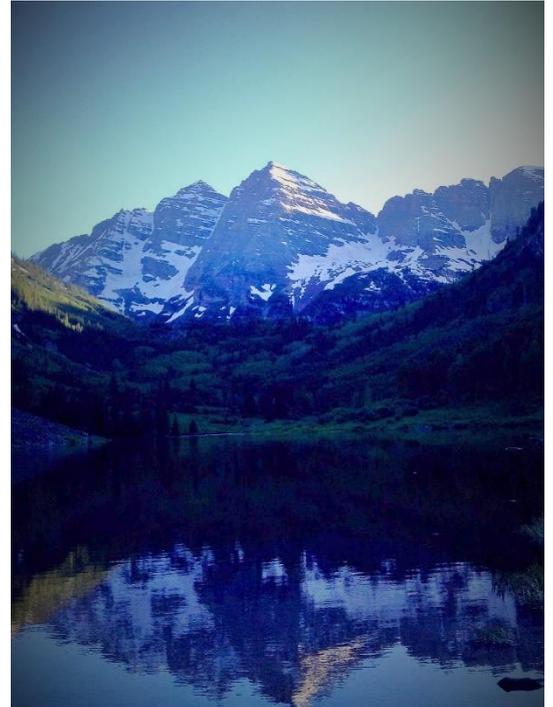


## A summer at the Aspen Music Festival and School

This summer I had the enormous privilege of attending the Aspen Music Festival and School in Colorado. I had wanted to go to this festival ever since my mum had told me about her experience there as a 'cellist in the 1980s. An eight-week intensive orchestral program sounded like heaven to me, so I sent a home-made recording of orchestral excerpts (featuring a barking dog) to the festival, and was surprised and delighted to be given a New Horizons Fellowship.

The City of Aspen is situated in the Colorado Rocky Mountains and along the Roaring Fork River, at an elevation of 8000ft. The weather is dry and hot with dramatic thunderstorms throughout July – it was hard to adjust when I returned to the UK!

The Aspen Music Festival and School was founded in 1949 by Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke. Originally it was a festival for musicians and other intellectuals, founded in celebration of Goethe, but the first music festival took place in 1951 and was then expanded when Dorothy DeLay joined the faculty in 1971. Currently the AMFS takes place on the beautiful Matthew and Carolyn Bucksbaum Campus renovated last year, as well as holding concerts in the 2050-seat Benedict Music Tent.



I also enjoyed hiking in the Maroon Bells and walking through the meadows behind the apartment complex where the students lived throughout the summer.



Throughout the eight week festival we had weekly orchestra programs, chamber music rehearsals and lessons, private instrumental lessons, and the opportunity to watch or perform in various masterclasses.

I love and miss my piano quintet - we managed to learn all of the César Franck, and performed in a concert as well as a masterclass with the Pacifica Quartet. Towards the end of the summer we enjoyed collaborating with the composers at the festival.



Most violists found the orchestral repertoire masterclasses especially useful – these were held every week with the principal violists of the Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, St Louis Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra. I found that the approach towards orchestral excerpts and auditions in the USA is very different from that in the UK, particularly regarding sound production and repertoire.

My viola lessons over the summer were with Victoria Chiang and Masao Kawasaki. They were both amazing teachers and taught me a lot about sound production. Vicky worked with many of her students on ‘finding the resistance in the string’ in order to create the most beautiful sound without any excess pressure. This involved releasing tension in the right hand – mainly in the muscles from the thumb down to the beginning of the wrist – and balancing the weight of the right arm between the elbow and 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> fingers.

I loved the weekly concerts with the Aspen Festival Orchestra and Chamber Symphony and will especially remember performing in the Tent. The atmosphere was wonderful (American audiences are incredibly enthusiastic) and the majority of the audience set up deckchairs outside with their dogs! I would highly recommend the AMFS to violists of any age and ability; with five orchestras and concerts almost every day, the festival provides a huge musical and personal boost to every student’s career.



