

Fabian Willmann Trio

**Presstext**

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Artist: Fabian Willmann Trio  
Album: Balance  
Label: Clap Your Hands  
Personnel: Fabian Willmann (Saxophone), Arne Huber (Bass), Jeff Ballard (Drums)  
Guest: Asger Nissen (Saxophone)

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Presstext short (670 characters)

Taking a break while breaking forth, breaking forth while taking a break: Fabian Willmann finds the perfect balance between perception and memory. He is a subtle chronicler of the eternal moment, finding the right tone for his debut as a leader in order to make himself undeniably heard.

From the very first note up to the end of the album, the saxophonist and his companions leave no doubt that they not only know exactly where they come from, but also where the journey should go. They strip themselves down to the essentials, yet with something to say in every breath.

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This concentration on what is necessary is extremely unusual for a debut album, but it is precisely this poised access to his imaginative mental and physical instruments that is Willmann's particular strength. His approach is devoid of any chatter, redundancy, or showing off. In this respect, *Balance* comes across as a kind of self-portrait. "I'd rather make a clear statement than hide the message somewhere in the saxophone" is his courageous credo.

Willmann's clear tone on the tenor saxophone recalls the best eras of a Dexter Gordon or a Stan Getz. On the other hand, the rhythmic meshing contributed by bassist Arne Huber and drummer Jeff Ballard is starkly modern.

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Presstext long (5.028 characters)

No bullshit: On his debut album, *Balance*, Berlin saxophonist Fabian Willmann immediately gets down to business. The opening track bears the businesslike title, "Intro". And indeed, with just a few simple tones, he foreshadows what emerges over the course of the album. Fabian Willmann is a trenchant narrator who, using a sonorous tone and a fearless narrative approach, strips himself down to the essentials, yet with something to say in every breath.

The experience of following Willmann's music is akin to that of reading Marcel Proust's epic novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, not because the album is that sprawling – the contrary is actually the case here – but rather because he rappels himself down into an imaginary past with the subtle means of poetic expression, arriving directly in the here and now. Willmann's clear tone on the tenor saxophone recalls the best eras of a Dexter Gordon or a Stan Getz. On the other hand, the rhythmic meshing contributed by bassist Arne Huber and drummer Jeff Ballard is starkly modern. As opposed to a dichotomy, this implied contrast creates a unity that fully corresponds to the essence of this Berlin-based saxophonist, who radiates restrained calm while still making it unmistakably clear that he knows exactly what he wants.

Willmann has been connected to Jeff Ballard since he was a student in Basel. He has always been captivated by the dynamics that the drummer can unroll, especially in trio situations. Arne Huber has partnered up with Willmann within various contexts. With Ballard and Huber, Willmann could envision a stable, equilateral triangular formation in which both playful and impulsive parts could be distributed in a balanced way. Fourth in the group for several pieces is the Danish alto saxophonist Asger Nissen, who harmoniously takes up Willmann's idiom from a complementary direction. The two saxophonists dance around and complete one another so elegantly that while listening, it is often difficult to identify who is making what tone.

Willmann had the sound of these combinations in his mind's ear before he started writing the pieces. "With these personalities in mind, I wanted to keep the pieces themselves as simple as possible in order to allow the trio's sound to better develop," Willmann recalls about the genesis of his album. "Simple not in the sense of easy, but rather to limit myself while composing in order to be as free as possible while playing. The less I assigned to and the cleaner the compositions, the more could be created in the room with the three to four musicians."

For Willmann, freedom always goes hand in hand with self-reflection. He considers spontaneity and control not as a contradiction, but rather as interdependent. At any given moment in his musical stories, he knows exactly where he is and what he has to say. Precisely because of this conscious vigilance, he is always able to give free rein to the music itself. As a saxophonist, he has a broad virtuoso vocabulary, but he deliberately uses only the means he needs in order to make the statement he wants. This concentration on what is necessary is extremely unusual for a debut album, but it is precisely this poised access to his imaginative mental and physical instruments that is Willmann's particular strength. His approach is devoid of any chatter, redundancy, or showing off. In this respect, *Balance* comes across as a kind of self-portrait. "I'd rather make a clear statement than hide the message somewhere in the saxophone" is his courageous credo. "The album's title *Balance* doesn't imply shying away from extremes, for me it's more about the contours. The fact that different elements are balanced gives me a satisfying gut feeling of restraint."

As is well known, jazz has many facets, and concrete classifications only make sense in very few cases. This also applies to Fabian Willmann's music, because it conveys much more about himself and the musicians involved than it does about historical derivations in jazz.

Nevertheless, a certain proximity to the attitude of cool jazz cannot be dismissed out of hand. This applies less directly to the music itself – which was especially prominent in the 1950s with musicians such as Gerry Mulligan, Stan Getz, Lee Konitz or Art Farmer – than it does to its aura. The album title, *Balance*, is also an apt motto for the record in that Willmann finds a balance between his influences – which he does not disclaim – and the genuine statements that only he himself can make. From the very first note up to the end of the album, the saxophonist and his companions leave no doubt that they not only know exactly where they come from, but also where the journey should go.

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