

*For the record*  
**Tributes  
to  
Charles Mingus**

by **Terry Orme**  
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SOME MIGHT THINK the late Charles Mingus was a bit mad. Others, that he lived life to the hilt, never taking no for an answer, never tolerating mediocrity.

When chroniclers of jazz greats write about the bassist, they talk about his passion for living, his need to experience, to taste, the present. He was known to yell at his band on stage when the music didn't come out his way because he just couldn't wait for intermission; he would make a scene in a restaurant if the table wasn't to his liking and the food impeccable.



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"Mingus always skirted the edge of sanity, because living is most intense there," wrote jazz authority Sy Johnson. "And Mingus abhorred life without passion. Many of his outbursts, however, were calculated to get what he wanted . . . he saw nothing wrong in employing his awesome reputation for violence to gain some slight leverage in what he perceived as a hostile universe."

IF YOU ASKED Joni Mitchell about Mingus, she would probably agree that Mingus was not mad but a man whose genius made him hard for some to understand.

"The first time I saw his face it shone up to me with a joyous mischief," she writes in the liner notes of her new album, **Mingus**. "I liked him immediately. I had

come to New York to hear six new songs he had written for me.

"I was honored! I was curious! It was as if I had been standing by a river — one toe in the water — feeling it out — and Charlie came by and pushed me in — sink or swim — him laughing at me dog paddling around in the currents of black classical music."

That first encounter with the enigmatic jazz great led to a project for Mitchell — an album of some of the songs Mingus wrote, to which she added lyrics.

Mingus followed her progress with the album until he succumbed to a long, debilitating illness in Cuernavaca, Mexico, January 5, 1979.

"Time never ticked so loudly for me as it did this last year," she writes. "I wanted Charlie to witness the project's completion. He heard every cut but one — "God Must Be a Boogie Man."

THE INSPIRATION for the song bore fruit two days after Mingus died.

With the cool bass lines of Mingus' charts underlying her willowly voice, Mitchell sings tribute after tribute to the big man.

It is Charles Mingus speaking in "A Chair In the Sky." Mitchell's lyrics are of a man who knows his time is near, and preoccupied with things left undone, of "beautiful lovers I never got to kiss." Yet the song is not a sad one, for Mingus will be back, or perhaps he'll never really leave. He'll be "resurrected royal," he'll be "rich as Standard Oil."

Perhaps Mingus' best known song is his tribute to jazz saxophonist Lester Young, "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat." Mitchell's words tell the story of Lester and Charles and the days in New York. The song ends with the affirmation that these two will always be part of the noise, the energy, of the big city.

Throughout the album are tapes of Mingus talking, bits and pieces that give a feeling for the man. The album begins with a bunch of friends singing Happy Birthday to him. Mingus insists that he's 54, while his wife Sue, keeps yelling across the room, that, no, he's 53. Sounds like quite a party is going on.

Then there is a conversation between Mingus and a man named Swede where Charlie's funeral is discussed. Swede says he is going to have a funeral the size of Duke Ellington's. Mingus tells him no, that he has it all figured out. He's going to be buried in India. His ashes were dumped at the source of the Ganges River by his wife after he died.

The musicians Joni Mitchell gathered for this tribute provide reason enough to buy the album: Phil Woods on alto saxophone; John McLaughlin, guitar; Stanley Clark, bass; Wayne Shorter, soprano sax; Herbie Hancock on electric piano, to name a few.



*The late jazz basist Charles Mingus is honored on a new album by Joni Mitchell, "Mingus."*

Those who have followed the career of Charles Mingus will find **Mingus** a worthy tribute as well as another fine album by poet, singer, and guitarist Joni Mitchell.

Columbia Records recently released another memorial to Mingus: **Nostalgia In Times Square**, a Contemporary Masters Series release. The double album set is from sessions recorded in New York in 1959.

Included are four cuts previously unreleased, and songs that serve to illuminate his career and influences.

He addresses his idol, Duke Ellington, in "An Open Letter To Duke." "GG Train" was written for a Langston Hughes poetry session; "Jelly Roll" is the bassist's tribute to Jelly Roll Morton.

Sy Johnson writes extensive liner notes in the album, giving an informative picture of Mingus' life and career. A portion of the those notes have been quoted above.

