

VIOLIN VIOLA CELLO BASS FIDDLE

# STRINGS

It's called *mojo*—that special magic that lies within the soul of an instrument. Stewards of some of the world's most coveted stringed instruments describe the soul of their fiddles.



Masumi Per Rostad performs on his Hill viola with Wagnon Chin.

STUFF : IN THE CASE

## MY VIOLA IS A PORSCHE—MORE OR LESS

**Player:** Masumi Per Rostad of the Pacifica Quartet

**Instrument:** 1770 Joseph Hill viola, London 16 3/8-inch body with brown varnish.

**Condition:** The body has some repaired old wormholes and cigarette burns. It was antiqued to look older when it was made, which is funny to think of 241 years later!

**Is this your primary instrument?** Yes

**How does it compare to your previous primary instrument (and what was that viola)?**

It is smaller, older, and more focused. I love my big, modern Marten Cornelissen viola (17-inch body, made in 1978), but it feels like a Cadillac. I prefer a Porsche for quartet playing—well, maybe a Subaru in this case. Still, I prefer a responsive viola.

**Can you compare your viola to another?**

I like my viola, but I'm not particularly attached to it. I would love a great old Italian instrument, but I haven't found anything reasonably sized and priced. Violin players have it sooooo much easier!

**What gift does this instrument bring to your playing that cannot be found in any other instrument? How does this instrument inspire you as a performer?**

I'm not particularly romantic about instruments, since it can be confusing to think that way about such a big financial investment. I want a healthy viola and bow to make the strings work the way I want them to. I play about 100 concerts a year, all over the world, and I want professional tools that reliably respond to what I put into them, wherever I happen to open my case. Call me a control freak—or call me a string player!

**What kind of strings do you use?**

I use D'Addario Helicore strings because they're stable and responsive.

**And the bow hair?**

And, I like black hair on my bow because it grips the string well and doesn't break as often as white hair.

**What is its history?**

I don't know anything about my viola's history. Until recently, this sort of English viola wouldn't have carried much value, but that's changing. In general, unless it's a very famous instrument played by a very famous musician, sellers don't want you to know where they got an instrument because it informs the buyer too much about price and profit.

**How did you come into possession of this instrument? Do you own it?**

I purchased it from a dealer about ten years ago and have recently paid it off.

**What drew you to this viola?**

It reminded me a little bit of a nice Gasparo da Salò viola that was loaned to me for a while. This was a lot cheaper!

**What's your instrument's personality? What are its strengths and limitations?**

It's stable, responsive, and clear, with a medium voice. Hopefully, it's versatile beyond that. I wish it had more quality and color options.

**What are your viola's likes and dislikes?**

It likes dry weather, but my bow likes humidity. Oh, well.

**Is your instrument female, male, or genderless?**

I haven't tried to make any moves on it yet, so I'm not sure!

**When and how did you truly learn who your instrument is, the soul of the instrument?**

Hmmm, I'm not quite there yet.

**Have you ever done anything that might have robbed your instrument of its "mojo," such as a repair or changing the strings?**

It hasn't sounded better than it does now. In my estimation, repairs tend to improve instruments. I had my [Chicago-based] luthier Louis Torick take the back off last summer to repair a shoulder. The more work you have done, the more opportunities there are to improve the condition. There is a balance, of course.

**What would your viola say to you if the two of you sat down for tea?**

Could you pass the cream? Oh, by the way, you haven't been seeing any other violas, have you? ■