

What a privilege to be writing for this column! I appreciate very much Greg Banaszak's kind invitation. It is always a challenge and a humbling experience for me when asked to present topics such as the ones in this article; volumes have been written and numerous pedagogues have spoken. My hope is that what I say to you today would be meaningful and helpful. And if you find that there are ideas here that you can apply to your own practicing and aid your development as a musician that would be my great pleasure indeed!

Practicing

Whether it is with my own students or when I give master classes in different settings, very often the question of "How to practice?" would come up. My answer is always as such: it is not "How to practice?" but rather, "How to practice **efficiently**?" I like to use the illustration of a typical Chinese dinner to describe one's practice routine. For those of you who are not familiar with a traditional Chinese meal, in a traditional Chinese dinner, you are presented with, not one, but several courses: fish, pork, chicken, soup, etc. Yes, it is a LOT of work on the part of the mother! Whether you like them or not, you are to eat them all. It is rude and also unhealthy not to eat the balanced meal that one's mother has prepared so lovingly.

What does practicing have to do with a Chinese meal? Let's turn to the subject of practicing; one could basically divide the routine into these areas (with my suggestions):

Technical Development

Long Tone

- a. From *ppp* to *fff* and *fff* to *ppp* without vibrato
- b. Focus on air support and tone quality

Vibrato Exercises

- c. MM 76-82, 4 undulations per beat
- d. Use various dynamic levels
- e. Use the whole range of your instrument
- f. Alternate straight tone and tone with vibrato

Scales

- g. Use various patterns
- h. Use various articulations
- i. Use various dynamic levels
- j. Incorporate *altissimo*

Articulation Exercises

- k. Use variety of tempi
- l. Practice the full range of the instrument

Musical Development

Etudes

- m. New ones
- n. Review old ones

Literature

- o. Lyrical and technical pieces from different eras and categories:
 - i. Solo
 - ii. With piano
 - iii. With orchestra/band
 - iv. Orchestral excerpts
- p. Chamber music
 - i. With other saxophones
 - ii. With other instruments

Similar to the food nutritional pyramid that we all know, how should one prioritize the above areas and create an efficient and yet balanced “diet” for your practice routine? I must say that when a student is asked this question, “Which area should be on the bottom of the pyramid (namely, rice/pasta group and fruit/vegetables group) and which area belongs to the meat and dessert?” often, he/she would answer that solo repertoire is more important and therefore should be in the pasta and vegetable groups; scales and other technical exercises are just warm up exercises so they should be near the top of the pyramid. The immediate response to this answer is that it sounds quite true. However, if you consider carefully, I believe that the answer should be the opposite: technical development on the bottom of the pyramid and literature as dessert.

Before I proceed, I would like to explain my statement so the readers would not misunderstand me. I am not at all implying that one should, therefore, spend 4 hours a day practicing scales and one hour on literature; if so, my students would be the first to complain! But rather, **Concentration**, **Perfection**, and **Creativity** are the key words. Warm-up exercises are not something you just “do.” They require as much attention, if not more, as playing your repertoire or etudes. To put it differently, warm-up exercises go beyond getting one’s body and mind ready. When a player is secure technically, literature studying becomes a sweet dessert; it is otherwise a struggle.

One’s practice/warm-up session should be a time of creativity. Mindless repetition, strict and unchanging routines only create boredom, and eventually practicing becomes drudgery. In other words, one should find and experiment with different “recipes” and ultimately create his own practice/warm-up structure that is beneficial and suited to his own needs.

Some Suggestions

In addition to the previous discussion, this is an example that I would suggest to my students in terms of practice structure: (I recommend students to rest as much as they practice)

Let us assume that a student has four hours in that particular day to practice:

First hour—Long tones 10 min., vibrato exercise 5-10 min., articulation exercises 10-15 min., scales 30-40 min.

Second hour—Etudes: review old ones, start new ones

Third hour—Literature: lyrical solo, technical solo, contemporary techniques, etc.

Fourth hour—Literature continued

For many, the motivation to *begin* practicing is very important but often lacking. It is vital, therefore, to start with a warm-up exercise that motivates you and is relevant to your daily goal. Quite often after the first six minutes of practicing, one's readiness and mood will set in for the rest of the day. That is why it is especially imperative to treat the start of the day carefully. The above structure is just an example. It does not mean one's technical development session has to be in the first hour of practicing. In fact, a more varied structure is encouraged to avoid monotony.

Before I leave the topic of practicing, I would like to suggest three exercises that I often ask my students to incorporate into their routine:

- 1) Practice with Fingers Only: Besides “saving some chops,” listening to one's key clicks is also very important; especially when one is practicing difficult passages or fast moving patterns. If the student can hear an even key-clicking sound, chances are that he/she would play them evenly. There are rhythms to the clicks. Frequently, that is how the student and I realize exactly which note or notes are causing the problem.
- 2) Practice with Air Only: We all know that we are playing a wind instrument. However, rarely do I hear people talking about practicing with air only and listening carefully to how one is manipulating and using the air stream.

Whenever I hear a student playing a musical phrase without any expression, I would ask him/her to finger the notes and blow air into the horn (while loosening the embouchure so no sound is produced) the way he/she would in actuality. Often, I could barely hear any wind sound from the horn! To put it simply, if you cannot *hear* the inflections in your use of air stream (the different “dynamics” or speed of the air), chances are you would not hear the inflections or expressions in the music. It is especially true and vital in the dramatic music of Gotkovsky, Husa, and others.

- 3) Think...Think...Think: Both fortunately and unfortunately, I was mostly self-taught for the first eight or nine years of my saxophone study. It was unfortunate because I lost some valuable time and guidance but fortunate because I was forced to do much research myself and had time to THINK.

May I suggest that when you are not playing the saxophone, while you are eating, resting, or commuting, that you analyze, meditate, and dwell on your technical or musical problems? Very often, solutions would emerge from one's vigilant thinking; be creative in your approach. I found that the time I spent in searching

for my own answers have carried me a long way through the different roles as a student, performer, and teacher. Remember, your teacher is only yours once a week. For the remaining time you are your own teacher.

Recommended Supplemental Materials:

<i>The Intonation Workbook</i>	Trent Kynaston	AdvanceMusic
<i>Exercices Mecaniques Vol. II/III</i>	Jean-Marie Londeix	Leduc
<i>Saxophone High Tones 2nd Edition</i>	Eugene Rousseau	MMB
The Orchestral Saxophonist	Bruce Ronkin & Robert Frascotti	Presser
<i>Daily Studies</i>	Larry Teal	MMB

Saxophone Repertoire

In a recent conversation with Monsieur Londeix, who was preparing a new edition of his famous book—*150 Years of Music for Saxophone*, he revealed that there are currently over 20,000 solo and chamber works written for the saxophone and still counting. This number excludes orchestral pieces that call for the saxophones. Moreover, Monsieur Londeix explained that according to figures from publishers, we are experiencing the first time in history where the demand for printing and sale of saxophone music exceeds that of the cello! As a friend of mine rightly put it, “There is too much music and too little time.”

With this vast number of repertory available to us, how does one know which are good pieces to study and perform? There are many approaches to finding good compositions. First of all, the most common way would be through the suggestions and often the requirement of one’s teacher. Thanks to the Internet technology and the innovative spirit of many teachers, there are currently quite a few saxophone studios from different universities that have their studio websites available online. One would certainly find very valuable information regarding the study of the saxophone and also the syllabus/repertoire list of that particular school. Of course, there are pieces that we all agree to be the standard repertoire such as the Creston Sonata, Ibert Concertino da camera, Glazunov Concerto and Desenclos’ Prelude, Cadence, et Finale. And then there are some that are required, in some schools, as standard repertoire but not in others. Whatever the case maybe, they are, at least, much shorter lists to be investigated and most of these compositions have been performed and accepted by many.

Secondly, one could also follow the trace of various well-known composers for our instrument. A few that came to mind are Jindrich Feld, Bernhard Heiden, Walter Hartley, Christian Luba, Libby Larsen, Pierre-Max Dubois, Robert Muczynski, Ida Gotkovsky, et. al. Obviously, they all present very different styles and challenges but certainly we could all learn from their music and the result is sure to be rewarding.

Thirdly and lastly, I would ask my students periodically to give a new music presentation. We are blessed to have the well-respected Eble Music Company in down town Iowa City and I like to ask the students to go “treasure hunting.” Once in a frequent while, one would bump into Dr. Himie Voxman or Mr. Charles Eble luring at a corner of the store researching as well! The students would then choose music that are rarely played or are virtually unknown; each student then studies and performs the piece and also gives historical, analytical, and technical information on that particular piece. This, I must say, is one of the great ways for everyone to learn and discover compositions that have often been missed in the pile.

Instead of recommending pieces that are already well served, I would like to, if I may, point out some that might be interesting for you to explore:

<i>Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano</i> by Violet Archer	Clark & Cruickshank
<i>Elegy for Saxophone</i> by Harry T. Bulow	Silver Mace
<i>Martyrs for the Faith: Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Symphonic Winds</i> by David DeBoor Canfield	Composer
<i>Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano</i> by David DeBoor Canfield	Composer
<i>Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano</i> by John Cheetham	Bonneslink Press
<i>Black & Blue for Alto Saxophone Solo</i> by Barry Cockcroft	Reed Music
<i>Ku Ku for Soprano Saxophone Solo</i> by Barry Cockcroft	Reed Music
<i>Rara Avis for Alto Saxophone Solo</i> by Michael Cunningham	MMB
<i>Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano</i> by Michael Cunningham	Seesaw
<i>Little Rhapsody for Alto Saxophone and Band</i> by Michael Cunningham	Composer
<i>Suite for Alto Saxophone Solo</i> by Francois Daneels	Schott Freres
<i>Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano</i> by David Gillingham	MMB
<i>As in Stained Light for Alto Saxophone and Piano</i> by Leonard Mark Lewis	Composer
<i>Sax de Voyage for Soprano Saxophone and Piano</i> by Jerôme Naulais	Robert Martin
<i>Frissons for Alto Saxophone and Band/Piano</i> by Jerôme Naulais	Billaudot
<i>Sarabande for Soprano Saxophone and Piano</i> by Mark-Anthony Turnage	Schott & Co.
<i>Cercles for Alto Saxophone and Piano</i> by Demis Vixvikis	Billaudot
<i>Sonata for Tenor Saxophone and Piano</i> by John C. Worley	Dorn
<i>September Sonata for Tenor Saxophone and Piano</i> by John C. Worley	Dorn

Career in Music

It is very ironic to me that when I was a beginning student, the question of the legitimacy of building a career in music was always present. Whether it was from my parents, relatives, friends, or myself, this question always emerged in thoughts and conversations. No one seemed to know how to answer. Now that I am on the other side of the table as a teacher, I find myself having the untold obligation of answering others the same question.

Let us assume that the readers here are determined to make a living in music. Regrettably, many institutions today do not offer courses or seminars on career building. That leaves us no choice but to learn on our own. Often after the students receive their

degrees, whether they are undergraduates or graduates, few have any clue on where to start. May I offer some suggestions?

If I were to summarize my comments, they would be:

- 1) Build your résumé *while* you are in school
 - a. If you are a performer, perform as much as possible, whenever and wherever. Before you are invited, one must initiate. Perform also for venues such as nursing homes, convalescent centers, and community events; they will give you an idea of what music is all about.
 - b. If you are in music education, learn how to practice so you can *teach* it. Build a good sound concept; start to memorize great sound around you so you can recreate it.
 - c. Prepare yourself to succeed, not just to get by.
 - d. *Become* what you came to school for.
 - e. Start early in collaborating with your friends in different schools.
 - f. Attend national and international conferences to stimulate your vision.
 - g. Participate in various competitions. Competitions are good as long as one does not take the result, winning or losing, too seriously.
 - h. Have you thought about making a recording? When you are ready, send demo tapes to record companies; you never know what might happen.

- 2) Acquire a different skill
 - a. Saxophone is only one of the tools in which to express yourself. Learn conducting, singing, or a different instrument, for example. Be marketable.
 - b. Besides your ability as a musician, try learning other skills such as computing, accounting, cooking, marketing, or whatever suits your personality. When a job situation in music does not work out, one can always use another skill to survive and carry on until other opportunities present themselves.
 - c. Most of all, build confidence and decisiveness in whatever you do

Recommended Reading:

Making Music in Looking Glass Land, Ellen Highstein, A Concert Artists Guild Publication, ISBN-0-9629075-4-5

The Musician's Business and Legal Guide, compiled and edited by Mark Halloran, Esq. Prentice Hall, ISBN-013-237322-X

For more information on Kenneth Tse, please visit his website at: www.kenneth-tse.com