

Watras: Source for viola, percussion and violin (2015)

World Premiere:

Melia Watras, viola; Matthew Kocmierski, percussion; Michael Jinsoo Lim, violin;
January 26, 2016, Seattle, WA

Duration: 25:01

Program Notes:

Using Schumann's *Märchenbilder* as a starting point, I set to collecting my own fairy tales to write about. I gathered ideas that resonated with me from different cultures (knowing that it would not be meant to be all encompassing). In the end, I didn't include a single fairy tale. Instead it was myth and legend, folk material, and an epic poem that captured me.

Source consists of five movements. The motivation for the first, *Creusa*, is from Vergil's *The Aeneid* and is named for the first wife of Aeneas. I wanted to echo Creusa telling the future to her husband. So, in that effort, the scalar figures in *Creusa* reflect the pitch centers used in each of the successive movements, outlining them as follows: movement I: pitch center C; II: B; III: A; IV: F; V: E-flat and C.

At the movement's close, one of the performers speaks, in Latin, a few lines from *The Aeneid*. I first read these words while on a plane to Copenhagen. They were so impactful, it felt like a hand reached in, grabbed my heart and squeezed (not exactly what one wants to feel at 10,000 feet). Later discussions with Catherine M. Connors, Professor of Classics at the University of Washington, increased the depth of my understanding as well as my love of Vergil.

Upon hearing Ms. Connors recite this excerpt, I thought I should use a recorded voice of an expert Latin speaker, such as herself. I would like to thank Ms. Connors not only for her very generous guidance, but for giving me the courage, and instruction, to speak these words myself:

ter conatus ibi collo dare bracchia circum;
ter frustra compresa manus effugit imago,
par levibus ventis volucrique simillima somno. *

* from *The Aeneid*, by Vergil. (ed. R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford University Press, 1969), 2.792-4.

English translation:

Three times I tried to fling my arms around her neck,
three times I embraced—nothing...her phantom
sifting through my fingers,
light as wind, quick as a dream in flight.

— Robert Fagles, Viking, 2.983-6

Movements II and IV are based on a Cherokee myth and legend, from a tale reported by James Mooney in the 1890's, *Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun*. All of the pitch material for both movements is generated from a short, original progression.

The third movement, *Lass: Variations on a Theme by John Jacob Niles*, takes its cue from John Jacob Niles' *Lass from the Low Countree*. Niles's rendition is an adaptation of the text of a traditional folk song, with an original melody by Niles.

Source's fifth and final movement is titled *Rawiya*, which is an Arabic name meaning "she who tells stories." While not a reference to an existing tale (or specific geographical location), the movement is a culmination of the piece, with elements from the previous movements reappearing in the finale.

I am grateful to the terrific percussionist Matthew Kocmierski, who graciously shared his vast knowledge and gave me a better understanding of the best ways for me to express myself through percussion.

—Melia Watras