

# Journal of the American Viola Society

Volume 37 2021 Online Issue



## Features:

Iranian Viola Music

Adolphus Hailstork's *Sanctum*

Biber's *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa*

# Journal of the American Viola Society

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Volume 37, Summer 2021 Online Issue

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On the Cover:

**Aimee Bonham**

*Jason's Viola*

**Oil on panel, 24" x 24"**

Aimee Bonham ([www.aimeebonham.com](http://www.aimeebonham.com)) is a professional artist from southern Utah who currently resides in Southern CA. Her husband is violist Jason Bonham. In 2002, Aimee painted *Jason's Viola* as a college graduation gift. Aimee has painted other abstracted viola paintings and loves using the viola and music as a source of inspiration. This painting is not available for purchase; however, commissions and special projects related to the viola are welcome. Her work can also be seen in person at Sandstone Gallery in Laguna Beach, CA.

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The *Journal of the American Viola Society* is published in spring and fall and as an online-only issue in summer. The American Viola Society is a nonprofit organization of viola enthusiasts, including students, performers, teachers, scholars, composers, makers, and friends, who seek to encourage excellence in performance, pedagogy, research, composition, and lutherie. United in our commitment to promote the viola and its related activities, the AVS fosters communication and friendship among violists of all skill levels, ages, nationalities, and backgrounds.

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The past year of the pandemic has taught me about the value of connections. We all have an innate desire to connect with others, something that was interrupted by COVID. Hours of FaceTime or Zoom helped to recreate these connections, but, as the public sphere begins to reopen, I'm reminded of the elemental

importance of person-to-person connection. In this same vein, this issue of *JAVS* presents many different views on connections in our musical and personal worlds.

One type of connection appears through many articles here: the bridge between the past and the present. In this fiftieth year of the AVS, reflecting on the beginnings of our society provides perspective and ideas for the future. Dwight Pounds, who is himself one of the most connected violists I know, writes compellingly about the early AVS years, and his voice is joined by other important violists, including Myron Rosenblum, Marna Street, and Thomas Tatton. We're also lucky to present a brief article from one of my viola idols, John Graham. In announcing the availability of his live performance archive, he writes beautifully about the connection between the viola and new music.

In her Honorable Mention article from the 2020 Dalton Research Competition, Chelsea Wimmer also makes a clear connection to the past (the year 1696 to be specific) by bringing Biber's ancient work into a new, contemporary form. Her scholarship and historically-couched creativity inspires me to investigate the past and make connections to today.

Whereas Dr. Wimmer mined the past for new ideas, several other writers forge connections with current, contemporary music. Kimia Hesabi introduces us to viola works from the Iranian diaspora; Hannah Levinson shows the myriad ways the violin and viola can connect to create new music; and Kathryn Brown analyzes Adolphus Hailstork's *Sanctum* from a viola-specific perspective.

The past year has pushed the inequitable construction of the musical world into the forefront of our minds. George Taylor lays this out in brutal, heart-wrenching terms, while also showing the potential for a creative path forward. Kathryn Brown compels us to question why some composers are canonized and others not, and how we can take concrete steps for change. And along these same lines, Ashleigh Gordon has taken these steps, and is a model for empowering the creation of a new, more equitable repertoire. Our musical world and the music we embrace is vast, and including new repertoire from historically under-represented sources isn't a zero-sum game—we all grow from it. Performing Hailstork or commissioning Tavakol doesn't mean that we stop playing Brahms; there is room for multitudes in our viola world, and the authors here show us how to take the first steps in building a better musical society.

This is my final issue as the editor of *JAVS*. It's been an enlightening four years, and I'm grateful for the many connections I've built with authors, for the knowledge I've gained in research, and for the opportunity to be part of this journal's remarkable history. I look forward to reading its next chapter in the future, and wish much success to the new editor, Christina Ebersohl.

Sincerely,

Andrew Braddock  
Editor



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# The David Dalton Viola Research Competition Guidelines

The *Journal of the American Viola Society* welcomes submissions for the David Dalton Viola Research Competition for university and college student members of the American Viola Society.

## **Eligibility:**

All entrants must be members of the American Viola Society who are currently enrolled in a university or who have completed any degree within twelve months of the entry deadline.

## **General Guidelines:**

Entries must be original contributions to the field of viola research and may address issues concerning viola literature, history, performers, and pedagogy. Entries must not have been published in any other publication or be summaries of another author's work. The body of the work should be 1500–3500 words in length and should adhere to standard criteria for a scholarly paper. For more details on standard criteria for a scholarly paper, please consult one of these sources:

Bellman, Jonathan D. *A Short Guide to Writing about Music*. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson, 2007.

Herbert, Trevor. *Music in Words: A Guide to Writing about Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Wingell, Richard J. *Writing about Music: An Introductory Guide*. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2009.

Entries should include relevant footnotes and bibliographic information and may include short musical examples. Papers originally written for school projects may be submitted but should conform to these guidelines; see judging criteria for additional expectations of entries. Any questions regarding these guidelines or judging criteria should be sent to [info@avsnationaloffice.org](mailto:info@avsnationaloffice.org).

## **Judging:**

A panel of violists and scholars will evaluate submissions and then select a maximum of three winning entries.

Entries will be judged according to scholarly criteria, including statement of purpose, thesis development, originality and value of the research, organization of materials, quality of writing, and supporting documentation.

## **Submission:**

Entries must be submitted electronically using Microsoft Word by June 15, 2021. For the electronic submission form, please visit <https://www.americanviolasociety.org/News-And-Events/Dalton.php>.

## **Prize Categories:**

All winning entries will be featured in the *Journal of the American Viola Society*, with authors receiving the following additional prizes:

**1st Prize:** \$400, sponsored by Thomas and Polly Tatton

**2nd Prize:** \$200

**3rd Prize:** Henle edition sheet music package including works by Schumann, Reger, Stamitz, Mendelssohn, and Bruch, donated by Hal Leonard Corporation



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Summer 2021 is already proving to be an exciting one for our society. Our first ever virtual conference was a huge success, and we thank all of you who participated and helped to make this event possible. Many members of our board were

instrumental in transitioning from a live event model to an online event, but the bulk of the work has fallen to our President-Elect, Ames Asbell. She has committed hundreds of hours to making the event a success, so please join me in thanking her for her tireless work to make sure we were able to gather this year for our Festival.

In case you missed the fun, we shared several news items at the Festival that I'd like to draw your attention to in this letter. First, I am pleased to announce that we will have a LIVE In-Person Festival June 1–4, 2022 at the Schwob School of Music in Columbus, Georgia. A call for proposals will be announced soon. For more information, contact [katrin.meidell@americanviolasociety.org](mailto:katrin.meidell@americanviolasociety.org).

Next, we are proud to announce the formation of the AVS Recording Label. The expense of making professional recordings too often determines which violists have recordings available. As a result, many wonderful musicians and excellent repertoire remain unheard. We have developed this label to help address these issues and plan to release one album per year for lovers of the viola everywhere. Our first project will be a compilation album featuring works by composers currently underrepresented in our canon. If you haven't yet done so, check out our [underrepresented composer database](#) in order to help find works that are eligible. We are not limiting submissions to works in this

database, but it can be a great start for research. If you'd like to learn more, visit our website or email [recording-label@americanviolasociety.org](mailto:recording-label@americanviolasociety.org). We are also accepting donations to help defray costs to participants.

Another exciting news item: after years of negotiations to find mutually agreeable terms, the AVS is once again a member of the International Viola Society. The creative problem solving of both executive boards has allowed us to find a way to move forward that maintains the AVS's adherence to US non-profit tax law and regulations, while also allowing us to be involved and support the international viola community. For an initial term of three years, the AVS will be making an annual donation of 500 Euros towards the IVS Congress fund in lieu of the previous arrangement of 7% of membership dues. These terms will be reexamined when the three-year term expires.

This information will be sent via email to members soon as well—many of you have reached out over the past few months regarding not receiving notices. Please take a moment now to add [info@avsnationaloffice.org](mailto:info@avsnationaloffice.org) to your saved addresses. This will help ensure that notices do not go directly to your spam folder.

Finally, this edition of *JAVS* marks the end of Andrew Braddock's term as Editor. He has done an amazing job in this role, finding excellent material, creative content, and helping us move to a digital journal offering on top of it all. Please take a moment to thank Andrew for all his done for the AVS.

All endings provide new beginnings, and as such, please join me in welcoming our incoming Editor, Christina Ebersosh to the role. In her interview for the position, she impressed the committee with her vision for the Journal—stay tuned to see more exciting developments!

May you all have a great summer,

Hillary Herndon

# Music for the Viola

## Announcing John Graham's live performance archive on YouTube

By John Graham



I was raised in a small town in California and, in the late 1950s, entered the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Everything in the city was a new experience for me and in music three things were especially so: chamber music, the viola, and contemporary music.

I was a violinist and while I had heard William Primrose play a recital in a nearby town large enough to have had the Columbia Community Concert Series, I had never had the opportunity to play a viola. At the Conservatory, as I began chamber music coachings, I also began to ask my colleagues, during rehearsal breaks, if I could try their viola.

The Conservatory had a String Orchestra and in my first week as a member, Bartók's Divertimento for Strings was one of our pieces. I recall being so amazed with the sounds that I could hardly concentrate on the notes I needed to be playing . . . it was a new world. This combination of the new led to my switching to the viola and to feeling that new music was as compelling as old music, that they were just different paths to the excitement of playing music.

My first chamber music coach and subsequently my viola teacher was Philip Burton, violist in the Griller String Quartet, in residence at the Conservatory and at The University of California in Berkeley. He had studied with

Lionel Tertis and was thus personally familiar with the zeal with which the latter had worked to have composers write music that featured the viola. Philip had a deep appreciation of the uniqueness of the viola's voice and cared a great deal about how to express that voice and to find music that could develop its potentials.

I finished my collegiate years at the University of California in Berkeley and by then was regularly performing brand new music by composition students there and at Mills College in Oakland.

The viola and the new were, from my start with both, combined.

As I pursued my performing career, chamber music was a focus but so were solo performances whenever they were possible. As the early twentieth-century music for viola had become the basis of the repertoire, I was always looking for something newer to play and began to use the phrase "Music for the Viola" for my recital programs and recording titles. In those same years I was very active in new music ensembles in New York City.

During my years at the Eastman School of Music, I had the great pleasure of having works written for me by my faculty colleagues in Composition and their students, some of whom were also my students. It was perhaps the ideal way to collaborate: to talk together about how music may be put together and about the diversities in viola voice; to gladly try things out before the work had been completed and to mutually enjoy the premiere performance.

I am thereby happy to now have my recordings from those years at Eastman join the video recordings I have had posted on YouTube and my set of four "Music for the Viola" CDs. You can access these recordings [here, on my YouTube channel](#), and find more on my website, [grahamviola.com](http://grahamviola.com).

# What Kind of Philanthropist Are You?

By Thomas Tatton

Now that we have determined that most of us are Philanthropists, what kind of philanthropist are you? When it comes to volunteering for a local service organization, at your place of worship and for the local youth symphony—we know **you** are outstanding! But, how are you at handling money? Like most of us—you probably make some really smart moves and then, just sometimes, not so smart moves. The following describes one “*Smart Move*.” It is:

- Tax effective
- Allows your money to grow tax-free
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## The Donor-Advised Fund (DAF)

Donor-advised funds have been around for some time before the Tax Reform Act of 1969. That Act made them more widely available and accessible to the general public. In the 1990s, these funds began to grow in popularity, and today they **are** philanthropy’s fastest-growing vehicles.<sup>1</sup> A donor-advised fund can be set up by most anyone at brokerage firms (and other institutions); Vanguard, Schwab and Fidelity are examples. The donor hands over (“donates”) to the brokerage firm (host) a certain amount of money. **If the donor itemizes** deductions on their tax return, that donation is “deductible” much as a donation to any charitable organization. These “donated” assets grow tax-free until the donor specifies a distribution(s), which **must** go to an IRS-qualified charity, i.e., a 501(c)(3). These charities can include your house of worship, the Red Cross, your Alma Mater, a local homeless shelter and of course, the **American Viola Society**! Records show that most DAF donors give to six or seven charities annually.<sup>2</sup>

Some important notes to consider:

- Funding a DAF is irreversible. The money must be used for a qualified charity.
- Most DAF hosts require a minimum investment: Fidelity and Schwab require \$5,000: cash, stocks, or other assets.<sup>3</sup>
- Most host firms have a variety of investment options including mutual funds and exchange-traded funds from which the donor may choose.

- There is a minimum cost to the donor for both the host (brokerage, etc.) and the investment vehicle, i.e. the mutual fund or ETF.
- Anyone can contribute to **your** DAF including uncles and aunts, cousins and even grandpa. They receive the same tax advantaged deductibility as the donor.
- Some DAF’s mandate regular giving. For example, at Fidelity the donor must make a gift of at least \$50.00 every three years.
- We mentioned above that a DAF could be set up to fund your favorite charities beyond your lifetime. This is very doable. If this is a feature that is attractive, we ask that you check with your tax advisor and or your estate-planning expert.

If you have read down to here, we have piqued your interest. Perhaps a Donor-Advised Fund is just right for you. If so, please check with your investment advisor. If it turns out that a DAF is not quite right, we will have another “*Smart Move*” idea in the next installment of *The Development Corner*.

More information can be found at:

- Consumer Reports. Google: Donor Advised Funds – Wang, Penelope Wang, *5 Things to Know About Donor-Advised Funds*, Consumer Reports, 2019.
- Fidelity website: [fidelitycharitable.org](https://fidelitycharitable.org)  
Drop Down Guidance  
Drop Down Philanthropy 101  
Scroll to “Donor Advised Find”
- Schwab website: [schwabcharitable.org](https://schwabcharitable.org)
- Vanguard Website: [vanguardcharitable.org](https://vanguardcharitable.org)  
Scroll down to “What is a donor-advised fund?”

This article is for educational and entertainment purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for tax advice. Please consult your tax advisor for guidance.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Consumer Reports, Penelope Wang

<sup>2</sup> Consumer Reports, Penelope Wang

<sup>3</sup> See “More information...” under Schwab and Fidelity



# Heinrich Biber's *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa*, *Partia VII*

## An Edition for Modern Violas

By Chelsea Wimmer

Known as the greatest violin virtuoso of his time, Heinrich Biber wrote music unparalleled in imagination, virtuosity, and narrative capacity. His popular Rosary Sonatas for violin and continuo are well-regarded by musicians and scholars, but his lesser-known *Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa* chamber pieces also embody these qualities. Partia VII of the *Harmonia*, originally written for two violas d'amore and continuo, provides modern violists with a unique opportunity. While the viola was most often a supporting player in German seventeenth century chamber and orchestral music, here, like in J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 6, the two violas are the soloists. In order to further expand soloistic viola repertoire from the Baroque era and bring this spectacular piece to a larger community of listeners and players, I've made an arrangement of it for two modern violas and continuo. In this arrangement, I prioritized the important historical performance practice considerations of diverse sounds, articulation, ornamentation, and continuo instrumentation. Incorporating these aspects of historical performance practice into this piece is the most compelling and effective way to bring Biber's vision to life.

### *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa*

Written in 1696, *Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa* is a collection of seven "partias" (a name generally applied to a multi-movement instrumental work) written for various combinations of three instruments. In his dedication of *Harmonia*, Biber offers his musical gifts and the pieces directly to Archbishop Johannes Ernst of Salzburg, and indirectly to God:

Most Noble and also Most Reverend Prince, Lord, Lord Most Clement. Be open O Most Noble Prince, since I have inscribed this Skillful-Melodic Harmony to Your Sacred Name. This is Your work, and whatever [is] in this work, One Concord is played by many fiddles. Certainly, this is the ideal of Your Virtue: as all things, which will merit eternity, are disposed concordantly. And why would it not be allowed to call to witness my faith in fiddles?

These are arias (as we call them), and indeed skillful, namely that in this way I have combined the beneficial with sweetness. Every note will be brought under Your Most Clement protection. Live long, reign auspiciously, Great Prince! Thus all good things vow with one harmony, and also I myself along with these. Of Your Reverend Highness a most humble servant. Henrich [sic] Ignaz Franz von Biber.<sup>1</sup>

In this dedication, Biber address his gratitude to the Archbishop—addressed as "Lord Most Clement" and "Great Prince"—who, as a representative of the Pope, connects to God. At this time, musicians and especially composers viewed music as a way to capture a glimpse of the divine: to escape the fear and chaos of the world and connect to the greater universe. Music was used to transform the chaos of the human world to harmony and concordance.<sup>2</sup> Biber hoped to achieve this in his wish to reach the "ideal of [God's] Virtue," to contribute goodness to the world, and to unite these "skillful arias" under "one harmony."

The specific title *Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa* invokes several elements crucial to seventeenth-century German music. According to James Clements,

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*This article was awarded the Honorable Mention Prize in the 2020 David Dalton Research Competition.*

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The most common and literal translation of the words *Harmonia artificioso ariosa* is “skillful-melodic harmony”; the word *harmonia* refers generally to the music. *Artificiosus* signifies something done “according to the rules of art” in broad terms or something “on which much art has been bestowed, made with art, artificial, ingenious.” The Italian term *arioso*, likewise, means more than just melodic. It can also mean “graceful, light, attractive, pleasing . . . tuneful,” and could also refer to the naturalness of music springing from nature.<sup>3</sup>

Clements’s interpretation of “*Harmonia artificiosa ariosa*” makes it clear that this music provided a specific aural experience for the audience. However, it also evoked a great range of metaphysical responses. In this time, composers wrote harmonies and rhythms that would provoke affections: love, joy, peace, anger, sorrow, fury.<sup>4</sup> This key component of Baroque music composition and performance was surely a significant factor in Biber’s writing and titling of this piece.

Five of the seven partias were written for two violins and continuo; one was written for one violin, one viola, and continuo; and the final partia was written for two violas d’amore and continuo. Six of the partias require scordatura, a technique that Biber also featured in his Rosary Sonatas for violin. The primary intention of this scordatura is to change the instruments’ fundamental tonal colors as well as to facilitate difficult fingering techniques.<sup>5</sup>

The piece under consideration here is the seventh partia, written originally for two violas d’amore. The viola d’amore is a non-fretted, bowed, twelve-string instrument played on the shoulder like a violin or viola. The twelve strings are divided in two groups: six main strings run above the fingerboard to be fingered and bowed and six sympathetic strings run underneath the bridge, vibrating with the main strings. This adds a unique resonance to the instrument.<sup>6</sup> Partia VII contains seven movements—Praeludium, Allamande, Sarabande, Gigue, Aria, Trezza, and Arietta Variata.

### Rhetoric and Diverse Sounds

Baroque aesthetic principles informed the performance decisions I made in creating my edition of *Harmonia*. The two most important were effective rhetoric and

communication of affect. There are of course countless treatises—both historical and modern—written about these principles, but distilled to its simplest essence, musical rhetorical theory in the Baroque era casts each piece as an oration, or a rationally organized argument, with certain distinct sections. Similar to figures of speech, musical sections and gestures served to communicate and amplify the emotional meaning of the piece: its *affect*. A composer’s goal was to construct the piece in order to move the emotions of the audience, or “to [actively] create the intended affections, not just passively reflect them.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, as Stephen Rose describes, the performer holds incredible power in guiding the audience through the passions as if by magic. Patrons would come to concerts seeking to be guided on an intense emotional journey.<sup>8</sup> Understanding and acknowledging that each gesture, dynamic, structural interplay, and harmony encodes a particular shade of meaning deepens the performer’s commitment and strengthens the affect the performer seeks to communicate. As described below, the choices that I made in terms of bowings, articulations, ornamentations, and dynamics had a two-fold purpose: serve and amplify each movement’s affect, and make the work technically accessible on modern viola.

Considine proposes that *Harmonia* may exemplify some aspects of Kircher’s “fantastic style,” which “is organized with regard to manifest invention, the hidden reason of harmony, and an ingenious, skilled connection of harmonic phrases and fugues.”<sup>9</sup> The fantastic style can provoke the emotions of the audience while also featuring the technical abilities of the performers. Considine also proposes a specific organ-style affect for the Praeludium, based on the density and rhythm of many chords in the violas and pedal tones in the continuo.<sup>10</sup>

Another important element I aimed to emphasize in *Harmonia* is the concept of diverse sounds and importance of contrast. Barbara Russano Hanning aptly describes the fundamental characteristic of the Baroque period as “a dynamically unstable fusion of contrasts: between the real and the ideal; between high and low, serious and comic; between heroic and prosaic, elevated and fallen; between light and dark, pleasing and disturbing; between passionate movement and noble calm, stirring drama and still life.”<sup>11</sup> Using the concept of diverse sounds—intentional discordance and disorder—is among the most effective ways to arouse the affections.

## Technical Alterations

Although the modern viola and the viola d'amore are two very different instruments, the range of Partia VII requires very few alterations when transcribed for the modern viola. I explored the possibility of incorporating some type of scordatura for the two violists to preserve its altered tonal color, but I ultimately kept the violas at standard tuning, as any scordatura would increase its technical difficulty and could narrow the work's accessibility to the general community of violists. Scordatura is often intended to have the opposite technical effect, but any tonal color change that occurred would not be powerful enough to warrant the increase in difficulty and accessibility.

Some chord alterations are necessary in adapting this piece, since Biber wrote it for two instruments that had sixteen more strings than the eight total strings of two modern violas. I aimed to keep as many of the original

chord notes as possible, but revoiced some chords between the two violas. For instance, in the opening of the Praeludium (ex. 1), I eliminated one note in order to fit three strings without disturbing the powerful parallel thirds. I also worked to avoid doubling notes as much as possible. In ex. 2, most of the original notes are present, but with voicing that simply makes more sense for the modern viola.

## Articulations and Bowings

Articulations and bowings help to create the emotional mood of each piece. In making my articulation decisions, I was guided by John Butt's observations:

Articulation might be influenced by the *Affekt*: strong passions such as Joy and Anger would not be especially slurred, but sorrowful and gentle words require a milder, slurred style. . . . Sharper articulation, for certain figures, was recommended



Example 1. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Praeludium*, mm. 1–2. On the left, the 1956 edition edited by Paul Nettle and Friedrich Reidinger. On the right: Chelsea Wimmer's arrangement (2018). All examples are displayed at concert pitch, rather than scordatura fingering.



Example 2. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Praeludium*, mm. 57–61. Upper system: Nettle and Reidinger edition; Lower system: Wimmer edition.

Example 3: Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Praeludium*, mm. 47–53, Wimmer edition.

from the time of Praetorius. *Gruppi* (cadential turns) need to be “scherffer als die Tremoli angeschlagen warden” (more sharply attacked than *tremoli*) and a clear, sharp performance is required of *tiratas* (fast runs up and down) (Praetorius 1619 p. 236).<sup>12</sup>

In the Praeludium, Biber took great care to notate different articulations, slurs, and a variety of rhythms.

In ex. 3, Biber added slurs to mm. 47–49 to de-emphasize individual beats and create a large gesture. In the *Più presto* section, I would encourage lifted down-bows and up-bows from mm. 52–56 for sharper articulations, resulting in a greater contrast and stronger affect of joy. This *Più presto* section should also be played with a slight lift after each dotted sixteenth note, as instructed in the stylistic writings of Leopold Mozart and Quantz.<sup>13</sup>

Three distinct bowing articulations should be demonstrated throughout the Praeludium’s slow sections: the weight and emphasis of down-bows, the lift of bow retakes, and decays on long notes. In this opening *Grave*, down-bow retakes should be taken after each dotted-half note (ex. 4). These down-bows emphasize the organ

canon affect by bringing out canonic entrances. Decaying the sound and retaking the bow on the long dotted half-notes allows the canon affect to be heard more clearly. Each dance movement should be approached with this same strategy: choosing bowing techniques that will intensify whichever affect the performer seeks to evoke. The syncopations, suspensions, and dissonances in the Allamande (ex. 5) evoke a sorrowful, cantabile affect. In this case, each tied note should be held for its full value with few retakes.

In contrast, the Sarabande (ex. 6) should be steadfast and declamatory, with somewhat heavy yet lifted bow-strokes that emphasize the 3/4 meter. As the playful Gigue (ex. 7) begins with a single voice and without a downbeat, this movement could be played nearly *attacca* following the Sarabande. In order to bring out its playful affect and emphasize the canonic quality of each restless voice, every rhythmic figure should be played in a short manner with separate bowings.



Example 4. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Praeludium*, mm. 1–6, Wimmer edition.

The joyous A-flat major Aria (ex. 8) should sing as if it were in an opera. The eighth-note pattern of parallel thirds beginning in m. 7 should be kept short to offer light-hearted, *agréable* contrast to the heavier, complex Sarabande and Gigue. The notes of the joyous, dancing Trezza should be light and flowing, executed through lifted, energetic bow strokes. Since this movement is so short, the Trezza should follow the Aria in a true *attacca*.

The final movement, Arietta Variata, should be prepared in a similar way to each of the dance movements. The slurred leaps in mm. 33–40 (ex. 9) can create an affect of longing joy that would not be nearly as effective if the notes were separate. By contrast, the thirty-second-note passages in mm. 81–96 (ex. 10) create a fiery, passionate affect of unapologetic joy that would be dulled if the notes were slurred.

Example 5. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Allamande*, mm. 5–6, Wimmer edition.

Example 6. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Sarabande*, mm. 1–4, Wimmer edition.

Example 7. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII*, *Gigue*, mm. 1–5, Wimmer edition.

### Ornaments and Dynamics

Ornaments were used in the seventeenth century to add grace and expression to music.<sup>14</sup> The only ornaments Biber added himself were trills—mostly cadential—and

he rarely wrote dynamics. Tarling writes that it is best to avoid “elaborate ornamentation” in the opening of a piece and instead, to add ornaments and complexity throughout.<sup>15</sup> Following Tarling’s point of view, and since there is already a great deal of virtuosity and grace

Example 8. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII*, *Aria*, mm. 4–10, Wimmer edition.

written into the music, I refrained from adding too many ornaments in order to avoid crowding Biber's complex writing.

In the spirit of beginning the piece in a simple, modest way, I did not add ornaments to the Praeludium's opening *Grave*. However, I did add several mordents

to the final *Presto*, beginning in m. 67. As I stated earlier, this is a return to the organ affect and virtuosic conversation between the solo violas, which is amplified by these ornaments and leads to a strong, exciting conclusion. I also chose to incorporate ornaments in many of the Praeludium's *Adagio* sections (ex. 11), in order to add grace and poise.

Example 9. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Arietta Variata*, mm. 33–40, Wimmer edition.

Example 10. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Arietta Variata*, mm. 81–84, Wimmer edition.



Example 11. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Praeludium*, mm. 33–35, Wimmer edition.

Dynamic variance was also considered part of ornamentation and embellishment in the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> In addition to specifying dynamic levels at the start of each section, I incorporated many crescendos and diminuendos to emphasize the contour of fast scales (exs. 12 and 13). This increases the strength of each affect, adds aural interest for the listener, and, again, clarifies the canonic conversations between the violas.

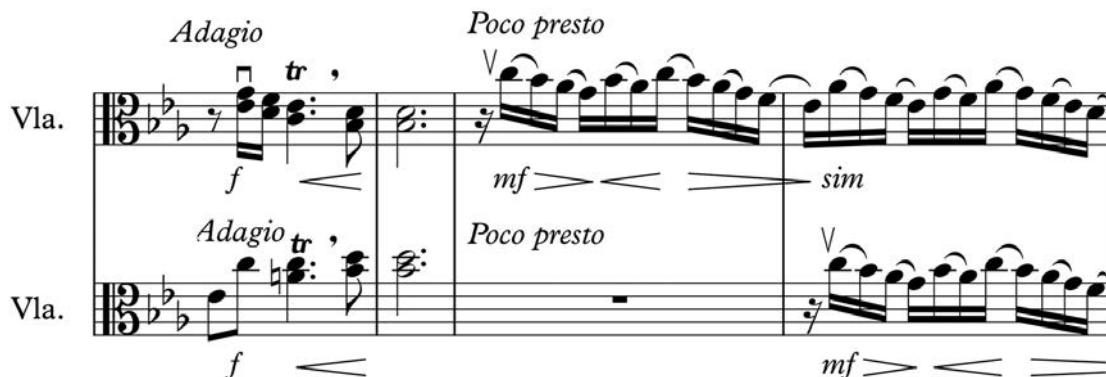
In the *Praeludium*, there is one specific dynamic ornament I added in m. 58 of the Viola I part: the *esclamazione* (ex. 14). As Dickey explains, “Caccini describes it in detail, claiming that it is the principal means of moving the affections. It consists, he says, in beginning the note by diminishing it—that is, beginning strongly and immediately tapering—so that one can then strengthen it and give it liveliness.”<sup>17</sup> The thirty-second

notes that follow this half note already have a strong ornamental expression—emphasized by the *tenuto* I added—so I observed this expressive moment as a perfect opportunity to incorporate the *esclamazione* ornament.

I added ornaments throughout each of the dance movements and the final *Arietta Variata* in this same manner. The addition of varied trills, mordents, and appoggiaturas on the repeats of each movement adds grace, dignity, poise, and clarity to the different affects of each movement. The dynamics I added in the dance movements and *Arietta Variata* serve to “persuade and . . . entertain the audience’s intellect and emotions.”<sup>18</sup> Beginning the *Allamande* at *piano* emphasizes its sorrow, particularly after the exciting, passionate *Praeludium*. The *Sarabande* must begin *forte* to establish its stately, bold affect. This pattern continues for the *Aria* and *Trezza*: a

Example 12. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Praeludium*, mm. 36–38, Wimmer edition.

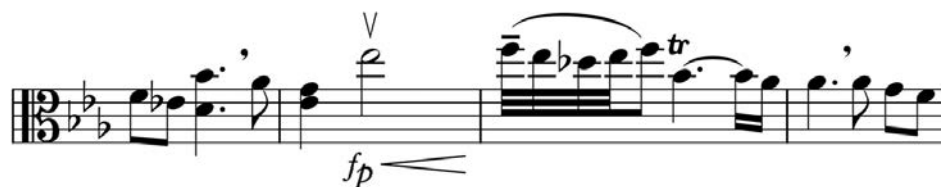




Example 13. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Praeludium*, mm. 43–46, Wimmer edition.

*piano* opening in the Aria serves to soothe after the busy Gigue, and a *mezzo-forte* start to the Trezza offers stronger contrast to the Aria with its joyful dance character. Finally, beginning the Arietta Variata in a *piano* dynamic creates further distinction in its affect and leaves room to grow throughout the long, complex movement.

strumming. One last important consideration is each instrument in the continuo ensemble does not need to play every note in every movement. The instrumentation should vary through the piece—and even within movements such as the Praeludium and Arietta Variata—to enhance affect and create the most contrast possible.



Example 14. Biber, *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa Partia VII, Praeludium*, mm. 57–60, Wimmer edition.

## Basso Continuo

In true seventeenth-century Baroque style, Biber's basso continuo writing includes a bass line and figures with no further realization or instrument specificity, again providing performers with freedom in their decision-making. In order to more closely capture the variety of affects in each movement, many players in the seventeenth century would have elected to use multiple instruments in their continuo section. Considine suggests that Partia VII is well-suited for an organ continuo.<sup>19</sup> Considering how many measures a single pedal-point note is often held in the continuo, I agree that organ could be a useful addition in the continuo group. I would also strongly advocate for the inclusion of harpsichord for its rhythmic, percussive quality; cello, for its flexibility in sustained notes, its dynamic range, and similar timbral color to the viola; and theorbo or guitar, for its ability to achieve different textures through plucking and

## Conclusion

Partia VII of Biber's *Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa* is a unique, imaginative, virtuosic display of musicianship. In order to realize Biber's musical vision in the most effective, authentic, moving way possible, it is important to prioritize the storytelling flow of affect, in part through diversity of sound. The best way to accomplish this is to use the tools of varied articulation, contrasting and shaping dynamics, graceful ornamentation, and a varied and flexible continuo ensemble. This piece can effectively be "translated" from viola d'amore to modern viola and incorporating historically appropriate performance techniques will result in a strong, effective, moving performance.

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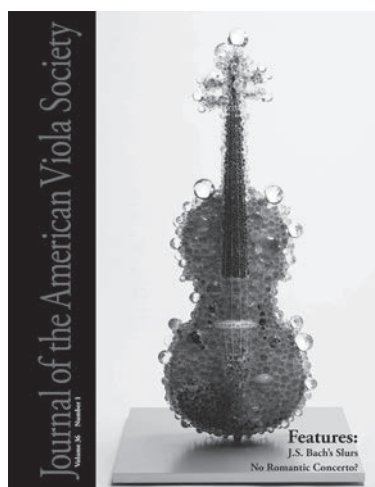
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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Charles Brewer, *The Instrumental Music of Schmelzter, Biber, Muffat and their Contemporaries* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 328-329.
- <sup>2</sup> John Butt, “The Seventeenth-Century Musical ‘Work’,” in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. Tim Carter and John Butt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 36-41.
- <sup>3</sup> James Clements, “Aspects of the *Ars Rhetorica* in the Violin Music of Heinrich Biber (1644-1704),” PhD diss., (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2002), 105-106.

- <sup>4</sup> Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 37.
- <sup>5</sup> Karen Considine, "Interpreting the Style and Context of Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber's Harmonia Artificioso-Ariosa," (Youngstown State University, 2015), 35–36.
- <sup>6</sup> Judy Tarling, *Baroque String Playing for Ingenious Learners* (Hertfordshire: Corda Music Publications, 2001), 230.
- <sup>7</sup> Bartel, 32.
- <sup>8</sup> Stephen Rose, "Music in the Market-Place" in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. Tim Carter and John Butt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 62.
- <sup>9</sup> Considine, 26.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 52.
- <sup>11</sup> Barbara Russano Hanning, "Music and the Arts," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. Tim Carter and John Butt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 111–112.
- <sup>12</sup> John Butt, *Bach Interpretation: Articulation Marks in Primary Sources of J.S. Bach* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 23.
- <sup>13</sup> Tarling, *Baroque String Playing for Ingenious Learners*, 92.
- <sup>14</sup> Bruce Dickey, "Ornamentation in Early Seventeenth-Century Italian Music," in *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 294.
- <sup>15</sup> Tarling, *The Weapons of Rhetoric: A Guide for Musicians and Audiences*, 159.
- <sup>16</sup> Dickey, 308.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, 309.
- <sup>18</sup> Tarling, *The Weapons of Rhetoric: A Guide for Musicians and Audiences*, vi.
- <sup>19</sup> Considine, 22.



## JAVS Call for Papers

The *Journal of the American Viola Society* encourages submissions of articles touching on all aspects of the viola world: musicological research, pedagogy, personal histories, instrument making, outreach, health, new music, and much more. We are particularly interested in articles highlighting underrepresented groups and their performances and compositions. Upcoming submission deadlines April 15 and August 15.



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# Adolphus Hailstork's *Sanctum*

## Capturing the True Essence of the Viola

By Kathryn Brown

The racial uprisings of 2020 and subsequent racial reckoning pressured many classical music organizations in America to reevaluate the inner workings of their institutions in the hopes of making them more equitable and inclusionary. While it should not have taken these unfortunate events to question the centering of whiteness in classical music institutions, these discussions and action plans are essential in helping to make the profession more just. To see an overall change in classical music, smaller changes must be elicited in every facet and at every level: from the way we first engage students in general music classes to curricula in music schools, to the repertoire requirements for orchestra auditions. Speaking more specifically to the viola community, one must consider the works and composers that are celebrated and played the most.

Similar to other instruments learned in the classical tradition, the viola has a repertoire of “standard” works. Some of these include the Bach Cello Suites, the Stamitz, Hoffmeister, Walton, Bartók, and Hindemith viola concerti, or the sonatas of Brahms, Schubert, Shostakovich, or Clarke; this assumption is rooted in the fact that most of these pieces can be found on any viola audition repertoire list.

Beyond orchestral requirements, conversations surrounding repertoire in the viola community also shape the pieces that have become standard. In their article, “11 Top Players Pick Best Viola Works of All Time,” *Strings Magazine* asked some violists which pieces are their favorites as well as which pieces they believe are overlooked.<sup>1</sup> Excluding the fact that none of the violists polled were Black violists (a separate conversation), none of the works discussed by these violists, particularly in regards to pieces that may be overlooked, were written by Black composers. And while this is one specific instance, it would be dismissive to assert that conversations

involving repertoire choice in the field do not mirror this *Strings Magazine* article. By ignoring and overlooking composers in the classical cannon, not only does the repertoire continue to be dictated and limited by the “standard” pieces, but the narrative is further skewed in dictating who is writing music for viola and whether or not it is deemed worthy of playing.

In this age of making classical music more equitable, it is also important to note that pieces written by Black composers should not be sought out and played solely for the sake of playing them. This work is not about checking off boxes on a symbolic inclusion checklist. Instead, pieces by Black composers should be researched and played in genuine interest in learning about the voices that have been left out of the conversation. In searching for these composers, while simultaneously seeking pieces that showcase the viola well, I would like to highlight American composer Adolphus Hailstork and his piece *Sanctum: Rhapsody for Viola and Piano*.

*Sanctum* is a post-tonal piece with clear structure, ideas, an obvious tonal center, and reoccurring motives, making it enjoyable to not only listen to but to play. The viola inhabits a wide range of personalities throughout the work: singing, recluse, feisty, reflective, mournful, excited, and subdued. It is a piece all violists should have in their repertoire as it explores the full range and attributes of the viola. Further, it challenges the violist in captivating ways including the use of improvisation and being a true collaborator with the pianist. My analysis will focus on the aspects of *Sanctum* that showcase and capture the true essence of the viola.

### Adolphus Hailstork

Before diving into an exploration of *Sanctum*, it is important to learn more about Adolphus Hailstork.



Hailstork was born on April 17, 1941 in Rochester, New York but was raised in the state's capital of Albany. Among his earliest and most influential musical experiences was at the Cathedral of All Saints in Albany.<sup>2</sup> There he sang in the boys and men's choir, learned how to read music, play the piano, and eventually the organ.<sup>3</sup> He began composing when he was in high school through the encouragement of his orchestra director. She told him, "If you write it, we'll play it."<sup>4</sup> This encouragement compelled him to write several pieces for his high school orchestra and his high school choir.

Upon high school graduation, Hailstork attended Howard University, a historically Black college in

That fall, he went on to study at the Manhattan School of Music. He spent three years there, getting his bachelor's and master's degrees in composition. Following his time at the Manhattan School of Music and a two-year deployment in Germany, the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired Hailstork to pursue his doctorate. "I had no idea what I was going to do with my master's degree in music composition. I saw in the obituary statements about Dr. King that they kept calling him Dr. King. I said, 'wow, I've never thought about getting my doctorate before. What if I just go ahead and get a doctorate?'"<sup>6</sup> Hailstork completed his doctoral studies at Michigan State University in 1971.

Work Title	Instrumentation
<b>As Falling Leaves</b>	Viola, flute, harp
<b>Divertimento</b>	Violin and viola
<b>Fantasy, Elegy, and Caprice</b>	Viola and piano (transcribed from cello)
<b>Fantasy Piece</b>	Viola and piano
<b>Sanctum</b>	Viola and piano
<b>Three Meditation</b>	Viola and organ
<b>Two Novelettes</b>	Viola and cello; or viola and violin
<b>Two Romances</b>	Viola and chamber orchestra

Figure 1. Adolphus Hailstork's works featuring the viola

Washington, D.C. Against the wishes of his mother who wanted him to major in music education for better job security, Hailstork enrolled in his first music theory course. He studied music theory at Howard since music composition was not offered at the time. His experience at Howard exposed Hailstork to the Black music traditions of the diaspora, as he had not been privy to these experiences before.<sup>5</sup>

After graduating from Howard University in 1963, Hailstork spent a summer at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau where he studied composition with Nadia Boulanger. He recalls this being an amazing experience because she challenged him to think critically about everything he wrote and to listen carefully.

Following the completion of his degree, Hailstork taught at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, OH for six years before teaching theory and composition at Norfolk State University in Norfolk, VA. Today, Dr. Hailstork is the Professor of Music Composition and Eminent Scholar at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA.

### Background on *Sanctum*

*Sanctum* was written for violist Beverly Kane Baker, the former Principal Violist of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra (VSO). They met in Norfolk, VA in 1992 when the VSO performed Hailstork's Piano Concerto, which they had commissioned. Beverly remembers the

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experience fondly, saying she had no idea there was a “. . . local treasure living in Virginia Beach.”<sup>7</sup> In the years to follow, they developed a friendship as Hailstork continued to work with the orchestra.

Hailstork wrote *Sanctum* with Baker as his inspiration, highlighting her artistry and beautiful sound. In the acknowledgements in the score, Hailstork states “*Sanctum* was written for violist Beverly Baker, whom I hold in high esteem as a performer and as a person.”<sup>8</sup> In an interview with Colin Clarke, Hailstork elaborates, stating:

I do like writing for particular performers, often without their knowing I am doing so. It's my humble way of trying to show them how much I appreciate them, especially if they have been kind and supportive. I was impressed with and proud of Beverly Baker, who, as an African-American, won the first chair of the VSO (a rare feat in any American symphony orchestra). Her musicality and her poised, self-disciplined demeanor make her a consummate professional.<sup>9</sup>

Outside of his sonic inspiration, Hailstork also drew on the role of the Cathedral of All Saints in his personal and musical development. *Sanctum* describes the stark differences between the chaos of the outside world and the peace and calm one finds inside a cathedral. *Sanctum* highlights “. . . the sense of refuge I felt every time I entered the quiet space of that [Cathedral of All Saints] grand building.”<sup>10</sup> The score details to the performer: “. . . *Sanctum* reflects the contrast between the turbulence of the outside world and the search for serenity within the walls of the cathedral.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Capturing the Viola's Essence: Analysis of *Sanctum***

What follows is an overview of the piece, paying particularly close attention to Hailstork's astute ability to fully highlight the viola's most characteristic aspects. *Sanctum* is a single-movement work in six cohesive parts. As indicated by Hailstork:

The work is divided into six sections: A. Viola introduction; B. Piano enters and the two instruments share ideas that are mostly turbulent in character; C. Intricate florid writing that includes improvisation on the part of both performers; D. A slow serene melody over quiet chords in the piano; E. A final agitated outburst, before, finally, settling into the, F. Tranquil coda.<sup>12</sup>

By far the most distinct and unique section of *Sanctum* is its opening. This three-minute introduction for unaccompanied viola is written entirely as one measure, alluding to idea of structured liberty. Here, with the tempo marking *Ad libitum*, the violist is given the freedom to interpret the opening in whatever way they wish. Hailstork's clear use of dynamics keeps this opening from being completely liberal and open to one's own interpretation.

This section is effective in capturing the viola's essence in several ways. First, it highlights the viola as a solo instrument; the piano does not enter until about three minutes into the piece. Second, this solo section evokes the subdued characters that are often ascribed to the viola, such as reclusiveness, somberness, and melancholy. Finally, Hailstork's deliberate use of rests in between ideas creates a natural sense of reflection, helping to restate the idea of the solitude one might experience inside of a cathedral.

Two motifs presented in the opening section reoccur throughout the piece (ex. 1). The first is the motive of four thirty-second notes, with the fourth tied to an eighth note. The second is the chant-like theme that is presented directly after the aforementioned idea. In the case of *Sanctum*, Hailstork tied in ideas reminiscent of his time in Albany, not only in the overall approach of constructing this piece, but also in incorporating ideas inspired by chant: “The chantlike theme recalled my youth in the all-male Anglican Cathedral Choir. . . .”<sup>13</sup>



Example 1. Adolphus Hailstork, *Sanctum*, m. 1. The initial iteration of the two primary motives, labeled A and B in the example. © 2008, Theodore Presser Company. Used with permission.

The second section, B, begins with the piano presenting the chant-like theme. The viola then joins the piano where the theme is now expanded, with additional rhythms and complexity. In this section Hailstork portrays the viola as a true collaborator with the piano. Upon first listen, it may seem as if the viola and piano are in complete opposition to each other, but in taking a closer look, one sees that the piano often previews or imitates motives of the viola. A good example of this occurs mm. 47–51 (ex. 2). The viola and piano pass varied triplet rhythms back and forth beginning with the

viola on the fifth beat of m. 47. The piano takes over this figure until the viola briefly takes the lead on the fourth beat of m. 49, bringing this section to its climax.

In the B section, Hailstork also showcases the sound and power of the viola in two distinct ways. First is in his use of subito-piano crescendo gestures (ex. 3). While these happen in different ways, they usually occur towards the end of a phrase that is building in volume and rhythmic complexity. It's as if Hailstork pulls the rug out from under you, drops the dynamic to piano on a

Example 2. Adolphus Hailstork, *Sanctum*, mm. 47–54. The passing back and forth of the triplet sixteenth gesture in section B. © 2008, Theodore Presser Company. Used with permission.



Example 3. Adolphus Hailstork, *Sanctum*, mm. 23–27. Dramatic subito dynamics. © 2008, Theodore Presser Company. Used with permission.

sustained note, and finally ends the phrase with a forte or fortissimo.

A second way Hailstork showcases the power of the viola in this section is by having the viola enter on an offbeat, in a forte dynamic, in response to the piano. In the three times this happens, the piano presents triplets, helping to establish momentum for the phrase. The viola then answers in the following measure on the and of one, accompanied by sustained notes in the piano. This effect can be seen most clearly in m. 56 and mm. 62–67 (ex. 4). Hailstork's use of this idea, paired with the music nearing the climax of this section, hoists the viola as a true powerhouse.

The third section, C, marked *pianississimo delicato sempre*, provides a solemn contrast to the chaos of the previous section. It also is one of the more unique sections of the

piece in regards to the versatility it affords the viola. This section is incredibly subdued, accentuated by a muted viola. The free-flowing and fast-moving triplets in m. 79 paired with the timbre change in the instrument create a whimsical sense of ease. This sense of whimsy is also due to the viola remaining between a pianissimo and mezzo forte dynamic. Inviting the viola to explore the multiple sounds and colors that are possible on the instrument is another clear way in which Hailstork highlights the full range of the viola.

The element that makes this section, or even this piece, truly unique is Hailstork's use of improvisation for both instruments. In m. 93 (ex. 5), Hailstork gives specific instructions to the viola and piano stating, to "Improvise freely, with short rapid figurations, using only these pitches [E, F, D; G, F, E], swelling to *mp* but only occasionally." This section begins with the right hand of



Example 4. Adolphus Hailstork, *Sanctum*, mm. 62–67. Off-beat entrances by the viola and piano. © 2008, Theodore Presser Company. Used with permission.



the piano sustaining arpeggiated chords with the viola and left hand of the piano improvising. Though both instruments are moving freely, one can deduce that this is meant to be a seamless interaction. This is evidenced by the piano's instruction to "blend tone with viola." In m. 98, when the piano reintroduces the thirty-second note motif from the beginning of piece, the viola continues to improvise, stopping four measures before the end of the section. The invitation to improvise is evidence not only of Hailstork's creativity, but also of his versatile demands of the performer, as violists are rarely asked to improvise (outside of concerto cadenzas).

The fourth section, D, marked *Sereno*, plays directly into the idea of the sense of calm and peace one finds in a sanctuary. The piano is instructed to play *pianississimo*

serenity of the previous section. As previously stated, Hailstork presents this section as "A final agitated outburst. . . ." Here, one experiences a conglomeration of all the themes and ideas introduced since the beginning of the piece. This section highlights the virtuosity of the viola in many ways. This section's rhythmic complexity is immediately evident. Hailstork writes sixteenth-note triplets in the viola line, often tying them to eighth and sixteenth notes. In addition, these sixteenth-note triplets are often juxtaposed against sixteenth notes and eighth-note triplets in the piano.

Non-idiomatic intervals further require virtuosity from the violist in this section (see ex. 6). While playing this section at a fairly brisk tempo, the violist must navigate tritones across strings and intervals of a step and a half.

Improvise freely, with short rapid figurations, using only these pitches, swelling to *mp* freely but only occasionally.

Improvise freely, with short rapid figurations, using only these pitches, swelling to *mp* freely but only occasionally.

Example 5. Adolphus Hailstork, *Sanctum*, mm. 93–97. Improvisatory indications in the viola and piano. © 2008, Theodore Presser Company. Used with permission.

*sempre* while the viola plays *piano dolce*. This section highlights the warmer tones the viola is capable of producing. Marked *legatissimo*, the viola toggles between soaring above the piano and playing softly in its lowest register. The true beauty of this section, after the forte sixteenth-note passage, is the *Sereno*. Hailstork describes this section as "a slow serene melody over quiet chords in the piano." The stillness in the piano contrasted with the sweetly moving melody in the viola creates the serenity that is indicated. Further, placing this section in the key of G-flat and later D-flat adds richness and highlights the natural warmth of the viola.

Section five, E, marked "Agitato" is perhaps the most difficult and exciting portion of this piece. It comes as a surprise to listeners who may have settled into the

Finally, Hailstork successfully incorporates the scope of the viola's range and its versatility therein. Hailstork revisits the motif of the viola entering on the and of one in mm. 176–180, highlighting the power of the C string. Finally, this section climaxes on B5, the highest stopped note in this section and in the piece as a whole.

The final section, F, provides the coda to this piece. Described as a "Tranquil coda," Hailstork marks this section *Più lento e tranquillo*. This section reintroduces the chant-like theme from the opening section underneath a harmonic A in the viola. There is a resurgence of the thirty-second note motif, written this time as sixteenth notes. This motive reappears throughout the coda. Hailstork indicates *morendo* in m. 201 (ex. 7), allowing the sound and overall mood to become



Example 6. Adolphus Hailstork, *Sanctum*, mm. 164–166. Difficult left-hand passage work in the viola part. © 2008, Theodore Presser Company. Used with permission.

more subdued and reclusive. The piece ends in virtual silence, with the direction of *niente* written under the final note. This section draws on the viola's ability to be inward, reflective, delicate, and reclusive. While these characteristics are most clear in Hailstork's instruction of *morendo*, this is also evident in his use of harmonics and the reintroduction of a mute.

### Implications for Performance

In preparing for a performance of this piece, one should first consider ensemble. *Sanctum* is difficult to put together: it presents a persistent sense of complexity, particularly in the first rehearsal. There are several meter changes and within that, the viola and piano are rarely playing the same thing. Beverly Kane Baker noted that “the piano sounds like it’s in a different meter.” Performing *Sanctum* will require a stellar pianist. Within that same category, the rhythm in general can also be challenging. Given the continuous meter changes paired with atypical combinations of note values and rhythms, rhythm will certainly need to be an area of focus.

### Conclusion

*Sanctum* is one of the pieces that Hailstork is most proud of, and rightfully so. Capturing the true essence and full range of the viola, it is a work that is truly captivating. Given this, one might think this piece would be spoken about, mentioned, and performed more often. Originally written in 1995, this piece first came across my radar in 2019, when I was searching for music by Black composers to play on my master’s degree recital. As violists, as classical musicians, it is time for us to have a deeper conversation about which pieces we champion and which composers we hold in high esteem. There are composers, like Adolphus Hailstork, who are not programmed in our concert halls or even completely written out of the narrative. And it is not because their works are not “quality” or “worthy” of performance, but instead, we feel bonded to the composers we were taught to value and cherish, leading to the canonization of some, and the dismissal of others. I hope you are encouraged and inspired to not only take a closer look at Hailstork’s works but other Black composers who have been overlooked.



Example 7. Adolphus Hailstork, *Sanctum*, mm. 201–202. The concluding tranquil section of the piece. © 2008, Theodore Presser Company. Used with permission.

A second factor to consider when approaching *Sanctum* would be the awkwardness of Hailstork’s writing. There are moments where an idea does not fit well into the hand such as in m. 164, within the *Agitato* section. Baker also notes that “there is an awkwardness to Adolphus’s writing, and he knows it.” Though awkward, it is certainly not impossible.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Heather Scott, "11 Top Players Pick Best Viola Works of All Time," *String Magazine*, December 2007, <https://stringsmagazine.com/11-top-players-pick-best-viola-works-of-all-time/> (Accessed April 10, 2021).
- <sup>2</sup> William Banfield, *Musical Landscapes in Color* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 96.
- <sup>3</sup> Gene Brooks, "An Interview with Adolphus Hailstork," *The Choral Journal* 39, no.7 (1999), 29.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> Banfield, *Musical Landscapes in Color*.
- <sup>6</sup> Brooks, 30.
- <sup>7</sup> Beverly Kane Baker (former principal violist of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra), in discussion with Kathryn Brown, September 2019.
- <sup>8</sup> Hailstork, *Sanctum*, 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Colin Clarke, "Defining Self: Adolphus Hailstork in Interview," *Fanfare*, January 2013, 42–43.
- <sup>10</sup> Clarke, 43.
- <sup>11</sup> Hailstork, *Sanctum*.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Clarke, 43.

## Database of Works for Viola by Underrepresented Composers

The American Viola Society is excited to announce the public release of a database of works for viola by composers from traditionally underrepresented groups. It includes works for viola solo, viola with piano, viola as soloist (concertos), viola ensemble music, as well as duos and trios that include viola. This database will continue to grow, but to date has over 1300 works. It can be accessed on the AVS website under the Resources tab.



# Viola Repertoire from the Iranian Diaspora

By Kimia Hesabi

When I moved to the USA in 2014, I did not imagine I would one day perform complete programs of compositions by Iranian composers on viola. Despite being born and living in Iran through my undergraduate career, I never knew about works written by Iranian composers and my exposure to Iranian contemporary music was limited. In the USA though, I was asked by colleagues, teachers, and fellow violists about the music of my country and about works written for viola. I was shocked and a bit embarrassed at how little I knew about this repertoire. My initial research yielded only a few, little-known works, so I set out to discover as many works as possible—however obscure they were—and even to commission some new pieces. The journey of finding new works and collaborating with composers in the past three years led to the performance and recording of several pieces with a variety of instrumentations and styles.<sup>1</sup> From this project, I have selected three works to discuss here: *Veiled* for viola and electronics by Niloufar Nourbakhsh, *Song and Whispers* for solo viola by Gity Razaz, and *Kamalto* for viola and voice by Showan Tavakol. Through the discussion of these pieces, I introduce a rich musical heritage, incorporate new perspectives into the viola performance repertoire, and provide a resource for performance practice, musical interpretation, and further research for contemporary viola repertoire from the Iranian diaspora.

## Western Art Music in Iran

The complicated history of Iran and the West has inherently influenced Iran's relationship with Western art music. The already complex nature of cultural exchange and influence is made more complicated due to the recurring influence of Iranian politics and government intervention(s) on the use of Western art music within

Iran. The very introduction of Western art music as well as other events, most notably the 1979 Revolution, have strongly influenced the presence, practice, and reception of Western-inspired music in Iran.

Western art music was first introduced in Iran in the 1870s, when Iran was ruled by the Qajar dynasty (1785–1925). During the reign of Naser al-Din Shah (1831–1896), who visited France during his rule, the government invited French musicians to Iran as cultural missionaries to train and educate the military bands to organize events, ceremonies, and receptions at the court.<sup>2</sup> This invitation and training process eventually led to the establishment of the first conservatories, universities, orchestras, and compositions that resembled Western musical practice. Once these institutions were established, internal debates formed amongst musicians during the early twentieth century about the practice of Western classical music in Iran, specifically regarding the approach to composition and music education.

The debating musicians fell into two main groups: those who used Iranian traditional modes and instruments within Western forms and genres, and others who preferred to perform Western compositions, reproduce Western forms and genres, and to promote the introduction of Western art music to a public audience in Iran via ensembles and other institutions modeled after those in the West. For decades, these debates shaped the practice of Western-inspired music in Iran, and created a complex music scene in the country.<sup>3</sup>

The 1979 Revolution created a new era in which all musicians and artists—no matter genre, background, or style—faced discouragement, limitations, and strict rules from the government. The new theocratic government



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controlled the practice of all types of music and performing arts in general, not just arts influenced by the West. As a result of the revolution, the Tehran Symphony Orchestra (and almost all other ensembles, orchestras, etc.) took a hiatus and for several years; the only genre of music practiced and performed in Iran was revolutionary songs or revolution-inspired music.<sup>4</sup>

The past decade in Iran has been an era of new beginnings and globalization, shepherding in new waves of composers, performers, and music educators. Especially due to the increased use and accessibility of internet and social media, those within Iran and the Iranian diaspora have been able to (re)connect and create a new, thriving chapter of Iranian music. In contrast to the government's introduction of Western art music, the debates surrounding institutions and musical forms, and the 1979 Revolution, this new era of Iranian music is driven from the bottom-up, fueled by organic, meaningful connections between composers, performers, producers, and educators. This recent movement led to the establishment of several organizations such as the Iranian Orchestra for New Music (1995), Tehran Contemporary Music Festival (2016), and the Iranian Female Composers Association (2017), as well as countless new works for a variety of ensembles and instrumentations.

Inspired by and part of this new chapter of music in my country and community, I am so happy to have a role in the creation of new works for viola, and to share these works with the viola community. This project aligns with the current musical and cultural movement to have a more equitable representation in our performance repertoires. In sharing these pieces, my goals are to foster recognition and respect for the often unrecognized elements that influence what we call "Western art music" and to provide a practical resource for performance and interpretation.

### **Selected Viola Repertoire from the Iranian Diaspora**

The works highlighted here create a conversation about cross-cultural influences, socio-political connections to music, and the blend of identities within cultures. These are works that I have commissioned (*Veiled* and

*Song and Whispers*) or presented the American premiere (*Kamalto*), and I've selected them because of the strong artistic connection I have had in the process of their creation, the meaningful collaboration I have experienced with their composers, and the variety of styles they present. Additionally, these works have great pedagogical value, offering a variety of educational performance techniques and programmatic qualities. They provide a representation of Iranian culture through the use of various musical elements and are examples of some of the current trends in contemporary music of the Iranian diaspora.

### ***Veiled* by Niloufar Nourbakhsh**

*Veiled* for viola and electronics (2019), composed by Niloufar Nourbakhsh (b. 1989) originally for cello (commissioned by Amanda Gookin), was arranged by the composer for viola.<sup>5</sup> According to Nourbakhsh, *Veiled* was inspired by two specific subjects: the hijab and the "veiled" presence of women in Iran.

One is the obligatory hijab for women in Iran and the concept of being "veiled" as a result. The covered hair is a metaphor in general for women's presence in the society. I thought about women's voices, and them not being able to sing freely in Iran due to conservative cleric rules from the government, and other limitations women face in the country. On the other hand, I used the meaning and concept of "veiled" in creating sounds from the instrument that "dissolve" or are "covered" in various ways.<sup>6</sup>

In 2017, a series of protests known as the Girls of Enghelab Street (Revolution Street) movement took place against the compulsory hijab for women in Iran. Nourbakhsh recalls being moved by this event and the tragedy and violence it provoked, and was motivated to center *Veiled* on it.<sup>7</sup>

*Veiled* includes both live and pre-recorded electronics. To perform it, one needs various equipment including a contact mic, a device connected to Max/MSP software, speakers to hear pre-recorded sounds and electronics, and a pedal to activate the Max built-in cues. The live electronics are created and sent to Max through the contact mic and the pre-recorded electronic track

The image shows a musical score for Viola and Violin (V.). The Viola part is in 3/4 time and features a pedal point marked with circled numbers 1 and 2, labeled 'ON' and 'OFF' respectively. The Violin part is in 3/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *f*, *pp*, *mp*, and *ff*. It also features a 'Phaser Activation' section marked with a circled number 3. The score includes tempo markings 'Sul. Pont.' and 'Normal'. The Viola part has a tempo marking of 60-66. The Violin part has a tempo marking of 60-66. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Example 1. Niloufar Nourbakhsh, *Veiled*, opening section. The pre-recorded electronics are cued by notes in the score; the performer controls the software with a pedal. © 2019. Used with permission.

includes sound effects and a female singing voice. In her composition process, Nourbakhsh created a sound world and characters through specific attention to pitch, register, and timbre. *Veiled* begins with a shrill timbre and a feeling of sonic anticipation with a glissando on the A string. The high-pitched live electronics create a chilling atmosphere, awaiting the first melody which has a faded, quiet, and lonely sound (ex. 1).

Nourbakhsh, born in Tehran, grew up listening to Iranian classical music and was strongly influenced by it. The inspiration can be seen in the way she writes melodies, specifically in their improvisatory characters and in their structure, which can be traced back to Iranian modes. The beginning motif of *Veiled* resembles the mode of *chahargah*, one of the twelve *dastgahs* (modes) of Iranian music.<sup>8</sup> While Nourbakhsh does not strictly follow the *chahargah* intervallic structure, this melody resembles the motivic qualities of the mode in general.

As the piece continues, the characters and sounds become bolder, bigger, and at times even aggressive and anxious. Different colors in sound, the electronics (both live through the contact mic, and pre-recorded sound effects and female singing voice), and the motivic cells throughout the piece create a polyphonic texture. Nourbakhsh structures the piece in a way that every detail leads to an arrival point where, for the first time, the female voice is prominent and becomes “unveiled.” The build-up and crescendo (ex. 2, mm. 59–63) finally releases and resolves at this arrival point, when the mood changes completely as the pre-recorded voice melody comes to the fore. The vocal melody performs multiple roles: telling a story about Iranian women, depicting a feeling of being silenced, and trying to break free. Nourbakhsh explains that she sought a sense of “granulation of the sounds; a quality that can be described as a feeling of suffocation, fighting (or singing) with your last breath.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, it also joins the viola to create what Nourbakhsh describes as a “collective

59 V. *agitated* *ff* *rit.*

59 FM.

8 ON This section up to m.100 use tapping and pizz. Match the speed of the vocalist in the track. The notation is not exact

This melody is pre-recorded with female voice, viola imitates it

63 V. *p* *niente.* *p*

63 FM. *pp*

68 V. *mf* *p*

Example 2. Niloufar Nourbakhsh, *Veiled*, mm. 59–64. The arrival point, where the vocal melody becomes “unveiled.” Note the increasing agitation, volume, sense of pulse, and dissonance until the resolution at rehearsal 8; at this point, the pre-recorded vocal track becomes the main melody, with the viola accompanying. © 2019. Used with permission.

force,” acting as both the arrival point of the first part of the piece, and a beginning for what comes next.

This melody is improvisational, full of embellishments, and depicts the traditional style of singing in Iranian classical music by using slides, grace notes, and left-hand taps. The grace notes especially resemble the Iranian ornamental techniques of *tekieh* or *eshareh*. *Tekieh* (ex. 3) literally means “to lean against” and is an appoggiatura-like ornament that happens at the end of the main note, right before moving to the next note. The performer slightly touches the upper neighbor note before continuing.

The unique timbres of the kamancheh, an Iranian bowed string instrument, inspired Nourbakhsh’s overall

colors and sound effects for the work. According to Nourbakhsh, this melody leads to the final bold character of the piece, which to her resembles the cover image of the score: a girl standing on the dome of the mosque, without her hijab, holding balloons (fig. 1).<sup>10</sup>

The emotional journey of *Veiled*, in addition to its technical ingenuity from an idiomatic perspective, makes it an appealing work for violists. The inspiration from Iranian music in melodies and ornamental techniques, the creative use of electronics, and the programmatic nature of *Veiled* make it a great work for violists to expand their horizons to new musical languages and styles.

8 ON This section up to m.100 use tapping and pizz. Match the speed of the vocalist in the track. The notation is not exact

tekieh

V.  $\text{p}$  niente.  $\text{p}$

FM. 63  $\text{pp}$

tekieh

V. 68  $\text{mf}$   $\text{p}$

Example 3. Niloufar Nourbakhsh, *Veiled*, mm. 63–64. *Tekieh* is indicated by notes (my own annotation) in the score. The performer should lightly touch the upper neighbor note with the left hand finger. © 2019. Used with permission.



Figure 1. Cover image of the score for *Veiled*. © 2019 Niloufar Nourbakhsh. Used with permission.



## *Kamalto* by Showan Tavakol

Whereas the voice in *Veiled* was a part of the pre-recorded electronics, the next work under consideration is for viola and voice: *Kamalto*, by Showan Tavakol (b. 1979).<sup>11</sup> It has two movements, the first for viola and voice and the second for solo viola.<sup>12</sup> *Kamalto* is a fine combination of Iranian musical characteristics and contemporary compositional techniques, as Tavakol explains:

I have been experimenting with ideas of bringing my roots into my new works. As a kamancheh player, I can easily perform Iranian melodies, modes, and motives on my instrument, but how can I write a piece that makes this available and accessible to more than just me? Hence the creation of *Kamalto*; *kamancheh* and *Alto* (French for viola).<sup>13</sup>

A kamancheh player and a specialist of Iranian classical music, Tavakol has expansive knowledge about the mode systems of Middle Eastern music and the *dastgah* system of Iran. He explains that the viola in many ways reminds

him of his instrument, the kamancheh. Their similarities, including a somber and deep sound, nasal quality, range of colors from brilliant to dark, and capability of producing rough edges in the sound inspired him to choose viola for this piece. By writing the piece with *scordatura* tuning (D–A–D–A, a common tuning for *kamancheh*), he made the two instruments' registers even closer, while also experimenting with a non-traditional range and color for viola. *Kamalto* is also based on two Iranian modes, but Tavakol approaches them differently than how they are commonly used within Iranian classical music. In a more traditional setting, the use of *dastgahs* follows specific rules: only certain modes can be used or combined together, and any modulation follows strict directions. Tavakol intentionally breaks these rules by using the modes of *chahargah* and *dashti* together; these two modes are completely contrasting, with distinct energies, qualities, and modal centers (ex. 4). The mode of *dashti* is often described as sad and mournful, while *chahargah* is known for its heroic, strong, and energetic mood. With this break from Iranian conventions,

The musical score for *Kamalto*, movement 2, measures 27–42, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 27–35) is labeled "Mode of chahargah, mm.27-35" and features a complex rhythmic structure with dotted rhythms and accents. The second system (measures 34–42) is labeled "Mode of dashti, mm.35-42" and includes a "Cantabile" marking, a "vibrato lent" section, and a "p subito" dynamic shift. The third system (measures 38–42) continues the *dashti* mode and includes a "f" dynamic marking and a "p subito" dynamic shift. The score is written for viola and includes various musical notations such as scordatura, dynamics, and articulation.

Example 4. Showan Tavakol, *Kamalto*, mvmt 2, mm. 27–42. The mode of *chahargah* is evident in the dotted rhythms, quick sense of pulse, and accents; the mode of *dashti* is relayed through the cantabile expressive marking, vibrato, and shifting dynamics. All examples from this piece use *scordatura* notation. © 2017. Used with permission.

43

Voix

Alt.

48

Voix

Alt.

52

Voix

Alt.

55

Voix

Alt.

En alternant ré( quart ton) vers la corde vide

*mp*

*gliss.*

*pp*

*gliss.*

*gliss.*

*sfz*

*sfz*

az na-fi ram mar-do zan nä li dé and nä

li dé - and

82

Example 5. Showan Tavakol, Kamalto, mvt 1, mm. 43–60. Javab e avaz technique. Note the call and response between the voice and viola. © 2017. Used with permission.

Alt.

*sfz*

*sfz*

*gliss.*

Example 6. Showan Tavakol, Kamalto, mvt 1, mm. 95–96. Tahrir vocal technique in the viola part. © 2017. Used with permission.

Tavakol creates a beautiful juxtaposition of tradition and modernity:

*Kamalto* follows a deconstructive idea, and is about breaking away from the traditional rules, but keeping the aesthetics of Iranian music. This is done by keeping certain short intervals from the modes and including them in the piece, and maintaining the character of each mode while not strictly following the rules of modulations.<sup>14</sup>

The first movement, for voice and viola, shows vocal and improvisatory qualities, similar to Iranian *avaz* (improvised singing). Tavakol uses the technique of *javabe avaz* (response to singing), where the viola responds to the vocal line in an improvised manner (ex. 5). He also incorporates vocal techniques such as *tahrir*, a type of vocal styling and voice crackling.<sup>15</sup> The viola imitates the concept of *tahrir* in the final section of this movement, by playing consequent appoggiatura-like figures on a melodic line (ex. 6).

The text of the first movement comes from the opening verses of the *Mathnawi* (a poem written in rhyming couplets) by Jalālād-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī, more widely known as Rumi. The main theme in the beginning verses of this poetic masterpiece describes the human soul, symbolically referred to as the *nay* (Iranian wind instrument).<sup>16</sup> The musical sound of the Farsi poetry (transliterated into a Latin alphabet in the score)

contributes to the meaning of the piece; according to Tavakol, this poem, its message, and the musical rhythm imbedded in the original Farsi text inspired him greatly in the composition of *Kamalto* especially in including the female voice in the first movement.<sup>17</sup>

The second movement, for solo viola, follows a version of a rondo form that, with the motivic repetition, has similarities to the Iranian *chahar mezbab*, a solo virtuosic piece, generally with a simple and repetitive melody. *Chahar mezbab*'s function within Iranian classical music is to relieve the tension generated by the non-measured melodies (or *avaz*),<sup>18</sup> and Tavakol follows this structure by contrasting the first movement's improvisatory singing qualities with the second movement's rhythmic energy (ex. 7).

Inspired by the Middle Eastern *adwar* (rhythmic modes), Tavakol shapes his rhythmic structure by marking a clear beginning and ending for each phrase using fermatas and a constantly changing number of beats per measure. The use of accents in varying groupings is another example of Tavakol's interpretation of these rhythmic modes (ex. 8). *Kamalto* is a remarkable piece that connects two completely different sound worlds. The improvisatory qualities in this piece explore performance freedom and agency, while the contrasts, the drama, and the rhythmic force of the music creates new and exciting territories for violists (and listeners) to discover.

♩=138 **agitato**  
martelé au talon

Alto Scordatura

5 s.t. → s.p

*p subito* *f* *gliss.* *mp* *f subito*

Example 7. Showan Tavakol, *Kamalto*, mvmt 2, mm. 1–8. The rhythmic energy at the opening of the second movement provides a contrast to the first movement, maintaining the original function of *chahar mezbab*. © 2017. Used with permission.

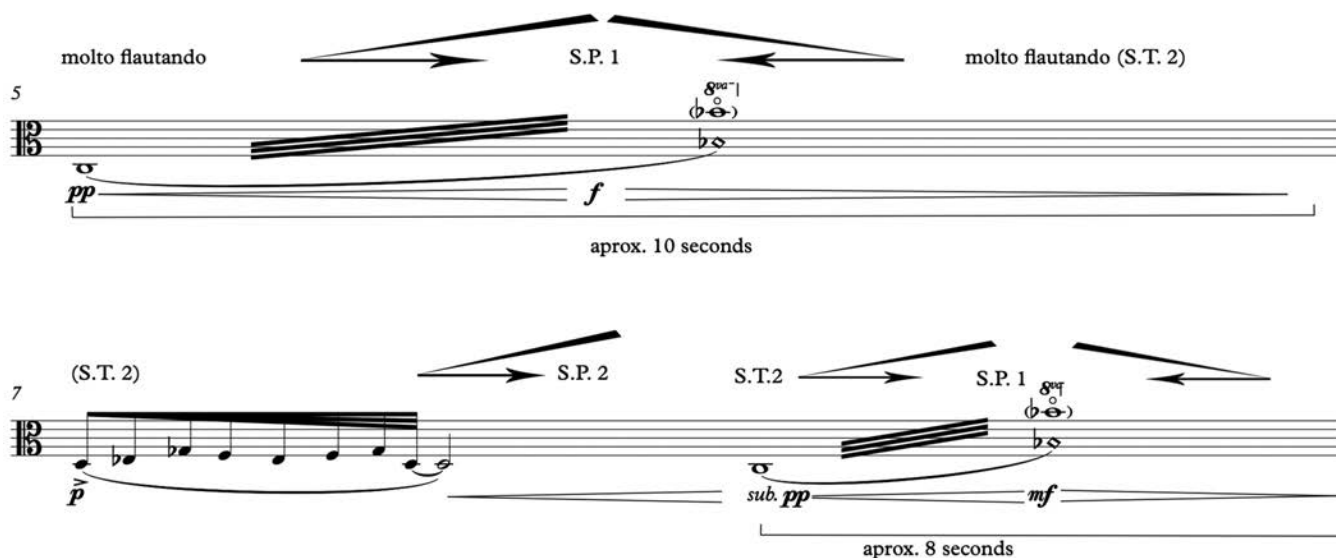


Example 8. Showan Tavakol, Kamalto, *mut* 2, mm. 15–26. *Adwar* rhythmic modes. The fermatas, shifting meters, and different accent groups help to imitate the traditional rhythmic modes. © 2017. Used with permission.

### ***Song and Whispers* by Gity Razaz**

Gity Razaz's (b. 1986) *Song and Whispers* for solo viola is based on two main ideas: a sound world created by pure atmospheric sounds, and an organic and original flavor of Iranian music.<sup>19</sup> This piece is through-composed with an episodic structure in which each episode builds on the previous one. However, Razaz describes the structure as not completely successive, but rather one that has episodes constantly moving back and forth and intertwining.

In creating this work, Razaz was intrigued by the concept that poetry is in many ways imbedded within Iranian music. Historically, most modes and their melodic components model the rhythmic stamp and melodic pattern of Iranian poetry.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, she found the story-telling, linear, singing, and improvisatory quality of Iranian music inspiring. Razaz was also interested in the concept of the *dastgah* system and its timbral flavor; she incorporated it into her work by using ornamental elements and improvisatory qualities in her melodies. Similar to Tavakol and Nourbakhsh, Razaz also found commonalities in sound between the viola and the Iranian kamancheh:



Example 9. Gity Razaz, *Song and Whispers*, mm. 5–7. Timbral effects and a melodic cell. Note the first seed of the melody appearing in m. 7, and its contrasting character compared to the timbral effects. © 2019. Used with permission.



When you consider Iranian music, you almost cannot ignore the role of the *kamancheh* and how unique its sound and timbre is. The fact that it also has many similarities in timbre with the viola creates a natural gravitation point for a lot of composers.<sup>21</sup>

Razaz's compositions have a sense of trajectory and dramatic flow in how she creates anticipation, climax, and resolution. This quality is reflected through not only the melodic and harmonic ideas but also in the rhythmic energy in her compositions. In the first part of the piece, for example, the viola plays atmospheric effects and sounds, exploring a variety of contact points and bow strokes, creating a sense of anticipation. Gradually, Razaz introduces a seed of the melody, moving back and forth between the melodic cells and timbral effects (ex. 9).

*Song and Whispers* comes from the relationship of the two sound worlds created by the melodic components and the atmospheric effects. Razaz envisions the atmospheric effect as "whisper," with its pitchless and soft quality, and how it can be intense yet barely noticeable at the same time. On the other hand, she creates melodic components, resembling qualities of a "song" (ex. 10). The alternations between atmospheric sounds and melody create dramatic contrasts that imbue the piece with narrative intensity. In these sections, she was not necessarily after a typical "beauty" in sound, but rather unique and different combinations and range of timbres, stretching the instrument to its boundaries, and emphasizing variety over refined sound.

Razaz's command in shaping musical ideas with originality is clearly visible in this piece, and she creates an emotionally compelling and effective work, requiring great technical demands of the performer. Contrasting characters and experiments in extended techniques and timbre make this piece a prime example of exploring a new spectrum of sounds and lyricism previously unknown for viola.

### Intersectionality in Iranian Viola Repertoire

The three works discussed display a musical language and performance practice that explores a mutual exchange between cultures. Despite the differences in background and compositional styles between the composers, these works all examine a unique blend of Iranian music and Western art music characteristics, and in doing so allow a performance practitioner of Western art music to explore a new musical language. The following three threads run through each of the works.

**Iranian identity** in these works is examined with the use of Iranian ornamental and performance techniques such as *tekieh* and *javab e avaz*, improvisatory qualities in compositions of melodic components, singing or song-like characteristics, and inspiration from poetry as well as the timbre of Iranian instruments such as *kamancheh*. The varying interpretations of identity are reflected both directly in conscious use of these elements in *Kamalto* and *Veiled*, and also within personal experience and perception in *Song and Whispers*. The concept of immigration, and its reflection in representation of Iranian art and culture is also a shared identity within these works. While all these works were created,

Example 10. Gity Razaz, *Song and Whispers*, mm. 53–59. Melodies that resemble the qualities of a song. Note these qualities in the glissandi, arpeggio figures, vibrato, and rests that act as breath marks. © 2019. Used with permission.

Figure 2. List of Iranian viola works, organized by instrumentation.

Composer	Date of Birth	Name of the Piece	Date of Composition	Instrumentation	Suggested Equipment
Alireza Mashayekhi	1940	<i>Variant</i>	1999	solo viola	-
Mozhgan Chahian	1990	<i>Hani and Shaymorid</i>	2019	solo viola	-
Reza Vali	1952	<i>Calligraphy No. 5</i>	2003	solo viola	-
Sahba Aminikia	1981	<i>Shetābān (In Haste)</i>	2012	solo viola	-
Sahba Aminikia	1981	<i>Kereshmeh</i>	2007	solo viola	-
Gity Razaz	1986	<i>Spellbound</i>	2020	solo viola	-
Gity Razaz	1986	<i>Song and Whispers</i>	2019	solo viola	-
Bahar Royace	1986	<i>Tombstone</i>	2017	solo viola	-
Amir Mahyar Tafreshipour	1974	<i>CHINVANT</i>	1999	solo viola	-
Arshia Samsaminia	1989	<i>In Memoriam</i>	2015	solo viola	-
Zola Saadi-Klein	2002	<i>Running out of mind</i>	2020	solo viola	-
Alireza Mashayekhi	1940	Sonata for viola and piano	-	viola and piano	Prepared piano
Arshia Samsaminia	1989	<i>In Eternity</i>	2017	viola and piano	-
Faraz Eshghi Sahraei	1984	Duet for violin and viola	2019	violin and viola	-
Mohammad Reza Tafazzoli	1974	Duet for violin and viola	2014	violin and viola	-
Amin Honarmand	1981	Duet for violin and viola	2015	violin and viola	-
Sanam Gharacheh	1978	<i>Still on the Way</i>	2014	violin and viola	-
Hormoz Farhat	1929	Duo in G	1963	violin and viola	-
Shahin Farhat	1947	Duo for violin and viola	2012	violin and viola	-
Mehrdad Pakbaz	1973	Duet for violin and viola	2015	violin and viola	-
Ashkan Behzadi	1983	<i>Crescita Plastica</i>	2015	violin and viola	-
Mani Mirzaee	-	<i>The Wights of Shadows</i>	2019	violin and viola	Santoor mallets or Mezrab
Ali Radman	1973	Duet in the Fair	2016	violin, viola, electronics	-
Niloufar Nourbakhsh	1989	<i>Veiled</i>	2019	viola and electronics	Contact mic, Max/MSP software, MIDI controller, Speaker
Arash Yazdani	-	<i>... plenty of nothing to add ...</i>	2016	viola and cello	Curved bow (optional)
Showan Tavakol	1979	<i>Kamalto</i>	2017	viola and voice	-
Golfam Khayam	-	<i>Duochrome</i>	2013	viola and guitar	-

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performed, and recorded outside of Iran, the Iranian identity and the influence from that culture is noticeable within their character and structure.

### **Protest and response to socio-political events in Iran**

is visible within the use of the female voice in *Kamalto* and *Veiled*, and in the programmatic and story-telling qualities of *Veiled*. The current administration in Iran has placed strict limitations in performing arts, especially for women. Many works with a female voice face challenges in acquiring permission for performances. Inclusion of voice in *Veiled* is a direct response to these limitations and how they impact the presence of women in Iranian society. Nourbakhsh's clever inclusion of a pre-recorded female voice allows for more flexibility in performance of the piece in Iran.

**Juxtaposition of tradition and modernity** in these works is reflected through the use of contrasting elements: the combination of modes in *Kamalto*, explorations in sound and timbre in *Song and Whispers*, and connecting electronic explorations with Iranian inspired musical elements in *Veiled*. In works like *Kamalto*, the blend of tradition and modernity is visible in the composer's inspiration from Middle Eastern rhythmic structures and his approach in expressing them within a contemporary compositional language.

In highlighting these works, my goal is to introduce new and exciting elements from current explorations in Iranian music and to help expand the canon and the scope of the viola repertoire by representing a musical language previously less explored. By performing and researching these works, I hope to not only help expand other violists and audience's horizons in learning new styles, genres, and a rich musical and cultural heritage, but also to provide an avenue in developing further mutual exchange in cultures, research, and creation of other new pieces. My hope is that this article would also offer an introduction to Iranian contemporary art music and be a helpful resource for violists, educators, and other musicians who are curious about the contemporary repertoire from the Iranian diaspora, its performance practice, and its pedagogical value. I am happy to conclude it by presenting a list of works I have been able to find, commission, or perform within the last few years featuring pieces for solo viola, or viola in a small ensemble (see fig. 2).

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This project is ongoing, and my album of many of these pieces is forthcoming. I will also be performing three of these pieces on my lecture recital at the American Viola Society Festival, in June 2021.
- <sup>2</sup> Ameneh Yousefzadeh, "Iran," in *The Other Classical Musics: Fifteen Great Traditions*, ed. Michael Church (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2016), 325. This book is a great introductory resource to other classical/art music traditions within other cultures. Each chapter is written by experts on the specific region's music and includes wide-ranging information on the practice, style, and analysis of each musical practice. Yousefzadeh provides a useful bibliography of further resources, and I recommend the *Garland Encyclopedia* as another resource to begin research on non-Western musical practices.
- <sup>3</sup> Church, *Other Classical Musics*, 270.
- <sup>4</sup> Azin Movahed, "Religious Supremacy, Anti-Imperialist Nationhood and Persian Musicology after the 1979 Revolution," *Asian Music* 35, no. 1 (Autumn, 2003-Winter 2004): 89.
- <sup>5</sup> For more information about Niloufar Nourbakhsh, please refer to <https://niloufarnourbakhsh.com>.
- <sup>6</sup> Niloufar Nourbakhsh, zoom interview by author, January 5, 2021.
- <sup>7</sup> This event is covered in various Western news sources, including Robin Wright, "Hijab Protests Expose Iran's Core Divide," *New Yorker*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/hijab-protests-expose-irans-core-divide>, and Rana Rahimpour, "Iran's Hijab Protests: The Girls of Revolution Street," *BBC*, February 5, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-42954970>.
- <sup>8</sup> Within this article, I include common knowledge descriptions of Iranian traditional techniques and my own English translations from Farsi. For those looking for additional information about traditional musical structures or techniques in Iran, the online edition of *Encyclopedia Iranica* is widely accessible; there are also ethnomusicological works, some of which are listed in the bibliography.
- <sup>9</sup> Nourbakhsh, interview.
- <sup>10</sup> Nourbakhsh, interview.
- <sup>11</sup> For more information about Showan Tavakol, please refer to <https://www.analekta.com/en/artists/showan-tavakol/>.
- <sup>12</sup> Kimia Hesabi, viola, and Lori Şen, voice, *Kamalto*, by Showan Tavakol, recorded April 22, 2019, Gildenhorn Recital Hall, College Park, MD. Mvt 1, <https://youtu.be/z1SmcI-DNwc>, mvt 2, <https://youtu.be/n348RyNh8-0>.
- <sup>13</sup> Showan Tavakol, zoom interview by author, January 2, 2021.
- <sup>14</sup> Tavakol, interview.
- <sup>15</sup> Tavakol, interview.
- <sup>16</sup> Jalau'din Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, ed. Reynold A Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1925), 5.
- <sup>17</sup> Tavakol, interview.
- <sup>18</sup> Tavakol, interview.
- <sup>19</sup> For more information about Gity Razaz, please refer to <https://www.gityrazaz.com>.
- <sup>20</sup> Gity Razaz, zoom interview by author, January 10, 2021.
- <sup>21</sup> Razaz, interview.



# How It All Began

## The Founding of the American Viola Society

By Dwight Pounds

*In accordance with actions by the General Assembly of the VFG on **May 22, 1971**, in Kassel, a **separate section of the VFG for the United States** was founded under the name, “Viola Research Society.” Their chairman is **Myron Rosenblum**, New York, New York, USA. As a result we hope that the work of the VFG in the United States can be considerably intensified. To the extent that this affiliate of the VFG is successful, we can foresee the establishment of additional [international] sections.*

This brief paragraph, quoted from *Newsletter No. 3* of the Viola Forschungs-Gesellschaft (“Viola Research Society,” original name of the organization that became the International Viola Society), marked the creation of what we know today as the American Viola Society (AVS). In the following space, I will share the story of the founding of the AVS as we know it today, and examine the primary events—most notably, the viola congresses in the US—that were cornerstones of its early development. The acronyms and terminology no doubt will be confusing to first-time readers or AVS members who were born after the society’s founding. While every effort

will be made to hold these to a bare minimum, some are essential. The **VFG** refers to the Viola Forschungs-Gesellschaft, the first viola organization that endured, founded in Kassel, Germany, in 1968.<sup>1</sup> The English translation of this title would be “Viola Research Society (**VRS**),” and is the exact name given to the American and very first independent section of the VFG. The original membership consisted of Germans, Austrians, Swiss, one Hungarian, and a scattering of Americans who had strong European connections or who happened to be working or studying in Europe at the time, notably Myron Rosenblum, Society Founder and first president. Other prominent American violists listed among the founding and early VFG membership included William Primrose, John Graham, Margaret Farish, Daniel Thomason, and Karen Phillips.

The American VRS connection with the VFG remained quite strong after it became an independent section. In 1974 Rosenblum began a series of *American Viola Research Society Newsletters*, following the VFG format. These publications were quite informative,

*Figure 1. A timeline of important events during the early AVS years.*

Date	Event
<b>1965</b>	<i>Pöllauer Protokoll</i> written
<b>1968</b>	VFG founded in Kassel, Germany
<b>1971, May 22</b>	VRS founded (American section of VFG)
<b>1974</b>	First publication of VRS newsletters
<b>1975</b>	IVC III in Ypsilanti, Michigan
<b>1977</b>	IVC V in Rochester, New York
<b>1978</b>	VRS name changed to AVS – American Viola Society
<b>1979</b>	IVC VII in Provo, Utah.
<b>1979</b>	Inaugural PIVC, the first viola competition of its kind

Figure 2. New members of the American Viola Research Society.

**1968 Founding VFG Members**

Myron Rosenblum, NYC, NY  
William Primrose, Bloomington, IN  
Margaret K. Farish, Evanston, IL  
John Graham, Rochester, NY.  
Daniel Thomason, Culver City, CA  
Karen Phillips, NYC

**1971 American Members of VFG**

William Lincer, NYC  
David and Jane Schwarz, Stamford, CN  
L. & W. Levine, Buffalo, NY  
L. Stein, NYC  
Nancy Sturdevant, Ann Arbor, MI  
Sheppard Lehnhoff, Chicago, IL  
Burton and Jane Fine, Newton Hlds, MA  
Jacob Glick, Bennington, VT

**1972 American Members of VRS<sup>2</sup>**

Francis Buebendorf, Kansas City, KS  
Midhat Serbagi, NYC  
Gabriel Davidson, NYC  
Nancy Sturdevant, Ann Arbor, MI  
Thomas Frenkel, Long Island City, NY  
Wolfgang Granat, Philadelphia, PA  
Anne Mischakoff, Detroit, MI  
Betty Goldblatt, Somerset, NJ  
Marilyn Gates, NYC  
Benjamin Brownstein, Shaker Heights, PA

listing the minutes of the latest Presidency meetings, announcements, introduction of new members, and listing new publication releases for viola. In the first fourteen newsletters, Rosenblum had the German content translated to English and added information pertaining to the American membership at the end; with *Newsletter No. 15* in 1978, active American membership was such that he departed the European format and worked independent of European input. Also in 1978, the official and original name, “Viola Research Society,” was changed to “American Viola Society” in a broader effort to appeal to performers, teachers, luthiers, composers, publishers, and commercial outlets in addition to scholars. It is important however to note that the first two international viola congresses in North America, International Viola Congress (IVC) III in Ypsilanti, MI, in 1975, and IVC V in Rochester, NY, in 1977, were held under the Viola Research Society name.

It is of equal importance to note that the original Viola Forschungs-Gesellschaft was organized in response to a stipulation in the *Pöllauer Protokoll*, the source document of viola organization, written in 1965 by Dietrich Bauer and Franz Zeyringer.<sup>3</sup> The document had stipulations for two separate functions: establish a *research body* for the viola and schedule *viola congresses* at appropriate intervals to service viola performance and scholarship. The resulting institutions were the Viola Forschungs-Institut, now defunct, but which in time became the Primrose International Viola Archive (PIVA), and the Viola Forschungs-Gesellschaft (VFG), which became the overall parent body.<sup>4</sup>

**Myron Rosenblum and the VRS**

Before going further into the historical narrative, please permit a few words regarding the accomplishments and dedication of the Society founder, Dr. Myron Rosenblum,

important thoughts to bear in mind as you proceed. In addition to the accounts above, Rosenblum ran the VRS for several years off of his dining room table having at his disposal primarily a typewriter and a mimeograph machine as his means of conducting business and communication. In addition to his credentials as founder, Dr. Rosenblum was also the first Society president and first Newsletter editor.<sup>5</sup>

**Maurice Riley and the Viola Congress Concept**

As stipulated in the *Pöllauer Protokoll*, the primary requirement of the VFG was to have congresses. IVC I and IVC II were relatively small, two-day affairs held respectively in Ulm (1973) and Bad Homburg (1974), Germany, organized and hosted by two of the organizational founders, Dr. Wolfgang Sawodny and Walter Lebermann. They probably would have remained a German/Austrian or at least a European affair for some time had it not been for a visit by Dr. and Mrs. Maurice Riley to Dietrich Bauer in Kassel who took them to the Bellevue Palace, a local museum, to show them the modest beginnings of the Viola Archive.<sup>6</sup> During a discussion of the concept of “viola congresses,” Riley asked his host why such a meeting could not be held in the United States. Bauer answered, “Because we have never been invited.” Riley replied, “Well, in that case I am inviting you to have a viola congress in the United States.” Although Riley personally was convinced that such a congress held enormous potential, his invitation was entirely spontaneous. Bauer was obviously impressed and took the proposal to the VFG Presidium. Thus, and almost on a whim, was the groundwork for the first North American viola congress laid. Upon their return to the United States, the Rileys visited Myron Rosenblum, president of the very new American VFG, in New York. Skeptical at first, Rosenblum became convinced by Riley’s arguments and supportive of an American viola congress, and discussions with Zeyringer began.<sup>7</sup>

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**IVC III, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1975**  
**Maurice Riley, Host; Myron Rosenblum,**  
**Programming**

The Riley-Bauer meeting took place in August 1972, a full year before the first congress took place. VFG President Zeyringer had many other commitments, meaning that time was on the American's side in that they had three years to organize. During this interval, the proposal was successfully presented to the Eastern Michigan University administration on the basis of public relations and recruiting. Michigan members of the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) also supported the congress with a monetary donation and active participation. Likewise, the support and active participation of William Primrose was a key element in the congress's success. Maurice Riley had some very useful connections of his own, even within the confines of his own family. His son, George Riley, was principal second violinist of the US Air Force String Orchestra, his daughter-in-law, Lauria (Mrs. George) Riley, and another son, Ben Carl Riley, were cellists. These connections were used to secure orchestral support at IVC III without charge. And then there was the person of Eric Chapman, representing the Violin Society of America, who used his position to sponsor an instrument makers' competition limited to violas and which would be held during the congress.

Walter Trampler was the first choice for a featured performer, but prior engagements in Europe created a scheduling conflict and he could not participate. This was by no means an indication that quality performers would be lacking, as Francis Bundra, Donald McInnes, Myron Rosenblum, Franz Zeyringer, Ernst and Lauri Wallfisch, Nathan Gordon, and Burton Fine definitely compensated for whatever slack Trampler's absence might have caused. Participating in lectures, panel discussions, and other congress events were Ralph Aldrich, Lyman Bodman, Robert Courte, Anne Dodge, Baird Knechtel, Louis Kievman, Nannie Jamieson, Henry Barrett, Harold Coletta, Robert Oppelt, Laura Sias, Robert Slaughter, J.H. Stephens, and William Primrose, among others. Musically the congress was the "coming out" party for Patricia McCarty—she was young and already close to the height of her powers, and displayed a wonderful balance of technique with musicality in her playing, as did one of her teachers, Francis Bundra. Riley himself was always quick to credit the participation of the VFG representatives, Franz Zeyringer, Wolfgang Sawodny, and Dietrich Bauer, as essential to the success of the congress. The fact that Riley and Rosenblum listed the event as IVC III lent legitimacy to the VFG by acknowledging this as the third such international viola congress. The fact that violists across the nation turned out in droves (over 300 participants) was also key to the success of the first North American international viola congress.



*Myron Rosenblum (left) presenting William Primrose with an award at the IVC III in Ypsilanti. Photo by Dwight Pounds.*

The congress also featured two important premieres. Clark Eastman, a Michigan composer, wrote his Concerto for Viola and Orchestra for IVC III, premiered by Nathan Gordon and the US Air Force String Orchestra. Vincent Persichetti's *Parable XVI* for Solo Viola, op. 131, was also premiered at Ypsilanti, by Donald McInnes. In the Violin Society of America's competition, 43 violas from luthiers from all over the world arrived and the overall quality of the entries was a revelation to everyone attending. Gold medals for craftsmanship and tonal quality were awarded to David Wiebe and Otto Schenk, two young American luthiers.

Likewise worth mentioning is the perhaps unintentional beginning of a North American viola congress tradition at Ypsilanti: the massed performance of J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 6. For the first reading, the solo parts were

performed by Ernst Wallfisch and Francis Bunda, violists, and Lauri Wallfisch, harpsichordist. The *ripieno* was performed by over one hundred violists, cellists, and double bass players. Dr. Edward Szabo conducted. For the second reading, the entire group of over one hundred violists played the two solo viola parts. For those in the audience, the overall sound was thrilling and awe-inspiring.<sup>8</sup>

Should anyone think that an inordinate amount of attention is being paid to the first North American viola congress, allow me to stress that its precedents were world-wide and, as we might colloquially say today, it cast the proverbial “long shadow.” Franz Zeyringer’s IVC III summary was unrestrained:

This congress was a milestone in the development of the VFG and viola congresses! Four hundred participants [sic], an artistically outstanding concert program, interesting presentations and, for those of European background, an unimaginable enthusiasm distinguished this congress. The presence of the great master, William Primrose, and the first direct contacts between European and American violists pressed upon this unique viola celebration the stamp of excellence! Now a standard had been established, a model for implementing future viola congresses. The congress in Ypsilanti, in addition to several other “firsts,” featured an historically unique world premiere: a violist would be awarded an honorary doctorate! William Primrose was recipient of this

distinction, and with him the entire guild of violists felt likewise honored.<sup>9</sup>

#### **IVC V, Rochester, New York, 1977**

**Louise Goldberg, Host; Myron Rosenblum, Programming Associate**

Compared to Ypsilanti, the first Rochester Congress was a rather subdued affair, given its much lower attendance. Still, William Primrose was present and scheduled for a lecture and a Q&A. By no means did the attractions end with Primrose because many established violists were present and on the programs: Walter Trampler, whose schedule was clear this time, and Paul Doktor were the featured soloists, each making his first appearance before a viola congress. Trampler presented the first reading of the Shostakovich’s Sonata for Viola and Piano, op. 147, at a viola congress. William Primrose announced in his lecture that he and Mr. Trampler had discussed the Shostakovich over dinner the previous evening and that, in the future, the Primrose interpretation of the sonata would be identical to that of Trampler. In addition to other selections, Paul Doktor played an arrangement of Schubert’s Arpeggione Sonata he himself had made from the original score. In addition to Primrose, Marna Street, Heidi Castleman, Michael Tree, and Jacob Glick presented lectures, lecture demonstrations, and lecture recitals. Francis Tursi teamed with Martha Katz and the Cleveland Quartet to play the Mozart String Quintet in D Major, K 593. The US Air Force Chamber Orchestra<sup>10</sup> once again provided orchestral support to the concerti performed

at the congress, including Johann Andreas Amon’s Concerto in G Major for Viola and Orchestra, op. 10, and Alessandro Rolla’s Rondo in F Major for Viola and Orchestra, op. 10, with Walter Trampler as soloist. Robert Coleman performed Sir William Herschel’s Concerto in F Major for Viola, Strings, and Cembalo, and Harold Coletta played Roman Hoffstetter’s Concerto in E-flat Major for Viola and Orchestra (now attributed to Joseph Martin Kraus). Myron Rosenblum and Robert Slaughter performed Christoph Graupner’s Concerto in D Major for Viola d’Amore and Viola.

Premiers included *Variations on “Veni Creator Spiritus”* by James Fry, performed by the Eastman Viola Ensemble, conducted by



*William Primrose, Marna Street, Paul Doktor, and Francis Tursi (left to right) at the IVC V in Rochester, NY. Photo by Dwight Pound.*



Paul Phillips. Francis Tursi performed a piece dedicated to him by composer Verne Reynolds, Sonata for Viola and Piano. Establishing a new tradition, the VRS (AVS) selected Rebecca Clarke, violist and composer, as its first Honorary Member.<sup>11</sup>

## IVC VII, Provo, Utah, 1979

### David Dalton, Host<sup>12</sup>

In a very real sense, the Provo congress was considerably more than the sum of its parts and rich in precedents. Not only was it a viola congress in the sense of IVC III and IVC V in organization and structure, it also saw the inauguration of what was to become the Primrose International Viola Competition (**PIVC**). The first Primrose Competition was won by Geraldine Walther; Jun Takahira from Japan, was second, and Patricia McCarty third; judges included William Primrose



David Dalton, Maurice Riley, and Franz Zeyringer (left to right) at the Ann Arbor IVC. Photo by Dwight Pounds.

himself, Ralph Aldrich, and Joseph de Pasquale. **PIVC I was the first international competition ever held for violists exclusively!** IVC VII was also host to an Ernest Bloch Centennial celebration with Bloch's own daughter, Suzanne, as the guest of honor. She introduced the celebration and shared anecdotes and glimpses of personal and professional life in their home. Each of her father's

works for viola were performed at the congress. Topping the entire agenda was a full celebration of William Primrose's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Featured Events:** David and Donna Dalton selected a program of compositions for viola and soprano. Solo recitals were presented by Joseph de Pasquale, Yizhak Schotten, Karen Tuttle, Raphael Hillyer, and Primrose Competition winner, Geraldine Walther. Lecture recitals were presented by Guillermo Perich and Marcus Thompson and a lecture on Brescian and Cremonese violas by Maurice Riley. Franz Zeyringer's viola/clarinet/piano trio performed, and in a program for multiple violas, Thomas Tatton led the Southern California viola ensemble in the premier of David Sargent's *Interlude for Multiple Violas*.

In programs featuring viola with orchestra, Milton Thomas and flutist Theodore Wight performed Bloch's Concertino for Flute, Viola and String Orchestra with the US Air Force Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Capt. Lowell Graham. Jerzy Kosmala played the premier of Maurice Gardner's Rhapsody for Viola and Orchestra and Jun Takahira was featured violist in the premier of Merrill Bradshaw's *Homages for Viola and Orchestra*, David Dalton, guest conductor. Emanuel Vardi performed Tibor Serly's Concerto for Viola and Orchestra, Jerry Bilik, guest conductor. Other premiers featured at the congress included Robert Manookin's *Reflections on a Hymn*, performed by David Dalton, viola, Donna Dalton, soprano, and Christopher Giles, piano. In a real show-stopper recital, Joseph de Pasquale teamed with pianist Vladimir Sokoloff in the premier of George Rochberg's Sonata for Viola, dedicated to William Primrose.<sup>13</sup>

**William Primrose's 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration:** A recital honoring William Primrose was given by Jun Takahira, Alan deVeritch, Yizhak Schotten, Karen Tuttle and Donald McInnes. Mr. Primrose's wife, Hiroko Primrose, and his sister, Jean Primrose, who designed the logo for his newly released memoirs, were present. Mr. Primrose autographed copies of his book, *Walk on the North Side: Memoirs of a Violist*, throughout the congress.<sup>14</sup>

*Dwight Pounds has been an AVS member for forty-six years now, and has held a number of official positions in both the American and International Viola Societies: Vice President, Executive Board member for over thirty years, PIVC juror, and IVS Executive Secretary. He is author of "The American Viola Society: A History and Reference," covering the first eleven North American congresses and a pedagogical work, "Viola for Violinists." He has photographed some thirty-three congresses with over thirty images representing the viola community on permanent exhibit in the PIVA Gallery.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The earliest attempt at viola organization was *Die Bratschistenbund* (1929–1939?), organized by Wilhelm Altmann in Leipzig and supported by Vadim Borisovsky and Paul Hindemith. Although relatively short lived and ultimately doomed because of lack of communication and transportation and by war, the *Bund* membership produced five newsletters through 1935 and *Literatur für Viola und Viola d'amore* in 1937.

<sup>2</sup> This 1972 VRS membership list was extracted from newsletters and should be considered as partial at best. The membership list most likely was larger.

<sup>3</sup> Dwight Pounds: *The American Viola Society: A History and Reference*, see pp. 322–323 for an English translation.

<sup>4</sup> See *JAVS* Vol. 19, No. 1, 43–46 for a more in-depth discussion of the *Pöllauer Protokoll* and founding of the PIVA.

<sup>5</sup> Myron Rosenblum was also co-founder and co-director of the Viola d'amore Society of America. His professional career involved teaching at CUNY and freelancing on viola and viola d'amore in orchestras and chamber groups.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Riley, Professor of Music at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, MI, second VRS/AVS President and second *Newsletter* editor, was host of IVC III in 1975. Myron Rosenblum handled programming.

<sup>7</sup> Dwight Pounds: *AVS/HR*, p. 28

<sup>8</sup> Maurice W. Riley: *The History of the Viola, Vol. 1*, Maurice W. Riley, publisher, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1980, p. 113

<sup>9</sup> Franz Zeyringer: *Die Viola da braccio*, Verlag Heller, Munich, 1988, p. 165 (Fragment translated by Dwight Pounds)

<sup>10</sup> The US Air Force musical organization that appeared at the early congresses apparently had official changes in their title. In the programs they were listed as the US Air Force String Orchestra, US Air Force Chamber Orchestra, and US Air Force Symphony Orchestra.

<sup>11</sup> Extrapolated from Dwight Pounds: *AVS/HR*, p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> David Dalton, Professor of Viola at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, third AVS President and third *Newsletter*/first *JAVS* editor, was host of IVC VII in 1979. An authority on the life and career of William Primrose, he was instrumental as a co-writer on *Walk on the North Side: Memoirs of a Violist* and author of *Playing the Viola: Conversations with William Primrose*; he also compiled a video on Primrose life and career. He performed in addition to hosting IVC VII, and supplemented his congress with such interesting features as the first Primrose International Viola Competition (which he organized and raised funding), a celebration of the Ernest Bloch Centennial, and William Primrose's 75th Birthday Celebration and Concert.

<sup>13</sup> See David Dalton's recent article sharing the story of this commission: David Dalton, "Pursuing a Commission," *Journal of the American Viola Society* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2019), 20–23.

<sup>14</sup> Extrapolated from Dwight Pounds: *AVS/HR*, pp. 98–99.

# Reflections and Memories of the Early AVS Years

*Editor's note: In recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the AVS, we are featuring the reflections of several prominent violists and foundational members of the AVS. These memories, along with Dwight Pounds's article in this issue and Thomas Tatton's forthcoming article in the Fall 2021 issue, serve to celebrate the history of our society. Those interested in further retrospectives should refer to the JAVS Volume 28, Summer Online Issue (2012), which is devoted to remembering IVC V, and David Dalton's article about IVC VII in JAVS Volume 25 number 2 (Fall 2009).*

## Myron Rosenblum

During my Fulbright year in Vienna, 1964–65, I made a trip to Poellau, a charming village in lower Austria, to meet Franz Zeyringer, the author of *Literature for Viola*. I was privy to his impressive viola research and also had the pleasure of performing with Franz, a good violist, and a local orchestra in the Graupner Concerto in D for Viola d'amore and Viola. It was at that time that Franz talked of having viola societies in countries, world-wide, and particularly in the USA. So, when I returned back to New York City, I set about to create an American chapter, the Viola Research Society (VRS), the forerunner of the American Viola Society (AVS).

Through some articles in music journals, the VRS grew quickly. It had not only Americans, but violists, teachers, students and scholars from Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries. Eventually, individual chapters were created in many countries. The American chapter was the largest and its International Viola Congresses were stellar events.

So, today, 50 years later, it gives me much pleasure to see how the AVS has grown and matured into a superlative organization with a roster of extraordinary musicians

and performers, with a fine and scholarly journal, a publication component, viola competitions, and other valuable ancillary projects. From those days when the viola was considered a poor relative of the violin and cello, I think with great satisfaction of what William Primrose said in a speech about the viola at one of the early Viola Congresses on American soil: "You've come a long way, baby!" May the AVS continue on its meaningful and special path in the viola world and music.

## Thomas Tatton

I joined the Viola Research Society in 1973 when I was in the middle of my DMA program and busy teaching at Whittier College in California—it seemed like a reasonable thing to do. What was a clear vision for Myron Rosenblum (and many others) was just a foggy notion to me. It wasn't until 1975, when I attended IVC III in Ypsilanti Michigan, that I knew I wanted to wrap myself in the organization. The level of playing was spectacular, the master classes sparkled, the pedagogy workshops were eye opening, and the exhibits were unlike anything I had seen before. In short, I was awed by the experience! That said, it was the cheerful, collegial, and friendly violists all around me (some 350 of them!) that clinched my lifelong love affair with the VRS/AVS!

## Marna Street

IVC III, in Ypsilanti, Michigan: What a thrill, all those violists. The viola was just coming into its own in the US, outside of a few patriarchs and matriarchs, including William Primrose, Paul Doktor, Walter Trampler, Lillian Fuchs, and Karen Tuttle. I had just graduated from the Juilliard School and met people that were students as well as All Stars. We all sat in the cafeteria and talked as

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friends and colleagues, which was something I had never experienced. Even at Juilliard in the 1960s, violists were treated as “3rd violinists.” Ivan Galamian, Joe Fuchs, and Oscar Schumsky (the Juilliard violin faculty) heard viola auditions along with “Uncle Walter” Mr. Trampler (who later walked me down the aisle at my wedding).

I realized at the Ypsilanti Conference that violists were a special breed. I met Nat Gordon, principal violist for the Detroit Symphony, famous for his “money sound”; Maurice Riley was writing his first volume of *History of the Viola*; and Franz Zeyringer had compiled his *Literature for Viola*, both massive undertakings. We all had a love for the sonority of the viola. We weren’t playing viola for “compensatory” reasons. At 22, I had never felt that before.

By the conference in Rochester, I was teaching “viola majors” and brought along several students. What a cast for them to see: William Primrose, Francis Tursi, Paul Doktor, Walter Trampler, all playing concerts in the Recital Hall at the Eastman School.

Through the years I have seen the development of viola mastery, and the expansion of the repertoire. Myron Rosenbaum had a vision he put together which now has a competition and repertoire expressly written for and inspired by the viola society.

Many of those I have remained in contact with have passed away but their passion for the viola, their humanity, and the camaraderie that so often grew from being a violist helped me forge my way into the professional world. I wish I remembered more details of these early congresses, but some specific highlights: the Bloch Suite played by Francis Tursi; Brahms’s F minor Sonata with Paul Doktor; Hindemith played by Walter Trampler; a masterclass with remembrances by William Primrose; and Louise Goldberg (the Eastman Reference Librarian) giving us access to Sibley Library, thus delightfully introducing me to shelves of viola music!

It is the flavor and essence of these conferences that I remember most. Wonderful people celebrating a wonderful instrument.

## Dwight Pounds

### IVC III

I recall finding a large envelope in my mail one day in 1974 at the Music Department of Western Kentucky University where I was employed, and wondering what it contained. Imagine my surprise and delight to find a rather sizeable poster announcing a viola congress to be held that summer in Michigan. My first thought was, “Well, at last somebody has put something together to celebrate the viola!” One may easily conclude that I had never heard of the VFG, VRS or any other viola organization.

**Specific Memories and Impressions:** There were fellow viola players everywhere (over 350 people registered for the congress), there was more viola music than I had ever seen here in one place, and the program variety covered almost every aspect of practical playing and instruction imaginable! Nathan Gordon’s appearance with the US Air Force Symphony marked my first experience with hearing a solo violist playing with a full orchestra. The congress had attracted distinguished visitors from Europe and the VRS was part of an international organization. It was amazement after amazement, and surely I must have impressed people as having come in from a void! That said, I wasn’t totally adrift because of my activities with David Dalton, Jerzy Kosmala, Kathryn Plummer, and William Primrose at Indiana University, but before the conclusion of the congress I had met 19 additional people with whom I would be fully engaged in future congresses.

“Died and gone to heaven” is an absurd and trite phrase that normally should be avoided at all costs...except that there is an imbedded element of truth in it regarding my experience with IVC III. I left Ypsilanti determined to attend future congresses, but without the slightest idea of what lay ahead for me.

### IVC V

**Specific Memories and Impressions:** the charm, personality, and eloquence of William Primrose; Heidi Castleman’s lecture matching specific Bach Suites with dance steps, *elan* and *repo*; Marna Street’s lecture-demonstration featuring two students from my Alma



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Mater, Texas Tech, where she was teaching at the time; Walter Trampler sitting alone on an empty chair during an hour of open discussion of matters viola; Michael Tree in a similar situation discussing the viola in the string quartet; Paul Doktor played a full program during the congress and, for an encore, chose to play the Marais *Five Dances* unaccompanied. Tom Tatton, Baird Knechtel and I were sitting together, enjoying the evening thoroughly. Doktor's sheer musical mastery in these pieces left us almost stunned—following the performance we didn't say a word to one another—but years later we all exclaimed, “Do you remember the *Marais Dances* that Doktor Played?!” This was one of my most enduring memories from IVC V, or for that matter, any viola congress, festival, or competition.

## IVC VII

**Specific Memories and Impressions:** A close examination of American Viola Society records will show that William Primrose never officially performed at a

viola congress. However, he enjoyed visiting displays to acquaint himself with contemporary violas, bows, and their makers. Selecting instruments and bows at random and proceeding to play whatever was on his mind (usually Paganini Caprices) during one such visit at Provo, what for Primrose was simply the enjoyment of trying new instruments quickly became an unforgettable impromptu “recital” for some thirty bystanders. Far from the peak of his powers, suffering seriously impaired hearing and terminal cancer in his 76<sup>th</sup> year, he nevertheless succeeded in totally astonishing the small audience with his still formidable skill in this incredibly poignant scene. Such was the artistry of William Primrose.



*William Primrose during the celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday at the IVC VII in Provo, Utah (1979). Photo by Dwight Pounds.*

# We Shall

## George Taylor's video project and thoughts on a career as a Black violist in America

Interviewed by Leanne Darling and Gregory Williams

On July 29th, 2020, George Taylor, Professor of viola at the Eastman School of Music, released a video titled *We Shall*. It was the culmination of his statement in response to George Floyd's death and the efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement towards civil rights and justice for police brutality. The video is a collaboration between Professor Taylor and his students from the past thirty years, performing an arrangement of the spiritual "We Shall Overcome" for many violas within the image of a large tree. You can view it [here on YouTube](#). The video begins with Taylor playing the melody, then the tree comes into view, where students appear each playing parts of the arrangement all recorded remotely. The music becomes more chaotic as the tree begins to "burn." Taylor appears again playing the melody, and is joined by his students singing the spiritual, ending with a quote by Rep. John Lewis. The video is 8 minutes and 46 seconds, the time George Floyd was being strangled. Professor Taylor spoke with former students Leanne Darling and Gregory Williams in January about the experience.

### **What was the initial inspiration for the video *We Shall*—where and how did you get the idea?**

I woke up like everyone else did to the events that led up to the death of George Floyd. Watching murder on your screen, and the ensuing epiphany that the nation seemed to have was not new to me. It was something that I knew and was familiar with for many years.

I felt that I had spent sixty-five years trying to become anonymous, trying not to make my color or my race matter, so that I could be a violist and a teacher, and not some Black existential threat to the people around me. There is a price you pay for that anonymity when you

walk into most environments, and triply so in your work environment of thirty-five years.

The microaggressions that wear on your psyche: touring with the Ciompi quartet, being on receiving lines and having people walk by you to get to the cellist. When I used to smoke, going out to have a cigarette at Eastman and having the security guard check on you saying someone had reported a strange Black man stalking at the back of the building. People running from you, or being tracked in a department store. Being called a "nigger" by an irate violist in a quartet rehearsal at Aspen, and, being told my violin playing was favorable because I did not sound like a "Black violinist." And the list goes on and on. At that moment in time, the pain of sixty-four years being a Black person in this country came tumbling down on me. There seemed to be an activism that was current and vital and part of a younger generation. I felt left behind, and that my voice was no longer viable because of my self-inflicted isolation and anonymity. I had lost any right to have a say in current events. With the growing maturation of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the awareness and activism it was creating, I was left feeling as if there was a bus that was taking off from the station and it had left me behind.

So there were a lot of tears, there was a lot of soul searching, and once I worked myself out of that psychological hole, came the questions: how can you be of service? How can you reclaim your voice? How can you help other people whom you love, find a small voice in these matters? I began to scan my experience. I came of age during the Civil Rights Era, so I watched the King speech at the March on Washington live on TV.

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I grew up with the Black Panthers, with the Food for Youths programs, with Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam and his rise to validity in the Black community. It's so ironic that with such incredible and vital moments in our history, a lot has been taken for granted, co-opted into popular culture, or blended into a national amnesia.

Brief inroads were made, of which I'm a proud result of to a certain degree: equal opportunity, scholarships, etc. I never paid a dime for school, but along with that came the baggage like "you only get this because you're Black, not because you're good enough." There is an undercurrent of inferiority, and other "underlying costs" that came with those benefits.

After I spent weeks of crying, I thought, well, what personal experience can I bring to this moment in time? In my musings, I remembered that "We Shall Overcome" was very much a part of my upbringing. It was sung at all the rallies, along with "Lift Every Voice and Sing." We sang it at school, we sang it at demonstrations and at church. It was very much part of my experience as a Black child. So, being a musician, I thought, that was the song. What can we do with it?

### **Why did you bring your students into it?**

As I am experiencing these events passing me by, I was thinking, well, what is helpful in keeping my life current? What keeps me grounded? What gives my life relevance? My family and my students!

My students and my relationships with other people are a constant reminder as to why I exist. I don't exist because I'm Black, I exist to be of use to other living beings. And as a person, I need other people. Teaching is basically a form of caretaking. That's all it is, really. You evolve and learn a set of skills, and then you pass it on. It's happened in every trade, everywhere. In doing that we also teach values we have learned and how we manifest them in our music and our lives. Those values are not always innate or equal in all of us. They have to be taught, learned, and practiced like anything else.

I knew that my students would be looking for ways of expressing their hurt and their anger, asking, "what can we do?" I have had students who had already marched and were tear-gassed. Not all of us choose to do that, so what can we do?



*The central image of a tree, with George Taylor at the roots, as videos of his students gradually fill the screen. Screenshot from 3:34 of the YouTube video, We Shall, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mk8xduZTSmI>*



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## **Why did you choose a tree as the central image?**

From the song to my concept of what creates relevance to my life, to my students, and to music, we are all connected to each other in a broader sense. From that thought came the idea of a tree. A tree starts from a seed, sprouts roots, and the first thing that grows is the trunk. The youngest branches are the ones that are the highest. The older branches are down below. It is in the tree, in the roots and the expanding of the roots, that the strength of the tree and the vitality of the tree is assured. That analogy for me was not born of the presumption that I alone am a “tree trunk” but more the representation of a life. This is my life! It could be your life! It is a seed, it has taken root. I have been privileged to live it thus far. It has roots that hopefully as I continue to live, continue to expand. I don’t want to stand in one place either. The idea was, “How can I be relevant? What can I do? How can I branch out more? Do I want to just stay there and die, and not grow?”

I then thought my connections are my students; to a large degree, to all degrees, my students are my life. Not so much because they’re violists, and I teach them, but because they are people. This idea of universal connections, it goes on ad infinitum until we get to almost every sentient being on two legs in this world, and that is the connection. We don’t like to think so broadly, because we are not given the opportunity to, but it’s because we DON’T think this way that we lose our humanity. So it is a call to humanity! It is a call to this idea of growth.

## **What made you think of collaborating with Andy Maskiell and Ben Magruder?**

For this project I thought to myself, there’s the tree, there’s the song, what can we do? I had two students who were composers. Ben Magruder was the one that I contacted first. He was one of the first graduates of the Film Scoring Studies program at Eastman. Andy Maskiell is a classical composer. Both are violists and former students. The more I thought about it, the more that I realized it needed to be in a format all listeners could relate to. So I rolled the ball in Ben’s court, and I said “here’s the tune, write it for a viola ensemble for me.” And then I said to Andy, “OK, There is going to be chaos music, and what I want is supposed to be. . . .”

If someone were to hear the music stripped back to the melody, and then go to the chaos music, you would hear organization in the chaos. You’re not going to hear it in the video! In the video, there are more layers, and that’s Andy’s music in the chaos. In making the video relevant, I wanted it to start off with just the “We Shall Overcome” melody and have it evolve into chaos. The burning tree, this is the idea that something beautiful can be easily destroyed by one act of violence. This act touches all people. You cannot create an act of violence and not have it come back to everyone. Originally the whole video was to be 8 minutes 46 seconds, the time that the officer had his knee on Floyd’s throat. My thinking was that there has to be a layer of representation of current events. This was all inspired first by George Floyd, and then by Congressman John Lewis, who died right after the making of the film.

## **What was the process of making the video?**

I have always been primarily an ideas person, so I solicited the help of one of my former students Cynthia Lam. She is this person that is of pure heart, really organized, and her recital had a social justice theme, so I knew she would be interested. She helped me organize things. The first thing was to get my students involved.

I figured I could start with a Facebook post. We organized a list of everyone I could think of and started with that, and then we created a group page, and I began to write the letters and began soliciting. Cynthia found the film editor, a friend of hers who did the final edits and found the tree graph. I set a timetable for everything, and had Cynthia take care of the daily manipulations of who sent in what, when it was sent, and whether we had enough people.

Originally it was supposed to be all volunteer, and then I mentioned it to Eastman Dean Jamal Rossi in a meeting and said, “Wouldn’t it be nice to pay two people something.” So we wound up with a little bit of money to pay Ben and the videographer. I thought Ben did an incredibly large amount of work. Not only did he do the arrangement, he did all the editing to make sure that the music lined up with the video.

The opening screenshot of me in my backyard with me playing in my dashiki was filmed by Annaliese Taylor. The video in the middle that has the Black Lives Matter



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poster, I filmed that on the iPad, just in the house. I came up with the idea to put the Black Lives Matter poster in the corner, and play as soliloquy.

Originally, I had wanted a different ending for the titles. I thought maybe the full ensemble should be playing after everyone sang “We Shall Overcome” as the credits were rolling. I was out of shape, and hadn’t touched the viola in a while but Cynthia thought my playing of the melody was beautiful, and she was adamant that the rolling of the credits should be my playing. Not long before the project was coming to an end, Congressman John Lewis died. I felt it was important to pay homage to his legacy, as he represented one of the last bastions of the era that I grew up in. The “good trouble” quote by Lewis seemed to be perfect for everyone who chose to participate. In helping to make this video, no one was doing it for the money. You’re giving of your time, effort, energy, and enthusiasm. You are going through a lot of effort to become a drop of water in an ocean of effort. You also claim a form of spiritual identity.

**What is the significance of *We Shall* to you personally now?**

The video is the culmination of many years of a relationship that I have forged with people I love and work I love to do, but it also speaks to my cultural experience in this country that I share with everyone.

I have always had a culture of caring and social awareness in my viola studio. For Martin Luther King’s birthday, I have always devoted a studio class to having students talk about his Dream, and their dreams. I believe that social awareness has always been a part of being a musician. A lot of the old school great musicians fled tyranny to play in service to others. Some gave more voice than others, which you have with Casals who is the best example for me. Having a voice on an instrument means being able to espouse those values in your art by living a life that is of value, that is of service to other people.

I’ve always told my students, “you’re more than your instrument.” One of the lectures in my first studio class is “the world doesn’t need another violist.” After we go through the litany of what the world needs, and you

decide that well I must be a violist, well then be a good one! For me, the viola has given me entrée into a life beyond my wildest dreams. I have something I can do and be which is of value to the world and brings me great pleasure and joy. While being a musician who plays the viola is a large part of who I am, I refuse to limit my aspirations solely through that lens.

For me, when I mourn the loss of my earlier years, what I mourn most is that I’ve had to put my head down just to survive. Now I feel like I can finally keep my head up. It is part of the catharsis of when you have a demon, and it is exorcised, it takes a while to heal. We are all still healing from the ripping open of the wound. The video was my anesthetic and the cure for the wound. I will always be in recovery.

**What was the response of your students?**

All of the correspondence was positive, and people were grateful to be able to have this outlet. I don’t think anyone including me expected the final result. When you look at it, of course, it’s not an MGM/Paramount Pictures kind of thing. We’re violists, it’s a viola studio, people who play the viola, we’re human beings! We live our personal lives in a technicolor world, but as violists, we live in this niche place. A lot of people were hungry for the opportunity to have this vehicle to claim the rest of our identity socially.

**What role do violists or musicians in general have in causing “good trouble?” What are some of your ideas on how musicians can get involved with social justice issues and better promote and explore the compositions of Black composers?**

What we do as musicians in our world is to make sure we lead a life of richness and inclusion. Classical music is already rife with competition, rife with exclusion. The excuse of “musical excellence” has been used to exclude a lot of people of color. We have this idea in our minds of what is acceptable from a musician and don’t realize that our opinions are totally subjective. We don’t fit comfortably into one niche or another.



*George Taylor performing Adolphus Hailstork's Two Romances with the Bloomington Symphony (Minnesota), Manny Laureano, conductor, October 2019.*

We come with that baggage as a birthright in classical music, it's like you've got a kettle that's on high boil. Without conscious acts of inclusion, the kettle stays on high boil forever. It will never cool. It means taking a hard critical look, and people just don't like being taken out of their comfort zone. So we're in it for the long haul.

When we are part of orchestras or opera organizations, we need to realize that we're part of a social structure. Are we so ensconced in the activity of trying to play in tune and learn the repertoire that we're not touched by the social norms around us? Some questions to ask:

1. Do we have a say in what's being produced the next season? If so, are we exploring new repertoire? Are we exploring repertoire by women, by LBGTQIA composers? Are we exploring repertoire by BIPOC composers?
2. Are we involved and engaged in serving and teaching in underrepresented communities? Are we on those committees that make sure our role in the community is not a hit and run where we go and play for the poor Black children and then go off and stay in our halls

- and never go back to those neighborhoods ever again?
3. Do we vote? Do we read?
4. Are we continuing to grow? Are we continuing to use our talents to serve everyone rather than serve ourselves?

For solo musicians and chamber ensembles:

1. Do we only play in the concert hall venues? Are we playing in the fire stations? Are we playing in the community centers? Are we playing in the churches?
2. Do we have a concert series in a Black community? In their church?
3. Are we handing out tickets in underserved areas?
4. What are we doing to spread our audience base?

We have to be advocates for our own skills. The only way to be a viable part of our community as a musician is by not only playing well but by teaching that this music is part of everyone's cultural inheritance. When I play that Allemande from the Third Bach Suite, I'm not thinking of a German dance with an agogic rhythmic structure of . . . I know all that stuff. I'm thinking of Radio Rahim

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from the movie *Do the Right Thing* with his ghetto blaster. Are we creating these relevancies for our audiences? Are we using our creative powers not just to create the music but to explain the music? That's what we can do as violists.

**What are some other ways we can address white privilege at our music schools and create a more diverse, inclusive culture amongst our students and faculty?**

At Eastman we're already exploring these ideas. I'm active on committees that will research music for our teachers to teach. For instance, with the freshman quartet seminar where students are learning string quartets, usually you begin with Haydn, Mozart, and learn basic quartet skills. Why can't you do that with George Walker's *Lyric Suite*? Why can't you use composers such as Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges in order to teach basic ensemble skills: how to play a simple accompaniment well without having to worry about a sea of notes going by. That music can be used as part of teaching an ensemble class. On the DMA aural exam, having more examples of music by women, POC, and LGBTQIA is in motion. We will include more examples of rhythm and harmony from Black cultures in the teaching of rhythm and harmony.

Manhattan School of Music is producing operas by Black composers, they're adding faculty of color, they've given their whole curriculum for the school year over to music of Black composers. Eastman is making changes in that direction, including hiring more people of color even as adjunct.

There are definitely hard, core issues that still need work. Alumni at Eastman have had to face the fact that they are one of only 2–5 BIPOC total in the student population. This is unacceptable. There will be greater efforts in Admissions, and towards looking for scholarship money for students of color. There needs to be a more viable and funded Black students' union.

We cannot continue to face these problems out of guilt, but with the strong desire to see the culture of music match the culture of society. For those of us who survived the stigma of inclusion by exception, you never really get rid of feeling "less than." I was told by the Dean of Duke University that hired me for the Ciompi Quartet: "You know the only reason you have this job is because you're Black." I said to him I thought I won an audition, which I had.

Moving forward, we own what exists, we accept the truth, and we act to enrich and enable equity, for all our sakes. The moment is now—we should all be on the train as it leaves the station.

*Violist Leanne Darling is a performer, improviser, composer and teacher who is comfortable in the concert hall, the nightclub, and the art space. She teaches at SUNY Buffalo, performs, and leads creativity workshops in the Buffalo area.*

*Dr. Gregory K. Williams is on the viola and chamber music faculty at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, City University of New York (CUNY). He also performs as Assistant principal violist of the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, principal violist of the Berkshire Opera Festival, and violist of the Golden Williams Duo.*

# andPlay: “More Than” a Violin/Viola Duo

By Hannah Levinson

In the liner notes for *playlist*, andPlay’s debut album (2019, New Focus Recordings), composer/conductor Nicholas DeMaison compared the violin/viola duo to Aristophanes’s Ur-human, a one-headed being with four feet, four hands, four ears, and two faces looking in opposite directions. This metaphor perfectly describes andPlay; the ensemble functions as a singular entity that integrates the capabilities of two individual musicians. Though I may be biased as andPlay’s violist, this conceptualization of the string duo has informed the unique identity of our ensemble and the type of music that we perform and commission. This article will provide a brief introduction to andPlay and our guiding artistic principles, using commissioned works from our repertoire as examples.

In 2012, eager to escape the oppressive summer New York City heat, violinist Maya Bennardo and I agreed to perform a concert of chamber works at a music-lover’s beachfront property in return for room and board for two nights. The positive audience response made us consider a possible future; we loved performing together and believed that this instrumentation had a lot of potential, but were faced with one major challenge: the repertoire.

Historically, the violin/viola duo has not been a favored instrumentation, and therefore has limited existing repertoire. Most Classical-era works were intended for light chamber music for the courts, like Mozart’s two Duos for Violin and Viola, K. 423 and 424 (which he actually wrote to help complete his friend Michael Haydn’s overdue commission of six duos!). Other notable contributions to the repertoire have been gifts for or commissioned by couples or siblings. For example, Martinů’s Three Madrigals (Duo No. 1), H. 313 and Duo No. 2, H. 331 were both written for Lillian Fuchs and her brother, Joseph. In more contemporary



andPlay: Maya Bennardo (violin, left), Hannah Levinson (viola, right). Photo by Shervin Lainez.

examples, Augusta Reed Thomas’s *Silent Moon* (2006) was commissioned by the performing couple Almita and Roland Vamos, and her work *Rumi Settings* (2001) was premiered by siblings Ani and Ida Kavafian.

While Maya and I appreciated the classic works by Mozart and Martinů, as players devoted to contemporary music, we felt strongly that the potential of this instrumentation greatly exceeded what was currently available. It seemed as if the similarities between the violin and viola often limited composers’ imaginations. The majority of works fell into one of two camps: either the two instruments passed melodies back and forth, or the viola simply served as an accompaniment to the violin as if they were the left and right hands of a pianist. From our viewpoint, the instruments’ shared characteristics were an advantage! The overlapping range was not a restriction, but rather offered the opportunity to form a new composite instrument with doubled strength, an



extended range in both directions, and more timbral possibilities. Though we could not name it at the time, the Ur-human concept was exactly what we envisioned when we became andPlay.

In officially founding andPlay later that year, our main goal was to commission new works to expand the repertoire for this instrumentation. Eight years later, andPlay has commissioned over forty new works for violin/viola, or violin/viola/electronics, developing a repertoire that presents the violin/viola duo in the way we always imagined. A non-profit 501(c)3 organization as of 2017, andPlay performs for audiences across the United States and globe, and our commitment to contemporary music motivates our education and audience engagement activities.

Propelling our mission is a commissioning philosophy we describe as “more than.” We work with composers to create works that sound like “more than” a violin and viola, collaborating with those who push us technically and musically to create unexpected aural experiences. The remainder of this article will discuss three principles that contribute to this philosophy, referencing works from our repertoire that embody our vision and have set the precedent for what we believe this instrumentation deserves.

## 1. More than the sum of its parts

This concept was briefly introduced above—we look for composers who will approach writing for andPlay in an unexpected way, obscuring all preconceived notions of the instrumentation. This often means that an audience member walks away thinking “I never knew that a violin and viola could sound like that!” While this is sometimes done through the use of electronics, alternate tuning systems, or theatrical elements, it can be equally achieved in more conventional scores. A prime example of a work like this is Ashkan Behzadi’s (b. 1983) *Crescita Plastica*, which andPlay premiered in 2015.

At first glance, the score seemed to stretch the extremes of our technical abilities, with unbelievably quick transitions between ranges, playing techniques (col legno, arco, harmonics), and intricate microtonal melismatic passages. Yet, after working with Behzadi, it became clear that this work was not meant to be solely a virtuosic exercise. The lyricism of this piece, which merges material reminiscent of folk music with contemporary microtonal language, is not confined to one part, but is dependent on the cohesive aural experience of the ensemble. Instead of viewing the violin and viola as separate voices, Behzadi’s score creates three or more collaborative, intertwined

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows the initial measures with a tempo of 100-108. The violin part (top staff) begins with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a series of sixteenth notes and slurs. The viola part (bottom staff) starts with a triplet of eighth notes and a series of sixteenth notes. Dynamics range from *pp* to *ff*. The second system continues the melodic development with various playing techniques like *np.* (natural pizzicato), *st.* (staccato), *sv.* (sul tasto), *op.* (open), *pizz.* (pizzicato), *arco* (arco), *lp.* (long pedal), and *ord.* (order). The third system shows further melodic complexity with microtonal markings like *8va* and *8va+*, and dynamics like *pp*, *mp*, *ff*, and *ppp*.

Example 1. Ashkan Behzadi, *Crescita Plastica*, mm. 1–4. Notice the overlapping gestures and rapid exchange of similar figures between the instruments. Click the icon to the right for an audio recording (from andPlay’s album playlist, New Focus Recordings 2019).

melodies. The long notes pass back and forth to become one melodic line, the accented notes another, and the fast passagework is not about microtonal precision, but singing expressively as if they were ornaments. Listening back to our first performance, we were shocked at the sonic result. We clearly knew the nuts and bolts of our own parts, yet in a recording we could no longer identify what was my viola and what was Maya's violin. Behzadi morphed and Play into one super-instrument that sighed, cried, pleaded, and exploded over fifteen minutes. This work represents our "more than" principle as the violin and viola are no longer separate entities. Instead, Behzadi established a new form of virtuosity by seamlessly merging the two instruments, requiring the performers to simultaneously create multiple, interlocked lyrical lines.

## 2. Extended techniques as intentional, not "sprinkles"

As players of contemporary music, we spend a lot of time working on and exploring extended techniques. But the term "extended techniques" can be a bit of a pet peeve for us. We don't view these as special effects, or something that can be sprinkled onto a piece as a final flourish. Instead, these techniques have simply extended

our vocabulary to widen the possibilities of sounds and timbres that we can produce on our instruments. These contemporary sound worlds have equal value to the ones we've been trained to play all our lives; therefore, they must be approached with the same amount of attention to detail, intention, and specificity that we would use to interpret a phrase of Bach or Brahms. While not all of our commissioned works include extended techniques, we choose to work with composers who take an integrated approach when using extended techniques in their compositional language.

In 2013 we commissioned David Bird (b. 1990) to write *Bezier*, a work that has since become a keystone of our repertoire. Our collaboration began with a workshop where Bird recorded us improvising sounds that we enjoyed making and also working off of prompts from Bird, like "sound like a dial-up modem" (which probably only means something to readers born before 1995). At the end of the day, Bird walked away with hours of material which he whittled down into a brief lexicon of sounds that were mainly simple extended techniques like a short scratch behind the bridge, or a col legno ricochet. In *Bezier*, he used this vocabulary as literal

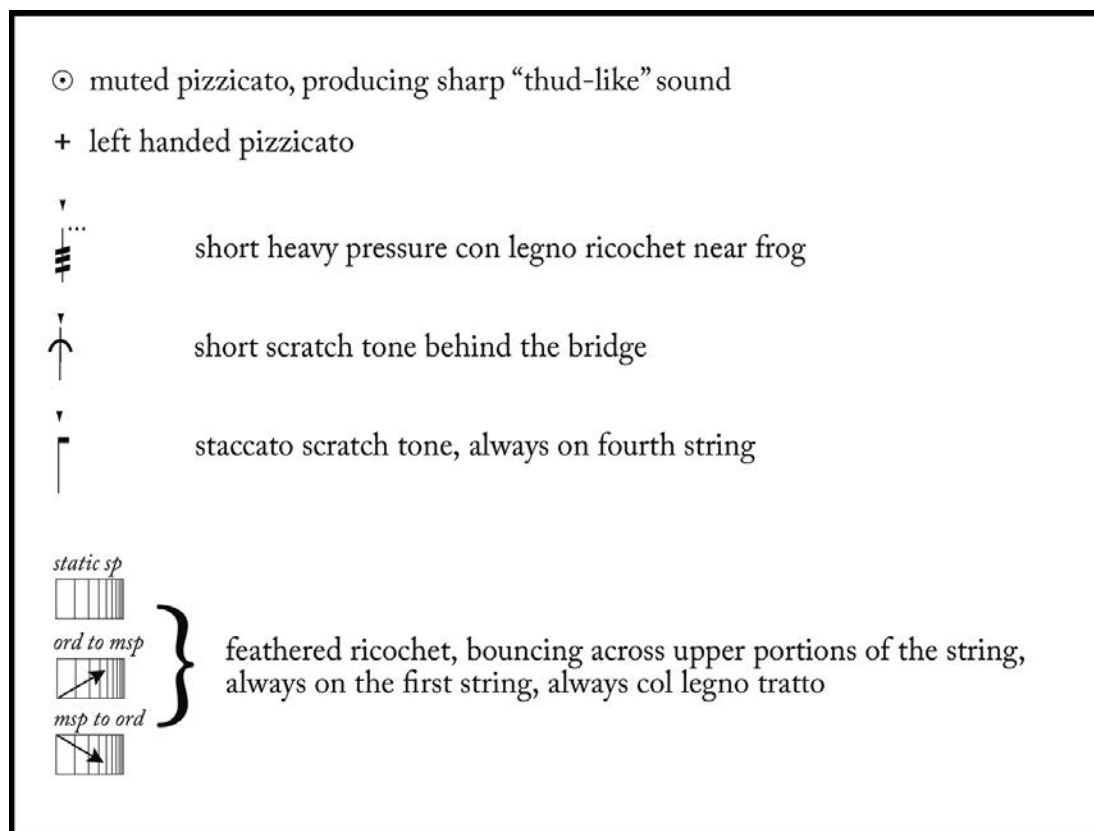


Figure 1. An excerpt of the key for David Bird's *Bezier*, describing the extended technique notation.

Example 2. David Bird, *Bezier*, mm. 26–44. The extended techniques described in the key are arranged in quick succession with harmonic gestures to form short phrases, creating a unique language for the work. Click the icon to the right for an audio recording (from *andPlay*'s album playlist, New Focus Recordings 2019).

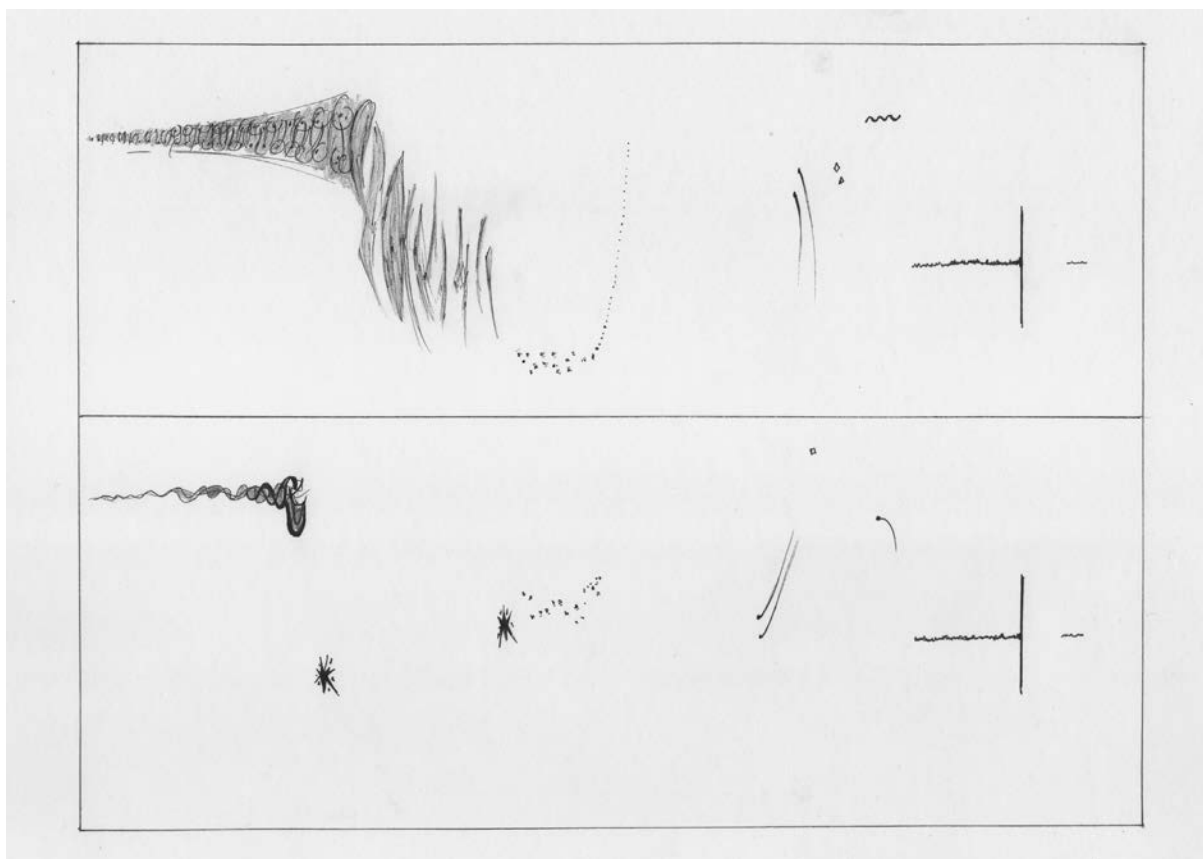
syntax, arranging the “words” into sentence fragments and phrases. Though it took a lot of practice to play these “sentences” up to tempo, this piece eventually became a fluid language that transformed the instruments into something entirely new. The placement of these “words” in quick succession gives the impression that the music is performed by a computer, or at least electronically processed, yet it is simply two acoustic string instruments. Bird’s approach matched how we think about contemporary performance: he incorporated extended techniques intentionally and with equal consideration of more traditional methods of playing to create a work that integrated a wide range of sounds into a cohesive, idiomatic language.

### 3. Sharing the creative role between performer and composer

*andPlay* is not interested in simply being replicators of musical scores, but instead finding ways to infuse works with our artistry through the exploration of our own creative impulses and ideas. This is especially true when premiering a new work; as there is no existing performance practice, we are left with a more-or-less open slate to approach a score. We look for collaborations that allow that space for our own voices as performers and creators.

One work that exemplifies this concept is *Letters to My Future Self*, written in 2018 by Leah Asher (b. 1986).

Asher’s compositions are in the form of graphic scores, which use visual or graphic images to notate sound instead of the staff and notes common to Western classical music. While graphic scores come in many different forms, Asher’s are highly influenced by her work as a visual artist and her experience as a performer and improviser on violin and viola. In many ways, *Letters to My Future Self* resembles a traditional score: the dividing line in the middle of each page separates the two parts, with the violin above the line and the viola below (see ex. 3). This creates a score-like presentation of the two parts, with the ability to identify simultaneous events vertically, and to establish the work’s pacing through changes in density of score events as time passes horizontally. While many would assume that a graphic score is a vehicle for constant improvisation, *andPlay*’s approach to this work is not improvisatory. Instead, we spent time thoughtfully considering every aspect of the score, determining what we imagined as the sonic result of each event, and then working to discover a repeatable way to create those sounds on our instruments. In a way, our approach to this work was the reverse of Bird’s, as Asher presented us with a score which we then broke down to create our own sonic vocabulary. After devising this language, we worked to interpret the score as logical musical phrases. Asher’s work allows for the artistic identities of the performers to emerge and play a meaningful role in the creation of the music, something that is vital to us as performers.



*Example 3. Page 2 from Leah Asher's Letters to My Future Self. The upper half of the page is the violin part, the lower half the viola part. Click the icon to the right for an audio recording (performed live at Kent State University on Nov. 21, 2019, Vanguard New Music Guest Artist Series).*

## Conclusion

While a soloist is capable of individual virtuosity and a quartet is able to combine four voices to create a lush composite, the violin/viola duo acts as a chameleon, able to embody any number of identities. Behzadi used the similarities of the instruments to create a super-instrument of eight strings. Bird's natural incorporation of extended techniques neutralized the hierarchy sometimes assumed between traditional and contemporary ways of playing, treating every sonic event as intentional and worthy of consideration. Finally, Asher created a score with space for ambiguity and choice on behalf of the performers. Her work captures andPlay's musical identity as it embraces our musical dispositions, personalities, and interests as an ensemble. While I used each of these works to demonstrate one principle, I would argue that they each achieve all three, successfully embodying our musical mission.

andPlay's "more than" philosophy guides our commissioning efforts and has helped to develop our unique identity as an ensemble. Though we feel closely tied to each of our commissions, we do not commission pieces solely for our own use, and encourage other violinists and violists to explore and perform works from our repertoire! As andPlay continues working towards reimagining and strengthening the identity for the instrumentation, we hope that our "more than" approach inspires a more vibrant future for the violin/viola duo.

*Dr. Hannah Levinson is an active scholar-performer of contemporary and classical music based in New York City. In addition to andPlay, she is the violist of the Talea Ensemble, the Fair Trade Trio, and a member of the Albany Symphony Orchestra. Hannah recently completed her Ph.D. in Viola Performance at New York University; her research explores how contemporary artistic practices engage with their surrounding political environments. Learn more at [www.hannahlevinsonmusic.com](http://www.hannahlevinsonmusic.com) and [www.andplayduo.com](http://www.andplayduo.com).*



# Ashleigh Gordon

By Martha Carapetyan



*Ashleigh Gordon. Photo credit Bearwalk Photography*

Ashleigh Gordon wants to play beautiful music on the viola. She wants you to know about beautiful music, to hear it sung and performed and taught and recorded. She wants you to know the stories of the Black women and men of the African diaspora who have written and are writing music that celebrates life and their own histories and unsung heroes, past and present. And as a violist, working largely within the Western classical tradition, she wants you to know about the multi-faceted experiences of Black musicians and creatives.

Gordon grew up playing the violin, starting in fourth grade in her public school. When she spoke with me in a Zoom interview, she remarked “I didn’t know much about music, but I knew I wanted to be *in* it, surrounded

by it.” Attending the Baldwin-Wallace Conservatory of Music as a violinist, she switched to viola in her junior year. Grateful for the incubation of a small conservatory at Baldwin-Wallace, Gordon undertook the stunning trajectory from Telemann Concerto to Bartók Concerto in her final two years, studying with Louise Zeitlin.

After graduation from Baldwin-Wallace, Gordon completed her master’s in viola performance as a student of Carol Rodland at the New England Conservatory of Music. Her time at NEC gave her the opportunity to teach widely around the Boston area and to observe and experience the life of a freelance musician in a major metropolitan area. This time in Boston helped Gordon to become clear about the trajectory she *didn’t* want

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for her work—taking every gig offered and teaching dozens of students while commuting constantly from school to school. She auditioned for the International Ensemble Modern Academy in Frankfurt, Germany and was accepted as the only violist and one of only two Americans for the year-long program. Traveling, studying, performing and learning German as a member of IEMA provided a foundation for Gordon to immerse herself in contemporary music and the life of a performing musician in Europe. At the conclusion of her year in IEMA, she explored options for staying in Germany but ultimately felt that the classical music working environment, revolving around the orchestra and church in each town, was too limiting.

Returning to the Boston area during the summer after her IEMA tenure, Gordon “sat around in libraries to dream” with NEC fellow alumnus and close friend, composer Anthony R. Green. Committed to not just “falling into” teaching and gigging, Gordon and Green dreamt up and formed what would eventually become the remarkable concert and educational series known as Castle of Our Skins. In forming COOS, Gordon has said that it seemed like a natural process that involved the acceptance and marriage of the qualities and strengths she had been exploring and honing up to that point. Bringing together her organizational skills, her performing abilities, and her interest in music as a social and collaborative endeavor, Castle of Our Skins provided an opportunity for her to play and dream. In particular, the profound desire to create a community of Black performers and composers and other creatives served as a guiding principle for what COOS would become.

As the Artistic and Executive Director of COOS, Gordon today leads an organization deeply committed to exploring and celebrating the voices of Black musicians and artists, including instrumentalists, singers, composers, dancers, spoken word artists, and filmmakers. Their performances in and around Boston have taken place in locations as diverse as bookstores, museums, libraries, and schools. COOS has also done residencies at the Longy School of Music at Bard College and Keene State College in New Hampshire. But far beyond locale, their social media presence is international in scope. Their offerings are smartly curated, exploring and promoting their loves, beliefs, and history. Their production, writing, and recording are all on a par with their passion and

organization. Their blog, [BIBA \(Beauty In Black Artistry\)](#) which posts several times a year, explores issues including the work of Black creatives, unknown compositions of Black composers, social justice within and beyond the classical music world, and the group’s upcoming events.

A particular post in March 2021, entitled “Power of Her Voice,” by COOS Director of Education Taylor Lena McTootle, led me to a remarkable performance from August 2020 by the same title. (Available [here on YouTube](#).) The program was presented virtually by The Kennedy Center as part of their Arts Across America series. Artists from COOS, including Gordon, as well as a commentator/narrator from the Museum of African American History, L’Merchie Frazier, interspersed the words of Black abolitionist and suffragist Francis Ellen Watkins Harper with stunning compositions for string quartet by Florence Price, Jessie Montgomery and Valerie Coleman. The result was a rich and powerful tapestry of the voices of Black women, made present through both music and words.

As a co-founder of COOS with Anthony R. Green, Gordon has made the promotion of Black creatives her *raison d’être*, participating in panels and conferences in the US and abroad, speaking, writing, and sharing her experiences as an entrepreneur, performer, and tireless advocate for the vast body of work of Black artists and musicians. In an article in *Chamber Music America* in the Fall of 2020, she wrote, “we, as Black people, and especially as Black women, do not want to be otherized. We do not want to be interchangeable bodies and seen as a monolithic, easily classifiable identity. We do not want to be part of a cyclical societal amnesia that is temporarily countered when topical or faddish consciousness deems appropriate. We do not want to be called to act only when there is a diversity crisis or racial unrest. We want to exist. Fully. And to celebrate the fullness of our humanity.”

With a full spring season underway in early 2020, Gordon and the team at COOS found themselves staring into the same COVID-strewn void as most arts organizations around the world. There was some retreat and rest early on as the shock of a blank calendar and valuable opportunities to share their mission were cancelled. But as has often happened in times of great stress and loss, brilliance emerged in the late spring.

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Gordon and her team kept the focus on the community alive in social media. Their annual Call for Creatives continued and the deadline was extended. Videos and posts from earlier concerts and events were shared to keep the connection to their audience alive.

But perhaps the most remarkable, generous, and unusual outreach in the pandemic came in the form of the Black Composer Miniature Challenge, issued as a call for scores over a one-month period in April 2020. Eighteen compositions were submitted by composers and immediately recorded by Gordon and Green. Featuring the viola, each composition was premiered on Instagram on successive Fridays at noon. The pieces vary remarkably in tonal language, instrumentation (for either viola solo, viola and piano, or viola with fixed media or voice) and style. The only stipulations were that the composer identify as Black or part of the African diaspora and that the pieces be between 30 and 60 seconds in length. The project took on a life of its own as listeners eagerly awaited each new debut. Though the project was borne out of the desire to make something beautiful amidst the pandemic, the body of works that were submitted will far outlast the difficult time in which it was conceived. In May 2021, COOS released a digital anthology of all eighteen works.

As a testament to what can be done with creativity and love no matter the circumstances, the collection is exceptional. But beyond that, it is a thrilling and beautifully varied collection of offerings by Black and African diasporic composers for our beloved instrument. Of the project, Gordon comments that “The Black Composer Miniature Challenge project was as much about supporting and building community as it was about sharing the work and artistry of African diasporic composers with our audiences. It helped keep creative spirits alive at a time when dual pandemics made that a constant struggle. Our Anthology is our way to commemorate each other’s unique artistry and resilience while continuing to build community, awareness and opportunity with one another.” The collection is currently available for purchase on the COOS website and is the first, it is hoped, of many publications of music that COOS has midwived into being through their mission to explore Black heritage and culture.

Looking into the future, Gordon and the dedicated staff at COOS are at work on a long-term vision that looks to the ongoing work of breaking down barriers and creating more access and opportunities for Black composers, performers, and artists of all kinds both locally and in the wider community of musicians. There is interest in creating a recording arm under the auspices of COOS as well.

Ashleigh Gordon is also, of course, a violist. As a supporter of and fierce performer on our beloved instrument, as well as a tireless advocate for the voices and work of Black creatives, she has hopes for the American Viola Society. As the classical music world struggles to find its place on the right side of history, she hopes that the AVS will continue to fight for and promote issues of inclusion and diversity, and not only in a year in which the temperature went up for all of us in terms of recognizing racial injustice and inequity. We can continue to promote, create and enhance such needed resources as the American Viola Society’s Underrepresented Composers Database. At every conference and festival we can feature the works of such composers, and not just in one fifty-minute program, but in panel discussions and multiple performance opportunities for BIPOC performers and composers throughout. And we can continue to program in our own performances and in the works that we teach our students, music from the amazingly diverse universe of music by Black composers, both past and present.

Ashleigh Gordon is a powerful advocate for the cause which we all share, of learning about and sharing beautiful music by the diverse voices within classical music. And she’s here to stay.

*Martha Carapetyan is a violist, teacher and writer living in Austin, Texas. She is a member of the Austin Symphony Orchestra and an avid chamber musician. During the pandemic, she discovered the joy of playing duet concerts on her porch for her neighbors and is looking forward to many more in the years to come!*

# Creating Community During a Pandemic

By Katherine Lewis

Viola teachers around the country found themselves in the midst of a huge learning curve in March 2020 as they struggled to figure out glitchy connections, sound settings, latency, camera placement, and a whole host of other issues related to online pandemic teaching. In the midst of the chaos, many teachers embraced the change and challenges, determined to help their students feel connected to their peers and mentors through a host of creative projects and programs.

“Is it a pasta or a composer?”—a fun Zoom game involving mixing Italian composer names with obscure pasta types—was one of the first viral virtual games that teachers shared with each other as their group classes abruptly went online.<sup>1</sup> As teachers scrambled to find engaging content to keep their programs going and their students connected, they began sharing tips on social media for embracing the constraints of the technology. Meanwhile, teachers of violists at all ages and levels created some unprecedented opportunities for online learning. In fact, in some ways, the 2020–21 school year was marked by a renewed sense of belonging to this unique community for teachers and their students, as a wide range of programs were developed to help fill the space where in person activities used to take place.

One of the first violists to create such programming in the early days of the pandemic was Molly Sharp, principal violist of the Richmond Symphony and founder of *VlaTutti.com*. She was inspired by her clarinet colleague at Virginia Commonwealth University to create a free group warm up for violists over Zoom. Using social media to promote the group, she welcomed hundreds of violists from around the country to join her on Zoom for an hour of stretching, yoga, left hand exercises, scales, and bowing exercises three times a week during the spring of

2020. As the group took off, she invited guests to lead the warm ups on Fridays, tapping into a huge network of well-known pedagogues. “Community is what’s important right now,” Sharp emphasizes, and through the Viola Warm Up she was able to provide an online viola home for adult amateurs, students, and professional violists alike who tuned in to warm up together, muted, on Zoom. The success of the Viola Warm Up led to two other online projects including a Viola Boot Camp to help violists with practice accountability and goal setting, and a six-week Wellness Workshop last fall which introduced students to teachers of yoga, Alexander Technique, Body Mapping, and other practices that musicians use to overcome and avoid playing-related injuries.

On a local level, college teachers were among the first to scramble as one by one, universities announced an immediate transition to online learning over university spring breaks in early March 2020. For some teachers such as Molly Gebrian at the University of Arizona, teaching through Zoom or Skype was not difficult on a personal level, as she has been teaching a small cohort of German students for many years online. While the lesson transition itself was not new for Gebrian, she noticed that her students needed extra help with wellness goals to help cope with new anxiety caused by online learning and the uncertainty of the pandemic in general. Through weekly wellness assignments that included taking a walk every day, practicing short meditations, and creative non-musical activities, Gebrian was able to help her students transition into their new routine and help them through their mental health challenges.

As the 2020–21 school year began, college professors including Gebrian and Tony Devroye at Northern Illinois

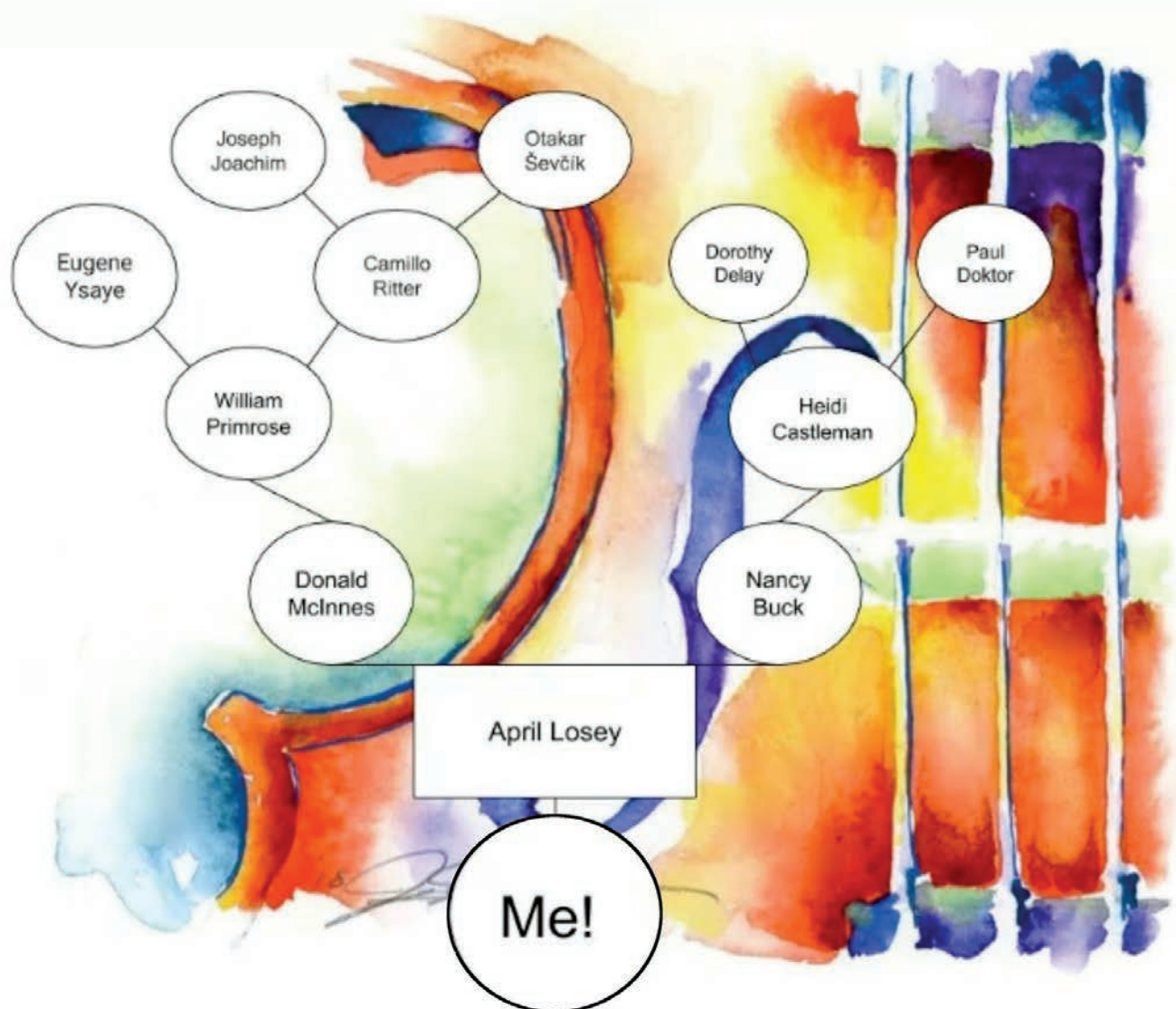


University continued to find ways to keep cameras turned on and students engaged in studio meetings. Gebrian found that she could continue her regular non-COVID reading/journal assignments, but in order to have a more robust discussion during studio class she assigned discussion leaders each week. Devorye, who like most of us had never had a Zoom meeting before March 2020, worked through immediate issues with sound delay and bad connections by pairing up students in duos and trios to record individual chamber music parts separately. Embracing the technology, Devorye, violist in the Avalon String Quartet, learned how to combine individual recordings and his students were able to produce several chamber music “collaborations.”

Perhaps the pandemic project Devorye is most proud of was an in-depth studio collaboration of the famous

Theme with Variations movement from Hindemith’s op. 31 no. 4 Solo Sonata. His students, including incoming freshmen and grad students, met with him online all summer to learn and study the piece. The project involved assigning a different variation to each studio member to learn in depth. As the school year began, the NIU Viola Studio was able to give one of the first in-person recitals of the semester with a socially distant yet continuous performance of the movement, and he later turned it into a [YouTube Video](#) featuring the whole group playing the theme and taking turns on the variations. Devorye reported that through this project, his students sounded like a “cohesive unit in the orchestra” when classes resumed in the fall.

Pre-College teachers also used technology in creative ways to keep in touch with their students. Sarah Montzka,



*A viola “family tree” created by one of the participants in Sarah Montzka’s Summer Viola Adventures classes.*

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faculty member of the Music Institute of Chicago and SAA teacher trainer, used the online platform Flipgrid to create fun weekly assignments for her younger students to complete outside of their lesson time. Like her colleagues at universities, Montzka was worried about the mental health of her students. To keep them connected with their peers, she created a 2020 Summer Viola Adventures classes for 9–12 and 13–15 year olds that included weekly listening and lectures and fun projects that they could complete in between classes using Flipgrid. The highlight of her program included “celebrity sightings” with famous violists such as Matthew Lipman, Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, Nadia Sirota, Jonathan Vinocour, and [The Running Viola](#) Alistair Rutherford, who joined the class for their Viola Trivia event.

Milwaukee-area violist and Suzuki teacher Julie Bamberger Roubik also grappled with concerns over staying connected with her students. In early summer 2020, she took a day off of teaching to drive around the greater metro area to check in with her students in person in their front yards. She repeated this road trip in December and hopes that through this gesture, her students “know that there is an adult who is not their family member who really loves them.” As a benefit of spending the year on Zoom, Roubik plans to keep “zooming” student recitals for family members out of state, and hopes that she can keep teaching students who have moved away from her area online instead of placing them with new teachers.

Kristina Turner, viola instructor at the Gifted Music School in Salt Lake City and viola vice president of the Utah Suzuki Association, organized a day of online events to celebrate National Viola Day on January 30. She reported that with the all-online format, students from around the state were able to participate and enrollment was much higher than for similar in-person events she hosted in the past. She appreciated the fact that there was no cost or time associated with travel for the families, and that because she didn’t have to rent a space to hold the event, her budget had minimal expenses. She hopes to expand on the event next year, embracing the technology that allows students from around the country to connect virtually with master teachers.

Although teaching during a pandemic has proved challenging, 2020/21 will be remembered by many as a year in which violists were able to connect in record numbers. From informal zoom get togethers with old friends to master-class swaps and zoom recitals, teachers were able to offer new challenges to their students to keep them practicing and engaged. Indeed, as teachers, we may look back on this time and realize that many pandemic programs created for this unique time are more cost effective and allow for greater accessibility. In reflecting on the unusual year of teaching that we’ve all experienced, Sarah Montzka offers this: “My big takeaway is that I’m just so grateful for our broader viola community and how generous, kind, and open our viola people are. It’s pretty inspiring to feel part of this special club where everyone is a team player. It doesn’t matter where you are on your viola journey, we’re all on that journey together.”

*Katherine Lewis is Professor of Viola at Illinois State University where she also serves as acting-director and master teacher for the ISU String Project.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> First shared by cellist Amy Barston in a Facebook teacher’s group

# The Viola-Guitar Duo

## Performance Considerations and Repertoire

By Bill White and Elizabeth White

The combination of viola and guitar creates a certain kind of magic. Both instruments share similar ranges and can fluidly switch between being a lead and accompanimental voice. The guitar gives the viola freedom to explore its quieter side, to not always push to project, and the viola provides the guitar with rich timbral support. There is a respectable collection of high-quality original music for this duo if one does some digging. This article spotlights this special combination, offers some considerations for playing together, and serves as a resource for finding repertoire.

Since little has been written about the viola-guitar duo, we interviewed performers who regularly play this music to shine a light onto this unique ensemble. These interviews are compiled in Elizabeth White's DMA document, "The Viola-Guitar Duo: Analysis and Performance Considerations of Gilbert Biberian's *Folklore III*."<sup>1</sup> All of the quotations in this article are from this document. Interviewees for this project include:

- Gilbert Biberian, composer and guitarist, wrote *Folklore III* for viola and guitar
- Carlos Boltes, violist for the Alturas Duo
- Alfonso Aguirre Dergal, guitarist for Duo Ditirambo
- Nicholas Goluses, Professor of Guitar at the Eastman School of music, has recoded and performed with violists Philip Ying and George Taylor
- Noelia Gómez González, violist for Duo Ditirambo
- Scott Hill, guitarist for the Alturas Duo
- Christopher Kenniff, guitarist of the former Duo Fresco

Their advice fell under four categories: balance, intonation, performance set-up, and repertoire. Each

topic will be presented with advice to both the violist and guitarist.

### Balance

In terms of the balance and blend between the instruments, Gilbert Biberian offered a succinct summary:

The two instruments are extremely compatible. The lower pitch of the viola sits well with the register of guitar, which is velvety, but they don't cancel each other out, this is the thing. They are velvety, or they are both capable of velvet textures, but they don't cancel each other out, which is fantastic.

The viola and guitar are particularly well matched and, with a few considerations, an even balance can be achieved. The guitar is naturally a quieter instrument and guitars and guitarists vary greatly in their projection capabilities. The degree to which balance might become a problem will depend on the tendencies of the individual violist and guitarist. This seeming issue is also a great opportunity. Playing in a viola-guitar duo challenges both musicians to develop their technique to be more expressive and play with power and sensitivity. This transforms an issue into an opportunity for musical growth, into something that can benefit both musicians.

Regarding the viola, Nicholas Goluses advises violists to "explore quiet colors." This is an opportunity not often afforded violists in other chamber ensembles. The guitar gives the violist space to explore their instrument's quiet side and opens the door to new sound worlds. Noelia Gómez González found that this exploration gave her new options which informed and elevated her playing outside of the duo. Gómez González's duo partner and

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husband, Alfoso Aguirre Dergal, agrees, saying, “Now when she plays solo, I find that it is more colorful, I would even say more refined.”

Whereas the viola gets to explore its quieter colors in this ensemble, the guitar needs to embrace its louder, brighter side. Guitarists should not be afraid, especially in passages where the two instruments play in rhythmic unison, to sacrifice some of the warm tone that they would use in solo playing. A warmer tone can then be used to great effect in quiet and solo passages, creating even greater contrast in the music. In a similar way that this combination pushes violists to find quieter, warmer colors, it pushes guitarists to find their louder, brighter voice.

### Intonation

Perhaps the greatest challenge of the viola-guitar duo is intonation. The guitar is an inherently out-of-tune instrument. Its intonation is not as fixed as the piano; the intonation shifts depending on the register and position the guitar is playing in. The viola is able to be very flexible with intonation and can adjust while the guitar is fixed. Even with the guitar’s fixed intonation, there are things each player can do to help create the most in-tune sound. Christopher Kenniff advises both players with a reminder of basics fundamental to success: guitarists need to be fluent in alto clef and violists must recognize that the guitar is a transposing instrument—it sounds one octave lower than written.

Violist Carlos Boltes helps intonation through score study, a good practice in any ensemble. His focus is learning the guitar’s part and exploring how the viola interacts with it, troubleshooting areas where he may need to adjust as a violist. The violist must be prepared to adjust to the guitar. When struggles arise, singing with the guitar can help violists step away and hear how to fit their line into the guitar’s harmonic texture.

Guitarists should consider not only tuning with a tuner and their harmonics, but also focusing on tuning structural chords. This is especially true in combination with the viola, which is going to constantly be trying to fit into the guitar’s harmonies. Players should analyze the work and find important, structural harmonies and tune those chords specifically. If one tunes this way, the viola will have an easier time fitting into the guitar’s sound. More description of this, along with other considerations

that are very helpful in this ensemble, can be found in the foreword of Roland Dyens’s *20 Lettres* published by Editions Henry Lemoine.<sup>2</sup>

Another technique the guitarist can use to help with intonation is balancing their chords. This is done by striking each note of the chord at different volumes. If the root of the chord is the loudest note and the third is the softest, the pitches can blend better and sound more in-tune. Scott Hill gives another suggestion for the guitarist to help intonation: always have a gentle coloring vibrato. He refers to this as harmonic vibrato. Contrasted with melodic vibrato, it is barely perceptible, but aids the viola in fitting into the harmonic foundation.

### Performance Setup

Performance setup is an important consideration of the ensemble and something that each duo should explore. As a non-standard ensemble, the violist and guitarist have many options for standing or sitting and what side each occupies. The Alturas Duo plays with both players sitting: the viola on stage right and the guitar on stage left. Duo Ditirambo originally started with the violist standing and the guitarist sitting, but later settled upon both players sitting, viola stage left and guitar stage right. Gómez González spoke of their thinking behind this change and the benefits it brought to their duo:

I see many duos with guitar and I keep thinking that if you sit down, it becomes a duo instead of viola accompanied by guitar. And that gave us a lot of space to rehearse and to discuss and to explore about gesture, how to develop gestures and the kind of gestures that the guitar did and that I did and how to do gestures together to have the same kind of energy when we play, the same kind of energy to finish the phrases or to start.

A general recommendation for this duo is that both players start sitting with the violist on stage left and the guitarist on stage right. This is a good foundational setup. Players can then feel free to explore other setups if they desire. Gómez González notes this performance setup can also aid the balance of the ensemble. Gilbert Biberian also recommends that both players first rehearse facing each other so that they can hear best and then face out when performing so that the audience can hear them.





*The authors' "at home" performance setup during COVID times.*

## Repertoire

The following is a selection of repertoire for the viola-guitar duo to provide a starting place for those interested in this ensemble. Besides original repertoire, players can also seek out arrangements and transcriptions. *Blackbird* by the Beatles arranges nicely for this duo as well as John Dowland songs. There are also transcriptions available of works like Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata and de Falla's *Seven Canciones Españoles*. We also encourage you to search the Underrepresented Composer Database available through the AVS website. It already contains a wealth of resources for the duo and, as a living document, it is continually being updated with new listings. The following is a selected annotated bibliography of original repertoire.

Samuel Adler, *Into the Radiant Boundaries of Light* (King of Prussia, PA: Theodore Presser, 1994).

This piece is sonata-esque with three movements. It is highly motivic and is among the most challenging pieces in this repertoire, but is very

rewarding to play. The guitar part features very fast and complex arpeggio patterns in the outer movements, and some lovely tender moments with harmonics in the middle movement.

Gilbert Biberian, *Folklore III* (Cadenza Music, 1993). *Folklore III* features folk songs from Biberian's home country of Turkey and has excellent writing for both instruments, showcasing both with equally strong solo and ensemble passages. Biberian also expertly balances the viola and guitar with equal roles as lead and accompanimental voices. Players will find this a challenging but highly rewarding piece. Biberian has also written a solo work for viola, *The Poet Makhtum Kuli*, and a concerto for viola and orchestra, premiered in November 2019. Scores are available for purchase by contacting the composer at [g.biberian@btinternet.com](mailto:g.biberian@btinternet.com).

Dusan Bogdanovic, *Trois a Propos* (Les Editions Doberman-Yppan, 2012).

This piece is in three movements. Typical of Bogdanovic, it is very rhythmically and metrically complex. The third movement in particular presents unique challenges with its syncopated sixteenth notes in odd time signatures.

Stephen Dodgson, *Echoes of Autumn* (Les Editions Doberman-Yppan, 2015).

This is a single movement work, but with several different sections/characters. It is very conversational and is a great opening piece in a recital. This piece presents less technical challenges than others in this list, with

considerable room for ensemble expression. A great piece for upper-level college students and professionals alike.

Javier Farias, *5 Fachadas* (Saint-Romuald, QC: Les Productions d'Oz, 2011).

Chilean composer Farias incorporates South American rhythms in this piece. The movements range from light and to quite intense. The last two movements are larger and more challenging than the first. This piece also features substantial sections of solo guitar, especially the opening of the final movement. Both players will find themselves challenged and highlighted in this work.

**Fast and rhythmic** ♩ = 126

The musical score is for a piece titled "Example 1. Samuel Adler, Into the Radiant Boundaries of Light, mvt. III, mm. 1–10." It is written for Viola and Guitar. The tempo is marked "Fast and rhythmic" with a quarter note equal to 126 beats per minute. The dynamics are marked "ff" (fortissimo). The score is in 2/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns with many sixteenth notes and syncopation. The Viola part is in bass clef and the Guitar part is in treble clef. The score is divided into four systems. The first system shows the initial entry of both instruments. The second system continues the rhythmic development. The third system features a more complex interplay between the two parts. The fourth system concludes the excerpt with a final cadence. The tempo is indicated as 126 beats per minute.

Example 1. Samuel Adler, *Into the Radiant Boundaries of Light*, mvt. III, mm. 1–10. Copyright © Theodore Presser Company. All Rights Reserved. Used with Permission.

Lento ♩ = 92

Viola

Guitar

*f* *mf* *f* *tr* *tr* *p* *mf* *mf*

Example 2. Gilbert Biberian, *Folklore III*, mm. 1–9. Used with permission.

Jan Friedlin, *Mist Over the Lake* (Columbus, OH: Editions Orphee, 1999).

Originally for clarinet and guitar, Friedlin has arranged this for many other instruments, including viola. This short piece is hauntingly beautiful and very melodic, exploring the viola's rich lower register.

Francis Kleynjans, *Hommage a Cesar Franck*, Op. 230 (Saint-Romuald, QC: Les Productions d'Oz, 2015).

This is a short single-movement work. It passes a simple melody between the instruments which become higher each repetition. The guitar often plays arpeggiated figures and has a largely accompanimental role.

Jose Manuel Lezcano, *Un pájaro sin plan de vuelo: Homenaje a Violeta* (<http://www.joselezcano.com/>, 2016).

Single-movement work where the guitar plays mostly accompanimental arpeggio figures. The opening utilizes some extended techniques, with the guitarist blowing into their soundhole while playing aleatoric harmonics.

Erik Marchelie, *Eclipse* (Saint-Romuald, QC: Les Productions d'Oz, 2003).

This is a simple single-movement work using jazz inspired harmonies that could serve as a good introduction to the ensemble for new players. The viola plays a long melodic line while the guitar strums chords the entire time. It also comes with options for violin or cello and guitar.

**Con moto: espressivo** ♩ = 92

The musical score is for a duo of Viola and Guitar. The tempo is 'Con moto: espressivo' with a quarter note equal to 92 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Viola part begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes, some grouped in triplets. The Guitar part plays a continuous sixteenth-note pattern, also with triplets. Dynamics include *poco f*, *f*, *sim.* (sustained), and *sf* (sforzando). A crescendo is marked in the Viola part towards the end of the excerpt.

Example 3. Stephen Dodgson, *Echoes of Autumn*, mm. 1–7. Copyright © Doberman and Productions d'Oz. Used with permission.

Erik Marchelie, *Sonate* (Saint-Romuald, QC: Les Productions d'Oz, 2007).

*Sonate* has four movements and the whole piece is melodic and jazzy. A section of high register unison in the final movement is challenging for both instruments, but the piece is generally accessible for the performer and audience. The second movement presents intonation challenges with its use of extended harmonies in which the viola often plays the third or ninth of the chord.

Edward McGuire, *Fast Peace III* (New Port, South Wales: Cadenza Music, 1982).

A single-movement work with a perpetual-motion and pseudo-minimalist character. Requires a high level of rhythmic accuracy and precision in metered sections, and coordination in the unmetered middle section.

Ronald Pearl, *The Places We Left Behind* (<http://www.ronaldmpearl.com/>, 2011).

This piece is a lovely single-movement work available for free. It is a good piece for a duo to work on balance and blend. The guitar part contains quite a bit of cross-string sixteenth note passages.

Ferdinand Rebay, *Kleine Moderne Tanz-Suite* (Madrid: Ediciones Eudora, 2013).

This is a collection of 5 dances including a march, tango, onestep, Boston, and shimmy. All the dances are short and cute, but slightly cheesy.

Ferdinand Rebay, *Sonata in D minor* (Madrid: Ediciones Eudora, 2015).

Rebay's *Sonata* is an earlier work in the repertoire and is a fine example of neo-classical/romantic writing for duo. Fairly typical parts for both instruments.

Klaus Hinrich Stahmer, *One stops searching, one grows silent* (Berlin: Verlag Neue Musik, 2009)

This single-movement work focuses on gesture and conversation between the two instruments. It is similar to declaimed poetry, but with music. It is powerful and challenges the performer to wholeheartedly commit to every gesture and musical idea in order to connect with the audience.



Example 4. Erik Marchelie, *Sonate, mvt. II*, mm. 17–27. Copyright © Doberman and Productions d'Oz. Used with permission.

Max Vladimiroff, *in purple, in blue* (<http://vladimiroffmusic.net/Vladimiroffmusic/Studio.html>, 2016)

This single-movement work draws influence from rock and blues music, with extended passages for both instruments including structured improvisation and percussive effects. It contains tricky rhythms throughout, and sections of strumming patterns for the guitar borrowed from electric guitar playing.

Eberhard Werdin, *Vier Bagatellen* (Vienna: Doblinger, 1984)

These are four short bagatelles, all using a rounded binary form. The viola carries the melodic line throughout while the guitar has an accompanimental role.

## Conclusion

The viola-guitar duo is a special combination with both instruments uniquely suited to complement one another. With a few considerations, this duo comes together quite naturally. Playing in a viola-guitar duo is an invitation to explore color and embrace creativity as the instruments intertwine and fluidly change roles. There is high-quality repertoire for this duo which will hopefully continue to grow as this worthy combination gains more prominence in the chamber music world.

Elizabeth White holds a DMA from the University of Memphis and has degrees in viola performance from Boise State University and the University of Idaho, and has taught for the Interlochen Arts Camp, the University of Idaho Preparatory Division, and Sistema Utah. She is currently developing a music program at Vista College Preparatory in Phoenix, AZ. As a violist, she has been a member of the Washington Idaho Symphony, Walla Walla Symphony, Jackson Symphony, and she performs with her husband, classical guitarist Bill White, in the viola-guitar duo, *Duo Violão*.

Bill White is a classical guitarist and composer with degrees from California State University: East Bay the University of Idaho. He is currently pursuing his DMA in Guitar Performance at Arizona State University. As a composer, he has written works for wind ensemble, orchestra, chamber groups, and soloists, with a new opera on the way.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth White, “The Viola-Guitar Duo: Analysis and Performance Considerations in Gilbert Biberian’s *Folklore III*” (DMA Document, University of Memphis, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Roland Dyens, *20 Lettres* (Paris: Editions Henry Lemoine, 2001).

# “Can You Make It Sound . . . Better?”

## A guide to basic instrument maintenance and how to communicate with your luthier

By Lanson W. Wells

Being a musician means you have to wear many hats. In a single day you may be a teacher, an arranger, an orchestral player, a chamber musician, or an arts administrator.

Throughout my career I have worn many of these hats, and I have been lucky to play orchestra and chamber music gigs, teach several instruments, and now to serve as the assistant editor of this publication. One of the hats I have worn longest is that of violin shop employee. For the past fifteen years, I have also assisted other musicians and their students in various capacities in the violin repair and sales industry. For me, it is truly gratifying to help students select their first “step-up” instrument, or to work with a top professional to help adjust their instrument for optimum performance. The information in this article has been gained through my experience playing viola and violin, and from working at both Cleveland Violins and Davidson Violins.

Advising players (and parents!) on repairs is a daily part of my job, and it is often the most challenging aspect for both me and my customers. It reminds me a bit of the experience many people have when they take their car in for service. You may hear a lot of technical information that you don’t quite understand, you leave your car to be repaired, and you may still not quite understand what was done when returning to pick it up and pay the bill. I have been trying to analyze and avoid this situation for years, and I have come to the conclusion that the problem is the customer and the repair person (be it mechanic or luthier) do not speak the same language! The purpose of this article is to help you communicate with your luthier more effectively by presenting basic terminology all violists should know, common repairs we all may need from time to time, and give you some ideas on what you could (and should!) do at home and at rehearsal to care

for your instrument and bow. Additionally, I will cover some viola-specific information on sound adjustments.

When talking to my mechanic, I have often felt bad that I didn’t have the terminology to describe the issues my gig-worn car was facing. I frequently have had to resort to pointing at a part of my vehicle or trying to describe the issue in what may be hilarious layman’s words. As players, if we know the correct terms and names of all the parts of our instrument and bow, along with their function, we stand a much greater chance of effectively telling our luthier the issues we are facing. In the following section I will focus on a few of the most common problems you may encounter.

### **Mystery Buzzes**

Has this situation ever happened to you? You played a few hours yesterday and your viola was sounding just as good as usual, and then all of a sudden it starts to buzz today. Few things are more frustrating for a player, though an instrument with a buzz or rattle is usually an easy fix. When you bring your instrument to a repair person or a luthier, we generally start to diagnose your problem through a process of elimination, checking several common trouble spots. With a little bit of study and practice, you can diagnose these issues yourself (though you should always have the work done by a qualified repair person). Open seams are the first thing your luthier (or you) should check for. Your viola is held together with a water-soluble glue made from animal hide, which will occasionally dry up and cause the ribs of your viola to separate and become unglued from the top and or the back. You can check for open seams by lightly tapping the outer edge of the top or back, directly above where they

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meet the ribs. I use the knuckle of my middle finger to check for open seams and if you hear a hard and bright slapping sound, which is the sound of wood hitting wood, you have an open seam. This is usually remedied by regluing the seam and letting the instrument sit in clamps for at least four hours. The best way to avoid open seams (or any other hide glue related issue) is to try to keep your viola in a consistent humidity and temperature. I highly suggest using some type of humidifier, and my two personal favorites are the Dampit (for inside the instrument humidification) and the Stretto (for in-case humidification).

The mystery buzz could also be produced by the nut (the tiny, slotted piece of ebony at the top of the fingerboard) needing to be reglued. The fingerboard coming unglued could also be the culprit of the mystery buzz. Seeing if your viola stops buzzing when you apply pressure to either nut or fingerboard may help you determine if either point needs to be reglued.

The bridge and the fingerboard are two common spots that may produce a mystery buzz. Only half the diameter of the string should be in the groove of the bridge, and if most of the string is deep in the bridge groove it is likely to cause a buzzing sound. You should be able to visually see if the bridge grooves are a possible case of your buzz. Additionally, I suggest checking your fingerboard for deep grooves in the wooden playing surface, usually seen directly under the string between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> positions (or wherever you play most often). These grooves can be a major cause of the mystery buzzes and the issue can be alleviated by having the fingerboard planed. To keep your viola in top form, I suggest inspecting it every few days. Your viola will go through seasonal changes just like your body and regularly inspecting it will help you to catch any problems before they become a larger issue.

### **The Bow**

Repair and maintenance of viola bows is a bit more straightforward than the instruments themselves, though bows are much more fragile than violas. The most important bow-related terms a violist should become familiar with are: stick, frog, chamber, tip, mortise (there are both tip and frog mortises), pearl slides, tongue, heel, eyelet, and ferrule. The most common issues viola players face with their bows are: hair wearing out or becoming discolored, bow hair stretching out, or eyelets stripping.

Each of these are simple fixes, and should be obvious when necessary. Worn, discolored, or stretched out hair should simply be replaced. In general, your bow hair should be replaced every six months. The eyelet inside your frog can be another problem spot. If the screw of your bow turns freely but does not tighten the hair of your bow, you likely have a stripped eyelet. Replacing it is a very straightforward procedure. Protecting and taking care of the tip of your is of the utmost importance, as it is the most fragile part of the bow. Sadly, a crack through the wood of your tip will greatly devalue your bow. Due to the elongated shape of their heads, baroque or period bows are particularly susceptible to breakage and require extra caution.

### **The Bridge**

Every violist should be able to maintain and protect the bridge of their instrument, and there are a few simple things you can do to ensure your bridge's health. The act of tuning constantly pulls your bridge toward the fingerboard and it is necessary to reset your bridge from time to time. To correct for this, I brace the bridge with my fingers from both sides and pull the bridge back into place by slowly applying pressure with my index fingers. If not properly maintained, many bridges will warp over time. You should be able to visually see this, and any bridge that is no longer straight should be either replaced or straightened. Unless badly warped, most bridges can be easily straightened by your luthier via the application of steam and at least eight hours in clamps.

### **Tonal Adjustments**

Sound adjustment is possibly the most mysterious aspect of working with string instruments. Because of our particular timbre and pitch spectrum, viola sound adjustments are often more challenging than adjustments to violins and celli. Moving the sound post, which transmits vibrations from the top to the back and is often referred to as the "heart" of the instrument, can have the greatest impact on both the timbre and response of your viola. Slightly moving the post changes the tension between the top and back as well as the intensity of the vibrations transmitted. These small movements can unlock an amazing variety of tone colors from any viola. Our wooden violas are similar to the human body, they shift and change with the humidity and temperature fluctuations of the seasons. As a result, we should expect

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our violas to sound different during each season of the year, and to occasionally need adjustment. Using rich and specific language to describe your requests or issues to your luthier is the best advice I can give a violist. For me, a request such as, “make the A string less bright” or “can the C string project more,” tells me exactly how to move the sound post from its current position to achieve the desired change. The previous sound adjustment requests are a sharp contrast to an indefinite request such as, “please make my viola warmer,” which is more difficult adjustment to dial in for a customer due to the lack of specificity. To get your desired sound from your viola you should expect to go back and forth several times with the luthier making small adjustments to the sound post, as you evaluate the changes caused by the sound adjustment, until you reach the desired result. You should keep in mind that sound adjustments are both personally subjective and frequently a compromise. It is always possible that an adjustment of the sound post that provides the “perfect” A string could negatively affect another aspect of the timbre of your instrument, so I would suggest searching for “balance” within your instrument’s tone color and projection.

Walking into a violin shop does not have to be a difficult or scary experience. A little bit of knowledge and string instrument specific terminology will go a long way toward helping you communicate with your luthier, and ensuring that you are able to keep your viola and bow in top performance shape.

### **Resources for Further Reading**

I would highly recommend consulting with a qualified luthier or repair person for any necessary or desired repairs, as nearly every aspect of stringed instrument repair is not “do it yourself” or for the faint at heart. For those that wish to learn more, the resources below offer a more in depth look at the world of violin repair.

*Violin Restoration: A Manual for Violin Makers* by H.

Weisshaar & M. Shipman, 1988

*Violin Making: Step by Step* by H. Strobels, 1994

*Violin Repair Guide* by M. Atria, 2004

*Violin Manual: How to assess, buy, set-up and maintain your violin* by J. Gosling, 2019

*Violin-Making: A Historical and Practical Guide* by E. Heron-Allen, 2005

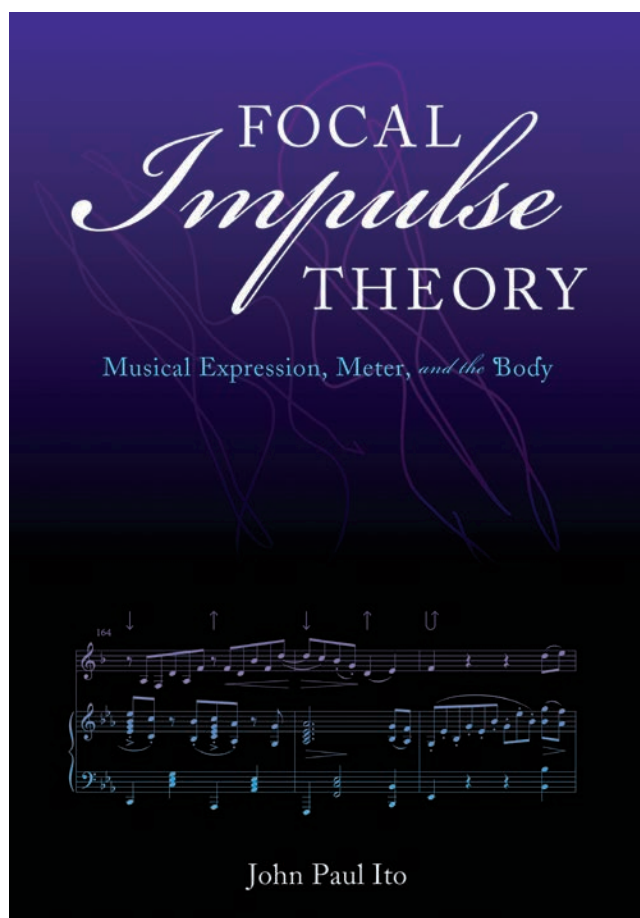
*Kitchen table violin repairs: An emergency handbook for string players and teachers* by L. D. Potter, 1997

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# *Focal Impulse Theory*, by John Paul Ito

Reviewed by Laurel Yu



*Focal Impulse Theory*, by John Paul Ito.

Indiana University Press

398 Pages; \$25.00

ISBN: 9780253049957

John Paul Ito introduces the central concept of his latest book, *Focal Impulse Theory: Musical Expression, Meter, and the Body*, with an anecdote familiar to musicians: a fellow musician stops during a rehearsal and suggests the music should feel in two rather than four. How and why does the suggestive, more prominent beat in two versus four make such a difference in musical interpretation? Throughout the rest of the book, Ito untangles the abstract and hazy notions around meter, pulse, and feel.

My first, almost immediate, question was, “what exactly is focal impulse theory?” Skim the book and you’ll see a section on body movement, so maybe this is like Feldenkrais. Not quite. Pulse is a word used in various ways throughout the book. Perhaps this is a performance guide on rhythm. Not quite that, either. Dive deeper to read about cognitive science and interpretation. Maybe this is an academic text on cognitive theories on how we interpret music. No, that’s not quite it, either. Focal impulse theory is an argument on the differences between what and how musicians organize pulse when distinguishing between larger and smaller beats. It’s backed with empirical data, studies, and a decoding of the word “feel.”

This book is broken down into defining how pulse, interpretation of beats, and our concept of beats apply to performance practice. Many of the pieces that Ito uses to demonstrate his concepts happen to be viola works, making this book particularly relevant for violists. These include JS Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 6, Schubert’s “Arpeggione” Sonata, Mozart’s Viola Quintet K. 406, and JS Bach’s Sonata for Viola da Gamba and Harpsichord BWV 1027. However, the focal (no pun intended) works lie with Brahms’s Sonatas, Op. 120. Ito is a music theorist professor at Carnegie Mellon University and also a trained violist, so I will forgive him for calling them the Brahms “Clarinet” Sonatas (however correct that might be). But, for the purposes of this review in a viola journal, I will refer to them appropriately as the Brahms Viola Sonatas!

Alongside the book are supplementary audio and visual examples used as reference materials. At the time of this review, some of those links were not active. However, the links supply a valuable guide to the concepts displayed in each part of the book with quartet performance examples by the Verona Quartet and the Brahms Viola Sonatas performed by the author with pianist David Keep. Ito hypothesizes that focal impulse theory functions as a

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helpful guide to the practice and interpretation of music. For violists, we can look to Ito's inclusion of our repertoire to experiment with the practical aspects of focal impulse theory. A fine example is the opening measures of the second movement of Schubert's "Arpeggione" Sonata. Upon seeing the Adagio tempo marking, the first measures can be sung and felt in either three or one. When describing the feeling of the beats and bars in this movement, Ito uses scientific measurements of milliseconds, with cited studies of the limits of metrical hearing at around 4–6 seconds. Feeling these measures in one or three is not only particular to a performer, but Ito describes it in a way he terms both "literal" and "metaphorical." The literal is grounded in the extensive empirical literature he cites from scientific studies. The metaphorical is based on the dichotomies of motion that differ from person to person, such as the amount of space the body moves in between beats and bars. The inclusion of this second movement can provide a performer with a guide on the appropriateness of tempo choices in the Adagio and justify the performer's choice in the pace.

Unique to *Focal Impulse Theory*, Ito introduces a specific form of notation for the focal impulses. Reminiscent of some of the more esoteric notation studied in advanced music theory courses, it took me several reads to understand the notation. Particularly interesting in the notation is also the usage of the focal impulse notation against hemiolas and ties. After reviewing how the notations are marked and comprehending where appropriate to indicate focal impulse notations, the music no longer looked like particular moments in my own scores with angry slash marks (where I probably miscounted), but a macro landscape of pulse and coordination of the music on a larger scale. This larger scale is Ito how describes the metric organization of measures over a larger span of time, calling them hypermeters. This unique form of notation would be beneficial as a teacher when teaching hemiolas, polyrhythmic patterns, synchronicity issues in a chamber music setting, and also beneficial to performers when trying to coordinate rhythmically challenging passages. This coordination of the focal impulse theory can be widely adapted to collaborative music settings.

The latter part of *Focal Impulse Theory* revolves around putting Ito's theory to practice, which he shows in the first movements of the two Brahms viola sonatas. For each time I have performed the first Brahms viola sonata, I can recall stopping and isolating in measures 68 to 72 (for those with a score in hand). And to add insult to injury, Brahms includes

an even further complex collaborative passage before the closing material at measures 184 to 187. As a performer's guide to focal impulse theory, an included chart breaks down the meter of the passages (in 3/4) and how Ito describes the heard meter in 4/4, notating the score with hypermeters in four-beat units rather than three-beat units. He basically moves the bar line over one beat without changing the meter or written music notation. With the focal impulse notation usage, this gives each specific passage a sense of a longer phrase and a definite arrival with violist and piano at measures 72 and 187, respectively. The larger spacing of the measures does change the placement of stronger beats, such as a typically prominent downbeat in a 3/4 measure now on the fourth beat of a 4/4 measure. When applying Ito's methods to moments like this, the conceptualized feeling of the phrase feels much larger due to the altered hierarchy of beats from a 3/4 to 4/4 meter. Largely, these moments of applying focal impulse theory can be discerned by performers, and perhaps the idiosyncrasies of a passage requiring more rehearsal showcase alternative meters typical of Brahms. But as a reference, the motion of what happens between the beats, regardless of how large or small the beats, comes down to the aesthetic of the performer and unique taste.

After reading *Focal Impulse Theory*, I found the best way to approach the theory is in constant listening and practice, just as learning a new piece of repertoire. When listening to the examples, I looked to IMSLP for the scores to follow along, not solely relying on the listening examples provided on the accompanying website. I found myself wanting to play along with the recordings on the supplemental website viola-karaoke style to grasp the "feel" of focal impulse theory not just in Ito's words, but the feel of the practice of focal impulse theory to better comprehend the accompanying text.

Ito has clearly done extensive data collection and research for his book. If asked whether *Focal Impulse Theory* is better suited as a performance or teaching guide, I would classify it as a study on feel, what happens between large and small beats, and large and small measures. Succinctly put, it's an in-depth guide to the practical aspects of the role meter plays in musical performances for musicians.

*Dr. Laurel Yu is a proud board member of the American Viola Society. He is currently Assistant Professor of Viola at Valdosta State University, Artistic Administrator for Sinfonia Gulf Coast, in Destin, Florida, and Administrator for the South Georgia String Project.*



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(Continued on page 2)

Updated 2/8/15

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