

Key Features of the Performance of Chinese Musicians (Sample Case: Playing on the Saxophone)

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the methods of teaching saxophone playing within the framework of two classical approaches to teaching, developed by two famous teachers: the French teacher and saxophonist Marcel Moulet and his American colleague Larry Teale. The purpose of the article is to identify the features of two classical approaches to teaching the saxophone within the French and American traditions from the point of view of the peculiarities of the perception of these two techniques by Chinese students. The objectives of the research are to reveal the basic principles of the pedagogical system of Marcel Moulet; identifying the features of the Larry Teale method; conducting comparative classes in two groups of Chinese students based on the criteria for mastering the performance skills of playing the saxophone. The research methodology is based on a systematic approach and includes the methods of the general scientific group (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction), as well as a group of special methods: content analysis of scientific literature on the research topic; method of sociological survey and method of statistical analysis. To process the results of the empirical research, special software Neural Designer, a tool for advanced analytics, was used.

The study revealed the preferences of Chinese saxophonists regarding two classical saxophone playing techniques. The survey was conducted among three groups of 25 people, two of them were involved in experimental classes and the third group was a control. The general sample consisted of 75 respondents.

Based on the study, the author of the article came to the conclusion that Chinese performers are more committed to the French method of playing the saxophone, since the European musical tradition is easier for Chinese students to perceive in the context of the musical traditions and philosophy of China.

Key-words: Musical Traditions, Musical Pedagogy, Teaching Methods, Classical Music, Saxophone.

1. Introduction

The relevance of the research topic lies in the fact that with all the popularity of the saxophone as a wind instrument and the breadth of methodological methods for teaching playing this instrument in the scientific and pedagogical literature there is still no consensus on the question of the methodological differences between playing the saxophone in the classical and jazz styles. At the same time, the differences in the two styles of playing the saxophone are essential for the quality of sound production, which also has a certain difference in both stylistic directions.

Saxophonists with both classical and jazz playing styles have existed throughout the history of saxophone, but it is only recently that saxophone pedagogy has begun to study the effectiveness of modern teaching methods.

Currently, there is a large number of studies devoted to methods and techniques that are characteristic only of the specialization of jazz or classical saxophone. The historiography of the studied issue is quite extensive and includes the works by such authors as V.N. Avilov [2], Zh.A. Ilmer [9], A.A. Nazaryan [13] and A.M. Ponkina [14,15], whose research is devoted to the problems of pedagogical methods and techniques of playing the classical and jazz saxophone.

It is also necessary to note the works by J. Angeli [1], C. Curry [4], who paid the main attention to the methods of playing the saxophone in classical and jazz styles in the context of world musical culture.

The history of the jazz saxophone dates back to the United States. Thus, it was the North Texas Teachers' College that introduced the first jazz curriculum in higher education in 1947. Since the 1970s, there has been an increase in jazz programs and degrees at universities in the United States. The saxophone, thanks to the instrument's strong connection with jazz music, has become an integral part of these new programs. American music schools maintain a close relationship with European traditions, so it is expected that the modern saxophonist should conform to a methodological model based on Western European classical tradition. However, at present, there are clear differences in learning to play the saxophone in the classical and jazz styles, which are rather poorly covered in the scientific literature.

The stylistic requirements of classical and jazz are different, and thus special requirements are imposed on the technique of playing the saxophone. Ear cushion, tongue and chin position, mouthpiece angle, use of air, and tone are all areas that represent stylistic differences.

In general, jazz saxophonists tend to change timbre in different registers; the lower tone is «indistinct, the middle is clearer, and the upper register is thinner and louder» [20, p. 10]. For

example, classical saxophonists, in order to be able to perform with other musicians in an orchestra, must be able to produce an even tone and timbre in all registers. In the classic style of playing the saxophone, you need to get a sound that is relatively dark, sonorous and clear with perfect intonation. The factors that determine such differences are, first of all, the ear cushion, the installation of the mouthpiece and the instrument itself.

The mouthpiece and its use in combination with reed and ligature is often the most important element for any saxophonist in both classical and jazz music. Combined with breath and ear cushions, the mouthpiece has a great impact on timbre. Mouthpieces are made from different materials and there may be differences in tip bore, gasket length, baffle height, bore and chamber size, and tip thickness. The methodological literature describes various combinations of materials, openings, lengths, chamber size and the presence or absence of a baffle will have a strong effect on timbre. During the development process and in order to satisfy the wishes of the musicians, the mouthpiece manufacturers introduced several new variants, and now there is a huge selection of saxophone mouthpieces.

In jazz music, saxophonists are allowed to choose their own mouthpiece according to their desired sound. However, in classical music, the choice is limited to a certain number of models according to the sound characteristics of a particular school, for example, the French school of saxophone playing. The most common mouthpieces used in classical music (French school) are the Vandoren brand (models: (A / T / S / B) 25, 27, 28) or the Selmer brand. These mouthpieces, thanks to their moderate tip opening and special chamber structure, help performers control intonation, produce clear sound and maintain good control over dynamics.

Another important difference between the two styles of playing is the technique of producing subtones - when the sound of a certain note, especially in the low register of a saxophone, becomes less clear, opaque, indistinct. In fact, the musician moving the jaw back to the tip of the uvula, which affects its vibration [15, p.209], generates the subtone. The inventor of this technique was Ben Webster, and nowadays almost all jazz musicians use subtones, especially in the low register. One of the reasons jazz saxophonists use this technique is because it helps to play more softly in a duet with the piano. Another aesthetic reason: subtones are part of the jazz style. Jazz musicians also use this technique to accentuate certain moments while performing a certain musical phrase. Classical saxophonists do not use this technique. They mainly use accentuation with air and tongue movement.

In addition to these methodological nuances, there are also differences in the method of forming the correct position of the lips, tongue and facial muscles of the musician (ear cushion) for sound production when playing the saxophone in classical or jazz styles. From a teaching point of

view, it must be emphasized that there is a difference between classic and jazz ear cushions. Unfortunately, in many higher educational institutions of music this distinction is not made clearly enough. At the same time, the study of these differences, in our opinion, will allow students to more fruitfully make the transition between the two styles of performance and create a solid practical base for correct sound production. Of course, as some music educators correctly point out, there are other factors that help create the right sound for each of the two styles, such as mouthpieces and reeds, however, in our opinion, it is the ear cushions that are the first most important step in the transition from classical sound. saxophone to jazz.

The classic saxophone ear cushion was originally developed from the attributes of a clarinet ear cushion. They are very similar, except for the angle at which the mouthpiece should be positioned in the mouth. Most saxophone teachers agree on the basics of classic ear cushions, but some details remain open to discussion. In particular, in his study, J. Angeli notes that during the formation of the ear cushion, the lower lip is tightly pulled over the lower teeth, which allows the lip to create a «cushion» - the place where the reed should remain firm, since it is stretched across the lower teeth [8, p.120].

When playing the saxophone in the classical style, the hardness of the lower lip is further strengthened by the fact that the chin is pulled down. It also allows the lower lip to be extended enough for the tongue to vibrate properly. If the lower lip is too far in the mouth, it will overly moisturize the reed and it will not be able to vibrate properly. The essence of this technique is that the upper teeth should tightly grip the upper part of the mouthpiece, and the jaw should support the lower lip. According to some music teachers of the saxophone, such as J. Trezon and M. Styles, the upper teeth and upper lip should work simultaneously to support the efforts emanating from the lower teeth and lips [9, p. 6].

It should be noted that in the modern scientific and pedagogical literature devoted to the methodology of teaching playing the classical saxophone, there are different approaches to the question of the angle at which it is necessary to use the classic ear cushions. In particular, supporters of Thiel's method advocate that it is necessary to apply the same pressure to the mouthpiece, in addition to shifting the corners to the center. However, some music teachers follow the school of R. Allard, who believed that such an arrangement of the reed dulls its sides, thereby depriving the sound of the necessary overtones. Supporters of this methodical school of teaching saxophone playing suggest using the lower lip to apply pressure to the central part of the tongue, allowing the sides to vibrate freely [9, p.152].

Some researchers argue that the jaw should have some flexibility and movement when forming a classic ear cushion, while others suggest that it should remain stationary [10, p.158]. In our opinion, for correct sound production on a classical saxophone, it is necessary to know both methods of forming an ear cushion. At the same time, the classic ear cushion can serve as a solid basis for the saxophonist, but when playing jazz, a completely different technique should be used. The first difference, according to music educators, is that jazz ear cushions require significantly less jaw pressure than the classical playing style. The pressure on the reed in a jazz saxophone is mainly carried out by the lower lip, which allows the reed to vibrate more freely.

Since the jazz ear cushion focuses on the maximum vibration of the reed, the lower lip should be turned outward, towards the saxophone, creating a soft, thick cushion separating the teeth from the reed in order to more deeply capture the reed in the mouth and achieve a fuller and more lively sound [14, p.6]. At the same time, music teachers note that when playing the jazz saxophone, a less fixed position of the jaw is needed to form a jazz ear cushion.

In the historiography of the issue, there is also an opinion that the classical French school of the saxophone is based on the principle of performing music as the composer intended. This in no way means that every saxophonist should play any piece of music in the same way, losing individuality, the point is that he should reproduce the music so that it accurately reflects what the composer wrote [16, p.27].

In some studies, one can also find scattered references to some of the classical principles of teaching saxophone playing [5,4,3], however, a detailed analysis of the methods and techniques has not yet been carried out.

In our opinion, the pedagogical methods in the two national schools have both differences and similarities. From this position, we can say that the French school of classical saxophone is inseparable from the legacy of its founder, Marcel Moulet. From developing the characteristic tone quality and the use of classical vibrato to the creation of the standard saxophone quartet and much of the saxophone solo repertoire, Marcel Moulet has had a tremendous impact on the growth of a positive perception of the saxophone as a classical instrument. In addition, his warmth and honesty as a person, combined with his unrivaled skill and meticulous pedagogical methods, have enabled him to profoundly influence a vast number of saxophonists around the world. According to one of his students, Daniel Deffaye: «May all classical saxophonists never forget that thanks to Marcel Moulet they are considered real musicians today» [17, p.118]. Marcel Moulet's pedagogical principles became the basis for the saxophone class at the National Conservatory in Paris, specially created in

1942. To this day, the French school for teaching saxophone includes the following basic principles, which were formulated by Marcel Moulet:

- Special requirements for sound production – «classic mule vibrato» (development of the skill of fast and hard vibrato of small range);
- Achievement of the tone of the imitation of the voice with the help of good air support and an ear cushion that does not pinch the reed tube of the instrument;
- Teaching is based on continuous improvement of technical performance skills;
- Performing skills are secondary in relation to technical ones (arise as a result of technical skill);
- Individual approach to each student;
- Learning outcomes directly correspond to the student's abilities.

In our opinion, it is the creation of a specific tone for the French school of classical saxophone that is a priority. Moreover, both tone and vibrato, according to the teaching principles of Marcel Moulet, should be modeled by a female voice. This effect is achieved precisely with maximum air support and an earcup that does not pinch the reed tube.

The specificity of the French school of teaching saxophone also lies in the unique concept of vibrato, which is so characteristic of the Western European tradition of using wind instruments. In teaching saxophone playing, the creation of wave-like sounds is of great importance as a way to give the saxophone sound a natural character, since «such waves organically exist in the world around us» [9, p.4].

Some researchers also note the difference in sound that is inherent in classical and jazz saxophone [10, p.157]. In particular, the biggest difference lies in the use of a technique such as vibrato. There are various possibilities for creating vibrato; however, the most commonly used method consists in smoothly changing the pressure of the jaw and lower lip on the reed by moving the jaw with small movements up and down [10, p. 7]. Although the technique for its production is the same, vibrato can be used in different ways. Typically, in classical music, saxophonists strive to produce a controlled and continuous vibrato, similar to the sound of a stringed instrument or string voices, whereas in jazz music, the vibrato tends to be amplified towards the end of the note. In the modern repertoire, vibrato can be really different in intensity, speed and pitch. Thus, the professional saxophonist must be proficient in different types of vibrato for use in different musical situations.

2. Methods and Materials

The research methodology is based on a systematic approach and includes the methods of the general scientific group (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction), as well as a group of special methods: content analysis of scientific literature on the research topic; method of sociological survey and method of statistical analysis. To process the results of the empirical research, special software Neural Designer, a tool for advanced analytics, was used.

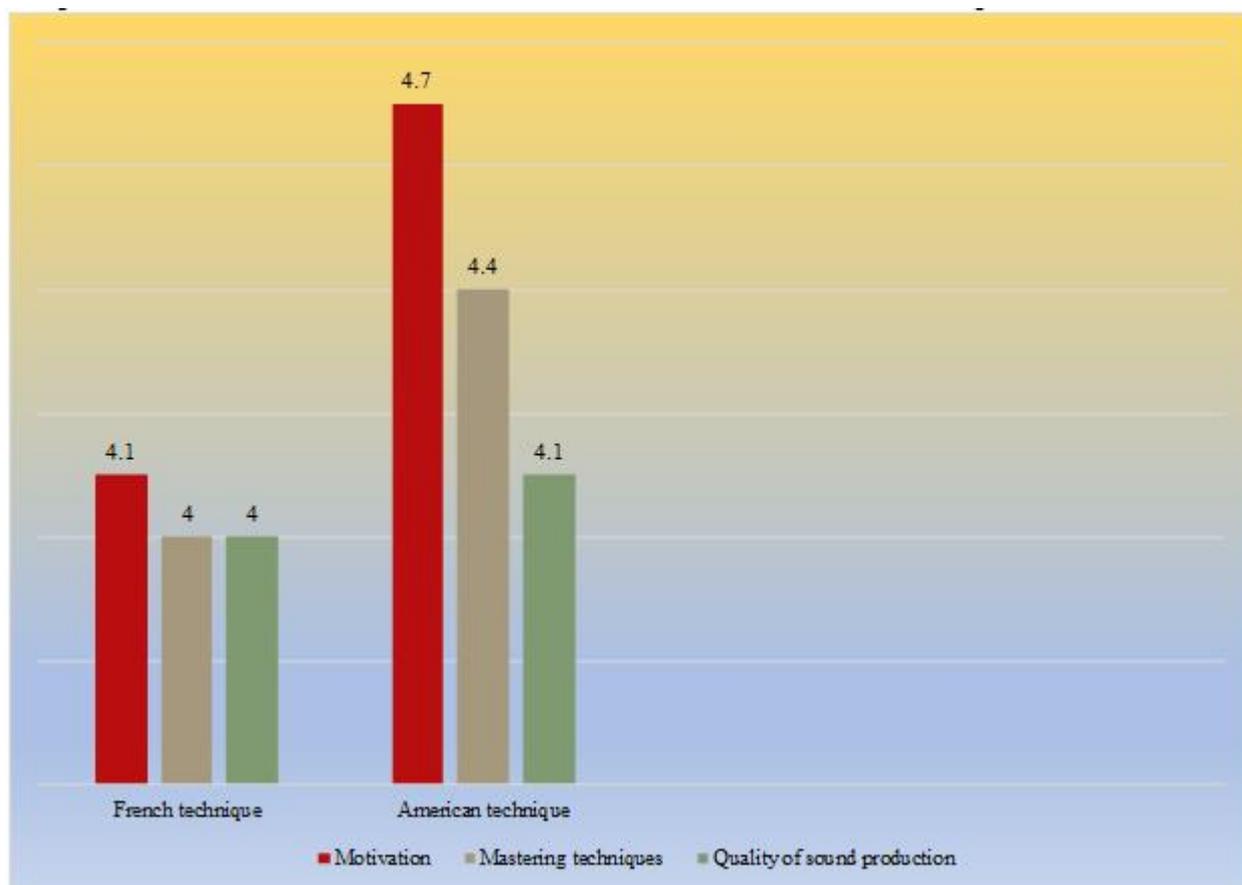
The study revealed the preferences of Chinese saxophonists regarding two classical saxophone playing techniques. The survey was conducted among three groups of 25 people, two of them were involved in experimental classes and the third group was a control. The general sample consisted of 75 respondents. The aim of the survey was to identify motivation for two teaching schools – French and American, by Chinese performers. The survey included two questionnaires with questions about the research topic. Three criteria for the analysis were identified: motivation, mastering techniques, quality of sound production.

Based on these criteria, students evaluated French and American saxophone teaching methods (two classical schools) on a 10-point scale, at which - a low grade from 1 to 3, an average grade from 4 to 6, a high grade from 7 to 10 points. According to the results of the survey using the Neural Designer program, an average score was revealed for all three criteria. Empirical research conducted in March 2021.

3. Results

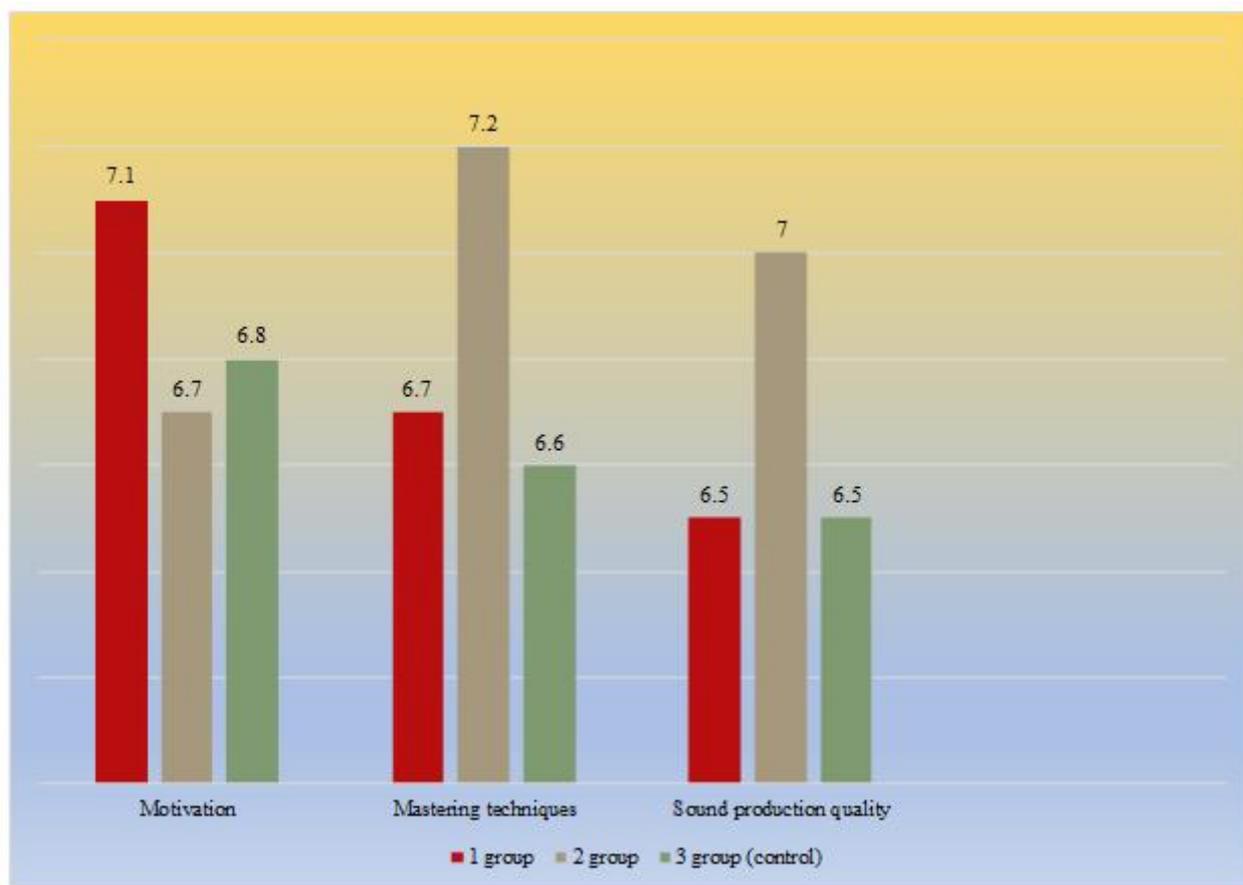
As a result of a survey of 3rd year students in three groups (bachelors), we obtained preferences of performers in the technique of playing the saxophone before the special comparative classes. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Assessment by Students of Three Groups of Qualities of Two Classical Schools of Teaching to Play the Saxophone
(Compiled by the Author Using Neural Designer Program)



As the data in Figure 1 show, all respondents rated the methods of playing the saxophone at a low level. This assessment is due to the fact that the students were poorly aware of the methods of performance that are recommended in the two classical schools of saxophone. After a series of comparative lessons on the French and American methods of play, the following results were obtained according to the students' assessment of the American methodology (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Evaluation by Chinese Students of the American Method of Playing the Saxophone (Compiled by the Author Using Neural Designer Program)

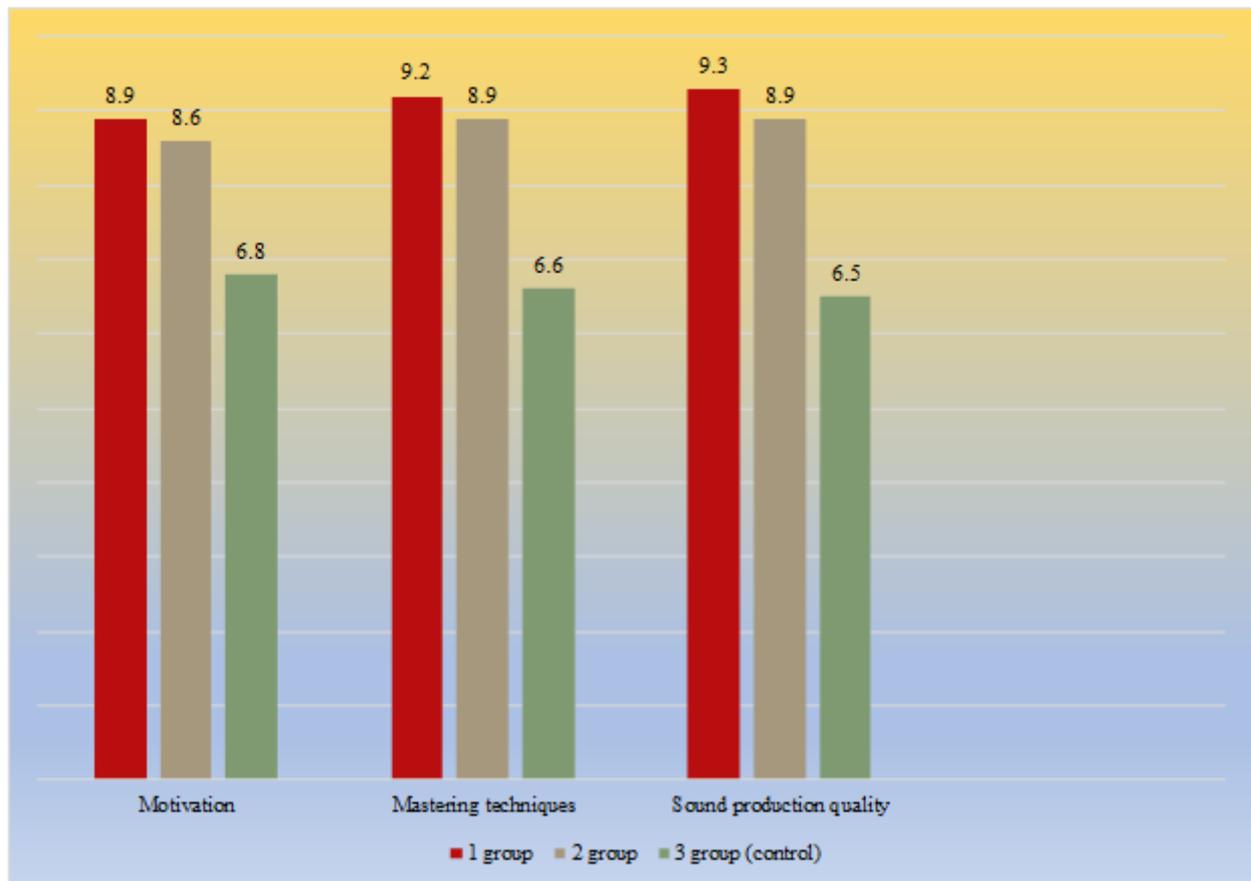


As the data in Figure 2 show, the Chinese students rated the American School's sound production technique above the average, but did not give the maximum score. In the comments to the questionnaire, 67 out of 75 respondents noted that they did not like the roughness of the style and the speed of sound production in the American saxophone school.

This is due to the general musical traditions in China, whose traditional musical culture characterized by smooth sound production, pentatonic scale and philosophical foundations for practicing music. The Chinese students also did not like the harsh manner of performing individual pieces, which «could be played more smoothly and gently».

A slightly different result was obtained according to the students' assessment of the French method of playing the saxophone (Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Evaluation by Chinese students of the French method of playing the saxophone (compiled by the author using Neural Designer program)



Thus, as shown in Figure 3, Chinese performers rated the French saxophone technique more highly. In their comments, the respondents noted that they like the French model of playing more for the more half-hearted sound production, for the fuller tone of the sound, for the more colorful sound of the saxophone.

The above data allow us to say that a feature of the Chinese performing art of playing the saxophone is its adherence to the French methodological school of playing.

An interesting fact is that most of the respondents in their comments refer to the traditions of Chinese musical performance, which are based on the beauty of a single sound, without halftones, without subtones. The dedication to the purity of the Chinese performers is very close in essence to the French classical technique of playing the saxophone. Therefore, we can say that the European tradition of performing is closer to Chinese students than the American model of playing.

The development of various performing schools and saxophone playing aids is still ongoing. The expressive resources of the instrument are far from being exhausted, which composers will

continue to unfold creatively for an infinitely long time. These are all fruitful prospects for the future progress of the saxophone in China. The modern saxophone is an instrument that stands out from other wind instruments with its beautiful, flexible and melodious sound, as well as its catchy elegant form. It is the colorful sound palette, the variety of sound production techniques that awaken the imagination of composers, attract them to active use in various spheres of contemporary musical art. The saxophone is a universal instrument, which means that the Chinese saxophonist can be a universal performer.

4. Discussion

Our results are confirmed in the works by such authors as M.J. Trezona, M. Styles [20], E. Wang [21], M. Titlebaum [19] and R.A. Stetsiuk [18].

In particular, L. Rebbeck, who considers the performing arts as part of the general national musical culture [16, p.92], confirms our results on the preferences of Chinese performers in relation to the methodological schools of playing the saxophone in the work.

In works by A.M. Ponkina [14, 15] the methodological aspects of mastering the performing skills of playing the saxophone are considered from the point of view of general cultural national characteristics and socialization of performers. This study confirms our findings on the rise in preferences of Chinese performers and their relationship to traditional Chinese philosophy of the performing arts.

Such authors as A.A. Nazaryan [13], S.E. Miracle [12], F. Martin, A.K. Betrus [11], S.S. Lukashova [10], Zh. Ilmer [9], F.L. Hemke [8] argue that the skills of performing the French sheola are more successfully mastered in Asian countries, which confirms our results among Chinese students.

The results of our research are also confirmed in works by S. Hase, A. Ellis [7], E. Eriksson [6], M. Draud [5], Ch. Currie [4], J. Bowman [3], V.N. Avilov [2] and G. Angeli [1] who assert that the French method of playing the saxophone is more typical for Chinese performers.

However, despite the differences that we have identified between the French and American schools, with each new generation of saxophonists, the differences in sound production become more and more blurred, which makes the contrast between the French and American schools less obvious. In modern music education, the difference between French and American schools is also leveled out because many saxophonists have studied with several teachers, sometimes crossing the methodological line between French and American schools.

5. Conclusions

The planning of academic work and a deeply thought-out choice of repertoire are the most important factors contributing to the correct organization of the educational process and the successful all-round development of the student's musical and performing skills. The current situation in our modern life is such that the main conditions are the rapid pace of development, the expansion of the information space, the development of which requires the ability to respond to ongoing changes and take into account these conditions to make certain adjustments to the educational process. A student's progress largely depends on an appropriately drawn up individual plan and on the extent to which it is fully, timely and of high quality. When drawing up an individual plan, the teacher should strive for the comprehensive development of the student's professional performance data, to cover all sections of the repertoire specified in the program, bearing in mind the need for students to understand the peculiarities of the performance of compositions of various styles. The student's repertoire should include works that are different in content, form, style and texture. One of the most important tasks of working in a special class should be considered the development of the skills of independent work on a piece, the ability to create and implement your own performing plan on the basis of a careful and thoughtful study of the musical text. Among the professionally significant qualities of the personality of a teacher-musician, it is necessary to emphasize the ability and ability to penetrate into the inner world of a student, to adequately perceive their feelings and thoughts at the moment of perceiving music. The psychology of perception is one of the central problems of the student's musical education.

The whole history of the classical saxophone is still relatively young, and most modern saxophonists are still not looking for new methodological ideas for teaching the saxophone. It can be assumed that the differences between the French and American schools will become less and less obvious over time, but the basic principles that were formulated by Marcel Moulet and Larry Thiel remain the main vectors for the development of the methodology of the classical saxophone.

Thus, we can conclude that within the framework of learning to play the saxophone, it is necessary to take into account the methodological differences in techniques and methods of sound production, characteristic of the classical and jazz styles. At the same time, in the future, it is necessary to more fully investigate the methodology of teaching saxophone playing from the point of view of a polystylistic approach, when the goal of training musicians is the ability to play both styles at an equal quality level.

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