

# British Viola Society

## Newsletter

2012



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## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> - Louise Lansdown	P. 2 - 4
<b>Supporting the Viola</b> - Simon Rowland-Jones	P. 5 - 10
<b>The Latent Voice</b> - Suzie Meszaros	P.12 - 13
<b>Watson Forbes</b> - Martin Outram	P. 15 - 19
<b>The 40<sup>th</sup> International Viola Congress</b> - Nicola Hicks	P. 21-22
<b>Membership Form</b>	P. 23



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# **BVS Newsletter**

## **Introduction**

Welcome to the very first British Viola Society Newsletter – we really hope you enjoy this first publication. The society is planning to issue an annual newsletter to members, so please do sign up to join and we hope to move from strength to strength in the coming months and years. A huge thank you to those people who have written such valuable, fascinating and informative contributions. A massive thank you also to Anne-Marie Fairhurst (Treasurer) and Janet Pazio (Secretary) who have willingly given their time for nothing to assist with making this first newsletter possible! There is much to remind us about what is great about the British Viola Tradition in this newsletter and we hope you enjoy perusing.

The British Viola Society is planning to hold it's official launch on:

**Sunday 14 October**

**Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester**

**Carole Nash Recital Room**

**10.00-18.00**

**Everyone is welcome and the day is being provided free of charge!!!!!!** The day will be a celebration of young British Violists – with recitals, ensembles and master classes to enjoy. PLEASE DO JOIN US AND TELL YOUR FRIENDS!! More details on the programme and exact timings will be found on our website from September onwards:

[www.britishviolasociety.co.uk](http://www.britishviolasociety.co.uk)

A little history for you - The British Viola Society, originally formed as the English Viola Society in September 2007 by Professor John White (Honorary President) and Dr Louise Lansdown (President). The society aims to support, promote and encourage every aspect of playing, composing and research relevant to the viola in Great Britain. The rich and vast heritage of wonderful British violists and compositions gives the society a secure and multi-faceted foundation.

If you would like to know anymore about the board, photos and biographies can be found on the website: [www.britishviolasociety.co.uk](http://www.britishviolasociety.co.uk)

This society exists for the benefit of violists. Please send any information you would like us to advertise for you pertaining to concerts and publications of viola music. If you would like to get involved, join the society, teaching, congresses, we would love to hear from you.

At the moment we are small and looking for more members to join and help us build a catalogue of British Viola Music, Events, Teachers, Chamber Musicians, Orchestral Players, Amateurs, Students, New Compositions.....please help us!

The British Viola Society is one of 19 sections belonging to the International Viola Society. It is the International Viola Society that hosts an International Viola Congress every year in a different part of the world. The 40<sup>th</sup> International Viola Congress took place in June at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester USA 2012 and the 41<sup>st</sup> International Viola Congress will be in Krakow, Poland from 12-15 September 2013, hosted by the Polish Viola Society. If you would like to find out more about the IVS, it's aims, work and the previous 39 congresses do look at the website listed at the end of the following paragraph.

You are all of course invited to these annual viola parties - each lasting around 4 or 5 days. Memorable gatherings of soloists, chamber musicians, orchestral players, pedagogues, students, composers and luthiers from around the globe! It is an invaluable opportunity to meet fellow violists and build lasting friendships, learn about new compositions and enjoy fabulous international connections. Violists are most certainly the most warm-hearted and open-minded breed of all musicians - providing an all embracing and enthralling atmosphere at all of these events. If you would like to know anymore about the International Viola Society please look on the website: [www.internationalviolasociety.org](http://www.internationalviolasociety.org)

The British Viola Society Newsletter can also be downloaded from the BVS home page on our website: [www.britishviolasociety.co.uk](http://www.britishviolasociety.co.uk), and if anyone would like to advertise or

contribute articles please write to Janet Pazio (Secretary) whose email address is on the contact page. **The closing date for 2013 newsletter will be 30 June!**

Please do feel free to contribute to the various sections under Resources or to advertise Jobs or request teachers in any area in the UK on our website. Please email either on the Contact page on our website.

The site will be updated with current and upcoming viola events, new compositions, appointments, teachers, luthiers, publications and news – so please do add your own. This is a forum for violists around the UK to be in touch and tell everyone what you are doing.

If you would like to join, there is a membership form online and also included in the newsletter. All payments can be made via Paypal online. The British Viola Society is a registered charity, so your membership fee can be used a tax deduction. It is £15.00 a year per person and Students and Pensioners £10.00! All membership money will be used to run the website, publish a newsletter, create opportunities for violists, obtain discounts at viola events and to host one official British Viola Society Event every year.

If you would like to organize any British Viola Society Events in your area – no matter how small or big. Tell us and all your friends and we can help you advertise!

## SUPPORTING THE VIOLA

**Simon Rowland-Jones**

**What was the biggest technical issue you faced when you became a violist?** I am thinking mainly of those of us who began musical life as violinists and subsequently 'upgraded' to the viola. But of course the same issue can affect all violists at different points in their development. Both as a player, I changed to viola at the age of thirteen, and as a teacher of conservatoire students most of whom changed at a similar point in their lives, the most pressing question for all concerned is 'How do I make a real viola sound?'. By which I suppose we mean a sound that is weightier than the one we have been making on the violin. Where does that extra weight come from? Where does the depth and richness of tone that we associate with good viola playing come from?

Clearly the will to make a good, rich, warm viola sound is a prerequisite to finding it and I have often found it necessary as a teacher to make students aware of the viola's miraculous tonal potential, thereby boosting that will. Once the desire is there then we quickly find ourselves thinking about right arm weight and how to release more of it into the string. The objective is simple enough but the task invariably turns out to be sufficiently complicated that the process of learning how to enrich our sound can be a long and frustrating one.

**We need to think of two things:**

1. How to relax the right arm sufficiently that the full weight of the arm can be hanging in the string? (Of course point of contact, bow speed and amount of bow-hair are also vital factors in good and varied sound production)
2. How to support the viola with the left arm in a way that is relaxed, ready to receive the full weight of the right arm and actively involved in the sound making process? (A relaxed stance and shoulders are crucial here)

1. A good exercise to achieve awareness of arm weight is as follows: standing with unlocked knees, swing both arms freely back and forth. Become aware of your shoulders and be sure that they are fully relaxed, i.e. as low as they naturally go. After some relaxed arm swinging, on a forward swing bring your left arm in front of you, hand about eight inches in front of your chest (palm facing you) and let your right wrist flop onto the base of your left hand first finger. Now you should be able to experience just how heavy your right arm is. Repeat the exercise a number of times until you feel the full weight of the right arm hanging on your left hand.

## ILLUSTRATION 1



2. Do this without any added shoulder support (shoulder rest or pad). Still standing with unlocked knees so that the whole of the top half of your body is relaxed, lift the viola high then rest it on your collar-bone. Do not put your chin on the chin rest – the shoulders and head are completely free with the viola resting in the left hand. Now, move scroll of the viola freely up and down, side to side and finally in circles in both directions. Resist any temptation to hold the viola with your shoulder and chin; it should be resting quite simply in two places, the left hand and on the collar-bone.

## ILLUSTRATION 2



**What is the precise purpose of these two exercises?** Imagine your point of contact as a point of light suspended in space in front of you. This tiny spec of light can vary in intensity from a pale white to a fiery red. This imaginary light represents your sound and its latent range of intensities, your sound-point.

The object of the two exercises is to help arrange yourself around the sound-point in such a way that you can make the light shine in all its various colours, in the most natural way possible. Instead of the bow pressing into the string, both hands (arms) are actively involved in producing the sound, you can imagine a friction between the hands. Thinking this way should create the purest sound, the sound in which the instrument's natural harmonics will ring most freely. Therefore we also need to use our bodies in the most natural way possible to create it, i.e. without causing any unnecessary stress.

What is wrong with holding the viola by lifting the shoulder and locking it in place with the chin, i.e. without the left hand providing any support? Just experiment for a moment. Put on your normal shoulder rest and clamp the viola tight between the shoulder and the chin. Now play some long heavy bows. Repeat the long heavy bows but now with no shoulder rest and with the viola held high, off the shoulder, resting equally on the collar-bone and in the left hand so that both shoulders are completely relaxed; feel that contact and friction between the two hands, that all-round sound production. You should hear a huge difference in the quality of the first tightly-produced sound, where the bow arm was probably pressing the bow into the string, and the second freely-produced sound, where with both shoulders relaxed, the full weight of the right arm was resting on the string



without pressing or forcing. Perhaps we can now begin to realize the huge potential of that sound-point.

**How to support the viola?** Let's keep uppermost in our minds the need to keep the relaxed stance and relaxed shoulder position. The question then is, how can we support the viola sufficiently at both ends so that we can play, shift, vibrate etc. without it feeling an impossible burden? Should we use any added shoulder support or would it be best to support it quite simply on the collar-bone and chin at one end and in the left hand at the other? The latter, support-less way works beautifully for some but for most of us puts too much stress on the left hand and causes problems with shifting. So, assuming that we do feel the need for some added support, try the following:

3. Return to the same position as in illustration 2. i.e. simply resting the viola on the collar-bone. Now reach round with your right hand and place the hand on your shoulder close to your collar-bone. You will find that the gap is easily filled by your hand.

#### ILLUSTRATION 3



Interesting? But many of us are using large, attractively designed, expensive 'scaffolding' types of shoulder rests which try to fill a much bigger gap further away from the neck. They may make us feel comfortable and secure at first but often in the end lead to lifting and locking the shoulder by holding the viola in a fixed, rigid position. So instead of **freeing** us up they tend to **tie** us up, tightening our shoulders, inducing pressing with the bow rather than creating an all-round supported sound-point. Of course there's nothing wrong with

using 'scaffolding' if you are not relying on it 100%, but as soon as you put that type of shoulder support on there will always be the temptation to bring the shoulder up and the chin down to the point where the viola is sticking out in front of you leaving left hand support superfluous.

But when there is the sensation of viola weight in the left hand, this not only improves sound but brings a hugely beneficial side-effect; you gain a more certain and precise feeling of where you are on the instrument. It helps shifting and intonation a lot. The weight somehow aids physical memory.

**Added support to the shoulder.** To replace your right hand filling that gap between your collar-bone and the viola, all you need is a couple of elastic bands and a foam pad for polishing cars! For many years I used a specially made pad produced by Gewa, their Shoulder Pad IIA. It is a kidney-shaped pad that does the job well enough but, after having tried them with a number of students, most find that they a) slip about too much and b) cause the viola to swing round to the right and down.

A few years ago, on the day before my summer course in Norfolk, I wandered into Motorworld in King's Lynn vaguely wondering if there was perhaps some kind of car-washing sponge that might do the job. Amazed to find they had exactly what I was looking for in the form of a car polishing pad that was firm enough to be supportive. I have used this (bright yellow!) inexpensive circular pad from that day on and find it ideal, as do many others who I have told about it. This is how it attaches to the viola.

#### ILLUSTRATION 4



The pad has the added advantage of a cover with an opening, which is intended for your hand (for those who use these pads to their polish cars!) If the pad is not sufficiently deep you can put a small folded duster in the opening to increase the depth, either all over or on one side. By some miracle Motorworld designed the perfect viola shoulder pad without even knowing they were doing it. The Car Plan - Triplewax - Polish Applicator Pad No.1. They currently cost all of £1.99. It's probably worth buying half a dozen at that price in case they stop making them or change the design. Here is the link:

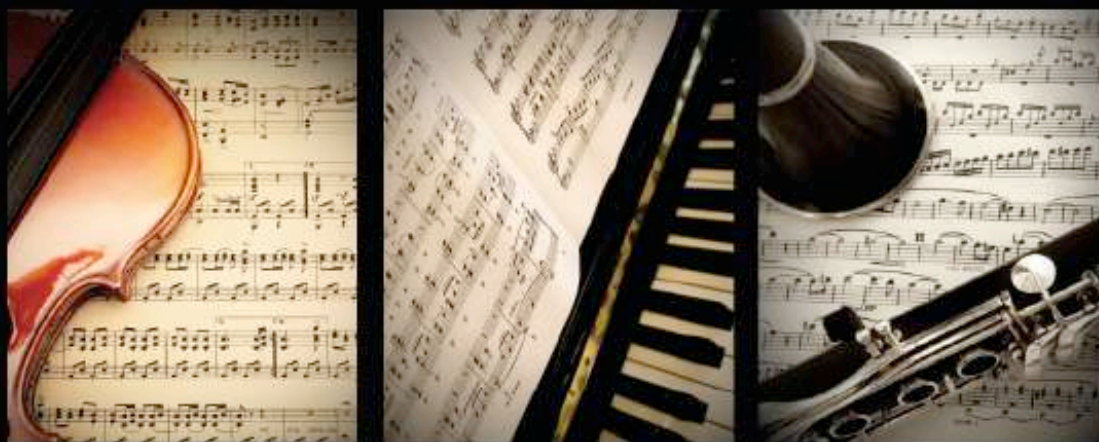
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There are other alternatives, such as using a folded duster placed on the collar-bone (or attached to the viola as in the illustration above), or putting the pad or duster on you rather than the viola, i.e. under what you are wearing. In the end what really matters is that the viola is supported without creating tension in the shoulders and that the weight of your right arm can be allowed to drop freely into the string.

**What the pad does so well** is to fill the gap between the viola and the shoulder in an unobtrusive, flexible way, while at the same time providing real support close to the neck where the gap is much less. The support may not feel as solid as other types of shoulder rests but it leaves the player much freer, less fixed and always aware of where and how the sound the being made. It seems to provide an ideal middle way between no added shoulder support and scaffolding.

**Long neck?** If you have a long neck and find that, with the viola resting on the collar-bone, the head has to bow impossibly low to reach the chin-rest, then you might want to consider finding a higher chin rest. Far better to make up the difference on top of the viola rather than underneath, where, assuming the instrument is simply resting on the collar-bone the gap is much the same for all of us.

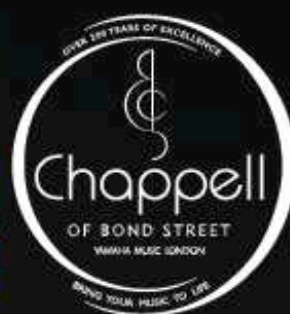
**50/50** Once the viola is resting 50/50 on the collar-bone and in the left hand then both shoulders are completely relaxed and great sound production can begin to take place. The left hand lifts the viola up to meet a relaxed bow-arm and your sound-point begins to glow. As soon as you become aware of that sound-point and hear those harmonics ringing freely you will know you are on the right track. The potential sound world is huge and the release from physical tension liberating.



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## The Latent Voice

Susie Meszaros

We all wince when reminded of Hans Keller's contention that the profession of a violist is a 'phony' one.

It has been claimed that a violinist can take as little as twenty minutes to learn the alto clef and just two or three days to master the tone of the instrument. Flippant though it may be, there is truth in it. Like many players I started on violin (I still switch from one to the other) and got the hang of the clef the quick way: by transposing treble clef down a third. As for the tone, it was like meeting something familiar and I was immediately drawn into it. What Keller meant was that the viola is just an offshoot of the violin and therefore there is no justification for specialisation.

One of the greatest violinists to turn his hand to the viola was Yehudi Menuhin. I first played my viola to him at the age of fifteen - until then I'd only played the violin. He found it so surprising he burst out: "Oh my goodness! The little girl has grown a beard!" He then gave me the first of many wonderful lessons on viola, culminating in a performance of Mozart's G major Duo with him at the Wigmore Hall. (During the dress rehearsal his wife Diana shouted down from the back of the hall: "Yehudi! You're too loud!" which pleased me greatly as I was quite tiny and likewise my viola.)

All great musicians are unique but there was something especially distinctive about Menuhin's sound - quite apart from his interpretation - which made it instantly recognisable. In large part this was due to the accommodation of a long-standing bow shake which expressed itself as his trademark exaggerated portato.

His own recording of the Walton viola concerto is sublime - my personal favourite of the work in fact - and it takes but a few bars to know it is unmistakably him, despite it being on a different instrument. Paradoxically, as he instinctively adjusts and adapts to the different tonal demands of the viola, producing a very 'violistic' sound, yet this just reinforces and affirms that same personal voice.

The definition of 'instrument', musical or otherwise, is: *a* means, medium or agency. It is an enabler comprising a range of potentials and limitations according to its individual properties. Of course there are some very fine and valuable musical instruments out there, but largely as a result of this, we have come to fetishise them, inflating the importance they play in the making of a sound. Conversely this diminishes our appreciation of the very material nature of sound itself, where it originates and to what degree we can manipulate and engineer it, transcending the limitations at the same time as utilising the potentials particular to that instrument. The object is not so much the physical instrument, then, as the sound itself which we mould and sculpt from our inner voice. Certainly this intense sense of

tangibility applies to my own experience. Simply put, playing is like spinning a thread, and not just an imagined one - it is as palpable to me as an actual substance.

So where does that latent inner voice reside? Is it after all just in our imagination or somewhere more concrete?

Much interesting research has been conducted on the activity of the vocal chords when listening to music and, as I discovered in a paper by Björn Vickoff (Musicology and Film Studies) and Helge Malmgrem (Dept of Philosophy) and Göteborg University, Sweden, the most striking evidence of this is that:

*"Babies as young as thirty minutes old have been proven to imitate mouth movements..*

*..This sensitivity to voices should according to action-perception theory be due to our highly developed motor ability to produce vocal sounds (the condition for empathy). It explains the automated connection between a heard tone and the motor production of this tone. We can step up to the piano, play a tone and then immediately sing it. A choir leader can give the voices tone and the whole choir starts singing at command. Almost anyone can imagine a tone and then sing it. **The explanation is that hearing it or imagining it is to rehearse the motor action latently without being aware of it.**" (my emphasis)*

*Training makes the player as sensitive to the sound quality of the instrument as others are to voices"*

So the good news is that we are all musicians when we listen to music, whether we have ever touched an instrument or not (..how often I've met people who modestly claim they love music but 'know nothing about it' - a notion I refute.)

Going back to Menuhin; that the cause of his exaggerated portato was the probable effect of stress rather than choice or an innate characteristic - nevertheless it saturated the fibres of his sound, affecting the colours and contours of his phrasing, influencing his concept of the music and in no way diminishing his powers. He remained one of the most memorable musicians of all time. I would argue that this lends weight to the idea that what we are expressively is indivisible from our physicality.

So when we choose a particular instrument we are really choosing something about ourselves. We search among these external qualities for a resonance with our internal ones, and in some of us this latent voice will best be realised on a viola rather than a violin.

By following the reasoning that it is phony for a violist to specialise, surely it is as absurd for a violinist not to play viola, and the 'professional violinist' becomes equally phony.

So, with all due respect, I don't fully agree with Mr Keller on this one.

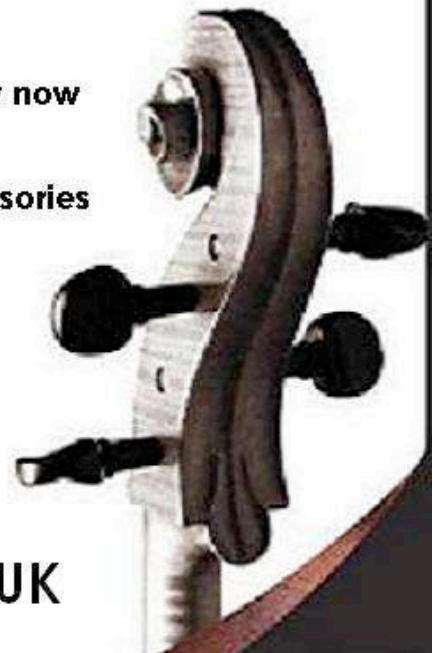
He did say something about professional music critics however...



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## Watson Forbes: Versatile Violist

Martin Outram

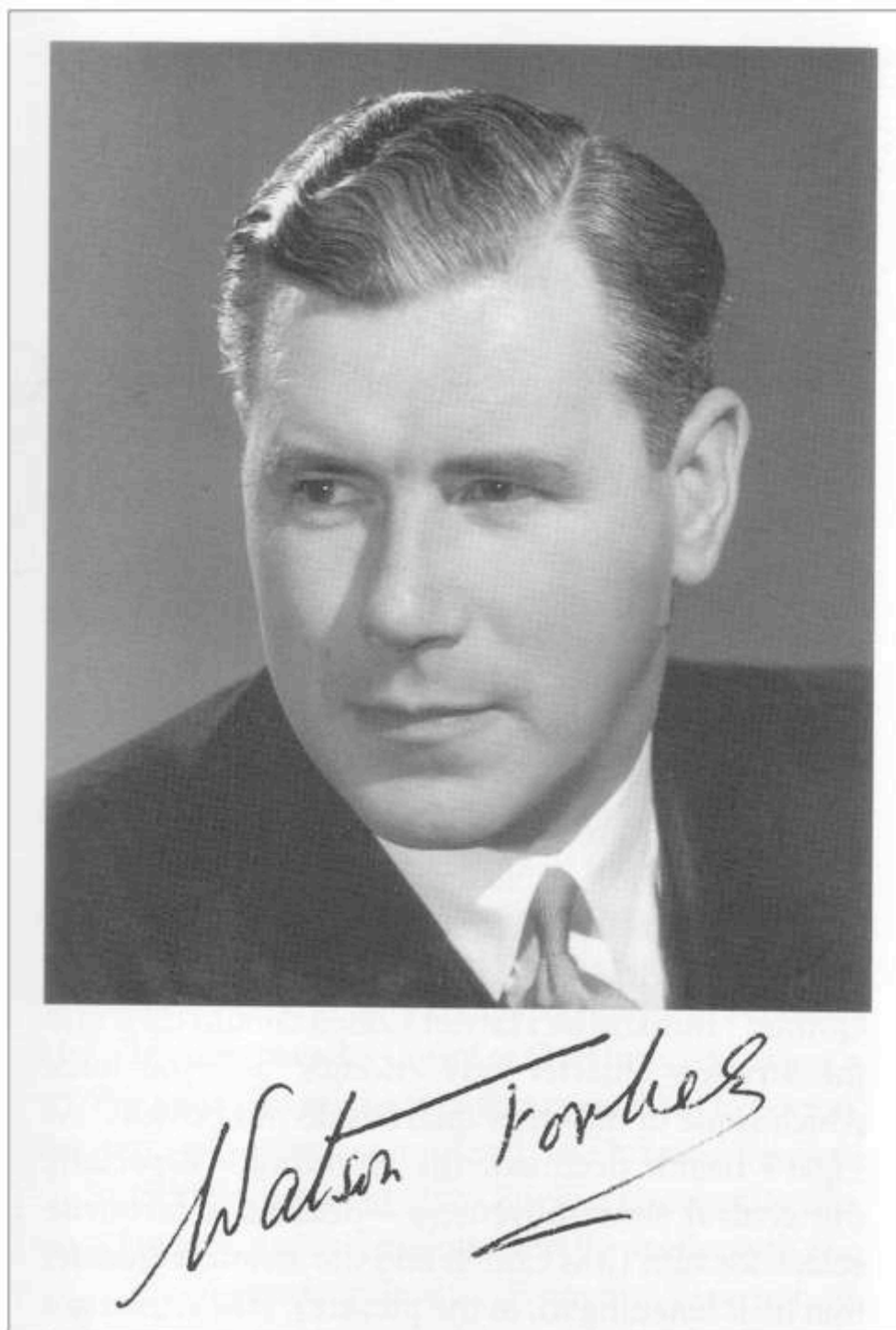
I first encountered the name Watson Forbes as a young violist while learning several of his arrangements of short Classical and Romantic repertoire. It seemed to me at the time to be rather old-fashioned and curious and needless to say at that age I had no idea of the eminence of the man himself. In the summer of 1976 I began to study with John White, himself a pupil of Forbes at the Royal Academy of Music and gradually the significance of the great Scot became apparent to me. It was not however until 1989 that I had the pleasure of meeting Forbes at an after-concert party at John's house and was struck by his warmth, generosity and eloquence as a raconteur.

Watson Douglas Buchanan Forbes (1909-1997) was arguably one of the most eminent British musicians of the last century. His influence was widely felt through his activities as a soloist, chamber music player, teacher and coach. He was also the dedicatee of a substantial corpus of solo works written for him specifically or for the chamber music ensembles of which he was a member. However, he is perhaps best known throughout the string playing world as an arranger of music. Much of this is for viola, but his arrangements are also for violin, cello and several wind instruments. When the great viola virtuoso William Primrose went to Japan to take up a teaching appointment, he discovered that his fellow Scot was better known there than he, owing to the wide use of Forbes's arrangements!

Watson Forbes trained at the Royal Academy of Music in London where he studied the violin with a variety of teachers, including Editha Klocker, Paul Beard, Marjorie Hayward and Albert Sammons. As a student he met the composer, organist and academic Robin Orr in 1926. A fellow Scot, Orr left London to read music at Cambridge University (where he subsequently became Professor), but this was the beginning of a lifelong friendship and he composed a very fine *Sonata* dedicated to Forbes in 1947.

Having won a scholarship in 1930 Forbes went to study for a summer with the famous pedagogue Otakar Ševčík in Prague, but upon returning to England he gradually switched to viola and studied with Raymond Jeremy. For sometime already, Forbes had been dabbling with the viola and performed York Bowen's first *Sonata* apparently achieving "a greater success than I had ever had on the violin". He also had lessons with Jeremy's teacher Lionel Tertis but according to Forbes, "these were not very successful". Forbes's chamber music teacher Herbert Withers added that "as a viola player, you will never be without a job", a remark that Forbes remembered and fulfilled.





After his studies at the Academy he embarked on a career as a freelance violist, appearing at West End theatres and, from 1932, as a section member of Beecham's newly formed London Philharmonic Orchestra. His colleagues in the celebrated Stratton Quartet (George Stratton, Carl Taylor and John Moore) were also members of the LPO. Forbes was very proud of the fact that the Stratton Quartet, together with Harriet Cohen, recorded Elgar's Piano Quintet. There is a famous photograph of the composer listening to this recording during his final days.

Forbes followed George Stratton to the London Symphony Orchestra during the war and became co-principal viola. He subsequently joined the Boyd Neel Orchestra and played alongside the violinist Frederick Grinke with whom, together with Harvey Phillips, he formed a string trio. This group disbanded after the war but with Maria Lidka and Vivian Joseph, Forbes created the London String Trio, a group which eventually became the London Piano Quartet with Emanuel Hurwitz as the violinist and (after Edith Vogel) James Gibb as the pianist. At this time Forbes also formed the Keltic trio with two composer-performers: the flautist William Alwyn and the pianist Alan Richardson. Both colleagues wrote several pieces dedicated to Forbes. Alwyn wrote his *Ballade* and *Sonatina No 2* for Forbes (Forbes having been the soloist in the first performance of Alwyn's *Pastoral Fantasy* for viola with either piano or strings).

Richardson wrote a substantial number of works for Forbes: a very fine *Sonata* dates from 1949 and there are shorter works including the *Sussex Lullaby*, *Autumn Sketches*, *Intrada* and latterly a *Rhapsody*. Richardson also collaborated with Forbes in an ambitious series of arrangements dating from the late 1940's and early 1950's of baroque and classical pieces, many of which were published by Oxford University Press. Other significant works of this period which were dedicated to Forbes include the *Fantasy on BACH* by Kenneth Leighton and the *Sonata da Camera* and *Introduction, Air and Reel* by Norman Foulton. However, it was in 1953 that one of the most remarkably felicitous events in the history of the twentieth-century British viola sonata occurred: Watson Forbes 'rediscovered' the magnificent *Sonata* by Alan Rawsthorne.

Rawsthorne composed his *Sonata* in 1937 and it was given its premiere by Frederick Riddle and Adolph Hallis. A critic asked for a score of the work for review purposes and apparently never gave it back. Rawsthorne himself forgot that he had 'loaned' the work out and assumed that it had been lost when a repository of his compositions in Bristol (ironically moved from London for safe-keeping) was bombed during the war. Watson Forbes found the manuscript in a second-hand bookshop in Hampstead in 1953 and contacted Rawsthorne. He suggested some revisions to the last movement and it is this version which is published by Oxford University Press. It is surely one of the most taut and skilfully crafted works in the viola repertoire.

For more than thirty years, Watson Forbes maintained a significant solo career. Forbes made his Proms solo debut in 1956 in the premiere of John Greenwood's *Viola Concerto* and broadcast as a soloist on many occasions. Notable broadcasts include the first performance of William Alwyn's *Pastoral Fantasy* with string orchestra which was given by Forbes as soloist with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in their wartime 'home' studio in Bedford and the second performance of the *Sonata* by Alan Richardson which was given with the composer at the piano in a broadcast for the BBC's Latin America Service in February 1950! He made many solo recordings, ranging from such works as the *Sonata for Viola and Piano* by Arthur

Bliss to the *Sussex Lullaby* by Alan Richardson with the composer at the piano. Let us hope this canon becomes available commercially again soon.

Throughout this time, Forbes remained with the Stratton Quartet, which in 1944 had renamed itself the Aeolian owing to the departure of George Stratton and the untimely death of Carl Taylor. However, having felt the need for a change in direction in his career for a while, in 1964 Forbes became Head of Music for BBC Scotland. He held this post until his retirement in 1974. His duties embraced overseeing all aspects of music broadcasting in Scotland, from the appointment of conductors to the BBC's Scottish orchestras to the encouragement of native composers and musicians from all backgrounds. He also instigated a viola competition, something which although the BBC in London had organized similar events for violin and cello, they refused for the viola! Forbes managed to arrange this to coincide with the City of Glasgow's celebrations of its most famous 'viola son', William Primrose. Frederick Riddle and Gwynne Edwards were invited to judge the preliminary rounds with Forbes.

As an arranger and editor, perhaps the works with which Watson Forbes is most widely associated are the Bach Suites, originally for solo cello, published in 1951 by Chester. Although there are of course several more 'modern' and scholarly editions of these works now available, this version remains eminently practical and well thought-out. Even for the most historically 'aware' player, the bowing solutions in particular contained in Forbes's arrangement are still worth consulting carefully in the preparation process for performance. As for Forbes's many volumes of arrangements of shorter works for viola and piano, they remain a treasure trove for the less experienced player and the repertoire mainstay of many a music festival viola class up and down the country!

In 2009 an international viola competition was held in Forbes's native city of St Andrews to commemorate the centenary of his birth. His son Sebastian composed a suitably challenging required test piece for this in memory of his father. Entitled *St Andrews Solo*, the work follows an earlier unaccompanied *Viola Fantasy*, also dedicated to Watson Forbes.

Watson Forbes was made an honorary doctor of music by Glasgow University in 1970 and later received the Cobbett Memorial Prize for services to chamber music. He is remembered as having made a very significant contribution to the history of the viola not just in the UK, but throughout the world. His legacy is multifaceted and in the current climate wherein more and more musicians must adapt to a 'portfolio' career, his serves as an inspiring model.

*The Scottish Viola: a tribute to Watson Forbes* was released in April 2012 on Nimbus NI 6180

*Martin Outram is Professor of Viola and Chamber Music at the Royal Academy of Music, London*

Visit [www.martinoutram.com](http://www.martinoutram.com)



*Three Generations of British Viola Playing  
Dr. Watson Forbes, John White and Martin Outram*

# The 40<sup>th</sup> International Viola Congress, Eastman School of Music

Nicola Hicks

An intense and inspiring five days of music began on 30<sup>th</sup> May as Eastman School of Music (ESM), Rochester, New York became the home of the 40<sup>th</sup> International Viola Congress (IVC). The school is in the heart of Rochester (roughly a four hour drive from New York City). The congress left little time to explore the city, but any time spent missing the congress events would have been sorely regretted anyway! In the history of the IVCs, ESM is the first venue to hold a congress for a second time thus, "What's past is prologue", (The Tempest, Shakespeare) was chosen as the theme. Reflecting this quotation, performances ranged from the opening Baroque recital given by Annette Isserlis, to the **"Premieres Plus" recital showcasing new works which included engaging performances of music by Nicolas Bacri, Matthijs van Dijk and Michael McLean.** **The theme also** highlights the important role of these congresses in encouraging and continuing progression in viola repertoire and performance for the future viola community; the way the first congresses have helped violists today. Education, exposure to fantastic musical knowledge and unifying the viola world seem to be the founding values of these viola congresses.

Before arriving at the congress I had high expectations of how some of the events would unfold. By the end of the congress, every single event had inspired me in some way and stretched my musical imagination. This congress was striking in its sheer volume of outstanding performance, engaging master-classes and thought provoking presentation-discussions; a relentless fusillade of fantastic musical information. In preparation for the day, each morning began with a viola wellness class offering Yoga, Pilates, Performing Arts Physical Therapy or Alexander Technique. There was also a class that explored the 'Violist as Kinaesthetic Musician'; an interactive session exploring the fundamental physical aspects of viola playing, relevant for every violist. Regular mass viola 'play-ins' were an alternative start to the day for early risers, culminating in a concert on the last day and sporadic flash-mob viola performances filled the rare breaks between events.

ESM offered the congress a variety of halls for events, each with a distinct acoustic and character. The opulent Kodak Hall was perhaps the most impressive space; a recently renovated hall that couples 1920's elegant décor with typical American vastness. This hall held the **Concerto Concert in the first** evening with **Wolfram Christ, Kim Kashkashian, Nokuthula Ngwenyama, Atar Arad and Paul Neubauer** appearing as soloists. **Christ's simple but beautiful rendition of 'Two Songs' by John Dowland was a memorable concert opening which was effectively complimented by his performance of Benjamin Britten's *Lachrymae*: Reflections on a Song of Dowland.**

**Kilbourn Hall was the venue for most of the recitals and chamber works at the congress; a warm hall in a Venetian Renaissance style. Concerts in this hall were particularly arresting, perhaps due to the more intimate nature of the space when compared to the Kodak Hall but, most likely from the rich variety of programme. Musical diversity ranged from well-known classical works, to John Graham's performance which incorporated**

viola and electronics, to Duo Jalal's Klezmer viola-percussion collaboration. Equally, the international spectrum of violists was reflected in the gamut of performance styles and approaches to interpretation, an experience that few will have outside of a viola congress. Hartmut Rohde's, performance of Paul Hindemith's Sonata for Viola and Piano (1939) was particularly perceptive and charismatic. Equally impressive but completely different in performance technique was **Jonathan Vinocour's elegant interpretation of Johannes Brahms' Sonata in E-flat Major, op. 120 No. 2. The Viola Transcriptions Recital presented further contrasting performance styles;** Bartok's Sonata for Solo Violin, Sz. 117, arranged and performed by Dimitri Murrath, was a particularly **extraordinary display of technical prowess and sound quality.**

**Stylistic breadth was also explored pedagogically in the twelve master-classes that were held during the congress, each given by a different viola professor. Master-classes provided the opportunity to glean not only new ideas for interpretation but also teaching techniques for problem solving, lesson structure and general technique ideology.** Heidi Castleman's master-class was an example of true pedagogical knowledge and experience whilst Michael Tree's master-class was full of charming musical anecdotes and specific performance tips from his own extensive career. **In addition to the torrent of concerts and master-classes, the congress offered orchestral repertoire classes given by the principals of leading international orchestras. Viola principals shared their musical and psychological tips to students on preparing excerpts and auditions.**

The penultimate day of events also saw some beautiful and impressive playing by performers in the semi-finals and finals of the **Young Artist Competition for which the first prize was** a handmade bow made for the occasion and donated by Benoit Rolland plus \$3000 cash donated by The String House of Rochester. In addition to the music making, there was a long list of instrument, accessories and printed music exhibitors present at the congress as well as several societies including The Rebecca Clarke Society. On the final day of events, the prestigious 2012 silver alto clef award was presented to Michael Tree. The only factor missing from the congress was time to catch one's breath! The list of the stunning performances and works is too long to mention here but I shall remember this congress for a very long time.

In 2013, the 41<sup>st</sup> International Viola Congress will be held in Krakow, Poland and hosted by Boguslaw Hubisz-Sielska from 12<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> September. My advice to any viola enthusiast or aspiring violist is to start saving for your ticket now as it will undoubtedly be an equally incredible and worthwhile experience.



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