

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

Jay Heltzer



Master Sergeant **Jay Heltzer** is currently the bass trombonist with The United States Air Force Concert Band, based at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, Washington D.C.

Sergeant Heltzer received a Bachelor of Music degree in trombone performance from Cal State University Northridge in 1994. Upon graduation he was unanimously nominated by the faculty as the Most Outstanding Baccalaureate Candidate. He then attended Indiana University where he earned a Master of Music degree in trombone performance in 1998. Sergeant Heltzer has performed with the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington Opera, Annapolis Symphony, the Milwaukee Symphony, Milwaukee Ballet, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and Tales & Scales.

While in the Chicago area, Sergeant Heltzer was also a private music teacher at several high schools, and was an adjunct faculty member at Harper College in Palatine, Illinois. He was the first trombonist ever awarded a scholarship by the Union League Civic Arts Foundation in their annual solo competition and was the winner of solo competitions of the Women's League of the Glendale Symphony, the Round Top Music Festival and the Cal State Northridge's Concerto Competition. His former teachers include Ed Anderson, Bill Booth, Floyd Cooley, Jeff Reynolds, Phil Teele and Charles Vernon.

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

I began at the age of 10, 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I also started piano at the same time, but it did not last and I wish I stuck with it.

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

I am primarily, if not solely a bass trombonist.

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

Verbier Festival Youth Orchestra for two summers and falls under the batons of James Levine, Zubin Mehta, Yuri Temirkanov, Wolfgang Swallisch, and Paavo Yarvi, while working with coaches from the Met Orchestra, and touring around Europe, North and South America. Amazing experience in every sense and every note.

***If you were stranded on a desert island and could only have 10 albums, what would they be?***

Strangely I have been crafting this list prior to this questionnaire. As of today the list is made up of...:

- "So" Peter Gabriel
- "The Wall" Pink Floyd
- "Ten" Pearl Jam
- Mahler 3, NYPO Bernstein (Deutsche Gramophone label)
- "Smart Went Crazy", Meridian Arts Ensemble
- "MACHINA", Smashing Pumpkins
- "With a Poets Eye", Chanticleer
- "V", Spock's Beard
- "As the World", echolyn

Not a lot of trombone in that list.

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

Kol Nidre by Max Bruch (cello), Syrinx by Claude Debussy (flute), Concerto by John Williams (tuba)

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

HS: barely. College (undergrad & grad school): 2-5 hours/day. Post: 2-5 hours.  
Pro: 1 hour/day (when I have time)

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

I have studied with a large collection of players and teachers, all of whom affected my playing in a positive way in some fashion or another. The highlights include: Bill Booth, Jeff Reynolds, Phil Teleky, Ed Anderson, Charlie Vernon, Floyd Cooley, Tony Kniffen, Gerry Pagano

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

In tenth grade, I made the connection between movie soundtracks, and the players who record them. I recall telling my band director that was what I wanted to do with my life. He laughed at the comment (but not at me) due to how difficult it is to break into the Hollywood studios, but was encouraging nonetheless.

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

I believe that anything that was written by Tommy Pederson is sacred and should be played by all. Basses should play the tenor etudes and vice versa, as well as their own books.

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

In my junior year, I had my first trombone quartet and it was fantastic. We sounded great and had so much fun. We were rehearsing for one of our member's Senior Recital and the laughing and joking was getting way out of hand, mostly due to me. Jim pulled me aside afterwards and chewed me out for wasting rehearsal time. He was at least 10 years older than me, and returned to school to finish his degree. He was a pro on the outside, and was all about efficient use of time (mixed in with the fun) and I was disrespectful of his time. That one afternoon had a pivotal effect on my life that I will never forget. I learned a lot about professionalism that day. Very influential moment.

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

#1 rule for freelancing and professional life In general: Show up, shut up, and play. That means be on time (early) and be attentive, don't show off by what you have to say (dropping names, showing how big your ego is), and let your great playing do the talking for you. #2: Be a good human. Be the kind of person that people want to work with not only because you are a great player, but you are easy to get along with.

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

They should choose their major because of what they want to do with all their heart. If its just your "backup plan" to something else, that is time you are not focused on your top priority.

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

My wife was a violist (we met at a gig) but has since moved to another career field.

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

Devin Townsend (metal) and Roomful of Teeth (contemporary vocal ensemble)

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

Hard to pick one. Progressive rock and metal, jazz, classic rock, various classical composers (Brahms, Mahler, Strauss...)

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

Fencing and Archery (two separate courses). I went to graduate school to focus on trombone performance, but I knew the value of getting out of the music building and away from the horn to do something to clear the head. They were two sports I was always interested in. Kept my spirit and my soul up.

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

Start prepping for the job you want BEFORE the audition is posted. Record yourself often. Play for your friends, teachers, and most importantly for people who make you nervous.

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

I would be a writer of something – short stories, novels, plays, comedy. I even thought about a “normal” career and it didn't make sense. I still need to be doing something creative.

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

Create a passion test for teachers. If they aren't passionate about the art of making music, then they can't teach students how to be.

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

I love teaching moments with students who are even more excited about making music than me. I feed off of their enthusiasm and it makes me a better teacher

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

Scharnberg: Betwixt and Between (if the end of this piece doesn't make you cry, you're doing it wrong), Wilder Bass Trombone Sonata, 100 Bars for Tom Everett by Andraz Szolloszy

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

Zen and the art of Archery. We can get so intense in the music making process that we lose sight of the art.