

ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Benjamin Lanners is Assistant Principal Cello.

BENJAMIN LANNERS *Cello*

This summer at the Aspen Music Festival and School (AMFS) is Benjamin Lanners's first, but for the standout cellist, it's also a coming home of sorts. The son of two concert pianists, Lanners had heard countless stories about the magical blend of music and nature he would find at the AMFS before ever setting foot on campus from his dad, who was a piano student in Aspen in the 1990s. "He described the nature as heaven on Earth," says Lanners.

Hailing from Stillwater, Oklahoma and currently pursuing a Ph.D. at Rice University, Lanner's decision to attend the AMFS this summer was simple: it afforded Lanners the opportunity to continue studying with Desmond Hoebig, who is his mentor at Rice. "[Hoebig] has a special talent for helping you develop all different types of tools technically to achieve musical means," says Lanners. He "bridges the gap" between technical and musical, a skill that all musicians aspire to achieve.

Not only is Lanners performing in the weekly Aspen Festival Orchestra concerts, he was also called upon to perform Rachmaninoff's demanding Cello Sonata in G minor on the Festival's opening night recital with pianist Conrad Tao. Lanners is no stranger to what one might refer to as "pinch-me moments" as a music student, having recently shared the stage with renowned soloists like Emanuel Ax and Augustin Hadelich, but this recital marks a special moment in Lanners's early musical career. He recalls a formative memory of seeing Tao perform with the Oklahoma Philharmonic over a decade ago when Tao was just breaking into the professional concert pianist world.

Sharing the Harris Concert Hall stage with Tao is an honor and opportunity Lanners doesn't take lightly. "I'm not sure what spurred Mr. Tao's great generosity of wanting to play with a student," remarked Lanners with a chuckle, but he plans to soak in every moment. "My job is just to sound beautiful, and I get to enjoy what he's doing."

Lanners, who juggles his coursework and teaching responsibilities at Rice along with a demanding performance schedule during the year, sees his time in Aspen as both a respite and creative refocusing. "[I have] the time to just focus on my instrument and nature and escape from everything else. I will have felt successful if I get to dedicate a lot of time to working with [my teachers]" and get in "great shape on the cello," he says.

Lanners sees music as his career and lifelong pursuit. "My parents, being musicians, [realistically advised] 'only go into music if you can't see yourself doing literally anything else,'" says Lanners. "And here I am."

Aspiring young musicians have been coming to Aspen for generations, leaving with invaluable knowledge and inspiration and stories of their newfound home. After growing up hearing his father's stories of his time at the AMFS, Lanners now has the chance to form his own Aspen memories that he will carry with him for years to come.

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BENJAMIN LANNERS IS A RECIPIENT OF THE NEW HORIZONS FELLOWSHIP, KAY AND MATTHEW BUCKSBAUM.