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—Cora Ann Wong
3rd-year UPEI Music major

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charts from a small group, or duo, are compared, the most likely case will be that specific notes on all saxophones have extreme pitch tendencies. Once those are discovered in personal exercise such as the intonation chart, students are far more likely to retain the pitches in question, and their tendencies.

On most every saxophone some notes have specific pitch tendencies that can be alleviated with the addition of alternating fingerings that shade the pitch in one direction or the other. The note D on the staff for all types of saxophones is frequently very sharp. Its sharpness is further enhanced by some ensembles tuning to a concert F, forcing Eb saxophones to tune to this notoriously out of tune pitch. On this note having students depress the low B key, inside pinky of the left hand spatula mechanism, will lower the pitch enough to bring it within a few cents, which can then be manipulated by the oral cavity. This same shading can be applied to Eb and E if the sharpness persists on these notes. C# on the staff is frequently flat, and another pitch which is in need of alteration. There are numerous ways to achieve this. One popular fingering, is to apply the side C key to this pitch. Another technique is to play the note by depressing the third finger of the left hand with the octave key. Students must experiment with these fingerings on their own saxophone, as they each will produce a different result for each saxophonist. Conversely the C# above the staff, one octave higher, is sharp. By depressing the middle finger of the right hand, while playing the traditional fingering, will allow for this note to resonate in tune more successfully. In the high range, pitches tend to get extremely sharp. To help counteract this problem, high E and Eb can be played without depressing the high D palm key. This will result in a lowered, more in tune sound. These fingerings, however, will need to be experimented with by each individual saxophonist. For some, these fingers will affect the pitch too drastically, and for others it may not affect the pitch at all. Empowering students with the knowledge to solve intonation problems, however, will clearly result in enhanced intonation.

Most music educators will agree that saxophonists are often times the culprit of disastrous intonation in the ensemble setting. Through a systematic approach this prevalent issue can quickly be corrected. Students must first develop a physical understanding of manipulation of pitch with the oral cavity, though mouthpiece exercises. Second, students must have an aural grasp of wave that constitutes the sound of intonation problems. Thirdly, students must implement daily practice with a drone to match pitch. This is a crucial step as students are improving pitch totally by way of aural perception, rather than visually watching the needle of a tuner. One must hear intonation, for it can not be seen. This step is the most crucial and will take months to master. Lastly, the implementation of a few choice alternate fingerings will allow the student to anticipate notes that are extremely out of tune on their personal instrument, and allow for an instant plan of action for their correction. When this system is adapted by the music educator, audible improvements in pitch will become a daily occurrence in each rehearsal.



Saxophonist Sean Murphy is currently pursuing his Master of Music Degree in Saxophone Performance from the University of North Texas. He also holds a Bachelor of Music Degree in Music Education from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. As an active performer, he has commissioned new works for the instrument by composers Gregory Wanamaker, Kit Turnbull, and Stephen Barr. His articles on saxophone pedagogy have been published in journals throughout the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Spain, France, and Australia. For more information please visit www.seanmurphysaxophone.com.

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