



PLANET M  
RECORDS

melia watras

STRING MASKS

# melia watras

## STRING MASKS

**melia watras**

viola

**charles corey**

harmonic canon and bass marimba

**sheila daniels**

actor/director

**frequency**

lim, watras, thorsteinsdóttir

**jose gonzales**

actor

**michael jinsoo lim**

violin and voice

**rhonda j. soikowski**

actor

**sæunn thorsteinsdóttir**

cello and voice

**bonnie whiting**

cloud-chamber bowls

**melia watras** (b. 1969)

KREUTZER for violin, viola and cello (2016)

- 1 I. Adagio - Febbrile 4:58
- 2 II. Danza 2:29
- 3 III. Lento 3:36
- 4 IV. Allegro agitato 2:29

*Frequency: Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin; Melia Watras, viola; Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir, cello*

**melia watras**

- 5 BLACK WING, BROWN WING for viola solo (2019) 5:35

*Melia Watras, viola*

**melia watras**

- 6 VETUR ÖNGUM LÁNAR LIÐ for voice (2016) 1:58

*Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir, voice*

**melia watras**

- 7 VETUR for cello solo (2016) 9:07

*Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir, cello*

**melia watras**

STRING MASKS for voices, viola, violin, Harmonic Canon, Cloud-Chamber Bowls and Bass Marimba (2017)

- 8 I. Transience 11:55
- 9 II. Crossing 3:40
- 10 III. Welcome 7:57

*Sheila Daniels, actor/director; Jose Gonzales, actor; Rhonda J. Soikowski, actor; Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin and voice; Melia Watras, viola; Charles Corey, Harmonic Canon and Bass Marimba; Bonnie Whiting, Cloud-Chamber Bowls*

World premiere recording

Total time 53:44

## Program Notes by Melia Watras

### melia watras

KREUTZER **for violin, viola and cello** (2016)

*Kreutzer* for violin, viola and cello traces a path of influence of Ludwig van Beethoven's ninth sonata for violin and piano, Op. 47, known as the *Kreutzer Sonata*. In the original manuscript, Beethoven dedicated the work to violinist George Bridgetower, who gave the premiere with Beethoven at the piano in 1803. I have read various reasons for why the dedication was changed when the piece was published in 1805 to violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer, which provided the sonata with its nickname, even though Kreutzer was never to perform the piece.

Beethoven's sonata inspired Leo Tolstoy's novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which in turn provided the basis for Leoš Janáček's String Quartet No. 1 (subtitled *The Kreutzer Sonata*); all three of these works have sparked the imaginations of countless artists in many mediums.

My piece, *Kreutzer*, consists of four movements, each containing related source material. Janáček opens the third movement of his string quartet with a reference (in canon) to Beethoven's second theme of the first movement of the sonata. I created a motive that I derived from the above two phrases, and use all three to form the DNA of the piece.

### melia watras

BLACK WING, BROWN WING **for viola solo** (2019)

I wrote *Black wing, brown wing* after reading Joan Didion's play, *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Didion experienced the tragic deaths of her husband in 2003 and her daughter in 2005. One facet that her play explores is what she describes as the vortex effect—paralyzing memories set off by everyday occurrences—that she painfully experienced in the aftermath of her husband's death and during her daughter's illness. In my piece, I use my own musical memories in the form of quotes from my cycle *Firefly Songs*, as a way to evoke Didion's vortex effect. I also make motivic use of some of the author's symbolism involving eyes and waves.

The title of my piece comes from a line in T. S. Eliot's poem *New Hampshire* (from *Landscapes*). The poem held great meaning for Didion and her daughter Quintana, and Didion chose to read it

at Quintana's funeral. I was very moved by the flow of Eliot's poem, which I reflect on by using a *parlando* theme, where the solo violist plays in a reciting manner.

### melia watras

VETUR ÖNGUM LÁNAR LIÐ **for voice** (2016)

*Vetur öngum lánar lið* (Winter aids no one) was written for the amazing Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir (who is a cellist, but here takes on the role of singer!). This work springs from my friendship with Sæunn, and her generosity in sharing her feelings about Iceland, her homeland.

When I started collecting and formulating ideas for the piece, I asked Sæunn if she had any poets or wordsmiths in her family or circle of friends. She told me her great-grandfather, Bjarni Jónsson, was a poet, and I asked her if she could pick out a poem or two of his. She sent me *Vetur öngum lánar lið* and *Ævidansinn* (The Dance of a Lifetime), with English translations by her cousin, Berglaug Ásmundardóttir. Jónsson's words became the text for my song. The poems, in Icelandic and English, are below.

POEMS BY BJARNI JÓNSSON, WRITTEN IN NEW YORK IN 1931

TRANSLATED BY BERGLAUG ÁSMUNDARDÓTTIR

#### Vetur öngum lánar lið

Vetur öngum lánar lið  
leggur þröngu sporin,  
Andinn löngum lífnar við  
lósöng á vorin.

#### Ævidansinn

Allt í gegnum aldaraðir,  
ekki breytast heimsins kynni,  
ýmist hryggir eða glaðir  
dansa menn um dauðans traðir,  
Drottinn stjórnar hljómsveitinni.

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Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir's family

#### Winter aids no one

Winter aids no one  
Lays narrow tracks,  
The spirit is accustomed to coming to life,  
To the plover's song in spring.

#### The Dance of a Lifetime

Through the ranks of the ages,  
The world's experiences are unchanging.  
Either doleful or jovial,  
Humanity dances on the paths of death.  
The Almighty conducts the band.

© 2016 by Berglaug Ásmundardóttir

## melia watras

NETUR **for cello solo** (2016)

*Netur* (Winter) is based on material from my song *Netur öngum lánar lið* (Winter aids no one), and like the song, was written for cellist Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir. The seasons have, of course, provided fertile material for composers' imaginations. As a respectful look at the past, I use the same pitch center (F) for *Netur* as Vivaldi did for his *Winter* from the *Four Seasons*, and under Vivaldi's influence, I created a recurring theme in the work, using quarter tones.

## melia watras

STRING MASKS **for voices, viola, violin, Harmonic Canon, Cloud-Chamber Bells and Bass Marimba** (2017)

When the Harry Partch Instrumentarium arrived at the University of Washington in 2014, I couldn't believe it! The extraordinary sound world that Partch created, and the original instruments that the iconic composer invented, built and thought of as people, were now living merely 2 floors down from my office at the School of Music.

Over the next few years, I had the good fortune to perform some short works by Harry Partch with Charles Corey, director of the Partch Instrumentarium. This experience fueled my desire to compose for the instruments.

As I thought about the piece I would write, the ancient and timeless colors of the Partch instruments brought the Latin word *imago* to my mind, and the layered meanings this word would have to an Ancient Roman, as illuminated to me in discussions with Catherine Connors, UW Professor and Chair of Classics. One facet of *imago* is the reference to funeral masks that were hung in the homes of Roman nobles and used in funeral processions by coffin bearers.

This connection between realms made me wonder about my own string ancestors.

I asked my close friend Sean Harvey, who I met when we both were studying as undergraduates at Indiana University, if he would write a text for the work. We chose seven string luminaries to be our subject matter: Josef Gingold, Eugène Ysaÿe, William Primrose, Ginette Neveu,

Niccolò Paganini, Arcangelo Corelli, and Giuseppe Tartini (listed in order of appearance in the story), each of whom changed the course of strings in their own way.

*String Masks* is written lovingly to the seven string luminaries and with many thanks to Catherine Connors, Charles Corey, Sheila Daniels, Jose Gonzales, Sean Harvey, Richard Karpen, Garth Knox, Michael Jinsoo Lim, Danlee Mitchell, Doug Niemela, Marcin Pączkowski, Rhonda J. Soikowski, Bonnie Whiting and to Harry Partch.



## Biographies

**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.

Watras has released 8 albums, while performing on 13 others as violist of the Corigliano Quartet. As a composer, her music has been heard on National Public Radio’s *Performance Today*, and can be found on the albums *String Masks*, *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. She is currently Professor of Viola 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.

**charles corey** is an American composer and performer holding a Ph.D. in Music Composition and Theory from the University of Pittsburgh. His approach to composition exploits and subverts the relationships that exist between different tuning systems. Corey’s compositions, known for their unexpected, evocative harmonies and their strong dramatic arcs, have been played across Europe and the Americas by performers including Cikada Ensemble, Iktus Percussion, Melia Watras, Kjell Tore Innervik, Ere Lievonen, and Inverted Space.

Corey is Director and Curator of the Harry Partch Instrumentarium and former Director of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra’s Merriman Family Young Composers Workshop. His music has been recognized by the Young Virtuosos Foundation, the Foundation for Modern Music, and the Sociedade Pró-Sinfônica de Limeira Encontro Internacional de Cordas. You can hear his compositions at [www.charlescorey.com](http://www.charlescorey.com).

**sheila daniels** is honored to mark her 5th cross-disciplinary collaboration with Melia Watras and/or Michael Jinsoo Lim. She is a Seattle-based director, actor, educator and choreog-



rapher. Recent projects include direction of Paula Vogel’s *Indecent* at Seattle Repertory Theatre and co-direction with Porscha Shaw of *Bodies of Water* featuring students from University of Washington, Cornish College of the Arts and Seattle University. She is currently directing her first documentary film, *Hidden Bodies: Body-typing and Shame in Theater in America*.

A “dream string trio,” according to King FM-Seattle’s *Second Inversion*, **frequency** presents innovative, invigorating and intriguing chamber music concerts. Composed of Michael Jinsoo Lim (violinist and artistic director), Melia Watras (violist) and Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir (cellist), Frequency is a modular chamber music group, breaking into different parts to present solos, duos and trios, while also expanding with renowned guest artists to perform in a variety of formations. Frequency members have performed as soloists and chamber musicians worldwide, in leading concert halls such as Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Weill Recital Hall, Suntory Hall, and Disney Hall.

**jose gonzales**, jazz pianist and actor, has composed and performed music for many theatrical productions in Seattle. His trio, Jose Gonzales Trio, has been performing Vince Guaraldi’s *A Charlie Brown Christmas* score for years, becoming an annual favorite for Northwest audiences. As a professional actor, Mr. Gonzales has performed locally and nationally: career highlights include originating the role of Franz Kafka for the premiere production of the Philip Glass opera *In the Penal Colony* at ACT Theatre, music director for *Passing Strange* at ACT, and band leader/lead keyboard for *Tommy* at the University of Washington.

**sean harvey** is a writer, musician and traveler who has authored travel guides for the *Rough Guides* series and spent the past fifteen years at Google and YouTube as a product manager.

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. His discography can be found on Naxos, Planet M, Sono Luminus, DreamWorks, Albany, Bridge, CRI, Bayer Records, RIAX and New Focus. In addition to his work as a performer, Lim serves on the faculty of Cornish College of the Arts.

**rhonda j. soikowski** is an actor, director, generative theater artist, and educator with an MFA in Contemporary Performance from Naropa University. Based in the Pacific Northwest, local acting credits include work with Seattle Children’s Theater (*The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*), NCTC (*Bright Half Life*), Strawberry Theatre Workshop (*FROST/NIXON, Accidental Death of an Anarchist*), Book-It Repertory Theatre (*Little Women, Peter Pan, Pride & Prejudice*), Village Theatre (*Crimes of the Heart*), Theatre22 (*Wizzer Pizzer*), upstart crew collective (*Titus Andronicus*), Cherry Manhattan Presents (*The Beebo Brinker Chronicles*), and many others.

Icelandic-American cellist **sæunn thorsteinsdóttir** enjoys a varied career as a performer, collaborator and educator. She has appeared as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Iceland Symphony, among others. Her recital and chamber music performances have taken her across the United States, Europe and Asia. Sæunn has performed in many of the world’s prestigious halls including Carnegie Hall, Suntory Hall, Elbphilharmonie, Barbican Center and Disney Hall. The press has described her as “charismatic” and “riveting” (*NY Times*) and praised her performances for their “emotional intensity” (*LA Times*). Born in Reykjavík, Iceland, Sæunn serves on the faculty of the University of Washington in Seattle, teaching cello and chamber music. For more information, please visit [www.saeunn.com](http://www.saeunn.com).

**bonnie whiting** performs experimental music, seeking projects that involve the speaking percussionist, improvisation, and non-traditional notation. Recent work includes performances

at the John Cage Centennial Festival in Washington DC, an evening-length song cycle for speaking percussionist composed by Eliza Brown and 10 musicians incarcerated at the Indiana Women’s Prison, and concerti with the National Orchestra of Turkmenistan. Her debut album, featuring a solo-simultaneous realization of John Cage’s *45’ for a speaker* and *27’10.554 for a percussionist* was released on Mode Records label in 2017, and her second album, *Perishable Structures*, launched on the New Focus Recordings label in 2020. Whiting has performed with some of the country’s leading new music groups, including Ensemble Dal Niente, International Contemporary Ensemble, Seattle Modern Orchestra, and red fish blue fish percussion group. She is Chair of Percussion Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle.



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Producer: Judith Sherman  
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