



## BOOK REVIEW

# CHOPS

BY DAN GRASER



Review by Paul Haar

Two things have propelled me throughout my career; discovering new things that the saxophone can do that I can't and finding inspiration in others' work. I love when I discover a new resource or hear a player so captivating that I cannot wait to get to my saxophone and practice. With the creation of his new book CHOPS, Dan Graser has inspired me in both arenas.

Graser is the Professor of Saxophone at Grand Valley State University, the soprano saxophonist with the award-winning Donald Sinta Saxophone Quartet, and a highly respected pedagogue. As a saxophonist, he is in rarefied air possessing world-class musicianship and super-human technique. For me, Graser epitomizes the Dizzy Dean quote, "It ain't bragging if you can do it."

A spiral-bound notebook with musical notation on the pages. The pages are filled with handwritten musical notes and staff lines. The notebook is open, and the pages are slightly curved. The text is overlaid on the pages.

"We have gotten the extended techniques reference books in recent years, and specialist books on altissimo, which are fine. But looking back on it everyone is essentially still using Kynaston and Londeix which were published around 40 and 60 years ago! It was time for something as comprehensive as the Deville method, but with modern players in mind."

-DAN GRASER



And with CHOPS, a 377-page magnum opus to modern saxophone technique, now you can learn how to do it as well.

I have been staring at this book for well over a month, and the amount of information enclosed is so vast that I still have a difficult time wrapping my head around it. Although plenty of material can be used for intermediate players, I feel CHOPS is designed for the advanced saxophonist who has already put in considerable time studying and playing the saxophone. It is an exhaustive resource that takes the player through all facets of technical development, including long tones, mechanical development, voicings, articulation, scale, interval and arpeggio development, and cool down. As if this wasn't enough, he includes altissimo fingerings for soprano thru baritone as well as practice advice.

Knowing that people like comparison, I could vaguely compare this book to the Universal Method by DeVille or the Complete Method by Klose. Like those two classic resources, CHOPS presents a variety of resources that can be used in various ways, either under guided study with a teacher or through self-study. That is where the similarities end. CHOPS will challenge and invigorate the most skilled player. I have always been motivated by what I can't do well, and this book contains years of motivation. If the saxophonist is dedicated and patient using these books, they are sure to build a foundation that will last a lifetime.

There is very little wrong with this book. There are a few small things that I would like to see added in future additions (because it would make it easier for me). First, I feel the binding is not the right one for the number of pages. I feel a spiral binding would do a better job of keeping the pages intact and allow it to be folded without damaging the book. I would also like for extensive altissimo exercises to have either some labeling or an ossia "cheats" where the altissimo notes are cross-referenced to in-the-staff notes. Where the current printing forces the player to learn the staffing for altissimo notes, most players don't live in that world regularly.

Table of Contents

**Foreword by Timothy McAllister** xi

**About the Author** xii

**Introduction** xv

**Part 1: Long Tones/Warm-Ups**

- Full range long tones 1
- Low register homogeneity 2
- Large leap long tones 4
- Wedge figures 7
- Kieble long tones for dynamic control 9
- Taster notes with long tones 14
- Timbre matching 17
- Low register refocusing 20
- Subdivided time warm-ups 21
- Vibrato 27
- Tuning 29

**Part 2: Mechanism**

- Chromatic groupings 33
- Single-hand dexterity 35
- Low register dexterity 37
- Palm-front-altissimo 38
- Chromatic wedges 40
- Front key altissimo bridge 42
- Five note diatonic patterns 43

**Part 3: Voicing Flexibility**

- Five note patterns 49
- Pitch bends 50
- Overtone sustains 53
- Overtone melody 54
- Overtone patterns 56
- Overtone scales 73
- Mouthpiece routine 77

**Part 4: Vocalises**

- Vibrato across registers 83
- Harmonic connection 84
- Large leap connection 85
- Scale outburst 86

vii

Table of Contents

- Rolling triads 88
- Descending focus 89
- Additive figures 90
- Major connection 92
- Blending the registers 93
- Articulated dynamic fanfare 105
- Baroque style 106
- Neighbor tone arpeggios 108
- Legato harmonic progressions 110
- Roulets 115
- Harmonic leap connection 117
- Arpeggio connection 118
- Expressive scales 119

**Part 5: Articulation**

- Single tongue 129
- Multiple tongue 132
- Altissimo Multiple Tongue 146

**Part 6: Scales**

- C Major/a minor 153
- Db Major/bb minor 155
- D Major/b minor 157
- Eb Major/c minor 160
- E Major/c# minor 163
- F Major/d minor 164
- F# Major/d# minor 169
- G Major/e minor 172
- Ab Major/f minor 175
- A Major/f# minor 178
- Bb Major/g minor 181
- B Major/g# minor 183
- Wholetone 185
- Diminished/Octatonic 187
- Chromatic 190
- Pentatonic 193

**Part 7: Intervals**

- C Major/a minor 197
- Db Major/bb minor 203
- D Major/b minor 209
- Eb Major/c minor 215
- E Major/c# minor 221
- F Major/d minor 227
- F# Major/d# minor 233

viii

Table of Contents

- G Major/e minor 239
- Ab Major/f minor 245
- A Major/f# minor 251
- Bb Major/g minor 257
- B Major/g# minor 263
- Wholetone 269
- Diminished/Octatonic 271
- Chromatic 277

**Part 8: Arpeggios**

- C Major/a minor 285
- Db Major/bb minor 287
- D Major/b minor 289
- Eb Major/c minor 291
- E Major/c# minor 293
- F Major/d minor 295
- F# Major/d# minor 297
- G Major/e minor 299
- Ab Major/f minor 301
- A Major/f# minor 303
- Bb Major/g minor 305
- B Major/g# minor 307
- Triad chord progressions 309
- Broken triad chord progressions 316
- Chromatic triad and 7th chord patterns 326

**Part 9: Cool Down**

- Normal air focused air 347
- Lightness in the fingers 348
- Sound/voicing refocusing 349
- Full circle long tones 351
- Air setting 353
- Articulation relaxation 354

**Appendix 1: Altissimo Fingerings**

- Soprano 355
- Alto 360
- Tenor 364
- Baritone 368

**Appendix 2: Practice Rhythms and Tempo Structures** 373

ix

My last criticism is more of personal curiosity. Too often, I found myself saying, "How the hell do I do that?" So often that I would like to have had some suggestions from Grasser on elements such as preferred altissimo fingers moving from the standard range to the extended range of articulation tips and suggestions.

But my quasi-criticism is actually what I like most about CHOP. Grasser has created a resource that can be used by any player or teacher, regardless of pedagogical background. There is no dogmatic directives or pedagogical assumptions. Suggestions and advice are sparse but helpful.

Today, there is no shortage of "tenure-fodder"; books that are mindless and do not address modern saxophonists' needs and issues. CHOPS is a resource that people will be using for generations. I am stunned and inspired by its content and can confidently say this is a new standard in developing the modern saxophonist.