
THE WHOLENOTE

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Melia Watras: Firefly Songs

By Cheryl Ockrant

While we continue to endure the extended shutdowns and performance cancellations, there was a particular joy in discovering Melia Watras' *Firefly Songs*. Listening to what feels like a personal diary of her inner thoughts, one could almost call this an album of accompanied poetry, yet it is so much more. At times deceptively simple, more often there are complex musical pairings to thoughts, poems, literary references, inspirations and memories. American violist and composer Watras wrote these 13 individual pieces between 2015 and 2018 for combinations of violin, viola, cello and voices, and the flow of the album is both unique and comforting.

Full of surprises, from the charming *Mozart Doesn't Live in Seattle* to the trancelike tones and rhythms of overlapping voices in *Seeing Cypresses with Catherine C*, this is an album of singular gems as well as a complete collection. A work belying its complexity, *Firefly Songs* also stands strongly, piece by piece as beautifully expressed miniatures, each feeling free and spontaneous. Watras' solo viola work, *Lament*, written for the passing of her father, expresses a delicate nuance of emotion delivered with depth and presence. In *William Wilson*, the complexities hidden between the lines of Edgar Allan Poe are beautifully unveiled both with voice and on the violin by Michael Jinsoo Lim. Lim also stands out in the operatic (*one*). It would be hard to pick a favourite from this box of gems, but *Vetur öngum lánar lið* (*Winter aids no one*) was the perfect accompaniment to my icy walks on the beach.

This collection would be enjoyable either in the suggested order or as random treats that would slip easily into any playlist.