

mid-century modern

four sonatas for
viola and piano





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It has been said that the long neglect of the viola as a solo instrument was due in large measure to the dearth of talented players. That situation was reversed irrevocably in the early twentieth century, as the instrument finally came into its own — thanks to the efforts of great performers such as Lionel Tertis, Maurice Vieux, and William Primrose, who inspired scores of renowned composers to write new works for the repertoire (and, in the case of Tertis, even contributed improvements to the design of the instrument itself).

In the words of Jacob Avshalomov, the viola offers a “unique spectrum of sound, which ranges from the sombre and gruff through mellowness and vibrancy into lyricism without loss of power.” The works featured

four sonatas for viola and piano

on this recording (not least Avshalomov’s Sonatine) require the violist to elicit all of those qualities and more, as they explore and extend the expressive possibilities of the viola–piano pairing.

The range of stylistic influences in these pieces is broad — Impressionism, Neoclassicism, folk music, polytonality — yet they never become mere formal essays. Deeply felt, following the narrative arc embedded in the sonata form, each piece becomes a journey in sound; taken together they form a travelogue through the early and middle decades of the century.

As listeners, we are fortunate indeed to have Joël Belgique and his compatriots, whose playing is at all moments passionate, rivetingly focused, and beautifully nuanced, as our guides on this sojourn.

David Abel



sonata for viola and piano (1919)

Clarke was born in Harrow, England, in 1886, to an American father and German mother. She began to study the violin at the age of eight, and in 1902 entered the Royal Academy of Music, where she continued her violin studies and began to compose. Though her father disapproved of her desire to become a professional musician, he sent some of her songs to Sir Charles Stanford, professor of composition at the Royal College of Music, and mentor to a generation of English composers (Vaughn Williams, Holst, Ireland, Bridge, and others). In 1907 Clarke became one of Stanford's first woman students; at his suggestion, she joined the college orchestra and switched to the viola.

In 1912, she became the first female member of the Queen's Hall Orchestra; her career as a violist blossomed after the First World War, and she was a much-sought chamber musician whose partners included Artur Schnabel, Pablo Casals, Jacques Thibaud, Artur Schnabel, and Percy Grainger, among many others. She made regular visits to New York and participated in Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge's chamber music festivals in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, beginning in 1916; in 1923 she made a world tour, and in 1925 gave a concert of her own works in Wigmore Hall, London, featuring Myra Hess.

Clarke divided her time between England and the United States during the 1930s; she was forced by English authorities to stay in New York at the inception of World War II, and lived the rest of her life in the States. In 1944 she married pianist and composer James Friskin, who had been a fellow student at the Royal College; she retired from performing and for the most part gave up composing. When she died in New York in 1979, at the age of ninety-three, she had been mostly forgotten, and most of her compositions remained unpublished. In the 1990s renewed attention was given to her work, including the beginning of a spate of recordings that continues; in 2005 the *Rebecca Clarke Reader* was published, edited by Liane Curtis, including Clarke's writings on music, several interviews with the composer, and essays on her life and work. (For more information about Rebecca Clarke and the *Reader*, visit www.rebeccaclarke.org.)

Clarke's early fame as a composer was due to two works, the Sonata for Viola and Piano and the Trio Sonata, both submitted to competitions sponsored by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, and both second-place winners (in 1919 and 1921, respectively). The Viola Sonata was submitted under the pseudonym Anthony Trent; it tied for first prize, and when the jury could not decide, Coolidge cast the deciding vote for the sonata by Ernest Bloch. The jury insisted on knowing the identity of the runner-up, despite the rules of the competition, which stated that only the winner's name would be revealed; they stated that the winning piece "was the work of a philosopher, the other, that of a poet." Apparently all were shocked to discover that the composer was a woman. The Viola Sonata remains Clarke's best-known and most frequently recorded work.



sonata for viola and piano
op. 22 (1932)

was born in Walla Walla, Washington, in 1882, to French-Jewish immigrant parents. The youngest of seven children, Marion began studying piano as a young child with her eldest sibling, Emilie. On the death of her father in 1890, the family moved to Portland, Oregon; after finishing secondary school there in 1898, Marion joined Emilie in New York City, where she studied with Henry Holden Huss and Eugene Heffly, in addition to her sister. In 1905, she met the French violinist Raul Pugno; she tutored Pugno and his family in English, and in exchange Pugno invited her to study with him in Paris. There she became the first in the distinguished line of Americans to study composition with Nadia Boulanger, again in exchange for English lessons.

Bauer returned to New York in 1907, and continued her studies with Heffley and Walter Henry Rothwell, also beginning to teach piano and music theory herself. Over the next fifteen years, she continued to pursue further studies in Europe (with Paul Ertel in Berlin, and André Gédalge in Paris), though by this time she had established herself as a serious composer.

In 1926, on Emilie's death, Marion assumed her sister's role as music critic for *The Musical Leader*. She went on to work as a reviewer for many other journals, including *Musical Quarterly*, and wrote several popular books,

including the highly regarded *Twentieth-Century Music*. Also in 1926, Bauer began teaching at New York University, becoming an associate professor in 1930 and remaining on the faculty until 1951 (counting among her students Milton Babbitt); she taught and lectured as well at Juilliard, Columbia University, the Institute of Musical Arts, the summer Chautauqua Institute, Mills College, the Carnegie Institute, the Cincinnati Conservatory, and elsewhere. Bauer helped found the American Music Guild, the American Music Center, and the American Composer's Alliance, serving on the board of the latter; in 1937, Aaron Copland founded the League of Composers, and asked Bauer to serve on the executive board of that organization as well.

Despite her busy teaching, lecturing, and writing schedule, Bauer kept up an active compositional career. She spent many summers between 1917 and 1944 at the Macdowell Colony, focused on composition (it was there, in 1929, that she met Ruth Crawford Seeger, beginning a lifelong friendship). Many of Bauer's works of the 1920s and 1930s were devoted to exploring new harmonic idioms; the Sonata for Viola and Piano, cast in traditional forms, nonetheless shows Bauer a committed modernist, with its harmonic and rhythmic liveliness. Among her best-known works, it was performed at an all-Bauer tribute concert at Town Hall in 1951, as well as at a memorial concert in 1956.

Marion Bauer died in 1955, in South Hadley, Massachusetts, at the age of seventy-three. Though her memory is secured by her prominent role as a writer, critic, professor, and tireless promoter of modern music, Bauer's works are too seldom performed and recorded, despite her catalogue of 160 orchestral and chamber compositions.



sonatine for viola and piano
(1947)

is at the center of three generations of an extraordinary musical family: the son of composer Aaron Avshalomov (born in Nikolayevsk-on-Amur, Russia, 1894; died in New York City, 1965), and father of both composer, conductor, and singer David Avshalomov, and violist Daniel Avshalomov (born in New York City, in 1946 and 1953, respectively).

Jacob Avshalomov was born in 1919 in Tsingtao, China, and received his general education in Tientsin; his first composition lessons, with his father, were conducted via mail between Tientsin and Shanghai. After relocating to the United States in 1937, he studied at Reed College and the Eastman School of Music, earning bachelor's and master's degrees; his teachers included Ernst Toch, Bernard Rogers, and Aaron Copland. He became a U.S. citizen in 1944. Following the Second World War (during which he served as an interpreter), he taught at Columbia University, founding the Columbia University Chorus, and played a significant role in the postwar musical life of New York. In 1954, he became the second music director of the Portland Youth Philharmonic (PYP), of which he himself was an alumnus.

The PYP (originally the Portland Junior Symphony) was the first youth orchestra in the United States. In Avshalomov's forty-year tenure (the longest of any of its directors), the orchestra made six international tours of Europe

and Asia; performed at the Seattle World's Fair and on three national television programs; became the first recording orchestra in the Northwest, releasing numerous recordings; and received the ASCAP award for "Adventuresome Programming of Contemporary Music." During this same period, Avshalomov was a guest conductor at the University of Washington, Tanglewood Music Festival, and the Aspen School of Music, and published three books about the PYP.

In addition to his tenure at Columbia, Avshalomov taught at Northwestern and the University of Illinois, and during summer sessions at Tanglewood, Aspen, and Reed College. He has conducted all over the world, including the Bloch Festival in Newport, Oregon; Aaron Avshalomov's 90th Anniversary Celebrations in Beijing, Wuhan, and Shanghai; and the Moscow Symphony, with whom he recorded three CDs of the music of his father; he also conducted the U.S. premieres of Bruckner's Mass in D, Tippett's *A Child of our Time*, Handel's *The Triumph of Time & Truth*, and Sessions's *Divertimento*.

The Sonatine for Viola and Piano, Avshalomov's first published work, was given its premiere in 1947 at a League of Composers concert in the Museum of Modern Art auditorium, "that catacomb," according to the composer, "where many a new work was garbled by the periodic rumblings of the adjacent subway." Virgil Thomson, in the *Herald Tribune*, described it as "a sweet and lyrical piece, half-Jewish, half-Chinese."

In 2001, Avshalomov published a "double biography" of his father and himself, *Avshalomov's Winding Way: Composers out of China — A Chronicle*, followed in 2005 by *Tripping on Oriental Rugs (A Fifty-Year Passion)*. He lives in Portland, Oregon.



sonata for viola and piano
op. 36 (1961)

was born in Paris of Czech parents in 1939; his father was a pianist, and also played timpani for the Prague Symphony Orchestra. He spent the war years in Boston, where he began his musical education on the piano at the age of three. Showing an early talent for composing, Svoboda completed his first opus (now published) at the age of nine. After his family's return to Prague in 1946, he continued his music studies, entering the Prague Conservatory in 1954 as its youngest student.

Unable to take formal classes in composition during his first years at the conservatory, Svoboda nevertheless continued to compose, completing his Symphony No. 1 (of Nature) at the age of 16. In 1962, after graduating from the Prague Conservatory with degrees in percussion, composition, and conducting, Svoboda entered the Academy of Music in Prague. By this time, performances and radio broadcasts of Svoboda's orchestral works had brought wide national recognition.

In 1964, his family emigrated to the United States, where Svoboda enrolled at the University of Southern California as a graduate student in 1966. His compositional skills were already so well developed that the department allowed him to forgo its usual program in order to study individually with Ingolf Dahl and Halsey Stevens. After receiving a master's degree in

1969, Tomas Svoboda taught composition and music theory for twenty-seven years at Portland State University, retiring from full-time teaching in June 1998.

The first publication of his music, in 1981, brought forth a front-cover tribute from *Piano Quarterly*. In 1985, Svoboda received an ASCAP Foundation/Meet the Composer Award and was commissioned to write his Chorale for Piano Quintet, Op. 118, for Aaron Copland's eighty-fifth birthday celebration in New York. National music educators, surveyed by *Piano Quarterly* in 1987, voted Svoboda's *Children's Treasure Box* piano series to be among the forty most important composer collections of the twentieth century for teaching piano at the elementary and intermediate levels.

In the summer of 1999, *Overture of the Season* was broadcast by the San Francisco Symphony. The Dayton Philharmonic released the first "all-Svoboda" orchestral recording in 2001 on the Artistic 4 label, featuring Piano Concertos 1 & 2, and in July 2003, the Oregon Symphony released the second "all-Svoboda" orchestral disk, with the Marimba Concerto, Symphony No. 1 (of Nature), and *Overture of the Season*. To date, forty-three works by Svoboda have been released on twenty-one CDs.

Svoboda composed the Sonata for Viola and Piano in 1961; it was dedicated to violist Jiri Fidler, who was never able to perform it, due to illness. When Svoboda escaped from Czechoslovakia in 1964, the only scores he had time to grab were sketches for his Second Symphony; fifteen years later, a box with all of his music arrived in Portland from Prague. Surely a dramatic story explains the peregrinations of that package; those details, however, remain a mystery to this day!

With the composer at the piano, this is the premiere recording.



viola

At the age of thirteen, Joël Belgique found his voice when he switched from the violin to the viola. Born in Lansing, Michigan, and raised in Salt Lake City by French parents, he began his viola studies with Mikhail Boguslavsky, continuing with David Holland at the Interlochen Arts Academy. After undergraduate work at the Eastman School and a Bachelor's degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music (where he studied with the renowned viola pedagogue Heidi Castleman), he earned his Masters in Performance and Pedagogy at Brigham Young University, working with Clyn Barrus and David Dalton.

Joël Belgique has been principal violist of the Oregon Symphony since 1997, and has appeared as soloist with the orchestra in works by Bach, Telemann, Mozart, Berlioz, Strauss, and Hindemith. The *Classical Beaver*, reviewing the Symphony's 2011 performance of Hindemith's *Trauermusik*, singled out Joël's "trusty viola oozing mournful warmth and buttery sound."

As a chamber musician, Joël has collaborated with Elmar Olivera, Leonard Pennario, Igor Gruppman, Bayla Keyes, Ralph Matson, and members of the Audubon Quartet, and is violist for the Oregon Symphony String Quartet, which plays many concerts throughout the region. For ten years he has been a core member of fEARnoMUSIC, an ensemble devoted to twentieth- and twenty-first-century repertoire (with a special focus on composers from the Pacific Northwest), performing works by Ligeti, Kurtag, Berio, Penderecki, Schnittke, Golijov, Desenne,

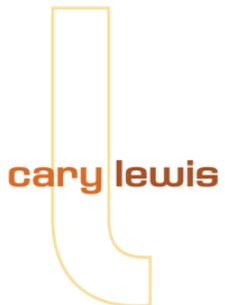
and many others. He frequently gives duo recitals with his wife, violinist Inés Voglar, and together they have performed Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* with the Columbia Symphony.

In addition to his posts with the Oregon Symphony and as faculty and coach for the annual Interlochen chamber music camp for adults in upstate Michigan, Joël has participated in the Spoleto Festival in Italy; the CrossSound Festival in Juneau, Alaska; and the Mainly Mozart Festival in San Diego. He is regularly invited to the Grand Teton Music Festival in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, the Strings Music Festival in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, and the Astoria Music Festival in Oregon.

Joël has twice been a guest artist at the International Viola Congress; in 2002 performing George Benjamin's *Viola, Viola* with his Symphony stand-partner Charles Noble, and in 2006 as C-stringus Pyromanicus, a member of The Four Violas (a comic ensemble of which he was a founding member), performing works that included Joël's arrangements of the *1812 Overture* (for four violas and pop-gun cannons), and *Also Sprach Sancho Panza*. In 2008, he was asked to be a tone-judge for the Violin Society of America's annual instrument-making competition, in the course of which he and two other judges played and examined just under a hundred violas!

Joël's recordings on the North Pacific Music label include Jack Gabel's *Hellenic Triptych* for solo viola and electronics, and Tomas Svoboda's *Trio Chorales* for violin, viola, and piano (with former Oregon Symphony concertmaster Amy Schwartz Moretti and the composer). He has frequently performed and recorded as a guest with the Portland-based band Pink Martini, appearing with them at Carnegie Hall, Disney Hall, the Hollywood Bowl, Portland's own Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, and on *Late Night with David Letterman*.

As a teacher, Joël works with many of the area's finest violists, young and old, and is on the faculty of Portland State University.



piano

Pianist Cary Lewis is in constant demand as a collaborator for soloists and chamber music groups. With degrees from the University of North Texas as well as a Doctorate and Performer's Certificate from the Eastman School of Music, he was a Fulbright scholar for two years in Vienna. His teachers included Eugene List, Brooks Smith, and Dieter Weber. He has been a member of the Lanier Trio with violinist William Preucil (concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra) and cellist Dorothy Lewis since 1986. The Lanier's recording of the complete Dvorak Trios was honored by *Time* magazine as one of the ten best music recordings of any kind in 1993; their other recordings include discs devoted to Brahms, Mendelssohn, Stephen Paulus, and Andrzej Dutkiewicz.

Dr. Lewis, who has performed at Carnegie Hall, Bargemusic, the Library of Congress, the White House, the Kennedy Center, Wigmore Hall in London, the National Philharmonic in Warsaw, and in other music capitals of the United States and Europe, retired from the faculty of Georgia State University in 2002, after twenty-five years of service, and is now based in Portland, Oregon. He is the director of chamber music for the Astoria Music Festival, and in recent years has participated in festivals in Montana, Colorado, Michigan, Maine, Hawaii, St. Croix, and Turkey, with additional concerts in Australia, Southeast Asia, and South America. He has recorded works from the standard literature as well as music by American composers on the Turnabout, Vanguard, Educo, Coronet, Crystal, Orion, MHS, ACA, Albany, MSR Classics, and Gasparo labels.

album credits

co-producers

Joël Belgique and Mark Eubanks

tonmeisters

Inés Voglar, Cary Lewis, Dorothy Lewis, Tomas Svoboda

recording engineer

Jon Lemon

additional editing and cd mastering

Kevin Nettleingham, Nettleingham Audio

graphic design/layout

Leo Daedalus / HELSINQI

photography: Kathryn Elsesser Photography

project oversight: Anna Daedalus

notes

David Abel

piano

Steinway thanks to Jon Lemon and Sherman Clay Pianos

viola and bow

Gabrielle Kundert 1998, Emil Auguste Ouchard 1950

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