

# Violin Octet

new voices for the 21st century

Vol. 2, No. 3 Spring 2005



## Music in the Church at Aust

### In the U.K. Roddy Skeaping Leads a Memorable Octet Concert

photo by Giles Godwin



David Bird, treble; Dan Wolverson, alto; Frances Laughton, mezzo; Steffan Llwyd, alto; Kate Cullen, tenor, Heather Hibbard, baritone; Charles Roberts, bass; John Harvey, Contrabass; Roddy Skeaping, conductor (seated, foreground)

In 603 A.D., when the Papal emissary, St. Augustine, traveled to Aust on the English side of the River Severn to meet with the Welsh bishops, his goal was to unify the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Churches. History tells us that the overbearing Augustine succeeded only in creating a public relations disaster, and that the trip was a failure. Augustine could not have known that his visit created an event for which an original musical composition would be commissioned some 1400 years in the future, and that

a 12th-century church built at Aust 600 years later would be the concert hall in which the piece was played.

Concert organizer Dr. Peter Dobbins tells us that Music in the Church at Aust is an independent musical charity (similar to a non-profit art organization on this side of the pond) that puts on a regular series of musical events featuring an eclectic mix of early music and traditional music of other cultures, but with an "occasional contemporary surprise." In this

case, that might be the understatement of the year!

#### "What a Programme!"

The concert was a success despite the unfamiliarity of the musicians with their violins and limited times for rehearsals. The event drew a full house, and there was also a good audience for the afternoon showing of the octet and a talk describing the science underlying the violins from physicist Dobbins. Dobbins noted that nobody left during the

see Aust, p. 4

### Building the Belgian Octet Joris Wouters Creates Future Music



instruments until he was in his twenties and began to study violin at a local music academy. Dissatisfied with the sound of his shiny student violin, Wouters went to the violin repair shop of his uncle, Achilles van Elst, and asked to borrow an instrument. Van Elst refused, telling his astonished nephew, "Go make one yourself!"

That might have ended Wouter's violin career on the spot except for one thing. Wouters recalls, "He gave me a copy of *Scientific American*, the one with the article on plate tuning by Carleen Hutchins, and told me I should read it."

Joris Wouters converses in a soft voice, but his plans for creating the first European-built octet speak loud. Like many who work to promote the new violin family, Wouters came to the octet only after walking a long and circuitous path. He was not drawn to the world of stringed

see Wouters, p. 5

## Officers and Board

### President

Paul R. Laird

### First Vice-President

John Cavanaugh

### Second Vice-President

Francis Furlong

### Secretary

Pamela Proscia

### Treasurer

Charles J. Rooney, Jr.

### Executive Director

Carleen M. Hutchins

### Trustees

Elias Abelson

Joseph F. Conrad II

Daniel Heifetz

Theodore A. Jones

André P. Larson

Donald Joseph McNalley

Sharon McNalley

Edith Munro

Robert Nersasian, MD

Joseph Peknik, III

F. Scott Ponicsan

Dean E. Richardson

Margaret H. Sachter, Esq.

Lin Tollefsen

Tim Trott

### Advisory Board

Alan Carruth

Carolyn Wilson Field

Frances Fielding

Elizabeth Haeger

Thomas Knatt

Frederick Lipsett

Stephen Nachmanovitch

Grigory Sedukh

Robert J. Spear

Chris Twidle

Duane Voskuil

James Weigel

Mary Williams

Robert Wilkins

Joris Wouters

### Newsletter Editor

Robert J. Spear

## Letter From the Editor

### International News.

In anticipation of our October Convention in Ithaca, NY, much of this issue is devoted to the international aspects of octet work. It may surprise some of you to know that beside the octet being constructed in the USA, others are underway in three countries; Belgium, Italy, and Australia. Read on to learn more, and make plans to attend the convention this fall. We have been working hard to provide our members with a varied, informative, and enjoyable experience. Our goal was to ensure that everyone would go home with useful and practical knowledge.

### Lodging Roommates.

Information about convention lodging is on our website, with the link prominently displayed on the home page. The best rate per night is obtained with double occupancy. If you have reserved a room and would like to share it, or if you haven't reserved a room yet and are looking for someone who needs a roommate, please contact Louisa Jones at the central office. She's there Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Call 603 569 7946 or email <nvfa@att.net>. We'll try

our best to match you up with someone of similar interests.

### Finding Others.

We are considering creating a registry that will contain the names of octet instrument players with some other basic information such as instrument played and level of ability. This kind of information would reside on the password-protected portion of our members web page where a level of privacy can be maintained. The process would be similar to the one used by the Amateur Chamber Music Society.

The suggestion was initially made to us by Patrick Tobin, one of our newest members, that individuals seeking to find others to play music or form groups would be greatly assisted by having access to such information. We think it's a great idea, Patrick, and thanks! While we work out the details, Louisa Jones has offered to get the ball rolling; send her an email <nvfa@att.net>, and be sure to list your instrument or area of special interest.

### Events Calendar Moves.

Many wonderful events featuring octet instruments are announced and performed between issues.

Keeping our Events Calendar current on two issues per year has been frustrating, so we have decided to discontinue it as a regular newsletter feature and move it to our web site at <www.nvfa.org/events.html>. We can update frequently online and post many more events there than we can here, and readers can learn of events in time to actually attend them! Check in often to find out what's going on in the world of octet instruments!

### Fall 2005 Issue Delayed.

The next issue of the Violin Octet Newsletter will appear in December 2005 or January 2006. This will allow your editor time to recover from his labors as convention organizer and to devote the contents to the OCTET 2005 Convention.

R. J. Spear, Editor  
PO Box 6562  
Ithaca, NY 14851  
rjspear@zoom-dsl.com



### Violin Octet Newsletter

is published twice each year by The New Violin Family Association, Inc. 42 Taylor Drive, Wolfeboro NH 03894

The NVFA encourages the distribution and dissemination of information about the new violin family octet, performers, composers, and luthiers. Permission is granted for fair use of any material appearing in the newsletter with proper attribution of its source. Please notify the editor when making such use.

Copyright 2005 by the New Violin Family Association, Inc.

Send concert and event notices to <rjspear@zoom-dsl.com> or PO Box 6562, Ithaca, NY 14851. We welcome submissions for articles, Letters to the Editor, Luthier's Workbench, and Lighter Moments. Please include your name, address, and a small photo of yourself (digital format preferred).

## Letters to the Editor

### Looking Back, Looking Ahead.

I enjoyed the latest issue of the Violin Octet Newsletter! It brought back warm memories from days of long ago when I played the violins and had such good contacts with Carleen. It's wonderful that you are doing this. I am hoping to attend OCTET 2005 in Ithaca this fall, and I'm looking forward to seeing you and also to the next issue of the newsletter.



-- *P a m e l a Gearhart is an internationally known violinist, educator, orchestra conductor, and retired Dana Pro-*

*fessor at Ithaca (NY) College, School of Music.*

**Errata.** The article on Joe McNalley's Hutchins Consort, "8 is Enough," incorrectly listed in our previous issue as appearing in the November 2004 edition of *Strings Magazine*, appeared in the issue for January 2005.

### Octet Violins on Compact Disc.

For the convenience of our readers, our full line of compact discs can be obtained online through CD Baby, where you can also find recordings by independent artists such as Chien Tan and Reginald Clews, performing on octet instruments.



### Compliments and Corrections.

I just got the newsletter over Christmas. Good Work! There is a needed correction to a sentence in my article "Modaling the Violin Octet," which appeared on page 13 (*Vol. 2, no. 2, Fall 2004*). The sentence that reads "Unaware that equations were available to reliably predict these mode frequencies, the Hutchins-Schelleng team scrutinized a broad range of bowed string instruments . . ." seems to imply that Carleen and John were looking for empirical connections when they should have looked at theoretical ones. The sentence should

have read "Aware that no equations were available to reliably predict these mode frequencies . . ." (Mea culpa, George. This one somehow slipped past me between the first and fiftieth revisions. Apologies to you, Carleen, and John. --Ed.)



-- *George Bissinger, Ph.D., is a professor of physics at Eastern Carolina University who*

*swears he will one day build a tenor violin for his wife!*

## Millions of People Have Seen This Exhibit!



Photo by Edith Munro

Joe Peknik, principal technician in the department of musical instruments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, informs us that the Hutchins Violin Octet exhibit will be extended through the end of June 2005 and possibly longer. Although the exhibit has remained mounted far past its original expiration date of 2003, Peknik says that it has been popular with visitors to the museum throughout its three-year presentation (originally scheduled for 18 months). During the period of Christmas and New Year, and the end of the "Christo Gates" exhibition in Central Park, people visited the museum at the rate of 30,000 a day. Peknik notes that the exhibit "always draws a lot of attention. Nearly five million people visit the museum annually.

## WIN THIS VIOLIN!



The NVFA is raffling off this beautiful copy of the del Gesu "King Joseph" violin made and donated by Joseph Conrad. The violin includes a case and bow. All proceeds go toward furthering the work of the NVFA. The violin will be on display and tickets may be purchased during the convention.

**Best wishes to the New Violin Family Association on your first international convention from your friends at the Guild of American Luthiers.**



**Aust from p. 1**

intermission, and that a large number of patrons later retired to the nearby Boar's Head Inn to meet the players.

John Oswin, writing in the *Thornbury Gazette*, said "What a Programme! The full ensemble sounded wonderful (and) the basses stood out as particularly good." Oswin noted that two compositions written especially for the octet were well received. He said Skeaping's *Reflections on a Disused Railway Line* "sounded really fine and should get more outings," while Mann's *Eight Verses for Saint Augustine* intrigued the audience with a "demonstration of the sound textures that can be created with such a well-balanced ensemble." Oswin also expressed his concern that the instruments not be "put away in a cupboard and forgotten." Hear, hear!

**Eight Verses for St. Augustine.**

With the financial support of Arts Council England South West, the Performing Right Society Foundation, and the South Gloucester Council, a new work for octet was commissioned from composer Terry Mann. Mann doesn't use unconventional harmonies even by 20th-century standards but relies instead on precision, tuning, and rhythmic clarity to define his pieces.

Mann had to write music for an ensemble that he did not hear or see until the first rehearsal, and it was not until then he realized that his music caused difficulties for the treble player due to the small scale of the fingerboard. In the end, Mann was not even able

to attend the premiere of his piece because he had to honor a commitment as composer-in-residence at Banff, Canada!

Mann says he did not think of the octet as eight individual violins, but as one large violin with eight voices. This striking feature of the instruments was also noticed by the players, some of whom commented on the surprisingly similar tonal response of the top six violins, remarked on their even response across the strings, and noted how well they responded in the higher registers--even on the lower strings.

**The Aust Players.** Finding musicians for the group proved to be a long process. In the end, the top three violins were played by



**David Bird, Dan Wolverson, and Frances Laughton rehearse.**

faculty members from the department of physics at Bath University; Professor David Bird on treble, Dr. Dan Wolverson on soprano, and Dr. Frances Laughton on mezzo-- surely the most academically illustrious group ever to shoulder octet instruments!

Other musicians were recruited from the Bath Symphony Orchestra or from a string quartet based at Bath University. Some, like John Harvey, responded to a



**John Harvey with contrabass.**

leaflet calling for volunteers. A versatile musician, he could have played any of the instruments, but his favorite was the alto violin. "If I'd been able to walk away with one, this would have been it," Harvey wrote to us, although he ended up playing the contrabass because he was the larger of only two volunteers who could play bass. Harvey said the power and tonal quality of the contrabass was "amazing."

Dan Wolverson said of his soprano, "I'd like to keep it please!" Wolverson, a violist, had to transpose his parts into alto clef, but found himself taken with the soprano. He feels that the instrument stands well on its own and does not need to be played only in an octet.

Others picked instruments for more pragmatic reasons. Unable to choose between the tenor and the alto, Kate Cullen selected the tenor because the alto was easier for another volunteer, Steffan Llwyd to transport on his motorbike! Cullen did not regret her decision, and she became

impressed with the tenor for its overall tone quality and potential as a solo instrument. Like many of the others, Cullen became attached to her new instrument and told us that she "was reluctant to leave it behind after the concert."

The musicians had high praise for the qualities of the octet, and fears about the condition of the violins after a long period of disuse at Edinburgh proved unfounded. Harvey, who played all of the set, said that they were remarkably easy to play and in good adjustment.

**Persistence Pays.**

Like Augustine's visit, the first attempts to organize the concert did not succeed. The event had to be cancelled twice in 2003, once when technical difficulties with the octet instruments arose and again when both Dobbins and Mann suffered serious illnesses. Dobbins tried again in 2004, and this time his efforts were successful.

Although organizing the concert was an exhausting experience, Dobbins says he is not through. He plans to take the program to Edinburgh for a performance in the Reid Concert Hall and to play in London in a venue to be announced later. The project will be completed with the release of a CD recording of what Dobbins calls "a landmark event" in the history of the little Aust Church.

**Thanks to Peter Dobbins for his contributions to this story and for providing photographs.**

## Wouters from p. 1

Instead Wouters got married, had three children, and saw his spare time “reduced to nothing.” He worked several jobs to support his family but felt aimless and often found himself thinking about violins. His wife, Mieka, urged him to pursue his dream, saying that he would always regret not trying. Wouters set up shop in the small Belgian village of Westerlo, about 30 km from Brussels, thinking it would take him at least 10 years to make a go of it.

Wouters did not think much about the octet and concentrated on building conventional violins and violas. The closest he came to building instruments of different sizes occurred when he made half-sized violins for his young children, which proved so difficult he promised himself never to try anything like it again.

Still, he felt that his new violins never reached their potential and at length he revisited the *Scientific American* article hoping to improve their sound. “A friend of mine made me a sine wave generator, but I didn’t know how to use it,” Wouters told us. His frustration led him to seek out Hutchins, but he didn’t have her address. It took him a full year before his search led him to the Stockholm Museum where a staff member found the information he needed. “Carleen replied to my letter,” Wouters recalls, “but she wasn’t taking students any longer and referred me to Tom Knatt and Alan Carruth. I came to the States for two weeks one summer and they taught me the basics.”

Knatt acted as an intermediary, and Wouters rented a car and



**Wouters planes a baritone bass bar.**

drove to New Jersey one Sunday afternoon to meet with Hutchins at her home in Montclair. Convinced of his intent, and relieved that he could speak English, Hutchins agreed to teach Wouters for a few weeks each summer. Wouters has returned for twelve years and is now the last of her students.

Despite his struggles to find Hutchins, Wouters remained more or less indifferent to the new violin family until he heard a full set played in Edinburgh in 1997, which finally put his interest in motion. “I remember listening to them and thinking that they sounded really great,” Wouters laughs. “Of course, I tried to put any thoughts of building an octet out of my mind as impractical, but in the end I couldn’t. It was like being infected with the flu. You have to let it run its course!”

Urged on by Hutchins, Wouters began to make an octet, but he worked mostly in his spare time

and progress was slow. Then he met a Belgian couple--composer Jan Van Landegem and his violinist wife, Jenny Spanoghe--who were interested in the octet, but Wouters had nothing to show them.

Realizing that no one would be interested in the instruments from talk alone, Wouters returned to his bench with renewed energy. Hutchins provided him with parts of several unfinished octet instruments, and in July 2004, when Wouters visited the couple again, he brought an alto and a baritone with him. “They invited me to stay for dinner,” Wouters



**Wouters varnishes a baritone violin in his shop.**

said, “but they could not keep their hands off the instruments. Very late that evening I returned home, ecstatic--and hungry! Finally, after knocking on so many doors it seems that this time I knocked on the right one.”

Wouters plans to have a treble, soprano, and mezzo ready to play

by the time you read this, after which he will turn his attention to a tenor. His indifference has vanished, and he now says he would make only octet instruments if he could.

He comments, “The octet is the future, and we are helping to create it.” For Wouters, this is more than a figure of speech. In the fall of 2004 he participated in the Ballidio Cello Conference, held in four historic buildings spread through the Belgian city of Antwerp. About 150 cello players and ten makers took part, and Wouters brought his recently completed baritone and alto violins. He admits there were some low moments, including a few discouraging episodes with older players who did not seem to grasp the octet concept and would not take a moment to even draw a bow across the strings.

“I would say that 60 or 65 percent of the musicians there had not heard of the new violin family,” Wouters told us in a trans-Atlantic telephone conversation, “but many liked the instruments. I saw that these people had outgrown the average ideas about musical instruments and were ready to try something new.” Wouters’ greatest successes occurred when students in their teens picked up the instruments. “The teenage musicians were the ones who played the most,” Wouters says, “and I recall four in particular who were ecstatic with them. I left the conference knowing I had sowed some seeds, and I’m sure some of them will grow.”

Joris Wouters supplied information and photographs for this article.

## Australian Octet Begun



**Members of the Queensland Branch of the Australian Association of Musical Instrument Makers meet to discuss the octet. (L to R) Trevor Martin (National Secretary), Robert James, Reg Cooke, Marion Goward, and Chris Twidle (standing, rear).**

There was great surprise and joy at the NVFA central office when we received word that the Queensland branch of the Australian Association of Musical Instrument Makers (AAMIM) in Brisbane was contemplating the construction of a full set of the new violin family.

At one of the group's regular meetings about a year ago, Marion Goward, a musician who recently had retired from the forest industry, raised the idea of building an Australian Octet. This idea fascinated Chris Twidle, a teacher of technology, graphics, and woodworking, who had long been interested in the work of Carleen Hutchins. To date there has never been a full octet built in Australia, although the late "Johnno" Johnson had acquired

a set of plans and started work on some of them. Other Australian makers had also tried their luck at building individual instruments of the set, but were handicapped in that none of them had ever seen or heard any of the new family first hand.

The undertaking will be expensive, but a donation of AU\$200 from Ms. Fran Gilje of Brisbane to the Queensland branch has allowed the project to enter the planning stage, and the generosity of Carleen Hutchins in addition to a bequest from the estate of Mr. Johnson has given the Australians a full set of plans and study guides and most of the material for the "top five" instruments. The question now looming for the group is what steps to take next.

### Local or Imported Wood?

From the start, the makers agreed to restrict themselves to native wood. Twidle reports that there is much interest in local forest products such as Tasmanian Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxydon*) and Queensland maple (*Flindersia breyleyana*) for the backs, while King Billy Pine (*Athrotaxis selaginoides*, also from Tasmania), which has been used extensively for guitars, seems like a good candidate for top wood. In light of what Carleen Hutchins had to say about the suitability of King Billy pine for the larger instruments, Celery Top pine (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*) and Bunya pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*) were added to the list, although the group has admitted they would resort to using European wood if all else failed.

### Makers in another hemisphere.

Being half a world away from Europe and nearly as far from the United States, Australia's violin makers have either been imported or constrained to travel overseas to obtain training. Recognizing that both their skills and resources are limited and widely dispersed, the interested makers formed a loose committee and have begun making some basic decisions about gathering the necessary information, selecting and obtaining the needed materials, and finding players for the instruments.

Trevor Martin intends to work on the treble violin; Maurice Briggs, a retired engineer and mandolin builder, will make a soprano; Chris Twidle will work on a mezzo;

---

**"The further we go along our path the more we are coming to realize the magnitude of the project. The actual building of the instruments could almost be seen as the most straightforward part of it."**

**--Chris Twidle**

---

Twidle says it was obvious from the start that the project was going to be a significant and long-term one with a steep learning curve for some to understand the acoustic concepts that underlie the octet. Twidle says, "The further we go along our path the more we are coming to realize the magnitude of the project. The actual building of the instruments could almost be seen as the most straightforward part of it."

Reg Cooke, another retired engineer, will take on the alto; and Marion Goward, who was responsible for the entire idea in the first place, has been persuaded to try her hand at a tenor violin. Chapter president Doug Eaton is likely to be pressed into service in the bow making department, according to Twidle.

**Thanks to Chris Twidle for his contributions to this story and for providing photographs.**

## Luthier's Workbench

### Tip #5: Balsa Crush Cauls

To glue ribs to blocks we usually make a wooden counterform, or caul, to match the block curve. Some time ago, we came up with the idea of making the entire caul from blocks of balsa wood commonly found in hobby and art stores. Balsa shapes easily, and the wood will compress to fit small irregularities the first time it is used. It will do the same in each



**A balsa wood crush caul for a contrabass showing plywood backer (on left). A large square assures perpendicularity.**

subsequent use, so your joint will always be perfect even when your curve isn't.

### Tip #6: Tailpieces and Tailhangers for Alto:

Your alto is finally ready to play, but you can't find the right tailpiece and the tailhangers are always the wrong size. By using a lightweight tailpiece such as the Wittner shown here, and a nylon spacer found in most hardware stores, you can solve both problems at once. The spacer can be cut to length with a knife. Tailhangers sometimes fail at the threads; solve this by using two nuts on each side.



Preparation is pretty basic. Make the underside flat so that it rests squarely on the work surface, and keep the sides perpendicular (see photo) so that in use the block stands where you place it and does not require a third hand to position it when applying clamps. To prevent the clamp jaw from deforming the block, glue a piece of wood to the balsa with white glue before shaping. The crush caul in the photo is for a contrabass, so the backing wood is 3/8" plywood scrap with the edges planed flush to the block. Shaping the balsa is done with planes and rasps, checking for a good fit and keeping the sides perpendicular.

Balsa blocks are a joy to work with. When we made our first, we simply expected to expend them after a few uses, but the number of times a block can be slightly crushed continues to surprise us. If the balsa becomes much deformed, it can be reshaped and used again. We started using balsa blocks on violas and cellos about twelve years ago and have yet to throw one out.

## Notes on the Alto Violin

### Comments and observations on this most middle of all the instruments.

The octet designers faced unique problems when deciding on the alto string length. There was concern that violists would not accept a vertical alto and evidence that players might prefer to play even a large alto on their shoulder. Bill Berman, a man of considerable arm and hand proportion, did, in fact, play the alto as a shoulder instrument for years. Later, his student, Randall Vemer, also played the alto horizontally.

Accordingly, the string length was kept short so that viola-style fingerings could be used. This solution worked well, even though it meant taking liberties with the proportions of the design, the length of the f-holes, and the traditional neck-to-body-length ratios.

Yet there are compelling reasons to play the alto vertically. Setting the instrument on a pin lifts the burdensome weight off the left shoulder, allowing the arms and hands to assume a natural position. The ease of playing in the extended range of the alto compared with the conventional viola is a benefit most better players quickly realize. While viola fingerings are intended in the lower positions, there is no argument that above the neck/body joint, only cello-style thumb-position playing will work.

Players who come to the alto violin from the alto viola and

players who come from the cello tend to look at alto fingering and tone production quite differently. Steve Stalker, former alto player with the Albert Consort, and John Acosta, former alto player of the Hutchins Consort, are both cellists, but Stalker studied viola and took a violist's approach while Acosta looked more to the cellist's techniques. Their opinion is that neither fingering style works entirely well.

Acosta's alto was an original Hutchins model with a string length of 400 mm; Stalker's a second-generation model made by Robert Spear for an air-mode experiments ("Influence of Form on the 'Signature Modes' of a Second-Generation New Violin Family Quintet," CASJ, Vol 4, no. 8 (Series II) November, 2003, p. 19). Its string length is 435 mm, which raises an interesting question: how long would an alto string length need to be before cello-style fingerings would prove more advantageous? Stalker said he would use cello-style fingering if the string length were longer, but he added, "It would have to be a *lot* longer."

Both Stalker and Acosta ended up using what might be called a "three-finger style" of playing, but where Stalker thought of his way as a variation of viola technique, Acosta said he thought of his as playing cello-style low-thumb position without the thumb.

**continued over . . .**



In this 1932 photo, Ramon Parramon of Barcelona plays his 524 mm (21") alto. Note elegant left hand fingering and right hand bow position.

Viola players also have a much different conception of tone, which is directly a function of how the bow is held and the stroke speed and weight. A combination of two styles proves helpful; the cello grip on the bow but without the heavy hand that most cellos require.

#### Viola Hand; Cello Thumb

The key to playing the alto is

to approach the instrument like a beginner. Removing preconceptions goes a long way toward overcoming what Stalker calls the alto's "middleness;" that combination of properties that makes it the most difficult member of the octet to play. "It really comes down to this," Stalker says, "viola hand, cello thumb."

Luthier Robert Spear, who built three altos and watched players adjust, agrees that cello-style thumb placement is more advantageous. "It allows the player to mix systems while providing an anchor for the hand," he says. "The exact choice between reaching back with the first finger as a cellist does, or sliding the second finger forward as a violist does, depends in large part on the passage being played. With the alto, a player can mix systems and choose the fingering that works better for a particular passage."

#### Playing Hurt

One of the great advantages of

the vertical alto is realized by individuals for whom age, disease, or accident has threatened or diminished their ability to play the conventional viola. Spear notes that the last three altos he made have been for injured violists whose playing days were otherwise over. While this may sound a little gruesome, he thinks that it represents a point where the alto will gain acceptance. "If the alto will save careers," he says, "the players will use it."

#### Build the Alto First!

Spear has advice for any luthier ready to build an octet--build the alto first! It offers a high probability of success on the first try, but, more importantly, it is the one for which it has been the most difficult to find players, and the one for which most players need the most time to adjust. If a subset of the octet is contemplated, the alto is the indispensable instrument.

**Our thanks to La Casa Parramon, Barcelona, Spain for the photo of Ramon Parramon and permission to use it.**

**Stringmakers for Octet Violins.**  
See us at **OCTET 2005**  
**Table #1, Cayuga Room.**

*Strings and Accessories  
for Bowed Instruments*

1805 Apex Road Sarasota, Florida 34240 Phone: 941-571-0016  
Fax 941-378-3817, E-mail: supersensitive@supersensitive.com

**Custom cases and bags at reasonable prices for New Family Violins.**  
**Stop by and visit us at OCTET 2005! Table #2, Cayuga Room.**  
[<cbobelockcases@juno.com>](mailto:cbobelockcases@juno.com)

**We'll be at Table #4, OCTET 2005 Cayuga Room.**

- +Newsletter Back Issues
- +Octet Plans and Drawings
- +Compact Discs and DVDs
- +Luthier's Kits
- +Article Reprints, and more!

## Dennis Flanagan 1919-2005

We note with regret the passing of Dennis Flanagan, who died January 14, 2005 at his home in New York. Flanagan, editor of *Scientific American* for 37 years and 436 consecutive issues, was a supporter of the violin octet. Like Carleen Hutchins, Flanagan believed that scientific findings should be presented to the general public in a clear and concise manner that dispensed with technical jargon and obscure terms. In 1962, *Scientific American* published Hutchins' "The Physics of Violins," a report of her findings on plate tuning that generated more requests for information than Hutchins and the old Catgut Acoustical Society (CAS) had ever received before. Exposure in *Scientific American* gave the work great credibility and brought it before the public in a way that, as Hutchins says, "put Catgut on the road as an international organization. Dennis Flanagan is one of the

reasons we are here." Flanagan felt just the opposite. He wrote to Hutchins some years later; "Your articles in *Scientific American* opened up an entirely new theme in the magazine that did us much credit." Another Hutchins' article, "The Acoustics of Violin Plates," appeared in 1981, just three years before Flanagan stepped down as editor. Flanagan served on the CAS Board for almost the entire period of its existence, and almost never failed to attend CAS events. After the CAS merged with the Violin Society of America, he served on the NVFA Board until January 2004 when he resigned due to advanced age and inability to travel. He then accepted inclusion in the association's new advisory board because it was something he could do from home. NVFA has lost a strong supporter and a good friend, and we are not likely to see another like him soon.



## OCTET 2005: The Premiere Convention of the New Violin Family Association

### Daily Schedule

#### October 30, 2005: Sunday

**1:00 p.m.** Lobby, Ithaca Downtown Holiday Inn. Registration begins; check in to your room: continues all day.

**7:30 p.m.** Ballroom. Reception and welcoming address by President Paul Laird. Recital by Norman Fischer, baritone and tenor violins; Wendy Olson-Posner, soprano and mezzo violins; and Nathan Cook, alto violin; with composer Gabriela Frank. Hors d'oeuvres before and two-hour cash bar after.

#### October 31, 2005: Monday

**7:30 - 9:30 a.m.** Breakfast Buffet, Max's Restaurant.

**9:30 a.m.** Cayuga Room. Exhibition and vendors' booths open.

**9:30 a.m.** Ballroom. General Session. Moderator to be announced. Comparison of conventional and octet instruments; playing demonstrations.

**12:00 p.m.** Board Room. Luncheon meeting of NVFA officers and trustees.

**12:00 p.m.** Lunch on your own.

**2:00 p.m.** Board Room. Luthier's workshop on basic plate tuning. Alan Carruth and Thomas Knatt, leaders. Also Joseph Conrad, Pio Montanari, and Joris Wouters (rotating).

**2:00 p.m.** Seneca. Performance Workshop with members of the Hutchins Consort, Albert Con-

sort, and others.

**5:00 p.m.** Exhibition and vendors' room closes.

**5:00 - 7:00 p.m.** Dinner on your own.

**7:30 - 9:30 p.m.** Location to be announced. Evening recital part one with Grigori Sedukh, treble violin, and Elena Svetkova, piano; also with Chien Tan, treble violin; part two; Steven Nachmanovitch, mezzo improvisations. Free to members.

#### November 1, 2005: Tuesday

**7:30 - 9:30 a.m.** Breakfast Buffet, Max's Restaurant.

**9:30 a.m.** Cayuga Room. Exhibition and vendors' booths open.

**9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.** Seneca Room. Roderick Skeaping; Conducting, composing, and arranging for the octet.

**9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.** Ithaca Room. Playing the alto, tenor, baritone, and bass violins. Akua Dixon, baritone; Dominic Duval, bass (jazz); Diana Gannett, bass (classical); Joe McNalley, bass (classical); Ted Mook, tenor; William Berman, alto.

**12:00 p.m.** Lunch on your own.

**2:00 p.m.** Board Room. Luthier's plate tuning workshop continues.

**2:00 p.m.** Seneca Room. Treble, soprano, and mezzo violin master class with Grigori Sedukh. Master students include Chien

Tan, Linda Case, and Wendy Olson-Posner.

**2:00 p.m.** Ithaca Room. Master Class on Improvisation with Stephen Nachmanovitch.

**5:00 p.m.** Exhibition and vendors' room closes.

**5:00 - 7:00 p.m.** Dinner on your own.

**7:30 - 9:30 p.m.** Location to be announced. Evening recital part one with Diana Gannett, Hutchins small bass, and John Ellis, piano; part two; Theodore Mook, tenor; Akua Dixon, baritone; Dominic Duval, small bass. Free to members.

#### November 2, 2005: Wednesday

**7:30 - 9:30 a.m.** Breakfast Buffet, Max's Restaurant.

**9:30 a.m.** Cayuga Room. Exhibition and vendors' booths open.

**9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.** Rehearsals, State Theatre. Octet players and soloists only---closed to members and the public.

**9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.** Ballroom. General Session presenting Scientific and Technical Papers. A. Thomas King, moderator.

"The Cremonese Method of F-Hole Placement", A. Thomas King;

"Coumarin; Time vs. Stiffness in Seasoned Spruce," Edwin R. Fitzgerald;

"CT Scanning of Violins", Steve Sirt and John Waddle;

"Tone Quality and Harmonic

Structure in the Mezzo Violin," Duane Voskuil; "Air Modes," Carleen Hutchins.

**12:30 p.m.** Lunch on your own.

**2:00 p.m.** Board Room. Luthier's workshop on basic plate tuning, concluding session.

**2:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.** Ballroom. General Session. Paul Laird, Moderator. Topic: "What's Next for the New Violin Family?" Presentations by NVFA officers and board; general discussion; question and answer period.

**4:30 p.m.** Cayuga Room. Exhibition and vendors' booths close.

**4:30 - 6:30 p.m.** Early dinner on your own.

**7:15 - 8:15 p.m.** State Theatre. Presentation by Dr. Paul Laird on the history of the violin Octet. Open to the public; tickets required.

**8:30 p.m.** State Theatre. Gala concert, first part. Hutchins Consort from California; also Grigori Sedukh, treble violin. Intermission: Second part: Albert Consort from New York; also Diana Gannett, bass. Combined Hutchins and Albert Consorts and invited musicians from the convention attendees. Open to the public; tickets required.

#### November 3, 2005: Wednesday

**7:30 - 9:30 a.m.** Continental Breakfast in lobby or breakfast on your own at Max's. Check out of your room by 11:00 a.m.

## People in the News



**Stephen Nachmanovitch**, a concert improviser on acoustic and electric violin and viola, prefers to play an instrument to “find the sounds it wants to make,” rather than forcing it to fit arbitrary needs. He has played a great many ancient and modern instruments and finds that his favorite is now a Hutchins mezzo violin. Nachmanovitch says “the instrument has elicited wonder from everyone who has heard it. It has a throatier, richer, and more powerful sound than a conventional violin. Listeners remark that the sound source seems to be not the instrument, but the entire room.”

Nachmanovitch has collaborated with artists in other media including music, dance, theater and film. He has published a number of articles and is the author of *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* (Penguin-Putnam, 1990). He will be part of an evening recital at the NVFA Convention this fall, in performance with jazz player **Dominic Duval** on the Hutchins small bass, cellist and baritone player **Akua Dixon**, and cellist and tenor player **Ted Mook**.



**Agnes Kory**, of the Béla Bartók Centre for Musicianship in London, performed on her restored tenor violin before an audience of about 300 people at King's College, London on April 22, 2004. Kory said, “To my surprise and delight, my instrument and its sound generated a lot of excitement and pleasure.” Kory published a paper on the tenor violin in the 1994 Galpin Society Journal.



**Elisa Evett** presented a recital on the baritone violin, accompanied by pianist **Rosalind Feinstein**. The performance was given on July 19, 2004, in the auditorium of Kendal at Ithaca (NY). The program consisted of works

by Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms and drew a large and appreciative audience of Kendal residents, their guests, and members of the Ithaca community. Event officials at Kendal ran out of chairs and said that they had never seen such a large crowd turn out for a duo.



**Chien Tan** continues to break new boundaries as she integrates multimedia and technology with the acoustically unique treble violin. Tan's long project to create a music video is complete (see photo of cover, above). This short film of Tan playing Vivaldi's “Goldfinch” was directed by Portland (OR) filmmaker Takafumi Uehara in the airy interior of Montgomery Park, and shows Tan playing the treble violin as she strolls over airbridges and rides glass-walled elevators to the accompaniment of strings played by members of the Oregon Symphony and a computer-animated goldfinch. David Stabler, music critic of the *Oregonian*, said that the music had “sparkle.” A DVD is available directly from Tan and also from the CD Baby online store. This spring, Tan was interviewed by Robert Siegal on National Public Radio's “All Things Considered.” <[www.trebleviolin.com](http://www.trebleviolin.com)>



**Stefan Smith** has been commissioned to write a work for treble violin by Chien Tan, who will premiere the piece in the spring of 2005. A composition student and a viola major at the DePaul University School of Music in Chicago, Smith has already written 2 symphonies, 3 concertos, and a score for the indie film *Death of Noir*. He is currently writing a film score to the feature “Bloom.”



**Akua Dixon** played her baritone violin at William Paterson University in Paterson (NJ) late last year, premiering a new jazz work by Rufus Reid. The work was played again in December at the Schenectady (NY) Community College. Dixon says the baritone violin has been a great addition to her acoustic jazz work over the last 15 years because it allows her to play with the saxophone or trombone without the need for amplification. Learn more at <[www.akuadixon.com](http://www.akuadixon.com)>.



Photo: Sabina Frank

**Gabriela Lena Frank**, a noteworthy young California composer, visited C. M. Hutchins in Wolfeboro in September 2004 with **Julie Yoon** and **Greg Beaver** of the Chiara Quartet (now in residence at Julliard). All were excited and enthusiastic about the octet instruments. Frank is currently exploring the possibility of establishing a quartet of new violins at Rice University, her alma mater, and writing a composition for the group. **Norman Fischer** is learning the tenor violin, and his graduate student, cellist **Nathan Cook**, has taken on the alto. **Wendy Olsen-Posner**, a violinist, will study both the mezzo and soprano violins, and wants to learn the treble if she can get one! Frank, Fischer, Olsen-Posner, and Cook will present the opening night recital at the NVFA Convention in Ithaca this fall.

**Diana Gannet**, professor of music at Michigan University, will be a featured recital soloist at the NVFA Convention this fall. In addition to holding the first Yale doctorate ever awarded in double bass, Gannett has recently released a new CD, *Ladybass*,



available on Iridia records, which features music from both the traditional literature for double bass and some premieres of contemporary music. Gannett also studied with C. M. Hutchins and has built several octet instruments, including the bass on which she now performs.



**Laurie Conrad** of Ithaca, NY has composed three works for new family instruments: her *Elegie* quintet was premiered by members of the Albert Consort on November 30, 2003, and her Quintet No. 2 was likewise given its first performance by the Albert Consort on March 13, 2005. Through Conrad's efforts, notice

of this work (and wonderful publicity for the new family) appeared in the March issue of the *Strad Magazine*, a great breakthrough. Conrad's third piece, *Prayer to St. Michael*, still in manuscript, is scored for the full octet and concert choir. Conrad is a former concert pianist and has studied composition with Karel Husa.



**Linda Case** has joined the Albert Consort as treble violinist. This brings the group to seven players in size, with only a contrabass needed to make it the eighth full octet in existence. Case currently plays a treble violin on loan from C. M. Hutchins.



**Pio Montanari** of Genoa, Italy reports his progress on the Italian Octet. A treble, soprano, and mezzo violin are complete while a tenor (in rear) needs only fittings. On the right in the photo can be seen an alto violin in the white. Bravo, Pio! When Pio is not creating octet violins, he assists

in the maintenance of historical instruments owned by the municipality of Genoa, including a violin by Guarneri del Jesu, the "cannon," once owned by Nicolo Paganini.



**Grigori Sedukh**, treble violin virtuoso of St. Petersburg, Russia, reports that he played a five-day tour in Japan that included the cities of Osaka, Omi Maiko, Moriyama, Kyoto, and Tokyo. Sedukh was in Japan from February 11 to the 16th. Among the selections he performed were excerpts from Tchaikovsky's "Children's Album," "Seasons," and "Swan Lake." Other works from Scarlatti, Bach, Paganini, Wieniawski, and Bloch were also performed.

We are pleased to report that Sedukh has been given time off from his duties in the St. Petersburg Symphony and will be in Ithaca, NY to attend OCTET 2005. He is scheduled to give a master class for treble violinists and those who want to play the treble violin. Sedukh's master class students will include **Linda Case**, **Chien Tan**, and **Wendy Olsen-Posner**.

**Our readership questionnaire yielded a 6% response with replies coming from 17 states, the District of Columbia, and 7 foreign countries. Never let it be said that NVFA members are just an average bunch of folks.**

## Who We Are

Sixty-eight percent of you said “instrument making” was what interested you most, while 63% said “acoustical research.” Playing stringed instruments interested 35 percent. Historical topics polled a surprisingly large 28%, with music appreciation garnering 20% and composing music a good 9 percent.

Instrument makers comprise the bulk of our membership at 26%, while 20% each are either musicians or researchers. In the mix we had three historians, two physicists, two teachers, several acousticians, and at least one composer.

About 42% were interested in “all” the octet instruments, 22% percent picked the alto as of most interest, 11% each for the tenor and mezzo, and from 2% to 9% for the other instruments in the set.

Nearly 36% of you played no instrument at all, but among the 64% who did, violinists were by far the most numerous by almost 4:1 with amateur players outnumbering professionals by a

3:1 margin. Our members play 31 different instruments!

An overwhelming 91% of you wanted to be notified of events where octet instruments are featured, which is reflected in the new concert and events calendar on the NVFA web site.

Nearly 74% percent of you are on the Internet, but over half said that you rarely or never visited the NVFA website. However, 71% thought that having a website was important, and having a newsletter was important to 76% of you.

Despite your familiarity with electronic technology, 66% still prefer your newsletter in printed form. Of the 16% who preferred electronic delivery, about half live outside the United States.

Creating octet instruments led the list for the activity you would be most likely to support (40%), while school outreach and lectures and demonstrations drew 31% and 29% support, respectively. Concerts also drew a strong response at 24%, and

there was a good showing for commissioning new works (16%). Some wrote down their support for acoustic research and also for creating recordings.

The results in general seem to indicate that you want a lot of information about the NVFA and octet instruments, and that you are ready to attend concerts that feature the octet as a set or in smaller groupings. With regard to subject matter deemed most desirable for inclusion in the newsletter, 95% of respondents checked at least one category, and the difference between the most-requested and least-requested topics was not numerically great.

News of instrument makers led the list with 55%, while acoustical research made a strong second-place showing with 52 percent. In a surprising third was the “historical” category (36%) followed by the events calendar (34%). News of future plans and progress was just a point behind (33%), with reports of ensembles logged at 28% and the related category of individual performers

at 26 percent. It is worth pointing out that the numerical spread between the first and last places was relatively small. Some 36% said to let the editor decide.

The showing for both historical and acoustical research is not surprising given that the initial mailing list was built upon a selected group from the old Catgut Acoustical Society. Doubtless our association is currently in a period of great change and renewal, and the next survey a year or two down the road should begin to show in what direction we’re going.

When the NVFA reconstituted itself several years ago, it was an association that had a large mailing list but no members. We got off to a slow start during the disruption caused by the relocation of the central office. After the first year we had only about 50 members. At present, membership has increased to about 125, and the roster continues to grow.

**Thanks to all who took the time to complete and return our survey.**

### Octet Order Update

We have the latest information from the central office on the sales of octet blue-line drawings through the first six months the NVFA was organized. The mezzo appears to have surpassed the alto as the most-re-

quested plan, although not by much. followed by the soprano, bass, baritone, treble and contra-

|            |    |
|------------|----|
| Treble     | 4  |
| Soprano    | 9  |
| Mezzo      | 26 |
| Alto       | 23 |
| Tenor      | 11 |
| Baritone   | 5  |
| Bass       | 8  |
| Contrabass | 4  |



## October 2004 Board Meeting

The meeting was called to order in Wolfeboro, NH at 11:10 a.m., Saturday, October 23, by Paul R. Laird in the absence of Interim President R. J. Miller and Vice-President Joseph Conrad. Executive Director C. M. Hutchins joined the meeting briefly.

Current trustees present included Frances Furlong, Ted Jones, Paul Laird, F. Scott Ponicsan, and Pamela Proscia. Also present were Association Secretary and Director of Development Louisa Jones, adviser Thomas Knatt, newsletter editor Robert Spear, James Weigel, and Joris Wouters. Margaret Sachter and Tim Trott participated by means of a conference call, but a poor connection made it difficult for all parties to hear each other.

### Changes in the Board.

The resignations of Godfrey Howard, Robert Miller, and Quincy Whitney were unanimously accepted. Elected to the board for one-year terms were Elias Abelson, John Cavanaugh, Daniel Heifetz, Theodore Jones, Scott Ponicsan, Margaret Sachter, and Lin Tollefsen. Elected for two-year terms were Sharon McNalley, Joseph McNalley, Edith Munro, Joseph Peknik III, Dean Richardson, and Tim Trott. Elected for three-year terms were Joseph Conrad, Frances Furlong, Paul Laird, André P. Larsen, Pamela Proscia, and Charles Rooney. In succeeding years, all trustees will serve three-year terms, but only one-third will be elected in any given year.

### Election of Officers, Advisers.

The trustees elected officers from among their number, after which the creation of a standing advisory board was approved. The non-voting advisers will serve as consultants to the NVFA and attend board meetings. Eighty-one individuals were invited to become advisers, and to date 14 have accepted. All officers, trustees, and members of the advisory board are listed on page two.

### Treasurer's Report.

At the close of the fiscal year on September 30, 2004 NVFA had a revenue shortfall of \$3,928.35. Treasurer Rooney noted that this was an improvement over the deficit of \$8,685.14 reported in June. While the pace of contributions has increased, Rooney pointed out that two-thirds of the association's income is through payments by Carleen Hutchins on the liens of unsold instruments. This advances money to the NVFA while postponing payment to Hutchins until the instruments are sold. Liens have declined in the last year from \$59,000 to \$49,000, and Rooney warned that the revenues from this source will not last indefinitely.

### Convention Report.

The convention planned for Ithaca, NY at the end of October 2005 was the subject of R. J. Spear's lengthy report. Much discussion was given to the scope and timing of the undertaking, but at last it was decided to continue as planned given that firm dates already had been secured for lodging, performance venues,

and the availability of performing artists. Spear requested that committees be formed to assist him with national and international advertising and publicity, and to help him secure sponsors for specific portions of the event. Margaret Sachter suggested that a steering committee would be desirable, and one was formed under President Laird.

### Music Publishing.

Our association has need of volunteers to enter octet compositions into computer music notation programs or to obtain funding to hire individuals to do this work. The exact number of octet compositions is unknown since records kept at the central office do not include all of the work done by Robert Miller, Joe McNalley, Robert Spear, Grigori Sedukh, and others. The lack of musical works on the association web site is a cause of concern, and for reproduction of these pieces it will be necessary to convert them to digital format as we are now doing with our technical drawings and photographic archives.

Pamela Proscia raised a question about the quality of the compositions and asked whether they would be acceptable to professional players. In the general discussion that followed, there was a feeling that music appropriate to all levels of performing ability should be in our catalog. A subcommittee of Trustees Laird, Proscia, Nersasian, Jones, and Richardson will review the library to assess the level of technical difficulty each piece presents.

### Fundraising.

With the number of viable options for advancement of the Octet steadily increasing, the discussion of raising funds to support our efforts occupied much of the remainder of the meeting. The board ate lunch at the boardroom table so that discussion would not be interrupted, and the various points presented were often interesting and useful.

Some old ground was gone over again, but there is a feeling that more expertise is needed either on the board itself or on the panel of advisers. Fundraisers with professional experience would be especially helpful if they also had a personal interest in furthering the goals of the NVFA. Many trustees felt that we should first establish an endowment so that the daily operations of the central office would enjoy a steady and reliable source of funding. Treasurer Rooney has said that a minimum endowment of \$500,000 would be needed just to continue daily operations as they currently stand.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Wolfeboro at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, April 16, 2005.

NVFA Members will find a more detailed recounting in the official Minutes of this meeting that are posted in the Members section of our web site.

## Morton Aldrich Hutchins May 6, 1910 - November 8, 2004



that the eyes of American airmen injured by lucite fragments from aircraft windows did not reject the foreign material or become infected.

Mort met

**Morton Hutchins** passed away peacefully on the morning of November 8, 2004 at Sunbridge Care in Wolfeboro (NH) at the age of 94. Mort had been in poor health from the affects of a stroke he suffered seven years earlier and required constant care.

Mort was born in Melrose (MA), the son of George A. Hutchins and Gladys Franksford Aldrich. He earned a chemistry degree from Harvard in 1933 and intended to enter a doctoral program at MIT, but the realities of the Depression caused him to seek a job at Dupont instead. The day of the interview brought bitter cold, howling winds, and heavy snow. Mort was the only one to show up, and he got the job.

After World War II began, Mort developed materials that helped soldiers burned in combat to heal faster. The US government considered this work so important that he received a deferment from military service to continue it, and his compounds may have saved thousands of lives. Mort also worked on developing lucite for cataract implants. He observed

Carleen Maley of Montclair (NJ) when the two were summering in Tufonboro near Lake Winnepesaukee in central New Hampshire. They were married in June, 1943 and hand-built their summer cottage on Tufonboro neck from trees blown down on their property by the great hurricane of 1938.

Mort gets credit for starting Carleen in the world of violin acoustics by suggesting that if she did not like the sound of her student viola, he would support her if she wanted to try building one. Mort's commitment to this promise never wavered. December 1943 found the newlyweds in a rented New York City apartment. Carleen had gone caroling with friends and Mort, alone in the rooms, discovered that the building's ancient wiring had set their Christmas tree on fire. Only after removing Carleen's viola to a place of safety did Mort extinguish the blaze!

Mort and Carleen had two children, William "Bill" Aldrich, born in 1947, and Caroline "Cassie" Hutchins, born in 1950.

About the time of Cassie's arrival, Mort left Dupont for a position at Hercules Powder where he had charge of their plastics coloring section. Mort's involvement with the Catgut Acoustical Society (CAS), predecessor of the New Violin Family Association, increased markedly after his retirement from Hercules in 1973. His background in chemistry proved useful to his wife in her work developing the New Violin Family Octet. Mort eventually authored five papers published in the CAS Journal and was co-author of several that appeared in other publications.

He worked on varnish colors, grounds, and the effects of humidity on wood, culminating in a series of violins made from non-traditional woods. Mort took his humidity measurements with a sling psychrometer. He would walk through the workshop, the device whizzing madly above his head, while his wife's violin-making students sought refuge under their benches.

Mort also participated in some memorable projects including the development of a glue that would hold a spruce bass bar to a graphite-epoxy violin plate and another glue that would hold the aluminum ribs of the first treble violin to its wooden top and back.

Mort's patience was boundless--and it often needed to be. The Catgut Society took over his sun porch to use as an office, his wife took over his garage to teach her

violin-making classes, her students took over his kitchen to prepare their meals, and his cats took over the best chairs in the living room. Mort knew how to negotiate a settlement; everyone got the space they needed, and on many afternoons the cats enjoyed their nap on Mort's lap.

Mort was conservative when it came to using chemicals in the environment. When he found a termite tunnel through the concrete and stucco of his foundation wall in Montclair, he spent days with a small hammer and a fine chisel following the tunnel to its end rather than simply poisoning the insects. Termites are persistent creatures, but they met their match in Mort. One class member recalled that Mort was the only chemist he knew that grew his vegetable garden without chemicals!

Those fortunate enough to have known Mort will always recall his quiet but slightly impish presence in the household where he took care of numerous details others considered trivial or unpleasant. Yet it was this contribution that made Mort the unsung hero of the new violin family; without his support Carleen could not have done half of what she did.

Mort was laid to rest at the Townhouse Cemetery in Tufonboro on November 11, 2004. Donations in his memory may be made to the Morton A. Hutchins Fund of the New Violin Family Association.

## News in Brief



**Robert J. Miller**, past NVFA interim president, suffered serious injuries from an accident that occurred in his home over the 2004 Thanksgiving holiday. Miller told us that he was in the attic over the garage gathering Christmas decorations when he got his feet tangled in some cords and fell backwards through the ceiling to the concrete floor below. His lengthy list of injuries included two skull fractures, a massive concussion, loss of sight in his left eye, nerve damage, and brain trauma, among other wounds.

Miller says he is now on the mend, but will still need surgery and physical therapy on his left arm before he can conduct again. Miller served the NVFA as first vice-president and later as interim president during the difficult period of transition between 2001 and 2004. He also created and maintained the NVFA web site during that time, composed and arranged over 200 pieces for various combinations of the new violin family, and was instrumental in creating some of the association's most popular CDs. Miller says he was glad when the year was over and hopes never to have another like it. We hope you never do, either, Bob, and we wish you a rapid recovery.

### Consorts Reconstitute.

Four members of the California-based Hutchins Consort have resigned, says consort founder and bassist, Joe McNalley. Original members remaining beside McNalley include bassist Fred Charlton, who now becomes the group's resident composer, Omar Firestone, tenor, and Igor Tchetchko, soprano. Joining as new members are Geoff Gartner, baritone; Carolyn Tyler, alto; and Ethan Busted, mezzo. The treble violin position is still open.

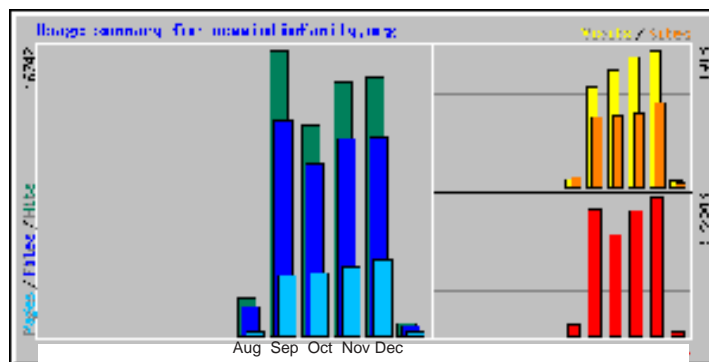
New York's Albert Consort is also emerging from a similar period of reorganization. Founding members Carrie Reuning-Hummel, mezzo; Sera Smolen, tenor; and Lizzy Evett, baritone; will be joined by new players Linda Case, treble; Jaime Kibelsbeck; alto, and Michael Fitipaldi, bass. Reuning-Hummel will move to soprano, and the mezzo will be played by Bill Hurley. A player for the contrabass will be found when the instrument, which is currently under construction, is completed.

### New Web Address.

Webmaster Tim Trott has secured <www.nvfa.org> for our use. Our new web address will be closer to the term that most members actually use and may be easier to remember. The old address <http://www.newviolinfamily.org> will still be fully functional, according to Trott.

### Web Site a Success!

We have figures for the year ending December 31, 2004 that indicate our web site is a success. Figures supplied by Webmaster Tim Trott show that the number of visitors to our site has nearly doubled from 37 per day in August to 64 per day in December, 2004. Over 60,000 requests for data were received by the host server with more than 45,000 files returned (the server makes no distinction if the data requested is a web page, an order for a CD, or a .pdf newsletter download). These numbers mount up quickly. Total visits for the five months ending December 31, 2004 came to more than 6,500!



**New Violin Family Association web site usage graph for the year ending December 31, 2004**

## Lighter Moments

### Let's Have Another Look at that Top Plate Scaling Equation, Shall We?



### Did "Stratovarius" Really Make an Alto Violin??

Blabbermouth.net, a forum on the Roadrunner Records web site, reports a posting on the *Black Sabbath* web site revealing that Finnish singer Timo Kotipelto performed several classic heavy-metal "covers" with Finland's Heavy Lilja Orchestra on August 26, 2004 at the Manala Bar in Helsinki. The report continues that in the orchestra were one cello, one flute, and an alto violin. An audience member wrote that the "arrangements were amazingly good, the songs were in new form," and that "the new maker must have been a real Nero."

If anyone knows who either the "alto violin" player or the "new maker" is, please let us know, and, by all means, encourage them to become members of the New Violin Family Association!

The New Violin Family Association, Inc.  
 42 Taylor Drive  
 Wolfeboro, NH 03894  
 phone: 603 569 7946  
 email: <nvfa@att.net>



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
 PERMIT # 15  
 MIRROR LAKE, NH 03853

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**This Issue: FOCUS on the INTERNATIONAL**

|                       |      |
|-----------------------|------|
| Aust, U.K. Concert    | 1    |
| Belgian Octet         | 1    |
| Editorial, Letters    | 2, 3 |
| Australian Octet      | 6    |
| Luthier's Workbench   | 7    |
| Convention Schedule   | 9    |
| People in the News    | 10   |
| October Board Meeting | 13   |
| Morton A. Hutchins    | 14   |
| NVFA News in Brief    | 15   |

Visit us on the Web! <http://www.nvfa.org>

The NVFA web site is hosted by Cyberchute. <[www.cyberchute.com](http://www.cyberchute.com)>

Web design by WEBicity. <[www.webicity.com](http://www.webicity.com)>

# ***OCTET 2005***

## ***First International Convention***

***Celebrating the Hutchins New Violin Family***

**October 30- November 3, 2005**  
**Downtown Holiday Inn**  
**Ithaca, New York 14850**



### **Many exciting and unusual events are planned for our members and guests:**

**Fill Your Plate with Knowledge. Music and more.**

For starters, there will be a practical session on plate tuning that runs the entire time!

Ever wondered what the real distinctions are between octet and conventional violins? You'll hear the difference on the first day! There is at least one recital scheduled every night of the convention, and a gala closing concert that features soloists and an augmented double octet in a concert you'll long remember.

**It's the Whole Country Wide!**

We have groups and performers coming from New York, Texas, Michigan, Oregon, and California. Violin makers from New York, Michigan, and Maryland will be present. We're losing count!

**We Haven't Forgotten Science.**

Five scientific and technical papers will be presented on a varied range of topics selected to provide the violin maker with the most practical and useful knowledge for octet building.

**It Really is International!**

Treble violin virtuoso Grigori Sedukh from St. Petersburg, Russia highlights our list of guest artists and teachers. Composer Roddy Skeaping from London will have you writing and arranging for the octet before you know it. Octet makers Joris Wouters from Belgium and Pio Montanari from Italy will also attend and bring news of their work in Europe.

**See Page 9 Inside for More.**

Please join us in Ithaca on October 30. For more information, visit our web site, [www.nvfa.org](http://www.nvfa.org).