

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



THOMAS GRAF *Tuba*

After years of hearing about the Aspen Music Festival and School from his University of Miami tuba professor, who is also a former AMFS tuba fellow, Thomas Graf is excited to be following in his mentor's footsteps and studying for his first summer in Aspen.

"I've always been into music," says Graf excitedly, "From third grade on I was really into playing the guitar, especially jazz. My grandfather plays the accordion and he was always playing around the holidays and would ask me to play with him. Once I switched to the tuba, we started playing polkas!"

"In middle school I played the French horn and was terrible! One day all three tuba players in my middle school band quit at the same time, so my band director came to me because I was one of the biggest guys and was useless on French horn anyway, and said, 'can you play the tuba?' That's how it started."

Graf was raised in Succasunna, New Jersey, only half an hour from Alan Baer, principal tuba of the New York Philharmonic, and throughout his development as a musician he had the opportunity to take lessons with him. When asked what he wanted to be when he grew up during one of these lessons, Graf eagerly responded, "I want your job!"

As a rising star and the AMFS tuba fellow on the Seth Kahn Scholarship for Brass as well as a Maestro's Circle Scholarship, Graf is on track to do just that!

Graf said the opportunity to study with artist-faculty member Warren Deck, one of the greatest tuba players of our time, was a deciding factor in attending the AMFS this summer.

"Even in the first week I've seen a huge difference in my playing and have pages upon pages of notes from my time with Deck," raves Graf, "and the opportunity to sit in a low brass section for eight weeks with the best trombone player from the Detroit Symphony and the associate principal trombonist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, among others, is very motivating."

It is not just the musical growth Graf is excited about, this is his first time in Colorado and he has nothing but great things to say about the Aspen area.

"The surroundings are just beautiful! I have never had the opportunity to visit Colorado and driving over Independence Pass was incredible," said Graf.

At age twenty, his love of the tuba continues to offer opportunities to visit new places. "The tuba is a huge sonic presence in the orchestra, which makes everything we do that much more important. From laying down a rhythmic foundation to tonal roots that every section in the orchestra plays on top of, the tuba has a lot of influence over how the entire low end of the orchestra sounds," Graf says passionately.

"As a tuba player, you're sort of the outlier voice in the music community. You have the trumpet section, violin section, bassoon section, and a tuba, singular," he continues.

"But music creates a sense of community! Music creates a bond between people, regardless of what language you speak or where you're from, music is the same. I've been able to sit with people from all over the world and play music together and, regardless of the circumstances, everybody in the room experiences the same thing."

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