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Faculty Mentor: Prof. Daniel Sender

Learning the Viola Outcome Report

I am extremely grateful for the generous funding provided by the Miller Arts Scholar Program that allowed me to learn the viola. With this Arts Award funding, I have been able to purchase a high-quality viola from a local luthier shop (Vacanti Violins) and have spent the last year learning how to play it. I have been able to participate in multiple chamber ensembles with the viola, furthering my growth not only as a violinist but as a multi-faceted musician.

After receiving the grant, I was able to test out multiple violas and bows at Vacanti Violins (the local luthier shop in Charlottesville). I've gone there multiple times for violin-related matters and also purchased my current violin from there a couple of years ago. Jonathan (the shop owner) was extremely helpful- I let him know the range of my budget and he pulled out multiple instruments for me to try. Although I didn't have any experience playing the viola at this time, I used my violin experience to select a viola that felt and sounded good. After testing out multiple different violas and bows I decided to go with the Ettore Callegari Viola (for \$3200) as well as a cheaper bow and case (with the hopes of upgrading those later on). The amount that I requested from the Miller Arts Scholars helped cover this, and I paid the additional difference out of pocket. I liked the overall tone of this viola (it was very rich and smooth) and also liked the overall feel of it, even though it was much larger than the type of instrument I was used to playing.

After purchasing my viola, I spent the summer trying to learn how to read alto clef and figuring out where each note was on the viola to the best of my ability. This was especially challenging since I usually only read music in treble clef (all violin music is in treble clef). The viola also doesn't have an E string (the highest string on the violin) and instead has a C string (an extra lower string) which further complicates things. It took me a while to figure out where each note was, but I utilized resources such as flashcards to help me become more proficient. I also found beginner-level pieces and attempted to play them. While reading the music was difficult enough, I also struggled to adjust to the size of the instrument. Since the viola is bigger, the spaces in between notes (aka where you place your fingers) are also slightly bigger. I would have to constantly shift where my fingers were in order to play in tune. Even to this day I still struggle, especially when I have to switch back and forth between playing the violin and the viola. However, these challenges made it much more interesting- I found myself having to concentrate a lot more while playing, rather than relying on muscle memory.

In the fall, I was able to join a piano quintet (two violins, one viola, one cello, and one piano) through the chamber music program at UVA. Our coach was Professor Ayn Balija, the viola professor in the Department of Music. Having Professor Balija as our coach was particularly helpful, as I was able to get advice regarding the viola from her during our

coachings. Our group decided to play Shostakovich's Piano Quintet in G Minor, Op 57. We ended up playing three out of five movements (Movement I, Movement IV, and Movement V). While I learned a lot about the viola, I was also able to learn a lot more about chamber music as a whole. I had only played in chamber groups as a violinist before, so it was interesting to experience playing a completely different part. I had to learn how to blend with the group with the viola, which was extremely different from blending with the violin. Since the viola mainly sits in the middle register (with a more mellow timbre), I had to learn to produce a lot more sound in order to be balanced with the rest of the group. This was a stark contrast to the violin, which often stands out more due to its higher range. Our group also participated in a masterclass mid-semester, where I was able to learn even more from other experienced musicians. We also played in the end-of-semester chamber recital with the rest of the groups who participated in chamber that semester. Overall, it was an extremely fun experience and I feel like I grew a lot as both a violist and as a musician.

I was also extremely fortunate to receive a Fall 2023 minigrant from the Miller Arts Scholars program which allowed me to purchase a higher quality viola bow. With this new bow, I was able to expand my tone and timbre in a way that complimented the piece even more. This semester I'm participating in chamber with the viola again- this time in a string quartet (two violins, one viola, one cello). We're currently working on Ravel's string quartet and will be playing in a masterclass as well at the end-of-semester chamber recital. Ravel's compositions are extremely different from Shostakovich's so this piece has provided unique, fun challenges.

My faculty mentor is Professor Daniel Sender, an associate professor of violin in the Department of Music as well as the current Concertmaster of the Charlottesville Symphony. Over the last year he has helped me adjust to the viola, answering any questions I have and helping me learn the more difficult sections of my chamber repertoire. He has provided a multitude of useful advice, significantly improving the depth of my sound and my technical skills. I am extremely grateful for the help he provided, as I would've had a much harder time learning and adjusting to the viola without him.

I cannot thank the Miller Arts Scholar Program enough for providing me with the funding for my viola and supporting my musical ventures. Being able to purchase and learn the viola has opened up numerous opportunities and has furthered my growth as a musician, and will continue to do so for the rest of my time at UVA. Thank you so much to everyone who helped make this project possible!

Links to Recent Performances:

Shostakovich Piano Quintet in G Minor, Op 57- Movement I:

https://youtu.be/F_zi3rc7T1A?si=YlwAiynPDoiEN9ZZ

Shostakovich Piano Quintet in G Minor, Op 57- Movement IV and V:

<https://youtu.be/oqD8nnx0YII?si=m8cjTCBtFg5jn3aW>

Budget Outcome:

Item	Cost	Details
E. Callegari Viola	\$3200	Pricing provided by Vacanti Violins
Howard Core Viola Bow	\$100	Pricing provided by Vacanti Violins
Howard Core Viola Case	\$100	Pricing provided by Vacanti Violins
Total:	\$3400	\$3000 covered by Miller Arts Scholars, the rest covered out of pocket

Pictures:





Fall 2023 chamber group (piano quintet)



Spring 2024 chamber group (string quartet)