

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Peter Freeman



Pete Freeman's mission is to do whatever he can to educate, encourage, and motivate others to discover the joy and excitement that comes from playing the trombone. He is the principal trombonist and President of the Massapequa Philharmonic Orchestra located on Long Island, New York; is a proud member of the Nassau Pops Symphony Orchestra; and has performed with other bands and orchestras including the South Shore Symphony, the Band of Long Island, as well as in many jazz bands and pit orchestras across the metropolitan New York area. He's had the honor of working with musicians such as Michael Tilson Thomas, Marvin Hamlisch, Colonel Arnald Gabriel, Michael Amante, and Elgar Howarth. As a retired Band Director and Arts Administrator, Pete has taught students and worked with teachers at all levels from elementary school through college, and is a Past President of Nassau (County) Music Educators Association and the Nassau County Chapter of the New York State Council of Administrators of Music Education. He continues to perform in the New York metropolitan area, and still maintains an active private studio.

Over the past year, Pete has been the guest on two podcasts- THIS IS YOU and THE ARTIST MATTERS. He also presented a session called Get To The Point at the 2021 International Trombone Festival at Columbus State University in Georgia.

Pete is the creator and administrator for The Trombone Place (www.thetromboneplace.com). He started it to provide a website that was a fun and safe place where beginner through intermediate (advanced too!) players and their teachers could find information, motivation, and inspiration. It has very simple and specific videos so that people can quickly and easily find exactly what they're looking for, and that are short enough to encourage repeat-as-needed viewing.

Pete is the humble husband to his gorgeous wife Joann, the proud father to Jeanette and Billy- both wonderful trombonists!, and the best buddy to Louie, his Maltese dog. HE IS a proud alum of Penn State (The Pennsylvania State University), Long Island University, and Dowling College.

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

I started on trumpet in fifth grade. After a year, my band director said to our section of twelve trumpeters that we had no baritone horns and asked if someone would switch. I thought being the only one on an instrument would be fun, so I raised my hand. To his credit, he refused to let me play treble clef parts and only gave me bass clef music, saying that if I was going to play the baritone horn, I was going to do it the right way. In seventh grade my junior high band director said I should double on trombone, so I borrowed one and learned the Bb scale. That's all I could play until eighth grade when I was recruited for the high school jazz band because they were in dire need of a third trombonist! I've doubled ever since, spending the majority of time on the trombone.

What equipment do you primarily use?

My primary (and favorite) horn is a King 4B that I've played for over 35 years. I use a Pickett 3 mouthpiece with it. I also have a Conn 6H (amazing jazz and pit orchestra horn) and a Courtois AC500 Bass Trombone (a monster that's a blast to play!)

What are some of your favorite highlights of your career?

Performing a trombone trio with my daughter and son accompanied by the Nassau Pops Symphony Orchestra, soloing with various ensembles across the New York tri-state area, presenting a session at the International Trombone Festival, being President of the Nassau (County) Music Educators Association, with a membership larger than that of over thirty states, and taking my high school marching band to Florida to perform for the halftime show at the Gator Bowl.

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

- ROMANTIC TROMBONE CONCERTOS- Christian Lindberg
 - Every trombonist learning the David Concertino must listen to this landmark recording. The cadenza is especially wonderful.
- MANHATTAN WILDLIFE REFUGE- Bill Watrous
 - If you're unfamiliar with this album, your life will be divided between "Before hearing Fourth Floor Walk-Up" and "After hearing Fourth Floor Walk-Up."

- RHAPSODY IN BLUE- unknown orchestra
 - My dad gave me this record when I was around 7 and, since he told me to listen to it, I quietly rebelled and put it on a shelf where it collected dust for two years. Finally, one rainy day I put it on and ended up listening to it five times in a row. I don't have the record anymore and don't remember who played, but that was the moment I knew that I needed to be a musician.
- THE ANTIPHONAL MUSIC OF GABRIELI- Brass members from the Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra
 - The absolute finest playing! (True confession- I could never listen to the whole thing at once. I'd focus on one or two tracks at a sitting- really listening to how the members were not only playing, but how they were listening to and working with each other. Unreal!!!)
- THE COMPLETE COLUMBIA JJ JOHNSON SMALL GROUP SESSIONS ○ Hours of the most incredible jazz music you'll ever hear.
- NOT A NOVELTY- Jennifer Wharton's BONEGASM
 - Jazz trombone quartet featuring Jen, John Fedchock, Alan Ferber and Nate Mayland with rhythm section. The arrangements and performances are so good!!!
- THE 2000 YEAR OLD MAN- Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks
 - This comedy album really did influence me as a musician! As a kid, I loved how funny Mel Brooks was as the 2000 Year Old Man. He was so inventive. After hearing it more often, I became awestruck at how Carl Reiner really listened to what Mel was saying (the routines were all improvised...) and how he followed up with questions that would either bring Mel to the next level of the topic or would go in a new direction. As a musician, this taught me the importance of listening to one another, working together, and knowing how to fit into various musical situations.

Who inspired you to play your instrument?

Danny Leeds. He was three years ahead of me in high school. I thought he was the best trombonist I had ever heard. He gave me my first professional job- playing in a Salvation Army Kettle Band during the holidays.

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

- ***Dvorak Cello Concerto***

- **Mozart Clarinet Concerto**
- **Sibelius Violin Concerto**
- **John Corigliano- Conjuror: Concerto for Percussionist, String Orchestra and Brass**

How have your practice habits changed over the years?

I used to practice with no overarching idea that would connect everything. A few years ago, I changed my approach by adding one specific long-term focus. For example, I spent about 18 months (time flies when the world is closed) working on smoothness and connecting notes and phrases no matter what I practiced- from lip slurs and scales to etudes and concert literature.

Since April, my big goal has been to improve my intonation in all keys as well as my ability to hear and fine tune myself- especially on those darn 6th partial notes (Hi F, E, Eb and alternate position D). Recording the same exercise/etude/piece over time proves that this method works!

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

Intonation and balancing when playing in band. (I was usually too loud!)

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

Absolutely! I always think of a statement that Bill Pearce made at the 1982 Eastern Trombone Workshop at Florida State University. He held up his trombone and said, "The trombone is not your instrument. Your heart is your instrument. The trombone is simply an amplifier." I sing to help me hear my instrument- then I use my horn to amplify what I hear.

What is your definition of success?

Success is using your talents to make other people's lives better.

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

Whatever your definition of success is, the most important qualities are knowing how you need to prepare for it and then having the grit to do what you need to do to achieve it. These will be similar no matter what you're attempting to be successful at. For example, when you were trying to be successful at tying your shoelace, you used the same preparation (thinking through the process) and action (practice, notice your

mistakes, learn from them, and practice again until you can do it) as when you're practicing your instrument.

What do you want your legacy to be?

I hope others will use my highest level of musicianship and teaching as their foundation for reaching heights that they can't possibly imagine.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Spending time with my family, reading, baseball (Let's go Mets!!!)

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

This happens to everyone! My standard advice is to remember that frustration often comes when your expectation isn't matching your current reality. Be honest about what you need to do to fulfill your expectation and then go for it!

Now- here's some real stuff... Sometimes you need to acknowledge that you're down and then take a little time away from what's frustrating you. When you come back to it, set a timer and only work at it for one minute. If, after that minute you've had enough, then you're done. Chances are you'll experience some success and will want to go another minute. Pretty soon, you'll be back on track.

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

I don't meditate, but I do a lot of creative thinking when walking Louie, my dog.

With whom did you study?

My most influential trombone teacher was David Gatts, who was the trombone professor when I was at Penn State. He really got to know me and knew how to push me.

For overall musicianship and communication as a conductor, I learned so much from Smith Toulson- conductor of the Penn State Wind Ensemble and Symphony Orchestra. Honestly, I learned more from him when he worked with the woodwinds and strings than from when he worked with the trombones because I could completely focus on what he was saying and the response he was getting without having to also worry about how I was going to play.

For jazz, I absorbed all I could from the late George Bouchard. George was the jazz instructor at Nassau Community College, taught every year with Jamey Aebersold at

Jamey's jazz camp, and is the the author of INTERMEDIATE JAZZ IMPROVISATION- an awesome book.

What qualities do you think are important in a student?

Of course be enthusiastic, prepared, focused, etc.

Let's alter the question a bit- As a teacher, what qualities do you need so that you can most effectively teach yourself as well as others? A student can be passive and can choose what and what not to learn. On the other hand, a teacher needs to not only understand the material- she needs to be able to explain and demonstrate it at a high level. He may be a "student" during a one hour lesson, but he's actually teaching *himself* whenever he practices during the other six days and twenty three hours. This mindset makes the student her own most important teacher, and gives her the permission and freedom to be curious and to experiment to find the best ways to accomplish her musical goals.

How has being a musician changed you as a person?

I wanted to say that it's helped make me more accepting and understanding of other people's views and contributions, but I'm not sure I'm that way because I'm a musician or if I was that way beforehand and those qualities helped me as a musician.

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

The day in fourth grade when I listened to Rhapsody in Blue five times in a row.

How much do you practice on a typical day?

I try to work on fundamentals every time I practice and then will add etudes, literature, jazz, improv, when I can. It can be twenty minutes one day and several hours another.

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

www.thetromboneplace.com. I started it in April of 2020 because there needs to be someplace for beginning through intermediate players and their teachers to quickly and easily find information, inspiration, and motivation. I'm really proud of it and have been humbled by the lovely comments visitors to the site have made.

What are some of your favorite etude books?

I love Bordogni, Schlossberg, and Blazhevich. Currently, though, here are the books I'm using and are always next to, or on, my music stand -

- ARBAN COMPLETE METHOD FOR TROMBONE- edited by Brian Bowman and Joe Alessi
 - I've used this book on and off since junior high school (there was a different edition back then), and feel like I'm just beginning to understand how to get the most out of it. The Bible...
- LIP SLUR MELODIES- Brad Edwards
 - Honestly, I rotate among all of Brad's books. He's so musical, and his comments are always spot on.
- TROMBONE INTONATION MASTERY- David Vining
 - The approach this book takes in forcing me to really hone in on my intonation is so logical and well thought out. It has proven to be extremely helpful.
- 24 JAZZ ETUDES FOR TROMBONE- Jack Gale
 - I just discovered this book a few months ago. It's amazing!

Do you use any apps when you practice?

I use TE Tuner, Tunable, Dr. Drone (my favorite for lip slurs), and iReal Pro. For my beginning students, I have them get the free version of BandmateChromaticTuner. Once you set it up, you play a note on your horn and it displays that note on a staff. This has really helped those students who don't know what partial and note they're playing. For example, playing a first position note and not knowing if it's an F or a Bb.

If you have an iphone, download an app called App Sliced. It lists apps that are on sale or are free for a limited time. There are almost always free tuners and metronomes on there!

Do you listen to any podcasts and if so, which ones?

- STICKY NOTES
 - Excellent stories and analysis of classical works.
- THE BULLETPROOF MUSICIAN
 - Incredible practice tips based on research.
- THE MUSICIAN'S GUIDE PODCAST
 - Karen Cubides is a brilliant interviewer and she, along with her guests, share such great information. So inspiring (and fun)!!!
- THE TROMBONE RETREAT

- Awesome, in-depth interviews with today's best trombonists.
- THE IAN BOUSFELD EXPERIENCE
- Thoughts and insights from one of my trombone heroes!
- HIP-BONE MUSIC BONE2PICK
- Jazz trombonist/composer/band leader/educator Michael Davis interviews a wide variety of brass players. Very engaging!
- CLEAR + VIVID with ALAN ALDA
- Alan's interviews with artists, scientists, and others are so interesting! I learn something new every time I listen.

What are some ways to improve one's rhythm?

Learning how to read and play rhythm is like learning how to read and recite poetry. It takes practice to understand how to recite a poem so that it reflects what the author's intentions are. In the same vein, it takes practice to know how to read and interpret rhythms so that they reflect the composer's intentions and the style. For example- eighth notes may look the same when seen in Tuba Mirum from the Mozart Requiem and in April in Paris from the Count Basie Band, but reversing styles would be challenging to listen to.

So to answer the question- practice and listen to players you respect while you look at the music they're playing so that you can see and hear how the rhythms should be performed. Do this often enough and you'll be able to transfer your knowledge to unfamiliar pieces.

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

Make sure you create goals that you have (almost) complete control in achieving. In other words, a goal of "I want to play in the Philadelphia Orchestra" depends on whether there's an opening and how others judge your audition. A goal of "I want to play well enough to be able to work as a musician, whatever that may look like" depends almost completely on your preparation, skill level, and professional attitude.

Who are some of your musical heroes?

Tommy Dorsey, JJ Johnson, Dexter Gordon, Joe Alessi, Jörgen van Rijen, Eddie Daniels, Billy Freeman

Who are your main influences in your life?

My parents and in-laws, my wife, and my kids.

How do you suggest balancing life with being a musician?

There's no easy answer- sometimes balance means spending chunks of time focusing on life and chunks of time focusing on music. What's helped me is spending time with friends and family who aren't professional musicians.

Please give some tips for freelancing.

I've read other artists' answers, and they're all wonderful. Let's think of it like this- Imagine you hire a painter to come into your home and paint your living room- the room that everyone sees. What would you expect the painter to do in order to make you happy and want to hire him/her again? For me, the painter would need to

- Show up on time
- Have all paint, brushes, rollers, tarps, tape, etc. ready to go.
- Use the color I asked for.
- Use the proper brush/roller to give the walls the texture I want.
- Be pleasant to be around.
- Not criticize whoever previously painted the room.
- Clean up and thank me when the job is done.
- Recognize that I will be the one who will have to answer to my friends if the job isn't done properly or if it looks incredible.

Now, think of yourself as that painter when you freelance. You need to

- Show up on time.
- Have your music, pencil, instrument, mutes, etc. ready to go.
- Play the music correctly in the manner/style in which you're asked.
- Be pleasant to be around.
- Never criticize anyone. (Let's capitalize and underline this one- **NEVER CRITICIZE ANYONE!!!!!!**)

- Clean up and thank the person who hired you when the job is done.
- Recognize that the person who hired you will be the one who will have to deal with the consequences of you not meeting expectations or of you performing beautifully.

With all this said about freelancing,
What do you do when you mess up?

Don't worry-you will! You may accidentally say the wrong thing, forget your music, forget your mouthpiece, or, as I did, forget to show up (next time I'll tell that story!) There are three points if you want to be hired again-

1. Apologize as soon as you realize your goof is, or will be, noticed before you can fix it.
2. Try to fix it on your own and offer to do whatever is needed to make things right and stay on the good side of the person who hired you.
3. Here's the tough love portion of our interview lol- Numbers 1 and 2 only work ONCE. We're all human and understand that none of us are perfect. Most people will work with you when they know how upset you are that you messed up, because it will be a single instance. If it happens again though, it will be seen as a pattern, and that's something you'll want to avoid.

What tips would you give to a young musician that wants to become a soloist?

Besides being an excellent musician and following the suggestions above, see yourself as an entrepreneur and make sure you have at least some understanding of the music business.

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

My elementary Music Ed professor Dr. Keith Thompson said it best during our very first class- "If there's anything you'd rather do instead of teaching music, go do it." The same goes for music performance. Living a life in the arts as a performer or teacher only works when it's a calling that you need to answer.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

My parents weren't, but my dad's mom performed in amateur musicals when she was a young lady living in England. My father-in-law was a wonderful pianist, and both of my kids are terrific trombonists.

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

I know this sounds silly, but I don't think of favorite places as much as times I've performed with and for people who love music.

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

Spend more time focusing on your low notes than your high notes. (I could go into so many exercises and thoughts here...)

What are you most proud of in your life?

Finally- an easy question!!! The answer is my wife and kids!

Do you practice visualizing yourself performing?

Yes. Not only that, but I'll stand in another room and practice walking to my practice spot or "on stage". I imagine the applause, how I'm going to acknowledge it, and memorize every detail of what and how I'll play between my first two breaths. This is the most important part to me because the adrenaline will be flowing and I want to know that, if needed, I can hit autopilot for that first phrase. By the time I take my second breath, the excitement will have started to settle down and I'll be able to focus on performing. (The real thought here is, "I'm nervous, and no matter what happens after getting started, my beginning is going to be awesome!" It helps me know that I'm feeling excited instead of feeling scared.)

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

If it's what you need to do, then you need to do it! Be ready for comments from loved ones about how hard it is to make a living with a music degree. Make sure whatever program you choose offers classes or instruction about the business side and entrepreneurship as you'll need to know more than just how to play your instrument.

What are you listening to currently?

Besides the albums I mentioned before, I've been listening to a lot of Curtis Fuller, Earth Wind & Fire, and the music of Sibelius. (His third symphony is a hidden gem!)

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

Not at all. There are only two kinds of music- the kind you like and the kind you don't like. I like everything as long as the craftsmanship is there (or if I personally know and I like the musicians...)

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

I had to take a gym class, so I chose golf. Thinking about it afterwards, I saw how much it helped me understand how to focus on the most minute details of playing before putting everything together.

What projects are you working on right now?

I've been working on my website, (thetromboneplace.com), trying to make sure everything on it is easily understandable and will help trombonists improve. I'm also President of the Massapequa Philharmonic Orchestra (as well as a trombonist) here in New York, so I'm making sure our re-opening this season is successful.

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

The question assumes that the young musician isn't already great, and I deeply believe that every person is already a great musician. For most of us, that greatness is buried deep inside. Every time we seriously practice/perform, I imagine that we're removing an outer layer of ourselves so that our inner great-musician can come closer to the surface. We're not learning new stuff- we're uncovering hidden knowledge and ability. When you look at it this way, there's never a reason to get frustrated with your progress or to think you had a bad practice session because, as long as you tried, you peeled off a layer. In other words, you don't practice to get better- you practice to get one step closer to releasing your inner great-musician. You will get better as a by-product of practicing- not because of it.

What life lessons have you learned through music?

These are true in music (in music, as in life, there are always exceptions...)

1. Always listen.
2. Know when to blend in, when to stand out, and when to stay silent.
3. Don't fret over the past, don't worry about the future- do focus on how you can be your best right now.

(My dad passed ten years ago and I'd be remiss if I didn't share this lesson he taught me. It is especially true for music. For this interview, I'm changing one word...)

4. You can't eat like a bird and poop like an elephant.

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

Yes, and just as importantly, learn one lick at a time and then incorporate it into actual solos until it becomes second nature. Aebersold play-alongs and the iReal Pro app are wonderful for this.

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

I'd probably be an English or Social Studies teacher or a professional haiku writer.

Who are your favorite composers?

Lauren Bernofsky, Clifford Brown, Fletcher Henderson, Jerry Herman, Billy Joel, Gustav Mahler, Wally Minko, Jean Sibelius, Rod Temperton. (There are more, but I can listen and learn from everything these composers have written...)

How could we make music education better?

I have a whole theory on how to make the entire education system better, but will save it for another time. To stick with the music part- Music should be a core subject that is included as part of each day's program. Reading music should be taught along with reading words. Rhythm should be taught along with math. A multi-disciplinary approach that includes music would help enrich and improve learning in all subjects. Again- this is just a bit of how I believe the education system can be improved.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I don't like to teach- I love and need to teach. It is at the core of who I am. There is nothing better than helping someone uncover their inner greatness!

What are your favorite solos for your instrument?

There are so many! My DNA favorites though are the David Concertino and Tommy Dorsey's I'm Getting Sentimental Over You because my parents loved when I played them.

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

- PEAK- Secrets from the New Science of Expertise- by Anders Ericsson and Robert Poole

- This book takes a deep, entertaining dive into what type of practice is most effective. The chapter on Mozart will make musicians feel like they can accomplish anything with the proper effort.

- THE TALENT CODE- by Daniel Coyle

- A gold-standard book that looks at places that have a high number of highly successful people in a certain field (soccer players from Brazil for example) and points out the environmental factors as well as the individual habits that cause them to be so good.

- HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE- by Dale Carnegie

- Let's get this out of the way- this book is old and many of the examples have aged. That said, you will find your career and life to be much more enjoyable if you incorporate the behaviors described here into your interactions with colleagues, friends, and family.

- TEAM OF RIVALS- by Doris Kearns Goodwin

- Seeing how Lincoln brought people into his administration because of their skills at performing specific jobs, even if they had disagreed with him in the past, teaches a lot about freelancing and working with people who you may not and may never want to be friends with.

- ILLUSIONS- by Richard Bach

- A fable with a very interesting philosophy about life.

- WANDA HICKEY'S NIGHT OF GOLDEN MEMORIES (and other disasters)- by Jean Shephard

- This collection of short stories is hilarious! The author (you know him as the narrator and author of the movie "A Christmas Story") uses words brilliantly. He makes it so easy to visualize the people and places he's describing. As you read, think about how we can musically communicate a story so that our audience can feel and understand it.

- CASTE- by Isabel Wilkerson

- (Because this interview will be read by young musicians, the first sentence of this description is purposely over mild.) This important book for high school students and adults shows how people who, through birth, have been looked down upon and have been treated poorly by those who, through birth, have more easily experienced society's benefits. (Again-this is a huge understatement.) It focuses on the Indian Caste System, Nazi Germany, and the post-slavery part of American history. The stories are disturbing, but your empathetic sense will be heightened. It will affect you in areas much bigger than music, but as a musician, this can be very useful in trying to

understand the life experiences that composers have had and how to use your performance to best convey those experiences.

Do you have any tips on learning how to improvise?

Think of learning improvisation in the same way as you did for learning your instrument. Start with the basics- play a scale while listening to a play-along recording that stays on one chord. Once you're comfortable with that, play arpeggios. Remember, this is a new language, so take your time!!!

What is your favorite food?

Homemade S cookies.