



Bio information: **THE GREAT HARRY HILLMAN**

Title: **TILT** (Cuneiform Rune 433) Format: CD / DIGITAL

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FILE UNDER: **JAZZ / POST-JAZZ**

**THE GREAT HARRY HILLMAN GLEEFULLY HURDLE  
THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN JAZZ, ROCK, & IMPROV  
FOR A WINNING PERFORMANCE IN *TILT***

**Switzerland** doesn't produce many musical acts compared to other European countries, but the ones that do emerge are always of the highest quality. Whether it's the arty metal of **Celtic Frost** and **Coroner**, the witty pop of **Yello**, the clattery punk of **LiLiPUT**, or the airtight funk grooves of post-jazz ensemble **Nik Bärtsch's Ronin**, Swiss passports are a virtual guarantee that the music will be smart, engaging, and highly enjoyable.

**The Great Harry Hillman** is a Swiss post-jazz quartet—composed of **Nils Fischer** on reeds; **David Koch** on guitar and effects; **Samuel Huwyler** on bass; **Dominik Mahnig** on drums—from **Lucerne**, a lakeside city in the country's center. About the name: **Harry Hillman** was an American hurdler who received three gold medals at the 1904 Summer Olympics, memorable as the first Olympics held outside Europe, in St. Louis. **The Great Harry Hillman**, the band, formed in 2009 - 105 years after Hillman's victory, a landmark noted by the band - and in 2015 won the **2015 ZKB Jazz Prize**. And yes, you're correct to assume that a European jazz band named in tribute to American athlete Harry Hillman is not your 'normal' jazz band adhering to staid standards. Since forming, this band of energetic Millennial musical iconoclasts have played nearly a hundred concerts, performing at jazz festivals and touring extensively across Northern Europe. They've recorded two previous albums, 2013's self-released **Livingston** and 2015's **Veer Off Course**, released by the German label **Klaeng records**. Now they've joined the **Cuneiform Records** roster for their third release, **Tilt**.

**The Great Harry Hillman**'s music combines jazz, rock, and improv into a subdued, layered, yet thrilling sound that will appeal to fans of bands like **Radian** or **Tortoise**, as well as modern jazz artists like **Mary Halvorson** and **Nik Bartsch's Ronin**. Mahnig's drumming is light but emphatic, his snare ticking like a fine watch as he sets up shifting rhythms that clatter and bounce. Koch's guitar work is often as much about atmosphere as riffs, though he can get loud at times; at the climax of "**354**," his guitar is a **Sonic Youth**-like clang, as Fischer erupts into long screams. Huwyler's bass is almost dubby at times, maintaining a subtle but powerful presence that gives even the group's most abstract pieces ("**Agnes fliegt**") a solid core. And while Fischer is often playing the most overtly melodic role, he's just as happy to step into the background and simply comment on the others' interactions.

**The Great Harry Hillman** thinks of itself as a collective, with nobody dominating the creative process and everyone making their voice heard. "We have music from all four bandmembers on the album," say the musicians, who speak as one. "Everyone brings tunes, fragments, et cetera, and we finalize every song together. Everything is a collective decision at the end." This philosophy has helped them to create a sound like no one else, one that has gradually mutated over time while retaining its essence. "Although we all have different backgrounds and work in different genres, it is very important that we are always open to any kind of influences from each of us."

Their open-mindedness and exploratory spirit extends beyond the music to every aspect of their existence as a band. Their live performances have energy and a sense of fun that keeps the complexity of the compositions and interplay from feeling dry or academic. And the same goofy exuberance can be seen in their band photos—which cleverly continue allusions to sports—and in their wildly creative YouTube videos. The 360\* video that they created to accompany **Tilt** is an artistic and technical tour-de-force that one viewer compared to a **Danny Elfman** movie. **The Great Harry Hillman** know that while music is an art, fueled by internal creative fires, they also know that music, like sports, is also entertainment, and like sports requires skill, practice, determination and an enjoyable, winning performance to succeed.

The songs come wrapped in obscure titles like “**The New Fragrance**,” “**How to Dice an Onion**,” and “**Moustache**,” and those are just the ones in English. While they flow seamlessly together, each piece has its own identity. “We wanted every song to have its own strong mood,” they say. “It was not the idea to feature extended solos, but to feature a strong sound as a band.”

The album also has a strong live feel; while the sounds are electronically manipulated at times, this is music made by four men in a room. This is made most obvious on “How to Dice an Onion,” which ends with laughter and studio dialogue. “We thought a lot about how we could put the energy and vibe we create live into a recording, and it turned out very well,” say the band.

Indeed, *Tilt* is **The Great Harry Hillman**’s best work to date: a quiet but powerful album by four thoughtful musicians who are more than capable of rocking out when they feel like it, but would more often than not rather wrap the listener in delicately constructed sonic webs of indefinable beauty. There are no gold medals in music (unless gold records count), but **The Great Harry Hillman** deserve a spot on the artistic podium for sure.

#### **BAND MEMBER BIOS: THE GREAT HARRY HILLMAN**

##### **NILS FISCHER**

is a saxophone and bass clarinet player with a taste for low frequencies. He likes playing different styles of jazz. Born in 1988 in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, he took saxophone lessons with **Andreas Krennerich** at **Musikschule Germersheim**. In 2008 he moved to Lucerne for his jazz studies, where he studied under **Urs Leimgruber**, **Reto Suhner** and **Frank Möbus**, who deeply influenced his musical personality. In July 2013, he received his **Master of Performance** degree from **Lucerne School of Music** and in February 2015, his **Master of Pedagogy**. His working band is **The Great Harry Hillman** (w. David Koch – Guitar; Samuel Huwyler – Bass and Dominik Mahnig – Drums), which has been playing tours throughout Europe since 2009. In spring 2015, the group won the **ZKB – Jazzpreis (Moods)**. Nils Fischer is also a sideman with numerous groups, including **Laurent Méteau’s Metabolism**, **Marena Whitcher’s Shady Midnight Orchestra**, **Blaer**, and **Raphael Jost and Lots of Horns**, and others.

##### **DAVID KOCH**

was born in 1988 in Sursee, Switzerland. He has always lived out his musical interests in intensive stages. Growing up the son of a classical flautist, he was surrounded by classical music during his childhood. Between the ages of 10 and 20, he played the flute on the road for the Irish folk and klezmer group **Planxty Irwin**. During this time he began to play the guitar. Starting with klezmer, he discovered and was inspired by the work of **John Zorn** and the music of the New York downtown avant-garde. This led to his jazz training at the **Lucerne School of Music**, where he was hugely influenced by **Kurt Rosenwinkel**, **Gerry Hemingway** and especially, **Frank Möbus**, with whom he completed his master’s training. Committed to the indie rock band **Book On Shelves**, he began to explore and appreciate the sound aesthetics and possibilities of pop music. In addition to his work as a guitarist, Koch is also a sound engineer and DIY researcher who tackles all of his projects with intensity and passion. He has a whole range of effects equipment, which he modified or built himself to ensure that he has all of the sound options he needs, even in live situations. Koch is a member of **The Great Harry Hillman** and has launched his latest project, the duo **VSITOR**, alongside **Lea Fries**.

##### **SAMUEL HUWYLER**

uses his creativity as a source for his work in both music and graphics. Born in 1988 in Endingen, Switzerland as the son of a jazz drummer, music surrounded him permanently. Musical instruments and drawing utensils evoked his passion to implement and present his ideas in his early years. After 4 years of lessons in classical guitar he discovered the electric guitar and quickly founded his first rock band, **TRD**, which is still active. Fascinated by string instruments, he changed to electric bass at 16; this was the crucial point for his later studies at **Hochschule Luzern**. **Wolfgang Zwiauer**, **Uli Heinzler** and **Heiri Känzig** influenced his career as a bass player. In 2013 he received his **Master of Arts – Major Performance Jazz**. The **Aargauer Kuratorium** awarded him with a grant in 2015. Currently Huwyler tours with his working band **The Great Harry Hillman (ZKB Jazzprice 2015)**, as well as with **Laurent Méteau’s Metabolism** and other European projects.

##### **DOMINIK MAHNIG**

was born into a musical family in Willisau, Switzerland in 1989. He has been fascinated by drums since birth and is a recurring winner of the **Swiss Drummer Competition**. His first contact with jazz was a solo concert by **Cecil Taylor**. Taylor’s intuitive and energetic playing left its mark on the young drummer, as did subsequent concerts by other artists at the **Willisau Jazzfestival**. After receiving his Bachelor degree in Lucerne, he moved to Cologne for his Master Studies. In Cologne, his groovy and powerful playing was expanded by this German hotspot’s sensitive musical style, which expanded his music with an important versatility. He studied with **Gerry Hemingway**, **Frank Gratkowski**, **Jonas Burgwinkel** and many more. In addition to **The Great Harry Hillman**, Mahnig plays with the **Zoom Trio**, **Die Fichten**, and **Tamara Lukasheva Quartett**. He has performed with **Mark Dresser**, **Simon Nabatov**, **Robert Landfermann**, **Matthias Schubert** and numerous other artists. In 2013, Mahnig was awarded Germany’s **Wilhelm-Fabry price Hilden** for a strong creative statement.

*For more information on The Great Harry Hillman:*

Twitter: [@tgharryhillman](https://twitter.com/tgharryhillman)

[www.thegreatharryhillman.com](http://www.thegreatharryhillman.com) - [www.facebook.com/thegreatharryhillman](https://www.facebook.com/thegreatharryhillman) - [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)

*“The Great Harry Hillman – the current definition of what it means to be a new young modern jazz band in these times. Four very strong individual musicians come together to create an extremely personal style of music that could only exist through time invested band chemistry. From fragile melodies, twisted grooves, to massive band climaxes, they deliver flawless and exciting music.”*  
- Jim Black, 2015

**PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available on the *The Great Harry Hillman* page @ [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)

