

# 17<sup>th</sup> International Viola d'amore Congress in Hungary

## June, 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 2014 Budapest and Kaposvár

### A perspective from Elizabeth Watson

For many years, viola d'amore players and makers, composers and historians have met every two years in different places in Europe or the United States of America. These gatherings have until this year been under the auspices of the Viola d'amore Society of America, Directors Dr. Myron Rosenblum and Dr. Daniel Thomason. They have been wonderful and inspiring occasions, led by these wise, knowledgeable and delightful people.

This year has seen the launch of the International Viola d'amore Society e.V., President Hans Lauerer and Vice-President Rüdiger Müller-Nübling. This, their first Congress, was in Budapest and Kaposvár, attended by Dr. Daniel Thomason and an elder statesman of the American Society, Dr. Gordon Childs. Unfortunately Dr. Myron Rosenblum was unable to attend, but he has kept closely in touch with this offspring of the original Society. This Congress was, as before, truly international, with members from Germany, France, Spain, Austria, Italy, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Qatar, Hungary, England and of course the USA, and I was pleased to find many old friends as well as new ones. I am pleased too that the German and English languages are both used.

The choice of Hungary was inspired, as was the choice of Margit Urbanetz-Vig to organise the events and to act as hostess. The programme and the choices of venues were imaginative and full of interest. Hungary has a rich and colourful history, with in its background Celts, Romans, Huns, Magyars, Germans, Turks, Hapsburgs and Russians among others. In our first evening we had a taste of history at the Hungarian State Opera with a performance of "Hunyadi László" by Erkel about the rise of King Mátyás, wonderfully sung in an imaginative production. Our Hotel Medosz was nearby in Pest, close to a variety of cafes and not too far from the Hungarian National Museum where we were guided<sup>n</sup> round the musical instruments, including three violas d'amore, the Esterhazy baryton and Beethoven's Broadwood piano. Later, we stayed on the hill in Buda, close to the Royal Palace, at the Hotel Castle Garden. This was near the Music History Museum where our very interesting guide was Dr. László Gombos in a museum full of vividly shaped and sounding folk instruments as well as a viola d'amore and cimbalom and a white wood piano which had been donated to Hubay the great violinist for his teaching rooms (which I saw in the Viktoria Hotel overlooking the Danube thanks to Margit). I was intrigued by the photo and sound of a duo, the man playing violin and his lady thumping rather than bowing a sort of cello, a garden!

Dr. Klara  
\*Radnoty

Our concerts included many performances on our favourite instrument, beginning in the Franz Liszt Memorial Museum with the great Biber Partia VII, played by young students of Margit, Veronika Hecher and Séra Anna, with Németh Agnes and Kóvacs Kata. In the Toeschi Sonata Margit's virtuoso performance was nearly overwhelmed by a characterful cimbalom played by the expert Herencsár Victória: We learnt that there is a big difference between an old subtle cimbalom and a modern vivid one designed for large halls. Michel Pons from France joined Kakuk Balázs, baryton, and Németh Agnes, baroque cello, in music by Burgksteiner. Then cimbalom, cor anglais and harp joined Kertesi Ingrid and Botos Veronika, viola d'amore, in Melinda's aria from another Erkel opera. This concert was introduced by Rüdiger Müller-Nübling, known as Nuffi (how else could we cope with all those umlauts!) who translated speeches in as many languages as there are bowed strings on a viola d'amore!

We went by bus to the hotel Kapos in Kaposvár, a charming small town of fountains, bells and tall spires, and Margit's home town. In the Franz Liszt music school Papp János gave intriguing insights into the acoustics of the viola d'amore and the differences between baroque and modern bows, the former able to give specially subtle articulation. Marianne Ronez introduced a major project, bringing her meticulous scholarship and exquisite playing to several performances. There were several singers blending so well with viola d'amore. Our friend Doritha Schwier sang songs by Wolfgang Anton, Dvorak, Mozart and Handel. Rachel Godsill joined Rachel Stott in sensitive improvisation with Bach, and music by Skempton, Emily Doolittle and Holst. Jónás Krisztina was delicious in the Ariosti Cantata with Margit. The enterprising Rachel arranged a song from Csitar in four parts for viola d'amores. Maria-Camino Bravo with Anton Gansberger played an unknown sonata from La Seo in Zaragossa.

Hans and Nuffi played duos by Henrik Rung. Pallos Laszlo partnered me in the Rust Variations. Dan and his wife Anita with Ernst Kubitschek played Parthia Amabilis, a very amiable piece by Vojta. Modern music was well represented with Ines Wein's virtuoso performance of Georg Friedrich Haas' (\*1953) Solo, and my first performance of Edwin Roxburgh's Soliloquy I. The unforgettable Hans Vermeersch played Makbaraa with Carlos Solare for two viola d'amores and continuo and brought wild joy in Sootch for viola d'amore and tape.

Margit invited us all to a party in her garden to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Dan Thomason, feasting us with goulash and fruit soup – and wine of course. Carlos Solare talked about Thomas Mann's writing about the viola d'amore, and in the balcony played pieces edited by Waefelghem and quoted by Mann.

We heard very impressive lively wind playing by Hungarians, particularly in a concerto by Vivaldi and chamber music by Boehm and Telemann. In this concert Ria Marsalkova also performed the big Concerto in F by Joseph Fuchs with pianist Kardos Kálmán.

I am afraid I missed a few items because of a lovely surprise. A new viola d'amore was brought from Utah by Paul Hart with whom I had played the Rust Variations at the Ephraim Congress. He had travelled with Gordon Childs and a friend. As soon as I saw and heard it I wanted to own it, and it is now mine. Another fine new viola d'amore was brought by Jonathan Hill. Anyone interested may see this in the last page of the last Newsletter.

Dr. Sibylle Hoedt-Schmidt conducted an open workshop on improvisation. Her husband, Ronald Hoedt-Schmidt, a retired librarian, attended many performances. Sibylle was also at the high table for a meeting of the Society at which honours were presented to distinguished members, including Dan, Marianne and Myron. There was one too for Max Tonson-Ward, composer and player, now 96, which I took to him at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea.

At the final concert in the Erdödy Palace, the Institute for Musicology, Budapest, Dan was joined by the very gifted young Karlina Ivana in a delightful performance of a duo by Huberty. Karlina had also played other solos and chamber music. This concert also featured solos played by Ria (Kral) and Michel Pons ("Violations" by Stephan Wiener, Michel's introduction even more amusing than the music). Margit played "Unconte" with piano by Hubay, and we had the privilege of a suite by Paul Angerer played with real style at the piano with his son Christoph playing viola d'amore. Twentieth century music played by Marianne and sung by Albena Naydenova followed, then a sorbet – a Vivaldi Gloria sung by Birta Gabor with Viera Bilikova, viola d'amore. A banquet in the Hotel Castle Garden was the finale to a fascinating, successful and highly enjoyable Congress. Congratulations to all concerned, especially Margit and Hans and Nuffi!