Thoughts on Tone Production

by

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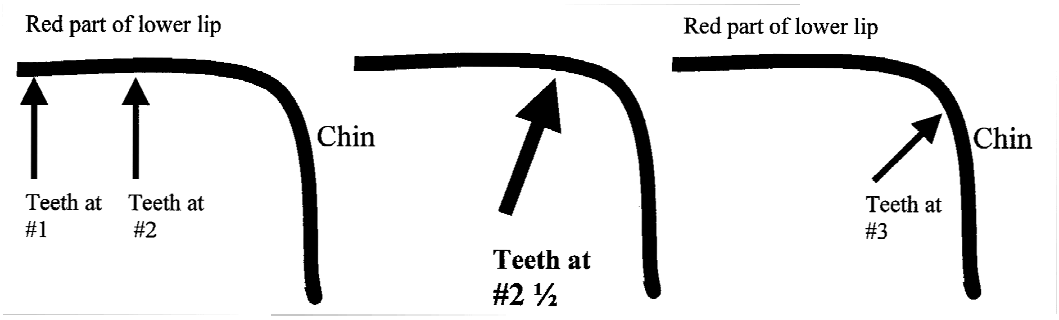
The production of the most efficient, full, and variable tone results from several interconnected factors. A reed without heart will never be able to produce a full sound in the upper register. Playing a reed without heart will cause the performer to produce a thin, bright sound. Too many players try to darken this sound by curling the lower lip around the reed, but curling the lower lip up will only cut off the free vibrations of the reed forcing the saxophonist to work harder by using more air to produce the same volume of sound that a reed with good heart and a flat, relaxed lower lip would produce.

The upper teeth should rest lightly on the mouthpiece with no excessive downward pressure. The lower jaw should not be pushed out or pulled in, but the lower teeth should be in their natural bite plane or axis with the upper teeth. The upper lip is used only to seal the air and should lightly hang down without being artificially tightened.

The air must be allowed to flow through the performer's oral cavity, vibrate the reed against the mouthpiece and flow into the horn as unobstructed as possible. Too much lower lip over the bottom teeth can also deaden and obstruct the production of the freest possible sound. For optimal reed vibration, the bottom lip for most individuals should be placed at 2 ½, as shown in the figure below.



The amount of mouthpiece inserted will also affect the quality and volume of sound produced. Taking in more of the mouthpiece will cause a louder sound to be produced; taking in less of the mouthpiece will create a softer sound when the same volume of air is used. Regardless of everything previously mentioned, if the performer does not take in a complete relaxed breath filling the clavicular, intercostal, and abdominal areas, a full, projecting sound will not be produced. The upper portion of the chest, ribcage, and abdomen must all be expanded and filled if there is to be sufficient air to compete with electronically produced sounds. Once complete breaths are taken, the fastest way to achieve a full sound in all the registers of the horn is to practice matching overtones. When an open, even tone is achieved throughout the entire range of the horn, it is time to start creating changes in tone colors by manipulating the embouchure and oral cavity settings.