

Canada Day IV
Harris Eisenstadt (Songlines)
 by David R. Adler

With three previous quintet dates and an octet spinoff under its belt, drummer Harris Eisenstadt's Canada Day returns with a new bassist, Pascal Niggenkemper, who picks up where Eivind Opsvik and Garth Stevenson left off. Otherwise the original members are in place: vibraphonist Chris Dingman with his timbral sophistication and tenor saxophonist Matt Bauder and trumpeter Nate Wooley in the frontline with stirring improvisatory bouts and intricately voiced themes.

Eisenstadt's horn writing on *Canada Day IV* is marked more by counterpoint and wide and weaving intervals than simple unison, giving the band a distinctive and often unsettled flavor. In such jittery pieces as "Let's Say It Comes in Waves" and "What Can Be Set to the Side", his orchestration for the full band is particularly ambitious and well wrought. The ingenious horn cross-rhythms in the midtempo section of "What's Equal to What", and that tune's surprisingly calm and spacious ending, also attest to Eisenstadt's imagination and unpredictability. "Life's Hurling Passage Forward" first comes across as dark and vigorous jazz with satisfying solo turns from Dingman and Bauder, but it mutates halfway through as Wooley moves into solo abstraction and billows of non-pitched sound. The piece ends with Dingman gently underscoring Wooley on muted horn; the initial loping swing feel never returns.

On the drums, Eisenstadt conveys a sense of deceptive ease, loose yet disciplined feel and great overall sound. His music isn't drum-centric yet his playing stands out consistently, propelling and shaping these seven original pieces in every way. On the closing "Meli Melo" he sits out most of the first half as Bauder ventures an intimate rubato dialogue with Dingman. His cymbal entrance at four minutes, like turning a corner and suddenly seeing a broad vista, is what makes the song. Rousing collective improvisation on a big, ambling swing melody ensues. It's not every drummer with a touch that refined.

For more information, visit songlines.com. This project is at *The Stone* Sep. 3rd and Eisenstadt curates *The Stone* Sep. 1st-6th. See Calendar.



Return of the Jazz Communicators
Louis Hayes (Smoke Sessions)
 by Alex Henderson

In 1967, drummer Louis Hayes formed a New York City-based quintet called the Jazz Communicators with trumpeter Freddie Hubbard, tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson, pianist Kenny Barron and bassist Herbie Lewis. The name brings to mind the Jazz Messengers and, in fact, Hubbard had been a member of that similarly drummer-led ensemble. Fast forward to the 2010s: Hayes, who turned 78 on May 31st, has

reactivated the name Jazz Communicators with a new lineup and different instrumentation. *Return of the Jazz Communicators*, recorded live at Smoke on Manhattan's Upper West Side in November 2013 as part of the club's Smoke Sessions series, unites Hayes with Abraham Burton (tenor saxophone), Steve Nelson (vibraphone), David Bryant (piano) and Dezron Douglas (bass).

The performances are mindful of the postbop of the '60s and listening to the quintet on Nelson's "Shape Shifting", Ernie Wilkins' "Groovin' for Nat" (which Dizzy Gillespie included in his big band repertoire), Mulgrew Miller's "Soul-Leo" or Cedar Walton's "Simple Pleasures", one is reminded of Hayes' early work with Cannonball Adderley and Horace Silver. The expressive Burton does a lot to help Hayes maintain that '60s ambiance; from "Without a Song" to his own "It's to You", he plays a big, robust tenor reminiscent of John Coltrane and Dexter Gordon.

Burton lays out on an introspective performance of Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life", which Nelson dominates with pleasing results. But Nelson is the one who lays out on J. Russel Robinson's "Portrait of Jennie", which gives Burton a chance to show how soulful a ballad player he can be.

Although Hayes grew up in Detroit, he has lived in New York City since 1956. The veteran drummer has played with a long list of jazz icons over the years, from Coltrane and pianist Oscar Peterson to tenor saxophonist Yusef Lateef (who was featured on Hayes' first album as a leader back in 1960). *Return of the Jazz Communicators* demonstrates that, after all these years, he remains a vital contributor to the city's jazz scene.

For more information, visit smokesessionsrecords.com. Hayes is at *Dizzy's Club* Sep. 3rd and 5th. See Calendar.



Balance 38-58
Alex Sipiagin (Criss Cross)
 by Phil Freeman

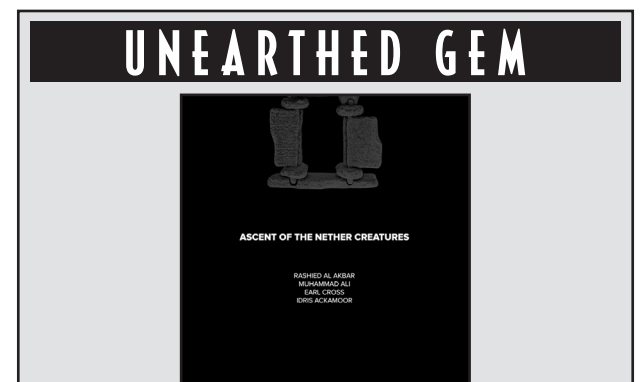
Trumpeter Alex Sipiagin made his debut as a leader on Criss Cross in 2000 and has continued to record for them for the last 15 years. *Balance 38-58* is his 11th album for the label and he's joined by saxophonist David Binney, guitarist Adam Rogers, keyboardist John Escreet, Matt Brewer and drummer Eric Harland, all of whom save Harland have also recorded for Criss Cross as leaders in the past.

The music shifts between two modes: acoustic postbop and electric jazz-funk. The latter pieces—including the opening "38-58" and the closing one-two of "Yragon" and "Trio Whale", both Binney compositions—are at times almost hilariously '70s in feel. Sipiagin's rich, melodic flugelhorn playing recalls Chuck Mangione while Binney is discursive and occasionally strident. Escreet's organ melodies are like an explicit tribute to George Duke and Bob James and Harland's machine-gun drumming genuflects before Billy Cobham's throne. Rogers' solo on "38-58" has some sting, but unfortunately never heads all the way out into Al DiMeola territory.

The four acoustic pieces—"Way to Her", "Momentum", the 12-minute "Echoes of Thought" and "Balance"—that make up most of the album have a sort of classicist hardbop feel, not unlike Woody Shaw's Columbia records, with Rogers giving them a slightly sharper edge. "Echoes of Thought" is the literal centerpiece (the fourth track of seven) and marks a turning point, as it shifts into a higher gear in its final

three minutes, during and after the guitarist's solo. "Balance", which follows, is a lush ballad on which Sipiagin journeys to the music's heart with skillful, precise phrases, the band vamping behind him; it's reminiscent of The Cookers, that allstar band of '60s and '70s power players. Escreet's solo has the beauty of summer rain on a pond. When the music returns to stuttering funk on "Yragon" and grinding, almost blues-rock grit on "Trio Whale", it almost feels like a step down. But the band makes it work, synthesizing their two sides into a cohesive whole.

For more information, visit crisscrossjazz.com. This project is at *Smalls* Sep. 4th-5th. See Calendar.



Ascent of the Nether Creatures
**Rahied Al Akbar/Muhammad Ali/
 Earl Cross/Idris Ackamoore (NoBusiness)**
 by Ken Waxman

High-class free jazz from an unheralded quartet of journeymen Americans, *Ascent of the Nether Creatures* confirms that a vociferous audience existed for more experimental sounds 30 years ago despite the supposed dominance of fusion and mainstream jazz.

Certainly no one in this sometimes raggedly recorded club date from somewhere in the Netherlands in 1980 was drawn by star power: best known was drummer Muhammad Ali—Rashied's brother—whose Center of the World band with Frank Wright and Bobby Few worked extensively during the '70s; trumpeter Earl Cross recorded with Charles Tyler, Noah Howard and Rashied Ali; saxophonist Idris Ackamoore's jazz-world music/jazz ensemble The Pyramids has toured slightly-under-the-radar for many years. Virtually nothing is known about bassist Rahied Al Akbar.

The latter's full-bodied string-stopping, sometimes featuring woody cross-strumming, is a constant of the four long tracks. But Ali's spectacular drum accents plus crackle cymbals make the most impact. The theme is usually stated by unison horns, which also recap it. Enough variation exists though so that there's always room for Cross' moderated grace notes or upended triplets plus Ackamoore's sinewy, excitable alto sax breaks, with the drummer spicing up the action with rattles or thumps.

The title tune is also the showpiece. An atmospheric Art Ensemble of Chicago-like exposition of bell-shaking, string buzzing and hand-muted brass and trouser-muted sax slurs keep the narrative simmering on low heat until it detonates a riveting blast divided among tremolo trumpet flutters, bent reed smears, an arpeggio-rich bass solo and a concluding demonstration of restrained crashes and rebounds from the drummer.

The organization of these strong performances shows that sophisticated avant garde impulses had permeated the DNA of even less-celebrated players working clubs in the '80s. A long-drawn-out near-orgasmic squeal from someone present as the quartet concluded its performance corroborates that the audience was enthralled as well.

For more information, visit nobusinessrecords.com