

DOWNBEAT

December 2006

Mingus Big Band

Live In Tokyo

SUNNYSIDE/MINGUS
MUSIC 3042

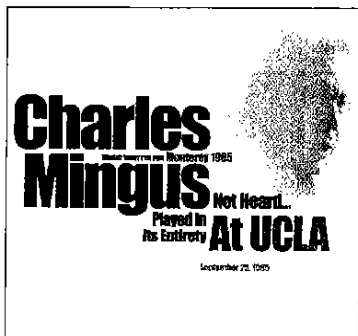
★★★

Charles Mingus

At UCLA 1965 »

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★★★★½



This past and present picture of Charles Mingus' music attests to both its historical significance and its durability. On *Live In Tokyo*, the current edition of the working Mingus Big Band shows that it's perhaps the strongest and truest to form repertory band out there. The present-tense issue of Mingus' music, recorded Dec. 31, 2005, at the Tokyo Blue Note, can't help but be less idiosyncratic and more studied. "Wham Bam"'s swinging flourish ushers in the first of eight Mingus pieces, in which the exciting charge is prompted by pianist David Kikoski, bassist Kenny Davis and drummer Jonathan Blake before the song's familiar head arrangement and fiery solos from Alex Sipiagin on trumpet and baritone saxophonist Ronnie Cuber. The band offers swinging and soulful renditions of such classics as "Opus Four," "Bird Calls," "Free Cell Block F" and, in the case of "Ecclusiastics," the familiar vocal entreaty is exhorted by trombonist Ku-umba Frank Lacy.

On "Free Cell Block F," the arrangement includes the simple substitution of Craig Handy on flute for an earlier trumpet and tenor line, as the sound of this large band paradoxically floats above the heft of Mingus' mid-'70s quintet. Artists in this stellar 14-piece aggregate include trumpeters Eddie Henderson and Jack Walrath, Earl McIntyre on bass trombone and tuba, alto saxophonist Abraham Burton and tenor saxophonist Seamus Blake.

The UCLA set, originally written for the 1965 Monterey Jazz Festival but not performed there, includes music that was new to the octet members and played with a tantalizing array of twists and turns. Sue Mingus addresses the issues that surrounded this concert in her informative liner notes. Mingus' intermittent speeches and monologues are entertaining interludes between charted false and improvised takes of such works as "Meditation On Inner Peace" (performed a year earlier), "Once Upon A Time, There Was A Holding Company Called Old America," "They Trespass The Land Of The Sacred Sioux" and the prescient "Don't Let It Happen Here." Aside from the political overtones were references to musical favorites: "Ode To Bird And Dizzy," "The Arts Of Tatum And Freddy Webster," New Orleans with "Muskrat Ramble" as well as "Don't Be Afraid, The Clown's Afraid Too."

The outstanding trumpets of Hobart Dotson,

Lonnie Hillyer and Jimmy Owens are featured, but the sections created by alto saxophonist Charles McPherson, Julius Watkins on French horn and tuba player Howard Johnson also were busy. With Mingus also playing piano and shouting out directions, drummer Dannie Richmond seems to join Mingus in holding it all together in a concert filled with theatrics and

no shortage of surprises.

—John Ephland

Live In Tokyo: Wham Bam; Opus Four; Celia; Bird Calls; Meditations; Prayer For Passive Resistance; Free Cell Block F; Ecclusiastics. (64:10)

At UCLA 1965: Disc 1—Meditation On Inner Peace; Meditation On Inner Peace; Once Upon A Time, There Was A Holding Corporation Called Old America; Ode To Bird And Dzy; They Trespass The Land Of The Sacred Sioux. (41:52) Disc 2—The Arts Of Tatum And Freddy Webster; Once Upon A Time, There Was A Holding Corporation Called Old America; Muskrat Ramble; Don't Be Afraid, The Clown's Afraid Too; Don't Let It Happen Here. (45:43)

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