

Melia Watras  
UW Faculty Recital: *Schumann Resonances*  
Meany Theater  
January 26, 2016  
7:30pm

Melia Watras, viola  
Galia Arad, recorded voice  
Winston Choi, piano  
Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin  
Matthew Kocmierski, percussion  
Cuong Vu, trumpet

Berceuse with a Singer in London for voice and viola (2015)\* .....Melia Watras  
text by Michael Jinsoo Lim (b. 1969)

Porch Music for viola and trumpet (2015)\* .....Cuong Vu  
(b. 1969)

Source for viola, percussion and violin (2015)\* .....Melia Watras  
Creusa  
Grandmother Spider  
Lass: Variations on a Theme by John Jacob Niles  
Grandmother Spider Returns  
Rawiya

Intermission

Schumann Resonances for viola and piano (2015)\* .....Melia Watras

Märchenbilder (Pictures from Fairyland) for viola and piano, Op. 113.....Robert Schumann  
Nicht schnell (1810-1856)  
Lebhaft  
Rasch  
Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck

Tertium Quid for violin, viola and piano (2015)\* .....Richard Karpen  
I (b. 1957)  
II  
III

\* World Premiere

## Program Notes

Schumann's *Märchenbilder* (Pictures from Fairyland), Op. 113 is one of the great pieces of the viola repertoire. I love these fantasies by Schumann, full of color, detail and life. I always enjoy returning to them, finding new magic from Schumann each time.

I have very fond memories of performing *Märchenbilder* with the astonishing pianist, Winston Choi, when we were both students at Indiana University. It's very meaningful to be able to play this work with him again, all these years later.

Tonight's concert takes Schumann's *Märchenbilder* as a building block, and travels in many new directions with the premiere of compositions by three UW faculty: myself and two of the most creative people I know, Richard Karpen and Cuong Vu. The only guideline for the new pieces was that their point of departure be this composition of Schumann: through *Märchenbilder* itself, or inspired by fairy tales or other folklore.

Special thanks to Doug Niemela for his assistance with the voice recording and technical requirements for *Berceuse for a Singer in London*.

### **Watras: Berceuse for a Singer in London (2015)**

The "Singer in London" in the title is the fantastic folk singer Galia Arad, to whom this piece is dedicated. I've always been taken with Galia's beautiful voice and innate music making. Galia and I share a number of connections, including spending formative years in Bloomington, Indiana, where Galia grew up, and where I moved to for college, studying viola with Galia's father, the distinguished violist and composer Atar Arad.

*Berceuse* took shape while I was practicing the exquisite fourth movement lullaby of Schumann's *Märchenbilder*. My intent was to write a piece in a folk song style, with Galia very much in my mind as I composed. The text for *Berceuse with a Singer in London* was written by violinist Michael Jinsoo Lim, my frequent instrumental collaborator, who this time shared with me his words:

Take me where you go.  
With shared footsteps,  
We will walk, light with stars.

When time stops,  
And now becomes then,  
We will walk, light with stars.

We float,  
Blind, like brightly lit secrets,  
Better killed than kept.

Text by Michael Jinsoo Lim

—Melia Watras

### **Vu: Porch Music for viola and trumpet (2015)**

For a few months leading up to writing this duo piece for Melia, I had spent a significant amount of time anxiously contemplating the challenges of coming up with a piece that would live up to the expectations of being commissioned by my friend, colleague and virtuosic violist that she is. My intention was that the piece would not only feature the coalescing characteristics of our instruments that resonate with me, but more so our musical personalities and overlapping musical experiences and what that could encompass. We had done some work together in Melia's project with two other amazing artists, violinist Michael Lim and drummer Ted Poor, in a context rooted in free improvisation. The advantage of integrating improvisation into the piece and using the musical data that we accumulated and internalized in that experience became a necessity and impetus.

While this realization provided momentary relief, the challenge of writing the piece continued to be perplexing due to the litany of things that I didn't want the piece to be nor how it would be referenced by the listener. Shoot me if the listener would think of it as a classical piece, a jazz piece or an avant-garde piece. I just want it to be simply heard as a Melia piece written by Cuong. Being handcuffed by my idea of what the original project theme should mean, the process of committing pencil to paper, so to speak, was difficult and didn't begin until the project transformed to include the idea of folk songs. This is territory that I'd never contemplated for my musical output but provided an area to work within that was still connected to Melia's project theme.

With this metaphoric green light, I decided to write my own version of a folk song that would be the generative germ for the piece. My "song" drew from the kinds of folk songs that one might find Charles Ives referencing in his incredible body of works. Songs such as "Oh Shenandoah" or folk songs that were influenced by "Amazing Grace" along with the general characteristics of American folk songs from the 1950's such as "500 Miles" and "Blowing' in the Wind" have permeated our collective consciousness whether we're fans of that music or not. Melodically and harmonically, this seemed a perfect overlapping starting point for me to use in bringing our different vocabularies together for Melia and me, since we are after all, a part of that collective consciousness.

Having this folksy, "fiddle music" type of sound in my ear as I wrote the song, it generated harmonies built on the interval of the 5th with suspended 2nds or 4ths (inversions of each other). The song's inherent harmonies further generated a sequence of chords that provided a harmonic opening that helped me to obscure the two initial presentations of its melodic theme, which then set up the environment for the first improvisation featuring Melia. These chords then serve as a transition into a second improvisation, featuring myself over Melia's accompanimental approach and interjections/declarations. This second improvisation then transitions into the simply stated song for the ending.

The name of the piece comes from my description of two musical approaches. The first is in playing with intonation to create a slightly unstable, "warble-y" feeling and character for the overall piece. The second is for the disjunctive feeling for the second improvisation. My description to Melia was to play in a way that would conjure up images of two old timers sitting on their back porch on the prairie, back in the day, reminiscing about their past while throwing back a heavy dose of whiskey.

I'm relieved to know that Melia really likes the piece! —Cuong Vu

### **Watras: Source for viola, percussion and violin (2015)**

Using Schumann's *Märchenbilder* as a starting point, I happily set to looking for fairy tales to write about. I read and researched and as I began to compose, I realized that I was not including a single fairy tale. Instead, it was folk material, sculpture, legends and an epic poem that captured me. I was specifically drawn to women characters.

*Source* consists of five movements. The motivation for the first, *Creusa*, is from Vergil's *Aeneid* and is named for the first wife of Aeneas. I wanted to echo Creusa telling the future to her husband. So, in that effort, the scalar figures in *Creusa* reflect the pitch centers used in each of the successive movements, outlining them as follows: movement I: pitch center C; II: B; III: A; IV: F; V: E-flat and C.

At the movement's close, one of the performers speaks, in Latin, a few lines from the *Aeneid*. I first read these words while on a plane to Copenhagen. They were so impactful, it felt like a hand reached in, grabbed my heart and squeezed (not exactly what one wants to feel at 10,000 feet). Later discussions with Catherine M. Connors, Professor of Classics at the University of Washington, increased the depth of my understanding as well as my love of Vergil.

Upon hearing Ms. Connors recite this excerpt, I thought I should use a recorded voice of an expert Latin speaker, such as herself. I would like to thank Ms. Connors not only for her very generous guidance, but for giving me the courage, and instruction, to speak these words myself:

ter conatus ibi collo dare bracchia circum;  
ter frustra compresa manus effugit imago,  
par levibus ventis volucrique simillima somno.\*

\*from the *Aeneid*, by Vergil. (ed. R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford University Press, 1969), 2.792-4.

English translation:

Three times I tried to fling my arms around her neck,  
three times I embraced—nothing...her phantom  
sifting through my fingers,  
light as wind, quick as a dream in flight.

— Robert Fagles, Viking, 2.983-6

Like many dreams and images we have in our heads, movements II and IV are based on the connection of multiple sources; Louise Bourgeois's spider sculptures, the Cherokee legend *Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun*, from a tale reported by James Mooney in the 1890's, and my own grandmother, who is a hero in my life. (Also, Seattle is full of spiders! ...but I digress.) All of the pitch material for both movements is generated from a short progression I created.

The third movement, *Lass: Variations on a Theme by John Jacob Niles*, takes its cue from John Jacob Niles's *Lass from the Low Countree*. Niles's rendition is an adaptation of the text of a traditional folk song, with an original melody by Niles.

*Source*'s fifth and final movement is titled *Rawiya*, which is an Arabic name meaning "she who tells stories." While not a reference to an existing tale (or specific geographical location), the

movement is a culmination of the piece, with elements from the previous movements appearing in the finale.

I am grateful to the terrific percussionist Matthew Kocmierski, who graciously shared his vast knowledge and gave me a better understanding of how best to express myself through percussion.

—Melia Watras

### **Watras: Schumann Resonances for viola and piano (2015)**

In *Schumann Resonances*, I considered different notions of resonance: that of the instruments (viola and piano), use of the piano as a resonator for the viola, the resonance of an ostinato figure, the resonance of a melodic line, emotional resonance, and Schumann's resonance on this particular piece.

In this work, two harmonic progressions from Schumann emerge: one from the 3rd movement of *Märchenbilder*, followed later by one from the 2nd movement. *Schumann Resonances* was written with respect for some of the great experimenters: Henry Cowell, Luciano Berio, John Cage, and George Crumb, who opened new sound worlds for us to continue to move forward and incorporate in different ways.

Many thanks to the extraordinary pianists Winston Choi and Cristina Valdes for their friendship and support.

—Melia Watras

### **Schumann: Märchenbilder (Pictures from Fairyland) Op. 113**

After some years of dedication to song literature, in the mid-1840's Robert Schumann turned to orchestral and chamber music. By the turn of the decade, Clara Schumann, in one of her letters, remarked that "the instruments are having a turn," referencing her husband's work on a series of chamber pieces for various duo pairings. One of these was *Märchenbilder*, for viola and piano, which Schumann wrote in only a few days in March 1851.

The four movements are linked by their key relationships, like a sonata, but each of the four pictures is complete in itself. Schumann dedicated *Märchenbilder* to his friend, Joseph Wasiliewsky, concertmaster of the Düsseldorf orchestra that Schumann conducted. Wasiliewsky would later become a biographer of Schumann.

*Märchenbilder* was given its first known public performance by Wasiliewsky and Clara Schumann in 1853.

—Melia Watras

### **Karpen: Tertium Quid for violin, viola and piano (2015)**

*Tertium Quid* is the third work that I've composed for violist, Melia Watras. This new work is dedicated to her with friendship and admiration for her artistry and her ever-adventurous spirit!

The three works that Melia has commissioned from me have turned out to be a solo, a duo, and a trio, composed in that order. This was an unplanned progression but, it added some

incentive for me to make this new work a trio! This series of three works began with a piece for solo viola and electronics, *Aperture* in 2006; next was *Bicinium*, for viola and violin in 2013 for Melia and the magnificent Michael Lim; and now *Tertium Quid*, a trio for viola, violin, and piano, again for Melia and Mike, with the addition of piano (pianist, Winston Choi). The piano part in *Tertium Quid* seems to have evolved into a kind of proxy for adding myself into the mix: the author appearing as a character in his own fiction!

*Tertium Quid*: a simple translation could be “a third thing”, and that fits neatly for a third piece in a series. For this work though, one in which “three-ness” is woven into so many aspects, an idiomatic usage of the phrase *Tertium Quid* that resonated with me in particular can be translated roughly as, “an indefinite third thing that is related to two other more definite things.”

I didn't at first plan for a three movement work when I started composing *Tertium Quid*. Robert Schumann's *Märchenbilder* (Pictures from Fairyland) from which it is derived, has four movements. I also did not expect that the moods of each of the three movements would be so similar (urgent; foreboding) to one another, as are also the timings and the structures. Each movement of *Tertium Quid* is perhaps a version of an archetypal dream. Things like this are up to listeners' imaginations in any case.

—Richard Karpen

## Biographies

Hailed by *Gramophone* as “an artist of commanding and poetic personality” and described as “staggeringly virtuosic” by *The Strad*, violist **Melia Watras** ([meliawatras.com](http://meliawatras.com)) has distinguished herself as one of her instrument's leading voices. Watras's discography has received considerable attention and praise from the media. Her latest album, *Ispirare* was described by *Strings* as “a provocative, relentlessly absorbing recital of profoundly expressive, experience-laden music.” *Short Stories* was a *Seattle Times Critics' Pick*, with the newspaper marveling at her “velocity that seems beyond the reach of human fingers.” *Strings* called her second release (*Prestidigitation*) “astounding and both challenging and addictive to listen to.” Watras's exploration of improvisation has led her to collaborating with jazz innovators Cuong Vu and Ted Poor, and to writing her own compositions. Her violin/viola duo *Liquid Voices* recently had its European premiere, and her next disc will feature five of her works. Watras is currently Associate Professor of Viola and chair of Strings at the University of Washington School of Music, where she holds the Adelaide D. Currie Cole Endowed Professorship and was awarded the Donald E. Petersen Endowed Fellowship. Watras has given viola and chamber music classes at schools such as Indiana University, Cleveland Institute of Music, Strasbourg Conservatoire (France), and Chosun University (South Korea). This spring, she will return for a third time to her alma mater, Indiana, to teach as a guest professor.

Singer/songwriter **Galia Arad** has appeared at London's Royal Albert Hall and has toured the USA, England, Ireland and Japan, singing original music. The winner of Songwriter Hall of Fame's Abe Olman award and winner of The Great American Song competition, she has collaborated with Shane MacGowan (from The Pogues), Elvis Costello's rhythm section, Marc Ribot, and many others.

Laureate of the 2003 Honens International Piano Competition and winner of France's 2002 Concours International de Piano 20e siècle d'Orléans, Canadian pianist **Winston Choi** has

performed in recital and with orchestra across four continents. Choi's debut CD, the complete piano works of Elliott Carter (l'Empreinte Digitale in France) was given 5 stars by BBC Music Magazine. He can be heard on the Albany, Arktos, Naxos, QuadroFrame and Southport Records labels. Choi is Associate Professor and Head of Piano at Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts.

**Richard Karpen** is a composer and researcher in multiple areas of music and the arts. His compositions for traditional and experimental media are widely known, recorded, and performed internationally. Over the last 30 years he has also been one of the leaders in the development of computer applications for music composition, interactive performance and sonic arts. He has recently returned to the stage as a pianist. Karpen has composed works for many prominent international performers and along with frequent concert performances his works have been set to dance by groups such as the Royal Danish Ballet and the Guandong Dance Company of China. Karpen's compositions have been recorded on a variety of labels including Wergo, Centaur, Neuma, Le Chant du Monde, DIFFUSION i MeDIA, Fleur du Son, Capstone, and RareNoise. Richard Karpen is Director of the School of Music at the University of Washington where he is also a Professor of Music Composition.

**Matthew Kocmierski** is principal percussionist with the Pacific Northwest Ballet Orchestra. He regularly performs with the Seattle Symphony and Seattle Opera, and is on the faculty of Cornish College of the Arts. He is currently a member of the Pacific Rims Percussion Quartet, makes regular appearances with the Seattle Chamber Players, and can be heard on many recordings of solo, chamber, and orchestral music as well as movie and television soundtracks.

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." He is concertmaster and solo violinist of the Pacific Northwest Ballet Orchestra, co-founder of the renowned Corigliano Quartet and serves on the faculties of Cornish College of the Arts and DigiPen Institute of Technology. Upcoming performances include the Stravinsky violin concerto with PNB at City Center in New York City, the Andrew Waggoner violin concerto at Syracuse University and Seattle performances of the Stravinsky concerto for PNB's 2016-17 season.

**Cuong Vu** is widely recognized by jazz critics as a leader of a generation of innovative musicians and has performed with a wide range of artists including Pat Metheny, Laurie Anderson, David Bowie, Dave Douglas, Myra Melford, Cibo Matto, and Mitchell Froom. Cuong is Associate Professor and chair of Jazz Studies at the University of Washington, where he was awarded the Donald E. Peterson Professorship, and the prestigious Distinguished Teacher Award. In 2002 and 2006, Cuong was a recipient of the Grammy for Best Contemporary Jazz Album as a member of the Pat Metheny Group. He's been recognized as one of the top 50 young Jazz Artists in an article called "The New Masters" from the British magazine, *Classic CD* and in 2006 was named the Best International Jazz Artist by the Italian Jazz Critics' Society. Amazon listed Vu's "Come Play With Me" on their "The 100 Greatest Jazz Albums of All Time".