

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



ALISON FIERST *second flute, piccolo*

When Alison Fierst started playing her aunt's old flute for fifth-grade band in Point Pleasant, New Jersey, she couldn't have known music would come to occupy such a huge part of her life. She had always enjoyed music, but her parents were not musicians, and she wasn't raised listening to classical music. At ten years old, joining band just sounded like a fun thing to try. A decade later, the now-twenty-year-old flutist can't imagine doing anything else with her life.

"I enjoyed playing from the start, but I didn't really get super serious about it until eighth grade," Fierst says. "My private teacher in high school said, 'You have something, and you should really pursue this.'"

Fierst participated in a variety of honors ensembles in the state and region throughout high school, and she very quickly fell in love with performing and the camaraderie of playing in orchestra. Now, she's approaching her senior year at Carnegie Mellon University, where she's studying with Alberto Almarza, and she's spending her second summer in a row in Aspen, where she'll study as a flute fellow on an Ernst and Wilma Martens Scholarship with artist-faculty members Nadine Asin, Aralee Dorough, Jeffrey Khaner, and Demarre McGill. She's also preparing for graduate school auditions, and she hopes for a career as an orchestra musician.

Fierst applied to the Aspen Music Festival and School because of its reputation and with the encouragement of her teacher at Carnegie Mellon.

"I just knew Aspen was one of the festivals to go to; it's obviously amazing," she says. "And my teacher at school said to me, 'You have to go.' So I applied and got in. It was the only summer program I applied to.

"You can't beat Aspen," she continues. "It's just two months of pure orchestral playing."

Fierst's first summer at the AMFS was an intense experience, but she loved every minute. One of the most exciting moments was being able to play next to Mark Sparks in the Aspen Chamber Symphony when violinist Joshua Bell performed the Saint-Saëns Violin Concerto.

"That was definitely a highlight," Fierst says with a laugh.

This summer, in addition to playing in Aspen's orchestra program, Fierst will also participate in chamber music. She's excited to make music in a smaller group; but then, she's happy to be making music in any setting.

"I just love the flute; it's the main thing in my life, and I can't imagine a life without it," she says. "I really like its soloistic quality. The flute can just rise and float over the orchestra in solos like in *Daphnis et Chloé* and *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. It just has a really sweet quality."

Fierst also loves being able to "communicate great pieces of music," she says. One of those great pieces is on the program today: Mahler's First Symphony, "Titan," a behemoth that follows Mahler's "hero" character through episodes of optimism, struggle, and, ultimately, triumph.

"A Mahler symphony is like nothing else," Fierst says. "I played it last summer for the first time, and it's just so much fun."

Fierst's love of playing the flute comes from a few different places: being able to express feelings and ideas that she can't express in words, of course, but also the intense challenges that come with being a serious musician.

"I love practicing, striving toward goals, things like that," she says. "You're always striving to get better, and I like seeing improvement in myself on my instrument."

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