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Honors: Laurel Gagnon (<http://kcstudio.org/honors-laurel-gagnon/>)

by Libby Hanssen (<http://kcstudio.org/author/lhanssen/>)  July 16, 2018

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The Park University Graduate Student Placed Fourth in the Singapore International Violin Competition in January

Laurel Gagnon attracted local and international attention when she placed fourth in the Singapore International Violin Competition in January.

"It was a high-pressure situation and also my first big competition, so I didn't really know what to expect," she said. "I didn't really put a lot of pressure on myself, because it was the first time. But at the same time, I'm a pretty competitive person and I wanted to do really well."

Gagnon studies with Ben Sayevich at Park University's International Center for Music. Originally from New Hampshire, she earned her undergraduate degree there and is now pursuing a graduate artist diploma.



Park University graduate student Laurel

Gagnon with the 1719 Carlo Tononi violin she has on loan from the Rin Collection for three years in recognition of her fourth-place win in the Singapore International Violin Competition. (photo by Jim Barcus)

She's played the violin since she was three years old. Originally, she wanted to play the flute, but her mother insisted she start with the violin, and wait until her lungs were more developed.

From the moment she picked up the violin, though, flute was forgotten.

"As I remember it, I was just excited to learn new pieces. I have this very distinct memory of sitting in the kitchen, my mom was making dinner and I was trying to get her to tell me the fingerings so I could play another piece."

When other children fantasized about being generals or pirates when they grew up, Gagnon played along.

"I would also be like, 'I want to be a farmer' . . . or whatever I wanted to be, but while I was saying that I knew that was fake. I had a very distinct realization — I know I want to be a violinist — everything else is make believe, for fun," she said.

When she was 11, she attended a performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's Piano Trio no. 2.

"It touched me in a way that changed the way I looked at life," Gagnon said. That's when she started to practice seriously.

"If I can ever do that for someone, that's an incredible thing, that's an incredible gift you can give someone," she said.

She's on the right track, with well-received performances in Kansas City and her placing in Singapore, which carries with it a cash prize and the three-year loan of a violin made by Carlo Tononi in 1719, "which is unbelievable."

The instrument is from the "golden era of violin-making," said Gagnon. Compared to modern instruments, "you get a certain maturity of sound."

"It has a personalized sound quality. It's relatively easy to play. It has a wide array of colors that I can access."

The trip also gave her some life experience. This was her first trip to Asia, having visited Europe the summer before, and a solo trip at that. Other than commenting on her height, people greeted her warmly, her Uber drivers offering history lessons while they navigated the city.

And the food "was amazing, oh my gosh!"

Cooking is Gagnon's other passion. "In high school I did a lot more, because expensive ingredients are free when you are at your parents' house," she admitted.

"It's a creative outlet. I don't like cooking with recipes. I always go online, do a bunch of research and figure out what I want to do and then put the ingredients together. I don't think I ever cook anything from an original recipe."

She certainly loves a challenge. "I like doing raw vegan cooking. I'm not a vegan and I'm not a rawist, I just like cooking – er, not cooking – raw vegan things," she joked.

Gagnon performed a recital in May at the 1900 Building and she plays with orchestras and chamber groups at ICM and around town, but she plans to spend the next few years focused on competitions and see where that takes her.

"It's also just a huge confidence boost that other people enjoyed my playing as much as I had hoped they would. It was a validation that I'm going in the right direction and I just have to keep doing it."

Watch for upcoming performances at www.laurelgagnon.com (<http://www.laurelgagnon.com>).

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Originally from Indiana, Libby Hanssen covers the performing arts in Kansas City. She's written for KCUR, "KC Studio," "The Kansas City Star," "The Pitch" and

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