

## INTERVIEW FOR MUSICA JAZZ MAGAZINE

NILS WOGRAM

AUTHOR: ALCESTE AYROLDI

1. I like to start to Albert-Mangelsdorff-Prize 2013 that you received recently; in particular strike me the statement of the jury, when they said about your sound, your touch: "*immune to fashion trends*". How were you able to reach a sound so personal?

**My big heroes are the greats from the jazz history. Miles, Coltrane, Ellington, Mingus a.o. These musicians had a clear vision about their music. The managers tried to sell their music the way it was and the musicians stayed strictly away from all kinds of marketing thoughts. At least they took risks in music and had a good balance between "zeitgeist" and long term artistic development. Today the scene is commercially so down that a lot of people are looking for ways to sell their stuff. In my opinion that is ok for the industry but not for the arts. I want to develop up to date music which is timeless. So I write the music I like to hear, play with the musicians who I like and question a lot of mechanisms in the music business. I simply do it my way with a strong sense for tradition. That makes the music and my sound and compositions personal. I don't believe in a lot of things that musicians, managers and agents are trying to tell me. I got my own vision and that works quit well so far.**

2. You are recognized as the best European's trombonist since the German Albert Mangelsdorff. Do you think that your music and your technique gains something from Mangelsdorff?

**My main influences are more the bebop players like J.J. Johnson, Jimmy Knepper, Curtis Fuller, Slide Hampton. Nevertheless I am a german trombonist and came across Mangelsdorff later and checked out his lines and multiphonics playing. Since I am interested in a more modern way to play melodies, rhythms there was only one guy at a time who would follow that path and that was Mangelsdorff. Other than that I am influenced by a lot of non-trombonists.**

2. Have you a musical reference? What are your references in music?

**I have a lot of influences but not one big role model. In general I try to keep my bands together for a long time and develop a real bandsound. I believe that most good music was played by ensembles that have stayed together for a long time. There is a certain spiritual thing that evolves from those long term relationships. You don't need to explain anymore like a soccer team that has all their positions and movements internalized but still improvises with all their intuition. A big role model for my bands is Miles Davis because he took the best decisions about who to hire for his groups and he never told his musicians what and how to play. That is the beauty about jazz: let the musicians find their personal way to play your stuff and they'll do the best.**

**My music should be entertaining, intelligent and spiritual. In those terms Duke Ellington and Coltrane are my heroes.**

3. Apologize me for this question: I read about your moniker "Skills". Why this nickname? (If you don't like to speak about, you can move on, thank you very much).

**Well that is simply a funny expression from the English speaking countries. It basically means skillful in a funny and loving way. Since I get around on the trombone quite well some people call me like that.**

4. I like to speak about your band Root 70: when it born? How did you choose the musicians? Why you called in this way the group?

**Root 70 was born in the year 2000. Before I had worked with a different Quartet with piano, bass, drums with a very dynamic and virtuos sound. I was looking for more transparency and freedom. That's why I took a set-up without harmony instrument. A more important reason are the**

musicians themselves in this band. I wanted to form a band with people who have a lot in common and similar roots. Our sax player Hayden Chisholm and bass player Matt Penman are both from New Zealand and know each other from there since they were 14 years old. Now they live in New York and Belgrade. Hayden, our drummer Jochen Rueckert and myself studied music in Cologne and developed many things we do today. There was already a very deep understanding. In the Year 1998 Jochen moved to New York and met Matt who is now his favorite bassist. He introduced him to me and I found out that he had been friends with Hayden for a long time. So there there was so much common ground and we are all born in the 70ies. That's way I called that band Root 70.

5. Talking about **Riomar**, it seems to me your tribute to Duke Ellington is not only in *Mental Isolation*, but also in the other tracks. You think I'm doing wrong? What does it mean for you Ellington?

**Duke Ellington is a big hero of mine and his influences come through in a lot of tunes of mine. So you are absolutely right. The title mental isolation is not so much influenced by Duke's music but by a quote of his where he talks about you can compose tunes where ever you are as long as you can isolate your thoughts and concentrate on the music. That can be anywhere : on the train, at a party or other situations. This concentration I wanted to receive in this song.**

6. **Riomar** is the third conceptual work: please, would you talk about the theme of this concept? Is it about your vacation in Portugal?

**No it is not about vacation but some places really inspired me to write tunes. Riomar is a small village in the Ebro (river) delta in Catalonia (Spain). Very calm and humid so I was thinking about that bluesy delta atmosphere. Lison is a lovely and very slow and romantic town. That's why this tune is so sweet.**

**The conceptual work consists of the idea to add guests for the first time in the history of this band. In this case three string players and I wanted to write some music which is less abstract and in parts calmer and sentimental than stuff I have done in the previous years. To keep one idea for an album helps me to find a definite sound aesthetic and a general mood which gives an album clear color and a better flow.**

7. Why did you also want a strings trio? You wanted a counterpoint for the sound of your quartet?

**Root 70 is a band that plays quietly a lot and has a strong focus on sound. I thought that would match well with string players who have such a lovely sound. Often the problem is that the string players are much softer than the jazz band. Especially the drums. A good acoustic balance in the band is very important to me. We even managed to play acoustic concerts without any amplification for the strings. We also recorded all together in one room without any separation between the instruments.**

8. Did you get the sound you wanted?

**I guess you never get exactly the sound you imagine. It is always a “getting closer”. That is also beautiful because otherwise the path and development would end. Nevertheless I think I got pretty close to my ideal and it is one of my best sounding albums. We had a great sounding room, a fantastic recording team and lots of vintage equipment which gave the whole production a very warm sound.**

9. *Song For Bernhard* : you dedicated this song in memoriam to Bernhard Steinmetz. What is for you this person?

**Bernhard was a good friend of mine from the high school times. He played trumpet and we hang out a lot and listened to a lot of music. He also called me for a very popular German funk/jazz/hippo band when I moved back to Germany from New York in 1994. Like that I had work and could make a living easily. We played a lot together and sometimes shared the room on tour. But then he got hooked on heroin and after a few years passed away. There was nothing we could do for him. Sometimes I have these flashes when I remember his spirit and in a situation like that I wrote him this melancholy tune.**

10. I like to make a backward step and I like to speak with you about your second conceptual work: the title is very important, is an important message: **Listen your woman**. Why did you want to send this message?

**That album is a blues album and I thought that theme is about separation, dreams, believes, disappointments and love. The title transports a lot of these things in it that's why I took it. A second reason is that I like long term relationships, family and real commitments where people decide for something and listen to their partner instead of keeping everything vague and open.**

11. Do you think your sound is more European or American?

**That is a very good question! I think today we have many American musicians who are influenced by European music. Stylistically I feel quite close to some of them. If I compare my music to many European bands I think I am closer to the American Jazz tradition. I use a lot of groove and swing. Nevertheless modern classical composers are very influential for my composing.**

**The German folk and song tradition was destroyed by the Nazis. That is part of the reason why German jazz musicians use less folk in their tunes than musicians from France and Italy for example. My folk is the songs coming from the jazz tradition.**

**I always wanted to be a jazz musician. That is the music I love up to this day and it is an American art form. Nevertheless I try to find my own personal mix being a German musician with all kinds of different influences.**

12. It seems to me that you want to hold the musical situation, both in the Sextet, Septet and also in the Quartet. It's something that comes naturally or you do it knowingly?

**It is a conscious decision but it is coming from the heart. It is pretty difficult to keep bands together for a long time. The reason for that is that the market always screams for something new and spectacular set ups and the musicians in the bands sometime develop in different artistic directions. Sometime there are personal problems. So as a band leader you**

**have to be pay attention to all those movements, streams and moods in the band. You have to develop and grow together but one person has to show the direction and bring in new music. It would be much easier for me to always say yes to various projects with always new musicians. But I believe that the music if deeper with long term bands.**

13. As it has influenced the way you play and compose your experience in the United States?

**Yes. I was in New York a long time ago 192-1994. But a lot of the stuff I do today and the general understanding of music is still influence by that time. Jazz has gotten a lot more international but the most influential and diverse scene is still in New York.**

14. You had play in various Big Band: Many musicians says that to a jazz musician is a valuable experience. Do you think this is true?

**Playing in big bands is a lot of fun. You meet many other musicians and the sound is very powerful. Playing in the section of a big band makes you a professional player. You learn how to read music and blend well with other musicians. You have to be on time and and reliable. For the real spirit in jazz and a original development of your own voice it is not important. That you learn in small groups.**

15. It's very interesting your duo with Conny Bauer: two trombones only. Which kind of musical lines follow? You entrusted only to the inspiration of the moment?

**Conny and I play free improvised music. Nevethless there is a lot of structure in our playing. Some kind of instant composition in the moment. I am honored to play with this trombone legend. I learned a lot about music and improvisation through him and every time we play we have a lot of fun together.**

16. Therefore in duo with Simon Nabatov, where I heard your classical influences, your passion for Ligeti, Alban Berg. Did you achieve this?

**Classical music is also a big part of my education and I use it mainly in composition. Simon Nabatov and I have also a classical background and it gives us great material and inspiration for compositions and improvisations. That is a good example how each player of a band influences the particular style. With an other pianist I might play differently. Unfortunately Simon nad I stopped playing together some months ago. In the mean time I played some gigs with two other great pianists: Florian Weber and Bojan Z.**

17. A notable number of different projects: there is one that you prefer overall?

**I don`t want to judge or show preferences. I love all of my bands. I guess root 70 is my most known and recognized ensemble. How much I play with each band has also to do with the commercial situation. It is easier for promoters to finance a smaller band than a lager because it is simply cheaper.**

18. I think that your music is very important and remarkable, because you play the past of jazz with the sound and the mind of the future. Is this your idea?

**If that is your impression I am very happy. That is exactly my thing: developing modern stuff out of a tradition.**

19. Now, what are your future's plans?

**The next thing I will release is an album with a new trombone quartet. It is a collective called Vertigo. The other musicians also compose for that band. We want to be a modern trombone quartet with original music with influences from classical composers and jazz. It features the strengths and originality of the trombone and overcomes it`s weak points.**

Thank you very much, Mr. Wolgram for your avaibility and I hope to meet you in person as soon as possible, because I love your music: congratulations from the bottom of my heart for your work. All The Best

Alceste

Dear Alceste thanks for all these great questions and for featuring my music in Italy. I hope we will meet soon somewhere on this planet.

All the best, Nils Wogram (without the "L" ☺)