

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Dr. Bruce Faske



Bruce Faske is Artist/Assistant Professor of Trombone at Arkansas State University, where he teaches applied trombone lessons, directs the A-State Trombone Choir, and performs with the A-State Faculty Brass Quintet. He currently serves as Second Trombonist of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, Principal Trombonist of the Delta Symphony Orchestra, and first trombone of the Diamond Brass Band. Prior to A State, he served as Adjunct Instructor of Trombone and Euphonium at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and held positions with the Starkville Symphony Orchestra and Missouri Symphony Orchestra Hot Summer Nights Music Festival. Faske has performed with the Owensboro Symphony, Texarkana Symphony, Dallas Opera, San Antonio Symphony, Tuscaloosa Symphony, Waco Symphony, the Lone Star Wind Orchestra, and fellowships with the Festival Institute at Round Top, TX and the National Music Festival in Chestertown, MD. In 2011 and 2013, he was a Participant in the Alessi Seminar, a week long, international workshop led by Joseph Alessi, Principal Trombonist of the New York Philharmonic. He has presented clinics for the Arkansas Bandmasters Association Convention, Arkansas Music Educators Association at the Arkansas State Music Convention, Arkansas Small Band Association All-Star Clinic, Big 12 Trombone Conference, and public school band programs in Texas, Alabama, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.

Faske has given recitals and masterclasses at West Texas A&M University, Louisiana Tech University, Baylor University, Ouachita Baptist University, and Colorado State University, as well as solo performances with the Arkansas State University Wind Ensemble, the Diamond Brass Band, the Southeastern Symphonic Winds at the 2014 Southeastern Oklahoma Band Directors Association Clinic, the University of Alabama Wind Ensemble at the 2013 Alabama All State Festival, the Huxford Symphony Orchestra at the University of Alabama, the University of West Georgia Brass Ensemble, the Texas State University Concert Band, the Baylor Symphony Orchestra, and numerous public school bands. Bruce Faske earned degrees from the University of Alabama (DMA), Baylor University (MM), and Texas A&M University-Commerce (BSM). His teachers include Jonathan Whitaker, Brent Phillips, Jimmy Clark, John McCroskey, Joseph Cox, Don Lucas, and Larry Campbell.

Bruce Faske is a Trombone Artist for the Edwards Instrument Company, performing on the T-396A model trombone with the Griego Artist Model 55 mouthpiece.

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

I started playing trombone at 11 years old. Originally, I wanted to play trumpet, but the band director needed euphoniums, and we compromised on trombone. I was AWFUL when I started!

What equipment do you primarily use?

95% of my playing is on my Edwards T-396A Alessi trombone with a Griego 55 mouthpiece. Whether I am teaching, playing solos, or in chamber music or orchestra, this trombone works well for what I do, and I've been playing it long enough that I know how it will respond in pretty much any situation.

What are some of your favorite albums?

I could talk about this for days, but if I HAVE to narrow it down, here's the best I can do. I'm pretty sure this is the hardest question to answer in this set!

Empire Brass *Class Brass I and II*

Star Wars original trilogy soundtracks with LSO

San Francisco Symphony/Blomstedt: Hindemith *Mathis der Maler/Symphonic Metamorphosis*

New York Philharmonic/Temirkanov: *Scheherazade/Russian Easter Overture*

Philadelphia Orchestra/Chailly: *Shostakovich Dance Album*

Maynard Ferguson: *Chameleon, Live at Jimmy's*

Bill Watrous: *Manhattan Wildlife Refuge*

Jimmy Knepper: *Cunningbird*

Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention: Freak Out!
Maceo Parker: Life on Planet Groove

Who inspired you to play your instrument?

My two earliest and strongest inspirations were Don Lucas and Joseph Alessi. I was fortunate enough to study with Don during high school, and he gifted me a cassette of Alessi's Slide Area album that I played on repeat until it wore out. Both of these gentlemen are passionate performers with a strong musical message and big hearts for other people.

What are some of your favorite solos written for another instrument?

I love the Bach Cello Suites, Schumann Dichterliebe, Vaughan Williams Songs of Travel and the Mahler Des Knaben Wunderhorn. A vocal approach to the trombone unlocked a number of things for me, and I've retained a heavy rotation of voice in my listening diet. I'm also a big fan of both Strauss Horn Concertos, and the Christopher Rouse Flute Concerto.

How have your practice habits changed from when you were a beginner until now?

When I was younger, it was a game of beat the clock and beat the calendar. On good weeks, I would watch the clock for the exact amount of time I was told to practice on the day before the lesson, and on bad weeks, I was interested in anything but practice. These days, I am task oriented, and must play something every day to maintain, and I must have specific goals if I want to continue to improve.

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

My scales and sight-reading were awful! I think this was a symptom of not slowing down and working to truly understand how scales and rhythms are constructed.

With whom did you study?

I have had the great fortune of working with WONDERFUL teachers! Jonathan Whitaker, Brent Phillips, Jimmy Clark (Dallas Opera/Dallas Winds Principal Trombone), John McCroskey (Houston Symphony, retired), Joseph Cox, Don

Lucas, and Larry Campbell. I've also worked with Joseph Alessi at the 2011 and 2013 Alessi Seminars, and with John Kitzman at the Festival Institute at Round Top.

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

I was fortunate to grow up in Texas, where music education was (and still is) very strong. I didn't decide to pursue music officially until the spring semester of my senior year of high school, because I respected the craft so much, and was terrified that I wasn't good enough to give it a go. Ultimately, my wonderful mentors shepherded me through the awkwardness of my teenage years, and gave me a sense of purpose and value that gave me the courage I needed to take the plunge.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

As a college teacher, finding a long enough stretch of time to practice can be a real challenge while other's aren't sleeping! My playing actually dipped a bit when I started teaching, because I had been used to the graduate school schedule, where I had large blocks of time to practice as much as I wanted. I like to get 4-5 sessions of 20 minutes each, and each session is a mix of fundamentals and repertoire. The older I get, the less I'm able to multitask, so I try to get a good amount of my practice done at home where distractions are at a minimum.

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

My website is www.faskemusic.com, and my trombone studio website is www.astatetrombones.com.

What are some of your favorite etude books?

I love Schlossberg, Arban, and Bordogni. They are still in print because they still sell, and they still sell because they still work. My undergraduate students get a steady diet of Bordogni, Tyrell, Bleger, and Cimeria Phrasing Studies. Each student is a unique case, so we round out their curriculum with clef studies from Brad Edwards and Blazhevich. There are so many great books!!!

Do you use any apps when you practice?

I use Adobe Audition for recording and Tonal Energy for metronome and tuner work, and since purchasing an iPad Pro in January, I've been using ForScore with a Flic button for most of my music reading.

What are some ways to improve one's rhythm?

A pencil! Write in the beats. You be better equipped to place the note once you can conduct and sing the line. Eliminate the guess work as much as possible. A short pencil is better than a long memory.

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

From my personal life, I have to thank my father for teaching me the importance of a job well done, and the value of giving my word to others that something will get done. Also Winston Churchill, the Dalai Lama, and John Wooden top the list. There are others, but these four are responsible for a lot!!!

How do you suggest balancing life with music?

I recently read something online that really resonated with me – "Don't forget to drink water and get sunlight. You're basically a house plant with more complicated emotions." I love to spend time at the lake where it's quiet and I can reconnect with nature and realign my priorities. I owe it to my colleagues in the orchestra and at the university to do whatever is required to be at my best when I return to work. Find the thing that recharges your batteries. Accept yourself as an introvert or extrovert. There is no right or wrong when it comes this. Some need time alone with a good book, and others need to be around people constantly. When you find out who you are and what makes you tick, be doggedly determined to embrace who you are and make the most out of your life. It's the only chance we get!

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Always show up early with a pencil and a smile. Don't talk about politics or religion. Keep a "freelancer's kit" in the car – set of mutes, white dress shirt, black suit, long tie and bow tie. If you're ready to say yes to the gig, and you have all you need to be there in half an hour, you are way ahead of the other players who might be less prepared. Keep accurate financial books or hire an

accountant. Don't think of a non music job as giving up, think of it as a way to subsidize your music career. Get to know the contractors in your area, be easy to contact, be prompt and polite in your correspondence, and most of all, be grateful that you can make even a part of your living performing! One more thing that is super important to remember: the "hang" is really important. You don't have to be a social butterfly, but if people get a bad vibe from you, they can probably find another player who plays as well as you without the attitude problem. In fact, many contractors will take a marginally weaker player with a good attitude over a monster player with a monster attitude.

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

Everyone's path is unique, and to assume that my path is what is best for others isn't fair to anyone involved. I have had music education majors who are wonderful players, and I have had performance majors who are great teachers. Work hard and look for opportunities to grow. All I ask is that my students work up to their unique potential! As their teacher, my job is to show them all the things they are capable of, and how to navigate the process. The rest is on their shoulders.

What are some of your favorite places that you have performed?

When I was a doctoral student, I joined the University of Alabama bands on a trip to Italy. Our wind ensemble played three concerts on this trip, the first of which was in a small town named Rieti. I loved everything about the town and the venue, which was a beautiful, old opera hall. A very enthusiastic audience made it a perfect concert. The restaurant with great food and red table wine might have made it great, too.

Do you have any tips for memorizing a piece of music?

Start early. Record yourself, and listen often. Try to notate the music on blank staff paper. If there is an accompaniment part, know it as well as you know the solo part. In fact, I think that the only way to really know it is to know the piano part as well as your solo part. If you are asking your pianist "what do you have in measure 45?" then you haven't done your homework. You don't necessarily need to know a chord-by-chord analysis of the whole piece, but ESPECIALLY in transitions and complex passages, knowing that there IS a chord on beat 2 in measure 45 will help everyone feel more comfortable.

Do you have any suggestions for working on one's range?

I was a natural high register player, and for many years, it was a struggle to teach. I believe that holding myself to the highest standard for smooth lip slurs establishes a strong embouchure and connects the registers. Always start in a register where you can do it well and then move out to your frontiers. For years, I would dive into low register practice by playing in the lowest register on the instrument. Wrong! I was reinforcing bad habits! Be patient and celebrate each half step!!!!

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

Find a teacher you click with and start developing trust in their instruction. Talk to the students at the school you're interested in to learn their perspective on the teacher. Visit campus more than once, if possible, and observe as much as you can. Remember that if you are experiencing resistance to the idea at home, your family's concern comes from a place of love. They are probably terrified that you will be living on their couch or in their basement at 35! As it is with every situation, communication is the key to understanding!!!

What are you working on right now?

In addition to my upcoming faculty recital that has been postponed due to the COVID-19 virus precautions, I have been preparing Samantha Hogan's *Mill Creek Concerto* for the Music By Women Festival at the Mississippi University for Women.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Bind the excerpts into one volume, along with the excerpt list and anything other information you've received about the audition. If your budget permits, make a second book so when you have people listen to your mock auditions, they can sit out in the hall and write comments in the margins. This is particularly helpful when the listener isn't a trombonist, and you should ALWAYS have someone who plays an instrument from a different family listen to you before an audition. There will be more people on the committee who DON'T play trombone, so that perspective is invaluable. Invest in a quality audio or video recorder and record yourself often. Be as tough on yourself as you would be

listening to someone else. Study scores and know the contexts in which the excerpts exist.

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

Welcome the nerves! Nerves are your friend. They are here to remind you that you care about this deeply and you want to have a quality performance. If you're a reader, check out *Effortless Mastery* by Kenny Werner. I have bought and given away this book at least a half dozen times. In time, you will develop a routine on performance days that sets you up for the best possible results.

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

I think younger players need to practice how to practice! Great players aren't made in a few intense practice sessions. Cultivate patience and stay curious. I think that too often, fundamentals are glossed over to get to "the good stuff" but in my experience, and the longer I play, the fundamentals ARE "the good stuff!"

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

I would likely be a therapist or a photographer.

Who are your favorite composers?

Gustav Mahler, Arvo Pärt, Paul Hindemith, Erich Korngold, Richard Strauss, Leonard Bernstein, and Frank Zappa. Zappa is one of the most original voices in the history of music, and was saying much more than what appears on the surface.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I love teaching! Connecting with students and sharing what I have learned is the greatest gift I can give back to the art form that has given me so much. If I can be a fraction of the teacher and example that my teachers have been for me, I will have done well.

What are your favorite solos for your instrument?

My favorites are a blend of old and new. The war horses, like the Hindemith *Sonata* and the Creston *Fantasy* are still on this list, but also newer works by Anthony Barfield, Jim Stephenson, Frank Gulino, and others. In light of ongoing discussions on gender inequality in the music world, I've re-examined my music library and programming choices, which has led to some really great pieces like the Anne Giffels *Sonata*, Susan Mutter's *Ages*, and Barbara York's *A Caged Bird*. There are many more to mention, but these are a few that have my serious attention at the moment.

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

I've already mentioned Kenny Werner's great book, *Effortless Mastery*, but it changed my life and allowed a measure of freedom I previously didn't know. Brene Brown's *Daring Greatly* talks at length about vulnerability. Daniel Coyle's two books, *The Talent Code* and *The Little Book of Talent* also give wonderful insight. I re-read these regularly!!!

Do you have any tips on forming a chamber group?

You must find people who are like-minded. If a player is a great hang and has the same goals as your group, it is a better fit long term than a dynamite player who disagrees in every way with the rest of the group. Don't settle for traditional chamber groups, either. Try something unique!