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## Karl Ivar Refseth Trio Unfolding

**Karl Ivar Refseth:** vibraphone

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### Karl Ivar Refseth - Unfolding

**A vibraphonist balancing melodic beauty and soulful intensity.**

With his distinctive, personal sound, Karl Ivar Refseth delights fans of jazz and Neo-Classical, minimal and groove music - whether as soloist, bandleader or sideman with The Notwist, Gisbert zu Knyphausen, and Tied & Tickled Trio. The albums his trio with Christian Weidner (alto saxophone) and Matthias Pichler (double bass) has released so far - most recently *Devotion* in February 2022 - have received highest acclaim from audiences and media. *Jazz'n'More* magazine stated, "Here music is whispered or danced on tiptoes and continuously evolves in new variations." *Jazzthetik* praised, "Exquisit, compact, precise pieces, with plenty of space for the musicians." Positive reviews also appeared internationally, like in Poland's *Stacja Islandia*; and the Austrian *Concerto* asserted, "Sparsely arranged, yet not austere chamber jazz with many beautiful details." And *Jazz Thing* wrote: "Refseth is a poet, not an orator, holding sounds together rather than firing bursts of notes."

"Through the production of *Devotion*, I was on kind of a roll compositionally," Karl Ivar Refseth describes the initial situation in the fall of 2021. Originally *Devotion* was planned to be a double album, one CD each with band and solo pieces. Only during the production it became apparent to postpone the solo works. "For years I had great respect for the challenge of performing just with the vibraphone alone without electronic effects. After the studio dates with the band, however, I knew: there's potential in this." The feeling was reinforced by some successful concerts that Refseth played without the band. The final impulse was given by a grant from the Berlin Senate, which opened up some time leeway. And so, starting in the spring of 2022, Refseth developed the repertoire for his first solo album, *Unfolding*.

The compositions were written in a very concentrated work phase, Refseth says. "My aim was to make a diverse record, with a wide variety of sounds. Each composition should have its own characteristic and

incorporate and convey different impressions. So I started with a lot of ideas and gradually sorted out the ones that had less power and expressiveness." In this selection process, Refseth once again relied on the advice of his co-producer Morton Qvenild. The Norwegian pianist and electronics specialist (b. 1978) is best known from Jaga Jazzist, and later Qvenild single-handedly formed Susanna Wallumrød's Magical Orchestra. He is a founding member of the trio In The Country and, as a professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music, he researched combinations of acoustic sounds, improvised music and new technologies. Even though Qvenild and Refseth's worked in a long-distance collaboration, it was very intense. "He asked a lot of questions about each of my drafts, sometimes making specific suggestions to enhance the atmospheres accordingly." Refseth likes to work on his compositions over a longer period of time. "Sometimes it's the sixth, eighth or tenth version that actually makes it onto a record. This principle is strongly inspired by working with The Notwist. I love to see the pieces 'grow up', like a child developing."

Unlike the trio albums *Praying* and *Devotion*, Refseth did not write under the immediate impulse of private events this time, but rather with a little more emotional distance. Nevertheless, alongside the positive ideas his new pieces also transcend melancholic thoughts. "Ein Stahlwerk" [A Steel Plant] and "We Shall Overcome" are marked by the horror left by Russia's invasion of the Ukraine, including specifically the fight over Mariupol and the fear of a large-scale outbreak flaring up throughout the Western world. It wasn't a purely abstract involvement with the subject, Refseth notes. "In my workshops with school children in Norway, I encounter refugee children from the Ukraine very often in the classes. This way I experience more directly what a catastrophe it is for the Ukrainian people."

The only older composition that made it onto *Unfolding* is "Castle In The Clouds". "I wrote it in 2017 as a rhythmic trio piece, but was never really satisfied with the result. Then in the studio I experimented a bit with the arrangement and suddenly it got its final, floating form." Emphatically rhythmic structures can be found elsewhere on the record. In "Laura And Steve" for instance, where flowing patterns and lightly rattling resonances are reminiscent of West African balafon traditions. Refseth has dedicated some titles to people close to him, like "Sunrise" to his daughter. Overall, he also sees *Unfolding* as a tribute to his mentors, including David Friedman, his former professor at the Berlin Jazz Institute and grandmaster of the jazz vibraphone.

Karl Ivar Refseth loves melodies, this is no different on the new album than on previous releases. They give his pieces their special 'vibe' and subliminally reference his collaborations in the pop genre. After all, the classically and jazz-trained percussionist, born in Lillehammer in 1977, has been supplying the indie rock innovators The Notwist with rhythmic and sonic impulses since 2009, giving Gisbert zu Knyphausen's clever songs further depth, and creating panoramas between techno and finely nuanced soundtrack music with Acid Pauli alias Martin Gretschmann.

Refseth embeds his subtly catchy themes and motifs in intricate environments. His pieces oscillate between contemplative moments, fluid patterns and clever harmonic extensions. Refseth skilfully illuminates seldom-heard facets of the vibraphone. He brings the metal plates into vibration with violin bows, uses drum sticks and other mallets, creates dry staccatos and shimmering overtones.

The impressive transparency and intimacy is captured extremely precisely by the sound engineer Martin Ruch, and is rounded off with a wonderful sound design. "I could play however I wanted in the studio, Martin was able to reproduce the complete intensity and dynamic range," Refseth says happily. Ruch also made the suggestion to mix and master a special edition of the album in Dolby Atmos. The surround sound format, known from cinema, enables an impressive sound architecture that sets sound sources in the room three-dimensionally and lets listeners sit in a sort of cloud of sound.

Overall, Karl Ivar Refseth's *Unfolding* impresses with its consistent focus on comparatively quiet tones that decisively counter the omnipresent noise. Refseth's transparent and variable playing creates an enigmatic aesthetic and special atmosphere that is not often to be found.