth, filling the lungs to capacity. 2) Pushing the air into the saxophone. The most important aspect here is the use of WARM AIR. This is the employment of a very large air stream, creating the optimum balance between embouchure, throat position, and breath support--similar to the air stream used when fogging a mirror. It is important that a small pin-pointed air stream is not used when playing any saxophone.

MOUTHPIECE BLOWING – Applying the three concepts discussed previously (embouchure formation, throat position, and breath support), remove the mouthpiece from the saxophone and blow warm air into the mouthpiece alone at an “FFF” dynamic level, striving to attain the specific concert pitches listed below. By the use of muscle memory, retain this same sensation when the mouthpiece is placed on the saxophone and the instrument is played normally, throughout the entire range. The correct mouthpiece pitches are:

SOPRANO = CONCERT C

ALTO = CONCERT A

TENOR = CONCERT G

BARITONE= CONCERT D



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The fundamentals of technical development involve three basic areas of discussion:

PERFORMANCE POSTURE – Whether standing or sitting, it is necessary that the human body maintain a natural/relaxed posture. Adjust the neck strap so the instrument comes directly into the mouth. It should not be necessary to reach for the saxophone; make the saxophone come to you. It is best not to “stand at attention,” slouch, or lean back in the chair while playing. The player should always sit on the edge of the chair while playing in the sitting position. The soprano saxophone should be played in the front of the body, while the alto may be played in the front or to the right side. The tenor and the baritone should always be played with the instrument to the right side.

HAND POSITION – Using the natural/relaxed curve of the hands, place the fleshy portion of the fingers on the keys of the saxophone. The thumb of the left hand should be placed on the thumbrest at a 45 degree angle to the body of the saxophone with approximately one-third of the thumb on the octave key, while the thumb of the right hand must be placed fully under the right hand thumbrest. Keeping the fingers close to the keys will provide the most direct motion for finger technique. Do not allow the fingers to become straight or flat.

ARTICULATION – Use the syllable “tah,” where the “t” is a very small - or soft- “t.” The “t” gives a clear beginning to the note, while the “AH” allows the warm air to create the tone. The tongue will gently touch the reed just below the tip of the reed, while the reed will touch the tongue just above the tip of the tongue. Again, saying the syllable “tah” will give the best results. When tonguing, it is most important to remember that the saxophone is a wind instrument. The air creates the tone, not the tongue. A good concept to remember is to always think MORE AIR AND LESS TONGUE.

PLAYING THE SAXOPHONE: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Baritone – The ideas discussed above concerning the fundamentals of tone production and technical development should be followed very carefully on each member of the saxophone family. The similarities between these instruments outweigh the differences. The saxophones are constructed to transpose for the performer; therefore, the saxophonist is able to read treble clef, and each instrument employs the exact same fingerings, making it very easy to move from one saxophone to another. The obvious differences involve the size of the mouthpiece/reed combination and the size of each instrument. At times this may be a problem for some players. For instance, a small person or an individual with small hands may have more difficulty playing the baritone saxophone. The weakest or least experienced player should never be placed on the baritone saxophone in challenging situations. It is important that every saxophonist has the opportunity to play each of the four saxophones,

either in a large ensemble (band or jazz ensemble) or in a chamber music (saxophone trio, quartet, etc.) setting. Consider your band saxophone section as a “saxophone choir” – which must match tone quality and musical style throughout the section.

In conclusion, attempt to incorporate more saxophone chamber music ensembles (duets, trios, quartets, quintets, and saxophone choir) into the overall music program, allowing each individual to perform on a different saxophone for each ensemble. By having the student learn each of the four saxophones, he/she will improve their overall tonal concept, flexibility, sensitivity to intonation, and technique on each instrument. In addition, the director will have the ability to move the most qualified players to play a particular instrument, depending on the music being performed.

Don’t let your students get stuck specializing on only one saxophone. Each saxophone is challenging and fun to play. Best of luck!