

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Dr. Zenas Kim-Banther



Described by Gramophone Magazine as "eloquent," **Dr. Zenas Kim-Banther** is an international soloist, orchestral trombonist, chamber musician, and educator. As a soloist she has been invited on several international stages, including performances with the Athens City Symphony Orchestra in Greece, Croatian Military Wind Orchestra in Zagreb, Altena Brass of the Netherlands, Brass of Peace, and most recently with the University of Maryland Wind Orchestra on their performance of Berlioz' Grand Funeral and Triumphal Symphony. She has given numerous solo recitals, including several appearances at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage in Washington D.C. Zenas was also a finalist of the International Trombone Association's Gagliardi, Smith, and Alto Competitions. With a passion for expanding the solo repertoire for trombone, she has commissioned

cutting-edge solo and chamber pieces from composers Osnat Netzer, Norman Bolter, and Ji-sun Yang.

As an avid chamber musician, Zenas was a core member of the Rodney Marsalis Philadelphia Big Brass, touring across the United States, and world wide. She has performed at various chamber music festivals, including the Storioni Festival in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, performing with principals from the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and members of the Storioni Trio.

Equally at home as an orchestral player, she was appointed Principal Trombone of Daegu Symphony Orchestra in South Korea, as well as appearing with various orchestras such as the Rotterdam Philharmonic. She has performed under the baton of conducting legends such as James Levine, Kurt Masur, Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos, Herbert Blomstedt, Yannick Nezet Seguin, and Ludovic Morlot. She was also a fellow at Tanglewood Music Center, Banff Centre's Orchestra Residency Program and National Symphony Orchestra's Youth Fellowship Program.

With a passion for music education, Zenas is involved in education across the board, for all ages. Zenas was on faculty at the Kye Myung University School of Music as adjunct professor of trombone. She has also held masterclasses at international brass festivals, including in Zagreb and Sao Paulo, and at universities across the United States, including George Mason University, Millersville University, and University of Louisville. Equally at home in the band room, she was Director of Bands at Trinity Christian School, credited to revolutionizing the band program during her two-year engagement. She also maintains a private trombone studio in the Washington D.C. area and is on faculty at MasterWorks Festival in Spartanburg, South Carolina. She is currently on faculty at Gettysburg College,

She received a Bachelor of Music from New England Conservatory, studying with Norman Bolter with a double degree in music history. She earned her Master of Music degree from Rotterdam Conservatoire, studying with Jörgen van Rijen of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Pierre Volders and Remko de Jager of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. She obtained a Doctorate of Musical Arts at the University of Maryland, studying with Craig Mulcahy.

[www.zenaskim-banther.com](http://www.zenaskim-banther.com)

<https://www.gettysburg.edu/academic-programs/sunderman-conservatory/>

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

I was 12 years old when I started the trombone. I played the piano since I was six, but always hated practicing and tried to get out of lessons! But once I first started the trombone, I loved practicing and had to beg my parents for lessons.

***What equipment do you primarily use?***

My tenor is the Edwards Alessi. I use a Griego Alessi 5E mouthpiece. My alto is a Courtois with a trill valve built by an instrument craftsman in the Netherlands.

## ***What are some of your favorite highlights of your career?***

Some of my favorite highlights of my career include meeting and connecting with audience members while on tour. One of the brass chamber groups I toured with made it a big point to meet and greet the audience during intermission and after each show. No matter where in the country or the world we were in, it was always heartwarming to see how we can connect through music no matter our differences. In a way, music was the gateway for all of us to come together and share beautiful moments and connect personally. Even if I felt like I was having a bad day, it was always humbling to hear how our music brought joy to someone's evening, how a certain piece meant so much to them, etc.

## ***How have your practice habits changed over the years?***

My practice habits are ever evolving! Admittedly, for far too long, I was not smart about my practice tactics. I'm always striving to be more methodical and analytical in my practicing rather than running things over and over, treating each practice session as if I'm in a lesson with someone who I respect and look up to.

## ***As a young player, what did you struggle most with your playing?***

I struggled the most with playing faster passages. It wasn't until my masters and studying with Jorgen van Rijen that I really figured out how to coordinate my slide and tongue. We always have more time than we think!

## ***Do you like to sing when you practice? Why or why not?***

I sing quite a bit for various reasons! First, it's great for pitch. I always tell my students if you can't sing it, you can't play it. Second, singing (as correctly as possible) sets up our playing in the most natural way. I find that it's a great way to get rid of tension, engage our air support system, and let air do its thing.

## ***What qualities do you think are important for being successful in life?***

I'm still on the journey of finding what "success" in life looks like, but so far, I would say be clear in what makes you content, and follow that. Society can trick you into believing having or achieving certain things is success, but none of that matters if you're not content. So far, I've found that I stuck with what keeps my heart at peace, and my career path followed. Life is short, be kind to others, and do what makes you happy.

***What do you want your legacy to be?***

If I made this world a slightly better place from my actions, my music, or teaching, that is legacy enough for me!

***What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?***

My spare time is consumed with my furry friends! I love being at the barn, spending time with my rescued Thoroughbred named Bolero. I also love tending to my 7 chickens, and my two chihuahua mutts. I also love reading.

***How do you stay motivated when you get frustrated or down? Do you have any tips to help stay motivated?***

If I'm being honest, it is quite difficult to stay motivated when I'm frustrated or down, but looking for the smallest of improvements keeps me going. Over time, the tiniest of improvements add up to a breakthrough.

***With whom did you study?***

In high school, I studied with Jim Kraft, now retired 2<sup>nd</sup> trombone of the National Symphony Orchestra. In my bachelor's I studied with Norman Bolter at NEC. I was fortunate enough to then go abroad to study in the Netherlands with Jorgen van Rijen, Pierre Volders, and Remko de Jager for my masters. Then I studied with Craig Mulcahy, current principal of the NSO during my doctorate.

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

I remember distinctly telling my middle school band director that I'm going to be a musician when I grow up. The feeling of making music with others was the most amazing thing for me, a thrill I couldn't find anywhere else. I knew then that this is something I have to have in my life.

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

[www.zenaskim-banther.com](http://www.zenaskim-banther.com)

### ***What are some of your favorite etude books?***

I love the Blazhevich clef studies book, Kopprasch, Slama 66 Studies for Bassoon, and lately, Megumi Kanda's Trombone Unlimited is my go to for myself and my students.

### ***Do you use any apps when you practice?***

Tonal Energy!

### ***What is your favorite place that you have traveled to?***

My favorite place is the Netherlands. From the warm people, amazing musicians, beautiful scenery, to amazing culture, I miss living there every day.

### ***How do you suggest balancing life with being a musician?***

Balancing life with being a musician is so so important! My first advice is, your identity as a musician does not define you. It is part of who you are, but you are so much more than that. Discover other things that make you happy and give joy. Make time to connect with family and friends. When you get frustrated, or something about music consumes you, force yourself to take a step back, do something else, and gain a healthier perspective.

### ***Please give some tips for freelancing.***

Networking is key! Be kind to everyone you meet. Always be professional, even when the situation makes it difficult. Go with the flow.

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

Go for it!! This is just my opinion, but if you are at all interested in music education, that I would go in that direction. You gain so much more knowledge going through coursework for music education. You will have to work harder to make time to keep up with your practice, but music education might give you more tools in your belt for a flexible career. I kind of fell into teaching, but I wish I had more structured education about teaching. All my performance degrees were amazing to go through, but it really just came down to practicing and my lessons. If you can find time to keep up with that plus the coursework for music education, you will be very well equipped once you graduate to be both a performer and teacher.

***Is anyone else in your family a musician?***

My cousin is a Curtis grad, and a violinist in the Minnesota Orchestra.

***Do you practice visualizing yourself performing?***

When I'm building up to auditions or performances that make me nervous, I visualize myself in the audition room, performance space, etc.

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

Do your due diligence, listen to all the music, go to all the performances, practice as much as you can, but also explore areas of music that really speak to you. In today's musical climate, I think pursuing your unique interests in music helps you creatively. Being an entrepreneurial musician is key, and knowing what niche in the music world you'd like to create can help you build a career path. But before you know, you have to explore what's out there.

***Do you ever get anxious for a performance? What advice would you give for dealing with nerves?***

I've dealt with anxiety in performance for a long time! My best advice is take every opportunity to play in front of others, take auditions, do mock auditions, play for people who make you nervous, etc. The more you do it, the more you become comfortable with that uncomfortable feeling, if that makes sense. Also, prepare well and practice well. When nerves hit, there's not much you can do in my experience – EXCEPT knowing that you put in the work and trusting in your preparation. Then you can tell all those doubting thoughts that they're lying to you, and that you are ready to play to the best of your abilities. Also, don't expect anything above your personal best. This is something that took me a while to figure out. Come audition day, I suddenly expect myself to play like all the other amazing players I hear in the warm up room. Accept and praise your own abilities. Comparing yourself to others, or expecting you to suddenly play better than your best will set off even more anxieties.

***To become a great musician, what are things that you think a young musician should focus on when they practice?***

A young musician should focus on HOW they practice. We all run into difficulties when we are first learning an instrument, and things aren't going to be perfect. But

establishing HOW we tackle a new concept or difficulty will get you faster results, and set you up for success for years to come.

***What life lessons have you learned through music?***

Perseverance, letting go, acceptance, delayed gratification

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

Just as tough as the music business, but I would do something with horses!

***Do you like to teach? Why or why not?***

I love teaching!! First of all, it's amazing to witness someone discovering their talents, working hard, and seeing the returns of their hard work. Secondly, I love connecting with my students. I love seeing how they develop as a musician and a person, and I love how music helps to bring out who they are. It's very fulfilling knowing you're having some impact on someone's life.

***Do you have any tips on forming a chamber group?***

Play with people you like making music with and get along well with! Communication is number 1, both musically and administratively in chamber music, so a happy vibe is a must!

***Do you memorize your music? Do you have any advice for young players on how to memorize?***

I don't memorize music on purpose, but when I'm working something up, it just kind of happens. I think it has to do with the fact that when I started piano when I was little, my teacher was big on ear training. So my advice would be, SING your parts, and try to memorize even just a measure each practice session. It all adds up!