Mouthpiece Pitch

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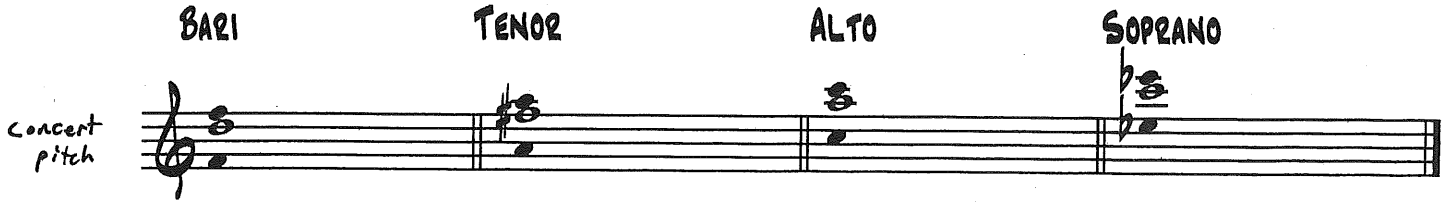


Mouthpiece pitch is the sound acheived when playing on the mouthpiece. Each saxophone mouthpiece has a minimum range of about one octave (represented by the outer pitches above). Sometimes a range of more than one octave may be playable, depending on mouthpiece/reed combination. However, one should work for the ability to play and control one octave of pitches. A mouthpiece that closes before reaching the uppermost note may be an indicator of a reed that is too weak for the mouthpiece.

The middle pitch on each instrument represents the "standard" pitch for classical playing, although some players vary this standard pitch by a half step or so. The pitch for classical playing has become standardized because the range of acceptable classical tone quality is relatively narrow. On the other hand, the range of acceptable jazz tone quality is quite broad. Therefore, the mouthpiece pitch for playing with a good jazz quality is not set in stone.

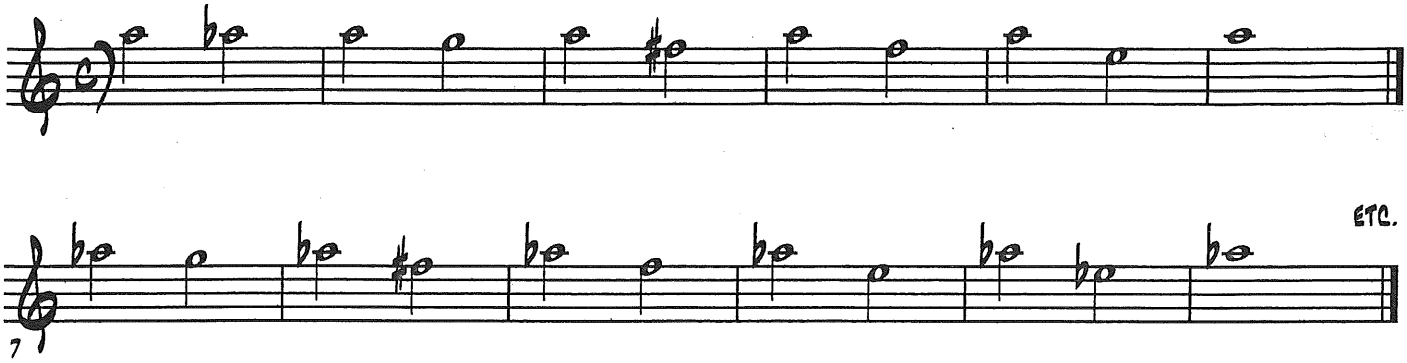
The lower you play on your mouthpiece, the more harmonic content you will get in your saxophone sound. The higher that you play on your mouthpiece, the less harmonic content you will get in your sound. Harmonic content can be heard as 'color' or perhaps 'buzz' in the sound. Because the classical voicing is relatively high within the range of available pitches, a jazz player will want to aim for a pitch no higher than the classical pitch. The key to finding the right pitch for you comes through experimentation. You will want to find a pitch that is comfortable for you, and one that you can control.

Flexibility and control are key. More flexibility and control on the mouthpiece alone equals more flexibility and control over tone quality and intonation on the instrument. You will immediately notice that it is much more difficult to maintain steady pitch on the mouthpiece alone. The capability to do this will only increase your steadiness on the instrument. Generally speaking, you will want to maintain the same basic mouthpiece pitch when playing in the normal range of the saxophone. However, flexibility will also add to your ability to change the color of your sound for expressive purposes.

For flexibility, first try to play 'sirens' on your mouthpiece, from the uppermost to lowermost extreme of your mouthpiece range. You will be able to get some pitch change through embouchure pressure alone, but the bulk of change should come from your tongue position or voicing.

Once you are able to get a siren, you will want to start working on finding pitches on your mouthpiece. You can do excercises such as the following to help with finding and maintaining a steady pitch:

A



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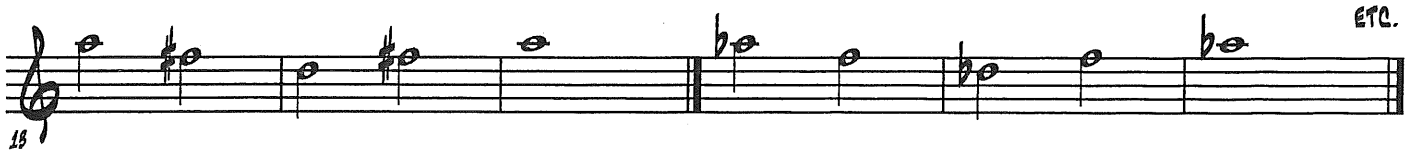

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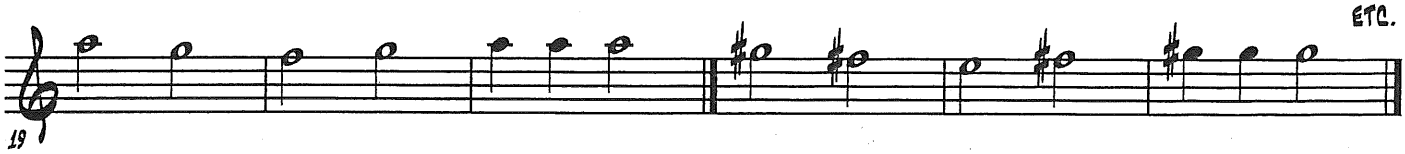

THESE ARE ONLY SAMPLE EXERCISES. YOU CAN MAKE UP ANY EXERCISE THAT GETS YOU TO PLAY SPECIFIC PITCHES AROUND THE MOUTHPIECE. ONCE YOU ARE GAINING ABILITY TO PLAY SPECIFIC PITCHES, TRY DOING THE EXERCISES AT VARYING DYNAMIC LEVELS WITHOUT THE PITCH CHANGING. ALSO, PLAY MEZZO FORTE ON A SINGLE PITCH, DECRESCENDO TO PIANISSIMO, CRESCENDO TO FORTISSIMO AND DECRESCENDO TO MEZZO FORTE AGAIN WITHOUT VARYING THE PITCH.