

MELIA WATRAS BIOGRAPHY (Full length)

Melia Watras has been hailed by *Gramophone* as “an artist of commanding and poetic personality” and by *The Strad* as “staggeringly virtuosic.” As a violist, composer and collaborative artist, she has sustained a distinguished career as a creator and facilitator of new music and art. The 2023-24 season includes the release of her new album *Play/Write*, which features her own compositions and works by Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti and Frances White; the world premiere of Watras’s *Fantasies in alto clef* for viola ensemble, commissioned by the American Viola Society for their 2024 festival in Los Angeles; and the debut of Watras’s *Sarabanda* for solo viola, which will be premiered and recorded as part of Atar Arad’s project, *Partita Party*.

Watras’s discography has received considerable attention from the press and the public. Her album *String Masks*, a collection of her own compositions including the titular work which utilizes Harry Partch instruments, was praised for “not only the virtuoso’s sensitive playing, but also her innovative and daring spirit,” by the *Journal of the American Viola Society*. Her compositional debut album, *Firefly Songs*, was hailed for “distilling rich life experiences into strikingly original musical form” by *Textura*. *Schumann Resonances* was described by the *American Record Guide* as “a rare balance of emotional strength and technical delicacy.” *The Strad* called 26 “a beautiful celebration of 21st century viola music.” *Ispirare* made numerous Best of 2015 lists, including the *Chicago Reader*’s (“Watras knocked the wind out of me with the dramatically dark beauty of this recording”). *Short Stories* was a *Seattle Times* Critics’ Pick, with the newspaper marveling at her “velocity that seems beyond the reach of human fingers.” Of her debut solo CD (*Viola Solo*), *Strings* praised her “stunning virtuosic talent” and called her second release (*Prestidigitation*) “astounding and both challenging and addictive to listen to.”

Watras’s compositions have been performed in New York City, Chicago, Seattle, Bloomington (IN), Columbus (GA), Denmark, Spain, Switzerland and Wales. She has been commissioned by the Avalon String Quartet, violinists Mark Fewer, Rachel Lee Priday and Michael Jinsoo Lim, cellist Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir, pianist Cristina Valdés, accordionist Jeanne Velonis, violist Rose Wollman, and has had works performed by artists such as violist Atar Arad, singer Galia Arad, pianist Winston Choi, Harry Partch Instrumentarium Director Charles Corey, violinists Tekla Cunningham, Manuel Guillén and Yura Lee, vocalist Carrie Henneman Shaw, percussionist Bonnie Whiting and the ensemble Frequency. Her music has been heard on National Public Radio’s *Performance Today*, and can be found on the albums *Play/Write*; *String Masks*; *3 Songs for Bellows, Buttons and Keys*; *Firefly Songs*; *Schumann Resonances* and 26. Watras’s adaptation of John Corigliano’s *Fancy on a Bach Air* for viola is published by G. Schirmer, Inc. and can be heard on her *Viola Solo* album.

Watras is the violist of Frequency, and for twenty years, she concertized worldwide and recorded extensively as violist of the renowned Corigliano Quartet, which she co-founded. The quartet appears on 13 albums, including their recording on the Naxos label, which was honored as one of the Ten Best Classical Recordings of the Year by *The New Yorker*.

Melia Watras studied with Atar Arad at Indiana University, earning Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees and the prestigious Performer’s Certificate. While at Indiana, Watras began her teaching career as Professor Arad’s Associate Instructor, and was a member of the faculty as a Visiting Lecturer. She went on to study chamber music at the Juilliard School while serving as a teaching assistant to the Juilliard String Quartet.

Watras is currently Professor of Viola and Chair of Strings at the University of Washington, where she holds the Ruth Sutton Waters Endowed Professorship and was awarded the Adelaide D. Currie Cole Endowed Professorship, the Donald E. Petersen Endowed Fellowship, the Kreielsheimer and Jones Grant for Research Excellence in the Arts, and the Royalty Research Fund. 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). She frequently returns to her alma mater, Indiana, to teach as a guest professor. She plays a viola made by Samuel Zygmuntowicz.

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