



TRILOGUE + 15 – A TRIBUTE TO ALBERT MANGELSDORFF
HR-BIGBAND, JIM MCNEELY, NILS WOGRAM

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How does one reimagine a trio-recorded classic of jazz history for a big band without overloading it or diminishing its essence? How can one do justice to such a monolith without merely copying it? And how does one translate it into a new decade, century, or millennium without stripping it of its original relevance? Jazz archives overflow with tributes to iconic albums by Coltrane, Miles, or Monk. And

then there are albums that rise like volcanoes from the sea—towering achievements that no one dares to scale. One such unattainable masterpiece is *Trilogue*, recorded on November 6, 1976, at the Berlin Jazz Festival by trombonist Albert Mangelsdorff, electric bassist Jaco Pastorius, and drummer Alphonse Mouzon.



On *Trilogue*, worlds collided. Mangelsdorff was at the forefront of Europe's emancipation from American jazz; Mouzon had been part of the founding lineup of Weather Report; and Pastorius was on the verge of recording Weather Report's milestone *Heavy Weather*. The common ground among Mangelsdorff—the one-man orchestra whose tone oscillated in countless colors—Pastorius the sonic alchemist, and Mouzon the pointillist, was their visual conception of sound. On *Trilogue*, three musicians carved an unconditional, open-ended path through the cosmos of their intentions. And in 1976, “unconditional” meant something entirely different than it does in 2026. Approaching such an album and reinterpreting it in a completely new setting is akin to climbing the Eiger's north face without a rope.

Yet in 2018, at the German Jazz Festival in Frankfurt, trombonist Nils Wogram, arranger Jim McNeely, and the HR Big Band dared to do just that. In Mangelsdorff's hometown of Frankfurt, he is revered like a saint. Many in the audience had known the visionary, who passed away in 2005, personally or at least experienced him live. Wogram thus faced perhaps the most critical audience imaginable for such a project. The risk could not have been higher, and this momentum is palpable in every single note.

That this unique inner tension still resonates with listeners eight years after the event is due to two very different forces at work. While Wogram sought to internalize Mangelsdorff as deeply as possible, McNeely and the Big Band aimed to distance themselves as far as possible from the original sound. When the project was first proposed to Wogram, he was understandably skeptical. The mountain of *Trilogue* loomed too large before him. Yet the challenge also intrigued him. “I wondered how I could engage with Albert's vocabulary and these influences

that shaped me so profoundly,” Wogram recalls. “How could I honor him without denying myself? This tension existed not only between the Big Band and me but also within myself. When rehearsals began, I was incredibly surprised by how creatively Jim McNeely approached the material and with what joy the Big Band performed it. This isn’t your typical big band sound. McNeely saw himself as a mediator, bringing the spirit and interpretation of Albert Mangelsdorff into the Big Band.”

The trio of Wogram’s trombone, Paul Höchstatter’s drums, and Hans Glawischnig’s bass often stays closer to the original 1976 album sound than the rest of the Big Band. Just as Mangelsdorff, Pastorius, and Mouzon negotiated relentlessly with each other during their performance at the Berlin Philharmonic, the core trio and the orchestra in this new recording continually grapple with their roles and contributions—especially with the addition of a whole new palette of colors: massive brass, clarinet, flute, and guitar. Neither Wogram nor the HR Big Band attempt to create something entirely new from the music; instead, they use what exists with creative restraint. In his approach, Wogram strikes the perfect balance between reverence and a wink. You can hear that it’s not Albert Mangelsdorff standing there—and yet, or precisely because of that, it is Albert Mangelsdorff in the person of Nils Wogram before the Big Band. This transfiguration is magical from the first to the last note, but that’s just how music and its mysteries are. “Albert’s spirit was in the hall; I could feel it,” Wogram recounts, and you can almost touch the reverent shiver that overcomes him as he speaks. “I think I can now allow myself to truly quote Albert.”

The original *Trilogue* album is largely based on the intuition of mutual listening and spontaneous interaction. This flexibility is impossible to replicate in a big band setting: first, every note of the original collective improvisation has already been canonized; and second, a big band is far less maneuverable than a trio. The dynamics of the two recordings are thus fundamentally different. For Wogram, the key lies in Jim McNeely’s deep understanding of this kind of spontaneous improvisation, which he transferred into this entirely different sonic space with great expertise and empathy. One state of perfection transforms into another, as if Michelangelo had chiseled a fleeting sketch into stone for eternity. The arrangements are playful; the musicians take their time; the entire music feels like a statement of defiant deceleration in an era that demands compression. Wogram calls it “rest in redundancy.” “Playing these arrangements, I often felt less constrained than I do with extremely tight arrangements for small ensembles. Jim McNeely left a lot of space for creative expression, especially for me and the trio. We had to—and could—fill that space. Jim gave us no instructions. This was certainly one of the most experimental arrangements he’s ever done.”

Trilogue + 15 is a live recording. The audience is part of the process. At the end, there is applause. And this applause sets this live album apart from all others in history. For mixed into the farewell applause, alongside the expected enthusiasm, is a murmur of awe—a long, cathartic “Ooooh,” like a collective exhalation. Fundamentally, this concert was neither a tribute nor a homage but, in the best Zen Buddhist sense, a reincarnation. A momentum that, with this release, is finally no longer reserved for the select few who experienced that memorable evening but lays its claim to immortality, accessible to all.

(Text: Wolf Kampmann)