

Staff Sgt. Kelley Corbett: Trumpeting Around the World

by Jean Elliott

Kelley Corbett started playing trumpet in sixth grade band class at age 10. "I was one of those lucky kids who could make a sound on a mouthpiece when we tried out instruments," he said. And he has never looked back.

School classes led to private lessons. Then Corbett focused on college.

"Virginia Tech was the perfect stepping stone at that point in my life," said Corbett, who graduated in 2004 with a degree in music performance. "It was the best of all worlds: a large university with all the advantages of a big, beautiful campus, exposure to many new people with different interests, and a small music department where I could get the personal attention I needed. The faculty not only had a vast wealth of knowledge for me to draw from, but also had a rare willingness to sacrifice their time for their students."

"Kelley is one of the finest brass players ever to graduate from Virginia Tech," said Jay Crone, professor of music. "He was always determined to learn more about the art of brass playing when he was a student, but even more importantly, he was always interested in learning more about music."

Corbett's desire to succeed and, as Crone puts it, "his innate curiosity about the art of music" have guided the talented trumpeter to an impressive array of venues. He earned his master's degree at Mannes College of Music in New York City, where he performed regularly with various groups as a freelance musician at both Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center.

In 2010, Corbett joined the U.S. Army Concert Band "Pershing's Own" and has performed with the band and as a soloist around the world.

One of Corbett's fondest memories occurred in November 2012, when the band toured for 10 days in China with the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army Band, performing in Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing. "One performance included playing 'The Stars and Stripes Forever' to a military audience on a Chinese military post," he said. "They clapped along while we played!"

Corbett, a staff sergeant has trumpeted with a brass trio from a pier in Chelsea and at a park in Sapporo, Japan, where he played alongside the principal trumpet of the Vienna Philharmonic.

In Japan, "where the kids were amazing," Corbett taught master classes through a translator. On one recital tour, the trumpeter recalls that a family of one of the students hosted him. "They didn't speak English at all, but they treated me like a son, and it was one of the most special experiences my career in music has afforded me."

Corbett has also managed to make sounds on that mouthpiece at the Kennedy Center, the United Nations building in New York, and the White House and in summertime concerts on the Capitol steps.

An avid vegan cook, Corbett loves to grow vegetables, brew beer, and work on a fixer-upper in Alexandria, Va., where he lives with his wife, Kathy Hanna, a Virginia Tech alumna.



Staff Sgt. Jesse Tubb

Staff Sgt. Kelley Corbett performs with the U.S. Army Concert Band "Pershing's Own."