

MESSAGE TO OUR FOLKS

The Art Ensemble of Chicago

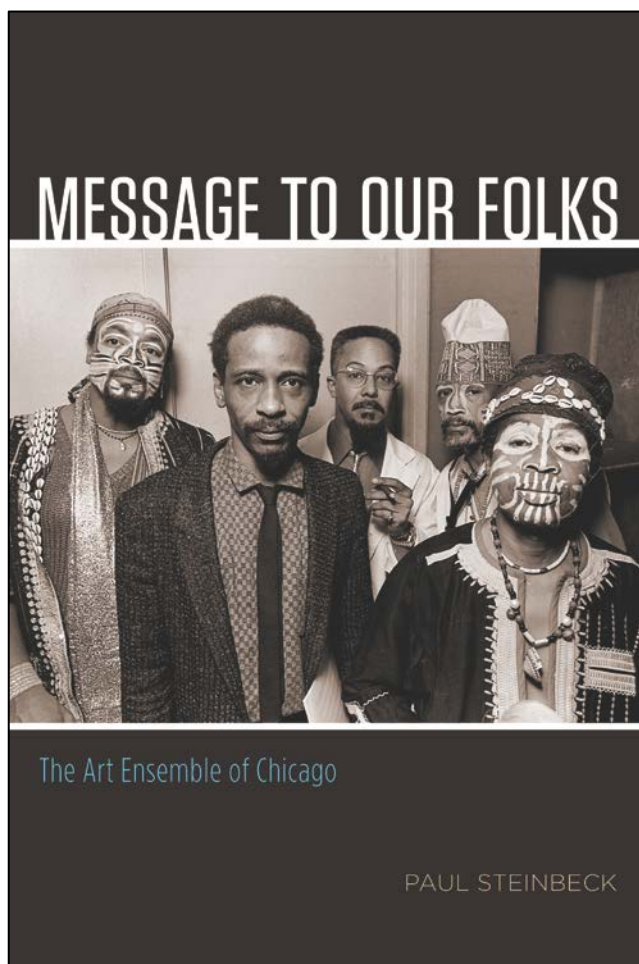
“Steinbeck has produced a major contribution to both music theory and the burgeoning field of critical improvisation studies, showing academic and lay readers alike how these boundary-shattering African-American artists realized their ambitious dreams, not only in sound, but through alternative communities of affect and agency that transformed experimentalism itself.” —**George E. Lewis, author of *A Power Stronger than Itself***

“I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Steinbeck for *Message to Our Folks*. This book is more than we could have hoped for, telling the complete history of the Art Ensemble of Chicago in careful, engaging detail.” —**Roscoe Mitchell, founder, Art Ensemble of Chicago**

Formed in 1966 and flourishing until 2010, the Art Ensemble of Chicago was the flagship group of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) and one of the longest-lived bands in music history. But what set the Art Ensemble apart from every other group in jazz and experimental music was its unique approach to performance. Members played hundreds of instruments on stage, recited poetry, performed theatrical sketches, and wore face paint, masks, lab coats, and traditional African and Asian dress. The group, which built a global audience and toured across six continents, presented their work as experimental performance art, in opposition to the jazz industry’s traditionalist aesthetics.

In *Message to Our Folks*, Paul Steinbeck combines musical analysis and historical inquiry to give us the definitive study of the Art Ensemble. In the book, he proposes a new theory of group improvisation that explains how the band members were able to improvise together in so many different styles while drawing on an extensive repertoire of notated compositions. Steinbeck also examines the intermedia dimensions of the Art Ensemble’s performances and the ways in which their distinctive model of social relations kept the band performing together for four decades. *Message to Our Folks* is a striking and valuable contribution to our understanding of one of the world’s premier musical groups.

PAUL STEINBECK is assistant professor of music theory at Washington University in St. Louis. He is coauthor of *Exercises for the Creative Musician*, as well as a bassist, composer, and recording artist.



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