

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Matthew Gee



**Matthew Gee** is Principal Trombone with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Aurora Orchestra and the brass septet Septura. He is also on the teaching faculty at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Earlier this year he released his fourth solo album, *Songs of Travel* exploring English song cycles by Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Stanford. Like his last recording (Schubert's *Winter Journey*) this is released on the Naxos label.

Matthew has performed with orchestras and ensembles all over the world, including the *Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra*, *Klangforum Wien*, the *Chamber Orchestra of Europe*, the *London Symphony Orchestra*, and the *Academy of St. Martin in the Fields* and has recorded and appeared in many films and television scores.

After studying Music at King's College London and the Royal College of Music, Matthew took up the position of Section Principal trombone with the Orchestra of Scottish Opera. After a brief stint with the *Orquesta Filharmónica de Santiago* (Chile) he then returned to the UK

to join the Orchestra of Opera North. Further study saw Matthew attend the Hochschule der Künste, Bern, where he was awarded the Eduard Tschumi award for gaining the highest mark in the competitive soloists diploma course.

As a soloist Matthew has performed internationally and has had a number of works written for him, most notably *Circus Games* and *Trombone Sonata* by Rob Keeley, and *Fischietto è morto* by Gary Carpenter. He gave the U.K. Première of Kurt Schwertsik's *Trombone Concerto* at St. Johns', Smith Square and is currently having a concerto written for him by Welsh composer Bernard Kane. He has performed and taken masterclasses at many festivals, including those in Melbourne, Wellington, New York, Sarajevo, Lieksa (Finland), Isla Verde (Argentina) and Beijing.

Concerto performances include works by Rimsky-Korsakov, Buxton Orr, Derek Bourgeois, Ferdinand David, Johann Albrechtsberger and Luciano Berio's demanding concerto *Solo* in the beautiful Konzerthaus in Bern.

He is President of the British Trombone Society and takes an active part in promoting the trombone and developing its repertoire. Matthew is a Getzen artist.

[www.matthewgee.info](http://www.matthewgee.info)

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

I play a Getzen 4147 IB, it is by far the best tenor trombone I've ever played. I also play a Bach Model 12 medium bore and a Letsch Alto from 1965, which I was lucky enough to buy from Derek James one of my predecessors in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

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

Where to start? Ok, Mahler's 'Symphony No. 3' live on TV from the Enescu Festival in Romania, 'Bolero' with Charles Dutoit from the KKL, Luzern, Berg's 'Drei Orchesterstücke', Mahler Symphony No. 6 and Webern Op. 6 with Pierre Boulez around Japan, touring New Zealand with Septura.

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

I'm a big Martha Argerich fan and her 'Live from the Concertgebouw' albums are fantastic. I think a lot of recordings can be heavily produced and obsessed with perfection, but there is a wonderful honesty to these recordings. We have worked with her a lot in the RPO and she is an incredible musician.

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

As highlighted through my most recent series of solo albums on NAXOS, I am a big fan of vocal music. Playing the trombone 'vocally' is an established approach, but all too often we purely focus on slow, lyrical, legato playing. Performing vocal music can offer so much more: I love how it challenges us to find real bounce through the phrase, a spectrum of colours (tone and articulation); how the language of the song impacts articulation. Musically, transcribing these works asks questions on many,

many levels and actually forces radical, technical development in ways more 'difficult' music may not.

***When did you form Septura?***

We started playing together back in 2013 I think, but Simon Cox (trumpet/founder) had already put in a number of years of work prior to us ever playing a note. He had even secured us a ten disc contract with NAXOS which we started recording in 2014.

***How often do you perform together in Septura?***

Pre-pandemic we were performing around forty concerts every year. These included a yearly tour of America and a couple of other larger tours such as Japan, New Zealand.

***How many albums have you made with Septura?***

We have recorded nine albums. Seven of these are part of the ten disc series, the other two are Christmas discs – who doesn't love a bit of brass at Christmas? The most recent album, 'Music for Brass Septet 7', has just been released and features Gershwin's 'An American in Paris' and his 'Preludes', Copland's 'Quiet City' and also his 'Appalachian Spring'.

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

The demands on a professional player in London are extreme: long days, very little rehearsal time, a huge number of concerts – the RPO did 240 the year before the pandemic. Throw in a couple of kids and practice has to be condensed into an interval or when I return home from a concert. I try not to lower my trombone too much during my practice. I have clear aims for each session and I want the time the instrument is on my face to be far greater than the time off it.

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

It is hard for me to believe this now, but my high register. It clicked in my second year of university and I would now say it is now a real strength.

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

My first professional work was a session in Abbey Road with the London Symphony Orchestra. In the break Maurice Murphy came up to me, put his arm around me, introduced himself and spent the entire break chatting to me. I often think about that moment, what an absolute gent Maurice was, and how such a seemingly small gesture can have such a lasting impression on someone. Basically, be nice, don't take everything too seriously and do your best.

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

Come rain or snow I've been doing bootcamp fitness for over 10 years. It is great for my head, means I can pretty much eat whatever I want and I find it really helps my playing. Cricket has always been a passion of mine – test match cricket, not this 3 hour, 20/20 nonsense. I also started baking as the pandemic hit and I've become somewhat obsessed; thank goodness for the bootcamp.

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

Chris Jeans, Andy Waddicore, Ian Bousfield, Dudley Bright, Dennis Wick, and Lindsay Shilling.

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

[www.matthewgee.info](http://www.matthewgee.info)

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

I am a big fan of André Lafosse. His 'Méthode Complète Volume 3' is basically my bible. If you want to become an orchestral player it has all the tools you will need for a lifetime of study. I also like the Maxted Studies for locking in your high chops.

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

I probably spend at least three months of the year on tour, mainly with the RPO, Septura or at festivals, so there are not many places left for me to visit. I will say that

whenever we travel to South Korea we do seem to have a fantastic time...and not just because of the soju!

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

Well, I am very happy in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and have a wonderful section, so I would be surprised if another job could tempt me away. I love playing in the brass septet 'Septura' so I hope to still be working with them. I have some solo recordings I still wish to do and I am also enjoying my teaching, so hopefully a mix of everything. The pandemic threw some welcome light on how busy I have been over the last few years and I think I will be more picky about what work/tours/festivals I take on.

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

I actually studied academic music rather than performance at university. I think as a trombone player with a healthy approach to practice studying something else whilst developing your playing is relatively straightforward. I also studied German and Spanish whilst a student. I am pretty rusty now, but over the years these have been really useful and looking back I wish I had taken them both further.

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

Absolutely. I found the best thing you can do is to accept that you will get nervous; do not try and fight them, they are a totally natural response. Can you play 'Bolero' after running up ten flights of stairs? Well your heart might be trying to jump out of your chest on the concert platform so try to re-create that feeling before hand. Everyone reacts differently – accept them, practice with them if you can, and find the coping mechanisms you need.

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

I think players who can improvise have a wonderful understanding of musical language. Even as a classical player it is important to know our keys and scales in the

same way in order to develop this language – it will improve your sight reading, section playing, all manner of things. Try playing some Bach Chorals around the cycle of fifths.

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

I really enjoy teaching. I spent my early 20s trying to be the best player I could, my late 20s working out how I actually play the trombone, and my 30s using this knowledge to really find areas I could improve on. The process has given me a great insight into my own and other people's playing, how things work, why things may not be working and what they can do to improve them. I also get to teach some incredibly talented players each week at the Royal Academy of Music in London. They keep me on my toes.

***Can you please describe your process of making a solo cd? How do you choose repertoire for it? How do you prepare for the recording? How long does an album usually take to record for you?***

There is a lot of work which goes into each CD. The first job is deciding on the repertoire with the record label. If music is in copyright then permission to arrange must be sought – for my last solo disc, this came through a week before the recording dates! Then all the arrangements must be made. I find this a very rewarding part of the process and although it can take a long time, by the time I have finished I know the music so well and have very clear musical goals.

An album, for me, has to be considered as a listening experience; I want to be drawn in to it, to want to listen to the end. My first two discs both focussed on a particular stereotype of the instrument. These were really fun to put together and include some absolute pillars of the repertoire ('Keren', Berio, Elliot Carter) and new commissions for trombone and chamber ensemble. I book three consecutive days for the recording, make sure I surround myself with fantastic musicians, I have a great relationship with the producer and recording engineer and always get another pair of ears in the box along side the producer; it is quite the team effort. The whole process can take around a year. Some of the pieces have taken six months to learn, such as Berio's 'Sequenza V' or Xenakis' 'Keren'. In fact, Elliot Carter's 'Gra' took longer than that...it is a serious technical challenge.

After that there is a little back and forth between myself and the engineer. We limit this to three edits, you will drive yourself crazy otherwise. Then just programme notes to write, discs to be pressed and covers to be designed. I am fussy that the design of the disc reflects the musical concept I have worked so hard to create, and I always avoid putting myself on the front cover – it is not about me, it is about the music.

Recording a solo album was something I had wanted to do since I was a teenager. I did not expect to have now released four, but it is an experience I have found very rewarding despite the challenges it often presents. That said, I can not wait to get back to play some concerts in front of an audience again. There is simply nothing better than live music.

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

Sourdough Pizza