



Nils „Mr. Red Horn“ Landgren

Bio- / Discography 2013

There is a synonym for the words diversity, curiosity and zeal: Nils Landgren. James Brown used to be considered the “hardest working man in showbusiness” and it now appears that the god of funk has bequeathed this title to a Swede who cheerfully travels the world with a bright red trombone. “Mr. Red Horn” swings brilliantly from one perspective to the next, also because he needs this constant change. Somehow, Nils Landgren, 55 years-old, also miraculously manages to divide his time – when he is not touring with his “Funk Unit” or other projects under his own name, he is very much in demand as a producer or talent scout. He passes his expertise on to students in Hamburg and Shanghai, advises the NDR Big Band on artistic matters (with which he also played as musician for several years), works with the versatile Swedish Bohuslän Big Band (most recently with arranger Colin Towns on “Don’t Fence Me In – the Music of Cole Porter” ACT 9028-2) and also compiles, as artistic director, the programme of the JazzFest Berlin (until 2011). “Even when I’m not bored it’s good for me to do several things at once so that I can have different perspectives as these change the way I sing and play the trombone and my audience also benefits from it,” he says.

For those who have been musically loyal to him for years, things never get boring. With Nils Landgren they have someone who feels as dedicated to the rich folklore tradition of his homeland as to the previously unheard. An idealist who ignores the boundaries between the genres and who has collaborated in joint projects with musicians such as Maceo Parker, Colin Towns, the Brecker Brothers, Airtó Moreira, Till Brönner, Roy Hargrove, Fred Wesley, Steve Gadd, Richard Galliano, Michael Wollny, Joao Bosco, Benny Anderson (from ABBA), Viktoria Tolstoy, Joe Sample, Ray Parker Jr., Eddie Harris and Esbjörn Svensson and, in doing so, has continually broadened his horizons.

Landgren embodies not one but two souls. When the audience sees him with his “Funk Unit”, the Swede shows himself from his masculine and distinct, relentlessly grooving side and acts the jazz action hero. However, there is also a gentle melancholic, highly sentimental Nils Landgren. He can be seen during Advent time, for example, when the instrumentalist and singer celebrates “Christmas With My Friends” or on ballad albums like the current “The Moon, The Stars And You” (ACT 9505-2) as well as “Ballads” (ACT 9268-2) and “Sentimental Journey” (9409-2) – in which he intones on the trombone with incomparable smoothness and his highly individual, fragile voice touches the heart and the soul with a remarkable sensibility.

Landgren came into contact with music already early on. He started playing the drums when he was only six years-old, the nightmare of all parents. It was when he was 13 years-old that Nils Landgren, born in 1956 in Degerfors, Värmland, under the star sign of Aquarius, realised his calling and changed to the trombone. Between 1972 and 1978, he gained a sound classical basis at various teaching establishments and quickly put these newly acquired technical skills on the trombone into practice, also in other areas. Encounters with folk jazz pioneer Bengt-Arne Wallin and trombonist Eje Thelin accelerated his musical career change. A change of location was also due and Nils Landgren moved to Stockholm where, within only a short time, he became known as the “man for all occasions”, a true one-off, someone who is able to stand out in almost any stylistic environment, a studio whizz. In 1981 he was taken on as the lead trombonist for the “Ball of Fire” project of the legendary Thad Jones which really proved to be a challenge. “After the first evening all I wanted to do was go home,” laughs Landgren. However, it is challenges like the one with Jones that made him such an accomplished musician, someone who is today not worried by new challenges. Bring them on!

The solo career of the man who has always gone right up to his limits and beyond, both musically and conditionally, has been going strong for almost thirty years. Nils Landgren’s debut, “Planet Rock” from 1983, marked the starting point of a very impressive discography including projects which could hardly be any more different from one another. The duo recordings, for example “Layers of Light” (ACT 9281-2) and “Swedish Folk Modern” (ACT 9428-2) with pianist Esbjörn Svensson who tragically died far too young, as well as the album “Gotland” (ACT 9226-2), reveal someone who is very closely connected to their homeland, who moves through Scandinavian’s sound worlds, drifts into the ethereal and into the incomprehensible. On “Salzau Music On The Water” (ACT 9445-2) he met vibraphonist Christopher Dell and bassist Lars Danielsson on an installation on the water near Schloss Salzau and played ethereal sounds into time, a time during which night is falling asleep and the new morning is still yawning. The three were totally at one with nature during the recording.

However, the same Nils Landgren is also able to quickly come back down to earth again. To make a reference, for example, to the world famous fellow Swedes from ABBA with "Funky ABBA" (ACT 9430-2) or honour Cannonball Adderley with the album "Paint it Blue" (ACT 9243-2) by his multi award winning group "Funk Unit", originally simply called "Unit". Landgren gave the group its current name for the JazzBaltica Festival which also gave him his international breakthrough in 1994. This band does not, incidentally, only achieve great things from a musical viewpoint – the album "Funk For Life" (9500-2) supported, together with Doctors without Borders, a project to help musically promote children and teenagers in "Kibera", one of the biggest slums in Kenya's capital Nairobi. For each sold CD, one euro went to the good cause.

"Teamwork" (ACT 9552-2), released in spring 2013, is another milestone in the Funk Unit history: technically outstanding, this is a group of team players who combine well with a great groove connection. James Brown meets Parliament meets Crusaders meets Funk Unit: that's one way you could describe the musical concept on "Teamwork". It is pure party feeling, the notes whirl coolly through the ranks, superb horn sets alternate with ecstatic solos, dance beats, smooth vocals and strong melodies, but there is also time for elegance and heartfelt blues. "Teamwork" is all that and then some, played by a dream team of sweat-inducing funk workers with soul in their blood.

With his album, "The Moon, the Stars and You" (ACT 9505-2), released in August 2011, Nils Landgren again shows himself from his sensitive and fragile side. The ballad album is a continuation of "Sentimental Journey" – one of the most successful albums of his career. Together with pianist Michael Wollny, bassist Lars Danielsson and renowned guests such as Richard Galliano, Steve Gadd, Joe Sample, Joao Bosco, Cæcilie Norby, the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and the NDR Big Band, Nils Landgren interprets jazz standards, folk and pop and, of course, several of his own compositions. These are all carefully tuned, full of longing, occasionally funky and effervescent, yet always inspirational and swinging.

What will Nils Landgren come up with next? Where will his musical and artistic talents take him? Which hurdles does he feel he must still overcome? The Swedish all rounder has proven himself in so many different areas that his audience now believes he is capable of anything and more. Fact is: his greatest weakness may also be his greatest strength – he is bad at one thing: saying no.

Discography:

Nils Landgren Funk Unit:

First Unit (ACT 9292-2) 1992

Re-release from 2001 of "Red Horn", the first recording of Landgren's "Unit" in 1992 and already using Quincy Jones/Michael Jackson engineer Bruce Swedien for mixing.

Live in Stockholm (ACT 9223-2) 1994

The first Funk Unit album, with Maceo Parker as special guest, dates from 1994 and was the foundation for the collaboration with Siegfried Loch and his then young ACT label.

Paint it Blue (ACT 9243-2) 1996

A homage by Nils to the greatly acclaimed Cannonball Adderley. Guests included Bernard Purdie, the Brecker Brothers, Till Brönner and Airto Moreira. The album was one of the most successful jazz CDs of 1997 in Germany, reaching number 2 in the jazz charts and receiving the German Jazz Award.

Live in Montreux (ACT 9265-2) 1998

A highlight in Nils Landgren's career was the performance at the ACT night at Montreux Jazz Festival in 1998. The enthusiastic reaction to the concert led to the release of the CD "Live in Montreux".

5000 Miles (ACT 9271-2) 1998/1999

Between May 1998 and July 1999 the sessions for the Funk Unit CD "5000 Miles" took place in Stockholm, New York, Tutzing and Montreux. His unit played with some of the "hippest players" on the international jazz scene: Tim Hagans, Roy Hargrove, Till Brönner, Esbjörn Svensson, Viktoria Tolstoy, Don Alias and Fred Wesley. The album received the German Jazz Award and also an Echo nomination.

Fonk da World (ACT 9299-2) 2001

To coincide with the Funk Unit's tenth anniversary, the album "Fonk da World" produced by Esbjörn Svensson was released, and was winner of the German Jazz Award.

Funky ABBA (ACT 9430-2) 2004

"Funky ABBA" was recorded in the legendary Polar Studio A in Stockholm where all the original ABBA songs were recorded and where Nils himself had stood in front of the microphone for the original ABBA recording of "Voulez-Vous" 25 years previously. The Funk Unit here was joined by special guests such as Till Brönner, Viktoria Tolstoy and, as "very special guest", the great Benny Anderson himself.

Licence To Funk (ACT 9455-2) 2007

His eighth Funk Unit Album features a killer band, comprising Ray Parker Jr., Landgren's new discovery the Swedish singer Ida Sand, saxophonist Magnus Lindgren and his trusted collaborators Magnum Price and Wolfgang Haffner.

Funk For Life (ACT 9500-2) 2010

The beneficial Funk Unit album has been released by end of January 2010.

Teamwork (ACT 9552-2) 2013

This might well be the best Funk Unit that Nils Landgren has had gathered around him since 2010: technically outstanding, this is a group of team players who combine well with a great groove connection.

Nils Landgren on ACT

Gotland (ACT 9226-2) 1996

In 1995 Nils Landgren followed in the steps of his grandfather and various ancestors, who had lived and worked as pastors on the island of Gotland. "Gotland" consists of original compositions by Nils, recorded in two churches in Stockholm and Hamburg, together with Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko and organists Anders Eljas and Claus Bantzer.

Swedish Folk Modern (ACT 9257-2) 1997

Stimulated by his mentor Bengt-Arne Wallin this excursion into the non-funky realm was released in 1997: Nils' first duo release with pianist Esbjörn Svensson is of new arrangements of traditional Swedish folk songs.

Ballads (ACT 9268-2) 1993 and 1998

Already recorded in 1993 "Ballads" included Bobo Stenson, Palle Danielsson and others, and added to with recordings involving e.s.t. (Esbjörn Svensson Trio). Released in 1999 it was a great success. The magazine Jazzthetik found that the "ballads were interpreted with such feeling that it gave you goose pimples".

Layers Of Light (ACT 9281-2) 1999

At the beginning of 2001, Landgren and pianist Esbjörn Svensson released their second duo CD - a follow-up to "Swedish Folk Modern". The album quickly reached number 5 in the German jazz charts and euphoric reviews, not least from Michael Naura in the weekly newspaper "Die Zeit": "I have seldom heard such transcendental music. Music which comes in such calm enormity. It is balsam for the soul", raved Naura under the headline "Harps for the soul".

Sentimental Journey (ACT 9409-2) 2002

With the recording of a selection of love songs in 2002, Nils achieved a long-desired wish and once again was into pastures new: he brought together the Swedish Flesh Quartet with musicians such as Anders Widmark on piano, Lars Danielsson on bass and Wolfgang Haffner on drums as well as inviting guests such as Esbjörn Svensson, Viktoria Tolstoy and Rigmor Gustafsson.

Rigmor Gustafsson: I Will Wait For You (ACT 9410-2) 2003

With the album *I Will Wait For You* Landgren put Swedish singer Rigmor Gustafsson in the spotlight, sings with her on three songs but is mainly credited on this release as producer. The album went immediately to number 1 in the Swedish and number 2 in the German jazz charts.

Nils Landgren & Joe Sample: Creole Love Call (ACT 9707-2) 2005

In May 2005 Nils embarked on a musical journey to America's Deep South. Together with Joe Sample, Nils recorded a new vocal jazz album in New Orleans, supported by a number of hand-picked New Orleans musicians as well as the Soul star Ray Parker Jr. The album received a platinum award in Germany.

Danielsson / Dell / Langren: Salzau Music on The Water (ACT 9445-2) 2006

A remarkable, almost zen-lik-mediation, *Salzau Music on The Water*, was recorded at five AM, and was shaped to an unusual degree by time and place. The eleven improvised movements of this suite were performed in the middle of a sound installation built on the jetty protruding into the Salzau palace pond ... A work of trio virtuosity of uncommon brilliance. (JazzReview)

Christmas with My Friends (ACT 9454-2) and Christmas Concert with My Friends (ACTDVD 9901-2) 2006

Live versions of the most beautiful Christmas songs from the middle-ages up to our time, featuring some of the most prominent Scandinavian musicians - Bugge Wesseltoft, Viktoria Tolstoy, Lars Danielsson, Ulf Wakenius and Johan Norberg, and the -as yet-internationally less familiar voices of Swedish singers Sharon Dyll, Jeannette Köhn and Ida Sand.

Christmas with My Friends II (ACT 9476-2) 2008

The sequel of Landgren's successful first Christmas album: A soulful mix of Swedish traditionals, Scandinavian versions of European carols, classic church music, originals and Christmas evergreens from the motherland of jazz.

Bohuslän Big Band directed by Colin Towns: Don't Fence Me In – The music of Cole Porter (ACT 9028-2) 2011

Swedish world class Bohuslän Big Band under the leadership of artistic director Nils Landgren play the music of Cole Porter: 12 all time greats like "What Is This Thing Called Love", "Love For Sale" and "I've Got You Under My Skin".

The Moon, the Stars and You (ACT 9505-2) 2011

Nils Landgren from his sensitive and fragile side. Together with pianist Michael Wollny, bassist Lars Danielsson and renowned guests such as Richard Galliano, Steve Gadd, Joe Sample, Joao Bosco, Cæcilie Norby, the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and the NDR Big Band, Nils Landgren interprets jazz standards, folk and pop and his own compositions. These are all carefully tuned, full of longing, occasionally funky and effervescent, yet always inspirational and swinging.

Christmas with My Friends III (ACT 9527-2) 2012

In collaboration with singers like Sharon Dyal, Jessica Pilnäs, Jeanette Köhn and Ida Sand, as well as 1500 guests, Nils Landgren celebrated a dearly as joyful musical Christmas devotion in December 2011. *"For all of us it was a magic evening. Our hope is that we can give the listeners the same feeling as we had during our performance that became this album."* Nils Landgren