

ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Zhang is sitting in the viola section, second chair on the first stand.

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– LAN ZHANG

LAN ZHANG *Viola*

“I think that the personality of a viola is like that of a British gentleman,” said twenty-six-year-old Lan Zhang. “I love my instrument. Like a gentleman, the viola is always saying ‘sorry.’ He sometimes gets angry and upset but he is always very disciplined in his actions. When I play the viola, I always feel like a British gentleman,” Zhang said. Attending the Aspen Music Festival and School for his third summer, Zhang is studying with Victoria Chiang this summer under the Ernst and Wilma Martens Scholarship.

Zhang was fourteen-years-old when he first decided to pick up the viola. What started as a hobby has now turned into a promising career for Zhang. “The Mozart Sinfonia concertante is my favorite piece for the viola. It’s so beautiful,” Zhang said. “I’m playing this piece right now, so I need to put all my love on this piece. I need to love this piece right now or else I won’t play it to the best of my ability. Also, I feel the structure is perfect and the content in the piece is very rich.”

Zhang received his undergraduate degree from the Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University. He liked the school so much that he decided to stay and pursue a Graduate Performance Diploma—he is set to graduate in May 2020.

A former teacher, CJ Chang, is the reason why Zhang became inspired to become a professional. He told Zhang that every day in practice he needs to make sure that he does something that means something. Starting from zero, every musician needs to get warmed up and work their way up to ten—with the hopes of finishing the day with something amazing. “Every day from morning to night is like birth to death. The theory is that you’re improving yourself and getting better and better each day. Don’t waste your life. Make every day count,” Zhang said.

Right now, as a music student, Zhang’s focus is to learn as much as he can from his mentors and teachers. “Maybe someday I can be as good as they are and bring these good bits of knowledge to the next generation. Right now, I want to be a very good musician,” Zhang said.

Zhang’s current teacher Chiang was the reason he came to Aspen in the first place. “She teaches here and she wants me to utilize the summertime to improve myself. It’s good to study with your own teacher and be involved with such a wonderful festival,” Zhang said.

“In China, I have been to some mountainous places like here, but it’s nothing like it is here. This is paradise,” Zhang said. Zhang’s favorite moments of the summer so far have been his time spent busking and hiking. “I busked in a string quartet in front of Paradise Bakery and I really enjoyed that. You have more communication with the audience because you are so close,” Zhang said.

Zhang keeps coming back to Aspen because he appreciates the level of professionalism here. “I like how the professionals and professors sit right next to you,” Zhang said. “They lead you from the school as being a student, to the state of becoming a professional. They teach us what the standards are to become a professional.”