

*Sonata for Viola and Piano* by Richard Wilson

I have always been drawn to disadvantaged instruments, and there is none more put-upon than the viola. Though not comic in sound--as its fellow stepchild the bassoon can be--the viola is the subject of endless dim jokes presumably because of its rumored acoustical flaws, its lack of repertoire, and the invidious accusation that it was invented to provide work for failed violinists (whose shortcomings could go unheard owing to the acoustical flaws and lack of repertoire.) Far greater composers than I have attempted redress: Mozart, Berlioz, Hindemith--to name but three.

Apart from favoring the viola in all three of my string quartets, my first overt contribution to its rescue was *Music for Solo Viola*, written for Stephanie Fricker in 1988. The next year, Rudolf Firkusny--a friend for many years--suggested I write a short piece with piano for a concert he was planning with Walter Trampler, another friend of long standing. Given the stature of these players, the temptation to do a more challenging piece was hard to resist. *Sonata for Viola and Piano* was the result.

After the piece was written, circumstances prevented the envisioned concert from taking place. The premiere was thus postponed until November 14, 1991, when it was given at Greenwich House Music School in Manhattan by Mr. Trampler and Blanca Uribe, who have since recorded it for Albany Records (TROY 074).

In four reasonably short movements, the work exhibits coloristic piano figuration, taking full advantage of the pedal, above and against which the viola pleads its case in tones ranging from

soothing and coy, to commanding and plangent. The instruments also engage in a good deal of contrapuntal repartée.

--RW