



MINGUS

THE LOST ALBUM FROM RONNIE SCOTT'S

DOUBLE ALBUM



Photo by Jan Persson / CTSIMAGES

MINGUS

THE LOST ALBUM FROM RONNIE SCOTT'S

A LOST CHAPTER: CHARLES MINGUS AT RONNIE SCOTT'S

It gives us at Resonance Records great pleasure to present this historic, fantastic-sounding Charles Mingus album recorded live at Ronnie Scott's in London in August of 1972. This is a "lost album" that's never been released until now. My connection to Mingus's widow, Sue Graham Mingus, goes back a decade to 2011 when I initially reached out to her about another project.

Resonance was very much in our infancy at the time and not many people were aware of our work. Over the years, Resonance founder George Klabin and I began to communicate more and more with Sue and Jazz Workshop, Inc., and we talked about finding recordings to work on together. Sue herself made us aware of these recordings and all these years later, as is the case with virtually all of our projects, I'm proud that through our work, we're finally seeing the release of this glorious document.

Let me start by saying the fidelity on these recordings is stupendous. It was originally recorded on eight-track tapes via a mobile recording truck. We worked from the original analog multi-track tapes, which were baked, transferred and remixed by Bill

Smith at United Recordings in Silver Lake, California with George Klabin and Fran Gala of Resonance. The newly mixed master was then delivered to the legendary Bernie Grundman at Bernie Grundman Mastering in Hollywood, California to be mastered for vinyl. It's quite rare to come across such a great-sounding document that's never before been officially released.

In the process of going through the multi-track tapes, we discovered that Mingus recorded a couple of inserts and re-dos during the performances. You can even hear him speak about it from the stage, where he talked about cutting and splicing the tape. We had two instances where an additional ending was recorded — “Orange Was the Color of Her Dress, Then Silk Blues” and also “Mind-Readers’ Convention in Milano” — and as you’ll hear, the edits are seamless thanks to the expertise of trumpeter/producer David Weiss, who worked with George and Fran on the audio throughout. We’re lucky to have been able to make these edits for Mingus nearly 50 years later.

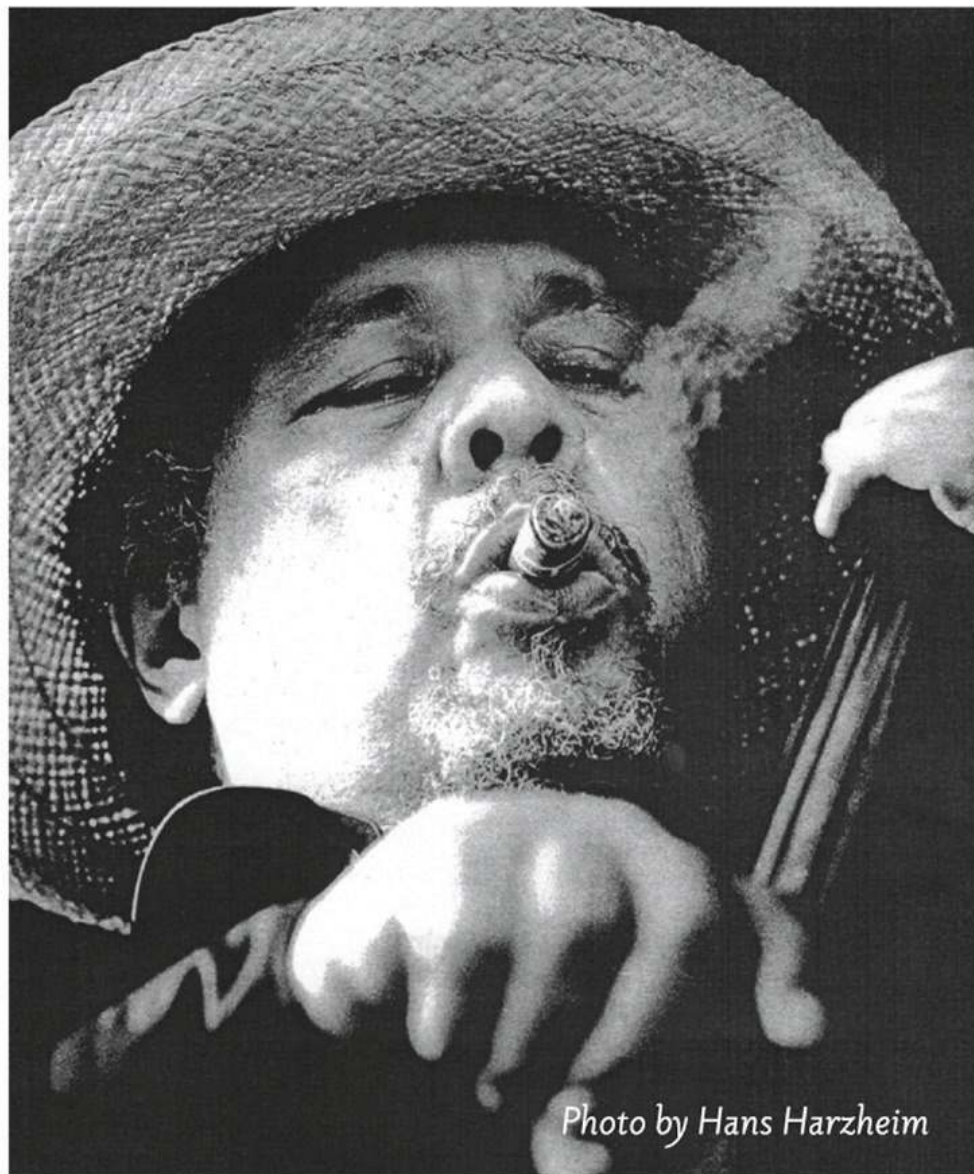


Photo by Hans Harzheim

We're very happy to have the renowned British jazz journalist, Brian Priestley, contribute liner notes for the package. He actually attended one of the concerts during this run by Mingus at Ronnie's, and even had an opportunity to interview Mingus with saxophonist Charles McPherson backstage in the dressing room at the time as well. We also had the honor to speak to Mr. McPherson about Mingus's brilliance and their strong relationship, which lasted for many, many years.

I'd also like to thank Ronnie Scott's widow, Mary Scott, who took the time to tell us about her late husband and her memories of Mingus back in 1972. It was a personal thrill getting a chance to speak with the intriguing author and public speaker Fran Lebowitz about her relationship with Mingus. I also had the pleasure of speaking with a good friend of Resonance Records, a man known so much for his work with Bill Evans, but who was also the bassist on the Mingus albums *Me, Myself an Eye* and *Something Like a Bird*, the great Eddie Gomez. He takes us on a trip with reflections about Mingus. Last but not least, I felt this package would not be complete without a word from today's father of the bass, Christian McBride.

We'd like to thank everyone at Jazz Workshop, Inc. for being so great to work with on this project — Roberto Ungaro, Zachary Kirsimae, Liz Torres and Sarah M. Williams — and definitely Jonas Herbsman of Herbsman Hafer Weber & Frisch, LLP.

This is a lost chapter in Mingus's history, originally intended to be an official album release by Mingus that never materialized. Now, we're thrilled to be able to bring this recording to light for the whole world to hear in all its musical and sonic glory.

ZEV FELDMAN

Los Angeles, July 2021

STATEMENT FROM JAZZ WORKSHOP, INC.

At last, a live experience of Charles Mingus and his music at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in the heart of London. This performance encapsulates the end of his Summer, 1972 tour in Europe featuring an all-star sextet of musicians: Jon Faddis on trumpet, Charles McPherson on alto saxophone, Bobby Jones on tenor saxophone/clarinet, John Foster on piano/vocals and Roy Brooks on drums/musical saw.

The ensemble toured France, Italy and the Netherlands before their two-week August residency at Ronnie Scott's in the U.K. On the final night, a mobile sound truck was dispatched to record the thunderous set.

In Spring of 1973, Columbia Records dropped the entire jazz roster — with the exception of Miles Davis — from its catalog. In Sue Mingus's memoir, *Tonight at Noon*, she recalls receiving the extraordinary tapes they had recorded; the reels remained in the Mingus vault; untouched until now. It is our honor, forty-nine years later, to present, with Resonance Records, this historic performance.

Exemplified here is Mingus's "Jazz Workshop" spirit. Charles, a spontaneous composer, famously transformed the bandstand into a wildly creative space for experimenting in the moment. Each of Mingus's compositions has its own evolutionary tale, personalized by Charles and his storied sidemen.

It is a pleasure to capture on record Mingus's workshop process, especially with early iterations of compositions such as "Noddin' Ya Head Blues" and "Mind-Readers' Convention in Milano." Here, this soulful, weary blues in F begins with explorative improvisations, organizing finally in an expression of the melody. On "Mind-Readers'," we experience Charles as he pushes his musicians to the limits of their individual creativity and, in some cases, their endurance.

“This composition is written to make things a little more difficult; in fact, it has made it so difficult that we decided not to play it, but it’s written to feature our drummer, Roy Brooks and he said play it because it’s going to come out as magic.”: Charles Mingus, introducing “Mind-Readers’ Convention in Milano” at Ronnie Scott’s.

This is the first official recording of “Mind-Readers’ Convention in Milano.” Like many Mingus compositions, on various occasions, this tune has had many titles. Also known as “My Music Emission,” “Alive and Well and Living in Dukeland” and “Number 29,” the composition was most recently rebirthed in 1996 on the Mingus Big Band album, *Live in Time*, with an arrangement by long-time Mingus collaborator Sy Johnson. (Sy tells a similar story when the tune was revisited in the late ‘70s — the near-impossible melody was brought in to see which trumpeter could best approximate it.)

Still to this day, Mingus’s Music is alive and well at Ronnie Scott’s. Listeners from around the world flock to join the Mingus Big Band in their annual residency celebrating the life and legacy of “Great American Composer & Bassist, Charles Mingus.” In that same spirit, we hope you enjoy this exhilarating time capsule, led by the Baron himself at the European vanguard for jazz. We are thrilled to present: *Charles Mingus: The Lost Album from Ronnie Scott’s*.

THE LOST ALBUM FROM RONNIE SCOTT’S

BY BRIAN PRIESTLEY

The magnificent music contained herein comes from a special period in the life of Charles Mingus, one in which he re-emerged from the depths of depression and inactivity, to be ultimately greeted with far wider acclaim than he had ever previously experienced. To be sure, his career in the 1940s, ‘50s and early ‘60s saw many ups and

downs, some related to fashions within the jazz world and some related to more personal issues. But the significant downturn in the live jazz scene during the second half of the '60s affected him badly, and his physical health and mental equilibrium suffered accordingly.

Things started to change at the start of the new decade, in no small part thanks to his recent relationship with Susan Graham Ungaro, whom he had known since the mid-'60s and who in 1975 would become Susan Mingus. He began referring to "my manager, Sue" and mentioned that his Guggenheim Foundation fellowship for composition, awarded in spring 1971, was facilitated by Sue doing the necessary paperwork — although he also had to provide 50 pages of composed material to prove his



Photo by Hans Harzheim

eligibility. Whitney Balliett, interviewing him for a long feature in *The New Yorker* (May 22, 1971), commented, “The last time I had seen him, a year before, his face was gray and puffy . . . he was very fat and had a listless, buried air,” whereas now “Mingus was dressed in an unusually conservative dark suit and tie. . . . A Charlie-Chan moustache and beard were carefully arranged around his mouth, and he looked wonderful.”

The other reason for his rejuvenation that same month was the publication of his long-rumored autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog* (Knopf). In the same way that Billie Holiday’s *Lady Sings the Blues* 15 years earlier had aroused interest far beyond the confines of her fanbase, the Mingus epic created quite a stir, even leading to a 35-minute interview by BBC-TV during his 1972 visit to London. The book he’d been writing since at least the mid-’50s was signed up for publication as far back as 1961, but the company then backed out, possibly for fear of litigation since the author was unsparing in his mentions of various music industry and gangland figures. Only after it was substantially edited and shortened was it released in 1971, and it was at its launch party that Balliett observed the new sextet Mingus had recently assembled, including Charles McPherson, Bobby Jones and John Foster, along with trumpeter Lonnie Hillyer and drummer Virgil Day.

Back in the fall of 1970, another of Sue’s organizational successes was in laying the groundwork for a European tour, which ended with three weeks at Ronnie Scott’s. McPherson and Jones were on board, with Eddie Preston on trumpet and, most importantly, long-standing Mingus associates Jaki Byard and Dannie Richmond. But the performances of his music were lackluster, especially compared to the present release, as Mingus was still in his “listless, buried” phase (which Sue later attributed to the strong medication he was taking). Interviewed on this tour by Mike Hennessey, the composer said “I don’t have enough to live on, otherwise I wouldn’t still be playing.” On stage,

he made absolutely no announcements, played his bass perfunctorily and took no solos, largely leaving the role of musical director to Richmond. To make matters worse, Jaki left after the first week at Ronnie's to return to New York while, rather symbolically perhaps, Dannie began sitting in with the otherwise drummerless rock band, Mark-Almond, working opposite Mingus, which then made him a lucrative offer to return to the States as a member of their group.

However, other factors helped to restore Mingus (apart from coming off his medication). These included a tour of Japan early the following year, a return to the Newport Jazz Festival in July 1971 and the premiere of choreographer Alvin Ailey's *The Mingus Dances*, performed by the City Center Joffrey Ballet with newly arranged versions of nine of his compositions. One of these orchestrations, "Adagio ma Non Troppo" (based on Mingus's 1963 piano recording "Myself When I Am Real"), then found its way into a monumental big-band album, produced by former Mingus sideman Teo Macero for the powerful Columbia label, titled *Let My Children Hear Music*. Not only that, but the February 1972 big-band concert staged to promote the record (with guests such as Dizzy Gillespie on vocals, Gene Ammons and Randy Weston) was also released in a double-album by Columbia as *Charles Mingus and Friends in Concert*.

Mingus remained on the company's roster until that infamous day in early 1973 when CBS Records president Clive Davis unilaterally ended the contracts of not only Mingus but Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett and Ornette Coleman, too — shortly before Davis himself was fired by Columbia. As it happens, Ornette had recorded in London in May 1972 with his quartet plus the London Symphony Orchestra, for the album *The Skies of America*. So, when Mingus's summer 1972 tour included two-and-a-half weeks at Ronnie Scott's between stints on the European continent, it must have seemed relatively straightforward

to set up a live recording with local engineers. Musically the omens were more than good, as I recall from seeing two long sets a couple of days before the taping and, as we can now verify, the performances were everything that might have been expected. But they have remained largely unheard until now.

The sextet's personnel had continued to evolve since Mingus's last appearance at Ronnie's. The successor to Jaki Byard was the comparatively little-known John Foster, whom Whitney Balliett described as "a mad pianist who easily mixes rumbustious gospel chords and steel-spring arpeggios." (Foster later stayed on in Europe but died tragically young in 1976.) Dannie Richmond, initially substituted by Virgil Day, was now replaced by drummer Roy Brooks, who not only had a strong reputation from his previous work with Horace Silver, but brought to the table his expertise with the musical saw. Bobby Jones and Charles McPherson remained on board, but the trumpet slot was filled by Gillespie protégé Jon Faddis who, originally booked as a big-band sideman for the concert that yielded the *Mingus and Friends in Concert* album, had suddenly stepped into a featured-guest role deputizing for the ailing Roy Eldridge, and who three weeks before the enclosed recording had just turned 19 years old.

The material Mingus played on this tour was a fine blend of the old and the fairly new. Leading off the playlist from his last two nights at Scott's is a piece that was in his repertoire as far back as 1964, when he toured Europe with Eric Dolphy in the band, and again when he appeared at that year's Monterey Festival with Charles McPherson replacing the departed Dolphy. "Orange Was the Color of Her Dress, Then Silk Blues" (which should not be confused with the 1959 tune "Song with Orange") can be heard as an altered 12-bar blues, although it has a basic AAB structure where the A sections have 11 bars each and B has 10. But that ground-plan is disguised by the opening, controlled

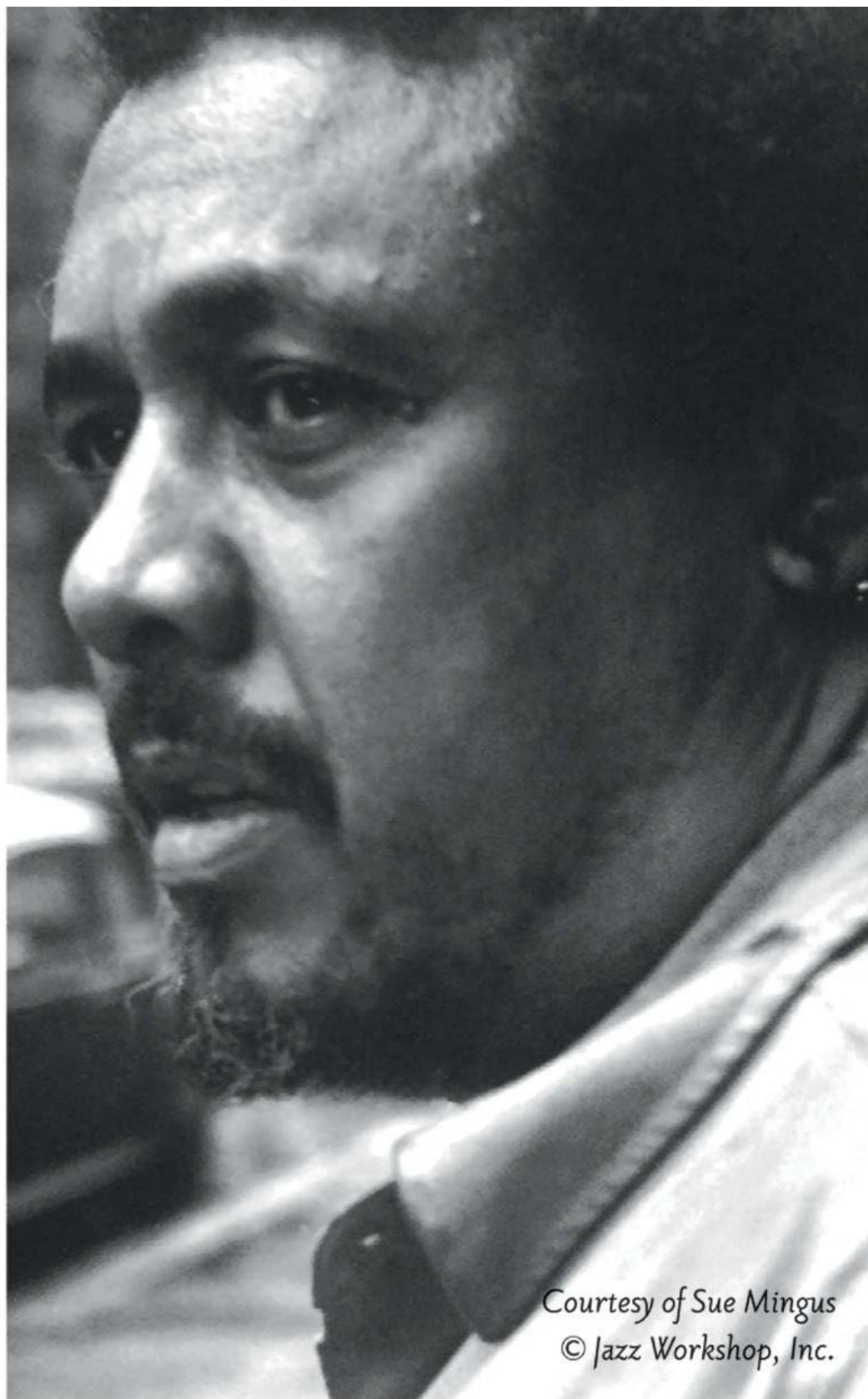
rubato (out-of-tempo) and then blown wide-open during the solo by McPherson, when (at 4:15) Mingus, who has already exhibited great invention in his backings, leads the altoist into a duet initially reminiscent of his famous “Ysabel’s Table Dance.” Similar but not identical happenings occur in the solos of Faddis, Foster and Jones on soprano, while Mingus’s own solo demonstrates among other things the huge variety in his articulation on the bass.

After the retake of the closing ensemble, necessitated by differences of opinion about rubato in the closing chorus, Mingus introduces another aspect of John Foster’s talents. Since earlier in the year, the pianist had been featured on the occasional vocal, initially it seems on the leader’s tribute to “Pops.” Now, however, after a three-and-a-half-minute solo introduction by the bassist, he takes the lead role on a slow blues in F, crediting some of his lyrics to Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson. Note the tenor responses from Jones, a very Parkerian solo by McPherson and a dynamic contribution from Faddis. Two other surprises are in store, namely the blues playing of Roy Brooks on his musical saw, and the closing theme, “Noddin’ Ya Head Blues,” which was never recorded in the studio until the 1977 album *Three or Four Shades of Blues*.

“Mind-Readers’ Convention in Milano,” which its composer describes as “written to make things a little more difficult” (i.e., for his musicians), was new on this tour, and it has survived in the repertoire of the latter-day Mingus Big Band under the title “Number 29.” A printed source declaring it to be related to the early Mingus tune “E.S.P.” seems to be in error, whereas author Gene Santoro describes how it was inspired by the very recent argument with a Milan promoter about whether the forest of microphones on stage would lead to the performance being bootlegged. This fantastic piece has solos all around but also incorporates several ensemble themes and several out-of-tempo passages

for collective improvisation, including the climactic section following Brooks's drum solo. It really deserves a comprehensive analysis at some point, but this half-hour performance (plus 30 seconds of an ultra-fast "Ko Ko") leaves everyone exhausted, except for announcer Ronnie Scott.

"Pops" is, of course, the great Louis Armstrong, who died the previous year and with whom Mingus himself had actually done his first touring away from his hometown, Los Angeles, back in 1943. John Foster's brief but very plausible vocal impersonation is a mashup of "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "Mack the Knife," but he also shows his stride-piano chops, while Bobby Jones (who previously worked with early trombone icon Jack Teagarden, as well as Woody



Courtesy of Sue Mingus
© Jazz Workshop, Inc.

Herman and Sy Oliver) breaks out his traditional clarinet. Mingus, not to be outdone, revives the “slap-bass” technique and, before the all-out finale, Roy Brooks channels the styles of Gene Krupa and Baby Dodds.

The next original composition is “The Man Who Never Sleeps,” a 24-bar ballad whose opening phrase Mingus previously used as “She’s Just Miss Popular Hybrid” but which was played in its present form on the 1970 European tour and then recorded in Japan. After nearly a minute of dialog between the leader and his highly promising “11-year-old”

trumpeter, Faddis brings in Mingus’s typically lyrical melody, which inspires some particularly striking solos all round. McPherson and Jones (still on clarinet) sound more

stylistically adventurous than on several other tracks, as does Foster whose emphasis on a now out-of-tune B-flat indicates this performance likely comes from the second night of recording. Also noteworthy is the way that the three-chorus solo from Faddis is accompanied by the bassist starting with four notes to the bar, then moving to eight, then 16 and then 12 notes to the bar. Play-off music at the end of the set now has an ultra-fast “Air Mail Special” preceding the ultra-fast “Ko Ko.”

The tour de force of the whole program is one of the bandleader’s “greatest hits” from his 1959 album *Mingus Ah Um*. In terms of overall invention, surprising

“Music is my life. Without it I'd be dead. All I need is score paper and a piano.”

— Charles Mingus, from an interview in London, 1972



development and compelling performance, this is a show-stopping version of “Fables of Faubus” (which five months later, when the President was about to receive his second inauguration, became renamed “Fables of Nixon”). Just before the 30-minute mark, Mingus’s ongoing solo spot turns into a tongue-in-cheek medley of Americana that eventually includes the band vocalizing on “(Mammy’s Little Baby Likes) Shortnin’ Bread,”

a nursery rhyme whose racial stereotyping the bassist was later to satirize in his 1976 track “Cumbia and Jazz Fusion.”

We are indeed lucky to have this music finally made available, not merely because it adds to Mingus’s legacy. It’s also valuable because this edition of his band was about to break up, partly through tension surrounding salaries and Bobby Jones, its only white member. There were stories of Mingus pelting the saxophonist with vegetables in the Netherlands and other instances of friction. In consequence, first Jones and then Faddis left, and just a week after this recording the band appeared at the Chateauvallon Festival as a quartet, augmenting to a quintet when they played Denmark with the temporary addition of Copenhagen resident Dexter Gordon. After this, McPherson (who had worked with Mingus on and off since 1960) also departed. When the bassist returned to Europe just two months later for more festival appearances, he had an entirely new front-line consisting of trumpeter Joe Gardner, baritone saxophonist Hamiet Bluiett and guest Cat Anderson on trumpet.

The other notable Mingus event in 1972 was the premiere of his “String Quartet No.1.” The fact that, in the past couple of years, this long-forgotten piece has been performed twice in London indicates how interest in his music continues to grow and, as we approach his centenary on April 22, 2022, his whole output is deserving of renewed celebration.

BRIAN PRIESTLEY

Brian Priestley is a prolific writer, pianist and broadcaster, and his Mingus: A Critical Biography (Quartet 1982, DaCapo 1984) is still considered a standard work.

BACH MUST BE THE BADDEST CAT GOING: BRIAN PRIESTLEY INTERVIEWS CHARLES MINGUS AND CHARLES MCPHERSON IN 1972

Brian Priestley: I'm delighted to say Charles Mingus and Charles McPherson are here with me.

Charles Mingus: Thank you for inviting us.

Tell us something about your regular small group, which is working here in London. It features Charles McPherson, of course. Who are other people in the band?

CM: Bobby Jones, tenor saxophone. Jon Faddis trumpet, newcomer to improvisation, actually — at least he said he was — but he sounds like he's been doing it before. And John Foster, piano, big ears. And Roy Brooks on drums, formerly with Horace Silver.

And apart from Bobby Jones, who I remember was in the band when you came here two years ago, and of course, Charles McPherson, who you said has been with you a long time, the others are all pretty new to your band. Is that right?

CM: Yes, though John Foster, the piano player, has been with me for about a year in New York off and on.

Charles McPherson:

The trumpet player is new, really new.

CM: Yeah, he's only been with the group for a couple of months. He's 19, but he's very promising. He's got very good chops. He's got good ears. He's got a quick wit, quick mind. He's got all the tools. Now all he needs is seasoning. Which he will undoubtedly get.

And how did you discover Jon Faddis? How did he come to be in the band?

CM: I was doing a concert at the Philharmonic and I was asking for first trumpet players and someone said Lionel Hampton had this young kid who came in town and he was available. I was looking for someone to rehearse a suite I wrote called *Royal Suite for Roy*. I tried him and he made it. Roy Eldridge was supposed to make it and Roy got sick, so Jon took Roy's part of the music for us — the solos that are in that suite.

CMcP: We recorded in concert.

At the Philharmonic?

CM: A lot of people were surprised because they didn't expect the concert, the jazz, to draw anybody. But they were surprised that we sold, oversold. The ticker tape thing broke. There were people still outside couldn't even get in. In a way, it gave confidence to promoters to start booking jazz in America again.

From what I read there seems to be quite a renewed activity as far as promoting jazz.

CMcP: I think that the younger people seem to be the most curious generation that we've had. And due to that curiosity, it would just be a matter of time before they would check jazz out. I think now they're all doing that, which is good. They are more curious, and that means that they're more apt to stumble upon, or either be directed toward a different type of music than rock. And jazz being another type of music, then it's a natural thing that they will eventually get turned on to jazz. I might be somewhat prejudiced, but I think that jazz in a way might be a broader musical expression.

CM: Experience too.

CMcP: Yeah. Because it's usually played by serious musicians who are really trying to be not just musicians but artists.

CM: Artists.

CMcP: There are a lot of jazz musicians who are really dedicated to their craft and are not in it for money because the average jazz musician is not in it to get rich. 'Cause he doesn't usually ever get rich.

CM: You never saw any rich ones.

But in the past that kind of art music has always been a minority interest, hasn't it? Do you think that's ever going to change?

CM: I feel it's been a minority interest. It's just because society doesn't want the best thing to sell. Madison Avenue, for instance, doesn't want the best to sell 'cause they can't overcrowd the field. It'll be a monopoly as to who made the money if the better, more trained musicians or the more serious people were pushed one half as much, one tenth as much. Anyway, life has many changes. Tomorrow it may rain. And it's supposed to be sunshine because it's summertime, but God's got a funny soul. He plays like Charlie Parker. He may run some thunder on you. He may take the sun up and put it in the nighttime, the way it looks to me. When people live so that they can only play one mood, one emotion, there's something dangerously wrong there, because it's like insanity in a way. You're the same catatonic self from day to day. You sit in the same position. Somebody comes and moves you and puts your hand in another place, you'll stay there. If that's what being normal is, if that's what being an artist is, then I quit. I'd rather hear a person even be nervous, for instance, for say 20 minutes out of his life and be honest

about it and then turn around and play beautiful. As he says, you can play sad with variations of sadness. You play love with variations of love.

CMcP: It's the whole emotional spectrum. There's a lot of different kinds of emotion. There's love, hate, protest, joy, glee, happiness, sadness, different kinds. And actually, like any artists, no matter whether he's a musician or a painter or a writer or whatever he is, he's not really a true artist unless he's able to portray all of the human emotions. If he only can do one, then he's limited.

CM: I was very lucky, man. When I was young, I saw a retrospective of Gauguin in a museum. And I've seen a lot of painters around New York who said they could paint and I saw them in San Francisco. And then one painting would not vary that much from another. [With the Gauguin exhibit] they'd have this room of hundreds of paintings, man, the next one was like another human being had done it. Yet I knew he did it. The same genius was there. I knew it was Gauguin, but it's another painting, man. It was not just another nude woman or another group of women pouring water or some flowers or trees he painted; it was another mood he felt when he captured this with his brush.

And I got to add this thing in there, man. I know myself, there are several kinds of painters with brushes and some people paint with their hands, some don't even walk up to the canvas. They dip in their hands and grab a handful, throw it at the canvas. Throw some sand on it, rocks and glass and get a monkey to walk on it and tell you that a gorilla or some animal, a dog painted this and the sell it for thousands of dollars in New York City. I've been told it's a very famous man doing it. I'm not saying he's good or bad. I hope he can make a good living. But I don't want to be a painter like that. I'd rather use my hands, control it myself and go for a D harmonic. If I miss, I admit it. I set myself and I

try and make up for it, but I don't want to be searching and have anybody say anything I do is right. I don't want someone to tell me, "Mingus, you can do anything you want to do. It's alright, man, be an idiot and stay drunk. Lie in the gutter. You're all right, man." It's a wrong note, really, but a Black man played it. White guys can't do that, but a Black man can do anything he wants. Come on, let's face it, man. That's bad. Don't tell my children this crap. I may want my kid to be a Jascha Heifetz or Yehudi Menuhin. Who knows? But if you tell him that he's right in anything he does, he's not going to try to get that education.

What Bach and Beethoven did was the latest science of development in art. Even today, Bach is still the most difficult. You hear jazz musicians playing contrary motion instead of playing avant-garde abstract music. Bach is still the most difficult of any music played, man. It may not be atonal or dissonant, but you don't find guys playing it every day. And I ain't heard no jazz cats do it yet. I once asked Roland Hanna to improvise me some Bach. I heard him play at home. He had to bring the book, yet he's a great piano player and a great composer. He hasn't done it yet; he hasn't improvised me some Bach. So Bach must be the baddest cat going. 'Cause a lot of guys come close to Stravinsky and Schoenberg and Bartok. A lot of the critics say that they do. But I ain't hear nobody say, "That cat has cut Bach yet." I believe Bach must be Jesus of the music.

Eric Dolphy used to work in your band. What do you think about the people who classify him as avant-garde?

CM: Eric did both. In the bebop, which I raised on — and so was Eric, he just came a little later in it — aside from the chord changes and patterns and lines that were there, there was another deeper expression on the bandstand; it was called conversation. Bird

could tell me what he felt. In fact, these are the exact words — I will never lie — that that man said. We were having a conversation with Bud and Monk at a table. And Bird made a statement, right? And I made a view on it. He says, “Mingus, that’s something to think about. I give you my view. Let’s discuss it on the bandstand.” When I got to the bandstand, man, when he played, it totaled up everything he was talking about. And as far as the words and thoughts, like I said, “Man, you know, you’re right.” And we discussed it off the bandstand, and we heard the same things. Everybody involved heard the same



Photo by Christian Rose

thing. And check this out. When you send a Western Union to Haiti, they don't carry it with no piece of paper to the people they send it to in the mountains. They still use the drums. And I said maybe somewhere accidentally, somebody has brought that out into jazz. Bird started this.

There was a doctor. He came in with his wife because he heard that we could talk and send messages. So he wrote a message down. And Eric had just left. McPherson was just learning the book. I told McPherson to go in the corner and I sent him a message. So he told me the message that the doctor wrote and McPherson didn't see it. The doctor's wife went with McPherson. So I played the message. And Mac says, "I hear something." And a voice sitting in the corner said, "Play it again." It was my drummer, Dannie Richmond. Then he said, "It's all mixed up — the message." He said, "He's trying to say, 'Mingus, I think is a genius.' But 'I think Mingus is a genius' is what he was saying. That's what he wrote. And that's what I played to McPherson. McPherson heard part of it, couldn't hear the rest of the words.

I'm not saying I could pass this test now, but we did used to really talk and say words with our instruments. Eric, he started it. We did it. We discussed all this pain we saw in Germany at one time, which has probably changed by now. We have different conversations because our fear, our laugh, our views of God, which is still the main subject today. It must be something right about Jesus or they still wouldn't be talking about him. He must've said something good. And a lot of people are ashamed to say that. I'm not ashamed, but I heard two doctors on television here talking about, people are afraid to say God or after life, there's a death. Or there's before life and afterlife. And they're afraid to mention Jesus or Buddha or Allah. They're afraid to say they believe in God.

So, you could say I look funny or corny, but I'm not afraid. Yeah. I believe in God. That's what my music is about. We were in that arena in Italy and I said, "That's where we belong. Right near where they killed the Christians for kicks." I said, "If I was here now under the conditions those people were in, would I say I didn't believe in God?" I hate to tell you, man. I just, I think I'd just have to go down and have to fight the lion — and might win. I got a feeling the lion might say by now, "Man, these guys really believe, man, we better be careful." If somebody said "Do you believe in this?" And you say, "We'll let you live." You say, "You don't believe in it, we'll let you go." That's a hell of a thing to say. The way I've lived, I haven't done anything to take advantage of those people who don't believe. So if they're going to destroy me for how I believe, then they got it. I still believe in God.

CMcP: Real artists believe in God, and that you know —

CM: Picasso and Einstein and Pablo Casals, right?

You mentioned about being down in the arena, and that reminded me somehow of the sound effects and the piece on the new album [*Let My Children Hear Music*], *Don't Be Afraid, the Clown's Afraid Too*.

CM: Oh yeah. I tried to get that. That was hard work to get that man, to get that arena sound, and in the circus too. I tried to get it. So it was a fear there. We had to get a lot of those same kinds of things. And we did use the arena. We used the arena sound with the chariot races to get that effect rather than in the circus crowd, because the circus crowd sounded too shallow. There wasn't any depth to it.

I'm glad you asked. I got something I want to say that might help somebody to free their kids enough, to let them have an equal education, instead of just limiting them to the

Black scene as is from the past and see that we're completely right to do anything. We have a right to do it. Give us a chance to be a doctor or lawyer or something else he wants to be, you know? Or a king or queen or president. At least give him the education for it. Don't limit him, or make him think he has to stay with the way it looks like he can make a living at — being a rock singer only, or just a jazz musician. Give him the whole field; let him play. He may be another Jascha Heifetz, you know?

From an interview with Charles Mingus and Charles McPherson conducted by Brian Priestley at Ronnie Scott's, August 12, 1972.

A WILD RIDE: CHARLES MCPHERSON REFLECTS ON HIS LONG TENURE WITH CHARLES MINGUS

I met Mingus soon after I came to New York from Detroit to put my feet in the water, throw my hat in the ring. A young trumpet player, Lonnie Hillyer, came with me. We'd saved some money to be able to be there for a couple of months in the hopes of working with a name band. When our money ran out, we'd have to go back to Detroit and come back again at another time. It just so happened that right then, Mingus needed an alto player and a trumpet player and Yusef Lateef knew that we were in town. Yusef is from Detroit and he knew us. So he told Mingus, "Well, there's a couple of young players, an alto player and a trumpet player, that I know from Detroit. They might be able to play your music and if you would like to listen to them, there is a coffee house in the Village that these guys play at in the afternoon, a jam session. You can just go by there and hear them and see if you like them or not." The jam session was at a club on MacDougal Street. Mingus came by and heard us and he hired us for that night to play in a club he was working in downtown in the West Village, the Show Place. Mingus had a kind of an extended engagement there. That's how I met him.

On the first night of the gig, Eric Dolphy was there and Ted Curson, the trumpet player, so for a while, Mingus had two altos and two trumpet players. In those days, when you quit a band, you gave the leader two weeks' notice and you stayed in the band and basically trained the new player to play the music. That's what was going on.

On the first night of the gig, Mingus was mad at the club owner over some money owed to him and he started to tear the piano up physically. Lonnie and I were terrified. Mingus was probably 41 at that time and he weighed 300 pounds. He had a reputation of being pretty confrontational. And here he was, proceeding to tear the piano up — go inside the piano and rip strings out with his bare hands. Lonnie and I were probably 20 years old and we were looking at that and saying, "We auditioned to get in this band. We are in the band and this is the person we are working for. And that's him, over there, tearing the piano up. So, are we supposed to be happy that we got this gig? What does this mean?" I remember thinking that it was going to be a wild ride. I had two very young kids, toddlers. I needed the money and I needed the work, so I decided, whatever Mingus was going to be, whatever the trip was going to be, I'm in it. But I definitely felt apprehensive. I ended up staying with him for 12 years.

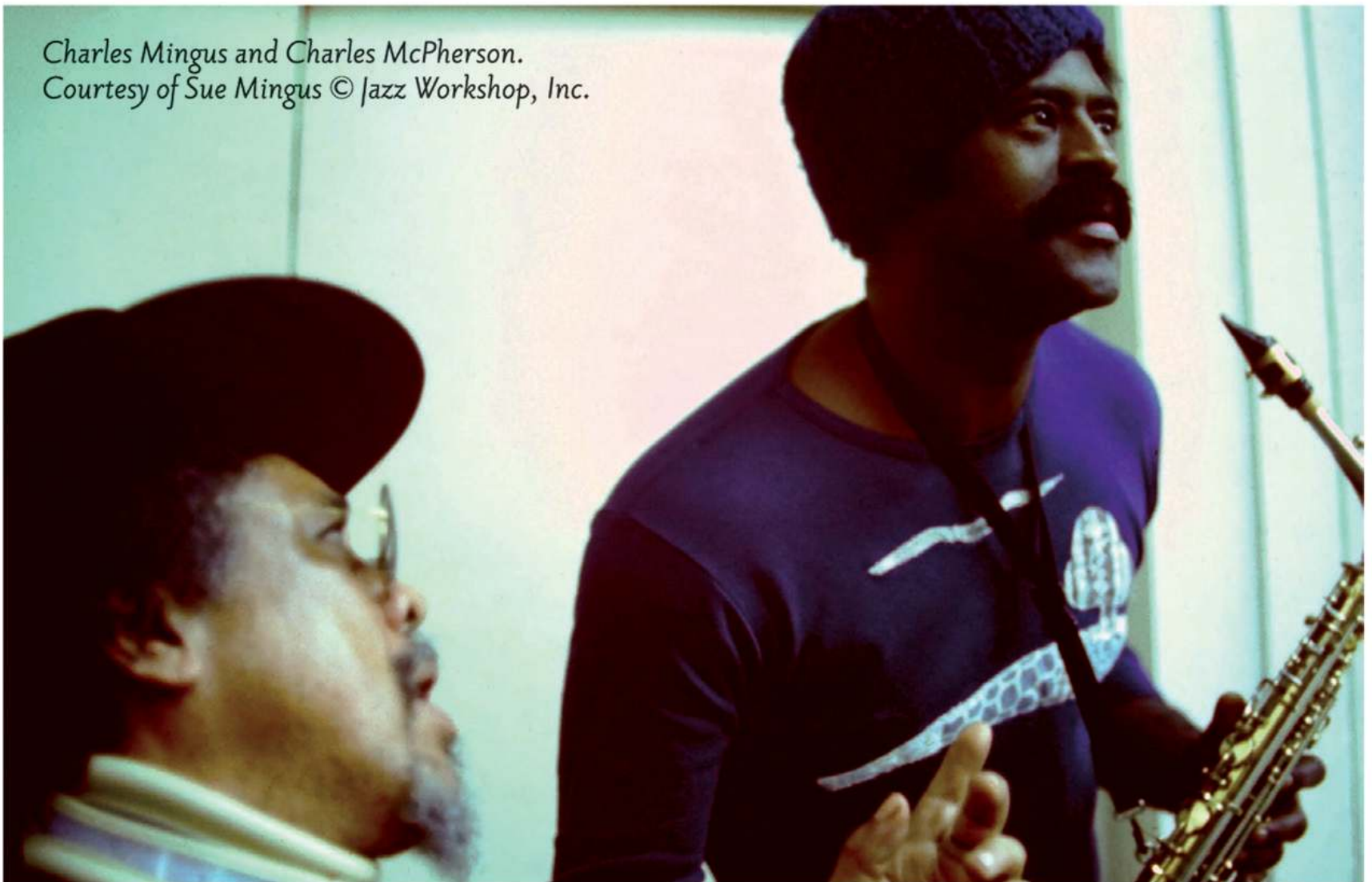
Mingus's music was complex and difficult. Quite often we would learn tunes with him playing the piano. Lonnie's and my ears were pretty good, so we were able to learn Mingus's tunes, with him just playing the parts on the piano. He would write our parts down after he'd heard us play them. So, playing with Mingus was a combination of learning tunes with him playing the piano and that would eventually be written down. Mingus also had music written down from past years that he played. Those were part of his book.

All of it was tricky; harmonic curveballs all over the place; often rhythmically complex. He was pretty much a taskmaster; he knew what he wanted and he insisted

that you do it the way he wanted. He would make statements like, “The solos are yours, but the tune is mine.”

Another thing: he didn’t like his compositions to sound too clean. At the same time, he didn’t want his compositions to sound too raggedy or disorganized. He used to say, “I like organized chaos.” Of course, that’s kind of a dichotomy. He liked for his music to be clean enough for it to be obvious that this is worked out and thought out, but not so pristine that it sounded robotic or unanimated or not human — too processed. I think “organized chaos” is an apt term because that’s the way Mingus’s music really did sound;

*Charles Mingus and Charles McPherson.
Courtesy of Sue Mingus © Jazz Workshop, Inc.*



it did have almost this tree-wheeling kind of a vibe and yet, you can tell it's written out, it's thought about, and it has all the elements of organization, but still, it has the elements of spontaneity.

His tunes are all interesting, but Mingus's ballad writing resonated with me most of all. I've always thought Mingus's ballad writing was particularly compelling for a lot of reasons.

Harmonically, as in all Mingus's music, there are these harmonic curve-balls all over the place. You're

not going to get the standard two-five-one situation all the time with him; you're going to have some curve-balls, along with some two-fives. So, he's interesting harmonically. And his ballad writing, to me, seemed to have different qualities from many other ballads. They had a combination of a haunting feeling mixed with Eros. Haunting, but also erotic and with a degree of reverence, too.

“Charles Mingus believed in the power of individual statement and people not whining about their lot. He was a so-called ‘Black man’ in a very white society, but he never felt that people had a right to just complain. He believed in effort — and therefore there is great optimism in his music. He believed you could prevail.”

— Sue Mingus, Jazz Workshop, Inc

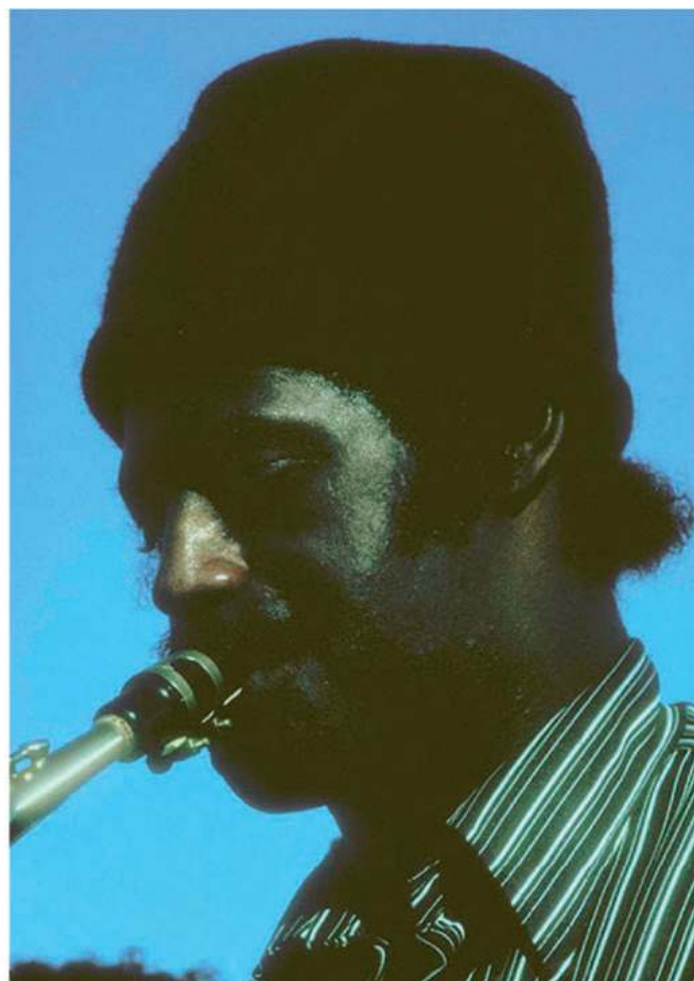
Stylistically, I'd say he's a combination of Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker. He loved Duke Ellington. You can tell from his writing that he studied Duke Ellington thoroughly. You can hear it — Ellingtonian phrases, melodic nuances are all over the place in Mingus's music. And he loved Charlie Parker.

Mingus was of that generation that heard bebop early on and was very much influenced by it. He had mucho respect for Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, especially. And of course, he loved Jimmy Blanton, the father of the modern bass and soloing; just the whole approach to jazz bass playing. So, Jimmy Blanton, Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington.

Mingus also was very much aware of and knowledgeable about modern classical music, especially the Russian composers like Prokofiev and Stravinsky, so he was very much in the Western classical tradition.

And all that mixed in and stirred up, to me, is Mingus. You can hear all of that in his music. You definitely hear it in his whole approach to form and structure. When Mingus wrote, he quite often wrote long form. He had tempo changes. There were parts that were almost polytonal; you could hear a lot of stuff going on. And he wrote thematically and he wrote episodically, as well.

Mingus was a Renaissance man. He was a true artist. We all know Mingus's music but, Mingus also wrote poetry. He painted. He wrote lyrics to some his tunes. He



Charles McPherson. Photo by Christian Rose.

was aware of how all the arts connect up with each other and he used everything. He used classical nuances, jazz, old jazz, in fact on some of the tunes on this record from Ronnie Scott's, you will hear him playing "When the Saints Go Marching In." Mingus would draw upon Scott Joplin or some ragtime or New Orleans jazz and also, of course, Charlie Parker and bebop.

You can hear classical nuances all through his music. Spanish themes. "Ysabel's Table Dance" is not on this record, but you hear he's influenced by Spanish music. He was eclectic. He was a genius, a very creative person and complex as a human being.

Ronnie Scott's in London was a very organized, well-run jazz club, very well-attended. Mingus drew well there. Ronnie Scott was a wonderful tenor player, a British tenor player. We knew who Ronnie Scott was as a musician, so it was a good club to work in, because it was his club. Because he was a musician himself, he knew what musicians liked, so it was fun to play in that club.

Ronnie Scott's is a perfect jazz club; it's just the right size, it has the area where people who really want to listen can listen. That's the biggest part of the room. But then there's also the bar, which is a little away from the listening area. People who just want to hear the music as kind of background while they talk and socialize, they can do that, too. The way it's set up, it lends itself to satisfying all people. When we were there, Ronnie really ran that room, he made sure that people that were in the listening area did not talk too much; certainly not too loud. He controlled the room and people knew that.

The band that played at Ronnie Scott's for this recording is Jon Faddis and Bobby Jones, John Foster and Roy Brooks on drums. Really good musicians, wonderful musicians. Jon Faddis has a certain kind of brilliance. Extremely smart. Humorous. And a wonderful trumpet player. Bobby Jones? Naturally talented. Had really good ears and good feeling. He did have

emotionality, and he had smarts too. He ended up staying in Europe, living in Germany. I think he lived his life out there. Bobby Jones was a Southern man and he played the tenor kind of like a Southern guy would play. But he really played the horn well, and he was very creative. John Foster was a brilliant piano player. Harmonically sophisticated and very talented. He was funny. He was almost like a character in a Three Stooges movie. He was pretty young when we did this; I think he was younger than I was. He was a smart person. But he had a certain childlike simplicity to his personality.

I know Roy Brooks better than the others because he was a year older than I and he was from Detroit. We went to the same high school. In school, he was smart, but he was also an excellent basketball player. He was short, but he was fast and he could shoot. Instead of being a drummer, he could probably have gotten a sports scholarship. He sure had some serious ability playing basketball, but he played drums as well, so he was quite popular in high school. He had his own style, his own way. He was kind of a cross between Elvin Jones and Art Blakey.

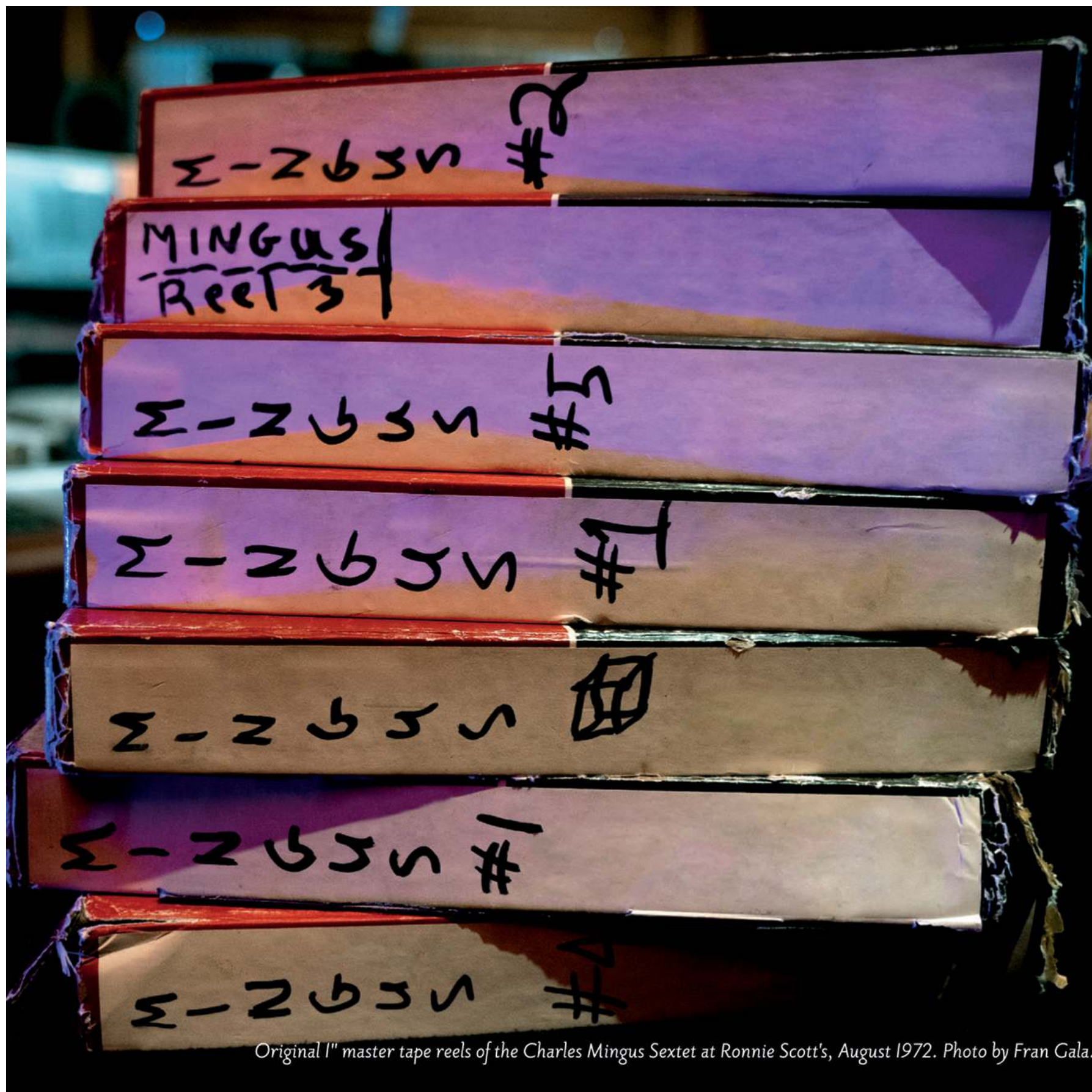
The repertoire? “Orange Was the Color of Her Dress, Then Silk Blues.” I like playing that tune, it’s an interesting tune. In fact, all the tunes on this record, “Fables of Faubus,” all those tunes, are interesting. I must say that, now, years later, I have more of an appreciation for some of Mingus’s music than I did when I was younger. Some of his stuff is more sophisticated than the norm. There’s a certain kind of sophistication that’s important to have in order to really play Mingus’s music well. I don’t care how brilliant and smart they might be, the level of musical sophistication — or just sophistication as a human being — doesn’t usually occur to people of 20 or 21 or 22. People can be brilliant and smart and talented, but only experiencing life and the human journey can impart that sophistication to you; experiencing all the variety of disappointments, all the

varieties of joy, all the different nuances of emotion. As you get older, you have a better understanding of all of it. Today, when I listen to Mingus's music, I'm listening to it as an 80-year-old man, not some 22-year-old or 23-year-old or 30-year-old young man. I understand the emotional content more now. I've lived life more and I understand what that is. Young people are just starting on the journey. What does a 20-year-old person know about deep love, really? You've just started. But after you've been there a while



Roy Brooks. Photo by Jean-Pierre Leloir.





Original 1" master tape reels of the Charles Mingus Sextet at Ronnie Scott's, August 1972. Photo by Fran Galia.



Courtesy of Sue Mingus © Jazz Workshop, Inc.

and experienced the lows and the highs, when you write a tune about unrequited love, then it's not a matter of technology — this is the A-minor seventh, or this is a half-diminished — it's no longer just a dominant seventh and some kind of harmony, some kind of technical; it's about life. That's why a half-diminished is used, as opposed to a major seventh chord; the half-diminished does a better job of expressing that particular emotion at that moment.

“Orange Was the Color of Her Dress” is a tune we played often. Mingus loved trumpet players, and he loved high note trumpet. Mingus ran his small band, with the model of a big

band in mind. He liked lead trumpet players and this is where Jon Faddis comes in. And of course, he loved the saxophone. This band and the tunes played pretty much capture what Mingus is about aesthetically, harmonically, melodically, rhythmically; the whole bit. “The Man Who Never Sleeps” is a particularly compelling tune for me. “Mind-Readers’ Convention in Milano,” now that’s Italy there. If you see “Mind-Readers’ Convention in Milano/Ko Ko,” of course, “Ko Ko” is Charlie Parker’s intro to Cherokee, which Charlie Parker and Dizzy played, so Mingus wanted Lonnie and me to superimpose “Ko Ko,” to have that part of the musical



Courtesy of Sue Mingus © Jazz Workshop, Inc.

collage he was building. These are the things he liked to do. It's almost like Charles Ives. He would take elements of certain tunes, of certain materials, and mix them with other tunes that are totally different and just have both things going on at the same time. I think the set of tunes here pretty much mirrors Mingus's whole musical style and his personality. This record captures what Mingus is.

Mingus was a very serious man; he was complex and he was a real artist. Every note he played, he believed in it. And he wrote from his heart. It's a good lesson for young musicians — for musicians, period — to realize that when you write and compose and play music, you're playing the human condition and you're using music as the medium through which this is to be done. But the main event is to tell the human story and also, be aware that a human being is complex, and what makes them complex is because there's a variety of emotions that make us human. We have deep sadness, we have the other end of the spectrum, joy. We have everything in the middle. Eros. We have reverence. We have mysticism, and mystery. We have thoughtfulness. We have all of these different gradations of emotionality that make us human.

As artists, we're supposed to be like actors and actresses; we're supposed to be able to portray all of the emotions that humans are capable of feeling. We use music to do that. Mingus really did do that. He was multi-dimensional. Some of Mingus's music is joyous, some of it is dark and deep and sad, some of it is humorous — the way we play “When the Saints Go Marching In.” So, you've got humor, you've got deep sadness; a lot of his ballads are about unrequited love. You have joy. You have all these different things, all these moving parts. And Mingus exemplified that as an artist and as a composer. That would be the thing, to me, that makes Mingus valid.

From an interview with Charles McPherson conducted by Zev Feldman on May 18, 2021.

PROFOUNDLY AN ARTIST: FRAN LEBOWITZ REMEMBERS CHARLES MINGUS

Zev Feldman: When did you first hear Charles Mingus's music? What impression did it make on you?

Fran Lebowitz: Boy, I really can't answer that. I always loved jazz. I probably heard it when I was really young. My parents, my mother especially, liked music. My mother had a huge collection of 78s, which I loved and played all the time, but I don't really know when I first heard Charles's music.

How did you first meet Charles Mingus?

That I remember exactly. I'd gotten a job at one of these little tiny, what we used to call underground newspapers, although they weren't really. It was called *Changes*. It was owned by a woman named Sue Graham who at that time was Charles's girlfriend. She later became his wife. The offices of this magazine were in her apartment. I came into the apartment one day and there was a big living room that was kind of the office. And then there was a big kitchen and I walked in and I looked around and I actually did not believe my eyes because here's what I thought I saw: Charles Mingus sitting at the kitchen table. In fact, it was Charles Mingus sitting at the kitchen table. I had no idea why he would be there. Sue wasn't there. I was just shocked. I had to go in the kitchen. I was not very happy about that because I didn't know what to do. But I went in the kitchen and I said, "Hi," and he said, "Hi." He had a very kind of growly voice. And he really was not an outgoing, gregarious type of guy. So, of course being a young kid — I was probably 20, maybe 21 — I thought naturally, that this had to do with me. Anyway, at some point, Sue

came in. She just came in and she was not surprised to see Charles Mingus sitting in her kitchen. So that's how I met him.

How did your relationship with him evolve after that?

Well, he was very uncommunicative. I don't mean just to me, but in general. From a talking point of view, he was not that communicative. And of course, I thought he didn't like me, and he may not have, I don't know. But I realized pretty soon that he was pretty much like that with everyone. Not with Sue, but in general. So I did talk to him sometimes. He played a lot in New York then, especially at the Vanguard. I went to the Vanguard all the time. I had been going there way before I met Charles. I even worked there very briefly. Once I knew Charles and he would play there, I would always go with Sue to watch him play. And I got to know him. When I say pretty well, I mean pretty well considering that I was a kid and he was Charles Mingus. I think eventually we came to have a kind of . . . I don't know what the word is . . . a camaraderie.

I saw him play live countless times; I would say hundreds of times. I also spent a lot of time with him because I was very friendly with Sue. She had two kids and I was friendly with them and I had numerous meals with them. New York was open all night then, so we would be out to eat in the middle of the night and I saw him a lot. I even went on a vacation with him once, not alone, of course. There's a place in the Berkshires called Blantyre Castle. It's a pretty fancy place, not a sort of place I would have been able to go to at all. Charles and Sue were going there for a weekend with one of the kids and I was doing something with Sue for work. I remember going there with them because Charles had a son named Eric who was named after Eric Dolphy. We picked him up on our way up to the Berkshires. When we got there, we went to eat dinner. Eric was pretty shy and Charles was a legendary eater.

As he almost always did, Charles ordered a gigantic steak. The kid said he wanted to get a hamburger. Charles said, “Don’t be ridiculous, of course you’re going to have a steak.” They bring this gigantic steak, they put in front of this little kid and he burst into tears because I’m sure he thought he was going to have to eat it. Of course, I already knew that Charles ordered it so he could eat it because Charles always liked to order two steaks.

Once, Charles came to my parents’ house for Thanksgiving because Sue’s kids had asked if they could come to my parents’ house for Thanksgiving, so I invited them. I invited Sue. I didn’t invite Charles because Charles had such a temper. Numerous times you’d see him blow up at people and I thought he’s just a loose cannon. But then he asked to come and actually said to me, “I’m going to be very polite,” and he was very polite. My mother had a cousin who was also big, like Charles, although he was much taller. They instantly bonded over a major discussion of where to get clothes made for guys who were this size. My mother ended up loving Charles because she said he was such a good eater. Not only did he eat half the food on the table, but then after dinner, he went into the kitchen and finished the turkey, so he was a hit in my family.

I heard he once chased you down Seventh Avenue from the Village Vanguard.

He was angry at me for some reason. I didn’t really know he was angry at me, otherwise I wouldn’t have gone to Vanguard that night. But I went to the Vanguard and I was sitting with Sue and he looked up from the bandstand and saw me and started yelling, screaming at me. And then he jumped up. He started running after me. The Vanguard is really small. It’s a basement. And near where we were sitting are the stairs. I ran up the stairs. He ran behind me. We went down Seventh Avenue really far; my recollection is to Canal Street. We ran to Canal Street and I couldn’t run anymore. I was like 21 years old. I don’t know how old

Charles was. He was probably in his late forties at least and he was not exactly in Olympic condition. Neither was I, but compared to Charles I was. I just fell on the ground. I couldn't run anymore. And then when he reached me, he fell on the ground and he's panting. And then he just looked at me and said, "You want to go eat?" because I guess he realized we were near Chinatown where he was the star eater of all time. I wasn't that surprised that his anger had dissipated because he was volatile. He would get angry, then it'd go away. And I pointed out to him that he was in the middle of a set when he did this. Vanguard was packed with people who paid to see him, the band was on the stage. I don't really remember, but after that, I assume that we went back to the Vanguard.

You worked for Max Gordon?

Well really, I did. Max owned the Vanguard but Max had a sister named Sadie and Sadie was the person people were much more afraid of. I worked at the Vanguard because I happened to working for a guy, Jack, who decided the Vanguard was empty all day, so why shouldn't it be making money? He would have kids come in in the middle of the day to read poetry and play music and stuff like that. So I got to know Sadie who, luckily for me, liked me because she was pretty tough. I was there one day working for Jack and the phone kept ringing. It was a week before New Year's Eve and there was no one there from the Vanguard, so I just took all the reservations on the phone. When Sadie came back, she was so thrilled that I booked the entire club for New Year's Eve that she really liked me after that.

These performances we have from Ronnie Scott's in London in 1972 were right around the time his book *Beneath the Underdog* was going to be released in paperback. Did you ever read the book?

“My present working methods use very little written material. I ‘write’ compositions on mental score paper, then I lay out the composition part by part to the musicians . . . I play them the ‘framework’ on piano so that they are all familiar with my interpretation and feeling and with the scale and chord progressions to be used. Each man’s particular style is taken into consideration. They are given different rows of notes to use against each chord but they choose their own notes and play them in their own style — from scales as well as chords — except where a particular mood is indicated. In this way I can keep my own compositional flavor in the pieces and yet allow the musicians more individual freedom in the creation of their group lines and solos.”

— Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um* Liner Notes

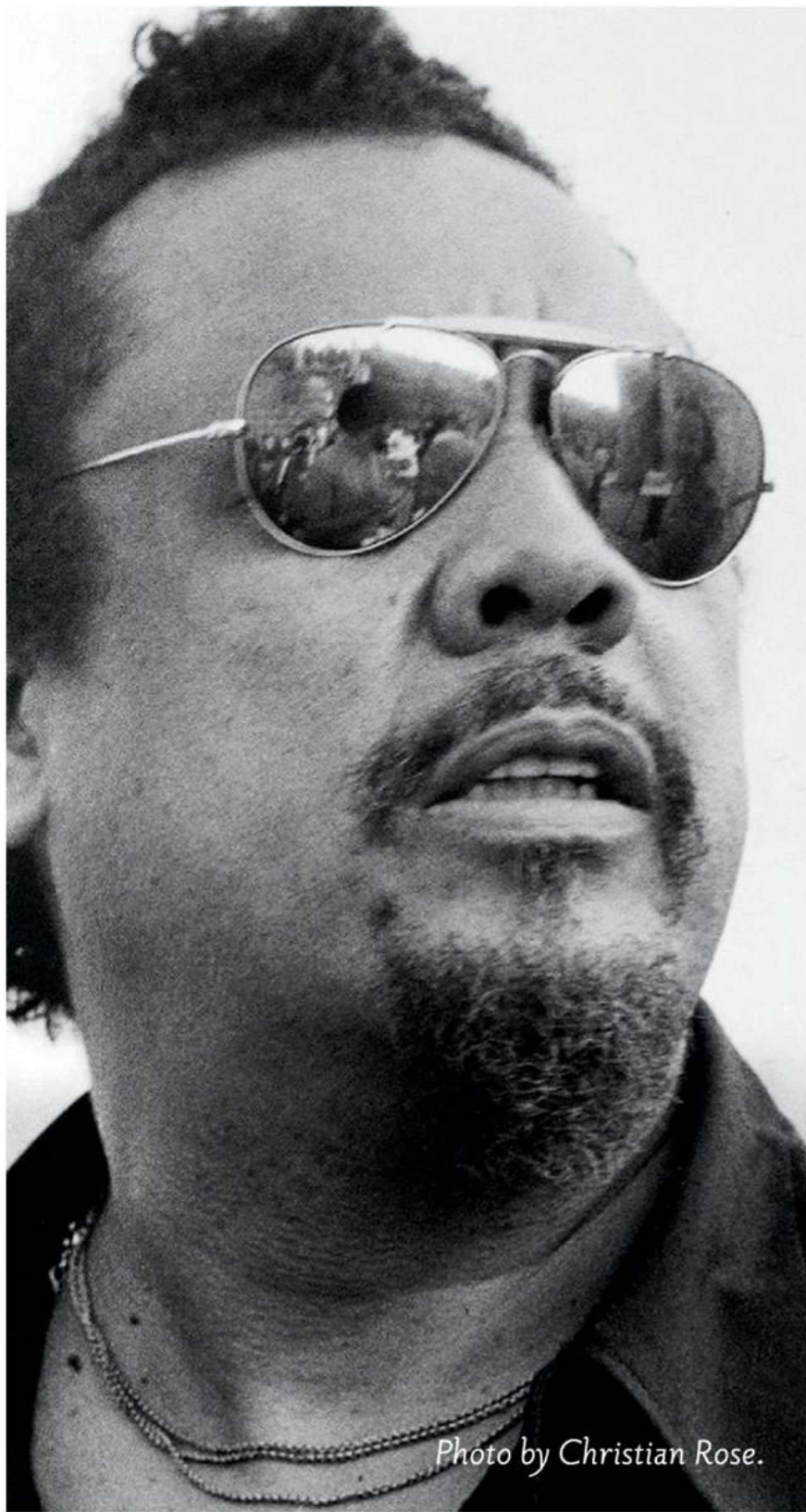


Photo by Christian Rose.

I read the book. I own the book. I was really surprised that Charles would do a book. I haven't read it probably since it came out, but I remember thinking that it was a very good representation of Charles because there was something about Charles — you see it here in his music, that was kind of abstract. I know a million artists, I know a million people who say they're artists, a million people that other people say are artists, but Charles was profoundly an artist. There was nothing about him that wasn't that of an artist. And so that doesn't mean that if you're a composer and a musician, you can be a writer. But it means that every way in which you express yourself, you can tell it's you and that is certainly true of that book.

These 1972 London performances were supposed to comprise Mingus's next album and then his label dropped him, Bill Evans, Ornette Coleman and Keith Jarrett.

Moral of the story, they dropped all these great guys. That's the worst. That's the moral of the story, I think.

Any final thoughts about Mingus?

Yes, I do have something that probably is unusual, which is Alvin Ailey choreographed a dance to Charles's music. Are you aware of that?

I'm not.

And it was called *The Mingus Dances*. I went to a number of these rehearsals with Alvin Ailey and Charles, because choreographers actually make the dance on the dancers; they don't sit in a room writing it. That was very thrilling to watch. I loved Alvin Ailey.

Do you listen to music a lot these days?

I can't say that I ever really listen to music — recorded music — the way everyone else I know does. I very rarely just sit and listen to music. I was lucky when I first came to New York that all these great jazz musicians were playing. Almost everyone who was alive in my lifetime I have heard; and probably many times. We also have the New York Philharmonic. I've heard lot of live music, probably unlike most people, I've listened to a lot more live music than I have recorded music. I sometimes listen to music in the car, but I don't drive that much anymore. But when I did, I did listen to music in the car. I listened to music when I'm exercising. I wouldn't call that really listening to music. We're surrounded by music all the time so I hear it. The truth is that of almost any art form I can think of, I know the least about music in any real way, but I've always been surrounded by it. And so that is to me a really lucky thing, I have to say.

From an interview with Fran Lebowitz conducted by Zev Feldman on May 14, 2021.

EXCERPT FROM *TONIGHT AT NOON: A LOVE STORY* BY SUE GRAHAM MINGUS

Meanwhile, back in Europe, en route to Ronnie Scott's club in London for the final gig of the tour, Charles spent a week at a club in Copenhagen, that climaxed with a famous headline in a Danish newspaper: MINGUS RUNS AMOK ON STOGET! The article described a "shirt scandal" that had taken place on Stoget, a strip of elegant shops where, in his usual fashion, Charles had purchased twenty-four shirts at one of the stores. When he returned to his hotel, someone told him the price was not right, that he'd "been took." He hurried back to the store where one thing led to another, a series of "colorful threats" was exchanged, the police were called in, and Mingus went briefly to jail. The British newspapers got wind of the story and ran their own headline. As a result, Mingus, whose English booking agent had arranged for him to perform on an ocean liner back to the States following his engagement at Ronnie Scott's, lost a gig he'd wanted all his life. The managers of the cruise ship were not about to risk a cruise having any surprises.

His mood was dark. Emotionally, things had gone from bad to worse during the tour, and now the ocean liner gig had been sabotaged. He spent a whirlwind series of days in London at the club, fighting about the music and recording some of the most exciting music of the tour. Although I had broken up with him in Italy and was now back in the States, I eventually returned one of his many calls from the club. Ronnie Scott himself answered the phone.

"I can't talk!" he shouted. "Mingus just threw the tenor player, Bobby Jones, down the stairway and I think he broke his leg!" He hung up the phone. When I called back an hour later, Ronnie again picked up the phone. "*The music is incredible!*" he said. "It's utterly fantastic! I've never heard anything like it in my life!"

“How is Bobby Jones?” I asked. “Is he all right?”

“The music is unbelievable!” he continued.

“The tenor player,” I asked again. “Is he okay?”

“Bobby? Oh yeah, Bobby’s fine. He’s back on the bandstand. They’re blowing away the crowd! It’s completely out of sight.” He hung up. One of the musicians told me afterward that Bobby had been drinking heavily, tripped on his way to the dressing room, and then drummed up the story, which later was reported in the press.”

SNAPSHOT OF A GENIUS: A CONVERSATION WITH CHRISTIAN McBRIDE

Zev Feldman: When did you first become aware of Charles Mingus and how did his music affect you?

Christian McBride: Mingus was on the first jazz album I ever loved, *Jazz at Massey Hall* with Dizzy, Bird, Bud Powell and Max Roach. That album that made me fall in love with jazz. Mingus’s presence is felt very much on that recording. The recording of *Massey Hall* I heard at age 11 was the Debut Records version of the album. Mingus overdubbed all his bass parts on that version. When I heard it at age 11, I didn’t know that. I think the first actual Mingus record I ever heard was the album *Mingus*. It was the quartet with Ted Curson, Eric Dolphy and Dannie Richmond. Later on, I heard *Blues and Roots*, which is my all-time favorite Mingus record. A lot of people love *Mingus Ah Um* or *Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*, But *Blues and Roots* has always been my all-time favorite Mingus record. It’s like Robert Johnson meets Duke Ellington. That’s what I love about that album. That’s what I love about Mingus, never gets away from the blues.

What do you think are Mingus's most lasting effects in jazz?

Mingus just has such an individual sound, such a presence. He had some real estate that no one else had. I love how Mingus's music is this very blurry balance of blues, swing and the avant-garde. It sort of goes back and forth between those three elements. He did it in a way that no one else did. Anytime someone thinks of abstract music as being something that has no time, no harmony, no blues, I will always point that person to Mingus because Mingus's music is not traditional in the way we think of swing being traditional. It's not bluesy in the traditional way that we think of being bluesy. So, to my ears, it's a little abstract, it could be opaque every now and then. But there's always something in it that makes it grounded and rooted. And for that, I think he really did set himself apart from a lot of other band leaders of his generation and of other generations.

How did Mingus influence your own playing and composing?

When you're around a musician who has an elevated conception like Mingus had, it moves you toward having expansive, extended, thinking. To a lot of people, extended, expanded, thinking entails getting away from the blues. Get away from time, get away from things that are recognizable. In Mingus's music — I'm talking about him as a composer — if you listen to an album like *Let My Children Hear Music*, a lot of that music is very Stravinsky-like, very Bartok-like. But then he'll come back to the language of bebop. He'll come back with the language of the blues. He'll come back with the language of Ellington. Filtered through this Mingusian lens. The way he impacted me was to let me know it's OK never, ever, ever to get away from the blues. You can stretch your mind, be as expansive, as

imaginative as possible — that's what an artist is supposed to do — but there's a core element in our being, which is the blues. We cannot negate that in the pursuit of imagination. And that certainly applies to his bass playing as well. Mingus's bass playing is just . . . a word like gutsy seems to be a cop-out word, but that's where I feel it when I hear him play. And when I hear his writing.

Let's talk about the band on this recording.

Jon Faddis must've been 19, maybe 20 when he was playing with Mingus. He was definitely the hottest young jazz prospect at that time — 1972. Of course, now he's a legend. It's just amazing to hear Jon in his early days when people were just hearing about him and were just becoming excited about him. Just a master musician.

How about Charles McPherson?

McPherson is such a strong, logical extension to Charlie Parker. Mingus deeply loved Charlie Parker. And I think out of all the great alto players that Mingus had in his band — John Handy, Jackie McLean, Shafi Hadi, all kinds of cats, Charles McPherson seems to me to have the direct Bird influence, which he brings to Mingus's music.

How about Bobby Jones?

I discovered him about 20 years ago. He's an enigma. I did a little research and I saw that he was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky. He passed away in 1980. But there doesn't really seem to be a lot of documentation of his work, which is a tragedy to me because he's playing his behind off with Mingus. There's a YouTube video that came out a couple of years ago of Mingus's group playing on this New Jersey public television show. Bobby Jones is in the band. Seeing the guy just makes me wonder whatever happened to him.

“I always thought that no matter what kind of work people did, they should involve themselves totally with all the discrimination they ran into. I remember once in Yugoslavia we played ‘Faubus’ and ‘Remember Rockefeller at Attica’ and this U.S. Embassy cat came running up and told me not to play songs with titles like that. I told him, ‘You know, man, we’re from a free country. We’re supposed to show people over here how great our country is by telling them we’re able to talk about the wrongs and the rights of our country, whereas they’re not allowed to.’ He wasn’t nasty, but he sounded like he forgot he was from America.”

— Charles Mingus

from Charles Mingus: More Than a Fake Book, Jazz Workshop, Inc., 1991, distributed by Hal Leonard

What's his full story? I'd like to know. He's a monster, monster player.

How about John Foster?

I don't know much about him as a player. He's in line with the kind of musicians Mingus kept around him — forward-looking musicians who took chances, but who were also very, very grounded. I love to point to Mingus when people say there was no jazz in the '70s. There was a whole generation of cats who really didn't care about acoustic jazz; they just wanted to run straight to the fusion. But look at all the cats who came through Mingus's band at that same time. Faddis of course, being a young buck. Bobby Jones, Don Pullen, Hamiet Bluiett. All these cats. They were the young guys coming up on the scene, Ricky Ford, Jack Walrath. So, Mingus always kept some cats in his band who really had to embrace the tradition. And John is very much doing that on this recording.

Roy Brooks?

One of the greats. I'm sure that Detroit connection between Roy and Charles McPherson played a big part in the sound and feel of Mingus's band at that time. He was also part of M'Boom, with Max Roach. Mingus's whole band was just a utopian, percussion experience. Roy Brooks was definitely one of the great, great rhythmic thinkers of his time. And hearing him with Mingus, not a lot of other drummers got a piece of that because that was Dannie Richmond's home for so long.

It's been said that Mingus's legacy was passed down to you. How do you feel about that? What does it mean to you?

If you play bass and you're a band leader, you're a part of Mingus's legacy. I'm part of a long list of bass-playing band leaders that came after Mingus — Dave Holland, Charlie

Haden, Marc Johnson; there are so many that it's too hard to start naming names. But people like Mingus, Ray Brown, Scott LaFaro, Paul Chambers and going all the way back to the godfathers, like Jimmy Blanton, Milt Hinton, Oscar Pettiford, they created this vast legacy. We're all part of this long legacy, this long thread, this long tradition. But if you look at all of the great bass players I just named. None of them has a legacy as big — certainly in terms of being a composer and a band leader — as Mingus. So, I'm always flattered to be mentioned in the same breath with Mingus.

These recordings showcase one of Mingus's last great lineups. What are your thoughts on these recordings overall?

I'm fascinated with Mingus's work during this period, in the early- and mid-1970s. This really is a snapshot of where he was; how developed he was as a composer, then as a band leader. Hearing it again, it's interesting hearing the young cats. If you were to go back to 1972 and ask someone, "Who are the hottest young guys coming on the scene?" The answer would be, "Go see Charles Mingus's band. That's how you find out." There was a period between '71 and '75 where Mingus had a whole bunch of bad young cats coming through that group. And they all went on to do some great things in their own careers. This is like a snapshot of a genius. Sadly, nearing the end of his career, and ultimately his life.

What do you see as Mingus's influence today on the new generation of players?

I hear it in the improvisation, specifically with bass players. I'm not sure I hear it as much on the composing side now. Today, that real nasty, hardcore, gutbucket blues is not considered so hip. There are some incredibly imaginative things going on in our world of improvisational music right now. But I definitely hear Mingus's direct influence in the



players of today — people like Dezron Douglas, Eric Wheeler, Joe Sanders. These young bass players coming on the scene got a lot of Mingus in them. They're not necessarily the youngest of the young, up-and-coming bass players anymore. But I definitely hear it in them. And the way a lot of cats improvise, I think Mingus would enjoy a lot of the cats coming up on the scene right now. Because they're just so imaginative. But Mingus would definitely make them deal with the blues a little more.

Any final thoughts?

I hope more people examine this period of his career and examine this period of acoustic jazz a little more. I do feel like people have chosen to sort of buy into a particular narrative about this era. It was dominated by fusion, but that doesn't mean there wasn't anything else going on. Just because it wasn't popular doesn't mean it wasn't happening. I hope that people really go back and listen to all these great bands and all this great expansive writing that Mingus was doing at that time. Then hopefully that'll lead them to some other cats. What was Art Blakey doing in the '70s? Horace Silver? Dave Brubeck? Or Mary Lou Williams? Or even Count Basie and Duke Ellington? They were still alive and still killing, so I hope this will make people more curious and make them seek out more history.

From an interview with Christian McBride conducted by Zev Feldman on July 1, 2021.

HIS PRESENCE FILLED THE ROOM: MARY SCOTT REMINISCES ABOUT CHARLES MINGUS AND RONNIE SCOTT

Zev Feldman: How did you meet your husband? How did Ronnie Scott's come into being?

Mary Scott: I met Ronnie in March of 1964 when Stan Getz played the club for the first time. After the first set finished, I had left the club to go home with my friend when a friend of hers arrived and begged us both to go back downstairs, which we did. Ronnie bought me a drink and the rest is history.

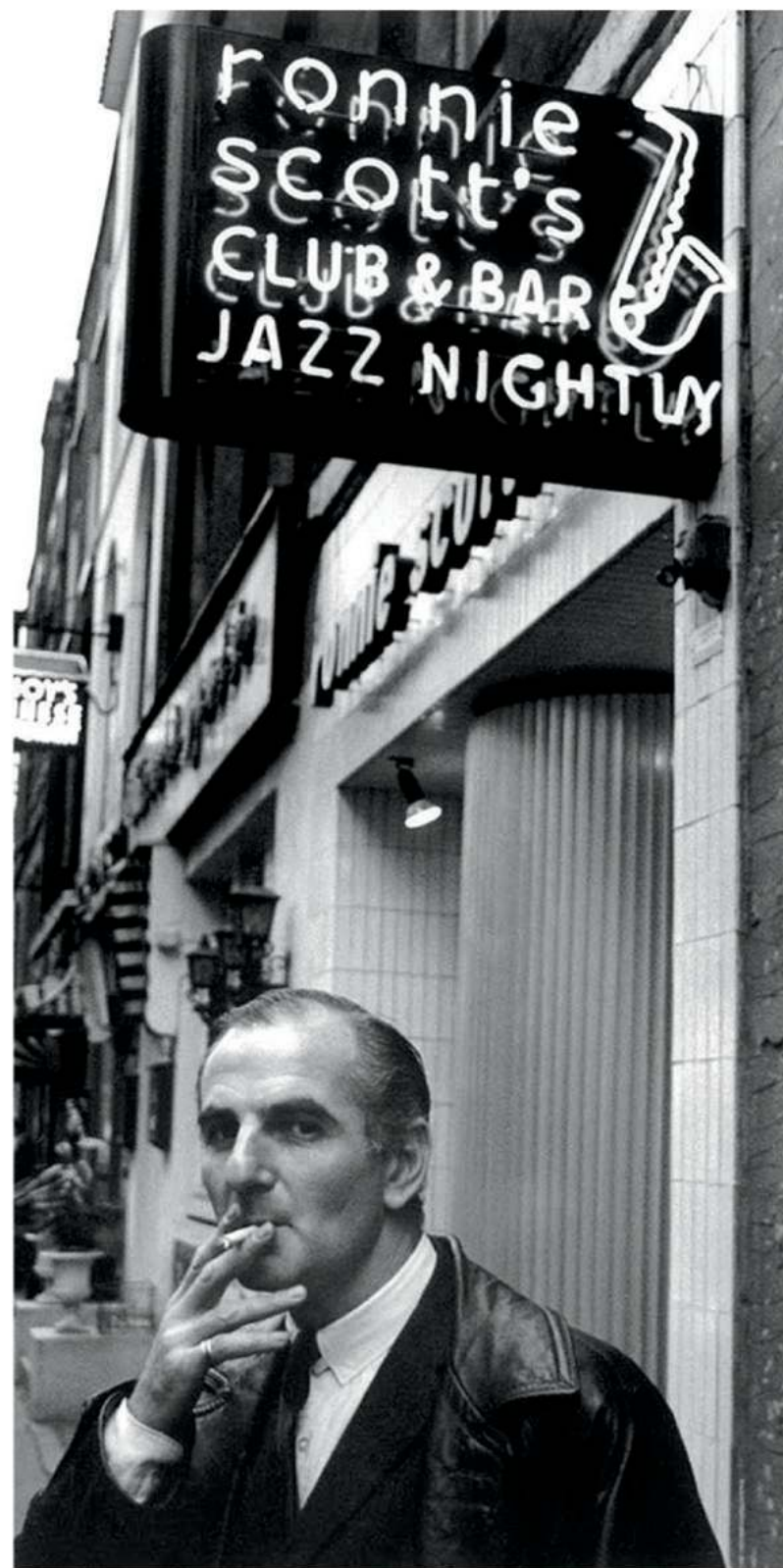
Ronnie's vision of the club was formed in April of 1947. He and a bunch of other British musicians would go to New York on the Cunard Line's Queen Mary, playing their way across. When they'd arrive in New York, they'd have a 48-hour stopover, which they

would spend entirely on 52nd Street. The first club he went into was the Three Deuces, which was where he got his inspiration to open the club in London.

I have a quote, a direct quote from Ronnie. He said, “On Friday the 30th of October 1959, came the moment which I had been anticipating since that night on 52nd Street in 1947, when I had seen Charlie Ventura . . . and marveled at the electric atmosphere of the Three Deuces. If I hadn’t been a musician, there would never have been a Ronnie Scott’s Club.” He said that many, many, times during the course of his life, because being a musician was first and foremost for him.

Do you recall the first time Charles Mingus played at Ronnie Scott’s and what had you heard about him and his music before he played at the club?

It was in the fall of 1971. He played the club for three weeks. We all knew about Mingus. As you know, in the world of jazz,



Ronnie Scott. Photo by Val Wilmer / CTSIMAGES

“It was written for a Robert Herridge television show. It’s about a talented composer who meets a rich girl that tries to ruin his life. She doesn’t have anything to offer him but money, so she asks him to write a song and dedicate it to her dress, which was orange. She knew that nothing rhymes with ‘orange.’”

**— Charles Mingus, explaining his song
“Orange Was the Color of Her Dress,
Then Silk Blues.”**

*from Charles Mingus: More Than a Fake Book,
Jazz Workshop, Inc., 1991, distributed by Hal Leonard*

everything is like a telegraph. You hear about everybody and everything that they do or don’t do. But that said, Ronnie met everybody who played on 52nd Street on his visits to New York, so he had previously established what turned out to be lifetime friendships with many of the musicians in those ten years before the club was opened. So yes indeed, we were familiar with Mingus and his music.

When Mingus first arrived at the club in ‘71, there was a representative from the Inland Revenue who delivered a writ to him for unpaid taxes for a previous visit. Mingus was absolutely fuming. Somehow or other, he managed to suppress it and he marched

onto the stage and announced, “I just received a letter from your Queen.” He grabbed his bass and embarked upon a fierce and passionate bass solo. His performance was incomparable, contagiously electrifying. Absolutely. And the audience was swept away. It was the most electrifying opening to a first set I’ve ever heard in my life.

What can you say about the members of the band?

I’ve always loved Charles McPherson and was engrossed listening to his playing, but the ensemble together in that setting — playing with Mingus — was really an education. It was what Ronnie would call a masterclass in jazz. Mingus putting them all together and the way they connected with each other, the communication between them was exemplary. That was the first time I met Jon Faddis, Dizzy Gillespie’s musical son. Dizzy took him under his wing. It was amazing to hear this young man, so mature in his playing. He captivated the audience, as he still does today.

How did audiences respond to Mingus?

When Ronnie opened the club and first booked American musicians, the audiences in London had not been privy to seeing their idols play live. People had only heard them on records. The reaction of the audiences throughout the early '60s was extraordinary. The first time they heard and saw Charles Mingus and felt that incredible presence that he had in person for the first time, it was the same excitement. Just alone, his presence filled the room. Amazing communication between him and anyone around him. His energy field was astonishing. When Mingus played at the club, it was an incredibly exciting moment. Everybody left elated and the exchange of energies was palpable throughout the club. Always a joyous occasion.

Do you have any special memories you can share about other times Mingus played Ronnie's over the years?

He only played Ronnie's twice — 1971 and 1972. He didn't play the club again. If you recall, Mingus's first European tour was at the end of 1970. We were able to pick him up from Paris in 1971 and he played three weeks at the club. Then in 1972, the recording. He never played the club again. Of course, prior to that, Mingus was going through so much himself, he didn't get out on the road until 1970.

Did you and Ronnie keep in touch with him? I know that you would frequently come over to the States. Did you ever socialize with him or keep in touch?

Oh, yes. It would always be at Bradley's. Susan and Charles loved to hang out in Bradley's and so did I. Bradley's was like a home from home. Everybody hung out there. Charles was in good fettle then — this would have been '75, '76, '77.

How did Ronnie balance his work life as a club owner with his life as a musician?

That was thanks to Pete King, his partner. He said many times that he'd never have been able to do it without Pete King. Ronnie was a musician; that was his great love. When he visited the Three Deuces in New York, he was so taken with it — it was almost as if you were in someone's living room, to be able to be that close to a performer on stage, just a few feet away, was magical. The fact that the audience sat in rapt attention (no talking) particularly impressed him, he wanted to create that ambience in his London club. Ronnie was the creative force behind the club. His ideas came from New York. He recreated — or tried to recreate — what he saw in the Three Deuces. The Three Deuces was his favorite out of all of them. In running the club, Ronnie handled the creative side. He designed the interior of

the club and had everything just the way he wanted it. Pete was very happy with everything he did on that score. Pete handled the day-to-day business. The bookings they shared between them. Often when Ronnie was on the road, he would talk to musicians and hear someone who he particularly wanted to put in the club and he would call Pete and Pete would make the arrangements. The communication between them, wherever in the world Ronnie was, was literally on a nightly basis. Even when we went on vacation, Ronnie would always call Pete before the club closed and they'd talk about what was going on at the club. That's really how he was able to balance it.

We came across a quote from Mingus in 1961 about your husband, where he said, “Of the white boys, Ronnie Scott gets closer to the Negro blues feeling, the way Zoot Sims does.” That must’ve been quite a compliment to receive.

Ronnie received many, many, compliments like that over the years, Zev. Back in the 1940s — 1948 or 1949 — he and John Dankworth sat in with Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, which will give you an idea of the level of musicianship, the standard of his playing. He was held in high regard, with great respect by the musicians who played at the club. Ronnie was also respected for the way he ran the club, the way he made sure the musicians were taken care of, but most definitely the respect came to him through his own musicianship. Sonny Rollins invited Ronnie to join him when he was on his two-year hiatus from playing and was walking around playing the saxophone on the Brooklyn Bridge and sometimes in the country. Ronnie was in New York and Sonny invited him to join him. It was one of Ronnie's hugest regrets that he didn't accept the invitation. He felt he couldn't accept it; he felt humbled.

Do you have any final thoughts about Charles Mingus and the recording?

Charles and Ronnie remained friends. We all remained friends. It was a great privilege to be alive and a part of the jazz scene then because it was all bubbling, as you well know, it was all bubbling. All the greats seemed to come in together, just like they did in classical music. They all came in within a few years of each other. To have been a part of that and to experience the audiences in England, who were such a part of it, the joy was extraordinary. The whole thing was extraordinary. I wouldn't have had it any other way.

From an interview with Mary Scott conducted by Zev Feldman on June 17, 2021.

A BIG INFLUENCE IN A BIG FOREST: EDDIE GOMEZ ON CHARLES MINGUS

Zev Feldman: How did you meet Charles Mingus?

Eddie Gomez: I used to see him at Bradley's. Bradley's was a place that featured jazz duos — piano and bass. It had a long bar, a beautiful bar. It had good food and it was a hangout for many, many, many musicians and many fans of jazz because people actually pretty much listened when the music was going on. Not always, but most of the time. It had a real vibration. I played there quite a few times. That's where Charles Mingus used to go. Mingus used to go in there and sit at a corner table.

At first, I think Bradley's had an upright piano. Later on, they started having trios, but my recollection is that it was duos early on. Bradley was a big jazz fan, obviously, because he featured jazz there. There was a little office in the back where musicians could go and do goodness knows what, but Mingus would go and sit in the corner just off to the left of where the so-called bandstand was. It wasn't really much of a bandstand; it was just a cleared area where the piano was. Maybe it was a small grand, like a seven-foot, and an area for the bass player.

Mingus would sit there in that corner and occasionally he would say, “Hello,” and I said, “Hello.” I knew that he had this semi-volatile vibe, his relationship with some of his musicians, so I was a little wary of him. Of course, I had tremendous respect for his music and his playing, but also really as a composer, great composer, a real force; someone who was very much part of the crossing over into the avant-garde world. That term is a slippery slope, but he was a modernist and a wonderful composer. But he had this reputation; he could get angry and that’s an understatement.

He was always nice to me and very friendly and said nice things, so I was thrilled to have any contact with him. I don’t think I felt all that comfortable around him just because I didn’t let my guard down because I didn’t know where an encounter with him might be going. I just wanted to keep it simple and keep it gracious and respectful. All that was genuine.

Another time we met he was writing, a ballet piece [*The Mingus Dances*]. It was going to be something we were going to perform. This might’ve been after we had already recorded this

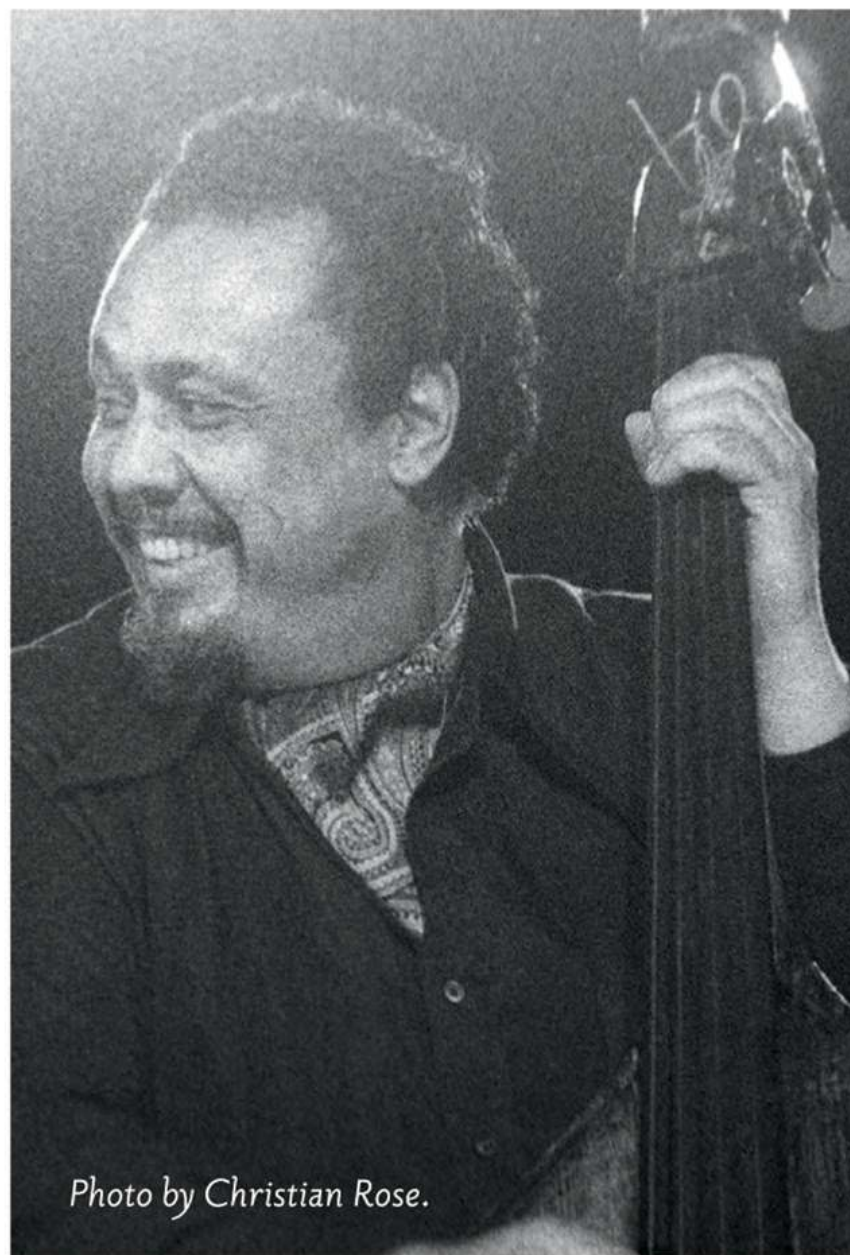


Photo by Christian Rose.

album called *Me, Myself and Eye*, an album in which there are two or three of every instrument, so there was a multitude; it was a Noah's-ark kind of deal. I think George Mraz was one of the other bass players. I don't recall who else was there in the bass section, but there were a lot of them. At that time, Mingus was in the wheelchair. I remember that. And he was there at the recording session. I don't remember having much contact with him. He wrote the music. He was the composer. And again, I think he was a figure that many musicians were very respectful of, but also had kept him at a distance, giving him all the well-deserved praise and respect.

He had a rehearsal up at his house for the ballet project. He lived up in the west forties. There are these big buildings there where a lot of artists live, Manhattan Plaza, at 42nd and 10th. He had an apartment up there on one of the high floors. Sue would come around too with him on an occasion, so I knew Sue Mingus and she was always also very nice and pleasant. I know we rehearsed at least once, certainly. That's all I remember is that we had this rehearsal and he was very nice, very pleasant, and we rehearsed the music and it all went pretty smoothly. I don't recall any bumps in the road there in any way. Not that there should be.

In my interactions with Charles Mingus, I didn't know exactly how to address him because I have a lot of respect for him. A lot of people just call him Mingus. I don't think he ever liked being called Charlie. I don't remember anyone calling him that like, "Hey Charlie." It was Charles. I think he was probably addressed usually as Charles and I probably addressed him that way too. I don't recall, I don't think I said Mr. Mingus, but he was really affable and generous with me and I'm thrilled that I had this good relationship with him. I don't know that he ever knew how much I respected him. I really had bought his albums. I had his albums and I really, I liked them a lot. I don't think I ever expressed that to him.

I think about that also with Bill — I don't know how many times I said that to him. I don't think I said it enough of being in awe of how wonderfully Bill played. The same thing with Mingus —

how important he was to the music, what he meant. He was this big influence in a big forest, so I assumed that he got a lot of recognition. Maybe he should have gotten more. He's still one of the great influences in jazz music.

How did he affect or influence your playing and composing?

It's hard for me to say. He's in there, but it'd be hard for me to pinpoint any one thing. I think there's a big part of me that's not traditional. I don't want to say marginalized even, but it's not traditional. Maybe that comes a bit from Mingus's world. I liked the fact that there was a wildness. It's seemingly wild, it wasn't that it wasn't. It was. But he was very disciplined. All the music makes perfect sense all together, but there was a raw element that reflects him, his nature. It was raw and touched on — not savage exactly — but it was wild and very intense. I had been exploring that world before I joined Bill Evans. I'd connected with Ornette, Albert Ayler, Paul Bley, Giuseppe Logan, Milford Graves. I think a part of Mingus was definitely in that. He had one foot in that world. Mingus was a truly important figure. He is definitely a modern composer and he's timeless. It's one of the words that I can use to describe Bill's music. And I think Mingus also fits into that description of timeless. You can listen to it now and not think that you're listening to any dated music. It stands the test of time. Mingus does, as does Bill.

Any other final words about Charles Mingus?

He was important. There was a connection between Mingus and Duke Ellington. You don't think about him as a pianist. You think of them as a bandleader and as a composer. And I think Mingus is like that — a great composer, great bandleader and of course a wonderful bassist. That goes without saying, but maybe it's in that order.

From an interview with Eddie Gomez conducted by Zev Feldman on June 15, 2021.

Charles Mingus - Bass
Jon Faddis - Trumpet | Charles McPherson - Alto Saxophone
Bobby Jones - Tenor Saxophone, Clarinet
John Foster - Piano, Vocals | Roy Brooks - Drums, Musical Saw

Recorded Live at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in London, England on August 14 and 15, 1972

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Dedicated to the memory of Charles Mingus, Bobby Jones, John Foster and Roy Brooks

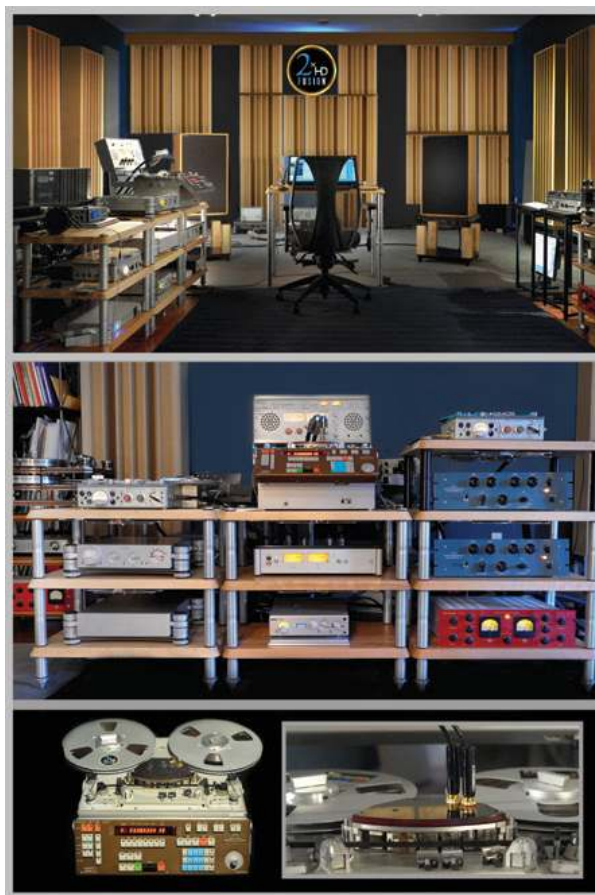


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MINGUS

THE LOST ALBUM FROM RONNIE SCOTT'S

1 ORANGE WAS THE COLOR OF HER DRESS, THEN SILK BLUES 30:43

2 NODDIN' YA HEAD BLUES 19:53

3 MIND-READERS' CONVENTION IN MILANO 29:59

4 FABLES OF FAUBUS 35:02

5 POPS (AKA WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN) 7:33

6 THE MAN WHO NEVER SLEEPS 18:35

7 AIR MAIL SPECIAL 2:00

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