



# NILS WOGRAM SEPTET

## Complete Soul

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**Nils Wogram is a master of small formats – duos, trios and quartets are his domains. But eleven years ago he proved that he has quite a bit to say in the sextet and octet on the CD *Odd and Awkward*. Back then, the multi-reed player Steffen Schorn was along for the ride. He is on board again on Wogram's newest CD, *Complete Soul*, this time in a septet. In addition, clarinetist Claudio Puntin, trumpeter Matthias Schriebl, the saxophonists Frank Speer and Tilman Ehrhorn as well as drummer John Schröder have also made this rendezvous.**

Wogram's approach on *Complete Soul* stands out in strong contrast to that of bands such as Roots 70 or Nostalgia. Normally, he writes the parts for his co-players, into their instruments; in other words, he sets their strengths to music, tailor-made. This time, however, he had a complex overall sound in his head, assembled like an organ made up of many horns, and then searched for the people who could fill out this sound with their personalities. *"The larger the band is,"* acknowledges Wogram, *"the more each individual has to blend into the overall sound. For this project I looked for people whose sound-ideal is similar to mine. In this way, the horns mix such that one attains these organ-like sounds. The chords function as a whole and do not simply result in six tones that somehow blend together. When the musicians have space to solo, however, I do try to emphasize their personal strengths."*

As a tonal ideal, Nils Wogram had the sound of Miles Davis' classic *Birth of the Cool* in mind. Not to simply imitate it stylistically, but rather to transfer a common, shrouded brass sound, borne by top soloists. In contrast to his customary way of working, he recycled compositions for *Complete Soul*, pieces he had already written for other projects. The material is made up of pieces that he wrote for commissions and that had only been performed live once or twice. Wogram felt sorry for these pieces, into which he had packed such passion; he asked himself which of them would be suitable for the septet. And yet, although the songs arose originally in different contexts, even if at around the same time, they resulted in a suite whose individual components belong together like pearls in a pearl necklace. Only in this way and in no other can this music be understood. For Wogram two parameters were important. Which pieces fit well together and what fits the band?

That the participants in this production apparently hold themselves back is all the more astounding given the fact of who they are: the protagonists who definitively characterize – by how they perform and play – the image of German jazz today; musicians one recognizes, one perceives as themselves in any context. This circumstance is also something *Complete Soul* and *Birth of the Cool* have in common. Wogram has formed a perfect chamber ensemble with these leading figures of contemporary jazz. *“Each band has a certain drive. All of these musicians are first-class soloists, but they can also restrain themselves when the music calls for it. They know intuitively that I attach great importance to this. At specific places each member has his solo feature, where he can do his own thing. These people don’t have problems with their egos, it doesn’t bother them to restrain themselves. That’s why they can do this.”*

Even these features serve the music so much that they don’t sound like solos at all. What has a decisive share in this, of course, is Wogram’s attitude. Indeed, his virtuosity and his sense of adventure on the trombone are beyond doubt, but *Complete Soul* is not a trombone record with enriched brass accompaniment. The leader steps so far back in the background that one occasionally forgets who plays trombone at all; he is, first and foremost, composer and organizer of sound. This distinguishes this septet from Nostalgia, Root 70 or the duo with Simon Nabotov. Wogram is more interested in mutual respect among the participants. He is searching for a relaxed matter-of-course that leaves behind the permanently hierarchical and mercantile competition that has horribly overloaded jazz. Here, it is a matter of perceiving the music as a whole.

The title “Complete Soul” expresses this admission to wholeness, as well. Indeed, Wogram allows himself a natural emotional balance between pathos and humility. Music can move at such a highly sophisticated level; in the end, it always remains a personal experience for both performer and listener. *“We all know each other well,”* says Wogram about the joint starting point the seven musicians take, *“can deal with each other in a relaxed manner and find an almost family-like structure, from which a unity suddenly appears and which is greater than the sum of the individual players. It’s not about making one’s skills heard, but rather about each musician giving his character into the music. And each character has, in turn, many facets.”*

Of course, one can understand the title, *Complete Soul*, in a completely different way. Several songs have Asian-Indian titles; Wogram does not have these pieces performed with tablas or sitars, but rather works through this experience from the perspective of a Central European. He moves, however, on a spiritual level, one which goes far beyond that shaped by Christian European values. In the music as in the album title, a complete spirituality reveals itself, which spans an arc to one of the great masters of German jazz and mentor of Nils Wogram. At the beginning of the sixties, Albert Mangelsdorff recorded his classic *Now Jazz Ramwong* under entirely similar signs, in which he unified jazz, European music and Southeast Asian influences.

**We can call *Complete Soul* a great album, without a false sense of shame. It is a massive step in the creative work of one of today’s most versatile and productive German jazz musicians and joins company with a tradition that has once before opened its gates wide to European jazz. Above all, it is a wonderfully beautiful, light and yet deep piece of music, which demands to be heard and heard again.**