Recycling Music of the 1800s: An Analysis of the Potential for M.A. Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises for Flute to Serve as a Technique Book for Saxophone

Lannah Fitzgerald

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol14/iss1/13

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
Copyright © 2018 Lannah Fitzgerald
Mathus Andre Reichert is a well-known name in the flute community. As a composer and virtuoso flutist, M.A. Reichert (1830-1880) produced a number of challenging works for flute that are still played today. One such work is Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises, Op. 5, first published in 1872. This book of music, consisting of seven multi-page etudes, is popular among advanced and even professional flute players. Although written for the flute, Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises has the potential to serve as an excellent, yet demanding, technique book for saxophone.

M.A. Reichert’s etudes can help players to improve finger speed, articulation, air control, range, timbre, rhythm, and tone, but these improvements do not come easily. Reichert’s studies go through unfriendly keys, include notes that soar above the staff, and utilize patterns with difficult leaps. On top of this, Reichert’s work poses a special challenge to saxophonists: the exercises go above the saxophone’s natural range, into the extended upward range of the saxophone known as altissimo.

Background

Normally, saxophonists change the instrument’s pitch through the pressing and releasing of keys. When keys are pressed down, air is directed through a longer length of tubing, resulting in a lowered pitch; when keys are released, air is directed through a shorter length of tubing, resulting in a raised pitch. The highest note of the saxophone’s natural range is produced when the saxophone’s pitch cannot be further raised through the releasing of keys. Interestingly, it is possible to play pitches even higher than the saxophone’s natural range due to a phenomenon known as the overtone series.
The overtone series is a set of pitches that are mathematically related to any given tone. When an instrument produces a tone, it sounds the pitch that people hear clearly, called the fundamental tone, while simultaneously quietly sounding a set of related pitches with higher frequencies (See Figure 2).

Overtones are often so quiet that they are nearly inaudible. Yet, through changing the shape of the larynx and oral cavity it is possible for saxophonists to draw out the overtones’ sounds. With a great deal of nuance, saxophonists can isolate specific overtones. Since many overtones go above the saxophone’s natural range, this manipulation of the overtone series makes it possible for saxophonists to play notes higher than the saxophone’s standard range.

Overtones that go above the saxophone’s usual highest pitch, F#6, constitute the saxophone’s altissimo register. This extended upward range of the saxophone gets its name from the Italian term “altissimo,” meaning “very high.” Through utilizing the altissimo register, saxophonists are able to play an increased amount of music, including works originally written for other instruments, such as Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises for Flute (See Figure 4).

Function of Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises as a Technique Book for Saxophone

Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises for Flute fills a specific role that currently is not adequately filled by any existing work originally written for saxophone; Reichert’s exercises can help saxophonists to improve both general and altissimo technique, as well as to gain fluency in playing in all key areas, while using varied altissimo fingerings. Additionally, Reichert’s exercises are melodic and interesting to play. Due to difficult altissimo passages, Reichert’s exercises would work best as a technique book for advanced or even professional saxophonists, but adjustments can be made for intermediate students to benefit from Reichert’s studies as well. Intermediate level students can practice smaller parts of Reichert’s etudes, or can practice the altissimo passages down one octave.

Detailed Description of Reichert’s Etudes

Reichert’s etudes have a unique format. Each study follows a different pattern and goes through that pattern in 24 different keys. The exercises all start in the key of C major, followed by the relative melodic minor, A minor, and then progress through different keys following the pattern of the circle of fourths. The organized set-up of 7 Daily Exercises makes it easy to progress through it; players can work on learning the new note pattern of each exercise while still playing within a familiar structure. Due to the cadence at the end of each line, any line of Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises can be played in isolation while still sounding complete. This format enables players to practice as much or as little of an etude as they desire.
The structured set-up of Reichert’s etudes also makes these studies accessible to saxophonists of varied ability levels. Students who are yet to learn altissimo can work on just the lines that do not extend above the saxophone’s natural range or can practice playing the etudes down an octave. Players who are still learning altissimo can focus on specific keys or altissimo passages they are trying to learn; and more advanced players can work on several lines or entire etudes.

Not all lines of Reichert’s music are equal in difficulty. The difficulty increases as the key signatures gain accidentals, and also as the music extends above the staff. Additionally, since each of the seven etudes utilizes a different pattern, some etudes are innately more challenging than others. Exercise No. 1, for example, follows a scalar pattern with an arpeggiated chord at the end. Each line of this exercise is a complete phrase with two high points, one in the second measure and one in the final measure (See Figure 5).

Exercise No. 1 utilizes one of the simplest patterns in Reichert’s book. But, this exercise also includes more altissimo notes than any other etude in Reichert’s book. For players hoping to improve fluency in the altissimo register in varied keys, this first exercise is a great way to practice. The changing keys and heavy use of altissimo lead players to utilize varied altissimo fingerings, and to master several different ways to play the same pitch. Additionally, the structure of each line prompts players to play musically and with phrasing, so the skills learned playing this exercise are easily applicable to the saxophone’s repertoire.

Exercise No. 2 follows a slightly more difficult pattern than Exercise No. 1, but includes fewer notes in the altissimo register. This second etude is made up of arpeggiated chords, alternating between the tonic chord and the dominant seventh chord. It is a great exercise to master full range broken chords, and several lines in Exercise No. 2 are written to be played 8va, making the exercise easy to play down the octave for saxophonists who have not yet learned altissimo (See Figure 6).

Exercise No. 3 presents the trickiest pattern, and would be best suited for advanced players. This exercise is quite disjunct,
featuring larger leaps between notes than the two previous exercises. It includes notes of the tonic chord in varied order as well as several neighbor tones, some of which are chromatically altered. These chromatic neighbor tones increase the difficulty of Exercise No. 3 because players must play in difficult keys while reading additional accidentals (See Figure 7). This exercise also includes more altissimo passages than Exercise No. 2, none of which are written to be played 8va. Less advanced saxophonists hoping to play this exercise must be able to read notes with up to five ledger lines in order to play this etude down the octave.

Exercise No. 4 is similar to Exercise No. 3 in that both exercises are centered on the tonic chord and utilize several neighbor tones. The pattern of Exercise No. 4 is smoother than that of Exercise No. 3. It includes alternating upward and downward 16th note arpeggiation of the tonic chord, and mixed in with each arpeggiation is either an upper or a lower neighbor tone, some of which are chromatically altered. The arpeggios start in a low register. Then they move upwards, reaching higher on the instrument until they peak in the middle of each line. This structure encourages players to crescendo up to the top of the phrase. The music then moves back down to the low register, until the final measure where it arpeggiates upward before moving down by thirds back to the tonic (See Figure 8). The note pattern in this exercise is not easy, but it is very melodic and enjoyable to play. Although many lines of Exercise No. 4 contain altissimo, intermediate level saxophonists could practice individual lines from this exercise that stay within the saxophone’s natural range.

Exercise No. 5 has a 2/4 time signature and consists of 16th note triplets. This study is double the length of the other six etudes in Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises. Whereas in the other exercises each new key gets one line of music, in Exercise No. 5 each key takes up two lines of music (See Figure 9). The result is that Exercise No. 5 is four pages long instead of two. Despite its length Exercise No. 5 contains the smallest number of altissimo notes out of all seven etudes. It could be played by saxophonists of varied abilities, and more advanced saxophonists could play it at a more rapid tempo.

Exercise No. 6 is made up of two octave chromatic scales. Unlike the previous five exercises, Exercise No. 6 is not slurred
Since Reichert wrote this exercise for the flute, an instrument on which double tonguing is often used, Exercise No. 6 was intended to be played as a double tonguing exercise. Double tonguing is a method of articulation in which a player rapidly alternates between two different consonants such as “da” and “ga.” This etude contains many altissimo notes, and would be a challenging exercise for saxophonists to play even while single tonguing. But, those with high ambitions can attempt to play Exercise No. 6 double tonguing.

The final study, Exercise No. 7, was meant to serve as a study in triple tonguing. Triple tonguing is similar to double tonguing but requires the use of three different consonants such as “da,” “ka,” and “ga.” This etude is in 2/4 time and consists of 16th note triplets. The pattern includes arpeggiations mixed in with a repeating note that acts as a sort of drone throughout each line. In major keys the repeating note is the tonic, and in minor keys it is the dominant. Saxophonists who do not wish to triple tongue can use this exercise to increase the speed of their single tonguing. The exercise does include a fair number of altissimo notes, and could help advanced players to improve their articulation in the altissimo register. Many of the exercises are written to be played 8va, so this etude would be easy to read and play down the octave for students who have not yet learned altissimo.

Comparison of Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises with Existing Saxophone Technique Books
Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises differs from other books for saxophone. While other books are strictly focused on either altissimo technique or general technique, Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises can help saxophonists to improve playing in both of these areas. Reichert’s book does not teach beginners how to play altissimo, but it is an excellent vehicle for experienced players to master the saxophone’s extended upper register. Altissimo passages are mixed in throughout Reichert’s studies, so 7 Daily Exercises can help players to make altissimo part of their normal playing range.

Unlike most altissimo method books, 7 Daily Exercises does not include fingering suggestions for saxophonists. Players must experiment with different altissimo fingerings for each of Reichert’s exercises. Luckily, there are a variety of resources available that contain fingerings for the altissimo range. For example, Eugene Rousseau’s altissimo book, Saxophone High Tones, contains an excellent altissimo fingering chart, and also serves as a thorough introduction to the altissimo register. Rousseau covers a wide variety of topics in his book, including proper embouchure, the harmonic series, overblowing sixths, altissimo fingerings, and scalar exercises. 7 Daily Exercises would work very well following study of Rousseau’s book, or could serve as a supplement to it.

Other saxophone books that could prepare players for 7 Daily Exercises include Todd Rewoldt’s Altissimo Studies for Alto Saxophone, Rosemary Lang’s Beginning Studies in the Altissimo Register, and Sigurd M. Rasher’s Top Tones for the Saxophone. Each of these books contains fingering suggestions for the altissimo register, and these fingerings could be used for Reichert’s exercises.

Conclusion

Matheus Andre Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises for Flute can help bring saxophonists to the next level, so that playing in the altissimo range feels natural as opposed to cumbersome. The diverse keys and patterns used in Reichert’s exercises drive saxophonists to use varied altissimo fingerings and prepare saxophonists for an array of situations they may encounter in the saxophone repertoire. For example, practicing Reichert’s 7 Daily Exercises can help saxophonists to succeed in playing difficult works that are important standards in saxophone repertoire, such as John Harbison’s San Antonio, William Albright’s Sonata, Libby Larsen’s Holy Roller, Robert Muczynski’s Sonata, and other works that feature the saxophone’s altissimo register. Additionally, 7 Daily Exercises can prepare saxophonists to take on and perform on saxophone many works originally written for other instruments. Reichert’s etudes are rigorous; they may require years of practice before achieving mastery. But, through recycling this music of the 1800s, saxophonists can discover and unleash their instrument’s potential.

References

About the Author

Lannah Fitzgerald graduated in December 2018 with a major in Music and a concentration in Music Education. Her research was conducted during the summer of 2017 under the mentorship of saxophonist Dr. Jonathan Amon, and was funded by an Adrian Tinsley Program for Undergraduate Research and Creative Work summer grant at Bridgewater State University. Lannah hopes to perform and teach music, and has special interest in teaching band.