

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Rachel Trumbore



Trombonist **Rachel Trumbore** is the Professor of Brass at Aurora University based between the Chicago suburbs and San Diego. An active freelancer, Rachel regularly performs with the San Diego Symphony and San Diego Pops. She has played with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Weird Al Yankovic, The Who, Common, Hugh Jackman, Laura Osnes, Johnny Mathis, The Midtown Men, Il Divo, Angelique Kidjo, and under the baton of Charles Dutoit, Edo de Waart, Rossen Milanov, Cristian Măcelaru, and James Gaffigan. Rachel completed her graduate studies from California State University Long Beach in 2018 with Kyle Covington and Robert Frear. Prior to living in Long Beach, Rachel received her Bachelor of Music degree from Northwestern University in 2016 where she studied under the guidance of Michael Mulcahy, Tim Higgins, Doug Wright, Randy Hawes, and Chris Davis. Outside of music, Rachel finds joy in hiking, gardening, and caring for alpacas with her wife Sarah.

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

1,000% YES! If I can sing it with articulation, dynamics, and style, chances are I can play it with those details too. It really helps me hone my ear and my understanding of the music.

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

I think determination, gratitude, and kindness can take you very far.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I love taking care of my veggie garden and our farm's 8 alpacas. When I'm not outside working on the farm, I also love to cook!

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

I feel that meditation is an essential tool that everyone can use in order to maintain their sanity in today's world. The best news is that there is no right or wrong way to meditate! Meditation to me is just BEing fully in the present moment in every situation as much as I can. So if you can do anything mindfully and presently, you are meditating. This approach has really helped me navigate my life, especially this past year. I also love sitting quietly with my breath, sitting in nature, driving, hiking, and listening to music as other ways to meditate.

BEing fully in the present moment is also where I have noticed that the best musicians operate from in performances. Observing this, I made an experiment of myself and practiced making this state of BEing something I experienced in my day to day life as well as during my practice sessions. I wrote my findings in my Master's Thesis on why I think two specific breathing meditation techniques that I implemented into my daily life and practicing helped me improve my performances. I noticed that the more easily I was able to enter into the present moment in general, the better my performances got. I think this was because I was less focused on what was happening in my head and body (performance anxiety), and more focused on what I was going to say through the music. I also think a lot of getting better has to do with the amount of awareness we are able to hold as we listen to ourselves play, so in being more present, I have been better able to improve my trombone playing.

With whom did you study?

I am very grateful to have had many great teachers. I formally studied with Sean Reusch, Mick Mulcahy, Randy Hawes, Tim Higgins, Kyle Covington, & Chris Davis. One of my favorite things about music is that you don't have to study

with someone to learn a lot from their musicianship. So I'm always continuing to learn from various musicians from Ian Bostridge to Wycliffe Gordon.

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

You don't need to be a pro to practice like a pro.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

My sister [Lizzi Trumbore](#) is one of my favorite singer/songwriters! And my parents were both in music through high school. Having their support and encouragement made a huge impact on my growth as a young musician.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Hopefully still living out in the country with my wife, alpacas, and a garden haha.

What are your favorite things to do that make you happy?

Growing my own food brings me a lot of satisfaction and joy, as well as hiking and spending time in nature.

What are you listening to currently?

I'm pretty obsessed with The Punch Brothers and Dreamers' Circus right now.

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

I took a couple of classes on Buddhism because I was really interested in learning more about the philosophy behind/practice of different kinds of Buddhist meditations. I liked the topic so much that I wrote my [Master's Thesis](#) on how meditative breathing can enhance musical performance. Meditation has really changed me as a musician and person, and I'm so glad I took those courses to start dipping my toes into that world.

What projects are you working on right now?

My biggest project right now is growing a huge veggie garden! My wife and I have several beds going, and we're super excited for a summer full of the freshest food nature can offer!

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

Yes! Almost every time, especially now since I'm not performing often due to Covid. I think this just means that I care about playing my best. I developed some performance anxiety as a college student, but since then have changed the way I think about nerves, and I've figured out what performance enhancing tools work for me. Now I practice a slow breathing meditation technique that gets my body out of the fight or flight mode (sympathetic nervous system) and into the parasympathetic nervous system, which brings my breathing rate, heart rate, and blood pressure down, and enhances my mental focus. I also tell myself that I am the musical messenger, and that my job is to convey a story to my audience. Having this bigger picture in mind gets me out of my anxiety because now I'm simply serving the music, not worrying about how I feel.

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

You don't need to be a pro to practice like a pro. This is probably the best advice I could give any student. Pros focus on making their best sound with ease, and listening as deeply as they can to their sound 110% of the time. The more fully you can hear your own sound, the more specific you are able to make it. I also think treating practice sessions like science experiments helps students reach more specific goals more quickly.

What advice can you give about mental wellness?

This is an extremely important aspect of being a musician (and human in general!) that I do not believe is talked about enough yet in the music world. Being a musician/artist has many ups and downs, and I think it is important to remember in those down times especially, that things will get better. I used to beat myself up for not sounding the way I wanted to yet, but then I realized that it was all a part of a much larger scale process of improvement. Improvement starts with our ears, then our playing has to catch up, so knowing it's all part of how we get better really helped me.

What life lessons have you learned through music?

Music has helped me in many many ways, most significantly with coming out. Playing and listening to music helped me feel and process my emotions in a

healthy way and I have always been very grateful for having it as a coping mechanism during that period of my life. I have learned how to hone and master a craft, how to become my own best teacher, how to deeply listen to others, how to overcome adversity, how to get deep into the present moment and into a "Flow State," and that how you do one thing is how you do everything.

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

I have been exploring this question since Covid hit and I am currently learning about how to grow and sell microgreens as a side business. I believe everyone should have access to real, nutritious food if they want it, and will dedicate an arm of my business to sharing resources and donated food with those in need in my local community.

How could we make music education better?

Talk about how to practice more. Empower students to become their own best teachers and musical artists.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I love teaching!! It helps me solidify new concepts I've been working through in my own practice and challenges me to describe and work on things in a way that will resonate with each student, rather than give the same type of lesson to everyone. I'm always learning from my students as well.

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

The Music Lesson by Victor Wooten
The Balanced Musician by Leslie Sisterhen McAllister
The Art of Phrasing by David McGill
Performance Success by Don Greene
The Talent Code by Daniel Coyle

What is your favorite food?

I love Ethiopian food!