

## GEORGE JOHNSTON, TROMBONE



Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, George Johnston lived all over the United States as a child. His family moved to Sacramento in 1962 where he attended Cal State Sacramento. In 1969, he transferred to Cal State Northridge where he performed frequent free-lance opportunities with community orchestras, the American Youth Symphony, Debut Orchestra and several large churches.

George Johnston joined the San Diego Symphony in 1971, and also was principal trombone of the San Diego Opera from 1971 until 2005.

Mr. Johnston has served on the executive board of the Musician's Union, Local 325, and on negotiating committees for both the San Diego Opera and the San Diego Symphony. He is an inactive elder at Westminster Presbyterian Church where he produced a concert series called "Music At Dusk" during the months of July and August. George also teaches, sings in his church choir (tenor), and also as a vocal soloist.

George Johnston has been married for over 30 years to Peggy Johnston, a free-lance bassist and staff Opera musician, and they have two grown children and 2 grandsons.

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### ***Getting to know George Johnston...***

#### **Q: How did you choose your instrument?**

A: My instrument chose me. I played the sousaphone briefly in elementary school. My father played the tuba in a high school whose band conductor was a retired cornetist with the original Barnum and Bailey circus band. My inspiration for playing the sousaphone was to get out of phys ed. I did not last with the sousaphone. I took up the baritone horn in the 9th grade. Before Christmas of 1962, the band director came to me and handed me a trombone and said if I wanted to stay in the band I would have to learn the trombone. All but one of his trombonists were graduating seniors. He gave me a book of scale studies and a week to learn scales in at least 3 keys and I could stay. Next year it was just me and another guy. We played duets every day after school. Pretty soon I was playing pretty advanced music. We moved to another neighborhood where the band teacher was the second trombonist with the local symphony.

Unfortunately, I had to give up the horn I was playing, so my dad and I went to a pawn shop and bought a trombone. It wasn't very expensive and it was a really terrible instrument. Mr. Woody was the name of one of my inspirations. A trombonist named Les Lehr had just graduated from Eastman that year and took a job at a local junior college to chair the music department. Mr. Lehr was a trombone student of the man who designed the Conn88h trombone, and he owned one of his teacher's horns. Lehr won the principal trombone job with the symphony in which Mr. Woody was a member. When Mr. Lehr put his horn up for sale, Mr. Woody made sure I got it.

That was 1964, my junior year in high school. I was very successful in high school. I was principal in the orchestra, the band and the pep band, plus I was student conductor. I did very well on recital competitions, and won a scholarship to the University of the Pacific. Mr. Woody wanted me to go to the local college. He had graduated from there, and the music department chair was also the trombone teacher. When my folks moved to San Diego in 1966, the local college started looking better than UOP, so, from Sacramento, after 3 years at school, I transferred to Cal State Northridge. I did well in school and managed to do a little free-lancing in LA. As you can see, trombone got me out of a lot of phys ed.

**Q: What are three of your favorite movies?**

A: *Stardust*, *Vitus*, and *The Reader*.

**Q: What is your favorite travel destination?**

A: The British Isles

**Q: Who are your favorite composers?**

A: My very favorite composer is Hector Berlioz, but very close behind are Mahler, Hindemith, Strauss, Bach, Monteverdi, Telemann, get the picture? I love the Renaissance. My idea of heaven is to spend the rest of eternity playing in a Gabrielli brass choir.

**Q: What good book have you read recently?**

A: I just finished Stephen King's *Hearts in Atlantis*, and I am about to dig into King's *Under the Dome*.

**Q: What do you love most about San Diego (besides the weather)?**

A: What I love most about San Diego is how it can be so many things to so many people. I am not a crowd person and I don't do well on the beach. My fair skin is prone to abuse by the sun and it's really hard to enjoy the surf with all your clothes on. But I love the mountains. I like being in higher altitudes. San Diego is close to a lot of high places, not the least of which is Mount Whitney. Though it is a several hour trip, I have been to the top. I don't ski, but there are members of the orchestra who do. There is a thriving theater community here and I have attended plays at the Old Globe, the Lyceum and Lambs Players Theatre in Coronado.