

# Mingus dynasty lives on thanks to work of bassist's wife

**S**UE MINGUS is a woman on a mission. The widow of Charles Mingus is working tirelessly to make sure her husband's music lives on and his legacy continues to thrive. Admittedly, even without her efforts, there is absolutely no chance of jazz fans forgetting about the exalted bassist-composer-bandleader, who died in 1979. He's one of the genre's true immortals.

But would we remember him as frequently without the work of Mrs. Mingus? That's doubtful.

Her greatest efforts have come with the memorial bands that she's assembled — the Mingus Dynasty, the Mingus Big Band, the Mingus Orchestra and the Epitaph Orchestra. Those acts, as well as the Bay Area's own Mingus Amungus, have helped keep the composer's music alive onstage at festivals and in clubs.

She's also written a fine book on the jazz giant, "Tonight at Noon," and started her own record label, Sue Mingus Music.

Last month, Sue Mingus Music simultaneously released two new live discs that warrant heavy consideration from jazz fans.

The more exciting of the two is the descriptively titled "Music Written for Monterey, 1965 Not Heard . . . Played Live in Its Entirety at UCLA."

The story behind the CD is that Mingus was ready to unveil a whole new batch of difficult material at the 1965 Monterey Jazz Festival. Things, however, did not go as he planned and his set was truncated to barely 30 minutes. He ended up scrapping most of his song list.



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**Last month, Sue Mingus Music simultaneously released two new live discs that warrant heavy consideration from jazz fans.**

A few days later, Mingus would head south and premiere the material at UCLA, the result of which can be heard on this new two-disc set.

The bassist often referred to his live shows as "workshops," and one can hear why here. He was very vocal as he directed his accompanying musicians through the unfamiliar material, shouting reprimands and, in general, looking for the same type of excellence from his side players as he demanded from himself.

Without a doubt, this disc is a necessary purchase for those who consider themselves big Mingus fans. Not only does it give a rare inside look at the musician's creative process, it also features Mingus performing songs you simply won't find anywhere else. We're

talking about "They Trespass the Land of the Sacred Sioux," "Don't Let It Happen Here" and "The Arts of Tatum and Freddy Webster."

Don't know those songs? You will after you get this disc. I know that I've had a hard time getting it off my turntable — oops, I mean, CD player — since I got my copy.

I feel compelled to add, before I get e-mails from the really big jazz geeks, a disclaimer that this CD isn't really, totally, new. It was originally released by Mingus' own label 40 years ago. But I truly doubt that you have an original copy — and if you do, you're one lucky jazz collector.

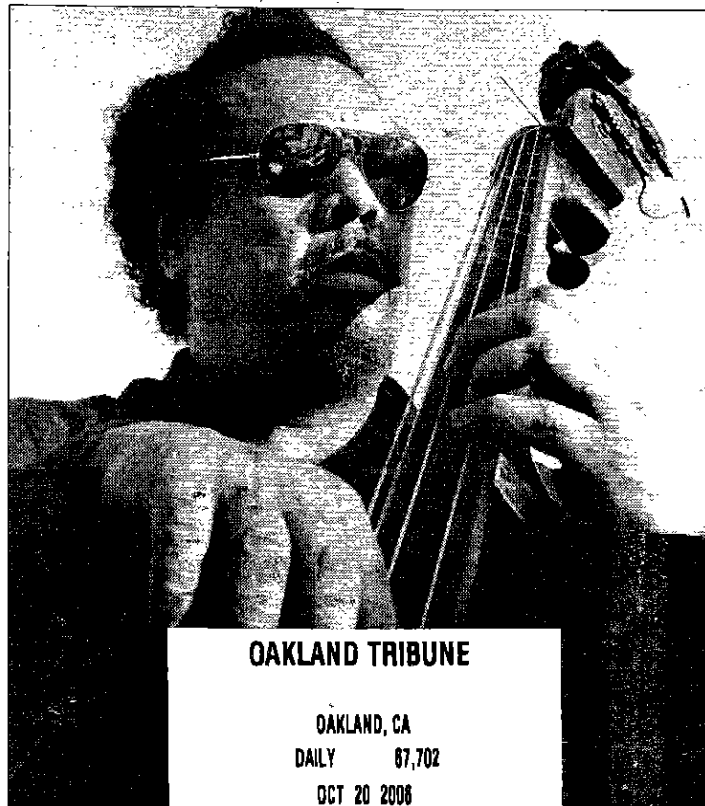
Only 200 copies were originally pressed before Mingus, like so many jazz musicians do, ran into money troubles. The masters were later destroyed by some morons when Capitol Records cleaned out its vaults in the early '70s.

I can just imagine the conversation:

Moron 1: "Hey, Bob, this box contains some Charles Mingus masters. What should we do with it?"

Moron 2: "Gee, Ted, I don't know. I guess we should toss it in the trash and go grab a burger. Have you heard the new Jethro Tull record? Those guys have talent!"

With the masters gone, Sue Mingus and crew had to recapture the bassist's performance at UCLA by remastering from the original vinyl. Given the difficulty of that process, I'm happy to report that "Music Written for Monterey, 1965 Not Heard . . . Played Live in Its Entirety at UCLA" sounds pretty darn good.



**MINGUS AMONG US:** Jazz great Charles Mingus died in 1979. Yet his music lives on due in part to the work of his widow, Sue Mingus.

The other new disc from Sue Mingus Music sounds even better — but that's because it was recorded just last year.

"Live in Tokyo at the Blue Note, 2005" captures the Mingus Big Band in a raucous run through the great composer's songbook during a New Year's Eve concert. Included in the mix are classics such as "Meditations," "Ecclesiastics," "Opus 4," "Bird Calls" and "Wham Bam."

I've always enjoyed this

group's work, especially its sensational rendition of "Haitian Fight Song," and the 14-piece ensemble doesn't let me down on "Live in Tokyo."

It will be interesting to see what else Sue Mingus has in store for us down the road. I bet it will be both bountiful and worthy. She remains a woman on a mission.

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