

Charles MingusIn **UCLA 1965**

[Mingus Music/Sunnyside]

★★★½

Mingus Big Band

Live in Tokyo

[Mingus Music/Sunnyside]

★★★

In this low-wattage jazz era, in case anyone should ever forget what high-voltage genius in jazz sounds like, "Mingus at UCLA 1965" will do nicely as a reminder. More importantly, its first appearance on CD now is, in fact, the first time in its history it's been easy to obtain. Mingus himself put out a set briefly in 1966 through his mail order house. But after the first pressing of 200 was sold, that was it. So this — taken from one of those sets (the master tapes were destroyed) — is, in effect, its first major release.

You can understand why no major-or-minor record company at the time would jump at the chance to release 80 minutes of such chaotic live performance. In what sadly became typical Mingus style, it was somewhere between a recording session and a live workshop concert with starts and stops and repetitions and plenty of onstage dissension and confusion and leaderly emotion to distinguish it from what any self-satisfied "professional" would do in live performance.

Add a goodly share of Mingus' political poetry for the young audience and you've got all the reasons in the world for a commercial record company to give it a pass.

The music itself was something else. This is ALL the music he composed for his legendary 1965 Monterey appearance but never got to play in entirety. It's by turns magnificent, passionate and ungainly, full of snarls, yelps, elegies, the whole inside out private/public world which was uniquely Mingus' and which gave jazz some of the most passionate and extraordinary music in its history. Its appearance now is yet another tribute to the incomparable care of his widow Sue Mingus for his legacy.

It's long been known that the Mingus repertoire band she operates — called the Mingus Big Band — is probably the most exciting live jazz orchestra extant. In this set from Tokyo's Blue Note Club on New Year's Eve 2005, the

lineup is mind-boggling: Eddie Henderson, Jack Walrath, Craig Handy, Ronnie Cuber, Seamus Blake, Frank Lacy and Dave Kikosky were among the players imbued with Mingus' fire. And all of them are inflamed by drummer Jonathan Blake, a firebrand Mingus himself might have loved for all those times when his main man Dannie Richmond was elsewhere.

— Jeff Simon

BUFFALO NEWS

BUFFALO, NY

FRIDAY 194.225

SEP 29 2006