

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Nick Garrison



New Orleans-based trombonist **Nick Garrison** maintains an active performance schedule throughout the country and abroad. Currently a member of the circus-brass rock band, Dirty Bourbon River Show, he tours part-time showcasing original compositions at festivals and theaters. Nick joined the Acadiana Symphony Orchestra in 2010 and continues to play orchestral and chamber music throughout Louisiana. He graduated magna cum laude from Louisiana State University in 2012 with a Bachelor of Music degree. While teaching primarily at Baton Rouge Music Studios, he developed an industry training program aimed at advancing students in jazz, rock, and blues to new performance heights. Nick performs locally as a freelance artist with musical acts such as the New Orleans Swamp Donkeys, Treme Brass Band, Lena Prima Band, New Orleans Swinging Gypsies, and the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra.

Link to websites:

<https://www.facebook.com/garrisontrombone>

<https://dirtybourbonrivershow.com>

What equipment do you primarily use?

I play on a King 2B Silversonic trombone for most of my jazz/contemporary/funk/hip hop/blues/latin performances and recordings. When I'm playing in the symphony, church, or in a chamber music setting I play an Edwards T-396A tenor trombone.

What are some of the highlights of your career?

In the U.S., I've toured and performed through more than 35 States. Internationally, I've played festivals and clubs through England, France, Turkey, Haiti, Australia, New Zealand, Wales, and Canada. I have shared the stage with incredible artists such as Rufus Reid, Topsy Chapman, Ellis Marsalis, Sonny Landreth, Marcia Ball, Chubby Carrier, Marc Broussard, Wes Anderson, Tony Dagradi, George Porter Jr., and trombone legends including Bonerama and Joseph Alessi.

What are your favorite solos written for another instrument?

Ooohh, I love the Paul Jeanjean "Prelude et Scherzo" for Bassoon. And of course, J.S. Bach's Cello Suites and Brandenburg concertos. Any Prokofiev piano concerto is awesome, or just, Prokofiev is awesome.

With whom did you study?

I've studied primarily with Steven Menard, Sean Reusch, Dr. Jeannie Little, Dr. Joseph Skillen, Dr. Brian Shaw, Dr. John Bishop, Dr. Bill Grimes, and Seth Orgel. I've participated in masterclasses and seminars with artists such as Michael Mulcahey and Wycliffe Gordon. Today, I find that I "study" with so many local musicians in New Orleans on a regular basis through shed sessions, listening sessions, and on-the-gig experience. We can learn from everybody.

Who are some of your musical heroes?

What an artist does musically, and who they are at their most honest core can be very different things. There are people out there who I respect for their artistic accomplishments, but I might not know, or connect with their values in life. To be a hero in my life, that person will exemplify mindfulness, compassion, and creativity in every breath.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

I haven't had a typical day since college, so practicing varies all the time. I will go through periods of concentrated fundamentals when there is something in particular I wish to improve on. In those instances I will do about a 10 minute warm-up, followed by one or two 45-minute sessions of basics with a break in between. Then I progress through the music I am currently working on, which might equate to one or two more 45-minute sessions with breaks. When I am practicing different instruments in the same day, such as small-bore tenor, large-bore tenor, bass

trombone, tuba, and trumpet, I try to space that out through the day. If I don't have any classical gigs coming up for a couple of weeks I tend to concentrate my all of my energy on transcribing jazz solos, improvising over changes, playing bass lines, and memorizing lyrics and melodies. I'm not sure how much time is spent each day doing this, but it's usually as much as I can fit in before the gig at night.

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

You know, this is something I've gone back and forth on for years. I used to have one, but currently I just post my schedule on Facebook. When the time comes that I lead my own solo project, I will create my brand. For now, I work enough locally as a sideman that I haven't found the need to further justify my schedule and accomplishments. But maybe that will change soon, haha!

What are some of your favorite albums?

The Vienna Trombone Quartet, "Russian Melodies." 'Nuff said.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Take many, deep, relaxed breaths. Spend your time listening to the music as much as possible before the rehearsal/performance. Out of ear, out of mind. Let the music you listen to guide the direction of your progress. Where do you want to grow and improve? What examples of recordings do you want to use to learn more about your craft and your command over style. Avoid the trap of only practicing for your gig coming up. Practice all the time in these areas that you want to master. The recordings and live performances are your inspiration.

Make a budget. Especially if you are just out of college, or moving to a new city, it can be financially challenging to plunge into the deep end of freelance work. Can you find any regular gigs or are they all last minute calls? It's OK to have a side hustle, or a couple! There are plenty of incredible musicians out there that work other jobs besides just playing their instrument. It's especially rewarding (and practical) if your outside work can involve music, or the arts in general. Have a wide variety of skills in your tool bag. There is always a need for arrangers, copyists, composers, recording engineers, audio technicians, music journalist, promoters, etc.

Network, network, network. You have to be seen on the scene. Shaking hands with an artist at their gig in a respectful manner can be the difference between them remembering you and hiring you in the future, or not.

Know your musical community, including every ensemble that performs in your city. Introduce yourself to the teachers of your respective instrument at the nearby colleges, the players in the sections of local orchestras, and as many other freelance artist as possible. Substitute work can be lucrative, and it can circulate your name and contact information in new areas of your community. It's easy to forget that this is a social industry and we are all entertainers, as much as we are introverted artists. So it's essential that we muster the courage to talk to others in our field and play for everybody. Exercise all of your options, every connection that you can make might open up another door of opportunity. Often enough the unlikely situation can turn out fruitful if you give it a chance.

Record yourself all the time, including your performances.

Always find your own sub if you have to back out of a commitment, and give everybody involved a couple weeks notice.

Keep playing the piano, or at least another chordal instrument. It will help everything.

Explore the balance in your life between teaching and playing. Many people do both of these well, and I suggest focusing on one as your primary interest. That might change down the road, so just keep in mind where you are sending your energy.

It doesn't hurt to document all of your gigs so that you have a nice spreadsheet at the end of the year for personal reference and for tax purposes. Find a CPA that works with musicians regularly so that they can inform you of everything you can write off as expenses, and then begin to file with them every year so that you can see your progress.

Stay positive in your outlook and your conversations. Don't talk trash. Most importantly, look inward to find the clearest idea of what you want, and then write down goals that will get you there. You will do this again, and again.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

Some people play or sing on the side, but nobody has gone all in, pursued music as a full-time career. I find support through my family. They don't really know first-hand what the musician's life is like, but they trust me to be proactive and make smart decisions, for which I am grateful.

What are you listening to currently?

Marquis Hill! His trumpet playing, deep knowledge of jazz, and inclusion of hip hop lyricists in his music fully satisfies my mind and heart in this moment. I always work on learning more traditional jazz from New Orleans. So I listen to a lot of artists like Louis Armstrong, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Sidney Bechet, not to mention the brass bands from town such as Rebirth Brass Band, Dirty Dozen Brass Band, and Treme Brass Band. I also play in a jazz Manouche band, so my ears have been filled with Django Reinhardt, Stephane Grappelli, and Angelo Debarre. Recently I've spent more time than ever learning the be-bop language of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Smith, Cannonball Adderley.

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

No, we can find so many examples of pieces we might like in all genres. Even if you don't hear it now, you might enjoy a certain genre down the road, so keep your ears open and always be eager to learn. I never used to like Bluegrass, but the more I listen to it the more I am amazed at what people can do. I see the trombone as a vehicle for expression and communication across all genres. So in that sense, we should stay curious as to how we can apply the instrument in new ways.

Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?

I've only won one contracted orchestral audition and a handful of sublist auditions, but many other informal auditions for contemporary bands. For the orchestra, I can attest that Weston Sprott's breakdown of 6-week preparation works great. It is a detailed regimen that takes all of your focus, and it pays off. For any of your auditions, formal or informal, it's essential to flood your ears with the required music. Learn the score (if there is one) or everybody else's parts. Get some run-throughs in a space that is similar to the room the audition will take place. Play for everybody and get feedback from people who play different instruments.

How could we make music education better?

In higher education I would like to see an all-inclusive approach to music history and theory. There is so much music just in the 20th century that has incredible teaching potential. If modern music was tied together with examples of the classics, students might be able to relate to genres of music that they otherwise would not hear or seek out on their own. They would be able to make connections between J-Dilla and Debussy in the classroom.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I love teaching! I've taught privately for 12 years, and spent 3 of those years working at a studio, where I implemented an audition-based school-of-rock program for students who wanted to specialize in jazz/fusion, rock, and blues. I currently only teach a handful of students by choice, because my schedule changes every week and I tour with bands at irregular intervals.

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

Thich Nhat Hanh, "Peace is Every Step." There are so many great books that help us in specific ways when it comes to performing, teaching, practicing, or even thinking about doing those things. I find this book to be even more valuable, because it influences how you live every day. It encourages us to allow mindfulness to permeate our being. This can help us to observe instead of react, and appreciate the value of every interaction and event, big or small.