

## To the Checkpoint

### **Checkpoint KBK delivers an unforgettable performance in the Soundings series at the Nasher Sculpture Center**

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Soundings: New Music at the Nasher review  
by Gregory Sullivan Isaacs | 11.5.2011

When a concert takes you suddenly to unknown regions and keeps you there, it can be difficult to write about the experience. The Friday's **Soundings** concert at the **Nasher Sculpture Center** was just such a concert. Much like remembering the details of a dream, it is hard even to remember the program order.



Part of this confusion is that all of the music on the program was new to this listener and it was played without pause with constantly shifting players. There was a string quartet on the stage. A singer would enter down the side aisle, singing in an unrecognizable language. A clarinetist would wander [sic] in. An accordion player appeared. They all took turns playing and it was so dark that the program was useless as a road map through the modernist and vaguely Hebraic-Middle Eastern-klezmer influenced musical landscape. It was wonderful to be a bewildered visitor in a different world.

The actual works on the program so melded into each other that the most distinguishing signposts were blurred. An occasional rousing ending would elicit applause. Since the players went right on after the applause died down, you were unsure if that was a change of composition. Only when they all stood up to bow were we certain that the first half was over. The same thing happened at the end.

The string quartet players were Keats Dieffenbach and Anna Elashvili, violin; Margaret Dyer, viola; Hamilton Berry, cello. The featured artists were **Checkpoint KBK**, a trio that brings together the unique talents of violinist-vocalist Iva Bittová, clarinetist David Krakauer and accordionist Merima Ključo.

The last time I heard Krakauer, a klezmer specialist, was in David del Tredici's *Magyar Madness* for String Quartet and Clarinet in New York in October 2009. In that piece, he seemed restrained by the written page to which del Tredici tied him. Here, he was set free to reach incredible flights of music fancy and notes the Boehm system of mechanical keys for the instrument never imagined possible.

[Bittová] demonstrated the ability to sing and play the violin at the same time. In one part, she accompanied herself. She sang in a wide variety of languages, from Czechoslovakian and Moravian to Yiddish and English. She also used an incredible range of vocal techniques, such as throat singing and trills, spread vowels, even some clicks and other non-sung sounds.

Ključo's accordion was a much lower energy contributor. However, don't let subtlety distract you from her incredible technique. She matched Krakauer note for note in each of his challenging melismas and she made a variety of sounds by using the bellows creatively [sic].

Since there wasn't a translation of the words available, most of the audience had no idea what she was singing about. At first, this was disorientating, but later I was glad that we didn't have a paper in our hands to follow. We wouldn't have submerged ourselves in the alien landscape that the music created. We caught her mood.

The actual music they played was programmed in such a way that it became [sic] a stream of conscience, an exotic goulash with distinctive but barely recognizable ingredients. A String Trio from 1944 by Holocaust victim Gideon Klein was folk-influenced by his Moravian homeland. Gubaidulina's *Silenzio* for String Quartet was just that—silence—but not in [sic] the way John Cage uses it in 4'33" where the pianist just sits and stares at his watch. This silence is filled with barely audible sounds from the strings. An icy harmonic here, a note there, a tremolo, a fragment of harmony, only ephemeral bits of musical nothingness drifted by. K'vakarat (1994) by Golijov, a setting of a prayer from the High Holy Days, used the entire ensemble. A series of Moravian songs, arranged by Elashvil, and some directed improvisations by Krakauer filled out the mystical program.

When it was over, we knew that we had been transported to some unknown Middle East dimension and the streets of Dallas felt cold and garish as we crossed them to the car.