

The Alpha Sax

Late last year (October 2008) a new option for early years learning of the saxophone was introduced by Trevor James & Company. The Alpha Sax has been designed to fill a gap in the market for an appropriate means of starting the smaller/younger player who previously had to wait until they were physically large enough to handle the weight of an alto sax and/or until growth allowed the left hand to stretch over awkward palm keys. Some alto saxophones were more sympathetically designed for smaller hands than others and some have been built to feel lighter than others but to my knowledge there has never been a purpose built alto sax targeted to young players, until now.

Some teachers might well say that they have had success starting keen beginners on soprano saxophone and indeed, patient tutors and very dedicated youngsters may well have managed in this way. Personally, I have never been a supporter of starting young children on the curved soprano sax for the simple reason that the soprano, of all the common saxophones, requires the most control and maturity to produce an enjoyable, rewarding result. I am particularly pleased to welcome the Alpha Sax as, for me, it is both very sensible and long overdue.

Trevor James has created an informative website for further background on the Alpha Sax and I would urge anyone interested to visit www.alphasax.co.uk.

To add a personal dimension to this review I'd like to say that the first thing that strikes one when picking up the Alpha is how light it is. This weight reduction has been made possible by dispensing with the bell notes (Bb, B: only left hand little finger C sharp and G sharp remain), all the palm keys above D (which remains) and all right hand side keys except Bb (which remains). The instrument retains a full two-octave plus chromatic range from low C to palm high D suitable for virtually all learning to grade three or four standard. The right hand little finger touches for Eb and C have been re-designed to reduce finger stretch and the left hand little finger key touch for C sharp has been brought up next to and in line with the G sharp key.

The result is a full size, completely satisfactory sounding alto sax that poses no problem to primary school players, age 7-10 being the ideal target group. For teachers or school programmes involved with the delivery of early years or recent government initiated Wider Opportunities primary school classroom instruction this means that

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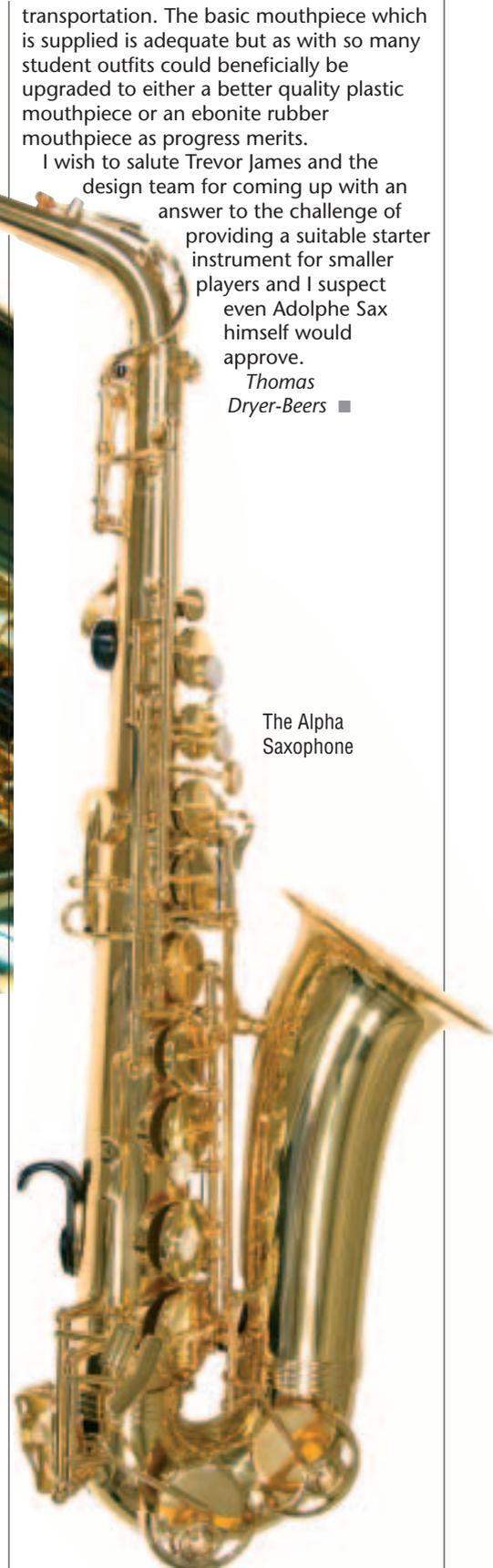
learning of the saxophone alongside curved head flutes, C clarinets, cornets and other child-size brass is now a reality. If an individual pupil wishes to begin study of the saxophone early they now can do so and, when the player has grown sufficiently, the transfer to fully keyed alto saxophone is very smooth indeed. I would expect that a parent considering an Alpha Sax for their child will wish to investigate the question of a later selling on or part exchange position with their music retailer at the time of purchase as the instrument is patently an introductory step towards a full specification instrument. From an internet survey the price is currently around £395 including VAT.

The Alpha Sax outfit comprises the instrument, sling, grease and a smart, rucksack-type gig case to ease

transportation. The basic mouthpiece which is supplied is adequate but as with so many student outfits could beneficially be upgraded to either a better quality plastic mouthpiece or an ebonite rubber mouthpiece as progress merits.

I wish to salute Trevor James and the design team for coming up with an answer to the challenge of providing a suitable starter instrument for smaller players and I suspect even Adolphe Sax himself would approve.

Thomas Dryer-Beers ■



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