



Photo: Liberty Ellman

## Liberty Ellman

### *Radiate*

PI RECORDINGS 60

★★★★

Liberty Ellman is one of the stronger guitarists in a jazz world filled with talented six-stringers. For the last 15 years, he's been a steady presence in Henry Threadgill's Zooid. In fact, he's been so busy with Zooid that his new album, *Radiate*, is his first under his own name in nine years.

Ellman's time spent with Threadgill has seeped into his own work. Tuba player and trombonist Jose Davila is a key cohort in Zooid, and his presence here draws inescapable comparisons. Yet apart from the wonderfully halting grooves, rigorous counterpoint and swerving melodies, the identity of this dynamic sextet belongs to Ellman.

The guitarist's jagged, shape-shifting compositions are in constant motion, expertly toggling between individual solos and high-grade, multi-linear group improvisation—such as the jabbing and weaving between alto saxophonist Steve Lehman and trumpeter Jonathan Finlayson on “Supercell.”

Davila and bassist Stephan Crump generate loads of low-end action, playing near-unison passages that simulate a weird stereo effect, but when the former switches to trombone (or pushes his tuba toward its rubbery high end) he joins a dense multitude of lines that flicker, slash and roll over the liquid grooves.

On the album's frenetic closer, “Enigmatic Runner,” overheated drum programming goes head-to-head with drummer Damion Reid's virtuosic rhythm-dicing, giving the guitarist a high-octane canvas on which to paint. It's followed by Lehman and Finlayson trading terrific phrases, and ends with a head-spinning rush.

This is deeply modern music, with a sense of chamber-esque sophistication and interplay that is buoyed by the improvisational rigor of jazz. Ellman's gift for clear-eyed melody gives the music on *Radiate* something unique, indelible and fully human.

—Peter Margasak

**Radiate:** Supercell; Furthermore; Rhinocerisms; Moment Twice; A Motive; Skeletope; Vibrograph; Enigmatic Runner. (45:25)

**Personnel:** Liberty Ellman, guitar; Steve Lehman, alto saxophone; Jonathan Finlayson, trumpet; Jose Davila, tuba, trombone; Stephan Crump, bass; Damion Reed, drums.

**Ordering info:** [pirecordings.com](http://pirecordings.com)