

# Playing Saxophone “in Style”

The Importance of Learning Different Styles

Created for Clearwater Jazz Holiday Jazz Master “Virtual” Sessions  
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# Why learn different styles of saxophone playing?

- It makes you a more versatile musician.
- Knowing many styles gives you a deeper understanding of music in general.
- Understanding historical style and context is important for being able to perform what is asked of you on certain “gigs.”
- You will work more often as a performing artist.



# Saxophone “Styles”

- Classical - from European traditions
- Early jazz
- Swing Era
- Bebop / Hard Bop
- Rock / Funk / Fusion
- Contemporary / Pop





# “Classical” Saxophone

- Saxophone invented by French-Belgian instrument maker Adolphe Sax
- Patented in 1846
- Originally designed to improve on the tone of the bass clarinet
- Intended for use with military bands and orchestras
- Became a type of “novelty” instrument before being taken seriously
- Spread to the U.S. where it became used in American military bands and as a solo instrument





# Classical Style

- Use a more closed/dark sounding mouthpiece
  - Vandoren, Rousseau, Selmer C\*
- Make use of vibrato - typically more fast and wide
- Be able to produce a more “dark” or round tone so as to blend with accompanying instruments (solo with piano, or concert/military/marching bands)



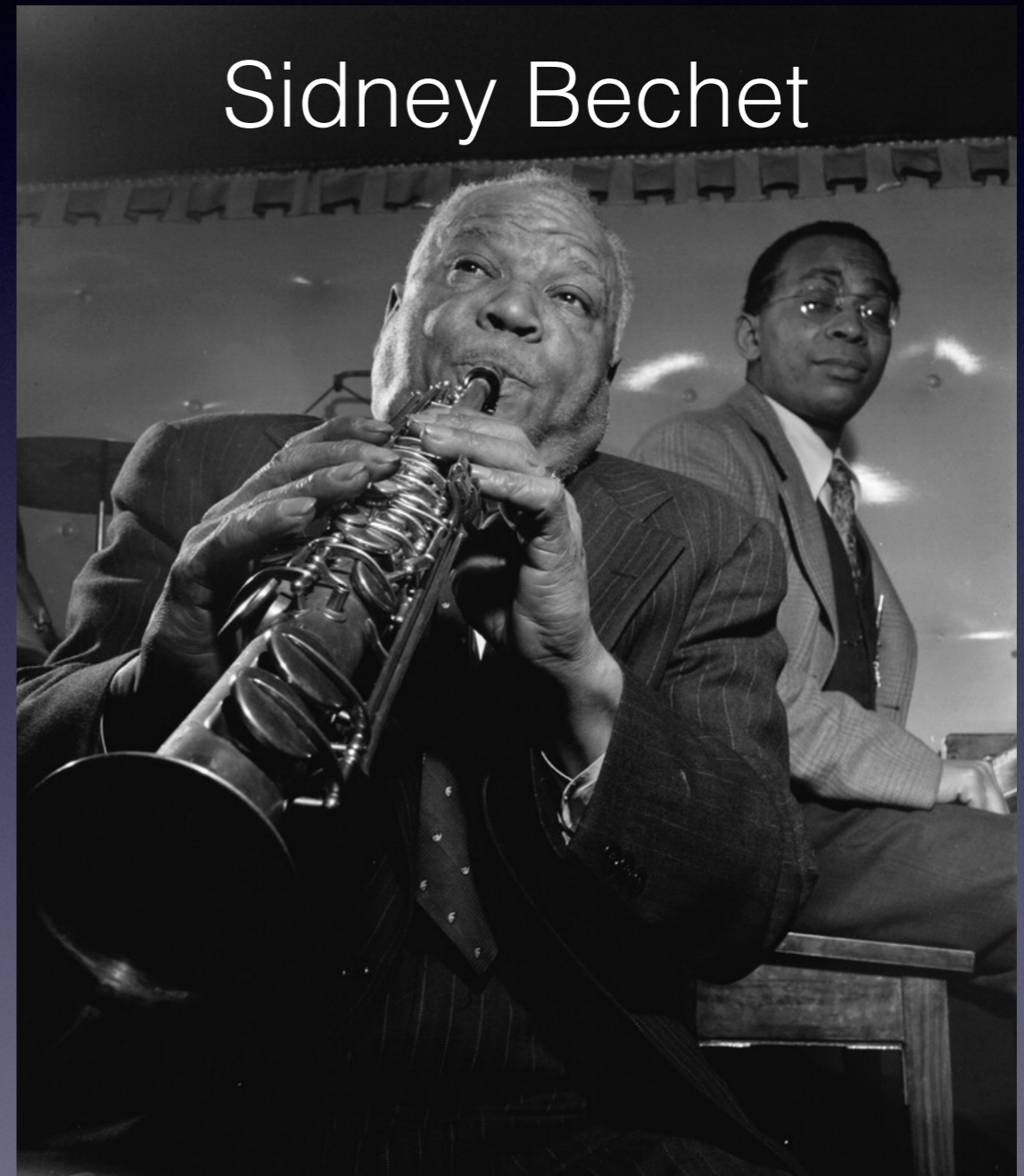
# Classical Style (Musical References)

- Marcel Mule
- Sigurd Rascher
- Eugene Rousseau
- Donald Sinta
- Larry Teal
- Alexander Glazunov
- Otis Murphy
- Fred Hemke
- Harvey Pittel
- Claude Delangle



# Early Jazz Saxophone - Early 1900's

- Styles influenced by European and African musical traditions
- Was used to “mimic” the sound of the human voice
- Made in a variety of keys at first, eventually moved to standard keys of Bb and Eb
- Used in small combos and dance bands





# Early Jazz Saxophone Style

- Ragtime / Bouncy feel
- Almost “comical” vibrato
- Sound could be darker or brighter
- Heavy use of inflection - bends, scoops, vibrato



# Early Jazz Style (Musical References)

- Sidney Bechet
- Frank Trumbauer  
(pictured)
- Barney Bigard
- Bud Freeman
- [https://  
syncopatedtimes.com  
/red-hot-jazz-archive/](https://syncopatedtimes.com/red-hot-jazz-archive/)





# Swing Era Saxophone - Late 1920's - 1930's

- Grew out of the New Orleans tradition
- Saxophone became the standard instrumentation for the wind section in dance bands / “big” bands
- 2 altos, 2 tenors, 1 baritone
- Short solos or musical features (Ellington / Basie)

Count Basie Sax Section





# Swing Era Saxophone Style

- “Tripletty” swing feel - less dotted 8th + 16th (though sometimes notated that way)
- Use vibrato in sections as well as solos
- Sound should blend with the section, lead alto should come out more on top
- Heavy use of inflection - bends, scoops, vibrato



# Swing Era Style (Musical References)

- Coleman Hawkins (pictured) (Fletcher Henderson)
- Lester Young (Basie)
- Johnny Hodges (Duke Ellington)
- Benny Carter
- Willie Smith (Jimmy Lunceford / Ellington)
- Harry Carney (Ellington)
- Leon “Chu” Berry (Henderson)
- Ben Webster (Ellington)
- Jimmy Dorsey
- Marshal Royal (Basie, Ellington, Lionel Hampton)
- Others: Lucky Thompson, Earle Bostic, Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis, Illinois Jaquett





# Bebop/Hard Bop Saxophone

## - 1940's - early 1960's

- Became a vehicle for soloists to be more creative and expressive
- Small combo playing became popular over dance bands (WW 2)
- Was viewed as the “musician’s” music
- Formats: trio, quartet, quintet



Charlie Parker



# Bebop/Hard Bop Saxophone Style

- Be able to play at faster tempos
- Vibrato can be more personalized. Less wide and not as fast.
- Swing style can be played more “straight” but not fully even 8ths; faster tempos = “straighter” swing.
- Understanding of harmonic and rhythmic concepts - chord extensions and heavy syncopation in improvisations
- Lot's of typical jazz vocabulary in this style



# Bebop / Hard Bop (Musical References)

- Charlie Parker
- Sonny Rollins
- John Coltrane
- Cannonball Adderley
- Sonny Stitt
- Joe Henderson
- Dexter Gordon
- Jackie McLean
- Ornette Coleman
- Wayne Shorter
- Stan Getz
- Phil Woods
- Art Pepper
- Lou Donaldson
- Eddie Harris
- Paul Desmond
- Gerry Mulligan
- Eric Dolphy

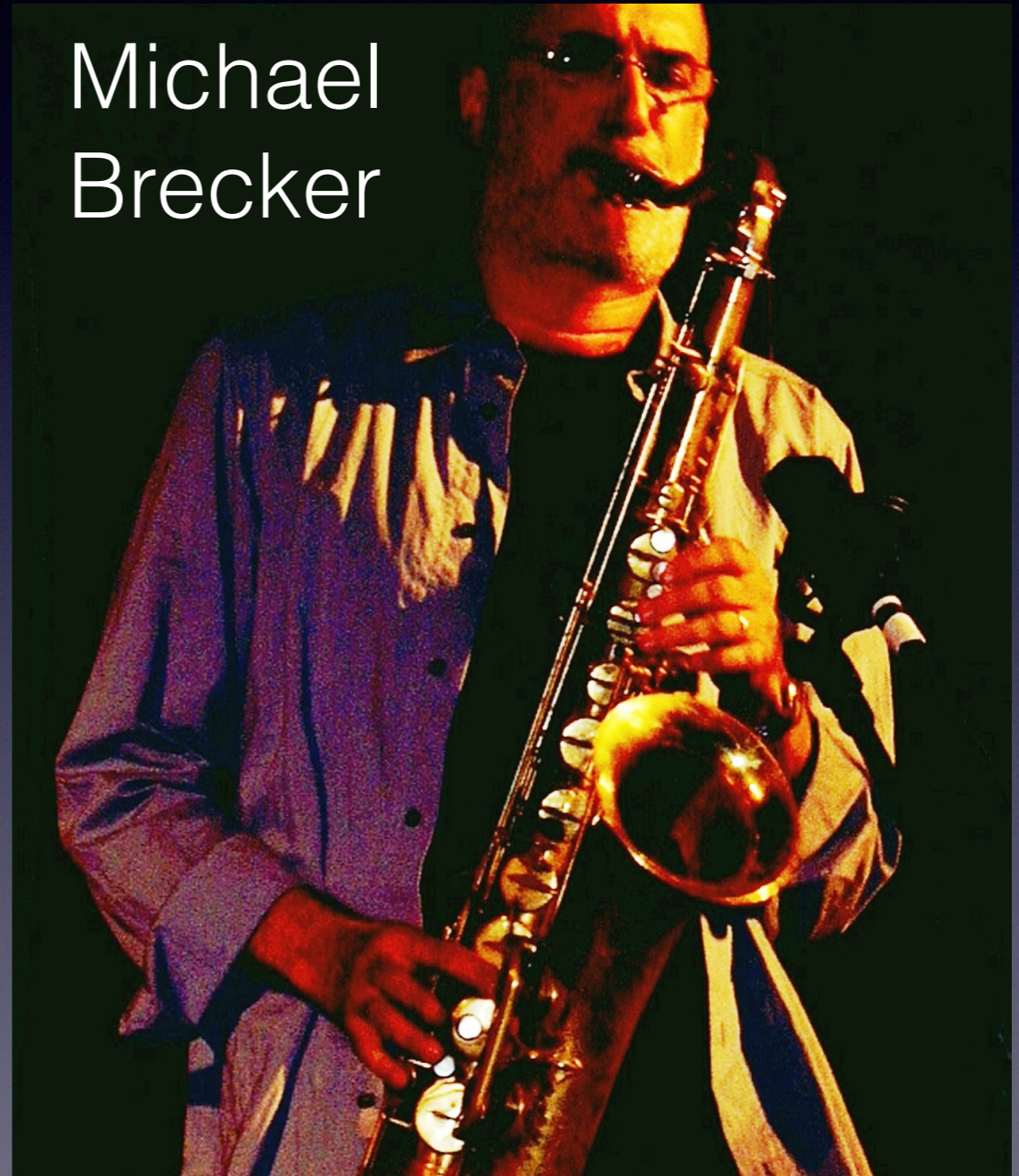


# Rock / Funk / Fusion Saxophone

## - Late 1950's - Present

- Funk / Fusion - Stepping outside the existing boundaries of harmony, song form, and earlier traditions
- More even 8th and 16th groove oriented melodies and compositions
- Rock - Less art music, more entertainment, more Blues and R&B focused

Michael Brecker





# Rock / R&B Saxophone Style

- Not as harmonically complex
- More simple improvisations, use of pentatonic and blues scale sounds
- Not as “sweet” of a tone, use a more bright and edgier tone
- Solo sections reduced down, more room for vocalists
- Use of the “growl” tone



# Funk / Fusion Saxophone Style

- Open harmonically as well as more 1-2 chord solo sections.
- Use of extended upper register (altissimo)
- Not as “sweet” of a tone, use a more bright and edgier tone/mouthpiece
- Solo sections reduced down, more room for vocalists



# Rock / Funk / Fusion (Musical References)

- David Sanborn
- King Curtis
- Michael Brecker
- Junior Walker
- Eddie Harris
- Ernie Watts
- Bob Mintzer
- Bob Berg
- Maceo Parker
- Pee Wee Ellis
- Boots Randolph
- Clarence Clemons
- Lenny Pickett



# Contemporary / Pop Saxophone 1980's - Present

- Solo artists, features in larger bands
- Styles can vary greatly: jazz, smooth jazz, pop songs, rock, contemporary jazz
- Highly personalized saxophone sounds, artists develop their own audiences with their styles





# Contemporary / Pop Saxophone Style

- Highly individualistic
- Artists are aware of the history of previous styles and incorporate what they've learned previously into their own unique style
- Use your own “bag of tricks” and what you've learned
- Be aware of all styles of music and how to produce the sound and style of the music you are hired to play perform



# Contemporary / Pop (Musical References)

- Kenny Garrett
- Mark Turner
- Chris Potter
- Melissa Aldana
- Joshua Redman
- Donny McCaslin
- Greg Osby
- Miguel Zenon
- Seamus Blake
- Troy Roberts
- Kenny G
- Kirk Whalum
- Grover Washington Jr.
- Kamasi Washington



# Tips on playing stylistically

- Be aware of the genre and style of each song you are playing.
- If you have a solo on a particular song, play in the style of the song depending on the gig.
- It's okay to “step outside” the box a little on a solo. You can add your own personality to the improvisation without compromising the integrity of the style of song you're playing.
- Learn all your scales, chords, arpeggios, music theory.
- Learn idiomatic phrases and licks for each style that you can play when you need to.
- Learn inflections and advanced techniques.
- Find a solid, reliable, versatile mouthpiece or two.



# In Summary

- There are many saxophone “styles” you should be familiar with as a saxophone player.
- Be able to play in as many styles as you can.
- The more versatile you are as a musician and a player, THE MORE WORK YOU GET!
- Learning many saxophone styles helps you figure out YOUR OWN style of playing.