

kravis rhonn project, reviews

“Very strong, extremely well integrated set, Krebs and Davies meshing perfectly; had I been told this was a (complex) solo set, I'd have accepted that. There's a wonderful gliding aspect to much of the music here, maybe set into motion largely by Davies, a kind of slow, up and down swoop, that's quite entrancing, all the more so when adorned with pebbles of taped sounds, gritty static, etc. Great balance of soft dronage, occasional quasi-rhythms, super-sensitive inclusion of quiet voices--next to impossible to describe to any degree of satisfaction, but that's usually the case with something as beautifully positioned as this. Mandatory.”

Brian Olewnick, Just Outside

“I've been listening to the recent release by Rhodri Davies and Annette Krebs on the Another Timbre label quite bit over the past week or so, but while I know I really like it a great deal I haven't really been able to find the right words to be able to say what it is I enjoy about it. I'm still not sure now I have the right words to hand, but I'll have a go.

Annette Krebs has been making wonderfully surprisingly, unusual and somewhat oblique music for a few years now, but if the truth be told so has Rhodri Davies in the right company. Together here they both seem to step up a gear, firing off of each other to produce music that repeatedly does the unexpected but at the same time still just sounds right, as if each sound is placed just where it belongs, even if they don't always seem to follow naturally from the sounds before. If that reads a little vague I can only apologise, its hard to think of other ways of describing Kravis Rhonn Project, which is the (pretty bad) title for this album.

Rhodri uses his tabletop electric harp for this recording, something he is doing increasingly often as a bad back and spiralling travel costs make lugging a full scale harp around a currently more difficult thing to do. Over the past couple of years he has begun to really find his voice with this laid-flat version of his chosen instrument however, and on this new album his range of sounds; buzzing, scraping, droning, chiming and even the occasional all out roaring are put to use brilliantly. While he may allow a sound to flutter or hum in the background for a while, others will build for a second or two before being cut dead. The range in sounds and textures allows Krebs the space and opportunity to place bits of sampled voices, radio grabs and the odd guitar chime into the gaps. Some of the voices used here come from recordings of dadaist sound poets Annette found online last year. A few of which found their way into her trio performance I caught with David Lacey and Paul Vogel last year, so although that was six months ago now they sound strangely familiar to me now.

At one point in the opening track Tragar (the titles come from the imaginary words spoken by the aforementioned voices) a blizzrd of sound from both musicians falls off the edge of the recording and the silence left behind is suddenly filled with a grainy blast of a rap record, some other unidentifiably cheesy music and then an oddly disembodied voice. This few moments of the music seems to sum up Kravis Rhonn Project for me, hints at the kind of electroacoustic improvisation we might have expected from this duo a few years back cut short by these odd breaks in the musical narrative. Near the end of the third track a thick, claustrophobic hum rises out of the music and builds in intensity until suddenly snapping dead, leaving a few seconds of distant sounds and then a half second burst of unidentifiable voice. This is how the album goes. It is exciting to listen to, full of these sudden twists and precarious cliffhangers but also a work of great focus and concentration as the two musicians wrap their contributions around each other so well that you lose track of who might be doing what.

I wrote a week or two back about a trio disc involving Davies alongside Robin Hayward and Taku Unami and said that the music on that release seemed to fit within a recent group of CDs and performances that feature new approaches to the sonic communication between musicians, utilising juxtaposed seemingly unrelated sounds rather than gentle blends of similar sounding events. Kravis Rhonn Project fits that aesthetic to some degree, with the radio grabs, voices and

sudden struck sounds playing counterpoint to the more musical abstract elements, but it should also be said that when sounds from both musicians are allowed to coalesce here in a more traditional manner they are also very beautiful indeed. That it isn't easy to place this CD into one firm box or the other is only to its own credit.

The three pieces on this album total up to some forty-five minutes in length, and I have listened through to it maybe as many as eight or nine times now but really it seems so much shorter, such is the way it really grabs the attention. Recorded only a year ago it offers a rare contemporary view of where two continually evolving musicians are currently at, something that, in Rhodri's case in particular has not often happened in the past. It is also yet another fine fine release on the Another Timbre label, which can do little wrong in my eyes recently. Album of the year so far. "

Richard Pinnell, The Watchful Ear

"Annette Krebs & Rhodri Davies – Kravis Rhonn Project (Another Timbre)

Max Eastley & Rhodri Davies – Dark Architecture (Another Timbre)

While these two albums were realised under very different circumstances, they're united on sonic and philosophical levels. The attunement that electric harpist Rhodri Davies and his confederates achieve is profound. Tabletop guitarist Annette Krebs assembled Kravis Rhonn from recordings that she and Davies made in her apartment. Strings scrape and pluck, outboard electronics sputter and abruptly drop out, both players working with small gestures so similar they could be playing a single instrument. It's easier to differentiate Davies's e-bow hums and cirrus pitches from the ghostly groans and lonesome whistles of Eastley's arc, a self-constructed, flexible wood and wire monochord, on the live recording Dark Architecture, but their confluence is so perfect it's pointless to do so. Particularly since the larger point of both records seems to be the productive coexistence of each duo's playing with potentially disruptive elements.

Dark Architecture enjoys the involvement of both planned and unplanned randomisers. The original plan was for the two men to play along with eastley's sound generating sculptures, whose occasional ringing and clatter contribute a laconic commentary, sparse yet pertinent. Less polite are the fireworks from a neighbouring park that start up about 11 minutes in, so loud you couldn't have blamed the duo for stepping out until the display was over and then trying again. Instead, the fireworks become part of the music, less predictable and more insistent than Eastley's sculptures, yet all framed by singing sine tones and bowed sighs.

The disruption on Kravis Rhonn is presumably more planned. Krebs is credited with tapes, which consist mostly of music and voices snatched off the internet. German newsreaders, archived sound poets and traces of rap and traffic noise rise up through Krebs and Davies's shimmering surfaces, pockmarking them like potholes on city streets, occasionally cutting the playing short.

The duo seem to be hanging back, trying to figure out how to fit into this rough surface rather than roll over it. It's a sublime ride. "

Bill Meyer, The Wire

"This album records the first time Davies and guitarist Annette Krebs played together, at Krebs' apartment in Berlin in April 2008. For such an event, the two are well suited and sound comfortable together. The music they produce flows naturally with no awkward moments and plenty of variety.

Across the three tracks, Krebs plays guitar, recordings and mixing board. Her taped recordings include a selection of voices speaking in German or sometimes making vocal noises. The album opens with dialogue, instantly creating an air of intrigue. These taped voices occasionally interject throughout the album, adding a vaguely surreal feel. At times it feels like listening to a barely understood radio drama, albeit one with an engaging soundtrack. The occasional use by both

players of electronic tones, often high frequency, washes of static and crackling sounds, enforces the sense of listening to a poorly tuned radio. In this regard, it is very reminiscent of Krebs' solo contribution to the Berlin Electronics compilation (Absinth, 2008)

The three tracks each have distinctly different moods and atmospheres, but cohere well as an album. Curiously, some of the sounds in "Ssrnck" could almost be field recordings of fireworks so authentic do they sound. (Curiously? See below for explanation.) Taken as a whole, Kravis Rhonn Project must be judged a success. It creates its own distinctive, internally consistent sound world, one immediately identifiable as the work of Davies and Krebs."

John Eyles, All About Jazz

"Annette Krebs has always been careful about choosing recording projects. After a handful of strong releases around 2001 and 2002, there was a long period where she barely recorded at all. Over the last couple of years she's returned to recording, coming out with some startling documents – a duo with Robin Hayward (Sgraffito), an untitled quartet with David Lacey, Keith Rowe, and Paul Vogel, and a solo submission on the Absinth Berlin Electronics collection (all tiny-run CDr releases). A bit easier to find, and well worth searching out, is her duet with Toshimura Nakamura, Siyu, on the SoSeditions label. Add this duo with Rhodri Davies to her commanding run. For this project, Davies took his table-top electric harp and electronics to Krebs' flat in Berlin, Krebs pulled out her guitar, sampled recordings (some of which she'd used on her Berlin Electronics piece), and mixing board, and the two spent a day improvising together. Krebs spent the next year editing, mixing, and mastering the recordings into three pieces which exist as a sort of spontaneous musique concrète. Each establishes a distinctive presence through carefully paced trajectories and transitory, shifting layers of detail. It is as if Krebs was tuning in beamed fragments of an improvisation as they drift in and out of focus across the active sonic plane. The essence of guitar and harp resonance is shot through with warped voices, field recordings, wafts of pop songs, and the hisses, flutters, and spatters of electronics. Davies' singular scrapes, variegated attack, and electronic modulations counter Krebs' discrete placement of guitar and sampled sound, balancing breathless delicacy with the physicality of amplified strings."

Michael Rosenstein, Paris Transatlantic

"British improviser Rhodri Davies has created a singular niche for himself in improvised music. A master of the harp, he has expanded its sonic palette with a host of extended techniques: amplifying it, preparing it in ways common to the piano and guitar; and plucking, striking and bowing it with a host of foreign objects. On these two CDs Davies concentrates on his small electric harp, played flat on a tabletop, in performances with two closely attuned partners who also play string instruments. The results are highly successful, each achieving a striking identity.

Kravis Rhonn Project consists of three improvisations from the first meeting of Davies and the Berlin-based Annette Krebs, who plays guitar as well as an assortment of objects, tapes and a mixing board. The pieces are spacious interactions, marked by Krebs' prominent use of fragments of sound poets taken from a internet site. These sudden vocal interjections merge with the sizzle of a mixing board and some analogue hum to create a sonic field that's ambient and dramatic by turn. Krebs and Davies create subtle gestures within this field: a sudden glissando; a plucked note left hanging in the air; an assortment of insect-like tweakings and scratches. Each gesture is invested with its own specific gravity, resulting in a work both deliberate and meditative that brings a strong sense of composition to the extended improvisations.

While Davies and Krebs have transformed traditional instruments into vehicles for highly personal expression, Max Eastley has taken the alternative approach of building his instruments from the ground up. Here Eastley plays his arc: an "electro acoustic monochord" of his own invention, it's a nine-foot long, wooden, single-string instrument that changes pitch with a flexing of the wood.

Eastley also bows it and plays it with glass rods, further altering its sound electronically. *Dark Architecture* is a CD-R, unlike the usual productions of *Another Timbre*, an unedited 34-minute snapshot of a performance at the South Hill Park Arts Centre in Bracknell, England, where Eastley's sound sculptures were on display. While the duet with Krebs has an abstract quality, as if it exists as a pure conception, *Dark Architecture* is rich with the resonance of the room magnifying every metallic tinkle of Eastley's percussive sculptures, letting the bending long tones of Davies' harp hang and echo in the space, magnifying tiny resonances and turning some unidentified percussion (it sounds alternately like an empty suitcase struck with a hammer, or a piece of sheet metal shaken vigorously) into thunder. At one crucial point, the confluence of percussive clicks and electronic whirs suggests a flock of mechanical birds."

Stuart Broomer, *Music Works*

"Once again, the mystery unfolds as we try and figure who is playing which sound. Sampled radio transmissions, distant ominous drones, tapping on the (harp or guitar) strings cautiously, unknown voice snippets in different languages, soft static, strings rubbed with metal, quietly harsh electronic fragments, delicate and carefully placed suspended sound/objects and silence used just right. I love the way this sounds more like a written modern classical work since each sound is so well placed. Quite a marvel in more ways than one." - Bruce Lee Gallanter, *Downtown Music Gallery*

"Somewhere in April 2008 Rhodri Davies packed up his harp and electronics and visited Annette Krebs in her Berlin apartment. There she had set up her guitar, lined up some recordings and a mixing board and the two spend a whole day doing recordings, which were then edited by Krebs into what is now released as 'Kravis Rhonn Project'. Both are accomplished and established players in the field of new improvised music. One of the more surprising elements of this work - spanning three tracks in total - is the presence of voices. I am not entirely sure if these voices are to be understood as 'field recordings' or whether they were accidentally picked up in the process of recording. They are not easy to understand, but make a distinctive difference in the music. Of course the two play their instruments on the edge of silence, and thus the leaked voices add just that little bit of extra, which makes this release into quite a joyful thing. Careful, intense, this is of course no easy listening music but the fully required concentration span is needed here. But it's a work that unveils a lot of silent beauty."

Frans de Ward, *Vital Weekly*

"Guitar, objects, mixing board, tape (Krebs), electric harp and electronics (Davies). Certain records have the word "masterpiece" embossed on their icon as soon as one starts the first listening session, and this CD belongs to that category. Everything is impressive: the composition's freshness, the surprising qualities of every incident, the fantastic control applied by the artists on the dynamics of the interaction, the way in which the music mixes with the surrounding environment. Each gesture appears, for lack of a better adjective, definitive. Krebs and Davies threw all their experiences in a pot whose boiling liquid emits exhalations of architectural sharpness under the guise of perfectly deployed events. The occasional quiet intervals separating the sonic outbursts-cum-bizarre vocal intrusions are in turn occupied by our imagination devising strategies for a further comprehension of the relations between expectancy and shock, or by the interference of extraneous elements from the outside: in this very moment, echoes of a festive ceremony from the nearby town are blending fabulously with the combination of radio and coarse droning generated by the duo. The final two minutes juxtapose frequencies so low that my thorax quivered and so high that the ears rang for a while after the end, until two ever-present and rather indispensable components of my domestic acoustic background - the far-off sounds of engines and the even more remote tolling of the bell tower from the neighbouring hill - brought your reviewer back to reality. This is an extremely demanding, conspicuously rewarding piece of work; one of those flawless examples of music that excites and elicits

reflection at once. It threw yours truly in a state of extreme concentration and somewhat dolorous awareness of the essence of being in a Sunday morning that had started normally, planting seeds of inward-looking regularity which, in the right circumstance, indicate the direction to follow in order to accomplish the difficult aspiration admirably synthesized by Richard Pinnell's erstwhile blog title: "learning to listen". The most essential lesson this side of silence."

Massimo Ricci, Temporary Fault

"It's been quite a while since I heard anything new from Annette Krebs (guitar, objects, mixing board, tape). The Kravis Rhonn Project documents her meeting with Davies (electric harp and electronics). What's always struck me about Krebs' music is a creeping sense of unease, something she achieves with the crackling preparations to her guitar, along with the cagey use of volume pedals. In slow waves and swells, abetted by disembodied voices from tape, there emerges a weirdly dissociative feeling that characterizes the entire piece. At regular intervals, we hear fragments like the crackling of magnetic tape or the flash of plectrum on string, imparting a lack of ostensive reference. But these are artfully, if unexpectedly, positioned, creating all kinds of tension with the thick beds of sound Davies conjures. It's music that refuses to be figured out, as exemplified vividly when it fizzles to near silence in the middle of "traguar" like the sound of traffic leaving a city square after everything shuts down for the night. The opening minutes of "jailom" are like listening to your neighbors' conversation through a thin apartment wall, with some guttural low end and sizzling high, bookending your sense of illicit intrusion. The track ends with a sudden volume swell, a combination of dripping water and burning plastic, like being suddenly found out. The final track, "ssronck" still features those muffled voices but is borne by a more insistent chorus of chirrups and whines. A fascinating wiretap."

Jason Bivins, Bagatellen

"The joint material of Krebs and Davies summarizes the meeting of two musicians who are significant representatives of two electro-acoustic improvisation centers: Berlin and London. Krebs arrived in the capital of Germany in 1993 and started getting to know its improvisational music scene as well as taking an active part in it. Her playing, so to speak, swims against the tide of her classical music education, which she received while learning to play the guitar. At first she began to modify the instrument, then she added electronics and a mixer, using it to process guitar signal, while the guitar itself became simply the sound source. For a while now, Krebs has been using a radio and tapes with prepared material.

Davies has lived in London since 1995, where he has collaborated with Mark Wastell on many projects - The Sealed Knot, IST, Broken Consort and Assumed Possibilities. He is a harpist, and is not only active in the field of improvised music, but also as a performer of contemporary music. His CV includes a collaboration with The Cinematic Orchestra.

At the end of the '90s, in both above-mentioned metropolises, improvised music turned towards generally quieter playing, as well as the limiting of sound material, in what has been dubbed "London silence" in England and "Berlin reductionism" in Germany. However, describing Kravis Rhonn Project as the aftermath of those past tendencies would be way off the mark, as music performed on this album is a completely different story. At the same time, some kind of an accounting and context-setting for the album would be very useful. I don't really know if I'll be able to provide it.

The trouble with the description results from the fact that this music is difficult, not so much when it comes to reception but - I imagine - because the creation of such music must be challenging. It's challenging because it demands courage from the creators, risky because it's not ultra-minimalistic, as, for example, the achievements of Malfatti and his "students" are; it enforces neither dialog nor exchange among the performers. It doesn't mean that the musicians don't listen to each other or play "in spite of." There is definitely some kind of agreement because such

prudence in sound selection can only result from mutual compromise. But there is something that doesn't translate into played sounds in an obvious way.

The dereliction of an improvised dialog as a model for music creation makes the statement that Krebs is a front-runner in the first piece (21 minutes long and a little shorter than the two other compositions) incorrect. It would suggest that Davies is left behind, is losing the race for high stakes. And the above can't be said as it's unknown what the stakes are, or even if there are any. Besides, it would indicate recognizing quantity as equal to quality. A harpist plays little, but when he creates a sound, say, resembling an acoustic guitar, it's exactly the sound that is desirable. A solid number of decisions made by the German artist are based on appropriate element location as she often uses voice recordings, which are perhaps radio announcements or conversations. Selected sounds are very quiet, as if they were coming from an adjacent room, so it's absolutely worth communing with the album by listening with headphones, though that's not a necessary condition.

In the following two pieces, Davies - to what extent it's possible to distinguish - adds a few sounds resembling feedback, resulting probably from working the strings with an EBow, along with soft rattle-buzzing elements. In the last piece, where the above come to the forefront, Krebs suggests a recording of real waves, proving the riskiness of this album, as if he's commenting on the "digital" personality of the drift. What I like a lot is the idea of using a number of recordings (let's not be afraid to use the word "samples") several times during one composition. We are far from any sense of familiarity, using it as a scale, but perhaps it's a distant derivative of a chorus. One such element is clearly slowed down at first and when it comes up for the second time it's played in a regular tempo, except that it sounds like a chewed-up tape. The second recording, a vocally distinct spoken excerpt, will come and go three times, but the mastery of the repetition lies in the fact that we can still remember it after two hearings; the last loop is just the beginning of the sample, suggesting the rest in the mind of the listener.

Another Krebs album, recorded in collaboration with Robin Hayward, could be a point of reference. However, that album is much more dynamic, at times even dramatic (thanks to Hayward's tuba) when compared to the reviewed album. On Kravis Rhonn Project (and what a title – I wonder if they'll use it instead of their names on the second album), surfaces can be heard more distinctively, but that doesn't mean one feels a lack of depth or tension. Both are clearly present, but served in a more subtle way, a result of the circumspection of the performers, which is in this case more than appropriate - it's a result of skills awareness, not of top-down principles.

I'm not sure if Kravis Rhonn Project is the best album of the last months, simply because I can't put together the criteria to determine whether it's good or bad, but it is certainly the most compelling. “

Piotr Tkacz

(translated by Maciej Janasik)

“There are more than the obvious links between Kravis Rhonn Project and Dark Architecture. Both benefit from the presence of harpist Rhodri Davies, but more importantly both feature a confrontation of sorts between “music” and “extraneous elements,” or rather question the very division between the two categories. In the live duet with Max Eastley, the outside elements, initially under limited control – Eastley's sound sculptures act at random but their range and timbre is defined by the builder – get out of hand with the external fireworks; here the “found” sounds are carefully added and interspersed in the texture of the music, which was edited by guitarist Annette Krebs from materials recorded while improvising in duo with Davies. What we have here is a selected presentation of sound objects, what we have on Dark Architecture is the document of what is happened. The point I am trying to make is that Kravis Rhonn Project is closer to a contemporary form of “concrete music” than to a freely improvised piece of music between two musicians on a more or less controlled soundscape. Nothing wrong with it of course; I am merely trying to find words to situate and describe a music that is distinctive on so many

counts in terms of the composed/improvised, the audible/inaudible, and the planned/unplanned. The most important point is that I feel the CD is successful in its own terms, inspiring the listener with a wealth of suggestions; one of the most important coming from the usage of snippets of talking voices, mostly in German, whose imaginary words give the title to the pieces. Listening to the CD using various devices is a good technique to fully perceive its multidimensionality; the care Krebs took in juxtaposing several layers of sounds, of different intensities, sometimes "hiding" the guitar and harp in the middle of found sounds, hums, or buzzes was fully revealed only on headphones. Freely associating the combination of German voices, birdsongs, waves, crickets and rattling bells evokes for me holiday traveling on small local trains in Italian summers. Other listeners may have different, maybe more unsettling associations, but this power of evocation is the best testimony of the internal coherence and expressive force of the music. "

Francesco Martinelli, Point of Departure

"Inspelat i Berlin för ett år sedan. Annette Krebs spelar gitarr, objekt, mixing board, bandupptagningar etc, Rhodri Davies spelar elektrisk harpa och elektronik. Det är två sorters lågmäld estetik som möts. Davies har en förkärlek för flytande, fräsande och glidande toner. Klangerna samlas till olika kolorerade moln över hans landskap. Det känns litet grand som att flyga drake, se hur den lyfter mot vinden och nästan svävar ur synhåll. Krebs är precis tvärtom. Jag är alltid lika fascinerad, då hon skall spela. Detta myller av sladdar som skall kopplas, saker som faller i golvet, de lätt kaotiska ögonblicken innan hon skall sätta igång. Så sitter hon där. Lyssnar på en liten ton, skjuter på den, kastar in ett nytt ljud. Det är skevt, skärande och oändligt lyssnande. I varje föremål bor en ton; men hon är mycket konkret. Allt annat än en drakflygare eller drömmare. Det är fysiskt. Närvarande. Slumpen får skära in. Dissonant. Och jag är alltid innerligt tacksam för varje album hon släpper. Något nytt har kolliderats fram och omsorgsfullt sträckts ut för lyssning under hennes händer, avsett för mina öron.

Tillsammans med Davies trollar hon med små, dirrande ljud, hon använder bandupptagningar av sin och andras röster. Hon manipulerar, förvandlar passager till ett slags konkret poesi. Smakar på orden. Hur känns de med litet lägre hastighet, lätt förvrängda. Och så ligger där de små ljuden och vibrerar, väntar på att kläckas. De skall först kokas och vändas i hennes föreställningsvärld innan de släpps ut på scenen. Då ofta kapade, kortade, skurna. Till slut har hon komprimerat bearbetade röster, gitarrljud och allt vad det är till något som mest liknar ett sceniskt framförande av en pjäs som saknar handling. Tystnaden blir en egen aktör. Klockklickande bildar den en hinna vi måste lyssna igenom. Ett mummel av ljud hörs. Där lämnas diskreta pauser, det är ingen musik som tränger sig på. Davies visar sig vara en utmärkt kolorist, som med lätt hand stänker på Krebs eftertänksamma infall. De stegras av ljudfragment som vittnar om krig, katastrof, hot. Terror. Musiken är ett svar, en återhållsamhet, som om den undrade vart den skall rikta sig i en så högljutt hotfull värld? Det är den eftertänksamheten som präglar albumet. Ett sätt att utforska vilka mellanrum, hålrum och möjligheter som musiken kan verka i.

Smärtsamma småljud och urklipp från röster blandas till en egen form som vägrar tåga. Då musiken upphör tar min egen värld vid. Kvar dröjer skavet från vassa toner, de oväntade avbrotten och minnet av en obeskrivlig musikupplevelse."

Thomas Millroth, Sound of Music