

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## James Miller



**James Miller** is the Associate Principal Trombone with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, a position he has held since 1999. His duties include performing on alto, tenor, and bass trombone; tenor tuba; and bass trumpet. His previous orchestral experience includes the North Carolina Symphony, the Long Island Philharmonic, and the New York Philharmonic and the Dallas Symphony. Miller earned his Bachelor of Music Education degree from the University of Northern Iowa and his Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School, where he was a scholarship student of Per Brevig.

His playing experience includes performances with the Silk Road Ensemble, the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra, Ensemble ST-X, the Michael Bubl  Big Band, and a variety of jazz, rock, ska, and Latin ensembles. He has been a participant in the Mainly Mozart Festival, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Ojai Music Festival as well as performing as a soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and on the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Green Umbrella Series. He has also been featured as a soloist with many ensembles throughout Mexico, United States and in Europe. As a composer, he has had world premieres in New York's Lincoln Center and continues to perform his own works in solo performances throughout the country. He serves on the faculty of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Miller is a Conn/Selmer and a Denis Wick clinician and has two CDs entitled *from coast to coast* and *Delays, delays* on All Barks Dog records.

Jim Miller's Website: [www.jamestmiller.net](http://www.jamestmiller.net)

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

I started playing in 5th grade. I asked my parents if I could play drums. All my friends started on trumpet, they thought that was a better idea. My band director convinced me to play baritone in 7th grade because I was getting braces. Then in 8th grade he convinced me to play trombone. He put me in 2nd chair out of 8 upper classmen. That was my first experience in the power of manipulation.

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

Bach 42BO and a King 3B

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

Playing a duet with Carl Fontana in college, playing the Sandstorm Moterbike Concerto 6 times with orchestra, Beethoven 9 at the Proms and responding to this questionnaire.

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

In this order:

Trout Mask Replica- Captain Beefheart

Kind of Blue- Miles Davis

Wired- Jeff Beck

Eminent J.J. Johnson

E.S.P.- Miles Davis

Ballads- John Coltrane

Night Passage- Weather Report

Ghosts- Albert Tyler

The Shape of Jazz to Come- Ornette Coleman

Holst The Planets- Chicago/Levine

***What or who inspired you to play your instrument?***

My childhood was in the 1970's. Television show themes back then were fantastic and really well orchestrated (Adam 12, Mary Tyler Moore, Emergency, The Waltons) I would attach myself to this great writing and want to replicate it. Carl Stalling's music for the Warner Brothers cartoons was a huge influence in my sense of calling. So was DCI. There was an Old Milwaukee Beer commercial that was set in New Orleans in which a trad band was playing the 'theme'. I figured it out on

trumpet, It also help that kids my age were exposed and excited about Louis Armstrong

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

I'm a sucker for the Tchaikovsky violin concerto AND the Sibelius!

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

High School-very poor, I had little focus for guidance but I did enjoy the moment! When I got my driver's license I would go out and sit in with a number of groups in Cedar Rapids, Iowa , jazz, rock and avant guard. I had little shame!

Undergrad- by the time I was a sophomore I figured some things out. The upperclassman at my school (University of Northern Iowa) were a huge influence. I was the first one in the music building warming up and the last one to leave at night. The custodians were good friends of mine. I actually learned a lot from them and even wrote a big band tribute in their honor (Late Nights with the Don and Ron Show).

I wasn't as aware of chops maintenance as I should have been even though I had a miraculous teacher, Jon Hansen. I learned the Berio Sequenza because I needed the money and the school had an avant guard solo competition. I ended up winning the \$150. I suppose that was a motivator.

In graduate school at Juilliard, it took awhile to weed through the first year of classes and then I was in the practice room a lot. I recall using the dance studios with the portable mirrors on wheels as audition screens to perform in front of. I still didn't invest fully into a orchestral career until I won my second job as principal of the North Carolina Symphony. I took a lot of auditions and practiced all the time. I had a giant pair of PA speakers that I would practice concertos with and presented about 4 solo recitals a year. I crashed a local women's college to practice at night. They had great facilities and more dancer audition screens. I started recording myself a lot and felt that was a huge game changer.

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

Kim Sharnberg, Jerry Owen, Jon Hansen, Per Brevig, Joe Alessi

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

There are thousands, all from different instruments. There are also too many trombone players whom I am influenced by. Please only listen to quality and intent and you will be influenced too.

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

I think I always 'felt it'

My mother played Greensleeves when I was 3 or 4, that stuck as well as discovering a Rite of Spring and Dance Macabre LP in my parents basement.

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

shoot, after I wanted to be a fireman, policeman and garbage man, maybe 8 years old?

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

I want to say 120 minutes but life gets in the way so it really varies. There is Face time and Mind time, I'm always practicing in Mind time. I will put more maintenance time in when I have a goal (usually a big concert) to get myself in strong condition. When I have some time between events I will spend time playing fun stuff and listening.

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

[www.jamestmiller.net](http://www.jamestmiller.net)

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

There are alot- but I gravitate towards-

Rochut book I

Blazhevich clef studies

Kopprasch book I

Arban

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

My son's friend's parents are pretty amazing. They are diverse and intelligent (think JPL and Pixar), I can always learn from them. Also, my tennis teacher, Alex.

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

Show up on time, be cool, be in shape and be willing to show you are a team player. Keep your comments positive, otherwise keep them to yourself.

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

I earned a bachelor's in music education degree, mainly because I was disappointed with the music education standard in the public school at the time in Iowa. There were great programs too but I felt could make a difference because I cared about my own playing. That is an important facet to music education. You have to value quality enough to embody it yourself and inspire others. Too often I am saddened by the lack of musical interest in most 'ed' majors. I make sure I instill a great respect for musical quality in my Ed majors at UCLA. They are some of the hardest working students I have. They know their scales and understand the importance of phrasing and harmony. I was a high school band director for two years. Crowd control and getting your students to believe in you are very important attributes that are rarely taught to budding teachers.

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

My son is, but he is only 6 and has LEGOs on the brain.

***What is your favorite place that you have performed?***

Crawford Hall, University of North Carolina School of the Arts.  
It's a 300 seat facility and sounds great for solo trombone.

***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?***

So many cool books are coming out these days but I have to say Rochut book I  
Blazhevich clef studies Kopprasch book I

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

Practice and listen obsessively. Find the best teacher you can and dedicate yourself 100%. It's better to spend Friday and Saturday nights shedding in the music building and sacrifice some social time than realize you didn't make it as an adult.

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

My ear worm currently is the Bernstein Mass we recently played. I've been digging my friend Jorgen Van Rijen, too.

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

Jazz, blues, rock and roll and the traditional Bulgarian vocal style

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

Can't certainly say, but it provided mental relief from music studies.

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

I'm recording some songs I wrote in my studio

***Please list some of your favorite websites for musicians.***

[www.trombone101.com](http://www.trombone101.com)

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

Obsess with technique, sound, intonation and listening to the pieces you are auditioning with. Record yourself with a metronome and listen back with a tuner, all the time! Find time to exercise on a regular basis. Allow for physical breaks from face time.

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

Can't. Think. Of. Answer.

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

All of them, except for maybe whoever writes music for Shakira.

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

Pay music educators more, they contribute to society

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

Too much, I can't stop sometimes. It makes me want to practice and improve myself