

MELIA WATRAS

BIOGRAPHY (Full length)

Described as “staggeringly virtuosic” by *The Strad*, violist Melia Watras has been hailed by audiences and critics alike for her electrifying and vibrant performances. She has long been at the forefront of the American new music scene, both as a soloist and co-founder of the award winning Corigliano Quartet (www.coriglianoquartet.com). Throughout her career Watras has championed the works of living composers, commissioning, premiering and recording numerous new works for the solo viola and for string quartet, while appearing in the nation’s leading venues including Carnegie Hall, Weill Recital Hall, Alice Tully Hall and the Kennedy Center.

Watras’s expanding discography has garnered considerable attention and praise from the media. Of her debut solo CD, *Viola Solo, Strings* remarked, “Watras is a young player in possession of stunning virtuosic talent and deserving of the growing acclaim.” *The Strad* called her “excellent” and “authoritative,” while the *American Record Guide* proclaimed, “Watras is a terrific violist.” For the CD, Watras adapted John Corigliano’s *Fancy on a Bach Air* for viola. Her edition of this work is published by G. Schirmer, Inc. Watras’s recently released second solo CD, *Prestidigitation* features world premiere recordings of five works written especially for her and was described by *Strings* as “astounding, and both challenging and addictive to listen to.” Her upcoming third disc will include short, stylistically diverse works from composers ranging from Henri Vieuxtemps to Gyorgy Ligeti.

With the Corigliano Quartet, Watras has concertized extensively throughout the United States and abroad, performing to much critical acclaim. Described as “musicians who seem to say ‘Listen to this!’” by the *New York Times*, the quartet’s 2007 CD release on the Naxos label was named one of the Ten Best Classical CDs of the Year by the *New Yorker* and prompted *Gramophone* to proclaim, “the unbridled force and full-metal virtuosity that the Corigliano Quartet unleash on this music is astounding.” The group has won awards such as the Grand Prize at the Fischhoff Competition and the ASCAP/CMA Award for Adventurous Programming, and has appeared at the Isaac Stern Chamber Music Workshop at Carnegie Hall and festivals including Aspen and Ravinia. The Corigliano Quartet has recorded for Naxos, Albany, Bayer, CRI, Riax, and Aguava and has appeared on NPR’s *All Things Considered* and *Performance Today* and WFMT-Chicago’s *Live from Studio One*.

A versatile performer, Watras has enjoyed collaborations with dance and theater. She made her dance debut at the Merce Cunningham Studio in New York City, where she played viola and danced in the premiere of Kathryn Sullivan’s *At Home*. Music from her *Viola Solo* CD was featured in director Sheila Daniels’s production of *Crime and Punishment* at Intiman Theatre, and she will soon work as a consultant for Braden Abraham’s production of *Opus* at Seattle Repertory Theatre.

Melia Watras was born in Honolulu, Hawaii and began her musical studies on the piano at age 5. Soon after, she turned to the viola and made her debut at age 16, soloing with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra. While still in high school, Watras drew attention by winning the National Wendell Irish Award. Her formal studies took her to Indiana University, where she studied with Abraham Skernick and Atar Arad, earning Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees and the prestigious Performer’s Certificate. While at Indiana, Watras served as Professor Arad’s assistant for many years, and was a member of the faculty as a Visiting Lecturer. She went on to study chamber music at the Juilliard School while also teaching there as an assistant to the Juilliard String Quartet. Watras then served as Musical Artist in Residence at Dickinson College and on the faculty of the New York Youth Symphony Chamber Music Program.

In 2004, Watras was appointed Assistant Professor of Viola at the University of Washington, where she teaches viola and chamber music. Watras currently resides in Seattle with her husband, Corigliano Quartet violinist Michael Jinsoo Lim. She plays a viola made by Samuel Zygmuntowicz. For more information on Melia Watras, please visit www.meliawatras.com.