



Light: The Early Years (1975-1989)
William Hooker (NoBusiness)
by Philip Freeman

Drummer William Hooker has been a fixture on the New York music scene for four decades, bouncing between the worlds of free jazz, avant-rock and liminal in-between zones of his own devising. In recent years, he's developed a relationship with the Lithuanian NoBusiness label, releasing three albums since 2010: the double LP *Earth's Orbit*, which featured alto saxophonist Darius Jones on one of its two discs; *Crossing Points*, an archival recording of a 1992 duo with the late saxophonist Thomas Chapin; and *Live At Vilnius Jazz Festival*, a duo with Lithuanian saxophonist Liudas Mockūnas. Now, NoBusiness has compiled this four-CD set, which gathers Hooker's early, self-released LPs alongside two-and-a-half discs' worth of previously unreleased performances. It's not only a tribute to his thunderous, explosive style and indomitable artistic spirit, but also a companion to similar boxed sets the label has devoted to the work of saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc and bassist William Parker.

Hooker's first release, *...Is Eternal Life*, is spread across the first CD and half of the second. A double LP originally issued on his own Reality Unity Concepts label in 1977, it opens with "Drum Form (Wings/Prophet of Dogon/Still Water/Desert Plant/Tune)", an 18-minute side-long solo on which Hooker plays the drums, chants, sings and generally goes all out in an expressionistic eruption straight from the Loft Era. The next two pieces, "Soy: Material/Seven" and "Passages (Anthill)", are also epic in length and find the drummer doing battle with saxophonist David S. Ware, then fresh out of his own trio Apogee and soon to join Cecil Taylor's Unit. On "Soy", electric bassist Mark Miller serves as intermediary/sacrificial lamb; "Passages" is a duo, every bit as unremitting and ferocious as one might expect. His second album, 1982's *Brighter Lights*, is also included here; the first two pieces, "Others (Unknowing)" and "Patterns I, II and III" are duos with little-known saxophonist Alan Braufman while "3 & 6/Right" pairs Hooker with pianist Mark Hennen, who was an early member of Jemeel Moondoc's Muntu, as well as the long-running Collective 4tet.

It's the previously unreleased material that's the most interesting, though; that includes the nearly 19-minute "Present Happiness" with Moondoc on alto saxophone and Hasaan Dawkins on tenor and an hour-long performance from 1988 featuring the late trumpeter Roy Campbell and tenor saxophonist Booker T. Williams. It's clear from this boxed set that Hooker doesn't like chords getting in between him and the other musicians—he prefers to stand toe-to-toe, metaphorically speaking, with a horn player (or a guitarist) or two and give as good as he gets until whatever they're doing has run its course and the improvisers who do best with/against him are those who can operate on an intellectual and a gut level at once. But even solo, his performances have a musicality and cohesion more Max Roach than Sunny Murray and command the listener's attention even at lengths that might initially seem forbidding. Hooker is a titan behind the kit and this boxed set is no less tribute than he deserves.

For more information, visit nobusinessrecords.com. Hooker curates and is at *The Stone* Feb. 9th-14th. See Calendar.

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