

“I ENJOY THE BALANCE”

Photo and words by Nick Gurovic



With
Jessica
Kesting

When Jessica Kesting, a Gold Coast-based trumpeter and teacher, informed her pupils that she would be interviewed by *4MBS Magazine*, the boy in the first row asked, “Are you going to talk about your soccer playing or band teaching?”

And here she is, on a late Friday afternoon in the 4MBS studio, admitting that she is indeed a keen soccer player, although currently competing in a lower division, due to her other commitments. When it comes to music-making, Jessica’s present engagements reflect her insatiable curiosity to explore a wide variety of repertoire while performing with Orchestra Corda Spiritus, Sinfonia of St. Andrew’s and the Bach Society of Queensland in Brisbane, as well as with the Northern Rivers Symphony Orchestra in the Tweed region of NSW.

“I also teach at three Gold Coast schools. I have 217 students from Grades 4 to 12, which is lovely because I can observe and cherish their development as musicians and as human beings,” Jessica notes.

Tall and dressed in amaranth red, with a luminous face framed by a sleek, brown bob, she seems capable of illuminating a space far larger than 4MBS Studio 2. Relaxed and quick to smile, she gives no sign of having just battled peak-hour traffic from the Gold Coast to meet me before heading off to rehearse with Orchestra Corda Spiritus.

“I’m used to driving a lot, from school to school and from one orchestra to another. While I’m on the road, I can get through my audiobooks in less than 10 days sometimes.”

Born and raised in Sydney, Jessica originally wanted to play the clarinet, but, easy-going by nature, she accepted her father’s suggestion to take up the trumpet instead.

“I didn’t mind. It was one of those things that was simply meant to be. From primary school through to high school, I greatly enjoyed playing in marching bands, rock groups, jazz ensembles and

symphony orchestras, literally anything I could get involved with. I was very lucky in high school to study with Leanne Sullivan, Principal Trumpet with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. She really opened my eyes to the versatility of the trumpet, an instrument that can sound just as beautiful in Baroque music as it does in contemporary works. Leanne made me realise that playing the trumpet was something I wanted to do forever,” Jessica explains.

While growing up in Sydney, she was exposed to the music of jazz and blues greats — heroes of her father. Classical music entered Kesting’s orbit thanks to her teachers and a few rare gems of the repertoire.

“I was a teenager when I first heard *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* by Jean Hubeau, an amazing work, especially the third movement, with its mixture of typical 20th-century French writing and subtle hints of jazz and blues woven throughout. That piece made me realise I could express my feelings through my instrument and that the trumpet was an extension of myself,” Jessica says.

Following the same train of thought, I ask my guest to expand on the repertoire and artists that inspire her.

“While studying for my tertiary degree, I listened constantly to recordings by Alison Balsom, trying to replicate her phrasing and sound as much as I possibly could. One of the most compelling works, and one of my all-time favourites, is Alison’s interpretation of *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* by Paul Hindemith. At the end of the third movement there is a chorale, *Alle Menschen müssen sterben* (All Men Must Die), and it is hauntingly beautiful. The way Alison plays is stunning. It is not only her virtuosic technique, but also the emotional resonance and lyrical beauty she brings to the listener.

“Another artist I greatly admire is Norwegian trumpeter Tine Thing Helseth. I remember being gifted her recording

of Trumpet Concertos as a teenager and being struck by the image of a female trumpet player featured alone on the cover. At that point in my musical journey, the trumpet recordings I had were all by male artists, so seeing a female trumpet player so visibly represented as a solo artist left a lasting impression.”

When she was 10 years old, Jessica was diagnosed with dyslexia, and it took time before she fully understood how her brain worked. “It was some time before I experienced academic success at school, but the trumpet was something that brought me instant success. Looking back, I can see how important the trumpet was for my confidence, particularly in my younger years. For the first time, I was the best in my class at something.”

As our conversation reaches its final stage, Jessica reiterates the role her teachers played in shaping her artistic development.

“I was fortunate to work with some of the best musicians and teachers in Australia, including Leanne Sullivan, Sarah Butler and Iaan Wilson. Because of them, and because of how generous they were with their time and knowledge, I try to do the same for my students.”

This young woman values a musical journey that did not lead exclusively to orchestral performance. “I really enjoy the balance of performing and teaching,” she says. Joining Orchestra Corda Spiritus over a decade ago gave her the opportunity to share music with like-minded people, making the long drives from the Gold Coast to Brisbane for rehearsals a small price to pay.

What, I wonder, is her secret formula for staying energised despite an overwhelmingly busy schedule?

“When I’m under pressure, I tell myself, ‘I can do hard things,’” she replies instantly. “But because I’m a perfectionist, I also have to remind myself that done is better than perfect.”