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Volume 31, Number 1

Sept/Oct 2006

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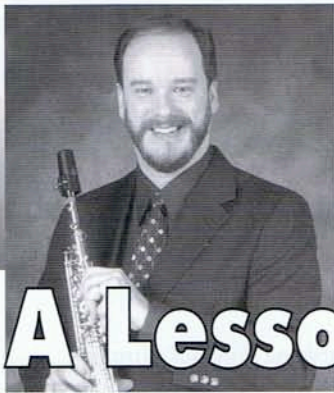
Vol 31, No. 1
Sept/Oct 2006
Saxophone Journal

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IN THIS ISSUE

A Lesson With Lauren Sevian
 Develop Good Jazz Listening Habits
 Orchestral Saxophone Primer, Part I
 Reviews Of New Saxophone Publications
 Using Palm Keys As Alternate Fingerings
 Akai EWI Story: Past Present And Future
 How To Lower A Saxophone's Tuning Pitch
 History Of The Rollin' Phones Sax Quartet
 Beginning Jazz Improvisor & The Minor 7th





By Greg Banaszak

A Lesson With Lauren Sevian

In this column saxophonist Lauren Sevian will be sharing her thoughts on the baritone saxophone, careers in music and touring. As a teenager she was awarded “most outstanding soloist” at the first Count Basie Invitational and was given the opportunity to play with the Count Basie Orchestra at the concert that evening. At 17 she auditioned on baritone saxophone for the Manhattan School of Music jazz program and graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree in May 2001. While attending the Manhattan School of Music some of her private instructors included Mark Turner, Steve Slagle, Joe Temperley, Mike Abene, and Donny McCaslin.

Lauren is a regular member of the Mingus Big Band, Howard Johnson’s “Bear-tones,” and Ada Rovatti’s Elephunk. Other groups Lauren has played with include the Mingus Orchestra, Mario Pavone’s Septet, Frank Lacy’s Vibe Tribe, Charli Persip’s Supersound, Travis Sullivan’s Bjorkestra, Kendrick Oliver and the New Life Jazz Orchestra, Mike Smith’s Supper Club Orchestra, The Stan Rubin Orchestra, Earl McIntyre’s Big Band, Diva, the Artie Shaw Orchestra, the Van Dells, the Benny Goodman Tribute Orchestra, the Harry James Orchestra, Sleva Slagle’s Sax Quartet, Blue #9, the Howard Williams Jazz Orchestra, the Ryles Jazz Orchestra, Gary Wofsey Jazz Orchestra, Istanbul Orchestra, Super 7, George Gee Orchestra, the JC Hopkins Biggish Band, John Malino Big Band, singers Deian McBride, Josh Weinstein, and Liz Winick.

Lauren Sevian’s discography includes *For Rent* (Ada Rovatti & Elephunk), and *Sunlight’s Path* (Liz Winick), as well as other studio projects and jingles. In December 2003 she was part of the Hollywood movie production *Mona Lisa Smile* as a member of an all female big band. Lauren has appeared on the covers of *Newsday’s Part Two* and the *Boston Globe’s* music and art section.

The touring she has done has taken her to places such as Canada, Columbia, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Israel, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and throughout the United States where she has been part of numerous jazz festivals. Other performance venues include Weill Recital Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, Iridium, Jazz Gallery, Village Vanguard, Regatta Bar, Sweet Rhythm, Joe’s Pub, Carnegie Club, Supper Club, Tilles Center, Westbury



photo by Mark Kaufman

Music Fair, Fez, 55 Bar, Bowery Ballroom, Mercury Lounge, Lion’s Den, Makor, Swing 46, Metropolitan Cafe, Tribeca Blues, the Knitting Factory, Bitter End, Five Spot, Europa Club, BAM cafe, Brooklyn Conservatory, Decade, C-note, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Cornelia Street Cafe, South Street Seaport, Central Park, Shelly’s, Triad, Groove, the Oak Room, The Slipper Room, Hofstra University, Emmanuel Baptist Church, St. Marks Church, Pratt Institute, Manhattan School of Music, Izzy Bar, and others. She is currently on faculty at the Musician’s General Store in Brooklyn, and substitute teaches at the Brooklyn Music School and the Brooklyn Conservatory. In addition to playing the baritone sax, Lauren doubles on tenor sax, alto sax, flute, bass clarinet, and clarinet.

LAUREN’S WARM-UP ROUTINE ON BARITONE

My basic warm-up on baritone saxophone includes harmonics, starting on low A, then continuing on through to low C#. Then I move on to a chromatic technique exercise (A, Bb, B, C, C#, C, B, Bb, A). First I play slowly, then increase the speed. After A, I will start on Bb, playing the same pattern and continue on.

I have a few different chromatic exercises I like to practice so I don’t get bored. Long tone exercises are very important so I have a few different ones I like to practice. For example, start on middle C# (a hard note to tune on the baritone) and move down (C#, B, C#, Bb), and so on until you reach low A. Then do long tones in the opposite direction (C#, D, C#, D#) and so on until you reach the highest possible note in your altissimo register.

My embouchure technique is more of a frown shape. It does take more strength and I practice it away from the horn by rolling in my lips and turning down the corners of my mouth. For a mouthpiece on my baritone I use a Ron Coehlo (hard rubber), tip opening 115, with a medium baffle. My ligature is a Selmer. For reeds I use Rico Jazz Select 4 medium filed.

As far as a baritone sound I like to have a large, fat, full sound, that cuts and projects. I play in a lot of big band settings and it’s easy to get buried, so the only way to achieve a big sound is through long tones, practicing them loudly and softly. When I practice I usually sit both feet on the floor, and try to keep my shoulders relaxed. Doing this in front of a mirror is

helpful.

BARITONE TECHNIQUE

My basic teaching philosophy is that a little goes a long way. It's important to encourage your students to practice every-day, even if it's for just 15 minutes. If they only practice long tones and scales it's better than not practicing at all. When I have a beginner student I use the Rubank method book, and have them buy a metronome. It's not only important to work on the development of sound and tone, but also keeping a good rhythm. I try to get through at least half a lesson from the book a week and I add long tone & articulation exercises and a new scale each week.

For my more advanced students we work more on jazz and improvisation, i.e., jazz theory, transcribing, and listening. We also work on more difficult scales, like the harmonic & melodic minor scales, playing them in intervals. I also incorporate the use of a piano in lessons and I think every student should be familiar with the piano. We work on ear training, chord recognition, interval recognition, and chord progression recognition. I emphasize the importance of studying the jazz language, how they should listen to recordings, and to transcribe things they hear. I like to use the *Patterns for Improvisation* book by Oliver Nelson because it has many great examples of jazz language and vocabulary.

REPERTOIRE

As I mentioned earlier, for beginner students I like to use the Rubank method and other similar books, while learning all of the major scales, then minor scales, (harmonic, melodic, natural). For students interested in jazz I have them get the *Omni Book*, a *Real Book*, *Patterns for Improvisation* (Oliver Nelson), *Jazz Conception* books (Lennie Niehaus). This allows them to get more familiar with the jazz language. I also emphasize the importance of listening to jazz artists. Jazz books are really great, but you have to know where the language is coming from otherwise it doesn't make sense to study just books. For me it started to come together when I would transcribe solos by ear, write it down, and study it. When I transcribed John Coltrane's solo on *Satellite* (Coltrane's *Sound*), it was easier for me to write it out and then study how his lines fit harmonically, along with his placement of certain notes. At the time it was easier for me to transcribe it by ear, write it out, and then learn it on the horn.

Some solos are better to transcribe "on the horn" without writing it down. I find you are able to retain the solos much more this way. Over the years it became easier

for me to transcribe "on the horn" (without writing it down), probably because I was becoming more and more familiar with the language. Saxophonists I've transcribed include John Coltrane, Dexter Gordon, Hank Mobley, Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson, Warne Marsh, Pepper Adams, Lester Young, and Jackie McLean. These are the saxophonists that I've listened to the most, but I am also influenced by George Coleman, Eddie Harris, and Clifford Jordan. As a baritone player I've focused on Pepper Adams, Serge Chaloff, Cecil Payne, Ronnie Cuber, and Gary Smulyan. I've also transcribed Freddie Hubbard, Lee Morgan, Miles Davis, and Wynton Kelly solos. I think it's important not only to transcribe saxophonists, but also other instruments, like trumpet and piano.

THOUGHTS ABOUT COMPOSING

Composition is an extremely valuable component of musical development. Once you have an idea for a tune you should write it down, whether it's a melody or a harmonic structure. I usually come up with a set of chord changes first, but everybody has a different way. Sometimes I have a melody that comes to me first. I don't think there's a right or a wrong way when it comes to composition. It's a very personal thing. People can love or hate something that you wrote but the only thing that matters is that it came from you.

There are ways to have a stronger sounding composition. When I studied with composer arranger Mike Abene he would emphasize having the melody in the upper structure of the

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chord (9th, 13th) and avoid the root and 5th. This should not be taken literally because it's only a suggestion for when you first start to form a composition. A knowledge of the piano is also important when you try your hand at arranging. You also have to know the ranges of all the instruments you're writing for, which range sounds the best, which notes are difficult to hit, and how to transpose instrument parts directly from the piano. The way to approach this is through trial and error. I haven't got into big band writing, but I've done some charts with four horns or more. You have to sit at the piano and try different voicings and see what works with your instrumentation. Different types of instrumentation may require different voicings.

CAREERS IN MUSIC

I think that it's important to compete and audition. By doing this you accumulate experience and it will prepare you for future gigs. It's important not only musically, but also how you handle other people professionally, and how you handle yourself personally. In high school and college I did a lot of competitions and auditions, which led to future connections and experiences. One thing will always lead to another and you meet so many people, and you're getting your name out there.

It's important not to get discouraged if you don't get something you wanted, or thought you deserved to have. Some things are out of your control. Just keep practicing, listening, and improving yourself as much as possible. Be humble, ap-

preciative, and respectful. If you have the opportunity to record yourself, go for it. It's important to document yourself over the years so you can track your progress, no matter what it is. Almost every concert I did in college I got a recording of so I could hear what I sounded like. If you're playing a session with other people, bring along a recording device and ask if they wouldn't mind if you taped it. If you're offered free studio time at your college or school, take it! I have a friend who gets free studio time at his college, and in the real world you will not come by this. It's important to take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way.

The first time I composed something was in high school, when we had to write in the style of a Bach *Chorale*. I really enjoyed that experience and I had a string quartet perform it. When I was in college we had to come up with tunes using different compositional techniques to create a melody, then inverting it, or writing it backwards. Another challenge is composing a bass line. The important thing is keeping in mind that while there are different techniques, the ideas should come from you.

PRACTICAL LIFE EXPERIENCES

I've been blessed with having many experiences travelling around the world, and the USA with many different groups, including the Mingus Big Band, Diva, the Artie Shaw Orchestra, the Benny Goodman Orchestra, and others. If you ever have the opportunity to go out on the road, do it! It's important to have

as many of these experiences as possible so you get a feeling of whether or not life on the road is right for you. It involves a lot of travelling, airplanes, buses, trains, and cars; you name it, I've done it! It takes a lot of stamina, especially for me traveling with a baritone saxophone. You have to deal with a lot of different obstacles, such as being sick in a foreign country (this has happened to me numerous times), not speaking the language, and missing your loved ones. You have to stay focused on what it is that you are doing. All the festivals and clubs I've played and countries I've visited, I wouldn't trade it for anything.

When I was in Spain last summer with the Mingus Band I had an awful case of food poisoning and had to go to the hospital. We were supposed to play that night and I was pretty sure I wouldn't make it. I was upset considering that it was a huge festival and that this was the whole point of being there. I didn't come here to get sick. So I had to mentally overcome being sick. I felt horrible and thought I was going to pass out, but I managed to get myself onstage and perform. Something came over me and I put my sickness out of my mind for that moment. After the concert I was exhausted and still sick for the next day or so but I was so glad I pulled it together. It takes not only physical toughness, but also mental toughness to be in this world of music. Some days you might feel like giving up and it's okay to feel that way. The important thing is to be able to pick yourself up and keep going, no matter what life hands you.

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