



## "Erta Ale" (PNL Records, 2014) CD, LP & Cassette

Website <http://www.paalnilssen-love.com/>

Twitter [https://twitter.com/PNL\\_LargeUnit](https://twitter.com/PNL_LargeUnit)

Store <https://catalyticsound.com/>

Bandcamp <https://pnlrecords.bandcamp.com/>

Subradar Store <http://www.subradar.no/>

SoundCloud <https://soundcloud.com/actionjazz>

**Selected Reviews**

## By John Fordham in The Guardian

Paal Nilssen-Love Large Unit: Erta Ale review – a percussion juggernaut

Like most free-jazz specialists, the prodigious Norwegian drums virtuoso Paal Nilssen-Love is often heard with small bands, but he has powered bigger ensembles with the eclectic American Ken Vandermark and the German sax legend Peter Brötzmann, and last year formed the 11-piece Large Unit featured on the mix of studio and live takes on this box set. As with Brötzmann's Tentet, there's a shrewdly struck balance between collective hollering and delicate miniatures for soloists and subgroups, and clear throwbacks to John Coltrane's larger-group explorations in the 1960s. But Nilssen-Love is a sophisticated thinker as well as a terrifying percussion juggernaut, and this music is distinctively his. Saxophonist Klaus Holm, trombonist Mats Äleklint and fellow drummer Andreas Wildhagen quietly stir multiphonic musings and a slew of quiet percussion variations into the three intimate Birdbox tracks; Fendika is a catchy tuba hook that swells into a Coltranesque anthem; three takes of Round About Nothing span wary group negotiations and blustering staccato gallops; and Erta Ale is a dark, low-brass gabble that becomes an improv reverie stitched together by long alto-sax tones and nimble pizzicato bass. The band plays London's Cafe Oto on 1 and 2 May, and on this evidence it will be a mind-bending experience. [Source](#)

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## By Enrico Bettinello in All About Jazz

Il batterista norvegese Paal Nilssen-Love è (giustamente) famoso per due cose. Per essere uno dei più straordinari strumentisti della sua generazione e per essere anche uno dei musicisti più attivi nel proporre -e documentare in modo quasi ossessivo-le tante facce della sua intensa attività di improvvisatore.

Come molti colleghi, anche Nilssen-Love (che suona con i The Thing, con gli Atomic e con Peter Brötzmann, tra le tante formazioni) ha focalizzato la propria attenzione su una formazione allargata. Come Ken Vandermark, che, ricordiamo, ha investito parte della cospicua somma derivante dalla vittoria della MacArthur Fellowship nelle prove e nel sostentamento della sua Territory band. Come l'amico Mats Gustafsson, che sta squassando i palchi che se lo possono permettere con l'energia della mastodontica Fire! Orchestra. Come il Chicago Tentet di Brötzmann.

La Large Unit di Nilssen-Love include undici musicisti scandinavi e si muove su terreni che il batterista frequenta da sempre: quelli a cavallo tra la libera improvvisazione, l'accumulo energetico post-punk/noise, la lacerazione elettronica, l'interazione tra materiale preordinato e quello del tutto inaspettato. Ci sono momenti di furiosa forza collettiva alternati a altri di tipo più astratto e cameristico, spesso affidati a gruppi ristretti di musicisti. C'è un forte senso della materia sonora, della sua centralità pur nella varietà delle situazioni che si vengono a creare. Il box include 3 dischi, che testimoniano sia l'attività in studio che quella dal



vivo. Tre documenti brucianti, intensi, adrenalini e a tratti non facili. Ma che ci raccontano la possibilità di condividere pratiche musicali trasversali, che parlano di libertà, della voglia di scardinare qualche regola (la rivoluzione non è forse più tra le priorità) e di spostare ogni volta, anche di poco, il punto di vista di chi la musica la fa e la fruisce. Beni comuni! [Source](#)

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## **By Tim Owen in Dalston Sound**

Paal Nilssen-Love is the most kinetic of drummers. His freewheeling energy seems to be fuelled by his motion, rather than vice-versa. Add to that his power, spontaneity and apparently innate musicality. Few can match him, though he can be complemented, as he was by the comparatively easeful intensity of Michael Zerang for the latter-day outings of the Peter Brotzmann Chicago Tentet.

Nilssen-Love's self-descriptive Large Unit is an undectet (11-piece) vehicle for his own original compositions, and he's obviously selected its members with equal care. It's less raw-sounding than Brotzmann's group and, despite the titular emphasis on unity, it's often broken down into smaller sub-groups, the better to exploit its full dynamic potential.

Erta Ale, named after a geographical region that's equally prone to igneous ejaculation, comes quickly after the Unit's too-brief First Blow, and it's more of the same, but in a bigger package. You can take it two ways; either as a triple CD set, or, if you pay double, as four 12" slabs of vinyl plus a CD and a flexidisc. Either way, it's a meaty proposition.

There are 17 tracks in total on Erta Ale (only 16 on CD). Half were recorded live in Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim during a Jan/Feb 2014 tour of Norway, the other half "on location" in a Trondheim studio. The vinyl edition bonus CD – same as the third disc in the CD set – presents four alternative performances recorded six months later at Moers Jazzfestival. The only track missing from the CD set (unless there's something worthwhile on the flexi) is a live version of "Slow Love" featuring Lasse Marhaug, which would've fit onto the first disc of the CD edition. Its omission is disappointing, since Marhaug is a notable presence and a wildcard operator, adding grit to the grain with turntable and electronics.

On the main body of work, the studio cuts are interspersed with live performances, all of equally clean audio fidelity. The Live at Moers disc – comprising four pieces, each around fifteen minutes long – is a tad more raw, but actually presents a pretty neat encapsulation of the Unit's method of operation.

"Round About Nothing IV" begins with a rude fanfare of brass and horns, all punching through a loose scree of turntablism and electric strings. After the percussionists enter and tangle with bassists, individual voices in the frontline take turns to soliloquise as

the group texture breaks down. The saxophonists are loquacious, the brass players more guttural, drawing the collective momentum down prior to a passage of abrasive, free-form electric guitar.

After such a restlessly discursive start, “Fortar Hardar II” powers in emphatically on a bass/drum ostinato that’s soon bolstered by riffing unison horns. When baritone sax starts to trawl the depths of the groove and Marhaug turns irruptive, the Unit’s concerted momentum is sustained until six minutes in, when there’s a sudden spotlight on the Unit’s sole cornetist, Thomas Johansson. Instead of the expected return to full-bore, the other players make only stabbing, percussive sorties, fizzling out into fitful flurries of muted trombone. The bass/drum ostinato is re-insinuated only at the death, lifting the group into a final unison recap of the tune’s thematic riff.

“Austin Birds” begins blue ‘n’ bruised, with Ornettish alto sax prominently solo amid less orthodox, even slightly unhinged group interplay. Later, following a middle passage of vocalised brass and scraped-string textures, there’s some scrabbly harmolodic guitar studded by brass-strafered percussion. It all hangs together, ending with a coda for solo trumpet that successfully encapsulates the texture of the whole.

“Culius” begins with pile-driving unison riffs and raw dis/connects of distortion, but soon bursts into a powerfully funk-inflected, brass-bolstered vamp that breaks first into a loping, almost musclebound groove, then into massed noise ending in a welter of feedback-scored dual-kit percussion. It’s one of the few pieces here that’s reminiscent of Nilssen-Love’s work with The Thing.

The drummer’s compositions reflect his playing style, in which sustained flurries of frenetic activity are punctuated by oases of acute sonic sensitivity, and punchy rhythmic are offset by textural, a-rhythmic sound-painting. Remarkably, the Large Unit’s considerable resources are bought into play on those pieces with a similarly responsive acuity, and all the economy of a much smaller entity. [Source](#)

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### **By Bill Meyer in *Dusted Magazine***

Nothing announces significance quite like releasing a triple-disc set (also available as a download, four cassettes, or a box set with four LPs, one CD and one flexi disc) by your biggest band ever. It’s not like Norwegian-born, globetrotting drummer Paal Nilssen-Love hasn’t been showing the world his merits for a long time now. If you’re a Scandinavian, you might first have caught Nilssen-Love when he was still a kid, part of the generation that Frode Gjerstad took under his wing to make sure he had musicians in his own land that could deal with free jazz. Elsewhere in Europe, he might have first crossed your bow approximating atom bomb explosions with Mats Gustafsson or swinging madly with Atomic. If you live in the U.S., you might first have seen him as one half of the skinhead rhythm section that put rocket fuel in Ken Vandermark and

Jeb Bishop's collective tank with the quartet School Days. More recently, you might have encountered him with Peter Brötzmann, Joe McPhee, members of The Ex or so many others that no website-keeper can tally an accurate count.

As an instrumentalist, Nilssen-Love's gifts boil down to this: He applies a rigorously worked-out awareness of the structure-imposing and time-dividing possibilities of the trap drum kit and exerts a force of will and unerring instinct for the essential that makes hard strikes and restrained strokes register with equal intensity. Anyone who brings him on board is recruiting an unshrinking contributor, not a mere sideman, and the ensembles where he is an established equal partner — such as Ballister or The Thing — thrive on the clash of strong musical personalities. Nilssen-Love's nerve has also been evident when he takes the reins; you don't ask Evan Parker to be in your band unless you expect a lot from yourself as well.

Until now, Nilssen-Love has led small combos engaged in free improvisation and has not asserted himself as a composer or big band leader. Still, passing the potential mid-point of life — Nilssen-Love turned 40 at the end of 2014 and recorded *Erta Ale* in January and February of the same year — can inspire a person to step up his game, and that seems to be the case here. Nilssen-Love has put together his biggest and most ambitious ensemble to date and brought to it a set of compositions that serve an ambitious mission. Most of the players in *Large Unit*, which is 11 strong including the leader, are probably new to non-Scandinavians; to date, only Lasse Marhaug (electronics, turntables) and Jon Rune Strøm (bass) have accumulated many international touring miles. This group is expressly designed to put the spotlight on a newer talent, and the material that Nilssen-Love has composed for them creates situations likely to bring out their collective strengths.

His tunes recall those of one of his longest-running collaborators, Ken Vandermark. Swings between stoutly built riffs are spring-loaded for soloing. Fields of open space require subgroups to make sense of the immediate situation in a way that connects the structures on either side. There's plenty of high-energy action across *Erta Ale*'s 16 tracks, which include multiple performances of pieces that differ drastically from each other; the compositions invite players to imagine the music anew each time rather than work out detailed variations upon a theme. There's enough variation from one long piece to the next that this review could spend the rest of your day unpacking the changes.

So instead, let's consider just a few. On the second disc's version of "Culius," Marhaug's electronics spew a coal-black cloud of noise, which parts from the history-steeped references from the more jazz-oriented players. Klaus Ellerhusen Holm's alto saxophone cuts through it like a beam from late 1970s New York, particularly the moment when Arthur Blythe donned a bowler and reasserted the virtue of soulfulness; Thomas Johnsson's cornet leads from imperious post-bop velocity to growling that references the early decades of the Ellington Orchestra. It's everything you might want from in a century-spanning big band performance. "Birdbox," on the other hand, is a framework for improvisation that speaks in non-jazz tongues. It is a subdued environment that invites a single instrumentalist to make something from near-

silence. On one version, second drummer Andreas Wildhagen brings to mind visions of a cold breeze sweeping through a scrapyard, but on another, Holm coaxes his fellow horns into a conversation of uneasy squelches and protestations.

Nilssen-Love doesn't exactly draw attention to himself as a drummer, although his management of energy flow and dynamics is key to the music's emotional ebb and flow. But his place in these performances corresponds to his place in improvised music today. He's not only making it happen; he is keeping it going by creating a continuum in which the clashing and mixing of personalities, genres, sounds and scenes is the stuff of creation, and he is an instigator and guide. It's not the size of this set that proves Nilssen-Love's significance; it's the space he gives to the right people, and what they do with it. [Source](#)

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## **By Burning Ambulance**

Erta Ale included in the magazine's "Best Jazz of 2014" list.

Legendary Scandinavian out-jazz drummer Paal Nilssen-Love, probably best known for his work in The Thing and many collaborations with Peter Brötzmann (including the Chicago Tentet), has formed a new band: the 11-piece Large Unit, which also includes Thomas Johansson on cornet and flugelhorn; Mats Äleklint on trombone; Kasper Værnes on soprano and alto saxophone; Klaus Ellerhusen Holm on alto and baritone saxophone; Børre Mølstad on tuba; Ketil Gutvik on electric guitar; Lasse Marhaug on turntable and electronics; Jon Rune Strøm and Christian Meaas Svendsen on double and electric bass; and Andreas Wildhagen on drums & percussion. They've just released a three-CD box (also available as a four-LP set), *Erta Ale*, on Nilssen-Love's own PNL label. (Buy it (\$25 for CD, \$50 for vinyl) from Catalytic Sound.)

It's a mixture of studio and live material, with the third disc containing a full set from the 2014 Moers Festival. The two main discs feature paintings by Nilssen-Love's father Terry as cover art, and the set comes with two booklets: one with liner notes by Audun Vinger, and one with photos by Peter Gannushkin (including the shot above). It may seem presumptuous for a band to put out a box so early in its lifespan, but the Chicago Octet/Tentet did the same thing, with their eponymous 1998 three-disc set on Okka Disk. And like that set, *Erta Ale* is both subtler and less overwhelming than one might expect. As might be expected, with a double rhythm section, electric guitar, and legendary noise master Marhaug in the lineup, this is not your typical big band, though it has its swinging moments, nor is it a "traditional" large-scale free jazz group in the bombastic, blaring vein of Michael Mantler's Jazz Composers Orchestra or William Parker's Little Huey Orchestra. Indeed, while it's a frequently raucous and quite noisy unit, with a hard-charging energy reminiscent of Charles Mingus crossed with the Melvins, there are numerous passages where individual instrumentalists take lengthy and at times quite meditative and exploratory solo turns. And given the fact that most

of the players are not nearly as well-known internationally as Nilssen-Love, he's to be commended for providing them with such a superb platform. [Source](#)

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### **By Tim Niland in Music and More**

Located in Ethiopia, Erta Ale is one of the most continuously active volcanoes on Earth. And is a fine name for this opening album by a new band of one of the most respected drummers in jazz, Paal Nilssen-Love. He was a mainstay of the famous Peter Brotzmann Tentet, and when that group was retired, he took up the mantle of very carefully putting a large band together with some of the finest Scandinavian musicians. Developed over the last 12 months the band began to mature, and the fruits of their labor are this is a three-disc set where two of the discs are studio/live mixes and one was performed live at Moers. All compositions are by Nilssen-Love, but the musicians are given great freedom to contribute their own flavors to the music. The music is a commanding powerhouse when being played as a full unit, but they are completely capable of breaking out into smaller units or solo spots within the band as a whole. There is a trust and a democratic nature that allows it to live and breathe a way that many other bands are not able to do. That democratic nature allow the music to ebb and flow, use dynamics and seemingly at times thermodynamics especially in the live settings, where their relation to energy and work is astounding and heat and temperature developed by the band particularly by the pushing and pulling by Nilssen-Love who is so supremely confident and completely in control of the music is very impressive. To begin the recorded history of a band with a three disc boxed set is an audacious move, but it pays off quite well. This is a very exciting band who makes excellent music, reveling in the moment where the energy and pressure created by the music can create something unexpected, the sound of surprise, and that great freedom to contribute their own ideas to the leader's own drives the success of this recording and leaves the listener wanting more and wondering what more could they possibly do for an encore? Nilssen-Love was in charge of the music from pillar to post choosing the musicians, the material, producing the album and releasing at in his own label in a heavy box, colorful sleeves, a booklet of liner notes and a booklet of photography. It was a Herculean task and a classy set through and through. [Source](#)

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### **By Spencer Grady in the Jazzwise Magazine**

Sluice your magma chambers – because Paal Nilssen-Love's 11-piece band hasn't just named their formidable box set after an eternally-active Ethiopian volcano, they've harnessed the lava bombs and sent them vaulting over the ozone. The drummer's formative experiences with Peter Brötzmann's Chicago Tentet and Frode Gjerstad's Circulazione Totale Orchestra undeniably impact on the full-blast ratio; mobocracies of

molten chaos blossom into welters of hellish cat-calls as jive rifts sling salvos of supremely low-slung swing. Ataxias of semi-composed sax scramble are jettisoned by Lasse Marhaug's coruscating coordinates, the electronics saboteur dishing clean slates, allowing the collective to devolve into constituent parts, a chain of improvisatory workshops preventing Erta Ale from becoming just another extended white knuckle ride. On the title-track the group broker a suite of diverging tectonics in the aisles of a pachinko parlour before detonating another plum in the guise of a wheezy carp. Nilssen-Love says this is just the beginning. Expect more thunder, more pyros and bucketfuls of BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! [Source](#)

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### **By Stephen Graham in Marlbank**

The release of Large Unit's Erta Ale (PNL Records \*\*\*1/2) should have wide appeal, and justifiably so given the ideas here, to free jazz and improv followers of the Brötzmann school particularly, this 3-CD/4-LP box set from The Thing drummer Paal Nilssen-Love's 11-piece.

A relatively new band, set up less than 18 months ago with a live album already under their belts, this latest release comes in an attractively designed box, with a UK release date of 8 December, and gathers combined Large Unit live and studio material, following on from an earlier Moers release and features some concert material again from the German festival but recorded this summer.

The line-up – Thomas Johansson (cornet, flugelhorn), Mats Äleklint (trombone), Kasper Værnes (soprano saxophone, alto saxophone), Klaus Ellerhusen Holm (alto saxophone, baritone saxophone), Borre Mølstad (tuba), Ketil Gutvik (electric guitar), Lasse Marhaug (turntable, electronics), Jon Rune Strøm (electric bass, acoustic bass), Christian Meaas Svendsen (electric bass, acoustic bass), Andreas Wildhagen (drums, percussion), and Paal Nilssen-Love (drums, percussion) – is a fearsome unit at times, their collective squalling a wall of sound sometimes but shrinking to more intimate abstractions in sharp contrast.

The second 'Studio/Live' CD is the most brutal of all, appealing not quite so much to me, but the first and third discs are excellent and still pretty full-on. There are several versions of 'Round About Nothing' (how's that for a statement in the title in itself?) at least one on each of the three discs and 'Birdbox' with different featured soloists is a firm favourite of the Large Unit's too, as is the panoramic 'Culius,' the Moers version the pick. Nilssen-Love is a significant figure on the global jazz scene his anarchic multi-directional and punk stylings utterly unique and compelling and his compositional direction reaching a crunch point here. [Source](#)

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## By Henning Bolte in Written in Music

De Noorse drummer Paal Nilssen-Love (1974) is een centrale figuur in het veld van de vrije improvisatie en actief in groepen als The Thing en Atomic, Brötzmann Chicago Tentet, School Days, Scorch Trio, Duos en Trios met Mats Gustafsson, Peter Brötzmann, Stan Sandell, John Butcher, Ken Vandermark e.a.. Ook in Nederland is hij geen onbekende getuige zijn nauwe samenwerking met saxofonist Ab Baars en The Ex, i.h.b.de offshoot Lean Left (zie op Written In Music HIER). Hij maakt deel uit van een schare grote Noorse drummers met Jon Christensen als voortrekker in de jaren 60/70: Rune Arnesen, Erland Dahlen, Wetle Holte, Hans Hulbækmo, Terje Isungset, Per Oddvar Johansen, Kenneth Kapstad, Audun Kleive, Torsten Lofthus, Gard Nilssen, IMG\_9510 Helge Andreas Norbakken, Thomas Strønen, Andreas Wildhagen, Jarle Vespestad, Paolo Vinaccia, Ingar Zach. De Large Unit, 2013 voor het Molde Festival (verslag zie HIER) opgericht, is zijn eerste grotere groep bestaand uit tien jongere top-musici uit het onuitputtelijke Noorse reservoir aan talenten inclusief één van de sterkste jongere trombonisten die uit Zweden afkomstig is. Het zijn Jon Rune Strøm en Christian Meaas Svendsen, bas, Andreas Wildhagen en Paal Nilssen-Love, drums, Mats Åleklint, trombone, Klaus Holm, alto and baritone saxofoon, Bb klarinet, Kasper Værnes, alto saxofoon, Thomas Johansson, trompet, Børre Mølsted, tuba, Ketil Gutvik, gitaar, Lasse Marhaug, electronics.

Deze musici spelen zelf in een aantal bekendere, succesvolle groepen waaronder Ballrogg, Honest John (rietblazer Klaus Holm), Cortex (trompettist Thomas Johansson), Lana Trio (drummer Andreas Wildhagen), Mopti (drummer Andreas Wildhagen, bassist Christian Meaas Svendsen), Knyst! (drummer Andreas Wildhagen, rietblazer Kasper Værnes, bassist Christian Meaas Svendsen), Angles 9 en Je Suis! (trombonist Mats Åleklint).

Erta Ale is een box met drie Cd's elk met eigen cover, Liner Notes en een foto-boekje. 2 Cd's zijn studio-opnamen en op 1 cd staat een live-registratie van het concert dat de unit op het Moers Festival van 2014 gaf (verslag zie HIER en HIER).

De box bevat tien verschillende stukken waarvan de helft in meerdere versies zoals Birdbox, Austin Birds, Fortar Hardar, Round About Nothing I en Culus.

IMG\_1859 Live bezit deze groep een enorme compactheid, een groots, vitaal klankbeeld, al met al een magische gezamenlijkheid in verschil. Niet de glans van minutieus uitgevoerde arrangementen is hier kernmerk en trade mark. Het zijn de rubato kwaliteiten van individuele musici die hier langs denkbeeldige lijnen door het zand ploegen, elkaar wonderwel steeds vindend. De blazers verschijnen dikwijls als schuim op de kolkende golven. Soms slepen de twee drums achter de blazer-wolken aan dan weer vallen de blazers in de plooiën van de drum tapijten. Rauwe energie, schitterende vamps, een opjagende, vooruit duwende drive, dat is Large Unit. Met tegelijk een speciaal soort helderheid die door het rumoer heen straalt.

“In PNLU a lot of new things unite in strong and convincing shape, on a new level,

firing inside and outside, making a strong mark.” (Henning Bolte)

### **Over het Moers-concert:**

“The Moers performance started (...) in such full overdrive that it first seemed that all the richness of the layers would be swallowed or buried. But the opposite happened in a gripping way, working out overwhelmingly as it became a true brand. A crucial role was played by the powerful and lengthy soaring of baritone saxophonist Klaus Holm. The horn section—normally consists of trumpeter Thomas Johansson, trombonist Mats Äleklint Quartet, tubaist Børre Mølstad, and saxophonists Kasper Værnes and Klaus Holm—had to compensate for Äleklint, one of the most prolific young trombonists of the moment, who could not make it to this concert. Johansson, Mølstad, Værnes, and especially Holm, did it a bravura. They were carried and propelled, with heavy fire, by guitarist Ketil Gutvik, bassists Jon Rune Strøm and Christian Meaas Svendsen, and Andreas Wildhagen as a second drummer” (Henning Bolte, *All About Jazz*)

De aangeduide kwaliteiten komen vooral op de twee studio over, iets minder helaas op de bonus-cd met de live-registratie van het Moers-concert. Een deel van de ter plekke beleefbare dynamiek en klanksamenhang wordt door de brede donkerte van de twee bassen in het klankbeeld sterk gedempt.

Naast de stukken in fast forward stormende modus zijn er ook genoeg stukken en passages in andere modi, temperament en temperatuur. Het klinkt nergens kant en klaar maar het spel van vinden en verbinden is dusdanig dynamisch en spannend dat het het meeste gestroomlijnde verslaat. [Source](#)

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### **By Stewart Smith in The List**

#### **Renowned jazz drummer Paal Nilssen-Love delivers a sizzling three-disc album**

As the rhythmic engine behind The Thing and sideman to Peter Brötzmann and Ken Vandermark, Paal Nilssen-Love is one of the world's most exciting and inventive drummers. Large Unit is his new Scandinavian big band, comprising of two rhythm sections, copious horns, guitar and electronics.

Named after an Ethiopian volcano, Erta Ale is a massive three-disc eruption of high-octane skronk, brash riffs and abstract free improv moves. A standout among their big tunes is 'Culius' - Finnish for slab of meat - where full-blast horn salvos slap you round the chops while Lasse Marhaug's electronics drip hot fat and sizzling juices.

Out of this emerges a demented seventies cop show theme, all wailing sirens and hot-wired chase riffs, before it all rides off into the prairie night where burbling trombones

converse inquisitively with the lowing cows. Tremendous noisy fun, but not without stretches of lyricism or quiet exploration. [Source](#)

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## By Joacim Nyberg in Sound of Music

För bara några månader sedan kom debut-ep:n från Paal Nilssen-Loves Large Unit, en elvahövdad best med potential bortom det ordinära. Med Erta Ale har vi så fått den första fullängdaren i form av en läckert förpackad 3-cd-box med två booklets, en med liner notes och info och en med foton. De två första skivorna är en blandning av studio- och livematerial och den 3:e "bonus"-cd:n innehåller en konsert från jazzfestivalen i Moers i somras. Allt material på Erta Ale är skrivet av Paal Nilssen-Love och kvalitén på kompositionerna är direkt överraskande. Nilssen-Love undviker alla klichéer och risker som är förenade med att skriva för stora improviserande ensembler och skapar meningsfull musik som känns genomtänkt och anpassad till instrumentationen. Det känns inspirerat, kreativt och riktigt roligt att lyssna på.

Över de tre skivorna spelar Large Unit en uppsättning av kompositioner i flera versioner. Vissa blir som snarlika alternativa tagningar medan andra har stor variation. Det är något förvirrande att studio och live blandas på de två första skivorna, jag kan inte höra någon skillnad. Bortsett från någon förströdd applåd efter något särdeles flyhänt solo är det omöjligt att höra vilket som är inspelat framför publik och vilket som är inspelat bakom lyckta dörrar (inspelningsinfo finns dock i bookleten). Detta tolkar jag emellertid som ett gott tecken. Det innebär att det är välrepat, avslappnat, proffsigt och att ljudet är mäterligt bearbetat.

Jag måste säga att Erta Ale är jättebra. Som sagt blev jag positivt överraskad av hur fina kompositionerna är. Samspelet är också i toppklass, Large Unit låter verkligen som en enda stor enhet. Ensemblens största styrka är dock de personliga prestationerna. Man kan inte annat än imponeras av Andreas Wildhagens trumspel. Jag har njutit av det med Lana Trio och med Large Unit bidrar hans magiska touch med en lätthet som låter underbar tillsammans med Nilssen-Loves tyngd. Och på tal om tyngd så ligger Børre Mølstads tuba i botten och skapar både stabilitet och jordbävningar. Ketil Gutviks fulsnygga plonkiga gitarrspel för tankarna mer till Terrie Ex än till Derek Bailey. Det får mig att le. Men allra gladast blir jag av att höra Thomas Johanssons trumpet som har allt man vill ha av en modern trumpetare: fraser, linjer, spräck, sounds, men framför allt tonen och riktningen. Superbra.

Men. Tyvärr finns det också ett problem. Large Units största styrka, de personliga prestationerna, blir också dess största svaghet. Det känns som att saxofonisterna och basisterna ligger långt under de övrigas nivå och långt ifrån vad man kan förvänta sig i en ensemble av dessa mått. Saxofonisterna får mycket utrymme och med slickt, snudd på 80-talsdarrande sound och polerade musikhögskolelicks känns de något malplacerade i en ensemble som ständigt tänjer på gränserna. Basisterna låter lite

oinspirerade och rutinmässiga, det finns inget som väcker något direkt intresse. Att delar av ensemblen inte lyckas nå upp till samma nivå gör lyssningen ojämn. Jag slumrar till när det är sax- eller bassolo och vaknar igen när det är över. Denna obalans mellan underbara personliga prestationer och intetsägande dito är obegriplig. Men det är bara att acceptera, för det finns tillräckligt mycket njutning på Erta Ale som kompenserar för bristerna. Paal Nilssen-Love har all anledning att vara nöjd. [Source](#)

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## **By Patrick Wall in Free Times**

Paal Nilssen-Love is an essential lynchpin on the Scandinavian avant-jazz scene, and one of the most innovative, versatile and dynamic drummers in jazz. His curriculum vitae includes stints with abstract jazz titans Ken Vandermark, Pat Metheny, John Butcher and fellow Norwegian Frode Gjerstad; Columbia audiences will likely remember Nilssen-Love from his two 2014 performances – one with energy-jazz trio Ballister, and another with Gjerstad – if not for appearances with The Thing, which also starred Mats Gustafsson and Joe McPhee, and Rob Mazurek’s cosmic Starlicker trio.

With Large Unit, though, Nilssen-Love has put together his biggest and most ambitious ensemble to date, certainly in terms of sheer size – the group boasts two drummers, two bassists, two saxophonists, a three-piece brass section, a guitarist and an electronic musician. Grants from organizations like the Norwegian Arts Council, Norsk Jazzforum and Music Norway, Nilssen-Love says, makes touring with such a big group possible.

But the most radical thing about Large Unit is, possibly, its membership. Most Large Unit musicians are probably new to even the most avid avant-garde fans; of the 12-strong group touring the States, few outside of Nilssen-Love and bassist Jon Rune Strøm have accumulated any international touring miles. This group, comprising mainly Norwegians with a handful of Swedes and Danes and one Finn, is expressly designed to put the spotlight on the newest generation of Nordic talent.

“Art Blakey, he was always using young musicians and taking them on the road and, not teach them, but give them [the benefit of] his experience as an older player, more experienced player,” Nilssen-Love says. “It’s refreshing for the music.”

Large Unit’s compositions serve its ambitious mission, creating situations likely to bring out their collective strengths. More than an all-ballast white-knuckle ride, the music ranges from out electroacoustic sound work to driving modern European jazz. Composition and improvisation coexist as inseparable. The unit, when playing all together, generates a powerful noise, but the ensemble often subdivides into smaller, self-governing groups to connect fields of open space, swinging between stoutly built riffs spring-loaded for soloing. Nilssen-Love’s compositions reflect his playing style, in



which sustained flurries of frenetic activity are punctuated by textural, arrhythmic sound-painting.

But unlike Ballister or The Thing, Nilssen-Love doesn't draw attention to himself in Large Unit, though as a conductor his management of energy and dynamics is key to the music's ebb and flow. He is both instigator and facilitator. He's not just making music, but he's making it happen — creating a continuum in which the clashing and mixing of personalities, genres, sounds and scenes is the stuff of creation.

“It's about everyone on stage,” Nilssen-Love says. “It's not just about me. It's not a show-off group for me, this group, in the sense that you have a guy who's writing the compositions, conducting it, leading it. I want the other guys to shine. Sometimes, you do more by not playing.”

It's not the size of his Large Unit that proves Nilssen-Love's significance; it's the space he gives to the right people, and what they do with it. [Source](#)

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## **By Tor Hammerø. Stor, større, størst!**

Supertrommeslager Paal Nilssen-Love har jobba med mangt og mye, men neppe noe større og hippere enn hans eget Large Unit.

Large Unit - de tøffeste gutta i klassen.

Helt siden begynnelsen av 90-tallet har Paal Nilssen-Love stått fram som en våre aller mest ekspressive, kompromissløse og alltid like søkende musikanter. Også langt utenfor Harald og Sonjas grenser har han markert seg som en av frijazzens aller tøffeste og mest allsidige trommeslagere og sjøl om ikke gitarunikumet Pat Metheny ikke er mest kjent for sine frijazzekskursjoner, så er det verdt å legge merke til når han utropte Nilssen-Love som "Paal for President" etter en konsert de gjorde sammen i Molde på begynnelsen av 2000-tallet.

Til tross for at han har tilbrakt vel 20 år i det aller beste selskap, så venter Nilssen-Love likevel til julaften med å fylle 40 år. Når det gjelder julepresanger så deler han dem ut rundhåndet med "Erta Ale". Det er en boks med tre cder, to av dem live i studio og en live fra Moers-festivalen. Når den i tillegg er forseggjort på alle slags vis og med en forbilledlig og informativ covertekst av Audun Vinger, så sier det seg nesten sjøl at musikken Paal Nilssen-Loves nye, store band Large Unit gir oss, er av aller ypperste merke.

Large Unit har tatt mange trinn på kort tid.

Paal Nilssen-Love har spilt med "alle" og "alle" har spilt med han de seineste 20 åra. Da

han først fikk anledning til å sette sammen et nytt, stort band etter et initiativ fra Eldbjørg Raknes og hennes daværende musikalske og kulturelle veksthus Sjøbygda i Selbu nord for Trondheim og deretter med ytterligere fødselshjelp fra Moldejazz, så valgte han å gå helt nye veier for å sette sammen dette unike 11-manns bandet.

Med to trommeslagere, Andreas Wildhagen i tillegg til seg sjøl, to bassister - Jon Rune Strøm og Christian Meaas Svendsen, gitaristen Ketil Gutvik, støyartisten Lasse Marhaug, tubaisten Børre Mølstad, den eneste "utlendingen", Mats Äleklint på trombone, kornettisten og flügelhornisten Thomas Johansson og saksofonistene Klaus Ellerhusen Holm og Kasper Værnes, har Large Unit blitt til både et fantastisk og unikt band, men også mange band i bandet. Her skjer det så mye at sansene skal være skjerpa og vel så det for ikke å misse noe.

Nilssen-Love har skrevet all musikken og her får vi alt fra det frie og løse til det strukturerte, groovete, rytmiske tøffe og melodiske. Disse unge musikantene er så søkende, dyktige, sultne og allsidige at de gir musikken akkurat det Paal Nilssen-Love hadde hørt for seg, vil jeg tro.

Her er det en energi, vilje og evne som er sjelden og "Erta Ale" og Large Unit er den optimale bekræftelsen på at Paal Nilssen-Love er en musikanter, unnfanger, komponist og bandleder i verdensklasse. [Source](#)

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## By Guy Peters in Enola Magazine

“Fuck it, dan doen we ’t zelf!” Geen idee of het allemaal toeval is, maar het feit dat Mats Gustafsson en Paal Nilssen-Love redelijk kort na elkaar, en volgend op het opheffen van Brötzmanns Chicago Tentet, op de proppen komen met een eigen XL-band, daar gaat geen zinnig mens, laat staan een improliefhebber, over klagen. Nilssen-Love’s elfkoppige band bestaat nog maar sinds 2013, maar dat heeft hem er niet van weerhouden om nu al een driedubbele cd-box uit te brengen.

Een tijd geleden verscheen al de ep First Blow. In de recensie daarover verzuchtten we nog dat het goed klonk, maar aanvoelde als een proevertje dat deed uitkijken naar meer. Daar hebben we niet lang op moeten wachten, want Erta Ale is een bijzonder knap vormgegeven box (met artwork van Nilssen-Love’s schilderende vader Terry, een boekje met schitterende foto’s van Peter Gannushkin én nog eens eentje met even uitvoerige als entertainende liner notes van ene Audun Vinger) die een knoert van een statement maakt. Met drie cd’s, waarvan de derde een registratie is van het concert op het Moers Festival dit voorjaar. Het is niet enkel een visitekaartje dat een nieuwe generatie Noorse muzikanten op de kaart zet, maar misschien ook wel het moment waarop Nilssen-Love beseftte dat het tijd was om die voortrekkersrol op te nemen.

Hij is natuurlijk al jaren the hardest working man in free improv, die een tomeloze

werkethiek koppelt aan gedreven performances en een onstuitbare drive om de wereld rond te reizen en en passant ook nog een eigen label te runnen, waarop dit intussen de 25e release is. En daarvoor krijgt hij de hulp van collega-drummer Andreas Wildhagen, bassisten Jon Rune Strøm en Christian Meaas Svendsen, saxofonisten Kasper Værnes en Klaus Ellerhusen Holm, kornettist Thomas Johansson, trombonist Mats Åleklint (de enige Zweed in het gezelschap), tubaspeler Børre Mølstad, gitarist Ketil Gutvik (onlangs samen met Nilssen-Love nog op een release met Akira Sakata) en noisegoeroe Lasse Marhaug. Een betere bandnaam dan Large Unit was amper mogelijk.

Dit gezelschap fungeert immers als een echte eenheid, eentje die ruimte laat voor individuele schittermomenten ("Birdbox" passeert drie keer en is telkens een solomoment voor een andere muzikant), maar vooral uithaalt als een collectieve splinterbom. Daarbij wordt onvermijdelijk herinnerd aan het Chicago Tentet (zoals in het uitbundige fanfaredeel van "Austin Birds"), maar ook de "Territory Bands" van Ken Vandermark. Marhaug en Nilssen-Love maakten daar ooit nog deel van uit en exploreerden er ook de zones tussen vrije improvisatie, strak gearrangeerde composities en moderne elektronica en noise. Bij Nilssen-Love staat het instinct en de fysieke energie misschien iets sterker op de voorgrond, ook al is dit zeker geen box vol onophoudelijke krachtpatserij.

Integendeel, dit is allemaal wat meer overzichtelijk dan bij het Tentet (al is er ook volop ruimte voor volièregekwetter en andere geluidenbrouwsels) en er wordt ook regelmatig ruimte gelaten en zorgvuldig omgesprongen met structuur. Opener "Round About Nothing I", duidelijk verankerd in zowel vrije improvisatie als loodzware rockmuziek, probeert zo een evenwicht te zoeken tussen logische opbouw en passages waarbij muzikanten naast en over elkaar tuimelen, Marhaug een schurend noisescherm mag construeren en soms een imposante muur van geluid wordt opgetrokken, die ook weer afgebouwd wordt om een muzikant – in casu, Jervik – in z'n eentje de boel te laten ontregelen. In "Round About Nothing II" wordt dat dan weer gecounterd met een verpletterende finale die wél inzet op de totale muilpeer.

Gelukkig zet de band hier ook in op een enorme diversiteit, waardoor je het ene moment wordt meegesleurd in een verbasterde groove met ronkende baritonsax ("Fortar Hardar"), die plaats ruimt voor dansbare feestelijkheid ("Fendika") of, iets verderop, een stuk dat helemaal gesteund is op een repetitief strijkstokmotief van Meaas Svendsen ("Slow Love"). Of hoe een verrassend ingetogen klankenspel opgebouwd wordt met een minimum aan middelen en decibels. Meest meeslepend en opwindend (en dan is dat werkelijk om recht te springen, zo spannend) is de band echter tijdens "Culius", dat vermoedelijk al uitgegroeid is tot hét climaxmoment op concerten. Na de staccato-uithalen en de lawaaidemonstratie van Marhaug groeit het uit tot een uiteenwisseling van verschillende bands binnen de Unit. De versie van Moers klinkt misschien niet zo goed, maar knettert van de elektriciteit en rondt af met een verbluffende finale.

Pompende en schetterende blazers, kletterende drums en stuwende bassen, schurende noise en hakkende gitaar komen er samen in een explosieve soep die moet aangevoeld hebben als vertrappeld worden door een kudde olifanten. Het applaus

achteraf is dan ook navenant. Met een totale speelduur van iets meer dan drie uur is Erta Ale te veel van het goede om in één ruk uit te zitten, want het is een luisterbeleving die zich grotendeels afspeelt op zeer fysiek niveau. Maar als je dit loeihard door de living laat knallen, dan zorgt het bij momenten voor opwinding die normaal enkel door de beste rock-'n-roll wordt voortgebracht. Het startschot is gegeven, de toekomst ziet er goed uit. Dan rest er nog maar één vraag: wie slaagt er in om de bende naar België te halen? [Source](#)

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## **By Stuart Broomer in Point of Departure**

Few drummers have had the opportunity to play in big bands in a current idiom, but Paal Nilssen-Love has had several, from the dense overlays of Frode Gjerstad's Circulacione Totale Orchestra (a band joined in his teens) to the roar of Peter Brötzmann's Chicago Tentet to the scores of Ken Vandermark's Territory Band. His own Large Unit, formed in 2013, reflects that experience in multiple ways: like the Gjerstad and Brötzmann bands there's plenty of free blowing as well as bands within the band; as with the Vandermark, there are scores, though they're evidently filled with choices; like all of them, there is more than one drum kit present; unlike all of the others, though, the Large Unit isn't a broadly international aggregation filled with stars of international free jazz: it's make-up is intensely local. Ten of its 11 members are Norwegian, and only the Swedish trombonist Mats Alekint, the turntablist/electronic musician Lasse Marhaug and Nilssen-Love himself enjoy wider recognition. The Large Unit successfully combines the energy of youth and the casual familiarity of the neighborhood, both welded together by the focus of Nilssen-Love's musical personality.

While Marhaug and Nilssen-Love have an on-going duo, the band also contains two distinct trios: the relatively conventional Knyst consisting of saxophonist Kasper Vaernes, bassist Christian Meaas Svensen and the band's second drummer Andreas Wildhagen; and the far stranger one of Marhaug, guitarist Ketil Gutvik and tubaist Borre Molstad. Cornetist/flugelhornist Thomas Johansson, alto and baritone saxophonist Klaus Ellerhusen Holm and bassist Jon Rune Strom complete the band.

The band's first release, First Blow, was a 20-minute EP from their July 2013 debut at the Molde Festival; Erta Ale (named for an Ethiopian volcano) is far more ambitious, a three CD (or four LP plus CD plus flexidisc) set mixing studio and live recordings from Oslo, Bergen and Moers. From the opening "Round About Nothing I," the music swarms with a fierce Mingus-like energy: horns grind out blues cries with honks and shrieks, resisting the drum kits and basses that churn out dense, rapid, contradictory rhythms. In a pattern that continues, it's a band that you don't necessarily hear all at once, the ear finding its own paths into and through the music. While contrasting bands within the band seem to set independent agendas or wail at one another, there are also moments of sudden synchrony, evident in the matching lines of cornetist Johansson and trombonist Alekint or in the subtle symmetries of Alekint and tubaist Molstad with



their complementary timbres.

The titles suggest close relationships between pieces, but they turn out to be very different, radically unstable, as if there are different paths through the scores, finding different lines as well as solos. There are two versions of “Round About Nothing I,” one of “II” and one of “III;” three versions of “Birdbox,” each featuring a different soloist; two versions each of “Austin Birds” and “Culius”; “Fortar Hardar” and “Fortar Hardar II.” If there’s a tendency to sprawling, energy-driven jams, the band is capable of very different dimensions. A passage of Marhaug’s electronics near the end of “Round...II” seems to issue from another world, while “Slow Love,” featuring bassist Holm, is work of tremendous restraint, swarming rhythmic repetition that develops a character unheard elsewhere from the band. Nilssen-Love’s sources likely include studies in African music (hinted strongly in the set’s title and the title “Fendika”).

The multi-disc set may echo the band’s fascination with scale, but this is large music, a window on a scene that seethes with creative energy and an unbridled intensity.

[Source](#)

**Review in the Wire**

Like that watch, *Unmoored By The Wind* is the product of antique technologies. On most tracks you can hear the hiss of magnetic tape, and there's nothing sonically or stylistically to distinguish it from some LP that was privately pressed up 40 years ago. But that is not a problem; rather, it is a tribute to Cohen's skill at creating a time capsule that takes listeners out of their own world and into hers.

Bill Meyer

### Large Unit

#### *Erta Ale*

PNL 3×CD/4×LP/3×MC

Some of the greatest figures in jazz and improv have addressed the problem of reconciling precomposed/arranged material with free improvisation in performances by large ensembles. The challenges include descending into directionless chaos, or overly circumscribing the improvisations by the directions of the composer/arranger/conductor – these issues were also sometimes met in 20th century classical music, particularly by Stockhausen during his intuitive music phase.

Butch Morris, George Lewis and Barry Guy have all come up with their own

approaches. Some years ago Lewis and Guy presented a concert of their music. In one piece Guy provided the musicians with cards, each referring to a fragment of score. He would indicate which of these were to be played, and eventually the musicians ran around swapping cards. Guy was quoted in *Jazz Times* as saying "the most a composer can do is develop an organic process with an ensemble so that there is a seamlessness between materials the composer brings to the situation, and the language the composer and the ensemble articulate together through improvisation". Guy, like Lewis, seems wary of "exercising some kind of politically incorrect power". After all, he came up in a UK scene where improvisation reflected a certain political stance, as evident in the work of figures such as Eddie Prévost and bands like Iskra 1903, of which he was a member.

The methodology used by Nilssen-Love with his Large Unit on their latest release *Erta Ale* is not at all easy to divine. The precision of many of the ensemble interjections must be attributable to direction from Nilssen-Love, though not necessarily to detailed written material. Long sections in which only a small number

of musicians are active bespeak either predetermined structures or extreme sensitivity on behalf of their colleagues. There are effectively two (sometimes more) groups within the band, and individual approaches ranging from fairly straight post-bop to abstract electronics.

Whatever, the result is riveting. There are completely solo passages, ferocious scimmages by the entire group, interspersed with concerto grossi-like episodes and almost conventional riffs supporting soloists, ghostly parodies and visions of creative cosmic chaos, moments that flood the viscera with adrenalin and others that pamper the tenderest ear.

Barry Witherden

### Monopoly Child Star Searchers

#### *Pinhead In Fantasia*

Pacific City Sound Visions DVD+LP+2×MC

Of all the fountainheads to froth forth from the US underground of the 2000s, few cascade as deep into their imagination as Spencer Clark, and few have compromised less. His creations seem to grow more arcane, ornate and indescribable. Case in point: his new four hour suite of warped chamber music centers upon the cenobite



**Paal Nilssen-Love Large Unit**  
*Ertä Ale*

PNL 025  
★★★★

It is hard to believe that this three-disc set is Norwegian drummer Paal Nilssen-Love's first recording as a leader. He has previously done solo works and been part of countless duos, trios and other collectives, but he never got an opportunity to write music for a band. To form the 11-piece Large Unit, the drummer did not recruit the usual suspects but a representative bunch drawn from the next generation of Norwegian improvisers as well as Swedish trombone player Mats Ålekliint.

The material gathered on *Ertä Ale*, the name of an Ethiopian volcano, will not surprise those familiar with Nilssen-Love's universe. Tunes based on simple but addictive riffs, textural explorations and collective blasts alternate on this sprawling collection. It would be easy to describe the performances as chaotic ramblings. But this would be unfair and deceptive, since actual planning takes place. And how otherwise could the cohesion and sway displayed by the ensemble on "Fendika" be explained?

One could question the decision to feature so much music on a band's debut recording. (The LP version contains even more tracks.) There was probably no other option to take the full measure of Nilssen-Love's concepts and understand the inner workings of the ensemble. For instance, "Birdbox" was conceived to put a pre-determined soloist in charge of taking the lead. On three separate occasions, alto saxophonist Klaus Ellerhusen Holm, bass player Christian Meaas Svendsen and drummer Andreas Wildhagen each gets a chance to elicit the participation of other band members and shape a bleak and stark soundscape.

The four versions of "Round About Nothing" illustrate how the ensemble has to follow directions but remains free to choose among several alternatives, which can result in musicians building or adding to an already laid-out foundation or disrupting what is taking place to head in other directions. This process is also noticeable on "Cullus," where at various points one feels that two bands are competing against each other. Indeed, the inclusion of two bona fide working trios within the group allows him to break the music down into several smaller units as well as to focus on his bandleader duties.

The first two discs alternate material recorded live and in the studio, and one would be hard-pressed to tell the difference because of the impeccable recording, mixing and mastering. The third disc was recorded at the 2014 Moers Festival. Overall, the variety of moods, tempos, structures and ideas makes for a fascinating listening experience for anyone willing to go below the surface. Finally, this collective success could not have been achieved without outstanding individual contributions. The interplay between trumpeter Johansson and trombonist Ålekliint is constantly deserving of attention, and tuba player Berre Melstad, one of the revelations of this out-

ing, displays an impressive nimbleness and sense of place. What this says for the future of creative jazz in Norway is that the well shows no sign of getting dry.  
—Alain Drouot

**Ertä Ale:** Disc 1: Round About Nothing I; Fortar Hardar; Fendika; Birdbox; Round About Nothing II. (56:10) Disc 2: Cullus; Ertä Ale; Slow Love; Austin Birds; Birdbox; Round About Nothing III; Birdbox. (72:00) Disc 3: Round About Nothing IV; Fortar Hardar II; Austin Birds; Cullus. (54:46)

**Personnel:** Thomas Johansson, cornet; Fugelhorn; Mats Ålekliint, trombone; Kasper Væernes, soprano, alto saxophone; Klaus Holm, alto, baritone saxophone; Berre Melstad, tuba; Ketil Guttvik, electric guitar; Lasse Marhaug, turntable, electronics; Jon Rune Strøm, Christian Meaas Svendsen, electric bass, acoustic bass; Andreas Wildhagen, Paal Nilssen-Love, drums, percussion.

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*"David Hazeltine has just released I Remember Cedar with an authentic Walton rhythm section, David Williams and Joe Farnsworth. This is potentially dangerous territory but I was delighted by what a superior listen it was. Hazeltine doesn't sound like Cedar Walton, but he sure sounds just as authentic as his team, and a playlist of Cedar's best underperformed compositions is a superb idea."*  
—Ethan Iverson, Do The Math

*"Cedar Walton passed away on August 19th, 2013. This CD is a testament to my deep love and admiration for this musical genius. He was, without a doubt, one of our greatest and most distinctive pianists and composers. His style of playing epitomizes, now and forever, elegance and perfection in jazz. I miss him dearly, but his music will live on forever."*  
—David Hazeltine

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Review by Christof Thurnherr in Jazz 'N' More Magazine



## Auftakt mit Paukenschlag



**Er habe sich gedacht, dass es endlich Zeit sei, eine eigene Big Band – treffender wäre: ein modernes Free-Ensemble – ins Leben zu rufen. Der Schlagzeuger Pal Nilssen-Love ist nicht nur einer der arbeitswütigsten norwegischen Jazzer, sondern mit Sicherheit auch einer der innovativsten.**

Nicht nur in Bands wie The Thing, Hairy Bones und OffOnOff, sondern auch in unzähligen weiteren kleineren und grösseren Kollaborationen, z. B. mit Ken

Vandermark, Otomo Yoshihide, Jim O'Rourke lässt er eindrücklich die Knüppel kreisen.

Mit der Grossformation Large Unit hat Nilssen-Love 2013 zehn Gleichgesinnte aus der norwegischen Szene zusammengetrommelt und was die elf veranstalten, klingt bisweilen erwartungsgemäss nach schön schweisstreibender Arbeit, wobei auch Platz für subtile Passagen ohne Angst vor Geräuschhaftem Platz finden. Die Grösse des Ensembles spiegelt sich nicht zuletzt in der strukturellen Vielfalt der Stücke wider: Da gibt es rockähnliche Nummern, die auf einem repetitiven Begleitriff aufbauen, dessen Dominanz aber durch das Drumherum rasch in den Wahrnehmungshintergrund tritt. Andere Stücke mäandern zwischen verschiedenen ruhigen, aber nicht minder beunruhigenden Stimmungen hin und her und scheinen den Hörer dabei förmlich in sich hineinzuziehen. Und dazwischen verlieren sich die Stimmen immer wieder in einem atemberaubenden, kaum entwirrbaren Durcheinander.

"Erta Ale" ist nicht nur eine erste Veröffentlichung der Big Band. In der würdigen Box (erhältlich als drei CDs, vier LPs, vier MCs) mit Bild- und Wort-Booklets sind bereits verschiedene Studio-Live- und eine Live-Live-Aufnahme vereint. Die produktive Grossformation hat künftig nichts mehr zu beweisen. *Christof Thurnherr*

**Large Unit, Erta Ale**

**(PNL Records/www.subradar.no)**



## BOXED SET



*Erta Ale*  
Paal Nilssen-Love Large Unit (PNL)  
by Mark Keresman

Norwegian drummer Paal Nilssen-Love has established himself through collaborations with reedplayers Ken Vandermark, Joe McPhee and Peter Brötzmann as well as his own projects, be it the Townhouse Orchestra (actually a quartet) or the cooperative The Thing. With this triple CD boxed set (alternately issued as a four-cassette box; four-LP, one-CD, one flexi-disc deluxe set; and high-definition download), Nilssen-Love steps out as a leader of a large ensemble comprised mostly of young(er) Norwegian musicians, one in which the separations between composition and improvisation (seemingly) blur. Two-thirds of *Erta Ale* is a collection of recordings from assorted live and studio contexts in Norway in early 2014, featuring multiple renditions of Nilssen-Love's originals. The sounds range from angular swing (a little) and feverish discourses (a lot) to subdued, almost sub-sonic, voyage-to-the-bottom-of-the-psyche soundscapes.

Disc One commences with a somewhat directionless version of "Round About Nothing"—to paraphrase Moe Howard, they're getting no place fast. There is heartfelt and inspired playing, to be sure, but it sounds as if the players are waiting for inspiration to alight. But the following "Fortar Hardar" is when the 11-tet clicks into high gear. Nilssen-Love and second drummer Andreas Wildhagen cook on all burners while the five horns (Thomas Johansson: cornet and flugelhorn; Mats Ålekint: trombone; Kasper Værnes: soprano and alto saxophone; Klaus Holm: alto and baritone saxophone; Børre Molstad: tuba) make with a bittersweet dirge that's oddly galvanizing. Baritone saxophone blisters with feverish, Brötzmann-like intensity while "Fendika" has Horse latitudes courtesy of swelling trombone.

Disc Two begins "Culius" and a raw, caustic barrage of crackling, abrasive dissonance from Lasse Marhaug, "noise artist in residence" (so says the booklet notes) until a lurching theme, loping and looping, during which guitarist Ketil Gutvik shreds salvos of his own wiry noise. "Slow Love" is driven by scraped basslines from Jon Rune Strøm and Christian Meaas Svendsen and insistent repetition of short, clipped riffs punctuated by deep horn bleats—the effect would be hypnotic save for the latter, keeping one's inner ear (delightfully) off-balance. This take of "Birdbox" may be the high point of uneasy listening, overtly bringing a sincerely personalized version of the Albert Ayler influence—overblown horns with serrated New Orleans funeral march cadences, cracking brass, sounding loosely akin to the rapturous wails of a gospel chorus.

Disc Three is all live, in concert at the 2014 Moers

Festival in Germany. The Large Unit wails with a heady mixture of abandon and focused power. "Round About Nothing" now is a fierce free jazz blowout, but there is ebb and flow driving the piece, with bombastic solos and crashing drums until a subtle, strangely haunting low passage evokes Duke Ellington's writing for massed reed instruments, then ends (or segues?) with buzz and crackle of guitar, electronics or wind instruments driven beyond their usual limits via extended techniques.

"Fortar Hardar II" roars away with more wild and woolly, snapping solos. "Austin Birds" begins with some beautifully blues-rich bop alto before evolving into a storm and then segueing into some low-volume reductive sighs and drones. That gradually rises into a cubist rave-up via volcanic drums and rising horns, leading into a riveting conclusion with "Culius". Over a vaguely march-like beat, horns swirl and surge, led by clarion-like cornet. Then the band lurches as if they were playing a bluesy (and sardonic) march by Charles Mingus, a playful burlesque. The ensemble roars to a climax, dissonant but thoroughly joyful and purgative.

The highlights of *Erta Ale* are many—there are a few moments of excess (some collective improvisations feel a bit redundant at times) but those are offset by profoundly stimulating performances. There is an undisputable earthiness and feeling of catharsis (both dark and joyous) throughout.

For more information, visit [paalnilssen-love.com](http://paalnilssen-love.com). This project is at First Unitarian Congregational Society Jun. 13th. See Calendar.