

Baritone Sax Basics

By Austin Vickrey

Discussion Topics

- Preparation and Assembly
- Posture, Breathing, Hand Position, Playing Position, Embouchure, and Tone Production
- Sound, Articulation, Technique
- Gear - Saxophone brands, reeds, and mouthpieces
- Recommended Listening - Prominent Jazz Bari Players and Recordings

Preparation and Assembly - What you NEED

- Saxophone with saxophone case
- Neckstrap/harness
- Mouthpiece, ligature, mouthpiece cap
- Reeds
- Care Kit - Cork grease, cleaning swab, reed cases, bari sax stand

Assembly - Part 1

- Case flat on the floor before opening, logo facing up
- Soak the reed in your mouth or cup of water
- Place mouthpiece on the neck, twist and push over cork about half way. (Use cork grease if needed)
- Slide ligature over the tip of the mouthpiece. Screws always go on the right hand side.
- “Face to face” - How to properly put the reed on the mouthpiece. Cover with mouthpiece cap

Assembly - Part 2

- Place your neckstrap around your neck
- Pick up the saxophone by the bell, never by the rods or keys!
- Attach the neckstrap to the ring on the back of the saxophone
- Remove the neck cap from the body and loosen the neck screw
- Gently attach the neck to the body with a twisting motion. Tighten the screw to where it feels snug.

Posture

- Feet flat on the ground.
- Sit on the edge of the chair, not resting back on the back of the chair.
- Sit up straight but not so straight that you are tense. Careful not to slouch.
- Your head should be straight forward.

Breathing - IMPORTANT!

- Breathing in - Your stomach area should expand. Place hand on stomach to practice this.
- Avoid raising shoulders, more shallow of a breath. A full and proper breath allows stomach to expand.
- Lay on back with a book exercise

Hand Position

- LH index finger on the second key, skip a key, middle finger on the next key, and ring finger on the next. Pinky operates spatula keys. LH thumb placed on the back thumb rest, touching the register key
- RH under the thumb hook. Fingers on the pearls and pinky operates spatula keys.
- Hands should have a relaxed, natural curvature as if dropping your hand to your side and coming up to shake someone's hand.

Playing Position

- Remember where hands go.
- Move saxophone to the right hand side of the body.
- The neck of the saxophone should come to your mouth. Never move to the saxophone!
- Adjust body and neck strap for proper alignment. Never sacrifice posture.

Embouchure

- Use neck and mouthpiece first.
- Embouchure - formation of your mouth around the mouthpiece to produce the sound.
- Roll half your bottom lip over your bottom teeth and place about half an inch of the reed in your mouth.
- Rest top teeth on the mouthpiece about the same half inch, top lip rests on the mouthpiece.
- Corners of your mouth should be focused inward toward the center of the mouthpiece - think about whistling or the syllables “too” or “doo.”
- Chin should be flat, pretend as if you are pointing it down to the floor.

Tone Production

- Proper breath: Breathe through the corners of your mouth, stomach expansion, don't raise shoulders.
- Blow through the mouthpiece, using your diaphragm to push the air until a sound comes out.
- Remember to keep the corners of your mouth firm and drawn inward.

Creating a good sound

- Long tones are best for developing a good sound.
- Keep air consistent while blowing.
- Adjust your lip and jaw pressure to keep pitch steady and to find a good tone.
- Playing on quality reeds and mouthpieces will also assist you in finding a good sound.

Articulation

- Use the tip of the tongue against the tip of the reed to articulate and start the sound.
- Avoid using too much of the tongue against the reed. This may create a “slapping” or “thunky” type of sound. *These can be useful later on, but only after one has developed the proper articulating technique*
- Develop confidence by studying and learning as much as you can - The more confident you are, the more effective and consistent you will be as a player!

Technique - Concert / Classical

- Recommended books (Concert playing and beginner)
 - Middle School - Essential Elements, Accent on Achievement, Standard of Excellence
 - High School and Adult Beginner to Intermediate - Rubank Method Series, 25 Daily Studies for Saxophone (H. Klosé), 48 Famous Studies Sax/Oboe (Ferling), Daily Studies for all Saxophones (T. Kynaston), Melodious and Progressive Studies Book 1/2 (D. Hite).
 - Any Disney or Pop books for Alto/Baritone Sax - These are fun and easy to learn in the beginning to develop a good sense of sound, rhythm, and articulation.

Technique - Jazz / Modern

- Recommended books (Jazz and Modern playing)
 - Jazz Conception Series - Lennie Niehaus
 - Patterns for Jazz (Treble Clef) - Jerry Coker
 - Charlie Parker Omnibook (Eb)
 - The Real Book - 6th Edition
 - Inside Improvisation Series - Jerry Bergonzi
 - Aebersold Play-along Series - Jamey Aebersold

Gear - Brands, Mouthpieces, Reeds

- Prominent Saxophone Brands:
 - Selmer, Yamaha, Cannonball, Keilwerth, Yanagisawa, Jupiter, P. Mauriat. Older (Martin, King, Conn if in working order)
- Prominent Classical / Concert Mouthpiece Brands
 - Selmer (S-80, C*), Vandoren (B7, V16, Optimum)
- Prominent Jazz Mouthpiece Brands
 - Berg Larsen, Jody Jazz, Meyer, Otto Link, Theo Wanne, Ponzol, Vandoren, SYOS, Drake, Rousseau Jazz...the list goes on...
- Try A LOT OF MOUTHPIECES!!!!

Selected Listening - Bari Players / Groups / Albums

- Gerry Mulligan - Miles Davis' "Birth of the Cool," "Gerry Mulligan Quartet with Chet Baker," "Two of a Mind," (w/ Paul Desmond)
- Pepper Adams - "Encounter!," "10 to 4 at the 5 Spot," "Ephemera," "Blues & Roots - Charles Mingus"
- Harry Carney - Duke Ellington Band - "Far East Suite - Agra," "The Duke's Men," "Sophisticated Lady" - Youtube Link - <https://youtu.be/brqxEdwsTQs> (Features circular breathing technique)
- Three Baritone Saxophone Band - Plays Mulligan - Nick Brignola, Ronnie Cuber, Gary Smulyan
 - Also look up albums by all each player: Nick Brignola, Ronnie Cuber, Gary Smulyan
- Serge Chaloff - Woody Herman Band - "Four Brothers," "Boston Blow-Up!"
- Other notable players: Joe Temperley (Lincoln Center Jazz Orch), Hamiet Bluiett, Bill Perkins, Cecil Payne, Claire Daly, Leo Parker, James Carter, Dennis DiBlasio, Jimmy Giuffre, Leo Pellegrino (Too Many Zooz)

Other Sources for Baritone Sax

- Jazz at Lincoln Center YouTube Channel
- jazzbarisax.com - Excellent source for all things jazz bari sax!
- jodyjazz.com/facing-charts/ - Mouthpiece facing chart with recommendations and comparisons.
- www.wwbw.com - Excellent general site to order saxophone gear; saxophones, mouthpieces, reeds, and accessories