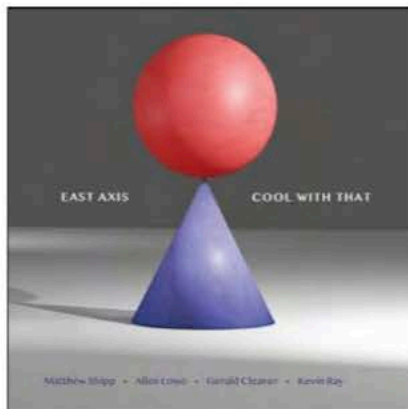


MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Roscoe Mitchell: *Dots—Pieces for Percussion and Woodwinds*. Wide Hive.

For decades, hallmarks of Art Ensemble of Chicago concerts were what came to be known as the “little instruments” segments, when Roscoe Mitchell, Joseph Jarman, Lester Bowie, Malachi Favors, and Famoudou Don Moye jammed on bells, bicycle horns, noisemakers, chimes, and various percussion. *Dots* is Mitchell’s pandemic-era, one-man-band, minimalist version of those epic sonic adventures. The 19 pieces, recorded in his home studio, run mostly in the three-to-four-minute range. But the combination of an unhurried approach to improvisation and a palpable veneration of the spaces between and surrounding the predominantly delicate sounds—in an airy, three-dimensional soundstage engineered by Wendy L. Nelson—creates the impression that these miniatures unfold over much longer periods of time. The now 81-year-old Mitchell employs his full battery of wooden and metallic percussion across 64 totally engrossing minutes. On seven tracks he overdubs saxophone parts, sometimes more than one, played with just as much deliberation and emphasis on nuance. Like Mitchell’s “dot” paintings reproduced on the CD package, the music is at once abstract and down-to-earth, and surprisingly serene. **Derk Richardson**

Further Listening: Art Ensemble of Chicago: *The Complete Live in Japan*



MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

East Axis: *Cool with That*. ESP-Disk.

Pianist Matthew Shipp, saxophonist Allen Lowe, bassist Kevin Ray, and drummer Gerald Cleaver have played together as a quartet for several years, adopting the name East Axis for this album, which vaults the band to the head of the class of free-jazz small groups. Sixty-year-old Shipp’s search for challenges to his vocabulary has recently put him in settings with Mat Walerian, Ivo Perelman, John Butcher, Hamid Drake, and Rich Halley, in addition to his steady trio. He has found yet another kindred spirit in the 67-year-old Lowe, a gripping tenor and alto player whose outsider perspective is manifested in multi-volume book-and-CD projects covering the history of American vernacular music. Shipp’s and Lowe’s unique melodic sensibilities, and their shared ability to spin out fresh, unrepeatable ideas at paces both furious and contemplative, dovetail in myriad attention-commanding patterns. The coherence of the performances—ranging from six to nearly 30 minutes, and packed with bluesy emotion—owes equally to Ray and Cleaver’s capacity for listening to everyone, responding both cannily and intuitively, and interlocking in rhythms that contribute to exhilarating maelstroms and support funky grooves. The collective commitment to musical storytelling keeps the righteously non-mainstream jazz from ever feeling rarefied or aloof. **DR**

Further Listening: Rich Halley: *The Shape of Things*



MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Keith Loftis: *Original State*. Long Tone.

Tenor and soprano saxophonist/composer Keith Loftis has spent most of his career as a sideman, playing with Roy Hargrove, Frank Foster, and Michael Carvin. Now he tours with the three-time Grammy-nominated Baylor Project. On his first recording as a leader since 2011’s *Simply Loftis*, he has joined forces with pianist John Chin, bassist Eric Wheeler, and drummer Willie Jones III for an entertaining program that includes six songs by Loftis, one by jazz pianist Michael Stanton, one R&B cover, and one standard. The album kicks off with “Oak Cliff,” a spirited tribute to the neighborhood where Loftis and Hargrove grew up. Stanton’s “Premonition” opens with a Wheeler bass intro before alternating between funk and hard swing. “Wifi Addiction” is a finger-popping 16-bar blues, and “Brigitte’s Smile” is a medium-tempo waltz Loftis wrote as a tribute to his wife. Another waltz, “For the Love of You,” was a 70s R&B hit by the Isley Brothers; on this version, Loftis plays some mesmerizing soprano. I think the Isleys would love this Coltrane-flavored treatment of their song. The album closes with a beautiful ballad rendition of the jazz standard “Weaver of Dreams,” which has previously been interpreted by Kenny Burrell, Cannonball Adderley, and others. Very enjoyable listening. **Greg Turner**

Further Listening: Samara Joy: *Samara Joy*