



# YAMAHA

## Educator Series

WIND INSTRUMENTS



*Thomas Liley, a Yamaha Performing Artist/Clinician of classical saxophone, has performed throughout the United States and in Canada in solo and chamber music recitals and as a soloist with such well-known conductors as Karel Husa, James Barnes, and Sir Vivian Dunn. Performances as an artist-clinician for the Yamaha Corporation and on his recordings for Delta Music and the Educational Music Service have included works written specifically for him by James Barnes, William Davis, and Frederick Fox, as well as standard works for saxophone.*

*A charter member of the World Saxophone Congress, Thomas Liley has long been involved with the North American Saxophone Alliance, including service as Editor of The Saxophone Symposium, the quarterly journal of the Alliance. Articles and reviews by and about Dr. Liley have appeared in The Saxophone Symposium, The Instrumentalist, Bandworld, and various state music educators magazines. He is co-author of The Cambridge Companion to the Saxophone, recently published by Cambridge University Press of Great Britain.*

*A former member of the United States Navy Band in Washington, D.C., Thomas Liley was awarded the degree of Doctor of Music in Saxophone by Indiana University, where he studied with renowned saxophonist Eugene Rousseau. He has been Professor of Saxophone at the University of Florida and at the University of Kansas and Guest Professor of Saxophone at Indiana University and the University of Minnesota and is currently a Professor of Music at Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Illinois.*

## Playing the Saxophone: Some Physical Suggestions

*By Dr. Thomas Liley*

Although the human body was not made with playing the saxophone in mind, the saxophone is constructed to be as comfortable to play as possible. The following comments will focus on some of the outward physical aspects of playing the saxophone: hand position, posture (both seated and standing), and neck strap length.

### HAND POSITION:

The hands should assume a natural position in front of the body, the right hand in line with the right leg and the left hand with the left leg. The fingers should have a natural curve, very much like holding a softball in each hand (the position one's hand takes to shake another person's hand is also a good description of the natural attitude to be assumed). The thumbs should be in contact with the thumb rests at all times. The right thumb is under the hooked thumb rest; remember that this thumb rest is usually adjustable. The left thumb should always be in contact with both the thumb rest and the register key. Younger players will frequently move the left thumb to operate the register key, a habit that will inevitably hinder technique.

The wrists should be relatively straight rather than broken. Check to see that the forearm flows easily into the hand without a noticeable angle at the wrist. This will help to keep the fingers free and supple, allowing the motion necessary to manipulate the keys.

### POSTURE:

A standing position is the best position to encourage proper use of the muscles involved in playing a wind instrument. Both feet should be firmly planted on the floor a few inches apart. The body is confidently upright, neither bent forward nor ramrod straight. The shoulders are roughly parallel to the floor.

Because many players perform almost exclusively in a band, it's important that their seated position be as similar to a standing posture as possible. Players should sit well forward in the chair, using the chair to support the body in an alert position. Again, both feet should be on the floor and the body upright. The saxophone should not rest on the chair.

The tenor and baritone saxophones must be held to the side; the soprano saxophone should be held in front. Although the alto saxophone can be positioned either to the side or in front, many players prefer the instrument in front because this is where it is held when standing. A good test of a correct seated position is to see if the student can stand easily. If the body weight must be shifted or the feet moved in order to stand, then the seated position is not allowing the same use of the necessary muscles as the standing position.



*Thomas Liley*

#### **NECK STRAP LENGTH:**

The neck strap should be adjusted to the length that brings the mouthpiece to the player without reaching. Young saxophonists often attempt to play with the neck strap too long. This forces them to reach for the instrument by bringing the neck forward, which is uncomfortable and restricts the air stream. It also puts unnecessary weight on the hands (especially the right hand) and the lower lip. The job of the neckstrap is to hold the instrument; the job of the hands is to balance the instrument and to move the keys.

Many younger players are unaware that the length of the neckstrap must be adjusted when changing from seated to standing or the reverse. The neckstrap must be shorter when standing than when seated. This is particularly useful information for saxophonists who stand to take a solo in jazz band.

These are a few suggestions to help young saxophonists establish good habits and more experienced ones to correct old problems. The idea is always to eliminate anything that gets in the way of creating the best musical results in the most effective and simple way.

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