

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Laura Brenes



After starting musical studies on piano as a young child, *Laura Brenes* began studying the horn at age nine. She went on to earn her Bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University, then later attended the University of Southern California and received her Master's degree while in the studio of Vincent DeRosa.

Laura Brenes is an active freelance musician in the Los Angeles area. She is currently Principal Horn for the Redlands Symphony Orchestra and Third Horn for the Riverside Philharmonic. Laura regularly performs with many orchestras including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Long Beach Symphony, Pasadena Symphony, New West Symphony, Santa Barbara Symphony, and Los Angeles Master Coral. She is very active in the recording studios and can be heard on many motion picture, television, and Video game soundtracks. Some of the titles include "10 Cloverfield Lane," "Rogue One," "X-Men, Apocalypse," "SpongeBob, the 2014)," "Godzilla (2014)," "The Lone Ranger," "Muppets,"

"X-men," "Once Upon a Time," "Agents of Shield," and many more. She has toured all over the world with a number of different musical groups.

She also greatly enjoys teaching the horn. She became the horn professor at the University of Redlands 2007 and has loved helping the next generation of musicians. For years, she also taught up to 30 students privately at her home and various schools throughout the south land. Her students now dot the country and have gone on to do wonderful things. As well as working as a musician, Laura is also a mother of two young children who keep her quite busy. She and her husband live in Yorba Linda, surrounded by their extended family, on both sides.

Laura released her debut solo album entitled "a Time and a Place" in 2015. Featured on the album are works commissioned by her for varying ensembles and solo horn. Go to LauraBrenes.com for more information.

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

I started playing the horn at age 9. I had played piano for a couple of years before that. My mom was a woodwind player and thought it would be a great idea to have a family woodwind quintet. She tried to get my older sister to play the clarinet, and I was to be the horn player. From a very young age, she would point out horns and say "Listen! You should play the French Horn!" Since I was a middle kid, I did what I was told.

What equipment do you primarily use?

I play on a Conn 8D, M series. My mouthpiece is equivalent to a Giardenelli 8 bore. I play on a Moosewood rim.

What are some of the highlights of your career?

Recording with Pat Metheny
Performing a concerto with full orchestra
Playing in concert and recording with John Williams, Pat Williams, Jon Brion, Alan Sylvestri, Richard Sherman and a bunch more of my favorites
Playing for the Academy Awards
Recording for TV and film on the legendary sound stages
Getting to travel the world playing music
Meeting so many wonderful artists and musicians
Making my album "a Time and a Place" stands out to me so far as highlight of my career. It took about 10 years from start to finish and I am so glad that I have it for my kids to listen to. I commissioned new pieces for horn, and also recorded some music for the first time. It was a labor of love, and I truly love everything about it. PS you can download it or buy it on my website, itunes, etc etc.

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

Michael Jackson Thriller
Daft Punk Random Access Memories
Blood Sweat and Tears Best of (I know... Best of albums...) Moody Blues
Question of Balance
JJ Johnson Blue Trombone
Postal Service Give Up
Yaz Upstairs at Eric's

Andy Williams Brothers Christmas Album (I'm assuming I will be stuck year round)

Elton John Goodbye Yellow Brick Road Walter Wanderly Rainforest

What are your favorite solos written for another instrument?

I love trombone literature. Especially Jazz trombone. (I'm not saying that because the director of this site is a trombone player haha!) I love the Mozart Clarinet concerto. I'm a fan of the Tchaikovsky Violin concerto, Dvorak Cello concerto as well as most concertos that people say are over played. I can't get enough. I also love jazz and gospel organ, Larry Goldings being one of my favorite.

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

Truthfully, practicing took me many years to figure out. I was more of the crash practicer. I could always sight read really well and that got me through many many lessons. I'm sure my teachers knew, but I thought I was fooling them. I started practicing more regularly in grad school, but truthfully it took until I was working a lot to want to practice daily. I now absolutely love practicing and play at least a couple hours a day, on top of work. I think that each person has to figure out what works best for them. I love playing scales and etudes and have piles of music all over my house that I play through.

With whom did you study?

I studied with Laurence Lowe for undergrad, and Vince DeRosa during Grad School. I also took lessons here and there with Rick Todd, Kristy Morrell, and Jim Thatcher.

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

My story is one of simply not stopping. I didn't know what I wanted to major in, so I chose music. Throughout college, I tried to steer away from performance a few times, but it just never felt right. When I finished my Bachelor's, I thought, well, I'll go to grad school if I get a scholarship... and low and behold, I did!

After that, I didn't pursue playing full time as much as I pursued teaching. I even thought about going back to school and getting my MBA. I thought about song writing, learned to play the guitar and drums (horribly) and then, after a while, I thought perhaps I should just practice my horn a bit more. Since then, I have been very lucky to make a living just playing horn. It is really my dream job and everyday I feel thankful.

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

I still don't know if I am going to be a professional musician! I know that sounds flippant, but truthfully, I considered making a living solely by playing the horn as a pipe dream. I pinch myself daily knowing that I am doing just that. I love performing music, and just being around fellow music makers. That was always the best part of working as a musician.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

I try to play about an hour in the morning, and then 20 minutes here and there throughout the day when I am home. I would say on average 2 hours.

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

You bet I do.... www.LauraBrenes.com

What are some of your favorite etude books?

Muller! Kopprasch!! Gallay!! Franz! Rochut! Clarke! I love them all.

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

My hubby, he's rad. Also, I have met a lot of friends along the way that have had a big influence on me. I love meeting people and trying to see how they see the world. There are so many different perspectives out there to explore.

How do you suggest balancing life with music?

This is something that I have thought a lot about, especially after I had children. Being a mother and raising my kids is such an adventure. I struggle with the word "balance" because I never quite feel like it is a equal parts balancing act. Work vs. home life never feels like a "one to one" ratio. For me at least, all of those things are ever present all the time. I will be sitting at work, and going over the calendar for the kids. I will be home making dinner and will play some long tones while I am waiting for the water to boil. So, for me, I like to say, there is no balance. Be all in, all the time. I like to think that whoever I am as an artist and human will be able to fulfill all that I am capable of fulfilling.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Show up on time, and play pretty! The rest is out of your control.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

Not professionally, but we can harmonize "Happy Birthday" better than any family I know!

What is your favorite place that you have performed?

Playing on stage at the Hollywood Bowl with a rock band with the sold out crowd singing along was pretty epic. But I also have had the chance to dress up as an alien and sideline for a TV show. Also super fun!

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

Do it. Learn as much as you can. Find out why you love music and then take that love into every class. Have a perspective of learning the history and traditions so that you can take that and give your own perspective to the art.

What are you listening to currently?

I listen to a lot of Yacht Rock. Since they named that genre, I have been in heaven. Give me some loafers and a pair of RayBans!

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

see above. haha dentist office music. As far as performance, I am a true Romantic. Romantic era music, or Rock and Roll.

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

I loved taking History of Civilization with visual art emphasis. Seeing the way the visual arts developed and then tying that into my music studies has truly given me new perspectives.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Learn the rep so well that you don't have to worry about any technical issues. Then take your knowledge and present your version of the music.

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

I would love to be a writer, a chef, a manager, an agent, a barista, a sommelier, an interior designer. I am often full of sadness when I think that I can't do it all. But I will continue to try!

Who are your favorite composers?

I love me some Brahms!! Just hearing the opening to the 4th symphony will evoke immediate tears. Mahler and Shostakovich as well. Elgar lately has been pulling my heart strings. Strauss, Varese, Ginastera, Prokofiev, Bernstein.

How could we make music education better?

I think that music should be started at the same level as reading. Kindergarten. Music and visual arts should be thought of as core, not supplementary.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I adore teaching, especially with beginning students. Give me a junior high band program, and I will give you a horn section. I am very passionate about beginning instrumental education. I taught all of the wind and brass instruments for a few years at an Elementary school. I loved taking young children and giving them a voice that didn't have to come out of their vocal chords. Some people are more comfortable speaking through a mouthpiece. I really miss teaching young students and know I will return to that someday.

What are your favorite solos for your instrument?

The Gliere is my favorite concerto for horn. I'm a fan of Alec Wilder also. I love recital music so anything with a beautiful phrase, or catchy tune, and I'm in.

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

Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance Lion's Roar (It's a periodical)

The Art of the Game

Blink

If you could go back in time, how would you practice differently when you were in high school?

I'm not a fan of time travel. I think that the way things happened is always the perfect way, even in it's shortcomings. That being said, I like to tell people that are in high school to avoid feeling like you are in a race with those around you. You are on your own path and there is no finish line. There's freedom in simply striving to learn more and refine your art every day.