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KARL IVAR REFSETH TRIO Praying

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Christian Weidner: alt-saxophone, dodouk
Karl Ivar Refseth: vibraphone
Matthias Pichler: double bass

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KARL IVAR REFSETH TRIO - Praying

With vibraphone many associate rhythm and grooves, others possibly think of complex harmonic cascades. Karl Ivar Refseth can certainly play all of this, as you can hear on the first productions of the Andromeda Mega Express Orchestra, with the Tied & Tickled Trio with Billy Hart and since more than four years with Germany's most innovative indie-rock band The Notwist. For his own album Praying, the Berlin-based Norwegian created an individual aesthetic. "When I compose, I sometimes also think in structures, but have only really accomplished my aim, when I can feel a special enchantment in the music," Refseth explains. "That is why there are many melodies on this album, that are likeable in the same way as a pop-song." Ultimately it is about playing something you really mean and not just trying to be cool, Refseth thinks. "Music can make strong statements, sometimes particularly in quiet, meditative moments."

There are in fact many of these on Praying. Refseth, Christian Weidner and Matthias Pichler play the contemplative compositions with extremely fine nuances. The sensible trio knows the intensity of precisely placed sounds and rests, its arrangements seem as clear as untouched nature on a winter day. Chiseled notes, reserved improvisations and pastel-colored soundscapes develop a rare, touching intimacy. Involuntarily the impression of imaginary soundtracks arises. But Refseth's music does not dictate certain images and stays away from direct references. Thus it allows associations in all directions.

Hereby the mindset of the musicians plays an essential role. "They immerse themselves in the notes, are exceptionally open, think musically and not in genres", Refseth praises his accompanists. "Christian already impressed me long ago. He's someone who prefers to integrate himself into a band instead of standing upfront as a soloist like I have often seen from saxophonists. And Matthias' playing just lifts me ten levels higher." Refseth wrote a larger part of the repertoire after forming the trio, but not directly with regard to his two partners. "Their personalities come out in the liberties of the compositions, in between the melodic and structural guidelines." With all selfless withdrawal, Weidner can still often bring in own sound ideas, sometimes contrasting the bell-like clear vibraphone with gently roughened saxophone tones. A few times Pichler places similarly distinctive accents with the bow. "During the recording process we allowed ourselves a lot of time, peace and quiet to develop the pieces", Refseth underlines the sincerity of the trio. That they chose two Norwegian churches as recording locations, adds to the warm atmosphere of the music.

Karl Ivar Refseth was born in 1977 close to Lillehammer. As a teenager he played with a local brass band and developed a love for jazz. Nevertheless, he initially studied classical music, "because they told me, with that I had more options in all directions and styles." After the final exam in 2005, Refseth changed the genre and focused on improvised music. At the same time he wanted to live abroad, at least for a while. "New York was expensive, that's how I thought of Berlin", Refseth grins, "but above all, David Friedman was here." Refseth leaves no doubt that the grand master, originally from New York, is one of his strongest sources of inspiration. "I came to David as a drummer and through him I became a vibraphonist. He lets the instrument become three-dimensional." Ever since, Refseth believes "it does the vibraphone more justice, when you don't just play it rhythmically, but also use its possibilities of oscillating timbres and wavering transparency."

In the Berlin-scene he made new contacts quickly. "Already in my first year, Daniel Glatzel asked me if I wanted to join the Andromeda Mega Express Orchestra", Refseth remembers, "at the same time, I released the first CD with my compositions." His student-trio at the time was called Hägar and featured drummer Andi Haberl and bassist Andreas Waelti. The first collaboration of AMEO and The Notwist followed, for their album The Devil, You and Me. "I didn't know this band previously, but their music just knocked my socks off", Refseth remembers. Thereafter he composed and played with Console, alias Martin Gretschmann, for the audio book "God" by Andreas Ammer.

The manifold experiences of the last two decades noticeably influenced Refseth's personal style. He loves Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, just as the melodies and the tone of Dexter Gordon and John Coltrane. Likewise, he appreciates the groundbreaking electronic visions of Martin Gretschmann. What Refseth doesn't like, is genre thinking and musical restrictions, especially in classical music.

Presently the focus is not on spirituality when speaking about any style of current music. Especially not in Europe, which values its secular position, politically as well as culturally. Some Afro-American jazz musicians, who have always also summoned spiritual influences, pursue a different approach. It is not only them, who perceive their improvisations as a dialog with the transcendental. "I am a religious person", Karl Ivar Refseth says, "without being at church very often. But I communicate with God, also through my music." The pieces on the record partly emerged in remembrance of a private loss in the winter of 2013/14. "Therefore I called the CD Praying. The title describes the feelings that I had when I was composing and that now arise again when we play the pieces." Of course these feelings contribute to the particular mood of this extraordinary album.

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