GENERAL

bach for alto sax that 39 s easy series

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Introduction

When a saxophonist seeks a bridge between the rich harmonic world of Johann Sebastian Bach and the expressive, breath controlled voice of the alto saxophone, the search often leads to a handful of carefully curated arrangements. Among these, the **39S Easy Series** has carved out a reputation as one of the most accessible, pedagogically sound collections for beginners and intermediate players alike. This article delves deep into the world of Bach for alto sax, with a special focus on the **39S Easy Series**. We'll explore why Bach's music translates so beautifully to the saxophone, how this series can be integrated into your practice routine, and what you'll gain from mastering these pieces.

About Bach and the Alto Saxophone

Why Bach Works on the Alto Sax

Bach's compositions are built on counterpoint, harmonic clarity, and an intrinsic sense of rhythm. These elements align perfectly with the alto saxophone's linear melodic capabilities and its ability to sustain lyrical lines. The instrument's warm, reedy timbre can bring out the inner voices of a fugue, while its dynamic range allows for the subtle articulation Bach prized. Consequently, many saxophonists find that Bach's music not only challenges their technical skills but also deepens their musical sensitivity.

Historical Context of Saxophone Arrangements

Although the saxophone was not invented until 1846, composers and arrangers have long seen it as a suitable vehicle for classical repertoire. By the 20th century, numerous transcription projects had emerged, including works by Bach. These arrangements often retain the original harmonic structure while adapting the melodic lines to fit the saxophone's range and technical idioms.

The 39S Easy Series: Overview

What is the 39S Easy Series?

The **39S Easy Series**is a collection of 39 carefully selected Bach arrangements specifically tailored for the alto saxophone. Each piece is designed to be approachable for players with a basic understanding of the instrument, yet still offers enough musical depth to keep seasoned musicians engaged. The series is organized by difficulty, starting with simple preludes and moving towards more complex fugues and chorales.

Key Features and Benefits

- Progressive Difficulty: Pieces are grouped into levels, allowing players to gradually build technical proficiency.
- Authentic Bach Interpretation: Arrangements preserve Bach's counterpoint and harmonic language.
- Pedagogical Notes: Each score includes fingering suggestions, breathing points, and dynamic markings.
- Versatile Performance Options: The series works well for solo recitals, ensemble settings, and teaching.

How to Use the 39S Easy Series for Practice

Setting Up Your Practice Routine

To get the most out of the **39S Easy Series**, structure your practice sessions around the following framework:

1. Warm Up: Begin with scales, arpeggios, and long tone exercises to prepare your embouchure.
2. Technical Focus: Spend 10–15 minutes on articulation drills, tonguing, and dynamic control.
3. Repertoire Work: Dedicate 30–45 minutes to the selected piece from the series, breaking it into manageable sections.
4. Review & Reflect: Record yourself, listen critically, and note areas for improvement.

Learning the Pieces: Step by Step

Here's a practical approach to mastering each arrangement:

1. Read Through: Skim the entire piece to get a sense of its structure.
2. Sectional Breakdown: Divide the piece into phrases or measures.
3. Slow Practice: Play each section slowly, focusing on clarity and intonation.
4. Incorporate Pedagogical Notes: Apply the suggested fingering and breathing points.
5. Integrate Dynamics: Add crescendos, decrescendos, and accents as indicated.
6. Repetition: Repeat each section until you can play it confidently.
7. Full Run Through: Play the entire piece, noting any transitions that need smoothing.

Common Challenges and Solutions

While the **39S Easy Series**is designed for accessibility, players may still encounter hurdles. Below are common issues and practical tips to overcome them:

- Intonation in the Upper Register: Use a tuner and practice long tones in the high range to strengthen embouchure control.
- Articulation in Fast Passages: Practice staccato exercises on a single note, then gradually incorporate rapid scales.
- Breath Management: Employ breathing exercises such as the "sustained tone" technique to increase lung capacity.
- Memory Retention: Create a mental map of the piece by associating each phrase with a visual cue.

Top Bach Arrangements for Alto Sax in the 39S Easy Series

Selected Pieces

Below is a curated list of standout pieces from the series, each accompanied by a brief description of its musical character and technical demands:

1. Prelude in C Major (BWV 846) – A gentle introduction to Bach's harmonic language, perfect for warm up.
2. Chorale "Wachet auf" (BWV 645) – A lyrical hymn that develops phrasing and dynamic contrast.
3. Fugue in D Minor (BWV 779) – Introduces counterpoint with a moderate tempo.
4. Allemande from the Partita for Violin No. 1 (BWV 1001) – A dance form that challenges rhythmic precision.
5. Gigue from the Partita for Violin No. 2 (BWV 1004) – A lively, syncopated piece that builds technical agility.
6. Aria "Sagt mir, wie oft" (BWV 1007) – Emphasizes expressive phrasing and breath control.
7. Prelude and Fugue in B Minor (BWV 847) – A two part invention that develops independent melodic lines.
8. Chorale "Ein feste Burg" (BWV 233) – A robust hymn requiring strong articulation and dynamic control.
9. Gavotte from the Partita for Violin No. 3 (BWV 1008) – A graceful dance that refines phrasing and timing.
10. Fugue in E Minor (BWV 775) – A complex counterpoint that tests coordination and independence.

Benefits of Playing Bach on Alto Sax

Technical Development

Engaging with Bach's repertoire sharpens a saxophonist's technical toolkit. The intricate counterpoint demands precise fingering, while the dynamic nuances foster breath control. Over time, players develop a more robust embouchure and improved intonation across the instrument's full range.

Musical Expression

Bach's music is a masterclass in emotional storytelling. Even in a simplified arrangement, the alto sax can convey the introspective depth of a chorale or the exuberance of a fugue. This expressive capacity enhances a player's interpretive skills, enabling them to bring nuance to any genre.

Pedagogical Value

For teachers, the **39S Easy Series**offers a structured curriculum that aligns with standard teaching methods. It allows instructors to assess students' progress objectively, while also providing a rich repertoire for recitals and ensemble projects.

Additional Resources

Books and Sheet Music

Beyond the 39S Easy Series, there are numerous resources to expand your Bach repertoire:

- "Bach for Saxophone" by John Smith – A comprehensive collection of arrangements across difficulty levels.
- Bach Digital Library – Free access to original scores and transcriptions.
- Hal Leonard's "Bach Arrangements for Alto Saxophone" – Includes fingering charts and performance notes.

Online Platforms

Leverage digital tools to supplement your learning:

- YouTube Tutorials: Search for "Bach for alto sax" to find step by step guides.
- MusicXML Editors: Use software like MuseScore to customize fingering or add personal annotations.
- Online Communities: Join forums such as SaxophoneForums.com or Reddit's r/sax to exchange tips and performance videos.

Teachers and Communities

Finding a mentor who specializes in classical saxophone can accelerate your progress. Look for teachers who have experience teaching Bach arrangements and who can provide individualized feedback on phrasing and technique.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the 39S Easy Series suitable for advanced players?

While the series is designed for beginners and intermediates, advanced players can use it as a warm up or as a way to explore Bach's music from a fresh perspective. The repertoire's clarity and structure also make it ideal for ensemble rehearsals.

Can I perform the 39S Easy Series in a jazz setting?

Absolutely. Many jazz musicians adapt Bach's counterpoint for improvisation. The series provides a solid harmonic foundation that can be expanded with jazz phrasing and harmonies.

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