

ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Isabella Amador is sitting assistant principal second violin.

ISABELLA AMADOR *Violin*

In all aspects of life, representation matters. Twenty-three-year-old violinist Isabella Amador has taken a special interest in performing works of traditionally underrepresented composers. Peruvian-American composer Gabriela Lena Frank is one of Amador's favorites. On performing Frank's Concertino Cusqueño at a recent Aspen Festival Orchestra concert, Amador said, "She is one of my favorite composers, not only because she writes amazing and inspiring pieces, but also because of my shared heritage with her. Peruvians in the classical community are somewhat rare, at least outside of Peru, so I always cherish it when I get to play or listen to [Frank's] music."

Early exposure to her cultural and musical heritage initially came from her parents. "Both of my parents are violinists and wanted to share that part of themselves with me," Amador said. At four years old, they signed her up for violin lessons, and she says, "I have loved it ever since."

During her first visit to Aspen in 2019, the Michigan native was blown away by Aspen's special charm. From hiking to the Maroon Bells, to braving the Benedict Music Tent stage, Amador felt that Aspen was a place she could truly flourish. Now, with a University of Michigan bachelor's degree and a master's degree in progress, Amador returns to the AMFS for a second season. Building relationships with fellow students and top-tier private instructors have made this summer the most memorable. "Sitting next to world-class orchestral musicians is a priceless experience as I start to enter the workforce," she said. In the future, she plans to perform professionally in an orchestra and teach young violinists.

Amador has already taken steps towards her goals, serving as a role model for other musicians by leading sectionals for her university orchestra, local youth orchestras, and elementary schools. Though balancing her many responsibilities is a challenge, it is also rewarding, as she finds purpose in guiding other violinists with the knowledge passed down to her. Amador recalls, "My chamber music coach back at [the University of] Michigan once told me that if my shoulder muscles are tense while I play, I should try sticking out my stomach. It seems counterintuitive, since I'm probably tensing my stomach muscles, but it totally works. I also use this technique to take my mind off hard passages so that my nerves don't get in the way of my muscle memory," she said.

With muscle memory, the brain effortlessly controls the body, translating human thoughts into beautiful sounds. "What's interesting about the violin," Amador says, "is that violinists strive to sound as much like the human voice as possible." Though at first there doesn't seem to be an exact resemblance, with close attention, one can recognize the violin mimicking certain vocal qualities. Amador says, "[Jessie Montgomery's Rhapsody No. 1] is one of my favorite pieces to play because the beginning starts out with simple phrases that follow the contour of an inhale and exhale of human breath, and then slowly morphs into a passionate frenzy while still holding onto a singing-like quality."

At today's concert, Amador encourages the audience to listen for similar characteristics in Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D major featuring soloist James Ehnes. An admirer of Ehnes's technique and expression, she looks forward to finally sharing the stage with him for the season's penultimate AFO concert.

Isabella Amador is a recipient of the Allen & Kelli Questrom Foundation Scholarship

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