

Mark Wyand

„Hidden Hill“

A masterpiece of musical contemplation, or impressionistic jazz to perfection

Mark Wyand has become established as one of the most remarkable tenor sax players on the contemporary German jazz scene. The 34-year-old musician and composer plays with an exceptionally sensitive style that often borders on the meditative. Wyand was born in England but grew up in Germany, and moved to Berlin a few years ago. His highly acclaimed SonyBMG debut „Eye To Eye“ (2007) marked a revival of the jazz ballad, and with his new album Mark Wyand has gone one step further: Where his live appearances as bandleader are often extrovert and freethinking, his new studio recordings, produced jointly with Till Brönner, have an introverted and contemplative flavour. The title of the album is intended metaphorically, and it was in a mood of contemplation that he set about creating this new work. In addition to seven of Wyand's own compositions, „Hidden Hill“ contains four cover versions: the two jazz standards „Once Upon A Summertime“ by Michel Legrand and „Dearly Beloved“ from the pen of Johnny Mercer and Jerome Kern, plus two contemporary songs – „Jóga“ by Iceland's avantgarde pop singer Björk, and „Paper Bag“ by the British group Goldfrapp.



Strictly speaking, „Hidden Hill“ is actually a classic quartet recording: Wyand invited three excellent musicians to join him in the studio. He had been impressed by the lyrical playing of Swedish pianist Daniel Karlsson for some time, while Dieter Ilg was regarded as one of the best German bass players even before his cooperation with Charlie Mariano. The quartet is completed by American drummer John Hollenbeck, whose filigree playing often crosses the boundaries between classical, jazz and world music. Hollenbeck works together with such big names as Bob Brookmeyer, Fred Hersch and Kenny Wheeler, and is currently a visiting professor at the Berlin Jazz Institute. The first-class ensemble is joined by guitarist Frank Möbus, leader of the avantgarde jazz formation „Der Rote Bereich“.

The new album opens in a calm and relaxed, almost sublime mood with „Kriyaban“, a term for a ‚searcher‘ taken from the doctrine of kriya yoga. The first piano chords here already set the tone for a album that derives its power from tranquil-



lity, and its beauty from a pure and melodious sound. The interaction between the musicians is almost free of the solo passages known as ‚breaks‘: the players place themselves entirely at the service of the composition and of the emotions it generates. The finely-tuned balance of power gives the music depth and spaciousness – everything flows effortlessly. „The Second Sight“ likewise has the effect of a musical ‚stream of consciousness‘. The next track, „Prelude“, is more static in character. Wyand stresses that he nearly always „thinks in visual images“ when composing, and in his playing with Frank Möbus he approaches the music like a film score, taking off on improvisations that tend to glide in circles.

Mark Wyand has an especially intimate relationship with his tenor sax, a Selmer „Super Sax“ dating from the early 1930’s: for him the instrument is invaluable, and played a significant role in the development of his individual sound: „On my instrument, I always try to evolve farther and farther away from a specific idea of sound that is only conveyed by the saxophone. Björk and Goldfrapp inspired me to aim at a particular kind of phrasing.“ This inspiration is reflected in Wyand’s interpretation of the Icelandic singer’s pop elegy „Jóga“, full of a painterly finesse that also reveals clearly his deep understanding of classical harmony. Remarkable, how he makes this piece his own. „Paper Bag“ is likewise a fine example of the tenor’s ability to empathise with the emotional appeal of a singer like Alison Goldfrapp, with the air across the saxophone’s mouthpiece filling the room.

„Hidden Hill“ regularly creates a fascinating, gentle shimmer as if every note has been carefully weighed. Be it in the cool, nocturnal atmosphere summoned up by „High Moon“, or the mystical mood of optimism conveyed by the energetic title track. Even „First Morning Without Rain“, a carefully-tempered sketch for sax and piano, is utterly captivating. Wyand’s exquisite versions of the two jazz standards likewise pay tribute to the inherent beauty of the compositions. „Dearly Beloved“ is taken from the Fred Astaire musical „You Were Never Lovelier“: a fine romantic patina lies over the song here, with piano, sax and bass each contributing a beguiling solo. And „Once Upon A Summertime“ is likewise performed with abandon, evoking the picture of a stroll through Paris as the original text describes it. „Hidden Hill“ ends with the lucid but fragile tonal sculpture „Flowers From Lila“, a duo for guitar and saxophone that lends the album a perfect closing note: a masterpiece of jazz contemplation.

Listening to „Hidden Hill“ is like strolling through a maze of lush green notes. With his new album Mark Wyand cements his reputation as one of Germany’s most sensitive tenor sax players, celebrating with awesome lightness his very personal musical world. „Hidden Hill“ is an artistically consummate magic mountain that exudes a compelling spirituality and magic. This is jazz impressionism to perfection.