

Let's have a discussion on Saxophone slings
by Brian Pickering www.saxystrap.com

....may I put in my two pence worth?

When I was in my teens, playing baritone, I had a one inch wide leather strap which had a standard belt buckle and no adjustment. Painful and unwieldy, you would think. But it was never a problem. Why? Because I was the only one who used it, which meant it never needed to be adjusted. I didn't have to manoeuvre the sling, I simply put it on when starting to play and, when finished, took it off without fuss. Being young and healthy, the weight of the instrument and the narrowness of the leather were not even a consideration.

However, as a teacher over the past twenty-five years, I have seen a range of problems caused by the slings which are generally available. Youngsters wearing T-shirts with necks uncovered; students, young, old and in between insisting on leaving their instruments on stands between practices with the sling attached; people constantly adjusting the height (usually too high anyway), and then getting the cord or the inch wide webbing tangled completely through the slider. I could list even more, but I'm sure you are aware of them.

How many times have I had to lend pupils my sling so that they could at least play something, while I spend ten minutes untangling their mess of cord or webbing? Of course, this has given them another reason for not practising – "I couldn't get my sling untangled so I've had to leave it since I last saw you." Yet another one to add to the portfolio of excuses!

However, I've never been a person to let a problem pass without seeking a solution. A good rule this – If you see a problem and you can do something about it, do it. If not, ignore it, and don't go on about it. So I sought.

I tested every type of sling I could find on the market, both in the years BG (before Google) and certainly since. And we've all seen the pathetic thin material included in the so-called "saxophone outfits" provided by the manufacturers of most beginners' saxophones. These appear suitable for nothing but garrotting. I can't help feeling that if the "nanny state" could do any good, these cheap and very nasty slings should be the first things to be made illegal!

But my search produced no positive results. So I went back to the drawing board because I realised I could do something about it. Next question: What did I and my students want from a sling? I started to list the requirements in order of priority.

- Holds the saxophone securely
- Does not tangle
- Wide enough to be comfortable on the player's neck
- Easily adjustable without having to be removed – one hand if possible
- No need to re-adjust every time you use it
- Does not twist

- Lies flat on the chest
- Is inexpensive

I was also insistent on maintaining the quality of the materials to be used and that there should not be a lot of unnecessary packaging – especially the wads of non-recyclable plastic which most manufacturers insist on. Finally, I realised that one colour was not enough. Black is fine for formal occasions, but becomes extremely boring, not to say funereal, when there is no other choice. And what about jam sessions or carnivals? What about weddings, anniversaries or other celebrations? And what about the Band uniform? And why should guitarists be the only ones to have a range of exotic and exciting slings for their instruments? You see them for guitars in music shops all the time, so why not for saxophones?

Some of my students asked me why they could not have a sling in the colours of their favourite football team. So a range of colours and finishes was needed.

Conclusions began to crystallise.

1. Passing the left and right sides of the sling through a central slider was a sure-fire way of causing tangling, so the adjustment had to be on one side only.
2. Less than 2 inches wide (50 mm) was neither comfortable nor acceptable, but at this width, extra padding would be required only if the material was too harsh. So whilst the strength of webbing was needed, the actual weave had to be gentle.
3. So that you don't have to leave the instrument dangling while you use both hands to adjust, the adjustment slider had to be usable with one hand only whilst still eliminating the risk of tangling.
4. To eliminate another irritation, it would be a blessing if it were not necessary to re-set the sling every time you used it. Why do we have to do this? Our size doesn't change between one gig and the next, nor does the instrument, so why should the sling have to? So it was essential to arrange it so that re-adjustment became unnecessary.
5. And when we've got the sling on, why do we have to put up with its twisting whenever we move around? The width of the webbing helps with this.
6. To make the sling lie flat on the chest, it was obvious that the hook had to swivel. So that determined choice of component.
7. For safety and security, the swivel hook had to be in metal, even though for grip and adjustability, the slider and other components were better in synthetic material.

Wow! This project was taking a life of its own!

A blinding flash of the obvious appeared from the night sky. About 45 years ago someone had given me a 2 inch wide sling which met some but not all of the requirements I've listed. Some of my students had shown interest in this old sling, which I had continued to use, so the task became one of development, improvement and enhancement rather than pure invention.

Anyway to cut a long story short. I developed the SaxyStrap®. But being a family man, I enlisted the whole of the family to help. So we now have a new cottage industry. And every SaxyStrap® is handmade and orders are sent out by us personally. Even special individual requirements can be fulfilled. Sometimes, if you want a job done, you have to do it yourself!

(The illustration and features are on Page 1 of this website.)

So if you think any of this makes sense, then let me know. For more information, or even to order, have a look at the website www.saxystrap.com, or send an Email to saxystrap@aol.com

I'm sure you'll love them. It goes without saying that I, and all my students do. Here's what some of them say:

"If you have to fit practice in between work, family and household chores, the SaxyStrap is great. I just slip it on, attach my saxophone and I'm ready to go. No need to untwist, untangle, or adjust. Even if it's just 10 minutes here and there, I get some practice in." (KC)

"The SaxyStrap is comfortable and convenient, no need to untwist, untangle or adjust" (PP)

"A revolutionary design in saxophone straps, every saxophonist should have one." (PH)

"..when switching from Alto to Tenor in the same arrangement, the change is easy. No adjustment, no tangle, two slings." (JJ)

"I shall certainly recommend the SaxyStrap to all my fellow musicians on my travels" (JG)

The SaxyStrap might not actually make you play better, but it should help you relax whilst doing so, so that must be a benefit.

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