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The Newest Music — Melia Watras: Schumann Resonances

By Stephanie Boyd

Composer-violist Melia Watras has used a poem by Michael Jinsoo Lim as the program notes for her titular work *Schumann Resonances*: it begins “She searches Looking inside the boxes That she loves”. In this short but powerful work we can feel that searching in the aching viola lines and in chords in the piano that are allowed to die away slowly enough that listeners can parse the overtones as one by one they disappear into the atmosphere. It is followed by Schumann’s *Märchenbilder* (Fairy Pictures), the work that inspired *Schumann Resonances*.

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Achieving a rare balance of emotional strength and technical delicacy, this performance is a gem. *Porch Music* for viola and trumpet by Cuong Vu showcases the many places on both instruments’ ranges where they sound so similar that the chords they make are immaculately homogenous. Vu’s inspiration for this work was a mix of traditional American folk songs and characteristics of improvisation. Watras’s *Source* for viola, percussion, and violin is again inspired by *Märchenbilder*, and each movement refers to a folk tale. She invokes Creusa (the first wife of Aeneas) and the large spider sculptures of Louise Bourgeois, and she even draws a movement’s title from an Arabic name meaning “she who tells stories”. This work is evocative, mystical, and enchanting. Richard Karpen’s *Tertium Quid* for violin, viola, and piano is a tour de force of these performing voices. With dynamic, assertive performances from pianist Winston Choi, Michael Jinsoo Lim, and Watras, this work is a strong aural treat. This program is full to the brim with powerful pieces and convincing performances; it is well worth your time.