

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Will Beardslee is principal viola.

WILL BEARDSLEE *viola*

“Music was a love that crept up on me,” says Aspen Music Festival and School student Will Beardslee. The Michigan native started playing viola in fifth grade: after trying out flute and clarinet to start, he decided to fill the viola void for his school orchestra. “No one in my family is a musician. I’m the first, so it’s been a learning experience for all of us,” says Beardslee.

He stuck with it through middle and high school, and—in part thanks to the support of his orchestra director, who was a violist himself—he decided to attend the Cleveland Institute of Music (CIM) for his undergraduate studies. “It was a little scary, but thrilling at the same time,” says Beardslee of his decision to pursue viola. “I feel very fortunate to make my passion my career,” he says.

Beardslee, who has spent the past three summers in Aspen, just finished his master’s degree at Rice University and is heading to Peabody Conservatory to pursue a graduate performance diploma in the fall.

“My experiences last summer were so important in getting to where I am today,” says Beardslee, who notes that he has had the opportunity to study with all three of his university teachers—Jeffrey Irvine (CIM), James Dunham (Rice), and Victoria Chiang (Peabody)—in Aspen.

“The viola faculty here is amazing, and these past few summers have worked as really wonderful transitions,” he says, stating the influence that Aspen has had on his path in music. “Because of last summer [studying with Victoria Chiang], I only applied to the two schools she teaches at. I was really committed to working with her.”

While he enjoyed performing side-by-side with professionals in the Aspen Festival Orchestra and Chamber Symphony the past two summers, this season provides Beardslee with another invaluable experience: leading the viola section as principal viola throughout the summer in the Aspen Conducting Academy Orchestra.

For Beardslee, the hallmarks of a successful summer in Aspen will be gaining ample experience as principal viola and getting a head start on his studies with Chiang before he heads to Peabody in the fall.

In reflecting on his decision to pursue a career in music, says Beardslee, “I spent a lot of time thinking about what I wanted my life to be like. In the end it came down to that I really, really love music and I wanted to give it my best shot.”

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—WILL BEARDSLEE