

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Dr. Eric Starr



"**Eric Starr** maintains a multi-faceted musical career as a faculty member at SDSU, Trombonist for Westwind Brass, and as an active performer. At SDSU, Dr. Starr serves as Studio Artist Teacher, Program Advisor for the Music, Entrepreneurship and Business degree, Director the Brass Chamber Music program, co-director of the Experimental Music Ensemble, Lecturer, Brass Coordinator, and Internship Coordinator, He was named "Most Influential Faculty" in 2023 and 2018. Off campus, he is a board member for the Hausmann Quartet Foundation and San Diego New Music and is a Community Engagement Partner with Art of Elan. He has developed unique projects including pairing music and surfing in "Sounds and Swells", and music with wine in "Tasting Notes".

Dubbed a "Trombone Champion" with "Stunning Style" (San Diego Union-Tribune), Eric has performed as a soloist at major venues including Copley Symphony Hall, the Spreckels Organ Pavilion, the San

Diego Museum of Art, and with the SDSU Wind Symphony, Symphony Orchestra and UCSD Wind Ensemble. As an ensemble player, he has performed with the Pacific Symphony, San Diego Symphony, San Diego Opera, La Jolla Music Society, SD Winds, and Broadway shows including Frozen and Mary Poppins.

A passionate advocate for contemporary music, Eric has premiered dozens of solo and chamber works for the trombone where he enjoys working with living composers and crafting seemingly strange notation and sounds into works of musical art. Composer collaborations have included Anahita Abbasi, John Adams, John Luther Adams, Christopher Adler, Caleb Burhans, Margaret Brouwer, Brent Dutton, David Lang, Lei Liang, Fernanda Aoki Navarro, and Chou Wen-Chung as well as many local up-and-coming composers such as Gabriel De Guzman, Maddi Baird, and Marilynn Do. Notably, Eric was the first known person to perform the music of John Cage at Copley Symphony Hall in 2017 with the Solo for Sliding Trombone.

Eric earned a B.M. from the University of Southern California (Terry Cravens), an M.M.(Richard Stout) and A.D. (Steven Witser) from the Cleveland Institute of Music and a D.M.A. (Michael Powell) from Stony Brook University with additional studies at the Aspen Music Festival and Tanglewood Music Center. He lives in Ocean Beach with his wife where he watches the waves daily, is an avid cyclist and has continued interests in fine wines, cooking, and summer time body surfing."

***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 15 but played baritone horn and euphonium from age 10. Guitar was my first instrument and my grandmother took me to weekly lessons from age 5 to 8.

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

Conn 88HCL with a Rose brass bell and nickel silver slide - a great combination. For Euphonium, I play a Besson Prestige 2502.

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

Twice having students named "Outstanding Undergraduate in Music" and being selected as their "Most Influential Faculty".

***What are some of your favorite and most influential albums that you have heard?***

Shostakovich Symphony No 7 with the Chicago Symphony and Leonard Bernstein and a recording of Bruckner Symphony No 8 with an orchestra I don't remember were my gateways to classical music.

***Who inspired you to play your instrument?***

No one in particular who played but my grandparents and specifically my grandmother was a constantly supportive presence in my early years.

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

Brahms Piano Concerto in D minor, Vivaldi Cello Sonatas played by Anner Bylisma or anything my wife is playing on the oboe.

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

My practicing is much more efficient and focused, in large part because I don't have as much time as when I was a college student.

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

My practice was very inefficient and included many hours but not always with appropriate focus. As a euphonium retread, my slide technique took many years before feeling natural. I also struggled to be consistent with air flow, delivery and support moving into the upper register. In general, I struggled to objectively analyze my playing in the moment when things weren't going well and would immediately become emotional, which often made the outcome worse.

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

Yes, especially after teaching many years of aural skills. I like to sing tricky passages and intervals and apply solfege syllables as I find that helps to keep the relationships secure.

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

Tenacity, Patience, Kindness, Work Ethic

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

Kindness and helpfulness

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

I am OCD obsessed with road cycling and ride 200 miles per week. Cooking and baking from scratch and traveling with my wife also bring great joy. I'm always scheming about our future adventures.

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

Focusing on long term goals helps to keep me consistently practicing.

***Do you meditate? If so, what benefits do you get from meditating?***

Not in the traditional sense but most of my bike rides are solo and I do not wear headphones. I am totally immersed in the repetitive motion and all that is around me. Sometimes my brain thinks over specific things but much of the time it just wanders.

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

Terry Cravens, Richard Stout, Steven Witser, Michael Powell

***What qualities do you think are important in a student?***

Work ethic, reliability, communication, a desire to learn and improve

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

In fifth grade public school music, I took home a baritone horn at the beginning of the school year and practiced for 30 minutes like Mr. Halfwassen said. It was fun so I practiced for another 30 and I was hooked. Playing music has been my favorite thing to do since then.

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

During a freshman research project in high school on a possible career. This was when I learned that Music Performance was a college major and immediately thought that was the route for me.

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

90 - 120 minutes with one light day per week and one day off per month.

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

Bordogni, Blazhevich, Kopprasch, Slama, Tyrell (Bass), Bitsch, Boutry, Pichaureau.

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

Korg™ 50 Metronome/Tuner and Cello Drones from Youtube to save the battery on my Korg, which can also play a drone.

***What are some ways to improve one's rhythm?***

Play literally everything with a metronome, including fundamentals like long tones and lip slurs. When playing a piece, have the metronome click the downbeats to be sure the counting is accurate. Isolate rhythm only in a tricky section before adding in the horn or the notes.

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

Practice with a metronome and take my parents' advice.

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

Tahoma, CA on the west shore of Lake Tahoe, Hanalei on the north shore of Kauai, Paris, Barcelona.

***Who are some of your musical heroes?***

Sean Reusch, Sarah Skuster, Kate Hatmaker, all of my teachers, Steven Schick, Donna Conaty

***Who are your main influences in your life?***

My family.

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

Routines work for me. Knowing I'll have a glass of wine at the end of the night, or take a trip at the end of the semester makes for a nice balance.

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

Be prepared, be early, bring a pencil and a straight mute, ears open, mouth shut, count, count, count.

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

To choose any music degree is a serious life commitment and should be considered as such. Most ways of making money are easier than any musical career whether it be as a performer, teacher, administrator, audio engineer, composer, etc. Make sure music is the passion of your life and something you literally can not live without.

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

No, but my brother is a winemaker and that is super cool. His job is all about patience and long term development which has some similarities to a musical career.

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

Play simple things and allow for very gradual progress. No forcing.

***What are you most proud of in your life?***

Hopefully being regarded as a kind person.

***Where do you see yourself in 10 years?***

The same place I am now - on the couch with my wife, cats, and a glass of wine after a fruitful day.

***What are your favorite things to do that make you happy?***

Play trombone and euphonium, ride bikes, cook, spend time with my wife and cats, hang out with friends.

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

Often. Sometimes it is related to an upcoming event and other times just daydreaming.

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

Make the most informed decision possible. Visit the campus, meet the teacher and students, sit in with an ensemble or two and possibly a class like music theory or conducting.

***What are you listening to currently?***

Silversun Pickups.

***Do you have a favorite genre of music?***

Good music of all types.

***What non-music courses in college helped you with being a musician?***

Not college courses but I spent significant time waiting tables and working on the family farm. Those two businesses can be tough and I learned many career skills there.

***What projects are you working on right now?***

SDSU Fall Semester. Another Sounds and Swells (surfing videos with live classical music) is happening April 15 and I am stoked for that!.

***Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?***

Have and execute a plan for both the preparation of the excerpts and the preparation for an audition. If the result is not as desired, tweak the plan and work to improve.

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

Yes. Be prepared, focus on breathing, hear the sounds you want to produce in your mind. This is all very helpful in stressful situations.



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

Tone, Intonation, Rhythm, Articulation

***What advice can you give about mental wellness?***

Maintaining balance and perspective is critical. As a person, have more than one interest. Take time to relax and enjoy being with great friends and family.

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

Perseverance and perspective. Had it not taken longer than I wanted to establish a career in music, I might not appreciate it as much as I do. To have a musical career is the greatest thing in the world and too many musicians don't feel that way later in their careers. Previous jobs I've done include telemarketing, bussing tables, driving a tractor and shoveling manure. Music is the best.

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

A sommelier and likely doing some work with my brother.

***Who are your favorite composers?***

Schubert, Brahms, Alison Knowles, Ken Friedman, Unsuk Chin

***How could we make music education better?***

Require one year of fundamental instruction on instruments before students are put into school ensembles. This was how I learned and it was great.

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

Absolutely. The students are amazing.

***What are your favorite solos for your instrument?***

Grøndahl, Berio, Hindemith, Heavy Matter by Timothy McCormack, Elizabeth Raum Fantasy. Gordon Jacob Fantasia for Euphonium.



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

The Talent Code, Centering in Seven Days

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

A library and librarian are necessary for functionality.

**What advice can you share about physical wellness?**

Physical wellness is important for career longevity and longevity in general. This is part of having a good life balance and I believe everyone can find something they enjoy to help maintain physical wellness. Also, cook your own food from scratch or as whole ingredients as possible.

**What is your favorite food?**

PIZZA