

My first job in the orchestra: Interview with Folkwang student Ezgi su Apaydin

How do you get a job in the orchestra as a music student? Which content from your studies is particularly helpful later on in your job? StudiScout Mihajlo spoke to violinist Ezgi su Apaydin (Instrumental Training – Bachelor of Music) about her first job with the Folkwang Chamber Orchestra in Essen, where she started working during her Folkwang studies.

How did you get the job?

I saw a flyer at the Folkwang gate saying that violinists were wanted for the Folkwang Chamber Orchestra. I wanted to take part in an audition for this orchestra before, but I missed the application deadline. This time I applied and prepared on time. That was my first audition ever.

The Folkwang Chamber Orchestra:

- exists since 1958 and has 11 members at the moment.
- focuses on early music and works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.
- gives concerts in halls in Essen such as Villa Hügel, the Essen Philharmonic and the UNESCO World Heritage Site Zeche Zollverein.
- likes to experiment with concert forms, genres and styles.
- is not an university orchestra of the Folkwang University of the Arts.

What does an audition in this orchestra look like and how did you prepare for it?

It's kind of a small competition with three rounds. Applicants play in front of a jury and receive points that take them to the next round. The jury consists of at least seven orchestra members and the conductor. In the first round a concerto is played, usually one by Mozart. The second round continues with orchestral parts, i.e. demanding parts for violin from orchestral pieces. In the last round you play in a quartet with orchestra members. My tactic, whether it's an audition or a competition, is always to think that this is my last time playing. That makes me do my best.

What exactly does your job include?

Our projects consist of rehearsals and concerts. Projects happen roughly every two weeks or ten days. We get the sheet music three or four days before the first rehearsal. Everyone practices for themselves and then we rehearse together – again three or four days, six hours each time. After that there would normally be one or two concerts, but all of them have been cancelled due to the pandemic.

How has the pandemic changed your job?

I started the job a few months later than originally planned. I was in Turkey and wanted to return to Essen for my first rehearsal, but then the first Corona measures were introduced. After that the borders were closed for a long time and I stayed at home in Turkey for four months.

At the same time, all concerts and rehearsals were cancelled and it was not clear whether the orchestra would continue to exist. When the borders were reopened, I came back to Germany. In late summer we were finally able to continue, for which I was very grateful.

Of course, making music under hygienic measures is a little different than normal. There are acoustic changes because you are no longer allowed to sit so close to each other. In the first rehearsals, all musicians had to get used to it. The nice thing is that everyone has their own music stand and can easily see the music at any time.

How do the job and your studies fit together?

I find it perfect for master's students or students at the end of their bachelor's degree, as it is the case with me. You have a job in a good orchestra and you can learn a lot. The most important thing for me and my professional experience is that I can now learn and process pieces faster. You get into an orchestra whose experienced members are already very well established. As the youngest, I have to be even better prepared so that I don't lag behind. Since it is a chamber orchestra and not a large symphony orchestra, the instrument groups are smaller. So it is not most important that I, as a violinist, play perfectly together with other violinists, but with all other musicians. That's why I have to listen more closely to other instruments like viola or cello. I had to adjust my sound – and therefore myself.

To what extent did studying at Folkwang prepare you for the job?

It prepared me in the sense that I was able to work with fantastic musicians from the start and learned a lot from them. In addition to the main subject, also in chamber music and orchestral projects. I noticed a big difference between preparing university projects and my job, for example in terms of responsibility. Although it is very important to me that the university projects go well, in a job it is a different level of preparation with more responsibility. For example: in a university project we practice more together in rehearsals, and at work you practice more for yourself and less in rehearsals.

What should you watch out for in your studies if your goal is an orchestral job?

I would say orchestral excerpts (Orchesterstellen). Orchestra excerpts are very difficult to play alone and without an audience. They are uncomfortable but very important, even if they are often very short and look like they are easy to play. You should pay special attention to them and practice every day, even if you think this is not necessary. If you practice them daily, almost nothing can go wrong with an audition.

Do you have recommendations for other Folkwang (music) students when looking for a job?

The most important thing is to learn to relax during the auditions. I was also a member of the jury recently. A lot of good musicians didn't make it to the next round because they were just too nervous. The trick in this job is to control the emotions on stage. You can practice all day, but it's useless if you can't calm down on stage.