



- CD 1 ■ TECH RITTER AND THE MEGABYTES**
- 1 The Little Big Horn 2 For Bb bass and Eb soprano saxophones 4:29
  - 2 November 18, 2000 For Bb soprano saxophone 19:48
  - 3 1999/2002 For flute and percussion cage 8:46
  - 4 Tech Ritter and the Megabytes/Improvisation For two altos, tenor and bass saxophones 2:22
  - 5 November 17, 2000 For Bb soprano saxophone 18:33
  - 6 A Dim Distant World For percussion cage 3:30
  - 7 Tech Ritter and the Megabytes/Composition For alto, soprano, tenor and bass saxophones 2:15



- CD 2 ■ SOLAR FLARES For Alto Saxophone**
- 1 Nemus 7:00
  - 2 Beyond Neptune 5:10
  - 3 The Kyper Belt 6:51
  - 4 Miranda 7:00
  - 5 As the Sun went Down He would Look Up 5:03
  - 6 Icy Pearls 1:18
  - 7 The Great Red Spot 10:29
  - 8 The Forgotten Players of the Solar System 4:41
  - 9 Methane Snow 2:01
  - 10 Frozen In Time 4:47



- CD 3 ■ THE PERCUSSION CAGE AND MUSIC ON THE GO**
- 1 Horn Bell and Drum 1:40
  - 2 Clear Pictures 2:38
  - 3 The Park 3:58
  - 4 The Mercurians 2:26
  - 5 Clocks 2:43
  - 6 A Surface Covered with Cracks 4:12
  - 7 Meteor 2:58
  - 8 Rings 1:52
  - 9 Some Flowers Were Seen 2:13
  - 10 Rock Number 84001 2:19
  - 11 An Ambiguous Sign of Life 2:50
  - 12 On Rolling Hills 4:42
  - 13 Jump 1:31
  - 14 Green Sky 0:43
  - 15 One Two and Red Blew 1:25
  - 16 Truly 3:05
  - 17 It Was Only a Nebula Away 5:27
  - 18 Next Stop Titan 2:15
  - 19 At Corona's End 2:18
  - 20 Dust 3:35
  - 21 Sailing 2:53



# ROS COE MITCHELL SOLO [3]



ROS COE MITCHELL ■ SOLO 3

mutablemusic 3 CDs

SOLO [3]

## Roscoe Mitchell solo 3

### CD 1 ■ Tech Ritter and the Megabytes

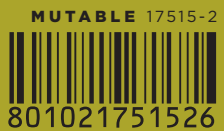
- 1 **The Little Big Horn 2**  
For Bb bass and Eb soprano saxophones
- 2 **November 18, 2000**  
For Bb soprano saxophone  
*Recorded live at November Music, Essen, Germany*
- 3 **1999/2002**  
For flute and percussion cage
- 4 **Tech Ritter and the Megabytes/Improvisation**  
For two altos, tenor and bass saxophones
- 5 **November 17, 2000**  
For Bb soprano saxophone  
*Recorded live at November Music, Gent, Belgium*
- 6 **A Dim Distant World**  
For percussion cage
- 7 **Tech Ritter and the Megabytes/Composition**  
For alto, soprano, tenor and bass saxophones

### CD 2 ■ Solar Flares for Alto Saxophone

- 1 **Nemus**
- 2 **Beyond Neptune**
- 3 **The Kyper Belt**
- 4 **Miranda**
- 5 **As the Sun Went Down He Would Look Up**
- 6 **Icy Pearls**
- 7 **The Great Red Spot**
- 8 **The Forgotten Players of the Solar System**
- 9 **Methane Snow**
- 10 **Frozen In Time**

### CD 3 ■ The Percussion Cage and Music On the Go

- 1 **Horn Bell and Drum**
- 2 **Clear Pictures**
- 3 **The Park**
- 4 **The Mercurians**
- 5 **Clocks**
- 6 **A Surface Covered with Cracks**
- 7 **Meteor**
- 8 **Rings**
- 9 **Some Flowers Were Seen**
- 10 **Rock Number 84001**
- 11 **An Ambiguous Sign of Life**
- 12 **On Rolling Hills**
- 13 **Jump**
- 14 **Green Sky**
- 15 **One Two and Red Blew**
- 16 **Truly**
- 17 **It Was Only a Nebula Away**
- 18 **Next Stop Titan**
- 19 **At Corona's End**
- 20 **Dust**
- 21 **Sailing**



Recorded by Buzz Kemper and Steve Gotcher,  
at Audio for the Arts, Madison, Wisconsin USA  
Mastered by Tom Blain, Ultimate Audio  
Riley Icenogle, recording engineer for percussion on "1999/2002"  
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Photography by Joseph Blough  
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Produced by MUTABLE MUSIC  
109 West 27th Street (seventh floor) New York, NY 10001 USA  
Phone: (212) 627-0990 | Fax: (212) 627-5504  
E-mail: info@mutablemusic.com  
Web site: www.mutablemusic.com  
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A black and white close-up portrait of Roscoe Mitchell. He is wearing large, round sunglasses with a metallic frame. He has a mustache and is looking slightly to the right. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be a window with a grid pattern.

Roscoe

Mitchell

SOLO [3]



Roscoe Mitchell's percussion cage.

# Roscoe Mitchell SOLO 3

Sudden music! All alone, unprotected, Roscoe Mitchell confronts Silence: the void, the vast unknown. One and a half of the thirty-eight pieces in this collection are composed. Two more are improvisations that begin with at least some conditions. The other thirty-four-and-a-half pieces are completely improvised—Mitchell simply picks up a horn or mallets and begins playing. He's armed only with his wide-ranging imagination, his instruments, his virtuosity, and his experience—for what more does he need? Proof of his self-sufficiency is that each improvisation is a distinctive, flowing work that has its own meaning, its own unique story to tell. “I started working on one CD,” he says, “but I started getting more and more material, and I thought that at this point in my career, one solo CD is not enough. I'd better put out three CDs, because time is going on by.”

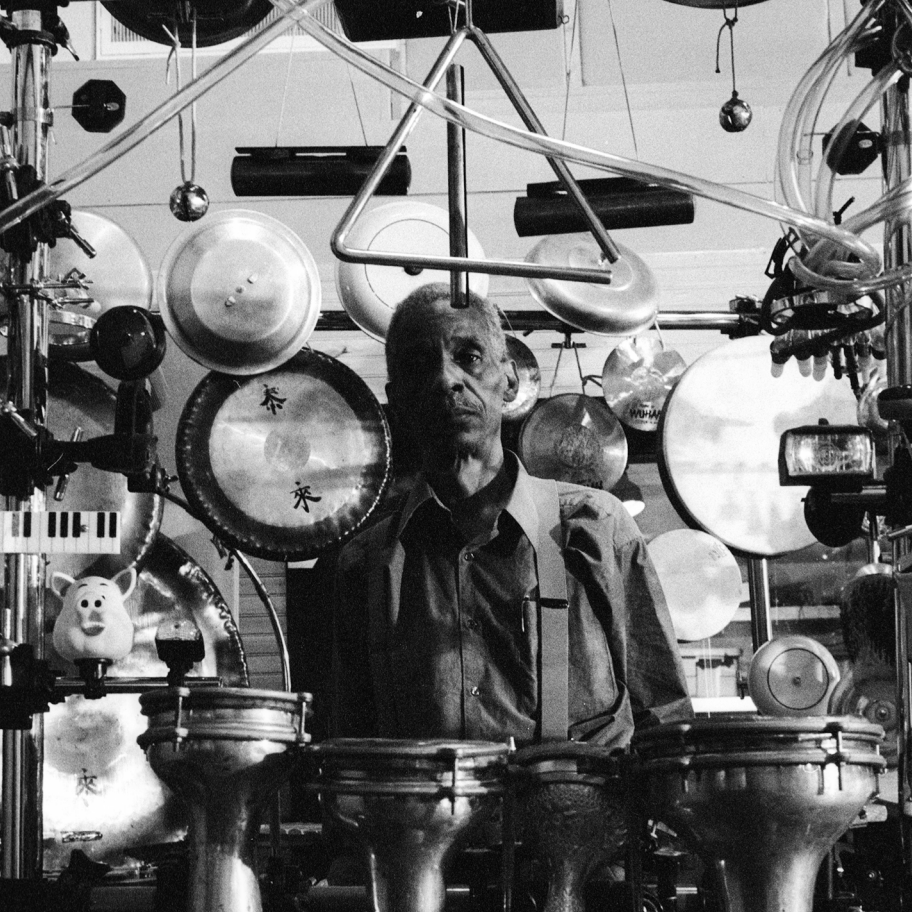
About the four selections that are not freely improvised solos. “Tech Ritter and the Megabytes” (no relation to 1950s country singer Tex Ritter) are modern (post-modern?) saxophone characters who first met in the composition on the *Tech* CD. All are played by Mitchell in this overdubbed performance. Each one moves at a different tempo, from the slow bass sax to the busy alto sax; the sax quartet improvisation on *Tech*, then, has the same tempo relationships, now with sweeping alto sax lines. “Little Big Horn 2” is a remarkable sequel to his 1973 “Oobina (Little Big Horn)” (on the Sackville LP *Solo Saxophone Concerts*). “Oobina” was a study in free space and alternating, staccato soprano and bass sax sounds, beginning in an upward curve; this new piece begins in a downturn, and space vanishes as overdubbed soprano and bass saxes make very lively lines indeed. As for the lovely “1999/2002,” it began as an improvisation on sounds and space inside Mitchell's percussion cage. In 2002 he composed a particularly attractive flute melody to go with it; often the independent percussion seems to respond to the flute; near the end, as harsher percussion appears, the flute melody becomes more detailed.

Mitchell has been creating a cappella solos for around four decades now. He's one of the Chicagoans who virtually invented the unaccompanied horn solo in free jazz: “You have to be responsible for all the music—I thought it

was part of what I had to learn. To be a good improviser you have to improvise by yourself and also with an ensemble. It's a good way to get where you're not following people—inexperienced improvisers will definitely start following the first strong idea that comes along." After a few pioneers such as Eric Dolphy and Jimmy Giuffre, Mitchell and some of his AACM colleagues (saxophonists Joseph Jarman, Anthony Braxton, violinist Leroy Jenkins, trumpeters Lester Bowie, Wadada Leo Smith, how many others?) went on to make a formidable medium of unaccompanied soloing. Along with the aesthetic rewards, there was another reason for this new medium's growth, in America and around the world, during the 1970s economic recession: Concert presenters who couldn't afford to hire a group could sometimes afford to hire a single artist.

Beginning with the accumulating complexity of his first document, "TKHKE" (in the Nessa collection *The Art Ensemble 1967/1968*), Mitchell's unaccompanied sax solos reveal different sides to his ever-changing art. He began sensitive investigations of the properties of saxophone family sounds; there were also precise, careful discoveries of the interactions of free space with sound and dynamics; there was the growth of "Nonaah" from a brief solo encore to a long, four-movement solo and then the several "Nonaahs" he composed for chamber ensembles and orchestra. There were also extended improvisations that exploded in long, unbroken catharses of ecstatic violence, like the long 1990s solos in the Delmark CD *Sound Songs*. It's interesting that such fearsome violence is absent from most of *Solo 3*, in which free space also plays a far less significant role.

Instead the personal intensity that has always characterized Roscoe Mitchell's music is mainly in the service of his singular lyricism. Sensitivity, intensity of feeling are certainly in the five soprano sax solos of *Music on the Go*—"These are short pieces. I thought of songs you might hear on your watch or your cellular phone"—and in the longer alto solos of *Solar Flares*. In the lovely melody of "An Ambiguous Sign of Life," in the melodies that begin "Nemus" and "Miranda," Mitchell's lyricism is most immediate. It's an original lyricism, knotty and gnarled—what we hear are long, angular, chromatic lines that tend to move organically by way of motive variation and evolution. Unlike his earlier recordings, extreme sounds—honks, overtones, multiphonics —



appear sparingly in his alto solos; accented bent tones give special flavor to “The Kyper Belt” just because they are so infrequent elsewhere in *Solo 3*. His lyricism is enhanced by his alto sound: it’s full, almost vibratoless, hard in his lower octaves, vivid and often singing in his higher ranges.

In some solos there’s also harshness, as in “The Great Red Spot” and “The Forgotten Players of the Solar System.” His methods of shaping solos, of giving them unity, are so strong and flexible that they make fascinating experiences of the two soprano epics on the Tech Ritter disc. They’re quite different solos, and “November 18” has especially fine, extensive developments of cell motives. Both this and “November 17” are fierce and complex, rising to long sections of whirling, circular-breath lines in tiny note values—yet Mitchell is always in control, you don’t get the sense that (as Ornette Coleman might say) the saxophone is playing him.

To return to Mitchell’s lyricism—what? Lyricism in the 17 percussion solos? Yes indeed, and “A Dim, Distant World” and *The Percussion Cage* demand that Roscoe Mitchell should at last be honored as the masterful percussion innovator he is. He began gathering bells, toy horns and drums, whistles, tiny cymbals, bike horns—his “little instruments”—in the mid-1960s; by now his collection is a high, four-sided cage with hundreds of instruments, mostly small. “I’m refining my percussion set-up and putting on a lot of different pieces here and there, decorating it. It’s a mixture of a lot of real instruments and a lot of stuff I find in used stores and convert over. Such as brass pieces—I look for things that ring. I’ve redeveloped some of those shapes into where I arrange several of those brass pieces together in one position in the cage.”

It’s important that, unlike drummers, he doesn’t play tempo and meter; also, nowadays other horn players may use “little instruments” strictly for color or accent, but not Mitchell. Rather, he creates musical lines that, with his subtle organization of sounds, develop into complete statements. Most of his “little instruments” are not tuned to standard pitches, either—like Albert Ayler, he presents a wholly new sense of musical line, and sustained melodic line is primary to him. Most remarkably, a number of these brief *Percussion Cage* pieces are almost perfect pieces. Hearing them, you sense that each particular piece of metal or wood he chooses to strike, and only those, must be struck exactly so, with just that sense of timing, in order to make the music flow so

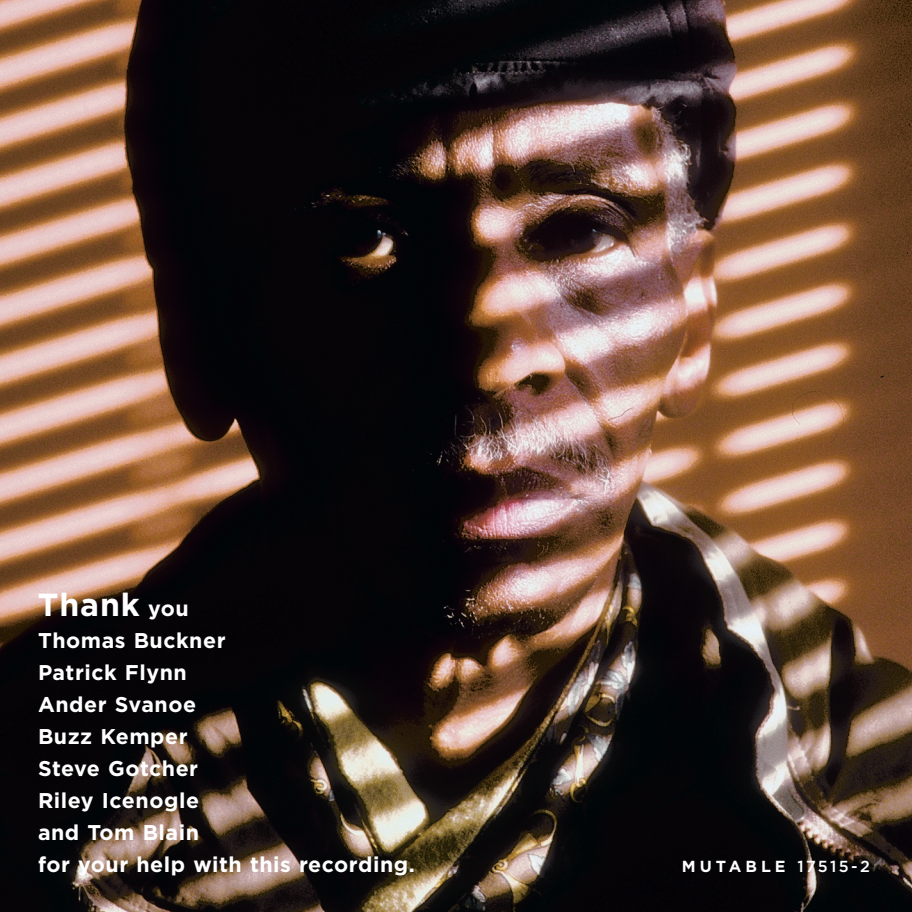
naturally. So his intensity brings not energetic activity, but heightened sensitivity and care for all of the elements of music-making.

One way to begin listening to Mitchell's percussion cage is to start with a rare, for him, piece of program music: "Clocks" (and look out, Franz Joseph Haydn). There are the sounds of various metal and wood objects, each tick-tocking at a different speed, suggesting a clock store gone awry; there's also the amusement of hearing mobile lines growing out of this counterpoint. Each percussion cage piece develops from its own community of sounds, in its own place in the cage. So for instance the sounds, with high bells, of "Clear Pictures," the steady, slow "Rings," and "Dust" recall the sound of Balinese gamelan. "A Surface Covered with Cracks," played wholly on metal instruments, presents his stately hanging bells and low gongs; "At Corona's End," especially, features spaces in which bell sounds hang, shimmering, before they decay. And in "Meteor" he thumps, whacks, and clangs at a wider range of high, middle, and low sounds, quite a remarkable piece.

It's not like the bygone times when artists spent their lives playing, say, dixieland or bebop. Today's artists have to continually reinvent themselves. Through all of Mitchell's musical changes, he has remained fiercely, insistently original. The early years of his Art Ensemble and (from 1969) the Art Ensemble of Chicago were a time of discovery. As his scope steadily expanded—improviser, composer, with many kinds of large and small ensembles, as well as Art Ensemble member and lonesome soloist—he not only made more discoveries, he made remarkable developments of his rediscoveries. As he did with "Little Big Horn 2," he may very well go on to develop delightful new works from some of the wonderfully rewarding improvisations of *So/lo 3*.

—JOHN LITWEILER





**Thank you**  
Thomas Buckner  
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