



THE STRADGRASS SESSIONS

Tessa Lark

...and Jon Batiste, Michael Cleveland, Sierra Hull, Edgar Meyer

First Hand Records FHR100 Release date: 5 May 2023

“ This album is a snapshot of the way I live in music; diversely, organically, intimately, sometimes collaboratively, sometimes solitarily, always sincerely – and anywhere, be it a concert hall or home studio.”

Tessa Lark

Born and raised in Kentucky, violinist Tessa Lark traces her earliest musical influences to bluegrass, Appalachian and other American folk styles, which have subsequently inspired her classical training, career and recital programming. *The Stradgrass Sessions* is an authentically personal project that explores the violin’s stylistic capabilities through a classical lens with a ‘picking circle’ of some of America’s most distinguished multi-genre composer/musicians around today – jazz pianist Jon Batiste, bassist Edgar Meyer, fiddler Michael Cleveland and mandolinist Sierra Hull. *The Stradgrass Sessions* also features the premiere recording of a work by American composer John Corigliano.

The inspired term ‘Stradgrass’ came about in 2015 when Tessa first experienced the novelty of performing bluegrass on the 1683 ex-Gingold Stradivarius violin, on loan to her at the time. *Stradgrass* soon became something of a personal trademark, representing the synthesis of Tessa’s musical styles (even though she had to return the Strad in 2018 and actually recorded this album on her ca.1600 Maggini violin, on loan through the Stradivari Society of Chicago). Calibrating her classical training with the more improvisatory approach of her colleagues was a pleasurable challenge for Tessa: *“An album like this is very natural to me. It’s where I live in music. I feel I grew a lot as an artist, as it did require me to listen with even bigger ears and a bigger soul.”*

The choice of *My Old Kentucky Home* as a theme to improvise upon with legendary jazz pianist **Jon Batiste** has deep meaning for Tessa, not only because Kentucky is where she grew up but also because of the sentiments inherent in this old minstrel song. The majority of this track, the first laid down, comes from their very first moments playing together.

/...

Lazy Katie is the result of a jam session with superstar fiddler **Michael Cleveland**. His more traditionalist approach evidently resonates with Tessa, and because he is blind and deaf in one ear, his sound is very articulate and clear; “*He plays something once and even if it’s just on an iPhone it sounds like it’s ready for a Grammy award*” (he has two of those Grammy awards and 12 Player of the Year awards from the International Bluegrass Music Association).

Tessa cites **Edgar Meyer** as one of her biggest musical influences. Since first performing with him in 2019 she now includes him in her circle of chamber music collaborators and recognises purity and poignancy in all of his work. Although she had not met **Sierra Hull** before making the album, Tessa was keen to have her onboard as she admires the confidence and consistency in her ‘phenomenal’ playing that reflects the aims of classical players. For this reason, she suggested they perform together some of the Bartók 44 Duos, as well as Hull’s own *Chasin’ Skies*. They were forced to record these remotely due to the pandemic lockdown but the intensity of listening to and attuning her own playing to Hull’s ‘untainted’ interpretations on mandolin led her deep into the music via some different paths.

Tessa reels her classical solos into the album’s repertoire with integrity and intelligence. Ysaÿe’s *Sonata for Solo Violin no.5* is a favourite work in which she hears folk influences, such as the second movement (*Danse rustique*) with all the high spirits of a barn dance. And **John Corigliano**’s *STOMP*, heard here in its premiere recording, employs jazz/bluegrass themes and techniques which demand unusual skills of co-ordination, musicality and style from the performer.

The dream of recording *The Stradgrass Sessions* was realised with the support of Tessa’s 2018 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship and the interest of First Hand Records (which also released her critically acclaimed, BBT-supported first solo album, *Fantasy*, in 2019). The collaborative nature of the project necessitated separate recording sessions to suit everybody’s busy schedules, and was further complicated when the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns struck. But, where there’s a will, there’s a way: the commitment of the players, along with the dedication and expertise of co-producers **Silas Brown** and **Michael Thurber**, made the completion of the recording possible - remotely, and in a host of different venues.

Further press information: Debra Boraston at Borletti-Buitoni Trust

T. +44 (0)7989 434388 E. debra@henrymoorestudio.co.uk

Notes to Editors

The Stradgrass Sessions Release date: 5 May 2023 FHR100

Tessa Lark (violin) with Jon Batiste (piano) Michael Cleveland (fiddle),
Sierra Hull (mandolin), Edgar Meyer (double bass)

Tessa Lark *Jig and Pop* (Lark)

Sierra Hull *Chasin’ Skies* (Hull)

Tessa Lark *Le Soka - Cheese in the Wine* (Lark)

Edgar Meyer *Concerto Duo for Violin and Bass - movements 1 and 4* (Lark/Meyer)

Eugène Ysaÿe *Sonata for Solo Violin no.5 in G major, Op.27*

Tessa Lark *Hysedelje* (Lark)

Béla Bartók *44 Duets for Two Violins, Sz 98 – nos. 35, 39 and 43* (Lark/Hull)

Michael Cleveland *Lazy Katie* (Lark/Cleveland)

John Corigliano *STOMP* (Lark) premiere recording

Stephen Foster *Meditation on ‘My Old Kentucky Home’* (Lark/Batiste)

L...

TESSA LARK violin
<https://www.tessalark.com>



- **AWARDS:** 2020 Grammy nomination as Best Classical Instrument Soloist for *Sky: Concerto for Violin* by Michael Torke; 2020 Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award; 2018 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship; 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant; Silver Medalist in the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis; winner of the 2012 Naumburg International Violin Competition; Fellowship from the Leonore Annenberg Arts Fellowship Fund.
- **PERFORMANCES:** Since making her concerto debut with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra at 16, has appeared with dozens of orchestras and at festivals and recital venues including Carnegie Hall, Ravinia, Cal Performances, San Francisco Performances, Wigmore Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, the Buffalo and Rochester philharmonic orchestras, Marlboro Music, Australia's Musica Viva Festival, Seattle and Indianapolis symphony orchestras, Royal Scottish National Orchestra.
- **CHAMBER MUSIC:** collaborators include Mitsuko Uchida, Itzhak Perlman, Donald Weilerstein, Kim Kashkashian, Peter Wiley and Ralph Kirshbaum, among others. Along with the Lark and Thurber duo, recent projects include a string trio with composer-bassist Edgar Meyer and cellist Joshua Roman and a duo partnership with jazz guitarist Frank Vignola.
- **WORKS** written for her include *Sky*, a bluegrass-inspired concerto by Michael Torke premiered with the Albany (NY) Symphony Orchestra and recorded for an Albany Records release issued in August 2019; *Love Letter* by bassist-composer Michael Thurber.
- **RECORDINGS:** Other recordings include *Invention*, a debut album of the violin-bass duo Tessa Lark & Michael Thurber comprising music of J.S. Bach along with non-classical original compositions; *Fantasy*, a First Hand Records release featuring fantasies and rhapsodies for violin including works by Kreisler, Schubert, Telemann, Ravel and Lark; and a live performance recording of Astor Piazzolla's *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, released in 2021 by the Buffalo Philharmonic in honor of Piazzolla's 100-year anniversary.
- **TRAINING:** Graduate of New England Conservatory with an Artist Diploma from The Juilliard School where she studied with Sylvia Rosenberg, Ida Kavafian, and Daniel Phillips.
- **MENTORS:** include Cathy McGlasson, Kurt Sassmannshaus, Miriam Fried and Lucy Chapman.
- **APPOINTMENTS:** Artistic Director of Musical Masterworks, a chamber music presenter in Old Lyme, CT; Co-host/Creative of NPR's *From The Top*, the premier radio showcase for the nation's most talented young musicians; Mentor and board member of the Irving M. Klein International Strings Competition.
- **INSTRUMENT:** Plays a ca. 1600 G.P. Maggini violin on loan from an anonymous donor through the Stradivari Society of Chicago. The original idea for *The Stradgrass Sessions* was conceived when she was playing the 1683 ex-Gingold Stradivarius courtesy of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis

Critical praise for *Fantasy* (FHR86)

"So now here is Fantasy, and it's every bit as strong as one would have expected...with Telemann at one end, and Lark's own Appalachian Fantasy of 2016 at the other. Appalachian Fantasy [is] a superbly coloured, multifaceted folk medley vividly evoking the vast plains of her home turf, complete with an opening which also cleverly honours the previous Schubert Fantasie (which itself is played with immense sensitivity by her and Yang) by translating his song into Kentucky tongue. Add a strong Tzigane – equally in tune with her own folk roots – and I'm already looking forward to whatever Lark does next."

Charlotte Gardner, *The Strad* December 2019

More reviews: <https://www.bbtrust.com/artist/tessa-lark/press/>