



American Viola Society  
**PREMIERES**

Scott Slapin, viola  
Yui Asano, piano

American Viola Society: Premieres  
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Frederick Slee (1870–1954)  
Variations on a Hymn Tune for Solo  
Viola  
1 Andante 5:17

Arthur Foote (1853–1937)  
Melody for Viola and Piano, op. 44a  
(1918)  
2 Moderato: espressivo 5:18

John Woods Duke (1899–1984)  
Suite for Viola Alone (1933)  
3 Aria 2:47  
4 Scherzo 2:05  
5 Cadenza 1:58  
6 Finale 2:15

Blanche Blood  
Barcarolle for Viola and Piano (1906)  
7 Allegretto 2:50

Ivan Langstroth (1887–1971)  
Viola Suite (1943)  
8 Prelude 2:10  
9 Scherzetto 1:09  
10 Menuetto 2:45  
11 Introduction and Fugue 2:44

Gustav Strube (1867–1953)  
Regrets for Viola and Piano (1933)  
12 Quasi Adagio 3:34

Maurice Gardner (1909–2002)  
Phantasmagoria: Sonata for Solo  
Viola (1981)  
13 Molto marcato e sonore 4:43  
14 Grazioso 3:08  
15 Con brio 4:28

Tracks 2, 7, and 12 recorded April 2, 2012, in Mandeville, Louisiana. Tracks 1 and 13–15 recorded June 11, 2012, in North Plainfield, New Jersey. Tracks 3–6 and 8–11 recorded January 17, 2013, in North Plainfield, New Jersey.

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## The Progress of American Viola Music

Even the most ardent lover of viola music would be forgiven an inability to name a single American composition written for the instrument prior to the twentieth century. Yet viola compositions date back to the beginning of the American Republic, with Peter Von Hagen's (1755–1803) Viola Concerto appearing in 1789. While that work is presumed lost, Johann Friedrich Peter's (1746–1813) set of six viola quintets from that same year have survived as the earliest known chamber music composed in America. Newspaper announcements and concert reviews record a number of original compositions over the next century, many of which are lost. George Frederick Bristow's (1825–1898) Duos for Violin and Viola (1845) and Theodore Thomas's (1835–1905) *Divertissement for Viola and Piano* (1860) are two of the more prominent surviving works, but other examples exist in manuscript, awaiting rediscovery.

It was with the turn of the twentieth century that the viola blossomed in America (and around the world). Boston, as a leading American center of classical music, was pivotal in the advancement of music for the instrument. Charles Martin Loeffler (1861–1935) composed nine songs for medium voice, viola, and piano, four of which were published in 1904. A year later his *Deux rapsodies*, for oboe, viola, and piano was published, the earliest American work that has remained in the standard repertoire. Émile Férir, principal violist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, premiered two works for viola and orchestra by his fellow orchestral colleague Gustav Strube (1867–1953): *Longing* (1905) and *Fantastic Dance* (1906). But it was 135 miles west of Boston in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, that the true turning point came when Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge selected viola and piano as the instrumentation for the second Berkshire Festival Competition in 1919. This revolutionary idea of a competition devoted solely to the viola resulted in seventy-two entries and a bit of controversy. The judges were deadlocked between two works, and Mrs. Coolidge was obliged to break the tie. She voted for Ernest Bloch's (1880–1959) Suite, but the runner-up, Rebecca Clarke's (1886–1979) Sonata, was also performed at the festival. Bloch's Suite was an immediate sensation among violists worldwide, both in its original version and the ensuing version for viola and orchestra.

Over the next decades, America proved fertile ground for violists interested in promoting their cause. One area of excellence was in recordings with several notable firsts including Paul Hindemith's premiere recording of his *Der Schwanendreher* with Arthur Fiedler's Sinfonietta (1939), the first recording of *Harold in Italy* with William Primrose and the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1944), and the first complete recording of Bach's cello suites performed on viola by Lillian Fuchs (1951–57). Soloists also commissioned or inspired new works by American

composers; particularly impressive concertante works include Alan Shulman's (1915–2002) *Theme and Variations for Viola and Orchestra* (1941), Béla Bartók's (1881–1945) *Concerto* (1945, completed by Tibor Serly and premiered in 1949), Quincy Porter's (1897–1966) *Concerto* (1948), Roy Harris's (1900–1969) *Elegy and Paeon* (1948), and Bohuslav Martinů's (1890–1959) *Rhapsody-Concerto* (1952).

In 1971, American viola music gained a new advocate in the newly founded American Viola Society (AVS). While the organization's scope is international, it has furthered the viola in this country through commissions, performances, and research; the co-commission of George Rochberg's (1918–2005) *Sonata for Viola and Piano* (1979) in honor of William Primrose's 75th birthday is one of the organization's most enduring contributions. And in 2010 the AVS launched the American Viola Project, a digital publishing initiative to preserve and promote music from the United States. The seven works recorded here are all part of this project, and each work is receiving its premiere recording (and in several instances, the composer is also receiving a premiere recording of any of his or her music).

**Frederick Slee's** (1870–1954) musical education represents a bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as he studied with both John Knowles Paine (1839–1906), the “Dean of American Composers,” in the 1890s and Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979) later in his life. While Slee pursued law as his profession, he maintained a life-long connection with music, performing as violist with the Saybrook Quartet. He was an integral part of the music community in Buffalo, New York, and after his death his wife established the Slee/Beethoven String Quartet Cycle, which has presented many of the world's finest ensembles in performances of Beethoven's quartets. The date of composition for his *Variations on a Hymn Tune for Solo Viola* has not yet been determined; it exists in three different versions with the edition heard here likely being the earliest. As the two other versions show more complex harmonic changes, it is possible that Slee composed the work while a student with Paine and then revisited the work over time. The hymn tune is by the American hymnist John Edgar Gould.

**Arthur Foote** (1853–1937), the most well-known of the composers represented here, was the first major American composer to earn his musical training entirely in the United States. His music is firmly rooted in the European Romantic tradition as evidenced in his *Melody*, op. 44a. Originally written in 1899 for violin and piano, Foote arranged the violin part for viola in January 1918. The manuscript indicates that he sent the part to two Boston violists: Émile Férir, principal violist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and Adeline Packard, violist of the American String Quartette. The arrangement of *Melody* marked the beginning of a brief

interest in the viola by Foote: in 1919 he reworked his Sonata for Cello and Piano, arranging it for viola and piano, and in 1921 he composed *Sarabande and Rigaudon*, for oboe (or flute), viola (or violin), and piano.

Born in Maryland, **John Woods Duke** (1899–1984) studied composition at the Peabody Conservatory with Gustav Strube, and the Suite for Viola Alone dates from 1933, the same year that Strube composed his *Regrets for Viola and Piano*. Duke spent the majority of his career teaching at Smith College (1923–67) and is best known as a composer of songs. The viola suite reflects his interest in vocal music, both in the first movement, aptly named *Aria*, and also in the work's complete absence of polyphonic writing; a rarity in solo string music. The suite was published in 1944 by Valley Music Press and earned a deserved measure of success with violists, who appreciate the work for its lyrical, rhapsodic beauty.

The *Barcarolle for Viola and Piano*, by **Blanche Blood**, is the earliest known viola composition by an American woman. Blood's musical education took place in Chicago, and she remained active there as a teacher, violinist, violist, and viola d'amore player as well as composer and author. Published in 1906, *Barcarolle* is one of a handful of musical compositions that Ada E. Taylor, the publisher of the popular magazine *The Violinist*, produced. This charming work, "originally written for and ... especially adapted to the deep toned effects of the viola," was intended for students or amateurs, who were beginning to show a greater appreciation for the viola.

**Ivan Langstroth** (1887–1971) was born in California and received his early musical training in San Francisco with the composer Theodore Vogt. He later studied composition at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin with Paul Juon and piano with Josef Lhevinne; a scholarship allowed further master class studies in composition with Engelbert Humperdinck. After performing and teaching in Europe, Langstroth returned to the United States by 1940, subsequently teaching in various New York schools. The *Viola Suite* dates from 1943 and is the first of several works by him for viola; most—if not all—of which were influenced by his personal friendship with father and son violists Karl and Paul Doktor.

The German-born composer, violinist, and conductor **Gustav Strube** (1867–1953) spent the early part of his time in America as a violinist in the Boston Symphony Orchestra, where he also conducted the Boston Pops Orchestra. He left in 1913 to teach theory and conducting at the Peabody Conservatory, and he was the first conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Strube composed prolifically for the viola, including two tone poems for viola and orchestra, a Sonata in D Minor for Viola and Piano, and a Sonatina for Viola and Piano.

*Regrets for Viola and Piano* was composed in 1933, and Strube later reworked the piece for viola and small orchestra, renaming it *Elegy*.

**Maurice Gardner** (1909–2002) had a long and fruitful relationship with the American Viola Society. A violist himself, Gardner studied composition at the Juilliard School and spent his early career involved in commercial composing for the theater, film, radio, and television. Retirement allowed him to return to classical composition, and his first viola work, *Tricinium: Sonata for Solo Viola*, appeared in 1976. Other works followed, several of which were premiered at American viola congress, and Gardner became a much-loved member of the American Viola Society. In 2010, the AVS honored Gardner's legacy with the inauguration of the Maurice Gardner Composition Competition, which offers cash prizes and performance opportunities for important new works. *Phantasmagoria*, a sonata in three movements for viola solo, was premiered by Robert Slaughter in November 1981 at Ball State University.

*Notes by David M. Bynog*

The sheet music for all of the works recorded here may be found on the American Viola Society's website at: <http://americanviolasociety.org/resources/scores/american-viola-project/>

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## Scott Slapin



Scott Slapin's viola playing has received critical acclaim in the *American Record Guide*, *Strad*, *Musical Opinion*, *Fanfare*, and *Mundo Clásico*. As a composer, his compositions have been performed by violists across the United States and Europe as well as at the Primrose, Tertis, and ARD Competitions. His *Recitative for Solo Viola* was commissioned by the AVS

as the required work for the 2008 Primrose International Viola Competition. His popular *Nocturne* and *Elegy-Caprice* are featured in the final scenes of the docudrama *Secret Life, Secret Death*. He is the first person to have recorded all of Bach's Violin Sonatas and Partitas on viola, and he has made premiere recordings of works for viola by composers including Gerald Busby, Richard Lane, Boris Pigovat, Patrick Neher, David Rimelis, Frank Proto, and the composers on this recording.

At eighteen he was one of the youngest graduates in the history of the Manhattan School of Music. He made his debut as the solo violist in the New York City production of Gerald Busby's *Orpheus In Love* (1992–1993), a chamber opera about a viola player, and he premiered Busby's *Muse for Solo Viola* in Carnegie's Weill Hall. Scott and his wife, violist Tanya Solomon, have performed at several international viola congresses, and they won Best Chamber Music Performance of 2008 at the Big Easy Entertainment Awards in New Orleans. They maintain a private teaching studio in their home in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and also teach worldwide via Skype. For more information, visit [www.violaduo.com](http://www.violaduo.com).

## Yui Asano



Yui Asano, full-time accompanist at Loyola University since 2005, is a very active recital accompanist throughout the city of New Orleans and enjoys a diverse career as chamber and orchestral musician. A proud member of the Windsor Court Trio and the chamber-music group Musaica, Ms. Asano also makes frequent appearances with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra where she recently collaborated with famed violinist Robert McDuffie in the Violin Concerto No. 2 by Philip Glass.

No stranger to the vocal world, Ms. Asano has served as a district accompanist for the Metropolitan Opera Audition and its master classes. She worked for the Knoxville Opera Company, Opera in the Ozarks, Shreveport Opera, Chattanooga Opera Company, and the New Orleans Opera Association.

Ms. Asano holds degrees from Musashino Academia Musicae in Tokyo and from Loyola University in New Orleans.