

Gamba Society's Consort Cooperative Provides Training for Emerging Artists

The Viola da Gamba Society of America's Consort Cooperative Program – held simultaneously with the its annual Conclave – is a concerted effort to invest in the Society's future. Begun as the vision of Toronto-area performer and teacher Joëlle Morton, an accomplished performer of the viola da gamba, violone, and contrabass, the program has received overwhelming support from the VdGSA board and benefitted from helpful advisors: Martha Bishop (artistic director of the Conclave), Wendy Gillespie and Alice Renken (VdGSA vice-president and secretary), and Conclave assistant director and board member Marie Dalby.

The focus of the week-long program is on attracting younger professionals and advanced players and exposing them to rich and varied repertoire for viol consort, while offering each participant a chance to coach and be coached in peer consorts. Aimed at performers of the viol whose needs might not be met by the regular Conclave program, this intense week of playing allows participants to work on treble, tenor, and bass viols, as well as violone.

Enrollment in the Consort Cooperative is particularly selective. The program seeks individuals who are techni-

cally accomplished and acquainted with the repertoire and who have a desire for self-improvement and determination towards team-building. For the 2006 Consort Cooperative, application to the program included regular Conclave registration, a personal statement, resume, two letters of recommendation, and recorded materials. Participants were chosen by a panel that included Martha Bishop, Wendy Gillespie, and Joëlle Morton. (Participants pay for room and board and a non-student conference fee. In addition, the society offers Conclave scholarship assistance with a separate scholarship application.)

The 14 players chosen to participate in the 2006 Consort Cooperative – held in late July during the 44th Conclave at Saint Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota – represented a wide demographic – performers and scholars of high standards and varied philosophies. I was impressed with the positive attitudes and supportive atmosphere among my colleagues – an infectious spirit that pervaded the entire Conclave experience – and by the demanding and varied repertoire they brought with them to coach. The program provided an environment that felt safe for experimentation with unfamiliar works as well

as for honing the subtleties of familiar works. The participants of the Consort Cooperative also took every opportunity to play and interact with the full Conclave community, something we found an enriching and enjoyable experience.

During the week, Cooperative members broke into small groups to explore literature by Carlo Gesualdo, Christopher Tye, John Dowland, Sainte-Colombe, as well as the “Seventh Brandenburg Concerto,” an arrangement of Bach's Sonata for Viola da Gamba and Harpsichord in G Minor, BWV 1029, using the same instrumentation as the Brandenburg Concerto No. 6. Also, participants were able to delve into contemporary music for viols, such as *Snowflower* by Susan Ross and Peter Sculthorpe's *Djilile*, later performed during the Friday Mini-Concert. Other composers featured in the Mini-Concert program included Guillaume Dufay, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Christopher Simpson, Orlando Gibbons, John Jenkins, and John Ward.

I look forward to the 2007 VdGSA Conclave and Consort Cooperative to be held July 22-29 at the University of Puget-Sound in Tacoma, Washington, as well as the first Pan-Pacific Viol Gathering, July 31-August 2, 2007, at the University of Hawaii-Manoa in Honolulu. Both will offer presentations, concerts, panel discussions, and pedagogy sessions for performers, teachers, and scholars of viola da gamba. It is an exciting time to be an enthusiast of early music and the viola da gamba. ♪

—Phillip W. Serna

Phillip W. Serna is a freelance musician in the Chicago area and is completing the doctor of music performance degree (double bass) at the Northwestern University, where he studied double bass with Chicago Symphony member Michael Hovnanian and viola da gamba with Newberry Consort founder Mary Springfels. For more information about the Consort Cooperative Program, visit www.vdgsa.org/pgs/consort-coop.html.



2006 VdGSA Consort Cooperative participants: front row, left to right, Phillip Serna, Andrew Saunders, Liam Byrne, Tobi Szüts, Jennifer Barron, Brooke Green, and Celia Olson; back row, left to right, Joëlle Morton, Marie Dalby, Webster Williams, Heather Miller Lardin, Virginia Kaycoff, Ken Perlow, and Josh Lee.