

# **Tracing the Saxophone's Divergent Paths: Jazz Influence and Classical Repertoire Development**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the saxophone's complex role in music and investigates how it has come to be widely linked with jazz despite its extensive repertoire in classical and contemporary art genres. With over 29,000 non-pop works documented from 1844 to 2012 in Jean-Marie Londeix's guide, the saxophone has a rich history beyond jazz. However, its jazz identity, shaped by icons like Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Kenny G, and Joshua Redman, remains dominant. This paper traces the origins of the instrument's strong association with jazz and examines influences from the 1840s onwards, namely military bands, vaudeville, and the saxophone "craze" in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century America. This study uses a mixed-methods approach and combines quantitative analysis of discographies with qualitative insights drawn from existing literature, including previously conducted surveys and interviews with saxophonists, composers, and audience members. Delimited to Western perspectives, particularly Europe and North America over the past two decades, the research assesses current uses and perceptions of the saxophone. By integrating historical context and contemporary artistic practices, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the saxophone's evolving cultural significance and its versatility across musical genres.

*Keywords:* classical contemporary, early recording industry, jazz, non-pop art music, saxophone

## **Introduction**

The saxophone stands as one of the most universally recognised musical instruments, its appeal extending to numerous notable figures, including the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, as well as former United States presidents

Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton. As William H. Street notes in the introductory section of Jean-Marie Londeix's 2003 work, *A Comprehensive Guide to the Saxophone Repertoire, 1844–2003*, by 1970, there were over 6,000 compositions dedicated to the saxophone, with thousands more added in subsequent years. This continued growth is reflected in the *Londeix Guide to the Saxophone Repertoire, 1844–2012* (Londeix, 2012), which catalogued a staggering 29,000 works for the saxophone, spanning from 1844 to its publication. These documented works are purely non-pop art music written for saxophone as a solo instrument or in a chamber setting, omitting genres like jazz or other popular oral and improvisatory traditions. Although no recent database comprehensively lists newly composed saxophone works from 2012 onwards, a substantial volume of new repertoire continues to emerge for the instrument. Notably, this expansion is supported by contributions from several renowned composers, including Zechariah Goh's *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Wind Ensemble* (2013), John Adams' *Saxophone Concerto* (2013), Steven Bryant's *Concerto for Alto Saxophone* (2014), Johan de Jeij's *Fellini* (2016), and John Corigliano's *Triathlon* (2020), among others. The repertoire of works that exist for the saxophone is remarkable, considering the instrument's relatively brief existence of around 180 years.

Nonetheless, the saxophone is often associated with jazz, with names like Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, and Kenny Gorelick (known by his stage name Kenny G) widely recognised by the general public (Chilton, 1990; Ingham, 1998). This study investigates the primary reasons behind this association and explores the saxophone's role in non-pop art music. Specifically, it examines how contemporary views correspond with or diverge from the instrument's historical jazz associations. The first half of this article traces the saxophone's origins from the 1840s and considers the impact of military bands, vaudeville, the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century saxophone "craze" in the United States, as well as the nascent recording industry, in establishing its strong link to jazz. The latter half focuses on the instrument's contemporary significance in non-pop art music.

The study uses a mixed-methods approach. It integrates a literature review covering the saxophone's evolution in art music with qualitative insights drawn from existing surveys and interviews conducted with saxophonists, composers, and audience members in Europe and North America. Quantitative data, derived from available discographies, and qualitative data together offer a deeper understanding of the saxophone's artistic roles in contemporary non-pop art music.

## Delimitations

1. Geographic focus: This study focuses on Europe and North America to examine the cultural impact of Western perspectives on the saxophone's association with jazz and its place in non-pop art music.
2. Historical period: The analysis primarily addresses compositions and perceptions from the last two decades to capture recent developments in both the instrument's use and public perception.

## Literature Review

### 1840s Until the Turn of the Century

The saxophone is the invention of a single man: Adolphe Sax (1814–1894) of Dinant, Belgium. Thomas Liley (1998) writes that the instrument's name—"saxophone"—literally translates to "the sound of Sax." Liley further explained that the Greek root *phōnē* refers specifically to vocal sound, which might explain why the saxophone is so often described as having a "singing" quality.

A conical-bore woodwind, the saxophone possesses the ability to blend the phrasing and tone of string instruments with the potency of brass instruments. Originally designed for outdoor use, it is celebrated for its versatility and expressive range. Sax's early liaison with the French Republican Guard Band ensured the instrument's sustained presence in French army bands. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, his innovative design caught the attention of military officials seeking to modernise their ensembles, ultimately paving the way for the saxophone to be adopted into various musical genres (Liley, 1998).

William H. Street, who wrote the introduction to Jean-Marie Londeix's *A Comprehensive Guide to the Saxophone Repertoire, 1844–2003*, observed that during the saxophone's early development, no performers were capable of playing the instrument at an artistic level, and certainly none who met the technical demands required for serious art music (Londeix, 2003). The first saxophone class at the Conservatoire de Paris (Paris Conservatory), established in 1857 and taught by Adolphe Sax himself, primarily consisted of members of military musical groups. In his book *Saxophone Soloists and Their Music, 1844–1985*, Harry Gee (1986) noted Sax's impressive 13-year tenure during which he guided over 150 pupils before the class was discontinued due to lack of funds from the military authorities.

The saxophone's limited repertoire further hindered its early progress. Street noted that by Sax's death in 1894, fewer than 300 works existed for the instrument (Londeix, 2003). These compositions, often in a simplistic style, were mainly written for the Paris Conservatory's annual examinations and outdoor entertainment performances. Among the earliest to compose for the saxophone were Jules Demersseman, Hyacinthe Klosé, and Jean-Baptiste Singelée.

Despite Sax's vision for the instrument in symphony orchestras, musicians displayed little interest. The essential instrumentation of the orchestra had already been established by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, lending weight to the decision against introducing the saxophone into orchestral writing. Although Georges Bizet featured it in his *L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1* (1872), the inclusion had minimal impact on audience appeal or sales. The reluctance to admit saxophonists as permanent orchestra members further discouraged composers, who feared a shortage of skilled performers when needed (Rousseau, 1982).

## **Military Bands, Vaudeville, and the Saxophone “Craze” in the United States During the Turn of the Century**

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the saxophone had solidified its presence in military bands across France, Belgium, Britain, Germany, and beyond. In France, the saxophone retained a prominent position in the French Republican Guard Band, which often featured saxophonists as soloists. According to Dryer-Beers (1998), François Combelle held the post of soloist for many years and played a vital role in mentoring the young Marcel Mule. Mule eventually emerged as a soloist himself and assumed the position of saxophone professor at the Paris Conservatory in 1944, when then-director Claude Delvincourt reinstated the saxophone class.

In the United States, the saxophone’s public exposure was greatly advanced by the efforts of Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore and John Philip Sousa’s bands. Gilmore, hailed as the “father of the American concert band,” founded Gilmore’s Band in 1858. He organised the World’s Peace Jubilee and International Musical Festival in Boston in July 1872, where the Republican Guard Band performed. Inspired by the band’s performance, Gilmore added several saxophonists to his own band, including Edward Lefebre, who performed from 1873 to 1892 (Liley, 1998).

Following Gilmore’s death in 1892, John Philip Sousa and his band played an important role in sustaining the saxophone’s popularity as both a band section and a solo instrument in the United States and Europe. Sousa’s influence spanned over three decades, marked by numerous live performances and recordings. Hester (1995) identified ten saxophonists who played with Sousa’s band between 1892 and 1932: Edward Lefebre (1893–1894), Jean Moeremans (1894–1900; 1902–1905), Ralph Lick (1917), H. Benne Henton (1919–1920), Jascha Gurewich (1920–1921), Anthony D’Ortenzio (1921), Frederick Bayers (1923), Richard Gooding (1924), Harold Stephens (1925–1926), and Edward Heney (1924–1930).

In addition to military bands, the saxophone found a warm reception in circus and vaudeville acts, where groups of saxophonists in clown costumes and darkened faces became a familiar sight. Among the most celebrated ensembles to showcase the instrument was the Brown Brothers Saxophone Sextet. In his book *The Saxophone*, Stephen Cottrell (2012) wrote that the Brown Brothers began as a multi-instrumental musical act but rose to fame for their saxophone performances. The group focused on compositions and arrangements of ragtime music, known for its light syncopation and occasional humour. The bass saxophone, with its heavily articulated on-beat notes, added a distinctive touch to their sound. Cottrell (2012) described their act as a comedy performance that relied heavily on pantomime, visual gags, and comic musical effects, such as sobbing and laughing sounds produced on the saxophone.

As the saxophone gained prominence, the public swiftly took an interest and began learning to play the instrument. Its appeal was further enhanced by the relatively short time required to reach an elementary level of proficiency. Frederick Hemke (1975), in his doctoral dissertation *The Early History of the Saxophone*, observed that:

Between the years 1919 and 1925, the United States underwent a saxophone ‘craze’ during which time over one half million saxophones were sold. By 1930 over a million saxophones existed throughout the world. (...) The early saxophone patents displayed an amazing awareness of the needs of the artist performer, but a market had been created which enabled not only the artist but virtually an entire population to share in the joy of music making. The mass-produced saxophone provided practical answers to a society which enjoyed and fervently demanded popular music. (p. 108)

This combination of accessibility, mass production, and compatibility with popular musical tastes was an imperative factor in the saxophone’s rapid adoption by both professional and amateur musicians and guaranteed its cultural prominence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Among the acclaimed saxophone soloists allied with various performance groups, Rudolphe Cornelius Wiedoeft, commonly known as Rudy Wiedoeft, stood out as one of the most distinguished and accomplished. His extensive recording activities brought him recognition and established him as a seminal musical figure in the United States and internationally. He was celebrated for his precise finger technique that produced a full and warm tone, as well as his exceptional control over articulation. His success helped popularise the saxophone; however, according to Cottrell (2012), Wiedoeft did not primarily identify himself as a jazz artist.

Wiedoeft’s performances and recordings both reflected the saxophone’s popularity and inspired many saxophonists, including Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, and even Charlie Parker. Hubert Prior Vallée (1962), who later adopted the name “Rudy” in homage to Rudy Wiedoeft, wrote:

Rudy Wiedoeft was one of God’s kindlier creatures, a man of charm and personality, and I don’t think he ever knew anything but friendship from those around him. (...) As I watched him record, kidding with the rest of the band that he had gathered for the recording date, I realized he was not only a great artist but a light-hearted, warm individual who perhaps never realized how great was his genius, never knew the impression he had made upon the world for the saxophone and music in general. (p. 28)

Wiedoeft’s broad appeal and artistic influence were key in shaping early perceptions of the saxophone and in securing its legitimacy as both a virtuosic and expressive instrument across various musical styles.

### **Saxophone in Jazz and Dance Music**

The period between 1920 and 1930, often called the “Jazz Age,” saw jazz and dance music grow into serious art forms. The saxophone began to be acknowledged as a central new element in both genres. Among the many influences that shaped early jazz instrumentation, the brass band and military band traditions were pivotal. Cottrell (2012) noted that brass bands were common throughout rural and small-town areas of the United States in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alongside military bands, they provided music for events like funerals, church celebrations,

street shows, and parades. Over time, these bands were augmented by the inclusion of woodwinds, including the saxophone.

The saxophone became increasingly attractive among brass bands and early jazz artists due to its wide range of timbres. Unlike the clarinet, it is a hybrid instrument without a fixed tonal range. Its conical bore allows for considerable variation in tone colour. In *The Art of Saxophone Playing*, Larry Teal (1963) suggested that the saxophone closely resembles the human voice in terms of the mental and physical processes required for tone production. These similarities include comparable breathing techniques, the reed functioning like vocal cords, the presence of free resistance chambers in both, as well as a shared flexibility in sound production.

Beyond the brass band, dance orchestras began incorporating the saxophone to alter the ensemble sonority and to respond to its growing popularity with the public. In his book *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest*, Ross Russell (1971) discusses this development:

In 1924, [American bandleader and pianist] Vincent Lopez required all members of his violin section to start doubling on alto saxophone. Jesse Stone and Alphonse Trent, whose later recordings reveal fully mature and trained reed sections, may have been using saxophones at an even earlier date. In the case of both jazz and society dance orchestras, the objectives appear to have been the same: to augment the overall sonority of the ensemble, which was the idea behind the saxophone when it was invented by Adolphe Sax. (...) Their popularity would follow experiments on the part of dance and jazz band leaders. Solo work by individual musicians would come later. (p. 233)

Among the pioneering groups that integrated the saxophone was the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. Paul Whiteman, often called “the King of Swing,” was a classically trained violinist and violist. His orchestra achieved worldwide fame by performing popular music and featuring jazz artists. Although the ensemble may not fit today’s idea of “authentic” jazz, it sold over two million recordings in the 1920s and was closely associated with George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924). The saxophone’s vocal quality and its ability to bend pitch with relative ease made it especially appealing to band leaders, composers, and performers. Saxophonists in Whiteman’s orchestra included Jimmy Dorsey, Alfred J. Gallodoro, and Frankie Trumbauer.

Several dance orchestras eventually evolved into or influenced the formation of jazz big bands, such as the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, Louis Armstrong Big Band, and the Count Basie Orchestra. These groups adopted the saxophone, which has remained a core and defining component of their sound. Its ability to produce a “singing” tone resembling the human voice made it attractive to jazz musicians. Indeed, jazz saxophonists are often recognised for their distinctive sound more than any other instrumentalists. As Coleman Hawkins famously said, “the only thing nobody can steal from you is your sound: sound alone is important” (as quoted in Miller, 1995, p. 159).

Notwithstanding its popularity among jazz artists, the question remains: Why is the saxophone often seen as a jazz instrument? Early recordings by renowned saxophone virtuosos may offer insight into the instrument's strong connection with jazz.

### **Early Saxophone Recordings in Jazz and Big-Band Music**

Charlie Parker, also known as "Bird," was a groundbreaking jazz soloist and a salient figure in the development of bebop. During his lifetime, he recorded prolifically and left such an enduring legacy that New York honours him with a nightclub and jazz festival bearing his name. In 2005, the Henri Selmer Paris saxophone company commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his passing by releasing a special series of "Tribute to Bird" saxophones. Similarly, Kenny G, a celebrated smooth jazz saxophonist from the United States, has enjoyed a career spanning nearly fifty years. According to Honcho (2023), he has sold over 75 million records, amassed 1.5 billion streams, and received 24 nominations for various awards. He has also won a Grammy Award, an American Music Award, two NAACP Awards, and two Soul Train Music Awards. His smooth jazz interpretations of Chinese songs such as "Jasmine Flower" (茉莉花) and "The Moon Represents My Heart" (月亮代表我的心) have found a special place in the Asian community. Although they have different styles, Parker and Kenny G share a common achievement: extensive discographies that have secured their lasting impact.

The surge in recording technology and radio broadcasting during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was instrumental in boosting the popularity of the saxophone. Although Cottrell (2012) suggested Edward Lefebre might have been the first recorded saxophonist during his time with Gilmore's Band, James Russell Noyes (2000), in his doctoral dissertation *Edward A. Lefebre (1835–1911): Preeminent Saxophonist of the Nineteenth Century*, pointed out that none of Lefebre's recordings featured him as a solo saxophonist—he participated solely as a band member and accompanied his colleagues. Noyes (2000) also proposed that Lefebre's reluctance to record solo likely stemmed from his concern that recordings threatened his livelihood, even though they were an excellent promotional tool for the instrument.

Recordings that involved the saxophone in jazz and big-band music were fundamental in capturing public attention. The pervasive popularity of jazz and big-band music became a social phenomenon, marking one of the earliest instances of an art form reaching a vast audience through mass media (Ward & Burns, 2005). In the 1920s, live performances could be broadcast nationwide, and together with album recordings, jazz and big-band music gained unprecedented exposure. In his book, *The Uncrowned King of Swing: Fletcher Henderson and Big Band Jazz*, Magee (2005) wrote that by the late 1920s, radio and records had created a feedback loop that enhanced the reputation of musicians and bands.

The Fletcher Henderson Orchestra exemplifies jazz's rise in the 1920s. Their residency at New York City's Roseland Ballroom and the live performance broadcasts brought them prestige. Recognising the commercial potential of record sales, industry executives frequently invited Henderson's band to record (see Appendix I), which boosted their popularity and increased attendance at live shows. According to Magee (2005), Henderson became the most recorded Black musician in jazz's early recorded history, particularly between 1923 to 1927. Notable saxophonists featured in these recordings included Coleman Hawkins, Buster Bailey, Benny Carter, Chu Berry, and briefly, Lester Young.



The saxophone's association with jazz and big-band music was well established by this time, with recordings by big-band and jazz saxophonists dating back to the 1890s. Its success was further cemented by Rudy Wiedoeft's influential albums from 1917 onwards, which were crucial in popularising the instrument. Table 1 below lists a selection of Wiedoeft's significant recordings from 1917 to 1927, organised by record company, with titles of recordings in the left column and their corresponding reverse sides in the right.

Table 1. *Selected list of American records by Rudy Wiedoeft (Walsh, 1973)*

<b>Edison Diamond Discs (1917–1924)</b>	
<i>Saxophone Sobs</i>	Reverse: <i>New York Blues</i>
<i>Valse Erica</i>	Reverse: <i>Light as a Feather</i>
<i>Saxema</i>	Reverse: <i>Return of Spring Waltz</i>
<i>Saxarella</i>	Reverse: <i>Valse Vanite</i>
<i>Valse Llewellyn</i>	Reverse: <i>My Waikiki Mermaid</i>
<i>Velma—Capriccio</i>	Reverse: <i>Where the River Shannon Flows</i>
<i>Saxophone Fantasie</i>	Reverse: <i>Fantasia from Simon Boccanegra</i>
<b>Victor (1921–1927)</b>	
<i>Saxophobia</i>	Reverse: <i>Valse Erica</i>
<i>Saxarella</i>	Reverse: <i>Souvenir</i>
<i>Valse Vanite</i>	Reverse: <i>La Cinquantaine</i>
<i>Dans l'Orient</i>	Reverse: <i>Serenade Badine</i>
<i>Marilyn</i>	Reverse: <i>Saxema</i>
<i>La Golondrina</i>	Reverse: <i>Rubenola</i>
<b>Aeolian – Vocalion (1919–1920)</b>	
<i>Valse Erica</i>	Reverse: <i>Migilavacca—Mazurka de Concert</i>
<i>Valse Erica</i>	Reverse: <i>Saxema</i>
<b>Emerson (1919–1921)</b>	
<i>Pretty Little Rainbow—Waltz</i>	Reverse: <i>Mavis—Waltz</i>
<i>Valse Erica</i>	Reverse: <i>Saxophobia</i>
<i>Llewellyn Waltz</i>	Reverse: <i>Fluffy Ruffles</i>
<i>Beautiful Ohio</i>	Reverse: <i>Until We Meet Again</i>
<i>Saxema</i>	Reverse: <i>Do Another Break</i>
<i>The Moonlight Waltz</i>	Reverse: <i>My Desert Love—Fox Trot</i>
<b>Gennett (1922)</b>	
<i>Valse Yvonne</i>	Reverse: <i>Pyramids Polka</i>
<b>Okeh (1924)</b>	
<i>Valse Yvonne</i>	Reverse: <i>Page Padrewski—Fox Trot</i>
<b>Pathe (1919–1921)</b>	
<i>Drigo's Serenade</i>	Reverse: <i>Waltz Llewellyn</i>
<i>Valse Erica</i>	Reverse: <i>Silver Threads Among the Gold</i>
<i>Velma</i>	Reverse: <i>Marriage Bells</i>

Figure 1 below shows the number of recorded songs by acclaimed jazz saxophonists Sidney Bechet, Coleman Hawkins, and Lester Young from 1920 to 1958. Each played a key role in big-band ensembles and released numerous albums with their groups. Compiling a complete discography for Hawkins between 1948 and 1958 is challenging, as he split his time between freelance recordings in New York and Europe during that period.

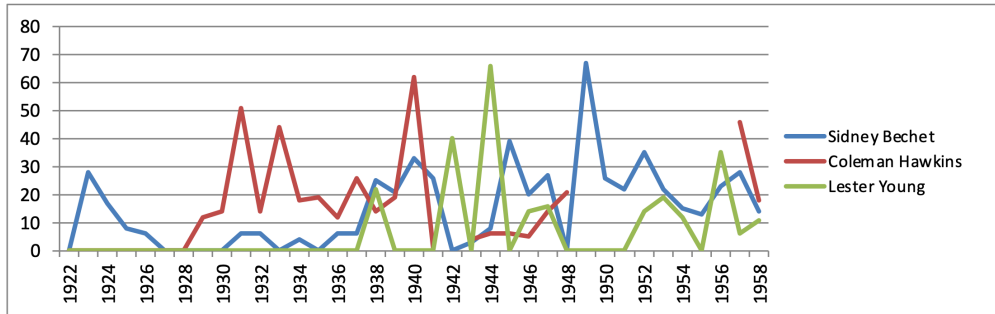


Figure 1. Number of songs recorded by Bechet (Sidney Bechet Society, n.d.), Hawkins (Evensmo, 1975), and Young (Porter, 2005) from 1920 to 1958

## Early Saxophone Repertoire and Recordings in Classical Genres

The historical context and timing of the saxophone's invention meant that many early classical saxophone pieces were transcriptions of existing works. It was not until the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that American saxophonist Elise Boyer Hall began commissioning original compositions for the instrument from leading composers of the era. Table 2 below lists the works linked to Hall between 1900 and 1920.

Table 2. *Works attributed to Elise Hall's patronage (Street, 1983)*

Composer	Title	Date of Composition	Date of Performance
Caplet, André	Impression d'automne Légende	c. 1905 1903	17 April 1906 19 January 1905
Combelle, François	Fantaisie Mauresque	1920	–
d'Indy, Vincent	Choral varié, Op. 55	1903	5 January 1904
Debussy, Claude	Rhapsodie	1903	11 May 1919
Dupin, Paul	Chant pour saxophone	1910	–
Gaubert, Philippe	Poème élégiaque	1911	11 March 1912
Gilson, Paul	Premier Concerto	1902	–
Grovez, Gabriel	Suite	1915	–
Huré, Jean	Andante Concertstück	1915 After 1915	7 February 1917 –
Loeffler, Charles M.	Ballade carnavalesque Divertissement espagnol Rhapsodie	1903 1900 –	25 January 1904 29 January 1901 –
Longy, Georges	Impression (Pièce) Rhapsodie (Lento)	1902 1904	7 January 1903 19 January 1905
Moreau, Léon	Pastorale	–	19 April 1910
Mouquet, Jules	Rhapsodie, Op. 26	1907	11 December 1908
Schmitt, Florent	Légende, Op. 66	1918	25 May 1938
Sporck, Georges	Légende, Op. 54	1905	2 January 1906
Woollett, Henry	Octuor no. 1 Siberia, Poème symphonique	1909 1909–1910	1 January 1912 25 January 1911

Hemke (1975) observed that the compositions commissioned by Elise Hall typically featured restrained virtuosic passages and often reflected her fascination with Spanish motifs. Although the saxophone was prominent, it rarely had solo passages.

The classical saxophone repertoire and performance practice advanced significantly in the 1930s with the emergence of French saxophonist Marcel Mule and German-born American saxophonist Sigurd Rascher. This progress was further solidified in 1942 when the Paris Conservatory reinstated its classical saxophone class and appointed Marcel Mule as professor. Figure 2 below illustrates the number of recordings attributed to Mule from 1920 to 1958.

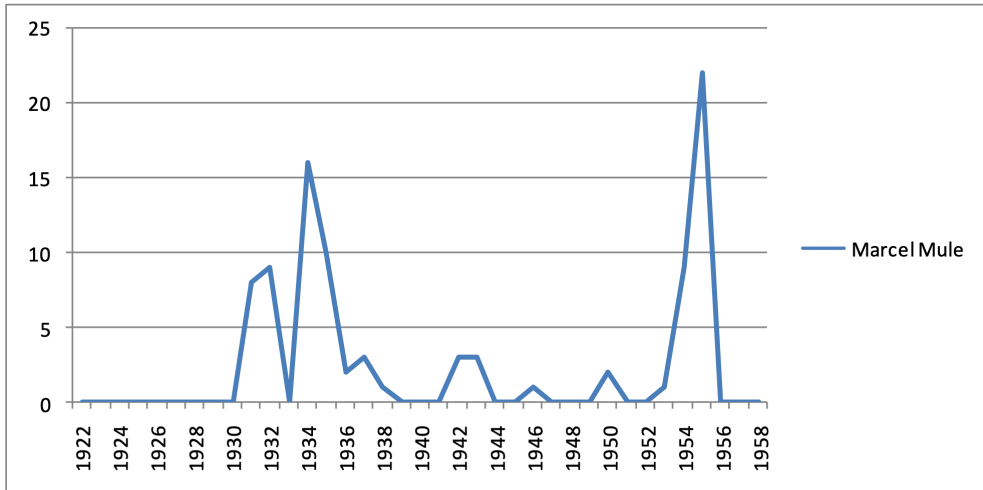


Figure 2. *Number of songs recorded by Mule from 1922–1958 (Rousseau, 1982)*

American saxophonist Cecil Leeson was another key figure in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century classical saxophone. While he may not have attained the same level of international recognition as Marcel Mule or Sigurd Rascher, Leeson was integral in establishing the saxophone as a concert instrument in the United States, where it was largely associated with jazz and big-band music. According to Cottrell (2012), Leeson hosted a series of live radio programmes on WHK in Cleveland, Ohio, performing for 30 minutes every other week from fall 1926 for nearly two years. He later held similar engagements with KNX in Los Angeles starting in 1930 and CBS in New York from 1935.

Demonstrating his commitment to the concert saxophone, Leeson gave the United States premiere of Alexander Glazunov's saxophone concerto with the Rochester Philharmonic on 13 January 1935, a major event marking the saxophone's first solo appearance in such a prestigious North American concert setting.

## Findings

### The Role of the Saxophone in Contemporary Non-Pop Art Music

Despite the sizable contributions of Mule, Rascher, and Leeson, the volume of recordings produced by big bands and jazz saxophonists between 1920 and 1958 far exceeded those by classical saxophonists. This abundance of jazz recordings

provided audiences with greater exposure to jazz saxophonists than to their classical counterparts, which might explain the saxophone's strong connection to jazz. This perception—that the saxophone is primarily a jazz instrument—persists to some extent today, as shown in Table 3 below, which compares Spotify streaming statistics for prominent musicians in both classical and jazz genres.

Table 3. *Spotify streaming statistics, accessed 6 November 2024*

Saxophonist	Style	Spotify Streaming Statistics
Claude Delangle (b.1957), former saxophone professor (1988–2024) at the Conservatoire de Paris	Contemporary classical	4,387 monthly listeners
Timothy McAllister (b.1972), saxophone professor at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance, United States	Contemporary classical	6,104 monthly listeners
Joshua Redman (b.1969), American jazz saxophonist and composer	Contemporary jazz, post-bop	212,332 monthly listeners
Melissa Aldana (b.1988), Chilean jazz saxophonist	Contemporary jazz, post-bop	55,947 monthly listeners

The timing and conception of the saxophone's invention have resulted in a considerable number of transcriptions of music from earlier centuries. These include soprano saxophone renditions of violin, flute, and oboe pieces; alto saxophone adaptations of clarinet, viola, and horn works; and tenor and baritone saxophones performing cello compositions. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of many saxophonists and composers, the saxophone is experiencing a prolific phase, characterised by the emergence of a large number of non-pop art music pieces by contemporary composers (Londeix, 2003; Londeix, 2012).

The saxophone's historical connection with military and modern wind bands has inspired various contemporary works written for wind bands and saxophone soloists. Many virtuoso saxophonists affiliated with these ensembles have contributed to the popularity of this genre. One example is the *Fantasia for Alto Saxophone* (1983) composed by Claude T. Smith for Dale Underwood and the United States Navy Band. Well-known composers like Paul Creston, Ingolf Dahl, Ida Gotkovsky, Karel Husa, Roger Boutry, Michael Colgrass, David Maslanka, Kenneth Fuchs, John Mackey, Steven Bryant, Jodie Blackshaw, Roshanne Etezady, and others have produced major works in this realm.

Saxophonists today are actively involved in developing new compositions and collaborating throughout the creative process. An illustrative initiative is the World Wide Concurrent Premieres and Commissioning Fund, Inc., established by American saxophonist Kenneth Radnofsky. This organisation commissions composers to write new works that are premiered simultaneously by multiple

performers in different locations. Noteworthy composers like John Harbison, Gunther Schuller, and Shih-hui Chen have contributed to these projects. Contemporary saxophonists also embrace an eclectic range of extended techniques—including sub-tone, flutter-tonguing, micro-intervals, glissandi, circular breathing, multiphonics, and slap tongue—which were widely considered impossible to execute by performers in the 1940s and 1950s. As a result, many contemporary compositions often reflect the unique personalities of both saxophonists and composers, and this dynamic can be seen in the works of Tunisian-born French composer Christian Lauba, who frequently dedicates pieces to specific saxophonists.

Although many of these contemporary compositions are fully notated, some incorporate elements of improvisation based on motifs provided by the composer. Cottrell (2012) wrote that this blend of written passages with spaces for interpretive freedom echoes practices prevalent in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This contrasts with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Western art music saw a decline in such flexibility, and concerto cadenzas were increasingly written out in full. This hybrid approach is evident in compositions like Lauba's *Hard* (1988), which features a substantial improvisational element not derived from jazz style.

As military bands traversed the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the saxophone's influence extended far beyond Euro-American regions. Accompanying colonial administrations, these bands introduced their music and instruments to communities they visited. Some local groups adopted Western ensembles and integrated Western instruments into their classical and traditional music. In India, for instance, a saxophone school emerged within its classical music. This tradition, with a history predating colonial empires, witnessed the formation of "Westernised" ensembles by local rulers who emulated those introduced by outsiders. Musicians adjusted to Western instruments, and the saxophone gained appeal through its prominent role in dance orchestra music, disseminated via recordings and broadcasts in the 1920s. The instrument eventually found a place in Indian classical music, despite challenges in reconciling its equal-tempered scale within India's microtonal tuning system. This broader cultural integration set the stage for individual musicians to further modify and innovate with the saxophone within classical traditions.

The Indian saxophonist Kadri Gopalnath first encountered the saxophone in the Royal Family's Mysore palace band set and was captivated by its vibrant tone. He immediately decided to learn the instrument and customised it to perform Carnatic music. Gopalnath dedicated years to mastering the skills required for this adaptation: removing some keys, replacing connecting rods with strong rubber cords, and substituting leather keypads with felt, convex equivalents. His pioneering use of the saxophone in Carnatic music is well-known within the Indian classical music community. Gopalnath recorded many albums and received an honorary title from the president of India in 2004 (darbar, n.d.).

While the saxophone is commonly affiliated with jazz, the genre itself has experienced substantial musical development since the 1960s. This evolution has acted as a primary catalyst for broadening the range of timbres achievable on the saxophone. Jeff Pressing (2002) notes that sounds such as animal cries, the

screeching of machines, the susurrations of the natural world, the conversational twittering of evoked harmonics, and the rich tone of jazz ballads can all now be produced on the saxophone with equal facility.

Contemporary saxophonists, whether classically trained or jazz-oriented, operate in diverse musical contexts and accommodate varied aesthetic demands. One such example is Wayne Shorter and the band Weather Report, which, while rooted in jazz, incorporated elements of R&B, funk, rock, and ethnic music. As one of the earliest jazz fusion bands of the 1970s, they took the innovative path of abandoning traditional straight-ahead jazz and instead emphasised continuous improvisation by all band members. During his solos, Shorter shifted roles by providing subtle harmonies and complex, inventive rhythms in response to his bandmates' improvisations. The saxophone's wide-ranging capabilities facilitated this approach and contributed to the band's success.

In 2001, Branford Marsalis recorded the album *Creation* with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. The repertoire consisted of works by French composers, including Darius Milhaud's *La création du monde*, Op.81 (1923) and *Scaramouche*, Op. 165 (1937), and Jacques Ibert's *Concertino da camera* (1935), one of the earliest saxophone concertos. Similarly, Paul Cohen produced an environmental-jazz album of solo improvisations, and Joe Lulloff released *Jazz-Tinged: Joseph Lulloff Plays Charles Ruggiero*. These recordings by Marsalis, Cohen, and Lulloff showcase the adaptability now expected of contemporary saxophonists.

Although the saxophone is still often seen as primarily a jazz instrument, its versatility allows musicians to convey their unique voices. Contemporary saxophonists across the board exploit its timbral flexibility, rhythmic agility, and improvisational potential. Consequently, the saxophone is increasingly recognised as a potent tool for artistic expression, embraced by distinguished musicians in nearly every musical style.

## Conclusion

This study explores the saxophone's complex, dual identity and traces how early historical influences shaped its association with jazz and impacted its development in classical and art music. Despite a substantial and diverse repertoire in non-pop art music, the instrument's legacy remains closely tied to jazz, largely due to influential figures and cultural trends in the early 20th century. By examining both historical roots and contemporary perspectives in Europe and North America, this research demonstrates that the saxophone's jazz image continues to influence public perception, often overshadowing its role in classical genres.

Drawing on literature review, quantitative discography analysis, and insights from musicians and audiences, this investigation stresses the lasting effects of the saxophone's early associations as well as its dynamic, yet divergent, trajectories. Ultimately, the study suggests that although its jazz legacy remains deeply ingrained, a growing acknowledgement of the saxophone's adaptability and relevance in art music could redefine its cultural identity and expand its role across genres.

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## Appendix I

### Fletcher Henderson selected discography

- Fletcher Henderson 1921–1923* (Classics 794)
- Fletcher Henderson 1923* (Classics 697)
- Fletcher Henderson 1923–24* (Classics 683)
- Fletcher Henderson 1924*, vol. 1 (Classics 647)
- Fletcher Henderson 1924*, vol. 2 (Classics 657)
- Fletcher Henderson 1924M*, vol. 3 (Classics 673)
- Fletcher Henderson 1924–1925* (Classics 633)
- Fletcher Henderson 1925–1926* (Classics 610)
- Fletcher Henderson 1926–1927* (Classics 597)
- Fletcher Henderson 1927* (Classics 580)
- Fletcher Henderson 1927–1931* (Classics 572)
- Fletcher Henderson 1931–1932* (Classics 546)
- Fletcher Henderson 1932–1934* (Classics 535)
- Fletcher Henderson 1934–1937* (Classics 527)
- Fletcher Henderson 1937–1938* (Classics 519)
- Horace Henderson 1940 / Fletcher Henderson 1941* (Classics 648)

### Other Henderson collections featuring music from a specific period, label, or radio broadcast

- Fletcher Henderson: Tidal Wave, 1931–34* (Verve 643)
- Fletcher Henderson: Under the Harlem Moon, 1932–37* (ASV/Living Era 5067)
- Fletcher Henderson—Swing: Great Original Performances, 1929–1937* (ABC Records 836 093–2)
- Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra: “Live” at the Grand Terrace, Chicago, 1938* (Jazz Unlimited JUCD 2053)
- Fletcher Henderson and His Orchestra: The Father of the Big Band* (EPM Musique 159352)
- The Essence of Swing: Wild Party* (Our World 101067)

(Source: Magee, 2005)

### **Biography**

LOW Chee Meng is a conductor, educator, administrator, and saxophonist who currently serves as an associate professor of music at UCSI University in Malaysia. Previously, he was a tenured faculty member and wind orchestra director at the University of Lethbridge, Canada. Chee Meng has performed and conducted across North America, Europe, and Asia. He also co-founded the SWATCA (South Western Alberta Teachers' Convention Association) U of L High School Honour Band and directed the South Western Alberta Youth (SWAY) wind ensemble. In Malaysia, he is the artistic director of the Outreach Youth Band, the nation's premier youth wind ensemble. His recent engagements include conducting the Second Annual Greater Bay Canadian International Schools Honour Band in China; performing as a saxophone soloist with the Canadian Red Deer Symphony; and presenting at the World Association for Symphonic Bands & Ensembles (WASBE). A dedicated advocate for music education, he has held leadership roles in various music organisations and proudly serves as an artist-educator for Yamaha Music Ltd.