

# ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Nate Seman is playing principal tuba.

## NATE SEMAN *Tuba*

If you have been to any of the Sunday afternoon Aspen Festival Orchestra (AFO) concerts this summer, you have likely heard Aspen Music Festival and School (AMFS) tuba student Nate Seman, even though you might not realize it. Somewhat hidden in the back row, without many flashy solos, and typically the only tuba player on stage, he plays an understated yet vital role as the foundation of the orchestra's sound.

Seman, who was awarded the AFO principal tuba fellowship this summer, began his musical studies on percussion, but while standing in the percussion section in the back of his middle school band—near the low brass section—he realized that he might be better suited for tuba. “I really liked the sound of the low, bass voice in the ensemble. There was no one playing tuba, so when I expressed interest in playing it, my band director said, ‘absolutely.’” A pivotal experience at a University of Georgia honor band clinic in high school led Seman to pursue the tuba more seriously. “It was really fulfilling, and after that point I figured I would try harder,” he says, laughing.

His school didn't have an orchestra program, so he played in his school band, and his first orchestra experience wasn't until he joined a youth orchestra later in high school. He recalls learning that “it's a whole different ball game, playing in orchestra. Your job is completely different [from in band]. It helps you improve a lot more, especially as a tuba player, since you're a one-person section. You have a lot more responsibility to know your part and to make sure you're on top of it. You have a much bigger role in holding down the brass.”

Having just completed his undergraduate degree at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, Bloomington, Seman is studying with Warren Deck this summer before continuing on to the University of Miami for his master's degree. Seman's brass quintet participated in the 2022 ABQ@Aspen Seminar, and now in his second summer at the AMFS, he has gained invaluable experience in the AFO. “Every single week has a different challenge that's presented, there's something big, an opportunity to learn or try something new,” he says, noting that he likely would not have had the opportunity to play larger works such as *The Rite of Spring*, the *Ring*, and Mahler's Third Symphony anywhere else.

In today's performance, you can hear Seman in John Luther Adams's *An Atlas of Deep Time* and Debussy's *La mer*. Of *La mer*, he says, “the ending has a really cool moment for the brass with huge chords and nuanced articulation. The whole idea is that you're imitating waves. Debussy's writing is great because the chord voicings work super well for brass. And it's an extended brass section—cornet has a darker sound than the trumpet, so it blends the high and the low brass voices together.”

Seman describes the role of the tuba as “very flexible.” He explains, “it's one of the only brass instruments that will play consistently with the brass, the woodwinds, and the strings in isolation. It's never a one-trick thing where you're just part of the brass section—you get to play with everybody. It's really fulfilling to fill out a chord, because adding the bass voice completely changes the sound.” Today, take a moment to listen for the tuba. You may be surprised to hear it not only as the lowest voice in a chord, but also as a mellow, dark tone accompanying the violins, or a sprightly addition to a passage in the woodwinds.

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

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—NATE SEMAN