

## ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



## KELSEY BENTLEY *French horn*

Kelsey Bentley comes to Aspen after completing her first season as fourth horn of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, but her story with music began at the age of five when she started taking piano classes with her grandmother.

“From a young age I would hear things on the radio or in a movie or on TV and I would play them on the piano,” recalls Bentley.

At the age of nine she thought she wanted to play the clarinet, but that idea only lasted for two weeks. It was her father who led her towards the majestic French horn when he played John Barry’s *Dances with Wolves* one night after dinner so she could hear the horn call. Young Bentley was mesmerized by its “magical tone quality.” Bentley switched to French horn.

Now as an adult, she is quick to say “it was in that moment that I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, and I love it more and more every day.”

Her journey continued as she completed her bachelor’s at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and her masters at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Her career in music has been shaped by the guidance of many mentors, and the most important takeaways for Bentley are that “it is always important to play with all of the love in your heart” and “every ounce of hard work that you put into the music is worth it.”

After completing one summer in Aspen with Aspen Music Festival and School artist-faculty members John Zirbel and Andrew Bain, there was no doubt in her mind that she had to return to continue her development as a professional musician.

“The moment last summer ended, I knew I had to come back,” says Bentley who is currently spending her second summer at the AMFS, studying with Zirbel, as a recipient of the *New Horizons* Fellowship given by Kay and Matthew Bucksbaum.

As a musician, the opportunity to make music among nature and find the connection between the classical masterworks and the world excites Kelsey. She fondly recalls her first performance in Aspen, “I remember looking out at the scenery that surrounds the Tent and thinking, ‘Am I in heaven or something?’ In my mind I pair classical music with this setting, and it feels out of this world!”

Today’s concert is especially enthralling for Kelsey because Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 7 is one of the pieces that makes her most excited to perform. His monumental “Leningrad” Symphony was composed in 1941, while that city was under siege by the German army. To this day the piece stands as a stirring symbol of strength and defiance in the face of totalitarianism.

“This piece means a lot to me and I feel privileged to have the opportunity to perform it in Aspen. As an undergrad student, one of my teachers gave me a vivid depiction of the context of this piece and what was going on in Shostakovich’s life at the time, and it made me understand how to play it.”

Additionally, “I am floored by how talented every one of my colleagues is and it gives me such a sense of pride to be associated with the very people that I look up to. I have met life-long friends in Aspen. It’s just one big family,” Bentley says with a smile.

*“It is always important to play with all of the love in your heart. I chose the French horn because it always has these special moments and a magical tone quality.”*

– KELSEY BENTLEY