



CD Review by [Colin Clarke](#)



Past Made Present: Music of Jessica Krash

Audio CD

Albany Records

The music of Washington-based composer Jessica Krash, if this disc is anything to go by, is long-breathed and innately lyrical. Only one disc has been reviewed before in *Fanfare*, (another Albany disc, in *Fanfare* 37:4) and these two discs are the only two listed at ArkivMusic. There has also been a disc of solo piano music on Capstone Records, released in 2006. This is a strange state of affairs, given the strength of the music.

On her website (jessicakrash.com), the composer states that she thinks of pieces “as microcosms or invented realities, each piece a world with its horizons and ways.” She is an accomplished pianist as well as composer, holding a masters in piano from Juilliard in addition to her doctorate in composition from the University of Maryland. Her website also gives a complete list of Krash’s compositions: There are plenty of pieces for an enterprising company to explore, and one hopes fervently that the present disc on Albany is the first of a series.

The stated intention here is to introduce a dialogue of old and new: yes, old and new music and poetry, but also old and new musicians and old and new social, philosophical and emotional issues. The title of the 2017 piece *Young Vilna* refers firstly to the place Vilnius (the capital of Lithuania) but more specifically the group of Jewish writers and artists working there in the 1930s. In the next decade, the group was destroyed due to the Holocaust of the 1940s. The music sets a sequence of questions asked 75 years later by Lithuanian teens of Ellen Cassedy, author of *We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust*; the music thus examines part of the post-USSR re-engagement of Lithuanians with their history. And the music examines and re-engages in a most poignant way. Krash’s expertise in the chamber music field is everywhere evident in her sparse but effective use of her forces (it is scored for chorus, violin, clarinet, and

cello); her talent in working with the human voice is no less impressive. Perhaps the most touching lines are those at the very close, asking questions of what it is to feel at home.

A lady by the name of Sulpicia wrote poetry in Rome in around 50 BC, and are the only lines from a female poet to survive from that time to ours. The poetry used here is translated by another poet, Mary Maxwell. The piano's role in the 2015 piece *Sulpicia's Songs* is not just to set the scene, but also to act as commentator. The language of the opening song, "At last it's come and to be said to hide this kind of love" is more astringent than *Young Vilna*; the music does soften rather beautifully for the third song. Interchanges between the excellent soprano Emily Noël and the composer, who plays the piano part, are delicious throughout.

The influence of Japanese shakuhachi music is felt on the 2016 work for flute and piano, *Turns of Phrase*. It was a chance encounter that led Krash to explore the shakuhachi and to light a passion for musics and instruments of distant lands. The composer explores a parallel between the movements of Nature (wind, waves, air, water) and how our feelings move. Again the composer's own voice is heard via the sensitively handled piano part; just as impressive is the singing flute line of Laura Kaufman. The piece acts as an oasis of peace at the heart of the recital.

Moving to texts by Codax, *The Cantigas de Amigo of Martin Codax* of 2015 sets 13th-century poetry in Galician-Portuguese. Codax even included snippets of melodies (albeit without precisely notated rhythms) that formed a springboard for Krash. Codax's songs were rediscovered in 1913 and are now held in Morgan Library, New York City. By extending her musico-harmonic vocabulary by combining scales of the Middle Ages with music of our time, Krash's settings have a delicacy, even a fragility, especially the writing in the first setting, "Ondas do mar de Vigo" (Waves of Vigo Bay). Krash opts for dance rhythms for "Mandad'ei comigo" (I received a message); the vocal line seems related to Berio's *Folksongs*, and one certainly speculates that Emily Noël could be a fine exponent of Berio's famous piece. "Mia irmana fremosa" (Sweet sister of mine) seems to return to the fragility of the first song, before the desolate "Ai Deus, se sab'ora meu" (O God, if only my friend knew) leads us into deep waters. It is a brave composer indeed who writes as sparsely as Krash does in "Eno sagrado en Vigo" (In a sanctuary in Vigo) and who sustains the atmosphere and argument so well; the performers are brave, too, and Noël exudes understanding of both text and musical idiom. At various points in the *Cantigas*, extended techniques on the piano are used with careful consideration and become a vital part of the piece's timbral language.

The solo cello piece *Delphi—What the Oracle Said* (1994, revised 2014) ruminates on glimpses of futures and the lingering effect of places on the soul—in this case, Delphi, visited by the composer while still a young teenager. Cellist Tanya Anisimova and Krash have been collaborators for over two decades. Anisimova, who also appeared on Krash's earlier disc on Albany, phrases expressively and really allows her instrument to speak. The resultant "narration," lasting over seven minutes, is absolutely gripping; the cello is recorded well, and blissfully not too closely.

This is a wonderful introduction to the music of a composer who has much to say. So let's hear her say it: one looks forward to the next installment, should one be in the offing. **Colin Clarke**
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