

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Tony Baker



**Tony Baker** is Professor of Trombone at the University of North Texas College of Music. Previously, Mr. Baker served as Assistant Professor of Trombone at Ohio University and as Visiting Assistant Professor of Trombone and Euphonium at Kent State University. A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, he is an alumnus of the University of Minnesota and the University of Central Arkansas. Mr. Baker's professional experience is as varied as it is substantial. Currently a member of the Dallas Opera Orchestra, he has performed with ensembles such as the, the Minnesota Opera Orchestra, the New Hampshire Music Festival Orchestra, and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, the Akron Symphony Orchestra, the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, and the Duluth-Superior Symphony Orchestra.

As a soloist, Mr. Baker has established an international reputation. Mr. Baker was a soloist at the 2007 International Trombone Festival in Birmingham, UK and was a guest recitalist that same year at the Wey Valley International Concert Series in Weymouth, UK. In 2000 Mr. Baker was a soloist at the Grindavik Cultural Festival in Iceland, an event held in conjunction with the Reykjavik Cultural Festival. He

was also a soloist at the 2000 Festival International D'Art Lyrique, held in Aix-en-Provence, France. This is an annual music festival hosted by the Academie Européenne de Musique in conjunction with the Ensemble Intercontemporain. Ensembles with which Mr. Baker has performed as a soloist include the United States Army Band "Pershing's Own", the University of North Texas Symphony Orchestra, the Ohio Valley Symphony, the University of Minnesota Symphony Orchestra, the Ohio University Wind Ensemble, the University of Central Arkansas Wind Ensemble, the trombone choirs of the University of North Texas, the University of Central Arkansas and Morehead State University (KY), the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Wind Symphony, and the Ouachita Baptist University Wind Ensemble (AR). Mr. Baker has given guest recitals and/or master classes at schools such as the Federal University of São João (Brazil), The Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester (UK), Trinity College of Music in London, the University of Arkansas, Humboldt State University (CA), the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, the University of Kentucky, the University of Central Arkansas, Murray State University (KY), the University of Texas at San Antonio, the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, Ohio State University, Ohio University, and Ouachita Baptist University. In February 1996, Professor Baker was invited to perform Luciano Berio's *Sequenza V* at the 1996 Music of Luciano Berio Symposium at the University of North Texas. He was also one of eight invited participants at the 1994 Christian Lindberg Solo Workshop. He has appeared as a clinician and performer at the 1998 University of Illinois Trombone Camp, the 1998 International Tuba/Euphonium Conference and most recently at the 2003 regional International Tuba/Euphonium Conference. In

2001 Baker was a guest artist at the International Trombone Festival in Nashville, Tennessee and was a guest clinician at the 2003 International Trombone Festival in Helsinki, Finland. In May 2002, Mr. Baker hosted the 2002 International Trombone Festival at the University of North Texas. This festival has been widely recognized as the largest and most successful in the history of this event.

As a jazz musician Mr. Baker has performed with groups such as the Woody Herman Band, the Duke Ellington Orchestra and the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra. He has also performed on stage with artists such as Wynton Marsalis, Steve Turre, Terry Gibbs, John Fedchock, Chris Vadala, Butch Miles and Jiggs Whigham. As a jazz clinician, Mr. Baker is on the faculty of various summer jazz workshops, including the University of North Texas Combo Workshop. In 2015 Mr. Baker performed as a guest jazz artist at events such as the American Trombone Workshop and the International Trombone Workshop in Valencia, Spain. In January of 2013 Mr. Baker served as the jazz trombone faculty for the Summer Course in Brasilia (CIVEBRA) in Brasilia, Brazil. He was the first jazz trombonist to hold this position in the 35-year history of this event. He also taught at the 2013 and 2014 Oklahoma Jazz Camps. Mr. Baker has been a guest artist at the Texoma Jazz Fest, the Redbud Jazz Festival, and the Capital University Jazz Week, to name a few. Mr. Baker served as the All-State Conductor of the 2004-2005 Minnesota All-State Jazz Ensemble. Mr. Baker has recorded with the Sounds of Blackness and can be heard with this group on their Grammy-nominated compact disc, Time for Healing. From October 1997 to April 2000 Baker was lead trombonist of the Columbus-based professional big band Jazz-to-Go.

Mr. Baker's chamber music experience includes past memberships of professional ensembles such as the Kent Brass Quintet and OhioBrass, of which he was a founding member. He was also a member of the Appalachian Trombone Quartet. Mr. Baker performed with this ensemble on two tours of the Midwestern United States and on a 2001 tour of the United Kingdom.

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

I started playing the trombone when I was 12 years old. I've learned how to play a number of to an appreciable level, but trombone is what I started on.

*What equipment do you primarily use?*

I use a Shires large bore for my classical trombone and a King 2B+ for my jazz/commercial instrument.

*What are some of your favorite highlights of your career?*

Boy, that's tough to narrow down. I suppose any time I get to perform in some significant way at an ITF is always a highlight. I also consider my overseas performances to be highlights. A number of years ago I got to play a New Year's job with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Also, in 2018 I got to go on a European tour with the Original Blues Brothers Band (I got to be Bones Malone for two weeks ;-). And as a member of the Brass Band of Battle Creek, getting to sit in a section with Scott Hartman and Mark Frost is always a highlight. 😊

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

Another tough question. Anything by JJ Johnson, Slide Hampton, Carl Fontana, Christian Lindberg, Joe Alessi, etc., etc. I cycle between classical, jazz and 70s soul in my listening.

*Who inspired you to play your instrument?*

No one. It's too long a story to type, so the TLDR version is that in 6<sup>th</sup> grade I wanted to get good at something. I decided it would be music because I didn't like anything else enough to work at it! And I decided on the trombone because I thought it looked easy! I was 12—I was an idiot!

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

In no particular order: Sonata for Saxophone by Paul Creston, Two Arabesques for piano by Claude Debussy, Meditation from Thais by Jules Massenet. I'm sure there are others that I can't think of at the moment.

*Do you have any tips on becoming better at transcribing?*

Do it a lot. Go slow. Do it a little at a time. Listen to the music you want to transcribe a LOT and try to have it memorized before you start transcribing. Save your work!

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

I'm much more focused and efficient in my practice. I have little time and energy to practice. So I don't waste time. Lots of slow, repetitive playing.

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

Articulation. Still struggle with it.

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

I sure do. Singing is the quickest, most direct way I (any of us) have to quickly and accurately realize the musical and/or technical concept we're trying to produce.

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

Hard work. Persistence. Honesty. Treating people the way you'd like to be treated. Acknowledging when you're wrong and apologizing if necessary.

*What do you want your legacy to be?*

I would like to be remembered as a good human being who helped produce more good human beings.

*How do you stay motivated? Do you have any tips to help stay motivated?*

I don't ever want anyone to question whether or not I should be there (wherever 'there' happens to be). And there's always something else to learn.

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

I don't meditate. I've thought about getting into it for years.

*With whom did you study?*

No one until I started my undergraduate degree. I studied with Dr. Denis Winter at the University of Central Arkansas for my Bachelor of Music Education degree and Tom Ashworth, Vern Kagarice and Jan Kagarice during my masters and doctoral work.

*Who are some of your musical heroes?*

Too many to name, but I'll list a few: JJ Johnson, Christian Lindberg, Bill Watrous, Wynton Marsalis, Miles Davis, Pat Metheny, Ella Fitzgerald

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

My earliest musical experiences were in the church. I sang in the choir. I originally pursued music in school because I wasn't good at anything. After some time, I pursued it because I fell in love with it. And eventually I pursued as a career because I simply couldn't imagine doing anything else for a career.

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

You know, I don't. It just kind of happened. By the time I got to the end of my high school years and just knew that whatever I ended up doing with my life would be musical.

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

It really depends on what I have coming up. When I'm preparing for something, I may practice 2-3 hours a day. But if not preparing for anything, I may not practice at all. But I usually at least try to always do a daily routine to maintain my playing.

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

Only my bio pages on the UNT College of Music website and the UNT Trombone Studio website. Self-promotion has never been my strong suit.

*What are some of your favorite etude books?*

Melodious Etudes, Book 1—Bordogni/Rochut  
Selected Studies—Voxman  
40 Progressive Etudes—Tyrell  
15 Rhythm Etudes—Bitsch  
Anything by Blazhevich  
Studies in Three Clefs—Uber  
Daily Drills--Schlossberg

*Do you use any apps when you practice?*

Just Tonal Energy. It's pretty much the Swiss Army knife of music practice apps.

*What are some ways to improve one's rhythm?*

Counting using subdivisions and clapping, metronome work of any type, using rhythm etude books such as the Bitsch and the Bona.

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

Have more fun. I was such an over-achiever.

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

It would be a four-way tie between Iceland, the UK, Italy and Spain.

*Who are some of your heroes in life?*

My grandmother, my teachers (most of them anyway), anyone who is an underdog and beats the odds against them to become successful.

*How old were you when you first began transcribing solos?*

I aurally transcribed solos all through high school, but I didn't actually start putting transcriptions to paper until about my junior year in my undergrad.

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

My grandmother mostly. I just try to live up to her example everyday.

*How do you suggest balancing life with music?*

Schedule and plan time for yourself and your family. For me, if I don't do that, I'll just work all the time.

*Please give some tips for freelancing.*

I could type many pages about this. But here are a few tips:

1. Show up early and when possible prepared.
2. Be easy to work with.
3. Keep negative opinions about people to yourself. The world is small and you never know who knows who.

4. Return communications promptly. Don't make a bandleader or contractor have to contact you twice.
5. Say thank you for the work.

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

Whichever you major in, make sure it's what you truly want to do for a career. I am not a believer in majoring in music education as a fallback. If you want to be a performer, then major in performance and work your butt off.

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

Nope, just me. Not sure how that happened! ;-)

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

That's a tough one. I guess I think of my favorite performance locations in terms of countries. That being said, it would be Iceland, the UK and Brazil.

***What are your favorite etude books and solos written for your instrument, as well as etudes/solos/albums not originally written for your instrument?***

I covered etude books earlier, so I'll list some of my favorite solos in no particular order.

Aria and Polonaise—Jongen  
Fantasy—Creston  
Concerto—Tomasi  
Improvisation No. 1—Crespo  
Blue Bells of Scotland—Pryor  
Colloquy—Goldstein  
New Orleans—Bozza  
Ballade—Bozza  
Concerto—Bourgeois  
Fantaisie--Stojowski

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

Play lyrical etudes (such as Bordogni) and simple tunes in various keys, ranges, clefs, etc. And make sure to work both ends of the horn.

*What are you most proud of in your life?*

My kids and my career, in that order.

*Where do you see yourself in 10 years?*

Hopefully planning for retirement! ;-) But if I'm still doing what I'm doing right now, it would not be the end of the world.

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

I deeply enjoy smoking cigars and sitting on my patio. I also love driving. When I travel during the summer, I always drive unless I must fly.

*Do you practice visualizing yourself performing?*

No, not really. But I routinely practice mentally.

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

I prefer to learn them by ear first, then transcribe them once I have them memorized.

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

I would advise a student to ask themselves if there's anything they can imagine doing that would make them as happy as music. If there is, I advise them to do that instead of music. Pursuing music can't be a choice, it has to be the only choice. Becoming a successful musician requires a higher level of commitment than just about any other career path. If a student isn't willing to apply that level of commitment, they should do something that would require less dedication.



*What are you listening to currently?*

I cycle between classical, jazz and 70s soul. Right now I'm on a 70s soul kick. ;-)

*Do you have a favorite genre of music?*

Just the three named above.

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

None. Anything that wasn't a music course distracted from my music studies. Maybe not the best answer educationally, but it's the truth.

*What are you working on right now?*

I've gotten into Concone lyrical etudes. I love the Bordogni, but I've been playing them for so long that I needed something that would give the lyrical etude fix while introducing me to new music.

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

YouTube (love it or hate it, it's a godsend)

IMSLP (lots of public domain music free for anyone to use)

Hickey's Music (not free, but still a great place to explore)

*Do you have any tips for preparing for auditions?*

A few.

1. Start preparing early.
2. Start preparing by covering fewer excerpts each day but in a more deep way. As you learn the music, you can allow yourself to cover more material each day.
3. Listen every day to the rep, with score in hand. And listen to multiple recordings.
4. Record yourself regularly, and be brutally honest about what you hear. Pretend you're listening to someone who isn't you!
5. Get some input from another set of ears. It doesn't have to be actual instruction (but it certainly can be). But it does have to be someone who's musical instincts you trust.

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

All the time. If you get nervous, acknowledge the nerves. Then remind yourself how hard you've worked and that the audience wants you to do a good job. And, of course, the best way to not get nervous is to be as prepared as possible.

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

1. Time and rhythm
2. Tone (consistency and quality)
3. Pitch (tuner work and playing with drones)
4. Articulation (clarity, variety)

*What advice can you give about mental wellness?*

Be kind to yourself. And listen to yourself. And if you need help, seek help.

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

I love to read, but I generally don't have time to read. I do most of my reading during the summer. I otherwise read a LOT of news.

*What life lessons have you learned through music?*

So many. But the one that seems to come up all the time is anything worth doing is worth doing well and working at it.

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

I do, though I don't promote that as an actual way of improvising. At some point, you want to get to where you don't have to rely on licks.

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

I honestly have no idea. It would probably be something with my hands. I love automotive repair and wood working (though I don't claim to be an expert at either).

*Who are your favorite composers?*

In no particular order:

Debussy, Rachmaninov, Shostokovich, Rimsky-Korsakov, Brahms,  
Thad Jones, Wayne Shorter, Horace Silver, Pat Metheny

*How could we make music education better?*

We can make it better by finding ways to teach music through more of the kind of music that actually excites young people, i.e. more modern music.

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

Most days. ;-) When I like it, it's because I'm actually witnessing students make connections that they may not have made without my help. And, of course, seeing a student build a career is always rewarding.

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

Effortless Mastery—Kenny Werner  
The Music Lesson—Victor Wooten  
Beyond Talent—Angela Beeching

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

I'd practice slower and with a metronome and tuner.

*Do you have any tips on forming a chamber group?*

Find people you like and gel with it. Being in chamber ensemble with people you don't get along with can be drudgery.

*Do you have any tips on learning how to improvise?*

Listen a LOT and do a lot of imitation. There's nothing wrong with sounding like players who are much better than you for a while.

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

I do memorize music, though not intentionally. If I practice anything for long enough, I'll eventually have it memorized. In addition to practice a piece of music a great deal, listen to it a lot (like, all the time) if you want to memorize it.

*What advice can you share about physical wellness?*

It matters. I wish I had taken better care of myself when I was younger. Making music is easier when you feel good.

*What is your favorite food?*

Barbecue and pizza. ;-)