

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Christopher Bassett



Christopher Bassett is the Bass Trombonist of the Jacksonville Symphony and the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra. He has also performed with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, the Boston Pops, the Richmond Symphony Orchestra, and the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. In addition to these professional ensembles, he was a Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center in 2016.

In June 2017, he was the Grand Prize recipient of the bi-annual Zellmer Trombone Competition in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the winner of the International Trombone Association's annual Edward Kleinhammer Orchestral Bass Trombone Competition. In March 2016 he was the winner of the American Trombone Workshop's Bass Trombone Solo Competition in Washington

D.C.

As an active chamber musician, he is a founding member of Boston Based, a trombone quartet formed in Boston in 2016. Boston Based was the winner of the International Trombone Association's Quartet Competition in June 2017.

Mr. Bassett received his Bachelor of Music Degree and pursued his Master of Music degree at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, where he studied with James Markey of the Boston Symphony. There, he also studied with Norman Bolter, Stephen Lange, Toby Oft, and Mike Roylance.

Aside from the trombone, he enjoys nature, politics, coffee, cooking, and owns an ever-growing collection of whacky socks.

How old were you when you began playing your instrument? Did you start playing another instrument before your current one?

I began playing trombone when I was 10 in 6th grade. This was the first instrument I ever learned.

What equipment do you primarily use?

I play on a modified Edwards B-502I bass trombone. It's actually the 10th one ever produced! This is the most versatile bass trombone I have ever played on and is truly my voice.

What are some of the highlights of your career?

Some big highlights of my career so far have been playing Bruckner's 6th Symphony with the Boston Symphony, Tchaikovsky's 4th Symphony with the Cleveland Orchestra, and Nielsen's 4th Symphony with the Jacksonville Symphony!

What are your favorite solos written for another instrument?

I actually love to play Lieder on recitals instead of a lot of standard pieces written for the trombone. That being said, I love Berg *Sieben Frühe Lieder*, Mahler *Songs of a Wayfarer*, and the Bach Cello Suites. Outside of things I can actually play, I love the Berg Violin Concerto, the Brahms 1st Piano Concerto, and, while not really a concerto, the Saint-Saens *Organ Symphony*.

What were your practice habits in high school, college, post-college, pro career?

The further along I get in my career I realize how much less time we have in our daily lives to practice between rehearsals, teaching, spending time with friends and family, and all the other chores we have to do. The older I get the more I realize how important it is to prioritize practicing the things we find most difficult in order to continue to grow as musicians who happen to play the trombone.

That being said, I put in a lot of time early on in order to be able to rely on my fundamentals now. When I started in middle school, I played about 7-8 hours per day between 2 band rehearsals, an hour of practice at lunch, 2 hours after school, then a few hours at home after I finished my homework. When I was in college I practiced at least 2 hours a day and often more. Now, with a professional schedule,

I'm lucky if I can get in 30 minutes most days but I make them count by knowing exactly what I need to work on and what I don't have to practice as much.

With whom did you study?

I actually began learning the trombone in Oceanside, California and was one of Sean Reusch's students! I then studied with Scott Pemrick in South Hadley, Massachusetts before going to the New England Conservatory in Boston, where I studied with James Markey and Norman Bolter. I wouldn't be where I am today without any of these people and couldn't ever thank them enough for their guidance and support.

How old were you when you decided that you were going to be a professional musician?

I think I was about 15 when I figured out that you could make money by playing music. From that moment I knew that was what I wanted to do with my life. I haven't looked back since.

What are some of your favorite etude books?

I am a big advocate for Bordogni/Rochut, and Kopprasch. These are such fantastic books that keep me coming back to improve my fundamentals day-in and day-out. I am also a fan of the Blazeovich/Vernon studies.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Freelancing is a difficult avenue because there is no such thing as "tenure." It's always important to show up well prepared, ahead of time, be kind and courteous to everyone, and be reliable.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

My uncle actually plays the drums! Other than that I come from a family that didn't know much about music until I started learning the trombone.

What is your favorite place that you have performed?

This is a tough one but I've been lucky enough to perform in the Musikverein in Vienna, Austria and would have to rank that as #1.

What advice would you give to someone interested in majoring in music in college?

Be sure you couldn't see yourself doing anything for the rest of your life besides playing music. Being a professional musician might be one of the hardest things to do. The field is consistently improving as teachers get better, produce better students, who then, in turn, teach, producing even *better* students, leaving plenty of over-qualified musicians without jobs. If you are willing to be hard on yourself and never except anything less than 102% of yourself in the practice room then absolutely go for it! It is by far the most rewarding profession and everyday I think "Wow. I'm getting paid to do what I love for a living" and I wouldn't change that for anything.

What are you working on right now?

John Williams' Tuba Concerto. It's really difficult!

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Yes. My biggest advice would be to also focus on things *besides* the excerpts. I find that focusing entirely on a list of excerpts puts our mind in a very stagnant and obsessed state. I always find myself coming back to some early etudes in the Bordogni/Rochut and learning or revisiting a solo piece when I am preparing for an audition or competition. Also, it's a great idea to find etudes and technical exercises (like in Arban's) that share similar principals with excerpts. Then you're practicing the techniques needed in a particular excerpt from a technical perspective which leaves your mind entirely connected to the musical aspect of the excerpt rather than thinking of it as a technical exercise. My main goal is to keep the excerpts musically fresh and exciting.

Who are your favorite composers?

This is somehow always the most difficult question! Brahms, Bruckner, Britten, Respighi, Mahler, Purcell, Beethoven, and Dvorak always seem to make my lists, but that leaves so many others to name.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

Absolutely! It's so enjoyable to see students discover things for the first time and help them reach their goals. I love sharing what I know and love with my students

and see them love it as well. It also makes me happy when they achieve something they put so much work into. Teaching is such a selfless act, but being able to help, inspire, and promote your students' successes is beyond enjoyable.

What are your favorite solos for your instrument?

I always find myself coming back to Bozza's *New Orleans*. I also really like Halsey Stevens *Sonatina*, Norman Bolter's *Sagittarius*², and Sulek's *Vox Gabrieli*.