

Melia Watras – String Masks

American composer and violist Melia Watras' latest album, *String Masks*, features a dramatic and unique array of music, including a surprise unaccompanied song with Icelandic lyrics. *String Masks* showcases not only the virtuoso's sensitive playing, but also her innovative and daring spirit, found especially in the title track which calls upon singers, actors, and instruments invented by the music theorist and American composer Harry Partch (1901-1974).

Watras' *Kreutzer* for string trio borrows not only from the piece's namesake, but provides landmarks to Janáček's *String Quartet No. 1* as well. Featuring Michael Jinsoo Lim on violin, Watras on viola, and Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir on cello, the trio brings the four-movement work to life with sensitive playing that warmly embraces the listener.

String Masks is by far the most complex and dramatic piece in the recording, utilizing several of Partch's innovative instruments, including the Harmonic Canon (a 44-string microtonal zither), Cloud-Chamber Bowls, and a Bass Marimba (fitted with organ-pipe resonators).

Narrated by three actors, the piece leads the listener through an underworld journey to visit legendary string musicians from the past.

The hauntingly beautiful *Vetur öngum lánar lið* is a delicate and atmospheric departure from the other music of this set. Composed by Watras, the words stem from Icelandic cellist Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir's great-grandfather's poetry. The sparse music meets with the title "Winter aids no one" to bring to life a vivid and still world. *Vetur* for solo cello follows the lied and quotes the Icelandic song. Watras notes that "[a]s a respectful look at the past, I use the same pitch center (F) for *Vetur* as Vivaldi did for his *Winter* from the *Four Seasons*."