

# THE SOUNDPOST

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

## President's Message

Lee Inman

### Play Day Schedule

September 17, 2011  
Cathedral Place

- ❖ 9:30 AM: Check in, signup for consorts, tuning, announcements
- ❖ 10:00 AM: Grand Consort, Presentation
- ❖ 11:30 AM: Lunch break
- ❖ 1:00 PM: Session I: Informal Consorts or Coached Consort
- ❖ 2:30 PM: Session II: Informal consorts or Coached Consort
- ❖ 4:00 PM: Clean up

*\$20 Fee per participant  
A = 415*

Another PNV season begins. Our Program Committee has arranged for a stellar lineup of presenters this year, including Ray Nurse of Vancouver, who will be our guest at the first Play Day in September. Those of you who've enjoyed Ray's teaching and lectures over the years will understand what a treat is in store for us.

What a summer it's been, at least for me, with lots of music and gardening. But I also discovered the marvels of the "Shruti Box", a musical instrument from the Northern Indian classical tradition. Mine is electrified, not hand-pumped as are the traditional Shruti's, but like the original instrument, it generates several flavors of drone tones. What's it for? Well, playing against a drone makes it much easier to evaluate one's intonation for good or ill. It's also useful to accompany improvisation exercises.

I know that for many of you, the word "improvisation" generates chills of horror down your spine. But the purr of a Shruti can inspire and support one's own solo improv efforts without judging their relative artistic or technical success. You know what they say: what's played with the Shruti *stays* with the Shruti! A little improv is a great way to warm up at the beginning of a practice session – gets the brain and fingers moving, gets one playing in tune. Improvisation can even become completely satisfying in its own way. Ask me for details – it's my latest passion!

In August, Dr. Savage requested that PNV participate in the 2011 Western Baroque Music Festival Workshop, which convened for the first time at Saint James in August, having moved from its former venue in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Bill Warren, Peter Stewart, Liisa Peterson, Charlie Nagel and Jon Brenner volunteered during the week-long workshop to be 'hosts' to the workshop students and faculty, ensuring that everyone could access the facilities, had clear direction to classrooms, and could enjoy a fresh cup of coffee at their mid-morning break. Linda Shortridge, the workshop founder and director, expressed her sincere thanks to the PNV hosts for their help, as do I. And our hosting helped PNV to meet our annual residency commitment to Saint James, as well.

I trust many, if not most, of you also had challenging, fulfilling summers. I know for a fact that our membership includes several attendees at this year's Conclave and Viols West workshop. I suspect everyone – including and especially our Sound Post editor – would appreciate even a brief article about your experiences and 'ah-hah' moments at these events. Do consider submitting something!

I look forward to seeing all of you in September.

*We have some  
improvements to  
the Consort sign-  
up procedure that  
we will try out  
this  
Play Day.  
Keep a weather  
eye on the  
changes!*



## Reflections for the September 17

*Text and image provided by Ray Nurse*



There was a time when the viol was a new instrument, when there was no established technique, no music yet composed for it, and players hadn't even decided how to tune it, how to hold it or what to play on it.

Isabella d'Este, the cultivated Marchesa of Mantua, apparently hadn't ever heard of a viol when her chancellor wrote to her in 1493 that he was surprised to hear Spanish players from Rome playing "viols almost as large as myself" but he considered their playing "sweet rather than artful". These may have been the same two Spanish players who were described a few years later as playing "two large viols with the greatest sweetness giving universal pleasure".

This attracted the musical Marchesa's interest, and in 1495 Isabella commissioned three "viole" in two different sizes to be made by a maker in Brescia. This is the first viol consort we know of that was made and established in Italy. Upon delivery the new viols were turned over to Isabella's lutenist Giovanni Angelo Testagrossa, who presumably was expected to work out how to tune, play and use them.

Isabella's consort must have made a favourable impression, for in 1499 her little brother Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, commissioned a set of five "viole da archo ... in all the possible sizes" because he had decided that he would like to learn play them. Isabella immediately announced in a letter "we have begun to learn the viola and we hope that we learn well, because in the two days that we have been working, we have begun to plan that when we come to Ferrara, we will be able to play tenor to Don Alfonso". She also ordered a new "viola grande" from her Brescian maker, enlarging her set to four.

They must have made quick progress, for in 1502, when Duke Alfonso married Lucrezia Borgia, he played at his own wedding in a consort with six viols. Perhaps the sixth player was Isabella on tenor, as Alfonso's set only had five instruments.

Within a few years, viol consorts were everywhere in Italy and the instrument flourished, although players must have continued to struggle and experiment with technique and repertoire; we have to wait nearly 50 years until the first real treatise for viol, Ganassi's *Regolo Rubertina*. One can only imagine the fascination that these new instruments created, and how the first viol-playing musicians must have spent their practice time experimenting and exploring.

Our session on September 17 will consider what music Isabella's consort might have tried to play in those first rehearsals, including Flemish music from her own personal *Chansonnier* (a wedding present from her husband), as well as the more modern *Frottole* she cultivated at her court in Mantua, when all viol players were beginners.

## Changes on the PNV Board

*Lee Inman*

We start the season with a change in Board membership. **Both Charlie Nagel and Sandy Haas bade farewell to their Board chairs at the end of last season.** As you know, Charlie was on the board for an incredibly long time, and served two terms as PNV President, as well as in the important role of PNV's liaison to Saint James Cathedral. I have valued his contributions highly over the years, and I know we'll miss his insight at Board meetings.

Sandy's steady support was significant, as well. The Secretary's chair is a difficult one to fill. Board meetings are rarely the epitome of organization and measured discourse, but Sandy's minutes always beautifully summarized and clarified our discussions and decisions, and created an accurate and succinct record to keep us all on course from meeting to meeting. My deepest thanks to both of you, Charlie and Sandy, for your contributions over the years to the ongoing success of the PNV organization. We hope to see you both at Play Days!

Jon Brenner has graciously offered to step into the Secretarial Hot Seat, and Bill Warren is now our primary point of contact between PNV and Saint James' administration. The board also greets a new member, Vicki Hoffman, whose primary contribution will be on the Program Committee. When you have a moment, please thank these folks for their active support of PNV.

## Souvenir of the Conclave: New Music on Our Website

*Charlie Nagel*

Every VdGSA conclave has its own unique ambience, and every person attending conclave has his or her own highly personal experience. For me, the mood this year was particularly relaxed and mellow, and my classes were all excellent. The week-long "Composers' Round Robin," directed by Martha Bishop, was particularly exciting. There was both playing and study of each other's works, and seminar-like discussions of questions Martha posed the group. Topics of the latter included "how do you start working on a new piece?", "what are your criteria for considering a piece successful?", and "how important is text?" One of the pieces we played was composed by Will Ayton specially for the conclave, "For R. Robin," for treble/treble/tenor/bass or treble/tenor/tenor/bass viols. It is a lovely fantasia on the hauntingly beautiful canon by William Cornysh, "Ah, Robin," and was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone. When asked, he generously gave us permission to post the work on our PNV website. Score and parts are now online for everyone to have the pleasure of playing.

## November Play Day in Portland

*Lee Inman*

Looking ahead to our November 19<sup>th</sup> Play Day, I'd like to formally announce that PNV will convene a first-ever Play Day in Portland. PNV has necessarily been Seattle-centric for most of its history, but the viol community in the Northwest continues to thrive and grow, particularly in our sister city to the south. Portland viol players have frequently made the trek northwards for Play Days, but Seattle has, to my knowledge, never trekked south. Since we are, after all, *Pacific Northwest Viols*, it's important to ensure that our neighbors south and north of PNV's home city can feel a part of our mission, too.

We have a venue for the Portland Play Day, a presenter – Tim Scott, a well-known name among viol players in this corner of the continent – and we anticipate enthusiastic participation from our Oregon colleagues. So, Seattle folks: please consider traveling southwards for the occasion, perhaps by car-pool or train. As we already know, Portland is a fine spot to make music, to have a memorable meal or two, and to enjoy a pleasant break from routine, all without travelling very far.

**Pacific Northwest Viols**  
10056 NE Knight Rd  
Bainbridge Island WA 98110

**ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED**



### **Pacific Northwest Viols 2011-2012 Season**

#### **Play Day Dates**

- ❖ **September 17, 2011 — Cathedral Place; Led by Ray Nurse**
- ❖ November 19, 2011 — Portland, Oregon; Led by Tim Scott
- ❖ January 14, 2012— Pastoral Outreach Center; Led by Shulamit Kleinerman
- ❖ March 10, 2012 — Cathedral Place; Workshop led by Margriet Tindemans, et al.
- ❖ May 12, 2012 — Cathedral Place; Led by Elizabeth Reed

*\$20 Fee per participant  
A = 415*

#### **Play Day Location for September 17**

##### ***St. James Cathedral Place***

Terry Ave. and Columbia St.

*Parking available in O'Dea High School lot (free) and in the Parkade at Boren and Marion Streets (\$)*

### **Pacific Northwest Viols, Board Members 2011 – 2012**

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ❖ Lee Inman, President             | ❖ Bill Warren                      |
| ❖ Jon Brenner, Secretary, Programs | ❖ Noreen Jacky, Programs           |
| ❖ Michael LaGaly, Treasurer        | ❖ Vicki Hoffman, Programs          |
| ❖ Lee Talner, Outreach             | ❖ Olga Hauptman, Instrument Rental |
|                                    | ❖ Liisa Peterson, Communications   |

*The **Soundpost** welcomes reader contributions of any kind: articles, commentary, personal stories, event reportage. E-Mail is preferred, but postal mail or napkin scribbblings are all gladly received, as well. **Email:** [liisapetereson@gmail.com](mailto:liisapetereson@gmail.com).*