

Guitarists, as the cliché goes, are loud, boastful and always anxious to celebrate the wonders of guitar technology. Sandra Hempel, on the other hand, is different, a musician who expresses herself in gentle colors and softer tones.

For her, listening precedes playing, development guides postulation, the collective predates the egomaniacal. In Hamburg, where she resettled after years of study in both Amsterdam and New York, she is valued as a guitarist who distinctly helps to shape the overall sound of an ensemble and who is accomplished in the broad spectrum of contemporary jazz styles without having to recalibrate her musical compass: she has played in the bands of Ulita Knaus, Herb Geller, Dan Gottshall, Jonas Schoen, the Kosmische Souverän and with the NDR Big Band.

Also clear is that her own musical home lies in somewhat rougher terrain, there where the stylistic guidelines are less stringent and where, in musical interaction, anything is possible. Sandra Hempel is no iconoclast: it's not important to her to dissolve the bonding forces of harmony and time and she's strongly drawn to the melody, this cannot be overheard. But based on the foundation that has been amassed during the almost 100 years of jazz history to date, she strives for the adventure of the mutual journey of discovery. With her new quartet she has created a setting in which communicative musicality is boiled down to its essence: saxophonist Sebastian Gille is a sound ascetic who doesn't let a single note go without coloring to his own specifications; bassist Oliver Karstens provides the tonal foundation with an almost stoic and quiescent playing style while Roland Schneider on drums weaves a rhythmical net in which the movements and impulses of the individual musicians are transformed into joint, collective energy. In Hempel's compositions, the four musicians devise a game of deception made up of attraction and repulsion, proximity and distance, action and reaction, constantly opening new windows, perspectives, prospects – and invent new musical solutions for themselves far beyond any known clichés.

Text: Stefan Hentz //English Translation: Jon Welch