



Fabian Dudek / La Campagne  
Protecting A Picture That's Fading

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**Fabian Dudek:** alto-saxophone, compositions

**Pauline Turrillo:** flute

**Berthold Brauer:** trumpet

**Felix Hauptmann:** piano, synthesizer

**Roger Kintopf:** double bass

**Alexander Parzhuber:** drums

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### Fabian Dudek/La Campagne - Protecting A Picture That's Fading

In the past four years, Fabian Dudek received a lot of attention, especially with his quartet (with Felix Hauptmann, Fabian Arends, David Helm). Already their debut release in 2019 and the subsequent tour, sponsored by the Musikfonds, were met with enthusiastic responses. The newspaper *FAZ* described Dudek, who finished his master's degree with Frank Gratkowski in 2022, as a "real high-flyer of contemporary jazz." Last year the band's second album, *Isolated Flowers*, received even more praise. WDR3 accredited, "Rugged, edgy and fiercely played postbop," and the Belgian station BRF1 said, "his explosive escapades are just as virtuoso as complex. His compositional style is imaginative in the best sense." The *Frankfurter Rundschau* summed it up: "...with his stubborn conception of free jazz [he finds] a captivatingly skillful balance between energetically tense playing styles and musical form."

Fabian Dudek's newest work was recorded with the larger formation La Campagne, which was founded about two and a half years ago. The five young high-flyers, aged between 24 and 31, have known each other for some time, partly from studying together at the University of Music and Performing Arts Cologne (HfMT). And trumpeter Berthold Brauer was acquainted with the French classical flutist Pauline Turrillo. Through her, the quintet got an engagement at a festival in Grasse, with performances on various stages and also on the streets. This first highly motivating phase of the band was still in the time of the pandemic. Hence Dudek developed the idea to write pieces for four jazz musicians and a classically trained musician.

From the end of 2020 until August 2022, the ensemble met again and again for intensive rehearsal phases in various locations to fill in the frameworks given by Dudek with a collective image. His compositions became the basis for joint developments, a kind of catalyst for all participants to contribute their own thoughts. "During the recording sessions, new things kept happening from take to take," says Dudek, "Only through the many rehearsals, did we reach this special point. We play with the material and break with the rules - those are personal and collaborative processes." In this

context, he points out the moment when Pauline Turrillo also began to improvise, which is uncommon in most of classical music: "That really pushed the band even further."

One of the more unusual facets of the album is certainly the fact that the bandleader's alto saxophone is heard for the first time after about fifteen minutes. "I enjoy listening to others playing my music," Dudek says serenely, "I am focused on what's good for the music, not my ego as an instrumentalist." After the more impressionistic "She Took Me Hear The Birds Sing", with spotlights on flute and trumpet, partly bowed bass and piano, Turrillo's subtle a cappella motifs at the beginning of "Oddballs" continue the tranquil mood. A drum solo by Parzhuber, almost reminiscent of Far Eastern rituals, marks the turning point; immediately dropping into a displaced groove, while Turrillo, Kintopf and Brauer switch into jazz phrasing. At first Hauptmann accompanies with organ-like synthesizer sounds, later he joins into a dialogue with the band playing piano, especially with Brauer's sometimes leading, tonally versatile trumpet, whose solo is spurred on by the increasing vehemence of the drums. After a good eight minutes, Dudek's strikingly raspy saxophone enters, and now he "speaks" with Hauptmann. And then, abruptly, in harsh contrast to the thus far predominant aesthetic, he celebrates an energetic outburst, reaching cutting high notes. Thereafter, the band creates a kind of new start of the still ongoing piece, with a new arc of suspense, a gripping groove and additional timbres of a melodica.

The following "Sunsets" sounds anything but romantic or dreamy; Parzhuber's driving, increasingly vehemently rousing and swirling entrances, Kintopf's bouncing bass lines as well as the cowbell, directly referencing Latin music, at first inspire Dudek to agile and imaginative excursions, then spur on Brauer to some brilliant trumpet modulations. After a rather restless break, the action finally culminates in a short unison frenzy in the style of Hermeto Pascoal.

It was by no means planned that the album would take on such extent. Now the seven pieces with a total of 85 minutes seem like an exciting journey through very diverse soundscapes and atmospheres. Like at a good concert, the music can leave you in awe at times. Purposeful variation between transparency and densification, surprising twists and turns, an enormous dynamic range from subtle whispering sounds (for example the bowed bass in "Tiger Face") to roaring, explosive expressions, as well as equally detailed and lively interactions create adventurous experiences.

At first glance, some titles seem to suggest a certain thought or perhaps feelings of the composer, but Dudek prefers to fend off questions about the background of the individual pieces. "I don't like the burden of meaning. Of course, there is always something that inspires me to write. That can be social processes, like the pandemic at the time with all its frustrating side effects. Or something I see when I walk down the street. But in the moment when we rehearse it together, my feeling is already different than during composing. And at concerts, the emotions change again every night." That's why Dudek prefers to leave the interpretation of his music to his audience. Or, to be more precise, he wants to make it possible for them to listen to the music without any bias. "After all, that's the beauty of art, that you can be part of it."

Overall, Fabian Dudek is fascinated by the possibilities of the sextet La Campagne: how the band inspired him to combine ideas and influences in the writing process, and what the group dynamic made out of it. "When we recorded 'Amsterdam Night Walk', everyone was impressed by the shared 'trip', because we had never before played the piece like we did in the studio." Beginning from a microcosm, Dudek broadens the perspective. It is essential, he says, to experience something together when you commit to it. "Maybe it takes your mind off things - or you can switch off for a while, like when you're running."

Listening to *Protecting A Picture That's Fading* may not necessarily exercise the body, but the mind is certainly invigorated by the clever and vital music. The fact that it effortlessly jumps traditional genre fences doesn't need to be mentioned; this generation is socialized with a very wide variety of styles anyway and knows how to cherry-pick from it. With their impressive album Fabian Dudek and La Campagne are putting an award-worthy landmark into the European contemporary jazz landscape.