His Jelly Roll Soul:

Revising and reclaiming the past, the minstrel mask, and the communal blast in Charles Mingus's Jazz Workshop

by
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Abstract

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Composer, bandleader, and bassist Charles Mingus was among the earliest modern jazz figures to dialogue with New Orleans-style jazz. His musical language included the idiom in a continuum of jazz, linking New Orleans collective improvisation to the avant-garde players of the 1960s. During the mid-century jazz wars between modernist and moldy fig, Mingus invoked the early era's heritage through Jelly Roll Morton in "My Jelly Roll Soul," (Atlantic, 1959), "Jelly Roll" (Columbia, 1959), and an arrangement of Morton's "Wolverine Blues" (Gennett, 1923). Mingus commented on contemporary attitudes toward his predecessors within an environment not well-disposed to them. Yet, even as the legacies of minstrelsy in the entertainment styles of Morton, Louis Armstrong, and Fats Waller shaped Mingus's performative identity, his unpublished writings and onstage manner reflect an alternative black male performativity. The testimony of Jazz Workshop

members and Mingus's own statements reveal his philosophy and identity as leader and teacher, and emphasize a reverence for the collective spirit. In the intersection of compositional and improvisational techniques in mid-to late-1950s recordings ("Dizzy's Moods," "Jump Monk," and "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting"), this emphasis shows a progression from short sections of group interplay reminiscent of early jazz to improvisation within extended forms that invoke the ecstatic communal events he heard as a youth in the Holiness church.

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Introduction

In recent years the composer, bandleader, and bass player Charles Mingus's place in the jazz pantheon alongside Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk has become more decidedly affirmed. His compositions are now regarded as models that carry the tradition within them, funneling a broad spectrum of jazz elements through a highly personal expression. In his music-making and compositions, Mingus saw the role of the artist as a chronicler of life and he dipped into tradition for the *best* way of expressing what he heard and saw. Although he was labeled a modernist in his day, his life and work is strongly allied with postmodernist values of difference, skepticism, separation, and (inter)textuality. He anticipated the hybrid styles of decades to come and was essentially a postmodernist who distrusted the modernist political, aesthetic, and economic agenda associated with white male identity. He could even be said to be anti-modernist in his dialectic, a man who learned from, then created his own brand of modernism. He drew from an impressive array of musical vectors, including the chromaticism of Richard Strauss, the polyphony of the New Orleans jazz masters, and the intense communal expression of black Pentecostal church music.

In this dissertation I draw from previous writings on Mingus in order to explore his music in its historical and cultural context. Unfortunately, too much Mingus criticism, including that of his friend and journalist Nat Hentoff, relies solely on impressionistic opinion. Almost all journalistic writings depict Mingus as spontaneous and ingenuous, an *enfant terrible,* and an intransigent personality, hardly in control of the reins of his art and activism. Much of the more scholarly literature looks through an exclusively normative white male lens. Within that frame, Scott Saul portrays Mingus as a

revolutionary figure expressing antagonism toward the Cold War era notion that freedom comes through free enterprise, and Brian Priestley's critical biography provides an excellent account of Mingus's life and work in this context of the jazz world. By contrast, Eric Porter has drawn attention to Mingus's legacy in terms of an expansive artistic vision. In his analysis of how Mingus's intellectual project went beyond the experiences of African American musicians in the jazz business, Porter corrects the portrayal of Mingus as a simplistically dichotomous figure.[1] Nichole Rustin's probing contextual analysis of Mingus has also given us a wide geography of issues to consider, particularly Mingus's interest in black masculinity.

The figure of Jelly Roll Morton nests within a larger circle of Mingus's musical influences. This dissertation focuses particularly on Mingus's use of early jazz rhythms, forms, and performance practices that ally him to Morton as a composer. Part of Mingus's association with Morton took the form of tributes, and I argue that his parody of the earlier music is an act of admiration. Because my main concern here is to bring critical writing on Mingus into closer proximity to his music and testimony, I discuss strategies and influences of modernism, minstrelsy, and the black church in specific works, using ancestry as a central point of entry in Mingus's artistic dialogue with Jelly Roll Morton.

In Chapter 1, Mingus's writings of the 1950s show his response to other jazz writers. His relationships with critics at jazz journals such as *Metronome* and *Downbeat*

[1] Viewing Mingus as self-contradictory or quixotic conveniently explains some of his doubleness, but I have come to think of his contradictions as truly dialectical. Mingus often weighed in on controversial issues with a perspective that could hold conflicting views even if he did not frame them discordantly within a given moment. His ability to navigate society's contradictions (many of them imposed on him) allowed him to say what he wanted to say. But black men were not often given the latitude for such complexity and Mingus's outspokenness put him at risk of being harnessed with the contradictions himself.

influenced his musical response to Morton's legacy. This response was the beginning of Mingus's advocacy of a jazz continuum over what critics were then constructing as an unofficial jazz history or canon, with several artists that Mingus would include as yet unmentioned. Morton's reputation foundered in the 1940s when jazz had come fully into its own as a commercial enterprise and when moldy figs and modernists debated the merits of his contributions. Mingus wrote what I call his "Jelly Roll" pieces in the late 1950s at a time when Mingus's bebop peers and the modernist critics disdained earlier jazz styles. I consult recent appraisals of the mid-century schism between bebop and early jazz, reviews from contemporary jazz journals, biographical research, and testimonials from Mingus himself, to form the extramusical context for my analysis of the tributes to Morton. I consider the "Jelly Roll" pieces through the European rhetorical strategy of parody and through the lens of Henry Louis Gates's theory of African American signifying. I also look at Mingus's arrangement of Morton's "Wolverine Blues" as a revision of the elder composer's recordings from the 1920s, especially Morton's trio recording of "Wolverine" in 1923.

Mingus was acutely aware of how race affected his ability to be successful in the music industry. He set out to make a reputation for himself in the mid-1940s by giving himself the honorary title "Baron Mingus," positioning himself alongside the successful big bandleaders, Duke Ellington and Count Basie. But when the jazz industry and the decline of the big bands made the going difficult, Mingus soon dropped the appellation. As simply Charles Mingus, he strove to affirm the music and identity of a pantheon of African Americans jazz artists. But he was troubled by the role of performance in this history, and by the role models provided by musicians such as Armstrong and Morton

who had experienced the life of a jazz performer primarily as an entertainer. In Chapter 2, I examine the caricatures and performative features of blackface minstrelsy adopted by Armstrong and Morton in their construction of black masculinity as vaudeville entertainers in the early twentieth century. Rustin has explored Mingus's interest in black masculinity; I contend that his performing persona was equally controversial and derives from his early experience witnessing Armstrong's onstage minstrel figure. I explore the contexts of both musicians' "acts," drawing on Mingus's lyrics, liner notes, and the unpublished manuscript of *Beneath the Underdog*. Mingus released "The Clown" in the mid-1950s, declaiming his struggle as a black musician/entertainer forced to come to terms with his forefathers' more compromised moments. The work depicts the jazz musician as minstrel caricature, its satirical narrative both honoring and subverting vaudeville and minstrel stereotypes in the stage personas of Armstrong and Morton, while simultaneously creating an alternative black male performer. My reading of "The Clown" focuses on its orchestration, stylistic juxtaposition, and text. Similarly, in "Eat That Chicken" Mingus portrays the racial climate of the 1950s. I draw on Jon Panish to discuss post-WWII race ideology in the U.S in general and the jazz industry in particular. With "Eat That Chicken" Mingus mocked his audiences' sophistication and paid tribute to the older jazzmen through the mask of Fats Waller.

In the final chapter I explore how Mingus fostered group interplay in the service of his compositional vision when leading his Jazz Workshop, where he incorporated collective improvisation practices from early jazz into his mid-1950s recordings. Later, his big band ideals were sublimated into his 9- and 10-piece bands, where he performed jazz rituals that summoned the dynamics of his childhood experiences attending Holiness

Church worship services. These dynamics drive the collective interplay and ecstatic events in his 1959 recordings and in the performance mode that continued into the 1960s and 70s.

This dissertation sets out to more fully understand Mingus's music that reclaims his heritage as composer, performer, and leader. By balancing research strategies, It also seeks to rectify the exclusionary approaches currently dividing jazz criticism. Jazz cultural historians refrain from analysis of the music, dismissing the many musical-cultural signifiers in the artifacts themselves; jazz researchers focus on these signifiers (and other minutiae of recordings, club dates, and performers), discounting the crucial importance of cultural context in our understanding of Mingus. His dialogue with Morton's era is a pivotal intersection for using both means to reveal Mingus's personal, political, and artistic struggles and accomplishments.

Chapter 1

Dignifying His Jelly Roll Soul: Reclaiming New Orleans-style jazz

> *It's too bad that so many musicians started separating themselves into 'modern,' old-time,' and 'bop' camps. If we had all continued together, the music would have developed into a much richer language than it has.*[2]—
> Charles Mingus

About a piece he had titled at first "My Jelly Roll Soul," and, in a revised version, shortened to "Jelly Roll,"[3] Charles Mingus once said: "It must have had to do with how I heard Monk interpret Jelly Roll, or thought that's what he was doing." Then, on another occasion he said: "It had nothing to do with Jelly Roll's music. I heard he was a pimp so I decided to relate myself to him—like I had a 'Jellyroll Soul' too."[4] This description of his early identity as a pimp is corroborated in the autobiography *Beneath the Underdog*, and if his ties to Morton were also fostered through Monk, it emphasizes how much the older composer meant to him.

Mingus's experience in making music across several eras of the jazz tradition lent his voice authenticity when he wrote music calling Morton's name. The legacies of the jazz tradition informed Mingus's work as he reclaimed Morton, dignifying the music within a contemporary climate of derogatory connotations. I am not naming the work of Morton as the only direct influence on Mingus from the earlier era. Many musical

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[2] Nat Hentoff, "A Volcano Named Mingus," *HiFi/Stereo Review* (Dec 1964), 54.
[3] Mingus had also performed the same piece under the title "Jelly Roll Jellies" at the Nonagon Art Gallery in January, 1959.
[4] Charles Mingus, *Mingus: More Than a Fakebook.*, ed. Andrew Homzy (New York: Jazz Workshop Publishers, 1991), 69, 73.

signifiers and practices used by Morton were standard in the 1910s and 20s, not to mention the specific musical practices—shouts, call-response, dance-rhythms—that remain prevalent throughout the black diaspora.[5] Nevertheless, within the realm of New Orleans jazzmen Mingus held Jelly Roll in special awe, and Morton's work as the preeminent composer and arranger of the 1920s was the voice Mingus sought to reanimate in the mid-to late 50s.

Mingus wrote several other tributes to other composers and important people in his life. "Duke's Choice" and "Open Letter to Duke," for Duke Ellington, and "The I of Hurricane Sue" and "So Long Eric," for Mingus's wife Sue Mingus and the multi-instrumentalist Eric Dolphy, with whom he worked closely for several years. "Jump Monk" and "Dizzy's Moods," invoke the great bebop innovators Thelonious Monk and Dizzy Gillespie. Mingus often made clear his debt to Ellington, both in his personal writings and his compositional style; and many who have written about Mingus have invoked Ellington's name.[6] He held deep respect for other predecessors but called Morton's name again in his large retrospective piece *Epitaph,* for which he arranged "Wolverine Blues."[7] In this chapter I will explore how we might understand Mingus's responses to African American musical traditions in the climate of a 1950s music industry that privileged many white jazz artists, and in an ongoing debate between so-called Dixieland revivalists, "progressive" swing and, later, bebop proponents.[8] It will be

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[5] Morton, however, claimed to have originated many of these practices. See the Library of Congress recordings, 1938.

[6] See Brian Priestley's *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, Andrew Homzy's editorial notes in *Mingus: More Than a Fakebook*, Santoro's *Myself When I Am Real*, among others. Salim Washington has reminded me that now, with the discovery that Billy Strayhorn wrote many of the works attributed to Duke Ellington, it might be more accurate to say how much Mingus owes to Strayhorn. Mingus's *Duke Ellington Sounds of Love*, the most obvious example, is modeled on Strayhorn's *Lush Life*.

[7] Performed at New York Town Hall in 1962, *Blue Note*, 1962.

[8] Although the terms Dixieland and New Orleans have been used interchangeably in past and present

useful to consider parody and irony as rhetorical strategies in my reading of the "Jelly Roll" pieces.

Parody and signifying methodology

Parody and ridicule are often used synonymously; hence I emphasize my use of parody as a rhetorical term as outlined by Linda Hutcheon and Henry Louis Gates. Hutcheon defines parody and irony in complementary relationship as

> a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text…Parody is, in another formulation, repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity… a transgression distinguished as always authorized… Both parody and satire use irony as rhetorical strategy. As a trope, irony is central to the function of both parody and satire, but not necessarily in the same way. The important difference is in irony's breakdown—it's both semantic and pragmatic. Its pragmatic function is one of signaling evaluation, most often pejorative.[9]

In Gates's elucidation, signifying operates on one level as a set of rhetorical strategies, which include parody and homage.[10] The notion of parody, for instance, can infer tribute as well as ridicule, and both senses may be a part of the transformation of the material. Gates's definition of signifying as "repetition with signal difference" connotes no necessarily derogatory sense, simply layers of new meaning onto the original text; a

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discourse, Bruce Raeburn points out that what most people refer to when they talk about New Orleans jazz is "the New Orleans style in classic recordings made in Chicago and New York in the 1920s [Morton's among them, and] what 'hot' collectors referred to when they talked about *authentic jazz*." Raeburn, Bruce. *New Orleans Black Atlantic Recordings*, (Mosaic, 1998). Liner notes, 2. The term Dixieland can have racist connotations. As John Kenrick points out: "[Minstrel] companies continued to perform in both North and South throughout the Civil War, with the minstrel tune "Dixie" becoming an unofficial anthem for the Confederacy. After the war, minstrelsy remained popular, and many skits took a sentimental view of the lost world of plantation slavery. Although African Americans were forbidden by law to perform on stage with whites in many states, some companies secretly included blacks." Salim Washington further notes that what white communities referred to as the South, which can connote the old world South, black communities think of as "down home." (Personal communication, 09/07/05.)

[9] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 6, 52. (Originally published in 1985.)

[10] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 66.

signifying revision.[11] Veit Erlmann cautions us, however, in applying Gates's theory of parody and homage to music, saying that "[i]ndirection, in its most general sense, is the very essence of music." Erlmann writes that granting signifying (irony and parody in jazz) in music as a governing aesthetic principle because ordinary uses are "less clear-cut in music than they are in language." But we can apply signifying to musical analyses in its meaning as repetition that aims at foregrounding the signifier itself. Erlmann argues that signifying consciously "advertises its rhetorical status…in standard English usage signification denotes meaning, in the black tradition it denotes *ways of meaning*." His observations of South African music stress that it is "not about meaning or representation [of meaning] but about the process of communication itself."[12] Gary Tomlinson also urges us to consider that the Signifying Monkey engages with preceding texts so as to "create space for its own." And in the act of riffing on other texts and tropes of 'received tradition' we reshape the tradition.[13]

In his article exploring Ellington's aesthetic and political role around musical category, George Burrows has noted the usefulness of problematizing and contextualizing Ellington's *Black, Brown and Beige* through Gates's theory of signifying.[14] Mingus's music-making and compositions also reflect a paradoxical positioning within black American cultural practice, and determine his response to

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[11] Gates, 65-68.
[12] Veit Erlmann, "Communities of Style: Musical Figures of Black Diasporic Identity," in *The African diaspora: a musical perspective*, ed. Ingrid Monson, (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 85. Erlmann further illuminates his statement with "African music is a cultural activity which reveals a group of people organizing and involving themselves with their own communal relationships…The aesthetic point of this exercise is not to reflect a reality which *stands behind* it but to ritualize a reality that is *within* it." 87.
[13] Gary Tomlinson, "Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies," *Black Music Research Journal* 11.2L, 230-231.
[14] George Burrows, "'*Black, Brown and Beige*' and the politics of Signifyin(g): Towards a critical understanding of Duke Ellington," *Jazz Research Journal* 1.1 (2007).

notions of tributes and parody in the Jelly Roll pieces. The rhetorical devices of Gates's literary theory, applied to performance, show the composer's complex and contradictory commentary on the early music within a cultural context of earlier developments in America's race relations and those surrounding him in the 1940s and 50s. Samuel Floyd gives historical context to Gates's work that applies to Mingus's generation:

> When black participation in World War I did not bring Africa-Americans the freedoms they expected…they developed a cynicism…accompanied by psychological self-defense and self-empowering strategies, one of which was Signifyin(g). Signifyin(g) became the tool of the human, the urban trickster…[15]

As George Burrows has noted, Floyd gives Gates's work historical context that applies to Ellington's generation. Floyd writes that "the original, actual minstrel mask was used to remind whites of African Americans' ostensible lack of humanity, their supposed irresponsibility, and their willingness to accept ill treatment."[16] Mingus, a musician who worked with Armstrong and Ellington, had been handed down this historical legacy in the 1940s and 50s.

In his analysis of Ellington, Burrows applies Houston Baker's two forms of mask-play that will also help to explain different forms of Mingus's signifying voice: 1) the "mastery of the mask," which employs the rhetoric of Booker T. Washington around 1895. Baker states that this form of maskplay marks a "liberating manipulation of masks" and "a primary move in Afro-American modernism"; and 2) the "deformation of mastery," developed from mastery of the mask explored in the writing of W.E.B. Dubois, and "marked by 'phaneric display' (a mode that advertises rather than conceals), 'the

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[15] Samuel Floyd, Jr., A. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 91-92.
[16] Floyd, 87-88.

coding of African, tribal or social sounds as active, outgoing resistance and response to oppressive ignorance and silencing.'"[17]

Mingus's signifying voice

Mingus's signifying persona expresses his identity as a mixture of black, white, Chinese and Native American, a musician whose early training included the European tradition—with bassist Herman Rheinshagen, who played with the New York Philharmonic, and Los Angeles multi-instrumentalist and pedagogue Lloyd Reese; and in African American musical traditions of many influences: the black church, bassist Red Callender, and saxophonist Buddy Collette, among others.[18] Mingus's musical dialogues with Morton diverged from those he participated in with his contemporaries. Mingus merged his knowledge of early practices into scoring and composing for big bands using newer elements from bebop language and practice. His band created sounds and interactions that challenged assumptions made in an ongoing debate in jazz discourse of the 1940s and 50s—among mainly white players and critics—about what jazz *is*.

By the late 1950s, when Mingus recorded his Jelly Roll pieces, he had been all over the jazz map in terms of musical experience. In the early 1940s he played traditional jazz with Louis Armstrong's all-star band, then stints with the Lionel Hampton and Ellington big bands. He also played on the West Coast with vibeist Red Norvo's trio in the late 1940s before embracing bebop; and in 1953 he organized an all-star concert in

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[17] Houston A. Baker Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 104. Quoted in Burrows, 58.

[18] The kinds of informal training and learning that Mingus underwent as a jazz player—at gigs, rehearsals, or in everyday conversation—are myriad and difficult to list *per se*, but they would be deeply influential for any musician apprenticing in the art, and cannot be overemphasized in value even if many teachers and influences remain unnamed.

Toronto, featuring himself, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Max Roach and Bud Powell. In 1960 he joined forces briefly with Ornette Coleman for the "revolutionary" counter-festival in protest of the Newport Jazz Festival.[19] And in the mid-50s, he established recording and publishing companies for the purpose of furthering his own and his community's accomplishments in both creative and critical discourse.

How did Mingus's aesthetic choices develop from his experience across so many genres of jazz? Eric Porter has argued that from an early stance of "all music is one," wherein Mingus wrote that jazz could be notated and played by all musicians (white or black, jazz or classical) he had, by the 1950s, taken a different position. His move away from the belief that jazz was "universal" was in part brought on by his experience of racial prejudice within the music industry, and resulted in a shift in his approach to his band, which he called the Jazz Workshop.[20]

In Mingus's signifying revision of Morton, with the "Jelly Roll" pieces, reanimates music of the early 1920s, juxtaposing bop choruses with those improvised in the style of New Orleans. His foregrounding of the signifier (in this case, the older music) forms a passageway for exchange between the two eras, and the process became part of his artistic signature in other juxtapositions of styles. In his "Jelly Roll" tunes Mingus places the distinctive styles against each other and alternatively interprets through a lens of parody—as repetition signaling the invocation of his musical ancestor—and of homage. In the revision, Mingus mixes the musical languages of New Orleans and bebop by using vocabulary and rhythmic performance practices to convey his agency as

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[19] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 134. Mingus and Max Roach, believing that African American artists at the festival were underpaid, invited Ornette Coleman, among others, to an "alternative" festival at Newport, Rhode Island in 1960.
[20] Porter, 121.

signifier and his response to the construction of jazz history as he viewed it in the mid-50s. Most apparent is Mingus's respect for Morton, who inspired him as an African-American composer in a lineage that he saw as passed down from Morton to Ellington.[21]

Mingus associated Morton with the great innovators of New Orleans jazz. His compositional style shows the influence of Morton's prepared breaks, intros, and group improvised interludes in a small ensemble setting, to which I will return later in my analysis. Furthermore, according to what Mingus wrote on the liner notes of the 1959 Atlantic recording session, "I had bought a book of Jelly Roll Morton's tunes that I planned to arrange." In an earlier draft, Mingus continues, "Since I couldn't find it [the book] I wrote MY JELLY ROLL SOUL, my impression or after thought [on the] forms and soul of Jelly Roll" [emphasis in the original].[22] Ultimately the project was never carried out, but demonstrates Mingus's desire to communicate artistically to Morton.

Mingus came to his own view of the jazz tradition, Eric Porter argues, in his shift of aesthetic ideals away from a universalist perspective:

> Mingus simultaneously tapped into a celebratory, self-affirming discourse from the community of black musicians and a critical discourse that sought to legitimize jazz by creating a tradition, employing them both to protest the treatment of black musicians by the jazz industry.[23]

"I want to talk about musicians' problems," Mingus said later, in a CBC-TV interview. "I want to help expose the conditions in which top Negro artists operate—

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[21] Andrew Homzy writes that, in these pieces, Mingus is remembering Morton while also paying tribute to George "Pops" Foster, the New Orleans bassist. Andrew Homzy, *Charles Mingus: The Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961*. Atlantic, 1959. Liner notes, 38.

[22] Mingus, Miscellaneous notes, Mingus Writings, Box 46, Folder 5, p. 3, (CMC), Library of Congress. Although Mingus says he lost the folio *Jelly Roll Morton's Folio of Famous Blues, Stomps and Ragtime*, compiled and edited by George Hoefner, published by Melrose (1949), Andrew Homzy recalls finding it when he put the composer's papers in order for the LoC archive, although the folio is not listed in the their holdings.

[23] Porter, 121.

expose the fact that they're paid less than white musicians, and live and die like paupers compared to the white men who copy their music."[24]

A 1954 article in *Time* magazine named "mainstream" jazz as a "healthy step" forward. The insinuation here, Porter argues, was that previously jazz, in the dominant white culture, was associated with "immorality and blackness." The *Time* article painted broadly over this by associating the tremendously popular (and white) Dave Brubeck with the "healthier" jazz, standing for a movement that ultimately minimizes African American contributions to the music.

As Porter notes, even before the *Time* article Mingus had struggled to get recorded or performed in the music industry, and his philosophical-aesthetic and political role reflected his changing beliefs. Beginning in the mid-50s he ceased to write out charts for the workshop musicians. He wrote a few years later:

> I decided to memorize the compositions and then phrase them on the piano part by part to the musicians. I wanted them to learn the music so it would be in their ears, rather than on paper, so they'd play the compositional parts with as much spontaneity and soul as they'd play a solo. And I decided to use a larger group to play in a big band form I'd like to hear that has as many lines going as there are musicians. I called musicians that I knew had great ears for playing and understanding my music.[25]

This allowed the musicians to shape each performance, and like Ellington before him, the practice signifies on the notion of authorship.[26] On Mingus's part, the new compositional approach reflected a musical vision that included the "need of the 'true' jazz improviser

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[24] Quoted in [no first name given] Kastner's "'Negro artists exploited' Mingus Urges Investigation," Toronto Daily Star (October 31, 1964). Institute of Jazz Studies (IJS) Mingus clippings file, Rutgers University.
[25] Mingus, *Blues & Roots* (Atlantic, 1959), liner notes.
[26] Burrows, 65.

to inflect a piece of music with the player's own meanings."[27] Mingus furthered this aesthetic shift from what Porter describes as a kind of "Romantic artist in search of self-fulfillment" to a more Morton- or Ellington-based dynamic of jazz where individual and group interplay flow through improvisation. In Mingus's early 1950s recordings, this philosophy is evident in the free improvisational pieces like "Percussion Discussion" (1955), and also in the New Orleans-styled collective improvisation in "Dizzy's Moods" (1957), or the inserted ecstatic events of "Jump Monk" (1955).[28] At a time when New Orleans music was considered almost exclusively the province of players such as Armstrong, Ory and Bigard, and seen also in the imitative efforts of mainly white revivalists—all under attack by modernist critics and players alike—Mingus risked attacks on own his standing as a composer and working musician within the modernist camp. But he had played with the elder musicians and his reading of the music may also have been intended as a masterful and authentic incorporation of the New Orleans style, retaining and reclaiming on his own terms the music of his predecessors.

As a movement for musicians, bebop by many accounts came out of the sense that black musicians wanted to define their own music again.[29] Hence, it would be easy to see Mingus's "Jelly Roll" pieces as parody in a derogatory sense. On the other hand, Mingus's use of New Orleans practices in a climate that did not favor them (in the modernist camp), *and* juxtaposing the style with the language of bebop, deliberately confuses a reading of these performances solely as tributes. In an irony intended to make

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[27] Porter, 125.
[28] Porter, 126-7. See also my discussion on ecstatic events in Chapter 3.
[29] See, for instance, Ted Gioia's *The History of Jazz* (1997), Donald Megill's *Introduction to Jazz* (1984), Ira Gitler's *Swing to Bop: An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s* (1985). Scott DeVeaux disputes early (and not-so-early) histories of jazz that simplify bebop as a revolutionary black man's music. Max Roach's testimony, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, shows that economic necessity and new influences were also motivators.

them uncomfortable, Mingus strutted the older music in front of the self-professed "sophisticated" musicians and audiences who disdained it. His tribute technique of layering new language over the authentic New Orleans style foregrounds Morton as signifier and ritualizes Mingus's music within the context of Morton's era and influence. This does not go without saying because in many tributes imitative significations connecting the piece to the one whose name is called may not be in evidence. Composers riff on their predecessors in many ways that problematize or invite conjecture about the influences in the tributes. For his tribute to Morton, Mingus reached into the past, slapping the bass in 2/4 ragtime and invoking Morton's name in the title. The modernist language of bebop speaks back to Morton's era, ritualizing a relationship between two historical moments that demonstrate Mingus as Morton's champion and successor.

It is significant that Mingus was well aware of the jazz media, its critics and conflicts around early and modernist developments. His letters to *Down Beat*, and his conversations and correspondence with critics show an active, ongoing involvement in formulating his opinions and getting his message across to them and the public they wrote for. In contextualizing this layered aura of signification, it will be helpful to explore the discourse that had built up around Morton's music until the late 50s when Mingus wrote his "Jelly Roll" pieces and, soon after, his arrangement of Morton's "Wolverine Blues."

Moldy Figs vs. Modernists

It would be too simplistic to place modernism for African Americans in the era later designated as denoting white modernist works. Arguably African Americans were

thrust into modernity as early as the slave trade. Or if, as Houston Baker, Jr. has written, black people entered modernity with Booker T. Washington, then Louis Armstrong as Washington's contemporary might be called a modernist. Beyond these, if one places the genesis of black modernity in the 1940s, when bebop musicians called their music modern, then Mingus might also be called a modernist, and for this discussion when I refer to his "modernist" ideas or choices, it is in the context of the debate of that era of modernity.

Scott DeVeaux explains that the kind of denigration that plagued early jazz masters was exacerbated by the revival of the music, mainly by whites: critics and collectors of early jazz, or moldy figs, as modernists called them.[30] These revivalists, DeVeaux notes, brought Jelly Roll Morton back from obscurity in the late 1930s when early jazz aficionados and collectors began trading and selling his recordings (in a small journal called *The Record Changer*). The Library of Congress released Alan Lomax's extended interviews with Morton in 1938 when Dixieland musicians were performing and recording music from the mid-1920s Victor recordings of Morton and his band, the Red Hot Peppers. The popularity of Swing bands in the 1930s and early 40s, and the common occurrence of white bandleaders led more black musicians to the perception that white players were stealing African American music and appropriating their history; they had already struggled to get jobs during the previous two decades when big bands like those led by Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and others had hired mostly white musicians, sometimes simply because it was easier to house and feed them while touring in the segregated South.

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[30] Scott DeVeaux *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 25.

Bernard Gendron describes the factions of the moldy fig and modernist debate in the discourse between critics:

> The jazz journals *Metronome* and *Downbeat* championed swing and first attacked the older jazz enthusiasts as "moldy figs" and castigate[d] New Orleans jazz as technically backward and "corny," and writers of the revivalist journals as hysterical cultists and musical ignoramuses, against whom it positioned itself as the defender of modernism and progress in jazz. Revivalists countered with charges of crass commercialism, faddism, and Eurocentrism.[31]

Revivalists also maintained a set of performance practices that fell under the rubric of "pure" jazz: collectively improvised melodies with timbres, rhythms, and phrasings from African-American sources.[32]

DeVeaux observes that critics from such journals as *Metronome*, especially Leonard Feather,

> delighted in demonstrating [that] the musicians themselves, more often than not, subscribed to th[e] idea of progress, usually measured in increased technical and harmonic sophistication. This infuriated others, especially early jazz connoisseurs, as it inferred that music of the 1920s was inferior—the awkward beginning…For their part, the young black musicians at the forefront of bebop often keenly resented what they perceived to be the patronizing tone of the New Orleans camp—the idealization of "primitive" jazz; the revival of literally toothless, aging black musicians as symbols of their people's art. They saw their music as the logical expression of modernity.[33]

Gendron has argued that jazz critics fought the war in print more than it was debated among musicians themselves, or audiences. A comment from Dizzy Gillespie typifies the kind of attitude bebop musicians had toward Dixieland jazz: that it was "like Mother Goose to us, all right for its time, but it was a childish time." As a representative of early bebop, Gillespie's comment likely signifies on New Orleans music as

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[31] Bernard Gendron, "'Moldy Figs' and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*. Ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 32.
[32] Gendron, 35.
[33] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum,* Vol. 25, No. 3, Literature of Jazz Issue (April 1991), 537.

represented in the media debate (and the jazz industry as a whole), as contemporaries and subsequent writings have suggested he knew better.[34] Bebop trumpeter Howard McGhee recalls that while playing in California—where Kid Ory and others, including Louis Armstrong, spent considerable time in the 1940s—some of the old New Orleans players held equal disdain for the new music.

> The musicians out there hated us, man. They thought we were bringin' somethin' there to destroy their kingdom. They hated it, Kid Ory an' them, they hated me! Oh, boy! We went in this joint to work. After we played the first set, Kid Ory stormed out of there. 'I *will* not play with this kind of music.' But the people didn't give a damn. They wasn't like that. I once read a write-up that said people walked out after every group. That's bullshit! They just stayed there and listened to see what was goin on. They wasn't objectin'. But it was Kid Ory, he said, 'Nooo.'[35]

As McGhee suggests, the debate between musicians reflected the political weather between generations. But aesthetic concerns were also prominent in print in the debate between critics. Modernists, Gendron writes,

> imputed to the revivalists a reactionary aesthetics, not a reactionary politics. In their most virulent and inflammatory articles—particularly Leonard Feather's—they went so far as to accuse the "moldy figs" of "musical fascism." They variously vilified them as the "rightwingers of jazz," "the voice of reaction in music," a "lunatic fringe" of musical criticism with its "ill-tempered and abusive outbursts," in effect, the "vanguard of jazz reactionaries."
>
> The minicontroversy over "cultural fascism" was situated in a larger network of discourses that constructed jazz as the very negation of fascist culture. These discourses were generated by the banning of jazz in fascist countries and stimulated by war patriotism. [36]

Critic and jazz historian Marshall Stearns used Louis Armstrong as a voice to argue against modernist claims of bebop's superior status. Armstrong's popularity gave him

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[34] I discuss Gillespie's response to Louis Armstrong in Chapter 2.
[35] Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bop*: *An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 166.
[36] Gendron, 46.

substantial weight as an arbiter of taste, and in a 1950 New Yorker article outlining various eras of jazz, Stearns introduced him as "endowed with a fine musical intelligence, his objections [to boppers] deserve to be taken seriously." According to Armstrong:

> They want to carve everyone because they're so full of malice, and all they want to do is show you up, and any old way will do as long as it's different from the way you played it before. So you get all them weird chords which don't mean nothing, and first people get curious about it just because it's new, but soon they get tired of it because it's really no good and you got no melody to remember and no beat to dance to. So they're all poor again and nobody is working, and that's what that modern malice done for you."[37]

Mingus regarded many of the critics involved in the debate as his enemies—understandably, as their power to make or break reputations of certain jazzmen had its effect on him. In his introduction to *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus names Gene Lees, Leonard Feather, George Crater, Bill Coss, Barry Ulanov, Marshall Stearns, Ralph Gleason, Don De Michael, Teo Macero, Jack Whittemore, and the American Federation of Musicians (an organization that promoted segregated musicians unions) as his enemies. He adds:

> This does not conclude my segregated list of self-appointed white jazz critics and other profiters whom I assume not only as my personal enemies but enemies of jazz and the few unbeatable black jazz men of whom four [crossed out "three"] I'm sure would not mind their names being here: Fats Navarro, Jelly Roll Morton, Max Roach, and Art Tatum.[38]

Metronome and *Record Changer* Critics

As his writing makes evident, Mingus was aware of critics who had shortshrifted and disparaged the contributions of musicians such as Morton. Morton's reputation had

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[37] Marshall Stearns, [n.t.] *The New Yorker*, Apr. 1950 (In vertical file for Jelly Roll Morton at Institute of Jazz Studies), 1936-1954 folder, 93.
[38] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* (Manuscript in the Charles Mingus Collection (CMC), Library of Congress).

suffered in the 1930s and 40s; his contract with Victor ended in 1930, not long after the success of those recordings. Even after the release of Alan Lomax's interviews (1938), where Morton also performed the music of his early years, the *Metronome* magazine reviewed his efforts with sarcasm and a jab at the figs:

> Regarded historically, these records have a mild interest. Regarded hysterically, as the olde jazze lovers look at them, they have a profound significance. Submitted to musical analysis, however, they simply do not sustain that significance. […] Jelly Roll was a ridiculous exaggerator of his own talents as pianist, composer and leader while he was alive; he has been succeeded by similarly top-blowing fanatics for his simple music. But nowhere, not for 12 measures, does the music itself live up to the fabulous claims made for it.[39]

Earlier that year, on the re-release of some of Morton's older hits such as "King Porter Stomp" and "The Pearls," the *Metronome* reported that

> …it contains *King Porter Stomp*, which, Eugene Williams's notes to the contrary notwithstanding, is a facile riff piece, and *The Pearls*, which gets a fair sort of early-day beat. But don't expect to find what Williams calls "richly varied and unified performance," "endless melodic inspiration," or "the knowledge which made him a king of the piano." Ferdinand was far more of a bull than a monarch at the keyboard.[40]

One of the top-blowing fanatics the Metronome writer refers to could easily have been Stanley Dance, who in 1944 wrote of Morton,

> There is little doubt that he was the greatest composer jazz has ever known. *King Porter Stomp, Wolverine Blues and The Pearls* have taken their deserved place in the jazz repertoire, but so many other fine pieces are badly neglected. ... It is amusing to recall the way those [trio recordings] by Benny Goodman were acclaimed, and then to compare his puerile exercises with the masterpieces recorded by Jelly Roll in 1927, 1928, and 1929.[41]

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[39] [n.t. n.a., possibly Ulanov, who wrote many of the record reviews], *Metronome Magazine* (December, 1946).
[40] [n.t. n.a., possibly Ulanov], *Metronome Magazine* (July, 1945).
[41] Stanley F. Dance, "The Emperor Montezuma, Mr. Jelly Lord, and Others," *Jazz Monthly*, ii/6-7 (1944), 117-18. Dance reviewing Morton's "Doctor Jazz."

Nesuhi Ertegun, the editor of *The Record Changer,* in his review—"The Real Jazz?"—of Hughes Panassié's book of the same title (omitting the question mark), lightly remonstrated the author for referring to Jelly Roll (or his music) as "archaic." Ertegun surmised that after Panassié read the book *Jazzmen*, he got his priorities in order because he "knows now that New Orleans music is the greatest thing that happened to jazz. He has discarded many of his first loves, such as Bix or Tesch or Teagarden. He has discovered Ma Rainey and Kid Ory and Jelly Roll Morton (whom he still calls "archaic,") which shows perhaps that his metamorphosis is not quite completed."[42] In the last issues of the *Record Changer,* Morton was described as "a modernist in his day."[43] The *Record Changer* also listed notices for Jelly's piano solos released on *Jazz Man Records,* and his records were regularly posted in the "For disposition" and "Wanted" sections of the journal.[44]

In the height of the fig/modernist controversy, however, Morton was taken to task for his composed arrangements, for de-emphasizing with riffs and sectionalized form, the aspect of the music that traditional jazz purists prized as authentic: on a given song, the three horns (trumpet, clarinet, and trombone) all soloing and a group improvisation at the "shout," or final, chorus. Ernest Borneman, writing a "musicology of jazz" column for the *Record Changer*, included "Jelly Roll Morton's 1939 group with its astonishingly wasteful ratio of individual talent to orchestral effect"[45] among several swing bands who, Borneman believed, had compromised the original New Orleans instrumentation with a

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[42] Nesuhi Ertegun, "The Real Jazz?," *The Record Changer*, Jan. 15, 1943, [n.p.].
[43] Martin T. Williams, "Jelly Roll Morton Solos: Transcribed from Piano Rolls," in "Records Noted," *Record Changer* (April, 1954), 17.
[44] Listings in issues of *Record Changer* from 1942-1954.
[45] Ernest Borneman, "Musicology of Jazz," *Record Changer* (June, 1944), 39.

ratio of more reeds to brass. Contrary to modernist cries that moldy figs lacked discernment regarding Morton, he was occasionally taken to task.

This argumentative climate would reinforce Mingus's idea of revising and responding to the reputation of New Orleans music. In 1951, he wrote a letter to critic Ralph Gleason (who later appears as one of his enemies), stating that:

> There is something to be learned from every score of the great composers, old and modern, each page bears evidence to the musical tight-rope walker that he has looked only at his own tiny rope, not realizing that men have not only walked ropes years before him, but tiny threads—perhaps the water. And can we not all learn one more step while restudying what might possibly aid us in walking the earth tomorrow?[46]

Thus, in response to the heated discussions of the debate, Mingus affirmed the importance of including all music of the jazz tradition, and in writing to the modernist *Down Beat*, he recorded the rare opinion of a black artist among white critics and listeners. Before examining how his music in the 1959 recordings reflect these influences, however, I will briefly note the changes in the revivalist movement in the mid-to-late 1950s. Three summer issues of *Record Changer* were devoted to the West Coast Dixieland revival (Wilbur de Paris and Turk Murphy, who went West in 1954, were its stars). When Leonard Feather surveyed the state of jazz in 1953, he reported that San Francisco "is the unofficial headquarters for ragtime…California and the Far West in general have given considerable support to the older jazz forms. It was Hollywood that bred the band of Pee Wee Hunt, the trombonist whose tongue-in-cheek Dixieland record of 'Twelfth Street Rag' sold over a million copies."[47] Mingus, who had been back to Los

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[46] Mingus. Quoted in liner notes of *The Clown* (Atlantic Records, 1957).

[47] Feather, Leonard. "Big Boom," *Redbook*, (November, 1953), 110. Pee Wee Hunt's records, which "Dixieland-ified" Cole Porter and Rodgers and Hammerstein tunes (among others), were not well received by moldy figs, although their reception at the *Metronome* is surprisingly warm despite its disclaimer that

Angeles sporadically since leaving in the early 1940s, would have been aware of the goings-on there, and on the coast in general. Morton's reputation had been on the upswing. At the *Metronome*, Jack Maher's 1958 article sums up:

> Whatever his delusions about wealth or boasts about his position, there is an integrity to his craft and art that came back to him in his most adverse moments. Even those times in his wanderings and in his myriad of enterprises, when Morton seemed almost to be fighting off his destiny as a musician, the music seemed to triumph.[48]

And, in a similar vein, Orrin Keepnews summed up Morton's life in *The Jazz Makers*, which appeared in 1957:

> It was clear that Jelly had a great capacity for annoying people, and that at times it kept them from granting him his due. (Duke Ellington has been quoted as making the bitter statement: "Sure, Jelly Roll Morton has talent...talent for talking about Jelly Roll Morton."—which seems something less than a fair appraisal.) But it also is clear that all the traits and the trappings that disturbed many (though certainly not all) of his contemporaries were fundamental parts of the man and of the way of life he chose; they were a facet of the whole man, and he would not have been *himself* without them. Put it this way: a more sedate Morton, without diamonds or the name "Jelly Roll" or the bravado to have his business cards carry slogans like "Originator of Jazz—Stomp—Swing" and "World's Greatest Hot Tune Writer"—such a man could not have written *The Pearls* or *King Porter*. And, all things considered, it was much better to have it the way it was.

The appraisals of Mahar and Keepnews brought some buoyancy to Morton's reputation within the ongoing debate and musical developments.

The "Jelly Roll" Recordings

Whether Mingus was reacting to such arguments about Morton, or to the two strains of New Orleans jazz flourishing in small clubs (and a few concert halls via the all-star bands), his presentation of the music came via a direct path from the older to the

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something is "missing" from them. See Bill Coss's "Current Dixieland Record Reviews," *Metronome* (December, 1958).

[48] Jack Maher, "Jelly Roll Morton: A Tour on the Wild Side," *Metronome* (April, 1958), 25.

modern music. The associations with Dixieland jazz revivalists were not pleasant ones for African Americans, but their place in the dominant culture was relatively more autonomous than that of their predecessors. This meant that beboppers reacted more openly against racism than did Armstrong's generation. Mingus reacted both vocally and musically to the treatment, in terms of getting gigs and recordings, that he and his peers experienced at the hands of the jazz industry. He saw Armstrong as having been thoroughly isolated and exploited by the music industry:

> If Louis Armstrong could have got a pile of money, like he should have made—which he *did* make, but it went to some of the agencies…If that money went to *his* society, *his* people, there wouldn't have had to be the Watts riot. Because he could have set up schools to teach what he was doing to younger children, and it would have been a whole different feeling about our music.[49]

Mingus tied the consequent fracturing of jazz in contemporary constructions of jazz history to the unrest of black communities. Perhaps with the "Jelly Roll" pieces he was seeking some sort of compensation for his generation through championing his predecessor. Porter notes that Mingus's view of jazz history avoided the evolutionary framework, which posited modernists as progressives and New Orleans (among other early jazz) players their lesser-formed predecessors. Instead, Mingus's view was formulated (as he states in the epigram opening this chapter) on the idea that a rich language such as jazz should retain and build on its traditions.

The Signifying revisions—melody

Mingus revised the older tradition within the context of developments from bebop in the 1940s and 50s. On the Columbia recording of "Jelly Roll," his rhythm section plays the traditional New Orleans-style accompaniment under the horns' chromatic

[49] Quoted in Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (New York: Da Capo, 1983), 19.

counterpoint. The saxophone's line descends from the higher pitch on the Columbia recording, whereas in the earlier Atlantic recording of "My Jelly Roll Soul," the line ascends from the bottom note. Mingus's longtime trombonist, Jimmy Knepper, commented that Mingus inverted the melody on the spot at the Columbia date.[50] John Handy, the saxophonist on the date, felt this revision overly complicated and unnecessary, a product of Mingus's whim.[51] But the revision also signifies on the contrapuntal procedures of classical music. Mingus's mastery of that procedure appears in what Baker calls a "phaneric" display, celebrating both his own and Morton's musical know-how in an act that resists silencing by modernist critics.

Progression and Form

The harmonic changes of Mingus's "Jelly Roll" pieces reveal a traditional blues form with modern ii-V set-ups substituting the tonic. The progression of the head:

|| ii-V-(ii-V-ii-V-ii-V)-I-(I-V)-IV-(IV-I)-I-vi-ii-V-I ||

shortened on the bop solo choruses to ii-V-I-IV-I-vi-ii-V-I, shows the back-and-forth of root-fifth in the older style smoothed out in the walking bass line of the bop sections. The ii-V elisions hang on to the V instead of repeating the ii-V twice more. The progression essentially I-IV-V-I, is a 14-bar blues that gives an overall bluesy effect, but which revises the blues form with the modern substitution (avoiding the tonic) at the outset. The 14-bar form deviates from the standard 12-bar, conveying Mingus's privileging of melodic line (which lasts for all 14 bars), as he does in other works of extended forms

[50] Priestley, 102.
[51] Interview with John Handy, 7/16/07.

where form follows content.[52] The addition of a few measures represents nothing new to the standard blues form, which has traditionally been outlined in whatever number of measures the artist might need, but it creates a space for received tradition to take its place within the new.

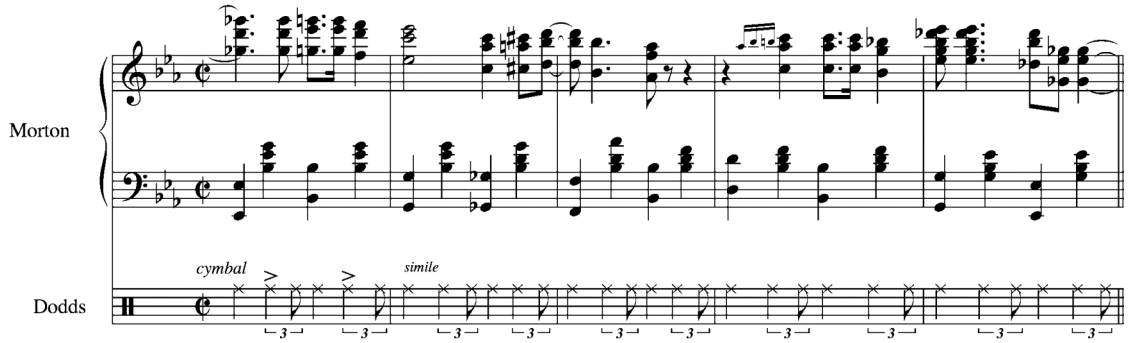
Style

Mingus's New Orleans-style accompaniment works as maskplay associated with physical stage performance that draws the listener toward the signifier. In Erlmann's outline of signifying in musical contexts, Mingus's piece foregrounds and upholds Morton as the signifier. In terms of the music, this relationship is represented by all three rhythm instruments. Drummer Dannie Richmond's triplet figure on sock cymbal with pianist Horace Parlan's root and fifth on 1 and 3 in the left hand (chording on 2 and 4 in the right) stems from ragtime bands and solo traditions. It reaches back to Morton's piano-playing and the "stride" style that developed from ragtime piano in the early decades of the 20th century in Harlem and points West and South. We can hear it near the ending in "Wolverine Blues" (Fig. 1.1), where Morton's ragtime left hand includes bass notes and chords with the left hand, as he solos or comps with the right.[53] Richmond uses virtually the same rhythmic accompaniment drummer Warren "Baby" Dodds's prominent cymbal provides.

[52] For another example, see the AABA form of 'Better Get It In Your Soul." The A section is 10 bars, not the usual 8 or 12. (The B section is 8 bars.)

[53] Morton used a string bass in his early recordings, an unusual choice at the time when most used a brass bass because, with the recording quality of the time, piano and drums often obscured the bass. Avoiding the fat sound of the tuba, Morton perhaps preferred the lighter texture of the string bass, which was less likely to overpower his own left-hand accompaniment, not by any means playing exclusively root-fifth bass lines.

Figure 1.1. "Wolverine Blues," Jelly Roll Morton, Gennett Records, 1923; my transcription.



On the earlier Atlantic recording, "My Jelly Roll Soul," Mingus's bass emphasizes the specific timbre of slap bass in reclaiming the music from New Orleans. This technique, used by "Pops" Foster who played bass in early New Orleans groups,[54] is executed by pulling the string away from the fingerboard, and producing a percussive snapping on its release. As the player releases, s/he also slaps the strings with the hand, or as jazz bassist Milt Hinton put it: "pick a quarter, slap a quarter": Hinton picks the string on the first quarter note and slaps the strings on the next quarter to get the percussive sound.[55] The playing style evolved when string bass players replaced the tuba in early jazz ensembles in Morton's generation. In fact, David Chevan has shown that, as bass playing developed, the reliance on slap bass came to be seen as the mark of an inferior

[54] Andrew Homzy writes that Mingus is remembering Jelly Roll Morton and paying tribute to George "Pops" Foster. Homzy believes Mingus may have met Pops Foster on the West Coast when the elder toured there in the late 30s-early 40s. There is yet no evidence of this meeting, but Mingus perhaps heard Pops's recordings. Personal communication with Homzy about his liner notes to the *Passions of a Man: The Complete Atlantic Recordings, 1956-1961*. Atlantic/Weaver, 1997.

[55] I am grateful to Andrew Homzy for directing me to this clip. *New York Public Library, Louis Armstrong Oral Histories*. http://jazz.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ&sdn=jazz&zu=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nypl.org%2Fresearch%2Fsc%2Fscl%2FMULTIMED%2FJAZZHIST%2Fjazzhist.html November, 2006.

player.[56] Before, Wellman Braud recalls, "notes weren't really required to come out of a bass violin 'cause they were slapping the bass, y'know, single slap, double slap, triple slap, spin the bass. It was a personality corner."[57]

Having been named among the first jazz bass virtuosos,[58] Mingus may have felt a disconnect in the evolution away from forefathers such as Pops Foster or Wellman Braud. But Mingus paid homage to them, exemplifying both the musical styles of their generation and the newer bass virtuosity he admired and developed from Ellington's bassist Jimmy Blanton. The triplets in the melodic line (m. 4), for instance, would not be commonly heard from a player of Foster's time (except from Foster himself). Moreover, Mingus's bass lines often veer up in register and in more ornate lines to the trombone or baritone sax, as heard in the intro to "My Jelly Roll Soul."[59]

Fig. 1.2 combines elements from the intros of "My Jelly Roll Soul" and "Jelly Roll" to show slap bass, Richmond's sock cymbal, and Parlan's ragtime accompaniment and mastery of the New Orleans' practice. Mingus's signifying resembles what Tomlinson has described as "restating and altering the tropes of earlier texts it reshapes, in the very act of enabling a new text, our conception of the tradition in which these texts occur."[60]

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[56] David Chevan, "The Double Bass as Solo Instrument in Early Jazz," *The Black Perspective in Music*, Vol. 17, No. 1/2 (1989), 77. To be fair, the practice had come about partially because in early jazz the bass functioned primarily as rhythmic support and slapped bass emphasized the pulse and propelled the soloist. It would have also served for doubling the piano's left hand bass notes, helping players and listeners alike to hear the root and fifth over the louder conglomeration of horns and drums.

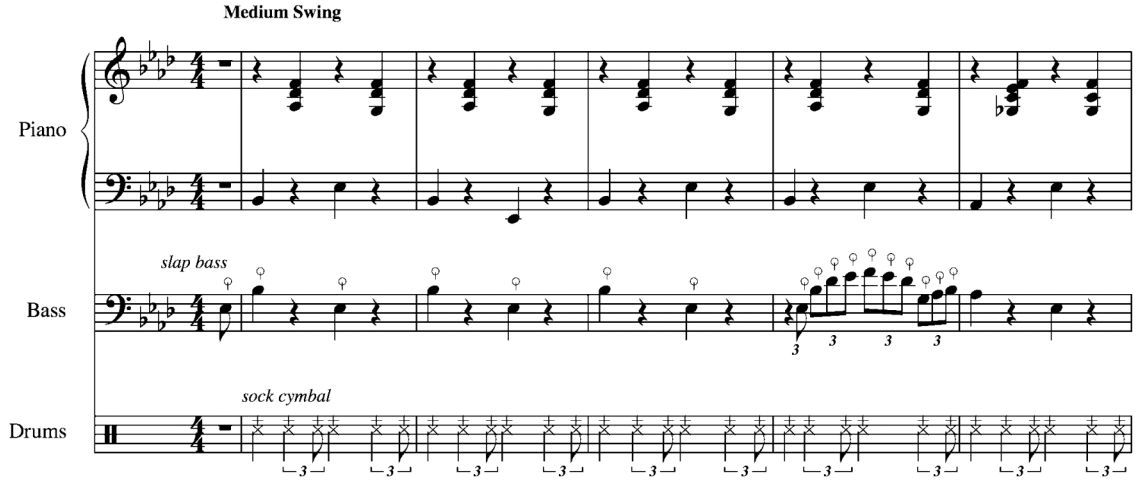
[57] Ibid. Since, in those days, the bass could hardly be heard, bassist Braud implies that the player had to rely on visuals and might do a little acting to compensate.

[58] Mingus won *Downbeat's* first Critics' Poll of New Star bassist in 1953.

[59] According to Peter Matthews, his student, Ron Carter noted Mingus's preoccupation with this register in his bass classes at City College of New York. Personal communication, 7/10/06.

[60] Tomlinison, 230.

Figure 1.2. "My Jelly Roll Soul," Mingus, *Blues and Roots* (Atlantic), and "Jelly Roll" *Mingus Ah Um* (Columbia), 1959. Rhythmic lines of two recordings merged in my transcription.



Mingus tips his hat to the older players, playing the "inferior" slap bass style in homage to those on whose shoulders he stands. It had taken decades for bassists to transform their "personality-in-the-corner" image and bring their musical identities out of obscure supportive roles—to be seen and heard instead as soloists on par with lead players.[61] Mingus used slap bass elsewhere in his work, and seemed always to be invoking the earlier tradition.

[61] Later, many musicians, including bassists, were influenced by a number of circumstances to master the instrument more thoroughly. Max Roach describes the advent of virtuosos resulting from the scarcity of work: "But I think that what was more significant to the development of the music—people talk about change and who did this and who did that. Well, the war had a great deal to do with what went on because during that '40s period the government had leveled a 20 percent tax on all entertainment, excepting instrumental playing. That meant that if an operator had a singer or a tap dancer, or even if there were public dancing in a room, he'd have to charge that extra 20 percent on top of the usual tax there that existed during that period. You know, city tax, state, tax, federal tax, alcohol tax, and buy his stock and pay for his help and pay for his music and other things. It was just prohibitive. So the only artists who were outside that perimeter the club would take a chance on, as I remember, were people like Billie Holiday—singers. But anyway, the sole source of entertainment was just instrumental work—instrumental playing. And so the best instrumentalists were the ones who got the gigs. Art Tatum. So most of the musicians worked harder developing themselves so that they could get jobs. So I think the war had more to do with the change than any individual pressure's effort like, 'I'm gonna change this.' It's the society. That 20 percent tax was the most important thing because of all this instrumental playing." Quoted in Gitler, 77-8.

Mingus's longtime trombonist, Jimmy Knepper, remarked that Mingus meant "Jelly Roll" to be "a sort of novelty."[62] By novelty, Knepper may have been describing something new or cutting edge, or he may have meant a throwback, something nostalgic, gimmicky or lightweight. New Orleans-style music was thought of as a novelty when the early recordings were introduced to white American audiences, and later the parodies (in the derogatory sense) of popular tunes by pianist and entertainer Fats Waller were labeled as such. In his liner notes, critic Nat Hentoff describes Mingus's "Eat That Chicken" as a throwback or novelty such as Waller's songs with suggestive lyrics, invoking the nostalgic sense of the term. But because novelty was also used to describe something that is cutting edge (and not always in positive ways, as when moldy figs described modernists as desperate in their "ceaseless search for novelty."[63] Mingus's tune resists the discourse that maligned the contributions of Morton and other innovative black jazz artists.

Knepper, who understood the development of styles that Mingus demanded for "Jelly Roll," remarked that "when required to play Dixieland or 'old style,' many musicians often just play corny or rickytick rather than being respectful of the idiom."[64] He implies that Mingus meant for musicians blowing these choruses to show respect for the early jazz style. In transforming his credo in the mid-50s from "all music is one," Mingus attempted to keep the tradition intact and perhaps designed the effect—from an old-styled chorus to the modern style—for that purpose. Thus, the first choruses of the solos on "My Jelly Roll Soul," and "Jelly Roll," are improvised in the New Orleans style,

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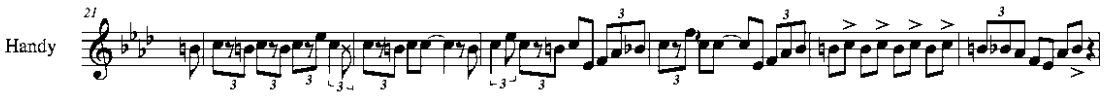
[62] Mingus, *Mingus: More Than a Fakebook*, 62.
[63] Leonard Feather, "Jazz Is Where You Find It," *Esquire* (February, 1944), 35+. Quoted in Gendron, "'Moldy Figs' and Modernists," 41.
[64] Mingus, *Mingus: More Than a Fakebook*, 73.

the second choruses in bop. The language of both New Orleans and bop are apparent in the rhythm section and soloists. In Figure 1.3, altoist John Handy leads off with a chorus that caricatures the music in the rickytick sound earlier beboppers had used to insinuate the inferiority of the older music. (In mid-tune, I will refer to specific time points of the recordings.)

Fig. 1.3. "Jelly Roll," Charles Mingus, (Columbia), 1959, my transcription (1:19).

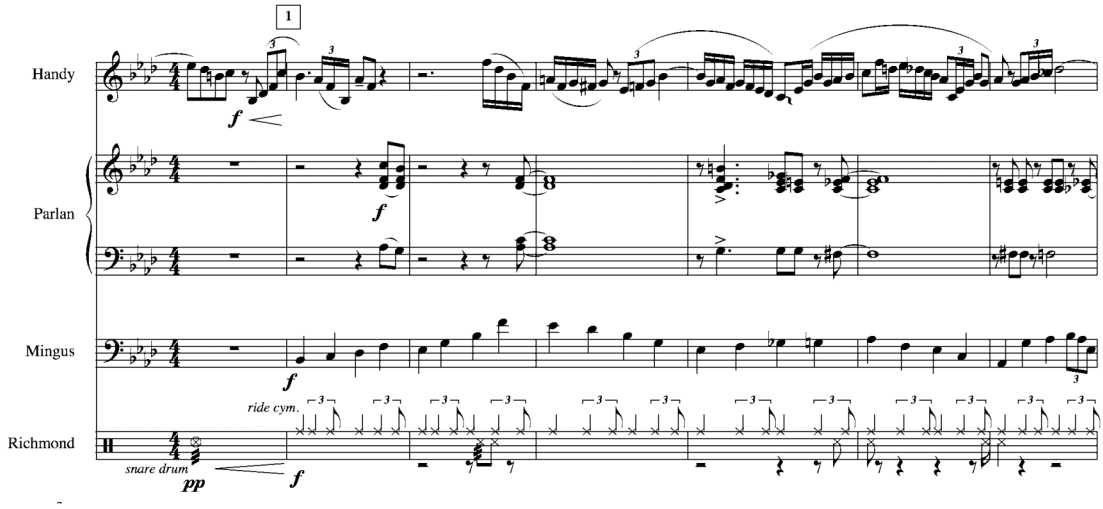


Around the third measure of Handy's solo in the New Orleans style, Mingus lets out a "Hot dog, boy!" evoking the hokum of the old days. The call represents mastery of the mask and nods to the ubiquity of good humor in early jazz and its primary function as entertainment. Mingus required his players to play in the early idiom, something they were not obliged to do in other playing environments in the late 50s. As will be discussed in my second chapter, the call "Hot dog, boy!" is also a vestige of the minstrelsy trope common in early jazz and vaudeville.

Handy, when asked about the directions Mingus gave for solos, replied that Mingus asked him to play rickytick. Handy maintains that he knew full well how to play respectfully in the early idiom, but Mingus asked him not to. In the second chorus (Fig. 1.4) both rhythm players and soloist switch to bop. The rhythm players reflect the change by moving from one set of conventions to the other: Mingus from slap bass to a walking bass line, using color pitches from the chord (seventh, ninth, i.e. not just the root, third

and fifth of the New Orleans style) and chromatic voice-leading. Richmond, on the ride cymbal now, improvises accents on the snare; Parlan adds color tones to chords in rootless voicings and irregular rhythms.

Fig. 1.4 Mingus, "Jelly Roll," *Ah Um* (Columbia), 1959, my transcription (1:43).



As the juxtaposition of the two idioms in two choruses puts them in dialogue, one wonders how Mingus's contemporaries might have responded, especially at the powerful moment where they change from New Orleans to bop. As a postmodern figure, Mingus complicates the idea of parody here, the signal difference reflecting musical experiences that included both traditions.

Racialized notions of performance determine how one interprets Mingus's New Orleans tropes. His references to the older idiom are honest and authentic in light of his own experience playing with Armstrong and others of that era. But listeners who hear early jazz signifiers as parody in the sense of ridicule respond to historical black performance from the perspective that Gillespie and other beboppers professed toward

early jazz. As a musician who regularly played and interacted with bebop players, Mingus would have known their disdain and perhaps even internalized it on some level. But his instruction to play rickytick in the early style ("which I did not want to do," said Handy[65]) raises questions about what he was trying to achieve. It may be helpful to consider what Hutcheon describes as a process of revising, replaying, inverting, and "trans-contextualizing" previous works of art.[66] In his revision, Mingus signifies on beboppers who conveyed disdain when playing in the early style. He ridicules not only these modernists, but their (and his) audiences' preconceptions of early jazz, at the arrogance toward his and, in some cases, their own musical ancestors. The switch to bebop comping styles in the solo choruses displays deformation of mastery, a resistance to silencing and oppression that might go right over their heads, but which draws the connection between his own and Morton's music, bridging the two styles in asserting the richness of the tradition.

The previous analysis shows Mingus's philosophical development translated into musical decisions. After erasing boundaries between jazz and classical in the 1940s, the 50s found Mingus dismantling them. This act of linking jazz eras demonstrates how he reconstituted and reclaimed the older music as part of a whole, within new developments in gospel, bebop, and blues. His insertion of his musical identity within a continuum of jazz coincides with his critique or revision of the idiom. In the act of signifying, Mingus counters his earlier universalist belief with the more defiant and defining "this is *our* music,"[67] claiming the African American roots of jazz.

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[65] Interview with John Handy, 7/17/07.
[66] Hutcheon, 22.
[67] Not to be confused with Ornette Coleman's album *This is Our Music!* (1959).

Wolverine Blues

The choice of one of Morton's best-known tunes, "Wolverine Blues (1923)," shows Mingus again using the creative space between his own and Morton's voice. As yet there exists no testimony or other evidence that reflects Mingus's specific motivations for reviving "Wolverine." (The entire score for *Epitaph*[68] was discovered after Mingus's death.) But by arranging Morton's work for big band, Mingus expressed his musical vision as descendent of his big bandleader-idol Ellington, and his appreciation for Morton.[69] The "Wolverine" arrangement accomplished three of Mingus's objectives: it implied a composerly association with Morton, its large-genre setting added gravitas to Mingus's own oeuvre and allied him with Ellington, and it re-animated Morton's work in defiance to those who would relegate it to obscurity. In the context of the late 1950s and early 1960s, outside previous revivalist contexts, this modernist response to the older composer could claim first-hand knowledge of the tradition through association with Armstrong and Bigard. Mingus's expansion of "Wolverine" into a big-band arrangement fell within the still larger format of *Epitaph*, a format where he could include all the music that he felt defined jazz. He called his larger work *Epitaph*, and thought of it in terms of a retrospective of his life[70] *and* as a reflection of jazz history. Thus, he implied the importance of Morton's legacy.

A portion of *Epitaph* was played at the Town Hall Concert of 1962, for which

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[68] The manuscript is now reassembled, mostly through the work of Gunther Schuller and Andrew Homzy, who discovered the correlation of the measure numbers written by Mingus on the twenty six scores that make up *Epitaph*.

[69] Robert Hammer, pianist, and an arranger for other of Mingus's works for this concert, says that the arrangement looks to be in Mingus's hand, and as evidence that Mingus wrote the arrangement, adds that it is written in concert pitch. "Very few arrangers will score in concert," Hammer says, adding that his only role in the arrangement was to answer Mingus's questions related to where the melody would be set in various instruments. Personal communication, 11/12/06.

[70] That is to say Mingus's life thus far; he was only 38 years old in 1960 when he began the long work.

Mingus struggled on several levels: to get the work finished, to have the performance recorded, and to keep the parameters of a rehearsal received as a concert work (which was how his Jazz Workshop often performed, and meant they stopped and started—as the name "workshop" implies). Robert Hammer, who arranged some of the work with Mingus's input, stated that Mingus did not have enough music for the concert, and he had to use some of Hammer's work instead of his own pieces, including the "Wolverine" arrangement, which was still being copied as the band was performing. As Mingus received the communication that he was not allowed to go beyond conventional concert length *during* the Town Hall concert, the arrangement of "Wolverine Blues" landed among those pieces that were set aside.

The genesis for the instrumentation of Mingus's arrangement most likely dates from the stock arrangement that Armstrong and others performed in previous decades. In 1923, a tune very like Morton's "Wolverine Blues," entitled "Lots O'Mama," was recorded by the Midway Dance Orchestra and attributed to the pianist of the orchestra, Elmer Schoebel.[71] In 1924, Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra at the Club Alabam recorded the tune and Louis Armstrong recorded "Lots O'Mama" with the Luis Russell Orchestra in 1940. It is conceivable that Mingus played a stock arrangement of either or both "Lots O'Mama" or "Wolverine Blues" with Armstrong when he joined the band, briefly, in 1941.[72] Both works expand on Morton's 1923 hit piano solo recording, which led to his formation of the "Red Hot Peppers" for the 1926-1930 Victor recordings.[73] Morton's instrumentation on the Victor recording is not unique—with "Baby" Dodds on drums and

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[71] Schoebel, Elmer. "Lots O'Mama." Chicago: Red Hot Jazz. Columbia, 1923. www.redhotjazz.com/midwaygarden.html. 10/20/06

[72] I am indebted to Andrew Homzy for pointing out this recording and for the suggestion that Mingus may have played "Wolverine Blues" as a member of Armstrong's orchestra.

[73] From the "Red Hot Jazz--Jelly Roll Morton" site at: http://www.redhotjazz.com/redhot.html. 10/29/06

Omer Simeon, clarinet—but the form is: Morton plays solo for the greater portion of the piece, bringing in the fresh sound of Simeon's dark clarinet color about halfway through the piece. Entering at an interlude section, Simeon improvises in the lower and middle register against Morton's sustained (one per measure) chords and Dodds's sock cymbal. The written-out sections, with which Morton alternated group and solo improvisations, account for the "composed" sound and tight arrangements of all of his 1926 Victor recordings.

As an arrangement for big band in the early 1960s, Mingus's "Wolverine" stands apart. The modern big band of the 1950s had turned toward Europe for inspiration in form and content, while confining the role of improvisation to soloists. Nat Hentoff wrote that "Jazz would seem to be at the beginning of a new stage of development—the combination of improvisation with extended form."[74] Arrangers and composers such as Gil Evans, John Lewis, Gerry Mulligan, Boyd Raeburn, and Stan Kenton were seen as ushers of a new era, where jazz found expression allied to Western European concert music.[75] But in "Half Mast Inhibition," a large-form composition Mingus had started in the late 1930s, he had melded jazz sounds and vocabulary with those of European music. It must have been particularly galling for him not to be included on a critic's list and to hear prominent columnists such as Feather and Ertegun propose that the real movers and shakers were men whose "modern" efforts he had preceded by almost two decades.[76] Mingus took a different turn in the 1950s, including his own "history of jazz" concept in

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[74] Nat Hentoff, [n.t.] *Down Beat*, (June 3, 1953), [n.p.].
[75] Leonard Feather, "The World of Jazz 1958." [no pub.], 1959, 111. IJS Mingus clippings file.
[76] There is some speculation about when Mingus wrote the drafts of "Half Mast Inhibition" that are considered final. Andrew Homzy believes that the score dates from 1939 when Mingus was 17 or 18 years old. He argues that, although no one has done a forensic examination, everything about it convinces him that the score dates from 1939. Personal communication, 10/28/09.

the big band genre. Modeling his Workshop after the successful ensembles of Ellington, or even Morton and Armstrong, and their "all-star" bands, Mingus struggled to keep top musicians at a time when big bands were not profitable. Only the most popular bandleaders—Ellington and Kenton—were able to pay salaries to their musicians on a consistent basis. Mingus's big band work combined jazz idiomatic language with new harmonic and theoretical ideas coming from Europe, but he balanced the latter priority with performative group and individualistic expression influence by the New Orleans-style communal dynamics. (Choruses featuring solos and group improvisation juxtaposed with written sections in the arrangement go back to the early recorded era—albeit holding the group improvisation till the end—Morton included. Riffs and breaks within composed pieces typify early big band arrangements, and were devices that Morton claimed to have originated.[77])

Writer Bill Coss, one of the critics Mingus denounced as an enemy, summed up his place in the modernist pantheon:

> Charlie Mingus is more properly new, although he too can be said to combine certain ingredients of the old. But his fresh and frequently profound approach pays little attention to what *has* to be done; is concerned instead with what best portrays his idea. It is the heart of expressionism and it only needs consistent discipline for perfection.[78]

In embedding his arrangement of "Wolverine" within the larger *Epitaph,* Mingus inserted his revision of Morton's tune as a modernist expression of the past. The arrangement (whether written by him or not) reflects his ideas and beliefs about modern instrumentation as developed by big band and smaller ensemble playing alike. With

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[77] Jelly Roll Morton, and Alan Lomax, *The Complete Library of Congress Recordings: Interviews*. Rounder Records, 1938.
[78] Bill Coss, "Please Pardon My Asking What's New," *Metronome* (January, 1958), 12.

trumpets written into the extreme high register (E's, F's, G's and A's above high C) of the instrument, "Wolverine" stands up to contemporary modernist band writing except when Mingus seems to overdo a bit with high notes that obscure the melody in the first four bars. Trumpeters from Armstrong on had developed the range of the instrument and, by the mid-1950s, big-band leaders/arrangers demanded higher and higher notes from their lead trumpeters. Indeed, it was on this kind of technical ground that much of the posturing for position in jazz masculinist culture was fought. Mingus's "Wolverine" shows the contribution jazz trumpeters had made to developing the instrument's capabilities. He wrote:

> I mean, the range has doubled, in octaves. For instance, Stravinsky wrote a piece for a high trumpet. He used a special trumpet –a piccolo trumpet—to play high, but Cat Anderson, played off the piano with an ordinary trumpet, played higher than the piano goes, higher than piccolos. So do Maynard Ferguson, Snooky Young, Ernie Royal, Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Clifford Brown, Dizzy Gillespie, Freddie Webster, Fats Navarro, [etc]. And there are many other instruments besides the trumpet which jazz musicians have made do the impossible.[79]

Trumpets ripping off high F's, G's, and A's (and higher) above high C became the standard by which a big band could display its virtuosic power, and every modern big band, at the very least, set off a few fireworks for its finale. The urge to show superiority by playing technically challenging music spurred bandleaders to incorporate new trends from Europe, complex tonal or atonal harmonies, for example. These might either be scorned or admired by other musicians, but were given high marks by critics of both modernist journals such as *Metronome, Jazz Today*, and the *Record Changer* (the latter of had by then softened its tone toward modern jazz).

Added notes played by muted trombones in the "Wolverine" arrangement distort

[79] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, CMC, Box 45.

otherwise conventional harmonies in the intro, riffing on Morton's melody in ways that reshape received tradition. A conventional C-Eb is heard over the C-minor chord, then a sequence (Bb-D) to the B-flat chord. But over Morton's original harmonic progression (Cm-F7-Bb), flatted sixths (Ab, Gb) are heard in the trombones under the first chords (Cm-F7), producing a meaner, grittier sound over Morton's original harmony. This kind of added-note harmony was not new to the vocabulary, but the juxtaposition against Morton's work adds to the aura of both old and new: it works simultaneously to bring new life to the older piece while cloaking the new in traditional garb.

During the 1960s, Mingus's arrangement of Morton's "Wolverine Blues" would likely have undergone significant changes in the Workshop environment had he continued to perform it, as other of his works evolved this way, for example, the inverted melody in "Jelly Roll." Mingus, like Ellington and Morton, balanced his written compositions with the improvisatory elements of individual expression in the Workshop and I will return to these influences in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

The "Jelly Roll" pieces and the arrangement of "Wolverine" show Mingus seeking to educate his audiences and peers through his composer relationship with Morton, one that responded to contemporary attitudes toward the early recordings and the moldy fig/modernist debate. Mingus, as an avid reader of jazz magazines and criticism knew their arguments, and responded in writing and in music. His experience working with Armstrong in 1940, although brief, provided him with the authority to respond authentically to the music in the late 1950s and his aesthetic and political role as an

African-American bandleader gave weight to his reconstruction of jazz history, an undertaking with which he sought to remedy, for one, the omission of Morton's legacy.

Chapter 2

Mingus in the Act: Confronting the Legacies of Vaudeville and Minstrelsy

> Charles always knew what audiences wanted and how to entertain them—"which [I] didn't do," he said…He could be something of a ham actor for his own enjoyment from time to time, but entertainment was not what he was after. He wanted audiences to listen to his music and take it seriously. He believed it belonged in concert halls, not noisy jazz clubs, but noisy clubs and ringing cash registers were the reality of his time.[80]
>
> Sue Mingus

> Pimps were street entertainers posing as entrepreneurs, and their blatant commercialism set them against the artist Mingus hoped to be.[81]
>
> Scott Saul

> It is important to move beyond continually attributing black men's (and women's) identity as always and only functioning as a reaction to a white male gaze. To reconsider black masculinity without depending on how white men represent and/or appropriate that experience is an important step toward a space which embraces multiple articulations of black male subjectivity.[82]
>
> Nichole T. Rustin

Minstrelsy and vaudeville stereotypes of black men, developed in the nineteenth century, transformed white and African American musicians in the twentieth. Chafing at the racializing of African Americans, Mingus struggled to rearticulate black masculine identities both as a performer and as an artist. In this chapter, I consider Mingus as an entertainer between 1955-1965—his career's zenith in terms of performances and

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[80] Susan Mingus, Personal communication. January 19, 2007. Interestingly, the term "ham actor" derives from the practice of white minstrel performers using ham grease to remove burnt cork, i.e. blackface makeup, after a show. In Michael Rogin, "Democracy and Burnt Cork," *Representations*, No. 46 (Spring, 1994): 8.

[81] Scott Saul, "Outrageous Freedom: Charles Mingus and the Invention of the Jazz Workshop," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Sep., 2001): 408.

[82] Nichole T. Rustin, *Mingus Fingers: Charles Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Postwar Jazz Culture*. PhD dissertation (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999), 68.

recordings—within the context of vaudeville and minstrelsy. Rather than prove specific ties or influences in my exploration, I suggest and reflect on associations and inferences found in the aura surrounding Mingus's historical moment. In his writings, composition titles, lectures to his audiences, and in the specific works "Eat That Chicken" and "The Clown," I focus on his overt statements and on how he signified on blackface practices and their influence.

In his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog* (1971), Mingus wrote, "I am three"[83]—the witness who stands unmoving; the man who attacks because he is afraid; and the man who wants to trust and love. Nichole Rustin, in calling for deeper analysis of black male identities, also distinguishes between several personae in which Mingus (from his three perspectives) struggled to understand himself: the composer, the performer, the bandleader, the celebrity, the pimp, and the intellectual.[84] She reminds us that he "insists that there can be no single representation of him because his own sense of identity depends upon the complexity, multiplicity, and intimacy of his relationships."[85]

Onstage, Mingus drew from the early history of jazz, when black (and white) musicians functioned principally as entertainers. But even as he used conventional means of interaction, Mingus questioned and challenged them in his aesthetic and political identity. Mingus's performance identity is linked to that of Louis Armstrong, with whom he worked in his early career, and who was regularly labeled an Uncle Tom by Mingus and others of the bebop generation. I have discussed Mingus's association with Jelly Roll

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[83] Charles Mingus and Nel King, *Beneath the Underdog* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1971), 3.
[84] Rustin, 53-54. For further discussion see Rustin's dissertation (Chapter ?), which investigates Mingus's multiple identities. Scott Saul's work on Mingus, implicit in the epigraph above and elsewhere, illustrates her point in his limited contextualizing of Mingus outside a white male perspective. For another discussion, see Salim Washington's "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*. New York: Columbia University Press, c2004.
[85] Rustin, 52.

Morton in their shared identities as bandleaders and pimps. Mingus the pianist also nodded to Fats Waller and the Harlem stride piano school.[86] His debt to Waller as pianist and entertainer is especially clear in "Eat That Chicken." Perhaps Mingus claimed Morton, Armstrong, and Waller as jazz forefathers in the sense that they, like him—and unlike Ellington—performed primarily in smaller ensembles and were usually associated with smaller venues, and utilized novelty and hokum in their entertainment personas.[87]

Mingus differs from his contemporaries and predecessors, however, by insisting that his audience get beyond the role of passive consumer and recipient of "entertainment." As his audience they were—under his care—in a position to get hip to *his art*, an objective that reversed the roles of audience and performer. He demanded that they distinguish between art and entertainment, and that they make concerted efforts to *please him* by listening quietly to his music as audiences do in concert halls, a demand that turned the traditional function of entertainment upside down. Mingus's entertainment role derived from the history of black men onstage (of which he was well aware). The depiction of African American culture in early nineteenth-century minstrelsy came from white observation of black entertainers in slave culture and pertains to this discussion of Mingus's response to his predecessors.

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[86] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, Mss., (CMC) 98. Mingus allied himself to a host of musicians in his introduction: "To the professional friends of jazz musicians in heritage of the traditions of Art Tatum, Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller, Teddy Buckner, Kid Ory, King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton, Sidney Bechet, Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, Chu Berry, Oscar Pettiford, Slam Stewart, Lester Young, Henry 'Red' Allen, Sid Catlett, Baby Dodds, Baby Lawrence, Snake White, Lloyd Reese, Red Mack, Big Chief Scott, Joe Albany, Al Haig, Billie Holliday, Dick Twatzik, Jimmy Knepper, Earl Hines, Monk, Duke Ellington, Rex Stewart, Red Rodney, Charlie Parker – the black creator of the art and the heirs, Max Roach, Fats Navarro, and myself."

[87] Although Armstrong fronted Louis Russell's big bands, and other orchestras put together for him, he was not known as a bandleader in the sense that Basie and Ellington were. He was primarily a soloist. Ellington's influence on Mingus as composer and bandleader obviously needs more attention, but an appraisal of how his appearances onstage were models for Mingus's own performances and presentations in concert and club venues would be better attended to in a separate study.

Minstrelsy, vaudeville, and the early jazz performers

Since the mid-1950s, historians of minstrelsy have examined the exploitation and appropriation of black dance, music, and culture by white entertainers, arguing that the construction of racial feeling in pre-Civil War America bears on later entertainment and race up to our current time. The emergence of minstrelsy in America appears in the late 1820s, "at the intersection of slave culture and earlier blackface stage characters such as the harlequin of the commedia dell'arte, the clown of English pantomime and the clown of the American circus, the burlesque tramp, perhaps the 'blackman' of English folk drama."[88]

Minstrelsy performance typed African Americans as lazy, boastful, and physically needy characters, the flipside of the ordeals of hardworking, ambitious, white Protestants.[89] Vaudeville succeeded minstrelsy as the most popular American entertainment form, and in turn was succeeded by silent film. Michael Rogin explains that each was absorbed by its successor, vaudeville absorbing minstrelsy as Jewish vaudeville entertainers like George Burns, Eddie Cantor, and Al Jolson used blackface to hide their Jewishness in the strongly anti-semitic climate of the 20s. Live vaudeville and silent movies in the 1920s continued to portray the minstrel as grinning-mouthed, lazy and greedy.

In her reading of the widespread, minstrelized stage versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Linda Williams notes the shift from Harriet B. Stowe's sympathetic portrayal of Uncle Tom—one that revolutionized whites' ability to see a black man as a human being

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[88] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 22.
[89] Rogin, 30.

whose virtue could evoke their purest empathy—to a ridiculed figure, desexed and passive. The Tom and "anti-Tom" material in minstrel shows into the 1900s, she observes, underwent a shift from racial sympathy to the racial antipathy epitomized in Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.'s 1905 novel, *The Clansman*. Dixon's novel was the source for D. W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation* (1915), and both relocated sympathy from slaves back to masters. Tom's "desexing" opposed the comically oversexed Zip Coon minstrel character.[90]

Eric Lott suggests that a dialectic of "misrecognition and identification" formed around early white minstrelsy performances with white responses on a spectrum between ridiculing and admiring stereotypes of African American style.[91] In the South of the pre- and post-Civil War years, the small number of black performers might mimic stereotypes whites projected onto them as forms of entertainment. Black audiences enjoyed the subtle ironies and not-so-subtle parodies of white misconceptions. William J. Mahar reminds us that minstrel performers in the antebellum years contributed to "the sometimes contradictory American attitudes and beliefs about race, gender, and class,"[92] and, without denying the racist stereotypes codified in blackface minstrelsy, he explores ways in which male minstrels acted out their anxieties about women, elitists and intellectuals, and other social issues via the black mask. Mahar writes that "Minstrel performers, even the rank amateurs, assumed, if only for an evening, that all races, classes, professions, and genders were fit subjects for comedy…At their best minstrels are social satirists, at

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[90] Williams, 64.
[91] Eric Lott, "'The Seeming Counterfeit': Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jun., 1991): 237-38.
[92] William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), 2.

their worst they joined in denigrating members of other ethnic groups.[93]"

Where Lott sees appropriation and ridicule, W. H. Lhamon's reading is also layered with the "appeal and exchange" in black dancing, and of the "public becoming patron to a specific style." He sees a development through the "slippage from *patron* to *patronize*, nurture to condescension," which parallels Lott's identification and misrecognition continuum. However, Lhamon warns that "the crudest mistake we can make… is to assume that the connection between public and performance is…either simple patrons or simple patronization." In blackface performance, he maintains, the line between the two usages is blurred.[94] As Williams points out, black performers languished under a lack of maneuverability, unable to "pass" out of their skin color. Nevertheless, the ridicule and desire/envy dichotomy was still alive in the performance careers of African Americans such as Morton and Armstrong. Morton's Creole background gave him a particularly ironic perspective in the cultural exchange between black and white.

Morton

Lawrence Gushee speaks of the dichotomous reception that dogged early performers such as Armstrong and Morton. "It is precisely the vaudevillian in Morton (and others of his generation) that has seemed barely tolerable to many only because he was otherwise a wonderful jazz musician."[95] Gushee's chronology of Morton's early years shows that Jelly Roll served a fairly long apprenticeship in vaudeville where,

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[93] Mahar, 6.
[94] W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.
[95] Lawrence Gushee, "A Preliminary Chronology of the Early Career of Ferd 'Jelly Roll' Morton" *American Music*, Vol 3, No. 4 (Winter, 1985): 389-90. Gushee refers to the years before 1917 when Morton moved to the West Coast to focus on his music. He also notes that Morton's nickname 'Jelly Roll,' was then not uncommon in black show business.

among other roles, he performed as a blackface comedian for white and black audiences.[96] Morton's biographer, Phil Pastras, lists a variety of additional occupations—pimp, vaudevillian, pool hustler, card sharp—that he experimented with before going to the west coast and concentrating on his music. Those years were formative in Morton's musical life, and give some insight into his stage personality.

Morton's ancestry, in part, makes him the exceptional example of how early jazz entertainers saw themselves within minstrelsy roles. As a Creole, his identity lay outside black and white, yet he identified to some extent with both. As the jazz writer and near-contemporary of Morton, Charles Edward Smith, pointed out, Jelly Roll's attitudes on race were similar to those of many Creoles of his time,

> …Jelly Roll's attitude was in no small measure due to his complete rebellion against the strict Jim Crow laws of the South ... [He] was the victim of his own particular "cult," or "social group" if you will, for in New Orleans the self-imposed color line between the light and the dark Negro is much more marked than the Jim Crow line between white and colored. … Jelly scorned the blacks, detested the lights, and was not accepted by the whites![97]

Smith also wrote that, "In personal talks with me, Jelly always knew himself to be a Negro, proud though he was of that 'French background.' He was just bitter underneath that being Negro during his lifetime assured one of little status."[98]

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[96] A publicity photo of Morton in blackface is well known. See in William Russell's *"Oh, Mister Jelly": A Jelly Roll Morton Scrapbook*. Copenhagen: JazzMedia ApS, 1999, 477. Gushee finds evidence of Morton's minstrel and vaudeville performances in the contemporary African American newspaper the *Freeman*, and William Howland Kenney III notes that his acts were frequently listed in the vaudeville column of the *Chicago Defender*. Because a large circuit of black theaters emerged after World War I, Morton likely performed in blackface for mainly black audiences. William Howland Kenney III, "The Influence of Black Vaudeville on Early Jazz," *The Black Perspective in Music*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1986), 233-248.

[97] First quote at http://www.doctorjazz.freeserve.co.uk/posth.html#hswill 12/9/06. Second in Russell's *Oh, Mr. Jelly!*, 483. In an April '69 letter [of] C.E.S., Russell notes that "Charles did not believe at all that Jelly ever seriously claimed to be white, or wanted to associate only with white people.

[98] The complexity of Morton's racial identity justifies some speculation of how he came to separate his Creole from his black and white identification. He had grown up with the prejudice that French-speaking

Morton's occasional denial of his skin color, and his attitude and actions regarding his (white) French heritage, is further complicated by his Haitian ancestry.[99] Pastras and Gushee agree that Morton and his family (indeed, as many Creoles) believed in the usefulness of Haitian voodoo magic and rituals. Morton's godmother, Eulalie Hécaud, practiced the "white magic" of Haiti (prayers, rituals that are designed to be helpful—to cure illness, for example) and Morton followed her advice and instructions at crucial moments in his life, as when he was convinced that Harrison Smith, a West Indian booking agent and promoter with whom he shared an office and did business, had put a curse on him.[100] Generally, the retention of certain customs while jockeying for position in the dominant culture is typical of diasporas, and Haitian customs in New Orleans (or in the South in general) were no exception.

Creoles were superior to the English-speaking blacks, who came to New Orleans as slaves or emigrated after Emancipation. Both the French and Spanish colonial governments nurtured an environment where Creole ownership of slaves during the nineteenth century was not uncommon, and this historical advantage over Anglophone blacks in New Orleans resulted in the color-line Smith alludes to between Anglophones and Creoles of color. The French Black Code (or Code Noir), a series of edicts that had been signed into law, according to David Ake, "spelled out rights and responsibilities, and rules of conduct regarding the interactions of free persons and slaves in France's New World colonies." Joseph Roach's work has shown that the Code sought to unify the French "'body politic' with 'One Blood,'" and miscegenation arguably a "geopolitical objective of Louis XIV's France." This ensured that French slave owners acculturated their slaves into the Catholic religion and in areas "both public and private." With the Louisiana Purchase, in 1803, the laws were amended and, Ake writes, that although "the Louisiana version of the Code Noir omitted certain articles of the original proclamation providing for the manumission of slaves and racial intermarriage, it did leave open the possibility for the emergence of a group of freed peoples of color in that region… On a more practical level, the ever-increasing mixed-race population tolerated by the relatively liberal policies of both the French and Spanish colonial governments nurtured an environment where skin tone did not necessarily determine social status." In David Ake's "Blue Horizon: Creole Culture and Early New Orleans Jazz." *Echo*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (Fall, 1999), 5.

[99] Gushee, 393. Morton spoke to Alan Lomax about his heritage, saying, "As I can understand, my folks were in the city of New Orleans long before the Louisiana Purchase, and all my folks came directly from the shores of France." Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Pr., 1950), 8-9. Gushee's genealogy has Pierre Monette, Morton's great-grandfather, born in Cap François (today Cap Haitian), and his father's line—the Lamothe's—"quite probably going back to Port-au-Prince or Saint Marc…In addition the roots of the Hécaud family [his godmother's] were Haitian."

[100] Phil Pastras, *Dead Man Blues: Jelly Roll Morton Way Out West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 197, 202. Also see pp. 56-71 for a discussion of voodoo in Haiti and its connection to the Creole communities in New Orleans and environs. Morton's fear was endemic to many Creoles and black Baptists in the South if we look at the preponderance of mojo, hoodoo, and other references to voodoo in recordings of blues artists.

Richard B. Allen, the former curator of the Jazz Archive at Tulane University, wrote that "Morton often insisted to singer Lizzie Miles that he was white."[101] If Morton, as Smith suggests, "scorned the blacks [and] detested the lights [quadroons, octoroons, etc.]," he may well have adopted, for personal and professional reasons, a double consciousness as a blackface comedian. As a Creole and blackface performer, he learned to parody or deride blacks, and may not have perceived any irony if he believed himself white, or as "good" as white. In front of African American audiences, then, Morton's complicated brew of identities would position him to switch from his perceived identity as either a white person or a Creole—both denigrating Anglophone African Americans—to that of a blacked up Creole mocking his own (white) perceptions of black life. It seems unlikely that Morton swallowed whole the mockery of whites' views of blacks by blacks, considering that he claimed, at least in some contexts, to be white. No doubt, in entering into the dichotomous roles of blackface, Morton's perception of the irony would have been complicated by his anxiety of being perceived as black, the ultimate twisting irony being that he would have played to the black tradition of self-mockery while whites who, although he might include himself within their ranks, ultimately rejected him.

As a performer, Morton's early days as a pimp required him to spend hours on the street and to develop an appropriate persona. New Orleans clarinetist Barney Bigard recalls how, later in 1930s New York, he and others would rib Jelly Roll, taking advantage of how his street personality had become a source of entertainment:

> He always loved to fuss and argue with somebody. He knew it all. He was a big shot at that time and could always talk a good fight. He and Chick Webb would

[101] In David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Pr., 2002), 26. Ake writes that Alan Lomax, too, claims that Morton denied his "Negro status."

> stand on a street corner and argue so bad you could have become rich selling tickets… Jelly would tell Chick he [Jelly Roll] was the greatest and Chick would tell him[,] "Yeah? Well come around to see my band tonight. We just got a new arrangement on so and so," and Chick would hum him the whole thing out of his head. Top to bottom. Jelly would say: "That ain't shit. Listen to this one," and he'd go to humming his stuff. People would all gather round. They thought there was a fight going on I guess. It was a show, those two guys, Chick with his little crooked back and Jelly with that damned great diamond stuck in his teeth. I guess ordinary people had never seen nothing like that before.[102]

Webb and Morton regarded their interaction as a cutting contest and, as Bigard implies, the street performance becomes a site for advertising their professional performances. It was not unusual for musicians of Morton's day to run a small sideline as pimps. Armstrong, in his early days in New Orleans, briefly pimped. In *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus uses his identity as a pimp as a metaphor for the commercially compromised jazz musician.[103] Playing the role of the "oversexed" pimp made Morton and Mingus both salesmen and showmen, giving their public personas extroverted persuasiveness.

Stride pianist James P. Johnson describes an especially performative element in Morton's act at a New York club in the 1920s:

> I've seen Jelly Roll Morton, who had a great attitude, approach a piano. He would take his overcoat off. It had a special lining that would catch everybody's eye. So he would turn it inside out instead of folding it, he would lay it lengthwise along the top of the upright very solemnly as if that coat was worth a fortune and had to be handled very tenderly. Then he's [sic] take a silk handkerchief, shake it out to show it off properly, and dust off the stool. He's sit down then, hit his special chord (every tickler had his special trademark chord, like a signal) and he'd be gone! The first rag he'd play was always a spirited one to astound the audience.[104]

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[102] Pastras, 4.
[103] Although much of the text in Miles Davis's autobiography has been disputed, he also claims to have pimped.
[104] Pastras, 7.

Pastras reads Johnson's description as Morton's "priestly persona," invoking Ralph Ellison's idea of the jazz performer as "leader of a public rite," in the sense that the jazz musician/performer plays a similar role to that of a preacher or secular leader in African American culture. Jazzmen defended their way of life "no less 'righteously' than others dedicated themselves to the church," Ellison wrote. Pastras also points to Morton's Roman Catholicism, which would have familiarized him with the role of "priestly persona."[105]

Morton's vaudeville background reappears in the sound effects of his 1920s recordings. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB) got first crack at recording the novelty music, most famously their "Livery Stable Blues" (1917) with its barnyard noises (taken from 1860s and 70s minstrel acts) and publicity photos that featured the performers in mugging grimaces and get-ups. Morton and others also recorded proven and profitable vaudeville tropes. His music has a subversive playfulness punctuated with aural effects from animal, street, and harbor noises. In the mid-1920s, Morton's innovations with the Red Hot Peppers produced unique arrangements that reflected the influence of recorded effects like those of the ODJB where he sought to increase his popularity by reeling in listeners with these effects. In "Billy Goat Stomp," for example, he used the attention-getting device of the opening goat noises and an annoyed voice, "Man, take that goat outta here." (This would have captured listeners of the period simply for the novelty effect of hearing a goat's bleat through a phonograph.) In "Sidewalk Blues" and "Dead Man Blues," he used street and harbor noises. Vaudeville and minstrelsy bits were subject to racial misreadings; the novelty and dramatic hooks Morton enjoyed held derogatory meanings for whites about black culture. With Lew

[105] Ibid., 9.

LaMar's laugh in "Hyena Stomp," Morton's choice of effects promotes, as his generation would, racist stereotypes from his vaudeville days. The hyena's laugh reads as novelty and as bestial (black man as hyena), the inference of primitivism already well inscribed in European/African binaries. Tension exists between Morton's perceptions of his own racial identity, the effects he recorded that whites might perceive as primitive, and by the roles and minstrel tropes he performed as a blackface comedian in the Zip Coon role. This figure, in turn, countered other white representations of black masculinity in American culture, particularly the hypersexualized brute depicted in Dixon's and Griffith's work that, as Williams notes, survived in the media's images of O. J. Simpson in the 1990s. These disparaging stereotypes would be more directly confronted by the generation of jazz performers that included Mingus, Dizzy Gillespie, and Miles Davis. Mingus honored Morton with his own creative interpolation of minstrel tropes in his "Jelly Roll" pieces, as we have seen in Chapter 1. Mingus also punctuated some of his early works with siren and cymbal reproductions of street and harbor noises, notably in "A Foggy Day"—subtitled "in San Francisco."[106]

Armstrong

In the 1910s Louis Armstrong witnessed the minstrel acts of traveling performers passing through New Orleans. Aside from these performances, the sheer joy of experimenting with dramatic gestures and facial expressions were, according to Thomas Brothers,

[106] Reviews by Barry Ulanov, "Tourist in Manhattan" *Down Beat* (October 3, 1956) and Jack Tracy's review of *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (September 5, 1956), [n.p.].

among the favorite games Armstrong enjoyed as a youngster. Brothers explains that, "the degree to which minstrel styles were saturated with racism and social exploitation was overlooked [by black musicians and performers], simply because of the opportunities for performance that minstrelsy provided."[107]

Armstrong onstage often played the self-mocking plantation negro, a business that by the 1920s was already called "Uncle Tomming." He actually began his career in a talent show at the Iroquois Theater in New Orleans where he covered his face with flour. The Iroquois was a nickelodeon and vaudeville theater for African Americans, and this reversal of blacking up signified on white conceptions of black caricature. Later, Gillespie, Davis, and Mingus (among others) would attack Armstrong for his tomming onstage, almost surely unaware of his early signifying efforts. Through this mugging technique, Armstrong perfected a style of shifting quickly between the comic and the serious, a stage sensitivity that reads (like Morton's) as a shift between artist and entertainer. Brothers asserts that Armstrong's behavior stemmed partly from early experiences with racist violence in New Orleans. Armstrong wrote that, as a ten-year old,

> I could see—the Bluffings that those Old *Fat Belly Stinking* very *Smelly Dirty* White Folks were *putting Down*…the poor white Trash were Guzzling down, like water, then when they get so *Damn* Drunk until they'd go out of their minds—then it's Nigger Hunting time. *Any* Nigger. They wouldn't give up until they would find one.[108]

Armstrong liked the idea that his music could ameliorate this kind of violence, Brothers notes. Before an integrated audience in Miami in 1948, Armstrong wrote,

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[107] Thomas Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 231.
[108] Ibid., 17.

> I walked on stage and there I saw something I thought I'd never see. I saw thousands of people, colored and white on the main floor. Not segregated in one row of whites and another row of Negroes…These same society people may go around the corner and lynch a Negro. But while they're listening to our music, they don't think about trouble. What's more they're watching Negro and white musicians play side by side. And we bring contentment and pleasure. I always say, 'Look at the nice taste we leave. It's bound to mean something That's what music is for.'[109]

Armstrong's earlier entertainment roles complicate his integrationist effect on audiences. In "Rhapsody in Black and Blue," a 1932 film short, he was

> hardly recognizable, as he is wearing a sort of faux-leopard skin costume and is growling in an almost pre-verbal manner. He is an intriguing mix of savage and modern minstrel type (amidst the animalistic noises is the line "when you're down under six feet, no more fried chicken will you eat...oh, that'll break your heart!")...[110]

In the verse of the 1930 recording of "Rockin Chair," Armstrong plays plantation slave to (white) Hoagy Carmichael's master,

HC: Fetch me that gin, son.
LA: I ain't got no gin bottle.
HC: Boy, I tan your hide, now.
LA: You gonna tan my hide.
HC: I cain't get from this cabin.[111]

Among other examples, Armstrong played "devil's helper" alongside the early black comedian and film actor Willie Best in *Cabin in the Sky*, Vincent Minneli's all-black cast morality fable, which furthered stereotypes of black males as grinning, dim-witted, dishonest or lazy. In "Now You Has Jazz" Armstrong calls trombonist Trummy Young's vocal "Bing Crosby in Technicolor," a racially rich comment; since Young's vocals were less like Crosby's sound than was his trombone, perhaps Armstrong commented on his

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[109] Brothers, 19.
[110] http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug99/graham/roles.html 7/21/09
[111] *Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra with Hoagy Carmichael*, New York: Okeh Records, 1930. Carmichael wrote the song and lyrics.

substitution of Young, a light-skinned black man, for Crosby, who also sang the tune with him. When, in 1949, Armstrong appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine as the King of the Zulus in the annual Mardi Gras ritual, his good-natured acceptance of the role further annoyed those who thought he pandered to white audiences. A photo inside the issue, showing him in costume of a wig, blackface make-up, and grass skirt and tights personified the feminine and acquiescent black man that for many African Americans was the archetypal Uncle Tom.

Armstrong's diplomatic approach and skirting of conflict came up against ideas of masculinity in the 1940s and the postwar period, when African-American men were more likely to see the hypocrisy in Jim Crow laws at home during and after the war. Black male musicians who came of age during these decades had witnessed or experienced firsthand the U.S. fight against fascism. They expressed their outrage for unequal treatment in their own country with a faster, angrier music and a refusal to accept the kinds of characterizations their forefathers had tolerated.

Minstrelsy legacies in the Postwar era

In the 1940s, Jon Panish notes, the ill-treatment of black soldiers and the continued violence toward blacks during and after WWII contributed to the bitter way beboppers expressed defiance in their music. Lott's dichotomy of positive and negative attraction can only problematically be applied here: even as positive reviews helped to gain interest in the music and its intellectual practitioners, an opposing force emerged where "[o]utside those locales [the clubs where they played] most [jazz musicians] faced

the same violence and terror confronted by the typical black man of the era."[112] Racial prejudice experienced by black jazz musicians during the first third of the century continued to hound their successors. According to Panish, bebop drummer Max Roach believed musicians in the 1940s countered prejudice by playing new tunes over old changes in order to withhold royalty money from record companies and white Tin Pan Alley composers. Black bebop musicians, to echo Panish quoting Gillespie, not only disparaged white appropriation of black music, but held accountable those black musicians who pandered to white audiences. Gillespie recalls,

> I criticized Louis for other things, such as his "plantation image." We didn't appreciate that about Louis Armstrong, and if anybody asked me about a certain public image of him, handkerchief over his head, grinning in the face of white racism, I never hesitated to say I didn't like it. I didn't want the white man to expect me to allow the same things Louis Armstrong did.[113]

Bebop musicians viewed themselves as artists, shunning the entertainment identity Armstrong embraced.[114] Their resistance to entertaining was also represented by a serious comportment that drew much comment on musicians such as Gillespie (despite his goofing around onstage, as will be discussed) and, later, on Miles Davis.

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[112] Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 11. Panish quotes Dizzy Gillespie's recollection of an incident with Oscar Pettiford where the two were attacked in 1944 by white sailors near the Onyx Club on 52nd street. The sailors' aggression stemmed from their seeing, or supposedly seeing, the musicians accompanying a white woman.

[113] Panish, 12-13. Panish quotes both Roach's and Gillespie's statements. Gillespie, Panish writes, later altered his, saying he had "misjudged" Armstrong's behavior.

[114] An example of the musicians' refusal to entertain is in Eddie Bert's account of a gig in 1943 where Oscar Pettiford refused to be a song-and-dance man: "We had two basses for a while, Chubby Jackson and Oscar Pettiford, until one night Chubby told Oscar that they were going down front to do a feature and a dance, which is when Oscar said, "I'm a bass player—bye!" Gordon Jack's *Fifties Jazz Talk: An Oral Retrospective*. Studies in Jazz, No. 47 (Lanaham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), 33.

The mainstream press cast Gillespie as the intellectual and the observer, the new alternative to the minstrel figure.[115] But Gillespie, whose name became synonymous with bebop in the mid-1940s, acted out the "clown" even as he chastised Armstrong for his tomming. Scott Deveaux writes that Gillespie,

> in reaching beyond the circumscribed world of the jazz virtuoso to the broader sphere of commercial entertainment, … discovered his own accommodation with audience expectation—what he later called "my own way of Tomming."[116]

Deveaux sees Gillespie as an updated Cab Calloway ("it is not very far from 'hi-de-ho' to 'ooop-bop-sh'bam'") or Armstrong. Gillespie's quick-change artistry could very likely be attributed to the trickster role. The irony of Gillespie's identities as entertainer and artiste, switching as occasion demanded, serves as the mid-century version of Morton's or Armstrong's perceived identities as entertainers who were also serious musicians, but who played down the latter identity. Gerald Early argues that Armstrong and his black audiences did not conceive of European standards of art and artists, and that his identity as an entertainer required that he please his audiences by any means necessary.[117]

As he moved away from the old stereotypes, Gillespie stood on Armstrong's shoulders, and his image of the serious, hip, intellectual jazz musician—alternating with his good-humored hype and onstage clowning—earned him some criticism, though not as much as Armstrong received from the beboppers. In the new era, by parlaying his hipster public persona with his musicianship, Gillespie could move fluidly from entertainer to artiste without judgment. Beboppers still respected Armstrong for his artistry, as they did

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[115] In Esquire Magazine (October, 1947). See also the *New York Times, Time, Life, Metronome*, and *Down Beat*.
[116] DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop,* 435.
[117] Gerald Early, *Tuxedo Junction: Essays on American Culture* (New York: Ecco Press, 1989), 296-97. Quoted in *The Birth of Bebop*, 26.

Gillespie, but Gillespie's intellectual persona steered an alternative course, one where he managed to capitalize on his predecessor's success while avoiding the hostility of his own peers.

Less than a decade later, Miles Davis resisted the entertainment practices of older jazz musicians by reportedly ignoring his audience. The idea that he shut out his audience, he later said, was simply one perspective; he maintained he was simply focusing on the musicians and the music, and that if his audiences misinterpreted this turn as rudeness, it was an inevitable by-product. He believed that the audience "wouldn't be there if they didn't want to hear some music, so you don't have to con them into believing that this music is great."[118]

Musicians dealt incongruously with their perceptions of each other. Gillespie, for instance, may have disparaged Armstrong in private and public, yet he still grinned and clowned on the bandstand. And audiences of both races differed in how they perceived African American jazz musicians. The particular perceptions can usefully be distinguished in this discussion by examining the ways in which these often unconscious and conflicting views impacted Mingus's sense of agency and self-determinacy within the cultural contingencies of race. Mingus was a *reactor* to the legacies of minstrelsy as well as an *actor* in his critique of the black male entertainer, on and offstage, where he expressed himself in discursive and paradoxical ways to a white "hipster" audience. In "The Clown" and "Eat That Chicken," Mingus explicitly addresses both his predecessors and his own seemingly incongruous behavior as bandleader and entertainer.

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[118] In Art Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musician to Musician Interviews* (New York: Perigree Books, 1971). Quoted in Robert K. McMichael's "'We Insist—Freedom Now!': Black Moral Authority, Jazz, and the Changeable Shape of Whiteness." *American Music*, vol. 16, No. 4. (Winter, 1998), 395.

Mingus in the act

Confronting Black minstrel stereotypes

In defining and claiming his own racial identity, Mingus initially came up against a confounding set of beliefs. As a boy, when his father attempted to teach his children that their lighter skin made them superior to darker blacks, Mingus and his sister Grace were upset because she, having the darkest looks of the family, was made to feel inferior. And, because of his multi-ethnic look, Mingus experienced the alienation of prejudice from both blacks and whites, in his neighborhood and at school. Later, he wrote:

> I am Charles Mingus. Half-black man, yellow man - half yellow - not even yellow, not even white enough to pass for nothing but black and not too light enough to be called white. I claim that I am a negro.[119]

Where Morton disowned his black identity, Mingus early on aligned himself within the black community in Watts, California, where in his teens he began to identify primarily with his black heritage. Priestley believes that "what evidence there is suggests that it was a conscious choice to be an underdog instead of an outcast, and that, having made an intellectual decision to relinquish his father's delusions of racial superiority, Mingus felt compelled to expose the similar delusions of white society."[120] Hence, Mingus responded in his autobiography, his public writings, and in his music not only to racial prejudice toward blacks, but to intraracial prejudice, and the stereotyping and invisibility he experienced as a black male musician.

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[119] Mingus, *Other Voices: The Meditations of Charles Mingus*. CBC-TV - Toronto, Canada - 31st October, 1964. IJS Mingus clippings file, [n.p.].
[120] Priestley, 8.

During the brief period as a sideman with Armstrong, Kid Ory and Barney Bigard, among others, Mingus became versed in the conventions of early jazz traditions. Working with Armstrong, however, left a bitter taste: "…although Mingus was full of admiration for Louis's instrumental creativity, he could not stomach his facial grimaces and apparent self-abasement before white audiences."[121] Mingus came face to face with the legacies of minstrelsy in a respected musical elder whose wild popularity with white audiences promulgated racial stereotypes.

Mingus quit Armstrong's band in the early 1940s, partly because he was too uncomfortable with Armstrong's entertainment style, but also because he was unwilling to tolerate Jim Crow laws and ill-treatment of blacks in the South.[122] His own reputation became associated with reverse discrimination, but he "denies that Crow Jim exists,"[123] wrote the interviewer of an article in *Time* magazine in 1962, in an overstated claim.[124] When asked whether he believed in Crow Jim, Mingus retorted: "How can you talk about Crow Jim and look at Mississippi?"[125] saying implicitly, How can whites claim reverse discrimination when white violence *of course* causes African Americans to withdraw into their own communities? Mingus illuminated the wide disparity between the effectiveness of Jim Crow and Crow Jim practices when he chastised Cannonball Adderley for his shortsightedness in criticizing blacks who refused to hire white musicians.

> Yet he [Adderley] goes about commenting on Negros' crow jim against the white so-called jazzmen as though crow jim were as effective as the ancient nooses

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[121] Priestley, 19.
[122] Ibid.. Priestley relates that Mingus knew of Jim Crow attitudes in the South second-hand.
[123] The term "Crow Jim" here refers to reverse racism; white club owners hiring only black musicians, for example, because of the "authenticity" associated with the music.
[124] [n.a.] "Crow Jim." *Time* (October 19, 1962), [n.p.].
[125] "Crow Jim." The writer adds: "To younger jazzmen a great musician like Louis Armstrong is suspect—instead of hopping on the freedom bus he has been content to remain an 'Uncle Tom.'"

> around the black man's neck that isn't too far removed from the count of Hitler's destruction of the Jews.[126]

The convolutions of racial identity illustrate the hall of mirrors negotiated by all—Mingus, his contemporaries and predecessors. In the following passage, he focused on the divide-and-conquer tactics of the music industry, the white copyists (the modern form of blackface), and those in his own camp who remained blind to how they abetted in their own oppression.

> Where is the jazz industry of wealth that the Negro is able to crow jim out of in the same manner that the white system jim crowed Ornette Coleman out of by crushing him into obscurity and poverty when that same system saw themselves about to build another *true* Bird? That sent the white boys into poverty and seclusion trying to figure out how in the fuck he did it all. And as long as they couldn't [figure it out] they followed him around, copied his playing and living until they could get a foothold on Bird's style the same as Stan Getz long had on Lester Young, which extended well into Lester's pockets, that sticky little hand that was even inobvious to Prez up until his dying time at the Alvin Hotel when I last saw him.[127]

For Mingus, the reality of the jazz industry meant that a black male jazz musician had no guarantee his artistic development would be either recognized or rewarded.

> He [Lester] was surprised that Stan Getz paid Jimmy Riney [Raney] more money than I received from Stan. But the funny thing was that I was paid more than the man Stan copied – Lester Young – in Birdland when Lester came to visit "old Stanley" as he called him.
>
> How can an Uncle Tom not see his foolish siding and selling of his black brother when he closes his eyes to the truth that obviously held [him] in inobvious slavery long past Hannibal and the Moors' conquering of the white flesh[,] and disarming splendor of pride and self worship is what reversed us to this present situation.[128]

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[126] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, Mss., (CMC) 103.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.

Unafraid to voice his perceptions in even more sensitive racial territory, Mingus confronted the intraracial knowledge that a black man is forced to turn on his own kind, given white male fears of miscegenation. In his nuanced critique that addressed southern white male fears of black males,[129] he outlined his perceptions of black musicians by means of a fictionalized version of his conversation with friend/colleague Fats Navarro. In his discussion of miscegenation, Mingus used minstrel stereotypes to ridicule the racist practice of reducing black men to their sexuality:

> You take a man like Louis Armstrong. See? I dig him. He hurts the white man more than Paul Robeson 'cause they don't believe Robeson even exists."
> "What you talking 'bout, Mingus? You changing the subject?"
> "No, Fats. Wait. Now add Stepin Fetchit and Fats Waller. Add them all into one man, a black man. The white man has his sick images of the black man, which exist in the stereotyped caricatured Negro that he terms 'nigger.' Now, I guarantee you to let me take your southern white man in one of my group therapy classes and show him the truth—the phenomenon of the black man and the white woman. I guarantee I can either rehabilitate them completely or send them to the morgue, killed by their own minds.[130]

Mingus also argued that whites ridiculing a "false image" of the black man as a subservient naïf equated with real performers such as Fetchit, Armstrong or Waller, illustrated how whites—and black men—work out their fears. He wrote,

> The false image he has of slobbering Stepin Fetchit, Willie Best, Louis Armstrong's 'Yas suh, boss', Fats Waller's cigar, checked vest, derby, patent leather shoes with spats—when actually the man in the next room with one of the daughters making advances by laying her head in his lap is a black dignitary, an Oxford graduate, which means little to you or me 'cause brainwashing [a] black man that much you might as well finish the job. Toss him some instant bleach and slap a blonde wig on his head an' he'll call me or Louis Armstrong a nigger and tom.[131]

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[129] This is not to say that Mingus meant to exclude, or that we couldn't include, non-southern white males.
[130] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, Mss., (CMC) 752-53.
[131] Ibid.

Willie Best, Armstrong, Stepin Fetchit, and Waller were entertainers who played to vaudeville and minstrel caricatures. Mingus compared Best, Fetchit, and Armstrong to Paul Robeson, a powerful figure in film and concert halls who, for whites, represented admired and feared black masculinity. White audiences accepted the caricatures because they conformed to their conceptions of traditional black entertainers; Robeson worked in the professional white world of "high art" music, where he threatened their bigoted notions of where black artists belong. Robeson's membership in the American Communist Party goes beyond his professional boundaries and, in mid-century Cold War climate, beyond the limits of acceptable citizenship.[132] Were Robeson white, Mingus seems say, his membership might be grounds for an F.B.I. dossier, but because he is black he is neither fully recognized as an artist nor as an entertainer—and so rhetorically does not exist.[133]

Whites and white-identified blacks confine black performers to roles either of emasculating self-abasement or hypermasculine danger. In either case, whites are simply playing out their own repressed sexual desire. Mingus wrote,

> See, Fats, Louis Armstrong ain't no tom, Stepin Fetchit, or actually nobody. They, you, me all serve as a scale of balance that always keeps the total to the truth of life[,] there for anyone who cares to read the scale total. And those that conform to their own lies as the truth of the world is living dead when he could on the other hand be living alive.[134] [emphasis in the original.]

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[132] Paul Robeson, actor, athlete, Basso cantante concert singer, and activist, who was enormously popular in from the 1920s to the 70s. Mingus refers to the constant F.B.I. and HUAC investigation from 1941-1974, surrounding Robeson, who was a member of the American Communist Party.
[133] Salim Washington has suggested that Mingus also refers to Robeson's invisibility, in Ellison's sense, as being perceived merely as a personality or stereotype.
[134] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, Mss., (CMC) 256.

Mingus's critique of white avoidance of this "scale total" reflects his desire for white males/audiences to face their fear of miscegenation, and for black musicians to resist the entertainer stereotypes that whites project onto them. His "conversation" with Navarro called for an alternative black male performer, one that, as Rustin has said, can "work through/act out his racial/sexual anxieties." Rustin emphasizes Mingus's internalization of these categories of masculinity as founded on miscegenation, the taboo, "which his father beat into him literally and figuratively," while noting the problematic layer between black and black that Mingus included in his discussion.[135]

But if white audiences had been unable to understand the minstrel caricatures as well as the implicitly contradictory role played by Robeson, could Mingus's more explicitly conflicted alternative performer lead audiences to really see *him*? Mingus sought in his own entertainment style a middle way, but unlike the more diplomatic Armstrong, who sought to ameliorate violence between the races with his music, Mingus demonstrated for his audiences the kinds of cultural and identity politics of the 1950s that had relegated him to contend with ingrained stereotypes of a racist jazz industry. He made his struggle their problem, too.

Mingus's civil rights awareness gave him the agency to stand up to Armstrong's performative solutions, but Armstrong as a trumpeter had more star appeal than Mingus, who, as a bass player could not impress audiences with displays of high-note virtuosity. Instead, Mingus relied on his interactions with his players and on his audience rapport to address his concerns. Where Armstrong's soloistic showmanship could obscure the minstrel stereotypes he portrayed to audiences, Mingus sought to educate his audiences (black and white) about racial inequality still present in the jazz industry, and for this he

[135] Rustin, 79, 81.

relied on invoking and subverting identifiable minstrel tropes and devices. In doing so, however, he had to contend with a 1950s climate that had grafted a new layer onto the white envy that Lott identifies in early minstrelsy and its aftermath.

Mid-50s minstrelsy and the jazz industry

The segregationist politics that emerged from a deeply entrenched racism had just begun to crack open in the 1940s and 50s, even though white violence toward blacks still ran rampant in the mid-1950s. Jon Panish distinguishes traditional racism from a new racial ideology overlapping the 1950s from the New Deal era of the 1930s. The new ideology promoted the notion of "race-neutrality" or "colorblindness," which presumed that assimilation by African Americans into white society was natural.

> Whereas the previously dominant paradigm of "scientific racism" contended that racial difference was not only biological but also determined the development of culture, the new color-blindness discourses argued that while physical, racial difference was biological, it had no influence on individual or group attributes.[136]

Challenges to the legitimacy of this ideology were made from "'subordinated' discourses," in particular against claims that an equal exchange existed between the white bohemians and counter-culturalists—Mingus's audiences for the most part—who flocked to jazz clubs, and African American artists in the mid-1950s.[137] "Whiteness remained the *invisible* norm," subordinating "the process by which these 'black values' were

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[136] Panish, 6-7. This outlook "emanated from the work of such scholars as Boas, Benedict, Myrdal…[who] encouraged public policy makers to ignore race."

[137] Panish, 11, 21-22. Panish refers to the "mostly white countercultural movement," of the 1950s and 60s, and, before that, the "Beat generation," (Mingus played to both audiences). The texts of the more famous Beats in the 1950s, Jack Kerouac and Norman Mailer, had enormous influence on the students who bathed themselves in Beat ideology during the height of civil rights movement. Panish notes 60s activist Todd Gitlin's account of the "romantic racialization" by the youth culture participating in the Civil Rights movement in the South of the African American communities—poor, uneducated, yet "close to the earth," and bound by struggle.

incorporated into 'mainstream' American postwar culture."[138] Thus, Panish argues, any white representation of African American culture is necessarily "distorted and decontextualized… It's extremely unlikely that these black values were transmitted through Euro American outsiders [counter-culturalists] into mainstream American culture without being fundamentally and ideologically altered by those Euro American mediators."[139] While white counter-culturists believed, then, that they absorbed these values, and that they came out just as they had been expressed by black people, in fact, the moment they were expressed by white people they were no longer black.

The counter-culturalists' blindness to their own misreadings of black values clouds the love/envy margin of Lott's "identification-misrecognition" dialectic. Panish sees a shift from the idea of mid-century white minstrelsy reflecting racial hierarchy, to one which signifies on whites themselves, in a distorted mirror. Mahar, however, might argue that the socially aware and the satirist, including the white minstrel, had always, on some level, seen themselves as the butt of the joke. In either event, Panish further points out that

> Like minstrel performers and audiences during the nineteenth century, those white men around the mid-twentieth century who were attracted to black men and black culture expressed their attraction in images that announced simultaneously their indebtedness to and their mastery over black human and cultural resources. Moreover, as with the Civil War-era phenomenon, the cold war-era incarnation featured frequent appearances of such features as homosociality, romanticization, sexism, stereotyping, primitivism, economic appropriation and exploitation, and vicarious pleasure.[140]

[138] Panish, 8-9.
[139] Panish, 20.
[140] Panish, xiii.

This perspective reflects white guilt and mastery over the appropriation of (their ideas of) black cultural practice.

White and black consciousness of integrationist culture had no small effect on the kinds of audiences Mingus played to. In this environment, the part of Mingus's act that relied on provocative challenges to the audience was a different kind of survival technique than the one of Armstrong enveloping the performance space with communal good cheer, although it is too simplistic to say that later generations of black male musicians had it better or worse. Liberal white audiences differed from earlier periods, McMichael observes, "mainly because the situation in the 1960s relied on a rearticulated concept…that resisted reproducing racist stereotypes of blacks as primitive, noble savages." He notes that the performance spaces were black-defined in the growing integrationist subculture of jazz, a "historically unique co-presence of black autonomy and authority and a predominant (but not universal) white affirmation of black authority…"[141]

McMichael has also observed that, in the mid-century, an unprecedented number of jazz programs on TV—a number as yet unmatched—reflected the "sociopolitical emergence of black culture into majority culture, which corresponded with changing mainstream attitudes toward blackness."[142] Mingus had two television engagements in 1960, one where he appeared with Roach and Randy Weston on NBC.[143] Even as musicians got together to do something where blacks defined roles and methods and

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[141] McMichael, 392-393.
[142] McMichael, 386. McMichael lists Robert Herridge's *The Sound of Jazz*, and Timex's "All Star Jazz Shows" on CBS (Dec. 1957-Jan 1959), Ralph Gleason's *Jazz Casual* (PBS), Steve Allen's *Jazz Scene U.S.A.*, hosted by Oscar Brown, Jr.; broadcasts of the 1960 and '61 Newport Jazz Festival into two dozen segments each year.
[143] Priestley, 130.

performance standards,[144] the development failed to influence the economics of jazz; black musicians still struggled to gain the kind of attention and financial success enjoyed by whites. As Mingus wrote in the early 1960s, "I am Charles Mingus - to me I am nothing. I am Charles Mingus, a famed jazz musician but not famed enough to make a living in society that is in America, my home."[145]

In the early 1950s, Mingus and Max Roach had established their own record label (Debut) in an expression of the frustration they felt about unequal performance and recording opportunities experienced by African American musicians. Mingus had also founded a publishing imprint (Chazz-Marr). Both companies were essentially run by Celia Mingus, his white wife at the time, while Mingus was busy writing and performing.[146] (Morton had also established his own publishing company, Tempo, in 1939, long after unwittingly signing away the legal rights to his music to the Melrose Brothers publishers.) By the late 50s, after some success, Debut had folded.

Mingus's limited success in the music business financially and artistically drove him to exhibit a kind of madness, in the sense of an understandable anger and of his turning in on himself, unable to cope with the kind of race madness society expected him to swallow. In a so-called act, he put down Jimmy Knepper (who was white) onstage; what Priestley calls reverse tomming:

> When Mingus again visited the West Coast in 1961 with Jimmy Knepper in the band, [journalist] Patricia Willard recalls that: "He was going on and on to the audience about this white guy in the group, and about what a drag it was to tour down South with him. And they hadn't even been down South! A friend said to Mingus afterwards, 'Why are you saying all these terrible things about this nice

[144] McMichael, 386.
[145] Mingus, Quoted in *Other Voices*, [n.p.].
[146] See chapter III of Rustin's dissertation for discussion of these enterprises and Celia's role.

> guy, who really loves you?' And Mingus's reply was, 'Don't mess with my act!'[147]

The act recalls Armstrong's early bit of whiteface in the Iroquois Theater; in these bits Mingus and Armstrong reverse the conventions of tomming by challenging white expectations of the black entertainer. Mingus berated his musicians in order to get the audience's attention. As trumpeter Ted Curson recounts:

> For instance, like Eric Dolphy was getting a lot of applause, he made him go into the dressing room and play where nobody could see, just hear the saxophone. Or if a chick came in and she dug you or winked at you, he would take you to what we called the 'whipping post'. Like all the songs started with the bass intro, and if you go to the 'whipping post', he would change the key and you wouldn't know this unless you had perfect pitch. So you would get wiped out. Or he would leave you on the bandstand to play by yourself for like 20 minutes.[148]

Chronicling the failure of the music industry to recognize him artistically or financially for his contributions, Mingus threw his outrage into his music and brought it to his audience's attention in whatever ways he could. He acknowledges that he used bad behavior to get attention:

> After going (to Bellevue) on my own, and the news got out, I drew more people. In fact, I even used to bounce people out of the clubs to get a little more attention, because I used to think that if you didn't get a write up, you wouldn't attract as many people as you would with a lot of publicity. But now I see what harm that kind of write-up has done to me, and I'm trying to undo it.[149]

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[147] Priestley, 87.
[148] Gary Giddens, Interview with Ted Curson, (CMC). Gary Giddens and Bob Rusch, transcribed by Bob Rusch.
[149] Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, Mss., (CMC) 343.

Lectures from the pulpit

Mingus's lectures to his audience convey an awareness that both musicians and audience were conscious of, and interested in, the cultivation of an integrationist subculture. He responded to audiences, and a music industry that, on some level, expected black jazz musicians to entertain, by inverting conventional entertainer behavior, demanding his predominantly white audiences to shut up and listen. Reflecting his autobiographical insistence on three "real" selves in *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus's alternative to Armstrong and Davis refused the white construction of black masculinity, neither kow-towing in the way he perceived that Armstrong had, nor silently resisting as did Davis. He acted out a narrative of personal struggle with race rather than acting out a personality onstage, or as a quiet enigma. Onstage Mingus, as Rustin puts it, "performed an identity and how that story is itself participating in a series of performances for insights about the subject of race and masculinity."[150]

In a lecture at the Five Spot, Mingus expressed a performative identity that would pour into his music the denials and erasures of racial difference for which he chastises his self-congratulatorily "integrated" audience:

> You, my audience, are all a bunch of poppaloppers. A bunch of tumbling weeds tumbling 'round, running from your subconscious . . . minds. Minds? Minds that won't let you stop to listen to a word of artistic or meaningful truth. . . . You don't want to see your ugly selves, the untruths, the lies you give to life.

He continues:

> So you come to me, you sit in the front row, as noisy as can be. I listen to your millions of conversations, sometimes pulling them all up and putting them together and writing a symphony. But you never hear that symphony. . . . All of you sit there, digging yourselves and each other, looking around hoping to be seen and observed as hip. You become the object you came to see, and you think you're important and digging jazz when all the time all

[150] Rustin, 70.

> you're doing is digging a blind, deaf scene that has nothing to do with any kind of music at all.[151]

Mingus made clear that his political views were part of his music; he reacted internally from his sense of multiple selves, however, and Rustin observes that he was clear "there is no separation between the music and the man; that the man does not privilege his race over his craft."[152] His ideal audiences would be those who entered into the music as spiritual participants as much as discerning listeners. In many of his performances and on recordings such as "Better Git It in Your Soul" (*Ah Um*, 1959) and "Ecclusiastics" (*Oh Yeah!,* 1961), Mingus plays the preacher—perhaps a blues preacher to Morton's priestly persona. In the liner notes of the Atlantic LPs, Nat Hentoff quotes Mingus: "The blues was in the churches—moaning and riffs and that sort of thing between the audience and the preacher."[153] The portmanteau word "ecclusiastics" blends the title of the Old Testament book, "Ecclesiastes" (its English translation sometimes "preacher," or "the book of the preacher"), with the meaning of the word "enthusiastic" (deriving from the Greek meaning, "possessed by, or full of, God").[154] At times Mingus the onstage preacher casts his audience as a congregation needing to be led. By insulting his flock he would guide them to grasp the nature of his art.

McMichael has pointed out that Mingus "reached a wide variety of audiences in the late 1950s and early 1960s and regularly connected his performances with civil rights struggles at home and abroad through composition titles, spoken word pieces, and in liner

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[151] Quoted in Saul, 33.
[152] Rustin, 99.
[153] Nat Hentoff, liner notes, *Oh, Yeah!*, Atlantic, SD-1377, 1961.
[154] Horace J. Maxile, Jr., "Say What: Topics, Signs and Signification in African-American Music," (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2001), 75. Maxile defines "ecclesiastes" as part of his analysis of Mingus's piece.

notes he wrote accompanying his recordings."[155] In his Town Hall concert in 1962, using a motif emulating a slave worksong, Mingus vocalized a poem of black uplift in "Freedom: Part One,"

> This mule ain't from Moscow, this mule ain't from the South,
> But this mule's got some learning – mostly mouth to mouth.
> This mule could be called stubborn and lazy.
> But in a clever sort of way, this mule's been
> waiting and learning and planning,
> And working for a sacred kind of day.[156]

And in "Don't Let it Happen Here," (1965), the spoken-word composition using a text by Martin Niemôller (1892-1984), Mingus makes his audience aware of their compliance with oppression:

> One day they came and took the communists and I said nothing because I was not a communist. Then one day they took the people of the Jewish faith and I said nothing because I have no faith…left. One day they came and took the unionists and I said nothing because I was not a unionist […]Then one day they came and they took *me*…and I didn't say nothing because I was as guilty as they were for not saying that all men have a right to freedom on any land. I was as guilty of genocide as you, all of you, for you know that when a man is free and when you set him free from his slavery…so I charge you all with genocide, the same as I. Of the 18 million dead Jews, *eight-teen* million *dead* people.[157]

In many of his recordings we hear expressions of Mingus working out his racial performer identity: the bemoaning, disparaging, laughing with and at his audience, and at the desperate measures and ingenuity necessary to get his message across. Nowhere is this more striking than in "Eat That Chicken" and in "The Clown."

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[155] McMichael, 386.
[156] Mingus, *Town Hall Concert*, United Artists UAJ 15024, 1962.
[157] Charles Mingus, *Music Written for Monterey, 1965 Not Heard…Played in its Entirety at UCLA*, Sue Mingus Music, 2008.

Revising minstrelsy tropes

> This so-called "tribute to Fats Waller" is one of the worst exhibitions of poor taste and meanness that I've ever heard. Fats will be remembered as a musician much longer than Mingus will as a social philosopher, and if *Eat That Chicken* represents the level to which Mingus' musical taste and talent have sunk, maybe he'd be happier in a minstrel show.[158]—Carlton Smith

> The story as I told it to Jean Shepherd, is about a clown who tried to please people - like most jazz musicians do - but whom nobody liked until he was dead. My version of the story ended with the clown blowing his brains out, with the people laughing and finally being pleased because they thought it was part of the act. I liked the way Jean changed the ending; it leaves more up to the listener.[159] –Mingus

The 1957 recording of Mingus's spoken-word composition "The Clown" was also the album title of his second recording venture with Atlantic Records who had produced his *Pithecanthropus Erectus* album in 1956.[160] Mingus was thirty-five years old and Atlantic's founding Ertegun brothers were challenging major labels by nurturing new talent. Along with "The Clown," he included the confrontational "Haitian Fight Song" on the February 12th recording session.

Jean Shepherd, as narrator of Mingus's "The Clown," describes the title character as someone who "just wants to make people laugh," and who is languishing artistically and professionally because of the inability of his audiences to comprehend his intense emotions—reflecting Mingus's plight. The composer challenges his audience's blindness to racist stereotypes of the black entertainer (or artists of any color, seen through Shepherd's white minstrel), and white appropriation of black music and musicians

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[158] Carlton Smith, "Overdone Chicken," 9-27-1962. IJS Mingus clippings file, [no pub.].
[159] Charles Mingus, *The Clown*, Atlantic Records, 1957. Liner notes.
[160] "The Clown" was one of several spoken word pieces by Mingus, which include Langston Hughes's poem "Weary Blues" (read by the poet) "Scenes in the City," and "The Chill of Death."

through their complicit approval of the clown's tragic end: the doom of entertainers who must please their audiences.

In early white minstrelsy, "[c]lowns and harlequins are as often lovable butts of humor as devious producers of it; slave-tale tricksters are frequently (though not always) champions, heroes, backdoor victors for the weak over the strong."[161] (The Virginia Minstrels, who supposedly started the first minstrel group in 1843, got their start as circus clowns.) The clown and the trickster figure sometimes overlapped in minstrel shows, especially later in African American performances: in African oral tradition the trickster is known for disobeying normal rules and conventional behavior, cleverly manipulating the language in order to overcome a restrictive hierarchy or systematic oppression from within. Lawrence Levine has written that

> The traits of the trickster are important also in the considerable number of toasts centering on pimps and whores. In their study of black pimps in San Francisco, Christina and Richard Milner concluded that the pimp's attraction as a hero stems from the fact that he is a trickster. "He must be able to observe the society around him with honesty and awareness...pimps and hustlers depend for their livelihood on an awareness of social forces and an understanding of the human psyche."[162]

As clown and social satirist, Mingus's biographer Gene Santoro notes, Mingus had related himself to prophets of Vedanta and Hindu religion, the "holy fools, manifestations of the changeless reality behind the impermanent world."[163] With his exaggerated features and whiteface makeup, the figure in "The Clown" presented Mingus's satirical self-portrait. He used a simulated audience on this recording, the sounds of applause and laughter clearly evoking an ersatz live entertainment and serving

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[161] Lott, *Love and Theft*, 22.
[162] Levine, Lawrence, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 382.
[163] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 52.

as part of Mingus signifying voice on his "hip" audiences. Formally, several episodes of the tonal waltztime theme alternate with the more dissonant, polyphonic melodies of Mingus's progressive ear. The latter represents the clown's artistic sensibility in a harmonically complex style, which also emanates in the text ("*Oranges and greens and yellows in him, all these colors*") and from Mingus's orchestration.

Mingus's clown plays the Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, and American Legion Hall—popular community service clubs to which many middle-class, white Americans belonged in the 1950s. This Midwestern, white audience would be the parent generation of those bohemians for whom Mingus performed. "*But he just wasn't makin' it*," the narrator sighs. In the narrative, the clown's act features a seal that accompanies him up and down a ladder as he plays "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean" on a "B-Flat Sears Roebuck, model 1322A plastic bugle." The act fails to amuse or to get much attention until one night when the seal gets sick onstage. The audience laughs and, although the clown doesn't find this funny, he's glad to get more attention. He gets more laughs in Dubuque, Iowa, when he falls and bloodies his nose, the self-mockery of the dimwit caricature. He begins to change his act in order to cater to his audiences' tastes, hiring a girl to throw a sack of flour on his head. This act "*breaks them up—but not like Dubuque!"* Dubuque, a city that for bohemian New Yorkers exemplifies the Midwest's lack of sophistication—and perhaps the parents they flee—also connoted to urbanites, particularly African Americans, the dominant, white, mainstream culture. Soon,

> *All the colors, greens, oranges, yellows, aren't as bright as they used to be. But he just wanted to make the audience laugh. They were laughin' all right. The dough starting to come in with bigger towns, Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh—big towns.*
>
> (The climax:)

About three quarters through his act the rope broke and he was down. He looks at the audience. They're rolling in the aisles… This was bigger than Dubuque!... He really had em goin… This was the last one.

(Trombone comments with short, descending, broken glisses, then alto sax with waltz theme.)

He really knew now! But it was too late. They were laughing. But now he knew. That was the end of the clown. And you shoulda seen the bookings come in. The Palladium, MCA, William Morris. He really knew, now! He really knew. But it was too late.

(Moaning in bass and sax.)

He really knew, now.

(Long pause.)

William Morris sends regrets.

The composer refers to the exploitation of artists by the Music Corporation of America and the William Morris agency that had alienated many black artists.

In a piece where he sought to mirror audiences to themselves as the "poppalopper" crowd, undiscerning except for their own enjoyment, Mingus satirizes the jazz musician as prostitute. But in another sense he is the pimp selling the story of a prostitute. As if to connect prostitution to vaudeville, Mingus has his horns produce sounds reminiscent of the late nineteenth-century recorded effects by vaudevillians and minstrels, and those later made by Morton. The text makes explicit the fate of performers less fortunate than a star such as Armstrong, those closer to Mingus and to the then-obscure Morton.

Mingus's comments on the legacy of a music confined to the function of white entertainment in "The Clown" is complicated by "Eat That Chicken." On the recording (*Oh Yeah*, 1961), we hear him signifying on another minstrel figure that has survived into

the twentieth century: the Zip Coon, later the urban black dandy and the pimp. Mingus evidently felt strongly about invoking this trope, and probably enjoyed making his audiences uncomfortable; he used "Eat That Chicken" as his theme song for many of his appearances in 1962, including his signature sign-off on the broadcasts from *Birdland* in New York City.[164] The lyrics speak to precursor texts—the derogatory "coon" songs of the 19th and early 20th centuries—and the entertainment aura of "Eat That Chicken" calls on early jazz and minstrelsy. The chicken trope had been prevalent in twentieth-century popular songs, some of which Mingus would have heard. It is found, for instance, in Cab Calloway's rendition of Babe Wallace's "Chicken's Nothin But a Bird" (1940), and goes further back in recorded music to white minstrels, for example, Arthur Collins's recording of "Chicken Reel" (1911). A more remarkable precursor by white minstrel Frank Dumont, "Bake Dat Chicken Pie" was recorded by Collins with Byron G. Harlan—a popular minstrel duo of the day—in 1907.[165]

Their related titles begin to describe similarities between Mingus's "Eat That Chicken" and Dumont's "Bake Dat Chicken Pie," and although Mingus would not have known about Collins and Harlan's recording, he may very well have heard or known about the comedian Lenny Bruce's rendition of it. Sue Mingus recalls that, "[Charles] liked and admired Lenny Bruce's intelligence and outspokenness—not surprising for

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[164] As a response to the ethos of the Old South, "Eat That Chicken" is not an isolated instance, Mingus also responded to the traditional song, "Shortnin' Bread," in his "Cumbia and Jazz Fusion," (1977): "Who said mama's little baby likes shortnin' bread? Who said mama's little baby likes shortnin', shortnin' bread? That's some lie some white man upped an' said! Mama's little baby likes truffles! Mama's little baby likes caviar!" Then drummer Dannie Richmond adds "Diamonds! Diamonds in the nose! Diamonds in the toes! Diamonds all our mama's little baby!' And 'Schools! So our kids won't be raised to act like no fools!' Quoted in Donald Clarke's "The Rise and Fall of Popular Music," http://www.musicwebinternational.com/RiseandFall/19.htm 2/10/07.

[165] I am indebted to Andrew Homzy for pointing out Dumont's piece and associating it to Mingus's.

someone who himself spoke his own mind on every occasion," and that they shared a stage at the Village Vanguard for a week.[166]

Bruce and his girlfriend performed the racist tune called "Bake Dat Chicken Pie," which includes choruses of iterations of the n-word. "'Why do you let words paralyze you?' Bruce asked [his audiences]. Then he [would] merrily dissect those—and other unpardonable—words as to their origins and use to deny individuality."[167] He also exposed white anxiety with his bit "How to Relax Your Colored Friends at Parties" (1958), which touched on white middle-class fear of African Americans met within private white communities as "equals," i.e. outside occupations to which blacks had been relegated—mainly in entertainment, sports, and service jobs.[168] In the bit, Bruce asks an African American guest at a party if he's hungry, then offers to find some chicken or watermelon for him. "Bake Dat Chicken Pie" gave Bruce a vehicle through which to comment on the hypocrisy of supposedly "colorblind" mid-century whites. No contemporary reviews or testimonies of the performance have turned up, although a clip appears in the 1997 film biography of Bruce, *Swear To Tell the Truth*. One reviewer reported that "Bake Dat Chicken Pie" elicited "merely nervous laughter" from the mostly-white viewers of the film.[169]

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[166] http://www.freenetpages.co.uk/hp/lennybruce/chronology.htm 2/9/07. Sue Mingus. Personal communications, 1/18 and 1/19/07.

[167] Nat Hentoff, "Lenny Bruce: The Crucifixion of a True Believer," *Gadfly Online* (March/April 2001), http://www.gadflyonline.com/archive/MarchApril01/archive-lennybruce.html 2/10/07. Hentoff writes that Bruce intoned: "What I wanted people to dig," Lenny used to say, "is the lie. Certain words were suppressed to keep the lie going. But," Lenny insisted, "if you do them, you should be able to say the words."

[168] Bruce commented on race in "How the Negro and Jew Got Into Show Business, "Ku Klux Klan," "Black Democracy and Liberals, "A White White Woman and a Black Black Woman," among others.

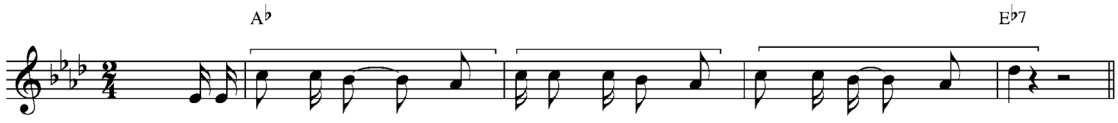
[169] Bowman, James. Review of the film "Swear to Tell the Truth," http://www.jamesbowman.net/reviewDetail.asp?pubID=697 2/9/07.

Examining Bruce/Collins's "Bake Dat Chicken" alongside "Eat That Chicken" highlights the kinds of distortion white minstrels and society perpetuated around blackness in both eras, and Mingus's ironic response. By the 1950s, Hollywood had hardly begun to reevaluate their promulgation of racist stereotypes of black men and women, and white minstrel descendants Gosden and Correll's *Amos 'n' Andy* show remained on the air until late in 1960.

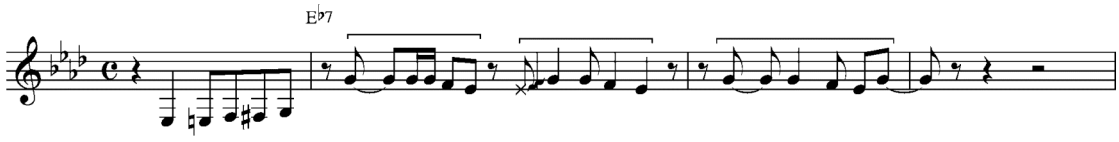
A significance of similarities accumulates between the two pieces, most prominently in comparing the verse of "Bake Dat Chicken Pie" to that of the (verseless) "Eat That Chicken:"

Fig. 2.1

Frank Dumont, "Bake Dat Chicken Pie," sheetmusic (New York: M. Witmark & Sons, c1906), bars 1-4.



Mingus, "Eat That Chicken," Charles Mingus (*Oh, Yeah,* 1961), bars 1-4.



The pieces also share the key of A-flat major, but "Bake" starts on the tonic, where "Eat" delays with the dominant for eight bars. Both start with three iterations of the short descending riff on the third degree of their respective chords whose differing functions obscure this otherwise striking pitch match.

"Bake that Chicken Pie" and "Eat that Chicken" interact in a collision of historical auras, particularly in their texts. Some fifty years had passed between these compositions, years culminating in Mingus's moment by the ongoing civil rights

transformation that articulated the overtly antagonistic dynamic between blacks and whites. Mingus's response to the minstrel legacy of racial patronization reads as a satire of earlier caricatures such as that found in Dumont's piece. But Mingus is also paying tribute to African-American performers who inherited and performed minstrel roles. At the piano he imitates stride players, operating on two levels: self-mockery of the stereotyping lyric "Oh, Lawd, I wanna eat that chicken pie!" and also sending an affectionate tribute to Fats Waller, whose appetite was legendary, and whose reputation as an entertainer and parodist of such stereotypes was well known.

Dumont was a prolific writer of minstrelsy tunes and entire shows, and we can assume the actor/singer of "Bake Dat Chicken Pie" is meant to be in blackface. In a put-down of African-American culture and cuisine, the singer gives instructions to the (presumably white) audience on how to "make a nigger happy," by making his "favorite" food. Singing "Eat That Chicken," Mingus as mid-century chronicler, impersonates a minstrel entertainer from a different era, in a sense spitting out the stereotype of the black musician/entertainer. His chorus of bandmembers—black, white, and mixed-race—sings with lustful abandon (in a down-home accent—"chicken *pah*!"), but Mingus is completely at the helm, calling out encouragement while they solo, and in enthusiastic Wallerian asides.

The musical era depicted in this recording, with bandmembers participating—singing-speaking the lyrics—recalls the New Orleans style, and, indeed, in the first chorus Mingus has his horn players play together in a collective improvisation. Here and in the out-chorus a general outpouring of individual interpretations of the song evokes an

ecstatic mood, much like that suggested by frontline players in the shout chorus of the early jazz era.

Mingus takes center stage as the singer-pianist/entertainer (the microphone catches his voice above the others). His encouragement of the musicians in their solos is standard Mingus leadership, but as the reincarnation of Fats Waller his asides are perfectly pitched, especially the exuberant showman's laughter, one of Waller's trademarks. Nat Hentoff wrote that the tune recalls Fats's novelties of the 1930s, the witty lyrics he wrote to entertain, and to which Waller brought an exceptional gift for cutting up the crowd. Reminiscent of how his "Jelly Roll" pieces play to Morton's vaudeville tropes, Mingus here emulates Waller's amiable parodies filled with racial and sexual innuendos. Asides and fills by the other members combine call-response with good-naturedly irreverent singing; the first call in the chorus is answered by one bandmember with "Hot and chewty!" and another with "Razz-a-ma-pa-tootie!" One wonders if Mingus is also signifying on Armstrong the entertainer, playing on whites stuffing blackness into a chicken.

When Bruce sings "Bake Dat Chicken Pie," he parodies his minstrel forefathers—the stand-up comic descends from minstrel and vaudeville performers—Collins and Harlan, who presented themselves as arbiters of taste. Complicating what the reviewer perceived as a put-down of Waller (in the epigraph above), Mingus's revival of the style and sentiments of minstrelsy, sets ridicule and ownership side by side—ridicule of white conceptions of black, and ownership in Mingus's understanding of the kind of entertainment participated in by Waller, Morton and Armstrong in order to survive in their time. At the end of the tune Mingus's voice has the final unaccompanied word, "Oh,

yeah I wanna—look-at-that chicken there, boy!" perhaps demanding that we re-examine the stereotype. His reanimation of the chicken trope from the mid-century vantage point revises misreadings of African American culture.

Conclusion

Onstage, Mingus saw himself primarily as a bassist/composer/bandleader. But he was well aware that his manner was part of an act. In his stage patter, Mingus was an entertainer who delivered *serious* ideas to his audience, ideas many of its members would not have anticipated grappling with in such a venue as the 1950s jazz club. He seemed inspired by his power to manipulate an audience from whom he needed support and approval to make a living, but also to express all parts of himself (whether they approved or not) as chronicler of his observations and experience.

In his entertainer persona Mingus's frequent exhortations of encouragement or lament during a performance or recording brought the traditions of early jazz, minstrelsy, and vaudeville into his own time as he sought like others of his generation to transform the image of the black entertainer. His reach back embraced traditions before him, paying tribute to the legacies of predecessors and protesting against the degrading experiences he and other black musicians endured in the music industry. Mingus's response to his predecessors, and to the larger exchange between black and white in minstrelsy discourse, shows his confrontation as an outright rejection of these old performer roles, or as adopting an image or act to subvert and pay tribute to them. These conflicting messages in Mingus's expressions of indignation and his signifying revisions marked his struggle for the artistic and financial recognition that continued to elude him.

Chapter 3

Mingus in the Workshop: Leading and Mentoring for the Group Experience

> But within all the varied components of black music and throughout all the changes it underwent, it remained a group-oriented means of communication and expression.—Lawrence Levine[170]

In his music and testimony after the fig/modernist debate and the 1940s Dixieland revival, Mingus made early jazz part of his larger embrace of communal expressions in the 1950s. His inclusion of idioms from the African American tradition differs from the confined uses of root music in contemporary recordings such as Nat and Cannonball Adderley's worksongs and gospel-influenced music. With the album *Blues and* Roots (1959), Mingus wrote that he was responding to the suggestion that he "didn't swing enough,"[171] and focused his musical research on the blues and on another communal aspect of his musical heritage—the rituals of the black Pentecostal church.

In 1959-60, Mingus was anxious to prove that his Jazz Workshop could play the "way out" sounds, with which Ornette Coleman was finding acclaim. But through his work in group improvisation he had already connected the free jazz of Morton's era to what would be called free jazz in the 1960s. In this chapter, I argue that Mingus's recordings from the mid-to late-50s progress from short sections of collective interplay and improvisation reminiscent of early jazz to longer forms of ecstatic ritual and direct invocation of spiritual communion he heard in the church. I discuss Mingus's role as

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[170] Levine, 239.
[171] Mingus, *Blues and Roots,* Atlantic Records (1959), liner notes.

bandleader and teacher within the workshop, and his emphasis on the collective spirit and its connection to music and life that encouraged his players to express themselves freely, both soloistically and through group interaction. I note briefly the European and West African pedagogical practices that underlie early musical training in New Orleans, and how these practices contributed to Mingus's view that workshop members were individuals in service to a larger compositional vision. These practices are evident in the collectively improvised sections of "Dizzy's Moods," "Jump Monk," and implicated in "Moanin," where compositional interplay along with group and solo improvisation transform textural and timbral aspects of the larger formal concerns. Later, these elements evolve into the pivotal idea of "growth" in form in Mingus's reënactments of the communal dynamics of the black church in "Better Git It in Your Soul," and "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting."

A Note on Methodology

Travis Jackson has warned against separating performance practices in jazz between European or African influences. He writes that,

> [jazz's] low level of "Africanness" is a function of the surface features of musical sound—discernable Africanisms in musical form or melodic or rhythmic patterning. As a number of commentators have argued, such an evaluative framework, freighted as it is with assumptions about what "sounds African" and what "sounds European" fails to distinguish between the expressive medium of musical sound and the conceptual bases that inform its production.[172]

Jackson's framework of the jazz ritual, and how it plays out in performance, contains the outside world and provides the opportunity to make sense of it in a purposeful or

[172] Travis Jackson, "Jazz Performance as Ritual." In *The African diaspora: a musical perspective*, ed. Ingrid Monson (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 27.

conscious way. He argues that interactions between players and listeners (Yeah!, Lord, I know!, etc.) are dialogic, functioning to

> become like one with one another and with other participants…It is in this sense that jazz performance is a kind of social action that intervenes in the daily lives of those who listen to and perform it. It does not merely reflect the events and circumstances that frame it. Rather, within those frames, musical items or other sound terms—become symbols...they are not so much symbols *of* something that can be categorized and classified, but symbols that can be *linked* to something.[173]

Jackson's descriptive model can be used to understand the kinds of individual and collective dynamics in Mingus's band, the links to his historical moment and the fostering of relationships and ideals of music-making. In order to distinguish the conceptual bases of Mingus's workshop performances and his bandmembers' testimony, I take Robert Walser's cue to address the interiority of the compositional process,[174] which leads to the Workshop players and their perceptions, relationships, training, and contributions to the group and the music.

Leadership and mentoring roots

Mingus's mentoring style retained practices from early jazz, derived from Western and Central African pedagogy. Christopher Wilkinson has drawn attention to the primary musical practices, "[f]ormal political or religious rituals [that] constituted occasions for all members of the community to participate in the virtually inseparable activities of drumming, song, and dance, led by the community's professional musicians." These occasions contribute to the "omnipresence of music within daily life as

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[173] Jackson, 68.
[174] Robert Walser, "Deep Jazz: Notes on Interiority, Race and Criticism," in *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotion Life in America*, eds. Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog (Yale University Press, 1997), 271-296.

well as its central role in formal ritual—practices that facilitate the education of musicians."[175]

African pedagogy parallels that of early New Orleans, where young musicians learned by "active participation," and the "slow absorption through exposure to musical situations."[176] An essential element of their training in both cultures is imitation. Wilkinson has observed the training of a Southern Ewe master drummer who has begun playing pots and pans by age three, in imitation of the adult players of his village. Before age eight he has participated in ensembles with his peers, emulating the adults, using cast-off instruments. Like his peers, he will be "subject to careful (if apparently casual) attention by [his] elders."[177] Among the Ewe,

> the future drummers learn to "play from the mouth," that is, they acquire knowledge of the basic rhythmic patterns of their instruments from adult drummers who teach them sequences of both nonsense and (subsequently) actual words that embody the rhythms they must master. Apart from these brief instruction, the adults do not appear to take an active role in the education of the young; rather, they expect those with the inherited gifts to develop proficiency on their own.[178]

Youngsters work their way from playing toy, or disposable drums to playing (with their consent) the instruments of the adult musicians. This progression of training parallels the Second Line in the parades of old New Orleans, where youngsters grabbed whatever noisemakers they could find and followed along beside the musicians in the parades.

In Mingus's workshop, musicians were technically and professionally advanced

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[175] Christopher Wilkinson, "The Influence of West African Pedagogy Upon the Education of New Orleans Jazz Musicians," *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Selected Papers from the 1993 National Conference on Black Music Research (Spring, 1994), 29, 32.
[176] Wilkinson draws from J. H. Kwabena Nketia's book *The Music of Africa*, which discusses pedagogical principles of music education in Africa.
[177] Wilkinson, 34.
[178] Ibid., 35.

by the time they had been recruited. Like John Handy, who describes working hard to master European harmony and technique, Mingus's musicians had mastered their instruments with formal lessons.[179] Mingus led the Jazz Workshop aggressively, often beginning his recruitments in a way that could make or break a young player's ego. Tubist Howard Johnson describes meeting Mingus at a gig, where he was immediately auditioned onstage. As both mentor and leader in his Workshop (he called it a workshop, Johnson believes, "so that he could do *anything* he wanted"[180]), Mingus's blunt appraisal had its drawbacks, and the attrition of players became perhaps unavoidable because he demanded that his players submit to his leadership while cultivating their technique and emotional reserves for the music. "I look for people with something strong of their own to say..."[181] Thus his young players essentially signed up for an apprenticeship.

Mingus admired several bandleaders in his youth who exacted similar demands—Ellington foremost, but his work with Lionel Hampton would have also provided a model. Although perhaps not as heavy-handed as Mingus, Ellington and Hampton stocked their bands with excellent, well-versed musicians, and Ellington undoubtedly influenced Mingus's inclusion of players as part of the compositional process. Handy reports, for instance, that for "Better Get Hit in Your Soul," "I wrote the bridge to that. I added the bridge, I didn't actually write it. (*Sings*) I did that,"[182] meaning he had created it during a rehearsal or performance.

Except for some significant interactions in Ellington's compositions that mix group improvisation with written parts, collective improvisation had all but disappeared

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[179] Interview with Handy, 7/16/07
[180] Interview with Howard Johnson, 7/3/08.
[181] Hentoff, "A Volcano Named Mingus," *HiFi Stereo Review* (December, 1964), 53.
[182] Ibid.

between Morton and Mingus's era. For example, in "Second Line," "Stompy Jones," and in the last chorus of "Harlem Speaks," the trombone and clarinet solo alongside the trumpet section's melody. Ellington also called out to the early era with similar modes of collective improvisation in his "New Orleans Suite."

Ellington's influence also contributed to the aura of the Workshop: Mingus played and recorded Ellington's songs. When Mingus's complete version of the large work *Epitaph* was first performed in 1989, Andrew Homzy reflected that "Mingus had conceived this as a tribute to all these great musicians—they were going to create as much of the piece as he was," and called it "a flashback of his goals and expressions as a composer, examples of where he had come from," the references to Ellington mixing with those of Morton's "Wolverine Blues."[183] In other ways Mingus's compositional process relates to Ellington's practice of nurturing and thriving upon individualistic expression and contribution to his orchestra's music. Mingus wrote of his own approach:

> Each man's particular style is taken into consideration. They are given different rows of notes to use against each chord but they choose their own notes and play them in their own style, from scales as well as chords, except where a particular mood is indicated. In this way I can keep my own compositional flavor…and yet allow the musicians more individual freedom in the creation of their group lines and solos.[184]

Composing in the workshop

Mingus regularly hired unknown but talented players, developing the individual voices and using them as compositional tools. Once they began working with Mingus, they would have to assume a Zen-like beginner's mind in order to avoid imitating and relying on riffs prevalent on the jazz scene of the day, and to cultivate the emotional

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[183] Tom Moon, "The Resurrection of Mingus' Jazz Symphony," *Musician* (June 1989), No. 128, 66, 68.
[184] In 1959 liner notes. Quoted in Whitney Balliett, "Musical Events: Jazz Records," *The New Yorker* (June 18, 1960), 127. IJS Mingus clippings file.

honesty he demanded in their solo work.

The ancient Greek idea of the 'polis,' where males are respected by their individual contribution is alive in Mingus's philosophy and wedded to traditional African community rituals where, as John M. Chernoff notes, "Music-making…is above all an occasion for the demonstration of character."[185] Mingus's compositional voice relied heavily on the strength of the individual voices.

> That's what you do on one tune. There's the ocean and there's a million waves and each piece is like one of the waves and different as each wave. A creative person is not one thing. That's why I'm trying to go back to the beginning to answer the question that's come to me so many times: "What is jazz?"[186]

The workshop was a facility for developing musicians—those Mingus felt could take his direction and contribute to his concept of combining written notes with individually and group improvised textures and lines. The workshop may have originated in part from Mingus's proposed School of Arts, Music, and Gymnastics, a facility based on the ancient Greek forum for education, which he felt was vital in sustaining artists' autonomy economically while supporting their communities and organizing musicians.[187] Because this project was never funded, Mingus's teaching aspirations went into the workshop where his style of "initiating" his musicians sometimes resulted in harsh culling. His players later testified that the experience, despite its drawbacks, served them well. Mingus's tenor saxophonist-clarinetist Bobby Jones said,

> There are formulas, but you have freedom within those formulas. It's difficult to explain—you must do it all by feel. Mingus gives you all the freedom you want, but no more or no less than any other group member. You have equal responsibility and equal privilege to follow or to lead, whatever the case may be. It's given me a lot more self-confidence. I've gone to sessions and checked

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[185] Quoted in Erlmann's "Communities of Style," 86-87.
[186] Quoted in Ira Gitler, "Mingus Speaks—and Bluntly," *Down Beat* (July 21, 1960), 30, 67.
[187] Porter, 135.

> myself out against people I used to play with and found that I'm a lot stronger as a result.[188]

Trumpeter Clarence "Gene" Shaw recalled that "Mingus made extraordinary demands on the musicians. He asked for one to bring forth one's essence, and he would do anything to point the way toward the work he wanted done at the time." Charles McPherson noted, "I figured that if I could work with this cat, I could work with anyone."[189] At its best, Mingus's leadership and mentoring promoted a strong group of individuals. Even with its fluctuating membership, the group remained a tight, interactive band that could play in a number of styles, and its members were able to open themselves to Mingus's personal style and his music-making. Handy remarked that it was not always easy:

> I got to see some of what I heard about Charles, see him act out, and he just had no diplomacy. I didn't like what I was seeing when I was there.[190]

And pianist/arranger Sy Johnson noted:

> When he felt the band had become too facile—just swinging along […] he'd destroy that ambience because he wanted us to *think* about what we were playing. He'd suddenly switch from four to six beats in the bar, and it was like slipping on a piece of ice on the street. You'd fall on your ass. But you'd surely be thinking. Mingus gave you *resistance*. He never thought his function was to support the soloist but rather to stir him up. And so his bass lines would snarl and pop and sizzle.[191]

Part of the difference in Mingus's style was in his comfort level with conflict. When Eddie Bert first worked with him, Bert recalls, Mingus was barred from Birdland.

> Mingus said 'you want me to work with you?' and I said, 'Yeah.' Mingus called Birdland and got permission. When we started playing he said "What's the matter with this band? Nobody argues." ([Ed] Shaugnessy on drums, Bennie Dean, Ray

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[188] Dan Morgenstern, "Inside Mingus With Bobby Jones," *Down Beat* ([n.m., 1972), IJS Mingus clippings file, [n.p.].
[189] Nat Hentoff, "A Volcano Named Mingus," 55.
[190] Handy, 7/16/07.
[191] Nat Hentoff, "Mingus Dynasties," *Village Voice* (March 12, 1979), 34.

> Abrams, tenor.) When a tune didn't go well Mingus would just stop it. It was just part of him. He couldn't understand why I didn't argue (in my band).[192]

Composing and improvising techniques

Mingus used both loosely defined and specifically structured techniques to guide soloists' improvisations and to shape individual pieces stylistically and compositionally. From his perch on the bass, he instructed or signaled players to switch from one style of jazz to another. Tubist Bob Stewart recounts:

> BS: He would call tunes like that right in the middle of something… you can hear that on *Let My Children Hear Music*... The very first tune where he switches up feels—on that first tune "Don't Be Afraid, the Clown's Afraid Too,"—he switches up all over the place during the course of that.
>
> JG: *Did he ever talk about that, or did he just say everybody play…*
>
> BS: Everybody knew what the vibe was. If they were gonna do something they knew they had the freedom to go ahead and play. He didn't have to explain, to give them the authority to play. It was ok, because you knew that that's what he was gonna do.
>
> *JG: And you knew that when you got the gig because you'd heard him before?*
>
> BS: Well, I came to know that. Because he would change the keys in the middle of the song…

I asked Stewart if Mingus indicated he wanted solos, duos and other group improvisation in the New Orleans style.

> BS: He never specifically said that. He would imply that by what he played on the bass…He'd play two…he'd play a two feel. *Donh be-donh-donh Donh.* That wouldn't tell them they should be playing bebop. They would take it from that we were gonna play something in two, that their accompaniment would be appropriate to what he was playing.

[192] Interview with Eddie Bert, 12/08/06

> *JG: And those feels, if there were 2 or 3 [people] soloing, he wouldn't say "you play and you play."?*
>
> BS: Oh, no, he never gave any directions. That's one of the reasons why somebody who makes something of quality'd hire good people. Because he therefore could depend on what the people *know*.
>
> *JG: Their judgment…*
>
> BS: Exactly, he doesn't have to second guess him, after you've already hired him to be on the gig. Kind of a waste if you going to tell him what not to do…why'd you hire him?

Stewart emphasizes the importance of players having a high level of knowledge of the tradition. Mingus often knew when and how he wanted his players to contribute to the performance or composition. In his charts, the level of instruction might be sketchily outlined, remaining open to the interpretive powers and contributions of the players. In a review of the 1955 Café Bohemia performances, *Downbeat* wrote:

> A remarkable aspect of this Mingus workshop program is that none of the material so far has been written out. On the originals, Mingus gives the musicians a basic idea of what he wants. He'll sing the thematic lines until they're absorbed by the other men, and on specific songs, Mingus gives additional instructions. He may tell the trombonist at times, for example, not to play the tonic, third and fifth since the bass already plays those notes. Instead, he'll advise the hornman to start on a ninth, a 13th or "whatever else you hear."
>
> He has each man start off his solo with a long line of the soloist's own shaping rather than with a fast-moving, choppy line. This is to enable the improvisational composition to build more cohesively and also to give the audience something to hang onto. The procedure therefore calls on a musician's melodic resourcefulness as well…[193]

Mingus's players would later remark upon the unusual nature of some of his specific instructions. Saxophonist Yusef Lateef reported, "For example, on one composition I had a solo and, as opposed to having chord symbols for me to improvise

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[193] [n.a.], "Caught in the Act: Charles Mingus: Café Bohemia, New York," *Down Beat* (December 11, 1955).

against, he had drawn a picture of a coffin. And that was the substance upon which I was to improvise."[194] As the composer dictating the piece, Mingus relied on players knowing their instruments and being able to improvise over abstract music principles. A 1959 review gives Mingus's account of composing a previous work, "Love Chant":

> This is an extended form version on a more or less standard set of chord changes. This form challenges the musician to create a line of long-held notes for the first chorus, to develop it on one or two chords (or rhythm patterns, scales, etc.) and then redevelop the line on the out chorus. This is done using only one or two chords per phrase so the lines must be developed for a much longer period of time than is usually taken before the chord change…*The whole success of the extended form depends on the ability of the musicians to do this in soloing and also in playing counter or accompanying lines* (my emphasis).[195]

Interaction and Interplay in the tradition

For Mingus and Morton musical expression determined form as much as form, through collective and the individual improvisation, determined musical expression. Early jazz recordings emphasized group interplay and improvisation much more than later developments (including big band, bebop, hardbop, etc.) up to the free jazz of the late 1950s and early 60s. During these later decades, when collective dynamics were relatively dormant, Sydney Bechet blamed big band arrangements and instrumental solos for the loss of the "conversation" among musicians.[196] Bechet and others of the early era grieved over the demise of group polyphony especially because they knew how much a group dynamic could result in intense emotional and musical connections between players. Bechet sought out the spirit of interplay within the piece, including duets and trios, that might arise spontaneously.

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[194] Priestley, 111.
[195] Whitney Balliett, "Mingus Among the Unicorns," Jazz Concerts, *The New Yorker* (January 24, 1959), 103-105. IJS Mingus clippings file.
[196] Interesting to note that Bechet also elevated the idea of composition.

> And all that freedom, all that feeling a man's got when he's playing next to you—they [big band arrangements] take that away. They give you his part to play and they give him your part, and that's how it's to be: they've got a trumpet taking the clarinet part and a clarinet taking the trombone part and every man doing any damn thing but the one thing he should be doing if he's really to find the music. All that closeness of speaking to another instrument, to another man—it's gone. All that waiting to get in for your own chance, freeing yourself, all that holding back, not rushing the next man, not bucking him, holding back for the right time to come out, all that pride and spirit—it's gone.[197]

In the mid-1950s, Bechet's idea of interaction was apparent in Mingus's workshop as a musical dialogue with his ancestors. In speaking back to these men through his work, he responded in a way that embraced the idea of a jazz continuum. Thus Mingus developed a working method that reflected group traditions in jazz, but his political and aesthetic role necessarily transformed earlier styles of group-oriented performance. According to testimony of early jazz performers, the communal ethos of that era focused on entertaining and creating a "good time." When Mingus resuscitated Euday L. Bowman's 1914 composition, "Twelfth Street Rag," he may have reveled in the entertainment aspect and traditional sound of this New Orleans tune, but his commentary on that ethos mingled with a desire for his listeners to distinguish between his art and their notions of jazz. Ellington and Armstrong had also recorded "Twelfth St." in the 1930s, and in 1948 the trombonist Pee Wee Hunt revived it. Hunt's recording, which was played everywhere (Mingus would certainly have heard it), was reviled by critics. "Twelfth St." attracted Mingus for its absurdity similar to the concoctions of Spike Jones. Its three-note melody, repeating over and over in 4/4 causes the first note to alternate from accented to unaccented note as the harmony changes underneath: a clever if limiting

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[197] Sidney Bechet, *Treat it Gentle* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 210-211.

device.[198] Like Morton, Mingus appreciated this sort of musical gimmickry, but where, say, Morton would use such a tune to draw in an audience for a "good time," Mingus willfully complicated the feelgood ambience by invoking the more recent debate over whether the music was entertainment or art. This dynamic rendered Mingus's "Twelfth St." a political statement and a calculated device to capture his audience's attention so that he might draw them further into his own music. Mingus's music went seamlessly from one genre of jazz to another, as we saw in John Handy's solo in "Jelly Roll" in Chapter 1. He might jump into a tune such as "Twelfth St." to mock his audience's taste, or, in the case of "Cocktails For Two," in reaction to distracted spectators, calling attention to their ignorance of modern jazz.

Howard Johnson performed "Twelfth St. Rag" in concert at UCLA in 1965. I asked Johnson what it meant to resurrect this tune at that time:

> HJ: I don't know, that didn't have any real meaning...I'll tell you one thing—I don't think there's any examples of it on that cd—but sometimes if we'd be playing, if the people would be talking or not paying attention, he'd stop the band and say, "Oh, I thought we had an audience here who was here to listen to *us*, what we were doing, but you want 'talking music,'" and then we'd play, [Byard] would play "Cocktails for Two." And we'd play as corny as possible…da-da da-da da-da da-duh…da-duhhhh, [etc.] and have a good time doing it because we were kinda laughin' at the audience.
>
> *JG: Yeah, well, the title implies that they're just there for the drinks, you know? It's a perfectly named song for that.*
>
> HJ: Yeah, right.
>
> *JG: So, that's basically the way you think Mingus thought of it, too: as just a way to…*
>
> HJ: Certainly…And then they really did pay attention better after that, you know without him getting mad and crying out.

[198] The device is called secondary rag in the literature; "In the Mood," for example.

To illustrate the meanings of collective improvisation in Mingus's band, I turn again to Morton as a precursor composer. In Morton's era, frontline soloists soloed collectively at different moments, predominantly at the end of a piece. The last, or shout chorus of a New Orleans-styled band functioned as a final burst of exuberance in polyphonic textures and retained the communal ritual of African music: the trumpet or cornet ornamented the lead, often in a higher tessitura, and the clarinet played more elaborately, while the tailgate trombone's growls and slides provided a complementary line to the trumpet. Rhythm and frontline players all play up a notch dynamically, the drums with a more prominent offbeat on snare, emulating the European marching band and the high spirits eliciting from the march back from the cemetery in New Orleans.

In Morton's recordings the last chorus could either play out as solo cadenzas ("Smoke-House Blues" and "Billy Goat Stomp," for example) or close with the entire band playing collectively. Although one can hear the buoyancy of the first chorus in many of Morton's recordings, collective improvisation, when present, is usually saved for the end (as heard in "Black Bottom Stomp" and "Someday Sweetheart"). Morton's compositions observe established New Orleans style while searching out new combinations in timbre, and in solos, duos and trios between sections that lay out his themes. Structurally, his compositions model themselves on the sectional form of ragtime. In the A section of a tune, Morton might have the traditional cornet taking the lead, while the trombone and clarinet play bass line and obbligato respectively. His myriad deviations from a standard format, however, account for his repertoire's singularly varied arrangements. For instance, in both "Beale St. Blues" and "Sidewalk Blues," after a brief intro, the trombone plays the melody while the other horns lay out or

provide staccato accompaniment. Longer sections in these and other works might feature a solo instrument or piano and one instrument. The shifts in textures create fresh sounds and dramatic effects, but they also give expression to the ornamenting and improvising of new melodic lines in social interaction between players that builds emotional intensity in the music.

The interludes and transitions, as well as the full 16- or 32-bar sections, feature solos, or might feature any combination of instruments soloing. But the free-for-all played at the end builds dynamically and virtuosically, finishing with the ecstasy of the outchorus. Of course, recordings of other artists show that group improvisation and interplay are a staple in this era, so this is not to single out Morton as the sole composer to use this device. But his compositional vision contrasts the standard interactions of smaller groups with textural and coloristic effects of different duos and trio sections, building up to the most vibrant colors and ecstatic group interaction at the end.

In his reanimation of early jazz, Mingus experimented with the ecstatic feeling in the music, placing it earlier in the form where it functioned also as textural or timbral contrast. His concept of group improvisation derived from the New Orleans style, generally, and Morton's in particular. I will return to how Mingus appropriated the interplay and improvisation of early jazz after a brief discussion of group ecstasy that can be traced to the black revivalist church and that can be found in Mingus's late-50s recordings.

Ritual in the black Pentecostal church

African-American marching bands in New Orleans originally formed to provide

music for all manner of festivities including the annual Carnival, picnics, parties, sporting events, and funerals. The music brought communities together and invited players to extemporize in many styles, particularly those of Caribbean and European influences in New Orleans. These influences might combine the written, Sousa-type march, with its European attraction to melodic counterpoint and chord progressions, with the tone decoration and improvisation of African practice. Worship music in the black Pentecostal church drew from some of these elements, especially if in some way they supported the functions of the service.

Martin Curtis has explained that "[t]he participatory style of the black music experience combines rhythm and language to create a dialogue between speaker and audience…Congregations respond to singing and the preacher's style by saying "Amen," "Thank you, Lord," and other phrases. Standing and clapping during choral singing and the highly emotional tone of black worship services reflect both the African worship style and the aesthetic considerations of the community…"[199] The service's improvisational language came out of heterophony, interjection and call-response patterns, and ecstatic ritual, in particular. It is underscored by singing (accompanied by drums and other instruments), hand-clapping, and dance.

Although similar music is used in various denominations of the church, I focus here on the Pentecostal sect because, as a child, Mingus attended their worship services in Los Angeles, and, beginning in the late-1950s, his work shows the influence of the worship leadership and musical function. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Pentecostalism expanded rapidly in Los Angeles in the form of African-

[199] Martin V. Curtis, "Understanding the Black Aesthetic Experience" *Music Educators Journal,* Vol. 75, No. 2 (Oct., 1988), 25.

American Holiness churches where ecstatic "spirit baptisms" structured a significant part of the service. Music was performed to encourage members who wished to experience the Holy Ghost by going into trance states, often led by the pastor, who might start or stop the band on signal.[200] Alexancder Alland writes that "The band plays loudly with a highly repetitive, simple melody and strong beat, while the pastor preaches directly to the person or persons attempting to gain trance."[201]

In collective dynamics of the Workshop, players often spoke about a sense of group exhilaration, a similar experience to that voiced in religious contexts. Bobby Jones (who was white and may have struggled to fit in), described a transition from ritual to meaning in the workshop.

> When I first joined the group, it was hard to get with the group-thinking where everybody is working and improvising toward some sort of goal. I couldn't figure out what we were working towards. Mingus has sections where he wants everybody to moan and cry, and that's supposed to last until it's over—whenever that is. Eventually, you learn to listen hard enough and to concentrate on what you and everyone else has done, and after a while you just know you're coming to the end of a section. Plus there are built-in cues; all of us at one time or another give cues. With Mingus you have the freedom to give the cue yourself if you think the group is ready, but you really have to know when. It's exhilarating when you do it, to have everybody jump in with you.[202]

Jones's account describes the kinds of interactions practiced by the Workshop in the 1970s. When Mingus first reënacted the dynamics of the Holiness church in "Moanin" "Better Git It in Your Soul," and "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" (all recorded in February, 1959, the latter two again in 1960), he was expanding his musical voice to include other African-American traditions into his jazz continuum. I first locate

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[200] Alexander Alland, Jr., "'Possession' in a Revivalist Negro Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring, 1962), 206.
[201] Ibid., 207.
[202] Morgenstern, 18.

brief ecstatic events of the New Orleans style in Mingus's 1955 Debut and 1957 RCA recordings in a modern jazz context (within one section of the AABA forms of "Dizzy's Moods" and "Jump Monk"), and then the expanded events of riff build-up and release in the later Atlantic and Columbia recordings.

Collective Interplay and Ecstatic Events in the Recordings

Mingus and Richmond had developed a rapport on what Mingus called 6/8 over 4/4, a rhythmic groove heard in his gospel-influenced tunes such as "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" and "Better Get It in Your Soul."[203] In an interview, Mingus voiced his frustration when asked about Cannonball Adderley's evaluation of him as a "surrealist."

> Cannonball's group (referring to "This Here") don't even play free in three. They're not free in the form. They don't swing it. It's a stiff 3/4, ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta! Ours swings. It's not 3/4. It's played the same as 4/4. It's 6 against 4. In church they don't play in 3/4; they play in 6/8 against 4. Even in Africa…Everybody knows that the African rhythms were not in 3/4 but in 6/8 against 4. Dig the way we clap our hands on the record.[204]

Mingus used a larger (9- and 10-piece) bands and employed collective techniques to, as reviewer Whitney Balliett put it, "[point] a way out of the box that the big band built itself into before its almost complete disappearance."[205] In liner notes, Mingus explained:

> I'd write for a big sound (and with fewer musicians) by thinking out the form that each instrument *as an individual* is going to play in relation to *all* the others in the composition. This would replace the old-hat system of passing the melody from section to section…while the trombones run through their routine of French horn chordal sounds…I think it's time to discard these tired arrangements and save

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[203] "Better Get It" is similar structurally and in dynamic to "Wednesday Night" and although I include it here without analysis, it cannot be left out.
[204] Gitler, "Mingus Speaks—And Bluntly," *Down Beat* (July 21, 1960), 67.
[205] Whitney Balliett, "Musical Events: Jazz Records" *The New Yorker* (June, 1960), 128. IJS Mingus clippings file.

> only the big Hollywood production introduction and ending which uses a ten or more note chord. If these ten notes were used as a starting point for several melodies and finished as a linear composition—with parallel or simultaneous juxtaposed melodic thoughts—we might come up with some creative big-band jazz.[206]

After listening to atonal works, as well as the music of Stravinsky, Mingus was able to find his way around such a dense thicket of voices. In "thinking out the form," his compositional devices reflected both his instructions to the Café Bohemia players and his strategy of inviting his soloists to develop their own ideas that he describes in his discussion of "Love Chant."

Recordings made in 1950-60 of works performed live for in subsequent years follow a stylistic trajectory that involves collective interplay and what I call "ecstatic events." By collective interplay I mean improvisations by frontline players over a given melody or set of chord changes. By ecstatic event I mean a collective effort to support the expression of extreme emotion and trancelike states of the soloist. (One can interpret the Holy Ghost event as either trancelike or ecstatic, or both.) In earlier Mingus recordings from this period, episodes of collective interplay and ecstatic events create intertextual references to New Orleans-style composition, combining frontline and rhythm players' extemporized passages over the harmony, and in short-lived expressions of exuberance. Set against the later forms they seem "inserted," creating an effect of a brief extemporized "aside," one that ends abruptly as the next, dictated section is laid out. In the later recordings, collective interplay and ecstatic events seem to grow out of repetition and riff build-up that replicates the intensification of emotion in the rituals of the revivalist church.

Mingus's compositional style included group improvisation in "Dizzy's Moods"

[206] Balliett, "Musical Events: Jazz Records," 128.

(*Tijuana Moods,* 1957),[207] where, in the repeat of the A section, trumpet, tenor saxophone, and trombone improvise as a group over the changes (0:42 on alternative take). On the alternate take, after Knepper (trombone) and Shafi Hadi (saxophone) take solos (4:59), Clarence Shaw (trumpet) takes a solo. After 8 bars, the saxophone joins in with a complementary improvised line, and the trombone enters at the bridge where the three horns engage in melodic interplay. The resulting effect produces both the conversational interactive dynamic and a polyphonic, compositional texture as a whole.

In "Jump Monk," the effect of interplay becomes more formalized. Mingus and (drummer) Willie Jones play the opening 16 bars of "Jump Monk," continuing with George Barrow's serpentine improvisation for the next 16. Eddie Bert's trombone joins in and the two interact in counterpoint for the another 16 bars of the extended intro. In the AABA form the two horns play the head: 8 bars of a wide-ranged melody (extending over 2 octaves): the first half of section A. Over the second 8 bars of the A (1:37), the horns improvise together in a high-spirited mood, shifting out into a free interaction. Howard Johnson notes that Mingus liked the plungers and growling (à la Ellington) of his players, here evidenced in the many smears and glisses of the horns in this segment.[208] Each iteration seems to focus on raising the communal emotive level by injecting blues and gospel-based licks. When performing the tune in the mid-50s, Mingus liked to

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[207] Mingus worked with Lennie Tristano in the early 50s, exploring an interest in European-African cross-pollination. Contemporary European trends in non-notated music were what George Lewis calls "performer-supplied" rather than "composer-supplied." George E. Lewis, "Improvised music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal,* Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1996), 91.

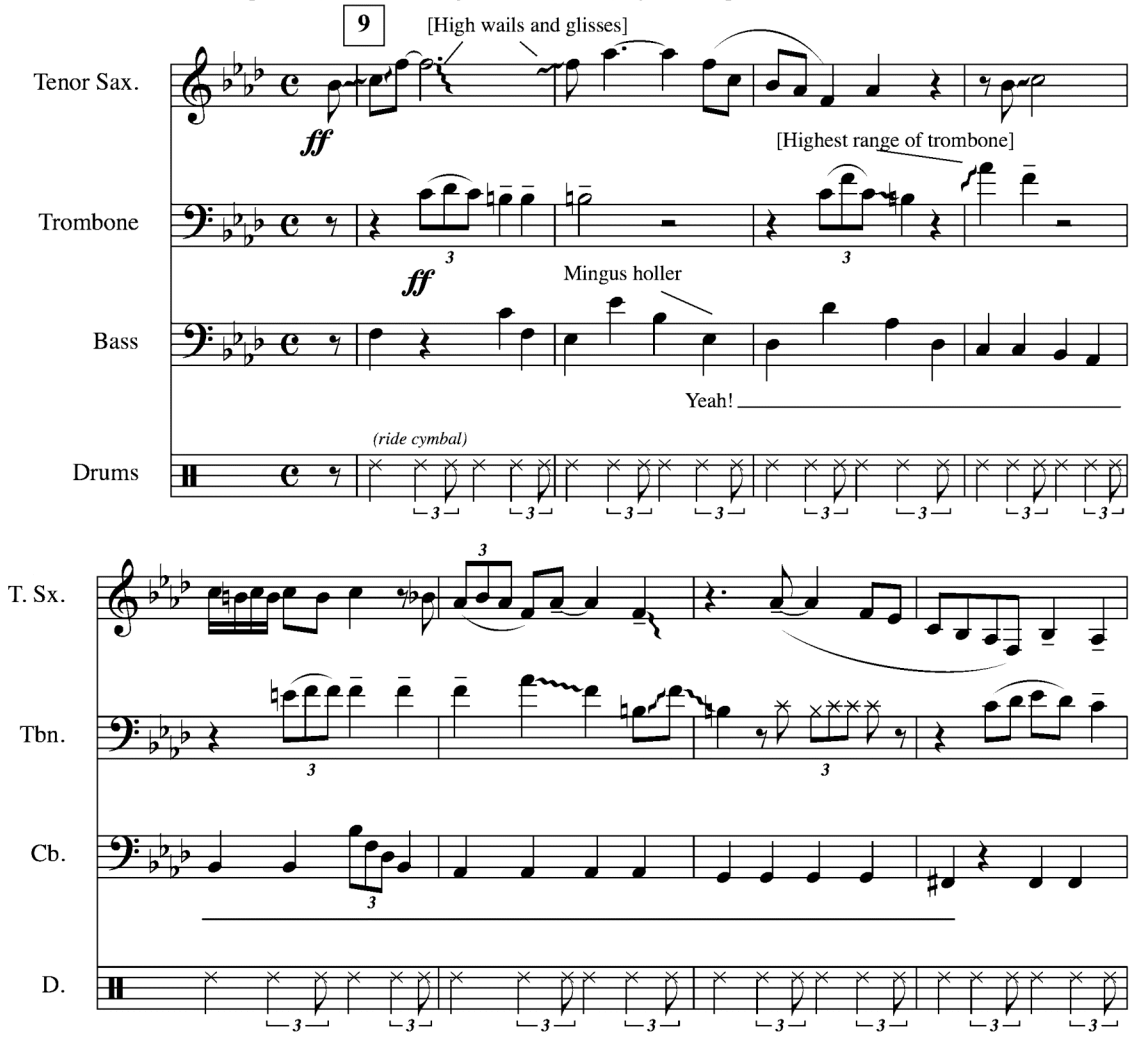
[208] Bob Stewart testifies that [later] Mingus hired him and others because of their experience in bands like Sam Rivers. "Mingus liked … them because they were comin out of that Sam Rivers [roars/growls] playin. So he loved that shit, so they got in the act. So I turned a couple cats into coming with me through Sam Rivers' band, the Collective Black Artists big band into Mingus's band because they were bringing that same attitude."

announce that "It is based on a blues feeling but doesn't have typical blues changes."[209]

One of the most striking color shifts driving these interactive and exuberant segments is the ride cymbal. In the intro we hear Jones's medium dynamic on the sock cymbal at a mezzo forte, much like Baby Dodds might accompany Morton's band. Not until the segment at bar 9 does Jones play the same rhythm with the ride cymbal, with a full-on dynamic. The higher pitch, the resonance, and the diffuse sonority of the ride cymbal all act to release the controlled and subdued energy of the previous 8 bars as well as contrast the subtle interplay of horns in the intro. Both horns play in the high registers of their instruments; we also hear Mingus calling out to the players for the first time in the piece, boosting their energy for the segment (Fig. 3.1).

[209] Burt Korall, "Charlie Mingus in Mount Vernon," *Metronome* (May 1957), 27.

Fig. 3.1. Ecstatic event in improvisational interplay betw. sax and trombone in mm. 9-16 of head (1:15), "Jump Monk," Charles Mingus (Debut, 1955), my transcription.



The written-out subdued bridge (B) runs 16 bars before the A returns. Here, the raucous bursts of riff-like phrases of the second 8 bars contrast the quieter, complex, long lines of the first 8, conveying the high emotive content of the free segment.

The effects of group improvisation and of the ecstatic event lie in these short bursts set against the context of modern jazz. In particular, the interplay of horns, wailing in their highest registers in the A section of "Jump Monk," (Fig. 3.2) is reminiscent of Morton's segments of "controlled" small group improvisation in "Steamboat Stomp," a written-out, sectionalized piece.

Figure 3.2. "Jump Monk," ecstatic event "inserted" in form. Charles Mingus (Debut), 1955.

Introduction	Vamp 1	Vamp 2	‖: A :‖	B	‖ A ‖
(bass & drums)	(tenor sax)	(ts, tbn)	(theme) (ecstatic event)		(theme) (ecstatic)
16	16	16	8 -------- 8	16	8 ------ 8

Although, in "Jump Monk," the repetition of this event in subsequent iterations of the A (in more or less the same gestures and melodies) de-emphasize its surprise effect, it nevertheless reanimates and connects to New Orleans jazz.

The remainder of this analysis illustrates my approach to Mingus's late-1950s (and 1960) recordings by a stylistic analysis using what Jan LaRue has termed "growth,"[210] as opposed to "form." Using LaRue's term, Mingus's compositions exhibit growth while retaining the aesthetic and emotional integrity of the ecstatic events as natural extensions of their structural framework. Mingus invokes the communal dynamics of the Holiness church in "Moanin," where the sectionalized instrumentation provides a developmental segue from the group interplay in "Dizzy's Moods." By the time he records "Wednesday Night," and "Better Git It" the church rituals appear overtly in song titles and communal spirit. As he wrote in liner notes:

> It has some of the old Church feeling too. I was raised a Methodist but there was a Holiness Church on the corner, and some of the feeling of their music, which was wilder, got into our music. There's a moaning feeling to those church modes. Try a song like Dizzy's *Woody'n You*, for example, and make some changes; fit a

[210] Jan LaRue, *Guidelines for Style Analysis: A Comprehensive Outline of Basic Principles for the Analysis of Musical Style* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970). Quoted in Monson's *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 139.

church minor mode into the chord structure and you'll hear what I mean.[211]

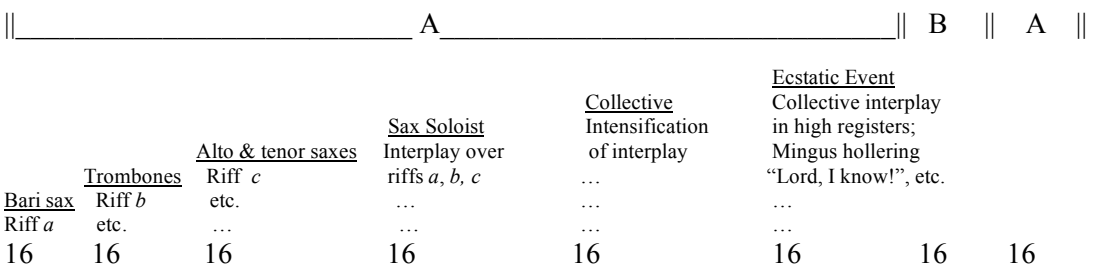
A build-up of instrumental color starts with Pepper Adams's baritone sax ostinato in "Moanin" (*Blues and Roots*, February, 1959). Mingus uses a nonet for the album (as relatively rare as it was in his career to find such an opportunity), and orchestrates the build-up from the bari's first line (adding trombones, then saxophones) to contrast individual timbres of the horns, and to create vibrant colors of greater and greater intensity. Figure 3.3 shows the middle phase of the trajectory as Mingus extends the A section of "Moanin" in order to allow for collective expression in several passages of interplay, ending in an ecstatic event just before section B. This A section begins with the baritone sax riff and, after layering new riffs and interplay in instrumental entrances every 16 bars, culminates in an ecstatic event of free interplay at the sixth repetition of the 16-bar blues progression that delineates this section. Building on Adams's bari line, Booker Ervin's tenor sax breaks in with a blues-based riff (very much in the Ellington vein), accompanied by more sustained tones from trombones. After the first 8 bars the horn lines feather out into extemporized melodies on their main riffs. The form is repeated under Handy's solo (0:54), intensifying the polyphony.

The band's forces have been completely engaged when (at 1:28) Mingus hollers "Lord, I know!," driving them into an ecstatic release. If he did not anticipate Ornette Coleman, by leaving out the chording instrument altogether, Mingus's pianist, Horace Parlan, abandons the traditional role of comping, playing instead in a soloistic, Chicago-blues style with repeated blues riffs sketchily outlining harmony. Both Jackie McLean and Handy shoot up to the altissimo register of the alto, building excitement to a higher

[211] From liner notes of *The Clown*, for "Haitian Fight Song." Interestingly, "Dizzy's Moods" is based on "Woody'n You," which Mingus performed earlier with Gillespie (and recorded for Debut release) at the Massey Hall concert in Toronto for the 1953 concert.

pitch. Mingus gives another holler after 4 bars, keeping his players at that level of intensity.

Figure 3.3 "Moanin," collective interplay and ecstatic events in extended A section. Mingus, *Blues & Roots* (Atlantic), Feb, 1959.



As in "Jump Monk," a tightly written B section subdues the mood, the alto playing a sustained melody with a backup riff from the trombones and tenor sax. After a unison line cascades down the octaves, the bari begins its line, returning home for the last A. This time, after 4 bars, trombones join in, thickening the dark line of color, and the remaining horns, at the last 8 bars, again add lighter shades, fanning out into improvised quicker rhythms and shimmering lights of color in the upper register. Punctuated by Mingus's exhilarated hollers, this communal expression contains the intense dynamic of ecstatic ritual in the Holiness church; but the entrance of the contrasting B section interrupts the "growth" of further collective events, perhaps exemplifying the formal and modern jazz proclivities of the composer, but also teasing players and listeners alike by cutting short, for the time being, the collective orgasmic experience.[212]

In "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting," "growth" starts in the head's riff-like

[212] In *Beneath the Underdog*, 73-74. Mingus explains how Pop Collette (Buddy Colette's father) taught him the art of seduction. One of the main devices in this lesson was the build-up of erotic pleasure and withholding release from the sexual partner, a demonstration of controlled power and discipline with which Mingus learned to emphasize his prowess.

motives, interwoven with interplay by the sax soloist. The ensuing build-up of riffs grows seamlessly from this head to accompany Handy's and trombonist Jimmy Knepper's solos. Figure 3.4 shows a part of the last phase of my trajectory, beginning with the closely-related riffs and moving to a single note in Mingus's bass during the piano solo, which is then taken up by the piano with accompanimental chording.

Figure 3.4 "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting," Mingus, *Mingus Ah Um* (Atlantic), 1959.

Intro-Head-riff	Handy solo	Knepper solo	Parlan solo	Parlan II (2:00)	Collective (2:16)	McLean (2:33)	McLean II (3:06)	Ecst.Event (3:57)
Repeats once			w/interplay	Single-note riff	Single-note riffs & interplay		hand-clapping shouts	collective interplay hollers, whooping
12-bar blues	12	12	24	12	12	24	24	24

Drum solo	Out head
24	24

Increasing in volume and texture, the development exhibits "growth," in extensive build-ups, with each soloist in "trance," similar to how ecstatic events occur in worship services of the church. Mingus wrote,

> The first, *Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting*, is church music. I heard this as a child when I went to meetings with my mother. The congregation gives 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 tongues (language that the Devil can't understand).[213]

[213] In Charles Mingus: *Passions of a Man*, the complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961, 98. Liner notes to *Blues and Roots*.

Alland provides a means to understand how the solos and "trance states" function in a Mingus performance. The trance, Alland explains, is defined within a religious ceremony as "a cultural response to a series of internal and external cues which operate in a particular kind of motivational state…most likely a form of hypnosis which later becomes auto-hypnosis through a continuation of the learning process."[214] External conditions—such as the behaviors and attitudes of the group—affect the individual's ability to reach a trance, connecting group participation and possessive states. These responses can be learned and triggered with proper cues.

> Trance is in one sense a highly distilled essence of all activities in the United House of Prayer which are directed toward joy, ecstacy and final salvation…trance fulfills a member's status rights in the eyes of the congregation. Repetition of trance acts to reinforce the belief of performers and spectators alike, proving that the people involved have not wandered from a state of grace.[215]

Alland notes the economically deprived membership of the sect and that hypnosis itself is a form of regression in the service of the ego in which a transference-dependency relationship is set up between the hypnotist and his subject. In the church this relationship appeals to the individual seeking the salvation of the Holy Ghost.[216]

The form of "Wednesday Night" shows the group supporting the "spirit baptisms" of the soloists, the cumulative effect of the last development peaking in Jackie McLean's sax solo (starting at 5:10), with 6/8 on 4 hand-clapping from the other players and the audience (the congregation), and directing and shouting from Mingus (the preacher). Figure 3.5 shows a variation in the 1960 Antibes, France performance.

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[214] Alland, 213.
[215] Alland, 210.
[216] Alland, 209, 210.

Figure 3.5. "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting," Mingus, *Mingus at Antibes* (Atlantic), 1960.

Head || Curson (tpt) - ecstatic event || Ervin (ts) - ecstatic event || Dolphy (as) (5:10) extended ecstatic event (6:17)

With each soloist supported by riffs building to ecstatic pitch, the peak trance arrives with Eric Dolphy's alto solo, moving both players and audience to shouts and clapping in an expression of collective emotion. In a sense Mingus is the hypnotist/pastor who prepares his subjects/players to receive the Holy Ghost.

Conclusion

Mingus's use of early jazz group improvisation and the collective rituals of church music enriched the group dynamics and musical techniques of the workshop. In particular, he expressed sections of group interplay and church dynamics in a jazz ritual that relates to Jackson's cultural framework:

> Meanings emerge from the linkages and oppositions between juxtaposed musical sounds and their interpretations by listeners. Each musical item and its creative use becomes a way of connecting with some of the most deeply held values of African Americans toward performance, toward living, and toward who they are as people, values that stress tolerance of individual variation and group cooperation in the service of survival…Jazz performance therefore assumes a synecdochic relationship to African American culture: one brings to the musical

> event those ideals that should motivate daily living—as in music, so in life. Not just a better musician but a better person.[217]

If the early compositional emphasis of group improvisation as practiced by Morton gave only glimpses of a uniting spirit, Mingus's incorporation of his bandmembers' talents in service to generating religious ecstasy created more transcendent events that blurred the line between audience and performers—a phenomenon that reflects the group-oriented emphasis of black music. Perhaps this creation of group one-ness accounts for what I have noticed as a widespread admiration and enthusiasm for "Mingus music" that reaches across generations and musical tastes. Mingus was able to forge relationships with players, demanding individual contributions in creating each melody, countermelody, rhythm and chord, as well as solos. And because he gave them the freedom and encouragement needed, his Workshop members also united around collective moments that could transcend the tired labeling of the music as either art or entertainment. Only those few audience members hard-wired to an alien aesthetic could fail to participate in these collective, transcendent moments.

[217] Jackson, 68.

Conclusion

In the 1950s and early 60s, Mingus constructed a vision of the jazz tradition that resisted the tendency to take sides, or to fragment the music into a series of eras and subgenres. Despite the dramatic transformations that took place in jazz, his writings and compositions show that such definitions of jazz constrained him, as they have constrained others from expressing themselves fully.

In his "Jelly Roll" pieces, Mingus spoke to his New Orleans musical ancestors, not in the way of the Dixieland revivalists, but in a response to the critical discourse of the modernist/fig debate that expressed his own ethnic and experiential ties to the music. For Mingus, the music of New Orleans needed no reviving because to him (and to others) it was not dead. His undertaking to move into the future without losing the past forms the kernel of his expansive vision of jazz. In his revisions of the early music, the admiration and desire to retain his roots influenced his search for an alternative black masculine persona. The revisionary model also influenced his commentary on black and white roles in jazz entertainment. In foregrounding his early predecessors, Mingus's process of communication unfolded, reclaiming received traditions in ways that reflected the complexity of race in the jazz industry. His reclaiming of the music of the black church focused on the communal spirit, which had been obscured in the wake of big band and bebop developments.

For Mingus's work as a whole, this study fits into the larger discussion of influences he included in his work—the atonal and concert music in, "Black Saint and Sinner Lady, *Epitaph* and "Half-Mast Inhibition," the Spanish tinge in his Tijuana compositions, or the expressions of political activism in the many smaller works such as

"Haitian Fight Song" and "Fables of Faubus." These are a few significant topics for Mingus studies, to which this study contributes in its understanding of Mingus's response to Morton, the minstrel mask, and his early communal experience.

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