

ABRSM Pathways through the Saxophone Syllabus

This poster showcases exciting pieces from the new syllabus, grouped by theme and colour-coded for clarity. Most selections are fresh, lesser-known works chosen for their strong teaching potential. Use the poster in your lessons, to inspire lesson planning, explore new repertoire, and introduce engaging, topic-based pathways to your students.

Grade 1

A1 Straight to the Point by Mike Mower

This little march will need some careful work on the articulation of the staccato. There are other pieces to explore on the syllabus where this technique will come in useful!



B1 I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls by M. W. Balfe, arr. Wilson

If you enjoy this beautiful 19th century opera aria by Balfe you can progress with tunes from operetta and modern musicals throughout the first grades in this syllabus. This song is from *The Bohemian Girl*, first performed in 1843. The arrangement found in the Grade 1 syllabus captures the lyrical and ethereal mood of the 1988 recording by Irish singer and musician Enya which was used for the film *The Age of Innocence*. Check out her version for real inspiration and try and emulate the soft tone and legato lines.



B11 Guanabara Bay by Ros Stephen

Once the smooth latin style of this fun Bossa-Nova has been captured there are many latin dances to explore through the syllabus to keep your feet tapping.



C3 Click Here by Mark Nightingale

An easy-swing number that will need some space and poise between the staccato notes. These rhythms might need clapping to ensure the pulse doesn't rush.



C6 Can Can by Offenbach arr. Wedgwood

A fun music-hall dance from Offenbach's operetta *Orpheus in the Underworld*, inspired by the lively 'galop' dance. Try to capture its high-energy character by imagining the high kicks of the chorus line of dancers, with bright articulation.



C10 Truly Scrumptious by R. & R. Sherman, arr. Lawrence

This innocent ballad by the Sherman brothers from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* is a good contrast to the aria in Grade 1 list B, with some dotted rhythmic patterns. A pure sound will convey the style of this song really well.



Grade 2

B2 A Million Dreams by Benj Pasek & Justin Paul, arr. Iles

A very popular song from the hit musical film *The Greatest Showman* by Pasek and Paul. It will need some careful thought about how the tied rhythms work in this new arrangement to get this to sit with the accompaniment and keep the pulse even.



B4 Pure Imagination by Bricusse & Newley

This enchanting song from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory uses some very expressive large interval jumps, so keep the fingering really clear.



B10 A Whole New World by Alan Menken, arr. Lawrence

A Disney duet between Aladdin and Jasmine, this is another piece that will need a sustained legato line to communicate the character of the music.



C3 Moondance by Van Morrison

A classic from the 1970s, with a soft jazz swing feel and a walking bass-line. In this new arrangement you can use a clear articulation to bring out the emphasised notes in each phrase.



C10 Take the 'A' Train by Strayhorn, arr. Lawrence

Another swing classic, this one was the signature tune of the Duke Ellington Orchestra. You can find some additional learning materials for this piece on Classroom 200. This is a great standard to use as a foundation to explore some improvisation and call and response.



Grade 3

B3 Hushabye Mountain by R. & R. Sherman

Taken from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, this new arrangement by Alan Bullard is a real treat for musicals fans and is a great way to introduce chromatic fingerings for A sharp and for the F sharp that follows the E sharp. Additional learning activities for this piece are available on Classroom 200.



B4 Tonight by L. Bernstein arr. Glover & Stratford (Eb)

Any younger players who have not encountered Bernstein's music from the classic musical *West Side Story* are in for a treat with this one. Some control will be needed over the growing dynamic range to build up to a suitable climax. Explore other movements and songs from this musical, it includes Latin rhythms in "Mambo" and the Huapango in the song "America".



B8 The Music of the Night by Andrew Lloyd Webber, arr. Lawrence

This tune from the musical *The Phantom of the Opera* is very suited to powerful sound of the saxophone. Keep the air flow strong to negotiate the large interval leaps. More resources are available for this piece on Classroom 200.



C1 Playground Swings by Luiza Lale & Adam Wilson

Triplets and swing quavers capture the lilting rhythmic character of this exciting new piece. A blues character needs to be found here so bring out the clashing blue note A flat.



C3 Fly Me to the Moon by Bart Howard, arr. Iles

This tune was originally written in 3 time, but Quincy Jones changed it to 4 time for the Frank Sinatra recording. This new arrangement ends with a fun and jazzy slow trill to look out for. It uses staccato and a lightly articulated sound to capture the buoyant nature of this style of music.



Grade 4

A2 Drinking Song by Verdi, arr. Bullard

"Let's drink from the joyful cups". This is one of the best-known opera melodies of all time from Verdi's 1853 *La Traviata*. Work for some very neat fingering over the ornamented semiquaver patterns. Some crisp staccato tonguing will also be needed.



B3 Hollywood Stars by Andrew Wilson

This new tune looks back to the golden age of Hollywood music and dance. Its high register will need plenty of support and air, and the chromatic moments will need some careful fingering, using the correct side-keys.



B4 End of a Perfect Day by Richard Kershaw (Eb)

A slow Bossa-Nova that captures the mood of a latin sunset. You will need to take care of the slowly fading dynamics and lengthening notes towards the end!



B7 On My Own by Claude-Michel Schonberg, arr. Lawrence

A solo from the 1980 musical *Les Misérables* which has become one of its most famous songs. Treat this like you were singing a musical theatre song and express the meaning of the words as much as you can in your playing.



C1 Priceless by Helen Madden

Work on a relaxed swing feel with this saxophone study. Don't let the low C take you by surprise, open up the sound as you descend down to it.



C2 Seguidilla by Bizet, arr. Blackwell

In this music form the 1875 Opera *Carmen* by Bizet the fast staccato sounds capture the Spanish character like clicking castanets. Like may pieces with staccato a clear contrast with the legato moments is also needed here. This piece and other music from *Carmen* also capture the Spanish origins of many Latin Dances.



Grade 5

A3 Summer Samba by Andrew Wilson

This tune captures the shifting grooves of a Brazilian Samba. The expressive rising arpeggio patterns will need some careful work, especially those that end on a high E!



A7 Study in A by Ferling (Eb and Bb)

Ferling was an oboist and composer and his famous studies have become part of the staple diet for players wishing to improve aspects of their technique. They are attractive to play and are also suitable as short concert pieces or audition repertoire. Study in A has a grand majestic feel with a bold confident approach required. Much of the range is covered and careful subdivision will help navigate the rhythmically complex lines. Light staccato articulation features throughout so make sure there is plenty of air support.



B1 Sail Away by Cheri Baster

This piece, written in a rock style, begins with a slow and flexible introduction before settling into the main groove. The attractive melodies lie in a pleasing register allowing the saxophone to soar over the steady rhythmic piano accompaniment. There is plenty of detail to observe to help with the phrasing and opportunities to explore the dynamics to give the piece direction. Some fifty finger work is required so worth practising the relevant scales at the tempo of the semiquaver runs in the piece.



C1 Corta-jaca by Gonzaga, arr. Hayter

An example of Choro music, a tango-like style with strong connections to ballroom dancing. This arrangement includes moments where the saxophone plays an accompanying role, so allow the piano's melody to come through.



Grade 6

A12 Adagio and Allegro by Vaughan Williams, arr. Stanton (Eb)

These two contrasting studies work beautifully as a pair. Vaughan Williams was a collector of English folk song which were usually passed on by aural tradition. Looking at the lyrics is a good way to help understand the character. The Adagio ('Lovely on the water') is melancholic and the saxophone often plays unaccompanied with piano only offering support on occasion. Allegro Vivace ('As I walked over London Bridge') is a complete contrast requiring crisp articulation and a sense of drive in the music. Both lie nicely under the fingers but the intonation needs careful attention.



B1 Autumn Song by Katy Abbott (Bb)

An excellent choice for budding tenor saxophonists is this expressive slow ballad that explores the full range of saxophone with well directed phrases and characterful use of dynamics. The beautiful melodies should sound effortless and yet are rhythmically complicated. Sub dividing or taking out ties as practice methods would be a good idea. This would be a great piece to develop and explore vibrato.



C8/11 Folk Dance by Karen Street (Bb and Eb)

One of the challenges in this unaccompanied folk dance is the mixed metre switching from 5/8 to 3/4 and occasionally 2/4, whilst keeping a steady pulse. There are also some double density fingerings to tackle which add to the folk sound world created here. The tempo is lively and there is plenty of important detail to note in the dynamic and articulation to inform the mood. Finding space to breathe needs some thought, as does the amount of air taken in each time.



C7 Balada nocturna by Robert Pintos (Eb)

This offers some authentic modern Argentine music, perhaps as an alternative for those who love Piazzolla. The second half needs a clear contrast into a cantabile and very expressive mood.



Grade 7

A6 Farandoulo di chatouno by P. Maurice (Eb)

One of the most well loved works in the saxophone repertoire, *Tableaux de Provence* is a set of descriptive movements about life in the south of France. Each movement has a title giving a helpful clue when exploring the character and mood. This charming and mischievous movement dances along at a pace and needs to sound effortless despite the tricky key and double sharps. Finger fluency and rhythmic security are key combined with clear and light articulation.



B10 Villa-Lobos Lent (2nd movt from Fantasia for Saxophone) (Bb)

This middle movement of the concerto is dramatic and atmospheric with much potential to paint a musical picture or tell a story. The long meandering melodies, which sound somewhat improvisatory, float over a more rhythmic accompaniment and consistency of tone across the range is crucial. As the movement progresses, there are some runs to navigate which need to sound powerful, effortless and confident. There is plenty of opportunity to explore tone colour using dynamics and vibrato as a starting point.



B11 Slowly by P. Woods (Eb)

Although the majority of the score is written out, jazz saxophonist Phil Woods invites the player to take part in the creation and development of this work and to have fun with it. It is an fusion of classical and jazz elements with scope for many interpretations. The attractive melody which could be approached as a jazz ballad builds to a virtuosic cadenza and ends with three chords offering the chance for a short improvisation. This piece gives possibilities to add your own ideas and character for a truly personalised performance.



C11 Not Strictly Tango by Karen Street

A solo tango for those who want to come dancing! You can bring out the off-beat accented notes in this one to fully communicate the character. Some clear dynamic contrasts and passionate expression will keep the listener engaged.



Grade 8

A10 Scherzo by Phyllis Tate

If a crisp staccato has been established early it will come in use for this very playful piece at Grade 8. Like playing some spirited Mozart, the light staccato help emphasise the notes that are slurred and therefore have a little more prominence.



B9 Ballade by Reed (Eb)

This beautiful piece, written in an attractive register for the saxophone, requires a well controlled tone, excellent breath support and long expressive phrasing. Consistency of tone quality across the range is important particularly when playing the high palm key notes. Use of vibrato will help the melody truly sing through the lyrical lines. There are changes of mood and colour, so consider using words, colours, and imagery to help tell the story.



C2 Obsession and Bahama Rhumba by John Carmichael

One a Habanera from Havana and the other a lazy Rumba that suggests the easy-going character of life in the Caribbean. John Carmichael's music frequently shows Spanish and French influences.



C3 Mambo, Baião and Merengue by Francaix

A selection from these five miniature dances where all the latin style that has been developed can come to fruition. Like many Latin dances you'll need to keep these strictly in time to keep with the nimble accompaniment.



C5 2nd movt (from October Dances) by Mick Foster (Eb)

This exciting piece is based on a dancing rhythmic idea, attractive melodic lines and virtuosic passagework. The dramatic opening is in rhythmic unison with the piano so requires careful counting and excellent communication between players. The impressive runs are fast and need to sound effortless so slow practice is required to build up muscle memory. Throughout there is much detail to explore to inform the character and mood of this powerful work.



KEY

- From Opera to Musicals
- Swing Rhythms
- Latin Dances
- Staccato Articulation
- Lyrical
- Fusion of styles
- Folk Influence
- Technically challenging
- Paints a Picture

*All pieces for Bb and Eb unless specified