

Chapter 3 How to Evaluate Viola Tone - as a player

Evaluation of viola tone is as important for the violinmaker as it is for the player. The writer first had the task of evaluating viola tone at the Wurlitzer shop in New York City many years ago, in 1960. It was certainly a daunting task, but led to purchase of a viola, which I liked and continued to like over the years. I also purchased from Wurlitzer a cello, which I selected mainly on the basis of its price and appearance (taking lessons later that same year). The writer learned a few years after starting violin making from Robert Cauet that playing a number of instruments, whether violin, viola or cello in sequence and for comparison can be effective by playing scales across the strings and playing an octave on each string. With this simple procedure one can focus on several important characteristics of good viola tone and identify problems, which may lead to further evaluation of the instrument or return to the shop. This procedure is only a first step to be followed by playing musical selections of varying complexity. A final step before sale of the instrument is testing by the teacher or coach and player who evaluate the viola for purchase.

Violas are capable of producing a wide range of objectionable sounds as well as very beautiful sounds. Unfortunately, there is not yet an existing vocabulary to adequately describe what we hear. Playing a C major scale in first position from the C string and up to the fifth position on the A string can give one a good idea of what the viola may sound like. The lack of colors, sonority and worst of all, dullness across all the strings is cause for rejection. A hollow dark sound on the C or G strings, or other peculiar sounds may be offensive. Weakness on the C and A strings is a major problem. The D and G strings may be dull and lifeless by playing a scale across the strings and especially by playing a scale on each string.

The importance of playing a scale on each string cannot be overemphasized. This should be done slowly enough to hear each note clearly. I understand that Peter Prier and the students at the Violin Making School of America have also used this method for many years.

The writer believes he has the ability to play well enough on violins, violas and cellos, as well as the experience of playing on multiple instruments to conduct initial evaluations and make some statements on this subject. I recently returned from a Violin Society of America conference and competition in Portland where I played scales on 125 violins (out of 183), about eighty violas on two occasions and about fifty cellos on two occasions. I did not know the maker of any of these instruments before playing on them. I did not look at the appearance of any of the instruments before playing. I recorded my impressions for each and noted whether accepted or rejected.

Most would agree that the C string on the viola is of critical importance. I should hasten to add my own opinion that the viola A string is of equal importance as well as the D and G strings. There should be a strong, clear tone on the C string not only in the first position but going up the string to at least the fifth position. A weak C string is unsatisfactory on a viola. In addition many violas will die out as you go up the C string and this is unsatisfactory. This may not be known unless you play at least a scale on the C string. The kind of sound the C string produces is also critical. In my opinion a coarse,

gravelly sound, even if loud is offensive, but not as bad as the kind of sounds that some persons such as Henry Kissinger manage to produce while speaking. Some people like a fuzzy kind of sound, not only on the C string but also on the G string. I had used Thomastic tungsten Spirocore G strings on cellos before finding that I could get a clearer sound using a Larsen Tungsten G string. In any case a clear core sound from the C string should resonate and produce a beautiful tone. The C string should not be hollow or tubby. The C string should permit enough of a clear core sound to carry over piano or orchestra. This cannot of course be tested with certainty unless in a hall with orchestra or piano accompaniment.

To me a fuzzy sound on the viola is unsatisfactory. Perhaps we should listen and compare our string instruments to tenor, alto, counter-tenor, or mezzo-soprano soloists. Maybe they could listen to our instruments and comment on what they hear? I have never heard a great operatic soloist produce anything but a clear core sound capable of producing the kind of colors appropriate for the music rendered. I think the same should apply to violas. Perhaps some day violists who organize meetings, which involve evaluation of viola tone will invite a notable vocal soloist to listen to selected violas and give their impressions about viola tone.

The G string is a particular problem for the viola in the third position. The lower position should be loud, clear, resonant and capable of producing many colors. The F natural or F sharp may produce a wolf note, similar but not nearly as pronounced as many cellos produce. This is not a problem unless the D string has a wolf note in first position, producing an offensive F natural or F sharp. Such problems should be corrected by sound post and bridge adjustment. Choice of strings may lead to improvement. A wolf eliminator behind the bridge on the G string may correct the problem. The lowers on the G string should have a beautiful clear core sound and be capable of expression. Excepting the F or F sharp the upper positions should produce clear notes, although this can vary with the viola. The upper positions may fail.

William Primrose commented (see Dalton, *Playing the Viola*, p 116) as follows: *Besides using open strings liberally in scale playing, I keep as much as possible to the first position until obliged to ascend into the upper range. The medium regions of the D and G strings can be a dull section on the viola.* With a good modern viola and careful attention to set up and adjustment, the viola should produce clear, core and expressive sounds with colors in the higher positions on the D and G strings

The A string is the prince of the viola. The E string on the violin is equally critical for production of beautiful, colorful sounds. What would a violin be like without a beautiful singing E string. The A string on the viola should produce a clear resonant core sound full of colors all the way up to the highest positions. The viola A string should produce great power and clarity. The viola A string should also be capable of producing a wide range of colors. Only the very highest positions may sound like a good violin with core and sonority to the sound. Elsewhere the viola should never sound like a violin. The A string on the viola is capable of expressing a great range of emotion. In my opinion, and others that love the viola, the viola A on a good viola is far superior to the violin A.

If playing scales across the strings and on each string is satisfactory the violinmaker may let the new instrument sit for a while and then play again. If satisfactory, one may play scales and exercises and selections from familiar pieces. I like to use the Bach cello suites and sonatas transcribed for viola to evaluate playability. The

ready response to the bow in all registers and the ease of playing may motivate one to keep playing. One may then return to playing scales across strings and on each string before one or more listeners who may comment.

This is only the first phase of tonal evaluation. Time permitting one may play on one or more instruments to be tried out and compare with a known instrument, which the player likes or uses as his own instrument. This has its drawbacks, since the viola used for comparison may not be adequate. Players sometimes try to replicate the tonal characteristics of their own instrument. It is important in tone evaluation of a viola for the player to “max out” individual notes on each string up and down the fingerboard to test the reserve and capacity of the viola to present with great contrasts and expressiveness. There is nothing worse than a viola, which “bottoms out” regardless of bowing technique and intent of the player or which is dull and lifeless. The player must evaluate volume, colors, contrasts and expressiveness. But the viola may be used primarily in chamber music and orchestra. A viola may sound great to a player and an audience in solo work but may not be suitable for a string quartet or orchestra. If a member of a string quartet or orchestra one may try out the viola and see how it plays and sounds. If the violinmaker does not play well enough for the above trials, it is necessary to find someone else to do this competently.

The next phase of tonal evaluation is in the hands of the teacher or coach and the player. Before an instrument is purchased, usually, it is necessary for the viola to be in the hands of the teacher or player for several weeks, and the time necessary for a full evaluation will depend on the amount of money invested and/or the importance of playability and tone to the teacher or player. This is the most important and yet difficult decision a player will make.

I have ventured my own opinions and thoughts about the subject of how to evaluate the tone of string instruments because I have found few references to this subject which I could readily follow. I have suggested, since attending the first viola congress in 1989 in Redlands, that more attention be directed to tone evaluation. I submitted the following suggestions to the American Viola Society at the conclusion of the 1989 conference (Parts one and two of *The Viola*, by the writer, which appeared in the January and February, 1993 VMAAI Journal) that:

- 1.) Viola lengths and string lengths be standardized.
- 2.) Comparisons between new and old violas, using blind evaluations, be a part of future viola congresses.
- 3.) Evaluations be performed in the same halls as concerts, rather than in small classrooms, and that selected new violas be played in concert.
- 4.) Students receive training and experience in tonal evaluation.
- 5.) Viola repertoire be expanded for general audiences, and that the students be required to give some of their recitals from works they have (composed or) transcribed.

The writer concluded in this article in the 1993 VMAAI Journal with the following:

There are many such possibilities that challenge the abilities of young players who today must create their own place in the world. The world needs their artistry and the sound of the viola. Audience research and development of instrumental tonal evaluation procedures are possibly best suited to a university setting with makers and musicians contributing to these efforts.

Unfortunately, some organizations such as the Violin Society of America today do not even permit violinmakers to attend any of the tone evaluations. However, all the viola congresses I've attended have excellent presentations by great artists who play consecutively as many as 30 to 45 violas in sequence (Paul Coletti in 1989, Roberto Diaz in 2002, Paul Neubauer in 2004, and Roberto Diaz in 2006). The purpose was not to present a "competition" but to permit violinmakers and players to listen and observe a great player who plays essentially the same on each instrument. I've ventured comments at the last two viola congresses that much could be learned if a panel of experts on tone evaluation could discuss and present examples of what good viola tone is and how to evaluate it.

How to evaluate viola tone – as a listener

If the viola in the hands of the player is acceptable, the next step is to see how the viola sounds as a listener. Few have the ability to play the viola with orchestra, however all serious players have access to a piano. Most can use a hall, which is ordinarily used for concerts. This is of vital importance, because a viola can sound good to the player, or the listener up close but fail entirely when played with piano accompaniment, even in a good hall. The first question that must be answered is "what should a viola sound like"? We have no trouble recognizing a trumpet, French horn, or clarinet vs. oboe, but it has not been determined yet among the powers that be in the music world what a viola should sound like. I have presented my present opinion as to what a viola should sound like to the player, as above.

I believe the answer to the question of what the viola should sound like will be generally accepted when we have a soloist performing on a viola, which stands out far above all the others. Few would argue about the excellent tone of the Soil Stradivarius in the hands of Menuhin or Perlman, or the excellent tone of the Guarnerius del Jesu in the hands of Paganini or Kreisler. Few would argue about the tone of the Duport Strad in the hands of Rostropovich. I will present below what I believe to be the ideal viola tone, from the standpoint of the listener giving examples from the 44 contestants I evaluated in the preliminary round, the 9 contestants in the semi - final round and 4 in the final round of the Primrose Competition and Festival I recently attended.

The first half of this chapter was written prior to attending the Viola Competition and Festival at BYU, Provo Utah, May 23 to May 28, 2005. First let me explain my purpose in being about the only viola maker to attend the entire conference and the method I used for evaluating violas at the competition. The following is a brief presentation of the rationale of what I had intended to do. I had heard two memorable performances by young students of viola on the program *From the Top* which I listen to in the shop every Saturday, 2 P.M. The first played on a viola which sounded superb and the second on one that sounded like a violin. So I thought it would be interesting to evaluate the tone of each viola played in all three rounds of the competition and then see whether there was any correlation between those I judged to be good violas compared to the judges' decisions about the best performances in the competition.

There were 44 contestants, mostly younger than 26 years old, who came from places as far away as China, Israel, and Europe, as well as from many states in this country. This was a rare opportunity to evaluate viola tone, since each competitor played

as well as he/she could, and had practiced on the viola often for a long time in preparation for the competition. This would effectively rule out uncertainties in how the player may regard a viola, and how well the viola is played to produce the maximum tonal qualities in all ranges of position, tempo, and volume. The judges' selection of viola music was excellent from the standpoint of illustrating the many kinds of voices violas can produce.

It goes without saying that what follows is my opinion based on what I heard and recorded for 44 contestants in the preliminary round, 9 contestants in the semi-final and 4 in the final rounds. My wife Mary and I sat in exactly the same place for each contestant in the preliminary round of the competition, two rows back from the front and right in front of the contestant. This enabled me to make an initial evaluation of tone. For the semi-final round and final round we sat just where we had chosen to sit at all the evening concerts, a few rows from the back of the hall, just behind where the judges sat. This enabled an estimate of articulation, clarity, projection, colors, contrasts and overall impact, etc. All contestants in the semi-final and final rounds played some selections with piano accompaniment. I waited until the player had finished his performance before recording my impressions of what I had heard.

I should first describe the violas that sounded best, before detailing those, which had problems. I had pointed out to the mother of one of the contestants that I could feel confident in judging only those with good overall tone since a slight movement of a bridge or sound post in the wrong place could lead to serious problems, not always the fault of the viola.

Preliminary round

I will use my notes, which I took following the performance of each contestant. The preliminary round included two sessions on 5/24 and two on 5/25. I selected only one viola # 4, in the first session on 5/24, which excelled with the following characteristics. This viola had power and clarity of all notes. The C and G strings were very adequate; the viola had good colors and contrasts; it was very expressive and the overall impact was beautiful.

For the next session I selected # 17, 20, 29 and # 27 for honorable mention. The judges advanced only # 29 to the semi-finals. I described # 29 as having clarity but possibly not having sufficient power.

I would not hear # 17, 20 or 27 again. The judges did not advance them to the semi-finals. However the following are excerpts from my notes for their performances during the preliminary round. Viola # 17 was very clear in all registers, had colors and had excellent tone. Viola # 20 was very clear and I thought sounded as good as # 17. Viola # 27 was almost as good as 17 and 20. The reason for presenting my impressions of those who I thought played on violas with superior tonal qualities is to hopefully distill the qualities, which a good viola should have.

I passed only one viola the following morning May 25th, from 8 to 10 A.M., that of viola # 38. This performance was so overwhelming that I simply remarked that this was the best performance I had heard. I told someone else who had missed this session that he had missed someone as good as Paganini. This may raise questions about judging, whether it is the performance or the instrument used by the performer. One could argue that "objectivity" or even fairness is not possible. There are those who say that it is the performer and not the viola, which tells the story. Some even claim that they can play as

well on a cheap factory instrument as on the ones most highly valued. There are some, even in the elitist establishments of the violin world who disclaim any value in attempting to judge the tone of violins, violas or cellos, saying that if one hundred persons had an opinion there would be one hundred different answers. There are some who even have high hopes that the answer of judging the tone of string instruments lies in complex technical and advanced "scientific" invention, with the answers coming out of a computer rather than a human being. Can you imagine hooking up a great operatic soloist to gadgets that pick up chest vibrations or sound waves and then expect to find out something from the computer?

All those who make violas or other string instruments must set up and adjust the instrument for maximal tonal output. They must also have some way that they can determine whether the viola model they are using is any good. Any attempts to do this which fail to include listener evaluation, with piano or orchestra are inadequate. Moreover, a computer will never be able to describe the emotional impact of a performance, the chief objective of the performance for the listener. The judges selected # 38 for the semi-final round.

The final session in the preliminary round was later the same morning from 10:20 to 12:30, May 25th. I passed # 41, 42, 45, 46, and 47. The judges passed to the semi-finals only # 41 and 47. Viola # 41 was very nice, with clear notes, rapid articulation, with good colors. Viola # 42 was very clear, good colors. Viola 45 had clear notes with rapid articulation, good colors, good upper strings. Viola # 46 was the best viola in the preliminary round, with the exception of viola # 38. It had clear notes, very expressive, great colors, contrasts and impact. Viola # 47 was clear and expressive, excellent tone.

From listening to all 44 violas in the preliminary round, while sitting two rows from the front and directly in front of each player, who played selections without accompaniment, the characteristics of the best violas were presented above. What can we learn from the violas, which sounded best and which I considered good enough to warrant further evaluation in the semi-final round? The basic requirement, noted for all these violas was the clarity of the notes, the clear articulation, even in rapid passages of each of these violas. There followed such characteristics as colors, contrast, expression, and favorable impact. Whether these violas would perform as satisfactorily when heard at the back of the hall, and with piano accompaniment could possibly be determined in the semi-final round.

Semi-finals

The judges advanced only nine violas to the semi-final round. Some of the violas the writer had judged to be worthy of further evaluation were not heard from again. These included violas # 17, 20, and 27 and violas # 42, 45 and 46. As noted above I thought viola # 46 was in my opinion the best viola in the preliminary round second only to viola # 38.

The judges advanced the following violas to the semi-finals, which I had rejected in the preliminary round. These included violas # 15, 19, 21, and 32.

The following are my ratings for the violas in the semi-final round the following day, 5/26.

Viola # 1 in the semi-finals (# 19 in the preliminary round, which I did not pass) had poor projection, especially with piano. The C was coarse and the lowers were not clearly heard above the piano.

Viola # 2 (# 29 in the preliminary round) did not carry, especially with piano. There was lacking colors and contrasts. This demonstrates that a viola can sound good on its own up close, but with piano and seated at the back of the hall it may not be clearly heard.

Viola # 3 (# 15 in the preliminary round) lacked clarity and articulation, the same judgment I made for this viola in the preliminary round. The judges advanced this viola to the final round.

Viola # 4 (# 41 in the preliminary round) had clear articulation. The player affected me with her charming presentation. The judges advanced this viola to the final round.

Viola # 5 (# 21 in the preliminary round) had poor articulation, coarse lowers, and scratchy uppers.

Viola # 6 (# 38 in the preliminary round) had clarity, colors, contrasts; it was a beautiful listening experience. The judges advanced this viola to the final round.

Viola # 7 (# 32 in the preliminary round), lacked colors, resonance and emotional expressiveness.

Is this getting pretty pickyish? Was I biased since I believe I knew something about this viola? Did it have an adjustment problem? This illustrates the difficulties involved in judging something as complex and important as the tone of a particular viola. I believe the judge should pass on a viola, or violist who the judge knows or suspects something about, or even knows possibly the dealer or maker of the viola, or in the case of the violist, the teacher or institute where the competitor is trained? Maybe the only fair method is to have each viola played behind a screen, with only numbers to identify each contestant?

Viola # 8 (# 4 in the preliminary round) carried well, and was judged best of all semi-finalists except Viola # 6 (# 38 in the preliminary round). This viola was advanced to the final round.

Viola # 9 (# 47 in the preliminary round) lacked power, clarity and could not be clearly heard above the piano.

Before presenting the violas in the final round, we should first consider the unfavorable characterizations I wrote down for those violas which I did not pass to the semi-final round as well as those in the semi-final round above. It should first be emphasized that our vocabulary, including my own is really quite inadequate to describe characteristics of viola tone, whether favorable or unfavorable. Some of the other difficulties have been alluded to above. I have made a sincere attempt to listen carefully to each contestant in all three rounds, sitting exactly in the same place for each contestant for the different rounds, did not know the background of any of the contestants, and consulted no one before making my judgments.

There follows below some characteristics noted for violas, which will not be numbered. The most common criticisms of the 33 or more violas, which I did not advance to the semi-final round are simply the absence of those qualities I found important for the violas, which I passed and found outstanding. The most frequently cited problem was the lack of clarity and articulation. Often cited were coarse lower strings, scratchy upper strings, or fuzzy notes, or harsh edgy upper strings. The absence of colors and contrasts were often found. Other comments such as dullness and lack of contrasts were related. Above all else the lack of an emotional response and experiencing something very beautiful is subjective but most important.

I tried to get a rough idea of the size and shape of the violas during the preliminary round. There were at least two violas that I thought were too large for the player, possibly Tertis models. There were six violas, which appeared to be based on the Erdez model.

The first two master classes were instructive. The first player in the master class conducted by Carol Rodland had what appeared to be an exceptionally large viola. Idiosyncratic shoulder rests and pads had failed to enable the player to hold the viola horizontally. It was not really possible to correct the problem despite very skillful instructions. Of course, those holding master classes cannot comment on the viola used by a player. Two other players had violas based on the Erdesz model. The first very skillfully navigated the fingerboard viola, even though the viola seemed too large for her. The last player also had a viola based on the Erdesz, which sounded very poorly. The master class the following day conducted by Nokothula Ngwenyama started out brilliantly with an outstanding player, but was followed by a player who had picked up bad habits and seemed to resist the instructions artfully given to her. But the third player also presented with another viola based on the Erdesz model and I left the master class.

During the preliminary round there were about six violas based on the Erdesz model, none of which I passed to the semi-final round. The best sound came from viola # 19, which I noted to be the “best” of the violas based on the Erdesz model. Nevertheless, I noted a fuzzy C and a lack of sufficient colors and contrast to warrant further evaluation. In fact I believe the Erdesz model will become very much like the Tertis model, something no longer used by all but a few makers and players. There have been fads and fashions in the kinds of violas thought to be an answer to the viola problem.

I wondered whether young women feel it necessary to play these violas, in order to compete with some of the big boys who can handle more readily some of the larger violas? The evening concerts featured three large violas, by Gasparo da Salo, Frirsz, and Peresson all performed by outstanding male artists, while a woman artist used a small viola! There can be no doubt that males, tall women and larger violas will still have a great influence for years to come and that large violas will continue to be played. The basic question is simply this. Why should a maker or player select a viola larger than 16 inches or so?

Now to the grand final round, which included four of the above in the semi-final round the judges advanced to compete for First, Second and Third prizes for the Primrose Competition. They included viola # 3 in the semi-final round (Viola # 15 in the preliminary round), viola # 4 in the semi-final round (# 41 in the preliminary round), viola # 6 (# 38 in the preliminary round), and viola # 8 (# 4 in the preliminary round),.

First up was Viola # 4 (# 41), different from her lovely performance the previous day in the semi-final round. The viola lacked colors, contrasts, power and emotional impact, in contrast to the previous day. Viola # 8 (# 4) was next up and I thought his playing and viola were really great and even better than the previous day. But his Paganini “La Campanella” didn’t have it and I almost “nodded off”.

Viola # 3 (# 15) was next. Once again the notes lacked clarity and articulation. My judgment was the same as I had made in the preliminary and semi-final rounds.

The next performance, viola # 6 (# 38) was the best musical performance with the best viola sound that I have ever heard, Right from the very first note of the slow movement of the Schnittke Concerto, one could tell that something extraordinary was happening. Every note was a concerto in itself, beautifully crafted with unbelievable

colors and contrasts. The stage presence was striking and completely appropriate throughout for embellishing what was heard. But I was supposed to be evaluating viola tone and not the overall performance! The viola was in fact the best I had ever heard and for me as a violinmaker, now focusing on violas. The young student was playing on his teacher, Roberto Diaz's viola, the 1739 Camillus Camilli. Like Ivry Gitlis said in the DVD *The Art of Violin*, "there was everything before Paganini and then there was Paganini", who started modern violin performance. But Paganini, although showing great interest in the viola, never made much of an impact, except secondarily through the violin. This student's performance of Paganini's *La Campanella* was absolutely superb, uniquely and clearly different from all the others, rising above all and bringing Paganini back to life. Even his interpretation of the Clarke Sonata was unique and perhaps expressed the emotional life of this great woman who had to put up with a tyrant father and a prejudiced (against women) society. It was my impression that my reactions were shared by most in the audience. I believe we have all witnessed something very great. The viola has become the equal to the violin and has a great and promising future in the hands of this student and other young students who performed brilliantly in this competition.

At the 2006 Viola Congress in Montreal I recorded my impressions of each of the 45 violas played in sequence by Roberto Diaz in the large concert hall well attended. I rated 11 out of 45 good for concert performance. I wondered whether this finding was the result of possible poor adjustment of the violas that lacked clarity and power? This was about the same result as I had obtained at the Primrose Competition at BYU in 2005, about one out of four with good tone. Names of makers, size of violas, and the price range of the violas were distributed after the presentation. My favorites were # 13, # 38, and # 39. # 13 was my own viola based on the Camillus Camilli. # 38 was a viola made by Jean Jacques Rampal, and # 39 was a viola made by Nicolas Friz, 17 1/8 inches.

I spoke with Rampal after the presentation and played scales and obtained measurements on his viola, 16 5/16 inches. He stated that his viola was based on the same model that another violinmaker in the shop of Etienne Vatelot had made for Antoine Tamestit. The measurements were the same as that for my viola # 13, except for a slightly wider upper bout - 200 mm., a slightly narrower lower bout - 240 mm., and a narrower C-bout - 136 mm. The height of the arching was not as high as my viola but the longitudinal arch extended near both ends. Most significantly, the length of the middle bout was 103 mm., compared to 92 mm for my viola # 13. I said to Mr. Rampal that if the middle bout on this model were 93 mm. long instead of 103 mm. it could become a model for a 16 inch viola.

All but three of those I rated satisfactory fell within the 15 3/4 to 16 1/4 body size (three out of eleven). There was only one large viola, # 39 by Friz. Most of the violas played by Diaz and which I rejected for one reason or another were larger than 16 1/4" (20 larger than 16 1/4" and 14 violas measured 15 3/4" to 16 1/4"). There was no relationship between price of viola and tone.

At the Montreal Congress I also recorded my impressions of the tone of each soloist at the congress, but I can present here just a few memorable impressions. The Brescian violas were represented very adequately throughout the Congress. The remarkable performance of Lars Anders Tompter on a large Gasparo da Salo viola performing the Shostakovich Sonata for cello transcribed for the viola was a marvelous

performance. The clear and resonant tones which filled the hall were remarkable and the drama intense. The viola of Michel Michalakakos, also a Gasparo da Salo, had clarity, power, sonority and expressiveness. A lecture recital by Bruno Giurano demonstrated the beautiful sonority of his viola, which Maurice Riley, p 201 of Volume II states is a Michele Deconnet, Venice, 1766, with a body length of 16 in. This viola also was very clearly and beautifully heard in the Mozart String Quintet, No. 2 in C major, K 515. The question of size versus tone was first demonstrated by a beautiful tone coming from a 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches Testore viola, played by Hsin -Yun Huang. The upper strings were very beautiful and yet the lower strings had clarity and power.

The winners of the Lionel Tertis (2003), Munich (2004) and Primrose (2005) competitions performed in a small hall. I was impressed with the good tone of their violas. I was especially pleased with Jennifer Stumm's performance and the tone of her viola, a Monteggazza. The Munich winner, Antoine Tamestit also performed in concert and I thought his viola was excellent, a modern viola based on a Brescian model made by a Paris maker in the shop of Etienne Vatelot.

The performance of Kim Kashkashian on the last day of the Montreal congress 6/11/06 was the most important event for me of the congress. The viola she used was about 16 inches body length with nicely sloping shoulders of the upper bouts and looked from where I was sitting as a perfectly "normal" contralto viola. It was the best viola that I had ever heard. It had clarity of all notes and excellent projection, even with a large grand piano with the lid fully opened. There was a great range of power on all strings, and with artful bowing an entire range of colors and contrasts were sounded. There were contrasts on each string at the will and art of the performer. The viola sang in a most beautiful manner. I regarded this viola, a Nicola Bergonzi viola, as the prototype for the "Standard Viola" with the demonstration of an ideal viola tone.