

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



ISABELLA GEIS

second violin, second stand, outside chair

Violinist Isabella Geis learned a lot from her first year studying music at The Juilliard School; the nineteen-year-old will enter her sophomore year in the fall. But sometimes learning a lot in a short amount of time brings about more questions than answers.

“I never had doubts about going into music,” Geis says, “but I’m still trying to figure out what exactly I would like to do in music.”

The Cincinnati, Ohio, native has become very familiar with the joys of performance, but in the past couple of years, she has also toyed with the idea of working in music service or teaching nonprofits.

“There’s this program called MYCincinnati that was started up maybe five years ago, and they do after-school lessons and orchestras,” she says. “It’s two hours every day for children in a low-income neighborhood called Price Hill, and I’ve really enjoyed helping out with it. I came up through the public schools, so I’m aware of what the music education is like. It’s usually available to a certain extent, but not always to the highest quality. I feel like it’s really important to be able to reach these people at a young age with really high-quality instruction. Otherwise, the interest might not be sparked. So I’m not sure if I would be interested in doing some type of nonprofit work, just performing, or both. We’ll see what happens.”

For now, Geis is focused on having a successful summer in Aspen. She’s here for the second time and studying with Naoko Tanaka, with whom she also studies at The Juilliard School. She says the performance opportunities in Aspen, plus continuing her work with Tanaka, is what made her want to return after her first summer here in 2015.

“The orchestra experience is what I really enjoy about Aspen,” she says. “At school, I was put in a couple orchestra cycles per semester, but the pace is really different because you have two or three weeks before performances. And the level of enthusiasm is not always as high as it is here.”

Geis is feeling particularly enthusiastic about today’s program and her opportunity to play with guest artist Augustin Hadelich, who will be performing Brahms’s Violin Concerto in D major.

“This will be really exciting for me as a violinist because so far we’ve been playing with piano soloists every Sunday,” she says. “I’ve seen [Hadelich] a couple times live, but I’ve never actually heard his Brahms before, and it’s also a piece I haven’t played before.”

In addition to the world-class guest artists Geis has performed with this summer, she also relishes the opportunity to learn from the artist-faculty members in the Aspen Festival Orchestra. Playing side-by-side with these professional musicians offers a whole new level of performance education.

“It’s an interesting experience because the conductors all have their input, but then the principals have additional input that they’ll also always be providing,” Geis says, “so it’s really beneficial.”

Whatever Geis’s sophomore year at The Juilliard School has in store for her—whether it’s affirmation that she should pursue a performance career or more inspiration for working in nonprofits—one thing is certain: it will be filled with music, and she will keep taking advantage of all the learning opportunities that come her way.

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