



## Kari Ikonen

## Ikonostasis



## Introvert Expansion

Kari Ikonen hates to sit still. Over the past decade, the Finnish pianist has played on almost 50 albums, toured with countless groups and still today seems to come up with a radical change of direction every week. And yet, even within this vortex of activity, IKONOSTASIS sticks out as something unique and special. For this deeply personal project, Ikonen has invited his favourite musicians to play compositions that are both experimental and yet strikingly beautiful. The first IKONOSTASIS album compiles ten of these tracks into an innovative and beguiling work – managing to sound both strangely familiar and yet like nothing you've ever heard.

In many ways, IKONOSTASIS can be regarded as a logical continuation of Ikonen's exceedingly popular piano trio. Already within that formation, the interaction between the musicians has always been remarkably open, with each player effectively free to do what he pleases. Whereas Ikonen almost exclusively relies on a grand piano within the trio, however, he now adds a visionary new palette of colours to the equation with the introduction of his beloved moog and a Fender Rhodes.

Especially in the duets with Louis Sclavis on (bass-)clarinet, the electronic elements create courageous utopian sound worlds somewhere between the aesthetics of p-funk and the avantgarde. But even in the 'acoustic' pieces, including epic fifteen-minute journey "Trinity", what at first appear to be recognisable harmonies, delicate trumpet melodies and dreamy piano chords are gradually pulled under by slowly turning, sinister currents underneath the surface. Even the inclusion of the human voice only takes the listener deeper down into the dark corners of Ikonen's mind.

As befits a project with such a diverse approach, the recording of IKONOSTASIS took place, as Ikonen puts it, "here and there" over the course of more than two years, whenever the chance for a sessions presented itself – with the final one as recent as October of last year. When he sat down with renowned percussionist, producer and Jimi-Tenor-collaborator Abdissa "Mamba" Asefa in Helsinki's Ambience Studios to mix the material, meanwhile, a common thread of emotional introspection and stylistic expansion emerged, which ran through the entire material. And yet, conventional narratives are notably absent here. Perhaps it is best to regard IKONOSTASIS not so much as a traditional album, but rather as a suite of clearly separated, and yet interlocking cycles, that provide contrast and mutual stimulation at the same time.

Already with his previous releases, which included a confident and arresting rendition of John Coltrane's fiendishly complex classic „Giant Steps“, Ikonen has not just established himself as one of the leader's of the Finnish scene, but contributed to putting Finland as a whole firmly on the European jazz map. With IKONOSTASIS, he is now taking an even bigger leap. This is music without any musical barriers or self-imposed restrictions, driven by nothing but the pure pleasure of performance, regardless of the outcome. By no means just 'a sideproject', it is sure to keep him busy for considerable time to come. Perhaps that's for the best - this man hates to sit still, after all.