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NILS WOGRAM'S NOSTALGIA
Affinity

feat. Florian Ross & Dejan Terzic

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The future begins yesterday. *Affinity* is a persuasive affirmation of this view.

Paintings by the German Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich are not exactly common on the covers of jazz albums. And yet his visual meditations on inner landscapes around 1800 made him just as much a free spirit as John Coltrane a century and a half later. But that doubtless somewhat forced connection is hardly likely to have been what motivated Nils Wogram to adorn the cover of the new album by his Nostalgia project with Friedrich's *Evening*. On cursory examination, the narrow strip of trunks through whose black canopy the evening light shines down resembles a barcode on contemporary packaging. The long since forgotten and the virtually present seem to be interwoven in a visionary way in this painting. And in Wogram's music.

Nils Wogram is a musician who values continuity. With his band Root 70 he built up one of Germany's most successful jazz formations. Though it is a rather rare quality in contemporary jazz, he likes to place emphases without having to impose a program. In the meanwhile Wogram himself lives in Zurich, and the rest of Root 70 is scattered across Europe and America. In 2004, when he recorded the first Nostalgia album, it sounded like a diffident counterpoint to Root 70. Meanwhile, though, Nostalgia too has become a steady ensemble.

In the pianist and organist Florian Ross of Cologne, Wogram has not only one of the most experienced keyboardists in Germany in his trio but also a real architect of sound, who with every note he plays always has an eye and an ear on the overall form, however complex it may be. Ross is a musician with a capability for abstraction that would do justice to an entire orchestra. He can pull away miles out of the band context and yet always ensure that the foundation remains stable. The percussionist Dejan Terzic of Nuremberg provides the fuel that propels the trombonist and organist. It may lie in his Balkan roots that he often gives the impression he is distilling a kind of

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metarhythm from several synchronous grooves. Terzic's timing is breathtaking, his playing as restrained as it is complex.

On *Daddy's Bones*, Nostalgia's first album, Wogram sought to establish an unprogrammable arc extending from the jazz of the 1950s to the present. Anyone who has heard even a single note by this trombonist knows that his goal was nothing less than igniting a new retro debate. But the tradition is part of our experience, and you can't take a trip without baggage. *Daddy's Bones* was an unsentimental confession to what is actually heard and what seems to be heard. A contemplative adventure in sound that had not existed previously in this form—even the combination of trombone, organ, and percussion is probably unique in the history of jazz—though it certainly could have.

Nils Wogram's musical personality unites the carefree jazz visionary and the transfigured romantic. In Nostalgia he can persuasively bring these two sides together in harmony. In the process, all melancholy disappears. Although Wogram alludes to nostalgia, he has nothing to do with the sentimental variety that crosses the border to kitsch. His concept of nostalgia has nothing to do with the dusty plushiness of which German jazz in particular is all too often accused. Nostalgia overcomes the boundaries between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as easily and cheerfully as those between Europe and America. Nostalgia—for Wogram, Ross, and Terzic is also means a fine sense of irony and refraction. It is like driving on the autobahn, hurtling toward one's destination but always keeping an eye on the rearview mirror. It is neither a departure nor an arrival but always the stretch precisely in between.

Affinity swings like hell. But Wogram, Ross, and Terzic are light years from coming close to a swing revival à la Roger Cicero. For the nostalgic trio, swing means interpreting a memory to their taste. Though extreme caution should always be exercised before declaring a new genre, it would not be entirely wrong to say this CD opens the doors to the potential genre of "free swing." The improvisations of these three musicians go far beyond the limits of the common solo. Dovetailing, collective abstractions, and extrapolations of the very highest order occur. As entertaining as the nine pieces on the CD may be, the patina of shared memory is also mixed with the projections of an individual listener, and the three happy nostalgics break daringly and ruthlessly with every expectation. The music is full of unexpected details and twists that can suddenly set the whole course moving in another direction.

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