

ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Hakami is sitting in the violin section, first stand, second chair.

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– LEERONE HAKAMI

LEERONE HAKAMI *Violin*

At just two years of age, Leerone Hakami found her passion for the violin. Her mother recalls that she took Hakami to a concert as a toddler and Hakami burst out crying when the violin player took the stage. When asked what was the matter, she cried out, “It’s just so pretty.”

Following that concert, Hakami wouldn’t stop asking her parents to play the violin. Finally, at the age of five, her parents gave in and allowed her to start taking lessons. “Every time I would hear recordings of the violin as a kid, I would just burst into tears. It was just so beautiful,” Hakami said.

Hakami is spending her first summer in Aspen, studying with Paul Kantor. After spending most of her childhood in Israel, Hakami came to the United States to attend The Juilliard School for her undergraduate degree. She will return this fall to pursue her master’s degree. “I realized that the most fun I have is going to summer festivals, and that could be my life if I attend a conservatory,” Hakami said.

“I think the violin sounds a lot like the human voice,” Hakami said. “When you have lyrical passages on violin, it sounds like someone is singing to you. To me, that’s so touching. I get goosebumps when someone plays the violin because it feels like a human, but it’s not coming from a human—or it is, but indirectly.”

Hakami, now twenty-two, remembers that her Juilliard teacher, Lewis Kaplan, always emphasized the fact that music is fun and it comes from the soul. “It’s so easy to get caught up in all the technical stuff but in reality,” he said. “It’s music and we play it for a reason beyond technicalities.

Kaplan also advised Hakami to pick someone in the audience and play for that specific person. “Every time I perform, I think about someone whom I wish was there to see me. Even if my mom is not in the audience, I picture her there, and then I become more relaxed. I feel more at home,” Hakami said.

To overcome performance anxiety, Hakami has many tricks up her sleeve. Outside of doing power poses, Hakami finds it helpful to play her instrument while bent over in attempts to relax her back. “I have to give myself pep talks and say to myself, ‘People here want to listen to me play. No one here is looking to see me fail. No one’s judging, they’re all here to support me.’”

After finishing her master’s at Juilliard, Hakami plans to go into music therapy to study how music affects memory. “I watched a documentary showing how people with dementia and Alzheimer’s react to the medications,” Hakami said.

“These medications are not helping them to retrieve old memories. But, if you play them a song or a piece from their past that they might recognize, then suddenly, they start to liven up a little bit. You see them wake up, and suddenly remember some things. I’m really interested in studying how music affects the brain.”

With a sister who is a physical therapist, Hakami and her sister dream of one day opening a joint practice where Hakami is doing music therapy and her sister is doing physical therapy.