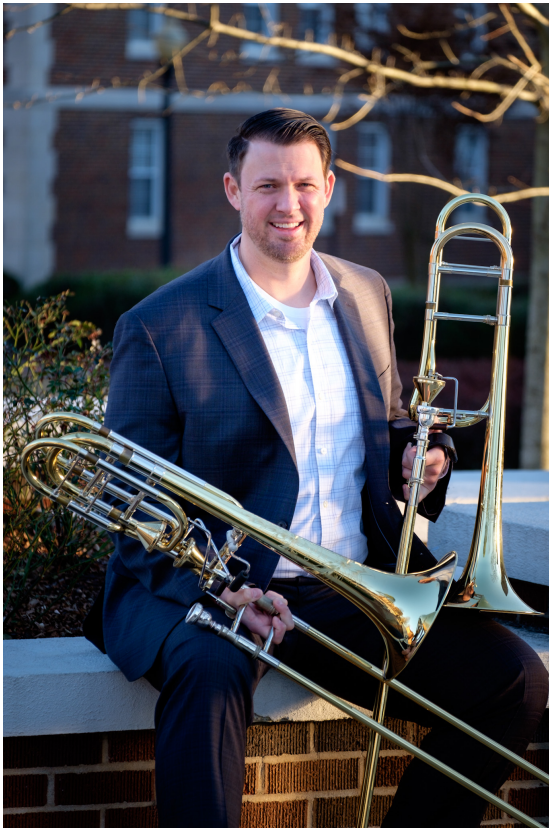


AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Dr. Justin Cook



Justin Cook is the Associate Professor of Trombone at the University of Central Arkansas where he teaches studio trombone, trombone choir, brass ensembles, low brass methods, and directs the Jazz Repertory Ensemble. In addition to his college teaching, Justin is currently on faculty for the Southeast Trombone Symposium and is the Festival Manager for the International Trombone Festival. In the summer of 2022 Dr. Cook hosted the International Trombone Festival at the University of Central Arkansas.

Recently, Justin has been featured as a soloist with the Natural State Brass Band at the 2022 International Trombone Festival and performed David Biedenbender's *Their Eyes are Fireflies* with the UCA Wind Ensemble in April of 2023. His first solo recording was released in 2018 and is entitled, "Connections." As a freelancer, Dr. Cook has performed with the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas, the Tulsa Symphony, Musical Productions at the Irving Arts Center, Dallas Summer Musicals, and The Arkansas Repertory Theatre. He has performed on the national tours of *Mary Poppins*, *The Book of Mormon*, and *Wicked*.

Equally at home as an educator and performer, the UCA trombone studio has seen tremendous success since Dr. Cook's arrival. The studio has tripled in size and now features three trombone choirs: The BearBones Trombone Choir, the Natural Slides Trombone Ensemble and the Jazz Bones. The trombone choirs have performed at the American Trombone Workshop, the 2018 and 2021 International Trombone Festival at the University of Iowa and Columbus State University and were featured performers at the 2018 Midwest Clinic in Chicago, IL. The UCA Trombone Ensembles performed a featured concert as the host of the 2022 International Trombone Festival. In May of 2023 the Natural Slides Trombone Ensemble recorded their first album entitled, "Sempre Avanti" which should be released in the fall of 2023.

Dr. Cook's students have been finalists and winners of the American Trombone Workshop Solo Competitions, the Big 12 Solo Competitions, the International Women's Brass Conference Solo competitions and the Southeast Trombone Symposium's Solo Trombone Competition. They have graduated and been accepted to some of the world's most prestigious universities and conservatories.

Dr. Cook has presented clinics and masterclasses at universities all across the United States and in 2019, presented a session on brass pedagogy at the Midwest Clinic.

Justin Cook holds a Bachelor of Music Education and Bachelor of Trombone Performance degree from Northern Arizona University, a Master of Music in Instrumental Conducting from Northern Arizona University, and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of North Texas. During the summer of 2005 Justin was a member of the Disneyland All-American College Band and in 2009, Dr. Cook was chosen as one of 18 international tenor trombonists to attend the Alessi Seminar where he had the opportunity to work with Joseph Alessi and Peter Ellefson.

Justin Cook is a S.E. Shires performing artist and Greg Black performing artist and performs exclusively on Shires trombones and Greg Black Mouthpieces.

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

I was 10 years old when I started playing the trombone. In Arizona, that was the age everyone started. I originally wanted to play the drums but my parents said it was too loud. Then I wanted to play the saxophone but my parents said it was too expensive. So I settled on the trombone....worked out pretty well if you ask me!

What equipment do you primarily use?

I play exclusively S.E. Shires Trombones and Greg Black Mouthpieces.

What are some of your favorite highlights of your career?

My biggest career highlight is hosting the International Trombone Festival in 2022. Other highlights include conducting my trombone choir at the Midwest Clinic, the International Trombone Festival, and several other conferences. I have always loved watching my student compete at solo competitions. My solo album was a blast to record as well. Lastly, I would say sharing the stage every summer with the faculty at the Southeast Trombone Symposium is always a highlight!

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

Growing up, I was obsessed with Boston Brass' albums. I'm a big fan of the famous Chicago Symphony recording of Shostakovich's 7th Symphony. I love exercising to anything by The Youngblood Brass Band.

Who inspired you to play your instrument?

My high school band director inspired me to go into music. Once I got to college, I realized how much I loved playing. From there my inspiration came from Joe Alessi recordings, lesson with Patrick Sheridan and Sam Pilafian, and studying with Dave Vining and Tony Baker.

Do you have any tips on becoming better at transcribing?

Do it. Every day. No matter how hard it is just keep doing it.

How have your practice habits changed over the years?

Big time! I used to beat my head against a wall while practicing. I would mindlessly practice via repetition. The older I've gotten the more about efficient practice I have become. I just don't have time to work hard anymore. It's become much more about work smart. Slow practice, small chunks, lots of singing and recording. Anything I can think of to help make my practice sessions more efficient.

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

High range and pitch! I still struggle with these things today.

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

I don't like it and I don't do it enough. But the positive effects are HUGE. When talking about efficient practice, there are very few things that are more efficient than singing a phrase accurately.

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

There are lots of qualities that are important to being successful and it changes based on the person you are talking to. For me, I think 2 things have played a major role. First is work ethic. I'm a big believer that hard work trumps talent every day of the week. Second is to always set goals. Have a plan and a purpose for the hard work or the work is worthless.

What do you want your legacy to be?

This is a challenging question. But I would say that it's that my students were supported, pushed, and that I helped them to achieve everything that they wanted in their life and career. Whether that is music or something else. The college experience is about understanding who you are and where you want to go in life. I hope that I can support them in that process.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

There are several things I like to do in my spare time. First, is to spend time with my family. Music can be time intensive so I try to spend as much time with my family as I can. I also love to ride my bike and smoke meats.

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

My first step is to step away. Take a day off or just leave that session. Practicing in a bad head space is never good. Then I do 1 of a few things. First is to get away from music all together and try to do things that remind me why we do what we do. That can be a walk outside, playing with my kids, cooking a meal, etc... Anything that can bring you joy. I also try to listen to players and ensembles that inspire me. That is not always classical music. Sometimes its Curtis Fuller or No BS Brass Band or Chicago. It doesn't matter; it just needs to inspire.

With whom did you study?

I did my undergraduate degree with Pete Vivona at Northern Arizona University. My masters is actually in Wind Conducting but while I did that, I studied with Dave Vining. His first 2 years at NAU were the 2 years of my masters. Studying with Dave was massively career changing and set me up for a lot of the success I have had. Once I got to UNT, I studied primarily with Tony Baker and spent summers studying with Vern Kagarice. It was like a power team for me and what I needed at that point. I attended the Alessi Seminar in 2009 at the University of New Mexico. This was incredibly inspirational and life changing for me. I spent 9 days studying with Pete Ellefson and watching Joe Alessi coach world class musicians. I can't say enough about how important that 9 days was for my career.

What qualities do you think are important in a student?

There are several qualities that cause different students to stand out. First would be for the student to be humble and coachable. Second is a self-discipline in terms of their personal calendar and schedule. Last is a strong work ethic. There is no short cut to being successful in this business. The students that put in the work become the professionals that are successful.

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

In high school I knew I wanted to become a band director. I didn't know if I wanted to be a high school or college band director, but I know I wanted to be a band director. Then, in my sophomore year of college, I had attended a brass band camp in Michigan and loved it! I also realized how much I loved practicing. That fall I added performance to my degree plan and went full force towards a life as a trombonist.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

This depends on the time of year. When I'm preparing for major performances like recital, guest artist visits, etc... I try to practice 3 to 3 and a half hours a day. Standard days are 2 hours a day. Vacation time is a daily routine and that's it. I do always try to play tenor and bass every day.

What are some of your favorite etude books?

Bordogni, Tyrell, Blazhevich Tuba Etudes, Slama,

Do you use any apps when you practice?

Tonal Energy and the Tempo App.

What are some ways to improve one's rhythm?

I think there are 2 elements here: groove and rhythm. One way that I like to help student improve groove is to buy an egg shaker. Then find heavily groove based music: hip hop, dance music, funk, etc... and shake the egg to it. Start with straight eighth notes but then add an accent and move the accent around. For rhythm I like to break down the math of the rhythm and then count it out loud with a metronome on the smallest possible subdivision. 2 other tricks I like are to practice a one note version

of the music. This helps focus on the rhythm and has a side benefit of working on articulation. Another way is to play the rhythms subdivided. In general, finding multiple ways to attack rhythm is what works best. One trick never fixes everything. You need to attack it from multiple angles.

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

Be patient and trust the process.

What is your favorite place that you have traveled to?

Cologne, Germany

Who are some of your musical heroes?

There are the obvious trombone ones: Joe Alessi, Jay Friedman, Randy Hawes, Jorgen van Rijen, Ben Van Dijk. There are more but that kept young me very busy on the listening front.

Non-trombone heroes would be: Ella Fitzgerald, Bud Herseth, Arnold Jacobs, Rene Fleming, YoY o Ma. And again, there are more but that would be a pretty solid start.

Who are your main influences in your life?

My wife and my parents. There are some career mentors that I look to frequently: Tony Baker, Brad Palmer, and Steve Wolfinbarger. There are a plethora of friends that I call weekly to talk through different aspects of life.

How do you suggest balancing life with being a musician?

This is super important! I think it's easy to get lost in the daily grind of practicing and working. But you have to take time for yourself and for your family. My wife and I try to take time every night before bed to spend a little time talking about our day and what the coming days look like. I also think it's important to take days off every once in a while, to go hiking or spend some time reading by yourself. It's all in an effort to remember why we work as hard as we do.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

One of the first things I figured out when freelancing is that there are a LOT of great trombone players in every city. So, it's the little things that matter: showing up to a gig early so the contractor doesn't worry, being a good section colleague during breaks, fitting into the playing situation as fast as you can. And playing in tune! Be a good person and play well in the sandbox.

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

I am a huge advocate for students majoring in music ed. I have never met a performer that regretted their decision to get an Ed degree. But I have met many people that had degrees in performance that wished they got an Ed degree. And whether or not you go into education, there are a ton of great skills and higher-level thinking that comes as a result of the Ed degree. Like I said, I'm a big fan!

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

My wife is a high school band director and my mom sings in the church choir. I had a Great Uncle that played trombone in the military during WWII.

What are some of your favorite places that you have performed?

Disneyland! I performed with the Disney band during the summer of 2005. That was some of the most fun I've ever had while performing!

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

I am a nut for Bordogni, Tyrell, Blazhevich, and Gillis. Additionally, I love studying the Bach Cello Suites (but never performing! 😊).

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

Go slow. Take your time. It's not an overnight process. I didn't develop a high F until my doctorate. It just takes time for some people. I'm also a big fan of scales and arpeggios in the upper register; or even simple tunes. Give yourself something that is easy for you to hear and trust your ears to drive the boat.

What are you most proud of in your life?

My amazing family.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Doing exactly what I'm doing right now: teaching and playing trombone.

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

Ride my bike, smoke meats, and hang out with friends and family.

Do you practice visualizing yourself performing?

Yes. Not all the time, but if I have a big performance coming up I'll spend time visualizing myself having a successful performance. The whole point for me is to build confidence. Even if I've never been to that specific hall before, I'll pull up pictures of it on the internet so I can have a more vivid picture to visualize with.

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

This isn't an easy field, but it is a HIGHLY rewarding one. Be willing to put in the time and effort. It's the only way to be successful in this field.

What are you listening to currently?

On my own time I listen to a lot of Chicago, No BS Brass Band, and the Maria Schneider Big Band. When my children are with me, it's a lot Bruno Mars, Frozen, Moana, etc...

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

Not really. I tend to enjoy a lot of different types of music.

What projects are you working on right now?

I'm finishing up a recording project with the top trombone choir at UCA. We have the tracks recorded and we are currently working on getting them mastered and out on disc.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Consistency is vital. Give yourself enough preparation time to not only learn the repertoire but also practice performing. Play for friends, family, and teachers. Anyone that will listen that might make you nervous. Put yourself in the situation as best you can in order to learn how to prepare yourself.

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

YES! I deal with a ton of performance anxiety! Preparation is key. Like preparing for an audition, give yourself time in the preparation process to practice performing and practice consistency. That way, when you get nervous, your positive muscle memory will take over.

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

Slow development of fundamentals. Don't rush the process. Also, listen to music. A lot of it. Of all types. Inundate yourself with music.

What advice can you give about mental wellness?

It's important! Take time for yourself. Understand that failure is a part of the growth process. And if need be, seek help; either from a friend or a professional. But it is vital to take care of yourself.

What life lessons have you learned through music?

Music has taught me many lessons!

A few of these include:

- a. All humans and cultures are amazing! Take some time to learn about them.
- b. The best things in life take time but are always worth it.
- c. True artistry is vulnerable.

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

I don't teach a ton of improvisation but I definitely teach learning of licks and patterns in all 12 keys. Also, as a final each semester, the students perform tunes in all 12 keys. The quantity changes based on age and degree but everyone has to perform at least 5 tunes.

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

I'm not sure. The ASVAB told me I should be a brain surgeon but that sounds terrifying! I really don't think there is anything I would want to do other than be a musician.

Who are your favorite composers?

I don't really have a favorite. I truly enjoy a ton of different composers. I love the orchestra music of Brahms, Strauss, and John Adams. There are a ton of new composers writing solo and chamber music that is extraordinary! Jim David, David Faleris, Madeleine Lee, and Dorothy Gates are a couple of examples, but there are a ton! Jazz composers I love are Maria Schneider, Jim McNeely, and Sara Jacovino.

How could we make music education better?

This is a hard question because there a lot of things that I think could be improved. But I also think there are a lot of things that are great! We always need more funding and support.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I love it! Helping students develop their musical skills and grow as young adults is such a joy!

What are your favorite solos for your instrument?

My current favorite solos include A Servant of Peace by Dorothy Gates, A Liminal Space by David Faleris, and Serenata by Anthony DiLorenzo. Some of the standard trombone solos that I love are the Creston Fantasy, the Tomasi Concerto, the Gillingham Bass Trombone Sonata, and the Casterede Sonata.

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

Here is my current list of suggested reading for the UCA Trombone Studio:

Song and Wind – Brian Frederickson

Attention and Motor Skill Learning – Gabriele Wulf

Grit – Angela Duckworth

The Talent Code – Daniel Coyle

Performance Success – Don Greene

The Inner Game of Tennis –

Psycho-cybernetics – Maxwell Maltz

Emotional Intelligence 2.0 – Travis Bradberry

Peak – Anders Ericsson

Talent is Never Enough – Malcolm Gladwell

Good to Great – Jim Collins

Side by Side – Wiff Rudd

The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People – Stephen Covey

Do you have any tips on forming a chamber group?

It's more important to find a group of people you get along with and have a similar desire to be in the group than people that are similar in skill level.

Do you have any tips on learning how to improvise?

Transcribing and playing in all 12 keys is vital in the beginning stages of improvising.

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

I used to. It can be a great way to develop your musical skills. I don't memorize much anymore. I guess some advice I would give is start with small chunks and sing it a ton. Ingrain the music before you start actively memorizing.

What advice can you share about physical wellness?

This is important! It helps your playing and your mental wellness! And it doesn't have to be hard. You can lift weights or do endurance training. Or you can simply part farther away from the building and walk, or chose to take the stairs instead of the elevator.

What is your favorite food?

A good steak and baked potato.