

ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



ABBY EASTERLING *flute*

Sometimes it just takes one person to inspire greatness. For 23-year-old Abby Easterling, her band director was that person. He recognized that Abby had a gift and he encouraged her parents to let her pursue music professionally and candidly told them “we wouldn’t recommend this for most people.”

Easterling is a flute student studying with Mark Sparks and Demarre McGill in Aspen this summer and will be playing with the Aspen Festival Orchestra this weekend. Outside of Aspen, she is a graduate student at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music. She holds a bachelor’s degree from the Eastman School of Music.

The initial inspiration to start playing classical music came from Easterling’s grandfather. Her first instrument was the piano that her grandfather bought her when she was just seven years old. He encouraged her to take lessons and learn music that she loved. “I was very shy as a child and the piano offered an outlet for me. When I played, I poured all my emotions into it. I chose to play my favorite songs, mostly pop hits. I didn’t actually play much classical repertoire,” Easterling said.

Easterling’s instrument of choice was chosen rather arbitrarily. Essentially, she chose the flute so that she wouldn’t have to carry around a big instrument. Although there was no musical reason for Easterling picking the flute, she ended up falling in love with it. “I ended up liking it and I discovered I was actually pretty good!” Easterling said.

After some time excelling in band classes, Easterling started taking private lessons with local teacher Helen Blackburn. “She was a source of musical inspiration from day one,” Easterling said. “I remember coming home and being overwhelmed by how excited she made me feel about music and playing the flute. Her knowledge and skill and the obvious joy she took in teaching were exactly what I needed.”

It wasn’t until youth orchestra in high school when Easterling realized she wanted to pursue music professionally. “While I always enjoyed playing the piano, I knew that the flute would allow me to be part of something bigger—a community of people who shared my passion.” To this day, Easterling is equally as excited about the idea of making music with other people as driven to creating musical excellence.

Easterling has attended numerous other programs and has placed in several competitions. Despite the numerous accomplishments, Easterling humbly points out, “On paper, everyone’s bio looks really impressive. But it’s important to realize that for everything that’s on a resume, there are ten times as many failures that aren’t on the resume,” Easterling said. “I feel like in order to keep improving, you can never really be satisfied with what you’ve done. I think if you’re satisfied with what you’ve done, then you’re going to remain stagnant. You have to keep aiming higher.”

Originally from Dallas, Texas, and currently living in Houston, Easterling is excited to be spending her summer in colder weather. “I really enjoy being outside and Aspen is such a beautiful place to be outdoors,” Easterling said. “I’m also really excited to play with the orchestra and work with the faculty. I know I will learn a lot from them this summer.”

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