

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Dr. Matthew Driscoll



**Dr. Matthew Driscoll** is Assistant Teaching Instructor of Trombone at East Carolina University and serves as Principal Trombonist of the Durham Symphony Orchestra. Driscoll has taught music to nearly every age, including several years of elementary and middle school music, and many years of collegiate teaching. He previously served on the faculties of Kirkwood Community College (Cedar Rapids, IA), Cornell College (Mt. Vernon, IA), and Central College (Pella, IA) and taught low brass applied lessons, brass methods courses, music appreciation, and performance seminar.

In addition to his teaching schedule, he has performed with the Augusta Symphony Orchestra (GA), Orchestra Iowa, the Des Moines, Dubuque, Ottumwa, and Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony Orchestras (IA), the Peoria and Quad City Symphony Orchestras (IL), the Gadsden Symphony Orchestra (AL), Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle, Tar River Symphony (NC), and many others. During his time in Iowa, he played with a regional Chicago tribute band for seven years, Brass Transit Authority, and played in many musical theatre productions with Theatre Cedar Rapids, Revival Theatre Company, and more.

In 2015, Driscoll founded the Durward Ensemble, a chamber ensemble that promotes the diversity of contemporary music

to a broad audience through performances of rarely performed works and commissioning new works by living composers. Committed to formal concert presentations and educational outreach programs, Durward engages audiences of all ages and artistic interests in experiences that celebrate creativity and develop a community-based commitment to new music. Durward's 2018 debut album, *Daughters of Earth*, features all living female composers and four world premieres. Their new album, *Prophetic Revolutions*, scheduled to be released in mid 2022, includes two vocal soloists, an instrumental solo, and several of all-time favorite composer collaborations!

In that entrepreneurial spirit in the spring of 2021 the podcast Skills and Bones: The Search for Trombone Treasures was launched to provide a variety of pedagogical topics to musicians of all ages.

A North Carolina native, Dr. Driscoll has received degrees from Jacksonville State University (B.A. Music Education), East Carolina University (M.A.), and the University of Iowa (D.M.A.). Primary teachers include David Gier, George Broussard, David Perkel, and James Roberts.

### **How old were you when you began playing your instrument?**

6<sup>th</sup> grade, age 11.

### **Did you start playing another instrument before your current one?**

I taught myself saxophone the summer before beginning band because my older brother played it. With a little help from him to understand the embouchure. I was able to play the first 3-4 pages of the first band method book. I thought this would be a good way of getting a head start. Then when school started that year, the beginning band director had the high school director, Bill Barker, in to assist with first year interest. Mr. Barker convinced me that the trombone was for me. He had those interested in trombone come with him and then to form a basic brass embouchure then he buzzed a pitch on his mouthpiece and played it on the trombone (his primary instrument). When it was my time, I buzzed an F on a mouthpiece and Barker said, "man you just buzzed the first note you are going to learn" and told me that "you're a trombone player."

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

Primary, Edwards – large bore tenor. Greg Black Mouthpiece. The rest of my trombone family is a mix, but eventually want to have all Edwards.

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

Honestly doing exactly what I am currently doing. Teaching a studio at a university, spreading the word about what a good trombone sound and what it can sound like to the region through middle school and high school students. If they come to me to study, great, if not, hopefully I've done them justice to enjoy their trombone and supply a good sound for the band to build upon. Opportunities to play with different groups are just an added bonus.

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

What a hard question! For my personal trombone growth, I would have to say Trombonology by Mark Lawrence and Slide Area and New York Legends by Joseph Alessi. There are many more, but early on, these were on constant repeat for me.

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

High School band director.

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

Brahms clarinet solo repertoire

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

I use my time more wisely.

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

Tricky rhythms – I made a self-discovery 2 years after turning in my DMA essay (AKA dissertation) that I am dyslexic. Knowing that helped me to fill in the gaps of WHY things didn't happen in lessons and other learning environments.

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

Yes, if I am having trouble with a passage and I can sing on pitch then place it in the right rhythm it helps me to lock it in a little sooner on the horn.

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

1. Consistent practice habits.
2. Diligence and persistency.
3. Failing.
4. Not afraid to fail.
5. Being positive – also being respectful to others. Treat colleagues or “strangers” in the field how you want to be treated.

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

I gave it my all while being a faithful loving family man.

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

Grilling and yard work – although you can't tell it from my yard right now.

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

Often times NO can be fuel for the fire of motivation, and I use that to keep going. If I can find the positives it also helps move me forward and continue to do the work.

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

Main teachers - James Roberts, George Broussard, Dave Perkel, and Dave Gier  
Tons of one-off lessons.

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

Sound is number one – on top of that is to listen and try things I say during lessons. You can't come in and have any shields up. Have an open mind! If I'm looking at other musical qualities, that would be a decent understanding of how time and rhythm works.

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

Going to musicals with my grandparents in Nashville, TN. My parents have always been lovers of the arts. I remember going to symphony concerts and other musical productions with them. That's when I knew I was an instrumentalist because I didn't pay much attention to what was happening on stage, but more to what the pit musicians were doing.

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

It wasn't until the summer before my last year in undergrad after attending Sewanee Summer Music Festival.

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

Most days I try and practice little segments throughout the day. 20-40 segments.

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

<http://www.matthewdriscoll.com/>

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

Brad Edwards and David Vining's text and methods.

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

Metronome/tuner/drone

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

Great question. This is something I use as fuel for teaching. I try and pass along the information to any of my students or groups I work with the things I did not know at that age. This is also some of my premise behind why I started the podcast.

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

My high school band director and all my main trombone teachers through the degrees. From a pure listening and watching performance and masterclasses point of view - Joseph Alessi, Conrad Herwig, Trombone Shorty, Charlie Vernon, and Jim Markey.

***Who are your main influences in your life?***

Parents and Grandparents. Loving faithful people that worked their butts off and that grind definitely was passed to me (music being my outlet). Not musicians, but they loved to listen to many genres, and I think that was good for my ears.

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

Do not say no. The 2<sup>nd</sup> time will be more comfortable than the first.

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

Wife – music therapist. My cousin on my grandfather's side was a band director.

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

A few go to etude books, Marstellar - Basic Routines, Edwards – Patterns and Snippets. Solos and albums depend on what I am current projects or the year. That seems to change over time for me.

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

Number 1 – Patience

These are the items that have personally helped me and some of my students - Easy tunes in all keys, scales and patterns in all keys, and Remington/Marstellar style flexibility.

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

Being a dad and showing my daughters it's okay to keep chasing your dreams whatever age you are.

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

Having a very successful studio with students succeeding as band directors, performers, composers or maybe even doctors. I do have plans to record an album eventually of pieces I have commissioned or have been written for me.

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

Yes

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

Ask yourself what you want to do in music. Educator, performer, composer, therapist, engineer, or producer. If you're not sure look at these fields and what sparks your interest and become the biggest GEEK and don't look back.

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

Recital rep

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

If it's live I'll listen to anything!

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

Skills and Bones podcast

Recital for the beginning of the Spring 2024 semester

***Do you ever get anxious for a performance?***

YES

***What advice would you give for dealing with nerves?***

Exercise, running, and meditation. Three books that helped me with this are Fight your Fear and Win, Zen in the Art of Martial Arts, and a beginning meditation book.

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

Sound concept, styles, rhythm, and intonation. Ultimately listen to what they want to learn to have a better understanding. What do they want to sound like? Listen to have a clear image so every day you warmup and practice or play in an ensemble you know what to aim for. After 47 years on this planet, I finally feel like I am getting close to that image in my head. Not completely there, but that is why I am still practicing.

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

See physical exercise comment.

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

Everything

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

Never have thought of another option.

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

It depends on the week/month or sometimes what I am practicing.

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

Fun for all students – assessment is a very good thing – but I do think this can be an obstacle for those that get anxious about things like this. This is a field where we can see and hear improvement. We need more of this.

***Do you like to teach?***

Love it

***Why or why not?***

It is a great way to give back and it also helps you think through things and improves your own personal skills. The relationship between teacher and students is another great thing about teaching. Yes, there are some challenging young people out there, but overall, they make me stronger and is another way I can grow as a person, educator, and player.

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

This one is too hard to answer. If I had to pick one, the Tomasi Trombone Concerto has a little bit of everything with beautiful melodies and harmonic language.

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

Not necessarily a musician book but *Win the Day* by Mark Batterson and *The Power of Intention* by Wayne Dyer are my most recent books over the last two years that have been very helpful for me as a person and career.

Early on was *Fight Your Fear and Win* by Don Greene and before that was *Arnold Jacobs: Song and Wind*.



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

Yes, I formed a mixed chamber group, Durward Ensemble that performs new music. The first thing is to ask your friends in your networks what their interests are and let them know of your idea. Start gathering your troops and collect the musicians that see your vision. Maybe it's not 100 percent of what you are thinking of at the time, which is okay, just as long as they seem very interested and eager to help that vision. The sky is the limit with music groups with this art form being the biggest melting pot of cultures around.

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

I just know when I began running when I was 30, performing became a more positive experience, better focus while practicing, and just better outlook on life. I guess take that for what it's worth.

Maybe not advice, but it did help my mental well-being.

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

Cannot narrow this one down. Not in any order: Hamburger, Pizza, Sushi, Smoked Meats. ICE CREAM!

## ***Could you please talk about the genesis of your great podcast, Skills and Bones?***

### ***When did you decide to create the podcast?***

I began brainstorming a lot of ideas during the Covid lockdown for interviews and pedagogical material that would help other professionals new in the field that are music majors or in high school thinking of a music career. The very first episode in on my YouTube channel where I conducted an interview with Dr. Jemmie Robertson and Dr. Casey Thomas discussing bass trombone with tips for players wanting to begin doubling, new students to the instrument, or purely to give band directors a bit of a guide of when and how to move students over to bass trombone. I do have plans to adapt that interview to the audio podcast this season with a few edits.

Episode one of season one is a panel of music educators about trombone in band with various topics that are challenging for them as a non-trombonist teaching them that instrument. My idea was to continue with episodes to help music educators, young trombone students, and professionals alike with answers that supply a variety of topics. This

has become my very own professional development. I was always the student in class growing up in high school and throughout most of college that sat there and was nervous to ask questions unless asking for help one on one. It is true there are not really any dumb questions.

The name came from simply being here in ECU in pirate country and wanting to tie it in to the mascot the Pirates. At first, I thought of Skulls and Bones, then my brilliant wife thought why not, Skills and Bones. When I went to register on Apple Podcast Skills and Bones was already taken. I knew I had to keep that title somehow, then thought of my initial idea that I am searching for answers for band directors, trombone colleagues, students, and myself. Going ahead with the pirate theme, I added the tag – The Search for Trombone Treasures. Here we are in season 4 that should approach 10-14 episodes.