### NATE RADLEY
*Morphoses*

Nate Radley, guitars; Loren Stillman, saxophones; Matt Pavolka, bass; Ted Poor, drums
Fresh Sound New Talent FSNT 452 (CD). 2014. Nate Radley, prod.; John Davis, eng. DDD? TT: 60:35

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★☆
**SONICS** ★★★★☆

Nate Radley is one of the significant guitarists to enter jazz in the last five years, not because of his technical expertise (guitar chops are cheap these days) but because of his concept. His first two albums, *The Big Eyes* (*Stereophile*, April 2012) and *Carillon*, were deep in fresh, challenging ideas. With his new recording, his concept has expanded. Radley's street-wise New York jazz has gone country.

Radley has said that he "never really dug country" until recently, when he began to appreciate guitarists like Roy Nichols, Danny Gatton, and Albert Lee, and began to supplement his Gibson 335 with a Fender Telecaster. Tunes like "Sunset Stomp" and "Travis" (for legendary country picker Merle Travis) offer the human tales told in elemental melody, the irresistible hooks, the twang, that make Americana music universal. "Travis," with its over-dubbed acoustic and lap steel guitars, has the richness of a string choir.

What makes *Morphoses* distinctive is that its earthiness is filtered through Radley's relativist postmodern jazz sensibility. This is Americana with an edge of emotional ambiguity. There are also pieces in which Radley departs the countryside and returns to the New York streets, to further explore the intense, volatile creative relationship that he and saxophonist Loren Stillman introduced on *The Big Eyes*. These tunes also reveal Radley's increased emphasis on composition and ensemble form. In "Long Notes," for 10 minutes, Radley and Stillman shadow, incite, and elevate one another. "Glow," through-composed, is such an elegant, suggestive arc that it requires no improvisation to be complete.—**Thomas Conrad**

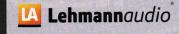### WADADA LEO SMITH
*The Great Lakes Suites*

Wadada Leo Smith, trumpet; Henry Threadgill, alto saxophone, flute, bass flute; John Lindberg, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums
TUM 041-2 (2 CDs). 2014. Petri Haussila, prod.; Robert Musso, Akihiro Nishimura, engs. DDD. TT: 90:21

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★
**SONICS** ★★★★☆

Following the gravitas of his *Ten Freedom Summers* (Cuneiform 2012), trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith's four-disc large-ensemble homage to the civil-rights struggle, *The Great Lakes Suites* feels almost like a breather. The sole focus is quartet, but one very different from Smith's Golden Quartet, which always features piano. Here, with just two horn players and rhythm, Smith evokes the vast beauty and awe-inspiring history of the Great Lakes, devoting a suite to each—including Lake St. Clair, northeast of Detroit. The six suites are spread across two discs, and the sound is powerful, clear, matter-of-fact.

The lineup is jaw-dropping: Henry Threadgill is aflame on alto saxophone and flutes; bassist John Lindberg brims with virtuosity, whether playing arco or pizzicato; the great Jack DeJohnette holds it all together with his peerlessly musical drumming. Then, of course, there's Smith, going full-blast on open trumpet, but also coloring deftly with his mute. Early in "Lake Ontario," his entrance against Threadgill's flute is a thing of untrammeled beauty. So is Threadgill's bass flute at the end of "Lake Huron" and the beginning of "Lake Erie," opening a sublime and contemplative space in these turbulent pieces.

Smith has a way of weaving silences into his themes, pausing before the next intense high-note unison or clashing acidic harmony with Threadgill, as DeJohnette and Lindberg carry on their churning rubato. There's an unflinching directness to the music, but also a deep mystery and ambiguity—and, in the coda of "Lake St. Clair," even a touch of funk.—**David R. Adler**