

## PLAY BETTER SAX SOLOS-SNAKE DAVIS

The magic of music. Any note will fit over any chord, it's endlessly forgiving and has limitless possibilities. It's a beautiful magical thing. How is it that I can take just 5 notes, play away over a tune I've played more than 1000 times, enjoy myself and even surprise myself with combinations of notes that I've never played before? That's magic that is.

Music is so full, in a great way, of crunches, notes that might look as though they should sound awful together maybe cos they're just a semitone apart for example, but actually work. And of tension and release, of repetition, of space. What a word 'space' is, hugely important in today's workshop. SOO often nothing is a better choice than something!!

The spaces, gaps, nothingness, give the something-ness so much more weight meaning and beauty.

I hear this from many students;

"I *can* solo but it sounds samey- I bore myself after one chorus/ I don't know how to come up with new/different/fresh/interesting/individual ideas. How can I practice this stuff? I can't, right? Just need to keep doing it?"

You CAN practice this, I have loads of ideas for you!

This lesson is not about technique, riffs, phrases, scales, chords, harmony et cetera although all those things are important of course, rather this lesson approaches ways of picking and using notes in more imaginative and creative ways.

Many students come to me with this scenario. They've plateaued and don't know how to practice and move on from here. The books seem so technical and complicated. As soon as they start on about scales, related scales, modes, key centres etc they zone out and lose the will to live. If they try to keep their eyes on the chords as they're whooshing by they get lost almost immediately..'

I suggest to them the following-

Based on the shut your eyes, turn your ears up to 11 and go-for-it approach, but with more strategy planning and structure..

Take a sequence/tune that you know pretty well, that is well within your capabilities. 12 bar blues, Watermelon Man etc. Dragonfly today

Use a full time round, I'll take AAB, or

'16 bars or so'

Off you go.. THE DRILLS

1. Play some choruses with no notes shorter than whole bars. Then minims. Then crotchets. The whole bar/minim drill gives you SO much time.. Time to ask 'Where next?' or 'Why did I choose this note?'
2. Play some choruses only playing in alternate bars.
  - 2b. Record the above then jam with yourself, filling in the spaces.. you don't need fancy technology, your phone will do it..
3. Play some choruses as though you are very sad and down. You may find yourself playing many flattened thirds and fifths and tending to wards the lower register. Actually 9ths and 6ths are even more poignant and reflective..
4. The opposite! Happy, smiley, major thirds and Bouncy optimistic riffs

5. Play some choruses using syncopation and stabby riffs more like a pop brass section
6. Play some very bluesy and bendy choruses, maybe adding some hard edge, growls n flutters.
7. Compose a new tune. Make it as good or better than the original
8. Hint at the written melody but with your own variations
9. Use the rhythmic form of the written melody but re-write the actual notes.
10. Use only your lower register.
11. Use only your middle then high register
- 12, and 12a, 12b etc. With your teacher or colleagues help if necessary pick an appropriate scale/s and use only notes from it/them. Typically pentatonics and blues scales are the ones to kick off with.
13. Angular and disjointed, staccato, syncopated
14. Smooth and flowing and dreamy and legato
15. Use as many octave jumps/movements, as you can
16. Link as many of your notes with glissandos as you possibly can, that is chromatic runs
- 17 As swingy as possible.
18. As straight and square as poss.
19. Sing a phrase then copy it on sax-this may take some trial n error, getting used to.. Persevere, get the played phrase to sit and groove as well the sung one does..
20. Whole chorus starts ppp ends fff and vice v
21. Starts bottom note ends top, only upward moves allowed, and vice v
22. Repetition. Play until you hit on a phrase that you like well enough, then repeat it. Once you've had success with that try repeating but displacing the time, i.e start on a different beat. Then try transposing the phrase, i.e. same phrase but starting on a different note. Then repeat but change one note, e.g. flatten the 3rd
23. One note only.. (But you may switch octaves) Then 2, 3, 4 .We've already done 5, the pentatonic scale.
24. Chromatic scale. Get all 12 tones of the chromatic scale in in a musical way. Often it's about what you lean on, perhaps placing on strong beats, 1&3, and what you almost ghost
25. One arm (right) 'tied' behind your back. Then left, harder! Then both.. joking.

Then onwards.. Write your own briefs from here on...

**NOW we have a better chance of coming up with some music, some jazzy loveliness over whatever we play...**

**These exercises are INVALUABLE preparation for any tune we're gonna play, and infinitely adaptable..eg pentatonics, blues scales, playing step patterns in 2nds, 3rds, 4ths etc**

**But remember to have some freeform fun at some point, go bananas, don't get locked into exercising...**

**The disciplined regime and exercises lead us to freedom and creativity...**

**So...**

**26 shut your eyes and go for it.** Last drill... To finish off have a good old 'free blow'. I don't mean carefully combining the drills you've been working on, quite the opposite really. 'Clear your mind', close your eyes and go for it.

Some of that is fun, some not, some of it is quite musical, some not very, some is easy, some very demanding. And this will vary from one individual to another. But, it is all doing you a lot of good and helping you achieve your goal of becoming great soloists. Honest! Trust me!

NOW GO AWAY and DO IT! Just possessing this sheet wont make you solo better...

Other tips..

If a tune has lyrics sing it through, and play from the lyrics rather than the dots.

**Start your own library of phrases and licks.. Practice them in all 12 keys..**

**DO include improvisation in your regular practice sessions**

**Student qn.-“I don’t know what to play.. no ideas.. cant think of anything..”**

**One answer- Listen to other people.. nick their licks. This is a sharing of ideas which will eventually lead to you developing your own personality, listen widely.**