Carolyn Jantsch, 20, who just completed her bachelor’s at the School of Music, won the principal tuba position with the Philadelphia Orchestra, it was announced in February. She is the first permanent female tuba player with one of the top major American symphony orchestras. Jantsch studies with Professor Fritz Kaenzig.

Philadelphia wasn’t Carolyn’s first audition. As any tuba player can tell you, openings in symphony orchestras are a rare thing indeed. When there is one, you go after it. As a sophomore, Jantsch made it to the semifinals with the New York Philharmonic. She was runner-up last spring for the tuba position with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and was chosen as the tubist for the Ann Arbor Symphony this year. When Philadelphia’s tuba position opened, Carol submitted her resume. Initially screened out as too inexperienced for the job, she got the standard pro forma letter of rejection.

Months later, however, Carol sent off a CD to Blair Bollinger, Music Director of the Bar Harbor Brass, in application for their summer workshop. As it turned out, Bollinger also happened to play bass trombone for the Philadelphia Orchestra and was chair of their tuba search committee.

“I listened and I thought, ‘Wow, this is good’, Bollinger told The Philadelphia Inquirer. “This is really good.’ It was some of the most amazing tuba playing I’ve ever heard. It was technically clean and musically eloquent.” The work she was playing on the CD was from the first movement of Khachaturian’s Violin Concerto—on tuba. Hard enough for a violinist, almost impossible for a tubist. That got everyone’s attention.

Bollinger passed the recording on to other members of the committee who were equally impressed. The tape won Jantsch entrée into the audition process, competing with 195 other hopefuls for the coveted spot.

As a test of her mettle, Carol was given a chance to play substitute tuba with the orchestra so they could determine firsthand if she was for real. She was. While recently guest conducting in Philadelphia, Sir Simon Rattle noticed her almost immediately and wanted her to audition for his own Berlin Philharmonic. By then, however, it was too late; she had been hired.

Christoph Eschenbach, Music Director for the Philadelphia Orchestra, said, “It seems to me she was just born with the instrument, she’s so at ease with it. She plays it like a flute.”

Professor Kaenzig, of course, is very proud of his student from Mt. Vernon, OH, who started on euphonium at age 9 but settled permanently on tuba at 12. “Carol is a very intelligent young woman,” he told Music @ Michigan, “but with a sensitivity and determination that is rare. At another level, she’s just a normal kid, with outside interests like anyone else her age—she’s been quite involved in Ultimate Frisbee clubs; she has a life outside her musical studies.”

Kaenzig added that until the last few decades, tuba players have been predominantly male, but with strides in recent years women players are more in evidence. Alumna Stacy Baker, BM ’91, MM ’93, teaches tuba at Morehead State; Kathy Brantigan, BM ’68, MM ’69, will host the next International Tuba and Euphonium Conference. Carol is the first, however, to be hired for a full-time, year-round job with a major symphony orchestra.

“The real reason [less women have been involved] is the demand of lung capacity,” he told The Philadelphia Inquirer. “Carol is an exception. She has 4.7 liters, as measured on medical equipment, the same as I do, and that’s just enough to get the job done. She is so determined musically, she gets the air in any way she can.”

“I thought I had a chance,” Jantsch said, with typical aplomb. “This is probably the best job I could ever hope for.”