TWO-PART FEATURE on Art Ensemble of Chicago. (1)

BOOK REVIEW: Message to Our Folks

We are publishing two pieces by Chris Parker which celebrate — slightly belatedly — the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. The second piece (link below) is an interview with Lester Bowie from 1995. First is a review of a new book tracing the history of the group:

BOOK REVIEW

Paul Steinbeck - Message to Our Folks
(University of Chicago Press, 358pp., £28. Book review by Chris Parker)

“This book is more than we could have hoped for, telling the complete history of the Art Ensemble of Chicago in careful, engaging detail” – thus Roscoe Mitchell, the band’s founder, on this meticulously researched and carefully compiled work.

Author Paul Steinbeck is Assistant Professor of Music Theory at Washington University at St Louis, as well as a bassist, composer, improviser and recording artist, and he has drawn sensitively on his knowledge and experience in all these related fields to produce a thorough, learned, yet consistently readable account of one of the most long-lived and successful bands in the music. Mixing a wealth of biographical detail and an entertaining history of the band’s rise to international fame with close musical analysis of three key recordings (A Jackson in Your House, Live at Mandel
Hall and Live from the Jazz Showcase).

Message to Our Folks perfectly captures the band's unique ethos by examining its roots in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians; its experimentation with multi-media performance art; its travels around the world, most importantly to 1970s Paris but subsequently to places such as Nigeria, Jamaica and Japan; its theory of group improvisation; and its pioneering approach to social relations. In short, this is a model study of one of the most influential bands in creative music.

PART TWO: 1995 interview with Lester Bowie

On Friday, March 17, 2017

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