

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Lauren Mathews is playing assistant principal cello.

LAUREN MATHEWS *Cello*

Cellist Lauren Mathews returns this year for her second summer as a student at the Aspen Music Festival and School (AMFS). The winner of the 2022 Low Strings Concerto Competition, Mathews spent much of her time last year preparing for the competition and performance. She is excited to be back again, this time with a concerted focus on a leadership role. As a member of the assistant principal pool in the Aspen Festival Orchestra (AFO) and a recipient of a Center for Orchestral Leadership fellowship, Mathews is gaining invaluable experience playing alongside AMFS artist-faculty including her teachers Brinton Averil Smith, the principal cellist of the Houston Symphony and Desmond Hoebig, who has held principal positions in the Cleveland Orchestra and other major orchestras.

Growing up watching her mom—who is an orchestra teacher and cellist—practice cello in the house, Mathews remembers asking for her own cello as early as preschool. She started playing cello when she was five and learning it has been a joy for Mathews ever since, especially with support from her musical family. Both of her parents and siblings play instruments, either for fun or as a career. Her uncle even attended the AMFS as a tuba student many years ago. “There was never any pressure to do it seriously—everyone in my family is varying levels of serious. The number one priority is to just have fun,” says Mathews. She couldn’t pinpoint a time when she decided to pursue music—it’s always just been a given. “It’s made up a lot of who I am,” says Mathews. “I never saw myself not doing it.”

What started as a fun hobby following in her mother’s footsteps became a more serious pursuit in high school when she began taking lessons with Smith. The now 20-year-old Mathews is halfway through her undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan where she studies with AMFS artist-faculty member Richard Aaron. She has already won auditions for and plays in two professional orchestras—the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra and Detroit Opera Orchestra.

Sitting next to the artist-faculty members who play principal in the AFO has given Mathews the opportunity to learn how to be a leader in orchestra. “There’s nowhere else that you can get that same experience,” says Mathews of the AMFS’s unique side-by-side format, which allows students to play alongside their teachers in orchestra all summer. “It’s so helpful to see how the artist-faculty talk to the sections and how they ask questions to the conductors. That’s something I’ll take away from this summer,” she says. It is especially enlightening for Mathews to perform alongside her AMFS teachers in an orchestral setting. “It’s interesting to see how they interact with others in the orchestra,” says Mathews. For example, “[Smith] is not afraid to get up out of his chair and ask questions. He’s not afraid of trying anything new. He’s very experimental.”

Outside of her orchestral commitments, Mathews has kept herself busy this summer performing in studio classes, Student Spotlight recitals, and, most fun for her, busking in the evening with her cello quartet outside of Paradise Bakery.

Mathews is one of the 480 young talents studying at the AMFS this summer.

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