

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



ADAM PHAN *harp*

Adam Phan tried several different instruments before eventually finding his way to the harp. His father—a composer, pianist, and guitarist—started Phan on the piano at age four. Then his mother wanted him to play the cello so he learned that, and then violin, viola, and trumpet all before the age of ten. Around this time he saw a performance of the Ginastera Harp Concerto and knew he needed to get his hands on a harp.

“I think the harp was the first instrument that I chose on my own that I wanted to play,” he remembers. But it was the sound that really drew him in, “the thing I like most is that you can create many different sounds and textures with the harp, like playing different parts of the strings or using your fingernails.”

Homeschooled in Dallas, Texas, twenty-year-old Phan now attends The Juilliard School in New York. This is Phan’s second summer at the Aspen Music Festival and School (AMFS) where he studies with Nancy Allen, who is also his teacher at Juilliard, and Sivan Magen. During his first summer, Phan won the Aspen Harp Competition and got to perform Carlos Salzedo’s *Ballade* as a soloist.

Studying away from the pressures of school was one of the reasons Phan chose to come back this summer. “I think the opportunity to study with my teacher over the summer in a completely different environment is really nice,” says Phan. The AMFS community was another reason. He remembers his first summer and the people he met fondly, especially the other harpists.

“At most music festivals, it’s only you by yourself as a harpist or there’s one other person. But Aspen’s so big, it has a bunch of different orchestras and opportunities. There are six harpists in the studio. We’ve all really gotten to know each other.”

The AMFS’s season theme of *Paris, City of Light* provides ample opportunity for great harp music this year. Phan is particularly looking forward to Debussy’s dreamy *La mer* on the August 12 Aspen Festival Orchestra program. In addition to rotating between the Aspen Festival Orchestra and Aspen Philharmonic Orchestra, Phan is excited to work with the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble this year as well. “I don’t usually do modern music a lot,” says Phan, “coming here, I get to experience edgier stuff.”

Throughout his musical career, Phan says there is one piece of advice that has really stuck with him, “There was a very big moment when I first came out to Nancy [Allen] at school. What she said was very inspirational, she was like, ‘as artists, our job is to love and spread love in what we do. Nothing else matters, including what’s going on in the world or what’s going on with yourself. If you can spread love through your creativity, that’s all you need to do as a musician.’”

When looking to the future, Phan is reminded of where he came from. His parents immigrated to the US from Vietnam in the 1960s, “they kind of lost touch with their roots a bit so they raised me to be really proud of my culture and my heritage. I would love to go back to Vietnam where I’m from and start a bigger classical music appreciation scene there.”

It’s something that Phan and his father have talked about doing, “I grew up in a financial situation where I didn’t have a lot of opportunities to take many lessons. Whenever I talk to my family [in Vietnam], they don’t understand the concept of me going to school for music and I want to change that. I want to give people an opportunity to do more than just the norm.” Encouraging others to pursue music and the arts, “that would be a long-time goal for me, as well as making money and having a job,” he laughs.

“The harp was the first instrument that I chose on my own that I wanted to play. The thing I like most is that you can create many different sounds and textures with the harp.”

– ADAM PHAN