

Violin Octet

new voices for the 21st century

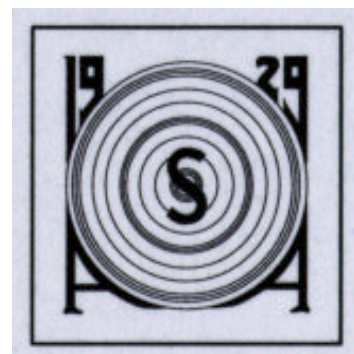
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“Playing for the World”

First International Convention Special Issue

THE NEW VIOLIN FAMILY'S PREMIERE CONVENTION A SUCCESS!



The New Violin Family Association (NVFA), in conjunction with the Acoustical Society of America (ASA), presented OCTET 2005, its premiere international convention, at the Downtown Ithaca (NY) Holiday Inn from October 31 through November 3, 2005.

The convention was a success by almost all measures, and even the famously sodden fall weather



Robert Spear photo

**Carleen Hutchins
in a recent photo**

common to Ithaca at that time of the year gave way to four mostly sunny and mild late autumn days. Convention organizer Robert J. Spear said that the response to the convention was much greater than the NVFA had anticipated, bringing over 100 participants from many states and three

foreign countries. The group ended up using all the available convention space in the Ithaca Holiday Inn, including meeting rooms and part of the hotel lobby.

The convention began on Sunday night with a welcoming reception and introduction from NVFA President Dr. Paul Laird. Carleen

Hutchins, who was unable to attend because she was recuperating from a fall, greeted the attendees via a videotaped message that left few dry eyes in the room. The recital during the welcoming reception featured Frederick Charlton, bass violinist and composer-in-residence with the Hutchins Consort, and Irena Tchetchko, piano, playing some of Charlton's own compositions.



Ted Jones photo

**Frederick Charlton performs for
the opening reception**

While the instruments of the New Violin Family have been known and respected in the academic and research worlds for over four decades, for this event the convention organizers wished to primarily emphasize their musical and performance aspects. Recitals and concerts were scheduled every night, a decision that proved highly popular with the attendees.



Robert Spear photo

**The Downtown Holiday Inn, site
of OCTET 2005**

On Monday night, treble violinist Grigory Sedukh and pianist Elena Tsvetkova, both of whom studied in St. Petersburg, Russia performed in Ithaca's Unitarian church to a delighted audience. Also featured on this program were tenor violinist Sera Jane Smolen with pianist Diane Birr, and mezzo violinist and

bass with high tuning, gave a splendid recital with accompanist John Ellis. Also performing on this program was Chien Tan, treble violin, with pianist Janet Jones; and Carrie Hummel, soprano violin, accompanied by Joan Reuning. A reception sponsored by Robert and Deena Spear and Googer's Bakery was held after each of the evening recitals. Both events were open to the public

One of the major surprises of OCTET 2005 was the popularity of the free-plate tuning workshop that ran continuously throughout the three-day convention. Session leaders Tom Knatt and Alan Carruth reported that the room they used, which normally holds 12 - 14 people, was often so crowded that many times not everyone interested could be admitted. Electronic designer Don Bradley of Bradley Engineering brought several of his late-model signal generators for demonstration, and at least one was in constant service throughout the convention. Interest was so high in this area that Knatt, Carruth, and Spear are

Monday's opening general session featured a discussion of the octet instruments, how they differ from conventional instruments, and demonstrations of all eight new family violins by Joe McNalley and members of



Grigory Sedukh and Elena Tsvetkova in recital at the Unitarian Church

improvisation master Stephen Nachmanovitch.

On Tuesday night, bass virtuosa Diana Gannett, playing on the original Hutchins/Blatter small



John Ellis and Diana Gannett at the Unitarian Church



Members and guests gather for refreshments and conversation following the Monday night recital at the Unitarian Church.

the Hutchins Consort. McNalley and the Hutchins Consort players also moderated a session on composing and arranging for the octet. Another well-received session provided a forum for discussion of the various approaches to playing some of the more interesting octet instruments, especially the alto violin (also known as the "vertical viola").

discussing the feasibility of setting up similar classes to run in several parts of the country in the coming months.

Scientific and technical aspects were also represented in a general session where five papers were read. Tom King spoke on the Cremonese method of f-hole placement, expanding on the work originally published in the *Strad Magazine*. Steve Sirr and



Sera Jane Smolen and Stephen Nachmanovitch

John Waddle's presentation of CT-scanned instruments was given rapt attention. Also addressing the session was Professor Edwin Fitzgerald whose fascinating topic was the effects of coumarin on the aging process of spruce. Duane Voskuil spoke about harmonic reinforcement in the octet violins and how other advantageous resonance



Chien Tan and Janet Jones, from Portland, OR



Ted Jones photo

Geoff Gartner with his baritone violin during a lecture/demonstration by the members of the Hutchins Consort

relationships might be achieved. Voskuil also stood in for Carleen Hutchins in presenting the late William Allen's findings on wave theory and air mode testing, noting that of all the research on this topic, Allen's was the most practical. [Abstracts of the papers can be found on page 6-- ed.]

Other interesting sessions occurred throughout the convention, including Steve

Nachmanovitch's improvisation workshop and a duo performance by baritone violinist Akua Dixon from Montclair (NJ) and her husband, the well-known Jazz trombonist, Steve Turre. Dixon has long been a champion of the baritone violin, and owns one of the original deep-ribbed models. She says that it was not until she acquired the baritone that she could perform with her husband without amplification, since it

would be nearly impossible for a standard cello to hold its own in a duet with a brass instrument.

On Wednesday, November 2, in Ithaca's historic State Theatre, the NVFA concluded OCTET 2005 with an evening of music preceded by Paul Laird's talk on the history of octet instruments and the many fascinating people who played a role in their development.

"Apparitions" written for them by New York City composer Marek Harris, and the group accompanied Diana Gannett in the "Lensky" Aria from Tchaikovsky's opera, "Eugene Onegin."

The consorts combined with guest soloists and other performers to conclude the evening with a lush and soaring arrangement of the Vaughan



Ted Jones photo

Akua Dixon, baritone violin, and Steve Turre, trombone, at their demonstration



Ted Jones photo

President Paul Laird addressing the State Theatre audience



Ted Jones photo

During a lull in the plate tuning workshop, Tom Knatt (seated, left) confers with electronics designer Don Bradley (center), while Patrick Tobin and Pio Montanari (both standing) look on

The Hutchins Consort from Encinitas (CA) and the Albert Consort from Ithaca (NY) performed an evening of music for full octets, including an original work, "Octopus Therapy," written for the Hutchins group by Frederick Charlton. The Hutchins Consort also accompanied treble violin virtuoso Grigory Sedukh in his signature piece, Vivaldi's "Goldfinch" concerto.

Ithaca's Albert Consort gave the world premiere of "Ballet of the

Williams "Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis" scored in 21 parts by Robert J. Spear especially for this event. This ensemble was comprised of nearly three octets, marking the first time that more than a single octet has performed in public and also presenting the greatest number of octet instruments ever to appear on a single stage. All recitals and concerts were open to the public.

Plans for a second international convention in Southern California in the winter of 2008 are already under discussion.

Totally Tallis

Wednesday, October 2, 2005; An Historic “First” as Largest Octet Group Ever Plays a Memorable Concert

When the decision to hold OCTET 2005 was made, Robert Spear, Chairman of the Organizing Committee, knew the musical finale would have to be something out of the ordinary. Spear had long admired the work of the British composer Ralph (pronounced “Rafe”) Vaughan Williams, and he knew Williams’s lush and densely-scored masterpiece, the “Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis” would be a perfect choice. “Albert Consort played Williams’ ‘Phantasy Quintet’ when we had only five instruments,” Spear



The Tallis Orchestra in rehearsal

implement a variation on the two-orchestra theme. “I had an idea that there should be a larger ensemble entirely of instruments on the Hutchins model, a smaller

one of my experimental instruments, and a solo group of five octet violins in between. In this way we would have an interesting tonal contrast.” Sixteen months before the scheduled concert date, Wednesday, November 2, Spear began to arrange the piece. It took him more than a year to finish. As the performance date drew nearer, Spear began to fill the ranks of the Tallis Orchestra. Joe McNalley’s Hutchins Consort formed the core of the larger “west” orchestra, while the Albert Consort became the smaller “east” orchestra. Then everything started to go wrong. “First, I did not finish my octet in time for the convention,” Spear recalls, “so I had to borrow a treble violin from Carleen Hutchins. As it turned out, that was the least of my worries.”

Not long before the convention, the gentleman who had planned to conduct the Tallis Orchestra abruptly cancelled. Pamela Gearhart, a longtime friend of the new violins and a fine conductor herself, recommended one of her students, Ubaldo Valli. Spear called Valli, who graciously agreed to take on the task if he could find a spot for it in his crowded schedule. His appointment book had only one open date in it through the entire convention week. Amazingly, it was Wednesday, November 2.

Other problems arose when only two of the five musicians from

Rice (TX) University could come. “Akua Dixon bailed me out as solo baritone player,” Spear recalled. “Then, the tenor player cancelled. I was fortunate to meet cellist Annie Barley, who had heard about the new violins and thought they were interesting. I had a tenor in her hands as fast as I could! Then the mezzo player cancelled, and I was lucky to find Elizabeth Cary, who was taking a semester off from her studies at Ithaca College, to fill in.”

Although Spear was fast running out of players, he was running out of instruments even faster. Spear says, “The demand for instruments placed quite a strain on our limited supply of octet violins, and for a while we were really scraping around to find enough fiddles. I was repairing damaged instruments and Carleen was working the phones to borrow privately owned instruments from individuals all over the country.”

Cellist Nathan Cook, who had been playing alto at Rice, had taken a position at the University of Georgia. Cook agreed to play



Conductor Ubaldo Dante Valli makes a point as the Tallis groups rehearses

recalls. “As I studied how he handled the parts using conventional instruments, I had the strong feeling that if octet instruments had existed during his time, he would have used them.” Spear realized that the complexity of the part-writing far exceeded the capabilities of a single octet. His solution was to arrange the work for nearly three octets.

The piece is scored for large orchestra, a second, smaller, “echo” orchestra, and a solo quartet. Spear decided to

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Tallis Orchestra in concert

in the quintet, but he could not use Rice's alto. Hutchins sent the only alto she had left, a 5-string model that Spear converted back to four strings. Then Spear built a crate and shipped the alto to Cook so he could practice his part. Violinist Wendy Olson-Posner, another former student at Rice, offered to play the soprano, and the quintet was in place--almost.

Problems flowed like a swollen river through the entire convention. Joe McNalley's treble player could not resolve conflicts with her orchestral commitments, so the Hutchins Consort flew east without her. Fortunately, Grigory Sedukh provided McNalley with the best of all possible substitutes. Sedukh learned enough music to be a soloist as well as a member of the Hutchins Consort. He participated in all the group's scheduled lectures and demonstrations--and sat in the leader's chair of the Tallis Orchestra [see also page 8 --ed].



Tallis Orchestra acknowledges applause

Meanwhile, Cook shipped the alto to Ithaca before flying there to attend the convention. He arrived on schedule, but the alto didn't. In fact, the alto had still not arrived on the day of the concert, leading the Convention Organizing Committee Chair to experience a severe migraine. But then an idea occurred to him. Steve McCann had brought a recently-completed alto to display in the exhibition room, where it reposed on a table, unused. That condition ended quickly, and at the concert Cook played a band-new alto he had never seen before. "My alto had its professional debut much sooner than I had expected," McCann said with a smile. Without the alto, McCann also got to attend more of the exhibition.

The day of the concert was a busy one at the performance venue, with a rehearsal scheduled for Hutchins Consort with soloists, the Albert Consort with soloists, and the solo quintet. The Tallis

Orchestra was slated for just two rehearsals, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, with the performance scheduled for the same evening. Spear recalls the moments leading up to the first rehearsal as tense. "It just hit me all at once that all the elements were firmly in place. We had 23 players who had never played together before, more than a few musicians who were new to their instruments, a complex piece, unusual seating, a new conductor, and only two 90-minute rehearsals to get it ready. It occurred to me that the quality of our playing for one hour might define octet instruments for the next ten years. We bet the Association on a single piece of music. What had I been thinking?" Then conductor Ubaldo Valli gave the downbeat, and the first tranquil measures of the piece floated out into the hall. "It gave me chills," Spear says. "Even I, who know the capabilities of these instruments pretty well, was not prepared for what I heard. I happened to be sitting next to Ted Jones, one of our trustees, and when I turned to say something to him, I saw that he had tears in



Members of the Albert Consort rehearse as "east" orchestra.

his eyes." Emotions were also running high on the stage. Alto violinist Jamie Kibelsbeck said, "I had the most amazing experience when the rehearsal started. The chords in the first two measures of the piece were so beautiful that I felt as if I were floating out of my chair." [see also page 10 for additional comments. --ed.]

The only disappointment in the performance was that Carleen Hutchins was not able to attend. Just before the Tallis was played, with more octet musicians on one stage than had ever been gathered before, everyone else attending the convention came to the area in front of the stage for a video greeting to a grand lady. The concert is a memory now, but with luck the record for octet instruments will not stand long. See you at OCTET 2008!

Tallis West (left) Orchestra:
 Grigory Sedukh, treble
 Igor Tchetchko, soprano
 Ethan Busted, mezzo
 Carolyn Tyler Lechusza, alto
 Patrick Tobin, alto
 Omar Firestone, tenor
 Geoff Gartner, baritone

Frederick Charlton, bass
 Diana Gannett, bass
 Joe McNalley, contrabass

Solo Quintet (center):
 Wendy Olsen-Posner, soprano
 Elizabeth Cary, mezzo
 Nathan Cook, alto

Annie Barley, tenor
 Akua Dixon, baritone

Tallis East (right) Orchestra:
 Linda Case, treble
 Carrie Hummel, soprano
 Bill Hurley, mezzo
 Jaime Kibelsbeck, alto

Sera Jane Smolen, tenor
 Elisa Evett, baritone
 Michael Fittipaldi, bass
 Nicholas Walker, contrabass

Conductor:
 Ubaldo Dante Valli

Abstracts of Scientific & Technical Papers

GENERAL SESSION, NOVEMBER 2, 2005 9:30 A.M. A. THOMAS KING, MODERATOR

The Cremonese Method of F-Hole Placement

Alvin Thomas King

Abstract: This paper will present a plausible reconstruction of a system for determining the size and placement of f-holes on Cremonese violins, violas, and cellos. I will review the evidence for such a system, give examples from classical Cremonese instruments, and provide explicit instructions for the maker who wishes to work in the Cremonese fashion.

Coumarin Coating Effects on the Dynamic and Mechanical Properties of Violin Wood.

Edwin R. Fitzgerald, Johns Hopkins University

Abstract: An automated dynamic mechanical measurement system has been used to find the effects of coumarin coating on spruce and maple violin wood samples. The measurement system provides, from 10 to 10,000 Hz. values of complex compliance, $J^* = J' - iJ''$, shear modulus, $G^* = G' + iG'' = 1/J^*$, shear wave velocity, and attenuation.

Initial measurements in the with-grain direction on samples from two separate spruce strips with portions of uncoated and coated strip sections were made eleven months after the coatings were applied. The results on samples from both strips displayed broad retardation dispersions with several superimposed, sharp resonance dispersions in the 10 to 10,000 Hz range. The general compliance levels of the coated spruce samples were about two thirds of the uncoated samples for samples from both strips; that is, the shear modulus values of the coated samples were correspondingly higher than values for the uncoated samples.

Measurements on the uncoated samples two years after the initial measurements show an additional compliance level decrease (modulus level increase). Changes in the superimposed resonance dispersions for the coated samples also occur with time.

Noninvasive CT analysis of the Andrea Amati "King" cello and others

Steven SIRR and John Waddle

Abstract: Using a multislice CT scanner and Osirix shareware, we obtain accurate outlines, archings, graduations, contours of inside

and outside, density information and measurements of the King cello and others. CT is also used to document existing condition issues of the instruments. Metallic substance in the illustrations of the back and ribs of the cello are shown.

Harmonic Reinforcement in the Octet Violins

Duane Voskuil

Abstract: Many players and listeners maintain the Octet violins have a fuller sound than conventional instruments. A theory is presented for the Octet suggesting why this is the case based on a study of the Mezzo violin. It expands on C. M. Hutchins' original design principle placing A0 near the open, D-string and the A1/B1 combination (W, i.e., F. A. Saunder's strongest bowed tone), near the open A-string. Preliminary data indicate other Octet violins may embody the same principles, namely, violins designed with dimensions so (1) the lowest wood and air and resonances occur around the lower octaves of the instrument's range allowing the bowed string, directly and by second and higher harmonic reinforcement, to simultaneously activate one or more natural wood or air resonances of the body with each bowed note played, and so (2) the intervals among these natural resonances set up mutually reinforcing, rather than destructively interfering, waves. A rationale is given for the A0-A1 interval as a fifth and the A1-B1 interval as a musical third.

Abbreviated Biographical Information

Dr. A. Thomas King has been a violinmaker for 25 years. He has served as CAS President and Editor of the CAS Journal. Dr. Edwin Fitzgerald is a physicist and educator. He received his BS in Electrical Engineering from the University of Wisconsin in 1944, a Master of Science in Physics in 1950, and a Ph.D. in Physics in 1951.

Dr. Steven SIRR was graduated with a medical degree and a masters in physics in 1975. John R. Waddle is a violin maker and dealer with a shop in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was trained at The Violin Making School of America in Salt Lake City, Utah, graduating in 1981. SIRR and Waddle presently have available CT data from about 40 instruments, including guitar, violin, viola, cello, and bass viol.

Dr. Duane Voskuil began violin making 33 years ago. He now owns a violin shop in Bismarck, ND, where he is working on an Octet set.

Heard in the Hall

Your fearless--well, O.K., *nosey*-- editor slipped through the hall after the concert and recalls what he overheard



I Finally Understand . . .

"I've heard about these instruments before. I've read some literature about them. I've looked at your web site. I've listened to the audio clips. But I had to hear them playing in concert before I finally understood what you meant."

--John Greenley, physicist,
Cornell University

Entirely Impressed . . .

"I have to say that I was entirely impressed by the power of those basses."

--Ubaldo Valli, conductor,
Tallis Gala Orchestra

You Have Got To Hear This . . .

"Our board of directors [was] meeting [that] night. The meeting [was] scheduled to end at 7:30. I went outside, got on my cell phone, and called each one of the 17 board members individually. I told them not to make plans for dinner. I told them you have got to come to the Theatre tonight. You have got to hear this."

--Scott Witham, President,
Historic Ithaca

Amazing Intensity of Sound . . .

"I've been a recording engineer my entire adult life, and I've never heard strings with such power. I kept going to the front of the house to check my micro-

phones because I was sure I'd put them in the wrong place. The sound I heard in my headphones was what I heard myself when I got closer. The intensity was unbelievable."

--Alfred B. Grunwell,
recording engineer

Playing for the World . . .

"I wish we had a better audience for you. I was glad to learn that you were making audio and video recordings because you were not really playing for the local community tonight; you were playing for the world."

--Unidentified woman speaking after the concert

Heard Every Instrument . . .

"Not long ago I sat in the audience here [in the State Theatre] listening as the Julliard String Quartet struggled to make themselves heard, and I remember feeling embarrassed for my city that we made such fine artists with such fine instruments play in such a poor acoustical space. [Tonight] I heard two [new violin family] octets play in the same, supposedly poor, space, and I had no trouble hearing any individual instrument no matter where I went."

--Name Withheld

Opportunity of a Lifetime . . .

"I consider hearing these instruments tonight to have been the opportunity of a lifetime. I feel sorry for anyone who missed it."

--Cheryl Lawrence, owner,
Googer's Bakery, Dryden, NY

Great Anticipation . . .

"I've been looking forward to this concert; I had the date circled on my calendar for months!"

--Michael Griffin, contra-
bassist, Rochester Philharmonic

Never Heard Anything Like It . . .

"I'm the general manager of the State Theatre and before that I was the technical director and stage manager. I've heard a lot of classical musical groups that have come through here over the years, but I've never heard anything like what I heard on our stage [Wednesday night]. Please come back and do it again."

--William Esty, General Man-
ager, State Theatre



A Membership Challenge

Our recent convention has given a great deal of exposure to the NVFA, and as the number of opportunities to expand our activities rise, so do the costs. The convention has given us some great momentum, and the future is so exciting it's easy to forget that while conventions and conferences give us our public *persona*, it is our members that ultimately form the backbone of our association. A small number of individuals have extended themselves considerably to bring us to our present point, and now it's clear that we must increase our membership.

For those of you who are not members but are receiving and enjoying this newsletter, please join up! Your membership will keep this newsletter coming, keep the NVFA solvent, and allow us to plan and implement many exciting projects for the future.

For those of you who are already members, thanks! Here's what you can do to help us grow stronger: persuade one other colleague or friend to become a member. Yes, that's right. Just one. As every journey is but a succession of single steps, the growth of an organization occurs one member at a time. We'd like to double our membership by this time next year, and while that might sound like a lot, all it requires from you is to bring a single friend on board. They will thank you, and so will we!

Treble Trials

Grigory Sedukh thought he was going to spend a relaxing few days in Ithaca, play a recital, and mingle with like-minded colleagues in the New Violin Family Association. Then he stepped off the plane . . .

Grigory Sedukh's busy life is spent as a violinist in the St. Petersburg Symphony, a violin teacher, and a performer on the treble violin anywhere in the world. By a great stroke of luck, his schedule was open in the fall, and plans were made for a solo



Ted Jones photo
Grigory Sedukh and Elena Tsvetkova perform at Ithaca's First Unitarian Church, October 31, 2005.

performance with the Hutchins Consort and a recital in Ithaca (NY) for OCTET 2005.

Pianist Elena Tsvetkova was recruited to accompany Sedukh. Tsvetkova, who now lives in the United States, was also trained in St. Petersburg, although she



provided
Elena Tsvetkova

and Sedukh were not acquainted prior to the convention. There were other problems to solve in obtaining the papers needed for Sedukh to come to the US on a visitor's visa, which has become more difficult since the tragedy of 9/11.

Sedukh's schedule had so little time that he could not even spare a few hours to visit his daughter, who lives in Boston. NVFA Trustee Dean Richardson drove Sedukh to New Hampshire where he met Tsvetkova for several days of intense rehearsals in a borrowed room at the Brewster Academy.

Upon his arrival in Ithaca, Sedukh learned that the Hutchins Consort's treble violinist had been unable to make the trip, so, in addition to his other responsibilities, Sedukh found himself installed as the Consort's new treble violinist with a full set of concert music to be learned in just two days!

Sedukh's evening recital at the Unitarian Church in Ithaca was a magical event. It would have been hard to believe that he and Tsvetkova had not been playing together for years. One of the most enjoyable moments of the recital was a treble violin duet with Chien Tan of a movement of the Bach Concerto for Two Violins in D minor. To our knowledge, it was the first time two trebles had performed together, and we were happy to obtain a fine, professional recording of the recital.

Sedukh's performance of the Vivaldi "Goldfinch" with the Hutchins Consort at the State Theatre two days later was equally wonderful. Sedukh loves

the piece, and says that the first time he heard it he could not help but think it had been written expressly for the treble violin. One unexpectedly humorous moment occurred because the front of the stage was not well illuminated. When Sedukh stepped forward to play, he all but disappeared into the gloom. While he may have been hard to see, no one had any trouble hearing his treble violin!

On Friday, November 4, 2005, Sedukh performed a solo concert in the Andre Mertens Galleries for



Ted Jones photo
Grigory Sedukh (r.) works with Chien Tan during an animated portion of the Treble Violin Master Class.

Musical Instruments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City to an enthusiastic audience of over 100 people. The concert was prefaced by a short introduction by D. Quincy Whitney, Carleen Hutchins' biographer and a Research Fellow in the museum's Musical Instruments Department.

Sedukh performed a program

similar to the one he performed at Ithaca, only without piano accompaniment. Sedukh had arranged some of these pieces at the last minute for this unaccompanied format, and the concert worked beautifully.

"I particularly remember when Grisha picked up the mezzo violin in the midst of 'The Children's Album' suite and played "Kamarinskaya" only using pizzicato, and the pizzicato filled the galleries," observed Joe Peknik, technician in the Musical Instruments Department. "I was standing in the back of the audience, perhaps fifty or sixty feet away from Grisha and I heard the pizzicato as if it were right in front of me,"

Gerald Goodman, a professional harpist who attended the concert, commented: "The treble violin has great musicality. Grisha's extraordinary technique on the treble made me curious to hear the Hutchins bass."

"The De Bériot violin concerto, with its trick bowing and double and triple stops, ended on a note that, had I been sitting closer, would have shattered my glasses. It was so high, just within audible range—absolutely astounding. To hear all that music coming out of that violin was just phenomenal," said Peknik.

Special thanks to Quincy Whitney and Joe Peknik, III, for substantial contributions to this article.

News in Brief



Edith Munro photo

Octet Exhibit Closes.

The longest-running temporary exhibit in the recent history of New York's prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art has ended with the closing of the Violin Octet display, according to Joe Peknik, the Met's principal musical instrument technician. Peknik reports that the popular exhibit was taken down on October 24, 2005 after a run of 41 months that began on May 10, 2002. Temporary exhibits usually are mounted from 6 to 12 months, but the Octet display remained popular for much longer and always attracted a large number of visitors. The octet can still be seen by appointment, Peknik says. The Department of Musical Instruments provides access to qualified researchers. If you wish to see the Hutchins Octet, call the department at 212 570 3919 to make arrangements.

Consort Acquires Second Octet.

Sharon McNalley, Joe McNalley, Carleen Hutchins, and the Hutchins Consort Board of Directors have announced that the Hutchins Consort has purchased a second complete octet from Carleen Hutchins. The Octet had been on display at the NVFA central office in Wolfeboro (NH) after its return from St.

Petersburg, Russia, several years ago. It was more recently taken to Ithaca (NY) where it was on display during the recently completed OCTET 2005 International Convention. From there the entire set was crated and trucked to California.

Apparently the ride must have been a bumpy one! When we called Joe McNalley not long ago, he was cooking some glue in preparation for some minor repairs to the instruments. "Every instrument had some little thing that needed attention," McNalley said. He has found musicians willing to play, and they are just waiting for repairs to be completed.

McNalley said that the second octet purchase was based on his realization of how vulnerable the group was with only one of each instrument and player. If a consort member suddenly becomes unavailable, or if an instrument is damaged, there are no

replacements available. This theme was echoed by Robert Spear, founder of the Albert Consort, who said his ideas of having octets in other cities has been tempered by the understanding that each group that comes into being likely will need two sets of instruments.

The Hutchins Consort may need two groups to help fill its busy schedule. In addition to its normal concert series presented throughout the year at the Neurosciences Institute, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, and the Irvine Barkely Theater, the group will also perform at the annual convention of the Guild of American Luthiers in June.

In addition, the Hutchins Consort will occupy an informal position as octet-in-residence at the newly created San Diego Conservatory of Music and has already presented a duo-concert with the conservatory's string quartet,

We heard you!

Many members have written to us that our web site is too static and not updated often enough. Others, including your editor, have been frustrated that we cannot afford to publish the newsletter more than twice a year, and that some of the news is stale by the time it reaches you. We will be experimenting with a more active and more frequently updated website in the months ahead, now that the burdens of convention planning are finally behind us. Please take a moment to let the editor or the staff at the central office know what kinds of things you would like to see on the web. It's your site, after all, but to make the changes you want, you must tell us what they are!

Octet Drawings Completed.

Carleen Hutchins told us recently that the project to create digital files of the original blue-line octet drawings is nearing completion. Architect Ted Sheridan of New York City, with assistance from luthier Joris Wouters of Belgium, has been working on the project for many months. In addition, the missing mylar drawings of the treble and mezzo violin, which has forced interested luthiers to work from sketches, have been recovered, according to Hutchins. With the files in digital format, it will be much easier to update the drawings, some of which were drawn nearly 40 years ago, when new information becomes available. The association is also discussing the possibility of making the drawings available as a full set on compact disc.



Green Bean's Productions

The Hutchins Consort on stage during OCTET 2005

Coming Events of Interest

NATIONAL MUSIC MUSEUM TO WELCOME AMIS, GALPIN SOCIETY, AND CIMCIM IN MAY

The American Musical Instrument Society (AMIS) will hold its 35th annual meeting at the National Music Museum (NMM) at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, May 19-23, 2006. This will be a joint meeting with the Galpin Society and the International Committee of Musical Instrument Museums and Collections (CIMCIM) of the International Council of Museums.

Papers will be presented on topics ranging from medieval drums to the early violin. Papers on the final day will address the presentation of musical instruments to the public, a topic of interest to CIMCIM members, and will end with an international panel discussion on the future of musical instrument research.

Instruments from NMM's nine galleries will be on display,

including a viol by Antonio Stradivari. A variety of performances is planned, including a festival of 18th-century keyboard music from Spain and Portugal. An international gathering of performers will play three of the NMM's greatest rarities--the grand piano by Manuel Antunes, Lisbon, 1767; the Portuguese harpsichord by José Calisto, 1780; and Joseph Kirkman's magnificent, two-manual harpsichord, built in London in 1798.

Individuals who wish to do research in the NMM's collections must make those arrangements in writing, well in advance. Registration materials and detailed information are easily accessible on the NMM's website, <www.usd.edu/smm>. Dr. André P. Larson, local arrangements chair, can be reached at <aplarson@usd.edu>.

GUILD OF AMERICAN LUTHIERS CONVENTION TO FEATURE APPEARANCE BY HUTCHINS CONSORT

Tim Olsen, founder of the Guild of American Luthiers, has announced the Guild's 18th Convention/Exhibition, June 21-25, 2006, at Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington.

The Convention/Exhibition serves to bring luthiers of all specialties and skill levels from all over North America and the world together to meet and share information and inspiration in a spirit of cooperation and camaraderie; to give luthiers opportunity to show their work to, and receive feedback from, fellow luthiers; and to provide stimulating educational lectures and demonstrations on a wide range of topics of interest to the lutherie community.

This year, the Hutchins Consort will perform for the members in PLU's state-of-the-art Lagerquist Concert Hall in the Mary Baker Russel Music Center. Joe

McNalley will lead a workshop on "The History and Practice of Matched Violin Family Instruments" and New Violin Family petting zoo.

Hundreds of handmade instruments and the builders who created them will be concentrated in the convention exhibition hall. Olsen calls it "the ultimate lutherie show-and-tell." There will also be a fabulous selection of lutherie woods, tools, and parts for sale at the tables of the many suppliers who will attend.

Most people, after attending their first Guild convention, are overwhelmed by the openness and friendliness of their fellow members, and by the wealth of information, contacts, and new ideas they've experienced. Full registration information is available at the GAL website: <www.luth.org>.

2006 VSA CONVENTION TO INCLUDE SESSION ON INNOVATION

The Violin Society of America announces its 34th Annual Convention to be held from November 6 to 12, 2006 in Baltimore, Maryland. A special feature of this convention will be an exhibition to encourage innovation in the design and construction of violin family instruments, bows, and accessories. Session Chair Fan Tao welcomes exhibitions of New Violin Family instruments providing they exhibit innovative developments beyond those found in the original models. Tao notes "Our present definition of innovation has no limits, so we're not ruling anything out unless we run out of space." A small fee will be charged, and exhibitors must be VSA members in good standing.

There will be a public exhibition of innovative instruments, bows, and their accessories. Any individual, group, or commercial company can submit an instrument, bow, or related accessory. There will also be

a day devoted to presentations on innovation made by invited speakers and playing demonstrations of selected instruments from the public innovation exhibition.

The VSA is an international organization of makers and restorers (amateurs and professional) of instruments and bows, players, collectors, dealers, music lovers, violin buffs, conservatories and libraries. Other activities of the VSA include publishing *The Journal of the Violin Society of America* and the *VSA Papers*, scholarships for students of violin and bow making, workshops, a library collection held jointly with Oberlin College, and a newsletter. Membership information is available on the VSA website, <www.vsa.to>, or by mail at Violin Society of America, 48 Academy St., Poughkeepsie, NY 12601, USA. Fan Tao can be reached at <Fan.Tao@Daddario.com>

People in The News



Gabriela Frank (above, right) and Cornell University Orchestra Director **Chris Younghoon Kim** visited NVFA newsletter editor **Robert J. Spear** (above, left) at his home in Ithaca, NY on March 4, 2005. Frank was in Ithaca to hear one of her pieces performed by the Cornell University Orchestra. Although she works on the west coast, Frank retains close ties to her alma mater, Rice University, in Texas and has been responsible for placing five octet instruments at the school for development and playing.



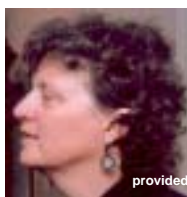
Chris Twidle reports that the Australian Octet project has taken another small step forward. The group has settled on using native Queensland maple for the backs and traditional European spruce for the tops. While the group tries to locate suitable pieces of maple, several members have started to work on molds.



Louise Jones resigned as NVFA office secretary and director of development effective April 29, 2005 to work full-time for New Hampshire North Coast, a short-line railroad. We wish Jones the best of luck in her new position, and we have no doubts that those trains will run on time!



Susan Taylor assumed the position of NVFA office secretary in May, 2005. In response to the increased workload due to the demands of OCTET 2005, Taylor will be in the office four days a week instead of three and will be available Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time (USA).



D. Quincy Whitney, former NVFA Trustee, received a second grant from New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art to extend her research fellowship during the spring of 2005. Whitney, who is

Carleen Hutchins' official biographer, used the time to expand her knowledge of stringed instruments as she prepared her book on the life and work of Hutchins and the violin octet.



Nicholas Walker has joined the Albert Consort as contrabassist for the 2005 - 06 season, and he made his first appearance with the recently completed bass at OCTET 2005. Walker received his DMA in Early Music at Stonybrook (NY) in 2004. He previously studied with Paul Ellison at Rice University and has been mentored by François Rabbath as a Fulbright Scholar. Walker has also won awards for his compositions, many of which feature the contrabass. Walker was recently appointed to the position of contrabass instructor at Ithaca (NY) College School of Music, where he hopes to integrate a new violin family octet into an elective chamber music program.

Nicola Morris of Ithaca was the lucky winner of the Conrad "King Joseph" violin raffle held during the closing concert of OCTET 2005. Morris, who had only

recently become interested in music, saw the concert advertisements and decided to go. She found out about the raffle at the display in the State Theatre lobby and said she had a "very strong feeling" that she would win. The feeling was so compelling she bought a single ticket, which was all she could afford. Then she felt a little silly for taking a chance because she is not a musician and "didn't know what I would do with a violin if I won it." When NVFA President **Paul Laird** called Morris's name, she screamed for joy. She said she took the violin home with her and for the first two days did nothing but look at it, calling it "extraordinary." After the violin received a little adjustment work from **Robert Spear**, Morris made arrangements to take lessons with a local teacher.



Joseph Conrad's copy of the del Gesu "King Joseph" won by Nicola Morris

A Luthier's Workbench

Tip #7: Inside Graduation

I've had a #50 Kunz spokeshave in my tool kit for years and never used it. It seemed like it was cheaply made and nothing of interest for the luthier. Boy, was I wrong!! Working on the interior archings of the basses in my recently completed octet, I think I found the reason the convex spokeshave was invented.



The Kunz No. 50 spokeshave is commonly available for under \$25 on the Internet.

I was laying a real beating on my back and shoulders working with a gouge and would have used a short scrub plane with a double-radiused sole if I could find one. Instead, I grabbed the Kunz #50 spokeshave and was pleasantly surprised at how well it cut across maple grain. It looked pretty small inside that octet contrabass, but I found I could remove a lot of wood quickly because the tool allowed me to use a full-length arm stroke. The tool's upward-arched handles makes this the only spokeshave I have seen that can be used in this application.

The small head of the tool is a great advantage because it can be used on most areas regardless of the radius, and it also can be used on baritones, tenors, and even altos, saving the cost of buying a separate tool for each instrument, as would be the case with brass planes. If the tool chatters on the pull stroke, simply

We examine an improbable tool for octet building-- the humble spokeshave-- and present our first-ever tool review--the Berbuer Precision Peg Shaver.

turn it around and push it!

The tool surprised me with its versatility for violin work. By holding one handle still and pushing or pulling the other, I could shave neat arcs and work precisely in areas that no other tool did as well. The irregular radius of the sole on my shave does not match the radius of the blade, but this detail turned out to be an advantage. Since the blade is not evenly exposed all the way around, by tilting the tool from side to side I was able to choose between two or three different depths of cut. This came in so handy I would ask that the tool be built this way to begin with.

Using the spokeshave makes the first rough interior graduation much more precise and very nearly removes a step in the process, which can be a real time saver. Alas, the little #50 did not do well at all shaving across the grain of spruce, although it cut along the grain very well.

Tip #8: Shaving Pegs

Nothing bedevils octet builders more than finding the right-sized pegs. If we stumble over something that actually works, how do we shave so many different diameters and tapers? The answer to this appeared recently when my attention was called to the Berbuer *Prazisions Wirbelschneider*, an adjustable

peg shaver from Germany. Offered in sizes for violin/viola and cello, these peg shavers adjust easily for any realistic shaft taper and diameter. Setting up the shaver is easy, and I especially liked the plastic guide that accurately positions the blade when it is replaced.

Adjustable shavers have appeared on the market before but never have been accurate enough for professional use. On the other hand, fixed shavers require little slips of sandpaper to vary the taper, which never seems to work right and is a great aggravation. David Berbuer has



The Berbuer Precision Peg Shaver in action.

neatly solved both problems with his shaver by using a unique double adjustment for the taper. This means that to reduce the opening of the shaver, two screws must be turned precisely together. Berbuer ensures this with a rubber ring that turns both knurled heads together but slips off to allow individual adjustment.

In use, the shaver unavoidably exhibits a small amount of play in the parts. This requires a firm hand to keep the peg pushed into the cutter. If the adjustment is not exact, chatter and faceting of the upper part of the peg shaft will occur, especially with heavy cello pegs. Expect a few blisters until you get the hang of it. On the other hand, the solid construction of the shaver handles tear-out like nothing I've used before. I took some wretched cello pegs with shafts torn to near-uselessness in my old fixed shaver, and the Berbuer precision shaver cut them as smooth as glass. Yes, I was impressed!

The Berbuer precision peg shaver is a professional tool with a price to match. With shipping, a set of the two sizes nestled in fitted plywood boxes costs nearly \$600. On the other hand, it is a lifetime tool that will shave any wooden peg in the octet set--although it was not designed for that purpose. Berbuer will even let you try it out at no charge. If you don't like it, you simply send it back.

Make me a good offer on my old brass shavers and I'll throw in the 25 little slips of sandpaper that I won't be needing any more! I'm keeping my Berbuer shaver! You can learn more about the precision peg shaver (and polish up your high school German) at <www.wirbelschneider.de> or you can write in English to <david@wirbelschneider.de>.

"Lighter Moments" will return to its usual spot next issue.

Letters to the Editor

Counting Heads.

I really wasn't sure about your statement in the last newsletter that the octet in the Metropolitan Museum had been seen by more than a million people. My colleagues and I sat down with our figures and I must say that now I agree with you. Even we were surprised by the big numbers!



-- Joe Peknik is a trustee of the NVFA and principal technician in the musical instrument department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

A World of Kindred Spirits.

Now that I'm back in Portland (OR) [after the convention --ed.], I have a strong feeling that I am on the wrong end of the country! Simultaneous immersion in the technical and musical aspects of the Octet during OCTET 2005 not only validates my tinkering and playing ramblings but also has revealed a world of kindred spirits. Until now, I thought I was alone!

The "hands on" experience with plate tuning will allow me to proceed with projects for a tenor and a baritone. Playing my alto for the first time in a New Violin Family orchestra for the Tallis confirms my migration from "chin fiddle" viola to vertical alto as a natural progression, removing obstacles and revealing vast new potentialities (and it was the *ultimate* interactive surround-sound experience!). It was both refreshing and empowering to rub

shoulders in a non-judgmental atmosphere of shared discovery!



-- Patrick Tobin lives on the left side of the country and researches the history of the alto and tenor violins.

Impressed With the Playing.

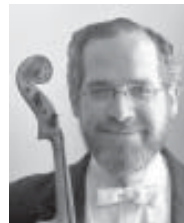
I enjoyed the OCTET 2005 concert [at the State Theatre] on several levels, and I congratulate you on your courage and determination to explore a new path, knowing how deeply entrenched the traditional violin family is over several centuries. I was very impressed with the level of playing and how the choice of music allowed the listener to make mental comparisons with the more traditional instruments. All in all, it was a stimulating experience. Bravo to you and all who contributed to a most stimulating and enjoyable concert.

--Meyer Stolov is a violinist and a former concertmaster of the Royal Opera House Orchestra, Covent Garden, U.K.

Notes on the Alto.

I enjoyed perusing the Spring 05 newsletter. That's a lot of work for you considering the membership! The article on the alto violin caught my attention. I suppose the alto can be played on the shoulder by guys with hands that hang down to their knees, but for the rest of us I concluded a long time ago that it HAS to be played cello-style.

This kind of put me off, but now I read that what's needed is a combination of cello and viola techniques. Play it cello-style, but finger it viola-style. That's got me thinking maybe there's hope after all! Have an unused alto hanging around that I could borrow?



Brett Allen, a professional musician, plays on a Hutchins viola and is a long time supporter of the New Violin Family.

Worth the Wait.

[The convention] went very well. The musical programs were grand, both ensemble and solo. This was my first time to hear the octet instruments professionally played and live. Next, I could renew acquaintance with a number of old friends from the 112 Essex shop in the 1970's and 80's, finding that we still have the same interests and can sometimes help each other.

Most important to me, I picked up some pointers that have helped me in my struggles with the alto. Sometimes I wonder about the future of many of the octet instruments, but I have no such doubts about the importance of the alto. In recent years it has saved my musical life. What I learned in Ithaca about strings and bows has made my instrument even more enjoyable. I hope you will do this again!

--Carolyn Field is a

long-time collaborator and associate of Carleen Hutchins and a proponent of the New Violin Family instruments.

Huzzah! . . .

Please accept an enthusiastic 'Huzzah!' for all who made the NVFA conference such a magical event. It was an amazing accomplishment! [Albert Consort] sounded fabulous, and it was clear how much the instruments inspired [them] to play with such love and passion. Dr. Hutchins must be very proud.



-- Omar Firestone is a cellist who plays tenor violin in the Hutchins Consort.

Didn't Want to Leave . . .

"I thought the conference in Ithaca was great. It was wonderful to hear all the instruments and to meet others who also like them. I much appreciate all the work you put into it. My only complaints are that it was too short--I didn't want to go home--and that I might have to wait a while for the next one."



Marty Kaszpryk lives in Rochester, New York, and is an active violin researcher.

There's a Future in This . . .

"I'm a cello player, basically. I play alto violin in the Hutchins

Consort because it's fun to do something that's a little different or out of the ordinary, but I consider myself a cellist first. After coming to this convention and playing with other octet musicians from different groups, I'm beginning to think about the whole thing differently. I'm beginning to see that there is a real future in this."

--Carolyn Tyler Lechusza is a cellist who plays alto violin in the Hutchins Consort.

News and Compliments.

During the meeting of the Technical Committee on Musical Acoustics at the recent gathering of the Acoustical Society of America in Vancouver [2005 --ed.], the chairman passed out brochures and newsletters about the Octet, as well as a preliminary program for OCTET 2005. I was most interested to read the newsletter [Vol. 2, no. 3--ed.], which had not then reached me in Ottawa, and I want to compliment you on its scope and quality. I had not realized that the instruments were spreading so well and so far, and I was also interested to learn that so many high-powered players had adopted the new instruments for regular use. Excellent work!

- Fred Lipsett of Ottawa is a retired physicist and alto player who also serves on the NVFA advisory panel.



It's Over, Thank You!

Now that OCTET 2005 is behind us, I find myself tired, happy, and looking forward to the next convention--especially because someone else will be the Organizing Committee Chair! A fond look back reminds me that even though I operated mostly as a committee of one, a project of this size and scope requires the help of a number of people.

First, a tip of my hat to Carleen Hutchins. Without her resources and her resourcefulness, the convention would have been much, much less an event, if it had happened at all. Supportive to a fault, and with the understanding that comes from long years in the trenches, she took on my errors as her own and made me look much better at the task than I really was. Thank you, Carleen.

Thanks also to NVFA Trustees Dean Richardson and Ted Jones, who became the other two horses in harness when the scope of the convention became too great for me to handle alone. Despite the sporadic and spirited discussions that some might characterize as arguments, these are two guys I'd want at my side if I had to do this

again. Thanks, Dean and Ted.

Thanks to NVFA Trustees Joe McNalley, who pulled my chestnuts from the fire more than once when cancellations left gaping holes in our schedule, and Lin Tollefsen, whose services as videographer made us a great record of a unique event. Thanks, Joe and Lin.

I'd like to thank Sue Taylor for hanging in there at the office during the turmoil. Thanks also to NVFA President Paul Laird, Tom King, Al Carruth, Tom Knatt, and others who took on the role of session chairmen. Thanks to all who came to play so beautifully. And thanks to all those whom I may have forgotten to mention by name. Many thanks!

I have been told that I tend to save the best for last, so this is the time to publicly thank my wife, Deena, for her help and support. This support went far beyond simply being a comforting helpmate. Deena assumed increasing amounts of the household burdens during the years (yes, years) that led up to the convention. During the period of time between July 5, 2005 and the

convention, I gave up all other personal and professional work to attend to the demands of convention organizing, and Deena assumed all our financial burdens. To put it simply, without Deena there would be no Albert Consort and no octet of instruments for them to play; without Deena there would be no newsletter; and without Deena Octet 2005 would never have happened with me as chairman. Thanks, Sweetie!

Many have asked me what I thought of the convention. I tell them that I don't know because I never got the chance to attend! Next time will be different, and I'll get the opportunity to chat with all the people I missed this time.

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This Issue: First International Convention

Playing for the World 1
Totally Tallis 4
Abstracts of Papers 6
Events of Interest 7
Treble Trials 8
News in Brief 9
Heard in the Hall 10
People in the News 11
Luthier's Workbench 12
Letters 14

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For the convenience of our readers, many of our compact discs now 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.



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Classified

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Alto Violin by Robert J. Spear 2003. Hutchins model. Excellent condition, very powerful. Regret that I need to sell. \$12,000. Neil Thompson Shade. <neil@akustx.com>

Alto Violin by Hamme Ashley 1978. Hutchins model. Comes with soft case. Asking \$10,000. Jill Geary <providence39@aol.com>



The mission of the New Violin Family Association is to educate the public about the new violin instruments through writings, concerts, lectures, and demonstrations; to encourage players to use the octet violins in public performance and teaching; to stimulate the composition of music for the violin octet and to make such music available to the public at large; to instruct others in the making of octet violins; and to sponsor the collection and preservation of documents and other material relating to these violins and their development so that such archives are generally available.