



by **Tim Price**

A Private Lesson With Flutist Marc Adler



This article will hopefully serve to encourage and inspire those who play the flute (exclusively or as a double) to use it more as a vehicle for jazz improvisation.

I personally came to jazz through the saxophone and through listening to great saxophonists like Coltrane, Parker, Cannonball, etc. It was pure chance that I had the opportunity to buy a cheap flute in high school, but once I started to play it I knew that this was going to be my “voice” in jazz. It was that comfortable. Yet, because of the relatively few jazz flutists around, and of the few jazz recordings featuring flutists, I stayed with the sax. I started using the flute heavily in jazz improvisation, though, encouraged by recordings of Joe Farrell and Hubert Laws. Finally, I decided to focus exclusively on the flute and began serious study with the late Harold Bennett (NY Philharmonic) and with Pamela Guidetti (virtuoso classical freelance Philadelphia area flutist).

Most of my study with Mr. Bennett and Ms. Guidetti focused on tone and technique, as I was up front with them about my primary interest in jazz improvisation. Some of the books I used with them and some that I discovered over the years are listed in this article. They are tried and true, and should be part of any flutist’s library.

TONE AND INTONATION

One of the most difficult aspects of flute playing! It really does take a lot of patience, effort, and time to develop and maintain, so don’t be discouraged. A good teacher in addition to listening to great flutists can go a long way to help you achieve your goal. The range of possible flute sounds is more varied than most players think. It is beneficial, though, to be able to get a full, rich, broad and clear sound that projects well, whenever you want to. A “rich” sound is one with numerous overtones present. Although achieving a great sound is a

step by step process that takes time, nevertheless, at the risk of oversimplification and omission, I’ll try to list the main points here, along with a couple of exercises and good books or articles to read and use.

POSTURE

Keep your back straight and shoulders relaxed.

Fingers should be curved over the keys with only the top “pad” of the fingers used to cover the holes (or keys if plateau). The little finger of the right hand is curved not straight (straight will put too much pressure on the joints). The right thumb is placed under flute between the first and second fingers. Left thumb is on the B not Bb key.

Marc’s Equipment
Piccolo
Gemeinhardt (silver)
Flute
Yamaha 681 (silver open hole low B)
Alto Flute
Armstrong (silver)
Indian Style Bamboo
Handmade by Romy Benton
Miscellaneous inexpensive bamboo and clay flutes

SOUND

Always keep the throat open (as in a yawn). The lower lip acts as a cushion, not hard or taunt. Singing while holding long tones helps to keep throat open, and with intonation. For example: Hold pitch at 1 with the g# key open. Sing pitch softly while still playing the A1. Sing other pitches while still playing the A1. Sing, at first, on syllable “ah.” Sing and play at various dynamic levels. Do the

same with other pitches throughout the instrument. Play lines while singing. Experiment. Create interesting exercises for yourself.

Overtone studies are excellent for tone and embouchure development. Make sure you don't overblow or force the air to get the pitches. The lower on the instrument you start, the more overtones you'll get. Usually the first three overtones are enough to work the lips nicely. There are many exercises you can create with overtones not to mention their use in soloing. For example, finger low E1, then gently adjust lips to "pop out" the E2, then the B2, then the E3. Then play in reverse back to the E1. Only a slight movement of the lips is necessary. Do this with various pitches, although the higher you go, the fewer overtones will be available. Also, for a variation, try alternating between an overtone fingering and its corresponding normal fingering. This is good for intonation as well as tone and embouchure.

Don't be afraid to roll the headjoint in and out to find the spot where your sound is most full, and adjust the headjoint accordingly. A good teacher will help in this matter, though, as you could end up playing out of tune or with the instrument turned too far in or out or at a strange uncomfortable angle.

For an in depth study on singing and overtones for tone development read Robert Dick's *Tone Development Through Extended Techniques*. Also, an excellent article on all aspects of flute playing is in *Flute Talk* (October 1995) by Michael Debost. He compiled excerpts from hundreds of articles on various aspects of flute playing written in the *Instrumentalist* and *Flute Talk* over the years. Finally a comprehensive classic on the subject of tone and technique is *De La Sonorite* by Marcel Moyse.

Of course, as with most wind instruments, long tones played each day throughout the instrument with an open throat and good posture are simple and practical approach to developing a solid, full sound (especially if you don't have time for anything else!). I usually like to keep some set of chord changes, tune, scale or mode in mind and alternate between the long tones and improvising over what is in mind, to keep things interesting!

TECHNIQUE

As a jazz musician, most of my technique develops from improvising. Each time I improvise, I discover some technical challenge that I want to master in order to get a particular line or idea out. This is one area where jazz and classical study differ. Every technical exercise (except for maybe some basic warm ups) that I create can be used at some point and in some way in my solos. All technical exercises are memorized and transcribed into various keys. All are played with various rhythms, tonguings and articulations. Some are typical jazz patterns, some are scalar, intervallic, arpeggio-like, conjunct, disjunct, diatonic, and chromatic. All with improvisation in mind. From major scales to exotic modes - all are analyzed and

worked out in endless ways, in endless applications. I listed some ideas for improvisation later in the article.

TONGUING AND OTHER EFFECTS

Single tonguing for staccato articulations fits nicely with jazz and I usually keep a "tu" syllable in mind and tongue behind the upper teeth.

Double tonguing is invaluable for very fast passages. I use it often in many different ways. It pays to learn it. You basically use a "te" (tip of tongue behind upper front teeth) "ke" (middle to back of tongue to roof of mouth) alternating very rapidly.

Breath tonguing doesn't use the tongue at all! Its like a short burst of air helped by the lips at times. Best to have demonstrated. Excellent for slow staccato passages. It gives you a very clean and clear staccato.

Percussive tonguing is unique to the flute and affords the player an invaluable rhythmic tool. Similar to single tonguing but the air is very forced, resulting in a sort of "pop" or burst of air which maintains the pitch you are fingering.

Glissando is a technique that is easier with open hole flutes, but still possible with plateau models. The technique leads nicely into a study of quarter tones. Steve Kujala has mastered this technique as well as Robert Dick (whose book *The Other Flute* describes it in detail). I use it sparingly, usually between notes no further than a fourth or so. It is very useful to know.

Personally, I've always approached jazz from the standpoint of melodic/harmonic ideas rather than effects. Therefore, I've concentrated primarily on the development of those ideas using effects as an enhancement to them.

FLEXIBILITY

Due to the nature of jazz improvisation, tone and technique must be flexible and limber. Unlike most classical music where much time is spent studying and interpreting the music regarding dynamics, articulation, phrasing and so on, jazz is of the moment. Changes in the harmony, "feel" or "groove," dynamics, improvised line, emotion, and so on all take place instantly, in real time and usually with one or more other players also improvising as well. The only way to develop this particular kind of loose, yet controlled playing is by doing it often. For practice, a metronome with a clearly audible beat provides a nice simple, clean and clear pulse that can be interpreted in many ways (i.e., on 2 and 4 straight ahead) depending on the music you are improvising over. Next, a drum machine can provide interesting grooves for you to play with. Finally, the play-along recordings (particularly of Jamey Aebersold) are excellent backdrops for improvisation. Then, when you either gig, rehearse or just jam with other musicians, you'll feel more confident and relaxed.

ETUDES & DAILY EXERCISE BOOKS

Jeffrey Khaner (principal flutist of the Philadelphia Orchestra) summed up the importance of etudes in an

interview in *Flute Talk*, "It does not matter who wrote them, but they should be difficult and varied so a student becomes familiar with as many musical styles as possible. New etudes teach a student to sightread, and they are great for the discipline" (1996 March. Adjusting to play with the Philadelphia style, *Flute Talk*, p.9.).

I personally do not play etudes as much as I used to, but I've included below a brief list of some tried and true. Also, I recently completed a challenging book of fully annotated etudes (with chord symbols) that should be available from Houston Publications (through Hal Leonard) in the near future.

DAILY EXERCISES

1. *Daily Exercises*, Maquarre
2. *Op. 101*, Hughes
3. *Exercises Journaliers*, Moyses, M.

ETUDES

1. *Exercises*, Berbiguier
2. *Exercises*, Andersen
3. *Op. 33*, Koehler

All of the above are available from *Flute World* (Franklin, Michigan). Call (810) 855-0410 for a catalog.

IMPROVISATION IDEAS

Listed below are some things to try. All are an attempt to create the classic tension and release so important and vital to all great music. Please note that the substitutes are for the soloist to use against the fundamental harmony played by the rhythm section.

A. ii7/V7/I Substitutes:

1. ii7/bVII7/I
Dm7/Bb7/C (contains many "typical" altered notes)
2. ii7/bII7/I
Dm7/Db7/C (tritone to V7)
3. ii7/bVI7/I
Dm7/Abm7/C (similar to #2)
4. ii7/V7/bVI
bVI/V7/III/III/V7/I
Dm7/Eb7/Ab/B7/E/G7/C (related by augmented triad I/III/bVI)

B. Chromatic Intervals can be used practically at any time. They are great for modal or slow moving harmonic progressions and can be practiced many ways. For example:

1. Changing Directions Major Seconds:
C D D# <C#> D E F <Eb>, etc.
2. Combining intervals, paths with half steps:
C F Bb B C <G D> D# E A D D# E <B F#>, etc.
3. Diminished and Whole Tone Scales:

Two extremely useful scales that should be fully explored, not just used "as is" or in a typical pattern. Practicing intervals naturally occurring within each scale can lead to a deeper understanding of these scales. For example, Alternating Minor and Major Sevenths found in the diminished scale:

1. C>Bb<Db>C<Eb>Db<E>Eb<F#>E<etc.

Consistent Tritones:

2. C>F#<Db>G<Eb>A<E>Bb<F#>C<etc.

The consistent intervals of the whole tone scale, Minor Sixths:

1. C>Ab<D>Bb<E>C<F#>D<G#>E<etc.

D. Major Triads:

Major triads sound great on the flute (Joe Farrell used them quite often in many unusual ways). Try these basic uses:

Over a V7 harmony:

C7: C Eb Gb A (diminished chord), as notes >E G C E Gb <Db Bb Gb> G Bb Eb G A<E C# A>Bb Db Gb Bb C<etc.

Over a Major Seventh type harmony:

Cmaj 7#11 - C D, as notes >E G C <F#> AD <G> C E <A> D F# <C> E G < etc.

E. Pentatonic Scales:

These are used extensively in jazz in both minor and major pentatonic as well as other more exotic versions. Read N. Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* or R. Ricker's *Pentatonic Scales for Jazz Improvisation*. Both are available from Jamey Aebersold).

Commonly used with V7 harmony they can alternate between two major (or minor) pentatonic scales a tritone apart using neighbor tones. For example, C pentatonic and F# pentatonic:

1. >C D E G G# <F# D# C#> D E G A A# <G# F# D#> E, etc.

F. Jazz progressions to know inside and out:

1. Blues (various forms and keys).
2. Rhythm Changes (at least in Bb concert!).
3. *All the Things You Are* (study of Secondary dominants, etc.).
4. *Stella by Starlight* (diminished and whole tone harmonies, etc.).
5. *Giant Steps* (some of Coltrane's harmonic concepts, etc.).

Don't forget to play over modal or static "progressions," tunes that have very few progressions or just one harmony. For example, *Impressions* (Coltrane) two changes, *Freedom Jazz Dance* (E. Harris) one harmony.

TRANSPOSITION

For a very important part of jazz improvisation I would recommend transposing:

1. Harmonic Progressions.
 - A. Entire tunes with simple progressions
 - B. Parts of tunes (challenging sections, etc.)
 - C. Specific Changes or Formula Changes (i.e., V7#9/I or ii7b5/ V7b9/i or V/III III/VI ii/V/I, etc.)
2. Individual Scales and Arpeggios including minor scales, major scales, diminished scales, whole tone scales, pantothenic scales, etc.
3. Patterns (generic or original)

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