

THE SOUNDPOST

Newsletter of the Pacific Northwest Viols – A chapter of the Viola da Gamba Society of America
On the web: WWW.PNVIOLS.ORG

The President's Message

Bill Warren



Spring at last! It is a welcome change to have more daylight with flowers and trees in bloom all around after such a long rainy gray winter. I have also enjoyed the wild weather of spring with alternating rain squalls, wind, and sun on the same day. Hopefully this puts you in a proper mood to attend our next Play Day Saturday April 29 when our presenter will be David Morris. For those of you who have worked with David in previous workshops, you know that he is an amazing and inspiring teacher, so you will not want to miss

his presentation for the Grand Consort in the morning and coached ensemble sessions in the afternoon. As always, our Play Day will be at Queen Anne Christian Church with sign-up at 9:30 and Grand Consort at 10 a.m. For further details about David see the article about him in this edition of The Soundpost.

We will have our Annual Meeting this Play Day just before the lunch break. This is an important time to get updates from all of our committee chairs, acknowledge those who have performed at QACC worship services in return for our use of QACC facilities for our Play Days, and to get an update about our ongoing relationship with QACC. We also have four board members whose terms are expiring, so we will have elections for those four positions. Let me know if you are interested in joining our board and contributing to keeping our organization viable!

Many thanks to Lee Inman for his presentation at the March 4 Play Day. Unfortunately, I was out of town and missed it but I understand that it was excellent as always. Be sure to read the write-up from Olga Hauptmann about his presentation entitled "The 'Inner Game' of Playing the Viol". We are fortunate to have Lee as a mentor and inspiration for our viol playing!

Play Day Schedule

- 9:30 am - Check in, sign up for consorts, tune
- 10:00 am - Grand Consort Presentation
- 11:30 am - Annual Meeting
- 12:00 pm - Lunch Break
- 1:00 pm - First Consort Session
- 2:30 pm - Second Consort Session
- 4:00 pm - Clean up

\$20 Fee per participant
A = 415

Saturday, April 29th: David Morris

Play Day Location
Queen Anne Christian Church
1316 3rd Ave. W
Seattle, WA 98119



A reminder that as you are planning your summer activities, consider the opportunity to attend the Port Townsend Early Music Workshop presented by the Seattle Recorder Society at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma. Of interest to viol players is the faculty of Joanna Blendulf, Jack Ashworth, Wendy Gillespie, and Ellen Seibert, in addition to the other outstanding faculty for the workshop. The venue and food at UPS are outstanding.

Check out this link to the workshop if you are interested:

<http://www.seattle-recorder.org/workshop>.

I hope that all of you will be able to attend our next Play Day April 29 at Queen Anne Christian Church.

David Morris leads PNV's April Play Day – Saturday, April 29th

Courtesy of David Morris



Dubbed a “basso continuo wizard” by Gramophone (UK), David Morris has made a specialty of performing 17th- and 18th-c. music on a variety of historical bass instruments. He has performed in the U.S. and abroad with the Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, Tafelmusik, the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Mark Morris Dance Group. He has recorded for Harmonia Mundi, Drag City Records (Joanna Newsom’s double-CD, *Have One on Me*), CBC/ Radio-Canada and New Line Cinema (as viola da gamba soloist for *The Nativity Story*).

David has planned a “Titan” of a Play Day for us filled with music by two Titans of the late 17th century -- Lully and Purcell. We’ll perform an overture and chaconne by Lully, and then we’ll work on a lovely Purcell suite for strings (adapted by the composer from an earlier ode for Charles II). All of this connects very nicely to the production of *Dido and Aeneas* that David will be performing in with Pacific MusicWorks and the UW Chamber Singers at the Nordstrom Recital Hall on Saturday evening at 7:30PM and at Meany Hall on Sunday at 2PM.

A Review of our March Play Day with Lee Inman

Olga Hauptman

Lee Inman presented a very interesting and helpful session to the participants of PNV’s March 4th Play Day – “The ‘Inner Game’ of Playing the Viol, or Thinking Your Way to Better Musicianship”.

Lee has the gift for teaching students how to teach themselves. He prefaced the class by saying

that one must use one's left hand, one's right hand, and one's HEAD! He then addressed the various issues that undermine the confidence of the player.

To feel more comfortable about sight reading, Lee helped us realize we need to keep our eyes ahead of our playing, by at least one note (and preferably more!). It's even more helpful to take in groups of notes, especially with scales and arpeggios. If you practice scales and arpeggios, you will spot those passages more quickly, and your left hand will more intuitively coordinate with your eyes. No matter what's going on with your hand, however, it is most important to keep counting, to aim for the downbeats, and thereby stay in the game.



If you are concerned about the quality of your sound, Lee had some suggestions for re-conceptualizing the approach to bowing. He passed out rubber bands which we stretched between our thumb and a finger in order to demonstrate the flexibility and elasticity of both the strings and bow. Imagine curves rather than straight, rigid lines. The bow doesn't have to be always parallel to the bridge. You can hurt yourself trying to force such a relationship! Be responsive to the natural curves which will decrease the amount of effort to control, and your sound will be better.

Take the time in your practice room to get to know the most natural motions for your body. Experiment with a very slow bow, make some crunchy sounds and feel the elasticity of the hair and strings; try a light, fast bow and feel the difference in tone made by the difference in energy. Get to know the best energy for various sounds at various contact points. Also try endowing your sound with a variety of emotions. How can you make your sound sleepy, angry, babyish—you name it and go for it!

Lee had a few more pointers about practicing: Pay attention to your mistakes. Don't fret too much over "careless" ones, but make sure you understand the cause of those that are "honest". If it's a problem with string crossing, for example, determine which hand is getting in the way. Put one hand in charge of the other and let it lead. In short, find the problems behind the problems.

We worked on three very lovely pieces all in three parts: a *Pavana* by Henri du Mont; Elway Bevin's *Browning*; and an *Ayre* by William Drew.

Lee added breadth to his presentation with several spontaneous tidbits of information. For example, when tuning in a group, play only as loud as you need to, and stop when you have the pitch. He recommends taking the pitches from one donor who gives all the reference notes from fretted pitches on one string, and at the end gets a personal courtesy tuning. Another: try eliminating a wolf tone by squeezing your instrument, to slightly change the shape of its resonating chamber. And the last example I'll include is that we should remember that the galliard is counted in six beats, not three!

We are so lucky to have Lee among us!

The Viol Curmudgeon: What's Inside Your Viol?

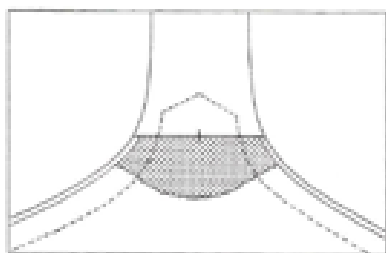
Part 1: The Blocks & Linings

Courtesy of Bill Monical and Cascadia Viols

These largely hidden assets in your instrument play a huge role in both structural stability and sound quality. They are usually of the same material, and fashioned of spruce, willow, or poplar...woods that are both light in weight and resistant to shrinkage and splitting during changes of temperature and humidity, all while under constant string tension.

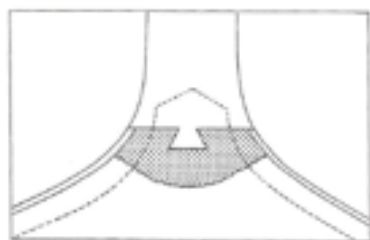
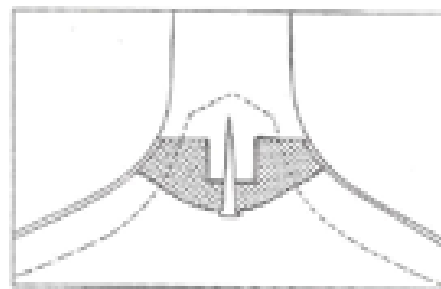
The Top Block:

The neck is permanently attached and glued to the top block. It is the largest and thickest block inside a viol that supports and distributes string tension to the table and throughout the instrument. The methods of fastening the neck have evolved over time, each improvement strengthening and increasing the physical reliability, pitch, and stability of the instrument.



Early viols, like lutes, were built with the neck simply glued to the top block with a simple locating pin and without other reinforcement. If the neck became loose, it usually fractured the supporting button of the back, making repairs extremely difficult and costly.

17th century English instruments added a tenon extension of the neck foot set into the block and secured with a nail for strength and stability. The tenon also made setting the neck easier by locating its position more accurately before gluing.



Modern instruments typically have a dovetail extension of the neck foot attachment to the top block; this type of extension is easy to fit to the block with great accuracy, and makes the whole construction immensely strong, thus reducing the likelihood of shifting under string tension or coming loose over time.

The Corner Blocks:

These four small, lightweight blocks, also of spruce, willow, or poplar, reinforce and strengthen the corner rib joints and miters and give increased body rigidity. This stability provides increased

volume, concentration of sound, and resonance by supporting the movement and vibrating flexibility of the table.

The Bottom Block:

An unsung hero, the strong and solid bottom block is almost totally responsible for an instrument remaining in stable tuning. It also helps support the rib structure and importantly withstands tension of the strings pulling the tailpiece toward the bridge, from either a fitted endpin and tailgut or a solid and stiff inlaid tailpiece pin, commonly of stained maple, rosewood, or ebony.

The Linings:

Early viols, like lutes, had most gluing surfaces reinforced with strips of linen saturated with hide glue to strengthen the joined surfaces between the thin (1.0–1.5mm) ribs necessary for instrument resonance, and the thicker outer edges of the instrument's back. Usually small reinforcing "studs" or cleats were glued to the joints of ribs and table edges. Later in the 17th century and beyond, with the adoption of spruce, willow, poplar, or walnut wooden linings to replace linen, linings could now be used on glued surfaces of both back and table, simplifying the construction process. In addition, instrument maintenance and repair were now much simplified, and wooden linings became virtually universally employed by makers of viols as well as instruments of the violin family.

Next time, in Part 2, we will explore musical elements of sound and the "amazing" bass bar, soundpost, and soundpost bar inside your viol.

Bass Viol for Sale

For Sale: Bass Viol, 6-string, by Wang Zhi Ming (2007) for Lu-Mi. Barak Norman, 65cm. scale length. Has Pegheds. Bow by Charlie Ogle workshop.

Includes hard and soft cases. Asking \$3500.
Contact Richard Vernier, verniernw@gmail.com
or 253-205-5240.



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Sammamish, WA 98074

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Pacific Northwest Viols - 2016-2017 Season

PNV Play Day Dates (Saturdays):

*\$20 Fee per participant
A = 415*

- ❖ October 8, 2016: Chris Briden
- ❖ November 19, 2016: Joanna Blendulf
- ❖ January 21, 2017: Tim Scott
- ❖ March 4, 2017: Lee Inman
- ❖ **April 29, 2017: David Morris**

Play Day location:

***Queen Anne Christian
Church***

*1316 3rd Ave. W
Seattle, WA 98119*

Pacific Northwest Viols, Board Members (2016-2017)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| ❖ Bill Warren, President | ❖ Chris Briden, Outreach |
| ❖ Jon Brenner, Secretary, Programs | ❖ Michael King, Communications & Member at Large |
| ❖ TBD, Venue Coordinator | ❖ Vicki Hoffman, Programs |
| ❖ Michael LaGaly, Treasurer | ❖ Olga Hauptman, Instrument Rental |
| ❖ Janet Slack, Membership Custodian | |

Find Pacific Northwest Viols on the web at: *http://www.pnviols.org and on Facebook*

*The **Soundpost** welcomes reader contributions of any kind: articles, commentary, personal stories, event reportage. E-Mail is preferred, but postal mail or napkin scribbles are all gladly received, as well.*

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