

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Sarah Hatler



Sarah Hatler is a versatile trombonist based out of Dallas, Texas. In addition to maintaining a low brass studio at the renowned Booker T. Washington High School for Visual and Performing Arts in Dallas, she can be heard playing throughout the country with various Top 40 cover bands. She is one-third of the Wonder Horns, an all-female, high-energy horn section for hire that has played together since 2016.

Trained as a classical musician, she has performed with the Turtle Creek Chorale, Washington Concert Opera, Pan American Symphony Orchestra, the Chelsea Symphony, Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra, and as part of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's SOLUNA Festival, among others. She was assistant principal trombone of the Amazonas Filarmonica in Manaus, Brazil, from 2009-2011 and taught at the local music conservatory while living there. She enjoyed her summers spent at the Aspen Music Festival and at Lorin Maazel's Castleton Festival.

In March of 2019, Sarah launched My Mutebag, a new business that gives brass musicians a stylish and functional way to carry their mutes and other gear. Students, music teachers, and professional musicians around the world have

loved My Mutebag for its durability, utility, and style.

She earned her Bachelor of Music on euphonium and trombone from Northern Arizona University under Dr. Pete Vivona and her Master of Music on trombone from the Mannes College of Music in NYC where she studied with Dr. Per Brevig.

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www.mymutebag.com

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

I started on euphonium in 7th grade and then started learning trombone my freshman year in high school. I majored on both instruments in my undergrad, and then primarily focused on trombone from grad school on.

What equipment do you primarily use?

I play on a Bach 42BO for classical work and a Bach 36 for commercial/jazz/pop work.

What are some of your favorite highlights of your career?

Playing the Tomasi Trombone Concerto with the Chelsea Symphony was a special experience. I will never forget playing the Mozart Requiem in a cathedral in NYC; I played the Tuba Mirum solo and remember how in-sync I felt with the ensemble and the environment. I also treasure the time I spent in Brazil playing fulltime with an orchestra for 2 years. Having the opportunity to play principal trombone on Pines of Rome with Lorin Maazel conducting was a highlight. More recently, playing in an all-female Tina Turner tribute band called iTina has also been a great time.

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

I loved Erykah Badu from the first moment I heard her music over 20 years ago on her Live album. I've seen her perform several times and even got to meet her, and I find her to be so inspiring and creative. I particularly love Dexter Gordon's GO album for the catchy melodies and swingin' solos and listened to it on repeat for years. I also obsessed over the RENT album and know almost all of the words to every song.

How have your practice habits changed over the years?

In high school, I woke up early to practice euphonium before school while my mom made me breakfast. After school, I practiced trombone. During school, I would take whatever elective I could that gave me time to practice. Through college, I played both instruments at weekly lessons and weekly master classes, so I always had tons of new rep to work on to be prepared. My life revolved around practicing then. In grad school, I practiced a minimum of 4 hours a days, divided up between 4 different sessions usually.

After graduating, I worked part-time and freelanced, and I practiced at least 2 hours a day.

As an adult who works full-time Mon-Fri and gigs nearly every weekend, I try to practice at least an hour every day. It's not guaranteed that I'm even home that long since I have two active kids with schedules that take us away from home often, so I try to be consistent with a long warm-up routine. I like to think my practices are more efficient now.

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

I remember I couldn't do lip trills at all through high school or college. It finally clicked for me in grad school. I practiced them daily starting with slow quarter notes between 2 notes, then 8th s, 16th s, etc until one day after months of that, it clicked and is not a challenge at all now. My husband was shown once how to do them in high school and was successful on his first try. This is a great personal reminder that slow and steady wins the race, and that not every skill will be equally difficult or easy to attain for individuals.

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

I notice that I sing a lot when I teach but I mostly sing in my head when I'm practicing alone.

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

Keep things in perspective (don't sweat the small stuff).

Remember you can rewrite your story at any point in time.

Set goals to stay accountable.

Just do it- don't spend too much time second-guessing every decision. Make it happen or move on.

What do you want your legacy to be?

Contributed two beautifully curious, kind, and smart people to humanity. I hope people will remember me for being a good friend, speaking up for injustices, and adding some joy into the world.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Watching my son play baseball, going to Six Flags with the kids, grilling and relaxing with the family, listening to podcasts, running, and reading

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

I have plenty of down days, and I try to pull out old solos that I used to love playing like the Grondhal or Martin Ballade. I also love New Orleans Brass Band music, and I find playing along to something like ReBirth Brass Band will get me in a better frame of mind and mood.

In terms of motivation, sometimes you just gotta string together one day at a time to stay on track until you feel genuinely motivated by a new project or upcoming gig. I also notice with myself, I go through short bursts of being super motivated and excited about something new, so I make sure I take advantage of that in the moment or else it'll pass me by.

With whom did you study?

I started private lessons in junior high in Phoenix with Bob McAllister who had a profound impact on me as a musician and person. I then studied at Northern Arizona University with another great teacher, Dr. Pete Vivona. After spending a couple summers at the Aspen Music Festival, I knew I wanted to study with Dr. Per Brevig for my master's degree. He was my teacher at Mannes College in NYC.

What qualities do you think are important in a student?

Ability to truly listen and adjust when receiving feedback, an attitude that seeks growth, and hardworking

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

I have a website for my business, www.mymutebag.com. I launched my business in March of 2019 after about 6 months of planning. One day, I was rushing around the house before a rehearsal looking for something to carry my mutes in. The duffel bag I normally used didn't look professional and my mutes had little dings from hitting each other. Once I got home from that rehearsal, I looked online to buy a new bag and didn't like the options, so I started my own business with mute bags that are stylish and functional. They fulfill a need that many music teachers and musicians have had for a

long time- a durable way to carry music, mutes, iPads, accessories, and gear while looking good.

What are some of your favorite etude books?

I still play from my Rochut book every day, thanks to studying with Per Brevig, who started each lesson with a new one. I play it as written, in tenor clef, and down an octave. I also like the challenge of Bitsch's book, and pull out my Kopprasch for some clef or articulation exercises.

Do you use any apps when you practice?

I use TonalEnergy at home and with students for tuning and as a metronome. I also practice with iReal Pro because you can download any tune and then practice it in any key, any tempo, and any style. It's great for practicing standards and working on transpositions.

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

Don't choose one path; keep practicing jazz. Once I headed down the orchestral trombone path for my master's degree, I neglected my improv skills and put all of my energy into classical music. Now I spend the majority of my gigs playing pop/jazz music and wish I would've kept up with jazz more.

Who are your main influences in your life?

My mom and my husband, both the best people I know

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Freelancing can be rough, especially when you move around a bit like I have. When I moved to Texas, I emailed or texted multiple trombonists including college teachers and other freelancers/local pros, to introduce myself and set up a time to meet or play for them. It's not easy to put yourself out there but being an active performer requires meeting new people and building connections in the community.

I'd also suggest saying yes to projects that may be outside of your comfort zone. I never imagined I'd be playing nearly every weekend for Top 40 cover bands but it's consistent and fun work.

Now that I've gotten some of my own work out here, being able to get friends that are new in town hooked up playing or teaching has been really rewarding.

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

Just my husband, who is another trombonist. No one from my immediate family growing up was involved with the music world.

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

All of the beautiful, old halls in Eastern Europe with my youth orchestra, Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, also loved my two summers at the Aspen Music Festival

Do you practice visualizing yourself performing?

Yes, I always visualize successful outcomes when preparing for any audition or performance that I may be nervous about.

Do you prefer to learn solos by ear or by transcribing or both? Why?

I prefer to listen and transcribe as I go along, measure by measure or phrase by phrase. I don't personally write solos down.

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

If music is something you can't live without, go for it! If you have other interests worth pursuing, you can always keep music for yourself or pick it back up anytime. Stay open to new opportunities along the way.

What are you listening to currently?

Jacob Collier In My Room, Jon Batiste WE ARE, Kris Berg and the Metroplexity Big Band This Time/Last Year, and lots of podcasts

Do you have a favorite genre of music?

Depends on my mood.

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

Yes. Being over prepared has always helped me with nerves. I also try to reframe my nerves as "excitement," because sometimes that inner voice is intent on making you feel bad; telling myself I am excited for this opportunity/performance can shut that voice down.

What advice can you give about mental wellness?

Take breaks when you need them. Per Brevig could see I had a pretty intense approach to playing trombone and that I was very disciplined about practice but he told me to only play 45 minutes out of an hour and take a 15 minute break. It's good for the chops but also resets your mind and gives you time to relax.

Find something that you can turn to when you're feeling down or bad and make yourself do it. For me, that's listening to a favorite podcast that I know will make me laugh and cheer me up. I also know being outside, even just for a walk around the block, lifts my mood.

Remember that you can always create a new path in your life. Don't think that because you've committed so much time, effort, or money to something that that means it's good or right for you. Start a new chapter in your life whenever necessary and give yourself permission to start fresh.

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

I wish I knew more licks when it comes to improvising but I approach improvising in a more melodic way than stringing together licks. Tons of licks can be really impressive and give someone a starting point but to me, it's more important to try to make a musical/melodic idea.

How could we make music education better?

Give younger students the opportunity to perform for their peers and parents sooner. Unlike typical strings/piano students, winds and brass students often don't have a chance to play alone on stage until they're in college. At that point, it's hard not to be extremely nervous. If it were more of a "normal" experience to perform solo, students could feel more comfortable by the time it counts (like a college jury or recital).

Do you have any tips on forming a chamber group?

Start by asking people you know and like to play with and spend time with. If you can't get enough people that way, ask people you trust for recommendations, and don't be afraid to hold an audition to find the right fit for your group.

Do you memorize your music? Do you have any advice for young players on how to memorize?

I do memorize music and still have pieces memorized (more or less) from a long time ago. While I am playing, my brain is saying every note name, so that is a constant, mostly silent but still present, dialogue in my head. When I am working on memorizing something for a recital or solo, I play it over and over while my brain does its thing. Once I feel like I really know a piece, I take away the music and play it and touch up spots that weren't quite right. Before playing the Tomasi Concerto from memory with orchestra, I ran through all the movements start to finish from memory with a recording every day for several weeks to practice and feel comfortable on the day of the concert.

For shorter things I need to memorize quickly, I look at the music while saying the note names in my head and notice any patterns that would be helpful- for example, stay in 4th for these three notes in a row.

In terms of advice, I think repetition is important to feel comfortable during a performance, and try to figure out which style of learning suits you best. You may need to see the notes over and over to lock it in or maybe the positions are the key for you or it could be direction of phrases that help memorize it.

