

*Newsletter of the Pacifica Chapter
of the Viola da Gamba Society of America*

Gamba NEWS

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The New Wave of Cheap Viols

Inexpensive viols from Central Europe are back, and allegedly better

Will the new millenium herald the advent of the decent \$1500 bass viol? Richard Wood, the man behind the Early Music Shop in Bradford, England, who sold the world on the do-it-yourself crumhorn kit ("Tape template to instrument. Drill.") thinks so.

Mr. Wood is offering up in anticipation of amazement and delight on the part of the viol-buying public the Ceske line viols, treble, tenor and bass. "They are made by a large-scale cello manufacturer to our own drawings and specifications and, although they are largely machine made, they are a product quality-manufactured to fairly high standards," he says. As the name indicates, they are made in the Czech Republic, of materials that Mr. Wood coyly refers to as "conventional" without apparent willingness to elaborate further. "They are all patterned after originals that we are aware of. We provided the drawings. The treble and tenor are after Jaye and the bass is after John Rose."

The fifteen-hundred-dollar question is, of course, are these things better than the Übels? "They are a thousand times better than the old German factory-made viols," says Mr. Wood. "They are fairly light, and at last we have got a decent color on them." The set-up is done at the Early Music Shop to Wood's standards.

The Early Music shop consulted with Alison Crum throughout the project, although she is in no way endorsing or promoting them. "I saw the first batch

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of Ceske viols and made quite a few suggestions – about the set up, neck width, etc. – which apparently they are incorporating for the next ones, so I wouldn't like to criticize too much 'till I've seen those," she says. "Certainly the sound was quite nice, and they are amazing value for money."

Explaining the low price, Mr. Wood explains that margins have been kept "to a minimum." The response, he says, has been strongly positive, especially for the newly-arrived Crum-adjusted batch. Any Americans wishing to try the Ceske may order directly from the Early Music Shop: sales@e-m-s.com. Buyers should remember that the actual cost is affected by the dollar/pound exchange rate. Wood

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mentioned several American makers and retailers who intended to stock the Ceske viols, but these others did not respond to *Gamba News*' attempts to verify this.

Consort Play on Sept. 11 — Coach David Morris

Our September 11 meeting will be held at Zion Lutheran Church, 5201 Park Blvd., Oakland, at 9:30 AM. The church is just downhill from Highway 13. Please bring a music stand; coffee, music and consort groupings (for those not in pre-formed consorts) are available, the latter based on the information you send on your reply post-cards. Coaching will be provided by professional gambist and teacher David Morris. Dates for later meetings will appear in October's newsletter.

Summer-Workshop Roundup

Ghost Ranch, June 1999

Ghost Ranch, north of Albuquerque, N.M., is a conference center run by the Presbyterian Church that offers classes in arts, crafts, natural sciences, healing and spiritual study. Linda Shortridge, player and viol maker of Albuquerque, got the bright idea to organize a week-long June Ghost Ranch class called *Viols and Voices*, focusing on 16th- and 17th-century Spanish and English repertoire.

The place has an unearthly beauty. At 6500 feet, the summer air is dry except when full of rain, and smells of dust and horses. Around the central grassy campus rise cream, purple and red sandstone escarpments forested in pinon and juniper, or shimmering bare in the hot sun. Think of yourself in a Georgia O'Keeffe painting, but what can't be conveyed is the astonishing scale of the formations. Our sleeping quarters and the cafeteria brought back memories of summer camp. "This food is terrible — and such small portions, too!" (In fact, the food wasn't bad for a cafeteria.) Nearly every afternoon clouds built up to lightning and rain, from light to torrential. One

guest broke his leg in a mishap with his motor home, and another had a bruising encounter with a 12-year-old on a bicycle. But all in all it was much better than summer camp.

Attendance was stronger in viol players than in singers, but everyone had a chance to play or sing. Countertenor Larry Lipnik of New York City, assisted part-time by Gary Wedow, also of New York, coached singing. Larry also coached viols, along with London's Alison Crum and Roy Marks. Students benefited from a student-teacher ratio of 6 to 1. Along with the usual consort composers, viol players prepared Spanish motets and villancicos and, with the voices, verse anthems by Gibbons and Ward.

Afternoons were free, so those not in need of a nap could hike the ranch trails, swim or ride horses. Linda organized special excursions, including a tour of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe; a Santa Fe concert by Crum, Marks, Lipnik, Marty Ronish on baroque flute and Kathy McIntosh on harpsichord; trips to Bandelier National Monument and other sites near Albuquerque; and a ride on the narrow-gauge Cumbres and Toltec Railroad into Colorado.

The entire population of Ghost Ranch (at capacity that week, at 400) was invited to two evening concerts. Alison and Roy played an evening of Spanish and Italian Renaissance music for bass viol and lute, viols played with a no-hair Renaissance bow grip. Students played and sang a concert of madrigals, Holborne dances, Purcell's *Fantasia No. 9*, and two English verse anthems. The Ranch audience was enthusiastic. Even those puzzled by the instruments enlightened us with their comments. "Rough," said one, refusing to elaborate. Another woman called the sound of viols "quaint, and so... so... Masterpiece Theatre!"

—Lyle York

Viols West, San Luis Obispo, Calif., Aug. 1999

This workshop can be depended on to be wonderful, but last year it had to contend with the Cal Poly campus summertime remodeling and road repair, complete with orchestra of leaf blowers, jackhammers and forklifts. This year,

blessedly, they weren't there.

The weather was temperate, the food good. Director Carol Herman did an outstanding job of organizing a record crowd of 58 students and 11 faculty. All housing and classes were in the same dorm, so we had the pleasure of going barefoot and leaving our viols wherever convenient.

With this army of faculty and with the largest category of students identifying themselves as UI, there was a rich array of class offerings: dances, sight-reading, Dr. Dornenburg's Technique Clinic, divisions, Scheidt, Gibbons, Lupo, Jenkins, etc. Some people were disappointed not to be offered mariachi again, but Ray Nurse came to the rescue with "Politically Incorrect," featuring unviolish music from Brahms to Sousa. David Douglass taught a class in improvised music stands necessary, a terrifying concept. Wendy Gillespie taught a consort of Revolving Sizes. Voices and Viols, lead by the incomparable David Morris, performed Purcell's verse anthem "Rejoice in the Lord Alway." The rest of the stellar faculty lineup were Lynn Tetenbaum, Julie Jeffrey, Carol Herman, Mary Springfels, Lucy Cross, and two from Vancouver joining us for the first time, Elizabeth Liddle and the aforementioned Ray Nurse.

After-dinner lectures and instruction included tablature (Baby Tab by Carol, Toddler Tab by student Alice Renken) and two lecture-demonstrations on tuning and temperament by Lizzie Liddle. The first was theoretical, the second practical: how to get a whole consort tuned the same way, how to raise and lower a note, how and why to split frets. Viol student Martha Bixler, better known as mistress of the recorder, taught a merry evening of English country dances, accompanied by David Douglass and student Melita Denny on fiddles.

A Viols West tradition is to present an unprepared faculty concert. This year, with 11 players, they even shared stands. There were the usual false starts and giggling, which only add to the audience's enjoyment. Unusual hits were student Peter Seibert's "Five for Seven," Delius' "To Be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water," and

two songs by Franz Tunder (ca 1630) sung by Mary Rawcliffe, who has added her beautiful soprano to the evening for the last several years. This year she performed only a few hours after a dental session with novocaine.

On our afternoon off, we escaped to the beach or town or debauchery in hot tubs, or even practiced for Friday night's student recital and faculty entertainment. The recital portion was enlivened by the Politically Incorrect class's performance, in black masks, of "The William Tell Overture." The faculty portion is customarily a less-than-solemn evening; this year, a group of students joined in to make it even less so. The indefatigable Carol's patented Broadway-style songs included numbers from "OklaSLOma" and two songs: "Scratch, Scratch, Squeak" and a tango, "Doing the Gamba Grip"; the Viols West Ukelele Band; a newly formed consort of yo-yos; and a soft-shoe routine to "Tea for Two" by Carol and student Christine Glazier, revealing four magnificent legs. The students presented a skit on the theme "Toutes les Excuses du Monde" (My chair's too high! My blood sugar's low!), ending with a new song, to the tune of "The Stars and Stripes Forever": "Be Kind to Your Students of Viol."

Perhaps on account of all that misbehaving, there will be no Viols West workshop next year. See you in 2001!

—Lyle York

Conclave 1999

Dreading heat and humidity, I had never ventured to the east coast for a VdGSA conclave. This July, I joined 146 other participants for the weeklong gathering, held at Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island. It was a record in attendance; nearly 30 came from the Boston area alone. Bristol turned out to be temperate in comparison with elsewhere in the eastern US during that time. Besides, our apartment-like dormitories within a hundred yards of the shore had quiet air-conditioning.

As usual, classes of all varieties and at different levels were offered by the 23 faculty members. For me, it was a privilege to study various parts

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of Bach's Art of Fugue with Lucy Bardo, using her PRB Productions edition. Always interested in new music, I enjoyed a piece for solo voice and viols by Will Ayton, faculty member at Roger Williams, performed during the rapidly paced student program.

Faculty performances have always highlighted each annual conclave. An old mansion in Bristol made a lovely setting for an exceptional evening concert of Marais' and Sainte-Columbe's music, performed by the ensemble Charivary, consisting of gambists Laura Jeppesen and Jane Hershey, theorbo and baroque guitarist Catherine Liddell. Each of the daily 5 pm faculty mini-concerts were also ear-openers, featuring professional groups such as the Ensemble Chanterelle. A program titled Monkey Music sampled the music of Orlando Gibbons; another focusing on Medical Musical Maladies performed Marais' Bladder Operation.

Banquet night frivolities centered on a costume contest, based on dressing up as one's favorite early music song. Also included was a performance of my arrangement of Duke Ellington's "Moon Mist" for violin and consort, solo played by President Jack Ashworth; members of the five-piece band included myself and the only other Bay area gambist to appear this year, VdGSA Newsletter Editor David Dreyfuss.

Those belonging to the national society will receive a more detailed and balanced review of the 1999 conclave in a future VdGSA newsletter, I am sure. In the meantime, if you are thinking about viol-ensemble fun next summer, reserve the week of July 23-30 for Conclave 2000, to be held at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, just one long day's drive from the Bay area.

—John Mark

Notices

I play harpsichord at the low intermediate level and am looking for a Viola da Gamba player in the Pleasanton/Dublin/San Ramon/Livermore area who would enjoy playing duets and trios for fun. Do you know how I might locate one? I live in Pleasanton, have a harpsichord, and can be reached via email at d.rodriquez@stellardomain.com or by phone in the evenings at 925-461-2529.

Continuo Camp, a one-day workshop for gambists and cellists, focussing on continuo styles and techniques. Faculty: **Mary Springfels**, gamba; **Elisabeth Le Guin** (cello); **Phoebe Craig** (harpsichord). Fee, \$50; Sat., Nov. 27, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, at St. Alban's Church in Albany. For information, registration, Contact Alisa Gould Sugden, (510) 549-9799 or AGSugden@aol.com.

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