

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Alex Iles



Alex Iles enjoys a varied and successful career in many musical settings as an active member of the musically diverse Southern California freelance performing and recording community. Alex began his musical career while he was attending UCLA as a member of the Disneyland All American College Band. His trombone studies were with Roy Main, Ralph Sauer, Byron Peebles and Per Brevig.

Since graduating, he has gone on to establish himself as a "first call" trombonist/low brass performer, recording artist and educator.

Among the varied palette of artists with whom Alex has performed and/or recorded are: Joe Cocker, James Horner, Meghan Trainor, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Alan Jackson, Zubin Mehta, Kid Cudi, The Tonight Show, Seal, Sir Neville Mariner, Hans Zimmer, Gustavo Dudamel, Quincy Jones, Johnny Mathis, Lalo Schiffrin, Natalie Cole, Jeffery Kahane, Danny Elfman, Ray Charles, Trevor Rabin, Harry Connick Jr., Robbie Williams, Henry Mancini, Josh Grobin, John Zorn, Terence Blanchard, Barbra Streisand, John Williams, Fallout Boy, Thomas Ades, Neil Young, Johnny Mandel, Paul McCartney, and Prince. Alex has also toured as lead and solo jazz trombonist with the Woody Herman and Maynard Ferguson big bands.

He has performed and recorded as a regular member of many of the top big bands and jazz groups in the Los Angeles area including Bob Florence's Limited Edition, Tom Kubis Big Band, Poncho Sanchez Latin Jazz Band, and he was an original member of Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band.

He has performed on The Motion Picture Academy Oscar Awards, The Emmy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, The People's Choice Awards and hundreds of television series and motion picture soundtracks including "Star Wars: The Force Awakens", "Frozen", "Coco", "La La Land", "Minions", "Ted", "Pirates of the Caribbean", "Up", "The Incredibles", "X-Men", "Secret Life of Pets", "Avatar", "Star Trek" (recent franchise reboots) "Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.", "LOST", "Transformers", "Godzilla", "Toy Story", "Rogue One", and, "Spiderman". Alex has played in the pit orchestras of numerous Los Angeles

productions of Broadway shows including: "The Lion King", "Phantom of the Opera", "Chicago", "West Side Story" trombonists from an international field chosen to participate in a 10 day orchestral/solo seminar hosted by New York Philharmonic Principal trombone virtuoso, Joe Alessi.

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

Nine years old [fourth grade public school music program in Arcadia, CA]

What equipment do you primarily use?

Schilke ST-30 small bore tenor trombone with brushed finish,
Bach 6 3/4C mouthpiece

Greenhoe ST-21-G3 large tenor trombone with lightweight slide, Acoustic
Resonance custom mouthpiece

Greenhoe GC5-3R custom bass trombone [tuning in slide], Giddings and
Webster Harwood model mouthpiece

Wessex EP-100 "Dolce" Euphonium Schilke 52E2 mouthpiece

Kuhnl and Hoyer S-122 alto trombone Bach 7C mouthpiece

Wessex Bass Trumpet Schilke 50 mouthpiece

What are some of the highlights of your career?

Touring with Maynard Ferguson

Recording for film and television soundtracks including Star Wars episodes 7
and 8, The Incredibles and the Pirates of the Caribbean films

Performing Schoenberg's Gurrelieder with Esa Pekka Salonen and the LA
Philharmonic

Performing at the Hollywood Bowl with Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock

Attending the 2001 Alessi Seminar

If you were stranded on a desert island and could only have 10 albums, what would they be?

Miles Davis, Kinda Blue

Al Jarreau, High Crime

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Schubert Lieder
John Coltrane, Ballads
Frank Rosolino, Conversation
Michael Brecker, Pilgrimage
Duke Ellington, Live at Newport '55
Chicago, Chicago VII
Mahler Symphony No. 5, Bernstein and Vienna Phil
JJ Johnson, Say When

[and a TON more!!]

What or who inspired you to play your instrument?

I was paired with trombone because I was a tall kid. It took me about 3 years of playing to really get into it and to begin to enjoy practicing more than playing soccer and basketball!! I got my first private lessons at 13 from a high school kid who was only 17! I still basically follow the practice and lesson outline he gave me back then! He also played recordings of all the great trombonists for me and that alone got me hooked on it!

What are your favorite solos written for another instrument?

Bach Cello Sonatas
Dvorak Cello concerto
Barber Violin Concerto
Charlie Parker jazz tunes [contrafacts]

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

High School...pretty sketchy except for preparing for All State auditions and big concerts. Started actively listening to jazz and imitating what I was hearing. Practiced flexibility, sight reading and recording duets with myself. Unfocused period with no private study or much discipline!!

College....I discovered the value of long tones and practicing fundamentals! Played constantly with on and off-campus ensembles, often to the detriment of my scholastic studies!! Participated in several summer festivals and concentrated stretches of playing and study. Started occasional private study. Began studying jazz and playing it more and more

Post College...weekly lessons with Roy Main. Started teaching privately. Weekly rehearsal bands, chamber music. Road gigs.

Pro Career... more serious practice for bigger performances. Learning solo rep and more orchestral repertoire. Expanding voice as a jazz musician. Returned to classical music in late 80's. Attended the Alessi Seminar in 2001 and subsequently won my current jobs as principal of the Long Beach Symphony and second trombone in the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra

With whom did you study?

My primary private teacher was Roy Main. I also took lessons with numerous great and influential teachers before and after that: Ree Oliva, Ron Borrer, Bill Yeager, Per Brevig, Milt Stevens, Joe Alessi

Who are some of your musical heroes?

Dick Nash, George Roberts, James Pankow, Gary Foster, Tom Kubis, Ralph Sauer, JJ Johnson, Carl Fontana, Frank Rosolino, John Williams, Bill Reichenbach, Andy Martin, Wayne Bergeron, Urbie Green, Jerry Hey, Dan Higgins, Nat King Cole, Fred Wesley, Peter Erskine, Charlie Loper, Vince De Rosa, YoYo Ma, Edgar Meyer, Jaco Pastorius, Herbie Hancock, Carl Stalling, Frank Zappa, Bill Watrous,

Discuss your early musical experiences. Why did you pursue music?

I loved listening to music above just about everything else. I was always looking for recordings, reading reviews in the paper, reading books about music and going to concerts. I loved playing and practicing and just loved the collaborative and social elements of music. I was always so impressed by composers and improvisors. I loved the way music wordlessly made me feel all these different emotions and dreamed of sharing that with other people some day.

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

I never really decided consciously. I realized that I was on the path to focusing on music as a career after a fairly rigorous set of exams and interviews for a career track insurance job. I asked the interviewer how much flexibility there

was on the job [sure fire question in insure failure on a job interview!!] I realized that I would rather risk building on the spattering of freelance work I was starting to do than commit to the security of a nice 9 to 5 desk job!

How much do you practice on a typical day?

Not enough!! ;)

Depending on my schedule. I tend not to measure practice in terms of time, I prefer to focus on addressing tasks. Sometimes, I can get a lot of practice done in 10-15 minutes, while other days that same material can take an hour or two.

My practice schedule is based largely on what I want to be working towards. Freelance musicians need to stay in pretty ready shape all the time. Big calls sometimes come in at the last minute. In an orchestra job, you know your schedule pretty well into the next year, you can see periods of not playing and plan accordingly. Not so for freelancers. A good maintenance routine is pretty essential. I usually do about a one hour maintenance routine every day, then an hour or so of drills focusing on scales and patterns by ear [I usually concentrate on 2-3 keys/day], and a couple aspects from the routine I might need to address [range, flexibility, more long tones, songs by ear],. I also allocate time to my doubles like bass bone, alto trombone and euphonium, depending on what I have coming up on any of those instruments. I also like to read a few etudes every day and have a couple "on going" etudes in my folder for that week. I am usually working on 2 or 3 solo pieces on an on going basis for that year. I will build my recital rep around those pieces. So that is usually another couple of hours. I think I may do the one hour in the morning and everything else depends on my work schedule.

Do you have a website? If so, what is the address?

Building one right now!!! TBA!!

What are some of your favorite etude books?

SO many!! I like the "classics" like Arban, Cornette, Borgogni, Mantia, Bitche "Rhythmic Etudes", Masson "12 Studies", . I also really like the books by Brad Edwards and David Vining. I am also a big fan of several trumpet books. "Flexus" by Laurie Frink, "Trumpet Method volumes 1-7" by Tony Plog, "Trumpet Studies and Duets" by Mel Broiles, "Trumpet Method" by Al Vizzutti.

Also for jazz and contemporary studies, I like scavenging through the saxophone method books out of the books by Raymond Ricker and Al Viola. Charlier "Trumpet Etudes" and "Trombone Etudes" sddds

Who are your main influences in your life (not just music)?

My parents! They always encouraged and lead my sister and me by example to be curious, skeptical, compassionate, patient, tolerant, encouraging, and open to seeing things in new ways.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Once you accept a job you are on the hook to put up with things that were not clear when you were called. Chances are good that you will have to put up with something obnoxious on any given freelance call. There is not much use complaining about it on the gig. If the gig, leader, location, music, other band members, or work environment is not what you expected, that first time is on you! The next time they call, you always have the option to say, "no"!!

Stay in musical shape. A lot of people only practice if they have a gig coming up. Freelancers [especially just starting out] often get the most interesting gigs at the last minute and without any warning at all. Develop and continually refine a daily routine that you can stick to.

Stay in good physical shape. Freelancing can mean long hours, long drives and strange eating schedules. Develop a good physical routine of diet and exercise to give you the opportunity to play your best and not get sick or weak physically be at your best. Keep it simple and sustainable!!

Strive to be consistent in your playing, personal life, attitude, and reliability. Great players tend to work more than not great players, but few great players who ONLY play well will continue to be called back if they are always late, wearing the wrong clothes for a gig, or otherwise bring a lot of drama to the workplace/bandstand.

Constantly monitor, and strive to improve the following: sight reading, intonation, sound, doubles, rhythmic consistency, articulation, repertoire [orchestral and songs for casuals and club dates], business skills [ie, bookkeeping, contracts, investments, networking, social media, etc], arranging and music preparation, teaching and pedagogy, listening skills and

communication skills [verbal and written]

What are your feelings about students majoring in music education versus music performance?

Depends on the individual. The only place degrees really mattered for me has been in academic settings. And even then, I only have a BA and it is NOT in music [economics]. No one has ever cared too much about the education sections of my CV for taking an audition or musical job interview. Your playing, knowledge, experience, character, reputation and personality are the traits which determine which most musical opportunities land in your lap.

Teaching opportunities, especially at the university level on the other hand usually require a graduate level degree these days, especially state schools.

But many teachers [school band directors for example] are having to teach music they have never played themselves. Sometimes an ed major might have skipped over certain kinds of music that a performance major is familiar with. If the performance major can learn to communicate and share that experience, they might be a better teacher than the ed major!

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

Neither parent, but my sister was an outstanding violinist. I was definitely following her example when I decided to play an instrument!!

What is your favorite place that you have performed?

Several places. Kursaal Congress Centre in San Sebastián, Spain with the L.A. Chamber Orchestra. Hollywood Bowl with LA Phil, Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Playboy Jazz Festival and the Quincy Jones Orchestra. Disney Concert Hall, with the LA Phil. Before he passed away, I played a couple of times at my dad's retirement home!! Great audiences!!

If you were on a desert island, what are your top 3 etude books for your instrument, Solos for your instrument, as well as etudes/solos/albums not of your instrument?

Trombone Etudes
Masson, Charlier, Bitche

Trombone Solos
Casterede Sonatine, Sulek Sonata, Tomasi Concerto

Non Trombone etudes
Brahms "12 Etudes for Trumpet"
Klose "Complete Method for Clarinet"
Reynolds, "48 Etudes for Horn"

Non trombone solos
Bach Sonatas for Viol de Gamba
Bach Cello Suites
Brahms Clarinet Sonata #1

Favorite non trombone albums
Jaco Pastorius, "Jaco Pastorius"
Edgar Meyer, "Uncommon Ritual"
Pat Metheny "First Circle"

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

Commit to music but stay interested in everything to learn at college. Come out of school a better thinker, learner, writer, speaker and human who is also a more open and more fully realized musician with things to offer the world.

What are you listening to currently?

I am always playing catch up with orchestral repertoire. I am currently listening to and comparing various recordings of the 4 Brahms symphonies. I'm continually learning that there is no "one way" to play the music of this giant composer.

I am also listening to a lot of Chris Potter's music. I will never improvise the way he does, but there are elements of his style that tickle me and I love his harmonic language and his fluency in every setting he plays, from the most progressive jazz settings to Steely Dan!

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

I like authentic music that is created and performed with great musicianship and imagination. Music can lift us above our everyday or remind of us of the realities

of the everyday.

What non-music courses in college helped you with being a musician?

My econ degree courses challenged me in areas I had minimal natural aptitude and allowed me to explore these parts of myself. I am glad I learned about the subject because it taught me about discernment, political manipulation of data and how art operates free from the laws of supply and demand.

I took a speech course that made me a better teacher and more comfortable in front of an audience and helped me to form arguments.

I took a one year long business writing and editing course that helped me become more comfortable writing about music and other subjects.

What are you working on right now?

Sal Lozano and I recorded a collection of original tunes that we will hopefully be releasing this year. The group and the project is called "All In". It is an eclectic collection of jazz and acoustic fusion. Many of the tunes started as very sparse and incomplete and basically came together in the studio in a group synthesis. We are pretty excited about how it came together in such an organic way.

I am working on my own solo project where I collaborate with several of my closest music compadres including Tom Kubis. There will duos, some big band music and hopefully a few surprises!!

Please list some of your favorite websites for musicians.

<https://peakperformancetrainingschool.com/>

Duh! ;) Don Green's work in the field of performance is now legendary and his website provides tools to musicians, public speakers, athletes and just about anyone who must deal with the pressures of "performance". All the tools and resources which have proven so useful to so many people are here to check out.

<https://rickbeato.com/>

Rick Beato is a beast of a musician, producer, teacher, pianist, composer, etc etc. His website and youtube channel have become my new private music school!!

hickeys.com

Hickeys is my favorite sheet music store on the net, especially for brass and wind players. Great selection, great service, very knowledgeable staff.

<https://qpress.ca/>

Trumpet player teacher Tim Quinlan has created a fantastic collection of vintage and new method books, solos and other materials for brass [especially trumpet, horn and trombone] and publishes incredible digital versions for download. In many cases he is publishing books that had fallen out of print, many of them staples to many teachers for years. I visit them all the time and freely admit that I have downloaded a book a day from his site the first week I started visiting his site!!

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Listen and learn the important orchestral repertoire before you see the title on an audition list. Have a connection and love for the music before it becomes the means to a job, scholarship or acceptance to music school.

Plan your audition to make sure you spend an adequate amount of time absorbing and playing each required excerpt in the amount of time preceding the audition. For my own personal best auditions, I created a daily practice schedule about 2 months prior to the audition and stuck to it pretty religiously. I built in things like playing only half the list on any given day and I made sure to arrange that I had practiced playing each excerpt back to back.

Play each excerpt at half tempo [even the slower ones!] every day to fine tune intonation, simplify and dial in embouchure connections and to remind yourself of your best sound that you replicate at tempo.

Find audiences to play for. If you are at school pull friends and teachers into practice rooms and have them listen to 2-3 excerpts. One of my most productive practice days was about a month prior to the day I auditioned for the Long Beach Symphony, when a cable guy was over repairing our wires. If I cracked a note or stopped playing to make a correction, I heard him yell from the other room, "FOCUS!! You have to focus!!". Totally cracked me up and that experience became a guiding image for when I found myself getting frustrated before the audition.

Plan a couple recital performances or challenging chamber music concerts a few weeks prior to the audition. Preparing for a public performance will help your musical and performance chops and take some pressure off your audition prep and prepare you to play music [as opposed to a bunch of well studied notes] in the audition.

If you couldn't have a career in music, what would you do instead?

I would probably gone through a few careers by now if I had not become a musician. I was all set to start a career in insurance. That would not have lasted too long I think. I love to write so I might have found my way into journalism or public relations or some kind of communication job. I figure that this too would have been short-lived and I probably would have gotten a degree in English and education and taught English, preferably to a class at the level I got really interested in writing and reading; middle school.

Who are your favorite composers?

Gustav Mahler
Duke Ellington
Johannes Brahms
Lennon and McCartney
Jerome Kern

How could we make music education better?

More parent support of school music. The best programs I have seen, the parents commit time, resources and money to their kids' school music program. Very often, this money is used to bring in professional players and other musicians to work with the kids, which can bring a huge return on the investment.

Band directors need to form collectives, formal and not, where they support each other. Too many band directors are in competition with each other and are too proud to accept or offer help to another school.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

Love it. If I can share 1% with students that my fantastic teachers shared with me over the years, it will have been worth it!! Seeing a kid start to hear his/her

"voice" is an indescribable experience.

What are your favorite solos for your instrument?

Casterede's "Sonatine" is my favorite piece for trombone and piano.

Pugh's "Concerto" is probably my favorite American trombone concerto

What are some of your favorite books that are helpful for musicians?

"Zen and Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" by Robert Pirsig

"Finite and Infinite Games" by James Carse

"The Power of Myth" by Joseph Campbell

"Elements of Style" by Strunk and White [keep your writing clear and precise!!]

All of Don Green's books on performance

"Sound in Motion" by David McGill