



K A T I E K R E S E K

Play Wide Open

During her career, **Katie Kresek BFA '98, BA '99** (music performance, literature) has played violin onstage worldwide with performers such as Adele and Rod Stewart, collaborated with the likes of Beyoncé and Jay-Z, and recorded with artists including Norah Jones and Paul Simon.

But for several days last spring, she played on a much smaller, yet important stage: inside New York City's Javits Center, entertaining front-line health workers and those in the observation area waiting the mandatory 15 minutes following their COVID vaccines. The performances had side effects. "One of the workers told us there were far fewer incidents of medical issues, like fainting, on the days there was music," she recounts. "The pulse and the continuity and the flow of the music can soothe people in a physiological way, which is very gratifying."

Household Names

The name Katie Kresek may not ring a bell, but her vast list of collaborators and accomplishments certainly will. A performer, recording artist, creator, and educator, Kresek truly embodies the term versatile. Before the pandemic shut down Broadway, she was concertmaster and

co-orchestrator of *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, for which she received the 2020 Tony Award for Best Orchestrations and a 2020 Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Orchestrations. She's thrilled to return to playing the show now that Broadway has reopened.

She's performed on albums with James Taylor and Five for Fighting, and contributed arrangements to Lana Del Rey's album, *Born to Die - Paradise Edition*, which received a Grammy nomination. Touring with Lana Del Rey internationally, Kresek was lead violinist and strings arranger. She served as the concertmaster of David Byrne's *Contemporary Color* project. And she's collaborated with performers across the musical spectrum: Rufus Wainwright, Diana Krall, Alicia Keys, and Chris Martin, to name just a few. She's performed on both late night and morning TV talk shows, on soundtracks, and in several Broadway shows.

And, no, she doesn't have a favorite artist. "I'm never able to answer that question. I love various aspects of everything they bring to my life. I love different styles, I like learning about all those different worlds, and getting to live in them at various times," she says.

Crossovers Encouraged

Kresek earned both a music and literature degree at Purchase, as well as an arts management certificate. She valued her experience on campus, especially her professors who nourished her penchant for interdisciplinary study. Her music professors encouraged her work in literature and vice versa. "I had a lot of freedom and I was encouraged to explore my interests," she recalls, which eventually informed her senior project—an interdisciplinary study of the emergence of Romanticism in Beethoven and Wordsworth. "It made for much richer cross-disciplinary connections in my research, and a richer experience in learning about the context of the music I was making," she says.

"And then also, bringing an aesthetic approach and an artistic lens to my literature work."

She wasn't done with her education, however. After Purchase, she earned an MM in music from Mannes College of Music, and then went on to pursue an EdM and EdD in music and music education from Columbia University.

The Power of Teaching

The daughter of two artist-educators, Kresek herself is well known as an accomplished teaching artist through her work with Lincoln Center Education, the New York Philharmonic, and other cultural organizations. Teaching not only provided stability while she freelanced on Broadway, in various orchestras, and elsewhere; its rewards have been powerful. "There's a reciprocal thing that happens when you're sharing what you do with other people. And it also brings a critical lens to your own work," she says. "So having to explain things to other people in order to share it with them and learning to be responsive in that way, I think it just makes you a better artist."

Be Open, Say Yes

Throughout her career, Kresek has plunged into different genres and roles. The coupling of her curiosity and willingness to say yes has led to interesting opportunities. "I'm usually pretty eager to dip a toe in a new musical world," she says. When a tango orchestra needed a violinist, she agreed, although it came with a notable learning curve. "I did not know what I was doing. I just took the gig and asked questions later," she says. "For me, it was really about paying attention and listening and asking questions and really taking in [the orchestra members'] expertise. And it was so satisfying. I appreciate the opportunity to solve problems or to take on a new task and figure it out. It feels very invigorating to me."

She had never written for the theatre before the *Moulin Rouge* opportunity, but she welcomed the challenge. Her sensibility for multiple music genres was a perfect fit. "*Moulin Rouge* has these incredible combinations of musical worlds; classical, which I was really well-versed in, and tango and pop. I was like, 'I know I can do this,'" she says, laughing.

Playing is Everything

Despite her love for the creative aspects of the music business, the pandemic reinforced to her the importance of performing with others. "There's nothing like the actual physical playing," she explains, adding, "I realized how much I missed physically playing with other people." She looks forward to continuing her collaboration with her new group, the XQuartet, and specifically, their work with singer/songwriters.

The XQuartet first came together in the Fall 2020 for the Beacon Jams, an eight-week virtual residency created by Trey Anastasio, lead singer of the band Phish, which featured live-streamed performances that served as fundraisers for those affected by addiction. For the residency, however, the group was known as The Rescue Squad Strings, a sticky moniker bestowed by Anastasio himself. "We're the Rescue Squad when we play with Trey. In any other context, we're called the XQuartet."

Following the Beacon Jams, the quartet agreed they wanted to keep working together. "We all really love this very specific art form of working with singer/songwriters. It's super specific; it's not like you can go in and just play the string parts. It's really about collaboration and listening to an artist."

The reaction to their session work has been enthusiastic. "People were saying to us, 'Wow, you guys are really responsive and you have everything ready to go from the first note. This is really a great experience; you should keep doing this,'" she recounts. "It felt really meaningful for us to spend a year together, whether it was playing at the Javits or playing for Trey or playing for other artists. That was a real silver lining."

Art Gives Back

While this year has been incredibly trying for artists in all genres, Kresek was able to continue working—the result of her interdisciplinary approach. "I've kind of pursued all the things that I have so that if one of them fell away, I would always have something else. And I saw that during the pandemic for the first time," she explains. "I felt this sense of validation that I still had so much going on. Even

if concerts were removed, I could still write arrangements, I could still teach, and I could still do recordings from my home. I felt a sense of that all coming together in that way."

Recalling the theme from both her senior thesis and graduate dissertation, which addressed different aspects of the compensatory nature of art, she says, "Art makes up for a lot.... Working in the arts and being in the arts, it's imbued with so much meaning that it's never going to let you down."

—Kristi McKee

Visit katiekresekmusic.com for a complete bio and list of credits.



At her home studio



Kresek plays with Elbow

Photo: @michelleshiers



Kresek plays with Five for Fighting

Photo: @ebeccehauermusicimages