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Dean Magraw and Eric Kamau Gravatt Fire on the Nile

Jazz legend Gravatt and guitar virtuoso Magraw push the envelope on this cosmic aural expedition
(RHR-CD-273 • Release Date: October 14, 2014)



Red House Records is pleased to announce the **October 14, 2014** release of *Fire on the Nile*, the new instrumental album by **Dean Magraw** and **Eric Kamau Gravatt**. These two jazz masters join forces for a cosmic aural romp – spontaneous, bare bones, profound and dazzling. Gravatt (**Weather Report, McCoy Tyner, Joe Henderson, Tony Hymas**) and jazz and world music virtuoso guitarist Magraw (**Jack McDuff, Greg Brown, Altan**) have been playing mind-bending shows together for more than two years and this is the first recording to capture that magic. Using only guitar and drum set, the music is startlingly stripped down but the result is expansive, thrilling and at times symphonic. “We went the Coltrane direction,” says Magraw. “I really studied his compositions and the way he played music, improvised and writes music.” Magraw found and connected with a kindred spirit in Gravatt, a Philly native who’d grown up immersed in the city’s rich multi-cultural music scene. *Fire on the Nile* captures these two seasoned players at the top of their game for this foray into melodic/rhythmic interplay.

Minnesota native Magraw has spent the past four decades playing jazz, folk, Celtic and world music, recording and touring and appearing on *A Prairie Home Companion*. An in-demand sideman who’s contributed to over two hundred recording projects, Dean has proven pivotal in creating more than a dozen of his own albums, including four for Red House Records. A cancer survivor, he went through a bone-marrow transplant in 2009, taking off two years from live performing.

Philadelphia native Gravatt grew up listening to jazz, funk, and Afro Cuban rhythms, all a part of the city’s vibrant music scene. His high school job was at Tony Staton’s Philly Steak shop. “It was a favorite hangout for a lot of people in Philly,” Gravatt says. “Jazz was what was happening and pieces of it were on the jukebox there -- Horace Silver’s ‘Filthy McNasty,’ Brubeck, Freddy Hubbard, Coltrane, Ahmad Jamal -- and three quarters of the Coltrane Quartet are from my home state, Pennsylvania. I was taking in the Coltrane sound and it reached right into me and I said, “who in the hell is this?””

Gravatt then lived and taught in DC before settling in Minneapolis to raise a family. Starting in the 1960s, Gravatt has recorded and toured with a Who’s Who of jazz greats, including years with Weather Report and McCoy Tyner. But for 20 years, from 1980 to 2001, he worked for the State of Minnesota as a Lieutenant in the Department of

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Corrections where he'd teach convicted felons how to structure their time. Gravatt toured with McCoy Tyner through 2010 and formed the Twin Cities fusion group **Source Code** before joining Magraw onstage as a sub for his regular partner. With decades of playing and improvisation between them, the creative sparks flew and the two began gigging as often as possible.

"What we bring is years and years and years of musical expression that we've done all over the world, both of us," Magraw says. "When you listen to Eric play, you'll hear almost the the entire history of the Afro American continuum plus Afro Cuban and something that's even more primal that goes back before recorded history. Some kind of source that gets passed on to us as human beings, speaking to our heartbeats and our internal beings. As we did it more and more we got better and better at it. Eric Peltoniemi at Red House saw that we were playing together and recognized Gravatt and he said that we should make a record."

The tracks were laid down over three days at Creation Audio in Minneapolis and was co-produced by Magraw, Gravatt and veteran engineer **Steve Wiese (Bill Carrothers, Steve Miller, Janet Jackson)**.

"Forms were created on the spot. Every piece had its own identity and origin," Magraw says. "One of the concepts was that you take something that was fully recorded and take out lots of it and put it back together. The track 'Inside Outside' is like that; it's a 7-beat rhythmic cycle that Eric wrote on the spot." Magraw would bring in melodies as starting points and Gravatt would suggest a direction. "We'd take a couple of takes and it would crystallize ... or just get the tape rolling and maybe not change a thing," he says.

During the sessions, both musicians found themselves gravitating towards the rawest versions of the songs. "It reminds me of John Lee Hooker, says Magraw, "not in the specifics of the music but in the 'this is where it's at' feel."

"There was a time when big band people, if they had a hit, they had to play that same solo every night," Gravatt says. "We improvise and play off each other. It's fresh every night."

Track listing with song notes:

1. Baby Wayne

The funky, innovative drummer from Dyke and the Blazers.

"He innovated as a result of his affliction; I've been told he had a substance abuse problem," Gravatt says. "His approach was disjointed, angular and disjointed - more than funky, *meta-funky*."

2. Innocence

What we've lost. There are two treatments of it. This track is more like a Cabildo rhythm.

3. Sleeping Diva

Is she resting? Is she dreaming? Heading towards the blues, honoring the tradition.

4. Sharrock

Shouting out to the great visionary guitarist Sonny Sharrock. "My first record was with him," Gravatt says.

5. Coast Highway

Bambinos on the beach. We were thinking of the Pacific Coast Highway.

6. Fire on the Nile

Sending love to the people struggling for peace, justice, and democracy in our world; especially in the Middle East. This melody emerged as an homage to the people and highest ideals of the Egyptian Revolution.

7. **My Lagan Love**

Traditional Irish Air collected in 1903 in Northern Donegal.

"I really liked the version by American folksinger Richard Farina," Magraw says. "He wrote lyrics and Sandy Denny sang it."

8. **Aposiopesis**

Rhetorical device, drum comment on a sideman's career. A one-take drum solo.

9. **Inside Outside**

Heaven times Seven.

10. **Anthem**

It's not about "me"...it's about us...

11. **Innocents**

Who we are. Gentle like a simple waltz.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Dean Magraw - <http://www.deanmagraw.com>

Dean Magraw is a consummate guitarist, playing with wit and soulful abandon. A performer like no other, he is part-comedian, part-philosopher and all-around musical genius. Transcending genre, he has performed with a cornucopia of collaborators from jazz organist **Jack McDuff** to folk icon **Greg Brown**, trad Irish supergroup **Altan** to classical violinist **Nigel Kennedy**.

Growing up in a musical household, Dean soaked in a smorgasbord of musical influences. His parents danced to big band swing; his sister sang showtunes and his guitar and veena playing brother's record collection was full of folk, jazz, rock, and classical Indian albums. But it was the opening riff to the Rolling Stones' "19th Nervous Breakdown" that caused him to fall in love with the guitar.

In his formative years Dean quickly expanded his musical knowledge by incorporating his love of myriad musical styles into his playing and writing. With his eclectic background and musical versatility, he quickly evolved into one of the most innovative guitarists on the international scene as well as one of the most accomplished and original composers, arrangers and producers around. From playing on public radio's **A Prairie Home Companion** to leading up his own experimental jam band **Eight Head**, Dean has literally generated a new world of music.

In addition to his role as an in-demand sideman on over two hundred recording projects, Dean has proven pivotal in creating more than a dozen albums, including five for Red House Records: **Wise-Magraw** (1985), **Broken Silence** (1994), **Seventh One** (1998), **Duo** (1991), an album he recorded with Emmy Award winning multi-instrumentalist **Peter Ostroushko** and **How the Light Gets In** (2010) with **Marcus Wise**.

Diagnosed with MDS (myelodysplastic syndrome) in 2009, a bone marrow transplant prevented him from performing but not recording. During the early stages of his medical treatment, Dean went into the studio with his longtime friend and collaborator Wise to record *How the Light Gets In*, an engaging collection of highly original compositions nurtured in a refreshingly distinctive soundscape. By 2011, he was well enough to return to the state, playing with Red Planet, Eight Head and Eric Kamau Gravatt, among others.

In 2014, he joined returning Red House alumnus **Claudia Schmidt** for a new studio album, **New Whirled Order**, as well as recording the sessions that would become **Fire on the Nile**, set for release in October 2014. He also joined the *APHC* fall 2014 cruise.

Eric Kamau Gravatt - <http://www.1619music.com>

American musician, educator and world-renowned drummer and percussionist, the Philadelphia native has played with world-class jazz artists and toured internationally since the 1970s. He started his career in the mid-1960s, recording with artists from that era including **Byard Lancaster, Lloyd McNeill, Andrew White, Terumasa Hino, Eddie Henderson, and Joe Henderson.**

Over a career spanning almost five decades, Gravatt has played with many of the greatest musicians and bands of jazz, including **Woody Shaw, Howard Roberts, Albert Ayler, Sonny Fortune, Kenny Dorham, Gary Bartz** and more. Gravatt's career attracted worldwide attention while he played with **Weather Report**, beginning with 1972's *I Sing The Body Electric*. After the making of the group's 1973's *Sweetnighter* he decided to leave Weather Report and joined the group **Natural Life** in 1974.

Gravatt then moved to the Minneapolis where he continued to play; he recorded with **McCoy Tyner's Focal Point** in 1977 and worked as a prison guard. He has always insisted that although he was disappointed with the manner in which the business of jazz had forced him into working outside music in order for him and his family to survive, he felt no bitterness. During these years he played with his band **Source Code**. He also recorded with **Bill Carrothers** on 1986's *The Artful Dodger*.

Since retiring from working in the prison system, Gravatt runs a recording studio and a publishing company, **1619 Music**, and directs the group **Source Code**. In 2004, he toured with Tyner's big band and also worked in a trio with Tyner and **Charnett Moffett**, garnering rave reviews and performing at prestigious festivals in the USA and overseas. He currently lives in Minnesota and has returned to recording with **Fire on the Nile**, his first release for **Red House Records**.

Gravatt attended Cheyney State College, Temple University, Howard University and the University of Minnesota. As an educator, he has taught at the Philadelphia Students' Symphony Orchestra, at the New Thing Art & Architecture Center in Washington, DC and with the African Heritage Dancers & Drummers. He has lectured at Georgetown Day School, the Children's Theater Company, Swarthmore College and more.