

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Wesley Lebo



**Wes Lebo** is currently Second Trombone of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra in Tennessee, Second Trombone of the Jackson Symphony Orchestra in Tennessee, Principal Trombone of the Rock Hill Symphony Orchestra in South Carolina, and Second Trombone of the Missouri Symphony Summer Music Festival Orchestra. He was formerly the Principal Trombone of the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra and Principal Trombone of the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra as well as a trombonist in the King's Brass. In addition to his performing positions, Wes currently holds a Teaching Fellowship with the Memphis Music Initiative in Tennessee where he coaches and mentors young musicians in the Memphis community. In 2011 Wes was invited by Principal Trombone of the New York Philharmonic, Mr. Joseph Alessi, to attend the Alessi Seminar as a Fellow.

also performed regularly with the Greenville Symphony Orchestra, the South Carolina Philharmonic, the Charleston Symphony Orchestra in South Carolina, the Savannah Philharmonic, the Macon Symphony, and the Augusta Symphony

Orchestra in Georgia, the Hendersonville Symphony Orchestra, the Brevard Philharmonic, and the Western Piedmont Symphony in North Carolina, the Richmond Symphony and the Roanoke Symphony in Virginia, the Sarasota Orchestra in Florida, and the Mobile Symphony in Alabama. Wes is also the trombonist for The State Theatre of North Carolina (Flat Rock Playhouse), and has been hired to perform with several national touring musical theatre companies including Cathy Rigby's Peter Pan, and White Christmas. Wes has also backed up Jonny Mathis, and the Irish Tenors.

Wes also does master classes and coaching sessions at universities and high schools across the country including the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, the University of Memphis, The Hartt School of Music, and University of Louisiana Monroe.

As a soloist, Wes has appeared on subscription concerts with the Jackson Symphony Orchestra in Tennessee, and the Fountain Inn Symphony Orchestra in South Carolina. In March 2017, he premiered a new trombone concerto with the NAFA Symphonic Winds in Singapore, a that was written for him by Mr. Kangy Zhang. He also performs solo recitals and chamber concerts around the country.

Wes's Website is [www.weslebo.com](http://www.weslebo.com)

Wes is a Shires Artist.

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

I began to play the trombone in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I did not play another instrument prior to my 5<sup>th</sup> grade trombone class and band experience.

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

I perform mostly on my custom Shires trombone. The specs are 7YLRW bell, TW47LRW slide, seamed crook, yellow brass tuning slide.

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

I recently performed (February 2017) a world premier of a new Trombone Concerto by Kangyi Zhang in Singapore with the NAFA Symphonic Winds under the direction of Joost Fläsch. I also performed the Bourgeois Trombone Concerto twice. Once with an orchestra in South Carolina where my very first trombone teacher played in the trombone section, and once with an orchestra in TN.

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

I love almost anything for vocal soloist. One of my favorite singers is Lorraine Hunt Lieberson. Her version of "As with rosy steps the morn" and "Lord to thee" both by Handel are some of the most beautiful moments I've ever heard.

I adore the Bach Cello Suites. Also, the Bach Goldberg Variations.

## ***What were your practice habits in high school, college, post-college, pro career?***

I began to become fairly serious about trombone by the time I reached 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I was homeschooled during my high school years, which allowed me to really focus a lot of time on practice. By the time I reached my senior year of high school, I would regularly practice 6-8 hours a day. It was just an obsession. I could not put the horn down. I still played soccer and basketball, and worked an early morning (4am) job loading trucks for a delivery company.

College was much the same, but I quickly found that I had to be more balanced in my life with other responsibilities. I was attending a liberal arts school that had pretty heavy academic loads and I was working a lot of hours to pay for school and my car insurance etc..

Currently, I practice anywhere from 2 hrs. per day to 6, depending on how busy my schedule is with teaching, performing, and other work responsibilities.

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

My first trombone teacher was Dr. Paul Overly. He started me in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and I studied with him all the way into my adult professional life. I also had regular help from Mr. Matt Anderson in my high school and even early college life. Eventually, I was fortunate to come into contact with Scott Hartman after my 7 year sabbatical from playing trombone. He gave me regular lessons when he was in town. I also drove to Atlanta to study with Colin Williams. Basically, when I came back into trombone, I studied anyone with whom I could possibly get a lesson. I recorded the lessons, and then practiced for weeks on what they told me. Craig Mulcahy also impacted my growth. I ended up attending a workshop in 2010 hosted by Haim Avitsur that really helped me a great deal, and the very next year in 2011, I was accepted as a Fellow into the Alsessi Seminar. That was a life changing experience. I still reach out for lessons from various professional players because they are doing the work I would like to do some day and I'm trying to keep growing every year.

## ***Who are some of your musical heroes?***

I admire the music of J.S. Bach. His music is an anchor that I consistently come back to throughout my musical journey. I admire him as a person, and also as a business man with regard to his musical profession. My first trombone teacher, Dr. Paul Overly, continues to be a hero of mine to this day. My colleagues in

the Memphis Symphony are also musical heroes to me. I get to sit next to Greg Luscombe who is the Principal Trombone of the MSO, and I've learned so much as he consistently lays it down week after week. Our Principal Trumpet, Scott Moore has been a major influence in my own playing. He is an incredible musician, and a good friend.

***How old were you when you decided that you were going to be a professional musician?***

I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade when I really knew. It was through the local youth orchestra that I was bit by the bug. From that point, it was never a question of if, but when.

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

2-6 hrs. depending on the time I have after balancing other responsibilities.

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

Yes. [weslebo.com](http://weslebo.com)

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

Kopprasch and Bitsch and Daily Scale Builder.

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

My dad demanded that I work hard as a kid growing up. I learned how to be a hard worker as a kid. He also constantly told me to hustle. He also helped to instill an entrepreneurial outlook on life. I believe all of those attributes have helped me in every aspect of my life and my journey as a musician. My three drill instructors in the Marine Corps helped me to become comfortable with being uncomfortable.

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

One mantra I like to embrace and pass along to students is that music teaches about life, and life teaches about music. This perspective helps to keep growth happening in every area of life, and each area benefiting the other areas. It is possible to become a better musician away from the horn, and it is possible to

become a better friend, husband, father, wife, mother, brother, sister, and citizen while playing the horn.

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

Be prepared. (Be more prepared than anyone.)

Be on time. (Be early.)

Be a good person.

Work harder than anyone you know.

When starting out, play every gig you can possibly fit into your schedule. While I was building my freelance career, I was working for UPS in Greenville, SC loading package trucks. I received a call from the Richmond Symphony in Virginia to sub on several Nutcracker performances one December. The opportunity was too valuable to me to turn down, but UPS had a blackout policy for time off in December because it is peak season. So I added up the hours it would take to drive to Richmond (7), the amount of time at work (4am-9am), and the length of a Nutcracker performance. It all worked out to less than 24hrs of a day so it was possible. I said yes. Worked my job, slept a couple hours, drove to Richmond, Virginia, played Nutcracker, drove straight back to work in South Carolina and did that 3 days in a row. This sort of work ethic helped me to get established, and to make enough money to survive as a playing musician.

Stay out of debt. This will allow you to be flexible enough to live the lean, efficient life needed to take every gig, and audition possible in order to grow musically and professionally.

Be diverse musically. Listen to everything. Learn to play everything by listening to everything and imitating what you hear. Never turn down a gig because it's not your style. Don't be a poser, but accept the gig, and do your best to step up to the requirements of that gig. My training has always been primarily classically based and orchestral. But so many of my professional opportunities have been on pops gigs, musical theater, small combo jazz, funk, or beach music gigs. I never try to make claims to contractors that misrepresent my abilities, but I make sure to put in whatever work needed to be utilitarian in those various contexts. I've paid a lot of bills playing a lot of musical styles outside of classical, orchestral music.

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

The world needs great music educators who are well trained. But we do ourselves, our students, and the industry a disservice if we don't continue to pursue excellence on our instruments.

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

My mom played piano and organ in our very small church growing up. My sisters studied piano as kids, and my brother studied trumpet as a kid. I am the only one in the family that continued as a professional musician.

***If you were on a desert island, what are your top 3 etude books for your instrument, solos for your instrument, as well as etudes/solos/albums not of your instrument?***

Kopprasch, Daily Scale Builder

***What are you listening to currently?***

Bach Cello Suites, Country Music, and rep for upcoming performances.

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

Business Management, Legal Environment of Business, Chemistry for Nursing Majors.

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

Preparing for a mini recital tour, getting fundamentals back in shape for some upcoming auditions

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

Practice slow with a metronome and drones. Create midi files of each excerpt that can be adjusted in speed. This will help in terms of pitch, time and evenness. Find your favorite recordings of each selection. Pick specific pre planned moments to show your personality. Enjoy the process. Always focus on the positive growth not the outcome of each audition.



Auditions really are about in time, in tune, good sound, and cleanliness. If you can do these on a consistent level, you will win your share of auditions.

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

I've had another career in the construction industry. I can't think of another career that I'd rather do than playing my trombone. I love doing other things and love learning to do them well, but there is literally nothing else I'd rather do or can think of doing besides performing and teaching music.

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

If we can connect each area of study to practical real world experience we could make the academic environment less sterile. Demonstrating the connection of each area to real life experience.

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

Yes, because we have the opportunity to help young people become better people. Not just better musicians.

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

The War of Art by Steven Pressfield, Relentless by Tim S. Grover

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

More attention to drones and metronome practice.