

# A LIFE TOGETHER IN THE PURSUIT

James and Catharina Meints Caldwell & the Caldwell Collection of Viols

By Tina Chancey

*What is a collector? In my experience, he is someone who not only gathers material objects for acquisition's sake but also becomes involved with the place of origin, the time, and the context of the objects. He studies the construction, the history of each piece, and has concern for the well-being of these objects of his desire. James Caldwell was a collector.*

THUS Catharina Meints Caldwell begins the preface to her new catalogue of the 22-instrument Caldwell Collection of Viols. More than just a checklist, with measurements and pictures, the catalogue pays tribute to Jim and Cathy's 39-year personal and professional partnership—"a life together in the pursuit of beauty"—grounded in two shared passions, the first, for collecting, and the second, for the viola da gamba.

When the two met in 1966, as first oboe and assistant principal cello in the newly-founded Chamber Symphony of Philadelphia, Jim was already a Baroque music enthusiast and an avid collector of recordings, cars, and instruments (including six modern gambas to supply potential consort members). Spotting Cathy as a good viol prospect, he invited her to come "see his gambas," and they were married five months later.

For two years, they played weekly consort sessions and attended workshops and

master classes, including one with Swiss viol virtuoso August Wenzinger, that sparked a long, multi-continent collaboration and whetted Jim's appetite for antique instruments. When Jim became professor of oboe at Oberlin College in 1971, Dean Emil Danenberg helped the couple found the Baroque Performance Institute, still the premiere summer program for the study of Baroque performance practice. For the next 35 years until Jim's death in 2006, the Caldwells continued to perform and record with the Oberlin Consort of Viols and the Oberlin Baroque Ensemble, and above all, to collect and restore to playing condition a remarkable group of 17th- and 18th-century viols, housed in their large, pink frame house. The catalogue documents the process by which these instruments were acquired and made playable, as well as offering a comprehensive overview of each instrument including, besides the standard measurements and mug shot, the maker's biography, copious pictures, and a solo performance of characteristic repertoire by Cathy.

Its unusual breadth of content is not the only thing that make this catalogue an intriguing, impressive achievement. Its multi-media material inspired publisher Ardal Powell, a former flute-maker and CEO of Music Word Media Group, to release the catalogue in two formats—a printed, 96-page book (with CD) and an iPad app. I asked the three people most responsible for the project, Cathy, Ardal, and musicologist Thomas MacCracken, to say more about its conception and how new technology and marketing strategies have given this project a 21st-century edge.

**More than just a checklist, with measurements and pictures, the catalogue pays tribute to Jim and Cathy's 39-year personal and professional partnership.**

*Head of bass gamba attributed to John Rose, London, c. 1600.*

# OF BEAUTY

**Tom, what makes the collection such a worthwhile subject, and what makes the catalogue so special?**

**Tom:** First, the Caldwell Collection is the second-largest private collection of viols in the world and certainly the largest in the States. There are 18 viols, plus four cellos, for a total of 22 instruments officially covered in the catalogue—not counting several modern viols and other instruments no longer owned by the Caldwells (listed in an appendix).

The catalogue is arranged so that viols come before cellos; viols are presented first by country (English, Germanic, French), then basses before trebles, then in approximate chronological order by date made. In all there are four English viols (three basses and a treble), eight Germanic (seven plus one), and six French (two basses, one treble, two pardessus, and a quinton).

And then, the catalogue text is particularly comprehensive. After Cathy's introductions, the entry for each instrument has three sections: first, her story of how it was found, restored and used; then, John Pringle's technical description, with measurements; and finally, my contribution giving background on the maker and his other known instruments. There are also appendices with additional information such as a chronological list of acquisitions, a discography and a bibliography.

Two additional features make the project different from other instrument catalogues: not only are there multiple photos of each instrument (even more in the app than the book), but the publication includes audio recordings made by Cathy on each of the viols (except the quinton). Cathy plays a scale on each and has chosen short movements or excerpts corresponding—more or less—



to the time and place each instrument was made.

*Catharina Meints and James Caldwell performing at an early Baroque Performance Institute at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.*

**Cathy, how did you and Jim get started collecting such a remarkable group of viols?**

**Cathy:** We certainly didn't start out to build a collection. They were just instruments we used to play the music we wanted to play. Deciding on who should restore the instruments and their general care, however, became a substantial part of our life. We definitely wanted the instruments to be playable. Stringed instruments can sustain more use than winds and keyboards. Keeping them safe and happy for the next generation became a major goal.

**Do you have a favorite instrument story from the catalogue?**

**Cathy:** In 1976, Jim heard from a dealer about a possible Tielke available in the unlikely location of Iowa City, Iowa, but we hadn't heard anything more in six months. As fate would have it, I was

## The Viola da Gamba Society of America Celebrates Its Golden Anniversary

The Viola da Gamba Society of America will mark its 50th anniversary in July at its summer Conclave in Newark, Delaware. The organization was incorporated in 1962 by a small nucleus of enthusiastic viol players in rural Maryland who met frequently to play consort music. Today, the Society provides a wealth of information and resources to about 1,100 individuals and institutions worldwide. Members receive a quarterly *Newsletter* and a periodic scholarly *Journal*. The Society offers recordings and reprints of consort music and rents viols to individuals and consorts around the country. Through its Grants-in-Aid endowment, the VdGSA offers grant support to qualified member applicants for projects that relate to the Society's mission.

Recently, the Society has developed programs for younger players, including a spring weekend workshop for high school and college players. Indeed, in 2012 the VdGSA will inaugurate its 15th president, Marie Dalby Szuts, who will be the youngest president in the Society's 50-year history.

The first Conclave also took place in 1962; eventually, the Conclave developed into a week-long event held at educational institutions around the country, attracting an average of 175 aficionados. From July 22 to 29, this year's Conclave at the University of Delaware in Newark will offer nearly 60 classes taught by distinguished faculty members from the U.S. and abroad; numerous concerts from early music to Sephardic, jazz and improv; archival displays; premieres of new viol works; an international group of vendors and exhibitors; a public beginner's program; and spontaneous consort playing and jam sessions lasting far into the night. Fifty professional player/teachers from past Conclaves will teach classes in their specialties and present afternoon demonstrations. Renowned French Baroque virtuoso John Hsu, who has influenced some of America's best-known performers, will offer three master classes for established and rising professionals.

For more information about the VdGSA or its 50th Annual Conclave, visit [www.vdgsa.org](http://www.vdgsa.org).

going to be touring with the Cleveland Orchestra to Ames, Iowa, and had a day off. Jim vaguely recollected the owner's name and I got his number from information, made arrangements to meet him, and rented a car. He had turned the viol over to a local repairman to "fix up" in his garage. Recognizing it immediately as a genuine Tielke (I had seen a number of them by this time) and one that was in immediate danger, I offered twice as much as what we'd heard the owner might want for it—and he accepted. The problem was how to take it with me. The viol was in two pieces with the top separate from the ribs and back, and there was no case. The repairman suggested a laundry bag! Again fate was on our side; the orchestra was returning to Cleveland on a charter flight, and there was plenty of room for a Tielke viol in a laundry bag.

**Tom, a question about the significance of this private collection. When you list the known instrument makers, they include some of the most famous (Rose, Norman, Tielke, Bertrand, Guersan) as well as less well-known names (Turner, Seelos,**

**Karpp, Hasert, Lambert, Salomon) of the age. Is there a particular value in having a wide variety of makers in a collection like this? Does a collection "make a statement" by what it includes?**

**Tom:** The greater variety of examples one has, the more complete a picture one can provide of what the category "viola da gamba" comprises—and the more closely one can match repertoire to the appropriate instrument. Of course, some people will be more impressed by a group of recognizable "big names" than by a group of anonymous instruments even if the latter sound better than the former. Any collection makes some kind of statement; it reveals what the owner considered worth acquiring, at least among what was available to him or her. Clearly, Jim and Cathy's first interest was in owning playable instruments with superior tone and response; I would imagine that "big names" were for them a secondary consideration.

An important reason Jim and Cathy acquired viols from several countries was their desire to have the most appropriate sound for each kind of repertoire they were interested in. (At one point she writes that after acquiring their first two bass viols, both of which were German, "Soon we were learning about the French literature, which requires seven-string viols, and the search was on for two of them. Then, of course, we needed two nice old English viols for consorts.")

**Tom, what were some of the other important private viol collections from the past?**

**Tom:** While the Caldwell Collection is quite special, there have been other private collections that contained a significant number of viols. The first that comes to mind is Madame de Chambure's, which after her death in 1975 became part of the Musée de la Musique in Paris and contained some 30 viols, among many other instruments. Other famous collections from a century ago likewise formed the nucleus of many major instrument museums, including Francis Galpin's for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (with 7 viols), Mrs. Crosby

**“The Caldwell Collection is the second-largest private collection of viols in the world and certainly the largest in the States. There are 18 viols, plus four cellos, for a total of 22 instruments officially covered in the catalogue.” — Thomas MacCracken**

Brown’s for the Met (10), Victor Mahillon’s for the Brussels Musical Instrument Museum (12), and Wilhelm Heyer’s for the University of Leipzig (23). These people were all collectors rather than performers, however, and their collections were comprehensive rather than focused on viols. In that sense, this collection is unusual, not least because all the instruments have been restored to playing condition.

**Ardal, how did you come on board?**

**Ardal:** I first encountered the Caldwell Collection a few years ago while I was director of operations at Pendragon Press. I had taken on the general editorship of a new series of books on musical instruments, and Tom got in touch to see if this would be a suitable project. When he explained about the photos and audio it seemed clear that a print publication would be prohibitively expensive, but no suitable electronic format suggested itself at that time. Fast for-

ward to 2011, when I had left Pendragon to follow my somewhat contrarian vision of a publishing house specializing in serious books about music. I thought the Caldwell project would work well as an iPad app, and checked to see if it was spoken for.

**Cathy, what did you think of having your catalogue offered to the public as an iPad app?**

**Cathy:** My first aim was to have pictures of the instruments, like a normal catalogue. Then I realized that recording all of them would be a useful addition, and finally, I realized that many people had asked me to write down all the stories of collecting that we had experienced.

I began to think that a book version with an attached CD would be the way to go. But when I talked to Ardal, I soon embraced the idea of an app. It would be so easy for people to listen to the viol as they look at it, zoom in on pictures, etc.

The possibilities of offering informa-

tion in a non-linear way really opens up content possibilities. You know, I started working on the catalogue over three years ago, but illness stopped me for a year. Ironically, if I had managed to get it published then, the idea of an app wouldn’t even have come up. With his tech-savvy mind-set, Jim would have loved the whole idea.

**Ardal, just what is an app? Why design one for iPad?**

**Ardal:** An app is just a self-contained package of programming code that operates on some device—a desktop computer, smart phone, or tablet like the iPad. Of these devices, or “platforms,” the most interesting, and the most promising for reading about music, is the tablet variety, because it integrates writing, visual, and aural media in an immediate *touch-screen* experience that can handle all sorts of media. Instead of

*A two-page spread from the printed version of the Caldwell Collection Catalogue.*





A page from the iPad app for the Caldwell Collection Catalogue.

### The Caldwell Collection of Viols: Where to Find the Catalogue

The app is on sale on the App Store: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/custos-caldwell-violos/id515392351?ls=1&mt=8>.

The print edition will be published on July 27, 2012 (\$49.00). Until then, copies can be ordered at a 20 percent pre-publication discount at [www.musicwordmedia.net/violos](http://www.musicwordmedia.net/violos). General information can be found at [www.custosmusic.com/2011/07/29/the-caldwell-collection-of-violos/](http://www.custosmusic.com/2011/07/29/the-caldwell-collection-of-violos/).

stopping reading to put a CD in the player and find the right track, you can tap an icon and read a commentary on what you're hearing in real time.

The iPad has opened up new potential to produce art books and other high-functioning publications with color and animation and sound and interactivity for a small investment, relative to print. How far that potential goes nobody knows yet: we're just getting a taste of it.

### Is making a book app very different from printing a physical book? Do you use them differently?

**Ardal:** The Caldwell catalogue presents almost exactly the same materials in the print and app editions, but they're organized differently, because books and apps offer different interaction experiences for their users. Accustomed as we are to books, we tend to *think* of them as linear: covers, title page, contents, chapters, footnotes, bibliography; page 1, page 2, page 3.... But in practice we typically use them as "hyperlinked" collections of information; we choose our own route through the material. In the app version of the Caldwell Catalogue, Cathy's friends can read stories of how she and Jim found, acquired, and restored each instrument. Viol aficionados can drill down into Tom's maker biographies, or John's descriptions and measurements, or the illustrated restoration reports. Musicians can listen to the music examples as illustrations to each catalogue entry, or stack them up back to back and compare the sound of one after another. All the navigational tools you need are tap, double-tap, and swipe.

### But, Ardal, you also had to find a way to get the print version into circulation.

**Ardal:** When Music Word Media first contracted with Cathy, we envisioned only an iPad publication. Making a print edition is massively costly and capital-intensive; to do it in the conventional way would have made for a very expensive and exclusive book. Then I got the manuscript and read the narrative, of which I hadn't been fully aware until

then. Together with the fabulous photographs, the enchanting stories suggested another novel approach: crowd-funding. If we could raise capital ahead of publication instead of budgeting on the basis of conservative sales projections, we could buy a print run large enough to get the unit cost down to a manageable level, and even subsidize it a bit.

### So, you put the project on Kickstarter.com to raise funds. Participants describe their projects and establish a target goal and a deadline, and, if successful, they receive 100 percent of the collected funds. If the goal isn't met within the time-frame, all donations are returned to the donors. Was this process easy?

**Cathy:** The process was totally foreign to me. But the Kickstarter format makes it extremely easy. It's a brilliant idea. I worked very hard compiling e-mail lists, and I friended more people on Facebook to get the word out. Each of the three e-mail blitzes I sent showed results. Ardal did a great job on the site itself, giving previews of pictures, text, and music. I knew 90 percent of the donors; many were Jim's old oboe students, past colleagues, and former students who sent me notes with their contributions. It turned out to be very exciting and gratifying. And as a result, the book will be available at a very reasonable price!

### Thanks to all of you for giving us a picture of how you came together to build a superb instrument collection, create a state-of-the-art catalogue about it, and make that catalogue available to the public in an up-to-date 21st-century format.

Viola da gambist Tina Chancey is a founding member and director of Hesperus and leads the Sound Catcher workshop. She remembers, "When Cathy and I were working on our recording of pardessus duos by Barthélemy de Caix in 1995-6, we rehearsed wherever we could. My favorite rehearsal spot, though, was Cathy and Jimmy's big pink house in Oberlin, because it gave me a chance to visit their collections: bonsai, Art Nouveau glass and furniture, computer art, and of course, viols. Compiling this article has given me a chance to revisit that world again."