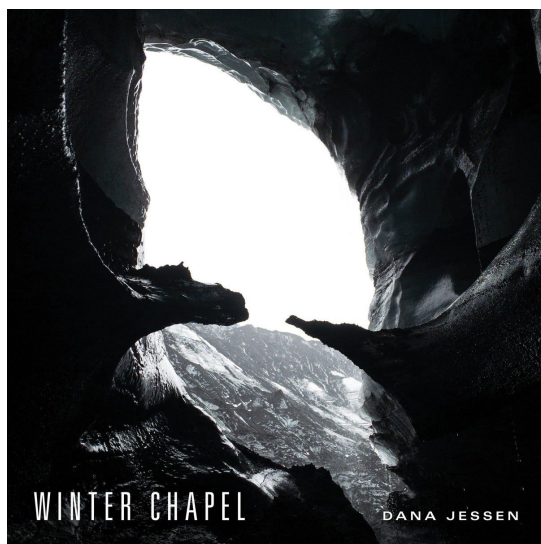


**CD Review—
Bassoonist Dana Jessen:
*Winter Chapel***

by Mike Telin



Improvisation: the act of creating something without preparation.

Inspiration: The process of being mentally stimulated to do something creative.

On her debut album *Carve*, Dana Jessen challenged listeners to discard any preconceived notions they might have had about the bassoon, and allow themselves to be swept into a magical world of colorful acoustic and electronic soundscapes. The album included commissioned works interwoven with improvisations.

Jessen has now followed up with her second solo CD, *Winter Chapel*. Recorded on January 17, 2020 in Oberlin College's Fairchild Chapel and available on [Carrier Records](#), the album is a continuum in Jessen's journey to push the musical boundaries of her instrument and herself as an improviser.

However, she is not alone as the six tracks, consisting entirely of her own material, are each influenced by the resonant acoustic. From beginning to end, Fairchild serves as inspiration as well as Jessen's constant collaborator, and together they bring to life the mysterious creatures that live there.

Part One (3:25) features a high-pitched squeal, like an imaginary bird calling out across a valley, while *Part Two* (5:50) is defined by low growls juxtaposed with uncanny multiphonics and flutter tongue.

The isolated, high-pitched sounds and blowing air bring to mind a cold winter breeze during *Part Three* (3:41). Jessen and the Medieval-style chapel bring an anguished feeling to *Part Four* (3:46) with the bending of pitches, and wailing sounds around melodic motifs.



At nine and a half minutes, *Part Five* is the longest track on the album, consisting of extended versions of four preceding movements. Jessen produces effortless leaps from the bassoon's lowest to highest registers all the while sustaining multiphonics — astonishing. The creatures of the chapel become violent around 7:40 and lead to loud, booming, arpeggiated chords that bring the movement to conclusion.

Since Jessen doesn't suggest a narrative for the album, listeners are free to create their own — perhaps it's a 21st-century soundtrack for *Beowulf*? In *Part Six* (3:36), it's easy to imagine the young warrior from Geatland in battle with the monster Grendel.

While the sounds that Jessen produces are not always pretty in a traditional sense, that is the magic of *Winter Chapel*. Throughout, Jessen creates a musical arc that invites listeners to sit back and close their eyes while imagining their own stories taking place inside Fairchild Chapel.

The album is recorded by Andrew Tripp, mixed by Dana Jessen, and mastered by Murat Çolak.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com December 15, 2020.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)