

Routine Saxophone Maintenance

Introduction

Saxophones have few joints to worry about, but the few that they do have must be looked after properly. Although they look quite robust, made from brass which is composed of copper and zinc, they are actually quite delicate. Damaging, perhaps through dropping them to the ground, could change the tone and tuning of the instrument. The advanced models of a Saxophone may be made from either gold brass or silver brass and have more elements 'hand-made' rather than a more automated system.

Students that are new to learning the Saxophone will probably have a student model either purchased or hired from their local music shop. There is often a small care kit included, but it's rarely everything that you need.

Saxophone Maintenance

There are just two joints that need regular care and attention, they are at both ends of the neck. One end is where the mouthpiece fits and has some cork on that end to help seal the mouthpiece so that air cannot escape. The other end fits into the top of the saxophone body.



As with maintaining the joints of a clarinet, a similar process applies with saxophones. Your local music shop can supply you with a tube of cork grease. You apply a small amount on each end and rub it in, this will help the fitting of the neck to the body and the mouthpiece to the neck. The grease is best applied after a practice session so that it has a chance to soak, particularly in the case of the cork end, into the material. Applying the grease at the beginning of a practice is not as good as the grease will be pushed down the neck and make little difference.

The neck is probably the most delicate part of the saxophone, it can be easily bent out of shape through mishandling. For example, a lack of cork grease might render the neck to become stuck in the body. The natural reaction is to grip it tight and twist or pull it out. Although twisting is the correct method, if it's really stuck in there you might actually bend it. You will also notice that there is a pad on a long arm at the top of the neck (the crook), that can easily be bent out of shape. Should that happen you will be unable to play a lot of the available notes, else they will be sounding wrong.

You will require a pull through to help dry out the inside of the instrument after playing.



The easiest way is to drop the weighted end down the top of the body, carefully turn the body nearly upside down to make the weight fall through and pull the cloth through the instrument.

You may not that unlike the clarinet pull through, this has a small brush on it to help push the cloth to the edges of the instrument.

Similarly to clarinets, there are other products available to assist in keeping the instrument dry, but more importantly to stop the pads on the keys from soaking up the moisture in the instrument

and rotting away.



Your local music shop can supply you with a set of Pad Savers, they are available for all sized of saxophones. They are designed to soak up the moisture from you saliva and protect the pads from sitting damp for hours or days.

As with the information contained in the clarinet maintenance article, more recent advice has now altered the way that I would use these. A number of local repairers are now informing me that these should not be left in the instrument for longer than necessary. They are very good for drying out your saxophone and highly recommended. However, use the pull through first and then place these inside the instrument. Leave them in for a few hours and remove them again because the Pad Savers themselves can sit in the instrument damp for quite a long time, so they need removing so that they can dry out

before the next use. If you leave them in the instrument damp, your pads can still soak up some of that damp moisture which would reduce the life span on the pads.

To keep the shine on your saxophone, you will need a cloth to polish up or buff up the instrument. Any droplets of moisture that appears on the outside of the instrument will eventually show up and discolour your saxophone. Your local music shop can advise you on the best to product to purchase for this, there is quite a range now from microfiber cloths to saxophone buff up mittens. You really need to do this about once per month.

General Tips

Probably the most important tip that I can provide, only because I have seen disasters so many times, is **do not** pick your saxophone up by the neck. It is likely that you will eventually purchase a sax stand, I have seen so many people reach for their sax, pick it up by the neck and watch it drop to the floor. The weight of the body is such that the tiny screw that you tighten down when you have inserted the neck, just is not strong enough to take the weight of the body. It will drop to the floor and it will be damaged and need to be professionally repaired at great cost. Always pick up the saxophone either around the middle of the body and/or by the bell, cradling the rest in your arms. It is also wise to get it clipped onto your neck strap as quickly as possible too.

Either purchase a stand for your saxophone so that it's safe when you are not playing it, or place it down on a surface that is flat and relatively soft. Make sure the surface is larger than the saxophone, do not balance it somewhere narrow or where it could be knocked off. The case is usually idea for this really.

The screw threads on the ligature often need a regular oil, possibly once per month. You may have a standard metal ligature or a leather version, spray the screw thread with either a very light oil or WD40 to keep them lubricated. It doesn't need much.

Do not try to repair an instrument yourself, they are a work of integral engineering and require a properly trained person to do the repairs. Speak to your local music shop, they will either have a service or know of a local person that is qualified.