

In This Issue



Quarter Notes from the President

by Kate Vincent

A New Discovery

by Brett Banducci

Local Spotlight: Andrew Duckles

by Alma Lisa Fernandez

Open Forum: Recording Family

by Alma Lisa Fernandez

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Quarter Notes from the President

Happy Spring from the Southern California Viola Society! We're excited to be bringing some amazing stories and articles to you in this issue. In the second installment of *Home Recording for Violists*, Alma Fernandez shares a poignant account of a recording collaboration between two members of a well-known LA music family, the wonderful violist Shanti Randall and his mother Joanna de Keyser - a trailblazing cello soloist whose career began in the 50's. In *Our Local Spotlight* we catch up with the infamous Andrew Duckles (violist, teacher and cartoonist extraordinaire), who talks to us about his creative beginnings with the viola and the pencil. Finally Brett Banducci explores another musical gem in *A New Discovery!*

It's hard to believe it is already one year since our world was turned on its head. While there has been so much suffering, loss and difficulty there are also many stories of musicians and other artists who have found meaningful ways to continue to share their creativity with others. This artistic perseverance is very inspiring especially when viewed in the context of such disorientation and financial difficulty. It is more important than ever to find ways to bring music to others not only because it is needed by listeners, but also for ourselves. While we still remain separate in so many ways, new pathways of connection have evolved as a necessary consequence, which we can use going forward. We also continue to be reminded on a daily basis of what we seek to rejoin - the essential tactile nature of music making, from the page to our fingers to their ears.

We hope that by sharing stories, interviews and articles we can provide another avenue of connection in our small musical community. If you enjoy reading, please forward this newsletter to friends and colleagues. They can sign up to receive it directly at info@socalviolasociety.org. We welcome any feedback you might have, so send us an email with your thoughts!

Kate Vincent
President of SCVS



Sofia Gubaidulina

A New Discovery

by Brett Banducci

Composer Sofia Gubaidulina was born in 1931 in the Tartar region of the Soviet Union. A modernist figure of international renown she bridges the Russian modernist movement of the second half of the 20th century with today. Encouraged by Shostakovich, while discouraged by members of the Kazan Conservatory, where she studied, her aesthetic embraces musical symbolism, mysticism, and religio-spiritual ideals.

A sonic perfume imbues Gubaidulina's works, and especially the work we will investigate this month, *Quasi Hoquetus* (1984), scored for viola, bassoon, and piano. This stunning work of profound atmosphere, reflective space, and timbre, incorporates aspects of the Golden ratio to inform not only the entrances of the various instruments, but also the structure of the work as a whole; she calls this compositional process, the "Rhythm of Form." Gubaidulina employs a contrapuntal medieval procedure called hoquet, where vertical lines of two or more voices combine to produce a "completed" linear melody. An anonymous 13th century example of hoquet. Let's see how this plays out in the context of the Gubaidulina trio. Click for a score and recording of [*Quasi Hoquetus*](#).

The fourteen and a half minute trio is divided into five main sections. While aspects of the smaller sections, including phrase length, and rests, are quite often under the influence of the Golden ratio, so too are the episodic sections and larger sub-divisions of the work. The first section of *Quasi Hoquetus* includes bars 1-21. The Fibonacci informed process yields, in the viola (**1+1+2+5+1**) = 10 total attacks; in the bassoon, 1 total attack; and in the piano (**5+3+13+34**) = **55** total attacks (bold numbers indicate they are from the Fibonacci sequence).

Harmonically, Gubaidulina rejects overly rich and needlessly complex or dissonant sonorities. The toccata-like opening piano material is quite simply an oscillating major-minor triad. A beautifully organic unfolding of material, unimpeded by empty virtuosity, operates on both a macro and micro level by way of her overarching "Rhythm of Form" concept; this leads to a cohesive and strikingly original work of great beauty and depth. Her combination of unusual instruments (a common theme in her works), and her use of double-stop harmonics in the viola, along with multi-phonics in the bassoon, invoke an otherworldly and liminal atmosphere of meditative contemplation. This is music that exists between the planes of this world and another-- held together by a truly resonant and sacred geometry.

While one does not need to know the individual ingredients that make up an entrée at your favorite restaurant, the ear can be considerably more curious, and will always benefit, when it comes to contemporary music, to a certain amount of understanding through the unveiling of the composer's pre-compositional process. This will also lead to a more clarified intent from the performer's point of view, as the true authenticity of one's interpretation is always translated on a visceral level directly by the audience. Performing a work with only a limited surface understanding of a piece, i.e., how to play it in tune and in time, while important, does the work, and the audience, a great disservice. It's like reading a poem, but skipping every other word. I encourage you to seek out analytical and scholarly discourse on the pieces that you're playing. Especially enlightening, is to lean into works that perhaps you don't have an affinity for. I'm always happily surprised when a work I previously disliked is flipped, to one I absolutely adore, simply by doing a deep dive into the work's inner mechanics.

While we have only just slightly scratched the surface of Gubaidulina's complex process, I hope you will seek out further scholarship on her life and work. Her journey as a female contemporary composer in post-war communist Russia was one of incredible struggle and perseverance. Due to the oppressive Soviet propaganda machine which actively suppressed the



Sofia at Festival Strings Lucerne

Photo by: Olaf Malzahn

dissemination of the art of its citizens, Gubaidulina's music would not be heard in the West until the early 1980s. The work cited below, *Offertorium*, catapulted Gubaidulina to the center of the contemporary music world. Championed by Gidon Kremer, this concerto for violin and orchestra, inspired by Bach's Musical Offering, is well worth adding to your permanent playlist of contemporary masterpieces.

Further listening:

[*Offertorium*](#) for Violin and Orchestra (1980)

[*Concerto*](#) for Viola and Orchestra
(+ scordatura quartet) (1996)

[*Two Paths*](#): Concerto for Two Violas and
Orchestra (1999)

[*Sieben Worte*](#) for Cello, Bayan,
and Strings (1982)

Documentary:

[*Gubaidulina*](#): Biography of a Violin Concerto

Biography:

[*Sofia Gubaidulina*](#): A Biography by Michael Kurtz

Bibliography:

Sul, Sookyung (2015). Symmetries and asymmetries in Sofia Gubaidulina's *Quasi Hoquetus* and *Ode to Broken Things* for clarinet, cello, and piano [Doctoral Dissertation]. University of Pittsburgh.



Local Spotlight

Andrew Duckles

by Alma Fernandez

In our last newsletter we shared some artwork by local violist and artist, Andrew Duckles. It was a cartoon of a T-Rex wearing a t-shirt of an alto clef with a heart around it, holding a viola perfectly nestled in one of his tiny arms, and a bow with quite a few broken strands of hair in the other. Viola T-Rex was supposed to be the artwork for ViolaFest 2020, the annual Southern California celebration of the Viola that is dedicated to students of all levels, but due to Covid-19 safety guidelines, the event had to be canceled. The featured guest artist was to be Kim Kashkashian. In case you missed her interview from our last newsletter, please check it out by [clicking here](#). The disappointment around these circumstances is an all too familiar story of 2020, and we look forward to when this event can safely return.

SCVS has had an enduring relationship with Andrew. Not only has he shared his musicianship with the many students of ViolaFest over the years, he has generously donated his cartoon art to the event since its beginnings in 2007. That's a lot of art! Each year has had a different ViolaFest mascot featured on the t-shirts and programs given to all participants. It is the first thing everyone sees upon arrival, and it brings us all together to share a moment of humor before setting off to the first classes of the day.



Andrew Duckles at work

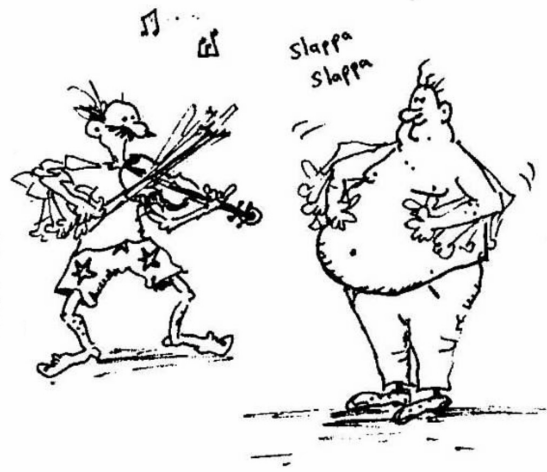
Duckles has been a friend and colleague for around 20 years—I've always known him to be a beautiful violist and talented cartoonist, but somehow we've never discussed his creative beginnings. I recently had the opportunity to sit down with him (over Zoom) and ask some questions about his roots in music and art.

Fernandez: When did you start playing the viola?

Duckles: I started playing when I was 6. My Mom is a violinist, my Dad is a cellist, and my older brother is a cellist. Viola seemed like a really good idea because if we were ever doing anything together, there would be a viola part involved, and I responded very well to it. I just thought it was great to have my own instrument, nobody else was doing it, and I was happy that it was all mine.

Fernandez: What aspects, if any, do you share as both a violist and cartoonist?

Duckles: When first asked about a feature on me, my first reaction was to say 'part of the beauty of being a cartoonist is the anonymity of it'. As a viola player, I've loved the idea of not always being front and center, and of being in a supporting role, making whoever has got the 'tune' look and sound better. I've always loved playing chamber music because I can morph into a supportive role easily without drawing attention to myself specifically. I'm sharing it with people, like sharing a good meal, it's finding the connectivity people enjoy together. Sharing an experience is something I've always been happy about. That sort of identity has always appealed to me, and as a cartoonist that's also true.



Duo for viola & stomach

DUCKLES '94



Fernandez: What is your background with art and cartooning? Were cartoons always your preferred medium?

Duckles: I had an uncle who was a school teacher and also a fantastic artist, Peter Duckles. When I was a kid, he would sit at the table with me and draw for hours. He would do this great game where he'd gather two or three of us, and we'd sit around a table and start drawing. After a couple minutes, we'd have to rotate that drawing to the person to our right, so we were always adding to the drawing that we were given. At the end we'd have these drawings that were all collabora-

tive works, it was so fun for my brother and me. He had an uncompromising style and so much talent, he taught me how to draw cartoons and caricatures, also how to exaggerate features and make things look silly. He could do anything from silk screening to woodcuts, cartoons, and cartoon strips. He always had such a good time drawing that I thought to myself, 'well that's fun, let's just keep doing that!'. I was not always drawing cartoons when I was learning, I would go to art museums and try to copy artwork I was seeing to advance my skill set. He taught me about different mediums like charcoal and water so I could experiment with complex shading. He was really incredible, and I can only imagine having him as a school teacher. I think his students were so fond of him because of his diverse skill set as an artist. He was only recently retired, and only 71 years old when he passed away. He was a big influence on me and will be sorely missed.

Fernandez: Other than ViolaFest participants, who else gets to regularly enjoy your cartoons?

Duckles: For years I've drawn posters for my wife's music classes at school. I'll just come in and I'll draw all over the whiteboard, so for that particular week she'll have a hilarious cartoon to go with whatever she's teaching. I think it's just always meant so much to me to be able to do that, if I can be a part of helping kids to learn in a way that makes it more fun is really the best thing. If they're enjoying it, the process of



When the dust cleared, the fly was gone.

doing work becomes totally secondary. When there's cartoons and fun to be had, this helps create a nurturing atmosphere, and I think that's a huge element for learning. The climate has to be good if you expect kids to soak in the information at all.

Fernandez: Where do you find the inspiration for ViolaFest cartoons, year after year?

Duckles: I'll think about what I drew for the previous year and then try and do something totally different for the upcoming year. In coming up with a design, I'll think to myself: What would a kid want to see on a shirt? What would be fun? What would make somebody smile? How can I draw something that will elicit an immediate response? These thoughts help motivate me in coming up with ideas for the t-shirt design; wanting to create something that people can identify with and will make them happy. If I draw the shark and it doesn't look funny, I'll trash it and I'll draw a sea lion instead, and maybe that'll be funnier. When I feel like something really needs to be drawn, the lag time between my brain and the page is zero. It's quite a spontaneous process for me, and I just have to be feeling good to make it look great.

Fernandez: Thank you to Andrew Duckles for taking the time to share some insights with us. Looking for more? Please visit the ViolaFest Archive page on the SCVS website where all 13 years of Duckles cartoons can be viewed and enjoyed: www.socalviolasociety.org

Canadian-born violist **Andrew Duckles** leads a diverse musical life as a recording artist, soloist, chamber musician and teacher. From a very tall family of musicians, Andrew is the "runt" of the Duckles family, standing at mere 6'4". Formerly principal viola of the Houston Grand Opera and Houston Ballet orchestras, Duckles now makes his home in Southern California and is the principal violist of the Long Beach Symphony. Duckles began his orchestral career with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and has made appearances as principal viola of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, the Hollywood Chamber Orchestra, among others. An enthusiastic chamber musician, Duckles appears regularly as a guest artist on a number of chamber music series throughout the United States and Europe, frequently sharing the stage with the Alexander String Quartet and the Los Angeles-based Debussy Trio. For over fifteen years, Mr. Duckles has been in high demand as a recording artist for multitude of studio recording projects for television and motion picture soundtracks, including the recent Star Wars films.

Andrew Duckles is married to culinary genius, master educator, and French horn player extraordinaire Laura Strand. Together, they live in Long Beach, CA with their two young sons, Aidan and Kiefer.



Any captions come to mind? Enter our cartoon caption contest! Please send entries to info@socalviolasociety.org by May 30, 2021. The winning caption will be featured in the next SCVS Newsletter and on the SCVS website.



An Open Forum

Recording Family

An Interview with Joanna de Keyser, cellist & Shanti Randall, violist

by *Alma Fernandez*

When I started thinking about this forum, many violists I knew were setting up their own home studios. Some were looking for new ways to generate income working from home, and others were finding new creative affinities. An old friend of mine, Shanti Randall, built his home studio to record himself and experiment more with his creative process. It was through this endeavor that he started recording with his Mother, cellist Joanna de Keyser, creating an unexpected family project for pure enjoyment. It has been a pleasure to hear what they have recorded together: to behold how recording with family can illuminate and deepen our relationships. I thought it would be inspiring to feature this Mother/Son team by celebrating the grace that sometimes is revealed when adjusting to pandemic times.

We all thought it was a fun idea for me to interview them together and discuss their experiences of recording at home. As the holidays approached we made plans for an interview and I began writing some questions. This took on a whole new meaning once we learned that Joanna was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer at the beginning of 2021. She went into hospice one week later and passed away on

February 3. I am grateful for the time she somehow found to respond with insights from her incredible life.

Joanna was born and raised in Los Angeles. She didn't start playing the cello until she was 14 years old, and by the time she was 20 she had already won a gold medal at the acclaimed Geneva competition. It was around this time, the early 1960's, that her parents opened and operated a music store on Hollywood Blvd called "De Keyser Music", a valuable resource for musicians of the time. This was one of the only places on the west coast offering an extensive collection of sheet music and scores. Frequent customers included notable musicians Heifitz, Piatagorsky, and Rubinstein. Joanna eventually moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico for a teaching position at the University of New Mexico and to be a member of the celebrated Seraphin Piano Trio. And although de Keyser music closed long ago (I am told it is now a Starbucks), the connection with this family and Southern CA continued. Shanti Randall spent close to a decade living in Los Angeles as a highly sought after studio, orchestral, and chamber musician.

He moved back to Albuquerque to be closer to his family, and is where he currently resides.

Alma: How did you introduce Shanti to music?

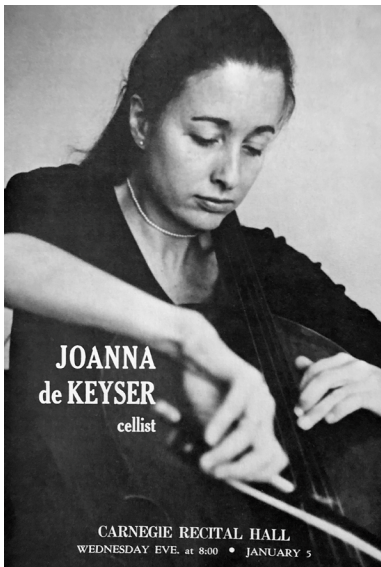
Joanna: I started Shanti out on the cello. However, in actuality (as he was only 3 years old) it was a viola with an endpin. Ironic. Fate?

Alma: Shanti, what are some early memories you have of growing up in a musical household?

Shanti: She'd warm up with the Dvorak cello concerto every morning, as long as I can remember. Ever since I was born, I was always waking up to her sound, every day. She was pregnant with me when she played in Carnegie Hall, so it goes back to the very beginnings and that was just the sound I heard. I never tried to emulate that sound per say, but that sound was always in my head of course. I never even thought about that, to be honest, but it turns out that her sound has influenced my sound so much. And I never knew that. And the reason I know that now is because of us recording at home together. She is my favorite chamber musician to play with because it's totally symbiotic. Everything just felt one hundred percent natural to play with her, more than anyone I've ever played with.

Alma: Did you ever envision Shanti becoming a musician as well?

Joanna: In the beginning, I wasn't thinking about whether or not he should be a professional musician, but more for pure enjoyment. However, as Shanti got more advanced as a violist, I realized that he was brilliant at business and mathematics. I thought that would be an easier life for him than the life of a musician. I discouraged Shanti, but he was determined, and insisted. And what a gift it has been for me, being able



Carnegie Hall Recital announcement, 1971



Young *Shanti* playing his 'cello'

to play with my own son. We have a rapport, and feel things the same, musically and tonally.

Alma: How does it feel to listen to recordings of yourself?

Joanna: It's scary. At times I think the performance was really terrible, as in my New York Carnegie Recital debut. I fell off the string and I thought I would be panned. The critics raved about the performance and didn't even mention the incident. When I listened to the recording of the concert, I could hardly hear it myself. At other times, I think I played great, but then listen to the recording and am disappointed. In general, I dislike listening to recordings of myself as I'm too self critical and the more I listen, the more I find things I don't like.

Shanti: When we recorded the Piston (Duo for Viola & Violoncello), we played through it a few times, maybe 4 times. I ended up using two takes out of the 4 to put together the final recording. My Mom being the perfectionist that she is, would point out certain spots she wasn't happy about but then we would talk about it and then I'd point out things I wasn't happy about but the overall result still sounded good to us. We learned it felt way better to be more organic about it than to try and edit and 'fix' spots.



Joanna playing the Samuel Barber Sonata for Dmitri Shostakovich (far right), 1959

Alma: How have you found the experience of collaborating and recording music with your son, in his home studio?

Joanna: Now, being diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer, the recordings we did in his home studio will live on as one of the most beautiful memories of my life. We had never recorded together, after all these years, and here, partially due to Covid, we finally got the chance. It was stressful at the time because frankly, if I'm honest, I wanted to be able to keep up with Shanti's playing; being older and not having Shanti's studio sight reading experience.

Alma: Shanti, do you find that your past experiences as a studio musician has influenced your process of recording at home?

Shanti: My experience of recording in the studios makes sitting down and recording anything else way easier. There are so many tools we use as studio musicians that I learned during my time in LA that are so helpful that I now use in everything. I found there are certain ways to mark things quickly and clearly that are invaluable, especially in a studio recording session where time is limited and you have to process everything very quickly. That has definitely carried over in everything I approach and makes the process easier. I'm extremely proud of my studio life in Los Angeles, and tying it back to my Mom having grown up there and starting her musical life there means a lot to me. It was especially great to play with people in the studios who had grown up with my Mom, many who are still active recording musicians.

Alma: Shanti, what are some highlights and fond memories from your time as a musician in Los Angeles?

My time in LA was by far the highlight of my career as a violist so far. When I look back on it, it was awesome being a part of so many memorable films and concerts. I loved playing on 'The Chronicles of Narnia', composed by Harry Gregson Williams. That was phenomenal music. Also 'Minority Report', by John Williams—that's one of my favorite soundtracks of all time. I loved every second of playing on that. 'Memoirs of a Geisha' was also scored by John Williams, we recorded that soundtrack with Yo-Yo Ma and Itzhak Perlman at Royce Hall. Some other favorites are 'Pirates of the Caribbean' (Klaus Bedelt & Hans Zimmer) and The Incredibles (Michael Giacchino). I also loved the live performances I got to be a part of, for instance performing with Bjork at Coachella, the LA Philharmonic, and LA Opera.

Alma: Will you continue to record at home?

Shanti: I'm still using my home studio, using the time to explore. It's interesting how this home recording studio was such a life changer. We didn't know that our time together was limited. Because of Covid, we got to have all this time together, and we had the time to record. She has always loved sharing music. At the beginning of Covid she would play cello on her porch, and people walking by would love hearing her, and that brought her the world.



Joanna playing the Dvorak Cello Concerto for Pablo Casals at UC Berkeley, 1960

One of her favorite memories was the time she played for a group of dolphins. She had a carbon fiber cello, and there was a speaker set up in the water. She started playing and the dolphins gathered. It brought her so much joy. My Mom played just to give.

Alma: And from what I can tell, she is continuing to give.
Joanna would have been 82 on March 1, the first day of Women's History month, a celebration of trailblazers past and future. She is survived by her son Shanti Randall, granddaughters Adriana Tixier and Malia Fritsch. Joanna was an active supporter of campaigns for world peace, protection of the natural environment, and various social justice issues. Any donations made in her memory can be sent to the cause of your choice.



Recent photo of *Shanti & Joanna*



Joanna at the Tchaikovsky Competition (circa early 1960's)

Walter Piston Duo for Cello & Viola

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOVLaxyMamo>

List of equipment used for this recording:

Mic: **Geffel UMT70s mic**

Software: **Logic and ProTools**

Interface: **Universal Audio Apollo Twin Quad**

Viola: **Johannes Cuypers (1790)**

Cello: **Sanctus Seraphin, "de Keyser" (1732)**

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