

ACT

Michael Wollny Trio

Living Ghosts

ACT 8010-2 CD / double-vinyl / digital

Release date: February 28, 2025

'The Michael Wollny Trio is a reminder that this is the 21st century – and not the 1960s,' wrote the UK's Jazzwise magazine as a reflection on the evolution of the jazz piano trio. And yet, in many respects, Wollny's new album 'Living Ghosts' flies in the face of the Zeitgeist: rather than short single tracks, we find four long 'sets'. It represents the antithesis to a culture based on channel-hopping or of breaking everything down into bite-size fragments. This music flows across any demarcation lines of category, it demands the full attention of listeners, and also rewards them with complete fulfilment to the senses. As ever, Michael Wollny proves that he is the exception to any rule.

For pianist Michael Wollny, his trio with bassist Tim Lefebvre and drummer Eric Schaefer is the constant in a musical cosmos which is otherwise undergoing constant change. The three players are united by a musical vocabulary which is more or less inexhaustible, an outstanding sensitivity in their interplay and the ability to create new music of tremendous tension and dynamism in the moment. Since the release of their last studio album, "Ghosts" (2020, co-conceived and co-produced with Andreas Brandis, the Michael Wollny Trio has performed the material from the album at a wide range of venues, from clubs to classical concert halls and major open-air festivals. Sometimes the trio has performed completely acoustically, sometimes working with a combination of electronic and acoustic sounds. Michael Wollny says, 'concerts have become beautiful séances where the ghosts of the trio's songbook visit us at their will. On some evenings they appear briefly and vanish after just a few bars. On others, single motifs inside a theme don't just stretch out, they also weave new stories.'

The repertoire of 'Living Ghosts' consists not only of pieces by 'Ghosts', but spans the Wollny/ Schaefer/Lefebvre trio's decade of collaboration, going back to the release of 'Weltraum' in 2014. That album was a game-changer for Wollny, it was the final step which took him into bigger venues – it's also one of those jazz albums often to be found in the record collections or playlists of people who don't tend to listen to much jazz. The trio's repertoire has continued to evolve through the years because of the regular schedule of live performances that they maintain. Time and again, Wollny, Schaefer and Lefebvre will allow new spaces to open up in the pieces, as they search together for new, previously unheard music. There are often subtle nuances which give the music a completely new direction in mid-flow. The original compositions, therefore, often serve as just a starting point for these new, and collectively formed musical explorations.

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It follows that the running order of the album 'Living Ghosts' is not divided into a conventional series of individual tracks. What we have are four long chapters, and within these substantial narrative arcs are formed out of fragments from compositions which are re-told in different ways. Michael Wollny says: As the pieces gradually shed their ties to specific arrangements, questions such as which key, what mood, and even whether to make a setlist, have been consigned to the past. New repertoire mingles freely with old; at any moment, different doors, connections and reinterpretations can open up. When we begin our concerts now, we never know which fragments of which pieces will emerge or the order in which they might unfold.'

The album 'Living Ghosts' is the recording of a concert from April 2024 at the 'Illipse' in Illingen, Germany. The recording shows three distinctive characters forming a unit in which both empathy and in-the-moment responsiveness are to the fore. Their music is so much more than the sum of its parts, impressively diverse as the individual components are: Michael Wollny has long been considered one of the most important European pianists of his generation, notably for the way he crosses genres. He is someone who 'can turn any kind of music into an experience that takes your breath away' (Süddeutsche Zeitung). In his playing, influences from jazz, classical, indie pop, new and early music merge into a distinctive personal style. Wollny has been working with drummer Eric Schaefer for more than 20 years. No one plays the drums like Schaefer: from the softest whisper to the most powerful blast, beyond the instrument's conventions, with an almost childlike playfulness and at the same time the deepest penetration of all possible styles from new music to heavy rock. Wollny and Schaefer are united by a deep familiarity that has grown from thousands of encounters, and at the same time by their ability to surprise and challenge each other again and again. The trio is anchored by American bassist Tim Lefebvre, an icon of the instrument who has played with artists as different as David Bowie, the Tedeschi-Trucks Band, Donny McCaslin and Wayne Krantz.

Together, Wollny, Schaefer and Lefebvre have created music that has an exuberant dynamism about it, and in which there is a boundless sense of variety, and episodes of irresistible urgency. 'Living Ghosts' is like a fast-flowing river; the only way to experience it is to feel its intensity, to revel in its twists and turns, be carried along and to experience its sudden and unexpected depths.

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Set I 18:17

Nacht (Alban Berg)

Rufe in der horchenden Nacht (Paul Hindemith)

Set II 19:36

Hauntology (Michael Wollny)

In a Sentimental Mood (Duke Ellington)

Little Person (Jon Brion & Charlie Kaufman)

Set III 20:13

Hand of God (Nick Cave & Warren Ellis)

Lasse! (Guillaume de Machaut)

Set IV 12:28

Willow's Song (Paul Giovanni)

This West (Jeff Babko)

Produced by Michael Wollny Trio

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Michael Wollny piano

Tim Lefebvre double bass

Eric Schaefer drums

Recorded live on April 19, 2024, at Illipse,
Illingen (Germany) by Saarländischer Rundfunk
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Mixed and mastered by Klaus Scheuermann

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