

Bio information: **HENRY KAISER / ANTHONY PIROG / TRACY SILVERMAN / JEFF SIPE / ANDY WEST**  
Title: ***FIVE TIMES SURPRISE*** (Cuneiform Rune 448) |  
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FILE UNDER: **JAZZ / ROCK / EXPERIMENTAL**

***Five Times Surprise* brings together five distinguished improvisers who all boast exceptionally diverse resumes. Together they reveal a vast universe of possibilities fueled by creative conflagration and genre blurring.**

Over the course of his 300+ albums as leader/co-leader, the prolific West Coast-based guitarist **Henry Kaiser** never ceases to jolt with his epiphanies of improvisation as a solo act or in the context of a collective where the group itself takes top billing. In the case of ***Five Times Surprise***, Kaiser doesn't serve as leader but an integral element in a striking electric cooperative endeavor.

Even though the shared outing got its name from a random band name generator, *Five Times Surprise* couldn't be a better appellation for the high-spirited quintet that features five masters of the free that revel in their ability to marvel into the unknown on their eponymous Cuneiform Records release. From found acoustic folk tunes in Madagascar and Norway to his multiple *Yo Miles!* electric recordings with avant trumpeter **Wadada Leo Smith**, Kaiser has said, his goal in all his multifarious projects has been to experiment and discover. "It's always an experimental science project," he said, then listed the salient qualities of his fellow "space gods" in flight with him: the ability to listen, kindness, generosity, and—rare in this electric realm—a sense of humor. All those factors were at work on this new recording.

*Five Times Surprise* comprises a wealth of six-stringers: Kaiser on guitars and effects; his friend unorthodox guitarist **Anthony Pirog**; six-string bassist **Andy West** who was a founding member of the **Dixie Dregs** (formed in the '70s and steeped in hard, southern rock with a heavy-meets-classical sound); and renowned fusion six-string electric violinist **Tracy Silverman** who worked with **Turtle String Quartet** and **Bach to the Future** and progressively beyond. (Hence the groove-to-drive tune in the collection "24 Liars" intensified by the 24 strings of the band.)

Add volcanic drummer **Jeff Sipe** to the mix and you get the full background to the formation of the band that managed to record three hours of intense and complex music that owes something to the influence to **John McLaughlin's** pioneering jazz-fusion band **Mahavishnu Orchestra**. "It's not a tribute to John and the group," Kaiser says. "It's our personal experiences of that music that resulted in the processes that brought us all together. We all loved that music. All the 5XS tunes are originals that we collectively wrote, except for one Mahavishnu cover, 'You Know You Know' [from 1971's *Inner Mounting Flame*]."

Kaiser explains how the *Five Times Surprise* project came together. He attended **McLaughlin's 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension** band concert in its final American tour in September 2017 at the Warfield Theater in San Francisco. He had been invited to the soundcheck and then a hang backstage during the show. That's where he met Sipe for the first time. They had never come into contact before, even though they knew of each other and shared the special pleasure of having worked together with the late fusion guitarist **Shawn Lane**. Sipe was playing drums with the opener **Jimmy Herring** that evening. He also played drums in the special set of Mahavishnu Orchestra material with both McLaughlin and Herring. It was the unusual feature of that final USA tour. "Jeff walked in and we had a spontaneous big hug, and we both said at the same time: we should make an album together," Kaiser reminisces. "The next night in L.A., Andy came and the two of us said let's make a record with Jeff. As it turns out, Andy and the Dixie Dregs used to play Mahavishnu covers."

This led to an invite to a Nashville studio, courtesy of Kaiser's pal, producer **Ed Pettersen**. Kaiser enlisted his D.C./Maryland guitar pal Pirog to join in and then there was the suggestion by Pettersen to bring Silverman aboard given his electric violin prowess and improvisational imagination. "Terry has such an unbelievable monster sound that it surprised all of us," Kaiser said. "His solo on 'You Know I Know' was amazing. Andy said that he had always wanted to record a Mahavishnu Orchestra tune, and that is something that requires a band to do an impeccably difficult job. Jeff got the drums right because it has a tricky rhythm. We had to all do it right."

The song has a lyrical quality with short stops and starts, a rhythmic riff throughout and a power-packed drum/guitar duet at the close. It's one of the highlights of *Five Times Surprise*. Another noteworthy piece is the uptempo, dramatic, aggressive opener, "Haboob," named for the violent and oppressive sandstorms that originated in Sudan but have also been more frequent in recent times to Arizona where West lives. The tune is best played at high volume. The original improvisation went on for 20 minutes but for the album has been shaved down to 10.

There are long assaults, including the grinding and fierce “Slicer,” the mysterious and at times jazz rocking “Torch Shadows,” and the finale, “Maneki Neko,” the 13-minute excursion named after the Japanese feline good luck charm. It’s spirited and high-energy with shifting tempo interludes and the lyrical beauty of the coda.

The band also delivers shorter pieces, including the high-energy “Why Starfish Why” with its terrific bass/drum grooves and great guitar conversations and crossfires. (Despite Kaiser’s passion as a deep-sea scientific diver in the U.S. Antarctica Program, he says the title has nothing to do with that.) Another tasty shorty is “A Realm of Paradise” that starts off as a calm meditation and flies with Silverman’s violin taking the lead with support from an effects tapestry of sound. The shortest piece, “My Brothers How’s,” clocks in at 1:45. The groove is sweet and the guitar-bass interplay is special. “This is a Jeff song with the bass line and rhythm,” Kaiser says. “But then we changed it, keeping the bass line and using our own melodies on top. Jeff really wanted to play that groove.”

Distinctively, most of the tunes shift gears mid-song, most prominently on “Earthshine.” It opens in a calm of the light colors of the aurora, then hurries into a forceful, even ominous stretch before another stretch of beauty, with acoustic guitar and harmonics and eBow acoustic guitar sonics. As for those shifts, Kaiser and co. made no plans. The flow just made themselves at home within the playing of a piece.

Working with two guitarists sharing space, Kaiser says, “It’s a piece of cake. A delicious piece of cake. I like playing with another guitar player. Partially because I can lay back into a support role and listen to Anthony, and we enjoy tossing the musical ball back and forth. Add the incredible electric six-string fiddle playing of Tracy to that, and it becomes a mirrored and time-warped fun house that is full of surprises.” As for the entire group playing, he says that it’s something like science-fiction, where there are newly imagined musical rules and strategies of fresh musical experimentation. “And this is what provides the surprise,” he says.

As a special surprise, **Five Times Surprise** has also released a 40-minute bonus CD that’s available to people who purchase the album from Cuneiform Records directly and is also a part of the digital release of the album. “Twilight of the Space Gods” is a full rock opera instrumental long-form sonic adventure, a novella of sorts with pockets of rock band kick and abrupt shifts and plenty of frenzied and distorted guitar playing.

***For more information on Five Times Surprise:***

<http://cuneiformrecords.com/bandshtml/fivetimessurprise.html>

**PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**

Digital [High-Resolution] images available at <http://cuneiformrecords.com/bandshtml/fivetimessurprise.html>

