

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Colin Williams



*Colin Williams* serves as the Associate Principal Trombonist of the New York Philharmonic, an appointment he's held since 2014. Prior to this appointment, he served as the Principal Trombonist with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for twelve seasons and with the San Antonio Symphony for three seasons. Mr. Williams's warm personality, technical prowess, and musical sensitivity have made him a welcome addition in performances by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Pops, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Houston Symphony, the New York City Ballet, and the Ft. Worth Symphony Orchestra.

Mr. Williams is not only a passionate performer and versatile educator – he's also an advocate for musician's wellness. During his tenure with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, he experienced a severe injury to his lip muscle, diagnosed as a tear in the orbicularis oris. This injury took him out of his performing career an entire season and resulted in years of lingering pain. This journey through injury, recovery, and mental health shapes his unique approach to teaching and playing the trombone. In 2018, Mr. Williams released his debut solo album *Ash*, embracing the crisis of injury and identity alongside his determination to return to the stage, to provide for his loved ones, and to transcend the barriers of language through music.

Mr. Williams can be heard on the album *Roadwork* by the Atlanta Trombone Project, which was comprised of himself and then-members of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra – Bill Thomas and George Curran – and was produced by Dr. Bradley Palmer of Columbus State University. This project would serve as the impetus for the first Southeast Trombone Symposium in 2010, which has since become an internationally acclaimed workshop and festival for hundreds trombonists of all ages. Artists of the STS would later release their ensemble album *Legacy* in 2016. Mr. Williams made his professional solo debut performing Arthur Pryor's *Blue Bells of Scotland* in 2001. Since then, he has appeared as a soloist with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Pershing's Own United States Army Band, the United States Military Academy Band, the Georgia Brass Band, the Atlanta Wind Ensemble, the Juilliard Orchestra, and the James Madison University Brass Band. He has also made solo appearances at the American Trombone Workshop and at the International Trombone Festival.

An avid chamber performer, Mr. Williams has participated in the Amelia Island Chamber Festival, the Grand Teton Music Festival, and in the Saito Kinen Festival Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa in Matsumoto, Japan. He has also appeared with the Chicago Chamber Musicians. Mr. Williams's teachers include Mr. Douglas Wright of the Minnesota Orchestra. Mr. David Finlavson of the New York Philharmonic. and Mr. Joseph Alessi. Principal

Trombonist of the New York Philharmonic. He currently resides in River Edge, New Jersey with his wife Nikki Abissi – trombonist, educator, and founder of Extendabone – along with their sons Christopher and Alex.

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

I started in the fifth grade in my elementary school band program. My parents kept the notice that came home from the school telling them that I had been selected to play the trombone! I had tried the violin in third grade, but it never appealed to me.

*What equipment do you primarily use?*

My main horn is my artist model shires. I also play a shires bass trombone setup in the orchestra. I'm currently in the middle of an alto trombone search. I bought a sterling silver Glassl before the pandemic but it's not the right sound for everything. I also play a Miraphone Euphonium and an Alexander Bass Trumpet.

*Who inspired you to play your instrument?*

The first CD my parents got me was The Romantic Trombone by Christian Lindberg. I was amazed at what was possible on the trombone when I heard that! Also one of my first teachers, Matt Tap, gave me a mix tape that had Ralph Sauer playing some Telemann Fantasies. Later on, it was the New York Philharmonic's recording of Mahler 2 with Leonard Bernstein where I discovered the sound of the trombone section that I fell in love with. I must have listened to that low brass chorale in the 5<sup>th</sup> movement a thousand times.

*With whom did you study?*

I was lucky enough to study with Doug Wright in high school. I studied with both David Finlayson and Joe Alessi when I was in college.

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

I liked the trombone, but I never really thought of music as something I would do for a living. It wasn't until I sang the lead role of Franklin Shepard from Sondheim's "Merrily We Roll Along" that I started to notice my affinity for music. Something about singing all of those tunes, how much I liked the melodies, and how much I enjoyed listening to the orchestra. It made me think of music more

seriously and eventually led me to audition for the Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra. There I fell in love with the orchestra.

*Do you remember when you decided that you were going to be a professional musician?*

I was 16. At the time I was thinking about law or medicine, but I also had this vivid image of myself being 50 years old and unhappy in my career and wondering if I should have tried to pursue music. I didn't want to find myself in that position, so I decided to see where the trombone would take me. I always had a deal with myself that I would have to be able to make a living from it by the time I was 25 or I would go back and do something else. 25 seemed old to a 16 year old. But I did manage to stay true to that goal!

*How much do you practice on a typical day?*

These days, between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. With the kids and other responsibilities I'm shocked at how busy I am even with concerts and rehearsals out of the picture. I have to be really efficient with my practice time to make sure I get enough of the right kind of playing in.

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

Yes I do! <https://www.colinwilliamstrombone.com>

*What are some of your favorite etude books?*

Marstellar Basic Routines, Bordogni, Bitsch, Blazevich, Boutry, Bozza, Naulais, Arban

*Do you use any apps when you practice?*

Tonal Energy is a go to app. Also Netflix from time to time!

*If you could go back in time and give yourself any advice, what would it be?*

I would tell my younger self to cultivate an identity away from the instrument. Young players can come to identify their entire self worth in what is coming out of the instrument at any given time. For me, it got to the point that if I had a bad

performance I believed I was a bad person. That kind of perfectionism and self abuse really took the joy away from playing for many years. It wasn't until I suffered a playing injury that forced me to take almost a year away from the horn that I had to face the fact that I didn't have a healthy relationship with music and with my instrument. I have tried to live a better and more well rounded life since then.

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

I think Japan. I did a music festival out there for several years and completely fell in love with the food and the culture.

***How do you suggest balancing life with music?***

I think our musicianship suffers if we don't take the time to discover life. I know that sounds like a trite little platitude, but its true nonetheless. I think that you need to carve out time for your life and identity outside of your practice so that you have something to bring to your music making.

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

The Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, Carnegie Hall, and Suntory Hall in Tokyo if we are talking about grand spaces. But for pure joy of performing it was probably an old high school gym outside of Santiago, Chile, where my youth orchestra played Dvorak 9 and really connected with a lot of young people who had never heard Dvorak. The enthusiasm was so real and the excitement was so palpable. I relish those kinds of moments.

***What are your favorite etude books and solos written for your instrument, as well as etudes/solos/albums not originally written for your instrument?***

My go to books: Marstellar Basic Routines, Arbans, Blazevich, Bitsch, Bozza, Boutry.

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

Don't take on too much debt. I think a little bit is ok, I'm not someone who thinks you have to have literally no student debt. But you should do your best to avoid burdening yourself with large loans as you go into this field. It's a very

rewarding, but often very erratic way to make a living. Learn secondary skills like recording technology, video capture, social media marketing, etc. Those skills will help you to both present yourself better for auditions and market yourself in the modern age of how people reach an audience. And earn entrepreneurship skills. Starting a private teaching studio is an act of entrepreneurship, as is marketing a small ensemble. It will serve you well to learn to market your skills and have the tools to do it at a high level!

*What are you working on right now?*

Jerom Naulais' 20 Transcendental Etudes, Anthony Barfield's Red Sky, and getting my bass trumpet chops back together!

*What is your favorite food?*

Anything spicy (I love Sichuan Hot Pot when I go to China!) and anything I can smoke on my smoker, but I especially love a good Brisket.