



Saxophone Warm-Ups

*Materials
For The
Contemporary
Saxophonist*



By Steven Mauk

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Forword

It's surprising how some saxophonists don't understand the concept of a daily warm-up routine. When I ask students what they do to warm up each day, I often hear something like, "Uh, I don't really do any warm-up" or, "Sometimes I play major scales as fast as possible." Ask a gymnast, swimmer, or football player the same question and you'll get a detailed set of exercises designed to prepare the athlete for a specific event. Why should musicians be different from athletes?

The purpose of this book is to share some ideas about preparing the human mind and body for playing the saxophone. It must be understood from the outset that there will be as many different warm-up routines as there are players. With that in mind, readers should approach this book as a way to discover how to create their own, unique warm-up routines.

Steven Mauk

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CHAPTER ONE

The Daily Warm-Up

One of the most neglected parts of the daily practice session is the initial warm-up routine. While many have a well-defined method, some saxophonists approach the warm-up in a very unorganized, haphazard way. Depending on how the player feels, one day may begin with long tones, the next with relaxed scales, and yet another day with rapid chromatic passages. Why should the warm-up routine be left to chance?

It is important to remember that the saxophone is a relatively new instrument in the course of musical history. Compared with the pedagogy of the voice, piano, and string instruments, saxophone pedagogy is in its infancy. It is not surprising to hear that the teachers of these other instruments have a long-standing tradition of warm-up routines that has been handed down from generation to generation. The tradition of saxophone warm-up routines is less well defined. With the number of performance-related injuries on the increase, saxophonists must become more concerned with ways to avoid them. The most logical step is the development of a suitable and reliable warm-up routine.

Why a Daily Warm-Up

There are three major reasons for a daily warm-up routine:

- *To prepare the mind and body for performing*
- *To warm up the muscles to avoid injury*
- *To review basic saxophone fundamentals*

Saxophonists should establish a routine early in their training, so it will become habitual. Students must understand that this is something they cannot omit from the practice session, so budgeting time is essential.

The idea of preparing the mind and body may need explanation. Let's assume the player has gotten out of bed and done all of the necessary morning chores. The saxophonist now wants to practice or, hopefully, warm up first. Remember, things are stiff; the body has been asleep for several hours and the muscles are not yet *awake*. Devising a suitable warm-up routine can help get those muscles ready for playing.

Similarly, the mind has been at rest during the night. It may be refreshed, but it needs to get focused to approach the demands of

performing music. As the saxophonist goes through a warm-up routine, the mind, both consciously and subconsciously, begins to address the challenges of playing the instrument. Omitting the warm-up session can mean that both the body *and* the mind are unprepared to coordinate the numerous actions needed to play music.

Many muscles are used to play the saxophone correctly. Before practicing, the saxophonist must be sure that these muscles are stretched to avoid injury and to prepare the muscles for their respective jobs. More often than not, this critical first step is overlooked. A proper warm-up routine should always include stretching and limbering up.

The player can continue to flex the muscles and prepare the mind by playing familiar musical patterns. These may range from long tones for sound development to complicated technical patterns for finger control. During the warm-up period the player should be reviewing known patterns, not learning new ones. At times the familiarity of the warm-up material can allow the saxophonist to go into a type of *automatic-pilot* mode, allowing the material to become truly routine. By using standard, fundamental patterns, such as scales and arpeggios, the musician can maintain a solid foundation of saxophone technique.

What to Warm-Up

During the daily routine the saxophonist should warm up the *neck* and *back*, the *fingers*, *hands* and *arms*, the *breathing mechanism*, the *embouchure*, the *tongue*, and the *mind*. These are the human components crucial to playing the saxophone. Many saxophonists also use the warm-up routine as a time to prepare the *reed*, an item equally crucial to playing.

The neck and back muscles are especially susceptible to injury from the stress caused by supporting the instrument with a neck strap. Stretching these important muscles, both in a warm-up session and frequently during playing, can help relieve muscle tightness and avoid injury.

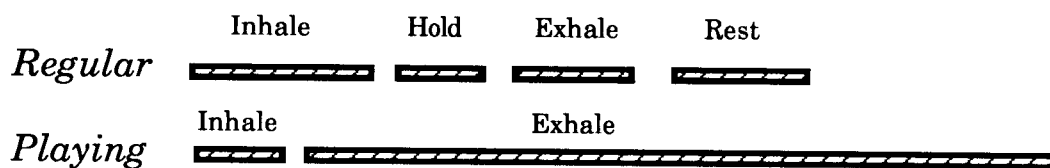
Other easily injured areas of the body are the fingers, hands and arms. The repetitive motion needed to play the saxophone can be very damaging. Similar injuries occur in the business world, due to the repetitive motion of typing and computer keyboard entry. Like the neck and back, these areas need warming up and periodic stretching during the session to keep them loose and injury free.

Since the lungs are active all the time, we might not think that they need warming up. The breathing cycle used when playing the saxophone, however, is quite different from that used when breathing nor-

mally. Under relaxed conditions a person usually takes a slow, shallow inhale of about two to three seconds in length. The breath is then held for about a second and then quickly exhaled. This usually is followed by a brief pause before the process repeats.

In playing the saxophone those time relationships change dramatically. A quick, musical inhale often fills the lungs fully in about half a second. Then, with or without a slight pause, the air is exhaled over a relatively long time—from several seconds to half a minute or more. If the music continues, there must be another quick inhale. This process repeats until there is time to rest. During extended rests, the player resumes the normal breathing cycle. A diagram makes these differences easier to visualize.

Regular Breath versus Playing Breath



Since the breathing process is so different when playing the saxophone, this is an area in need of immediate attention in the warm-up routine.

Like the breathing mechanism, the embouchure, tongue, and the oral cavity are important elements for tone production. Many muscles of the mouth and face are required to form the embouchure. These must be flexible, yet strong enough to carry out their duties properly. The tip of the tongue must move quickly and delicately when stroking the reed. Various areas inside the mouth make up the oral cavity, that essential chamber so important to the basic sound quality. It is vital that the warm-up routine adequately stretches and flexes all of these important muscle groups.

Although we may not always think about it, the mind is a vital element in need of a warm-up. Without complete concentration, a musical performance cannot be at its highest level. Before starting the warm-up, the mind must be cleared of all distractions to allow complete focus on the fundamentals of playing. A warm-up routine requires that the musician listen carefully to evaluate the material being performed. Attention to details during the daily routine, especially regarding tone, air, and finger technique, is essential.

The final item to mention is the reed. Without an adequate reed, the tone will not be at its best. A reed that is too hard may require excessive embouchure pressure, thereby fatiguing the muscles sooner. A soft reed may inhibit high register playing. Numerous tone, embouchure, air, and technical problems may occur if the reed is not functioning properly. Although some saxophonists choose to use a time separate from the warm-up routine for reed selection, most players at least evaluate the reed's suitability during this time.

How to Warm-Up

Once the saxophonist has answered the questions of *why* and *what* to warm up, the all-important question of *how* must be addressed. A good warm-up routine consists of several key elements. Each is an important part of the whole and should not be omitted. The elements discussed in this book are:

- *Stretching Exercises* without the instrument to loosen up the muscles used in playing the saxophone
- *A Base Warm-Up Routine* played on the saxophone to focus the mind and to get the breathing and fingering mechanisms operating properly
- *Specialized Warm-Up Exercises* to specifically prepare for the type of music to be performed that day

The next three chapters explore these elements in depth. While saxophonists may not choose to use all of the items discussed, these exercises can serve as models. The logical conclusion of any warm-up study must be that each person must personalize his or her own routine.

CHAPTER TWO

Stretching Exercises

The analogy of a musician to an athlete is a good one. Both are highly directed performers, who rely on talent and physical training to accomplish their goals. Both must go through years of preparation and draw heavily on past preparation. Both must work on physical and mental skills to ensure a high level of accuracy. In the area of warm-ups, however, musicians and athletes often differ greatly.

Athletes are trained from an early age to respect the regimen their coaches assign and rarely start a practice session without several minutes of stretching and limbering up. The coach or trainer warns that using the body without a proper warm-up can lead to serious injury, which may keep them from participating in the sport. How many musicians stretch before practicing? Shouldn't musicians have the same concerns as athletes? Isn't there a possibility of injury from using body parts that are not warmed up properly? The answer to all of these questions is an unqualified yes!

The musical community has only recently become aware of the very high potential for injury that accompanies musical performance. Medical institutes are being created, both in the United States and abroad, for studying and treating performance-related injuries in musicians. Information learned from studies at these centers, as well as independent research related to musicians' injuries, is being published in musical and medical journals. Experiences gained in body awareness programs, such as Feldenkrais and the Alexander Technique, have been helpful for numerous performers. Compared to athletes, however, musicians are far behind in this research and training.

As mentioned in *Chapter One*, part of the warm-up session should be done without the saxophone. That is the time to direct attention to the needs of the mind and body, not to the saxophone and its mechanics. The exercises described in this chapter should be completed *before* playing the instrument. It is recommended that they be performed in this order and that a mirror be used to observe the motions. The approximate time needed to perform a specific exercise is listed at the end of each description. (Note: A time indication of 2:45 would mean two minutes and forty-five seconds.) Eventually each saxophonist must determine which ones are crucial to his or her own needs.

CHAPTER THREE

A Base Warm-Up Routine

Every saxophonist should have a set of playing exercises to use as a *base warm-up routine*. This routine should be used daily and is intended to wake up the body and prepare it for the day's musical demands. It may vary depending on the types of activities scheduled or may consist of the same material every time. Ultimately the player should choose a routine specifically geared toward individual needs.

The playing exercises presented in this chapter are intended to serve as a model. Included in the base warm-up routine are:

- *Long Tone and Vibrato Studies* p. 17-20
- *Intonation Study* p. 21-22
- *Finger Exercises* p. 22-30
- *Chromatic Scale Passages* p. 31-33
- *Wide Leap Exercises* p. 33-34
- *Extended Scale Patterns* p. 35-36
- *Altissimo, Chromatic Scale Patterns* p. 37-38

The final item needed to complete a daily warm-up routine would be *specialized exercises* to help prepare for playing a specific type of music. Specialized warm-ups are discussed in *Chapter Four*.

Note that tempo markings and specific instructions are listed for each exercise. Always use a metronome to guarantee a constant and accurate tempo. As with the stretching exercises in *Chapter Two*, approximate timings are listed for each study.

The first few exercises in this base routine are relatively slow and limited in range. This allows the embouchure, finger, and breathing muscles to warm up gradually. Avoid the temptation of playing high and fast too soon, since this can put unnecessary strain on the muscles and hinder endurance.

Long Tone and Vibrato Studies

A crucial part of any warm-up routine is the performance of long tones. This allows the saxophonist to concentrate on the item of primary importance, the tone.

Tone Study #1 combines long tones and vibrato. Since many saxophonists dislike playing long tones, this is a way of disguising them by

CHAPTER FOUR

Specialized Warm-Ups

Like speaking, music may be thought to contain different dialects within one language. The standard dialects of classical, orchestral, pop, show, and rock music are usually major- and minor-scale based. Jazz and various types of ethnic music, however, are comprised of many dialects. Music, therefore, can be written in an incredible variety of dialects, and can be based on scales including major, minor, diminished, whole-tone, pentatonic, quarter-tone, blues, modal, and even synthetic ones. A performer must consider which dialect will be *spoken* during that particular session, to determine which scale base to use in the warm-up.

As a musician grows and learns new musical dialects or styles, the warm-up must change to meet the needs of this developing musical vocabulary. A saxophonist should include a *specialized* portion in the warm-up routine to reflect the type of music being prepared.

Personalizing the Base Routine

The base warm-up outlined in *Chapter Three* is intended to serve as a basic routine for all saxophonists. It is purposefully built around major and minor tonality. The following examples show how exercises from the *base warm-up routine* in *Chapter Three* can be varied to accommodate individual requirements.

Tone Study #2 can be performed using any scale, including the harmonic minor or mixolydian form.

TONE STUDY #2

(Harmonic Minor Scale)



CHAPTER FIVE

Supplemental Materials

After using a warm-up routine for some time, a player may want to supplement it. By selecting additional materials to add to the base and by varying it from time to time, the daily warm-up can remain both valid and fresh.

Supplementing the Warm-Up

There are a wide range of possibilities for supplementing the warm-up routine. The easiest way is to supplement it with other fundamental exercises, such as scale and chord studies. While some players may have a unique set of fundamental drills, others may need guidance as to what materials will work best for their level. A few fundamental books are discussed below, but numerous others are listed and annotated at the end of this chapter.

Probably the most popular public school scale book is the *Parès Scales for Saxophone*. It presents the basic scales, with a tonic-to-tonic range, in a familiar rhythm.



The scales are then used in a number of variations to form scalar studies. These studies help the student become thoroughly familiar with a given key. Using assigned scales and studies as part of a daily warm-up would be ideal for middle school and intermediate-level high school saxophonists.

Books that expand the range from low B \flat to high F or F \sharp for each scale are best suited for advanced high school, college, and professional saxophonists. Two publications that do this quite well are *The Saxophonist's Workbook* by Larry Teal and *Daily Studies for All Saxophones* by Trent Kynaston. Both present extended-range scales in all keys, along with interval studies, chords, chromatic patterns, articulation exercises, and high- and low-note studies. Saxophonists can find a wealth of material in these books to use in reviewing the basic fundamentals during the warm-up routine.

Another useful type of method is one that takes a specific pattern through all the keys. A little-known but excellent method is *16 Daily Studies* by Alamiro Giampieri, published in 1936. This book includes