

# *Your Weekly World* **Gamba NEWS**

Volume 13, Number 8

April 2001

## **SPECIAL APRIL 1 REPORT**

### **Viols in the White House?**

***It almost happened.  
Here's the inside story.***

BY GAMBO\*

No doubt you've heard the rumors: Someone high up in the American viol hierarchy has been invited to play at the White House.

Your *Gamba News* correspondent got on the phone to VdGSA President **Brent Wissick**. "I guess it's going to come out," said Brent. "Yes, the Bush staff called me. It started when a friend of Laura Bush's rented *Tous les Matins du Monde*."

It seems that Laura's friend played her the soundtrack, and she really liked the viols – "mellow," she said – and one thing led to another. She had the White House Arts Committee do some research. "The history of the viol made her sad," said Brent. "She was especially upset to learn that countless

*Continued on the next page*



### **The last viol played in the White House**

BY GAMBO\*

*Reprinted with permission from the Journal of the Viola da Gambola Society of America, Volume XXXVIII, 2000*

Every American schoolchild knows that Thomas Jefferson was an accomplished violinist. Yet his knowledge of the viola da

*Continued on Page 4*



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## Viols in the White House/continued from Page 1

viols had been destroyed during the French Revolution, because they came out of the palaces, you know, they were part of the aristocracy. The royal heads rolled, and the viols were chopped up for firewood. 'Political correctness going overboard again,' said George when she told him.

"But you know, Laura Bush is interested in education, and she started thinking – as many of us have – that viols in schools might be a good idea. And that

young people might benefit from learning to play something harder than a CD player. Introducing viols to American youth could go a long way toward promoting traditional values. She talked George into inviting some players to the White House, just to get the idea going."

An Arts Committee staffer called Brent, and the conversation went pretty well for a while. The staffer wanted Brent to play a solo concert. Brent suggested that the sound of a viol consort is much more relaxing – "and I explained what a consort was, and suggested he get hold of Sex Chordae out in California – thought I'd try to give the West Coast viol scene a boost. He said, 'Sex?' I said, 'Six, not sex. Six, meaning six strings. *Six. Six. Six.*'"

"There was this silence on the line, and after that I had the feeling he just wanted to get off the phone. More staff members called me. I just couldn't interest them in

the consort from San Francisco. One guy said, 'I bet they love the tights and wigs.' So I said I would play a solo program of Marais and Forqueray, which I have already presented several times in the last few years. It's about the two composers as angel and devil, and about the father-son

Forqueray feud. This didn't go over so well. The staffer said it didn't sound like good family values to him."

In the end, the White House went for the idea. Brent was

invited to play on April 1 for an audience of schoolchildren and music students. Then Brent got one more phone call.

"Well, it was I who backed out. They wanted me not to play any Forqueray. I have my limits."

Brent wouldn't confirm this, but there are further rumors that his replacement will be **Jordi Savall**, playing the soundtrack from *Tous les Matins du Monde*.

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### \*WHO IS GAMBO?

Our contributor GAMBO mailed us these articles in a plain envelope, but included no biographical information. Who is the historical/mythical/allegorical creature whose spirit shows up on CDs and program notes? If you have any information or have sighted GAMBO, please contact the editor. Thank you.

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*'Political correctness  
going overboard again,'  
said George to Laura.*

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# Death-Watch Weevil Destroying Britain's Early Strings

***Threatens to wipe out viols, baroque violins and cellos; authorities fear it may spread to modern instruments***

LONDON (Reuters) – A small wood-boring insect usually associated with the decay of support beams in historic buildings destroyed viols belonging to attendees of an early-music festival in mid-February in England's Sellafield Cathedral. The insects somehow jumped from the cathedral's rotting woodwork. They have also been found, to general alarm, in the instruments of the attendees' consort-playing friends in their respective home towns.

Robert Ludlow, curator of stringed instruments at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, has called for all English viols to be collected and burnt before the infestation spreads beyond the early-music community.

"It is irresponsible that we have allowed matters to proceed this far," said Ludlow in a statement issued by the museum. "We must take serious, concerted action before the weevil spreads beyond this group of amateurs and destroys instruments of greater value."

The weevil, called "death watch" for the ticking sound that emanates from the wood it infests, said to presage death, has not been previously known to infest musical instruments.

"You would think that the relative newness of the wood and the nature of the varnish would be a deterrent," said Ludlow, "but the Oxford entomologists who have been working with us on this say that this may be a new subspecies which has adapted to this kind of diet."

The viol players of Winsley-le-Dale, near Manchester, have already built a public pyre of their viols to alert the public to the danger.

"Jane Horrocks opened her case one morning and there were just splinters," said Millicent Ware of the Winsley-le-Dale Consort Players. "I could hear them going at my Eyland bass, as well."

Further aggravating the problem is that no supervisory authority in the UK has the power to address the situation. "It's not an agricultural matter, and the instruments currently in question have no historical value," said Simon Lind, a spokesman for the Home Office. "No action can be taken unless a body is created for that purpose by an act of Parliament."

Alison Crum, president of the British Viol Association, urges Americans who have brought their instruments to England to quarantine them for several months before bringing them to play with others.

John Mark, a board member of the Viola da Gamba Society of America, has had his local chapter's instruments examined by a University of California entomologist. No infestation was found.

As a lover of historic buildings himself, Mark feels that, "compared to the pest destroying the cathedral, the bug eating a few viols is the lesser of two weevils."

Added Mark, who runs a viol rental program, "I didn't want to be the lessor of any weevils."

— Oliver Iberien



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## The last White House viol */continued from Page One*

gamba has been largely ignored by historians. Inexcusable, yes, but perhaps understandable that these scholars would be reluctant to ascribe a love of the aristocratic viol to a Founding Father of our democracy.

So out of fashion – on both sides of the Atlantic – was the viol by the time Jefferson attained the nation's highest office that he almost never revealed his possession of a fine bass viol, crafted in 1744 by the Moravian maker Friedrich Grimm of Winston-Salem.

Jefferson's violin accompanied him everywhere; he was known to practice three hours a day, and the violin was easy to carry on his international travels, even to the court of France. But Jefferson's bass viol never left the White House during his two terms. Travel with a bass viol was no easier in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century than it is today.

Jefferson's wife, Martha, sang and played the harpsichord, and their vast music collection, preserved at Monticello, includes duets and trios by Corelli, Campion, Boccherini, Haydn, Vivaldi and Abel. A piece by this last composer provided to an alert musicologist the clue to Jefferson's clandestine practice of the viol.

In 1922, Herbert Aylward of Columbia University, studying the musical life of the Jefferson household for his Ph.D. thesis, discovered inexplicable fingerings marked on the basso continuo part of Abel's Sonata in C major. Aylward concluded that they could only be fingerings for a bass viol.

This discovery led him to a hitherto

unexplained sale receipt among Jefferson's papers for a "gambacello."

Jefferson, a tireless inventor, had attempted to improve upon his instrument. Failing, and unable to bear his discouragement, Jefferson sold the viol to an instrument maker in Richmond, who on acquiring the altered viol, ignorant or heedless of its historic value, immediately converted it to a cello and sold it to a wealthy tobacco farmer who, if the maker's comments can be believed, "should better have dedicated his talents to his primary bufineffe."

And there the trail of Jefferson's viol grows cold. But one White House anecdote survives, testifying to the unhappy life of Jefferson's instrument.

As previously stated, the President almost never revealed his possession of the fine bass viol. He did – once.

By then a widower, Jefferson often invited gentlemen friends to sup informally with him at the White House, where, freed from the feminine civilizing influence, they enjoyed wine and song.

On one such evening, April 1, 1802, Jefferson played a violin solo that was greeted by such applause that he was emboldened to bring out his bass viol.

After some difficulty tuning, during which some of the gentlemen partook generously of the house port, the President played a creditable Abel sonata.

Polite applause followed, but the cry arose: "Cain't you play a Virginia reel on that thing?"

And the President obligingly fetched his violin.



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# REVIEWS OF NEW RECORDINGS

BY OLIVER IBERIEN

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## **Musica Mea** by Jordi Savall.

Recorded live at the Hammersmith Odeon, Auvidis 6041

Virtuoso viol player Jordi Savall spends 70 captivating minutes in a recital *without playing any music*. Tiny wireless microphones attached to his wrists, knees, eyebrows, lower lip, vest pocket and bow frog pick up every nuance of his movements. Savall is heard to stride across the stage, gesticulate, and put on and take off his reading glasses. One can almost hear his imperious gaze.

The album is divided into 283 labeled tracks, so that one can follow Savall's progress back and forth across the stage. The live crowd inspires him to new levels of showmanship, but the sound of the applause is occasionally overwhelming; only Savall's artistry saves the magnificent first withdrawal of the reading glasses from their case from being entirely spoiled by the enthusiasm of his audience.

The only recent album that approaches this disc in virtuosity is violinist Andrew Manze's *The Entire Bach Unaccompanied Partitas and Sonatas Played From Memory Backwards*, but Savall's stands up better to repeated listening.

## **Moldy Bread: A Musical Salute to the Black Death**

by Ensemble Farallonese. Harmonia Mundi USA HMU 234031

Hard on the heels of their groundbreaking Medieval/bossa nova recording, *Never on a Whitsun*, the Bay Area's favorite ensemble of 12 sopranos and a hurdy-gurdy strike a more somber note with this collection of medieval dirges on the subject of death in plague time, supported by vielle, bagpipes and pennywhistle.

By turns sprightly, by turns hypnotic, the folk-

rock beat continues throughout the recording, from "Fowels in the Frith Aer Unwel" to "Wat Childe Ys Thys, Thatte Coughs and Spittes," revealing a side of the Black Death not fully explored musically before. Inclusion of French and Bulgarian songs, melded so seamlessly one would not know they came from different countries, evokes the universal helplessness of humankind before the plague.

A great record both for pondering one's own mortality and for relaxing while doing the dishes.

## **Antonio Vivaldi: Sonatas That Can Only Be Heard by Dogs**

by Marion Verbruggen and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra. HMU 235002

In addition to the female orphans in his care, Vivaldi was also very fond of dogs. So fond that he wrote this set of pieces for the smallest member of the recorder family, the sopranino in c'''''''. Marion Verbruggen plays a replica by Gunvor Larking of an Italian instrument. The sopranino in c'''''''' plays entirely out of the range of human hearing, but dogs can appreciate it fully, which was the Red Priest's intention. He dedicated the work to his Maltese, Poppino.

We played the record to a standard poodle, who by turns stared intently at the speaker and barked frantically in time with the orchestral accompaniment. Not even his favorite dog treats could lure him away, except during the Adagio of Sonata II. Several dogs from a park a half-mile away jumped our fence and pressed against the windows to get a closer listen. On this basis we recommend this recording to anyone with a canine music-lover in the household.

It also rid our garden of gophers for two weeks.



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## ATTENTION

*The remainder of this newsletter is entirely true.*

### Roy Whelden to coach in June

We're pleased to announce that **Roy Whelden** will be our coach at Pacifica's June 9 playday. Any group that knows what pieces it plans to work on that day is encouraged to e-mail him ahead of time with the info: [rwhelden@aol.com](mailto:rwhelden@aol.com).

Roy studied viol with **John Hsu** in Ithaca, New York, and **Thomas Binkley** in Bloomington, Indiana, and has performed with various ensembles, including Sequentia (of Cologne), Ensemble Alcatraz and American Baroque.

Roy lives in Oakland and teaches viol and vielle. He has recorded original compositions on the New Albion label.

#### 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.

Sheet music, coffee and tea will be supplied. 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](mailto:mark_bach8@hotmail.com).

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

<u>Date</u>	<u>Coach</u>
<b>April 27-29, 2001</b>	FRESNO WORKSHOP WEEKEND
<b>May 19, 2001 (new date)</b>	JULIE JEFFREY
<b>June 9, 2001</b>	ROY WHELDEN

### Still time to register for Fresno

The annual North/South Viol Meet is accepting registrations until April 6. The weekend workshop, April 27-29 (beginning at 8 pm Friday evening), is held at the Piccadilly Inn on Shaw Avenue, Fresno. Playing is in a large conference room and in larger student and faculty rooms. This year's faculty will be our own dear **Julie Jeffrey** and **David Morris**. Other attractions are warm spring weather, a pool and Jacuzzi, and group dinners at nearby restaurants. Players of all levels are welcome, including beginners.

For further information or a registration form, contact: **Stuart Elliott**, (626) 798-2912; **Gwen Rodman**, (909) 981-1633; or **Edwin Harris**, (562) 596-4892.



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# Viols and recorders at Marin Headlands

The annual Workshop for Recorders and Viols will be held at the spectacular Marin Headlands May 11-13.

This workshop, sponsored by the East Bay Chapter of the American Recorder Society, features 11 conductors in 17 different music sessions spanning many centuries and styles. Intermediate to advanced recorder and viol players can choose to attend all or part of the weekend, since each session is self-contained.

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The workshop begins with a potluck dinner and large-group play Friday night, led by **Louise Carslake**.

On both Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon, participants can choose two out of three offerings. Conductors Saturday morning are **Francis Blaker**, **Tish Berlin** and **Frances Feldon**. Saturday afternoon conductors are **Bob Dawson**, **Joanna Bramel Young** and **Eileen Hadidian**. On Saturday evening, **Fred Palmer**, **David Barnett** and **Peter Maund** will conduct.

Sunday morning concludes with a mass led by **David Morris**.

Music selections include pieces from the Odhecaton and the Italian Renaissance, Baroque selections with continuo, fun and jazzy contemporary, medieval music with percussion, Senfl tenor *lieder*, a neo-Baroque piece composed by EBC member **Glen Shannon**, and music by Guerrero, Agricola, Scheidt, Locke, and others.

There will be ample time on Saturday and Sunday after lunch to enjoy the beautiful Marin Headlands, from beach to hills. The Marine Mammal Center and Point Bonita Lighthouse are both open for tours.

Accommodations are dormitory style; the food is excellent and healthful.

Past participants agree that this workshop cannot be equaled for excellence in music, setting, friends and food.

Flyers have been mailed to past participants. If you need one, or more information, contact **Britt Ascher**: (925) 283-7134, or [brittascher@home.com](mailto:brittascher@home.com). — **Britt Ascher**



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# Mark your calendar

## FRIDAY, APRIL 6, 2001

**MAGNIFICAT:** "Acteon" by Antoine Charpentier. With John Dornenburg, Mary Springfels and Julie Jeffrey, viols.

8 p.m., *First Lutheran Church, 600 Homer at Webster, Palo Alto. Tickets \$25/\$18/\$12. Information: (415) 979-4500; magnificat@jps.net.*

## SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 2001

(FRIDAY PROGRAM ABOVE REPEATS)

8 p.m., *First Congregational Church, Dana and Durant streets, Berkeley.*

## SUNDAY, APRIL 8, 2001

(FRIDAY PROGRAM ABOVE REPEATS)

4 p.m., *St. Gregory's Church, DeHaro and Mariposa streets, San Francisco.*

## FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2001

**LYNN TETENBAUM, VIOLA DA GAMBA, WITH YUKO TANAKA, HARPSICHORD, AND JULIE JEFFREY, VIOLA DA GAMBA:** Music by Christopher Simpson, August Kuhnel, J.S. Bach and Marin Marais.

8:00 p.m., *St. Alban's Episcopal Church, 1501 Washington Avenue, Albany. Tickets (available at the door): \$10/\$8. Information: (510) 271-8041.*

**THE UC BERKELEY COLLEGIUM MUSICUM:** Tasso in France: Music from the French Court for Viol, Violins, and Voices. A *ballet de cour* from 1617.

8:00 p.m. *Presented by Trinity Chamber Concerts, 2320 Dana Street, Berkeley. \$10/\$8. Information: (510) 549-3864.*

## SUNDAY, APRIL 22, 2001

(FRIDAY TETENBAUM/TANAKA/JEFFREY PROGRAM ABOVE REPEATS)

4:00 p.m., *St. Gregory's Episcopal Church, 500 De Haro Street, San Francisco.*

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25, 2001

**EARLY MUSIC COLLEGIUM:** David Morris conducts music of Henry Purcell. Collegium evenings are SFEMS-sponsored community music-making events for all amateur singers and instrumentalists.

7:30-9:30 p.m., *St. Albans Episcopal Church, 1501 Washington Street, Albany. Tickets: \$12. Information and reservations: (510) 527-9029 or (510) 549-9799.*

## APRIL 27-29, 2001

**NORTH/SOUTH VIOL MEET, SPONSORED BY VIOLS/ WEST AND PACIFICA CHAPTERS OF THE VdGSA:** The Picadilly Inn/Shaw, Fresno (see Page 6).

*Information: contact Stuart Elliott, (626) 798-2912; Gwen Rodman, (909) 981-1633; or Edwin Harris, (562) 596-4892.*

## MAY 11-13, 2001

**MARIN HEADLANDS WORKSHOP FOR RECORDERS AND VIOLS:** Sponsored by the East Bay Chapter of the American Recorder Society. Conducted by David Barnett, Letitia Berlin, Frances Blaker, Louise Carslake, Robert Dawson, Frances Feldon, Eileen Hadidian, Peter Maund, David Morris, Frederic Palmer, Joanna Bramel-Young. (See Page 7.)

*Information: (925) 283-7134 or brittascher@home.com.*

## JUNE 24-30, JULY 1-7, 2001

**SAN FRANCISCO EARLY MUSIC SOCIETY SUMMER WORKSHOPS:** Two of SFEMS' four summer workshops are of special interest to viol players. The Baroque Workshop is June 24-30; the Medieval and Renaissance Workshop is July 1-7. Both are held at Dominican University in San Rafael. Among the faculty will be gambists Mary Springfels and Julie Jeffrey.

*Information: info@sfems.org; www.sfems.org; (510) 528-1725.*

## JULY 14 - AUGUST 5, 2001

**CARMEL BACH FESTIVAL:** Send for a brochure; note that J. S. Bach's St. Matthew Passion (performed on various dates) will include John Dornenburg on viola da gamba; on July 23, Dornenburg, Tina Chancy and Julie Jeffrey, viols, will join soprano Rosa Lamoreaux in a program of music by Gibbons, Byrd, Purcell, and Schutz.

*Information: (831) 624-2046 or [www.bachfestival.org](http://www.bachfestival.org).*

## AUGUST 12-18, 2001

**VIOLS WEST: THE SOOTHING VIOL:** Carol Herman, director; faculty includes Carol, Tina Chancey, John Dornenburg, Julie Jeffrey, Larry Lipkis, Larry Lipnik, Sarah Mead, Ann Marie Morgan, Rosamund Morley, David Morris, Laurie Rabut, and Brent Wissick. CalPoly campus, San Luis Obispo.

*For more information, e-mail Carol, [hgamba@aol.com](mailto:hgamba@aol.com), or Alice Renken, [arenken@sandwich.net](mailto:arenken@sandwich.net)*



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## Random Notes

**Contributors wanted:** Send *Gamba News* your concert listings and reviews, opinions, workshop experiences, CD reviews, drawings, photos, poems or out-of-body episodes. Send all contributions to **Lyle York**, Editor, 1932 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Berkeley, CA 94707, or via e-mail: [lleyork@earthlink.net](mailto:lleyork@earthlink.net). 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 [lleyork@earthlink.net](mailto:lleyork@earthlink.net). 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).

Another way to join is from the Pacifica web site, <http://home.pacbell.net/hesuome>. Click on "Join the Chapter."

### Pacifica chapter officers are:

President, **Julie Jeffrey**; Vice-President, **Lyle York**; Secretary, **Annette Barnett**; Treasurer, **Helen Tyrrell**; Members at Large: **Cindy Share**, Coaching Liaison; **John Mark**, Rental Program Coordinator; **John Dornenburg**, **Alvin Roper**, and **Lee McRae**, VdGSA Chapter Representative.

**Information, please:** Our VdGS/Pacifica chapter Web site, <http://home.pacbell.net/hesuome>, is maintained and regularly updated by **Helen Tyrrell**. It contains the Viol Players' Calendar, which is often more up to date than the *Gamba News* calendar – along with a list of local teachers, sources for music, supplies, inexpensive viols, repairs, and travel tips. The VdGSA (national) Web site is [www.vdgsa.org](http://www.vdgsa.org).

**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. Rental fees range from \$10 to \$25 per month. In charge of rentals is **John Mark**, 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.

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## CLASSIFIEDS

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**FOR SALE:** Boulder Early Music Shop Hungarian tenor viol. Good quality student instrument, less than one year old. Asking \$1,600 with bow and hard case. Call **Michael** or **Vicki** at (408) 298-3255 or e-mail to: [harp@standingstones.com](mailto:harp@standingstones.com).

**SEEKING A GAMBIST:** My wife and I and two friends play baroque flutes and recorder. We would like to find a gambist willing to play with us in Pacifica. **John Sayre**, (650) 355-8895.

**SEEKING BOW:** I am looking for a good tenor bow. Contact **Bill Lazar**, [jblazar@aol.com](mailto:jblazar@aol.com); (408) 737-8228.



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# Gamba NEWS

c/o Barnett, 2502 Hearst Avenue, Oakland, CA 94602



♪ Mary Elliott  
920 Ventura Avenue  
Albany, CA 94707