

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Brian O'Donnell



Brian O'Donnell, a native of San Diego California, completed his Master of Music Degree with Dr. Denson Paul Pollard at SUNY Purchase where he held a Graduate Teaching position. He earned his undergraduate degree in music as a full scholarship student with Jeannie Little at Louisiana State University.

Mr. O'Donnell began his studies with Vince Hernandez and Sean Reusch. He made his Carnegie Hall début in 2004 as soloist with the Carlsbad High School Wind Symphony and has since performed in major venues throughout the world including Kennedy Center, Copley Symphony Hall, Smetana Hall in Prague, Mozarteum in Salzburg, the Hermitage Theater in St. Petersburg, Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Blue Note Jazz Club, and Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Mr. O'Donnell is a multi-faceted musician, at home in both jazz and classical genres. He has performed with the Purchase Jazz Orchestra, New York Chamber Brass, Camerata Virtuosi of New Jersey, and the Westwind Brass Quintet. In 2012, Brian was featured as a soloist with The Purchase Symphonic Wind Ensemble and received an honorable mention as a finalist in the Southeast Trombone Symposium's International solo competition. Recent seasons have seen Brian performing with Joe Garrison and Night People, the Gaslamp Quarter Jazz Orchestra, Renga SD, Pacific Lyric Opera, the San Diego Opera, the San Diego Symphony, the Sarasota Opera, the 2017 International Trombone Festival, the Old Globe Theatre, the Civic Theatre, Johnny Mathis, The Western Standard

Time Ska Orchestra, Evanescence, Lindsey Stirling, and The Who. You can hear Brian on Joe Garrison and Night People's latest albums, "The People Upstairs", and "The Broken Jar".

Mr. O'Donnell is the newly appointed music teacher at La Mirada Academy in San Marcos California and spends his summers teaching trombone at the Idyllwild Arts Academy. Prior to becoming a band director, he was on faculty at Point Loma Nazarene University and Palomar College. He regularly hosts masterclasses for his students and coordinates and hosts the annual San Diego Trombone Day at Point Loma Nazarene University. When not making music, he enjoys spending time with his family and friends, cooking, brewing beer, and being outdoors.

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

I began playing trombone in the sixth grade, and hadn't studied an instrument before that.

What equipment do you primarily use?

I play a Shires independent bass trombone, and really try to play on the smaller side of the mouthpiece continuum because I love getting that clear and classic sound.

What are some of the highlights of your career?

I've enjoyed performing with Orchestras, Operas, Musicals, and a lot of different rock and commercial groups. My favorite musical outlet over the past ten years has been working and performing/recording chamber music written by Joe Garrison.

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

This is tough, and I am sure if you were to ask me a month from now I would tell you something different!

"Bruckner Motets" with Matthew Best and the Corydon Singers, "1+1" by Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, "Know What I Mean?" Cannonball

Adderley, "Wave" by Jobim, "Malibu" by Anderson .Paak, "John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman", "Chicago Transit Authority", "Chet Baker Sings", "First Impressions of the Earth" by the Strokes, and "Songs In the Key of Life" by Stevie Wonder.

What or who inspired you to play your instrument?

My first band director, Vince Hernandez!

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

I've always enjoyed practicing! In regards to daily practice time, I feel like this increased steadily through high school and through into grad school. Looking back, I feel I was kidding myself in grad school thinking that putting in large amounts of hours a day would guarantee success. Too much time can lead to bad habits and tension for me as well as a poor work/life balance. I wish I would've devoted more of that time to studying jazz and listening to more music.

These days I have many short sessions throughout the day. I look at my practice agenda in more of a weekly scope now, where I make sure I attend to everything I need throughout the week. I still have basic things that I try to address daily, but gear the rest of my practice to what I have in the coming weeks.

With whom did you study?

My main teachers have been Vince Hernandez, Sean Reusch, Dr. Jeannie Little, Dr. Denson Paul Pollard, and Kamau Kenyatta.

Who are some of your musical heroes?

I've always admired Frank Zappa for taking musical risks, and doing whatever he had to do to perform his music at a high level. I think this is why I also consider Joe Garrison to be a hero of mine. He assembles great players and fearlessly

writes for us on a seemingly never ending basis. Sometimes it doesn't work out, and sometimes magic happens. I love being a part of that.

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

My early musical experiences are mostly centered around the school band, and local youth orchestra. I was very fortunate to receive private lessons at an early age. Vince was one of the first people to plant the seed of this idea that you could be a professional musician, and since then it has always been what I wanted to do.

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

I believe in middle school, but I don't think I really knew what that entailed at the time.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

I am lucky to get two hours of my own time in a day! This is chopped up into many small sessions.

What are some of your favorite etude books?

I love my Bordogni books, Cimera Studies, Tyrell Etudes, Remington Studies, Brad Edwards EVERYTHING!, and lately the Schroeder Foundation Studies for Cello.

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

My parents and brothers are huge influences on me. You have also shaped my life in a monumental way by being a constant source of inspiration, positivity, and encouragement.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Be dependable! Keep an organized and up to date calendar, and show up on time with a positive attitude. Practice sight reading, and remember that you are there to make the whole team sound better and help your colleagues feel comfortable and sound their best.

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

I recently completed a teaching credential after earning my Masters Degree in music performance. I never knew I loved teaching so much and just how fulfilling it is for me. If you find out that teaching sparks life into your students and yourself, I think you should go do it! You can still perform at a high level if you are committed to it.

I am not keen on people using Music Ed as a “backup”. I have seen many people teach over the years only because they need money. It is crystal clear to the kids when you do not want to be there, and it is obvious to everyone else as well. It would be a shame to push someone away from music because you do not want to give the energy, time, and patience often needed to teach well.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

No.

What is your favorite place that you have performed?

Every time I have performed in Mexico I love it. The audience always has so much energy and love for the people on stage that it makes performing a lot of fun!

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

Work incredibly hard and be proactive. Take responsibility for your own education and don't wait for teachers to "push" you. Be honest with yourself and practice with Integrity. A negatively-dominated approach to your growth is never the way to go and if you find yourself with a teacher like this, I highly suggest looking elsewhere.

What are you listening to currently?

"Whatever it takes" by the James Hunter Six.

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

No.

What are you working on right now?

Improvising and transcribing. I've also been working on shedding extra tension and playing with a more efficient embouchure.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Play mock auditions often, and record yourself. Keep in mind that we are always preparing for our next audition.

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

I would be a professional brewer. I love trying to brew classic and historical styles of beer!

How could we make music education better?

Teaching needs to be all about our students, and not about ourselves. It is entirely possible to hold high standards for yourself and your students and to be

positive with them at the same time. I really think we need to find more ways for parents to see music education as more than an activity to put on their child's resume for college. High school is more than a stepping-stone to college, and students deserve to grow as people through music or other forms of art.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I LOVE to teach! I really love being a part of showing students the never-ending wealth of fun, discovery, challenge, and reward that music offers. It is rewarding to watch my students grow into great people and to know that I had a positive effect on them.

What are your favorite solos for your instrument?

"Etoiles des Profeunders" by Jerome Naulais, "New Orleans" by Eugene Bozza, and the Sonata by Gillingham.

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

"Mastery" by George Leonard.