

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

MATT HALL



Matt Hall was born in East Tennessee where he began his musical journey playing the trombone around the age of 11. He began music in middle school and was quickly taken to the sound and feel of jazz after hearing local trombone phenom Rick Simerly. Matt's musical influences quickly blossomed into a vast array of artists in the straight-ahead jazz genre, not limited to only trombonists.

By the fourth year of playing the trombone, Hall was leading his own quintet that kept a busy schedule of local and regional performances, even recording two albums of jazz standards independently under the group name "The 2nd Floor Katz".

While in high school Matt was an active member of both the Milligan College Jazz Ensemble directed by Rick Simerly and The Knoxville Youth Jazz Orchestra directed by Don Hough. Both directors Matt considers to be exceptional musical mentors.

"These years were a very formidable experience for my musical growth as a trombonist, not only playing in a section, but also being around so many great musicians of all ages on a weekly basis was invaluable. Everyone in these particular ensembles played great (both on and off the page) and both bands were led by world-class trombonist/educators! These ensembles set me up for success in the years to come, especially in the U.S. Marine Corps Band Field."

Matt Hall joined the United States Marine Corps in late 2011 where he was stationed in Southern California at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar serving a four year enlistment as a trombonist.

While in the Marine Corps, Hall was a member of the US Marine Corps Jazz All-Star Jazz Band, an ensemble created to showcase the Corps' top jazz musicians. The band toured a majority of the United States and performed such prestigious stages such as Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City and The Monterey Jazz Festival.

Since moving to Southern California, Matt has been extremely active around the US with his brother Charlie Arbelaez, whom he met earlier in the service. The two co-lead various groups including "The Charlie Arbelaez-Matt Hall Big Band" which showcases some of the finest musical talent that the Southern California area has to offer.

During this time Matt was mentored by the world-renown trombonist Bill Watrous. Matt and Bill had a wonderful friendship filled with stories, laughter, trombone, and a lot of music.

After an Honorable Discharge from the Marine Corps in late 2015, Matt would embark on a journey with his brother Charlie to New York City where they would attend SUNY Purchase College-Conservatory of Music, studying with some of the top-call musicians of today.

While in NYC, Hall would perform at some of the city's top clubs or record with such artists as Ingrid Jensen, Gary Smulyan, Ralph LaLama, Mike LeDonne, Ted Piltzecker, Dick Oatts, Steve Davis, and Jon Faddis. Matt would also be mentored by the great trombonists Slide Hampton and John Mosca during this time.

Matt graduated with his Bachelors Degree in Arts (Jazz Studies) from SUNY Purchase College-Conservatory of Music in 2018.

He would soon move back to Southern California mid-2018 where he would become an active member of the KSDS Jazz Orchestra under the direction of Gilbert Castellanos and The Jazz Garden Big Band directed by Dave Eshelman.

The Matt Hall Sextet had it's debut performance at Birdland Jazz Club in New York City in early 2019 featuring a truly all-star group consisting of Jon Faddis, Charlie Arbelaez, David Hazeltine, Dr. Todd Coolman, and Kenny Washington. Further performances with this amazing group are in the works for the future! "To say the very least: A Dream Band Come True!!!"

Matt Hall is soon to be releasing his debut album as leader, "I Hope To My Never". The album features all new original music in the modern jazz tradition spanning a wide range of personal chronological experiences. Stay tuned for details!

Currently Matt resides with his wife Jeanne and dog Pappy in Southern California where he has a very active performance schedule. Check out the "Gigs" tab for details!

Since returning to California, Matt has went on to graduate with his Masters Degree in Jazz Studies from San Diego State University.

Matt plays Michael Rath Trombones and AR Resonance Mouthpieces exclusively.

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

11 - Trombone only

What equipment do you primarily use?

I have had a very long equipment journey. When I was a freshman in high school, I owned 9 professional trombones [8 Straight Tenors and one large bore for symphonic/concert band] (to name a few: 1952 King 2B Silver Sonic with Gold Accents, 1938 King 2B Liberty, Conn 100H that I had completely customized by Mike Corrigan [of what's now B.A.C.]

That was eventually whittled down to a completely custom lightweight Shires made by Steve, then a 2B+GB that I really got tricked out by Mike Corrigan while in the service. I am now a sponsored artist for Michael Rath Trombones out of England.

What are some of your favorite highlights of your career?

I feel very fortunate and downright blessed having been in some amazing situations leading me to the bandstand.

-Opening for Joe Lavano & Dave Liebman at Birdland in NYC with my sextet featuring Jon Faddis, Charlie Arbelaez, David Hazeltine, Dr. Todd Coolman (Horace Silver's Bassist), and Kenny Washington.

-Guest Artist with Arturo Sandoval's group on multiple occasions -Touring with the Marine Corps Jazz All-Star Big Band

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

The most influential album is Simple/Complexity by Rick Simerly, hands down. Second would be his sophomore release Obscurity. More on Rick in the next question...

Other albums that come to mind:

JJ's Eminent Vol. 1, 2

JJ INC.

Bill Watrous Manhattan Wildlife Refuge Bill Watrous Roaring Back to NY

Urbie Green's 21 Trombones

Introducing Jimmy Cleveland

Carl Fontana - The Great Fontana

Eric Alexander Nightlife in Tokyo

Hank Mobley Social Call

ANYthing by Clifford Brown or Freddie Hubbard Hank Jones The Magnificent Touch

Who inspired you to play your instrument?

One man: Rick Simerly. I was in my second semester of sixth grade and my close friend Sam Vines shows me a track off of a CD that he, his brother AJ, and father Tony picked up at a concert the night before.

Track 2 on Rick Simerly's debut album Simple/Complexity was John Coltrane's Giant Steps, starting off with an earth-shattering cadenza that certainly rivals a 1970's Bill Watrous without a single doubt. My life was completely changed.

I go home that day, fire up the dial-up internet, and get to searching for this phenom. I quickly find that he lives 20 minutes away from me and teaches at a local college.

I proceed to email him, essentially asking how he does what he does what he does. The next morning, I get the most beautiful, extensive email that felt like the real-life Santa had granted my Christmas wishes! This kept on for years. I would go to every (and I mean every...some private events too) performance I could get to where Simerly had a trombone to his face. Those performances were MIND BLOWING. The complete and total package: Tone just as good, if not better than if Watrous and Alessi somehow blended the best parts of their sounds. Range...forget about it. Technique that simply isn't matched. Reading 4-6 bars ahead when sight reading. Melodic and theoretically accurate when improvising. ...again, total package.

I would eventually become Rick's private student, also studying Jazz at his college throughout my entire high school career.

I would skip school weeks at a time to practice, eventually starting my own quintet as a sophomore in high school, keeping a busy schedule gigging.

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

I love the Bach Cello Suites

(If we are talking jazz: I love how Eric Alexander gets around on the tenor saxophone)

Do you have any tips on becoming better at transcribing?

Transcribing can be a rather daunting task to start...but, start super simple: Miles Davis' solo on So What is a fantastic starting place.

So What only has two chord changes: D Dorian and E-Flat Dorian— furthermore, Miles plays very melodically, leaving a lot of space, with short phrases that are very inside those dorian tonalities.

How have your practice habits changed over the years?

I would skip school weeks at a time to practice [8-12 hours a day, mostly working on range and improvisation], eventually starting my own quintet as a sophomore in high school, keeping a busy schedule gigging.

I practice at the very least 3 hours a day, 6 days a week. I find that taking a day off here and there is very therapeutic.

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

Reading anything of any difficulty and range. When I first started the trombone, my top note, completely pinched and wimpy, was a C# or D just one ledger line above the bass clef staff. Hearing Rick Simerly lit the fire and thus started my skipping school...

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

Yes! But, I don't do it enough and have started to incorporate it more into my current routine.

Really being able to hear pitches [and sing them in tune] will only help your accuracy on the bone. Both tuning and range.

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

Communication & Consistency.

What do you want your legacy to be?

I would like to be remembered as one of the best jazz trombonists to do it. And I'm not ever going to stop. Ever.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Practice...I'm kidding.

I am a self-proclaimed bourbon aficionado. I have about 100 open bourbons at home right now.

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

Take a little time off and go get some fresh air, rest, relax. Maybe even do some type of working out. It's good to clear your head. There are no musical emergencies. They simply don't exist.

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

I do yoga at least 3 times a week that I find very helpful to find grounding and furthermore helps with air!

With whom did you study?

-Rick Simerly
-Don Hough
-Bill Watrous
-John Mosca
-Jon Faddis
-Gary Smulyan

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

I essentially got tricked into joining band from a close friend at the time...ha! And I was going to quit but Simerly to the rescue!

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

Yes, the second I got done with Track 2 of Simerly's Simple/ Complexity. I knew *RIGHT THEN* what I would be for the rest of my life: A Jazz Trombonist.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

3 Hours Min - 6 Hours Max usually - with proper rest and hydration

Do you use any apps when you practice?

Sometimes: DrumGenius, iRealPro [formerly the iRealBook] What are some ways to improve one's rhythm?

Sing or clap the rhythms...the truth will come out but, it'll set you straight

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

Don't let your studies slack. You can a bit...but, not like you did... made things very difficult starting out in college.

How old were you when you first began transcribing solos?

I started transcribing seriously around senior year of HS.

Who are your main influences in your life?

My Aunt Joan...she adopted me when I was 5 [due to my mom having serious mental health issues]. She raised me, with my mom there a lot of the time. She supported my music to the n'th degree buying those trombones mentioned earlier...

How do you suggest balancing life with being a musician? Please give some tips for freelancing.

Don't be afraid of failure and getting told "no". You gotta want it. When I was in high school first hunting gigs, I took the restaurant section of the phone book and just started calling any and everywhere that had a number. It worked, eventually working 20 or so dates a month, using that money to record albums.

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

You better really be happenin' on your axe, whatever that may be, to be in performance. That needs to be very clear to the individual to make it really work how we all envision.

Education is a great, stable option. But, you need to want that, too! You don't want to be giving a disservice...you want to be an inspiration!

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

I'm the first.

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

Jazz at Lincoln Center, The Blue Note

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

Yes. Do it and do it often. If you want to play up there, you must practice up there. A lot.

I recommend taking etudes 8va {and eventually 15va.} at a piano or softer dynamic.

What are you most proud of in your life?

A few things: Becoming a Marine and obtaining my goal of being in the premier jazz ensemble of that branch for my entire enlistment, meeting the love of my life Jeanne Geiger [why yes of course she plays trombone!!!], owning a house before I was 30,

becoming an artist for my favorite trombone maker, and lastly becoming friends with Bill Watrous & Jon Faddis, two giants that I have looked up to since my beginnings.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Hopefully firmly rooted in the Airmen of Note. (I take an audition very soon...)

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

Making music, challenging myself with difficult music—getting better. Sharing great food or whiskey and making lasting memories.

Do you practice visualizing yourself performing?

110%

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

Transcribing by ear. No writing. Ear only. You internalize it better.

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

Get in a solid routine. If you need help getting a routine together, ask your instructors. They'll set you up!

What are you listening to currently?

Airmen of Note Discography in its entirety
Anything with trombonist John Allred...can't get enough.

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

...straight ahead jazz/bebop/hardbop

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

...I can't say that anything academic helped me. I would get that **** done as fast as possible. HA! When at SUNY Purchase, I was doing a Four Year Bachelors Degree in two years.

28.5 Credits a semester. Ouch.

What projects are you working on right now?

I'm going to be recording two new albums in the near future: A duo project and a bigger project featuring NYC's finest musicians.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Practice Slow, Hydrate, Rest.

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

Always. Just breathe. Everyone is there for you to do a great job... they're in your corner.

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

Getting a great sound, one that is open and full, is number one. Focus on getting a great sound out of the instrument and everything else will come along.

What advice can you give about mental wellness?

Do things that make you truly happy with people that you love being around. It's good to get away from life's ups and downs.

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

Yes. But, learning them digitally so you can easily transpose into any key.

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

Probably something in culinary - I love to cook. Another form of art.

Who are your favorite composers?

Bach, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Lee Morgan, Tom Harrell, JJ Johnson, Freddie Hubbard...too many to really list...

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

Yes. It's very important to pay it forward.

Do you have any tips on learning how to improvise?

Start with a buddy that's interested too and get the Major & Minor Play-Along from Jamey Aebersold.

Start there, using only the notes of the given major or minor scale. It is a good tool, too, because it gets you used to playing in time with a real professional rhythm section.

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

I have about 300 or 400 tunes memorized, I'd say. Start off easy, taking a bar or two/phrase at a time...don't go on until its 110% memorized.

What advice can you share about physical wellness?

Being physically fit will only help you as a wind player. It helps to get into a routine, just like a practice schedule.

What is your favorite food?

Anything with insane spice levels Sushi Ota (in PB...the best)