

Glossary of Violist Terms

- Albert Hall - 19th Century violist, and inventor of the highly entertaining spontaneously collapsing music stand. They are still available for purchase in many music and joke shops.
- Alto Clef - One of the greatest features of the viola is not actually a part of the instrument itself, but rather the way its music is written. Having a clef that most other musicians struggle to read has always been one of its most precious saving graces.
To other musicians, and even conductors, the alto clef is the work of Satan. However, beware of conductors who are also violists that have gone over to the dark side. They do exist.
- The Autophile - You can identify these violists by their dirty and broken fingernails. In many viola sections there is a (usually male) player who owns an ancient, tatty, but beloved wreck of an automobile, held together with string and duct tape, upon which he spends many happy hours per week carefully ministering to. He will often take this vehicle on orchestral tours, but is forced to travel alone because, firstly, no other musician would risk being a passenger, and secondly, there would be no room anyway as he needs to take enough tools for a complete roadside rebuild should necessity demand. His car, you will quickly discover should you engage this violist in conversation, is the greatest vehicle ever made and represents the absolute pinnacle of mankind's engineering genius. You have to admire them.
- The Bloodhound - Not just violists, but any string player who habitually sniffs on-the-beat whilst navigating a syncopated phrase.
- A Cellsterphile - Any musician whose cellphone rings during a rehearsal or concert. A capital crime through the eyes of the orchestral manager.
- A Chixulub - The instruments belonging to first-stand players are most at risk to surface damage caused by droplets of corrosive perspiration that fly in all directions off the prevailing Maestro, until their once pristine varnish eventually resembles the surface of the moon. Unfortunately the majority of instrument insurance companies will no longer accept this as being legitimate grounds for a claim.
- Chinchiller - A violist who likes attaching the latest outlandish chin rest or shoulder rest, or indeed any new gadget that is being touted as the greatest thing since Stradivarius, to their instrument, but which will most likely be discarded when a newer innovation appears in the catalogues.
Caution: Should you be seen to take an interest in their gadget-bedecked instrument they will try to sell their old discarded ones to you. They are usually nice people, but tough love is the best course of action. Trust me.
- Chin rest - A great innovation at the time, and now universally employed as the standard setup for the instrument (except by early music exponents, of course). However, it's original purpose was as a means of ensuring a comfortable sleep during rehearsals. There are still those in the viola

community who will use it thus as it was originally conceived.

- Cholera Parte - Generic term for a range of diseases that are contracted through contact with VS*.
- The Cockeralist - A particular sub-species of symphonic musician who, during those few minutes prior to stepping on the concert platform, and whilst most other players are focused on their personal warm-up routine of scales and exercises, like to play the first few bars of all the concerti they have ever learned. Or, as is entirely possible, what you are forced to witness is indeed the sum of all the concerti they have learned for the sole purpose of being an actual Cockeralist. Maybe it's taught at music college. Surely not.
- A Cold Snap - Violist term, similar to snap pizzicato on a violin, but much colder.
- The Death Ray - When you are the only person to notice that the Maestro has made a mistake, and you look up and catch his/her eye. This is an extremely unwise move. Just don't, seriously.
- Double jeopardy - Turning two pages by mistake.
- A Dunkanist - Pre-performance nerves is known to force the concert musician to do some unplanned things. And an urgent last minute summons to the toilet is certainly a known symptomatic phenomenon. However, any male musician who sits on the toilet without first taking off his tailcoat risks finding himself in an even more distressed state.
- Farte / Fartissimo - An unpleasant smell (perpetrator usually unidentified) that in the worst cases (molto fartissimo) can engulf an entire concert platform in noxious gas.
- Footwangler - This is about the game of soccer. It is said there is one in every (usually European or South American) string section. Not entirely true, because although there may be just one soccer fanatic in every violin, viola, and cello section, generally all the contra-bassists enjoy both following and participating in the sport. You can spot the Footwangers by their cellphones propped on the music stand for the purpose of accessing the latest scores. Sometimes they forget themselves and will spontaneously cheer during a rehearsal. Luckily the conductor will most likely interpret this as a sign of approval in response to their words of wisdom and inspiring musical prowess.
- Hugo de Surlygitt - 18th century violist, and the first to declare use of the treble clef as being acceptable in viola notation. Even to this day there is considerable opposition to this. These opponents present two strong arguments against this practice: 1. It is confusing and hard to learn clef-changing. And 2. It means others (meaning non-violists) will then be able to see and read what the violas are up to.
- The Kleptomaniac - ... or stand-stealer. A general string-term referring to a stand partner who, by degrees, will nudge the music stand away from you and closer to themselves.

- The Lamborghini - There is usually just one to be seen in any viola section; a player who, whilst engaged in playing, indulges in exaggerated movement and dangerous swaying that might at any time knock the instrument from the hands of a section colleague who sits nearby. Their section colleagues often secretly draw straws to pick the player who has to sit beside their resident Lamborghini.
- Legatote - An irritating unconscious habit of toe or heel tapping, or shuffling slightly out of synchronisation with the music.
- The Loquationist - Usually a string player who won't stop talking during rehearsals - and sometimes concerts. Question: What do they talk about? Answer: Usually about their favourite soap opera(s). Although they are good talkers, and have perfected the art of circular talking (they breathe through their ears), they are poor listeners so don't try to involve yourself, you won't be able to get a word in anyway. There is a sub category called "The Gabbler". They are similar to Loquationists but talk about music - a lot! These monologues often spill over into the rehearsal breaks. Just ignore them, they won't be offended because they won't notice.
- Lento - This is a pulse. For reasons that *ought* to be obvious, orchestral players should endeavour to avoid starchy foods that are liable to cause a build-up of intestinal gases. See Farte*.
- A Lincolncentrist - A violist who can do jigsaw puzzles whilst practising.
- A Luciano or Luciana - A violist who believes themselves to have a good singing voice.
- The Malcontent - Not just confined to violists, but any instrumentalist who will deliberately play badly because they either don't like the music or the conductor. This is highly unprofessional but still happens. Beware, the wind might change.
- The Non-Stopper - This is the term for any orchestral instrumentalist who, during rehearsal sessions, continues to play after the conductor has stopped. It might be because they weren't aware at the time, or it may simply happen because it is getting close to feeding time and they want to chivvy things towards an early break.
- Occulation - The first blink after a difficult passage.
- Page Turn - Composers and music publishers have enjoyed a long-standing and amicable partnership that is designed to ensure page turns are, musically speaking, in the most in-convenient possible place. There are countless good examples of this strewn throughout the repertoire. Musicians have endeavoured to fight back by inserting cues, copying pages, and even cutting and pasting sections of the music. However the only thing that would provide a guaranteed solution would be by reprinting the music using modern notational software. But this has been declared illegal. Unfair!

- Pathegique - Medical term for the presence of any pathogens that may be concentrated at the bottom right-hand corner of orchestral sheet music. Usually caused, and passed on, through the page-turner's saliva.
- The Snipper(s) - With the exception of Autophiles*, string players, usually after a break from playing, such as annual leave for example, and where the musicians' fingernails have been allowed time to grow, the return to the rehearsal studio will undoubtedly be to the accompaniment of a chorus of nail clippers in action. Quite a nice effect, really.
- The Prestophile - The violist (again, usually male) who likes to exit the concert platform as quickly as possible, indeed before the last echoes have died away, so he can join his (even faster) colleagues in the brass section at the bar. Try not to get in their way.
- L'altiste Rouge - This is the viola section's extreme left-wing member. Their default state of mind is best described as seething anger, usually directed towards the administration or occasionally the Maestro whom they perceive as being the downtrodden musician's oppressor (see The Malcontent).
- Tacet Agreement - This was a legally binding contract between George Frideric Handel and his viola section of the time. It is a lengthy document, but in essence it states that, in acknowledgement of the violists' instruments being both larger and heavier than those of the violinists, they should therefore, in respect of the aforesaid, have fewer notes to play and also longer rests - even to the extent of missing entire arias. Throughout his composing career Handel adhered faithfully to the terms of this contract. This remains so even to this day.
- The Tap Dancer - Nothing to do with dancing, but everything to do with timing. This refers to the annoying section colleague seated immediately behind you who, just prior to the conductor's up beat, and while you are girding up your loins to start playing, will tap you on the shoulder and ask you to move either right or left so they can see better, causing you to miss the first few notes of the performance.
- Tasto-lick - The actions of the page-turner (usually the inside player) who habitually licks their finger prior to executing the page turn. See Pathegique*.
- A Testudinus - A violist who keeps terrapins.
- The Snap-Cracker - Thankfully a rare event. When your string snaps during a performance, but you can't replace it because the tuning peg dropped out and was accidentally (possibly) kicked out of reach by your colleagues.
- Trenchant - A French word (there is no English equivalent) meaning the stained and calloused groove on a violists fingertips where the string naturally rests. These are nurtured and worn with considerable pride.

- Valve Oil Charisma - The light lubricating oil used by all brass instrumentalists has a highly distinctive aroma. Hence, those violists at the rear of the section who are most likely to pick up microscopic droplets (or aerosols) that having been blown through said instruments, will then precipitate on hair and clothing. It generally doesn't bother them as they have become so accustomed to it that they stop noticing. But others do. It might puzzle those violists to know how a complete stranger will say "You're a violist, aren't you?", without guessing the reason how they could possibly know. That's charisma for you.
- A Verdiphile - Any violist who likes growing vegetables.
- Violaholic - A violist (usually male) who believes their encyclopaedic knowledge of viola repertoire makes them sexually irresistible.
- The Viola Joke - Reluctantly included in this glossary. However, the origins go back a long way. Indeed, to the times of Handel, who we know granted the violists special privileges (see Tacet Agreement). This engendered some animosity amongst the other musicians who have from that time onwards have made the violists the butt of their feeble and viola-phobic jokes.
- Violescapitulationist - A long word (often abbreviated to Violesca) referring to the practice of certain contemporary composers whose viola writing is conspicuously frugal compared to that of the other strings. Of course this may simply be because they didn't want too much viola involvement in their masterpiece(s). And that is indeed what they usually say when questioned over this shortfall. However, violists will secretly give thanks that their alien clef has again thwarted the machinations of yet another composer. Note: it is important to point out there are a few dangerous composers who are genuinely fluent in the alto clef.
- Volti Subito (or VS) - The grubby, dog-eared corner at the bottom of the right-hand page of sheet music. It is the unhappy task of the inside player to grasp this corner in order to execute a page turn. Keep some hand sanitizer on your person.
- The Window Shopper - Usually male, and usually a middle-aged married Cockerlist*, who, from his seat on the concert platform, and prior to the house-lights dimming, will carefully scan the auditorium for pretty girls. Much as a toreador will choose a lady from amongst the spectators. And similarly, he probably imagines himself to be heroic in the eyes of the adoring public. And certainly not creepy at all.
- Zippenstance - During a performance, sitting with the knees together, tip-toed, and heels raised. The posture that must be adopted in the event of a male musician who, whilst performing, suddenly suspects he might have left his zip undone.