

Viola Performance Enhancement Funding Proposal

Lauren Schmidt

When asked what my favorite music is to listen to and to perform, my answer is always chamber music. The challenge of fitting four unique parts together in a string quartet through subtle communication with other musicians while also balancing dynamics, phrasing, and articulation is frustrating but incredibly rewarding. I first studied chamber music on the violin, but fell in love with the richness, warmth, and depth of the viola's sound when I was asked to play viola in a string quartet during my freshman year of high school. Since then, I have actively pursued chamber music as a violist, including while at the University of Virginia. I am currently involved in three chamber ensembles at UVA, all of which I play viola in. Last year, my string quartet was chosen to represent the University's Music Department during a week-long residency and partnership concert at the University of Pécs in Hungary. In addition, I have taken lessons on viola with Professor Ayn Baliya and have had numerous chamber music coachings on viola with Professors Daniel Sender and Adam Carter. My experience with viola performance is extensive, but my progress has been limited by the quality of bow and accessories I am using. I am asking for a Miller Arts minigrant to fund the purchase of a new viola shoulder rest and rosin, as well as partially fund the purchase of a new viola bow so that I can further my progress on this instrument.

Although I have been playing viola for 7 years, I have been unable to afford purchasing my own viola bow and viola. Instead, I have used a low-quality instrument and bow to practice on and borrowed my teacher's higher-quality instrument and bow for performances. I am currently fortunate enough to be using one of the University's violas and viola bows, but because the instrument and the accessories have been used by many students before me, the quality of these is not ideal for playing music of the caliber I am looking to attain. In addition, this method of instrument loaning is not sustainable in that once I graduate I will not be able to perform on a viola unless investing in my own instrument and bow. Although I would love to own my own instrument, the cost of investing in a quality viola, bow, and necessary accessories is high. This is especially challenging for me to afford because I am also responsible for covering the cost of upkeep of my violin, which includes bow repairs, string changes, and music purchases. This grant would provide me with an opportunity to afford the purchase of a few simple accessories and a bow that would have a lasting impact on my musicianship and performance experience.

My skills as a violist would be greatly improved by owning a high-quality bow and accessories. Because the viola is one of the inner voices within a string quartet, having a full tone and being able to support other instruments in the ensemble raises the caliber of the performance quality. Furthermore, using a stickier rosin can help with obtaining a clearer sound because a viola's strings are heavy and require high amounts of friction to begin vibrating the strings and producing sound. The purchase of a new viola bow would help with tone production and sound quality on whatever viola I am playing on, and would also improve my chamber group's sound as a whole. The purchase of new rosin would help improve the clarity and quality of the sound produced by the bow and the instrument. I have also been working in my private lessons on achieving a more relaxed posture while playing, so the purchase of a new viola shoulder rest would allow me to be more comfortable when in rehearsal and performance.

My outcome report will consist of a reflection on my experience testing different bows and ultimately deciding on one, as well as audio clips that demonstrate the difference in sound produced by using different viola bows, a new shoulder rest, and different rosin.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my request. Any aid in the funding of this would be greatly appreciated and would open up a myriad of new possibilities for me with regards to playing the viola. Please contact me with any questions or concerns about this proposal.

1. Proposal Schedule

<p>October - November 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purchase viola rosin and shoulder rest - Use these accessories in practice as well as in rehearsal for upcoming end-of-semester chamber music concerts and DMP performances next semester - Contact Atelier Constantin Popescu about viola bow availability and what viola bow makers he currently has in stock at his shop in Westport, Connecticut
<p>November - December 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visit Constantin's instrument shop in Connecticut to receive a set of bows within the desired budget - Use the end of November and the beginning of December to test out each potential bow - Play for professional musicians in Connecticut using the best bow candidates in order to receive multiple opinions on which of the bows produces the clearest sound and has the easiest playability (this will be done over Zoom out of an abundance of caution due to the pandemic) - Decide on a bow to purchase by mid-December
<p>Spring Semester 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilize the new purchased bow and accessories in lessons, rehearsals, and concerts throughout the semester and in future years

2. Proposed Budget

Item	Price*	Explanation
Mach One V-16 Viola Shoulder Rest	\$29.99	This shoulder rest is perfect for me as the underside is made of non-slip rubber. I have had problems with my current shoulder rest slipping as I play, creating discomfort in my upper back. This shoulder rest will help fix that issue.
Cecilia 'A Piacere' Viola Rosin	\$35	This rosin has been described by professional musicians as easily pulling the strings to produce a warm tone. When used to play louder music, the sound rarely cracks, which can happen with many types of rosin.
Viola Bow	\$400	I am asking for \$400 in funding to be put towards purchasing a viola bow. The bows I look at will most likely be above this price point but this grant would greatly help me in affording the purchase of a bow that I will be able to use for my future musical endeavors.
Total	\$464.99	

*Pricing for the shoulder rest and rosin is taken from SHAR music. I have purchased strings and accessories for my violin through this company in the past and trust their products.