

HARRIS EISENSTADT
GOLDEN STATE



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| 1. What is a Straw Horse, Anyways? | 5:37 |
| 2. It is Never Safe to Be | 5:08 |
| 3. Dogmatic in Any Case | 8:49 |
| 4. Unless All the Evidence is In | 4:38 |
| 5. Sandy | 8:55 |
| 6. Especially Preposterous Assertions | 6:22 |
| 7. Flabbergasted by the Unconventional | 7:50 |

Nicole Mitchell
Flute
Sara Schoenbeck
Bassoon
Mark Dresser
Contrabass
Harris Eisenstadt
Drums, Compositions

Total Time **47:18**
Recorded and mixed in 24 bits/88.2K

SONGLINES

C & P 2013
Songlines Recordings
3036 W. 6th Ave
Vancouver BC V6K XK3 Canada
www.songlines.com



**All compositions by Harris Eisenstadt, Heresy Music (SOCAN)
Harris Eisenstadt plays Istanbul Agop Cymbals
www.harriseisenstadt.com**

**Recorded by Darrell Harvey at Studio West, San Diego CA, November 17, 2012
Mixed by John Raham at Afterlife, Vancouver BC
Mastered by Graemme Brown at Zen Mastering**

**Photography by Jon Setzen
Design by Jordan Bent
Produced by Harris Eisenstadt
Executive Producer: Tony Reif**

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Alex Cline, Jon Setzen,
Darrell Harvey,
and the folks at Songlines**



GOLDEN STATE

‘Harry Einstein’ my son and daughter call him, but there’s nothing relativistic about this remarkable composer and musician whose successive associations and works always follow a clear, three-dimensional logic and structure. It’s remarkable to think that this is his 15th recording as a leader since 2001, a fact that might be ever so slightly clouded by Harris Eisenstadt’s constant willingness to submerge his name, if not his musical personality, in ensembles as different as the Ahimsa Orchestra, The All Seeing Eye and Woodblock Prints. Even those names, chosen at somewhat less than random, suggest the range and unexpectedness of his philosophical purview: is that a Gandhi reference right there? It surely is, but what of the others? If the first one suggests the ‘eye of Providence’, the Christian/Masonic symbol that appears on the Great Seal of the United States, and on a dollar bill, then it’s worth reflecting on another of Eisenstadt’s group-names, Canada Day; and if the second hints at ‘orientalism’ again, here’s a composer who comes from above a certain parallel and who claims a freedom to absorb rather than colonise, and the confidence to reference Downton Abbey as well as satyagraha (the concept rather than the opera).

As might by this stage be expected, Golden State differs clearly from previous groups in sound and intent. Its roots lie in a 2012 residency at CalArts, which put Eisenstadt and wife Sara Schoenbeck in close orbit with flutist and AACM stalwart Nicole Mitchell and with bassist Mark Dresser, with whom he had worked on and off for many years. A ‘jazz’ group fronted by flute and bassoon can be guaranteed to set off rustles in the undergrowth. Double-reeds have never enjoyed a secure place in jazz, despite the efforts of Illinois Jacquet, Yusef Lateef, Sonny Simmons, Paul McCandless, and a handful of others, and despite glorious writing by Mozart and others the bassoon has rarely been regarded as anything other than a back-room instrument. Schoenbeck has done much to change all that. She and Mitchell worked together on one of Anthony Braxton’s weightiest and most high-profile projects, the Nine Compositions (Iridium) 2006 set which brought the cream of the avant-garde to Times Square. Mitchell was voted ‘Chicagoan of the Year’ around that same time and was starting to emerge into international awareness as a composer and leader of rare substance. Dresser also has Braxton DNA in his resumé and, like so many ‘rhythm section’ musicians a somewhat neglected body of work under his own name, dating from the magnificent Force Green for Soul Note in 1994, a kind of modern classic you should check out when you want a break from listening to Golden State.

That's not likely to be soon, for this music has intrigue and grip. It comes in the form of relatively short pieces rather than suites or long-forms, and shows as much continuity as it does change when set against his work in current formations like Canada Day and September Trio, and other, earlier groups. Listening to any Eisenstadt group, however named, it's always clear that the impetus is coming from what the drummer/percussionist is doing, not in a chariot-riding Art Blakey way but almost in the sense that the music's metrical and textural shifts are directed from the kit. It's always interesting to listen to a drummer and ask if his set-up sounds like one instrument or several instruments. It's not quite so easy with Eisenstadt, who seems to be able to do both in successive tracks, or even within a single track, and who thereby imposes a democracy of instrumentation across the group, so that we lose the old aural hierarchy of horns, harmony, rhythm, percussion and experience the group as a field or space for activity. Is that what Golden State means? Is it another version of utopics rather than a self-clapping road sign: 'Welcome to X – the Golden State', where X stands for California but only one of these players is a native Californian.

The writing is taut but flexed. There's a lot of tight unison work for the two winds that sounds like separated, two-part writing, and there's a lot of multi-part writing that sounds like the group's pushing behind a single idea. Eisenstadt isn't one of those drummers who thinks that a bar-line is a cue for a drink or that swaying drunkenly between metrical lamp-posts is a reasonable approximation of freedom. He has the ability – shared, dare I say it, with some of the best British and European drummers, which is maybe why he's so admired over here – to imply a beat even where it cannot strictly be counted, or to impart that almost mystical quality, swing, to a passage that seems to have no settled direction. These compositions are quiddities rather than definitive statements.

Improvising musicians are fated to work in situations that mix familiarity with strangeness. Groups are thrown together on the night and immediately find a common language. Groups, or associations, that stay together long term run the risk of playing the same stuff every night or, worse still, trying so hard to play different stuff they play the same stuff, just louder and more dissonantly. Eisenstadt and Schoenbeck have solved this problem, not in some cosily domestic way, nor in some bland approximation of yin and yang, and not at all because of the substantial difference in sound between a drum kit and a bassoon, but largely because they keep the conversation going at all times. Golden State had benefit of just a couple of gigs and rehearsals before this recording was made, but what's immediately clear, beyond the rigour and intelligence of Eisenstadt's writing, is that a conversation is taking place, a free exchange of soloistic positions, agreement, begging-to-differ. No one's left to prop things up or shape a consensus. Eisenstadt may be chairing, but he's not directing other than with his notes.

‘What’s A Straw Horse, Anyways?’ It’s an excellent question and the best answer to it lies in its essential unanswerability. Consider how each of these pieces ends. None of them conclude on a dramatic flourish or a knock-them-dead-in-their-seats There! They often end with a sense that there is much more to be said, a quality which often suggests we may have missed at least some of what has already been said, which in turns prompts a fresh listen. André Gide once begged ‘Please do not understand me too quickly’, a request that probably ought to be electro-etched on every creative work ever issued, for hasty interpretation is more dangerous than prolonged misunderstanding. Eisenstadt and his compeers have found a clever way of slowing down that process. I watched three people, all musically literate, listening to parts of this recording. All of them at different times raised their eyes from newspapers, books, their own interwoven fingers, as if to ask silently ‘What just happened there’, ‘Where is this going now’, ‘We didn’t expect that, did we?’ This isn’t to say that Eisenstadt has just worked a fresh variation on the old sound-of-surprise cliché but that he creates a music that shimmers with possibility and openness. To re-borrow another of his borrowed titles here, the evidence is not yet all in on this remarkable musician.

Brian Morton