

## **Altissimo Development, Part 3: Alto Saxophone Fingerings**

While there are numerous altissimo fingerings considered to be established and proven, more often than not, there several other fingering options dependent upon various factors, such as the saxophone one is using (i.e., the brand name); the type of saxophone (i.e., soprano, alto tenor, baritone); the context which the note is played (i.e., surrounding intervals and melodic patterns); the saxophone's intonation tendencies; the dynamics; the maturity of the saxophonist (i.e., embouchure and air stream development and control as well as finger coordination); as well as other factors affecting altissimo production. The following will identify and discuss some of the more commonly used fingerings for alto saxophone only, and based upon several of the factors listed above.

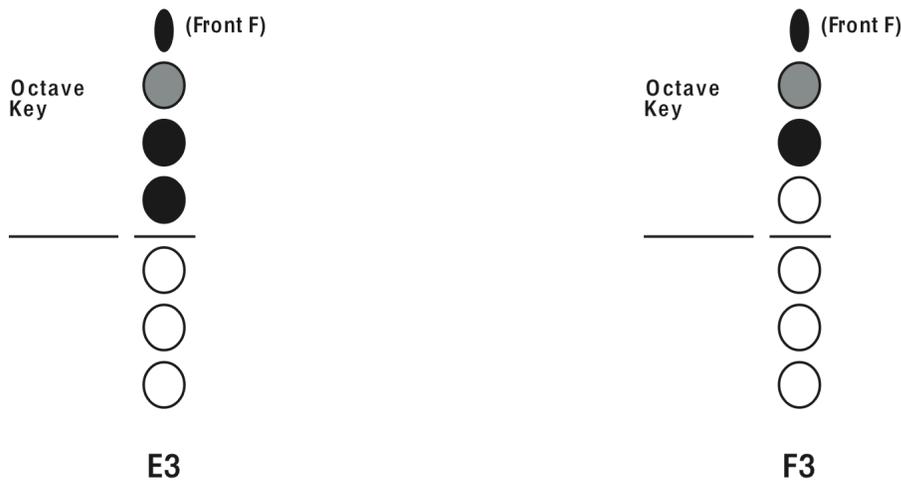
### ***The Basics***

Before we begin discussing altissimo fingering options, I want to preface my discussion with the following statement. Although the fingerings to be discussed will facilitate the production of the altissimo (i.e., allow for a suitable acoustical means for the note to be produced), the development as well as the control of one's tonal (i.e., pitch and intervallic relationships) and muscular memory (i.e., facial and oral cavity positioning of the muscles) is critical for altissimo notes to be performed accurately and consistently. Therefore, I strongly urge the student to practice overtone exercises found in various altissimo books before moving forward. Practicing overtone exercises allows the saxophonist to develop the tonal and muscular memory needed to produce the approximate position of the embouchure and oral cavity during the production of the altissimo register as well as becoming acquainted with the composition of one's sound (it is recommended that the saxophonist has a well-established embouchure with a good control of the air stream before attempting overtone and/or altissimo exercises). Please refer to Eugene Rousseau's *Saxophone High Tones*, Robert Luckey's *Saxophone Altissimo*, and Sigurd Rascher's *Top Tones* for suggested overtone exercises.

### ***The Front Fingerings***

Let's begin with the front fingerings for E3 and F3 (see Example 1). Although E3 and F3 can be performed with the palm-keys and therefore remain in the normal range of the saxophone, the front fingerings for these notes are considered to be altissimo since they involve the over-blowing of fundamental notes a sixth interval below (i.e., E3 over-blows G and F3 over-blows A).

### Example 1



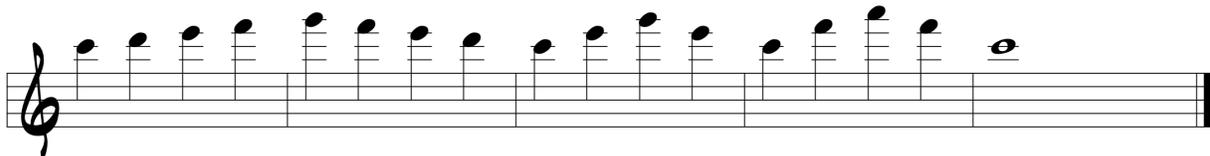
These fingerings are used most effectively and typically when skipping to E3 and F3 from C3 or C#3 (see Example 2). Once the saxophonist has learned to play these notes accordingly (i.e., with proper tonal and muscular memory as described above), the front fingerings will usually produce stable as well as stronger sounding notes as compared to the palm-key counterparts.

### Example 2



Should the pitch of these notes sound flat when using the front fingerings, the left-hand pinkie G-sharp key may be added to stabilize the note and pitch. In addition to the uses described above, the front E3 and F3 fingerings may be also used when connecting notes in either a scale or an arpeggio from the normal range into the altissimo range (see Example 3).

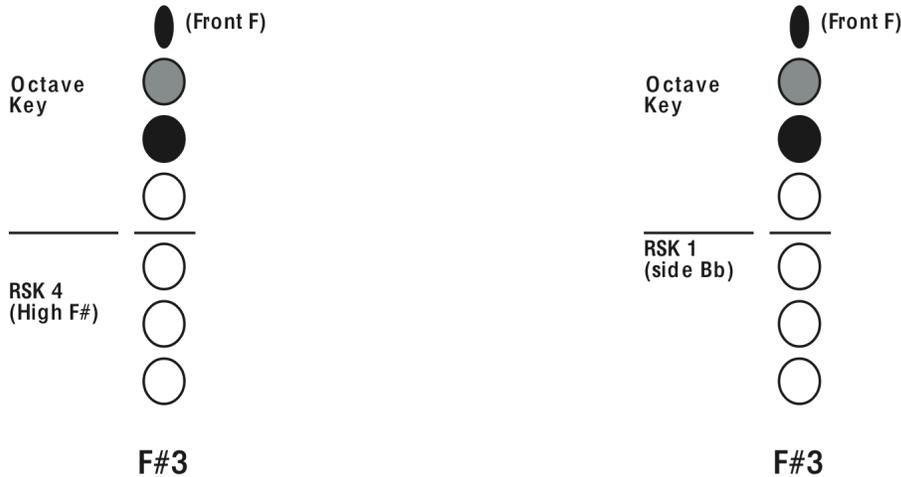
### Example 3



F#3 has several fingering options depending upon the notes surrounding it and the saxophonist's finger coordination. The fingerings for F#3 include the standard palm-key fingerings with the high F-sharp key (i.e., LSK 1, 2, 3 and RSK 3 & 4), as well as the

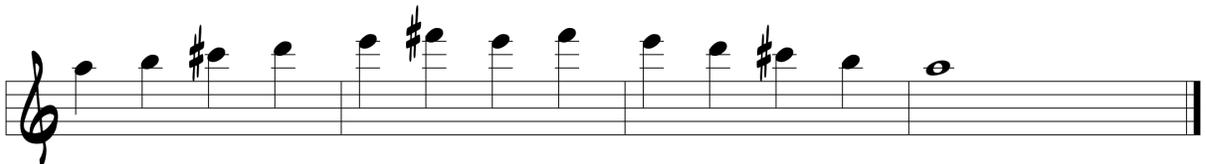
altissimo fingerings (see Example 4) using the front F3 fingering with the high F-sharp key (i.e., RSK 4); and the front F3 fingering with the side B-flat key (i.e., RSK 1).

### Example 4

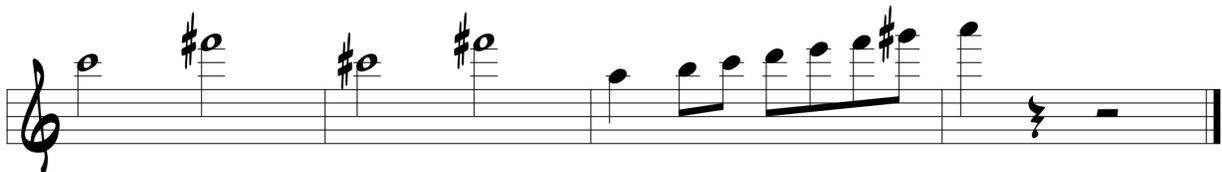


While the palm-key fingering for F#3 is used primarily for step-wise motion ascending to and descending away (see Example 5), the other two fingerings may be used in very much the same way as the front fingering for E3 and F3 described above (see Example 6). Although, the front fingering with the side B-flat key (i.e., RSK 1) can be more adaptable for smoother scale passages moving through and above F#3, the other fingering (i.e., front F and RSK 4) is generally more stable.

### Example 5



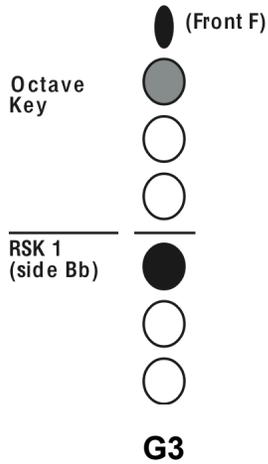
### Example 6



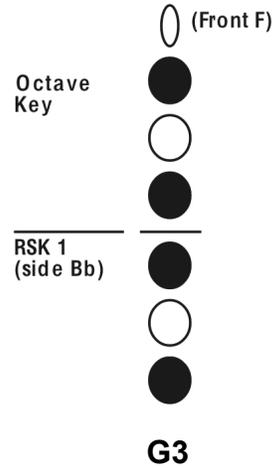
A widely used fingering for G3 is the front F3 fingering with the right-hand index finger (i.e., F key) and side B-flat (see Example 7a). Another possible fingering for G3 is the 1 - 3 - 4 - 6 with side B-flat (i.e., the left-hand index and ring fingers; the right-hand index and ring fingers; and RSK 1). This fingering (see Example 7b) often produces the most stable sounding G3, but is a very awkward fingering when used in conjunction with

surrounding notes as in a scale-like passage. It is used most effectively for long notes and can maintain a stable tone at louder volumes.

### Example 7a

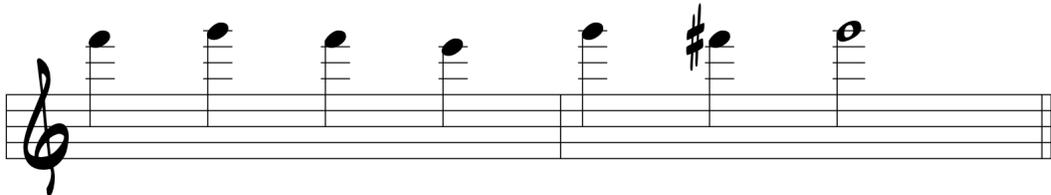


### Example 7b



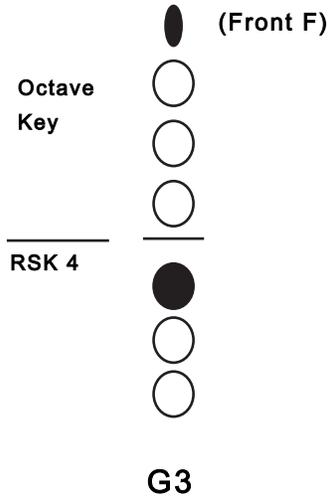
Although the fingering in Example 7a can be a little difficult to manipulate at times, it produces a fairly stable sounding note and will generally work well with other common fingerings of notes that surround it (see Example 8), compared to Example 7b

### Example 8



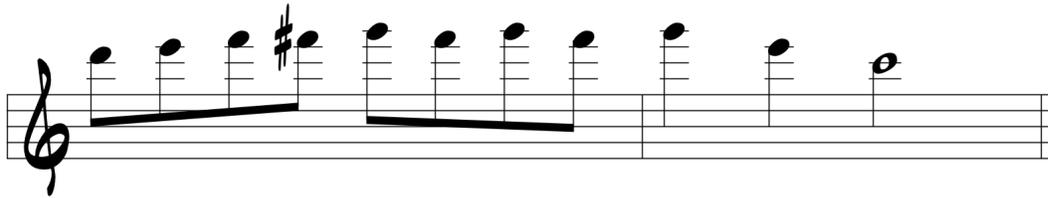
Another handy fingering for G3 (see Example 9) is the front F3 fingering with the high F-sharp key (i.e., RSK 4) and middle F key.

### Example 9



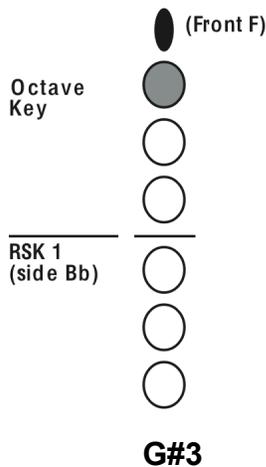
It is particularly useful in chromatic passages and/or when moving quickly from G3 to F#3 and visa versa (see Example 10). Unfortunately, this fingering can be a bit unstable at times and may require additional embouchure control to produce and maintain.

### Example 10

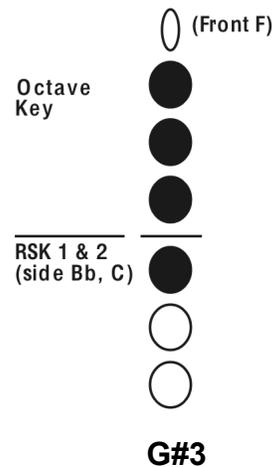


Two useful fingerings for G#3 are the front F3 with side B-flat (i.e., RSK 1) and the 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 with side B-flat and side C (i.e., RSK 2) depressed together (see Example 10a and 10b).

### Example 10a

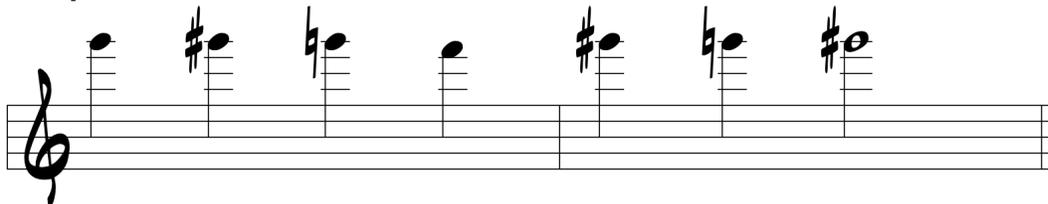


### Example 10b



The first fingering works well with fingerings of notes surrounding it. For example, one simply lifts the right-hand index finger (i.e., the F key) to play G#3 from G3 (see Example 11). Although this fingering works well in this situation, it can be unstable in other situations, especially when larger intervals are involved.

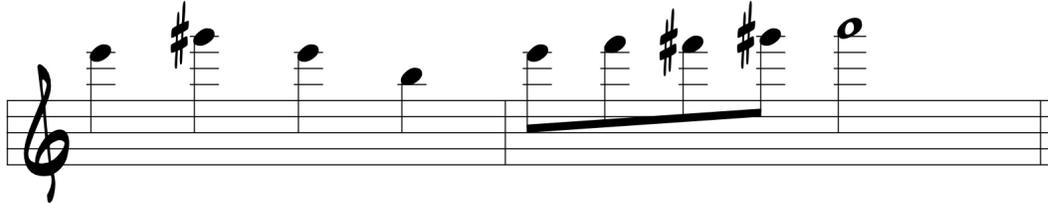
### Example 11



On the other hand, the second fingering (i.e., 10b) produces a very stable note but requires a little more work to manipulate cleanly because of the awkwardness of the fingering with fingerings of notes surrounding it. Nevertheless, once one gains confidence in using this fingering, one will find it to work extremely well in most cases because of the good sound and intonation that it produces.

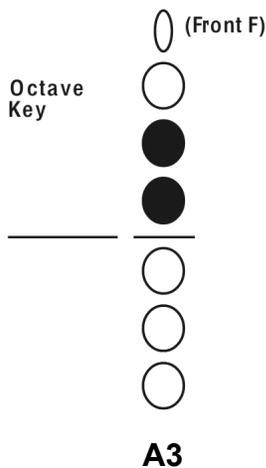
In particular, it works well when played from front E3 to G#3 and when moving from G#3 to A3 (see Example 12). In both cases, the fingerings are similar and require minimal finger motion to move from one note to another.

**Example 12**

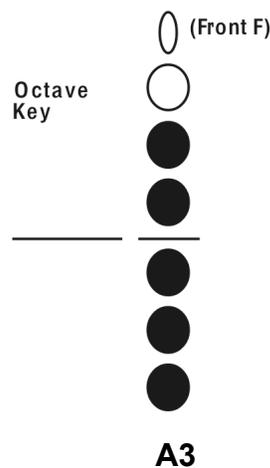


There are a few good fingerings for A3. One fingering for A3 is simply 2-3 (i.e., left-hand middle and ring fingers, see Example 13a). It is a simple fingering (i.e., it does not require many fingerings and seems to work well with other fingerings), but may require a bit more embouchure and air stream control to produce and maintain. Another typical fingering choice for A3 is 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 (see Example 13b). This fingering produces a stable tone but may tend to be sharp in pitch (do not use the octave key if the pitch is too high). In addition, it works well with larger intervals (i.e., a third or more), but is somewhat clumsy when used for step-wise scale patterns. Finally, a preferred fingering for A3 is 2 - 3 - 4 with side B-flat (RSK 1) and side C (i.e., RSK 2) depressed together (see Example 13c).

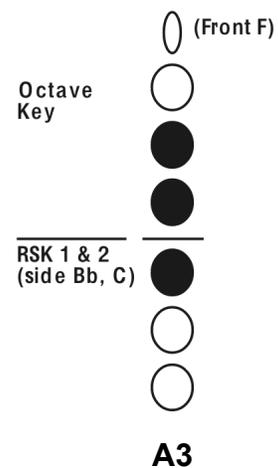
**Example 13a**



**Example 13b**



**Example 13c**



The latter fingering works well with the second G-sharp fingering discussed above (i.e., Example 10b), as it only requires lifting the left-hand index finger. Although this fingering may seem awkward at first, it generally works well with the fingerings of surrounding notes and produces a stable tone with good intonation (see Example 14). These are only a few suggestions for these altissimo notes. The saxophonist should experiment with these fingerings in order to devise other variations of suitable fingerings to use.

Example 14

