

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Dr. Joseph Skillen



In addition to teaching applied tuba and euphonium, Galante Endowed Professor **Joseph Skillen** coaches chamber music, teaches seminars in performance and literature and has served in multiple administrative positions including the Director of Graduate Studies. He has presented solo performances on four continents and throughout the United States. His solo playing appears on 17 different recordings. His writings appear in books with Indiana University Press, and various professional journals. He has also been recognized for his teaching and research skills winning numerous University and State awards, including most recently the LSU Distinguished Professor

Award in 2015. He has served as the Secretary of the International Tuba Euphonium Association since 2007. In addition to a number of other creative pursuits, Skillen has taught at Domaine Forget, directed the LSU in Ireland Program and taught in Germany, Prague and the Czech Republic with the LSU in the Heart of Europe program. He lives in Baton Rouge with his wife, two sons, and two snoring rescue dogs.

Joseph Skillen's webpage: <https://www.lsu.edu/cmda/music/people/faculty/skillen.php>

Apply to LSU: <http://www.lsu.edu/cmda/music/admissions/undergraduate/index.php>

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

I started taking piano lessons in fourth grade, sang in choirs, and then joined band in sixth grade. They put a tuba in my lap and I've been at it ever since.

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

I really enjoy the travelling that I have been able to do and the different people with whom I have come in contact. Performing on four continents, making

recordings, and teaching motivated students count as the real highlights for me.

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

Six Suites for Cello – J.S. Bach  
Sonatas for Trombone and Trumpet – Paul Hindemith  
Concertos for Horn – W.A. Mozart  
Complete Piano Sonatas – L.V. Beethoven  
Cello Sonatas – Johannes Brahms

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

High School – I practiced for about 1.5 hours a day. My parents made me stop by 10:00 pm!

College – 3-4 hours a day (long sessions, I know better now to practice in smaller chunks more often!)

Post-College – 2-3 hours a day.

Career – 1 – 1.5 hours a day.

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

Charles Herron, Middle School Band Director  
Tyler Fleming, High School Band Director  
Whit Morrison – was a high school student who taught me beginning lessons  
Ken Riddle – Middle and High School private lessons  
Scott MacMorran – High School private lessons  
R. Winston Morris – Tennessee Tech  
Mark Lusk – Penn State  
Michael Lind – Royal Conservatory of Music, Stockholm  
Phil Sinder – Michigan State University  
Tons of masterclass performances for other great musicians

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

I remember the decision in my sophomore year of college – 19, I guess.

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

One to one and half hours.

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

Guggenberger – Basics Plus  
Bai Lin – Lip Flexibilities  
Charlier – Transcendental Etudes  
Bordogni – Complete Vocalises  
Arban – Complete Method

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

Be patient.  
Be Kind.  
Be prepared.  
Be fun to hang around.  
Study scores before you arrive, if possible.  
Return every message.

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

I feel that music is the most important part of either course of study. I have done both and am grateful for my educational background that continues to instruct my private teaching. I also believe that we should push ourselves to the heights of our ability, so performing was always an expectation even when studying music education. The great performers will always be asked for lessons, they should do it in an informed way – so a music education background never hurts. Practice time in any curriculum is a personal decision – no one ever told me I practiced too much.

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

My brother, Jeff, is an excellent musician who now works in the music industry.

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

I am very much enamored with Henryk Gorecki's Aria Op. 59 for tuba, piano, bass drum, and tam tam. After visiting Poland and studying his music, I believe it is one of the more expressive works in the tuba repertoire. It doesn't appear flashy to the novice, but it expresses a great deal.

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

Start singing and playing piano, plus I suggest attending a summer camp to try what it is like to experience musical immersion. It isn't for everybody, but if it's right – you'll know.

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

I love Irish folk music!

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

Psychology, Philosophy, History, Marketing, and fundamentals of finance and accounting. Also, read great books!

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

I am working on a video project to capture the expression I feel when performing Gorecki's Aria Op. 59 (referenced above). The work is so much more than the notes we perform. It expresses geo-political issues that are extremely relevant today.

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

If it is a college audition, try to meet the person for whom you will be auditioning ahead of time. You will feel better when you know them personally and they will have a sense of your playing and personality before you play for them the first time. Don't be afraid to reach out to them via email with any questions prior to your audition.

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

I would likely be a professor in the humanities. I have also thought about being a counselor or life coach.

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

Remember why we got into music in the first place and keep that front and center.

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

I really enjoy teaching mainly because I am helping others to discover their abilities in a field that I love. Showing music's expressive power and helping others to discover their unique voice really motivates me.

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

Effortless Mastery – Kenny Werner  
Musical Excellence – Aaron Williamon  
Letters to a Young Poet – Rainer Rilke  
The War of Art – Steven Pressfield  
Lynchpin – Seth Godin  
Icarus Myth – Seth Godin  
Originals – Adam Grant  
Deep Work – Cal Newport  
Let Your Life Speak – Parker Palmer