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# Gamba NEWS

Volume 13, Number 1

September 2000

## 1,000 strings

*Over the rainbow and into the woods at Conclave 2000*

Imagine 180 viols, at six or seven strings per viol, tuning for Conclave 2000's opening-night Bow-In. The basses on low D were like a jet engine idling. Then imagine all 1,000 strings taking off.

They played Ward's *Fantasia #1*, Malvezzi's *O Fortunato Giorno*, and Stanley Starkey's 1982 *Fantasia ubique super arco coeli*; over the rainbow it truly went. A thousand strings, tuned only approximately, make a sweet, shimmering wash. "It was like playing in a huge symphony orchestra," said **Dick Templeton**. "Like playing inside an organ," said **Stu Elliott**. "Like Debussy," said viol maker **Wesley Brandt**.

180 viols playing together was a VdGSA record, said **Jack Ashworth**, outgoing president – "possibly a Guinness record." Undoubtedly so, considering that back when viols were more popular they did not meet in conclaves. Total attendance was 223, including 26 faculty, 19 gophers (more politely called student assistants), 14 beginners, and 12 players from Japan.

But the numbers were not the astonishing part. This conclave, held at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, was called "The Viol Now," meaning that viols made altogether new sounds and players explored new ways of hearing. Viol players are acquainted with the

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past, but here they traveled into the present (which can sound like the future), across hemispheres and into deep space.

*Subheading 1* This year was not the first Conclave to benefit from a contingent of Japanese players, but it was the first time I had heard **Yukimi Kambe's** solo playing and the Yukimi Kambe Viol Consort.

Kambe's solo performance included two exquisite contemporary compositions with roots in traditional Japanese musical forms. *Jiuta*, by the American composer David Loeb, featured voice-like unisons and pizzicati suggesting the plucked strings of the *sangen* and *koto*. *Kappa*, by Tsutomu Mizuno, depicted a legendary Japanese animal, something like a giant frog, employing bent notes, *col legno*, knuckle beatings and slaps to the viol.

The Yukimi Kambe Viol Consort, made up on this occasion of four players with Kambe on treble, has been playing in some form since 1983, specializing in both European Renaissance music and world contemporary music. Whereas Kambe's solo performance revealed a highly polished technician with a cosmopolitan, dominating intelligence, warmth and humor, the Kambe consort revealed – the very same. I find my reaction hard to put into words, but the consort seemed both a collection of four highly individual players and a unified performing whole.

The consort's program included J.S. Bach's Sinfonia No. 12 from *The Art of the Fugue*, several contemporary American and Japanese pieces, and Antonio Carlos Jobim's *Girl From Ipanema*, rendered in an authentically Brazilian style. "Arabian Dance," from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, imitated slurpy strings yet did not fall into parody.

When Americans talk about Japanese musicians, they are forced to talk about culture, using words like discipline, group dynamics, submission to authority, dogged perfectionism, etc. These elements were certainly there, but the audience also saw a commitment to the music itself that goes beyond questions of individuality vs. commonality.

"They don't feel they have to play loudly all the time, and this results in crystal clarity," said teacher **Julie Jeffrey**. VdGSA Treasurer **Ken Perlow** put it this way:

### PACIFICA PLAY DAY SCHEDULE

All play days except those at Stanford are held at Zion Lutheran Church, 5201 Park Blvd., Oakland.

The church is just west of the Park Blvd. exit off Highway 13. We meet at 9:30 a.m. for the coached session. Lunch break is at 12:30; players can go to nearby restaurants or bring lunch from home. Uncoached afternoon playing goes on till 4:00 p.m.

Coffee and tea will be served. Please bring a music stand and any music of your own you'd like to play. Consorts are formed based on the information you provide on the enclosed postcard. **Please mail it in immediately!** Or e-mail your data to **John Mark**, mark\_bach8@hotmail.com.

Newcomers and rank beginners are welcome. If you're coming for the first time, Please phone ahead: (510) 531-1471.

Date	Coach
September 9, 2000	AMY BRODO
October 14, 2000	JULIE JEFFREY
November 11, 2000	TBA
December 9, 2000	AMY BRODO
January 13, 2001	LYNN TETENBAUM
February TBA, 2001	JOHN DORNENBURG AT STANFORD
March 10, 2001	DAVID MORRIS
April 27-29, 2001	FRESNO WORKSHOP WEEKEND
May 12, 2001	JULIE JEFFREY
June TBA, 2001	TBA

“Western musicians creating a group sound share and play into a common space, but do so as individuals. The instruments of the Kambe Consort sound like they are being played by a single person. It is an awesome sound that is utterly selfless, an altogether different conception of art.”

**Ellen Alexander** remarked, of the contemporary pieces, “It didn’t even sound like viols!” And that’s the heart of the question raised by this Conclave: **What does a viol sound like?**

Subhead 2 If you ask that question of **Gerald Trimble**, he might reply that a viol sounds like an electric guitar in full howl. Trimble, a world traveler who lives in Kansas City, discovered the sound of the viol after years of studying singing, the lute, the Persian *kemanche*, and numerous other stringed instruments in his pursuit of Greek, Turkish, Indian, Celtic, and Early European traditional music. For Trimble, the viol, representing the confluence of Islam and Christianity, embodies the unity of the world’s musics and religions. In concert, playing a specially tuned and fretted 7-string, he demonstrated musical synthesis: a Persian minstrel song that sounded like fine rock ‘n’ roll, a pentatonic medley of an Indian song and two Irish tunes. At times he could sound like an entire bluegrass band. Not surprisingly, sometimes his bows suffer. Viol and bow maker **Linda Shortridge** met Trimble when he broke a bow before a concert in Albuquerque, and this meeting led to his appearance at the Conclave.

More new sounds on the viol that are not really new at all were brought to Portland by New York City’s **Jay Elfenbein**, one of a few American jazz gambists, with beautiful versions of such standards as “Easy Living,” “Straight, No Chaser” by Thelonius Monk, and a fantasia upon “I Think I’m Going Out of My Head,” made famous by Little Anthony and the Imperials.

Subhead 3 Then there was the Leo M. Traynor Competition for New Viol Music, for which the New York Consort of Viols played the 10 finalist entries. Among former Traynor winners is Pacifica’s own **Peter Ballinger**, in 1989 (finalist) and 1991 (second prize). The judges awarded two prizes, and the audience was challenged to award its own prize, forcing us to listen critically and vote for one entry.

The entries ranged, to my naïve ear, from beautifully modernized early music to derivative modern piffle to truly new, bone-chilling effects. The audience favored *Fantasia: The Triumph of Death*, by **Michael Hamill**. First prize went to *Canzona* by **Wolfgang Bottenberg**, second prize to **Dana Hawkes** (a student at the Conclave from McKinleyville, California, who has played the viol for only three months) for *Windgereste Fantasy*.

## New sounds by viols at Conclave 2000

- Soprano saxophone
- Electric guitar feedback
- Sitar arpeggio
- Pebble skipping on water
- Big stone plopping into water
- Heavy animal splashing into water
- Screwing a lid off a jar
- Balloon squeaking in the hands of a child
- Bow waving in air (you didn’t hear that?)

Traynor was an American working for the U.S. government in Japan for many years and a major developer of the early music movement there. The point of the Traynor competition, and the point of focusing on new music, was best stated that evening by **Yukimi Kambe**. We love early music, Kambe said, but we forget that "when it was written, it was not 'early music,' it was contemporary music." Our revered 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century composers explored new idioms, sharing ideas with one another, she said. We should do the same.

Don't get the impression that this Conclave was all about jumping off perceptual cliffs. There were ordinary, everyday pleasures that Conclave-goers expect, such as good classes and coaching, The Rose Consort, **John Pringle's** singing, after-dinner playing, the fund-raising auction, day trips to downtown Portland or boat rides on the Willamette, and general sleep deprivation. The weather was (it seemed to Northern Californians) impossibly soft and the grass green. In a central downtown Portland intersection stands a huge bronze elk. I never did learn until I got home that one can turn right on a red in Oregon. I just stopped at intersections, put on my right blinker, and waited for someone to honk. No one ever did. After the Saturday night banquet, a fiddle band struck up, including **David Dreyfuss** on Renaissance violin and **Christine Bartels** on recorder. Some things never get old.

— Lyle York

COMING UP

→ Mark your calendars

## Workshop for recorders, viols and harpsichord

International Elderhostel presents a week-long workshop for players of recorder, viola da gamba and harpsichord in Carmel Valley, California, November 5-11.

Hidden Valley Music Seminar will host the Elderhostel. Recorder faculty are the members of the California-based Sirena Recorder Quartet: **Letitia Berlin**, **Frances Blaker**, **Louise Carslake** and **Hanneke van Proosdij**. Early strings specialist **Shira Kammen** will lead the strings and singing classes, and harpsichordist **Trevor Stevenson** will coach players in continuo playing and in baroque ensembles.

Classes will include technique warm-ups, repertoire classes for music from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, and mixed baroque ensembles. Players of baroque flute will want to bring their instruments for a special class offered by Louise Carslake. String players may want to bring other early stringed instruments in addition to gambas, to take advantage of Shira Kammen's expertise in early strings. Besides gamba consorts, she will offer a class for those wishing to learn vielle, and a special class in singing rounds for all.

A few spots are available for harpsichordists, pianists and organists who wish to learn

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how to play continuo. An optional movement/dance class in the morning is a great way to get warmed up for the day.

Carmel Valley is about 30 minutes by car from Carmel. It is about three hours from the San Francisco airport, about two hours from the San Jose airport, one hour or less from the Monterey airport, and about an hour from the Salinas Amtrak station.

Evening events will include a wine tasting and informative talk by a local vintner, a one-man dramatic presentation of a historical California figure, a Sirena Recorder Quartet concert, and a student concert on Friday night. The food is excellent, the accommodations comfortable, and **Peter Mекle**, the director of Hidden Valley Music Seminars, is one of the nicest people you could want to make the week run smoothly.

The workshop is characterized by congenial company, a relaxed atmosphere, and as much playing as you can handle. The cost for the week is \$620, which includes room and board. To register for the workshop, visit the International Elderhostel's website ([www.hiddenvalleymusic.org](http://www.hiddenvalleymusic.org)) or call (831) 659-3115.

– *Tish Berlin*

# The singing viol

*Master class by Erin Headley, Berkeley Early Music Festival*

As part of June's Berkeley Early Music Festival and Exhibition, **Erin Headley** gave a warm, informative master class in the vocal skills of the viol. Headley, born in Fort Worth, Texas, has lived in London since 1979. She is one of the world's leading continuo players, an expert in the lirone, and co-founder of the group Tragicomedia, which performed at the festival. The most recent CD by her violin/gamba group Tirami Su, specializing in 17<sup>th</sup>-century string repertoire, is *Che soave armonia*. Tirami Su's web site is [www.tirami.co.uk](http://www.tirami.co.uk).

Master class participants were **Alice Renken** of Carlsbad and **Vera Kalmijn** of Encinitas, playing the Handel aria "Lascia ch'io pianga" from *Rinaldo* and a sarabande movement by Johann Schenk, and **Glenna Houle** of Palo Alto, playing Marais' *Prelude* from Book I, Suite I. Houle was accompanied by **Sarge Gerbode** on the archlute.

Other professional coaches might emphasize bowing, fingering, and so on, but Headley instead acts as a vocal coach, bringing singing technique and attitude to the viol. After all, she said, "the viol is really a vocal instrument." The violin, for instance, can specialize in articulating consonants, but the viol is master of vowels. As in singing, viol playing can do and should do both – but it can capitalize on what it does best, vowels.

Headley has a disarming, ordinary-Joe manner that only disappears when she picks up

a viol. As a coach, she is a sympathetic friend, honest but tactful; she uses earthy, concrete language to describe the effects she wants. Demonstrating a passage, she takes no prisoners.

What a singer does, and a viol soloist should do, is seize command of the audience and demonstrate this command in the first phrase. Draw support from your breath, which is centered in the diaphragm, as every singing student knows, “or somewhere lower,” as Luciano Pavarotti famously attests. “I’ll leave it to you where to locate the source of your breath power,” Headley said. She also believes in full communication of the body with the viol: the spine, the calves, even the feet.

Command should be seized not only at the beginning – “Step forth!” – but whenever a player enters with a new idea. This goes equally for top or bottom player. In a duet, the bass player represents the whole orchestra, “as important, if not more important, than the singer.”

Gesture, metaphoric or literal, is a tool of the viol player as of the singer. Charge into a passage with gesture, even to a dangerous extent. Take a risk. Headley takes risks and, she said, has thrust her bow under the bridge, between strings, and once even into one of the holes in her bridge. Entering a high passage, play close to the bridge and flatten the bow for maximum hair contact.

As a singer does, take plenty of breathing time when the music warrants. When playing recitative, especially, build in plenty of space to allow the continuo viol player time for chords. Coaching Glenna Houle in a complicated Marais passage, Headley demonstrated how it benefited from being granted space that enhanced the music’s intelligibility.

Breathing gives both the player and the audience security. In playing such complex music as Marais, in which the player fulfills the roles of both soloist and accompanist, the player must always make it clear which role she is playing – being a leader, and giving herself time – so that the listeners will know exactly what is going on. She must decide where the music is going, and take the listener there too.

But how much can the player bend a tempo? “Keep the pillars – the main notes – in place,” Headley said, “but between the pillars you can steal from one note to give to another . . . wallow where necessary, lift where necessary.”

One surprise – to me, at least – was hearing Headley say that if you are playing music that climbs, that symbolizes effort or rising tension, you should *show* that in your playing.

#### **ASSORTED HEADLEY ADVICE**

- A pull bow is the *result* of the push: it bounces back by itself. One doesn’t have to work too hard on a pull.
- The bow arm is your breath, so lots of arm equals lots of breath.
- Don’t worry about making a good sound; shape the notes, and the sound will take care of itself.
- Illustrate key words you are playing, especially if they are Italian, an especially pictorial and onomatopoeic language: e.g., *Libertad*, *pianga*, *sospiri*.
- Sometimes louder is not really louder; it means be more generous.
- Use more bow on the double stops than you think you need.
- Use more butter on the bread.

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Don't make it look easy – make it look difficult, if that is what the composer intended. Act it out. This entertains the listeners.

We shouldn't forget that the viol is good at show business.

– *Lyle York*

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## Random Notes

**Contributors wanted:** Send *Gamba News* your stories, opinions, CD reviews, concert listings, drawings, photos, poems, jokes and recipes. We'll publish anything not libelous. Send all contributions to **Lyle York**, Editor, 1932 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Berkeley, CA 94707, or via e-mail: [ly@sfgate.com](mailto:ly@sfgate.com). Phone (510) 559-9273. Short classified advertisements in plain text to be placed in *Gamba News* are free to VdGS/Pacifica members. For non-members, ads are \$5 per issue. Please mail your check for \$5 to **Lyle York** (address above), made out to VdGS/Pacifica. Deadline for calendar submissions, classified ads and all editorial contributions for a given month's newsletter is the 15<sup>th</sup> of the preceding month (e.g., the deadline for the April issue is March 15).

**Newsletters by e-mail:** If you'd like to receive your monthly *Gamba News* on-line, please e-mail **Lyle York** at [ly@sfgate.com](mailto:ly@sfgate.com). Your reply postcard will take e-mail form as well.

**Join VdGS/Pacifica!** The annual membership rates are: Playing Members, \$25 (can attend regular coached consort meetings free, receive *Gamba News*, and get a discount on special consort-coaching sessions); Two-Person Memberships, \$35 (two playing members in the same household); Newsletter-Only Members, \$10. For a membership form, contact **Annette Barnett**, 2502 Hearst Avenue, Oakland, CA 94602; (510) 482-8649; [annette.barnett@esis.com](mailto:annette.barnett@esis.com).

**Information, please:** Our VdGS/Pacifica chapter Web site, [home.pacbell.net/hesuome](http://home.pacbell.net/hesuome), is regularly updated by the able **Helen Tyrrell**. The VdGSA (national) Web site is [www.vdgsa.org](http://www.vdgsa.org). Need a list of local teachers? Sources for sheet music, supplies, inexpensive viols, repairs? Travel tips? We have extra copies of a back issue full of information. We also welcome contributions and corrections to our store of knowledge. Contact **Lyle York**, Editor, *Gamba News*, 1932 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Berkeley, CA 94707, (510) 559-9273; or via e-mail: [ly@sfgate.com](mailto:ly@sfgate.com).

**Rent a viol:** Pacifica has trebles, tenors and basses to rent. Donations of viols and bows to our rental program are extremely welcome—we'll accept them in any condition. We have two basses available at the moment, a rare occurrence. Rental fees range from \$10 to \$25 per month. In charge of rentals is **John Mark**. Contact him at 10 Holyrood Manor, Oakland, CA 94611; (510) 531-1471; [mark\\_bach8@hotmail.com](mailto:mark_bach8@hotmail.com). The VdGSA, Pacifica's parent organization, also rents viols. For VdGSA members, rates are \$250 per year for trebles and tenors, \$300 for basses, and \$750 for a complete consort of viols. For more information, contact **Stephen Morris**, 2615 Tanglewood Road, Decatur, GA 30033-2729; (404) 325-2709; [smmorris@mindspring.com](mailto:smmorris@mindspring.com).

The VdGSA recently instituted a Rent-To-Own program. If interested, contact **John Mark**, address above.

# Mark your calendar

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9 AND  
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23**

**A TRIBUTE TO J.S. BACH:** Camerata Vocale California, Daniel Canosa, director, with **Julie Jeffrey** and **Lynn Tetenbaum** on viola da gamba, Tetenbaum on violone. The program includes motets "Lobet den Herrn" and "Jesu, meine Freude," and Cantata 106, "Actus Tragicus."

8:00 p.m., September 9, Pioneer Methodist Church, 1338 Lincoln Way, Auburn, CA

8:00 p.m. September 23, St. Francis of Assisi Church, 26<sup>th</sup> at K Street, Sacramento, CA. \$20/\$15. For information call (916) 483-1386.

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2000**

**JOHN DORNENBURG, VIOLA DA GAMBA, AND YUKO TANAKA, HARPSICHORD:** Music by Marais (Le Labyrinthe, and other Pieces de Viole), Francois Couperin (E minor Suite), J.S. Bach (G minor Sonata), and others.

8:00 p.m., Alliance Francaise, 1345 Bush Street, San Francisco. \$15 (Alliance members \$10). For information call (415) 775-7755.

**NOVEMBER 5-11, 2000**

**WORKSHOP FOR RECORDERS, VIOLS AND HARPSICHORD:** sponsored by Elderhostel, in Carmel Valley, CA.

See Page 4 for details.

**DECEMBER 1-3, 2000**

**MUSIC OF MONTEVERDI, FROM ST. MARKS IN VENICE:** California Bach Society and the Sex Chordae of Viols.

8:00 p.m., December 1, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Berkeley.

8:00 p.m., December 2, St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park.

4:00 p.m., December 3, St. Gregory Nyssen Episcopal Church, San Francisco.

For information call (650) 299-8616, or [www.calbach.org](http://www.calbach.org).

## Gamba NEWS

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