

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*Featuring*

## Sophie Volpe



**Sophie Volpe** has a multifaceted career as a performer and music teacher. Sophie is a Rochester, NY based musician who earned a BM in Trombone Performance and Music Education from the Eastman School of Music.

Sophie performs with the Rochester Philharmonic, Buffalo Philharmonic, Erie Philharmonic, Clinton Symphony, and Greater Rochester's Women's Philharmonic. She has performed with musicians from the Metropolitan Opera, Saint Louis Symphony, Empire Brass Quintet, and The United States Army Band and has performed in Severance Hall with the Eastman Wind Ensemble. Most recently, Sophie was a finalist in the International Women's Brass Conference 2019 Mock Audition Competition in Tempe, Arizona.

In addition to her professional performance career, Sophie is also a dedicated teacher. She has performed masterclasses and presentations at Interlochen Arts Academy and Arkansas State University and runs an online studio of students from around the U.S. Sophie held the position teaching Assistant at Interlochen Arts Academy in the summer of 2019 and will be returning to be the Trombone Teaching Fellow in 2021.

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

I began playing the trombone when I was nine years old, but my first instrument was viola when I was eight. I heard another 5th grader smearing away on the trombone in a music store and thought "I need to play THAT - whatever that is!"

### ***What equipment do you primarily use?***

I play a custom Edwards trombone, a Greg Black mouthpiece, Sheridan Get-a-Grip and a sshhmute.

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

Don Quichotte El Dulcine by Ravel, Song of the Black Swan by Heiter Villa-Lobos and Bach Cello Suite I and V

### ***How have your practice habits changed from when you were a beginner until now?***

When I was a beginner I felt like practicing was like chucking darts at a dartboard without much thought or plan. Now, I am more methodical about how I practice - I utilize a practice journal and create "modules" for myself around different repertoire, styles, techniques etc... I feel like time is more meaningful and I want to make the most of it! But I still leave time for free play!

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

When I was a young player, I always felt like I was not a sporty player. I would have rather played a singing melody over a technical passage any day.

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

I constantly sing in practice! I believe that if we can sing it, we can play it!

It is one of the most important parts of practice. In instances where notes are not slotting as I wish for them to, I will sing them because it is usually not due to any technical deficiency but a lack in me truly hearing the pitches presented. The length of the horn and the buzz have to match up and singing is the most efficient way to get there!

I also use singing to investigate my musical intentions. If something is not coming through as musically convincingly as I wish, I will sing it and take the middleman (trombone) out of the mix. If I sing it the way I played it, that shows me that I need to work on hearing the phrase differently; if I sing it more convincingly, that shows me that I have an opportunity to improve my

expression through my instrument. It is a really incredible tool for investigative work!

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

Curiosity, empathy, vulnerability, and resilience.

***What do you want your legacy to be?***

I had not attended a concert with a female trombonist on stage until I was in college. In my formative years, I never saw someone who looked like me doing what I wanted to do. I want to be seen by young girls and other women and serve, at minimum, as a data point for them to reference as they construct their hopes and dreams.

***With whom did you study?***

I studied with Larry Zalkind but I was lucky to also receive consistent instruction from Mark Kellogg over my time at Eastman.

***How much do you practice on a typical day?***

Two and a half hours!

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

Yes! My website is [sophievolpe.com](http://sophievolpe.com)! Come visit!

***What are some of your favorite etude books?***

The Tyrrell, Blazhevich and Blume etude books are my absolute favorite.

***Do you use any apps when you practice?***

I use a time tracker app called Toggl, Pro Metronome, Tonal Energy, Drum Beats+ (for when a metronome is less than fun to listen to), a piano app and my Voice Memo's app for recording.

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

You are enough and you do not have anything to prove, just do the best you can, remain curious and take more opportunities to have fun!

***What is your favorite place that you have traveled to?***

London, England!

***Who are your main influences in your life (not just music!)?***

Karen Cubides is one of my greatest influences. She shows the world exactly what a confident, hard working and empathetic person acts like. She has an innate ability to lift others up and show them that their work matters and they actually can do anything they put their mind to and I am really lucky to get to work with her!

***How do you suggest balancing life with music?***

When artists can identify as things other than that related to their art, they will feel more balanced

***Please give some tips for freelancing.***

If you are reaching out to a principal player for a lesson to be considered for their substitute list, just take a lesson with them to learn something, rather than to "get on the list." Everyone in the position of asking you to play has something to share and incredible value to add. Pay them for their time, and let your preparation, authenticity and gratitude speak for itself.

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

I feel lucky to have majored in music education and trombone performance during my time at Eastman! I love teaching and performing equally but my music education degree lent me a bigger empathy for others in the field of music than a performance degree ever could. Through music ed training I got to interact with educators at schools around Rochester, NY and professors who have directed or seen into music programs around the world and the thing that all of them talked about was the importance of music in their communities and

the true impact that educators have on communities. As performers, we have to stay in touch with this side of what we do - the impact we are trying to have on others.

There are also a lot of performers who see a music education degree as a way to earn extra income later on. I think that if you love teaching, studying it in school is one of the best things you can do.

***Is anyone else in your family a musician?***

No! But that does not stop them from singing along to songs in the grocery store and I love it.

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

Severance Hall in Cleveland, OH, David Geffen Hall at NYC's Lincoln Center and the Eastman Theatre in Rochester, NY!

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

Take relaxation seriously, and know that range more of a mental game than a physical one. Chipping away each day and staying consistent while believing you can achieve the range you want will get you where you need to go.

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

Baking bread or desserts, going for walks or hikes with friends, exercising, eating yummy food, finding a new coffee shop, and having game nights with friends.

***Do you practice visualizing yourself performing?***

Yes! My high school band director taught us about visualization! He carved out time during marching band rehearsals to visualize the show as a group - everything from getting off the bus to going to warmup to stepping on the field to ending the show. I am really grateful for that instilled habit! I still use visualization in performing and life!

***What are you working on right now?***

I am working on a blog series that will investigate how wellness, music and ambition work together! Stay tuned!

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

I absolutely get nervous! For a long time, I tried to get rid of nerves completely but I know that they will never fully go away and I wouldn't want them to! I try to prepare for nervousness rather than try to make them go away. Preparing for nervousness can be done through visualization, playing for people more often than you might otherwise or recording yourself. Doing these things and getting used to what it feels like to be nervous while playing will help your body and mind feel more at ease when it is happening and the nervous side effects will dissipate and it will feel more like excitement than nervousness!

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

Musicality first, then working on each tool it takes to make the most effective musical statement. I often feel that it is encouraged to practice the other way around.

***What advice can you give about mental wellness?***

I have seen people get very far with very low mental wellness but I can't imagine that the mountain top feels very satisfying when the whole way up you haven't taken the time to feel each step along the way. Tending to feelings, recurring thoughts, fears, anxieties, joys and desires makes you stronger.

***Do you like to read? What are you currently reading?***

I do! I am re-reading *The Road Back To You* by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile (an awesome Enneagram book) and Amy Shumer's *The Girl With The Lower Back Tattoo* (this has given me some great laughs).

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

I would be a lawyer, therapist or fitness instructor!

## ***How could we make music education better?***

Often music education tries to teach kids how to read before they are taught to listen or speak and it can very easily turn into a memorization game rather than a form of expression. I think that music education could be better if more students were encouraged to listen, learn by ear, speak through their instrument and only then learn to read what they have already heard and said (this is exactly like how we learn a language as children). I think in this way, it would empower more kids to express themselves through music and leave kids feeling more confident in their musical abilities.

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

I love teaching! I think it is an amazing way to connect with people and I always learn something. I am lucky to get to work with students of all ages and intentions; whether we are working on music to incorporate a musical/artistic practice into one's life, to learn discipline or time management or prepare for an audition, I know that the presence of music in that student's life is making their life better in some way. I am so grateful to get to share that process with students.

## ***What are your favorite solos for your instrument?***

Nostos by Spiros Exaras, Aria et Polonaise by Joseph Jongen, Cogent Caprice by Tommy Pederson, Grondahl Concerto and anything by Nicola Ferro for trombone

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

I would practice out of love and not out of fear and try playing in new styles!

## ***What advice can you share about physical wellness?***

The more I take care of my physical wellness through exercise, nourishing food and self care, the easier it is to show up as my best self and make the best music possible. Plain and simple.

## ***What is your favorite food?***

Sourdough bread!