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Association for the Promotion of Viola Performance and Research

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DAMAGING DECIBELS

by

BERNARD FLESHLER

I consider myself very fortunate that back in 1952 an army major convinced (ordered) me to switch from violin to viola. We had an interesting musical organization named the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra stationed at Patch Barracks near Stuttgart, West Germany. A rather endearing gentleman who resembled Santa Claus without a beard lent me quite a nice viola. I promised Herr Hamma that I would take good care of it. I've always been indebted to this most distinguished luthier for his trust. I honestly grew to love the viola despite its "cumbersome" size, the perplexing clef, the absence of an E string, and the addition of a rather sonorous C string.

The first few concerts were played in a state of great anxiety, but gradually the alto clef began to make some sense; and our conductor, the well-known composer Samuel Adler, was very understanding.

So began for me an adventure that apart from my family became of central importance and interest in my life.

Not that I am bitter, but I credit that army major of long ago for giving me a good case of tinnitus (ringing in the ears, hissing, gurgling and other such loathsome auditory manifestations). I now have a great feeling of empathy for Robert Schumann, and for all others who have made the futile pilgrimage from one otologist to another.

One must understand that the reward in playing the viola came not only from its unique and gorgeous sound, but from the almost erotic harmonic sensation of being an inner

voice. And then when we do get a tutti solo, and the section wails away, we have our cake and eat it too (waltzes notwithstanding).

Occupational Hazard

Playing in the viola section put me in front of the brass, and most of the time, the trumpets. I loved to hear the ethereal blasts of sound. It was a great feeling, sort of Sony Walkman, live.

Now after thirty-three years sitting in front of the brass my ears let me know it by hissing at me.

About seven or eight years ago during the tenure of Julius Rudel as conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic, the problem of NIHL (Noise Induced Hearing Loss) became an issue with our orchestra. At that time I was chairman of our Artistic Advisory Committee. The jurisdiction of this committee and the orchestra committee overlapped. But it was our committee that drew the attention of those sitting in front of the brass, percussion, piccolo, and even the Eb clarinet. In essence they said to us, "We're not going to take it anymore, do something!" We did, we sympathized, and we took them out for a cup of coffee. Out of this *Kaffeeklatsch* came some practical suggestions and a few ideas that had best be left unwritten.

It is a peculiarity of the 1970's and 1980's that "decibel sensitivity" became a vocal issue. People began to express their concern and to voice their opinions. Experts sat up and took notice. A new field for the otologists opened up, and for the most part, all these hearing doctors could do was to observe, study the problems, compile statistics and offer sympathy. At this writing most otologists do not have the proper equipment to measure the hearing loss of musicians. They cannot



That's enough, trumpets, we lost all the violas that time.

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measure those upper frequencies that constitute high-fidelity. How often has the frustrated musician argued with the doctor: "is the music sounds distorted!" and the doctors have replied; "But your tests are normal".

It is understandable with the larger and "harder" concert halls, Modern and Pop repertoires with an expanded percussion section, electronics, new concepts of forte, and with conductor and audience expectations of louder and still louder, that musicians are finally speaking up.

One day we did speak up and took our problem to Julius Rudel, who was most sympathetic and understanding, much more so than a conductor--now deceased--who for punishment would seat a string player in front of the percussion. (Oh, I do hope that Lionel Tertis is giving it to him now!) Our meeting resulted in plastic shields used as a baffle or buffer between brass and strings, and percussion and strings. The experiment was more or less successful if used in front of the percussion section. Their sound did not suffer, but the brass sound was muted, and so these baffles were removed. That left the violas with ear plugs for protection which is not always conducive to good ensemble playing. The thought occurred to me that attaching a curved baffle to the back of our chairs might help. What we are using in Buffalo now is a portable baffle that can and is used on run-outs. These baffles fit most chairs. Not everyone wants to use them, but for those of us who do, we feel they offer some protection from intense "sound pressure levels."

I would like to note that in an informal survey of the viola section, every member was very "decibel" conscious. Most used some sort of protection, either a baffle or ear plugs, and sometimes both. A significant

number has some hearing problem, from actual hearing loss, to heightened sensitivity to loud sounds including a fear of potential hearing loss.

At this point I would like to suggest as others have done, that a base-line study of every musician's hearing be done upon entering an orchestra. This is important should a musician want to file for compensation at a later time in his musical life. Also, I believe that every orchestra should have an acoustical study performed by a specialist regarding decibel levels.

The life of the musical artist should be free from unnecessary worry about his hearing. And yet there was Beethoven who did the impossible by showing us that the mind's ear can overcome great adversity.

Bernard Fleshler is a member of the Buffalo Philharmonic. He has developed the "Buffalo Baffle" or Acoustishield which can be ordered through NFVR Center, 100 Leroy Ave, Buffalo, NY 14214■

A MOST UNPLEASANT BREAK

by

Pamela Goldsmith

I broke my arm. My left arm. The arm with which I hold the viola. The viola is not only my craft and my means of earning a living, it is my life. When I broke my arm, I was afraid I wouldn't exist at all--if I weren't playing the viola, I was not alive.

The particulars of the incident itself are not very exciting. I was walking in the woods, where it was moist and



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slippery, and I fell. I landed on my left arm, causing an angulated fracture of the radius just above the wrist. That is the objective report. What I felt as I lay there on the ground is something else again. I could not move my fingers, my grotesquely gnarled hand, or my wrist. The fear was so all encompassing, I was momentarily nonfunctional. The pain was nauseating, but fear was the real problem. I knew instantly that it would be a long time, maybe never, before I would play the viola again. I walked out of the woods on my own power, reassuring everyone that I was all right, but in my mind I was already assessing the damage to my life and my career.

In the emergency room, the X-rays confirmed that I had, indeed, a most unpleasant break. The pictures in black and white were shocking enough, but when we pulled off my jacket and I saw for the first time what my arm actually looked like, I came close to hysteria. There was a big bend and drop in the ordinarily straight forearm, and the hand hung loosely, totally out of my control. Once the arm was set in the cast, all I could do was attempt to wiggle my fingers, which were, mercifully, left free from this nightmarish incarceration. The cast, a heavy plaster pressing on me from just below my fingers all the way to above my elbow, was an incredible trial.

Every pain I felt during this period, from the enormous throbbing to each minor twinge, became magnified because of my great interest in what was going on beneath the plaster curtain. Each new X-ray was threatening and wondrous at the same time. Imagine looking at a picture of the inside of your arm, and seeing a misshapen damaged bone. What I managed to accomplish during this time was to learn word processing on the computer and produce a written version of the

lecture-demonstration I had recently presented at the Violin Society Convention titled "The Transition to the Tourte Bow and its Effect on Bowing Articulation". I dared not think of the possibility that there might be no more opportunities to grapple with the problems of bowing articulation, or any other problem of viola playing, for that matter. I had been playing for thirty-eight years; I could not conceive doing anything else.

After six weeks, the cast came off, and the day I had looked forward to so greatly turned into yet another nightmare. As they peeled off my cocoon the pain hit I was even distracted from the appearance of the atrophied tissue. The arm, supported by the heavy plaster for so long, could not support itself, and the hand hung down, flopping in the air. I could barely walk out of the hospital.

The Reunion

At home, the anticipated reunion with the viola was delayed a few days, until I could lift the arm somewhat. Finally, I unpacked the instrument and put it under my chin. I lifted up the arm, and discovered that I could not rotate it enough to get any finger down on any string. I could not reach the fingerboard at all. I put the viola away and went back to bed. After some time had passed, in which I floated in a dream-like state of horror, it occurred to me that something must be done. With the tears rolling down my face, I went back to the viola and tried again. Expending enormous effort, I wrenched my arm around and succeeding in getting my first finger down on the A string. The pain was excruciating. I could hold the position for only a few seconds, and then dropped my arm. I tried again, lifting my finger above the string and putting it down to alternate between A and B. I could play two notes, slowly. Very

slowly. Everything I did with my left hand *had* to be done slowly. It was extremely weak and hurt all the time.

I could play my two notes for only a few repetitions at first. Gradually I increased the number of repetitions, then added the second, and then the third finger. The fourth finger was much more difficult. I was an absolute beginner. Eventually the D string loomed into view, and the rotation necessary seemed possible, if only momentarily. The correct word for the motion I was attempting is supination. I have learned this word well, and also its opposite, pronation. We use pronation of the right arm to add weight and power to the bow stroke--it is the turning of the hand down towards the floor and away from the body. Pronation of the left hand is still difficult for me, but supination, the turning of the hand *toward* the body, was the motion I needed to reach the fingerboard, and supination was next to impossible, or so it seemed.

I had no muscles. My pitiful arm and wrist were quite swollen, but as the swelling receded I saw how little of my formerly well-developed arm remained. What was prominent instead was a big bump where the break had occurred and another big bump on the outside of my wrist. I analyzed the pain: the muscles were screaming from being used after having been frozen for so long, the muscles and tendons were being stretched again after foreshortening, and the bones in the new position were pressing against each other. In retrospect, it was the weakness of the muscles which was my major problem. They just would not pull the hand around over the fingerboard, and exhaustion set in quickly. I could practice for only a few minutes at a time. I dared not think about how many hours I used to work in the recording industry, in any given day. As a free-lance musician, I

accepted the work when it was available, even if it meant occasional thirteen to sixteen hour days. In fact, it was those days that built my strength and gave me great endurance. Now all that was gone.

I left the viola out on the piano all day, and just kept returning. Getting down to the G and finally the C string was a major accomplishment in those first weeks. At first, I would lock my thumb over the neck and fingerboard and hang on for dear life. Any kind of chromatic alteration requiring lateral motion was extremely difficult, and the extension back of the first finger, which I had always relied on so heavily, came much later and with great effort.

I began to creep up the fingerboard: second position and then third position. One day, to my amazement, I found myself in fourth position on the A string. I also found that I could play for a few more minutes before the pain set in so strongly that I had to stop. Sometimes I would break down in tears, but I always went back later and tried again. I devised a warm-up exercise that was, at first, all I could manage to do. It was basically a trill preparation exercise on each finger, and then a patterning of the four fingers in different half step formulations. I was still a beginner, but my range was growing and my endurance improving.

I learned what it is to be compulsive. I went back again and again, trying to extend what I could do. I was *driven* to practice. My life depended on it.

Therapy

It was after about two weeks that the doctor sent me to occupational therapy. What we did there was stretch the wrist. Increasing 'range or motion' was the goal, since I was severely impaired in the pronation and



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supination motions and somewhat impaired in the up and down motions as well.

If anything, the severe stretching exacerbated the pain, but after about two weeks of daily stretching, I discovered something wonderful. My vibrato was coming back. Slow sustained playing was still my most difficult task, requiring the greatest strength and endurance, but the freeing of my wrist made the vibrato motion possible. I gained twenty degrees of motion in each direction during this period. I was starting to sound like a violinist again.

What did I practice? Everything I could find in the music cabinet. I was playing the viola at least four hours a day; when it hurt too much, I would stop and come back later. I don't remember when it occurred to me that I had made tremendous progress I was so involved in the process of relearning and the task so great, I had little perspective on what I was accomplishing.

Toward the end of the fifth week out of the cast, the pain changed from the demanding, shooting pains and muscle cramps to a deep ache. I was grateful. This meant I now could play longer at any given opportunity, I was able to increase my range on the C string, still my nemesis, and I could work on double stops at last. The more I was able to play, the stronger I got. The sound improved because the finger strength was gaining. I recorded myself and listened back with trepidation. Always my worst critic, I found the playing almost acceptable.

At the end of six weeks out of the cast, three months after I first broke my arm, I was ready to go back to work. I don't consider anything I did to be heroic. There are other string players I know who had much more to

overcome than I to be back in the field of battle.

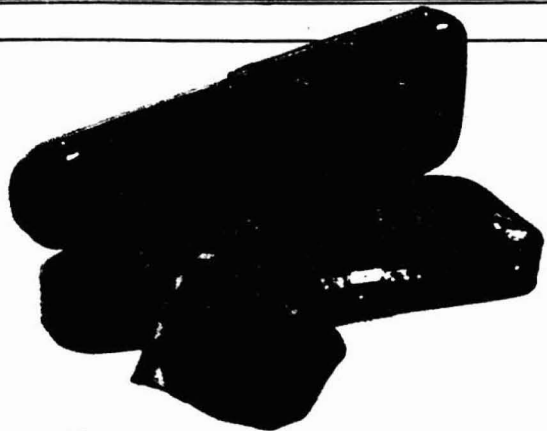
Warming Up

I learned a great deal from this experience. First, the importance of warming up. I will never again pull the viola out of the case and start playing. The exercises I devised, while not original, seem to be extremely helpful and I will probably begin each day with them for the rest of my life. It is also a good idea to do some large muscle movements such as general body stretching, shoulder and head rolls, and so forth, before one even approaches the viola. Because I was so stiff and sore, I found heat applied gently to my wrist and arm for five minutes before I began to practice to be of help, also. But apparently, heat must be used with care, because it draws fluids to the area, and if one is swollen, it can cause more swelling and hence less freedom of movement.

I had always thought that it was necessary to begin practicing with long, slow, sustained tones. But I found that this kind of viola playing is perhaps the most difficult, and requires the most strength and control. For me, it was impossible at first. It seemed better to begin with moving fingers, up and down on the fingerboard, gradually increasing speed. Three octave scales and arpeggios are a mainstay of our technical practice, but even these are quite athletic and should be preceded by more restrained motions.

I solidified some basic tenets or teaching, and found my concepts validated by my own experience. The most important is that practice must push at the edges of what is possible for the player, otherwise it is only maintenance. I am not discounting the value of maintenance practice for the professional it is absolutely imperative to counteract the effects of overwork,

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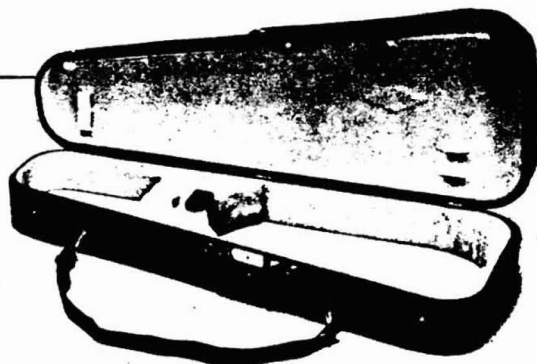


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underwork, and orchestral playing in general. But for students, *progressive practice* is the goal. Building all the time from what is possible to the next step, be it faster, higher, louder, softer, more sustained, more intense, etc., this is the way to progress. And measurable progress is the greatest motivator of all. Positive reinforcement is a powerful tool, and what you accomplish on the viola is your own personal victory; no one can do it for you, take the credit, or the blame.

Building physical prowess is not the only goal in progressive practice. Increasing mental awareness, gathering the information from the page of music faster and more accurately, is also a learned process. So is absorbing information from what you hear and correcting it instantly. Again, pushing at the edges, constant effort to do more, learn more, see more, hear more, and play more. It requires great energy to practice in this fashion, but the rewards are measurable. I can assure you that this is true.

I went back to work a few weeks ago. It is a pleasure to make music with my colleagues instead of solitary practice. I can feel myself gaining in strength each day. My latest purchase is a three-pound barbell, with which I exercise dutifully. Each of us can benefit from the development of muscular strength in the arms and hands. Viola playing is a very physical activity. And being a violist is a privilege to which I have happily returned.

Pamela Goldsmith studied at Mannes College of Music and received her DMA from Stanford University. She presently teaches at Cal State Northridge. As co-principal of the Cabillo Festival Orchestra. She gave the West Coast premiere of the Hans

Werner Henze Viola Concerto. She played electric viola with Frank Zappa, and was recipient of a "Most Valuable Player" award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Science.■

JAMES MILLINGTON

by

ROSEMARY GLYDE

Editor's Note: This is the third in a series of articles by the author on prominent violists and those who have had influence in our field.

"Only one violist. Only one violist on the island. And he just returned home to England." This was a surprising pronouncement from a gentlemen I was recently privileged to meet. We sat on the porch of an old sugar plantation farmhouse one morning in March of this year. The house was located in the parish (village) of Christ Church on the island of Barbados, the English protectorate in the southeast Caribbean. The old farmhouse had the Bajan-styled central stairway leading up to a wraparound porch lined by jalousies. Just inside I could see old portraits of a young violinist. Across from us was a grove of mahogany trees. The grove, owing to the trees' shallow roots, fell and wreaked havoc on the house in the hurricane of 1955, he explained. It was hot, the day was bright, bright sun. The gentleman's wife brought out a welcomed tray of sweet orangeades.

I was on that porch by way of a simple phone call to the Barbados Tourist Authority in New York after I learned I was to accompany my husband on a business trip to Barbados. The

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Mentally-Physically

by

LOUIS KIEVMAN

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Tourist Authority suggested I contact the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill on the island. There, the secretary--after being momentarily stymied when asked to give me the name of the local violist, or at the very least, the local viola teacher--said she would look into it. A week later, she had found the violinist teacher on the island, a retired teacher named James Millington. His daughter, Janice Millington Robertson, a violinist and pianist, joined us for the meeting.

James Millington is a man of eighty-four years who seems much younger. The story of his beginnings was told fervently and in great detail, as though it had all happened yesterday. Enthusiastic, he sometimes sang entire passages of a concerto to illustrate his point, gesticulating strongly with his bow arm. Alternately, he lay down on a chaise lounge to rest a chronically pinched nerve in his neck. This man had studied in New York, and had achieved the reputation of being the violinist and teacher on this island. How did it come about in this remote tropical region?

James Millington was born in Barbados, a true "Bajan". His uncle, who had no children of his own, took great interest in him and discovered that James had musical talent. The uncle had his own organ; James sang while the uncle played. The uncle gave him a mandolin in which James took great interest. Then he heard a violin. His uncle found one for him, and James began to teach himself at fourteen. Later his uncle insisted he go to college and sent him to America in the 1920's.

In New York

Arriving in New York, he first studied privately to prepare for the college entrance exam. The college, the Conservatory of Musical Arts in

Fort Washington Heights, failed him in the exam. He was 22 years old. James told them that he wanted their best teacher. "I want you," he said to Professor Farina. Farina answered, "But I don't want you. You're too old and your fingers are too thick. Where do you come from?" "Barbados." "Never heard of it." James then mentioned something he had read about Ysaÿe. Ysaÿe had to put on a broader fingerboard to accommodate his thick fingers. "That saved me. I was able to tell him this and that got him!" Millington told me triumphantly. "I was in!" The professor then asked him which violinist he wished to pattern himself after. James answered, "I would like to play like myself, but I do admire Kreisler. Heifetz plays fast, like a cyclone. Kreisler is just as fast, but he takes more time." He then added, "Give me one year. I'll pay you in advance, and if I don't come up to standard, I'll be out." The professor was wicked; everything he gave me was beyond me," but at the end of the year, he said, "You can go on." He just couldn't understand how the young Millington could memorize so very well.

Every year there were concerts given by the students outside the Conservatory. A young player, Andrietta, from New York and a wealthy boy, could play in a room by themselves but couldn't bear an audience. "But for me, the more people, the better I play. I played the DeBeriot Concerto No. 9 for my test and passed."

After graduation in 1930, he returned to Barbados to visit his mother and uncle, but "they didn't allow me to go back." Millington thought he would not be able to make a living in Barbados, but his uncle was convinced it was actually better for him to remain because Barbados would, he believed, provide a lucrative base for the sole string player. In addition, he could

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become a nationalist, creating opportunities for his nation.

He then met the British organist, Gerald Hudson, organist at the main cathedral on Barbados, a fellow of the Royal College of Organists, and "the best musician on the island." Wanting Millington to be introduced to the island, he arranged a concert for him at the cathedral. The cathedral was packed. After that concert, Millington never had an empty hall. He took on private pupils for nineteen years, playing student concerts and his won solo performances every year.

His daughter, Janice Millington Robertson, pointed out that on the island, a recitalist was expected to play for free. Therefore, when Millington was offered a teaching position at the Camembere School on the island, it was very inviting to him. He was asked to create a department to introduce the English exams of Oxford-Cambridge. The position offered him a fixed salary which was, or course, much more rewarding financially. But he had studied in the U.S. and as such, was unfamiliar with the English grading system. As the thought processes and syllabi were very different from the American and Barbadian, he had to devise a method to adapt the English to the island's needs. He evidently enjoyed much success in the position of his students at the school, all have passed and many received distinctions. A former pupil, Augustus Brathwaite, for example, went to Peabody and is presently in Georgia working on his doctorate.

Millington also founded a string group at the school that later became the Barbados Strings, and later, the Barbados Sinfonia. He directed this group for years, and until very recently, it was directed as well by his daughter, Janice.

Janice Millington Robertson

As I spoke to Janice, several facts brought us in almost immediate rapport. We are both the same age; we both have a small child; and we both studied the violin with our fathers in out-of-the-way places. Discussion of her violin studies with her father brought not an unexpected volley of laughs and concerned glances in regard to stubbornness on both their parts. He had wanted her to study medicine, but she ultimately chose music; the violin was her first instrument, the piano, her second. She is well known on the island, for in the short time I was visiting there, several people I spoke to knew her by reputation or had heard her in performance.

The governor from St. Kitt's had assisted her in obtaining a scholarship to study in England. He informed her father that, if the subject she was interested in was not obtainable at the island's university, she was eligible to receive the Commonwealth scholarship. There followed her years of study in London. There she found her mentor in Jean Harvey, herself a violinist and pianist.

Janice now teaches at Harrison College and is herself at a crossroads. She just played solo concerts in Guiana and finds that now is the time of her life to play. The question is whether to stay in Barbados or go overseas. "If I play at a national level, what kind of contribution can I make?"

On the subject of the viola, Janice feels that "the island needs to hear a good violist, in order to allow the viola to be a visible thing. Some people don't even know what a viola is!" There had indeed been only one violist on the island. His name was William Greasley, an Englishman who came from Kneller Hall, the English military academy for training musicians.

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Greasley conducted the military band and was a violist as well. He had recently retired back home to England.

I was about to ask Millington who was filling Greasley's shoes when my taxi arrived, honking, and I had to leave quickly to catch the boat. Otherwise, I could have easily spent hours with them and gotten my answer.

It was truly a memorable meeting listening to these dedicated musicians, true trailblazers on this remote island. Their life-long struggles have been and will be appreciated and enjoyed. I'm sure the Millingtons would welcome letters and inquiries: Maxwell, Main Road, Christ Church, Barbados. It was hard to leave them.

Rosemary Glyde received her doctorate of Musical Arts from the Juilliard School under Lillian Fuchs. She was violist in the Manhattan String Quartet and has appeared as soloist with the Houston Symphony and other orchestras. Ms. Glyde is the treasurer of the American Viola Society.■

TEACHING THE VIOLA IN FRANCE

by

OLIVIER SEUBE

Practically every city in France of more than 30,000 inhabitants has a school of music, managed and administered by the municipality government with the help of the regional council. All children who desire to study music, dance or dramatic art can enroll in these schools after having taken courses in a private

school, or private lessons, or by registering directly as beginners. Each region has a National Regional Conservatory which gathers the best students from the schools of music. Here students can study all instruments as well as solfege (required), sight reading (required), chamber music, orchestra, piano (secondary instrument), music history, musical analysis, acoustics, and eventually, a second instrument.

The professors teach sixteen hours a week and are paid full-time salaries. Often, they have an assistant who teaches the lower level courses. The lessons are private--although other students may attend--and the length of the courses varies depending on the conservatory. At Strasbourg, where I teach, I give a one-hour lesson to each student every week.

At each level, there is a corresponding age limit, (the course of study being very hierarchal). The duration of study at each level is set by each conservatory. Entrance examinations designate at which level the students will enter the program. A semi-annual examination monitors the student's progress.

Every school year starts in September and ends in June of the following year. The students are admitted from about the age of eight years. Violists usually play small violins which have been restrung, or they play small scale violas made at Mirencourt 1/4, 1/2, and 3/4 size. Beginning at the level of middle school, the students buy their own instruments, usually made in Strasbourg or Mirencourt, for approximately \$2,000.

The courses go up to the "course license" or the preparation to become a professor (twenty-eight years old). Most of the advanced students then go to the Superior National Conservatories of Music at Paris or Lyon to finish

their studies. Some students change from the study of the violin to the viola. This is rare, but they do have the choice, Violinists are actually encouraged to briefly study the viola in order to acquire a more resonant tone.

The study of music requires numerous sacrifices because it must be balanced with traditional school studies which are very demanding in France.

But for twenty years, each regional conservatory has offered the choice of studying on an adjusted schedule: at school in the morning and at the conservatory in the afternoon. This often yields the best results.

String teaching method used in France is very traditional, since all the professors are French and are taught the same approach in the National Conservatories, i.e., the Franco-Belgium technique which is akin to the Russian technique.

The use of foreign or contemporary music is rather limited although the professors are free to teach as they wish. There are also few exchanges with foreign conservatories. For these reasons, teaching has remained rather unchanged.

Fortunately, about ten years ago, an organization, Friends of the Viola, was formed in France presided over by Serge Collot, professor of Viola at the Conservatoire National Superieur de Musique in Paris. (cf. Secretaire address below*)

This association has greatly enriched the opportunities for the advancement of viola professors through contacts, meetings, concerts, trips to foreign countries, and a journal of informative articles, discussions, studies and works in collaboration with the makers of stringed instrument, composers and editors.

In fact, the goal of the French conservatory is to offer a very specialized musical ambience in order to produce professionals. Contemporary music is really just now beginning to make headway in our teaching. We would be very happy to receive recommendations of contemporary American viola works which could enrich us even more. I, in turn, list works of pedagogical interest for teaching contemporary French music.**

THE HISTORY OF THE VIOLA

By
Maurice W. Riley

The first book to deal with all aspects of the viola from ca. 1500 to the present. The instrument, its music, and outstanding violists are discussed and evaluated. The Foreword is by William Primrose. An appendix contains over 300 short biographies of outstanding violists. Over 400 pages of photographs, music, and text.

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Olivier Seube studied at the Paris Conservatory with Serge Collot and Bruno Pasquier. He was a violist with the Colonne Concert Association and has soloed with several French orchestras. He is an associate professor of music at the Strasbourg Conservatory.■

Editor's Note: The November, 1987 issue of the JOURNAL will not arrive at our subscribers' address until January, 1988.

A MUSICAL FEAST AT ANN ARBOR

by

Alexander Harper

It was a musical feast, indeed, for devotees of the *alto* and *Bratsche*, as some 200 violists assembled for the week of June 16-20, 1987, at Ann Arbor, Michigan. The American Viola Society and the School of Music of the University of Michigan co-hosted the XIV International Viola Congress, with Yizhak Schotten as host chairperson, assisted by his wife, Katherine Collier.

It was a feast for gourmands, with performances of seven concertos and five other viola works with orchestra, some twenty-eight chamber works and solos, eight works with composers present and five world premieres. It was a feast for gourmets in elegant performances by world-class artists. Two orchestras and a dozen skilled accompanists at piano, harp, harpsichord and--would you believe it?--gamelan ensemble provided settings for the viola works.

Yet the Viola Congress was not a mere performance marathon. Both the International Viola Society and its American chapter are committed to viola *research* as well. Frontiers of recent scholarship were shared by Franz Zeyringer on the emergence of bowed stringed instruments in Europe by the 7th century A.D. and of the viola da braccio family *before* that of the violin; by Maurice Riley on methods and materials for viola research; and by Ann Woodward in profiling the violist of the classical period.

David Dalton, AVS President, reported some progress in the Primrose recording-reissues. He presented a new

videotape which included the master violist performing Beethoven, Schubert and Paganini in 1946. Both Zeyringer and Dalton have forthcoming books on their topics. Riley is readying a revised, enlarged edition of his *The History of the Viola*.

Viola pedagogy received close attention in a lecture by Louis Kievman (practice pointers), in master classes by Emmanuel Vardi, Robert Vernon and Heidi Castleman, in a Suzuki Viola Workshop by Doris Preucil, and by mock orchestral auditions before a panel of Nathan Gordon, Patricia McCarty, Yizhak Schotten and Robert Vernon.

Makers of violas and bows were in attendance with examples of their craft for purchase or order, all coordinated by Eric Chapman, Joseph Curtin and Gregg Alf. A cacophony of violas undergoing simultaneous sampling could be heard at all times in the display rooms. Tokyo Quartet violist Kazuhide Isomura demonstrated instruments by nineteen attending makers, playing identical passages from Tchaikovsky, Brahms and Beethoven. Purveyors of music, recordings, videotapes, accessories and journals did brisk business.

Primrose Competition

First event was the Primrose Memorial Fund Scholarship Competition, with finalists Lynne Richburg, Carla-Maria Rodrigues and Paris Anastasiadis. First, second, and third place awards were in that order. (Henceforth, in this article, makers of instruments played are given in parentheses after violist's name and names of compositions are limited to awards or first performances.) Winner Lynne Richburg (Matsuda viola), pupil of Donald McInnes, played later with orchestra Alan Schulman's Theme and Variations as part of her award.

The congress was greatly enriched by the fine performances of the U.S. Air Force Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Lt. Dennis Layendecker. Unique for the Michigan setting was the National Arts Chamber Orchestra, and faculty of the University of Michigan in supporting chamber music roles on winds and keyboard.

The opening concert was presented by University of Michigan School of Music faculty, past and present: Patricia McCarty (J.N. Brugere), viola; Gamelan ensemble under March Benamou; Leslie Gunn, baritone; Donald McInnes, viola (Matsuda); Katherine Collier, piano; Fred Ormand, clarinet; Yizhak Schotten, viola (Brescian: Gasparo?); and Lynn Aspnes, harp, Geoffrey Applegate, principal 2nd violin of Detroit Symphony, replaced Camilla Wicks, violin. They performed works by Lou Harrison, C.M. Loeffler, Leslie Barrett, Bax and Rolla, with composer Barrett in attendance.

A recital by Patricia McCarty with Ellen Weckler, piano, included works by Alexandre Winkler, George Balch Wilson, Henri Busser and Tibor Serly, with composer Wilson present, and a first performance of the viola version of Serly's Sonata in *Modus Laviscus*. Violist Toby Appel (Heir. II Amati), with John Mohler, clarinet and Frances Renzi, piano, presented Romantic English works by Rebecca Clarke and Frank Bridge.

Works with Orchestra

With the Air Force symphony, Fred Ormand, clarinet, joined Schotten in Bruch's Double Concerto. Barbara Westphal (Gasparo) rendered Jean Francaix's *Rhapsody for Viola*, while William Preucil (Sgarbi) played Heinz-Werner Zimmermann's Concerto for Viola, containing jazz-motifs, with the composer present.

Kazuhide Isomura (Mariani) gave a

program of virtuoso unaccompanied music by Bach-Kodaly, Vieuxtemps, Fuchs and Reger. Chamber works by Hummel, Randall Thompson, Loeffler and P.D.Q. Bach were combined in a program by Appel, Westphal, Preucil, David Dalton (Peresson) and Suzanne Ostler, violists with Nina de Veritch, cello, Fred Ormand, clarinet, Katherine Collier, piano, and Penelope Crawford, harpsichord. In another recital Westphal and Collier played Martinu, Hindemith and the first performance of a Solo Suite by Maurice Wright.

The Air Force Symphony returned to accompany Robert Vernon (Knorr) in David Finko's concerto, Paul Swantek (the symphony principal) in Vanhal's Concerto in C, Patricia McCarty in Bax's *Phantasy on Irish Tunes*, and Donald McInnes with Endre Granat, violin, in the premiere of Maurice Gardner's Double Concerto.

With the National Arts Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Kevin McMahan, Susan Kier (Keller) played James Domine's concerto. Emanuel Vardi played Walter May's Concerto No. 1. Kathryn Plummer (Grancino) was heard in Alan Shulman's 1984 Variations with composers Schulman and May in attendance.

A final recital of viola duos by Emanuel Vardi and Lenore Weinstock (both Iizuka) ranged from Rolla to the Handel/Halvorsen Passacaglia, with the usual violin part taken by Vardi on the viola. Duos by Richard Lane and Seymour Barab were dedicated to these violists.

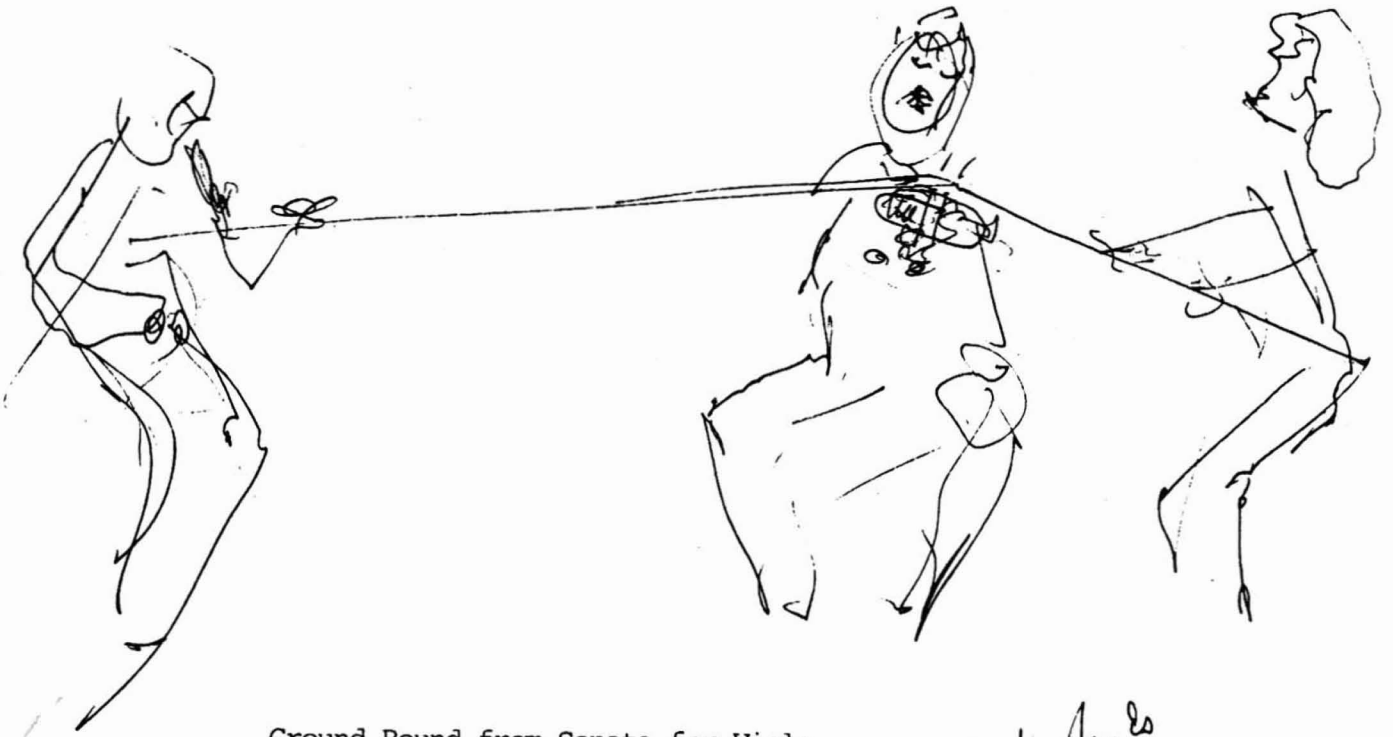
"Career Options" was the theme of a panel discussion by Nathan Gordon, Louis Kievman, Donald McInnes, Kathryn Plummer and William Preucil. Near the end McInnes quoted a leading artist-manager saying, "There's room for only one top-flight solo violist in the world." Quipped Nathan Gordon:

"And he's dead!"

The 1987 Congress opened with a banquet, at which citations for service were made to Maurice Riley, Francis Tursi, Ann Woodward and the U.S. Air Force Symphony Orchestra. The IVS presented its annual Silver Viola Clef to David Dalton. The Congress ended with separate meetings by the American and Canadian chapters in which lively discussion was heard regarding plans for the expansion of their organizations.

Violists will gather again at the next Congress which was announced for 16-20 June 1988 in Kassel, West Germany.

Alexander Harper has been principal violist of the Fox River Valley Symphony in Aurora, Illinois, for a decade, and a pupil of William Schoen



Ground Round from Sonata for Viola
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