



VIOLA

A Primrose Pilgrimage

by J. David Arnott

A pilgrimage may be defined in several ways including as an especially long journey, made to some place as a sacred act of religious devotion, or undertaken as a quest, or for a votive purpose as to pay homage. Some people make their pilgrimage to Canterbury, some to Mecca, some to La Scala. In the world of the viola, one may consider any of the above definitions as a reason for making a pilgrimage to the Primrose International Viola Archive (PIVA) at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Having written about William Primrose (1904-1982) previously in this column, PIVA represents the ultimate legacy of one of the greatest violists, musicians, and human beings. It also represents the largest repository of viola music in the world.

Having begun its existence in 1974 as The Primrose Viola Library, a repository for all of Primrose's memorabilia, it grew in size and scope exponentially in 1981 when the International Viola Society transferred all of its viola collection to BYU. PIVA holds the largest collection in the world of the viola literature including scores and manuscripts, recordings, Primrose's own collection of letters, photographs, personal belongings, and instruments. In addition to the Primrose collection, the library now also holds the Franz Zeyringer collection, the Ulrich Drüner Collection of Viola Music, much of the Walter Lebermann collection, the Jan Albrecht library, the materials compiled by Rudolf Tretsch, and the recording collection of François de Beaumont. Together this adds up to the largest collection of viola-related materials known to human kind. Any serious viola-related research project begins at the PIVA.

If a trip to Provo is out of the question, then a trip to the PIVA web site is at least a start: <https://sites.lib.byu.edu/piva/>. In it you will find a beautiful biography of William Primrose, sound samples of Primrose recordings (start with the Paganini *Caprices*), and a wonderful essay by David Dalton (the man most responsible for the acquisition of the Primrose archive) titled *The Viola & Violists*.

Perhaps someday, a trip to Provo will be unnecessary as much of the collection is being digitized.



We have many descendants of Primrose here in Minnesota, though perhaps not many direct descendants. Primrose touched the lives of many violists in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Indiana, Tokyo, Australia and Utah. If your teacher studied with someone who studied with Primrose, that means your heritage also includes the teachers of Primrose and the teachers of the teachers of Primrose including Camillo Ritter, Eugene Ysaÿe, Joseph Joachim and Otakar Ševčík. It's good for us to remember our heritage and why we do things the way we do. Stella Anderson has some really great William Primrose stories—when you see her next, ask her about her first car!

One of my greatest sorrows in life is having missed meeting Primrose in person by just a few months. When I met my teacher, Mr. de Pasquale, in August of 1982, at the time I did not realize the profound sadness he was experiencing at the loss of his friend and mentor, who had been dead for just three months. The Primrose Archive will be there in perpetuity for when we are ready for our own journey of discovery. This will be the year of my pilgrimage.

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