
Sax Tips eZine – Altissimo

Wow! Did you hear that?

Yeah, that high note that Micheal Brecker, David Sanborn, Sigurd Rascher, Vincent Abato, and many others, played?

Playing those high notes has become a landmark for many of us as a personal and professional accomplishment on our instrument. For those who haven't started yet, or have wanted to start, or who right in the middle of learning the altissimo register, this article is for you.



What is the altissimo range?

Simply said, it is the range above which the saxophone is played with "normal" fingering, above the high "f" or "f#", depending on the model of your sax. Theoretically, the saxophone can be played up to another full above the high "f".

What can I do to prepare myself for the study of the altissimo?

I find that the best preparation for the altissimo is regular practice of the overtones (See the SaxTips Newsletter - "Overtones") and then experimenting first with just a couple of altissimo notes.

On the following websites you can download some sample charts for altissimo fingering. You may have to use different fingerings depending on which voice you play (alto, tenor, etc.) and which make (Selmer, Yamaha, Keilwerth, etc.). These fingerings will respond differently from horn to horn.

I suggest first trying the altissimo "A". Why? Believe it or not, the hardest note to produce is the altissimo "G". It's comparable to the "break" on the horn (just like middle C# to D). Once you've experience the sense of achievement by producing this tone, you'll may feel more confident in trying to produce G# and G.

Always compare your altissimo tones with the lower octaves for the purpose of intonation. Practice a few simple major arpeggios and scales. Then try simple melodies.

I suggest working on extending your range up to altissimo "A" for a few weeks until you're comfortable before moving on to Bb, B and C. Again, always use simple arpeggios, scales and melodies at first. Once you've got these pretty much under your belt, move on to C#, D, D#, E and F.

Don't expect to master these notes within the next few weeks. Playing altissimo is a study that takes time, patience, imagination and a willingness to practicing them to keep fit and accurate.

Avoid practicing the overtones too high in order to match the altissimo notes. Due the fact that the upper partials of the overtones series (past the 4th partial) are too flat in comparison to the well-tempered scale, this may lead to you learning to play these high notes out of tune.

So, remember - Practice with Patience and Diligence!

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