



Music Written for Monterey 1965 Not Heard...

Charles Mingus

(Sue Mingus Music-Sunnyside)

by George Kanzler

Live in Tokyo:

At the Blue Note

Mingus Big Band

Ghost bands play the music of a band whose leader is deceased, carrying it on as played when that leader was in charge. So the Mingus Big Band isn't exactly a ghost band, since bassist/pianist/composer Charles Mingus never led a big band, except very sporadically in studios and concerts. *Music Written for Monterey 1965 Not Heard* actually features one of the larger bands Mingus led for more than a one-off engagement, an octet. *Live in Tokyo* features the 14 member Mingus Big Band, an ensemble Mingus, who died over 27 years ago, would have loved to lead.

Mingus wrote some of his most ambitious and challenging music for the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1965, assembling an octet from his working quintet, sans the pianist, of Lonnie Hillyer (trumpet), Charles McPherson (alto sax) and Dannie Richmond (drums). Added were trumpeters Hobart Dotson and Jimmy Owens, French horn player Julius Watkins and tuba player Howard Johnson. The album's two CDs feature that music (not played at Monterey due to unforeseen time constraints put on Mingus' set) at a UCLA concert one week later, including some false starts and Mingus lecturing his musicians and talking to the audience, making this a typical Mingus Jazz Workshop performance.

It opens with the extraordinary tone poem, "Meditation on Inner Peace", with Mingus bowing throughout, tuba and drums keeping a slow, varied pulse as horns drift in and out with the long-form theme under solos from Mingus, McPherson and a fervent Watkins. After a couple of breakdowns, Mingus dismisses the augmenting musicians and presents a quartet version of "Ode to Bird and Dizzy", an uptempo romp incorporating a number of bebop tunes. The octet returns for "They Trespass the Land of the Sacred Sioux", a largely rubato and/or slow tempoed piece with Mingus on piano, McPherson in the lead and Watkins evoking a cavalry charge on his horn.

The second disc opens with "The Arts of Tatum and Freddie Webster", a feature for the splendid upper register trumpet of Dotson, showcased over rolling ostinatos from the other horns. "Once Upon a Time, There Was a Holding Corporation Called Old America" is successfully played next, full of multi-layered themes, overlapping horns, tempo and time changes and Hillyer's trumpet riding over it all as Mingus and Richmond find a killer groove. After some

short, two-beat fun with "Muskrat Ramble", the 10-part fugue "Don't Be Afraid, the Clown's Afraid Too" is given a decent reading (it was later done much better on record), enlivened by incisive solos from Hillyer, Johnson and Watkins. "Don't Let It Happen Here", a feature for Owens' flugelhorn, ends the album on a cautionary note emphasized by gospel inflections.

All of the characteristics of Mingus music, from multi-layered horn lines to shifting tempos to time signature changes, dropouts and clashing horns (ensembles and individuals), as well as frequent ensemble activity in interludes and behind soloists, can be heard on the Mingus Big Band *Live in Tokyo* album, which captures the band at its best. The eight compositions are all Mingus, with arrangements by current and former band members. The band is equally adept on punchy uptempo romps like "Wham Bam" and beautiful, long-lined ballads such as "Celia". Soloists - trombonists Ku-umba Frank Lacy and Conrad Herwig, tenor saxophonists Wayne Escoffery and Seamus Blake, baritone saxist Ronnie Cuber and flutist Craig Handy - challenge one another, often paired in trading choruses, fours and ending in tandem. It all makes the music bristle with a palpable excitement.

For more information, visit www.sunnysiderecords.com. The Mingus Orchestra is at Merkin Hall Nov. 30th with guest conductor Gunther Schuller. The Mingus Legacy Band is at Iridium Tuesdays. See calendar and regular engagements.