

Journal of the American Viola Society

Volume 26 Summer 2010 Online Issue



Journal of the American Viola Society

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Summer 2010

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On the Cover:

Robert J. Lang *Violist, opus 437*

Robert J. Lang has been an avid student of origami for over forty years and is now recognized as one of the world's leading masters of the art, with over 500 designs catalogued and diagrammed. *Violist, opus 437* was composed in 2002 and is formed out of one uncut square of Korean hanji. For more information on the artist, please visit <http://www.langorigami.com/>

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FROM THE EDITOR



One day in the 1980s, while walking through the living room, a sight on the TV screen stopped me in my tracks: Shelly Long was playing what looked and sounded like a viola. As a young and enthusiastic violist, I settled in to watch the remainder of *The Money Pit* and thrilled at my first taste of the viola in popular culture. Nearly twenty-five years later, it is still a rarity to see the viola represented in popular media. Over the next two issues of the JAVS, we will highlight a sampling of mainstream portrayals of the viola.

The Summer issue specifically looks at the viola in literature. Violists have had diverse portrayals in literature including a lovestruck teenager in Robert Corbet's *Fifteen Love*, a concert violist trapped in an unhappy marriage in Elise Blackwell's *An*

Unfinished Score, and a half-demon sent to earth to torment humans in Vladimir Orlov's *Danilov the Violist* (his viola-playing is not how he tortures humans). Mysteries in particular have had their fair share of violists, and two of our feature articles look at musical detectives.

The first investigator, Sherlock Holmes, should be familiar to everyone. Less familiar is the idea that Holmes played the viola. While the stories all indicate that Holmes played the violin, Rolfe Boswell speculates that Holmes actually played the viola. This article, which was originally published in 1948, uses an almost Holesian method to deduce that the original texts are in error (we've all seen a misprint where the viola is erroneously referred to as a violin) and that the musical evidence points to the great detective's preference for the viola. The article is entertaining, thought-provoking, and a reminder of how viola research progressed during the twentieth century.

While Sherlock Holmes may not have been a violist, one detective certainly is: Joan Spencer. The subject of six mysteries by Sara Hoskinson Frommer, Joan plays viola in a local civic orchestra

while solving crimes on the side. Readers familiar with Frommer's work will enjoy getting to know the woman behind the mysteries in our exclusive interview. If you have not had the pleasure of reading one of her stories, I am sure you will be inspired to pick one up for yourself.

Retaining the popular theme, we also look at an instrument more associated with popular music than classical: the banjo. At the 2009 International Viola Congress in Stellenbosch, Paul Elwood premiered his new composition, *Capricious Apparitions*, for two violas and bowed banjo. Here, Paul discusses the inspiration behind the work and introduces us to the concept of bowing a banjo.

Lastly, we look at the recent Lionel Tertis Viola Competition, held every three to four years on the Isle of Man. The competition routinely attracts the best young violists, and this year's event was no exception. Louise Lansdown and Dwight Pounds detail both the competition and the accompanying events.

Cordially,

David M. Bynog
JAVS Editor

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Summer Greetings!

Many of you had the pleasure of attending the 38th International Viola Congress in Cincinnati. For those of you who were not so fortunate, you missed an absolutely fabulous event! Hosted by Catherine Carroll and Masao Kawasaki at the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, the event honored both the old and the new. Participants learned the ins and outs of being a quartet violist from some of America's most prominent quartet violists including two of the longest serving ones: Michael Tree and Samuel Rhodes. Violists of long-standing international stature performed side-by-side with the new generation of soloists including David Aaron Carpenter and Dimitri Murrath. Traditional master classes were presented by prominent teachers from around the world. *JAVS* Editor David Bynog and Cleveland Orchestra violist Lembi Veskimets presented a

lecture-recital on the music of two Cincinnati composers highlighting David's work on the AVS's American Viola Project. Please be sure to visit the AVS website to explore this project further and to download these pieces and more free of charge.

Mark your calendars and plan to attend the next North American viola congress to be held at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, from May 30–June 3, 2012. Co-hosts George Taylor, Carol Rodland, and Philip Ying look forward to welcoming you to the Flower City. Eastman will be sporting its newly renovated and expanded facilities, and the congress promises to be a memorable experience!

The next Primrose International Viola Competition will be held May 31–June 4, 2011, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Stay tuned to the AVS website at www.americanviolasociety.org for upcoming information and competition guidelines.

AVS chapter presidents: please be on the lookout for information regarding the AVS's application to the IRS for group exemption. Please verify that the AVS office has your primary contact's (president) name and e-mail address to ensure that you receive

the necessary forms and information. The group exemption application will be submitted this fall, so it is crucial that we have your contact information right away. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Charles Tucker of Korb Tucker PLLC Attorneys in Fort Collins, Colorado, for his pro bono efforts on our behalf.

I hope you enjoy this online issue of the *JAVS* in which we highlight the role the viola plays in American popular literature. Fittingly, I made mention of a recent publication by Lemony Snicket, author of the ever popular children's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, during my speech at the welcome ceremony at the recent viola congress. If you are not familiar with it, I highly recommend Snicket's *The Composer is Dead*. It comes with a compact disc recording of the book read by the author, complete with original music. It is an ideal addition to the private studio teacher's library, and adults will enjoy it as well.

Enjoy your summer, and I look forward to catching you up with more AVS news in the fall print issue of the *JAVS*.

Warmly,

Juliet White-Smith,
President

Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition and Workshop X

by Louise Lansdown and Dwight Pounds

Louise Lansdown writes:

The end of an extraordinary week in the history of the viola is drawing nigh, and a reflective glance at this unique and intimate event is called for. Picturesque Port Erin situated on the south coast of the Isle of Man is the perfect home for the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition with its very own Erin Arts Centre (EAC) as the main hub of activity throughout the event. Although the hall is small, the acoustic is warm with the newly completed bust of the late Lillian Tertis just below the competition emblem in the middle of the stage. Everything about this competition is

unusual—the place, the program, the selection process, the concurrently run workshop with master classes and virtuoso recitals, and the endearing team who manage this tightly run ship. Five of my viola students from the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and I took a ferry from Liverpool to Douglas on Saturday, March 20. We drove straight to our rental cottage in Port St. Mary, the neighboring town to Port Erin, and immediately drove into Port Erin to find the Erin Arts Centre, register for master classes, and join in the opening reception. A board displayed passport-sized photographs of the competitors from all over the world—just an indication of the immense task ahead for the



Erin Arts Centre stage and audience area (all photos courtesy of Dwight Pounds)

distinguished jury chaired by Christopher Yates, including Tatjana Masurenko (Russia), Simon Rowland-Jones (UK), Hartmut Rohde (Germany), Garfield Jackson (UK), Pierre-Henri Xuereb (France), and Su Zhen (China).

Sunday morning began with an energetic viola ensemble session led by Martin Outram followed by a master class with Su Zhen. Non-competitors were able to take advantage of daily master classes from members of the jury until the eight semi-finalists were announced on Wednesday, March 24, at which time competitors who were not progressing were permitted to play in these master classes. Simon Rowland-Jones and Huw Watkins gave the afternoon recital, which included works composed by both performers and finished with Shostakovich's epic viola sonata. A moving and beautifully constructed program! On Sunday evening we were given an enthralling recital of Russian music entitled "The White Nights—Viola Music from St. Petersburg" by Tatjana Masurenko and Anthony Hewitt. Works by Shostakovich, Glinka, Stravinsky, Glazunov, and finally Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* were played with integrity, imagination, and impeccable technical control throughout!

The first round of the competition began bright and early on Monday morning, March 22. This first round, which lasted two and a half days with fifty-two competitors, was closed to the public with just the jury in situ. In the meantime, we were all kept busy with the activities of the festival. Talks by Tully Potter on Watson Forbes and David Hume on "Taking care of your Bow" were

interspersed with more viola ensemble sessions.

On Monday evening we were treated to a fabulous collection of English viola sonatas performed by Martin Outram and Julian Rolton, featuring works by Jacob, Arnold, Delius, Berkeley, and Ireland. A mind-boggling collection performed with great aplomb!



David Hume, master restorer, luthier

Tuesday morning saw a fascinating session in instrument set-up and sound post adjustments with David Hume. Barbara Buntrock (a competitor from Germany) brought her fabulous Mariani viola with several niggles about sound and clarity, certainly testing David's skills in this public forum. Viola ensemble sessions continued valiantly, followed by an inspiring master class conducted by Martin Outram. He worked on the first movement of York Bowen's Sonata in C Minor with competitor

Benedicte Royer (France), Vitali's Chaconne with Rhiannon James (Royal Northern College of Music), and Brahms's Sonata in E-flat, op. 120, no. 1 with Lucy Nolan (Royal Northern College of Music). The afternoon session finished with a talk on Lionel Tertis delivered by Tully Potter.

Sarah-Jane Bradley (viola), Roger Steptoe (piano), and Adrienne Murray (mezzo soprano) delighted audiences with an eclectic selection of French and English music in the evening recital, with Brahms's op. 91 songs thrown in at the end for good measure.

Although I attended all events during the rest of the week, Dwight and I agreed that he would take over the reporting from Wednesday morning, March 24!

—Louise Lansdown



Sarah-Jane Bradley addresses the audience before her evening performance

Dwight Pounds writes:

John and Carol White. My first visit to the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition and Workshop almost did not happen. A dear friend of several decades, John White, had taken ill and would not attend the competition, thus dampening my enthusiasm for making the journey. John White is a living legend among violists: a former student of Watson Forbes, he played many years with the Alburni String Quartet. Following his performing career and several years teaching at the Royal Academy as viola professor, he was appointed Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music (FRAM). He is the consummate authority on Lionel Tertis, having written an acclaimed biography of the violist and served for years as advisor to the Tertis Competition. The International Viola Society acknowledged these contributions to the viola by presenting him with the IVS Silver Alto Clef for 2010, its most prestigious award. It seemed impossible to travel to Isle of Man knowing that John would not be present. However, when he informed me that surgery had proved quite successful and he had regained health and strength much sooner than anticipated, I quickly reconsidered. An invitation to visit him and his wife at their home in Old Harlow sealed my decision.

John and Carol White welcomed me into their home where it was my pleasure to share hours of their hospitality. This included the obligatory British cup of tea, a delightful lunch, a visit to the Harlow Arts Center, which served as the venue for the annual Harlow Viola Festival given by his students between 1990 and 2002, and

several hours of delightful conversation about the Tertis Competition and International Viola Congress XXVI, which John and Carol with Jimmy and Dawn Durrant hosted in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1998. Other topics included British works for viola, publishers, luthiers, his good friend Harry Danks, and his Tertis biography. Even as we were visiting, the postman delivered just-released copies of Kenneth Harding's *Moonlit Apples*, Harding's *Poem*, and William Alwyn's *Ballade*, three works for viola and piano edited by John for Comus Edition. It was my joy to receive signed copies of each. However, the highlight of the visit came when John said, "I rather imagine that you would enjoy seeing these," and placed in my hands bound copies of three Walton Viola Concerto scores, each signed and marked by Lionel Tertis and used in different performances. Each also contained an inscription from the composer: "For Lionel Tertis, with gratitude for everything he has done for this work, and his magnificent playing of it, from William Walton, February 6, 1931." It indeed was a marvelous experience, to say nothing of being a humbling moment. Tertis, when he retired, insured that the scores went to Harry Danks, and Danks likewise before he died insured that they were put directly in John's hands. Although we had enjoyed hours together, the time for this memorable visit nevertheless was far too short, though it alone had made my journey worthwhile—and the Isle of Man and Tertis Competition lay ahead.

The Lionel Tertis Viola Competition.

My initial visit to this historical celebration of the viola proved to be a rather intimidating experience. Firstly, while it is my practice to appear at an international event—whether congress or competition—at least one day early to acquaint myself with the local geography and examine the rooms for lighting balance, this was not possible on this visit because of travel arrangements and the visit with John White. Much of my time during the first evening and day on Isle of Man was spent groping my way through unfamiliar territory and incessant drizzle and rain. Once I found and became acquainted with the Erin Arts Centre, everything quickly fell into place. Dr. John Bethell, EAC Director, greeted me most cordially and provided me with a full packet and program and extra tickets reserved for close British friends. Although I had attended International Viola Congress XXVI in Glasgow in 1998 where many new friendships were made, I would deem myself fortunate to find three or four acquaintances at Isle of Man after a twelve-year hiatus, quite a change from North American viola congresses where dozens of friends can be encountered in short order. I needn't have been concerned since several people were present—Dr. Louise Lansdown, IVS Vice President and viola professor in Manchester; my friend Tully Potter, lecturer, music critic, and author of a soon-to-be-released book on Adolf Busch; and David Hume, master luthier.

While well acquainted with the international viola congress system and the American Viola Society (AVS)-sponsored Primrose

International Viola Competition, there was much to learn about the Tertis Competition, now in its thirtieth year. Firstly, it is an entity unto itself with its own organizational structure. Dr. John Bethell, MBE, serves as Director and Yuri Bashmet as Honorary President. The self-sufficient competition has no formal affiliation with the Welsh, English, or International Viola Societies, though the latter lists the Tertis Competition as a “Friend of the IVS.” Rather the competition is very well endowed, with substantial gifts to the Tertis Foundation over several years from Mrs. Lillian Tertis and other patrons and contributors too numerous to list. Mrs. Tertis, the great violist’s widow, died in 2009 in her ninety-fifth year. The Isle of Man Arts Council and the Tertis Foundation actively—even *aggressively* in a positive sense—support the competition. The fact that the Tertis Foundation contributed an impressive £15,000 (ca \$22,500) for the first three prizes (as is noted below) speaks for itself. Secondly, the competition enjoys many common traits with viola congresses, with recitals, lectures, master classes, group viola play-ins, and exhibits that complement the competition as the “workshop” portion of the celebration, but ultimately these are secondary and subservient to the competition itself. Dr. Bethell announced that, in the future, “workshop” would be replaced by “festival.” Thirdly, the eight-day schedule allows much more free time than viola congresses, with ample opportunity to visit with delegates, walk around Port Erin and its beautiful beaches, and tour the island. International congresses tend to be

shorter by two or three days and have their events tightly scheduled.

The Erin Arts Centre on Isle of Man itself is an interesting facility. To his great credit and foresight, John Bethell purchased with his own funds a lovely old stone building, the Victoria Square Wesleyan Church, for use as an auditorium; the remainder of the center and offices were added. The EAC hosts diverse artistic events during a given year or cycle of years, such as the Barbirolli International Oboe Festival and



Lillian Tertis, widow of Lionel Tertis and major contributor to the Tertis International Viola Competition Endowment taken during International Viola Congress XXVI, 1998, in Glasgow, Scotland.

Competition, to be held next in 2012, one similar in structure to the Tertis. However, the Victoria Square Wesleyan Church was not the home of a large congregation and thus the facility seats only some 150 people. The arrangement of the incredibly small stage included a six-foot piano, two hand-crafted and beautiful wooden music stands, and the Tertis Competition banner in the rear center, in front of which was placed an alabaster bust of Lillian Tertis. What the performing area lacked in space, it more than compensated in intimacy. At any time, depending upon placement of the piano, the soloists—had they wished and using their bows as pointers—could have touched someone sitting on the first row. While having the audience so close might have proved initially intimidating to some of the performers, most seemed to adjust to it quite well and actually appeared to have drawn strength from sympathetic listeners.

Good organizational skills proved as essential for Tertis Competition contestants as technical and musical abilities. Of 152 applicants from 31 countries, only the first 60 to submit a complete application package were selected, no doubt resulting in many disappointed would-be contestants. Following three days of preliminary hearings, eight semi-finalists were announced late Wednesday evening. The contestants retained the original “ballot order” assigned to them in the preliminary rounds and performed the closing recitals in the same order:

Ballot No. 7: Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt (age 21) United States

Ballot No. 9: Barbara Buntrock (age 28) Germany

Ballot No. 12: Veit Hertenstein (age 24) Germany

Ballot No. 15: Seungwon Lee (age 20) South Korea

Ballot No. 28: Adrien La Marca (age 21) France

Ballot No. 45: Benedikt Schneider (age 27) Germany

No. 49: Kyoungmin Park (age 19) South Korea

Ballot No. 52: Elias Goldstein (age 27) United States/Norway

Page thirty-three of the program listed eight spaces for the semi-finalists’ names and that of their accompanist with ample space for comments in order for the audience to choose their own favorites. Rather than second-guessing the judges, I was content to identify traits among these outstanding young people that particularly impressed me. Having judged competitions myself, the question foremost in my mind was whether the “curse of the first performer” would be a factor during this round.



Tertis X Group photo outside the Erin Arts Centre

Any concerns were quickly allayed—Melina Pajaro-van de Stadt performed with precision, skill, great confidence, and set an extremely high standard for the remainder of the field. Other personal favorites became evident as the evening progressed. Barbara Buntrock, whose Mariani arguably was the superior instrument performed in the semifinal round, coaxed a gorgeous, luxuriant, and dark-chocolaty sound from it that absolutely radiated throughout the small room.

Veit Hertenstein was at the “top of his game” in this performance, technically and musically exquisite, a consummate musician in my opinion. Benedikt Schneider

possessed such personal presence that he elicited audience excitement simply by taking his place on the stage. His *La Campanella* was the best to that point in the evening and one of the cleanest performances of the piece I have ever heard. Kyoungmin Park, the youngest of the semi-finalists, played with astounding ease and natural ability, equaling Schneider’s superb rendition of *La Campanella*. We have by no means heard the last from her. The second American, Elias Goldstein, combined his own impressive stage presence and beautiful interpretation with superb bow control to leave an indelible impression on the audience. Such reactions are highly subjective, of course, and each audience

member would have selected different contestants for different reasons, but those were mine—which is to take nothing from the fine musicians not mentioned. Each contestant was allowed forty minutes of performance time with a dinner interval built into the program following the fourth contestant. Later in the evening, Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, Veit Hertenstein, and Kyoungmin Park were announced as the finalists who would perform in the Saturday afternoon finals, the only event scheduled that day. I was rather proud of myself, having picked two of the three finalists, with the third firmly on my list of three additional potential finalists.

One of the finest recitals of the competition was that of four violists deemed by the judges to have missed the final eight “by a whisker,” to quote jury-chairman Christopher Yates. As non-finalists, their performance pressure had been significantly diminished, and they as a group seemed to replace this with a “how dare they not have selected me!” attitude. These outstanding violists included Viktor Batki (age 30) from Hungary, Benedicte Royer (age 23) from France, Sang Hyun Yong (age 21) from South Korea, and Yoshihiko Nakano (age 22) from America. The final three days also featured master classes conducted by Garfield Jackson, Pierre-Henri Xuereb, and Tatjana Masurenko; recitals by Xuereb and Hartmut Rohde; a lecture by jury chairman Yates; a forum; and a viola ensemble conducted by Sarah-Jane Bradley, who had been featured in the Tuesday-evening recital.

In the final round I was assigned a seat on the front row, meaning the soloists occasionally were closer to me physically than students in my own studio had been. They performed in the same order as the earlier round—Pajaro-van de Stadt, Hertenstein, and Park. This time it was Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt who was at the top of her abilities and who delivered an absolutely amazing performance. Her fingers hit the fingerboard with the precision of the proverbial Swiss watch; she was expressive, her intonation was perfect, and her bow control was such that even the slightest waver was beyond my ability to detect it. It was an improvement even over her impressive semi-final round. Hertenstein also performed in a superb fashion but had some noticeable problems at the close of the Walton Concerto’s first movement, and his tone at times seemed forced. Park again displayed an almost supernatural ease and confidence, but this performance seemed to lack the freedom and spontaneity of the previous round. Still, all three performances were superb, but such were the expectations of Tertis Competition finalists. This review would be woefully inadequate were not the battery of superb piano accompanists mentioned: Caroline Dowdle, Anthony Hewitt, Sophia Rahman, and a gentleman with the very violistic name of Tadashi Imai proved both prodigious and loving in their efforts to interpret accompaniments in the highest musical standards, and which were worthy of their charges’ talents, preparations, and aspirations. Mr. Imai confirmed that he had met Nobuko Imai but that no connection had been found between their two families.

Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt was selected as the winner of the tenth Tertis International Viola Competition. She was awarded the “Lillian Tertis Memorial Prize” of £7000 (ca. \$10,500) donated by the Tertis Foundation, a London recital at Wigmore Hall, and separate engagements with the Philharmonia Orchestra of London and the London Schubert Players. Kyoungmin Park in second place was given the “Ruth Fermoy Memorial Prize” of £5000 (ca. \$7500), also donated by the Tertis Foundation. In third place, Veit Hertenstein was awarded the “Artur Rubinstein Memorial Prize” of £3000 (ca. \$4500), again courtesy of the Tertis Foundation. An amazing eighteen special prizes—playing engagements, bows, and cash prizes ranging from £30 to £280—were distributed to semi-finalists and non-finalists

alike who had impressed the judges with their musicianship and personalities. Of these I would venture to say that Elias Goldstein was the unofficial fourth-place finisher, taking home a silver-mounted viola bow crafted by John Clutterbuck valued at £2000 (\$3000). The prizes were announced by John Bethell and presented by the Honorable Noel Cringle (the President of Tynwald) and Mrs. Cringle.

One additional comment: the competition work required of all competitors in Tertis X was a solo viola composition, Sonatine I, by British composer Roger Steptoe. I found it to be a beautiful, challenging, and cogent composition and one that surely will find its way to the New World via the American and other contestants who learned it.



From left to right: Christopher Yates (jury chair), Veit Hertenstein (third place), Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt (first place), Roger Steptoe (composer), Kyoungmin Park (second place), and John Bethell (Erin Arts Centre Director)

Were I a member of the AVS Primrose Competition Jury for 2011, I would obtain a copy of this work and familiarize myself with it sooner rather than later, because it shall be encountered at a major viola event in the near future.



Roger Steptoe, composer of the Tertis Competition's required work, Sonatine I

There it is, my first Tertis International Viola Competition and Workshop, nee "Festival," which now can be listed with some twenty-five viola congresses, several Primrose Competitions, workshops, and smaller viola venues I have attended, which are too numerous to mention. In all sincerity I would have to concede that the triennial Tertis Viola Competition arguably is the world's leading viola celebration by virtue of its endowment, leadership, reputation, having a permanent home, and its prize structure. This is not to imply that the American-sponsored Primrose Competition should be in competition with the Tertis, but rather that the two events

should complement one another, each serving to advance the cause of the viola, its literature, luthiers, its performers, and each preserving and advancing its rightful and distinguished place in the music of the world's peoples.

—Dwight Pounds

Dr. Louise Lansdown has been a full-time viola and chamber music tutor at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) since 2001 and holds part-time teaching positions at the University of Manchester and Junior RNCM. She currently serves as Vice-President of the International Viola Society and as President of the English Viola Society, an organization that she founded in 2007.

Dr. Dwight Pounds is past Executive Secretary of the International Viola Society, photographer of many violists, and frequent contributor to the Journal of the American Viola Society. He is also the author of The American Viola Society: A History and Reference and Viola for Violinists. Dwight has served on the AVS Board multiple times and has often appeared as a presenter at viola congress

Quick, Watson, the Fiddle

by Rolfe Boswell

[Editor's note: This article originally appeared in October 1948 in *The Baker Street Journal*. Reprinted with kind permission.]

SHERLOCK HOLMES was not a violinist, though the world has believed, according to Doyle, that he was. Perhaps some Baker Street Irregulars may regard such a dogmatic statement as unConanical, if not heretical, flouting of the time-hallowed rubric; it is not so intended. This writer merely proposes to emend what those contemporary spoofreaders, Amos & Andy, call "a typocryphal error."

This printer's boner crept into the first chapter, headed "Mr. Sherlock Holmes," of Dr. John H. Watson's original reminiscence, *A Study in Scarlet*, published in December, 1887. At the initial meeting of the master detective and his slightly obtuse Boswell, the following colloquy transpired:

"Do you include violin playing in your category of rows?" he asked anxiously.

"It depends on the player," I answered. "A well-played violin is a treat for the gods—a badly-played one—"

"Oh, that's all right," he cried, with a merry laugh.

It is in the ensuing chapter ("The Science of Deduction") of the same study that Watson, striving to deduce Holmes's odd vocation, lists the various traits of his fellow-lodger. The tenth point was "Plays the violin well."

After an intervening paragraph, Watson returned to this musical topic with:

"I see that I have alluded above to his powers upon the violin. These were very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*, and other favorites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music, or attempt any recognized air. Leaning back in his armchair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful."

Many musicians have made easy japes of that "fiddle ... thrown across his knee." The late Harvey Officer, composer of the *Baker Street Suite* for violin and piano, in five movements, commented in his "Sherlock Holmes and Music": "I defy any violinist to produce such chords.... They can only be played when the violin is held strongly in its accustomed position."

In his *Sherlock Holmes and Music* (Faber & Faber, Ltd.), Guy Warrack, an English musician, speculated that “when Holmes produced chords that were sometimes ‘sonorous and melancholy,’ sometimes ‘fantastic and cheerful,’ he was practising the *Chaconne*. [“*Chaconne à son gout*,” as Irving Kolodin’s clever calembour puts it.] On the other hand, most violinists find it difficult enough to make a convincing show of Bach’s solo-violin works even holding their instruments in a more orthodox way than thrown across their knees.” In choosing just such an unorthodox position for his fiddlestickery, Holmes himself pointed to the clue for posterity to use in deducing the nature of the instrument upon which he played. Surely it must be obvious by now that every reference to a “violin” in the preceding quotations is a typographical error?

Indeed, writers who deal in musical terminology often complain that printers and proofreaders appear to be unaware that the violin’s darkling congener is spelt “viola.” There, then, is the solution to the problem of the unorthodox fiddling position. Holmes played the viola!

In connection with another problem in Sherlockiana, Dorothy L. Sayers pointed out in her *Unpopular Opinions* that a certain conclusion was “patently absurd, and suggests the error of a not-too-intelligent compositor at work upon a crabbed manuscript. Watson was a doctor, and his writing was therefore illegible at the best of times.”

The doctor undoubtedly wrote “viola” in his scrawling screed, failed to proofread his *Study in Scarlet* himself, and, the word in error, “violin,” having appeared in print, his own stubborn pride prevented acknowledgment of what actually was a typographical mistake, and not a failure in his own personal observation to distinguish between violins and violas.

The very tones of Holmes’s instrument, alluded to in later chronicles of the celebrated detective’s exploits, proclaim that his music came from the tenor of the fiddle family. In one instance there was a “low, dreamy, melodious air,” in another “low melancholy wailings,” while on still another occasion “he droned away” on his instrument.

Grove’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Vol. V) calls the viola’s tone “of different quality from that of the violin; it is less powerful and brilliant, having a muffled character.... Everyone must have remarked the penetrating quality of its upper tones. Its tone is consequently so distinctive, and so arrests the attention of the listener.”

The good Dr. Watson and sundry bent characters who fell afoul of the Baker Street sleuth could testify as to the “clear, mellow tone, darker than a violin’s” which is noted as to the viola in another work of musical reference.”

What was Holmes doing when he was “leaning back in his armchair,” closing his eyes, and scraping “carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee”?

Grove's dictionary provides a leading clue—"when the instrument (viola) is built large enough to answer acoustically to its compass, that is, so as to produce the notes required of it as powerfully as the corresponding notes on the violin, it comes out too large for the average human being to play it fiddle-wise, and only fit to be played violoncello-wise between the knees. If, however, the Tenor is to be played like the violin, and no one has seriously proposed to play it otherwise [perhaps the Holmesian experiment was in jest only], it follows that its size must be limited by the length of the human arm [there is good internal evidence that Holmes's was longer than the average] when bent at an angle of about 120 degrees, but even the violin is already big enough! Though instruments have from time to time been made somewhat larger than usual, and that by eminent makers, such as Stradivari, players have never adopted them."

That leads directly into the question of Sherlock's Stradivarius. In *The Cardboard Box*, Watson related:

"We had a pleasant little meal together, during which Holmes would talk about nothing but violins, narrating with great exultation how he had purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas [\$2500 in 1885], at a Jew broker's in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings [\$13.75]. This led him to Paganini, and we sat for an hour over a bottle of claret while he told me anecdote after anecdote of that extraordinary man."

Mark well that sequence of names—Stradivari, followed by, Paganini. Why is Paganini coupled with a Stradivarian violin when it is a matter of record that the Italian virtuoso showed the fine values of a Guarnerius from the standpoint of sheer tonal beauty?

Mystery veils Guarneri's entire life, and his work virtually was lost to the world until Paganini, in 1820, discovered Joseph Guarneri del Gesù's violins. At Leghorn, Paganini had to part with his violin to pay a debt contracted at the gaming tables, but a Frenchman named Levron lent him a fine Guarnerius, and was so charmed by the Italian's playing upon it that he made him a present of that fine fiddle. Paganini willed that violin to the city of Genoa; it may be seen in the Municipal Building, where it is kept under glass.

Later, Pasini, a painter, gave Paganini a fine Stradivarius, but the Guarnerius remained his favorite.

Perhaps one anecdote anent "that extraordinary man" which Holmes related to Watson was that told by Hector Berlioz, in his memoirs, in recounting the story of the French composer's *Harold in Italy*, op. 16. After a Paris *Conservatoire* concert on 22 Dec. 1833, "a man with a long mane of hair, with piercing eyes, with a strange and haggard face, one possessed by genius, a colossus among giants, whom I had never seen and whose appearance moved me profoundly, was alone and waiting for me in the hall. He stopped me to press my hand, overwhelmed me with burning praise, which set fire to my heart and head: *it was Paganini!*"

“Some weeks later Paganini came to see me. ‘I have a marvelous viola,’ he said, ‘an admirable Stradivarius (dating from 1731), and I wish to play it in public. Will you write a solo piece for the viola? You are the only one I can trust for such a work.’”

Warrack’s *Sherlock Holmes and Music* puts the question of why the master detective, in Watson’s *Study in Scarlet*, “prattled away about Cremona fiddles and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati,” but did not mention the third great family of Cremonese luthiers—the Guarneri. Grove’s dictionary (Vol. IV) supplies the answer in the article on Antonio Stradivari:

“His violas bear a more distinctive stamp of his creative genius than do his violoncellos. The changes so apparent in his violins are quite as evident in these larger instruments. Before 1690 the influence of the Brescian school, and of the Amatis, still ruled the properties of his violas, but after that year he adopted a smaller model, and to this he mainly adhered.”

Sherlock’s Stradivarius, certainly, was a viola; and it may very well have been an unusually large viola, since he is shown to have been experimenting with an alternative position for playing it.

Warrack believes that Holmes, after his lucky purchase at the pawnshop, must have hailed a hansom-cab “for a dash to Messrs. Hill’s in Bond Street, where he learns that

his fiddle is a genuine Stradivarius, worth nearly two hundred times what he had paid for it.” There is some documented support for this belief:

At the beginning of Chapter III, “Stradivari’s Violas,” the three Hills of London, in their *Antonio Stradivari, His Life & work (1644–1737)*, a monumental and exhaustive study published in 1902, the year Holmes retired to beekeeping in Sussex, commented—“Stradivari made few violas. We are acquainted with only ten examples. In an old note-book in our possession there is a reference to one, dated 1695, *but we have failed to find its present owner.*”

Of course they couldn’t find him. Sherlock Holmes, detective by vocation and violist by avocation, covered his own tracks as well as trailed the long-cold spoors of the enemies of society. Even now he may be sitting in an armchair in the dwelling-room of hiscroft amid the Sussex Downs, leaning back, closing his eyes, and scraping carelessly at the viola across his knees. Sometimes the chords are sonorous and melancholy; occasionally they are fantastic, for the retired master sleuth is experimenting with the type of bow used by Corelli and Tartini, straight for nearly its entire length, curving downward at the point. Holmes has found, as Roman Totenberg did for the violin, that such a bow makes it possible to play three-note chords as a unit, rather than as arpeggios. The combination is at once sonorous, melancholy, and fantastic.

The Joan Spencer Mysteries:

A Violist Investigates

by David M. Bynog

In 1986, with the publication of *Murder in C Major*, Sara Hoskinson Frommer introduced readers to a new musical heroine: Joan Spencer. Since the success of the first book, five additional mystery novels in the series have followed, with a new volume currently in production. Set in the fictitious town of Oliver, Indiana (no relation to the actual town of Oliver, Indiana), the books follow Joan Spencer, who plays viola and serves as manager of the local civic symphony. After the death of a fellow orchestra member, Joan assists Detective Fred Lundquist in solving the crime. Joan and Fred team up over the course of the series for other crimes, and Joan's two children—her adult daughter, Rebecca, and her teenage son, Andrew, who lives with Joan—are frequent characters.

Like her protagonist, Frommer also plays viola (previously in the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra) and resides in Indiana. Frommer uses many of own experiences as background for her books including a love of quilting in *Buried in Quilts* and playing viola in Gilbert and Sullivan pit orchestras for *Murder & Sullivan*. While readers know Joan Spencer's story, we instead are focusing on the creator of the books:

DMB: Sara, tell us first about your background as a violist.

SHF: I actually began playing (if you don't count a few years of piano lessons) the cello. When the University of Hawaii Elementary School in Honolulu, where we lived from 1946–49, began offering orchestra to its sixth graders, the man who demonstrated the instruments did a fine job. But, like many little girls, I wanted to play the flute. When I told my parents, my dad (who probably couldn't afford a flute) told me to try holding my arms up to the side like that for five minutes. Of course I couldn't.



Sara Hoskinson Frommer, author of the Joan Spencer series

Then I remembered the cello. The man called it the lazy man's instrument because you played it sitting down. (He didn't mention that the whole orchestra sat down, of course.) So I asked to start on cello.

I played a school cello in that orchestra and later for a few months in Evansville, Indiana. Then we moved to Kewanee, Illinois. There was a good orchestra program going, but for the first time there was no school instrument available—they had eight cellists already. Only two violists, though, and I was begged to make the switch. We couldn't afford a cello, but we bought my first viola from the Sears, Roebuck catalog for \$35 including the case and the bow. Even in 1950, that was a good deal, and that viola wasn't bad.

The local band director, Mr. Bert, whose wife conducted the school orchestra, was really a violinist and violist who taught at Interlochen during the summer. I bartered for lessons with him and played viola in high school and the Kewanee Civic Orchestra once I was up to that level.

DMB: You ultimately decided not to pursue a full-time career as a musician, though you have had a fulfilling life as a violist.

SHF: When I went to Oberlin, I didn't attend the conservatory as a music student, where I would have been seriously outclassed, but the college, where I majored in German. For years, I put my fiddle aside. Then, when our first child turned out to be

musical, we were living in Bloomington, Indiana, and we started him on a tiny violin. It didn't take me long to wish I too was back with my instrument. I started viola lessons with his teacher, Donna Bricht, and by the time the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra (BSO) began, I risked joining its viola section. That was forty years ago. I played in the BSO most of those years, though I have finally given it up because of physical problems unrelated to music.

A note to music lovers is that Donna was also Joshua Bell's very first violin teacher before Mimi Zweig and Josef Gingold at Indiana University. Josh and I had back-to-back lessons when he was about four. I watched that little guy play "Twinkle, Twinkle" solidly and knew he had an ear but had no idea how good he'd turn out to be.

DMB: When did your writing career begin?

SHF: Do we count the stories I made up for my little sister when we were both small? Or the horse story I wrote in a notebook when I was eleven? My first paid writing job was as a newsletter editor in Ann Arbor when we spent a couple of years there. In the late 1970s, back in Indiana, I was hired as a half-time writer for an educational TV agency.

DMB: So, how did you start writing the Joan Spencer novels?

SHF: While writing for money and playing viola in the BSO for love, I was reading mysteries and mulling over the idea of writing one involving such an orchestra. I had an idea for a basic plot in which I'd kill off an oboe player (haven't all violists had that urge?) But after doing some research, I was stuck.

One day, my husband came home waving an issue of *Scientific American* with a picture of fugu, the Japanese puffer fish, on the cover. "I've found your poison!" he cried. "You can write your mystery." I read the article, and sure enough, he was right. So I did, and it became *Murder in C Major*, first published in 1986.

DMB: Your later mysteries have featured wide-ranging topics from quilts to Gilbert & Sullivan to The Indianapolis Violin Competition, among others.

SHF: After *Murder in C Major*, my plots varied, book by book. But the story had to make sense for my established characters to be involved in, especially Joan.

Death Climbs a Tree began quite differently. I had thought of dropping a victim out of the choir loft in a church, but was afraid that wouldn't be a long enough drop to do the job. Then I thought of the tree sits that had taken place outside of our town and decided to use that as the means of death. As for the weapon, I will avoid a spoiler, but instead say that I spent several summers in northern Michigan, where I learned about something

found nowhere else, and I used that in my southern Indiana woods.

DMB: Fans of the Joan Spencer mysteries can see some similarities between you and Joan. Is Joan based on you?

SHF: Joan Spencer is not me, but we certainly have some things in common. She plays viola about at the level I did. We both live in southern Indiana, but she lives in a little town with a small college, not this one with a big state university. People believe what they want to, no matter what I tell them, but that's the truth. Putting her in southern Indiana means that the plants and woods and weather match what I know well. Of course I use what I know, in addition to researching what I don't know.

DMB: Living in Bloomington must offer rewarding musical opportunities as well as ample fodder for musical mysteries.

SHF: Yes, one of the best times I had was doing the research for *The Vanishing Violinist*, in which Joan attends the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis. I wrote a brief feature article for our local newspaper, for which I was given a press pass to the whole event. After asking the Indianapolis host families of competitors questions for the paper, I told them I was writing a mystery too. Was there anything they wouldn't want to be quoted as

saying? You bet there was! And you bet I used it.

Also, years ago, I was thrilled when William Primrose joined the faculty of the Indiana University School of Music in our town. I finally heard him play in person, but I didn't understand why he was playing second viola in a string quintet (Mozart, I think). Only later did I learn about his increasing deafness. Years after that, we spent a year in Ann Arbor, and I attended the International Viola Congress nearby. Primrose was there, but didn't play. Instead, they played us a recording of one of his beautiful solos. Like Beethoven, he had to be turned around to see us applauding.

DMB: So what is next for Joan?

SHF: Work on my most recent novel was delayed owing to an injury. I eventually finished it, revised it, and sent it to my agent, who is working on a new publisher for it. I know what's next in the story, but for the publication we will all have to wait and see.

Joan Spencer Novels by Sara Hoskinson Frommer:

Murder in C Major (1986)

Buried in Quilts (1994)

Murder & Sullivan (1997)

The Vanishing Violinist (1999)

Witness in Bishop Hill (2002)

Death Climbs a Tree (2005)

Composing for Bowed Banjo and Two Violas

Programmatic Associations and Process Derived from Instrumental Color and Capabilities

by Paul Elwood

***Capricious Apparitions*, for two violas and bowed banjo by Paul Elwood**

(Commissioned by Juliet White-Smith, Professor of Viola, University of Northern Colorado, for premiere at the 2009 International Viola Congress with Timothy Deighton, Professor of Viola, Penn State)

In January of 2009 I was approached by Juliet White-Smith, a colleague at the University of Northern Colorado, to compose a piece for two violas to be premiered at the 2009 International Viola Congress in Stellenbosch, South Africa. I immediately thought of adding five-string banjo into the mix as I often compose for this, my instrument. It was also a great excuse to travel to a part of the world that I'd never seen to perform on the premiere. One of my very first compositions as an undergraduate was a two-movement composition for viola and banjo, but I hadn't written for the viola in such a prominent soloistic manner since.

Capricious Apparitions, scored for two violas and bowed five-string banjo, takes its title from Federico Fellini's film, *8½*. The title refers to surrealist images that the main character Guido Anselmi, a famous film director, played by Marcello Mastroianni, inserts into a film that he is making. The composition is in five short movements, each depicting a different "apparition" scene from

the film. While the piece has a programmatic design that follows the apparitional dream sequences in the film, I derived the colors used in the piece from sounds and techniques available on the bowed five-string banjo.

As a banjo player, my early roots are in bluegrass and Appalachian music (with many excursions into free improvisation and electronics). I exploit the rich tone colors that the instrument may produce in a variety of ways using a cello bow, an Ebow, guitar slides, paperclips inserted between the strings, etc. As a teenager in the 1970s I often attended the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas, held each September. The festival is a huge event featuring a diverse array of folk artists along with a variety of guitar, fiddle, and banjo competitions, among others. It was at one of these festivals that I heard the wonderful banjo player DMinor Bennett bowing a low-tuned, I think fretless, banjo with renowned Arkansas musician Washboard Leo. I'd never seen anyone bow the banjo before, and I still don't see many players bow it, though a few do now. After that, I began experimenting with the bow, going through a variety of awkward right hand positions over a period of two to three years before I hit upon holding it more like a viola da gamba player. And I figured out a few things the hard way instead of doing the obvious—asking a string player how to produce a good tone with the

bow. I learned to angle the bow a little into the string and I learned different tone-producing aspects of bow pressure on the strings. Natural harmonics speak beautifully on the bowed banjo, and the harmonic of an octave and a third, which speaks poorly when plucked, rings out when bowed. Even pronounced harmonic glissandi are possible. As we were rehearsing *Capricious Apparitions*, White-Smith suggested that I would produce better results with a cello bow, and she was right. The instrument has a flat bridge and fingerboard enabling the playing of bowed chords with no arpeggiation. This can sound at times a little like an Indian tambura. A device that may

be added to the tuning gears on the instrument, the Scruggs Keith Tuner, is constructed to enable a quick scordatura from one specific pitch to another without overshooting the target pitch and then can be returned accurately to the starting pitch. A limitation of the bowed banjo is that single melodic lines can only be played on the first, outside (D) string, but melodic bowing sounds a little like the Chinese *erhu* or the Indian *sarangi*. As I was composing *Capricious Apparitions*, these technical possibilities suggested the following complementary colors and orchestrational ideas in the viola writing (Table 1).

Table 1: Possible complementary colors and orchestrational ideas between viola and banjo

BANJO	VIOLA
bowed harmonics	bowed harmonics
scordatura	scordatura, glissandi
harmonic scordatura	harmonic glissandi
bowed melody	sul pont/sul tast (single line, no double stops)
“picked”	pizzicato

The entire composition is an arch form, the distinction of which is mostly evident if one compares the tempi, emotive moods, techniques, and colors of corresponding arch movements (I–III–V and II–IV). The arch-form consistency between movements I, III, and V lies in the rhythmic drive infused in each of these sections. The correspondence between II and IV lies in coloristic use of glissandi and harmonics, and there is some motivic correspondence between these sections.

Movement I: *Traffic* – The opening scene of the movie is a dream sequence in which the main character is trapped in a traffic jam. He seems relaxed until the car begins to fill with smoke and he can't escape. Suddenly he is floating out of the car, above the traffic, then high above a beach. Conveying a little of the frantic nature of being trapped in the car, I created a movement with a strong rhythmic drive and a motivic idea that, for me, is reminiscent of Bartók (ex.1).

Example 1. Elwood, Capricious Apparitions, movt. I, Traffic, mm. 7–11.

7 (♩ = 120)

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

9

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

Bjo.

The frenzy and nebulousness of a dream world is furthered by a short, polyrhythmic section that ends with a chromatic descent in harmonics (ex. 2).

Example 2. Elwood, Capricious Apparitions, movt. I, Traffic, mm. 34–47.

The musical score is divided into four systems, each containing three staves: Vla. 1, Vla. 2, and Bjo. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

System 1 (Measures 34–36):

- Vla. 1:** Measure 34 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 35 is marked *sul.pont.* and *p*, with a five-measure slur. Measure 36 is marked *f* and has a triplet of eighth notes.
- Vla. 2:** Measure 34 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 35 is marked *f* and has a five-measure slur. Measure 36 is marked *f* and has a triplet of eighth notes.
- Bjo.:** Measure 34 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 35 is marked *f* and has a five-measure slur. Measure 36 is marked *f* and has a triplet of eighth notes.

System 2 (Measures 37–39):

- Vla. 1:** Measure 37 has a five-measure slur. Measure 38 has a five-measure slur. Measure 39 has a five-measure slur.
- Vla. 2:** Measure 37 has a five-measure slur. Measure 38 has a five-measure slur. Measure 39 has a five-measure slur.
- Bjo.:** Measure 37 has a five-measure slur. Measure 38 has a five-measure slur. Measure 39 has a five-measure slur.

System 3 (Measures 40–42):

- Vla. 1:** Measure 40 has a five-measure slur. Measure 41 has a five-measure slur. Measure 42 has a five-measure slur.
- Vla. 2:** Measure 40 has a five-measure slur. Measure 41 has a five-measure slur. Measure 42 has a five-measure slur.
- Bjo.:** Measure 40 has a five-measure slur. Measure 41 has a five-measure slur. Measure 42 has a five-measure slur.

System 4 (Measures 43–47):

- Vla. 1:** Measure 43 is marked *normale*. Measure 44 is marked *normale*. Measure 45 is marked *sim.*. Measure 46 is marked *sim.*. Measure 47 is marked *sim.*.
- Vla. 2:** Measure 43 is marked *normale*. Measure 44 is marked *normale*. Measure 45 is marked *sim.*. Measure 46 is marked *sim.*. Measure 47 is marked *sim.*.
- Bjo.:** Measure 43 is marked *normale*. Measure 44 is marked *normale*. Measure 45 is marked *sim.*. Measure 46 is marked *sim.*. Measure 47 is marked *sim.*.

The violas, when playing tremolo in the example above, are *sul ponticello*, a timbral approximation of the bowed banjo. Throughout the piece I exploit a number of the coloristic possibilities of the viola, but, unlike the scoring for banjo, I didn't use new extended techniques. Having come of age as a composer in the 1970s and 80s, I often explored the extended sonic possibilities of the instruments for which I composed. As I grow older, I'm less interested in exploring those sonic regions as I believe that much interesting ground has been explored by a number of composers,

and I want to concentrate on the idiomatic tonal/harmonic possibilities of traditional instruments. However, that being said, the blend of timbral possibilities in the violas mixed with the unique sound of a bowed banjo yields interesting colors.

Rhythm and melody are the foci of the third movement, titled *Nino Rota* (ex. 3). Rota's music, for me, is sometimes the best part of Fellini's movies. His scores are often dance-like in nature, and I wanted to emulate the rhythmic consistency of a Rota composition while not actually appropriating his wonderful material.

[Example 3. Elwood, Capricious Apparitions, movt. III, Nino Rota, mm. 14–24.](#)

The musical score for Example 3, titled "Elwood, Capricious Apparitions, movt. III, Nino Rota, mm. 14–24," is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 14–16) features Viola 1 playing a tremolo pattern (p) and Viola 2 playing a melody (f). The second system (measures 17–18) continues the tremolo in Viola 1 and the melody in Viola 2. The third system (measures 19–24) introduces the Banjo (Bjo.) part, which plays a melody. The score includes a tempo marking of 112 (♩ = 112) and a key signature of one flat.

Example 4. Elwood, Capricious Apparitions, movt. V, Spaceship to the Inferno, mm. 24–30.

24 (♩ = 108)
arco

Vla. 1
p f p

Vla. 2
p f p

Bjo.
p f p

28
arco gl.
f f

The excerpt from the fifth movement, *Spaceship to the Inferno* (ex. 4), alludes to ideas from at least three other movements: the use of the tremolo from the first movement, the accompanimental rhythm found throughout the third movement, a descending/ascending line from the third movement, a restatement of the opening “Bartókian” motive from the first movement, and a short glissando alluding to the second movement. The scene in the movie that this section is evoking programmatically is at the very end, where all of the film’s characters join hands and dance in a circle on a raised platform around the semi-completed rocket in the film.

If the consistency between movements I, III, and V lies in the rhythmic drive, then the correspondence between II and IV lies in coloristic use of glissandi, harmonics, and chords. The second movement, *The Girl at the Spring*, depicts a scene in which Guido is at a health spa and imagines that a beautiful woman is giving him spring water. The movement opens with the banjo playing a single bowed tone that is then tuned upward on the sustain through scordatura. After establishing the harmonic tone on the banjo with the bow, the bow is released and the left hand bends the pitch of the string with the tuner. The violas then take up this gesture using harmonic glissandi. This technical capability on the banjo inspired the use of glissandi as a primary motivic idea in the second movement (ex. 5).

Example 5. Elwood, Capricious Apparitions, movt. II, The Girl at the Spring, mm. 1–14.

Capricious Apparitions
II. The Girl at the Spring

Set Scruggs/Keith tuner on D string for D and B, a minor third lower. Low D string should be tuned to C a step lower.

Banjo
♩ = 72 (return tuner to D)
p portamento w/Scruggs/Keith tuner
1.v.
gl.
1.v.
gl.

Vla. 1
6
p senza sordino
gl.

Vla. 2
p senza sordino
gl.

Bjo.
(return tuner to D)
p

Vla. 1
11
mp *pp*

Vla. 2

Bjo.

This glissando texture is then expanded to full chords, developed from the ability of the banjo to play full-chord glissandi (ex. 6).

Example 6. Elwood, Capricious Apparitions, movt. II, The Girl at the Spring, mm. 20–29.

The musical score is presented in three systems, each containing staves for Vla. 1, Vla. 2, and Bjo. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. Measure numbers 20, 23, and 26 are indicated at the start of their respective systems.

System 1 (Measures 20-22): All three instruments play full chords with glissandi. The Bjo part is marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. Slurs indicate the glissando movement across the chords.

System 2 (Measures 23-25): The texture continues with glissandi. The Bjo part includes a glissando marking (*gl.*) above the staff. The dynamics remain consistent.

System 3 (Measures 26-29): The final system shows the continuation of the glissando texture. The Bjo part features more complex chordal structures with glissandi. The notation includes various accidentals and slurs to indicate the specific glissando effects.

The movie *8 1/2* is an Italian film from the early 1960s. At that time an artist living in a Catholic society might wish to seek the imprimatur, or approval, from authorities of the church for a published work. There is a dream sequence in which Guido descends a staircase with many people into a steam bath and meets with a cardinal of the Catholic Church in an attempt to secure his imprimatur; paradoxically this seems to be a meeting in hell. I based the fourth movement on a juxtaposition of major chords separated by major thirds that I was able to produce with harmonics on the banjo (ex. 7). The resulting progression of major triads

(B–G–B–D) reminded me of the exquisite “God Music” portion of George Crumb’s string quartet *Black Angels* (1969). In Crumb’s composition the chord progression is performed with bowed wine glasses. In my movement, the banjo sets up a continuous cycle of glassy harmonics on the major chords while the violas state a short non-tonal melody. (This connection to Crumb led, in part, to a performance of the piece at the George Crumb Festival in Boulder, Colorado, with Juliet White-Smith and Erika Eckert, Associate Professor of Viola at the University of Colorado, Boulder.)

[*Example 7. Elwood, Capricious Apparitions, movt. IV, Steambath with the Cardinal, mm. 1–11.*](#)

Capricious Apparitions
IV: Steambath with the Cardinal

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-6) includes staves for Viola 1, Viola 2, and Banjo. Viola 1 has a melodic line starting on a whole note G4, marked 'norm.' and 'p'. Viola 2 has a similar melodic line starting on a whole note B3, also marked 'norm.' and 'p'. The Banjo part plays a sequence of major triads (B-G-B-D) with harmonics, marked 'p'. The second system (measures 7-11) includes staves for Vla. 1, Vla. 2, and Bjo. Vla. 1 has a melodic line starting on a whole note G4, marked 'norm.' and 'p'. Vla. 2 has a similar melodic line starting on a whole note B3, also marked 'norm.' and 'p'. The Bjo. part plays a continuous cycle of glassy harmonics on the major chords, marked 'p'.

Later in the movement, to evoke a religious atmosphere, the violas accompany the banjo, which is playing a short quote/paraphrase of the *Pange Lingua*, a Gregorian chant that I grew up singing in an Episcopal church boys' choir, and which was used by many Renaissance composers as the basis for mass settings (ex. 8).

Example 8. Elwood, *Capricious Apparitions*, movt. IV, Steambath with the Cardinal, mm. 24–28.

24 con sordino
Vln. 1 *pp*
con sordino
Vln. 2 *pp*
plaintive
Bjo. *p*

The overall form of the piece in five movements, with corresponding tempi and colors, may be diagrammed in the following manner (Table 2):

Table 2: Overall form of *Capricious Apparitions*.

I	II	III	IV	V
a. fast	a. slow	a. fast	a. slow	a. fast
b. rhythmic, driving, polyrhythmic	b. harmonics	b. rhythmic, driving	b. harmonics	b. rhythmic, driving
c. sul pont., tremolo	c. chordal	c. tremolo, pizz.	c. chordal textures	c. sul pont./trem./pizz (the only mvt. where the banjo is plucked, briefly)
d. melodic		d. melodic	d. melodic	



From left to right: Juliet White-Smith, Paul Elwood, and Tim Deighton premiere Capricious Apparitions at the 2009 International Viola Congress (photo courtesy of Dwight Pounds)

When one of my students at the University of Northern Colorado is beginning a composition, we sometimes talk about programmatic design because they often are thinking of something extramusical that they would like to express. And it can be helpful in the beginning stages of a composition to have a story to depict. I have written pieces based on proportions discerned in works of two-dimensional art and films, and I've used poetry, novels, and other music compositions as the starting point for my own work. But, in the final analysis, music is about music; sounds that may be organized around a structure that will give the listener a sense of an internal coherence between motives, phrases, colors, etc. In *Capricious Apparitions* the programmatic

idea was an important starting point to get my pencil moving, but it was the technical capabilities and limitations, timbres, and the overall sound world of the bowed banjo that guided the manner in which I wrote for the viola. Composers intrinsically possess a variety of starting points for their creations. A composer who is a good pianist might write pianistically, an organist like Messiaen produces chordal structures for winds or orchestras that sound as if they might have been realized originally on his instrument, and Hindemith—a violist—wrote much significant work for his instrument. A banjo player such as I thinks harmonically and melodically; as a composer I might think contrapuntally in some compositions, but the fact is that my performance medium leads

less to counterpoint and more to chords, colors, rhythm, and melody, especially if I am writing for this instrument with the limitations and advantages of melodic and chordal realization described above. The viola is a perfect blend for bowed banjo in terms of range as the banjo shares much of the same registration. The viola possesses a wide range of pronounced and rich colors that blend beautifully with the banjo, which made the pairing of these two timbres seem quite natural. I hope in the future to further explore these two sound worlds in combination.

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Sound clips for each musical example may be found at:

<http://americanviolasociety.org/resources/recordings/>

Paul Elwood is currently Assistant Professor of Composition at the University of Northern Colorado. His music often incorporates his background as a folk musician and experimentalist on the five-string banjo with that of his voice as a composer who loves the processes and syntax of contemporary writing. Elwood studied percussion with J. C. Combs and composition with Donald Erb, David Felder, Walter Mays, Arthur S. Wolff, Charles Wuorinen, Peter Maxwell Davies, and Gunther Schuller.