

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Isabelle Lavoie



Isabelle Lavoie is an active freelance bass trombonist and educator based in Thunder Bay, Canada. She has performed with many Canadian orchestras over the years, including those of the *Canadian Opera Company*, *National Ballet of Canada*, *Toronto Symphony*, *Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony* and *Hamilton Philharmonic* to name a few. Isabelle was also invited to play with the *Macao Orchestra* in Asia on several occasions. Ms. Lavoie was appointed Principal Trombone with the *Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra* for the 2016-2017 season and held a contract lecturer position at *Lakehead University* teaching trombone. She was also featured as a guest soloist and clinician at the *International Trombone Festival* in Redlands, CA.

member of the *Monarch Brass*, Isabelle has performed at the *International Women's Brass Conference* in Kalamazoo, MI, in Cincinnati, OH and in Glassboro, NJ, at the *International Trumpet Guild Conference* in Columbus, OH, the *International Trombone Festival* in New York City, NY and at the *Midwest Clinic* in Chicago, IL.

Isabelle is currently enrolled in *The Global Leaders Program*, an initiative of the *Youth Orchestra of the Americas*. This nine-month professional development course for musicians will grant her a certificate in Civic Leadership, Teaching Artistry, Cultural Agency and Social Entrepreneurship. Through the program, she had the opportunity to participate in two residencies in South America, teaching the low brass students at the *Campamento Musical Marqués de Mancera* in Chile, and at the *Conservatorio Plurinacional de Música* in La Paz, Bolivia.

Ms. Lavoie has attended the *Tanglewood Music Center* as a guest artist and the *Aldeburgh Festival* (England), as a member of the *Britten-Pears Orchestra*. She also participated in several Canadian

summer orchestral programs such as the *National Academy Orchestra of Canada* and the *Banff Festival Orchestra*.

After receiving a Bachelor of Music from the *University of Montreal*, where she studied with Albert Devito, Isabelle completed an Artist Diploma at *The Glenn Gould School* of the *Royal Conservatory of Music* in Toronto, under the tutelage of Jeffrey Hall and Gordon Wolfe.

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

My musical journey started on the piano at 7 or 8 years old. I must say that I was not a very patient child. I wanted to play Bach and Liszt right away, and couldn't care less about technique and structure. Although I stopped going to my lessons after only a few months, I kept learning the piano by ear. I was fortunate to attend an elementary school that had a band program at the time. Trumpet was assigned to me in grade 4, but I was already drawn to the sound of the trombone. In grade 7, I picked up tenor trombone, which I played all through high school. I only switched to bass in grade 12. I also studied classical guitar for about 2 years while I was in high school.

What are some of the highlights of your career?

My first year out of music school was a very successful one: I was given my first contract with the *Canadian Opera Company*, I was invited to perform with the *Macao Orchestra* and to tour Portugal and Xinjiang (Northwest China), I played with the *Monarch Brass* for the very first time at the *International Women's Brass Conference* in Kalamazoo, MI, and I was also invited to join the *Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra* for two weeks.

Every performance with the *Monarch Brass* is special, but our appearance at *ITF 2016* in NYC was especially exciting. I am also grateful that I got to perform as a guest artist and as a member of the *Cramer Choir* at *ITF 2017* in Redlands, CA.

In the last few years, I have found a new passion in teaching. I am currently enrolled in the *The Global Leaders Program*, a nine-month professional development course designed to equip musicians with the tools necessary to start their own music initiative. Through the program, I participated in two residencies in South America, teaching low brass students at a music camp in Niebla, Chile, and at the *Conservatorio Plurinacional de Música* in La Paz, Bolivia. Both experiences have been incredibly inspiring.

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

Between the ages of 12 and 16, I practiced almost every day for 30 to 45 minutes if I could. I worked mostly with *Arban's* method, practiced scales, rhythm and repertoire for youth orchestra, and I would occasionally compose and record 4 parts chorals with myself. I only started private lessons at age 17. In college, I practiced enough, but struggled with reinforcing good habits. I went through a very difficult embouchure change and a couple of injuries that held me back for a long time. It was when I graduated from music school that I truly started building strength. Not only did I make more time to practice slowly, I also started setting specific goals: no more mindless practicing. Now, I practice smartly and more efficiently. I have a much better understanding of my body and I take breaks often (to rest, stretch, drink water, go for a walk, etc). If I can, I take one day off trombone weekly to let my muscles recover. I learned the consequences of overworking my body and 'chops' the harsh way in the past.

With whom did you study?

My teachers were Jeffrey Hall, Principal Bass Trombonist with the *Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO)* and Albert Devito, previous Principal Trombonist with the *Grands Ballets Canadiens Orchestra* in Montreal. At *The Glenn Gould School* at the *Royal Conservatory of Music* in Toronto, I also learned a great deal from Gordon Wolfe, Principal Trombonist with the *TSO*.

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

I was 14 years old when I decided that I wanted to be a professional trombone player. Ensemble-training in youth orchestra is what really brought out my passion for classical music. There was nothing else that I could see myself doing and there was no question that playing the trombone for a living was the path for me.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

I practice one to three hours a day depending how busy it is. I usually aim for several short sessions spread out throughout the day.

What are some of your favorite etude books?

David Vining's *Flow Studies*, Brad Edward's *Lip Slur Melodies* and the of course, the Bordogni *Legato Studies*.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Although freelancing usually starts with someone giving you a shot, you can't just wait around for that to happen. Be proactive: go play for other musicians, take auditions and create your own projects. When you become active on your local music scene, people start taking an interest in you and in what you are up to. Show up to events and to concerts: be supportive of the community. Most importantly, be the best student and colleague you can be, be ready and say 'yes' to every opportunity that will help you grow.

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

I believe that people should only major in one or the other because they are passionate by it. To be a successful performer, you have to believe that you will 'make it'. You need to want it more than anything. If you don't have that fire in you, you should consider studying in a different field. However, no performer should become a music teacher by default or just because they don't think they can make it as a performer. Young players deserve to study with dedicated and generous individuals, who are truly committed to being the best teachers they can be.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

Although my parents are music lovers, I am the only professional musician in my family. My dad had a huge collection of CDs and vinyl records when I was a kid. Every day, I would spend hours listening to music of all eras, including a couple of classical music albums.

What is your favorite piece that you have performed?

I am hesitating between J. Brahms' *Symphony No.3* and W.A. Mozart's *Mass in C minor*.

If you were on a desert island, what are your top 3 etude books for your instrument, solos for your instrument, as well as etudes/solos/albums not of your instrument?

Ha! If I was on a desert island, I probably would not bring anything trombone related with me.

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

Strive for the best that you know you can do, not for perfection. Be critical, but be kind to yourself. Play music because you love doing it, not to feed your ego. Be selfless, be a vessel for something much bigger than yourself. Most importantly, never forget that music is only something that you do and that it doesn't define who you are as a person.

What are you listening to currently?

Albums by Samaris & Susan Sundfør, amongst other Scandinavian artists, Grizzly Bear, *After Bach* by Brad Meldhau, and Talking Heads, as always.

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

Other than classical music, I very much enjoy listening to Scandinavian Indie artists. Their music has such a unique sound: different timber in the voices, accents and languages, and the use of electronics and/or real instruments, etc. I am very drawn to it. I am also a huge fan of early music and the voices of Nathalie Stutzmann and Philippe Jaroussky.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Be honest with yourself, but be kind and patient. Record yourself, play for people and make every single excerpt your favorite.

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

I would teach anything I am passionate about or I would be a child social worker.

Who are your favorite composers?

Some of my favourite composers are Johannes Brahms, W.A. Mozart, J.S. Bach, Gustav Mahler and John Adams

How could we make music education better?

Music education has become a powerful tool for social change. Countless studies have shown that it can contribute to the development of a wide array of mental, physical and personal skills in children and youth. Moreover, in combination with life skills training, it has the capacity to empower youth from all socio-economic environments to reach their full potential.

I believe that we can make music education better by redefining our role as teachers. In addition to educating children and youth, we need to promote values such as integrity, inclusion, joy, excellence and community, all of which can positively impact their sense of identity, purpose and citizenship. As motivators, we must inspire our students to tap into their creativity and foster a growth mindset. As facilitators, we need to make music education as interactive and co-creative as possible. Seeing that people learn best in completely different ways, we ought to be flexible, to constantly adapt to our students and to encourage communication.

In terms of educating university music students, maybe it is time to adjust to the current market a little more. We must encourage them to figure out early on what distinguishes them from everyone else and what they are truly passionate about: what is their 'brand'?, what role do they want to play in the industry and in society?, is getting a job in a symphony orchestra the only way they can accomplish themselves as artists, citizens and people?, etc.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

Teaching is the ultimate learning tool and I love it. Exchanging and communicating with my students like equals is one of my top priorities. I constantly ask them questions, which trains them to teach themselves and forces them to really think about what they are doing: the process, the purpose, the results they are hoping for, etc. Not only can developing self-awareness make them better musicians, it can also make them better citizens. Inspiring my students also inspires me to be the best musician and human I can be.

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

What Every Trombonist Needs to Know About the Body by David Vining,
Effortless Mastery by Kenny Werner