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COMEBACK PLAYER, FROM 0 TO 100

BY XAVI CASTELLÀ

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COMEBACK PLAYER, FROM 0 TO 100

BY XAVI CASTELLÀ

This article was approved for publication by the ITG Non-Pro Players Committee.

Dear ITG community, my name is Xavi, and I am a Chilean-Catalan semi-professional trumpet player. By profession, I am a journalist who holds a master's degree in business communication from Universitat de Barcelona, and I have been closely involved in music since an early age in Chile.

When I was invited by the Non-Pro Player Committee to tell my story, I immediately thought about giving this article an approach that would highlight the discipline and years of dedication that every musician, regardless of their background, must give to their instrument. Here, I will summarize my musical life, joys, and frustrations.

The beginnings

My first steps into music were at the age of seven, and thanks to the support of my parents, I learned to play the cello through the Suzuki Method, which was being taught for the first time in Chile. About eight years later, I started playing trumpet in the high school concert band. I remember that my first year of trumpet was self-taught, thanks to an old, basic trumpet video by Clark Terry.

Along with studying instruments at school, I enrolled in pre-college studies, first with cello and later with trumpet, at the Music Institute of Universidad Católica in Chile. I was still a child, but thanks to my parents' support and constant dedication, I attended weekly classes for about eight years. For a long time, I studied and participated actively with both instruments in the school's orchestra and band, being recognized for my motivation and ability to play well, both by classmates and teachers. I even represented my school along with a few other musicians at the Suzuki Method International Conference held in West Berlin in 1987.

Graduation from high school was when I had to face a big decision: continue studying music in college or follow other legitimate interests of mine. It is important to note that during these years, I had the opportunity to audition as a cellist for the first national youth orchestra we had in Chile, as well as other competitions. However, I did not manage to win any of these, which was a negative experience for my musical development.

Distancing from music

I decided to study something else unrelated to music; I wanted to know more! That is why I went to journalism school for five years until I received my diploma. During this time, I abandoned my musical studies but continued to play sporadically in some musical projects. I traveled to participate musically in youth encounters in places as far away as Volgograd, Saskatoon, Quito, and Lima—projects linked to a regional television channel and emerging bands in which the trumpet was greatly valued.

It was during this time that my quality as a trumpet player declined to the point where I only picked up the instrument for group rehearsals or performances but did not dedicate a single minute of time at home to practice. Consequently, my

playing ability deteriorated, and I acquired bad musical habits for more than ten years.

The oasis

Already holding my diploma as a journalist, I gave my musical studies another opportunity at the Projazz Music Institute. Here, the teachers, classmates, and musical experiences gave my life the necessary boost to continue developing music through my trumpet. I remember participating in a few Projazz bands, including a big band and an ensemble made up of winds, electric strings, and percussion instruments especially dedicated to preparing

musicals such as *West Side Story* and *My Fair Lady*. I learned and enjoyed a lot at that time, in addition to earning my first salary as a musician.

The breakdown

I was over 25 years old and had to get a serious job. I felt it was too late to dedicate myself 100% to music and that my future was written in the business communications area. Again, and with greater difficulty, I walked away from music to study and work in Barcelona. I had been there before because of my family and thought it would be the best place to study and earn my master's degree while also working in communications for a business unit of Nissan Europe.

After a few years, I returned to Chile and continued working for an important bank and an international consulting firm. Later the closest working experience related to music was collaborating with a music development NPO in Chile as a communications specialist. During these years, I played the trumpet less and less until I completely quit. The last thing I did was to go with my trumpet in 2009 to cheer Barcelona FC in the Champions League final game in Rome against Manchester United. These were crazy times with fans singing along with my trumpet in the plane, metro stations, Fontana di Trevi, and, of course, in the stadium! After this experience, I don't remember exactly when, but I spent more than ten years without playing a single note.

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Facing Page: Xavi Castellà. Santiago, Chile, March 2019.

Photo credit: Amina Donskaya

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Xavi cheering FC Barcelona against Manchester United, Champions League Final in Rome, Italy, May 2009. Photo credit: Ignasi Ferraz

Reuniting with my trumpet

At the end of 2018, I ran into John Walker, a former high school music teacher. He asked if I was interested in getting together to make some music. First, I politely said no, that I didn't play the trumpet anymore. Two or three days after that invitation, I dusted off my old instrument to start playing trumpet duets and participating in some activities and perform-

ances in churches and other brass ensembles with teachers and professional musicians linked to my old school. This was a key moment in my relationship with the trumpet and everything that would come after.

With the arrival of the COVID pandemic, it was difficult to attend school. I tried to stay motivated by recording and publishing personal musical challenges on the internet, such as trumpet covers or recording absolutely all the national anthems in the world, which today can be found on YouTube. Sometimes I am embarrassed to find my first videos not playing too well, and I feel like deleting them. On the other hand, I think these videos are evidence of a long learning path to becoming a better trumpet player today.

Road to success

Between 2020 and 2022, I decided not only to continue playing the trumpet, but also to clean up my technique, eliminate bad habits, and reach a higher level than the one I had as a child. I entered the Conservatory of Music of Universidad Mayor and made a lot of progress in a few years, considering that music programs in Chile take a long time.



Xavi and fellow students at the Conservatory of Music of Universidad Mayor, December 2022. Photo credit: Xavi Castellà



Xavi & Grupo La Rosa performing at different venues in Santiago, Chile, 2023

Happiness arrived quickly in this musical time of my life. After knocking on several doors, I managed to join a city hall concert band, named “Santa Cecilia,” as first trumpet. Having four weekly concerts, I finally began to feel that my vocation as a musician was making more sense. I could finally work as a musician, which filled me with satisfaction.

Already happy regarding my new musical life and dedicating a large part of my time to this, I learned from my colleagues that Grupo La Rosa, a successful Argentine band in the *cumbia* folk and dance genre, had a vacancy for second trumpet. It is curious that when I found out about this, I didn’t pay any attention to it since it was a night job for which I already felt a little too old. I also thought I would not have a shot, knowing that in Chile there are plenty of good trumpet players who were interested.

Apparently, this position was meant for me, though. After a couple of months of hearing that the position was not yet taken and after thinking about it a lot, I decided to express to La Rosa my interest in working with them, without knowing anything about *cumbia*. Of course, before going to audition, I practiced their music a lot. I think I did this right in time because I knew about some

friends already asking for the job. It was now or never, and I got it!

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40,000 souls at the

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myself very lucky to be working as a musician and reaching all these accomplishments only five years after picking up my trumpet for the first time in many years.

With Grupo La Rosa, I have had the opportunity to travel throughout Chile, appearing on television and at huge summer festivals and casinos in the country. Among the main venues at which I have played, I can highlight playing for 15,000 people at the Movistar Arena and for 40,000 souls at the

Santiago Club Hípico, broadcast on television for millions!

Conclusion

It is true that I don’t qualify as a “professional musician” in terms of my years of study, experience, or main source of income. However, in terms of my daily routine, I am dedicating a lot of time to music now, nearly the way professionals do. I study a lot and take my job with Grupo La Rosa very seriously, as if my life depends on it.

Currently, I not only do music; I also work as a freelance journalist, among other businesses. Considering I am a comeback player, I consider

I don't consider myself a great trumpet player, but I am currently playing at an advanced level. I practice at least two hours a day, dedicating much of it to the Arban method, and my main warmup consists of chromatic scales and focal point exercises by Rich Willey. From time to time, I go through my trumpet part at Grupo La Rosa, and maybe once a month, I practice first trumpet, too. Even though the first trumpet has a much more difficult range, I need to feel as ready as I can in case of an emergency.

For all the above, I have a big trumpet collection. Among them, my favorite instruments that I am not planning to sell are a lacquered Bach Stradivarius 37 B-flat trumpet (fiftieth anniversary model), a silver-plated Yamaha LA B-flat trumpet (second generation), a silver-plated Monette Unity LR B-flat trumpet (fortieth anniversary model), a silver-plated Bach Stradivarius 229 C trumpet, and a few student-model instruments (a Yamaha B-flat trumpet, a Bach flugelhorn, and a P-trumpet to carry on vacation). Recently, I acquired a Schilke C piccolo trumpet (C5-4), which I hope to learn to play soon. In my collection you can also find a Chinese trombone and my old cello in its case that I want to play again in the future.

I thank my family for their support, as well as a few professors and musicians who have been of great support in my interrupted musical journey. The list is huge, but some are:

Marilyn O'Boyle, Gustavo Ruiz, John Walker, Jorge Román, Juan Goić, Javier Contreras, Pepe Vergara, Rodrigo Arenas, Víctor Castro, and Tony Gariglio.

"In 2024, I participated for the first time at the ITG Conference in Anaheim, and this experience was wonderful."

I believe, regardless of your level, you should never stop dreaming—even if situations sometimes stand in your way. In addition to thanking my trumpet teachers, I will never forget when I took advantage of a trip to Paris to have a private class with Sergei Nakariakov or when I visited New York and had the chance to meet

Wynton Marsalis after a show at Lincoln Center.

In 2024, I participated for the first time at the ITG Conference in Anaheim, and this experience was wonderful. Meeting so many trumpet players, both in the non-professional and professional segments, from the United States and other countries, allowed me to develop an even greater number of contacts. In addition to all the learning and fun, I met great musicians like Wayne Bergeron, Jens Lindemann, and Allen Vizzutti; was able to try incredible instruments; and had a great time playing in various workshops and presentations. It was wonderful to attend, and I am seriously considering returning.

I thank ITG, which is about to turn fifty years old, for this initiative! I hope to be able to be around again. For those who want to stay in touch or see some of my work, you can find me on Instagram and Facebook as @xavitrompeta (Xavi Trumpet).

