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# A Brazilian Primer

by Bill McBirnie

I have been meaning to do this for a while ... but I have always required a little time and effort to pull it together ... so here t'is...

As most of you probably recognize, Latin music plays a very important role in jazz. Accordingly, it is equally important to develop some facility in this area regardless of what instrument you play. However, if you are going to play jazz on flute, then you simply *must* learn about Latin music in a serious manner. Unlike more mainstream jazz contexts, the flute is actually a very common "voice" in Latin music. So both musicians and listeners will expect you as a jazz flutist to be able to deliver musically in this area. You should be able to do so in a thoughtful and idiomatically sensitive way. Of course, in order to meet that objective, you must first become familiar with the sound.

Broadly speaking, there are essentially two strains to Latin music; (1) Cuban and (2) Brazilian. I am going to confine myself to the Brazilian strain here (because I have previously written a piece for *Canadian Musician* bearing on the Cuban strain).

I will begin by delivering a caution: Brazilian music is so beautiful and captivating that you will find the task of investigation to be not at all arduous. In fact, in the course of delving into this idiom, you may find that you want to forget all about be-bop!

Brazilian music has both its indigenous and African roots but it also has some European influences. So it is important to begin by recognizing that Brazilian music is not just the bossa nova. In fact, Brazilian music is an enormously vast area that includes samba (of which the bossa nova is really merely a subset), batucada, baião, maracatu, afoxé, partido alto, choro, frevo as well as permutations and combinations of these various styles, etc. And, once you start to explore this music, you will also find that the number of truly great Brazilian writers and performers (notably the singers) is overwhelming. Although it is not really possible to do justice to the idiom here. I will try to do so by citing just 10 albums that helped me a great deal in learning about this vast area of music. These albums are as follows:

**(1) Wayne Shorter, *Native Dancer* (Columbia)**

This is a seminal jazz album that bears

an unusually strong Brazilian influence due to the presence of the great Milton Nascimento. Indeed, this was essentially Nascimento's introduction to North American audiences ... and became a Wayne Shorter classic...

**(2) Milton Nascimento, *Miltons* (Columbia)**

This is absolutely my favourite Nascimento album!

**(3) Milton Nascimento, *Nascimento* (Warner Bros.)**

Here he is again ... I admit that I am a bit of a Nascimento freak ... and I often return to this album too...



**(4) Stan Getz & Joao Gilberto, *Getz/Gilberto* (Verve)**

This is perhaps the classic bossa nova album (complete with the original versions of "Girl from Ipanema" and "Corcovado") and, although it may seem something of a hackneyed choice, it isn't – and precisely because it has stood the test of time.

**(5) Joao Gilberto, *Amoroso/Brasil* (Warner Bros.)**

This is a magnificent two-fer with some gorgeous orchestrations by Claus Ogerman (on the "Amoroso" cuts) and Clare Fischer (on the "Brasil" cuts).

**(6) Elis Regina, *Personalidade* (Philips/Polygram)**

In my considered opinion, Elis Regina is the Aretha Franklin of Brazil! She is a truly amazing vocalist ... and this compilation represents a magnificent cross-section of her work (with only two or three dud tracks).

**(7) Sergio Mendes, *Brasileiro* (Electra)**

This is a very highly, but also a very well, produced and diverse collection of compositions written and performed in collaboration by Sergio with some of Brazil's finest performers/writers at that time (the very early '90s).

**(8) Djavan, *Djavan* (Rym Musique)**

This is a beautiful compilation of work by a very classy singer/writer who is quite a famous pop star in Brazil ... but one who has always kept some elements of "country" in his music.

**(9) Cafe Brasil (Teldec)**

This is an unusual recording – a real find – and a very hot tip that I received from jazz guitarist, Reg Schwager (who, you guessed it, is a real Brazilian freak!) This album is a mixture of both older and newer Brazilian musicians performing some classic samba and choro tunes. In my view, this particular album is of perhaps the greatest relevance to any of you who have a real interest in this area ... because it has got a lot of Brazilian spontaneity and "soul" to it...

**(10) The Mondo Series, *Mondo Samba* (Mondo Melodia)**

This is a compilation that I recently stumbled upon and it is a beautiful cross-section of work done by some of the star Brazilian singers/songwriters ... but also by a few performers whom I did not know at all. The CD contains consistently beautiful tunes as well as outstanding performances and it demonstrates just how broad the samba, alone, can be in Brazilian music!

Hopefully, this list of 10 will get you started because you are likely to find great Brazilian music is a never-ending story!

*Bill McBirnie is a jazz and Latin flute specialist located in Toronto. Bill has also been chosen Flutist of the Year by the Jazz Report Awards, nominated as Instrumentalist of the Year at the National Jazz Awards and declared a winner of the USA National Flute Association's triennial Jazz Flute Masterclass Competition. He has produced several Extreme Flute projects including his new Duo/Quartet album (with Bernie Senensky, Neil Swainson and John Sumner) entitled, Paco Paco. All are available from the distributor, Indie Pool at indiepool.com. If you would like to contact Bill directly, you can reach him at billmcb@direct.com.*

# Developing Superior Time

By Daniel Schnee

**I**n today's vast digital music marketplace, there are still plenty of opportunities to develop, record, and perform your music. The competition is still as fierce as ever, and it takes some creativity to get heard or noticed. But there is still one almost surefire way to make an impression with your listening audience, and especially with those you work with or hope to work with...

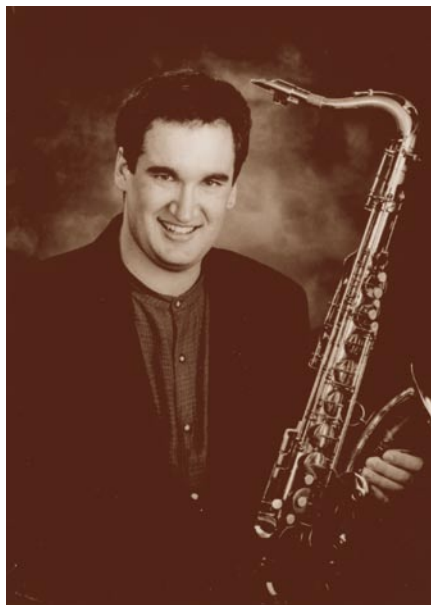
Time feel, the ability to lock, whatever you call it, is still THE most important part of your improvising. It is the thing that makes voice-leading sound sweet and phrasing even sweeter. It clarifies your ideas, and makes the "less" in "less is more" actually happen. It is also really vital to have if one likes to play suspended, "floating" phrases like Wayne Shorter or vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson. As we all have witnessed, there are a lot of young saxophonists who mistake floating for not needing to feel the time... "cuz that's the drummer's job." No, it isn't. It's our job too, and we can really take our playing to the next level if we learn to feel time as solidly as our friends in the rhythm section do.

It is especially important if you are playing a lot of styles as a sideman. I discovered this the second I first started accompanying musicians from places like Pakistan or Egypt. All the technique I had built up became mostly useless as I learned to ornament and embroider the vocalizations of the singers I was working with. Yet it was my studied ability to feel time that saved me and gave me the basis to start truly feeling and understanding what I should do, or could do, to make the music sound good.

Thankfully there is an exercise that not only is great training, but is enjoyable as well. And, the more you do it, the better you get; immediately. This one idea can be applied to so many different chord changes and songs that you can never really exhaust the possibilities.

We have all learned to outline and voice-lead the chords for a song to guide our improvisations, but there is another level we don't usually go to. We don't

learn to voice lead like a bass player. They "walk" on a blues for so many countless hours that they start coming up with interesting substitutions and creative ways to outline the harmony and to keep things interesting. Once we start trying this idea, it becomes really clear how time is the thing that makes those ideas really work.



1). Start by placing your metronome on  $mm = 48$ , with the click acting as beat two and beat four, like a hi-hat. Over a  $B\flat$  blues, play only half notes, outlining the chords as you go through the changes. The half notes must be spot on, and resist the urge to "creative," as concentration is vital. After a few minutes of this you will instinctively start wanting to play the half notes like a solo. This step is a leap forward, as real professional improvisers mix in a variety of note lengths to add beauty and creativity to their work. Like they say, nothing says "amateur" like long, unbroken strings of eighth notes! As you get comfortable with this exercise, slowly start increasing the speed. The goal is not speed, of course, just the comfortable

ability to play half notes in time.

2). Now start doing the same exercise with quarter notes. As before, keep yourself from getting creative and stick with just the basic exercise. Sometimes younger players worry that they won't swing if they play the notes straight like this. Don't worry. Once the time feel is there, the notes will naturally start swinging, as everyone feels time a little differently. "Behind the beat" means something completely different than just "behind." As this exercise gets more comfortable, take the metronome up a few more notches progressively as you go. You'll notice that the quarter notes start to sound like slow eighth notes. Voila! You have discovered "metric" multiplication and subdivision. You are now hearing time as a metric variable. This is important, as it will help you relax on up-tempo tunes, and help you keep the time more comfortably.

3). At this point, you will begin to combine the previous two exercises and all sorts of interesting new combinations will begin to appear. This is my favorite part of the whole process, as creativity and technique begin to merge into one amalgamated exercise. And as an added benefit, one also begins to hear more deeply into the music. I was surprised, when first beginning to reach this level, how much musical information I was actually missing when listening to a great bass player like Ron Carter or Scott LaFaro. Their individual brands of bass "counterpoint" are a great lesson for any musician, and it was only after doing these exercises that I really began to better appreciate what the great bass players all around us do.

Playing the saxophone well is a lifelong process, and it takes a lot of effort to balance career, music, and life. But hopefully this exercise will help you get much farther along, and you enjoy your new sense of creativity and expression as your time improves and you discover new ways to say what's on your musical mind. Enjoy!

# Studio Work & Recording

by Bill McBirnie

**I** was recently asked a series of questions about studio work and recording, so here are the answers I provided...

## What do you have to say about the sound and miking of the flute in different recording sessions?

Quite frankly, I don't worry about miking too much because I have never really had an engineer ruin my sound. However, in order to avoid a sound that is thin and/or harsh, I might ask the engineer to cut the highs and/or the mid-ranges as this serves to eliminate any brittleness in the sound, especially in the high register. This applies with respect to sound men on live gigs too! I find that if you are polite and not prima donna-ish about the matter, then the sound man will likely appreciate the guidance. The engineer will often consult you as you are warming up anyway so, when you speak to an engineer in these terms, they quite readily understand, and accept, what you're saying.

Non-classical recording sessions are typically close-miked and, if you detect too much wind blast, either mic well above the tone hole and/or ask for a pop screen. However, remember that in over-dubbing situations (which are frequent), you are probably going to hear more flute in your phones than will likely appear in the final mix. Some things that might sound less than perfect in your phones end up sounding fine in the final mastered track, so don't become overly preoccupied or, worse yet, self-centered about YOU, especially when you're dressing a track because it's not about you!

Having said that, my one concern about final mixes is that they often result in the flute being placed too far back in the mix and thereby losing some of its nice characteristics (such as just a little wind-blast which can be quite desirable, especially in exposed passages). I remember once, years ago, I was listening to a cut which Hubert Laws dressed for a high-profile artist and I noticed that, overall, his sound was just not that good. I thought, 'Gee, Hubert must have really had a bad day!' When I became more experienced and re-visited that same track some years later, I realized that it wasn't Hubert's fault. Indeed, it was obvious that the recording/mixing engineer had placed him so far back in the mix that they had completely lost the essence of him!

## Do you ever record your solos again?

In most overdub situations, I offer a couple of takes so the producer/artist can play with that track if they want to. However, I rarely offer any more than three takes because any more than that will simply create problems in making artistic and/or editing decisions, and neither the producer nor the artist need to deal with that!

## What kinds of flutes are needed for a session flute player?

I usually just bring a C flute unless they ask for something else. I find that the alto flute (as opposed to the piccolo or the bass flute) offers the nicest "sonic alternative" so, if I happen to know what is up and I feel that it may suit the circumstance, then (and only then) might I suggest the alto.

## How do you get the most from the contacts with producers and the like?

I am a craftsman – not a politician, so I am not very good at what one might call the 'glad-handing' side of things. It's been my experience that being on time, being co-operative and doing a REALLY good job is ultimately your strongest recommendation. I like to go into a session with the attitude that, "I want to see if I can deliver something they didn't expect ... but it is exactly what they wanted!" If you can succeed in delivering a singular and polished product then word will get around. (NOTE: Regarding "polished product" because I am a flute specialist, I do NOT double and this fact has worked both FOR me and AGAINST me in terms of session work over the years.)

## How do you price yourself for the sessions?

The pricing for recording sessions is a function of a number of variables but usually there is a minimum rate for say a three-hour call and that rate depends, in turn, on if the session is for a demo, a domestic release, or an international release. Check with your local AFM to find the applicable scale. However, producers on the session are generally fully aware of all of this and simply pay you the applicable scale.

I might add that, in today's work environment, there are a lot of independent projects going on. So, if I know that it is an indie session, I definitely have mercy on the artist! Indeed, if the artist is really new, then he or she knows that they can't pay you well enough, so I am inclined



to accept whatever the budget permits. Remember, the artist may well have a better budget for the next project, and they will keep in mind the players who were understanding and/or sympathetic towards the nature and the cost of their previous undertakings. They usually appreciate the ones who were on time, co-operative, polite, and who delivered a singular product that was worth far more than they paid. In such cases, believe me, they will call you back! Part of my empathy for the artist in this regard is because I have been a leader and I am an independent myself who has had to struggle with these very same issues, so I understand completely what that independent artist is going through. It's a little like being a sideman where I adhere to the philosophy that, "The leader has enough problems ... Don't you be another one of them."

Finally, I might mention that in a couple of key instances in my career I have been cold-called (typically by referral ... and because of what was an important and exposed flute part) for an indie/demo session that didn't really pay very well. However, after that one session, I was in the band, and that paid off with lots of live and studio work afterwards!

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# Musical Grids For Improvisers Part I

by Bill McBirnie

## The Problem

**B**eginning improvisers often attempt to create interest in their solos without a clear notion of what it is that they are trying to accomplish. In some cases, they become so preoccupied with trying to be original that they may convince themselves whatever it is they happen to be doing is justifiable – if only on the ground that it constitutes a “personal statement.” Of course, this can lead to some very unsatisfying results.



## A Healthy Attitude

Your musical efforts are ultimately better served by developing a healthy attitude and by concentrating on basic musical elements first because, in your efforts to be “innovative,” you (like anyone else) can end up sounding just plain bad when, with the proper focus and direction, you (like anyone else) can produce a result that is very pleasing – even if your results (like anyone else’s) are not necessarily as momentous and earth-shattering as you might have hoped they would be.

When you get right down to it, every note you play is not a sacred thing – and you will come to find that this is true no matter how accomplished the player is. What is more important is ensuring that whatever you play is heart-felt and that it is connected with what is going on around you.

In terms of establishing a healthy and realistic outlook, recognize before you even begin that you cannot conceal bad musicianship from your listener. This cuts the other way too. You cannot conceal good musicianship from your listener either (even on those very occasions when you really feel that you are not playing at your best!). In short, your musicianship is something that is plain and evident for all to hear. You

can’t hide your musicianship – whether it is good or bad. So concentrate on the basics – the fundamentals, the things that are perhaps obvious but which are also the most likely to produce pleasing and musical results.

And never fake an emotion because you will not deceive most casual listeners – and you will certainly not deceive an informed and intelligent listener.

## How to Start

The best way to begin is by analyzing the elements that contribute to pleasing musical results and to do so in a non-technical way. Learn to recognize the most basic and fundamental elements and then observe how they function and relate to one another in musical situations you like.

Basic elements are, by definition, not complicated and, what’s more, they are not that difficult to execute. In fact, it is often the basic of elements of music that enable something to work well. Indeed, the most obvious things can produce remarkably interesting and pleasing (i.e., musical) results. The key here is (1) to identify what are the contrasting elements and then (2) learn to exploit these contrasting elements in a thoughtful and balanced way when improvising.

## Tension & Release/Dissonance & Consonance

All music has sources of tension and release; i.e., dissonance and consonance. Developing an awareness of these sources of tension and release is the first thing you should do. Then learn to utilize these sources of tension and release in an expressive and meaningful way.

These sources can be examined on two levels; i.e., (1) on a performance (or non-technical) level and (2) on a structural (or a more technical) level.

## The Performance Level

Some of the elements of performance that will serve as sources of relaxation and tension are set out below. I would emphasize once again that these elements are non-technical.

Read all of them slowly and carefully and do not make the mistake of dismissing any of them as obvious. Listen for these elements in the work of musicians whom you enjoy and observe how they

utilize and exploit these elements. Then try to emulate the manner in which they use these elements in your own improvised solos.

## Sources Of Relaxation Sources Of Tension

Soft	Loud
Low	High
Slow	Fast
Long	Short
Rest	Motion
Unadorned	Embellished
Joined	Detached
Plain	Inflected
Simple	Complex
Gradual	Sudden
Sparse	Dense
Compress	Swell
Smooth	Rough
Silence	Noise

Note that, when viewed in a horizontal context, the entries in each line above are directly contrasting. Note also that, when viewed in a vertical context, the entries in each line become progressively more textural. Also note that these basic elements are present in all musical idioms – whether sophisticated or primitive. That is, it doesn’t matter if the context is jazz, pop, rock, country & western, world beat or free – you will find all of these elements of relaxation and tension functioning on some level or another in any idiom.

After identifying these basic contrasting elements, explore the ways in which these elements can be combined and re-combined. Then try to utilize those combinations and re-combinations as sensitively as you can when improvising (being mindful of the context in which you are playing, of course).

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# Constructing A Good Blues Solo

by Pat Carey

All scales are in C concert. All scales to be played ascending and descending and over entire range of your instrument.

The image shows six musical staves, each representing a different scale. Staff A is the Blues scale (C4 to C5: C, E♭, F, G, A♭, B♭, C). Staff B is the Pentatonic scale (C4 to C5: C, D, E, G, A, C). Staff C is the Major Blues Scale (C4 to C5: C, E, F, G, A, B♭, C). Staff D is the F Mixolydian scale (F4 to F5: F, G, A, B♭, C, D, E, F). Staff E is the F Mixolydian scale starting on C (C4 to C5: C, D, E, F, G, A, B♭, C). Staff F shows two variations: Pentatonic (Adjusted 3rd) and Major Blues scale (Adjusted 3rd), both with a flattened third note.

In this column I am going to give you some basic scales that are used over blues progressions and from which blues riffs are developed. In the end analysis, what makes a good blues solo is a particular player’s phrasing, tone and emotion, but before we get to that point we need to know what notes to play and where to play them, and by listening to other players we can create our own blues ideas.

The starting point for playing blues is the blues scale (See A). (For ease of explanation, we are using the key of C. All 12 bar blues and various scales can be transposed to all 12 keys.) The blues scale is important due to its bluesy sound, using the ♭3, ♭5 and ♭7, but also because it is diatonic in nature. To explain what this means let’s look at the structure of a basic blues.

We see that in a standard blues we have three chords: C7, F7, and G7. The C blues scale can be played against all three of these chords making it a diatonic scale, or a scale based on the I chord, in this case C. In other words, when we go to F7 (IV) and G7 (V) we don’t switch to the F and G blues scales, we continue to use the C blues scale. Try playing the notes randomly from this scale with your own phrasing and rhythms. Once we get a handle on the blues scale we then turn to three more scale types: pentatonic, major blues, and Mixolydian (See B, C, and D).

These scales are affected by root movement and need to change when the chords change.

For example:

C7 (I)	F7 (IV)	G7 (V)
C Pentatonic	F Pentatonic	G Pentatonic
C Major Blues Scale	F Major Blues Scale	G Major Blues Scale
C Mixolydian	F Mixolydian	G Mixolydian

These scales will all work in their particular root positions, but if we treat the C7 (I) and F7 (IV) diatonically we get better voice leading, and a stronger sense of the key center.

If we look at the C Mixolydian and F Mixolydian scales

(See D, E), we notice one thing – there is only a one note difference between the two: E natural, in the C Mixolydian, and E♭ in the F Mixolydian. If we take the F Mixolydian scale and change its root note to C and then look at it next to a C Mixolydian scale, we can really see how close they are.

We can now think of using one scale over C7 (I) and F7 (IV) but keeping in mind that we must adjust the third note for the F7 (IV), E♭ instead of E. We can apply the same idea to our Pentatonic and Major Blues Scale (See F). Keep in mind that when we switch to G7 (V) we must treat G as the root and adjust our Pentatonic, Major Blues, and Mixolydian scales to G for that one bar or revert to a C blues scale.

I hope this helps as a launching pad for learning to play the blues, and remember, in the end, blues is all about the feeling!



Pat Carey is the saxophone player for Downchild Blues Band having joined the band 23 years ago. Pat also leads his own jazz group, Pat Carey’s Jazz Navigators, which has just released its latest CD South By Southeast available at [www.Iridescentmusic.ca](http://www.Iridescentmusic.ca), along with Starlight, Pat’s previous CD. Pat is also a saxophone and clarinet instructor at The Merriam School of Music, as well as being a busy freelance musician performing weekly with Sophia Perlman & The Vipers, Bradley & The Bouncers, Big Rude Jake, Chuck Jackson & The Allstars, and The Nomads. [patcareysax@aol.com](mailto:patcareysax@aol.com), [www.myspace.com/patcareymusic](http://www.myspace.com/patcareymusic).

# Musical Grids For Improvisers Part II

by Bill McBirnie

## A Couple of Illustrations

**T**hink back to the worst improvised solos you have ever heard and, by reference to the Relaxation/Tension grid (from March/April *CM*), consider why they struck you as being so bad. You will likely find that the soloist was working one side of the grid only! Indeed, in the worst case you can possibly think of, I'll bet that the soloist was resorting almost exclusively to the elements set out in the right side of the grid – and all in a vain effort to create “interest.”

This is why I stress the importance of relying on relaxation as a point of reference in your improvising. Only invoke tension as a means of creating balance and sustaining interest – from time to time – and generally not as an end in itself.

With the proper focus and direction, you can structure your solo such that there is a logical sequence and development that typically (though not necessarily) unfolds as follows: Relaxation – Tension – Relaxation.



Miles Davis is often cited for his remarkable use of space. Indeed, his “silences” often make his “noises” speak with formidable eloquence. Ultimately, the fascination, the appeal, indeed, the very mystery of Miles is a direct function of his well-grounded sense and astute application of these very basic musical elements.

There are many examples of this all-encompassing aspect of Miles' work but, to cite just a few, let me suggest *E.S.P.*, *Sorcerer*, *Miles Smiles*, and *Neffertiti* (all on Columbia records).

When John Coltrane developed his “sheets of sound,” he quite deliberately played lines of unrelenting motion at staggering speeds. For Trane, this relentless speed served as a point of consonance (or relaxation, if you will) with the unusual consequence that his slow and more restful passages became points of relative dissonance (or tension). Indeed, what Trane did with his “sheets of sound” approach was to turn the Relaxation/Tension grid on its head and then sort of twist it all around. There are many examples to illustrate this particular facet of Trane's work. However, I will cite just one here: *Black Pearls* (on Prestige records).

## The Structural Level

As I indicated earlier, the basic elements of music can be examined both on a performance (i.e., a non-technical) and on a structural (i.e., a technical) level. Let's turn to the structural level now.

Some of the basic elements of structure that serve as sources of consonance and dissonance are set out below. These elements are technical in nature and they will likely

be a little more difficult to follow. Nonetheless, read them slowly and carefully ... and think about them. Then start to listen for these structural elements in the work of musicians whom you admire and observe how they utilize and exploit these structural elements (and how, in some cases, they mix and match these structural elements). Ultimately, try to utilize these same devices in your own improvised solos in a meaningful and balanced manner.

### Sources Of Consonance

Diatonic  
In Time  
Down Beats  
Scales  
Small Intervals  
Thirds, Sixths, Fourths, & Fifths  
Root Movements In 4ths & 5ths  
Major/Minor/Pentatonic Tonalities  
Simple Chord Structures (e.g., Triads)  
Within The Tonality  
Asymmetrical Structures  
Non-Sequential Arrangements  
Modal & Chanting Formats

### Sources Of Dissonance

Atonal  
Out of Time  
Up Beats  
Arpeggios  
Big Intervals  
Seconds, Sevenths, Altered  
Fourth, & Altered Fifths  
Root Movements In Other  
Intervals  
Dominant/Diminished/  
Augmented Tonalities  
Complex Chord Structures  
(e.g., With Extensions,  
Alterations, & Substitutions)  
Without/Against the  
Tonality  
Symmetrical Structures  
Sequential Arrangements  
Through Composed  
Melodies with Rapidly Shift-  
ing Harmonies

Once you become more aware of these contrasting elements, explore the many ways in which these elements can be combined – and re-combined. Then try to utilize those combinations and re-combinations as sensitively as you can when improvising (being mindful of the context in which you are playing, of course).

In summary, relaxation and consonance will serve to anchor your solo while tension and dissonance will serve to create interest and propel your solo forward. If you can manage to balance these contrasting elements (based on the two grids above) in a sensitive and thoughtful manner, then you will experience a much greater likelihood of producing pleasing – and musical – results in your improvising.

*Bill McBirnie is a jazz and Latin flute specialist located in Toronto who has been chosen Flutist of the Year by the Jazz Report Awards, nominated as Instrumentalist of the Year at the National Jazz Awards, and declared a winner of the US National Flute Association's triennial Jazz Flute Masterclass Competition. He has produced several Extreme Jazz projects to date including his most recent, Paco Paco, with Bernie Senensky (piano), Neil Swainson (bass), and John Sumner (drums). All of these are available from the distributor Indie Pool at [indiepool.com](http://indiepool.com). If you would like to contact Bill directly, you can reach him at [billmcb@direct.com](mailto:billmcb@direct.com).*

# VIBRATO

## Part I: How To Approach It

by Bill McBirnie

**V**ibrato is very much a matter of personal taste, so what observations and preferences I set out below are very much my own and they may well vary with those of others ... and that's all right because, ultimately, matters of taste cannot be dictated.

Physically speaking, I use throat vibrato because it produces the most pleasing result and it is the easiest to control. The alternative – the abdominal or diaphragm vibrato – generally sounds too broad or “woofy” to my ear. However, I will deviate from throat vibrato now and again. For example, in an occasional soul, R&B, or funky type of passage, I might literally “throw some gut into it.” But, quite frankly, a little of this goes a long way ... so I am very sparing in my use of diaphragm vibrato. Besides, I find that I can get just about everything I really need from throat vibrato.

I discovered vibrato on my own, and I think I know why ... I say this because my teacher was very surprised when I started to use vibrato (given that I was quite young and he had never even discussed it with me). Anyway, the story goes like this: whenever my teacher demonstrated anything on the instrument, I would always ask myself, “Why does he sound so much like Buffy Sainte-Marie playing a flute, and does he really want to sound like THAT?” Indeed, I started to worry that I myself might end up sounding, like THAT! (Believe me, when you're very young, this is the stuff that nightmares are made of!) So, I decided I would learn vibrato in my own way, as an act of musical “self-defence,” if you will, and I'm happy to announce that as a consequence of my efforts, I don't sound anything like Buffy Sainte-Marie playing a flute. By the way, I do NOT mean to disparage one of my first teachers here (much less Buffy, herself). In fact, that very same teacher taught me one of the most important lessons – if not THE most important lesson – of my musical life which is ... well, that's a story for another occasion.

The physical action required in throat vibrato is really quite simple. It lies in the muscles associated with coughing. Indeed, if you cough gently into your instrument, you will find that you can actually articulate a note. Now, pick a very accessible, mid-range note and “cough” very, very gently into the instrument – repeatedly and rhythmically – articulating the note by way of that delicate coughing action (and, of course, without using your tongue). Now, gradually, soften the action of the throat muscles involved until you are playing a sustained – albeit an inflected – tone. Voila! Vibrato!

Now cultivate this action and experiment with it. You will find that you can achieve a broad array of results in terms of breadth, depth, and pacing in the inflection. Explore ALL of the possibilities and find the one(s) you like (because, as I mentioned at the outset, vibrato is ultimately a matter of taste).

At the risk of being slightly prescriptive here, I would encourage you to target the pacing of your vibrato at the slower end of the spectrum. I say this because I find that the faster end of the spectrum can sound erratic and perhaps a little



frantic, and that is when it doesn't sound (at least to my ear) downright comical! (Think “nanny goat” and you'll see what I mean.)

Anyway, it has been my observation that classical flute players, in particular, feel bound to inflect ANY exposed and/or sustained tone to vibrato. This is completely uncalled for in the jazz, rock, Latin, etc. idioms. Indeed, you must learn to hear and accept a completely uninflected tone as a VALID alternative to an inflected one. Indeed, an uninflected tone is, generally speaking, the BEST place to start. And, if you doubt me on this point, then listen to the opening track, “Say It (Over And Over),” on John Coltrane's album, *Ballads* (on Impulse), and note how Trane uses absolutely NO vibrato throughout the entire tune! Then listen to the rest of the album and note how very little vibrato Trane uses at all, and, when he does so, how very subtle and understated it is, yet the emotional impact is heart-wrenching! This is a telling illustration of the principle that you cannot hide a lack of soul under a veil of vibrato! So, just don't do it, and where you do use vibrato, then certainly don't OVERDO it!

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# VIBRATO

## Part II: How I Approach It

by Bill McBirnie

In my own case, I might start a sustain with a straight, uninflected tone and then introduce vibrato in the course of the sustain; or I might invoke it only towards the very end of the sustain; or I may start the sustain with vibrato and eliminate it in the course of the sustain; or I may augment or diminish the vibrato in the course of the sustain; or I may simply toy with the vibrato in the course of the sustain; or do unusual things like let the vibrato actually fracture the note as it diminishes (i.e., remember the coughing action?!).

However, I find that it is usually better to rely on a simple "compress" or a "swell" in the overall volume of a given tone in order to draw attention to that note. Of course, compresses and swells will always work best without ANY vibrato: i.e., simply rely on the fundamental change in volume to achieve the desired effect.

Also recognize that, sometimes, letting the pitch go in the course of a compress or swell can be quite effective: i.e., a little movement in the intonation in a well-placed compress or swell is not a "bad" thing ... and it may, in fact, serve to dramatize the effect!

In brief, in my own case, I do not invoke vibrato at every opportunity – and I absolutely never do so when the line is in motion. I also tend not to inflect the earlier part of a line. Rather, I am much more inclined to do so, if at all, towards the end of the line – and often simply the very last note, and this is a very useful and valuable rule-of-thumb which I discovered intuitively over the years.

So, if I were to reduce the question of when – and when not – to use vibrato to a very quick and concise instruction, then I would say, "Hold off using any vibrato until the end of the phrase!" In the meantime, use compresses and swells to highlight and dramatize the line – NOT vibrato. By this means, you will end up with a much more convincing, as well as musical, result!

Of course, the depth of the wave in the vibrato can be varied considerably as well. I deal with this aspect very intuitively because the depth of the wave (like the pace of the vibrato itself) tends to be governed by the musical context. As a simple illustration, I typically use a deeper wave for ballads and a much shallower wave for up-tempo tunes.

Please be advised that the best way to get a really good sense of all of this is to listen to, and to examine closely, the approach of really great vocalists like Ray Charles and Frank Sinatra.



Finally, by way of illustration, you might want to listen to three short, two-minute sound clips of my own work at the Jazz Flute Resident link on the Sir James Galway web site: [www.thegalwaynetwork.com/jazz/jazz.htm](http://www.thegalwaynetwork.com/jazz/jazz.htm).

There you can actually listen to and hear me demonstrate some of the things that I have been saying in this article and in just a few, short, contrasting, musical examples...

Take "My Song" (a ballad which displays a good deal of vibrato) and contrast the approach here with "The Great City" (a medium swing tune where I use virtually no vibrato).

Also, by way of self-critique, I will draw your attention to a third sound clip – the bebop tune entitled, "Teaneck." During the head, I actually feel that I use too much vibrato, and although the result is perhaps not utterly terrible, I handle the vibrato much better during the solo – precisely because there is none!

I hope this discussion about vibrato will provide you with some insight into its effective use and enable you to see that what should merely serve as a subtle colouring device often, through exaggeration and excessive use, ends up detracting from the overall quality of not only the sound, but the music as well! So, once again, the best advice in the matter of vibrato is ... don't overdo it!

*Bill McBirnie is a jazz and Latin flute specialist located in Toronto who has been chosen Flutist of the Year by the Jazz Report Awards, nominated as Instrumentalist of the Year at the National Jazz Awards, and declared a winner of the U.S.A. National Flute Association's triennial Jazz Flute Masterclass Competition. He has produced several Extreme Flute projects to date including his most recent, Paco Paco, with Bernie Senensky (piano), Neil Swainson (bass), and John Sumner (drums). All of these are available from the distributor, Indie Pool at [www.indiepool.com](http://www.indiepool.com). If you would like to contact Bill directly, you can reach him at [billmcb@idirect.com](mailto:billmcb@idirect.com).*

# A Practical Guide To Aksak Rhythms

by Daniel Schnee

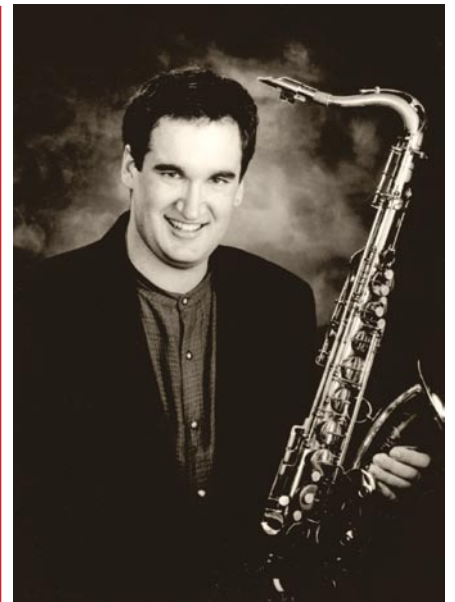
**T**hough many jazz musicians have undergone some kind of traditional training in the classical or folk music of another culture, many do not have access to these cultures through more than just a good recording or the occasional concert. This is especially true of the music of many of the Eastern European countries that have woodwind or improvisatory traditions.

One such tradition is what are known as “limping” or **aksak** rhythms, a Turkish term used to describe rhythms that contain a certain kind of time sense that we Westerners tend to experience as “asymmetrical” or “odd.” Those of us who listen to the music of bands like Rush or any of Frank Zappa’s more adventurous numbers are a little more accustomed to hearing a piece of music in 7/8 or 11/4, but we certainly don’t have practical systems designed to help us feel/internalize these rhythms.

The limping effect created by an aksak rhythm is due to the irregular relationship between the units of time used to count them. In most Western rhythms, we use long pulses or short pulses to create a time signature. 2/4 is two long beats in a bar, 3/8 could be called three short beats, for example. Many aksak beats are better described as certain groups of rhythmic units rather than a “time signature,” as there is no time signature that reckons with two eighth notes followed by a dotted eighth. To us, it is logical to break it down into 7/16, as this time signature is an “accurate” description of the unit grouping in Western music analysis – but the rhythm itself is heard as a kind of “three” rhythm with an irregular final unit, and this is what I am ultimately trying to explain. It is normal to hear this “limp” in music from Bulgaria, for example, and naturally include the limp

in the pulse without the need to count out sixteenth notes in one’s head in order for the rhythm to make “sense.” I wish to address this “irrational” quality and get beyond the need to count or make “sense” of these rhythms, which is a hindrance in truly feeling and playing these rhythms in a traditional or contemporary setting.

The easiest example to begin with is binary and ternary note combinations. Six basic aksak rhythms are: 232, 223, 332, 323, 233, and 322. I have chosen these because they create time signatures of seven and eight, seven being relatively uncommon in Western music, and the eights offered here being structured in a way that we usually don’t conceptualize. Using these groupings, we can lay them over a melodic framework to begin transforming our traditional scale practice to include these new ways of organizing our musical time. The C major scale is a good starting place, since it is one we are all very familiar with. Using C major, and counting the notes out in step with the rhythm, we can practice 232 as the stepwise reorganizing of the scale [CD, CDE, DF], logically followed by [DE, DEF, EG] and so on, up and down the scale. This not only imprints the new rhythm practically into your technique without having to count it in your head, it also breaks up habitually organizing scale practice into symmetrical formats. Moving on to 223, we could organize this set as two sets of large intervals followed by diatonic ascension: [CE, DF, EFG] followed by [DF, EG, FGA] and so on. Do this with major and minor scales. Then move on to chromatic and symmetrical scales for even more of a rhythmic and melodic workout (I didn’t say it was going to be easy!). Then you can begin to build longer chains of rhythm, and begin to form practical scale exercises of your



own to continue this first step into aksak rhythm.

The implication of this brief description is that you will begin to develop this idea to fit your own particular level of technical proficiency. You will especially begin to hear the rhythms as independent of signature, yet just as useful for organizing time as our “rational” Western system of reducing everything to the lowest common denominator.

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# A Carnatic Approach To Rhythm & Time

by Daniel Schnee

While in training as a Soto Zen Buddhist in Japan, I spent countless hours chanting scripture as part of my study regimen. And thanks to my ability to organize the words rhythmically, I was able to memorize large amounts of text quite rapidly. But this was no coincidence, for I had previously engaged in reciting *solkatu* as a part of my study of South Indian Carnatic with master Sri Kadri Gopalnath.

Solkatu, or *konnakkol*, are syllables that function as vocalized representations of the various rhythmic groupings, and as organizations of the musical / temporal structures. They are different from syllables used in North Indian music in that *bol* are onomatopoeia of the actual sound of the tabla drums, while solkatu are rhythmic mnemonics only. Solkatu is not only a pedagogical aid, but has been and is considered by some to be an art in itself with itself. Though we don't practice this particular art in jazz, the ability to sing rhythmic patterns is an important ability to have, and a basic look at syllabic rhythm and counting may help you advance your own understanding of rhythm as an improvising musician, create your own set of written exercises to help you memorize and internalize long cycles, and help you compose or transcribe cyclic structures with greater ease.

The principles of rhythmic theory in Carnatic music are called the *Dasa Prana*, the 10 vital elements of rhythm. Among the ideas discussed are the various modes of indicating rhythm, subdivision, tempo, classification, and the idea of "time" in general. The meters in South Indian music are considered to have developed over time from Sanskrit poetry, and out of this system five basic lengths of time (*jati*) developed: *chatusra* (4), *tisra* (3), *misra* (7), *khanda* (5), and *sankirna* (9). The groupings (*anga*) of beats (*akshara*) can be arranged quite creatively, and I intend to discuss them in terms of how you can begin to use these particular groupings to your advantage.

Among the many ways to articulate these groupings, the Carnatic music and dance terms *taka*, *takita*, and *takadimi* work very well, although I tend to use

the word "takida" instead as I find it easier to pronounce at fast tempos. Logically, "taka" is used as a grouping of two, "takida" of three, and "takadimi" of four. Having these groupings as a basic set of building blocks helps one create longer structures without having to count in one's head, and prevents thought in general from interfering with your music making. The idea is to become comfortable with a rhythmic cycle by repeating the syllabic version of it until the rhythm feels completely natural.

So, in order to create a cycle of five beats for example, we can say "taka-takida." We could also say "takida-taka," but most people seem to prefer the former. It seems to flow off the tongue easier. Now that we have chosen a five-syllable phrase, we can add notes to each syllable and experiment with musical phrases and ideas. "Takadimi-takida" is a good seven-syllable structure, as is "taka-taka-takida." Of course, the big fun begins when you start working out long cycles, and begin to memorize and internalize their syllabic flow. Beginning with 13 beats (*takadimi/takida/takadimi/taka*), we can repeat the phrase over again and then add an extra "taka" on the end, thus creating a 28-beat cycle. Suddenly, the idea of memorizing a 32-, 45-, or 63-beat cycle doesn't seem so alien, or out of reach. Then you can take the next step and write out a simple melody utilizing that rhythm either as a further memory aid, or as a full-blown composition to improvise over. In fact, many of my cycles have now become practical tools for teaching or performing in some fashion or the other.

An effective practice (and composing) device is to create several cycles and turn them into concurrent bars of music. It is a great way to train the fingers and mind, practice difficult shifts in rhythm and tempo, and also guarantees you don't fall into the habit of creating only long, single chains of rhythm exclusively. One exercise is to write out and sing additive bars in a sequence: 9/4, 10/4, 11/4, etc. They are fun to sing and play, and create an exciting, complicated sound without actually being complicated at all.

In terms of improvisation, I have found that the occasional cycle over a standard time signature is a nice rhythmic effect, and the ability to feel long



cycles helps one organize melodic material even in traditional formats much more effectively. Cycles are also fun to use in both traditional and more contemporary compositional forms, and introducing a cycle section into one of your pieces is a nice way of expanding your music into creative, unexplored territory. Variety is the key, and the more you experiment with this system the more enriched and creative you will become as a musician.

Be careful you don't overdo it, though. Like such activities as circular breathing or playing multiphonics, playing and improvising on cycles should be done with taste. But if practiced and performed with care, there is no limit to what you can achieve musically with hard work, ingenuity, and as always, a metronome.

And just think ... you could be the first person in your town to successfully play a few choruses of a slow blues ... in the time signature of 86/4!

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*Daniel became the woodwind and jazz history instructor at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Jerusalem. His work, along with the works of Brian Eno, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Steven Reich will be featured in an upcoming anthology of innovative graphic score composers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, published by the American Musicological Society.*

# The Importance Of Studying Harmony On The Piano

by Daniel Schnee

The study of harmony on the piano is essential, especially if you want to expand your palette as a composer and improviser. Arpeggiation and scale/chord matching serve their purposes until you start repeating the same old tired, clichéd patterns over and over, or have no new ideas at all. Studying harmony as it appears on the piano gives you access to a colour palette and harmonic ideas that the woodwinds by their very nature don't address.

One such idea, which completely floored me once I "discovered" it, was the Sound concept of jazz voicing introduced to me by Charlie Austin, a phenomenal jazz pianist and brilliant teacher. Though this information had been around in one form or another for decades, and can be found in the styles of pianists Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans, and McCoy Tyner, Austin's conception of the Sound idea is unique, and is one potent example of what study of his and other systems can do for your playing.

The 'Sound' in its initial form is a

major seven chord with a flatted 5<sup>th</sup> (fig. 1). It's a nice, somewhat impressionistic chord on its own, but becomes much, much more in its flexibility of function. If you look carefully at the chord as it is spelled out on your right on the piano, you will notice a curious fact. If you play F maj.7<sup>b</sup>5 chord and then hold down the D preceding it, you now have a D minor 6/9 chord (fig. 2). The F now becomes the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the D chord while the remaining notes spell out the 5<sup>th</sup>, a 6<sup>th</sup>, and a 9<sup>th</sup>. Even without the 7<sup>th</sup> it sounds like a solid minor chord. Moving on, we play the F maj.7<sup>b</sup>5 chord again, and this time hold down the G directly next to the F we are holding and all of a sudden we are holding a G 13 chord (fig. 3). The F is now the 7<sup>th</sup> of G, the A functions like a 9<sup>th</sup>, the B is the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and E functions like a 13<sup>th</sup>. So, we have two very nice ways of arpeggiating chords without always starting from the given root and merely outlining the standard chord, as this single chord works over D min.7 and G7 without any alteration. And as you have probably already noticed, Dmin.7 going



to G7 is part of a "II - V - I" progression (in C), probably the most common chord progression in jazz music. Now you have a new, more colourful way of efficiently moving from a minor chord to a related dominant chord that is not clichéd or mere repetition of whatever chords are written in your charts.



Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

But that's not all. Look at F maj.7<sup>b</sup>5 again. See what it is hiding in plain sight? I'll give you hint. It has something to do with the II - V - I progression. Scrutinize the chord, and if you don't "see" it after a minute or two, keep on reading.

Very often, jazz musicians substitute certain chords with interesting replacements that not only work with the harmony of the progression, but add a beautiful sound or interesting shape to the music. A common substitution is known as a tritone substitution, as you are taking out one chord, usually a dominant chord, and replacing it with the same or similar quality chord on the tritone (interval of a flat 5<sup>th</sup>) above it.

The F maj.7<sup>b</sup>5 chord already contains a nice version of the standard tritone substitution that would be used if you were playing a II-V-I progression in C. What happens is that instead of playing Dmin.6/9 going to G13, you replace the

G13 with a dominant chord starting on D<sup>b</sup>. That way, the root of each chord descends with a nice "falling" sound. And the great thing is... if you put a D<sup>b</sup> under the F maj.7<sup>b</sup>5 chord ... you now have a D<sup>b</sup>7<sup>#</sup>9<sup>#</sup>5 chord (fig. 4), a sophisticated tritone substitution for G13 without even having to move your right hand at all!

Another interesting use for the Sound chord in its basic form is as part of each chord in a minor II - V - I progression. If we choose the key of A for example, the first chord will be Bmin.11<sup>b</sup>5 (fig.5), an Fmaj.7<sup>b</sup>5 over B. The dominant chord would be E, so we can play a G<sup>#</sup> maj.7<sup>b</sup>5 over E, which creates an E 7<sup>#</sup>9<sup>#</sup>5 chord (fig. 6), followed by a C maj.7<sup>b</sup>5 over an A (fig. 7), which creates an Amin.6/9 chord - heavy stuff for any saxophone player not previously familiar with these methods.

*Daniel Schnee is a Toronto-based saxophonist who has performed internationally with a number of Juno and Grammy award-winning musicians. He has studied privately with several renowned South Indian and Arabic masters, as well as with legendary saxophonist Ornette Coleman.*

# The Chromatic Axis Concept

by Daniel Schnee

I love chromaticism. The concept of chromatic tonality occupies my thoughts most of the day. In fact, I love it so much I have written a book about it! The chromatic scale itself is almost completely ignored in standard music training, as it is treated as merely a bunch of half steps, and is seemingly of little consequence. In response to this, I have explored and created a way for myself and others to approach the twelve-tone chromatic scale like one would any other scale. Just like other scales, the chromatic scale is emotive and musical in its own right, and it is time to reconsider its possibilities as a melodic and harmonic entity.

I have labeled my system of organizing and studying chromaticism "The Chromatic Axis Concept", and I thought I would share one of its fundamental preliminary exercises with you, an exercise that I think will expand your idea of harmony and melody, as well as train your inner sense of time. It is designed to radically shift one's sense of mode, harmony, and melody from the standard diatonic training systems to a more acute sensitivity to chromatic tonality.

Out of all the exercises in my book, the easiest one also happens to be the most difficult to do. It will test your patience as well as your physical and emotional stamina if it is practiced over long periods of time. So, take it easy at first, and if you can handle and enjoy it, pursue it enthusiastically. I am sure you will find it as rewarding as I do once you get used to it. I also recommend that you do this exercise when you are rested and alert – early in the morning if it is possible.

The exercise is called "Chromatic Metronome Training." You set your metronome somewhere between 60 and 70, and play random quarter notes in time. Avoid any note repetition or scale-type ideas, including the chromatic scale. Try and play as randomly as you possibly

can. If you want you can also write out a few random tone rows to help you get the feel of this exercise. Stay within one octave, if you want, for a few moments before moving up; challenge yourself with wide intervallic leaps; schedule increasingly longer practice periods; or make up little challenging games like avoiding certain pitches for a minute or two. The point is to play completely random pitches in time. Simple, you say. Turn on the metronome, start playing a series of non-repeating notes with good time feel. So? The "catch" is... start in



two-minute segments, and eventually work your way up to several hours. Yes. Several **HOURS**. This is some real Jedi-level training, for saxophonists especially!

This exercise breaks down old habits, clichéd patterns and phrases, and completely destroys old habitual ways of playing and thinking as your mind and musical sense begin to hear the deep musicality embedded in streams of linear non-diatonic pitches. When you have been playing chromatic pitches non-stop for an hour, you arrive at a very interesting place. Initially, you are calm before your mind and body start to react and become bored, resistant,

tired, indifferent, impatient, cynical, doubtful, and/or unfocused. You most likely will want to quit and do something more fun – something that makes you feel like you are making progress. If you continue on through the hour and ignore the negativity, you will arrive at a new place inside yourself that will help you become a much more technically skilled and harmonically advanced musician, no matter what kind of music you make – but it is extremely demanding. After one particularly intense day (nine 45-minute sessions in a row with 15-minute breaks in between) I felt like I had gone for a 10 km run, and then drank a cup of cherry-flavored Guaiifenesin. The point is: don't abuse cough syrup! And talk to your doctor before engaging in any strenuous activities.

Of course, you can do relatively small sessions and still not miss out on some kind of reward. Even a few minutes a day of this one exercise will help towards opening up to new possibilities in technique, composition, and improvisation. I also don't recommend doing more than an hour maximum at first, unless or until you are also engaging in controlled athletic strength and flexibility training, and have the appropriate diet to support such a rigorous musical lifestyle. Proper exercise, nutrition, and good sleep habits will really help keep you healthy, physically prepared, and injury-free during your practice sessions.

I encourage you to consider and explore the discipline of sustained chromatic study over extended periods of time. It is a powerful tool for personal and musical growth – and you will save hundreds of dollars on running shoes and cold medicine.

*Daniel Schnee is a Toronto-based saxophonist who has done a lot of stuff all over the world with famous people ... even in Finland!*

# The Chromatic Axis Concept Part II

by Daniel Schnee

**A**s I mentioned last issue, chromatic tonality occupies my thoughts most of the day (the remaining hours being spent in search of various flavours of pie!). In fact, I love chromaticism so much I have written a book about it called *The Chromatic Axis Concept*. This time, I will discuss the concept of chromatic scales or "axial" modes, the next part of the system after doing chromatic metronome training.

The idea underlying axial modes has been around in one form or another for quite awhile in the work of serial composers and jazz musicians such as John Coltrane. The idea is to use a set number of intervals for constructing a melody or chord series without assigning a specific key beforehand, kind of like the Western medieval method of writing out a melody using only a map of the vertical distances between notes. I have taken this idea one step further to create spontaneous modes in this manner without assigning a specific direction up or down in which the intervals must proceed. As the mode unfurls, the notes can be used as pivot points to shift the direction of the mode while still maintaining its intervallic logic; thus, each note of the mode can be an axis for a shift in harmonic colour and direction.

As an example, I will create a mode starting with the note C, using a short series of whole and half steps. If the interval set is a half step followed by a whole step [ $\frac{1}{2} : 1$ ], then starting on C I can move to C# or B. I must then move a whole step, so if I moved to B first, then my options are C# or A, both a whole step away. I must then move a half step, so if I moved to A, I can move up to B $\flat$  or down to A $\flat$ . Continuing on in this manner creates a defined modal structure while still being able to add a certain kind of chromatic freedom to the motion of the mode. Expanding on

this, I could also use a larger interval set of half step, whole step, and a minor third in the same manner. Starting on C, several different patterns could appear right from the beginning using this intervallic structure; C C# D# F# F ..., C B C# A ..., C C# B A $\flat$  ..., and so on.

An issue one might raise would be the assumption that the harmony would be "unclear" – that modes need to imply a clear relationship with a song's chords or amongst the notes within the mode itself. What makes these shifting modes work is that there is a clear pattern in the asymmetrical progress of the mode. The harmonic colour may change from moment to moment, but axial modes have their own inherent logic when played with good time and good control over one's technique.

To begin practicing this idea, write out a small set of two or more intervals, and slowly practice creating modes using those intervals only, though you are free to move in any direction up or down. So, if you are using the intervallic ratio a perfect 4th to a half step, then the mode could look something like D G G# D# E A A#. Or, if you use a minor 3rd and a whole step, you create a mode like D F G B $\flat$  C and so forth. Once you become comfortable with that, start trying larger sets such as [ $\frac{1}{2} : 1 : 4 : 1 : \frac{1}{2}$ ].

I usually keep to the mode strictly, but it is fun once in a while to stray from the pattern and add some random intervals to create "intervallic tension." You can also assign a certain range within an octave to stay inside to force yourself to be more creative with a smaller amount of freedom.

The application of this idea in jazz doesn't necessarily have to be in more avant garde forms either. On a composition like "Solar" which contains a series of interesting II – V progressions, an axial mode makes a nice connecting process as you move through the chords.



On "All Blues" or the solo section from "Spiritual," the ever-shifting whole and half steps also create a nice harmonic contrast to the bass patterns. An especially good place to use axial modality is on "Giant Steps," as you never stray too far from the harmony by limiting the range of your modes to small steps. The axial mode is also very useful on a blues with an altered form, such as "Mr. Day" by John Coltrane. In this case, an axial mode can build a nice chromatic tension, which is released in the last four bars over the alteration. On songs with solo breaks such as "Seven Steps to Heaven" or "A Night in Tunisia," an axial mode can create an exciting lead-in to and resolution of the first chord of the solo section. It can also work nicely on a modal lead-in as well, such as the bars of C minor before the solo section of "Crescent."

This system will not only help your technique expand and grow – you will instantly discover a plethora of new improvisational and compositional structures to use in your playing. Good luck!

*Daniel Schnee is an internationally active saxophonist/ethnomusicologist based in Toronto.*

# Reconnecting With Your Voice

by Jane Bunnett

Over the last five years I have had the great opportunity to be the bandleader and artistic director for *Global Divas*, a fundraiser show for St. Stephen's Community House in Toronto. This annual show has allowed me to work with some of the emerging and established voices on the global music scene.

Tanya Tagquet from Nunavut, Maryem Toller from Egypt, and Brenda Macrimmo from Turkey (just to name a few) have shifted my approach in how I can more effectively interact with the colours and nuances these unique artists deliver.

By really tapping into "their thing," it's made me think not just about notes and scales but, more importantly, about connecting to their sound and building on that to hopefully make a stronger musical statement altogether.

When I first started to play music, my first choice was the piano, later, the clarinet, and in my teenage years I even tried my hand at the guitar (that sure wasn't me!). Much later, as I began to mature, I began listening to many of the jazz greats (and that includes the great jazz vocalists). At this time, I found the saxophone and flute to be my musical voice.

Some of those musical greats (and I know I'm going to miss a few) were Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Helen Humes, Bessie Smith, Maxine Sullivan, Helen Merrill, Nina Simone, Jo Stafford, Rosemary Clooney, Shirley Horn, Sheila Jordan, and Jeanne Lee.

Strangely enough, they are all women, and these were the voices that had early impact on me – later, of course, I heard Jon Hendricks, Eddie Jefferson, Chet Baker, etc.

The human voice is our truest expression. After many months of listening to the drumming of the heartbeat in our mother's body, the cry and the human voices responding to it are perhaps our first musical interactions.

While working on my new recording for EMI called *Embracing Voices*, I had the great fortune of working with the 10-piece accappella group Grupo Vocal

Desandann. Upon hearing this group for the first time, the vibrations I felt from their voices had a huge impact on me, hence the title of the new recording. This is why, for my 16<sup>th</sup> recording, I decided to return full circle and focus on the human voice.

While writing the music for 10 voices, it was important that it still remained a jazz recording and that the horn and lead voice really worked together to become extensions of one another.

I invited the great vocalist Molly Johnson to interpret Jacques Brel's "Ne Me Quitte Pas" but with Rod McKuen's English lyrics "If You Go Away." Molly has the most beautiful smoky voice – a voice that tells a story and really resonates with the mood of these tragic lyrics. It was important to keep in synch with the mood created. I often think of the combination of Lester Young and Billie Holiday as two artists who worked in the same linear manner. What an incredible pairing! Also, who could forget the stunning work that Shirley Horn and Miles Davis did together on "You Won't Forget Me"?

What a great opportunity it was to hear the live performances of Dexter Gordon in the '80s. Boy, was I fortunate! Often, Gordon would recite the verse or chorus of a well-known standard before proceeding with the melody and, later, his improvisations. Luckily, many of these were recorded: "More than you know, more than you know, man o' my heart love you so. Lately I find, you're on my mind more than you know" (first verse to "More Than You Know").

This truly set up the meaning of the piece. The lyrics were important. A great composition is the combination of the two. I think it's true that many of the great jazz improvisers (Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Joe Lovano, etc.) know the lyrics and are capable of singing the song. I've found that many of the young and advanced horn players that are out there can play their butts off but are not really able to simply sing a standard! Revisiting this concept is a great idea and a practical learning tool.



photo: Richard Martin

On a final note, the chance to work with two very diverse vocalists on *Embracing Voices* allowed me to also work with the various timbres of the horns I play.

Kellylee Evans (who wrote the lyrics for four of my compositions) has a clear and silvery voice – very honest and open. Her voice reflects her lyrics. This again dictated the mood for how I would blend so as not to take away from her sound. Again, Molly Johnson's voice is unique – calling upon my sound to adjust just a little.

I have always wanted to sing – and I have tried. Playing with many great singers has brought me back to what initially "turned me on" to the melodies and rhythm of jazz.

*Jane Bunnett, the Toronto-based soprano saxophonist, flutist, and bandleader, has built her career at the crossroads between world music and jazz. Twice nominated for Grammy awards and a fixture of the nominations for Canada's Juno awards, she has turned her bands into showcases for the finest musical talent from Canada, the US, Cuba, and elsewhere. Embracing Voices is available from EMI Records. You can contact Jane Bunnett at [janeb@janebunnett.com](mailto:janeb@janebunnett.com).*

# Free Improvisation For Beginners

by Daniel Schnee

**O**n a hot, humid New York night way back in 1997, I was completely blown away and divinely transformed by saxophonist Ornette Coleman performing a set of music with his reunited original trio. Since then, I have not only been his student, but also a promoter of the study and performance of freely improvised music, otherwise known as **free jazz**, or free improvisation. I believe that an organized study of freely improvised music is not only beneficial to all musicians, but can be an extremely useful and deeply enjoyable individual or collective activity for anybody to participate in. I will begin by describing what it is, and then explain how you can begin to do it yourself.

**Free improvisation** is actually a fairly loose term covering a wide array of people and practices. Whatever you think you can turn into interesting or beautiful spontaneous musical sounds can be called free improvisation. I have encountered young and old musicians all over the world making freely improvised music in many ways under many names. In Kobe, I saw a man attempting to coax spirits out of four radios arranged in a square, the squawking of static mixed with faint signals being his "music." In Reykjavik, I heard of a group of avant-garde rock musicians that took readings of a famous classical composer's vital signs and turned them into an album of improvisations. But these are fairly extreme examples. The usual occurrence of freely improvised music is within more conservative collectives and live performance situations, and in many styles other than jazz or alternative rock music.

So what do you do when you decide to just "play?" As composer Joannie Ing asked me once, "What is a successful free improvisation, and how is it measured?" Heavy questions indeed! How would a beginning free improviser learn to create and interact in this manner? If you are practicing by yourself, then the following activities will be a good way to start discovering interesting new ways to make music with your saxophone, clarinet, and/or flute. Though it may seem frivolous and not really "serious" at times, these methods

have led to the creation of some very profound, "successful" works of music over many decades, and I urge you to seriously consider the following before judging their effects and usefulness prematurely.

Begin by first exploring your instrument purely as a sound maker. What does it sound like when you tap it? Breathe into it without blowing. Speak into it like a mega phone. Does the wood or metal create any interesting sounds if you flap your fingers up and down on the keys without blowing? How about the sounds the clarinet makes when you slightly lift your fingers while blowing? Could you make a composition out of that?

Next, begin making a list of qualities you like in music. Some examples are: softness, darkness, silence, brightness, slow, fast, breathiness, slowing down, speeding up, and such. Once you have a list that you like, put it on your music stand and begin trying to make these qualities happen in music without trying to play in any particular key. If that sounds too unorganized to you, try and do the same exercise with a scale, a chord, or small melody that you invent off the top of your head. An interesting chromatic scale to experiment with is the symmetrical dominant, a series of whole- and half-steps starting with a halfstep [C C# D# E F# G A Bb].

This exercise is about experimentation, not how "good" you can do it. Don't be worried or saddened if you don't like what you create. The joy is in the attempt and the thrill of discovery. And no one is thrilled all the time! The whole process reaps many musical rewards for those that become comfortable with exploring their own unknown musical wilderness.

Once you have tried that, move on to the next exercise, which is doing the exact same thing, only not looking at a list ... but a picture. Find any picture that you like and put it on your music stand. Now, try and spontaneously make music that you feel describes the picture or music that explains the picture somehow.

For an interesting study of graphic or visual score improvisation, go to the website of the New York Miniature



Ensemble, and peruse its online gallery of graphic music scores. A few minutes of improvising to many of the scores contained therein will open you up to an interesting world of structure and improvisation you may not have experienced before. Then move on to actual movie clips. Create your own improvised soundtrack to any one of your favorite DVDs, or rent some classic silent films and make your accompaniment to them.

I could go on, but I think you get the point. Free improvisation can be a learning resource, a compositional tool, a social activity, and many other things. Whatever you need it for, it can be used, and it has been and continues to be a valuable guide to the study of creativity and human resourcefulness.

If you live in the Toronto area, contact the Association of Improvising Musicians (AIMT) at [www.aimtoronto.com](http://www.aimtoronto.com) for more info on workshops and performances near you.

*Daniel Schnee is a Toronto-based saxophonist who has performed internationally with a number of Juno and Grammy Award-winning musicians. He has studied privately with several renowned South Indian and Arabic masters, as well as with legendary saxophonist Ornette Coleman. After composing for theatre and dance in Japan for several years, Daniel became the woodwind and jazz history instructor at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Jerusalem. His work, along with works by Brian Eno, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Steven Reich will be featured in an upcoming anthology of innovative graphic score composers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, published by the American Musicological Society.*

# Building A Better Embouchure

by Daniel Schnee

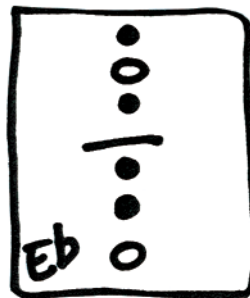
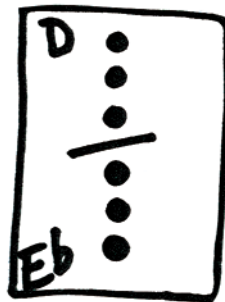
There are many things that can go wrong with your embouchure. I will never forget giving a lesson to a student who carried so much tension in his jaw that his top front teeth had dug deep slots in his hard rubber mouthpiece – so deep that they almost broke through to the inside! When he put his teeth on the mouthpiece, he couldn't move it at all in his mouth, like it was welded to his teeth! And I can only imagine the nerve damage done to his lower lip and jaw muscles. Believe me, you don't want to end up like this.

A good embouchure means less wasted energy, reduced neck and jaw tension, less psychosomatic tension in the rest of one's body, and most importantly, a longer musical career thanks to less wear and tear on your joints, vertebrae, and tendons. And most importantly, it will give you a gorgeous tone. To begin with, let's not forget the first rule of the embouchure for the saxophone: it should be a circle or formed like an "O." By making sure that your embouchure is round, we can then begin building the muscles to be strong in this position, all around the embouchure ring.

Probably the most vital embouchure exercise is the ability to play a one-octave major scale on the mouthpiece alone, hitting the various pitches accurately along the way. I like starting on  $A\flat$ , especially on my tenor mouthpiece, but most people I have met usually use  $A$  natural as their starter. After practicing that for a few minutes, I also play a few diatonic melodies within the range of an octave to make sure my embouchure is nice and warmed up before trying a few chromatic phrases and diatonic triads within the octave as well, both ascending and descending. Not only does this build flexibility and strength in your embouchure, but trains your ear as well, which is important if you are ever required to alter your embouchure away from the standard position to perform certain aural effects.

Another strength builder is developing the ability to play **multiphonics** clearly and evenly without losing the upper and lower harmonics. Multiphonics are the harmonic creation of two or three tones at once on a single-note

instrument. Most often, they are used to create a kind of white noise effect in free jazz, but if practiced and played with sensitivity they can be quite beautiful in their raw immediacy. Be forewarned, they sound scratchy and screamy when you first begin to try them. Once you learn to hold them steady with a consistent air stream, you will hear what they are capable of as complex expressive devices. The multiphonics shown below are two of the nicer sounding ones a person can choose. The top one should come out sounding like a bit like a diesel engine idling, while the lower



one should come out sounding like a low sounding electric razor. It takes a bit of practice playing multiphonics, as you have to direct the air through the mouthpiece at a specific speed, and at a slightly different angle from a normal note. These are micro adjustments, and eventually your mouth and mind will naturally work out the right position.

Another really good embouchure builder is one handed down to me from Ornette Coleman, and one that Dewey Redman used to hand down to his stu-



dents. You take a deep breath, and play the lowest note ( $B\flat$ ) really loud (but controlled) on your saxophone until your air runs out. Then you do the same thing with the next note a semitone up until you reach high  $F$ . Then you go down the horn doing the same thing. Then you repeat the entire process playing as quietly as possible. This should take about a half-hour, and it will give you a controlled embouchure like no other.

One rather effective embouchure builder from the world of classical saxophone is to make an exaggerated kissy face for three seconds, followed by pulling your embouchure as far back as you can into a highly exaggerated smile, and repeating the process for a few minutes. You can practice this anywhere, and I have found it a good way to get my face warmed up and ready to play if I don't have time to actually spend 20 minutes warming up before a show.

All of these exercises can be done during the same embouchure session, or you can pick one or two exclusively to do for your daily embouchure exercise regimen. Just be careful to not overdo it, and possibly give yourself neck or jaw muscle problems from readjustment tension or over-practicing.

*Daniel Schnee is a Toronto-based saxophonist who has performed worldwide with a number of Juno and Grammy Award-winning musicians, and has been internationally recognized as a graphic score composer. Currently, he is doing doctoral research on aesthetic philosophy and east Asian studies.*

# Introduction To Graphic Scores

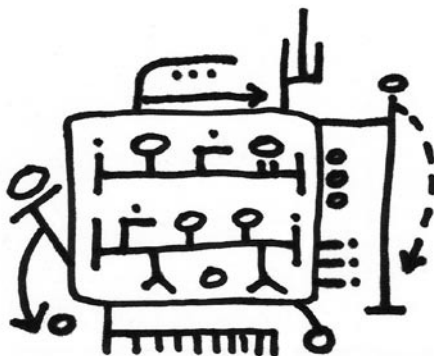
by Daniel Schnee

**In** 1968, the legendary composer John Cage published an anthology of music called *Notations*. In it, he gathered scores by many famous composers of the day. They were randomly arranged, with guidance from the Chinese work the *I-Ching*, with a brief description alongside. This book became a classic work, and had an influence on many of the more adventurous or experimental composers that came along afterwards. This was because the anthology concerned graphic scores – manuscripts that used original designs and symbols to arrange the music – not the standard methods that had been previously used. Many composers and improvisers are also involved in visual arts, and promoting graphic score work gave many musicians and non-musicians alike a new, exciting venue to access each other. Now a “pure” visual artist could hear her colours being played, or a calligrapher could have his own original alphabet spoken out from a violin. This process also became a liberating method for the artists and musicians who strive to explore the extremes of their abilities.

So how do you go about creating a graphic score? What if you have no experience or skill in drawing, design, or painting? Does that make a difference? I don't think so. But if you want to have an organized, rather aesthetically-pleasing collection of original graphic scores, there are several things you can do.

The first task is to go about establishing a general sense of what shapes, lines, and dots create images that you personally find pleasing, leading to which usage of each could be seen as being expressive of your ideas and feelings. In my case, I have always enjoyed scribbling while on the phone, so I kept several of these scribbles, and documented them in a journal. Using these initial scribbles, I began to take them apart and create new scribbles based on parts of the older ones. Soon I discovered that curves accented by dots were interesting forms to me, and I began to work out shapes using combinations of each. At this point, the favourite shapes began showing up like icons or letters in the drawings, and I began to make rudimentary hieroglyphs and graphic forms that I could fashion imaginary

musical “sentences” out of. After several months of creative play with these forms, I had what you could call a private vocabulary of symbols that could be assigned musical values in a score format.



Another task that coincided with this activity is looking through books on semiotics, alphabet development, graphic design, and such for inspiration or ideas. This is where the Internet is a fabulous tool for finding such things. You can find graphs containing ancient symbols and alphabets, Taoist alchemical symbols, ancient cross designs – all sorts of things to mix into and influence your private language system. Having studied such languages as Japanese, Korean, and Farsi, I chose to dig through my old study materials for interesting characters to morph into symbols, and as you can imagine, the field was rich.

Another rich field of symbols to play with and interpret of course is terminology and equations from the sciences. Physics, algebra, and geometry are endless supplies of letters, brackets, the Greek alphabet, Latin words, and such, let alone the various styles of graphs and charts. Having failed general math twice in high school, I have always had a phobia of and somehow a secret admiration for complex equations and measurements. I have great difficulty thinking mathematically, but I turned this weakness into a visual strength by creatively altering equations into semiotic art. I don't understand square roots, but I can certainly give the square root sign three legs and a purple halo!

Once you have found a few inter-

esting shapes and techniques that you enjoy working with, it is vital to begin limiting yourself rather than expanding your system until you begin forgetting your initial shapes and forms. Your greatest enemy will always be too much freedom. Everything needs a system or a structural principle inherent in the work or guiding it from behind the scenes. Charlie Parker had a very limited set of phrases he liked to use, but oh how those phrases poured out of his horn in exciting and unexpected ways. Michel Brecker had his bag of chromatic phrases and chord/scale ideas he used frequently, but they always had a twist, and I loved anticipating them or being happily surprised by their subtle alterations. So it is an important exercise to pick one shape and find 25 small ways to make it different. Many of these ways won't be “good” or be very interesting, but it forces you to be creative, as opposed to just mindlessly pumping variations without any thought. As frustrating as this exercise is, it will really pay off when you come up with something interesting that you couldn't have imagined without the constant reworking of one form.

Crack open a notebook and start scribbling today! You'll be amazed at where this little graphic exercise can lead you.

*Daniel Schnee is a Toronto-based saxophonist who has performed worldwide with a number of Juno and Grammy Award-winning musicians, and has been internationally recognized as a graphic score composer. Currently, he is doing doctoral research on German aesthetic philosophy and East Asian studies.*





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by Daniel Schnee

# Keeping A Practice JOURNAL

**With** all of the “how-to” books on scales, technique, chords, standards, and such circulating in print and online, you’d think we would all be a bunch of Coltranes, Adderleys, and Jarretts running around creating masterpieces around the clock!

Thankfully, we are humans, and will always be prone to aging, varying levels of talent, opportunity, and motivation, disease, falling in love, and all the things that make life worth living, or at least clinging to tenaciously (Go Leafs!). I have found one activity to be very helpful in keeping track of the swirling continuum of activities and feelings, though – the act of keeping a multi-topic practice journal.

A practice journal doesn’t have to be a scientific study of every aspect of your playing, but the closer attention you pay to your playing and associated lifestyle, the closer you will get to finding your voice and style. You must know exactly who you are if you are going to be “someone.” Here are some areas to consider when starting to record your musical activities.

It is vital to use a metronome, and it is very important to keep track of the various tempi that we use for the scales, arpeggios, and patterns we practice. By writing them down, you make it clear to yourself where your limits are, what tempi you aspire to in which areas, and can make wiser choices concerning the material you compose and perform for yourself and others. I know for myself that I can play certain things at high speeds, but can play them much more musically at slower tempi. I know this because I have tested the threshold of my abilities, and there is a physical limit to how fast my big ole’ fingers can fly. This knowledge also helps other musicians with arrangements and set lists if they know your particular traits and habits in a measurable sense.

And how often do we have a killer idea for a song or title and then promptly forget it? Having a practice journal around puts you in the habit of always having paper, pens, a cell phone, or laptop around to keep track of your possible genius. Even if you end up not using it now, you may end up liking it a few years later upon rereading your entry on the subject.

Many people keep practice records for a couple of weeks, but then it devolves into merely a to-do list of things their teacher wants them to work on. Your opinion counts, especially to you! Putting those feelings down can help you get over procrastination and boredom, especially if you can explain how you feel to your teacher.



If you work hard and efficiently, and wisely manage the opportunities you get, you will undoubtedly travel to foreign lands to perform, and the cultural events and opportunities available to you will be greatly expanded. Why not capitalize on that? Keeping a journal before, during, and after such a time gives you the opportunity to record networking info, addresses, interesting bits of information, new travel vocabulary, and such during times when the phone or the laptop is shut off or back in the hotel.

A key tip is gathering a few interesting greetings, toasts, and local colloquialisms to help you integrate into the scene a little easier, and show the locals you are aware of their regional differences. If I had done so on my second trip to Japan, I might not have taken a rather large swig of liquid dish soap that I mistook for Gatorade. And lest you think you are immune to such mistakes, my bass player, who laughed the longest and hardest at my predicament, ended up doing the exact same thing an hour later!

You don’t know where you are going if you don’t know where you have been. Looking at your collected practice journals years later is a mostly pleasant experience. You can see your progress, laugh at your folly, and reminisce about the good old days. And surprisingly, many of the “bad” days will be remembered in the future as rather good days. A practice journal can be used many different ways, and I recommend you explore as many of them as possible.

# RECOMMENDED READING



## **ANYONE CAN PLAY FLUTE - DVD BY LISA R. WRIGHT**

This DVD teaches the fundamentals of flute playing and note-reading in a simple, step-by-step method.  
<http://musicbooksplus.com/anyone-play-flute-p-6192.html>



## **DAILY WARM-UP EXERCISES FOR SAXOPHONE BY JACKIE MCLEAN**

Here are the essential warm-up exercises to help students become familiar with playing through different keys ascending and descending chromatically.  
<http://musicbooksplus.com/bdaily-warmup-exercises-saxophoneb-p-692.html>



## **ESSENTIAL ROCK FOR CLARINET**

Instrumentalists will love jamming with a play-along CD for 15 top rock classics.  
<http://musicbooksplus.com/essential-rock-clarinet-p-6283.html>



## **FUN WITH THE CLARINET BY WILLIAM BAY**

A collection of 47 big-note, easy solos on folk favorites designed to build technique, range, and endurance while maintaining student interest.  
<http://musicbooksplus.com/with-clarinet-p-6097.html>



## **MEL BAY'S SAX FINGERING CHART**

A graphic, easy-to-understand fingering chart for any saxophone which features chromatic, major and minor scale studies.  
<http://musicbooksplus.com/bmel-bays-fingering-chartb-p-5165.html>



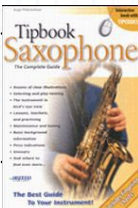
## **PLAY ALTO SAX TODAY! LEVEL 1**

A fabulous pack for the beginning alto saxophonist, this book/CD pack teaches all the essentials, and lets players progress at their own pace!  
<http://musicbooksplus.com/play-alto-today-level-p-4769.html>



## **PLAY CLARINET TODAY! LEVEL 1**

A fabulous pack for the beginning clarinetist, this book/CD pack teaches all the essentials, and lets players progress at their own pace!  
<http://musicbooksplus.com/bplay-clarinet-today-level-p-4775.html>



## **TIPBOOK SAXOPHONE - THE COMPLETE GUIDE BY HUGO PINKSTERBOER**

This accessible and convenient guide, in a new 6" x 9" format, offers both beginning and advanced saxophonists a host of information on the instrument.  
<http://musicbooksplus.com/tipbook-saxophone-complete-guide-p-8369.html>

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