Matthew Zalkind, the newest member of Lamont’s string faculty, has traveled the world with his cello. But for this musician, whose training and career were largely New York-centric, an appointment at the University of Denver means something of a homecoming.

Zalkind was born and raised in Salt Lake City, the son of two prominent members of the Utah Symphony. His father, the former principal trombonist, is currently Professor of Trombone at the Eastman School of Music and teaches every summer at the Rafael Méndez Brass Institute, which is hosted by Lamont. It was through him that Zalkind first learned of DU and of the first-rate facilities housed in the Newman Center.

“I’d heard they were amazing, but when I came to see Lamont in person I was really blown away,” said Zalkind. He was impressed with the accomplished faculty and talented students at Lamont. “Everyone is making music at a really high level,” he added.

That statement means something coming from Zalkind. After receiving his degrees from Juilliard (BM and MM) and the University of Michigan (DMA), he joined the Harlem String Quartet and spent three years touring and recording with the group. Their tours took Zalkind across the U.S. and abroad.

“We went to England, Japan and Ethiopia, just to name a few,” he said. As a soloist, chamber musician and laureate of several prestigious competitions, including the Washington International and Tchaikovsky competitions, Zalkind also performed in the Washington, D.C. Kennedy Center, New York City’s Carnegie Hall, Moscow and Beijing.

But Zalkind is happy to be settling in Denver and pursuing his passion for education. He got his first taste of teaching on the university level while filling in for a colleague at Utah State University, and was hooked.

“I’ve always loved that Itzhak Perlman quote, ‘When you teach others, you teach yourself.’ It’s so true. Just this year, working with the students here, my own playing has improved so much,” he said. Audiences have borne witness to this: a recent recital program, the first half of which ended with the virtuosic tour de force Sonata for Solo Cello by Zoltán Kodály, was met with an immediate standing ovation and a chorus of shouts of “bravo!”

Denver has also supplied some unexpected perks.

“This is a real food town!” Zalkind remarks, “and thankfully it’s more affordable than New York.” He is also excited to get back to his roots and take advantage of the skiing and hiking opportunities in his adopted state. “I did a lot of outdoor stuff growing up in Utah, but I have to say, the weather is definitely better here!”