Eddie Harris - Instant Death (1972/2014)

A1 Instant Death 5:45 A2 A Little Wes 7:30 A3 Zambezi Dance 4:09 B1 Summer's On Its Way 7:46 B2 Nightcap 5:08 B3 Superfluous 3:18 B4 Tampion 2:47 Bass, Electric Bass – Rufus Reid Congas, Talking Drum – Henry Gibson Drums, Kalimba [Kilimba] – Billy James Electric Guitar – Ronald Muldrow Electric Piano, Whistle [African Whistle] – Richard Abrams Electric Saxophone, Trumpet, Cowbell, Shaker, Voice [Horn Vocals], Effects – Eddie Harris

This is one of Eddie Harris's stronger Atlantic albums of the 1970s. Harris jamming on "Instant Death" is one of his most satisfying statements on the reed trumpet, guitarist Ronald Muldrow's "A Little Wes" is memorable and even the briefer pieces are worthwhile. In addition to Harris (who mostly plays his electrified tenor) and Muldrow, the group consists of keyboardist Richard Abrams, bassist Rufus Reid, drummer Billy James and percussionist Henry Gibson. This long out-of-print LP is long overdue to be reissued on CD. ---Scott Yanow, AllMusic Review

Eddie Harris was one of the few jazz musicians ever to achieve the distinction of a million-selling hit single, with his cool jazz version of the theme from the film "Exodus" in 1960. That success did little for his credibility within the jazz community, but paved the way for his subsequent jazz-funk and pop recordings in the 1960s and 1970s.

Harris, who died following a number of serious illnesses, was a multi-instrumentalist with a difference. Best known as a tenor saxophonist, he was also a credible singer, and an accomplished pianist (he once worked as an accompanist for Billie Holiday) and organist. He

pioneered the use of electronics with the tenor saxophone when he took up the Varitone signal processor and similar devices in the mid-60s, and later devised and experimented with both a trumpet and flugelhorn played with a reed, and a saxophone played with a trumpet mouthpiece.

He was also one of the first jazz musicians to exploit the commercial possibilities of a jazz-rock-funk fusion, both as leader of his own groups, and in a famous collaboration with soul-jazz organ star Les McCann, which survived their personal incompatibility long enough to make two albums, and score a huge success at the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1969.

His pop-crossover recordings included another big hit single, Listen Here, and the commercially successful album The Electrifying Eddie Harris in the late-60s, and a live album recorded in the UK with Steve Winwood and Jeff Beck in the early 70s.

At the same time, he was an often underated straight jazz musician. He inherited the hard-blowing, full-toned, blues-inflected style of the Chicago bop school, and developed both an expressive sound and a polished technique. He wrote several highly regarded instructional books on jazz improvisation and composition, but the best evidence of his genuine empathy with a bop-based style came in his concerts and recordings in an acoustic jazz setting.

Such a setting dominated in his work up until the mid-60s, and he returned to it again in the Eighties, while some of his experiments with electronics and unusual instruments in the intervening decades were also couched in a jazz rather than fusion idiom. He was also a composer, and possessed a refined melodic sense. His best-known composition, "Freedom Jazz Dance", entered the jazz repertory as a standard modern work when it was recorded by the Miles Davis Quintet for their 1967 album Miles Smiles. ---The Scotsman, jazzhouse.org

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