

Before you say, “I don’t know” when your teacher asks, “So, what do you want to do for your doctoral project?”, here are 50 dissertation topics that I wrote down off the top of my head in 20 minutes.

—Douglas Yeo—

**International Trombone Festival 2024
Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas**

1. Trombone Solo Recordings Before Arthur Pryor

Arthur Pryor (recipient of the ITA’s 2007 Legacy Circle Award) made his first solo trombone recording in 1897, but there were other solo recordings of trombonists before Pryor. What are these recordings? Who were the players? What repertoire did they play? Where are the recordings?

2. Tracing the Legacy Tree: Notable Trombone Teachers and their Students

This has been done for American football coaches and teachers of mathematics. Why not the trombone?

3. Juan Tizol: From the Valve Trombone to *Perdido*

Puerto Rican valve trombonist Juan Tizol played with Duke Ellington and Harry James, and he employed his signature style in many arrangements and compositions for Ellington including his hit, *Perdido*.

4. Fired for the *Vaterland*: German Musicians in American Symphony Orchestras During World War I

Anti-German sentiment in America extended to many symphony orchestras including the Boston and Chicago Symphony Orchestras where players of German ancestry (including trombone players) were fired in 1918.

5. The Development of Carbon Fiber Trombones

Are carbon fiber trombones the next big thing in trombone innovations? Several companies are making such instruments, and there are now scientific studies that favorably compare acoustics of brass and carbon fiber instrument sound and response.

6. Melba Liston: Composer, Trombonist, and Band Leader

While she is the subject of a children’s book, Melba Liston (recipient of the ITA’s 2019 Legacy Circle Award) has never been the subject of an in-depth scholarly profile.

7. Trombone Innovations of C. G. Conn

C. G. Conn was the most successful musical instrument company from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, and their trombone innovations include the slide lock as we know it, numerous bell metal alloys, and the spectacular engraving of the Stenberg brothers.

8. The Bass Trombone in France: From Berlioz to the Present

The bass trombone was virtually unknown in France until the last third of the twentieth century. The arc of writing for “trombone 3” in France—from Hector Berlioz’s first encounter with a bass trombonist in Germany to the late twentieth century—explains a great deal when we look at how French composers have used the trombone.

9. Trombone Smears Without Smearing: The Life and Work of Nathaniel Cleophas Davis

Nathaniel Cleophas Davis, a Black trombonist, U.S. Army veteran, educator, and composer, wrote humorous trombone rags that employed glissando without resorting to the kinds of racist stereotyping that Henry Fillmore used in his “The Trombone Family.”

10. Beyond *Bluebells*: Virtuoso Trombone Solos, 1890–1930

Arthur Pryor was not the only composer to write virtuoso solos for trombone. Explore the history of trombone solos and soloists who wrote during the golden age of the band movement in the United States.

11. The Trombone Music of Eric Ewazen: A Catalog and Appreciation

Eric Ewazen has written over 20 works for trombone solo or trombone ensemble, and they are among the most frequently performed works for trombone on student and professional recitals.

12. Jules Demersseman: Solos for Slide and Six-Valve Trombone

The Paris Conservatory has had an annual concours for slide trombone from 1842 and for six-valve trombone from 1859 to 1870. Jules Demersseman wrote many pieces for slide and six-valve trombone that were the required piece for the Conservatory’s annual trombone concours on 17 occasions, the most of any composer.

13. The Cincinnati Pair: Ernest and Betty Glover

Teacher and student, husband and wife, and colleagues in the Cincinnati Symphony and Cincinnati College-Conservatory, Ernest and Betty Glover (Betty Glover was recipient of the ITA’s 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award) were a trombone power couple who influenced countless students.

14. The Trombone Solo Compositions of Christian Lindberg

Long known as a notable trombone soloist, Christian Lindberg (recipient of the ITA’s 1991 ITA Award) has also written many works for trombone solo.

15. The New York Philharmonic Orchestra Low Brass Section of Gordon Pulis, Louis Van Haney, Allen Ostrander, and William Bell: An Appreciation

The New York Philharmonic Orchestra Low Brass Section of Pulis (recipient of the ITA’s 1976 ITA Award), Van Haney (recipient of the ITA’s 1973 ITA Award and 2007 Lifetime Achievement Award), Ostrander (recipient of the ITA’s 1981 ITA Award), and Bell made many contributions to the musical world beyond their work as symphony orchestra players, including as composers, arrangers, and teachers.

16. Bass Trombone Players of John Philip Sousa's Bands

Several dissertations have been written about trombone soloists of John Philip Sousa's bands but there has never been an investigation and appreciation of his bands' bass trombonists.

17. Trombone Solo and Ensemble Compositions and Arrangements for Emory Remington's Trombone Class at Eastman School of Music, 1922–1971

The first performance of the Eastman Trombone Choir under the direction of Emory Remington (recipient of the ITA's 2007 Legacy Circle Award) was in 1941, but before and after that time, Remington students and friends of Remington composed and arranged a significant amount of works that his students played, including many that are still performed today.

18. Tracing the Arc of Multiphonics in Trombone Solo Compositions

Multiphonics have been used in many compositions for trombone since the early twentieth century.

19. It's the Greatest: Commercial Trombone Endorsements, 1890–1920

Musical instrument manufacturers including C. G. Conn and Frank Holton competed for endorsements by the best players in America. These endorsements tell us a lot about advertising as well as the players who used their instruments.

20. The Life, Work, and Legacy of John Swallow

John Swallow (recipient of the ITA's 2024 IA Legacy Circle Award) was an impactful trombonist who was a member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, New York City Ballet Orchestra, and New York Brass Quintet, and taught at New England Conservatory of Music and Yale University. His influence on the trombone community from his own work and the ongoing work of his students is incalculable.

21. Over-the-Shoulder Trombones: Form and Function

Over-the-shoulder bell trombones have been around since the Renaissance, but they have never been the subject of a formal treatment of their construction, acoustics, repertoire, and function.

22. Trombone Players of James Reese Europe's 369th Infantry Regiment Band

James Reese Europe's 369th Infantry Regiment Band was a transformative ensemble that was established in the world of ragtime on the cusp of the jazz age. The band's trombonists—including one who played a two measure improvised solo on one of the band's recordings that may have been the first recorded improvised trombone solo in history—have never been researched.

23. Gardell Simons: A Foot in Three Worlds

Gardell Simons found success as a member of bands and orchestras (including the Cincinnati Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, and NBC Symphony), and as a composer. His trombone technique was compared to that of Arthur Pryor.

24. Blood, Sweat & Tears and Chicago: Horn Bands of the 1960s

Dick Halligan, Jerry Hyman, and Dave Bargeron (Blood, Sweat & Tears) and James Pankow (Chicago; recipient of the ITA's 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award) shaped young trombonists in the late 1960s and beyond with their trombone performances and arranging for two of the great horn bands of the late 1960s that are still giving concerts today.

25. Norman Bolter and The Frequency Band

Retired trombonist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Norman Bolter has written over 400 compositions for trombone and has also made a mark—along with his wife, Carol Viera—with performances, clinics, recordings, and residencies with The Frequency Band.

26. The Multifaced Career of Dorothy Ziegler, 1922–1972

Dorothy Ziegler (recipient of the ITA's 2022 Legacy Circle Award) was a multi-faceted, transformative musician a trombonist (she was a student of Emory Remington, played with Leopold Stokowski's All-American Youth Orchestra, and was principal trombonist of the St. Louis Symphony) and educator (director of opera theater at St. Louis Opera Guild, Indiana University, and University of Miami, and trombone professor at University of Miami).

27. The Impact and Legacy of Trombone Players of The Goldman Band, 1918–2005

Established by Edwin Franco Goldman, The Goldman Band was the successor professional concert band to those of the golden age of American bands (Kyrle, Conway, Sousa, Pryor), and the Goldman Band needs a new scholarly treatment that picks up after the last doctoral dissertation about the band (1971) and which focuses on the many trombonists who played in the group over its 87 year uninterrupted lifetime.

28. Paying Respects: Grave Markers of Notable Trombonists

Where are Arthur Pryor, Emory Remington, Edward Kleinhammer (recipient of the ITA's 1986 ITA Award and the 2007 Lifetime Achievement Award), and Dorothy Ziegler (and others) buried? What do their cemetery markers and monuments say about them?

29. Trombone Solos by Salvation Army Composers: A Catalog and Assessment

The Salvation Army is responsible for dozens of solos for trombone with piano and/or brass band, including works by Ray Steadman-Allen and Dorothy Gates.

30. Benny Sluchin and the Modern Trombone: A Career and its Influence

Benny Sluchin (recipient of the 2024 ITA Lifetime Achievement Award) has been at the forefront of both contemporary trombone techniques and a revival of 19th century French trombone repertoire.

31. Changing the Sound: Adolphe Sax and Hector Berlioz

Adolphe Sax and Hector Berlioz are buried near each other in Montmartre Cemetery in Paris, a reflection of the closeness of their friendship and how Sax's musical inventions (including the six-valve trombone) were employed and championed by Hector Berlioz.

32. The Evolution of American Symphony Orchestra Trombone Audition Lists

As musical preferences have changed over the last 100 years, so have the orchestral excerpts that appear on professional trombone audition lists.

33. More Than a Curiosity: Methods for Adolphe Sax's Six-Valve Trombone

One of the most important musical instrument innovations of the 19th century was Adolphe Sax's *le nouveau trombone Sax à six pistons et à tubes indépendants*, an instrument for which a vast repertoire was composed.

34. *I Want You To Be My Baby*: Lillian Briggs and the Dawn of the Rock n' Roll Trombonist

Lillian Briggs (recipient of the ITA's 2021 Legacy Circle Award) was the first rock n' roll trombonist; she championed the instrument in concerts, television, and film.

35. Trombonists of the NBC Symphony Orchestra, 1937–1954

Gardell Simons, Abraham Perlstein, Allen Ostrander, and John Clark were only a few of the many notable trombonists who were members of the NBC Symphony Orchestra.

36. Filling the Need: Robert King's Music for Brass Series

Robert King, (recipient of the 1975 ITA Award) who, in his youth, was a renowned double-bell euphonium player, transformed the brass world with his Music for Brass series of arrangements for brass ensemble (begun in 1940). His company also championed and published music of contemporary composers of his time including Alan Hovhannes, Gordon Jacob, Daniel Pinkham, and Samuel Adler.

37. The Trombone as Popular Art: Covers for *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post*

Cover art for *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post* has inspired generations of people to pick up and learn to play the trombone.

38. The Introduction of European Brass Instruments to Japan

Western brass instruments were introduced to Japan by Dutch military bands in 1844 and again in 1853 and 1854 by American Commodore Matthew Perry.

39. Low Brass Players of Leopold Stokowski's All-American Youth Orchestra (1940–1941): A History and Assessment

Leopold Stokowski's All-American Youth Orchestra—an egalitarian ensemble that included many women at a time when women in American symphony orchestras were uncommon—helped launch the careers of several notable trombonists including Dorothy Ziegler and Edward Kleinhammer, and a comprehensive treatment of the orchestra, its recordings, its tours, and its trombonists has never been done.

40. J.J. Johnson and André Previn: A Study in Bitonality and Creativity

The 1962 recording, *André Previn and J. J. Johnson play Kurt Weill's Mack the Knife & Bilbao-Song* includes a bi-tonal track that deeply influenced composers, arrangers, and trombonists. Johnson was the recipient of the ITA's 1988 ITA Award.

41. There's a Sucker Born Every Minute: A Look at Manufacturing and Marketing of Stencil Brand Musical Instruments

Stencil brand instruments—instruments made by an “anonymous” company who are sold to another company that then engraves their name on them—have been around since the nineteenth century, causing confusion in the marketplace.

42. Music Commissioned by Trombonist David Taylor: A Catalog and Appreciation

New York-based trombonist David Taylor (recipient of the ITA's 2016 ITA Award) has commissioned important works for bass trombone and has made influential recordings that have transformed the modern view of the bass trombone and its capabilities.

43. Edward Elgar and Gustav Holst: Playing and Writing for Trombone

Both Edward Elgar and Gustav Holst played trombone in their youth and young adult years, and that experience shaped their writing for trombone in their orchestral works.

44. The Impact of Dental Structure on Brass Instrument Playing

Any trombonist who has worn braces knows that dental structure has an impact on trombone playing. This subject needs a new treatment in light of new research since Toshio Nemoto's long series, “Dental Clinic,” published in the *Brass Bulletin* from 1996–2002

45. Revelations from Within: Peter Iltis and the MRI Brass Repository Project

The MRI Brass Repository Project—pioneered by Dr. Peter Iltis at the Max Planck Institute in Göttingen, Germany—has transformed how we understand the role of the tongue and oropharynx in brass playing.

46. Those “A-Maisie-ing” Solos: Maisie Ringham-Wiggins

Maisie Ringham-Wiggins (recipient of the ITA's 2018 Legacy Circle Award) blazed paths as a child prodigy on the trombone, the first trombonist to earn a performer's diploma at Royal Manchester College of Music, principal trombonist of the Hallé Orchestra, trombone soloist at the premiere and recordings of notable compositions including Ray Steadman-Allen's *The Eternal Quest* and Erik Leidzén's *Concertino for Band and Trombone*, and as a Salvation Army Bandmaster.

47. The Valve Trombone in Mexican Banda Music and Performance

The valve trombone, often thought to be primarily used in Italy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has been a core instrument of Mexican Banda music and performance.

48. Dmitri Shostakovich and the Trombone: Desperation and Triumph

Russian Composer Dmitri Shostakovich has penned notable solos and ensemble parts for trombones in many of his symphonies which run the gamut of emotion including sarcasm, pathos, and triumph.

49. Trombone Patent Curiosities: 1890–1960

A look at patents taken out in the United States (and other countries) shows a wide range of unusual, interesting, and fanciful inventions that were designed to improve trombone manufacturing and performance.

50. Inspiring a Community: A History of The International Trombone Festival

The prototype for the International Trombone Festival (held every year since 1973) was the National Trombone Workshop, held at Vanderbilt University in 1971 and 1972. The story of over 50 years of International Trombone Festivals (known as the International Trombone Workshop from 1973 to 1993), its organization, leadership, artists, and impact has never been told beyond a six-page treatment in a 1991 dissertation about the ITA and a 2001 article of remembrances by Festival organizers and participants in the *ITA Journal*. This is a story that needs to be told more fully.

A graduate of Wheaton College (Illinois) and New York University, **Douglas Yeo** (yeodoug.com and TheLastTrombone.com) was bass trombonist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1985–2012 and has served on the faculties of the Peabody Institute, New England Conservatory of Music, Arizona State University, Wheaton College, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Recipient of the International Trombone Association's 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award and 2014 ITA Award, and the International Tuba Euphonium Association's 2010 Clifford Bevan Award for Meritorious Work in Low Brass Scholarship, Douglas Yeo joined the ITA at its founding in 1972 and is a frequent contributor to the *ITA Journal*. The most recent among his five books is *An Illustrated Dictionary for the Modern Trombone, Tuba, and Euphonium Player* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2021). Douglas Yeo is an international YAMAHA Performing Artist.