THE MUSIC OF CHARLES MINGUS: COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH, STYLE, AND THE PERFORMANCE OF RACE AND POLITICS IN THE "FREE LAND OF SLAVERY"

by

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ABSTRACT

THE MUSIC OF CHARLES MINGUS: COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH, STYLE, AND THE PERFORMANCE OF RACE AND POLITICS IN THE "FREE LAND OF SLAVERY"

by

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As a composer, bassist, and bandleader, Charles Mingus (1922-1979) is widely regarded as one of the most influential and innovate figures in American music. Most existing scholarship on Mingus has focused on his biography and his socio-cultural milieu, yet very little offers any in-depth analysis of his music. This dissertation examines selected works by Mingus, providing detailed musical analyses and transcriptions while also considering the context in which the works were composed, with emphasis on the various cultural, political, and social issues that had strong ramifications on his compositions and performances. The project is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 examines Mingus's complicated relationship with the jazz avant-garde and focuses on his composition "Folk Forms, No. 1" (1960), which demonstrates the various ways in which Mingus anticipated, was influenced by, and rejected prevailing avant-garde aesthetics. Chapter 2 traces the transformation of "Fables of Faubus" (1957) from its first recording in 1959 to the performances that surrounded Mingus's European tour in 1964, and examines how Mingus's significant revisions to the piece reflect the increasing tensions and discords of the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, Chapter 3 delves into the complexity of Mingus's racial

identity and his performances of black masculinity, and shows how these issues unfold in four compositions: “Eclipse” (1953), “Devil Woman” (1961), “Ecclusiastics” (1961), and “Sue’s Changes” (1974).

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I would also like to thank my family. My parents had the foresight to see that the difficulties of emigrating from El Salvador to Canada would ultimately lead to a better life and more opportunities for their children. My mother has always supported my career in music, even when it meant me moving away to New York City. My father not only passed on to me his love for jazz and Benny Goodman, but also took me to see Sonny Rollins in concert as a very young teenager; this concert was the moment I decided to become a musician. Thanks also to my sister

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* * *

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INTRODUCTION

As a composer, arranger, bassist, and bandleader, Charles Mingus (1922-1979) was at the forefront of many stylistic developments in jazz, including hard bop, third stream, and the avant-garde. As an instrumentalist, he revolutionized jazz bass performance by expanding the expressive possibilities of his instrument to include techniques not typically used by jazz bassists, such as bowing, double stops, harmonics, and playing in the upper register. Perhaps even more significantly, Mingus transcended the traditional role of the bass as timekeeper in jazz, becoming—along with the rest of the rhythm section in his ensembles—an equal with front-line instruments such as the saxophone and trumpet, as exemplified in pieces like "Folk Forms, No. 1" and "What Love." While Mingus's impact as a bassist is undeniable, his most significant contributions to American music have been in the realm of composition. Mingus was quite prolific: the Charles Mingus Collection, housed at the Library of Congress, contains the manuscripts for over 250 original compositions. More importantly, Mingus's various interviews and writings, such as "What is a Jazz Composer" and his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*, reveal that he wished to be recognized primarily as a composer.[1] In *Beneath the Underdog*, for example, Mingus recounts his introduction to guests at a party by musician and friend Teddy Charles: "'I'd like to pay a tribute to our guest of honor—a toast to one of the greatest bass players in the world of jazz—Charles Mingus!'" To this seemingly kind introduction, a Mingus fan replies, "'Boo, Teddy Charles! Mingus is a composer, a very good composer. Most people don't know the real Mingus music. Ask my friend Diana—we played 'Revelations' for music class at school and the professor thought it was a piece by some classical composer he'd

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[1] Charles Mingus, "What Is a Jazz Composer?," in *More Than a Fakebook*, ed. Andrew Homzy (New York: Jazz Workshop, Inc., 1991). Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

forgotten!'"[2] Yet, most scholars have continued to focus on the political and sociocultural aspects of Mingus's artistry—which are certainly intrinsic to his music—while neglecting to fully explore his compositions.

Mingus's works are impossible to categorize. He spent his early career with such diverse musicians as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Red Norvo, and Charlie Parker, and his professional and personal experiences led him to produce work that drew heavily from various styles of music, including the blues, New Orleans jazz, bebop, gospel, and Western European art music. Even within single albums he would include a wide array of styles, though somehow the music remains unmistakably Mingus's. For example, his most popular album, *Mingus Ah Um*, ranges from Mingus preaching the most jubilant of musical sermons in "Better Git It In Your Soul," to the hard-driving and infectious "Boogie Stop Shuffle," to the highly intimate and fully-composed "Self-Portrait in Three Colors." Miles Davis once said, "If a guy makes you pat your foot and if you feel it down your back, you don't have to ask anybody if that's good music or not."[3] This couldn't be more true of Mingus, though ironically Davis had criticized Mingus's compositions as "depressing" in the same *Down Beat* article. Yet "foot-pat*able* or footless," to use Mingus's own words, his music transcends any definitions of jazz.[4]

Many of Mingus's compositions exhibit unique and highly sophisticated structures that, according to Gunther Schuller, rival those of Arnold Schoenberg, Charles Ives, or other composers.[5] Yet, the complexity of Mingus's works is often compounded by other extra-musical aspects. Part of what makes Mingus's music so fascinating is that his most fertile period came at

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[2] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 286.
[3] Nat Hentoff, "Miles: A Trumpeter in the Midst of a Big Comeback Makes a Very Frank Appraisal of Today's Jazz Scene," *Down Beat*, 2 November 1955, 14.
[4] Charles Mingus, "An Open Letter to Miles Davis," *Down Beat*, 30 November 1955, 13.
[5] Don McGlynn, *Charles Mingus: Triumph of the Underdog* (Newton, NJ: Shanachie Entertainment Corp., 1999), DVD, 42:25.

a time when many political, social, and musical changes were taking place in the United States. As a deeply passionate, notoriously emotional individual who spoke through his art, Mingus's music inevitably reflected the world around him. In 1964 at *A Jazz Summit Meeting*, which included such luminaries as Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, and George Russell, Mingus stressed the deep connection between his music and his emotions:

> Now look, when the world is happy and there's something to be happy about, I'll cut everybody playing happy. But as it is now, I'll play what's happening. And anybody who wants to escape what's really going on and wants to play happy, Uncle Tom music, is not being honest. . . . I was discussing this with Henry "Red" Allen recently, and he told me he doesn't play happiness. He plays what he feels. So do I. And I'm not all that happy.[6]

Many of Mingus's pieces seem to corroborate this statement. Some, such as "Eclipse" (chapter 3), are concerned with highly controversial sociocultural issues like miscegenation. Others, like "Fables of Faubus" (chapter 2), comment on the climate and events of the Civil Rights Movement. Still others, like "Folk Forms, No. 1" (chapter 1), are reactions to one of the most critical and controversial developments in the history of jazz—the establishment of the avant-garde.

The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady, arguably Mingus's greatest achievement, was recorded in 1963 at the height of Mingus's creative powers. That same year, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) made an observation that seems to be particularly resonant with Mingus's music. "The Negro's music," Jones stated, "changed as he changed, reflecting shifting attitudes or (and this is equally important) *consistent attitudes within changed contexts*. And it is *why* the music changed that seems most important."[7] This dissertation seeks to explore Mingus's music in

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[6] Robert Walser, ed., "A Jazz Summit Meeting," in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 282.
[7] All italics are in Jones's original text. LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1999), 153.

relation to both his shifting attitudes *and* the ever-changing cultural, political, and social contexts in which he composed. While a main focus of this project will be an in-depth study and analysis of selected works—including Mingus's compositional approach, his treatment of form, and general stylistic features—I am particularly interested in how specific compositions were a product of Mingus's sociocultural and artistic milieu and how they reflect his views and attitudes. In other words, the *why* and *how* of a composition—*why* it was composed and *how* it may reflect a multiplicity of issues and contexts—is especially significant. This includes how Mingus's music was influenced by other musical developments, by racial and political issues, and by his own struggles with his identity as a black man.

State of Research

Next to Ellington, Mingus is arguably the greatest composer in the history of jazz, and as Salim Washington points out, his output is perhaps even more varied than Ellington's.[8] Mingus also stands as one of jazz's top innovators alongside Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane, but while a considerable amount of material has been written on each of these figures, it is perplexing that Mingus's work has yet to receive the scholarly attention it deserves. Brian Priestley's *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (published just three years after Mingus's death) is of tremendous value and is still considered the most comprehensive study of Mingus's life and work.[9] Yet, other than a few transcriptions of Mingus's bass solos and some formal outlines of selected compositions, Priestley does not provide any in-depth

[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*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 35.
[9] Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1983).

analysis of the music. Gene Santoro's *Myself When I Am Real* is mainly an account of Mingus's life rather than an exploration of the music, while, more recently, Todd S. Jenkins has acknowledged that "comparatively little has been committed to print about [Mingus's] lifeblood, the music he created over more than three decades;" Jenkins's book, *I Know What I Know*, aims to "fill the gap as a listener's guide to the recorded works of Mingus."[10] Yet as a "listener's guide," Jenkins's work quickly runs the gamut of Mingus's recordings while avoiding any substantive musical analysis. Sue Mingus's memoir, *Tonight at Noon: A Love Story*, is an engaging account of her dynamic relationship with her husband and of the difficulties they faced as Mingus battled the effects of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis.[11] Her intimate portrayal of Mingus is of significant value, as it provides us with a more intimate knowledge of Mingus's character and personality, as well as his political and social philosophies.

L'Amerique de Mingus by Didier Levallet and Denis-Constant Martin is an in-depth study of one of Mingus's most famous compositions, "Fables of Faubus."[12] While the authors place the work in its proper historical context and provide an analysis that focuses on structure and the most salient details of the improvisations, they ignore or gloss over critical issues such as parody, irony, and the significance of formal revision and musical quotation. In addition, by highlighting the 1964 recordings over earlier versions, Levallet and Martin overlook the work's ability to illustrate Mingus's compositional process and show that his pieces did not necessarily

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[10] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Todd S. Jenkins, *I Know What I Know: The Music of Charles Mingus* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 2.
[11] Sue Graham Mingus, *Tonight at Noon: A Love Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).
[12] Didier Levallet and Denis-Constant Martin, *L'Amérique de Mingus: Musique et Politique: les* Fables of Faubus *de Charles Mingus* (Paris: P.O.L. éditeur, 1991).

have a definitive version, but were works in progress that changed according to the various circumstances in which Mingus composed, recorded, and performed his music.[13]

Nichole Rustin's dissertation demonstrates how central characteristics of Mingus's masculinity—including his will to achieve self-determination and his relationships with other men that were based on mutual love and intimacy—can provide us with alternative ways of reading black masculinity.[14] While Rustin has taken great steps in understanding the complexity of Mingus's identity, her work does not really address possible connections between Mingus's masculinity and his music. More recently, Jennifer Griffith has written an insightful account that explores Mingus's reactions to the legacies of vaudeville and minstrelsy, as well as the impact of the black church in his music; Griffith's detailed analyses of specific compositions are indeed a welcome addition to the Mingus literature.[15]

Mingus has also attracted attention from scholars in various disciplines, including American Studies and English literature. Some of these studies—especially those of Scott Saul and Eric Porter—have been significant additions to the existing scholarly work on Mingus, as they draw illuminating connections between Mingus's outspokenness on racial, political, and sociocultural issues and his approach to composition and performance.[16] Yet, while the complexities of Mingus's character and the various contexts in which he performed and

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[13] The Jazz Workshop, the name Mingus gave his ensembles beginning in 1954, also implies a compositional approach where works are in progress and collaborative.
[14] Nichole Rustin, "Mingus Fingers: Charles Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Postwar Jazz Culture" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1999).
[15] Jennifer Griffith, "His Jelly Roll Soul: Revising and Reclaiming the Past, the Minstrel Mask, and the Communal Blast in Charles Mingus's Jazz Workshop" (D.M.A. diss., City University of New York, 2010).
[16] Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

composed are explored with great sophistication, these studies lack in-depth musical analyses, and the complexities of the music itself still remain largely unexplored. This is a great problem: Mingus himself had expressed outrage and disbelief at his 1973 Grammy Award nomination for best liner notes to his album, *Let My Children Hear Music*, instead of for the actual music.[17]

Approach and Chapter Overview

Because of the importance of improvisation in jazz, a detailed analysis of Mingus's compositions will require extensive transcription from recordings.[18] Yet, the forging of a musical text from a music that was never meant to be fixed, as well as the application of methods commonly used to analyze Western European art music, are not sufficient in explaining jazz, much less the work of a composer with such a complex and diverse background as Mingus. As Robert Walser notes, the "classicization of jazz" and the trend in jazz criticism toward modernist aesthetic theory—in which art is autonomous from the external influences of politics and society at large—has been a dangerous route to follow because it "effaces both [jazz's] complex cultural history, including the myriad effects of racism and elitism on the music and the people who have made it, and the dialogue that is at the very heart of the music."[19] Walser's comment is especially important when thinking about jazz in the late 1950s and 1960s, when racial, social, political, and economic issues were explicitly reflected in the work of many musicians. Mingus was perhaps

[17] Sue Mingus, *Tonight At Noon*, 112.
[18] Transcription is utilized as a tool to clarify the arguments being presented. While I have tried to transcribe the music as accurately as possible, many of the nuances in rhythm and tonal inflection are simply not possible to represent in standard notation. The transcriptions, especially the more extended excerpts in the first and second chapters, are not meant to stand for the music, but should whenever possible be examined in tandem with the recordings.
[19] Robert Walser, "'Out of Notes': Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 169-170.

the most outspoken figure in terms of both his music and his comments on and off the bandstand; although his compositions are clearly able to stand on their own as autonomous works of art, they are continually intertwined with race, politics, identity, and the divisive racial disparities present in the jazz industry. For this reason, it is essential to complement any formal analysis with other interdisciplinary approaches that allow for consideration of the political and sociocultural contexts of the music.

In recent years, for example, jazz scholars have increasingly drawn from the literary theory of signification by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in which Gates explores how the African American tradition of "Signifyin(g)" can be utilized to analyze African American works of literature. In contrast to the white "signifying," where only a single meaning exists, the black "Signifyin(g)" allows for a wealth of meanings depending on the context and type of reference or allusion being employed.[20] This theory has been applied to jazz by scholars including Walser, John P. Murphy, Samuel Floyd, Krin Gabbard, and Ingrid Monson—and to studies of Mingus by Jennifer Griffith and Horace J. Maxile, Jr.—to discuss meaning and ideas in compositions and improvisations, as well as the dialogue that takes place during a performance among musicians and between musicians and audience.

Traditional modes of music analysis, which cannot fully address such issues, were perhaps used initially in a troublesome attempt to "elevate" jazz to the standards of Western European art music, yet they are not necessarily "inadequate to the task of helping us to *understand* jazz," as Walser argues.[21] After all, in his analysis of Miles Davis's "My Funny

[20] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 44-51.
[21] Walser, "'Out of Notes,'" 179. Walser refers specifically to Gunther Schuller's famous analysis of Sonny Rollins's "Blue 7," in which Rollins is praised for the "thematic and structural unity" of his improvisation, an aspect that, according to Schuller, is not present in the work of

Valentine," Walser provides a detailed transcription of Davis's solo along with very specific musical commentary to demonstrate how Gates's theory can be adapted to provide a more meaningful interpretation of Davis's music. At the same time, Walser acknowledges that "jazz criticism has lacked detailed analyses of specific performances that articulate links among reactions, theories, performance choices, and technical details." Interdisciplinary approaches such as Gates's theory can certainly provide us with ways of interpreting jazz that would not be possible through purely sonic means, but Walser's real point, it seems, is that rather than dispense entirely with methods that examine the structural aspects of music (such as the use of transcriptions to analyze form and thematic development), we can gain a deeper understanding of jazz if *both* of these approaches are used together.[22]

An excellent model for this dual approach is Ingrid Monson's *Saying Something*.[23] In this study on the interactive role of the rhythm section in jazz, Monson highlights the similarities between improvisation and conversation by drawing from the literary theories of Gates and Mikhail Bakhtin, and provides support for her arguments with detailed transcriptions and musical analyses. The combination of such varied approaches that draw attention to jazz's social *and* musical significance results in an illuminating and significant contribution to jazz scholarship. Monson acknowledges the importance of the interdisciplinary approach used by scholars such as Peretti, Tucker, and Radano, but notes that "Such newer works on jazz that

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other jazz musicians. Gunther Schuller, "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation," in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 213.

[22] Scott DeVeaux has also noted the dangers of limiting jazz scholarship to either a purely musical or purely contextual approach. He stresses that "any analysis of bop that ignores either the nuances of musical language or the political context for its creation is manifestly incomplete." Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 27.

[23] Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

focus on politics, social history, and interpretive issues . . . have often excluded close readings of musical compositions and performances. Indeed, discussions of musical structures and cultural issues in musical scholarship have generally proceeded along parallel—decidedly nonintersecting—lines."[24] Poststructuralist cultural theory, Monson notes, is able to address issues such as aesthetics and meaning, while formal musical analysis can provide insight into more technical issues regarding the music. Monson's conviction is that close readings of musical works can benefit from both of these approaches, and throughout the book strives "for a more cultural music theory and a more musical cultural theory."[25] Like Monson, I will approach my study of Mingus's music from various musical and cultural perspectives.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation explores Mingus's complicated relationship with the jazz avant-garde—particularly the music of Ornette Coleman—through a close reading of "Folk Forms, No. 1." While Mingus admired musicians like Coleman for their innovations and avoidance of old clichés, he was disturbed by their disregard for traditional musical elements such as form and harmony, as well as their apparent lack of technique. Yet, much of Mingus's approach to composition and performance—such as his use of collective improvisation and the independence of the rhythm section—was congruent with (and preceded) the aesthetic principles of the avant-garde. Drawing on the work of Salim Washington (2004) as well as Mingus's various interviews, writings, and my own transcriptions of the piece, I argue that Mingus uses "Folk Forms, No. 1" to demonstrate that avant-garde music can be original and innovative without relinquishing tradition. At the same time that Mingus adheres to many avant-garde aesthetic practices, he rejects the avant-garde's break with tradition by turning a seemingly themeless twelve-bar blues into a highly sophisticated large-scale structure that achieves the

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[24] Ibid., 3.
[25] Ibid.

formal continuity prized by Mingus through, among other elements, a complex network of recurring motives.

Chapter 2 deals with Mingus's most overtly political composition, "Fables of Faubus," in which he mocks Arkansas governor Orval Faubus for his infamous 1957 refusal to integrate schools. I draw on the work of Gates (1988), Floyd (1995), and Monson (1996) to underscore Mingus's musical use of parody and irony, and to explore how the radical transformation of the piece—from the subtle, understated 1959 Columbia recording (stripped of its controversial lyrics), to the fiery and bombastic tour-de-force heard in the 1964 European tour recordings—reflects Mingus's increasing feelings of bitterness and frustration as the controversies regarding the Civil Rights Movement escalated. Particularly significant are the extensions to the form in the 1964 versions of the piece, which allow for a variety of intertextual references during the improvisations. This includes Mingus's prodigious developments of quotation—especially "My Country 'Tis of Thee"—that serve to undermine the quintessential American values of freedom and liberty while at the same time draw out the reality of African American oppression—which Mingus equated to slavery—during the Civil Rights Movement.

In chapter 3, I examine the connections between Mingus's various performances of masculinity and the way he represents himself and women in his works. At first glance, Mingus seems to perfectly personify the image of the stereotypically misogynist black jazz musician, yet the ways in which he negotiated stereotypical and alternative models of black masculinity are quite complex. Drawing on feminist work by Wallace (1979) and hooks (2004), I explore how Mingus's constructions of masculinity and his depiction of women in *Beneath the Underdog*—a work that is rife with passages of hyper-masculine sexuality and degradation of women—can be understood more fully by exploring the myth of his public persona, which compensated for the

struggles he faced as a light-skinned black man and served as a reaction to what Wallace calls "the myth of the black man's castration in slavery." Finally, a close look at how Mingus's conflicting models of masculinity are reflected through his music—particularly in "Eclipse," "Devil Woman," "Ecclusiastics," and "Sue's Changes"—will reveal how his works can provide new insights into the intersections between performance, politics, race, and gender.

CHAPTER 1

"You Can't Improvise on Nothing": Tradition, Avant-Garde Jazz Aesthetics, and Structured Freedom in "Folk Forms, No. 1" (1960)

Throughout his career Mingus evaded conforming to any particular musical trend, composing and performing works that drew from a wide range of musical styles and genres. Yet, whether his inspiration derived from Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton, Charlie Parker, the black church, Mexican mariachi bands, or Arnold Schoenberg, Mingus's consistently innovative compositions placed him firmly at the forefront of developments in jazz. By the time the jazz avant-garde emerged in the late 1950s, Mingus had been creating music that diverged from the status quo, sometimes quite radically, for almost twenty years; his reactions to the "New Thing" and the musicians that became associated with it were thus conflicting, and he often expressed feelings of both praise and derision. This chapter explores Mingus's complicated relationship with the avant-garde and the effect that the new style had on his music, paying close attention to his role as "the avant-garde's reluctant father" (to borrow Salim Washington's insightful description) and the ways in which Mingus both embraced *and* rejected the aesthetic concerns that were central to the avant-garde.[1] In particular, a detailed analysis of the 1960 composition "Folk Forms, No. 1" will highlight the various ways in which Mingus responded to the aesthetic principles of early avant-garde jazz—and specifically to the music of Ornette Coleman—while remaining true to his own aesthetic concerns and desire for innovation as a composer within the jazz tradition. I will also explore how in addition to serving as a comment on the avant-garde, the methods of composition that Mingus used in the creation and performance of this work can

[1] Washington, "'All the Things You Could Be by Now,'" 34.

be regarded as a response to Gunther Schuller's call for thematic improvisation in jazz, made famous in the 1958 essay "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation."[2]

Mingus and the Avant-Garde—a Complicated Relationship

Following the release of Ornette Coleman's first two albums and his subsequent emergence on the New York scene in November of 1959, there was a wide range of reaction regarding Coleman's new and unusual approach. Critics, composers, musicians, and audiences argued about the nature of Coleman's music and his unorthodox treatment of form, sound, and harmony, as well as his unconventional instrumental technique. Heralding Coleman as a messiah, many critics praised him as a radical new voice that would forever alter the course of jazz; others, including many prominent jazz musicians, considered him an amateur and impostor.

Yet for Mingus, Coleman's music elicited a much more complex reaction. For his various incarnations of the Jazz Workshop (the name Mingus used for his ensembles beginning in 1954), Mingus sought out sidemen that could not only adapt to the technical and expressive demands of his music, but that could also bring an original voice to the bandstand. He shunned those who were either incapable of avoiding old clichés and styles, or who purposefully remained stuck in tired routines to cater to the tastes of apathetic audiences and the economic demands of the record industry; Mingus referred to such musicians as "clowns" and "circus artists."[3] In this regard, the emergence of the avant-garde, heralded by Coleman's radical departure from bebop and its derivatives, was indeed a welcome change for Mingus. Yet, while Coleman's originality and "ingenious sense of composition" intrigued Mingus, as his wife Sue recalls, he had difficulty coming to terms with Coleman's apparent lack of technique and his

[2] Schuller, "Challenge of Thematic Improvisation," 212-222.
[3] Quoted Priestley, *Mingus*, 51.

abandonment of standard forms and harmonies.[4] After taking part in one of Leonard Feather's "Blind Fold Tests" for *Down Beat* in 1960, Mingus, disappointed that none of Coleman's records had been played, shared his mixed feelings on Coleman: "Now aside from the fact that I doubt he can even play a C scale in whole notes—tied whole notes, a couple of bars apiece—in tune, the fact remains that his notes and lines are so fresh. So when Symphony Sid played his record, it made everything else he was playing, even my own record that he played, sound terrible. I'm not saying everybody's going to have to play like Coleman. But they're going to have to stop playing Bird." Mingus perceived Coleman's music as "organized disorganization, or playing wrong right. . . . And it gets to you emotionally, like a drummer."[5]

Over a decade later, Mingus continued to voice his concerns over the "New Thing" in "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde," where he complained of the technical deficiencies of various musicians and opined that those "who do play avant-garde can't play a straight melody and solo on it with the approximate changes, with *any* approximate changes." Mingus considered avant-garde music "old fashioned music because it's played by beginners, by people trying to learn how to play, or trying to wonder what to play to be different."[6] Although there are no specific references to Coleman in this letter, Mingus's comments are clearly analogous to his views on Coleman, whom he had previously described as an "old-fashioned alto player."[7]

Mingus's ambiguous stance on Coleman seems to stem from his inability to reconcile Coleman's incredible artistry with both an unorthodox technique—which in reality was an integral part of that artistry—and a marked abandonment of formal elements that had for years

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[4] Sue Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 105.
[5] Charles Mingus, "Another View of Coleman," *Down Beat*, 26 May 1960, 21.
[6] Charles Mingus, "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde," in *More Than a Fake Book*, ed. Andrew Homzy (New York: Jazz Workshop, Inc., 1991), 119.
[7] Mingus, "Another View of Coleman."

been defining characteristics of jazz. Yet much of Mingus's dilemma perhaps lay with the simple fact that he was competitive and envied Coleman's success. The considerable attention bestowed upon Coleman during his first year in New York City—by critics, audiences, and even famed classical artists such as Leonard Bernstein—resulted in a prodigious amount of work, with long engagements at prominent clubs like the Five Spot along with several recording opportunities. Meanwhile, other musicians who were making significant contributions to jazz—including Mingus, who was often vocal regarding his lack of recognition from critics and audiences—were frequently overlooked and struggling to find regular employment.[8]

Mingus's mixed reactions to Coleman were further compounded by his contention that although Coleman's music was certainly original, the avant-garde in general was not a new concept, and that other musicians, including himself, had been creating avant-garde music for years. Mingus expounds on this issue in his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*:

> Bird was playing then what they're calling avant-garde today—playing major sevenths with minor sevenths, playing a fourth away from the key, things like that, and people would say he squeaked. Well, now they hear what those squeaks meant. All this free-form business isn't new—dropping bar lines and all. I was doing it and Duke before me and Jelly Roll before that. I wrote "What Love" back in '42 . . . and just recently some horn men looked at it and said it couldn't be played—too freaky, too hard.[9]

Mingus seems justified: compositions from the early part of his career, including "The Chill of Death"(1939), "Half-Mast Inhibition" (1941), "Eclipse" (1953)—which Todd S. Jenkins describes as "frighteningly avant-garde"—and even the more recent third-stream "Revelations"

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[8] Even with all this attention, Coleman was still not impervious to exploitation by the jazz industry. Just like most other black jazz musicians, he was forced to play for low wages and in poor conditions, and many of his long periods of inactivity were a direct result of the treatment he received from club owners and record companies. Like Mingus, Coleman felt trapped, saying he would "like to get out of [the performing world], but I don't have the financial situation to do so." See John Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992), 106 and 133-134.
[9] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 350.

(1957), were in many ways more divergent from mainstream jazz than anything Coleman created in the period surrounding his emergence on the New York jazz scene.[10] While Mingus's concept of a true avant-garde lay in the music of composers like Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Jelly Roll Morton, and Duke Ellington—composers whose innate sense for innovation became influential in his own style—the so-called avant-garde of Coleman and (later) his successors was simply "old-fashioned music" played by "beginners." Mingus's stance becomes even more clear in "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde," where he explains his vision of making an avant-garde record: "I'm just trying to say that it would be beautiful to hear—if there were such a thing as avant-garde—the best musicians play it. Because don't let anyone tell me that Clark Terry or Duke Ellington can't play avant-garde music, or incoherent music if they wanted to. It would be the *most* incoherent. It would be the most noisy. They would cut everybody playing bad." According to Mingus, his opinion that avant-garde music was "old-fashioned music" was also shared by Ellington, who delighted Mingus with his response to the suggestion of making an avant-garde record: "Let's not take music back that far, Mingus. Why not just make a modern record?"[11]

Mingus's take on the avant-garde is congruent to an issue that Salim Washington has discussed with great insight—that the avant-garde, or the idea of being on the cutting edge, was not a new concept that originated with Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, or any other musician in particular, but rather an aesthetic practice that depends on continual innovation, and which is

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[10] Jenkins, *I Know What I Know*, 26. By "mainstream jazz" I mean the more dominant forms of the music that were being performed at the time that Mingus composed these pieces, such as the big-band swing of Count Basie or Benny Goodman, the bebop of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, or the hard bop of Art Blakey and Horace Silver.

[11] Mingus, "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde."

integral to jazz as an art form.[12] Washington makes an important distinction between "avant-garde aesthetics as a primary *principle* of the music" versus "the avant-garde as a *style* practiced by a select fringe element of the jazz community;" he refers to the two notions as the "perpetual avant-garde" and the "permanent avant-garde."[13] Being aware of this difference is crucial not only when considering Mingus's conflicting position on the "permanent avant-garde," but also in realizing the various ways in which Mingus himself was really an avant-garde musician, as he suggests in *Beneath the Underdog*, as well as how he makes use of the aesthetics generally associated with the permanent avant-garde in his own compositions and performances. Although Mingus's music (with very few exceptions) was firmly rooted in the jazz tradition, it never exhibited complacency with the common trends and idioms of jazz; tradition was never used at the expense of innovation.[14] Mingus thus exemplifies the notion of the perpetual avant-garde. Yet at the same time, Mingus anticipated many of the techniques and practices used later by members of the permanent avant-garde.

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[12] Washington, "'All the Things You Could Be by Now,'" 32-33.
[13] Ibid., 27-28.
[14] There are obvious problems in referring to a "jazz tradition," but in this context and throughout this chapter I use the phrase to describe music that is rooted in the elements (swing and the blues, along with clear formal structures) that were defining characteristics of jazz before the emergence of the permanent avant-garde. Being aware that Mingus knew where he stood within that tradition—as part of a legacy that extends back to Parker, Ellington, and Morton—is crucial in understanding his insistence on remaining strongly rooted in this tradition. Coleman, on the other hand, was perhaps able to create the music that he did because of his detachment from this tradition (especially from the earlier history of jazz), though much of his music is unquestionably steeped in the blues. Although Coleman was then making a break with "the jazz tradition," I (and many others) certainly consider him, as well as the permanent avant-garde, part of that tradition now. For a recollection from Gunther Schuller on teaching Coleman about early jazz history (including Morton and Armstrong) in 1959 at the Lenox School of Jazz, see Litweiler, *Ornette Coleman*, 69. For more on the jazz tradition, see Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 483-512.

In his classic study *Free Jazz*, Ekkehard Jost introduces his discussion of the most influential figures of the avant-garde not with Ornette Coleman, but with Mingus, drawing attention to qualities in Mingus's music that pointed to the avant-garde well before the contributions of Coleman, Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane, and Albert Ayler. As Jost notes, the most important aspects of Mingus's musical conception "had already been worked out in the mid-Fifties, and . . . anticipated some of the basic elements from which varieties of free jazz later crystallized."[15] In addition to his transformation of the bass's role from strict timekeeper to an instrument that could also play virtuosic melodies and contrapuntal lines, Mingus's unusual formal structures—featuring sections of indefinite length, collective improvisation, and frequent variations in tempo, meter, rhythm, and texture—are crucial to his role as pioneer of the permanent avant-garde. The use of such elements in "Pithecanthropus Erectus" (1956), along with the screams and wails demanded of the saxophonists, anticipated the free group improvisations, free forms, and timbral effects that later became central elements of the permanent avant-garde. In addition, the role played by the musicians of the Jazz Workshop was fundamental to Mingus's compositional approach; Jost notes that through the use of collective improvisation, and by allowing his sidemen the freedom to change compositions in the middle of a performance, "Mingus brought his players directly into a process of spontaneous co-creation," a central preoccupation of the permanent avant-garde.[16] The dichotomy between Mingus's anticipation of avant-garde techniques and elements, as demonstrated by Jost, and his disparate views on the avant-garde that range from restrained praise to outright repudiation of the music, has led Washington to refer to Mingus as "the avant-garde's reluctant father."

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[15] Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (Graz: Universal Edition A.G. Wien, 1975), 35.
[16] Ibid., 41.

The Influence of Coleman

Given the significance of Mingus's contributions to the avant-garde, his reservations regarding Coleman's music and popularity are not surprising. Yet, despite his assessment of Coleman's technical abilities and his bewilderment at Coleman's newfound fame, Coleman's music had a profound effect on Mingus's creativity. One illuminating example is "Weird Nightmare," recorded in May 1960 for *Pre-Bird*, an album that was conceived as a showcase of works either written in Mingus's early, pre-Charlie Parker period, or influenced by other figures (mainly Ellington) or styles that pre-dated Parker.[17] While several versions of "Weird Nightmare" were recorded (in 1946, 1953, 1958, and another from 1960), neither of these possesses the "avant-garde" character of the *Pre-Bird* version. For this album, Mingus added a "free" introduction/conclusion that features wild and unusual timbres, complex rhythms, a very unclear sense of meter or beat, and seemingly random interjections from various instruments. These "avant-garde" bookends to the piece are so compelling and effective—and seem to be so in tune with Mingus's text—that, without having ever heard the previous recordings, it would be difficult to imagine the piece without them. In relation to the music that Coleman was producing in early 1960, Mingus's new introduction/conclusion sounds decidedly more "avant-garde." Although definitely not "pre-Bird," its inclusion in an album that suggests that this work was conceived before the influence of Parker—who according to Mingus was also more modern than Coleman[18]—along with the album's release at the height of Coleman's rise to jazz stardom, is surely not coincidental, and it is very unlikely that Mingus would have created this version were it not for Coleman's influence. This performance of "Weird Nightmare" is a revealing attempt by Mingus to demonstrate that, just as he explained in *Beneath the Underdog*, the avant-garde

[17] Charles Mingus, *Pre-Bird* (Verve 314 538 636-2).
[18] Mingus, "Another View of Coleman."

was nothing new, and that he had been writing and performing avant-garde music long before anyone ever heard of Ornette Coleman. As Mingus later wondered, "If I was avant-garde in 1954, then what am I now? Avant-avant-garde? Modern-modern, new thing-new thing?"[19]

The influence of Coleman also led Mingus to form a quartet with an instrumentation identical to Coleman's unusual (though not unprecedented) pianoless quartet. Mingus's group, which was borne out of his engagement at the Showplace in the early months of 1960, was composed of an extraordinary group of musicians, including Dannie Richmond on drums, Ted Curson on trumpet, and Eric Dolphy on alto saxophone. While Mingus continued to compose with the sense of structure and respect for the jazz tradition that he refused to relinquish, the collaboration of these musicians enabled him to create music that possessed the freedom and originality that he admired in Coleman. Without question, the culmination of this quartet's efforts is the album *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*, recorded on October 20, 1960, roughly a year after Coleman's New York debut.[20] As Washington has noted, this album is not only indicative of Mingus's engagement with the concept of the perpetual avant-garde, but it "also highlights the degree to which Mingus self-consciously addressed both cultural and political issues through his music"—a key concern of the permanent avant-garde.[21] In particular, Mingus addresses such issues through the political satire of "Fables of Faubus," as well as with the short monologues to his "audience members" (it was a studio recording) that were typical in his performances and that often addressed the exploitation and commodification of musicians and their work by the jazz industry. Replicating his typical environment at the Showplace, Mingus introduces the music in the album by vocalizing his disdain for performing in noisy

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[19] Mingus, "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde."
[20] Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* (Candid CCD 79005).
[21] Washington, "'All the Things You Could Be by Now,'" 38.

venues, warning the audience to "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… we are interrupted by your noise. In fact, don't even take any drinks, and no cash register ringing, et cetera!"[22] While concerns with the economics of the jazz industry—as well as other political or social issues—were not always made explicit in the work of other avant-garde musicians, they were essential to the development of the "New Thing" and to its particular aesthetic musical qualities.[23]

The music that follows Mingus's bitter remarks is an excellent example of his response to Coleman's influence and of his overall engagement with avant-garde practices and aesthetics. Much of the avant-garde character of Mingus's quartet can be attributed to Eric Dolphy, who recorded later that year with Coleman on the monumental *Free Jazz*,[24] and who, as Priestley has observed, "set the seal of quality and innovation on this new group."[25] Dolphy's highly idiosyncratic sound, unusual choice of pitches, and frequent digressions from the underlying harmonies and overall tonality of a piece ultimately led to numerous comparisons with Coleman. Mingus's choice to work and record with this particular quartet—and thus to create an inevitable analogue to Coleman's group—was certainly deliberate, as attested by Ted Curson, who remembered attending one of Coleman's performances with Mingus and Dolphy: "After a while [Mingus] said 'Do you think you can play like that?' Of course, we could. I'd just got my

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[22] Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*.
[23] Mingus was, at this time, the most outspoken figure regarding these issues, although (as stated earlier in footnote 8) Coleman also shared his concerns regarding the exploitation of musicians by the jazz industry. Archie Shepp would later become another figure of the avant-garde who fervently expressed his views on racial and social injustice, as Mingus had, though in a much more militant manner. Like Mingus, Shepp's musical conception was also shaped by racial politics. See Ronald M. Radano, "The Jazz Avant-Garde and the Jazz Community: Action and Reaction," in *Annual Review of Jazz Studies 3*, ed. Dan Morgenstern, Charles Nanry, and David A. Cayer (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1985), 74-75.
[24] Ornette Coleman, *Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation by the Ornette Coleman Double Quartet* (Atlantic 1364-2).
[25] Priestley, *Mingus*, 109.

pocket trumpet. Eric said OK. We rehearsed a bit, and soon we were playing that style, and just as good."[26] With obvious similarities with Coleman's quartet, now Mingus, playing on the avant-garde's own turf, could embark on his quest "to outdo the avant-garde."[27]

"Folk Forms, No. 1"—A Response to Coleman and the Avant-Garde

In "Folk Forms, No. 1," the opening work on *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*, Mingus creates a composition that engages with avant-garde aesthetics, where musicians have the freedom to venture beyond the typical sounds, common patterns (mainly derived from the bebop language of Charlie Parker), and traditional instrumental roles (where trumpet and saxophone play melody and bass and drums form the accompaniment) that had become entrenched in the dominant discourse of jazz performance. Yet at the same time, the ensemble performs within an innovative formal structure that acknowledges the jazz tradition. Maintaining a clear focus on tradition was of prime importance for Mingus: "Tradition, to me, is the only way a person is gonna do anything good."[28] After being shown an abstract painting by his son, Mingus's fatherly advice was, "Go paint an apple. . . . You can't improvise on nothing. . . . Study reality before you improve on it."[29] Clearly, Mingus believed in artists acquiring a solid foundation in the traditions and techniques of their art form before venturing off into new avenues of expression; his attacks on avant-garde musicians were due not necessarily to the music itself or

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[26] At the Showplace, Mingus's ensemble (which initially underwent various changes in personnel) originally included piano. Though Priestley views the eventual removal of piano as mere coincidence, Curson's statement, as well as the music that Mingus would record with the group (as seen in the following section), suggest that Mingus's choice was quite intentional. See Priestley, *Mingus*, 110-111.

[27] Mingus, "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde."

[28] Wayne Enstice and Paul Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here: Conversations with Twenty-Two Musicians* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 216.

[29] Sue Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 91.

to the musicians' artistic sensibilities, but rather to the same lack of structure and respect for tradition that he witnessed in his son's painting: "I think they're playing anything they want to play: noise, squeaks and hollers, yells, banging bells, with no continuity to it, with no recapitulation, with no form."[30]

The avant-garde's disregard for following formal structures and chord changes—or "improvising on nothing"—is addressed thoroughly by Mingus in "Folk Forms, No. 1." Although Mingus was a master at pushing the boundaries of traditional forms, and four years later would create spaces of great freedom within tightly controlled compositions, such complex structures would perhaps have been too advanced for what he deemed "beginners."[31] Rather, he turns to the twelve-bar blues, the most traditional and fundamental of jazz forms, as the structural platform for the improvisations. Yet Mingus, with his keen sense for innovation, transforms this seemingly simple blues into a large-scale tour-de-force, in which the form is dictated not by the usual repetition of the same chorus structure along with the standard sequence of theme-improvisations-theme, but by changes of instrumentation, rhythm, metric emphasis, dynamics, and an intricate thematic relationship between the material played by all four musicians that provides a strong sense of continuity throughout the twelve-minute work.

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[30] Mingus, "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde." This is the root of Mingus's ambivalence toward Coleman. While he genuinely seemed to like Coleman's music, it seems that Mingus just couldn't get around the absence of the fundamentals of jazz in Coleman's music. Since Coleman had never proven that he could play music that conformed to the jazz tradition, many of his detractors assumed that his approach to music, however novel, was simply the result of incompetence. When John Coltrane, on the other hand, moved into the realm of the avant-garde, there could be no argument as to the legitimacy of his "chops."

[31] Mingus, "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde." Two examples of such structures are the various versions of "Meditations on Integration" and "Fables of Faubus" that were recorded in 1964 (see chapter 2). Both works appear on Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Sextet With Eric Dolphy: Cornell 1964* (Blue Note D 222854).

Formal Structure

When playing the blues, Mingus often followed the practice most common among jazz musicians: this traditionally involved stating the head (theme) over a twelve-bar blues chord progression, having any number of soloists improvise on that progression through an indefinite number of choruses, and ending the piece with a final statement of the head. However, Mingus also looked for ways to transform standard jazz forms (including forms other than the blues) into more complex structures.[32] For example, the heads and/or choruses of his compositions are often extended to unusual lengths, and solos are not only played over a series of chord changes within a certain structure, but are often organized into various sections with changing instrumentation, rhythms, meter, and/or tempo. In these types of "extended forms," as Mingus referred to them, the basic head-improvisations-head outline common in jazz is often retained, yet the overall effect is that of a much more elaborate composition where each section is tightly organized into smaller sub-sections, and where structure and unity are achieved through much more than the continuous repetition of a harmonic progression within the standard blues or popular song forms. A fairly straightforward example of this practice is "Haitian Fight Song" (1957). In this twelve-bar blues, the head—heard after an introductory bass solo by Mingus—is not simply a melody played over one blues chorus (as is most often the case in any number of tunes based on the twelve-bar blues), but rather consists of a gradual piling up of two riffs over an ostinato that occurs over a span of four choruses (counting the last twelve bars of the bass solo where the ostinato is introduced). In addition, the improvisations in "Haitian Fight Song" do not simply

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[32] For a list of selected Mingus compositions that deviate from standard chorus structures, see Priestley, *Mingus*, 243-244.

follow the twelve-bar blues chorus structure, but are organized into sections of regular time, double time, and stop time.[33]

This basic approach to expanding formal structures is also present in "Folk Forms, No. 1," though in a much more elaborate way. The piece begins with a signature unaccompanied bass solo by Mingus in a similar fashion to "Haitian Fight Song" or "Better Git It In Your Soul" (1959), prompting listeners to expect a consequent statement of the theme. However, even after Richmond joins Mingus, followed by Dolphy in the third chorus and finally Curson in the fourth, a standard theme has yet to be presented. As Brian Priestley observes, it seems that this is in fact an "entirely themeless" blues in the same vein as Mingus's "No Private Income Blues," recorded the previous year.[34] While there is indeed a lack of a conventional theme in "Folk Forms, No. 1," Mingus still retains the common head-improvisations-head outline in the studio recording as well as in the only other recording of the piece from a live performance at the Antibes Jazz Festival just three months earlier (see table 1.1).[35]

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[33] Charles Mingus, "Haitian Fight Song," *The Clown* (Rhino/Atlantic R2 75590). The improvisations of Jimmy Knepper (trombone) and Shafi Hadi (alto saxophone) follow the same structure: two choruses of regular time (following the already-established tempo of about 152 beats per minute in a 4/4 meter); one chorus of double time (where the tempo doubles in the entire ensemble while the harmonic rhythm remains constant—in other words, the regular-time and double-time choruses are the same length); one chorus of stop time (the soloist improvises over an ensemble rhythm of three quarter notes followed by a quarter rest in each measure); and one final chorus of regular time. Wade Legge's piano solo skips the double-time chorus, keeps the stop-time chorus, and ends with two choruses of regular time, while Mingus's improvisation deviates from these structures by remaining in regular time and ending with an unaccompanied section where he temporarily abandons the form. Although the improvisations in "Haitian Fight Song" clearly follow a twelve-bar structure, the structure of the head is more ambiguous due to the overlapping of eight-bar phrases. In the first recording of the piece (1955), the improvisations also follow a twelve-bar form, but the head is clearly an eight-bar blues. This earlier version can be found in Charles Mingus, *The Charles Mingus Quintet Plus Max Roach* (Fantasy OJCCD-440-2 [F-6009]).

[34] Priestley, *Mingus*, 99 and 113.

[35] Charles Mingus, *Mingus at Antibes* (Atlantic, 7567-90532-2). The live recording of "Folk Forms, No.1" features the same personnel as the studio version, with the exception that Booker

Table 1.1. "Folk Forms, No. 1," large-scale structure (number of choruses per section are included in parentheses).

Head (7 choruses)		Solos (36 choruses)				Head (8 choruses, plus one-chorus coda)	
Bass Solo (2)	Collective Improvisation (5)	Trumpet (9)	Bass (6)	Alto Sax (12)	Drums (9)	Bass Solo (1)	Collective Improvisation (7) + coda (1)

Beyond introducing thematic material that will be discussed later in this chapter (see examples 1.1, 1.4, and 1.6), the head of the piece is comprised of both the opening bass solo and the ensuing section of collective improvisation, lasting a total of seven full choruses. Further, the collective improvisation (choruses 3-7; 1:27 to 2:38 of the recording) within the head is meticulously structured. It begins with the gradual addition of instruments to the texture in each successive chorus—along with a gradual increase in dynamics and rhythmic intensity—and ends with a two-chorus climax, in which the metric emphasis is shifted from a two-beat to a four-beat feel, and where bass and drums finally assume their standard rhythmic roles, supporting the simultaneous improvisations of the saxophone and trumpet (see table 1.2). The head, as a combination of introductory bass solo and collective improvisation, is recapitulated (at 10:48) in almost the exact same manner following a succession of trumpet, bass, alto saxophone, and drum improvisations, with only three exceptions: the bass solo, in which thematic material is once again stated by Mingus, is only one chorus long; the climax at the end of the collective improvisation is extended by two choruses; and a coda of one chorus, where the music gradually slows down, is added. Beyond those slight differences, everything else about the head—

Ervin is added on tenor saxophone to form a quintet. While there are differences between both versions of this work, the following discussion deals primarily with the studio version, and all examples, transcriptions, and tables refer to that version. The thematic content and overall large- and small-scale structure of the studio version, however, also applies to the live recording.

including the sequence in which instruments are added and the change from a two-beat to a four-beat feel at the climax—remains the same.

Table 1.2. "Folk Forms, No. 1," head (choruses 1-7).

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Head</td><td rowspan="2">Bass Solo Introduction (0:59)</td><td>Introduction consisting of three motives (drums enter at end of chorus; quiet and sporadic); 2-beat feel continues through fifth chorus (chorus 1; mm. 1-12)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reiteration of three motives (chorus 2; mm. 13-24)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Collective Improvisation: gradual increase in dynamics and rhythmic activity in all parts to climax in chorus 6 (1:27)</td><td>Saxophone enters (chorus 3; mm. 25-36)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Trumpet enters (chorus 4; mm. 37-48)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Drums increase rhythmic activity (chorus 5; mm. 49-60)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Climax; change from 2-beat to 4-beat feel; bass (walking) and drums finally assume standard rhythmic roles (choruses 6-7; mm. 61-84)</td></tr>
</table>

The structuring of the head through a gradual addition of layers and intensification of sound and rhythm is a key characteristic of "Folk Forms, No. 1," and is a stylistic technique that is also found in many other works by Mingus; this process culminates in what Jennifer Griffith has referred to as an "ecstatic event," an "expression of extreme emotion" and "exuberance," which she links to the influence of the Holiness church on Mingus's music.[36]

Like the head, the improvisations in "Folk Forms, No. 1" are also performed within a complex structure beyond the usual repetition of choruses and harmonic progressions. While the solos do not all necessarily adhere to exactly the same structure, the organization of each passage is clearly deliberate, and not, as Jenkins observes, "spontaneously created"—though the group

[36] See Griffith, "His Jelly Roll Soul," 98-111.

certainly creates the impression of spontaneity (see table 1.3).[37] All four of the improvisations in this work are organized around, and framed by, sections of collective improvisation, often with clear references to the climax of the head—where trumpet and alto saxophone improvise over a straight-ahead, four-beat feel accompaniment in the bass and drums. The trumpet and alto saxophone solos share a structure similar to each other, beginning and ending with collective improvisation. In between each section of collective improvisation, Mingus uses various permutations of instruments derived from the quartet, with the lead instrument (trumpet or saxophone) playing through a series of "conversations" (free of standard accompaniments) with each of the other three instruments—though each instrument is decisively the lead voice in its respective solo within the framework of collectivity.[38] In effect, the trumpet and saxophone improvisations mirror the large-scale structure of the entire piece, beginning and ending with collective improvisation and including a series of solos in between. While the bass and drum solos are more straightforward, they are still organized around sections of collective improvisation. Interestingly, the middle section of the drum solo is more of an allusion to collective improvisation; the saxophone and trumpet are absent, but the bass and drums keep the same general four-beat feel as in the sections of collective improvisation during the other solos as well as the head's climax.

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[37] Jenkins, *I Know What I Know*, 75.

[38] Zenni recognizes that Curson and Dolphy are the lead voices during the passages that I have designated as the trumpet and saxophone solos, but argues that since the other musicians can intervene freely, it is better to refer to them as choruses "conducted" or led by Curson and Dolphy, rather than actual solos. See Stefano Zenni, *Charles Mingus: Polifonie dell'universo musicale afroamericano* (Viterbo: Nuovi Equilibri, 2002), 67.

Table 1.3. "Folk Forms, No. 1," solo structure.

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="7">Trumpet
(2:38)</td><td rowspan="2">Collective Improvisation
(trumpet is lead voice)</td><td>2-beat feel; bass and drums do not keep time
(choruses 8-9; mm. 85-108)</td></tr>
<tr><td>4-beat feel; bass and drums alternate time-keeping roles every 2 measures (choruses 10-11; mm. 109-132)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Trumpet in conversation with one other instrument</td><td>Drums (do not keep time) (chorus 12; mm. 133-144)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Saxophone (chorus 13; mm. 145-156)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bass (does not keep time) (chorus 14; mm. 157-168)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Collective Improvisation
(trumpet remains lead voice)</td><td>Climax; change from 2-beat to 4-beat feel; bass (walking) and drums resume standard rhythmic roles
(choruses 15-16; mm. 169-192)</td></tr>
<tr style="display:none"></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Bass
(4:46)</td><td>Solo with sporadic drums</td><td>2-beat feel; rather free, yet maintains chorus structure throughout; drums become more prominent in each of first three choruses and subside in last chorus (choruses 17-20; mm. 193-240)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Collective Improvisation
(no lead voice)</td><td>2-beat feel (choruses 21-22; mm. 241-264)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Alto
Saxophone
(6:07)</td><td rowspan="2">Collective Improvisation
(saxophone is lead voice)</td><td>Transitional chorus; sax gradually emerges as the lead voice; alternates between 2-beat and 4-beat feel
(chorus 23; mm. 265-276)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Climax; 4-beat feel; bass (walking) and drums resume standard rhythmic roles (chorus 24-25; mm. 277-300)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Saxophone in conversation with one other instrument</td><td>Drums (do not keep time) (chorus 26; mm. 301-312)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Trumpet; drums remain, but sporadic (choruses 27-28; mm. 313-336)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bass, no drums; bass provides beat (walking) for first two measures only (chorus 29; mm. 337-348)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Collective Improvisation
(saxophone remains lead voice)</td><td>Climax; change from 2-beat to 4-beat feel; bass (walking) and drums resume standard rhythmic roles
(choruses 30-34; mm. 349-408)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Drums
(8:49)</td><td>Solo</td><td>Plays largely around second motive
(choruses 35-36; mm. 409- 432)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Collective Improvisation
(allusion, with bass only)</td><td>4-beat feel; trumpet and saxophone are absent, but alludes to all other collective improvisation passages where bass and drums assume standard rhythmic roles
(choruses 37-39; mm. 433-468)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Solo</td><td>Finishes with second motive
(choruses 40-43; mm. 481-516)</td></tr>
</table>

If the main proponents of the avant-garde ever felt that the possibilities for innovation had been exhausted with the blues and other forms that were perhaps over-used in jazz, in "Folk Forms, No. 1" Mingus shows—through a rigorous structuring of the head and improvisations—that the blues structure can be a solid foundation for more complex and innovative large-scale forms.

Thematic Content

In the spoken introduction to his "audience," Mingus introduces "Folk Forms, No. 1" as "a composition that's based on a folk song form... has no title yet, so it'll probably appear on a record someplace titled something like... What could replace opus? Like opus... Oh, 'New Series One.' 'Folk Series.'"[39] This short but crucial statement reveals several important details: first, Mingus establishes himself as a "serious composer" through his use of the term opus and the number "one;" at the same time, Mingus prefigures the spontaneous character of the performance by implying that the composition is so new that it does not yet have a title, even though it had been in the group's repertoire for several months; lastly, in his attempt to come up with a title, Mingus uses the term "series" rather than opus, an important choice to consider since the title chosen for the album was "Folk Forms" rather than "Folk Series." The title "Folk Forms" may simply be a reference to the twelve-bar blues and the blues feeling that permeates the work, as well as the folk quality to these blues that at times seem to remain firmly on the tonic, with little or no harmonic movement—though it becomes obvious in the sections that feature a walking bass line that Mingus does in fact follow the standard blues progression. The title "Folk Series," on the other hand, is more ambiguous, and may refer to a series of thematic elements that are taken up and rearranged in many different combinations by each musician.

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[39] Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*.

While there seems to be some consensus among scholars, including Priestley, Washington, and Zenni, that there are certain thematic recurrences throughout the improvisations, the exact nature of this material has not been fully demonstrated, and its occurrence is much more prominent than it initially appears.[40]

There are three main motives or figures—and many permutations arising from those motives—that make up the thematic content of the piece, and, along with the blues form, it is the character of these motives that is crucial in establishing the music's strong roots in tradition. Each motive, though varied in rhythm and pitch content, is typical of the blues and is reminiscent of figures used not only in jazz blues performances, but also in the blues outside of jazz, like country or urban blues. The second of these figures discussed below (example 1.4), for instance, is heard in much blues-based popular music of the 1950s and 60s. In addition, as a result of their continuous repetition and development, the figures often take on the quality of riffs, which is a way of connecting "Folk Forms, No. 1" to the tradition of using riffs in jazz improvisation, composition, and arranging. Mingus demonstrates his firm grasp on tradition by using figures that are familiar and characteristic of the blues, and although the use of such figures could potentially become tired or clichéd, the way in which Mingus and his ensemble combine and develop them is highly original and innovative.

The first motive is the most difficult to identify due to the lack of a definitive version, although the various forms of the motive are clearly related. The first version, introduced in the

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[40] Washington writes of the "seemingly endless variation on the ensemble's approach to the same material," but the exact nature of this material is not specified. Washington, "All the Things You Could Be by Now," 40. Along the same lines, Priestley hears that "the entire performance is spontaneously organized around a couple of simple rhythmic figures," but only one of these figures is identified (the second motive in the discussion below). Priestley, *Mingus*, 119. I argue that while the character of the performance is spontaneous, the conception of these figures was predetermined.

third measure by Mingus, consists of two upward-sliding quarter notes (preceded by an eighth plus quarter-note pick-up) in its first half, followed by a series of eighth notes from beat three to beat one of the next measure.

Example 1.1. First motive, seven versions from bass introduction (this and all subsequent transcriptions by the author).

1 (mm. 2-4)

#2 (mm. 4-6)

#3 (mm. 6-7)

#4 (mm. 10-11)

#5 (mm. 14-15)

#6 (mm. 17-19)

#7 (mm. 20-23)

During the two-chorus bass introduction, Mingus makes six more statements of the motive, each varied in some form through changes in rhythm and/or pitch (see example 1.1). The second version of this motive, for example, retains the same pitches but features a reduction in rhythmic activity, with a single quarter note pick-up, a sliding half note instead of two quarter notes, and quarter notes rather than eighth notes on the last two beats of the motive. In the seventh version

of the motive, notes two to five are an augmentation of notes three to six of the first version, while the rest of the motive is an exact match to the corresponding beats of the third version. Although this motive may be somewhat obscured by Mingus's continuous variations, its importance is brought into relief during Dolphy's initial entrance in the third chorus (at 1:27).

Example 1.2. First motive, version 7 (1:22) and Dolphy's variation (1:27).

Mingus motive 1, version 7

Dolphy, variation of motive 1, version 7

Example 1.3. Dolphy's development of first motive into AAB "blues theme" (1:27).

chorus 3

fragment later used by Dolphy

chorus 4

Here, Dolphy's variation of Mingus's last version of the motive is thematically oriented, and is deployed in a manner consistent with the AAB melodies (and lyrics) characteristic of the blues—Bessie Smith's "Reckless Blues" or Charlie Parker's "Now's the Time" are two classic examples (see examples 1.2 and 1.3). Due to its length, melodic nature, its prominence during the bass

introduction (both at the beginning and at the return of the head), and its transformation into a "blues theme" by Dolphy, the first motive bears closer resemblance to a traditional theme than the other two motives.

The second of the three motives is more rhythmic than melodic in nature, and is identified by Priestley and Zenni as an important rhythmic figure heard throughout "Folk Forms, No. 1."[41] According to Priestley, this motive is first introduced in the drums in measure 23 of the piece, a completely separate rhythmic entity free from any melodic association (example 1.4).[42] Yet, the first appearance of this figure is somewhat hidden, growing out of and overlapping with the third version of the first motive (example 1.5).

Example 1.4. Second motive, first rhythmic statement, m. 23 (1:25).

Example 1.5. Second motive, mm. 6-7 (1:05).

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[41] Priestley, *Mingus*, 119 and Zenni, *Charles Mingus*, 67.
[42] Priestly points out that this is exactly the same rhythm as the exclamation, "Oh, play that thing!" heard in King Oliver's classic "Dippermouth Blues;" perhaps this is Mingus paying homage to the New Orleans bandleader and his then protégé Louis Armstrong, whom Mingus had worked with early in his career. As in Oliver's piece, Mingus also uses this rhythm to show his approval for his sidemen's performance with one of his favorite exaltations, "Oh yeah, I know," during sections of collective improvisation, once almost half-way through the piece in the twenty-second chorus and again at the beginning of the thirty-fifth chorus. Priestley, *Mingus*, 119.

Each subsequent statement of the first motive (versions four to seven) overlaps similarly with the second motive (as does Dolphy's variation in the third chorus), so that by the time the second motive is played in isolation by Richmond, it has already been presented five times by Mingus (see example 1.1). While the second motive begins on the fourth beat of the measure in statements that grow directly out of the first motive, statements of the figure alone (as Richmond's in measure 23) usually begin on the second beat of the measure. Of all three motives, the second is the most common and is played regularly by all the instrumentalists. Its prominence as a rhythmic figure is highlighted in Richmond's drum solo, which is structured around several statements of the motive, as well as in the punctuation of the motive on snare drum that concludes the piece. The frequency of this figure has also led Zenni to identify it as one of two structural elements of the composition—the second being the twelve-bar blues form.[43]

The third and final motive is a descending arpeggiated figure, usually beginning and ending on the tonic, which appears immediately following the introduction of the second motive. While it is the least common of the three motives, it is immediately recognizable as a recurring figure, as subsequent statements of it feature little rhythmic or melodic variation (example 1.6).

Example 1.6. Third motive, mm. 8-9 (1:08).

[43] Zenni, *Charles Mingus*, 67. I agree with Zenni's assessment of the dominance of this figure, though I argue that all three motives, and not just this one, serve as structural elements in the piece.

Mingus often uses this figure to provide a strong emphasis at the ends of phrases or to signal the end or beginning of a chorus. This function is already evident in the introductory bass solo, where the strong descending figure highlights the ends of certain four bar phrases (the second and third phrases in the first chorus, and the first and third phrases of the second chorus), and punctuates the end of Mingus's introduction. Although this figure appears with much less frequency later in the piece (with the exception of Mingus's bass solo), its prominence during the introduction establishes the motive's primary role in defining key structural moments throughout the rest of the performance. These include: 1) the transition between the "head" of the piece (see Table 1.1) and the instrumental solos at the beginning of the eighth chorus; 2) the transitions—in both trumpet and saxophone solos—between two- and four-beat metric emphases in the first collective improvisation, and between collective improvisation, conversations, and back to collective improvisation (choruses 10, 12, 15, 24, 26, and 30); and 3) the transitions between trumpet and bass solos (chorus 17) and saxophone and drum solos (chorus 35) (see solo structure, Table 1.3).

By the beginning of the ninth measure of the studio version of "Folk Forms, No. 1," the thematic elements that will serve as germs for future development in the improvisations have already been presented by Mingus. While the piece does not exhibit an identifiable "theme" in the conventional sense, the fact that the introductory bass solo is composed entirely of this material suggests that Mingus perhaps conceived of the combination of these motives as a type of malleable theme—one which does not rely on a fixed succession of events, but is rather composed of any combination and variation of the three motives, as is evident in the inclusion of

all three motives in the one-chorus bass solo at the return of the head.[44] Yet unlike a traditional theme, which aside from usually scant references generally only frames the improvisations in a performance, this collection of three motives and its various guises appears repeatedly throughout.[45] The frequency with which all this thematic material appears is certainly not a strong coincidence, but was surely worked out in advance by Mingus and his ensemble. In the album's liner notes, Nat Hentoff confirms that the musicians "were mainly given a rhythm pattern"—suggesting that some of the material was pre-composed—and the appearance of all three motives in the Antibes recording of the piece is evidence that this is not just another "themeless" blues.[46]

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[44] Mingus's manuscripts at the Library of Congress contain two lead sheets with the titles "Folk Forms #1" and "Folk Forms #2," which are essentially transcriptions (though somewhat inaccurate) of Mingus's opening bass solo in the Candid and Antibes recordings, respectively. The transcriptions are perhaps an attempt to catalogue Mingus's work, as they are dated November 1976 and seem to be in a hand other than Mingus's. Whether Mingus intended for his opening solos to be transcribed as "lead sheets," however, is unclear. In any case, neither of the solos provides a complete picture of the piece, as the continued recurrence of the three motives in both performances seems crucial to Mingus's conception of the work. Box 7, Folders 11-12, Charles Mingus Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[45] The motives themselves are traditional blues figures, but the process of providing composed material and having the performers draw on it and transform it at will is an avant-garde practice. This can be heard in Cecil Taylor's "Unit Structures" from 1966. For a discussion of Taylor's piece, see Jost, *Free Jazz*, 76-83.

[46] Nat Hentoff, liner notes to Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*. It should be noted that although all three motives appear in the Antibes recording of the piece, the second motive is absent from Mingus's introductory solo, although it is still present during the introduction as a purely rhythmic figure in the drums. In the Antibes recording, Mingus plays versions of the first motive that conclude with the same melodic movement (F, E-flat, E-natural, F) as those in the third, fifth, and seventh versions of the same motive in the Candid recording (which result in the outgrowth of the second motive). The characteristic rhythm of the second motive, however, is missing from the Antibes version. This provides us with a rare glimpse into Mingus's compositional process, and suggests that the second motive—which may not have initially been Mingus's idea, but possibly Richmond's or one of the other musicians'—eventually became such an integral part of the piece that Mingus perhaps felt that it should be included as part of his malleable introductory "theme."

Thematic Unity and Development

Even though "Folk Forms, No. 1" is permeated by these three motives, the material is performed with such varied and distinctive approaches that it never becomes tedious. The musicians' strong individuality and creativity results in improvisations of the various thematic elements that, although strongly related, are considerably varied, with each musician playing the different motives in his own unique style. This leads to what Zenni describes as a highly theatrical aspect in Mingus's approach to composition, where the musicians perform the role of "characters on the stage."[47] The following section will analyze the "character development" of the musicians throughout the piece, achieved by their unique interpretation and reworking of the thematic material. Since the function of the third motive is primarily structural (rather than as development for improvisation), and since Richmond's material is largely centered around essentially rhythmic versions of the second motive, this section will focus on Mingus, Curson, and Dolphy's distinct approaches to developing the first and second motives.

While Mingus's first three choruses consist entirely of a combination of the three motives, the individuality of his character in the piece hinges largely on his unique development of the first motive, which becomes very prominent during the more free (non-walking) sections of collective improvisation. Immediately after his solo introduction, Mingus begins the third chorus (at 1:29) with a new version of the motive (example 1.7, mm. 26-27) that resembles its third statement (example 1.1, mm. 6-7), except that the figure now begins with an eighth rest plus eighth note, rather than a quarter note. Mingus subsequently continues with a prolongation of this figure, along with other simplified variations, until the beginning of the sixth chorus (at

[47] Stefano Zenni, "Composers as Innovators," *Current Research in Jazz* 4 (2012), accessed December 19, 2012, http://www.crj-online.org/v4/CRJ-ComposersInnovators.php. This is an interesting way of looking at the performance, especially given Mingus's penchant for acting. See chapter three, footnote 20.

2:10), where the bass finally assumes the traditional role of timekeeper (see examples 1.7 and 1.15). In a similar passage of collective improvisation after the bass solo in the middle of the piece, Mingus brings back these figures, repeats them, and develops them even further from the twenty-first to twenty-third choruses until he again resumes the walking bass role (5:39 to 6:20).

Example 1.7. First motive development by Mingus, choruses 3-4 (1:27 to 1:56) and 21-22 (5:39 to 6:07).

chorus 3, mm. 26-27 (1:29)

chorus 4, mm. 40-41 (1:45)

chorus 4, mm. 48-49 (1:55)

chorus 21, mm. 246-247 (5:45)

chorus 22, mm. 254-255 (5:54)

chorus 22, mm. 256-257 (5:56)

chorus 22, mm. 258-259 (5:59)

As evident from example 1.7, the variations of the motive from the twenty-second chorus are quite different than those presented in the introduction (for example, compare the last two versions of example 1.7 with the first of example 1.1). Yet, the pattern of gradual transformation

is clear, as the various versions of the motive are discernible either by rhythm or their similar, and at times even exact, melodic contour and pitch content.

The development of Curson's musical persona also depends on his unique treatment of the thematic material. While his statements of the first motive more closely resemble the very first version played by Mingus—including the characteristic upward slides on the first two quarter notes—it is his development of the second motive that is exceptional. His first utterance in the piece (at 1:42) is a truncated version of the second motive that is also extended by an eighth rest plus eighth note (see example 1.8, mm. 37-38). Curson then proceeds with a process of development that involves variations and repetitions of several versions of the figure until the beginning of his solo in the eighth chorus (at 2:38)—where, like all the other musicians when playing the "lead" role, he largely abandons the thematic-based approach in favor of a greater degree of melodic and rhythmic creativity. This is one instance, especially beginning at the fifth chorus (at 1:56), where the motive functions as a riff through its consecutive repetitions. While with few exceptions the motive's rhythmic identity remains largely intact, Curson's variations are based more on extensions of the motive into longer and more melodic gestures that can be played repeatedly without becoming monotonous (see example 1.8). Further, though varied in melodic contour, Curson's figures revolve primarily around a characteristically bluesy combination of the tonic, flatted third, and flatted fifth, and often end with a descent from the flatted third to the tonic. Also key to the unique character of these and later versions is the ascending pair of eighth notes (often F to A-flat) on the third beat of the first measure, as well as the series of off-beat eighth notes that follow it.

Example 1.8. Second motive development by Curson, choruses 4-6 (1:42 to 2:24).

chorus 4, mm. 37-38 (1:42)

chorus 4, mm. 39-40 (1:44)

chorus 5, mm. 49-50 (1:56)

chorus 5, mm. 55-56 (2:03)

chorus 5, mm. 57-58 (2:05)

chorus 5, mm. 59-60 (2:07)

chorus 6, mm. 61-62 (2:10)

During the five choruses of collective improvisation after Mingus's extended solo (from 5:39 to 6:48), Curson continues to develop the second motive using the same approach—the figure is at first woven into Curson's improvisation along with other material, but becomes increasingly dominant until the last two choruses (the climax) of the section. As example 1.9 shows, Curson ends the twenty-fourth chorus with a statement of the figure (at 6:32) that is rhythmically identical to an earlier version (example 1.8, mm. 39-40), and continues through the entire twenty-fifth chorus with an improvisation that is entirely composed of more adventurous elaborations of the figure. In this passage, Curson combines the more melodic gestures with

shorter, disjunct versions where the rhythm is altered, and/or where the beginning of the figure is shifted to another beat of the measure. In addition, the successive leaps (played in a simple, quarter-note rhythm) in the middle of the chorus, though obviously not full rhythmic statements, clearly allude to the figure's opening two-note leap. Curson's treatment of the second motive—which to varying degrees continues through the remainder of the piece—becomes so emblematic of his improvisations that Richmond is able to almost perfectly anticipate (at 6:46) the rhythm of the entire two-bar gesture at the end of the chorus.[48]

Example 1.9. Second motive development by Curson, chorus 25, mm. 287-301 (6:32 to 6:48).

Dolphy's improvisations also feature individual interpretations of the first two motives, though he is less insistent than Mingus or Curson in adhering to the thematic material. Rather than continuously repeating and varying the motives over entire sections that may last several

[48] This type of anticipation and dialogue, along with further statements of the second motive by Curson, can also be heard in the conversation between Curson and Dolphy in the twenty-seventh chorus (see example 18).

choruses, Dolphy scatters short and often simpler versions of the figures throughout his adventurous and often fragmented improvisations, and quite often, the motives themselves become fragmented, adopting the function of allusion rather than obvious statements. One example of such allusions occurs during the saxophone/drums conversation (at 6:48), where the main idea exchanged between Dolphy and Richmond consists of various iterations (at times incomplete) of the second motive (example 1.10).

Example 1.10. Development of motives, Dolphy and Richmond, chorus 26, mm. 301-313 (6:48 to 7:02).

Dolphy's first three statements of the motive are followed by a figure that has by this stage been repeated a number of times, and which is actually a fragment derived from Dolphy's original variation of the first motive; it is thus not a clear statement of the first motive, but an allusion to it (see examples 1.3, m. 30 and 1.14, m. 38). The saxophonist's main emphasis throughout the piece, however, remains on the second motive, and particularly on clear rhythmic statements (featuring little or no elaboration) that are characterized by a minor-third relationship—usually as an ascent from the tonic (F) to the flatted third (A-flat) and back to the tonic (as in the last version of example 1.10)—and which often appear in pairs an octave apart (see examples 1.11 and 1.16).

Example 1.11. Second motive (including minor-third relation) and allusions by Dolphy (heard at 3:50, 4:27, and 12:26).

chorus 13 (mm. 145-146)

motive 2

motive 2

chorus 15 (mm. 176-178)

motive 2 allusion

motive 2 allusion

chorus 51 (mm. 605-611)

motive 2 allusions

motive 2

Because of the frequent appearance of this particular version of the motive, instances where Dolphy simplifies the rhythm while retaining the same sequence of pitches and octave displacement can be perceived as allusions to the motive (see example 1.11).

Responding to "the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation"

As much as "Folk Forms, No. 1" can be considered a response to the new challenge posed by Coleman's music—and it is indeed very unlikely that Mingus would have performed and recorded this work, at least in this format, without Coleman's influence—the work could perhaps also be an answer to Gunther Schuller's famous 1958 essay, "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation," in which Schuller hails Rollins as an innovator in forming improvisations of a thematic sophistication and coherence that were without equal in the jazz world.[49] It is not unlikely that Mingus would have been familiar with this essay, which was published in *The Jazz Review* less than two years before the "Folk Forms, No. 1" recording, since Schuller was a friend who was (and still remains) a champion of Mingus's music. In addition to conducting Mingus's "Half-Mast Inhibition" for *Pre-Bird*, Schuller had also commissioned Mingus to write "Revelations," and conducted its premiere at the 1957 Brandeis Festival.[50]

In his article on Rollins, Schuller praises the "thematic and structural unity" achieved by Rollins in his improvisation of "Blue 7" as a key "juncture in the constantly unfolding evolution of improvisation," and separates the performance from the "less inspired improvisations" of

[49] Schuller, "Challenge of Thematic Improvisation."
[50] Priestley, *Mingus*, 82. Schuller also reconstructed Mingus's *Epitaph* and conducted its premiere in 1989, ten years after Mingus's death.

players whose music suffers from "the lack of a unifying force."[51] Schuller's comments are problematic in their dismissal of the merit of other musicians' improvisations, yet they offer a perceptive if limited look at a unique aspect of Rollins's method of improvisation. The problems that mar most improvisations, Schuller writes, are the following: "(1) the average improvisation is mostly a stringing together of unrelated ideas; (2) because of the *independently* spontaneous character of most improvisation, a series of solos by different players within a single piece have very little chance of bearing any relation to each other . . . ; (3) in those cases where composing (or arranging) is involved, the body of interspersed solos generally has no relation to these nonimprovised sections."[52] For Schuller, Rollins's performance solves this dilemma with its continuous references to the opening thematic material, which also surfaces, albeit partially, in the work of the other musicians. Yet, although Schuller notes some similarity between the improvisatory material of both Rollins and drummer Max Roach, his main focus is on the way that Rollins develops his own material and less on the unity of the material between all members of the ensemble.

With his complex treatment of the thematic material in "Folk Forms, No. 1," Mingus, who admired Rollins and cited him (in *Beneath the Underdog*) as one of the few musicians who

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[51] Schuller, "Challenge of Thematic Improvisation," 86-87. Schuller, a classically-trained French horn player and composer, was one of many writers who adopted methods used to analyze Western European art music, such as looking for thematic and structural unity, in an attempt to bring a sense of legitimacy and dignity to jazz. Although the thematic unity found in Rollins's improvisation is significant from a Western European aesthetic standpoint, such elements will not necessarily be valued by all listeners or musicians. Schuller's method has been controversial among scholars because it fails to engage with aesthetics that are particular to African American culture. As Walser notes, the trouble with Schuller's analysis is that "he searched for 'purely musical qualities,' deliberately stripping away the 'historical and social trappings' that enable sounds to be meaningful to people." Apart from telling us that Rollins's improvisation is coherent, the analysis "says nothing about why we might value that coherence, why we find it meaningful, or how this solo differs from any of a million other coherent pieces of music." Walser, "'Out of Notes,'" 171.
[52] Ibid., 87.

had made any significant contributions to jazz since Charlie Parker, raises the "challenge of thematic improvisation" presented by Rollins to a whole new level, providing a more thorough response to Schuller's concerns on the interrelation of ideas within a piece.[53] The improvisations by each musician in "Folk Forms, No. 1" are not only coherent (in Schuller's sense) within themselves, but, most significantly, are related to each other and to the piece's main thematic material throughout the work. Mingus has seamlessly coalesced composition and improvisation—the motives themselves are composed, but the manner in which they are presented, combined, and varied, as well as the highly individual character with which they are played by each musician, is certainly improvised. This is not meant to imply that the improvisations are limited to or constrained by these motives. Rather, the motivic content is used as a foundation and a means of departure for the improvisations.

Interestingly, Schuller was also a big proponent of Ornette Coleman's music, and his admiration for the thematic unity achieved by Rollins extended to Coleman's improvisations. In his liner notes to *Ornette!*, Schuller describes Coleman's process of motivic elaboration: "Little motives are attacked from every conceivable angle, tried sequentially in numerous ways until they yield a motivic springboard for a new and contrasting idea, which will in turn be developed similarly, only to yield to another link in the chain of musical thought, and so on until the entire statement has been made."[54] Although Schuller's remarks pertain to the piece "R.P.D.D.," recorded in January of 1961, there are plenty of examples of Coleman's concern with motivic elaboration that were recorded before Mingus's recordings of "Folk Forms, No. 1," and this was clearly an important component of Coleman's style during the period when Mingus became

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[53] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 350.
[54] Schuller, liner notes to Ornette Coleman Quartet, *Ornette!* (Rhino/Atlantic R2 73714).

familiar with his music.[55] If Mingus was aware of this aspect of Coleman's method of improvisation (which may still not have been enough, in his mind, to forgive Coleman's transgressions regarding the jazz tradition), then "Folk Forms, No. 1" could serve as a type of "cutting contest," where Mingus could use thematic development as a way of outdoing both Rollins *and* Coleman.

Structured Freedom

In spite of the very careful and deliberate structuring of "Folk Forms, No.1," both in terms of the large-scale form and the small-scale thematic unity, the performance possesses an extraordinary sense of freedom and spontaneity. To a certain degree, this quality is achieved simply through the absence of a traditional theme, giving the impression that this is perhaps an impromptu performance and the musicians are making things up as they go along—"improvising on nothing." Mingus's spoken introduction to the album and the manufactured illusion of a live set at the Showplace no doubt also contribute to this aspect of the performance. Yet, the most important factor in providing the piece's spontaneous character is the rhythmic ambiguity created by an almost continuous lack of a clear, regular beat (one of the defining elements of avant-garde jazz, according to many scholars). Passages of rhythmic instability abound throughout the performance, and are contrasted with those that are more stable, which mainly occur during the hard-swinging, climactic choruses of the collective improvisations (in both the head and solos), where bass and drums maintain a regular, four-beat feel. Such passages, however, are relatively few—only 20 out of 52 choruses feature this type of stable rhythmic accompaniment that at the

[55] Other examples include Ornette Coleman, "Free," *Change of the Century* (Atlantic 81227 3608-2); Ornette Coleman, "Mind and Time," *Tomorrow is the Question!* (Contemporary OJCCD 5342); Ornette Coleman, "Eventually," *The Shape of Jazz to Come* (Atlantic 1317-2).

time defined most standard jazz performances. To place himself on equal footing with the avant-garde, Mingus largely abandons "straight-ahead" accompaniment in favor of a more collective approach that allows bass and drums a greater degree of autonomy. In these areas, Mingus utilizes four different methods to create varying degrees of rhythmic ambiguity and freedom.

The first of these methods consists of solo improvisations from the bass and drums that are performed with little or no accompaniment (the bass solo only features very sporadic drums at times), and which posses an inherent freedom simply through the absence of other instruments. Of course, this method is not particularly innovative, as there are plenty of recordings, by Mingus as well as others, where bass and (especially) drums are featured in this type of solo setting. Yet for Mingus, such bass solos without accompaniment served as avenues for heightened expression, and his explorations in rhythmic freedom and changes of tempo often resulted in deviations (at least temporarily) from the form of a piece. Such is the case in his virtuosic solo on "Haitian Fight Song," which begins as a standard blues improvisation with rhythmic accompaniment. After five choruses, piano and drums gradually subside until Mingus is left alone, and his playing acquires more and more freedom until he finally breaks from the twelve-bar blues form in the last section of his solo.[56] The solo, recorded in 1957, is a perfect example of what Mingus meant when he said, "all this free-form business isn't new—dropping bar lines and all."[57]

Mingus's solo in "Folk Forms, No. 1" seems to follow a similar pattern, beginning (at 4:46) with a clear delineation of the twelve-bar blues structure and culminating in a section of increased freedom and rhythmic intensity. In this final section, the beat is clearly obfuscated,

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[56] In his transcription of the bass solo on "Haitian Fight Song," Priestley shows this deviation from the twelve-bar blues chorus structure by notating the section with broken bar lines and marking it "quasi out-of-tempo." Priestley, *Mingus*, 235-237.
[57] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 350.

and it seems like another instance of Mingus's rhythmic explorations that stray from the piece's twelve-bar chorus structure. The sense of freedom in this solo, however, is not actually created by playing rubato, changing tempos, or abandoning the form, but rather through irregular accents and note groupings that result in the music being perceived as a succession of metric changes. Beginning with the last four-bar phrase of the nineteenth chorus (at 5:21), the music seems to alternate irregularly between 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 3/8, and 5/8 meters, until it finally settles back to a 4/4 meter four bars before the collective improvisation in the twenty-first chorus (example 1.12).[58]

Example 1.12. Mingus bass solo with implied changes of meter, end of chorus 19 to beginning of chorus 21 (5:21 to 5:39).

Throughout these changes in meter, the eighth note remains at a constant tempo, and it is only the organization of those eighth notes that varies. The instability created by these irregular metric emphases certainly imbues the last part of the solo with a great degree of freedom and

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[58] The use of different meters in this transcription does not intend to show that Mingus played his solo with these specific meters in mind. Rather, this is a way of demonstrating how rhythmic ambiguity is created within the twelve-bar blues structure, and how Mingus's use of irregular accents and note groupings may alter the way the music is perceived by listeners.

spontaneity, yet this effect turns out to be only an illusion, as the combination of the different meters or note groupings is carefully planned to fit perfectly within the twelve-bar blues structure (see example 1.13). While Mingus's solos often strayed from the form of his compositions to venture into areas of free rhythmic exploration, in "Folk Forms, No. 1" he insists on maintaining the form to a tee, demonstrating that freedom does not necessarily entail freedom from form.

Example 1.13. Mingus bass solo following 12-bar blues structure, last four measures of chorus 19 to beginning of chorus 21, mm. 225-241 (5:21 to 5:39).

chorus 20

chorus 21

The second method of creating freedom in this piece is through unstable passages of collective improvisation where bass and drums abandon their usual rhythmic roles. An example of this is in the third through fifth choruses (1:27 to 2:10) of the piece after Dolphy and Curson make their initial entrances. In this section of the head, we hear a gradual progression of increased instability and build-up of tension all the way to the more stable climax of the collective improvisation in the sixth chorus. Although Dolphy clearly plays a lead melodic role during the third chorus (see example 1.3), true collectivity begins to take place once Curson joins the ensemble in the following chorus (at 1:42). Here, Curson, Dolphy, and Mingus each play

fragmented and rhythmically independent lines while Richmond fills in the gaps. This approach to improvisation generates a sense of freedom through instability; neither of the musicians keep time in the usual sense—there is no walking bass or shuffle rhythm in the drums—nor is there a clear lead melodic voice. Yet, the freedom perceived here is also highly structured, balanced through a combination of the melodic fragments (often the first or second motives) in the four parts that results in a continuous, rhythmically-stable melodic line (example 1.14).

Example 1.14. Melody as a combination of melodic fragments, chorus 4, mm. 37-49 (1:42 to 1:57; numbers in parentheses correspond to the motive played, if any).

This collective approach is continued in the following chorus (1:56), though Richmond heightens the sense of instability by creating a cross-rhythm that contradicts the tempo of the other three musicians. Richmond's eighth notes remain equal to those played by the rest of the ensemble, but his beats consist of quarter-note plus eighth-note groupings. This causes his tempo to sound one-third slower than the actual tempo (where the quarter note gets the beat), and for his and the rest of the group's downbeats to only line up every three measures (see example 1.15).

Throughout this extraordinary build-up of tension, the twelve-bar blues form is kept rigorously, and the instability is finally resolved in the sixth chorus (at 2:10), once Mingus and Richmond settle into a four-beat groove.

Example 1.15. Collective improvisation, tempo modulation in drums, chorus 5, mm. 49-52 (1:56).

chorus 5
motive 2
motive 2
Tpt.
motive 2
3
3
A. Sax.
motive 1
motive 1
Bass
Dr.

A third way of creating even greater freedom and instability is through a reversal of the usual melodic/rhythmic roles, which occurs in passages where the solo/melodic instrument (saxophone or trumpet) plays with a clear sense of the beat, while the rhythm instruments (bass or drums) or secondary instrument (saxophone or trumpet) play independently of the beat. This type of interaction between solo and "accompanying" instrument can be heard in the trumpet/saxophone and trumpet/bass conversations during Curson's improvisation. Curson begins the thirteenth chorus (at 3:50) with two statements of the first motive (using the slides and rhythm of Mingus's first version), and continues his improvisation with clear rhythmic and phrase structures (example 1.16).

Example 1.16: Trumpet and saxophone conversation, chorus 13, mm. 145-156 (3:50 to 4:04).

Dolphy, meanwhile, frames the conversation with variations of the second motive, picked up from a statement made by Richmond in the second-last measure of the previous chorus. While these statements of the second motive—featuring Dolphy's characteristic minor third relation—are highly rhythmic, in the middle of the chorus Dolphy abandons delineating the beat for a more snaking, chromatic descent. In a manner similar to Richmond's cross-rhythm in the fifth chorus (see example 1.15), the rhythmic ambiguity of this passage is created through an emphasis on every three eighth notes that briefly results in a 3/8 meter (with one 5/8 grouping in measures eight and nine of the chorus) and that contradicts the rhythm and tempo of Curson's melodic line.

The trumpet/bass conversation in the following chorus (at 4:04) features an even greater degree of instability, resulting in one of the most chaotic sections of the piece where the twelve-bar blues form comes perilously close to unraveling. The rhythmic roles are again reversed; Curson, while clearly playing a lead melodic role, improvises within a fairly strict and clear rhythm for the first five measures of the chorus, while Mingus "accompanies" with a series of repeated eighth notes, off-beat accents, and irregular note groupings that are not quite in time with Curson's phrases—sometimes edging ahead of the beat and sometimes falling behind it—and that echo the chromaticism of Dolphy's previous line (see example 1.17). Due to the lack of a solid rhythmic foundation, and exacerbated by Mingus's playing against him, Curson rushes in the seventh measure and seems to lose control of the form, arriving at the downbeat of the eleventh measure of the chorus two beats early (note that Curson's figure here matches the phrase-ending figure he plays on the downbeat of the fifth measure of the chorus).[59]

Throughout this section, Richmond is silently but keenly aware of the twelve-bar structure, and seems to anticipate that the rhythmic instability created by Curson and Mingus may pose a problem at the return of the collective improvisation in the following chorus.

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[59] In the transcription of this section, I have used the first two changes in meter (from 7/8 to 9/8) not to reflect the intention of the performers, but to depict Curson's phrasing more accurately. The two measures really continue in a 4/4 meter (the amount of eighth notes remains the same in both cases), but Curson essentially begins the seventh measure of the chorus (written in 9/8) half a beat early, and makes up that deficit by playing the third beat of that measure as a group of 3 eighth notes (the last two of which are played as a triplet and equal to the following two triplets). While the independence of the two parts is clear from listening to the recording, the notation here reflects how Curson's improvisation roughly lines up with the material played by Mingus, and not necessarily how the musicians perceived the music. The ninth measure of the chorus (written in 9/8) reflects an actual addition of an eighth note by Mingus.

Example 1.17. Trumpet and bass conversation, chorus 14, mm. 157-173 (4:04-4:23).

chorus 14

straight 8ths

Tpt.

straight 8ths

Bass

(approximate rhythm)

(exact rhythm)

phrase-ending figure

Tpt.

Bass

chorus 15

phrase-ending figure

Tpt.

two beats early

A. Sax

turnaround

Bass

Dr.

Mingus chorus 15
two beats early

Tpt.

A. Sax

Bass

Dr.

Attempting to keep the structure intact and the group together, Richmond indicates this key structural moment in the piece by preceding it with a two-measure drum roll (at 4:15), and highlights the beginning of the fifteenth chorus with a clear four-beat metric feel and a standard hi-hat emphasis on beats two and four of the measure.[60] The drum roll cue is picked up clearly by Dolphy, who enters exactly on the downbeat of the chorus, while it seems that Curson has misinterpreted Richmond's cue and begins the section a measure early with a high F, which he holds through the transition until he is able to find his place. Mingus's arrival, however, is even more at odds with the rest of the group, since his walking bass line for the next few measures does not coincide with Richmond's clear downbeat and ensuing rhythmic pattern. In fact, Mingus was so attentive during his conversation with Curson that he noticed Curson's early arrival to the eleventh measure of the chorus. Rather than following the form exactly, Mingus instead follows Curson's phrase-ending figure and adjusts his playing accordingly, so that the turnaround and his arrival to the beginning of the fifteenth chorus are two beats early in relation to the rest of the group and the actual twelve-bar blues structure. Since it is now Mingus that is off, he proceeds to get back on by dropping a beat in his (displaced) third and fifth measures of the chorus until he is finally back on track by the (actual) fifth measure. While both Richmond and Mingus identified the problem at the end of the trumpet/bass conversation, each chose a different solution at essentially the same time (Mingus's turnaround begins only two beats after Richmond's drum roll). This passage can be seen as a nearly chaotic mistake, yet the musicians' ability to quickly listen and adjust to unexpected circumstances is an example of the high degree of communication and concentration required in jazz performance and improvisation, an aspect of the music that is not always perceived when musicians take fewer risks.

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[60] This is precisely the type of playing that made Richmond such an integral and irreplaceable part in the realization of Mingus's complex approach to composition and performance.

While “Folk Forms, No.1” features varying degrees of rhythmic instability, some sense of the beat—and thus the form—is usually present in either at least one voice or, as example 1.14 shows, through a combination of voices. In the final method of creating freedom, however, all voices avoid clear articulations of the beat, as illustrated by the saxophone/trumpet conversation during Dolphy’s solo (from 7:02 to 7:29; see example 1.18). The very familiar renditions of the second motive played by Curson should provide some stability, yet the manner in which this material is presented is highly unpredictable, as he alternates between the more common melodic gestures that begin on the second beat of the measure (as seen in example 1.8) and other more ambiguous variations, including: a reversal in the rhythmic pattern of the first two beats of the measure (quarter rest plus quarter note becomes quarter note plus quarter rest); a shift of the beginning of the gesture from the second to the first beat of the measure; variations in the length of each figure ranging from two to eighth beats; and an omission of the figure’s initial note. While Dolphy’s portion of the dialogue is mainly a direct imitation of Curson—another example of the highly sophisticated level of communication in this piece—his treatment of the material is even more unpredictable, as his rhythms are more varied and fragmented, and he often only emphasizes the off-beats from the second half of Curson’s gesture. The instability of the passage is further heightened by Richmond, who responds to the dialogue sporadically and unpredictably.

As evident from the previous examples, the notion of freedom in “Folk Forms, No. 1” is dependent on the amount of rhythmic ambiguity created in each instrumental part—the more the musicians deviate from standard rhythmic patterns that clearly articulate the beat, the greater the degree of freedom perceived by the listener. Yet even in these cases of greatest freedom, the quartet’s ability to maintain an innate sense of time along with the complete twelve-bar blues form—and with very few exceptions, perfectly—is staggering.

Example 1.18. Trumpet and saxophone conversation, choruses 27-28, mm. 313-337 (7:02 to 7:29).

chorus 27
motive 2 (Curson's extended version)
motive 2
Tpt.
A. Sax
motive 2
motive 1
Mingus vocal:
Bass
Yeah!
Oh
(text inaudible)
Dr.

motive 2
growl
motive 2
growl
growl
immitates Curson off-beats
Whoo!

motive 2
motive 2
motive 2

Example 1.18 (cont'd). Trumpet and saxophone conversation, choruses 27-28, mm. 313-337 (7:02 to 7:29).

chorus 28
motive 2
growl
motive 2
motive 2
motive 2
motive 2
motive 2
motive 2
slap
recalls chorus 6, mm. 63-64
3
motive 2
allusion
chorus 29
motive 2
motive 2
motive 2
motive 2
motive 2
3
motive 2
motive 3

Conclusion

In “Folk Forms, No. 1,” Mingus demonstrates his exceptional ability to transform a common form like the twelve-bar blues into a composition with multiple levels of structural complexity, a hallmark of his compositional style that appears again and again throughout his oeuvre. Through the continuous blurring of boundaries between the seemingly disparate notions of freedom and structure, along with the systematic development of thematic material within that structure, Mingus is able to prove that innovation does not need to come at the expense of continuity and cohesion, and that the avant-garde’s aesthetic concerns do not necessitate a break with tradition, but can coexist with it. With the absence of a traditional theme, seemingly spontaneous interactions between all four instrumentalists, and extended sections that lack a strong rhythmic foundation, much of the work borders on the brink of chaos and indeed sounds as if these musicians are “improvising on nothing.” Consequently, it may appear that the quartet is taking part in an entirely spontaneous and collective process of improvisation that in many ways was similar to the music that Coleman was then creating (or at least the way it was perceived by many, as Coleman’s compositions at the time were certainly structured and began and ended with clear, if unusual, themes). Yet, this work rivals the structure and unity of anything else that Mingus ever composed. Mingus’s ingenious method proved that his music could be quintessentially avant-garde, engaging the aesthetic practices that were central to the “New Thing,” while at the same time acknowledging the legacy of figures like Morton, Ellington, and Parker through an utterly innate sense of the blues and a compositional style that prized an extremely sophisticated notion of structure—Mingus was, as he so consistently affirmed, avant-garde, yet his musical identity remained firmly rooted in the jazz tradition.

CHAPTER 2

"Free Land of Slavery": The Transformation of "Fables of Faubus" (1957-1964)

Although Mingus's oeuvre resists categorization, many of his musical works exhibit a concern with the racial, social, and political issues that were central to the aesthetic of many avant-garde jazz musicians of the 1960s. Throughout his career, Mingus actively dealt with these issues by voicing his views—particularly regarding racial prejudice—not only through numerous interviews or his infamous monologues in clubs, but primarily by composing and performing works with political titles. Such pieces include "Work Song" (1955), "Haitian Fight Song" (1955), "Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb On Me" (1961), "Remember Rockefeller at Attica" (1974), and "Free Cell Block F, 'Tis Nazi U.S.A." (1974). The climate and events of the Civil Rights Movement were a particularly strong catalyst for Mingus's creativity, resulting in pieces such as "Fables of Faubus" (1957) and "Meditations on Integration" (1964), perhaps his two most powerful and enduring musical protests. This chapter will examine how changes in the performance of "Fables of Faubus" through a period of five years, from 1959 to 1964, can be regarded as Mingus's response to the increasing hatred, violence, and tensions that surrounded the most tumultuous years of the Civil Rights Movement.

"Fables of Faubus" was Mingus's protest against Arkansas governor Orval Faubus, a political leader who became one of the great villains of the Civil Rights Movement after making national headlines for the events that took place at Little Rock's Central High School in September of 1957. Following the 1954 decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* by the U.S. Supreme Court to eliminate racial segregation in public schools, the NAACP registered students in schools across the South, including those who soon became known as "the Little Rock Nine"

at the city's Central High School. In the face of overwhelming pressure from his political party and his largely segregationist white Arkansas constituents during a campaign for a third term as governor, Faubus sent in the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the nine African American students from entering the school. After three weeks of protests, President Eisenhower finally ended the ill-fated quarrel and enforced the Supreme Court's decision by sending federal troops and taking control of the Arkansas National Guard.

Almost immediately after (and perhaps even during) the events in Little Rock, Mingus had already composed and was performing "Fables of Faubus" for audiences in New York City night clubs.[1] The piece was initially conceived as a purely instrumental number, but it almost instantly developed a more direct and conspicuous criticism of Faubus during one performance when, according to Dannie Richmond, Mingus sang the main melody with the lyrics "Tell me someone who's ridiculous," to which Richmond emphatically responded with "Governor Faubus!"[2] While at its inception the piece was focused on the racist attitudes of Faubus and like-minded politicians, it eventually developed into Mingus's strongest political statement, an anthem that not only engaged the immediate issues pertinent to the Civil Rights Movement, but that stood against the countless years of brutality and oppression suffered by African Americans.

The Civil Rights Movement coincided with Mingus's most prolific and intense period of creativity. During this time, Mingus created new compositions that were worked out and revised during rehearsals and performances with his Jazz Workshop, and eventually recorded these works for some of his most celebrated albums, including *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (1956), *The Clown* (1957), *Blues and Roots* (1959), *Mingus Ah-Um* (1959), *Charles Mingus Presents*

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[1] Priestley notes that Mingus was already playing the piece in the same month of the controversy, possibly at the Café Bohemia in September of 1957. Priestley, *Mingus*, 86.
[2] Priestley, *Mingus*, 87.

Charles Mingus (1960), *Oh Yeah* (1961), and *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (1963). While he occasionally returned to older compositions (especially his most popular tunes) in performance, Mingus's efforts were most frequently directed towards new compositions, and few of his works were recorded more than once. One example is "Pithecanthropus Erectus," described by Andrew Homzy as "a watershed work for Mingus;" after the pivotal 1956 album, the main melody of "Pithecanthropus Erectus" served as a short introduction to Mingus's magnum opus, *Epitaph*, but the only other full recording of the work is a less-inspired rendition that was made in 1970, a time when Mingus was recycling old material after a long hiatus from the jazz scene.[3] Mingus did perform other works with some frequency, but none compare to the attention he devoted to "Fables of Faubus," which he returned to and recorded repeatedly throughout his career.

The issues of education and segregation that were central to the Little Rock crisis also had a very personal significance for Mingus, and thus contributed to his continued focus on performing and reworking "Fables of Faubus." In Thomas Reichman's film *Mingus*, which chronicles the composer's eviction from his New York City loft in 1966, Mingus drew attention to his own lack of a proper education: "…basically I'm a cop, most kids are—cops and soldiers." "Are you a kid?" Reichman asks. Mingus's answer is revealing: "Yeah, if you never get a

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[3] Mingus, *More Than a Fakebook*, 109. *Epitaph* was never fully performed during Mingus's lifetime, but was performed and recorded in 1989 by a 30-piece band with Gunther Schuller conducting. In Schuller's reconstruction of this eighteen-movement work, "Pithecanthropus Erectus" serves as the introduction, though this is not the introduction in the album from the disastrous Town Hall concert of 1962, which contains several movements from *Epitaph*. Charles Mingus, *The Complete Town Hall Concert*. Blue Note CDP 7243. The 1970 recording of "Pithecanthropus Erectus" appears in Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus in Paris: The Complete America Session*. Sunnyside Records SSC 3065. For more on this album, see Priestley, *Mingus*, 182.

chance to get an education, what else can you be? Education means age."[4] "With no education," Mingus later lamented, "it's a bitch to try and figure out this society and this system."[5] One of his projects—which was expected to be funded by Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited but unfortunately never materialized—was the School of Arts, Music, and Gymnastics, an institution whose instructors, in addition to Mingus, would have included drummers Max Roach and Willie Jones, Mingus's long-time friend and multi-instrumentalist Buddy Collette, and dancer Katherine Dunham.[6] When Mingus was evicted from the loft that he hoped would serve as a space for this school, the importance that he placed on education becomes evident as he described the situation to reporters who were there for the occasion: "I want to build a school. It meant a lot to me. It meant a chance to learn more, to improve myself, and also to teach kids." When a reporter agrees "it could make a real contribution to jazz," Mingus brushes off the comment, believing it to be directed at the significance of his own achievements. But when the reporter clarifies that the comment refers to Mingus's possible contribution to jazz education, "as a teacher rather than as a straight musician," Mingus again turns serious: "That's what I wanted to do. I felt . . . [jazz] needs to be passed on."[7]

The issue of segregated schools throughout the South also runs parallel to the many obstacles Mingus had faced throughout his career as a result of segregation. His decision to switch from cello to bass, for example, was more of a necessity rather than a desire to play jazz, since as he had been advised more than once, "at least a black man can get employment with a

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[4] Thomas Reichman, *Mingus (Charlie Mingus): 1968*, (New York: Rhapsody Films, 1968), VHS, 19:40.
[5] Ibid., 49:22.
[6] Priestley *Mingus*, 149.
[7] Reichman, *Mingus*, 51:39.

bass, because he can play *our* music."[8] Even in the jazz world, Mingus's employment opportunities were limited due to the segregation of the white and black locals of the American Federation of Musicians in Los Angeles. While Mingus had already left for New York City when the union was finally desegregated in 1953, Buddy Collete—who played a central role in the desegregation—gives Mingus credit for getting the amalgamation of the two locals started, emphasizing that Mingus was very outspoken and "always fighting the battle of the racial thing."[9] This is all very germane to "Fables of Faubus," since as Monson observes, the success in Los Angeles led to the desegregation of other AFM locals around the country, and "became something like the *Brown v. Board of Education* case of the music world."[10]

The impact of such issues on Mingus's music can be seen in the radical transformation of "Fables of Faubus" as the piece moved through various stages of development, from the time of its first recording in 1959 to the extraordinary performances that took place at the height of the Civil Rights Movement during Mingus's 1964 tour of Europe. By studying how Mingus's style and performance practices changed and were influenced by the events of this period, we can gain a better understanding of how Mingus's music expressed his increasing feelings of bitterness and frustration as the anxieties and events surrounding the Civil Rights Movement escalated.

Mingus and the art of Signification

Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. stresses that in order to draw attention to the complexity and originality of African American music, we must use methods specific to African American culture—as

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[8] Priestley, *Mingus*, 10.
[9] Clora Bryant et al., eds., *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 154.
[10] Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48. Also see Monson pp. 37-52 for a detailed account of the entire process of desegregation of the AFM.

opposed to methods derived from and used to analyze Western European art music—and that for any meaningful discourse to take place, we must consider all aspects of the music and its performance that are specific to African American culture.[11] As a way of better understanding Mingus's music, and especially "Fables of Faubus," it is necessary to first examine the African American concept of Signifying, which Henry Louis Gates, Jr. employs as a tool for African American literary criticism. For Gates, Signifying is a language of multiple meanings that "addresses the nature and application of rhetoric" in African-American culture.[12] In contrast to the standard English usage of signification, in which "all of the association that a signifier carries from other contexts . . . must be deleted, ignored, or censored . . . for meaning to remain coherent and linear," the black form of Signifying is the exact opposite, relying on the interplay of "unconscious associations which any given word yields at any given time."[13] In other words, the standard, or white, form of signification refers to specific meanings, whereas black Signification dwells in the ambiguity of meaning. The signifier, not the signified, is the crucial element in black Signifying. What is important is not *what* is said, but *how* it is said—"one does not Signify some thing; one Signifies in *some way*."[14]

Although Gates uses Signifying (from now on spelled as signifying) to interpret African American literature, he recognizes that it can also be applied to the discussion of discourse in African American music, noting that "There are so many examples of Signifyin(g) in jazz that one could write a formal history of its development on this basis alone."[15] A critical aspect of signifying is formal revision and intertextual relation, which is an element that pervades jazz

[11] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History From Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 234, 255.
[12] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 85.
[13] Ibid., 49.
[14] Ibid., 78.
[15] Ibid., 63.

performance. "Repetition, with a signal difference," Gates repeatedly asserts, "is fundamental to the nature of Signifyin(g)."[16] These aspects are also central to Floyd's study of African American music. Floyd defines musical signifying as "the rhetorical use of preexisting material as a means of demonstrating respect for or poking fun at a musical style, process, or practice through parody, pastiche, implication, indirection, humor, tone play or word play, the illusion of speech or narration, or other troping mechanisms."[17]

In jazz, formal revision and intermusicality (to use Ingrid Monson's more accurate description of intertextuality in music), and therefore signifying, can take shape in several different ways.[18] These include but are not limited to: 1) the performance and reinterpretation of popular songs or any composition that has been previously performed—signifying upon a tune; 2) the repetition of formal structures and the revision or reinterpretation of these structures; 3) the implication of or allusion to other types of music, such as march music, ragtime, the blues, gospel, spirituals, Western European art music, Middle Eastern music or music from other cultures, etc.; 4) the invocation of jazz styles from earlier periods or, more specifically, the individual styles of musicians—for example, the use of musical devices, techniques, mannerisms, idiosyncrasies, or timbres associated with icons such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, or Charlie Parker; 5) the use of a specific rhythm or motive, a peculiar harmony or interval, or a certain type of rhythmic groove that invokes or alludes to a certain musical style or previous performance; 6) improvisation—which Gates, perhaps somewhat simplistically, calls

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[16] Ibid., 51.
[17] Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 8.
[18] Monson explores musical discourse through the notion of intermusicality, which she uses "as a way to begin thinking about the particular ways in which music and, more generally, sound itself can refer to the past and offer social commentary." Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something*, 97.

"nothing more than repetition and revision"[19]—whereby a musician draws on a vast vocabulary of original and borrowed riffs, licks, and phrases; and 7) the use of musical quotation.[20] Monson—who recognizes the importance of using the concept of signification as a tool in analyzing jazz performance—notes that musical references come in different forms that may or may not be recognized by both performers and audience, and may be as obvious "as a melodic quotation from a particular piece or as diffuse as a timbre or style of groove."[21]

Through his compositions and performances with the Jazz Workshop, Mingus schools his audience not only in the creative processes of composition and improvisation—and the combination of these elements into a unified and coherent work of art—but also in the art of signification. Although signification can serve as an effective tool in the interpretation of jazz or any other form of African American music, I find that this method is particularly well-suited to Mingus's music for several reasons, which include: 1) his penchant for using complex formal structures that are derived from, build upon, and reinterpret the standard forms most common in jazz performance—such as popular song form and the twelve-bar blues; 2) his varied (re)interpretations of both jazz standards and his own compositions—such as "All the Things You C#" (1955), a piece (and title) that signifies upon the well-known jazz standard "All the Things You Are" and Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C# minor by superimposing elements of both compositions;[22] 3) his use of diverse styles of music, including his heavy use of gospel elements ("Better Git It In Your Soul" [1959]), allusions to Spanish/Mexican music ("Los Mariachis

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[19] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 64.
[20] For a detailed discussion of intermusicality and the different methods that musicians use to Signify, including specific musical examples of irony and parody that occur through formal revision, reversal, and quotation, see Monson, *Saying Something*, 97-98, 106-132.
[21] Monson, *Saying Something*, 127.
[22] Charles Mingus, *Mingus at the Bohemia* (Fantasy OJCCD-045-2 [DEB-123]). For an analysis of "All the Things You C#," see Scott Michael Strovas, "Black Identity in the 1950s Jazz Compositions of Charles Mingus" (M.M. thesis, Texas Tech University, 2007), 24-32.

[1957]), and his early quest to combine “classical music” and jazz (“Eclipse” [1953]);[23] 4) his homage to, and effective imitation and emulation of, the work of other musicians such as Duke Ellington (*The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*) and Charlie Parker (“Reincarnation of a Lovebird” [1957]);[24] and 5) his elaborate use of musical quotation to elicit specific meanings in his works. The importance of signification and intermusicality in Mingus’s music becomes clear from Mal Waldron’s liner notes to *Mingus at the Bohemia*, where he expressed that a primary objective of the Jazz Workshop was to present “new ideas and new developments on old ideas,” an approach Mingus continued to follow throughout his career that relies on continually referencing and revising standard forms and tunes, as well as his own compositions.[25]

Mingus’s works also demonstrate an exemplary and overt use of what Floyd describes as “musical practices of the ring . . . [that] can serve as Signifying(g) figures”—“the characterizing and foundational elements of African-American music.”[26] These include cries, hollers, hums, moans, grunts, distortions of timbre, call and response, hand clapping, and “musical individuality within collectivity,” a particularly essential element that Mingus constantly demanded of his sidemen.[27] Although these ring-derived practices are by no means exclusive to Mingus, his exemplary and even self-conscious appropriation of them is singular, and his music seems to perfectly embody the essence of these essential aspects of African American music.

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[23] Charles Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um* (Columbia CK 65512); Charles Mingus, *Tijuana Moods*. (RCA Victor 88697 05533 2); for a discussion of “Eclipse,” see chapter 3.
[24] Charles Mingus, *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (Impulse IMPD-174); Mingus, *The Clown*. “Reincarnation of a Lovebird” is a particularly interesting example of signification for the way that Mingus evokes the memory, or the reincarnation, of Charlie Parker through short quotations of various tunes and phrases that were associated with Parker.
[25] Mal Waldron, Liner notes to *Mingus at the Bohemia* (Fantasy OJCCD-045-2 [DEB-123]).
[26] Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 6-7.
[27] Ibid., 6.

"Too Dirty, Too Hard on Whitey": The 1959 Columbia recording

Mingus spent over a decade trying to find a publisher for *Beneath the Underdog*, and when he finally managed to do so, his work was heavily edited and reduced to about a third of its original length. Mingus's reasoning was that the book, which included graphic tellings of his sexual exploits and relationships with white women, was "too dirty . . . too hard on whitey."[28] Censorship was nothing new for Mingus by the time the autobiography was published in 1971, and it is essentially for this same reason that the first recording of "Fables of Faubus," made almost two years after the Little Rock crisis, was released without the controversial lyrics that had become critical to the character of the work (see section on Candid recording below). As one of the leading record companies in the country with wide distribution throughout the South, Columbia perhaps had too much at stake to risk the release of a piece whose lyrics equated a Southern politician with Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan, and refused to make the recording unless Mingus omitted the biting text.[29]

Recorded on May 5, 1959, "Fables of Faubus" went from the intimate setting of a club to a vastly wider audience as part of the hugely successful *Mingus Ah Um*, which has now become Mingus's best-selling album.[30] The Jazz Workshop's personnel for this recording includes John Handy on alto saxophone, Booker Ervin and Shafi Hadi on tenor saxophone, Jimmy Knepper on trombone, Horace Parlan on piano, Dannie Richmond on drums, and of course, Mingus on bass. This is the largest group heard in any recording of "Fables of Faubus," and the ensemble's size

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[28] Whitney Balliett, "Mingus at Peace," In *American Musicians II: Seventy-Two Portraits in Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 406. For a detailed exploration of *Beneath the Underdog*, see chapter 3.
[29] Hentoff, liner notes to *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*; Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 183; Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 202.
[30] Jenkins, *I Know What I Know*, 63; a quick search on amazon.com also reveals the overwhelming popularity of this album, compared to other Mingus titles.

and complement of instruments—particularly in the use of trombone, which is not heard on other recordings of the piece—provides rich textures and a wide array of tone colors that sets this recording apart from later versions. In addition to the instrumental timbres, the relatively subdued dynamics and relaxed tempo of around 120 beats per minute give the piece an air of nonchalance that is rare in Mingus's music, and is perhaps more reminiscent of the "cool" school of jazz than the hard-driving gospel- and blues-infused styles that were more characteristic of the late 1950s. Although the performance is ironic and witty, it is perhaps the more subdued character, especially when compared to later recordings, that has led Scott Saul to describe it as "button-down, professional—Mingus playing a society gig, with aplomb but no hilarity."[31] Crucial in establishing the unique character of the piece is the haunting eight-bar introduction, which is composed of a highly melodic bass line of half notes with interspersed eighth-note triplets that acts as a countermelody to an undulating two-bar riff, played quietly and sensuously by the low horns. Following the introduction, the lurking riff and bass line continue for another eight measures as the alto saxophone and trombone begin their statement of the theme, while Parlan now supports the melody on piano and Richmond joins in on drums with a rhythmic composite of both the bass and melodic lines.

A perfect example of signifying occurs with Mingus's treatment of the main melody, a memorable four-bar phrase consisting of a short-long-short-long articulation of quarter notes followed by staccato triplets played in a stiff and exaggerated swing style. The rigid, overwrought character of the rhythms gives the passage a humorous feel, as if parodying an amateur's attempt to swing (see example 2.1). The simplicity of this melodic line, and in particular its short, abrupt rhythms—which are highlighted by the relatively slow tempo of the

[31] Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 202.

performance—seems to reflect the square personality and ridiculousness of the white Arkansas governor, who would have had no idea of, or interest in, African American musical values and aesthetics.[32] And indeed, the first two measures of the melody coincide with the lyrics "Name me someone who's ridiculous," with the stilted staccato triplets corresponding exactly with the words "who's ridiculous." These rhythms are an example of how incongruity in African American music can be used to provide a sense irony.[33]

Example 2.1. "Fables of Faubus," theme.[34]

♩ = ca. 120

Name me some-one who's ri-di - cu-lous Gover-nor Fau- bus!

The flowing thematic material presented in the first half of the bridge (at 1:30) signifies upon Faubus's square melody by repeating the same phrase structure (four bars repeated) and providing a very similar melodic contour and harmonic rhythm, but now with a significantly contrasting character, one that suggests not the "ridiculousness" of Governor Faubus, but rather the disappointment, resentment, and even anguish of those whose basic rights were refused by Faubus and his followers. This effect is accomplished not only through the performance of the

[32] Mario Dunkel has also recently noted that this phrase "parodies the serious and stiff mindset of racist politicians." Mario Dunkel, *Aesthetics of Resistance: Charles Mingus and the Civil Rights Movement* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012), 23.

[33] Monson notes that incongruity, along with reversal and recontextualization, "are the hallmarks of irony as defined in both literary and anthropological usages." Monson, *Saying Something*, 104.

[34] This passage reflects the notation most commonly used in Mingus's manuscripts, including articulations and the use of triplets to depict the exaggerated character of what would normally be swing eighth notes (in measure two of the example). Three other ways of notating this measure are found in some of the instrumental parts, and include: quarter note plus eighth note triplet; dotted eighth note plus sixteenth note; as well as actual eighth notes on a few occasions. Box 7, Folders 2-3, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress.

mournful melody in the tenor saxophone's upper register, but also by a plaintive and desolate trombone countermelody, as well as the low-pitched, sliding moans played by a second tenor saxophone that respond to the melody.

In terms of structure, "Fables of Faubus" demonstrates Mingus's penchant for writing pieces with long and unusual forms. Mingus signifies upon the thirty-two-bar popular song form by retaining the familiar AABA pattern but extending it to an asymmetrical seventy-one-bar form (19+18+16+18). A significant feature of the piece is the continual opposition between stability and tension, an aspect that remained relatively unchanged through the various performances of the piece and its myriad changes. While the simplicity and stiff rhythms of the melody, the continued regularity of the opening riff and bass line, and a harmonic movement that alternates regularly (every two measures) between Bbm7 and Db7 all provide stability, the absence of a strong rhythmic foundation from either a walking bass line or regular drum pattern creates an unsettling sense of tension. As the composition progresses to the second half of the A section (at 0:32; mm. 9-12), the roles of tension and stability are now reversed. The background of the opening riff and bass countermelody is now replaced by a walking bass line, a more regular shuffle drum pattern, and stronger harmonic support from the piano, providing a more familiar frame of reference for the listener. By contrast, the descending motion and faster rhythm of the harmonic progression, as well as the more varied rhythm and tonal range of the melody, produce an effect of heightened tension and instability. As the harmonic progression continues its descent towards the end of the A section, the tension gradually increases as the horns oppose the harmonic movement with a chromatically-ascending series of pitches that are each reinforced with a strong crescendo.

The bridge is the most stable part of the piece in terms of phrase structure (with sixteen bars evenly divided into four-bar phrases). Yet, Mingus's rhythmic and harmonic treatment transforms it into the area of greatest instability. This is especially evident in the second half (at 1:46), where Mingus not only speeds up the harmonic rhythm (as he had done in the second half of the A section), but more significantly, doubles the tempo for four measures (mm. 9-12 of B), while the long melodic line is the only part that has remained in the original tempo and now competes for attention with the double-time improvisation of the tenor saxophone. In the improvised choruses the doubling of tempo remains, but is shifted to mm. 3-4 and 7-8 of the bridge, creating even more instability.[35] Both cases, however, illustrate a hallmark of Mingus's style, in which an abrupt doubling of tempo serves to provide instability with an unexpected burst of energy and momentum, and at the same time functions as a pillar in the structural framework of the entire composition.

More generally, the use of rhythm as a structural device is also heard at other points throughout the piece. During the improvisations, for example, the melodic bass line that previously accompanied the main melody in the first eight bars of the A section (and which returns in the final chorus) is now replaced by highly syncopated rhythms between bass, piano, and drums that pull in different directions, creating considerable tension behind each of the soloists (for example, at 2:37). Another instance is the propulsive rhythm that is introduced (by the rhythm section, with or without tenor saxophone and trombone) four measures before the bridge (at 1:22) and clearly demarcates all subsequent transitions between sections in every

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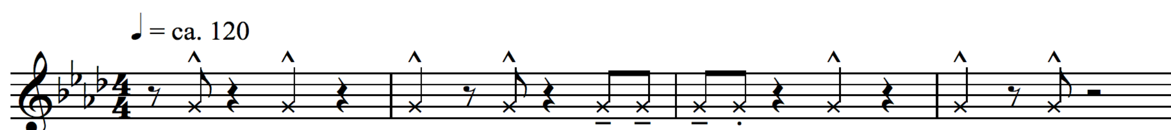
[35] At 3:48 of Horace Parlan's piano solo, for example, the music alternates between regular time and double time every two measures for the first eight measures of the bridge, and goes back to regular time for the last eight measures. These exact shifts in tempo can also be heard in the drums and piano during the bridge of the following chorus (Mingus's solo at 6:01), as well as in the improvisations of all subsequent versions of the piece, though with an altered rhythm.

chorus, including the improvisations (see example 2.2).[36] Thus, the form does not rely solely on phrase structure and harmonic changes, but on varied rhythmic phrases and accompaniments that recur as fixed compositional elements, a significant characteristic that is also present (with some variations) throughout the different recordings of "Fables of Faubus."

Example 2.2. "Fables of Faubus," transition rhythm (1:22).[37]



"Original Faubus Fables": The 1960 Candid recording

On October 20, 1960, not even a year and a half after recording "Fables of Faubus" for Columbia, Mingus took a new edition of the Jazz Workshop into the studios of Candid Records, a new and very short-lived record label that specialized in presenting the work of subversive jazz artists. These included musicians affiliated with the avant-garde, such as Cecil Taylor, as well as those who provided more overt political and social commentary through their music. This latter category included figures such as Max Roach, who reacted to the 1960 lunch-counter sit-ins of the Civil Rights Movement with *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*.[38] As both an avant-garde and politically engaged musician, Mingus was particularly well-suited to the new record label, and in fact his recordings made up a large portion of Candid's catalogue. With Nat

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[36] The transitions between the first and second A sections do not utilize this rhythm, but still feature another structural rhythm that is based on ascending quarter-note triplets.

[37] Here I have also followed the rhythms and articulations used in Mingus's manuscripts. The first of the eighth notes is often notated as a quarter note followed by eighth rest; the last of the eight notes is sometimes notated as an eight note tied to a quarter note. Box 7, Folders 2-3, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress.

[38] Max Roach, *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* (Candid CCD 79002). For more on this album and Candid Records, see Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 171-183.

Hentoff as the label's A&R man, Mingus had absolutely no restrictions on any of the material and was finally able to record "Fables of Faubus" as he had been performing it for the last three years, with lyrics that would dramatically change the piece's character from the toned-down Columbia version.

Other than the obvious explanation of Mingus wanting to record this piece with the lyrics, there were certain events that took place earlier that year that are important to consider and that may have compelled Mingus to record this new version. Of great significance is the addition of Eric Dolphy, as well as Ted Curson, to Mingus's Jazz Workshop. Dolphy and Mingus had not only known each other since their days growing up in Watts as students of Lloyd Reese, but both enjoyed an emotional musical partnership with each other that lasted until Dolphy's death in 1964.[39] "Fables of Faubus" had been a regular feature for the Jazz Workshop since the group (with Dolphy and Curson) had begun its residence at the Showplace in January of 1960. In one review, Gene Lees drew attention to the "semi-legendary" anger of Mingus, and described the piece as "one of the most vitriolic satires the art of this decade has produced."[40] There is little doubt that with Dolphy, who possessed one of the most striking and distinctive voices in jazz, the piece immediately acquired a dramatically new and "avant-garde" character that may have had an effect on Mingus's decision to include the piece as part of his first recording date with Candid, which was eventually released as *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*.

Perhaps of even greater significance to this new version of "Fables of Faubus" were the Woolworth lunch counter sit-ins that occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina, in February of

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[39] Priestley, *Mingus*, 22.
[40] Gene Lees, Caught in the Act, "Charlie Mingus," *Down Beat*, 31 March 1960, 34-35. While Booker Ervin is listed as the tenor saxophonist in this review, Priestley notes that Ervin was only substituting for Dolphy. Priestley, *Mingus*, 111.

1960, and the similar protests that took place at the same time in Nashville and throughout the South. This pivotal event in the Civil Rights Movement had been the most controversial attempt at desegregation since the events in Little Rock three years earlier, and just as Mingus had responded to the events in Little Rock with "Fables of Faubus," his "Prayer for Passive Resistance," recorded on May 25 (five months before the Candid session), was inspired by the sit-ins.[41] The inclusion of "Prayer for Passive Resistance" in *Pre-Bird*—an album that otherwise was composed of works from Mingus's early period, before the influence of Charlie Parker—is indicative of the enormous impact that the racial tensions of the Civil Rights Movement had on Mingus and his artistic choices. And while "Fables of Faubus" was already in the Jazz Workshop's repertoire when the sit-ins began—which was probably partly due to the success of *Mingus Ah-Um*—it is likely that this new stage in the Civil Rights Movement sparked a renewed animosity towards the segregationists, and gave Mingus an even stronger reason for continuing to perform, and eventually record, the new version for Candid.

Another reminder of the injustices of Jim Crow occurred in early July at the Newport Jazz Festival, where Mingus staged his own sit-in by forming a "rebel" festival in protest of the organizers' preferential treatment of white musicians. One report stated that Mingus had agreed to perform at the main festival for $700, but then refused after he demanded and was denied Benny Goodman's fee of $5000.[42] Indignation at the discrepancy in wages paid to black and white musicians is a recurrent theme in *Beneath the Underdog*.[43] As Gene Lees noted in *Down Beat*, Mingus saw the festival as "a symbol of all those forces opposing him," and on several

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[41] Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 129; Priestley, *Mingus*, 111.
[42] Burt Goldblatt, *Newport Jazz Festival: The Illustrated History* (New York: The Dial Press, 1977), 72.
[43] Mingus's views on the treatment of black musicians by the jazz industry are discussed in chapter 3, 15-17. See also Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 118-121, 132-136.

occasions referred to the event as Jim Crow.[44] Musicians also complained about the increasing commercialization of the festival, which created "a circus atmosphere with people who didn't listen to the music at all."[45] To attract a younger audience, the organizers were booking artists—such as Eartha Kitt, Pat Suzuki, and the Kingston Trio—that musicians and critics felt "did not belong at a festival that had originally defined itself by its curatorial embrace of the *jazz* tradition."[46] These acts, John Gennari writes, were taken by "jazz critics and purists . . . as a personal affront, a challenge to their canon-formation endeavors."[47]

In retaliation, Mingus (with the help of Max Roach) organized his own counter-festival that would take place during the same weekend as the Newport Jazz Festival on the grounds of the nearby Cliff Walk Manor Hotel, with an all-star line-up that included Roach, Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge, Booker Little, Kenny Dorham, and Ornette Coleman's quartet.[48] Also providing support were critic Nat Hentoff, and more importantly, Elaine Lorillard, who had founded the Newport Festival in 1954 with her husband Louis Lorillard, whom she had recently divorced.[49] With Elaine Lorillard's help, Mingus could get back at the white establishment by stealing paying customers away from Louis Lorillard and George Wein, the festival's main organizer. During this time, Mingus also experienced a disturbing but all-too-common incident when he arrived at his hotel to find that the room he had reserved as musical director of the rebel

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[44] Gene Lees, "Newport: The Real Trouble," *Down Beat*, 18 August 1960, 21.
[45] Goldblatt, *Newport Jazz Festival*, xxviii.
[46] John Gennari, "Hipsters, Bluebloods, Rebels, and Hooligans: The Cultural Politics of the Newport Jazz Festival, 1954-1960," in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 138.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Priestly, *Mingus*, 116.
[49] Lees, "Newport: The Real Trouble," 21.

festival was not available.[50] He seems to have been upset about this, as suggested by his remarks when vibraphonist Teddy Charles (who was white) asked about accommodations: "Oh man, I can't get you a room in this damn Jim Crow town."[51]

During the third night of both festivals an ironic event unfolded: while audiences at Mingus's festival enjoyed an indoor concert with Mingus and Roach, the crowds of young white college students that were unable to get into the official Newport Festival caused a riot, which got out of hand when it flowed into the streets of Newport and resulted in the cancellation of the main festival.[52] According to Elaine Lorillard, this happened because of the "absolute greed on the part of the people who put on the Newport Jazz Festival," who had continued to advertise tickets even though they had already sold out.[53] Lees described the college students' deplorable actions—"smashing windows and throwing beer cans and bottles"—as "a queer commentary on the refining powers of contemporary education.[54] Although many musicians from the rebel festival, including Roach and Hawkins, saw the whole fiasco as a significant detriment to jazz, the irony of the situation must have delighted Mingus, who felt "That's the way it should be. They did it themselves. They deserve it because they confused rock 'n roll with jazz."[55] Scott Saul has noted the significance of the rebel festival and its embodiment of the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement, drawing attention to the similarity between the actions that the musicians' took in protest of the powerful white establishment and the methods used for peaceful protest to

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[50] Priestly, *Mingus*, 115.
[51] Lees, "Newport: The Real Trouble," 21.
[52] Ibid., 116.
[53] Goldblatt, *Newport Jazz Festival*, 86.
[54] Lees, "Newport: The Real Trouble," 23. Lees also notes that an anonymous attendee said in jest, "You could tell the students from Harvard and Yale . . . They were throwing only *imported* beer bottles."
[55] Goldblatt, *Newport Jazz Festival*, 86.

demand racial integration and provoke change through the sit-ins.[56] This similarity was not lost on contemporary audiences, as illustrated by a reporter from *Time*, who saw the rebel festival as "an extension of the sit-ins. I called it a sit-out."[57]

The events and experiences of Newport were unquestionably still fresh in everybody's minds during the two recording sessions that Mingus and the Jazz Workshop did for Candid on October 20 and November 11, especially since the last of these dates was partly devoted to recording material for *Newport Rebels*, an album that attempted to commemorate the rebel festival and its remarkable music and atmosphere. In keeping with the rebel festival's mission of artistic freedom, integrity, and self-sufficiency, Mingus, Roach, and Jo Jones had formed a musicians' collective immediately after the festival that they dubbed the Jazz Artists Guild (which was also the name they used for *Newport Rebels*). This group—which anticipated later jazz collectives like the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians—was to provide its members with greater control in the dissemination of their art, as well as a more equal stake in the distribution of profits.[58] And while the venture was very short-lived, in an African American newspaper the effort was compared to the civil rights protests in Alabama, with the only difference being "geography. The issue is the same: Liberation."[59]

In the midst of this climate of protest and activism, the new rendition of "Fables of Faubus" was recorded with a new sense of urgency for social change that seems to have had a significant effect on Mingus's conception of the piece. Because of his contract with Columbia, Mingus had to come up with a different title—"Original Faubus Fables"—although he still

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[56] Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 123, 125.
[57] Quoted in Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 125. For more on the Newport riots and the importance of the rebel festival, see Saul, 99-143.
[58] Ibid., 126-128.
[59] Quoted in Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 127.

referred to the piece as "Fables of Faubus" in the spoken introduction to his "audience."[60] Yet, the new title draws attention to several important issues. First, it shows that since Mingus was not allowed to sing the lyrics for the Columbia release, it is this version that is the "original," and thus the most important. Second, the new title accounts for the significant transformation of the piece in the short amount of time between both releases, and highlights the fact that the new recording is not simply another arrangement of the same piece, but is in many ways a different composition with a drastically different character. In addition, "original" also may be connected with deeper issues of novelty ("Original Dixieland Jazz Band," "Original Memphis Five") and assertions of creative ownership, which are especially salient given Columbia's refusal of the lyrics in the earlier version.

The entire performance is a lesson in signification that occurs primarily through reversals of "normal" black/white power relations as well as intertextuality and intermusicality. The lashing of Faubus begins immediately as Mingus signifies during the spoken introduction, reversing the laudatory phrase "all-American hero" to a mocking insult that serves as his dedication to "the first, or second, or third all-American heel: Faubus."[61] With this witty play on words—a critical element of signification in the piece—Mingus reverses Faubus's image from someone to be admired to a loathsome politician, and situates Faubus within what is in his mind a long line of miscreants that as we see later in the lyrics also includes President Eisenhower and New York governor Nelson Rockefeller. What comes next would have been a shock to listeners only familiar with the Columbia version. The brooding introductory riff—played here by Dolphy—is mirrored by Mingus's opening vocals, although it is not necessarily the content of

[60] Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 364. For the sake of clarity, I will continue to refer to the piece as "Fables of Faubus."
[61] Mingus, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*.

the lyrics that is shocking, but the manner in which they are delivered. This is not the bluesy and highly lyrical voice of Mingus the preacher that we later hear in pieces like "Hog Callin' Blues" (1961) and "Devil Woman" (1961).[62] This voice reflects the violence of the lyrics it sings, shouted aggressively as if Mingus is at a podium trying to get his message across to a large crowd of protesters. This is Mingus the preacher turned civil rights activist:

(Introduction)	Oh Lord, don't let them shoot us Oh Lord, don't let them stab us Oh Lord, don't let them tar and feather us Oh Lord, no more swastikas!
(A)	(first A section is instrumental)
(end of A)	Oh Lord, no more Ku Klux Klan!
(A)	Name me someone who's ridiculous—Dannie? (Richmond:) Governor Faubus! Why is he so sick and ridiculous? (Richmond:) He won't permit us in his schools! Then he's a fool! (Oh, boo!)
(B)	Boo! Nazi fascist supremists (background Richmond: boo, boo!) Boo! Ku Klux Klan (boo!) (Richmond:) With your Jim Crow plan!
(A)	Name me a handful that's ridiculous—Dannie Richmond? (Richmond:) Milbourne (?), Thomas, Faubus, (unintelligible), Rockefeller, (unintelligible), Eisenhower Oh, why are they so sick and ridiculous? (Richmond:) Two, four, six, eight (Mingus and Richmond:) They brainwash and teach you hate!
(end of chorus)	H-E-L-L-O, Oh, Hello! (high pitched response: hello!)

The repeated use of "Oh Lord" in the text intertextually references the broad tradition of African American spirituals, but also demonstrates a strong link between "Fables of Faubus" and

[62] Charles Mingus, *Oh Yeah!* (Rhino/Atlantic R2 75589).

many songs of the Civil Rights Movement, which often invoked the "Lord" or "God" as a source of strength in the struggle for freedom—songs with such references include "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," "Do What the Spirit Say Do," and "Freedom Is a Constant Struggle."[63] The reference also stems partly from Mingus's experiences in the black church, and is an element that is prominent in compositions associated with Mingus's "gospel style," including "Ecclusiastics" (1961) and "Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb On Me" (1961).[64] Although quite different in style, it is interesting to note the connection between the latter work and "Fables of Faubus," both of which deal with a similar subject matter—impending doom caused by white men with power—and begin with the exact first five words. Mingus said that "'Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb On Me' is my *selfish* me. . . . Drop it all over the world, but don't drop it on me!"[65] While here Mingus refers to the individual "me"—he wants to save his own hide—in "Fables of Faubus" he refers to "us," a collective entity that encompasses African Americans in general, but, more specifically, the Little Rock Nine (the link to the students is confirmed later when Richmond answers Mingus's question, "Why's he so sick and ridiculous," with "He won't permit us in his schools"). Mingus's use of "us" reflects a practice that was prevalent in songs of the Civil Rights Movement, in which the emphasis on individual identity—"I"—in traditional songs was shifted to an emphasis on collective identity—"we" or "us"—as a strategy for group unification and solidarity.[66]

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[63] Kerran L. Sanger, *"When the Spirit Says Sing!": The Role of Freedom Songs in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 90-91, 196, 211.
[64] Mingus, *Oh Yeah!* For more on the connections between black Pentecostal church worship services and Mingus's music, see Griffith, "His Jelly Roll Soul," 98-112.
[65] Charles Mingus, interview with Nesushi Ertegun, in *Passions of a Man: The Complete Atlantic Recordings, 1956-1961* (Atlantic R2 72871), 53:35.
[66] Sanger, *"When the Spirit Says Sing!,"* 74-75.

At the same time, Mingus reverses black/white power relations by creating a binary opposition that pits “us” against “them.” In this case, “them” suggests not just Faubus or other politicians, but all those who were instrumental in refusing black students a right to an equal education, including Faubus’s armed mercenaries as well as the throngs of angry white men, women, and students that protested outside the Central High School. In an ultimate form of subversion, Mingus equates these perpetuators of Jim-Crow politics with the Ku Klux Klan, and even worse, turns them into that which they fear and loathe the most—Nazis and fascists that at the time represented the greatest threat to the precious democracy and boasted freedom of white America. In a postwar political landscape where the activities of actors, artists, and musicians suspected of being communists and spies were constantly being monitored by the House Un-American Activities Committee, Mingus, in a perfect example of signifying, has turned the mirror and pointed it against the truly “un-American activities” of the segregationists and politicians themselves. Through an attack on white America’s value system, Mingus epitomizes the practices of the trickster, who as William Barrow notes, overcomes his “formidable opponents with guile and a certain amount of bravado and by cunningly inverting the status quo of normal power relations.”[67]

In creating an effective platform for his political views, Mingus again signifies on the situation in Little Rock by adopting the role of teacher while recreating a classroom atmosphere that is both humorous and ironic. Perhaps in an imaginary lesson where the students are learning about the greatest “heels” in American history, Mingus poses various questions—“Name me someone who’s ridiculous?—and encourages his students’ responses by calling out names—“Dannie Richmond?” Richmond, in turn, repeatedly responds to the questions with the

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[67] Quoted in Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 48.

excitement and fervor of a precocious child. In the very last chorus, Mingus takes the mockery even further as he signifies on Faubus by adopting a ridiculous, distinctly "white" accent. The parody continues as Mingus draws on a cheer that was sung by the protesters outside the Central High School—"two, four, six eight, we don't want to integrate"—and turns it upside down through revision—"two, four, six, eight, they brainwash and teach you hate." "Just as the segregationists had taken school-yard rhymes and planted them into their political culture," Saul writes, "Mingus was willing to ventriloquize the playground in the musical culture of his workshop."[68] Finally, the absurdity of the situation in Little Rock is reflected by another common childish practice—the spelling out of random words, in this case "hello," and Mingus's subsequent repetition of the word in a "ridiculous" high-pitched voice.

In terms of the actual music, the Candid "Fables of Faubus" differs somewhat from the Columbia version in its arrangement, length, and sequence of improvisations, but while some of these variations can be expected in different performances of any piece, there are many striking changes in tempo, dynamics, and overall approach to performance that contribute to the radically different aesthetic quality of the Candid version and that reflect the change in social context since the Columbia recording. As Salim Washington has noted, "the Candid version not only contains the lyrics but also sports a more raucous and avant-garde *musical* performance," making the Columbia version sound "tame and controlled by comparison."[69] The septet from the earlier version has now been pared down to a quartet of trumpet, alto saxophone, bass, and drums, with the notable absence of piano—the same ensemble that Ornette Coleman was using when he burst into the New York City jazz scene a year earlier—which, coupled with Mingus's frequent

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[68] Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 204.
[69] Washington, "'All the Things You Could Be By Now,'" 39.

avoidance of a typical walking bass line, often results in harmonic ambiguity and instability.[70] Yet even with these reduced forces, the performance is much more powerful due to the overall louder dynamics (which complement the shouting vocals and actually make the ensemble seem much larger) and a slightly faster but much more volatile tempo that provides the soloists with a platform for increased virtuosity.

Many sections in both versions of the piece feature nearly identical bass and drum grooves, again pointing to a defining feature of Mingus's compositional style, where the use of pre-composed bass lines and rhythmic patterns serve to highlight the structure of a piece. One point of departure, however, occurs during the introduction, where Mingus delays the appearance of the more melodic, jaunty bass line in favor of playing the chords' roots in a brooding pattern of short quarter notes separated by quarter rests. By doing so, he transforms the mood of the introduction to give it a more foreboding and ominous character, foreshadowing a new approach to the melodic material from both Curson and Dolphy.

While the quirky theme of "Fables of Faubus" is now more sparse, played only by Curson on trumpet, with Dolphy's alto saxophone abandoning the introductory riff in favor of dissonant punctuations on the melody's accented long notes, the basic character of the tune—especially the critical short-long-short-long articulation of quarter notes and stilted staccato triplets—is kept intact. The approach of Curson and Dolphy, however, is markedly different, as both musicians display a more avant-garde conception of sound that is rougher, edgier, and more guttural, providing a sound palette that corresponds perfectly with Mingus and Richmond's singing. It is, in fact, difficult to imagine the performance of these lyrics in the context of the sound world of the Columbia version.

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[70] For more on Mingus's use of this instrumentation as a response to the influence of Coleman, see chapter 1.

The significance of Curson and Dolphy's contributions to the success of this performance is even more evident in the astounding rendition of the bridge (at 1:47), where the musicians' signifying reinterpretations of melody and accompaniment are a perfect complement to the lyrics. Dolphy transforms the mournful melody of the Columbia version into a distorted cry of anguish, characterized by a series of bent notes and constantly fluctuating pitches that are masterfully welded together. His impassioned wails are answered comically by derisive "boos" from Mingus and Richmond, while Curson signifies on these boos through uncanny imitations of his own. Once the band arrives at the double-time section, Curson assumes the lead with an eruption of dissonant, high-pitched flourishes that anticipate the visceral quality, blurred runs, and out-of-tempo solo passages of his and Dolphy's forthcoming improvisations. The inherent sense of instability is compounded in this performance by a more-than-doubling of an already-faster original tempo, as well as Curson's volatile improvisation, in which he renders individual pitches difficult to discern and seems to be playing at a much faster tempo than the rest of the ensemble. By the time "Fables of Faubus" was recorded again three-and-a-half years later, the highly mocking and sardonic tone of the Candid version was transformed once again, this time into a violent and highly emotional and complex version that has become one of the highlights of Mingus's career.

The 1964 Cornell and European Tour Recordings

In April of 1964, Mingus and the Jazz Workshop embarked on a European tour of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. The tour provided Mingus the opportunity to perform his music for European audiences—who generally had a higher regard for jazz than American audiences—at prestigious institutions such as Paris's Salle

Wagram and Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. For scholars and devoted enthusiasts of Mingus's music, the tour provided an invaluable source of live recordings—mostly from bootlegs, which enraged Mingus but is fortunate for us—and performances that were recorded for European television.[71]

Of the several pieces that were part of Mingus's arsenal during the tour, "Fables of Faubus"—along with a new composition entitled "Meditations on Integration"—occupied a central role in many performances, with renditions generally lasting from around twenty-five to forty-two minutes. Although it is not clear how often Mingus performed the piece since he recorded it for Candid, it likely remained a part of the Jazz Workshop's repertoire, at least intermittently, until the time of the European tour, especially given the subject matter and its relevance to the prolonged civil rights struggle. What is clear, however, is that Mingus's conception of the piece had again changed, this time quite radically. While the differences between the Columbia and Candid recordings of "Fables of Faubus" are quite significant, in the European tour version Mingus obliterates any preconceptions listeners may have by drastically altering many elements of the music, including a furious tempo, thunderous dynamics, and an extension of the form that allows for the presentation of more complex ideas in the improvisations.[72] Exactly when this change occurred is difficult to determine, but it most likely took place in late 1963 or as late as March of 1964. An extant recording of "Fables of Faubus" from a radio broadcast of a 1962 live performance at Birdland reveals that the transformation

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[71] Television appearances from Belgium, Norway, and Sweden appear in Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus: Live in '64* (Jazz Icons DVD 2.119006).

[72] While the Candid version had been re-titled "Original Faubus Fables" to draw attention to the original lyrics that had not been included in the Columbia version, the differences in this version of the piece are highlighted by the title "New Fables" that appears in a recording done at the Jazz Workshop in San Francisco that June. Charles Mingus, *Right Now: Live at the Jazz Workshop* (Fantasy OJCCD-237-2 [DEB-86017]).

heard in the European tour recordings had not yet taken place. Unfortunately, the poor quality of the Birdland recording renders the lyrics (among other aspects) all but inaudible, and the obvious absence of Dolphy and Curson make the performance less adventurous; the only aspects of this performance that point to the European tour are the slightly faster tempo and increased activity from the rhythm section during the improvisations.[73]

The radical transformation of "Fables of Faubus" that we hear in recordings from the European tour is likely influenced by events related to the Civil Rights Movement that took place in 1963. These include protests in Birmingham, Alabama, one in April which resulted in the arrest of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and another in May where the Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, used fire hoses and police dogs to deter black demonstrators. Medgar Evers was murdered in June, followed on September 15 (exactly six years since the events at Little Rock) by the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham—which had been an important location for civil rights meetings—that killed four girls, and the subsequent riots that led to the deaths of two more black boys (the bombings also were the source for John Coltrane's "Alabama"). These shocking events, especially the murder of innocent children, may have triggered a response in Mingus, and seem to be reflected by the chaotic and violent character of the new "Fables of Faubus."

The injustices and atrocities that had taken place in the South were obviously on Mingus's mind during the time surrounding the European tour, as evidenced by the amount of

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[73] Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus & The Jazz Workshop All Stars: The Complete 1961-1962 Birdland Broadcasts* (Rare Live Recordings RLR 88661). Another version of "Fables of Faubus" was recorded in September of 1963 by Pepper Adams for an album of Mingus compositions. While this arrangement by Thad Jones has some interesting moments, it features no lyrics and is more similar to the Mingus's Columbia version, and unfortunately, without Mingus as the driving force behind the music the overall performance falls flat. Pepper Adams, *Pepper Adams Plays the Compositions of Charlie Mingus* (Fresh Sound Records FSR-CD 604).

attention he devoted to one of his newest compositions, "Meditations on Integration" (also known as "Meditations," "Meditation on Inner Peace," "Meditations for a Pair of Wire Cutters," or "Praying with Eric" after the sudden death of Dolphy in June). On April 4, 1964, immediately preceding the tour, Mingus performed the piece, along with "Fables of Faubus," at a benefit concert for the NAACP at New York City's Town Hall, and spoke frankly to his audience regarding the genesis of "Meditations": "Eric Dolphy explained to me that there was something similar to the concentration camps once in Germany now down South, where they separated the picketers, the green from the red, or something like that. And the only difference between the electric barbed wire is that they don't have gas chambers and hot stoves to cook us in yet. So I wrote a piece called 'Meditations,' as to how to get some wire cutters before someone else gets some guns to us." After some nervous laughter from the audience, Mingus continues, off-mic, "Oh, they gonna burn us! They'll try!"[74] The comparison of the South to German concentration camps is a blatant reminder of the association between Southern whites and Nazis that Mingus makes explicit in "Fables of Faubus." Although Mingus was somewhat removed from the atrocious events that had taken place in the South, he could not escape racism by living in New York City. In an interview after a concert in Paris, Mingus explained that the performances of his music, which included "Fables of Faubus," were really meant to relate his personal experiences, and specifically cited the treatment African Americans received from "whites from New York, who for the most part do not wish us any harm, but not any good either. They don't want our death, but they're not anxious to accept us. I believe they hate us. I'm quite convinced they hate us. This is what I wanted to say last night through my music."[75] Clearly, Mingus's own experiences with racism, as well as the overall injustices inflicted upon African Americans,

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[74] Charles Mingus, *Town Hall Concert* (Fantasy OJCCD-042-2 [JWS-005-S]).
[75] Levallet and Martin, *L'Amérique de Mingus*, 164. Retranslated from the French by the author.

had a tremendous impact on his compositions, and being aware of his state of mind around the time of the European tour is crucial for a thorough consideration of the complexities involved in this new version of "Fables of Faubus."

Although the following discussion will focus primarily on the recently discovered version of the piece recorded on March 18, 1964 at Cornell University, the recordings made during the European tour also feature the same personnel (with the exception of Coles in some performances), structure, arrangement, and other distinguishing features (see table 2.1 for a chronology of recordings).[76] The ensemble is now a sextet, and includes Johnny Coles on trumpet, Clifford Jordan on tenor saxophone, Eric Dolphy on bass clarinet, and a rhythm section that became known as the "Almighty Three," composed of Mingus, Richmond, and the versatile pianist Jaki Byard.[77] Just as Dolphy and Curson had helped define the character of the Candid recording of "Fables of Faubus," the contribution of the musicians in this ensemble—possibly the best edition of the Jazz Workshop—is also critical in the development of Mingus's new conception of the work. The use of six entirely different instruments that are able to provide widely varied tonal qualities is an example of the increased tendency in Mingus's music toward what Olly Wilson calls "the heterogeneous sound ideal," an integral element of African American music whereby "a kaleidoscopic range of dramatically contrasting qualities of sound . . . is sought after."[78] This is a significant contrast to the Columbia recording, which features the largest ensemble of the three versions, but possesses a rather homogeneous timbre with the particular blend of three saxophones and trombone.

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[76] Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus Sextet With Eric Dolphy: Cornell 1964* (Blue Note D 222854).
[77] Priestley, *Mingus*, 143.
[78] Quoted in Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 262.

Table 2.1. "Fables of Faubus," chronology of recordings (1959-1964).

Date	Place	Album Name	Personnel	Duration
5/5/1959	Columbia Studios, N.Y.C.	*Mingus Ah Um*	John Handy, as Booker Ervin, ts Shafi Hadi, ts Jimmy Knepper, tb Horace Parlan, p Charles Mingus, b Dannie Richmond, d	8:11
10/20/1960	Candid, Nola Penthouse Studios, N.Y.C.	*Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* ("Original Faubus Fables")	Ted Curson, tp Eric Dolphy, as Charles Mingus, b Dannie Richmond, d	8:54
3/24/1962	Birdland, N.Y.C.	*Charles Mingus & The Jazz Workshop All Stars: The Complete 1961-1962 Birdland Broadcasts*	Richard Williams, tp Charles McPherson, as Booker Ervin, ts Toshiko Akiyoshi, p Charles Mingus, b Dannie Richmond, d	10:41
3/18/1964	Cornell University	*Charles Mingus Sextet with Eric Dolphy: Cornell 1964*	Johnny Coles, tp Clifford Jordan, ts Eric Dolphy, bcl Jaki Byard, p Charles Mingus, b Dannie Richmond, d	29:16
4/4/1964	Town Hall, N.Y.C.	*The Jazz Workshop Concerts 1964-65*	Same as above	10:21
4/10/1964	Amsterdam	*The Jazz Workshop Concerts 1964-65*	Same as above	30:34
4/16/1964	Bremen	*The Complete Bremen Concert*	Same as above	33:12
4/17/1964	Paris, Salle Wagram	*The Salle Wagram Concert*	Same as above, minus Coles	24:48
4/19/1964	Paris, Théâtre des Champs Elysées	*The Great Concert of Charles Mingus*	Same as above	27:25
4/26/1964	Wuppertal	*Charles Mingus in Europe, Volume 1*	Same as above	36:08
4/28/1964	Stuttgart	*Live in Stuttgart! 1964*	Same as above	42:00 (see fn. 91)
6/2-3/1964	San Francisco	*Right Now: Live at the Jazz Workshop* ("New Fables")	John Handy, as Clifford Jordan, ts Jane Getz, p Charles Mingus, b Dannie Richmond, d	23:06

One key ingredient is the addition of the bass clarinet, a rather unusual instrument in jazz whose low range and peculiar variations in timbre throughout its four different registers bring an entirely different type of sound to the ensemble. Mingus's use of this instrument (which he could have used in the Candid recording, since Dolphy performs on it brilliantly in the album's "What Love") suggests that its distinctive timbre and low sonorities were crucial to his new perceptions of the piece. With infinite variations in dynamics, as well as various effects such as multiphonics, squeaks, screams, and moans, Dolphy's interpretations of the composed material and his creative improvisations are some of the most significant elements in creating the sense of terror and chaos that pervades the piece. The importance of Dolphy's bass clarinet is evident in two different alterations to Mingus's ensemble. The first is the absence of Johnny Coles from all performances recorded after (and including) April 17, when Coles collapsed on the bandstand from a stomach ulcer and was hospitalized for the rest of the tour.[79] Although the absence of the trumpet is obvious, and Coles's improvisations added an interesting component to the piece as a whole, the overall aesthetic quality of the performances remains essentially the same. By contrast, a recording of "Fables of Faubus" made at the Jazz Workshop in San Francisco the following June suffers tremendously from Dolphy's absence.[80] Mingus attempts to minimize the damage by distributing some of Dolphy's material among Clifford Jordan and pianist Jane Getz, with John Handy playing the melody on alto saxophone, but Dolphy's striking bass clarinet sound and his irreplaceable improvisations are sorely missed.

Dolphy's work figures prominently throughout the earlier versions of the piece and is the first sound heard as he plays the now sinister introductory riff in the bass clarinet's lowest register (in some versions holding the first note for up to seven seconds before anything else

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[79] Priestley, *Mingus*, 157.
[80] Mingus, *Right Now: Live at the Jazz Workshop*.

happens). Jordan, playing an octave higher, joins Dolphy almost immediately, and as both musicians play at the top of their dynamic range, we hear a pounding heartbeat from Mingus's bass. While Mingus plays exactly the same pitches and rhythms as in the Candid recording, the foreboding character is now replaced by a feeling of utter terror and chaos created by the emphasis on the low registers of all three instruments, the sheer strength of dynamics, new complex rhythms with added dissonances, and a fast and volatile tempo that fluctuates between 160 and 200 beats per minute (compared to 120 and 126 beats per minute of the Columbia and Candid versions).[81] The drastic change in tempo is quite telling, as it does not contribute to a comfortable or very coherent rendition of the lyrics. And while the lyrics are also often inaudible due to the quality of the recording and microphone placement, they nevertheless seem to play a secondary role to the chaotic character of the performance.

The biting mockery and humor of the Candid "Fables of Faubus" has been transformed to violent upheaval, perhaps a call to arms from Mingus during very turbulent times. This very palpable sense of violence in the music must be strongly related to Mingus's heightened emotional state—as well as the general state of anger and resentment among African Americans—during the European tour, as he demonstrated in comments that allude to both "Meditations on Integration" and "Fables of Faubus": "Many of us feel like killing because they've treated us like animals and used fascist ways towards us. . . . Certainly, [our situation] will improve, but for now, they must first exterminate a million of ours like the Nazis did during the last war with the Jews. . . . If we continue to protest and demand liberty, they'll burn us and

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[81] These figures do not include the double-time sections or the continuous accelerandos performed in the extended sections.

throw us in the incinerator."[82] The mocking tone of the "Faubus" melody remains intact, as Coles on trumpet keeps the tune's "ridiculous" and "white" character by emphasizing the short articulations, especially important at this fast tempo. However, the sense of violence expressed in Mingus's comments is created by setting the melody against dissonant punctuations and aggressive melodic/rhythmic figures played by Dolphy and Jordan.[83]

The volatility of the piece is greatly heightened by an even faster tempo created with an accelerando on the propulsive rhythm that delineates the transition into the bridge (at 1:00).[84] This in turn brings on one of the most chaotic events of the entire piece during the structural double-time section (at 1:14), where the tempo is actually more than doubled (around 400 beats per minute) by the rhythm section as Jordan plays the melody, Coles improvises quick melodic figures, and Dolphy provides a virtuosic display of pyrotechnics. All this sets the music on the brink of collapse. As the musicians prepare for the return of the A section, Dolphy, Jordan, and Coles play a series of undulating eighth notes that fail to match the tempo of the propulsive rhythmic figure that is once again played by the rhythm section. Realizing this, Dolphy and Jordan drop out so they can get back on at the return of the A section. Coles, however, is unable to find his place, misses the entire first measure of the return of the tune, and subsequently plays the staccato eighth notes beginning on the third beat (rather than the correct second beat) of the A section's second measure. The point is not that Coles made a mistake, but that the mistake is the result of a brilliant effort to create chaos, an effect crucial to the piece that could only be accomplished through the risk involved in performing complex material at such fast speeds (the

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[82] Levallet and Martin, *L'Amérique de Mingus*, 163-164. Retranslated from the French by the author.
[83] In the performances without Coles, some of the aggressiveness is unfortunately lost as Dolphy takes over the melodic role.
[84] All timings refer to the Cornell performance unless otherwise stated.

unwillingness of musicians to get out of their comfort zones was something that always irritated Mingus). As Robert Walser has argued regarding the mistakes and missed notes in Miles Davis's improvisations, this is a process that must be taken into account in analyses of jazz in order to understand the music's power and the crucial role that musical risk plays in creating meaning.[85]

"Plastic Form"

While the elements discussed thus far are significant, the most remarkable revision in the European tour version of "Fables of Faubus" is in its structure. If the seventy-one-bar AABA form of the Columbia and Candid versions signified upon the symmetry of the thirty-two-bar popular song form, Mingus's new version signifies further upon both of these forms by introducing a new section of indeterminate length four bars before the end of the bridge in each of the improvisation choruses. This type of addition to the form is what Mingus referred to as "extended form," and what Andrew Homzy more accurately describes as "plastic form" to account for the extension's ability to stretch the form to indefinite lengths.[86] As Priestly has shown, Mingus's propensity for composing music with unusual forms sometimes resulted in the inclusion of sections of indefinite length found in pieces such as "Pithecanthropus Erectus" (1956), "Profile of Jackie" (1956), and "Sue's Changes" (1974).[87] In each of these cases, however, the section of indefinite length was built into the composition's structure as part of Mingus's original conception. For example, the ABAC pattern of "Pithecanthropus Erectus" features two such sections, with the A sections each consisting of sixteen bars and the variations

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[85] Walser, "'Out of Notes,'" 176, 180.
[86] Mingus, *More Than a Fakebook*, 4.
[87] Priestly, *Mingus*, 243-244.

in length taking place through a vamp between Fm^7 and Bb^7 in both the B and C sections.[88] Although theoretically these sections could continue for a long time and dwarf the fixed-length sections, Mingus makes the overall structure of the piece very clear through three different methods: 1) by giving each soloist a single chorus for improvisations; 2) by underlying each section of indefinite length with a specific accompaniment, with walking bass and shuffle drum rhythm in the B section, and a chaotic three against two rhythm with saxophones screams and wails in the C section; and 3) by restricting the length of these sections in each of the five choruses, with the B sections lasting between twenty-two and thirty bars, and the C sections lasting between sixteen and thirty-two bars.[89] "Sue's Changes" is more complex, with a vamp in the last section of each chorus lasting from forty-four to over one hundred measures, yet these vamps do not overshadow the fairly long and intricate overall structure. The two solo choruses do feature an actual extension of the form that occurs exactly between the two C sections, but this extension is only a short cadenza-like addition, with the longest one from the piano solo lasting only thirty seconds.[90]

In the 1964 "Fables of Faubus," the gargantuan extensions in the structure are of a much more complex nature, dwarfing the original seventy-one-bar form and becoming the focal point of each improvisation and of the entire piece. To provide an idea of the magnitude of these extensions, the forty-two-minute performance of the piece recorded in Stuttgart—with improvisations that occur over a single chorus and last between seven and eleven minutes—would only have lasted around ten minutes if Mingus had followed the original form as recorded

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[88] Mingus, *More Than a Fakebook*, 108.
[89] Here I refer specifically to the 1956 recording of "Pithecanthropus Erectus." Charles Mingus, *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (Atlantic 8809-2). The recording made in Paris in 1970 is slightly different in accompaniment and features slightly longer sections of indefinite length, but is otherwise the same as the 1956 version.
[90] For more on "Sue's Changes," see chapter 3, 53-58.

in the Columbia and Candid versions.[91] In effect, each extension becomes like an entirely different composition, with its own form, its own sections of definite and indefinite length, and even specific themes and quotations that recur throughout the various performances. Within the extensions we also find other forms, including the twelve-bar blues, various moods, sections of free improvisation, lengthy areas of modality, and myriad changes in tempo, including furious accelerandos that put the music on the verge of disaster.[92] The significance of this malleable structural expansion to Mingus's new conception of "Fables of Faubus" in 1964 cannot be overemphasized, since the complex modes of expression that Mingus now sought could not be contained within an inflexible structure.

In every performance of the piece, each extension is introduced by a rallentando of quarter-note triplets; these, without the rallentando, were first introduced to the piece in the 1960 Candid recording as accompaniment to the improvisations in the second half of the bridge. The triplets come to a complete stop just before the propulsive transition rhythm, at which point the extensions begin. After each musician has played through the different events that take place during his own extension, a drum roll of varying length signals the return of the original form, at which point the rest of the band jumps in by playing the propulsive rhythm that leads back to the final A section of each chorus. The new form of the piece thus becomes A/A/B(first twelve

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[91] Charles Mingus, *Live in Stuttgart! 1964* (Unique Jazz RKO1038). Although the total time of the released recording is almost forty-one minutes, the actual performance time would have been around forty-two minutes, since the first A section of the first chorus and the last A section of the last chorus have been edited from this recording.

[92] Mingus essentially turns the piece upside down in a similar manner to what Monson has noted about John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things," where Coltrane provides an "ironic reversal" of the Broadway tune by focusing on the tune's two-bar interlude and turning it into an extended section of improvisation, rather than soloing on the tune's chord structure. Monson, *Saying Something*, 107-110.

measures)/Extension(indefinite)/B(last four measures)/A, but again, this occurs only during the solo choruses; the form remains unaltered in the opening and closing statements of the head. Even though the extensions provide a multitude of different events for listeners to digest at once, the overall sense of structure is maintained by having each soloist play a single chorus—just as they had in every single performance since the Columbia recording—and by usually (though not always) keeping each soloist's improvisations and extensions of a similar length.[93] The improvisations from the performance at Paris's Théâtre des Champs Elysées, for example, are all within fifteen seconds of each other.[94] This sense of timing is quite remarkable when the improvisations are each around six minutes long, especially since the length of each extension is not prescribed, and each soloist plays through a different progression of events.

Upon hearing any of the 1964 "Fables of Faubus" recordings, listeners may have some difficulty understanding exactly what is happening during the extensions, as each soloist seems to go through a series of events that alternate randomly and spontaneously between areas of free improvisation (with no accompaniment), and sections that exhibit various changes in tempo, style, and accompaniment, all of which seem like they could go on indefinitely. This is all compounded by the fact that the organization of each extension is rather different from soloist to soloist. Indeed, it seems as though Mingus has finally embraced the ultimate freedom of the avant-garde, which he had so vehemently criticized. Yet, after repeated listening to the various recordings, it becomes evident that these sections are highly structured. As usual, Mingus had a

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[93] Although it is entirely possible that Mingus may have allowed his sidemen to take solos longer than a single chorus, it wouldn't make much musical sense to go through the grueling extensions and then return to do it all over again. Even in the live version from Birdland in 1962, which doesn't contain the extended sections, all the soloists take only one chorus. It was a common practice for Mingus to hold all improvisations to a single chorus in pieces with unusually long forms, such as "Pithecanthropus Erectus" and "Sue's Changes."

[94] Charles Mingus, *The Great Concert of Charles Mingus* (Verve B0002680-02).

very clear conception of what he wanted in his composition and in each of the improvisations, and undoubtedly planned and rehearsed every aspect intricately and meticulously. Each extension features similarities as well as significant differences, but in every case, each soloist goes through a logical progression of events that shape these sections into compositional and improvisational masterpieces, and it is because of this alteration to the overall form of the piece—in addition to the musicianship of the entire ensemble—that the 1964 recordings of "Fables of Faubus" are among the most, or perhaps even *the most*, original and innovative in Mingus's entire oeuvre.

The nature and function of the each soloist's extended sections can be gleaned through careful listening of the recordings from Cornell and the European tour.[95] The performances demonstrate that certain events were fixed, some of them recurring consistently and exclusively in the work of certain musicians. Other areas were more flexible, and the musicians were free to draw upon certain ideas and could alter the music at any time. The recordings also show that the work was always in progress and could be changed and adapted as new ideas emerged and as the group's interpretation and execution solidified. Rather than try to explain the form of each extended section in each performance of the piece, a more useful approach would be to identify the structural similarities and elements that are most common and recur throughout the different performances.

[95] All recordings of "Fables of Faubus" from 1964 figure into this discussion, with the exception of the following: 1) The April 4 performance at Town Hall was shortened to ten minutes due to time restrictions, with the only improvisations coming from Dolphy and Coles. Mingus's introduction reveals that he considers such a performance to be incomplete: "There's not time to play what I wanted to play, but we'll play part of it." Charles Mingus, *The Jazz Workshop Concerts 1964-65* (Mosaic MD7-253). 2) The performance from the San Francisco Jazz Workshop on June 2-3 maintains some of the same elements as the other 1964 versions, but is very different due to the absence of Coles, Byard, and Dolphy.

In Mingus's own improvisations, the extensions are quite rigid in terms of the elements used and the order in which they are presented, though there is a good amount of flexibility within each of the four areas.[96] In general, each musician begins and ends his extension with an area of free improvisation, which is largely unaccompanied except for the occasional utterances from Mingus and Richmond. Although the length and exact way in which this initial "free form" area is rendered varies between performers and performances, in every instance the extension is begun with a held note from Dolphy and/or Mingus—perhaps Mingus signifying on the cadenza of the Western European concerto. While these free introductions are usually played unmetered by the other musicians, Mingus often follows some kind of meter, since the specific function of this free section (in Mingus's extensions only) is to introduce a barrage of quotations from folk songs, popular songs, and patriotic songs that he continues to develop throughout the subsequent areas within the extension. Yet, he still uses the freedom of this unaccompanied section to continuously vary the tempo and to switch back and forth between different meters or between metered and unmetered playing. In the following section, Mingus assumes a 4/4 meter and a slow-to-medium blues tempo (ranging from about 96-112 beats per minute depending on the performance), and begins to slap his bass as a cue to Richmond and Byard to join in with a highly syncopated accompaniment on the upbeats of the first and third beats of the measure. For the next transition, Mingus quickly speeds up his improvisation and again signals Richmond and Byard for a change of groove, this time to a fast swing feel (around 164-188 beats per minute), with Byard comping while Richmond plays a shuffle rhythm, emphasizing the second and fourth beats of the measure. The music slows down until Mingus is left alone in the final free section,

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[96] Timings (Cornell version) for each of these areas within Mingus's extension are provided in table 2.2.

which this time only serves as a short transition back to the main form of the piece.[97] While the entire extension—with its various rhythmic grooves and tempo changes—sounds spontaneous, it follows a specific formal outline and is played in virtually the same manner in every performance, with the only real differences being in the length of each of the four sub-sections (table 2.2).[98]

Table 2.2. "Fables of Faubus," 1964, structure of extension within Mingus's improvisation.

Section	Characteristics
Free (17:48) (timings refer to Cornell version)	• introduces quotations from folk songs, popular songs, patriotic songs • various meters/unmetered • fluctuating tempo • no accompaniment; sometimes sporadic drum interjections
Slow-Medium Blues Tempo (19:06)	• tempo 96-112 beats per minute (depending on performance) • 4/4 meter • drums and piano play only on (swing) upbeats of 1 and 3
Fast Swing Feel (20:51)	• tempo 164-188 beats per minute (depending on performance) • 4/4 meter • drums shuffle, with very strong emphasis on backbeat; piano comps • introduced by an accelerando • ends with a rallentando
Free (22:15)	• serves as transition back to AABA form; usually very short • largely unmetered • largely unaccompanied • drums cue return of bridge with drum roll, followed by propulsive rhythm from last four bars of bridge

[97] In the Cornell performance, the transition between these two sections is more abrupt, demonstrating that the ritardando heard in every subsequent performance was an element that was added at some point after the Cornell date. In only one instance (at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées), Mingus decides to skip the last free section, as it really only lasts two seconds.

[98] Levallet and Martin have noted the similarities in Mingus's solos from some of the performances, especially the free "cadenzas" that begin and end each extension and are separated by an ensemble accelerando, though this explanation is a bit simplistic and not quite accurate. Levallet and Martin, *L'Amérique de Mingus*, 115-119. Stefano Zenni also shows these free sections in diagrams from three of the performances and seems to notice the difference between the two middle sections, though he provides little explanation. The diagrams, however, imply that the structure is less rigid and contains more variations between performances. Zenni, *Charles Mingus: Polifonie dell'universo musicale afroamericano*, 130-131.

Understanding that Mingus had a very clear plan for this section is crucial to the way we experience these performances, and allows us to perceive subtleties in the music that we may not be able to otherwise. A very interesting and humorous example that draws attention to the importance of Mingus's formal plan is his solo from the concert in Bremen, where the transition between slow-medium tempo to fast swing feel does not quite work out.[99] As Mingus speeds up into the new section (at 24:40), he expects Richmond and Byard to switch the groove to reflect the shift in sections (from playing on the upbeats of the first and third beats of the measure to Richmond emphasizing backbeat and Byard comping).[100] Richmond and Byard, however, somehow fail to realize the shift and remain focused on the old groove, which leads Mingus (at 24:51) to provide them with a more overt cue where he plays a walking descent for one measure and strongly taps his foot on every beat. Richmond seems to hear Mingus's cue, but his very soft shuffle rhythm on the ride cymbal shows that he is hesitant, while it is obvious that Byard is confused, as he stops playing altogether. The growing impatience in Mingus's playing is clearly audible as he finally lashes out at Richmond and Byard with impassioned high notes that sound like musical expletives (at 24:56). Mingus eventually slows down to play freely, but only does so for four seconds, and aborts his solo by playing the propulsive rhythm that leads back to the form of the piece. Clearly, Richmond and Byard were not expecting this—Byard does not play the rhythm at all, while Richmond, who usually prefigures this rhythm with a drum roll to cue the rest of the band, does not pick up on the rhythm until after two measures. Perhaps this is the type of moment that has gone down in Mingus folklore, where Mingus was provoked to stop the music and rebuke his sidemen on stage, and perhaps even fire them. The audiences in Bremen, however, may not have been familiar with this aspect of Mingus's style, and thus Mingus is left

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[99] Charles Mingus, *The Complete Bremen Concert* (Jazz Lips JL 774).

[100] Timings provided in relation to this specific solo pertain to the Bremen performance.

fuming well into Dolphy's solo. This is evident from Mingus's unusual failure to introduce the Flamenco rhythms that accompany Dolphy's Phrygian section. The musicians prod Mingus by suggesting the rhythm, but it seems that he has checked out of the performance early. Richmond and Byard have thwarted Mingus's formal plan, and his musical reactions demonstrate how important a proper realization of the extensions is to his conception of the piece and its proper performance.

Although the extensions from the other soloists are more flexible in terms of structure, they still draw upon certain figures, rhythmic accompaniments, or forms that may or may not be played. In the improvisations by Coles, for example, the free section at the beginning of the extension (2:54, Cornell) is always followed by a strong ostinato figure (3:25) at a medium-fast tempo that is introduced by Mingus and then staggered through the rest of the band, much like the driving ostinatos in "Haitian Fight Song."[101] This ostinato is usually followed by a rhythmic shift to a swing groove (at 3:52, with walking bass, shuffle beat in the drums, and piano comping) with or without an accelerando into the fourth section (at 4:22), which is played at a furious tempo, again with or without an accelerando.[102] The penultimate section consists of a slow twelve-bar blues (at 4:45; skipped in the Amsterdam performance), and the extension finally ends with another free section (at 5:30) that in Cole's improvisations is usually quite short. Byard's extensions are usually quite similar to those of Coles; he makes use the ostinato figures, swing sections, and twelve-bar blues form, though the last two performances from the tour feature more variation in grooves and an increased use of the twelve-bar blues.

Jordan's improvisation includes certain elements that are particular to his extension. Like all the others, it begins with free improvisation (at 10:20) but is always followed by a slow

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[101] The Bremen performance features a different rhythmic figure for the ostinato passage.
[102] The Bremen performance skips these two sections.

lament (at 12:19)—where Mingus plays an ostinato as Dolphy and Coles respond with moans and wails—that seems to symbolize the sorrow and suffering created by all the violence of the recent events in the Civil Rights Movement. Jordan next goes through a series of twelve-bar blues choruses (at 13:35) with shifting tempos that become faster and faster as the solo progresses. In all but the Cornell performance, the first of these blues choruses consists of the same stop-time rhythm that Mingus uses in the "Haitian Fight Song" version from *The Clown*, which becomes another way of signifying through intermusicality.[103] This allusion is highly relevant, since "Haitian Fight Song" was one of Mingus's earlier works with political implications."[104] Near the end of the extension, there is another area of free improvisation (at 14:22) where Jordan participates in a dialogue with Richmond, which is usually followed by another accelerando with the entire ensemble that ends in the final free section.[105]

While Dolphy's extension is the most flexible, every performance contains a strong and lengthy allusion to "Freewoman and Oh, This Freedom's Slave Cries" from *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* that consists of improvisations by Dolphy on the Phrygian mode over Spanish/Flamenco rhythms played by Mingus (at 24:46). As Mingus's psychologist wrote in the liner notes to *The Black Saint*, this part represents "the pain and tears of the black man;" the music, according to Mingus, "was meant to mirror the period of the Spanish Inquisition and El Greco's mood of oppressive poverty and death." [106] As all these examples illustrate, the addition of the extensions and all their subsections—with such wide-ranging moods and themes—was crucial in presenting Mingus's ideas, and ultimately reflects the transformation of "Fables of

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[103] The stop-time rhythm consists of three quarter notes followed by a quarter rest in every measure, and is incidentally the same rhythm as Mingus's ostinato in Jordan's lament section.
[104] Also see the section below on Mingus's use of quotation for other connections between "Haitian Fight Song" and "Fables of Faubus."
[105] In the Cornell performance, the last section consists of a return of the lament at 15:54.
[106] Edmund Pollock, liner notes to *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (Impulse IMPD-174).

Faubus” from a protest song against a particular individual and event, to a larger commentary on the state of racial relations in the United States at the height of the Civil Rights Movement.

Subversion Through the Art of Quotation—“My Country ’Tis of Thee”

Beginning with the Candid recording of “Fables of Faubus,” there is an increased frequency in the performance of certain recurring quotations that, in addition to perpetuating the bebop tradition of quotation, are a significant and ingenious form of subversion. The quoted material ranges from African American songs—such as the spiritual “Wade in the Water” and the Negro National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”—to songs associated with American patriotism and national identity—such as “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” and “Yankee Doodle.” By playing familiar patriotic tunes that were created by white men, contrasting them with works produced by African Americans, and placing them all within a subversive context of mockery and ridicule, Mingus, along with his sidemen, is signifying (or commenting) upon these “sacred texts.”[107] With a sense of parody and irony, Mingus simultaneously questions the values engendered by the patriotic tunes, asserts the feeling of hope that the African-American songs convey, and thereby reverses the status quo of standard white/black power relations—again, an important element of signification. The 1964 performances of “Fables of Faubus” contain a number of different quotations, but this section will focus on Mingus’s treatment of “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” specifically because it seems to be of special concern for Mingus and is an integral component to his ultimate conception of “Fables of Faubus.”

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[107] Robert James Branham and Stephen J. Hartnett, *Sweet Freedom’s Song: “My Country ’Tis of Thee” and Democracy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92.

The practice of jazz musicians quoting from extraneous musical texts during performances has not always been valued by scholars because of the seemingly incongruous relation of the quoted material to the music at hand. Gunther Schuller, in his famous essay on the genius of Sonny Rollins's improvisations, praises the saxophonist's ability to organize his improvisations through thematic development, in contrast to the "failure of less inspired improvisations" that, among other things, "are often marred by a sudden quotation from some completely irrelevant material"—though in fact, Rollins was a master in the art of quotation.[108] In particular regard to Mingus, Vladimir Simosko and Barry Tepperman have praised the various performances from the 1964 European tour, yet their negative view of the musicians' "distracting" insertions of "derisive cliché-quotes," such as "Yankee Doodle," seems to underscore a lack of understanding of the general aesthetics of quotation in jazz and, more specifically, of the quoted texts' relevance within the context of pieces like "Meditations on Integration" and "Fables of Faubus."[109] Even when describing the enormous impact of Dolphy and Mingus's collaboration in the 1960 Candid sessions, Simosko and Tepperman question "the insertion of topical social protest 'messages' into the otherwise brilliant *Original Faubus Fables*," which in their opinion does not stand up to the extraordinary aesthetic quality of the recording.[110] Although "Fables of Faubus"—along with other politically charged pieces—can certainly stand as a complete work of art if separated from its social context (ignoring its lyrics and quotations), it is erroneous to perceive that "its aesthetic impact [is] unenhanced by such messages or social relevance."[111]

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[108] Gunther Schuller, "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation," 214.
[109] Vladimir Simosko and Barry Tepperman, *Eric Dolphy: A Musical Biography and Discography*, rev. ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 84.
[110] Ibid, 51.
[111] Ibid, 82.

The importance of quotation has been explored by Krin Gabbard, who writes that "the art of quotation provides the jazz artist with modes of expression that are otherwise blocked by forces based in race, class, and popular taste." He views the practice as an "avant-garde gesture" that the beboppers adopted "to undermine distinctions between high and low art and to question the 'aura' that in the minds of most listeners surrounds the work of [respected composers] but not the improvisations of a black saxophone player."[112] Mingus extends this subversive concept in "Fables of Faubus" by perpetuating and exaggerating the practice of quotation, shifting the balance of white/black power relations at a time when African Americans sought equal rights and freedom from oppression. Charles Hersch has written that while the political message of "Fables of Faubus" is made evident through its lyrics, "Mingus's purely instrumental works conveyed a more subtle and complex political meaning."[113] Aside from the fact that the lyrics of "Fables of Faubus" *are* complex—especially when considering them together with the underlying music—Mingus's exemplary use of quotation in the 1964 versions imbues the piece with a complexity and multiplicity of meanings that is unmatched in his other works. In using quotation as an integral part of his musical discourse, Mingus draws on an alternate form of expressing complex ideas that would be impossible to realize, or at least for his audience to grasp fully, by utilizing purely abstract music.

In the 1964 recordings of "Fables of Faubus," the seemingly inordinate amount of emphasis that Mingus places on quoting "My Country 'Tis of Thee" becomes impossible to ignore after listening to its continued recurrence not only during a single performance, but

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[112] Krin Gabbard, "The Quoter and His Culture," in *Jazz in Mind: Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz*, ed. Reginald T. Buckner and Steven Weiland (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 93.
[113] Charles Hersch, "'Let Freedom Ring!': Free Jazz and African-American Politics," *Cultural Critique* 32 (Winter 1995-1996): 104.

throughout the several different versions of "Fables of Faubus." In using this patriotic hymn, which once served as America's unofficial national anthem, Mingus is (whether intentionally or not) joining a long tradition of subversion in the United States, not just by African Americans, but by Americans in general who made use of this song as a means of challenging the political landscape and ideologies throughout the country's history. In their enlightening study on the connections between "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and American democracy, Robert Branham and Stephen Hartnett discuss the function of America's most significant political song, tracing its role since 1744 (initially as "God Save the King") in the transformation of national identities, specifically in the fight for women's suffrage, the temperance and antislavery movements, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction era. The song's importance in subverting dominant ideologies was achieved in hundreds of different versions by rewriting the lyrics, often with a good dose of parody and irony, while keeping the tune intact.

Some of the most fascinating examples of appropriating "My Country 'Tis of Thee" for subversive use were written during the antislavery movements of the antebellum period. As Branham and Hartnett note, the song "was particularly useful for illustrating the country's hypocrisies and for providing familiar, poignant melodies for antislavery lyrics."[114] Abolitionists questioned the supposed "sweet land of liberty" portrayed in the song by subverting the "sacred text" with lyrics that brought attention to the horrors and injustice of slavery. In formulating an alternative version of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" in 1839, its creator, "Theta," observes that the original song portrays "such a manifest unlikeness to our true condition as a nation," that the parody was written "In order to bring out some great and shameful truths in relation to our

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[114] Branham and Hartnett, *Sweet Freedom's Song*, 87.

national character and condition, which are concealed by this otherwise beautiful production."[115] The intertextual relation between "Theta's" parody and the original are obvious:

My country! 'tis of thee,
Stronghold of Slavery—
    Of thee I sing:
Land, where my fathers died;
Where men *man's* rights *deride*;
From every mountain side,
    Thy deeds shall ring.

My native country! thee—
Where all men are born free,
    If *white* their skin:
I love thy hills and dales,
Thy mounts and pleasant vales;
But hate thy *negro* sales,
    As foulest sin.

Let *wailing* swell the breeze,
And ring from all the trees
    The *black* man's wrong;
Let every tongue awake,
Let *bond* and free partake,
Let rocks their silence break,
    The sound prolong.[116]

Branham and Hartnett observe that by retaining a large part of the original lyrics and changing key words—repetition with difference—"Theta" transforms the song into "an arena of struggle, as a cultural icon subject to dispute and refiguration, parody and irony."[117] A similar example was published in an 1854 collection of antislavery songs written by Joshua McCarter Simpson. This alternate version, entitled "Song of the 'Aliened American,'" also makes use of intertextuality with the original to highlight the oppression of African Americans as well as the

[115] Quoted in Branham and Hartnett, *Sweet Freedom's Song*, 93.
[116] Ibid., 212.
[117] Ibid., 93.

tyranny of the white man: "My country, 'tis of thee / Dark land of Slavery, / In thee we groan," and "The white man rules the day— / He holds despotic sway, / O'er all the land."[118]

Well after the Civil War and the supposed liberation of slaves, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote a version of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" that was published in *The Horizon* in 1907, where he proposes a solution to the dilemma of African Americans being caught in the middle of a performance of the patriotic anthem. How can they sing about a country whose ideals they love, yet does not grant them the liberty and freedom that it promises? Du Bois thus offers "a way out: Arise, gracefully remove your hat, and tilt your head. Then sing as follows, powerfully and with deep unction. They'll hardly note the little changes and their feelings and your conscience will thus be saved:"

My country tis of thee,
Late land of slavery,
    Of thee I sing.
Land where my father's pride,
Slept where my mother died,
From every mountain side
    Let freedom ring!

My native country thee
Land of the slave set free,
    Thy fame I love.
I love thy rocks and rills
And o'er thy hate which chills,
My hear with purpose thrills,
    To *rise* above.

Let laments swell the breeze
And wring from all the trees
    Sweet freedom's song.
Let laggard tongues awake,
Let all who hear partake,
Let Southern silence quake,
    The sound prolong.[119]

[118] Ibid., 97.

There are striking similarities between Du Bois's post-slavery version and "Theta's" parody, in particular the emphasis on "land of slavery" replacing the original song's "land of liberty." Along with Simpson's "Dark land of Slavery," these revised versions invert the song's meaning by depicting the country "as one in which slavery, not liberty, is the definitive property."[120] The song is transformed from a patriotic proclamation of liberty to an expression of sorrow, one that reveals the hypocrisy of a nation built upon values that are not accorded to all its citizens.

Like "Theta," Simpson, Du Bois, and many others who wrote new, antislavery lyrics to "My Country 'Tis of Thee," Mingus also adapted the song to reflect his despondent views of a nation that, in his view, still treated African Americans as slaves. Mingus's placement of a patriotic song—especially one that epitomizes the "liberty" and "freedom" prized by white Americans—within the context of "Fables of Faubus" is, of course, not a patriotic gesture at all. Rather, Mingus signifies upon the song in several ways. Although his quotations of the song are musical, and thus it is impossible to know his exact thoughts, Mingus provides us with powerful clues in Reichman's film *Mingus*. After shooting a rifle "like the one that killed Kennedy" and admiring the hole he made in the roof, Mingus proceeds to sing, "My country, 'tis of thee, / Free land of slavery."[121] Mingus thus continues a long tradition of subverting the song's text with the simple but powerful change from "liberty" to "slavery." In addition, the paradox created by setting the word "free" against "slavery" draws attention to the hypocrisy of the country and of white men who seemed to think that there was nothing wrong with maintaining the status quo. It is also significant that the violent act of shooting a gun provoked Mingus to reflect on the "free

[119] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Creative Writings by W.E.B. Du Bois: A Pageant, Poems, Short Stories, and Playlets*, comp. and ed. Herbert Aptheker (White Plains, New York: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1985), 15.
[120] Branham and Hartnett, *Sweet Freedom's Song*, 97.
[121] Reichman, *Mingus*, 19:46.

land of slavery" in which he lived. Earlier in the film, Mingus also recites his own signifying revision of the Pledge of Allegiance:

> I pledge allegiance to the flag, the white flag. I pledge allegiance to the flag of America. When they say black, or negro, it means you're not an American. I pledge allegiance to *your* flag. Not that I have to, but just for the hell of it I would pledge allegiance. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America—the white flag. With no stripes, no stars. It is a prestige badge, worn by a profitable minority. Yeah, I pledge allegiance, to the United States of America. I would pledge allegiance to see that some day they will live [up] to their own promises, to the victims that they call citizens. Not just the black ghettos, but the white ghettos, and the Japanese ghettos, the Chinese ghettos, *all* the ghettos in the world. Oh, I pledge allegiance alright. I could pledge a *whole* lot of allegiance.[122]

By drawing distinctions between two America's—one that boasts of a freedom that is only accessible to privileged whites, and another that fails to live up to its promises for the rest of its citizens—Mingus subverts the Pledge's doctrine of a nation that is "indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Later on in the film, Mingus provides a disturbing if somewhat humorous image of being lynched by having his daughter tie a noose around his neck with a trick rope.[123] Although only his recitation of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" ties in directly with his quotation of the song in "Fables of Faubus," there is a clear theme that runs through his recitation of the "Pledge of Allegiance," the "free land of slavery," and lynching, and the appearance of all these events in the film suggests that for Mingus, the song was fraught with a multitude of meanings and images. When we are aware of Mingus's appropriation of the lyrics to "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and the context in which he used them in the film, the quotations of the song's melody in "Fables of Faubus" become even more significant.

It is particularly interesting to note that Mingus's appropriation of this tune was not limited to "Fables of Faubus," but that he also used it in his improvisations to other works

[122] Ibid., 13:30.
[123] Ibid., 25:03.

written during the Civil Rights Movement that depicted the plight of African Americans.[124] One of these is "Work Song" (1956), whose musical depictions of slavery and oppression are depicted by the piano clusters that, according to Mingus's pianist Mal Waldron, simulate "the blow of a sledge-hammer."[125] Waldron writes that the composition is "a jazz tone poem depicting the old slave gangs as they did their back-breaking work of 'swinging that hammer.' In particular, I think Mingus thought of the men who worked out their bondage by driving stakes or laying railroad ties. In a broader sense, he thought of the whole Negro race with its oppressions and problems."[126] "My Country 'Tis of Thee" is also quoted in "Haitian Fight Song" (1957), which according to Mingus "could just as well be called 'Afro-American Fight Song.'"[127] Mingus described his powerful improvisation in "Haitian Fight Song" as "a deeply concentrated one. I can't play it right unless I'm thinking about prejudice and hate and persecution, and how unfair it is. There's sadness and cries in it, but also determination. And it usually ends with my feeling: 'I told them! I hope somebody heard me.'"[128] Indeed, the quotation of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" is presented at the very end of Mingus's passionate three-minute solo, and although its appearance is brief, it corresponds exactly with the first phrase of the song—"My country 'tis of the, / Free land of slavery"—and provides the essential thematic germ for Mingus's quotations of the tune in "Fables of Faubus." This exact idea is also used on "Compositional Theme Story: Medleys, Anthems and Folklore" (1963), which features

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[124] From my knowledge, Mingus only quoted "My Country 'Tis of Thee" in his political compositions, with the exception of the quote's earliest appearance on "I'll Remember April," recorded in 1952, when he was working with Charlie Parker. Charles Mingus, *Charlie Mingus: The Young Rebel* (Proper Records 77).
[125] Mingus, *Mingus at the Bohemia*. The quotation occurs at 4:46.
[126] Waldron, liner notes to *Mingus at the Bohemia*.
[127] The quotation appears at 9:40 in the 1957 recording of "Haitian Fight Song" from *The Clown*, though the piece was also recorded in 1955.
[128] Quoted in Nat Hentoff, liner notes to Mingus, *The Clown*.

quotations from various musical texts, as its title implies. Yet, Mingus—who here plays solo piano—builds this composition around ironic statements of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" that act more as a theme rather than mere quotations. Played in an asymmetrical rhythm that parallels the statements made in "Haitian Fight Song" and, later, in "Fables of Faubus," the quotations become increasingly dissonant (the most dissonant statement concludes the piece) and more abrupt in rhythm as they are developed, and are set incongruously against the legato lines and lush harmonies that surround them. While the title of "Compositional Theme Story" is not political, Mingus's message certainly is:

> "This is a mixture of all the things I've heard, known and felt about this country. . . . The Bill of Rights is fine. All those civil rights that are being struggled for are already in there, but it hasn't been applied and it isn't in people's hearts. We're still talking in terms of Negroes and whites, but we're either all Americans, or forget it! As long as those two words exist, with all the divisions they imply and with all the oppression of the Negro they imply, there is no real place for me in this society."[129]

The intricate web of associations between "My Country 'Tis of Thee," Mingus's views on American society, and the music that he explicitly associated with oppression and the fight for civil rights results in a highly complex level of intermusicality and intertextuality that continues to grow throughout the 1964 performances of "Fables of Faubus." By continually referencing and developing "My Country 'Tis of Thee," Mingus signifies not only upon the original tune, the original lyrics, other lyrical versions, and his own revision of the lyrics, but upon his own quotations of the song in previous performances and in other pieces that he associated with the trials of the African American experience. An example of the astonishing levels of intermusicality that Mingus is able to achieve occurs in the Cornell version of "Fables of Faubus" (at 18:14), where he indirectly signifies upon "My Country 'Tis of Thee" by prefiguring

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[129] Quoted in Nat Hentoff, liner notes to Charles Mingus, *Mingus Plays Piano: Spontaneous Compositions and Improvisations* (Impulse IMPD-217).

the first statement of the tune with a quotation of the theme from “Work Song” (see example 2.3, mm. 18-24).

However, the mere fact that Mingus quotes “My Country ’Tis of Thee” is not as significant as *what* he does with the tune, such as the thematic development of melodic figures and his treatment of rhythm—again, “one does not Signify some thing; one Signifies in *some way*.” Applied to Mingus’s use of “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” this signifying in “*some way*” refers to his foregrounding of the tune—the signifier—through, first, an initial statement within an incongruous context, followed by many forms of repetition and revision. As Gates points out, “Signifyin(g) . . . turns on the sheer play of the signifier. It does not refer primarily to the signified; rather, it refers to the style of language, to that which transforms ordinary discourse into literature.”[130] Floyd elaborates on Gates’s points in relation to music, arguing that “the *how* of a performance is more important than the *what*. Certainly, African Americans have their favorite tunes, but it is what is done with and inside those tunes that the listeners look forward to, not the mere playing of them. . . . With the *musical* experience, the expectation is that something musical will *happen* in the playing of the music, and it is the *something* that fascinates, that elevates the expectation and places the hearer in a critical mode.”[131]

In Mingus’s case, the development and transformation of “My Country ’Tis of Thee” is what is most significant, what turns the ordinary tune into art, and what imbues Mingus’s improvisations with a great sense of irony. As Monson explains, for irony to occur in jazz improvisation, it is essential “that the iconic moment is not simply resemblance but a transformation of the thing resembled,” for “reversal, incongruity, and recontextualization are the

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[130] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 78.
[131] Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 96-97.

hallmarks of irony."[132] In the Cornell version of "Fables of Faubus," Mingus's treatment of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" first becomes ironic simply by the incongruous presence of the patriotic tune within a civil rights protest song. Yet, even the first statement of the tune is fraught with irony due to Mingus's rhythmic revision of it. Rather than presenting the melody in its familiar 3/4 meter at a reverent tempo, Mingus crams the first phrase of two measures ("My country 'tis of thee") into a single measure of a very fast and asymmetrical 5/8 meter, with a rhythm that is an exact diminution (from quarter notes to eighth notes) of the original, except for a reversal in emphasis on "'tis" from a long dotted quarter note to a quick sixteenth note (for this and following discussion, see example 2.3, mm. 25-38). This first phrase is immediately followed by a shift to a 4/4 meter and a more swinging rhythm on the second phrase ("Free land of slavery"). Mingus then improvises quick figures through some erratic changes in tempo, finally slowing down to provide the tune's third phrase ("Of thee I sing"). Following this first statement of "My Country 'Tis of Thee," Mingus repeats and revises his already-revised version several times, never playing it the same way twice. The first of the repetitions begins in the 5/8 meter of the first statement at a slower tempo, and is transposed from F major to A major, with the first major difference happening on the second phrase, which remains in the 5/8 meter and is slightly distorted with upward slides on the first two notes ("free land"). Mingus further distorts the tune on the third phrase in the next measure by completely changing the expected pitches, which are now played with slides, bends, and a wide vibrato. The next repetition of the tune follows quickly, transposed now to C major and again in the 5/8 meter, but without the third phrase—very similar to the way we hear Mingus recite it in the film.

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[132] Monson, *Saying Something*, 127, 104.

Example 2.3. "Fables of Faubus," Cornell, Mingus solo with quotations (17:48 to 18:47).

♩ = 144
Bass
poco accel.

♩ = 168
(straight eighths)
"Dixie"
rit.

accel.
molto rall.

♪ = 252
♩ = 168
"Work Song" (to m. 24)

♪ = 240
rall.
accel.

♩ = 200
My coun-try 'tis of thee, Free land of sla-ve-ry,
rall.

♩ = 160
♪ = 184
rall.
vib.
Of the I sing. My coun-try 'tis of thee, Free land of sla-ve-ry, Of the I sing.

♪ = 224
wide vib.
My coun-try 'tis of thee, Free land of sla-ve-ry, My coun-try 'tis of thee, Free land of sla - ve - ry,

Mingus then ends his first concentrated development of “My Country ’Tis of Thee” with a fourth statement an octave higher, with the most radical change thus far occurring with a flattening of each note beginning on the last note of the first measure (D-flat on “thee”) until he returns to the “normal” or expected pitch on the very last note of the phrase (C on the last syllable of “slavery”). The distortion of rhythm and pitch is further compounded by an even more prominent deformation effected by eerie upward slides, which are highlighted by a slower quarter-note triplet rhythm (now in 4/4 meter), and an incredibly wide vibrato ending the phrase. The timbral distortions seem to especially correspond to a key change in the revisions of “My Country ’Tis of Thee” by “Theta” and Du Bois, where the “music” from the original’s “Let music swell the breeze” is transformed into “wails” and “laments.”[133]

Mingus continues to develop and distort the tune throughout the solo with changes in rhythm, pitch, and timbre. He also adds a more complex level of intertextuality by interspersing a series of quotations from other tunes (see example 2.4 for following discussion). A quotation of “Blues in the Night” is followed by a more syncopated and swinging statement of “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” which is then followed by “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” another tune that was quoted in nearly every performance of “Fables of Faubus,” including statements by both Dolphy and Mingus in the Candid version.

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[133] This feeling is further expressed by Mingus in the free section at the end of his extension, where he quotes and develops the Funeral March from Chopin’s Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 35 (at 22:15 of the Cornell version). However, the quote—which was also often quoted in the piece by Byard—is not really a reference to Chopin, but to Ellington’s “Black and Tan Fantasy,” which famously ends with the Funeral March. In his composition, Ellington essentially implies that the notion of integration put forth by the mingling of races in black and tan clubs of the 1920s was still a fantasy. In the context of the Civil Rights Movement, Mingus’s reference suggests that the American ideals of equality and freedom are also still only a fantasy.

Example 2.4. "Fables of Faubus," Cornell, Mingus solo with quotations (19:32 to 20:49).

♩ = 98

Bass

"Blues in the Night"

My coun - try 'tis of thee, free land of sla-ve-ry

vib.

"When Johnny Comes Marching Home" (to m. 13)

vib. vib.

vib. vib. vib. vib.

My coun-try 'tis of thee, free land of sla-ve-ry

"Ol' Man River "

Tote that barge and lift that bale! You show a lit-tle grit and you land (in jail)

It ain't ne - ces-sa - ri - ly so

It ain't ne -ces-sa - ri - ly so

My coun-try 'tis of thee, free land of sla - ve - ry

It ain't

ne-ces-sa - ri - ly so

My coun-try 'tis of thee, free land of sla-ve-ry

Immediately after this, Mingus plays a passage from "Ol' Man River," from Kern and Hammerstein's *Showboat* (1927), which may seem somewhat trivial but is actually of great significance. "Ol' Man River" draws attention to the power structures of American society by depicting the hard labor of African Americans working along the Mississippi "while de white

folks play." While Mingus's quotations usually reference the beginning of a tune, here he plays the exact same pitches as the last four-bar phrase of the eight-bar bridge, whose original lyrics are as follows (Mingus's quotation begins on the third line):

> You an' me, we sweat an' strain,
> Body all achin' an' racked wid pain.
> "Tote dat barge!"; "Lift dat bale!"
> Git a little drunk an' you'll land in jail.

The specificity of this quotation is significant, as it seems to point not to Hammerstein's lyrics, but to Paul Robeson's signifying revision of the lyrics. As Charles Bernstein notes, Robeson used this song throughout his career, including civil rights meetings, "as a theme for his radical racial and social politics."[134] Robeson changed the original lyrics to reflect his political views, and one of the most significant changes occurs in the exact passage quoted by Mingus, where Robeson eliminates the dialect and sings "'Tote that barge!'; 'Lift that bale!'/You show a little grit and you land in jail." Sheila Tully Boyle and Andrew Bunie observe that in revising the lyrics, Robeson "transformed the song from "a 'white-person's spiritual'—a poignant lament of unchangeable fate—to a strident, unapologetic protest."[135] It is unlikely that Mingus's quotation of this very specific passage is mere coincidence, as there is a clear parallel between Robeson's inversion of the lyrics to "Ol' Man River" and Mingus's treatment of "My Country 'Tis of Thee."

Mingus continues to build upon the intertextual references by quoting Gershwin's "It Ain't Necessarily So" immediately before and after another statement of "My Country 'Tis of Thee," whose first and last notes overlap with those of Gershwin's tune. Just as Sportin' Life

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[134] Charles Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 145.
[135] Sheila Tully Boyle and Andrew Bunie, *Paul Robeson: The Years of Promise and Achievement* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 381.

questioned the validity of certain facts presented in the Bible, so Mingus challenges the doctrines put forth in the original lyrics to “My Country ’Tis of Thee.” The juxtaposition of these two tunes, and the message that they suggest, is clearly not a coincidence, as they are also presented in other performances of “Fables of Faubus” from the European tour. At the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées concert, for example, the two tunes are presented together on two separate occasions (at 16:38 and 18:15), the first of which adds one more level of intertextuality with a quote of “Deep in the Heart of Texas” (beginning at 16:22), recalling the ongoing injustices and atrocities in the Deep South.

The myriad repetitions and revisions of “My Country ’Tis of Thee” constitute a radical difference in style—highly ironic and even violent—from the restrained original version, and are a critical mode of expression that Mingus utilized to convey his views and emotions on the continuing civil rights struggle. In addition, the use of quotation within the lengthy extensions is of immense importance, as the extensions allowed Mingus to present and transform a large amount of diverse material that he tailored to each soloist—such as the intricate development of quotations, the introduction of new themes, the use of the twelve-bar blues form, the stop time choruses that allude to “Haitian Fight Song,” Jordan’s areas of lament, and Dolphy’s Phrygian-mode areas that recall the Spanish Inquisition—that would not have been possible without an alteration of the original form.

Conclusion

Although the political implications of “Fables of Faubus” are evident from a quick examination of its lyrics, it is the transformation of the music and specific musical elements that are able to reveal the multifaceted ways in which Mingus expressed his views not only on the Little Rock

situation, but more broadly on the Civil Rights Movement. Close musical analysis of the piece can draw attention to aspects like the significant changes in structure, but such details tell us little about the music's meaning and its intertwinement with broader historical and political issues. Gates's theory of signification allows us to more fully explore how Mingus creates a wide array of meanings. First, it can help us understand how Mingus comments on the racism of Faubus and other like-minded politicians through the reversal of power relations in the text, as well as through the use of intertextuality, such as the "two, four, six, eight" cheer. Yet, Mingus achieves this same effect and creates even more varied and complex meanings by signifying musically. The 1964 versions of the "Fables of Faubus" are most significant in this regard, as Mingus signifies not only on his previous versions of the piece, but revises it to such an extent that it almost becomes an entirely new composition. The extensions of the form were essential to the range of expression required by Mingus, and illustrate an engagement of issues contested during the Civil Rights Movement that go beyond the events in Little Rock. Just as Mingus had signified on the Pledge of Allegiance in Reichman's film to draw attention to the fact that the values of liberty and justice were only available to a select few, he develops quotations like "My Country 'Tis of Thee" not as patriotic statements, but as modes of subverting the most cherished of American values: the freedom, liberty, and democracy that weren't yet available to African Americans.

CHAPTER 3

"Devil Woman [?]": Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Representations of Women

Mingus's autobiography *Beneath the Underdog* was published in May of 1971. The book contains many vividly descriptive sex scenes that portray Mingus as a super-human, hyper-sexualized black man, and women as his objects of sexual desire. In addition to employing extremely offensive language to describe women—including bitch, slut, whore, and worse—Mingus's almost incessant boasting regarding his sexual power over women (highlighted by the conspicuous lack of details regarding his life as a musician) contributes to an image of Mingus as a stereotypical misogynist black man. The original manuscript of the book, which allegedly numbered over a thousand pages, contained even more explicit language and sexual references; according to Mingus, this content was cut from the final version because "it was too dirty . . . too hard on whitey."[1] Because of the seemingly misogynist, male-centric perspectives presented in *Beneath the Underdog*, scholars such as Hazel Carby, Monique Guillory, and Eric Porter have situated Mingus within a male-dominated jazz world where women were perceived as a threat to the creative genius of black men, and treated as purely sexual objects that were relegated to a

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[1] Whitney Balliett, "Mingus at Peace," 406. The book's explicitness was the reason why Mingus had so much difficulty finding a publisher—Playboy Books and Random House considered it but declined, and McGraw-Hill had given Mingus an advance (accounts range between $10,000 and $25,000), but a senior editor rejected it because it was "the dirtiest book he'd ever read." See Sue Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 37. Although Mingus seems to have been pleased with final version published by Knopf—he commended Nel King, the final editor, as "probably the only white person who could have done it"—Janet Coleman (Mingus's friend and one of the book's earliest editors) describes the published version as "weak tea indeed," a result of the book being "whitened up beyond repair" by the several editors that worked on it before King. See Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus/Mingus: Two Memoirs* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1991), 8. An 875-page manuscript of the autobiography survives. See Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, Box 45, Folders 2-10, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress. For accounts of the autobiography's reception by the press, see Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 61-64, and Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 172-173.

sphere outside the male-dominated world of jazz.[2] Yet, it is unfair and simplistic to view Mingus within such a narrow category of masculinity, since as Nichole Rustin has observed, *Beneath the Underdog* is a complex text that suggests "multiple and shifting meanings of masculinity," which Mingus both conforms to *and* evades.[3]

This chapter will explore new ways of understanding Mingus's image and creative output by looking at the intersections between performance, race, and gender that are found in both his musical compositions and his autobiography. I suggest that Mingus grappled with two separate and conflicting models of masculinity—one that he "performed" overtly in the public sphere that adheres to dominant black male stereotypes, and an alternative, closely guarded model that challenges these stereotypes. By studying the different ways in which Mingus portrays himself throughout *Beneath the Underdog*—including the images of the Buck and pimp, and the dichotomies that arise from his conflicting representations of women—we can uncover Mingus's construct of an alternative model of masculinity while at the same time shed light on his reasons for performing dominant notions of masculinity. In addition to Mingus's autobiography, close examination of the compositions "Eclipse," "Devil Woman," "Ecclusiastics," and "Sue's Changes" can yield yet another dimension to Mingus's models of masculinity and his representations of women.

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[2] Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 143; Monique Guillory, "Black Bodies Swingin': Race, Gender, and Jazz," in *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure*, ed. Monique Guillory and Richard C. Green (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 203-213; Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 142. While Porter acknowledges that Mingus's performances of masculinity are complex and not always hypermasculine, he nonetheless considers that Mingus's creativity is directly linked to his sexuality and power over women, and that deeper connections with women (and family) represent a threat to that creativity.

[3] Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 28 and 38.

Mingus and Racial Identity

Throughout his life, Mingus struggled with his identity as a black man, and constantly sought to be accepted and loved by other blacks. Much of Mingus's confusion stems from his upbringing in the predominantly black Los Angeles suburb of Watts as a racially-mixed child (two quarters black, a quarter Swedish, a quarter Chinese).[4] But perhaps the greatest source of Mingus's racial anxieties derived from his father. With very light skin and hazel eyes, Charles Mingus, Sr.—who even claimed a lineage going back to Abraham Lincoln—was able to pass for white, and as Priestley surmises, the physical violence he exacted on his darker-skinned children was likely not coincidental.[5] Mingus, Sr.'s adamant emphasis on his family's light skin color, his view of blacks as inferior racial "others," and stern warnings to his children to stay away from "'them little black nigger yaps' down the street" undoubtedly had a confounding influence on Mingus.[6] Mingus remembered that his father "never gave us any pride in being black. I don't think he was *ashamed*, I don't think he knew anything about it, about the fact that there was anything to be proud about. And I think he put his hopes in the strength of the fact that he passed for white."[7] For years, Mingus never even realized that he was black, until one day two Mexicans called him a "nigger."[8]

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[4] Charles Mingus, Sr. was half black and half Swedish, and was effectively raised as a white child by his single Swedish mother. Mingus's mother, Harriett Sophia Mingus, who died while Mingus was only twenty months old, was half black and half Chinese. Further, Mingus was raised by a stepmother that was half black and half Native American. See Celia Zaents's (Mingus's second wife) comments in McGlynn, *Charles Mingus: Triumph of the Underdog*, 16:21.

[5] Priestley, *Mingus*, 1-3. Priestley notes that Mingus, Sr. had blue eyes, but Mingus describes his father as having hazel eyes in *Beneath the Underdog*, 30.

[6] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 27.

[7] Priestly, *Mingus*, 2.

[8] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 27.

Mingus's confusion over his racial identity and his need to fit in to black society is a very strong theme that runs through *Beneath the Underdog*, which is replete with examples regarding Mingus's experiences growing up in Watts as a "half-yellow schitt-colored nigger."[9] In the autobiography, Mingus describes himself as "kind of a mongrel, lighter than some but not light enough to belong to the almost-white elite and not dark enough to belong with the beautiful elegant blacks."[10] Since he felt at odds in both black and white circles, as a young boy Mingus found it easier to form relationships with other outcasts of society in Watts (such as the Mexicans and Japanese), and as Sue Mingus has remarked, he even "tried to conk his hair and . . . be a Mexican."[11] Even then, he still didn't quite fit in with any group, or as he states in *Beneath the Underdog*, he was "of no race, country, flag, or friend."[12] Yet, Mingus ultimately identified himself as a black man. In an interview, the sorrow and anger in Mingus's voice is very palpable when he describes the racism he encountered from blacks as a result of his skin color: "My hair wasn't beautiful, nappy, like theirs was; my skin wasn't dark ebony black, and beautiful like they were. They made me feel ugly; they called me schitt-colored motherfu… no, half-yellow, schitt-

[9] The original title *for Beneath the Underdog* was *Memoirs of a Half-Yellow Schitt-Colored Nigger*. The reference appears in *Beneath the Underdog*, 52, as well as in McGlynn's documentary (see note 13 below). Janet Coleman writes that when she was first shown the manuscript in 1960, Mingus was toying around with two titles: "*Half Yaller Nigger*" or "*Half Yaller Schitt-Colored Nigger*." The title *Beneath the Underdog* was a cleaned-up, more publishable version, though its meaning remained related to "the social situation in America . . . of a half-yaller schitt-colored nigger." See Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 4. Santoro and Jenkins erroneously omit the word "yellow" from the original title, identifying it as *Memoirs of a Half-Schitt-Colored Nigger*. The spelling for "schitt" is Mingus's own idiosyncratic spelling and appears in that form throughout the book and in other writings by Mingus. See Sue Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 24.
[10] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 65.
[11] McGlynn, *Triumph of the Underdog*, 18:00.
[12] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 66.

colored motherfucker."[13] Mingus's quest for acceptance eventually found an outlet through his performances of blackness and black masculinity in both his music and his personal life.

I argue that Mingus's public persona—which includes his performances as "The Angry Man of Jazz," the Buck, and the pimp—is strongly related to his need to fit in with black society and be accepted by other black males, and that the stereotypical image of the strong, angry, sexual, and virile black male that he created does not necessarily coincide with the model of masculinity that he followed in his private life. While Mingus's music was often criticized for not being black enough (much of his early music was strongly influenced by Western European art music), he compensated by molding his public persona into an image that was unquestionably consistent with society's definitions of black masculinity.

Part I: Mingus and the Performance of Black Male Stereotypes

"The Angry Man of Jazz"

Beneath the Underdog opens with Mingus presenting himself as having three distinct personalities: "In other words, I am three. One man stands forever in the middle, unconcerned, unmoved, watching, waiting to be allowed to express what he sees to the other two. The second man is like a frightened animal that attacks for fear of being attacked. Then there's an over-loving gentle person who lets people into the uttermost sacred temple of his being . . . [a] man who wants to trust and love but retreats each time he finds himself betrayed."[14] Rustin sees these

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[13] McGlynn, *Triumph of the Underdog*, 18:18. McGlynn recognizes the critical role that Mingus's racial identity played in the unfolding of his personal and musical life (including his failures and successes), and begins the documentary with an excerpt of Mingus commenting on his mixed racial heritage, but ultimately claiming that he is "a Negro."

[14] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 3. Gerald Early notes the similarity between Mingus's three selves and the Holy Trinity, and draws attention to the connection between this similarity and Mingus's obsessive fear of becoming insane. Early sees Mingus's three different personalities as

three selves as existing "delicately on the taut line between public and private."[15] Yet in reality, Mingus usually drew clear distinctions in the ways he presented himself in the public and private spheres, performing two opposing masculinities as exemplified by the man who "attacks for fear of being attacked" (public) and "the man who wants to trust and love" (private).

In the public sphere, Mingus became known as "The Angry Man of Jazz," attaining a mythic status that became in many ways another one of his compositions, a calculated performance intended to mask his vulnerabilities and at the same time attract an audience to his music through an overt display of macho bravado.[16] This tactic is similar to that of other musicians who adopted distinct personalities as a way of connecting with listeners (including Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, and even Miles Davis, who in trying to distance himself from the "Tomming" of Armstrong created his own "cool" mode of engaging audiences through disengagement). Mingus's performances as "The Angry Man of Jazz" are well documented and include his famous tirades—such as firing musicians on stage or admonishing audiences to keep quiet during sets—as well as the violent outbursts that have become intrinsic to the Mingus myth. Stories of Mingus's violent nature include the famous altercation during a performance at the Apollo Theatre between Mingus and Ellington trombonist Juan Tizol, who in commenting

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"a tongue-in-cheek way of saying that if he is a divided, irrational self, so is the concept of the Christian God." See Gerald Early, "The Passing of Jazz's Old Guard: Remembering Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk, and Sonny Stitt," in *The Kennyon Review*, New Series, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring, 1985): 27.

[15] Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 26.

[16] According to Janet Coleman, "The Angry Man of Jazz" moniker was bestowed on Mingus by the press. See Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 28. Rustin regards Mingus's three selves as "performance personas," though in my view, Mingus's only performance persona is the one he presents in the public sphere. See Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 52.

that blacks could not read music, provoked Mingus to run after him with a fire axe, which in turn caused Ellington to fire Mingus from his dream job.[17]

Since these types of outrageous actions occurred both on and off stage—and Mingus was unquestionably a very emotional and impulsive individual—the "Angry Man" persona may seem like an accurate representation of who Mingus really was, especially since Mingus also had a reputation for being honest. As Nat Hentoff wrote in the liner notes to *The Clown*, "Mingus tries harder than anyone I know to walk naked. He is unsparing of phoniness and pomposity, and is hardest of all on himself when he feels he has conned himself in any respect. . . . If you make any attempt at honest communication with him, Mingus returns the word with love."[18] Yet as Hentoff suggests, Mingus was honest mainly with himself and those who were honest with him, which did not include audiences, acquaintances, critics, the press, or even the majority of musicians. In his notes for *Oh Yeah!*, Hentoff also emphasized that Mingus "likes to act, off as well as on the stand, and he may yet add a career in the theatre to his musical achievements."[19] Mingus was indeed an actor of sorts, but while he disliked phoniness and regarded the practice of musicians acting in outrageous ways to attract attention "a kind of sickness [that] can become real," he at the same time admitted, "I had my act going on, too."[20]

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[17] The different versions of this story illustrate the mythic proportions of Mingus's "Angry Man" persona. Mingus's (likely hyperbolized) version of the incident appears in Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 323-325. Britt Woodman also describes this event, although he makes no mention of the fire axe. See McGlynn, *Triumph of the Underdog*, 22:07. Another version from Tony Scott mentions the fire axe, but inflates the story to include a machete-wielding Tizol. See Priestley, *Mingus*, 50. Mingus's mythic status had already been cemented by 1956, when critic Barry Ulanov (who was one of the few critics Mingus admired) warned audiences to be wary of the stories they believed, as "only a very small percentage of what you hear will be true, and rarely in the version in which you hear it." Quoted in Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 131.
[18] Nat Hentoff, liner notes to Charles Mingus, *The Clown* (Rhino/Atlantic R2 75590).
[19] Nat Hentoff, liner notes to Charles Mingus, *Oh Yeah!* (Rhino/Atlantic R2 75589).
[20] Quoted in Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 75. Several Mingus scholars and friends have noted Mingus's penchant for acting. Gene Santoro identifies Orson Welles as one of Mingus's heroes,

The act to ensnare audiences was far-reaching, and Mingus went to great lengths to make his "Angry Man" persona seem as real as possible, to the extent that he even manufactured the rants to his audience. A famous and obvious example is the album *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*, which includes introductions to the set and tunes, as well as the regular banter and admonishments that had made Mingus famous.[21] Though the fact that it was a studio recording was not hidden, anyone who did not notice the details of the recording would assume that it was performed live—and it would in fact seem like Mingus was in complete command of his audience, for not a single noise is heard from conversations, ice rattling in glasses, cash registers ringing, or even applause.

Another example that perhaps continues to fool Mingus's audience is an often-quoted outburst that was supposedly transcribed during a set at the Five Spot by Mingus's then

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and draws interesting connections between Welles's works as a filmmaker and Mingus's works as a composer. According to Britt Woodman, Mingus's childhood friend, Mingus did not only look like Welles, "with the little mustache and all," but "was crazy about [him] . . . and he wrote lyrics and music that almost sounded like Orson Welles." See Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 53-54, 70, and 73. Janet Coleman has written about her experience acting with Mingus in *Indiangivers*, in which Mingus played the role of Pancho Villa. Al Young has also described acting with Mingus in another impromptu film, and points out the similarity between that film and John Cassavetes's improvisational film *Shadows*, for which Mingus wrote the musical score. Further, Young has observed that Mingus's "interest in theater was evident in everything he did," and that Roland Kirk "used to say that Mingus taught him a lot about getting an audience's attention." Young also reports that Mingus used to work as an extra in Hollywood movies. See Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 34, 94-95, and 102. For an insightful study of Mingus's music and his "acting" in reaction to black vaudeville and minstrel stereotypes, see Jennifer Griffith, "Mingus in the Act: Confronting the Legacies of Vaudeville and Minstrelsy," *Jazz Perspectives*, Vol. 4, No. 3, December 2010, 337-368. A perfect example of Mingus's acting is Thomas Reichman's documentary film *Mingus*, in which Mingus clearly works the camera with a series of outrageous performances, including shooting his rifle at the ceiling and reciting the "Pledge of Allegiance to the White Flag." On reviewing Reichman's film for *The New York Times*, Vincent Canby pointed out Mingus's ability to draw in his audience with a "consciously choreographed, real-life performance," adding that Mingus's awareness of the camera makes the film "as interpretive as staged, fictional cinema." See Vincent Canby, "Screen: 'Mingus,' Man and Musician," *New York Times*, 17 May 1968. For more on Reichman's film and Mingus's "Pledge of Allegiance," see chapter 2, pp. 114-115.

[21] For more on this album, see chapter 1, pp. 21-22.

girlfriend, Diane Dorr-Dorynek, and subsequently published in *The Jazz Word* in 1960, the same year that *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* was recorded.[22] The following is a short excerpt:

> You, my audience, are all a bunch of poppaloppers. A bunch of tumbling weeds tumbling 'round, running from your subconscious, running from your subconscious unconscious . . . minds. Minds? Minds that won't let you stop to listen to a word of artistic or meaningful truth. You think it all has to be in beauteous colors. Beautiful, like your 'lovely' selves. You don't want to see your ugly selves, the untruths, the lies you give to life. . . . You haven't been told before that you're phonies. You're here because jazz has publicity, jazz is popular, the word jazz, and you like to associate yourself with this sort of thing. But it doesn't make you a connoisseur of the art because you follow it around. You're dilettantes of style. A blind man can go to an exhibition of Picasso and Kline and not even see their works. And comment behind dark glasses, Wow! They're the swingingest painters ever, crazy! Well, so can you. You've got your dark glasses and clogged-up ears.[23]

In the lengthy speech, Mingus chastises his audience for having private conversations during his set, and for being "dilettantes of style" who go the clubs not to listen to music, but to be seen. Dorr-Dorynek explains that her transcription is a condensed version of Mingus's diatribe, and that she later added the "Mother's Conversation, just to give you a more concrete idea of The Bandstand View."[24] Yet, while Mingus was indeed famous for these types of rants, this particular one never happened. In one of Mingus's private tapes, now at the Library of Congress, Mingus the actor recites this very speech slowly and deliberately, in a pitch so low that it sounds sinister and almost eerie—quite the opposite of Mingus's usual rapid-fire style of speaking.[25] It is this tape that is Dorr-Dorynek's original source, since the published transcription is faithful to Mingus's wording (though it cleans up some of the language and omits

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[22] Diane Dorr-Dorynek, "Mingus . . .," in *The Jazz Word*, ed. Dom Cerulli, Burt Korall, and Mort Nasatir (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 14-18.
[23] Ibid., 16-17.
[24] Ibid., 15.
[25] Charles Mingus, *[Mingus ruminating; playing solo piano]*, RGA 9750-9751, Charles Mingus Collection. Mingus as an actor is discussed in footnote 20.

certain phrases), and the "Mother's Conversation," which Dorr-Dorynek said was added later, does not appear in the tape. More significantly, Mingus's tape cuts off at the exact moment that Dorr-Dorynek writes, "Someone taped this that night, and the tape breaks off here."[26] That "someone" was either Dorr-Dorynek or Mingus, but the tape was definitely not recorded at a live performance—there is absolutely no noise whatsoever, and no exclamations from the crowd of "'Tell 'em Charlie!' 'Someone has been needed to say that for years!'"[27] In effect, Mingus and Dorr-Dorynek manufactured a hoax, another propagation of the Mingus myth that served to reach a broader audience that may not have had a chance to hear Mingus live or even on record.

While Mingus's "Angry Man" persona was largely an act, as Mingus himself admitted, this act served a dual purpose, and the anger, strength, and violence that had become so synonymous with the black male functioned as a veneer that became extremely effective at hiding the racial anxieties that stemmed from Mingus's childhood. In her explorations of the difficulties faced by black men in American society, bell hooks has noted, "every black male has been forced to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain for fear of being attacked, slaughtered, destroyed. Black males often exist in a prison of the mind, unable to find their way out."[28] In the same vein, hooks also writes, "The chronically angry black male is living in an emotional prison. Fear-based, he is isolated and terrified. In patriarchal culture his anger may be seen as 'manly,' so it becomes the perfect cover-up so that no one, not even himself, can know the extent of the pain he feels."[29] hooks's comments bear a strong similarity to Mingus's "Angry Man," corresponding perfectly to the "frightened animal that attacks for fear of being attacked" from *Beneath the Underdog*. As Britt Woodman explained, Mingus's reasons

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[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] Ibid.
[28] bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), xii.
[29] Ibid., 96.

for fighting were often related to racial prejudice (as the incident with Tizol demonstrates), and one of the effects of Mingus's typical behavior was that it made "people think that he hated white persons. They called him the angry man. But if you'd go to his pad, that's all he had surrounding him, white people. The blacks were the ones that couldn't understand him. . . . They didn't really know him, his heart, how beautiful a person he was. So he didn't hate white people, he hated prejudice. And that's when he'd get angry."[30] Thus, Mingus's insecurities of not being black enough and his fears of not being accepted as a black man forced him to adopt a model of masculinity that was consistent with society's expectations of what a black man was—angry, violent, vengeful against the white man, and of course, a sexual predator.

Mingus as the Buck and pimp

The hyper-sexualized masculinity that Mingus presents in the public sphere can be understood through the image of the Buck, which Michele Wallace identifies as "the only black stereotype that is sexual. He is brutal, violent, virile, tough, strong—and finds white women especially appealing. . . . He is the personification of the black threat to white womanhood and, more importantly, to white male authority and dominance."[31] Like the "Angry Man" persona—which is an obvious extension of the Buck image—Mingus's seemingly endless displays of sexual power, as exemplified in *Beneath the Underdog*, can be seen as another method of asserting his

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[30] Woodman also comments that the main attraction for some club-goers was Mingus's arguments with a club's audience and/or managers; he provides Mingus breaking the piano at the Five Spot as one example. See Bryant et al., eds., *Central Avenue Sounds*, 123-124.
[31] Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Verso, 1990), 25. The other stereotypes are the Uncle Tom and the Coon.

identity as a black man—if this is the way black men were supposed to act, then he could be as black as anybody by emphasizing and exaggerating his sexuality.[32]

One example found in *Beneath the Underdog* is the dissemination of "some good rules for fucking" through a kind of sacred male ritual—a ceremonial passing down, from "a wise old man" to Pop Collette to Mingus, of techniques on pleasing a woman that Mingus makes sound like the Holy Grail of sexual advice.[33] Armed with this new knowledge, Mingus is able to achieve sexual control over the "goddess" Rita, who is enraged with Mingus "for leaving [her] wanting it like this." Exhilarated with his newfound sexual prowess, Mingus responds confidently: "Who's leaving you, you fine-cunted whore? There's more coming and the way to get it is do what I say."[34] Mingus's disrespectful language and treatment of Rita as a sexual object, whom he is able to dominate with his penis, is certainly in line with the image of the oversexed, misogynist black male, as is his philosophy regarding keeping a woman's conduct in check: "I find there's less bullschitt with two or more girls, all on their best behavior. They're like so many flowers to me. I dig just about all of them except another man's."[35]

Though offensive—and written in such graphic detail that led one reviewer to call Mingus "an unusually gifted pornographer"[36]—these examples are only further attempts by Mingus to prove his identity through dominant stereotypes of black masculinity, and do not

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[32] In addition to exaggerating his sexuality, Mingus was notorious for exaggerating almost everything else he did, as his wife Sue explained: "Charles never does anything in a small way . . . If he has one bike, he will have three or four bikes. If he has one camera, he'll have five. He goes into a store to buy a pencil, he'll buy ten boxes of pencils." See Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 31.
[33] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 73.
[34] Ibid., 90-94. In the scene with Rita, Mingus further asserts his blackness through Rita's acceptance and admiration for him as a black man: "'You're colored like me. Big, beautiful, hard, with these Taurus sacs—black as I am, Mingus!' For the first time Charles felt completely accepted by a black Negro."
[35] Ibid., 263.
[36] Quoted in Guillory, "Black Bodies Swingin'," 208.

necessarily reflect the role played by women (or his treatment of them) in his personal life. Buddy Collette, who in Mingus's story was a part of the Pop Collette ritual, commented on the exaggerations in *Beneath the Underdog*:

> "We weren't quite as wild as he portrays. . . . Mingus was a very creative, very inventive guy who loved a lot of fanfare. . . . We were lucky sometimes; we would have young ladies come by. But at that time there was no way to pull any fancy stuff or get real serious with them, because at that period I don't think we were aware of any kind of protection . . . And 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, almost like shotgun-type from the father."[37]

Early in the autobiography, Mingus himself admits to his exaggerations through Dr. Wallach, who recognizes that the "fabrication and fantasy" in Mingus's stories—such as the absurdity of having sex with twenty-three prostitutes at a time—stems from Mingus's obsession with proving his manhood. When confronted with this analysis, Mingus replies, "I am more of a man than any dirty *white* [my emphasis] cocksucker!"[38] This exchange between Dr. Wallach and Mingus is revealing, for it signals that the sexual "fabrication and fantasy" throughout *Beneath the Underdog* is not only a method that Mingus uses to assert his masculinity, but a tactic employed by Mingus to demonstrate his sexual superiority over the white man.

In thinking about Mingus's sexualized image as the Buck, it is helpful to consider the ways that black men have traditionally been viewed (and have viewed themselves) in a white patriarchal society, and that his performances of the black stereotypes are a reaction against these views. Wallace speaks of a "mythology that surrounds the American black man . . . [that is] based upon the real persecution of black men: castrated black men hanging by their necks from

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[37] Bryant, *Central Avenue Sounds*, 137-138.

[38] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 4. Mingus also prefaces the book with a disclaimer that highlights the fictitious nature of some of the characters and events in the book, warning his readers to not take his stories too literally. The book's subtitle, *His World as Composed by Mingus*, is also an indication that this is not an entirely factual autobiography.

trees; the carcasses of black men floating face down in the Mississippi; black men with their bleeding genitals jammed between their teeth."[39] According to Wallace, this view—which she refers to as "the myth of the black man's castration in slavery"—is the most widespread view of the black man.[40] As a victim of the white man and black woman, the black man is symbolically castrated and reduced to a lower social condition, resulting in a vicious cycle of unemployment, poverty, drug and alcohol addiction, and imprisonment.[41] This lower social condition manifested itself in the lives of many jazz musicians, most notably Charlie Parker (one of Mingus's idols) and Fats Navarro, whose lengthy dialogues with Mingus figure prominently in *Beneath the Underdog* and depict him as perhaps the only black man who could truly understand Mingus. Parker and Navarro—who were both constantly broke and died at young ages from their addictions to heroin and alcohol—epitomize Wallace's description of the history of the black man in America; both men were victims of a viciously racist society and, more specifically, a jazz industry that Mingus often criticized with strong allusions to slavery. In a letter to Janet Coleman, Mingus bitterly described "the true jazz scene that has made our *masters* millions and taken the most famed to their penniless graves they had awaited as the only escape from the invisible chains on black jazz as an art."[42] In a radio interview, Mingus also commented on how absurd it was that the family of a an innovator like Fats Waller could live in absolute poverty; the

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[39] Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, 15-16.
[40] Ibid., 17 and 23.
[41] Ibid., 15-16. Mingus also challenged this myth by presenting himself as a wealthy man (he often carried copious amounts of money and bragged about living in the Upper East Side) and avoiding drugs. Janet Coleman writes that Mingus spent much time with Timothy Leary and his friends at Millbrook, where Leary conducted experiments using psychedelic drugs, including LSD. Although Mingus was impressed by Leary's "professorship," he never actually took any of these drugs himself. See Janet Coleman and Al Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 34-35.
[42] Coleman and Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 6.

fact that Waller's records were only benefiting his publishers was "a mark on this society's invisible slavery."[43]

Mingus's adamant criticisms of this system found their way into his public displays of masculinity through the image of the pimp—and his supposed adoption of the profession—which he cultivates extensively in *Beneath the Underdog*. Almost from the book's outset, Mingus presents a glamorized notion of the pimp as a heroic figure: "[It's] almost impossible to explain—how you feel when you're a kid and the king pimps come back to the neighborhood. They pose and twirl their watchchains and sport their new Cadillacs and Rollses and expensive tailored clothes. It was like the closest thing to one of our kind becoming president . . . When a young up-and-coming man reaches out to prove himself boss pimp, it's making it. That's what it meant where I come from—proving you're a man."[44] Indeed, there is a strong link between Mingus's sense of masculinity, his sexuality, and the pimp image, which is itself an extension of the Buck stereotype.

Like the Buck, the pimp is another manifestation of Mingus's desire to be accepted by black culture and to counteract "the myth of the black man's castration in slavery." Yet, the pimp is not merely an entity that functions on raw sexuality alone, but is rather Mingus's shaping of himself as a shrewd and powerful businessman who sets out to clear the socio-economic hurdles set for the black man by a white-dominated world. As others have noted, the constant focus on Mingus's career as pimp in *Beneath the Underdog* serves as a commentary on American society and particularly on jazz, a music whose main innovators had been black, yet

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[43] Ibid., 159. For more on the specific problems that Mingus had with the jazz industry—including night clubs, record labels, and unions—see Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 118-121, 132-136.
[44] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 6.

was owned by the white man.[45] As the master pimp Billy Bones explains, jazz is a profession that "might be said to make whores out of musicians . . . [so] 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 . . . He was saying, 'White man, you hate and fight and kill for riches, I get it from fucking. Who's better?'"[46] But even Billy Bones, one of the richest and most admired pimps around, was forced into pimpdom after the white press scared customers away from his legitimate nightclub and hotel businesses.[47] These views are concurrent with what Julius Lester points out about the hustler: "why waste your life working at a job you hate, getting paid next to nothing, when you can make more money with half the effort. So, a new class is created, the hustler who gambles, runs numbers, pushes drugs, lives off women, and does anything to avoid going to 'meet the man' five days a week, year in and year out. It is dangerous, rough, and a none too beautiful life, but it has some compensation: A modicum of self-respect and the respect of a good segment of the community is gained."[48] By adopting the ill-reputed profession of pimp, Mingus can at once escape the jazz industry's modern system of slavery and become a heroic figure of black culture.

In presenting himself through the images of the Buck and pimp, Mingus is also able to reverse the black/white power structure by assuming a position of dominance over the white man. As Wallace notes, what the white man was most afraid of was "that brutal buck who would come to get his daughter and his wife. . . . What had that woman always symbolized to the white

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[45] See Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 139-143, and Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 172-179.
[46] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 267-268.
[47] Ibid., 270.
[48] Quoted in bell hooks, *We Real Cool*, p. 19.

man? Everything that he owned, his domination. And it was that simple."[49] Mingus provides a perfect example of this principle of revenge in Thomas Reichman's documentary film, *Mingus*. In his anger over his eviction from his apartment/studio (which the documentary chronicles), Mingus concocts a plan to take revenge on someone who is trying to hurt him (presumably the person behind his eviction, though this is unclear from Reichman's cut in the film):

> Well, I'll figure out who it is, and I'll beat him in the face with a sack of money. I'll take his daughter and sell her back to him, if necessary. [Chuckles] I'm serious! . . . I mean, I can't kill the cat, 'cause that is not my bag—blood is not my bag. But broads is my bag. Even as old and as fat and out of shape [as] I am, I can take his broad from him. 'Cause he's probably too busy. I'll take his broad and I'll sell her back to him. I'm serious! With no education, it's a bitch to try and figure out this society and this system.[50]

Mingus plays into white fears by exemplifying the image of the Buck and pimp, threatening to take the white man's daughter and/or wife ("his broad") as a way of gaining advantage over the white man and dealing with an economic system that left few other options for black men.

Within the context of the Civil Rights Movement, this act of defiance against the white man is not only a personal vendetta through which Mingus reverses the power structure inherent in white patriarchal society, but also a political act that reacts against "the black man's castration" (as described by Wallace) and is symbolic of everything that had for years been denied to the black man—including a proper education, which Mingus identifies as the reason for his inability to "figure out this society and this system."[51] Wallace argues that the Civil Rights and Black Power movements were not only about equal rights and freedom for African Americans, they were about the black man reclaiming his manhood: "There was more to the protest and furor of the sixties and seventies than an attempt to correct the concrete problems of

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[49] Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, 32.
[50] Reichman, *Mingus*, 48:50.
[51] Education was very important for Mingus. He often blamed his troubles on his lack of education, and for years wanted to set up a school—the "School of Arts, Music, and Gymnastics"—to give kids what he never had. For more, see chapter 2, pp. 65-66.

black people. The real key was the carrot the white man had held just beyond the black man's nose for many generations, that imaginary resolution of all the black man's woes and discontent, something called manhood. It was the pursuit of manhood that stirred the collective imagination of the masses of blacks in this country and led them to almost turn America upside down."[52] And indeed, many black men in leadership roles, including Eldridge Cleaver and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), exploited the female body as a site on which they could "prove" their manhood.[53] Cleaver, for example, infamously boasted about his career as a rapist, first raping black women for practice, and finally graduating to raping white women with the purpose of exacting revenge on the white man.[54] Mingus's threats to take the white man's "broad" and "sell her back to him" in Reichman's documentary, as well as the many conquests of white women he describes in *Beneath the Underdog*, echoed (though less militantly) the contemporaneous politically charged stances of Cleaver and Jones.

Mingus's fantasies of dominating women carry even broader political implications. In her insightful study of Miles Davis's masculinity, Hazel Carby links Mingus to the misogyny of Davis through both men's desire of exercising "unlimited patriarchal power" over sex workers.[55] The example from *Beneath the Underdog* that Carby refers to is disturbing in its sexual violence:

> I wonder if I could hypnotize all the prostitutes of the world so they'd run into the streets nude to rape every man in sight! Their foulery will enter the homes of our leaders, the madmen plotting to conquer the world or destroy it . . . when my entranced women pounce upon the leaders of government, the world will know where it is—that Hitler could only have an erection when elated crowds or his girl Eva yelled *Heil, Hitler!* and

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[52] Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, 33.
[53] In *American Sexual Reference: Black Male* (1965), Jones (Baraka) wrote: "The most heinous crime against white society would be . . . the rape, the taking forcibly of one of whitie's treasures . . . the average ofay thinks of the black man as potentially raping every white lady in sight, which is true, in the sense that the black man should want to rob the white man of everything he has." Quoted in Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, 64.
[54] Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992), 33.
[55] Carby, *Race Men*, 143.

> that Napoleon was a faggot and Mussolini an M6-plus junkie. . . . Kings and royalty practiced perversion and cocaine-sniffing and arrested paupers for what they did themselves ten-fold. It's time to know what our leaders are that lead us to die for their way of escaping life. Whores, off with the clothes of our leaders! Today! All over the world! If they run cut off where their balls should be. Save this sick world, oh ye priceless whores![56]

Although this statement does express an unusual desire to control women, perhaps Carby is missing the point in Mingus's fantasy. His statement would engender quite a different meaning if it read, "I wonder if I could hypnotize all the prostitutes of the world so they'd run into the streets nude to *please* every man in sight!" But Mingus's display of power here is only a consequence of his real intentions of saving the world from its leaders—men, whom he classifies as hypocritical and narcissistic—and their insane obsession with conquering and destroying the world.[57]

Significantly, Mingus's fantasy of world revolt features a reversal in the usual roles assigned to men and women in sexual violence. Rather than being the victims of rape, women not only enact rape upon men—exercising sexual power over the world's patriarchy—but also strip these leaders of their manhood by metaphorically castrating them. In telling these women to "cut off where their balls should be," Mingus also reverses perceived notions of black and white masculinity and power—the "myth of the black man's castration in slavery" is transformed into Mingus's fantasy of the white man's castration through sexual slavery. It should be noted that this is the only example of sexual violence found in *Beneath the Underdog*; although many other instances of violence occur, these are all enacted by Mingus's "Angry Man" persona and

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[56] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 282.

[57] We must remember that Mingus was working on *Beneath the Underdog* during the late 1950s and early 1960s—soon after the Second World War and the atomic bomb, and during the Cold War with the Soviet Union, which included the threat of nuclear warfare during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Mingus even expressed these fears through his composition, "Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb on Me" (1961), in Mingus, *Oh Yeah!*

are directed at men, not women. Davis, by contrast, provides many examples of his own physical violence against women without any apparent remorse; his violence is a normal part of his life.[58]

The assertion of superiority and power through the adoption of negative stereotypes of violence and sexuality associated with black masculinity are a central element to the persona Mingus presented in the public sphere, and are crucial in understanding his view of the world, as well as the composition and performance of his music. Yet, these stereotypes—including the domination of (white) women—are primarily an act, and there is no evidence that Mingus's real character or actions are equal to those of a man like Cleaver (especially regarding the raping of women), or that Mingus's true purpose in forming relationships with white women was revenge; he certainly loved these women (the last three of his four wives were white), and agonized at the difficulties he faced with them in a racist society, as we shall later see. The sexual arena was one area in which Mingus could at least pretend to have control, which reflects some of bell hooks's thoughts about this era: "Sex becomes the ultimate playing field, where the quest for freedom can be pursued in a world that denies black males access to other forms of liberating power."[59] If the injustices endured by the black man for so many years—including the Jim Crow laws and

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[58] Carby, *Race Men*, 142.
[59] hooks, *We Real Cool*, 74. Rustin has written about Mingus's will to self-determination as integral to his masculinity, and his attempt to take control of his life as composer and musician by forming his own record label, Debut. See Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 183-243. Another attempt by Mingus at controlling the means of production and distribution of his music was the formation of Charles Mingus Enterprises with Sue Graham (whom he had just met) in 1965; they made the records, wrote the liner notes, and published ads. See Sue Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 36-37. Porter notes that although Mingus tried to be self-sufficient by creating his own record labels and publishing companies, he still found that he couldn't control the means of distribution—which is ultimately what matters in the end—because of the monopolization of the market by the major record labels, who demanded loyalty from their distributors and therefore left smaller labels with few options for selling their music. See Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 112-15, 133, 136.

the castrations, lynchings, and other atrocities of the Ku Klux Klan—were a result of white fears of black men defiling white women (as Wallace points out), then Mingus's performance of the Buck and pimp images, along with his resultant sexual power over white women, can be seen as more than simply sticking it to the white man.[60] It can symbolize Mingus's stand against past and present injustices towards African Americans, as well as the overall state of racial progress in America (on which he had also commented more directly in public and through his political compositions).[61]

Part II: Counteracting the Black Male Stereotypes

"The man who wants to trust and love"

Mingus was very convincing in his over-the-top performances of negative black male stereotypes, and even went through a "full-dress Pimp Period," as Janet Coleman recalls, when "he wore a diamond stickpin and spoke with some authority."[62] Yet Mingus's closest friends dismiss his claims of being a pimp. Al Young, who at one point was asked to edit the autobiography, finds the passages on pimping in *Beneath the Underdog* intriguing and persuasive, yet feels that "It was a curious pose for Mingus to adopt."[63] Thinking about the tradition of jazz musicians (such as Jelly Roll Morton) working in the sex industry—and euphemistically giving the musician/pimp the title "artist as elegant lumpen proletariat"—Young contests that "in Mingus's case, pretensions to pimpdom and all-around badness were . . . a front

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[60] Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, 25.
[61] For a discussion on Mingus's response to these injustices through his music, see chapter 2 on "Fables of Faubus."
[62] Coleman and Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 29. Coleman writes that Mingus tried to teach her to be a whore, but that his appetite was apparently stronger than his desire to be a pimp. While waiting to speak with a madam and owner of a club, Mingus aborted the lesson because "he was hungry for 'Chinese snails,' the small ones, with black bean sauce. Some pimp."
[63] Ibid., 154.

as well as an exquisite cover. Mingus loved women too much to ever exploit them that way. He was forever falling in love, although he often pretended it was all a bore and a trap."[64] Buddy Collette also notes that Mingus "loved a lot of fanfare," but that beyond the mythic stories, "there was another side to him, a very quiet and very nice side that he didn't show very much unless he was in a comfortable setting."[65] While any notions of tenderness, vulnerability, and love were largely hidden from most of the world, Mingus privately reveals an alternative model of masculinity—one based on love, honesty, and respect—through which he evades the very stereotypes he so compellingly performed in public.

Integral to this alternative model of masculinity is a notion of love as something sacred, which in *Beneath the Underdog* can be observed through Mingus's relationship with Lee-Marie, his first true love.[66] Mingus recalls meeting Lee-Marie at rehearsals of the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic Orchestra, where she led the cello section of which Mingus was a part. His descriptions of her as "a princess—a movie star! . . . Everything about her was bewitching," along with his excitement at obtaining her phone number—"it meant she wanted him to call her and she might even invite him to her house!"—illustrate the fondness, innocence, and high hopes of a young boy in love.[67] What Mingus experienced with Lee-Marie was a "miracle," a "secret

[64] Ibid.

[65] Collette also discusses the incident when Mingus punched Jimmy Knepper in the mouth and knocked a tooth out—yet another of the many stories that fuel the Mingus myth. Bryant et al., eds., *Central Avenue Sounds*, 137, 139-140.

[66] Rustin has discussed the concept of intimacy and understanding between men (mainly Fats Navarro) in *Beneath the Underdog* as being "based on an ethic of love," and explores the ways in which we can read the autobiography to understand how men experience gender through their male relationships. Rustin goes on to suggest in a footnote that Mingus's "relationships with women are also always based upon a desire to be connected in a loving relationship," but does not explore any of these relationships further. See Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 36-37 and 47.

[67] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 32-33.

shy communication of love."[68] Such nostalgic descriptions, also present when describing his early infatuations with other girls, demonstrate that Mingus's early experiences with women were very positive. The experiences turn negative only when his chances at finding love are constantly taken away from him, usually by parents who cannot possibly understand true love.

We can gain insight into Mingus's concept of love from his first conversation with Lee-Marie after a five-year separation. Admitting to his various sexual experiences, Mingus explains: "I have goofed, not slightly. I have balled chicks and really made the whole scene. But even while they're doing what I teach them, I know that using sex this way is mocking love."[69] While continuing to demonstrate a strong macho image through his sexuality—which includes his sexual expertise as "teacher"—Mingus contradicts that image by expressing guilt for not having waited for Lee-Marie and for engaging in sex with women he didn't love. Further, through Lee-Marie's comments, Mingus expresses a definition of a more ideal masculinity that is dependent on the ability to demonstrate love, loyalty, and respect towards a woman: "I'm afraid this society is beginning to make *you* a child again. When you were only ten you were more of a man than you are today. You said nothing could separate us, but today you dream of me as your sacred bride and take tramps to bed."[70] Mingus's respect for Lee-Marie prevents him from taking her back to his usual "outhouse" that was "the scene of so many parties and conquests," instead taking her to Lake Elsinore, an oasis from their childhood.[71] After finally having sex with Lee-Marie, Mingus provides yet another perspective on what love, sex, and intimacy really mean to him: "I haven't really made love to nobody except you—and I wanted to kiss you all over you, inside and out, everything and anywhere, but that's sacred to me so I just hesitated

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[68] Ibid., 36.
[69] Ibid., 97.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 101-102.

when I found myself there wanting to love all the ways in the world that people make sound so perverted and dirty because they don't dig what love is."[72]

The exchanges between Mingus and Lee-Marie are representative of Mingus's intimate relationships with women, which often convey a rare "commitment to honest and open communication" that hooks identifies as an essential component of intimate and meaningful relationships between black men and women.[73] Janet Coleman recognized the incongruity in Mingus's public and private behavior, relating that "For all the bravado, Mingus was deep and open in his feelings about women, more than enough, compared to other men."[74] Despite all the "fabrication and fantasy" in *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus's unusual emotional honesty and vulnerability challenges dominant stereotypes of black masculinity that view black men as liars. As hooks observes, "The inability to be vulnerable means that we are unable to feel. If we cannot feel we cannot truly emotionally connect with one another. We cannot love."[75]

Mingus's search for love, honesty, and intimacy also hinges on his ability to make an intellectual connection with women. Billy Bones, in fact, recognizes that intellect is the most significant aspect of Mingus and Lee-Marie's relationship: "What you dig is each other's minds, the other [physical appearance, sex, etc.] is just little surface diminuendos."[76] The importance of making this type of connection with a woman can also be gleaned from Mingus's newfound respect toward his father.[77] Mingus admires that his father did not leave a ruined relationship

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[72] Ibid., 106.
[73] hooks, *We Real Cool*, 127.
[74] Coleman and Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 29.
[75] hooks, *We Real Cool,* 122.
[76] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 263.
[77] This respect is significant given Mingus's prior experiences with his father, and the feeling of self-loathing that his father's previous infidelity elicited: "Your father used his hands to help him cross his legs in front of his bitch on Forty-eighth Street. You hate yourself for being fat and using your hands to cross your legs, like him—it makes you remember his philandering—and

with Mingus's stepmother for a younger woman, which would have been "a sign of weakness. But you're a man of seventy-six and you went with a woman suitable to your own age. And she's a person with pride in herself which means that the *mind* [my emphasis] has a great deal to do with your relationship and that's normal and mature."[78] Yet another example can be found in Mingus's first encounter with his third wife, Judy Starkey Mingus McGrath, as he explains his philosophy for a more ideal life:[79]

> 'I'd become a pimp, bigger and better than . . . Billy Bones . . . I wouldn't get involved with music or women at all, other than what they could do for me. . . . I'd keep me a loaded forty-five in event of any personal affront . . . [and] if I had to use it I'd want it to make a full-size hole that couldn't be patched. . . . I wouldn't believe in any bullschitt like 'love' and I wouldn't get involved with any woman who talked it—any woman in my company would have to admit that what she loved was money. . . . I might even become a junkie if my bank roll could stand it and I felt like that scene.' The girl Judy laughs. She's entertained and amused and she doesn't believe a word of it.[80]

Mingus's attraction to Judy does not lie solely in her blue eyes, blonde hair, and bony face—the "surface diminuendos" that in the long run fade away.[81] Mingus loves Judy's mind, which is able to look through his rough, macho exterior and find the real Mingus—a man whose moral character does not allow him to really be a pimp, a junkie, or be maliciously violent towards anyone, and more significantly, a man who could never stop creating music or stop believing in love.[82] As the penultimate event in the autobiography, Judy's reaction to Mingus's fantasies should also prompt readers to be wary and not take Mingus's extravagant stories too literally.

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your own. That was your father's escape too—food helped him forget for a while the misery he was creating." Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 141-142.

[78] Ibid., 126.

[79] For the sake of clarity (since both Charles and Judy Mingus share the same last name), I will refer to Judy Mingus as "Judy." Judy later remarried.

[80] Ibid., 353-354.

[81] Ibid., 349.

[82] Although Mingus performed the role of "Angry Man" convincingly, he often expressed guilt at his violent actions towards others: "One minute he believes his actions were soul-saving and he's glad he didn't whip Teddy . . . The next minute he wishes he'd beaten the life out of the

Mingus's alternative masculinity is also dependent on self-respect and integrity, which he first tries to find in *Beneath the Underdog* by turning from a life of meaningless sexual promiscuity and the objectification of women to a monogamous life with a woman that he respects. Before marrying his first wife, Barbara, Mingus explains to his father: "I feel guilty sexually about her like we shouldn't have sex until we're married. . . . I don't want to think of her as just a girl I want to bed. I feel I've done too much of this. I lose respect for myself and I'm confused as to what else a woman is for sometimes."[83] Although Mingus's marriage to Barbara fails and he eventually adopts the career of pimp, it is also this need for self-respect, integrity, and respect for women that prevents him from embracing the pimp's lifestyle.

In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus's first experience as pimp grows out of necessity—his white girlfriend, Donna, offers to sell herself so that they can go to Europe and escape a racist society that spurns their love and prevents Mingus from being an artist.[84] While the relationship between pimp and whore is often romanticized or glorified, there are also many passages where Mingus offers a more conflicted view of the pimp lifestyle. After Donna's meeting with her first john, for example, Mingus paints a very different picture of the pimp who, rather than being glamorized, is transformed into an immoral and objectionable idea:

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punk. Then he decides he could never do that under *any* circumstances and hates himself for having destructive thoughts about any human being. He figures he must be somewhere in between Jesus and the Devil—closer to the Devil but unable to perform a perfectly evil act." Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 55.

[83] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 127. Mingus's first wife, Canilla Jeanne Gross, is Barbara Jane Parks in the autobiography. See Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, 21. Mingus had four wives, although he may have counted Lee-Marie as his first wife—they get married in Mexico in *Beneath the Underdog*, although the marriage (if it ever really happened) seems to have been annulled: "the world didn't look kindly on what they'd done and God did not bless their union." Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 108.

[84] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 209.

> [H]e felt . . . cheap, low, still in love with a woman yet hating her for giving in to his cautious turning out. So ashamed he couldn't even look at her as he folded the money in his shirt pocket . . . Was this the way a pimp felt, turning out his first girl and finding out he loved her? It couldn't be. Pimps are usually pretty calm people, cool but lively, full of laughs and jokes and some are even intellectuals. Surely they could never feel like this. To be a pimp, one would have to lose all feelings, all sensitivity, all love. One would have to die! Kill himself! Kill all feeling for others in order to live with himself. . . . *Mingus* couldn't be this . . . a pimp.[85]

Is this an embodiment of the stereotypical black man that hooks describes as the "brute—untamed, uncivilized, unthinking, and unfeeling?"[86]

Mingus thinks and feels so much that he is unable to "make it" as a pimp. After the traumatic experience with Donna, he attempts to lure in a new girl, Pam, by first romancing her and finally shaming her for sleeping with other men without asking for anything in return. But even as Pam agrees to become Mingus's whore, his guilty conscience causes him to realize that exploiting this woman—who only wants to prove her love for him—is equivalent to murder. Letting Pam go, Mingus writes, "was like giving a bottle to a crying baby or freedom to a slave or pardoning a condemned man."[87] This image of Mingus as a sensitive and emotional pimp is a stark contrast to the more stereotypical and chauvinistic representation of pimping presented in the autobiography of Miles Davis, who justifies taking money from his "stable of bitches" by showing them what Davis regards as "respect"—taking them out to dinner, having sex with them, and treating them like regular people, even like family.[88] As Carby notes, Davis either refuses or is unable to recognize his exploitation of these women, instead regarding himself as righteous patriarch of a happy family.[89] Unlike Davis, however, Mingus plays against the

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[85] Ibid, 212.
[86] hooks, *We Real Cool*, xii.
[87] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 216.
[88] Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 148.
[89] Carby, 143.

stereotypes by recognizing his exploitation of women and acknowledging that his actions are wrong and even a sin—as pimp, Mingus is transformed into what he described as "a full-fledged devil waiting to be cast into hell-fire."[90]

As Scott Saul notes, the connections made throughout *Beneath the Underdog* between the jazz and sex industries indicate that if the musicians are the whores of the music industry, then Mingus the pimp is the impresario of the sex industry.[91] Although Mingus continues his attempts at pimping after his experiences with Donna and Pam, he inevitably realizes that his exploitation of women as commodities is no better than his own exploitation by the pimps of the jazz industry. While Eric Porter argues that Mingus's eventual rejection of the role of pimp signifies a construct of "artistic genius as a male quality"—he gives up his whores and lavish lifestyle to pursue the more noble and romantic notion of the struggling artist—this rejection is not so much a choice as it is an absolute necessity. If "artistic genius" was the sole concern, Mingus should have had little problem in sacrificing his sense of morality and propriety for his art. Yet throughout the pimp narrative presented in *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus continually demonstrates that what eventually drives him away (or prevents him) from this career is that the artistic freedom he stands to gain by becoming independent from the jazz industry comes at too great a cost—as "a full-fledged devil," Mingus loses his self-respect, integrity, and the feelings, sensitivity, and love that he knows are essential for both the creation of music and his pursuit of meaningful and loving relationships with women.

In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus's relationships with men and women are largely organized around two separate gendered spheres—when women are present in the male-dominated musical sphere, it is either as admirers or wives of club owners, whom Mingus

[90] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 210.
[91] Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 178.

usually ends up sleeping with.[92] While in a way this plays directly into the dominant narratives of jazz musicians' lives, the book is still built largely around Mingus's relationships with women, and the scenes that feature any insight into the exclusive male creative process are few, becoming only sidelines in the grand scheme of the world that Mingus composes.

The many contradictions that Mingus exhibits in his performances of masculinity in both the public and private spheres—including the negative black male stereotypes through which Mingus seemingly objectifies women and his continual search for love with women—also manage to surface in his music in similarly contradicting ways. The compositions "Eclipse" (1953), "Devil Woman" (1961), "Ecclusiastics" (1961), and "Sue's Changes" (1974) demonstrate Mingus's varying and complex notions of masculinity as well as his relationships with women, and that women were not a threat to his creative genius but rather an inspiration.

Part III: Performing and Counteracting the Black Male Stereotypes Through Music

"Eclipse"

Mingus's romantic interests in *Beneath the Underdog* included black, Mexican, and white women, yet after his first black wife, it seems that Mingus became interested and formed relationships solely with white women, three of whom he married. There are many factors that could contribute to Mingus's later predilection for white women. As already discussed, the white woman could be symbolic of everything that the black man had been denied for so many

[92] Although in reality, Mingus did hire women as instrumentalists, including Jane Getz, Melba Liston, Phyllis Pinkerton, Jutta Hipp, and Toshiko Akiyoshi. According to Al Young, Mingus defended Jane Getz when a table of black patrons at a club apparently didn't agree with Mingus's use of a white woman in his band. As a bandleader whose only concern was a musician's ability to play his music, Mingus complained to the management and asked for these people to "leave right now, I'll pay for their drinks!" See Coleman and Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 157.

years, and can possibly be considered a type of revenge strategy against the white man. However, although Mingus's performance persona as the Buck certainly accepts such a one-dimensional explanation that reduces women to mere pawns in the black/white patriarchal arena, his reasons for loving white women must have a more multi-faceted nature that can account for the complexity of Mingus's masculinity. In a passage from *Beneath the Underdog*, where Mingus reminisces about his previous relationships with non-white women and compares them with Donna, Mingus carefully points out that his attraction to this white woman is not necessarily of a purely physical nature. While cautious not to diminish the beauty or character of black (and Mexican) women, Mingus explains that Donna was "not a better woman, just someone life was easier for—she'd never been subjected to the galling rules America inflicts on Negroes."[93]

Perhaps for Mingus, white women represented an escapism that would bring him closer to a life of white privilege that would otherwise be unavailable and even unimaginable to a black man. Unfortunately, the reality of sexual relationships between black men and white women made this type of life even more elusive, as interracial couples were subject to an entirely new set of difficult circumstances and opposition (from both whites and blacks) that Mingus now had to contend with in addition to those he already faced as a black man. Further, Mingus's partners also became exposed to a scorn and even danger that had previously been unknown to them—if Mingus was able to access any white privilege, these women also acquired a very real perception of what it was like to be an African American in the 1950s and 60s. Yet for all the difficulties he and his partners faced—and despite his numerous diatribes against the white man—Mingus was

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[93] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 201.

an integrationist, not a separatist, and these relationships symbolized a step (however small) towards racial progress and equality in America.[94]

Mingus confronts the subject of miscegenation in "Eclipse," a vocal work first recorded in 1953 and released on the Debut (Mingus's independent label) album *Charles Mingus Octet*, and again two years later as part of a compilation titled *Autobiography in Jazz*.[95] In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus describes the scorn he encountered due to his relationships with white women: "a black and white couple meet with barriers of hate that the world's greatest lovers couldn't overcome. Not only the hard stares at a stoplight . . . or Mingus and Donna sitting ignored at a La Cienega drive-in till a girl in white boots and red uniform throws a tray against the car and refuses to serve a nigger with a white tramp."[96] Although Mingus surely encountered such experiences throughout his various relationships with white women, "Eclipse" was written specifically for Mingus's second wife, Celia Mingus Zaentz, as evidenced by the names "Celia

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[94] I use the term "integrationist" here in the same way that Henry Louis Gates, Jr. uses it to describe Albert Murray and Ralph Ellison's viewpoints (which are very similar to Mingus's) on American culture. "Integration," Gates notes, "wasn't an act of accommodation but an act of introjection. . . . their assertion was that the truest Americans were black Americans. For much of what was truly distinctive about America's "national character" was rooted in the improvisatory prehistory of the blues. . . . So, even as the clenched-fist crowd was scrambling for cultural crumbs, Murray was declaring the entire harvest board of American civilization to be his birthright." This view that anything of cultural significance in America stemmed from the traditions of black Americans, which Mingus also expressed, is in Gate's opinion "the most breathtaking act of cultural chutzpah this land had witnessed since Columbus blithely claimed it all for Isabella." See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man* (New York: Random House, 1997), 33-34.

[95] Mingus, *Charlie Mingus: Young Rebel*. *Autobiography in Jazz* featured work by other artists that had recorded for Debut and featured jazz standards as well as some compositions by Mingus. The "autobiographical" title seems to stem from "Eclipse," as well as two other Mingus compositions, "Extrasensory Perception" and "Portrait." Two other versions of "Eclipse" were recorded in 1960 and 1972, and appear in Mingus, *Pre-Bird*, and Charles Mingus, *Charles Mingus and Friends in Concert* (Columbia C2K 64975).

[96] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 208.

Mingus" and "Chas Mingus" that appear in a manuscript of the work.[97] The exact date of composition is unknown, but it was likely written after an incident during Mingus's tenure with the Red Norvo trio, close to the time that he and Celia married on April 2, 1951.[98] In both *Beneath the Underdog* and a 1976 interview, Mingus described the humiliation of traveling through the South with Norvo and Tal Farlow, having to gas his hair (to appear more white) and pretend that Celia, identified only as his "white girl" in the autobiography, is the wife of one of the other white men when checking in and out of hotels or going to restaurants.[99] Mingus's humiliation quickly turns into fear:

> "How does it feel . . . when you find in the morning the two white guys have checked out and you're left there in that hotel, boy, alone with a white woman? It feels very dangerous, that's how it feels. You pack and go downstairs separately not knowing what's going to happen. But thank God nobody says anything, they just *look* at you funny. You get out as fast as you can . . . and down the road apiece in front of a restaurant you see your leader's car and inside are the two dumb white boys having breakfast."

"Eclipse" is a reflection of the situations and sentiments expressed by Mingus in the above passages. Through the allegory of a solar eclipse, the text describes a black and white couple that is confronted with the scorn and loathing of a racist society.

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[97] For the sake of clarity (since both Charles and Celia Mingus share the same last name), I will refer to Celia Mingus as "Celia." Celia later remarried Saul Zaentz. Their names appear on the top right-hand corner of the first page of the manuscript. Box 6, Folder 5, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress.

[98] Mingus and Celia were married from 1951 to 1958 (she left on their seventh anniversary). See Priestley, *Mingus*, 43 and 95.

[99] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 321-322. Although Celia is never directly mentioned in *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus related the same story using Celia's name in a 1976 interview. Charles Mingus, *[Mingus on Music] #1*, RYI 6001, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress. After *Beneath the Underdog* was published, Mingus told Whitney Balliett that there was a lot about Celia in the original manuscript, but that it was left out because she didn't want to be a part of the book. See Balliett, "Mingus at Peace," 406.

Eclipse, when the moon meets the sun,
Eclipse, these bodies become as one.

People all around,
Eyes look up in frown,
For it's a sight they seldom see.

Some look through smoke glasses,
Hiding their eyes,
Others think it's tragic,
Sneering as dark meets light.

But the sun doesn't care,
And the moon has no fear,
For destiny's making her choice.

Eclipse, the moon has met the sun,
Eclipse, two loves are joined as one.[100]

The view of white women espoused by Mingus in "Eclipse" certainly contradicts the stereotype of the Buck, for whom white women only serve as objects of sexual gratification and revenge against the white man. Where much of *Beneath the Underdog* situates Mingus in a position of great sexual power and control over all women (as demonstrated explicitly by his conquest of Rita), "Eclipse" features a rare equality between the two bodies as they become one, even to the point that the gender relationships in the text are ambiguous. We may assume that the moon and the sun correspond to the woman and man, respectively. As Priestley observes, "there are many poems describing Man as the sun and Woman as the moon (a mere satellite)."[101] Yet, Celia's comments suggest that those roles are likely reversed: "'Eclipse' was a really

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[100] This text is taken from Mingus's manuscripts of "Eclipse." Box 6, Folders 4-5, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress. The last two lines of the text, a variation of the first two lines, only appear in the 1960 recording. Other slight variations occur between the 1953, 1960, and 1972 recordings. The word "sneering" from Mingus's manuscript is sung as "staring" in all three versions.
[101] Brian Priestley, liner notes to Charles Mingus, *Charlie Mingus: Young Rebel* (Proper Records 77).

important thing for [Mingus] to do because it was the black-white 'when the moon meets the sun.'"[102] The text itself implies that Mingus is the moon, the "satellite," and Celia the sun, especially with the lines "Sneering as dark meets light" and "But the sun doesn't care/And the moon has no fear" (which is changed to "knows no fear" in the 1960 version). The latter phrase, in particular, is fraught with meaning and is especially subversive: in an experience such as the one described by Mingus when travelling through the South with Norvo, it would most likely be Celia who "doesn't care," and Mingus who should be terrified of the consequences but "knows no fear."[103]

For years, white fears of miscegenation had resulted in the castration and lynching of black men. And although less common than in previous decades, when Mingus wrote "Eclipse," black men were still being lynched for such defiant behavior against white mores—yet to happen was the Emmett Till lynching of 1955, when the 14-year-old boy was killed for allegedly flirting with an older white woman.[104] The dangers of this type of relationship in the 1950s were definitely real, and Mingus is obviously conscious of the possible consequences in the situation he describes in *Beneath the Underdog*—"It feels very dangerous, that's how it feels"—and in "Eclipse." Since he was a young boy, images of lynching had been ingrained in Mingus's mind: "When I was a little kid they had, on Watts, on third street, they had this little room where they

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[102] Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 186.

[103] In the 1953 version, Janet Thurlow sings "has no fear," while Lorraine Cusson sings "knows no fear" in the 1960 recording. It is not clear whether this was Cusson or Mingus's choice, but the change is not inconsequential, as it reflects a more assertive and bolder repudiation of racist attitudes during a time when civil rights activism had increased among African Americans, including Mingus.

[104] For a more in-depth look at the history of lynching, including statistics on the lynching of black men as a result of alleged sexual crimes against white women, see Christopher B. Booker, *"I Will Wear No Chain!": A Social History of African American Males* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 140-144.

had ping-pong, [and] pictures of two, three negroes hanging on a rope. Big picture . . . of lynchings, where they show . . . where they cooked the Negro and broke the ears off, the toes."[105]

The strong associations between "Eclipse" and lynching are also apparent through Mingus's remarks that he originally intended Billie Holiday to perform the song: "I heard her do Strange Fruit, so I figured she could do this one."[106] Given that "Eclipse" is not particularly suited to Holiday's singing style, it seems that Mingus's hope to have Holiday perform the song had more to do with the visceral emotion she brought to her performances of "Strange Fruit," which she could possibly channel into "Eclipse," rather than with her actual singing style. Noting the connections between the two songs, Saul writes that in Mingus's protest song, "The lynch mob was recast . . . as the conformist crowd; the bloody black victim, meanwhile, became the esoteric black lover."[107] Although the two bodies in "Eclipse" presumably remain united, the song can be thought of as a foreshadowing of the "Strange Fruit" narrative.

Another reading of the lovers' eventual destiny can be gleaned from *Beneath the Underdog*, where Mingus makes an oblique connection between the song and his reluctant choice to become a pimp. When pondering if he could really get into the business, Mingus thinks of Billie Holiday: "Charles remembered when he had written a song for her—'Eclipse'—and, how did it happen?—she'd given him a madam's phone number. . . . Billie told him, 'When you get one of them real nice ones, Mama will fix you up right.'"[108] In this scenario, the strength of the two lovers in "Eclipse" is only an ideal; their ultimate fate is Mingus and Donna's sudden

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[105] Mingus, *[Mingus on Music] #1*.
[106] Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 184.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 210. Although Mingus wrote the song for Holiday, she never performed it.

foray into the sex industry, which is identified as the only way the two lovers can save their love and escape society's intolerance.

Saul argues that Mingus's use of the eclipse allegory to represent the two lovers is a way of avoiding an explicit reference to black-white sexual relationships, and that because of this, the song exhibits a "thinness of . . . social detail; 'Eclipse' is a song so high-minded as to be disembodied. Representing a road usually not taken in Mingus's art, 'Eclipse' prefers to escape from social dilemmas rather than explode them from within."[109] Yet, it is highly unlikely that Mingus shied away from explicit references of gender, race, or the very real threats he faced from loving a white woman, simply because of the taboo nature of the subject—Mingus was never one to shy away from anything, especially from expressing his opinions on race. Perhaps Mingus does not "explode" the issue of miscegenation with "Eclipse," but he does not "escape" from it either. And while, as Saul notes, the lack of overt references to race may have resulted in audiences missing the allegory in Mingus's song, the political message is clear enough for those who want to find it; those who couldn't or refused to understand it were perhaps the same observers who "look through smoke glasses/Hiding their eyes." Why, for example, would Mingus characterize what is undoubtedly a majestic and mesmerizing event as "tragic" in the minds of the onlookers? The political implications of the song are made even clearer in the 1960 version, where Mingus makes a small but crucial change to the form of the piece. Whereas the original recording ends with Janet Thurlow singing the word "Eclipse" after the return of the fourth stanza, in the recording made seven years later (now with Lorraine Cusson on vocal), Mingus repeats the entire first stanza, but changes its second line to "Eclipse, two loves are joined as one." Replacing the word "bodies" with "loves" makes the eclipse as an allegory for

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[109] Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 185.

interracial love even more explicit. For Mingus, this is a deeply personal issue that cannot be stated or explained in more straightforward terms. Rather, it requires a more poetic and nuanced approach that is fraught with many layers of meaning, an approach through which Mingus shows a sensitivity and vulnerability that is highly uncharacteristic of the stereotypical black masculinity he performed in public.

Early in his career, Mingus believed that any musician could learn how to swing as long as the music was notated correctly, a view that reflected his integrationist philosophies and that was a prominent stylistic feature of many early works.[110] When Mingus began recording and releasing material on his Debut label in the early 1950s, many of his compositions used cello as a way of showing "that it is possible to write jazz so that when read correctly by a classically trained musician, the music would naturally swing itself."[111] This practice can be heard in "Precognition" (1952) and "Montage" (1952), where the cello—replacing the usual trumpet—swings the main melody in unison or in harmony with the alto saxophone.[112] The alto saxophone, however, remains the lead instrument, and the rhythm, arrangement, and improvisations still conform to the more common jazz performance practice of the period.

In the original 1953 recording of "Eclipse," on the other hand, Mingus blurs the boundaries between Western art music and jazz as a method of reflecting, musically, the breakdown of racial barriers portrayed in the text. In the striking introduction, Mingus presents an anguished twelve-tone-inspired melody played by a cello—over a bowed bass pedal point, military-style snare drum, and a broodingly dissonant instrumental accompaniment—that is

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[110] For more on Mingus's integrationist approach to music, see Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 186-187, and Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 114-115.
[111] Quoted in Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 115.
[112] Mingus, *The Young Rebel*. The Lee Konitz-like alto saxophone in "Montage" is played by Paige Brook, a flutist who had just joined the New York Philharmonic that same year, proving Mingus's point that the music could "swing itself" if notated correctly.

much more reminiscent of Arnold Schoenberg than jazz (see example 3.1). Not only does Mingus feature an instrument associated with Western art music in the lead role (rather than the expected saxophone or trumpet), but the defining characteristics of jazz—improvisation, blues feeling, and the rhythmic element of swing—are completely eliminated.

Example 3.1. "Eclipse," cello introduction, mm. 1-8.[113]

Cello

Once the voice enters, the harmonic and rhythmic language suddenly transforms the music into a jazz ballad (with the vocalist taking the usual liberties with rhythm, and bass and drums now assuming more standard rhythmic roles, though the bass and drum parts are completely notated).[114] Yet, the insistence of the European influence is continued with the cello playing unusual ascending figures and long melodic lines in counterpoint with the singer, as opposed to the more usual role of sidemen that improvise responses between the singer's phrases (see example 3.2). The singer's ballad is soon interrupted by a swinging ensemble passage played in double time, which gives way to another Western European section—featuring a trio of cello, flute, and clarinet, plus timpani—that eventually leads to a return of the voice to end the piece.

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[113] This example, along with articulations, comes from the existing cello part from Mingus's "Eclipse" manuscripts, though the clefs have been changed from the original bass clef. Box 6, Folder 13, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress.

[114] In the1953 recording, the drums deviate somewhat from the notated part; Mingus, however, follows the bass part exactly apart from some changes in octave. Box 6, Folder 13, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress.

Example 3.2. "Eclipse," voice and cello counterpoint, mm. 9-12.[115]

Unlike most of Mingus's other pieces during this period, all of the writing for cello, as well as flute and clarinet, is firmly rooted in the Western European tradition and is not meant to swing or evoke any kind of jazz "feeling" (with the exception of the double-time "swing" section were these instruments are more buried).[116]

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[115] I have not used a key signature for the vocal part in keeping with Mingus's original notation. The rhythms of the vocal part also follow the simplest version in Mingus's manuscripts. Another version replaces the quarter note plus two eight notes from measures 1 and 2 with dotted quarter note plus two sixteenth notes. Both of these versions are just outlines, however, as the singers in all three recordings are rhythmically much more complex. Box 6, Folders 4-5, Charles Mingus Collection. In measure 12, the cellist in the 1953 recording repeats the rhythm from beat one on beat two. The rhythm from this example, which follows Mingus's manuscript, is also heard in the saxophone line that replaces the cello in the 1972 arrangement. Box 6, Folder 13, Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress.

[116] Interestingly, the introduction to Mingus's "Paris in Blue" (1952) features cello and flute playing dissonant lines and irregular rhythms over a military-style snare drum and bowed bass accompaniment in a manner similar to the "Eclipse" introduction. Like in "Eclipse," the Western European influence of the introduction serves a specific purpose to denote whiteness, though in the case of "Paris in Blue" it is used ironically with the intent of mocking. The music seems to take a stab at white Americans—or perhaps even white Europeans, as "Paris" can refer both to the city and the vocalist—who claimed that they too could play the blues, as suggested

Although the second recording of "Eclipse" from 1960 is much less overt in its use of atonality, the general notion of using jazz and Western European art music to denote blackness and whiteness is still prevalent.[117] In this arrangement, Mingus forgoes the atonal introduction for a more simple statement of the first line of text by male voices. In the absence of cello, the role of countermelody is shifted to the trombonist—a logical choice given the range—though these lines are played in a much freer and improvisatory character, more in line with a jazz ballad accompaniment.[118] The Western European influence, however, is maintained in the incongruity of the piano's eerie dissonant figures, which fall quickly and irregularly in response to a quick saxophone riff along with Cusson's vocal line and the trombone countermelody. The ballad then becomes more conventional and eventually returns to the opening stanza (a key difference from the original recording), until it is interrupted by a piano cadenza that is introduced by a bowed bass pedal point. The cadenza—which could be labeled "appassionato" and is played in a romantic, rubato style—develops an ascending four-note motive through a series of harmonic modulations (in contrast to the atonality of the earlier version), and finally leads into one of the most beautiful moments of the piece, where Cusson returns quietly and wistfully (with rhythm section only) on "But the sun doesn't care." Although the arrangements of the first two

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from the spoken introduction by Jackie Paris: "The blues? Man, do they call this the blues? Now, what do they know about the blues? Have they had 'em lately? I'm the guy who should be cryin' some blues around here!" Ironically, the material following the introduction, while conforming to the stylistic features of jazz, features a complex form that is highly uncharacteristic of the blues. Mingus, *The Young Rebel*.

[117] Eric Dolphy's recording of "Eclipse" demonstrates that he understood the importance of the contrast between these two musical styles. Although Dolphy's version is completely different from any of Mingus's and is absent of lyrics, he replaces the vocal line with B-flat clarinet (a rare use of the instrument in Dolphy's recorded output), and uses the cello of Ron Carter to provide dissonant countermelodies in a Western European style; the end of the piece features Dolphy's own "classical" cadenza on clarinet. Eric Dolphy, *Out There* (Prestige PRCD-8101-2).

[118] Mingus began his musical studies playing the trombone and then the cello before switching to the bass. In this light, it may be interesting to consider "Eclipse" as a love duet between Celia (the female voice) and Mingus (the cello/trombone line).

recordings are extremely varied, both make use of the contrasts between Western European art music and jazz with the same intent.[119] The blending of these distinct influences in "Eclipse" can symbolize not only the union between Celia and Mingus, between white and black, but is perhaps also illustrative of Mingus's notion of man and woman as opposite beings "that belong together but don't look alike, perfect opposites that can form a new perfection with each other."[120]

"Devil Woman" and "Ecclusiastics"

While Western European influences were a significant aspect of Mingus's early style of composition, his most fruitful period, beginning in late 1955 with pieces such as "Work Song," Haitian Fight Song," and "Pithecanthropus Erectus" (1956), saw him increasingly abandoning the integrationist view of music featured in "Eclipse" in favor of a style that drew extensively from African American forms, tropes, and musical styles, including the blues and gospel. Mingus's methods of composition, rehearsal, and performance also changed dramatically to reflect the more interactive and participatory aspects of African American musical practices. In contrast to works like "Eclipse," which relied on notated parts—even for piano, bass, and drums—to guarantee their correct performance, Mingus now wrote his music "on mental score paper" and required his sidemen to memorize their parts, which he sang to them during

[119] The 1953 version of "Eclipse" was arranged for big band by Sy Johnson and recorded again in 1972 during Mingus's comeback concert (after years of absence from the jazz scene) at New York's Philharmonic Hall. In addition to drawing attention to the importance of the piece in Mingus's life, the arrangement points to Mingus's preference for the original version, which is more effective at providing the contrast with Western European music that is such an integral part of the piece. The move from a chamber-like setting (featuring the cello) to a big band (with cello lines now being played by alto saxophone) is much less effective, however.

[120] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 356. The combination of jazz and Western European art music also works very well in purely musical terms, and since Mingus's compositional approach often depended on such an amalgam of styles, this was also an aesthetic choice and not only a political or cultural one.

rehearsals.[121] Suddenly, Mingus dismissed his earlier notion that classical musicians could swing if the music was notated correctly. He argued, in his liner notes to *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, that jazz "cannot be held down to written parts," and that a "classical musician might read all the notes correctly but play them without the correct feeling or interpretation."[122] Western European approaches would return later in Mingus's career—to the extent that he composed the fully-"classical" "String Quartet No. 1" (1972) for voice and string quartet—but after 1955, Mingus's music became more and more an exploration and celebration of the wealth and diversity of African American musical creativity.[123]

Although this stylistic change is surely partly indebted to the emergence of the "hard bop" style in jazz, as well as the increasing prominence of blues and gospel influences in American popular music, there are also other significant factors that come into play.[124] As Porter has observed, the decided change in Mingus's aesthetic approach during this period stemmed largely from Mingus's inability to reconcile his "universalist" vision of music with the exploitation of musicians by the jazz industry.[125] The change, then, was partly an economic one.

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[121] Charles Mingus, Liner notes to *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (Atlantic 8809-2). For more on Mingus's method of teaching music orally in his Jazz Workshop, see Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, 158-162, and Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 124-128.
[122] Mingus, Liner notes to *Pithecanthropus Erectus*.
[123] There are, of course, exceptions even during this period, the most obvious being "Revelations," commissioned by Gunther Schuller for the 1957 Brandeis Festival.
[124] Mingus, of course, was not the only jazz composer to use Western European influences, and his new approach reflected an overall concern among black jazz musicians of going back to the music's African American roots. As Ingrid Monson has observed, "The aesthetic dilemma for jazz and modernism in the 1950s revolved around the extent to which musicians would accommodate themselves to classical musical standards of expression, . . . in the process "elevating" the music to European-American highbrow tastes, and the extent to which they would deploy African American call and response organization and improvisational principles to breathe new life into contemporary definitions of musical modernism itself. If the early fifties placed a great deal of emphasis on the former, by the early 1960s the triumph of the latter was in full swing." Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 91-92.
[125] Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 117.

Monson argues that since African American musicians attributed their lack of opportunity to the commercial successes of white musicians, many African American musicians during this period "seemed determined to emphasize and develop black difference rather than witness a repeat of the 1930s, when Benny Goodman was crowned the King of Swing."[126]

It is also hardly a coincidence that this rift in Mingus's style occurred at the same time that the Civil Rights Movement began taking shape, and that as the movement gained momentum and Mingus became more critical of the state of race relations in the United States, his raceless, integrationist approach to music—which embraced the influence of "white" music and its performance by musicians of any race—increasingly became more exclusionist. His gravitation from a style that acknowledged his interest in the Western European tradition to one that self-consciously paid homage to African American styles, forms, and practices, can be interpreted as both a rejection of the white man and a show of solidarity with the black man.

In public, Mingus adopted the "Crow Jim" attitude that became common among African American jazz musicians, who claimed jazz as theirs and argued that white musicians could not or had no right to play jazz.[127] He criticized Dave Brubeck and Lee Konitz in a 1955 issue of *Down Beat* for playing music that didn't swing: "This makes me mad, because it's not jazz, and people are calling this kind of beat jazz. . . . It's like five dead men, this record. No stars, man. They shouldn't ever have released it. Not release it—they shouldn't even *play* like that! I think these cats hate jazz."[128] In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus stressed that only African Americans had a right to play jazz when he voiced his opinions on British jazz: "If you're talking about

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[126] Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 106.
[127] Mingus, however, denied that "Crow Jim" existed. For more on Mingus's opinions on reverse racism, see Griffith, "His Jelly Roll Soul," 61-62. For an insightful exploration of the "Crow Jim" phenomenon, see Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 238-282.
[128] Quoted in Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 119. For more on Mingus's opinions and his eventual apology to Brubeck, see Porter, 117-124.

technique, musicianship, I guess the British can be as good as anybody else. But what do they need to play jazz for? It's the American negro's tradition, it's his music. White people don't have a right to play it, it's colored folk music. . . . white society has its own traditions, let 'em leave ours to us. You had your Shakespeare and Marx and Freud and Einstein and Jesus Christ and Guy Lombardo but we came up with *jazz*, don't forget it."[129] Of course, Mingus the composer and artist was only concerned with a performer's musical ability and compatibility with his own style, and often employed white musicians, such as Jimmy Knepper and Pepper Adams, because what they could do musically was unique.

Along with his alignment with the "Crow Jim" camp, Mingus's new approach also served as another method through which he could affirm his identity as a black man, and is analogous to the stereotypical black masculine behavior that he performed in public. Just as Mingus was ostracized as a young boy for the color of his skin, his identity as a black jazz musician and composer was challenged by primarily black musicians and audiences who criticized his music for not sounding black enough. Nat Hentoff recalls an experience when, while he was speaking with Mingus after a set, a "very black man" came to their table and told Mingus, "You're not black enough to play the blues!"[130] Even more painful must have been the criticisms Mingus received from Miles Davis in a *Down Beat* article from 1955, shortly after Davis and Mingus had recorded the album *Blue Moods* together for Mingus's Debut label. Davis disparaged Mingus's recent compositions as "tired modern pictures" that were "depressing," dissonant, did not use the proper instrumentation, and were too cluttered.[131] Just a few weeks later, Mingus defended his

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[129] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 351.
[130] Nat Hentoff, "Is Jazz Black Music?," *JazzTimes* (June 2008), accessed May 14, 2013, http://jazztimes.com/articles/18103-is-jazz-black-music.
[131] Nat Hentoff, "Miles: A Trumpeter in the Midst of a Big Comeback Makes a Very Frank Appraisal of Today's Jazz Scene," *Down Beat*, 2 November 1955, 14.

music and his influences, whether they came from "Duke, Bartók, Schoenberg, or Bird," in "An Open Letter to Miles Davis": "I play or write *me*, the way I feel, through jazz, or whatever. Music is, or was, a language of the emotions. If someone has been escaping reality, I don't expect him to dig my music, and I would begin to worry about my writing if such a person began to really like it."[132] While Mingus took a strong stance in defending his stylistic choices, the criticisms he faced nevertheless had an effect on his composition and performances. The album *Blues and Roots* (1959), for example, was a response to "people, particularly critics, [who] were saying I didn't swing enough"—in other words, his music wasn't black enough, and therefore, *he* wasn't black enough.[133] Even after recording *Oh Yeah!* (1961)—perhaps the culmination of Mingus's overt uses of African American musical elements—Mingus talked about the racism he continued to face within his own race. Speaking of the piece "Passions of a Man," he lamented, "All my life I've been struggling, and being, the color they call me . . . it's spelled s-c-h-i-t-t . . . schitt-colored nigger. . . . Now, I wanted to say 'Passions of a *Black* Man,' and then it came to me that, they say I'm not. Miles Davis . . . makes fun of me right now, he says, 'Man, you tryin' to pass for colored?'"[134] While in *Oh Yeah!* Mingus tried to capture his experiences as a black man through music, he remained concerned that his approach to composition and performance did not mold to existing preconceptions of black music; disillusioned, Mingus remarked, "still, my identity is trying to be accepted by my own people as a black man."[135]

"Devil Woman" (1961) and "Ecclusiastics" (1961), two pieces appearing in *Oh Yeah!*, are both fascinating examples of how Mingus used African American elements not only as a way

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[132] Charles Mingus, "An Open Letter to Miles Davis," *Down Beat*, 30 November 1955, 12-13.
[133] Charles Mingus, liner notes to *Blues and Roots* (Rhino/Atlantic R2 75205).
[134] Charles Mingus, interview with Nesushi Ertegun, in *Passions of a Man: The Complete Atlantic Recordings, 1956-1961* (Atlantic R2 72871), 7:20.
[135] Ibid., 1:07:41.

of affirming his black identity, but as musical representations of his stereotypical and alternative models of masculinity. Both works demonstrate Mingus's idiosyncratic gospel- and blues-drenched styles of piano-playing (*Oh Yeah!* is the first album that features Mingus solely on piano) and singing, with Mingus moaning, hollering, and testifying like a preacher out of a sanctified (or holiness) church service.[136] While blues lyrics are not always autobiographical in nature, both "Devil Woman" and "Ecclusiastics" were of a highly personal nature for Mingus, as is evident from his response to criticisms of his singing: "My efforts at blues singing were not meant to challenge such diverse masters as Joe Turner, Ray Charles, or Big Bill Broonzy . . . Joe sang for Turner, Ray Charles for himself, just as did Big Bill. No one could sing my blues but me (if you must call it singing), just as no one could holler for you if I decide to punch you in your mouth."[137] It is clear that these are *Mingus's* blues, and the songs depict his personal experiences, anxieties, emotions, and struggles.

"Devil Woman" is the musical equivalent of Mingus's experiences as the Buck and pimp in *Beneath the Underdog*. In the same way that Mingus's hyper-sexuality in the autobiography can be thought of as a defense mechanism, "Devil Woman" can be interpreted as another way that Mingus seeks acceptance into black society by exemplifying stereotypical notions of black manhood. The sensitive man from "Eclipse," who suffers at society's disapproval of his love for a white woman, is transformed into the pimp, who now only uses sex as a means of financial security. In contrast to the more figurative language of "Eclipse," the text of "Devil Woman" is brash and direct:

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[136] For more on the connections between black Pentecostal church worship services and Mingus's music, see Griffith, "His Jelly Roll Soul," 98-112.
[137] Quoted in Priestley, *Mingus*, 131.

I'm gonna get me a devil woman,
Angel women don't mean me no good,
I'm gonna get me a devil woman,
Angel women don't mean me no good,
Hmm, just a gigolo, everywhere I go,
Get me a devil woman to get me so dough.

Hmm, uh-huh,
I'm just a gigolo, everywhere I go,
Get out and get me some dough.

Oh yeah, devil woman,
Hello, devil woman,
Hello, devil woman, goodbye angel woman.

I'm just a gigolo, everywhere I go.

Goodbye, angel woman!
Goodbye, angel woman!
Goodbye, angel woman!
Hello, devil woman.[138]

Although "Devil Woman" is certainly a blues, it deviates from the standard twelve-bar structure in favor of an asymmetrical form that engenders a feeling of freedom and harkens back to the more open forms of the country blues, which vary according to the contents of lyrics rather than adhering to a pre-set form. The essence of the text is presented in a loose eight-bar introduction (though these first six lines do conform to the AAB structure of blues lyrics), which is then followed by a head (theme) consisting of four irregular phrases (three, four-and-a-half, four, and four bars in length). After the first chorus of the first improvisation, however, the music settles

[138] The text "I'm just a gigolo, everywhere I go" also signifies on the popular song "Just a Gigolo," which begins with the exact lyrics used by Mingus. The song was originally Austrian ("Schöne Gigolo" written by Leonello Casucci and Julius Brammer) but became popular in the United States after Irving Caesar's English version of 1929. A popular version was recorded by Louis Prima in 1956, only five years before "Devil Woman," and the song was also recorded by several jazz musicians, including Art Tatum, Louis Armstrong, and Thelonious Monk. Mingus, therefore, signifies on all of these versions at the same time. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 179-180.

in to the twelve-bar form until the return of the head at the end of the piece, making it evident that this in fact is a blues.

Mingus is again emphasizing his sexuality by adopting the role of the pimp ("gigolo") publicly and through his most significant and personal mode of communication, but the music is by no means celebratory of his circumstance—this is Mingus singing his *blues*, after all.[139] In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus alluded to composing "Devil Woman" during a time when "he'd had a very narrow escape from getting into a kind of life he didn't want to live."[140] In the song, however, there is no escape from this life, and the emotionally charged ending, with Mingus's voice painfully wailing "goodbye" to the "angel woman" and welcoming the "devil woman" into his life, features the same type of anguish that Mingus describes in *Beneath the Underdog* after his first experience as pimp.

Although "Devil Woman" ends with Mingus embracing his fate as pimp, the story continues with "Ecclusiastics," which "is a bastardization of the word 'Ecclesiastes.'"[141] In this gospel hymn, we see a return of the sensitive and emotional Mingus, who recognizes the mistakes he made in "Devil Woman" and confesses his sins, singing "Oh yeah, Jesus I know . . . I've been wrong." Mingus's goes back to his childhood experiences in the holiness church,

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[139] The words "pimp" and "gigolo," of course, do not have the same meaning, but in this context Mingus uses "gigolo" to stand for "pimp." This is clear from Mingus's comments to Nesushi Ertegun in their discussion of the piece (see quote below on p. 174). The use of "gigolo," then, is a poetic choice, as well as a signification on the song "Just a Gigolo" (see previous footnote).
[140] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 153-154.
[141] Mingus, interview with Nesushi Ertegun, 1:07:32. Horace J. Maxile, Jr. draws attention to Mingus's role as preacher in this piece, noting that "ecclesiastes" means "preacher," and that Bible scholars refer to the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes as "the book of the preacher." In addition, Maxile suggests that Mingus's title could be a combination of the Bible book with the word "'enthusiastic' (the 'lively' dynamic of African American worship and preaching)." Horace Maxile, "Churchy Blues, Bluesy Church: Vernacular Tropes, Expression, and Structure in Charles Mingus's 'Ecclusiastics,'" in *Annual Review of Jazz Studies 14*, ed. Edward Berger, Henry Martin, and Dan Morgenstern (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), 75 and 80.

where "the congregation give their testimonial before the Lord, they confess their sins and sing and shout and do a little Holy Rolling. Some preachers cast out demons, they call their dialogue talking in tongues or talking unknown tongue (language that the Devil can't understand)."[142] This final statement is reminiscent of Mingus's made-up dialect in "Passions of a Man, which appears at the end *Oh Yeah!* and can be considered a further extension of "Ecclusiastics." When speaking about the album with Nesushi Ertegun, Mingus continually returned to "Devil Woman" and "Ecclusiastics," and on several occasions drew attention to the seeming incongruity between the two pieces:

> There's a very contradictory thing in here. On here, I'm saying, like a pimp says: "Get that devil woman to go out and get me some dough, get me some money." . . . I turn it right around, and on . . . "Ecclusiastics," I say, "I've been wrong." Well, see, you could say that's contradictory, but it's not. Because this, when this did happen was at the very early period of my life . . . I'm not telling it to tell you it's wrong anyway, but still, at one point I was thinking, maybe it'd be safe to be a pimp. Or something like that, than to be a jazz musician. So, in fact . . . the book [*Beneath the Underdog*] is written just like this. This girl, who I convinced that she should do this, was about to go on a very expensive date in Acapulco. Over $3500, guaranteed, for three days . . . And I had this visitation, that if . . . I let her go that night, I would really become a pimp. I mean, a cold person . . . And I'd loose all the talent I ever had.[143]

As Mingus told Ertegun, "this *is* the book. This is the musical part of the book."[144] Like *Beneath the Underdog*, *Oh Yeah!* finds Mingus contesting and balancing two aspects of his masculinity, the public and private. While "Devil Woman" achieves his goal of portraying a masculinity that would be understood as black, "Ecclusiastics" negates that, and in a manner overt enough that Mingus worried that others would think he was a "coward," and therefore not a real, strong black man. Throughout the 76-minute interview with Ertegun, Mingus remained fixated on these two pieces, and felt the need to explain his reasons for not becoming a pimp:

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[142] Mingus, liner notes to *Blues and Roots*.
[143] Mingus, interview with Nesushi Ertegun, 4:49.
[144] Ibid., 1:16:02.

> When I told you about trying to send that girl out in the streets, and I couldn't make it, I'm not really a... I'm not a *pimp*! Yet, man, there's a lot of money in it. But I can't, I can't... It's not being a *coward*, man, it's... I know that . . . this is *wrong*. I do know what God means. It ain't no jive, man . . . this kind of church, that is in a man, that there is *a* right, a single right and a single wrong, that is, includes me and you. Like, we don't step on each other's feet without saying "excuse me," and if we do it intentionally, something's wrong with us and we gotta . . . get it out of us.[145]

Just as *Beneath the Underdog* served as a platform for psychological analysis, "Devil Woman" and "Ecclusiastics," taken as one continuous narrative, serve as a catharsis that helped Mingus work through the "spiritualogical" problems he experienced as a result of the conflict between his performances of stereotypical black masculinity (whether those performances were real or just pretensions) and his desire within himself to abandon those stereotypes and become a different kind of man.[146]

"Ecclusiastics" is Mingus's way of musically playing out the "struggle within myself, to free myself from my imprison[ment], my invisible prison chains, and also the . . . real ones that I know are there, and I don't have to lie to myself."[147] While the head of "Devil Woman" is composed of asymmetrical phrases and played rather freely (though it is highly structured), half of the piece is clearly confined to the twelve-bar blues form and harmonic structure. "Ecclusiastics" is not exactly a twelve-bar blues, yet as Horace J. Maxile, Jr. has demonstrated, the piece maintains a "striking allegiance to the traditional twelve-bar blues" through "definitive harmonic markers of the blues [that] coincide with character changes" in the theme.[148] While Mingus maintains a strong blues feeling and clear associations to the blues harmonic framework, he achieves freedom from his "prison chains" as he "breaks out of the stereotypical blues

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[145] Ibid., 52:13.
[146] Ibid., 40:56.
[147] Ibid., 50:52.
[148] Maxile, "Churchy Blues, Bluesy Church," 70.

box."[149] This is partly achieved, Maxile notes, through "chromatic excursions and interruptions" that function to liberate the music from the harmonic confines of the blues.[150] Further, the theme—which is typical of Mingus's complex forms but atypical of blues phrase structure—consists of contrasting phrases of varying length along with changes of tempo and rhythmic groove. The transition from slow, meditative prayer to double-time "gospel jubilee" is especially significant, for it reflects the worship practices of the holiness church that serve as a confession and cleansing of the congregation's sins.[151] This transition is a salient feature of the piece, and is reflected on a larger scale by the improvisations. The first solo, taken by Mingus on piano (at 1:52), consists of two choruses, the first of which is played entirely in the slow, reflective mood of the first part of the theme. In the second chorus (at 2:41), the mood shifts back to the "gospel jubilee," with the rhythm section now subdividing the slow beat into three, creating a characteristic 12/8 gospel metric feel. The "gospel jubilee" now becomes permanent for the remainder of the improvisations: Mingus has finally broken free from his chains. In the following tenor saxophone solo, Rahsaan Roland Kirk demonstrates how well he understood Mingus's conception of the piece. Kirk begins his solo (at 3:25) with a quotation of a phrase that Charlie Parker used thematically in several improvisations of "Now's the Time," and follows it with a quotation of the opening of the spiritual "Down by the Riverside," whose opening lyrics vary between performers, but are usually either "I'm gonna lay down my heavy load" or "I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield." Kirk, then, makes a strong statement—"now's the time to lay down my heavy load"—that reflects Mingus's struggle for freedom and change, and continues to increase the intensity of his improvisation into the following chorus, where the duet

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[149] Ibid., 79.
[150] Ibid., 71.
[151] Ibid., 67-68.

with himself (playing multiple instruments was one of Kirk's trademarks) along with Mingus's passionate "Oh yeahs" and vocal wailing, suggests the frenzied collective exuberance and exultation of a congregation in the throes of redemption.

While "Devil Woman" and "Ecclusiastics" are different compositions with seemingly contradictory subjects that can stand alone, they can more accurately be regarded as two parts of the same narrative, and listening to them consecutively, as well as understanding Mingus's conception behind each piece, can provide us with a more nuanced understanding of Mingus's conflicting models of masculinity.[152] Further, if we recognize that Mingus viewed pimping as a sin, and remember that he described himself as a "full-fledged devil" in *Beneath the Underdog*, the title "Devil Woman" acquires a more complex meaning. It does not refer to woman as the devil, but rather to the devil's woman, the whore who becomes ensnared by the lure of the pimp.

"Sue's Changes"

"Sue's Changes" was recorded and dedicated to Mingus's last wife, Sue Graham Mingus, in late 1974, a few months before they were married.[153] Sue was a successful writer and entrepreneur who co-published the *New York Free Press*, owned an advertising agency, and in the early seventies published the counterculture and arts newspaper *Changes*. With Sue—who according to Janet Coleman had "a mind like a lawnmower"[154]—Mingus had found an intellectual equal who challenged him and could see past his macho façade and his many pretenses. In a 1971

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[152] In *Oh Yeah!*, "Devil Woman" appears as the second track and "Ecclusiastics" as the fourth track. The recording session for the album, however, began with these two pieces recorded in succession. Priestley, *Mingus*, 272.

[153] For the sake of clarity (since both Charles and Sue Mingus share the same last name), I will refer to Sue Mingus as "Sue." "Sue's Changes," in Mingus, *Changes One*, Rhino/Atlantic R2 71403. Another work dedicated to Sue is "The I of Hurricane Sue" in Mingus, *Let My Children Hear Music*. Columbia CK 48910.

[154] Coleman and Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, p. 31.

interview with Whitney Balliett—who was speaking with Mingus about his new book—Sue expressed her negative opinions of *Beneath the Underdog* while Mingus went to the restroom: "I don't really like Charles' book, and I've told him. I think the sexual parts are too savage, and I think that Charles himself doesn't come through. It's the superficial Mingus, the flashy one, not the real one."[155]

Mingus's relationship with Sue illustrates another aspect of Mingus's life—that his success as a musician and composer was heavily dependent on healthy relationships with women, which is quite the opposite of the stereotypical notion that women only got in the way of a man's creativity. The women in Mingus's life not only had an effect on Mingus creatively—inspiring pieces such as "Diane" (1959), "Celia" (1957), and of course, "Eclipse"—but usually helped with the business end of his career, allowing him to focus his attention on the composition and performance of his music.[156] Many of Mingus's successes later in his life were a direct result of Sue's influence, and her impact on his professional career is evident. The most tumultuous period in Mingus's life and career, when he virtually disappeared from the jazz scene between 1966 and 1969, coincided with the rockiest part of his relationship with Sue (they didn't

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[155] Balliett, "Mingus at Peace," 409. Although Sue and Mingus did not marry until 1975, they had already known each other for seven years by the time the book was published. See Sue Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 13.

[156] In 1978 Sue even collaborated with Mingus on a song, titled "Sketch #1" in manuscripts, for which she wrote the lyrics. The first section of "Sweet Sucker Dance," recorded by Joni Mitchell in *Mingus* (1979), comes from this "sketch," although the words in "Sweet Sucker Dance" were written by Mitchell. Box 22, Folders 2-4, and Box 23, Folder 12, Charles Mingus Collection. Nichole Rustin has written an extensive chapter on the crucial role that Celia Mingus played as the wife of a jazz musician—working as Mingus's manager and running Debut, the record label that Mingus co-owned with Celia and Max Roach. See Rustin, "Mingus Fingers," 183-243. In addition, the staggering amount of work that Celia did for Mingus can be observed in the hundreds of letters to record companies, music critics, and other individuals, available in the Charles Mingus Collection, Library of Congress.

speak for almost a year between 1968 and 1969).[157] It was Sue who encouraged Mingus to begin playing again, and his slow return to jazz was sparked by his performance at a 1969 benefit concert for the *New York Free Press* that Sue co-published.[158] After Mingus had taken part in Duke Ellington's seventieth-birthday celebration later that year, Sue took initiative and began booking gigs for Mingus, because "it was obvious that he needed and wanted to play music again."[159] According to Mingus, Sue was also instrumental in getting him the Guggenheim Fellowship—the most prestigious award he ever received—in 1971.[160]

Sue utilized her publication *Changes* as a channel for the promotion of Mingus's recordings, concerts, and writings. These included "An Open Letter To the Avant-Garde" as well as the lesser-known "Charles Mingus Answers John S. Wilson of the N.Y. Times," a response to Wilson's critique of the comeback concert at Philharmonic Hall, which begins in typical Mingus fashion: "The title of this article should read John Ass Wilson is full of shit."[161] The most significant effect that Sue's *Changes* (the newspaper) had on Mingus's career, however, was that the publication of a passage from *Beneath the Underdog* in 1970 caught the attention of Knopf and eventually led to the publication of the book, which in turn led to a renewed interest in Mingus's music.[162]

Although Sue is never mentioned in *Beneath the Underdog* (the book deals only with the period before they met), Mingus pays her a more significant tribute through his music in "Sue's

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[157] Sue Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 94 and 97.
[158] Priestley, *Mingus*, 178.
[159] Ibid., 179-180.
[160] Balliett, "Mingus at Peace," 407.
[161] "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde" originally appeared in *Changes* 82, June 1973. Serendipitously, this issue also contained an article titled "The Year of the Pimp." "Charles Mingus Answers John S. Wilson of the N.Y. Times" originally appeared in *Changes* 71, 15 March 1972.
[162] Priestley, *Mingus*, 180.

Changes," where once again Mingus exhibits the loving and emotional side he so often hid in public. Mingus emphasized that the composition was meant to portray "some moods I think Sue goes through" and had nothing to do with her newspaper.[163] Perhaps what Mingus meant is that the substance of the piece had to do with Sue's changes in mood, but the change from the original title, "Sue's Moods," clearly suggests a double meaning in the title (as well as a third meaning that alludes to chord changes in jazz).[164]

The work belongs to a series of compositions that Mingus dedicated throughout his career to people that influenced him either musically or personally. These include male jazz figures (Duke Ellington, Jelly Roll Morton, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Eric Dolphy), male friends (artist Farwell Taylor), his daughter (Carolyn), and female friends, girlfriends, and wives (Peggy Hitchcock, Diane Dorr-Dorynek, Celia Mingus). When Sue and Celia came together for an interview years after Mingus's death, Celia explained the crucial role that women played in Mingus's life, and that "he needed a lot of reassurance, constantly, from a woman. He needed to know he was loved. . . . I think it's really obvious in the way that he writes, especially about women, or any of his soft ballads or love songs. I think you really feel the sadness, the love, and the yearning." "The romance," finishes Sue.[165] "Sue's Changes" certainly expresses these emotions with some of the most beautiful and poignant melodies that Mingus ever composed, yet it does not have the effect of a typical "love song" all the way through. To showcase Sue's various moods, as well as the complexity of her character, Mingus designs a rich tapestry constructed of several sections of varied length, tempo, and

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[163] Quoted in Hentoff, liner notes to *Changes One* (Rhino/Atlantic R2 71403).
[164] Sue Mingus, *Tonight at Noon*, 119.
[165] McGlynn, *Charles Mingus: Triumph of the Underdog*, 8:15.

melodic and rhythmic content. Yet, the music also alludes to the relationship between Mingus and Sue—at times loving and tender, angry and tempestuous.[166]

The piece provides a great example of the complexity that Mingus could achieve in his "extended form" compositions. It does not feature a singular "theme," but rather four distinct yet inseparable melodies that flow directly from one to the next—each melody, like each of Sue's moods, is an inextricable part of the whole. Together, these distinct melodies form a series of sections—A(11) B(6) C(11) C'(12) D(8) D(8) E(12) Vamp (indefinite)—that bear a strong similarity to the march form strains used in ragtime and early New Orleans jazz. The first section introduces a tender melody played by muted trumpet over a sequence of falling (mostly) chromatic chords, and presents various "changes" that anticipate the subsequent "changes" throughout the work. This includes a shift from swing to straight eighth notes in the melody at measure 5, which also signals a change in direction of the melodic line—rather than falling along with the chords changes, the trumpet now rises. Further, in the short span of eleven measures, the tempo fluctuates dramatically from a marked "slow" in the beginning to "very slow" in the ninth measure.[167] This change in tempo also results in a perceived change of beat from the quarter note to the eighth note, and the music continues to slow even further until coming to an almost complete standstill by the end of the eleventh measure. Each subsequent section becomes progressively livelier, with Mingus's bass anchoring the music with specific changes in rhythm that help to establish the mood of each section and, along with the harmonic changes, provide the foundation for the improvisations. The end of each chorus features a vamp of indefinite length

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[166] Coleman describes the strong connection between Mingus and Sue, as well as the tempestuousness of their relationship, through an incident in which Mingus imagined an "Otheloesque betrayal" and pulled a knife on Sue. See Coleman and Young, *Mingus/Mingus*, 31.

[167] These markings appear in a manuscript of the piece. Mingus, *More Than a Fakebook*, 136.

that allows the music to gradually spiral out of control, perhaps suggesting the more turbulent side of Mingus and Sue's relationship. However, the music, like their relationship, eventually returns to the tenderness and love of the opening melody.

Conclusion

Because of the complex ways in which Mingus accepts and challenges dominant notions of masculinity—both in *Beneath the Underdog* and in his compositions—it is a disservice to his legacy as both musician and writer to view him as only enacting negative stereotypes of black masculinity. The stereotypes to which he conformed were not only a way in which Mingus dealt with his desire to be accepted by the black community, but were challenges against a view of the black male as weak and castrated. If Mingus's public persona was another one of his performances, we can think of Mingus as directly challenging "the myth of the black man's castration in slavery" (as described by Wallace) by creating a myth of his own—the myth of "The Angry Man of Jazz," a myth of great physical strength, virility, and control over all women. The images of the whore and pimp that seem to have been such an obsession for Mingus serve as metaphors for a society in which African Americans had few rights and very little or no choice—including the right for a good education that would lead to a respectable profession—and were often forced into careers that were considered immoral and illegitimate. Further, there are many examples from *Beneath the Underdog* that reveal an alternative model of masculinity that prizes relationships with women, and in which love, integrity, and mutual respect are central elements. As Mingus makes clear in the autobiography, his search for his own identity as a musician and black man depends on understanding both "the man who attacks because he's afraid" and "the man who wants to trust and love." Yet, the varying and conflicting models of masculinity that

these identities act out also become manifest in Mingus's art, and provide a more nuanced understanding of his music.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation has been to take an in-depth look at the music of Charles Mingus while relating it to broader cultural, racial, and political contexts. Through his art, Mingus found an outlet where he could express his views and feelings on various matters, sometimes quite overtly. And perhaps because Mingus was a fascinating individual whose opinions on racial and political issues have proven to be a source for interesting research, scholars sometimes neglect to pay full attention to why most of us come to love Mingus in the first place: his music. His "Angry Man" persona, after all, was not the product he was trying to sell, but only a clever means to draw more people into his work as a composer. This project aims to demonstrate that we can still continue to analyze and dig deep into the contextual issues surrounding Mingus's oeuvre, but also that the way we perceive these issues can be informed by a more judicious and focused analysis of the music itself.

Chapter 1 explored how "Folk Forms, No. 1" reflects Mingus's engagement with the avant-garde. Central to this discussion was Mingus's large-scale form and his use of three motives as the main thematic elements of the piece. From a purely sonic standpoint, the continued development of these motives within a tightly organized formal structure is quite remarkable, especially considering that the execution of the material is largely improvised. Yet, the combination of these formal aspects together with an approach that provides a feeling of spontaneity and freedom demonstrates how Mingus at once rejected and implemented the avant-garde's aesthetic concerns. The complex interaction between all performers in this piece was not fully explored here, but, combined with other works by Mingus as well as those of other composers and performers, can be a source for further research into jazz improvisation as discourse.

Mingus's political views are most evident in his performances of "Fables of Faubus," the focus of chapter 2. Beyond the obvious connections to civil rights that are made through the piece's lyrics, a close musical analysis can provide insight into how Mingus's compositions reflected the conditions of his changing environment. When Mingus embarked on his European tour in April 1964, the Civil Rights Movement was in full force, and the obvious transformation that occurred between the first recording in 1959 and those made during the tour demonstrate that these events likely had a strong impact on the music. Mingus's complex reactions to the Civil Rights Movement, which are evident from his various public remarks, seem to have taken musical shape with the extensions to the form of the 1964 versions of the piece, which he devised to allow for the expression of a wider range of emotions. A product of the extensions is the systematic use of quotation as a mode of subversion, as exemplified by Mingus's fixation on developing and transforming "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Although only the use of this quotation was analyzed in detail, further research will explore how Mingus and his sidemen signified on American values of freedom and democracy by employing other folk and patriotic songs as recurring thematic elements in the various performances of the piece.

Chapter 3 made connections between Mingus's music and his identity as a black man. In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus showcases the stereotypes of the Buck and pimp as a way of covering up his vulnerabilities, yet he also exhibits an alternative masculinity based on love that was antithetical to these stereotypes but that generally resided within his private sphere. Like many other aspects of Mingus's life, his racial identity and conflicting notions of masculinity found their way into his music. The stereotype of the pimp is expressed in "Devil Woman," while "Eclipse," "Ecclusiastics," and "Sue's Changes" demonstrate the desires of "the man who wants to trust and love." The crude stereotypes Mingus played out in *Beneath the Underdog* and

in his public life were primarily an act, and an awareness of this and his alternative model of masculinity can help us gain a deeper understanding of his compositions. As Mingus told Nesushi Ertegun, "I'm *not* the picture that I've drawn to some people. I'm *not* cruel, man. I mean, I love my little baby, man."[1] Mingus's love for his daughter, Carolyn, is evident throughout Reichman's documentary. Although Mingus had a conflicted relationship with his father and struggled with his own masculinity, he tried to instill in his daughter values that he perhaps hoped his father would have instilled in him. In a tender moment in the film, Mingus puts his arm around his daughter and asks: "What you gonna do? . . . when you're old enough. Man. What did we talk about? You gonna love one man or a lot of them?" After Carolyn responds, "One man," Mingus looks up at the camera, and with a proud, loving smile exclaims, "Solid!"[2]

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[1] Mingus, interview with Nesushi Ertegun, 50:21.
[2] Reichman, *Mingus*, 38:55.

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