**Florian Weber**

**Lucent Waters**

**Ralph Alessi:** trumpet; **Florian Weber:** piano; **Linda May Han Oh:** double bass; **Nasheet Waits:** drums

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Florian Weber’s second ECM appearance, following a critically-acclaimed duo recording (*Alba*, 2016) with Markus Stockhausen, finds the gifted German pianist leading a newly formed quartet through a programme of his compositions. Openness is key here: whether paying tribute to mentor Lee Konitz on “Honestlee”, impressionistically conveying the glittering “Melody of a Waterfall”, or generating impactful outcomes from fragments of material on a conceptual piece like “Butterfly Effect”, the intention is to encourage fresh responses from the participants.

“I see this album as a meeting of very independently-minded musicians,” says Weber. “It’s the first time I’ve had a band where what particularly interests me is the *difference* between the players and their approaches to improvising.” He cites the contrast between the soulful, grounded quality of Linda May Han Oh’s bass playing and Nasheet Waits’s fleet, free-flowing drums. “Linda and Nasheet are very different characters, but they balance each other in their exchanging of energies.” The *Lucent Waters* line-up marks a first collaboration between Weber and Waits, the drummer being recommended by producer Manfred Eicher for the project. “I liked very much Nasheet’s playing on Ralph Alessi’s ECM albums [*Baida* and *Quiver*], those are great recordings, so the idea resonated with me.”

Linda May Han Oh and Florian Weber first worked together in trio with Lee Konitz a decade ago. “That was the beginning of a vivid exchange of ideas that has continued in other contexts. For myself, working with Lee night after night taught me what it really means to be spontaneous in the music.” There’s a difference, Weber suggests, between the contemporary emphasis on “self-expression” and “exploring what is actually there, implied in the material and in the interaction of the players.”

Weber and Ralph Alessi have been in and out of each other’s groups for more than 15 years. Latterly, Weber’s been playing in Alessi’s trio with Dan White. “If I look at my career to date, I’ve mostly tried to play with people that I feel close to, that I understand where they’re coming from, emotionally.” Friends, of course, can still challenge each other: “Ralph always says that my writing and playing pushes him to play differently.” This is strikingly evident on “Fragile Coccoon”, where an initially gentle piece bursts open to feature the trumpet in a blazing admixture of lyricism and intensity, framed by Waits dramatically powerful drums.

There are, says Weber, several factors influencing the pieces gathered here. “Pieces emerge, a lot of times, as a feeling or a perspective on some aspect of my life – in this case the twilight atmosphere of the touring musician’s world, and all the ups and downs of that. Then there’s the compositional aspect: I’m always trying to create or shape something which hasn’t, to my knowledge, been there before.”

The degree of freedom given to the players differs from piece to piece. “On ‘Brilliant Waters’, for instance, I didn’t give them much more than the title: that’s a free, open piece, although we end organically on one note, which does sound composed. I did tell the group that I wanted the album to have a sense of narrative, with interconnecting links, of some kind. A motif that appears in one piece might recur in another piece, perhaps reversed. Atmospheric ideas return, two pieces may have a similar instrumental emphasis at certain points, or a soundscape may be similar. As a bandleader I think there’s a fine line between giving musicians too much information and not giving them enough: I wanted the musicians to make their own thing, too.”

Nasheet Waits has the freest role in “Melody of a Waterfall”, which takes its inspiration partly from traditional Japanese drum ensembles: “I like the clarity and focus of that music, its stillness as well as its passion and energy. I find Japanese culture and its ideas fascinating and have tried to understand it – insofar as one can, as a westerner.”

“From Cousteau’s Point Of View” references some recent diving experiences: “The changed three- dimensional perspectives and transparency are central to this tune. Musically it’s 3 against 7, both times going on at the same time, and you’re not sure which one you should follow. I like transparency, but too much of it can make the mystery disappear. And I also like the mystery, just as I like the things that are not said, and the notes not played.”

“Honestlee”, dedicated to Lee Konitz (“every time I meet Lee I learn something new” says Florian), incorporates “some Lennie Tristano School ideas, but not Tristano-style playing. It explores some ideas he had about lines and counterpoint.” The piece also takes impetus from drawings which Karlheinz Stockhausen made at Darmstadt. “The drawings illustrate some polyphonic concepts. I looked at them and immediately wanted to write a tune. Wanting to dedicate something to Lee, the ideas converged. So we start with lines and then go into open mode.” Weber’s playing, exemplary throughout, is particularly affecting here. (Konitz, on hearing this recording, has said “Florian is one of the most creative piano players I have ever played with. His music is totally free. He has got the texture, the feeling, just beautiful. I am very touched by this music. It feels divine to me.“)

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Born into a musical family in Detmold, Germany, in 1977, Florian Weber began playing piano at the age of four, and by the time he graduated high school was appearing with both jazz and classical ensembles. In Cologne he studied with Hans Ludemann and John Taylor, before heading to the USA and further studies with teachers including Paul Bley, JoAnne Brackeen, Danilo Pérez and Richie Beirach. In 2002 Weber founded Trio Mensarah with bassist Jeff Denson and drummer Ziv Ravitz. By 2006, Lee Konitz was playing with the group which subsequently formed the basis of his New Quartet, touring widely and recording a prizewinning album at New York’s Village Vanguard. In 2011 Weber founded the group Biosphere with guitarist Lionel Loueke, bassist Thomas Morgan and drummer Dan Weiss. Florian Weber also continues to play with trumpeter Markus Stockhausen. The intuitive music of their ECM album *Alba* was praised for its “natural warmth and character” by *The Times* of London. For further details, including details of upcoming dates, visit www.florianweber.net and [www.ecmrecords.com](http://www.ecmrecords.com)

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*Lucent Waters* was recorded at Studios La Buissonne in the South of France in September 2017 and produced by Manfred Eicher.