

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Donna Parkes



Australian trombonist Donna Parkes has been Principal Trombone of the Louisville Orchestra since 2008 and has been Principal Trombone of the Colorado Music Festival since 2009. Prior to this year she played the 2012-13 season with the Utah Symphony and the 2007-8 season with the San Francisco Symphony. Miss Parkes was a member of the Virginia Symphony from 2001-2007 and was a member of the New World Symphony

under Michael Tilson Thomas. She has performed with many orchestras including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, London Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Oregon Symphony, National Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, Singapore Symphony, Sydney Symphony and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. Miss Parkes has performed at the Arizona Musicfest since 2009, the Malboro Festival and the Grand Tetons Festival and in 2016 toured with the Australian World Orchestra. Solo competition successes include winning the Australian National Trombone Competition, the Brisbane International Brass Competition and finalist in the Jeju Brass Competition in Korea. She has appeared as a soloist or clinician at the International Women's Brass Conference, International Trombone Festival and the Melbourne International Festival of Brass. She was one of five musicians in the US awarded the 2019 Ford Musician Award for Excellence in Community Service. Miss Parkes received her Masters Degree studying under Charles Vernon at DePaul University and other primary teachers include Michael Mulcahy and Ron Prussing. Donna is a Shires Performing Artist.

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

I started playing trombone when I was nine years old. I was lucky enough to have an incredible music education program in my school in Australia and feel in love with making music right away.

What equipment do you primarily use?

My primary instrument is a Shires bell with a Bach slide and my alto is a Glassl. I find that horn suits my needs which are primarily orchestral and chamber music and it gives me the flexibility to use a range of colors depending on the context.

Who inspired you to play your instrument?

My band teacher in the fourth grade was an amazing educator – Earl Winterstein. He was also a trombone player and had an infectious energy for music and the instrument. He instilled a great mix of being dedicated to sounding as good as you can and having as much fun as you can. He was a huge inspiration for the beginning of my musical adventures !

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

The educators that started me had a structured practice routine that was required of all students and that was half an hour every day. I really appreciate that I had a regular routine from the beginning and that part of my practice has stayed the same. The amount I practice has increased and there have been times during my career where I've practiced 4- 6 hours a day. As a working professional you don't always have the luxury of time so I aim for using my practice time as efficiently and productively as possible. Focused and intentional practice is the key for me!

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

I do like to use singing although I don't love my singing voice! It's a really useful tool in the practice room for working on pitch and also refining my musical concept and establishing longer phrases.

With whom did you study?

I was very lucky to have great teachers when I started playing in band from the fourth grade. I then started private lessons when I was 12 and was attending the music conservatory in my city. I studied with Michael Mulcahy in high school and Ron Prussing (Principal of Sydney Symphony) in my Undergraduate studies. My move to America was made when I received a scholarship to attend DePaul University to study with Charlie Vernon of the Chicago Symphony.

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

For me music was pure fun! I loved playing in bands and wind ensembles and it was exciting and social and allowed me to fall in love with making music with others. My early orchestra experiences gave me exposure to very high level music making. I realized how passionate I was about trombone and it always felt like a natural and necessary part of my life. I didn't have a light bulb moment of "knowing" rather it developed for me and evolved with more great opportunities.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

Practice really depends on what my performance schedule demands. Having an orchestra job means there is constant preparation for upcoming repertoire.

Practicing as a professional means you have to be mindful of the concerts you need to play and if you want fresh chops! I always make time to play fundamentals and if I have no performing commitments I can put in more time in the practice room. It can vary from one hour if it's a big show to play or 3 hours if I have the time.

What are some of your favorite etude books?

All of the classics are great Rochut and Arbans but I also love playing from Concone.

Do you use any apps when you practice?

My favorite app is Total Energy Tuner- it has everything I need in one place.

How do you suggest balancing life with music?

It is so important for me to have a good balance of other parts of my life. I prioritize time with my family and friends – quality time with those people is essential to me feeling happy! I love being active and have been a long distance runner for many years. The healthier I am the better I function both inside and outside of music. I firmly believe well rounded people make more interesting musicians.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

These sound straightforward but are so important. Be early to every rehearsal and gig. Take every gig seriously and bring your absolute best in preparation and performance – you never know who is in your ensemble or audience! The biggest part is your attitude – be respectful and humble. Be kind to everyone and do your best to develop good relationships with all the musicians you cross paths with. The music world is very small and how you play is as important as how you interact and if people enjoy working with you.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

My older sister Kelly plays trumpet. We went to the same Conservatory and Kelly has degrees in performance and education and is now on faculty at Columbia University. She also has one of the most beautiful sound qualities I've heard – so it was a great inspiration and motivation growing up.

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

Two all time favorites are Carnegie Hall when played with San Francisco Symphony and the Royal Albert Hall. I just remember sitting on stage and feeling so incredibly lucky, not only to be in those places but playing with an orchestra that sounded phenomenal.

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

Be open to learning from different sources and in different ways. You can learn from everyone whether its your fellow students or your professors so keep an open mind. Work as hard as you can in a healthy way- college is a great opportunity to focus and challenge yourself to achieve more than you thought possible.

Please list some of your favorite websites for musicians.

I am huge fan on Don Green and Noa Kageyama – the Bulletproof Musician is a wonderful resource and addresses topics all musicians can benefit from.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Recognize that auditions are an opportunity. Know that you are on a path of learning and taking auditions is a great tool to learn your strengths and where you need work. How you perceive the act of auditioning plays a huge role in how you feel on the day. Being over prepared and approach the mental and physical equally. Mock auditions were immensely helpful for me – play for as many people as will listen and simulate the experience so many times it no longer feels unnatural.

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

Yes! I have yet to meet a musician who has never felt nervous. It helps me to keep perspective – one performance does not define you. You are not your instrument- you are more than your musical output on one day. Give yourself the mantra to do your best and that your goal is to express yourself musically. Focusing on the music and giving to your audience helps to shift the stress away from self analysis.

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

Fundamentals and having fun! We all need to work on our basics every day and that is the most beneficial practice you can do. Enjoy the act of practicing and be sure to take joy in the small improvements. Building a healthy and productive way to practice is key and finding a good mix of challenging yourself and establishing routine.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I love to teach. I find it both challenging and inspiring and it has made me so happy to see my students develop and grow.

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

I have found Don Greene's books very helpful and books that focus on mental resilience. We need to work on this part of our preparation just as much as we practice our instruments.

If you could go back in time, how would you practice differently when you were in high school?

I would learn to multiple tongue! I have a oddly fast single tongue so was never taught or learnt to double or multiple tongue. I basically played catch up much later when it became a real necessity.

Do you have any tips on forming a chamber group?

Find players who you enjoy both their playing and their personalities . Don't be afraid to ask great musicians to play with you you never know what exciting music you could be making. Establish good communication from the beginning with any new group and make sure all musicians voices are heard and valued.

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

I have occasionally memorize music but it's a skill I need to work on. I would suggest young players start doing this today! The more you work on it the

easier it becomes and if you do it from the beginning of your musical training you will be very happy you did.