

GRAND ENCYCLOPEDIA OF VIOLA JOKES

Organized and presented by David Johnstone

***AN IMPORTANT NOTE FROM **johnstone-music** ABOUT
THE MAIN WRITINGS STARTING ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE:***

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GRAND ENCYCLOPEDIA OF VIOLA JOKES

This is surely easily one of the biggest sites where jokes in the vast array of anecdotes relating to the viola are offered amusingly to all our readers and visitors!

We divide the jokes up into several sections, for comfort. Of course, the list of jokes is never-ending, but this is a pretty good selection.

Please note that where a joke might be included in more than one section, we have made a choice as to which section we place it.

Read and enjoy ...

If new jokes surface (*but not sick ones please!*), please send them via the contact section of *johnstone-music*, and we will try to incorporate them in periodic updates.

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A) Short Jokes

*** The Viola - a brief introduction**

Why do violists stand for long periods outside people's houses?

They can't find the key and they don't know when to come in.

Why do so many people take an instant dislike to the viola?

Why wait ... it saves so much time ...

Why do violists make bad policemen (or women)?

They can't stay on the beat for long! ...

Why are violists bad lovers?... because they hardly know more than one position.

Why doesn't a gorilla play a viola?

He's too sensitive and intelligent to make that choice ...

A couple of friends are strolling past a cemetery, when one of them sees a gravestone which reads:

"Here is buried a great violist, an incredible musician"

"Goodness me! They've buried two here in the very same grave!" he says.

Viola players: are those people who spend half their time trying to tune the instrument, and the other half playing it out of tune ...

DEATH ROW

What's the difference between a Viola and a coffin?

The coffin has the corpse inside ...

Why do you always bury a viola player three metres under?

Because deep down they are all very nice people ...

If you're lost in the desert, what do you aim for? A good viola player, a bad viola player, an oasis, or a pink elephant?

The bad viola player. The other three are only figments of your imagination ...

How many violists does it take to screw in a light bulb? (*three answers*)

- 1. Only one, but it will take some two hours to find the right position ...**
- 2. None. They're not small enough to fit ...**
- 3. No-one; nobody on the viola can get up *that* high ...**

What's the definition of a viola de gamba player?

A violist who's moved up in the world, and who can now sight-read simple parts ...

* **Playing the Viola**

What's the best way to play the viola?

- Alone ... !

An amateur viola player entered an open air market on a hot summer's day, playing a fast Hungarian style piece, and a man by the nearby fruit & vegetable counter began to cry ...

"Oh, are you Hungarian, sir?" asked the viola player.

"No", he replied, "I'm a violinist" ... !

How is lightning like a violist's fingers?

Neither one strikes in the same place twice, nor is aware of the damage that they are doing ...

How can you tell when a violist is playing out of tune?

If you see the bow is moving ...

A mature-looking man entered a party, and at once noticed a lady playing lighter classical music on the viola. She in turn noticed that he was watching her play, and asked him at the end of a piece "Ah, you like classical music?" He answered:

"Yes I do. A lot. But never mind, keep on playing!"

How was the canon invented?

Two violists were trying to play the same passage together ...

Or:

What inspired Johann Sebastian Bach to write his first canon?

He heard two violists trying to play unison ...

Why should violists *never* take up mountaineering?

Because if they get lost, it would takes ages before anyone notices that they're missing ...

Note: the following joke is very funny in German, but doesn't translate well into English:

Was sind die drei Lagen auf der Bratsche?

Erste Lage, Notlage, und Niederlage.

(What are the three positions of the viola?

First position, emergency, and defeat.)

What's the famous Viola players' credo?

"It's far better to play a little sharp than to play out of tune" ...

The difference between the relative tuning of a violinist and a violist: whilst the first is a constant search for perfect exactness, the other is only a heroic attempt

THE DREADED ALTO CLEF

Why are Viola parts written in Alto Clef?

An inventive solution by a forward-thinking viola player – harder for colleagues to prove that wrong notes weren't copying errors ...

So where did Alto Clef originally originate?

It seems that Bach took a bribe from a wealthy viola player ...

In today's world, what's the difference between Alto clef and classic Greek manuscript?

Some viola players can actually read fluent Greek ...

Why is playing the viola like peeing in your pants?

They both give you a nice warm feeling without making any sound ...

Why do violists get so very nervous when they see the *Kama Sutra*?

It's that ... there are so many positions to learn! ...

*** The Instrument itself**

What is the range of a Viola?

As far as you can throw it ...

What do a viola and a lawsuit have in common?

Everyone is happy when the case is closed ...

Why is viola called "bratsche" in Germany?

Because that's the sound it makes when you sit down on it ...

How is the viola defined in physics textbooks?

**A friction-driven, vibrating, manually-operated, musical
pitch-approximator ...**

**So ... how do viola players find the solution to an out-of-tune string instrument
the day before an important concert?**

- Buy a new viola ...

Two neighbours were speaking:

"Please, will you lend me your viola tonight?"

"Ah, you want to try to play it as well, then?"

"No, I just want to get a good night's sleep!"

*** What's the difference between? *etc. etc.***

What's the difference between a viola and an onion?

When you cut up an onion you cry ... (*but when ... !*)

What's the difference between a viola and a trampoline?

You usually take your shoes off to jump on a trampoline ...

What's the difference between a washing machine and a violist?

The washing machine has a more intense vibrato, and also the result is also cleaner ...

IT'S A DOG'S LIFE

What's the difference between a violist and a dog?

The dog knows when to stop scratching ...

What's the difference between a violist and a puppy?

The puppy will stop whining eventually ...

What's the difference between a Viola and a Macaw?

One makes obnoxious, irritating, non-musical noises – and the other is a bird ...

What's the difference between a rhythm sampler and a violist?

You only need to give the information to a rhythm sampler once.

**'NATURAL COMPETITION' - COMPARISONS OF LAWNMOWERS,
CHAINSAWS, VACUUM CLEANERS
AND THE VIOLA**

What's the difference between a Viola and a lawnmower? (*five answers*)

1. The neighbours get pissed if you don't return their lawnmower.
2. If you show the lawnmower on the Home Shopping Network, you have a chance of selling it.
3. You don't pour gasoline ON to the lawnmower.
4. You can start and stop the lawnmower.
5. The exhaust smells different ...

What's the difference between a chainsaw and a Viola? (*three answers*)

1. The person holding the chainsaw can more probably read music.
2. The law doesn't currently require a DANGER: MAY CAUSE INJURY warning label on a viola.
3. You can't fake cutting down a tree ...

How is a chainsaw like a Viola? (*two answers*)

1. When either is in use, anyone nearby should wear earplugs.
2. When being used, they both start out very sharp but don't stay that way ...

What's the difference between a vacuum cleaner and a Viola? (*two answers*)

1. A vacuum cleaner has a better chance at blending in a string quartet ...
2. A vacuum cleaner has to be plugged in before it sucks ...

VIOLA & PROSTITUTION JOKES

What is the difference between a violist and a prostitute? (*two answers*)

1. The prostitute has a better sense of rhythm, and at least knows all the positions ...
2. Prostitutes have a useful purpose in life ...

What is the similarity between a violist and a prostitute?

Both are paid to fake climaxes ...

**What's the difference between viola players and government bonds?
Government bonds eventually mature and earn good money ...**

NAUGHTY LANGUAGE

**What's the difference between a dressmaker and a violist?
The dressmaker tucks up the frills. A Viola player ...
(figure it out)**

**What's the difference between a Viola player and Doctor Scholl's Footpads?
Doctor Scholl's bucks up the feet: A Viola player ...
(OK, again, we're not going to spell it all out !)**

VIOLAS ON THE ROAD

**What's the difference between an injured viola player lying in the road and an injured accordion player lying in the road?
The accordion player was probably going to a gig.**

**What's the difference between a dead cat in the road and a crushed viola in the road?
Skid marks before the cat ...**

**Why shouldn't you drive off a cliff in a mini with three violists in it?
You could fit in at least two more ...**

WAR-LIKE VIOLA JOKES

What do a Scud missile and a viola player have in common?

They're both offensive and inaccurate ...

A client enters a shop and says:

"It's the first time that I've ever seen a shop specializing jointly in string instruments and arms"

"Ah" we've just got accustomed to the fact that it's quite often that someone buys a viola, and then just a few days later a neighbor comes in and buys a pistol" ... !

Why is a viola player like a terrorist?

They both mangle the bowings. (*Bowings/Boeings ... !*)

What's the difference between a violist and a terrorist?

A terrorist has sympathizers ...

By the way, as an additional anecdote:

What's the difference between a terrorist and a soprano?

You can negotiate with a terrorist ...

* Students (Teachers)

The beginners' class of viola students were attending their first music lesson. The teacher was trying to begin at the beginning. She drew a musical staff on the blackboard and asked a little girl to come up and write a note on it. The little girl went to the blackboard, looked thoughtful for a minute and wrote:

"Dear Aunt Emma, just a short note to tell you I'm fine" ...

Little Harold was practicing the violin in the living room while his father was trying to read in the den. The family dog was lying in the den, and as the screeching sounds of little Harold's violin reached his ears, he began to howl loudly. The father listened to the dog and the violin as long as he could. Then he jumped up, slammed his paper to the floor and yelled above the noise, "For pity's sake, can't you play something the dog doesn't know?" ...

What do you call a Viola student with half a brain?

Gifted ...

SYLLABUS

What is the main difference between undergraduate and post-graduate viola courses in the Paris Conservatoire?

In undergraduate courses you need to take the viola slowly out of the case, and meticulously place it under the chin, whilst holding the bow in the right hand.

However, in postgraduate courses you need to take the viola slowly out of the case, and meticulously place it under the chin, whilst holding the bow in the right hand - *from memory* ! ...

Three viola students walked into a bar. You'd think that one of them would have seen it!! ...

What is the difference between a viola professor and a chimpanzee?

It's scientifically proven that chimpanzees are able to communicate with humans

MELODIC INTERVALS AND TUNING

What's the definition of a minor second?

Two viola pupils playing in unison ...

Or even worse

What is a chord?

Three violists playing in unison ...

What do you call two viola students trying to play in unison?

Counterpoint ...

How long does a viola generally stay in tune?

3 or 4 weeks - or until someone starts to play it; whichever comes first ...

What's the most common tuning system utilized by viola students in Western music?

Badly-tempered ...

"Dad, will you buy me a new viola for Christmas?"

"Absolutely no way. Just think of the noise it makes"

"Don't worry, I'll only play it when you're sleeping" ... !

THE BOX OFFICE

A viola student goes to hear a recital of his teacher. He buys the ticket, and then goes to the entry door. He returns to the ticket office, buys another ticket, and goes off once more to the entrance. This process happens some four or five times, until the lady in the box office says:

"Why do you keep coming back to me?" The violist replies seriously:

"I'm just about to go inside, when a nasty man comes over to me and tears my ticket into two" ...

HOW IS MY DETACHÉ?

Paul, a viola student, goes for his weekly class. He starts to play, but his teacher (probably a violinist!) pulls him up.

"OK, we're going to present the important first note just right - do play it again".

The viola student plays - {beeeeeeeep}.

"No, this note should be much shorter than that - try again".

The student plays it {bip}. "No, no, not that short! Again ...".

{beeeeeep}. "Too long!" {biip} "No, for damn's sake, far too short!".

{beeeep}. "No, it's marginally better, but still a long way off".

The viola student loses a bit of patience, and responds:

"Well, I don't know about it being long and short, but at least is the *WIDTH* acceptable?" ...

DISHING OUT THE PUNISHMENT

"Haven't I seen your face before?" a judge demanded, looking down at the defendant.

"You have, Your Honour," the man answered hopefully. "I gave your son regular viola lessons last winter"

"Ah, yes," recalled the judge -

"Twenty years!" ...

The following joke only works well in Spanish:

Un violinista y un violista se encuentran – el violista empieza:

“José, he comprado un metrónomo, bastante caro por cierto”

“¿Sí, pues ... qué marca?”

“El pulso” ... !

GLASSES

A short-sighted, bespectacled viola student, decided to see his professor in an important recital. His teacher had already indicated that he might learn quite a bit technically, so to concentrate. He was taking a drink in the theatre bar before entering, and to his surprise saw a notice at the exit of the bar which read “Glasses are not allowed into the auditorium”. So he took off his specs and had a most miserable evening!

A few student friends were busking in the metro (underground) in London, and they were getting tired. The violinist turned to his viola friend and said: “Right Paul, why don't you finish on a high note – give the public the Moto Perpetuo of Paganini?!” “Are you mad” replied the violist “my Jubilee line train comes in twenty minutes” ... !

A violist saw her son crying in the bed one morning, and comforted him: “But, Johnny, you've got to go to school, you know, to be prepared to fight in life, be prepared, be intelligent ...” “But” he sobbed “I don't want to be intelligent, I just want to be like you” ... !

At the end of the academic year two friends – a cellist and a violist – swapped around their music exam results temporarily.

The violist's mother asked her son "Well, where are they –the results"

"Oh, I lent them to Paul"

"Why" she asked.

"A joke – as a surprise to give a worry to Paul's father ..." ... !

A viola teacher came home and said "Patricia, darling, in the music school they are beginning to call me the absent-minded professor".

The reply straight away "Look, sorry, I'm not Patricia – she lives up on the next floor" ... !

At a funeral the little music group asked to play was missing its pianist, so a viola student offered to help out. Unfortunately it sounded terrible, as being in 'mourning', she only played the black notes" ... !

"How does the viola go then ?", a father asks his 12-year old son.

"Well, I'm not sure" he replies "I get confusing signals. On the one-hand my teacher more-or-less says 'OK', but on the other there's a small statue of Beethoven in class and after my first attempt he puts the ear-plugs in the bust!"

A strange 11-year old girl says:

"please, dad, will you buy me a viola for Christmas?"

"Sorry, Cynthia, just think of the noise"

"Oh, don't worry, I'll only play it when you're sleeping!"

***Going to Work**

Two viola players were going to a date, and they realized that they were late. Worse still, they were told to stop by police on what seemed a routine check. Getting really nervous, one said “look give him €20 and see if we pass”. Sure enough it worked, and they were waved on. But another 75 metres and ... another control! “Give him €20 and let’s see if we can move on”. Again it seemed to work. But ... another 75 metres and yet another police control. “I haven’t got any more money, stop Paul”. The policeman asked the driver to wind down the window and said:

“If you give me €50 I’ll show you how to leave the roundabout” ... !!
(Roundabout in US = circle)

Air how long – just a minute sir

A viola player was on a plane from London to Dublin. Shortly after take-off, and despite the air stewardess getting uptight with other passenger problems, he insisted on pulling her attention and asked her:

“How long is the flight?”

She, dealing with three passengers at the same time, replied:

“Just a minute sir”

... “Ah, thank you very much” ... !

A pianist, arriving at a small city to give a recital, gets lost. But he sees a musician with a viola case, so he seemed the obvious person to ask:

“Please, there, can you tell me where I am? – I’ve got to get to the Town Hall”

Back came the answer: “Yes, you’re in your car” ... !

A violist was walking in the street, and asked directions:

“How do I get to the National Auditorium, please?”

The answer came quick:

“Practise, son, practise” ...

On the contrary, a violist was walking in the street, viola case strapped over shoulder, when a lady approaches him:

“Do you know where the High Street is, please?”

The viola player replies:

“Any idiot knows that”. Surprised, she quickly comes up with:

“Exactly, that’s why I decided to ask you!” ...

And ... Leaving Work

A violist got pretty badly drunk after an orchestral concert.

In the street he said to a lady passing by:

“Could you tell me where the opposite pavement is?”

“There – on the other side!”

“Now, now, you’re pulling my leg, aren’t you?”

“Why would I do that” she asked.

“Because I’ve just come from there, and someone told me it was here!” ...

AIR STORIES:

Faulty Plane

A plane – a big Boeing – carrying an Iceland orchestra was taking off from Reykjavik in the beautiful northern summer sunset, and the chamber orchestra was due to start their tour in Stockholm next day. But not even only two minutes after take-off the pilot announced “We’ve had a flock of birds pass in front of us; we’ve lost one of the four engines”. Twenty minutes later he said “We’ve got a technical failure – a second engine has blown”. Another hour goes by, and the plane flew into an electrical storm. “I’m very sorry” he said once more – “a third engine has been damaged. But don’t worry, these planes are tough, and there should be no problem. Anyway, it’s only an hour to Stockholm now”. At which the sub-principal viola perked “I jolly well hope that the fourth engine doesn’t blow, or we’ll be up here all night, and we’ll lose the rehearsal scheduled tomorrow morning”! ...

No Smoking

Just after take-off, in the very same plane full of these viola players who were going to the international viola congress in Zurich the pilot announced seriously:

“Smoking in the lavatories is prohibited. Any person caught smoking in the lavatories will be asked to leave the plane immediately.”

A Beautiful Violist

In a plane bound for a viola congress in Zurich, the flight attendant approached a violist in the first-class section and requested that she move to economy since she did not have a first-class ticket. The violist replied, “I’m a great violist, I’m beautiful, and I’m going to Zurich, so I’m not moving.”

Not wanting to argue with a customer, the flight attendant asked the co-pilot to speak with her. He went to talk with the woman, asking her to please move out of the first-class section. Again, the blonde replied, “I’m a great violist, I’m beautiful, and I’m going to Zurich, so I’m not moving.”

The co-pilot returned to the cockpit and asked the captain what he should do. The captain said, “I’m married to a blonde viola player, and I know how to handle this.”

He went to the first-class section and whispered in the blonde’s ear. She immediately jumped up and ran to the economy section mumbling to herself, “Why didn’t anyone just say so?”

Surprised, the flight attendant and the co-pilot asked exactly what he said to her that finally persuaded her to move from her seat. He said, “I told her the first-class section wasn’t going to Zurich.”

[MORE AIR STORIES:](#)

Viola 'Con'

And, after landing: "Thank you for flying Delta Business Express. We hope you enjoyed giving us the business as much as we enjoyed taking you for a ride."

Hijack Worry

A group of terrorists hijacked a plane full of violists. They called down to ground control with their list of demands, and added that if their demands weren't met, they would release one violist every hour! ...

In-flight Jokes

A noted comedian was recently flying to Berlin. He decided to strike up a conversation with his seat mate. His first words were:

"I've got a really great viola joke. Would you like to hear it?"

"I should let you know first that I am a violist".

"That's OK. No problem, I'll tell it real slow!"

*New Jobs Section

Reading between the lines Reference for a Violist:

To whom it may concern:

1 Bob Smith, my assistant viola, can always be found
2 hard at work at his desk. He works independently, without
3 wasting orchestral time talking to colleagues. Bob never
4 thinks twice about assisting fellow musicians, and always
5 finishes learning repertoire on time. Often he takes extended
6 measures to complete his work, sometimes skipping coffee
7 breaks. Bob is a dedicated individual who has absolutely no
8 vanity in spite of his high accomplishments and profound
9 knowledge in his field. I firmly believe that Bob can be
10 classed as an fine employee, the type which cannot be
11 dispensed with. Consequently, I duly recommend that Bob be
12 promoted to principal viola, and that the proposal will be
13 executed as soon as possible

Appendix:

Dear Sirs,

That idiot was standing over my shoulder while I wrote the letter sent to you earlier today. I didn't like to tell him the bitter truth to his face, so ... kindly re-read again, this time reading only the odd numbered lines for a more correct reference.

B.G. Jones – Orchestral Manager
Smallville Symphony Orchestra

A violist went for a conservatoire job audition-interview. He played lousy, but there was no-one else applying. So the panel tried to help him. They said:

“Never mind your playing, your profile interests us. Look here, on your CV it says that although you are English you can speak German, Italian and Polish. Is that right?”

“Yes, it is” replied the violist.

“OK, we'll give you an easy question to see if you can come here to work – how do you say 'yes' in German?”

“Oui” replied the violist.

“But that's French” exclaimed the chairman of the panel.

“Ah, well ... well ... make a note of French too” replied the viola player!

Examination to become a professor at a Spanish Conservatoire:

Christian Gómez, a viola player, applied for a chamber music post at the Madrid Conservatoire. An American violinist also applied for the same job, and as both applicants gave an equal demonstration of a chamber music class in front of the adjudicating panel, and had roughly the same qualifications, they were asked to take a short written test, given to them by the principal/director of the music school. Upon completion of the test both men had only missed one of the questions. The principal went to Gómez and said:

"Thank you very much for your interest, but we've decided to give the American the job"

Gómez: "And why would you be doing that? We both got nineteen questions correct of the twenty. This being Spain, and myself being Spanish, I really think I should get the job!"

Principal: "Well, we have made our decisions not on the correct answers, but on the question you missed."

Gómez: "That's unbelievable - terrible! Unfair! And anyway, just how would one incorrect answer be somehow better than the other?"

Principal: "Simple, Mr. Gómez, the American put down on question #9, 'I don't know', and you put down ... 'Neither do I' " !!!

Entry Exam For The BBC Symphony Orchestra--Viola Rank and File Players

(this paper is especially suitable for British subjects)

The pass mark is 10% but be careful – anything over 45% and you are probably overqualified.

1. Who wrote the following:
 - a) Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6*
 - b) Fauré's *Requiem*
 - c) Wagner's *Ring Cycle*[5 pts.]

2. Tchaikovsky wrote 6 symphonies including *Symphony no. 4*. Name the other five.
[5 pts.]

3. Explain "counterpoint" or write your name on the reverse of the paper.
[10 pts.]

4. Approximately how many strings has a viola?
[1 pt.]

5. Can you explain "sonata form"? (Answer yes or no.)
[5 pts.]

6. Which of the following literary works was made the subject of a Verdi opera?
 - a) *First among Equals* -- Jeffrey Archer
 - b) *Macbeth* -- William Shakespeare
 - c) *Noddy and Big Ears* -- Enid Blyton[5 pts.]

7. Domenico Scarlatti wrote 555 harpsichord sonatas for which instrument?
[5 pts.]

8. Arrange the following movements in order of speed, starting with the slowest first.
 - a) Quickly
 - b) Slowly
 - c) Very Quickly
 - d) At a Moderate Pace[4 pts.]

9. Where would you normally expect to find the conductor during a performance?
[5 pts.]

10. Which of the following wrote incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
 - a) Des O'Connor
 - b) Mickey Mouse
 - c) Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy
 - d) Terry Wogan[5 pts.]

11. Which of the following is the odd one out?
 - a) Sir Colin Davis
 - b) Andrew Davis
 - c) Sir Peter Maxwell Davies
 - d) Desmond Lynham[5 pts.]

12. Arrange the following words into the name of a well known Puccini opera.
Bohème, La
[5 pts.]

13. Within two minutes or so, give an estimation of how long could be Chopin's *Minute Waltz*?
[5 pts.]

14. From which of the following countries did Richard Strauss come?
 - a) Venezuela
 - b) Sri Lanka
 - c) Germany
 - d) Japan[5 pts.]

15. For what town were Haydn's "*Paris*" *Symphonies* written?
[5 pts.]

16. Which is the odd one out?
 - a) Fantasy Overture *Romeo and Juliet* -- Tchaikovsky
 - b) Symphony *Romeo and Juliet* -- Berlioz
 - c) Ballet *Romeo and Juliet* -- Prokofiev
 - d) Song *Ten Green Bottles* -- anon.[5 pts.]

17. From which song do the following lines come?
"God save our gracious Queen, Long live our noble Queen."
[5 pts.]

18. Spell the following musical terms.
allegro
rallentando
crotchet
pizzicato
intermezzo
[5 pts.]

19. Tosca is a character found in which Puccini opera?
[5 pts.]

20. Arrange the following letters to form the abbreviation for a well known British broadcasting corporation.
C, B, B.
[5 pts.]

***Professionals**

What's the usual line-up of a string quartet?

A good violinist, a bad violinist, a failed violinist (viola player),
together with someone who hates violinists ...

A string quartet went to play an engagement at a new year's party – the event went pretty well, and the organizer immediately came by afterwards and offered the same date the following year. Before anyone could respond the viola player popped out:

“Would you have somewhere safe to leave my viola?” ...

Definition of a gentleman:

A man who knows how to play the viola ... but doesn't ...

VIOLA OPTIMISTS

Definition of an optimist:

A Viola player with a mobile telephone ...

Definition of a big optimist:

A Viola player with a mortgage ...

What kind of calendar does a Viola player use to keep track of his gigs?

Decade-at-a-Glance ...

ROCK VIOLA PLAYERS

Why don't you see MIDI Violas being used in rock bands anymore?

Mattel stopped making them ...

What kind of microphone works best live on a Viola with a rock band?

A Sony wireless mini-condenser with a *dead* battery ...

What's the least-used sentence in the English language?

"Isn't that the viola player's Porsche?" ...

PIZZA TIME

How does a professional viola player make his car faster?

Take the Dominos' Pizza sign off the roof ...

How do you get rid of a viola player at your front door?

Pay for the pizza ...

What does a Viola player say when he gets to his deputizing gig?

"Would you like fries with that, sir?" ...

VIOLIST AT THE DOCTOR JOKES

A violist complains to the doctor of a stomach upset. He's given the prescription and looks at it as he walks down the corridor. Then says to the receptionist:

"I don't understand it - a little stomach upset, and it says written down here 'Prohibited to play the viola in six months'. But I just can't do that - I have to work for a living". The receptionist replies:

"Ah, are you not the guy who lives across the street - look, right there on the sixth floor"

"Well yes ..."

"It's that ... the doctor has just moved to the seventh floor" ...

A violist goes to the doctor and says:

"All my body hurts - look, here (points/touches the cheek and says 'aaargh!'), here (neck, and 'aaargh' etc.), here (chest), here (top of legs), here (back) ..."

"Give me your hand one second please - ah, yes, I see it - you've simply broken your first finger!" ...

A viola player goes to the doctor and says: "I am obsessed, doctor"

"Poor chap" replies the doctor - "with what?"

"With the future, doctor". The doctor continues: "Aha, and ... when did this start?" The violist thinks, then replies: "From next week" ...

A guy walks into the doctor's office and says:

"Doc, I haven't had a bowel movement in a week!" The doctor gives him a prescription for a mild laxative and tells him:

"If it doesn't work, let me know."

A week later the guy is back: "Doc, still no movement!"

The doctor says: "Hmm, guess you need something stronger" and prescribes a more powerful laxative. Still another week later the poor guy is back:

"Doc, STILL nothing!" The doctor, worried, says:

"We'd better get some more information about you to try to figure out what's going on. What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a musician – a professional viola player"

The doctor looks up and says, "Well, that's it! Here's €10.00. Go get something to eat!" ...

A violist went to the doctor:

"Look, I've cut my finger on the left-hand".

"Let's see ... aha ... that's almost nothing" replies the doctor.

"Please, please, give it attention – I'm a viola player, and I've got an important recital in two weeks time"

"No, really, don't worry, in a few days time it'll be fine"

"Ah, you mean to say that I'll be able to play fine afterwards?"

"Yes, of course"

"Phew, what a relief – before I played lousy"

Two men are walking late at night in the street, and the conversation goes:

"What does your wife say when you arrive so late at home?"

"No, it's that I'm ... I'm a viola player"

"Ah, I understand ... "

Two violists speaking –

"OK, you call me tomorrow afternoon about the rehearsal ..."

"I can't. The mobile isn't working"

"Ah well, don't worry – I'll call you" ... !

A conversation between a violinist and a violist – the violist said:

"Here's the 100 euros for those viola strings you bought me"

"Wow, and I didn't even remember that"

"Eh? Well, why didn't you tell me that before?" ... !

*Soloists

THE AUTOGRAPH BOOK

A world-famous viola player was once handed an autograph book by a violist fan while in the greenroom after a special concert. "There's not much room on this page," he said. "What shall I write?" A good violinist friend of the performer, present throughout the performance and now standing by, offered the following helpful hint:

"Why not write your repertoire?" ...

Actually a famous violist once wrote a book about left-hand viola technique. It is remembered that he was with a friend and said:

"Have you read my viola book?"

"Yes, I bought it and read it during a weekend" he replied.

"Ah ... it was ... you" ... !

WHERE IS THE PUBLIC?

A cello student noticed an advertisement "World Famous Viola Soloist to give a recital in town". "Aha, why don't I go along, and hear her" thought the student. On ringing the box office he asked "What time does the recital start?" The answer came back: "Well, what time can you make it" ! ...

VIOLA CONCERTOS

What's the most popular recording of the William Walton viola concerto?

Music Minus One ...

What is the longest Viola joke in the world?

Harold in Italy ...

What do you call the cadenza in a Viola concerto?

Comic relief ...

How do you become a highly-valued committee member of the newly formed 'Hate-Elgar' Society?

By playing the viola version of the Elgar Cello Concerto ...

A man rang up the wife of his friend, Jack, a world famous viola soloist who practiced hour upon hour to get to where he was in the music world.

“How’s Jack?” he asked her.

“I don’t know” came the reply. ‘I haven’t spoken to him for three days’.

“Has he been away then?”

“No. I didn’t like to interrupt.”

VIOLA RECITALS

What's the last thing a violist does before walking on stage for his/her performance ?

Looks for the instrument ...

What's the latest crime wave in New York City?

Drive-by viola recitals ...

A viola player was talking to a friend:

“Did you hear my last viola recital?”

After a moment came the reply: “That’s what I hope” ...

A viola soloist found he was playing to smaller and smaller houses as the years passed by. It got so bad that one day there was not public at all – not a single person. Rather depressed, he went to the psychiatrist for advice. The psychiatrist, a well-meaning kindly man, said innocently “Have you tried writing to the Pope and ask *him* for an audience?” ...

Did you hear about the new international viola competition in Glasgow – and rather more to the point, do you know what it’s been called?

Scratch lottery ...

A cocky violist said to a pianist friend:

“I can play the Minute-Waltz in 25 seconds”

“That’s impossible – no one plays it in less than 50 seconds”

“Ah, but I’ve found a short cut!” ...

REAL-LIFE REHEARSALS AS SOLOIST WITH ORCHESTRA

A viola soloist was attending the first rehearsal of his forthcoming concerto appearance. “OK, let’s take the first movement through” called the conductor. When they got to the end the conductor gently said to the orchestral members “please have your pencils to hand – right, letter A – the viola entrance – mark ‘*meno mosso*’; next bar ‘*un poco accelerando*’, next bar between 2nd and 3rd beats put in a long pause; next bar ‘*molto rubato*’ at beginning of bar, next bar please ignore ‘*cantabile*’ marking and write in ‘*pesante*’ ”. The viola soloist, by now quite nervous, interrupted “but ... please, please maestro, I’m playing it all from memory, I’m never going to remember all this!”. “No of course, don’t worry, dear chap, you just play it as you NORMALLY do” ...

Towards the end of the first movement of a viola concerto, the viola soloist stopped – and turned the page over all in his own good time. “You can’t stop like that” said the conductor, “the performance is tonight, and you’ll just ruin the flow of the music”. “But I don’t know it from memory” replied the soloist. After arranging a beautiful young page-turner, it got to the performer. When it got to this very place, the pretty young girl turned the page – but unfortunately the soloist stopped playing just to tell her “Thank you so much, dear” ...

*** Comments by the Public / for the Public**

"Why is it that whenever I hear a piece of string music I don't like, it's always for the viola?"

"A viola recital is the kind of music that starts at six o'clock and after it has been going an hour and a half, you look at your watch and it says 6:10"

"Her playing reminds me of a cart coming downhill with the brake on"

"Viola Sonatas are better than they sound"

"God tells me how the music should sound, but you stand in the way" (to a viola player)

During the second half of a viola solo recital, a youngish man was snoring somewhat loudly in the public. The lady alongside him gave a firm 'nudge' and told him:

"Please don't snore so loudly - you're going to wake up the whole hall!" ...

An awful viola player was giving a recital for a local music club, and the performance went on and on. In fact, an hour and ten minutes passed by without arriving at an interval. A drunk man in the public picked up a bottle and threw it at him. Unfortunately, it totally missed the violist and hit the music club chairman on the head. The chairman was momentarily knocked out, but as soon as he came round he could be heard to say

"Hit me again - I can *still* hear him" ... !

Even worse, at the beginning of a recital by a Viola Octet, the local organizer briefly introduced the event, and then innocently said:

"For the benefit of the players, here are the names of the public" ! ...

A drunken man came onstage during a viola recital, and said to the performer:

"That's the most boring recital I've heard in all my life". The lady concert organizer came over from the back of the hall to the rescue, removed the drunk from the platform as fast as she could, and went back to the artist.

"I'm so sorry" she said - "We've had it before - when he's drunk he just repeats what everyone else says" ...

Comments to the public (by Violist)

"This must be an extremely wealthy town: I see that each of you bought two or three seats." (A viola soloist, playing a viola-piano recital to a half-filled house.)

At the end of a viola recital there was very lukewarm applause. But the violist, perhaps unaccustomed to any applause, quickly sparked up:

"Ah, would you like an encore?". To which, an old man sitting at the back of the hall chirped in, in a loud voice:

"Yeah, play a little bit more if you like – it's still raining outside!" ...

The audience at a viola recital were appalled when a telephone rang just off stage. Without missing more than a few notes the soloist glanced toward the wings and called, "If that's my agent, tell him *I'm working!*"

***The Orchestral World**

Note: Due to the fact that in the orchestral world, more than in any other situation, serious musicians have to 'bear' and 'put up with' viola players, perhaps in this section one can find the most inventive and amusing kaleidoscope of all the Viola tales offered in this Grand Encyclopedia ...

What's the difference between the first and last desk of a viola section? (two answers)

1. Not usually more than a couple of beats ...
2. Roughly half a tone ...

Why do symphony orchestras use so many Violas?

To make the bottom end of the office staff feel superior ...

How do get a Viola section to play softer?

Give them the music ...

How do you get a viola section to play a ritenuto?

Ask them to play in 4/4 at a steady 120 bpm.

Why are orchestral concert intermissions only 15 or 20 minutes long? (two answers)

1. So the violists won't forget where the stage is ...
2. So the violists don't need to be retrained ...

How do you get a violist in the orchestra to play tremolo ?

Mark the passage 'solo' ...

How do you get a violist in the orchestra to play a flying staccato ?

Find a whole note or half-note/breve or semi-breve and then mark it: "up bow, solo" ...

PROFESSIONAL COMPOSERS/ORCHESTRATORS ETC.

Why don't professional orchestrators indicate *Scordatura* in Viola parts?
The instrument is already generally played pretty much out-of-tune
... giving this indication would only confuse the player ...

So,

If there is almost hardly ever no 'scordatura' on the viola, how then do you get a viola player to tune his top string to G#?

Loosen a battery on his electronic metronome/tuner when he's not looking ...

How does a composer create an orchestral glissando effect?

Write a 16th note run (semi-quavers) for the Violas.

What is the most badly guessed at sign written by copyists to violists, probably dating from being 'erroneously' taught in conservatoire days?

V.S. ... Violas Stop to turn the page!

What are the two most common dynamic markings used in the twenty-first century by composers for difficult viola parts?

PP & PDP (Pianissimo & Please Don't Play)

In today's world, what is a sure sign of a composer's madness?

Writing a large-scale, four movement Viola Octet! ...

What does a viola section sound like under water?

A very good idea! ...

A viola player arrived a few minutes late for the first rehearsal of the local choral society's annual performance of Handel's Messiah.

He picked up his instrument and bow, and turned his attention to the conductor.

The conductor asked, "Would you like a moment to tune?"

The viola player replied with some surprise, "Why? Isn't it the same as last year?"

The conductor said to a late viola player at a rehearsal "Thompson, you're late. You should have been here at nine.thirty."

Thompson: "Why maestro? What happened?" ...

REAL COMPOSERS

Why didn't Mozart write any awful notes for the viola to play in his Musical Joke?

It really wasn't necessary for him to write out those notes ...

Why did Arnold Schönberg use violas in his Verklärte Nacht?

It was the best he could do, because he hadn't invented atonal music yet ...

Why is it envisaged that the 'Arpeggione' instrument is going to make a comeback in the 21st century?

So that viola players will be able to play the Schubert sonata with frets ... and thus in tune ... !

Conductor: "Start at the third measure/third bar"

Principal violist: "Please ... Hold on! We don't have bar numbers" ...

Did you hear about the sub-principal violist who played in tune?

No, neither did I ...

ORCHESTRAL SOLO PASSAGES

Why is a viola solo like a bomb?

Because by the time you hear it, it's *already* too late to do anything about it ...

Why is an orchestral viola solo like premature ejaculation?

Because you know it's coming, it's coming, it's coming, but there's nothing you can do about it ...

During a concert, the first viola makes a hash of a viola solo and someone in the public cries

"Principal viola ... animal!"

The conductor looks over his shoulder but continues conducting. After a while another solo is heard, and the violist makes a equal mess of it. Once again the musicians heard from someone in the public: "Principal viola ... animal!" This time the conductor is rather annoyed, and looks menacingly at the corner of the public where he heard this comment. But he continued his work. Finally an even more difficult viola solo came round, and unfortunately it was a complete disaster ... Yet again, and by the same voice, one could hear: "Principal viola ... animal!" This time the conductor could bear his anger no longer. Stopping the orchestra in mid-passage, he stood up the violist in question, turned to the public and exclaimed - "I want to know, WHO, from the anonymous multitudes of the hall, has dared call 'Principal Viola' to this animal" !!!

What's the difference between a principal viola and a chimpanzee?

It's scientifically proved that chimpanzees are capable of communicating with humans ...

Why can't you hear the viola section on a symphony orchestra digital recording?

Recording technology has reached such an advanced level of development that all extraneous noise is eliminated ...

TUTTI / RANK-AMD-FILE VIOLAS

What do you do with a dead violist?

Just move him back a desk ...

What's the difference between a class of deaf students and a symphony viola section?

The violists at least have a pension plan ...

What is the definition of a cluster chord?

A viola section playing on the C string ...

What's the similarity between the *Beatles* and the viola section of the *Royal Philharmonic Orchestra*?

Neither has played together since 1970 ...

One day in an orchestral rehearsal, the 3rd violist – in good spirits – made a stupid joke. The principal viola, and it's not known whether for jealousy or for pure responsibility, stood up and looked at him hard in the face, and said "John, that's enough; the stupid things here are ONLY said by me, understood?"

...

In a symphony orchestra rehearsal the principal conductor looked at a difficult passage, and decided to hear the viola section alone. The conductor, a man with great aural perception, then said "I'm sorry, you, yes you, the 7th viola, that F is too sharp". The violist responded:

"But yesterday, I played it more or less the same, and it was alright!" ...

Did you hear about the principal violist who bragged that he could play demi-semi-quavers/32nd notes?

The rest of the orchestra didn't believe him, so he eventually proved the point by playing *one*.

After his retirement the violist arrived home carrying his viola case. His wife saw the case and asked "What's that?" (Especially in Germany it is a standing joke that some players leave their instruments in their lockers, removing them only for rehearsals and performances.)

Did you hear about the violist who played so out of tune even the rest of the viola section could tell? (No, just kidding. That is very, very unlikely to happen) ...

A conductor gave out orders:

"We're going to take it from seven bars before letter A".

"But we haven't got rehearsal letters in the score" said the concert master/leader.

"Oh dear, how do we find it then?" replied the conductor.

"It's easy", said the principal viola - "it's exactly seven bars after where we are going to start from" ...

How do orchestral viola players traditionally greet each other, after a time goes by without them meeting up?

"Hi. I played that last year" ...

What do you call ten viola players at the bottom of the ocean?

- A good start ...

A female viola player was walking back-stage in large boots, when an annoyed sound technician says "I suppose you don't know THE RULES OF MOVEMENT in recordings?"

"Well, no, but if you hum the first line maybe I could pick it up by ear" she replied!

(Here is David Johnstone's favourite viola joke!)

An orchestra was about to rehearse the 'Eroica' Symphony of Beethoven with its principal guest conductor. He duly put his arms up, and unleashed those intense initial chords. However after some twenty bars he stopped and exclaimed:

"Violas, what's up, let's start again"

He resumed once more, but had to stop in the third bar. Rather annoyed he turned to the principal viola and asked:

"Please, why on earth are you not playing?"

"We have six hundred and sixty-six bars rest, maestro" replied the violist.

"That's utterly impossible - show me your part" stormed the conductor.

"Look - here maestro" pointed the principal.

"You IDIOTS" shouted the conductor "don't you know that it's written in Eb Major!" ...

LOSING WORK

An orchestral manager was just a little irate that a sub-principal violist was still turning up for work past his contract expiry. He said:

"Jimmy, have you received my letter?"

"What, that one telling me something about my services were no longer needed?" replied the violist.

"Yes, that" the manager continued

"Err, no, I haven't received it yet" ... !

A sub-principal viola was noting that his form was deserting him, and decided to give it a go working in the orchestral management office. At work, on his first day in the office, the conductor said:

"I've really got my eye on programming 'Carmina Burana' at the main Easter concert this year". To which the (ex) viola player said:

"Well, I'd like to show good faith. I'll certainly offer to go to the airport to pick her up" ... !

(especially funny in Spanish orchestras ...)

Two violists on the same desk at the start of an orchestral rehearsal:

"Hello, Juan, how you've changed! Before you were short and you've grown, and you used to be a bit fat and now you're slim-ish"

"But I'm not Juan, I'm Charles!" replied the colleague.

"Wow, and you've even changed your name!" ... !

A conductor to a viola section during a rehearsal:

"We cannot expect you to be with us all the time, but perhaps you could be good enough to keep in touch now and again"

* The viola, and other instruments

How do you keep your violin from getting stolen?

Put it in a viola case.

What's the difference between a violin and a viola? (*three answers*)

- 1) The viola burns longer (especially because it's generally inside the case).
- 2) The viola holds more beer.
- 3) Actually they are exactly the same - but of course the viola does look bigger. But it is only an optical illusion! That is because the violist's head is smaller !!! ...

Did you hear about the time the double bassist who, after parking, accidentally locked his keys in the car?

It took two hours to get the viola player out ...

Why do people tremble with fear when someone comes into a bank carrying a violin case?

They think he's carrying a machine gun and might be about to use it.

So why do people tremble even more with fear when someone comes into a bank carrying a viola case?

They think he's carrying a viola and might be about to use it ...

NASTY FALLS

When a violist and violinist are pushed simultaneously from a 30-story building, which one hits the pavement first?

The violinist, because half-way down the viola player says "Err ... where are we now?"

Who would you push first from a 30-story building - a violist or a conductor?

It doesn't really matter which one, as long as *both* of them are indeed pushed ...

If you a violist and a soprano fall off a cliff, which one would hit the ground first?

Oh really, who cares? ...

If a violist and a flautist fall off a cliff; who hits the ground first?

The violist *should* have hit the ground first, but he *missed* the leap ...

What instrument do violists envy most?

The harp. You only ever have to play pizzicato on open strings ...

How can a professional violinist best keep his violin from getting stolen?

Keep it in a viola case ...

Two woodwind-playing friends were out walking, and they passed a cemetery. One looked down at a gravestone and remarked "Look here, here it says - Here rests a great violist, an incredible musician - "

The other friend replied: "Wow, they've buried two in the very same grave then" ...

IF YOU WANT TO CONSIDER GOING FROM THE VIOLIN TO VIOLA

Why do some Violin players double on Viola?

So they can get less work, and more free time as they grow older ...

How can you make a Violin sound more like a Viola? (two answers)

1. Play only on the G string and fake a lot of notes ...
2. Sit in the back row and just pretend to play ...

Why do many violinists think they can play viola?

They all know violists who think they can play the viola ...

A violist and a percussionist were walking in a park. The percussionist saw a dead crow and said to the violist:

"Look, there's a dead crow."

The violist looked up, hands on eye-brows, and exclaimed:

"Where?" ...

What's the difference between a heavy rock guitarist and a violist?

The heavy rocker sustained brain damage *after* taking up the Instrument ...

How do you suitably transcribe a violin piece for viola?

An octave lower, but do be *sure* to divide the metronome marking by 2 ...

A violist and a 'cellist were standing on a sinking ship. "Help!" cried the 'cellist, "I can't swim!" "Don't worry," said the violist, "just fake it!" ...

VIOLA PLAYERS AND CONDUCTORS

A conductor and a viola player are standing in the middle of the road. Which one do you run over first, and why?

The conductor - of course. It's business before pleasure ...

A violist came home and found his house totally burned to the ground. When he asked what happened, the police chief told him "Well, apparently the conductor of your orchestra came to your house, and ..." . The violist's eyes lit up at once, and he interrupted excitedly, "The conductor? Actually came to my house?"

At a rehearsal, the conductor stops and shouts to the double bass section: "You are way out of tune. Check it, please!"

The first bassist pulls gently at all his strings, says, "Our tuning is correct: all the strings are equally tight." But then the principal viola turns around to the conductor and shouts:

"They're bloody idiots! It's not the tension. The pegs have to be parallel!" ...

Maestro (to arrogant viola principal): "Give me the F in tune!"

Violist (to Maestro): "Please can we hear the F-in' tune too?" ...

In the orchestra at the end of the season, four musicians are picked at random to play a field game ... so ... out of the lucky dip with the straws came the concert-master (leader), a second violinist, a virtuoso violist, and a bass player, who are placed individually at the four corners of a football field. At the signal, someone drops a 100 euro note in the middle of the field and they are run to see who grabs it first. Who gets it?

Well, the answer is the second violinist; in fact there was little or no competition!

Why? ... Because:

No concert-master (leader) is going anywhere for only 100 €

The bass player hasn't figured out what it's all about.

And there's no such thing as a *virtuoso violist* ! ...

A viola player, fed up with the jokes of his instrument, decides to change instrument. After thinking about it during several weeks, he decides that it's going to be the accordion for him. He goes to the local music shop and says to the shop assistant:

"I would like to see your accordions please". The assistant points to a shelving area and says

"There sir, all our accordions are there". After looking a while, the violist says

"I really like that big red one in the corner".

"But you are a viola player, aren't you" asks the shop assistant.

"Well, yes, how did you guess that?" says the surprised viola player.

"Because that big red accordion ... is ... the radiator" ... !

***Advertisements / Announcements etc.**

CLASSIFIED ADS in the magazine "The violist"

FOR SALE: Viola, German, 19th century, 405mm. Excellent condition, lovely varnish. Recently tuned. pegsahrstuck@bogus.com

ESTABLISHED STRING QUARTET looking for two Violinists and a 'Cellist. kentReedwell@bogus.com

VIOLIST AVAILABLE to sub in symphony or small ensemble. Please give me full 2 days warning before date so I can rent an instrument. AnitaLessin@bogus.com

THEY LAUGHED when I said anyone can have perfect pitch. I can teach you in just 3 weeks. My home study course includes CD, manual and even DVD if you order promptly. €49.95 + p/p. Results guaranteed. (Except Viola players) SkipTowne@bogus.com

FOR SALE: Viola, Excellent condition. Semi-new; not used beyond the third position. virtuosoviola@bogus.com

CLAMSBURGH SYMPHONY announces a section Viola vacancy. 8 week season. Off-season employment placement arrangement with MacDonalds. Auditions by appointment only. Candidates will be expected to hold the Viola from memory. Contact personnel mgr. at HymanCharge@bogus.com

***YOU'VE HEARD of Tai Bo ... now try,
VIOLA BOW. America's latest fitness craze.
For information,
<http://www.lakofsky.com/violabow>***

***FOR SALE – A nice shapely wooden
case (and as a free gift, a Viola thrown in too.
For more information,
<http://www.ripov.com>***

B) Stories - Tales

The Bookshop

A violist walked into the main bookshop of his town, and asked the girl at the cash-desk:

"I'm looking for a book called 'The Virtuoso Viola'".

"Oh, I don't think we have that" she replied.

"Please, this book is very important to me – I'm a viola player".

"Oh very well then – try walking down this corridor, turn left at the corner, then half-way along you have to go down some stairs. It might just be there – in the 'Science Fiction section' ... !

The Jacket flap

A violinist noticed at the beginning of each rehearsal, the oldest violist of the section (poor chap) would look at the inside flap of his jacket before starting, and also as he sat down to resume the rehearsal after the break. This continued for several months, and the violinist became quite curious about it. One day, during hot weather, the violist took off his jacket and went outside during the break. The violinist waited until almost everyone was off the platform, looked around, and sneaked over to the jacket. He pulled back the flap and saw a little note pinned on the inside. It read: "viola left hand, bow right."

Shop visit

A viola player decides that he's had enough of being a viola player--unappreciated, all those silly jokes. So he decides to change instruments.

He goes into a shop, and says, "I want to buy a violin."

The man behind the counter looks at him for a moment, and then says, "You must be a viola player, aren't you?"

The viola player is astonished, and says, "Well, yes, I am actually. But how on earth did you know?"

"Well, sir, this is a shoe shop."

I'm the Boss

The principal violist was complaining in the artistic committee meeting the other day that he wasn't getting any respect. The next day, he brought a small sign that read:

"I'm the Boss!"

He then taped it to his viola case.

Later that day when he returned from lunch, he found that someone had taped a note to the sign that said:

"Your wife called, she wants her sign back!"

The stuffed rat

A conductor went into a novelty shop and saw an item that caught his fancy almost immediately. It was a stuffed rat. He couldn't take his eyes off it, and finally asked how much it cost. The answer was "€79.95, but if you buy it, be careful, for you can't return it for any reason whatsoever". The man thought this was a bit odd, but he was really taken by the stuffed rat so he bought it.

Right outside the front door he saw a live rat approaching, but paid no attention. However, as he headed down the street with the stuffed rat, several live rats started following him. He thought this was really odd, but he just kept walking. Within a few blocks, he had a huge pack of rats behind him. He then became a little scared. When he got to the river, he threw the stuffed rat into the river, and all the live rats jumped into the river and drowned.

The man returned to the shop. As soon as he walked in, the owner said "I told you that you couldn't return the stuffed rat!"

The man said "No! I don't want to return it! I was wondering if you had any stuffed violists."

The 'Big' Pupil

One day Timmy came home from school very excited:

"Mommy, Mommy, Guess what? Today in English I got all the way to the end of the Lord Alfred Tennyson poem, but everyone else got messed up long before the end"

His mother said, "Very good, dear. That's because you're a violist."

The next day, Timmy was even more excited:

"Mommy, Mommy, guess what! Today in maths I was to only one in class to be able to do long division correctly"

"Very good, dear," his mother replied. "That's because you're a violist."

On the third day, Timmy was beside himself:

"Mommy, Mommy, today we measured ourselves and I'm easily the tallest one in my class! Is that because I'm a violist?"

"No dear," she said. "That's because you're 26 years old" ...

Telephone Conversation

A telephone conversation between two viola players ...

"Hello is that Milan 22 - 22 - 22" (*said as twenty-two, twenty-two, twenty-two*).

"Well no, this is Milan 2 - 2 - 2 - 2 - 2 - 2"

"Oh, I'm so sorry to bother you at this time of the night" (3.00 a.m.)

"Don't worry about it, the telephone was ringing in any case" ...

The Pianist Trill

A viola player went to a piano recital. After the performance he went up to the pianist and said, "How well you play. You know, I particularly liked that piece you played last--the one that started with the trill."

The pianist said, "Huh? I don't remember playing any pieces that started with trills." The viola player said, "You know--[he hums the opening bars of Für Elise.]"

The Clever Dog

In a pub:-

"Well I never! What do I see - a dog playing the viola!"

"Yes, but I'd have much preferred if he had studied medicine, you know ..." ...!

The Timid Lovers

Once upon a time there were two young violists, who were boyfriend and girlfriend during quite some time. She picked up courage and said:

"Don't you agree it's about time we got married?"

"Well yes" he said "but who would want us?" ... !

Schools concert

In a schools concert, the conductor announced that if the children were to behave very well, and were exceptionally careful, they might come on to the stage during the interval and look at - or even try - some of the instruments. All well so far, but at the start of the second half the principal viola was very nervous and fidgety. "What's up?" whispered the conductor.

"It's those damned children on the stage during the intermission".

"Well?... don't you think you're overreacting?" continued the conductor.

"I'm not overreacting! It's that one of them came up to have a look at my viola - I was approaching the stage again - and this brat untuned one of my strings by moving a peg - but the little bugger won't tell me which one" ...

Eric Coates

Not only a joke ... this was actually a true story:

Radio presenter, Tim Pollard, on BBC Radio Jersey, when introducing a piece of music by the well-known British composer Eric Coates was heard to have said:

"All Eric Coates ever wanted to do was to write music to entertain. But for a while he was a professional viola player" ...

A Perfect Student ?

A guy in his late 30's decides that he wants violin lessons, and approaches a teacher. The teacher says:

"at your age I think you'd be better off on viola - what do you say?" The guy says "OK", goes and gets a viola, and comes for a lesson. The teacher teaches him the open strings and the 1st finger and says:

"you're catching on very well! Next time I'll teach you the 2nd finger". And the next time he does indeed teach him the 2nd finger and says:

"very good, no problems! Next time I'll teach you the 3rd finger". And so at the 3rd lesson he teaches him the 3rd finger and says:

"fine - next time I'll teach you the 4th finger...". And so at the 4th lesson he duly teaches him where the 4th finger goes.

But the guy doesn't show up for his 5th lesson, nor the 6th, nor the 7th. In fact, three months go past without a sight of him. Finally he turns up one day, and the teacher, so concerned about his promising new pupil, asks:

"what's on earth's happened to you - are you OK?" The guy says:

"Oh yes. Great! It's just that I've been so inundated with gigs, that sorry - I don't have time for any more lessons!" ...

High-profile Orchestral Tour

An American orchestra had just arrived in Europe for a two-week tour. One hour before the first concert, the conductor suddenly became very ill and was unable to conduct, and the orchestra had no option than to find a substitute. The orchestra manager asked whether someone in the orchestra could step in and conduct, given its importance of this night, but it seems that the only person who was willing to try was the last chair violist.

The manager was understandably very, very nervous about this. "We can't audition you," he said.

"No problem," replied the violist.

"There's absolutely no time to rehearse. You'll have to do the concert cold."

"I know. Don't worry, it'll be all right."

The violist conducted the concert to a full house, and it was a smashing success. Since the conductor remained ill for the duration of the tour, the violist conducted all of the concerts, getting rave reviews and standing ovations at each one.

After the tour, and with the orchestra back on American soil, the conductor had completely recovered. At the next rehearsal, there he was again on the podium, and the violist took his place at the back of the viola section. As he sat down, his stand partner asked him *"Where on earth have you been for the last two weeks?"* ...

The Genie – Part I

Once there was a violist playing in the Winnipeg Symphony. He wasn't that wonderful a player, so he sat at the very back of the section. One day he was cleaning out his attic and discovered an old lamp. He gave it a rub and out popped a genie.

"For letting me out of my lamp I'll grant you three wishes! Anything you want!" he said. The violist thought for a moment and replied, "Make me a far better musician than I am now."

The genie told him that this would be done. He was to go to sleep, and in the morning he would be a much better musician. In just a week's time the principal viola resigned, and he became the automatic choice for the new principal violist of the Winnipeg Symphony. Well, this was just great, he thought! He was happy for several years in his new position. But he gradually came to feel that he could do even better in life. He rubbed the lamp again, and out popped the genie.

"You have two more wishes!" he said.

"I want you to make me an even more competent musician than I am now!"

Once again, the genie told him to go to bed, and when he woke up it would be so. When the violist awoke, he received the invitation to be the principal violist of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Well, the violist thought this was incredible, and he spent fifteen happy years there, gaining a reputation second-to-none.

However, he one day remembered that he had a final wish. He rubbed on the lamp again, and once more out came the genie.

"This is your last wish." the genie said.

"I want you to make me yet a better musician still!"

Yet again, he was told to go to sleep. The next morning, he woke up to find himself back in the Winnipeg orchestra, sitting in the last desk of the second violin section! ...

The Genie – Part II

A viola player was on the beach when a bottle washed up. On taking the top off, out sprung a genie.

"I'm only a young genie" he said " but I can offer you a wish".

"Fantastic" said the violist – "well, I'm really a pacifist, and these problems in the Middle East do rather upset me. Rather than ask any personal favour, I'd like to suggest that you resolve the Middle Eastern problem".

"Good heavens, that's surely well outside my capacity at the moment. Please give me something else to do".

"Aha, well ... in that case, I'd really like you to fix the such bad intonation problems we have in the viola section of my orchestra. I'd be so happy if we could all play in tune".

The genie looked despaired, covering his hands on his head, and answered:

"In that case ... please go and fetch me an up-to-date map of the Middle East" ! ...

Brain Transplants

Once upon a time there was a famous hospital where they made brain transplantations. A client asked about the prices.

The doctor said: "Well, we have a normal common-place brains starting at about €15,000. This Ph.D. brain costs €30,000... and this brain belonged to a NASA top scientist and costs a little in excess of €45,000. And ...oh yes, here we a violist's brain as well. It costs over €95,000."

The client asked, "What? So much! How's that possible?"

The doctor replied, "You see, it's totally unused."

Great Health Hazards

The Association of Iberian orchestras was rather worried about the behavior of its playing personal – you know, evening concerts followed by late-night drinking, parties etc. and they saw it as too closely linked to the 'entertainments' world. So they set up various activities to help inform the musicians of the perils of their lifestyle. One of these was an AIDS conference held in Madrid. Each orchestra was to send a responsible member, but it seems that the Barcelona orchestra could not find any employee interested in going, less a third desk viola player. So he was duly 'chosen'.

Upon the return to the orchestra the members eagerly asked him:

"Well, how was it?"

"Oh, just great!"

"What did you learn?"

"Lots of things"

"Come on, give us an example"

"OK, see this" (stretching down to pick up a syringe) ... *"it's infected with AIDS. Now ... just look at this"* – he proceeded to take the needle and stab it into his arm several times. There was absolute aghast from the other players, indeed despairing shouts. But he turned gently to them and said:

"Don't worry – you see I've already put a condom on!" ...

Seriously though, do you know that viola players can't catch AIDS?

No, even the virus is minimally proud ...

C) Viola - Miscellaneous

Viola Performance evaluation translations ... an A - Z

Preparatory Note: *this writing should be considered absolutely vital for all orchestral offices, conductors, audition panels etc.*

A keen analyst: Thoroughly confused in the section.

Accepts new job assignments willingly: Never finishes to learn a piece.

Active socially: Drinks heavily.

Alert to company developments: A section gossip.

Approaches difficult problems with logic: Finds a violinist to do the job.

Average: Not too bright.

Bridge builder: Likes to compromise, no playing outside range of *mp* to *mf*.

Character above reproach: Still one step ahead of the law, able to do outside gigs.

Charismatic: No interest in any opinion but his own.

Competent: Is still able to get work done even if viola section leader helps.

Conscientious and careful: Scared.

Consults with co-workers often: Indecisive, confused, and clueless; always asks
the bar numbers, what position to play in etc.

Consults with supervisor often: Very annoying, always asking viola section leader

Delegates responsibility effectively: Passes the buck well, puts blame on the fifth
desk (unfortunately the Philharmonic orchestra only has 8 violas!).

Demonstrates qualities of leadership: Has a loud voice.

Displays excellent intuitive judgement: Knows when to disappear, and fake it!

Displays great dexterity and agility: Dodges and evades the conductor well.

Enjoys job: Needs more to do than a mere viola part.

Excels in sustaining concentration but avoids confrontations: Ignores everyone,
in his/her little world.

Excels in the effective application of skills: Makes a good cup of coffee.

Exceptionally well qualified: Has committed no major blunders on stage to date.

Expresses self well: Can string two sentences together, or play two lines of music
with only minimal mistakes.

Gets along extremely well with superiors and subordinates alike: A coward.

Happy: Paid too much.

Hard worker: Usually does it the hard way, frequently avoids playing higher than 3rd position; never uses the fourth finger, and rarely the third!

Identifies major management problems: Complains a lot about other string players.

Indifferent to instruction: Knows more than his section leader.

Inspires the cooperation of others: Gets everyone else to do the work.

Is unusually loyal: Wanted by no-one else.

Is well informed: Knows all office gossip and where all the skeletons are kept.

Judgement is usually sound: Lucky.

Keen sense of humour: Knows lots of viola jokes, and takes them in good part!

Keeps informed on business issues: Subscribes to Playboy and National Enquirer.

Listens well: Has no ideas of his own.

Maintains a high degree of participation: Comes to rehearsal on time.

Maintains professional attitude: A snob; maintains he can actually play the viola!

Meticulous in attention to detail: Puts fingering on every note, including the open strings.

Mover and shaker: Favours sitting where he/she thinks without regard to other opinions on his/her ability.

Not a front desk person: Did not go to college.

Of great value to the organization: Turns in work on time, and can actually tune the viola.

Uses all available resources: Takes office supplies (pencils, rubbers, etc) home for personal use.

Quick thinking: Offers plausible excuses for errors.

Requires work-value attitudinal readjustment: Lazy and hard-headed, frequently sitting with body resting on back of chair.

Should go far: Please find him/her another job - whatever!.

Slightly below average: Stupid.

Spends extra hours on the viola: Miserable home life.

Stern disciplinarian: A real jerk.

Straightforward: Blunt, and absolutely insensitive to 'subito p'.

Strong adherence to principles: Stubborn, never tries the requests of the conductors such as using a fast vibrato in an intense passage, or trying out a passage 'non-divisi'.

Tactful in dealing with concert master (leader): Knows when to keep mouth shut.

Takes advantage of every opportunity to progress: Regularly buys drinks for the principal cello.

Takes pride in work: Conceited.

Unlimited potential: Unfortunately will stick with us until retirement.

Uses resources well: Delegates everything to the last desk of violas (god help us)

Uses time effectively: Clock watcher.

Very creative: Finds 22 reasons to do anything except to play correctly the real original written notes.

Visionary: Cannot handle a solo sonata although he/she tries, and never tackles a concerto although dreams of it, or in fact to be truthful any other project (however easy) that lasts less than a week.

Well organized: Does too much faking of semi-quavers (16th notes), but looks good doing it!

Will go far: Relative of someone in the orchestral office.

Willing to take calculated risks: Doesn't mind attempting to play even as fast as the second violins!

Zealous attitude: Opinionated about the double bass section (the only other section which our violist might minimally be able to challenge for virtuosity).

Viola Job forms – real ghastly errors

"Exposure to German for two years, but many words are not appropriate for business."

"Proven ability to track down and correct musical errors."

"Strengths: Ability to meet deadlines while maintaining composure."

"My goal is to be a meteorologist. But since I possess no training in meteorology, I suppose I should try viola."

"Accomplishments: Oversight of entire section."

"Extensive background in teaching. I can also stand on my head!"

Cover letter: "Thank you for your consideration of my viola application. Hope to hear from you shortly!"

"Education: Courses in arts, courses in pedagogy, courses in orchestral playing."

"Instrumental in ruining entire operation for a Midwest chamber orchestra."

"Personal: Married, 1992 Chevrolet."

"I have an excellent track record, although I am not a horse."

Actual Answers From Viola Students in Music Theory Exams

The principal singer of nineteenth century opera was called pre-Madonna.

Gregorian chant has no music, just singers singing the same lines.

Sherbet composed the Unfinished Symphony.

All female parts were sung by castrati. We don't know exactly what they sounded like because there are no known descendants.

Young scholars have expressed their rapture for the Bronze Lullaby, the Taco Bell Cannon, Beethoven's Erotica, Tchaikovsky Cracknutter Suite, and Gershwin's Rap City in Blue.

Music sung by two people at the same time is called a duel; if they sing without music it is called Acapulco.

A virtuoso is a musician with real high morals.

Contralto is a low sort of music that only ladies sing.

Probably the most marvelous fugue was the one between the Hatfields and the McCoys.

A harp is a nude piano.

Refrain means don't do it. A refrain in music is the part you'd better not try to sing.

I know what a sextet is but I'd rather not say.

My favorite composer was Opus. Agnus Dei was a woman composer famous for her church music.

Johann Sebastian Bach wrote a great many musical compositions and had a large number of children. In between he practiced on an old spinster which he kept up in his attic.

Rock Monanoff was a famous post-romantic composer of piano concerti.

Famous Viola players !

Kenny Kudditt

Willie Showup

Ima Dudd

Howard Ino

Manny Mustakes

Skip DeRunz

Chaim Lostalott

Sinbad Tayste

Peg Stuck

Hyman Trubble

Buster Bridge

Les Saithnotz

Moe Clinkers

Other Viola Players (not necessarily famous)

Someone who thinks there're a good violist ... *Jo King*

the bodyguard (post-concert) of a famous violist ... *Barry Cade*

Two violists called Robert Mee and Susan Frame collected up a notable collection of viola instruments from dubious sources – they then married. They are now ... *Rob Mee and Sue Mee*

And - who finally got Robert's violas then? *Simon Swindells*

Someone hired to kill violists ... *Anna Sasin*

An ex-virtuoso who went hysteric? ... *Priti Manek*

And a violist who is just a little stupid? *Andrew Burke* (generally known as *A. Burke*).

A viola instrument maker ... *Tim Burr*

He who also carries 2 violas to the rehearsal? ... *Justin Case*

A viola student who doesn't seem to progress ... *Stan Still*

The British 3rd-Prizewinner in the recent Milan International Viola competition ... *Terry Bull*

Someone of vital importance to violists (since hardly any of them memorize the music) ... *Paige Turner*

Seasonal work:

Only plays in December ... *Mary Christmas*

Only plays March-April time ... *Esther Munday*

The violist with 30 years practise behind him? *Anna Prentice*

An athletic violist: *Jim Hall*

A violist about to end his life by jumping ...
Sidney Harbour-Bridge

A happy violist who invites people to start up a chant:
Mary Lee (mari-lee, mari-ly, merrily, merrily, merrily ...)

MYSTERIOUS ANAGRAMS HIDDEN IN THE NAMES OF
FAMOUS COMPOSERS

Heitor Villa- Lobos

contains the hidden message

Viola thrills oboe

and also

He boos viola trill

~~~~~

**Claudio Monteverdi**

*contains the hidden message*

**Viola introduced me.**

~~~~~

Nicolai Rimsky- Korsakov

contains the hidden message

OK man, rock viola is risky!

~~~~~

**Peter Illyich Tchaikovsky**

*contains the hidden message*

**Check viola key: triply shit!**

~~~~~

Ludwig Van Beethoven

contains the hidden message

Viola? Venn wet bed ... Ugh!

~~~~~

**Giovanni Gabrieli**

*contains the hidden message*

**Being a Viola, I grin!**

# THE COMPLETE ENGLISH MUSICAL DICTIONARY FOR THE VIOLA

## Definitions:

- **A 440:** the highway that runs around Nashville.
- **accidentals:** as applied to the viola - wrong notes.
- **ad libitum:** a premiere of a new viola piece.
- **agnus dei:** a famous female church composer.
- **altos:** Alistair's toes - not to be confused with "Tom's toes" or "Dori-toes".
- **arpeggio:** The result of an overshoot of note intervals when a viola student tries to play a scale.
- **audition:** the act of putting oneself under extreme duress to satisfy the sadistic intentions of someone who has already made up his mind.
- **augmented fifth:** a 36-ounce bottle.
- **bar line:** a gathering of people, usually among which may be found a viola or two.
- **bass clef:** where you land up if you fall off the alto clef.
- **bassoon:** a double-bassist with a bad case of gas.
- **beat:** what viola students do to each other with their instruments. The down beat is performed more on top of the head, while the up beat is struck under the chin.
- **big band:** when the bar pays enough to bring two banjo players, which obviously help to cover up the viola player's meagre efforts.
- **bossa nova:** the car your principal oboe of your orchestra drives.
- **broken consort:** when the viola player in the ensemble has to leave to go to the bathroom.
- **cadence:** when everybody hopes you're going to stop, but a viola carries on.
- **cadenza:** that ugly thing your wife always vacuums when the principal conductor comes to the house.
- **cantus firmus:** the part a violist gets when he can still play only four notes.
- **cello:** the proper way for a dreaming violist to answer the phone.
- **chromatic scale:** an instrument for weighing that indicates half-pounds.
- **clef:** something to jump from before a viola solo.
- **conductor:** a musician who is adept at following many people at the same time, even a viola section.
- **crescendo:** a reminder to the violist that he has been playing too loudly.
- **crotchet:** like knitting, but faster. .
- **cut time:**
  1. parole.
  2. when everyone else is playing twice as fast as the viola section.
- **detaché:** an indication that the trombones are to play with their slides removed.
- **diatonic:** low-calorie Schweppes for violists.

- **diminished fifth:** an empty bottle of Jack Daniels.
- **French horn:** your wife says you smell like a cheap one when you come in at 4 a.m.
- **glissando:** a technique adopted by viola players for difficult runs.
- **half step:** the pace used by a viola player when carrying his instrument.
- **interval:** how long it takes a viola player to find the right note. There are three basic kinds:
  1. Major interval: a very long time.
  2. Minor interval: a few bars.
  3. Inverted interval: when you have to go back a bar and try again.
- **intonation:** singing through one's nose. Considered highly desirable in the Middle Ages, and recommended for viola players, and thereby 'rest' their instrument for a while.
- **isorhythmic motet:** when half of the viola section got given a different edition from the other half.
- **lamentoso:** viola solo so bad that it should be accompanied with handkerchiefs.
- **major scale:** what you say after chasing wild game up a mountain: "Damn! That was a major scale!"
- **metronome:** a city-dwelling dwarf.
- **middle C:** the only fruit drink violists can afford when work is 'normal'.
- **minor third:** your approximate age and grade at the completion of formal schooling.
- **music:** a complex organizations of sounds that is set down by the composer, incorrectly interpreted by the conductor, who is ignored by the viola players of the orchestra (amongst others!), the result of which is surprisingly clapped by the audience.
- **oboe:** an ill wind that nobody blows good.
- **order of sharps:** what a viola player gets at the bar.
- **passing tone:** a piece of paper frequently seen being handed over by back desk violists, trying to flirt with a nearby wind player.
- **preparatory beat:** a threat made to the viola section in especial *i.e.*, play, or else....
- **perfect fifth:** 1) a full bottle of Jack Daniels. 2) the smooth coating on a freshly paved road.
- **pianissimo:** "refill this beer bottle".
- **plague:** a collective noun, as in "a plague of conductors"
- **portamento:** fanciful journey to a foreign country a violist has always wanted to experience, but doesn't know how to get there.
- **quarter tone:** a most useful note, more widely played by means of intuition by viola players than by any other instrument.
- **quaver:** with what you begin the fourth year viola class.
- **recitative:** a disease that surely Monteverdi had.
- **relative major:** an uncle in the Marine Corps.
- **relative minor:** a girlfriend.

- **repeat:** what a violist does until he is finally expelled.
- **risoluto:** indicates to orchestras that they are to stubbornly maintain the correct tempo no matter what the conductor tries to do.
- **ritard:** there's one in every family, but probably various in a violist's family.
- **ritornello:** a Verdi opera. .
- **senza sordino:** a term used to remind the viola player that he forgot to put his mute on a few measures/bars back.
- **stops:** something Bach didn't have on his organ, but what comes so naturally to a present-day violist.
- **string quartet:** a good violinist, a bad violinist, an ex-violinist, and someone who hates violinists, all getting together to complain about the music of composers.
- **subito piano:** indicates an opportunity for the back desks of violas to become soloists.
- **supertonic:** the drink of Schweppes for the orchestral interval.
- **tempo:** good choice for 'ticking over' speed on a used car.
- **tenor:** 1) two hours before a nooner. 2) A normal viola player's fee.
- **time signature:** what you need from your managing director or librarian if you forget to get to rehearsal on time.
- **transposition:** the act of moving the relative pitch of a piece of music that is too low for the violas to a point where it is too high for the sopranos.
- **transpositions:** 1) men who wear dresses. 2) An advanced technique where you change from viola to violin fingering (or vice-versa) in the middle of a piece
- **transsectional:** a viola who moves to the second violin section (very rare, of course).
- **tuba:** a compound word: originally indicating the speed with which viola players can play in 'two bars' (therefore the number of notes).
- **tutti:** as applied to viola - a lot of fakers at the same moment.
- **whole note:** what's due to be paid by a violist after failing to pay the mortgage for a year.
- **vibrato:** a most interesting effect used by violists to hide the fact that they are on the wrong pitch.
- **virtuoso:** a violist with very high morals.

## The First Viola Joke Ever?

Full Credit here given to Martin Butler who says:

*I found this in a programme note the other day:*

"The violinist Francesco Geminiani arrived in London in 1714, one of the many expatriate musicians who settled in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.... As a young man Geminiani was appointed head of the orchestra in Naples, where according to English music historian Charles Burney he was "so wild and unsteady a timist, that instead of regulating and conducting the band, he threw it into confusion", and "was demoted to playing the viola".

*So there you have it! They felt the same way about viola players in Italy three hundred years ago"...*

### Final Acknowledgement:

*I would like to thank the help of my wife, without whose help this encyclopedia would have been finished three months earlier.*

*Johnstone Sensible Publications 2011*