

KROKE

What makes me feel drawn to KROKE music is spiritual reality of the musicians, this means honesty and authenticity of the music.

Nigel Kennedy

The music is too dark to really represent traditional klezmer. At times, it is almost as if the Velvet Underground have been reborn as a klezmer band.

Ari Davidov

KROKE live are a hair-raisingly brilliant, unforgettable experience.

John Lusk

At times they sound jazzy, at times contemporary, at times classical. Their music is at once passionate and danceable.

Dominic Raiu

KROKE (which means Kraków in Yiddish) was formed in 1992 by three friends and graduates of the Kraków Academy of Music: Jerzy Bawoł (accordion), Tomasz Kukurba (viola) and Tomasz Lato (double bass).

The members of the group completed all stages of standard music education, including contemporary music.

KROKE began by playing klezmer music, which is deeply set in Jewish tradition, and adding a strong influence of Balkan music. Currently, they draw inspiration from a variety of ethnic music from around the world, combining it with elements of jazz and improvisation, creating their own distinctive style.

Initially, **KROKE** performed only in clubs and galleries situated in Kazimierz, a former Jewish district of Kraków. There, for the first time, one could listen to KROKE's songs. They later recorded their first cassette released at their own expense in 1993.

While performing at the Ariel gallery, they came to the attention of Steven Spielberg, who was shooting Schindler's List in Kraków at the time. Spielberg invited them to Jerusalem, where he was shooting the final scenes. The group performed a concert at the Survivors' Reunion for those of Oskar Schindler's list who made it through the war. Spielberg also sent a copy of the group's cassette to Peter Gabriel, who in 1997 invited **KROKE** to the WOMAD Festival, where the audience gave a rousing welcome both to the group and its debut album - "Trio" (Oriente Musik; 1996). Cooperation with Peter Gabriel resulted in joint recording sessions at Real World Studio - parts of these recordings were later used on by Peter Gabriel on his album "Long Walk Home", the soundtrack to Phillip Noyce's film "Rabbit-Proof Fence".

In 1997, **KROKE** released their second album entitled "Eden" (Oriente Musik). On the one hand, the record carried on the tradition of Jewish music started with "Trio", and on the other, it was a result of both musical and archival search. The group's expanding audience received an album which combined traditional ornamentation with modern technique and traditional motives combined with modern musical sensitivity, which presented a completely new tonal colour.

This first stage of KROKE's activity was well summarised by a live album called "Live At The Pit" (Oriente Musik; 1998), recorded in the United Kingdom and nominated for the German Record Critics' Award in 1999.

After being invited to some of the most significant European festivals and after becoming acquainted with numerous well-known musicians and personages of art and culture, **KROKE** earned themselves many concert tours. This enabled the group to opportunity to discover new sounds and musical cultures. In their original compositions, though klezmer and Balkan influences were still audible, **KROKE** began branching out with more Sephardic and Arabic sounds. The result was "The Sounds of the Vanishing World" (Oriente Musik; 1999), which was evidence to the musical evolution of **KROKE** and the capability of the musicians to create their own unique style. Gaining enormous popularity in Poland and Europe, the album received the prestigious Preis der Deutsche Schallplattenkritik (German Record Critics' Award) in 2000.

In summer 2001, while on concert tour in Cornwall, **KROKE** met with Nigel Kennedy for the first time, who immediately spoke to the group about collaboration. The result was the joint recording "East Meets East" (EMI; 2003), which became a smash hit. **KROKE** was nominated for the BBC 3 Radio award in the World Music category, and their concerts with Nigel Kennedy played at numerous European festivals received enthusiastic applause. At the same time, another of **KROKE**'s own record, "Ten Pieces to Save the World" (Oriente Musik; 2003), was released. This tuneful, climatic album was ranked second on the World Music Charts and was a crowning achievement of group's ten years in the music business.

In 2004, **KROKE** released another live album entitled "Quartet - Live At Home" (Oriente Musik), recorded at the S-5 Studio of Radio Kraków. In the recording, Kraków jazz percussionist Tomasz Grochot took part, and ever since then, he has been recording and performing with **KROKE**.

In 2005, in cooperation with jazz pianist Krzysztof Herdzin, the group started work on Edyta Geppert's album "Śpiewam życie" (Agencja Artystyczna Edyta; 2006). The record also appeared in Western Europe, released by **KROKE**'s record company as "I Sing Life" (Oriente Musik; 2007).

At the same time, the group was working with the Sinfonia Baltica Orchestra on a joint music project called "KROKE – Symfonicznie", arranged and conducted by Bohdan Jarmołowicz. These concerts were warmly welcomed by audiences throughout Poland and Germany.

In 2006, **KROKE**'s song "The Secret of the Life Tree" appeared on the soundtrack to David Lynch's film "Inland Empire".

Working with Nigel Kennedy and Edyta Geppert does not mean that **KROKE** neglects their own audience. In 2007, on their 15th anniversary together and following nearly four years of touring throughout numerous European countries, **KROKE** released another studio album called "Seventh Trip" (Oriente Musik), a record full of energy and an oriental journey along new musical paths.

Numerous concerts in Poland and throughout Europe filled the year 2008, as well as work on a new "symphonic" project arranged by jazz pianist Krzysztof Herdzin, which premiered in Spain with the orchestra "Sinfonica de Burgos," conducted by Javier Castro. Performances of this concert in Krakow and Saint Petersburg in Russia with the "Sinfonietta Cracovia", an outstanding orchestra from Krakow conducted by Robert Kabara and which brought with them a new style merging classical and contemporary music, were enthusiastically received by audiences who demanded repeat encores.

In 2009, **KROKE** decided to do another turnaround, and more and more often the group played concerts as a trio without Tomasz Grochot playing drums. As a result, the concerts become more intimate as the music returned back to Ashkenazi and Balkan sounds, which had been so long absent in KROKE's music. Janusz Makuch, the head of the Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow, called it "a return to roots", and **KROKE** confirmed this with their October 2009 album "Out of Sight" (Oriente Musik), on which energetic compositions inspired by klezmer tradition were combined with jazz and the evocative vocals of Tomasz Kukurba.

At the end of the 2010 European promotional tour for "Out of Sight", **KROKE**, who had constantly been touring with Nigel Kennedy and Edyta Geppert, began work on a collection of Greek songs with Maja Sikorowska as well as performing concerts together with the Norwegian band "Tindra" and Spanish violinist Diego Galaz. Other special events that year included the recording of music for the film "Streetcar Memories", directed by Łukasz Czuj (the film played at the opening of the Schindler Factory Museum in Krakow), and participation in the "Polish Weekend in Southbank Centre" in London alongside Nigel Kennedy.

In August 2010, **KROKE** performed with great success at the "Schleswig Holstein Musik Festival" in Germany and took part in the concert "Your Angel's Name is Liberty", directed by Robert Wilson, on occasion of the 30th anniversary of "Solidarity" in Gdansk. January 2011 also brought the band news that the collaboration album "Śpiewam Życie" with Edyta Geppert was certified "gold".

In the same month, **KROKE** and Maja Sikorowska along with Sławek Berny (percussion) completed work on the album "Avra" (Pomaton EMI), containing 12 beautiful Greek songs about the hot mediterranean sea, love, stolen kisses, longing and toasting life in seaside taverns, all to the accompaniment of unique rhythms, melismatic vocals and exoticism intermingled with a light breeze of Slavic culture. At a brief glance, one can determine the "aura" of this new release.

MUSICIANS:

Jerzy Bawoł – accordion

Tomasz Kukurba – viola

Tomasz Lato – double bass

DISCOGRAPHY:

[1996] „Trio” (*Oriente Musik*)

[1997] „Eden” (*Oriente Musik*)

[1998] „Live at The Pit” (*Oriente Musik*)

[1999] „Sounds of the Vanishing World” (*Oriente Musik*)

[2003] „Ten Pieces To Save The World” (*Oriente Musik*)

[2003] „East meets East” – with Nigel Kennedy (*EMI*)

[2004] „Quartet - Live At Home” (*Oriente Musik*)

[2006] „Śpiewam życie” – with Edyta Geppert (*Agencja Artystyczna Edyta*)

(in 2007 released in Europe by *Oriente Musik* as „I Sing Life”)

[2007] „Seventh Trip” (*Oriente Musik*)

[2009] „Out of Sight” (*Oriente Musik*)

[2011] „Avra” – with Maja Sikorowska (*Pomaton EMI*)

KROKE ON THE WEB:

<http://www.kroke.krakow.pl> – official band’s website

<http://www.facebook.com/kroke.trio>

<http://www.myspace.com/kroketrio>

<http://www.oriente.de> – record label releasing Kroke’s albums

<http://www.shop.gigicd.com> – CD’s distribution in Poland