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MITOCHONDRIA

Mitochondria

Akira Sakata & Takeo Moriyama

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Spectacular live recording from 1986 of two seminal figures of the Japanese avantgarde - Akira Sakata on saxophone and Takeo Moriyama on drums.

Mitochondria captures the reunion of the two free jazz masters, who started playing together in the Yosuke Yamashita Trio in 1972 until 1975. For both, the experience with the trio was an important step in the development of their own career and musicianship. The recordings are a remarkable performance in which each successfully highlights the essential elements of his playing while giving of room for the other musician.

Recorded at Kashiwa Church Chiba Pref. In Japan on 24 May 1986 by Yukio Tezuka on Sony stereo cassette recorder.

Mixed by Jim O'Rourke, Mastered by Martin Siewert. Graphic design/cover photo by Lasse Marhaug. Liner notes by Kazue Yokoi>attached.

Tracklisting

A1. Archezoa (07:12)
A2. Mitochondria (10:34)
A3. Hachi (07:50)
B1. Tsui-oku (reminiscence) (10:21)
B2. Satsuki (09:11)
B3. Ghosts (05:29)
C1. Chiasma (08:50)
C2. Dance (12:50)
D1. Wann kann Ich Sie Wiedersehen (14:11)

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Liner notes

In the mid 1970s, a Japanese free jazz trio took Europe by storm. It was the Yosuke Yamashita Trio. The group at the time included members Akira Sakata and Takeo Moriyama.

The Yamashita Trio visited Europe for the first time in 1974 to perform at Moers Festival. According to Burkhard Hennen, Moers' musical director at the time, their standing ovation lasted over an hour. In years following, the Yamashita Trio would frequently tour Europe. During my own visits to Germany, I recall several encounters with fans who spoke of that period of the Yamashita Trio with great fervor. The trio was possessed of an originality unlike American and European free jazz, combined with an eruptive overwhelming energy that must have astounded their audiences. The performance at Moers was subsequently released as the live album *Clay (enja)*, which captured the wildly enthusiastic audience response as well. Yamashita himself had begun playing free jazz back in the mid-1960s. Yosuke Yamashita Trio was formed in 1969, settling upon the lineup of Yamashita, Sakata and Moriyama in 1972. It took these three persons to usher in the golden age of the Yamashita Trio, leaving their indelible mark with their European tour. And for both Sakata and Moriyama, experience with the trio was clearly a major step in the formulation of their careers and musicianship.

Moriyama has discussed his style of free drumming in recent years, such as in his book and DVD set *The Heart of Swing* (2017, Yamaha Music Media). He began playing free jazz in a duo with Yamashita around the end of the 1960s, developing his distinctive style of drumming. Of particular importance was "the combination of the 2 and 3." The secret lay in the random strike of the 2 and 3, in quintuplets. The velocity with which these hits were rendered gave a freeform impression while still grounded by a sense of groove. Seiichi Nakamura, the first saxophonist of the Yamashita Trio, left the band and was replaced by Akira Sakata, who had joined the Trio in an impromptu capacity several times prior. The devotee of free jazz was already a presence in the small venue scene as a performer in his own right. With the addition of Sakata's energetic drive, the intertwining of these three personalities culminated in the unique and singular musicality of the Yamashita Trio.

Moriyama left the trio in 1975 and Sakata followed in 1979 to pursue their respective careers. Moriyama started his quartet in 1977 while Sakata formed his own trio in 1980, and both would go on to tour Europe. Sakata's activities span the spectrum across myriad musical groupings, including a recent memorable tour of Japan and Europe as ARASHI, alongside Paal Nilssen-Love and Johan Berthling.

Traces of the student movement era were still felt during the years Sakata and Moriyama were active in the Yamashita Trio, with free jazz itself being a reflection of the climate of those times. Yet even as the times changed, the mode of expression that was free jazz would not fall into disuse. Far from being merely a style, this was music that would directly give voice to the player's expression. This live recording from 1986 captures the reunion of these two musicians in which, now as a piano-less duo and unconstrained by chords and thus a greater degree of freedom, the result is a remarkable performance in which each successfully draws out the essential elements of the other.

The A-side opens with Sakata's introductory clarinet solo [*Archezoa*], followed by his famous works [*Mitochondria*] and [*Hachi*], featuring the seamless undulations of Moriyama's drums upon which ride the howling of Sakata's saxophone. The sound is like an alto sax version of later Coltrane; indeed, it is Sakata's response to the giant. The B-side is a contrasting story, with plaintive motifs from the clarinet on [*Tsui-oku (Reminiscence)*]. This is followed by a drum solo [*Satsuki (May)*] with its inimitable tone and sense of space and time, the world according to Moriyama. Next comes Albert Ayler's [*Ghosts*], where Sakata

once again quotes a phrase from the children's song [*Akatombo (Red Dragonfly)*]. I recall when I first heard him employ this developmental device on Yosuke Yamashita Trio / *Montreux After Glow* (FRASCO), recorded live in Montreux in 1976; it opened my eyes to how Japanese melodies could be effectively woven into free improvisation. Side C features Yamashita's early representative work [*Chiasma*], then [*Dance*], a driving force from Moriyama and piercing wail from Sakata, this is free jazz in all its glory. The album concludes with [*Wann kann ich sie wiedersehen*] on side D in which the listener is treated to Sakata's songful alto sax.

Theirs is a sound that has retained freshness even to modern ears. From the accelerated passages of Sakata's screaming alto sax and the brimming emotion of his clarinet, to the tonal richness Moriyama coaxes from the cymbals to the bass drum in cascading 'sheets of drums' (kindred to sheets of sound) in his artful innovations in free drumming, this album documents an important landmark by two pioneers of Japanese free jazz.