

Journal of the American Viola Society

Volume 21 Summer 2005 Online Issue



VIOLIST oder BRATSCHIST.

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

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An Interview with Thomas Tatton

by Dwight Pounds



L-R: Neil Shepherd, IVS President Michael Vidulich, and Tom Tatton on the “Golden Circle” bus tour at the Iceland Congress, June 2005.

Unit 1. Teachers

DP: I have the honor of visiting with Thomas Tatton, fifth President of the American Viola Society, an acknowledged expert on the subject of music for multiple violas, a writer, and a public school strings teacher/orchestra director and leader known to his students simply and affectionately as “Dr. Tom.” Tom, I would like to begin this interview by asking what drew you to the viola, who was your most inspirational teacher, and what special gift did you receive from this individual?

TT: Dwight, I was a violinist through my formative school years. I didn't win any major competitions but I became a fairly proficient player. After a stint in the navy I enrolled at California State University Northridge (CSUN) as a music major. CSUN owned an excellent but rather large Spanish viola. The String Department made

me an offer I could not refuse; they provide the instrument and the lessons, and I play viola in the university orchestra. I fell in love with the instrument—it had (and trust it still has) a rich, velvet purple C-string and a crystal clear upper register—a magnificent rainbow of color across its range. I never looked back!

DP: Let's mention some names at this point. Was your “most inspirational teacher” early or late in your musical experience? Pre—post-university, or for that matter even graduate school?

TT: That's hard to pin down and I can't offer a definitive answer. Perhaps it was my first public school (Beethoven Elementary School, no really) violin teacher, Miss Teager. She piqued my over-anxious curiosity that began this journey. Maybe it was Peter Meremblum, my youth orchestra director. As a freckled-faced ten year old, I was placed last chair, second violin. I remember our first concert; I was seated partially behind a curtain. I don't think anybody could see me, and it certainly didn't matter to me. I played every note I could the very best I could. I played several years in that orchestra. When he passed away he left my ex-wife and me his 1932 Steinway baby grand piano. It sits in my living room today. Oh, by the way, I did move up from last chair, second violin...over the years.

Perhaps it was my high school orchestra teacher, Mr. Paney, who was infectious in his love of music. We played a stunning performance (or at least that's what I

remember) of The Merry Wives of Windsor overture. Maybe it was Mr. Shaffer, my first private violin teacher. At one lesson, hearing me totally misunderstand Massenet's Meditation, he asked, "Tommy, do you have a girlfriend?" At 13, because I had not yet discovered girls, my reply was "No sir!" He immediately gave me the Bach A Minor Concerto!

Myron Sandler might qualify. He was my first viola teacher at CSUN. He was a caring and gracious teacher who saw potential in this tall, lanky kid fresh out of the navy. Or, maybe it is Manual Compinsky at CSUN, a taskmaster who thoroughly challenged me. Naturally, I accepted.

I cannot leave out Guillermo Perich, my viola teacher at the University of Illinois. Words are not adequate to describe how much I learned from Mr. Perich. There was much about our repertoire and playing that I did not know but mostly I learned about the passion of and for music. Notes I could play—it was music I learned from Mr. Perich. But with regard to overall question of inspirational teachers, the ultimate answer might lie with great performers with whom I never studied. Perhaps having heard, as a very young lad, my first recording of Beethoven chamber music—opus 74, The Harp played by the Budapest Quartet. I wore out the groves! Maybe it was Isaac Stern who shared his eloquent passion for me at the Hollywood Bowl, or hearing Heifetz, Primrose and Piatigorsky at the Sunday afternoon concerts at U.S.C. It may have been watching Paul Rolland sharing his love of music with a child. Perhaps it was the many wonderful violists who have woven their special musical magic at our viola congresses. It is possible that the answer is the collective inspiration I have received and continue to receive from the many students

who cross into my world of music with their youthful enthusiasm and open hearts.

Unit 2: Instruments and Students

DP: You obviously still recall the qualities of the Spanish viola furnished by CSUN—did this instrument establish a standard for you?

TT: The instrument was built by Juara, a Spanish maker I know little about. It is almost 17" but is not difficult to play. The one-piece back and top is quite beautiful and its tone, though lacking in real power, is gorgeous. My current instrument, purchased when I graduated from CSUN, is by the English maker Wilkinson in 1948. It has similar qualities: it too is also almost 17", has a beautiful tone and is not difficult to play. I often wish I had sold the Wilkinson and purchased something slightly smaller. I have had several opportunities to buy a smaller instrument (especially with the number of outstanding instruments displayed and offered at our congresses) but I have never pulled the trigger.

DP: Incidentally, what qualities do you look for in a student viola?

TT: We have a subtle difference here—school and student instruments. Let me speak generally about all school and student instruments. You see, I have one of the most important jobs in our country—I teach kids...lots of kids. I touch their lives and shape their attitudes about music in a way that will remain with them forever. When I do my job well, my students fill concert halls, buy classical CD's, become great teachers, play in their local amateur symphonies, sit on arts councils, support financially local performing groups, raise children (who are now showing up in my string classes), and a few go on to a

university where they appear in colleagues' string studios. It begins with me and a part of my success depends on how I set students up with instruments.

For school instruments I use the 1988 (reprinted in 2002) pamphlet, "The Complete Guide: Standards, Programs, Purchase, and Maintenance," published jointly by MENC, ASTA, and the then NSOA. This is still a more than adequate guide. Catalogues, local shops and national brands often describe an instrument as set up according to MENC specifications.

DP: What are your preferences with neck size on your personal instrument?...and instruments used by your students?

TT: I prefer a narrow neck, especially on a viola, and I would add that a lighter instrument is better than a heavier one. Every student instrument should have a reasonable tone, respond well and have an acceptable dynamic range. Of course I have favorite companies and I try always to give our local stores business (it's part of my job to help them be successful; their success is an important measure of the musical health of my community) but I ought not promote my preferences and prejudices here. Allow me one quick digression regarding improving the tone of a student instrument. The least expensive way to improve sound is to improve the quality of the strings. All too often, when I visit a school program, clinic an orchestra or judge a solo an ensemble festival, I see poor quality strings, or strings that are old, frayed or false. This doesn't help the student performance!

DP: Does your school furnish a given number of instruments?

TT: Yes, I'm very lucky. The district in which I teach, the Lincoln Unified School

District (LUSD) in Stockton, California, owns almost 250 instruments including full and fractional sized violins and cellos, several sizes of violas including a few 14" models and 3/4 and 1/2 sized basses. We lend them out free of charge to students we deem worthy and needy. LUSD is training over 500 string students (I've lost count). Most students rent or own their instruments.

DP: At what point do you like to see students in string classes buy their own instruments and get a private teacher? At what point in their development do you tend to make these recommendations?

TT: I most often recommend parents rent and not purchase an instrument until their child is almost fully grown and that both parents and child have demonstrated a commitment to continue the child's musical studies. In many cases this means private lessons and participation in a youth orchestra. This, for me, is not a rule but a guideline. When parents do decide to purchase an instrument it is often the private teacher who provides advice. If I do get involved, I recommend that parents buy the very best instrument that they can afford and not to scrimp on the bow. I try to make recommendations within their announced budget. For my own students, I insist on participating in the purchase of their child's instrument.

I recommend private lessons to every identifiably interested child during the summer months after their nine months study in my group classes or, if that's not possible, during the second year. I never recommend my studio to my school students unless a parent asks directly. I go out of my way to recommend and extol the virtues of other excellent teachers in the area.

DP: Is this the point that we raise the question on whether violists should start on the viola or the violin?

TT: May I make a confession? I don't start beginners on the viola, in part because I don't have time to teach smaller classes. Furthermore, I have a terrible problem mixing and matching—I don't teach violins and violas very well at the same time in the same room. Even if a child begs to play viola I require them to play violin for the first two semesters. Then, I strongly encourage all my second year violinists to play viola for three to four weeks. I always end up with good viola players who want to play viola because of tonal preference, the instrument size or the attention they receive. Professor Edwin Gordon's work at Temple University on musical aptitude indicates that certain timbres and ranges of sound attract certain children. When my students select the viola for themselves through this self-auditioning process, I end up with a happy, committed and prideful viola section.

DP: You are by no means alone in this approach. Mr. Primrose was an advocate of potential violists beginning on the violin in part, probably, because the smaller and lighter instrument is more negotiable by younger and smaller people. His primary concern with study on the violin appeared to be a thorough development of facility before moving to the viola. I am sure that many other pedagogues make it a habit of selecting violists from their current crop of violinists but we all are familiar with the occasional violist who has never played the violin and struggles with treble clef.



Tom Tatton relaxes at his home in Stockton, California.

Unit 3: Tom Tatton and Performance

DP: Speaking of violists, I have heard you play and consider you a gifted performer. It would be a shame if you never had the chance to play the viola outside of an instructional situation. With such a heavy teaching load in your schools and private studio, do you avail yourself of any performance opportunities or does your schedule prohibit this?

TT: Dwight, you flatter me! Gifted I don't know, but I have always enjoyed the challenge, thrill and adulation that comes from playing well. I even enjoy the practice—undisturbed with my viola and some of the greatest music bestowed on mankind. During my later student years and a college/university career, I performed one or two recitals a year, a concerto or two each year with a community or junior college orchestra and lots of chamber music.

In 1985 Jonathan Pearce, Associate Superintendent of Instruction (a man I highly respect and admire, now retired) convinced me to build a string program in

his district (LUSD). I didn't realize it at the time but when I quit my university job, I traded the thrill of performing for the joy of teaching and the superficial adulation commonly associated with performance for the love of youthful students. The challenge remains. After 1985 I still performed a lot at first: much chamber music, a recital or two and an occasional solo appearance but, as time went on my skills grew weaker and the younger players coming into the profession somehow got better!

DP: How has your performing changed since you have been with public schools as opposed to the more active concertizing during your university tenure?

TT: My most joyful experiences are playing concerts with my students (school and private). Recent literature includes the Bach Sixth Brandenburg, Mozart Duo Concertante (first movement), Handel/Halverson Passacaglia and the Beethoven Two Eyeglasses Obligato duet. My wife, Polly, is always amused when I exclaim, "Gulp—I need to practice or this youngster is going to play better than me!" I hope you can imagine my joy when they occasionally do! Most memorable were the 15 years of recitals I gave for my very youngest string students—10-12 year olds with their parents. The fun part was selecting the title; only then would my pianist and I select the repertoire. Titles for these recitals included: "Can Dr. Tom Really Play", "Dr. Tom Going for Baroque", "Dr. Tom and Friends" and "Thoroughly Modern Dr. Tom." I drew the largest crowd, including several administrators, when the title was "Dr. Tom, Romantically Involved." I remember programming the first movement of the Arpeggione, the first movement of the Brahms Sonata in E-flat, Schumann's Märchenbilder, the Enesco Concertpiece and a couple of filler pieces.

DP: Those are wonderful titles for recitals—perhaps the AVS should sponsor a contest to select next year's featured program!

Your love of music and sharing it with your students is certainly beyond question, but you and I both are aware that we have seen evidence of careers "waxing and waning" during almost 30 years of viola congresses alone. What differences do you personally find in an active performance schedule today as opposed to the year you cite, 1985?

TT: Five years ago I hurt my left shoulder—my playing hasn't been the same since. I remain passionate in my music—but do less playing. Just recently my private students held their Winter Concert. I performed an appropriate duet with each and then, of course, they performed their solo piece. I have a 15-year-old viola student who gave a stunning performance of the Arnold arrangement of the Kreisler Praeludium and Allegro. Duet literature included the W.F. Bach G Major and some Pleyel. I occasionally read chamber music with friends, perform in the yearly faculty recital and regularly share my music at church. That's about it.

DP: For that matter neither of us is quite as young as we used to be. I know that you have not yet retired, but the word has come up in some of our private conversations so you have to be looking to the future. What about Dr. Tom in the first decade of the 21st century as you near the end of your teaching tenure?

TT: Between my school position, private teaching, clinics, conference presentations, judging and some writing, I try to find some balance in my life. In my youth I earned 1750 master points in chess and held a 10 handicap on the golf course. Right now I'd like to break 90 and lose a little less often at

chess. I am involved in my church leadership, enjoy the challenge of my IVS commitments and I owe my wife Polly every bit of attention that I can give to her. So, life is good. As I mentioned I have traded thrill for joy; adulation for love while all the time retaining the passion and challenge of, and for, music.

Unit 4: Music for Multiple Violas

DP: Tom, let me prod your memory on an incident from the Glasgow Viola Congress in 1999: between presentations one day a British woman approached me and said, “You must be Dr. Thomas Tatton, the authority on works for multiple violas!” Never dreaming that I would ever be mistaken for you, I introduced myself and walked her over to you trying to keep a straight face with my very best borrowed British “stiff upper lip.” Even last year I personally received two requests for copies of your work on this subject. Review for us, please, your involvement with works for multiple violas and how you gained this reputation.

TT: I can share that my initial experience with ensemble music was in the early 1970's while I was working on my doctoral dissertation—the subject of which was Lionel Tertis. I came across two intriguing original pieces for viola ensemble inspired by Tertis, the York Bowen Viola Quartet and the Benjamin Dale Introduction and Andante, op. 5 for six violas. I located and obtained copies of each by using the 1963 edition of *Literature für Viola* by Franz Zeyringer. I was so intrigued by these two pieces I soon began digging for more original ensemble works.

At first I used this newly found repertoire with my viola students at Whittier College.

We would hold viola parties, which included the reading and rehearsing of the latest ensemble pieces I had found. We'd play our solos for each other and talk about strings, viola history, the latest recordings, etc. It was an enjoyable and memorable learning experience for all. Soon I began using the ensembles in concerts and as a recruiting tool. I organized "Viola Jamborees" thinking the title would be appealing to youthful violists. On a given Saturday area high school violists were invited to campus; the day was organized around a viola master class, ensemble reading sessions and rehearsals, an informal performance and then I would end the day with a sonata or two. Great fun.

DP: It has to be quite gratifying that you have been known as “the authority” on the viola ensemble and its repertoire. Do you try to go beyond what you have already accomplished in this field or have you made accommodations for other researchers and/or innovators?

TT: There is an immense inner satisfaction and pride regarding my role in helping to develop the viola ensemble as a body of literature, a pedagogical tool and a medium of musical expression. The field is growing so rapidly that I am no longer "The Authority". The baton has been passed to others whose contemporary work and energy incorporate and continually expand the boundaries of this repertoire. Four individuals currently stand in the vanguard of ensemble development—Catherine Forbes at University of Texas Arlington, Tim Deighton at Penn State and, still making major contributions are John White of the Royal Academy of Music (recently retired) and Myron Rosenblum of the NYVS. “The Four Violas,” all members of the Oregon Symphony led by Joël Belgique, are also expanding the borders of the

ensemble repertoire while increasing the public's awareness of viola ensemble music. They played marvelously at Congress XXXII in Minneapolis.

I continue my research in this field however. My latest project (completed in the fall of 2004) is a fairly exhaustive chapter on the history and literature of the viola ensemble to be published in a book simply titled *Playing and Teaching the Viola*, an approach somewhat like Henry Barrett's *The Viola: Complete Guide For Teachers And Students* in design and purpose. The volume, edited by Gregory Barnes, is soon to be published by ASTA. Gregory is an extraordinarily bright man who has assembled a virtual 'who's who' in the viola world to write various chapters. Included are Daniel Avshalomov, Thomas Heimberg, Jeffery Irvine, Michael Kimber, Patricia McCarty and Roland Vamos among other luminaries. I am anxious to see the finished product. With that in mind I don't want to repeat much about viola ensembles here. 1

DP: Would you care to offer an observation about the performance of viola ensemble music at viola congresses in general?

TT: Viola ensemble repertoire was performed as early as Congress IV (1976) in Bonn-Bad Godesberg and the Southern California Viola Ensemble, under my direction, was featured at Congress VII (1979) at Brigham Young University. These, as well as other congresses important in the development of viola ensembles, are chronicled in the ASTA book. I must say that the Brigham Young congress was most memorable—I met and heard so many wonderful violists including William Primrose, David Dalton, Maurice Riley, Myron Rosenblum, Don McInnes, Raphael Hillyer, Marcus Thompson, Karen Tuttle, Joseph de Pasquale, and Emanuel Vardi—

even my own teacher, Guillermo Perich, played.



L-R: Myron Rosenblum, Wendy Mehne (flute), Virginia Lenz, Michelle Micciche, Thomas Tatton, and Baird Knechtel. They had just performed a piece by viola-friendly composer Richard Lane at the Ithaca Congress, 1991.

DP: You stated earlier that you felt that it was inappropriate to use this forum to share your preferences and prejudices, but I nevertheless feel compelled to discuss your pedagogical writing. Tell us about the book based on your extensive teaching experiences...as I recall it is your personal guide to building a public school orchestra program.

TT: Thanks for asking about my book. It's entitled *Connecting the Dots*. It is a very personal but now public snapshot of my experiences and perspectives in teaching a first year string program. As you know, this is the most crucial time in child's musical career. I took the title from a chapter I call "Sequential Teaching." Kids are smart. If we teachers give them easy, understandable, logical and sequential steps, they can learn to play a string instrument—it's easy. It's

like the 'connect the dots' game in the Sunday paper or on the kid's menu at a restaurant.

DP: This obviously represents the formulation and evolution of your teaching philosophy. At what point did you become serious about committing these thoughts to paper?

TT: Dwight, you will never believe how much I did not know about teaching youngsters in groups when I was given the opportunity. Soon in my teaching I began to write down thoughts, ideas, problems and solutions—a journal if you will. Connecting the Dots is a result of that intellectual exercise. Much of what I offer is experience and perspective. A good example is explained in the very first paragraph in a chapter I call "Fallacies of String Teaching." The first topic is "A String Program Teaches Children How to Play Instruments." Wrong! We don't just teach string instruments—we teach kids a long list of life's skills. Over the years I learned that very powerful lesson in all its ramifications. I became a much better string teacher the day I let go of the instrument and embraced the child.

Many teachers teach music to kids; I teach kids about what I love—music. For example; colleagues and student teachers alike asks: "Dr. Tom, how can you stand teaching Hot Cross Buns year after year?" My reply is always that I don't teach Hot Cross Buns, I teach Johnny the love of the violin using Hot Cross Buns. It is always the child, never the music! This does not mean that I have low standards. Indeed, I hold all of my students to a very high standard. If a child is not progressing appropriately and there does not appear any external reason then, after a reasonable time, that child is returned to his or her academic classroom. This, of course, is understood by the parents

at the beginning of the school year, done in consultation with the classroom teacher and, always at my discretion. This perspective permeates my teaching. The book deals with everything from learning to read music, to selecting the appropriate method book, learning theories, assessment, recruiting and has detailed the first six weeks of lessons. The conclusion comes from my heart and explains, I think, who I am as a teacher:

"Know that in thirty-five years of teaching, learning and striving to be the best I can be, the magic is still there. The power that comes from that beautiful little wooden box to instruct, to lift, to enlighten, to make whole that which was broken, to create that which was not present and to provide a little private place in the mind where beauty exists and only the musician can go, is truly undeniable."

DP: Your eloquent conclusion is evidence both of your passion and compassion. Did you write it in a more or less continuous sitting or was it something you would return to periodically over several weeks or months?

TT: I wrote the book during the summer of 2002. The material was so personal and, in a way emotional, that I needed a great deal of help with editing. Thanks go to my wife Polly, a close friend and wonderful string teacher herself, Wilma Benson and a sister-in-law, Betty Sawin for helping me work through the problems in syntax, grammar, and consistency that I simply could not see. The book has been received very well and I think it has a place in a college string tech class; even if one doesn't agree with everything in the book, the topics are all there ready for discussion. I am already a winner, the future for the book will take care of itself; I was able to put my thoughts and

experiences on paper in an organized manner. I am well pleased.

Unit 5: The Tatton AVS Presidency; the IVS and Looking to the Future

DP: Tom, I would like to address the topic of your AVS Presidency, one that established most of the practices that the Society still follows today. Would you please comment somewhat on these accomplishments?

TT: My entire time in AVS leadership was extraordinarily exciting, rich in creativity and filled with events that shaped and illuminated the course of opportunity for all violists. Allow me a quick bit of history. I remember a call in the spring of 1981 from Myron Rosenblum, the founder and President of the Viola Research Society (VRS). Having been an early member (1975), Myron asked if I would join the Board; my primary task was to help create west coast interest and membership in the relatively new organization. We first met in 1976 at International Viola Congress IV in Bonn Bad-Godesberg where he performed a brilliant recital and I gave a lecture demonstration on British Viola literature.

My VRS Board participation was dutiful—learning all the while—using my contacts and resources to help create west coast interest. In 1982, under the presidential leadership of Maurice Riley the name was changed to The American Viola Society (AVS). I continued quiet participation until 1989 when I received a call from David Dalton, the then AVS President. David and I talked for some time about the future of the AVS. In that conversation he asked me to run for president. Somewhat flabbergasted and deeply honored, I said yes. I lost by a

landslide to Alan de Veritch, a magnificent violist who was popular, articulate and very, very bright—he still retains all those qualities! What a wonderful personality—I believe I voted for him!

DP: I'm glad you didn't ask for whom I voted because my memory doesn't go back that far. Yes, Alan has left many important marks on AVS history and I am certain that these years were beneficial in your experience with the Society. At what point do you think something you did or wrote influenced the Society's policy?

TT: My opportunity to truly influence the direction of the AVS came under Alan's presidency. My voice grew more audible in the summer of 1992 when Alan placed me as chair of the Chapter Formation Committee and, then as Vice-President when that position became available in 1993.

My presidency of the AVS began in the summer of 1994. I remember vividly the room where our first board meeting was held—the second floor of the Harris Fine Arts Center on the campus of B.Y.U. The room was somewhat small for the large sized oval table. Seated were board members of world-class stature, including you, my friend. These were performers and teachers I had admired, respected and held in some awe for a number of years. When it came time for me to address the board, with my head slightly bowed but in a steady voice, I thanked those in attendance and expressed my gratitude and pride that the AVS membership had placed this responsibility in my hands. I raised my eyes to meet those around the table and boldly stated I would not fail their trust! I then outlined goals for my term as President of the AVS:

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1. To double our membership by 1998
 2. To raise the attendance at our congresses to 600
 3. To double our Primrose Memorial Scholarship Fund by 1998
 4. To have twenty healthy and functioning chapters by 1998
 5. To activate the committee structure.

We could talk about the activation of the committee structure but that was easy; I gave creative, bright and resourceful people a job to do! I remember you and Jeff Irvine restructuring our AVS awards and you creating a handbook. Peter Slowik (our next AVS President) led in the creation of a Congress Handbook; several of us, including you, worked on updating our AVS Bylaws, Donna Lively Clark created a computerized membership tracking system, Mary Arlin, bless her soul, worked long hours under difficult circumstances getting our finances straight. Pamela Ryan, Pamela Goldsmith and Alan de Veritch worked miracles creating structure and guidelines for our new chapters; and David Dalton increased the size and quality of JAVS (from 54 pages in 1994 to 96 pages in 1998.) We could also talk about how we increased membership, from 628 in December of 1994 to 1241 in December of 1998, but....

DP: I have always felt that one of the strengths you brought to the AVS Presidency was the ability to delegate important tasks and trust those to whom the jobs had been given. So many very important things were accomplished in those years and established policies that are still followed by the Society today. But here we are—seven years later and three years since you rotated off the Board. What remains with you from this period in the way of memories, accomplishments—even regrets?

TT. What remains are the keenly unforgettable memories of the extraordinary people I met, was challenged by and worked with on various levels of possibility and opportunity. At the enormous risk of leaving someone important out, I'll quickly mention some memorable names: long walks and chats with John White, FRAM, in and around his home in Harlow, England; intellectual and philosophical discussions with Uta Lenkewitz-von Zahn (then Chair of the German Viola Society and spokesperson for the IVG); visiting in his home and awarding Harry Danks (now deceased, he was the long time Principal Violist of the BBC Symphony Orchestra) the 1997 AVS Honorary Membership Award; discussing viola repertoire over tea with Tully Potter (writer/reviewer for *THE STRAD*—I was definitely out of my league); working with the indefatigable William Preucil on chapter formation; and watching the eyes of my high school charges at the Congress XXV in Austin when, at our one rehearsal in the hall, Geraldine Walther (then Principal Violist of the San Francisco Symphony), after having listened for a time, came down to the stage and, with a broad smile and a perky voice, told them how wonderful they sounded and gave us a couple of pointers on presentation. Many years ago I also met this tall, finely wrought man with great energy, a quick wit and an infectious smile named Dwight Pounds. Great guy. Spending time with you over the years has been a unique blessing. Listening to Paul Doktor, Manny Vardi, and Walter Trampler was always a thrill. David Dalton was quite an influence on my AVS views and especially my work with IVG—but so were Henry Janzen, Ann Frederking and yourself. I have wonderful stories—Pam Goldsmith saving the 700 mislabeled copies of "Die Viola" off the docks of San Pedro, the wonderful performances of Don McInnes, the level-headed sage advice from Jeff Irvine, and watching in awe when Peter

Slowik gave a master class or when all those fabulous L.A. violists organized by Louis Kievman at Redlands could not get Kenneth Harding's IDYLL June Sunrise – Blue Sky for 12 violas together—so I conducted. That piece was dedicated to me, incidentally. I know I've missed several people and I probably should and could rattle off twenty more names, but I won't.

DP: I recall that Theodore Roosevelt referred to his Presidency as the “bully pulpit,” if I may be so bold as to make a national comparison, but I certainly feel that you used your position effectively to cajole, coax, encourage and even inspire the Board and the Society membership. Comment, please, on how you used your office in this manner.

TT: Let me say a few words about the wonderful podium accorded me to share ideas, views, feelings and my just plain excitement about the viola—“From The President”—the column in each issue of JAVS. My recurring theme was the belief that the relationship with our instrument is an affair of the soul and that our AVS represents a unity of our hearts. Among other topics, I wrote about “The Sense of a Goose”—the idea that we should stand by each other; I shared my personal feelings about our “Beavis and Butthead” national morality and suggested that we can, together, begin to elevate the cultural values of our nation; and I spoke about the uniquely American notion that taxation without representation is wrong—the relationship between the AVS and the then IVG.

Let me speak about our “pioneers”—the bold, adventuresome and faithful violists who, early on, started viola chapters. The concept, cooked up by Alan de Veritch, myself and a couple other free thinkers was born out of the idea of “Viola Days” around

the country; an idea that had percolated in my mind in the late 80's and early 90's (since then, Viola Days have successfully been implemented by Peter Slowik, our sixth AVS president) The entire idea for chapters was to provide local venues of opportunity including as many violists who wanted to participate as possible. AVS provides the structure, organizational and logistical support, activity ideas and tax/monetary cover; local leadership provides the organized activities including mini-congresses, student recitals, competitions and other venues for local professionals/amateurs/makers and students to participate—a grand idea!

DP: Do you recall specifics—where and how this got started?

TT: Among the very early viola days/chapters were the "Arizona Virtuoso Violas," a celebration begun by William Magers in 1991 and followed by a wonderful event in October on 1992; the ever strong Chicago Viola Society started as the Mid-West Viola Day in May of 1992 with Peter Slowik, William Preucil, William Schoen, Anne Mischakoff and Lisa Herschmugl as organizers; the Utah Viola Society held their first Viva Viola! celebration in November of 1992 with Michael Palumbo and David Dalton leading the way; the New York Viola Society began their extraordinary successful series of events in 1993 with a array of wonderful violists led by the late Rosemary Glyde; the Rocky Mountain Viola Society organized in June of 1995 with a three day Mini-Congress led by Juliet White-Smith; the Northern California Viola Society began their successful organization in 1994 with Eleanor Angel and Ted Seitz; and 1998 saw the beginning of the Southern California Viola Society with an inaugural event

organized by Ralph Fielding and Valerie Dimond.

DP: Do you have anything in mind—a new goal or activity—that you would like to see the AVS assume?

TT: Now that I am an IVS officer, it probably would be out of turn to comment specifically on AVS goals, but let me say this: I am thrilled to see the AVS mature and blossom—Peter Slowik provided marvelous leadership. AVS continues to flourish as the talents and visions of Ralph Fielding and soon Helen Callus design the future of our organization. The AVS has a destiny that will be molded and shaped by its leaders. I am blessed to be a part of AVS history and I look forward to the future with continued confidence and youthful anticipation of great things to come. It is with pride I state that I am a member of the American Viola Society!



L-R: Wilma Benson, Ann Frederking, and Tom Tatton at Bloomington Congress, 1995.

DP: Speaking of the IVS, let's move on to the fact that you have recently been elected Vice President of the International Viola Society, assuming office in January 2005.

This is an organization on which you had considerable say while AVS President² and now have the opportunity to wield the same kind of influence on an international scale. In what directions do you see the IVS going?

TT: I'm excited about my new adventure as Vice President of the IVS team.³ I have enormous confidence in Michael Vidulich, the new IVS President. He is a man with energy, enthusiasm, vision and a sense of urgency. My plan is to be the best Vice-President possible. My immediate assignment is to present a mock-up IVS brochure at our summer meetings in Iceland. That I am working on. In the meantime I have passed on some ideas to IVS leadership that I can share with you. I would like to see a more meaningful IVS Mission Statement. Whatever we decide upon should be complete but brief, memorable, and measurable. Once we have agreed on a mission statement it ought to appear on every section newsletter, in every language where we have a section and be prominent at every sanctioned IVS event. Then, we should organize our IVS activities around and apply that mission to everything we do. I believe violists should know we exist, what constitutes our mission and how we operate.

DP: What personal goals do you plan to present to the IVS Board for your term in office?

TT: I have suggested that IVS target a country or region for the development of an IVS section. I'm thinking of a concentrated, focused, laser-like approach using all the resources of our combined leadership. Grand deeds are accomplished by small events brought together. Further, we probably need to develop a package of information that offers ideas to newly formed sections regarding building membership, raising

money, holding events and making contact and exchanging information with other sections. It is time to boldly state who makes up the IVS, why we exist, how we are run, and what benefits the IVS provides. Then we will be in a position to go about providing those benefits. I look forward to our meetings in Iceland.

DP: It would appear that violists everywhere can expect some exciting events over the next three years—and we all look forward to seeing new opportunities for violists emerging from your endeavors.

It has been my pleasure today to visit with a unique and outstanding servant of the viola, Dr. Thomas Tatton—“Dr. Tom” to his students, and “Tom” to most of us. He has served the AVS for years in a variety of capacities in addition to his four years as the Society’s fifth President and has begun a term as Vice President of the IVS. His recognitions include the AVS Distinguished Service Citation (1989), the Maurice W. Riley Award (2000) and the International Viola Society Silver Viola Clef (2004), the latter presented at Congress XXXII (Minneapolis) in 2004 for his decades of service and contributions to his students, the Society, the viola and viola pedagogy. Tom, thank you for your time and sharing with us these reminiscences of your love affair with the viola and your students.

NOTES:

1. Connecting the Dots can be ordered from Dr. Tatton directly. The ASTA publication, *Playing and Teaching the Viola*, Gregory Barnes, editor, should be in print by August 2005. *Viola for Violinists: The Violin to Viola Conversion Kit*, by Dwight Pounds, should be released by July 2005.

2. Dr. Thomas Tatton and Internationalization of the Internationale Viola- Gesellschaft (IVG)—a brief summary: The first four AVS Presidents, Drs. Myron Rosenblum, Maurice Riley, David Dalton, and Alan deVeritch all worked more or less comfortably within the first international viola organization, the Internationale Viola-Gesellschaft, or IVG. Alan deVeritch formally proposed internationalization of the IVG at Congress XX (Vienna) in 1992. At Congress XXIV (Markneukirchen) in 1996, Tom Tatton concluded that the IVG had to internationalize or that he would propose severing ties with the parent organization. For him to support an international viola organization, Dr. Tatton stipulated that Drs. David Dalton and Dwight Pounds from the AVS play leading roles in the reorganization. IVG President Günter Ojstersek and the IVG Board acceded to his demands at Celle, Germany, during the GVA’s 1999 Viola Day celebration. The old IVG board and international delegates in consultation with German attorney Walter Witte, dissolved the IVG and immediately established the International Viola Society (IVS). The new officers included: David Dalton (USA), President; Emile Cantor (Germany, Holland), Vice President; Ann Frederking (Canada), treasurer; Roland Schmidt (Germany), secretary; and Dwight Pounds (USA) and Uta Lenkewitz (Germany), Executive Secretaries. Ojstersek, filling the position of Past President, served as advisor to the Board. Terms were set at three years, bylaws written and adopted by the international members (the American, the German, the Canadian, and the Australian-New Zealand Viola Societies. International membership has expanded to include the Nordic, Icelandic, and South African Viola Societies).

3. The IVS Executive Board referenced by Dr. Tatton is the third to serve since 1999, taking office in January 2005. Officers include: Michael Vidulich (NZ), President; Tom Tatton (US), Vice President; Pamela Goldsmith (US), Secretary; Ronald Schmidt (Germany), Past President; Donald Maurice (NZ), Treasurer; Henrik Frenzen (Sweden) and Carlos Maria Solare (Argentina, Germany), Executive Secretaries.

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

Marcus Klimke and His Golden Violas

by Eric Chapman



Marcus Klimke has quickly established himself as a major player and talent on the international violin making stage. From humble beginnings under Communist rule in East Germany to Gold Medals for his work-- at the Triennale in Cremona in 1999, the Violin Society of America in 2000, and the Paris International in 2004-- Klimke's rise has been meteoric. Perhaps more astonishingly, all the Gold Medals were won with violas and each instrument was built on the same model, albeit slightly differently sized. What is his secret and who is Marcus Klimke, soon to be a household name in the viola world?

Born in 1968 in Weimar, then part of East Germany, Klimke had limited cultural opportunities during his childhood relative to young people living in the western sectors of the country. His parents, both graphic designers, saw to it that he started violin lessons by the age of 8. While not a highly

talented or motivated player, his love of music was clear. Options were few in a drab city devoid of many cultural icons. In his spare time Klimke focused his creativity on wood, spending many hours carving and making small items.



Through a series of fortunate circumstances Marcus' parents navigated through the piles of paperwork to apply for an exit permit. (As Klimke recalls, he was not a good communist "Boy Scout" and the authorities were happy to see him go.) In 1984, young Marcus, free at last, began to consider a suggestion his father had made--visit Mittenwald, the center of fine violin making in Germany and home of the Bavarian State School of Violin Making. With his earlier pursuits in wood carving, Klimke's opportunity was before him; it would take three years on the school's wait list, however, for a place to open. In the interim, he honed his woodworking skills at Schwabisch Hall, a technical college for wood processing, and worked as a cabinet maker.

By his own admission, Klimke struggled to find the motivation that now drives his work. While he graduated from the Mittenwald school, his record was not sterling. One factor that did inspire a new focus, however, was his introduction to the viola. Fascination with the lush, darker sound worked its magic on Marcus; it is a love affair that has grown stronger over the years.

Following a two year stint working on set up and restoration at the Michael Becker shop in suburban Chicago, Klimke returned to Europe in 1999 with the idea of someday establishing his own workshop. There was, however, a new fork in the road that led to Angers, France and the workshop of Patrick Robin and his wife Andrea Robin-Frandsen, two of Europe's very best makers and both gold medal winners at the 1991 Paris International competition. With Patrick Robin working mainly on violins and cellos and Andrea being a very gifted viola maker, Klimke found kindred spirits as well as inspiration. Klimke remained at the Robin shop for six years learning a system that has been singularly successful for his mentors

Success followed for the student as well. In October 2000, Klimke entered the Triennale at Cremona, one of the most important competitions in the world. Voila! Gold Medal for his viola. This turn of events presented a welcome problem. Gold Medal winners at the Triennale are required to sell their instrument to the competition, which then places the instrument on permanent exhibit in their museum. While delighted with the honor, Klimke now had no viola to enter in the Violin Society of America's competition in Cincinnati the following month. The only option was to borrow his first viola that had been sold in America. The instrument was graciously loaned and

entered in the VSA competition, and voila!...Gold Medal again.

The recurring success on the competition circuit had begun in earnest. In June of 2001, Klimke set his sights on the German competition at Mittenwald and came away with the Bronze medal, again for viola. The 2004 Concours Etienne Vatelot in Paris presented a particular honor because of the person for whom it is named: Vatelot is one of the world's greatest authorities on French bows and a formidable viola maker in his own right. The host country of the competition was different, but the color of Klimke's medal was again gold.

What is Klimke's viola model that has been so successful?

Few in the music world outside professional violin shops are familiar with the name Giacomo Gennaro, also known in history as Jacobus Januarius, the name used on his labels. A pupil and assistant to the great Nicolo Amati in Cremona from approximately 1641 to 1654, his work very much resembles that of his teacher. Gennaro instruments are seldom seen; many having been "upgraded" to more famous Cremonese names, and those that he made in the Amati shop would certainly bear the label of the master.

Fortunately for today's violists, Klimke has had access to a Gennaro viola model that measures 41.6cm (roughly 16 3/8") in body length. This instrument is slightly wider in the upper and middle bouts than a Brothers Amati model, which presumably the Nicolo Amati shop utilized. These bout widths, Klimke believes, achieve the darker sound he wishes to create. He adapts this model to build violas in four different sizes—40.5cm, 41.0cm, 41.4cm and 41.7cm. Gold Medals have been won using different sizes.

Like many other top makers in the world, Klimke prefers to avoid “big” violas, which he think “give a big but not very precise sound in the ear.” Players, he says, need a sound that is “very precise and concentrated, rich in harmonics.” Klimke tailors his work to the perceived needs of each client. “Everything is important in the viola,” he says; “more than on a violin or cello.” Most of Klimke’s violas are made to look “new” rather than antiqued. Although there are of course many degrees of antiquing, it is his belief that the natural aging process is preferable.

Remembering his hungry student years and his desire to have young people play his instruments, Klimke offers a discount for students commissioning a viola. The Klimke shop is becoming a very busy place indeed!

A founder and current Board member of the Violin Society of America, Eric Chapman owns Eric Chapman Violins, Inc. in Chicago and serves as Vice President of the Chicago School of Violin Making. He has been commended for distinguished service by both the AVS and the VSA.

Scenes from the Icelandic Congress

Photos courtesy of Jennifer Drake

The 33rd International Congress was held June 2-5, 2005 in Reykjavik, Iceland- in the tradition of its predecessors; it was a wonderful and unique success! Putting on a Congress is a huge undertaking, and the organizers Sesselja Halldórsdóttir and Guðrún Thórarinsdóttir did a tremendous job of putting it all together. Violists came from as far away as New Zealand-- the opposite end of the earth-- both to witness and to participate. To see the schedule of events, see the Congress website at <http://www.congress.is/viola2005/>.

The following photo essay gives a few “snapshots” of the experience, taken by Jennifer Drake. For a comprehensive and lively review of the Congress, be sure to see Ms. Drake’s article in the Fall issue of JAVS!

–Matthew Dane



#1: View of Mount Esja, across the harbor from downtown Reykjavik.



#2: Sun-dial sculpture of Viking ship overlooking the harbor.



#3: A premiere of Prelude and Fugue for Ten Violas by English/Icelandic composer (and conductor) Oliver Kentish. Performers are members of the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra's viola section.



#5: Norwegian Lars Anders Tomter was one of the featured performers; he played a marvelous Romantic recital program the night before this picture was taken.



#4: Some participants found time to visit the famous Blue Lagoon- the rain only highlights the strange colors and mist that surround it.



#6: Elves and trolls play important roles in Icelandic folklore. During a walk around Hafnarfjörður (a suburb of the capital), our tour guide explained that trolls only come out at night. Those that get caught in daylight turn to stone, which was the unfortunate fate of this yawning troll!



#7: Herdís Anna Jónsdóttir and Steef van Oosterhout perform Icelandic folksongs during the “Golden Circle” tour stop at Thingvellir. Steef is playing a marimba made of Icelandic basalt, while Dísá’s viola is still “in the white!”



#9: Gullfoss is one of Iceland’s most famous natural treasures. We were lucky enough to see a rainbow, which we found out is a rarity.



#8: Also along the “Golden Circle” tour, participants heard a short program of Medieval and Baroque music (performed by the Darkwood Consort and Håkan Olsson) at this solitary, stark church in Skálholt.



#10: Henrik Frendin (facing front) and Håkan Olsson delight participants “after hours” with Swedish folk tunes at the coffeeshop nearby.



#11: Looking across the city at 12:30am- the sun dipped below the horizon for less than four hours at night.

In the Studio: Fundamentals of Shifting

by Ralph Fielding

String players at all levels often experience trouble with clean shifting. I have noticed that many performers stop the motion of both the bow and vibrato before a shift while leaving the left hand clamped down on the fingerboard. This causes a tense (and often inaccurate) shift and an inability to sustain the musical line with the bow.

At its simplest level, the shift should feel like this:

The diagram shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It illustrates a shift from a lower note to a higher one. The first note is on the first line (F4) with a fingering of '3'. An arrow points from this note to the right, with the text: *Tone and vibrato continue right up to the moment that the left hand relaxes.* A downward arrow points to the staff at the first position (F4), with the text: *Left hand relaxes to harmonic pressure, then rests in first position before moving.* A second downward arrow points to the second line (G4) with a fingering of '3', with the text: *Left hand glides up to shift note just before the bow moves to start note.*

These exercises are designed to quickly develop the basic shifting motion, so that the vibrato does not stop before the shift and the hand relaxes to harmonic pressure BEFORE it starts the relaxed glide to the next note.

The first two exercises isolate the components of the shift and should be mastered first before moving on to the third exercise. After the third exercise is working effortlessly, it only takes a few days of practice on lines four and five to develop the feel and timing of the actual shift.

Most violists at a reasonably advanced level should take about two weeks to develop a smooth shift, though they will take longer if they are used to squeezing with the left hand.

Easy Steps to Effortless Shifting

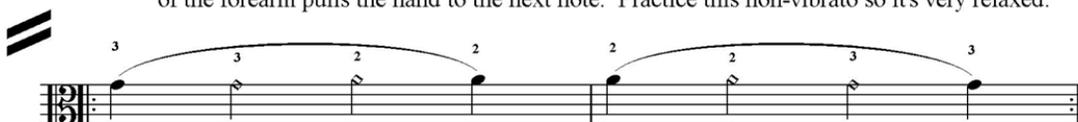
Master each group of exercises before moving on to the next set.
Once learned, it takes just a few seconds to make any individual shift in your repertoire clean and smooth.



Use a constant **relaxed** vibrato from regular note to harmonic note and back.
This exercise lets the fingers relax to harmonic pressure without stopping vibrato.



GLIDE between these two harmonic notes by simply opening and closing the left elbow.
The left fingers should be relaxed and flexible. Just substitute one finger for another.
The left wrist should be seen to BEND as you watch it in a mirror during this exercise,
as the relaxed hand stays where it is for a fraction of a second, before the movement
of the forearm pulls the hand to the next note. Practice this non-vibrato so it's very relaxed.



This combines the first two exercises and lets the left hand relax BEFORE the arm movement starts.
Try to maintain a continuous vibrato from note to harmonic and back, but at least
make sure that you do not stop the vibrato before the hand relaxes to harmonic pressure.
The bow arm plays a whole note: keep speed constant WITHOUT stopping the arm motion.
This exercise takes about one week to master.



The bow arm plays a whole note: keep speed constant WITHOUT stopping the arm motion.
The vibrato continues until the left hand springs up for the open string and GLIDES to next note.
This duplicates the relaxed "springy" feeling of a quick shift.



The bow arm plays a whole note: keep speed constant WITHOUT stopping the arm motion.
The vibrato continues through the harmonic "squeak". Left arm GLIDES to each note.
This should feel the same as the previous exercise.



THE SHIFT! The vibrato is continuous, the bow arm keeps moving at the same speed and the left hand
glides along the string with flexible fingers and wrist during the inaudible moment of harmonic pressure.