

Margaret Miller, viola recital

Faculty, Colorado State University

With Amanda Arrington, piano

October 15, 2024

7:30pm

All Faiths Chapel, Kansas State University

PROGRAM

Romance for Viola and PianoRalph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Varsha (Rain) 2019

Take What you Need (2016) Reena Esmail (b. 1983)

INTERMISSION

Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 11 no. 4.....Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

- I. Fantasie
- II. Thema mit Variationen
- III. Finale (mit Variationen)

PROGRAM NOTES

There is no information about the approximate date on which this work was written. The manuscript was discovered with others, without any clue, among the composer's papers after his death. All that can be said is that it was probably intended for the great virtuoso Lionel Tertis, for whom Vaughn Williams had composed his two major works for viola-Flos Campi in 1925 and the Suite in 1934.

-notes by Bernard Shore, who gave the first performance in 1962 with pianist Eric Gritton.

Indian-American composer Reena Esmail works between the worlds of Indian and Western classical music and brings communities together through the creation of equitable musical spaces. Esmail's life and music was profiled on Season 3 of PBS Great Performances series Now Hear This, as well as Frame of Mind, a podcast from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Esmail divides her attention evenly between orchestral, chamber and choral work. She has written commissions for ensembles including the Los Angeles Master Chorale, Seattle Symphony, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Kronos Quartet, and her music has featured on multiple Grammy-nominated albums, including The Singing Guitar by Conspirare, BRUITS by Imani Winds, and Healing Modes by Brooklyn Rider. Many of her choral works are published by Oxford University Press.

Esmail is the Los Angeles Master Chorale's 2020-2025 Swan Family Artist in Residence and was Seattle Symphony's 2020-21 Composer-in-Residence. She has been in residence with Tanglewood Music Center (co-Curator – 2023) and Spoleto Festival (Chamber Music Composer-in-Residence – 2024) in She also holds awards/fellowships from United States Artists, the S&R Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Kennedy Center. Esmail holds degrees in composition from The Juilliard School (BM'05) and the Yale School of Music (MM'11, MMA'14, DMA'18). Her primary teachers have included Susan Botti, Aaron Jay Kernis, Christopher Theofanidis, Christopher Rouse and Samuel Adler. She received a Fulbright-Nehru grant to study Hindustani music in India. Her Hindustani music teachers include Srimati Lakshmi Shankar and Gaurav Mazumdar, and she currently studies and collaborates with Saili Oak. Her doctoral thesis, entitled Finding Common Ground: Uniting Practices in Hindustani and Western Art Musicians explores the methods and challenges of the collaborative process between Hindustani musicians and Western composers.

Esmail was Composer-in-Residence for Street Symphony (2016-18) and is currently an Artistic Director of Shastra, a non-profit organization that promotes cross-cultural music connecting music traditions of India and the West. She currently resides in her hometown of Los Angeles, California.

Varsha was written for the Haydn Seven Last Words project, for Juilliard415. The project commissioned seven composers (including Nico Muhly, Paola Prestini, Jessica Meyer, Tania Leon, Caroline Shaw and Colin Jacobsen) to write interludes between each of the Haydn quartets.

This piece, Varsha, serves as an interlude between Sonata V (Sito – “I Thirst”) and Sonata VI (Consummatum Est – “It is finished”) of Haydn’s Seven Last Words. The combination of Hindustani raags used in this piece are from the Malhaar family, which are sung to beckon rain.

I imagined an interlude between these two sonatas: Christ thirsts. Rain comes from the distance (Megh Malhaar). There is a downpour around him (Miyan ki Malhaar), but he grows slowly weaker. His next words make clear that even the rain is not enough: his thirst is of another sort, which cannot be quenched by water. And so, it is finished.

Of the many performances of Take What You Need, very few of them have been in traditional concert halls. Most performances have taken place in jails, homeless shelters, support groups, schools, memorial services, places of worship — in places where people can gather to see and honor the humanity in one another.

Take What You Need was first written for Urban Voices Project, a choir made up of people who are experiencing or have recently experienced homelessness — so many of whom have trusted this piece with their own stories of loss and redemption, and who I am so honored to count among my dearest friends. But this piece is also meant to be a resource for musicians and communities to come together and build the lasting relationships that plant seeds for social change.

Note: this work can also be performed with a narrator. Here is the text:

Take a moment

Take a breath

Take time

Take care

Take heart

Take hope

Take a step

Take a chance

Take courage

Take charge

Take a stand

Take pride

Take joy

Take pause

Take a moment

Take a breath

Take what you need

Though not without original touches, this graceful and amiable sonata is one of few works which hints at the source of Hindemith's style in the sound-world of Brahms and even Dvorák. There is also a Franco-Russian strain, perhaps heightened by a study of Debussy (whom his wartime commanding officer had especially admired). Little in the sonata's musical language would have caused surprise in the 1890s, though few pieces of that era modulate so freely. The rather unusual form, with a short introductory movement, a theme and variations, and a finale that interrupts the variation-sequence only to resume it later, suggests the genre of fantasy-sonata cultivated by some of the Romantic composers.

The first movement's lulling initial melody might almost be by Brahms, though the chromatic harmonization of its counter-statement points to César Franck. A cadenza-like passage leads into the variation movement, whose folk-song-flavoured theme is rather redolent of the Russian nationalist school (Borodin, say, filtered through Debussy). The ensuing four variations are more individual, however, with the part-writing turning increasingly into real polyphony.

The finale disrupts the process: it resembles a self-contained sonata-form movement with two contrasting ideas—the first assertive, with a prominent three-note rhythmic figure, and the second a gentle, lullaby-like tune, one of the most frankly Romantic melodies in Hindemith’s entire output. After an extended development, however, the sequence of variations begun in the previous movement resumes with a final group of three: one gently flowing, a livelier fugato, and a coda where the folk-song-like theme has the last word.

-from notes by Malcolm MacDonald © 2009