



ERIC HARLAND'S VOYAGER
Vipassana

Eric Harland, drums, vocal backgrounds, synth-strings; Walter Smith III, tenor saxophone; Julian Lage, Nir Felder, guitar; Taylor Eigsti, piano; Harish Raghavan, acoustic & electric bass; Chris Turner, vocals

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Voyager is one of today's finest live bands, though its 2010 debut, *Live By Night*, didn't fully do it justice. While *Vipassana*, their first studio effort, is more concise and sonically superior, it doesn't quite convey the raw talent that Voyager unleashes on a typical night. Still, as a vehicle for the muse of drummer Eric Harland—sideman to Charles Lloyd, Dave Holland, Ravi Coltrane, and others—*Vipassana* is a gutsy leap forward.

There are touches of hip-hop in the opening "Relax" as well as in "Pas-sana," with electronic textures and a hypnotic R&B vocal from Chris Turner that push Harland in a futuristic direction. Harland's synth-strings and Taylor Eigsti's piano blend together in "VI" in a feat of imagination: neo-soul chamber music rapturous in its effect. There's even a rock power ballad, "Normal," featuring guitarist Nir Felder, who's been subbing for Julian Lage on the road, bringing a fluid, atmospheric, funky touch on a number of tracks.

Tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III and bassist Harish Raghavan contribute some of the most effective compositions, including "Raghavan" and "Singularis"—band showcases all the way, with poetic harmonies, intriguing rhythms, and brisk improvisational fire. In the sole cover, "Maiden Voyage," Harland sets the Herbie Hancock classic in a tensile 5/8 groove and gives his pianist the spotlight. Recasting the harmonies in the band's own language, Eigsti proceeds with phrases of endlessly subtle dissonance that owe little to Hancock and everything to his own mercurial approach. —David R. Adler

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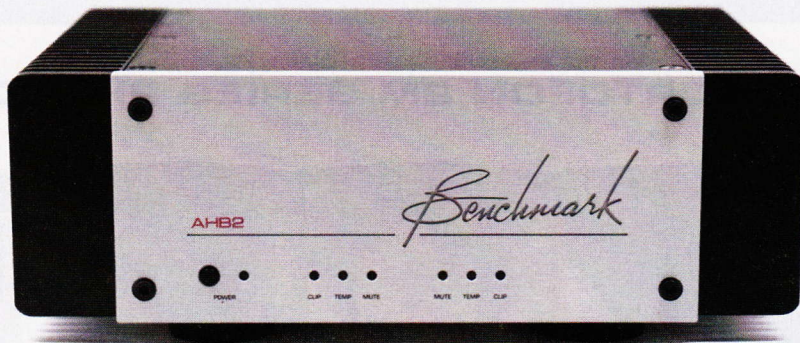


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