

Recommendations

What is a good saxophone for a beginner?

Until recently I usually advised beginners to get either a Yamaha or Jupiter student model as the build quality, intonation and tone of these instruments is very good. However, there have recently been a lot of very inexpensive Chinese made saxophones available, especially on Ebay and internet stores. Some of these instruments are astonishingly good for the price, but some are total rubbish, so beware. It is best to avoid buying one unless it is from a reputable dealer with a no quibble money back guarantee, e.g. the stores mentioned above. One of the very best makes available in the UK or for export is the Walstein.

What about a secondhand saxophone?

If you know a bit about saxophones you may get better value with a secondhand saxophone. If it is well maintained a saxophone doesn't get worse as it gets older. (But neither does it get any better). The main problems are with saxophones that have been relacquered, but only in their resale value. In order to relacquer a saxophone, all the scratches must be removed and this can involve polishing the instrument to such a degree that a significant amount of metal is lost. Although this is unlikely to affect the sound unless the toneholes become damaged due to overbuffing it may well affect the instrument's value.

A good "vintage" saxophone can be a very good buy. Apart from the Selmer MKVI, Super Balanced Action and Balanced Action (which are good horns but generally overpriced) you can often get a professional quality instrument without spending too much. Some good models to look out for are Martin ("The" Martin), Conn 6M/10M, King Zephyr & Super 20, SML Gold Medal, Buescher 400 & Aristocrat.

Which size saxophone to buy?

The most commonly played saxophones are the alto and tenor, of these the most popular saxophone for beginners is the alto. It is easier for small hands and, of course, is that little bit cheaper than a tenor. The fingering is the same, although as the saxophone is a transposing instrument, the notes sound different. The soprano is becoming a more popular instrument (possibly thanks to the influence of Kenny G), but can be more problematical for beginners as it is often harder to play nicely in tune. The baritone is also an attractive instrument for younger beginners thanks to Lisa Simpson, but is not easy for small fingers, requires a lot of puff and can be very heavy on your neck.