

Review Quotes

Viola Soloist with Orchestra

“Thompson, a fine performer with a big, warm tone and a strong, supple technique, is clearly doing everything he can with the music. With Paul Freeman's professional conducting and the more than passable playing of the Czech National Orchestra, Thompson makes Jongen's ardently expressive Suite, Françaix's slightly melancholy Rhapsodie, and Serly's Bartók-without-tears Concerto as convincing as possible.”

– James Leonard, ALL MUSIC.COM, CD Review

“From the very first bars, Penderecki's Viola Concerto held one's attention with arresting immediacy. Marcus Thompson gave a suavely assured yet soulful account, the simple, sighing semitones of the opening soliloquy that later permeates the thematic texture polished and resonant. This is a masterpiece of its genre, tautly structured yet optimistic and expressive, tonally guided though a highly dissonant surface to ultimate resolution in the moving conclusion. Ingeniously the viola hardly plays together with the orchestra but instead engages in dialogue, through extended interludes, two explicitly marked 'cadenza', intensifying in each appearance. The orchestra dovetails smoothly, the viola's tone gliding seamlessly into the vividly syncopated wind, brass and notably timpani gestures that Anzolini directed intrepidly. The final section was especially exciting, the incisive, dissonant and polyphonic cadenza gaining energy towards the orchestra's buoyant impetus, until a sudden return to the initial sigh motif in strings, over which the viola presents a beautifully expressive and tender new melody, dissolving into a tonic focus.”

–Malcolm Miller, Music and Vision, London, UK

“One of the most stirring events of the season came late, with an unexpected work and an unexpected venue. It was the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki's 1983 Viola Concerto played by violist Marcus Thompson. The piece begins with the solo viola in a series of falling two-note phrases, a lament, not quite sobbing, but—as Thompson played it—an expression of a sorrow “too deep for tears,” restrained, dignified, yet immediately heartbreaking. Thompson's “sound” is full, rich and extremely complex; he has a rhythmic backbone, an edge, even when his tone is most gorgeous and velvety (He wasn't a student of

the great Walter Trampler for nothing). His phrasing “speaks.” And he never allows himself to descend into sentimentality or melodrama.”

-Lloyd Schwarz, *The Boston Phoenix*

“Thompson delivered a remarkable, heart-felt viola solo. A careful intonation highlighted the viola’s beautiful timbre, which was rather hoarse and meditative in the low registers, yet outspoken and vibrant in the higher ones. Thompson’s brilliant technique made the piece flow naturally in its dense middle section.”

-Bogdan Fedeles, *The Tech*

“Thompson, who commands a large velvety tone, ...”

-Daniel Webster, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

“Jongen’s “Suite Symphonique” for viola and orchestra written in 1915, is rarely played. The evening’s other visiting artist, MIT violist Marcus Thompson – familiar to devotees of the Sitka Summer Music Festival– gave this work its local premiere. The composition is divided into two contrasting sections. The first movement, “Poem,” is a brooding, introspective piece. At the time Jongen wrote it, his country was being devastated by World War I. Well-set for viola, it is a showcase for Thompson’s rich, warm, woody tone.” The concluding movement, titled simply “Finale,” struts out as if the performers were wearing colorfully embroidered Flemish folk costumes. All double-stops and bravura for the soloist, it quickly dispelled the deep moods and shadows of the first movement.”

-Philip Munger, *Anchorage Daily News*

“Thompson is a master of his instrument, playing with impressive agility and drawing a wonderful variety of color from his instrument.

Bloch’s Suite inspired Thompson to his most moving playing of the concert. In the slow introduction to the first movement and the Lento third movement, Thompson communicated the deep soulfulness of the music with beautifully sustained phrasing and effective use of vibrato for emphasis.”

-Mark Kanny, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“Marcus Thompson is a fine violist. I welcomed his return to play the Telemann Concerto in G, which he managed with eloquence and a fine sense of the baroque style. This was chamber orchestra music, expertly done.”

-Chicago Sun-Times

“You must admire Thompson for the wonderfully flowing, richly colored sound he secures from his instrument, and most of all the dignity he projected in the music.”

-Chicago Sun-Times

“Thompson proved an eloquent soloist”

-Chicago Tribune

“Marcus Thompson, guest violist, whose compelling, sonorous tone falls easily on the ear, is a virtuoso instrumentalist.Thompson and the orchestra gave Berlioz’s piece the full measure of pathos, intensity and sheer beauty that it deserves.”

-Gail Garson, Union News

“Earlier, Menuhin was joined by Marcus Thompson, a remarkable American violist, for the celebrated Mozart Sinfonia Concertante. It was a delight to see them work together, to witness the joy with which they responded to one another and the orchestra responded to them. The slow movement is one of the greatest string duos ever composed, and in this performance, the effect was ravishing.

-Robert C. Marsh, Chicago Sun-Times

“Marcus Thompson, a superb violist, was soloist in Paul Hindemith’s folkish rhapsody, ‘Der Schwanendreher.’ Hindemith imaginatively provides a luxuriant backdrop for the viola while keeping its voice the highest stringed instrument in the work. Thompson is an elegant musician who plays with great style and handsome silky tone. The work used to be called knotty or thorny, and its composer himself did not always provide the most attractive kind of viola sound when he played it. Perhaps it was waiting for a violist like Thompson.”

-Paul Hume, The Washington Post

“Solo players of the viola are rarely able to claim a place on a symphonic program, and black solo violists all but never. Marcus Thompson is one who deserved the opportunity that came to him –to perform Walter Piston’s concerto for viola and orchestra in Carnegie Hall. Thompson has assurance, temperament, and major mastery of his instrument.”

–Irving Kolodin, Saturday Review

“Thompson gave the commanding and convincing first performance a composer must dream of; this was wonderful, committed playing.” [Anthony Newman Concerto]

–The Boston Globe

“Mr. Thompson is a solo viola player of the first order. His phrasing and intonation were immaculate and his concept of the Piston work was unified and cohesive. The audience brought Mr. Thompson back for five curtain calls. It should have been six!” [Piston Concerto with the Albany Symphony]

–The Albany Times-Union

“Thompson’s growth as an instrumentalist in the past few years has been extraordinary. His tone is even more opulent, his technical control has reached a point at which the word mastery is not out of order, and he knows how to keep an audience in his thrall by playing straight to them—the ruminative, indecisive violist archetype couldn’t be further from his personality.” [Harold in Italy]

–The Boston Globe

Chamber Music

“Albert Roussel's 1929 Trio juxtaposes sprightly neoclassicism with more enigmatic, impressionistic streams. Flutist Fenwick Smith, violist Marcus Thompson, and cellist (and BCMS artistic director) Ronald Thomas had their own fascinating counterpoint: Smith's pearly tones contrasted with Thompson's sleek elegance and Thomas's wiry, taut timbre. The combination bore uncanny fruit in the second movement, a nocturnal stroll that, for all its placidity, passes through some eerie places.”

–Matthew Guerrieri, *The Boston Globe*

“Friday night's performance [with the Boston Chamber Music Society] was uncommonly good. Harumi Rhodes and Judith Eissenberg (violins), Marcus Thompson (viola), and Rhonda Rider (cello) rightly treated [George Crumb's Black Angels] as a theater piece as much as a musical one, performing with searing intensity on a darkened stage.”

– Jeremy Eichler, *The Boston Globe*

“Each year the [Montreal Chamber Music] festival generates one memorable performance so unusual, so magical, or of such transcendent beauty –and often so unexpected-- that the memory of it lingers for weeks, even years. The event in this year's festival was a performance of Brahms's G Major Sextet, which closed the concert on 20 June. Six distinguished musicians –Ilya and Olga Kaler (violins), Marcus Thompson and Douglas McNabney (violas), and Matt Haimovitz and Katerina Juraskova (cellos)—infused the music with such infectious enthusiasm, spontaneity and a unified sense of purpose that the enthralled audience forgot to give them the obligatory standing ovation and just sat and cheered.”

–The STRAD

“The superb violist Marcus Thompson has been playing second viola in a free chamber series at MIT's Kresge Auditorium featuring, on each program, a Mozart string quintet. (The next two are November 3, with the Vogler Quartet, and February 23, with the Audubon.) The first concert this season was with the Jupiter Quartet: violinists Nelson Lee and Meg Freivogel, violist Liz Freivogel (Meg's sister), and cellist Daniel McDonough - all still under 30. ... Mozart's five late string quintets (there's also an early one) are among his greatest chamber

works. K.593, in D (his penultimate), is one of the most ravishing, with a Schubert-like throb and melodic gift. The violinist takes the lead in the slow movement's song of sorrow, Mozart's emotional center. But finally the work leaves one with a sense of profound joy. I've heard guest-star violists ruin Mozart quintets, but Thompson never tried to steal the spotlight. It was a balanced, unified, cooperative conception, a glorious performance of a glorious work."

-Lloyd Schwarz, *The Boston Phoenix*

Violist in Recital

"Apparently word has gotten out that Thompson is one of the best string players in America today.... The arpeggione was a musical instrument in vogue just long enough for one masterpiece to be composed for it--this sonata. Today, it is usually played on the cello, but Thompson's masterly performance {of the Arpeggione Sonata} made an eloquent claim for the viola's rights. His musicianship and control of his instrument were also impressive in Schumann's (Fairy Tale Pictures) which began the program and Weber's Andante and Hungarian Rondo which concluded it."

- Joseph McLelland, *The Washington Post*

"Thompson played four pieces for viola and piano by Clarence Cameron White (1880-1960) an African-American composer and violinist who taught for a time in Boston. Two pieces from a suite called "The Cotton Fields" as well as "Chant" and "Levee Dance" were built on familiar spiritual melodies "Nobody Knows the Trouble" "I've Seen and Go down Moses" - sometimes played at untraditionally fast tempos. Thompson's performances were eloquent enough to make you hear the words. Thompson also played Schumann's Märchenbilder (Fairy Tale Pictures) with a technique fully equal to the virtuoso passages and quiet fulfilling steadiness in the slower pieces."

-Richard, Dyer, *The Boston Globe*

"Marcus Thompson proved an exceptionally articulate performer of both romantic and contemporary works. He played an interesting program with authority and feeling, intelligently meeting each interpretive challenge. His tone was surprisingly large and very warm."

-The Minneapolis Star

“Superb Violist” (headline)

“Marcus Thompson played with the authority of a mature artist. He combined vigor and sensitivity, rhythmic power and tonal color, attesting to the complete interpreter. He played brilliantly.”

“Playing the viola d’amore, Mr. Thompson presented two striking pieces from the early 18th century by Attilio Ariosti. One was the Lezione III in E minor, the other a cantata “Pur al fin gentil Viola.” The latter is an allegorical tribute to the viola versus the violin, in terms of the modest violet as opposed to the haughty rose. Mr. Thompson, perfectly at home on the forerunner of his present instrument, played brilliantly, filling out the score with suavely handled ornamentation.”

– The New York Times

“His phrases were golden, his communication effortless”

–The New York Times

“Remarkable, ravishing!”

–Chicago Sun Times

Viola d'Amore

“Next on the program was Hindemith’s piece for chamber orchestra and viola d’amore, a member of the ancient viol family that features 14 strings (seven of them sympathetic) and a small but warm timbre. It was performed by violist Marcus Thompson and eight other musicians (the piece is scored for flute, oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, three cellos and two basses) under the baton of Charles Dutoit, who provided subtle direction of a work with subtle charms. A challenging hybrid of post-tonal 20th century works and the contrapuntal music of the Baroque, the piece consists of intricately assembled combinations—duets, trios, quartets of instruments—that snake in and out without ever mounting a full-scale tutti. As a result, Thompson’s hushed but virtuosic playing pierced through the orchestra, producing, a purity of tone that softened the edges around Hindemith’s angular music.”

–Amy Biancolli, Times-Union, Saratoga Springs

“Guest Artist Mesmerizes Audience With Special Viola” (Headline)

“Guest violist Marcus Thompson caused a sensation in Saturday’s Baroque concert by the Chamber Orchestra of Albuquerque when he played an obsolete instrument called the viola d’amore.

His performance of a concerto for the beautiful, old instrument written by Antonio Vivaldi held an audience of several hundred in rapt attention as he produced intense, piercing tones of a mesmerizing sweet quality. He had played a concerto on a modern viola earlier, and had little difficulty in adjusting to the viola d’amore in Vivaldi’s assertive first movement.

But once into the concerto’s transparent, ethereal slow movement the old instrument made sounds of remarkable purity and luminosity. Vivaldi’s dancing finale was a triumph of both melodic agility and tonal intensity by the soloist, who teaches music at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

After the viola d'amore concerto, which ended the concert in St. John's United Methodist Church, dozens of listeners crowded up to the front of the hall to hear Thompson give a brief talk on his beautiful old instrument.

Thompson's performance on a modern instrument of a Viola Concerto in G by Telemann revealed that he is a violist who has a strong rapport with his instrument. He produced secure tones and had a special affinity with the dark, sometimes rasping notes at the bottom of its range. But in Telemann's finale the notes were too short to allow Thompson to use that vibrato, and his playing was deft and stylish."

-David Noble, Albuquerque Journal