

The Power Of One Note

Surrender your whole being into a note, and gravity disappears.

--Carlos Santana

Everybody should try to find a sound that really belongs to you. In the end, I think everyone should be different. Good teachers should help a student evolve in a natural way, not be a copy machine.

--Concert pianist Lang Lang

The first step you should take to develop your sound is to listen to yourself. It is a good idea to spend at least 15-20 minutes a day focusing solely on your sound. Play one note and strive to produce the sound that you like. Make a connection between the sound you hear in your head and the sound you are producing from your instrument.

--Guitarist Roni Ben-Hur

Its principal merit in my view is the varied beauty of its accent, sometimes serious, sometimes calm, sometimes impassioned, dreamy or melancholic, or vague, like the weakened echo of an echo, like the indistinct plaintive moans of the breeze in the woods and, even better, like the mysterious vibrations of a bell, long after it has been struck; there does not exist another musical instrument that I know of that possesses this strange resonance, which is situated at the edge of silence.

This instrument possesses incomparable and expressive qualities; the trueness and beauty of sound which can be produced when one really masters the technique are such that it can, in slow pieces, challenge the finest singers.

It is full, mellow, vibrant, extremely powerful and yet capable of being soft.

--Hector Berlioz on the Saxophone

This is the most beautiful kind of sound that I have ever heard.

--Rossini on hearing a saxophone for the first time.

I cannot say enough times, the saxophone is called to the highest destiny by the beauty of its timbre and that opinion is common with several notable musicians, among others Meyerbeer and Halevy, who have heard it at the same time as myself.

--Jean-Georges Kastner in his *Traité General d'Instrumentation*

You cannot imagine the beauty of sound and the quality of the notes.

--Leon Escudier on the saxophone in *La France Musicale*

To my ears the saxophone is the most expressive of all wind instruments - the one closest to the human voice. And surely all musical instruments should be rated according to their tonal closeness to human kind's own voice!

--Percy Aldridge Grainger

Your basic task, as a player, is the development of a glorious sound. The sound begins in your ear, and is nourished by your breath.

--Margaret Thornhill

I work with students on getting their fundamentals together. There is a tendency for students to want to find something that is profound. All musicians are really doing the same thing. For saxophone players, you have to be doing long tones. When you say something to them that is really simple, like they have to be doing long tones, they don't really want to hear that because they think there are more profound things...but everybody has to do the same things and there is no quick fix. For saxophonists, you have to be doing long tones. We can move forward once you're working on that part of your playing.

--**Kenny Garrett**, in Saxophone Journal interview (14 solo recordings, sideman with Art Blakey, Donald Byrd, Chick Corea, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Quincy Jones, Mel Lewis, Branford Marsalis, Duke Ellington)

"A painter paints his pictures on canvas. But musicians paint their pictures on silence. We provide the music, and you provide the silence."

- **Leopold Stokowski**

You can solidify and increase your range by a very simple method—long tones. Not only can it increase the beauty of your tone, but it also improves your intonation. Long tones and scales are essential for all players in developing their sound and technique.

When I talk about scales, I don't mean you have to play them at racehorse tempos. Just practice scales at reasonable tempos through all the keys. This will keep your intonation intact and it also helps your execution and articulation.

I've got a theory about increasing musicality that everybody finds kind of weird. When I was on the road with Count Basie, I used to sit on the bus and hour after hour I would sing out loud to myself.

I noticed that when you try to sing the phrases you have to play; it can be very hard at first. You might be breaking the phrases in the wrong place. But the more you sing them, you'll begin to see how the phrases should be, and you'll improve your breath control.

--**Grover Mitchell**: played with Earl Hines, Lionel Hampton, Duke Ellington. TV work and Broadway musicals. 22 years as lead trombone for Count Basie

We have to touch someone with our sound. The moment you do that, you know you are a musician.

--**Marcus Eley**, clarinet professor, California State University, international soloist

I love to practice. The best thing I do all day is practice. If I don't practice first thing in the day, then the day just doesn't seem right. I don't find any trouble finding time to practice. We make time for the things that are important.

I always play long tones. With long tones I concentrate on the core of my sound, as well as vibrato and intonation. Long tones are as much about focusing my mind as they are a physical exercise. It's a Zen thing.

The biggest thing is you have to listen and you need to do it every day. I have had a number people audition at the University who have never listened to a lot of saxophone music, and you can tell. Listening is the most important thing.

--**Steve Stusek** Professor of Music at University of North Carolina

I always felt that your sound on any instrument is like your voice. It's the first thing people hear. That's what makes them want to hear what you have to say. Orson Welles, JFK, Malcolm X, Dr. King...these guys had beautiful speaking voices. And when they spoke you heard the sound, and even before you started to pay attention to what they were saying, you heard that sound. And because the sound is so good, it made you want to listen.

--**Russell Malone**, guitarist (in Jazz Times "Before & After" Listening Session)

"Everyone is scared to be different. I'm scared to sound like everyone else."

--**Ricardo Morales**

"Dear young man, we are worlds apart: you are interested in playing twenty notes per second, but what interests me is taking twenty seconds to playing one note well. Your instrument must vibrate and be as melodious as a string instrument."

--**Louis Cahuzac**, renowned for being a strict but kind teacher who stressed the importance of embouchure, air column and timbre.

The magic in music, regardless of genre, is when musicians understand the power of sound to create emotion.

--**Branford Marsalis**

"Instead of just playing your note, style the note. That's the one note you have in life. You're really going to play the shit out of it. Your big chance to be a star with one note. Here we go."

--**Frank Zappa** to the Ensemble Moderne, rehearsing them for his final concert before succumbing to prostate cancer, July 1991