

Take The Lead

Saxophone Journal Masterclass Play-Along CD

By Joe Eckert

Welcome to this “Take the Lead” masterclass play-along CD for *Saxophone Journal*. It was my great honor to play lead alto with the USAF Band’s Airmen of Note from 1984-2004. This masterclass will focus on some of the styles and performance practice that were a part of my daily routine as a professional lead player. You’ll hear the complete section on the demo track and then have the opportunity to “take the lead” when the section plays again without the lead part. I hope that this will be a good learning experience and enjoyable for those of you who choose to play along.

ATTRIBUTES OF A LEAD PLAYER

Perhaps the most important attribute of a lead player is consistency. Consistency not only of sound, time, pitch, but also correct style and interpretation is essential for a saxophone section to come together. I often tell my students that it should, “sound like one player is playing five parts.” The consistency of a lead player will not only cultivate the confidence of the section but also make it easier for the saxophone section to follow. This is one of the reasons we call the lead chair the “hot seat.” It’s fun to have the melody but also a great responsibility and a challenge to play with that degree of consistency on a regular basis.

TAKE THE LEAD

CD Tracks

- 1.....Introduction
- 2.....*Licorice* demo
- 3.....*Licorice* play-along (prep is 4 clicks)
- 4.....*Four Others* demo
- 5.....*Four Others* play-along (prep is 8 clicks)
- 6.....*Impressionable* demo
- 7.....*Impressionable* play-along (prep is 5 clicks)
- 8.....*Super* demo
- 9.....*Super* play-along (rhythm section prep)
- 10....*A Warm Breeze* demo
- 11....*A Warm Breeze* play-along (rhythm section prep)

A KNOWLEDGE OF PLAYING STYLES

Knowledge of styles is also an essential element for a lead player to interpret the music accurately. We would obviously not play a “Miller” style tune the same way we play “Super-sax.” The lead player has some latitude in interpretation as the lead part is really a solo that is harmonized, but you must remember that you can’t over stylize and expect the section to

follow you. For this reason, the most stylized solis (in the style of Glenn Miller or Count Basie) are usually the most difficult to perform.

For this particular masterclass I’ve chosen five different lead styles to demonstrate how they should be played and sound. These are in no way all-inclusive, just a representation of five different approaches of taking the lead in a saxophone section. One performance note: I’ve left out most of the articulations except for those written into the part on *A Warm Breeze*. I would prefer that you listen and then imitate what you’ve heard in the complete version.

GLENN MILLER CLARINET LEAD STYLE

Licorice

Most jazz oriented saxophonists are keenly aware that they must also be good doublers to make a living these days. The role of the lead alto player is no different as demonstrated by

Licorice performed on track 2 (play-along is track 3). The distinctive Glenn Miller sound is characterized by clarinet lead over a sax section consisting of clarinet, two altos and two tenors. The example you'll hear and then play is voiced in close harmony with the 2nd tenor doubling the lead clarinet. You'll also notice that vibrato is used by the entire section, matching the width and intensity of the lead clarinet. When playing clarinet in this style, it would be advisable to use a bit more open mouthpiece and perhaps a softer reed to enable you to achieve a better, more relaxed balance with the saxophones in the section. The articulation style is usually legato and phrasing should be consistent from part to part.

WOODY HERMAN FOUR BROTHERS

TENOR LEAD STYLE

Four Others

On track 4 is a complete performance of a tune I call *Four Others* (the play-along version is on track 5), and is characteristic of the famous "Four Brothers" sound which was of course one of the hallmarks of the Woody Herman Orchestra. The "Four Brothers" section consisted of three tenors and one bari with Woody occasionally playing clarinet or alto solos over the band. This style emerged with Woody's "First Herd" in 1946 and has been a popular sound ever since. You'll notice that the style of the section is a little more of the "cool school," with less vibrato used throughout. Since the harmony is four parts instead of five, you won't hear the usual doubling of the lead in the lower octave by the bari or low tenor part.

BUD SHANK AND THE SAX SECTION STYLE

Impressionable

One of my favorite albums to listen to from the late 1960s was, and continues to be, *Bud Shank and the Sax Section*. It featured, of course, Bud Shank with some of the great West coast players of the 60s, and fabulous arrangements by Bob Florence. The format followed featured Bud in a sort of solo, or melodic role, accompanied by the other saxophonists. After the statement of the original theme, a harmonized sax soli in the style of "Supersax" followed, and then Bud would "take it out" with a restatement of the original theme. I would highly recommend you listen to this recording titled *Bud Shank and the Sax Section*, if you've never heard it before. The complete performance of *Impressionable* is on track 6 (the play-along is track 7). My *Impressionable* loosely follows the same format Bud Shank used, with a piano solo inserted between the soli and the restatement of the theme. The melody is played in more of a solo style, while the lead part in the soli is played in a fairly traditional bop, post bop style. You'll hear the traditional lead doubled by the bari, and also some "drop 2" and other voicings in this style.

SUPERSAX STYLE

Super

Supersax took the sax soli concept to newer heights by taking the improvised solos of Charlie Parker and harmonizing them for the complete sax section (AATTB). My example is in no way exemplary of Charlie Parker's genius, but does touch on the bop style he and Dizzy Gillespie made famous.

After one chorus of introduction by the rhythm section my complete recording on track 8 of *Super* begins with a unison line for the first chorus (the play-along is on track 9). The melody is harmonized the second time through and a harmonized solo ensues. The ensemble "trades 4's" with the drummer and then goes back to the original theme to finish off this example. Once again there is traditional octave doubling and some drop two and more "spread" voicings highlighted in this example.

COUNT BASIE STYLE

A Warm Breeze

Along with my mentor, at the University of North Texas, Jim Riggs, Marshall Royal was definitely one of the biggest influences on my concept of lead alto playing. As the lead altoist with the Count Basie Orchestra for many years, Royal defined the "classic" lead alto sound, which in my opinion, every player today should try to learn and emulate. I'm forever grateful to my good friend Sammy Nestico for giving me permission to adapt his classic composition written for the Basie Orchestra, titled *A Warm Breeze*, to demonstrate this style. A complete performance of *A Warm*

Breeze is on track 10 and the play-along version is on track 11.

I can think of no better saxophone soli written in this style. An added bonus, which I've included, is the ensemble section towards the end of the tune which features flute lead over the ensemble. This lead style (made popular by the incomparable Frank Wess) is also indicative of the distinctive Basie sound. For those of you who may not double on flute (yet), you can transpose the section written for flute and play it on alto.

PLAYING LEAD IN A BIG BAND

Playing lead in a big band has definitely been one of the most fulfilling musical experiences I've enjoyed over the course of my professional career. Having to play all of the section parts on this recording has reaffirmed my respect for the guys who supported me for all those years. I hope you've enjoyed this brief introduction to lead playing and invite you to write or e-mail me if you have any questions or comments about this masterclass. My thanks again to *Saxophone Journal* for interest in this topic.

JOE ECKERT is currently Associate Professor of Saxophone and Director of Jazz Studies at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia. He recently retired from a 20-year career as lead alto saxophonist woodwind specialist and director for the USAF Band's Airmen of Note in Washington, D.C. Mr. Eckert received his B.M. from Baldwin-Wallace College and went on to complete graduate and post-graduate studies at the University of North Texas, where he was a member of the world renowned One O'clock Lab Band. Prior to joining the Airmen of Note, he was Assistant Professor of Saxophone and Director of Jazz Studies at West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia (1981-84), where his ensembles were awarded for their excellence and he received the "Outstanding Teacher Award" for 1982-83.

While with the "Note" he toured extensively across North and South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. He had performed with some of the great named in jazz, including Louis Bellson, The Brecker Brothers, Bob Mintzer, Peter Erskine, Jimmy Heath, J.J. Johnson, Cleo Laine, Mike Mainieri, Carmen McRae, Clark Terry, Kenny Werner, Paquito D'Rivera, Joe Williams and many others. Some of his freelance activities include performances with the Dallas Symphony, the Fort Worth Symphony, and the National Symphony

Orchestra and tours with Liza Minnelli and Nelson Riddle.

Comfortable in both jazz and classical idioms, he is the only member of the faculty at Shenandoah to have been a guest soloist with the Symphony Orchestra, Wind Ensemble, Jazz Ensemble and Brass Quintet. After serving as adjunct faculty since 1987, Joe joined the faculty full-time upon his retirement from active duty in the fall of 2004. He has served as an adjudicator and clinician at music festivals, high schools, and colleges nationally and internationally. Mr. Eckert is currently an educational specialist for the Conn-Selmer Corporation and is President-Elect of the Virginia Chapter of IAJE. §

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SUPPORTING MUSICIANS ON THIS CD

Bob Larson, piano
Golder O'Neill, bass
Alphonso Young, drums
Engineer: Todd Campbell
Photos: Cathy Kuehner
Recorded at Shenandoah University Studios October 1, 2005

JOE ECKERT'S EQUIPMENT

- Clarinet
Buffet R-13 with Ralph Morgan J-6 mouthpiece and Vandoren #3 reeds
- Alto Sax
Conn 25-M with Charles Bay #10 "jazz" mouthpiece and Rico Jazz Select #3 Soft (filed) reeds
- Tenor Sax
Martin Committee Model with Berg Larsen 105/0 mouthpiece customized by Ralph Morgan and Vandoren #3 Java reeds
- Bari Sax
Selmer Mark VI with Berg Larsen 100/0 mouthpiece and Vandoren #3 Java reeds
- Flute
Gemeinhart 3SS B-foot (solid silver open hole)



Track 2 *Licorice* demo
Track 3 *Licorice* play-along

Licorice

(Clarinet Lead)

Joe Eckert

Swing q = 96

The musical score is written on a single treble clef staff in 4/4 time. The key signature consists of two sharps (F# and C#). The piece is in a swing style with a tempo of quarter note = 96. The score is divided into seven systems, each starting with a measure number: 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, and 30. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and various accidentals (sharps, naturals, and flats). A triplet of eighth notes is indicated with a '3' above the staff at measure 13. The piece concludes with a final measure at measure 37.

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Four Others



Track 4 *Four Others* demo
Track 5 *Four Others* play-along

(Tenor Lead)

Joe Eckert

Fast Swing q = 200

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature (C). It consists of seven staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a common time signature. The music is a fast swing, with a tempo marking of q = 200. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, along with rests and accidentals. A circled cross symbol is placed above the second staff. Measure numbers 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, and 25 are indicated at the beginning of their respective staves. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' below it in the 21st measure.

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Four Others cont'd

29

33-48

16

49

53

D.C. al Coda

57

Coda

61

65

Impressionable

(Alto Lead)



Track 6 *Impressionable* demo
Track 7 *Impressionable* play-along

Joe Eckert

Swing q = 160

6

11

16

21

26

31

36

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Impressionable cont'd

41



Musical staff 41-45: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The staff contains a melodic line starting with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes, including a trill on the fifth measure.

46



Musical staff 46-50: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a trill on the fifth measure.

51



Musical staff 51-55: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a trill on the fifth measure.

56



Musical staff 56-60: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a trill on the fifth measure.

61

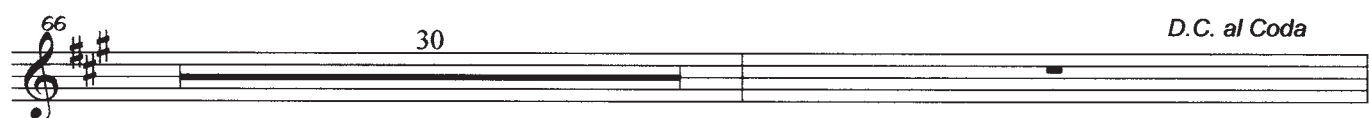


Musical staff 61-65: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. The staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a trill on the fifth measure.

66

30

D.C. al Coda



Musical staff 66-96: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. The staff contains a long horizontal line representing a 30-measure rest, with the instruction "D.C. al Coda" written above it.

⊕ Coda

97



Musical staff 97-100: Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. The staff contains a melodic line starting with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes, ending with a fermata on the final note.



Track 8 *Super* demo
Track 9 *Super* play-along

Super

(Alto Lead)

Fast Swing q = 212

Joe Eckert

11

13

19

25

31

37

43

49

55

61

To Coda

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. It consists of ten staves of music. The first staff shows measures 1 through 11, with a double bar line and a fermata over the final note. The second staff begins at measure 13 and includes a first ending bracket over measures 13-18. The third staff begins at measure 19 and includes a second ending bracket over measures 19-24. The fourth staff begins at measure 25 and includes a third ending bracket over measures 25-30. The fifth staff begins at measure 31 and includes a fourth ending bracket over measures 31-36. The sixth staff begins at measure 37 and includes a fifth ending bracket over measures 37-42. The seventh staff begins at measure 43 and includes a sixth ending bracket over measures 43-48. The eighth staff begins at measure 49 and includes a seventh ending bracket over measures 49-54. The ninth staff begins at measure 55 and includes an eighth ending bracket over measures 55-60. The tenth staff begins at measure 61 and includes a ninth ending bracket over measures 61-66. A 'To Coda' symbol is placed above the staff starting at measure 31. The score is marked with various musical notations including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

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Super cont'd

Musical staff 67-72: Treble clef, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note, with the number '2' written above the staff.

Musical staff 73-78: Treble clef, continuing the melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note.

Musical staff 79-84: Treble clef, continuing the melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note.

Musical staff 85-108: Treble clef, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note, with the number '24' written above the staff. The text "(Piano solo)" is written above the staff.

Musical staff 109-116: Treble clef, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note, with the number '4' written above the staff.

Musical staff 117-120: Treble clef, continuing the melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note.

Musical staff 121-126: Treble clef, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note, with the number '4' written above the staff.

Musical staff 127-132: Treble clef, continuing the melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note, with the number '3' written above the staff. The text "D.S. al Coda" is written above the staff.

Musical staff 133-137: Treble clef, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staff contains a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note.

Musical staff 138-140: Treble clef, continuing the melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line and a fermata over a whole note. The text "Fine" is written below the staff.

A Warm Breeze



Track 10 *A Warm Breeze* demo
Track 11 *A Warm Breeze* play-along (Alto Lead)

Laid Back Swing $q = 116$

Sammy Nestico

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It consists of seven staves of music. The first staff is a whole rest for 15 measures. The second staff begins at measure 16 and contains a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff begins at measure 21 and contains a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth staff begins at measure 26 and contains two triplet markings. The fifth staff begins at measure 31 and contains a triplet marking. The sixth staff begins at measure 36 and contains a triplet marking. The seventh staff begins at measure 46 and contains a triplet marking. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents (>), and dynamic markings.

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A Warm Breeze cont'd

Musical staff 51-55. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 51 starts with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 52 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 53 has an accent (>) over a quarter note. Measure 54 has an accent (>) over a quarter note. Measure 55 has a slur over two eighth notes.

Musical staff 56-60. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Measure 56 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 57 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 58 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 59 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 60 has a slur over two eighth notes.

Musical staff 61-65. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Measure 61 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 62 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 63 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 64 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 65 has a slur over two eighth notes.

Musical staff 66-76. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Measure 66 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 67 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 68 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 69 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 70 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 71 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 72 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 73 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 74 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 75 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 76 has a slur over two eighth notes.

Musical staff 77-80. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Measure 77 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 78 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 79 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 80 has a slur over two eighth notes.

Musical staff 81-85. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Measure 81 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 82 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 83 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 84 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 85 has a slur over two eighth notes.

Musical staff 86-91. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Measure 86 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 87 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 88 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 89 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 90 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 91 has a slur over two eighth notes.

Musical staff 92-95. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Measure 92 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 93 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 94 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 95 has a triplet of eighth notes.

Musical staff 96-100. Treble clef, key signature of two sharps. Measure 96 has a slur over two eighth notes. Measure 97 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 98 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 99 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 100 has a slur over two eighth notes.

A Warm Breeze cont'd

101

Musical staff 101-105 in B-flat major. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The melody features eighth and sixteenth notes with various articulations like slurs and accents. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it.

106

Musical staff 106-110. The melody continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it.

111

Musical staff 111-115. The melody continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it. The staff ends with a fermata and the instruction "to alto" above the final measure.

116

Musical staff 116-120. The key signature changes to B major (one sharp). The melody continues with eighth and sixteenth notes.

121

Musical staff 121-125. The melody continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it. Three triplets of eighth notes are marked with '3' below them.

126

Musical staff 126-130. The melody continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' below it. A double bar line with a '2' above it indicates a two-measure rest. The staff ends with a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' below it.

131

Musical staff 131-135. The melody continues with eighth and sixteenth notes, ending with a fermata.