

# Eva Kess

## Doublebassist & Composer/Arranger

### Press Kit 2020/21

Sternschnuppen – Falling Stars (Neuklang 2020)

### Short Bio

Born in Berlin-Schöneberg, Germany, Eva started her musical career as a child in Porto Alegre, Brazil, as a Ballet and Tap Dancer. Back in Europe she continued as Classical Pianist and Ballet Dancer in Bern and at age 17 discovered the Double Bass. Eva Kess lives in Bern, Switzerland.

She studied Jazz Double Bass at the Music Academy of Basel with Bänz Oester, Larry Grenadier and Ensemble Classes with Jorge Rossy, Julio Baretto, Ann Malcolm, Lester Menezes, Adrien Mears. Countless masterclasses with Ben Street, Marc Turner, Michael Kanan, Peter Bernstein, Ben Monder, Joëlle Léandre, Itiberê Zwarg, Boško Petrovič, Louis Nash, Jim Black, Sidsel Enderson, William Parker und John Hollenbeck complete her education.

Eva expanded her horizon in direction of composing for larger ensembles in the *composition & theory* masters of the University of Arts in Bern. She studied composition with Guillermo Klein, Django Bates, Bert Joris, Martin Streule, Christoph Baumann, Frank Sikora, Klaus Wagenleiter and classes with Patrice Moret, Colin Vallon, Claire Roberts, Xavier Dayer.

Winning the Friedl Wald-Scholarship allowed her to dive into the music scene in New York City and to take lessons with Larry Grenadier and Matt Penman.

Eva Kess has recorded several albums with music of hers and gained recognition nationally as well as internationally. An active performer, Eva played concerts in Bern, Basel, Zürich, Geneva, Berlin, Paris, Barcelona, Zagreb and Rio de Janeiro.

### Quotes

*With these Falling Stars no wish remains unfulfilled.*

– Jazzthing 2020 –

*Eva Kess's music seems to effortlessly find the balance between disparate worlds. Floating ethereal harmonies mingle with understated driving rhythmic grooves, simplicity and virtuosity converse with one another, and throughout one is left feeling that this music is a very cohesive whole, the result of a very clear vision and sharp focus.*

- Jeremy Harman, Sirius Quartet 2020 -

## Line-up

Vincent Millioud – Violin 1  
Susanna Andres – Violin 2  
Nao Rohr – Viola  
Ambrosius Huber – Violoncello  
Simon Schwaninger – Piano  
Philipp Leibundgut – Drums  
Eva Kess – Doublebass & Composition

*Sternschnuppen – Falling Stars* has been released on the label Neuklang in 2020.  
A Co-Production with the Swiss Cultural Radio SRF 2.  
Recorded at the Hardstudios with Moritz Wetter.

## Links

YouTube: <https://bit.ly/3fX9vvi>  
Twitter: [https://twitter.com/eva\\_kess\\_music](https://twitter.com/eva_kess_music)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/evakessmusic/>  
Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/eva\\_kess\\_music/](https://www.instagram.com/eva_kess_music/)  
Bandcamp: <https://evakess.bandcamp.com/album/sternschnuppen-falling-stars>

## About Sternschnuppen

**Eva Kess** isn't the first musician to combine a jazz rhythm section with a string quartet, but the Swiss bassist, composer, and bandleader has created an arrestingly beautiful body of music that sounds unlike any other in the jazz-string canon. Kess's fourth album, ***Sternschnuppen - Falling Stars***, is an ambitious departure from her previous projects. The Swiss and German dual citizen has gained attention on the European and New York scenes as a rising force on her instrument, and ***Falling Stars*** marks her ascension as a composer/arranger with a strikingly integrated vision that treats all of her collaborators as equals within a single septet.

Encompassing the post-bop continuum, chamber music, and jazz's kindred South American traditions, the music showcases her big sound and commanding presence as a player, but ***Falling Stars*** is most impressive as a statement by a composer who has found a voice as distinctive and personal as her compositional mentors, British pianist/composer **Django Bates** and Argentine pianist/composer **Guillermo Klein**. She doesn't mind the growing recognition of her instrumental prowess, "for me it's about the music as a whole, not only the bass," Kess says.

"I love the sound of string instruments and the endless possibilities when it comes to string writing. There are so many possibilities of sounds for each instrument and they blend very well as they belong to the same family. The double bass is a string instrument as well so I'm very connected to the sound and the temper of string players and am of course a part of the rhythm section."

More than the considerable sum of the individual pieces, ***Falling Stars*** is a suite-like body of music that Kess always performs in the same sequence as the album. Cellist **Ambrosius Huber**, who's also recorded with acclaimed Swiss jazz pianist Nik Bärtsch's Mobile, introduces the gently flowing theme "**Ikigai**" (a Japanese

word that can be translated as “purpose” or “a reason to live”). Gradually building in intensity with several intertwined melodic lines and a groove reminiscent of a northeastern Brazilian baião, the piece climaxes with **Philipp Leibundgut**’s concise drum solo, a finely calibrated statement that emerges directly from the increasingly coiled melody. The playful “**Porto Alegre**” features an insouciantly swinging violin solo by **Vincent Milliod**, who’s gained recognition in recent years as an important new jazz voice, followed by Kess and Huber’s plush unison line supported by an undulating pizzicato mesh.

An arco bass line opens Kess’s sublime ballad “**Love Is**” before her stately pizzicato transition to pianist **Simon Schwaninger**’s gossamer solo, which is accompanied by a delicate thrum of strings. When Kess returns to the foreground with her bow, she renders the gently lilting melody with consummate grace. “**The Subsequent Use of Yesteryear and Futurity**” is the only track without piano, and Kess keeps the episodic piece moving with her steady plucking. About halfway through the piece the pulsing strings fade out and Kess delivers a dramatic, buzzy unaccompanied solo before the ensemble rejoins the fray and she leads the briskly swinging outro. “As a rhythm section player, the whole groove part is a matter of the heart for me,” she says. “As a double bassist I’m in a team providing rhythmic as well as harmonic information, defining the harmony through my choice of the bass notes.”

The dream-like title track **Sternschnuppen** takes a similar approach to erasing distinctions between accompanist and soloist, and rhythm section and strings. Buoyed by Kess’s full-toned bass, the piece glides and swoops, churning to a close with **Leibundgut**’s particularly dynamic trap work. While most of Kess’s pieces unfold with an emotional coherence and clarity that make the music sound effortless, “**Many Black Dots**” is something of a steeplechase. Navigating the interlaced melodies with aplomb, the ensemble has clearly put in the requisite time so that the twists and turns sound utterly natural. The album closes with “**Penta Piece**,” which combines an exhilarating groove with a slithery theme. The strings offer a master class in interplay, transitioning from chord to chord with shimmering glissandi.

Surprisingly, the strings are not a working quartet. “I brought the whole septet together,” Kess says, noting that she had trouble finding string players who could navigate some of her untypical time signatures. French Swiss violinist **Vincent Milliod**, a longtime friend of Kess’s, proved to be the key recruit. “Once he agreed I knew the project was going to work,” she says. “He knows how to lead a string quartet. They could follow him on when to come in—that is, when playing backgrounds.”

Violinist **Susanna Andres** and the Swiss-Japanese violist **Nao Rohr** are also essential collaborators. “This is highly contrapuntal music,” says Kess, “where every player holds a high degree of melodic and rhythmic responsibility. **Falling Stars** marks a major leap for Kess.

## About Eva Kess & Discography

Born in West Berlin on April 10, 1985, **Eva Patricia Kesselring** spent several years of her early childhood in the southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. By the time she was five her family had settled in Bern, Switzerland, where she still lives today. Growing up, she sang children’s songs in German, English, Portuguese, French, and Swiss German with her family, and Kess made quick progress on piano, her first instrument. Trained in the European classical tradition, she was devoted and talented enough to perform a Bach piano concerto with a symphony orchestra as a young teen, while also studying classical ballet. As a high school student, she analyzed Paul Hindemith’s “Trauermusik” (Funeral Music), originally composed for viola and string orchestra, and performed the orchestra part on the piano. “The piece was composed and performed on the same day - and the harmonic movement is simply *perfect*, everything makes complete sense,” she notes of the early 20th-century piece.

She experienced a life-altering epiphany at 17 when she happened to miss her bus and stumbled across an al fresco performance by a double-bass quartet playing “super beautiful music that blew my mind,” she recalls.

“They were playing bass lines, melodies, middle lines, rhythmic, percussive stuff, and having so much fun together.”

She'd already been thinking about starting a new instrument so she could play more easily with other musicians, and she suddenly found her calling. Around the same time a friend took her to a jazz concert with a trio consisting of trumpet, guitar, and bass. At the end of the show, she approached the bassist **Lorenz Beyeler** and lined up lessons. “I'd been asking my piano teachers for more rhythmic pieces,” Kess says. “I was searching for something else. I didn't have the word or term for what it was, but it might have been jazz.”

Attending every jazz concert she could in Bern, she got to know the local scene while also catching dozens of gigs by New York players touring in Europe. With guidance from her teacher **Thomas Dürst**, she started studying and transcribing recordings featuring bass masters like Paul Chambers, Oscar Pettiford, Charlie Haden, and Larry Grenadier. After 18 months of intense work she launched her trio with guitar and trumpet, gigging around town with a repertoire of jazz settings for Christmas songs. Attending the Music Academy of Basel, she studied jazz and improvisation with artists such as Bänz Oester, Patrice Moret, Larry Grenadier, Jorge Rossy, Julio Baretto, Adrien Mears, and Wolfgang Muthspiel. Increasingly interested in writing for larger ensembles, she earned a coveted spot in the University of Arts in Bern's composition and theory master's degree program, studying with Guillermo Klein, Bert Joris, Martin Streule, Klaus Wagenleiter, Frank Sikora, and Django Bates. In 2010 Kess won a scholarship to study in New York City, where she once again studied with Larry Grenadier and took lessons with Matt Penman.

“I got to know the city and since then I go to New York whenever I can,” she says. “Sometimes for a long run, and sometimes a short stay. At first it was overwhelming, but after a week it was like I was completely high on music, and I forgot about time. I'd sit in the Village Vanguard, and it would sound like a classic record. I played a lot of jam sessions. People say New York humbles you. Most of the best players live there or go there. It definitely puts everything in perspective.”

Kess considers herself to be a “Third Culture Adult,” but “also a European, and I have many insights as well into Brazil and the U.S. I have a facility to get to the root of things and backgrounds of many different topics, places, and cultures. I don't have a strong sense of national belonging; rather, it's places and people that make me feel at home. Of course, I feel at home in Switzerland, but also in Berlin, in Brazil, in New York.”

The year 2010 also saw Kess releasing her critically hailed debut album ***Wondering What Is Coming***, a self-produced quintet session featuring tenor saxophonist Simon Spiess, guitarist Johannes Maikranz, pianist Niculin Christen, and drummer Severin Rauch. Featuring original compositions exploring extended forms, the album introduced an impressive new voice and garnered exuberant praise. As the great Catalan drummer Jorge Rossy noted, “Kess writes music that slowly reveals itself with its own logic, adventurous music in the real sense of the word without clichés, long forms that evolve dealing with sound rhythm, form, melody, and harmony. New ideas with the timeless elements.”

She followed up in 2017 with ***Flying Curly***, a co-production with the Radio SRF 2 Kultur released on the UNIT Records label. Shedding a horn player, she introduced her quartet with Berlin-based Portuguese guitarist Filipe Duarte, Slovenian pianist Gregor Ftičar, and Brooklyn-based Austrian drummer Peter Kronreif. Like her first album, ***Flying Curly*** features a program of Kess originals, intricately constructed pieces that offer tantalizing hints at her expanded palette on ***Falling Stars***. She continues to perform in trio and quartet settings, and also plays riveting solo recitals featuring bass and vocals. 2019's ***Bassexperiment***, was a bold solo album featuring only her bass and voice. Stripped down to essentials, the project documented her work as a protean improviser unafraid of a blank canvas. In many ways, integrating a string quartet brings together Kess's far-flung musical passions, establishing her as an essential explorer in a jazz realm that's still largely untapped.

With ***Falling Stars*** she's staked an incontrovertible claim as a jazz artist capable of turning chamber music conventions to her own devices. The resulting music is as thrilling and fresh as the day after tomorrow. •