

Journal of the American Viola Society

Volume 23 Summer 2007 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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A publication of the American Viola Society

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Adelaide Congress in “Snapshot”

By Dwight Pounds

Photos by Dwight Pounds (except as noted)



Details of the recital hall reveal a room rich in ornamentation and graceful touches that could have been designed by boat builders—turn the roof upside down, stretch planking across it the cross-pieces, insert a mast, and it could sail the seas!

International Viola Congress XXXV convened 29 June-3 July 2007 at the Elder Conservatorium, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA, Australia. Congress host Keith Crellin opened the congress in the main recital hall and took delegates on a walking tour of the facilities set aside for recitals, lectures, master classes, and panels.



Americans were well represented, including a recent adoptee; Donald Maurice was presented a plaque denoting his selection by the AVS Executive Board as an Honorary Member of the American Viola Society.

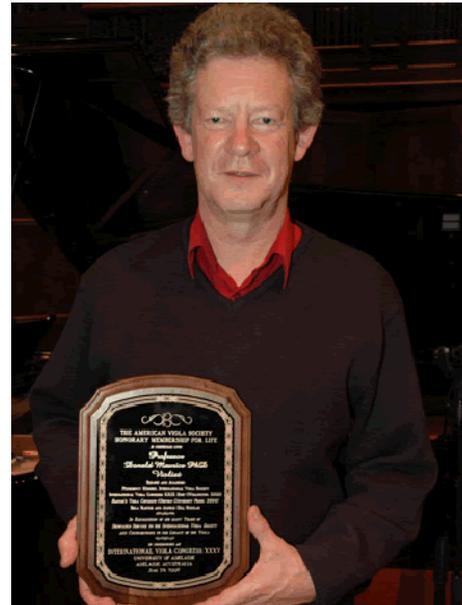


Photo by Ronald Schmidt

Former Primrose Competition contestant, Kathryn Lockwood, and her husband, percussionist Yousif Sheronik, presented a program of compositions written for them or adapted to the style of their unique duo.



The congress also featured presentations on the restoration of two historic instruments. British luthier David Hume gave a detailed account and slide show of how he had purchased his Amati viola and the procedures selected for its restoration, complete with problems and solutions employed. To the delight of the delegates, he invited anyone who so inclined to play the instrument. Playing a superb Amati viola with a Sartori bow was a delightful and rare experience.



South African Louise Lansdown presented a detailed account of the career of Cecil Aronowitz with many details photographs of his active life and explained how an instrument described only as a “1750 French viola” was smashed when Aronowitz collapsed while playing it, having suffered a massive stroke. Louise is shown holding the viola—which she now owns—in its meticulously restored state. Thanks to Keith Crellin, his wife Ruth, and their entire team at the Elder Conservatorium for a job well done.



And when in Australia,... A trip to the outback was imperative following the congress. A guide asked my wife during one short trip, “Where is your cowboy?” Knowing exactly what she was suggesting, Margaret said, “That is not a cowboy hat he is wearing—he bought that in New Zealand six years ago (a memento of the Wellington viola congress in 2001).” Play the viola and see the world. Another Australian asked me, “And where is that accent from?” Unaware that I even had an accent, I offered him a choice between Western Australia and West Texas. He said he would have to think about it, raising possible doubt whether it was the voice or the hat that prompted the guide’s question.



Photo by Ron Vincent

[Editor’s Note: Look for a full review of Congress XXXV in the Fall2007 issue of JAVS.]

--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.

Milton Thomas and the Evenings on the Roof Concerts

By Kenneth C. Leiter

While writers have ably demonstrated the important contribution that the *Evenings on the Roof* concerts made to the cultural life of Los Angeles and to the nation by premiering music by Igor Stravinsky, Pierre Boulez, Charles Ives, Aaron Copland, Ingolf Dahl, and Henri Lazarof, the contribution that the *Roof* series made to the musical careers of its musicians has largely gone untold. The *Roof* concerts allowed studio musicians a new venue where they could recapture their dreams of being soloists, playing serious music. In this way, violist Milton Thomas' participation in the *Roof* concerts led to his international career as a violist.

During the late 1930s and the early 1940s Los Angeles became a major locale for the composition and performance of modern classical music. Eric Wolfgang Korngold, Ernst Krenek, Ingolf Dahl, Igor Stravinsky, and Arnold Schoenberg were some of the composers who fled Hitler's Nazi regime and gravitated to Los Angeles. At that time, according to cellist Laurence Lesser, "there were probably seven full-time orchestras in Los Angeles and only one of them was the Los Angeles Philharmonic."¹ The others were the orchestras of the major movie studios. But where besides the Los Angeles Philharmonic could classically trained musicians perform and composers present serious music?

Enter Peter Yates, founder of the *Evenings on the Roof* concerts. He was not a wealthy man; he knocked around at odd jobs before landing a position with the California Unemployment Office. Far from mere

bureaucrat, his passionate love of both Baroque and modern music led to friendships with Charles Ives and Igor Stravinsky. His wife, Francis Mullen Yates, was a professional pianist who specialized in modern works. In 1938, to provide an additional venue for his wife, Yates hired architect Rudolf Schindler to add on to the roof of his Micheltorena Street house a music studio that could seat one hundred people. After its completion, he began presenting musicales in the studio on Sunday evenings. He called the concert series *Evenings on the Roof*, after his sons repeatedly asked him to take them onto the roof when he returned home from work in the evening.²

The *Roof* concerts were already established and had moved off the roof to larger venues when Milton Thomas arrived in Los Angeles in 1945. In 1940, Thomas auditioned for and won a position in the viola section of Leopold Stokowski's All-American Youth Orchestra (AAYO). While the AAYO was rehearsing in Atlantic City for its tour of South America, Thomas auditioned for the Cleveland Orchestra and signed a contract.³ ⁴ Upon returning from the AAYO's South American tour, he became a fifth stand viola in the Cleveland Orchestra under conductor Artur Rodziński." After the second tour of the AAYO, he went from fifth to first stand as first assistant principal viola.⁵

While he was in Cleveland, Thomas was an active recitalist. He established a fine reputation for himself in Cleveland. Music critic Herbert Elwell found that Thomas's

playing possessed the authority and flexibility of a seasoned professional. He produced a rich, solid tone from his viola. Thomas had more than just flashy technique; he had the lucid musicality that would be the hallmark of his career.⁶

In 1944, Thomas left Cleveland for New York City to become principal viola of Stokowski's New York City Orchestra. When Stokowski's efforts at creating the new orchestra failed and it disbanded, Thomas headed out to Hollywood and the life of a studio musician.

Three kinds of studio work existed in Los Angeles in the 1940s: movies, radio, and commercials (jingles). The large movie studios (RKO, Paramount, and MGM) had full-time orchestras with musicians under contract to play in them. Getting work in these orchestras was in the hands of the studio music managers, who had lists of musicians that they called for specific projects. Getting on the lists was critical for obtaining studio work. Newcomers got on the lists through a friendship network. Thomas had friends from the Stokowski AAYO who were already doing studio work in Los Angeles in 1945. One of his best friends throughout his career was violist Joe Reilich. They helped each other get studio jobs for many years and played together at the Casals Festivals in Puerto Rico.

Studio work was a very impersonal business. When a musician was to play a movie score, he would enter a large room with the music already on the stands. Behind the musicians was a large screen where the movie was silently projected along with streamers and clicks that told the conductor when to have the musicians play. As cellist Nathaniel Rosen explains:

For movies, there were streamers on the screen and a click track and we would have to play along with the click track. We'd have to coordinate everything perfectly. The composer would be conducting and watching the movie, and he would know when to start because the streamers would come across the screen from left to right and then the clicks would begin. If the streamers said four clicks there'd be click, click, click, click, play. He'd sort of conduct along anyway but the click was the boss.⁷

The musicians never saw the movie scores prior to arriving at the studio. They were sight-reading the music, which might seem quite a feat. To the studio musician, however, this wasn't a challenge--not even something that would make the job interesting or give it a little excitement. Most of the pieces in studio work were not technically difficult.⁷

Milton Thomas became a regular player in Peter Yates' *Evenings on the Roof* concerts. They probably met during one of Yates' visits to the studios. Shortly after coming to Yates' attention, Thomas made his debut at the *Evenings on the Roof* concerts on March 11, 1946, playing the *Sonata for Viola and Piano* by Arnold Bax. Isabel Morse Jones wrote that Thomas was the "hit" of the concert:

The Evenings on the Roof concert last night brought out a new and exceptionally fine violist, Milton Thomas. He played the Arnold Bax's Viola Sonata with able pianist Mildred Portney. This town boasts an array of capable pianists but a viola player with technical equipment style and an ability to make the music and not his own personality important is news in any city. . . . He plays the viola as easily as if it were a violin but does not try to make it sound like one.⁸

Another reviewer wrote, “Milton Thomas, violist, played a *Sonata for Viola and Piano* by Arnold Bax in which he disclosed a tone of extraordinary beauty and technical facility that stamped the player as a virtuoso.”⁹

The Wilshire-Ebel Theater was the scene of Milton Thomas’ next solo performance with *Evenings on the Roof* on December 3rd. Thomas and his cousin, Pescha Kagan, played Paul Hindemith’s *Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 11 No. 4*. Again Thomas’ playing made a favorable impression on a critic:

*In the Hindemith Sonata for Viola and Piano, she accompanied her cousin, Milton Thomas and together they gave a vitalizing interpretation of the work. Even in the few moments of intensity in the finale, Thomas and Miss Kagan kept their balance and tone and at its conclusion were rewarded with an ovation.*¹⁰

The March and December *Evenings on the Roof* concerts brought Thomas to the attention of composer Ingolf Dahl. Born in Germany of Swedish-German parents, Dahl fled Europe because he was Jewish. A superb pianist, he supported himself as the accompanist for singer Grace Fields. By 1946, Dahl was a regular performer at the *Evenings on the Roof* concerts, both as a pianist and as a conductor, where he met Thomas. Dahl composed a divertimento for viola and piano and at the *Evenings on the Roof* concert of March 8, 1948, Thomas and Dahl premiered it.^{2, 11}

At the same time that Thomas was playing in the *Evenings on the Roof* concerts, he was busy as a studio musician. Studio work was both demanding and slow. There were often double sessions, each three hours, with a break in between. It was not uncommon for

recording sessions to run into the early hours of the morning. Studio work took its toll on the personality and enthusiasm of many musicians but, as Jeffrey Solow explains, not on Milton Thomas.

*For somebody who spent so many years playing in the studios, where you come across so many cases of musical burnout, Milton never lost any of his enthusiasm. He was always up for every rehearsal and every performance, just as he must have been when he was a kid. Through the whole time that I played with him he was absolutely excited about everything that he did, which was very inspirational because, I would see so many other cases of musicians who were just, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, here we go again.”*¹²

In the early 1950’s the *Evenings on the Roof* began the transition to the *Monday Evening Concerts*. Lawrence Morton, a professional organist and studio musician, took over the programming chores for the *Roof* concerts and Robert Craft began conducting many of the performances, while Peter Yates worked on a novel. In 1954, Morton and Craft broke with Yates and formed the *Monday Evening Concerts*.²

Due to his exposure at both the *Evenings on the Roof* and *Monday Evening Concerts*, Thomas broadened his musical activities. He performed in and co-produced (with Eve Kendall) a small classical music festival of works by Bach and Beethoven at the Purple Onion, a nightclub on Hollywood’s Sunset Boulevard. The performers, besides Thomas, were from the *Monday Evening Concerts*.

The Purple Onion concerts were also notable for being an early performance by Thomas of one of Bach's solo Cello Suites. Thomas was one of the first violists, along with William Primrose, Emanuel Vardi, and Lillian Fuchs, to play them as performance pieces. On a hot July night in 1957, Milton Thomas played the Bach Suite in C-minor to a sold out house at the Purple Onion. Standing on the dance floor surrounded by thick smoke from the audience and illuminated by hot spotlights, Thomas performed the Bach suite "with pure intonation, beautiful phrasing and sensitive dynamics."¹³

By 1959, Thomas had established himself in Los Angeles as a solo violist. He was now giving solo recitals and was selected to be the leadoff player in several concert series. The University Friends of Music at UCLA chose Milton with Natalie Limonick to open their 14th season with a viola recital. In the opinion of critic Albert Goldberg:

*Thomas is one of the small band of viola players who is justified in exploiting the solo possibilities of his instrument. The normal cumbersomeness disappears under his suave technical command and he manages to evoke a tone that for beauty and variety is far removed from the viola's customarily nasal voice.*¹⁴

The UCLA recital was a "dry run" for Milton Thomas' debut as a soloist at Carnegie Hall. For that debut, he played a program consisting of the Bach *Suite in C-minor*; Britten's *Lachrymae*, Beethoven's *Variations on Themes from Mozart's Magic Flute*, Telemann's *G Major Viola Concerto*, *Three Italian Dances* (Renaissance pieces arranged by Thomas) and Stravinsky's *Elegy*. The fact that Thomas had played all of these pieces before did not diminish the difficulty of the program. New York Times

music critic Harold C. Schonberg was impressed with Thomas' huge tone, sense of rhythm and the musicality of his playing.¹⁵ Schonberg disapproved of Thomas' playing transcriptions for viola instead of having a program entirely of music composed for the viola.

Thomas took Schonberg's criticism to heart. At his debut in New York City's Town Hall in October 1960, Thomas, assisted by pianist Georgia Akst, mezzo-soprano Shirley Verrett-Carter and the Brandenburg players, presented a program of works all of which were original to the instrument. This time there was no doubt that Milton Thomas had arrived as a soloist. "For melodic smoothness and purity of tone, Mr. Thomas stands alongside our top-ranking violists," wrote John Gruen of the New York Herald Tribune. "His performance, throughout, was marked by expressiveness and understanding of the music at hand."¹⁶ The critic from the New York Times found the lyric quality of Thomas and Akst's rendering of the Hindemith *Sonata, Op. 11 No. 4* alone made the recital worthwhile. During their performance of Brahms' *Two Songs for Voice, Viola, and Piano*, Thomas's command of tonal quality created a perfect blending of viola with the soprano voice of Verrett-Carter.¹⁷ Having played the entire program, except for the Brahms Songs, at one time or another during the *Evenings on the Roof* and *Monday Evening Concerts* became the springboard for Thomas' polished performance in Town Hall.

A few weeks later, Town Hall provided Milton Thomas with a "Hollywood" moment. At noon on the day of her performance pianist Hilde Somer cancelled, on her doctor's advice. With the recital just hours away Thomas, Akst, and Verrett-Carter were asked to fill in. They put

together a program consisting of two of Bach's unaccompanied suites, the *Gagliarda Veneziano Italian Dance*, and the Brahms *Songs*. Allen Hughes said that there was nothing in the artists' performance that betrayed the fact that it had been put together just hours before they took the stage. Thomas' solo playing was confident and convincing,¹⁸ and demonstrated his ability to give a first-rate performance on very short notice.

Following his successful recitals in New York, Thomas made his London debut in Wigmore Hall, England's equivalent of Carnegie Hall. Together with Akst and London musicians, Thomas performed many of the pieces from his successful Town Hall recital: The *Gagliarda Veneziano Italian Dance*, the Hindemith *Sonata*, and the Telemann *Concerto*. To these pieces he added Schumann's *Märchenbilder* and an arrangement of Bach's *Concerto in F Minor, BWV 1056*.

The Wigmore Hall recital established Milton Thomas's playing credentials in England. The critic from the Daily Telegraph put Thomas in the top ranks of viola soloists.¹⁹ The critic from *The Times* wrote that Thomas "proved an artist to his fingertips."²⁰ Thomas demonstrated that the viola could be played with the speed and dexterity of a violinist while producing a tone with the sonority of a cello.¹⁹ Thomas' performance of *Märchenbilder* was particularly noticed: his decisive bowing in the second movement and rich mellow tone in the fourth movement turned Schumann's piece "into little masterpieces."²⁰ Another critic wrote that during the fourth movement of *Märchenbilder*, Thomas' tone was huge and intense.¹⁹

Thomas' career began to take on a pattern of giving performances in New York while

continuing to play in the *Monday Evening Concerts*. Having been chosen by Lawrence Morton to open its 1962-1963 season, Thomas played music that spanned six centuries.^{2, 21} Then it was back to New York's Town Hall for another recital with Akst. They performed *Märchenbilder*, Schubert's 'Arpeggione' *Sonata*, and Henri Lazarof's *Inventions*. Although they had performed *Märchenbilder* at Town Hall in a previous concert, the New Times critic commented that Thomas and Akst brought new depth and meaning to their performance, giving it a lyrical quality.²²

On February 21, 1966, the *Monday Evening Concerts* saw Thomas as viola soloist, ensemble player and conductor. During this concert Milton Thomas and Georgia Akst performed the Dahl *Divertimento*. According to the review by Albert Goldberg, Thomas played the *Divertimento* with a fine appreciation of its charm, delicate texture and humor.²³ It was a masterful presentation by a true artist.

That performance of the Dahl *Divertimento* brought Thomas' solo career full circle. He had come to Los Angeles initially to make money as a studio musician after having been an active recitalist in Cleveland while a member of the Cleveland Orchestra. Then came the *Evenings on the Roof*. The *Roof* concerts gave him an outlet for launching his international career as a soloist, and at the same time this series became the main beneficiary of his maturing talent. Thomas continued to play in the *Evenings on the Roof* and the *Monday Evening Concerts*, giving some of his finest performances there. Audiences were able to hear the rare talent that was Milton Thomas, promoting his beloved instrument, the viola, and its repertoire.

Kenneth Leiter is a sociologist and amateur violist who audited Milton Thomas' master classes at the Music Academy of the West and played for Mr. Thomas during 1974-80. He has played in the Rice Chamber Orchestra, SMU Chamber Orchestra, Dallas Civic Symphony and Texas Gilbert & Sullivan Company. He currently divides his music time between the viola and clarinet.

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WORKS FOR THE VIOLA BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNING COMPOSERS

An Annotated Bibliography

by **Michael Alan Weaver, Ph.D.**

Foreword by Myron Rosenblum

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7 appendices

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Reviewed by Dwight Pounds

If the title of Michael Weaver's doctoral dissertation, *AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS FOR SOLO VIOLA, VIOLA WITH KEYBOARD, AND VIOLA WITH ORCHESTRA BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNING COMPOSERS*, betrays its obvious origins, the less exact, less academically-oriented but more accessible title chosen for this book, *WORKS FOR VIOLA BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNING COMPOSERS*, expresses the point well. Whether one is inclined toward the academic or prefers the "bottom line" in a title, please rest assured that Michael Weaver's treatise-to-book transformation has been thorough, that his organization and presentation of data has been exacting with many cross references, and that this volume deserves a place in violists' personal and/or professional libraries.

The Pulitzer Prize in Music is American through and through—an annual award funded by an American institution for annual presentation to an American composer nominated and selected by an all-American jury. This fact is reflected in the citation definition which establishes eligibility for the Pulitzer Prize in Music:

For distinguished musical composition by an American that has had its first performance or recording in the United States during the year.

As both violist and scholar, Dr. Weaver's purpose in each version of his research has been to identify the Pulitzer Prize winning composers who wrote for the viola and to document this literature in the form of an annotated bibliography for reference. His scope, as indicated in the original title, is limited to works for *solo viola*, *viola and keyboard*, and *viola and orchestra*. This includes compositions for another instrument *or* viola (i.e., clarinet *or* viola and piano). Transcriptions by someone other than the original composer and works written for another alto clef instrument, but not the viola, are not included. Each entry includes the composer's name, dates, the title of the Pulitzer Prize winning composition, and the date the composer won the Pulitzer, followed by an annotated bibliography of each of the composer's viola works. Annotations are limited to each work's premiere, instrumentation, publisher/date, availability, duration, dedication/commission, introductory/program notes, selective

bibliography, selective discography, and a general description of the work to the extent that each datum is known.

Interest in the work transcends the viola community since the purely anthological content is supplemented with valuable and interesting information pertaining to the prize itself. The fact that the most prestigious award in American music has its roots in journalism and that indeed a journalist (a newspaper critic) sits with four prominent American composers on a typical jury is somewhat enlightening. Chapter 1 is dedicated to a history of the Pulitzer Prize and its precursor in music, the Pulitzer Traveling Scholarships in Music (1917-1942). Weaver presents in fine detail the organization of review committees, the procedures they follow to select winners, problems with the award, exclusions, controversies, special awards, and citations. Despite the interesting and informative content in the Introduction and Chapter 1, this is a reference book with the annotated bibliography itself in Chapter 2. The bibliography spans the award from 1943, when William Schuman won the first Pulitzer Prize in Music for his *Secular Cantata No. 2*, to the 2005 winner, Steven Stucky, for his *Second Concerto for Orchestra*. The entries, whether extensive or minimal, are well laid out and enable the reader to focus very quickly on specific topics. Weaver's style is smooth and accessible. The book's academic origins become evident with occasional reiterations of methodology in the Introduction (Research Procedures) and Chapter 1 but these have no impact on the anthology itself. Likewise it is incumbent on the reader to bear in mind that Weaver's bibliography is limited to works for *viola solo*, *viola and keyboard*, or *viola and orchestra* and is not intended as a

compendium of a given composers' viola compositions.

My personal questions going into this review included the following, with answers:

1. How many composers have won the Pulitzer Prize in Music through 2005? **55**
2. How many of these composers wrote for the viola? **28**
3. How many viola compositions did these people write? **47**
4. How many of these have been recorded? **Less than half**
5. How many have been performed at viola congresses? (1975 –1993) **3**
6. How many of the winning composers had multiple works for viola? **19**
7. Who of these had the most viola compositions? **Quinto Maganini, George Perle and Leo Sowerby** each had four but **Quincy Porter** had six.
8. How many Pulitzer Prize winning compositions were written for viola? **1** (The only prize-winning composition with "viola" in the title was *Symphony Concertante for Piano, Trumpet, Viola and Orchestra* (1952-1953) by Gail Kubik. Although this composition did not fit into Weaver's criteria of *viola solo*, *viola and keyboard*, or *viola and orchestra*, it was included in the anthology since it won the prize.)
9. What was the most unusual piece described? My admittedly subjective choice would be **George Perle's *Solo Partita for Violin and Viola*** (written for Irvin Ilmer, 1965), in which the performer is required to play each instrument.

10. It is possible for a composer to win the award a second time? **YES** ((The double winners include **Samuel Barber, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Walter Piston** and **Elliott Carter**. Technically, Samuel Barber has won the most Pulitzers as recipient of two Pulitzer Traveling Scholarships (pre-1943) in addition to his two Pulitzer Prizes. Using Weaver's criteria, Carter and Piston wrote for the viola, Barber and Menotti did not.))

The reviewer for this book, Dr. Dwight Pounds, is Retrospectives Editor for the JAVS and has been advisor to or member of the AVS Executive Board for 25 years. He is author of THE AMERICAN VIOLA SOCIETY: A HISTORY AND REFERENCE and VIOLA FOR VIOLINISTS.

Weaver follows the anthology with seven appendices, an extensive bibliography, and a very useful index. To no one's surprise, the major violists of the last century—Primrose, Doktor, de Pasquale, Katims, McInnis, Trampler, and Graham in addition to many others—both premiered and commissioned works from Pulitzer Prize winners. These are easily cross-referenced in the appendices listing premieres, selective discography, commentaries and references, and commissions/dedications—all listed by violist.

Dr. Weaver's book focuses on a relatively unknown segment of viola literature and has the potential of being a catalyst for follow-on research, discovery of new compositions and repertoire expansion by both teachers and students, and future publications on individual Pulitzer Prize winners and specific viola compositions. I would not dare predict how many recitals and lectures this book will spawn but "Works for the Viola by Pulitzer Prize Winning Composers" certainly would be a marvelous and compelling topic for presentation at a future international viola congress.

Modern Makers:

Summertime: Mind the Gaps!

by Eric J. Chapman

For musicians, summertime often coincides with extended travel, music festivals, strange venues, and the structure of meeting unfamiliar schedules. Travels with “Charlie” (or whatever name your viola goes by) call for careful planning. Its not easy being a viola in the summer! Check your instrument early and often and mind the gaps. The instrument will reward your kindness.

If your travel plans include airplanes, your viola is now almost always welcome. However, given an increase in border vigilance, it is perhaps wise to carry documentation with the instrument’s description both to establish possession and ownership. In addition, instrument theft does occur while traveling and an immediately available full description can assist authorities with recovery. Perhaps as important, if not more so, is the documentation of any bow with an ivory or tortoiseshell frog. As both materials are now banned, you may need a bill of sale or other certificates of origin or appraisals stating the date when the bow was created. Plan ahead. If you are stopped by customs agents and you don’t have the necessary documentation, you could face confiscation- it is not worth the risk!

Heat and humidity often impact your bow more quickly than expected. In less than an hour of playing, humidity can stretch

horsehair to the point where it is no longer useable. Bows have what is called a trench that holds an eyelet that is fit into the frog. The eyelet has threads that allow the button to tighten and loosen the hair. The bow can only be tightened until the eyelet makes contact with the back of the trench. If you continue to try to tighten the hair after it is stretched out, the eyelet and the button become a vise. With the pressure put on the stick between the trench and the button, you could easily crack the stick. Even if your bow has been recently rehired as short as possible by a very good luthier who anticipates your travel schedule, remember that the trench which holds the eyelet is perhaps a bit more than half an inch. It doesn’t take horsehair very long to stretch that distance in high humidity. Restoration of a cracked stick is not only expensive but causes a loss of value to the bow.

Your viola is made of wood and glue along with some varnish on the outside. All wood reacts to heat and humidity. Vigilance is necessary. Keep checking your bridge to make certain that it is straight. Look at the back side of the bridge that should be at a right angle to the top. Check the bridge feet to make sure that they fit flush with the top and there are no gaps. Each time you change strings, do so one at a time to retain bridge tension so the post doesn’t move or fall. Take a #2 lead pencil and rub the pencil in each string groove on the bridge. Do the same at the nut. This will help keep the string from fraying as you tune. A good bridge, fit by a highly competent luthier, should last years if it is kept straight. While

tuning, the combination of string pressure and rosin along the string grooves pull the bridge forward. This not only shortens the string length which could alter sound quality, but left in a forward leaning position, the fibers of the bridge wood will stretch which increases the likelihood that the bridge will warp and ultimately need to be replaced. It is not uncommon for restorers and dealers to find instruments with bridges made more than one hundred years ago. Really good bridges can get quite pricey. It pays to care for the one you have.

Heat and humidity can cause the neck angle of your viola to drop rather quickly. The strings then become too high off the fingerboard and playing is extremely difficult. If the instrument is to be exposed to steady heat and humidity, you should have a neck support which fits between the fingerboard and the high point of the arch in the upper bout. Keep the support in place unless the instrument is in use. Remove carefully without scratching the varnish. To make a neck support, you can use milk carton material that has a waxy surface. The length should be about 2.75" with a width of about .5". Cut the strips of carton to that size and stack to a height where the stack fits snugly between the fingerboard and the high point of the arch. Scotch tape the stack together and then wrap with wax paper and scotch tape the edges just like wrapping a package.. If you have trouble getting the proper fit, consult with a good luthier and perhaps have him make one for you.

Sticking pegs are perhaps the most common summer annoyance. First, check with your luthier to make sure the pegs fit properly. Then always carry a little tube of peg compound (also referred to as "peg dope") to keep the pegs from sticking in the humidity. Keep in mind that boxwood is a more porous wood than ebony or rosewood

and it is more likely to absorb humidity and get stuck. If your peg(s) are slipping, never use chalk. The chalk will of course stop some or all of the slipping. If, however, the instrument encounters a rise in humidity, the peg could really be stuck and the player runs the risk of breaking the peg trying to turn it or worse yet, jamming the peg to the point where a good luthier has to drill it out and replace the peg. One hates to think that the pegbox itself can crack, but excessive force trying to turn a peg has cracked many peg box walls.

Excessive heat softens glue so never leave your instrument in a hot car for a minute. For pit stops on the thruway, take your instrument with you as a car in the direct sun, heats very quickly. Never put the instrument in the trunk. Keep in mind that hide glue is used to make instruments because it does let go which can save the top and back plates from cracking. Remember also that the atmosphere could also get "hot" with your insurance company if the instrument is stolen from a parked car, whether the car was locked or not.

It never hurts to keep checking the instrument for open seams. The first tip that you may have an open seam is a new buzz on the viola. While a buzz can be caused by any number of issues, seams are always one of the first suspects. Check the ribs very closely at the joint with the top and back. Openings can be visually located, or by tapping the edges of the top and back along the purfling line. Make sure that you are not wearing any jewelry that could make contact with the instrument and damage the varnish. If a seam is open the tapping sound generated will be different from the norm. Often you will hear a smacking noise as the top or back hits the ribs and linings.

If your viola has an open seam and you are stuck in a part of the world with no trained luthiers anywhere around, you may have some options. If you are a touring professional headed to remote locations, carrying a spare viola wouldn't hurt. The good news is that there is now at least one case maker, Maurizio Riboni in Cremona, Italy who makes a double viola case. Also, Titebond makes a cold liquid hide glue specifically for instruments. In an extreme emergency, you can rub a small amount of glue in the seam gap and use your chinrest as a clamp. Wipe any excess glue off the instrument with a paper towel and warm water, and take it to your luthier when you arrive back home. Never use Elmers or any similar glue and do not ever try to close any cracks on the top, back or ribs. That is a job for a skilled professional who has all the proper clamps.

There is a saying sometimes embossed on the ribs of French and Bohemian instruments, which loosely translated says: *Alive in the forest, I am silent. In death I sing.* Have your viola well cared-for to ensure that it keeps singing. Mind the gaps.

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.

At the Grassroots

By Louise Zeitlin

Great things are happening on the state level of the American Viola Society! State chapters have renewed energy and are hosting imaginative and exciting events. Guest violists from America and Europe have given lectures, master classes and recitals. B.R.A.T.S. (public school viola events) have been held. These events have generated great excitement with our next generation of violists. Reading sessions and parties have brought violists of all ages and abilities together to share in a mutual love for our rich, sonorous instrument.

You may not be aware that 2008 is the thirtieth anniversary of the American Viola Society! In 1978, the Viola Research Society became the American Viola Society. While the organization was essentially unchanged, the new name made the dual mission of supporting both research and performance more obvious. During this 30th anniversary year, the AVS plans to celebrate in as grand a manner as possible! After all, we have much to celebrate - a wonderful instrument and fantastic people!

At our American Viola Society board meetings in June, the executive board decided to embark on a new initiative; we hope to establish a state viola chapter in each of the fifty states. There are many advantages to starting a state chapter. The advantage that most immediately comes to my mind is that the combined resources of a group are always greater than an individual effort. I am very lucky to live in Cleveland

where there are some of the greatest violists, music schools and The Cleveland Orchestra! Through the resources of the Ohio Viola Society, we have been able to provide “nourishment” for the professional violist, the college-aged violist, as well as for the young violist (both who study privately and in their school). We have also included the amateur community in our events. The feeling each time we put on an event is extraordinary. There is great support and a mutual learning that takes place. It is thrilling to see some of our nation’s top viola professors and members of the Cleveland Orchestra sharing a stand with a public school viola student!

If you do not have a chapter in your state, I would like to strongly encourage you to start one. Yes, it is a lot of work, but the payback is great and the rewards many! If you get ten new regular members to join the AVS (or fifteen new student members) you will be eligible to receive a grant of \$200 to help fund your events. You will be amazed at how little money you will need to put on a variety of events. Also, don’t forget that if you get five people to join together you will get a group discount! A regular member will save \$6.00 and a student member will save \$3.00 over the regular price by joining as a group.

The University of Northern Colorado is the first of the AVS student chapters. This chapter had a great first year. Heather Buffington, the UNCO chapter president writes: “we hosted a luncheon, had a fundraiser, but most of all the chapter helped

pull our studio together.” A student chapter can give your students many opportunities. Through their chapter, they will be able to bring in guest violists, go out and work in the community, learn organizational and leadership skills and much more. If you are a college or university professor, I would like to encourage you to help your students to start their own student chapter. This too will have great benefits to all.

The AVS is working hard to make the organization one that is accessible to all violists. Please take an in-depth look at this web site. You will see the many things the AVS does for its members: the new viola bank (viola lending organization), BRATS educational initiative, the Primrose, Gardner, and Dalton Competitions, the Journal of the American Viola Society and much, much more! There is something for everyone. If you look under the “Community” pages, you will be able to reach your state chapter.

If you do not have a chapter in your state, I would like to encourage you to go out on a limb and start a state chapter of your own. Please feel free to contact me at <Louisezeitlin@oberlin.net> or AVS President Helen Callus at <hcallus@music.ucsb.edu> if you have any questions. There are guidelines for starting a state chapter also under the “Community” pages.

Let’s celebrate the upcoming 30th anniversary year and enjoy our instrument by participating in viola events on both the state and the national level. You will be glad that you did!

Louise Zeitlin is on the faculty at Baldwin-Wallace College, where she has been lecturer in viola since 1995. Recently she was appointed as Director of the Oberlin

Community Music School. She has been featured as recitalist and chamber musician throughout the United States. Ms. Zeitlin is currently a board member of the American Viola Society. She is also a founding member and board member of the Ohio Viola Society. Recent honors include awards given by the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, and the Founder’s Award given by the American Viola Society.

New Music Reviews:

Giya Kancheli

***Styx* for Viola, Mixed Choir and Orchestra (1999)**

Difficulty: Level 4
Duration: 34 minutes
Dedication and Premiere: Yuri Bashmet with Dutch Radio PO and Large Chorus

Vom Winde beweint (Mourned by the Wind), Liturgy for Viola and Large Orchestra (1989)

I. Largo molto
II. Allegro moderato
III. Larghetto
IV. Andante maestoso

Difficulty: Level 4
Duration: 38 minutes
Dedication and Premiere: Yuri Bashmet with Orchestra of the Leningrad Kirov Theatre

By Giya Kancheli (b. 1935)

After my first listening to the recording of Kancheli's *Styx* [Deutsche Grammophon 289 471 494-2 with Yuri Bashmet, viola soloist with the Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre], I was amazed at how quickly the time passed, as this is a full one-movement work that lasts for 34 minutes. I was captivated and interested in every moment, and am sure that experiencing a live performance of this work will be even more interesting. I found this work to be immediately accessible and my impression is that it will certainly prove to be an audience pleaser. It is written in a linear

style, with plenty of captivating mood and color changes.

The title *Styx* comes from the river mentioned in ancient Greek mythology that separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. This work seems to be very programmatic; the music takes us through a long journey in a slow flowing "river-like" fashion, with the occasional moments of excitement or "rapid currents" dispersed sporadically along the mostly cool and tranquil setting. This "river-like" tapestry is created with underlying smooth, meditative ostinati and drones, and the occasional "rapid currents" contain moments that range from bizarre, fantasy, grotesque, dance-like, and hymnal. The music is extremely successful in keeping the listener in suspense, and the orchestration is always captivating- especially with Kancheli's instrument choices of the spinet piano, bass guitar and percussion. The use of the voices and the eerie harmonics in the solo viola seem to be tapping into the deeper, darker side of the psyche here, often representing the spooky unknown world of the dead. I also know of no other viola solo work in which the composer seems to take such joy in juxtaposing extreme differences in dynamics (from *ppp* to *fff*) and orchestration (from transparent to glutinous). This work ends with an extremely soft repeated pattern in the solo viola- a very serious and contemplative ending. This work joins many other works for our instrument that end softly like this, as it seems composers have an affinity to associating our timbre with seriousness, contemplativeness, and

death (as in this piece, which portrays the river meeting the world of the dead).

The solo viola part, when used, is always prominent as the orchestration is usually pretty transparent when the soloist is playing. The long viola lines heard are usually very simple and rhapsodic, and not at all virtuosic-sounding. Difficult “gymnastics” are hardly used at all, however he does seem to utilize complete freedom in his choice for the range of the instrument, occasionally venturing into the stratosphere. The solo part by itself is pretty uninteresting, and rhythmically fairly simple, but is certainly an integral piece of the puzzle when put together. Kancheli does not seem to be concerning himself with virtuosity of the instrument at all, and he takes an attitude of writing this work more like a symphony with a prominent viola part, similar to the Berlioz *Harold in Italy* in that regard. Probably like the Berlioz, this work holds less value from a pedagogical standpoint than it would hold for a violist who is just looking for an interesting deviation from the standard Bartok/Walton/Hindemith programmed works for viola and orchestra. This piece would also make an excellent companion piece to the Vaughan Williams *Flos Campi* and/or William Schumann’s *Concerto on English Rounds*, both for solo viola, orchestra, and choir.

In Kancheli’s *Mourned by the Wind (Vom Winde beweint)* he similarly depicts issues of nature and death, and similarities between the linear movement of the “wind” in this work can draw to the movement of the “river” in *Styx*. Issues of death, dark deeper moods, and remembrance are also projected in this concerto. This work is also more symphonic than concerto-like, and I was similarly moved and captivated throughout the entire length of this substantial work and surprised at how quickly time passed while

listening [ECM New Series 1471 437 199-2, Kim Kashkashian with Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Saarbrücken]. Also similar in this work was the use of drones and ostinati to portray the linear movement, and the solo viola line was again lyrical, rhapsodic, and contemplative while using the full expanse of the viola range. The orchestration in this work was also extremely interesting, full, and colorful, especially in his utilizing of the small harpsichord, celeste, bass guitar, harp, and piano.

This work opens with a huge, spooky piano cluster that dies away, and the whole movement spins out from that decay. One could imagine the opening as the beginning of Time, with this first cluster as the “Big Bang”; all of the elements (the notes) explode from it and the resulting music as a sliver of the observed passage of time in macrocosm. (I would love to ask Kancheli if this was indeed what he was thinking!) The second movement *Allegro moderato* sounds strongly similar in contour and harmony to the second movement of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*. The endings of these two works have similarity, though with important character differences. While both finish slowly and softly, *Vom Winde* has a feeling of contentment and omnipotence; *Styx* leaves the listener hanging, with many things unanswered.

Other works with solo viola by Kancheli include *Caris Mere* (1994) for Soprano and Viola, *Left In Order Not To See (Abii Ne Viderem)* (1992) for Viola and Orchestra, and *Twilight* (2004) for Violin, Viola and Orchestra.

The score for the above works are published by Musikverlage Hans Sikorski <http://www.sikorski.de/>

Kenneth Martinson, viola professor at the University of Florida, received degrees from Eastman and the University of Michigan. He is currently the Secretary of the American Viola Society and President of the Florida Viola Society. Formerly of the Artaria Quartet of Boston, Rackham and Julstrom Quartets, he has also been Principal of the Orlando Philharmonic, Toledo, Peoria, and Lansing Symphonies. He recorded three CDs for the Centaur Label, with music of Milhaud, Clarke, and Martinu. Ken was a featured violist at the 1999, 2002, and 2005 International Viola Congresses.

Key to the Difficulty level chart:

- 1 Very Easy
- 2 Somewhat Easy
- 3 Intermediate
- 4 Somewhat Difficult
- 5 Difficult
- 6 Very Difficult

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