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### Melia Watras: *Ispirare* CD Review

By Rob Haskins

Ms. Watras teaches at the University of Washington; this program illustrates very well her extraordinary technique and musicianship along with her laudable commitment to contemporary music. I imagine she makes the best case imaginable for Rochberg's neoromantic sonata (1979), but it still confounds me. Although I'm in sympathy with Rochberg's aesthetics and can admire his technique as a composer, I often feel let down by the musical result: the expansive first movement of the sonata, for instance, sounds like it wants to be Shostakovich but isn't. The individual ideas and the way they unfold are merely competent, not magical or compelling. (The faster, rather truculent second idea of the sonata goes a long way in creating this sense of failure.)

*Caprice Four (for George)* by Watras's teacher, Atar Arad, makes a better impression with its lonely, wayward melody (which itself refers to the opening movement of the Rochberg). Shulamit Ran's *Perfect Storm* uses a fragment from Berio's haunting setting of 'Black is the Color' from his *Folk Songs* (1964) as a kind of refrain for a series of more extensive and varied musical ideas. (A lovely performance of the Berio offers a welcome opportunity to pair the two works as part of the program.)

The closing work, Berio's *Naturale* (1985), draws from a Sicilian folk song that he previously used in his viola concerto *Voci*. Here, a recording of the song by a Sicilian folk singer serves as departure and periodic returning point for the substantive, 20-minute meditation beautifully performed by Watras and Kocmierski. The sound is terrific. Strongly recommended—in particular, for the Berio and Ran.