

SONO
LUMINUS
SL|Editions

26

MELIA WATRAS

Melia Watras, viola

Atar Arad, viola

Garth Knox, viola d'amore

Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin

Total time 76:41
All world premiere recordings.

Atar Arad

- 1 **Toccatina a la Turk** 3:22
Atar Arad and Melia Watras, violas

Melia Watras

- 2 **Liquid Voices** 7:26
Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin; Melia Watras, viola

Garth Knox

- 3 **Stranger** 9:55
Garth Knox, viola d'amore; Melia Watras, viola

Melia Watras

- 4 **Prelude** 3:19
Atar Arad, viola

Melia Watras

- 5 **Luminous Points** 4:53
Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin

Atar Arad

- 6 **Esther** 6:36
Atar Arad and Melia Watras, violas

Melia Watras

Sonata for viola solo

- 7 Agitato 5:06
8 Semplice 4:42
9 Ansioso 3:06
10 Semplice (played by offstage performer) :25
Melia Watras, viola

Melia Watras

- 11 **Photo by Mikel** 6:16
Melia Watras, viola

Richard Karpen

- 12 **Bicinium** 20:41
Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin; Melia Watras, viola

26 centers around the concept of violists performing and sharing their own compositions. As a violist/composer, I am inspired by the legacy of others who have picked up both bow and pen to create music. 26 was my way of gathering some of my favorite musicians who share a love of the viola, and a love for the new. This album features performances and works by violists Atar Arad, Garth Knox, and myself. Our trio of violists/composers is joined by composer Richard Karpen and violinist Michael Jinsoo Lim. The title of the recording comes from the number of strings on the instruments used: four strings each for the violas of Arad and myself and Lim's violin; and 14 strings (seven playing and seven sympathetic) for Knox's viola d'amore.

As a student of Atar Arad's, I had the opportunity to experience his artistry through his teaching, viola playing and his compositions. It was, indeed, Atar's example that helped lead me to composing myself, along with the experiences culled from my performing career filled with new music and improvisation. I first got to know Garth Knox as an admirer of his work as violist of the

Arditti Quartet. I have since had the good fortune to perform with him on a number of occasions, and to get to know him as a composer. Richard Karpen's sense of experimentation was one of the initial draws for me to join the faculty at the University of Washington, where I am very happy to be his colleague. Michael Jinsoo Lim has been my partner in crime since we met in college. As co-founders of the Corigliano Quartet and members of Frequency, Mike is the musician I most often perform with. We work well together and get along quite famously (which is a good thing, since we are married!).

Thank you to the Royalty Research Fund at the University of Washington, for making this recording possible. This album is dedicated to the memory of my father, Joseph Watras (1943-2016). I cannot possibly do justice with words how important he remains to me and to my music.

Program notes on the individual pieces, written by the composers, are below.

—Melia Watras



Toccatina a la Turk

for two violas (2008) | Atar Arad (b. 1945)

The *Toccatina* is inspired by Dave Brubeck's famous *Blue Rondo a la Turk* and by rhythms and gestures from the Balkans. I originally wrote the piece for two violins as a gift for Mimi Zweig, an exceptional violin teacher (and my beloved partner for life), to be performed by members of a group of talented young disciples she directs, called Violin Virtuosi. Two sisters, Zoe and Ren Martin-Doike, then 16 and 18 years old, premiered the piece in 2008. Playing it, the siblings had projected so much fun and such happiness – I could not resist a selfish urge and arranged it for two violas as well. Melia Watras and I first played this version in Seattle in 2012.

Esther

for two violas (2008) | Atar Arad

My late mother, Esther, to whom this music is dedicated, was born in Bulgaria to a Sephardic family before moving to Israel at a very young age. I remember her as a woman who could never stop singing: joyful and lively Bulgarian songs for the benefit and delight of her family and friends (hence the inspiration for my *Toccata*), or melancholic, tender, sweet Sephardic tunes while on her own, mostly when working on her paintings (she was a well known artist). *Esther*, I believe, is a brief nostalgic reflection on my childhood and the music I used to hear a long time ago.

Stranger

for viola and viola d'amore (2014) | Garth Knox (b. 1956)

The starting point for this piece is an old Irish tune called *The Wounded Hussar*, thought to have been composed by blind Irish harper Turlough O'Carolan (1670 - 1738) for his friend Captain O'Kane:

"The hero of a hundred fights from Landon to Oudenarde, who, when old and war-worn, tottered back from the Low Countries to his birthplace to die, and found himself not only a stranger, but an outlawed, disinherited, homeless wanderer in the ancient territories that his fathers ruled as Lords of Limavady."

The bitterness and anger which accompany this eighteenth

century equivalent of a post-Vietnam experience are already present to some degree in the melody. My idea was to draw these out, and to portray a world that is falling apart, gently and without drama. Following the opening exposition of the tune, there are many attempts to recapture the melody, but each time there are more parts missing or transformed and little by little a feeling of "strangeness" becomes more and more persistent, filling the absences of an Alzheimer-like memory loss.

The sympathetic strings of the viola d'amore, which prolong the resonances of the playing strings are in themselves a kind of memory, albeit a very selective one. As the piece progresses, they become more present, and are even played directly both plucked and with the bow (normally they are left to resonate passively). At the end of the piece, these sympathetic strings are left holding the last partial memories of what once had been.

Stranger is commissioned by and dedicated to Melia Watras, to whom I am grateful for her encouragement, her enthusiastic collaboration and her beautiful playing.

Liquid Voices

for violin and viola (2013) | Melia Watras (b. 1969)

Liquid Voices, written in 2013, takes its inspiration from Virginia Woolf's short story, *The Fascination of the Pool*. Woolf has been a profound, influential and special author to me. Her experimental nature and ever-changing writing style make her elusive. She was lyrical, poetic

and forward thinking.

I was taken with the story's fluidity, imagery and depth, which helped shape the structure and basic concept for my piece: voices floating on top of each other. The pitch centers of *Liquid Voices* are taken from the harmonic series played by the violin in the first few measures of the work.

Prelude

for viola solo (2014) | Melia Watras

I vividly recall a lesson with Atar Arad where I began with the Prelude from Bach's Third Suite. Atar's concept for this movement was creative, unusual and very personal. I think of it every time I hear or play the piece, and I share it with my students today. Bach's Prelude begins with a simple descending C major scale, which Atar described as a string player gently warming up, a sort of private ritual that we do every day. It then unfolds as a daydream, before returning to the same C major scale to end the movement, bringing us out of the dream state and back into reality, where we began.

I decided to compose a piece for viola solo, dedicated to Atar, with this vision of his in mind; my resulting *Prelude* is an homage to both my dear professor and J.S. Bach. The work opens with long tones on open strings, which is my daily warm-up. In my daydream, influences of Arad and Bach float into the piece. The work focuses on the pitch C (as does Bach's Third Suite), which is

emphasized by the use of scordatura tuning in which I ask the violist to tune the D string down to a C. *Prelude* is infused with a 6-note quote from Atar's solo viola sonata. The end of the piece, with its sixteenth-note arpeggio figures, is another nod to the Bach Prelude that sparked the imaginings Atar described to me in his studio in Bloomington, Indiana years ago.

Luminous Points

for violin solo (2013) | Melia Watras

I began with the image of a mysterious, secret garden, where the night sky, brilliantly studded with unending stars, is reflected in a pond. The sky becomes the water and the water the sky.

I wrote *Luminous Points* for violinist Michael Jinsoo Lim, hoping to imbue the work with his gentle character and *molto dolce* E string playing.

Sonata

for viola solo (2012) | Melia Watras

I wrote my Sonata for viola solo with a desire to continue exploring emotional landscapes that are very difficult, or impossible to explain with words. The first movement is a contemplation of an inner and outward journey of a lone figure. At its core is a sense of yearning to find or return home. The movement opens in the midst of a tempest, and the second section begins with a quote from the refrain of the Appalachian folk

song *O Death*. I was particularly influenced by Ralph Stanley's interpretation and soulful singing.

The idea of a timeless, positive force provided the impetus for the second movement, written in Mixolydian mode. *Ansioso*, the third movement, reflects on the desire to escape. Each section can be seen as a side of a cage, with the first segment providing the pitch material and order for the other three. When the sonata ends, we are left with the timeless force from movement 2; revealing the ever-present nature of its existence.

Photo by Mikel

for viola solo (2012) | Melia Watras

In January 2012, my cousin Mikel Watras, who is a wonderful artist, presented me with a gift of a miniature photograph. The image is of an olive grove in Akcay, Turkey, on the coast of the Aegean Sea, where she had been visiting.

I put this photo in my studio, and often found myself staring into it, transfixed by its beauty and uniqueness. As I improvised music on my viola, I would become lost in this other world. These practice sessions were the catalyst for my composition.

The rhythm commonly associated with the *alla Turca* style provides architectural and motivic elements to *Photo by Mikel*.

Bicinium

for violin and viola (2014) | Richard Karpen (b. 1957)

There are only small differences between how we experience the past and the future. For the past we have tangible evidence that it existed. For the future we have just our expectations, desires, or fears for what will be. But we live in neither the past nor the future and can only experience them in our imaginations.

It's always most enjoyable to compose for friends. *Bicinium* was composed for two of the best musicians and best people I know. Melia Watras and Mike Lim inspired this piece and while they are two people who always make others around them feel hopeful and optimistic, this is a somewhat nostalgic composition, a kind of meditation on the mysteries and intangibles of time and art.



Melia Watras, violist/composer

Hailed by *Gramophone* as “an artist of commanding and poetic personality” and described as “staggeringly virtuosic” by *The Strad*, violist Melia Watras has distinguished herself as one of her instrument’s leading voices. She has performed in major venues such as Carnegie Hall, Weill Recital Hall, and Alice Tully Hall, while achieving acclaim as an important recording artist. Watras has released 5 albums, while performing on 13 others as a chamber musician. As a composer, her works have been performed throughout the United States and in Europe. Watras studied with Atar Arad at Indiana University and served as a teaching assistant to the Juilliard String Quartet while at the Juilliard School. She is currently Professor of Viola and chair of Strings at the University of Washington School of Music, where she was awarded the Adelaide D. Currie Cole Endowed Professorship, the Donald E. Petersen Endowed Fellowship and the Royalty Research Fund.

Atar Arad, violist/composer

Atar Arad is an internationally renowned viola soloist, chamber musician, composer and educator. A First Prize-winner at the Geneva International Music Competition (1972), he has performed worldwide as a soloist with major orchestras and as a member of the famed Cleveland Quartet. Arad's compositions include Sonata for Viola Solo, String Quartet, Twelve Caprices for Viola, Viola Concerto (which he premiered in Bloomington, Brussels and Stockholm), and *Tikvah* for viola solo, commissioned for the Munich International Viola Competition. His concerto, string quartet and viola sonata are recorded on RIAX. He recently presented his viola caprices on a European tour including concerts in London, Berlin, Frankfurt, Detmold and Hamburg. Arad currently serves as Professor of Music (viola) at the Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University.



Garth Knox, violist/composer

Garth Knox is one of today's leading performers of contemporary music, and his vast experience as a member of Pierre Boulez's Ensemble InterContemporain and as violist of the Arditti Quartet has given him a very comprehensive grasp of new music. Stimulated by the practical experience of working on a personal level with composers such as Boulez, Ligeti, Berio, Xenakis and many others, he channels and expands this energy when writing his own music. Knox's solo and ensemble pieces have been played all over Europe, USA and Japan. *Viola Spaces*, an on-going series of concert studies for viola published in 2010 by Schott combines ground-breaking innovation in string technique with joyous pleasure in the act of music making and the pieces have been adopted and performed by young string players all over the world.



Richard Karpen, composer

Richard Karpen is a composer and researcher in multiple areas of music and the arts. His compositions for both electronic media and live performance are widely known, recorded, and performed internationally. Over the last 30 years he has also been one of the leading pioneers in the development of computer applications for music composition, interactive performance, and sonic arts. Karpen is Director of the School of Music at the University of Washington where he is also a Professor of Music Composition. He previously served at the UW as Divisional Dean for Research in the College of Arts and Sciences and Founding Director of the Center for Digital Arts and Experimental Media (DXARTS). Karpen's compositions have been recorded on a variety of labels including Wergo, Centaur, Neuma, Le Chant du Monde, DIFFUSION i MeDIA, Fleur de Son, and Capstone.



Michael Jinsoo Lim, violinist

Violinist Michael Jinsoo Lim has been praised by *Gramophone* for playing with “delicious abandon,” and hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as a “conspicuously accomplished champion of contemporary music.” Concertmaster and solo violinist for the internationally acclaimed Pacific Northwest Ballet, Lim is featured as soloist with the company in concertos by Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Bach and others. Lim is artistic director of the Seattle-based ensemble Frequency and co-founder of the award-winning Corigliano Quartet, with whom he has appeared on over a dozen albums. Lim attended Indiana University, where he studied with the legendary Josef Gingold, and the Juilliard School, where he taught an assistant to the Juilliard String Quartet. In addition to his work as a performer, Lim is a dedicated teacher who serves on the faculty of Cornish College of the Arts.

Melia Watras

26

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