

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Nicole Abissi



**Nicole Abissi** is a professional trombonist and teacher living in New York City. She is a member of the Stiletto Brass Quintet and performs on Broadway and with professional orchestras around the world. Nicole received her Bachelor of Music degree from The Juilliard School under the instruction of Joseph Alessi, Principal Trombonist of the New York Philharmonic, and international soloist. She received her Master of Music Degree from Stony Brook University as a student of Michael Powell, Principal Trombonist of the Orchestra of St. Luke's and member of the world renowned American Brass Quintet. Nicole's other teachers include Per Brevig, Warren Deck, Glenn Dodson, and Ian Bousfield. She is also an alumna of Interlochen Arts Academy and Camp, and a student of Tom Riccobono.

Beginning in September of 2007, as a fellow of the New World Symphony, Nicole had the opportunity to work closely with one of the premier conductors of our time, Michael Tilson Thomas. In 2009, Nicole won her first professional position as the Second Trombonist of the Alabama Symphony. In September of 2012 she joined the Colorado Symphony as the acting Principal trombonist for the 2012-2013 season. In the same year, she also filled in as acting Principal Trombone in the Macon Symphony under the direction of Ward Stare. Nicole has also had the pleasure of performing with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, New Jersey Symphony, Delaware Symphony, American Symphony Orchestra, and others.

In addition to her performance experience, Nicole is a passionate teacher. Nicole is an instructor of trombone at Montclair State University in New Jersey as well as Mannes Prep. She has given clinics at many fine universities as well as music festivals, such as, Georgia State University, University of Alabama, Interlochen Arts Camp, Southeast Trombone Symposium,

University of Kentucky, Jackson State University, and Youngstown State University. Her students have gone on to study trombone performance at such schools as The Juilliard School, Northwestern University, New England Conservatory and Lynn University.

Nicole Abissi is an Antoine Courtois Sponsored Artist.  
Nicole's website - <https://citytrombonelessons.com>

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

I took a few months of piano lessons when I was in kindergarten as my first instrument. When we moved to a new town before the start of first grade, I didn't get a new teacher because I didn't ask and my parents didn't think I was very good. In hindsight, I really wish I had kept it up so I wouldn't have needed remedial piano at Juilliard. Regardless, I had enough of a foundation that I knew how to read treble and bass clef and continued to teach myself to play simple things from Disney or Broadway songbooks. I think this made learning to play trombone at 10 a lot easier.

*Who inspired you to play your instrument?*

I was inspired to play the trombone by my affinity for the tenor voice. I grew up listening to Billy Joel, Jim Croce, Frank Sinatra, James Taylor and Bing Crosby. I have always liked the tenor vocal range better than that of sopranos or altos. When my parents took me to Broadway shows, I always liked the men's songs better. The trombone lets me sing with that voice.

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

I would love to play the Artunian Trumpet Concerto. I feel like they don't appreciate it because they have so many great concerti to choose from. Christopher Rouse Flute Concerto is one of my favorite orchestral works. I love it as a symphony, though, and not as something I would want to steal for myself.

*With whom did you study?*

Joe Alessi was my teacher at Juilliard. I still hear his voice in my practice room. I try to listen to recordings of myself and think about what Joe would say. I feel like my time before that with Tom Riccobono at Interlochen was the only reason I made it to Juilliard, so I like to make sure I list him as a teacher. I was fortunate

to get to attend the Aspen Music Festival four times where I studied with Per Brevig and Mike Powell. When I went back to school for my Master's Degree I studied with Mike Powell again. At Aspen, Warren Deck teaches the low brass class. I can't stress enough how much I learned from him in those classes.

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

I started playing trombone when I lived in Port Jefferson, NY, but we moved to Libertyville, IL right before my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. In Libertyville, I was in middle school in 6<sup>th</sup> grade instead of elementary and they had a jazz band in addition to the concert band. Actually, they had two of each for the different levels! I was behind where my peers were and I wasn't going to advance to the upper level band the following year with my classmates, so my band director recommended a private teacher for the summer.

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

I have a website with Colin <https://citytrombonelessons.com>

*What are some of your favorite etude books?*

Brad Edwards Lip Slurs, Bordogni, Blazevich, and Bitsch.

*Do you use any apps when you practice?*

I use Tonal Energy constantly. The drones are fantastic, and I love being able to use them and the metronome at the same time. My old Dr. Beat would not allow this, so I had to use drones in my ipod along with the metronome.

*Please give some tips for freelancing.*

I actually wrote a whole blog post about this if anyone is interested, but my short answer would be to be super patient and practice a lot. You can't rush the process of breaking into a new city, so it will take however long it takes. But you can control what you do with the time you are not gigging and that is the best time to invest in yourself and try to be as good as you can be.

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

Having more education is never a bad idea. No one can ever take qualifications away. You also never know what you may end up doing in your career. I'm about to take over as brass instructor at a private girl's school in NJ. This means I will be teaching beginners through high school. I kind of wish I had taken a methods class once in my life now.

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

I take it a bit for granted because I play there every other week, and not in the most artistically satisfying concerts, but Carnegie Hall is pretty spectacular.

*Do you have any tips for memorizing a piece of music?*

I am not great at this, but when I solfege the piece, it sticks. My excerpts that I solfaged in college are still perfectly memorized.

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

Make sure you are ready to put in a ton of work for the rest of your life. Music as a career is not just fun. I love to play, don't get me wrong! But I have and continue to practice really hard every day. You can play music on the side for the rest of your life and keep it fun while also having a career that pays the bills. Having a different career path doesn't mean that you stop playing; it just means that playing is only for fun. But if music is your career, it needs to be work, too. I have run into a lot of high school students over the years that don't get that. They think music school means all play and no work and I worry about their futures.

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

One of the mandatory classes at Juilliard was Aesthetics. It gave me an excuse to visit the Guggenheim museum and I discovered the artist Marc Chagall. This was the start of a lifelong obsession with his work. I also sought out oddball art exhibits when I visited London on my spring break. Asking the question "what is art?" was a very important and formative experience in the shaping of me as an artist.

*Please list some of your favorite websites for musicians.*

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

I feel like the mental game of performance is everything. Certain personality types are drawn to music and find their way to excel. Perfectionism and obsessive compulsion are common traits. Both can be helpful in small doses and harmful in large ones. I have read a multitude of books on the subjects of performance anxiety and sports psychology. The audiobook versions make it easy to listen while cooking, running, or commuting so there is no excuse. This needs to be seen as at least a minor to anyone trying to attain a performing career.

*Who are your favorite composers?*

Brahms makes whole notes and half notes a joy. Bernstein is the genius my teachers knew who I wish I could have met. Tchaikovsky never wrote a piece that I don't love to listen to on repeat. Mahler makes me think and feel in a deep way that is both profound and divine.

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

I love to teach! My very first student just started his doctoral studies in wind band conducting. I am insanely proud of him and he will have to suffer through me always calling him my student. Having an excellent high school student while I was a fellow in the New World Symphony really informed and shaped my own practice. I still practice what I preach to all of my students. I also find that it continues to make me a better player.

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

I would spend more time on things that scared me. I really focused on fundamentals and hid from the more virtuosic playing techniques. I was insecure and thought I could never do them. Now, I wish I had just tried earlier, because the same way that I was able to improve all of my other techniques has worked for me when improving my virtuosic playing.