
STRINGENDO (Australia)

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Melia Watras: *Viola Solo* CD review

By Susan Pierotti

The solo violist is at a huge disadvantage. Compared with the solo repertoire of the violin and cello there is a paucity of original works written for the instrument. Even this recording contains a few arrangements. But all hail *Fleur de Son* and Melia Watras for producing this CD! The seven pieces are all from the 20th century (if one counts the arranged Bach Chromatic Fantasy as more Kodaly and Watras than Bach).

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Her former teacher Atar Arad has written a fine three-movement sonata which shows up the colour range of the viola—melancholy, wistful and at times, somewhat sinister. The above-mentioned Bach keyboard piece is an exercise in virtuosity from arranger and performer alike. There is much flying up and down the fingerboard in a dizzying array of arpeggios that

bring out the full harmonic content of the original. Originally for cello, Corigliano's solo is also an homage to Bach, the inspiration coming from the theme of the Goldberg Variations. Though the Goldberg sarabande was periodically evident, this work of long slow high notes didn't grab my attention, but the next four pieces did. Andrew Waggoner's yearning, surging piece leaves the listener with intended unresolved tension, a reference to Ives' "The Unanswered Question". Stravinsky's lyrical *Elegie* is followed by a recent work by Paola Prestini and Penderecki's *Cadenza* provides the final item.

Watras is an amazing player. She has a virtuosic flair that tosses off any technical difficulties with ease and panache and tackles the demands of these works with strength and affection. She imprints her personality on each piece as if it had been written for her alone. This CD is as much a tribute to her masterly performance as it is a substantial contribution to the viola solo repertoire.