



David Demsey

New Saxophone Publications

Woodwind Mouthpiece Selection • Rober Scarff
Jazz Play-Alongs • Hal Leonard Series Of Three Book/CDs

Woodwind Mouthpiece Selection

Robert Scarff

Robert Scarff Publishing, \$22.95

<http://users.adelphia.net/~bobscarff/>

Recommended for performers, teachers, and intermediate to advanced students.

California woodwind performer and repairman Robert Scarff has designed a manual that can serve as a guide to several areas of saxophone equipment as it relates to sound concept. Although the title refers only to mouthpiece selection, the author branches into several other related and helpful areas.

Many readers will own books from the well-known "For Dummies" series (examples are *Mac for Dummies*, *Music Theory for Dummies*, etc.). These books are, of course, not written for stupid people; they just use plain language for the rest of us "mortals" who don't take easily to overly technical, jargon-filled manuals. They use a conversational and humorous style that wins the reader over as the book progresses. Scarff's writing style in this book mirrors a theme that could be titled "The Dummie's Guide to Saxophone Equipment."

The main section of the book, dealing with mouthpiece selection, is set up like the performance of a tune: *Introduction and Verse, Solo, Choruses One through Eight*. Each "chorus" describes a different area of the author's viewpoints on the pathways and pitfalls of choosing the best mouthpiece. The sentence structure feels as though he transcribed a clinic workshop because it is very conversational with many humorous asides.

Through it all comes Scarff's experience in both the repair and woodwind performance fields. He makes it clear that there is no one answer for everyone; that everything is a trade off in terms of mouthpiece dimensions, style, etc. There are certain areas of mouthpiece exploration where experimentation is comparatively cheap, easy and beneficial (such as reeds and ligatures), while there are other areas (such as the purchase of a high-end mouthpiece) that should be approached with great preparation, research, caution, and care.

The opening "choruses" of this section of the book take the reader through the process of learning one's own current mouthpiece, its dimensions, and getting an unbiased view of what it will and will not achieve. The physical feedback from a mouthpiece is discussed, including stiffness, too open sensations, brighter and darker sounds, and the parts of the mouthpiece structure that will affect these performance areas. There are also short and informative sections on saxophone necks and reed selection.

Scarff has also borrowed valuable material from authors, with permission. He lists the Woodwind/Brasswind mouth-

piece comparison charts as a huge help for teachers and their students in the sometimes intimidating search for a new mouthpiece. He also reproduces portions of the chapter on reeds from Larry Teal's landmark book *Art of the Saxophone*. Written over 40 years ago, Teal's book, the information and writing style, are still relevant today.

The end of the book continues successfully in the "consciousness stream" approach. There are short sections on reed adjustment, mouthpiece refacing advice, mouthpiece storage, neck and body swabs, sticky pads, advice on contract design, and even a list of musicians' jokes. The author's entrepreneurship in self-publishing this book has given less experienced players a helpful guide to many facets of saxophone equipment and the way they affect the sound. §

Jazz Play-Alongs:

Volume 17 Count Basie

Volume 18 Harold Arlen

Volume 21 Rodgers & Hart Classics

Hal Leonard Publishing

book/CD set \$14.95

book alone, \$5.95

CD alone, \$9.00

Recommended for: intermediate level jazz improvisers.

These more recent additions to Hal Leonard's *Jazz Play-Along* series represent a series that is more than "just another set of play-alongs." They contain some features that address the needs of some intermediate level improvisers who may know the basic vocabulary, but they supply some stylistic elements that are left up to the player in other play-along series. All of these sets were arranged, produced, and supervised by the widely published arranger Mark Taylor.

A major element of the series is the double presentation of each track. First is a practice track with bass and piano parts that are removable by using the balance control. These tracks also include trumpet or saxophone playing the melody, and feature one chorus of solo space for the user. The second presentation of each track is a "performance version" with a full stereo mix on the accompaniment rhythm section, no horn part included, and additional solo choruses. Each of these book CD sets features tunes that in most cases do not appear on other play-along records.

Volume 17 Count Basie contains classics from the Basie repertoire. A good added feature is the accompaniment which features the tunes in the style of the original arrangements, including fragments of shout choruses, introductions and codas. *All Of Me* has a melody laid out in the sparse style of the original Billy Byers chart, *April in Paris*, has a similar (but shortened) introduction and a coda featuring the famous "One more time" repeated phrase. Also

included are *Blues In Hoss Flat*, *Cute*, *Jumpin' At The Woodside*, *Lil' Darlin'*, *Moten Swing*, *One O'Clock Jump*, *Corner Pocket* and *Shiny Stockings*, all presented in the same Basie-esque manner. The rhythm section and the horn players are faced with the nearly impossible task of substituting for the Count Basie band and its singular time feel. They play hard, doing a good job of capturing the spirit of the originals. It should almost go without saying that there is no substitute for hearing the real Basie band play these charts (and the great soloists who are featured on them), which is strongly recommended for any student who buys this set.

Volume 18 Harold Arlen features several classics that deserve to be heard and performed more often. These include *Come Rain Or Come Shine*, *I've Got the World On A String*, *Over The Rainbow* and *If I Only Had A Brain* (both from *The Wizard of Oz*), *It's Only A Paper Moon*, *Stormy Weather* and others. The tracks were wisely chosen to concentrate on swinging, and they are presented in well-written arrangements by Mark Taylor that take students into the realm of swing figures, rather than simply stating the literal un-syncopated melody as it appears on the original sheet music and leaving the interpretation up to the user.

They also use some creative reharmonizations on the restatements of some of the melody choruses. The only instance where this arranged melody concept breaks down is in the ballad style. This problem is avoided largely because there are so few ballads in these sets (some tunes like *Over The Rainbow* are done as slow Latin tunes). In other cases, though, it might have been better to include some written melodic fills rather than notate the whole tune literally. This principle also would have worked on uptempo tunes, adding some fills to melodic restatements.

Volume 21 *Rodgers & Hart Classics* features arrangements of tunes with similar qualities (swinging, interesting melodies that are not often heard). The set includes *Falling In Love With Love* (in a 4/4 version that is often played by jazz musicians rather than the original 3/4), *Isn't It Romantic*, *(I'll Take) Manhattan*, *Mountain Greenery*, *This Can't Be Love*, *Thou Swell*, *My Funny Valentine*, *You Took Advantage Of Me*, and others.

In the Rodgers & Hart and Arlen books, the lyrics are included at the back of the book, rather than on the sheet music. One valuable feature that could have been included is a discography of some of the most influential recordings of each of these songs. These records could well be a young student's first exposure to such classics as Miles Davis' recording of *My Funny Valentine*, Sonny Rollins immortal recording of *Paper Moon*, or other jazz classics. Such a connection to the original versions is crucial in any learning situation. In fact, many of these original solos are transcribed in Hal Leonard's own *Artist Transcription* series, and references to these books would have been valuable as well.

These sets are well done, and are particularly suited for students who are less experienced stylistically. Because of the double-track presentation, they would be suitable not only for individual practice, but also for classroom performance situations. §