



# The Rise of the Phoenix

PHOTOS AND REVIEW BY PAUL HAAR

Growing up as a saxophonist in the 1980s, Eugene Rousseau was the man. From his work with Yamaha developing saxophones to his recordings and clinics, he was the central figure of saxophone pedagogy for many of us. My first classical mouthpieces were Rousseau mouthpieces. Despite changing equipment in college, I would try them when I was at a conference or music store. Over the years, the magic I remembered would fade. I assumed it was just me evolving as a player.

So when I was contacted and asked if I would be interested in reviewing the Rousseau mouthpiece for The Saxophonist Magazine, I was a bit Luke-warm about the idea.

Then, I learned that Jody Espina, President of Jody Jazz, had acquired Rousseau Mouthpieces as part of the Jody Jazz brand; I jumped at the chance.

I make no bones about it; I am a fan of Espina and his work. I have always said you may not find exactly what you are looking for with Jody's mouthpieces, but you will never say they aren't quality mouthpieces made with dedication and craftsmanship.

So I was curious as to what mojo Espina could bring to the classic Rousseau brand. For this test, I was sent four alto mouthpieces (Classic 4R, NC4, JDX6, and Studio Jazz 6) and six baritone mouthpieces (Classic 4R & 5R, NC4 & NC5, JDX6, and JDX7).





## OVERVIEW

From the moment I opened the package, I knew these mouthpieces would be different from the previous models. Rousseau's packaging is finally fitting of the man who has done so much for the saxophone. Sporting Rousseau's classic image and signature, these mouthpieces are now sending a message to the marketplace.

The mouthpieces have not changed their appearance from previous designs so the traditionalists can breathe easy. Each sport that familiar Rousseau signature sets off against the black of the hard rubber.

One look at the table and rails shows a massive improvement in the refinement of the production line. I measured every mouthpiece using gauges and a jeweler's glass. Not one facing was misshapen or uneven, and every table was perfectly flat. The Rousseau mouthpieces are some of the cleanest mouthpieces, concerning construction, and finishing that I have ever seen.

## PERFORMANCE ALTO

### Classic 4R

I started with the Classic 4R alto mouthpiece. This was my first classical mouthpiece, and playing this piece was déjà vu all over again. It is incredible what the mind remembers, and the feeling is just as I remembered it. Players coming from more free-blowing mouthpiece like the Yanagisawa or Selmer Concept will find the Classic to be a bit more resistant.. The tone has that classic warm and woody core that is the hallmark of the original Rousseau mouthpieces. With medium rails and a straight taper, that transitions into a horseshoe chamber, the mouthpiece gives one that classic, French, saxophone tone.



## NC4

I remembered when the NC4 first came out. We all thought it was the Rousseau answer to the Selmer S-80 C\*. It wasn't. I can remember trying this mouthpiece several times and felt it was average at best. Flat, with a hollow core, I wasn't looking forward to trying this new version for the review. Boy, was I wrong. The updated NC4 is a real treat to play. It has a few updates from what I remember. The mouthpiece has a slight rollover baffle for projection, as well as a dip in the chamber after the baffle. This, in combination with slanting sidewalls, helps with focus and stability. The result is a wonderfully free-blowing, colorful, and flexible classical mouthpiece.

The response is quick, as is the articulation. The low end and altissimo response are quite impressive, and the loss of excess noise is most welcome. I used a variety of reeds on this mouthpiece and found most of them to work. I was especially impressed with the pairing of the NC4 with the Legere American cut 3.50. These two make a great combination.

I enjoyed this mouthpiece so much; I am probably going to purchase it. The NC4 of the best surprises to be found in a year that has not been full of good surprises.

## JDX6

The JDX6 was my jazz alto mouthpiece through undergraduate and masters degrees. Once again, I was taken back to yesteryear. The response, sound, and power of this mouthpiece was just like I remembered except for the response. This modern version of the JDX mouthpiece is exceptionally responsive. I have always loved the slanted shank of this mouthpiece as well as the straight, step-baffle. Despite the baffling, flexibility is ever-present. You can open up and spread the sound as well as focus it. Playing the JDX6 made me wonder why I ever stopped.

## Studio Jazz 6

Like the NC4, my past experiences with this mouthpiece left me Luke-warm. Again, Espina has pulled an average piece out of the trash and made it a real treat to play. The best comparison I can make is that it is very Meyeresque. Sporting a traditional rollover baffle and a rounded horseshoe chamber, this mouthpiece can do just about anything you want it to do. From soft and heathery to powerful and projecting, this mouthpiece is excellent for studio work. I enjoyed this mouthpiece on a variety of medium to medium-soft reeds. I also found great luck using the Legere American Cut 3.0 reed. This combination felt the most natural I have ever achieved from a synthetic reed/jazz mouthpiece combination.

Like the NC4 this mouthpiece is a pleasant surprise and makes me wonder why more people don't play on it. My assumption is the same one I had. Why would I look to a legend of the classical world to make a jazz mouthpiece? Well, put that aside for a moment. The Studio Jazz is worth the blow.

### **PERFORMANCE BARITONE**

I found it remarkable that the baritone mouthpiece paralleled the alto mouthpiece to such a similar degree.

### **CLASSIC 4R and 5R**

The 4R and 5R are the standard of the classical Rousseau baritone line; and mirror their cousins of the alto line. Offering nice projection and centered sound, the Classic had more resistance than the NC models. I found the tone to be a bit woodier with more high overtones. This could be the mouthpiece or the fact that I don't commonly play the baritone. In comparison to the NC line, I view the Classic as a good mouthpiece to provide that classic French sound, where the NC line is more modern. A bit brighter than modern pieces, it offered good control and nice response in the extreme registers.

### **NC4 AND NC5**

Like the alto saxophone mouthpieces, I enjoyed the NC line for the baritone. The NC5 offered a beautiful project and core to the baritone. The response was quick, and the pitch was excellent. However, it was the NC4 that made me see the possibilities of the Rousseau baritone mouthpieces. I felt connected to the instrument using the NC4. The response in the low register was comfortable and the color palette was quite vast. I am very impressed with this mouthpiece and would have it be included with a select few baritone mouthpieces that I feel are worthy of professional designation. This is an excellent mouthpiece that is certainly worthy of consideration for the student and/or professional baritone saxophonist.

### **DX 6 & JDX 7**

What is there to say about these jazz baritone mouthpieces? They have the body, power, and perhaps one of the strangest chambers I have ever seen on a mouthpiece (and that includes the DV and DVNY Jody Jazz Pieces). The mouthpiece walls are angled in such a drastic way that it almost forms an "X" before the chamber. I assume this is designed to direct the air for center and power.

If that is the case, they achieved the goal. I can say that this mouthpiece is an excellent jazz mouthpiece, particularly for big band play. It is warm enough to blend with a section yet has enough edge and power to be able to anchor the section and blend with the brass. The response is good, especially in the low register. The resistance is moderate to easy. The only difference between the two test pieces is the tip opening.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Overall I was very impressed with the quality, artistry, and performance of these mouthpieces. They are certainly worth a try if you are a serious saxophonist. They perform wonderfully and at their price point, you can't beat them. Alto mouthpieces range from \$135 for the alto mouthpieces to \$250 for the baritone models. I am thrilled to see these mouthpieces come back to the market (yes, I am aware they never really left). What I mean is these mouthpieces are now at the level befitting of their namesake. Under the Jody Jazz corporation wing, these mouthpieces have greater consistency, quality, and viability in today's market. You owe it to yourself to try them out!