



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

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November 9 Meeting

Our meeting will be at Zion Lutheran Church, 5201 Park Bl., Piedmont. Arrive in time for tuning and socializing at 9:30 AM. Lunch locally or brown bag. Please send in your cards to Peter Ballinger, *even if you do not plan to attend*: on it are two additional questions to which we need your replies! Corliss and Herb Myers offered to host one of our meetings in Carmel in 1992: we would be able to play in the excellent acoustic environment of their church facilities. We could provide one or two pieces for the Sunday service, but this is not a requirement. The Myers offer their home for us to stay the night, or make our own arrangements. Please let us know your reaction to this on the card. The second question is about the December workshop with Lucy Bardo (see article below).

October Meetings

Some of our regulars were missing, but we had an enjoyable day on at our regular meeting on October 12, with three groups: one three-part group devoted to tablature, and two 5/7-part groups. I understand that the Headlands Recorder/Viol weekend was enjoyed by all, including several of our members. The SFEMS Evening Class for Viol Consort is going well, with four participants studying Lawes and Hingston pieces with John Dornenburg.

Forthcoming Events

Mid-Peninsula Recorder Orchestra: Playing meetings November 6 and 20, 8 PM. Duveneck School, Alester and Channing, Palo Alto. Information: Fred Palmer (415) 591-3648. [We are considering a joint meeting with MPRO in 1992].

Berkeley Symphony Orchestra: West Coast Premiere of George Benjamin's *Upon Silence*, featuring a gamba consort [see article elsewhere in this issue]; concert includes Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 and *Amériques*, by Varèse. December 18, Zellerbach Hall, 8:00 PM. (510) 841-2800.

December 14 Workshop

As noted above, this workshop will be given by Lucy Bardo, virtuoso gambist of the New York Consort of Viols and other East Coast groups. Because of her rehearsal commitments (without which we could not have planned the workshop at all!) the workshop will be held in Berkeley at MusicSources, and beginning at 9:30 AM, ending at 12:30. Those interested in continued playing will then adjourn to Peter Ballinger's nearby premises for general consort playing. Cost of the workshop is our usual \$15.00 (\$10.00 for playing members). We want to provide the most useful information/instruction to our membership, so please indicate your preferences on the reply card: we'll try to accommodate as many desires as possible.

Membership

Our appeal for membership renewal was heeded dramatically: one member paid dues a second time, causing a temporary bulge in our budget! Dalton Cantey, our treasurer, reports that we now have 36

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT:	Peter Ballinger
VICE-PRESIDENT:	Lee McRae
SECRETARY:	Marilyn Cantey
TREASURER:	Dalton Cantey

playing and 18 Newsletter members. My apologies to members who had already renewed but received a newsletter with the dreaded warning 'LAST NEWSLETTER!' stamped in scarlet on the exterior.

Symphonic Viol Consort

While the Berkeley Symphony's audience is well-accustomed to the modern programming selections of music director Kent Nagano, they will surely be surprised to find five viols take center stage on December 18th's Zellerbach Hall program.

Sandwiched between the Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5 and Edgar Varèse's *Amériques* will be British composer George Benjamin's new piece *Upon Silence* in its U.S. premier. The work is scored for 5 viols and soprano, and was originally composed for England's Fretwork consort. The Berkeley performance will feature soprano Rachel Lewis with gambists Lucy Bardo, Patricia Halverson, Michael Sand, Roy Wheldon, and consort director John Dornenburg.

In an interview for BBC radio, George Benjamin admitted that the viols "have connotations of old music, but they have potentials and techniques that are so different from ordinary string instruments, and have all these hidden wonders in there that where never used before." As examples he includes big six-part chords, "extraordinary" pizzicato and harmonic pizzicato, extremely fast tremoli, a wonderful choice of harmonics (six strings, each with 7 frets, on five viols equals 210 open string sounds!), various types of vibrato, the underhand bowing technique and sound, and the fact that when the instruments are playing together in polyphony you can completely lose the idea of where the sound originates.

In describing *Upon Silence*, Benjamin said "the piece from beginning to end is one long transforming flow of line and harmony in the background, but the harmony results from the lines. The primary source (of inspiration) is my gut reaction to the sound. I liked the sound of viols beforehand."

Upon Silence is a setting of a poem by W.B. Yeats in three sections, each describing an important historical figure alone with their thoughts: Caesar the night

before a great battle, Helen of Troy dancing in the streets of Sparta, and Michelangelo while painting the Sistine Chapel.

John Dornenburg

International Viola da Gamba Symposium, Utrecht 1991

As part of the annual Utrecht Festival of Old Music, the Dutch early music organization STIMU presented a four-day conference on the viola da gamba and its music. Over a long weekend of hot sunny weather, some 100 participants heard 14 lectures on a wide range of gamba-related topics, interspersed with 4 master classes and 9 concerts (the Festival as a whole included some 17 ensemble concerts that included gamba, 4 concerts of purely consort music, and an astounding total of 12 solo gamba recitals!). Due to the international character of both the symposium's presenters and audience all the lectures and masterclasses were spoken in English.

The lectures were given by an eclectic choice of performers, instrument makers, and scholars, which resulted in a considerable range of presentation content and quality. Highlights were the talks by Andrew Ashbee (The viol fantasias of John Jenkins), Robert Green (Recent researches and conclusions concerning the pardessus de viole), and Christophe Coin (Commentaries on a portrait of Antoine Forqueray), with other interesting contributions from Ian Woodfield (The Basel *gross Geigen*: an early German viol?), Martin Edmunds (Venetian viols in the 16th century), and Sarah Cunningham (Markings in a copy of book 2 by Marais). Several of the lectures were augmented by live performances, and we heard England's Rose Consort demonstrate both a consort of 16th-century Italian viols and some four-part Jenkins, and Fretwork performing a six-part fantasy by William Lawes. The most unforgettable moments of humor undoubtedly came from Francis Baines, who at one point during his lecture on Gibbons actually removed and then later replaced his teeth! All of the lectures were recorded and will be published by STIMU at some time during the coming year. (address: STIMU, Postbus 565, 3500 AN Utrecht, Nederland).

J. Dornenburg