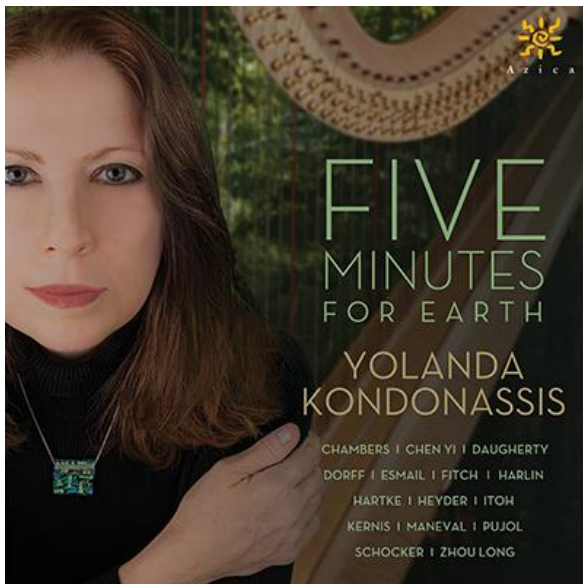


CD Review: Yolanda Kondonassis
FIVE MINUTES for Earth

by Nicolette Cheauré



The closing line in the description of Yolanda Kondonassis' latest CD *FIVE MINUTES for Earth* is “What is at stake...is only everything we have.” With a line like that, one can reflect on the consequences of their actions, which are often irreversible when applied to such imperative matters like climate change and Earth conservation. A labor-of-love project that commissioned fifteen composers to write for solo harp, this album — released by Azica Records on April 1 — cherishes, urges to protect, and aims to preserve the planet.

Several tracks depict nature or natural disasters, starting with Takuma Itoh's *Kohola Sings (Humpback Whales)*, Michael Daugherty's *Hear the Dust Blow*, Chen Yi's *Dark Mountains*, and Aaron Jay Kernis' *On Hearing Nightbirds at Dusk*. Itoh's imitation of whale songs during migration are demonstrated in repeated bass notes which increase in rhythmic intensity. Arpeggios ebbing and flowing provide a comforting, sea-oriented atmosphere. The use of special effects in the Daugherty, including soundboard knocks, gongs, and ringing harmonics allow the solo line to sit comfortably above the texture, confidently bouncing between silence and cadenza-like material.

Kondonassis' navigation of the unpredictable, almost atonal harmonic trajectory in the Kernis proves that such jumbled figures next to each other can still make logical sense. Yi's *Dark Mountains* is the most percussive, using extended techniques to mimic thunder. Kondonassis is a storytelling champion, effortlessly allowing unfinished, ascending fragments to function like a cliff drop-off within the remote landscape. Stephen Hartke's *Fault Line* is in the same vein — with irregular, angular moments that provide an element of sharpness to the album.

Máximo Diego Pujol's *Milonga para mi tierra* pays homage to the low grasslands in South America. It's easy to hear that Argentine flair, through insistent, sultry rhythms, and thick harmonies that lend themselves to being a type of tango. It's one of the more lyrical pieces, and Kondonassis' relaxed lower line allows the fluid melody to dance on top.

Reena Esmail's *Inconvenient Wounds* and Gary Schocker's *Memory of Trees* are more narrative in function. Esmail portrays the frantic melting of a glacier, while Schocker's imitation of a medieval troubadour song is reminiscent of lute playing. Esmail's piece is aided by techniques similar to those in *Dark Mountains*, including pedal buzzes, tremolos, and rocket slides, while Schocker gets his points across through more traditional harp techniques.

Keith Fitch's *As Earth Dreams*, Patrick Harrlin's *Time Lapse*, Jocelyn Chambers' *Melting Point*, and Philip Maneval's *The Demise of the Shepard Glacier* are all related through constant forward motion, tension within rising figures, and a sense of manipulating time. Rhapsodic, meandering fragments in the Fitch allow the music to speak for itself. The continuous, strumming bassline in the Chambers offers a sense of energy underscored by feelings of unease and resignation.

A similarly unresolved ending is finally achieved in the Harlin after bassline rhythms push the music onwards. In the Maneval, Kondonassis' powerful, twinkling high register seamlessly falls into the middle-low range while supported by stable grounded notes in her lower hand.

No tracks better wrap up the album than Nathaniel Heyder's *Earthview*, Zhou Long's *Green*, and Daniel Dorff's *Meditation at Perkiomen Creek*. The music of *Earthview* is reminiscent of the beeps and tones often heard on electronic devices — an ingenious acknowledgement of the Earth functioning both as an object of untainted beauty, and as the home of man-made technological advances.

Green — heard here in one of several adaptations — shows the collaborative relationship between humans and the planet they inhabit. Kondonassis progresses on a slow journey allowing the material to go up in space and ring as it may. *Meditation* encourages the same degree of solitude, utilizing the instrument's natural tendency to vibrate and the whistle pitches made by dragging a damp cloth through a string.

Kondonassis' ambitious project showcases her own multidimensional abilities through incredibly diverse pieces — bonded together over the organic beauty of the Earth. *FIVE MINUTES* leaves listeners with the harrowing message that protecting the planet is a

global dilemma rather than a localized one — uniting all of humanity both now and in the future.

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