

Lauren Schmidt
Fourth Year Arts Award Outcome Report
Faculty Mentor: Prof. Ayn Baliija

Outcome Report: Investing in a New Viola

My Fourth Year Arts Award project centered around looking for and ultimately purchasing a new viola. This project grew out of my passion for chamber music, which is what led me to learn to play viola. Although my experience with viola performance has been extensive as a result of my consistent chamber music involvement throughout high school and college, my progress was limited by the quality of the instrument I was using. In high school, I had to borrow an instrument from one of my teachers for rehearsals and performances. While at UVA, I have been using an instrument on loan to me by Professor Ayn Baliija, the viola professor, through the University of Virginia Music Department. Purchasing a new instrument would mean having my own instrument that I could use after graduating, instead of needing to rely on others for a borrowed or loaned instrument. Because of Prof. Baliija's knowledge of the viola and of the limitations of my current instrument, as well as her understanding of myself as a musician and person, I asked her to be my faculty mentor for this project.

I spent this past summer in Charlottesville, and took the opportunity to travel to a local instrument shop, Vacanti Violins, while in town. I have been going here for a while for my violin upkeep and know the owner of the shop, Jonathan Vacanti, well. He had a handful of violas for me to try to familiarize myself with what he commonly had available. I was fortunate enough to have Prof. Baliija join in order to provide me with a second opinion on the instruments I was playing. In early August, I briefly went home to Connecticut and visited shops in my hometown and in Boston, Massachusetts. After visiting these shops, I found a few violas that I wanted to test for a longer period of time, and had them shipped to Charlottesville for a two-week trial. This gave me the opportunity to play the instruments for Prof. Baliija as well as utilize them in rehearsals. I also went back to Vacanti Violins, as the shop had just received a few new violas that Jonathan Vacanti recommended I try. After comparing the instruments to each other, I ended up returning the two violas from Massachusetts and keeping the Vacanti viola on a long-term trial. I was given the opportunity to trial the instrument for the remainder of the Fall semester, allowing me to really understand the instrument and its abilities.

In the Fall semester, I was the violist of the Chaos Quartet, which was enrolled in the chamber music program and studied the Debussy String Quartet. Being a member of this quartet

meant that I could use the viola for rehearsals and performances with this group, including at the end-of-semester Chamber Music Recital and the Fall 2021 Tea Time Recital. I was also given the opportunity to perform viola duets with Prof. Baliija at the Tea Time Recital, allowing me to perform with the viola in Old Cabell Hall and hear its full potential. After using this instrument for the semester and gaining valuable practice and performance experience with it, I decided to purchase it at the end of November. The instrument is a 16.5" Jay Haide l'ancienne special model viola made with European wood - the back is European maple and the front is European spruce. In my initial budget, I had allocated funding for the purchase of a new case for the viola, but was fortunate enough to receive a case from the shop owner with the purchase of my instrument, and did not have to cover that additional cost.

Since purchasing this instrument, I have played in numerous concerts and rehearsals and have even had the opportunity to travel internationally for a partnership concert with it. I am currently still performing with my string quartet from last year, and am also planning on taking viola lessons with Prof. Baliija following the completion of my DMP Violin Recital this coming March. Without the generosity and support of the Miller Arts Scholars program, this purchase would not have been possible. It has truly been a dream of mine to purchase my own viola, but up until this point has been unrealized. The Miller Arts Scholars Program has given me life-changing opportunities and experiences that have shaped the musician and person I am today, and I am incredibly grateful. I would also like to thank Ayn Baliija for her constant support and incredible generosity of her time and knowledge. She has helped me through each step of this process and I would not have been able to see this project through without her guidance. Thank you to everyone who has made this project possible!

Links to Recent Performances

Debussy String Quartet, Mvmt 1: <https://youtu.be/QIobdXYEY6M>

Debussy String Quartet, Mvmt 2: <https://youtu.be/bRL305uZnW0>

Budget Outcome

Item	Cost
Viola	\$4,400

Additional Images



Figure I. Violas at Carriage House Violins in Newtown, MA



Figure II. Purchased instrument from Jonathan Vacanti's shop