

# Journal of the American Viola Society

Volume 30 Number 1



## Features:

41st Viola  
Congress Review

The Viola Music of  
Robert Covert

Laforge and the  
Paris Conservatory

Takemitsu's *A Bird  
came down the Walk*

# Journal of the American Viola Society

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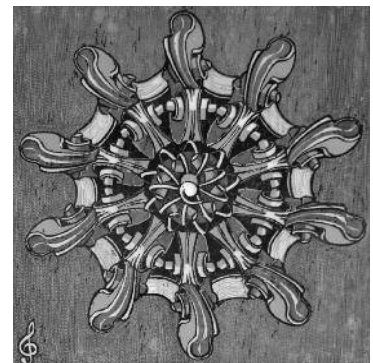
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On the Cover:

**Martha Briana** *Kaleidoscope for Viola*  
Reduction Woodcut on Rice Paper. 17 x 17 inches

Martha Briana is an artist from Belfast, Maine, who is currently pursuing a Master's degree in printmaking at Southern Illinois University. This woodcut is a collage of her drawings, featuring a repeated pattern of a scroll motif. To view more of her musical-themed art, please visit: [marthabriana.net](http://marthabriana.net).



# RECORDING REVIEWS

by Carlos María Solare

*New People*—Daniel Powers: *The Rain Is Full of Ghosts*; Rob Deemer: *Erotica*; Michael Colgrass: *New People*; Jonathan Santore: *Front Porch Poems*; Graham Reynolds: *Jabberwocky*. Chiaroscuro Trio—Elizabeth Pétillot, contralto; Aurélien Pétillot, viola; Yuko Kato, piano. Albany TROY1425.

Even knowing, in theory, that the repertoire for voice, viola, and piano reaches much further than Brahms's *Zwei Gesänge*, op. 91, I was amazed at finding a list of over 150 items in the Chiaroscuro Trio's website. Their debut CD includes five of them, all by American composers and written—with one exception—in the twenty-first century. The odd man out is Michael Colgrass, represented by his song cycle *New People*, composed in 1969 to his own surrealistic texts. Colgrass's word-setting is highly expressive, and he gives the viola some crucial onomatopoeic solos to illustrate the text. Daniel Powers, a violist himself, makes the instrumental part duet with the voice on absolutely equal footing in his settings of three sonnets by Edna St. Vincent Millay, *The Rain Is Full of Ghosts*.

Of the two Chiaroscuro commissions, I was more taken by Graham Reynolds's ghoulish, but rousing, setting of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* than with Rob Deemer's *Erotica*, although the seedy saxophone impersonation in the latter is wickedly realized by Aurélien Pétillot. Finally, Jonathan Santore's *Front Porch Poems* brings together two short songs about rural New England—one of them evoking the world of the *Fairies on My Hilltop* with modally-tinged harmonies, the other a none-too-veiled homage to Schubert describing *A Winter Night*—and what should by rights become the ultimate party piece for any musicians performing in this particular combination: *Tango Violistico*. Which violist could possibly resist playing such sexily infectious music to the singer's running commentary about how wonderfully you do it ("The man plays the viola like a god!")?

The husband-and-wife team of Elizabeth and Aurélien Pétillot, with pianist Yuko Kato as their resourceful

collaborator, makes an excellent case for all these songs. Elizabeth has an expressive mezzo-soprano voice. Her words are not always clearly understandable, but full texts are included in the booklet, along with short liner notes from each composer. Aurélien's dark viola sound matches his wife's phrasing beautifully, especially in the Powers songs, where they share the same melodic material. Elsewhere, he is consistently responsive to the songs' moods, modulating his tone with great expressivity. Hopefully the trio will work their way through that list in due time.

*La Viola. Music for Viola and Piano by Women Composers of the 20th Century*—Minna Keal: *Ballade in F Minor*; Marcelle Soulage: *Sonata for Solo Viola*, op. 43; Fernande Decruck: *Sonata for Viola and Piano*; Luise Adolpha Le Beau: *Three Pieces for Viola and Piano*, op. 26; Pamela Harrison: *Sonata for Viola and Piano, Lament*; Lillian Fuchs: *Sonata Pastorale*; Rebecca Clarke: *Sonata for Viola and Piano*. Hillary Herndon, viola; Wei-Chun Bernadette Lo, piano. MSR Classics MS 1416 (2 CDs).

This is a most interesting compilation of viola music from the first half of the twentieth century (in Le Beau's case going back to 1881), an age that—as Hillary Herndon points out in her eloquent and informative liner notes—saw women composers coming into their own. Luise Adolpha Le Beau studied with some of the most respected teachers of her time (Joseph Rheinberger and Franz Lachner among them) and enjoyed some modest success in her native Germany. Her *Three Pieces* have a somehow dated charm but are very enjoyable, especially the rumbustious *Polonaise*.

Both Marcelle Soulage and Fernande Decruck studied in Paris and had long academic careers. Soulage's unaccompanied *Sonata* from 1930 is ideally tailored for the viola. Its idiomatic double and multiple stops, harmonic language, and general atmosphere remind one of Ysaye's violin sonatas. Decruck wrote her *sonata* for alto saxophone, providing a viola alternative (Herndon's wishful assertion that the piece might just have been "conceptualized for the viola" seems to be contradicted by some arpeggio writing typical of wind instruments, the complete

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absence of double stops, and the dedication to the well-known saxophone player Marcel Mule). Although composed in 1943, the piece looks back to the *Belle Époque*, with some Ravelian harmonies and evocative titles for three of its four movements. Herndon is swift in *La Fileuse (The Spinning Wheel)*, which takes the place of a scherzo, and haunting in the harmonics that open the final *Nocturne et Rondel*.

Lillian Fuchs's unaccompanied *Sonata Pastorale* from 1953 fits the viola like the proverbial glove, as could only be expected given its composer's pedigree as one of the finest American violists of her age. Herndon catches the music's improvisatory character convincingly and negotiates its many technical obstacles with complete aplomb, exhibiting a nicely bouncing spiccato in the work's concluding section. Minna Keal's *Ballade* was written in 1929, when the twenty-year-old composer was a student at the Royal Academy of Music, but only published over half a century later (I remember first hearing it at a viola festival organized by the late John White). This slightly overlong but melodious morsel would have won the approval of the Academy's viola teacher, the redoubtable Lionel Tertis. Pamela Harrison, who studied at the rival London institution, the Royal College of Music, wrote her *Viola Sonata* in 1946. Its four clear-cut movements are slightly reminiscent of her teacher Gordon Jacob, himself the composer of much beautiful and idiomatic viola music. As Herndon observes, Harrison's *Lament*, thematically related to the Sonata's *Andante affettuoso*, could have been conceived as part of the larger work.

This encyclopedic recital concludes with the one well-known piece, Rebecca Clarke's *Sonata* from 1919. One could wish for more of a sense of elfin impishness in the *Vivace*, but Herndon and her piano partner Wei-Chun Lo more than hold their own in a relatively crowded field. Indeed, their musical rapport throughout this fascinating program is cause for joy and gratitude. Herndon has also taken a hand in the recording's production, making sure that her vibrantly exciting tone is faithfully caught and well balanced with the often quite full piano parts. This well-planned, imaginative recital—two of them, actually—has been a pleasure to listen to, and it was obviously a labor of love by all concerned. I look forward to hearing much more from Hillary Herndon.

W. A. Mozart: Duos for Violin and Viola, K. 423 and 424; Benedikt Brydern: *Bebop for Beagles*, *From My*

*Notebook Vol. 2*. Duo Renard—Mark Miller, violin; Ute Miller, viola. Fleur de Son Classics FDS 58011.

Mark and Ute Miller are, respectively, concertmaster and principal viola of the East Texas Symphony Orchestra. Both were trained in the United States and Germany, settling stateside after several years working in German orchestras. In this, their third CD together as Duo Renard, they alternate Mozart's two masterpieces for this instrumental combination with music by Benedikt Brydern. Since—to paraphrase Mark Miller's affectionate liner notes—if you are reading this, you probably already know all about the Mozart duos, I would like to share my discovery of Brydern's music. He is a German-born, LA-based composer and violinist—active in the classical, pop, jazz, and film-music scenes—who has an uncanny ability to conjure the sounds of a big-band from just a violin and a viola. For example, in *Bebop for Beagles* he writes a passage of triple-stopping for both instruments that effectively evokes a brass section in full blast. Brydern's instrumental writing makes few concessions to the players, requiring the greatest virtuosity and also the art that conceals art, since everything should sound—as it does in this performance—like it is improvised on the spot.

The Millers enter completely into the spirit of the music, and I am amazed how Ute's viola can sound like a sleazy saxophone when swinging some innocent-looking passages. The beagles, by the way, are the Millers' house pets, whose “unique lifestyle” between “utmost relaxation to frantic and playful moments” (Brydern) inspired this seven-movement suite. *From My Notebook Vol. 2* consists of four movements in a similar vein, although the *Impromptu* almost threw me with its not-quite-quotation from Verdi's *Aida*, underlined by the mildly “Oriental” hue of its main theme. In the Mozart G-major duo, the Millers exhibit some nicely flexible—and absolutely unanimous—phrasing in transitional passages. Appropriately, they give the B-flat duo a more monumental character, as befits a piece conceived on a larger scale and even including a slow introduction (I wish they had gone the whole hog and included the repeat of the movement's second half!). The truthful recording has a disconcertingly wide stereo spread, which is perhaps partly responsible for accentuating the timbral differences between Mark's violin and Ute's uncommonly dark-voiced viola. There is nothing here like the almost clone-like matching of, say, the