

Journal of the American Viola Society

Volume 20 Summer 2004 Online Issue



VIOLIST oder BRATSCHIST.

*Die Stimm ist etwas rauh, so die Violo giebet,
Zoch heist sie angenehm, dem der sie recht versteht,
ein Stück wird edeler geachtet und geliebet,
wann dieser artige Thon zugleich darunter geht.
Rom, so die Mutter-Stadt der Musick-Künstler heisset,
ist, die mein Instrument als etwas schönes preisset.*

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An Interview with Roberto Diaz

by Charles Noble

Roberto Diaz is one of the foremost players and teachers of the viola in the world today. Though still only in his forties, his career has included section posts with the Minnesota Orchestra and the Boston Symphony, Principal viola with the National Symphony and his present position of Principal viola of the Philadelphia Orchestra. His teaching posts have included the University of Maryland, Peabody Conservatory, Rice University, and the Curtis Institute. He is the product of a musical family – his mother Pauline was a pianist, his father Manuel is a violinist and violist, his brother Andrés is a prize-winning concert cellist, and his youngest sister Gabriela is a violinist in the early stages of her career. Roberto's varied (and full) schedule includes his duties with the Philadelphia Orchestra (which include a solo turn with the orchestra each season), teaching at the Curtis Institute, solo recitals, concerts with the Díaz Trio, and master classes around the world. In the fall of 2002 I sat down with Roberto in dressing room 'B' at Verizon Hall in Philadelphia to ask him about his life and career in music – the following is a portrait of his life in his own words.



Photo - Dwight Pounds

Family life – My family was pretty musical: my father was a violinist and violist, my mother a pianist. They insisted upon at least a basic musical education for all of us, and three out of four of us have stayed in music. I started violin with my father in Chile, but soccer was my predominant occupation. My brother Andrés, on the other hand, was glued to the cello. I had no chemistry with the violin and never progressed much in my first 4 or 5 years. We moved to the US in 1973, just outside of Atlanta, Georgia. Soccer in the U.S. was a great disappointment to me, people just ran around in clumps chasing the ball! They just didn't know how the game was really played. Gradually my focus shifted from soccer to the viola; my father decided that I should switch from the violin in the hopes that I would take more of an interest in my musical studies. At the same time I had a

real interest in architecture and design. I graduated from high school a year early, and rather than go on to conservatory, where I had been already accepted, my father urged me to stay in Atlanta for one more year [the tragic death of Roberto's mother Pauline in an bicycling accident not long before was also a factor] and I enrolled in a college in the area and studied industrial design, earning a certificate. The following year I went to Boston to study at the New England Conservatory.

His father, Manuel Díaz – There's no substitute for what you learn at home. It's amazing what a role model my father's been. Sometimes I think to myself, "if I could only learn to be as patient, as understanding, as level-headed, as tough in the face of adversity [as him]." I know that no matter what, no matter when, I can call home, no matter what he's doing he's going to be there for me. I still refer to my parent's house as "home." Now that I'm married, Elissa and I talk about everything, but the influence that he has on me is undeniable; I just think "I know what he would do, I've just got to stay cool." I saw him be a father to Gabriela, my youngest sister, it was amazing to watch that because I was actually conscious at that time of what it was that he was doing and how he was doing it. When the other three of us were growing up and were all in the middle of it, and there were fists flying and feet flying and words flying, you weren't aware of how he was handling it. But with Gabriela, he would take a situation and resolve or dissolve conflict. It's good to have a good buddy who can do that.

Burton Fine – I couldn't have asked for a better person [as a teacher] at the time. He was organized and meticulous. We did one or two etudes a week for all four years I studied with him. We covered every

possible etude book: some famous, some very obscure. He demanded very organized playing, especially regarding intonation: "I don't recognize this" was his constant statement about my playing. "Go home and get it in tune and really work on it. It has to be honest." I was a wild player in those days, I played the Bartók Concerto and the Ravel Tzigane for my placement audition when I got to NEC. He would say to me "Just because you've got Primrose's recording in your head doesn't mean that you sound like Primrose." To this day I still fly to Boston occasionally to play for Burton before I play an important concert. When I was preparing the Walton Concerto for the Philadelphia Orchestra, I went to Boston to play for Burton, because he hears things differently than other people do. He is so demanding in "picky" ways. Burton was instrumental in preparing me for a career in orchestras. From my very first year with him he started working with me on orchestral excerpts, years and years before I ever even considered taking an audition. By the time I graduated I'd covered just about any piece that you could expect to run into at an audition. He demanded that you know the context of each excerpt, why it has to be played a certain way, who you had to pay attention to while you were playing a passage. For example, does the accompaniment allow you freedom, or do you need to keep it in a very strict tempo? We used them like exercises every week. He knew the repertoire better than anyone I've talked with about that stuff. I probably didn't realize it at the time, but it was a big advantage for me to be that prepared that way. When it came time for me to play Don Juan at an audition, I'd been playing Don Juan for four years, but without every having to be under the pressure of having to learn it for an audition next week. It made such a big difference. As a player, Burton is so unassuming; he's not as flamboyant in his

ability as say, [Joe] dePasquale. But there would be lessons where we'd be working on a Paganini Caprice, and he would say "don't make me do this!" and then he'd just grab my viola and play a Paganini Caprice that would leave me stunned, and he'd be doing it on my viola! He would just rip through a passage, and then say "I can't play this stuff" and you'd be left thinking, I didn't know this was possible! [Many of Roberto's present and former pupils might remember similar incidents in their own lessons.]

Louis Krasner - Krasner was an amazing influence, but I was too young and unaware of who he was to take advantage of him the way I needed to while I was actually at NEC. I came back to Krasner after I'd studied two years at the Curtis Institute and played in the Minnesota Orchestra for a year. I then returned to Boston to join the Boston Symphony, which I played in for five years; it was during this time that I studied with Krasner. I played for him once a month or every three weeks. Lessons were completely unlike those that I had with Burton or with DePasquale. He would say 'why are you doing it this way?' Some of the hardest facts to face were those questions that Krasner would raise in his lessons. He would say, "You play the viola as well as people play the viola, but after five minutes I know how you play, and what you're going to do, and frankly I'd rather go home and watch television." What do you do when you're faced with that? He made me realize that there's so much more to viola performance than playing music fast and in tune and with a nice sound. That, actually, was a completely different outlook than I had had before. I think of those lessons to this day. He was just an amazing person. Sometimes we would have a lesson where we would never even take out the instrument. He would bring an article from the New York Times or a review from the

Times, and he would say "Okay, if this [reviewer] reacted to a concert this way, describe what the concert sounded like to me in your own words." And you'd have to start thinking, what would this person have sounded like for the reviewer to use these words to describe them? There were many musical questions which were dissected in minute detail, such as "Why is it piano here?" or "Why is it slurred here at this dynamic level, when it's another way in another place in the piece?" These questions led you to ask why the composer wrote it this way, and what are the implications? Knowing the musical implications of every bar is important when learning a piece like the Bartók Concerto. If you understand how a piece is written, how a piece is put together, why things happen, it makes a huge difference in how you approach it technically. The impact of a phrase, knowing when you can take time and when you can't, affects what fingerings and bowings you can use. When you try to make the music fit within the technical difficulties of the piece, it can get very difficult for both the performer and the listener. I'm sure that Burton talked about these things in one way or another, but it just went in one ear and out the other. Even with Krasner the same thing happened. You learn when you're ready to learn; as with a lot of other people, it just didn't happen all at once for me. I studied with Krasner at just the right time, working as a professional, trying to improve on things. I had a good job, but I needed to get other aspects of my playing and music-making caught up to my technical abilities on the instrument.

Competitions – The three competitions that I did [Washington International, Munich (ARD), and Naumberg], I did after I was already a member of the Boston Symphony. For me the best thing was that I was practicing like a maniac while I was in the

orchestra. It was a great experience every time, even though I didn't always come out the top prizewinner. But there was so much to learn from the experiences. I remember after the Naumberg finals, in which I was given the third prize. This was a surprise to me, since I didn't think that I played worth anything in that round, not even honorable mention! The problem in the final round was strictly musical, and I knew it. Bobby Mann came up to me and asked me "Hasn't anyone said anything to you about music?" I know why he said it. It was hard to hear, but it made my work with Louis Krasner certainly more urgent. I knew that the music just wasn't coming out, it wasn't 'going' anywhere. When people react that way to your playing, it really makes you reevaluate the "state of the union," so to speak.

The Munich competition was a very different experience for me. That year there was no first prize given, only a second and a third prize. I got the third prize. I went to the competition with an instrument that was not what it should have been, it was the instrument that I played through high school with, and that was all I had at the time. I wasn't educated in the fine points of owning a great instrument, and I figured that this viola got me this far, so there I went. I remember talking to Kim Kashkashian after the competition and she said, "You know, your instrument killed you." As a result of that I was given a viola at the end of the competition. It blew my mind, it was better than winning the lottery! The jury unanimously decided by merit, and certainly by need, that I was the one that should get the instrument. It was donated to the competition that day, and was owned by the principal of the Munich Philharmonic in the 1930's. It was a wonderful small instrument, but impossible for me to play. It was reassuring to be told that if I had a better instrument, I would have probably done

much better. The music-making was much better than at Naumberg, but the nuances just weren't making it past the instrument.

I did the Young Concert Artists auditions, and I was in the finals, and I had the same cheap viola that I used for Munich and Naumberg. The viola judge, who I won't name, was extremely insulted that someone from the BSO would show up and represent himself with a cigar box of that magnitude. He took it very personally that someone would not care enough to get a better instrument for the competition.

One of the lessons these experiences taught me was that if you have a fine instrument you can spare, you should lend it out. Later on, I lent my Landolfi viola to Cathy Basrak, who did very well in the Munich Competition on that viola [she in fact won first prize]. So, now that I have more than one instrument, I certainly try to lend them out as much as I can. It allows you to do something for someone who needs help. These instruments are very expensive and you can't just expect everybody to have one, you know? I've been told that 'you just can't play here on this lousy instrument', and I know what that feels like, and I can try to prevent that for a few people.

Joseph dePasquale – Burton said to me 'you should go study with Joe, and watch him play. Just watch him play, and imitate what he does as much as you can. There's a lot to learn from that. At this point you are at a place where you can emulate someone at the level, the finer points.' It was the best way to learn from Joe. You would go to lessons and play something for him, and he'd go "No, play it like this" and you'd do your best to do it the way he did. You have to have a lot of reserve to be able to do that. If you're set up well technically, you can learn a lot that way. Burton was able to

demonstrate incredible things in lessons, but the attitude from Joe during the demonstration was completely different – here is the way this is played, the only way. He really challenged you to play the way he played. He wanted a bigger sound, total virtuosity, to “wow” the audience. There was a “big stage presence” attitude to how you present yourself. Having worked with both Joe and Burton was great because the combination of their approaches really worked in developing my playing. I’m glad that I worked with them in the order that I did. Burton really laid a solid foundation upon which I could build other aspects of my playing with Joe. Interestingly, I was never able to play with the Philadelphia Orchestra when I was a student at Curtis because I was substituting with the Boston Symphony at that time. The few times I got a call from Philly I had to turn down the work because I was already committed to Boston. I think that was a bit of a sore point with Joe. So the first time I played with the Philadelphia Orchestra was as Principal Viola!

Minnesota Orchestra – During my second year at Curtis, I won the position with the Minnesota Orchestra. I was there just that one year. At the end of that year I auditioned for the BSO and was offered that position. It was one of Neville Marriner’s last two years with the Minnesota Orchestra. He was great, very nice, and very supportive of me. After a couple of months I was called into his office. I thought, “Oh my God, what is happening? I’ve lost my job, he’s going to fire me!” So I walked into his office, my first time in his office and it was very intimidating, and he says “Can I give you some advice?” I said certainly, and he said “Get out of here as quickly as you can. Listen to what I’m telling you, leave as soon as you can.” There’s so much luck involved in winning auditions that there was no

certainty that I would be able to leave, but as luck would have it I won the BSO job at the close of the season. I spent one year in the Minnesota Orchestra. Then I went to Boston.

Boston Symphony – It was like coming home; I knew the orchestra, I’d subbed with them for several years. I loved going to Tanglewood. I got to live in Boston, but not as a student, so I could afford a car and a stereo! The experience was great. They had a rotation system where the last chair player moved up whenever there was a vacancy, and so I sat with everyone in the section, including Burton on the first stand. I loved it, it was great. The years in Boston and the year in Minnesota were really invaluable for my first principal position in the National Symphony.

National Symphony – There started my experiences with Slava [Rostropovich]. Anybody who knows Slava knows he’s like a tornado, a force of nature. We played some concerts where it was absolutely like he was possessed. It was never refined, like the BSO under Haitink; it was making music in some of the most primitive ways, so brutal, complete devastation. Some of the Shostakovich symphonies we played, or Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet*—thinking about those performances raise goose bumps on me to this day. It was vintage Slava. It was power, a natural force that I never felt from a conductor before. At the same time, when I got to the orchestra, he had a very unfortunate relationship with the viola section. He described it as his “Achilles Heel” in the orchestra. He described it on many occasions as an embarrassment to the orchestra. The thing is, the viola section was a really good bunch of people. Slowly, it just got turned around, and people got to trusting each other a little more. Playing with someone else in the section was key. It

didn't matter who so long as you played with someone else in the section. It was to your benefit as well as to the section's benefit. After a few years it really turned around. I remember the first time Slava asked the first violin section to play something like the viola section, and the orchestra was just in complete disbelief. It really became a really wonderful section. People really put a lot of pride in the level of performance that they achieved. And Slava completely changed his opinion of the viola section, which was a great source of pride for us. We became an example of how to do things as a section. After several years in Washington, I had to make a decision -- is this where I want to spend the rest of my life, or do I want to explore some other options? There was a clumsy exchange with the personnel manager where I expressed my desire to never play a Pops concert again in my life, and he responded with "That choice is not yours to make." Ultimately, I decided that I did have a choice. And so I decided to leave the orchestra. Slava was leaving, I wasn't married, all my obligations came to paying rent and making a viola payment. Because of the competitions I'd done, I had some outside engagements, and I was doing a little teaching at both the University of Maryland and the Peabody Conservatory. I talked to my manager, and she felt that if there was ever a time to try, now was the time to do it. I talked to my dad, and he said at the very least I could come and live at home. That was comforting, having a place to go. So, I turned in a letter of resignation the next day, with a PS saying that I requested leave without pay for the remainder of the Pops concerts for that season. I think they thought it was an impulsive crazy thing by some kid, but then they realized that I was serious. At first some of my colleagues thought I was insane. Later, a lot of them said, "I wish I could do that." And so I did it, and I've

never looked back. Career-wise, it was one of the best things I ever did: leaving a good, secure position. So I was a free agent, for just a few years I hoped. And then came the phone call from the Philadelphia Orchestra, asking me if I'd audition for the principal viola position.

Philadelphia Orchestra -- I knew that if I went back into the orchestra business, it would be for a position like principal of the Philadelphia Orchestra. I wasn't sure if it would be open within my lifetime, since Joe [dePasquale] is so strong, and had many years ahead of him physically and as a player. The announcement came sooner than I'd expected. My first answer was thank you, but no thank you. And so I didn't take part in that first audition. They went ahead and had auditions, with many fine players, and they didn't choose anyone. A few months later I received another phone call. Would I agree to meet with Maestro Sawallisch to play some chamber music, sonatas, and talk a little bit? After the first audition, Sawallisch contacted Issac Stern to ask about people that he should contact about filling the chair, and that's how Sawallisch came to call me at that point. So we agreed on the condition that it was clear that I had no interest in the job. We met, and the Maestro is a very persuasive man, and it eventually led to me being offered the position. From the second that I met Sawallisch, I was blown away by him in every possible way: as a musician, as a person, and in any other way you can imagine. My admiration for him grew exponentially as I really got to know him. I'm completely impressed with his knowledge of all things with his music and his way of dealing with me, it was just a fantastic experience from the very beginning. For him and the orchestra to know that I wasn't really looking for a job, and that I had just left a similar job with the

NSO, made it so that my coming here was much more on my terms. I had things that I'd already agreed to do, teaching at Rice and Peabody, playing with the Trio; I'd worked so hard for those things and didn't want to give them up. It was a situation where, by the end of the meeting, we came to the understanding that if it were done in a certain way, it would be crazy for me to pass up this opportunity. When I played for the audition committee it was behind a screen; no one in the orchestra even knew that I was to be there, and I won the job.

Philadelphia Orchestra violas -- My attitude about playing or about the viola section -- and I think we've really achieved this here in Philadelphia -- is that you can have a real superstar section. Conductors come here to work with the orchestra, and they pretty unanimously say that the viola section is unequalled. It's a section with a lot of players who are very much in demand for high-profile outside events -- the Marlboro tour and the best festivals all around the world. It's a very active section in that respect, more than any of the other sections in the orchestra. Violists from this orchestra are going all over the globe playing and touring, and it's really great because it gives the section a special 'feel.' That really comes from the fact that it is made up of viola players who have this attitude that you will notice the viola section, the viola line. If you are going to hear the melody line all the time, and the bass line all the time, you're sure as hell going to hear the viola line too! We're not always going to hide in the background. We play just at the edge of "too much." It's what holds the string section together. If you don't hear the violas in an orchestra, there's a certain color that's missing. It's like with some of the great string quartets -- with the greatest quartet violists like Michael Tree or Larry Dutton you hear the viola all the time, you have to,

or there's actually something missing. That's what we try for with the viola section here in Philadelphia. Conductors seem to really appreciate it here. They might not specifically ask for it, but when they get it they don't seem to mind. There's definitely a certain leadership position that the viola section has taken in this orchestra, not just artistically, but in the way it functions. With rotations, for example, the depth of talent is such that anybody is able to sit anywhere, so we don't have any of the pettiness that "this is my chair" or "I won't sit behind so-and-so." They're all good enough to sit in the first stand, and they do! We get complaints from other sections about 'why is so-and-so sitting on the first stand?' Why shouldn't they? Should there be an artistic problem with them sitting on the first stand? There isn't, there just isn't. So, it's a great situation, and they make my job easy. I don't have to do anything!

Teaching -- I think that there's a responsibility to teach, to keep the art form alive. Somebody has to take over where you leave off, to take the ball and run with it. I was fortunate to have several good teachers, enough that I became aware of what is possible in teaching. The kind of influence that my teachers had on me is certainly a great thing, but it is also kind of a scary responsibility. If you don't watch yourself, you can really harm somebody in many ways. It's a big challenge and a big responsibility, while at the same time it's fantastic -- especially with the kids at Curtis, with the talent that they have. It is kind of amazing to get them to play better than they already do! It takes a certain commitment, but it's very exciting at the same time. It's not a job that you dread going to.

My first teaching job was actually when I was with the Boston Symphony, I taught for a couple of years at the Boston

Conservatory. When I joined the National Symphony, I was asked to teach at the University of Maryland, College Park. Some time later, when I played a performance of Harold in Italy with the NSO, a very nice lady and man came backstage after the concert. It turns out they were the Dean and Director of the Peabody Conservatory, and they asked me if I was interested in coming to look at the school and maybe do some teaching there part-time. So then, while I was in the NSO, I was teaching both at College Park and Peabody. In the second year after I had left the NSO, I got a call from one of the violin teachers at Rice University in Houston. They said that Rice was looking for a full-time viola teacher, a tenure-track position, and so on. Would I be interested in applying? A few months later I did a college interview, talked to the dean, the faculty, taught lessons, did a recital and chamber music coaching. They analyzed all that, and then offered me a position. Just a few months later, the call from Maestro Sawallisch came, and so I went to Rice knowing that I was only going to be there for one year. On top of that, I had a full teaching load at Peabody. It was a crazy time! Then, a few years ago, after joining the Philadelphia Orchestra, I started my teaching duties at the Curtis Institute. That's a relatively small load compared to other schools because of the small number of students.

When you teach, the most important thing is to get people to think for themselves. You get them to listen to themselves. Krasner said, "You have to teach people to teach themselves." Do you learn to trust your ear and your instinct? Do you know the difference between what you want to sound like and what you actually sound like, that comes directly from the "Burton" days - this, as well as how to get from Point A to Point B [to bring your performance to the

level that you want to sound like]. In some ways it's very easy, in some ways it's very difficult. You have to teach people to use a process of elimination, so that they can learn to trust how to work through problems. The idea of teaching is to get people to think, not to just play. It's not so hard to take the instrument out and just play at it for four hours a day, but are you really getting anything out of that time? You want to prepare them so that when they leave school and they're on their own, you don't want to have them say "Now what am I going to do?," "How am I going to choose a fingering?," because their teacher just said "Here's what I do, now just do it." Also, one size does not fit all; some people are more resilient, you can beat up on them more than others. Others, you must be very optimistic with them. The approach has to suit the temperament of the student.

Diaz Trio – the trio was something that my brother and I cooked up. I was in the BSO at the time, he was living in Boston, probably just out of school. It became a trio out of necessity – we didn't have time to rehearse the way you had to rehearse a string quartet. We thought we could do chamber music at a really high level, but without quite the commitment of time that a quartet would require. Also, what was appealing was that the basic mindset of the string trio is very different than the string quartet. The quartet is sort of an "all for one" frame of mind, whereas the trio is more suited to three, more individual players that play very well together. Also, the ability to turn it into a quartet with another instrument - piano, flute, guitar - had more possibilities without having to leave someone else out. The group sort of took off, for many years we played with our first violinist, a fine violinist from the BSO, Jenny Shames, and we did very well. Eventually, I left the BSO, and it really put a damper on things. The trio almost

ceased to be. Basically the group fell apart because I moved away. A few years later we revived the trio at the behest of Andrés' management, Herbert Barrett Management, because Issac Stern wanted us to play for the 100-year celebration of Carnegie Hall. The manager put us together with one of the violinists on their roster, Benny Kim. We did the one-time concert with him, and had a great time doing it. Unfortunately, someone in the management office told Benny that he'd ruin his solo career if he did chamber music, so he really expressed no interest in playing more concerts with the trio. Then, David Kim came into the picture, and we played with him for several years until decided to leave to further his solo career also. Around this time I'd played a chamber music concert with Andrés Cardenes [concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony], and we asked him if he had any interest in doing the trio. The fact that it was the *trés amigos* playing these concerts held some appeal, you know. So we asked him if doing the trio would hurt his solo aspirations; when he looked at us like we were from Mars, we knew we had our violinist. So, that's the group we have now. We have way too much fun, it should be illegal to get paid to have that much fun! We love it. It's not a full-time thing – we combine schedules from the two orchestras a year or so in advance and block out periods that all three of us are available, and we get as much to do as we're able to do. We probably spend about 4 to 5 weeks during the season together, then most of the summer. In the winter we do mainly concerts, in the summer we do various festivals. We do piano quartets with Angela Chang; we've done guitar quartets on tour in Canada with Norbert Kraft. I would say we spend a couple of months out of the year together, and we play as many concerts together as we can during that time. We do it for the fun of it, and at the same time we get

to play literature that people don't get to hear all the time. The Beethoven Trios are fantastic, the Hindemith Trios are incredible, as well as Schnittke and Schoenberg. People hear the quartets by these composers many times over, but not some of the trios. I mean, the Mozart Divertimento (K. 563) - what more can you say? Even though the literature is not so big as the quartet literature, we have enough repertoire to keep us busy for a long time. Gunther Schuller is writing a piece for us now. That will be great (and very challenging). Thomas Oboe Lee wrote a piece for us. We premiered a piece by Myra Rosenbaum. We're just in the production stages of a recording of a recital program we did at Curtis with producer George Blood, who does the recordings for the Philadelphia Orchestra broadcasts, and did the Druckman Concerto recording. The works on the program are the Irving Fine Trio, which is a really wonderful piece, the Dohnanyi Serenade, the Beethoven G major Op. 9/1, and the Penderecki Trio -- all great pieces. And we'd really like to find someone who is interested in a recording of the two Hindemith Trios, paired with the viola/cello duo.

Recitals – Recitals are a tough thing to keep going. It's not easy to program them, the last one I did almost killed me. It was at BYU for the opening of the Primrose Room at the BYU library, and was a program entirely of Primrose transcriptions. I wonder if Primrose ever played a whole recital of his transcriptions? It's quite a challenge! I must say, looking back on the experience, that even though looking forward to that recital was very frightening, it was a very rewarding and valuable experience, doing that kind of playing for two solid hours. Plus, the opportunity to play the viola on which Primrose performed and recorded many of these transcriptions makes the idea of doing the recital again and then recording

it very appealing. The viola has resurfaced after being in hiding for 40 or maybe even 50 years, and had a major restoration to put it into top shape; it is a great honor to use this instrument for however long it's meant to be with me. Not a single piece on the Primrose program had I done before I was asked to put the program together. A whole new program of "Primrose-related music" -- I should say that because there was one piece on the program that Primrose did not transcribe, but was instead written for him: the Bergsma Fantastic Variations on a Theme from Tristan. I love that piece. It was a really fun piece to put together, a really wonderful piece, that I also did at the Viola Congress in Seattle. I'm always on the lookout for new material to do, but for the most part, my programs lately have been made up of works that I've already known, in different combinations.

Concertos -- What I have been working on lately in terms of new works are concertos. I get to play a subscription series with the orchestra here every season, and it's my private little project to play premieres of works with the orchestra -- not necessarily world premieres, but works that haven't been played with the Philadelphia Orchestra before. I've come across so really great things that way: the Rozsa concerto, the Druckman concerto, for example. I'm very hopeful to do the Denisov concerto, which I worked on with the composer in Moscow before he died. I have been learning new things, including a very wonderful concerto by Schedrin. I've been learning a lot more new repertoire for viola and orchestra than viola and piano these days.

Next season I'll be fortunate enough to do the world premiere with the Pittsburgh Symphony of a piece co-commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony and the Philadelphia Orchestra, a double concerto

for violin and viola by Roberto Sierra, with Andrés Cardenes. It will be premiered with the Pittsburgh Symphony in the 2003-2004 season, and in the following season with the Philadelphia Orchestra. I've also gotten a new concerto for viola and cello by a friend of mine who is a really, really fine composer, David Teie, a cellist in the National Symphony. I like his music a lot because it's very accessible and it's very high energy, very lyrical and romantic. Audiences really respond to it well, it helps them with their fears about contemporary music that they've heard in the past and not liked. Pieces like the Denisov or the Rozsa have really made people realize that the viola can be a unique solo instrument, just as enjoyable as a violin concerto or piano concerto. People become fans of the viola that way. It's great to expose them to the standard works as well as some of the more unfamiliar pieces.

This season I'm going more to Europe to play, and it seems like audiences there are more used to having viola works with orchestra than they are here. In the States there are very few orchestras that have a viola soloist every season, and I'm very thankful that Maestro Sawallisch made it possible here in Philadelphia. I've also been fortunate to get very nice press for the concertos I've done here. One of the things that the press mentions is the variety of new music we do here, and how great it is, like *Der Schwanendreher*; that it was nice to hear a great orchestra perform the piece really well, with a conductor that really loves Hindemith. Eventually, with a lot of performing of these viola pieces, maybe we'll see more than one violist during a season with an orchestra like this, which would be a great thing. But from what I hear, in Europe it's much easier to get viola works performed with orchestra.

I think that there a lot of really good pieces that have been written relatively recently but aren't being played today. That's what has been my focus, rather than commissioning new works, though the Sierra commission is very exciting. Someday, I'd like to do a work that's commissioned for me, but I don't want to spend the orchestra's money, and a composer's time, to commission a work to be played here only once, and then never be heard again. At this point though, I think that I would have an easier time promoting a new piece in Europe rather than the United States. The main thing is making sure that the piece gets the exposure that it deserves. It doesn't really serve anyone to have a piece written, play it here in Philadelphia for 10,000 people, and then wait 15 years before it is played again. I've been having conversations with Riccardo Lorenze, a very good composer in Venezuela about a new concerto, and my manager has said on many occasions that having a Latin American connection would be good, which we have with the Sierra piece. Riccardo keeps threatening to write a viola concerto, and we've talked about what kind of a piece it would be, and what the style would be, so we can actually get repeat performances of it. Not that it must be a sellout, but that it has appeal to large audiences, much like the Schnittke concerto does. Not only is Bashmet playing the concerto all over the world, but every major viola player in the world wants to play the piece, and audiences want to hear it. It doesn't hurt to have somebody like Bashmet playing the concerto all over the world – pieces really need performers to promote them to audiences.

Schedule/Time – You certainly have to look at the year coming up as a whole and see what demands are on your time. I certainly don't have the luxury of saying that “this year I will play this concerto and this

concerto, and then this recital program, and you can choose from this small list,” I just have to take things as they come. You have to consider overall, how many concertos am I playing this year, how far apart are they, what is the orchestra's schedule, what am I doing with the trio, are there any new works? It's very hard to keep up with it all. Some years I think, how could I have said I'd do all of this? So, a new piece can affect how many other projects you take on, and even how many students you take in a given year. There's always the performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra, which is huge. Not only is it the Philadelphia Orchestra, but it's home. You want it to be absolutely your best. There's a lot more pressure than going somewhere else; there's always pressure, but at least you can always leave somewhere else. That's always the focal point, the Philadelphia Orchestra performance. You want to make sure that it's “bulletproof” when you walk on stage in front of your colleagues. It has to be bulletproof. There are so many considerations in every season. I can't imagine learning more than one brand new piece per year.

Family – Sometimes you think to yourself, when you're nervous about something coming up, it's really worrying you, and then you think to yourself “in the big scheme of things, how important is this in relation to other things in my life, like my daughter, Sofia, and my wife, Elissa? It doesn't mean that it doesn't matter, but your priorities get turned upside down by having a family. I don't mean that like music doesn't matter. It doesn't mean that you aren't as driven or as conscious about how you need to do things, or that you're lowering your standards, but it puts things in a hugely different perspective. You know that you can go home and someone is going to be waiting for you with a huge smile. If you don't have to worry about missing that

high note, it actually makes you nail it, and nail it with a little smile on your face. That's a great thing.

Charles Noble has been the Assistant Principal violist of the Oregon Symphony since 1995. He studied with Roberto Díaz at the Peabody Conservatory and the University of Maryland.

Rivinus and the Pellegrina

by Eric Chapman



A Pellegrina viola made in 1997 for Don Ehrlich, assistant principal violist of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra

If playing the violin is viewed as an art, playing the viola is perhaps more a state of mind—a mind that is generally quite open to innovation.

Creativity and innovation are practically synonymous with the work of David Rivinus, most noted for the development of his Pellegrina viola, a totally new concept in viola design. While the word “pellegrina” means pilgrim in Italian, this instrument is certainly not a pilgrimage to the high altar of classic Italian violin making. Rather, it is a new and alternative life style for the viola and violists. In many ways, the Pellegrina is

more than just an alternative. For some, who have sustained a wide range of injuries from playing the work of Rivinus has preserved and re-vitalized careers.

Rivinus’ path to the Pellegrina, like the instrument itself, has been anything but traditional. The son of a career diplomat, Rivinus was born in Turkey where his father served as a Consul General. The nomadic life of a diplomat, however, had its advantages. Rivinus developed important perspectives that accompany such cross-cultural exposure. He also became fluent in five languages.

When the Rivinus family settled in Indianapolis, David made the acquaintance of Thomas Smith, a violin maker trained in the Swiss tradition. Rivinus described him as a gifted violinist “without the nerves of steel” but with a sure hand when transforming wood into instruments. It was a good introduction to the world of violin making.

The most important training Rivinus received was at the shop of Hans Weisshaar in Los Angeles. Weisshaar, known to be a tough taskmaster, provided the grounding in techniques necessary for success in the violin world. Weisshaar was renowned for his ability to spot talent, as was Robert Kagan of Kagan & Gaines in Chicago. Kagan brought Weisshaar to America along with such other notables as Rene Morel, who trained many great restorers at Jacques Francais Violins, and Tschu Ho Lee, who has trained many outstanding violin-making students at the Chicago School of Violin Making for the past 25 years. Weisshaar, in turn, not only showed great insight in spotting talent, but became one of the great teachers of luthiers. Among the many whom Rivinus had as colleagues were David Burgess, Otto Schenk, Paul Siefried, Peter & Wendy Moes along with Joseph Grubaugh and Sigrin Seifert.

Following a four-year stint at Weisshaar’s fertile proving ground, Rivinus struck out on his own and formed a partnership with Thomas Metzler, a colleague from the Weisshaar shop. Given a passion for photography, Rivinus sold his partnership after 6 years and became one of a handful of specialists in the complex process of photographing string instruments. Increasingly, he found great demand for his photographic work, especially in the creation of certificates of authenticity. The passion for photography remains and

Rivinus has accepted the task of photographing all the winning instruments and bows at the Violin Society of America’s international competition in Portland, Oregon this November.

Traditions die hard in the music world in general, and the area of violinmaking clings to its own strongly. Many makers have become slaves in modeling their work after Gasparo da Salo or Stradivari, to the exclusion of other viable options. Dario D’Attili, one of the chief restorers at Rembert Wurlitzer in New York, once told his colleague, the great Ferdinand Sacconi that he was sorry Sacconi ever saw a Strad, as he felt much individuality had been lost. For Rivinus, individuality is key, but his work is always solidly grounded in the principles of acoustics and playability.

As with Joseph Curtin and the Evia, Rivinus placed a premium on weight reduction when designing the Pellegrina, or the “Pell” as it is fondly called by its adherents. With four-hour rehearsals qualifying as legitimate back breakers, he replaced the ebony fingerboard with synthetic phenolic resin veneers thus reducing the overall weight of the instrument by about 10%. Part of the volute was taken out of the scroll while the traditional willow and spruce for blocks and linings were replaced with ultra-light woods. Extra sound holes, which allow the instrument to vibrate more freely, also reduce weight.

The key design issue in the Pellegrina is the degree of supination—the angle to which the left elbow is forced to tuck under the instrument. The Pell reduces that angle by about five degrees, which in turn increases the comfort level and relieves the likelihood of muscle spasms, pinched nerves and other general aches and pain.

Many violists have become advocates of the Pell. The instrument's most visible proponent has been Don Ehrlich, the Assistant Principal violist of the San Francisco Symphony and Viola Professor at San Francisco Conservatory. Ehrlich's Pell was on constant public display for both audiences and shocked orchestra soloists who thought they might be hallucinating upon spotting such an unconventional instrument!

Ehrlich's path to the Pellegrina was quite classic—severe left elbow pain had become insistent and made playing difficult. What to do? Following a frustrating search for a smaller viola and an orchestra strike, he summoned his determination, and found his way to Rivinus. After some model refinements, Don had the second Pella and retreating tendonitis pain—something he ascribes to the maker's neck set design with its counterclockwise angle.

"Recently" writes Ehrlich, "a colleague asked me to help her with a bow buying decision. When it came to the time that I

tried her instrument with the bows, I found that the pain in the elbow began to re-establish itself, and after about three minutes I gave her the instrument back. I know that I cannot go back to a standard viola."

While the Pellegrina requires more player adjustments than a typical unfamiliar instrument, Erlich gladly made the accommodations necessary to allow his career to thrive once again. Now he and the Pell bask in the attention the instrument attracts.

The Pellegrina is not the only innovative instrument designed by Rivinus. There is a small viola named by the maker the "Riviola", much smaller than the Pell but also asymmetrical and ergonomically designed. He also offers a six string Riviola intended for use by jazz musicians, which has a range from the highest note of a violin to the F above open C on the cello.

Whatever your instrument of choice might be, call soon, as there is now a two-year waiting list for the delightful sound of the Pell!



A Riviola with paintings on the back and belly. Rivinus is frequently asked for custom artwork, anything from family portraits to the bouquet of daffodils shown here.

Book Review: Bartók's Viola Concerto: The Remarkable Story of His Swansong

**A New Book by
Donald Maurice**

**Bartók's Viola Concerto:
The Remarkable Story of His Swansong**

Reviewed by Dwight Pounds

Evanston, Illinois, 1993

Any fascination Donald Maurice might have had regarding Bartók's Viola Concerto was evident to American violists as early as 1993. A lecture at International Viola Congress XXI in Evanston, Illinois, by a relatively unknown New Zealand viola scholar and performer caught delegates' attention quickly. His topic, "New Light on the Bartók Concerto," centered on his prolonged personal efforts to obtain a usable copy of the composer's original sketches, his examination thereof, and his precedent-setting personal revision of Bartók's manuscript. All illustrations were projected on a screen and copyright restrictions, 75 years in the U.S. versus 50 in Australia and New Zealand, prevented distribution of printed material and permitted only recorded excerpts to be played. Delegates questioned Maurice at length, obviously intrigued both with his insights into the concerto and by his solutions to problematic points within the work that seemed better or were more satisfying than the version by Tibor Serly. All seemed aware that, 44 years after its premiere, critical examination of Serly's rendition and a new approach to Bartók's incomplete concerto were inevitable. In

addition to that of Maurice in 1993, Csaba Erdélyi had completed a revision of the concerto and had performed it in Budapest in 1992, and the composer's second son, Peter Bartók, in collaboration with Nelson Dellamaggiore, was also engaged in revising his father's concerto, later published in 1995.

Austin, Texas, 1997

*Four years later at International Viola Congress XXV Donald Maurice chaired a two-session discussion with six additional Bartók scholars, all of whom received prominence in his book. I suggest that this panel, consisting of a theorist, a musicologist, a viola historian, two revisionists, and the consultant to a third revisionist, was the most qualified ever to discuss the Bartók Viola Concerto or any other topic in the history of international viola congresses. In addition to Maurice, the panel included Elliott Antokoletz (University of Texas) and author of *Study of Tonality and Progression in Bartók's Music*; David Dalton (Brigham Young University), whose interviews with Tibor Serly and William Primrose were part of his 1970 doctoral thesis; Csaba Erdélyi (Bloomington, Indiana) who had completed his own revision of the viola concerto and performed it in Budapest in 1992; Malcolm Gillies (University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia), internationally recognized musicologist with a special interest in the life and music of Béla Bartók; and Paul Neubauer (New York), concert artist and consultant violist to Peter Bartók on his*

revision. Each of the scholars commented on the viola concerto at some length from their point of expertise before engaging in sometimes spirited discussion with the other participants. Donald Maurice prepared a 25-page transcript of the two sessions which is published in JAVS Vol. 14, No. 1, page 15.

Kronberg, Germany, 2003

At Kronberg and International Viola Congress XXXII Donald Maurice's name once again was linked with Béla Bartók, but the presentation was a preview of his new book, Bartók's Viola Concerto: The Remarkable Story of His Swansong. He discussed various aspects of the book and the subject, including the book's organization, the history of the concerto, the concerto's state at the composer's death, the involvement of Primrose and Serly, the three major revisions of the 1990s, and the important adaptations by Atar Arad of the original score. The listeners correctly sensed that a new major work regarding the viola had been unveiled in their presence. The gentleman from "down under" indeed had proved to be Bartók's most driven protagonist and his most eloquent human voice.

Donald Maurice: Bartók's Viola Concerto: The Remarkable Story of His Swansong. Oxford University Press, ISBN [0-19-515690-0](#), 2004, 222 pp.

In my opinion, Maurice's book on the Bartók Viola Concerto is the most important work pertaining to the viola since the 1998 release of The Anthology of British Viola Players compiled by John White. This book, in essence, is the synthesis of Donald Maurice's eighteen-year research on every meaningful aspect of the concerto he could identify. Persistent and sometimes nagging

questions never seem far from his mind. Whose work is this we hear under Béla Bartók's name that the author calls "enticingly incomplete?" Where is the border between Bartók's sketches and Tibor Serly's realization? Is it truly "Bartókian" in style? How faithful was Serly to the sketches? Did he take liberties and, if so, where and why? What input did William Primrose have on Serly's final score? Is a definitive version of the Bartók Viola Concerto possible and if so, will we be able to hear it...and when? The reader's challenge will be to expect no short, easy or uncomplicated answers.

The first five chapters are devoted to the genesis, reconstruction, reception, and structural aspects of the work. Chapters 1-4 will be intriguing to those readers who value historical progression. Chapter 5, "Some Aspects of Structure," is demanding but rewarding reading. Maurice discusses evidence of the Fibonacci series and golden section in Bartók's music and presents almost a measure by measure structural comparison of the Serly, Bartók-Dellamaggiore, Erdélyi, and Maurice original revisions. The next five chapters examine the issues that arise in the post-Serly era and feature Atar Arad's innovations concerning specific matters of interpretation and style and legal issues that confront future possibilities for the work. These are in addition to an almost superimposed view of the three major revisions. There were times during my reading, particularly in Chapters 5-7, that I longed for copies of full scores by Serly, the major revisionists and the Arad adaptations, and any number of fully indexed recordings to match Maurice's text measure by measure, phrase by phrase, movement by movement, revision by revision.

The author is careful to discuss the effects of cross-influence among the three revisions in his introduction and Chapter 6, “Revisions.” He establishes that Peter Bartók’s revision is free of cross influence and for purposes of this book treats his own 1993 revision strictly as a historical document. Maurice states that if the legal restrictions that prevent him from performing the work were lifted, his revision would “gladly undergo further refinement,” partly due to cross-influence and partly resulting from further research. Erdélyi likewise has revised his score twice, in 1996 and 2001, presumably for similar reasons. The author, commenting upon Erdélyi’s most recent revision, writes:

“In his quest for the definitive version, Erdélyi once again revised his work in preparation for a performance at the opening night concert of the Twenty-ninth International Viola Congress in Wellington, New Zealand, on April 8, 2001. ... This performance was in many aspects a historic occasion. It was the first time a performance of the Bartók Viola Concerto other than the Serly or Peter Bartók versions had ever been performed ‘legally.’”¹

To my thinking Chapter 7, “Authenticity,” is the heart of the book. In this regard Maurice writes early in the chapter:

“As Serly’s experiences had been only with completed works and Bartók was unlikely to have shown him early drafts of any other works, he may not even have been aware of how different an early and final draft of Bartók’s could be. Current scholarship suggests that orchestrating the sketches as they stand is inadequate to bring this work to the caliber of his other late works.”²

Further pursuing authenticity, the author compares the Viola Concerto to “a work of similar genre, the Second Violin Concerto,

with its various drafts available for scrutiny.” Applying a model developed by László Somfai based on Bartók’s late compositional procedures to the first movement of the Violin Concerto, Maurice draws implications for how the Viola Concerto probably would have evolved. He is not engaged in wistful thinking—Maurice is looking to the future and at the possibility of a definitive version of Bartók’s Viola Concerto. He hypothesizes that this is possible though dependent upon resolution of legal issues and additional scholarship. Returning for the moment to Somfai’s model: Maurice establishes that the Viola Concerto sketches lie somewhere between the first and second steps of a six- to eight-step process, thus “substantially incomplete” as Malcolm Gillis wrote in the editor’s preface. Had Bartók lived longer and utilized the approach identified by Somfai, the concerto would have been subject to addition or reordering of measures, possible increased rhythmic complexity, rebarring, indications for dynamics, phrasing, and tempi, and then orchestration. Close consultation with the artist also would have been integral to this process (i.e. Paul Neubauer to Peter Bartók and Nelson Dellamaggiore), an interaction which never occurred between Béla Bartók and William Primrose.

Since Maurice’s analysis is heavily dependent upon detailed assessment of Tibor Serly’s realization of Bartók’s sketches, any knowledgeable reader certainly will be interested to learn how the author treats Serly and William Primrose, the two people most responsible for the concerto as we know it.

Maurice writes of Tibor Serly:

“It is to Tibor Serly that credit must be given for bringing into the viola repertoire

Bartók's Viola Concerto, possibly the most performed and recorded work for solo viola and orchestra of all time. The task that faced Serly was immense, much more difficult than actually writing a new work, as he had to attempt to put himself inside the mind of another."³

Having made this acknowledgment, Serly's realization of the concerto—the standard against which the major revisionists measured themselves—is under near continuous scrutiny and Maurice is not hesitant to challenge any of Serly's procedures, decisions, or claims. Referring to the transposition of measures 114-33 in the third movement, he writes:

"Here Serly transposed the entire section up a semitone. This was inexcusable and surprising from a man who claimed to be so close to Bartók's compositional style. The interrelationships of key centers is crucial in Bartók's music, and this meddling in such a fundamental structural element makes this probably Serly's worst transgression."⁴

Notice the implication that there were other "transgressions." Primrose is treated more favorably though even he does not completely escape Maurice's watchful eye. Regarding the addition of m. 73 to the first movement he writes,

"...the late addition of this measure was strongly encouraged, if not actually suggested, by William Primrose."⁵

There is much more to discover about Bartók's Viola Concerto in Maurice's work than could be listed in several additional pages to this review, but a few tidbits will be mentioned to encourage curiosity. As you read the book, you will learn Primrose's opinion of his importance to the concerto. You will examine the mystery of the

thirteen-measure fragment, the missing sketch page, the viola concerto that almost was written for cello, the intriguing contribution and importance of Burton Fisch to the concerto, and the interesting added measures to all three movements by Serly and/or Primrose. The issue of added measures is of extreme importance since all three major revisionists elect to omit most of Serly's additions. The author writes:

"All three of the revisions have also taken the approach of staying as close as possible to the manuscript, in fact much more so than the Serly version."⁶

Conversely, Maurice admits that it could be argued that addition or reordering of measures was an observed procedure of Bartók's late style and thus identifies the paradoxical dilemma faced not only by Tibor Serly in his realization of the sketches but also by Csaba Erdélyi, Peter Bartók, himself and future scholars in their reconstructions: does one treat Béla Bartók's sketches as sacrosanct or does one use them as the basis for the free application of Somfai's, or another, model in the quest for a definitive version?

In conclusion I am going to be so presumptuous as to suggest the order in which the book should be read for maximum gain. I recommend you begin with Appendices One through Six (pp. 159-190), followed by the Dalton reviews with Tibor Serly (pp. 36-44) and William Primrose (pp. 64-68). Resume your reading with Appendix Seven and carefully examine Tibor Serly's "A Belated Account of the Reconstruction of a 20th Century Masterpiece" because Maurice will challenge many of these claims. After finishing the remaining three appendices, you will have done your homework and are ready to read the remarkable story of Bartók's swansong.

My fellow Indiana University alums will quickly note Maurice's references to the incorrect "University of Indiana," a forgivable and minor infraction since this New Zealander cannot be expected to be fully familiar with the idiosyncrasies of American university titles.

Notes:

1. Csaba Erdélyi's revisions of the Bartók Viola Concerto include the 1992 version performed in Budapest, another in 1996, and his 2001 version, performed in Wellington. See Maurice, p. 102.
2. Maurice, p. 119
3. Maurice, p. 45
4. Maurice, p. 109
5. Maurice, p. 60
6. Maurice, p. 119

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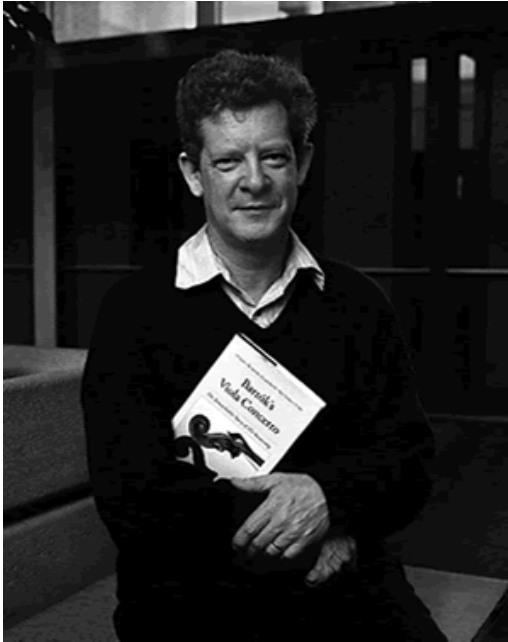
1. Conrad Bruderer: An Analysis of Bartók's Viola Concerto. JAVS Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 11
2. Peter Bartók: Commentary on the Revision of Béla Bartók's Viola Concerto. JAVS, Vol. 12, No.1, p. 11
3. Panel Discussion: The Bartók Viola Concerto. Transcript prepared by Donald Maurice, 1997 Viola Congress in Austin, Texas. JAVS Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 15

Dr. Donald Maurice, Associate Professor of Music, Conservatorium of Music, Massey University at Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand, currently serves as one of two Executive Secretaries with the International Viola Society, is holder of the IVS Silver Viola Clef, and is in frequent demand as a speaker and performer at viola congresses. He was host of International Viola Congress XXIX in Wellington.

Dr. Dwight Pounds is a frequent contributor to the JAVS as a writer and photographer and has served on the AVS Executive Board for over 25 years in various capacities. He was the third AVS Vice President, first IVS Executive Secretary, and is author of The American Viola Society: A History and Reference. He earned his doctorate from Indiana University where he studied viola with William Primrose and Irvin Ilmer. Dr. Pounds is Professor Emeritus from Western Kentucky University.

Interview with Donald Maurice

by Dwight Pounds



DP: It is my good fortune to have the opportunity to spend some time interviewing Dr. Donald Maurice, author of a recently released book, *Bartók's Viola Concerto: The Remarkable Story of his Swansong*, published by Oxford. I would like to begin by asking which preceded the other in your personal interest: Bartók the composer, or Béla Bartók's *Viola Concerto*?

DM: The interest in Bartók came through listening to the string quartets. I was seventeen and remember that I had never listened to any Bartók—I simply wasn't aware of his music—and a friend of mine said to me, "Well look, I'm going to sit you down and you're not going to get up until

we've heard all six string quartets." I actually listened to all six quartets straight which was a pretty shocking thing to do when you are thrown straight into that texture. There is no easy way to get you into that language—it was the "deep" end and I would say for the first hour I had no idea what was going on. It was like being dropped into a foreign language and not understanding a word. At the end of what must have been two-and-a-half or three hours, I almost felt as if I was speaking the language because it was so intense, in spite of everything.

DP: Did you listen to the quartets in order?

DM: Yes, all six, and then I just wanted to hear more Bartók and became a lover of Bartók's music from that point on. I was aware of the concerto and I listened to it but didn't study it at that point—in fact I delayed studying it for a very, very long time. I was always aware that there was some sort of issue about this work but didn't really understand what it was all about and there were other things I wanted to do. Three years later I went to England to study for four years at the Guildhall but I didn't study the work there. I went to Washington and studied with Don McInnes and again didn't study the work to play; I did, however, begin studying the work from a scholastic point of view. I thought this was the right time, and with reason: in 1978 I went to Banff and Primrose was at Banff that year. One day he announced that he was going to give a talk to all the students there on the Bartók Viola Concerto. I attended

that talk. I don't know what age Primrose was at that time but he must have been quite elderly already—I suppose he was 74 or so—and he approached the subject of performance practice. When you talk about 'performance practice' with regard to the Bartók/Serly Viola Concerto, you're really talking about "What did William Primrose do?" because he established what performance practice was with that piece. I think he believed he had a kind of ownership of the piece—it was his piece, he paid for it, so I think he believed he had more than an ownership, that he had an authority about how it should be played. He was sharing with us his ideas about how fast it should be performed and so on and suggested some changes from what was in the score. That puzzled me a bit because I wasn't sure by what authority one could change what was in the score. Just because you paid a fee for it, I don't think it necessarily gives that level of *carte blanche* authority. I wasn't sure it was because in his older age and wisdom he had found better ways to do things, but anyway, that was the trigger for me to delve into the work. I realized later that actually in some ways he did have some authority because there is so much that Bartók didn't give us that may have resulted if he had had a meeting with Primrose.

DP: This was not the presentation where Serly was present?

DM: No, I believe that was a few years earlier in the seventies. I was not present for that one.

DP: Do you know if a transcript was ever made of that presentation?

DM: Ralph Aldrich referred to it in his review of the book. He was present and would be the one to ask, but I really don't

know. It would be fascinating to read that transcript.

DP: Yes, it would, but you were not privy to this lecture in the course of your research?

DM: No, not at all...I didn't even know about it until Ralph mentioned that it had happened. But I did return to Seattle where I was studying and decided to study the concerto as part of my Masters Degree—the oral presentation, not a performance, and I wanted to re-analyze the piece historically and musically.

DP: Therefore your first in-depth analysis of the concerto was in preparation for your Masters?

DM: Yes.

DP: At this point I would like to move on to your association with Peter Bartók. I found it rather remarkable that, on the whole, Peter Bartók was very forthcoming during the preparation of the book, but I am sure he had his own concerns. Would you share some of those with us please?

DM: Of course he had an interest in what my book says because he has made the only official revision of the concerto available in North America and Europe. He had been working with Paul Neubauer to make a new performing edition based only on the manuscript, but I did manage to write him shortly after my Chicago presentation to explain what I was doing, that I wanted to turn my study into a PhD dissertation and would like some assistance from him documenting and confirming information, wanted to include parts or the whole of my revision in my thesis, and would he give his permission to do that. I wanted to discuss with him my decisions and he said to me—that would have been in 1993/94—that he

would prefer not to see what I had done because he did not want to be influenced by anybody else's decisions.

DP: You are referring to the cross influence discussed in such detail in your book and concurrently indicating his own level of integrity.

DM: Absolutely. He wanted his revision to be totally without cross influence, he said he wanted to deal with what he saw in the manuscript only, and that he would be very pleased, after he had finished his work and I had finished mine, that we compared notes, but that he didn't want to do that during the formative stage. That was really pretty interesting. However, that aside, he was very willing to share other information. I sent him many questions about family circumstances, other concerns and details, and he replied to everything, including information on some things I didn't think he might be willing to share but in fact he was. I think he wanted the story to be told.

DP: Would you comment on the Peter Bartók/Nelson Dellamaggiore/Paul Neubauer collaboration? How did each of these contribute to what has been called the "Peter Bartók" or "Paul Neubauer Revision?"

DM: I went to Peter Bartók's home in Florida; he actually was in Hungary at the time I visited but I did work for a full day with Nelson Dellamaggiore and we spent the whole day discussing this. My understanding of the process was that Paul approached Peter Bartók, saying that he was interested in doing the revision and Peter Bartók then involved Dellamaggiore, I guess you would say, to do the mechanical work and assist in the decision-making. Nelson Dellamaggiore's background is as a composer and arranger, and he works full

time for Bartók Records so it was his job to take the manuscript and turn it into a fair copy. So he did that: he actually went through and painstakingly transcribed the whole score exactly as it was on the manuscript and put it in an easily readable edition. He and Peter Bartók together worked out structurally where things should go and I think must have spent many, many hours making decisions. Peter Bartók was certainly involved in that process but I believe Nelson Dellamaggiore was doing the mechanical work. Nelson did share with me that they had made a log of what they did...it was a bar by bar decision making process, of which he actually gave me a copy. It is many, many pages long—I don't know how many pages—but absolutely detailed such things as why they decided to give this to the bassoon here etc. It was incredibly detailed—it was basically their thinking recorded in a log. He gave me a copy to take away which I've still got. I see that it has never been published and it's not part of the facsimile edition. It was for their private use, which is why I haven't quoted it at all, and was given to me to help me in my work.

DP: At what point did you begin to think that you had a book? At what point did you say to yourself, "I have the personal interest, curiosity, ambition, and motivation to do this."?

DM: It was at the point when I was near submission of my PhD, I suppose, (in the Ph.D. you are so absorbed in what you are doing, you can't think far beyond it) and I was thinking that this thesis will go to some examiners, it will come back, it will go out to the library and probably nobody will read it because it will be totally inaccessible. I couldn't make it accessible publicly because it had things in there for which Peter Bartók gave limited permission. He said I could

include my revision within the thesis but it had to remain in the library context and it could not be published in any form. So I thought, well...that's going to make things difficult for the library if anyone who wants to use it and learns they cannot because it is under library restriction. At that point I thought there were so many viola players that want to know the story—the only way is to actually take it back, start again, redraft it into a book form and include what I am allowed to include and leave out what I am not.

DP: Wouldn't you think that you also would have more than just a little bit of curiosity from Bartók scholars?

DM: Well, interestingly one of my Ph.D. supervisors was Malcolm Gillies who was one of the panelists in the discussion at the University of Texas during Congress XXV and Malcolm, of course, is one of the world authorities on Bartók; it was through Malcolm that I made contact with László Somfai in Budapest, head of the Bartók archives. I was invited to attend in Hungary—I think it was 1995 or 96—a big Bartók conference in Szombathely. Most of the significant Bartók scholars were there—Elliott Antokoletz, Somfai, Benjamin Suchoff, Sándor Kovács and others were presenting, so I had three full days of solid Bartók where the viola concerto wasn't even in the picture.

DP: Which leads very nicely into my next question: Budapest does not exactly enjoy convenient access from Wellington. How many places did your research take you during the course of your investigation?

DM: Well I was in Budapest on two different occasions, went twice to Banff to work with Zoltan Szekely, and went to Florida of course. There was a conference in

Switzerland which I attended with Csaba Erdélyi in which he was focusing on Bartók and asked if I would be there. I went to Australia a number of times to work with Malcolm Gillies—that's what comes to mind immediately—and I was in Bloomington to interview Atar Arad at the Bloomington Congress (1995). There have been a lot of other important encounters along the way and it's quite hard to remember them all, but these are the ones that come to mind.

DP: Write a Bartók book and see the world?

DM: Exactly...and there is a bit of a story I probably should tell you as you won't know to ask about it. In 1989 I was in Banff for three months attending the winter program. That's when I learned the Bartók Viola Concerto. It's an interesting story because I had always wondered if one had nothing else to do all day how much one could achieve. I decided to learn the Bartók concerto and to do it in twenty one days, going from not having any of it under the fingers to having it fully memorized. I actually learned the concerto working backwards. I learned the last page in one day until it was memorized and then went back a page—by day twenty one I had in fact memorized the complete concerto and performed it in a concert with a pianist.

DP: And this would have been the Tibor Serly version?

DM: Well, it was in the sense that we played from his music, but I had changed all the notes to agree with the manuscript. I already had a copy of the manuscript by then. It was at this point that I went to Zoltan Székely and informed him what I was doing. I wanted his comment on the changes I was making...and he was not happy with what I was doing. He said you can't do this and I

said but this is what the manuscript says. He said there is no manuscript and I said, well, here it is and gave it to him. He was totally shocked—I mean he just sort of said it was like he had received from his friend a letter that he didn't know existed. He then said, "I'm sorry—I cannot deal with this. Can you please leave this with me and come back in a week or two when I've had time to look at everything?" So I did. We went away and came back in two weeks and he said, "Now I want you to play again what you did." So I played it again and he was a completely different man. He was saying, "Yes, this is the right thing here and I don't know about this," but he had had time to absorb what he had seen on the page and had a totally different attitude. What he could say was, "For so many years I have taught this piece and now I realize that so much was wrong." It was really quite sad in a way.

DP: Since we have discussed Peter Bartók, tell us what you can about your association with Csaba Erdélyi, whose revision was performed at the Wellington Congress and which you hosted.

DM: Csaba and I didn't know one another in the early nineties. We became aware of each other and met at the Bloomington Congress (1995). I became aware that he had done a revision and he became aware that I had done a revision. We were both aware that we couldn't go anywhere with our revisions because of copyright restrictions, so rather than become competitors we decided I guess to discuss the decisions we had made. I said, "Well look—I'm not going to try to publish a revision but I am going to write a thesis and possibly a book." So I said, "Why don't you 'go for it' with your revision and I'll 'go for it' with a kind of scholarly account and we will keep each other informed on what we are doing?" That's what happened. Then when New Zealand was awarded the Viola

Congress in 2001, this was the obvious opportunity for Csaba to perform. I was well down the track with my book by then. He could perform in New Zealand where it was now legal to perform his own revision, so he performed and recorded with the New Zealand Symphony his own revision, the only country in the world left where you can actually do that. I say that because Australia apparently this year is going to change the ceiling this year to seventy five years and New Zealand will be the only country left with fifty.

DP: Therefore this would extend the copyright in Australia until 2024?

DM: Yes. So that's the relationship with Csaba. In the book I do compare his revision with the others but I haven't had back any response on his feelings about what I said about comparing the revisions...nothing at all at this point.

DP: Those of us who do academic research are well aware that there are surprises along the way and sometimes an encounter with our personal bias. Did you experience anything of this nature?

DM: I think at the beginning I had set out to try and find fault with Tibor Serly. That was a bias if you like because he had made some decisions with which I did not agree; therefore I was looking for things. But there wasn't any point, and of course I was made aware by the Bartók scholars that doing a literal 'translation,' if you like, of the manuscript into a performing edition, which is really what we all had done, actually doesn't give you an authentic Bartók work. You have to then take it to further stages, and of course Tibor Serly attempted to do that. And he is the one who probably has made the best attempts actually to try and transform a first sketch into a full work so I

ended up with quite a lot of respect for what he had done. Although on one hand I was criticizing some things, on the other hand I had to accept that actually he did take the initiative to try to develop it. We've all come along since and tried to be more "authentic," and we are being more authentic in that we are presenting the sketch literally. What we hear in these performances is a sketch which has been only minimally developed.

DP: In this regard, you know that I personally consider Chapter 7 on "Authenticity" the heart of the book. Given future research, more sophisticated techniques in this area, and perhaps a more comprehensive understanding of Bartók's mind, do you think we will ever have something that you refer to in the book as a possible authentic version?

DM: I think that what hasn't happened so far is we haven't had someone who is thoroughly inside Bartók's language to actually do this job. The Bartók Estate, Peter Bartók, or whoever there has the authority—hasn't actually given the authority to a thoroughly grounded composer for this task. So far we haven't had someone involved like György Kurtág, a Hungarian composer who is totally inside this language—this whole understanding of Hungarian folk idioms, the language itself—that's what hasn't happened and I think it would have to be someone with that kind of background who could transform the sketch into something that would really sound like a mature Bartók work.

DP: What did you find to be your most difficult challenge during the project—what was the most difficult piece of evidence to uncover? What comes to your mind that was particularly difficult?

DM: I think trying to figure out what happened between Bartók's death to the solo viola part there in the sketch and what actually came out of the Boosey & Hawkes edition of 1950—there was so much difference that the hard thing to actually crack was who did what. What did Tibor Serly do, what did Primrose do, what did Burton Fisch do?

DP: You mention Burton Fisch and his involvement with the concerto—this was the biggest surprise that I found in the book. Here was a name I had not read or heard in talking to people any number of times, but yet, considering that he played the concerto before Primrose received the manuscript, his reading must have been totally authentic compared to the changes that took place later in the construction.

DM: That is correct. As I have said, it was the only "uncontaminated" performance before Primrose. That is a loaded term, but I should say there was no cross influence—Burton Fisch was influenced only by Tibor Serly.

DP: And he (Fisch) used pizzicato passages later adopted by Atar Arad, though each appears to have reached the same conclusions independently.

DM: Yes, I would say so, but I would expect that Burton Fisch was instructed by Tibor Serly to play that passage pizzicato. That's what Tibor Serly thought it should be because it was like in the string quartets, and in fact you can't play four strings at once with the bow. So it is very likely that strummed pizzicato was Bartók's intention. My guess, which I think is probably accurate, is that Primrose decided that he did not want to do the pizzicato and that's where the arco came in. So that was a Primrose decision—to play that section arco.

DP: Let me close by asking about your next writing project. Do you have something in mind?

DM: Yes, I do. I'm right now working on getting permission from the Mitchell Library in Sidney to publish a diary of Alfred Hill. He has a diary that goes for four years while he was at Leipzig at the Conservatorium. It is a daily account of lessons, impressions, rehearsals and encounters as he sat in the orchestra; he writes about Brahms conducting one day, the next week it is Bruch, then it is Strauss, Tchaikovsky etc.. We hear an account of what these people were like in rehearsal at a time when they may not have yet become the "great" greats. They were of course already great but you know how another hundred years adds another level of greatness. At that time they were visiting teachers, just people. It is an interesting kind of an angle on these personalities and we all know their names—they all are in there because they all visited. It is an 18-20 year-old boy sitting in the orchestra describing his encounters in absolutely beautiful writing.

DP: That sounds fascinating, but I have to ask—are we discussing another eighteen years of your life in this project?

DM: Oh no. I am collaborating with the Mitchell Library and the proper authorities in Australia—we are very close, I believe, to getting the permission because they all want it to happen. We simply have to dot the "i's" and cross the "t's," and once that happens I want to flesh it out, this life in Leipzig. I will have to travel to Leipzig and do a bit of research on that. Then I think we will make a book, and give it a commentary, and read the diary through it, and I think it will be completely fascinating reading.

DP: Fascinating indeed and I am rather captivated already by what you and Alfred Hill have in store for us.

DM: I'm always looking for a new project to discuss but, in the meantime, I am busy enough being a viola player.

DP: We have been discussing the circumstances and challenges confronted by Donald Maurice in his effort over two decades to piece together the remarkable story of Bartók's swansong. While the viola concerto itself was "enticingly incomplete" as Donald described it, I strongly suspect the same could be said of the story behind it with its near legendary proportions...until now. Thank you, Donald, on behalf of all violists for your efforts on this book, and thank you for sharing your time with us today.

Dr. Dwight Pounds is a frequent contributor to the JAVS as a writer and photographer and has served on the AVS Executive Board for over 25 years in various capacities. He was the third AVS Vice President, first IVS Executive Secretary, and is author of The American Viola Society: A History and Reference. He earned his doctorate from Indiana University where he studied viola with William Primrose and Irvin Ilmer. Dr. Pounds is Professor Emeritus from Western Kentucky University.

2004 Congress in Pictures

Photos courtesy of Dwight Pounds



PIVA Dispay table, including a reproduction of Emanuel Vardi's "Homage to a Great Violist", which was silently auctioned to benefit the AVS.

The 32nd International Viola Congress, held June 9-13 this year on the University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis, was a great success. Over 300 registered attendees of all ages and experience were treated to great recitals, lectures, demonstrations, and more great recitals!

Below you will find the Congress program and selected scenes- look for the review article on the upcoming Fall issue of JAVS.

Attention attendees: did you take any digital photographs at the Congress that you think captured the spirit of the event? JAVS welcomes JPEG submissions to be considered for inclusion in the printed review article. Please paste into an email and send to the JAVS Editor Matthew Dane at mdane@ou.edu.



Host Chair Korey Konkol, left, is congratulated for his Herculean efforts by IVS President Ronald Schmidt.

Celebrating Minnesota Composers



Minnesota Orchestra Principal violist Thomas Turner and bassist colleague William Schrickel prepare to perform John Tartaglia's "Fantasia on Themes of Marin Marais."



Minnesota Orchestra violist Kenneth Freed after performing movements of Janika Vandervelde's "Clockwork Concerto." Freed also conducted several larger works throughout the Congress.



Minnesota Orchestra Assistant Principal violist Kerri Ryan with pianist Jason Alfred, following their performance of movements from Stephan Paulus' "Seven for the Flowers Near the River."

The Four Violas



The Four Violas "meet their maker" after the first of many excellent performances at the Congress (left to right, Charles Noble, Brian Quincey, Gabrielle Kundert, Joël Belgique, Mara Lise Gearman). Luthier Kundert built three of the four instruments played in the ensemble.



Juliet White-Smith tries out one of the many violas at the extensive Luthier exhibit hall.



Some IVS Board members take a short break in their meeting.



Myron Rosenblum delivers his fascinating lecture on 20th century violists who also played viola d'amore.

Viola with Orchestra



Sabina Thatcher performs John Harbison's viola concerto in Saturday's evening concert.

**Congress Review article to come in the
printed Fall issue of JAVS!**