



Nils „Mr. Red Horn“ Landgren

Bio- / Discography

With his smoking, hard-hitting "Funk Unit", the man with the Red Horn has been responsible for a bunch of successful CDs over the past years. His concerts from Stockholm to Beijing have been met with ecstatic acclamation. In duo with pianist Esbjörn Svensson, he has elevated Swedish folk music to the level of subdued works of art. As a singer he shows where "you can always most reliably find the mind: in the middle of the heart" (Die Welt). He is a world-class soloist and artist with heart and soul: Nils Landgren.

Born in 1956, Nils Landgren began playing drums at the age of six, before at last discovering the trombone at 13. Between 1972 and 1978 Nils studied classical trombone at the music college in Karlstad with David Maytan and at the university in Arvika with Ingemar Roos. Meeting the legendary Swedish Folk-Jazz pioneer Bengt-Arne Wallin as well as the fantastic trombonist Eje Thelin persuaded Nils to move from strict classical studies to improvisation and to begin the development of his own approach.

After his graduation Nils moved to Stockholm to work as a professional trombone player. He was soon touring with the most successful Swedish pop star of that time, Björn Skifs' "Blue Swede" who got to number 1 in the US pop charts with "Hooked on a feeling". In 1981 Thad Jones invited the Swede into his new big band project "Ball of Fire", to take the lead-trombone chair. Ever since that time Nils Landgren has been involved in most styles equally: jazz and rock, soul and hip hop, big band sessions, and by his own reckoning, at least 500 albums including such international stars as ABBA, The Crusaders, Eddie Harris, Bernard "Pretty" Purdie, Wyclef Jean and Herbie Hancock.

In 1983 Nils' debut album "Planet Rock" was released, followed by "Streetworker" in 1984, "You are my Nr 1" in 1985, "Miles from Duke" with Bengt-Arne Wallin in 1987, "Chapter Two 1", in 1987, "Chapter Two 2" and "Follow your heart" in 1989. Between 1985 and 1987 Nils also performed as actor, singer, trombonist, and dancer in over 360 performances of the Swedish "play of the year", SKÅL, as well as appearing in several TV-films as an actor.

1992 saw the first performances and recording of the Nils Landgren "Unit". The final breakthrough beyond Scandinavia came first in 1994: it was at the Jazz Baltica Festival at Salzgitter in Germany that the "Unit" became the "Funk Unit". The album "Live in Stockholm" (ACT 9223-2) was released that year and was the foundation for the collaboration with Siegfried Loch and his then young ACT label.

The next Funk Unit release, "Paint It Blue" (ACT 9243-2), was one of 1997's most successful albums and received Germany's Jazz Award. The following tour of over 100 dates gave Nils Landgren and the Funk Unit their breakthrough in Germany. Inspired by his mentor Bengt-Arne Wallin, Nils Landgren ventured into non-funky realms with a re-working of traditional Swedish folk songs: "Swedish Folk Modern" (ACT 9257-2), his first duo with the pianist Esbjörn Svensson, followed up by "Layers of Light" (ACT 9281-2), an even gentler evocation.

Between January 1998 and January 2001 Nils Landgren was also a member of the NDR Big Band in Hamburg, but continuously touring throughout with the Funk Unit worldwide. During this time three albums were released: after "Live in Montreux" (ACT 9265-2) appeared in 1999 "5000 Miles" (ACT 9271-2) and in September 2001 "Funk da World" (ACT 9299-2), which was presented live at a special 3 day festival in Hamburg dedicated to Nils Landgren's music. The "grooving band, which encouraged the younger members of the audience into a dance frenzy, but which was also taken seriously by the greying jazz snobs" (Spiegel), proved that it could be counted as "the best funk band in Europe today" (Stereo).

As artistic director of the illustrious Berlin Jazz Festival in 2001 Nils Landgren set up a concise overview of the current directions in Scandinavian jazz and was awarded the "Tore Ehrling Prize" by the Swedish Composers' Federation for his "special contribution in bringing worldwide attention to Swedish jazz".

A further aspect of Landgren's multi-facetedness has been shown since 1993, when the album "Ballads" (ACT 9268-2) was recorded, and on its release in Germany in 1999 showed for the first time his talent as an emotional ballad singer. With his tasteful tenor voice he has been compared to the introverted style of Chet Baker. In 2002 he undertook a recording of a sequence of love songs on a "Sentimental Journey" (ACT 9409-2) which was enthusiastically received by public and critics alike. "We want more of this" proclaimed the WOM Journal and so was able to follow this through the production of the album "I Will Wait For You" (ACT 9418-2) where the singer Rigmor Gustafsson – having previously made her name as a guest on "Sentimental Journey" – took centre stage. It stormed into the jazz charts in Sweden and Germany, reaching number 1 and number 2 respectively.

In 2004, after a self-imposed sabbatical of almost two years, Landgren went full steam ahead with his Funk Unit and produced the acclaimed Platinum "Funky Abba" album (ACT 9430-2); his own personal homage to one of the greatest pop bands in history. 2005 marks the new album "Creole Love Call" (ACT 9707-2) together with the legendary keyboarder Joe Sample of The Crusaders, in which Nils Landgren can be heard again primarily as a vocalist.

In December 2005, Nils Landgren celebrated Christmas in a church in Stockholm with some friends from the Scandinavian music scene and thus fulfilling a long-time dream. This unique recording of the most beautiful Christmas songs from the middle ages to our time was released in December 2006 on CD and DVD, went gold in Sweden and Germany within a month of its release, and climbed to #2 of the German Jazz charts: "Christmas with my Friends".

2007 brings the Funk Unit back again. The eighth funk album demonstrates the same killer groove as its award-winning predecessors lead us to expect. Nils Landgren definitely has it: the "Licence to Funk" (ACT 9455-2).

Given the resounding success of JazzFest Berlin '01, Landgren has been nominated again in 2008 as artistic director of the JazzFest Berlin for the coming three years. At the end of 2008 he will release a sequel of his successful first Christmas album: "Christmas With My Friends II" (ACT 9476-2).

Music knows no borders, music is freedom – this is Nils Landgren's credo. For every record of his new Funk Unit album "Funk For Life" (released in spring 2010) sold, one Euro goes to the Funk Unit - Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without borders) project "Funk For Life" in Kibera Nairobi. By purchasing the CD the buyer will contribute in making life for people in Kibera just a bit easier. And he helps to guarantee that from now on, music will be a central part of the education in Kibera.

Nils Landgren's Funk Unit on ACT

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

Hagens, 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 will be released by end of January 2010.

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 into the studio.

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 Dyall, Jeannette Köhn and Ida Sandlund.

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.

Nils Landgren appears as guest on the following ACT-recordings:

ACT 9242-2 Bernard Purdie's SOUL TO JAZZ
ACT 9249-2 Eddie Harris – THE LAST CONCERT
ACT 9254-2 Bengt Arne Wallin – THE BIRTH AND REBIRTH OF SWEDISH FOLK JAZZ
ACT 9259-2 NDR Bigband – BRAVISSIMO II
ACT 9233-2 NDR Bigband – ELLINGTONIA
ACT 9418 -2 Rigmor Gustafsson – I WILL WAIT FOR YOU
ACT 9602-2 Roberto Di Gioia – Marsmobil: STRANGE WORLD
ACT 9701-2 Viktoria Tolstoy – SHINING ON YOU
ACT 9703-2 Rigmor Gustafsson & Jacky Terrasson Trio – CLOSE TO YOU
ACT 9705-2 Viktoria Tolstoy – MY SWEDISH HEART
ACT 9710-2 Rigmor Gustafsson – ON MY WAY TO YOU
ACT 9603-2 Wolfgang Haffner – SHAPES
ACT 9716-2 Ida Sand – MEET ME AROUND MIDNIGHT
ACT 9468-2 Wolfgang Haffner – ACOUSTIC SHAPES
ACT 9459-2 Ulf Wakenius – LOVE IS REAL
ACT 9721-2 Viktoria Tolstoy – MY RUSSIAN SOUL

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