

David Taylor: Bass Trombone

"An Appreciation and Interview by Douglas Yeo

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In the program notes to David Taylor's historic 1984 Carnegie Hall recital, annotator David Wright penned the following telling words:

It's true that David Taylor has been through The Juilliard School, and his professional skills have put him at the top of his field. But he's also married, with a couple of kids, and that gives a person something to think about besides whether the sixteenth note is exactly a third as long as the dotted eighth. Such as: In what kind of world are we hearing this music? How do we as artists and audiences affect that world? How should we play, and listen, and live?" (1)

Asking questions is a big part of David Taylor's life. So is answering them. But why should we listen to David Taylor's questions, or care about his answers? The answer to that question is simple: Because he has something to say.

There are abundant examples in the past of musicians who excelled in many different musical genres. Palestrina and Bach distinguished themselves in composing both secular and sacred music. Early in their careers, Caruso and Paganini were equally at home in the cabaret and the concert hall. But in our highly specialized times, it is more the exception than the rule when a performer successfully moves back and forth across the musical "boundary lines." In light of this, it is even all the more remarkable to note that there has never been a trombonist, much less a bass trombonist, who has distinguished himself in as many areas as David Taylor. And it is very clear that his influence has been very strong in each area in which he has become involved.

David Taylor's first musical instrument was the trumpet, which he played for only a month. His teacher put a tuba in his hands and he stayed with it until high school when he first began playing trombone. A tenor trombone major at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, he studied under Davis Shuman and received his bachelor's and master's degrees there. Between his sophomore and junior years at Juilliard, he spent a summer at the Music Academy of the West (Santa Barbara, California) and switched to bass trombone.

He first played with The American Symphony under Leopold Stokowski in 1967 and, at the same time, began playing in jazz and big bands in New York. After one year of teaching intermediate public school music in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of New

York City, he devoted himself exclusively to performing and began to become involved in more and more musical genres. Following The American Symphony came concerts with the New York Philharmonic under Pierre Boulez and membership in the bands of Gil Evans, Chuck Israels, George Gruntz, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis and Bob Mintzer to name a few. He played in the orchestra for the hit show "Promises, Promises" and started doing studio jingles and records.

His bass trombone began to be heard on dozens of recordings with major jazz and popular artists including Duke Ellington, Barbra Streisand, Frank Sinatra, Aretha Franklin, The Rolling Stones and Quincy Jones.

In 1979, David Taylor embarked on a period of commissioning music for the bass trombone and in the years following gave premieres of significant works including compositions by Charles Wourinen, Alan Hovhaness, Frederic Rzewski, Eric Ewazon, David Liebman and George Perle. In 1982, he was awarded the Most Valuable Player Award on bass trombone given by the New York Chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) - the first time the award had ever been given to a bass trombonist by the New York Chapter. He was to win that award for five consecutive years, the maximum number of years it could be awarded. In 1987, he was awarded the New York NARAS Most Valuable Player Virtuoso Award, an honor no other bass trombonist has received before or since.

His first full solo recital was given, at the age of 40, at Carnegie Hall in 1984. Two more New York recitals followed, each with significant new premieres, as well as his first solo album, DAVID TAYLOR-BASS TROMBONE on the Triple Letter Brand label. His best selling recording, THE PUGH-TAYLOR PROJECT, which was produced in conjunction with tenor trombonist Jim Pugh, continues to garner recognition for its originality, sound, and recording technique. After a hiatus of nearly 20 years, David Taylor, in 1989 began teaching again, this time at the Manhattan School of Music, where he leads a chamber music class called "Sans Batons" and teaches privately. For many years, he did not do the traditional "circuit" of master classes for trombone players around the country, but recently, he has begun travelling and bringing his unique style of performing and teaching to trombone conferences around the world, including the 1988 International Trombone Workshop, the Third Wind Symposium in Paris and the Sixth Annual Convention of the Trombone Association of Western Massachusetts.

Yet despite all of this acclaim, David Taylor remains somewhat of a mystery to many trombonists who have, over the years, chosen to label and put him in one or another genre. To many symphonic trombonists, he is a commercial player, a jazz player or "non-legit," to some free-lance trombonists he is a "legit player," and to each he may be referred to as "the guy who commissions that weird music." But David Taylor rightfully rejects the labeling, knowing that his trombone represents himself better than any verbal defense. He has chosen to live and work in New York City, knowing that that choice has kept him from being known in the "trombone world" as well as others who have for years engaged in master class self-promotion.

Because I have known David Taylor for many years (I myself was a free-lance bass trombonist in New York from 1976-1981 also playing with the American Symphony, the Goldman Band, the orchestra for the Broadway Show "The King and I," and studio jingles and records), I found him happy to sit down and talk freely about his ideas about making music. His insights on not just the trombone, but on broadening our world view, are challenging and thought provoking. But when all is said and done, David Taylor does his best talking with his trombone. And when his trombone talks, we all should listen.

Yeo: You have been known to be very much in favor of musicians not being stereotyped.

Taylor: Yes. Years ago, there were certain catchwords such as "legit" and "non-legit." People tended to get pegged as one kind of player or another. In the world today, it's clear that there is a superfluous number of orchestrally trained players. When eighty to one hundred and twenty people show up at a bass trombone audition, that's a lot of bass trombone players, and many of these players who don't win orchestral positions go on to play in other genres of music. These are educated people; we're not talking about guys who just came into the house with their muddy shoes on when asked not to and go to the gig in their overalls and don't know how to play in tune. For instance, the last time I went to the ITW, I said to the players, "If you're here, you know how to play the trombone. Now we can start to talk about music." And that's the way it is - people can play. We have so many beautifully educated trombonists who have all the technique they need using equipment that is so far advanced. But, to call a person with an orchestral job "legit," and a person without an orchestral job "non-legit", well, I think that's archaic, and it implies too many things.

Yeo: As soon as you put "non" in front of something, you make it a negative.

Taylor: In what I call the "private sector," there are many high-quality chamber groups, jazz groups, concert spaces and clubs in which the government doesn't have a major funding influence. There are many engagements where you don't play in a "fortress." Lincoln Center, for instance, can be like a fortress, keeping aesthetics in and out. Don't misunderstand me about this "fortress" statement. I frequently play classical and jazz concerts at Lincoln Center. I go there to hear many interesting and uplifting concerts and I have premiered several pieces written for me there. However, "art centers" like this give off a very imposing presence and sometimes just being near all that opulence can tarnish the way you hear or play a composition. Anyway, in New York we have the New York Chamber Symphony, the St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and other excellent chamber groups. In these ensembles you have people who play not only chamber and symphonic music, but people who play the high-end free-lance jobs in other genres.

I do a lot of recording sessions where the woodwind section has the first chair players from the New York Philharmonic. The string section may have the concertmaster from the Philharmonic in it and the brass section could have people from every orchestra in town. Does that mean that if I go to a jingle, film date or recording session and all those orchestrally employed people are there and I'm there, that they're "legit" and I'm not, or

that I'm suddenly "legit," or that somehow they are suddenly "non-legit" when they're at a session and then "legit" again when they get back to Lincoln Center? It doesn't make any sense. One of the things that I'm a little concerned about in the conservatory is that while we are still training trombone players to play the RakÚczy March beautifully, our concept of orchestral training is getting too narrow. Why is it that so many players in orchestras try to treat sound as if it were an artifact or try to have the same uniform sound? There are certain elements in U.S. cultural history that we brass players have not explored or listened to fully enough.

Improvisation, for example, has been very misunderstood in our schools. In the late 19th century and first half of the 20th century, a cry of industry was "Yankee Ingenuity." Much of our film acting is improvised - the early films were sometimes just "shot" without the heavy scripted technique. Our stand-up comedy is the same. The most obvious and pervasive examples of cultural tradition and worldwide American influence are jazz improvisation and the popular song. It is my feeling that true interpretation of written music must have elements of all of our past and present cultural characteristics in it. Not necessarily with obvious inflection, but certainly not with the obvious denial of our country's varied and strong musical tradition that seems to pervade the way we interpret music today. For sure this is the way Europeans have approached their music. It is common knowledge in all areas of life experience that if you understand your own traditions and heritage, your performance or presentation will be more natural, and you will be more able to understand some one else's traditions and heritage.

In my approach, I don't always hear various genres of music ending or beginning in definite black and white approaches or styles. I don't necessarily hear music being geographically separated - or age old traditions being separated from the present. I hear or try to hear styles, rhythms and harmonies being on a continuum and overlapping and "user friendly." When conversing with composers and arrangers, I get responses such as Charles Wourinen's - in which he describes listening to various articulations from jazz groups, for example the Preservation Hall Jazz Band (or reading about Stravinsky liking Shorty Rogers' trumpet articulation). Slide Hampton plays big "symphonic" equipment. Gil Evans constantly talked about concerts he had heard, classical music he had studied, and of how he and Miles Davis would go to hear Alban Berg concerts. Lester Bowie's deep and uplifting amalgam of sound encompassed many cultures. Part of this problem of not exploring our cultural areas is the immaturity of the student, and as teachers we must try to coax them out of it. I've seen many statistical things in the ITA Journal, such as what does an orchestral player earn, what is his day like, and what kind of equipment and music does he or she play. I haven't seen statistical data based on all those people who trained to be orchestral trombonists and bass trombonists who are left out in the cold. Perhaps we should see more data on concept and equipment changes that occur after the academic experience. Perhaps more articles should be written on how our general "music scene" has been uplifted with all of these educated musicians dealing with the reality of not having a steady job, and living in today's cultural pool dealing with the "private sector's" demands.

Yeo: So, we are both denying and losing our individuality.

Taylor: Let's say that our students can be shown ways of achieving good strong concepts including greater understanding of individuality within the values of so-called "high art." When people think of musicians making a living other than in the university or in an orchestra, I think there tends to be a suggestion that we should be on the lookout to prevent the demeaning of the values of this "high art." This way of thinking comes from what I call the "orchestral/academic complex." In the last decade or two we have seen a very positive rise in quality and "respectability" of jazz departments in our conservatories, but I include jazz orchestras and classes in this type of problematic situation.

I object to the "high art police," but to say that I object to it would be just like everybody else saying they object to something without doing anything about it. My objection to being labeled found a vehicle in my playing. My transcriptions, commissions, solo, chamber and improvisatory projects were a kind of "Let me throw this out, this is where I am, you make the judgment" attitude. I found musicians and audiences liking my music; magazines and newspapers started writing about what I was doing. When I started seeing that kind of very positive reaction from the public or private sector....

Yeo: You knew you were saying something.

Taylor: Something went down, because it didn't just happen there. It happened again later on in other concerts. My concept started to change and improve. I had more goals for my development.

Here's something I'm concerned about related to this. It seems to me that when a person is 24 and goes into the orchestra - symphonic or jazz - and then immediately goes back to the college to teach full-time, it can be a very stultifying experience. I wonder, when did this process begin? When did musicians go right from college to the symphony or jazz orchestra and then back to the classroom? When there are 80 to 120 players at an audition in their twenties and one is accepted from that group for a position, is that person being accepted because he or she is a great artist - and I'm sure he or she is or will be - or can it be that the management is able to offer that player a lower salary and doesn't have to worry about his or her pension and disability - is it that it feels he or she can be molded into the style of the orchestra? These are all things that should be thought about.

Here's another train of thought. When a trombonist plays in front of a whole group of his or her peers, are there certain freedoms that will not be taken? Conventional wisdom says it makes more sense to play all the notes cleanly than to play the phrase - hey, the trombonists in the audience are looking at every alternate position you use! When you play for the PUBLIC (or "private sector"), where people might not know the difference between the 6 1/2 A and the 6 1/2 AL mouthpiece, isn't it possible that creative freedoms may open up? An improviser, for instance, will many times do his most creative thinking after some "mistake." I think that when a lot of players do a clinic or master class and they're playing a real florid passage and they sense that they're not set up right for the

phrase ending five or ten notes down the line, they will alter the phrase to make the notes sound.

Yeo: They won't take the chance.

Taylor: They won't take the chance. Whereas, when you play for the PUBLIC and not just for the "trombone crowd," the goal is to have those thoughts not enter your mind. I remember playing low C's on the Pugh-Taylor Project but without the trigger. When I hear that now, it's weird. I guess I just happened to hear something and played it. You have to take chances. That's kind of how all of this stuff overlaps. The goal is to make the best of where you're at. Hopefully, I'm doing that for myself.

Yeo: Well, you have a reputation for remarkable longevity in a very competitive atmosphere and in varied styles that is unlike anyone else's. You still compete in all the venues very successfully.

Taylor: I've gambled a lot. Like with my improvisation. I didn't really get up and start to improvise with a big band until I was about 37, 38 years old. It took me a long time, and I finally started improvising in my own way - you wouldn't call it the norm. And you're gambling when you do this, not only on your ability, but with your reputation. It used to be that a player wasn't supposed to do studio work, substitute with the Philharmonic and play with Thad Jones and Mel Lewis all on the same day - which is what I did. I wasn't the only one, others did it also; Dick Hixon, for instance, who was a great bass trombonist, played on the "Stravinsky conducts Stravinsky" albums and many other Columbia Symphony recordings while playing in Larry Elgart's band and other fine groups.

Yeo: But gambling implies either winning or losing. There's no middle ground.

Taylor: Yes. What I'm talking about is taking a chance - it can go either way. On a musical level, maybe you succeed, maybe you don't, and then you try to improve. However, you also gamble on a business level, because when you've developed a reputation or "trademark" and you start doing things differently, even controversially, it puts you right out there and you could get cut out. You might unintentionally step on someone's toes or just philosophically annoy some people, but you must continue.

Yeo: When I do trombone demonstrations for young people, often related to our youth concerts, I tell the kids to close their eyes for a minute and imagine the thing they love doing most in the whole world, whether it's riding their bike or whatever. Then I ask them to imagine that they could do it every day and they could make their living doing it. I say to them that next to my faith and my family, trombone is that thing. And that's a privilege.

Taylor: You know, it's interesting that you said that. It's only in the last few years that I've been able to realize just how much of a privilege that is. I can't imagine doing anything else. A lot of people made fun of the fact that I was always losing money giving

recitals, commissioning music - I never went for grants and that stuff. People in my field on my instrument would say, "What gives with this kind of stuff?" But I think back to a show called South Pacific. There's a song in it called Happy Talk. The lyrics go, "Happy talk, keep talking happy talk, talk about things you like to do. You've got to have a dream, 'cause if you don't have a dream, how are you going to have a dream come true." That's basically the bottom line.

Yeo: You've not traditionally gone to a lot of places and done classes, recitals and clinics for an audience of just trombone players. But you have recently begun to do some things; for instance, you were at ITW a few years ago and you did a workshop in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1989. The Holyoke clinic was the first class I've ever seen you do. Your approach and method is very different. As I was thinking about it, I was trying to put it into perspective. Fifty percent of the people there probably didn't have any idea what was going on because they were looking for someone to come in and say, "We are going to talk about technique now." They didn't know what to think when you came at things from a totally different perspective. They spent the whole time trying to figure out where you were coming from and missed the point completely.

Taylor: It's funny that you said that, because someone called me up after a master class recently and said, "After you figure out that you're not going to get the normal fare, you begin to realize that what you're being asked to do is figure out how to arrive at your own conclusions."

Yeo: That's very true. Let's say that another 40% of the people present are sort of just shaken up by the whole thing in that they're experiencing something totally different. But maybe 5% or 10% of the participants might have had their lives changed because your presentation is, and I'm going to use the word in the positive sense, "provoking." You came in and decided that you would let the audience set the tone of the class. You opened up by playing a very difficult piece, Bozza's Piece Breve, and then after you played it, the first thing you did was to read a quote by Hindemith about how technique wasn't an end in itself. Then you said, "What do you think about that?" Silence. "Okay," you said, "then what do you think about this?" and you read another quote from a book. Boom. This provoking style, where does it come from, and where does it go?

Taylor: This is how I live my life. In New York City, I'm always having to improvise my lifestyle. Schedules change daily. I might play a Mingus concert in Cleveland and then have to change my flight to get back for an orchestral rehearsal the next morning. That's the way things are. It wouldn't be honest for me in a class to say, "And now I'm going to get classical." That's not the way the real world is. I read a lot about artists, I read a lot about composers, and things aren't so cut and dry. You are who or what you live. If I'm provocative, it's because I'm here in New York living that kind of life. Why cover up the fact that I play for Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston and Frank Sinatra? Why not utilize the positives of those experiences? The abstract expressionists didn't paint figures. Andy Warhol painted a tomato soup can, Lichtenstein paints cartoon pictures - this is what we are.

So that's how I approach everything. When you say I'm provocative, well, I live in a provocative city. We live in a provocative society. These are provocative times. We are artists. We mirror our environment; hopefully, we honestly mirror in our art universal qualities we've lived in each of our localities. This is how my master classes go. "This is who I am, ladies and gentlemen." The night before that class you spoke about, I was worried about playing Piece Breve because I was up until three in the morning playing with Quincy Jones on "Saturday Night Live." I had to get up very early on the morning of the clinic, about six o'clock - after three or four hours sleep - practice, and drive up. This all affected the way I approached the class. I was in the car for a long drive and was charged up and had to use that energy. I must admit, though, that I was a little disappointed that many people wanted just to be entertained.

Yeo: It was interesting how the class went. The first half-hour was very quiet. And then it started to pick up because people began to ask the honest questions. Because you would keep quoting and asking

Taylor: When you start to get too conscious about why you are doing something, you lose that God-given naivetÉ, that childlike simplicity. At this point in my life I'm thinking of trying to get away from the "provocation" word because now I'm beginning to think, "Must I always be provocative when I go out?" Is it being expected of me now? It seems to me that the brass world is really behind the times if by reading a book and asking people about it you are being provocative. Maybe it should take more to provoke a brass player. Is that a horrible thing to say?

Yeo: No, because it would seem to be true.

Taylor: It's unfortunate. I was talking to a fiddle player in one of my ensembles at the Manhattan School of Music. This girl is one of the best violinists in the school. But she won't play minimalistic music. "There's nothing there," she says. So I responded, "Why don't you just get into the sound." But she just won't do it. This is a problem. When a person like me comes along, people tend to want to say that I'm provocative, but I'm not really provocative, I'm just telling you what I do, how I live my life. What's really funny about it is that I'm successful financially and to become successful financially in the freelance music business you have to be somewhat conservative. Not make waves. So how am I succeeding in this if I'm so provocative? I did not mean for my transcriptions or my classes to be "provocative." I didn't mean for my commissions of these contemporary pieces to be "provocative." I commissioned these pieces and took them and played them in chamber music situations, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, in front of real people. It's all in the approach. Labeling or characterizing people is not good. But you tell me, what was the most positive reaction you had from that class?

Yeo: That you have to think for yourself. And it's okay to be yourself. However, it wasn't what they expected. But David, the problem would seem to be that many people don't want to think. A person at the clinic said to you, after you read a quote, "What do you think about that?" You said to him, "I won't tell you what I think about it. I made the action, you give a reaction and then I'll react to your reaction." And that's a very good

way to approach things. People don't want to think. They want to have you tell them what you think. They're there - you are the teacher, they are the student. They say, "Tell me what you think." And if you make them think, it's sometimes a very uncomfortable thing. Because when you're out there in the audience, you're anonymous. You just want to say, "Give it to me. Entertain me." But when the artist says for you to give something back to him and then he'll give you more....

Taylor: A lot of people say that when you write in some magazines, you've got to write down to the level of the reader or when you play, you must play things that the audience will immediately grasp. I say that's baloney. There are enough people doing that. It's important for audiences and students to be around people thinking on a level that they have to come to. It's okay for a lecturer or a teacher or an influential person to come into someone's life and make one grope for something, to not understand everything. I think that when audiences hear genuine honest expression, they react positively and when this is reinforced, it takes hold. The person might go home feeling that he or she didn't understand it all, but he or she also intuitively knows when something is really going on and in a year might say, "Wow, that's what he meant by that."

Yeo: Because it's in their head and it sits there.

Taylor: Right. I think that one of the built-in problems with the educational system is that so many teachers are forced to communicate on the lowest common level or have their students show immediate progress -there are important points that are being forgotten. When they see a clinician come in, students and some teachers want to be dazzled by his technique, and they want to find out "how did he do it." And they want him to be able to say, "Here is my tongue, it goes like this," or "Here's how to play changes." It's very important that the student realize and have confidence that if he has a great enough desire or a great enough need to have that technique, he will get it. I spent hours a day on articulation; I still do, even at this point. But I don't double tongue and that surprises a lot of people.

Yeo: I don't often double tongue either.

Taylor: How did you come to that?

Yeo: Nobody ever taught me how to, so I just single tongued.

Taylor: Right! You had to play the part. You stretched yourself. And to me that's an ingredient in what real interpretation is based on. I was just reading about Schubert. For years after Schubert died, orchestras didn't have or refused to work up the technique they needed to play his symphonies. Now, you know that when those pieces were first being played, they were being played with abandon. Sometimes they were being played with an extraordinary strain and effort and this abandon added to the music. I think that's what music educators sometimes forget.

There are musical things - spiritual and etc. - that are really not explainable, and if one lets oneself go, these unexplainable things just appear in an interpretation and have a positive value. I'll tell you something, when I look back at the recording I made of Charles Wuorinen's string quartet, do you know what I think some of my best playing is? There is a passage of four octaves of b flats in a row - pedal, low, middle, high. I allowed myself to make those leaps in a way that made them sound like colors, not octaves. It's like bing - bong - bang. I did it with abandon, and it has effected other interpretations and given me confidence.

Yeo: That stretched you.

Taylor: Right. And it also added a certain flair to the interpretation.

Yeo: Well, you have to take the chance, as you have said.

Taylor: You just hit the nail on the head.

Yeo: Throughout this interview is the theme, "You've got to take chances." As you've said, if we play a recital for trombone players, we might not take chances because we're worried that we won't play the note in the right place, or we might miss and make a clam or run out of air. But when you play for the "private sector" as you call it, you're trying to make the music, not just play the trombone.

Taylor: I think that's vital.

Yeo: You have been busy as a professional musician for almost 25 years and have been extremely successful from many points of view. How do you keep it all fresh and new to you?

Taylor: My playing is changing and it's becoming more personalized. It's a funny thing that I should say that because with orchestral repertoire, a lot of the guys thought that my playing was too personal from the beginning. But I never felt that way. Now I can see myself saying, yeah, I'm really beginning to personalize my playing more.

Yeo: But you've always been independent in your playing, haven't you?

Taylor: I've always done independent, individual things.

Yeo: So this newly personalized style is maybe just a continuing expression of that.

Taylor: Going out even further. It's becoming more fun, but it's more scary because every time I go out there, I'm trying to push myself further. I'm always studying. I read a lot of literature. It's my relaxation. I love to jump from book to book. In preparation for a master class on transcriptions at the Manhattan School of Music, I read a book about Irish Christmas Mumming, which made me jump to Jean-Paul Sartre, which made me jump to a Berio interview, which made me jump to a Ferruccio Busoni book; I mean this reading is

all in segue somehow, jumping back and forth from one thing to another. This morning I went back to a book that I hadn't opened up in maybe 10 years.

During my master classes I cite examples from a wide variety of books. What I'm trying to do is show people by example that we're not reading enough, and that in these books written by great artists we see so many possibilities and freedoms within our structured art that allow us to take chances and give us confidence. Finding out about other "searchers" helps us determine our own sound, interpretation and musical thought. Many great musicians of the past said that if you're going to be a good musician, you've got to have a broadly based education and you've got to bring in all your experience to your art. You receive information and you never know how, why, when or where it will affect you. I like to read and it always ties in - indirectly or directly - to my music.

Yeo: Let's explore your movement to these more personal things, like the various "Suites" you have put together.

Taylor: I have four "Suites" now and I've just recorded three of them.

Yeo: Are these all with piano, or do they have varied instrumentation?

Taylor: They are with varied instrumentation. *Appellation Sprung* has violin, piano, harp and bass trombone. *Five (5) Songs Avec BÈnÈdiction et Divertissement* has string quartet, piano, harpsichord, harp and bass trombone - the *Divertissement* varies in instrumentation from performance to performance, sometimes with tape, sometimes with percussion. *Omens and Oracles*, a suite based on original composition, improvisation and transcription, has bass, cello, violin and bass trombone, and *French Suite* has piano, harp and bass trombone. Except for the French grouping, all of the suites use extensive mute changes and colors. Even though these are set instrumentations, sometimes they vary with the situation I am performing in. When I went to Paris for the Third Wind Symposium, I played my French Suite with only piano. I used the piano player the group provided, and this pianist played for many trombonists at the symposium, so time necessitated that I stay simple. There are times when you may run into an economical problem or you might be better off not getting too complicated with accompanying instruments for the sake of the interpretation of the piece. I was actually very flattered at this symposium. They submitted the program notes that I made for my recital to the French Cultural Ministry to show how good their symposium was. The reason that I'm so proud of this is that of the 35-40 classical musicians who were there - mostly all the performers were Europeans, including many French artists - I was the only person to play French music on a recital. I went to France with program notes explaining why I played French music and people were touched. I played my French transcriptions for a trombone master class there and one of the compositions I played was *Piece Breve* by Bozza.

After I played it, the room stayed really quiet. It struck me as being odd; you know it's a pretty difficult piece to play and I thought I did it fairly well . . . and it's different. Later a professor from the Paris Conservatory came over and told me why everyone was so quiet. He said it was because they couldn't believe what they were hearing. Not necessarily only

in terms of how I was playing this or that, but the fact that here I was, an American, and I was telling them that they should be playing French music - and that furthermore I was playing a saxophone piece on the bass trombone.

Yeo: With all that tradition of great French music, nobody else played anything French?

Taylor: To my knowledge, no one on the recitals played French music. It was weird. But I'm happy that I did it because I'm having a problem with the skyscrapers looking the same in every city. French music students and their teachers came to this symposium, and there were about 15 bass trombone players who played at my master class. They were all going after this big, fat, American bass trombone sound. It was gorgeous. But my question to them was, "With all the tradition in France, why give up what you have?" I'm not saying that it's necessarily right or wrong to try to sound like this or that, but I really wondered why they weren't playing French music and why they seemed to be throwing out some very strong qualities of their tradition. I was surprised that some still thought it almost unheard of to play saxophone transcriptions. After my trombone master class and recital, I was asked to give a master class open to everyone. I named the master class "How to Speak French in One Easy Lesson!"

Yeo: Now this concept of your "Suites," which you're creating and performing more and more, tends to take the listener by surprise. People are used to doing or hearing a collection of Brahms songs all together, or the Mahler Wunderhorn Songs or something like that. But the idea of putting together a "Suite" of five very different things by different composers that may have a common thread is very unusual.

Taylor: There are several factors that made these "Suites" logical to me. The fact is that in clubs or jazz concerts, sets are made up of different kinds of music; many tunes may be by different writers. Again, I live in a country where jazz and popular music have an amazing worldwide impact and these forms feel natural to me. I utilize some basic structural concepts without copying a specific style or cliché. Larger forms of classical music have diversity in tempi, style, key, movements, etc. The symphonic form is a strong example of this. Sometimes, the "Suites" came about because I just wanted to put philosophically similar music together, sometimes out of some intuitive thing and sometimes it needs no reason - it just feels right. The common thread in my "Suite" called Five (5) Songs Avec Bénédiction et Divertissement (Five Songs with a Benediction and Divertissement) is tolerance.

Incidentally, I tried to use tolerance as a theme at the ITW a few years ago. I did a short "Suite" called Pax Romana. A Pax Romana is not only historically known as a period of 200 years of peace, but it's also defined as a tenuous yet workable peace. I took a composition called Dagon II (Dagon is an agricultural god of the Philistines) and two Ravel songs, Kaddish and Eternal Enigma. Kaddish is the prayer for the dead, Eternal Enigma is kind of a general song questioning why is the world as it is. I played Duke Ellington's Come Sunday ("Lord, dear Lord above: God almighty; God of love, please look down and see my people through.") I started out with Song of the Watcher of the Night by Darius Milhaud, "Ho, who goes there?" The concept was to put together these

clashing things and make a beautiful musical and philosophical statement. The last song in Five (5) Songs Avec BÈnÈdiction et Divertissement is called Tolerance, by Ives. It says, "How can I turn from any fire, or any man's hearthstone? I know the longing and desire that went to build my own!" One of the funny things for me about putting Ives and Ravel in this "Suite" is that Ives couldn't tolerate Ravel! Ives had this strong New England, Ruggles' type thing and he couldn't deal with Ravel who he thought had this sweet, song thing happening. Anyway, the Ravel song I chose was Meyrke my Son, and it's about a boy and his father talking, "Why is it so, what's going on?" Then I put in Duke Ellington's Come Sunday. I can't go into a concert to perform for the general music public and just play "trombone" music. I have given some recitals of my own when mostly musicians come, but I like to play on other people's concerts with mostly non-musicians, non-trombonists in the audience. Although I love playing and studying a Bach cello suite or some kind of trio sonata, and find that playing it on the trombone is beautiful, educational and admirable, it doesn't bring in the public or fully satisfy the need I have to communicate something personal.

So for me, the concept of "Suites" really worked out quite well. Here was something I was doing from my heart, from my spirit, and people believed in it enough to program it on concerts of "music." I received a New York Times review for a performance of my Benediction Suite on another group's concert (the name of the group was "For The Love of Music") and they gave me the headline. The leader was ticked off at me! For my Kauffman Hall concert at the 92nd St. Y, I sent out a professional, glossy flier to every ITA member. But I didn't just send it to teachers - I sent it to regular ITA members. I did it, at worst, for my own self-aggrandizement, but at best, I did it because I wanted to show people that yes, there are bass trombonists out there trying to communicate in front of the general music-going public - not just trombone players - and on a professional level. I sent it to students - internationally.

Yeo: Let's get back to the different songs in the "Suites."

Taylor: Well, I arrived at this "Suite" of Bach, Ives, Ellington and Ravel during a period when I was reading about abstract impressionistic painting and its relationship to jazz. Look at Ives in his piece Tolerance; he writes about tolerance, yet he couldn't deal with Ravel - a man from a different culture and a different musical scene - but it fit. I put Dagon II in the Suite as the divertissement which was rather a joke, because that's a wild, hairy piece, not a divertissement at all. And the confidence for that joke and the title of the suite was influenced somewhat by my love of the music, heroism and humor of Charlie Parker, in this case the jazz tune Quasimodo. He based the tune for Quasimodo, who of course was the hunchback of Notre Dame, on the changes of the song Embraceable You. Also, most importantly of all, the music deals with a spiritual cause or a calling for spiritual strength. For example, the Benediction, the Bach aria, Awake all my Powers within me.

Yeo: But even in these suites that you put together, you sometimes change the pieces around.

Taylor: Yes, I take something out, put something in. For recording I have a set idea of what is to be done, but for particular concerts, I change things just to have fun, to test things out to see how malleable my "Suites" are, or to adjust lengths for duration. The thing about the "Suites," too, is that when you perform a 20-minute work of music, you're putting a focus on the concert. You're not running off the stage every three minutes. It helps you program pieces on either end or in the middle, and it makes those other pieces have more meaning.

Yeo: I remember on your 1984 Carnegie Hall recital that you did some of these pieces, but you didn't list them as a "Suite."

Taylor: At that time it was all up in the air; that whole recital was like an incredible experiment. It was a scary thing. That was my first recital and I was 40 years old. I told myself that it was time to **** or get off the pot. That was a rough evening!

Yeo: How did you get through Juilliard without doing recitals?

Taylor: Davis Shuman died and the trombone scene at school was in flux for awhile. But at that time, I was playing with Stokowski's orchestra and recitals didn't seem so important. Looking back, it would have been good to do recitals but I waited until I was 40. I really wasn't ready before then. I had been playing solo pieces here and there. So when I finally decided to do a recital, I threw in the kitchen sink. I mean I did some wild stuff, the Rimsky-Korsakov Clarinet Concerto, some monster Bach transcriptions . . . I want to get some of these things recorded - I worked hard to do them first. Let me take this opportunity to sidetrack for a moment. I'm all for the college spirit of Xeroxing and copying someone else's stuff. I'm all for sharing things. But I'm trying to be a professional soloist. That's one of my priorities. So if I come up with a special kind of a piece or arrangement, I like to be the one to do it. Hopefully, it will first of all be identified with me. When people commission a certain piece of music, they often have the rights for performing and recording for so many years.

Yeo: But that must be balanced with letting the music out.

Taylor: Yes. There has to be a balance somewhere. For instance, a lot of the music a guy like Christian Lindberg commissions, a trombonist in some orchestra will end up playing, and Christian won't get the next gig. He did something, helped make and form the piece, and then it gets out and he ends up cutting his own throat. After Christian does it, the first trombone player in the orchestra will want to do it. And that's good on a certain level, too. But there needs to be respect for the people who work to get the pieces commissioned and promoted in the first place.

Yeo: I'm intrigued by the concept of "unified diversity" in the "Suites." I'm going to use it sometime because I like the idea.

Taylor: I want you to, I'm glad you like it.

Yeo: It's a good idea to pull things together. I never thought of grouping very diverse things under a single theme.

Taylor: Well, you have to take a chance. Look, Debussy broke ranks with the romantic style. The varying degrees of conscious and unconscious motivation in his quest are something to think about. I think that in order to make some kind of statement, a conscious move is required. And that's what everyone's scared of - making a conscious move. As you get older, hopefully the conscious/unconscious thing gets melded more together.

Yeo: And you are getting older!

Taylor: Yes, and it's getting better. The Appealation Sprung Suite is made up of pieces by Bartók, Kodály, Elias Tannenbaum, Poulenc and a three-to-five minute improvisation. I wanted to bring improvisation to the concert stage during my recitals. I've improvised in lots of jazz bands, and the way I improvise can be considered rather unusual. Although it's based on blues, classical and contemporary music, I wouldn't call myself a chordal, II-V blues player or changes player in that sense. My improvisation is kind of eclectic. Bartók and Kodály, as we all know, besides being great composers, were Hungarian ethno-musicologists; they catalogued folk songs. Folk music was an aural tradition. Improvising! It changed.

Yeo: Handed down from ear to mouth and it keeps going.

Taylor: Exactly. Bartók and Kodály took this material and sometimes put it flat out in settings, sometimes turned it into art songs and of course at times larger structures. Having the improvisational nature of the folk song and art song from that tradition in a "Suite" of my own design gave me subjective and philosophical credence to thrust my own improvisation into the overall structure. Over the years, I have had to find a way to create "sound fields" for myself, to enhance my communicative strength. The 12-bar blues structure isn't precisely my structure although when I hear myself back, I definitely have certain elements of blues in my playing. I guess we have been so exposed to this form all our lives that it's become part of us. The sonata allegro form, especially the way it's being done now, oftentimes is a tired structure. It isn't me. So that's why all of this came about. I had to find a way to let people know what I do.

What I do is play in a jazz group one moment, play the Lincoln Center Chamber Society in another. The Lincoln Center Chamber Society gives me a chance to play real classical exactitude with personalised interpretation and with high calibre musicians. I don't necessarily play blues/gospel/jazz because the language is not basically in my tradition. The bands I play in are fairly modern, avant-garde, progressive bands, like Gil Evans'. In these groups I can improvise in a language with a more personalized vocabulary. I had to figure out a way to say to a person, "Look, I'm making music," but I couldn't just come out and say "Look, I'm a trombone player and I can really play music." Trombone players have been saying that on campuses for years and years; it makes no sense to me. I had to figure out a way to find a structure to support who I am. The "Suites" became that thing.

They enabled me to speak to the people. Incidentally, these "Suites" are just one short period of my career and I'm moving on to other things now.

Yeo: Why do you use the word "Appealation" - when you say it, it sounds like "Appalachian."

Taylor: Well, I started researching Hungarian music and as I said, that "Suite" is around because I had to find a way to improvise during a classical type of concert. I started researching folk material, and I found out that a great deal of this folk material had to do with war, women's struggles and hardships, romance and Eastern European conflict. So I wanted to make an appeal; three of my suites are based on social appeals. I wanted to say I was springing an appeal. But who am I to say that I am springing forth an appeal? This appeal, for peace, tolerance and love, has been going on for eternity. So the appeal had already been sprung. There's a lot of double entendre. I was asked to put the "Suite" together for a group's springtime concert, so the title Appealation Sprung has a number of meanings depending on how you look at it.

Yeo: You have mentioned in previous interviews that you have changed your practice routine over the years. You got frustrated with a single-minded emphasis on long tones. Not that they're not important, but you got tired of that single focus.

Taylor: For years I used to play long tones including the first 10 exercises of the Schlossberg book every day. But I couldn't deal with that any more. I practice scales all the time now. By running from genre to genre, style to style, I find the extreme diversity tears down some of the "correctness" of embouchure and breathing. For me the scales help keep some focus on everything. I began doing a Robert Mueller routine, eighth, two sixteenths, I call that my "bop-ba-ba-bops," but all of that has changed over the years, too. It's important to do things that make you feel warmed up psychologically as well as physically. When I'm not in the heavy music practicing cycle, like for a recital or solo, I try to play at least two hours of scales. Fundamentals are very important.

Yeo: Let's talk a little about your involvement at the Manhattan School of Music.

Taylor: I'm really happy with what's going on. It seems that students are coming to me for my musicality. And I'm proud of that. I'm accessible, I'm a good entertainer, and we get the job done. There are times that because of my schedule, I have to run my class at 7 a.m. That means the students get up at 5:30 in the morning. They do it for me, and they do it because they know I'm committed. Part of my job as a teacher is to show a student by living experience the level of commitment required to make it. I'm in it every day. I'm trying to teach commitment.

Yeo: What would you do if a student came up and said he wants to audition for Tanglewood and work on an audition list?

Taylor: I would work on his audition list. But I think we have a problem here with the system and the way we are looking at things. I would like us to view excerpts in a slightly different way. Do you know the name Wilhelm Furtwöngler?

Yeo: Yes (Furtwöngler was a well-known German conductor [1886-1954] who served as music director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic and Berlin Opera).

Taylor: He left New York after a distinguished but disappointingly short American career and went back to Europe to work. He was a musician of very high regard and many of his interpretations are being reissued on CDs even now. He had a very personalized and subjective approach to his art. His conducting style actually follows in a direct line from Richard Wagner. His approach encouraged musicians to participate in the orchestral situation much the same way as highly creative chamber musicians do, with inspired chance-taking interpretations of their parts. This, for me, means that he recognized where his music came from and called upon musicians to use their more universal emotions and abilities to express it. Here again is an opportunity to have ITA Journal articles discussing how mass communication has opened up various communities' music for our enjoyment and education - and how these newly digested cultural experiences affect our present music and our interpretation of old music. In the United States, we play so much "old" European music. I guess this is partly because we are heavily populated with European descendants. But why the overemphasis on trying to remember what might have been natural for our forefathers? Certainly at this point in our individual and global development we have gone into other areas of tradition. Hasn't it struck us at this point that in the States we import the heavy controllers of our orchestral music scene and that Europe imports Americans as an almost exclusive mainstay of their jazz festivals? If we are all importing these big "mucky-mucks," shouldn't we be concentrating on learning what it is they're doing that makes their music more natural for them and universal for all of us? To me, that is what real communication is about.

I guess my feeling is that I believe in the power and beauty of local traditions, but when these local traditions are used as "bastions of exclusivity" rather than overlapping extensions of the human experience, I get a little fidgety. We are entering the 21st century, and we have to remember that mass communication has been worldwide for truly a lifetime. Anyway, Furtwöngler felt that conductors who rehearsed everything to its smallest detail ended up putting the piece "in alcohol." Those conductors pushed inspiration into the background out of their own insecurity. This attitude, he felt, wouldn't do justice to "living masterpieces." Furtwöngler felt masterpieces were subject to a "law of improvisation" to a far higher degree than is commonly realized. He felt that when people lost the feeling for true form, and when they had forgotten that its origin was improvisation, they began to search for other things to save the "tottering edifice."

He spoke about Beethoven's revisions of the Leonore Overture. He felt that Beethoven revised the recapitulation of the overture because of his direct contact with the sonata allegro form and its origins being based on improvisation. Furtwöngler felt that Beethoven didn't see one version as being better - or best - he saw it as just another way

of doing it. Furtwöngler's is a beautiful concept and it gives us freedom. After my graduation from the conservatory, I had a problem with some of the orchestral concepts I came into contact with. My phrasing changed to what was going on around me, and I felt many of the groups I played in in New York were playing pieces as if they were written in stone. Someone in an ITA Journal article or interview asked a famous orchestral trombonist, now retired, what would he have done differently if he could do it all over again. He said he would have taken things less seriously. I know what he means. You've got to be loose about things. Serious about your playing, yes, but also more playful, perhaps with phrasing or attitude.

Yeo: But we're talking about a system. You've got a guy who comes to your studio and says he wants to work on an orchestral excerpt for such and such an audition. He knows that he's going to be judged against the standard of the judges. So he'll say, "Mr. Taylor, teach me the mainstream approach," and you're going to say...

Taylor: I'm not sure I know it...whatever mainstream means....

Yeo: Then you might say to him, "Okay, you tell me the mainstream approach." What I'm saying is that all things being equal, if all guys in the audition have great time, intonation and sound, how are they going to pick one person over another?

Taylor: I don't think that at this point they can anymore. Eighty to 120 players show up to an audition.

Yeo: But I talk to students about this "X" factor. How is anyone going to pick you, how will you distinguish yourself assuming everyone else is going to be great?

Taylor: You have to bring personality to it. Something. You can't just play everything like it's written in stone. I would teach a player that when you make something your own, based on an educated and practically experienced viewpoint, it becomes truly special and noticed. Through the teacher-friend/student relationship I would show this person that if the excerpt interpretation really "is" what he or she is, it is felt by the hardened professional and the general public alike. For years you and I went to schools that had an orchestral repertoire class and every member of the faculty was an orchestral player. Now it's changing. There are repertoire classes, but also brass quintets, ensembles, jazz groups - it's wonderful. It's getting so you can't just be the best in the orchestral repertoire class, get into the orchestra, and go back and teach excerpts. You can't do it. It's not right. One of the things these varied activities can help us learn is that there has to be more freedom of phrasing in sections.

You have to follow a lead player, there's no question about it, but there's room within that. We must all listen to the constant changes in phrasing going on all around us. These different chamber and improvisatory groups can teach us that there is life after excerpts. I think we tend to put too much importance on new and newer instruments, bigger sounds and rating technique. Our openness in schooling is helping to break down these barriers. The bottom line to me is the phrase. Many music teachers should have their students

reading books outside of music. Students should get out of being trapped into doing only "musical" things, and ignoring the rest of the world. When I was in school, the most depressing thing was to see how many students were ruined by teachers. Teachers tried to change them to make them carbon copies of themselves. This just isn't nice. When you try to duplicate something that's been done in the past without adding to it or realizing that no matter what you do there's going to be something new put on it, you're holding yourself back.

Yeo: So now we have seen a part of David Taylor. You've made these two records (DAVID TAYLOR-BASS TROMBONE, THE PUGH-TAYLOR PROJECT), a few more are awaiting release, you've been a sideman on countless other records, you've given several important New York recitals in Carnegie Hall and other venues, performed solos with orchestras and chamber music groups, you've commissioned many significant pieces for the bass trombone and you teach at the Manhattan School of Music. What's next? Where do you go from here?

Taylor: I'm starting to compose my own music. One piece I wrote was played in Europe. I did that with Ray Anderson and Annie Whitehead; Albert Mangelsdorff became ill, he was supposed to perform with us in a group called "The New World Trombone Quartet." When he couldn't play with us and we had to consolidate the music for trio, Ray renamed the group The "Small" World Trombone Quartet. Jim Pugh and I are thinking of recording and making another album and I will have a composition of mine on that.

Yeo: What do you want to do that you haven't done?

Taylor: I have this fantasy, probably just a daydream, that I'd like to go back for my doctorate in aesthetics and philosophy. I would like to study how and why Louis Armstrong redefined the art of being a soloist. I would like to explore how Debussy developed his compositional style and helped the romantic style move on. There's a writer of letters, Maeterlinck, who wrote PellÈas and Melisande. He had a great effect on Debussy and a great effect on Schoenberg. Schoenberg and Debussy were totally different mentalities, trying to forge new ground at the same time. They were both heavily influenced by Maeterlinck. What was it that Schoenberg was thinking that made him avoid going the path of Debussy and the impressionists? How did Duke Ellington develop into a great composer with the ability to let his personnel direct the colors of his palette? How did Miles Davis make the transition from his "bop" period to his "cool" period of playing? What were the difficulties he faced in leaving behind his success to take the chance? What was it in Ives that enabled him to develop his "American Primitive" style? What was it in a guy like [Jackson] Pollock who didn't necessarily draw well but developed great painting? Or the poet John Milton who was blind, and perhaps because of this problem, changed the style of English literature?

How do the pop culture artists take clichÈs and make them their own and sound fresh to their public? Schenberg did not study composition in a school environment. He was uneducated in that way. He started out as a painter. What enables these people to do what they do? And how does that effect us? That's the area that I'm beginning to get interested

in. It's that spark, that adjustment, that drive, that "provocation" - uh oh, there's that word again - that makes people think. I tend to be going in that direction and I'm tending to want to teach more. I'm totally knocked out being involved at the Manhattan School of Music. I'm finding out that the students really get something out of it and I love it. I'm going to finish the record of three of my "Suites," I'll just call the record Suites. Then I'm going to move on to some other stuff, some trios, also a composition that Charles Wuorinen did for me with bass trombone, tuba and string bass. I've already recorded an album with Hovhaness' Symphony No. 34, Opus 310 for Bass Trombone and Strings with Gerard Schwarz and the New York Chamber Symphony, but I won't release it until my next two records have had a chance to sink in.

So that's where I'm going now. What's next? I'm always looking for the "what's next." It doesn't matter what area it is, I love playing the trombone, and I do that every morning and afternoon and night, so whatever other area of "what's next" there is, it will come out and in some way utilize the trombone. But next week, you could ask me the same question and you might get a different answer.

Yeo: When is the next Pugh-Taylor project coming out?

Taylor: Soon, we hope. The first record keeps getting critical acclaim. For several years now, Natural Sound has named it one of the 10-15 best CDs on the market sonically. We've sold more than 15,000 copies of it.

Yeo: Tell me about the mute you use on Passion Flower.

Taylor: It's just a harmon mute without the pin in it. I also made a buzzer mute on Creature Memory with all sorts of things in it.

Yeo: Let's go back for a minute because we haven't talked about Davis Shuman, your teacher at Juilliard. I'd like to have you, one of his pupils, fill in some of the gaps of misunderstanding about his influence not just on you, but on the whole trombone and musical scene.

Taylor: When I was at Juilliard, he had only a handful of students. If he was misunderstood, it was because he wanted to choose his own path, and because of his sense of freedom. This man would be playing recitals in New York and everybody would come. He realized the importance of commissioning music, not only for the future of the instrument, but because playing music being written during one's lifetime is what the natural, living, cultural, real-life mentality is all about - unless you want to be a safe, museum-like sofa covered with plastic personality. This is not a quote, it's my interpretation of a reason he might have done this commissioning. I know that's why I do it. He would speak with me about his relationship with Bloch, Milhaud and meeting Hindemith after his ground-breaking recital in New York. He also did a lot of transcribing, and transcribing hasn't always been as accepted as it is today. There have always been periods when it was looked upon as not really being the thing to do.

When I would be at his house (we both lived in Brooklyn), I'd see letters from all over the world from musicians and students telling him how much they loved what he was doing, thanking him, asking questions, etc. What I also remember is riding to some gigs with him, driving around, just talking and grooving. He was always excited about music. I was accepted to both Manhattan and Juilliard, but I went to Juilliard because Davis was there. Think how lucky I was - I would go see my teacher playing in the "private sector" - making music. Is it too obvious to remind our young readers that in art, perhaps more than in any other field, one should choose one's school based on who one wants to study with, and not by the name of the institution?

Yeo: What do you see when you look back on that time?

Taylor: Here's the most obvious thing. A lot of the mainstream trombone scene couldn't see it when it happened. Davis Shuman did all of this stuff - the recitals, the records, the commissions - because he loved to do it, and he did it because it made his life more happy and fulfilled. He was doing his thing - orchestral work, solo appearances, making records - he was teaching. I think people were having a hard time with him because he was such an individual. I don't think his activities meant to provoke; he made his music naturally and folks reacted. But I think that the most basic thing we should see is, "Wow!," he was there doing it because he loved it. He was living a musical life and not as a hermit. He has a wonderful family - wife, Shirley, a daughter, Nina, who conducts on the West Coast and a son, Mark, who is a very active cellist in New York.

Yeo: So there seems to be a little of him in you in that way.

Taylor: Well, I hope so. We took very different approaches because we lived in different times. One major similarity between us is my need for family life. I have a wonderful wife, Ronnie, who always encouraged me to play my music and practice. At one major slow period, she insisted that I stay home and practice while she went to work. I also have a son and daughter, Scott and Jessica, who are great kids. Davis began playing trombone much earlier than I did. I remember his relaying a story to me that for his first job, he had to borrow a pair of long pants from someone - he wore knickers or shorts at the time. So you know he started playing at quite a young age.

I'm not sure, but I think his background was basically a classical one, whereas mine was coming from the radio and TV, you know, jazz, classical, R & B, movie music and rock and roll. He was a great admirer of Tommy Dorsey. I can only imagine that besides his love of Tommy Dorsey's playing, there must also have been the admiration of the fact that he was able to reach the public. Davis must have been listening to everything because he was really open. Davis Shuman's greatest thing is that he was living a cultural life. He loved to play. He'd invent things. That angular trombone, I mean it's really a practical horn. But it's not like people think it was. Your arm didn't go sideways with it. When we play our regular trombones, our arm actually crosses our chest to the left to go slightly in front of our body at an angle of 10 to 15 degrees. The angular trombone is designed so that the arm goes out straight. So the angular trombone is really a non-

angular trombone. The trombones we play are really the angular trombones. It's really a fantastic idea. I owned one and played it before I switched to bass trombone.

I remember that when I was in the process of making the switch from tenor to bass, I came flying into his studio once with both instruments in their cases. I tripped over them somehow. Davis looked at the student who was still having his lesson at the time when I literally barreled into the room and said to him, "That's why I like him - he does things the hard way." I always remember that statement with pride, because I know Davis did things the hard way. And when things aren't going quite the way I want them to, I think of Davis' admiration of not taking the easy way out. I'm sorry, though, that I couldn't have afforded to hold on to that angular trombone at the time and still have it now.

Yeo: Shuman's angular trombone makes perfect sense. In fact when I play, I compensate for the typically "unnatural" trombone posture by sitting slightly sideways to the left, and turning my head slightly to the right away from my body. But I never thought about it in terms of Shuman's trombone. It just made sense to sit that way. But I've been using his idea all along without even knowing it. Too bad we just didn't get it at the time.

Taylor: We need to remember Davis Shuman; he was living life for the moment with everyday problems like our own. He was a real person.

Yeo: He was doing the recitals.

Taylor: He was doing the recitals at a time when a trombone recital was unheard of in the private sector.

Yeo: We talked about the glut of trombone players, and not just, as you said before, "Guys that don't take their muddy shoes off..." Good players. Some are working, most aren't. They want orchestral careers, or chamber music careers, or even solo careers. What do you say to a young player who reads this interview who likes to play the trombone and wants to do something with it? What do you tell him about what's out there based on your experience, your success? You came to your place in the music scene through a very unconventional method. You didn't run around and take all the bass trombone auditions for every orchestra.

Taylor: If you really want to be a musician, you already are one and you will do it. Here, I'll give you an example. I was recently a guest artist with the Saturday Brass Quintet - they just won the Naumberg Award in chamber music - they are really a fine up-and-coming group. We played the Dahl Music For Brass Instruments. The group was upset over their performance and I detected that perhaps they were doubting themselves. I got down on them for that. It doesn't matter if your colleagues perceive you as being great or bad. It doesn't matter if you make a thousand mistakes or your phrasing is backwards because if you are honest and you really want to be a musician and you persevere, then you are a musician. And if you love what you're doing, then it doesn't matter how you're perceived. Of course there's a practical side to that, but you can't let your enthusiasm and love for music be limited by the attitudes of others.

Yeo: If you don't want to be an orchestral player or you don't want to be a jazz musician, it may seem like there's no place for you. But there's a place for David Taylor.

Taylor: Well, you have to go to a place that will support you, or go to a place where you can develop variety. New York City was the perfect setting for me to do that. The opportunities were here. But here it is again - if you really want to be a musician, you already are one. It's as simple as that. When I went to Juilliard, I was low man on the totem pole. I couldn't get into the orchestra, I couldn't get into the second orchestra, the repertory orchestra. I couldn't even get into theory class - I was in a rudimentary theory class. When they auditioned me for my piano entrance exam, they had to tell me that middle "c" was between the S and T in "Steinway." So what I did was play in four or five community orchestras. I didn't take no for an answer. I practiced like crazy and the next thing I knew, I was playing with Stokowski's orchestra. I went to all the big band rehearsal bands and played in several of them. Before I knew it I was playing in Chuck Israel's band, sitting next to Bill Watrous, Garnett Brown and Wayne Andre. If you really want to be a musician, you are a musician already.

If you can't draw like Rembrandt drew or don't even have the desire to, you can be like Jackson Pollock, find a way around it. Like with me, I don't necessarily play on blues changes, I don't necessarily play in the bebop style, but I improvise a lot and on a lot of recordings. I might not be - or may not want to be - the most versatile or fluent in the playing or the utilizing of the history of jazz and know every particular style, but when I started improvising, I was around 40 and it was do or die. So I did. If you really want to do it, you do it. But then you have to come to terms with people judging you. And you have to have the courage to go beyond that. You must always try to improve. There's a great quote of Edgard Varese hanging on my wall and it says, and I'm paraphrasing, that a work of art that's come out of your imagination is only an approximation of the work of art that you've envisioned. Progress is trying to get closer to that vision of the work of art you imagined so you will continue to improve. I really believe that's the key. You have to do that. You have to continue to search and improve. You have to have the courage to look at yourself and remember, "To thine own self be true."

Yeo: You've gone through phases. And in all phases you've done all things. But there have been times when you've concentrated in particular on one thing. There was a big commissioning time for you, then a big recital time, now it's a teaching time, coming up is the beginning of your head/philosophy/aesthetics time.

Taylor: I never really thought of those periods per se, but that's right, there have been periods of specific activity. You know, though, through all of that, there has been a common thread. I always practiced my "bop-ba-ba-bops." So I always maintained the core of how I approach my instrument no matter what the particular focus may be because I love my instrument. That's why Shuman took me on as a student, you know. He said he would teach me how to play because in my sound, he heard that I loved the instrument. And I try to have that love show in everything that I do

Footnote

(1) Carnegie Hall Stagebill. October, 1984. © David Wright. Used with permission.

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