

CHOPS 2

New Systems of Scale Patterns
for the Advanced Saxophonist

Dan Graser

Review by Paul Haar



CHOPS 2 REVIEW

Book Review

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I vividly remember being a freshman in college and my teacher assigning me a scale book called Scales by Step and Interval by Jean-Marie Londeix. I was so amazed at the depth and detail of this book that I stepped into the coffee shop next door and studied it for hours. I remember feeling that if one mastered all that book had to offer, they could play anything. And for the past 30 years, I have continued to view this seminal work as the finest scale book ever created for saxophone until last year. That is when Dan Graser released CHOPS: 221 Full Range Fundamentals and Technical Exercises for the 21st Century Saxophonist. That book not only changed the modern saxophonist's game plan, but it also sent older players, such as myself, into a tailspin of lost ego.

Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the practice room, Graser has done it again. This time, he has offered the modern saxophonist CHOPS 2: New Systems of Scale Patterns for the Advanced Saxophonist. Unlike the original, which dealt more with expanding music and technical foundations, CHOPS 2 takes the scales (major minors wholetone and diminished), tetrachords, hexachords, and chromatics to dizzying levels of manipulation.

Classical players will find a resource unlike anything they have encountered, where jazz players might be reminded of a format similar to the scales and pattern books that have flooded the jazz education market. The difference here is that Chops 2 presents all the scales and patterns in all 12 keys and extends outside the written range of the saxophone. It is marvelously exhaustive in breadth and depth.

The book begins with the presentation of the scales in 3+ octaves. If you are not used to playing your scales above high F#, get your pencil out, because this will be a challenge. But you want to play the saxophone in the modern era, 3 and 4 octaves scales are expected, and this resource is just what the doctor ordered.

After the presentation of materials Graser then gives us a glimpse into what is possible concerning manipulating the material. This is where the saxophonist gets a sense of the type of mind the author has. Graser is a fiercely gifted saxophonist who also possesses a monster intellect. The organization, alterations, and development of the scale material are beyond exhaustive. For this reviewer, it was somewhat intimidating at first glance. However, nobody is immune to being humbled by this book. For those who seriously wish to move their playing to the next level, this book (as well as the other accompanying volume) is an absolute must.

It is rare to find a technique book that isn't just a font variation of the same old materials studied for years. In this reviewer's opinion, CHOPS is the new "Londeix" scale books for a new generation of saxophonists. This book is already mandatory reading for several college saxophone studios, and mine is no exception.

If you want to be considered an advanced saxophonist, these books are a mandatory right of passage. But, like diet and exercise, you only get the results you want with practice. Chops 2 can help you find the shortcomings in your playing and turn them into assets.