

Case Stories

You can sometimes learn a lot about a musician by peering into their open instrument case. On a backstage visit before the Curtis Symphony Orchestra's October concert, four string players gave us a mini tour.

BY JAMIE MCCRARY



Anaïs Feller, violin

Case highlights:

Pictures of Blackpink, her favorite pop group;
lucky coin; Romans 5:8 verse

► **Performer pizzazz** Whenever I'm feeling nervous, it helps me embody someone I see as confident. And for me, that's my favorite K-pop band, Blackpink. Recently, I was practicing this huge run in a piece, and I just imagined a confident, beautiful girl trying to show people happiness. By visualizing Blackpink's confidence and command, I was able to step into that state.

► **Lucky charm** During high school, my biggest dream was to get into Curtis. This coin is so special to me because one of my closest friends gave it to me—they even engraved it with my name—and it traveled with me to all my college auditions.

It's a reminder of the wonderful, loving people I've met through music.

► **Perfectly imperfect** Romans 5:8 helps me remember my playing isn't going to be perfect—but that's OK, because I'm an imperfect person. Diligence and hard work will always be seen, and sometimes that's enough. Performance-wise, it's also about remembering my music isn't just about me. It's about having a heart of giving to others—I believe this is the heart of music, and life in general. *Anaïs Feller, from San Diego, studies with Midori and Erin Keefe, is the Tobe Amsterdam Fellow, and entered Curtis in 2023.*

Sooeon Kim, violin

Case highlights:

Poster from her first solo recital;
Snoopy card; baby violin bow

► Performance inspiration

I knew I wanted to be a performer after my first solo recital. I was 11 years old performing at Kumho Art Hall in South Korea. It was my first time performing by myself, and I remember feeling true happiness on stage. I keep this recital poster because it continues to inspire me before I perform.

► Practice motivation

[Snoopy] was my former teacher's favorite character and keeping it in my case motivates me to practice. My teacher was like a second

mom to me—she's actually my godmother back home. I always want to make her proud, so it helps me lock in while practicing.

► Playing around

Even though my friend gave this to me for fun, I still use it often to practice slowing my bow speed. It's a good reminder to have fun—but still serves as a good practice tool.

Sooeon Kim, from South Korea, studies with Shmuel Ashkenasi and Pamela Frank, is the Martin and Sarah Taylor Fellow and entered Curtis in 2022.





Hannah Tam, violin

Case highlights:

Family pictures from a trip to Japan; photos of her cats in Hong Kong; shots from Curtis' holiday party

► **Steadfast support** This family picture reminds me that, even though we all live in different places, I still have a tight-knit support system. My family has been my biggest supporter since day one—they've done nothing but their best to help me. My mom left her whole family for five years to live with me here; my dad works to support us, and my brother always says good luck before concerts. It's a reminder I'm not alone, and that people I love are cheering for me.

► **Comfort cats** I've had my cats Ned (orange, pictured right) and Rio (brown, pictured left) since I was five years old. We grew up

together—I even wanted to be a veterinarian when I was younger. When I'm home in Hong Kong, they sit with me while I practice.

► **Chosen family** In 2022, I was alone here for a month because my mom's visa was revoked. My close friends at Curtis would hang out with me every day—they made sure I wasn't alone. The holiday party picture reminds me that even when I'm feeling lonely, I have a strong support system.

Hannah Tam, from Hong Kong, studies violin with Benjamin Beilman and Ida Kavafian. She entered Curtis in 2018 and is a Demeng Foundation Fellow.

Emad Zolfaghari, viola

Case highlights:

Letter from a student; photo of his string quartet; pictures of close friends

► **Meaningful mentorship** I was performing at a festival recently, and I started teaching lessons to one of the other player's children. She was only four years old and was so enthusiastic. It was so fun to spend time with her and help her learn. The letter she wrote me is a reminder of why I do what I do.

► **Musical bond** The photo of my quartet is also a reminder of why I do what I do. Each of us felt this connection when we played, and as people—but we're spread out in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Last summer, we wanted to audition for some festivals, so we planned a rehearsal schedule and each traveled to

practice together. I think it's that each of us took time to work and be together.

► **Celebrating community** So many people, myself included, get wrapped up in the repertoire; we feel we have to practice until we're perfect. Pictures of my close friends remind me what else viola has given me: wonderful friendships, travel, and many meaningful experiences I've gotten to live.

Emad Zolfaghari, from Oakville, Ontario, studying viola with Misha Amory and Hsin-Yun Huang, is the Elaine W. Camarda and A. Morris Williams Jr. Fellow and entered Curtis in 2021.

