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## STUDIO / COMMERCIAL SCENE

NICK MONDELLO, COLUMN EDITOR

# FROM HOLLYWOOD TO BROADWAY, IT'S TRUMPET TALENT DIVINE—AN INTERVIEW WITH MARISSA BENEDICT AND JAMI DAUBER

BY NICK MONDELLO

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# STUDIO/COMMERCIAL SCENE

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*Studio/Commercial Scene* seeks to present information on issues related to the trumpet's role in the music industry in today's ever-changing environment. Ideas and suggestions should be directed to: Nick Mondello, Big Toots Enterprises, 29 Riggs Pl, Locust Valley, NY 11560 USA; [studio@trumpetguild.org](mailto:studio@trumpetguild.org)

## FROM HOLLYWOOD TO BROADWAY, IT'S TRUMPET TALENT DIVINE—AN INTERVIEW WITH MARISSA BENEDICT AND JAMI DAUBER

BY NICK MONDELLO

**M**arissa Benedict and Jami Dauber represent two of the most talented trumpeters on today's scene. Whether on a studio soundtrack session in Los Angeles or a paint-peeling DIVA swingfest in the Big Apple, each of these two superb musicians brings horns-of-plenty to their dates.

Marissa Benedict has been a freelance trumpet player in the Los Angeles area for 33 years. As well as playing in the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, she is also principal trumpet in the Pasadena Symphony and the Pasadena Pops Orchestra. She actively performs with the Los Angeles Opera, Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra, and the Long Beach Municipal Band and is a founding member of the Modern Brass Quintet. A very active and in-demand studio player, she can be heard on nearly 150 motion picture recordings, including *Indiana Jones IV*, *Avatar*, *The Polar Express*, *Spider-Man 2*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Sucker Punch*, *Zorro*, *War of the Worlds*, and *The Terminal*. Her television studio recording credits include *Star Trek: Enterprise*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, *JAG*, and *Commander-in-Chief*. Marissa has studied with Joe Alessi, Sr., Boyde Hood, John Copolla, and Uan Rasey. She graduated from the University of Southern California with a bachelor's degree in trumpet performance

and is an active and dedicated music educator.

Based in New York, Jami Dauber is a busy commercial performer. She is a key player and manager in the esteemed DIVA Jazz Orchestra and its celebrated quintet, FIVE PLAY. An active freelancer, she is a member of the Ellington Legacy (led by Duke's grandson, Edward Ellington), has performed with the Wycliffe Gordon Jazz Orchestra (for the live soundtrack to the silent movie, *Within Our Gates*) and Christian McBride's Big Band, and has played on several Broadway shows, including *Honeymoon in Vegas*, Maurice Hines's *Tappin' Thru Life*, *Annie*, *Anything Goes*, *West Side Story*, *Evita*, and *Porgy and Bess*. She has also performed in the orchestra for the Radio City Christmas Spectacular. Jami can be heard on six DIVA Jazz Orchestra CDs and two FIVE PLAY CDs, as well as on Broadway's *Carols for a Cure*, Joy Wright's *Just You, Just Me*, Debra Barsha's *Women in Windows*, Don Adolfo and his Orquestra Organizacion's *Ritmo Caliente*, and Ed Palermo's *Ed Palermo Big Band Plays the Music of Frank Zappa*. She has also played on various jingles. She is a graduate of the University of North Texas, where she earned a master's degree in jazz studies (and where she was the first female trumpet player in the world-renowned One O'Clock Lab Band). She holds a bachelor's degree in music education from the University of Florida.

**Mondello:** *On behalf of the ITG Journal and its readers, thank you both so much for taking time.*

**Benedict:** It's my pleasure, and thank you for having me.

**Dauber:** I am honored that you invited me to participate.

**Mondello:** *Please share with us a little about your background—when you started, early days and influences, and what drove you to become a professional musician. What else did you consider?*

**Benedict:** I grew up in a very large, musical family where music was a must. I am the youngest of seven children. We all started piano at age seven and, from there, took various instruments as the schools provided. My mom was a private piano and violin teacher, so there was music in the house at all times. I started piano at seven, violin at nine, and trumpet at ten and continued all three through high school, with private lessons on all. I grew up in Terra Linda, California, and I believe that

the school district and its teachers had a huge influence on me continuing in music. Music was offered and encouraged at every grade level; because of that, there was a lot of competition and fine players, making the atmosphere perfect to grow as a musician. By the time I was in junior high, I knew I wanted to be a professional musician and, by the end of my high school years, I knew it was going to be the trumpet.

**Dauber:** I started playing piano at age three. When I was old enough to be in concert band, I chose percussion, but then quickly switched to trumpet—well, cornet—because of the brass sound, which I loved. Music was always playing at home, be it from the Chicago Symphony to Bob Dylan, Count Basie, Maynard Ferguson, Oscar Levant, or Blood, Sweat & Tears. I was exposed to a lot of different styles of music from a very early age, and I am so grateful for that.

When I went to college, I initially thought about being a



(L – R): Marissa Benedict, Chris Tedesco and Tim Divers.  
Photo by Dan Goldwasser/ScoringSessions.com

journalism major, because I had a knack for writing, and the University of Florida had the top journalism school in the country at the time. But I couldn't stray from the trumpet and wanted to be a professional trumpet player. Which genre? No clue at the time, so I chose to be a music education major, you know, to have something to "fall back on." I made it a point to play in every ensemble and take opportunity that I had in order to be a versatile player. No one had told me to do that—it was just an instinct I had.

**Mondello:** *What about formal trumpet study: your respective teachers and their impact on your development?*

**Benedict:** I was blessed with two awesome parents who made it possible for me to study privately, no matter what the cost, financially or time-wise. From age thirteen, my trumpet teacher was Joe Alessi, Sr., and he was responsible for my strong fundamentals, transposing abilities, and sight reading. I also took jazz lessons from John Copolla in San Francisco. He also had a huge influence on my sight reading abilities. Boyde Hood was my teacher at USC, where I learned more of the solo repertoire, mouthpiece buzzing, and life in general. Boyde still remains a great friend and colleague today. Another very influential teacher in my trumpet career was Uan Rasey. His teaching was all about sound production and making every note you play—even when warming up—the most beautiful sound it could be. "Make 'em cry with every note," he used to say. His positive outlook on everything in life was very contagious, and he will be missed by all who knew him.

**Dauber:** I had some great teachers and band directors along the way, including Gary Langford at UF. For private teachers, when I went to University of North Texas, I studied with Don "Jake" Jacoby. Jake wasn't into teaching technique and physics of the mouth. It was all about what goes on in your mind when you're playing—that is, when playing high, think "out," not "up." When I moved to New York, I studied a little bit with Laurie Frink. Laurie was great, whether she was teaching me the Caruso method or we were sitting at the bar having a McSorley's. Those lessons were almost twenty

years ago, and I still do the routine every day. I miss her.

**Mondello:** *What advice given to you by an influential teacher or teachers has been the most impactful on your playing, approach to the instrument, career choice, etc.?*

**Benedict:** I think all of my teachers were most impactful on my playing because of the different stages in life I was when taking from them. I needed strong fundamental teaching and a good "kick in the ass," as Joe Alessi, Sr., did for me in my high school years. John Copolla was a nice relief and a more relaxed teacher while teaching me jazz phrasings. Boyde was a huge influence on working hard and staying on track when first arriving at college, while also teaching me what I needed to know as an undergrad. When I took from Uan, I had three kids, and life was much more stressful and time for trumpet scarce; and he had such a positive outlook—always asking about the family first—and solid teaching of Schlossberg, Clarke, and any French etude, that it still remains with me today.

**"Make 'em cry with every note."**



Marissa Benedict



Jami Dauber. Photo © George Kopp Photography

**Dauber:** I think the best advice given to me was to be a versatile player. It makes you more “hireable.” Oh, and from Laurie, to “be on time, keep your mouth shut, and play your horn.” I’m not always good at keeping my mouth shut—ha!

**Mondello:** *Marissa, I know you do a lot of studio/film sessions, as well as orchestral work with the Long Beach Symphony, the Los Angeles Opera and others. What’s a usual performing week like and how do you prepare for the respective requirements?*

**Benedict:** A usual performing week varies greatly because of the freelance element of my career. When I have a symphony week, rehearsals are usually Tuesday through Friday evenings, with concerts on Saturday (sometimes two on Saturday) and a Sunday matinee. My afternoons are usually filled with rehearsals for other groups or recording sessions, depending on the week. Any spare time I have, I try to schedule rehearsals for quintet. My mornings, which usually start at 6:00 A.M., consist of a warmup of Schlossberg and Clarke on my B-flat trumpet, scales and more Clarke on my C trumpet, Clarke on my piccolo trumpet and, depending on the rep for the week, I might use other instruments as well. I’m also listening to the rep for the week in my car on the way to work.

**Mondello:** *Jami, I’m familiar with your playing with DIVA, its smaller group, FIVE PLAY, and the Friday Night Birdland Big Band, led by Tommy Igoe. What other work are you doing or have you recently done?*

**Dauber:** I had a great time playing Maurice’s show last year in DC and this year in Atlanta. Last fall, I played in the orchestra for *Honeymoon in Vegas*, a musical based on the movie from 1991. It stars Tony Danza, with music and lyrics written by Jason Robert Brown. I did two days in the studio with DIVA for the Macy’s 4th of July Fireworks Spectacular on NBC. Both DIVA and FIVE PLAY have new CDs coming out this year. I also play with the Ellington Legacy, led by Duke’s grandson, Edward Ellington, and

starts way before the job begins, and with the symphony at least you know what the music will be. With studio work, you

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**“Be on time, keep your mouth shut, and play your horn.”**

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don’t know what the music will be, but you need to be prepared for anything. Sometimes that can mean sitting for a long period of time and then being able to come in with something soft and exposed or loud and enduring. I have to say that the most challenging and most rewarding for me is quintet playing. In my quintet, we have such a unique group of players, all who are willing to rehearse at any time of the day, and all willing to take on any music to be performed at the next recital or concert we give. Sometimes, the group that works the hardest, takes up the most time, and makes very little money is the most satisfying artistically.

**Dauber:** The biggest thrill for me is playing live, whether it is at an intimate jazz club, a concert hall, or in the orchestra pit. I just love playing! One of the biggest challenges that players face, that has nothing to do with actually playing, is being in a Broadway-type show where the band is on stage. You never know when he/she is going to turn back to the band, and if you’re caught off-guard and are not paying attention or acting engaged (if the scene calls for it), you’re going to get called out. Drinking a Red Bull before those types of shows is usually part of my routine. Oh, and leaving my cell phone in my gig bag!

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**“Sometimes, the group that works the hardest, takes up the most time, and makes very little money is the most satisfying artistically.”**

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**Benedict:** I am often in situations where the trumpet is very exposed. I find that my mental approach to playing trumpet is much easier when I am physically prepared. Staying in shape

the great tenor player, Virginia Mayhew.

**Mondello:** *What’s a typical “Jami” week like?*

**Dauber:** Being a freelance musician, I never have a “typical” week. There are some weeks when I’m working almost every day/night, and there are some days or weeks when I hear the crickets chirping. It really varies. I spend every day practicing, working on booking gigs for DIVA and FIVE PLAY, staying in touch with people. And, should I mention that I walk my neighbor’s dog every day and I have two cats?

**Mondello:** *What gives you the biggest thrill, and what provides the biggest challenge(s) in the work you usually do?*

**Benedict:** Different jobs provide different challenges for me. Symphony preparation and studio work are so different. With both, the preparation

**Mondello:** *Both of you perform in “tightrope” situations where there’s little or no margin for error; you’re very exposed. But, the music itself demands individual expression and interpretation. What’s your mental approach to performing in these types of scenarios?*

as a freelancer, when often you have multiple days before your next rehearsal or gig, is hugely important and not always easy. I find that if I'm prepared in all aspects, nerves and anxiety are less often a factor. All the years of practicing fundamentals are very important.

**Dauber:** When it comes to playing a Broadway show, consistency is the key and comes from staying in shape and being focused. For DIVA gigs, since I am also the manager, I often don't get up on stage until right before the hit; and I have to completely change gears, from making sure the stage is set up properly and the CDs are on the table, to thinking "Oh, *this* is what I'm 'supposed' to be doing—playing the trumpet!" It usually only takes a few bars, and I'm good to go. I'd actually like to give a shout-out to the great trumpet player Carol Morgan, who often surprises me by setting up my horns and putting my music in order while I'm running around.

**Mondello:** *Along the same line, do you incorporate any relaxation/tension-release or meditation techniques into your practicing and performing?*

**Benedict:** I don't have any specific relaxation techniques, except breathing, to stay relaxed. I've never been one to meditate, probably because I never had the time. Again, for me, being physically prepared for the job and being on time, or, better yet, being early, helps me stay relaxed. As for studio work, which involves sight reading and often exposed moments, this is when I am still thanking Joe Alessi, Sr., for making me sight read constantly, so that nothing would surprise me. All this time, I thought he was torturing me—that turned out to make my life just a little easier.

**Dauber:** I think about Jake a lot, especially if I think I'm having chop problems. He always said there was no such thing. Mind over matter. It usually works!

**Mondello:** *I'd be remiss to the "geeks" out there if I didn't ask each of you about your usual/current equipment.*

**Benedict:** All of my colleagues can confirm that I am not an equipment geek or junkie—again, I never had time. I've always had the outlook that if something is working fine, don't change it. All of my trumpets are Yamaha trumpets, with the exception of one. This wasn't by design, but over the years it is what it became. I have played the same B-flat for the last 24 years, and it is a Yamaha 6345HGS. My original Bach 37 was stolen. My C trumpet is a Yamaha 6445 H (YaMalone) that was made by Bob Malone before he worked for Yamaha—by far the best trumpet I have ever owned. My D is a Yamaha (a straight D, not D/E-flat), and the newest of my instruments is a 9835

Dave Washburn model piccolo trumpet. The exception is my D/E-flat, which is a Schilke. I've also played on the same mouthpiece for 24 years. It's a Lechner B'hoffen G3, also known as Breslmair Wien. I use the same make for my piccolo trumpet, but it's a G4 and has a shorter shank. When I need to go more commercial, I use a Bob Reeves s692 with a copy of my rim.

**Dauber:** I have never been an "equipment geek." I played on the same trumpet for over twenty years—a 1982 Benge MLP 3X. I loved playing on that horn, but as I began to play more lead, I felt like I needed to move to something smaller. So, I found this great 1940s

medium-bore New York Bach, and I've been playing that for the last eleven or twelve years. For jazz/lead, I play a Bach 3E mouthpiece, which was given to me by John Laverty back in 1987 at the University of Florida. For other stuff, I use a Yamaha 14B4-GP. I have a Couesnon flugelhorn, a Bach cornet, and a Schilke picc.

**Mondello:** *Are you doing any teaching or clinics?*

**Benedict:** Now that the kids are grown, I do have time to teach, and I love it. I am on the faculties of The Colburn School of Performing Arts and Glendale Community College. I also coach trumpet sectionals at three local high schools, two junior high schools, and two elementary schools, teaching their concert band, chamber music, and jazz programs. In addition, I have my own studio of ten students.

**Dauber:** I occasionally participate in clinics with DIVA, but I don't teach privately.

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Jami Dauber. Photo © George Kopp Photography

**Mondello:** *For the young female trumpeters out there: any special advice, recommendations or experiences—good and bad—to share, pitfalls to avoid?*

**Benedict:** For all the young female trumpeters out there: practice and always be prepared. “No excuses” is a great way to go. Use the advice from Uan Rasey and “Have all the ego on the outside to give you the confidence needed for your work, but all the humility on the inside to remain a good person.” Be grateful for the life given to you. Have fun and enjoy!!

**Dauber:** There isn’t enough space here to really go in depth. It is a complex issue, and really shouldn’t be; it should just be about playing the horn. Unfortunately, it isn’t, even to this day; and although things have gotten better since I began playing, there is a lot of room for change, especially when it comes to contractors, agents, bookers, etc. So, my advice is to just keep your head up, play your ass off, and don’t let the bad guys get you down!

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“Just keep your head up, play your ass off,  
and don’t let the bad guys get you  
down!”

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**Mondello:** *Marissa and Jami, on behalf of the ITG Journal and me, thank you both so much!*

**Benedict:** It was great speaking with you, thank you.

**Dauber:** Thanks for thinking of me, Nick.

*About the Author:* Nick Mondello is a freelance commercial trumpeter, teacher, clinician, author, critic, and artist/event marketing consultant representing clients worldwide. He is the co-author of *365 Trumpet Lessons* (Note-A-Day Press) and writes for *All About Jazz* and other publications. He attended the Berklee School of Music and Long Island University and holds BA and MS degrees in music education and an MBA in marketing.

