

# ARTS for Youth

## SPOTLIGHT

# Aynsley Porchak is champion fiddler

Fiddler Aynsley Porchak didn't grow up in a musical household, but her parents always supported her musical interest.

"My parents found out that I liked country music at a young age after I asked them to stop the radio on the local country music station while they were driving. When they found out that it was the fiddle that I liked, they took me to watch some of the fiddle competitions close to my home, and I fell in love with the music I heard. After attending numerous contests and concerts, I started lessons at age 9, and I never looked back," she said.

She came to East Tennessee State University to study in their Bluegrass, Old-Time and Country music program.

"Before I came to ETSU, I was familiar with bluegrass music to some degree, but I was still very much

learning the ropes of how to be a bluegrass fiddler. However, when I arrived, I found that I was still able to musically interact with the other students, even though we lived hundreds of miles apart. To me, that experience really speaks to one of the things that I find most fascinating about the nature of music – it is an inclusive way of communicating thoughts and culture across the boundaries of regions, and even nations," she says.

She performs with the ETSU Bluegrass, Celtic and Country Pride Bands. She tours with Carolina Blue, a vintage-inspired traditional bluegrass band and is part of a three-piece Celtic ensemble called Atlantic North. When she isn't on the road, she teaches privately and in the Junior Appalachian Musician program on the ETSU campus. She also keeps busy with sessions work recording for other musicians.

She also has great success in the competitive world of fiddling. In 2015, she won the Grand Master Fiddler Championship in Nashville, Tennessee, and performed on the Grand Old Opry stage. Two years later, she won the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Championship. She is the first person to win both competitions.

"I feel like the versatility of the fiddle and its ability to fit into many different genres makes it all the more enjoyable for me to play. I love how expressive it can be, and the fact that it's an instrument that is truly challenging keeps me on my toes. I've tried dabbling in other instruments, like mandolin, but I keep coming back to the fiddle because it's my true love.

"Music really does mean a lot to me. I truly feel like it has changed my life for the better. I feel God has blessed me with the ability to

play, and so I want to give back to others through my fiddling, whether that means teaching fiddle lessons, performing on stage and making people smile, or just simply talking to an audience member after a show. Music is such a beautiful way to bring people together, and if I can make someone forget about whatever sadness they have going on in their life just for a little while through my playing, I feel like my job is done," she says.

Aynsley is working on a graduate degree in Appalachian Studies at ETSU. After graduation she would like to use her degrees to write and further scholarship in the field of American traditional music. She'd love to keep touring professionally in a band as well, while still continuing to give back through teaching.

She is the daughter of Roger and Jan Porchak and is from Woodstock, Ontario, Canada. *A!*

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