

Preface

In an interview by David Dalton, William Primrose was asked why we don't have soloists like Corelli, Verucini, and other prominent violinists to the present for the viola. Primrose replied: "The reason is that the viola was not a brilliant, coluratura instrument like the violin – and that composers didn't write for it" (*Primrose- A Violist's Legacy*).

In contrast to the viola the violin has been standardized for body size and string length for more than three hundred years (with later change of the neck length). Three generations of Amatis produced hundreds of violins, which were at one time preferred by players. Most makers have used models of Stradivari and Guarnerius del Gesu. Stradivari made hundreds of violins, experimenting with several models before perfecting his marvelous forma G violins, a model for del Gesu's early violins..

No one has done this for the viola. Stradivari made less than twenty violas. Many violinmakers have used one of the Andrea Guarneri violas as a model especially during the past two decades. Andrea Guarneri made only a few violas and it should be pointed out that a few violas can serve as examples or inspiration, but as with the violin, a large sample is required before any conclusions can be relied on. One or two violas here and there cannot form the basis for any conclusions about what kind of viola model should be accepted. Science requires more than application of procedures including impartial evaluations based on adequate samples, with confirmation of results.

Primrose complained of the lack of clarity and responsiveness of the mid range of the lower strings on the Primrose Guarneri viola, preferring the first position and advocated use of open strings. He thought the Stradivari violas were weak on the lower strings. The Hill brothers also came to the same conclusion.

From attending Viola Congresses during recent years, it appears that makers have produced many violas in the range of 15 ¾ to 16 ¼ inches. (Rene Morel recommends a viola of 16 ¼ inches with a string length of 14 ¾ inches). Many in this range sound excellent, upon playing and listening to thirty-five to forty-five violas brought to Viola Congresses by makers and played by great performers such as Coletti, Diaz and Neubauer. It remains the task of players and makers to research this question.

The viola remains the greatest challenge for the maker. The question of what a viola should sound like remains one of the most important things basic to acceptance of any "standard viola" or even what model a maker should use. My own approach stems from a life long love of music, listening many hours each day to music and attending as many concerts as possible. In 1960 I purchased from Wurlitzer an old Austrian (1800) viola and began to play viola in 1960, having studied violin as a youth.

I have liked what I've heard live and on recordings, and most importantly the ability to observe and take measurements from violas made by Adolph Moenig, 1873 (Coletti), the Camillus Camilli viola, 1739 (Diaz), and Carlo Guiseppe Testore, 1710 (Vincent Deprecq). The closest thing to an ideal standard viola, about 16 inches body length, is the remarkable Nicola Bergonzi viola used by Kim Kashkashian.

Credits can go not only to the references cited but also to my teachers and all the makers who have inspired me over the years. The writer appreciates the help he received when first starting to make violins, violas and cellos. In particular Victor Gardener, whose shop was 2½ hours from my Brookings Oregon home, was always willing to

share with me his own personal experiences with violinmaking and I received a good deal of practical instruction on how to make violins. I owe to him the good fortune in starting on good models for violin, viola and cello as well as an introduction to the study of wood, which was Victor's particular interest.

The writer is also grateful to Robert Cauer, whose shop is in Los Angeles near the Hollywood bowl. I am grateful for spending several weeks in his shop learning how to varnish as well as set up instruments. I learned a good deal from his critiques and suggestions about my instruments, which he purchased. I have used his shop manual ever since. I also keep Henry Strobel's *Useful Measurements for Violin Makers* handy. I should mention two other books, which I kept in the shop and were of value. The first was Simone Sacconi's *Secrets of Stradivari*, from which I tried to base details of design and construction, regardless of model used. The other book is Hans Weissnar's *Violin Restoration*, which was invaluable especially when I received my cellos back for repairs.

Finally, I should express appreciation for the contribution of Eugene Andrie, who came to Brookings about the same time as I, 25 years ago, after his retirement as Professor of Music at the University of Montana, and founder-conductor of the Missoula Symphony, among many other things. His generous involvement established many musical activities in Brookings, including our Friends of Music organization, which has brought many concerts to Brookings during the past 20 years. He also founded the Curry Del Norte Chamber Orchestra fifteen years ago, in addition to playing in many concerts and teaching many young students. His ability to create beautiful and very expressive music, his remarkable bowing and his presence will always be remembered and serve as an example.