

Roscoe Mitchell And The Note Factory - Far Side (2010)

Written by bluesever

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1. Far Side, Cards, Far Side 2. Quintet 2007 A For Eight 3. Trio Four For Eight 4. Ex Flover Five
Roscoe Mitchell - sax, flute Corey Wilkes - trumpet, flugelhorn Craig Taborn - piano
Vijay Iyer - piano Jaribu Shahid - bass Harrison Bankhead - bass, cello Tanni Tabbal - drums
Vincent Davis - drums (3)

It's been over a decade since reed and woodwind multi-instrumentalist Roscoe Mitchell—a veteran of Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), which he helped establish in the mid-1960s, in addition to co-founding the groundbreaking Art Ensemble Of Chicago, around the same time—released *Nine to Get Ready* (ECM, 1999), with his Note Factory group. *Far Side*, Mitchell's first Note Factory session since *The Bad Guys* (Around Jazz, 2003), pares the group back to a double-quartet, with six members from *Song for My Sister* (Pi, 2002) creating a degree of continuity, moving the group forward while, at the same time, retaining some of the stylistic markers that have been with the group since its inception in the early 1990s.

Mitchell's seemingly dichotomous nature—sometimes, delivering abstruse, near-chamber works more akin to contemporary classical constructs, albeit with a kind of unfettered spontaneity; other times music more closely aligned with the jazz tradition, swinging with ease...and no shortage of levity. This time, however, Mitchell leans more towards the complex writing of his Transatlantic Art Ensemble's, *Composition / Improvisation Nos. 1, 2 & 3* (ECM, 2007)—with its dense, challenging blurring of form and freedom.

Recorded live in Burghausen in the winter of 2007 by German radio, *Far Side*'s four tracks provide plenty of space for collaborative free play of the most extreme kind, especially on the opening "Far Side/Cards/Far Side," a demanding half hour that moves from a gradually intensifying fanfare of dense, low-register piano chords, upper register arco bass harmonics,

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and overarching horn lines that shift fluidly in and out of the mix—how György Ligeti might sound, perhaps, scored for jazz instrumentation—to a cued segment where the atmosphere opens up like an indigo flower in a Tibetan mountainscape, gradually deepening, however, and leading to a freewheeling and densely layered improvised section, where pianists Craig Taborn and Vijay Iyer attack turbulent lines of apparent abandon, supported by a maelstrom of basses and drums from Jaribu Shahid and Harrison Bankhead, and Tani Tabal and Vincent Davis, respectively. When trumpeter Corey Wilkes enters, moving from blating lows to dexterous highs, he cements his position as the undisputed torch-bearer for the late Lester Bowie, while avoiding any overt imitation. The title would suggest a return to the opening composition, but in such an oblique way as to be virtually unrecognizable.

If the opening piece was largely about forward motion, albeit with no discernable pulse, then "Quintet 2007 A For Eight" is equally amorphous, despite a far more defined melody and, in its idiosyncratic stops and starts, knotty arrangement. Like its predecessors, but with the group broken down into various permutations and combinations, "Trio Four For Eight" and the closing "Ex Flover Five" deal with multiple vertical thematic streams, rather than conventional horizontal linearity. Together, they make Far Side an album that, while not for the faint-at-heart, delivers reward after reward to the intrepid ear, so thorough and so compelling, that it's impossible to truly capture what's happening on the first, second, or even tenth listen. ---John Kelman, allaboutjazz.com

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