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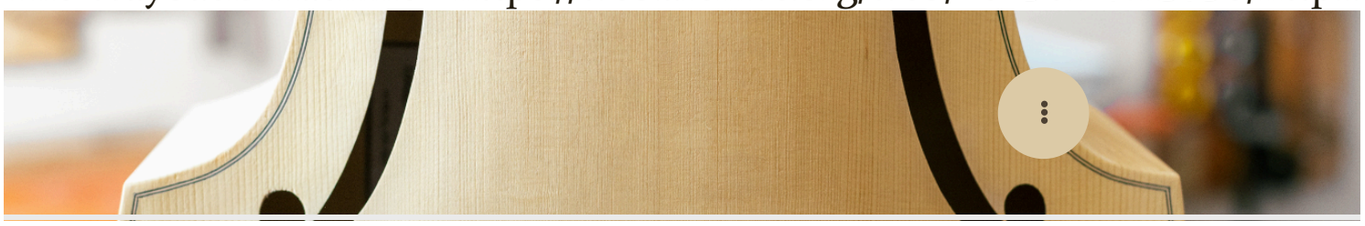

Best Yamaha Saxophones Brand Guide

Saxophone / By Kenaz Filan

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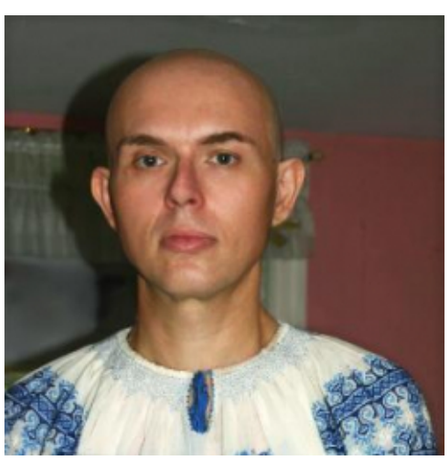

Kenaz Filan

Kenaz is a writer, author, and musician. His first instrument was the clarinet, but he's a lover of all woodwinds. His favorite method of musical expression is singing. His music collection ranges from contemporary to classical and jazz. He loves a little bit of everything, even progressive rock. While a bit out of the box, Kenaz credits Emerson, Lake & Palmer as the catalyst for his interest in classical music.



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Yamaha's instruments are highly regarded by musicians, and Yamaha saxophones are no exception.

For nearly 60 years Yamaha has been making high-quality instruments for students, professionals, and enthusiastic amateur musicians alike. Yamaha saxophones are famous for their reliability, durability, and tone. But which Yamaha saxophone is best for you?

I've consulted musicians, studied specs, and examined Yamaha's saxophone lineup from top to bottom.

Bottom line up front: While Yamaha's YAS-280 E ♭ alto saxophone will be the best choice for most beginning musicians looking for their first sax, Yamaha has an excellent selection of saxophones to meet the needs of sax players at every level.

How I Chose the Best Yamaha Saxophones

Some of the considerations I took into mind include:

Ability

Yamaha sorts its instruments into Student, Intermediate, Professional, and Custom lines. Alto and tenor saxophones are available at all levels. Soprano and Baritone saxophones start at the Intermediate level, as those instruments are generally played by experienced saxophone players.

Type of Saxophone

Yamaha makes soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones. I have broken my listings down by saxophone type for convenience.

If you are just starting out on saxophone, you will probably do best with an alto or tenor saxophone. They are by far the most popular saxophones, and also the easiest to play.

Price

If the price difference between a student and intermediate model is small, I generally recommend going with the higher model.

Saxophones are expensive instruments and even a student model is going to set you back nearly $1,500. When you're making an investment in your musical future, I want to make sure you get the best price-to-value ratio for your money.

Guide to the Best Yamaha Saxophones

Best Yamaha Soprano Saxophones

The soprano saxophone is considered the most difficult saxophone to play, certainly the most difficult saxophone to play well. Most soprano saxophonists got their start on an alto or tenor sax. Yamaha's soprano saxophones are highly regarded, but not cheap.

Best Intermediate Soprano Saxophone: Yamaha YSS-475II B♭ Soprano Saxophone

Because soprano saxophones are complicated instruments and in limited demand, you don't see many student soprano saxophones. Yamaha's YSS-475II offers many of the features of their professional soprano saxophone line, with precision machining and excellent intonation.

At nearly $3,000, the YSS-475II is a big investment. But cheaper soprano saxophones are painful to play and even more painful to listen to. With the YSS-475II, a skilled alto player will be able to master basic soprano sax playing in no time. As a second instrument, the YSS-475II may be the last soprano saxophone you ever need.

Pros

- Single body design gives YSS-475II a particularly bright and cohesive sound.
- Comfortable action
- Precision design and top-notch Yamaha quality control

Cons

- Neck is not interchangeable

Best Professional Soprano Saxophone: Yamaha YSS-875EXHG B♭ Soprano Saxophone

Yamaha's YSS-875EXHG has a one-piece body and comes with a straight and a curved neck so the musician can choose based on their favorite playing position. The special brass alloy used in the YSS-875EXHG makes it lighter weight, and the keys are precisely machined for fast action and leak-free fitting.

The YSS-875EXHG has a great dynamic range that can produce a great tone through the softest passages and blow through even the loudest crescendos without becoming shrill.

And the high G key gives you more alternate fingerings in the highest registers. Classical, pop and jazz players will all find the YSS-875EXHG a beautiful-sounding and beautifully playable professional instrument.

Pros

- High G key gives you extra options in highest register
- Ergonomic design for easy, comfortable action
- Key layout based on Yamaha's classic 1962 saxophones

Cons

- Over $2,500 more expensive than the YSS-475II

Best Yamaha Alto Saxophones

The alto saxophone is pitched in E ♭ , a fifth below the soprano saxophone and a full octave above the baritone saxophone. It is the most popular saxophone, though in jazz the tenor sax is a close second.

An alto sax has the approximate range of a choral alto (though good alto sax players, like good singers, can go higher).

Best Beginner Yamaha Alto Saxophone: Yamaha YAS-280 E ♭ Alto Saxophone

The YAS-280 is one of the world's most popular student alto saxophones and is widely used in band and music programs. It has the front F and high F# keys lacking in many entry-level saxophones, as well as Yamaha's world-class quality control and intonation.

At around $1,400, the YAS-280 is nearly five times as expensive as many of the cheap imported saxophones available online. But the YAS-280 will make students sound their best when those cheap imports leave them throwing up their hands in frustration.

Pros

- One of the world's most popular student instruments
- Comes in gold lacquer or silver plate finish
- Exceptionally durable for young students

Cons

- Only available in the US as a gray market import

Best Intermediate Yamaha Alto Saxophone: Yamaha YAS-480 E♭ Alto Saxophone

Like other saxophones in Yamaha's Intermediate line, the YAS-480 can accept necks from Yamaha's professional and custom lines. Because the

neck plays a major role in the sax's feedback and responsiveness, this upgrade capability is a very nice touch.

The YAS-480 includes many of the features you will find in professional and custom Yamaha saxophones, like a left-hand seesaw key redesigned for extra playability and comfort and a hand-engraved bell.

For a bit over $2,000, you can own an alto sax that will serve you through the conservatory and as a rehearsal and travel instrument throughout your career.

Pros

- Can upgrade neck and mouthpiece
- Hand-engraved bell usually found only on professional models
- Superb Yamaha build and intonation

Cons

- May not hold resale value as well as the YAS-62III

Best Professional Yamaha Alto Saxophone: Yamaha YAS-62III E♭ Alto Saxophone

The Yamaha YAS-62 has attained legendary status for its reliability and marvelous tone. The YAS-62III, Yamaha's third version of this classic, has a slightly narrower "62 neck" that allows for better control and feedback.

The key posts are now integrated into a single plate for a more solid tone, and the hard steel needle springs provide faster, more responsive key action.

The YAS-62III body is fully ribbed to stand up to the rigors of touring but surprisingly light and well-balanced so you don't run out of steam onstage. Gold lacquer and silver plate options are available. Yamaha's clean, accurate house sound lets you tell the audience exactly what you want to say.

Pros

- The latest updated version of one of the world's most popular alto saxophones
- Instrument repair shops around the world are familiar with Yamaha saxophones
- Superb Yamaha build and intonation

Cons

- Over $1,000 more expensive than the YAS-480

Best Yamaha Tenor Saxophones

The tenor saxophone is pitched in B ♭ , a fifth below the alto saxophone and a full octave below the soprano sax. It is a bigger and somewhat heavier instrument, and may not be suited for the very youngest players. But most musicians who can play an alto sax will have no trouble playing a tenor.

Best Beginning/Intermediate Yamaha Tenor Saxophone: Yamaha YTS-480 B ♭ Tenor Saxophone

While it is in Yamaha's Intermediate line, the YTS-480 can be used with necks and mouthpieces from Yamaha's Professional and Custom lines.

The improved low B/C♯ connection gives you clearer and stronger performance when you are playing in the bottom register, and the lightweight design makes the YTS-840 easy to hold and play for long practice sessions and performances.

At around $3,500, the YTS-480 is only about $500 more expensive than the YTS-26, Yamaha's student model. If you are going to invest in a student saxophone, that extra investment will get you an instrument that will last through conservatory and beyond.

Yamaha's YTS-480 has a quick response and a warm sound suitable for jazz and classical music. For musicians who only use their tenor saxophone for a few numbers, or even for many seasoned professionals, the YTS-480 may be more than sufficient to meet their needs.

Pros

- Can swap in necks and mouthpieces from Yamaha's higher line
- Only a few hundred dollars more than the YTS-26, Yamaha's student saxophone.
- Sounds and plays very like Yamaha's professional YTS-62 tenor saxophone

Cons

- The YTS-62, from Yamaha's professional saxophone, costs only $500 more

Best Yamaha Professional Tenor Saxophone: Yamaha YTS-82ZII B ♭ Tenor Saxophone

If you are serious about your tenor sax playing and you want Yamaha's finest tenor saxophone, look no further than the YTS-82ZII. The YTS-82ZII comes with the new, freer blowing V1 neck. For those moments when you need every bit of power, the YTS-82ZII will go loud without going harsh.

The YTS-82ZII's adjustable Front F mechanism lets you dial in the optimal resistance level for when you are playing in the altissimo range.

And you can get your YTS-82ZII in silver plate, gold lacquered, black lacquered, or unlacquered. Whatever finish you choose, you'll have a world-class richly engraved instrument that looks like more than its $5,500 price tag.

Pros

- The absolute cutting edge of Yamaha saxophone technolog

- Comes in multiple finishes to meet your performance needs
- An even bigger sound and more power than the legendary YTS-62

Cons

- Will faithfully reproduce sloppy technique and mistakes for all to hear

Best Yamaha Baritone Saxophones

Like the soprano saxophone, the baritone saxophone is generally played by musicians who first learned on an alto or tenor sax. It can be unwieldy to hold and challenging to keep in tune, but once mastered a baritone saxophone can sound sweet on anything from ballads to bebop.

Best Intermediate Baritone Saxophone: Yamaha YBS-480 E♭ Baritone Saxophone

The Yamaha YBS-480 E♭ baritone saxophone is designed for intermediate players, but includes many of the features found on

Yamaha's professional baritone saxophones. The YBS-480's slightly shorter bell helps with the challenging lowest notes, and the key layout is designed for maximum comfort.

The YBS-480 lacks the top F♯ found on the YBS-62, and its key posts are soldered directly onto the body while the professional and custom models use ribs that provide more strength and tone resonance. But the YBS-480 has at least 90% of the professional model's sound and costs over $3,000 less.

Pros

- $3,000 less expensive than the YBS-62
- Includes many of the features found in Yamaha's professional line
- Excellent intonation and playability

Cons

- Lacks some features found in the professional line

Best Professional Baritone Saxophone: Yamaha YBS-62II E♭ Baritone Saxophone

The YBS-62II was designed by Yamaha specifically for a baritone saxophone player's specialized needs. Its ergonomic key layout makes the YBS-62 comfortable for sax players with smaller hands, and the optional bottom peg can help support your baritone's weight through long hours of practice or performance.

The YBS-62II has a huge, bold tone that will provide a solid base for a saxophone quartet or horn section. Musicians praise the YBS-62II for its easy blowing, fast action, and durability. At over $9,500 the YBS-62II isn't cheap, but it holds its resale value well if you decide on a different instrument.

Pros

- Powerful altissimo range and low end
- Ergonomic design excellent for smaller players
- Used by many professional baritone saxophonists

Cons

- Expensive

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Question: Do You Need Strong Lungs to Play the Saxophone?

Answer: The saxophone is considerably less taxing on a musician's lungs than a tuba or contrabass trombone, but you still need some wind power to sustain high notes or play at loud volumes.
Many musicians with asthma report that regular practice on the saxophone or other woodwind instruments helps lessen their symptoms and improve their breathing.

Question: Can You Do Circular Breathing on a Saxophone?

Answer: Circular breathing involves blowing out with air stored in your cheeks while breathing in through your nose. Using circular breathing, a musician can play a continuous tone longer than a single breath would allow. Among the saxophonists who use circular breathing are Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Sonny Rollins, and Kenny G.

Question: Is Yamaha a Good Brand for Saxophones?

Answer: Yamaha musical instruments are highly regarded at all levels, and their saxophones are no exception. Yamaha's student line is among the best in the world, and its professional saxophones are regularly found on stages and in recording studios.
Yamaha instruments are also known for offering an excellent price/value ratio and top-notch quality control.

Conclusion

So what is the best Yamaha saxophone for you?

For a beginning saxophonist, **the Yamaha YAS-280 Alto Saxophone will be the best entry-level instrument you can buy**. The alto sax is smaller and less expensive than a tenor sax, making it the best choice for absolute beginners unsure how far their practice will take them.

Yamaha's soprano and baritone saxophone lines start at the Intermediate level, with the YSS-475II Soprano Saxophone and YBS-480 Baritone Saxophone. Soprano and baritone saxophones are typically played by people who have already mastered their craft on an alto or tenor saxophone.

If you are a tenor saxophone player, **the Yamaha YTS-82ZII is one of the best professional tenor saxophones on the market.** If you are a beginning tenor saxophone player or a jazz musician on a budget, **the Yamaha YTS-480 has an excellent price to value ratio.**

Whatever your level of skill, you can be sure that your Yamaha instrument will meet your needs and serve you for many years. Happy playing!

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- Guide to the Best Saxophone Reeds
- Best Selmer Saxophones Brand Guide
- Best Saxophone for Beginners Guide: Why You Need the Yamaha Jean Paul USA TS-400
- Mendini Tenor Saxophone Review and Guide

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