

Tony Baker & Alex Iles:
Interviews with Two Trombonists who Excel as Performers and Soloists in

Classical and Jazz settings

by

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ABSTRACT

The ability of musicians to perform well in multiple musical styles is increasingly common and necessary. This paper profiles two trombonists who have gone well beyond the ability to function in multiple genres, and are instead considered significant artists. Tony Baker and Alex Iles were chosen to be profiled for this project because both have achieved recognition as solo artists in the genres of classical music and jazz and have performed on international stages as soloists. They also have significant ensemble experience in both classical and jazz settings and are active teachers as well. Both hold-high profile positions that have helped grow their reputations as performers: Mr. Baker as a professor at one of the largest music schools in the United States, the University of North Texas, and Mr. Iles as a highly in-demand freelance musician in Los Angeles. This paper presents interviews with both trombonists that investigate their development as musicians and soloists in both classical music and jazz. They are asked to describe the benefits and challenges of performing at a high level in both styles, and how these have affected their musical voices. Common traits found in their responses are examined, and recommendations are created for musicians seeking stylistic versatility.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my grandfathers, William Guy Balsinger and Elmer Andrew Lennex. Neither attended high school, but through hard work they provided for their families. The importance they placed on education for their children and grandchildren pushed me to pursue and complete this degree.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1920s classical musicians and composers have looked to jazz to expand their creative palettes. Likewise, jazz musicians and composers have studied classical music to garner technical knowledge to apply in their compositions and improvisations. Today classical music organizations rely on “pops” concerts to draw in large audiences; theatres host a variety of shows; and church music is increasingly influenced by popular music. Many musicians find it beneficial, even necessary, to be versatile in different genres in order to earn a living.

It is now common for classical musicians to perform and record jazz-influenced pieces, and for jazz recordings to feature compositions with harmonic, rhythmic, and formal structures that are far more advanced than those of early jazz tunes. Despite this crossover, some musicians still hold unfavorable opinions and misinformed conceptions of the musical genres they do not perform.

This paper is, in a way, a response to those musicians who do not have an appropriate appreciation for other styles, but comment on them nonetheless. Among these offenders are classical musicians who believe that jazz musicians in general have less or poor technique on their instruments and that improvised music cannot compare with thoroughly composed and rehearsed music. This paper is also a response to jazz musicians who believe classical music is not creative because it was composed long ago and is performed exactly the same

way each time, with the same nuances and musical style regardless of the composer.

This paper is a profile of two musicians who have far more than the general appreciation of both jazz and classical music that allows some just to “get by.” Instead, they have deep knowledge that has helped them develop as significant artists. Both Tony Baker and Alex Iles are trombonists with international reputations as performers in jazz and classical music. Interviews with both artists are presented here in which they discuss the development of their interest in the two genres, and how performing at a high level in both influences their artistic voice.

Chapter 2

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE SUBJECTS

Tony Baker

Tony Baker is an Associate Professor of Trombone at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. In addition, he is the Second Trombonist with the Dallas Opera Orchestra. He has earned a Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education from Central Arkansas University and a Master of Music degree in Trombone Performance from the University of Minnesota. Mr. Baker has also served as Assistant Professor of Trombone at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, and Visiting Professor of Trombone at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio.

Mr. Baker has established an international reputation as an outstanding artist in both classical and jazz settings. He was a featured solo artist and clinician in both styles at the 2003 International Trombone Festival in Helsinki, Finland, and at the 2004 International Trombone Festival in Ithaca, New York. He has also appeared as a soloist, clinician, conductor, or Jazz Jam Session leader at the 2001, 2002, 2006, and 2008 International Trombone Festivals. In 2008 Mr. Baker performed a solo classical recital and a jazz concert and gave a masterclass at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo in Brazil. His other international appearances include solo performances and clinics at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England, Trinity College of Music in London, England, the Wey Valley International Concert Series in Weymouth, England, the Grindavik Cultural Festival in Grindavik, Iceland, the Festival International d'Art

Lyrique d'Aix-en-Provence in France, and the 5th Trombones de Costa Rica Trombone Festival in San Jose, Costa Rica.

As a classical soloist Mr. Baker has been featured with the United States Army Band "Pershing's Own," the Ohio Valley Symphony, the Minnesota Contemporary Ensemble, the University of North Texas Symphony Orchestra, and the Ouachita Wind Ensemble. He has also performed at the Texas, Arkansas, and Ohio Music Educators Association Conferences, and has been a soloist with the trombone choirs of several universities.

Mr. Baker has performed as a classical musician in more than a dozen symphony orchestras, including those of Dallas and Columbus (OH), as well as the Minnesota and Columbus Operas. As a chamber musician he has performed with the University of North Texas Faculty Brass, the Appalachian Trombone Quartet, the Kent Brass Quintet, and the Ohio Brass, of which he was a founding member.

In jazz settings Mr. Baker has been featured with ensembles at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Stephen F. Austin State University, and Kenyon College. He has been an artist and clinician at the Denton Arts and Jazz Festival in Denton, Texas, the Northern Oklahoma Redbud Jazz Festival in Tonkawa, Oklahoma, the Lamberton Jazz Festival in Lamberton, Minnesota, and the North Texas Jazz Festival in Addison, Texas. He has performed with the Duke Ellington Orchestra and the Woody Herman Orchestra. At the 2003 International Tuba Euphonium Association Regional Conference in San Antonio, Texas, Mr. Baker was a jazz artist on euphonium and a clinician. Other

performances have been with the jazz trombone group Them Bones, the Jazz Heritage Orchestra in Cleveland, Ohio, the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, and the Mesquite Jazz Orchestra in Mesquite, Texas.

Alex Iles

Alex Iles is based in the Los Angeles, California, area, where he is in great demand as a freelance trombonist in both classical and jazz settings. He is the Principal Trombonist of the Long Beach Symphony. Mr. Iles is also on the music faculty of the California Institute for the Arts and is an educational consultant and clinician for both the Disney Magic Music Days program and the Disney All-American College Band program. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Mr. Iles was a featured artist at the 2007 International Trombone Festival in Las Vegas, Nevada, and at the 2009 International Trombone Festival in Aarhus, Denmark. He toured for two years as the Lead and Solo Jazz Trombonist with jazz trumpet legend Maynard Ferguson, and for an additional year with the Woody Herman Orchestra.

As a classical soloist Mr. Iles performed a guest recital in 2010 with the Hong Kong Trombone Association, and he has been featured with the Long Beach Symphony, the California Polytechnic University - San Luis Obispo Wind Ensemble, and the Pierce College Wind Symphony. In 2001 he was selected from an international field to participate in a ten-day orchestral/solo seminar hosted by New York Philharmonic Principal Trombonist Joseph Alessi.

As a jazz soloist Mr. Iles has been featured at numerous festivals and concerts with the Bob Florence Limited Edition big band and the Gordon Goodwin Big Phat Band. He has also been featured a number of times with the Disney All-American College Band.

Mr. Iles has performed as a recitalist, guest soloist, and clinician with schools and organizations throughout the United States, including Indiana University, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Southern California. He has performed with orchestras throughout southern California, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Pasadena Symphony, and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. In addition, Mr. Iles has been heard by international audiences through his performances on numerous television and film scores.

Chapter 3

INTERVIEWS WITH THE SUBJECTS

Tony Baker Interview

Where were you born? Did you move around?

I was born in Little Rock, Arkansas. I moved around Little Rock growing up, but it was all within Little Rock.

When did you begin playing trombone?

I began playing the trombone when I was 12 years old, junior high, 7th grade.

They did not have music in elementary school.

Why did you choose the trombone?

The junior high band director came to my middle school with a bunch of his students and a bunch of instruments because he was on a recruiting trip. I was a particularly self-conscious sixth-grader—I was overweight, and I wasn't really good at anything. My academics were decent; I was strong but I really couldn't say I was athletic. I was very aware that I wasn't good at anything. I didn't particularly want to study a lot and I didn't want to be an athlete, so that kind of left the arts. So I'm looking around at these instruments, thinking, "Band? I guess I could do that."

Looking at the instruments, the woodwinds—too many keys. The trumpets—they're kind of loud and they have too many keys. The drums—they didn't seem very intellectually stimulating to me, so I didn't go that route, so I settled on the trombone. I said, "Ah. This is it. This is it. No valves. No keys. I mean, look

at this thing. It's perfect. How easy could an instrument get?" That's why I picked it, because I thought it was easy.

But I started playing and immediately fell in love with it and I started practicing for at least a couple of hours every day.

Did you have private lessons early on?

I had no private lessons. My junior high band director was a trombonist and I got a lot of help within the classroom, partly due to the fact that he was a trombonist, but he never actually gave me private lessons. I don't know whether that was because of a lack of interest or because I didn't ask for them, or because he thought I was progressing just fine. His name was E. O. Huddleston.

What was your first exposure to classical music?

That's a tough one. It would have to have been in high school. Being in band and being clued into the fact that there was such a thing as an orchestra. I'm pretty sure it was through recordings that were furnished to me by my band director. I can tell you my first favorite composer was Debussy and I came to know his work in high school.

What was your first exposure to jazz?

Probably earlier, more like junior high. The public radio station in Little Rock played jazz during weekend nights, so I used to listen to it all the time. That became my ritual and it was a very exciting day for me when I could save up enough money to buy a boom box with a cassette deck so I could record the radio programs. My first idol was Erroll Garner, the great swing pianist. I fell in love with his playing. I wore out the cassette that had an album of his on it. So it was

in junior high that I became exposed to jazz and started to try playing it a little bit on the trombone. And it helped that my junior high band director—this Mr. Huddleston that I mentioned—was a Dixieland trombonist par excellence. He was an amazing player, so I got to hear him play a lot.

What were your early musical experiences in junior high and high school?

In junior high, I was just doing band. I started off in beginning band and I was in the first band by the time I was in eighth grade, which was unusual because it was pretty much all ninth graders except for me and maybe one or two other people. I did some singing in the children's choir at church, but I think by that point in my life, I had kind of gotten too cool for that, you know what I mean?

In high school, the same—band—although I did get involved doing community musicals that happened every once in a while. I think I did “The Wiz” and I may have seen “West Side Story” for the first time in high school, playing in a pit orchestra.

When did you play your first solo piece?

It would had to have been in junior high for solo and ensemble, and I think I even remember what it was; it was an arrangement of *Bist du bei mir*, the Bach thing. I probably would have been in eighth grade.

When did you begin playing jazz?

That's kind of a tough question, because I can tell you when I began playing what I thought was jazz and I can tell you when I began playing honest-to-goodness jazz. I began playing what I thought was jazz in high school with the high school jazz band because I had already been doing a lot of listening and a lot of

experimenting. I started to get handed solos pretty quickly once I got to the jazz band in tenth grade and I did a lot of playing from there.

When did you play your first improvised solo, first began improvising?

I would have to say that was also in tenth grade and in high school jazz band. Not to say that I could read chords or anything like that but that's the earliest I can recall standing up and taking a ride with the band.

How did your interest in classical music develop?

I'd have to say it developed slowly. When I got to my undergrad, I still thought of myself as mainly a jazz trombonist, but I was eager, and I was hungry and I was curious and so I started doing a lot of listening right off the bat. I had a wonderful teacher in undergrad who loaned me just about anything that I asked to listen to and we're talking about some rare LPs here, because I happened to have a record player in my room. Whatever I felt like I wanted to listen to, he loaned it to me. Plus I was able to check out some things from the music library. So that was when I really started to get a clue about classical music, when I really started to listen. This was about the time I really started to fall in love with (the) New York (Philharmonic), Chicago (Symphony Orchestra) and Vienna (Philharmonic).

How did your interest in jazz develop?

Pretty much the same way, just listening. Getting to know the jazz players and the giggers in my hometown of Little Rock and taking their advice when they said, "Hey, you need to listen to this." That developed more quickly. It was developing right alongside my classical interests during my undergrad.

Were there any teachers who were important to your early musical development up through high school?

Outside of my band director there weren't really any. For a very short time, I took lessons with this local trumpet player, Dixieland player named Bob Martin. I think he was talked into giving me free lessons by Mr. Huddleston who was still very much a supporter of mine in high school. I took a few lessons with him and he decided that I wasn't going to amount to much as a player. I seem to remember practicing but he definitely wasn't happy with what I was showing him in the lessons and he decided it was a waste of his time. But we're talking maybe four or five lessons with this guy. I would come in and play for him. But he was pretty old and pretty crotchety, and maybe a bit bitter, because I remember him being a fantastic trumpet player and I remember wondering why he was in Little Rock, Arkansas. I can't really say he was a major influence on me because I studied with him for such a short time. Mainly my band directors were my biggest influences.

What universities did you attend?

I attended the University of Central Arkansas, in Conway, where I earned a bachelor's in music education, and I attended the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis, where I earned a master's in performance and started a doctorate, but did not finish it.

How did you choose the University of Central Arkansas?

Basically I chose it because up until about mid-April, early May of my senior year of high school, I really had no interest in attending college. I really just hadn't

even thought about it. It embarrasses me to this day to think about that. I did nothing. I took the ACT and the SAT but I applied nowhere. Once my mother realized that I had done nothing, she got in touch with Dennis Winter who was this teacher at the University of Central Arkansas with whom I had developed a very good rapport. He was my teacher at the Governor's School in Arkansas, and she basically said, "Help. My son has dropped the ball, he's fumbled it, he hasn't done anything. Can you help?" So he got in touch with me and said, "Hey, you know, Tony, if you'd be interested in coming to UCA, I'll give you a scholarship." So that's how I ended up at UCA. I can take no credit for ending up at UCA. But it ended up being possibly the best place I could have ended up given where my head was at the time. I often think to myself, "I should have pursued going somewhere like North Texas," but I would have been eaten alive there, because I was talented and curious, but not serious.

Did your teacher there play both classical and jazz?

Dennis Winter was actually a euphonium player—that was his principal instrument. He played euphonium in the Coast Guard band for a number of years, so trombone was a second instrument to him. He played no jazz; Dennis couldn't swing on a playground. That being said, he very strongly encouraged my participation in the jazz ensembles in school. Along with everything else, that is something that I will always owe him for, because he saw early on that I had a strong interest in it and he kind of stayed out of the way of that.

What ensembles did you play in?

I played in lots of things [at UCA]. I played in the wind symphony. I played in the jazz band. I played in the Dixieland band, the jazz trombone ensemble. I even played a little on the faculty brass ensemble whenever they would do six-piece things. I played in marching band for four years, four long years. I played in pretty much everything I could play in. I kind of broke all the rules in terms of ensemble participation: I never said “No.” If someone expressed an interest in me playing in something, I just did it, because I loved playing. I wanted to play.

Did you take separate jazz lessons or jazz-related classes?

None whatsoever, except of course for jazz ensemble and Dixieland band. I’ve never had any jazz instruction, and whether it is a deficit in my experience, I don’t know, but it’s the fact of the matter.

How did you choose the University of Minnesota?

Let me give you a little bit of history—I don’t know how much it will help. Up until I student-taught I was pretty convinced I was going to get out and become a band director. I said I was going to be one of these band directors who taught during the day and gigged at night—I guess as much as you could gig in Little Rock, Arkansas. And then I started student-teaching and to this day I have never been as tired or played as badly as when I was student-teaching. And I’m thinking to myself, “Geez, I’m not even the main guy and I’m this worn out. What’s it going to be like when I actually have a gig? Or when I actually have the teaching job?” So I had to do a little bit of scrambling, and I had already been in touch with Tom Ashworth at the University of Minnesota. I had already visited the school once, but I had made no commitments to him and the two main schools

that I ended up considering were the University of Minnesota and Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. I was much more impressed with what Tom Ashworth had to offer as a teacher. I had a bit of an ego, but not so much of an ego that I didn't realize that I needed my butt kicked. I realized that Tom Ashworth, the very versatile trombonist that he was and having the teaching record that he did, he was the guy to kick my butt. I liked Minneapolis; I felt there was a good artistic scene. For personal and family reasons concerning my wife and son I felt that would be the best town for us. And they offered me a nice financial aid packet—I have to say that.

Was the fact that Tom Ashworth played both classical and jazz part of your decision to go there?

Yes. It wasn't that I intended to study jazz with him, but I just wanted someone who could kind of understand where I was coming from and where I was hoping to get to. And he could.

What ensembles did you play in at the University of Minnesota?

Again, I broke the rules: I didn't say "No." I played in the orchestra - oh, I forgot, I played in the orchestra in my undergrad, too - and the wind ensemble. Whenever we would have a jazz trombone group, I played in that. I played in chamber ensemble, jazz ensemble. I'm sure there's something that I'm missing. Curiously enough, for whatever reason, I never played in a brass choir and that's one of the things I regret about my grad school years is that I never played in a brass choir. I don't think it was a decision not to, it just never got on my radar screen. But I wish I had played in a brass choir.

Was improvisation part of your lessons with Ashworth?

Sometimes. He never really offered instruction, per se, we would just sometimes start, or end, lessons by playing a tune with Band-in-a-Box or with Aebersolds, but there was never actually instruction. I guess I considered it instructive because he's such a fantastic player that it was great to hear someone five feet away from me killing it on some changes. So I considered that instructive but it wasn't like, "Hey you ought to allow space here," or "try altering the harmony there," that sort of thing.

Did you take jazz lessons or jazz classes at Minnesota?

No.

What opportunities did you have to solo in classical settings in college?

Of course, I had to do recitals. I was only required to do one master's recital but I ended up doing, I think, two solo recitals during my master's years. And three or four solo recitals during my doctoral time. I won the concerto competition in my first year at U of M—in the spring of my first year. So that was the first time I got to solo with an orchestra. I'd gotten to solo with the wind ensemble at my undergrad numerous times playing "Bluebells" on tour and whatnot, but that was the first time I had soloed with orchestra. For whatever reason, I got a reputation as someone who was very willing to play new solo literature. So the composition students would write something, unaccompanied or with percussion ensemble or something like that, they would come to me and I'd play it. Some of it was not very good and some was really terrific. And I guess I got that reputation because I just didn't say "No." I guess I felt flattered to be asked and since I was kind of

thinking that I was wanting to become another Christian Lindberg¹ at that time, I just made it a point to do those things.

What opportunities did you have in college to solo in jazz settings?

There are two big opportunities that I had during my college years: one as a member of the University Jazz Ensemble —both as a section player and as the jazz TA for one year, I had lots of opportunities to solo—and I became part of the first honest-to-goodness good jazz combo I'd ever been in, during my years at the University of Minnesota. We actually won a couple of competitions. I really cut my solo teeth in that ensemble. And that was where I really started to understand changes and understand how much I couldn't read them. I actually started to shed (practice) changes a little bit.

What opportunities did you have to solo outside of college?

Something very helpful and important that I did—I guess this would have been back in '96, during the time when I thought I wanted to be another Christian Lindberg—I arranged a bit of a solo tour to several universities. In fact UNT was one of the places that I hit and that was very big for me because I was actually doing guest artist recitals as a doctoral student getting out and playing. And I did competitions while I was at the University of Minnesota. I actually won a national solo competition during my undergrad. The MTNA solo competition. I also became a member of a group that was then called the Minnesota Contemporary Ensemble and I think this came about because of the reputation I'd gained of being someone who played new music at Minnesota. That was the first

¹ Christian Lindberg is the first trombonist to establish a full-time career as a classical soloist, recitalist, and recording artist.

time I had gotten to play the Berio *Sequenza* (V). Those were all big opportunities. I performed in various places: mainly at various venues in Minneapolis but I went on tour a couple of times with that ensemble and I would usually end up doing that solo on tour.

What competitions did you enter in graduate school?

It was mainly local competitions. One was called—you're not going to believe this—the Ima Hogg Competition. The ITA competitions and concerto competitions, that sort of thing. It was at this point that I realized that I did not record very well and so that was extremely helpful for me. I didn't record very well because, for whatever reason, recording made me very nervous. It made me considerably more nervous than standing in front of people and playing. So it was during this time that I essentially learned how to record.

Were there any influential teachers or players during college but outside the college environment?

There was a trombonist and I believe he's still based in the Minneapolis / St. Paul area named Mike Nelson. He's the trombonist that plays in the Horn Heads, the great *a cappella* jazz brass group. It isn't like I studied with him or anything like that, but I got to hear him live on a number of occasions and he was just so good, just fantastic—very much a Watrous-y² sort of player, but he had it down and it was really wonderful to hear him and I learned a lot listening to him and watching him play. I also learned from watching Dean Sorenson who is the person who runs the jazz program at the University of Minnesota. It wasn't that he was such a

² Reference to Bill Watrous, a jazz trombonist known for having impressive technique and a consistently smooth tone

burning player or anything like that, but he was just so competent. It was just all there; there were no holes in what he was doing. It was eye-opening to me that, hey, a person could play with no holes. Those particular players were very influential to me. During my undergrad there was a trombonist named Bill Gibson—I think he teaches somewhere in South Dakota now—he was kind of a journeyman trombonist. He played everywhere, did everything and knew everybody. He had lots of connections in New York and played in Las Vegas and played on cruise ships and whatnot. I was never was very impressed with his trombone playing, to be quite honest, but I was always impressed with the fact that he was up for anything. He played anything and I learned a lot from that. I learned not to turn my nose up at a lot of things, especially considering that he was making a living. He wasn't a rich man, but he was making a living. He could feed himself, he could clothe himself; he was doing ok.

How did you manage practicing in both styles during college?

That was tough. It's still tough. I got a hell of a lot better during this time—particularly in my Minnesota years. I got really, really a lot better. What it came down to was, for about a year, I was practicing jazz as much as I was practicing classical. It was the year that I had the jazz TA, which I believe was from '95 to '96. It may have been '94 to '95—one of those years. I was practicing jazz as much as classical and that's what I figured out—that if you want to get better at both and get to where you can do both, you've got to practice both, you've got to put in a lot of time on both, you've got to put in your time and burn the midnight oil doing both. Even today when I need to practice, and I've got lots of things

coming up, I'll find I'm practicing my jazz stuff as much as my classical stuff. I still consider myself primarily a classical player, because of what my opportunities and really, my significant experiences, have been. But I make it a point to keep both going as much as I can.

At this time in college, were you using different equipment for each style?

No, and that was a big weakness. I was using the same horn for both, and I was practicing and playing enough that I made it work and people accepted it and that was just the way it was. I used a Bach 42, believe it or not, closed wrap, older Bach 42. I was making it happen, even after I got my first job at Kent State University, I was still playing it all on the big horn [large-bore tenor trombone]. It wasn't that I didn't know that a smaller horn would be better [for jazz], it was that I couldn't afford a good one. It was, "This is what I got, and I'll do the best I can to make it sound right, but this is where it is right now." Had I been able to get my hands on a decent small horn, I would gladly have played jazz on it.

Do you use different equipment now?

Yes. I do.

How did you develop proficiency on different equipment?

It goes back to what I was talking about before—having to practice both styles and spend time on both sets of equipment. That's really tough, and right now something I'm dealing with...depending on what's going on with me professionally, I'm either doing one or the other a considerable degree more. Right now I'm playing a lot more small horn than big horn because of this workshop and because typically the big horn stuff is bone dry during the summer.

But I'm doing this big band and that big band and this commercial thing and whatnot, but during the fall, when the opera gets rolling around again, I'll be doing a lot more big horn and the jazz stuff will all but dry up. And that gets tough. When I'm really trying to be disciplined, I'll make myself get on the other horn, even though I don't have much going on with it at that point, but I have to make myself be disciplined.

How did you go about finding your voice in each style?

Listening, trial and error. I can't really sit here and say that I've found my voice. Let me put it this way: my voice on the classical end, I'm much more sure about. As a matter of fact, I'd be surprised if it changed at this point. But on the jazz end, I'm still figuring it out. I'm trying to figure out what I want to sound like as a jazz player. Maybe it's because jazz is not the primary style that I play in. Lots of people say, "I'm still learning, I'm still figuring it out," but I am really still figuring it out. I'm still learning how to play a small bore, but it gets better every year, and maybe by the time I'm fifty, it will be ok.

Do you perceive your voice as being constant, or something that changes depending on whether you are playing classical or jazz?

That's a very good question. I think I'm striving for the same voice, no matter what. It's just that I haven't quite figured out how to adapt that voice to jazz yet. I can't really get away with adapting my classical voice, unaltered, to jazz, but I don't want to play with a different voice in jazz, just an altered version of the same thing—if that makes any sense. And maybe I should be striving for a different voice in jazz. I want people to be able to tell who is playing. I want

people to be able to tell it's me playing no matter what horn is on my face. I can tell, but that's not to say that someone else can tell, and I haven't figured out how to sound like Tony Baker on a small horn. I know how to sound like Tony Baker on a big horn, but not on a small horn yet.

What playing and teaching positions do you currently hold?

Associate Professor of Trombone at UNT [University of North Texas], second trombone in the Dallas Opera orchestra, trombone in the UNT faculty brass. I'm kind of a de facto, unofficial member of the [jazz] faculty. None of my pay comes from the jazz studies area, and administratively, I'm not listed in the jazz studies area. But in every other way, I'm considered to be a member of the jazz studies faculty.

What significant solo performances have you had since college, since entering the professional realm?

That's a tough one. I guess they all seem significant. My first international solo performance was at a new music festival in Iceland. I'd consider that pretty significant. I performed with the United States Army Band in 2004. I've done all kinds of things with college groups as a guest artist. I was on the artist roster at the 2004 International Trombone Festival in Ithaca, New York. I was also a guest artist at the 2003 International Trombone Festival at Helsinki, Finland. [At those festivals he was listed as both a classical and jazz artist.] In 2006, I soloed with the University of Central Arkansas Trombone Choir at the trombone festival in Birmingham, England. One of those solo performances opened the final concert of the festival. Those are the ones that come to mind.

I have done faculty recitals at the UNT in both classical and jazz. I'm sure there's something big and obvious that I'm leaving out and I wish I could think of it.

How have you been able to cultivate your reputation in both areas?

Guest artist engagements, freelancing in both areas, teaching in both areas—mainly through those things and just kind of, for lack of a better way of putting it, marketing myself as someone who does both—meaning actively trying to keep a foot in both worlds. And keep connections going in both worlds.

Describe your warm-up and practice routines:

They tend to be very organized. I tend to know exactly how much time I want to spend on what, even scheduling my break time into my practice session. It's not that I want to do it this way, I've just found that if I don't do it that way, my practice ends up being too haphazard, and I don't get done what I need to get done. So they tend to be very organized and planned out.

How do you maintain your ability to solo in both styles?

The best thing that I do is that I listen a lot. One of the best things that I did, and I was late to the game in this respect, is I bought an MP3 player years ago. I've had at least one or two since then. I bought an iPod and a Toshiba Gigabeat, both have 40 gigabytes of space on them—but the point I'm making is that I listen a lot; I listen all the time. I've always got the sound of great players in both styles in my ears, and that's the best thing I do to keep my playing up in both styles.

Because I'm at a point right now as a player that I play smart enough that I know how to sound decent no matter how much or how little I'm practicing. I'm always fairly sure I'm going to sound good and if I practice, I'm fairly sure I can

sound great. So it's not so much a matter of how I play the horn, it's always a matter of how I play the style, and I can't do that unless I'm listening a lot, I've figured out. It always has to be in my ear.

What do you do to prepare for a major classical solo performance coming up or for a jazz solo performance?

With a major classical performance, there's literature that I know I'm going to be doing, so at least a month-and-a-half to two months before, I'll start practicing the stuff, getting it ready, and I'll start off practicing it gradually, maybe 30, 45 minutes, an hour each day. And as I get closer and closer to the performance, I'll increase the amount of time I spend on the classical material I'm doing.

As far as jazz is concerned, those programs tend to be much more up in the air until the time for the show, so I just make it a point to start practicing improvisation every day, since that's what jazz is all about. So I make it a point to spend at least 45 minutes to an hour playing with Band-In-A-Box or Aebersold every day just to get my improvisation ready for what I need to do.

How does playing in both styles benefit your musicianship in both styles?

Both styles have a lot to gain from each other. Because of my classical background, it's made me a much more clean and proficient jazz artist. And because of my jazz background, it's made me, I think, a more soulful classical player. For instance if I'm playing the second movement of the Sonatina by Jacques Castere, if I approached that with a little more of a jazz palette, I find that I play it better. And it's not that I'm putting in scoops all over the place or that I'm improvising, but there's just a place that I find I can get to if I'm

approaching it more as a jazz player playing a classical piece than as a classical player playing something classical and slow.

Do you feel that playing both styles limits or hinders your musicianship in any way?

No, I don't. I think my musicianship would be limited and hindered if I was only playing one style. And I don't speak for everybody, just me. I'm really too deep and too far into this whole dual-style thing to stop doing that, because it's become too much a part of who I am as a player. That if I stop doing one or the other I think it would do irreparable harm to me as a player and a musician. I don't think it hinders me at all. There's always fertile ground for me to learn and get better.

Anybody in any style can say that, but I think I can say it even more than someone who only plays jazz or only plays classical. If you only play classical there are wonderful experiences that you're never going to have because you only play that style and vice versa. So that's how I feel about it.

How do you manage to go from [Stan] Kenton to [Richard] Wagner?

It's funny you mention those two particular figures because I'm always looking for similarities. Kenton was someone who revolutionized the big band. He made it a much bigger, more sonically powerful force. Wagner revolutionized the sound of the opera, of the orchestra, utilizing the brass in a way that no one had ever done it. And so in my mind they're not that far apart. The equipment's different. You wouldn't want to hear me play "The Ride of the Valkyries" on my (King) 2B. The equipment's different and the style is different, but the similarities are that there's a lot of sound involved and it has to be a good sound.

The way I can always make the change is that I'm not just looking at the differences, I'm looking at the similarities. And I think that why people have so much trouble going between styles is because they focus so much on the differences that they can't see what the similarities are. And there are more than they think.

I think if musicians looked at music just more as music and not as just this or that or whatnot, they'd learn more and enjoy it more. I say that I'm more of a classical player than a jazz player, but if you ask me what I really am, I'll just tell you I'm a trombonist. That's what I am.

Alex Iles

Where were you born? Did you move around?

I was born July 19, 1961, in Pasadena and raised in Arcadia, California, which is a suburb of Pasadena, which is a suburb of Los Angeles.

When did you begin playing trombone?

I began playing in 4th grade, 9 years old.

Why did you choose trombone?

I didn't actually choose the trombone. I was debating between trumpet and drums and clarinet and maybe some other woodwind instruments. We had a very good elementary school music program in Arcadia and the guy who started it was a guy named Ken Wydow. Mr. Wydow was a very innovative music teacher and he met with parents whose kids were interested in music. In third grade we all played song flute or recorder. Every third grader had to learn song flute and that sort of created a farm system to find out who was interested in music and the people who

did best at that were the ones who were approached to take up an instrument in fourth grade. It was a really great system and it produced a lot of really great musicians out of Arcadia. I work with a lot of them now. It was great early training. I did pretty well with the song flute so I was on the list to join band, and my sister was a musician so I knew I wanted to play an instrument of some sort, I just didn't know which one. So my mom went to meet with Mr. Wydow, he talked to the parents of each kid who they thought might be interested in being a musician, and the first thing he said was, "Tell me about your son." She said, "He's quite tall," and he said, "OK let's try him on trombone." So that was it.

Did you have private lessons early on?

My sister, who was four years older, hung out with a lot of the trombone players in high school. She was a violinist, but all her friends were the trombonists and trumpet players. One of these guys was a really cool guy. He was a junior in high school and I was an eighth grader and I said, "I want to take lessons with him. I want to try taking lessons." I liked the way he sounded. He had been studying with a teacher I thought I'd be studying with, but I thought, "I'll study with him. It will be more fun." He was a cool guy. He was a hero. So those were my first trombone lessons. Jim Feitchmann, now an A & R [artists and repertoire] guy for Warner Bros., classical division - he introduced me to warm-ups and all the things that became meat and potatoes in my own study and my own teaching

as well, the Bordogni Etudes, Arban's³. He was very into listening to trombones and talking to people about playing.

In high school I really didn't take any private lessons. I was listening and picking people's brains and my school directors gave me things to work on. And I'd always be preparing for the next audition for the honor bands so I was working on solo pieces and sort of practicing on my own.

What was your first exposure to classical music?

I had a friend at school whose father was an orchestra director, and he was a percussionist and he was a classical music nerd of the highest order. His name is Alan Reinecke. We listened to orchestra recordings together. This was in high school and he introduced me to Mahler, he introduced me to a lot of classical music through the Star Wars soundtrack which came out when I was a sophomore in high school. That music was really influential on anybody who played an instrument. When you're in a school band program, when that movie came out, everything changed from that point on. We still see the effect of that today. To be 15 when Star Wars came out the first time was pretty amazing. It was a pretty amazing experience. Nobody saw it coming either. Everybody saw the previews of this movie and thought, "This looks stupid." Then we went to see it and it was the music that we came away with the biggest...that affected us the most. And when the soundtrack came out, well, I bought the soundtrack album and we were listening to it and Allen was one of the first people I knew to say, "this is

³ The *Melodious Etudes* by Marco Bordogni, ed. Johannes Rochut, and the *Arban's Famous Method for Trombone* by Jean-Baptiste Arban, ed. Charles L. Randall and Simons Mantia. Two of the most widely method books in developing trombone performance technique.

Prokofiev, this is Mahler, this is Strauss. John Williams is great, but he's taken all this stuff, he's repackaging some really great classical music, you should check it out. You should check out Romeo and Juliet. Prokofiev—that's like the Death Star. That's The Planets right here. Check it out." So he was the first guy to make this connection that I knew, so wow, and so this opened my head up to classical music and to film scores.

What was your first exposure to jazz?

One day Jim Feitchmann brought over some records: J. J. Johnson, Bill Watrous. I can remember that day as vividly as if it was yesterday—that day he brought those records over. From that moment on I was on a quest to find recordings with trombones on them. I started going through my dad's records and I found Dick Nash—he was in there. I found Jack Teagarden in there, too, in my parents' collection. Because all of a sudden, I'm falling in the love with the instrument. I thought, "This is really cool." There was a whole world opening up.

What were your early musical experiences?

I was pretty good; I wasn't anything special. I didn't have any special aptitude at the start, but I really enjoyed playing in a group and I loved hearing the other instruments. That was something my mom mentioned many times when I was little, I'd come back and say "the clarinets were doing this and the saxophones did that," and was really into what was going on around me so I realized I was always pretty good at listening. I might not have had musical skill but I was pretty good at listening and seeing how the whole group sounded all the time. I was never just

concerned with what I had to do all the time. I was always listening to other people.

I was first chair in elementary district band but mainly because no one else could play and Mr. Wydow saw that I had an interest and he liked that I could make a sound—I could play pretty loud and I had some success, but never had any prodigious talent.

In high school I was practicing a little bit more and I was playing in a lot of groups outside our high school band. Our high school band and orchestra were very good. I had a band director in high school who was really a good clarinetist and we had a very good wind ensemble; we did all the big wind ensemble pieces that most people don't get to play until they're in college. The Holst Suites and the Hammersmith⁴, all the big [concert] band pieces.

When did you play your first solo piece?

My first concert solo performance was in college actually, playing “Thoughts Of Love” with the UCLA wind ensemble.

When did you begin playing jazz?

I eased into jazz. I listened and played in my bedroom for 5 or 6 years before getting up the nerve to do it for real.

When did you play your first jazz or improvised solo?

There was one sort of embellished written-out solo I played in 8th grade.

How did your interest in classical music develop?

⁴ The *First Suite in Eb for Military Band*, the *Second Suite in F for Military Band*, and *Hammersmith* by Gustav Holst are among the most widely performed compositions for band

I was listening to recordings, to Ralph Sauer. There weren't that many classical trombonists then but there were symphonies to listen to. And once I started showing an interest, my dad said, "Let's go to the library." So I started listening to all the records. I started listening to symphonies and I became obsessed with finding recordings with trombones on them.

How did your interest in jazz develop?

One thing that happened that was pretty pivotal—I was in 8th or 9th grade—a local college jazz band came to play at the high school. They were from Chafee College. They were a good band and had some good players and they played this really wacky music that I had never heard before. It wasn't dance bands, it wasn't like Big Band, like Glenn Miller Big Band stuff. It was real jazz Big Band stuff. I'd never really heard that live before. So at the end of the concert, I realized the tunes I liked the best were the songs with the weirdest titles. I thought that's pretty cool. All the tunes that they played with these funny, weird, triptych titles were the ones I liked the best. So I went to the record store with my dad, and I went to the jazz section. I knew nothing about jazz at all. Some of the names I kind of knew, but I had no idea. So I started flipping through records and I came upon a record. I saw the title of the song and I thought, "I know I'm going to like this song." The name of the song was, "The Magic Bus Ate My Doughnut." I thought, "That's got to be a cool song," and it was on *Don Ellis Live at Fillmore*. It was wild. The trombone player on this record was this wild guy named Glenn Ferris, for his day was a little Gary Valente, that kind of approach. He has since moved to France and he's had a pretty interesting jazz

career in France. Anyway Glenn Ferris was the first trombone player I bought a record of, which really corrupted me in a lot of ways, but it was a great age. I was into Maynard [Ferguson] by that time and when you'd listen to Maynard there'd be a tune on there, a Dizzy Gillespie tune. Dizzy who's that? So I was in the portal, I entered the jazz portal. Now I'm starting to listen a lot, at that point. About this same time I found out about these live jazz concerts, second Sunday every month, at Eagle Rock High School. Hearing a high school jazz band that really swings, super swingin', a great high school jazz band—and I didn't have a jazz band at school—I was just blown away by this high school jazz band. Then after the high school jazz band played they had a little jam session with local players and the local players were some of the best in the world. Shelley Manne, Blue Mitchell, Frank Rosolino, Carl Fontana came out sometimes to do it, Jack Sheldon. All the great West coast jazz players would sit in at this jam session. So now I'm hearing what a jam session is and hearing the songs that they would play. It was incredible hearing these guys play live. I still have a few of those tapes around that I just recorded on a little hand-held recorder. So that was a really influential period, too, as far as getting into jazz.

Were there any teachers who were important to your early musical development?

We got a new orchestra director my junior year, and he was a very innovative guy and he pushed us hard. We did *The Planets*, not watered down, the real thing, and we did Mahler's 4th Symphony and we started preparing and we almost got to a piece by George Crumb, *Tales of Time in the River*, which is this really out, contemporary piece. He's just rehearsing it with a high school orchestra and with

all these weird instructions, matrix music kind of stuff, really heady things to throw at a high school orchestra. He also had a jazz background. His name is Bruce Polay, he's a university teacher and a composer. He was a great orchestral conductor, knew how to rehearse a group as well as anyone. My rehearsal technique when I work with any group is all connected to Bruce Polay. When I teach lessons, it's all connected to Jim Feitchmann and when I rehearse a group it's all Bruce Polay. I feel like I'm channeling Bruce Polay. I'm really imitating what I remember of him when I work with a high school or college group.

What colleges did you attend?

I got in to UCLA, but I was an Economics major, not a music major.

Did the teacher at UCLA play both classical and jazz?

I didn't take any lessons at UCLA, so I didn't work with the teacher there.

What ensembles did you play in?

When I got there I was playing music and they were short trombones there so I was instantly wrapped up in playing in all the music groups that they could put me in and that's when I started really working harder and harder. I played in the orchestra, I played in every music group at UCLA. I formed a little group made up of three trombones and a saxophone, called Electric Mustard, which was a comedic group. We actually recorded on the UCLA Band album. It was a performance art kind of little group. We played jazz and we played arrangements of things like Spike Jones style stuff. As I got near the end of college, I was playing in the LA Jazz Workshop and playing around and doing little shows at school and I was playing in the jazz band at UCLA.

Did you take separate jazz lessons or jazz related classes?

In 1981 and 1983 I went to the Aspen School of Music on a Jazz Fellowship. I took lessons with Ron Borrer. He was the trombonist in the American Brass Quintet before Michael Powell. Aspen was my only music school experience. I studied jazz with a guy from University of Miami, Vince Maggio, who is a great jazz pianist, a real good bebopper, beautiful player. His was my first real class in improvisation.

What opportunities did you have to solo in classical settings in college?

Not too many solo opportunities in college as I was not a music major.

What opportunities did you have to solo in jazz settings in college?

I wound up playing quite a bit of jazz in college. I really got more into improvising there. And doing club gigs and casuals.

What opportunities did you have to solo outside of college?

I won a little jazz competition in college and I got to play in a jam session with Art Pepper, Jimmy Smith, Don Cherry, Charlie Haden and some super heavyweight jazz guys and I got to play in a jam session with them.

Were there any teachers or players who were influential in these settings?

The jazz band director at UCLA, Gary Gray, was a clarinetist in the studios and he brought us to sessions sometimes. He did a lot of movies. He's a great clarinetist. He brought us to Warner Bros. Then I went to a TV session he was doing with a small orchestra. There was a trumpet, a trombone, and a horn. The trombone player was someone I knew, Bill Reichenbach. I had only known him as a tenor trombone player; he played on the Earth, Wind & Fire records. I didn't

even know he played bass trombone—that's his main instrument—and here he was playing bass trombone, tuba, and euphonium. I had no idea this guy played all these instruments and he sounded great.

How did you manage practicing in both styles?

I was studying with Roy Main and started on the bass trombone a little bit, picking that up, playing orchestral music a little bit, not too much. I was more interested in playing jazz and learning how to improvise and working on that. I practiced a lot and worked on improvising and imitating the people I'd been hearing around me. I started working diligently out of Arban's and out of a lot of books with techniques and stuff. So I was really working on my technique. And I was transcribing solos a little bit. I've never really practiced with a particular "style" in mind. I've always strived to practice music using the trombone as my instrument. I've really approached all music pretty much the same way. It was the listening part I think that made the difference for me. I devoured every recording I came across and imitated the stuff by the players I loved. I played close attention to all the details that caught my ear and made them special to me. I could spend hours analyzing how one player started a vibrato on the end of 3 of a note, while another player started it on beat 2 at the same tempo. I was always attracted to weird little idiosyncracies like that. I didn't differentiate along any particular line though. When I started playing in different ensembles that played a certain "style" I just did my best to fit in and play whatever style the group was into.

Were you using different equipment then?

I started playing big and small tenors in 8th grade. Just kind of came naturally to switch for different musical settings. I played a Bach 16 and an [Conn] 88h through college. I switched to a [King] 2B by the end of college for my primary small bore. I added the bass bone around two years out of college, and euphonium another year later when I played it a lot in theme park bands. I started playing alto about 10 years ago. I flirted with tuba about 15 years ago and recently sold it when I started doing more principal trombone work in the studios. I found it too hard to do all those instruments justice when your butt is potentially on the line every time you pick up a "second" instrument and have to play a solo on it.

Do you use different equipment now?

My "regular" equipment as of today is:

A small bore tenor that is a 1950's era King 2B. For my large bore tenor I primarily use my mid 1950's Elkhart 8H/88H convertible tenor, and also a mid 1980's gold brass Bach 42BO. My bass trombone is a Greenhoe 62H prototype he made originally for Bill Reichenbach. I just bought it last year. My euphonium is a Yamaha 321 and my alto trombone is a Kuhn and Hoyer 122.

How did you go about finding your "voice" in each style?

It's a constant process. I think my "voice" started coming into focus for me about 10 years ago, but it's always going to be ongoing. I think one's voice constantly evolves as you move [out of choice and necessity] in and out of certain playing situations. And again, this is less a style thing, and more about your changing body/chops, tastes, influences, other players/ensembles you are playing with.

Do you perceive your musical voice being constant, or as something that changes depending on whether you are playing classical or jazz?

I really think there is a bigger adjustment to be made, for instance "switching" from lead trombone in a high energy big band like Gordon Goodwin into a Chicago Style "trad" jazz band than there is going from Gordon's band to playing Tchaikovsky in an orchestra—even considering that I would be switching equipment for the orchestra gig. It's a much bigger challenge [for me anyways] shifting within the "jazz" genre sometimes than between genres. Same thing if I went from playing Schubert to Bartók as opposed to going from late 60s Kenton style charts to Bartók. Again, there's even an equipment shift there and the musical demands are more alike going from Bartók to Kenton than Schubert to Bartók...at least for what I'd be doing as a trombonist.

What playing and teaching positions do you currently hold?

I am currently serving as adjunct faculty at California Institute of the Arts and Azusa Pacific University.

What significant classical solo performances have you done?

In 2010 I presented a guest recital with the Hong Kong Trombone Association, In 2009 I performed the Tomasi Concerto with the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra. I've done performances at colleges, including a guest recital at Indiana University, the Ewazen Concerto with the California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo Wind Ensemble, Jack Hayes's "Fantasy for Trombone" with the Pierce College Wind Symphony.

What significant solo jazz performances have you done?

I performed as solo and lead trombone with Maynard Ferguson, at the Playboy Jazz Festival. I've performed as solo trombonist at numerous festivals and jazz venues with Bob Florence's Limited Edition and Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band, and done solo or guest performances with university groups.

How have you been able to cultivate your reputation in both styles?

When I came in off the road from that [Maynard Ferguson and Woody Herman's bands] I'd had dance band experience, I'd played with Maynard—I had a little bit of credit under my belt. I started getting more students and I'd learned a lot about teaching as well as playing out [on the road] with Maynard. I learned about the whole education scene with musicians, as a clinician. Maynard did a lot of clinics and they included the band and I had to come up with presentations to be able to talk in front of a group of kids and work with them and I learned a lot from how the other guys did that —like how the rhythm section worked with the high schools. That was a great learning experience playing with Maynard and also playing my horn every night, performing a high-energy show and having to improvise and be ok. When you play with Maynard, you have to be good, so I had to really pump up and I developed a lot more skill and technique and abilities as a jazz player out there doing that. I was practicing a lot on the road—probably as much as anyone else in the band. I was an early morning riser, getting my horn going.

How did you develop proficiency on different equipment? Describe your warm up and practice routines.

I tend to spend at least a minimum of time doing different parts of my daily routine and practicing things on every horn every day. I usually start on whatever "home base" is. These days, mostly that's the Conn, but often it's the 2B. Sometimes I practice the horn I am not playing on the upcoming gig. Sometimes, though, I'll play only the horn on the gig coming up. It really varies and, to be honest, I am not really sure I can verbalize what fuels that part of the decision.

How do you maintain your ability to solo in each style, or prepare for a significant performance?

Preparations vary. I try to work up a new recital program [between 30 and 45 minutes of music] every year and perform it once or twice locally and then continue to have it performance-ready through the year if I'm invited somewhere to perform. I work on fundamentals every day which help me in most of the musical situations I work/perform [sound, pitch, time, articulation, range, etc]. Improvising is a big part of my routine and my routine is largely improvised. Although I might not get called to improvise all that regularly, I like to always explore that area of my musical personality every day. It's a big part of what I love about music. I might put old tunes in different keys, transcribe [phrases, ideas, whole solos], do some scale permutations, modal experiments, learning and adding new repertoire, as well a lot of listening and then imitating the things I like.

How does playing both styles benefit your musicianship in both styles?

Music is music to me. Even the composers that create our "war horse" repertoire had to start by looking at a blank page in front of them before they composed these historically significant pieces. They had to "improvise" or at least go through some trial-and-error work, in order to compose these pieces. It serves every performer to adopt a similar perspective to keep the way they interpret and create performances on their own. If we all thought a little bit more about what a composer was hearing when he/she wrote a piece, we can get away from the "hard machine" stuff of the trombone and technique and focus on the music. From another perspective, a well-studied approach which is normally associated with "classical" musicians can provide a method of maintaining a healthy connection to the fundamentals of instrumental performance. Scales, slurs, long tones, etudes, and chamber music can be a great foundation for "jazz" brass musicians too, depending on the kind of musical direction they wish to pursue. Exploring many genres of music [and not thinking of only "jazz" and "classical"] is the path I have followed in my career. It has helped me to look forward rather than fear the inevitable surprises colleagues, conductors, composers, producers, and employers have thrown my way.

Do you feel playing both styles hinders or limits your musicianship in any way?

The down side to being "versatile" is that you are never 100% in any one idiom. But if you have exposed yourself to enough of most things in this vast musical spectrum, you are hopefully 85-90% ready and in most professional situations that can mean the difference between getting called back or not. Once I stopped thinking of music styles in terms of "difference" and began looking to develop the

diverse things needed for "any" style, the more comfortable I have become in [al]most [every] musical situation that needs a trombone.

How do you encourage and help your students develop as versatile trombonists and soloists?

First, I encourage my students to study with a significant professional from a specific genre. I often steer my commercial/jazz trombonists to study with orchestral professionals, or my orchestral students to take lessons with jazz professionals.

I encourage my students to foster an intense and active emotional connection to each particular genre they wish to pursue. In order to be a viable player in a given genre, the student-player needs to foster a significant emotional connection to that music, not just a mercenary approach [playing in the genre to get employment].

They have to seek to fully hear, understand, and feel emotionally connected to each kind of music so they can perform it with conviction.

The active listening students engage in must include live as well as recorded music.

I encourage the development of musicianship above all else. The musical routine should incorporate a full range of musical demands common to all genres. I encourage my students to develop flexibility and control of extremes in tone, range, articulation, with attention to scales, transcriptions, interpretation, theory and historical perspectives.

Chapter 4

EXAMINATION AND APPLICATION OF PRACTICES USED TO DEVELOP MUSICIANSHIP IN MULTIPLE GENRES

In the interviews with both Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles, several common elements essential to their development can be found. Listening passively and actively to music in various genres, performing often in classical and jazz ensembles, utilizing different equipment or sizes of trombones when playing in different genres, and balancing practice time to allow for development in both genres are the activities that enabled both men to develop their broad musicianship. Incorporating these practices into a regular routine can help students develop their musicianship with a focus on stylistic versatility.

The primary element that has been essential to the development of the musicianship of both men, inspiring them to pursue opportunities in both classical and jazz music, is listening to music. Passive listening, or listening for enjoyment, sparked the initial interest in pursuing musical opportunities and playing the trombone in different settings. Mr. Baker cites his time spent listening to jazz on a local radio station as a primary influence. Because of this experience he considered himself to be primarily a jazz trombonist when he entered college. He also notes that his interest in classical music developed once he began listening to that genre more frequently after beginning his undergraduate studies.

Similarly, Mr. Iles describes the importance of listening to music in shaping his interest in performing music. Mr. Iles describes the profound effect

on him of hearing recordings of such great trombonists as Ralph Sauer and J. J. Johnson, as well as recordings of orchestral works, including Mahler symphonies and movie soundtracks like *Star Wars*. He describes how enjoyment of recorded performances and compositions led him to seek out other recordings and artists. In addition, growing up in close proximity to Los Angeles, home to the film and recording industries as well as numerous clubs and concert halls, allowed Mr. Iles to hear live performances featuring many world-class musicians. His interest in the trombone, and in playing all music associated with the instrument, stems from these experiences.

Listening to a variety of music that used their instrument, the trombone, provided both men with the inspiration that guided their early interest and efforts in music. This model can be followed by musicians and music teachers who are seeking a spark to ignite the curiosity to study and pursue music on a deeper level. Hearing different styles of music that use an instrument can help stimulate interest in playing the instrument, and listening for the instrument in different contexts can stimulate an interest in studying and performing in various musical genres.

The passive listening in which both men engaged quickly gave way to active listening as they sought to gain the ability to perform the music they heard. In their active listening to music, both men paid close attention to the nuances of the performance. They noted similarities and differences between the performers they enjoyed and selected traits they wished to emulate. This active listening provided a strong mental image for both men of how they wished to sound when performing on the trombone. With this ideal in place both men could go beyond

practicing just to get the notes and rhythms correct and get to a higher level of music-making.

It is important to note that both men were actively listening to classical music, jazz, and other music regularly. Because of this they did not develop a separate concept of each genre. There was no analyzing of classical performance versus jazz performance, there was just one concept of making music on the trombone. This does not mean that they ignored the stylistic nuances of the music they played or that they attempted to make classical music and jazz sound the same, but rather that their concept of making music on the trombone included the nuances of both genres. The thought process was not an adversarial one in which the stylistic differences between genres were identified, compartmentalized, and accentuated. It was, instead, a thought process in which all stylistic elements from all genres came together into one concept of the trombone's voice. Developing musicians should apply the same active listening skills to all genres they study, and they should try to develop one all-encompassing concept of music-making on their instruments.

Another important element for both was performing in a variety of ensembles. At both the high school and college level Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles regularly participated in ensembles that focused on either classical music or jazz. Mr. Iles notes his experience in his high school's orchestra as important to his early development while also describing jazz ensembles both in and outside of the school setting that provided opportunities for his musical growth. Mr. Baker described himself as having "broken all the rules" regarding the number of

ensembles he performed with during both undergraduate and graduate studies. That both men sought out numerous opportunities and settings in which to make music speaks to their curiosity and desire to learn about more than one specific style, to learn about music in general. These ensemble experiences not only encouraged their interest in music, but also provided an opportunity to perform what they had been practicing. Through ensemble experiences both men were able to develop their understanding and execution of stylistic nuances with guidance from other musicians and directors. They were also able to find their own musical voice through opportunities to perform as soloists with these groups.

Performing in ensembles is important not only to developing musicianship and stylistic versatility, but also to maintaining a high level of performance. Both Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles continue to participate in a variety of ensembles even though these ensembles are not their primary source of income and they both have frequent opportunities to perform as soloists. While teaching full-time at the University of North Texas and performing as a clinician and soloist at universities and festivals around the world, Mr. Baker still dedicates time to performing with the Dallas Opera as well as jazz ensembles in northern Texas. Likewise, Mr. Iles is also in demand as a clinician and soloist, teaches as an adjunct professor, and works regularly as a studio musician while also performing with the Long Beach Symphony and big bands based in the Los Angeles area. Developing musicians may or may not receive opportunities to solo with ensembles, but performing in a wide variety of ensembles is an important means of acquiring the skills necessary to be a versatile musician.

Choosing equipment, or what size of trombone to play in various settings, was a small part of the discussion of how Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles developed their musicianship in both genres, but holds a significant place. Developing musicians and their teachers must decide when and if it is appropriate to play different equipment in various musical settings. This discussion applies to other wind players as well as to trombonists. Saxophonists often use different styles of mouthpieces made out of different materials for playing classical and jazz, and other brass players use different mouthpieces or instruments. On trombone the equipment issue is magnified. Standard tenor trombones, ranging from student instruments to those played by most jazz trombonists, are referred to as “small bore” trombones. This means that the inside diameter of the bore, or inside of the slide tube, is typically between .491” and .508”. The final diameter of the bell of small bore trombones ranges from 6 3/4” to 7 3/4”. These instruments are perceived to have a brighter timbre and to facilitate playing high or fast passages. By contrast, the “large bore” or “symphony” model trombones preferred by most orchestral and classical performers were designed to accommodate the loud volume and full tone quality needed to project from the back row of a large orchestra into a full concert hall. Large bore trombones almost universally have a .547” bore diameter and an 8 1/2” bell diameter. The two major concerns with switching a developing musician between these two sizes of trombones are the amount of air required for each and the size of mouthpiece used. Because of the immediate difference in the bore sizes, the same mouthpiece typically cannot be used on both sizes of trombone. While mouthpieces with similar rim diameters

can be found for both bores, this still may not produce a comfortable feel for the individual trombonist.

The issues of when an individual trombonist should switch equipment and how to choose that equipment are complicated. Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles generally use small bore trombones in jazz settings and large bore trombones in classical settings. However, as with the development of their musical concepts through listening, neither trombonist takes a “classical versus jazz” approach to choosing equipment. For example, Mr. Baker spent years developing his abilities in all genres solely on a large bore trombone, in part due to the financial constraints of buying multiple instruments. As professional musicians and active soloists both men play different sizes of trombones regularly, and the decision as to which trombone to use is guided by the specific music they are playing rather than the genre under which the music is categorized. The trombone is chosen because it allows the performer to effectively communicate his ideas.

The final element essential to developing musicianship and stylistic versatility is that of practice and preparation. In this case the method is not a program of suggested exercises, such as specific scales and arpeggios, or studies, such as those designed to increase flexibility or range. The method refers to the regular allotment of time focused on practicing music of different styles and preparing for opportunities, such as solo performances, that require a high level of musicianship within a genre. Both Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles pay close attention to planning their practice sessions to ensure they maintain their technical proficiency on every trombone they use and their artistic voice in each genre. Mr. Baker

speaks of feeling that his technical ability and musicality in both genres progressed well when he dedicated equal time to practicing in each. Mr. Iles notes that he regularly practices fundamentals and technique studies on the variety of trombones he plays. The similarity both share is not a specific long-tone or scale routine, but instead is the concept of balancing the practice schedule.

However, there is no obvious common format for a balanced practice routine. Mr. Baker is a college professor who deals with teaching lessons in a more classical setting, and who regularly performs on campus recitals featuring mostly classical repertoire. His practice does not consistently have an even balance between classical and jazz, as it is skewed greatly towards classical repertoire and the large bore trombone he uses in that setting. Aware of this tendency, Mr. Baker schedules time for focused practice on jazz pieces, improvisation, and playing his small bore trombone. This focused practice allows him to maintain his stylistic versatility so that when a significant jazz opportunity arises, he is not re-learning how to play the style. In preparation for such an opportunity Mr. Baker will balance his practice more evenly, or even skew it towards more jazz practice. The balance in Mr. Baker's practice comes not from an even split of all available practice time between classical and jazz, but instead from dedicating a smaller amount of focused practice time towards maintaining technique and style in the genre not in immediate demand. The remaining practice time is dedicated to the repertoire to be performed, which may be entirely from one genre or mixture of both.

The balance in the practice routine of Mr. Iles is somewhat different. As an active studio musician in Los Angeles, Mr. Iles is regularly hired to play not only the small bore and large bore trombones, but also the alto trombone, bass trombone, and euphonium. The studio sessions he plays may include settings that entail classical, orchestral, and jazz settings, or mixtures of both of these and other genres. While the amount of practice time Mr. Baker spends on his small bore trombone can vary greatly, Mr. Iles must maintain consistent time on all of his equipment. Though the amount and frequency may vary, to do this Mr. Iles must also dedicate smaller amounts of focused practice time to specific equipment or genres. As a regular performer with Los Angeles-based big bands and a guest artist with college ensembles, Mr. Iles often has more solo opportunities in jazz settings than in classical. To maintain his artist voice in classical settings Mr. Iles selects solos from the classical repertoire to practice and prepare each year.

A balanced practice routine would divide the daily practice of scales and arpeggios, flexibility studies, articulation studies, and long tones between the different trombones used. The scales and articulation studies practiced on each trombone would be tailored to the genre most often played on each type. Major and minor scales and *marcato* articulations would be the focus when practicing on the large bore trombone, while scales from the various modes and jazz articulations, or doodle-tonguing, would be the focus of small bore trombone practice. Musical studies would then be similarly divided between etudes and orchestral passages on the large bore and improvisation on the small bore. After this part of the routine is complete, the remaining time would be used to focus on

solo repertoire. This section could be balanced evenly on a daily or weekly basis, or could be skewed in favor of one genre to prepare for an upcoming performance. By setting goals and creating a plan to guide the routine, balanced development can be achieved while still accommodating the changing demands of various performances.

It is also important to note that both Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles consider the active listening they do to be part of their practice. Whether focused on finding new repertoire and new interpretations, or expanding the creative palette, the active listening both engage in is an essential element in their ability to maintain stylistic versatility in ensemble and solo settings.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Tony Baker and Alex Iles are recognized as significant trombone soloists in both classical and jazz settings because they have developed a deep understanding of the musical nuances for both genres. Unlike musicians who study one genre exclusively and promote the virtues of that genre above all others, Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles use their instrument, the trombone, as a vehicle to discover and appreciate the artistry in any genre they encounter. Their curiosity leads them to find the similarities in a variety of musical settings regardless of how the music is classified.

The focus of this paper has been on the genres of classical music and jazz, although both men have performed music in other genres as well. Classical music and jazz were chosen because these are the primary focus of school and academic music programs, and because they offer more opportunities for trombonists to develop as soloists. A soloist must have a deeper understanding of musical nuances and greater ability to apply that understanding than does a strictly ensemble musician.

Beyond their curiosity to study and perform various styles of music, both men have resisted the practice of dividing music into separate categories defined by varying characteristics. Both within and outside of the interviews, Mr. Baker and Mr. Iles each discussed, often adamantly, how they simply think of “music” not genres. They take a broader view of the music they perform and hear, making connections at a much deeper musical level than the terms “classical” and “jazz”

can provide. For example, Mr. Baker draws connections between the approaches to ensemble writing employed by orchestral composer Gustav Mahler and big band writer Stan Kenton. Mr. Iles discusses how playing and soloing with a contemporary big band is more closely related to playing contemporary classical music than it is to playing 1920's jazz, despite the fact he may use the same equipment in both settings. It is this focus on the voice of the instrument within the music, rather than the genre of the music, that has allowed both men to develop into creative soloists in any setting.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew W. Lennex was born August 10, 1977, in Wheeling, West Virginia. He earned a Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education from West Virginia University in 2000, and a Master of Music degree in Trombone Performance from the University of North Texas in 2002. Mr. Lennex has taught at Arizona State University and the University of North Texas as a Graduate Teaching Assistant/Fellow, served on the faculty of the North Carolina Governor's School each summer from 2001 to 2006, and since 2006 has taught music in the Chandler Unified School District in Chandler, AZ. Currently Mr. Lennex is Vice President of the Board of Directors and Bass Trombonist for the Salt River Brass. He is also a member of the Phoenix Chamber Brass, the Bruce Gates Jazz Consortium and the Mesa Jazz Orchestra. Mr. Lennex leads and performs with the Phoenix Jazz 'Bones – winners of the 2010 Kai Winding International Competition. As a soloist Mr. Lennex has been featured with the Musica Nova Fine Arts String Orchestra, the Salt River Brass, and the Chamber Winds, Contemporary Music Ensemble and Jazz Repertory Band at Arizona State University. He was invited to perform *T. Rex* by Mark Phillips at the 2003 National Conference of the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States. In 1998 he was named the Collegiate Division winner of the Eastern Trombone Workshop National Classical Solo Competition. Mr. Lennex has previously served as Principal Trombonist with the Musica Nova Orchestra and the Mesa Symphony Orchestra, and has performed with the Phoenix Symphony, the Tucson Symphony, and the Arizona Opera Orchestra. As a freelance jazz artist he has performed with the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra, and the ASU Faculty Jazz Combo.

