

## **Fabian Willmann: Freedom**

The Fabian Willmann Trio's second album, *Freedom*, is unexpected, as it does a lot of things differently. Its sound is anthemic rather than hectic. It celebrates melody, not abstraction. It dispenses with extravagance and focuses instead on musical unity. "I wanted to write music that was as simple as possible and create a state in which the band didn't have to think about the music, rather, just let it happen," said the saxophonist Fabian Willmann, originally from Freiburg, who now lives in Berlin. In fact, "letting it happen," versus "making it happen," could be considered the credo of the album, and if the result is the consolidation of a collective sound, then the virtuoso can also be found in the details.

For example, Jeff Ballard's drums here are complex yet unobtrusive. The Californian is a generation older than Fabian Willmann and became renown as the drummer for Ray Charles, Chick Corea, and the Brad Mehldau Trio. He plays from the core of the beat, ornamenting within the structure. This works well for a team that values communication. Ballard's fills tell stories – he is a narrative drummer.

Bassist Arne Huber complements the trio. His tone is warm and embracing and therefore ideal for tethering to the combination of Ballard and Willmann. Here, there is no need for a harmony instrument that provides chords. Huber's voluminous sound and choice of bass notes and Ballard's overall adeptness open up a playing field in which the saxophone can concentrate on the essential musical elements.

Fabian Willmann also pays attention to subtlety. In addition to his studies in Basel and New York with Mark Turner and Domenic Landolf, among others, he plays in ensembles with Eva Klasse, Sarah Chaksad, and Janning Trumann and incorporates this experience into the nine compositions on *Freedom*. His melodies carry the pieces gently and confidently. He lets the themes unfold as if singing with the instrument, always playing from a place of equilibrium that emphasizes each moment of the music.

For the recording of the album, which took place on January 6 and 7, 2024 in Berlin's Funkhaus studio (where Nils Frahm also produces his opulent albums), singer Sessel Vera Pettersen and Lionel Loueke, guitarist of the Herbie Hancock Band, also joined the trio. The two complement three of the pieces with floating, poetic lines and fit delicately, but pointedly, into the trio structure. Loueke in particular has the freedom to act a little differently within this setting than he does in his usual stylistic environment. In this way, *Freedom* surprises on many levels.