



YAMAHA

Educator Series

WIND INSTRUMENTS



Sue Terry

Sue Terry began her professional career in Hartford, Connecticut, where she was a cum laude graduate of the Hartt School, and a protege of saxophone great Jackie McLean.

She has worked with Clark Terry, Al Jarreau, Wallace Roney, Dr. Billy Taylor, Walter Bishop, Jr., Mickey Roker, Chaka Khan, George Duke, Hilton Ruiz, Dr. John, Mike Longo, Dianne Reeves, and many others.

She has appeared as a jazz soloist with various chamber groups and orchestras, including the National Symphony, the New York Pops, the Downtown Chamber Players and the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

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Longtone Exercise: Hearing Shadow Tones & Overtones

By Sue Terry

Every tone you play has many parts, or levels, to it. The most obvious part – the one that stands out to our ear as we play – is the part that contains the sound of the airstream itself. This part has an “edge” to it; you can hear the upper partials, or “treble” part of the sound, very clearly. Many players never get beyond listening only to this part of the sound.

Behind this sound is what I call the “shadow tone.” This part of the tone has no upper partials. It sounds very much like a sine wave tone produced on a synthesizer. It is not affected by vibrato; it remains a pure tone even while you’re doing vibrato.

If you keep listening very intently to the sound as you play sustained tones, you will begin to hear these two parts, or levels, of the sound quite clearly. The awareness of the shadow tone may fade in and out, and this is fine. By focusing on becoming aware of the shadow tone, you are stimulating the intensity and projection of your sound.

Although this exercise may be done on any wind instrument or with the voice, the shadow tone may be affected by certain characteristics of the type of instrument you’re playing. For instance, on a saxophone, the airstream changes direction as it follows the curve of the instrument at the bottom of the bell. So if you play a note in this section of the horn, such as low Eb, you may hear that the shadow tone is of a different pitch than the main tone! It may differ by a half step, whole step or more. This phenomenon may allow you to hear the shadow tone more clearly. Playing against a wall is also helpful, because the sound bounces back at you.

After your ear is well practiced at “grabbing” the shadow tone, you can begin to focus on other parts of the sound, such as overtones. When I play long tones, I hear very distinctly several overtones at once. When I focus very intently on the overtones, sometimes they can begin to dominate the aural spectrum, so that the original tone actually disappears into the background.

One way to practice your long tones is to play them in a set interval within the diatonic scale. For instance, if I choose the interval of a 5th, I would start on low Bb, then up to F, then the next diatonic note of G, and down to C, then D, and up a 5th to A, and so on. When you get to the top, you can come down the same way, or you can come down on the next scale, the scale of B major. This exercise is also great for intonation.

After a few weeks of using the interval of the 5th, experiment with other intervals. You can also use scales other than the major scale. By varying your long tone practice in this way, you can sustain your interest in studying your tone. This exercise enables you to distill your sound so that to others, it becomes recognizable immediately as your personal sound. After all, despite all the cool runs and licks you may be able to play, the first thing heard is the quality of your tone.

Excerpted from PRACTICE LIKE THE PROS: SAXOPHONE by Sue Terry.
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