

The Super Roger Argente

Principal Bass Trombone with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, **Roger Argente**, has worked with the world's top conductors and instrumentalists. Professor of Bass Trombone for Trinity Laban Conservatoire and Artistic Director of the brass dectet, Superbrass, he tells BBW Editor, **David Childs**, how he made it to the top

DC: Growing up in South Wales during the '60s and '70s, what were your most significant musical influences?

RA: Living in Neath, I attended Dwr-y-felin Comprehensive. The school had a fantastic reputation for music-making and would often compete in the Music for Youth competitions held at Fairfield Halls, Croydon. In my first year, we successfully performed the first movement of Schubert's Great C Major Symphony and I remember taking umbrage with the conductor, who suggested that I mime some of the unison trombone solos because I'd only been playing a couple of weeks and didn't know where fifth position was! I was also in the school brass ensemble and performed with it in the first School Proms at the Royal Albert Hall.

None of these opportunities would have been possible without the support of my fantastic parents and the patience of my brilliant teacher, Idris Rees. In addition to the school's music, I graduated into the county ensembles and particularly enjoyed playing in the youth brass band conducted by Tony Small.

I know I'm not wallowing in nostalgia when I say that the standard and variety of what was achieved back then was quite remarkable - not just in my backyard in South Wales, but right across the country. An amazing, dedicated, passionate team of county and school music staff delivered all of these opportunities for free! Now sadly things are so different and, despite pockets of excellence, the future is very uncertain for music education.

DC: You graduated from the RNCM in 1986 and have been involved in higher education for many years. What differences, if any, have you witnessed in conservatoire training during the past 30 years?

RA: I suppose the biggest difference is that, as students in the '80s, we were largely trained to become orchestral musicians concentrating solely on orchestral extracts and test-piece concertos. Back then, if you combined huge amounts of

solid hard work and a certain amount of luck with being in the right place at the right time, you stood a good chance of getting an orchestral job. Now it's more a case of harnessing a strong set of transferable skills to build a portfolio career, which could include holding down several part-time jobs whilst exploring the myriad of opportunities out there in these exciting times.

DC: Having been appointed Principal Bass Trombone of Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra upon graduating from college, you later moved to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) where you've been Principal Bass Trombone for more than 23 years. Was it always your ambition to join one of London's elite orchestras?

RA: Yes of course. When I joined the RPO, it was on the crest of a wave - the schedule was jam-packed with tours, concerts and sessions - it was like a dream come true. I also got the chance to sit in a section with the one and only Derek James on Principal Trombone - one of the finest musicians that I've ever worked with.

DC: You've played with all the great London orchestras, performing for many of the world's finest conductors. Is there a particular conductor that you've enjoyed playing for the most?

RA: Our Musical Director is Charles Dutoit. I adore what he does with certain repertoire, mainly French impressionistic works, but also Bartok and Respighi. Before him we had Daniele Gatti and I used to enjoy the amount of trust he gave us, particularly when performing Mahler symphonies. Two identical concert programmes were never the same - it kept you on your toes and developed stronger listening skills.

DC: As a session musician you've recorded film scores for Hans Zimmer, John Williams and John Barry to name a few! What has been your best experience in the studio?



Roger Argente

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RA: Working with John Williams is right up there and Hans Zimmer is great fun to work with too. Danny Elfman is very quirky - we recorded the Sleepy Hollow soundtrack with 12 trombones in an orchestra of over 100! Working with trumpet sections led by Derek Watkins, which included Maurice Murphy on the Bond films prior to Skyfall, was a great education. There was no need for discussion regarding note lengths, it was just a case of buckling up and being dragged along in the musical rush that their amazing power created.

DC: Having made two brilliant CDs and having launched a sheet music series with Superbrass, can you tell us more about your plans for this unique brand?

RA: I am planning another CD at the moment and the sheet music is doing well, with interest coming from as far away as New Zealand, Japan, Canada and the USA. I've also been talking to several new composers about exciting new works, so watch this space!

DC: Finally, is there any advice that you would give a young trombonist aspiring to make it in the orchestral world as a pro-player?

RA: There's no gain without pain! Work hard, commit 100%, be patient, listen to everything, go to concerts (not just brass concerts), be musically curious and don't be a musical snob.

DC: Thank you for your time and all the best for the future.

For more information about Roger Argente and Superbrass visit: www.superbrass.co.uk ■