

2015

Graduate recital in viola

Nichelle Probst
University of Northern Iowa

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GRADUATE RECITAL IN VIOLA

A Recital Abstract

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music in Viola Performance

Nichelle Probst

University of Northern Iowa

May 2015

This Study by: Nichelle Probst

Entitled: Graduate Recital in Viola, a Recital Abstract

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Masters of Music

_____	_____
Date	Dr. Julia Bullard, Chair, Thesis Committee
_____	_____
Date	Dr. Rebecca Burkhardt, Thesis Committee Member
_____	_____
Date	Dr. Jonathan Chenoweth, Thesis Committee Member
_____	_____
Date	Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter, Interim Dean, Graduate College

This Recital Performance: Nichelle Probst

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ABSTRACT

Nichelle Probst performed her graduate recital on Friday, April 24, 2015 at 8:00 p.m. in Davis Hall at the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center at the University of Northern Iowa. This recital was given in partial fulfillment of requirements for her Master of Music degree, with an emphasis in viola performance. The recital program consisted of Suite No. 6 in G Major (transcribed from the original for cello in D major), BWV 1012 by Johann Sebastian Bach; *Romanze* for viola and piano by Ralph Vaughan Williams; Sonate for viola and piano, Op. 25 No. 4 by Paul Hindemith; and *Le Grand Tango* by Ástor Piazzolla. Ms. Probst collaborated with Dr. Polina Khatsko, faculty pianist at the University of Northern Iowa, on the pieces by Hindemith, Vaughan Williams, and Piazzolla.

J. S. Bach: Suite No. 6 in G Major (transcribed from D Major) BWV 1012

The six cello suites by J.S. Bach (1685-1750) have been considered a staple in the standard repertoire for cello since cellist Pablo Casals promoted them late in the 19th century. They were transcribed for the viola early in the twentieth century¹ and are now part of standard repertoire for the viola. These suites were written while Bach was working as Kapellmeister in the city Cöthen (1717-1723), during which time he had a large output of instrumental music including, in addition to the cello suites, his six violin partitas and sonatas, and the Brandenburg concertos.²

¹ Maurice W. Riley, *The History of the Viola*. Vol. 1, (Ann Arbor, MI: Braun-Brumfield, 1993), 113.

² Allen Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites Analyses and Explorations*. Vol. 1, (Indiana University Press, 2007), 3.

Each of the six cello suites is a clear example of the mature baroque suite.³ This genre consists of a group of dances played in succession, each with the same tonic. These suites were typically four to six movements in length. There are four dances which were generally expected to be in a mature Baroque suite: allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue. Some suites did not include all of these movements and it was not uncommon to have up to two additional movements, including a prelude to introduce the work, and an optional dance, such as a minuet, a bourrée, or a gavotte, inserted between the sarabande and the gigue.⁴ Each of the cello suites fits these criteria by being in a single key and having six movements, including a prelude and an optional movement.

The sixth and final cello suite is a fitting conclusion to these masterful works. One notable attribute unique to this suite is that it was written for a five-stringed cello, most likely an instrument called a *viola pomposa*,⁵ which has a high E-string above the A-string. Already difficult on the intended instrument, this makes the suite a remarkably more challenging work to play on a traditional four-stringed instrument. Because of this, many editions of the viola transcriptions, including the Edition Peters, have transposed the piece to G major in order to facilitate the execution of much of the material,⁶ as the original key of D major requires the performer to spend considerable amounts of time in an extremely high register of the instrument. The transposition also allows a more

³ Allen Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites Analyses and Explorations*. Vol. 1, (Indiana University Press, 2007), 8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁶ Simon Rowland-Jones, Preface to *Six Suites for Solo Violoncello*, BWV 1007-1012 by J.S. Bach. Edited by Simon Rowland-Jones. (New York: Edition Peters, n.d.), 3.

authentic use of open strings through much of the work, as there would be several open E strings played in the original key (particularly in the Prelude), and the viola does not have this string. The transposition is helpful in many ways, but this suite remains very challenging, requiring more technical dexterity, range, and flexibility, as well as more stamina, than the preceding suites.

The prelude serves as a perfect introduction to the piece. It clearly establishes the key of the work with a buoyant G major triad being the sole component of the first two measures of the piece. An interesting aspect to this first statement is its strategic use of open strings. This is a pervasive attribute throughout the movement. The first motive begins with a covered G on the C string slurred to the same G, but on the open string. This repetition of the same pitch but with two different timbres creates a striking effect and demonstrates Bach's knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of bowed stringed instruments. Another strategic use of open strings can be found in measures 23-32, where the open A string provides a pedal tone throughout the section (this is an instance where the open string would be lost if played in the original D major key). There are similar, but less extensive, pedal points on an open D in measures 70-74 and on A in measures 94 and 95.

Like many preludes, this movement has an improvisatory feel and is quite rhythmically repetitive. Written in a 12/8 time signature, this movement is almost entirely comprised of eighth notes. Only in about the last quarter of the movement, at its most climactic point, is there any rhythmic variation. After a very high ascent there are some virtuosic flourishes hinting at faster notes further in the movement, but these are followed by several more bars of eighth notes moving up the instrument and landing on a held

leading-tone F#, the longest note in the entire movement, finally giving the movement a moment of respite before cascading down into a highly virtuosic sixteenth note passage and bringing it back to the first motive of the piece. The familiarity lasts only a moment, however, before more sixteenth notes, new material, several striking chords, and a short coda mark the end of this majestic movement.

The allemande, meaning “German” in French, is derived from an old German dance.⁷ A few of the cello suites follow fairly closely to the style of the dance from which it originated, but the allemande of the sixth suite follows more closely the model of the French concert allemande,⁸ which is slower and not particularly easy to dance to. As is characteristic of the allemande, this movement begins with a short anacrusis. It is a very serene movement, which is usually played quite slowly. Despite the leisurely tempo and slow harmonic movement it maintains a constant flow with an extensive use of small note values, such as 32nd notes, 64th notes, and sometimes even as small as 128th notes.⁹ This movement is in a clear binary form, with two repeated sections, as are the other three typical dance movements from the baroque suite (courante, sarabande, and gigue).

A courante, meaning “running” in French,¹⁰ is usually a faster and livelier dance. The courante from the sixth suite is an Italian style courante, characterized by its fast triple meter and running eighth notes.¹¹ This is a highly virtuosic movement and is quite

⁷ Allen Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites Analyses and Explorations*. Vol. 1, (Indiana University Press, 2007), 34.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

technically challenging with many large leaps in the eighth note motives and long fast passages of sixteenth notes.

The sarabande was, perhaps, Bach's favorite dance to compose, evidenced by the fact he wrote so many of them, more than any other kind of dance.¹² The dance's origins are believed to have been from Southern Europe and Latin America and originally had a brisk tempo;¹³ however, the sarabande of a baroque suite is typically slow and smooth. This sarabande is quite pensive, in spite of the major key. There is frequent use of dissonance in this movement, particularly on second beats. Sarabandes are characterized by being in a triple meter (in this case 3/2) with the emphasis on the second beat. In this particular sarabande, this emphasis is achieved with dissonances, often appoggiaturas, as well as long held notes and harmonic changes.

The gavottes of the sixth suite are likely the best-known movements of the work, due to the fact that the well-known Suzuki books for violin and viola include arrangements of it. The first gavotte is very stately, a noble melody marked with many chords giving harmonic framework. Gavotte II has a more playful and casual character, including an extended section with a G drone quite reminiscent of a bagpipe. As is typical with dance forms, both gavottes are in two sections, each repeated. The first gavotte is reprised to finish the movement.

¹² Allen Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites Analyses and Explorations*. Vol. 1, (Indiana University Press, 2007), 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The final movement of this work is the gigue. A gigue is a very lively dance that originated in Britain, but was adapted into both French and Italian forms.¹⁴ The gigue from the sixth suite is a mixture of the two forms¹⁵ using the compound meter and some polyphony from the French, and a simple melody, brisk tempo, and much homophony from the Italian. This movement is characterized by its virtuosity, with its many fast, running passages and no lack of challenging double stops. This buoyant and energetic gigue makes “a fitting movement for a musical *Auf Wiedersehen*”¹⁶ for the entire set of suites.

Paul Hindemith: Sonate For Viola and Piano, Op. 25, No. 4

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) is one of the most influential composers of the early twentieth century. He was quite prolific, writing music in many different genres. He considered himself primarily a composer, but he was also an accomplished concert violist.¹⁷ Hindemith wrote his Sonate for viola and piano, Op. 25 No. 4 shortly after returning home from serving in World War I. Much of the piece gives the impression that the viola and the piano are at war with each other, with many contrasting melodies and rhythms layered on top of each other. This is the fourth of seven viola sonatas written by Hindemith, each premiered by the composer himself. Although written in 1922, the work

¹⁴ Ibid., 77.

¹⁵ Allen Winold, *Bach's Cello Suites Analyses and Explorations*. Vol. 1, (Indiana University Press, 2007), 77.

¹⁶ Ibid. 81.

¹⁷ Giselher Schubert. "Hindemith, Paul." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. (Oxford University Press)
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13053>. (Accessed February 21, 2015).

was not published until 1976, thirteen years after Hindemith's death. In general, this work is highly chromatic and rhythmically complex, employing neither time nor key signatures throughout.

The first movement is marked *Sehr lebhaft. Markiert und kraftvoll*, meaning "Very lively. Marked and powerful." This movement has three major themes. The first theme is introduced in the piano and is very powerful with many accented, dissonant chords. The viola then enters, introducing the second theme. This theme is somewhat ominous and violent, with uneven rhythms and juxtapositions of differing melodies. The piano and the viola almost appear to be at war with each other, as the piano line is continuing ideas from the first theme, particularly in the left hand. There are many relentlessly repeated gestures, each marked with a crescendo and becoming increasingly emphatic. The second theme is much more lyrical; however, it is still ominous, especially in the piano part, with running eighth notes and quintal harmonies. The first theme (originally introduced in the piano) comes back in the viola, followed by a short transition to the second theme two octaves higher than it was played before, sounding still more desperate and crying. The following section is marked with a long crescendo leading to a sequence of descending broken thirds with a pedal A in the viola. This section ends with a restatement of the end of the first theme, reaching the climax of the piece, which is marked *fortississimo (ffff)*. The movement then calms back down into the second theme, ending surprisingly with two peaceful *pizzicati* in D major.

The second movement, marked *Sehr langsame Viertel* ("very long quarters"), is slow and mournful. There is a repeated motive of a descending fourth followed by a

semi-tone, creating the range of a tritone. The interactions between the piano and the viola are reminiscent of recitative, much of it very free, with the piano often holding sustained notes. This movement is in a clear rounded binary form. The A section is very subdued, quiet and sad. The middle section is a little more insistent, exploring the higher registers of the instrument, reaching a moment of climax with a loud, crying, high C#, then quickly subsiding both in register and dynamic before returning to A section, during which the original motive is played in several keys. The movement is completed with the primary motive, played in inversion.

The third movement—marked *Finale. Lebhaftes Viertel* (“Finale. Lively quarters”)—is the most violent of the three, and its most prominent characteristic is the repeated, percussive use of a highly dissonant chord. This dissonant chord is often used as a transition between sections, but it is also interjected throughout the work. This movement is arguably in sonata-allegro form, although the developmental section and the recapitulation fit the form only very loosely. The first theme has two main motives. The first idea introduced in the viola is in a clear compound meter, usually a feeling of 12/8, whereas the second motive, first introduced in the piano, moves in a more straightforward common-time. These two ideas are consistently played against each other, the motives switch between the viola and the piano, and together create the composite first theme. The viola introduces the melodic material of the second theme, which is much more lyrical. Fragments of the two themes then sound in quick succession. Toward the end of the exposition the piano plays the signature chord of the movement more and more frequently until it is played several times in a row, heralding the development. The

developmental material is very loosely related to the theme, but plays a lot with the polyrhythmic texture of the first theme. The piano takes the melody through this section while the viola plays an ostinato comprised of eighth and sixteenth notes with many double stops. As this section concludes the viola begins to mark the transition with repetitions of the dissonant chord. The recapitulation is unconventional, as the themes are presented in reverse order, and the second theme is highly expanded while the first is cut short. The movement ends with a repeated triplet section which gets faster and faster, and culminates in a unison statement of the lyrical melody in a slow, grand gesture, before a quick *accelerando* toward the dramatic final cadence on a high E, the viola's highest note in the piece.

Ralph Vaughan Williams: *Romanze* for Viola and Piano

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) started playing violin at a young age and, like Hindemith, later switched to the viola.¹⁸ In his early years he wanted to be an orchestral musician; however, his family frowned upon this line of work.¹⁹ Little is known about this *Romanze* for viola and piano. The piece was discovered shortly after Vaughan Williams's death in 1958. The exact date of the composition is unknown; however, Bernard Shore (who premiered the work) believes it was written for the great English violist Lionel Tertis.²⁰ This short work has an ABA' structure. It begins serenely in the piano and the viola enters soon after with a somewhat hesitant line, but transitions

¹⁸ Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley. "Vaughan Williams, Ralph." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford University Press). Accessed March 11, 2015. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42507>.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ Bernard Shore. Foreword to *Romanze for Viola and Piano* by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Edited by Bernard Shore. (Oxford. Oxford University Press. 1962).

into a smooth, beautiful melody that meanders up into the higher register of the viola. Vaughan Williams uses texture, range, and melodic material to maintain interest rather than frequent harmonic changes. A stormier middle section follows, with many chords and double stops. Although texturally this piece is quite different, the thematic and harmonic material of this section is highly reminiscent of themes found in Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, which is based on old English folk song melodies.²¹ The work concludes with a return to the opening melody, the viola now muted, and ends on a very soft harmonic.

Ástor Piazzolla: *Le Grand Tango*

Ástor Piazzolla (1921-1992) is an Argentinian composer and is considered by many to be the savior of the tango. As a young man Piazzolla was given the opportunity to study with Nadia Boulanger,²² who is known as one of the greatest teachers of composition of the twentieth century. She strongly encouraged Piazzolla to compose music in the style of his roots and to continue to write tangos, rather than more mainstream classical music.²³ Piazzolla took this to heart and wrote many tangos. Among the most famous is *Le Grand Tango*. *Le Grand Tango* was written for cellist Mstislav Rostropovich in 1982, but it was not performed until 1990.²⁴ Although this piece was originally written for cello and piano, due to its popularity, it has been transcribed for

²¹ Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley. "Vaughan Williams, Ralph."

²² Cliff Eisen. "Piazzolla, Astor." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* (Oxford University Press).

²³ Cliff Eisen. "Piazzolla, Astor."

²⁴ Betsy Schwarm. "Le Grand Tango." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online.* Accessed Feb 20, 2015. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1940980/Le-Grand-Tango>.

several different instruments and ensembles including violin and piano, viola and orchestra, and viola and piano. This piece demonstrates Piazzolla's style of "nuevo tango", which is "a melding of traditional tango rhythms with jazz syncopations."²⁵

Le Grand Tango is a single-movement work in three distinct sections, arranged in a fast-slow-fast pattern. The different sections share relations to two common types of tango: the *tango-milonga*, and the *tango-romanza*. The *tango-milonga* is very rhythmic and energetic in nature. The *tango-romanza* is slower and more lyrical, often including a singer presenting romantic lyrics.²⁶

The first section marked *Tempo di Tango* is definitely in the *tango-milonga* style. Although having moments of lyricism, this section is mostly very rhythmic with accents on nearly every note (quarter note or longer). The section includes extensive use of glissandi and double-stops, often used together. The glissandi and portamenti are prominent not only in the rhythmic material of the movement, but also the more lyrical passages. This section ends with a long fifth in the viola, which sets the stage for the contrasting middle section of the piece marked *Meno mosso: libero e cantabile* ("Slower: free and singing"). This section is very lyrical and romantic in nature. It begins with a sad minor melody marked *espressivo*. It appears to get sadder and more longing throughout the movement. The melody gets louder and the lines get longer until the section reaches a climactic point, which is the loudest and uses the smallest note values. It then returns to the opening material of this section, now slightly ornamented to sound slightly more

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Gerard Béhague. "Tango." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* (Oxford University Press).

emphatic than the original iteration. The final section is slightly faster than the first and much more virtuosic for both viola and piano. There are several glissandi and many double-stops. As the piece reaches its end there is a long section where the viola plays octaves for 27 measures (m. 263-290), then both viola and piano play a fast run together, ending the piece with a long two-octave glissando in the viola.

This graduate recital included several important works from the solo viola repertoire, collectively demonstrating the violist's skills in musical expression as well as technical ability. The styles and genres varied greatly, and allowed the performer to show an understanding and awareness of stylistically appropriate interpretation and expression for each work as the culmination of her studies for the Master of Music degree.

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC**

PRESENTS

A Masters Recital

Nichelle Probst, Viola
Polina Khatsko, Piano

Davis Hall
April 24
8:00 pm

Suite No. 6 in D Major (transcribed to G Major)

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Prelude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavottes I and II
Gigue

Romanze for viola and piano

(1872-1958)

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Intermission

Sonate for viola and piano, Op. 25, no. 4

Paul Hindemith
(1895-1963)

I. Sehr lebhaft. Markiert und kraftvoll
II. Sehr langsame Viertel
III. Finale. Lebhaftes Viertel

Le Grand Tango

Ástor Piazzolla
(1921-1992)

*This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Music degree at
The University of Northern Iowa School of Music. Nichelle is a student of Dr. Julia Bullard.*