

# AVS RETROSPECTIVE

## THE PRIMROSE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION'S EARLY YEARS

by Dwight Pounds

### **The Artist, the Fund, and the Competition**

The great William Primrose enjoyed numerous recognitions in his lifetime and still more were bestowed upon him following his passing in 1982. Late in his career he was knighted as a Commander of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II and in 1975 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti at ceremonies during Congress III. Concurrently he was given an award unique in the American Viola Society, the AVS Scroll of Distinguished Service. In further actions by AVS leadership, Primrose was also named Honorary President of the Society and Honorary Chairman of the Executive Board. International Viola Congress XI, convening in Houston, Texas, in 1983, was dedicated to his life and artistry, the first such dedication in AVS or IVS history. He was made an honorary member of the International Viola Society posthumously. An annual memorial concert/master class was established at Brigham Young University in his memory—and this is by no means a definitive list. The William Primrose Memorial Scholarship Fund was

activated following his death and contributions began to be solicited. The AVS Executive Board determined that the fund would have to reach \$10,000 before interest from earnings could be dedicated to awards. When Congress XIII convened in Boston at the New England Conservatory of Music in 1985, the fund had matured to \$8500. In the November 1986 issue of the JAVS, Past President Maurice Riley announced that the fund had a base in excess of \$10,000 and President David Dalton in the same issue announced that the William Primrose Scholarship Fund Competition would be held in conjunction with the 1987 Ann Arbor congress. In 1989 the Board created the Primrose Memorial Fund and the Primrose Memorial Scholarship Competition, giving each function its own designation.<sup>1</sup>

### **The First 10 Years**

The first Primrose Memorial Scholarship Competition was held, as scheduled, in June 1987, in conjunction with Congress XV in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and was won by Lynne Richburg, a student of Donald McInnes. The winner received \$800 and performed Alan Shulman's Theme and Variations

for Viola, Strings and Harp with the National Arts Chamber Orchestra. Carla-Maria Rodriguez placed second and Paris Anastasiadis third. They were given \$300 and \$200 respectively and performed in congress master classes. Jurists included Robert Oppelt, chair, David Dalton, Rosemary Glyde, Nathan Gordon, Louis Kievman, Dwight Pounds and Ann Woodward.



*Lynne Richberg and  
Carla-Maria Rodriguez*

In 1989 and with Congress XVII convening on the campus of Redlands University in California, the second PMSC was won by Daniel Foster, a student of Jeffrey Irvine. Ming Pak took second place and Kai Tang Third. Foster played the world premier of Wayne Bohrnstedt's Concerto for Viola and Orchestra with the Redlands Symphony. Jurists included Louis Kievman, chair,

David Dalton, Alan de Veritch, Roberto Diaz, Rosemary Glyde, Donald McInnes, Dwight Pounds, Sven Reher, and Karen Tuttle. Todor Pelev was the competition coordinator.



*Dan Foster, second PMSC winner, receiving congratulations from Donald McInnes following the competition at Redlands.*

At Ithaca College of Music, Ithaca, New York, in 1991, and held in conjunction with Congress XIX, the third PMSC was won by Kirsten Docter, a student of Jeffrey Irvine, with Kin-Fung Leung placing second. These were the only awards given. The winner performed again a world premier, Richard Lane's Aria and Allegro with the USAF Symphony. Jurists were Emanuel Vardi, chair, Harold Coletta, David Dalton, Rosemary Glyde, Pamela Goldsmith, and John White.

The fourth PMSC was held during Congress XXI in Evanston, Illinois, in 1993, and won by Nokuthula Ngwenyama, a student of Alan de Veritch. Ngwenyama performed a solo recital and was scheduled for an appearance in Congress XXII in 1995 in

Bloomington, Indiana. Second place was taken by Kathryn Lockwood. Judges included William Preucil, chair, David Dalton, Mary Arlin, Paul Coletti, William Magers, and Thomas Tatton. Lisa Hirschmugl was the competition coordinator.



*Nokuthula Ngwenyama, winner of the fourth Primrose Memorial Scholarship Competition.*

First place in the fifth PMSC, held with Congress XXIII in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1995, was taken by Catherine Basrak, student of Roland Vamos. The second prize went to Joan DerHovsepien and third to Scott Lee. Continuing with the precedent set in Evanston, Basrak gave a solo recital and was promised a featured appearance in Congress XXV, the Silver Jubilee, to be hosted by the University of Texas in Austin. The previous winner, Nokuthula Ngwenyama, played a solo recital and performed the Shulman Theme and Variations with the USAF Symphony. Jurists included Donna Lively Clark, James Durham, Csaba Erdélyi, Abram Skernick, Thomas Tatton, and Marcus Thompson. Laura Kuennen-Poper was the competition coordinator.

In 1995 the first prize cash award had grown to \$1500 with \$1,000 going to the second place contestant, if awarded. The prize also carried the obligation for a solo performance at the next congress; the runner-up was guaranteed a master class performance in conjunction with the current congress.

The winners and finalists in the Primrose Memorial Scholarship Competitions, representing many American, Asian and European nationalities, languages and proud musical traditions, have gone on to distinguished careers in performance and teaching—giving credence to Primrose's observation that the idea of the "solo violist" as a professional was a myth—and have made the competition a truly international celebration of the viola. By way of update, the American Viola Society 2003 Directory and various websites have yielded the following information on the PMSC winners and finalists through its first ten years, though some listings may not be current. Among the winners, Lynne Richburg is principal violist with the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, a member of the New Century Chamber Orchestra, and an active studio musician in Los Angeles, having performed on over 100 motion pictures including *A Beautiful Mind* and *Seabiscuit*. She revisited Alan Shulman's Theme and Variations in a February performance with the NCCO and was joined by the composer's son, Jay Shulman, in this tribute to his father and his music. Dan Foster is affiliated with the University of Maryland, is

principal violist in the National Symphony Orchestra, and is a JAVS contributor.<sup>2</sup> Kirsten Docter is on the viola and chamber music faculties at the Cleveland Institute of Music, violist with the Cavani String Quartet, and has appeared as soloist and ensemble member in Europe and North and Central America. Nokuthula Ngwenyama has performed as soloist with several major symphonies and in recitals at the Kennedy Center, the Louvre and the White House. Ngwenyama was the recipient of the 1996-1997 Fulbright Grant to study at the Conservatoire de Musique in Paris and also received the 1997 Avery Fisher Career Grant. She graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and resides in Boston. Cathy Basrak is assistant principal violist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, principal violist of the Boston Pops, is affiliated with Boston Conservatory and active with faculty ensembles there. Predictably, many PMSC finalists also have established high profile careers. Carla-Maria Rodriguez records and performs with the San Francisco Silverwood Ensemble. Susan DuBois, former prizewinner and recitalist at the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition and winner of Artists International's 23rd Annual Auditions, is viola professor at the University of North Texas. Lembi Veskimets is a member of the Cleveland Orchestra, teaches at the Cleveland Music School Settlement and the Encore School for Strings, and currently serves as President of the Ohio Viola

Society.<sup>3</sup> Carol Rodland is on the faculty at the New England Conservatory and serves on the AVS Executive Board. Rodland, recently elected to the AVS Executive Board, has come full circle as a PMSC finalist and now serves on the competition committee. Joan DerHovsepan played many seasons with the Everest Quartet which for at least two years was in residence in the Midland-Odessa (Texas) region and may have a position now in Houston. Scott Lee, 1996 Concert Artists Guild Competition winner and Lionel Tertis Competition finalist, is a faculty member at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory and at the Idyllwild Chamber Music Festival and Workshop in California and is particularly active in chamber music. Kathryn Lockwood performs and records with the Lark Quartet, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Trio Solisti, Muir Quartet, Concertante, and Triple Helix. She serves on the faculties at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Concordia Conservatory and the Boston University Tanglewood Institute. Gilad Karni won the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition 1994, is a former member of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, and has performed internationally as a soloist. Karni is currently the newly appointed principal violist of the Deutsche Oper in Berlin. Other PMSC finalists who competed at a congress include Heather Bentley, Amalia Daskalakis (who performs electric viola with a modern ensemble

called Mad Juana), Ming Pak, Kai Tang, Man-Qin Zhang, Mike Kelly, Matthew Phillips (who may be playing in the Buffalo Philharmonic), and Ken Mathewson. The international character and appeal of the PMSC truly has become one of its most enduring hallmarks and continues to mark the legacy of this still relatively young event. ☺

#### Notes:

1. The Primrose Memorial Scholarship Competition should not be confused with the single 1979 Primrose International Viola Competition which took place in Provo, Utah, before the opening of Congress VII. Geraldine Walter won first place, Jun Takahira took second, and Patricia McCarty third. Judges were William Primrose, Ralph Aldrich, and Joseph de Pasquale.
2. Dan Foster's article, "Preparation and Performance of Richard Strauss's Don Quixote and Ein Heldenleben" is published in JAVS Vol. 18 No. 1, 2002.
3. Lembi Veskimets' interview with Bloomington PMSC winner, Cathy Basrak appears on page 49 of this issue of JAVS.