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Features:

George Rochberg's Viola Sonata

Loeffler's Rapsodies

45th IVC in Review

Andrew Braddock

In late November 2018, violists from around the world converged on the vibrant city of Rotterdam for five days filled to the brim with viola. Though I am a veteran of stateside viola events, this was my first visit to a Congress outside of America, and it was a fantastic introduction to the world-wide community of violists. From masterclasses to lectures, “talk shows” to recitals, and dramatic performances to late-night sessions, this Congress covered an extraordinary range of anything related to the viola.

The theme of the Congress was “Exploring New Ways to Perform,” pointing towards an emphasis on both performance and new music. There were six types of events during the Congress, and the frequency of each showed the emphasis on performing: recitals (24), workshops (17), master classes (16), lecture-recitals (8), lectures (7), and talk shows (2).

My time in Rotterdam began the evening before the Congress with an informal dinner organized by its hosts, Kristofer Skaug and Karin Dolman. The dinner served as a portentous microcosm of the week’s events to come: convivial violists from all continents gathered, rekindling old friendships or igniting new ones in spite of the chilly Rotterdam winds.

Tuesday morning opened with a throng of violists descending upon the lobby of the Hofplien Theater for registration. A scene like this is always chaotic, as everyone figures out their bearings, checks in, and stops every few feet to hug an old friend. The following brief opening ceremony with introductions by Kristofer Skaug, Karin Dolman, and Carlos María Solare (president of the International Viola Society) marked the official beginning of the 45th International Viola Congress.



Molly Gebrian, Marcin Murauski, Hillary Herndon, and Andrew Braddock at the 45th IVC in Rotterdam. Photo by Dwight Pounds

The morning’s chaos extended into the early afternoon, as Lawrence Power’s masterclass was rescheduled and later re-assigned to the always-ready and always-brilliant Jutta Puchhammer-Sédillot, causing a ripple effect throughout the opening day’s events. I was, however, the happy beneficiary of this reshuffling. It allotted a little extra time to the 1919 Berkshire Festival Competition lecture-recital, during which Daphne Gerling, Hillary Herndon, Bernadette Lo,

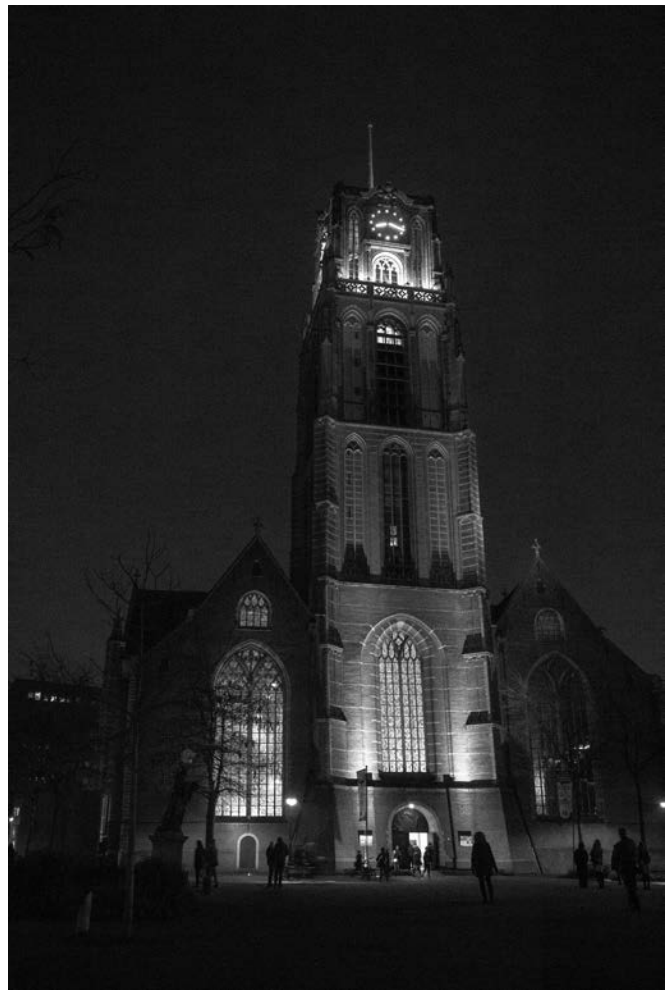
Katrin Meidell, and I presented and performed selections from works possibly submitted to the famed competition. We were overjoyed with the positive response to our presentation, and were excited to perform many under-recognized works.

Following this presentation, I spent the rest of the congress darting between every possible event, venue, and my own presentations, so it would be impossible to honestly recount all of the week's events. Instead of a complete listing, I'll share some of the many highlights and offer my perspective on the events.

The daytime events from this opening day ended with another ceremony, the Opening Celebration. After introductions from Neil Wallace, the program director of De Doelen concert hall, and Drew Forde, better known as ThatViolaKid, the Opening Celebration concluded with a performance of two viola sextets by members of the Rotterdam Philharmonic and the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. The first was a premiere performance of Leo Samama's *Viola Pomposa*. The composer, whose brother is a violist, remarked that he went against the standard advice of "never write anything difficult for the viola" when composing this piece. Though he succeeded in his aspirations, the performers deftly handled all the challenges he presented. The most innovative part came about three quarters of the way through: After a syncopated ostinato in the inner voices, the music melted into an amorphous texture of harmonics and descending pizzicato gestures that sounded like a waterfall of pebbles. The work was punctuated by a driving and polyrhythmic conclusion. Benjamin Dale's Introduction and Allegro, op. 5, for six violas rounded out this brief program. The players gave a sparkling performance of the works, and León van den Berg shined in the stratospheric passages for the first viola.

Featured Artist Performances

The Congress's featured artists ran the gamut from seasoned veterans to burgeoning stars: Atar Arad, Nobuko Imai, Kim Kashkashian, Lawrence Power, and Timothy Ridout. All of their performances were not to be missed. Lawrence Power bookended the Congress with two orchestral-based performances. Though his presence at the Congress was only to be apprehended via the stage platform, his signature luscious tone and free rubato made for two remarkable performances. The first



Rotterdam's majestic Laurenskerk, the setting for a viola and carillon premiere and the IVC's first evening concert. Photo by Dwight Pounds

on Wednesday night was in the majestic setting of the fifteenth-century Laurenskerk (St. Lawrence Cathedral). Before the concert, Congress co-host Karin Dolman joined carillonneur Richard de Waardt for a premiere of Leo Samama's *Cadenzas and Songs* for viola and carillon. The cold weather did not keep a sizable group of violists from experiencing this one-of-a-kind event. Inside the church, Power joined the Codarts Chamber Orchestra and the Laurenscontorij for performances including works by Puccini (*Requiem* for choir, viola, and organ), William Alwyn (*Pastoral Fantasia* for viola and strings), and Schubert (*Gesang der Geister über den Wassern*). Though the cavernous cathedral led to some muddy acoustics, Power's sound spoke with direction and clarity.

Power returned on the Congress's final evening to perform with the Bochumer Symphoniker inside the beautiful Grote Zaal of de Doelen. Along with the

Doelen Quartet, they performed Herbert Howells's understated and richly scored *Elegy* for viola, string quartet, and string orchestra, and led attacca into Walton's Concerto for viola and orchestra. Power did well to fill the large hall with his sound, but his performance was most remarkable for the blistering tempo—the fastest I've ever heard—of the second movement. For an encore, he played Aleksey Igudesman's darkly humorous *Brexit Polka*, a mashup of the national anthems of all EU countries, rudely interrupted by Britain's "God Save the Queen."



Timothy Ridout (left) and Nobuko Imai (right) perform Bridge's Lament. Photo by Dwight Pounds.

One of the musical highlights of the Congress was Thursday night's concert on the 105th birthday of Benjamin Britten. Both the repertoire and the personnel invoked a variety of student-teacher connections: Britten and his teacher Frank Bridge, Timothy Ridout and his teacher Nobuko Imai, and Yuval Gotlibovich and his teacher Atar Arad. Imai opened the recital with Britten's *Elegy* for solo viola, and returned before intermission to perform Bridge's *Lament* for two violas with Ridout. It's impossible to imagine a more unified sound than that presented by Imai and Ridout. Both took great pleasure in sculpting ever richer tones from all corners of their ranges. Imai began with a focused and unembellished tone, setting the stage for Ridout's richly singing mezzo-soprano entrance. They played with such a wide range of colors that they sounded at times like an entire string quartet, rather than just a viola duo. They concluded the piece with a heartbreaking non-vibrato C minor chord.

In between this student-teacher double bill came Gotlibovich's performance of his Sonata for Viola and Piano Left Hand with Noriko Yabe, a work that Imai had

premiered one year earlier in Tokyo. The first movement began with an echo-box effect between the viola's harmonics and the piano, reminiscent of the technique used in Schnittke's Concerto for Viola. Gotlibovich played the swinging second movement with great ease, and the third movement, an homage to Ravel, featured wandering scalar lines and unison passages. The fourth and final movement was a deliberate *moto perpetuo* with Bernstein-like harmonic gestures, ending with a whirling ascending scale that landed on a perfect fifth, like a whiff of sweet-smelling smoke.

After intermission, the Utrecht Conservatory Strings, conducted by violist/conductor Mikhail Zemstov, performed a rousing rendition of Britten's Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge before welcoming Atar Arad onstage for the world premiere of his Concerto for viola and strings (*Ceci n'est pas un Bach*). As Arad remarked, the work was his attempt at writing a "fake Bach concerto," written "maybe not by Johann Sebastian, but maybe by one of his sons." The first movement was dominated by a rhythmic cell that would thread through all three movements of the work. It was almost the inverse of the rhythm from the first movement of J.S. Bach's G minor gamba sonata. The second movement featured ornamented lyrical lines and a remarkable moment with the solo viola playing bass accompaniment to the violins' higher line. The final gigue-like movement featured furious passagework and a cadenza with borrowed bits of Bach's Chromatic Fantasy. Arad brought panache and energy to his performance of his piece, and his virtuoso technique shined as brilliantly as ever. As a programmed encore, Arad performed his Caprice no. 9 (Benjamin), with arpeggiated chords masking references to *Lachrymae*.



Atar Arad premieres his concerto, Ceci n'est pas un Bach, with the Utrecht Conservatory Strings. Photo by Dwight Pounds.

The evening concluded with Timothy Ridout's heartrending performance of Britten's *Lachrymae* for viola and string orchestra. He used a heavy practice mute to achieve a glassy and transparent tone in the work's first part, a contrast which made the first *senza sordino* notes speak with unparalleled focus. I was particularly moved by his expressive playing of the pizzicato variation and his selective employment of non-vibrato colors. The work ends with one of the great feelings of transcendental serenity in all of music, but this did not stop the audience from bursting into applause, requesting no fewer than three curtain calls for Ridout.

On Friday night, Kim Kashkashian and percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky performed a wide-ranging recital in de Doelen's recital hall. The percussion battery included a marimba, an assortment of drums, a glockenspiel, an array of gongs, and even upside-down wine glasses, but the music was never sonically overwhelming. The program intertwined works with folk elements—arrangements of Armenian songs by Komitas, Mansurian's *Three Medieval Taghs* ("laments), and Berio's *Naturale*—alongside viola and percussion versions of Kurtág's *Signs, Games, and Messages* and Linda Bouchard's *Pourtinade*. *Naturale* provided a powerful and doom-filled conclusion, with its final devastating gunshots and plaintive harmonics echoing through the hall. For a more light-hearted ending, the duo came back on stage for an encore of a dance written by Mansurian. Above all, I was blown away by the precision of ensemble and expression between these two close collaborators. I felt that no matter what instruments they might be playing—viola, wine glasses, or gongs—the two artists were resonating on the same unbreakable wavelength.

Recitals

With over 24 recitals during the Congress's five-day span, it was impossible to attend every one. But, in seeking my viola "fix" for the winter, I tried to hear as many as possible. Here are just a few of the recitals that excited me the most.

It only makes sense that the International Viola Congress would host a bevy of geographically themed recitals; Norway, New Zealand, Poland, Middle and South America, Italy, Turkey, and Switzerland all received recitals devoted to their music. The performance featuring music from South America was a real highlight in



Kim Kashkashian (left) and Robyn Schulkowsky (right) perform at de Doelen. Photo by Dwight Pounds.

this regard. The Sonata for Viola and Piano (1960) by Venezuelan composer Modesta Bor was a beautiful (tonal) piece that would be great for students. It contains lovely lyricism and rhythmic jazzy parts, while showcasing the color of the viola. This was followed by another composition by a South American woman composer, the *Capricho Montevideano* for viola and piano by Uruguayan composer Beatriz Lockhart, which can be found online. It has a strong tango character but is not overly difficult and would be a great piece for students. The concert closed with a set of fantastic pieces by Argentinian composer Juan Esteban Cuacci, with the composer at the piano. Three of the movements performed, Cromado I, VII, and XIII, are part of a larger work for solo viola. All three of these movements are real crowd-pleasers: rhythmic and



Olivier Marin performing his work Undō for viola, electronics, and video. Photo by Andrew Braddock

driving, with some contrasting lyrical sections. These pieces were much more difficult than other, and are more suitable for an advanced student (or professional). Recordings of Silvina Alvarez, the superb Argentinian violist who performed here, are available on SoundCloud.

The Congress was awash in performances of contemporary and new music. Two recitals on opposite ends of the instrumental spectrum—one for viola duo, the other for viola orchestra—were particularly gripping. On Wednesday, a 23-member viola orchestra comprised of faculty and students of the Conservatory of Amsterdam performed Max Knigge’s *Achille, Ajax & Moi* (2008). Subtitled “an imaginary ballet for solo viola and viola orchestra,” the work loosely recounted scenes from Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from the perspective of Odysseus. It was filled with imaginative and surprising combinations of colors—I was most struck by the sheer variety of sounds Knigge conjured from the ensemble. Takehiro Konoye adeptly handled the demanding solo part of this richly engrossing work.



Takehiro Konoye performs the solo part of Max Knigge’s *Achille, Ajax & Moi* for viola solo and viola orchestra. Photo by Andrew Braddock.

On other end of this spectrum—and the final recital of the Congress—was a riveting performance of viola duos by Italian violists Luca Sanzò and Camilla Insom. Sandwiched between two sections from Garth Knox’s *Viola Spaces* were Gérard Pesson’s *Paraphernalia* (2009) and George Benjamin’s *Viola, Viola* (1997). In terms of sheer execution, this recital presented the most formidable challenges of the Congress, but the two modern-music experts relished in them, playing with near flawless delivery and laser-sharp focus. In *Paraphernalia*, the performers swam in hazy and shadowy colors, crafting

a mysterious sound world through ponticello, ricochet, and pianissimo tremolo. Their virtuoso rendering of *Viola, Viola* made the work’s extreme difficulties seem almost manageable, and I was astounded with their rhythmic precision.

Two other performances featured inventive presentations of viola repertoire by student groups. The first recital consisted of arrangements for viola ensemble of Lionel Tertis’s compositions, performed by the ESMAE (Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espectáculo) Viola Ensemble from Porto, Portugal. The students brought a fresh sense of energy to these works, and they showed Tertis’s lasting importance in viola literature. Later in the week, viola and drama students from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire created a multimedia version of *Romeo and Juliet*: excerpts from Shakespeare’s play were interspersed with selections from Borisovsky’s arrangement of Prokofiev’s ballet for viola and piano.

Master Classes

Alongside the recitals, the many master classes allowed Congress attendees to not only hear great performances, but also to learn from great teachers. The classes began in earnest on Wednesday, when I was able to attend three of the four classes that day. Each presented the unique pedagogical viewpoints of the teachers. Marcin Murawski focused on the technical elements that create an artistic performance. He worked on vibrato with students playing both the Vieuxtemps Sonata and Schumann’s *Fantasiestücke*, asking for a “seductive vibrato” that would draw an audience in. This would help create an immediately approachable sound—a “YouTube moment”—so the listener wouldn’t be tempted to click to another video. After lunch, Timothy Ridout taught through performing, offering imaginative and enthralling demonstrations. When working with a student on *Märchenbilder*, Ridout conjured extreme tone colors in the first movement, both delicately hushed and forcefully present, and effectively embodied the “gallant knights and trumpet calls” in the second movement.

Given only twenty minutes to work with each student, Atar Arad opted to share a few specific pieces of salient wisdom rather than get into the minutiae of viola technique. After a performance of the first movement from Brahms’s E-flat Sonata, Arad asked if there were any non-violists in the audience. Of the 125 or so audience

members, only one person raised his hand. Arad then asked him if he knew the title of the movement—he did not—and then asked him to guess. His first guess, “Allegro moderato,” was met with a curt “No, try again” from Arad. “Poco Sostenuto?” Again, “No.” After a third unsuccessful guess, Arad revealed the title (“Allegro amabile”), proving his point that performers must make clear the meaning of the music, to all audience members. When working with the next student on the Bartók Concerto, Arad implored her to study the manuscript to differentiate the Bartók and Serly features of the score. He also gave a plug for violists to seek out Serly’s own Viola Concerto. The final student, Anuschka Pedano, performed the first movement of Rebecca Clarke’s Sonata with an uncommon maturity and conviction, so much so that Arad remarked: “You do a lot of things completely differently from me, but I still like it, because it’s personal.” He proceeded to offer a few special fingerings and technical tricks before sharing an amusing anecdote whose punchline had the audience roaring with laughter.



Arttu Nummela (left) performs Kurtág for Kim Kashkashian. Photo by Andrew Braddock

On Friday, Nobuko Imai’s master class got off to an untraditional start, as she performed Toru Takemitsu’s *A Bird Came Down the Walk*. She recounted the origin of the work in her introduction. After premiering Takemitsu’s *A String around Autumn* for viola and orchestra, she found that orchestras were reluctant to program it due to its large and varied instrumentation. So, she went back to Takemitsu and asked for a piece for viola and piano. After not receiving a definitive response, she was delighted when, a few years later and out of the blue, he sent her *A Bird Came Down the Walk*. She was able to premiere the work four months before the composer’s death in 1996. When speaking about the

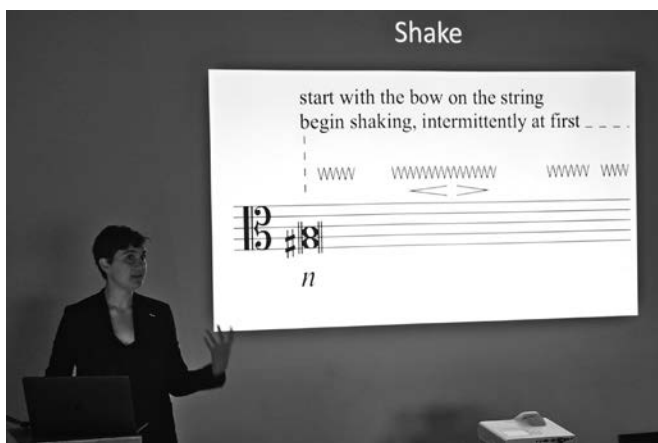
work itself, Imai brought up Takemitsu’s fascination with the second movement of Brahms’s F-minor viola sonata. The texture of *A Bird Came Down the Walk* certainly bears similarities to that work, but, the connection between the two works became more explicit during Imai’s luscious and full-bodied performance. She played with a richness and warmth well beyond the *p* and *pp* dynamic indications, giving the work a more romantic and sensuous quality. Her master class continued along the same lines, as she showed an almost maniacal obsession with sound when coaching students on works by Hoffmeister and Hindemith.

Two other master classes paired teachers with repertoire with which they have particularly intimate connections. Jutta Puchhammer-Sédillot’s class was on the “Pièces de Concours” of the Paris Conservatory, which Puchhammer-Sédillot both recorded and edited for publication (see *JAVS* Summer 2017 for an interview about her project). After performing Leon Firket’s *Concertino*, she shared her exacting attention to detail and note-by-note knowledge of the works with two student performers.

In the Congress’s final master class, Kim Kashkashian coached students in selections from Kurtág’s *Signs, Games, and Messages*. Kashkashian shared stories about playing the works for Kurtág and working with him on subtle nuances of expression. Student Arttu Nummela played with great poise and technical security, and Kashkashian helped him bring out different colors through string choices, bow speed, and contact point changes. After Gonzalo Martin Rodriguez’s performance of *The Carezza Jig*, Kashkashian shared that it was written at Prussia Cove and supposed to imitate a young girl dancing with screeching seagulls overhead. In addition to her spot-on technical advice, details like these brought added meaning—and comprehension—to these elusive works.

Lecture Recitals, Workshops, and More

While concerts, recitals, and master classes represented a sizable majority of the week’s offerings, a variety of other events filled out the Congress. Workshops offered attendees the opportunity to open their cases and learn through playing. Anne Lanzilotti led two workshops exploring extended techniques. She began by performing Andrew Norman’s *Susanna*, and guided us towards



Anne Lanzilotti leads an extended technique workshop. Photo by Andrew Braddock

hearing its overall arch-like structure. Throughout the course of her workshop, she repeatedly touched on the exciting pedagogical uses of many extended techniques, such as scratch tones. Teaching kids to play scratch tones on purpose, she said, can allow them to problem solve for the times when they *don't* want a scratch, and informs them about which techniques can change their sound. In another workshop, Daphne Gerling transmitted her ideas about bowing technique and physical set up alongside Karen Tuttle techniques. I loved seeing her tricks with rubber bands to encourage bow arm release.



Daphne Gerling demonstrates bow arm release with Krzysztof Komendarek-Tymendorf. Photo by Andrew Braddock

Several lecture-recitals assembled large ensembles for their performances. Donald Maurice and Marcin Murawski performed Johann Christoph Graupner's Concerto for Viola and Viola d'amore in A major with an ensemble of five violins, two violas, and a cello, followed by an illuminating examination of Graupner's life and works. In one of the largest lecture recitals, the Italian ensemble I Solisti Aquilani and musicologist Daniela Macchione performed two Mozart concerti incorporating scordatura: the famous Sinfonia Concertante for violin and viola, and a completion of the first movement of Sinfonia Concertante KV Anh 104 for violin, viola, cello and orchestra.



Donald Maurice (left) and Marcin Murawski (right) perform Graupner's Concerto in A major for viola d'amore and viola. Photo by Dwight Pounds

Amidst the busyness in the lobby, several informal "Talk Shows" offered a relaxed discussion of viola topics. Max Knigge moderated a chat about composing for the viola with Atar Arad, Anne Lanzilotti, Yoshiaki Onishi, and Leo Samama. Lanzilotti observed that the viola is the best adapted instrument to scordatura, which can "make it sound like an entire string quartet." Then Arad spoke of how the viola is the most human of instruments: the viola's size is acoustically imperfect for its range, so it is flawed, just as humans are flawed.



Kai-Thomas Roth (right), Jan van der Elst (middle), and Chaim Achttienribbe (right) discuss their viola. Photo by Dwight Pounds

One final unique aspect of this Congress was a team of four luthiers stationed in the lobby. They sought to make a viola from start to finish during the span of the Congress (just five days). The luthiers—Chaim Achttienribbe, Kai-Thomas Roth, Jan van der Elst, and Gijsbert van Ziel—modelled their instrument after Andrea Guarneri’s 1676 “Conte Vitale” viola. It was fascinating to see them work away at each step in the process during the course of the Congress.

A Closing Celebration on Saturday afternoon wrapped up the week’s events. It began with a 32-member viola orchestra performing, among others, the Radetzky March and Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus. Following closing remarks from Kristofer Skaug, the four luthiers presented their completed (but unvarnished) viola to Kim Kashkashian and Atar Arad for a brief demonstration. We all marveled at the transformation from slabs of wood into a real viola playable by master artists in just five days! Next, Carlos María Solare presented Atar Arad with the IVS’s Silver Alto Clef, its highest award, in recognition of his performing, teaching, and scholarly contributions to the viola. The ceremony concluded with an invitation to attend the 2019 IVC in Poznań, Poland.

Conclusion

As with many of the viola conferences I’ve attended, I was overwhelmed by the warmth and friendliness of everyone in attendance. I was also overwhelmed by all of the viola music crammed into five days, but it allowed me to fill up my ears and mind with many ideas to bring home. For both the variety of its events and the headlining guest artists, the



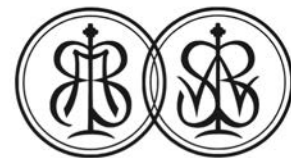
Atar Arad (left) receives the Silver Alto Clef award from IVS President Carlos María Solare. Photo by Dwight Pounds

Congress brought together an enthusiastic and talented set of violists, renewing old friendships and creating new ones in its five short days. I’m already looking forward to the next one.

A special thanks to Molly Gebrian for her contribution to this review.

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