

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Joseph Alessi



**Joseph Alessi** was appointed Principal Trombone of the New York Philharmonic in the spring of 1985. He began musical studies in his native California with his father, Joseph Alessi, Sr. As a high school student in San Rafael, California, he was a soloist with the San Francisco Symphony before continuing his musical training at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music. Prior to joining the Philharmonic, Mr. Alessi was second trombone of The Philadelphia Orchestra for four seasons, and principal trombone of L'Orchestre symphonique de Montreal for one season. In addition, he has performed as guest principal trombonist with the London Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall led by Pierre Boulez.

Mr. Alessi is an active soloist, recitalist, and chamber music performer. In April 1990 he made his solo debut with the New York Philharmonic, performing Creston's Fantasy for Trombone, and in 1992 premiered Christopher Rouse's Pulitzer Prize-winning Trombone Concerto with the Philharmonic, which commissioned

the work for its 150th anniversary celebration. His most recent appearance with the Philharmonic as soloist was in world premiere performances of William Bolcom's Trombone Concerto in the winter of 2017. Mr. Alessi also has appeared as soloist with the New York Philharmonic in performances of concerti by Kazimierz Serocki, Bramwell Tovey, and William Grant Still. In August of 2021 he will give the world premiere of the Chick Corea Trombone Concerto.

Joseph Alessi has recorded and performed extensively with four prominent trombone quartets; The New York Trombone Quartet resulting in the only recording of Bartok's 4<sup>th</sup> String Quartet, Aries Trombone Quartet, Four of a Kind Trombone Quartet, the World Trombone Quartet, and Slide Monsters Trombone Quartet.

Other solo engagements have included the New Japan Philharmonic, Nagoya Philharmonic, Orchestra of Teatro Bellini, Mannheim National Theater Orchestra, Hauge Philharmonic, Helsinki Philharmonic, and the Colorado, Alabama, Santa Barbara, Syracuse, and Puerto Rico symphony orchestras.. Mr. Alessi has also participated in numerous festivals, including the Festivale Musica di Camera in Protogruaro, Italy; Cabrillo Music Festival; Swiss Brass Week; and Lieksa Brass Week in Finland. He was featured in the 1997 International Trombone Festival in Feldkirch, Austria, and the International Meeting of Brass Instruments in Lille, France. In 2002 Mr. Alessi was awarded an International Trombone Association Award for his

contributions to the world of trombone music and trombone playing, and in 2014, was elected President of that association.

Mr. Alessi is currently on the faculty of The Juilliard School; his students now occupy posts with many major symphony orchestras in the U.S. and internationally. As a clinician for the Eastman-Shires Instrument Co., he has also given master classes throughout the world and has toured Europe extensively as a master teacher and recitalist. He has performed as soloist with several leading concert bands, including the U.S. Military Academy Band at West Point, U.S. Army Band (Pershing's Own), and the U.S. Marine Band (President's Own). In addition, he has performed with the Maria Schneider Orchestra, the Village Vanguard Orchestra, and has recorded with jazz greats, J.J. Johnson and Steve Turre.

Mr. Alessi's discography includes many releases on the Summit record label, including the Trombonastics, and a disc with New York Philharmonic Principal Trumpet Philip Smith entitled Fandango; he also recorded New York Legends on the Cala label. His live recording of the Rouse Concerto with the New York Philharmonic can be heard on Volume II of the recent release, An American Celebration, on New York Philharmonic Special Editions, the Orchestra's own recording label.

Mr. Alessi was invited by the International Trombone Association to record a solo disc of newly composed works, which was distributed to the Association's membership of 5,000 trombonists. in early 1999 and is now available as Beyond the End of the Century through Summit Records. His recording of George Crumb's Starchild on the Bridge record label, featuring Mr. Alessi as soloist, won a Grammy Award for 1999- 2000. Other recordings featuring Mr. Alessi are with the Canadian Brass (Sony Classical and Philips Records). Further information about Mr. Alessi can be found on his website, [www.slidearea.com](http://www.slidearea.com). Mr. Alessi plays exclusively on a Shires-Alessi model trombone.

[Alessimusicstudios.com](http://Alessimusicstudios.com)  
[josephalessi.com](http://josephalessi.com)

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

Started playing trumpet at age 5 and switched to trombone at age 8.

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

Shires Alessi Custom horn and Shires Alessi Q alto

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

Playing and recording Mahler 2, 3 and 7 with Leonard Bernstein Premiering the Pulitzer Prize winning Rouse trombone concerto

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

JJ Johnson Dial 5, Doc Severinson Rhapsody for Now, The Chicago Low Brass LP (CD)

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

My father and first teacher. Joseph Alessi Sr.

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

Haydn Trumpet Concerto, Any of the Strauss Horn concerti, John Williams Tuba Concerto, Mozart Piano concerto 23 Dvorak Cello Concerto Saint Saens Violin Concerto

### ***Do you have any tips on becoming better at transcribing?***

Put your track into a (DAW) Digital audio work station and create a click track with the solo. Slow everything down and starting learning the solo by ear first. Then transcribe to sheet music or Finale etc.

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

Practicing is less overall but more goal specific. Warm up and Maintenance is more important now. Time off (days off) the horn is less however when I occasionally get frustrated or I am a bit beat up, I do take time off the horn. When things feel great and I feel I am very efficient, I am continue daily practice.

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

High register and knowing when to stop practicing.

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

Yes, of course, along with conducting and I encourage all my students to do the same. Showing you are a musician away from the horn is huge in your development and playing after singing and conducting always yields improvement.

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

Set goals, be very disciplined about those, be passionate and find inspiration in what you hear or desire. Be relentless and don't be afraid of humility or failure. Be humble and grateful.

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

Don't think of this often as I won't really ever stop creating and hard to think of myself leaving a legacy behind. I think this is a question for the readers and listeners of my music and teaching.

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

Cycling, golf, reading and taking walks with my wife.

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

When you get frustrated as we all do, it would be a good time to put the horn down and go outside and get some fresh air and have some peace and quiet in order to think a bit and clear out the head. Also, a good nights sleep can wipe away this depression. Waking up to a new day always brings new possibilities. Try to play music for pure enjoyment. If you feel pressured about your studies perhaps music is not for you as a profession. It is important to keep striving to improve and gain knowledge little by little. More often than not, this frustration is brought about because we are playing pieces and tempi that are too difficult. Always be smart and take a step back and slow your tempi down.

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

I used to but found that I always fell asleep. HAHA. Nowadays, I pray instead.

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

Many teachers. Ehrlich, Meredith, Anderson, Lawrence, Ross, Livesay, Stewart and Dodson.

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

JJ Johnson, Natalie Cole, Bill Watrous, Doc Severinson, Pavarotti, my mother and father, Clifford Brown and many others

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

Curiosity, diligence, work ethic, people ethic, a good ear, creativity and imagination.

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

Music was always around the household from my musical parents. It seemed natural for me to be a musician. Maria Leone, my mother, sang at the Met in NY and had a golden voice. My father was a professional trumpet player and teacher how also worked at the Met in the orchestra for many years. I copied my mother's style and phrasing and received excellent tech advice from my father.

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

When I was a prizewinner of a large music competition in the SF bay area when I was 14 years old.

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

90 min to 2 hours not including my daily routine

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

[alessimusicstudios.com](http://alessimusicstudios.com) and [josephalessi.com](http://josephalessi.com)

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

Blazhevich ed Hunsberger, Kopprash 60 studies, Voxman, Arbans Characteristic Studies, Boutry, Bozza and Bitsch

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

No but I record onto my DAW and learn new music this way

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

Sing and conduct. Attack and response technique is very useful for subdividing in a new and interesting way. Too long to explain here but there is information on my

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

I played in the high school jazz band back in the day 5 days a week at 7:30am. Definitely did not approach playing correctly and was not warmed up properly and suffered for it causing me to take time off the horn. So, it is important to warm up properly and not to force.

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

Anywhere in Italy

***Who are some of your heroes in life?***

Frank Sinatra, Chick Corea, Riccardo Muti, Leonard Bernstein

***How old were you when you first began transcribing solos?***

Haven't had time for this yet, but this is something I will be getting into when I have more time. Big fan of transcribing

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

Barack Obama (met him once). Nelson Mandela, my mother and father, my grandfather Alessi, Johnny Carson, Willy Mays, Dr J, Joe Montana, and Tiger Woods

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

Practice when you feel inspired, make the warm up routine a part of your life, but know when to step away from practicing. Music and my years of being a musician is engrained in me. Therefore, I feel as long as I practice a certain amount, I can then enjoy the remainder of the day doing whatever pleases me.

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

Network, study with the main people in town, create your own projects that people might envy. (i.e. creating a website, creating interviews, writing and arranging,

setting up your own local teaching studio) but also do your talking through your playing.

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

My father always suggested and encouraged me to go for my education degree but that didn't happen. However, this would be a good idea for many people especially nowadays in the midst of the virus. Being a fine instrumentalist can happen while you have a band directorship.

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

Yes as mention above but my brother Ralph is a fine jazz trumpet player  
[ralphalessi.com](http://ralphalessi.com)

***Where are some of your favorite places that you have performed?***

Carnegie Hall, Berlin Philharmonie, Musikverein in Vienna, Suntory Hall Tokyo, Teatro Colon Sao Paulo Brazil.

***What are your favorite etude books and solos written for your instrument, as well as etudes/solos/albums not originally written for your instrument?***

Etude books listed above. Peaslee Arrows of Time, Rouse Trombone Concerto, John Mackey Harvest. Outside of trombone, the NY Trombone Quartet recorded Bartok's 4th String Quartet which was amazing to learn.

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

Arpeggios and more arpeggios. Pick a favorite melody that you absolutely love. Can be something like a John Williams movie tune or anything for that matter. Write it out on manuscript in a key you play it effortlessly with a great sound. Transpose it up a 1/2 step each week and see what happens but always play it in a singing style keeping the most beautiful and effortless tone. You will reach your limit, but this kind of practicing can extend your range.

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

Not yet happened but most likely when I premier the Chick Corea Trombone Concerto

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

Performing and Teaching just like I do now

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

Being with my beautiful family and spending time in Canada next to the lake

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

Yes, I practice performing by playing all the way through the piece without stopping after practicing thoroughly all the components.

***Do you prefer to learn solos by ear or by transcribing or both? Why?***

I have done both. That being said I know JJ's solos from only listening to them and I can sing you some of them right now.

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

If it were my kids, I would ask them to pursue music at a non music school so that they would be able to minor in another field. Or perhaps minor in music and consider another field to major in. Perhaps as a pandemic specialist!

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

Clifford Brown

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

Jazz

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

Only went to a music conservatory but I would say Italian class.

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

Getting ready for the Chick Corea Concerto.

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

<https://orchestraexcerpts.com/trombone/>  
<http://trombone.myartsonline.com/lists/tenlists.htm>

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

I have many tips but too long to list here. 1. Record yourself daily 30-60 days before the audition vetting yourself for rhythm and pitch. 2. Regular mock auditions Perhaps a dozen to get ready. 3. Just before you walk out on stage, have a talk with yourself while watching yourself in a mirror. It should be a heated conversation about convincing yourself that you will go out and play your best.

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

Yes, a bit but I use technique #3 in the previous question to scare the demons away.

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

1. Warm up and daily routine. 2. Fundamental practice (lip slurs, flexibility, articulation, scales and arpeggios, Schlossberg and Arban) 3. Rochut in many different registers. 3. 2 etudes. 4. A solo or concerto. 5 Orchestral Excerpts. Be a great musician throughout each practice session of 30 min each. Concentrate on Pitch, Rhythm, phrasing, dynamics and clean slide technique !

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

Be positive. Tomorrow is a new day and will bring something different and interesting. LEARN

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

Music is teamwork and should always be listening to make that happen.

***Do you promote the idea of learning licks and patterns in all keys to become better at improvising?***

Yes but mainly the most popular keys and usually tunes are traditionally played in 1 or 2 keys.

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

Either a professional bowler, or a baseball player, or perhaps a truck driver. Very hard question!

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

Prokofiev and Brahms.

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

Music should be a regular subject from grade school all the way through High School. Listening sessions should be part of this classwork.

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

Yes.

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

I started in high school forming my own brass quintet and learned a good amount of repertoire. I would say, if you are in HS or college, start playing trombone quartets as often as possible. Work up rep with your colleagues and perform a set of 4 concerts in 4 different venues.

***Do you have any tips on learning how to improvise?***

Start out doing free improvisation for 5 minutes. Play anything that comes to mind but keep going. Doing this 5 min daily can help you develop your skills. Of course, knowledge of chords is essential. Try this exercises. Play arpeggios in 2 two octaves the following. C major 7, C6, C7, C minor 7, Cmin 6, C minor major 7, Cminor7 b5 (aka C half dim) C major 7 b5, C dim triad with major 7th.

***Do you memorize your music? Do you have any advice for young players on how to memorize?***

Not normally but for standard solos like the David, I would be embarrassed at this point if I could not play this memorized. For all of my students doing competitions and solos for any auditions, I recommend that they memorize. I would suggest recording from top to bottom your selected solo with the music, and then playing along with the recording without the music. Also, memorizing chunks of selection and everyday of the week play memorized from A to B for example. The next day B to C etc.

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

In the past, I have used swimming as a great tool for breathing and keeping the lungs exercised. Half a mile to a mile continuous laps in the pool. After that, there was a long period of running for about 3 miles 3 or 4 times a week, and more recently I have taken up long distance cycling averaging about 25 miles for each outing. Every time I work out, my mind is cleared and I feel so much better and this allows me to operate the trombone at my peak level. At some point, I plan to return to daily swim workouts.

***What is your favorite food?***

Walnuts.