Getting Altissimo Higher, Faster

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Excerpt from Claude T. Smith’s Fantasia for Alto Saxophone

“Fundamental” Steps

1. Understand the Overtone Series
2. Practice Overtone Exercises
3. Other Exercises:
   a. Bugle Calls
   b. Pitch Bends (“Dive Bomb,” “The Remington”)
4. Get your fingerings from a reliable source

The Overtone Series
Overtone and Altissimo Tips

1. Think of the muscle memory for your throat setting. “Snapshot.”
2. It’s okay to “pop” the octave key to get overtones to sound.
3. You can also approach overtones chromatically.
4. If you can’t HEAR it, you can’t play it.
5. Slur and breath-attack only, at first (don’t try to tongue)
6. Before playing an altissimo note, sing it. Also try playing the pitch an octave lower to get it in your ear.
7. Extreme High Notes
   a. Try a thinner lower lip
   b. “Stick your jaw out,” change the location of pressure on the reed

Altissimo Resources


• Fingering the lower notes to sound upper pitches.
• Practice with both slurred and "breath attack" articulations.

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1. Main fingering for accessing altissimo.
2. More stable if sax has high F♯ key; awkward to access higher notes.

1. Main fingering.
2. Tends to be flat.

1. Connects well to A♭-1, B♭-1, B-1 and C-1.
2. Stable and good pitch.
3. Fragile and often hard to voice; connects well to G-1.

1. Connects well to G♯-1, B♭-1, B-1 and C-1.
2. Easy fingering to access.
3. Stable, but quite sharp.
4. Stable and in tune, but awkward fingering.
1. Connects well to G♯3-1, A3-1, B♭3-1 and C4-1.
2. Solid Fingering.

1. Connects well to G♯3-1, A3-1, B♭3-1 and C4-1.
2. Solid fingering that connects well to B♭3-2.
3. Good fingering.

1. Connects well to G♯3-1, A3-1, B♭3-1 and B3-1.
2. Solid fingering that connects well to B♭3-2 and B3-2.
3. Good fingering that connects well to B3-3.
4. Good alternate fingering on some instruments.

1. Overblown fingering for E3 (palm key E).
2. Can be unstable, but connects well to C4-4
3. Good alternate fingering.

1. Overblown fingering for F♯3 (palm key F).
2. Easy fingering to access.
1. Overblown fingering for \( F^\#_3 \) (palm key \( F^\# \)); best fingering if high \( F^\# \) key is present.
2. Stable fingering; same as \( A^\#-4 \).
3. Overblown fingering to \( C^\#_3 \).

1. Best fingering.
2. Overblown fingering for \( D^3 \) (palm key \( D \)) and \( B^\#-3 \).

1. Best fingering; same as fingering for \( C^4-4 \).
2. Overblown fingering for \( E^\flat_3 \) (palm key \( E^\flat \)) and \( C^\flat-3 \).

1. Overblown fingering for \( E^\flat_3 \) (palm key \( E \)) and \( C^\flat-1 \).
2. Same fingering as \( C^\flat-3 \).

1. Same fingering as \( E^4-1 \).
2. Good fingering.
3. Can be unstable.