

PLANET M  
RECORDS

**MELIA  
WATRAS**  
SCHUMANN  
RESONANCES

# SCHUMANN RESONANCES

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

**Melia Watras** (b. 1969)

- ① **Schumann Resonances** for viola and piano (2015)\* 5:17  
*Melia Watras, viola; Winston Choi, piano*

**Robert Schumann** (1810-1856)

## **Märchenbilder (Pictures from Fairyland)**

for viola and piano, Op. 113

- ② I. Nicht schnell 3:05  
③ II. Lebhaft 3:32  
④ III. Rasch 2:34  
⑤ IV. Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck 5:19  
*Melia Watras, viola; Winston Choi, piano*

**Cuong Vu** (b. 1969)

- ⑥ **Porch Music** for viola and trumpet (2015)\* 9:33  
*Melia Watras, viola; Cuong Vu, trumpet*

**Melia Watras**

**Source** for viola, percussion and violin (2015)\*

- ⑦ I. Creusa 3:53  
⑧ II. Grandmother Spider 3:00  
⑨ III. Lass: Variations on a Theme by John Jacob Niles 8:20  
⑩ IV. Grandmother Spider Returns 2:26  
⑪ V. Rawiya 7:23  
*Melia Watras, viola; Matthew Kocmierski, percussion;  
Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin*

**Melia Watras**

- ⑫ **Berceuse with a Singer in London** for voice and viola (2015)\* 2:50  
*Galia Arad, voice; Melia Watras, viola*

**Richard Karpen** (b. 1957)

**Tertium Quid** for violin, viola and piano (2015)\*

- ⑬ I 7:41  
⑭ II 7:14  
⑮ III 7:26  
*Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin; Melia Watras, viola;  
Winston Choi, piano*

\*World premiere recording

Total time: 79:34

### Schumann Resonances

She searches...  
Looking inside the boxes  
That she loves.

She reaches...  
Resonating electricity  
In a long-awaited breath.

She (se)arches...  
In time,  
Lightning, glowing, radiating...

She (re)aches...  
“Will you put on the Schumann and  
Stay with me?”

— Michael Jinsoo Lim



Melia Watras



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. For my album, **Schumann Resonances**, I wanted to use *Märchenbilder* as a building block, traveling in new directions with world premiere recordings of compositions by me and two of the most creative people I know, Cuong Vu and Richard Karpen. The only guideline for the new pieces was that the point of departure be this composition of Schumann: through *Märchenbilder* itself, or inspired by fairy tales or other folklore (including folk songs).

Thank you to the Adelaide D. Currie Cole Endowment, Richard Karpen and the University of Washington School of Music, David Sabee and SeattleMusic, and Doug Niemela.

Notes for the piece, *Schumann Resonances* for viola and piano, exist as the poem on page 3.

— 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 simply be heard as a Melia piece written by Cuong.

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 *Blowin' 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 *The 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 comprehensa 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 COUNTRY*. 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: Berceuse with a Singer in London** for voice and viola (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.

— 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

## MELIA WATRAS

Hailed by *Gramophone* as “an artist of commanding and poetic personality” and described as “staggeringly virtuosic” by *The Strad*, violist/composer **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 established recording artist. Watras has released 6 albums, while performing on 13 others as violist of the Corigliano Quartet, an ensemble which she co-founded and toured with for 20 years. 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.



11

**GALIA ARAD**

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), Marc Ribot, and many others. Arad was recently on tour supporting artists Jools Holland and Marc Almond.

**WINSTON CHOI**

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 orchestras 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, QuadroFrame and Southport Records labels. Choi is Associate Professor and Head of Piano at Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts.



12



13

## RICHARD KARPEN

**Richard Karpen** is an American composer and researcher whose work spans multiple genres of music and the arts. His compositions for traditional and experimental media are widely known, recorded, and performed internationally. Since the early 1980s he has been one of the leaders in the development of computer applications for music composition, interactive performance and sonic arts. Karpen has composed works for and collaborated with many prominent international soloists and ensembles as well as for theater and film. His works have been set to dance by groups such as the Royal Danish Ballet and the Guandong Dance Company of China. He performs and records as pianist with the group Indigo Mist. Karpen's works 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. He was born in New York in 1957.

## MATTHEW KOCMIEROSKI

**Matthew Kocmieroski** is principal percussionist of the Pacific Northwest Ballet Orchestra, a founding member of Pacific Rims Percussion Quartet, and has appeared at numerous festivals nationally and internationally. He has worked with many composers including John Luther Adams, John Cage, George Crumb, Lou Harrison, and Toru Takemitsu as well as diverse popular acts such as Gladys Knight and the Pips, David Byrne, Perry Como and "Mr." Fred Rogers.

14



15

## MICHAEL JINSOO LIM

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, and has toured with PNB to Paris and New York City. Lim is artistic director of the Seattle-based ensemble Frequency and was co-founder of the award-winning Corigliano Quartet, with whom he 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 serves on the faculty of Cornish College of the Arts.



## CUONG VU

**Cuong Vu** is widely recognized by jazz critics as a leader of a generation of innovative musicians. A truly unique musical voice, Vu has contributed to a wide range of artists including Pat Metheny, Laurie Anderson, and David Bowie. Since his early years in NYC, Vu has been active in leading various groups, most notably his trio (with bassist Stomu Takeishi and drummer Ted Poor) and 4-TET with (Poor, Luke Bergman and Bill Frisell), displaying how he has carved out a distinctive sonic territory on the trumpet while blurring all stylistic borders. Along with Grammy awards in 2002 and 2006 as a member of the Pat Metheny Group, Vu received Europe’s Echo Jazz 2017 Awards, International Instrumentalist for his work on his recording, *Cuong Vu Trio Meets Pat Metheny*. Each of his eight albums have garnered critical acclaim having been considered among the top recordings of their respective years by jazz pundits. Currently residing in Seattle, Vu is Professor of Jazz Studies at the University of Washington.



16





Recorded on July 16-17 and August 24-25, 2016  
at Nordstrom Recital Hall at Benaroya Hall, Seattle, WA

Judith Sherman, producer  
Dmitriy Lipay, engineer  
Jeanne Velonis, editing assistant

Photography by:  
Michelle Smith-Lewis (cover, back, inside panels, p. 4, 14, 15, 17)  
Kathrin Baumbach (p. 11)  
Patricia Willis (p. 12)  
Steve Korn (p. 13, 16)

Designed by The Design Studio™ at Disc Makers





**PLANET M**  
**RECORDS**

PMR-001

[www.planetmrecordsseattle.com](http://www.planetmrecordsseattle.com) | [www.meliawatras.com](http://www.meliawatras.com)

©©2018 Planet M Records, LLC. All rights reserved.  
Unauthorized reproduction is a violation of applicable laws.