

The Altissimo Primer

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It has taken well over 100 years since the invention of the saxophone for its original range to be accepted by performers and composers. The pioneering work of Sigurd Rascher in the classical field, and to a lesser extent Al Gallodoro, Freddy Gardner and Ted Nash in the commercial and jazz field, established this higher range as an integral part of the saxophone. The altissimo register, the name of which creates an artificial distinction between the higher range and the rest of the instrument, is now an accepted part of the literature and performance practice of any serious saxophonist. However, there is still a qualitative difference in sound and access to this register as played by most saxophonists that compromises its full integration into artistic and professional use. Intonation, dynamics, articulation and technique often are discernibly less advanced in the altissimo than in other registers.


The Altissimo Primer serves as an introduction to the development of altissimo as a natural extension of the range. This book extends only to altissimo C, with full understanding that much of our literature requires at least another fifth in range. (The Martin *Ballade* and Cowell *Air and Scherzo* extend to G, and the Ibert *Concertino* and Brant *Concerto* even higher.) Many of the exercises work to establish the consistency of tone and facility between the key range and the altissimo. Additional exercises present simple scalar and intervallic patterns within a framework of technical clarity and tonal control. None of the exercises are originally composed by this author. They are altered compilations from existing texts whose original intent did not include the altissimo register but are well suited in this adapted context.

The Altissimo Primer is divided into three parts:

- 1) Scales and Arpeggios
- 2) The Equality of Registers
- 3) Cultivating an Artistic Facility

Practice Suggestions:

- 1) Each exercise should be practiced and perfected with two different articulations:
 - a) all slurred
 - b) with a smooth legato tonguing. (♩ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪)

- 2) For these exercises, all occurrences of the following pitches, 

in any order and in any duration (quarter, half, eighth note, etc.) should be played with the alternate (front key) fingerings. This discipline helps to develop a consistent sound and smooth facility between registers. Specific fingerings for passages in performance situations are always left to the discretion of the performer.

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