

**Historic, unheard Roscoe Mitchell trio recording released by ScienSonic  
Laboratories:**

**Soundscape 1979**

**Release date: Aug. 17, 2019**

In 1981, Roscoe Mitchell – giant of creative music, and founder of the famous Art Ensemble of Chicago – released *New Music for Woodwinds and Voice*, with vocalist Thomas Buckner and woodwind specialist Gerald Oshita. This was startling music, unlike anything in Mr. Mitchell’s previous discography, seeming to lie somewhere between radical chamber music and free improvisation. This unusual trio formation of Mitchell plus Buckner, a classically-trained baritone, and Oshita, a sadly under-documented player of rare instruments such as sarrusophone and conn-o-sax, made for a music that was genre-defying before the term was widely used. This amazing group -- later known as SPACE -- issued only a very few recordings, and with the untimely death of Mr. Oshita in 1992, it seemed there would be no more.

Mr. Mitchell, a longtime friend and a frequent collaborator here at ScienSonic Laboratories, casually mentioned to me during one of our occasional phone calls that he had recently been given a box of tapes by Oshita’s brother, and needed to go through them and see what was there. Some months later, following a dinner gathering at his home in California (he was living in the Darius Milhaud house at Mills College at the time), he played me a digitized version of one of the tapes, and it blew me away. It was an unreleased live recording of the trio with Buckner and Oshita. I checked the date, and was excited to see that it predated *New Music for Woodwinds and Voice* by 17 months. Further research revealed that this tape was, in fact, a document of the very first meeting of this important trio.

Buckner and Oshita, both Bay Area musicians at the time, had been getting together every morning for a year to practice improvisation and work out ideas when Mitchell invited Gerald to his composer workshop at the Creative Music Studios in Woodstock, NY, in the summer of 1979. Buckner came along, and when Mitchell heard the two of them perform, he was impressed enough to suggest they form a trio. The debut of this new group took place at Verna Gillis’ Soundscape performance space in NYC on Aug. 17, 1979, and was documented on a ¼” tape reel recorded by sculptor Brad Graves. The music, consisting of solos, duos and an extended trio performance, is as startling today as it must have seemed on that summer night 40 years ago.

Of course, with a vintage tape of this kind there are bound to be audio flaws. Many long hours were spent with noted mixing engineer Dave Darlington to bring this tape to its best possible audio state. Moments of distortion were smoothed out as best as possible, and other issues addressed, with great care being taken not to alter the sound or flow of the music. Sophisticated tools such as a “spectral analyzer” were used to carefully remove distracting noises, such as recurring loud clicks, which were able to be entirely eradicated with no discernable effect on the music. It suddenly occurred to me, after tackling a number of these clicks, that I was hearing the sound of a camera shutter, and I began to wonder: where are all these photos? They must exist somewhere. Could I possibly find them? After spending so much time and money mitigating the sonic damage done by our unknown photographer, wouldn’t it be great to be able to also benefit from their results, and present some of these photos with

the music? It took months of research, and a number of false leads, before photographer Mitchell Seidel said to me, "You know, I bet it was Ray Ross; he used to shoot a lot of these types of things. He died a few years back, but his archive is in California somewhere."

ScienSonic Laboratories is extremely proud to be able to say that we finally succeeded in tracking down the photos of that very night, licensed several of them from CTS Images, and incorporated them into the beautiful packaging for this important release: *Soundscape 1979*. These stunning performance photos include beautiful individual portraits of each player, as well as shots of the trio in action and the stage setup, putting the listener right in the scene. The striking cover art (as on all ScienSonic releases) is a painting by noted science fiction artist Richard Powers, used with the permission of the estate. This particular piece, previously unpublished, is among the artist's very last works. Done in Madrid, it was painted on a sheet of *El Pais* newspaper dated Sunday, Jan. 21, 1996... just a few weeks before his death.

We wish to emphasize that this is a fully-authorized release, *not* a bootleg, and was made possible through the kind cooperation of Verna Gillis as well as Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Buckner and the estate of Mr. Oshita.

Any newly-discovered music by Roscoe Mitchell -- recently named an NEA Jazz Master for 2020 -- is to be celebrated. A previously unknown album by this seldom-recorded group -- a recording of their very first meeting, in fact -- is a real find. The intent was to release this record two years ago, but it had to be delayed in accordance with Mr. Mitchell's agreement with ECM at that time. Further delays then ensued due to the backlog here at ScienSonic... but today we are proud to announce the long-awaited release of this historically significant music, 40 years to the day from when it was recorded.

Scott Robinson, ScienSonic Laboratories

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"The coming together of this trio is amongst my fondest memories. Thank you so much for releasing this, Scott. I appreciate all your work on this project and I am honored that you are releasing these materials on ScienSonic. I am extremely grateful for all the work you have done to make this a reality."

Roscoe Mitchell