



YAMAHA

Educator Series

WIND INSTRUMENTS



Dr. Caroline Henderson

Active as both a performer and clinician, Dr. Caroline Henderson has premiered works for saxophone at the 11th World Saxophone Congress held in Valencia, Spain; the 12th World Saxophone Congress held in Montreal, Canada; and the 1994, 1996, and 1998 Biennial Conferences of the North American Saxophone Alliance (NASA). Additionally, she has performed or given presentations at the Annual Meeting of the College Music Society, the Music Educators National Conference, the National Association of College Wind & Percussion Instructors Symposium, several regional NASA conferences, and the Texas Music Educators Association Conference.

In addition to her performances as a soloist, Dr. Henderson has performed as a member of the critically acclaimed LYNX Duo with percussionist Kenneth Broadway since 1997. As advocates of new music, the LYNX Duo has performed at the 2001 International Conference of the College Music Society in Limerick, Ireland; the 11th World Saxophone Congress in Valencia, Spain; the 1998 Biennial Conference of the North American Saxophone Alliance; the 4th and 5th Symposia of the National Association of College Wind & Percussion Instructors; the 12th World Saxophone Congress in Montreal, Canada; and at numerous regional meetings of the North American Saxophone Alliance. They have commissioned and premiered works by Budd Udell, Robert Romza, and Kenneth Broadway. Their debut compact disc recording *The LYNX Duo: Music for Saxophone & Percussion* was released in 2001 through Mark Custom Recordings.

Caroline Henderson is an Associate Professor of Music at Ouachita Baptist University. She earned a Master of Music degree in Woodwinds Performance and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Saxophone Performance from the University of Georgia under the direction of renowned saxophonist and pedagogue Dr. Kenneth Fischer. Prior to joining the faculty at Ouachita Baptist University, she taught at Eastern New Mexico University.

Dr. Caroline Henderson is a Performing Artist for the Yamaha Corporation of America.

Instant Help for Your Saxophone Section

By Dr. Caroline Henderson

The saxophone section has the potential to add a well-blended and rich texture to your ensemble. However, it also has the potential to add a strident and harsh voice creating intonation havoc. The most common complaints I hear about the saxophone section are: "Why can't my saxophone section play in tune? I hate that whiny saxophone sound! Why can't my saxophonists tongue more quickly and lightly?" While developing a characteristic sound and becoming proficient with tuning and intonation certainly take time to fully evolve, there are some quick and easy techniques you can teach and reinforce with your saxophone students to solve many of these frustrations.

Embouchure/Tone Production

First, check to make sure the instruments are in good playing condition. Instruments with pads that don't seal properly and bent keys will discourage students before they even have a chance to discover the joys of making music.

Teach your students to play with a large, warm air stream (as if they were fogging a mirror). The corners of the mouth should push in toward the mouthpiece as if saying "ooh," not pulled back in a smile. The chin should be flat, rather than "bunched up" toward the reed. To help students with this, have them feel their chins and look in a mirror while whistling. Then have the students play a "C" with just their left hand and ask them to feel their chin with their right. This technique will help students feel what they are doing and gain better awareness and control of the muscles in the embouchure. The top front teeth must be firmly in contact with the mouthpiece. A student with crooked teeth may have trouble keeping the mouthpiece still while playing. Using a mouthpiece patch, available from any music store, will greatly help by giving the student something better to "bite down" on.

Be consistent and diligent about teaching and reminding your students about proper instrument position. The soprano saxophone should be played straight in front of the body, not propped up on a knee. The alto saxophone may be played either in the front or to the right side. If played to the right side, make sure the student turns the mouthpiece as necessary to keep the head straight. If played in front of the body, make sure the instrument is not resting on the seat of the chair. Both the tenor and baritone saxophones should be played to the right side of the body. Harness neckstraps or an instrument stand can facilitate easier playing of the tenor or baritone saxophones for younger students or those with back/shoulder pain. The neckstrap should be adjusted so that the instrument pivots directly into the mouth.

Mouthpiece/Reeds

Unfortunately, the "stock" mouthpieces supplied with most beginning instruments are generally of poor quality. Investing in a higher quality mouthpiece will significantly improve tone quality, response and intonation.



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Teaching students about reeds is just as important as having an instrument in good playing condition. They must understand that in order for a reed to work well, it must be able to vibrate freely. We have all heard a student complain about not getting a good sound and then discovered the reed is chipped, covered in lipstick, and being played dry. In addition to these obvious problems, be sure to teach students to properly store their reeds in a reed case, pull the ligature down past the scraped part of the cane, and make sure the ligature is on correctly. Although ligatures may be regular or inverted (to be played with the screws on top of the mouthpiece), the screws should always be on the right. There are many good brands of reeds, but I recommend Vandoren, Hemke, or Glotin reeds for most ensemble playing. Vandoren Java and Lavoze reeds work especially well when playing in jazz bands. Fibracell makes a composite reed that works extremely well in situations requiring outdoor performances (such as marching band) or involving quick instrument changes (as in pit orchestra doubling).

Articulation

Teaching proper articulation and spotting bad habits can be tricky since we can't see exactly what the student is doing inside the mouth. There are three things that will help in developing a clean and light articulation. First, make absolutely certain the student is touching the reed with the tip of the tongue. If the student is touching the roof of the mouth or using the back portion of the tongue to articulate, the resulting sound will be inconsistent and sloppy. Second, make sure the jaw is not moving up and down while tonguing. A good way to correct this bad habit is to have the student tongue slow quarter notes using just the left hand while placing the right hand under the chin. This will help students feel extra jaw movement. Finally, be sure to teach students how to tongue using a smooth and consistent air stream. Singing quarter notes without stopping and starting the air stream is a good teaching tool to use. Another analogy students can identify with is the air stream being like "water flowing from a faucet." Tonguing is like running your finger back and forth through the stream of water, rather than turning the water off and on repeatedly.

Vibrato

Vibrato should be taught as soon as students have a good characteristic sound - no later than the second year of study. If you wait until high school to begin teaching vibrato, they will have a more difficult time developing the flexibility necessary to produce a characteristic vibrato. Saxophonists should be taught to use jaw rather than breath vibrato. Saying and singing the syllables "yuh-yuh" or "vah-vah" will help them understand the feel of playing with vibrato. Begin by having students sing (then play) with vibrato in eighth notes. Gradually move to triplets and then sixteenths. This will help them be comfortable with varying speeds of vibrato. Give your students access to professional recordings so that they can hear what vibrato should sound like.

Tuning

The great majority of tuning and intonation issues may be solved by teaching students to play the following concert pitches on just the saxophone mouthpiece:

Soprano - "C"

Alto - "A"

Tenor - "G"

Baritone - "D"

If a student is consistently using a warm air stream, a good embouchure, and the proper air speed, they should be able to get close to these pitches with little problem. Using cooler air, too little mouthpiece, or biting too hard will cause a student to play a higher pitch on the mouthpiece. Using too much mouthpiece, too slow an air stream, or too loose an embouchure will cause a lower pitch. Once the student is able to consistently play the desired pitch on the mouthpiece alone, they will be able to play throughout the range of the instrument with improved response, tone quality, and intonation. The best tuning note for all members of the saxophone family is a concert A, Bb, or D. Concert F tends to be quite sharp on most saxophones. Because playing with jaw vibrato actually lowers the pitch center, I recommend having students tune with vibrato.

Fingerings

There are many alternate and trill fingerings that students should be familiar with to gain technical facility. Two fingerings for Bb should be learned: Side Bb & Bis Bb. Bis Bb is played with just the left hand index finger and should never be used when approached from or left by a B natural. Many books still teach a "1 and 1" fingering for Bb. This fingering tends to be quite flat in pitch, so I advise against using it. Another often misused fingering is overblowing the lowest octave C# in place of the open C# an octave above. A better alternate fingering for open C# is "covered C#," played like middle D minus the first two fingers of the left hand.

Final Comments

With the great popularity of the saxophone, many band programs have more saxophones than they know what to do with. Rather than asking some students to switch to other instruments, consider expanding your saxophone section by using additional tenor and baritone saxophones. This will add a rich, inner texture to your ensemble without sounding "top heavy."