

Since I am not involved in social media as many other teachers/studios are, I have created an informational document that may help familiarize you with what happens in my trombone studio at the Jacobs School of Music.

I have been teaching at the Jacobs School of Music since August 2002. I left a position in the Seattle Symphony to join the esteemed faculty at IU. It is an honor to teach at such a magnificent institution, one with such a storied history. Indiana University has been one of the top music schools for decades. In fact, we just celebrated 100 years!

I love being around young, talented, intelligent, motivated people!

Here is information about some of my students:

I have former students in the following positions:

Orchestras:

Boston Symphony
Detroit Symphony
Grand Rapids Symphony
Louisiana Philharmonic
Mississippi Symphony
New Mexico Symphony
Pittsburgh Symphony
San Francisco Symphony
San Diego Symphony
Vienna Philharmonic
Winnipeg Symphony

Premiere Military Bands:

“The President’s Own” US Marine Band
US Army Band “Pershing’s Own”
US Army Field Band
US Navy Band
US Naval Academy Band
US Military Academy at West Point Band

University Teaching Positions:

Boise State University
University of Arkansas
Ohio University
University of Alabama
University of Minnesota-Duluth
University of Louisiana-Monroe
West Texas A&M University
Southwest Oklahoma State

Here is some information about my own performing career (my bio is online):

My Performance Experience (orchestral):

Boston Symphony
Chicago Symphony
Cincinnati Symphony/Cincinnati Pops
Cleveland Orchestra
Indianapolis Symphony
Milwaukee Symphony
Music of the Baroque
National Symphony
New York Philharmonic
Oregon Symphony
Seattle Symphony/Seattle Opera (former member)

Performance Experience (chamber):

Canadian Brass
Chicago Chamber Musicians
CSO Brass
Chicago Trombone Consort
New York Philharmonic Brass Quintet
Proteus 7
Trombones de Costa Rica
Washington Symphonic Brass

Solo Recordings:

“Pura Vida” (2010)
“A la Maniere de Defaye” (2016)
“3” (2018)
“4” (2022-24)

Selected Masterclasses:

The Juilliard School
Manhattan School of Music
Curtis Institute of Music
Eastman School of Music
Peabody Institute of Music
New World Symphony
Florida State University
University of Oregon
Oregon State University
University of Washington
Central Washington University
Ohio University

University of Alabama
Western Michigan University
Texas A&M University Corpus Christi
Texas A&M University Kingsville
University of New Mexico
Puerto Rico Conservatory
University of Costa Rica
University of British Columbia
Melbourne Conservatorium
Sydney Conservatorium
Queensland Conservatorium

FAQ:

Can you tell me about your studio at IU, I can't find much on the internet?

-Since social media is not of interest to me and since I do not have a frequently updated website, this question is a fair one. Each year I carry a studio of 16-18 trombone students, with a fairly even distribution by grade level, undergrad to doctoral. My studio is very successful in the ensemble auditions that happen every semester. I make sure there is a healthy, supportive studio environment. Often, my role is that of a mentor, which sometimes involves guidance in matters other than trombone playing. We have a great vibe in the studio. Part of the audition process is making sure I want to spend an hour each week with the student and that the student will fit the studio culture. This ends up producing a harmonious group. I have high expectations and push each student toward improvement and excellence. The rest is up to the student.

How often are you in town and around school? Will I have 3 lessons in a week and then weeks with no lessons?

-NO To the second part of the question!!! This is my only job. I live in Bloomington. During the school year, my life is centered around my work with students at school. I attend as many student concerts as possible, as I love seeing my students in action! I schedule any outside activities around important student events. Students will not need to fit into my schedule...I fit into theirs. It is not just about the lesson time together. I need to be part of the "full circle" to make sure you are functioning well as a musician in your ensembles in addition to what you do in your lessons. Very occasionally, I will be away, performing with a great orchestra, chamber group or giving masterclasses elsewhere. My IU students are my primary concern. My wife lives and has an important, demanding job in Washington DC and when I am able, I go to visit... and to see my dog. My trips are always scheduled around student activities. I am not a "drive-by" teacher. I do not leave Bloomington as often as possible. I really like it here. I am available, in-person, as a mentor and guide. I am old-school. I prefer in-person interaction to digital communication, but of course, use it if necessary. I have been at IU over 20 years and have had hundreds of students. I know how to take care of the

youngest undergrads to the grizzled doctoral veterans. I am a full-service teacher, even doing simple repairs to your instrument. I love being available to offer help and support.

Can we schedule a lesson for me to evaluate your teaching style?

-My teaching style is quite simple. You present what you have prepared. I tell you what needs to be fixed and suggest how to fix it. You then take that information back to the practice room and work on what I suggest. I do work on the principle of positive reinforcement and over the course of our work together, your playing will evolve and improve...many times without you noticing.

Can we schedule a sample lesson?

-Not only can we schedule a sample lesson, we can actually schedule a real lesson! Some schools/teachers offer free lessons to prospective applicants. I do not. I view a lesson like a visit to the doctor. One wouldn't expect to spend an hour with a physician for no charge, even the first visit. In fact, people often pay hundreds of dollars for less than ten minutes face-to-face time with their health professional. During a lesson with me, you will get my attention and knowledge for an hour. I charge for these lessons. Zoom lessons are also possible, when necessary, for a slightly reduced rate.

While at IU, will I study with a graduate student?

-NO! This is a rumor that is passed along by faculty at other schools. Unlike other large music schools, all majors in the trombone area at IU will study with a faculty member.

What is a typical lesson like? What is your teaching philosophy?

-My focus is to help you to grow into a mature musician, using the trombone as a megaphone of your musical thought. I am first and foremost concerned with sound—as it is your “voice.” I will likely address some aspect of sound in almost every lesson. This is a gradual process and growth takes place over a period of years. I am also very focused on intonation. Trombone players can be lazy (sorry) and are often sloppy with intonation. I also address this in almost every lesson. Going further into this concept, in order to be successful, one needs to not make the same mistakes that everyone else makes. I emphasize this idea constantly in lessons. We need to hold ourselves to the same standard as fine violinists or pianists. Every instrument has inherent difficulties and I can help you with this in the trombone arena. A very important part of acquiring mastery of any instrument is “fluency.” Scales, arpeggios and intervals are the DNA of music. Just as the ability to add, subtract, multiply, and divide are vital to the execution of higher math, so are scales, arpeggios, and intervals to the exploration of musical repertoire. I encourage this fluency through what is known as the “Lesson Routine.” I change it slightly every semester. My goal is to have you never be at a loss for what to practice but will also never give you busy work.

Consider this metaphor: There was a great sculptor who made incredibly lifelike creations of bears out of marble. When asked how they were able to accomplish such accurate representations of a bear they replied, “Well...I start with a block of marble and chip away everything that doesn't look like a bear.” This is how I teach.

I know what a great trombone player sounds like. I work to rid you of everything that doesn't sound like a great trombone player/musician.

The Jacobs School of Music is a big school, will I be overwhelmed?

-Indiana University/Jacobs School is a large school but we have not lost anyone yet! Consider comparing it to a city: Indiana University is your city. The Jacobs School of Music is your neighborhood. The Brass Department is your street. The Trombone Area is your house/apartment building. Most importantly, the studio is your family. Your closest interactions will be within the studio but you also have access to all that a "city" offers.

What repertoire will I be working on if I become a member of your studio?

-Elsewhere on this site you will find suggested repertoire lists and Lesson Routine materials. I use very traditional, tried and true study materials. As tempting as it is to jump at every new method book, the ones I use are the same ones that have produced the finest players in the world. They are good enough for me and my studio. That said, I am not completely closed minded. I am open to discovery but there has to be a reason to deviate from my list.

I really want a new trombone for college, should I get one now or wait?

-Getting a new instrument is a super-exciting event! I need to caution you, however. I always recommend waiting until you are at your new school to take advantage of the professor's knowledge. Your new teacher will steer you in the right direction for you. Resist the social media barrage that some prominent instrument companies aim at you. Your teacher knows more about you than these aggressive companies and will have your best interest at heart. There is an added bonus to waiting: asking your teacher for suggestions and input gives you a chance to show that you value their knowledge and following their suggestions shows that you are willing to follow their advice. Every instrument, no matter how old or "out of vogue" can still produce a great sound. Here is an example I frequently use: "Who will sound better: Toby Oft (or Tim Higgins or Brian Wendel or whichever great player) on your horn or you on their horn?" That should take the equipment discussion off the table. I am not suggesting that a new instrument is a bad idea. I am advising you to wait.

I hope this information is helpful in your search for a great place to study trombone and music. If you are seriously considering a career in music, the Jacobs School of Music has unmatched resources and performance opportunities.

Please email me if you have remaining questions: ellefson@indiana.edu

Prof. Peter Ellefson