

## Richard Karpen: *Tertium Quid* (2015)

Program Notes:

*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