

Brent Michael Davids: Viola Jokes (2005)

Program Notes:

Commissioned for Violist Melia Watras by the University of Washington Royalty Research Fund, *Viola Jokes* is a soloistic work for viola, with the addition of a Tenor whose lyrics are viola jokes. For those so informed, there exists an incredibly vast and time-honored anthology of viola jokes. It is from this literary storehouse that the lyrics are derived, in contrast to the considerable virtuosity of the viola. For the duration of this playful work, the Violist is the defensive witness, while the Tenor is the accusatorial barrister. To reveal any more in advance would betray too much!

To disclose the history of our Violist-Composer collaboration, however, is rather noteworthy. It all began at the “Crossroads of Traditions” Inter-American Composer Workshop in 1997. As a guest composer, I met Melia Watras for the first time, a graduate viola student at Indiana University in Bloomington. She was a member of IU’s celebrated graduate string quartet that performed my challenging work *The Singing Woods*, which had been previously and exclusively performed by the Kronos Quartet. John Corigliano was also one of the guest composers at this workshop presenting one of his own compositions for string quartet, likewise performed by IU’s graduate quartet. Following the “Crossroads” Workshop, the true impetus for our current Viola-Composer collaboration came to its fullest realization. That wonderful graduate ensemble went on to become one of America’s favorite quartets, naming themselves after one of the guest composers from the “Crossroads” Workshop. Now, if you were naming your quartet after a Workshop composer, who would you chose? Davids, or Corigliano? “The Davids String Quartet” or “The Corigliano String Quartet?” Hmmm. Davids Quartet. Corigliano Quartet. But, of course, they chose to become the “Corigliano Quartet,” and Melia has been trying to make amends to me ever since. Hence, the current collaboration. Enjoy!

--Brent Michael Davids