

VIOLA DA GAMBA SOCIETY PACIFICA VOLUME 20, NO. 2 OCTOBER 2006

GAMBA NEWS

Handbook for Composing for the Viola da Gamba

A Review of Yukimi Kambe's New Book

Roy Whelden

In February of 2006, I was asked by the Pacifica Viola da Gamba Society to review Yukimi Kambe's *Handbook for Composing for the Viola da Gamba*. The author of this thirty-page booklet is the founder of the Yukimi Kambe Viol Consort of Tokyo, a group well known for their collaborations with living composers in creating new works for the viola da gamba. Since I, too, have an interest in creating a modern repertory for the instrument, Ms. Kambe's booklet held a great deal of interest for me.

Very few books on orchestration discuss the viola da gamba. For instance, Samuel Adler's textbook, *The Study of Orchestration*, never mentions the viol, although it does mention the relatively little-used viola d'amore. Mention of that instrument in Adler's classic book might have led one to expect a similar treatment of the viol. But, unlike the viol, whose last virtuoso proponent died in 1787, the viola d'amore continued to be used sporadically throughout the 19th century by composers such as Meyerbeer, Massenet and Puccini, so that the instrument's historical use has been continuous since its introduction in the 17th century. Since the reintroduction of the gamba in the early 20th century, it's high time that modern orchestration manuals discuss the instrument. Yukimi Kambe's *Handbook for Composing for the Viola da Gamba* seeks to partly remedy this situation.

A large number of topics are discussed in the Handbook. These include expected topics such as fingering, double stops, vibrato, the commonly used clefs, fretting, articulation and a general description of the family of viols in its various ranges. (There is no mention of the violone, however.)



The Yukimi Kambe Viol Consort

Clockwise from bottom: Yukimi Kambe, Kaori Hashizume, Eriko Ozawa, Maki Noguchi

The first section of just two pages is devoted to the timbre of the instrument. This proves to be a difficult topic, for it is almost impossible to describe tone color using English or Japanese or any other natural language. Thus, the author wisely sticks to a description of the details of instrument construction which account for the fact that "the main character of this instrument is focused on the sound color and not on the volume of the sound." The instrument, in other words, is relatively soft. This leads naturally to a discussion of the flat backed construction of the instruments of the viol family which, unlike the members of the violin family with their rounded backs, can't support strings of high tension.

The difficulties of writing about tone color lead to some descriptive phrases which I found to be enchanting, yet a trifle puzzling. For example, describing the "deep sound which is characteristic of the viol family," Ms. Kambe asserts that this is what gives the "mutually intertwined ripe effect in an ensemble." I'm not sure what this means. However, I was

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Bow Rehair Alexandra Saur is now offering rehairing for both modern and early bows. Top quality hair and quick turnaround! 510-559-9563, bowrehair@alexandrasaur.com.

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Bass viol, Wolfgang Uebel, Celle, Germany, 1977. With carved rose on sound board; 64 cm free string length. Very nice condition. Asking \$2500 with unpadded soft case. Bows available separately.

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Pictures of all are available on my website (www.bill-lazar.com) on the 'used instruments' page. Contact **Bill Lazar**, jblazar@aol.com, (408) 730-2238 for more information.

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Treble viol by Michael Plant available for rent at reasonable price. Contact **Lee McRae**, (510) 848-5591, LmcR@aol.com.

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GAMA NEWS

Gamba News is published 10 times a year by the Pacifica chapter of the Viola da Gamba Society. It vacations in July and August.

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Send concert listings and reviews, opinions, workshop experiences, CD reviews, drawings, or photos to Julie Morrisett, Editor, 1148 Norwood Ave. #1, Oakland, CA, 94610, or jmorrisett@gmail.com; (510) 444-2380.

Classified Ads

Short classified advertisements in Gamba News are free to VdGS-Pacifica members. For non-members, ads are \$5 per issue. Please mail your check made out to VdGS-Pacifica to Julie Morrisett, Editor, 1148 Norwood Ave. #1, Oakland, CA 94610.

www.pacificaviols.org

Our VdGS-Pacifica chapter website is maintained and regularly updated by Helen Tyrrell. It contains the Viol Player's Calendar, along with a list of local teachers, sources for music, supplies, inexpensive viols, repairs, and travel tips. The VdGSA (national) website is 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 \$15 to \$30 per month. In charge of rentals is John Mark, 10 Holyrood Manor, Oakland, CA 94611; (510) 531-1471; mark_bach8@hotmail.com.

Donating to VdGS-Pacifica

The Pacifica Chapter is an affiliate of the San Francisco Early Music Society (SFEMS), and along with other privileges this affiliation confers, we can receive tax-deductible donations. These include not only cash but viols, bows, musical scores, method books, tuners, stands and other viol paraphernalia. Especially since we now have a Youth Project working to teach young people the viol, please remember the chapter when you are cleaning out your music room.

Cash donations can be used for new rental instruments and bows, new music for the chapter playing library, the Pacifica Youth Project, or our scholarship fund.

To ensure that your donation will be tax-deductible, please make out the check to SFEMS with a note on the lower left corner: "for VdGS-Pacifica." Then send your donation check to Penni Savage, Treasurer, VdGS-Pacifica, 436 Hudson Street, Oakland, CA 94618. She will forward your check to SFEMS.

SFEMS will accept and record the donation, then transfer the funds to us. You will receive an acknowledgment letter from SFEMS for your tax records.

When you donate a viol or other materials, you will receive a letter citing the estimated value of the instrument or materials for your tax records.

Pacifica Play Day Schedule 2006-2007

DATE	COACH
October 14	Amy Brodo
November 11	Joanna Blendulf
December 2	Shira Kammen
January 13	Roy Whelden
February TBD	John Dornenburg at Stanford
March 10	Julie Jeffrey
April	~ no play day ~
May 12	William Skeen
June TBD	Our Party

Each month, as soon as you receive your Gamba News (or before), please call or email John Mark, our peerless consort arranger, to tell him you will attend the upcoming play day and what size(s) you will bring. (510) 531-1471; mark_bach8@hotmail.com.

All play days except those at Stanford are held at Zion Lutheran Church, 5201 Park Boulevard, Oakland. The church is just west of the Park Boulevard exit off Highway 13. We meet at 9:15 am for the coached session.

Sheet music, coffee and tea will be supplied. Please bring either a sack lunch for yourself or a dish or drinks to share at our customary potluck. The church has a microwave we can use. There is also a Mexican restaurant close by.

Please bring a music stand and any consort music of your own you'd like to play. Consorts are formed based on the information you provide to John Mark. Newcomers and rank beginners are welcome.



Mark Your Calendar

Upcoming Playing Opportunities, Concerts and Workshops

Wednesday, October 4

The Mid-Peninsula Recorder Orchestra (MPRO) bimonthly meeting. Early strings, winds and recorder players are invited to attend. Please bring music stand. Future meetings: October 18, November 1, 8 and 29.

8:00 pm, Jane Lathrop Middle School, Music Room #060, 480 E. Meadow Drive, Palo Alto. Contact Frederic Palmer (650) 591-3648; www.sfems.org/mpro

Saturday, October 7

The Mid-Peninsula Recorder Orchestra (MPRO) presents "From the Palazzo to the Proscenium: Late Renaissance madrigals and the theater music of Henry Purcell," a **workshop by David Morris**. Bowed and plucked string players, as well as recorder players, are invited.

9:30 am - 4:30 pm, Union Church of Cupertino, 20900 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino. \$41/\$39, \$2 discount when for registering by September 30. Contact Mary Carrigan (415) 664-9050; www.sfems.org/mpro

Friday, October 13

The California Bach Society presents J.S. Bach *Jesu, Meine Freude* and works of Heinrich Schutz, with guest artists The Consort of Viols.

8:00 pm, St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, 500 De Haro St. at Mariposa, San Francisco. \$25/\$18/\$10. (415) 262-0272; www.calbach.org

Saturday, October 14

The California Bach Society repeats program of October 13.

8:00 pm, All Saints Episcopal Church, 555 Waverly St. at Hamilton, Palo Alto. \$25/\$18/\$10. (415) 262-0272; www.calbach.org

Sunday, October 15

The California Bach Society repeats program of October 13.

4:00 pm, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 2300 Bancroft Way at Ellsworth, Berkeley. \$25/\$18/\$10. (415) 262-0272; www.calbach.org

Friday, November 3

The Skyflower Ensemble (Felicia McFall, baroque violin; Jonathan Salzedo, harpsichord; Mary Elliott and Robin Easterbrook, violas da gamba; Sarge Gerbode, archlute) presents "Music from Germany, 1676-1720." Featuring Buxtehude's trio sonatas Opus 1 #1 and Opus 2 #4, Bach violin Partita #2, and Biber's joyful Mystery #5.

8:00 pm, Music Sources, 1000 The Alameda, Berkeley. Suggested donation \$10. (510) 528-1685

Sunday, November 5

The Skyflower Ensemble repeats program of November 3.

4:00 pm, St. John's Episcopal Church, 40 5th St., Petaluma. Suggested donation \$10. (707) 762-8872

Saturday, November 11

SFEMS presents **Fretwork: "L'Dor Va Dor," Jewish Composers in the English Court**. Featuring music by Lupo and Bassano.

8:00 pm, St. John's Presbyterian Church, 2727 College at Garber, Berkeley. \$25/\$22. (510) 528-1725; www.sfems.org

Sunday, November 12

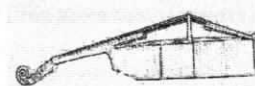
Fretwork repeats program of November 11.

3:30 pm, St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, 500 De Haro at Mariposa, San Francisco. \$25/\$22. (510) 528-1725; www.sfems.org

Monday, November 13

Fretwork repeats program of November 11.

8:00 pm, First Lutheran Church, 600 Homer at Webster, Palo Alto. \$25/\$22. (510) 528-1725; www.sfems.org



Review by Roy Whelden, *continued from page one*

immediately put in mind of the attractive and wonderful ability of the viol family to render with perfect clarity such intertwining counterpoint as is commonly found in the English consort music of the 17th century:



Unlike the modern violin family, where the "fullness" of timbre would make this intertwined passage very muddy unless preternatural care were taken, the viol family is perfectly suited to render this and similarly closely written passages with luminous control. But I'm not sure if this is what was meant by the phrase "mutually intertwined ripe effect in an ensemble."

If this Handbook sees future editions (and I hope it does), then I would wish for the inclusion of more musical examples. The John Ward example I reproduced is not found in the text. In fact, the Handbook contains no musical examples at all aside from a single measure taken from Christopher Simpson's *The Division Viol*. Although the booklet is directed at living composers, it wouldn't have hampered any composer's imagination to have been offered musical examples from the extensive viol repertoire. It's always illuminating to see and hear models of how past masters wrote for and thought about the instrument. Here is a short example from my own experience as a performer: I have on occasion encountered new music requiring what seemed at first to be impossible stretches of the left hand — until I realized that the exact same physical stretch had been requested by Jean Phillippe Rameau in a musical context with vastly different syntax and style. It's good to let composers in on what was expected of viol players in the past.

The Yukimi Kambe Viol Consort itself accomplishes this by inviting composers to their rehearsal studio and there introducing composers to the world of the viol by playing early music for them.

Tuning and range is always a first consideration in the study of individual string instruments and it is the next topic, after tone color, taken up in the Handbook. It is not necessary to go into detail here, except to remark that the author briefly mentions the fact that viol tuning must be tempered with any of the following: Meantone, 1/6 tuning, Kirnberger, Werkmeister, or some other. This might leave a composer wondering about the qualities and potentialities of each of these tunings.

I had the opportunity to pursue the tuning question (as well as other questions) in greater depth when the Yukimi Kambe Viol Consort came through Berkeley in April of 2006. Through the generous efforts of the musical agent and Pacifica Viola da Gamba Society member, Lee McRae, I was able to interview Ms. Kambe after the first of two Berkeley concerts, a concert at the Institute of East Asian Studies on the U.C. Berkeley campus. I found the concert, given in an intimate space in the museum, to be inspiring and intriguing. It was designed as an accompaniment to a slide show featuring the works of Japanese graphic artists.

I was surprised during the concert by how much time and effort the group put into tuning. I asked Ms. Kambe about this — their tuning philosophy — during the post-concert interview. I had thought that their tuning system of choice might have been equal temperament, but no, that wasn't the case. She said

"It is almost impossible to describe tone color using English or Japanese or any other natural language"

that the consort usually used a 1/6 Valotti tuning, not equal temperament. A 1/6 Valotti tuning is a kind of halfway approach to equal temperament. As wonderful as it would be to have a sequence of 12 perfectly tuned fifths come out

exactly on the octave, it won't happen in this world or any conceivable world. It's a mathematical impossibility. In 1/6 Valotti, the miniscule interval, or "comma", by which a pile of 12 fifths exceeds an octave (actually, a sextuple octave or the harmonic

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ratio 26:1) is divided into six equal parts and distributed among a choice of six of those fifths. In this way, the pile of twelve fifths, half of which are mistuned by a tiny amount, comes out sounding like a perfectly tuned sextuple octave. It is this tempering of the sequence of fifths which forces it to close, to come full circle. The practical effect of this breaking up and distribution of the comma is to render a large number of keys easily playable – it will be as easy to play in B flat minor or E flat major or A flat as it is to play in D. For the viol player, with the ability to alter the natural pitch of a fret by pulling or pushing the string, a Valotti 1/6 tuning makes it relatively easy to play in any key. It's a natural choice, as Ms. Kambe indicated, for a group which plays a lot of modern music. The Consort reached Valotti 1/6 after intensive research of more than 15 years, and after experiments with other tunings, including Kirnberger and Werkmeister, proved that they are not optimum for the viol family.

The concert at the Institute of East Asian Studies was completely devoted to contemporary music either written for the consort or transcribed by them. Many of the special techniques beloved of contemporary composers were used. These included several of the right and left hand techniques described in the Handbook: sul ponticello, sul tasto, col legno, harmonics, tremolo and pizzicato. According to the Handbook, not all will be used with equal pleasure or success by the player. About ricochet bowing she writes: "Bouncing bow is not suitable for viol, because of the bow warping." But, of course, as soon as a technique is proscribed, then some enterprising composer will want to find a way to use it. In fact, within weeks of the Berkeley concert, I was at Stanford's CCRMA (the university's computer music center and the model for IRCAM in Paris) performing a piece named

'skin' for solo viol plus computer. The composer of this "duet", Michael Edwards of Edinburgh University, asks for ricochet bowing at several points during the 15 minute long composition. He had found a way to use it which worked well on the viol, even if it remains true (or seems to remain true) that it can't be used in the same situations on the viol as it can on the violin. An example from 'skin':



The dynamics may seem extreme, but remember that this is a piece performed with a pickup placed on the bridge carrying every sound to the computer for modulation. I should mention that the arrows indicate a slow transition between sul ponticello, col legno bowing and ordinary bowing.

There is not space to discuss all the techniques mentioned in the Handbook. They are all, without exception, accurately and convincingly described. But I would like to take up the topic of harmonics, since, as it happened, I was forced into an intense confrontation with harmonics soon after I spoke with Ms. Kambe. She asserts in the Handbook (in agreement with most orchestration texts) that "it is rather difficult to make clear sounds above the 5th harmonic." Indeed, I heard no high harmonics being used during the Institute concert and yes, it is rather difficult and it depends in part, as she says, on the nature of individual instruments. But I'm convinced part of the difficulty has to do with lack of experience. The Edwards composition just mentioned uses partials up to the 7th harmonic, and while I found the 7th consis-

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Membership News

New Members

Toni Chiapelli
PO Box 2381
Monterey, CA 93942
(831) 261-8198

Renewals

Alice Benedict, Dalton Cantey, Robin Easterbrook, Jane Johnson, Kirby Leong, Joan Lounsbery, John Mark, Lee McRae, Pj Savage, Helen Tyrrell, William Wright, Lyle York

Updates

Denise Mauldin
dmauld@aol.com

Viol Talk

Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be Friday, September 29 at 7:30 pm. All are invited! President Ellen Farwell will host as well as preside: 1807 Butte St., Richmond. (510) 524-3327.

Mary Abbott

In Memoriam

Long-time chapter member Mary Abbott died earlier this year. Following are memories of her from members of our community.-Ed.

From John Mark:

During the 70's, Mary and Al Roper were among those who made it to my Hayward home for occasional viol sessions and workshops under Martha Blackman. I recall attending her graduate recital at Mill's during the 80's. By then, I believe she had married her longtime companion, Dr. Sedgwick Mead, a Kaiser physician in rehabilitative medicine. She hosted a number of music-making gatherings in their lovely home in the Kensington hills. A memorable event happened sometime during the 90's, when Mary, Greg and Annette Barnett, and I put together a short program for a dinner meeting of retired Kaiser physicians, when Mary played both flute and treble viol. I don't believe she ever made it to a Zion play day.

From Eileen Hadidian:

I first met Mary Abbot in 1980, when I was teaching in the Early Music Program at the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts in Richmond. Laurette Goldberg had been instrumental in starting the program, and it was attended by people in the community interested in receiving private lessons

and ensemble coaching. There were four instructors (voice, harpsichord, flute/recorder, viol) and our students came mainly from the East Bay.

At the time Mary had just retired from her work as a computer programmer at UC Berkeley, and wanted to pursue music more seriously. She had had polio as a child and was in a wheelchair, but she never let that get in the way of what she wanted to do. She started playing recorder in a baroque ensemble, but also wanted to learn to play baroque flute: I went to her apartment in El Cerrito once a week to give her lessons: she was curious, full of perceptive questions, and made good progress.

In the early 1990's Mary decided she wanted to go back to school to get a music degree. After checking out the different programs in the Bay Area, she decided on Mills College, where I was affiliated as an adjunct professor in music history, recorder and baroque flute, and also directed the Mills Early Music Ensembles. Mary persevered, despite the lack of accessible classrooms, and in addition to her papers gave a fine recital at the end of her studies.

I was honored to have been her teacher, and learned a lot about living fully in the face of adversity - wisdom that served me well when I was diagnosed with cancer.

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tently frustrating and difficult to produce, it became relatively easy with practice to play the 6th harmonic. (Part of the problem, I believe, is that the 6th and the 7th harmonics are not stopped exactly above any of the frets.)

The Handbook is written in a natural and informative English style, with a few peculiar but oddly endearing exceptions. This pleasant style is due in part, as the author says in the introduction, to the linguistic and editing talents of the author's long time friend and colleague, the American composer David Loeb. In fact, Mr. Loeb was, Ms. Kambe told me, the primary inspiration behind her interest in modern viol music and the formation of the Yukimi Kambe Viol Consort in 1984. The first modern piece for viol which Ms. Kambe ever played was a piece written by Mr. Loeb. She showed me the original manuscript of the piece. It was obvious that she had a great deal affection for the music, which had been given her

while studying in Basel with the great viol teacher Hannelore Müller.

Lest it be thought the Ms. Kambe's Handbook be directed only toward composers, it is worthwhile to quote from her introduction. "I wondered whether it is possible or not for players of today to cooperate with living composers, to reproduce the same collaboration experienced by players of earlier day(s).... Very interestingly, when I began this effort, I found that various kinds of unknown clues for the performance of early music were also included in this procedure." It seems almost paradoxical, doesn't it? Engaging with living composers in the process of creating new works can yield insights on the performance of music whose creators have long ago passed away.

(Thanks to John Mark for the generous loan of his copy of *Handbook for Composing for the Viola da Gamba* and to Lee McRae for assistance in making contact with Yukimi Kambe.)

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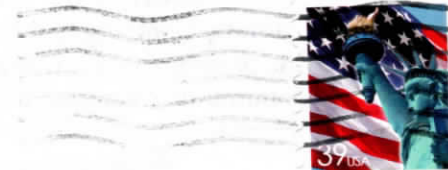
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