

Eugene Watts

Biography

Eugene Watts is not just a visionary trombonist—he's a musical trailblazer, spiritual explorer, and a founding force behind the legendary Canadian Brass. With a signature blend of virtuosity, warmth, and showmanship, Gene helped transform brass chamber music from a niche artform into a global phenomenon. His artistry and charisma played a central role in the ensemble's international acclaim and enduring charm.

Born in Sedalia, Missouri, Gene earned his stripes at the University of Missouri and went on to complete a Master's Degree at the New England Conservatory in Boston. He studied at Tanglewood, trained with the great Arnold Jacobs in Chicago, and has since been awarded Honorary Doctorates from Hartwick College, the New England Conservatory, the University of Missouri, and McMaster University. After graduating from the New England Conservatory, he was hired as Principal Trombone in the North Carolina Symphony, moving on to the San Antonio Orchestra, then the Milwaukee Symphony. In the mid-1960s, Gene moved to Canada to become Principal Trombone in the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Seiji Ozawa. But a few years later, he traded orchestral life for spiritual study, traveling to Rishikesh, India, to learn Transcendental Meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

Returning to Canada with both musical chops and inner peace, Gene co-founded the Canadian Brass with Chuck Daellenbach. Their shared vision: combine world-class musicianship with an engaging, joyful concert experience. Gene's penchant for playing from the heart, his imaginative programming and his onstage joy and playfulness helped transform chamber music into a truly shared experience between audience and performer—and tuxedos with white sneakers became a thing.

Over several decades, Canadian Brass toured the world—across Asia, Europe, North and South America—released over 100 recordings, and became a fixture on major television networks. Appearances included The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson, Merv Griffin, Entertainment Tonight, and even 12 segments on Sesame Street. One of their crowning achievements was to win the Echo Music Prize (the German equivalent of the Grammy) for their recording of J.S Bach's Goldberg Variations.

Offstage, Gene is a respected teacher and a passionate advocate for the benefits of Transcendental Meditation. For more than 40 years, he has shared this practice with musicians and non-musicians alike, promoting creativity, focus, and well-being.

The International Trombone Association is proud to present Eugene E. Watts with its Lifetime Achievement Award—honoring his groundbreaking contributions to the trombone, his pioneering role in Canadian Brass, and his lifelong dedication to music, mindfulness, and mentorship.