

Primrose Memorial Concert and Masterclass

Myrna Layton



David Dalton, Alan de Veritch and Paul Neubauer at the dedication. Photo courtesy of the Harold B. Lee Library.

On the north wall of the Primrose International Viola Archive, two charts hang side by side. One shows the familial lineage of William Primrose, tracing his family back to 1490. The other shows the pedagogical lineage of William Primrose, tracing his teachers back to Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713). If the chart were to move forward, it would show the pedagogical “children” of William Primrose, and names like Pamela Goldsmith, Dwight Pounds, Karen Tuttle, David Dalton and Alan de Veritch (among many others) would appear.

The pedagogical connection between violists, which creates a bond akin to familial relationship, was the unofficial theme of the Primrose Memorial Concert weekend celebrated at Brigham Young University on

September 22 and 23, 2017. Hosting the event was Claudine Bigelow, professor of viola at Brigham Young University, and a pedagogical grandchild of William Primrose through her teacher, David Dalton. Special guest and honoree was Alan de Veritch, the youngest of William Primrose’s pedagogical “children,” whose donation of materials to the Primrose International Viola Archive was cause for celebration at this annual event. Three former pupils of Alan de Veritch—James Dunham, Nokuthula Ngwenyama and Paul Neubauer—were the guest artists and performers at the concert on Friday evening. Attendees were also treated to their expertise at a masterclass on Saturday morning, and in a panel discussion that followed in the afternoon. All this made for a wonderful weekend of celebrating the viola.



The William Primrose Pedagogical Genealogy chart that hangs on the wall at PIVA. Photo by Eric Howard.

Reception

Events opened on Friday, September 22, with a reception to honor Alan de Veritch and his contributions to the Primrose International Viola Archive. Guests attended from far and wide. When those from outside the state of Utah were asked to stand, about half the audience rose to their feet. To name a few, Alan's children came from California, Washington and Indiana; the family of viola historian Maurice Riley traveled from Michigan. The longest journey was made by violinist Andy Zaplatynsky, a string quartet colleague of Alan's, who traveled from his home base of Bogota, Colombia, to partake of the musical offerings the weekend would hold.

The theme of lineage was introduced at the reception by Dr. Claudine Bigelow, who in her remarks said:

I want to take a moment to contextualize this event for some of the most important people here—my students. You are the next generation. On the surface, it looks like this event is for Alan de Veritch, and it is. But if you look deep down, you will see, this event is a celebration of people in the past, the present and the future. PIVA is for you and for your students and their students. The concert is also for you. I remember being so moved by Primrose concerts when I was here as a student, and it has motivated me to continue the tradition for the past 19 years. There are going to be moments in the concert tonight where you hear sounds that sear your heart so completely, you will remember and be inspired by them all your life.

Claudine also spoke of her experiences at the International Viola Congress in New Zealand:

The Maori people talk about their ancestors and invite their ancestors to everything they do. In that spirit...I want to show you the legacy I see; a pedagogical lineage that is lasting and beautiful and is connected to all of the violists here. We can and should invite the spirit of Primrose to this event; if Primrose is here, Ysaÿe, his teacher, would want to be too. And Ysaÿe's teacher was Henri Vieuxtemps. This long line of teachers reaches back to Vivaldi and Corelli. We would want their presence to be watching over us too.

Claudine spoke of Alan de Veritch as another branch of the Primrose pedagogical family tree since he was also a Primrose student. She spoke of the many violists who have contributed music and memorabilia to the archive, all of whom are connected. Adding Alan de Veritch's materials to the archive is appropriate, as he is a part of the same pedagogical lineage. "Alan, welcome to PIVA. We are glad you are here," she concluded.

Concert

The Primrose Memorial Concert on Friday evening (September 22, 2017) continued to celebrate connections both pedagogical and familial. Each performer chose music that connected them in some way to Primrose and/or de Veritch. Nokuthula Ngwenyama chose to play the



Claudine speaking at the dedication. Photo courtesy of Harold B. Lee Library.

short and sweet *Scene de Ballet*, a composition by Alan de Veritch's grandfather, Wilhelm von Winterfeld. Her second piece, *Sonoran Storm*, is her own composition, following in the footsteps of those in her pedagogical lineage who were both performers and composers. This piece was a beautiful but difficult piece, which included much variation in mood and texture, and some tricks with the lighting in the room to simulate lightning.

Paul Neubauer began his set with Benjamin Dale's *Romance for Viola and Piano*, which was one of Primrose's favorite pieces, composed after Lionel Tertis "harassed [Dale] into composing a piece for viola." *Mattie Rag*, an Arthur Benjamin composition that William Primrose transcribed for viola, was next. *Hakinoh* (Lament) op. 186 by Mana-Zucca, was a piece which had been dedicated to a young Alan de Veritch and edited by Alan's father. Mana-Zucca, who also dabbled in art, made a painting to go with the music, which she gave to Alan de Veritch and which he has gifted to the Primrose International Viola Archive. It was displayed on stage during Paul's performance of this piece. Paul's final piece was *Serenade du Tzigane*, a piece by Charles Robert Valdez, and published by Fritz Kreisler, whose music was frequently performed and recorded by Primrose.

When James Dunham came on stage, he told the audience of his choice to play a work which had connections, for him, both to Primrose and to Alan de Veritch: Sonata in F Minor, op.120, no.1 by Brahms. The Schirmer "Great Performers" edition of this work had been edited by William Primrose. When he was a student, his teacher Alan de Veritch had mentored him on this

piece. When James said this, Alan quipped from the audience, "I have probably changed all my bowings and fingerings by now." James smiled and replied, "I probably have also," much to the delight of concert attendees. Dunham gave a wonderful performance during which there was a very fine collaboration between him and pianist Forrest Howell.

The concert ended with a viola choir, described in the program as "made up of the BYU viola studio, visiting artists, and any violist in attendance who wishes to participate." In addition to Claudine Bigelow, LeeAnn Morgan and viola students from BYU, participants were James, Thula and Paul, as well as Andy Zaplatansky playing first viola on the violin; a total of twenty participants, conducted by Alan. Before they began to play, Alan said that he wished to make a tribute to David Dalton. They, as students of Primrose, had discussed the need to "do something to keep William Primrose's memory alive." Alan expressed gratitude for David, who has been the one with the determination and motivation to preserve the memory of Primrose through collaborating with him on his autobiography, his memoirs, making videos, and through working with the BYU community to create the space that houses the archive. Alan asked his grandson, Layne Beams, to please come to the stage with a gift, which was a china bowl.

David Dalton was seated up high in the recital hall, and in the middle of a row. He called out, in good nature heckling Alan, "You are not going to get any money in that collection plate." Amid laughter, Alan again encouraged David to come to the stage. As he was moving to the aisle, Alan said, "It is taking you longer to get here than it used to take." David responded, "Thirty years ago, I would have already been in your lap." Alan retorted, "Thirty years ago, this presentation would have already been finished by now!" But then, with great kindness, "You are worth waiting for."

Alan explained that his wife Evelyn is a china painter, and she had painted this china bowl as a tribute to David Dalton. "The inscription reads, to David, with deep gratitude." In his reply to Alan's presentation, David said, "After I had a few summer lessons at the Eastman School with Mr. Primrose, he invited me to come out west to study with him. But we were moving to Europe to study. After we moved back a few years later, I decided to come to Mr. Primrose and take a lesson or two. I went to his

home on Sunset Boulevard. I saw a program sitting on a desk. It listed Alan...Something—playing the Hindemith unaccompanied. I asked Mr. Primrose, ‘How old is he?’ He said the boy was 14. I said, ‘No violist who is 14 years old should be allowed to play that piece!’” It was clear that David and Alan both admire the accomplishments of each other.

Before the viola choir began to play the Zwei Gesange (Two Songs) op. 91 by Brahms that he had arranged, Alan de Veritch told the audience that he believes the viola is the instrument that sounds the most like the human voice. He spoke of the legendary recordings made by William Primrose and Marian Anderson of these very songs, and shared his idea that they “would sound pretty good without the singer, and with viola instead.” He said, “I really believe in viola choirs. They are a wonderful musical experience. In these songs, I replaced the voice with violas, to create my arrangement for viola choir.”

Masterclass

Saturday morning, about sixty people gathered in the Harold B. Lee Library auditorium for the Primrose Memorial Masterclass, and the pedagogues of the past were again made present in comments made to the students. Each of the three guest artists had the opportunity to work with one of Claudine Bigelow’s viola students. First up was Hana Giauque, originally from Arizona, who played Quincy Porter’s *Speed Etude* for Nokuthula Ngwenyama. This was a reunion experience for the two women, since Hana had previously studied with Ngwenyama before attending college. As Ngwenyama sought comments on Hana’s playing from her colleagues, James Dunham recommended Ysaÿe’s famous bowing exercise, passed down to him from de Veritch via Primrose. This exercise was written by Ysaÿe at the bottom of a photo, which he gave to Primrose.

As is typical for James Dunham, as he listened to and worked with Utah native Jessica Denning on the Walton Viola Concerto, he asked a lot of questions. He asked Jessica about her “contact point,” and she explained that it’s where you get the best sound out of your instrument. James said, “I prefer contact area. If it’s a point, you can fall off it.” Dunham emphasized that we don’t work the viola, we play the viola, and that there needs to be an enjoyment typical of play that should be a part of viola performance. Another question he asked referred to

the venue: the library auditorium is not a very resonant space—it is pretty dead. What can a violist do? We need to invite our viola to bring its own resonance.

Student Ashley Galvez-Redd played the Bach-Kodály *Chromatic Fantasy* for Paul Neubauer. Following on the theme James Dunham had introduced of “playing” the viola, and not working too hard, Paul said, “I try to be as lazy as possible. I try to concentrate my energy on the music and keep everything as easy as possible.” He shared an exercise taught to him by Mr. Primrose, wherein every note you play, you get as close as you can to the next string, and basically go up and down. The goal should be to play as naturally as possible, with nothing tense or jerky. Paul also suggested that students use their teachers as a sounding board, which is what he would do with his teachers, Alan de Veritch and Paul Doktor. Neubauer would experiment with various ways of playing a section of the music, and then ask his teacher which way sounded and looked best, emphasizing that good sound is important, but so is an elegant performance. Playing should be natural looking, with the instrument an extension of the body. “Obviously it’s not,” he said, “but we’re trying to make it seem that way.” For Paul, part of that was throwing away the shoulder rest, which happened from his first lesson with de Veritch. In Paul’s experience, “They lock you in place. You have to work around them. If you have a shoulder rest, find a way to be in charge.”



The four guests on the panel, from left: Nokuthula Ngwenyama, James Dunham, Alan de Veritch, and Paul Neubauer. Photo by Myrna Layton.

Panel Discussion

All four of the guest artists for the 2017 Primrose Memorial events are part of the viola legacy begun generations ago by Corelli through the pedagogical career of William Primrose. All four participated in the panel discussion that ended the weekend events. In the section that follows, each will be identified by their initials (NN for Nokuthula Ngwenyama; JD for James Dunham; PN for Paul Neubauer; AD for Alan de Veritch). They answered questions from the audience, mostly made up of young violists who are currently studying and preparing to be teachers or performers themselves, carrying on the legacy of those before them on the Primrose pedagogical family tree.

What do you do for your daily warm-up?

NN—I do something that I learned in a masterclass with Paul [Neubauer]: open strings are a great warm-up. They feel good and natural. I also use Schradieck book one—this is a lifetime book for me. I do scales on one string and continue from there. Vibrate a little. Get the blood flowing.

JD—I also do the open string thing as Thula mentioned, and the Ysaÿe exercise that I talked about earlier. I like to do a position shifting exercise that Alan taught me—I do one octave of shifting exercises. After a half hour, I think, “I can make music.” Small muscles forget, so they need the warm-up.

PN—I will preface my comments by saying that everyone has to find their own way. Sometimes warm-ups can be excessive. I knew a student whose scale routine took an hour—that might be excessive. Maybe ten minutes for two weeks, then a different scale routine. Experiment: sometimes what we think we need turns into a chore. Do what you need. All I want to do is feel the sensation of the string and touching it down.

NN—Alan taught the warm-up of the spiders on the mirror [she demonstrated this]. A lot of what we need is mentally warming up.

PN—Something short can be a warm-up. If it is taking a lot of time ask, “Can I tweak this? Do I need all of this?” We need to use our time as wisely as possible.

AD—One of the most critical elements needed by string players is the attitude “what am I about to do?” Primrose taught me to slow down and think. Playing is a physical activity like going to the gym. Approach it in a calm, relaxed way. Look at the instrument, ask it, “How are you? How nice to see you.” Have fun with it; humanize the instrument. The instrument is going to *speak* for you. If you think of it and you separately, you lose the concept of unity. While tuning, remain very calm and quiet. You are already in a loose configuration, “I am ready to being.”

Do you have advice for college auditions?

JD—It is really good if you can visit the campus and have a lesson with the teacher before you take an audition there. The teacher can also put you in touch with others who have studied, so you can get an idea of fit. In planning what to play, it should be something that you have played a lot before, something that has simmered; nothing new. Bring your best stuff.

What the teacher is looking for is: Who are you? Does this person have something to say? Good technique is nice, but I am listening for what in the performance is *you*.

PN—You want to be able to make a connection, to feel comfortable with the teacher. Look at all the things—scholarships, what city it is, performance venues (dead sound? good sound?). If you know the audition venue, practice in similar spaces. Make the sound ring in a dead space. Go with your best. Remember that others may play the same work, so make your performance awesome. You want to go in with your best effort.

Everyone makes mistakes; the listener doesn’t even hear them unless there are many. It is the overall impression of the player that matters most. Teachers are not listening for the tiny details—they are interested in the big picture.

NN—BREATHE. Be relaxed. Use a work that starts with piano first; it can help you to hear the sound of the room. If there seem to be gruff people, ignore them. It doesn’t mean anything. Everyone wishes you the best.

AD—The level of incoming university students on the viola has risen dramatically over the years. When I was that age, most people did not know what a viola was.

Start doing your college prep work a year in advance. Don't play something that is too hard. It is better to play a student concerto really well than to butcher a more advanced concerto.

You might want to schedule a lesson with the professor you are interested in studying with; but don't be surprised if there is a charge involved. A talk is on the house, but if you want a real lesson, it's a lesson, and you pay for that. If you schedule a lesson with the teacher before the audition, it can change the expectation at the audition. It may be better to schedule a lesson after the audition—or many months before, so there is time between the lesson and the audition.

Can you please tell us about career development?

NN— While I was making my repertoire choice for college auditions, I wanted to play the Walton Concerto. I received guidance from Alan, as I was preparing for the Primrose competition. I was a quick learner and in my lessons, Alan did deliberate pacing, helping me with preparation. I learned how to be efficient. Opportunities come up; be prepared for them. If an opportunity doesn't work out, there will be another one. As long as you're rolling as a musician, as an artist, you're ready for whatever comes up. Exactly what that will be is hard to predict.

JD— Be open to ideas. Use your teachers for guidance, but be open. Say yes to opportunities. I feel sometimes like I might have a speech impediment: N...n...n...n... yes. Can you come? Yes. Say yes to opportunities and more of them will come.

PN— I grew up in Los Angeles and had a wonderful teacher, Alan de Veritch. I also was in the California Institute of Arts Youth Program. The whole morning was chamber music. I was told of a Russian violinist whose musical priorities were in this order: soloist, orchestra member, teacher, chamber musician. He immigrated to Israel at age 16 and had never played chamber music. When the opportunity came, he had no idea what to do. Listening and communicating are skills from chamber music that you would be wise to develop. Teachers and coaches can really help you. I had Henri Tamianka as a chamber coach, Paul Doktor as a teacher after Alan, and masterclasses with the god, William Primrose. Now, I can do a variety of things. Also, be aware of how you relate

to people. There are excellent players who don't do much playing because of how their relationships went. Be aware that you are part of a family, a circle that intertwines. You want to be a part of as many circles as possible in the viola family. More people equal more opportunities.

NN— Chamber music is good for brain development. MRIs have shown that musicians in a quartet use more parts of the brain and make quicker decisions than a fighter pilot. Open the mind; do that as soon as possible.

AD— If you are thinking career wise about money, you are not going to get rich as a solo violist. The best way to prepare economically as a violist is to be great at chamber music. Prepare for everything: orchestra, solo, free lancing. Be an opportunist. I insisted that all my students have exposure to the electric 5-string, for the practicality and technical experience—they can play more repertoire. Opportunity. Flexibility—rigidity doesn't cut it. The more tools you have, the better. Preparation is fundamental.

A final piece of advice was given to the students as the panel discussion ended. Alan de Veritch said, "Life is a gift. There are many ways to use music—within the family, as a part of our culture, in addition to career possibilities. The higher you are trained, the more you will enjoy it, however you choose to use music in your life."

To have the viola in your life, to play it and enjoy it: This is the legacy that has been passed down to young violists from their teachers, and their teacher's teachers, including Primrose, Ysaÿe, Vieuxtemps—all the way back to Corelli.

Myrna Layton holds a doctorate from the University of South Africa, has taught world music at Utah Valley University, and currently teaches a Topics in Music class at Brigham Young University. Her main assignment at BYU is as performing arts librarian, where she has been responsible for the Primrose International Viola Archive for fifteen years.