

# AN ARTIST'S CORNER

*featuring*

## Dr. Brittany Lasch



As the 2nd Place winner of the 2017-2018 American Prize, trombonist **Brittany Lasch** has appeared as soloist with the U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own", the Queens Symphony, the National Repertory Orchestra, and the Manhattan School of Music Philharmonia. With playing described as "masterful" (Syracuse Post-Standard), Brittany was recently appointed Assistant Professor of Trombone at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, where she previously served as Instructor of Trombone. Brittany was also recently appointed Principal Trombone of the Michigan Opera Theatre Orchestra at the Detroit Opera House and will begin her position at the start of the 2018-2019 season.

Brittany was a winner of Astral Artist's 2017 National Auditions. Additionally, she was as the winner of the 2015 National Collegiate Solo Competition hosted by the U.S. Army Band, the 2010 Eisenberg-Fried Brass Concerto Competition and she was the recipient of the

Zulalian Foundation Award in 2014. Her trombone quartet Boston Based was named the winner of the 2017 International Trombone Association's Quartet Competition.

Brittany was a finalist in the 2015 International Trombone Association Frank Smith Solo Competition, and has received prizes from the 2015 Enkor Woodwind, Brass and Percussion Competition, the 2010 Queens Symphony Young Soloist Competition, and the 2006 International Women's Brass Conference Competition, as well as the International Trombone Association's Larry Wiehe Solo Competition and Gilberto Gagliardi Competition. Upon graduation from the Manhattan School of Music, she received The coveted John Clark Award for outstanding accomplishment in Brass Performance.

Brittany has performed with the Toledo Symphony Orchestra, Rhode Island Philharmonic, Vermont Symphony, Albany Symphony, Springfield Symphony, Symphoria, Bangor Symphony Orchestra, and the New World Symphony in Miami Beach. She participated in the Verbier Festival Orchestra for two

summers, and has also appeared at the Spoleto USA Festival, Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, the Castleton Festival, in the National Repertory Orchestra, and at the Aspen Music Festival. She has also been a participant in the prestigious Alessi Trombone Seminar in Fossano, Italy, and in the Summer Trombone Workshop at Temple University.

A native of Park Ridge, Illinois, Brittany Lasch earned her Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Boston University, where she received the Brass Department Award. She also holds a Master of Music degree from Yale School of Music. With a deep commitment to education, she has been a featured teacher and performer at workshops such as the Midwest Trombone Tuba Euphonium Conference at Eastern Illinois University and Trombonafide in Wichita, Kansas. She has presented masterclasses at Youngstown State University, Louisiana State University, Towson University, and the Boston University Tanglewood Institute. Her principal teachers include Toby Oft, Scott Hartman, and Steve Norrell.

Brittany Lasch is an Edwards Trombone Performing Artist. Brittany also uses and endorses ChopSaver Lip Care.

Brittany Lasch's Website - [www.brittanylasch.com](http://www.brittanylasch.com)

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

I started trombone at age 9, but guitar and violin came before it.

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

I primarily play on my Edwards T-350 HB. I also play a Kruspe style Thein alto trombone.

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

I've been very fortunate to be hired at Bowling Green State University, first as Instructor of Trombone and now as Assistant Professor. One could not ask for better colleagues!

Playing solo music is a passion of mine, so being invited to join the roster of Astral Artists was a life-changing moment for me last year. I am also very excited to be joining the Michigan Opera Theatre Orchestra next season as their new Principal Trombone.

## ***What or who inspired you to play your instrument?***

My initial inspiration to play trombone started with my dad showing me the original Star Wars films on VHS (episodes 4-6). The music is so incredible and I loved the Ewoks. The week after I saw the films, one of the band directors came to my music class to demonstrate the band instruments. He played themes from Star Wars on trombone, and as my mom will tell you, apparently I came home and told her I had a calling to play trombone.

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

I can't remember exactly what I did in high school, but I do remember using a free period to practice, as well as having my dad pick me up an hour after school ended so I could use the practice rooms before coming home.

In my undergrad, I became very inspired to practice as much as possible. There is music everywhere in NYC, as well as competition. I tried to practice as much as I could in each of my degrees. I rely a lot on repetition so I've never been able to efficiently practice less than 3 hours a day.

For better or worse, I've never ever been someone who has a scheduled routine. Some days I feel like being up at 7 am and playing and some days I'm warming up at 6 PM, and if I'm in the zone I'll practice until well after midnight. Most of the time I don't have control over my schedule between teaching, playing and traveling, so I just have to adapt. I feel like not having a routine has actually been an asset to me. I am generally able to play at any time no matter how well rested I am. I aim for at least 3 hours a day to be ready for everything I have coming up.

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

In my undergrad, I worked mostly with Steve Norrell of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. I studied with Scott Hartman in my masters and I worked with Toby Oft of the Boston Symphony during my doctorate. They all continue to be incredible mentors to me and I'm very grateful to have studied with each of them. I also learned a great deal from each of them purely because of their main occupation. Each of my mentors has a career in a different aspect of the music world; in an opera orchestra, a symphony orchestra, and as a chamber musician and soloist.

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

My first musical memories are of my guitar lessons. My uncle is a classical guitarist and he gave me an instrument for Christmas when I was about 5. My grandmother would sometimes babysit me when I was little and my uncle would come over to her home when I was there. He'd give me a lesson while my grandma observed (she had obviously heard him practice his whole life growing up!) He would ask me what I wanted to play and he would write out any music I asked for, on the spot. I was too young to realize how hard it is to transcribe things a child asks for on the spot, in the range of their (the child's') abilities! Since he encouraged me to play whatever I wanted, I was always driven to continue. I was lucky to grow up in a school district that cared about the arts so I picked up the violin after they demonstrated it at school as well as the trombone. To be honest, I never had a moment where I decided to become a musician. Going to conservatory after high school was just the natural progression of things in my mind. I was very lucky to get into music school. Music was all I had done and all I could see myself doing!

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

Honestly, I cannot point to one moment where I 'decided' to be a musician. If there was such a moment, it probably happened around 8th grade. That was around when I decided to graduate high school early to get to NYC (what I thought was the center of the world) as soon as possible and study music. Looking back, it was quite a gamble to leave school early and hope to be accepted to a school. I'm very grateful for how supportive my parents have been and continue to be, as neither of them are musicians. Music was my entire life from about 5th-11th grade so it just felt like it was something I had to continue to the furthest level.

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

A typical day has about 3 hours devoted just to my personal practice. This makes my days extra long, particularly if I am teaching 4 or 5 students that day. I feel like teaching inspires me to practice as I'm constantly learning new things from the students experiencing things for the first time. Also, I feel strongly that I should be able to master and embody the things I'm encouraging them to do! I play a lot in lessons so I feel compelled to be in my best shape.

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

I do! [www.brittanylasch.com](http://www.brittanylasch.com).

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

My favorite etude books are (surprise) the new Arban book (Alessi & Bowman), the Brad Edwards Lip Slur book, and In the Singing Style by Phil Collins. Sure, I love the Bordogni Etudes, but I really like the Collins book since it is all famous melodies from classical music. I find it a little more engaging. Steve Norrell was the person who showed me this book and had me work out of it in my undergrad. The focus on being vocal and musical permeated all of our lessons.

The Lip Slur book made a dramatic change in my playing. I feel that it helped me become fluent in alternate positions as well as natural slurs. I gained a new command of my instrument that made flexibility and alternate positions more into a tool for my expression as compared to an obstacle. The Lip Slur book, Arban, and Bordogni are all required texts in my studio.

**Please give some tips for freelancing.**

In a nutshell - obey the "Golden Rule!"

Respond to emails within an hour if possible. Contractors love hiring people who respond quickly and clearly. Make sure you can read in at least 5 clefs as a trombone player - C treble, Bb treble, alto, tenor, and bass - on all the instruments you play, particularly on the alto. Always be friendly and take opportunities to network, but when in doubt, less is more. "We have 2 ears, 2 eyes, but only one mouth." Practice every day because you never know when you're going to be called last minute to anything. And last but certainly not least, try to let things roll off your back. People will always gossip. Most of the gossip will happen far from where you can hear and defend yourself. The only thing you can control is being a good person and a great player.

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

I feel that all students who are studying the trombone in college should be held to the same standard of work whether they are majoring in performance or education. I firmly believe that no performer in the music world can escape teaching to some degree, and no educator can teach without performing to some degree. In the reality of 2018, musicians in all fields are required to have similar talents such as

public speaking, computer skills, teaching abilities and obviously playing chops. Students who are starting college should think carefully about their major. Music education should never be a “backup” in case performing doesn’t work out. You’re setting yourself up for failure before you’ve begun! Also, do you really want to have a band director who is only there because his or her dream career didn’t pan out? Students should only become teachers if they have a driving passion to be an educator, as it is a very important job. Getting a teaching job is no easier than winning a playing position. I strive to prepare all of my students in the same way, which is to help them develop an unflappable work ethic that applies to everything they do.

***What is your favorite place that you have performed?***

Hmm. It is hard to pick. But last month comes to mind when I did a number of recitals in the greater Philadelphia area with pianist Natalia Kazaryan through Astral Artists. Before our high-pressure bookings recitals, we performed our program at a number of retirement communities. Every venue had a great space and piano for performing. I loved these concerts the most out of my week since I was able to interact with the audience much more intimately than a formal recital. We started one concert at a retirement community in Philly with the Telemann F minor sonata for bassoon. Halfway through the first movement, a man in the front row gasped at a low note, and his commentary dominated the rest of the performance. At first, it almost made me giggle mid-performance, but as the concert progressed I felt like I had my own cheering squad as I navigated a challenging program. His reactions were so genuine. These are the kinds of performances I live for. When there is a huge divide between the performer and the audience I might as well be at home playing for my Zoom.

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

Choosing to major in music requires a delicate balance of being in awe of the gift that your main purpose in life is to create art, combined with the acceptance that you will need to work harder than most of your peers in most other fields just to pay your rent. There are no shortcuts in music, period. There are no substitutions for practice, period. I think that sometimes young students don’t realize how many hours being a musician takes outside of rehearsals and classes. It is not a 9 to 5 job. It should not discourage anyone from majoring in music, but I always hope they have some idea of what they’re getting into so there is no shock midway through an expensive degree. There will be so many parties you’ll have to miss because you’ll have to practice. There will be a lot of things you won’t be able to afford

because you'll need to save your money to pay for a festival application fee. But, when you've put in the work and you get that first call to sub with the local symphony and you get to play the chorale in Mahler's Second Symphony and it feels like every cell in your body is electric, you'll know why you do this. There are a number of moments in music that overcome most of us with emotion. Sometimes they're few and far between, but those precious moments are reminders of why we have spent so much of our lives alone in small rooms with a piece of metal.

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

Honestly, Beyoncé, "Hold Up". I'm a super fan of her voice!

***Do you have a favorite genre of music?***

No, not really! I certainly listen to classical music the most. There is always music to study and prepare and I also really love certain composers such as Rachmaninoff and Bruckner. I try to listen to everything - even country and rap. The trombone is a really diverse instrument and I can never predict what I might be called to play.

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

I took a course in my masters called Community Engagement which helped performers learn about creating and performing educational recitals. The class culminated with the creation of a whole program that we actually took out into the New Haven public schools. We learned how to talk about music at a comprehensible level, how to program, how to manage schools in different types of neighborhoods, and the do's and don'ts of engaging with various age groups. Everything I learned in this class I use almost daily as a teacher and soloist!

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

The Bulletproof Musician and the teachings of Don Greene and Noa Kageyama changed the direction of my career. Starting to learn to control my energy to master my performances under pressure (a work still in progress) has been one of the best things I've ever done. I highly recommend becoming a full member of the site.

<https://bulletproofmusician.com/>

Another incredibly useful site is <http://alessimusicstudios.com/>

Joseph Alessi has created one of the most useful tools for trombonists pursuing an orchestral career. There is a play-along track for almost all excerpts as well as for

the notable solos such as the David. Besides The Machine, there is a wealth of written, video and audio information about the pieces and how to play them.

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

The best tip I can give is to take a lot of them. Practicing for years in the practice room, taking lessons, and playing mocks are all great things to do. However, nothing can truly replicate the feeling of spending a small fortune on a hotel and plane, traveling, getting dehydrated, learning what was not smart to eat the night before, and yet managing to play your best once you're behind of the curtain. It's a law of averages and the more shots you take the more wins you will have.

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

The only thing I love as much as music is animals. I have two 12-year-old rescue cats who run my world. They both like the trombone but one of them, Fudge, *really* loves the trombone. I try to practice at home as much as possible for her enjoyment. I would love to work with rescue animals. Fudge was abused before I adopted her and it took her years to open up to me. Now, she is my shadow. The transformations animals are capable of achieving, even after experiencing the worst of the humanity, is really special.

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

The best way we could make music education better is to make it an integral part of our society from the beginning of a child's life by making it a required core school subject. Children have math classes from kindergarten to undergrad and no school district would ever even consider cutting these classes. Music, as we all know, is one of the first things to get cut from schools when money is tight. Study after study has proven all the ways creating music makes us smarter and there are countless scientists and politicians who owe part of their success to the time they spent studying their instrument. I strongly believe that if music was a core subject in schools all across America, urban and suburban, public and private, we would start to build a new generation of curious, creative, and kind people nationwide.

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

Yes! It has become one of the biggest aspects of my career. Watching students figure out their own potential and reap the benefits of hard work is one of the most gratifying things I've ever experienced. My students push me to be a better

musician and educator every day. Observing them teaching is my greatest source of pride. It becomes clear what aspects of what I've offered them have worked for them and what they want to pass on. My students at BG are great individuals and it is a privilege to teach them.

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

A few books have helped to make significant improvements in my career. Denson Paul Pollard recommended a few books in a masterclass at MSM that really spurred me to work. Two of them are *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell and *Talent is Overrated* by Geoffrey Colvin. Both of these books discuss the "10,000-hour rule" and are very easy to read. It is hard not to RUN to the practice room after! Toby Oft recommended a few books to me to help me reign in my inner dialogue. *The Inner Game of Tennis* (W. Timothy Gallwey), *Zen in the Art of Archery* by Eugen Herrigel and *Peak Performance* by Charles A. Garfield, Ph.D, have all been instrumental in my performance under pressure. None of these books are directly about music. As artists, we are our own worst critics, and silencing our inner critic is the bulk of the battle.