

NILS

Alley Cat

In 2014, nine years after his massive radio single “Pacific Coast Highway” established him as one of contemporary urban jazz’s top artists and producers, Nils took an exciting look back on a decade of non-stop hit-making with the release of the compilation *Jazz Gems: The Best of Nils* – a collection one astute journalist dubbed “The Best of Contemporary Jazz in the 2000s.” Aside from taking stock of his extraordinary career, the popular compilation included only one new track – giving the prolific, Munich born, Los Angeles based guitarist and composer extra time to pen his most explosive and infectious tunes ever for his latest BAJA/TSR Records release *Alley Cat*. In addition to capturing a wide range of emotions on his electric (and sometimes acoustic) guitar, the 12 tracks showcase, more than ever before, Nils’ masterful skills as a producer and inventive sonic architect.

Like a guitar driven equivalent of keyboard great and producer Jeff Lorber, Nils’ success as creator of some of the genre’s most identifiable hits – including “Let’s Bounce,” “Ready to Play,” “Catnap” and “Shake It,” – has led to his becoming a powerful behind the scenes force for many established and emerging artists. Working at his L.A. based studio, he has written songs and helmed tracks and full projects by saxophonist Reggie Codrington, guitarist Keith Andrews, pianists Al DeGregoris and David Hunt, Brian Simpson and most recently, “Harmony Park,” a track for multi-instrumentalist Nate Harasim’s #ShadesofNate featuring Dave Koz and mixed by Paul Brown.

Extending that spirit of collaboration to his latest solo project, Nils invites a wealth of dynamic musical cohorts to help create the magic of *Alley Cat*. In addition to his longtime core of Clydene Jackson (keyboards, vocals), percussionist Oliver C. Brown and bassists Reggie McBride and Darryl Williams, the guitarist incorporates more horns than usual, firing up the high energy hypnotic funk of “Milkshake” (which includes a chainsaw effect!) with saxophonist Eric Marienthal and trumpeter Johnny Britt. Britt and Codrington’s rising horns jazz and snazz up the buoyant, old school soul influenced title track “Alley Cat,” while Britt adds soulful trumpet harmonies on his own to the sly, easy funk flow of “Night Flyer” and the bright, plucky melody and simmering grooves of “Don’t Hold Back.”

Another old friend, Carsten Schmelzer, whom Nils knew from their days at Musicians Institute, popped in unexpectedly - and Nils invited him to play bass on the hauntingly seductive, bluesy ballad “Open Space.” The guitarist also had the incredible blessing of working with the late, legendary jazz/R&B drummer Ricky Lawson in the final years of his life –and many of the tracks on *Alley Cat* feature his signature rhythmic foundations.

“It was so much fun and very inspiring to work with all of these great musicians,” says Nils. “*Alley Cat* is a true labor of love, and they all came through the way great friends do when they’re in the moment, having a great time and open to spontaneity. Even for a producer who likes to play around a lot with electronic textures, nothing is better than playing alongside this caliber of musicians live. A lot of these tracks were recorded when the musicians would just come over, hang out and say they felt like playing. That fresh energy comes through and

everyone who joined me did so because they love the music and share a strong working relationship with me.”

One of the most inspiring things about Nils is that his music is always evolving sonically and he’s open to trying new ideas on the guitar and behind the boards. Not only are his keyboard skills on such instruments as Fender Rhodes evolving all the time, his extensive experience as a TV and film composer adds to the palette he draws from for his increasingly creative sound design. He created the synth-generated reverse “sucked up” wall of sound that launches the shuffling, retro soul-jazz gem “Saturday Night” – and explains that when he started his career, such an effect was only possible by flipping over a tape on a tape machine.

One of Nils’ favorite songs on *Alley Cat* is the sensual, silky ballad “Call of The Sirens.” It starts out with vinyl pops and includes a cool mix of acoustic and electric guitars, plus a drum loop that Lawson played over. “It’s one of those tracks that allows me to show off some of the guitar tricks I have learned over the years,” says Nils. “I love its high range feedback and the way the volume adjusts based on the melody. I use ‘high harmonics’ as part of the melody and the breakdown at the end, which create an eerie effect.”

Born and raised in Munich, Nils (pronounced Neels) Jiptner picked up his first guitar as teenager. While his first inclinations were to follow the lead of his idols Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin, it wasn’t until he was introduced to funk music that he was hooked; he spent “endless nights” learning and copying rhythm players like Nile Rogers, Al McKay and Paul Jackson, Jr. He was also a huge jazz fusion fan, inspired by The Yellowjackets, Jeff Lorber Fusion and Larry Carlton.

Moving to L.A. in the mid-80s, he began studying composition, arrangement and film composition. While making inroads into the competitive field of film and television, he got his first job as a teacher at the legendary Valley Arts Music Store; no matter how busy he’s become over the years as the various facets of his career—sideman, film composer and now solo artist—have taken off, Nils still loves to give back by teaching young guitarists. While acquiring his current production skills as a studio engineer in the 90s, he started doing sessions as a rhythm guitarist for everyone from Rick Braun to The Temptations and George Benson.

“Pacific Coast Highway” stayed at #1 on the Radio & Records airplay chart and was named by Broadcast Data Systems (BDS) as the most heavily played track in the smooth jazz format over the past 11 years with over 30,000 spins. Nils kept the momentum going with subsequent BAJA/TSR releases *Ready To Play* (2007) and *Up Close And Personal* (2009), which scored three popular airplay singles—all of which led to his nomination for “Best Guitarist” at the American Smooth Jazz Awards, in a category that included George Benson, Nick Colionne and the late Jeff Golub. Nils’ other releases on the label include *What The Funk?* (2010) and *City Groove* (2012). “Let’s Bounce,” the first single from *City Groove*, hit #2 on the Billboard Contemporary Jazz chart and stayed on the list for an incredible 26 weeks; the follow-up single “Jump Start” was #1 for seven weeks and stayed on the chart for 33 weeks.

Nils’ success in the urban jazz genre has somewhat obscured his dynamic background as a versatile R&B/ pop guitarist. Over the years, he has worked with greats like George Clinton and he has a platinum record for his contributions to The Temptations’ 1998 album *Phoenix Rising*. He contributed as a musician and co-writer of “Keep Rollin’” on Benson’s 1998 album *Standing*

Together, and the guitar and vocal legend returned the favor by playing a duet with Nils on Nils' 1998 debut CD *Blue Planet*; *Blue Planet* also featured performances by Gerald Albright, Nathan East and the late vocalist Carl Anderson.

His film and TV composing includes writing and arranging music for The Independent Spirit Awards – including special arrangement of “Lean on Me” that was sung by several of the legendary backup singers that appeared in the Oscar and Spirit Award winning documentary *20 Feet From Stardom*. Nils also scored an independent animated feature film about a cartoon aardvark called “Cerebus.” In addition, he produced music for the independent film *Beyond The Ring*, and worked as Music Editor on the Fox sitcom *Undeclared* and the classic hit show *Weeds*.

Several years ago, Nils wrote an instruction book “How To Make Your Guitar Talk,” and in line with his passion for education, released a songbook in connection with *Jazz Gems: The Best of Nils* that features sheet music transcriptions and a play-along CD for each of the tracks. He is also starting to make videos breaking down each song (and focusing on the trickier passages) that he will post on his popular YouTube channel www.youtube.com/nilsguitar.

“As anyone can tell from listening to *Alley Cat*, I love playing the electric guitar, and feel very strongly that the songwriting and production here is some of my best work ever,” says Nils. “Releasing *Jazz Gems* was a great way to take stock of my career and reflect on some of my favorite songs and how they’ve been able to touch so many fans. It was also the perfect time to start thinking about my future as an artist and some of the things I would like to do that are different from the music I have made in this genre. This includes the opportunity to write and record my first all-acoustic album, which will be released sometime in the near future. Since I started doing my own projects, my goal has been to be known as a guitar player, not just a single genre artist, so I think that leaves a lot of avenues open in the future.”



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