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info@socalviolasociety.org

www.socalviolasociety.org

Quarter Notes from the President

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter from the Southern California Viola Society! We're excited to be sharing some fun reading with you including: an exclusive interview with world-class violist and teacher, Kim Kashkashian; the first installment of *Home Recording for Violists* curated by Alma Fernandez; our *Local Spotlight* featuring Metzler Violins (including a discount code) as well as Brett Banducci's trailblazing column *A New Discovery*!

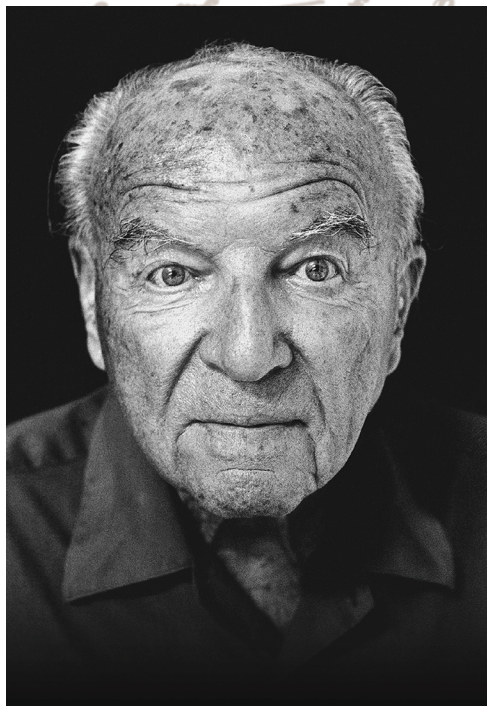
While these past months have created some pretty rough challenges for performing musicians, on the other side of the coin "stay at home" has also given us the opportunity to explore new activities and delve into projects that we usually would not have time for. In response, SCVS is working to create some dynamic new programs, for violists of all ages and stages, which will offer new avenues for creativity, education and community building. Please stay tuned for details in our next newsletter.

I also want to offer deepest thanks and a huge round of applause to outgoing SCVS President, Gina Coletti. Gina has worked tirelessly over many years to keep our organization active and flourishing with an especially strong commitment to ViolaFest. Thank you Gina for all your great work!!!!

In closing, I hope you enjoy our first quarterly newsletter! Please help us get the word out by forwarding it to friends/colleagues/foes. They can sign up to receive it directly at info@socalviolasociety.org. Our next issue includes an SCVS membership drive, which will help us fund some valuable new programs. Why join a VIOLA SOCIETY? Because not only are you contributing to a worthy educational non-profit, but being a member of a viola society is as exclusive, nerdy, mystical and odd as joining a union of unicorns or an association of aardvarks. Need I say more?

Kate Vincent

Incoming President of SCVS



Ernst Krenek

(Born: 1900, Vienna, Austria,
Died: 1991, Palm Springs, CA)

1988, Photo by: Klaus Barisch



A New Discovery

by Brett Banducci

During these times of social unrest and political polarization why not lean into music created during similar times in our past. Perhaps no other historical or musical movement could be more apropos (and polarizing) than the 1940s and the serial practices established by the Second Viennese School. Now, you might be thinking, “where does the viola fit into all of this?” Good Question! And it most certainly does. Enter, Ernst Krenek. Only four years after emigrating from his native Austria, Krenek wrote a wonderful sonata melding twelve-tone discourse with neo-classical aesthetics. The result was his *Sonata for Viola (Alone) op. 92/3 (1942)*. Cast in four movements, like a traditional sonata, Krenek assigned not only themes to the various components of sonata form, but rows as well. The sonata is fun to play, not easy due to the rows selected (the first one is a stack of thirds!), and rewarding as it challenges the player to enter an entirely new harmonic realm; one which thwarts harmonic and formal expectations to reveal a truly original and challenging work for viola. I had the honor, in 2007, to meet Krenek’s widow Gladys at a party in Palm Springs. For the next few years we both worked diligently to bring these sonatas back into print (there are two other sonatas, all published by UE, that include viola: op. 117 for viola and piano, and op. 92/2a for flute and viola). Happy Discovering!

www.universaledition.com/sonata-for-viol-krenk-ernst-ue34941

An Interview with Kim Kashkashian

September 22, 2020

Kate Vincent: What types of activities (musical or otherwise) have you found most creatively fulfilling during this extended time at home?

Kim Kashkashian: Tai Chi and Kung Fu¹ have been a very important part of my life and have affected how I make music and how I think about teaching... and I've been doing that for 20 years. It is a huge part of my life, and just as our musical lives were affected I had to practice it by myself and couldn't do it with others. But the practice provided both a release of energy and a balance for the anxiety about the unknown nature of our future. The other thing which has provided, and will continue to provide, great comfort and solace (and it's a great anxiety reliever too)... is gardening! So I have been growing so many vegetables this summer and trying to feed the neighborhood! Music for Food without the music!!!

Vincent: What projects have you been working on these past months?

Kashkashian: What I was doing before the start of lock-down was a solo Bach and Kurtag program which I performed in Europe for the 50th Anniversary of ECM Records in Hamburg. Right after that I came home and we had lock-down so any chamber music that I was scheduled to do and all summer festivals were cancelled. In an attempt to substitute activities and have some short-term goals, I've chosen to learn a few pieces that I had never performed such as the Brett Dean Viola Concerto - not that I'm planning to perform it, but just teach it! I also gave myself a couple of projects such as: learn all the viola parts to the Bartok Quartets and the late Beethoven Quartets so that when things open up again, I'm ready!

1. Calvin Chin: www.calvinchin.com



Photo by: Steve Riskind

You've got to find projects that you can more or less independently pursue and feel that you have the inner drive to work on. We must all examine what it means to have the absence of outer motivation. There are no concerts to prepare for, so it becomes a question of inner drive and inner need and an aesthetic that exists between you, the composer and your instrument. It's been a very interesting experience and shift for all of us.

Vincent: Yes, definitely

Kashkashian: So I think that in a time like this you want to have a couple of long term goals, and a couple of mid term goals and some short term goals. For me a short term goal on the instrument was to redefine for myself how the instrument and I “held each other” and a long term goal was learning that big concerto or learning all the parts of the late quartets and a mid term goal would be something like “make sure the bow is straight all the time”. It is important to pick a couple of things that you know are on your list of things to do and say “yes, I am going to solve that and I have a month, the gift of a month to really focus on straight bow and comfort in holding the instrument and also to learn this one piece” and then you move on. I think it’s been very important for all of us to graph this time and our energies, and understand short term, middle term and long term goals.

Vincent: In what ways do you think our role as musicians in the world has been affected by the pandemic and how can we adapt?

Kashkashian: Well this is huge because in one way we’ve lost a huge part of being a performer, which is the audience. The space, the room, hearing yourself back from the back of a hall, feeling and understanding what you’re giving your audience and what they are giving back to you, that’s all missing. On the other hand, you can record something, which is between you and your microphone but it can reach anyone in the world.



Photo from: New England Conservatory

It’s not confined to the hall so we lose something but we also gain something. I hope we are not making a permanent adaptation to this situation, because I really believe in the energy triangle of composer, interpreter, audience - and that energy comes back as a never-ending cycle. Nevertheless, we can think about putting something out into the world that is our truth and we know it can reach anybody. It’s missing that primary element of reality, (i.e.) actually what it means to hear sound in a space, but it does give us some substitutes that are not to be sneezed at.

Vincent: The situation that we are in has taken away a “tactile” aspect of music making in terms of the direct auditory relationship between audience and performer.

Kashkashian: Yes, which is a huge element of our art form! We must be on guard not to forget what that means and what that is... I wrote on Facebook very early on in this pandemic, that every day I would stand in front of my window and visualize sending resonance, vibration and sound out across the street as I played my open strings ... so keeping alive the sense of space and keeping alive resonance and vibration and that that belongs in space - I think that is very important.

Vincent: So on a similar topic: Do you have any suggestions about meaningful ways in which we can continue to bring music directly to our communities?

Kashkashian: At least here in Boston there has been a great effort to create outreach for musicians to hospital workers, to those who are in nursing homes, to those who are in shelters of any kind - by creating personal musical videos and vignettes which can reach out and hopefully give them courage in this time. Also at NEC, our wonderful outreach director Tanya Maggi is working very hard to make sure that all students who are playing chamber music here can make their videos (including personal introductions), which are sent out to hospitals, nursing homes and any kind of other community centers. At Music for Food, we are offering such videos to all local pantries and shelters for their clients. So we are trying to do as much outreach as possible in the best sense of the word - just opening our hands and our hearts with sound and reaching out to whoever can grab it.

Vincent: Given this period of separation from other musicians and also limited performing opportunities: What advice or tips would you give to students/young professionals who are trying to maintain motivation and a level of excellence in their playing at this time?

Kashkashian: If you are still in lock-down the best thing you can do is give yourself a big piece of paper (like a banner) and divide it up into - let's be optimistic and say another four months of this. You say - ok, I've got this much time and I want to make some long term goals for myself that will be completed and performed: even if only for my own stupid, little mechanical device and shared with a teacher. In order to get there, what do I have to do? Well, I have to have the first mvt. completed by week three, I have to have the next mvt. completed by week five etc. So that is in terms of repertoire. Then pick a few mechanical or technical issues, which have been bothering you (or your teacher) that you want to solve and then you say - what's going to help me solve that? For 15 minutes of every hour, I am going to make sure my bow is absolutely straight from frog to tip and back. Give yourself one quarter of the time for the technical thing, one half of the time to work on the repertoire goal and then the last quarter is the "wild-card" when you get to do whatever you want. Just play something fun!

Vincent: Looking ahead to a time when things are more normal, what specific music projects are you most excited about rekindling?

Kashkashian: Well you know I'm not sure about performance projects right now. I do feel very strongly that it's the right thing to do, to step aside and let younger artists have the spotlight. If I'm going to engage in other projects right now, it's going to be more transcriptions because we always need more repertoire as violists! I might try to do a few performances of pieces that have been written for me and spotlight those, but I'm not really looking for an active performance life right now except to support Music for Food and whatever comes along that interests me. I want to do a series of teaching videos and I want to combine those videos with my knowledge of Tai Chi and how it affects players. That's maybe a project for me in the next year or two.



Photo by: Claire Stefani

Vincent: In closing, is there anything else you wish to share with us?

Kashkashian: I want to encourage any young musician who wishes to do a Music for Food event, they can do it at home and send out a video to everyone they know. I can say it's so important today because of Covid-19. The fact that so many people are not working who normally would have worked, the need for food is so great. So I would put in a plea for anyone who can do something about it, even on a very small scale, to step up and do it! Every student can contribute, they can do a house concert all by themselves and send it out through the fantastic electronic media that we have available. Sometimes we get really great results and the food banks get what they need.

Vincent: Thanks so much Kim for reminding us of this important way we can contribute to our wider community through our music. For more information on the non-profit organization Music for Food please visit: www.musicforfood.net



An Open Forum

Home Recording for Violists

Alma Fernandez

I have been recording for Film & Television projects since 2003. The memory of my first studio recording session is pretty clear: it was at the Warner Bros. sound stage for a film called "Bad Boys 2", and a completely different musical experience than anything I'd ever known before. Wearing headphones and listening to a click track (essentially a metronome designed to keep us all in sync) while sight reading the notes in front of me. It was exciting and overwhelming at the same time. Other than the headphones and microphones I truly had no idea what any of the surrounding equipment was. The technology around recording seemed magical to me, and over the course of 17 years, having recorded on more than 500 projects, my knowledge of recording actually hadn't evolved very much. As musicians we spend so much time learning and expanding the craft of playing our instruments, and often everything else around us can get lost. Having a family, exploring other interests (such as food and wine), and the general feeling of never having enough time, perhaps can explain my obliviousness about the mechanics of recording. There was always a team of people to take care of those details, so I never had to think about it very much. What a luxury!

And now we all find ourselves living through a pandemic, and we're figuring ways to survive the circumstances. Our livelihoods are changing and don't seem to be returning to the life we formerly knew anytime soon, if ever? With most concerts being canceled or postponed well into next year (as far as we know now), musicians are searching and finding new ways to evolve. Being able to record at home has played more of an important role than ever, especially as a way to facilitate our creative activities. Now we have our own space and time to record works that may have otherwise been buried by our busy routines, as well as to learn from what we hear.

While we have many friends and colleagues who have been doing this for some time, there are now more people entering this recording world who previously had little or no interest (like myself!). From our new home studios, we are searching for information. Now more than ever, this feels like an opportunity for us to learn from each other and expand our community. I'm writing this as an open forum to create more possibilities to interact during these otherwise isolating times.

I wanted to include some resources that might be helpful when setting up to record from home. I am not in any way affiliated with these organizations or the products they recommend, but I found some of the insights helpful. When it comes to equipment, everyone has to find what works best for their own situation. There are many factors and questions to consider, for example: finding the right space (is there street noise? is it a dry sounding space?); how to create an optimal sound situation?; where to place your mic; how to choose a mic; and more. I found that there's a lot of information to be found about recording violin and cello, but somehow viola seems to have been mostly overlooked. We often get lumped into having similar qualities as one or the other. Maybe this forum will be a platform to carve out a unique viola path together.

I'm also hoping to create some kind of Viola Recording Club, open to anyone who wants to set up their own home recording situation. We're aiming to bring violists from all over to collaborate remotely, in celebration of the instrument and the composers who write for us. The repertoire for now is focusing on Viola ensemble works. As this develops, I will be providing more information, but if anyone is interested, please feel free to reach out and contact me at: newsletter@socalviolasociety.org. Also, feel free to reach out with any experiences and insights you'd like to share about recording at home.

Here are some resources that give some helpful overviews on what aspects to think about in setting up your own home studio:

www.prosoundweb.com/in-the-studio-how-to-record-violin-or-any-new-instrument

This Reverb article covers some basic microphone-focused questions such as basic mic placement, the qualities of the room, microphone types and polar patterns, proximity and sound qualities. As the title suggests it is specifically speaking to the microphone setup for recording violin, viola, and cello, and does not go into audio interfaces nor software DAWs (Digital Audio Workstations):

www.reverb.com/news/how-to-mic-violin-viol-a-and-cello-at-home-or-in-the-studio

Many of the equipment recommendations in this article are directed towards a different type of musician, but there's helpful information on Headphones, Audio Interfaces, Software, Cables, Hard Drive, and Soundproofing Equipment.

www.nymag.com/strategist/article/best-beginner-home-recording-studio-equipment.html



Los Angeles based violist **Andrew Duckles** has generously donated his artwork to SCVS for over ten years. He participates regularly in ViolaFest not only as a lecturer but also as the creator of the annual artwork featured on programs and T-shirts. His cartoons for the events are a highlight that always bring smiles to participants' faces. We will be interviewing Duckles for a future edition of this newsletter, sharing his diverse career as an artist and musician.

Local Spotlight

Thomas Metzler

The Southern California Viola Society is pleased to feature Thomas Metzler, of the Metzler Violin Shop, as our first ever Local Spotlight Feature! For the past ten years, Thomas Metzler has been a huge supporter of ViolaFest Los Angeles as our premiere "C String Sponsor". With his generous support, ViolaFest has been able to host over one thousand Southern California violists from fourth through twelfth grades for an annual day dedicated to camaraderie and celebration of all things viola. We were very happy to catch up with him for this conversation!

Linnea Powell: Hi Tom! To start, can you tell us a little about yourself and how you became a luthier and violin maker?

Thomas Metzler: At the age of eight, in the small university town of Ames, Iowa, I had the chance to hear my first live symphony concert. I remember being mesmerized by the sound of the solo violin, and by the sparkle of the soloist's sequined dress. I pestered my parents for a week or two until they arranged for me to take violin lessons with this soloist, a local university professor. The teacher, Ilza Niemack, remained my teacher for the next ten years. When I started my university studies, I loved playing in the symphony orchestra. But I began to have doubts about making violin performance my life's work. I took a summer job in Cleveland working for the violin importing firm of Scherl & Roth. It was there that I met five or six young Bavarian violin makers who had all attended the Bavarian violin making school in Mittenwald, Germany. They showed me photographs of the beautiful town in the shadow of the Bavarian alps, and of them riding bicycles through the mountains with cellos strapped to their backs. It was at that moment I decided that I would pursue a similar dream. I headed to Germany with little money, and even fewer language skills. I enrolled in a German language institute for a



Metzler Staff

month in a small town, and spent the evenings walking around with my dictionary translating store signs. When I finally got up the courage to visit the violin making school in Mittenwald, I learned that a slot had unexpectedly opened up, and that I could start my studies the following week. I celebrated by taking the ski lift high into the mountains on that lovely fall day!

I started work on my first five violins, but, simultaneously, dove back into music making. The forty students at the school were from all over the world, and our common bond was music. I played in the school orchestra, in services at the beautiful baroque Catholic church, in the local "peasant theater," and for weddings and funerals. And we got together day after day for quartet, quintet, sextet, and even octet read-throughs, usually with a bottle of wine. When the only violist at the school graduated, I was approached by the school violin teacher who asked if I wouldn't consider switching to viola? I agreed, and my life as a violist was started. I still play on a viola that I made at that time. After graduation I was fortunate to find a repair technician apprenticeship at the long established Weisshaar violin shop in Hollywood. I was surrounded by many fine violin makers and bow makers there, including my future business partner, David Rivinus.

Powell: The Metzler Violin Shop has been a generous “C String Sponsor” of SCVS’s ViolaFest for many years, and we’re so grateful for your support! Can you tell us a little about the history of the shop?

Metzler: The firm of Metzler and Rivinus was born in August of 1979 in an upstairs walk-up not far from our current shop. As I recall, we began our new business with only four violins for sale, and on a shoe-string budget. There was, of course, no email or internet at that time, so we sent out frequent paper newsletters to all the string players in the local 47 Musicians Union, and to as many teachers as we could identify. One of our early violin customers was my future wife, Barbara Don, who became a critical part of the business. My founding partner, David Rivinus, left the business in 1985 to move to Vermont.

Powell: What sets the Metzler Violin Shop apart from other instrument shops?

Metzler: There are a few things that really set our shop apart from the others in southern California. It was my wife Barbara’s dream to start a world-class sheet music department which she built up over many years. This has turned out to be a great asset as well as a curse, since with about 20,000 sheet music titles it is very difficult to run, and absolutely impossible to inventory. And for fifteen years we had the preeminent bass shop in Los Angeles, led by Lisa Gass, with dozens of famous bass players gracing the shop. One thing that still sets us apart from others is our almost annual exhibition and sale of contemporary instruments and bows that we have held for about the last 25 years. This inspires makers from all over the country and the world to send us their creations for exposure to the musicians of southern California. Our selection of contemporary American violas is particularly strong.

Powell: Do you have any favorite stories from your long history of the Metzler Violin Shop?

Metzler: If any of you had visited our shop in the late 1990s you would have met our pet sulcata tortoises named Louis Tourte & Francois, who roamed our

patio noisily. Having started out the size of a walnut, Louis outgrew the patio, and now, at age 25, owns our backyard, tipping the scale at about 120 pounds and knocking over tables and chairs and anything else in his way. In 1989 the violinist Elmar Olivera arrived to perform with the Pasadena Symphony. Somehow, just hours before the concert, his bridge broke and I was contacted to make an emergency replacement bridge for his Stradivarius violin. I was so nervous, mostly because of the time pressure, that I wasn’t able to appreciate the beauty of the instrument I was working on. I got the violin to him just an hour before performance time.

Powell: How has COVID-19 affected the Metzler Violin Shop?

Metzler: Like everyone else, we were forced to close our doors for about ten weeks at the outbreak of the pandemic. We are now almost fully reopened, but on an appointment only basis. We are all wearing masks, of course, and we limit the numbers of customers to just a few at a time. More and more of our sales are now from instruments that we mail out on approval to musicians all around the country. Unfortunately, because most schools have not reopened, our instrument rental numbers are very low this season. But, still, demand for string instruments is surprisingly strong.



Louis Tourte



Hungarian Musicians at the Metzler Violin Shop

Powell: Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

Metzler: We would love to help all the readers of this newsletter get to know us a little better. So, for the months of November, December and January we offer you the following promo code good for a 15% discount on cases, strings, and all other accessories: SCVS15. You may mention this code when visiting our shop in Glendale, or use it when checking out on our web-store: www.metzlerviolins.com.

Please make an appointment if you wish to visit our shop by calling this number: (818) 246-0278. Services at Metzler's include instrument and bow sales, rentals, appraisals, repairs, rehairs, sheet music, accessory sales, exhibitions, and events. Find out about our new Loyalty Program to be unveiled this week by subscribing to our newsletter at our website above!

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