

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

---

Musicology and Ethnomusicology: Student  
Scholarship

Musicology and Ethnomusicology

---

2021

## How Have Classical Composers Written for and Adjusted Their View of Viola over Time? Annotated Bibliography

University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.du.edu/musicology\\_student](https://digitalcommons.du.edu/musicology_student)



Part of the [Musicology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

University of Denver, "How Have Classical Composers Written for and Adjusted Their View of Viola over Time? Annotated Bibliography" (2021). *Musicology and Ethnomusicology: Student Scholarship*. 114. [https://digitalcommons.du.edu/musicology\\_student/114](https://digitalcommons.du.edu/musicology_student/114)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

This Bibliography is brought to you for free and open access by the Musicology and Ethnomusicology at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Musicology and Ethnomusicology: Student Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu), [dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:dig-commons@du.edu).

---

## How Have Classical Composers Written for and Adjusted Their View of Viola over Time? Annotated Bibliography

### Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

### Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

## How Have Classical Composers Written for and Adjusted their View of Viola over Time? Annotated Bibliography

### Dictionary / Encyclopedia Articles

1. Boyden, David D., "Viola (Fr. *alto*; Ger. *Bratsche*)." Revised by Ann M. Woodward. *Grove Music Online*. Edited by Dean Root. Published online: 2001.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29438>.

This is *Grove Music Online*'s general article about viola. Besides a concise reference of viola facts, the article establishes viola icons such as Primrose and also provides fundamental repertoire such as the Walton Concerto. This is a good starting place for acquainting yourself with the viola world and a brief context, and it guided me on where to look next for viola composition (Bartok, Walton, Hindemith). This is where I find my benchmark when comparing especially opinionated sources. If, per say, Primrose (a renowned violist) writes about viola's most important works, I look to this encyclopedia article to compare lists. *Grove Music Online* is a long-running encyclopedic source and carries an authority on music topics reference.

2. Forbes. Watson. "Primrose, William." *Grove Music Online*. Edited by Dean Root. Published online: 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22359>.

William Primrose's *Grove Music Online* article, while concise, effectively provides context for the life of one of the greatest and certainly most important viola figures, not just of the 20th century, but of all time. Primrose is especially relevant to topics of viola composition because of his involvement in so much of the 20th century viola repertoire. While not exhaustive by any means, this article is the bare minimum for giving context to his method book and impact on viola composition, which will be heavily discussed in the paper. It also fills in the gaps of *Playing the Viola*, David Dalton's recorded dialogue with Primrose about viola.

### Secondary or Tertiary Monographs

3. Dalton, David. *Playing the Viola*. Oxford University Press, New York. 1988.

This book is a recorded interview/ conversation with William Primrose, the most esteemed performer of his time, and a revolutionary of viola performance and composition. It is relevant in the "View" part of the topic. Primrose's views of viola technique are in fact crucial to the understanding of his views of viola repertoire and ultimately, his impact on composition. While Primrose's authority as a viola historian is largely not "official," the point here is that his opinions mattered as he changed so much for viola. It is interesting to compare his opinions to those of Tertis, another prominent violist of his time.

4. Primrose International Viola Archive. *Brigham Young University*, 2015.  
<http://sites.lib.byu.edu/piva/biographies/>

An impressive resource center established by Brigham Young University for "students, violists, and scholars," the Primrose International Viola Archive is an amalgam of many viola collections. While remote access is limited, discographies of Primrose and Tertis are available, along with relevant viola databases. This was helpful in searching for manuscripts and other sources relating to Primrose and composition. The level of research in this institution is quite obviously high, giving authority to the topic.

5. Primrose, William. *Technique is Memory*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1960. Primrose's technique book is an important monolith to the violist and pedagogue, and is reflective of the impact he wished to leave on the future generations of violists. This is a direct piece of composition from Primrose, which is really interesting in comparison with Hindemith, Walton, and Bartok's compositions for viola. Any string player or teacher could see Primrose sought to prime viola students with tools that would be useful for the contemporary compositional techniques that were gaining popularity. Of course, his authority on the topic is self-evident.

6. Riley, Maurice. *The History of the Viola*. Michigan: Braun-Brumfield, 1980. Maurice Riley's in-depth dive into the history of viola is as extensive as it is dense with information relevant to viola topics. Thoroughly researched, the book follows the instrument from the evolution of the instrument, to the 20th century. The sections discussing the role of the instrument are important to the discussion of how composers viewed and therefore how they wrote for the instrument.

7. Skelton, Geoffrey. *Selected Letters of Paul Hindemith*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995.

Hindemith's own words serve as the best source of his views, and he discusses his viola works in letters that have been collected in this volume. Hindemith's viola works are regarded as extremely important contributions to the field, and how he wrote about viola and his works is important to the discussion of viola composition. His views of viola differ from Primrose's, but how the two interact and intersect are of value to the topic. The letters are printed as written from the words of Hindemith himself.

### **Essays in Collections**

8. Schoonderwaldt, Erwin, and Lambert Jun-Yuan Chen. "The player and the instrument: Analysis of bowing gestures in violin and viola performance." *CIM09* 156 (2009): 157. This essay was useful in figuring out how similar or different viola and violin are from an outside role. Clearly they are unique, but in technique, why are they viewed so differently? Well, partially, because they are literally viewed differently. The bow's interaction with the thicker strings seems to have an effect on the motions of the bow. This, in the context of viola composition, may have made composers feel as though viola was clumsier, or at least, not as capable of fine dexterity in faster passages.

### **Dissertations and Theses**

9. Swanson, Christina Marie. "Adding to the viola repertoire by arranging: A study on methods of arranging music for viola from clarinet, with an original arrangement of the Saint-Saëns Clarinet Sonata in E-flat, op. 167." D.M.A. diss., University of Arizona, 2003. This doctoral dissertation is fascinating and important to my study, especially as a non-violist. The concept of transcription is powerful and important to violists everywhere, and this academic

breakdown of the technique of doing so is incredibly useful. As a cellist, my familiarity with performing Brahms Clarinet Trio also is helpful in orienting myself in the conversation of viola articulation and sound within a chamber setting. Many of these techniques also interplay with Primrose and Tertis, who established many of the performing norms that caused composers to become more ambitious with their viola composition.

## Music Scores

10. Bartók, Béla. *Viola Concerto*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1949.

This is one of the most popular and commonly performed viola concertos of today, and only written in 1945. Where it plays into the conversation is that it would not exist if not for William Primrose. Perhaps the most direct contribution to viola composition, Primrose commissioned this work shortly before Bartok's death. Primrose famously instructed Bartok to have little to no regard for the technical constraints of the instrument when composing this piece. Non-coincidentally, this is considered one of the most difficult viola pieces in existence.

11. Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat Major*. Offenbach: Johann Andre 1802.

An interesting example of viola being given an equal solo role to violin in an earlier 19th century work, Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat Major* is a double concerto for viola and violin. The viola is given a much more virtuosic role than typical for the time, and it is possible that Mozart had a particularly gifted violist at the time in mind for the part. This is relevant to my topic in the evolution of how composer viewed violists.

## Sound and Video Recordings

12. Primrose, William, violist. *William Primrose: Collection 1*. Recorded 1937. Doremi Records DHR7718. 1998. CD.

Primroses' recordings are the last remnants of his performance and playing. Listening to his performances informs study of his method book as well as his interview with Dalton, both sources used in this paper. His performances as a chamber musician and soloist reflect his views and have inspired the next generations of violists. The recordings also give a record of Primrose's stylistic choices in sound and phrasing, some of which was relatively new to viola, especially in his time.