

ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Ana Isabella España is assistant principal second violin. She performs as a soloist with the Aspen Conducting Academy Orchestra on July 23 as the 2025 AMFS Violin Concerto Competition winner.

ANA ISABELLA ESPAÑA *violin*

AMFS violinist Ana Isabella España can't imagine her life without music. She began taking violin lessons from a close family friend (who also happened to be the violinist who performed at her parents' wedding) at the age of four; shortly after, she was enrolled in the Special Music School in New York City, a musically and academically rigorous program that she attended from kindergarten through high school.

"I don't come from a musical family, but we all love music," says España, and her parents encouraged her to start violin from a young age. As the end of high school loomed, she knew she had to make a tough choice: would she continue studying music and attend a conservatory, or pursue another route for college? "I just could not make that decision," she said. "I knew I wanted to pursue academics but also have a really fulfilling time with music because I love it so much. I could not leave it—there was no way I was going to abandon all the time I had with this instrument I love so much." So, España found the perfect combination for her in the Columbia University and The Juilliard School dual enrollment program, where she just completed her first year of studies in psychology and violin performance.

"Through my time pursuing other things, I've come to realize that everything I study I see through a lens of music," she says. And while España plans to pursue a career in violin performance, she sees music as much more than acing an audition or winning a competition. "To be able to share music with people that you're close with and for them to just enjoy it—I think that's the point of music."

España first came to study in Aspen as a high schooler, and she returns this year for her third summer. "There's so much to like, that's why I came back three times," she says. "One of the best things for me is all of the performances we get to see here. There are so many chances to see some of the best musicians in the world. You're never bored. There's always going to be a concert at the Tent, Harris, or on [Bucksbaum campus]." And having the chance to share the stage with renowned guest artists is "so inspiring," she says. Today's performance also marks a summer highlight for the young violinist, who notes Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration* as "one of my favorite pieces of all time."

In addition to the immersive orchestral experience, España also sees the summer in Aspen as an opportunity to focus in on her individual studies with artist-faculty violinist Masao Kawasaki, with whom she also studies at Juilliard. "I've always lived by this philosophy, but it's great coming from him," she says of one of Kawasaki's recent suggestions: "Remember to enjoy the music, and remember that you enjoy playing this piece. You want to savor every moment of it." These words of wisdom from her teacher must have resonated: Just last week, España was named with winner of the 2025 AMFS Violin Concerto Competition. Hear her perform Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor with the Aspen Conducting Academy Orchestra this Wednesday, July 23.

"I've come to realize that everything I study I see through a lens of music."

—ANA ISABELLA ESPAÑA

ANA ISABELLA ESPAÑA IS ONE OF 480 YOUNG ARTISTS STUDYING IN ASPEN THIS SUMMER. SHE IS A RECIPIENT OF THE TALENTED STUDENTS IN THE ARTS INITIATIVE SCHOLARSHIP, A COLLABORATION OF THE DORIS DUKE CHARITABLE FOUNDATION AND THE SURDNA FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP.