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Fabian Dudek **Distant Skies, We dream**

FABIAN DUDEK: alto-saxophone, flute**FELIX HAUPTMANN:** piano, synthesizer**DAVID HELM:** bass**FABIAN ARENDS:** drumsindigo cd 252312
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Fabian Dudek - Distant Skies, We dream

In 2019, Fabian Dudek released *Creating Meaning*, the debut album of his quartet, which had formed the previous year. In February 2022, the following album *Isolated Flowers* came out, consolidating Dudek's reputation as a "high-flyer of contemporary jazz" (FAZ). Both productions as well as the band's concerts received enthusiastic acclaim, and the second album was nominated for the German Record Critics' Award. "On the path to unlimited jazz" the magazine *Concerto* wrote about *Isolated Flowers*, and the jury of the Horst and Gretl Will Foundation praised, among other things, the "captivating blend of inventiveness and clarity of intention and direction, of instrumental virtuosity and multi-layered, original sound design." Bavarian Radio BR said: "His explosive [...] escapades are as virtuos as they are complex. His compositional style is fantastically imaginative in the best sense possible." And in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Hans-Jürgen Linke was thrilled by "music made of flows of energy, peculiar harmonies, tonal freedoms and articulatory expansions."

Last year, Dudek released the diverse album *Protecting A Picture That's Fading* with the sextet *La Campagne*, now he presents the new pieces by his quartet on *Distant Skies, We Dream*. The already remarkably high quality has been raised even further. First of all through Dudek's sophisticated compositions, whose rhythmic sophistication and precise detail set a striking mark in the contemporary jazz landscape. In addition, the nuanced but also powerful, always extremely attentive interplay of the working band is impressive; they have noticeably grown together and have been able to increase their dynamics between quiet and passionately escalating passages, between contrasts and densifications. With all its emotional power, the band is more incisive than ever, convincingly realizing intricate structures and purposefully letting its expressiveness burst out. An additional facet of this impressive development is the expansion of the sound palette, especially by David Helm's electric bass, but also by the synthesizer, Dudek's occasionally sparkling flute and his extremely variable expression on the saxophone.

“This album is a personal milestone for me, because I am at a point now that I have been striving for for a long time,” Fabian Dudek summarizes contentedly. “I have been seeking to get a band to flow and at the same time integrate experimental aspects in the music. We have succeeded at that very well now and it is extremely fun to play these pieces.” Dudek, who was a scholarship student of the German Academic Scholarship Foundation and completed his master’s degree with Frank Gratkowski in 2022, obviously had great fun writing the music, just going by his use of odd metres and the constant time changes. “Everything is all over the place the whole time, going against traditional norms, not just in terms of rhythmic meters. There are indeed clear harmonic structures, but no chords that need be slavishly followed the whole time. This creates a lot of free space in which everything is possible and there is room for everything.” This also include “microtonal detunings between the piano and synthesizer” in the title piece “Distant Skies, We Dream”, the calmest and also most melancholic piece to be heard from the quartet thus far.

With all the complexity of his compositions Dudek places great importance on exactly these open spaces, which can be shaped by his fellow musicians and invite improvisations. Of course the music also thrives on the fact that they can surprise each other. “To achieve this the pieces need to have a certain openness, perhaps even fragility, that allows different paths. Ideally the result is very compelling, but it can also fall apart sometimes.” In the past years they have tried out many paths together, occasionally concentrating heavily on the jazz field, Dudek says. Today the terrain is definitely broader. For example, when pianist Felix Hauptmann references the aesthetic of modern Classical music four-minute intro to the magnum opus “The River Flows Everywhere” and later in the same piece plays in an almost impressionistic manner. Or when he (on Dudek’s impulse) adopts structures from Morton Feldman over longer passages in “Everything Is A Present”.

Another important aspect of the album is the recording situation. What was planned as a studio production surprisingly turned out to be a live recording in the end. “We had recorded the pieces in the Fattoria and actually thought the results were great,” says Dudek, “especially as we had already polished the repertoire in concerts beforehand.” Back in Cologne, the quartet gave a concert at the Jaki, “which was actually a bit difficult. All the more we all played 'on fire' and the gig developed an extremely strong energy.” Due to the intensity of the interplay, it was decided quickly to use only the live recordings for the album, even though the piano in the club did not have the sound quality of the grand piano at the studio. “I look for and need a bit of dirt sometimes,” grins Dudek, who appreciates not only Coltrane, Feldman, Ives and Sakamoto, but also James Brown with Maceo Parker, Tom Waits and some hip-hop artists.

Fabian Dudek answers the question about possible backgrounds to his compositions with a personal philosophy. “Generally I want to move away from defining the meaning of individual pieces and instead focus on the sense of a complete album. Of course the music has a meaning to me, which I also feel. But I don't want to dictate how it should affect others. From my perspective, the meaning of the music is revealed when listening to it, even if it leaves different impressions on different people.”

It is clear that Fabian Dudek and his quartet have once again outdone themselves with *Distant Skies, We Dream*. Exciting compositions with enormous depth of detail, masterful interplay and equally clever and lively improvisations definitively place the band in the Champions League of contemporary international jazz.

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