

Charles Mingus and the Paradoxical Aspects of Race as Reflected in His Life and Music

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Ernest Aaron Horton, MA

University of Pittsburgh, 2007

Charles Mingus was a jazz icon who helped to redefine the barriers that were inherent for those whose artistic expression was labeled jazz. He was a master bassist in an expressive style that was forced to fight and claw its way to respectability; he crafted challenging and emotional performances in venues where the ring of the cash register competed with his music during performances; and he developed musical techniques that had an immediate impact on American music, though he was never invited to fill any academic post. These contradictions are all brought together in light of his status as a jazz icon. The term “jazz” represents a paradox because it is the word used to represent a musical style developed in the United States and closely, but not exclusively, tied to the African-American experience. This experience represents triumph, but it also represents many things that were painful and humiliating to all Americans. Any serious study of jazz must visit this paradox. *Charles Mingus and the Paradoxical Aspects of Race as Reflected in His Life and Music* examines these aspects of the history of jazz using specific parts of Mingus’s life and by analyzing and comparing some of his works. This dissertation will also examine the social pressures under which Mingus lived and that gave his work direction, and how this direction was expressed in his work.

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PREFACE

My first experience with the music of Charles Mingus was at the University of North Texas's most important jazz performance venue, a small bar called Rick's. On Tuesday nights during fall and spring semesters, two bands would perform. The music was always good, but almost eight years later, I really do not remember very much of it, except for one song that stands out: an arrangement of "Fables of Faubus." As a jazz performance major, I had no interest in anything outside of the practice room, lessons and band rehearsal. The first time I heard the song, I had no idea of the history of the "Faubus" that the "Fable" was about. As I listened, I became focused on the music in a way that I hoped for every time I listened to any piece. It was emotionally and technically challenging, but at the same time it sounded accessible and inviting, and although this version was an instrumental arrangement, I felt that the piece was communicating to me. As I studied the music of Charles Mingus as a scholar, I found a huge body of work that provoked the same reaction, and as I connected with the history and social context of the music, I became more and more focused on understanding the circumstances that provoked the creation of that music. For me it was as if the music gave history life. I always approached the task of learning about Mingus and his music with excitement and anticipation, but I could not have studied this music without the help of a group of very important people.

I would first like to thank Dr. Nathan Davis. His guidance and understanding allowed me to explore jazz and musical styles from around the world in ways I had never thought of before I met him. He is a wonderful judge of character who gave me the opportunity that is partially fulfilled by this dissertation. Whether through our direct conversations or my observation of his treatment of others, he has invested in enriching my life, musically and personally, and for that I say thank you.

I would also like to thank my parents, Ernest and Evelyn Horton. Through years of lessons, rehearsals, and road trips they have been a source of encouragement. Their support insured that I could focus on my growth as a person and as a musician within a protected environment. They were willing to spend their money, and more importantly their time, to give me the opportunities essential to the development of a professional musician. Most importantly they facilitated a level of academic discipline that allowed me to take advantage of a life in scholarship, and for that I say thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Melanie, whom I met as a student at the University of North Texas. Since the day we met, she has shown me an unbelievable level of tenderness and understanding. Whenever my self-confidence began to fade, she was there to augment it. As I began this dissertation, she worked and took care of our son, and as I progressed, she gave birth to our daughter. In the face of our growing responsibilities, she still found time to help me to stay on track and realize my goals, because my goals are her goals, and my sacrifices are her sacrifices. As I move forward with this landmark in my career, my success is her success and my triumph is her triumph, and for that I say thank God.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Charles Mingus was one of the most outstanding bassists of the twentieth century. He was relentless in his pursuit of improvement; he practiced for hours on end and squeezed rubber balls to simulate the motion of bass playing and strengthen his fingers when he wasn't practicing. He dedicated himself to his instruments and to music in general in a way that very few people will ever be able to comprehend, much less achieve. He was also supremely indulgent. Clothes, food, women...if he had an appetite for anything, it was insatiable. His disposition was legendary; he shared love and tenderness without abandon, but he could also become vitriolic and even physically violent with the same level of passion. These aspects of his career have been covered by numerous writers, which begs the question, what more really needs to be said? A great deal more.

All of the topics above—favorite subjects of jazz musicians and historians—represent the reactionary and impulsive sides of Mingus's persona. They make interesting anecdotes, but by placing the historical focus of his life on just these aspects, something critically important is woefully overlooked. The reactions and impulses that have become the focus, not only of the legacy of Charles Mingus and of the legacy of jazz itself, divert attention from the methodical, measured ingenuity that propelled Mingus to the status of musical legend.

From the time he first recorded as Baron von Mingus until he dictated his last measure of music into a tape recorder because Lou Gehrig's disease had made him too weak to hold a

pencil, he systematically developed his artistic ability and output to facilitate innovation. Throughout his career as a band leader he worked with hundreds of musicians. Those who withstood the slow, grinding pressure of his unorthodox rehearsal methods became part of an unparalleled musical experience. He also spent a lifetime developing an unmistakable compositional style that is so unique that, no matter who arranges his works, they are always distinctly Mingus. He took the time to ground himself so thoroughly in the music around him that his pieces were never an imitation; they were instead the result of total assimilation.

Mingus was much more than just a musician. He was also a man who was sensitive to the trials and tribulations that he encountered as an African American. He was loved and he loved others, he was rejected and he rejected others, he was offended and he offended others, and he was needed and he needed others. Through his music and his writings, he chronicled some of the tenderest as well as the harshest aspects of his life, and through this process he represented the lives of others. He led a life that was full of irony, of opposites, of seemingly incompatible components. He led a life full of paradoxes. This dissertation will explore the paradoxes that Mingus experiences as he developed as a musician.

Music is one of the fundamental elements in the social fabric of America. It is one of the methods that people throughout the world chronicle and teach their heritage. This type of transmission is important even in the United States because there are many aspects of American history that have not been recorded in written form. This is particularly true when considering the history of African Americans. In order to gain access to American history, as it affected this specific group, it becomes necessary to find the means of expression through which blacks could easily and freely communicate their social circumstances. Through the music of African Americans, students of culture and history can access to their heritage in a way that is otherwise

impossible. An ideal study of music as a means to access social history allows the researcher to examine the dialectic between musical sound and society. I have accomplished this goal by examining the music of Charles Mingus, the subject of my doctoral dissertation titled *Charles Mingus and the Paradoxical Aspects of Race as Reflected in His Life and Music*.

Mingus was a virtuosic performer as well as a prolific composer. His musical impact spanned chronologically from the forties through the seventies. He played in a variety of styles, ranging from rhythm and blues to free jazz. As a bassist, Mingus performed with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Max Roach,¹ and Michael Brecker. Comparing the music that Mingus recorded to music of many of the people that he either performed with, or that were active during the lengthy time span that his career covered, is revealing. Mingus performed and composed within the musical framework of New Orleans Music,² Free Jazz,³ the Cool School,⁴ Swing, Bebop, Hard Bop, and Third Stream.⁵ Mingus was uniquely able to use any and all of these styles, or even meld them simultaneously. This created a tension in his professional endeavors because of his ever evolving and independent music journey.

Early in his career Mingus was always at odds with the conventional image of a jazz musician as well as with the role that their music was to play in society. Through the various accounts of the way that Mingus interacted socially with his musical mentors and peers during the early part of his career, it seems as if he was broadcasting that he was going to form the basis of a musical overthrow of entrenched paradigms. It is in his later years that we see the manifestation of this overthrow in his music.

¹ Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, (New York: Oxford Press, 2000), 416-424.

² Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 18-19.

³ Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* 2nd ed., (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1983), 481.

⁴ Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus/Mingus: Two Memoirs*, (Berkeley: Creative Arts; 1989), 17.

⁵ Priestley, 50, 53, 120.

Mingus was a musician who was steeped in the traditions of jazz. He not only went to great lengths to respect and capture tradition through his music, perhaps more importantly his music always had an intense focus on the spirit of innovation that the musicians that were deemed “traditional” were striving for in their works. His music reflected an admiration and deep analytical knowledge of those who came before him. His music shows that Duke Ellington heavily influenced him. Under the name of Baron von Mingus he was clearly modeling his compositions after Ellington in a way that could almost be seen as musical hero worship. Even as he developed his own style he would hold fast to the lessons that he learned as a student of the Ellington style.

In the 1940s and 1950s, when Charlie Parker became an international phenomenon, Mingus would add many of Parker’s musical techniques to his repertoire. Throughout his career as a bandleader he often hired alto players who had a style that was similar to that of Parker’s.⁶ In spite of his insistence that his sidemen have a thorough knowledge of the jazz tradition, he was always very vocal about his disdain for musicians who absorbed musical styles but did not innovate. One example of how strongly he felt about these types of musicians, who he referred to as “copy cats,” can be found in the liner notes of his 1959 album *Mingus Dynasty*.⁷ It was in the liner notes for this album that he wrote a scathing criticism directed towards saxophone players who copied Parker’s style without taking the responsibility to advance the music beyond that point. During this period Mingus began to develop the music that would earn him the title of “Father of Avant Garde.”⁸

⁶ Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um*. Columbia, Compact Disc.

⁷ Mingus, Charles. *Mingus Dynasty*. Compact Disc, Columbia. CK 65513, 1998.

⁸ Salim Washington, “‘All the Things You Could Be by Now’: *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* and the Limits of Avant-Garde Jazz,” in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* edited by Robert G. O’meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 34.

Because of his emphasis on the marriage between tradition and innovation, not only was his music a signal of the transition that jazz was going through, it was also a refraction of the changes that Blacks in the United States were facing during that period. He used his music to bring light to a number of events that were significant in American social history with songs such as “Fables of Faubus,” which drew attention to the plight of black school children in Arkansas, to “Remember Rockefeller at Attica,” a song whose title gave focus to the conditions of prisoners in a New York state correctional facility. In addition to his role as a social activist through his music, his business dealings also show how he worked actively against the hegemony of the music industry, critics, club owners, and even his audiences. Mingus gained a notorious reputation for demanding respect from listeners. Stories of his brutal treatment of inattentive audience members are legendary. Perhaps even more astounding is the way he treated business associates that dealt with him in a dishonest manner. Mingus’s Debut record company, his mail order distribution business, and other activities in the record industry, are a significant signal of his resistance against the status quo of the industry.⁹

Mingus is also unique because his life and works incorporated so many different parts of American culture. Through his own writings and statements that he made throughout his career, with confirmation from writers such as Nathan Davis and Brian Priestly, we know that Mingus included German American, African American, British, Chinese, and Native American in his family lineage. He also represented a great diversity in spiritual experience as a man whose life began in the African American religious tradition and ended following the Hindu practice of having his remains spread into the Ganges River of Northern India.¹⁰ This diversity was represented in his music, which he used to capture the elements of the society around him.

⁹ Sue Mingus, ed., *Charles Mingus: More Than A Fake Book*, (New York: Jazz Workshop, 1991).

¹⁰ Susan Graham Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 3-4.

His openness to the various cultures that he was connected with was displayed in many of the musical projects that he undertook.

I have pursued this dissertation by looking at the project in two parts. First is the analysis of Mingus' life. His life displayed the struggle that African Americans face within society. Examples of this can be seen in his childhood. Mingus's father went to great lengths to instill in his children a sense complexion based superiority.¹¹ For him, skin color was one of the signals that indicated to the world their "secure" upper middle class status. One of the works that will guide my scholarship in this area is Edward Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie*. This is particularly important because of Mingus's place within the stratification of African American Society. Mingus's family was clearly in the black middle class¹² and his father went to great lengths to be sure that they would stay at that level of social status. The Senior Mingus was a member of the Elks, the Masons, a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and an employee of the United States Post Office (a government job that was held in high esteem by blacks of that era). As a youth Mingus would see the paradox that his family life represented on two stages. One stage was the deterioration of his Watts neighborhood as a flood of poor blacks began to move into the area,¹³ and the second was within his household as his mother began to dress "more like a mammy" and attend Pentecostal Church service, both of which were signs of the lifestyle of less affluent blacks. The reaction to both of these factors from his father would have been a source of significant tension within the Mingus household. Even the difference in skin color between the Mingus children was a source of stratification.¹⁴ Even though this

¹¹ Priestly, 2

¹² Santoro, 23.

¹³ Ibid, 23.

¹⁴ Priestly, 2-4.

skewed view on race was instilled in Mingus from the time he was a youth he still gravitated towards performing music associated with blacks as a career.

Although these are important issues in looking at the music of Charles Mingus, equally important is the way he dealt with the stratification that existed between the music industry and jazz musicians. Mingus constantly worked to resist the social and economic hegemony that was held by the American music industry. Mingus would, at various times in his career, find himself at odds with many in the industry, including those that made, sold, and distributed records, and those who owned performance venues. Through the course of this dissertation these paradoxes, along with others, will be explored.

The organization of the dissertation follows this two part format. In chapters two through seven, I will focus on the paradoxical aspects of race as reflected in his life. There is a great deal of writing, by Mingus and others, that deals with some of the absurdities he faced throughout his life, and these will be central to this section. This section will also examine some of the symbolic representations that Mingus used to create a race narrative in his book, *Beneath the Underdog*. Chapters eight through thirteen will examine his music. This section will detail Mingus's creative process, and it will also discuss the aspects of society that shaped his work and how he broke through the barriers that were placed before him.

2.0 MINGUS'S EARLY PEERS, MENTORS, AND HEROES

Charles Mingus Jr. was born on April 22, 1922, in Nogales, New Mexico.¹⁵ He was the youngest of his father's five children.¹⁶ His father, Charles Sr., and his stepmother, Mamie Carson, raised him in the Watts area of Los Angeles, California.¹⁷ From the beginning, he was exposed to a tremendous variety of music, including western classical music through his sisters, and he played trombone and cello early in life. Eventually Mingus would switch to bass for primarily racial reasons. During the 1930s and 1940s, it was nearly impossible for African Americans to succeed as classical musicians, and cello was not considered a jazz instrument at that time.¹⁸ There were a number of people who influenced Mingus and the way that he would approach his life and art. Some of those people were close and affected him on a daily basis; others were internationally renowned entertainers. The thing that each member of this group has in common is the drive, integrity, and perseverance through which they lived their lives and accomplished outstanding and, in some cases, outlandish things. All of these individuals served as sources of inspiration to Mingus during his formative years.

¹⁵ Barry Kernfeld, Mingus, "Charles(Jr.)," (Groves Music Online, 2005), http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=997444171&hitnum=2§ion=jazz.302400.

¹⁶ Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 13-14.

¹⁷ Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 3.

¹⁸ Priestley, 6-10.

2.1 CHARLES SR. AND MAMIE MINGUS

Mingus's early life started out under less-than-perfect circumstances. His mother, Harriet Sophia Mingus, died twenty-three weeks after he was born.¹⁹ His father and stepmother, Mamie, raised him. He lived in a house where intraracial views often caused fights among the children, who would tease the darkest sibling.²⁰ Charles Sr. and Mamie's relationship was one fraught with tension, one source of which was the long-term extramarital affair of Charles Sr. This caused tension for the whole household and eventually ended the marriage, although they would never divorce. His father's mistress was a choir member in the African Methodist Episcopal Church that he attended.²¹ Despite the pain that Mingus witnessed daily because of the affair, his father's indiscretion was a model he would repeatedly follow. Perhaps due to the public embarrassment of the affair, Mingus's stepmother regularly attended a nearby Pentecostal church. The services that he observed in the Pentecostal church were perhaps his most important early musical experiences, and the contrast between the two churches would have heightened the musical and spiritual wonders that he witnessed.

The official church of the Mingus family was the African Methodist Episcopal Church.²² This Christian denomination was officially started in 1799. The music that was performed in this church would have been an edition of a hymnal written in 1801 by its founder, Reverend Richard

¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

²⁰ Santoro, 23.

²¹ Ibid, 20.

²² Priestley, 4.

Allen,²³ and was largely based on the one used by the Methodist Episcopal Church.²⁴ At the same time, and perhaps more important to Mingus's musical development, was his exposure to the music in the Pentecostal Church.

The influence of the Pentecostal (also often called the Holiness) Church is well recorded and noted in the Mingus's biographies written by Santoro and Priestly, and also mentioned in the article on the Grove music Web site. The Pentecostal church service is brimming with energy and spirituality that finds its roots in a spiritual event that lasted for three years, between 1906 and 1909, known as the Azusa Street Revival.²⁵ This time and place is legendary in the American Pentecostal movement, and the 312 Azusa Street address is only fifteen miles from Mingus's boyhood home. The Pentecostal church service is known for its participants being filled with the Holy Spirit, which may induce dancing, singing, and *glossolalia*, (speaking in tongues).²⁶ I believe the raw spiritual emotion that Mingus witnessed during his time at the church informed his ebullient performance practices, including yelling at musicians in his ensemble to encourage them musically.

A number of his works were written in the style of the music that he heard as a child at Holiness church meetings. One such song, titled "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting," was first recorded in 1959 with Langston Hughes on his "Weary Blues" poetry reading. This continued to be a part of his performance and recording repertoire through 1978. Hughes was obviously referring to the dissatisfaction that the youth of the fifties felt when he exclaimed,

I tire so of hearing people say,

²³ Southern, 74-75.

²⁴ John Michael Spencer, "The Hymnody of the African Methodist Episcopal Church," *American Music*, 8 no. 3 (1990): 278.

²⁵ Joe Creech, "Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History," *Church History*, 65 no. 3 (1996): 405-406.

²⁶ Queen Booker, "Congregational Music in a Pentecost Church," *The Black Perspective in Music*, 16 no. 1 (1988): 32.

Let things take their course, tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead,
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.²⁷

These words were a rejection of the notion that blacks should patiently wait for change with nothing more than their spiritual beliefs as comfort for the conditions that they were enduring. This statement was given even more intensity because of their pairing with Mingus's music. Mingus would prove to be a master at combining spoken word with music, and his work with Hughes is an early example of how he could exponentially increase the effectiveness of an already powerful statement with music. By combining Hughes's words with Mingus's musical allusion to the African-American church, the statement was clearly predicting social trends that would occur in the sixties, as politically aware black youths turned from the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr. and the leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to embrace the teachings of Malcolm X and the other progenitors of the black power ideology.²⁸

However, in many of Mingus's pieces there are much more direct references to the energy that he witnessed as a child in the Pentecostal Church. One can hear this in Mingus's "Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb on Me," originally released on the album *Mingus/Oh Yeah*. Although the song is thoroughly grounded in Mingus's blues sensibilities, listeners are affronted by his vocals as he wails, moans, and calls to the Lord to rescue him from the possibility of an atomic nightmare. The influence that the church had on him musically is

²⁷ Langston Hughes, *Weary Blues with Langston Hughes, Charles Mingus, and Leonard Feather*, compact disc, Polygram Records, inc., 841 660-2, 1990.

²⁸ Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 226.

clear.²⁹ In addition, it had an effect on his overall spirituality. The contrast between the Pentecostal church and the reserved practices of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, including phenomenon such as *glossolalia*, opened the door to curiosity about religious practices that fell outside of traditional Christianity. As he grew older and more independent of his immediate family, this curiosity grew into an openness to a diverse body of spiritual doctrine.

2.2 FARWELL TAYLOR

As Mingus recounted his childhood in *Beneath the Underdog*, he conveyed that his sense of spirituality existed from a very early age. However, the way he felt connected with God was very different from the connection he observed in those close to him who adhered to Western religious practices. The religious philosophy that Mingus was most closely aligned with was the Vedanta form of Hinduism practiced in the United States. The Vedanta philosophy appealed to him from the time he was first initiated. Its inclusiveness would guide his actions throughout his life. In Sue Mingus's *Tonight at Noon*, she recounts that from the early stages of his career, "Mingus would call out all the names of the prophets in a jackhammer roll: '*Buda! Moses! Krishna! Confucius! Mohammed! a-a-a-nd Jee-sus Christ!*' Then he'd look into the audience and shout one more time: '*All the prophets!!*'"³⁰ The belief that all of these figures are equally spiritually important is a part of Hindu philosophy. It is necessary to gain at least a cursory understanding of Vedanta Hinduism to understand the impact that it made in his life artistically and personally.

²⁹ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961*, compact disc, Atlantic Recording Corporation, R2 72871, 1997.

³⁰ Susan Graham Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 11.

Mingus was first introduced to Vedanta³¹ beliefs as a seventeen-year-old by Farwell Taylor, who was a painter living in San Francisco. He was an open-minded man who believed that all men were God's children, something he attributed to his Eastern belief system.³² His beliefs and actions, perhaps seen by Mingus as coming directly from his Vedanta influence, would have contrasted sharply with his experiences in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, where the practices seemed to endorse his cold, almost loveless home environment. Vedanta, through the nurturing encouraging environment created by Taylor, fostered an inner peace and balance.

The man considered the spiritual founder of the Vedanta philosophy is Sri Ramakrishna. To followers of Vedanta, Ramakrishna is not unique because of "the originality of his teachings and of his ability as a dynamic organizer but the intensity of his spiritual quest and his ability to attract young Hindu disciples of talent and education to carry on his work."³³ Writings on Ramakrishna show that he had experiences with Islam and Christianity, and embraced both Muhammad and Christ.³⁴ It is important to note that Ramakrishna shared his experience and philosophy with only a small group of disciples, who spread his teachings through India and the world. One of these disciples was Swami Vivekananda.

Vivekananda was responsible for bringing the philosophy of Ramakrishna to the West during the World's Parliament on Religion, held in America in 1893. His original purpose for traveling to America was not to spread the gospel of Ramakrishna but to acquire funds for humanitarian work in India. Swami Vivekananda was considered by many to be the most dynamic speaker during the seventeen days of meetings. This conception may have been helped

³¹ Vedanta is a sect of Hinduism.

³² Santoro, 41.

³³ Carl T. Jackson, *Vedanta for the West*, (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press), 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

by the fact that Vivekananda was skilled in the use of the English language.³⁵ He would remain in the United States, lecturing and teaching throughout the country, for three years on this first visit. In that time, he founded the first Vedanta Society in the country, in New York City.

There were probably a few central aspects of Vedanta in particular that appealed to Mingus. Among the reasons that Mingus may have found this religion attractive were its inclusion of all religions and its belief in the divinity of all people.³⁶ In his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus gives the reader the impression that he had within him a type of spirituality that could not be summed up by the Christian doctrine in which he was raised. The openness of Vedanta more easily allowed for this type of inclination, an inclination which probably conflicted with the religious structure of his youth. Another reason that he may have been drawn to this philosophy is that, as expressed by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the model for Vedanta ethics “is not the mystic in his cell or the philosopher in his retreat...but the warrior fighting with righteous indignation the battle against the forces of evil and wickedness.”³⁷

Mingus was well known for using his popularity and celebrity to expose issues and situations that he felt were socially incompatible with his ideals. This aspect of Hinduism would have been one that matched perfectly Mingus’s disposition throughout his life, which he expressed through songs like “Fable of Faubus,” and used as a tool to fight the evil and wickedness of segregation. Mingus’s dedication to Hinduism would go even beyond the grave, as his widow, Susan, spread his ashes in the Ganges River in January 1959 as part of a ritual designed to facilitate reincarnation.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 24-26.

³⁶ Ibid., 33.

³⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, “The Ethics of Vedanta,” *International Journal of Ethics* 24, no.2 (Jan., 1914), 174.

³⁸ Susan Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 3-4.

2.3 SIMON RODIA

Mingus, who was raised in the Watts section of Los Angeles, California, was no doubt influenced by the work of Sam Rodia, builder of the Watts Towers. The towers were in their earliest stages when Mingus was a youth, and their construction would definitely have had an impact on Mingus's views on artistic perseverance and sacrifice. Rodia began creating the towers in 1921 and continued building until 1955, when he moved from the area.³⁹ The towers are said to be the largest structure ever made by one man alone. Such a creation could never have come to exist without surpassing vision, commitment, passion, and indeed, obsession.⁴⁰ The towers consist of four structures that measured up to 100 feet tall at times. Their form changed over time as Rodia built and rebuilt them. Young Mingus "lived only a block from the towers, [and] watched Sam build small portions of the sculptures and later remove and rebuild them."⁴¹ Although Mingus never received any fame as a visual artist, the process that Rodia exemplified was important in Mingus's artistic development and in his view on what devotion and sacrifice to a creative endeavor meant.

Mingus moved into the area in late 1922 or early 1923. This means that for his entire life, well into adulthood, he witnessed the artistic dedication that Rodia displayed toward his art. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact this would have had on Mingus's art, we must get some idea of what the towers meant to the Watts area. The towers began as a simple fence around Rodia's property.⁴² Rodia was consumed with the creation of the towers. "Neighbors

³⁹ Bud Goldstone and Arloa Paquin Goldstone, *The Los Angeles Watts Towers* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1997) pg. 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴² Joe Seewerker and Charles Owens, "Nuestro Pueblo: Glass Towers and Demon Rum," *The Los Angeles Times* (April 28, 1939).

said he often worked all night, then went to his job the next morning. Sometimes, they recalled, he would follow this routine for days, not even stopping to eat.”⁴³ The decorations that adorned the tower were made from discarded items. His decorations included, but were not limited to, “7-Up bottles and the blue from Phillip’s Milk of Magnesia bottles and Noxzema cream jars. Many of the architectural tiles are from Malibu Potteries where he worked and probably took home broken and rejected pieces, and from other companies including Batchelder Tile. The tableware, broken and whole, includes Fiesta and Harlequin, Bauer, Metlox, Catalina and Canton Ware.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, the way that he constructed the tower must have been a spectacular sight for those able to see their creation firsthand. These activities by themselves were enough to draw attention to Rodia’s artistic endeavor, but it is hard to surmise the initial reaction by Rodia’s neighbors. It would have been amazing to watch Rodia, who always worked alone on his towers,⁴⁵ climbing around the ever-rising structures “like a spider on a steel web,” carrying all the equipment necessary for his colossal endeavor in bags and buckets tied to his body without more than a homemade window-washer’s harness for safety.⁴⁶ Rodia probably did much of his early building without notice because the area in which he lived was not yet the population center that it would become in later years, and still is today.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly how the community, which Mingus was a part of, saw the project in the very beginning. By 1939, the towers, named “Nuestro Pueblo,” or “Our Town,” by Rodia, were being embraced by the community. At the time, they were described in a short *Los Angeles Times* article as “a sight to behold. Their colorings have the brilliance of a

⁴³ Goldstone, 11.

⁴⁴ Gloria Koenig, *Iconic LA: Stories of LA’s Most Memorable Buildings* (Glendale, California: Balcony Press, 2000) pg. 40.

⁴⁵ Goldstone, 1.

⁴⁶ Koenig, 38.

peacock's feathers."⁴⁷ From this article we see that the towers were viewed as works of art enriching part of the community.

The construction of the Watts Towers would necessarily have had a great impact on Mingus's life. First, Rodia worked on the project until Mingus was thirty-four-years old. This means that throughout Mingus's childhood and well into his adult life, he observed Rodia and his creative ambition. Also, since Mingus lived only a few blocks away,⁴⁸ he would have witnessed the Herculean efforts of Rodia on a daily basis. Additionally, Rodia's odd social behavior must have impacted Mingus. [Simon Rodia's] "eccentricities included walking out on his family, installing a siren in his car to use to bypass traffic jams and then burying the car next to the towers before an impending police visit, and spending thirty-four years of his life and most of his money building a nonfunctional, albeit universally acclaimed, work of art."⁴⁹ Rodia showed a pure artistic devotion to the project, which had no monetary reward. Rodia's structure could not have been ignored by Mingus or his peers in the neighborhood, and Mingus showed the same type of obsession as he, at times in his early career, refused to work outside of the music industry to support his first family, stating, "I'm not no pick and shovel man...I'm made to be a musician. I'm sticking to my music."⁵⁰ This dedication was common among Mingus's circle of friends, many of whom would go on to have successful careers in some of the most famous ensembles in jazz. Among his most enduring friends were Britt Woodman, who became a member of the Duke Ellington band,⁵¹ and Buddy Collette, who played with the Chico Hamilton quintet.⁵²

⁴⁷ Joe Seewerker and Charles Owens, "Nuestro Pueblo: Glass Towers and Demon Rum," *The Los Angeles Times* (April 28, 1939).

⁴⁸ Goldstone, 39.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁰ Santoro, 59. Quoted from Vivian Mingus. Later he would break from this train of thought as he repeatedly returned to working at the Post Office when music was no longer lucrative.

⁵¹ Clora Bryant and others, *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 12

Woodman in Particular was well connected, and it was through him that Mingus would make a number of important contacts with the people who would give him musical insight that would last a lifetime.

2.4 BRITT WOODMAN, BUDDY COLLETTE, AND OTHER LOS ANGELES AREA MUSICIANS

The Woodman family was under a musically skilled patriarch who was endearingly called “Pops.”⁵³ He organized his sons into a small group that was named the Woodman Brothers Biggest Little Band in the World. The Woodman brothers attended Jordan High School along with Mingus. Mingus developed a relationship musically and socially with the entire Woodman family, and was particularly close to Britt Woodman.⁵⁴ Buddy Collette was also part of this circle of friends. Collette suggests in *Central Avenue Sound* that it was at his urging that Mingus made the switch from cello to bass. Collette says he told Mingus that if he switched he could play in the band, sight unseen.⁵⁵ Had Mingus continued on cello, even if he had reached the same level of virtuosity, he would have been excluded from jazz because cello was not considered appropriate in the genre at that time, and he would have been excluded from classical music because there were few or no opportunities for African Americans in classical music. As he began to focus on jazz, he found many sources of knowledge that facilitated his improvement. During this high school period, he also found an early teacher and mentor in Lloyd Reese.

⁵² Ibid., 134.

⁵³ Santoro, 28-29

⁵⁴ Bryant, 94-96.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 136-137.

Reese was an important mentor to a variety of students. As a performer, he played with the Les Hite band alongside Marshall Royal, an alto saxophonist who would go on to play with the Count Basie band. Reese was said to be as skilled as Royal, but he was more attracted to education as a career than performance.⁵⁶ A list of musicians whose development can be attributed, at least in part to Lloyd Reese includes Mingus as well as Buddy Collette, Dexter Gordon, and Eric Dolphy.⁵⁷ Being under Reese's tutelage was demanding because of his use of a musical system grounded in the ability to play and think in all keys through the use of a Roman numeral system. The experience that Reese shared was unique because, in addition to learning theory, they got to apply that theoretical knowledge by arranging for a rehearsal band that met weekly.⁵⁸ Along with the knowledge Mingus gained from Reese, he was also studying with jazz bassist Red Callender and with a former New York Philharmonic bassist, Herman Rheinschagen.⁵⁹ Mingus became well versed in his technique as a bassist and in his knowledge of western theory. His access to those in his community with a huge degree of national experience and musical skill was an important part of his musical development. Although these performers were essential to his musical growth, Mingus would also receive musical inspiration from outside the Los Angeles city limits.

⁵⁶ Ted Gioia, *West Coast Jazz: Modern Jazz in California 1945-1960*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 40, 343.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁹ Santoro, 37-38.

2.5 JELLY ROLL MORTON AND THE NEW ORLEANS INFLUENCE

One of the earliest types of music that Mingus was exposed to as a professional probably would have been New Orleans–style jazz. California gained an authentic sounding New Orleans jazz scene because of the migration that many greats of the style made from New Orleans to Los Angeles beginning in 1907. Well-known musicians who were steeped in the New Orleans tradition, such as Freddie Keppard and George Baquet, among others, made Los Angeles a permanent base of operations by the second decade of the twentieth century. While in the area, they formed the original Creole band, which toured nationally.⁶⁰ The 1917 arrival of Ferdinand “Jelly” Roll Morton in Los Angeles certainly would have boosted the city’s reputation as a center for New Orleans–style music.⁶¹ Morton performed throughout California, Washington, Colorado, parts of Mexico, and Canada for the next six years. However, most of his time was spent in the Los Angeles area. While in Los Angeles, Morton associated with many musicians, but most important in uncovering his musical influence on Charles Mingus would certainly have to be his association with trombonist William “Pops” Woodman (mistakenly called “Pops” Woodward by Morton on several occasions^{62, 63}). Woodman owned an amusement park with a hall called Leak’s Lake, where Morton performed throughout much of 1922. Proof that this was a positive working relationship can be seen in the fact that Morton went as far as to facilitate performances by Joe “King” Oliver.⁶⁴ “Pops” Woodman was the father of Britt Woodman, a longtime friend of Mingus. Mingus would grow to see the Woodman household as a “safe-

⁶⁰ Bryant, 5.

⁶¹ Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll Morton: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and “Inventor” of Jazz* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 193.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶³ Phil Pastras, *Dead Man Blues: Jelly Roll Morton Way Out West* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 119.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 75, 124.

haven”]; he was close to the family and sometimes participated in the Woodman family band.⁶⁵ Also Morton “moved to the West Coast in the early 1940s in an attempt to once again rekindle his career, but he died on July 10, 1941, in Los Angeles, California.”⁶⁶ Morton returned to Los Angeles, in part, because of performances guaranteed by “Reb” Spikes.⁶⁷ “Pops” Woodman was one of the musicians who worked continuously in Los Angeles from the twenties through the forties and perhaps beyond. It is reasonable to believe that during 1940 and 1941, when Morton was in the Los Angeles area, he would have visited Woodman, his former employer, perhaps as a friend or perhaps seeking work.

There is no solid evidence that Morton and Mingus ever worked together. However, it is safe to assume, based on the closeness that Mingus felt to Britt Woodman and his entire family, not to mention the music that he learned from the family, that Mingus learned a great deal about the music Morton was playing through the Sr. Woodman. Mingus’s awareness of Morton and his work are evident in his pieces *Jelly Roll* and *My Jelly Roll Soul*. On those pieces, as John Handy told me in an interview, Mingus’s goal was for parts of that tune to be in an older New Orleans style.⁶⁸ By most accounts, Mingus felt a “wounded kinship with...Morton.”⁶⁹ He certainly would have seen Morton as the first great jazz composer and found a level of admiration in the way Morton shaped the sound of jazz through his compositions, and also because of the way he shaped jazz through his use of the ensemble as a form of expression.

⁶⁵ Santoro, 28-29.

⁶⁶ David Dicaire, *Jazz Musicians of the Early Years, to 1945* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2003), 35.

⁶⁷ Spikes was an area entrepreneur and bandleader.

⁶⁸ John Handy, interviewed by Ernest A. Horton, June 22, 2004.

⁶⁹ Santoro, 70.

3.0 THE IMPACT OF MUSIC EDUCATION

One of the most important aspects of Mingus's early life in Los Angeles was his experience with institutional music education and private lessons. As is the case with most modern western musicians, early school bands and private lessons form the foundation upon which a career in music is built. The same was true for Mingus, but the impact of these early experiences came from more than just learning the fundamentals of harmony and rhythm. There was a very important social dynamic that existed for black musicians in the United States, and learning how to function within this dynamic was as important a part of the educational process as being able to identify the notes on an instrument. The process that African Americans endured to gain musical knowledge was fraught with boundaries placed by some teachers and challenged by others. Although it was the racially motivated boundaries that shaped and motivated his career, Mingus would destroy the preconceptions that many of his teachers harbored concerning the abilities of black musicians.

3.1 THE MISEDUCATION OF CHARLES MINGUS

No doubt there was a level of anger and resentment on the part of African-American musicians about the conditions that their society imposed on them. In Mingus's case, we can see a lot of his resentment expressed through his autobiography. Examining the passages

about his early experience with cello, before he began to play bass, his writings suggest that the problems that he had musically were analogous to many of the problems that he had racially. Although the account that he gives in *Beneath the Underdog* is a personification of his early experience as a musician and may not have been entirely factual, his writings show the deficiencies that he suffered were directly related to the expectations that his early teachers had for blacks.

3.1.1 Mr. Arson

Mingus's earliest, and perhaps most detrimental, music experience is characterized in his autobiography through the fiction characters Mr. Arson and Signore Lippi. Of his early experiences in music, Mingus wrote:

In Watts, itinerant teachers—not always skillful or well educated in music themselves—traveled from door to door persuading colored families to buy lessons for their children. Mr. Arson was one of them, out of the few bucks he collected weekly from each of the families whose money paid his bills in a “white only” section of L.A., he would teach anyone how to play anything that even looked like an instrument that poor folks might beg or buy second-hand or on the installment plan. Maybe he didn't even admit to himself that he cheated his pupils but the truth was he took no time to give the fundamental principles of a good musical education. His short weekly sessions had to result in satisfying sounds that proved to parents their children were really learning something in a status-building, money-making field. So Mr. Arson bypassed the essentials that even the most talented child must master if he is going to learn to read music well, and the parents, as usual, were paying for something their children weren't getting.⁷⁰

This passage is not written simply to convey the insufficient musical instruction that Mingus received. The language used very purposely highlighted the fact that the teacher was white and cared nothing about the music that he was teaching or the students. He was taking advantage of the fact that he could find a group of blacks that cared enough about their children

⁷⁰ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 25.

that they would make financial sacrifices to provide musical lessons. He preyed upon families that hoped music lessons could be part of a process that would raise their children's status in society. Mingus emphasizes that Arson was acting in a predatory fashion by sharing the process that his students went through to get musical instruments. He describes the families of the students as "poor folks" who had to "beg or buy secondhand or on the installment plan." This creates an image for the reader of people who had to lose a measure of dignity, acting as beggars or even going into debt, to insure that their children would be able to receive an education in music. Mingus also shows that his white teacher was unscrupulous in his dealings because he was under qualified, having been included in the ranks of people who were "not always skillful or well educated in music," and he was also willing to "teach anyone how to play anything even looking like an instrument." The integrity of the fictitious Mr. Arson is cast in a terrible light, particularly when you compare the description of this teacher with his descriptions, in the same text, of Red Callender and Lloyd Reese, two teachers whom Mingus highly respected. Mingus makes no mention of Mr. Arson's proficiency as an instrumentalist, or even what instrument he played in lessons, but he carefully includes information that indicates to the reader how skilled Callender was as a bassist. After reading the account of Mingus, first learning about Callender and then finally hearing him in person, we see that Mingus and other young Los Angeles musicians of the late thirties considered Callender the best bass player that they had ever heard. In addition to conveying the level of respect he had for Callender, Mingus also described, in detail, why he thought that Callender was so talented, as well as the aspects of his own playing that he wished to improve by studying with him.⁷¹ He also gives high accolades to the first teacher to work with him on the fundamentals of music theory, Lloyd Reese. He establishes

⁷¹ Ibid., 75.

Reese's prowess as an instrumentalist, describing his ability to carry out the near impossible task of playing a high G on trumpet while the instrument was suspended in the air by a string. Mingus goes on to describe Reese's skill as a teacher, pointing out that many of his students went on to become famous, specifically Eric Dolphy.⁷² This is important because Dolphy would become one of Mingus's most important musical collaborators. Dolphy earned a level of respect from Mingus that the bass player reserved for only those he felt were the finest and most artistically talented musicians, as well as his personal friends.⁷³

In the creation of the character Mr. Arson, Mingus is describing a man who has no true interest in, and, in fact no business, teaching anyone music. The antagonist in this passage has no musical skill other than to use musical shortcuts to convince parents that his services would be needed for more lessons, without regard to the musical potential that would go unrealized as a result of his trickery. His white teacher's zeal for money denied Mingus the tool that would give him access to western classical music during his early development, the ability to read music. This denial of access would continue throughout his musical career. However, as Mingus points out later in this section, as Mr. Arson cheated his black clientele out of what they believed they were getting, his methods, at least in Mingus's case, "would turn out to be great for jazz improvisation."⁷⁴ As was the case in much of black history, Mingus's strength would arrive in spite of, or perhaps even through, the trials he faced because he was black. We can identify this situation as being a black problem, in Mingus's mind, because the itinerant music teacher that he was describing worked in the poor, largely black neighborhood of Watts, and he also specifically

⁷² Ibid., 76.

⁷³ Santoro, 230.

⁷⁴ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 25.

identifies the families that paid Mr. Arson's bills as being black.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, Mingus's experience of being cheated of an education because he was black was not isolated to a single unscrupulous teacher.

3.1.2 Signore Lippi

His inability to interpret music notation would directly effect his perception of how his music was received as he played classical cello in youth orchestras. Again we see race as the ominous shadow behind his inability to enjoy the full spectrum of music available in America. His white teacher did not teach him to read music, and this had an incontrovertible effect on his formative musical experiences in classical music ensembles. As he studied classical music, a style in which all of the noted composers, well-known performers, and most of the teachers that Mingus would have known during his childhood specialized, it would seem as if the music itself received him coldly and refused him because he was not considered white. As he describes his treatment from classical music teachers through his portrayal of "Signore Lippi," his school band director, we can see the feelings that he gleaned from his experiences as a classical musician and understand why he so readily switched to bass, and jazz, when the opportunity presented itself. Mingus uses this passage to illustrate that the deficiency he had in reading music, one that occurred because of his relationship with Mr. Arson, and the social implications and racial dynamic, which he outlined in that relationship, was used by Mr. Lippi to embarrass and humiliate him musically and racially. Mingus also uses this passage to show one of the reasons that he labeled blacks as the "underdog." In the narrative, Mr. Lippi states, "I've noticed that

⁷⁵ Ibid., 25.

most Negroes can't read [music]."⁷⁶ This statement clearly places the blame for Mingus's inability to interpret written music on his blackness. Although reading ability could have been addressed through education, the real problem that Mingus is writing about is that Mr. Lippi equated inability with blackness. While Mingus proved through his career that he could change his level of ability in music, this was a particularly harsh encounter because he was being attacked on the grounds of ethnicity, something that an African American could not change. Mingus would take this rejection terribly and even consider quitting music altogether because of the embarrassment from the negative attention of being asked to leave a rehearsal because of his inability to read music. The rejection that he suffered from Mr. Lippi was a representation of the rejection that blacks faced during this era when they tried to succeed and grow as classical musicians. The school band should have been a place where the teacher was the key element in the growth of Mingus as a young musician. It should have been a safe harbor where Mingus's weakness could be diagnosed and corrected. Instead it became a situation that his music teacher used to highlight a perceived racial inferiority when it came to western classical music.

Furthermore, Mingus uses the narrative with Mr. Lippi to show that it is only African Americans that paid such a high price for their perceived ethnic inferiority in respect to the ability to perform as a classical musician, and that other ethnic groups were not excluded. Mingus very carefully pointed out that Lippi represented an Italian American and was not "white." Lippi would not have been considered white because of the social standards that applied to race in the first half of the twentieth century. "New immigrants," who were often practitioners of some derivation of Catholicism or Judaism, were considered separate from white

⁷⁶ Ibid., 63.

American Protestants and often suffered discrimination because of it.⁷⁷ Here we see the Lippi persona inferring his own racial superiority by asserting the intellectual inferiority of blacks, using musical ability as a conduit, in spite of the fact that he himself was a member of an ethnic group that was a less powerful part of America's social structure.

Mingus's treatment as a youth is particularly stinging and absurd when the reader takes in the full meaning of the situation that he brought to light. It is clear, when one considers the education combination of Mr. Arson and Mr. Lippi, that his inability to read is not a genetic trait that is inherent in "negros" as Mr. Lippi asserts. His inability to read was a function of Mingus being African American and going through the education process that was available to African Americans as exemplified through Mr. Arson. Mr. Arson was an inferior educator offering blacks an inferior education, a person who, as Mingus implied, was unqualified to teach anyone.

In order to fully understand the statement that Mingus is making about blacks and music in American society during his early teen years, the exchange with Mr. Lippi has to be taken in context with the book's account of his early experience with Buddy Collette. In this section, Mr. Lippi, in combination with Mr. Arson, represents a "gatekeeper" to classical music. Even Mingus's most sincere and honest attempts to join him in the knowledge and ranks of classical practitioners were stifled. Mingus was rejected and even expressed a desire to stop his musical pursuits altogether because of the experience. This stands in stark contrast to his reception as he began to pursue music as a jazz musician. No amount of knowledge or ability could have helped him to escape the coldness and indifference directed toward him by his early teachers; this was not the case as he began to use his musical talents in the field of jazz.

⁷⁷ Gail Williams O'Brien, "Return to "Normalcy": Organized Racial Violence in the Post-World War II South," in *Violence in America Volume 2: Protest Rebellion, Reform*, ed. by Ted Robert Gurr, 231-254. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1989) 236-237.

3.2 PREPERATION WITHOUT OPPORTUNITY

Blacks were accepted to music schools and would often become educators, but they were excluded from most major classical music ensembles until the late fifties when the unions amalgamated.⁷⁸ If an African American were to be a musician, he was necessarily involved in jazz or popular music. Therefore it makes sense that the major innovations in jazz would come largely from blacks because this was the primary artistic outlet available to them. Prior to the sixties, and even after that, the best and brightest black musicians were systematically kept out of the field of classical music. There were always exceptions to this rule. The works of masters such as Harry Burleigh, Marion Cook, Clarence Cameron White, R. Nathaniel Dett, and William Grant Still are evidence of the participation of African Americans in the field of classical music.⁷⁹ Unfortunately their impact on mainstream orchestral repertoire was minimal because major orchestras did not regularly perform their works. There were also a number of black classical performers, but pursuing this type of career was very difficult. As stated before, they were not welcomed in major orchestras as members. Sometimes blacks would get opportunities to perform as soloists with major orchestras and even in major concert halls, but these opportunities did not present themselves often. Typically an African-American concert artist would have to travel all over the world to string together enough performances to support

⁷⁸ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 264-265.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 264-276.

himself financially.⁸⁰ This seems like an exciting lifestyle, but an international career must have been a rigorous and tiring endeavor, especially before air travel became widely used in the 1940s. It was impossible for even the most highly trained and capable black musicians to maintain careers as classical performers domestically. This sad fact of life was instilled in Mingus at an early age, when he was told to switch from cello to bass because opportunities for blacks to make a living on cello were nonexistent. His devotion to the instrument is evident because even as he began to seriously study bass with Red Callender in the late 1930s, Callender would comment that cello was still Mingus's main instrument.⁸¹ For a young teenager who had dedicated his early musical efforts to cello, this reality must have been heartbreaking.

3.3 MINGUS'S JAZZ GENESIS

As a jazz musician, Mingus was accepted even before he began to play bass. Buddy Collette immediately accepted him into his swing band, and by proxy, into the field of jazz. The only stipulation was that he become the band's bassist.⁸² This story is corroborated in both Mingus biographies, in Buddy Collette's autobiography, and in Clora Bryant's *Central Avenue Sound*, which chronicles the accounts of a number of Los Angeles jazz musicians. Under Collette's offer, there was opportunity for him to gain knowledge while performing the music. This attitude was in stark contrast to his experience in classical music. Not only was he immediately accepted as a jazz musician, offering him artistic opportunities that were

⁸⁰ Ibid., 280-281.

⁸¹ Santoro, 30.
Priestly, 10.

⁸² Mingus, *Beneath he Underdog*, 68.

unavailable to him in classical music, but he was also able to immediately see the tangible evidence of the benefits of being a jazz musician.

For Mingus, and other young blacks aspiring to turn their musical talents into feasible careers, there were no visible examples of black classical instrumentalists. The most historically noted example was James Reese Europe's Clef Club, which reached its zenith before 1920. Many question whether this ensemble should even be considered "classical" based on its performance emphasis on musical-theater-based genres.⁸³ There were, of course, composers such as William Grant Still, but his work during the twenties with the "Deep River Hour" made no mention of the fact that he was a black composer and could not have been any motivation to Mingus's generation of black musicians. Black jazz musicians, on the other hand, were a very visible example of a career path in a genre that was available to blacks. Race records, recordings that featured black artists and were marketed to the black community, enjoyed great popularity in the United States. Even in the years after the Depression, when record sales in many other genres weakened, the sales of race records remained relatively strong.⁸⁴ This may have been due to the lack of radio exposure for African-American music, but the most important effect on the lives of musicians like Mingus was the availability of black musicians to serve as models for potential careers. While these national stars were important, it was jazz on a local level that would really push Mingus to become a career musician. The Los Angeles area was brimming with black musicians who had achieved the highest level of instrumental virtuosity and a level of national accomplishment as jazz musicians. The opportunities available in jazz were made even more attractive by the lifestyle that was part of that career, a lifestyle that included fine clothing

⁸³ Olly Wilson, "The Black-American Composer and Orchestra in the Twentieth Century," *The Black Perspective in Music* 14 no. 1 (1985): 27-29.

⁸⁴ William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 133.

and popularity with women.⁸⁵ At seventeen these things may have been as important and attractive as the opportunity to perform.

⁸⁵ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 68-69.

4.0 WORKING IN LOS ANGELES

The early formative years of any musician cannot be overlooked. The development of a jazz musician relies heavily on the ability to connect with like-minded individuals and on numerous opportunities of the right kind and caliber to help a musician develop the skills necessary for the national and international stage. In Mingus's case, it was not only the artistic aspects of being a musician in Los Angeles that were influential; it was also the political and racial atmosphere that surrounded the opportunities for professional musicians that were critically important in shaping his future. Because Mingus was an African-American musician, his development had specific boundaries that came with a paradox set by society for his development as a musician. As this chapter will show, his exclusion from certain career paths was often the factor that pushed him into the opportunities that made him a musical legend.

4.1 CENTRAL AVENUE

Central Avenue, also referred to as South Central or simply The Avenue, was the geographical focal point of the African-American community of Los Angeles during the 1930s and 1940s. Central Avenue ran south from downtown, and it was the main thoroughfare on the

east side of Los Angeles.⁸⁶ The groundwork for Central Avenue to become the center of black life in Los Angeles began before the turn of the century. From the 1890s through the end of the 1910s, the east side of Los Angeles saw an increase of African-American, Jewish, Japanese, and Mexican immigrants, with African Americans and Japanese having the greatest increase. The contrast between east and west Los Angeles was tremendous. During this period, western Los Angeles was seen as an Anglo-Saxon haven, while the eastern half of the city was a model of diversity, with families from a variety of ethnicities living side by side.

4.1.1 The “Blackening” of Central Avenue

The area would begin to solidify itself as an African-American stronghold in 1911, with the formation of the 74th Assembly District. Although the area was not ethnically homogeneous, it was African Americans who were the most assertive in forming active political and cultural organizations. In the 74th Assembly district blacks garnered enough political power to elect an African American to the state legislature, Fredrick Roberts, and they were able to continue to elect him for a decade.⁸⁷ In conjunction with being an African-American center of political power, Central Avenue was also the nexus of the black economy in Los Angeles. As was the case with most immigrant groups at the turn of the century, blacks in the city began to develop businesses to cater to their own community. This was particularly true for African Americans because, through most of the twentieth century, the only way to receive quality goods and services, without the humiliation that Jim Crow–derived logic promised, was through African-

⁸⁶ Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 94, 96-97.

⁸⁷ Flamming, 100-102.

American-owned businesses. The pattern of blacks patronizing black enterprises that was practiced on Central Avenue was commonly done throughout the country. In Los Angeles, the two major African-American newspapers, the *Western News* and the *Eagle*, actively published articles calling for blacks to direct their money to black businesses as early as 1888.⁸⁸ The year 1919 saw the publication of a list of 185 members of the Progressive Business League of Los Angeles (formerly the Negro Business League) and made it even easier for blacks to find businesses to meet their needs and insure that those businesses were owned by blacks. The Progressive Business League lists influenced 15,000 African Americans, and although there were black businesses as far as Venice and Santa Monica, most were located in the 74th Assembly District. One fourth of the businesses were actually on Central Avenue.⁸⁹

In spite of the economic and political power that blacks achieved in the Central Avenue area, they were not a numerical majority. In the early forties, blacks became the fastest growing minority group in Los Angeles, a situation magnified by the fact that blacks, unlike other minorities, were competing with whites for some of the cities finer housing areas instead of settling for slums.⁹⁰ The tensions between the growing black presence and an already-existing community, which was largely white, created a kind of “separation cycle.” The growth of black business and population in the area fueled an increase of Jim Crow attitudes within the white community. As these attitudes grew, it became easier to convince blacks that they should spend their money at African-American enterprises. This inspired black entrepreneurs because of the growing number of blacks looking for opportunities to spend their money with black businesses.

⁸⁸ Flamming, 118-119.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁰ Charles B. Spaulding, “Housing Problems of Minority Groups in Los Angeles County,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 248 (1946): 221.

Many whites of the period found this growth of black economic power threatening, continuing the cycle.⁹¹

4.1.2 Containment and Pressure on Residents and Businesses

It was, in fact, the actions of whites that were the primary reason for the concentration of African-American homes and businesses in the Central Avenue area. The African-American community of Central Avenue spread southward because they were bordered on the east by the Los Angeles River and on the west by “a rigid racial boundary, beyond which potential black residents were met with implacable resistance.”⁹² Two blocks west of Central, San Pedro Avenue represented a residential and business line that black property owners could not cross. To keep blacks out of selected housing areas, Californians enacted strict housing covenants. These covenants were agreements white landowners made with each other so that minorities groups would be ineligible for home ownership in certain areas. Although these covenants were used on any number of ethnic minorities, they were primarily aimed at limiting the geographical growth of African Americans. Housing covenants remained an effective way to contain, or at least direct, the growth of black communities through the first half of the twentieth century. In California these housing covenants had the backing of the courts through 1931. Even after the court decisions were overturned in California, they remained nationally viable until the Supreme Court case of *Shelley vs. Kramer* outlawed the practice in 1948.⁹³

⁹¹ Flammig, 124.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁹³ Michael Jones-Correa, “The Origins and Diffusions of Racial Restrictive Covenants,” *Political Science Quarterly* 115 no. 4 (2000-2001): 544-545.

In addition to the tension between blacks and whites, there was also tension between the types of businesses that existed in the Central Avenues area. From almost the beginning of its development, there were nightclubs, and their presence was unappreciated by many middle-class blacks. These establishments were constantly under attack; from whites because of the interracial mingling that was a part of their mystique, and from blacks because of the impact they saw alcohol, gambling and prostitution had on their communities.⁹⁴ As Charles Mingus developed as a musician in the forties, this was the Central Avenue that he was part of. Being an African-American musician during this period meant being part of this questionable nightlife and working in an atmosphere of intense, and career limiting, racial tension. Even as members of the musicians' union, they could not expect to move beyond the rigid racial boundaries that dictated the direction of their careers.

4.2 THE SEGREGATED UNION

While Los Angeles would prove to be the environment from which Mingus would absorb a great deal creatively, as an African-American musician in Los Angeles his career options were limited. As Mingus was developing into a world-class bass player and composer, musicians unions in Los Angeles and throughout the country were divided on the basis of race. “With the exception of New York and Detroit, the largest cities—Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and San Francisco—had segregated musicians' locals.”⁹⁵ In Los Angeles, the white union, which

⁹⁴ Flamming, 118-119.

⁹⁵ Marl Young, “Amalgamation of 47 and Local 767” (Reprinted from article that appeared in *Overture*, March 1999), Professional Musicians Local 47 Web site, <http://www.promusic47.org/amalgamation.htm> (accessed August 23, 2006).

was approved for its charter as a member of the AFM in 1897, was numbered 47.⁹⁶ The local 767, which was to cover the same geographic area and service African-American professional musicians, received its charter in the 1920s.⁹⁷ This phenomenon, in theory, was designed so that the black and white unions would have equal jurisdiction over a given city. The only difference between the two unions would be the ethnicity of the members of the organizations. However, as was consistently the case with “separate but equal” accommodations, the difference went further than whether the unions had black or white membership. In practice the employment of the members of the 767 was restricted to “their own districts” throughout its existence.⁹⁸ From the time the local 767 received its charter until it was dissolved on April 1, 1953, the region of Los Angeles that met the criteria of being blacks’ “own district” was built around the activity on Central Avenue, an area whose musical employment prospects consisted primarily of after-hours clubs.⁹⁹

In the forties, as a developing professional musician, Mingus was a member of the local 767. However the black union in and of itself represented an insurmountable contradiction, a paradox that would shape Mingus’s political outspokenness. For many musicians, the union is representative of the highest level of professionalism. Those who make music their craft and trade go to the union for strength and rely on the protections that it offers, from pensions to contract enforcement. However, for Mingus, and other African Americans of that time, it was clear that the black union offered compromised protection and compromised opportunities. Blacks entering the music field felt that there were no real benefits to their membership in the

⁹⁶ Professional Musicians Local 47 Web site, <http://www.promusic47.org/history.htm> (accessed August 22, 2006).

⁹⁷ Charles Emge, “Move Grows to Scrap L.A.’s Jim Crow Union.” *Down Beat*, June 15, 1951, 1.

⁹⁸ Emge, 1.

⁹⁹ Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Love?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 106.

union under the Jim Crow restrictions.¹⁰⁰ The union's racial problem kept Mingus from playing venues outside the Central Avenue region. Making matters worse, Mingus was unable to take full advantage of the proximity of Hollywood and the need that the motion picture industry had for new music. He was connected enough to Hollywood to appear in films and take part in sidelining (assisting Hollywood composers by filling in parts), but he was unable to get a foothold in Hollywood as any more than a musical ghost writer.¹⁰¹ Even the university setting, which is generally viewed as a bastion for creativity, was not yet open and ready for a composer with the musical focus, and ethnicity, of Mingus. Though UCLA was embracing the challenging and rewarding tonal concepts of Arnold Schoenberg,¹⁰² it had not yet embraced jazz, or any other African American music, as a musical style worthy of formal study. This meant that Mingus was limited to working at nightclubs on and around Central Avenue. This was an essential part of his development as a musician, and as a person. Until well into his career, he would have to depend almost completely on these types of venues to sustain his musical career. It was the in clubs of Central Avenue, where he performed with ensembles like the Stars of Swing with Buddy Collette, where he was made to feel like a star. It was also in these venues that Mingus would begin to explore some of the less admirable but nonetheless defining aspects of his life. Because of these limited opportunities, Mingus would have to leave Los Angeles to fulfill his musical dreams. Unfortunately leaving Los Angeles did not mean Mingus could totally escape the conditions and attitudes that were affecting his career.

¹⁰⁰ Emge, 19.

¹⁰¹ Santoro, 56.

¹⁰² O.W. neighbour, "Schoenberg, Arnold," *Grove Music Online*, 2006, <http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=music.25024>, (Accessed September 17, 2006).

5.0 THE TRANSITION TO THE NATIONAL STAGE

As a young musician in Los Angeles, it may have been difficult for Mingus to gauge the level of talent that he possessed, although he was very confident in his abilities. As discussed earlier, even a superbly talented black musician would have a problem earning a reasonable income limited to the venues of Central Avenue, even in its heyday. With the pressures of a new wife and child, Mingus found himself in need of more significant income than was possible for a local musician. Mingus was at a crossroads, and the direction he took was dictated by his talent. And though his talent afforded him a level of privilege that was not available to most African Americans, his career experiences were still dictated by the social realities of the era.

5.1 MIXED OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Racial boundaries, and their social ramifications, have always been a part of American life. Due to his own ethnic background and his larger-than-life behavior, Mingus was always at odds with these boundaries. Although leaving Los Angeles would change the personal effects that racism had on his life, his actions now became symbolic and, whether desired or not, made statements that were heard and interpreted on a national level. In the late forties, Mingus began to have experiences and to meet people who showed him that he could influence the way the world treated him. This period was a catalyst for the political and social outspokenness that he

would become known for. This kind of outspokenness is not easy to maintain and can be wearing for some. This moral fortitude was not something that Mingus possessed immediately, but it was a characteristic that suited his disposition. The Mingus family had a rich cultural heritage in the early twentieth century when discrimination against minorities was the norm. Based purely on physical characteristics, Mingus was an outsider in all groups. While he was considered black, there were times in his youth when he was also rejected by African Americans because of his light complexion. This outsider status made Mingus able to connect with many different kinds of people, and this connection made him able to sympathize and feel comfortable speaking and acting on behalf of many different causes.

His most mentionable acquaintances during his youth, outside of his musician friends, were a Japanese family named Okes.¹⁰³ As is illustrated through his account in *Beneath the Underdog*, the Okes were generous to Mingus, teaching him about aspects of their culture, including judo, which helped to build young Mingus's confidence.¹⁰⁴ One jarring example of racial injustice may have been when Mingus realized that the Okes, like most people of Japanese descent living throughout the country during World War II, had been forced from their home and into an internment camp. Perhaps this was part of the motivation for Mingus to falsify test results and receive a 4-F rating that would forever exclude him from military service.¹⁰⁵

Another individual who had a profound impact on Mingus's views was trumpeter Fats Navarro.¹⁰⁶ His influence is best captured in Mingus's autobiography. Looking at Mingus's account as a summary, Navarro related views on race and money and how those two issues

¹⁰³ Santoro, 25-26.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 45-56.

¹⁰⁵ Santoro, 55-56.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

related to each other within the politics of the music business.¹⁰⁷ Navarro, who met Mingus in the late forties when they were both working with Lionel Hampton, was ahead of his time concerning the true complexity of racial politics, especially as they applied to jazz. Navarro asserted that it was the media that exaggerated Charlie Parker's drug use while ignoring similar problems of white musicians. This was an especially heinous injustice because, as stated by Navarro, Parker was never arrested for drug use.¹⁰⁸ By Navarro's logic, it was not a black musician's ability to become a star that signified equality, but instead his ability to get the daily performances that would insure sustained income.¹⁰⁹

It is also important to be familiar with the experiences that Mingus encountered as a professional musician, and how they may have informed his decisions to include political subjects in some of his works. The professional experience that most influenced Mingus's view of race and business was his work with Red Norvo from 1950 through 1951.¹¹⁰ The Norvo group was a revolutionary music ensemble that was contemporary in time and concept to the Modern Jazz Quartet. Mingus first worked with the group while it was backing Billie Holiday. When Norvo offered him a position with the trio, Mingus was working for the Post Office, but he left that job to resume his musical career in Norvo's trio.¹¹¹ Mingus's relationship with Norvo went well beyond that of a band member; Norvo was often consulted about issues as diverse as women and composition.¹¹² Norvo even exerted influence over the planning of

¹⁰⁷ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 185-192.

¹⁰⁸ This is a statement that was relayed from Navarro through Mingus in the original manuscript of his autobiography and may or may not reflect actual fact.

¹⁰⁹ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* unpublished manuscript version, Box 45/3, The Charles Mingus collection, Music Divisions, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 202-207.

¹¹⁰ Santoro, 93.

¹¹¹ Priestley, 42.

¹¹² Santoro, 94.

Mingus's wedding to his second wife, Celia, convincing the two not to get married on the same day Celia's divorce was finalized.¹¹³

One curiosity about Mingus and his roll in Norvo's group was that he was African American. During that period, an interracial music group such as Norvo's was significant. Mingus was playing in many high-profile, segregated establishments, but he allowed his racial identity to pass as ambiguous. It was during this time that his lifelong friend, Buddy Collette, was moving to desegregate the Hollywood music scene through an integrated community orchestra that performed weekly. Instead of using his success with the Norvo trio to act as an African-American trailblazer, Mingus allowed his racial status to remain nebulous, taking advantage of his light complexion and straightening his hair.¹¹⁴ At one point, Collette and a group of his companions were refused admittance to one of Mingus's performance because they were racially mixed. Collette threatened to sue the restaurant, but Norvo, with Mingus as a willing party, requested that they not sue the establishment and, therefore, compromise their employment. Collette did not expose Mingus as an African American, but this was a disappointing low in their relationship.¹¹⁵

This willing denial of the responsibility he could have assumed as a black musician must have made it even more painful when he was replaced for the group's television debut. The official reason that Mingus was not allowed to perform was because he was not a member of New York Local 802. He was replaced by a white musician. Mingus saw this as a racial conspiracy and felt Norvo was complicit. It was clear to Mingus that he was not allowed to appear with the band on television because he was black. Because of this perceived slight, he

¹¹³ Priestley, 43.

¹¹⁴ Santoro, 90.

¹¹⁵ Buddy Collette and Steven Isoardi, *Jazz Generations: A Life in American Music and Society* (London: Continuum, 2000), 124.

quit the band and pursued his musical career in New York City.¹¹⁶ His animosity toward his former bandleader would be magnified, in 1952, when performing a weeklong date with Billy Taylor in Boston's Storyville. "The club's owner, George Wein, told Mingus he'd paid the Norvo trio \$900 a week. Norvo always said the trio was a cooperative, but Mingus had not been paid \$300. Instantly he crescendoed [sic.] into a soliloquy about co-op bands and white man's world and slave labor, and hurled an ashtray at the wall."¹¹⁷ Mingus was not alone in his anger over the treatment that seemed to be embedded in the fabric of society. Throughout the country blacks were beginning to realize their potential not only to define the way they viewed themselves, but their ability to change the way society saw them.

5.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK AWARENESS

Blacks in the United States became more fervent about asserting themselves into American society as early as the 1950s. African Americans had been educating themselves about their own history in America and about world history as it pertained specifically to them and their children. As outlined in an article written in the seventies by Lawrence Crouchett, titled "Early Black Studies Movements," this education began during slavery with the secret transmission of knowledge about African heritage and was later carried on through religious organizations such as African-American and Quaker churches. With the twentieth century came institutions designed specifically for blacks to carry the torch of black education. According to Crouchett, the efforts to educate blacks on African-American history waned in the 1940s and 1950s but

¹¹⁶ Priestley, 44.

¹¹⁷ Santoro, 98

were reestablished after the sit-ins of the late 1950s into the 1960s, spurred by the same energy that was inspiring the American black pride and Black Muslim movements.¹¹⁸ The self-definition of African Americans through black education was changing in significance; it was no longer a means of collective memory and silent dignity. Beginning in the 1950s, it became the source of inspiration for social struggle, and by the 1960s, black studies had a new and powerful impact, not only for blacks, but also in the statement it made to the greater American society. The same was true of the offerings of jazz musicians during this period.

Critics and academicians began to notice the trend in the late fifties as the “soul” or “funky” jazz style began to gain popularity. This musical movement saw young, African-American musicians using church music and rhythm and blues to form the basis of a new style. Avant-garde jazz also was associated with “blackness” as many of the most important figures in this genre were seen as using their music to make strong racial statements. Some saw this emphasis on African-American musical conventions as a reaction to the popularity that cool jazz and third stream enjoyed years earlier. It was no coincidence that the major personalities of both styles were white and that the new music was being made by blacks and relied heavily on “blackness.”¹¹⁹ Artists like Max Roach, Miles Davis and many others began to express a sense of ethnic pride and ownership concerning jazz music, which came to be seen as a threat to the established norms of the music industry. In Mingus’s case, this sense of ethnic pride was complicated because of his physical appearance.

It is generally taken for granted that Mingus was black. People on both sides of the racial spectrum often create this classification without either explaining it or examining the finer points of the social constructions surrounding being black in the United States. This is a particularly

¹¹⁸ *Journal of Black Studies* 2 no. 2

¹¹⁹ John F. Szwed, “Music and Racial Conflict,” *Phylon* 27 no. 4 (1966): 359.

salient point when examining Charles Mingus. Physically, Mingus, his father, and biological mother were very light-skinned African Americans. This minor detail created significant paradoxes in his life and the development of his consciousness as an African American. One paradox was being black in America; another was being a person who was on the fringes of blackness. Mingus, like many other Americans, lived fully and simultaneously in both realities. There is no doubt that Mingus thought of himself as black. In his own words, in fact in his own voice, Mingus has been recorded as saying that he claimed he was a negro.¹²⁰ As evidenced through Mingus, a person can be strongly identified as African American even if they appear to be white. Throughout American history, there have been several terms to encapsulate this sentiment, such as the “one-drop rule,” the legal term “traceable amounts,” or the anthropological term “hypo-descent.” Whichever term is used, they all mean that anyone who had *any* African ancestry was black.¹²¹ The reasoning behind this logic is clearly explained in Naomi Zack’s book *Race and Mixed Race*: “If a person has a black parent, a black grandparent, or a black greatⁿ-grandparent (where *n* is the number of generations in the past and can be any degree of ancestry), then that person is considered black. But if a person has a white parent, or three white grandparents, or *Z* white greatⁿ-grandparents (where *Z* is any odd number and *n* is still any degree of ancestry), then that person is not thereby considered white.”¹²²

Even though Mingus met these qualifications of being black, that did not mean that his situation was not complicated by the stratification that existed within the African-American community. Historically this stratification has proven to be a benefit for lighter-skinned blacks in this country, but because of the status of jazz professionals, it was almost as if the opposite

¹²⁰ Don McGlynn and Sue Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Triumph of the Underdog*, DVD, directed by Don McGlynn (Newton, NJ: Sanachie Entertainment Corp., 1999).

¹²¹ F. James Davis, *Who Is Black?* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 5.

¹²² Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 9.

were true for him because of the sentiment that jazz was the musical domain of African Americans. Mingus wrote a great deal in *Beneath the Underdog* about how, even though he was black, he did not feel that he fit in with blacks as a youth because he was being insulted and teased by people of all ethnicities. In essence Mingus faced some measure of rejection from all of the social groups around him, which was especially ironic because he felt linked to so many ethnic groups. As he wrote in his autobiography concerning his high school years, “whenever [I] looked in the mirror and asked ‘What am I?’ [I] thought [I] could see a number of strains—Indian, African, Mexican, Asian, and a certain amount of white.”¹²³

It was in fact his experience of being an outsider to outsiders, or a minority among minorities, that inspired the title to his book. The term “Beneath the Underdog” refers to the feeling that Mingus had of being below the lowest rung of the racial and socio-economic rung of the American ladder. While this title is a veiled allusion to the situation that was central to his narrative, his original titles, *Half Yaller Nigger* or *Half Yaller Schitt-Colored Nigger*, were more direct and more confrontational, but unpublishable.¹²⁴ He drew these titles from the way he felt he was perceived by blacks. Even though he identified himself as African American, he had a paradoxical relationship with other blacks. This paradox has seen no better expression than Mingus’s own words as he proclaimed “my hair wasn’t beautiful nappy like theirs was, my skin wasn’t dark ebony black...beautiful like theirs was. They made me feel ugly. They called me shit colored mother fucker, you half yellow shit colored mother fucker.”¹²⁵ This attack was bitter and harsh, and especially so because jazz was seen by many as the domain of African Americans.

¹²³ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 66.

¹²⁴ Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus/Mingus: Two Memoirs* (Berkeley: Creative Arts Book Company, 1989), 4.

¹²⁵ McGlynn.

6.0 JAZZ AS A CONDUIT FOR BLACK PRIDE

The idea that jazz was an African-American art form was not new. The association between jazz and African Americans has sometimes been taken for granted and is often cast as one of the unavoidable detriments, or necessary evils, of the music. For example, in his article “Jazz Since 1945,” Charles Fox wrote: “Jazz has often been attacked for being uncivilized, for being African and primitive in its inspiration.” Fox is clearly implying that those who find jazz a lesser musical form equate its African influence to primitiveness. His strategy for defending jazz as a worthwhile music, equal in character to whatever type of music his critics may have considered “civilized,” does nothing to address the assertion that if something is African, or influenced or rooted in African conventions, it is inherently primitive. To the contrary, as he points out the virtues of jazz music, he does not dispute the primitiveness of jazz because of its relationship with African music; instead he says that the progress that jazz has made is due to the rapidly increasing use of European musical conventions.¹²⁶ Fox’s statement, made in 1960, showed that within the music world, there was still that alienation of “blackness.”

¹²⁶ *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association* (1959-1960): 16.

6.1 THE HARDSHIPS OF JAZZ

Jazz's association with African-American musicians has, at times, marked it as a lower form of American music. The most tangible manifestation of this alienation in the United States was the paradox faced by African-American musicians as they aspired to sustain themselves as professionals. Through Mingus's life we can see that this alienation is historic and that he addressed it through the assertion of his Africa-American identity.

6.1.1 The Hardships of Jazz as Entertainment

It is easy to see why Mingus was moved toward performing as a jazz musician, when examined in historical context. There was no other choice for Mingus at that time. His opportunities were limited, if not nonexistent, as a classical musician. It was clear that, had Mingus pursued this career path, his skills as a bassist, and later as a composer, would have languished. He assumed the role that society allotted him as a black musician, but for much of his career he would be forced to overcome the strife as he worked actively to embrace the role of jazz musician and shed the image of entertainer. The black musician as entertainer was one of the roles that often went along with success for African-American jazz musicians. This conflict of artist as entertainer was one that Mingus would deal with throughout his career.

As he toured and performed with the ensembles of Louis Armstrong and Lionel Hampton, Mingus saw the positive and negative aspects to the onstage practices of both musicians. Both Hampton and Armstrong were internationally respected because of their musicianship. No one, including Mingus, could question their talents as instrumentalists. It was also obvious that they held their audiences by their willingness to carry on comic or acrobatic

antics during their performances. Mingus would have become aware of this as he traveled with the two bands, however, Mingus made it clear in his personal writings that he saw Armstrong's stage antics as "tomming," or pandering to whites for their favor.¹²⁷ He felt that the most important part, the music, should have been sufficient on its own, without the acting and joking. Mingus expected his music to be taken seriously, and he let his audiences know it. As Mingus's reputation as a bandleader grew, so did his demand that his audience remain totally silent.¹²⁸ This does not seem unusual by today's standard of jazz performance, but in the fifties and sixties, the primary venue for jazz was bars and nightclubs. Mingus was adamant about his music being performed in an atmosphere appropriate to his artistic endeavors, that is, a concert hall, and he was willing to be confrontational to create that atmosphere.

6.1.2 The Hardships of Jazz as Art

By the 1960s, Mingus's music was seen as avant-garde jazz. This genre was associated with the social discourse—both the words and the actions—ongoing in the United States about the plight of African Americans in all aspects of their lives. As a whole, the music and musicians that came to be labeled avant-garde in the 1960s were seen as part of the Black Nationalist movement. Although some have said that Mingus was not political when it came to his music,¹²⁹ the second part of the statement that opens *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* addresses an issue with great political importance to black musicians. To alert his fans, potential audiences, and prospective employers to the artistic value that he placed on his music, he

¹²⁷ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* unpublished manuscript version, Box 45/1, The Charles Mingus collection, Music Divisions, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 103.

¹²⁸ Buddy Collette, interview by Ernest Horton, July 10, 2006.

¹²⁹ Sue Mingus, interviewed by Ernest Horton, July 6, 2006.

included this mock introduction on his 1960 album *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*: “Good evening ladies and gentlemen, we would like to remind you that we don’t applaud here at the showplace, or wherever we’re working. Restrain your applause, and if you must applaud, wait till the end of the set, and it won’t even matter then. The reason is that we are interrupted by your noise. In fact don’t even take any drinks, or no cash register ringing, etcetera.”¹³⁰ This comment is particularly important when examined in the context of jazz musicians and nightclub owners.

Mingus’s statement that audiences should restrain their applause because their applause didn’t matter was provocative but necessary. This comment places the work of the musicians, the performance, as the most important part of the evening. It also solidifies the fact that Mingus is not seeking the approval of an audience through his performance. Approval seeking was the cause of his disgruntled behavior in both the Hampton and Armstrong bands. For the Mingus ensemble, the most important fact was the music; other factors were a distant second. The music, the group’s artistic statement, was so important that Mingus was willing to alienate the audience to insure that the music was respected and unimpeded by anything. The second part of the statement was even more provocative: “In fact don’t even take any drinks, or no cash register ringing, etcetera.” Mingus is giving an ultimatum to club owners that even their desire to profit from the performance through drink sales is secondary to the music. This was a bold statement for a jazz musician to make. At the time this recording was circulated into the mainstream the music of black jazz musicians was typically performed in clubs and bars, places where drinks were the main source of income. By putting this statement onto the recording and into the public arena, he was taking the risk of alienating employers and reducing his ability to

¹³⁰ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*, Candid, CCD79005.

profit from his popularity. Mingus, once again, showed that he was either going to create on his own terms or he would not share his creations at all. He was making a clear statement on the value that should have been placed on his music. He was changing the perception of jazz from being entertainment and the background noise to conversation in a bar, to something that required total focus on the part of audiences. Inherent in the change that Mingus was seeking was a racial component that rose from the relationship between avant-garde performance and performers, such as those on *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*, and the club owners and clubs that usually facilitated performances.

6.1.3 The Hardships of Jazz as Life

Many writers have identified avant-garde jazz, such as that performed by Mingus on this album, with the African-American struggle for power over their own lives. Other critics dispute the connection between the music and the movement occurring in the black community, even though black activists Stokely Carmichael and Malcom X were known to attend and even speak at avant-garde jazz performances.¹³¹ Avant-garde jazz musicians often identified themselves closely with black power ideology. For example they refused to be called colored or negro, preferring to be called black. Some musicians also began to examine the political implications of the word *jazz*; a term that many felt had come to represent the abuse and exploitation of black musicians.¹³² There were a number of avant-garde musicians who directly represented the civil rights struggle with a sonic affront as their contribution to the struggle. “Abbey Lincoln’s blood-

¹³¹ John D. Baskerville, “Free Jazz: A Reflection of Black Power Ideology.” *Journal of Black Studies* 24 no. 4 (1994): 493.

¹³² Baskerville, “Free Jazz”: 485-486.

curdling screams on 'Protest,' from Max Roach's 1960 recording *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, highlight the parallel changes that occurred in jazz and society that erupted in full force in the 1960s."¹³³ The music on *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* does not contain such a direct musical representation of the civil rights struggle, but it is, as are all parts of his life and music, representative because of its avant-gardeness.

A number of writers who have focused on the place of avant-garde music in society have illustrated that the music should be considered not only an expression of the struggle, but also the focus of the struggle itself. Considered in this light, even though Mingus did not directly address racial issues on this album, his music is still a part of the broader discourse that has historically existed between African-American music and society. One writer who has made this very point by using a variety of different African-American historical and social references is John D. Baskerville. In chapter five of his book, *The Impact of Black Nationalist Ideology on American Jazz Music of the 1960s and 1970s*, he creates a link between the economic colonialism African Americans have suffered and the musical economics that avant-garde jazz musicians faced. Baskerville uses the beginning of this chapter to establish the concept of the "universal slavemaster" or capitalist oppressor. He shows how the "universal slavemaster," represents a force that promotes the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic, which acts to create a nihilistic atmosphere in black communities throughout the world. One of the sentiments circulated among the most radical of the black nationalists is that the only way to overcome the "universal slavemaster" is through a violent revolutionary uprising in which all black people unite. Baskerville illustrates how black nationalists of the sixties made it seem as if all historical African-American civil

¹³³ Robert K. McMichael, "'We Insist-Freedom Now!': Black Moral Authority, Jazz, and the Changeable Shape of Whiteness," *American Music* 16 no. 4 (1998): 381.

rights leaders were moving toward this conclusion.¹³⁴ Baskerville also shows in a very concise manner that the lives of avant-garde jazz musicians are examples of the “universal slavemaster” principle at work. In his 1993 article “Free Jazz: a Reflection of Black Power Ideology,” he calls nightclubs “plantations of the new slavery.”¹³⁵ In the same vein, author Frank Kofsky dedicates an entire chapter of his book to what he calls “cockroach capitalism.” Kofsky illustrates how club owners pay the band less than one-fifth of the net profit they make in a given evening.¹³⁶ No matter how symbolic his music may have been of the assertion that black music was high art and not mere entertainment, the statement on the album was a direct—and permanent—way for Mingus to put his feelings about the treatment of the music on record. Since he was addressing the issue that was characterized by black musicians redefining their relationships with white club owners, it was also, if only by default, a racial statement.

6.2 JAZZ AND POLITICS

Although the seeds existed in hard bop, the avant-garde jazz of the 1960s more than any other era in jazz represented an aggressive political stance on the part of African Americans. The question must then be asked, why? Jazz has always been avant-garde. Even when you look at the definition given by author Frank Tirro, in which avant-garde jazz is a musical style that “declared itself free of melodic, harmonic, and metric restraints,”¹³⁷ we still find ourselves with a

¹³⁴ John D. Baskerville, *The Impact of Black Nationalist Ideology on American Jazz Music of the 1960s and 1970s*, (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 107-112.

¹³⁵ Baskerville, “Free Jazz,”: 489.

¹³⁶ Frank Kofsky *Black Nationalism and the Revolution of Music*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1970), 147-149.

¹³⁷ Frank Tirro, *Jazz: A History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, inc., 1977), 341.

description that could be used for every style of jazz. It could even be applied to every style of African-American music, when taken in cultural and historical context. After all, if we consider the blues in its earliest forms, it would also seem to break existing melodic, harmonic, and metric constraints that existed in America at that time. Blues singers would scoop and bend notes in ways that were unheard of in western music of the period. In its earliest stages (during the nineteenth century), the harmonic structure of the blues lacked its current rigidity. The scoops and bends and structural flexibility show how early blues musicians exercised their harmonic freedom. In addition, the use of the drone by a solo musician allows for freedom from strict meter.¹³⁸ While these styles of jazz may have had the same musical impact on society, changing the landscape of American music by use of a uniquely African-American contribution, their participants were not seen as overt operatives of social change. Salim Washington points out that the music that was labeled avant-garde was no more revolutionary than bebop and was no more political than songs like Ellington's *Black, Brown, and Beige Suite* or Billie Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit."¹³⁹

6.2.1 The Shifting Philosophies of Jazz Musicians

I believe that the reason avant-garde jazz was seen as more political is because the earlier artists saw their music as primarily entertainment. As such, even though their public lives represented an ever-changing black identity, they were not actively attempting to be agents of change. Even as Billie Holiday sang the jarring lyrics to "Strange Fruit" (she was describing the phenomenon

¹³⁸ Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz* 6th ed. Revised printing, (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 2002), 95-97.

¹³⁹ Salim Washington, "'All the Things You Could Be by Now': *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* and the Limits of Avant-Garde Jazz." in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* edited by Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin.33.

of lynching), she was suffering through drug addiction and facing racial problems touring with the Artie Shaw band. But she never attempted to use her popularity to bring attention to racial injustice. “Strange Fruit” was a call to stop that kind of violence, but in a tone that would draw sympathy to the subject. Because her song was looking for whites to take action, the politics behind the song were relatively unthreatening. After all, the overwhelming majority of her audience could sympathize with the position that hanging blacks without a trial and often for completely trivial reasons was heinous.

However, the sentiment that musicians were primarily entertainers changed during the bebop era as they began to seek out attention as artists because of the time and effort that they put into developing their skills.¹⁴⁰ Avant-garde jazz musicians also wanted to be considered artists, and as such, they consciously presented their audience with a concept that would drastically change the fabric of American society. Also avant-garde jazz artists had deep convictions about the views they espoused. They were much more likely to use whatever attention they received to bring light to their politics instead of just enjoying the limelight. Blacks were going through a process of redefining who they were on their own terms, and this redefinition often included the rejection of things that many felt were fundamental to American life. Musicians like Idris Muhammad, Ahmad Jamal, and Yusef Lateef turned to Islamic beliefs and changed their names as a reflection of their newfound religion. Changing one’s name, especially in the midst of a career in the arts where name recognition is critically important in drawing a consistent audience, is a risky proposition for a popular figure. This was a very public way of bringing attention to their attempts to find harmony in their lives, and a risk they were willing to shoulder. This made it seem as if avant-garde jazz was inherently more political, when in reality it was only political

¹⁴⁰ Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz*, 168.

in a different way. Because they were advocating drastic change, the type of change that might have a negative effect on mainstream society as well as negative implications on the direction of jazz, their views received more intense scrutiny by the mainstream and by jazz critics. It was the political stance of musicians and composers like Mingus that solidified them into a group. Their more aggressive and assertive attitudes brought attention to race, even if, as some argued in the case of Mingus, the majority of their musical output was not aimed directly at racial issues.

6.2.2 Crow Jim

As blacks began to assert themselves through their music, some began to ask whether authentic jazz fell exclusively in the domain of African Americans. This question was not a reflection of the feelings of the artists themselves. After all, African-American trumpeter Miles Davis, one of the most important figures in jazz, used white pianist Bill Evans on his 1959 album *Kind of Blue*,¹⁴¹ and one of the most popular songs of the hard-bop era, “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy,” a song that made heavy use of African-American musical conventions, was composed by Austrian native Joe Zawinul in 1966¹⁴² and performed in the ensemble of African-American saxophonist Julian “Cannonball” Adderly. Mingus himself performed as the only black member of the trio of white xylophonist and vibraphonist Red Norvo beginning in 1949.¹⁴³ That is not to say that the experiences of Mingus, Zawinul, or Evans were without racial tension, only that, for these

¹⁴¹ Edward Murray and Barry Kernfeld, “Evans, Bill [William John],” *Grove Music Online*, <http://lawrence.library.astate.edu:2492/shared/views/home.html> (Accessed October 11, 2006).

¹⁴² Mark C. Gridley, “Hard Bop,” *Grove Music Online*, http://lawrence.library.astate.edu:2492/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=309628043&hitnum=4§ion=jazz.188100 (Accessed October 11, 2006).

¹⁴³ Barry Kernfeld, “Norvo, Red [Norville, Joseph Kenneth]” http://lawrence.library.astate.edu:2492/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=65528605&hitnum=17§ion=jazz.333100 (Accessed October 11, 2006).

musicians, the issue of race was not paramount. However, some white musicians and critics saw the new emphasis on ethnic identity by blacks as a threat to the musical credibility of whites. Some even saw it as parallel to the attitudes that black musicians had faced for decades as professional musicians in the United States.

One of the popular monikers for this reverse discrimination was “Crow Jim,” a term credited to Barry Ulanov.¹⁴⁴ The use of this term and the concept it described is still today receiving a great deal of attention. Was it possible that black musicians and audiences, and perhaps some critics, had a preference for music made by black musicians? This could certainly have been true. The question—was this treatment equivalent to the rabid Jim Crow traditions that affected black musicians—created quite a stir in the music world. Take for example the case of band leader and pianist Stan Kenton. Upon finding that he had finished last in the 1956 *Downbeat* readers poll, Kenton sent a telegram proclaiming his disgust at the poll. He also went on to proclaim white jazz musicians as a new minority group. While he does not explicitly use the term “Crow Jim,” it was clear that he felt that he was the victim of the reverse discrimination the term describes. He made this claim although there were a number of white musicians who won other categories in the same poll.¹⁴⁵ Kenton’s experience of not finishing higher in the *Downbeat* poll seems trivial when compared to the experiences of a musician like African-American trumpeter Roy Eldridge, who was denied entrance to the front door of a performance venue that had his name on the marquee,¹⁴⁶ or Mingus turning to the U. S. Post Office for employment because he was rejected from a musical gig because he could not join the white

¹⁴⁴ Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of the Encyclopedia of Jazz: Completely revised, enlarged and brought up to date* (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), 83.

¹⁴⁵ Leonard Feather, *The Jazz Years: Earwitness to an Era* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 122-124.

¹⁴⁶ Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of the Encyclopedia of Jazz*, 82.

musicians union in San Francisco.¹⁴⁷ To black musicians the notion was ridiculous. In a 1964 *Playboy* panel titled “Jazz—Today and Tomorrow,” Mingus himself chimed in on the issue, saying, “Well, until we start lynching white people, there is no word that can mean the same as Jim Crow means. Until we own Bethlehem Steel and RCA Victor, plus Columbia Records and several other industries, the term Crow Jim has no meaning. And to use that term about those of us who say that this music is essentially Negro is inaccurate and unfeeling. Aren’t you white men asking too much when you ask me to stop saying this is my music? Especially when you don’t give me anything else?”¹⁴⁸ Crow Jim was not, as feared by some, an attitude of reverse discrimination, it was a reflection of the growing urgency that blacks were expressing through the civil rights movement. Mingus’s feelings on black empowerment are made even clearer in reading the second introduction to the unpublished version of *Beneath the Underdog*, in which he spends a great deal of time discussing how blacks should use power and money. It is clear from these passages that he is for black empowerment and sees himself as part of that process. He asks that blacks use their money only where they are welcome and that they develop products that can bring out their natural beauty. Mingus also notes in a section in which he specifically addresses the issue of Crow Jim that his attitude of empowerment for blacks does not have a reciprocal effect on the status of whites. While this section was edited out of the published work, it is nonetheless an important passage discerning his feelings on this issue. In this section he writes that some musicians and critics act as though:

“crow jim were as effective as the ancient noose around the black man’s neck that isn’t too far removed from Hitler’s destruction of the Jews....[these people are foolish for] even considering the word crow jim until the black man owns something to crow jim from making a living from...The black man certainly has no hold on jazz other than the fact that he is the one reputed to play it.

¹⁴⁷ Santoro, 73-74.

¹⁴⁸ “Playboy Panel: Jazz—Today and Tomorrow,” <http://www.cannonball-adderley.com/article/playboy2.htm> (Accessed September 26, 2006).

There is no known wealth in the industry that the black man has established from jazz such as Ellington has established for RCA or Nat Cole for Capitol or Ray Charles for Atlantic or Louis Armstrong for Joe Glaser. Where is the jazz industry of wealth that the Negro is able to crow jim out of in the same manner that the white system jim crowed Ornette Coleman out of by (103) crushing him into obscurity and poverty when that same system saw themselves about to build another true bird?"¹⁴⁹

As a composer, Mingus would often find ways to use his music to make statements about racial injustice. Sometimes through the lyrical content of his songs, as in "Fables of Faubus," which condemned the use of the Arkansas National Guard to keep black children out of school,¹⁵⁰ or in "Eclipse" a song in which Mingus used the imagery of a natural phenomenon to represent interracial love.¹⁵¹ In other examples, Mingus would give a song a politically charged title even if the song was not conceived with a given situation in mind. Such is the case with "Remember Rockefeller at Attica,"¹⁵² which was titled because of the conditions that brought about the 1971 prison riot, and the probe into the conditions at that prison, ordered by then New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller. His early experiences would compel Mingus to create these and other pieces that addressed some of the social inequities he was party to throughout his life. Through his song titles, interviews, and liner notes, Mingus left a great deal of material that informed the world about his view of race. However, one of the most overlooked sources of discourse on race that Mingus created is the extensive symbolism he used in his discourse on sex in *Beneath the Underdog*.

¹⁴⁹ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* unpublished manuscript version, Box 45/1, The Charles Mingus collection, Music Divisions, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 103-104.

¹⁵⁰ Mingus, *Mingus, More Than Just a Fake Book*, 47.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 40

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 116.

7.0 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEX AND RACE AS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF CHARLES MINGUS

Throughout his book, Mingus confronts racial issues through his accounts of his sexual exploits. His treatment of sex and prostitution has been surrounded by a great deal of controversy. As his overall work was cut in half from its original length, the stories surrounding Mingus' sexual exploits were included disproportionately to increase the appeal of the work to general readers.¹⁵³ The validity of the sexual exploits included in *Beneath the Underdog* depends on if you view the book as an account of the facts of his life, exaggerated or not, or as a piece of literature that Mingus crafted to make a social statement.

7.1 BENEATH THE UNDERDOG, FACT OR LITERATURE

In a scholarly context, it is important to establish the factual content of Mingus's accounts. When creating a biography, it is often the case that historical events are remembered differently by different people. Buddy Collette was around Mingus in his formative years and, in the unedited version of the autobiography, was portrayed as a model for sexual experience and

¹⁵³ David Yaffe, "Pimp My Memoirs: Jazz Autobiographies' Tricked-Out Personae," *The Chronicle of Higher Education: The Chronicle Review* (issued January 6, 2006) <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i18/18b01401.htm> (accessed Nov. 1, 2006).

aggression at a very young age. He says that the stories in *Beneath the Underdog* are a greatly exaggerated version of how things really were for them at that time. In his autobiography, Collette wrote “we had an apartment and would have young ladies come by. But there was no way to pull off any fancy stuff or get real serious with them...If you had anything to do with any young ladies at, say, age fifteen or sixteen you knew good and well that it would be marriage, shotgun-type, from the father.”¹⁵⁴ The subtitle of the Nel King edition of his book, *His World as Composed by Mingus*, lets readers know that liberties and embellishment are a part of the narrative. If that is not enough, there is a disclaimer on one of the title pages that reads: “some names in this work have been changed and some of the characters and incidents are fictitious.” Readers may be struck by the sensationalist inclusion of sex for sex’s sake. There seems to be no real reason for including so many detailed accounts of Mingus’s sexual exploits other than to increase readership. However, this is clearly not the case when Mingus’s narrative is taken in its fuller context. When one reads the accounts of sex in the book, after having read the two prefaces and some of the sections that were edited from the published version, and then contrasting what he wrote in his book with some of the events of his real life that were not mentioned at all in the final version, the inclusion of such details assumes a different meaning.

One of the most infamous characteristics of *Beneath the Underdog* is its explicit, detailed, and romanticized description of the world of prostitution, which gets far more coverage than his musical life.¹⁵⁵ The Nel King version includes stories of sexual grandeur, including the use of Kama Sutra techniques by prostitutes¹⁵⁶ and a scene involving more than twenty Mexican

¹⁵⁴ Buddy Collette and Steven Isoardi, *Jazz Generations: A Life in American Music and Society* (London: Continuum, 2000), 23-24.

¹⁵⁵ Yaffe.

¹⁵⁶ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 237.

women.¹⁵⁷ Because of the editing done by the time the book was released to the public, it is only partially possible to see the deeper meaning behind the inclusion of so many of these episodes in the 366-page published version. The Nel King version focused on such accounts, at least in part, because their inclusion guaranteed the sale of more books. However these accounts of sex were more than just a self aggrandizing diatribe. These stories represented a part of a strategy Mingus used to give readers a look at the resourcefulness involved in his survival as an African-American artist. This strategy is much more easily comprehended by readers who have had access to the longer version of Mingus's biography.

7.2 THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SEX AND POWER IN MINGUS WRITING

For the perceptive reader, the bizarre accounts of sexuality and the context within which they fall throughout the book are evidence that Mingus is making a statement through these stories, and embellishing his life to insure himself status as a legend. Mingus uses prostitution to weave a delicate web that ensnares the reader, using sex and sex work as representations of the struggle for power faced by African-American men who use any means at their disposal to create a niche in a world that has gone to great effort to keep them powerless. His stories of sexual conquest parallel his life as a jazz musician, to prove he had tremendous prowess in an area seen as an illegitimate pursuit and frowned on by many. This assertion is almost startling, but careful consideration of Mingus's descriptions in light of the realities of prostitution shows that he effectively uses sex, race, and power to embody strength in black men. The purposeful inclusion

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 176-178.

of this power narrative is lost in the Nel King version, but in the unedited version (available through the Library of Congress) Mingus writes a great deal more about the way he feels about the influence that people have on their own lives. Mingus carefully orchestrates the use of sex, sexuality, and even the ethnicity of those involved, to illustrate important points on American social relations as they relate to the world of jazz and beyond. However, before we can understand why this is an effective literary device, we must first examine prostitution as it exists in the real world.

7.2.1 The Symbolic Importance of Prostitution as Expressed in the Writing of Charles Mingus

There is a significant debate as to the morality and role of prostitution in society, and Mingus artfully uses the tension inherent in sex work as it exists in the United States to create his complex narrative on the relationship between sex, race, and power. The tension is created by the dual images surrounding the institution of prostitution: the first in which a woman takes advantage of a form of labor that is not unlike any other form of labor, except for the judgment society has placed on it, and a second sinister image of a criminal world in which people are bought and sold and the worst aspects of society are brought to the fore. In his 1999 book *Sex and Ethics*, Igor Primoratz puts forth the argument that prostitution is not harmful to women, and that it is in fact the impositions of paternalist morality from society that does the most harm to those who are involved in the sex trade. This is one important attitude that is a part of Mingus's narrative. Primoratz examines prostitution as a process in which a willing participant exchanges a sex act (Primoratz does not discuss the act itself) for money to another willing participant. He sees no difference between this exchange and the exchange of housekeeping services, or the

exchange that happens when an artist sells one of his creative works.¹⁵⁸ There are compelling points to Primoratz's argument, and Mingus carefully shares with his reader that the women in his book are all examples of Primoratz's vision of what prostitution should be. All of the women that Mingus deals with in his book have become prostitutes voluntarily. In critically reading Primoratz, it is easy to find flaws in his logic because he considers the sex industry without social context. It is the inclusion of social context that makes Mingus's use of prostitution such an effective and jarring device throughout his writing.

Primoratz's argument contains loose ends that, if followed to their logical conclusion, weaken the effectiveness of his argument. Primoratz argues that prostitution can act as a needed safety valve for many in society, protecting the society from the consequences of the alternatives that sex consumers might otherwise employ. He uses the sex industry as it exists in Amsterdam as an example of the positive effect that prostitution can have. In the Amsterdam example, Primoratz describes a situation in which sailors, returning from long voyages at sea, would have to plague the women of their society if they were unable to satiate their sexual desires in brothels and sex clubs.¹⁵⁹ He focuses on a fantasized version of Amsterdam's red light district as it existed in the 1950s and 1960s. Totally absent from Primoratz's narrative is the reality of Amsterdam, particularly modern Amsterdam, in which the population of prostitutes is made up primarily of extremely poor people from former Dutch colonies and Eastern Block nations. These women are coerced into the industry because their chances for survival in their home countries have been greatly compromised. The factions that control prostitution in this part of the world are also involved in drug trafficking, protection rackets, and the trafficking of human

¹⁵⁸ (New York: Routledge, 1999) 88-109.

¹⁵⁹ 97.

beings.¹⁶⁰ The mixture of any of these criminal enterprises with prostitution effectively devalues Primoratz's argument because, if a prostitute is coerced in any way, if a prostitute was to increase activity to pay for "protection," if a prostitute is compelled to work to support substance abuse, and especially if a prostitute has been kidnapped or purchased and threats of violence or cultural barriers prevent escape or support of oneself in another way, then free-will participation is questionable and the deplorable aspects of the enterprise come to the surface. Another facet of the Amsterdam example that exemplifies the negativity of prostitution is that the objectification of women, and men for that matter, is one of the inherent characteristics of the acceptance of prostitution. The sailors mentioned here, who would become a danger to society at large, have been reduced to the status of an uncontrollable mob of animals that are unable to control their sexual urges. Women who are not prostitutes are shown as lesser members of society because they are unable to ward off sexual advances. The account in Primoratz's book does not say whether the sailors would rape women if they did not have access to prostitutes or if they would coerce women in less reprehensible ways to give in to sexual intercourse, but inherent in this scenario is that women are not equal to men either in their physical or mental capacity, or both, because they are unable to resist these advances. This scenario also brings up another inequality inherent in real-world prostitution: solicitors are almost never female, and the overwhelming majority of people who sell sex as a commodity are female.

¹⁶⁰ Chrisje Brants, "The Fine Art of Regulated Tolerance: Prostitution in Amsterdam," *Journal of Law and Society* 25 no. 4 (1998), 627.

7.2.2 The Realities of Prostitution

Generally prostitutes can be placed into three categories. One category covers men who act as prostitutes. These men usually are not full-time sex workers, and their clientele is overwhelmingly male. Another is the high-priced call girl. These are women who are well paid for their activities and control their clientele. A call girl is often characterized as a woman who makes a transition from promiscuity to vocational sex. For the call girl, sex is a service and its sale is equivalent to other service-oriented jobs such as housekeeping or factory or secretarial work. The final category describes those who walk the streets as prostitutes. These women are usually poor and are often drawn into prostitution as the solution to a substance-abuse problem. They may be subject to violence through their clients and are under the domain of a pimp, who oversees their activities.¹⁶¹ The women engaged in this type of prostitution are often referred to as streetwalkers, and close inspection would show them as the victim of the “victimless crime” of prostitution.

Mingus makes no mention of the first category of sex worker; none of the prostitutes mentioned in his book are men, and none of the clients or pimps are women. Mingus uses the call girl category of prostitution extensively. In the unedited version of his book, he shows an intimate knowledge by describing the process and experiences that a woman goes through to become a call girl. He specifically deals with a white woman who is interested in one of the black musicians in his band. Mingus tells us that the woman has been with at least four other men. The first was when she was a virgin and in love; the second was with another man whom she thought loved her but really didn't; the third was with a “bad boy,” hippie type; and the

¹⁶¹ Debra Satz, “Markets in Women’s Sexual Labor,” *Ethics* 106 no. 1 (1995) 65-66.

fourth was with a black friend of the hippie, which has brought her to the point she finds herself now. Mingus suggests that since she was going to go through with the sex act, they should both profit from it, but ultimately he talks her out of it.¹⁶² Throughout the book, Mingus can never truly accept fulfilling the role of a pimp. Mingus focuses on call-girl situations, that is, women who are willing to support his endeavors through prostitution. Mingus never actually involves himself in the women's activities, and he always leaves the reader aware of the ominous specter of the ills that exist within prostitution. It is the assumed familiarity with the prostitute as streetwalker that creates the literary tension of this situation.

It is in the streetwalker that we see American prostitution in its ugliest form. The average streetwalker becomes a prostitute at age fourteen. They are often runaways or victims of human trafficking, who are vulnerable and may see the pimp as means of protection from even less desirable circumstances. The pimp will use physical and mental abuse to convince the streetwalker that she is unable to survive on her own as a sex worker or in any other capacity. In addition to controlling the commerce involved in the purchase of the streetwalker's sexual labor, the pimp may control her body in other ways. Part of the institution of prostitution may include a pimp selling one of his prostitutes (not her sexual labor, but her entire physical being, as one would sell an animal) to another pimp, or forcing a streetwalker to buy her own freedom.

These women are treated as less than human even by the authorities who should protect them. When they do go to the police for protection from their pimp or from clients they may be told that a prostitute cannot be the victim of a sexual crime.¹⁶³ Using this logic, no matter what form of sexual violence the prostitute has suffered, it is her fault because, as a prostitute, she is

¹⁶² Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* unpublished manuscript version, Box 45/5, The Charles Mingus collection, Music Divisions, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 463.

¹⁶³ Neal Kumar Katyal, "Men Who Own Women: A Thirteenth Amendment Critique of Forced Prostitution," *The Yale Law Journal* 103 no. 3 (1993), 791-795.

inherently the solicitor of such advances. This account of prostitution has many parallels to American slavery, particularly American slavery as it pertained to African and African-American females. This issue is particularly relevant in examining Mingus's use of prostitution because it is one of the areas where racial and sexual issues clearly intersect. It is also one of the dark aspects that is not stated explicitly, only implied. Readers with this historical knowledge will be even more moved when they read Mingus's narrative and see the parallels.

African and African-American female slaves were often used in the same capacity that prostitutes are used today. The control that slave owners had over the reproduction of slaves, and the harems of slaves that they kept as evidenced by the tremendous population of mixed-race slaves, was one of the lesser known points of attack used by abolitionists to topple the institution of slavery.¹⁶⁴ Those who justified this treatment of slaves often used the same argument that Primoratz cited in his Amsterdam example. They saw this treatment of slaves as a societal safety valve that protected the virtue of other women, and, as was the case with the modern prostitute, they portrayed a slave as a sexual temptress who was the cause of the sexual aggression she endured from her white slave owner.¹⁶⁵ Mingus would use this history to assert the power of his lineage through his ancestry, as recounted by his father, to create a narrative that reflected power in his family heritage, but he would also use the images of the streetwalker, a near slave, as an implicit backdrop to the call girls in his narrative to create a prose that focused on the American racial power structure.

¹⁶⁴ Katyal, 797.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 791.

7.3 SEX POWER AS A FUNCTION OF MINGUS'S NARRATIVE OF HIS FAMILY HERITAGE

As mentioned previously, Mingus and his family were African Americans with very light complexions. Implicit in his appearance was that Mingus had a significant amount of white ancestry. If one were to consider Mingus's appearance and make assumptions in light of most American history, this would mean that, in at least one instance in Mingus's heritage, a white slave owner asserted power over a black slave. But as Mingus tells the story, in his case, there is a reversal of power in the relationship in which his father was conceived, thereby making his lineage, and himself, more powerful. In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus includes the story in a conversation with his father. Instead of his white ancestry being a female slave it is a white slave owner; Mingus explains that his grandfather was a black slave and his grandmother a white woman who was married to his owner. Their relationship was consensual, and Mingus's grandmother even assisted in Mingus's grandfather's escape so that in the future they would be able to be together. This further raises the social worth of Mingus's heritage because his father's conception was not an act of violence but an act of love. The narrative even intimates the possibility that the interracial couple were actually able to be together, since Mingus's father completely lost track of them after the age of fourteen. This is a reversal of what was typical in American history. In addition Mingus's father tells him that his last name is a truly African name. This contrasts with the typical practice of African Americans adopting European last names, and is another example of Mingus's resistance to his identity being subsumed by the broader American culture. Mingus further demonstrates his pride in his African heritage by asserting that he does not want any part of his white ancestry, even though he establishes that his

lineage descends from Abraham Lincoln.¹⁶⁶ Mingus's use of historical knowledge along with his own personal history is one of the ways that he demonstrates his literary brilliance, on par with his use of the world of prostitution as a symbol of power.

7.4 AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT MINGUS'S INTENDED NARRATIVE

The social significance of Mingus's inclusion of so many graphic sexual encounters is diminished in the publicly available version of his book because of the omission of sections in which he assertively lobbies his readers to have more pride in their blackness and to not hide their natural beauty. In Mingus's original manuscript, there are two very lengthy introductory sections that include a great deal of his personal thoughts on a tremendous number of issues; these contextual dimensions are unavailable to most readers. In one omitted passage, Mingus says that there are "too many jock straps bought by the black men ashamed to show they got up front what whitey say we got in back—tails, real male's tails."¹⁶⁷ This, of course, makes reference to the clichéd notion of genital size as related to ethnicity. This passage, in which Mingus points out the need for blacks to have pride in themselves, gives the sexuality included in his book a clearer purpose, showing that race and social power go together in Mingus's narrative. The complexity of the issue is enhanced because this section shows that Mingus is not using his sexual exploits simply to show his superiority to most men, but instead to show an example of the reversal of inferiority and shame.

¹⁶⁶ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 128-129.

¹⁶⁷ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* unpublished manuscript version, Box 45/7, The Charles Mingus collection, Music Divisions, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 463.

Further evidence of this immediately follows this passage as Mingus talks about his experiences attempting to be a pimp, to “turn out”¹⁶⁸ a woman. Ultimately Mingus is unable to coerce her participation, even though she has already submitted herself to him, because he finds a personal contradiction in using women in this way unless it is their decision to support themselves this way. This represents an important aspect of the narrative because the entire story is told in the context of him confessing his guilt over his use and abuse of sex and women to fill a void in his life. This creates a contrast between Mingus using women’s bodies to support himself and those in society who were able to engage in slave labor without guilt over the humanity they were destroying. The parallel between slavery and prostitution is the coercive use of the human body common to both.

Mingus’s narrative is effective because he carefully weaves together a number of popularly held notions about prostitution to represent a racial-power narrative. The immediate paradox that comes to mind when considering this narrative is how could Mingus, a man whose grandfather was a slave, feel comfortable in the world of prostitution, an institution that parallels slavery. Part of his literary ingenuity is that he uses the irony inherent in oppression—coming from the hands of someone who has proclaimed himself “beneath the underdog,” or lower than people who are treated as if they are on the lowest rung of the American societal ladder. Mingus gives his readers clear evidence that he is well aware of the historical significance of one human being having control of the body of another. In a story of a pimp who is a close personal friend of Mingus’s turning out a woman, we see the violent use of a whip by the pimp, named Billy Bones, who declares that he will never relinquish his hold on the prostitute, creating an easily understood parallel between prostitution and slavery. This story is disturbing but a necessary

¹⁶⁸ “Turn out” refers to the process of a man convincing a woman to be a prostitute and to turn her profits over to him.

part of the creation of Mingus's narrative on sexual power, because not only has Billy Bones acquired the women in his stable of working girls, she is also in a relationship with Bones in which she considers herself to be his wife. This story portrays Bones as a complex character who has taken a tight grip over a woman's life but still has a positive quality because of his respect for her, exemplified in their marriage like relationship.

7.5 THE FINE LINE BETWEEN MINGUS AND "PIMPDOM"

The story of Billy Bones is told in the third person so that Mingus is not seen as a villain, but it is only through the careful creation of his role as pimp that Mingus keeps the reader from seeing him as the antagonist in the story. It is possible for him to remain above villainy because he never violently persuades any woman to become a prostitute. The two women who work for him in that capacity, Donna and Lee-Marie,¹⁶⁹ were not coerced into prostitution. Their entrance into the occupation was clearly their own choice.

The narrative surrounding the "turning out" of Lee-Marie had to be handled with great care. Lee-Marie is the only African-American call girl in the story, and because of the analogies between sex work and slavery that Mingus is relying on for impact, he told the story of her entrance into the world of prostitution as a mixture of a passionate love story and a dramatic rescue. In the narrative Lee-Marie is Mingus's teenage lover, and he elopes with her and spends time with her in Mexico. Upon their return to the United States her father separates the young couple and forces them to get their marriage annulled. As an adult Mingus goes back to confront

¹⁶⁹ Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 256.

her father about the incident. Mingus blames him for ruining his life, making a prisoner out of Lee-Marie, and forcing her to get a reproductive surgery that killed his unborn son. He even blames the loss of his true love for destroying the life of his next wife and their son. This scene ends with Lee-Marie asking Mingus to be “rescued” from her current life by joining him in New York and working for him as a prostitute.¹⁷⁰ Here Mingus escapes being seen as a villain because of the protracted abuse that Lee-Marie received from her family, her strong desire to become a prostitute, and because of the innocent and pure love that she felt for him.

In Donna’s case, Mingus has drawn a white woman who leaves a rich family to become a prostitute. Her motivation is that she is in love with Mingus, and even though it costs her a very comfortable lifestyle and she has received a number of threats from her husband and father,¹⁷¹ she would still rather be with Mingus, and the only way to stay in this relationship is for her to support him through the sale of her body. Donna chooses to stay with Mingus even though he is very apprehensive about the relationship, which is portrayed with honesty so it rises above the negativity associated with prostitution and leaves the reader sympathetic to Mingus. Mingus contrasts his honest dealings with Donna with a manipulative relationship she is having with one of her clients. In that relationship she is being mentally manipulated by a john, and because of the control that he has over her she is told, by a pimp friend of Mingus’s that she will soon be a slave and as bad off as the cheapest streetwalker.¹⁷² This again reinforces the contrast between Mingus and those whom he sees as the true predators in society. While Mingus has entered a relationship with Donna in which she has a level of respect, it is the white john who would commit her to the slavelike status of a streetwalker.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 247-252.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 245.

¹⁷² Ibid., 268.

7.6 INTERPRETING MINGUS'S USE OF SEX

This brings out several important reasons, besides just titillating his audience, that Mingus includes such graphic accounts of his sexual exploits. There are two important points in the story that allow the reader to see Mingus's turmoil. It is important to remember that the story is written as if it were Mingus recounting his life to a psychologist. He has visited the psychologist because he feels he needs help in coming to terms with some of the rough spots in his life. In the beginning of the book, which is a dialogue between him and his doctor instead of the narrative form of most of the story, he discusses his experience in Mexico. As he explains, he was with twenty-three different women in less than three hours he says because, at least partially, he wanted the experience to end in death. Right from the beginning of the book, Mingus writes of the love that he was seeking and how he was not in any way fulfilled by the experience. Mingus includes this at the very the beginning so that the reader knows that his involvement in such areas has another purpose.

There are several reasons that, when taken in the context of his life, Mingus would pursue such a professional endeavor as prostitution. The ability to manage illicit activity in order to support a career in the arts was modeled by the man who claimed to have invented jazz, Jelly Roll Morton. Morton is well known for his engagement in less-than-amicable fields in order to support his music. There is evidence early in his career that he was active as a gambler, pool player, and "procurer."¹⁷³ Mingus was well aware of Morton's activities, and he justified his activities by using Morton as an example, but not as an attributable source. Through a third

¹⁷³ Gunther Schuller, "Morton, Jelly Roll [Lamothe, Ferdinand Joseph; Mouton, Ferdinand Joseph]," *Grove Music Online*, <https://sslvpn.pitt.edu/shared/views/article.html,DanaInfo=www.grovemusic.com+%?section=jazz.313800.1#jazz.313800.1> (Accessed October 31, 2006). Although Schuller never mentions it explicitly the term "procurer" refers to his activities as a pimp.

party in his story, Mingus writes “by my reckoning a good jazz musician has got to turn to “pimpdom” in order to be free and keep his soul straight. Jelly Roll Morton had seven girls I know of, and that’s the way he bought the time to write and study and incidentally got diamonds in his teeth...He was saying, ‘White man, you hate and fight and kill for riches, I get it from [sex]. Who’s better?’”¹⁷⁴

There are two important parts to this statement. First, that a jazz musician must turn to “pimpdom” to be free and keep his soul straight is one that is based on his own life as he searched for ways to keep himself and his family financially afloat without abandoning his career as an artist. Gene Santoro points out the several times that Mingus was employed by the United States Post Office (he saw it as a sort of refuge), and each of those times represents a breakdown in his life and career. One example of this is after his first marriage disintegrated and he began worked at the Post Office in San Francisco. After finding a steady music position with a San Francisco–area band, he left the Post Office to pursue his musical career.¹⁷⁵ In the next instance, Mingus was living with a pregnant partner in the home of his stepmother. After this stint in the Post Office, he found himself in the Red Norvo trio touring nationally and again making a living playing music.¹⁷⁶ The last time he worked at the Post Office was before he went to New York to play with Charlie Parker. This is perhaps the most telling instance because, during this period, Mingus found himself in a routine that offered stability but did not include music.¹⁷⁷ The Post Office did offer a refuge, but it was always accompanied by a hiatus in Mingus’s musical creativity. Mingus could not overcome his need for the creativity and satisfaction that

¹⁷⁴ Mingus *Beneath the Underdog*, 267-268.

Here again we see Mingus using a surrogate to make a strong social statement to keep the reader from inferring a possible negative judgment.

¹⁷⁵ Santoro 73-74.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

expression through music offered him. His reason for becoming a postal worker was purely financial and a sign of temporary artistic defeat. Whenever he was offered a chance to be involved in music and bring in money, he would leave the steady government job. He would always return to his musical pursuits, even though a career in music came with the risks of the financial ebb and flow inherent in supporting oneself through the arts. Prostitution offered the opportunity to smooth out the monetary rough spots without sacrificing his musical career. While it was possible for white composers and performers of the time to do this through grants, opportunities with orchestras, or affiliations with universities, these opportunities were remarkably fleeting for blacks, and this was especially true for black jazz musicians.

The second point that Mingus makes through this aspect of his writing is that, even for those who engage in prostitution to support themselves, American prostitution is less morally repugnant than American slavery.

8.0 EARLY MUSICAL INFLUENCES OF CHARLES MINGUS

As shown earlier in this dissertation, although there were a number of barriers that affected the careers of Mingus and other musicians who found themselves in similar circumstances, the music was paramount over all circumstances, and any sacrifice that was made was well worth it. From a very young age Mingus was like a sponge that was able to absorb the best from all his musical heroes. In this chapter I will explain and analyze the influence of two of the major characters in Mingus career and show, through the music itself, how Mingus expressed their effect.

8.1 THE INFLUENCE OF DUKE ELLINGTON

Perhaps the musician who had the greatest influence over the development of Mingus as a composer was Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington, born in 1899. Beginning in the 1920s, he was often cited as America’s most important composer, but just as often completely ignored in the discussion of American music.¹⁷⁸ Mingus imitated Duke Ellington on a number of levels, even going so far as to bill himself “Baron” Mingus for his 1948-1949 recordings with Dolphins

¹⁷⁸ Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz: The First Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 102.

of Hollywood and Fentone Record Companies.¹⁷⁹ The parallels between Mingus and Ellington seem to have been there for as long as Mingus was nationally recognized. The most important influence on Mingus was the way that Ellington used his ensemble, which can be seen in pieces such as “Daybreak Express,” which provides a direct example of Ellington’s inspiration. In “Daybreak Express,” Ellington used the band to imitate a train, Ellington bringing the image to mind through a band figure in which the drummer played even eighth notes with brushes on the snare and most of the horns accent the down beat of each measure, with a few playing a four note figure that drops a third and then rises by step to the first note in figure one. This figure rises chromatically, and at the same time, the tempo accelerates.

Figure 1 Ellington’s chromatic “Train” line



This creates the effect of a locomotive gaining momentum. Eventually the locomotive reaching full speed is represented by the snare and banjo playing quarter notes and the acoustic bass playing on beats one and three.¹⁸⁰ Ellington would often use musical devices to represent nonabstract concepts. In this case he was representing a train, but in songs such as “Echoes of the Jungle” and “Caravan” there were representations of the jungle, and there are other such examples throughout his music.

Mingus would imitate Ellington’s train effect closely in his “Shuffle Stop Boogie,” using the snare drum and accents within the band to create the same locomotive effect.¹⁸¹ He used

¹⁷⁹ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961*. compact disc, Atlantic Recording Corporation, R2 72871, 1997, liner notes.

¹⁸⁰ Duke Ellington, *Duke Ellington Masterpieces: 1926-1949*

¹⁸¹ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Complete 1945-1949 West Coast Recordings*. Jazz Factory, JFCD22825, Compact Disc.

these types of sonic representations at many important points in his career, including his abstract use of traditional jazz instruments to create the sonic image of the San Francisco waterfront in his version of “A Foggy Day.”¹⁸²

The fact that Ellington influenced Mingus is evident when one considers how Mingus created dense, rich harmony within the ensemble. The harmonies that can be heard on “Inspiration,” recorded in 1949,¹⁸³ share elements with songs from Ellington’s early works, such as “The Mooche” and “Awful Sad,” both recorded in 1928. When the Ellington band was first gaining popularity in the 1920s, most Los Angeles clubs did not allow African Americans in any capacity, but by 1930 segregated Los Angeles nightclubs began to hire African American employees, including entertainers. This advance on its own would have done no good to Mingus at that time. He could not have attended a 1930 performance at the nightclubs in Los Angeles in which Ellington performed since he was both black and eight years old, but in addition to their live performances, “by 1930 blacks could listen nightly to live half-hour radio remote broadcasts from clubs that refused their patronage.”¹⁸⁴ It was through these broadcasts that Mingus would first be exposed to Ellington’s music.¹⁸⁵ Ellington’s dress, demeanor, and music would all act as factors to inspire Mingus throughout his professional career. An often forgotten fact about Ellington is that during the 1930s and 40s he was a very popular figure. As Mingus was forging

¹⁸² Since, at that point in his life, he had never been to London, this version was subtitled “In San Francisco” instead of Gershwin’s original subtitle, “In Londontown.”

Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961*. compact disc, Atlantic Recording Corporation, R2 72871, 1997, liner notes, 27

¹⁸³ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Complete 1945-1949 West Coast Recordings*. Jazz Factory, JFCD22825, Compact Disc.

¹⁸⁴ Ralph Eastman, “‘Pitchin’ Up a Boogie’: African-American Musicians, Nightlife, and Music Venues in Los Angeles, 1930-1945,” *California Soul: Music of African Americans in the West*. Edited by Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and Eddie S. Meadows, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 83.

¹⁸⁵ Priestley, 6.

his own style early in his career, he borrowed from jazz stars like Ellington as well as other popular artists from the world of rhythm and blues.

8.2 LOUIS JORDAN

Louis Jordan, an Arkansas native, was born in 1908 in a small town named Brinkley. He studied music at Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock. After college he moved to North Philadelphia and later to New York City. Among his many credits as a sideman were the Rabbit Foot Minstrels and the Chick Webb Big Band. After leaving the Webb band, after the death of its leader, Jordan formed his Tympany Five group.¹⁸⁶ Jordan's career peak was from the end of the 1930s until the mid 50s. His popularity can be measured by his fifty-seven top-forty hits as listed by *Billboard*.¹⁸⁷

Jordan's work in rhythm and blues forms a perfect baseline because he is one of the pioneers in the style. Additionally, as mentioned above, Mingus, along with the rest of California, was heavily influenced by his music. Although Mingus was not recorded extensively in this style, there does exist more than enough material to make this assertion. In providing evidence, it was important to choose a comparable song from the repertoires of Jordan and Mingus. From Mingus's recordings I chose "Ain't Jivin," and from Jordan's the 1946 recording "Let the Good Times Roll."

Jordan was also an effective influence on Mingus because of the place he held in the jazz community. In scholarly writing, Jordan is usually dismissed as a part of popular culture, a

¹⁸⁶ Hugh Gregory, *The Real Rhythm and Blues*, (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1998), 9-10.

¹⁸⁷ Joel Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn Presents: Top R & B Singles, 1942-1999*, (Menomonee Falls, Wis.: Record Research Inc., 2000), 232-233.

culture that, until recently, was not considered “high brow” enough to warrant consistent rigorous academic attention.¹⁸⁸ Upon closer investigation, it is easy to see that Jordan would have been well respected in the jazz community, particularly before the musical techniques and social dynamics of bebop asserted themselves. As mentioned above, Jordan came to prominence in the big band of Chick Webb, a music contemporary and competitor of the more famous Count Basie band. During this period of time, after formal study at the college level and stints with less-well-known ensembles, Jordan was described as “a highly accomplished alto saxophonist in the mold of Benny Carter.”¹⁸⁹ It was also said that “Jordan’s [solo playing] remains firmly grounded in a traditional jazz dialect. His deep scoops and wide vibrato borrow liberally from Johnny Hodge’s renowned alto sound. His performance in general retains all of the features of the swing-era ‘head arrangement’ style built around steady rhythmic flow and simple background riffs. Such an approach to jazz performance and composition clearly suggests the scaled down version of the ‘classic’ Count Basie ensembles of the 1930s and 1940s.”¹⁹⁰

This evidence leads us to conclude that Mingus borrowing from the conventions of rhythm and blues should not be looked upon as a talented musician “dumbing down” his repertoire to increase his profit margin. Instead it is clearly a case of a probing composer seeking to exhaust all outlets of creative expression. The musical possibilities available through rhythm and blues would have been as inspiring to Mingus as any other jazz-based musical form. This statement is strengthened by most accounts, even that, at the beginning of the 1946 appearance of the Dizzy Gillespie/Charlie Parker quintet at Billy Berg’s Supper Club in Hollywood, Mingus

¹⁸⁸ David Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 48.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

remained unimpressed by bebop.¹⁹¹ Mingus even went so far as to say the area saxophonist Buddy Collette was a better player than Charlie Parker because of his tone and melodic style, which was reminiscent of Johnny Hodges.¹⁹² This likening to Hodges was also, as noted above, used to describe Jordan, further evidence that Mingus may have felt a musical admiration for Jordan, although this admiration is not mentioned in any of the Mingus literature.

It becomes obvious from the first listening that Mingus's piece was highly influenced by Jordan, because of the great number of similarities. Although this specific recording of "Let the Good Times Roll" was recorded five months after "Ain't Jivin," Jordan was already quite well known throughout the country, and the popularity of his group among African Americans from the beginning of the forties guaranteed that his music would act as a source of inspiration for others. Also "Let the Good Times Roll" is a significant piece because, even though it did not attain the number-one spot, it held a ranking within the top forty for twenty-three weeks.¹⁹³ The first and perhaps most important similarity is the use of the twelve bar blues harmonic structure.

Dr. Nathan Davis, of the University of Pittsburgh, states in his book, *Writings in Jazz*, "to know the Blues is to know hardship."¹⁹⁴ Groves online dictionary defines the blues as:

"A secular, predominantly black American folk music of the 20th century, which has a history and evolution separate from, but sometimes related to, that of jazz. From obscure and largely undocumented rural American origins, it became the most extensively recorded of all traditional music types. It has been subject to social changes that have affected its character. Since the early 1960s blues has been the most important single influence on the development of Western popular music."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Preistly, 28.

¹⁹² Santoro, 65-66.

¹⁹³ Whitburn, 233.

¹⁹⁴ Davis, 91.

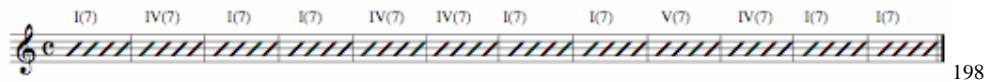
¹⁹⁵ Paul Oliver, "Blues," (Groves Music Online, 2005),

<http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=music.03311#music.03311>, (Accessed September 23, 2005).

Although it is generally agreed that the blues should be seen as a derivative of spirituals or field holler or perhaps both, its point of origin will forever remain a victim of the times in which it developed. In its earliest forms it had no harmony and was performed either in unison or solo. Early on the blues was recognized because of its melodic use of the minor third interval. “The seemingly downward thrust suggested by the lowered third produced the ‘blue’ feeling that is associated with the blues.”¹⁹⁶ This minor third was and still is one of the essential elements of the blues, although a song need not necessarily contain the minor third in order to be categorized blues.

In theory the blues began to develop its harmonic structure between the American Revolutionary War and the American Civil War.¹⁹⁷ As the blues developed it would take on eight, sixteen, and twenty-four bar forms, but the most common was the twelve bar blues. In standard western notation the harmonic structure of the blues can be expressed as follows:

Figure 2 A Simple blues chord progression



William Christopher Handy first published this chord structure specifically as “blues.” It forms the basis for a tremendous amount of popular music throughout the world including Mingus’ “Ain’t Jivin” and Jordan’s “Let the Good Times Roll.”

The tempo of “Let the Good Times Roll” measured at 106 beats per minute. This piece saw Jordan’s tenor voice in the key of G. It contained twelve full choruses of the twelve bar

¹⁹⁶ Nathan Davis (with a chapter by Ursula Davis, Professor of Communications, Penn State University, Behrend College), *African American Music: A Philosophical Look at African American Music in Society*, (Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing, 1996), 14

¹⁹⁷ Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1968), 34-37.

¹⁹⁸ Nathan Davis, *African American Music*, 118-119.

blues harmonic structure. This piece began with a horn introduction that lasted one full chorus, the first of six total. After the initial introductory chorus, all of the following choruses prominently feature vocals. The fourth chorus, in contrast with choruses two, three, and five, made use of a convention widely known in jazz and popular music as stop time. During the stop time chorus, the band plays only on the first pulse of each measure in rhythmic unison. This leaves empty musical space for the rest of the measure. During this space Jordan is featured as a vocalist. To end this piece we hear for the second and final time the three horns that played on the introductory phrase play in the final phrase of the piece.¹⁹⁹

“Ain’t Jivin,” a song attributed to Mingus-Cryor (the Mingus being Charles Mingus and the second name an unknown contributor), shares a great number of similarities with “Let the Good Times Roll.” As with the first song, “Ain’t Jivin” measures at 106 beats per minute, and both songs contain six complete choruses of the twelve bar blues form. Mingus’ piece also makes use of stop time. The tonal center of the two pieces lies very close to one another as the Mingus song is in the key of A flat. Additionally, the male vocalist on the recording, Claude Trenier, has a vocal range that is similar to Louis Jordan’s.

8.2.1 An Analysis of Louis Jordan’s “Let the Good Times Roll”

Rhythm and blues of the forties was not far afield, stylistically speaking, from the blues numbers performed by swing bands during the war years. Mingus was not working with the musicians who were receiving accolades nationally as rhythm and blues musicians, but his depth of knowledge of music in the styles of swing and traditional New Orleans music would serve

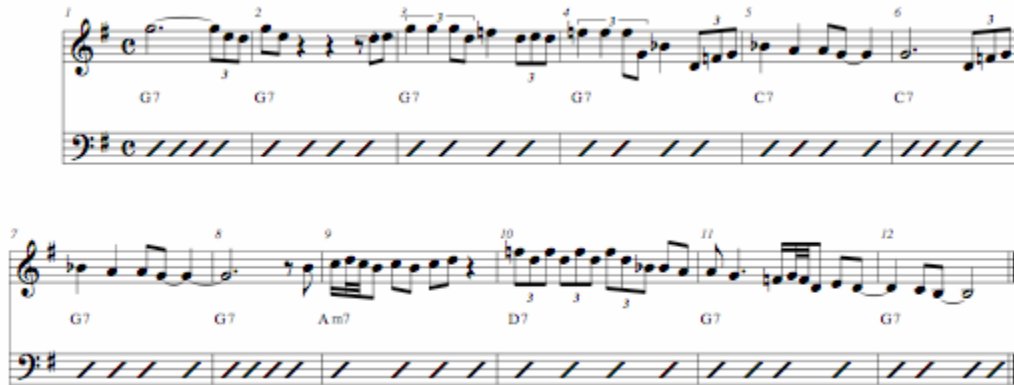
¹⁹⁹ Louis Jordan, *Let the Good Times Roll: The Anthology 1938-1953*, compact disc, MCAD2-11907, MCA Records Inc.

him well as he capitalized on the opportunities in Los Angeles for those making this type of music. By taking advantage of his ability to provide a growing audience of rhythm-and-blues devotees with the style of music they found most appealing, Mingus insured that he could sustain himself, and his other musical ambitions, more comfortably.

However, one must remember that in addition to the financial rewards that may have been accessible, Mingus was also creating music that fully realized his creative impulses. While on the surface it may seem that these are run-of-the-mill commercial pieces of music, when they are analyzed in-depth it becomes clear that what makes these pieces is in the details. Again using Louis Jordan's music as a theoretical baseline it is easy to see that there are a great number of conventions that were not standard for rhythm and blues in "Ain't Jivin." Through comparative analysis we can see that it is the use of elaborate jazz concepts that separates this piece from the standard rhythm and blues as performed by Jordan.

To the casual listener, the first signal that this piece was conceived differently than Jordan's has to do with the use of time and space by the instruments backing the vocalists. In Jordan's version it is clear that the delivery of the vocal part is of great importance. The texture of the musical arrangement, as well as the way the instruments share the musical space with Jordan's vocals, are a reflection of that fact. The introduction to "Let the Good Times Roll," is twelve bars long, with the horns playing the melodic line written below. Two of the three horns, trumpet and alto saxophone, play in unison, and the third horn, tenor saxophone, plays the same line an octave lower.

Figure 3 Introductory melody for “Let the Good Times Roll”



The identifiable “bluesy” parts of this particular line lie in the use of the minor third over the dominant chord in measures four, seven, and ten. This section is a particularly effective introduction because of the power and effect the horns, playing in octaves and in unison, convey.

From this introduction we move to the first vocal chorus. The introduction serves as a foil to the musical contrast that occurs when Jordan’s vocals enter. In the first measure of the song, the horns are tacit and the rhythm section accompanies Jordan. In the second measure the trumpet, piano, and guitar play solo lines that are independent of each other. Although the solo lines are improvised, their spatial relationship with Jordan’s vocal melody is not. The space that is used by the soloist is meticulously choreographed to insure that Jordan’s voice will be the prominent musical feature throughout the body of the piece. In this transcription the top line represents Jordan’s vocal melody and the bottom line is the improvised piano melody.

Figure 4 Illustration of spatial relationships between Jordan's vocal melodies (top line) and the piano melody (bottom line) in "Let the Good Times Roll"

The image displays a musical score for the song "Let the Good Times Roll". It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line (top staff) and a piano accompaniment (bottom staff). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The score is numbered 1 through 12. The vocal line features a melodic line with various rhythmic values and rests. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support, often using triplets and sparse figures. The spatial relationship between the two lines is clear, with the vocal melody being the primary focus and the piano accompaniment providing a subtle background.

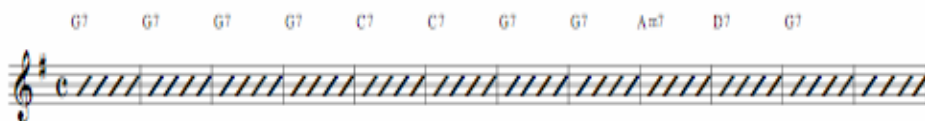
Among the important aspects in keeping the vocal melody as the focal point is the way that the pianist carefully plays sparse background figures or rests when Jordan's vocals are active. Here Jordan is articulating the main melody. This facilitates the clear and easy expression of the words of the song without competition. This is particularly important because each vocal chorus has a different set of lyrics. The above transcription shows how careful the

accompanist is to avoid busy solo lines when the vocal melody is active. As a soloist, the pianist usually remains dormant while the vocal melody is active. The pianist is most active when Jordan is either resting or when he is holding a long syllable. When the latter occurs, the long note (which usually occurs on A3) is the second syllable of the word “roll” and does not lose its clarity as a result of being accompanied by the underlying melody.

8.2.2 Comparing the Rhythm and Blues of Jordan and Mingus

A similar in-depth analysis of Mingus’s “Ain’t Jivin” reveals that it has a series of sharply contrasting details with “Let the Good Times Roll.” The first contrast is revealed when we look at the harmonic foundations that each of the pieces is based on. Although both songs are based on the blues, there is a great difference in the way that each artist treats the blues. Looking at the standard twelve bar blues form, as it is written out in Figure 2, page 28, we see that both artists deviate from the standard form. The blues form that Jordan uses is as follows:

Figure 5 Chord changes for Louis Jordan's “Let the Good Times Roll”



Jordan makes three substitutions in his version. The first is the use of the tonic chord in the second measure in place of the subdominant. This is a common substitution that is easily acceptable to the ear because the subdominant chord in the second chord is an anticipation of measures four and five. The next substitution that Jordan makes occurs in measures nine and ten. The progression of these two measures, subdominant to dominant, leads to the tonic chord at the end of the phrase. This motion is similar to a perfect cadence. The most important

function of these two chords is to lead back to the tonic chord. Jordan substitutes the supertonic for the dominant and the dominant for the subdominant. The supertonic to dominant to tonic chord, or II-V-I progression, is very common in western music and is used widely in jazz and popular music. By the 1940s, listeners would have found this cadential substitution pedestrian.

The chord substitutions that Mingus used for the main harmonic underpinning to his piece are far more extensive.

Figure 6 Chord changes for Mingus’ “Ain't Jivin’”

The figure shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The first staff contains measures 1 through 6, and the second staff contains measures 7 through 11. Chord changes are indicated above each measure:

- Measure 1: A⁹6
- Measure 2: B⁹min7, A7
- Measure 3: A⁹6
- Measure 4: A⁹7
- Measure 5: D⁹7
- Measure 6: E⁹min7b5, A7
- Measure 7: A⁹7
- Measure 8: B⁹min7, A7
- Measure 9: A⁹7, E⁹min7b5
- Measure 10: E⁹7, E⁹min7b5, A7
- Measure 11: A⁹7, A7, A⁹6

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In comparison with the standard blues as quoted from Nathan Davis’s *African American Music*, the only chords that are not altered are in measures four and five. However, careful examination shows that these changes represent great embellishment, but still adhere strictly to the essential elements of the basic harmonic structure. This realization can be best expressed by analyzing the pieces in four-measure chunks, and then looking at the form in its entirety.

Compare the first four bars of the harmonic progression of the standard blues, in figure two, with the first four bars of “Ain’t Jivin’.” The progression in the standard blues is I(7)-IV(7)-I(7)-I(7) each chord change lasting for one measure. In these four measures, we see a stable tonic chord interrupted only by the plagal cadence in the second measure. All of the chords in the standard blues have a dominant seventh chord quality. Thus the tonic chord creates the tension that is resolved when the subdominant is reached in the fifth measure. Taken at its basic

²⁰⁰ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961*, compact disc, Atlantic Recording Corporation, R2 72871, 1997.

premise, Mingus's substitutions serve the same functions, only exaggerated. The progression of the first four bars of "Ain't Jivin," in roman numerals, are I(6)-II(min7), raised I(7)-I(6)-I(7). The II(min7) chord (which in the key of A flat is B flat min7) acts as a substitute chord for the IV(7) (D flat 7) chord, which is standard in the blues harmonic structure, as illustrated in figure 2.

In the first four measures of "Ain't Jivin" the stability is accentuated by the fact that the first and third measure are major sixth chords. The major sixth is a very stable chord. Mingus' piece, just as the tonic in the standard blues, is interrupted in the second bar by a cadence. In this case the plagal cadence is replaced by a variation on the II-V-I progression. It begins on the II chord (B flat minor) and then, instead of moving to the five chord (E flat dominant), it moves to the tritone substitution (A(7)). This type of chord substitution is common in jazz because the third of E flat dominant, the note G natural, is the same as the seventh of the A dominant chord, and the seventh of the E flat dominant chord, D flat (the enharmonic of C sharp), is the third of the A dominant chord. The use of the II-V-I progression in the place of the plagal cadence creates the feeling of harmonic motion, but perhaps with a greater sense or tension, particularly when taking into account the chromatic base motion that the second measure leading into the third measure has in the Mingus's piece. This substitution also provides another reason why Mingus may have used the I major sixth chord instead of the I dominant seventh chord. In using a cadence that has such a great degree of harmonic tension, it is more satisfying to the ear to hear the chord resolve fully instead of going immediately to another dominant chord. The use of the tonic chord with a dominant quality, as is the case in the standard blues, is delayed in "Ain't Jivin" until the fourth measure. This actually gives the chord more harmonic weight. The major sixth chord built on the tonic, particularly because of the II-V-I progression, is a stationary

harmony. When it transitions in the fourth bar, it presents the listener with a sound that needs to be resolved to the subdominant in measure five.

In the next section, the listener is again confronted with a myriad of chord substitutions that, when viewed on paper, would seem to obscure its harmonic integrity, but analysis leaves no doubt that it is clearly grounded in the standard blues form. In bars five through eight of standard blues there are two tonalities. The first is IV dominant seventh chord, which lasts for two bars, and the second is I dominant seventh chord, which also lasts for two bars. Mingus's version is an elaboration on that structure. During the two bars in which the standard form is in the IV dominant seventh chord tonality, "Ain't Jivin" has one bar of the IV dominant seventh chord and one bar with the sharp V minor seven flat five for two beats and the sharp II dominant seventh chord for two beats. Using the IV dominant seventh chord establishes that this section is congruent with the standard blues. The next measure has something of a surprise. Although Mingus has already conditioned the listener to accept the sharp II, the sharp V is unexpected. Because of its short duration and its clear association with the sharp II, the sharp V is heard as something unfamiliar. The next two bars on the standard blues remain static, holding on the I dominant seventh chord. This provides a point of emphasis on the chord. Mingus also emphasizes the tonic, but he does it with tonal motion. Mingus establishes the I dominant seventh chord for two beats and then moves to the II minor chord. This is followed in the next measure with the sharp I chord, which in turn resolves to the I dominant seventh chord. This is the same cadence used in the second bar of the form. This motion emphasizes the tonic chord in the same fashion that it was in, in its earlier appearance.

The final four bars of the form also parallel those of the standard form. The ninth bar of the standard form is the V dominant seventh chord. Mingus's alteration in this case is sharp V

minor seventh flat five to the V dominant seventh chord. The minor seventh flat five is built upon a diminished triad, a chord that is inherently unstable in western music. It is used here as a substitute for the II minor chord. This substitution is effective not because the sharp V, minor seventh, flat five, makes a good substitute for the II minor, but because of the tri-tone substitution principal, thus the sharp I is a substitute for the V. Because of this it is possible to substitute any of the chords in a II-V-I progression with the chord a tri-tone away and have a coherent resolution. That is the case in this measure. In measure ten of the form, the sharp V, minor seventh, flat five, to sharp I dominant seventh chord is substituted for the IV dominant seventh chord. This is aurally acceptable because it is serving the harmonic function established in measure six. This commonality becomes the source of continuity and familiarity, which allows such a dissonant harmonic progression. The final two bars emphasise the tonic chord in both the standard blues and “Ain’t Jivin.” Mingus added a sort of harmonic exclamation point by inserting another sharp II(7) chord before the last bar.

There are also a number of differences in the two pieces when one analyzes the horns. While Jordan’s introduction jolts the listener with the power of the horn section, Mingus introduces his piece in a much more subtle manner. He begins “Ain’t Jivin” using a four bar duet between bass and piano. The most interesting aspect of the introduction is the melodic bass line that he creates.

Figure 7 Mingus's bass solo introduction to "Ain't Jivin"



The upper line represents the piano, and the lower line Mingus's bass line. The beginning of the line is clearly diatonic. In the third bar of the introduction, he begins to use chromatic motion. The first triplet of the third measure outlines the tonic chord. Through the use of chromatic anticipation, the triplet figure on the second beat emphasizes the last note, the E flat. The same anticipation is used to emphasize the B flat in beat three. The use of a chromatic embellishment serves as more than a simple show of Mingus's coordination as a bassist. It is an effective strategy that prepares the listener for the A natural, a tone that is not diatonic in the key of A flat. Although set in the delicacy of a piano/bass duet, the dissonance of this solo chromatic bass motion has as much power for the listener as Jordan's horn introduction. This is especially evident because this figure occurs in the first four bars of the piece.

There is a tremendous difference in the way the instrumental arrangements of the vocals is presented. As opposed to Jordan's piece, where the vocal is prominent, in the Mingus piece the voice acts as a part of the greater musical texture. This is evidenced by the sustained harmonic pads that the horns play throughout each measure that the melody is present. Also where Jordan's horn arrangement is done in unison, Mingus uses much denser harmonies. These complex harmonies draw some of the attention of the total song away from the vocalist because, instead the horn parts often play at the same time as the vocals. Instead of creating the effect of a background, this section sounds as if the vocals are the lead line of a polyphony that includes the

horns. In many ways this weakens the prominence of the lyrics, but at the same time makes the song as a whole a strong and unique artistic statement.

As a result of this comparative analysis of Louis Jordan's version of "Let the Good Times Roll" and Mingus's "Ain't Jivin," we conclude that Mingus incorporated a style that is popularly used in African-American music outside of the straight-ahead swing jazz that was the standard in jazz in the 1940s pre-bebop era. This is something that Mingus would do again and again throughout his career. The most important difference between these two examples is in the details of arrangement of the ensembles. Jordan's music represents the most popular format of African-American music of the 1940s. He was not only important because of his popularity, but also because of the superior musicianship of all of his endeavors. Mingus's use of 1940s rhythm and blues shows that he was in tune with the most cutting-edge music that was available to him at the time.

9.0 MINGUS'S MORE ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS

Another important aspect of the early recording “Ain’t Jivin’” is Mingus’s use of more complex musical settings. This is particularly important considering that when this piece was recorded he had not yet found his place within the world of bebop, and yet he was able to create very harmonically complex pieces that rivaled bebop in their musical intellectuality. Although this work has a clear leaning toward the desire for commercial success, other works of this period show Mingus in a more artistic light. Pieces in this category are important because they show the artistic development that Mingus was moving toward before he was influenced by bebop, and that he stayed with those elements while integrating new ideas throughout his career.

9.1 MINGUS'S EARLY BIG BAND RECORDINGS

Among the important aspects of this period is the use of larger ensembles as a musical pallet. Although most of the recordings of this period contain a Mingus band of no more than eight musicians, there are two songs that are performed by a twenty-piece jazz band. There are at least two obvious influences from popular non-dance big bands of the era that are discernible in this recording. The layering, use of instruments in the lower register, and the transitions between sections in “The Story of Love” are reminiscent of some of the devices used by the Stan Kenton orchestra. Also, the double time unison melody lines in the brass are reminiscent of the

writing that Dizzy Gillespie was doing for his own group and the Woody Herman band. All of these bands were well known by the forties and had recordings that were available to the general public. There are also a few more obvious signs within the recording itself that allow the listener to assume that Mingus was at least acknowledging Gillespie and was well aware of the Kenton group. First, he named the ensemble “Charlie Mingus and His 22-Piece Bebop Band.” Although he was slow to accept it as an influential jazz style, bebop had made its impact in California with various groups playing at Billy Berg’s nightclub beginning in 1945.²⁰¹

As for the Kenton influence, what cannot be surmised simply by listening to the piece, is made up for upon inspection of the personnel of the ensemble. As stated in the liner notes of *Charlie Mingus: Complete 1945-1949 West Coast Recordings*, a large number of the sidemen in the ensemble were members of the Stan Kenton Orchestra.²⁰² This allows for two safe assumptions. The first is that Mingus was well aware of the musicianship of the Kenton orchestra because he had the confidence in its members’ abilities to execute his music. The second assumption is that, via this recording, Mingus’s prowess as a composer in the traditional sense is evident. For many of his future recordings, he would teach ensembles by singing each individual their melodic lines.²⁰³ Teaching music in that manner takes a tremendous amount of time and effort, and the difficulty of such an endeavor increases exponentially as the number of personnel in an ensemble increases. This was recorded during a time when the Kenton ensemble was actively performing. The most likely scenario is that, during a period when the group was not engaged, perhaps a day off when no performances or rehearsals with Kenton were scheduled, they all decided to take part in Mingus’s project, for a fee of course. Thus Mingus was limited in

²⁰¹ DeVeaux, 364.

²⁰² Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961*. compact disc, Atlantic Recording Corporation, R2 72871, 1997, liner notes.

²⁰³ Jimmy Owens, interview by E. Ron Horton, June 8, 2004, personal archive.

two ways: the time he had with the ensemble and the money that he had to spend. Studio time is expensive, and the sound of the ensemble, especially considering mistakes and intonation problems that survived in the final recording, suggests that they had very little time before or after the main recording session to make adjustments. This meant that Mingus had to have complete written scores, and parts, at the time of the recording. Even under the best of circumstances this is no small feat. This lends tremendous weight to Mingus's abilities as a composer and theoretician of jazz music. Further evidence of these abilities can be found on some of the more progressive recordings made during the same time frame. A good example of this would be Mingus's composition "Weird Nightmare."

9.2 MINGUS'S EARLY COMPOSITIONAL SENSE

"Weird Nightmare" is important because of its long-term place in the Mingus repertoire. The first recording of this piece was in 1946, and he was still recording it in the 1960s,²⁰⁴ not to mention its inclusion on the *Mingus 94* album, recorded posthumously by the Mingus big band. This piece shows that Mingus's intellectual leanings at this point were as advanced as that of the bebop musicians of the same era. Although there were a number of small discrepancies in the chord changes of the various versions, they are all essentially the same.

As far as composition is concerned, "Weird Nightmare" is important because of the way that it was constructed. In this piece, Mingus gives the listener the illusion of a winding, wandering tonality that sonically incurs the agitation that its title implies. However, an analysis

²⁰⁴ Mingus, *Charles Mingus: More Than A Fake Book*, 149.

borrowing from the techniques of Heinrich Schenker reveals that these intricate chord relations that are the basis of the tension that makes this song so unique was crafted by Mingus upon a steadfast and rock-solid harmonic foundation.

Figure 8 Schenker patterned analysis of the harmonic structure of “Weird Nightmare”

The image shows a Schenker patterned analysis of the harmonic structure of "Weird Nightmare". It consists of three systems of musical notation, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system is labeled '1' and the second '2'. Above the staves, various chords are written in a shorthand notation, such as DMIN7, F/C, BPMAS7, G7, CMIN7B7(-9), A7(+9), EP7-5, DMIN7/C, and A7ALT. The analysis uses curved lines to connect notes across staves and systems, illustrating the underlying harmonic structure and the relationship between different levels of the music. The notation is dense and complex, reflecting the intricate harmonic language of the piece.

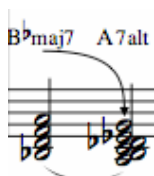
This type of analysis allows many of the hidden intricacies of this piece to be revealed. Figure 8 is representative of the harmonic motion that occurs in the first, second, and fourth sections of the four-section piece. A close examination of the background level shows that the dominant tonality is D minor. However, it is in the construction of the foreground and middleground levels that Mingus puts his distinct stamp on the piece. On the foreground level, even though the piece never loses coherence, Mingus creates a seemingly meandering musical setting. This is first accomplished in the first four beats of the form. This section contains four different chords, but is essentially the same tonality. All four chords—D minor, D flat augmented, F major, and B minor seventh, flat five (half diminished)—share the common tones F and A, making all of those chords substitutions for D minor. Those two notes define the

tonality, thus the entire measure can be seen as related to the tonality of D minor. It is the root motion that is occurring under this section that creates the harmonic tension. This is due to the four chromatic steps within the minor scale that do not usually occur. It is especially unusual because the B flat of the next measure is also a substitute of D minor. This means that this section, which is in D minor, creates tension through the use of half-step motion.

This B flat major chord can be viewed as serving a dual purpose. This chord is one of the features that gives the piece its wandering feel because it simultaneously assumes three possible tonal functions. The first function, B flat major chord, is one of a series of substitutes for D minor. The second function is that of a tonic chord; this chord would be considered the first point of rest although it occurs in the second measure. This sounds like a natural point of rest because it occurs after the quarter notes during which there is chromatic motion and the B flat major chord lasts for two beats, a stable chord that occurs with a slowing of the harmonic motion. It also takes on another meaning when examined in the context of the chord that follows it.

As notated in my analysis, I have designated the B flat major seventh chord to be an anticipation of the A flat seventh altered chord (the example is in treble clef, D flat substitutes for C sharp for notation purposes).

Figure 9 B flat major seventh to A altered seventh



The altered chord in jazz is a chord that simultaneously uses all of the alterations that are common to dominant chords. This chord would include the root, flatted ninth, sharp ninth, major third, flatted fifth, and dominant seventh. The fact that B flat major is followed by the A altered

changes the tonality of the major chord because it changes the function of the chord. Two of the notes in the B flat and A chords are common tones. The B flat creates harmonic tension, which is resolved through its motion to the root of the next chord. The D creates similar harmonic tension that resolves to the C sharp (D flat) of the A7alt chord. The remainder of the section can be reduced to a harmonic elaboration of D minor using several layers of chord substitutions (example in treble clef).

Figure 10 Illustration of the tonicization of D minor

The figure displays two staves of musical notation in treble clef. The top staff contains four measures of music with the following chord labels above them: Cm7, B7(+9), Bbmaj7A7(+9), and Eb7-5. The bottom staff contains five measures with the following chord labels below them: Cm7, F7, Bbmaj7, A7, and A7. Brackets and arrows are used to show relationships between the chords. A bracket under the first two measures of the top staff points to the first two measures of the bottom staff. Another bracket under the last two measures of the top staff points to the last two measures of the bottom staff. An arrow points from the Eb7-5 chord in the top staff to the A7 chord in the bottom staff.

The above figure illustrates the relationships between the chords of this section, the fourth, fifth, and sixth measures of the piece. The same is true of the bridge section of the piece, in which the first four measures anticipate the third degree of the D scale, F major seventh, and the second four measures anticipate the dominant, A. This places the entire piece in D minor, a fact that is further bolstered because the entire melody is in D minor (with the exception of two notes).²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ See “Appendix B” for complete analysis.

9.3 MORE MUSICAL SYMBOLISM AS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE MUSIC OF CHARLES MINGUS

Another example of Mingus's mastery of text setting is exemplified in the song "Eclipse." Mingus wrote "Eclipse" in 1948 with Billie Holiday's performance of "Strange Fruit" in mind.²⁰⁶ This piece is important because of the way he used it to tackle racial issues pertinent at the time because of his musical text setting. Mingus first recorded this song in 1953 with vocalist Jane Thurlow. Because the words and music are by Charles Mingus, it is a highly personal musical dialogue on interracial romance in the forties. This composition is littered with musical and lyrical symbolism. This first layer of symbolism lies within the lyrical content of the piece. Mingus used the eclipse, a natural marriage of darkness and light, as the symbolic representation of the partnership of elements that were kept separate during that era. Through the 1960s, there were miscegenation laws all over the United States that made it illegal for whites to marry African Americans and, in some states, other minorities as well, such as American Indians, Asian Americans (Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans), and "Malays" (or Filipinos).²⁰⁷ Although he was refused, Mingus had proposed to his soon-to-be-wife Celia in 1947,²⁰⁸ making it likely that she was the inspiration for the piece. Even after marrying in 1951, they had to deal with racial tension, particularly as Mingus toured with Red Norvo in the South. At times Celia had to register as guitarist Tal Farlow's wife because he was white.²⁰⁹ Even in New York they were forced to live in a hotel for a year because they could not find an apartment

²⁰⁶ Priestley, 36.

²⁰⁷ Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth Century America," *The Journal of American History*, 83 no. 1, (Jan. 1996), 48-49.

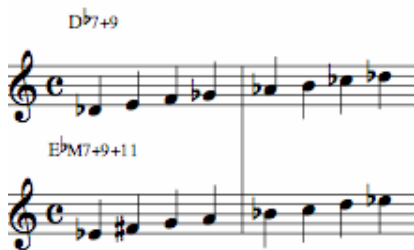
²⁰⁸ Santoro, 78.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

that would allow interracial couples.²¹⁰ This is the world that Mingus is referring to in “Eclipse.”

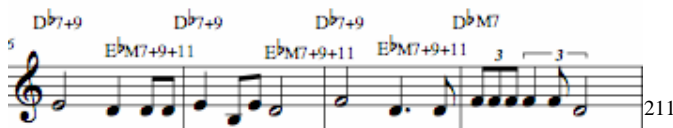
If we look at an eclipse as representing the joining of unrelated, even opposing, bodies to form a single celestial object, we can interpret some of the musical symbols that Mingus created in the first four bars of the piece. I believe that the two chords that alternate throughout the first four bars represent the sun and moon; the chord scale relationship of these two chords are tonally unrelated, sharing only one common tone.

Figure 11 Chord scale relationship for first two chords of “Eclipse”



Over these chords, which ordinarily would not function together, Mingus created a melody that could not exist independently in either key. This melody can exist only because of the joining of the two chords, just as an eclipse exists because of the joining of the moon and the sun.

Figure 12 First four bars of “Eclipse”



The lyrical content of measures nine through thirteen discusses how unsettled people of the time were by the idea of interracial romance.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 96.

²¹¹ Sue Mingus, *Mingus, More Than Just a Fakebook*, 40.

Some look through smoked glasses hiding their eyes,
Others think it's tragic—sneering as dark meets light.²¹²

This section represents the “unsettledness” with a harmonic progression that avoids a feeling of resolution. The lack of stability that this section conveys can also be attributed to the nine bar phrase length.

The next section, which corresponds with the line, “But the sun doesn’t care, and the moon has no fear, for destiny’s making her choice,” is the most stable section in the piece considering the underlying chordal structure, combined with the melody. At this point more than any other, Mingus creates harmony mated with a more traditional, consonant melodic line, as opposed to a line emphasizing a chord extension or leading tone, as was the case in the first four bars.

Figure 13 Last four bars of “Eclipse” bridge



The first time we hear this line, which is the poetic resolution of the piece, the dissonance in the ensemble in the following section works as if to question (musically) the statement being made.

The coming together of things normally foreign is represented by the third stream treatment of the piece. For a piece to be truly third stream, it must join music that is classical with music that is jazz. In the 1953 recording, arranged by Nadir Qamar, this is achieved in the introduction and in the middle of the recording with a section that is written in a style

²¹² Ibid., 40.

²¹³ Ibid., 40.

reminiscent of a forties movie score.²¹⁴ This technique of combining classical and jazz styles should be seen as another representation of the joining of two things that are considered alien.

It is after this point that Mingus gives us the final resolution to the piece. He creates the musical high point by reusing the earlier consonant section. In the end of this version, Mingus brings back the two dissonant chords that the song began with, which represents the social dissonance that the couple could never fully escape.

²¹⁴ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Debut Recordings*. Compact disc, Fantasy, Inc., 12DCD-4402-2, 1990.

10.0 MINGUS AND BEBOP

It is important to understand the difference between the music that was performed by Mingus in the forties and bebop. The music that Mingus recorded, particularly before the 1950s, culminating in his tenure with the Red Norvo trio, was more related to the relaxed sound of Nat King Cole than the bebop of Charlie Parker.²¹⁵ However, making the issue more complex is that, by 1946, Mingus was involved with bebop through his relationship with musicians such as Miles Davis, who was working in Los Angeles with Parker at the time.²¹⁶ In this section I will clearly establish the basis of these differences. This section will highlight the differences in the social experience that bebop musicians shared and the musical boundaries that they were testing as they relate to Mingus.

10.1 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MINGUS AND BEBOP MUSICIANS

Perhaps one of the reasons that Mingus would be considered so different from his peers is the unique position he held because of his age, musical prowess, and the location of his development before he achieved national recognition. Chronologically, he was in the same

²¹⁵ Santoro, 87.

²¹⁶ Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography of Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe*, (New York: Touchstone, 1989), 92.

generation of musicians such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Howard McGhee, and Thelonious Monk. However, there are major differences between the professional development of Mingus and those players. Most of them, except Mingus, were born on the Eastern seaboard and developed as professionals in post swing big bands. These bands should be defined as post swing not because of the chronological placement, but because of the concepts that were being expressed within them. All, except Mingus, were in New York City during the development of the bebop music scene in the early 1940s. Mingus was isolated geographically, and in fact, musically, from this group. It was this isolation that allowed Mingus to develop a musical style that was different from his contemporaries.

One of the first characteristics that most of the early bebop players shared was that they were born in the Southern region of the United States, and therefore surrounded by the musical culture of the region in the 1920s and 1930s. Specific evidence of this hypothesis can be seen in South Carolina-born Dizzy Gillespie;²¹⁷ Charlie Parker, who spent his formative musical years in Missouri;²¹⁸ and Thelonious Monk, whose family roots can be traced to North Carolina.²¹⁹ This regional experience was important not only to the individual development of each musician, but also it was a key factor in establishing the vocabulary that would define bebop as a genre separate from swing.

²¹⁷ Thomas Owens, "Gillespie, Dizzy [John Birks]," *Groves Online*, 2005, http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=749531834&hitnum=1§ion=music.11145 (accessed October 4, 2005).

²¹⁸ James Patrick, "Parker, Charlie [Charles jr.; Bird; Chan, Charlie; Yardbird]," *Groves Music Online*, 2005, http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=543780770&hitnum=7§ion=music.20922 (accessed October 4, 2005).

²¹⁹ Ran Blake and Barry Kernfeld, "Monk, Thelonious (Sphere) [Thelonious, Jr.; Theloious, Jr.]," *Groves Music Online*, 2005, http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=397468878&hitnum=1§ion=jazz.307400 (accessed October 4, 2005).

It is, initially, hard to surmise why a Southern upbringing would be so important in facilitating the musical knowledge base necessary for a musician of that era to develop the musical vocabulary used in bebop, but the answer is in the blues. This should bring to mind the question, “What was unique about the blues heard in the South?” After all, between 1912 and 1915 there were at least six blues songs published and available for national consumption, including “St. Louis Blues” by W.C. Handy and “Original Jelly Roll Blues” by Jelly Roll Morton.²²⁰ Additionally, by 1921, blues recordings became available from artists such as Ma Rainey and Ethel Waters.²²¹ The availability of such material would seem to prove that musicians throughout the nation should have been equally well-versed in all aspects of the blues. However, a detailed inspection of the types of blues that were occurring regionally and the circumstances surrounding their dissemination and development suggests otherwise.

First we must more definitively pinpoint what “the blues” are and what stylistic mutations exist within the larger category. Outside of the South, the artists mentioned earlier represent the authentic source of the blues. It is unquestionable that each of them represents a unique form of the blues, but in all cases they were not the original source of this African-American art form. Instead they all acted as direct filters of that original source through which the blues was first introduced to the American public at large. Handy credits his inspiration for writing his published blues to a man singing in a Mississippi train station. Rainey first heard the blues, while touring with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels, sung by a girl in Missouri.²²² These experiences are representative of the process that created the earliest nationally consumable blues. While their forms of the blues are of tremendous importance—because they were a

²²⁰ Southern, 338.

²²¹ Ibid., 365-366.

²²² Ibid., 330.

musical breakthrough—and because of the social significance of commercial and economic mobilization of African-American artists and the African-American community—they were distinctly different from the type of music that was performed by the Mississippi man and the Missouri girl who inspired them. Handy and Rainey, as cited, were both professional musicians prior to their use of the blues in their music, and therefore, well-versed in the western musical conventions of the time.

No one would seriously forward the claim that the music they offered the public was not blues. At the same time, no one should seriously forward the claim that these musicians were not at least equally influenced by their previous musical training. This would work toward having the effect of “pianizing” the blues. Those who were exposed to the music of Ma Rainey would have heard her vocal techniques not as an alternative tonal sense to western music, but instead as embellishments of western tonality. This would certainly have been true of those who heard the blues through Handy’s piano or brass-band arrangements. These arrangements expressed the essence of the blues but were tethered to western tonality. Since they were created for use on piano, it would have been impossible to convey the altered tonalities that made the oral forms of folk blues in the South truly unique.

These published and recorded blues were documented and available to musicians (including Mingus) throughout the country.²²³ However, it was a more direct rural blues influence that would direct bebop musicians to the musical experiments for which they would eventually gain fame. Several sources refer to this musical style as “country blues.” The best

²²³ Bebop vocabulary is also often theorized as being inspired by classical music. However, just as in the case of the classic blues, this music was available to musicians nationwide. While it can explain part of the difference between swing and bebop, it could not have been the factor that caused the difference in the vocabulary between bebop musician and musicians who were involved in the last stages of swing, such as Mingus, Buddy Colette, and Britt Woodman.

examples of this music were first recorded in the 1920s. There were a great number of factors in this style than in the “classic blues” of Smith and Handy, but the one that is most important when considering bebop is the “melodies full of ‘bent’ tones [that] were strangely atonal.”²²⁴ However, this music was less widely disseminated due to the Depression, and was surely not listened to in the staunchly religious and socially upper-class Mingus family. Bebop was in fact a sort of refreshing of the original elements that had been adapted onto European instruments in the early twentieth century. The exposure to the folk blues style, even in a peripheral manner, had a great effect on those who set the trend of bebop. Because of the problems that the country, and specifically the record industry, faced during the Depression (the production and distribution of goods), those in the South stood a greater chance of hearing the blues live than those who had to depend on the use of records for its influence.

The blues in the South was different from that in the rest of the country because of the social institution of slavery and its historical aftermath in the region. Evidence of this influence can be found musically in the difference between the melodic vocabulary of top-ranking swing players of the forties and the new vocabulary being introduced by bebop musicians who were occupying the same chronological space. The folk blues that bebop musicians would have been exposed to was tied directly to the unique economic condition that existed in the South after the Reconstruction. There was still the need for labor after the Civil War, and Southern plantation owners developed a new way to extract the maximum amount of labor for the minimum price. There were also large numbers of unemployed African Americans with little or no skills with which to support themselves outside of the plantation economy. Out of this dual need arose tenant farming, or sharecropping. Sharecropping became a main source of employment for

²²⁴ Ibid., 369-371.

many Southern blacks. Sharecroppers were often former slaves and their descendants. Although their title had changed, they were still poor laborers, and the blues was the music that represented them best. Sharecropping was a strong industry throughout the South until at least the late 1930s.²²⁵ This survival of sharecropping would also have supported the culture that surrounded it, including the blues. It is during this period that bebop musicians, born in this region during the late teens and twenties, would have received exposure to folk blues that would influence their music in the future.

One of the primary factors in the development of bebop was the reinterpretation of the blues tonality. What seems like a natural connection, between the blues and bebop, is in some ways strained because of the precarious relationship between blues and the community from which it originated. Within the black community itself there was a stigma associated with the blues.²²⁶ This feeling of disdain also existed within the musical community, probably because of the historical association the music had with poor, uneducated African Americans in the South. Bebop pioneer Dizzy Gillespie stated flatly that the rural blues had no impact on him because he had no contact with it.²²⁷ This statement was probably more related to his experience with the societal aspects of the blues as opposed to his actual experience of the music. While Gillespie may have had no contact with the stereotypical rural “bluesman,” his experiences early in life with the Works Progress Administration picking cotton in the fields of North Carolina²²⁸ would suggest that he was probably exposed to blues-related work songs during this period. There are notable exceptions to this trend of bebop musicians being directly exposed to Southern folk blues

²²⁵ Craig Heinicke, “Southern Tenancy, Machines, and Production Scale on the Eve of the Cotton Picker’s Arrival” in *Social Science History*, 23 no. 3, 437.

²²⁶ Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz*, 93.

²²⁷ Alyn Shipton, *Groovin’ High: The Life of Dizzy Gillespie*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1999), 8.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

styles. Among those born outside of the South who were undoubtedly innovators in bebop were drummer Kenny Clarke and pianist Bud Powell. However, these two musicians were a part of the development of the music as it was being formalized in the jam sessions in New York City in venues such as Minton's Playhouse.²²⁹ Their exceptional musicianship and presence during the earliest meetings of the bebop pioneers would have more than compensated for the lack of direct contact with the folk-style blues prevalent in the Southern-born musicians. However, even if the connection with the blues and bebop cannot be conclusively proven through a Southern-born bebop musician like Gillespie, it is made clear through the only man who is given more credit in the development of bebop, Charlie Parker.

10.2 THE CONTRAST BETWEEN SWING AND BOP

In the words of Dizzy Gillespie "Yard [Parker] knew the blues."²³⁰ This knowledge of the blues tradition, combined with the ever-increasing body of accessible harmonic substitutions used in bebop, created a language that was separate and, at times, seemingly at odds with the existing swing vocabulary. Through a comparative analysis, the ways that Parker re-contextualizes and refreshes the use of the blues and simultaneously introduces melodic lines based on unexpected harmonic impositions become obvious. This analysis is crucial in understanding bebop, which was considered cutting-edge jazz in the middle and late forties, and the specific elements that separated it from swing as a genre. The reason that Hawkins was the right choice for a comparison of this type as opposed to musician such as Don Byas is that Byas

²²⁹ Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz*, 6th ed., (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2002), 164.

²³⁰ DeVeaux, 174.

represents a link between swing and bebop. Hawkins on the other hand represents a swing style in his playing throughout his career even as he recorded side by side with the future masters of bebop.

10.2.1 The Musical Conventions of Swing Using the Playing Style of Coleman Hawkins as a Baseline

In this analysis, Coleman Hawkins’s solo on “Boff Boff” will be considered the baseline. The harmonic structure of this piece is based on the rhythm changes harmonic structure.

Figure 14 Standard Rhythm Changes

The figure displays the harmonic structure of Standard Rhythm Changes, a 32-bar form. The notation is presented in six systems, each representing 8 bars. Above each staff, the corresponding chords are listed. The structure is as follows:

- System 1 (Bars 1-8): C, Am7, Dm7, G7, C, Am7, Dm7, G7, C7
- System 2 (Bars 9-16): FM7, F#m7-5, Em7, A7, Dm, G7, C, Am7, Dm7, G7
- System 3 (Bars 17-24): C, Am7, Dm7, G7, C7, Fm7, F#m7-5, Dm7, G7
- System 4 (Bars 25-32): C, E7, E7, A7, A7, D7, D7, G7, G7, C, Am7, Dm7, G7, C, Am7
- System 5 (Bars 33-40): Dm7, G7, C7, F7, F#m7-5, Dm7, G7, C

The use of the structure in jazz was popular during the swing era and has remained popular today. Rhythm changes is a thirty-two bar “AABA” form. The A sections, which are all almost identical, should be looked at as containing two dominant harmonic centers. The first

four bars are centered on the tonic. The repeated harmonic motion, I/VI/II/V is a diatonic chord progression that works to emphasize the tonic. In the fifth bar we see a significant change in that, instead of the V chord leading to the I major sixth chord, it leads to I dominant seventh leading to IV. This creates a tonal shift in which the IV chord becomes a temporary central tonality. The last two bars again move to the original key center. The eight bars that make up the bridge are a simple prolongation of the V chord using dominant chords. In the standard rhythm changes, this prolongation is obtained by moving through the cycle of fifths beginning with the submedian and ending with the dominant. The recording used for this analysis was made in 1943 by tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. It will be compared to Charlie Parker's 1944 solo on "Dizzy Atmosphere."

Hawkins's solo is a magnificent example of the musicianship and technical prowess that can be expressed through the tenor saxophone. His solo is also firmly grounded in the swing era. In his first eight bars, Hawkins clearly uses a technique in which a single note group forms the basis of the melodic material throughout the section. This becomes apparent after removing the embellishments in the melodic line.

Figure 15 Analysis of melodic material in the first eight bars of Coleman Hawkins's solo in "Boff Boff"

²³¹ Coleman Hawkins, *Coleman Hawkins, The King of the Tenor Sax: 1929-1943*, compact disc, Jazz Legends JA 1012, 2003 Allegro Corporation.

In the above transcription, all the notes that are embellishments are grouped with a tie and have an arrow over them indicating the note that they embellish. These notes should not be considered scale choices; instead, they are embellishments that bring sonic attention to other notes. If those notes are eliminated, then all the note choices in the section belong to the C major scale, omitting the seventh, B natural.

This choice of scale avoids all dissonance. Even though it may not seem obvious omitting the B natural on the part of both the rhythm section and Hawkins insures that C, when used melodically, as it is ten times in this eight-measure section, does not clash with the B natural. However, Hawkins also omits the B flat, which should be prominent because it is the only melodic indicator of the tonal shift that characterizes this section. This is a strategic device that works to add more emphasis to the shift in the second section.

The next eight bars begin with a flurry of sixteenth notes. In isolation this section seems out of place considering the rest of the solo, but this line is a continuation of the use of sixteenth note in the previous solo, played by piano legend Art Tatum. Tatum, in standard form, played almost an entire chorus using this sixteenth note double-time feel. Hawkins was infamous for his sense of musical competitiveness and was known to go to extraordinary lengths to establish his prowess. In this case, the use of chromaticism acts more as a way to remain rhythmically stable. This rapid-fire meandering line is very difficult to analyze conclusively. The key to my interpretation is Hawkins's subtle use of accents and chromatic notes to indicate when split second shifts in his choice of melodic material occurs. The first melodic section occurs in the eleventh full measure of the piece. In this section he moves diatonically through the key of C.

Figure 16 Second measure of the second eight bars of Coleman Hawkins’s solo on “Boff Boff”



In the next section, Hawkins begins to introduce chromatic notes, but this time the notes are not related to the surrounding notes in the same manner they were in the first eight bars. In this case the chromatic notes work to provide rhythmic stability. In the next two beats Hawkins inserts an E flat into the C scale.

Figure 17 Beats two and three of the third measure of the second eight bars of Coleman Hawkins’s solo on “Boff Boff”



This is important because, although this section goes by very quickly, Hawkins’s thinking is organized around the note C. He begins and ends on this note and without the insertions it is impossible to play a line that does not have a skip. Although a skip would not compromise the musical integrity of the line, at the speed that the notes in this phrase are occurring, 840 sixteenth notes per minute, Hawkins is probably relying on familiar and easy-to-play digital patterns. The next two beats are similar, using chromatic notes more as rhythmic placeholders than harmonic indicators.

Figure 18 Beats three and four of the third measure of the second eight bars of Coleman Hawkins’s solo on “Boff Boff”



In this case, the most important note is the A natural, which both beats begin on. The next measure is similar with two beats starting on A natural and moving downward using sixteenth note triplets, ending on D natural, and the phrase ends in a slightly awkward sounding manner on a C. At that point in the harmonic progression C is the fourth of the dominant chord that occurs at that spot and is a note that would not ordinarily be used in that situation and does not follow a clear logic.

Figure 19 Fourth bar of the second eight bars in Coleman Hawkins’s solo on “Boff Boff”



The next section moves back to phrasing and ideas that are comparable to those heard in the first eight bars.

Figure 20 The fifth through eighth measure of the second eight bars in Coleman Hawkins’ solo on “Boff Boff”



Again we see Hawkins using notes almost exclusively from the C scale, but here he uses the dominant seventh (B flat) and the lower neighbor of A natural. This gives much more weight than his treatment in the first eight measures.

Hawkins treatment of the bridge is artfully put together but not particularly exotic. The bridge used for this song is identical to the one in the example above, and, with the exception of two triplet figures, Hawkins moves through the section by moving down by a step and up by a skip of at least a fifth, staying within the diatonic scale related to each of the chords in the bridge.

The last A proceeds in much the same manner as the first except the chromatic embellishments are even more elaborate and, in this case, a scale tone on the staff in the second measure of the first system of figure eighteen and the same note in the second measure of the second system becomes a part of one of the embellishments. Some of the note choices the second time that figure occurs could be seen as questionable, since it is a repeated figure it is acceptable to the ear.

Figure 21 The last eight measures of Coleman Hawkins’s solo on “Boff Boff”

The musical score for Figure 21 shows the final eight measures of Coleman Hawkins's solo on "Boff Boff". It is written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth-note patterns with various chromatic alterations. Chords are indicated above the staff: C6, Am7, Dm7, G7, C6, Am7, Dm7, G7, C7, F7, F#m7-5, Dm7, G7, C6, C6. Measure numbers 27, 31, and 34 are marked at the beginning of their respective lines.

Hawkins’s solo is a magnificent example of the artistry of the swing-era soloist. His note choices clearly reinforce the harmonic material of the piece through embellishment. In this solo it is clear that Hawkins adheres closely to scale tones and avoids notes that are overtly dissonant. He also manages to combine notes in a way that is exciting and innovative and maintains the creation of a “singable” melody. There are a great number of contrasts between the way that Hawkins plays rhythm changes on “Boff Boff” and the way that the same harmonic theme is approached using the musical conventions of bebop.

10.3 THE CHANGING STANDARD, EXAMINING THE INNOVATIONS OF BEBOP THROUGH CHARLIE PARKER

There is no doubt that Charlie Parker is one of the most important musicians in the development of bebop. In addition to his importance to the greater musical community, Parker also had a very important personal impact on Mingus. The two musicians would perform together on many occasions. Mingus used Parker's positive and negative behavior as a model of what to do and what not to do in a musical career. Mingus would constantly seek musicians who could develop performance innovations using Parker's vocabulary as a starting point. Parker is given credit for, along with Dizzy Gillespie, developing the melodic conventions that would change jazz. Even the uninitiated listener could compare Parker's performance in "Dizzy Atmosphere" with Hawkins in "Boff Boff" and hear the new worlds of sound that were available through his combination of a knowledge of folk blues and technical genius.

Looking critically at the two pieces, there are similarities in the styles of the two players and their treatments of the changes. First we must account for the difference in the chord changes of the two pieces. For the most part, the songs are almost identical. Small discrepancies in the chord qualities in the first, second, and fourth eight-measure sections of the piece, such as the difference between a major sixth chord and a major seventh chord, do not change the overall character of the chord progression. The most significant difference occurs during the bridge. Hawkins's solo is played over the standard bridge for this harmonic form, a cycle of dominant fifths. Theoretically this chord progression should be viewed as an anticipation of the final V of I chord that occurs in the last two measures of the section. At first glance, the chord progression in the bridge of "Dizzy Atmosphere" appears to be very different.

Figure 22 Bridge to “Dizzy Atmosphere”

The image shows two staves of musical notation in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The top staff contains four measures of music, each with a chord symbol above it: F#M7, F#M7, FM7, and FM7. The bottom staff contains four measures of music, each with a chord symbol below it: EM7, D#M7, Dm7, and G7. A small '5' is written below the first measure of the bottom staff. The notes in the staves are represented by diagonal lines, indicating that the specific melodic content is not shown.

However, close inspection reveals that this section is also an anticipation of the V chord. The easiest way to see this is to start with the eighth measure of the figure above and work backwards. The eighth measure, just as in the parallel section in “Boff Boff,” is the V chord or G dominant seventh. In the seventh measure the chord is D minor seventh. This is a traditional anticipation of G dominant seventh. All of the chords before that move chromatically, using the tri-tone substitution principal as a basis even though the chord quality is major. D sharp major seventh is a substitution for A. E major seventh is not substituted. F major seventh is a substitute for B. F sharp major seventh is not substituted. These substitutions result in the progression below, which is only a slightly altered version of the bridge to original harmonic setting as performed in Hawkins’s solo.

Figure 23 Bridge to “Dizzy Atmosphere” without tri-tone substitutions

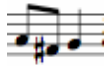
The image shows two staves of musical notation in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The top staff contains four measures of music, each with a chord symbol above it: F#M7, F#M7, BM7, and BM7. The bottom staff contains four measures of music, each with a chord symbol below it: EM7, AM7, Dm7, and G7. A small '5' is written below the first measure of the bottom staff. The notes in the staves are represented by diagonal lines, indicating that the specific melodic content is not shown.

It is much easier to see the similarities in the two harmonic progressions with the intermediate stage between the two sets of changes as listed above. This makes it clear that one of a number

of major similarities in the two pieces is the harmonic progression. Other similarities lie in the melodic materials of the two solos.

Looking critically at the two pieces, there are similarities in the styles of the two players. There are several shared melodic devices found throughout the solos of both men. This should come as no surprise as bebop musicians such as Parker used the conventions of swing as a springboard for innovation. For example, both soloists used similar approach tones to highlight important notes in their solos. One of the best evidences of this is when the soloists highlight a note by playing the note a half step or whole step above and then a half step below before the note in the manner of the example below.

Figure 24 Upper lower neighbor chromatic device



This device is simple, yet complex enough that its use should not be judged as accidental. Hawkins and Parker both use the device six times in their respective solos. Over the course of thirty-two bars, this is enough to show one of the threads of common musical understanding the two shared.

However, it is in the details of the use of this device that we find the differences in the two players. Hawkins used this device to highlight the root, third or fifth of a given chord. The only spot where this is not obviously true is in the following example from the end of the piece.

Figure 25 Hawkins's melodic embellishment of the upper lower neighbor chromatic device



But this anomaly can easily be compensated for by the fact that, as pointed out earlier, Hawkins was treating most of the space in the A sections of the song as a single C major tonality, instead of conceiving of the chord changes that occur every two beats separately. That means that, even though the melodic line occurs at a D minor seventh chord, Hawkins is thinking in terms of a C major sixth chord and therefore is highlighting the third of the latter chord and not the ninth of the former.

Although in form this device is the same as in the solo of Charlie Parker, its use sometimes serves a different purpose. Parker also uses the device to embellish chord tones, but there are other times when he uses the chromatic device to bring extensions of chords beyond the third to the listener's attention, and to add weight to some of the tonal anticipations that he uses. One such example is in the penultimate measure, in which Parker uses the upper and lower neighbor to highlight an E natural. The concept of Parker's melodies containing tonal anticipation and delay will be discussed on page 121.

Other devices that are shared by the two musicians are downward chromatic embellishment, in which two or more consecutive notes move downward to highlight a tone, and upward chromatic motion, in which two or more consecutive notes move upward and serve the same function. Parker uses the downward motion five times to Hawkins's one use. Both musicians use the upward motion only one time.²³²

In addition to the device that they both use, Parker adds a device that is generally credited as vocabulary developed specifically in the bebop era; that device is called the bebop seventh. The bebop seventh is typically the addition of the major seventh in a dominant seventh chord. Its adoption by bebop musicians created the use of a rhythmically symmetrical eighth note scale

²³² See Appendix B for analysis

instead of the traditional seven note scale. In its simplest form this meant that eighth notes could be played in succession, and every two beats the musician would land on the same note.

Figure 26 Bebop seventh scale



Although this scale is typically identified with the dominant chord, the addition of this chromatic device can be used in any scale within the major modes.

Figure 27 Alternate applications of the chromaticism usually associated with the bebop seventh scale



However, just as with any scale, it is not typical for it to be used in its entirety, the scale simply reveals the theory behind the use of the device. In practice the upper three notes of the scale are often used to emphasize the seventh as is the case in the fifth measure of the second eight bars of the piece.

Figure 28 Use of bebop seventh melodic device in the context of Parker's solo



As mentioned in section 4.1.1, one of the important differences between Parker and many swing players is the use of the blues as a source of melodic inspiration. Although there are many musical examples in which Parker was much more blatant in borrowing melodic conventions

from the blues, this piece is not one of them. However, even in the rhythm changes harmonic structure, he introduced subtle indicators to his proclivity toward blues and his ability to adapt it into a more harmonically intricate form. In other words, Parker did not just use bluesy melodies, he embellished to fit the new musical doors he was opening. Parker was by no means the first to use blues melodic material in a solo; jazz has always been closely related to the blues. In fact Hawkins does so in his solo in the second full measure.

Figure 29 Hawkins’s use of blues-based melodic material



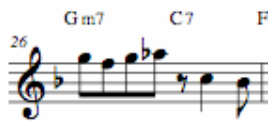
Keep in mind that, as outlined in section 10.2.1, Hawkins is thinking of the first eight bars in C major, so instead of this being the flatted ninth of D minor it is the flatted third of C. There are two spots in his solo where Parker alludes to the lowered third. The first occurs in the second measure. Parker’s solo is in F major, and he played the flatted third (in this transcription the G sharp replaces its enharmonic neighbor, A flat). He embellished the note and used a scale pattern resulting in a chromatic approach that highlights the major third of the key (this example is treble clef and in the key of F major; the B below is a B flat).

Figure 30 Example one of Parker’s uses of blues-based material



Parker was using the F major tonality through the section and that in this single bar he used the lowered and raised third. He also used the minor third in measure seventh measure from the end of the chorus.

Figure 31 Example two of Parker’s use of blues-based melodic material



In this instance the note is given weight because of the way it is presented rhythmically.

Another way that Parker’s approach to playing differs from Hawkins’s lies in the rhythmic conception that flows so naturally in his playing. As in Figure 21, Parker is able to combine melodic tension with rhythmic tension in a manner that does not exist within Hawkins’s solo. Comparing the way the two musicians use triplets in the melodic lines easily proves this.

A detailed analysis shows that Hawkins used nine sets of triplets in the course of his thirty-two-measure solo. In context, seven of the nine times he used triplets they provided no rhythmic contrast. For example, in the second eight bars of his solo, after two measures of sixteenth notes in rapid succession, Hawkins plays four sets of sixteenth note triplets. Because of the speed of the line the rhythmic shift is almost indiscernible. Another use of triplets in his solo that is obscured occurs in the fifth measure of the first eight measures and in the third measure from the end of the solo form.

Figure 32 Hawkins’s use of triplets as a turn



In Figure 32, the triplet is subordinate to the chromatic embellishment it is part of, thus instead of being heard as a triplet with independent note, it is heard as a turn. There are a few places where Hawkins used the triplet as a true rhythmic variance and in these spots the triplet is used in only one way. Both of these examples occur on the bridge of the song. In both instances where Hawkins used the triplet on the last beat of the measure, the triplet is preceded by an

eighth note and is followed by a line containing a string of eighth notes. Integral to understanding the difference in the playing style of the two musicians, and their respective musical styles, is the way in which the intervals used in these lines are strung together. The triplet moves up in thirds and then leaps to the highest note in the figure and then moves down by a step. Parker's solo follows the same general rule of intervallic motion, with a few distinct exceptions.²³³ It is, however, in the placement of the triplets within the framework of his melodic line that we see the significant difference between the solos of Parker and Hawkins.

There are two distinct ways that Parker used triplets in this solo. One is very similar to the way that Hawkins did. This can be seen by observing the first and second measures of the last eight-bar section of the solo chorus. In this figure, Parker outlined the A triad, although his outline differs slightly from Hawkins's because he outlined the triad in first inversion. Parker's solo leads into the triad by half step, just as Hawkins's solo does, and the triplet leads to the root of the chord in the rest measure (this example is treble clef and in the key of F major).

Figure 33 Example one of Parker's uses of triplets



In Parker's solo, we also see triplets used in the middle of a line to add emphasis to a melodic line; in his solo, Hawkins did not use triplets in this fashion. The triplet above occurs in the fifth measure of a six-measure phrase, when the chord changes are F7 to F7/A.

²³³ See Appendix A "Dizzy Atmosphere" measures 21-23.

Figure 34 Example two of Parker's use of triplets



In Figure 34, the triplet works to draw attention to the dominant seventh. This is a very important note at this point in the song because it is the point at which the root chord makes the temporary but all-important transition to a dominant tonality. That is to say that he emphasizes the note that is harmonically the most important at this point in the chord sequence by highlighting it with rhythmic variation. Most of the triplets used in this solo by Parker fall somewhere between the two categories. One of the most interesting spots in which triplets are used as a rhythmic variance to draw attention to a melody note important to the harmony of the piece is in sixth measure of the second A section. In this section, Parker used the triplet to highlight a note that implies the anticipation of harmony, in this case anticipating the F major seventh of the next measure (this example is treble clef and in the key of F major).

Figure 35 Example three of Parker's use of triplets



Using a melodic phrase to anticipate, prolong, and imply alternate harmony is common in bebop. There are many examples in Parker's solo on "Dizzy Atmosphere" that exemplify all three of these concepts. Anticipation abounds in this solo, but is often masked by chromatic embellishment. Take for example the last three measures of the piece. These measures are a

prime example of anticipation, but must be reduced to their essential elements to be more clearly expressed.

Figure 36 Analysis of Parker's use of anticipation

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff shows a melodic line in 4/4 time with six measures. Above the staff, the chords are labeled: B \flat 7, Bdim7, Gm7, C7, FM7, and FM7. The first line shows the original melodic line with various ornaments. The second line highlights these ornaments with slurs and arrows. The third line shows the simplified melodic framework of the second measure, illustrating the F major triad.

In accordance with Figure 36, Parker anticipates the F major seventh chord beginning in one measure and one eighth note before. This first line shows what he played in the four bars involved in the anticipation. The second line identifies all of the embellishments and the notes that they highlight using slurs to identify sets of embellishments and arrows pointing to the notes that they embellish. The third line shows the simplified melodic framework of the second measure. After the melodic line has been reduced, it is easier to see how it outlines the triad of the F major triad. Parker used anticipation in his solo frequently.

Parker also employed prolongation techniques in his solo, although less frequently than anticipation. The best example of prolongation in “Dizzy Atmosphere” is in the third through fifth measures of the last eight-bar section.

Figure 37 Analysis of Parker's use of prolongation

The prolongation occurs specifically in the second and third measure of the figure above. It is framed neatly between the melodic material of the C dominant seventh chord in the last half of the first measure and the F dominant seventh chord in the fourth measure of Figure 37. The C dominant seventh chord is clearly shown through a melody that contains the root and seventh of the chord. Clarifying where the melodic material generated in the fourth measure is also made easier, in spite of the fact that the F major seventh and F dominant seventh chord have so many notes in common. Looking at all four measures, we can see that when he played a figure directly tied to the bar that it is in, the first note is the root. Thus is the case in measure one of the figure above, in which he begins with a G and the G minor seventh chord and when he plays the C on the C dominant seventh chord. This is also true of the fourth measure of the figure, which is an F dominant seventh chord and begins on an F. This makes it clear to the listener that he was doing something different in the other two measures. This is emphasized by the lack of root notes.

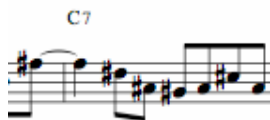
The prolongation outlines the F major seventh chord that occurs in the first half of the second measure. The top line represents exactly what Parker played, the middle line shows all of the embellishments and the last line shows the notes that outline that prolongation. My analysis

shows that Parker prolonged the F major seventh chord until the beginning of the fourth measure of Figure 37. Within this example, in addition to the prolongation, we see Parker's use of implied harmony through melodic material.

One of the most typical examples of using melodic material to imply a harmony that is not present occurs beginning with the pickup to the last measure of the bridge. It is a classic example of a tri-tone substitution, and its use in this instance is significant because the melody, which is clearly in F sharp dominant seventh, is played over a rhythm section that is playing a C dominant seventh. There are two ways that this chord can be explained. One way of looking at a chord like this is in terms of the F sharp dominant. The phrase occurs in a fairly straightforward manner, thinking in these terms. The innovation in that case is that Parker phrased it in a different key. However, it is equally important to look at in terms of C dominant seventh.

In terms of C, the phrase is full of extensions, and this is one of the earliest examples of melodic phrasing using chord extensions in this fashion, particularly considering that he used altered chord extensions.²³⁴ Hawkins's solo on "Boff-Boff" does not use chord extensions, altered or otherwise. All the ones that are not diatonic are embellishments, as discussed above. This phrase is proof of the extensive use of chord extensions by Parker (this example is treble clef and in the key of F major).

Figure 38 Parker's use of altered tones in melody to imply alternate harmony



The phrase begins on an F sharp, which in this key is the sharp eleven. The second note of the phrase corresponds, enharmonically, with the minor third. The third, fifth, and seventh

²³⁴ Chord extensions, in this case, are defined as chord tones beyond the seventh of the chord.

note, A sharp or B flat, is the seventh scale degree. The fourth note of the figure is the raised fifth, and the sixth note is the same as the flatted ninth, or D flat. The use of such notes represents a marked change in the musical vocabulary of modern jazz.

Parker also used chromatic tones in a sort of melodic substitution. This device was foreign to jazz in the early 1940s, but it fits into Parker's solo on a purely melodic basis. The previous example, particularly in light of modern harmonic sensibilities, is a successful melodic line because of its adherence to chord extensions along with its viability as a tri-tone substitution. This is only partially the case with Figure 36 (this example is in treble clef and in the key of F major, the B in the second measure is a B flat).

Figure 39 Parker's use of melodically based substitutions



In Figure 39, the third and fourth beats of the measure are clearly outside of the diatonic tonality. The G sharp minor seventh is the tri-one substitution for the D minor seventh. The same principal that allows a dominant chord is flexible enough in jazz that it can be applied to other chords, even if those chords do not share interchangeable thirds and sevenths. It is, in fact, the melodic commonalities of beats one through two, three through four of the first measure in the above figure and beats one through two of the next measure that makes this a feasible musical statement. Each of the beats outlines a simple minor seventh chord, and it is this sound that the ear of the listener organizes itself around in this instance. This theory is further proven by the inclusion of the major chord melody on a minor chord harmony. This is a chord extension that is not generally acceptable in western music, including jazz, so it is logical to conclude that this makes musical sense because it is related through melodic means. The dispersion of the

music is also important because it offers further evidence as to why bebop was so isolated in its development.

10.3.1 The Dissemination of Bebop

The first seeds of bebop were planted within some of the big bands of the early forties. Bands such as those led by Earl Hines and Billy Eckstine began to forge the way for the use of the harmonic and melodic material that would develop into bebop, but not intentionally. These bands used the bebop style, not as a musical statement or as a planned move toward the innovations of the future, but as a result of the increasingly bebop-devoted personnel who were being hired to man the bands. After all, it was in the Hines and also the Eckstine bands that Gillespie and Parker began to solidify their bebop soloing style.²³⁵ These two musicians would go on to become living legends, but during their tenure in the two big bands, they served only as sidemen. It is only natural that these two forceful personalities would have influence over the artistic tendencies of their respective ensembles. Being a member of one of these ensembles gave a musician a decided advantage in unraveling the musical conventions of bebop. Consider those who at some point performed in Billy Eckstine's band alone.

“The members of the Eckstine band made up a who's who in jazz during the Bebop Era. The orchestra included at one time or another Dizzy Gillespie, Fats Navarro, Miles Davis, and Kenny Dorham on trumpets; Gene Ammons, Dexter Gordon, and Lucky Thompson on tenor saxes; Charlie Parker on alto sax; Leo Parker on baritone sax; John Malachi on piano; Art Blakey on drums; Tommy Potter on bass; arrangements by Budd Johnson, Tadd Dameron, and Jerry valentine; vocals by Sarah Vaughn; while Eckstine himself sang and played valve trombone.”²³⁶

²³⁵ Earl L. Stewart, *African American Music: An Introduction*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 143.

²³⁶ Nathan Davis, *Writings in Jazz*, 179.

This firsthand exposure of bebop to a significant group of capable and dedicated musicians created a important pool of performers who could assimilate, reinterpret, and refresh the advanced ideas being developed. The development of bebop was further isolated by a recording ban that occurred during its early growth as an independent musical style.

Among the effects of the recording ban of 1942 was the delayed exposure of bebop to the general populace. The cause of the strike had to do with the new technologies. The American Federation of Musicians president during the era, James C. Petrillo, saw this new technology, which allowed entertainment venues to use prerecorded music, as a threat to the employment prospects of musicians. To curb what he saw as a danger to musicians, Petrillo called for a strike, which lasted from 1942 through 1944.²³⁷ The year 1943 Parker and Gillespie were in the Hines band,²³⁸ and they spent 1944 with Eckstine as part of an “astonishing concentration of talent” that would become a part of jazz lore.²³⁹ During this period, Gillespie and Parker were trading ideas and influencing young bandmates, but all that’s left as a record of this period are a few written reviews and the testimonies of musicians.²⁴⁰

All the factors above, musical and professional, are crucial in understanding why there was such a gulf between players who developed within bebop circles (such as Parker, Gillespie, pianist Bud Powell, and bassist Oscar Pettiford) and those who developed at the same time, but outside of this circle, as Mingus did.

These uses of such music conventions were new to jazz and not warmly welcomed by musicians of earlier generations. Pianist “Fats” Waller (who died in 1943) is said to have

²³⁷ Lewis Erenberg, *Swingin’ the Dream: Big Band and the Rebirth of American Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 216.

²³⁸ Shipton, 114.

²³⁹ DeVaux, 319.

²⁴⁰ Shipton, 106-112.

complained to unnamed musical tormentors at Minton's, "Stop that crazy boppin' and a stoppin' and play jive like the rest of us guys!"²⁴¹ This sentiment expressed disconnection between generations; musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, and Cab Calloway did not appreciate the innovations of the bebop musicians. It can be said that most musicians who were not directly involved with the creations of bebop found the new style awkward and unmusical. Charles Mingus is among those who found themselves uninspired by bebop's original offerings.²⁴² It was the musical factors above, particularly the use of melody to imply various harmonies, that presented the most difficulty for Mingus as he began to integrate with musicians based in New York.

²⁴¹ DeVaux, *Bebop*, 267.

²⁴² Santoro, 65.

11.0 MINGUS'S EARLY COMPOSITIONAL INFLUENCES

The most important aspect of understanding Charles Mingus's artistic contribution to jazz is understanding his work as a composer. It is rare to find a composer whose emotional range was as vast as his. It is even rarer to find a composer whose life experience allowed him to authentically use a range of techniques such as New Orleans-style swing and bebop and his own style in one composition. As the analysis in this section will show, it is for these reasons and more that Mingus is one of the most important figures in jazz history.

11.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF MINGUS'S MUSICAL CONCEPT

The period of time during which Mingus became nationally and internationally known as an innovator in jazz was the 1940s through the 1960s. He was by no means the only person, but his contributions were unique. There were a vast number of musicians who also contributed to the music during the same period, including Art Blakey, Horace Silver, Sonny Rollins, Clifford Brown, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Miles Davis. These musicians performed music that is a part of the bebop/hard bop style. Mingus had a number of things in common with all of the members of this list. First, he as well as all of the other musicians had a focused period in their youths in which they studied with an advanced teacher or were able to grow in a smaller "local scene." This was the period in which they

accrued the technical facility necessary to become a professional musician. Next were their first national exposures as musicians. This could be seen as the journeyman stage of their career. This is the period during which the musicians become nationally recognized for their talents as they worked for musicians who had already built their reputations. The work done during this period is sometimes referred to as “paying their dues,” because the musicians have realized that they are capable and talented, sometimes more so than the men that they are working for, but they must remain in the shadows of more popular musicians until their ability is recognized by a larger body of their peers, the general public, and jazz critics. This period is necessary and is how musicians become respected. Often if a musician skips this part of his career and moves immediately to stardom his abilities may be questioned by his peers.²⁴³ Finally a musician becomes recognized on his own terms. This stage of development presents its own set of challenges largely because once a musician is accepted he may feel pressure to perform in the style that he was initially introduced to the public performing. Mingus’s professional career parallels these broad categories, but there are some very distinct differences in the specifics of his career that foster the development of his compositional style.

Mingus’s first stage of development, the period during which he developed his technical abilities, was not remarkably unique. As mentioned previously, his skill was developed in a situation that was less than ideal, but this was the case for other African-American musicians as well. In his autobiography, Miles Davis speaks of his treatment in an all black school in East St. Louis, Missouri, as equivalent to the way cattle were treated.²⁴⁴ Although he received a great deal of musical training as the pupil of a talented local teacher and the first trumpet in the St.

²⁴³ David Ake, “Re-Maculating Jazz: Ornette Coleman, ‘Lonely Woman,’ and the New York Jazz Scene in the Late 1950s,” *American Music* 19 no. 1 (1998): 36.

²⁴⁴ Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography*, (New York:Simon and Schuster, 1989), 20.

Louis Symphony Orchestra,²⁴⁵ the conditions to which Davis was subjected as a student made a great impact on the way he perceived this part of his youth. Davis endured these conditions despite the fact that his family was affluent.

Also take into account Dizzy Gillespie's early musical experience. Gillespie spent his early years in a small town in South Carolina named Cheraw. He began playing trombone because of the limited number of instruments available to the students in his school; he had no private training or theory on the trumpet until he went to the Laurinburg Institute, in North Carolina, at the age of 16. Gillespie pursued his education after taking on difficult manual labor projects for the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Gillespie realized that the key to escaping this type of work as a permanent livelihood was to get an education. He quickly saw the limitations of men who lacked education as he worked side-by-side with men who were so illiterate they could only sign an "X" for their names.²⁴⁶ There were no high schools that admitted black students in Cheraw, so Gillespie traveled 30 miles to the Laurinburg Institute to further his education. In addition to the anxiety he must have felt from the separation from his family, he also had to endure working on the school's farm to pay for his schooling.²⁴⁷

Mingus's experience as a young musician was on an even keel with Davis's and Gillespie's, with the very important exception of the relationship that each of them had with their earliest music teachers. Davis and Gillespie were both in black schools and being taught by black teachers. While they may have lacked materially in their education, they were still supported in their early growth by teachers. Both musicians pay homage to early musical mentors who supported their creativity on a very personal level.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 31.

²⁴⁶ DeVeaux, *Bebop*, 176.

²⁴⁷ Alyn Shipton, *Groovin' High: The Life of Dizzy Gillespie*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10-11.

Charlie Parker's experience in his formative years also left a great deal to be desired. Parker began his studies on baritone horn and quit school completely at the age of 15. His primary means of musical education were the jam sessions of Kansas City.²⁴⁸ In contrast, Mingus had access to a large orchestra, but his relationship with his early music teachers was very poor. Because Mingus did not get personal support and attention, he increased musically through what he could absorb from and communicate to other musicians.

The "jam session" has been iconic to jazz almost as long as jazz has been iconic. We see the jam session identified in scholarly writing in 1937.²⁴⁹ The jam session served two distinct and seemingly incompatible purposes. Jazz musicians would use the sessions to establish which players were respectable and which should be rejected. This situation served as a sort of peer review for performers. Newcomers to the jazz scene of a given city would have the soundness of their playing tested through their ability to navigate through difficult song forms and keys. The jam session was meant to be exclusive and these practices turned away those who were not dedicated. Those who could persevere through this rejection and practice to raise their skills to an acceptable level would be granted musical acceptance by their peers. But these sessions also can be seen as a network of musical laboratories.²⁵⁰ They were particularly important in the period before music was accepted in the institutional setting as part of the curriculum of colleges and universities. Although the jam session is a collection or a group of like-minded musicians, those involved can be represented as musical isolationists. Musicians must at the absolute minimum be able to execute a repertoire of jazz "standards," being intimately familiar with the

²⁴⁸ DeVeaux, *Bebop*, 176-177.

²⁴⁹ H. Brook Web, "The Slang of Jazz." *American Speech* 12 no. 3(1937), 182-183.

²⁵⁰ William Bruce Cameron, "Sociological Notes on the Jam Session." *Social Forces* 33 no 2 (1954).

melodic material of a range of thousands of songs²⁵¹ and have the theoretical knowledge to navigate through their harmonic structures. In addition to memorizing the melodies to jazz standards, the top professionals in the field will also memorize exceptional solos and song orchestrations from other musicians. Personal experimentation has shown that this process may take dozens of hours of study and preparation of a single song to master pre-existing vocabulary. This estimate does not take into account the amount of time necessary to foster musical innovation. For bebop and hard bop musicians, the jam session was the primary means through which innovation was spurred. For these musicians, a personal style was developed in isolation and then applied to a group setting.

The prime example of this kind of development is Charlie Parker. Parker's solo style was highly advanced, even by today's standards, but one of the most ingenious aspects of his style, and probably one of the reasons that it caught on so thoroughly in the world of jazz, is that his solos lines could be used with a rhythm section that did not have a handle on the concepts that he was using. This is reflected in the song forms that he used throughout his career. A large portion of Parker's repertoire was built on some variation of three simple song forms, the 12 bar blues, "I Got Rhythm," and "Honey Suckle Rose."²⁵² This was a move of remarkable, and often unrecognized, cunning on the part of Parker. He developed a solo style and died before it would have been reasonable for him to expect attention from an abundance of musicians familiar with it. Parker limited his harmonic repertoire to a small number of different song forms so that he could perform his innovations with any competent rhythm section and even, as was the case when he performed with Lucky Thompson in California, an outstanding musician who was only

²⁵¹ Ibid,178.

²⁵² James Patrick, "Parker, Charlie." *Grove Music Online*, <http://lawrence.library.astate.edu:2492/shared/views/article.html?section=jazz.345700.2> (Accessed Dec. 15, 2006).

passingly familiar with his repertoire or vocabulary. Parker was not alone in developing his solo style in this fashion. Gillespie also developed a solo style that relied on established jazz repertoire and popular song forms. This musical philosophy was conducive to a generation of musicians, probably the first generation, who learned a musical style from analyzing recorded solos and then executed the theoretical structures they realized through their studies at jam sessions. If bebop was the musical representation of “black rage,”²⁵³ then their method of communicating it to the masses could not have been better conceived. Even as bebop musicians spent time as journeymen in the swing bands of the early forties, they could insert their musical developments. Bebop vocabulary could be used interchangeably with swing vocabulary in which even the most generic ensemble playing could suffice if necessary. This was a definite part of the compositional style that was identified with the improvised and written music that is identified as bebop. Although there were jam sessions in Los Angeles, and the musicians were also developing their own unique vocabulary, when Mingus was building his musical abilities it was under a set of circumstances that put far more emphasis on the value of ensemble development.

Only a few years after the now legendary development of Charlie Parker in the jam sessions of Kansas City, Mingus was going through a very important development period of a different nature. As was the case with Parker, Gillespie, Davis, and so many other jazz legends, Mingus spent a great deal of time in self-preparation, but he also spent a large number of hours preparing in an ensemble setting in a group called the Stars of Swing.

²⁵³ David H. Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz and Black Music, 1955-1965*, (New York Oxford University Press, 1992), 16.

11.2 STARS OF SWING

The Stars of Swing represents the focal point of the racial paradox that existed in Mingus's musical life on Central Avenue. The group had unlimited musical ability but was bound by the social circumstances of Los Angeles in the 1940s. The racial climate in Los Angeles during that period was seen by some to be so averse that it was referred to as "Mississippi with palm trees."²⁵⁴ There are no surviving recordings of the group, but according to the descriptions given by Mingus and musicians like Los Angeles-based Buddy Collette, it was probably a style that could be seen as one of the foundations of the musical lineage that led to the cool school of jazz commonly identified with the West Coast in the 1950s and 1960s. Collette, one of the members of the short-lived group, gave a detailed description of what the group sounded like and the popularity that it enjoyed. "We were playing real music. We had arrangements of pretty tunes, like 'Laura,' that was different from the bebop songs. So the people were packed [into the club], because a lot of people were hungry for the real music."²⁵⁵ When Collette speaks of bebop here, he is comparing the more jagged, angular music that was the trademark of bebop, with his own smoother more melodic conception. This was particularly relevant to the 1945 appearance of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Their music was well received by the critics but left audiences challenged, to say the least. As Collette's account reveals, California audiences were very receptive to the melody-based compositions that were a staple of the Stars of Swing. As bebop gained status as a high art form, it only makes sense that there would be a jazz antithesis to the popular style, and this seemed to be the niche that the Stars

²⁵⁴ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 386.

²⁵⁵ Buddy Collette, interview by Ernest Horton, July 10, 2006.

of Swing filled. They were creating music that was as complex but was still different than the sounds associated with bebop. The group organized formally in January 1946,²⁵⁶ but the effort that went into creating the group began long before its debut at the Downbeat Club on Central Avenue.

The ethos of the Stars of Swing can be traced back to the relationship that Mingus and Collette had as youths playing saxophone and bass duets while riding the red car to rehearsals in the Los Angeles area. Mingus would even go to Collette's house early in the morning so that they would have more opportunities to play.²⁵⁷ They exhibited that they were dedicated to improvement and innovation. As youths, playing on the streetcar entertained some and probably annoyed others, but for Mingus and Collette it was the opportunity to perform and explore that was important. Soon after Collette's completion of military service and his return to Los Angeles, the two got together and assembled the Stars of Swing. It was this dedication that allowed them, most of whom were working very little or not at all, to focus their full attention on a group that had no promise of profitability. The benefit that each got from the group was artistic fulfillment. Mingus's relationship with Collette was strong, he was one of the few people able to help Mingus control his drastic mood swings. It is quite possible that Mingus would not have been able to survive as a member of the Stars of Swing without the calming influence of Collette. Although there are no recordings of the Stars of Swing, "Mingus always attributed near-magical powers to this septet."²⁵⁸ Collette expressed a similar sentiment when asked about the group, saying, "it was one of the best experiences I've ever had."²⁵⁹ Perhaps Collette sums up what the

²⁵⁶ Buddy Collette and Steven Isoardi, *Jazz Generations: A Life in American Music and Society* (London: Continuum, 2000), 67.

²⁵⁷ Collette, interview.

²⁵⁸ Santoro, 69.

²⁵⁹ Collette, Interview.

group had accomplished musically when he said, “I think it was so good that it was better than anything you’d hear anywhere, before or after.”²⁶⁰

The two most important factors necessary to judge the musicianship and ability of the Stars of Swing are the musicians themselves and the level of dedication they exhibited. Many of Mingus’s band mates in the Stars of Swing would go on to work in some of the most important and innovative ensembles in jazz. Buddy Collette, who played alto saxophone and flute with the group, would work with ensembles ranging from Chico Hamilton to Stan Kenton, in addition to working on *The Groucho Marx Show* and writing musical scores for films.²⁶¹ His role in integrating the segregated chapters of the Los Angeles musicians union, through political action and his musicianship in the bands in which he broke the color barrier, was so important that he was considered the Jackie Robinson of music.²⁶² Trombonist Britt Woodman would have a long and illustrious career working with musicians such as Lionel Hampton, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Quincy Jones, and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra.²⁶³ John Anderson, a musician who toured with Ray Charles and Count Basie, held the trumpet chair.²⁶⁴ The group also included Lucky Thompson on tenor saxophone. Thompson was well known as a bandleader, performing at the Savoy in New York City and touring throughout Europe with his own groups, as well as performing as a sideman with groups led by Billy Eckstine, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Lawrence Koch and Steven L. Isoardi, “Collette, Buddy,” *Groves Music Online*, 2005, <http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=jazz.095700> (accessed September 12, 2006).

²⁶² Collette, *Generations*, 121-131.

²⁶³ Eddie Lambert and Barry Kernfeld, “Woodman, Britt,” *Grove Music Online*, 2006, <http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=jazz.490500> (Accessed September 12, 2006).

²⁶⁴ “Anderson, John,” *Grove Music Online*, 2006, <http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=jazz.012200> (accessed September 12, 2006).

²⁶⁵ Scott Yanow and Barry Kernfeld, “Thompson, Lucky,” *Grove Music Online*, 2006, <http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=jazz.448600> (Accessed September 12, 2006).

By the time the Stars of Swing first began rehearsing, Woodman, Collette, and Thompson had already proven themselves as professionals, Woodman and Collette in military bands and Thompson on the road with the Count Basie band. Although it seems completely illogical that circumstance would have all of these incredibly talented musicians available at the same time, the dedication that each member had to his profession makes it seem perfectly natural that they would take part in such an endeavor, given the opportunity. After all, the only way for the individual members of the group to achieve their maximum potential was to be around the highest caliber musicians. This motivation for performance is clear considering Collette's statement that "every [musician's performance] was very powerful, so you had to play your best. Somebody would play a good solo before you, you can't come out with a little sad solo, you had to go for it.... That was the exciting part of it."²⁶⁶

Perhaps even more important than the level of skill in the group was the level of dedication the members exhibited. Had the members made it their goal to make the ensemble more profitable they could have spent far less time and effort and simply imitated styles that had proven popular with the masses—but this was not their goal. Their goal was to perform jazz in an original and artistic style. They focused entirely on music that reflected their abilities and musical philosophies. It was only possible to achieve this goal because they were all like-minded and they viewed one another as being equally talented. The strength of the Stars of Swing was the musical and professional equality of all its members, and their devotion to artistic perfection—to the excellence within the group—as it applied to their individual performance abilities. At their best, the members had enough respect for each other to allow the development

²⁶⁶ Collette, Interview.

of abstract ideas that seemingly made no sense until several repetitions in rehearsal.²⁶⁷ The ensemble rehearsed from nine in the morning until five in the evening every day for three months. Several of the members were composers and contributed new material. The Stars of Swing dedicated themselves to bringing out the most minute details in the music. The ensemble gave Mingus and the other musicians the opportunity to experiment and expand on musical concepts that were not common at the time.²⁶⁸ The question must be asked, why didn't this group record? If they were truly as good as Collette, Mingus, and Woodman claimed, how could they have been unrecorded by either a national or local record company?

The Stars of Swing had the misfortune of being the difficult combination of artistically independent and original, and unwilling to compromise to get the approval of critics or record companies. In Brian Priestly's biography of Charles Mingus, he quotes Woodman as saying agents and club owners were intrigued by the group but consistently asked if any of the members sang or danced while they played.²⁶⁹ As Mingus would make clear on numerous occasions, his music was going to be consumed as art; if his audience was going to be entertained it would be on his terms. Singing and dancing were not his terms. It was also a very modern sounding group, but it did not fit the mold of bebop for those interested in the newest trends in jazz. These two factors turned out to be the group's marketing downfall. Collette attributes the group going unnoticed to the fact that it could not be classified. Because the group was not easily categorized, the industry did not take the risk of marketing the ensemble. Bebop fans wanted bebop, and fans of smoother vocal styles wanted a vocalist to be center stage. No matter how good the group was it was risky because it didn't fall into a pre-existing niche.

²⁶⁷ Collette, *Jazz Generations*, 67-68.

²⁶⁸ Santoro, 69.

²⁶⁹ Priestly, 30.

At the time the Stars of Swing reached its zenith, bebop had already reached the West Coast. The Los Angeles–based group began performing at the same time that Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker were touring on the West Coast. For those who were interested in jazz as an art form, Gillespie and Parker were the gold standard, and 52nd street in New York City was the center of the jazz universe. This should not be seen as an imposition made by the musicians, or even a choice made by jazz audiences. The primary force behind the popularity of bebop artists over artists performing other types of jazz was the attention that it received from critics. I make this statement not to belittle the importance of those who are considered bebop innovators or their audiences, but, as Ralph Eastman makes clear in his article “Central Avenue Blues,” the critics gave the music and musicians on the East Coast a great deal more attention than those in other parts of the country in all popular musical styles. *Billboard* polls, which were one of the methods used to divine the popularity and importance of artists in a variety of genres, did not have a single polling station west of the Mississippi River.²⁷⁰ This meant that New York musicians such as Parker and Gillespie had a natural advantage. In addition to them being superb musicians, the people whom they performed with, including Teddy Hill, Cab Calloway, and Billy Eckstine, received attention from the record industry. As young musicians performed in these bands their names became known to national record executives, and this name recognition boosted their early careers. Because of the location of the record industry executives, and their aversion to the West Coast, being a New York musician and being a nationally recognized musician were virtually synonymous. Music from the Savoy Ballroom or the Rainbow Room in New York was heard all over the country. This was never the case with any of the major halls in Los Angeles, and therefore, it was virtually impossible for local

²⁷⁰ Ralph Eastman, “Central Avenue Blues: The Making of Los Angeles Rhythm and Blues, 1942-1947.” *Black Music Research Journal* 9 no. 1 (1989), 20-21.

musicians to receive national recognition without leaving the area. Since the members of the Stars of Swing, with the exception of Thompson, who had performed in New York, were all local musicians that never received national recognition as sidemen or bandleaders, so there was no development of a sense of importance of the Central Avenue scene on the part of the critics as there was with the 52nd Street scene.

In addition to the superiority in location that bebop had over the music that Mingus was involved in, bebop was also a perfect fit for the historical philosophy of the “great man.” Although critics were not consciously writing to fit this mold as they began to “define” modern jazz, it was a much neater and simpler task if they used one group of musicians and its music as representative of the entire body of post-swing innovation in jazz. There are two main factors that contributed to the critics’ ability to attribute bebop to a very small circle of individuals or “great men.” One was the ban on recording during World War II. There was a great deal of musical activity that went unrecorded during this period, including that of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker in the bands of Cab Calloway and Billy Eckstine. We are also unaware of the activities of other innovative musicians during that period. Musicians like alto saxophonist Jack Johnson were a part of such innovations,²⁷¹ but because they had shorter careers and never relocated to New York, they became historically obscure. As the haze created by the inability to record music nationwide cleared, bebop became the unique, post-swing, modern jazz style. Parker and Gillespie, along with a few others, were seen as the innovative forces behind it. The second factor that led to the centralization of the critics around a few figures in music was the nature of the music itself.

²⁷¹ Davis, *Writings in Jazz*, 179.

Bebop as played by Parker and Gillespie was seen as a soloist's art form, furthering the "great man" scenario surrounding it. Since their music focused on the vocabulary of the soloist, Parker and Gillespie could perform bebop with a rhythm section that was grounded in swing vocabulary. They played with many musicians who were heroes of the swing era, which helped them to increase their popularity through association. This is arguably the case in their collaboration with Coleman Hawkins.

Hawkins was a popular recording figure and recorded hundreds of songs in 1943 and 1944. Most of these featured his contemporaries from the swing era, tried and true artists who already had solid followings. Through the combination of his clout with the record industry and his appreciation of the musicians who frequented the 52nd street bebop scene, he was able to record with Dizzy Gillespie, essentially introducing the recording industry to bebop.

Bebop and swing were very different melodically but they were harmonically compatible, making the music accessible to swing fans as well as aspiring musicians who were familiar with swing. This accessibility increased the popularity of the style among musicians. The emphasis on individual musical vocabulary also meant that those who wanted to adopt the musical conventions of bebop needed only a recording and the determination to master the acrobatic musical feats that bebop musicians performed. The incredible displays of musical dexterity and flexibility made it easy for the critics to determine the superior musicians within the style. By 1946, when the Stars of Swing were working at the Downbeat on Central Avenue, bebop was a nationwide phenomenon, and when critics looked for modern jazz they were looking for the athletic displays that were such a critical part of bebop. To the critics, this meant that music that was less athletic was less modern.

It was this mentality that left the Stars of Swing in a professionally awkward position. Both Brit Woodman and Buddy Collette noted that there was interest in the group, but that it never amounted to success. This is because record executives, taking their cues from writers and critics, were not able to easily place the group into a category. Had the group been closer in format to Louis Jordan, with vocals and more emphasis on the visual aspects of their entertainment package, they would have been more attractive to record companies. As a modern jazz group (circa the late 1940s) they would be judged according to the standards of bebop. As Collette related in his telephone interview, the group was put off by the lack of melody and was almost consciously rebelling against the conventions of bebop. Had they been recorded, perhaps the recordings—combined with some of Mingus's other pre-1950 recordings and other recordings of California jazz musicians of the same period—would have shown they were involved in the early development of cool jazz. Viewed in this way, the development of cool jazz would have occurred at the same time as bebop but without national attention, instead becoming an offshoot of bebop, as it is characterized in a great deal of scholarly writing. The group's emphasis was on their agile and delicate group dynamic. This type of playing had more in common with the Modern Jazz Quartet and the cool school of the 1950s than the bebop musicians of the 1940s.

The group dynamic that the Stars of Swing depended on may also have been one of the reasons that the group was not signed to a record deal. Focusing on one performer, as was the case with Parker and Gillespie, made it easier on record companies. A single star could perform with any combination of all-star or unknown musicians backing him up. The group dynamic required that the ensemble remain cohesive. It was the need for cohesion that would be the main factor in the Stars of Swing being unable to record. The musical group dynamic is one that

depends not only on the ability of individuals to have a vibrant musical relationship, but also on a cohesive personal relationship. The personal relationships that the group needed in order to achieve long-term success was destroyed when Lucky Thompson tried to get top billing in the group without the permission of the others. Thompson removed the “Stars of Swing” sign from the front of the Downbeat club, where they had their flagship performance, and replaced it with a sign that read “Lucky Thompson and His All-Stars.” Thompson was famous for his sense of self-importance, once even demanding that he should be considered over Louis Armstrong. Although the sign would be replaced the next night, the argument that surrounded the incident—with the rebuttal of Thompson’s assertion that he was the best player in the group and a death threat from Mingus—left Thompson’s ego so bruised that he would work for only two more nights with the group and did not return for the rest of the engagement.²⁷² This neutralized the group’s three months of work.

This dissolution of the ensemble, no matter how much potential it may have had, does not clearly present why this situation in Mingus’s life represents a racial paradox. Long-term cohesion of a musical group is not common, and being black did not cause the group to break up. It is in looking at how the members of the group progressed in their careers from there that one can see the racial paradox involved. Using the post–Stars of Swing careers of Mingus, Thompson, Collette, Woodman, and Givens, even if the group had been less able than described, it was still probably one of the top groups in the area. The writing and playing abilities of the members of the ensemble ensured that they would perform and make comfortable livings in the music field in the Los Angeles area, even if they could not do so as a unit. Logic would suggest that the movie industry and other musical activities of such an enormous metropolitan area

²⁷² Collette, *Jazz Generations*, 69-70.

should have been able to sustain the members financially if not artistically. But for African Americans, the opportunities were few and far between because of the racial climate they faced as black musicians working the clubs on Central Avenue.

11.3 THE ENSEMBLE CONCEPT OF THE RED NORVO TRIO

Although the Stars of Swing was never recorded, the ensemble concepts that Mingus developed in this period are evidenced in his recordings throughout his career. This concept was developed even further during his time with the Red Norvo trio, with Mingus on bass, Norvo on vibraphone, and Tal Farlow on guitar. This was a meticulously rehearsed and arranged ensemble group when it came to ensemble work as evidenced by their recording of “I’ll Remember April.” The intricate ensemble work is especially clear when it is compared to the version recorded by the Clifford Brown/Max Roach Quintet in 1956.

When one examines this piece as a composition, one notes that it follows a very standard and fairly rigid musical framework. The Brown/Roach version begins with a vamp in G major. The rhythm section remains firmly within the traditional roles that had been established during the swing era and that continues today. The two melodic instruments, the tenor saxophone of Sonny Rollins and the trumpet of Clifford Brown, also never stray from their traditional roles, although they are arranged very loosely. As the melody is performed, one or the other, but never both, performs the main melody. When Brown is performing the melody Rollins creates a countermelody as accompaniment. The introduction and ending of the piece are closely related and represent the only significant variation for the rhythm section. Other than that, the choreography for that part of the band is very strict, with very little room for variation in the role

of the instruments. The drummer keeps time, the bassist plays figures that emphasize the root notes of the chords, and the pianist plays functional harmony. Through the course of this composition there are eleven repetitions of the harmonic structure (an independent harmonic chorus will be referred to as a chorus from this point) all of which are on the same key center. The soloist for the eighth and ninth solo choruses is drummer Max Roach. This is the only section of the piece where the arrangement changes from the strophic harmonic structure, and the change occurs because the rest of the ensemble is tacit. Even when the piano is soloing, the role that each of the rhythm section players fills is unchanged, and the pianist, Richie Powell, provides functional harmony as he solos. The brilliance in this performance is in the solo improvisation, with the choreography for most of the ensemble remaining static for seven minutes and twenty seconds of the nine minute and thirteen second performance. The version that is performed by Mingus in the Red Norvo Trio is very different and shows some of the contrasting sensibility that he was exposed to in respect to ensemble choreography.

The Norvo trio had two less members than the Brown Roach group, and the Norvo version is only three minutes and twenty-five seconds. It was recorded six years earlier, in 1950. Their performance is far more complex, but allows for less flexibility overall. The Norvo version begins with the guitarist, Tal Farlow, outlining the chord structure with a chord arpeggiation.

Figure 40 Tal Farlow's guitar figure



The lowest note of this figure indicates the root of the chord. As the vibraphone and bass enter, we see the bass used in a very nontraditional role, doubling the melody along with the top voice

of the vibraphone in octaves. This is a distinct break from the roles that bass and guitar would usually play in a trio setting. Beginning with the ninth measure of the main melody Mingus assumes the role traditionally left for the bass. The piece has two key changes, and it is in the second key change that we see the level at which this composition is choreographed. The second key change places the group in the key of A Flat, a half step above the original key, and the ensemble plays this section identically to the other. As evidenced by comparing Mingus's bass line in the two keys, they are almost identical. The ensemble work for this piece is superbly constructed containing two spaces for soloists and taking less than a chorus of musical space. The solo space is short, and the band leader's solo is very forgettable. Norvo performs in a swing style during the period when bebop was nearing its musical and popular zenith. Mingus's solo over the piece was twice as long as the leader's and displayed some of the originality and technical facility that gave him such a remarkable reputation as a bassist. Regardless of whether or not one appreciates the solos in this piece it is the way that the ensemble was choreographed that is of primary importance.

By 1950, when this recording was released, the innovations of bebop had already spread and the small group format, which allowed for the maximum amount of creativity from the improviser and a very restricted role for the ensemble, was the experience of most young musicians of his stature. The intricate ensemble relationships that were part of the Norvo experience must have taken hours of rehearsal and a cohesiveness that was very different, and perhaps unparalleled, in bebop and similar musical styles. To achieve a mastery of bebop took hours of practice, but Mingus was involved in groups that took hours of ensemble rehearsal. As he began to branch out and experiment, he would take the more adventurous improvisatory spirit of bebop and fused it with his own sense of the possibilities of a cohesive ensemble.

There was, however, another and perhaps even more important extra-musical aspect of Mingus being part of the Norvo trio. The time that Mingus spent in the group is probably best viewed as a musical reinforcement for Mingus rather than a learning experience. Although Norvo rehearsed extensively, this was not a new situation for Mingus, who was equally dedicated to the ensemble rehearsals of the Stars of Swing. In performance the group was very rigid and geared toward audience entertainment and not artistic satisfaction. In jazz polls Mingus was increasing in popularity²⁷³ because, as a member of Norvo's trio, he was redefining the role of the bass.²⁷⁴ Although he was beginning to be nationally recognized, he was playing in a way that was well within the technical facility that he had developed as a local Los Angeles musician. As a member of Norvo's trio Mingus was receiving well-deserved international attention for his performances. However one of the primary reasons that Mingus received such attention was because of his role as a racial pioneer, not as a musical one. Mingus's popularity with the media did not begin until his tenure with the Norvo group. *Downbeat* magazine, which was and still is, one of the premier magazines dealing with jazz, also served as a subtle forum for race issues. In the May 18, 1951, issue, the magazine gave major coverage to a number of race-related topics, including the local 802 petition of Puerto Rican singer Perez Prado, and a major story about the problems Roy Eldridge was having problems working in an interracial setting, titled "No More White Bands for Me, Says Little Jazz."²⁷⁵ The magazine included a picture of the Norvo trio and Mingus and his new white wife, Celia. There was no article, and the publication did not state outright that the reason that they were being featured was because of their very public interracial marriage (Celia toured with the band). But there was a picture

²⁷³ Santoro, 87-94.

²⁷⁴ Priestly, 42.

²⁷⁵ Leonard Feather.

accompanying a short statement (*Downbeat* was generally not in the business of announcing weddings unless both parties were very well known). Mingus benefitted from that attention, which he would not have received had he been a black musician in a black band or a white musician in a white band. Mingus would receive increasing amounts of the media spotlight from the magazine in the years that followed, although in subsequent appearances it would be his straight-forward communicating style and engaging ideas that would get him into the magazine and increase his popularity.

12.0 DEBUT RECORDS, MINGUS'S FIRST MAJOR MUSICAL STATEMENT

Some of the most important works in Mingus's early canon were those pieces that were recorded for his Debut label. The recordings that Mingus made on this album, as a leader and as a producer, leave essential clues in understanding many of the pieces that Mingus would create in the next part of his career.

Although the earliest recording in the Debut catalogue, a duet of Nadi Qamar and Mingus,²⁷⁶ was recorded in 1951, Charles and Celia Mingus and Max Roach officially founded the company on May 7, 1952. Its beginning was spurred by the treatment of musicians. Perhaps if there is any single moment that could be seen as spurring the formation of the company it was when the then head of Prestige Records, Bob Weinstock, "offered to record the Mingus trio for \$10 apiece, and free lunch and drinks and cocaine. Mingus was infuriated and disgusted."²⁷⁷ He was disgusted by this treatment because it was something that would never happen in a genre that was not identified with African Americans. It was episodes like this one that motivated Mingus to start a record company in which jazz artist would be treated with dignity and respect. Celia Mingus handled the finances and distributed the albums directly to record stores and through the mail.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Debut Recordings*. Compact disc, Fantasy, Inc., 12DCD-4402-2, 1990.

²⁷⁷ Santoro, 97.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

12.1 DEBUT'S MOST RECOGNIZED RECORDING

Debut records made its mark in the music industry on a recording session at Massey Hall in Toronto, featuring Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Max Roach, and Charles Mingus on May 15, 1953.²⁷⁹ “The Massey Hall issues not only put Debut on the map as a company specializing in quality East Coast Jazz, ready to rival Blue Note and Prestige, but brought about distribution and leasing deals with European companies.”²⁸⁰ This recording was valuable as the block upon which Debut was built because, for the previous 10 years, Gillespie and Parker sharing a stage was extremely rare.²⁸¹

12.1.1 Mingus's Musical Ascension

This also was a significant moment for Mingus's position on the jazz map. Mingus's appearance in the quintet with the founders of bebop was something of an anomaly. There were other bassists who may have been more authentic choices in the re-creation of the original bebop music scene. Mingus was, as established earlier in the dissertation, in California in the formative years of bebop. Even if he was aware of the events on 52nd Street, the musicians who were developing bebop were not yet aware of him. Evidence shows that the group that was organizing the event, the New Jazz Society of Toronto, was focused on featuring pianist Bud Powell. However, Powell was hospitalized, and their attempts to reach Dizzy Gillespie were also unfruitful. It was under these circumstances that Mingus was contacted. Celia found Powell,

²⁷⁹ Santoro, 104-105.

²⁸⁰ Preistley, 55.

²⁸¹ Shipton, 252.

Gillespie, and Parker, and Debut co-founder Max Roach played drums.²⁸² The fact that Mingus performed in this venue was a sign that he had finally and completely overcome any notion that he was an outsider to bebop. The Massey Hall concert has been referred to as the end of an era, but the elements that were present at that concert represent the seeds that Mingus planted as the father of avant-garde jazz. One of the most important elements was Charlie Parker's artistry and personality.

12.1.2 The Place of Parker in Mingus's Life and Music

As mentioned previously in this dissertation, Mingus was initially unimpressed by Charlie Parker and his musical efforts, and his feelings toward Parker can be taken as a representation of his feelings toward bebop in general. According to Gene Santoro's biography, *Myself When I Am Real*, as late as December 1945, the first time Mingus was able to hear Parker live, he still described the music as "chaotic and unlovely."²⁸³ However, this apathy toward Parker could not survive in the face of his ever-rising popularity and the increasing recognition of Parker's musical genius. This sentiment must have changed distinctly and abruptly by early 1946. As described by Miles Davis, "Charlie Mingus loved bird, man, almost like I have never seen nobody love."²⁸⁴ It is impossible to tell exactly what swayed Mingus's opinion of Parker, and for that matter, bebop, but by 1946 the alto saxophonist had groups of devoted followers, including his then future wife Celia. It was due to her urging that Mingus began to familiarize himself with the recordings of Charlie Parker.²⁸⁵ Eventually Mingus would begin to use Parker

²⁸² Priestley, 51; Santoro 104.

²⁸³ Santoro, 65.

²⁸⁴ Miles Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography of Miles Davis with Quincy Toupe*, 86.

²⁸⁵ Priestley, 48.

as a musical model, the same way he modeled his playing after Duke Ellington's. In his own future ensembles he would choose musicians who were firmly of the tradition that Parker started. Mingus knew that Parker had a tremendous influence, once telling him, "if [you] jumped out of a window, twenty kids would jump out too."²⁸⁶ Parker spoke as if he was well read and had a great deal of oratory prowess. Mingus saw in Parker the same qualities that attracted him to his early mentor, Farwell Taylor.²⁸⁷ Of course, one cannot talk about the influence of Parker without acknowledging the dark side of his life, his heroin addiction.

Despite Parker's public statement that "a musician professing to play better when he was high on anything was a liar,"²⁸⁸ many people would imitate Parker's substance abuse. Mingus was not one of them; he decided from the time he spent with Parker when he was not high that he would always stay away from hard drugs.²⁸⁹ Mingus had a tremendous amount of admiration for Parker. So much so that Mingus came out of a retirement from music based on Parker's promise that he would pay considerably more than his comfortable Post Office salary since he had put his musical career on hold.²⁹⁰ Ultimately though, Parker did not pay Mingus, but this was not what caused Mingus to separate Parker's destructive personality from his ingenuity as a musician. Mingus's final performance with Parker was a fiasco. On March 4, 1955, Parker, along with pianist Bud Powell, had a very public breakdown onstage at Birdland, a famous New York City nightclub named for Parker (whose nickname was "Bird"). The event was so embarrassing that Mingus addressed the crowd, saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, please don't associate me with any

²⁸⁶ Robert George Reisner, *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*, (New York: The Citadel Press, 1962), 151.

²⁸⁷ Santoro, 72.

²⁸⁸ Ira Gitler, *Jazz Masters of The Forties*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 16.

²⁸⁹ Priestley, 33.

²⁹⁰ Santoro, 102.

of this. This is not jazz. These are sick people.”²⁹¹ Fortunately for Mingus he was open-minded enough to understand that Parker was a musical genius in spite of a suicidal lifestyle.

12.2 EARLY SIGNS OF MINGUS’S MUSICAL OPENNESS

One of the early Debut recordings that signifies Mingus’s musical openness was made in 1952 with another important alto saxophonist, Lee Konitz. What makes this recording important is the creative restrictions under which they were produced. Konitz was under contract with Norman Granz,²⁹² and under the details of this contract, Konitz was permitted to record for others, but could only improvise for Granz label. This provision was probably in place to allow Konitz to take part in lucrative commercial recordings, while leaving his most valuable creative products as the property of his recording company. Mingus circumvented this provision by writing a solo in the style that Konitz was known,²⁹³ a style that was shared by a circle of musicians associated with Lennie Tristano in the late forties and early 1950s. It is easy to discern the difference between the rhythmic conventions that Mingus used in his melody on “Extrasensory Perception,” and “Marionette,”²⁹⁴ the melody constructed by Tristano devotee Billy Bauer, and the standard set in bebop as exemplified by Charlie Parker.

²⁹¹ Santoro, 112.

²⁹² Liner notes, Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Debut Recordings*. Compact disc, Fantasy, Inc., 12DCD-4402-2, 1990.

²⁹³ Santoro, 99.

²⁹⁴ See appendix A for complete transcription of both melodies.

12.2.1 Konitz's Significance on Debut

“Extrasensory Perception” can be viewed as something of an exaggeration of some of the musical conventions that made the sound of those who studied under Tristano unique. There are two easily discernable factors that indicate how much Mingus had absorbed Tristano’s style. First, there is a unique use of quarter-note triplets. This is not typical for bebop, as can be proven using the *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, as a reference. The *Omnibook* contains 142 pages of transcriptions of 60 pieces that are representative of the type of playing that Parker was doing throughout his career. In “Extrasensory Perception,” Mingus used quarter note triplets four times. In the melody of “Marionette,” which also featured Konitz on alto saxophone, quarter note triplets were used twice. In the entire *Omnibook* Parker used quarter-note triplets in the main melody of a song only three times.²⁹⁵ Another example of how knowledgeable Mingus was about the Tristano school of thought was displayed in the way that eighth notes are grouped. “Extrasensory Perception”²⁹⁶ contains a passage in which there are a string of sixteen consecutive eighth notes. A similar section is contained within “Marionette.”²⁹⁷ This type of juxtaposition of eighth notes is rare in melodies generated by Parker, occurring only four times in 56 separate examples. This use of eighth notes is one of the recognizable hallmarks of musical thinking related to Tristano and his musical devotees.

²⁹⁵ Jamey Abersold, ed., *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, (New York: Atlantic Music Corp., 1978).

²⁹⁶ Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Debut Recordings*. Compact disc, Fantasy, Inc, 12DCD-4402-2, 1990.

²⁹⁷ Lennie Tristano, and Warne Marsh, *Intuition*. Compact disc, Capitol Records, Inc. CDP 7243 8 52771 2 2, 1996.

12.2.2 The Place of Lennie Tristano in the Music of Charles Mingus

Lennie Tristano was a curious figure in the world of jazz; his importance is difficult to ascertain because of his rather modest collection of recordings and the seclusion in which he lived his life. Tristano was born in Chicago in 1919 and lived to be fifty-nine years old. After he moved to New York in 1946, he continued his work as a jazz educator and began to attract a cult like following of students, many of whom became world renowned, including Warne Marsh, Lee Konitz, Billy Bauer, Bill Russo, Bud Freeman, and Sal Mosca.²⁹⁸ Mingus used his wife as a sort of spy to discover some of Tristano's musical secrets,²⁹⁹ evidence of Mingus's interest in the methods of Tristano. Pinning down the specific pedagogical elements that characterized Tristano's students' musical style is a difficult if not impossible task. Based on Celia's testimony, Tristano's was a regimen of transcription.³⁰⁰ When asked about what Tristano taught him, in a 1980 interview, Konitz replied, "I can't remember too much of what I learned material-wise... but there was an extraordinary impetus to be very dedicated."³⁰¹ Mingus was attracted to Tristano as a teacher and also by the possibility of working as a teacher at his school. Perhaps most importantly Tristano's musical experiments would have been attractive to Mingus. Some indication of one type of experiment can be gleaned from two pieces recorded in 1949, "Intuition" and "Digression."

²⁹⁸ J. Bradford Robinson and Barry Kernfeld, "Tristano, Lennie [Leonard Joseph], *Groves Online*, 2005, http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?from=search&session_search_id=784948182&hitnum=2§ion=jazz.456400 (Accessed November 10, 2005).

²⁹⁹ Santoro, 101.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 101.

³⁰¹ Wayne Enstice and Paul Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here: Conversations with Twenty-Two Musicians*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 206.

12.2.3 Tristano's Experiments

These two pieces represent experiments conducted within the walls of Tristano's school and performances of his sextet, which consisted of Tristano, Konitz, Marsh, and Bauer along with Arnold Fishkin and Denzil Best.³⁰² There are some similarities in Tristano's musical experiments and the free jazz that Mingus would first make popular with his 1956 recording of "Pithecanthropus Erectus."³⁰³ It will forever be a matter of speculation as to whether Konitz would have recorded a piece along these lines had his contract with Norman Granz not been in place. Tristano's crew performed "Intuition" without bass or, as a matter of coincidence and not design,³⁰⁴ a drummer. The instruments entered one by one, and their entrances are the only part of the piece that was choreographed. Although it is impossible to be entirely sure based solely on a single recording, according to the accompanying liner notes, the pieces were entirely spontaneous except for the order that the instruments entered. The first entrance is a string of nimble eighth note lines played by Tristano. He sets the tempo and mode of the piece. The next musician to join in was Konitz. His alto saxophone melodies seamlessly replaced those that were being played by Tristano as he moved to a support role, undergirding the alto saxophone with harmonically sparse and rhythmically jagged accompaniment. Konitz's tone and melodic choices adhere closely to western tradition and are sparsely laden with the Charlie Parker-influenced jazz vocabulary that was popular in the fifties. Bauer's guitar enters next, moving back and forth between playing chords and melodic lines. Bauer's musical communication is

³⁰² Liner Notes, Lennie Tristano, and Warne Marsh, *Intuition*. Compact disc, Capitol Records, Inc. CDP 7243 8 52771 2 2, 1996.

³⁰³ Scott Saul, "Outrageous Freedom: Charles Mingus and the Invention of the Jazz Workshop," *American Quarterly* 53 no. 3, (September 2001), 387.

³⁰⁴ Lennie Tristano and Warne Marsh, *Intuition*. Compact disc, Capitol Records, Inc. CDP 7243 8 52771 2 2, 1996.

very purposely placed to form a third complementary layer. As Bauer entered, Tristano began to play more melodically, creating three lines that are intertwined. Finally Marsh enters. Upon Marsh's entrance there is a gradual slowing of the tempo until the end of the piece. This spontaneously constructed piece should not be heard as an effort to create a new music form, but instead as an effort to increase music acuity within the context of western norms expressed through jazz instrumentation and peppered with elements from the jazz idiom.³⁰⁵ Tristano probably adopted this format to create a musical environment in which musicians would be focused entirely on the spontaneous, reactionary creation of melodic material. For Tristano this may have been an advanced musical exercise. It was musical and valuable because the musicians performing it were of the highest echelon in both the art and craft of music. The two points of prime importance when comparing it to the avant-garde music of Charles Mingus is that Tristano's experiments were formless, and the defined extra-musical meaning, if there is one, is obscure. Hearing the techniques used in Tristano's camp may have endeared him to Mingus music because of his use of similar nontraditional techniques in 1946 and because of the ensemble cohesiveness that Tristano achieved through the dedication of his students to his musical concepts. In transcription his students seem to be so synchronized in their thinking about the unstructured composition that the piece achieves an atonal quality. Listening to the full chords voicing one can almost hear melodic climaxes being reached at the same time. Tristano's music, however, should not be considered avant-garde jazz because he still closely follows traditional notions of ensemble cohesion, use of western instruments, and rhythmic sensibility, as shown in Figure 41.

³⁰⁵ Lennie Tristano and Warne Marsh, *Intuition*. Compact disc, Capitol Records, Inc. CDP 7243 8 52771 2 2, 1996.

Figure 41 Tristano/Konitz Improvisation

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is labeled 'A. Sax.' and 'PNO.' and begins at measure 29. The second system is also labeled 'A. Sax.' and 'PNO.' and begins at measure 35. The Alto Saxophone part is written in a single staff with a treble clef, featuring a highly rhythmic and melodic line with frequent eighth and sixteenth notes. The Piano part is written in two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a brace on the left. The right hand contains chords and some melodic fragments, while the left hand has a sparse bass line with occasional notes.

These were types of concepts that Mingus was developing melodically, but with more advanced rhythmic and less inhibited harmonic concepts, while he was still living in California. This is supported by testimony from Miles Davis, who was rehearsing with Mingus at that time. In Davis's autobiography, he stated that some of the music that Mingus was writing in 1946 he was

“like John Cage playing all the [things] he’s playing, making all those strange sounds and noises” and that the music was “wide open for anything.”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶ Miles Davis, 93.

13.0 THE COMPOSITIONAL INNOVATIONS OF THE FATHER OF AVANT-GARDE JAZZ

Entering into a discussion of the creative process involved in Mingus's compositional style demands is a challenging task because of the complexity of the improvisational elements involved. One of the intricacies of Mingus's compositions in their final stage was that they often required there to be composition on the part of the musicians in his ensembles within the overall composition through individual improvisation. The difficulty in describing this process using the terms "improvise" and "compose" is that most jazz pieces call for this process, and the discussion of this process usually is presented in a fashion that presents the two concepts as creative poles. Composition is viewed as the methodical planning of a piece of music, usually by one person, with a stable and unchanging end result. A composition, particularly in the western conception of the term as applied to music, is connected to writing.³⁰⁷ In this conception of composition, the composer is analogous to an architect and the composition a blueprint. The end result of this process is a very specific result. If a blueprint is given to several different teams of contractors who are experienced at building the type of structure in the design, they will assemble buildings that are very similar, if not identical. The same holds true for music. If a composition is given to a musical ensemble that is skilled in the style of music in which the piece

³⁰⁷ "composition," *Merriam-Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged*, <http://lawrence.library.astate.edu:2787/mwu> (Accessed December 18, 2006).

is written, they will be able to produce very similar if not identical results as well. Although in either case there may be slight interpretive differences, the most important aspect of the process is that the end result of the process has a high level of consistency by design.

Improvisation is defined as “extemporaneous composition” and “a course pursued in accordance with no previously devised plan, policy, or consideration.”³⁰⁸ This definition needs adjustment to be compatible with music. In music, improvisation requires the same amount of preparation as composition. A well-constructed improvisation, like a well-constructed composition, will reflect a knowledge, vocabulary, or method of assembly that reflects a great degree of knowledge and forethought on the part of the creator. The difference lies in the specific time and space in which the piece of music is assembled. Using this as a working definition, improvisation and composition are closely related processes, and in jazz they can, and usually do, coexist. It is this intersection that has seen very little exploration, and it is, in fact, this intersection that forms one of the key elements of Mingus’s creative genius as a composer.

In jazz, composition and improvisation can exist in the same space in a variety of manners. The most obvious and most central aspect of jazz is the improvisation of the jazz soloist. Although the improvisation of a jazz soloist occurs simultaneously and is in fact dependent on the composition it shares space with, it is usually considered separately by composers, arrangers, improvisers, and scholars. The clear line between composition and improvisation that exists in jazz can be demonstrated by considering any jazz-arranging textbook. Take, for example, Rayburn Wright’s *Inside the Score*, a text that examines the compositional styles of Sammy Nestico, Thad Jones, and Bob Brookmeyer. Wright extensively explores a number of aspects of at least two songs from each composer, but never references any

³⁰⁸ “improvisation” *Merriam-Webster’s Third New International Dictionary Unabridged* <http://lawrence.library.astate.edu:2787/mwu>, (accessed December 18, 2006).

aspect of improvisation even though improvisation is an important part of the performance of the compositions.

Another place that we see the intersection between improvisation and composition in jazz is in the role that is played by the jazz rhythm section.³⁰⁹ Very little attention is directed toward this intersection in jazz scholarship, even though almost every style of jazz since the 1920s has relied on the foundation that is laid by the rhythm section. Typically the rhythm section in a swing, bebop, or latin-jazz-derived style improvises based on a set of chord changes or tonal centers that are established by a composer or arranger. With the exception of those scholars who focus on the advancement of beginning rhythm-section players, the interaction that a jazz rhythm section has with an ensemble or soloist is almost always completely taken for granted. Take for example *The Charlie Parker Omnibook*. This book has acted as a resource for the study of improvisation for years and includes the chord changes that Parker and his rhythm section adhered to during his solos, but gives absolutely no indication of what the rhythm section played. Thus one of the most important characteristics of a jazz solo, the performance of seventy-five percent of the contributors to the performance in the jazz quartet format, is absent from the text.

This separation of composition and improvisation exists in jazz even though the alteration of pre-existing melodic material is one of the most interesting aspects of jazz in general. In Mingus's creative works, it is the blend of improvisation and composition that may be the single most important factor. Because the subject has been so ignored, it is necessary to expand the vocabulary used to forward the discussion. It is fitting that in his autobiography, Mingus discusses himself as a persona who relies on three separate parts to create a whole. His

³⁰⁹ The most common configuration of the jazz rhythm section is piano, bass, and drum set. The jazz rhythm section may also include other instruments that can act in a chord-producing role such as vibraphone, or guitar, and other percussion instruments such as Latin, or African drums.

compositions also call for a triumvirate of roles: the composer, the improviser, and the musical choreographer.

To facilitate the discussion, it is necessary to clarify the exact meaning and usage of the terms as they will appear through this portion of the text, and why it is necessary to modify existing terms and adopt new ones. There are three terms that require very specific detail to move forward with the discussion of Mingus's music. First we must visit the term "composition." For the purposes of this dissertation, it is necessary to define composition as the final result of the creative process in music. Although a composition can and does exist on paper the finalization of the process as it is referred to in this dissertation is sound. This sound does not need to be permanently recorded. Since Mingus's compositions incorporated improvisation as an essential element, his compositions can only be realized in their entirety through performance. Second, the terms composer and improviser are very closely related but not completely interchangeable. It is accepted almost without question that a composer's composition is premeditated. It is my contention that an improviser's improvisation is equally premeditated, his efforts are simply assembled in a different way. Accepting this contention as we closely examine Mingus's works, we will see that he often creates a situation in which composition within a composition is called for in a way that represents variation when compared to jazz improvisation as it is typically discussed. The need to avoid ambiguity and confusion in the discussion of the creative process behind Mingus's compositions calls for the term "choreography" to be adopted and adapted to apply to the directions involved in the creation of a composition.

It is necessary to deviate from standard terminology because use of the term composer has implications that are not in and of themselves negative, but that need to be avoided

nonetheless. As we consider a composer, particularly with the context of western culture, we assume that there is a level of detailed control. As mentioned before, the composer is often seen as a musical architect with detailed control over the final product, even if this is not true in practice. A written product is also part of the implication that comes with the term composer. There are two reasons why this is not an appropriate label for Mingus. First, he often released the detail control of one of his compositions, allowing a tremendous amount of very structured creativity on the part of performers. Second, his compositions were not always written down; there are many cases in which he communicated his parts through dictation, either on the piano or vocally. The reason that Mingus is described here as a musical choreographer is because of the way he managed the musical motions of his musicians. Throughout the history of jazz, performers have followed choreography to different levels in different styles. For example, New Orleans-style jazz may be performed with a very loose choreography in which each musician must fulfill a specific role using specific vocabulary, but has a great deal of choice within the role that they are performing. The first chorus of a song performed with a New Orleans-style ensemble would be choreographed so that the trumpet was playing the main melody, the clarinet would be embellishing the chords in approximately the same register, the trombone would embellish in a lower register than the clarinet, the tuba or bass would play figures that emphasized the roots of the chord changes, and the percussionists would emphasize the beats in the measure. They each have a great deal of latitude in how they fulfill their roles in the ensemble, but they must fill that role.

Contrast this with the musical choreography that occurs within a big band. That ensemble is larger, typically consisting of four trumpets, four trombones, five saxophones, and a rhythm section. The participants in this type of ensemble usually must adhere to very strict musical

movement with little or no possibility of deviance from a specific note. In many songs, such as the Glenn Miller version of “In the Mood” or the Count Basie version of “April in Paris,” even the solos are written out, leaving very little room for interpretation. Thinking in terms of choreography allows the analyst to view these two separate types of works on the same terms. This concept will be invaluable as we examine Mingus’s individual works and his works as a whole.

13.1 “PITHECANTROPUS ERECTUS” AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE AVANT-GARDE

“Pithecanthropus Erectus” is hailed as one of the most important songs in Mingus’s career and as one of the pivotal points in the evolution of avant-garde jazz. In Salim Washington’s article “All the Things You Could Be by Now,” Mingus is painted as “avant-garde’s reluctant father.”³¹⁰ Scott Saul begins his article, “Outrageous Freedom: Charles Mingus and the Invention of the Jazz Workshop,” with the assertion that the point of origination of free jazz was the January 30, 1956, recording of Mingus’s “Pithecanthropus Erectus.” Although Saul focuses primarily on the political aspects his description of the sonic intentions of the album as swerving “away from well-tempered sound in favor of percussive pounding and saxophone blats, wails, and screams” and “a new harnessing of collective energy in jazz, a new language of seemingly unbounded

³¹⁰ Salim Washington, “‘All the Things You Could Be by Now’: *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* and the Limits of Avante-Garde Jazz,” in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* edited by Robert G. O’meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 34.

melodrama”³¹¹ is a description of the musical reorganization that Mingus was engineering in his Jazz Workshop ensembles. Its open challenge to the musical status quo could be seen as early as 1955 with his live recording of a duet with Max Roach. As Charles Hersch shows, the Mingus/Roach collaboration “Percussion Discussion” stretches the existing casts of bass and drums allowing a melodic intermingling that is traditionally not heard from these two instruments.³¹² “Pithecanthropus Erectus” is also important because it shows how Mingus stretches the role of a composer.

It is with “Pithecanthropus Erectus” that we truly see the importance of the introduction of the term choreography. First it is important to understand the the basic chord structure that the song is built on is the blues-based I-IV-V-I structure as evidenced by a Schenkerian-style harmonic reduction. This blues-based chord structure is clear even though it does not follow the twelve bar form and has a number of harmonic embellishments. The following analysis will show how, even though this piece appears to be very complex it still has the blues-based progression at its basis. This interpretaion is reached when one considers the harmonic and melodic structure in conctext.

³¹¹ Scott Saul, “Outageous Freedom: Charles Mingus and the Invention of the Jazz Workshop,” *American Quarterly* 53 no. 3 (2001): http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_quarterly/v053/53.3saul.html

³¹² Charles Hersch, “‘Let Freedom Ring!’: Free Jazz African-American Politics,” *Cultural Critique* 32 (1995-1996): 105.

Figure 42 “Pithecanthropus Erectus” Analysis

The image displays two systems of handwritten musical notation for the piece "Pithecanthropus Erectus". Each system consists of four staves: a top staff for a melodic line, a second staff for a bass line with chord diagrams, and two lower staves for additional instruments. The first system covers measures 1 through 12, with chord changes labeled above the staff: F#m7, D#m7, G#m7-5, C7-9, D#m7/F, D#m7/D, E#7-9, A#7#11, G#m7-5, C7-9, F#m7, and D#m7. The second system covers measures 13 through 24, with chord changes labeled above the staff: A#m7, D#7, G#m7, G#m7-5 C7, F#m7, B#7, F#m7, B#7, F#m7, B#7, G#m7-5, C7-9, and F#m7. The notation includes various musical symbols such as accidentals, stems, beams, and slurs, along with handwritten annotations and chord diagrams.

The beginning of the song gives little foreshadowing to what is to come. It begins unassumingly with the horns playing sustained notes, but the way that Mingus has dictated the roles of the instruments seems to challenge the “frontline” role that the horns would ordinarily play. Even though all of the instruments of the ensemble play through the first section of the piece, Mingus had carefully crafted the role of the horns through his use of contrasting sustained and rapid, jagged melodic material and ensemble dynamics to create a shifting melodic focus. At times it seems as if Mingus is backing the horns and at other times it is alto saxophonist

Figure 44 Melodic Material for the first B section of “Pithecanthropus Erectus”

Handwritten musical score for the first B section of "Pithecanthropus Erectus". The score includes staves for Alto Saxophone (A. SX.), Tenor Saxophone (T. SX.), Piano (PNO.), Bass, and Double Bass (D. S.).

The A. SX. and T. SX. parts feature melodic lines with slurs and a triplet. The piano part has slash marks indicating accompaniment. The bass part has a simple line of notes. The double bass part has slash marks. Chord symbols are written below the piano and bass staves.

Chord symbols: D⁷, G⁷PMAG⁷, G⁷MIN7-5 C⁷, F⁷MIN⁷, B⁷.

14

19

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

19

22

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

22

24

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

24

27

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

27

A. SX.
 T. SX.
 PNO.
 BASS.
 D. S.

8D7 FMIN7 8D7
 8D7 FMIN7 8D7

A. SX.
 T. SX.
 PNO.
 BASS.
 D. S.

FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7
 FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a jazz ensemble. It is organized into two systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Alto Saxophone (A. SX.), Tenor Saxophone (T. SX.), Piano (PNO.), Bass, and Drums (D. S.). The second system includes staves for Alto Saxophone (A. SX.), Tenor Saxophone (T. SX.), Piano (PNO.), Bass, and Drums (D. S.). The score features various musical notations, including triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings. Chord symbols such as FMIN7 and 8D7 are written below the piano and bass staves. The notation is in a 4/4 time signature.

Mingus’s dedication to jazz as an ensemble process begins to surface in this section, although the evidence of his importance to avant-garde jazz has not yet appeared. The tension of this section finds its release in the second “A” section, which is identical to the first. It is in the second “B”

section, which is perhaps more accurately labeled “B prime,” that we see how Mingus introduces the concept of avant-garde within a meticulously prepared ensemble framework, the most important part of which may have been the drum-set performance of Dannie Richmond. Mingus would stretch the boundaries of jazz rhythm and tonality in his work with Richmond. The drummer was so influenced by Mingus’s musical concepts that Mingus considered him a musical son.³¹³ Over the course of a very long-term musical relationship, Richmond would become one of Mingus’s most important collaborators. With Richmond, he worked out a concept in which they were able to place emphasis before and after the beat in a sort of musical spiral. Mingus labeled this concept as “rotary perception.” The rhythmic concepts represented by rotary perception fueled the free jazz movement,³¹⁴ and is clearly displayed in the B prime section of “Pithecanthropus Erectus.” Mingus creates the illusion of musical chaos through the careful assembly of a number of advanced techniques into a precisely crafted ensemble collaboration that centers around the concept of rotary perception. The most important aspect of understanding the concept is that multiple points of emphasis can exist simultaneously and that those points can be manipulated so that they are seemingly incompatible. Although it is not possible to completely and accurately represent this concept on paper, in its simplest form it is represented through the simultaneous existence of 4/4 and 3/4 time. It differs from a three against four feel because, depending how you perceive the passage, it is either wholly in 4/4 time or wholly in 3/4 time, as is partially shown through Figures 45 and 46.

³¹³ Brian Priestly, *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 159.

³¹⁴ Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 200), 178.

Figure 45 Rotary Perception Example perceived in 3/4 time

The first system of musical notation shows a melody in 3/4 time. It begins with a 3-measure rest, followed by a quarter note, and then a triplet of eighth notes. The time signature is 3/4.

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COMPING IN A B FLAT TONALITY EMPHASIZING QUARTER NOTES

The piano accompaniment consists of a steady pattern of quarter notes in 3/4 time, represented by diagonal slashes on the staff.

The second system of musical notation shows a melody in 3/4 time. It begins with a 3-measure rest, followed by a quarter note, and then a triplet of eighth notes. The time signature is 3/4.

The first system of a full band arrangement includes three parts: T. SX. (Tenor Saxophone) in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 6-sharp sign; PNO. (Piano) in treble clef with a key signature of one flat; and BASS in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 6-sharp sign. The T. SX. part features a melody with a 3-measure rest and a triplet, while the PNO. and BASS parts provide accompaniment.

The second system of a full band arrangement includes three parts: T. SX. (Tenor Saxophone) in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 6-sharp sign; PNO. (Piano) in treble clef with a key signature of one flat; and BASS in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 6-sharp sign. The T. SX. part features a melody with a 3-measure rest and a triplet, while the PNO. and BASS parts provide accompaniment.

Figure 46 Rotary Perception Example Perceived in 4/4 time

The image displays two systems of handwritten musical notation. The first system is labeled 'TENOR SAX.', 'PIANO', and 'BASS'. The second system is labeled 'T. SAX.', 'PNO.', and 'BASS'. Both systems are in 4/4 time. The Tenor Saxophone part features a melodic line with various rhythmic patterns and triplet markings. The Piano part consists of a steady accompaniment of eighth notes, with some triplet markings. The Bass part provides a rhythmic foundation with eighth notes and triplet markings. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as stems, beams, and brackets.

This section exists in the rotary perception state until it is developed fully into a musical section that is not beholden to time or pitch center, although it eventually gravitates, via a very traditional supertonic, to dominant progression in F minor. In the second B section, McLean also plays saxophone in a manner that is not able to be translated into western notation, another example of how Mingus's ensembles pushed the boundaries of jazz technique. The accompaniment for each of the solo sections follows the same pattern, giving each soloist the opportunity to use the varying sections as a foil for his own creative energy. Mingus also shows his ensemble ethic as he designs backing for the soloist that uses the ensemble in every possible manner, including using his own voice as part of the texture.

13.2 MINGUS'S COMPOSITIONAL CONCEPTS

As stated, it was Mingus's unique ability to incorporate improvisation into his compositions that marked his most important pieces. Mingus seemed to be able to get more out of his musicians than many of his contemporaries. This can be related to the way he moved his music from his own conception to reality. This is impossible to discern solely from the music, but it can be reconstructed partially through the testimony of former members of his ensemble. In recent writings Mingus's composing and leadership has been characterized as intuitive genius, even receiving the label "primitive" by some writers. The application of the term is given ample space, but it does not speak to the essence of Mingus's character as a composer, musician, or artist. This "primitive" is characterized as someone who "either willfully ignores the rules of art, or can't or won't learn them."³¹⁵ This is a curious way to describe an artist; it harkens back to the "noble savage" description of musicians because they are versed in a set of rules that are different from the rules that are used by scholars. The term primitive is an unfortunate choice, at best. Mingus expressed emotion through music in a way that had not been done before. If Mingus's music is to be placed in a chronological framework, the term "primitive" should be replaced by "advanced." After all, his music was as acute an expression of raw emotion as any music of any style that preceded it, if not more so. If the music of Ellington was a magnifying glass that exposed the soul, then Mingus's music was a microscope. Regardless of how well explained, the use of the word "primitive" implies a recession in intellect. Even if this recession is overcome, it implies that the primitive began in an inferior state to those who are not considered primitive. The next part of the definition of a primitive calls into question the use, or

³¹⁵ Todd S. Jenkins, *I Know What I Know: The Music of Charles Mingus*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006) ix.

ignorance, of the rules of art as evidenced by an artistic product that demonstrates an ignorance of those rules. Any master of an artistic field is considered a master because he easily manipulates the rules that provide the structure necessary for most people to coherently participate in the act of artistic creation. The master, an individual who gives the world an advancement that is imaginable, and perhaps even understandable, by only a few, realizes that the rules are only an illusion. For artists at this level, the rules can be adhered to or manipulated to serve a purpose, instead of having their works manipulated by the rules. Mingus was such an artist, and one of the ways that he manipulated the rules of composition was by abandoning of the traditionally used methods of notation.

13.2.1 Something Old, Something New

Mingus was unique because of the way he choreographed his ensembles. He molded together existing elements in ways that created a new musical experience for listeners. One of the elements that Mingus used was the bebop sensibilities of musicians who were reaching prominence in the 1950s and beyond. The horn players that Mingus gravitated toward were always highly influenced by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Musicians like Charles McPherson, John Handy, Jaki Byard, and Charlie Mariano were all known for an approach that was influenced primarily by the vocabulary of Parker. He also gravitated toward trumpeters whose facility and range allowed them to attempt Gillespie-like feats of acrobatics such as Ted Curson, or Lonnie Hillyer, although his disappointment in their ability to execute such feats led him to sometimes omit the trumpet altogether. His consistent choice of Parker- and Gillespie-influenced musicians, combined with the repertoire that he often selected, made it seem that, at

times, he was trying to re-create the great Massey Hall concert.³¹⁶ It was not, however, his use of these musicians that was unique. By the 1950s, bebop was the musical vocabulary that was standard for any musician serious about performing as a jazz artist. Mingus often wrote in disgust about musicians who mastered bebop as performed in the late 1940s but did not use their talents to further the music. In fact one of the songs of his *Mingus Dynasty* album was titled “Gunslinging Bird,” the unabridged title of which is “If Bird were a gunslinger there would be a lot of dead copy cats.” Although it was not written to portray this topic musically, he wrote extensively in his liner notes about how disturbed he was over the assimilation without innovation of the style that Charlie Parker was largely responsible for. In the introduction to his original manuscript of *Beneath the Underdog*, available through the Library of Congress, Mingus’s attacks focused on a specific, very well-respected saxophone player. He vehemently expressed his disappointment in the lack of innovation that the alto player had shown.³¹⁷ His feelings about the problems of copying Parker verbatim did not, however, diminish his appreciation for musicians who were well versed and practiced in Parker’s vocabulary. One of the compliments that Mingus paid John Handy right before he hired him was the excited exclamation, “Bird was back!”³¹⁸

13.2.2 Pushing Past the Ghost of Charlie Parker

In practice Mingus would change the way that musicians played through the musical settings that he provided for them. The use of any musical vocabulary, particularly improvised

³¹⁶ Jimmy Owens, interviewed by Ernest Horton, June 4, 2004.

³¹⁷ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* unpublished manuscript version, Box 45/1, The Charles Mingus collection, Music Divisions, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 103.

³¹⁸ John Handy, interviewed by Ernest Horton, June 22, 2004.

music, is reactionary. If a musician sounds the way Charlie Parker sounds, it is because he understands the musical reaction to a given stimulus. For the musicians who Mingus worked with through most of his career, a Charlie Parker–influenced reaction was natural. To change the reaction, Mingus would alter the stimulus to one that Parker had never encountered, and therefore the reaction from the musicians was influenced, but not based, on the musical vocabulary of bebop. Mingus took pride in his ability to expand the musical horizons of the musicians in his ensembles. He was fully aware of the effects performing his music had on musicians such as Jaki Byard or Charles McPherson, even saying, “I finally got to them” when he was able to get reactions that were outside the bebop vocabulary they relied on.³¹⁹ He would use a number of methods, including forcing the musicians to find the chord progressions without the use of written music. This technique spurred a type of creativity and innovation, but it was also like walking a tightrope without a net. For alto saxophonist John Handy, this was a point of contention. Handy felt that the music would have been learned more easily, and much more accurately, if the musicians would have had access to written parts before the recordings. Handy requested parts and he felt that this request was the first glimpse of the tension that would characterize his and Mingus’s brief professional relationship. Because of the lack of accuracy bred into Mingus’s method of aural transmission, Handy felt that some of his recorded performances with Mingus were embarrassing and humiliating; it was as if Mingus was purposely sabotaging the group’s ability to perform.³²⁰ There was, in fact, a measure of truth to what Handy said; sometimes Mingus would teach musicians two different parts because he did not want a particular song performed exactly the same way every time.

³¹⁹ Charles Mingus, “Charles Mingus Interviewed by Nesuhi Ertegün,” Charles Mingus, ‘Passions of a Man: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961.’ compact disc, Atlantic Recording Corporation, R2 72871, 1997.

³²⁰ John Handy, interviewed by Ernest Horton, June 22, 2004.

Even at its best, the process that Mingus used to teach musicians was a tedious one; he would sing each musician their individual lines. Again, this method had problems. Whether by accident or design, as Mingus taught the musicians a new song over the course of approximately a week, he often changed a part from one day to the next, which added frustration to the process.³²¹ However, for those who were able to bear the frustration, the final results were worth the slow and tedious procedure. Jimmy Owens describes the work he did with Mingus on a project titled *Music Written for Monterey 1965, Not Heard...Played in its Entirety at UCLA*, as genius and as the most creative period of his career. Tuba and baritone sax player Howard Johnson describes the process the men went through to learn Mingus's music. For the song *Don't Let It Happen Here*, the band learned the music one line at a time, and each member started on a note that was one octave below the note that the previous player ended on. The pieces were played as individual solo parts, and then they were joined together to form what Johnson called "a great antiphonal melody."³²² This method of musical creation is reflexive of most of Mingus's work from 1955 until 1970, when his stature as a great artist and demands for his music were too great for him to spend the necessary time with musicians to develop compositions in this manner.

Music Written for Monterey 1965, Not Heard...Played in its Entirety at UCLA is a prime example of how Mingus was able to achieve such a significant level of intimacy within his musical groups. At the core of Mingus's most important recordings was Dannie Richmond. Richmond's ability as a drummer was almost entirely forged within Mingus's group from beginning to end, and their musical link was almost telepathic. When Richmond was

³²¹ Jimmy Owens, interviewed by Ernest Horton, June 4, 2004.

³²² Howard Johnson, interview by Ernest Horton, June 28, 2006.

unavailable, it was impossible for Mingus to find a drummer who could replace him.³²³ Mingus would make up the second part of the rhythm section. Although he was far better known and skilled at bass, he would also play piano with his ensembles.

Mingus also usually centered his group on a few horns. For the Monterey recording, the core horns were made up of Charles McPherson and Lonnie Hillyer. This group, consisting of Mingus, Richmond, McPherson, and Hillyer, performed Mingus's music internationally for five years before *Music Written for Monterey 1965, Not Heard...Played in its Entirety as UCLA* was recorded.³²⁴ This core quartet learned Mingus's music by listening to the musicians they were replacing for a two-week period when the Curson/Dolph horn section was transitioning out of the ensemble. There were also some things that were written out. When Mingus added to this core group, he would build the rest of the parts using the music of the core group as a foundation. Most of what McPherson and Hillyer played was unchanged when Mingus would add additional horns. This type of augmentation was typically reserved for record dates and special occasions.³²⁵ Each of the parts was tailored to the specific abilities of the ensemble. This was a very slow process, and at the time of the 1965 recording, Mingus had only four songs prepared and would "fire" the band, perform a few songs with just the quartet, then rehire the band to finish the concert.

This process produced a group that was very sensitive to Mingus's musical concepts and very musically agile. This agility is especially apparent when listening to the spoken-word pieces that were an important part of his repertoire. The way that he constructed his musical pieces was very similar to the way he constructed his ensembles: There is always a musical core.

³²³ Charles Mingus, "Charles Mingus Interviewed by Nesuhi Ertegun," Charles Mingus, "Passions of a Man: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961." compact disc, Atlantic Recording Corporation, R2 72871, 1997.

³²⁴ Another frequent addition to the core group during this period was pianist Jaki Byard.

³²⁵ Charles McPherson, interviewed by Ernest Horton, July 1, 2004.

Harmonically the core to most of his pieces was the fundamental I-IV-V-I structure of the blues. Even when the musical core was not the blues, the concept of a core artistic idea or framework acting as a catalyst to a larger artistic composition was one of the ideas that Mingus used exhaustively.

Mingus's "The Clown" is an example of one of his groups manipulating a short motive and improvising. The recording of "The Clown" relied heavily on the groups ability to spontaneously create a group composition. In addition to the spontaneous composition of the band the spoken word was also being created using a similarly choreographed framework. Although the speaker was improvising he was guided by Mingus's framework for the story idea. The narration in "The Clown" is another example of Mingus's sense of literary symbolism and artistic modernism. "The Clown" is a tragic tale of a clown who degrades himself to become famous by enduring self-inflicted wounds to entertain his audience. The more pain he endures, the more popular he becomes, but the material he performs takes its toll on him. Mingus represents the Clown's early career, when he is less popular but much happier, by saying that the Clown saw many colors. As the Clown's career calls for him to rely on more dangerous slapstick gags, the colors turn to gray. This story was actually a message was extended to jazz musicians, who Mingus felt were engaging in the musical version of this sadomasacistic, humiliating behavior. The evidence for this lies in a 1953 article in *Downbeat* in which Mingus said "the clown has taken over jazz. Good jazz is when the leader jumps on the piano, waves his arms, and yells. Fine jazz is when a tenorman lifts his foot in the air. Great jazz is when he heaves a piercing note for 32 bars and collapses on his hands and knees. A pure genius of jazz is manifested when he and the rest of the orchestra run around the room while the rhythm section grimaces and dances around their instruments. The impresarios bill these circus artists as

13.2.3 Avant-Garde versus Free Jazz

It was the Curson/Dolphie quartet that was the apex of this period. It was with this group that Mingus transcended the musical boundaries of time and space, not by forgoing the conventions of musical logic, but by manipulating them so thoroughly that instead of boundaries that dictated the direction in which the group must move, the conventions could be used like clay, given whatever shape the group chose.

This is another reason why Mingus and the groups that he led, should be considered advanced and not “primitive,” and why, in Mingus’s case, the term “free jazz” does not apply. One need only compare Orenette Colemans “Free Jazz,” performed by a double quartet of some of the most appreciated musicians in jazz, to Mingus’s “What Love” to realize why. “Free jazz” is truly just that: the ensemble cohesion is almost indiscernible. The musicians play off each other, and the music that happens is a cascade of random chance. The individual is given reactionary freedom, and the unifying ensemble concept, if there is one, is buried deep within the intuitive and unfettered musical communication that is going on. Coleman has set up an atmosphere that produces compositions with a level of musical power parallel to Mingus’s, but “Free Jazz” seems virtually unchoreographed. The ensemble for this recording was put together expressly for this situation, and the newness that the members felt was part of the creative process.

The concept that created “Free Jazz” is almost the opposite of the process that gave us “What Love.” This piece is the prime example of the malleability of tradition in the hands of masters. Consider how Curson and Dolphy phrase the melody; they perform in a way that is impossible to notate, and yet they play the melody in unison and the phrases seem totally natural. Only when listened to from a mathematical standpoint would one even notice that they

have transcended the boundaries of western musical time and space because the most important and noticeable aspect of the composition is the musicality. Through this composition, Mingus and his group communicate, and the structure they use to form the basis of this piece, the chord changes to “What Is This Thing Called Love,” bends until it is unrecognizable but is never abandoned. A portion of this song moves so far away from its origin that, instead of music, it seems as if Mingus and Dolphy are conversing through their instruments in a language whose literal meaning is just out of reach of the listener.

To clarify the point look at the opposing way that Coleman and Mingus use the musical convention of melody. In Coleman’s “Free Jazz” there is little or no single musical line material that asserts itself as a melody. Melodically this piece is a cascade of non-repetitious sound. Harmonically “Free Jazz” is also completely without form. This is due largely to Coleman’s musical grounding in Rhythm and Blues. In a conversation with Nathan Davis Coleman said that he did not have a jazz background.³²⁷ This opened up a completely different set of harmonic possibilities for Coleman. In contrast Dolphy, Curson, and Mingus were thoroughly grounded in the conventions of jazz and relied strongly on the harmonic and melodic vocabulary of that style of music as a springboard to the innovation they achieved through pieces like “What Love.” They were able to move completely outside of western musical conventions, but they were also all able to manipulate those conventions in a way that was almost telepathic.

Although Mingus appreciated the way Coleman was forcing musicians to grow out of the Charlie Parker mold they felt so comfortable in, he also had a level of contempt for the seemingly structureless music because of how blindly the critics accepted the musical style without any understanding of the terms under which it was created. Once, to prove that the

³²⁷ Nathan Davis, Personal interview by Ernest A. Horton March 20, 2007.

critics, and perhaps some of the musicians involved in free jazz, were not what they seemed, Mingus had a group of eight-year-olds with no musical experience perform at the Village Vanguard behind a curtain while his own band pantomimed. When the audience applauded, he exposed the rouse, making a powerful statement about the superficiality and ignorance that existed among the critics.³²⁸ This incident achieved its purpose, which was to show the absurdity of accepting a musical style without understanding it, and it alienated the critics, but it had the same effect on the audience that attended the event, which brings us to the issue of one of the greatest limitations Mingus put on his own musical potential—the way he dealt with people.

The most famous story centering on Mingus's wild mood swings and his often violent treatment of musicians was an incident with trombonist Jimmy Knepper. Knepper had been a loyal sideman to Mingus for years, and his only offense was his proximity to the band leader during a period of great stress. Confronted with an eminent failure at a Town Hall concert in 1963, he hit Knepper in the mouth, causing an injury that permanently affected his ability to perform on trombone.³²⁹

Although he was never physically attacked, John Handy worked with Mingus for only a short period because of the atmosphere he created. Handy recalled incidents in which he found himself at odds with the leader because of his comments degrading Horace Parlan's physical handicap and verbal attacks on a woman that Handy found so offensive he would not repeat them.³³⁰ This aspect of Mingus's personality was also experienced by Jimmy Owens in the time he worked with Mingus. "I was always prepared against Mingus in case he was going to do anything [like he did to Jimmy Knepper] to me, I never had any real altercations with him

³²⁸ Richard Williams, *Long Distance Calling: Writings on Jazz*, (London: Aurum Press Ltd., 2000), 180.

³²⁹ Priestley, 138-140.

³³⁰ John Handy, interviewed by Ernest Horton, June 22, 2004.

physically...we cursed each other out.”³³¹ Even McPherson, who worked with Mingus on and off for 12 years, noted, “He would get into problems with people because he was candid. He would be confrontational, he was honest, sometimes to his own detriment.”³³² Mingus would begin to mellow later in his career. Trombonist Sam Burtis, who subbed for Jimmy Knepper, did not spend a great deal of time with Mingus, but did feel respected on the bandstand and felt the treatment he received was reflective of the way he treated Mingus and his music in performance. When Burtis played with Mingus, the music was written and the band just played.³³³ This was a different atmosphere for the musicians, but it also yielded a different musical product. Another important story that conveys the emotional burden that many of Mingus musicians had to bear occurred with Eric Dolphy. Dolphy was probably Mingus’s most important collaborator, but a knife attack ended their relationship. The attack occurred at Town Hall in New York, and Dolphy immediately left the Mingsu group and flew to Europe. Nathan Davis was with Dolphy the next day in Paris and he conveyed and was there to witness how disturbed Dolphy was by the incident.³³⁴

13.2.4 Message and Madness

The passion that Mingus subjected his musicians to, both positive and negative, was expressed through his music. His later music deals with that passion in a completely different way. This is easily discernable when comparing “There Once Was a Holding Company Called

³³¹ Jimmy Owens, interviewed by Ernest Horton, June 4, 2004.

³³² Charles McPherson, Interviewed by Ernest Horton, July 1, 2004.

³³³ Sam Burtis, Email correspondence with Ernest Horton, June 27, 2006.

³³⁴ Nathan Davis, Personal interview by Ernest A. Horton March 20, 2007.

Old America,” recorded on *Music Written for Monterey 1965, Not Heard...Played in its Entirety as UCLA* to a slightly retooled and retitled recording called “The Shoes of the Fisherman’s Wife Are Some Jive Ass Slippers,” recorded on *Let My Children Hear Music*, which was recorded in 1972. This first thing that shows the displacement of passion that defined the piece in its original recording was the title exchange. The original recording was performed with a set of tunes that were titled and designed to make a very intense political statement. Mingus did not give specific details on two of the titles, but “They Trespassed in the Sacred Land of the Souix” makes a powerful statement, regardless of the music it is attached to. Before starting “There Once Was a Holding Company Called Old American,” Mingus gives a brief statement about the irony of the control that America has over the world economy, using alcohol distribution as an example. Perhaps the most powerful statement on the album was the spoken-word portion that was made on “Don’t Let it Happen Here.”

One day they came and they took the communists,
And I said nothing because I was not a communist.
Then one day they came and they took the people of the Jewish faith,
And I said nothing because I have no faith left.
One day they came and they took the unionists,
And I said nothing because I was not a unionist.
One day they burned the Catholic churches,
And I said nothing because I was born a Protestant.
Then one day they came and they took me!
And I could say nothing because I was as guilty as they were
For not speaking out and saying that all men had a right
To freedom on any land.
I was as guilty of genocide as you.
All of you.
For you know when a man is free,
And when you should set him free from his slavery.
So I charge you all with genocide.
The same as I.

The sentiment that was first expressed in this poem did not originate with Mingus, but this in no way diminishes its power. On the 1972 version, Mingus changed the title of the piece and created an album that did not have nearly the political context. Additionally the 1972 version was the product of an ensemble that was put together specifically for a studio session and had no

more invested in the music than a few short days of recording and rehearsal. The second recording was a great deal more polished and precise, however it lacked the intangible effect that weeks of rehearsal combined with music conceived to draw every inch of musicianship that you have to offer created. It is ridiculous to say that one is better or worse, but the difference is clear. The projects that Mingus headed in the seventies were still works of creative genius, but, as seen when comparing these two pieces, the more generic, less intimate relationship that Mingus had with the musicians affected the compositions. The unmistakable thumbprint, the personality that Mingus imparted into each of his pieces, was still there but in a different, perhaps more distant way.

14.0 CONCLUSION

This dissertation represents the opportunity to visit topics that have not been a part of the Mingus canon up to this point. The first chapter of this work discussed the multiple factors that influenced the direction and intensity of his career. It looked not only at the musical influences in his life, but also at some of the non-musicians that were models for his career and at some of the philosophical aspects of his early development. Additionally it examined the impact that music education in its many facets had on Mingus's development. It is made clear through this aspect of the dissertation that Mingus's negative and positive experiences were equally important in shaping his professional career. This dissertation also extensively studied the conditions that surrounded his development as a musician in the Los Angeles music scene. Using the first hand accounts of those that were directly involved produced a very detailed and in-depth look not only at the development of Mingus's career, but also at the circumstances that surrounded it.

I also used Mingus's own words and thoughts as they existed in his unedited autobiography. This process was particularly important when observing his stance on the issues of black pride. Although there are a few scattered interviews that address his feelings on this issue there is no better source to find this information than the Charles Mingus collection in the Library of Congress. This work also brought to light the brilliant fashion in which Mingus used sex as a metaphor for race relations in the United States.

In addition to looking at Mingus's life, this dissertation also closely examines how Mingus expresses the paradox of race through music. Mingus's tendencies as a traditionalist who had great respect for those who blazed the trail before him was established by thoroughly investigating the connections with jazz masters Louis Jordan, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker. By looking at each of these in a focused manner and comparing their work to Mingus's early efforts, we see that there is no denying his grasp of the roots and past innovations in jazz. As this section developed, it became clear that Mingus used tradition to foster innovation. This was established by linking Mingus's innovations to the blues and the artists who influenced him. Taken as a whole, Mingus's life and music gives us the unique opportunity to examine some tremendously important paradoxes, make some tentative conclusion, and also unearth some very important questions.

As we consider some of the paradoxes that Mingus faced, it seems as if every aspect of the topic for which we get a firm answer unearths another question. The paradoxes that Mingus faced in his life changed significantly in the six decades since he began his musical career in California. One question that surfaces is how did the change in America's social atmosphere effect the artistic process? In Mingus's case there are many concrete examples of how this was expressed. As his career began in the forties, Mingus was fully aware of the injustice that he faced because society saw him as black. Due to his father's attitudes and the racial stratified views that he espoused to Mingus at home, he was fully and personally aware of how vitriolic attitudes could be towards blacks. In his early career, when it was impossible to assert ethnic pride as it is today, Mingus would fully use his individual ethnic identity, heritage, and physical appearance, to advance himself. Because of this, Mingus knew that the color barrier was an artificial one, and this must have been magnified by the denial of success that he

experienced as a member of the Stars of Swing, and the pain of his experience being replaced in the Red Norvo group, and perceiving his replacement as being based solely on race.

Mingus was also on the first wave as American society changed due the realization by African Americans that change would only effectively arrive through self assertion. His choice of song titles and poetic works in the middle portion of his career reflect that he was a part of this assertion. Choosing names for songs like “Fables of Faubus” and “Remember Rockefeller at Attica,” and the content of pieces like “Eclipse,” was Mingus’s way of asserting a social presence that called attention to societal injustices. Mingus was also at the forefront of social self assertion as he promoted his works through his own record company and resisted societies compulsion to group people according to racial constructs on and off the bandstand.

Another important question that we see exemplified through Mingus’s life is - did he possessed an intellect that would have fostered innovation regardless of circumstances or was it the pressure of race in the United States that pushed him in his artistic endeavors? In Mingus we see a man whose ability and desire for musical excellence were undeniable. From the time he began to play cello he supplied evidence that he had a heightened understanding of music. He also had a tremendous amount of determination, as evidenced by his willingness to seek out the best teachers and playing situations. You can also see this in his early practice and rehearsal habits. He continued to provide evidence to his dedication to music through his career and even continued to create when he was in the final stages of Lou Gerhig’s disease. There is no doubt that Mingus would have been a talented musician under any circumstances. There is also no doubt that had he not been forced into the role of black musician, and more importantly black American, that he would not have had the creative impact that he had on American society. In

Mingus's case being cast as black was a particularly important influence because of his multi-ethnic background. One needs only to examine Mingus's full canon to see that what he was representing in his music was not just the African American experience. Just as Mingus was too complex for a single label, the influences that his music absorbed and reflected were also too complex for a single label. His pieces clearly rise above classification. But part of what makes them so important is the process of rising above classification. In summation, the most important thing to take from an examination of Mingus's life and music is that he refused to be defined or defeated by the paradoxes he faced.

APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTIONS

This appendix will contain the completed transcriptions. Each of the transcriptions has been included in part or in its entirety at some point within the main text of dissertation.

Alto Sax. **Dizzy Atmosphere**

♩ = 258

Charlie Parker's solo

FM7 Dm7 Gm7 C7 FM7 Dm7 Gm7 C7

5 F7 F7/A B^b7 Bdim7 Am7 Dm7 Gm7 C7

9 FM7 Dm7 Gm7 C7 FM7 Dm7 Gm7 C7

13 F7 F7/A B^b7 Bdim7 Gm7 C7 FM7 B7

18 B7 B^b7 B^b7 A7

22 G[#]7 Gm7 C7 FM7 Dm7

26 Gm7 C7 FM7 Dm7 Gm7 C7 F7 F7/A

30 B^b7 Bdim7 Gm7 C7 FM7 FM7

Tenor Sax.

Boff Boff

Coleman Hawkins Tenor Solo

$\bullet = 210$

C Am7 Dm7 G7 C Am7

Dm7 G7 C7 Fm7 F#m7-5 Em7 A7 Dm G7

C Am7 Dm7 G7 C Am7

Dm7 G7 C7 Fm7 F#m7-5 Dm7 G7

C E7 E7 A7

A7 D7 D7 G7 G7

C Am7 Dm7 G7 C Am7 Dm7 G7

C7 F7 F#m7-5 Dm7 G7 C

34

Extrasensory Perception

Lee Konitz Alto Sax. melody

Mingus

♩ = 208

FM9 FM9 Em7-5 A7-9

6 G7 C7 Am7 D7 Gm7 C7

10 FM9 Dm7 Em7-5 A7-9 Gm7

15 C7 FM9 FM9 Em7 A7

20 DM9 Em7-5 A7-9 F#m7-5 B7-9 Gm7 C7 FM9

26 FM9 FM9 Em7-5 A7-9 Gm7

31 C7 Am7 A7 Gm7 C7

Alto Sax.

Marionette

Billy Bauer

♩ = 172

6

12

17

21

26

31

SCORE

INTUITION

TRISTANO TRANS. HORTON

♩=200

ALTO SAX.

Musical staff for Alto Saxophone in the first system, showing four measures of rests.

PIANO

Musical staff for Piano in the first system, showing a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

A. SX.

Musical staff for Alto Saxophone in the second system, showing four measures of rests.

PNO.

Musical staff for Piano in the second system, showing a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

A. SX.

Musical staff for Alto Saxophone in the third system, showing four measures of rests.

PNO.

Musical staff for Piano in the third system, showing a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

INTUITION

A. SX. 16

PNO. 16

This system contains measures 16 through 19. The saxophone part (A. SX.) is represented by a staff with a treble clef and a flat key signature, showing rests for all four measures. The piano part (PNO.) consists of two staves: the right hand has a melodic line starting with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes, and ending with a quarter rest in measure 19; the left hand has rests for all four measures.

A. SX. 17

PNO. 17

This system contains measures 20 through 23. The saxophone part (A. SX.) is represented by a staff with a treble clef and a flat key signature, showing rests for all four measures. The piano part (PNO.) consists of two staves: the right hand has a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes, including a quarter rest in measure 22; the left hand has rests for all four measures.

A. SX. 21

PNO. 21

This system contains measures 24 through 27. The saxophone part (A. SX.) is represented by a staff with a treble clef and a flat key signature, showing rests for all four measures. The piano part (PNO.) consists of two staves: the right hand has a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes, including a quarter rest in measure 25; the left hand has rests for all four measures.

INTUITION

A. SX. 25

PNO. 25

A. SX. 29

PNO. 29

A. SX. 33

PNO. 33

INTUITION

A. SX.

57 1

PNO.

57 1

SCORE

I'LL REMEMBER APRIL

RED NOVO TRIO, TRANS. HORTON

$\text{♩} = 72$ G MA17

COMPING INDICATED BY CHORD CHANGE OVER PART

VIBRAPHONE

GUITAR

BASS

G MIN7

VIB.

GTR.

BASS

A MIN7-5

VIB.

GTR.

BASS

I'LL REMEMBER APRIL

07 8MIN7-5 E7 A MIN7 07

15

VIOLIN

GUITAR

BASS

G MAJ7 G7 C MIN7 F7

18

VIOLIN

GUITAR

BASS

8D MAJ7 G MIN7 C MIN7 F7

22

VIOLIN

GUITAR

BASS

8D7 I'LL REMEMBER APRIL 07 GMA7

VIOLIN

GUITAR

BASS

GMA7 F#MIN7 B7 EMA7 AMIN7 07

VIOLIN

GUITAR

BASS

GMA7

VIOLIN

GUITAR

BASS

I'LL REMEMBER APRIL

40

G MIN7 Am

VIB.

GTR.

BASS

45

D7 Bm E7 A MIN7 D7

VIB.

GTR.

BASS

50

E D MA3 7

VIB.

GTR.

BASS

I'LL REMEMBER APRIL

VIOLIN (VIB.)

54

EDMIN7

GUITAR (GTR.)

54

BASS

VIOLIN (VIB.)

58

BD MIN7-5

ED7

C MIN7-5

GUITAR (GTR.)

58

BD MIN7-5

ED7

C MIN7-5

BASS

VIOLIN (VIB.)

61

F7

BD MIN7-5

ED7

GUITAR (GTR.)

61

F7

BD MIN7-5

ED7

BASS

I'LL REMEMBER APRIL

VIOLIN (VIB.)

64

APMA7

APMA7

OPMIN7

GUITAR (GTR.)

64

APMA7

APMA7

BASS

VIOLIN (VIB.)

67

G7

OPMA7

APMIN7

GUITAR (GTR.)

67

G7

OPMA7

APMIN7

BASS

Handwritten musical score for the first system, featuring three staves: Violin (VIB.), Guitar (GTR.), and Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The guitar and bass parts are marked with slash symbols, indicating they are to be played as a continuous texture. The bass line includes some specific notes and rests.

Chord progressions for the first system:

- Measure 1: D^bM7
- Measure 2: G^b7
- Measure 3: C^bM7

Handwritten musical score for the second system, featuring three staves: Violin (VIB.), Guitar (GTR.), and Bass. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The guitar and bass parts are marked with slash symbols. The bass line includes some specific notes and rests.

Section title: I'LL REMEMBER APRIL

Chord progressions for the second system:

- Measure 1: C^bM7
- Measure 2: B^bM7
- Measure 3: E^b7
- Measure 4: A^bM7

APMA7 GMIN7 C7

77

VIOLIN

GUITAR

BASS

FMA7 BbMIN7 Eb7 APMA7

80

VIOLIN

GUITAR

BASS

I'LL REMEMBER APRIL

A^bMIN7

34

VIB.

GTR.

BASS

B^bMIN7-5

E^b7

G^bMIN7-5

38

VIB.

GTR.

BASS

F7 B♭MIN7 E♭7

Vib. 

GTR. 

BASS 

SCORE

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

CHARLES MINUS TRANS HORTON

$\text{♩} = 170$

The musical score is arranged in five staves. The top staff is for Alto Saxophone, the second for Tenor Saxophone, the third for Piano, the fourth for Bass, and the fifth for Drum Set. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 170. The Alto Sax, Piano, and Tenor Sax parts share a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, while the Bass provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Drum Set part shows a consistent rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

GMIN7-5

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

C7-9

FMIN7

DPMAG7

APMIN7

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A. SX. 

T. SX. 

PNO. 

BASS 

D. S. 

14

Chord progression: D7, GPMaj7, GMIN7-5 C7, FMIN7, Bb7

A. SX. 

T. SX. 

PNO. 

BASS 

D. S. 

19

Chord progression: FMIN7, Bb7, FMIN7

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A. SX. 

T. SX. 

PNO. 

BASS 

D. S. 

A. SX. 

T. SX. 

PNO. 

BASS 

D. S. 

24

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A. SX. 27

T. SX. 6

PNO. 27

BASS 27

D. S.

A. SX. 30

T. SX.

PNO. 30

BASS 30

D. S.

30

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A. SX. 
T. SX. 
PNO. 
BASS 
D. S. 

A. SX. 
T. SX. 
PNO. 
BASS 
D. S. 

45

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A. SX. 48

T. SX. 48

PNO. 48

BASS 48

D. S. 48

A. SX. 55

T. SX. 55

PNO. 55

BASS 55

D. S. 55

Chord symbols: Gm, C7, F#m7, D#m7, A#m7, D7, G#m7, Gm, C7

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

57 1

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

SEE NOTE

COMING IN A B FLAT TONALITY EMPHASIZING QUARTER NOTES

FMIN7

Bb7

The symbols used in this section are representative of Jackie McLean's abstract musical concepts

61 1

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

x p* x * x *

p* z

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A. SX. *p_z* *x x* VERY DISTORTED

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

A. SX. *p_z* *A ** VERY DISTORTED

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

71

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

VEE DISTORTED PITCH

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS

D. S.

80

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

A musical score for the piece "Pithecanthropus Erectus". The score consists of five staves, each with a different instrument or voice part:

- A. SX.** (Alto Saxophone): The first staff, marked with a dynamic of *85*. It begins with a melodic line in the first measure, followed by rests in the subsequent measures.
- T. SX.** (Tenor Saxophone): The second staff, marked with a dynamic of *6*. It features a complex melodic line with many slurs and accents throughout the piece.
- PNO.** (Piano): The third staff, marked with a dynamic of *85*. It contains a rhythmic accompaniment consisting of a series of slanted lines, likely representing a piano accompaniment.
- BASS**: The fourth staff, marked with a dynamic of *85*. It features a bass line with a steady, rhythmic pattern.
- D. S.** (Drum Set): The fifth staff, marked with a dynamic of *85*. It contains a drum set accompaniment, represented by slanted lines.

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS.

D. S.

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

AGGREGATE PULSE BEATS

A. SX.

T. SX.

PNO.

BASS.

D. S.

A. SX. *101*

T. SX. *6*

PNO. *101* *G MIN 7-5* *C 7-9*

BASS *101*

D. S.

AGGREGATE PULSE RE-ESTABLISHED

A. SX. *107*

T. SX. *6*

PNO. *107*

BASS *107*

D. S. *107*

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS ROTARY PERCEPTION EXAMPLE

SCORE

TRANS HORTON

$\text{♩} = 172$

TENOR SAX.

PIANO

BASS

T. SAX.

PNO.

BASS

T. SX. 7

PNO. 7

BASS 7

T. SX. 10

PNO. 10

BASS 10

T. SX. 15

PNO. 15

BASS 15

T. SX. 16

PNO. 16

BASS 16

T. SX. 19

PNO. 19

BASS 19

SCORE

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS TENOR SOLO

J. R. MONTEROSE TRAN. HORTON

♩=172

TENOR SAX.

The score is written for Tenor Saxophone in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 172 bpm. It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble clef staff for the melody and a bass clef staff for accompaniment. The first system (measures 1-5) has a key signature of one flat (Bb). The second system (measures 6-10) has a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb). The third system (measures 11-14) has a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb). The fourth system (measures 15-18) has a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb). Chord diagrams are provided below the treble staff of each system.

System 1 (Measures 1-5):
Chords: GMIN7-5, C7-9, FMIN7, D♭MA7, GMIN7-5

System 2 (Measures 6-10):
Chords: C7-9, FMIN7, D♭MA7, E♭7-9, A♭7#11

System 3 (Measures 11-14):
Chords: GMIN7-5, C7-9, FMIN7, D♭MA7

System 4 (Measures 15-18):
Chords: A♭MIN7, D♭7, G♭MA7

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS TENOR SOLO

13 6
GMIN7-5 C7-9 F7 C7-9 F7 C7
HITS MADE BY MINQUE VOICE, ALTO SAX AND SAGE LOWS

13 1

25 6
F7 C7 F7 C7

25 1

27 6
F7 C7 F7 C7

27 1

31 6
F7 C7 F7 C7

31 1

Detailed description: The score is written for tenor voice and piano. It consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The key signature has one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 6/8. The first system (measures 13-16) includes a vocal line with various note values and rests, and a piano line with slash marks. Chord markings GMIN7-5, C7-9, F7, C7-9, F7, and C7 are placed below the piano line. A note 'HITS MADE BY MINQUE VOICE, ALTO SAX AND SAGE LOWS' is written above the piano line in the second measure. The second system (measures 17-20) continues the vocal and piano parts with similar chord markings (F7, C7, F7, C7). The third system (measures 21-24) and fourth system (measures 25-28) follow the same pattern, with vocal lines featuring eighth and sixteenth notes and piano lines with slash marks. Measure numbers 13, 25, and 31 are indicated at the start of their respective systems.

35 6

F7 C7 F7 C7 F7

35 1

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS TENOR SOLO

40 6

C7 F7 C7 GMIN7-5 C7-9

40 1

45 6

FMIN7 DPMAS7 GMIN7-5 C7-9 FMIN7

45 1

50 $\frac{6}{8}$

DPMAS7 E7-9 A7 GMIN7-5 C7-9

55 $\frac{6}{8}$

FMIN7 DPMAS7 A7MIN7 D7

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS TENOR SOLO

60 $\frac{6}{8}$

GPMAS7 GMIN7-5 C7-9 FMIN7 B7 FMIN7 B7

FOR MEASURES 65, 66, AND 67 MINQUE WALKS IN 4/4 TIME WHILE CELLO AND PIANO PLAY IN 3/4.

65 $\frac{6}{8}$

FMIN7 B7 FMIN7 B7 FMIN7 B7 FMIN7 B7

67⁶

FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7 8D7

70⁶

FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7 8D7

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS TENOR SOLO

74⁶

FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7 8D7 FMIN7 8D7

77⁶

GMIN7-5 C7-9

SCORE

THE CLOWN (MAIN THEMATIC MATERIAL)

CHARLES MINCUS TRAM. HORTON

TENOR SAX. G MAJ7 E^b MAJ7 G MAJ7 C[#] MAJ7#11

TROMBONE

T. SAX. B^b MAJ7 E^b MAJ7 A MIN7 D7 G MAJ7

T.B.N.

T. SAX. E^b MAJ7 G MAJ7 E7#5

T.B.N.

APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTIONS WITH ANALYSIS

This section contains analyzed transcriptions that are referenced in the dissertation but were either not placed, or not placed in entirety within the body of the dissertation.

Boff Boff/Dizzy Atmosphere Comparison

UL=upper note than lower chromatic note approach
 U=Chromatic approach from below, upward motion
 D=Chromatic approach from above, downward motion

Hawkins/Parker

The musical score is divided into five systems, each with a Tenor Saxophone (T. Sax.) and Alto Saxophone (A. Sax.) part. The notation includes various chords and performance markings:

- System 1:** T. Sax. part starts with a whole rest followed by eighth notes. Chords above: C6, Am7, Dm7, G7, C6, Am7, Dm7, G7. Markings: UL, U.
- System 2:** T. Sax. part starts with a triplet eighth note. Chords above: C7, FM7, F#m7-5, Em7, A7, Dm, G7, C, Am7. Markings: UL, D.
- System 3:** T. Sax. part features sixteenth-note runs. Chords above: Dm7, G7, C, Am7, Dm7, G7. Markings: UL, D, UL.
- System 4:** T. Sax. part continues with sixteenth-note runs. Chords above: C7, Fm7, F#m7-5, Dm7, G7, C, E7. Markings: UL, UL.
- System 5:** T. Sax. part continues with sixteenth-note runs. Chords above: F#7, F7, F7, E7, D#7. Markings: U, UL.

Boff Boff/Dizzy Atmosphere Comparison

2

The musical score consists of three systems, each with a Tenor Saxophone (T. Sax) and Alto Saxophone (A. Sax) part. The notation includes chords, articulation marks (UL), and fingerings (3).

System 1 (Measures 24-27):
 T. Sax: G7, D, G7, UL, C, Am7, Dm7, G7
 A. Sax: Dm7, G7, CM7, Am7, Dm7, G7

System 2 (Measures 28-31):
 T. Sax: C, Am7, Dm7, G7, C7, F7, F#m7-5, UL
 A. Sax: CM7, Am7, Dm7, G7, C7, C7/E, F7, F#dim7

System 3 (Measures 32-35):
 T. Sax: Dm7, G7, C
 A. Sax: UL, D, CM7, CM7

The following analysis of the harmonic structures of “Weird Nightmare” and “Pithecanthropus Erectus” are based on a Schenker–styled method. The solid line ties indicate that a group of chords works as a unit in the way they function. If two chords are tied together by a dotted line, then the chords between the two chords are prolonging the harmonic function of the area between them. If a group of chords has an arrow over top, then that group of chords is anticipating the chord that the arrow points to. If a group of chords is joined by a tie, but is not under an arrow, then the chords are prolonging the first chord in the group. The roman numerals under the example indicate the fundamental harmonic structure.

WIERD NIGHTMARE ANALYSIS

ANALYZED BY HORTON

Section I: Musical score with guitar and bass staves. Chord annotations include: DMIN7, F/C, BPMAS7, DMIN7 G7, CMIN7 B7(-9), A7(+9), EP7-5, DMIN7/C, A7ALT, DPAUG, Bm7-5, A7ALT, DMIN7, BPMAS7, A7ALT, DMIN7, BPMAS7, A7, DMIN7, BPMAS7, A7, DMIN7, BPMAS7, A7.

I

Section III and V: Musical score with guitar and bass staves. Chord annotations include: BPMAS7, EP7, BPMAS7, EP7, FMA7, GMIN7, GP7(-5), FMA7, B7(+9), BP7(+11), A7(+9), AP7(+9), G7(+9), EMIN7-5, B07, A7-5, EP7-5, BPMAS7, EP7, BPMAS7, EP7, FMA7, GMIN7, GP7(-5), FMA7, B7(+9), BP7(+11), A7(+9), AP7(+9), G7(+9), EMIN7-5, B07, A7-5, EP7-5, FMA7, BP7(+11), A7(+9), AP7(+9), G7(+9), E7ALT, A7.

III

V

WIERD NIGHTMARE ANALYSIS

The image shows a handwritten musical score for guitar and bass. The title is "WIERD NIGHTMARE ANALYSIS". The score is written in a system with two staves, labeled 1 and 2. Staff 1 is a guitar part in treble clef, and Staff 2 is a bass part in bass clef. The music consists of several measures with various chords and melodic lines. Annotations above the staff include chord names such as DMIN7, E/C, BPMMA7, A7, G7, CMIN7, B7, BPMMA7, A7, E7, DMIN7/C, BPMMA7, A7, and DMIN7. The notation includes notes, rests, and slurs, with some notes marked with a 'p' for piano. The bass part features a simple line with some chords and rests.

I

PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS ANALYSIS

FMIN7
DPM7
GMIN7-5
C7-9
D^F/F
D^F/D
E^D7-9
A^D7||
GMIN7-5
C7-9
FMIN7
DPM7

I

A^FMIN7
D^F7
G^FPM7
GMIN7-5 C7
FMIN7
B^F7
FMIN7
B^F7
FMIN7
B^F7
GMIN7-5
C7
FMIN7

IV

V

I

APPENDIX C

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