

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Myles Blakemore



Myles Blakemore is an up and coming classical trombonist. He currently serves as Trombonist in the US Naval Academy Band and as Professor of Trombone at Howard University. Prior to his current positions, he was the inaugural Rosemary and David Good Fellow with the Minnesota Orchestra and a fellow with the New World Symphony under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas.

Myles has performed on international stages including with the Malaysian Philharmonic, Charleston Symphony and Dallas Symphony. As a student, he spent summers attending some of the country's premier music festivals including Brevard Music Center, National Repertory Orchestra, and Aspen Music Festival.

A Dallas native, Myles is a graduate of Southern Methodist University, where he studied with John Kitzman. He received his Master's Degree at the Manhattan School of Music where he studied with Per Brevig in the Orchestral Program.

He is a sought-after masterclass instructor, and maintains a trombone studio in the Washington, DC area. He is currently at work on his debut solo album, which features the works of unaccompanied trombone. Follow Myles' journey on social media, where he shares his musical process, performance education, and music industry satire.

www.mylesblakemore.com

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 decided to join band. I heard the local high school marching band play a popular radio song named "In Those Jeans" by Ginuwine. I thought it was so cool that I signed up the next day. The band director told me I had long arms and that I should play trombone. When I made it home I begged

my parents to get me one and they agreed, even though neither of us knew what a trombone was.

What equipment do you primarily use?

I use a Bach 42b that has been modified by the Brass Ark in LA along with a Doug Elliot mouthpiece. I grew to love the Bach sound listening to a ton of live concerts from the Dallas Symphony and the Minnesota Orchestra.

What are some of your favorite highlights of your career?

It's so cliché as a brass player, but all my favorite moments have come from playing Mahler. My favorite of which was performing his 5th symphony at the Brevard Music Center. I got to spend an entire week sitting next to David Jackson, which to this day is still one of the only times I've ever worked with another professional African American trombonist.

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

From a pure brass side of things the Four of a Kind Trombone Quartet album opened my mind as a high school student to what the trombone is capable of. But from a general music side Nina Simone's Little Girl Blue took me to another world of what a musician is capable of.

Who inspired you to play your instrument?

Must be a three way tie between that high school marching band, my first band director, and Ginuwine.

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

Oh I just love to listen to music written for other instruments. Some of my favorites are Sibelius Violin Concerto, Copland Clarinet Concerto, and John Williams Trumpet Concerto.

How have your practice habits changed from when you were a beginner until now?

In a lot of ways they've stayed the same. For example I practice whenever the mood strikes me rather than scheduling a certain time. However when I am practicing it's way more efficient than when I was younger. I chalk this up to listening to reference recordings and recording and listening back a lot.

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

When I was younger I wasn't shown how to properly articulate with the tongue so I never used it. I would start every note with the lips and a "poo" syllable. It wasn't until I began lessons in 10th grade that this was corrected and now articulation is one of my strong suits.

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

I love to sing whenever I can. In the shower, in the car, even at the dinner table so it's only natural that I do it in my practice as well. I sing especially when I'm listening to a reference recording or before I buzz a section of music.

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

Perseverance and luck have been the most helpful for me. I've never come into a new situation as one of the better players, but I've always worked my way up to it over time.

How do you stay motivated? Do you have any tips to help stay motivated?

It's difficult and I find myself going in and out of periods of motivation. I'm not sure it's possible to manufacture motivation so I think it's important to capitalize once you have it. Whether it lasts for 3 months or 3 weeks do something with it.

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

I meditate right before auditions and it has worked wonders. It brings my heart rate down and clears my mind of distractions just long enough to play a good first note. I use both guided meditation and Zen Buddhist meditation tactics I found on Youtube.

With whom did you study?

I studied with James McNair, former member of the "President's Own" Marine Band in high school. John Kitzman, former principal of the Dallas Symphony in undergrad. And Per Brevig, former Principal of the Metropolitan Opera during my masters degree.

Who are some of your musical heroes?

All of the African American classical trombonists that have come before me are huge inspirations. Like Weston Sprott, David Jackson, and Ken Thompkins to name a few.

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

When I was in high school I was flipping through channels one day and came across a PBS airing of Mahler's 5th symphony with the New York Philharmonic. It was that opening trumpet solo played by Phil Smith that caught my attention and I listened to the entire symphony. The next day I asked my band director about orchestras and him and my lesson teacher encouraged me to audition for the local youth orchestra. I auditioned every year and finally got in my senior year. From the first notes sitting in that ensemble I knew I'd found that something special.

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

My high school teacher gave me the idea that it was possible, but even then I knew I wanted to pursue music in some way.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

When I was in school I could get 3-4 hours a day, but I've learned how to get a lot done in 2.

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

Yes, mylesblakemore.com

What are some of your favorite etude books?

It's hard to beat the classic Rochut/Kopprasch combo, but I've really been digging the etudes in Megumi Kanda's Trombone Unlimited book.

What are some ways to improve one's rhythm?

Listening to both reference recordings and your own practice recordings at half speed to see how well they line up. It's extremely painful but effective.

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

Loosen up every once in a while. I was a bit uptight in my younger years to say the least.

What is your favorite place that you have traveled to?

Both New York City and Miami have pieces of my heart.

Who are some of your heroes in life?

Nina Simone was the total package. Intelligent, civil rights activist, and brilliant musician.

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

My parents are some of the most hard-working people I've ever known. Growing up I never saw them take a sick day or even a vacation from work.

How do you suggest balancing life with music?

I'm not the best at doing this, but it's important to have things outside of music. If for no other reason that you need experiences for your music to draw upon.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Do not wait for opportunities to come to you because they won't. You have to get out and make your own opportunities.

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

If you're going to go for it then go for it all the way. A back-up plan will only leave you unhappy. This is coming from someone who started college as an education major because it was the "safe" option. That we need music educators that are not only passionate but good musicians. So work your tail off no matter what your major is.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

Not when I was growing up, but funny enough my dad picked up the electric bass 5 years ago. We have yet to play together but I know it's coming.

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

The Meyerson Hall in Dallas has the best acoustics I've yet to encounter!

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

People always complain about the lack of repertoire written for our instrument but some heavy hitter composers have written for trombone. My favorites include Saint-Saens, Dutilleux, and John Mackey. As for transcriptions I've really learned to love Bach cello suites.

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

Find a piece of music that sits in the high range and learn it. It's easier to improve technique if it's in a musical context. It's also a lot funner.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I see myself really enjoying life. Surrounded by a great family, playing in a great ensemble, and teaching a ton of students.

Do you practice visualizing yourself performing?

Before an audition or big performance I find a picture of the venue online and

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

Do not go into debt whatever you do. The top school on your list is not worth six figure student loan debt.

What are you listening to currently?

A mix of Reginald Chapman, Kota the Friend, and Excerpts for a competition.

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

Hip hop really warms my soul. I remember the first album I fell in love with as a kid was Graduation by Kanye West.

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

I took an acting class in college that really informed me how similar the two arts are.

What are you working on right now?

Too many things. I'm currently recording an album, preparing for two competitions, applying for a fellowship, composing an etude book, making social media content, and scheduling masterclasses for the spring semester. All on top of my work at Howard and the Naval Academy. But being busy is good and I count myself lucky.

Please list some of your favorite websites for musicians.

Last Row Music and the International Trombone Association are great for keeping up with industry news. Trombone Excerpts and Alessi Studios are awesome practice tools. Weston Sprott and Doug Yeo's website both have some awesome blogs if you're looking for inspiration or knowledge.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

Be methodical as possible, write down everything, and track which excerpts are your strongest/weakest. I like to think of your excerpts like cooking a dinner with multiple parts. You want everything to be done around the same time. So if you

spend more of your time on Ride. That way they'll both be finished cooking around the same time.

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

Definitely! I try to worry about the things I can control to set myself up for the best possible performance. For example eating right, getting sleep, and giving myself plenty of time to get to the venue. I figure the nerves will still be there but at least everything else is taken care of and I can focus solely on the music.

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

Getting fundamentals down. The great musicians may be different in a lot of areas, but they're all similar in that they have a solid foundation. I've never heard a great and thought "wow their intonation was a little off". That's never a worry!

What advice can you give about mental wellness?

It is important to keep track of your mental health. Having a support system around you is key I've found. Talking about issues rather than bottling them up is an easy way to avoid larger problems later. I personally use talk therapy and would happily recommend it to anyone.

Do you like to read? What are you currently reading?

Yes, I'm actually in the middle of reading Lord of the Rings for the first time. I'm really late to the series, but it's fantastic!

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

I'd still be within the arts somewhere. Perhaps acting or dancing.

Who are your favorite composers?

Mahler is my absolute favorite but I also enjoy Ravel, Gershwin, and Duke Ellington.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I do, it's awesome to see students gaining confidence as they improve upon an instrument. It's even better knowing that the skills are transferable and that if they learn how to play an instrument than they can take on anything.

What are your favorite solos for your instrument?

Saint-Saens' Cavatine, John Mackey's Harvest, and Dutilleux's Choral Cadence et Fugato.

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

Anything by Malcolm Gladwell, Grit by Angela Duckworth, and the Inner Game of Tennis by Timothy Gallwey.

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

I would practice at much slower tempos, record myself, and listen to more reference recordings.

Do you have any tips on forming a chamber group?

Find people who are like minded in their goals for the group. There's nothing worse than being ambitious and having someone who doesn't have the same goals. Or vice versa.

What is your favorite food?

A good cheeseburger!

