

MOZART FOCUS THE BOW'S DEVELOPMENT IN HIS TIME + NIKOLAJ ZNAIDER ON CONCERTO NO.5
INDIAN TAKEAWAY HOW THE VIOLIN HAS BEEN ADOPTED INTO INDIA'S TRADITIONAL MUSIC
NEW VS OLD WHAT HAPPENED WHEN STUDENTS TESTED CLASSIC ITALIAN AND MODERN VIOLINS

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RICHARD BAILEY

AN INTERVIEW WITH PINCHAS ZUKERMAN

recently caused controversy in violin circles. Published by the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper, it contained a comment from the violinist suggesting that musicians take up orchestral jobs as a 'last resort', because they have failed to make it as soloists.

The raised hackles are understandable, but there's an element of truth in his words. Young musicians are generally trained as soloists, and given that only a tiny percentage achieve this, some will inevitably feel disappointment in taking up an alternative role.

This isn't the full picture though, as we show this month. There's a growing number of so-called portfolio musicians – those with a variety of different strands to their careers, only one of which might be as a soloist. In fact, many well-known performers could be classed as portfolio musicians, and in this issue we talk to five of them about how their various roles inform each other and improve their musicianship (see page 40).

The good news is that increasingly such careers are not seen as the second-best option. As Zukerman went on to say, being an orchestral musician isn't a job. 'It should be something you feel that you are able to do because you've been given a talent, an ability to do something that's unique.' And this applies to any kind of musical career.

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KEN HUNT (Indian violin traditions, page 52) is a freelance writer, broadcaster, translator and lyricist. He authored seven chapters on the music of the subcontinent in the *Rough Guide to World Music* (1999) and brought Asha Bhosle and the Kronos Quartet together to record *You've Stolen My Heart* in 2005.

Violinist **HASSE BORUP** (violin testing, page 58), a member of the Coolidge Quartet, has performed on radio and television in Australia, Asia, Europe and the US. He is assistant professor in violin and chamber music at the University of Utah School of Music, Salt Lake City.



TORBJÖRN ZETHELIUS (arching methods, page 44, and Trade Secrets, page 64) is a graduate of the VMSA and has worked at the Stråktion Violin Ateliers in Stockholm and at Reuning & Son Violins in Boston. He has collaborated with several other violin makers and now works independently in Stockholm, Sweden.



ALL PHOTOS AMY LEUNG AND LORI CARTER

Peter Prier welcomes the audience to the second Salt Lake City Instrument Acoustics Workshop

When students from the leading violin making and performance schools in Salt Lake City joined forces for a workshop on string sound they were astonished by the results. HASSE BORUP explains why



In an April day in Salt Lake City Recital Hall, students from the University of Utah School of Music's chamber music programme gathered with students of the Violin Making School of America (VMSA) for the second Instrument Acoustics Workshop. The idea for a workshop like this occurred to me several years ago when, as a young professional violinist with the Coolidge Quartet, I was constantly trying out instruments. I would bring the ones I liked to our quartet

rehearsals, but would often find that the instrument didn't work with those of the rest of the group.

While we were working alongside the Guarneri Quartet as fellowship quartet at the University of Maryland, an opportunity presented itself. The luthier Hiroshi Iizuka had recently completed a quartet of instruments commissioned for the Curtis Institute of Music, and Guarneri violist Michael Tree, who teaches there, asked us if we would come to Philadelphia to play the instruments before they were handed over to the school. So, on our way to a concert in Boston, we made a stop in Pennsylvania and played

HEARING IS BELIEVING

Iizuka's instruments at a private mini concert. The collected sound of the instruments was wonderful. To my great surprise, Iizuka claimed he had never heard four of his instruments played simultaneously. We were thrilled – and so was he.

Later we performed a concert on instruments from the collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington, DC, as part of the Violin Society of America's annual symposium. We played an early Haydn quartet on the set of Stainer instruments, a Mozart quartet on the Amatis and a Beethoven quartet on a decorated set of Stradivari instruments. Although it was an amazing experience for us as players, I was unsure how it had sounded, as we had had minimal time to prepare on the instruments. However, according to many of the dealers and makers in the audience, it was a unique demonstration of the tonal qualities of each featured maker, which would not have been evident had the instruments not been played together.

Through these experiences, and by talking to performers and makers, I realised that we often approach the issue of instruments and sound with a certain amount of prejudice: performers tend to choose instruments with their eyes rather than their ears, and makers can be so obsessed with technical details that the overall product suffers. I thought that it would be great to create a situation in which both performers and makers could listen, discuss and share knowledge about sound to their mutual benefit. So when I was appointed to the faculty of the University of Utah School of Music last year, one of the first things I did was call the founder of the VMSA, Peter Prier.

The VMSA has seen the graduation of many of today's successful makers, such as Samuel Zygmuntowicz, Gabrielle Kundert and Charles Woolf. When I mentioned the idea of a combined workshop to Prier, he was immediately enthusiastic. Salt Lake City is one of the few places in the world where this concept would be feasible: within a few kilometres we have a high-level school of music and a violin making school. It was time to start a workshop – and the first took place in December last year.



Violinists Katie Waltman and Amanda Chamberlain of the Mount Olympus Honors Quartet swap bows

Performers tend to choose instruments with their eyes rather than their ears, and makers can be so obsessed with technical details that the overall product suffers

Since we would be comparing the sound of different instruments at these events, it was important not just to use words such as 'better' or 'worse', but rather talk about the sound in quantifiable terms. Using words such as 'dark', 'full' and 'shrill' would give us a better premise for a learning environment. Luckily, Prier had previously developed a tone chart to help his students describe sound.

At the beginning of the second workshop in April I asked players, makers and the

audience, made up of other young string students from the area: if you could choose only two characteristics in the sound of any instrument, what would they be? After some discussion, the consensus was 'volume' and 'clarity'. As violinist Arnold Steinhardt of the Guarneri Quartet once pointed out to me: 'If the audience can't hear what you are playing, you may just as well pack up and go home. If the instrument has the loudness and clarity, you – the player – provide the quality and sweetness.' With these ▶



Students examine instruments after the workshop

parameters defined, we were ready to hear some instruments.

The first group performed the first movement of Schubert's C major Cello Quintet. They played the exposition on their own instruments to establish a reference point, before switching instruments. Prier had chosen five instruments from his shop that would give us an idea of the sound you can get for about \$4m. The group played the same excerpt again and we opened the discussion.

First we heard the reaction from the players, who were in agreement that the sound was deep, well rounded and complex. Violist Danae Wardell was not entirely happy with the response from her instrument, and cellist Blake Lawlor thought his instrument sounded a bit 'thin', or lacking in bass. Violinists Brooke Bennet and Joann Larsen were thrilled with the depth and ease of their instruments. We heard similar reactions from the audience, who reported a deep, golden, balanced sound. Violin maker Georg Meiwes pointed out that, compared with the sound of their own instruments, the sound produced by the high-quality instruments had more complexity, more overtones and was matched throughout the entire register.

It was time to switch instruments again. This time we replaced the multimillion-dollar wonders with instruments that had barely been finished; some had been completed only a week prior to the workshop. All of them were by VMSA students or faculty.

The group again played the Schubert excerpt. The student makers in the audience were astonished by the sheer volume of the sound. All the instruments could be heard clearly and precisely with no trouble at all, particularly in the lower to middle register. However, the players had quite a different experience.

First violinist Bennet felt the sound of her violin was not very deep and she couldn't hear her colleagues well. The other players raised similar concerns. These comments led to a more general discussion about the fairness of comparing week-old instruments to 300-year-old instruments. Prier pointed out that the Stradivari, Montagnana and Rocca here had been played continuously for centuries, thus gradually making



Testing out new-found acoustics knowledge on the cello

To everyone's astonishment, it seemed as if the change of bows had had a more marked effect on the sound than the switching of instruments

the structure of the wood conform to the basic sound of the instrument — the main ingredient for a complex, deep sound. While this is true, and an obvious reason why old instruments trade for very high prices, we had met our initial criteria: the sound of the brand new instruments had clarity and volume. The players had to provide the quality.

In connection with this discovery, I mentioned a process that can help speed up this acoustical ageing of an instrument. By playing fortissimo minor 2nds in chromatic succession, very close to the bridge with a slow bow, from low to high register, it is possible to open up the sound and deepen the tone. To demonstrate, I played a G major scale on one of the week-old violins. I then played it in the fashion described above, grinding the sound and looking for maximum vibration in the wood. While this exercise is absolutely horrific to listen to, the result was immediately clear to the audience: when I played the G major scale again, the sound had already matured.

Meiwes had brought along a white violin — an instrument not yet varnished. I played it for the audience, demonstrating

that the basic qualities of the instrument are already established before the varnish is applied. It was a beautiful, open and clean sound.

With the Bow Making School of America (BMSA) sharing a roof with the VMSA, it seemed natural to devote the second half of the workshop to examining the effect that bows have on the sound of a chamber group. According to Paul Prier (of the second generation of the Prier family), when purchasing a bow it is best to look for one that balances your natural tendencies. For example, aggressive players should go for a softer bow, and more lyrical players should go for a stiffer bow. He also explained that some bows simply click with a particular instrument and extract the best quality of sound from it. This phenomenon is difficult to predict, but it is obvious when it happens. The wood (or composite material) of the bow somehow perfectly matches the instrument. To illustrate this, I played three of my bows in succession: a Wunderlich bow, which produces a medium loud sound; a soft Cuniot-Hury bow, which produces a sweet, rounded sound; and finally a stiff Fétique. ▶



Hasse Borup with the white violin, which demonstrated an open, clean sound before it was varnished

It was evident that the *Fétique* was most compatible with the *Zygmuntowicz*: the sound came out with little effort and filled the room.

To experiment with the difference made to sound by changing bows, the Mount Olympus Honors Quartet played the first movement of Mozart's 'Dissonance' Quartet K465, a piece that requires exquisite articulation and sound, and is therefore an excellent vehicle to test the effects of different bows. Again, the players started with their own equipment, but this time the swap was blind. Prier distributed a different set of bows, but only he knew what they were.

After the run-through we started with comments from the performers. The members of the quartet all seemed to agree that they heard each other clearly and with precise articulation. The two

violinists were especially excited about the way the bows made their instruments sound. The violist and cellist also felt good about the change. The reaction from the audience was quite excited: most of the makers and audience members agreed that the sound with the second set of bows was full, complex and clear. The combined volume of the group was markedly bigger than at the first run-through, and all the instruments were heard clearly. To everyone's astonishment, it seemed as if the change of bows had had a greater effect on the sound than the switching of instruments.

Prier then revealed the identity of the bows: the two violin bows were by Maire and Peccatte and had a combined value of \$100,000, and the viola and cello bows were composite bows from the BMSA, worth \$1,100 between them!

Finally, the quartet played the Mozart excerpt again, and this time they all used composite material bows. After this performance the comments were unanimous: although the sound was not quite as interesting as during the second run-through, it was big, clear and complex. The articulation and response made the sound of the group vibrant and exciting. It was clear to both players and audience that this type of bow can be an affordable solution.

In the concluding discussion between performers and makers, it was evident that the biggest surprise was the effect that the change of bows had had on the sound of the quartet. We were also surprised to find that the change from very expensive instruments to brand new instruments did not diminish the volume of the group. Though the sound was less complex, the basic principle had been met: the new instruments provided the players with volume and clarity.

With the formal part of the workshop completed, there was an open session in which student makers and student performers exchanged observations and tried instruments. The performers were excited to have viable alternatives to very expensive, older instruments, and the makers appreciated being able to compare their work to the old master instruments. The whole event was a valuable learning experience, a workshop concept that in the future will be directly incorporated in the syllabuses at both the Violin Making School of America and the University of Utah School of Music. ■

INSTRUMENTS AND BOWS TESTED

Instruments played at the workshop

Violins

Antonio Stradivari, 'Borwick', 1702 (\$2,500,000)
 Lorenzo Storioni, 1791 (\$425,000)
 Domenico Montagnana, 1738 (\$365,000)
 Samuel Zygmuntowicz, 1992 (\$45,000)
 Charles Woolf, 2006 (\$7,800)
 Michael Larsen, 2005 (\$6,000)
 San Hun Lee, 2006 (\$4,800)
 Georg Meiwes, 2006, white violin

Violas

Matteo Albani, 1690 (\$115,000)
 Georg Meiwes, 2005 (\$6,000)

Cellos

Johannes Tononi, 1703 (\$685,000)
 Giuseppe Rocca, 1833 (\$350,000)
 Charles Woolf, 2006 (\$18,000)
 Chung Shu, 2006 (\$9,000)

Bows played at the workshop

Violin bows

François Peccatte (\$65,000)
 Nicolas Maire (\$34,000)
 Francois Nicolas Voirin (\$24,000)
 Victor Fétique (\$10,000)
 Pierre Cuniot-Hury (\$5,500)

Friedrich Wunderlich (\$1,000)
 JonPaul 'Bravo' composite (\$415)

Viola bows

JonPaul 'Bravo' composite (\$670)
 JonPaul 'Legacy' composite (\$415)

Cello bows

JonPaul 'Arpège' (composite) (\$900)
 JonPaul 'Bravo' composite (\$670)

Further information

University of Utah School of Music
www.music.utah.edu
 Violin and Bow Making School of America
www.prieviolins.com