Melia Watras, UW associate professor of viola, has some eclectic new music out. For "Short Stories," released in May on the Fleur de Son label, Watras was joined by Kimberly Russ, orchestral pianist for the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

For this third solo album, Watras said she sought to demonstrate the versatility of the viola with a variety of sounds and emotional content. "I wanted to show the virtuosic and expressive capabilities of the viola and to feature different time periods and styles," she said. "I liked the idea of having shorter works for this particular CD, to give the feeling of a collection of short stories, rather than a novel."

Watras said it's "a great joy in my musical life" to collaborate with formidable composers such as those whose work appears on "Short Stories": Betsy Jolas, Dan Visconti, Andrew Waggoner and Anna Weesner. The CD includes two pieces that Watras commissioned — Waggoner's "Elle s'enfuit" and Weesner's "Flexible Parts."

The commissioning process, Watras said, starts with an idea she might have for a recording. "I'll think about composers that I want to work with, and tell them the general idea behind the project to see if they are interested." Knowing she'd be backed by the "wonderful" Russ on piano, Watras said the only suggestions she had for Waggoner and Weesner were approximate length for the pieces and that they should be for viola and piano. "There were no limits on what they wanted to do artistically with their work," Watras said. "I want composers to write music that they want to write!"

She said she has a fondness for the old-school charm of the era of Henry Wieniawski (1835 to 1880), whose "Reverie for Viola and Piano" is on the disc; and Henri Vieuxtemps (1820-1881), whose "Elegie for Viola and Piano, Op. 30" also is included. "My love of contemporary music is well known, and there are some beautiful new works on this disc. For me, great music is great music, no matter when it was written."

Watras said each of the three important components of her career — teaching, performing and recording — informs the others. "As an artist, recording allows me to present music that I believe in to a wide audience. This is my third solo album, and I hope to continue to explore different facets of music and music making with future recordings."