

## **Melia Watras: Prelude for viola solo (2014)**

World Premiere:

Atar Arad, viola; July 9, 2014, Bloomington, IN

Duration: 3:19

Program Notes:

When I was a student at Indiana University, I had the great honor to study with the renowned violist and composer Atar Arad. I vividly recall a lesson with him where I began with the Prelude from Bach's Third Suite. Atar's concept for this movement was creative, unusual and very personal. I think of it every time I hear or play the piece, and I share it with my students today. Bach's Prelude begins with a simple descending C major scale, which Atar described as a string player gently warming up, a sort of private ritual that we do every day. It then unfolds as a daydream, before returning to the same C major scale to end the movement, bringing us out of the dream state and back into reality, where we began.

I decided to compose a piece for viola solo, dedicated to Atar, with this vision of his in mind; my resulting *Prelude* is an homage to both my dear professor and J.S. Bach. The work opens with long tones on open strings, which is my daily warm-up. In my daydream, influences of Arad and Bach float into the piece. The work focuses on the pitch C (as does Bach's Third Suite), which is emphasized by the use of scordatura tuning in which I ask the violist to tune the D string down to a C. *Prelude* is infused with a 6-note quote from Atar's solo viola sonata. The end of the piece, with its sixteenth-note arpeggio figures, is another nod to the Bach Prelude that sparked the imaginings Atar described to me in his studio in Bloomington, Indiana years ago.

—Melia Watras