

The viol in Australia

by Miriam Morris

(This talk, presented at the PPGG was based on an article written for the 2007 'Chelys Australis', the yearly journal of the Australian Viola da Gamba Society. The following version is a slightly fuller account than time allowed at the Gathering. It is to some degree autobiographical with special reference to teaching, and outlines the beginnings of viol playing in Australia with details of pioneers, teachers, performers, musicologists, amateurs and professional viol players and makers who have contributed directly to that development. In no way does this article purport to be a full history.)

My own beginnings were in 1972 at the 2nd Norvis summer school, shortly before I emigrated to Australia. My teachers were Jane Ryan and later Wieland Kuijken. I had however first seen the viol as a child when my cello teacher took me to Dietrich Kessler's house to get my cello repaired. He was playing when we arrived. I asked my teacher what the instrument was, and was told that it was a horrid scratchy thing that didn't stay in tune! I went to a boarding school near Haslemere in the South of England, the home of the Dolmetsches. Thirty years earlier Arnold Dolmetsch had been master of junior music at my school. I have a picture in the book 'Bedales School, the first hundred years', which shows Dolmetsch conducting the string orchestra with a fretted violin family being played viol-way. I remember the Dolmetsch consort coming to school to play for us. At that point I had no inkling of future connections with the viol.

As far as I know, Professor Donald Peart, who occupied the first Chair of Music within the Faculty of Music at Sydney University, introduced the viol into Australia on his arrival in 1947. He had known and been inspired by the Dolmetsch family and owned a viol that Arnold had pieced together from an original back that he found on a rubbish heap. That instrument is now owned by the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. Peart introduced many people to the viol and some of them still represent a cross-section of our existing community. Invariably pioneers are superseded and Peart was very much an enthusiastic viol player of his time. This is an excellent time to acknowledge him and others of his ilk for laying the foundations. Just a few of Peart's key converts to the viol include Winsome Evans, director of the Renaissance Players at Sydney University, who has always encouraged the viol in the ensemble and in her course work and Patrice Connelly who founded the Australian Viola da Gamba Society and the shop Saraband Music, importing music, strings, and writing/publishing her own and other editions. Others included Roger Covell, Joanna Parkes, music librarian, arts administrator who went on to study at the Schola in Basel, and Michael O'Loughlin who studied in Vienna with Jose Vasquez and lives in Queensland, where he has taught the viol at the University of Queensland, The Queensland Conservatorium and Griffith University.

Michael is best known as a musicologist, writing forewords for Guentersberg, and is completing a book on viola da gamba music in the world of Frederic the Great, to be published by the English academic publisher Ashgate.

The 'Prof' as Peart was affectionately known, formed the Mico Consort that included Ted Granlund, Sharon Wicks who subsequently studied at the Schola in Basel and played professionally for a number of years, and Catherine (Katy) Finniss, cellist and gamba player, who at that time had returned to her native Australia from the UK where she then returned again some years ago. Katy taught Victoria Watts when she was still at school and Victoria is an active viol player in Melbourne playing in Consort Eclectus with Laura Vaughan, Ruth Wilkinson, (the only member of Consort Eclectus not at the PPGG) and myself. Katy also taught Jenny Errikson who went on to study with Jaap Ter Linden in Amsterdam. She lives and works in Sydney and directs the Marais Project and plays in Sounds Baroque under the auspices of Musica Viva's schools programmes.

The Melbourne beginnings happened later in the 70s. We have a thriving Early Music Studio within the Faculty of Music at the University of Melbourne that was opened by Jordi Savall in March 1996. At that time he said that there wasn't anything like it in Spain. The EMS is in fact the consolidation of 25 years early music teaching at the University of Melbourne. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor in those early days was Professor John Poynter, an enthusiastic amateur viol player and keen collector of viols, Kesslers in particular. Victoria Watts plays on one of his instruments, a tenor that Kessler made for his father. John Poynter had been introduced to the viol in England by Marco Pallis, who, he told me, financed Arnold Dolmetsch in his making and restoration of early instruments. John arranged for the initial purchase of viols from Michael Heale that are still in use in the beginner ensemble at the Early Music Studio. Later six instruments were bought from a local maker Harold Evans. Pianist Max Cooke, also on the staff, had an interest in early keyboards and he brought Hannelore Muller out from Europe as the first guest viol teacher for a few weeks residency in 1978. They performed the Bach gamba sonatas - a first in Australia. Composer/pianist/inventor Percy Grainger also has a connection with the viol in Australia and with Arnold Dolmetsch. Born in Melbourne 1882 - 1961, he bought a treble viol from him that is now owned by Grainger Museum at the University of Melbourne. Grainger wanted to buy a whole set of viols but didn't make enough money on the particular tour which would have funded the idea.

Professor John Griffiths heads the Early Music Studio where Victoria Watts is the part time administrator. The EMS provides tuition on early instruments, and there are a variety of ensembles that the viol players can liaise with including a vocal ensemble, renaissance dance troupe, baroque ensemble and orchestra. There are academic lectures specific to early music and many performance opportunities. There is a beginner viol ensemble and opportunity for first and second study within the undergraduate degree course and further chamber music and consort playing for more advanced viol players.

So far no one has done postgraduate performance on gamba – it's probably a good idea to broaden the horizons and go to the European centers at that point. John Griffiths estimates over 200 students have learnt the viol since the late 70s. Ruth Wilkinson and I have had a continuous flow of 1st and 2nd study students since that time – usually 1, 2 or 3 per year at most.

Thanks to funding we are able to put on a student performance of *Orfeo* in our Spring Early Music Festival in October 2007. This will be a great experience for all concerned. The Festival invariably includes performances by students, professional Australian and international early musicians. Libby Wallfisch who hails from Melbourne has been part of the festival as have Wieland Kuijken with Eva Legenne when they visited Australia last year. Wieland gave memorable classes at the EMS that lasted a full day, teaching advanced players – present students and a student consort at the university and past students of Ruth and myself. In 2005 Dr Janice Stockigt, a University of Melbourne musicologist, discovered a setting of *Dixit Dominus* kept in the Saxon State and University Library, Dresden, under the name of Baldassare Galuppi. This work was discovered to be a lost work by Antonio Vivaldi. After confirmation by the International Vivaldi Editorial Committee that this was indeed a work by Vivaldi the work was given its premiere performance in Dresden in 2006, a CD was released and an edition made available. Soon afterwards the Australian premiere was given by the EMS and a broadcast made through the ABC.

Ruth Wilkinson was the first Australian to study the viol in Europe and return to Australia. She is a recorder player as well as a gamba player and began her studies on the gamba and the violone with Jordi Savall. Her return to Australia was vital in getting a momentum going with the viol. She plays with the medieval group *La Romanesca* and *Capella Corelli*, which were formed when she returned from Europe. I arrived in Melbourne in 1988 from Adelaide where I had done a lot of performing, taught a number of amateur viol players and set up a primary schools programme. It was only when I came to Melbourne that I started to teach students who would become professional players. I've worked with Ruth since then, taking over the beginner viol ensemble in 1998 – relinquishing it this year so that Laura Vaughan my ex student could get some valuable teaching experience in the group in which she began playing in 1988. At present I teach 1st and 2nd study viol teaching at the University and Ruth is doing the same with the recorder while teaching the viol in her private studio. We formed *Consort Eclectus* in 2001 and Victoria Watts and Laura Vaughan make up the group with Danny Yeadon as a 5th player.

When I went to Europe to study with Wieland in 1984 I also researched viol teaching in schools in the UK and Holland. When I got back to Adelaide in South Australia I set up a programme in a primary school with a recorder colleague and a second programme within one of the High Schools soon followed. The viol is a most appropriate instrument for music in education and the idea of students of the viol being able to start

at the equivalent age as their modern counterparts is only logical. I wrote a little tutor, 'Right from the start' which presumes no prior musical knowledge and found a harp maker to make simple instruments suitable for school use based on plans from the Dutch viol player Dieuke Berkelaar who was doing similar work at that time. I actually left Adelaide a couple of years after setting up the programme to work at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne but it is still operating, in the capable hands of Grahame Strahle - better known as the writer of *An Early Music Dictionary* published by Cambridge University Press. I've taught some ensemble-based classes at the Secondary School of the Victorian College of the Arts and set up a programme at a large private school in Melbourne that Laura Vaughan has now taken over. I have found that the serious gamba students so far have mostly been a very small proportion of my cello students who have heard the viol and fallen in love with it, and in some instances, the likes of Keren Bruce and Laura Vaughan have made careers. Keren teaches at the Conservatoire in Stockholm and plays in Erin Headley's group Tiramisu and is very active as a player in Sweden.

In such a geographically isolated country as Australia it is vital for students at a certain point to spread their wings and go to one of the European centres for further studies. Only then can they have a clear perspective of where they stand in the bigger pool. Fortunately there is employment within Australia if they want to come back - granted it is harder for viol players than violinists but it is possible, given initiative, to work in Australia but not to make a living solely as a gamba player. Danny Yeadon emigrated from the UK to Sydney some years ago and has a very busy life as a modern/baroque cellist and gamba player, also still spending quite a bit of time working in the UK and Europe. He and his partner, Neal Peres Da Costa do a great deal of solo work around Australia including Danny being a 5th player in Consort Eclectus. Last year when I was researching my article, Neal who is the senior lecturer in early music at Sydney University, was in the throes of setting up a very wide ranging early music programme in the department where the viol promises to play a prominent role with Danny as teacher and there will be much interface with the modern musicians which bodes well.

It is only in the last few years that professional groups made up solely of viol players have emerged in Australia. Consort Eclectus was formed in 2001 and Convivio in 2003 when Laura Vaughan returned from her studies in The Hague with Wieland and Philippe Pierlot. Consort Eclectus has recently made its first CD that is now available. I had hoped to bring it to the Gathering but the editing and production was only partially completed at that time. backgammon, directed by Brooke Greene has been in existence for many years but only in the last few years has it focussed on a viol consort. Brooke is a baroque violinist as well as a treble viol player. As a producer for the ABC in Tasmania she has been in the ideal position to interest players from the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra to play the viol. Two members of backgammon are in the TSO and Laura and Victoria have also been regular performers. Brooke is commencing studies with Wendy Gillespie this year at Indiana. Danny Yeadon and Neal Peres da

Costa I've already mentioned, also Jenny Errikson. Polly Sussex is setting up a consort in Auckland. I have been to New Zealand twice in the last 2 years and we have done concerts together with harpsichordist James Tibbles. I was pleased to meet Shaun Ng in Hawaii. Shaun is based in Western Australia, and I hope to have further contact in Australia. There are also various groups that include gamba players that I won't mention here. Suffice to say that the instrument is alive and well and is an accepted and growing part of the Australian musical scene.

It is necessary to have local instrument makers in any country but vital for those living far away from the main centres where there are many makers. I think it is particularly hard both for makers who have never been outside Australia and for intending buyers to have any clear perspective on which to make their choices. Ian Watchorn worked in Europe for many years and then returned to Australia. I am very happy with my Cheron copy that he made for me over 10 years ago and apart from that instrument I own a Kessler treble and six string bass that Jane Ryan sold to me. Ben Hall has made over 60 viols and has supplied various universities, a lot of serious amateur players and some professional players. Harold Evans who supplied the University of Melbourne made 26 instruments but no longer makes. The late Geoff Wills was a highly colourful character, a seaman working on a dredge where he built an instrument workshop. He made over 250 viols. Mike O'Loughlin told me that Geoff would go to work on a Monday morning with a sack of wood and return on Friday night with a viol. Geoff was the prime example of someone working in a vacuum and it would have helped him greatly to have contact with other makers. Nevertheless many people have played his viols that wouldn't have had the opportunity if Geoff hadn't been the enthusiast that he was. Paul Cavell in country Victoria has recently made some treble and tenors under my supervision for school use and is keen to learn more.

One thing I love about the viol community at large is that there isn't the same great divide between the amateurs and the professionals as in the modern world. Amateur early music making in Australia and the state of Victoria in particular owes a great deal to Lyn and Peter Hawkins. Lyn began playing in 1962 when her father made her a viol to play in her school Elizabethan pageant. Mischa Schneider the cellist in the Budapest Quartet was in Australia and lent Lyn a very heavy German Bass Viol. Learning from cellists was the only option at that time but subsequently she had lessons with Cecile Dolmetsch and Hannelore Muller and visiting tutors at the viol schools. Lyn was involved with the forerunner of the EMSV, the St Peters Music Society formed in 1968. Sadly the founder and first president Harold McDonald was killed in a gliding accident. The secretary Helen Richmond was Patrice's forerunner, fulfilling a vital role in the community by being the first to import copies of early instruments and strings - mainly from East Germany. Various people including Lyn got viols in this way. Lyn organizes many activities through the Early Music Society of Victoria that involve viols.

Lyn and Peter were the prime movers with support from another keen amateur player, David Strahle, in organizing the first viol school in Australia in Ballarat Victoria in 1978. David and family had studied with the Dolmetsches while living temporarily in England. The tutors were Joanna Parkes and myself. This school was the forerunner of the Annual Easter Viol Schools. Joanna, originally a Peart student who had gone on to study in Basel was at that time Music Librarian at the University of Adelaide and teaching at the Elder Conservatorium at the University of Adelaide. It was here that Joanna introduced the viol to Ruth Kelly who was active in the formation of the South Australian Early Music Society and a tireless advocate and supporter of the gamba, both in its early days in Australia and up to the present day. Ruth has been resident in Sydney for many years and continues to play consorts and produce a valuable service to early musicians in the form of her editions that she produces for the community on a non profit making basis. In 1979 a National Viol School was held in Adelaide where Prof. Peart, Jo Parkes and myself were the tutors. Prior to the formation of the AVdGS the viol schools were hosted by the particular state early music society where the school was held. There are early music societies in New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and formerly, South Australia. As far as I know there hasn't been a viol school in WA. It is the policy for the Easter Viol Schools to have overseas tutors. This is a really important stimulus in terms of our geographic isolation. Brent Wissick, Judith Davidoff, Alison Crum, Julie Jeffreys, John Dornenburg, and Asako Morikawa amongst others have all bridged this gap for the amateur and professional players alike.

Patrice Connelly formed the AVdGS in 2000. We have 81 members at present – tiny in comparison to the UK, Japan and the US. There would be more members in the New York chapter alone than we have in the whole of Australia. Our activities and aims are similar to the other gamba societies. I truly believe that the Society is having a unifying effect – I think it is important to have a central representative body. For instance, dealings with PPGG have been made much more simple because of this. Since Patrice retired as President, Richard Milner has taken over the reins. The Newsletter in particular keeps us all in touch with what's going on nationally and internationally.

I've alluded to the problems of geographic isolation but I'd like to finish on a positive note and detail what I think are the pros rather than the cons for the future of early music and the viol in Australia. We have a good standard of living and way of life – maybe it's a safer environment than Europe – certainly up to now. There is scope for employment for early musicians – albeit more for orchestral instruments than the viol but we do get a look in. Engagements with Passions happen with ABC orchestras, Sydney Philharmonia and other regional orchestras and choral societies. Handel's Julius Caesar is performed fairly regularly by Opera Australia so the gamba gets the airing in the onstage band. Australian composer Richard Mills included the gamba in his scoring of the opera *Batavia*. Consort Eclectus has recently recorded works by contemporary composers Natalie Williams and Calvin Bowman. It is an important part of the

philosophy of the group to seek and encourage new composition for the gamba by Australian composers. Viol players are often to be seen in major arts festivals in Australia. As mentioned, there are specialist viol groups and other ensembles in which the viol features throughout Australia.

Importantly there is much more acceptance of early music in general by mainstream musicians with far less of the bias that I used to see when I first came to Australia, especially in the tertiary institutions. Ex-patriot Australians are returning/visiting to perform after study and/or living in Europe so we have a mutually beneficial situation. There is room to grow, creating one's own style/school. This is a healthy state of affairs so long as there is contact with the wider international community. Thank you, Brent, Esha and the committee for making exactly this possible with the PPGG.