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# MINGUS IN THE WORKSHOP: LEADING THE IMPROVISATION FROM NEW ORLEANS TO PENTECOSTAL TRANCE

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JENNIFER GRIFFITH

But within all the varied components of black music and throughout all the changes it underwent, it remained a group-oriented means of communication and expression.

—Lawrence Levine (1977, 239)

In the mid-1950s Charles Mingus embraced two historical African-derived approaches that emphasized group expression: (1) the collective improvisation of early New Orleans jazz, whose roots lay in (2) the ecstatic worship and singing rituals of the black Pentecostal church. Mingus's recordings from the mid-1950s to early 1960s musically progressed from short sections of frontline collective interplay and group improvisation reminiscent of early jazz to longer forms of ecstatic ritual. This latter practice—in the form of solos, band, and audience participation—was a direct invocation of the “Holy Ghost-filled” spiritual communion (Booker 1988, 32), or Holy Spirit possession that Mingus had witnessed in Pentecostal church services as a youth. Many writers have observed Mingus's diverse influences. Eric Porter (2002) writes that Mingus challenged all musical boundaries, invoking his aesthetic of late Romanticism, his anticipations of free jazz, and points between in tributes to Jelly Roll Morton. Brian Priestley (1982) remarked on influences from Mingus's work as a sideman for Louis Armstrong and big-band leaders Lionel Hampton and Duke Ellington. Both Porter and Priestley also note influences of the black church, bebop harmonies, and rhythms modeling Charles

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JENNIFER GRIFFITH moves between jazz scholarship and her creative efforts as a composer and performer. She has written on composer/bandleader/bassist Charles Mingus's reanimations of early jazz and his response to the legacies of vaudeville and minstrelsy (*Jazz Perspectives* 2010) and on Savoy Records owner Herman Lubinsky and the postwar music industry with Robert Cherry (*Journal for Jazz Studies* 2014).

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Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk as well as Lennie Tristano's modernist jazz sounds. Finally, Todd Jenkins mentions Mingus's jazz-rock and world-music fusions (2006, 4).

Relatively little has been written regarding the contexts of these influences, particularly of early New Orleans jazz and the black Pentecostal church, nor have they been explored in close readings of Mingus's works and recordings. In this article, I argue that Mingus's use of New Orleans-style collective improvisation and composition (as in his response to Jelly Roll Morton) and the influence of church music follows a stylistic trajectory. I also explore his use of these influences contextually and through a musical analysis of the recordings. The elements of the two African-derived approaches are most evident in five recordings from the 1950s. The New Orleans style can be heard in the frontline's collectively improvised sections, in recordings as early as "Jump Monk" (1955), in "Pithecanthropus Erectus" (1956), "Dizzy Moods" (1957), and implicated in "Moanin'" (1959), where melodic instrumental interplay—along with group and solo improvisation—create texture and timbre, but also determine a tight structure. Later, such elements evolved into the pivotal idea of "growth" or expansion, what Mingus referred to as "extended form." Here he gives soloists room to enact a spiritual transcendence within this more flexible form; Mingus's reenactments of the communal dynamics of the black church play out most obviously in "Better Git Hit in Your Soul" (1959) and "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" (1959).

Mingus used these two approaches to advance not only musical expression but also political and spiritual ideas. In his music and testimony, after the moldy fig/modernist debate (Gendron 2002, 121–123; one between early jazz and bebop proponents arguing the merits of these subgenres) within the 1940s "Dixieland" revival, Mingus made New Orleans jazz a part of his larger embrace of group expression in the 1950s. His use went beyond bebop's small group format of head-solo-head (or soloist-versus-rhythm) or big band's similar arrangements. While Mingus's music orbited the same sphere of soul music (influenced by gospel) that Ray Charles and others mined during this era, his inclusion of idioms from African-American church tradition developed in musical form the confined uses of a "roots" stylistic approach, which can be seen in Charles's contemporary recordings or Nat and Cannonball Adderley's work songs. Yet with the album *Blues and Roots* (1959), Mingus wrote that he was responding to (Atlantic Records owner) Nesuhi Ertegun's suggestion that "people said he didn't swing enough" (quoted in Mingus 1997, 98). He had focused his musical research on the blues and the rituals of the Pentecostal church. If initially Mingus merely responded to criticism, his music and mentorship also influenced the individual affect or emotion of his players, developing their expres-

sion and even supporting their experience of transcendence in the music through soloing and group interaction. His own “gospel” is also clearly implied through his leadership, where he played the role of preacher on the bandstand, urging and countering the utterances of his players with shouts of encouragement and censorship, which I discuss later. Thus, his mentoring and leadership was meant to push players out of conscious states into those where the music could be driven by spirit alone.

As bandleader and teacher in his Jazz Workshop, Mingus emphasized the collective spirit and its connection to music and life. He encouraged his players to express themselves freely, both in solos and through group interaction. But even as he encouraged their individuality, he viewed them as in service to a larger compositional vision, not merely of his exclusive creation, but rather a communal experience. For this purpose, he promoted the erasure of the self or ego in search of transcendence and group-oriented music. In examining Mingus’s Workshop performances, I include his testimony relating to leadership and musical goals and his Workshop players’ testimony of Mingus’s mentoring along with their perceptions, relationships, training, and contributions to the group and to the music. His remarks demonstrate Mingus’s process of individually mentoring players as soloists and group members. This process begins with his early 1950s revision of contemporary critical ideas of the jazz orthodoxy (Porter 2002, 107, 123–124) to include Jelly Roll Morton—unique among New Orleans jazz musicians of his era as a fully developed composer and arranger—and Mingus’s mid-1950s reanimation of New Orleans-style improvisation. As Gunther Schuller notes, “The improvisation of many lines at the same time is a typically African concept, and is perpetuated in most forms of early jazz, a music marked above all by ‘collective improvisation’” (1968, 57). In the mid-1950s to early 1960s (and beyond) Mingus fostered long-term relationships with his Workshop musicians in order to explore another idea of group expression: bringing a witnessing of Holy Ghost possession to the bandstand.

### Leadership and Mentoring Roots

Mingus first used the name “Jazz Workshop” in 1953 for Friday night jazz workshops and—beginning in 1955—generically for all his groups (Priestley 1982, 54). He adapted the name for his work with various musicians using players according to availability and ability for a gig or a concert, but his leadership marked the process of mentoring musicians, who were either young or had undiscovered talents. As is well known, Mingus led his Jazz Workshop boldly, often beginning his recruitments in a way that could

make or break a young or relatively unknown player's ego. Tubist Howard Johnson describes meeting him at a gig, where Mingus immediately auditioned him onstage with the audience looking on. As both mentor and leader in his Workshop (he called it a workshop, Johnson believes, "So that he could do *anything* he wanted" (personal communication, July 3, 2008), Mingus's blunt appraisals had their drawbacks, and the attrition of players became unavoidable because he demanded submission to his leadership while also cultivating their technique and emotional reserves for the music.

Mingus's mentoring style retained practices from early jazz, which were derived from western and central African pedagogy. Christopher Wilkinson has drawn attention to these primary musical practices: "Formal political or religious rituals constituted occasions for all members of the community to participate in the virtually inseparable activities of drumming, song, and dance, led by the community's professional musicians" (1994, 32). These occasions contribute to the "omnipresence of music within daily life as well as its central role in formal ritual—practices that facilitate the education of musicians" (29). African pedagogy parallels that of early New Orleans,<sup>1</sup> where although many first-generation Creoles were schooled in Eurocentric methods, Uptown and Downtown blacks—as young musicians—learned by "active participation" and, as Nketia observed in 1973, the "*slow absorption* through exposure to musical situations" (quoted in Wilkinson 1994).<sup>2</sup> These practices reflected those among the Ewe:

The future drummers learn to "play from the mouth," that is, they acquire knowledge of the basic rhythmic patterns of their instruments from adult drummers who teach them sequences of both nonsense and (subsequently) actual words that embody the rhythms they must master. Apart from these brief instructions, the adults do not appear to take an active role in the education of the young; rather, they expect those with the inherited gifts to develop proficiency on their own (35).

In contrast to the youth-oriented instruction in West African and New Orleans jazz traditions, in Mingus's workshop, musicians were older and professionally schooled in the European music tradition by the time he

1. In New Orleans, David Ake (1999) explains, two cultures—blacks (who lived Uptown) and Creoles (who lived Downtown)—were divided musically as well as in other cultural aspects. Ake notes that "having been raised on the aesthetics attached to the European art-music tradition, most Creoles ridiculed the Uptown musicians as 'unschooled.' Uptown players were usually less adept at sight reading musical notation than their neighbors, and incorporated a number of instrumental effects (blues-inflected slurs, 'growls,' etc.) that conservatory-trained Downtown musicians of the time found to be primitive, distasteful, or otherwise inferior" (8).

2. Wilkinson draws from J. H. Kwabena Nketia's book, *The Music of Africa*, which discusses pedagogical principles of music education in Africa.

recruited them. John Handy, like many of Mingus's musicians, had mastered his instrument with years of formal training in European harmony and technique.

We were trying our best to learn the chord changes, the harmonies dictated the notes that you played and it was up to you to adhere to that and we were very academic in that way. Well, that's what I was learning; mind you I was twenty-five and about a half, as a matter of fact I was closer to twenty-six by the time I played with him [Mingus]. I'd gone to school most of my life and I was young then, I'd been out of the army a coupla years, I guess. I'd come right back to school; I'd thought I'd finished school . . . [laughs]. Otherwise, I was goin to New York. I went there expecting to play the way I'd been training and preparing myself. (Personal communication, July 16, 2007)

Mingus said, "I look for people with something strong of their own to say" (Hentoff 1964, 53). Thus, his young players essentially signed up for an apprenticeship.

In his younger years, Mingus admired several bandleaders who exacted similar demands. These included Jelly Roll Morton (whose influence I discuss later and at length in Griffith 2010a, 6–41), Duke Ellington, and Lionel Hampton. Mingus looked to Ellington foremost, experiencing his influence firsthand when he played with Ellington's orchestra in 1953 (Priestley 1982, 50). Although collective improvisation had mostly disappeared from jazz's forefront between Jelly Roll Morton's era and Mingus's in the mid-1950s, Ellington did occasionally mix group improvisation with written music. For example, in "Stompy Jones" (1936) and in the last chorus of "Harlem Speaks" (1933) the trombone and clarinet solo alongside the trumpet section's melody. Mingus's earlier work with Hampton would have also provided a model. Although undoubtedly not as heavy-handed as Mingus, Ellington, and Hampton stocked their bands with excellent, well-versed musicians, and Ellington and Morton likely influenced Mingus's inclusion of players as part of the compositional process. For instance, Handy reports that for "Better Get Hit in Your Soul" (1959), "I wrote the bridge to that. I added the bridge, I didn't actually write it. [Sings] I did that" (personal communication, 2007), meaning he created it during a rehearsal or performance.

Ellington most directly influenced Mingus in several ways. First, Mingus performed and recorded many Ellington songs, among them "Day Dream" (1953), "The Jeep is Jumpin" (1955; with Hazel Scott), "Things Ain't What They Used to Be" (1959), a back-to-back version of "Do Nothin Til You Hear From Me" and "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart" (1960), "Take the 'A' Train," (1962), and an extended Ellington medley in his album *Live at Chateaufillon* (1972). Second, Mingus borrowed directly from Ellington

musically. When Mingus's complete version of the large work *Epitaph* was first performed in 1989,<sup>3</sup> his archivist Andrew Homzy reflected that "Mingus had conceived this as a tribute to all these great musicians—they were going to create as much of the piece as he was," (quoted in Moon 1989, 66) and called it "a flashback of his goals and expressions as a composer, examples of where he had come from" (68). Homzy noted that *Epitaph* contained references to Ellington that mixed with those of Morton's "Wolverine Blues" (Moon 1989, 66, 68). Ellington also influenced in other ways, as Mingus revealed when writing of his own approach:

Each man's particular style is taken into consideration. They are given different rows of notes to use against each chord but they choose their own notes and play them in their own style, from scales as well as chords, except where a particular mood is indicated. In this way I can keep my own compositional flavor . . . and yet allow the musicians more individual freedom in the creation of their group lines and solos. (Quoted in Balliett 1960, 127)

Thus, Ellington's compositional collaboration with his band members directly influenced the Workshop band as Mingus adopted his practice of nurturing a musician's unique voice and promoting individual contributions to his orchestra.

### From Individual to Group Focus in the Workshop

Mingus, like Ellington, developed the individual voices, using them as compositional tools. Mingus's approach differed, however, both musically and philosophically. Once a musician began working with Mingus, he would have to assume a Zen-like beginner's mind in order to avoid imitating and relying on riffs prevalent on the jazz scene of the day and to cultivate the emotional honesty Mingus demanded in solo work within the group. Mingus's Workshop rehearsals and performances resembled traditional African community rituals where, as John M. Chernoff notes, "Music-making . . . is above all an occasion for the demonstration of character" (1979, 64). If by "character," Chernoff means the development of one's individual voice, Mingus's compositional voice relied heavily on the strength of a select group of individual voices, as he revealed in a 1960 interview:

That's what you do on one tune. There's the ocean and there's a million waves and each piece is like one of the waves and different as each wave. A creative person is not one thing. That's why I'm trying to go back to the beginning to answer the question that's come to me so many times: "What is jazz?" (Gitler 1960)

3. Mingus first performed a major portion of *Epitaph* at the Town Hall concert, October 12, 1962. (*Epitaph Pts 1 and 2*, United Artists UAJ 15024). The remaining pieces Mingus assembled, or had in various stacks of his oeuvre where Homzy discovered them after he died.

Thus, the Workshop, although perhaps not set up as such, effectively became a facility for developing musicians—those Mingus felt could take his direction and contribute to his concept of combining written notes with individual- and group-improvised textures and lines.

The Workshop may have influenced Mingus's proposed School of Arts, Music, and Gymnastics in 1963. Mingus's facility would resemble the ancient Greek forum for education, and he saw education within a group setting as vital in sustaining artists' autonomy economically while supporting their communities and organizing musicians (Porter 2002, 135). Because the school, anticipating assistance from Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, ultimately never received funding (Priestley 1982, 149), Mingus's teaching aspirations went into the Workshop, where his style of "initiating" his musicians resulted in harsh culling. Some players later testified that the experience, despite its drawbacks, served them well. Mingus's tenor saxophonist-clarinetist Bobby Jones said:

There are formulas, but you have freedom within those formulas. It's difficult to explain—you must do it all by feel. Mingus gives you all the freedom you want, but no more or no less than any other group member. You have equal responsibility and equal privilege to follow or to lead, whatever the case may be. It's given me a lot more self-confidence. I've gone to sessions and checked myself out against people I used to play with and found that I'm a lot stronger as a result. (Morgenstern 1972, 18)

Trumpeter Clarence "Gene" Shaw recalled that "Mingus made extraordinary demands on the musicians. He asked for one to bring forth one's essence, and he would do anything to point the way toward the work he wanted done at the time" (Hentoff 1964). Charles McPherson noted, "I figured that if I could work with this cat, I could work with anyone" (Hentoff 1964). At its best, Mingus's leadership and mentoring promoted a strong group of individuals. Even with its fluctuating membership, the group remained a tight, interactive band that could play in a number of styles, and its members were able to open themselves to Mingus's music-making and his personal style. At its most difficult, it was very challenging: "I got to see some of what I heard about Charles, see him act out, and he just had no diplomacy. I didn't like what I was seeing when I was there" (J. Handy, personal communication, July 16, 2007). And pianist/arranger Sy Johnson noted:

When he felt the band had become too facile—just swinging along . . . he'd destroy that ambience because he wanted us to *think* about what we were playing. He'd suddenly switch from four to six beats in the bar, and it was like slipping on a piece of ice on the street. You'd fall on your ass. But you'd surely be thinking. Mingus gave you *resistance*. He never thought his function was to support the soloist but rather to stir him up. And so his bass lines would snarl and pop and sizzle. (Hentoff 1979, 34)

Part of the difference between Ellington's and Mingus's styles in managing their respective bands lay in Mingus's comfort level with conflict. When Eddie Bert first worked with him, Bert recalls, Mingus was barred from Birdland.

Mingus said, "You want me to work with you?" and I said, "Yeah." Mingus called Birdland and got permission. When we started playing, he said, "What's the matter with this band? Nobody argues." ([Ed] Shaugnessy on drums, Vinnie Dean, Ray Abrams, tenor.) When a tune didn't go well Mingus would just stop it. It was just part of him. He couldn't understand why I didn't argue in my band. (Personal communication, December 8, 2006)

For Mingus, the directorial style of commanding with his personality worked to elicit emotional responses from his players. In his commanding approach he may have consciously sought musicians' raw or more vulnerable expressions. Porter (2002) has observed that Mingus used "apparently unplanned group improvisation as a means of getting musicians to express their emotional selves during performance" (116).

### Composing and Improvising Techniques

As part of the Workshop's mentoring process, Mingus used both loosely defined and specifically structured techniques to guide soloists' improvisations and shape individual pieces stylistically and compositionally. From his perch on the bass, he instructed or signaled players to switch from one style of jazz to another. Tubist Bob Stewart recounts, "He would call tunes like that right in the middle of something . . . you can hear that on *Let My Children Hear Music* (1971), on 'Don't Be Afraid, the Clown's Afraid Too'" (the first tune on the album where Mingus changed the rhythmic groove from four to two, as Stewart recounts; he does so several times in this recording). Mingus gave no specific instructions as to who should play where, as Stewart says: "Everybody knew what the vibe was. If they were gonna do something they knew they had the freedom to go ahead and play. He didn't have to explain, to give them the authority to play. It was ok, because you knew that that's what he was gonna do" (personal communication, January 22, 2008). Asked if Mingus indicated what he wanted in terms of solos, duos, or group improvisation in the New Orleans style, Stewart replied:

He never specifically said that. He would imply that by what he played on the bass . . . He'd play two . . . he'd play a two feel . . . *donh, be-donh-donh donh* . . . that wouldn't tell them they should be playing bebop. They would take it from that we were gonna play something in two, that their accompaniment would be appropriate to what he was playing. He never gave any directions.

That's one of the reasons why somebody who makes something of quality'd hire good people. Because he therefore could depend on what the people *know*. (Personal communication, January 22, 2008)

Stewart emphasizes the importance of players having a high level of knowledge of the tradition. Mingus often knew when and how he wanted his players to contribute to the performance or composition.

In his charts, the level of instruction might be sketchily outlined, remaining open to the interpretive powers and contributions of the players. In a review of the 1955 Cafe Bohemia performances, *Down Beat* wrote:

A remarkable aspect of this Mingus workshop program is that none of the material so far has been written out. On the originals, Mingus gives the musicians a basic idea of what he wants. He'll sing the thematic lines until they're absorbed by the other men, and on specific songs, Mingus gives additional instructions. He may tell the trombonist at times, for example, not to play the tonic, third and fifth since the bass already plays those notes. Instead, he'll advise the hornman to start on a ninth, a 13th or "whatever else you hear."

He has each man start off his solo with a long line of the soloist's own shaping rather than with a fast-moving, choppy line. This is to enable the improvisational composition to build more cohesively and also to give the audience something to hang onto. The procedure therefore calls on a musician's melodic resourcefulness as well. ("*Caught in the Act*" 1955)

Mingus's players would later remark on the unusual nature of some of his specific instructions. Saxophonist Yusef Lateef reported, "For example, on one composition I had a solo and, as opposed to having chord symbols for me to improvise against, he had drawn a picture of a coffin. And that was the substance upon which I was to improvise" (Priestley 1982, 111). As the composer dictating the piece, Mingus relied on players knowing their instruments and being able to improvise over abstract music principles. A 1959 review gives Mingus's account of composing a previous work, "Love Chant":

This is an extended form version on a more or less standard set of chord changes. This form challenges the musician to create a line of long-held notes for the first chorus, to develop it on one or two chords (or rhythm patterns, scales, etc.) and then redevelop the line on the out chorus. This is done using only one or two chords per phrase so the lines must be developed for a much longer period of time than is usually taken before the chord change . . . *The whole success of the extended form depends on the ability of the musicians to do this in soloing and also in playing counter or accompanying lines.* (Balliett 1959; my emphasis)

Mingus's way of charting, and his mentoring emphasis on spontaneous, frontline interplay, formed the Workshop's particular style of group

expression. With a form that allowed indeterminate interplay on a few chords, for example, he could prepare players for following his more extended forms, where frontline improvising went on until a signal (changing a harmony or rhythmic groove) to jump back into the original form.

### Interaction and Interplay in the Tradition

In his workshop, Mingus also transmitted means by which his musicians could incorporate the styles and practices of the black Pentecostal church, both its music and ecstatic worship rituals. This turn to embrace the musical and cultural practices of the black church was also in keeping with jazz tradition, thus reflecting Mingus's musical and aesthetic goals. He had attended the Pentecostal church in Los Angeles as a child (with his stepmother, who also took him to Methodist services), which demonstrated a valuable connection between the collective spirit in music-making in the Sanctified church of New Orleans, similar to the Pentecostal sect in its use of music in worship services.

That Mingus's exposure to Pentecostal worship and music practices would have direct bearing on his musical development is not a far stretch, as will be demonstrated. A correlation between Sanctified (a precursor to Holiness or Pentecostal) church music and that of New Orleans jazz has been shown by Thomas Brothers, whose discussion relies on Baby Dodds, Mahalia Jackson, and others to understand the connections between church music and jazz:

Congregational heterophony is organized around the tune itself . . . and the same is true for New Orleans jazz. "The secret of good jazz music has always been to carry the melody at all times," wrote Baby Dodds . . . Everything that is added to the tune, the crooks, turns, slurs, appoggiaturas, slow dragging, and so on, is essential for a good performance yet ancillary in perceptual terms. In the classic format of "collective improvisation," the texture that as much as anything else distinguishes early New Orleanian jazz, the clarinet, second cornet, violin, and trombone fill these ancillary roles while the first cornet usually plays the lead melody. The clarinet, especially, often seems like a one-man effort to reproduce the heterophonic richness of a congregation, even though it also foregrounds instrumental virtuosity so fiercely that the resemblance to vocal practice gets covered up. Collective improvisation may thus be read as a stylized, instrumentalized, and professionalized transformation of church heterophony. (Brothers 2006, 45)

Because heterophony is part of, or forms the textural vocabulary of a collective improvisation, I talk about both interplay and group heterophony (or interweaving musical lines) as a feature of the latter. As

with New Orleans jazz—at least through collective and the individual improvisation—Mingus’s musical expression determined form as much as form determined musical expression. Recordings by early jazz groups emphasized group interplay and improvisation much more than did the music of the big bands and bebop units. During these later decades, when collective improvisation lay relatively dormant, clarinetist Sydney Bechet blamed big band arrangements and instrumental solos for the loss of the “conversation” among musicians. Bechet (1960; who also elevated the idea of composition) and others of the early era grieved over the demise of group heterophony, especially because they knew how much the group dynamic could result in intense emotional and musical connections among players. Bechet sought out the spirit of interplay within the piece, including duets and trios, that might arise spontaneously.

And all that freedom, all that feeling a man’s got when he’s playing next to you—they [big band arrangements] take that away. They give you his part to play and they give him your part, and that’s how it’s to be: they’ve got a trumpet taking the clarinet part and a clarinet taking the trombone part and every man doing any damn thing but the one thing he should be doing if he’s really to find the music. All that closeness of speaking to another instrument, to another man—it’s gone. All that waiting to get in for your own chance, freeing yourself, all that holding back, not rushing the next man, not bucking him, holding back for the right time to come out, all that pride and spirit—it’s gone. (Bechet 1960, 210–211)

In the mid-1950s, Bechet’s idea of interaction lived on in Mingus’s Workshop as a musical dialogue with his ancestors. In speaking back to these men through his work, Mingus prominently embraced a jazz continuum that included Jelly Roll Morton, who had then received little recognition for his contributions. Mingus wrote his “Jelly Roll” pieces—variations on the first, “Jelly Roll Jellies”—in the late 1950s, at a time when his bebop peers and modernist critics disdained earlier jazz styles. Thus, Mingus developed a working method that reflected group traditions in jazz, but his political and aesthetic role necessarily transformed earlier styles of group-oriented performance.

In one of Mingus’s transformations, he took on the perception of jazz as entertainment. According to Morton and other early jazz performers, the communal ethos of that era focused on entertaining and creating a “good time.” When Mingus resuscitated Euday L. Bowman’s 1914 composition, “Twelfth Street Rag,” he may have reveled in its entertainment aspect and the traditional sound of this New Orleans tune, but his commentary on that ethos mingled with a desire for his listeners to distinguish between his art and their notions of jazz. Ellington and Armstrong had also recorded

"Twelfth Street" in the 1930s, and in 1948 the trombonist Pee Wee Hunt revived it.<sup>4</sup> Hunt's recording, which was played everywhere on radio and jukeboxes (Mingus certainly would have heard it), was reviled by critics. "Twelfth Street" attracted Mingus for its absurdity similar to the satirical concoctions of the bandleader Spike Jones of the 1940s and early 1950s, and he was also bouncing off Ellington's recording of "Twelfth Street Rag Mambo" (1954). Its three-note melody, repeating over and over in 4/4, causes the first note to alternate from accented to unaccented note as the harmony changes underneath: a clever, if limiting, device called secondary ragging. Like Morton, Mingus appreciated this sort of musical gimmickry, but where Morton would use such a tune to draw in an audience for a "good time," Mingus, while certainly not averse to making fun of an old chestnut, also threw a wrench into such "feel-good" ambiances by invoking a more recent debate about whether the music was entertainment or art. Mingus's complaints to audiences who talked over his performances have been documented (see Rustin 1999; Priestley 1982), and he took these opportunities to lecture them on his music as art. In tandem with such artists as Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis, Mingus had, musically and otherwise, spoken out against the legacy of black music as entertainment first and foremost. (I discuss Mingus's reverence for Jelly Roll Morton and his response to jazz as art or entertainment elsewhere [Griffith 2010b]). Here, the recollections of Howard Johnson, who performed "Twelfth Street Rag" at UCLA in 1965 ([2006], the music "written for Monterey Festival" that year, but performed a week later in this college concert, issued much later) provide illumination. When asked what it meant to resurrect this tune at that time, he states,

I don't know, that didn't have any real meaning . . . I'll tell you one thing—I don't think there's any examples of it on that CD—but sometimes if we'd be playing, if the people would be talking or not paying attention, he'd stop the band and say, "Oh, I thought we had an audience here who was here to listen to *us*, what we were doing, but you want 'talking music,'" and then we'd play, [Byard] would play "Cocktails for Two." And we'd play as corny as possible . . . *da-da da-da da-da da-duh . . . da-duhhhh*, [etc.] and have a good time doing it because we were kinda laughin' at the audience . . . And then they really did pay attention better after that, you know, without him getting mad and crying out. (Personal communication, July 3, 2008)

Thus, this and similar gestures rendered Mingus's "Twelfth Street" a political statement and perhaps a calculated device to capture his audience's attention so as to draw them further into his own music. Mingus's music

4. Discography information on the "Twelfth Street Rag" recordings referred to in this article: Louis Armstrong, Columbia 35663, 1927; Duke Ellington, Brunswick 02307-B, 1931; Pee Wee Hunt, Music for Pleasure MFP 1151, 1948.

from the same years went seamlessly from one genre of jazz to another, as might be seen in John Handy's "ricky-tick" solo in Mingus's tribute, "Jelly Roll" (1959); Mingus might jump into a tune such as "Twelfth Street" simply to mock his audience's taste, or, as Howard Johnson explains in the case of "Cocktails for Two," in reaction to distracted spectators, calling attention to their ignorance of his modernist project.

Though in his reanimations of early jazz, Mingus drew from the music's entertainment and artistic aspects, his compositional vision clearly promotes improvisational devices from the era. To illustrate the meanings of collective improvisation in Mingus's band, I turn to Jelly Roll Morton as a precursor composer. As Schuller observes, Morton's "best arrangements were not mere orchestrations, but carefully organized structures in which all the details of instrumentation, or timbral relationship, of rhythmic and harmonic counterpoint were realized as integral compositional elements (1968, 136). In Morton's era, frontline musicians might solo as a group at different moments, but predominantly at the end of a piece. The last, or shout chorus of a New Orleans-styled band functioned as a final burst of exuberance in heterophonic textures and retained the communal ritual of African music: The second trumpet or cornet ornamented the lead, often in a higher tessitura, and the clarinet played more elaborately, while the tailgate trombone's growls and slides provided a complementary line to the lead trumpet. Rhythm and frontline players would all move up a notch dynamically, the drums with a more prominent offbeat on snare. The finale evoked, for instance, the high spirits of the march back from the cemetery after a New Orleans funeral.

In Morton's recordings, the last chorus could either play out as solo cadenzas ("Smoke-House Blues" [1926] and "Billy Goat Stomp" [1927], for example) or close with the entire band playing collectively. Morton also mixed composed sections with improvised ones, as in "Dead Man Blues" (1926), which begins with a collectively improvised section. Although one can hear the buoyancy of the first chorus in many of his recordings, collective improvisation, when present, is usually saved for the end as on "Black Bottom Stomp" and "Someday Sweetheart" (both recorded in 1926). Morton chose specific instrumentalists for their ability to read or improvise, and his compositions observed established New Orleans style while searching out new combinations in timbre and in solos, duos, and trios between sections that lay out his themes (Raeburn 2000, 97–98). They were structurally modeled on the sectional form of ragtime; in the A section of a tune, Morton might have the traditional cornet take the lead, while the trombone and clarinet played bass line and obbligato respectively. His myriad deviations from a standard format, however, account for his repertoire's singularly varied arrangements. For instance, in both "Beale Street Blues" (1927) and "Sidewalk Blues" (1926), after a brief intro the trombone plays the melody

while the other horns lay out or provide staccato accompaniment. Longer sections in these and other works might feature a solo instrument or piano and one instrument. Morton also mixed improvised with composed sections, the shifts in texture creating fresh sounds and dramatic effects, but also giving expression to the ornamenting and improvising of new melodic lines in social interaction between players that builds emotional intensity in the music.

Interludes and transitions (as well as full sixteen- or thirty-two-bar sections) featured solos in Morton's arrangements—or any combination of instruments soloing together; the free-for-all played at the end of a piece builds dynamically and virtuosically, finishing with the ecstasy of the out chorus. Of course, recordings of other artists show that group improvisation and interplay were a staple in this era, so this is not to single out Morton as the only artist to use this device. But as a composer, his vision contrasted the standard interactions of smaller groups by featuring more fully formed arrangements, using textural and coloristic effects of different duos and trio sections, and building up to the most vibrant colors with exuberant group interaction at the end. In this, Morton's arrangements anticipated the stylistic trajectory of Mingus's compositional development: from brief windows to a longer build-up of ecstatic release.

Mingus's experimentation with the group feeling of New Orleans-style jazz followed Morton's approach with composed and improvised sections, using group interactions of even smaller eight-bar windows in the form, where they also functioned as textural or timbral contrast. His concept of group improvisation derived from the New Orleans style generally and from Morton's in particular. I will return to Mingus's compositional development, and his musical responses to the interplay and improvisation of early jazz, after briefly introducing group dynamics informed by music functioning in the black revivalist church and found in Mingus's late-1950s recordings.

### Ritual in the Pentecostal Church

African-American marching bands in New Orleans were originally formed to provide music for various festivities, including the annual Carnival, picnics, parties, sporting events, and funerals. The music brought communities together and invited players to extemporize in many styles, particularly those Caribbean and European influences in New Orleans. These influences might combine the written, Sousa-type march, with its European attraction to melodic counterpoint and chord progressions, with the tone decoration and improvisation of African practice. Worship music in the black Pente-

costal church drew from these elements, especially if they supported the functions of the service in some way. As Martin Curtis explains:

The participatory style of the black music experience combines rhythm and language to create a dialogue between speaker and audience. . . . Congregations respond to singing and the preacher's style by saying "Amen," "Thank you, Lord," and other phrases. Standing and clapping during choral singing and the highly emotional tone of black worship services reflect both the African worship style and the aesthetic considerations of the community. (1988, 25)

The service's improvisational language came out of heterophony, interjection, and call-response patterns, and ecstatic experience, in particular. It was underscored by singing (accompanied by drums and other instruments), hand clapping, and dance.

Although various denominations of the church use similar music, I focus here on the Pentecostal sect because Mingus attended its worship services in Los Angeles as a child and, beginning in the late 1950s, his work showed the influence of the worship leadership and musical function. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Pentecostalism expanded rapidly in Los Angeles in the form of African American Holiness churches, where ecstatic "spirit baptisms" structured a significant part of the service. Alexander Alland shows that music—often led by the pastor, who might start or stop the band on signal—functioned to encourage members who wished to experience the Holy Ghost by going into trance states (1962, 206). "The band plays loudly with a highly repetitive, simple melody and strong beat, while the pastor preaches directly to the person or persons attempting to gain trance (207)."

Mingus sought to recreate the same exuberant trance state and borrowed similar musical practices as the musicians and pastor of the Pentecostal church. Regarding the collective dynamics of Mingus's Workshop, players often spoke about a sense of group exhilaration, a similar experience to that voiced in religious contexts. Bobby Jones described a transition from ritual to meaning in the Workshop:

When I first joined the group, it was hard to get with the group-thinking where everybody is working and improvising toward some sort of goal. I couldn't figure out what we were working toward. Mingus has sections where he wants everybody to moan and cry, and that's supposed to last until it's over—whenever that is. Eventually, you learn to listen hard enough and to concentrate on what you and everyone else has done, and after a while you just know you're coming to the end of a section. Plus there are built-in cues; all of us at one time or another give cues. With Mingus you have the freedom to give the cue yourself if you think the group is ready, but you really have to

know when. It's exhilarating when you do it, to have everybody jump in with you. (Morgenstern 1972)

Jones's account describes the kinds of interactions practiced by Mingus in the Workshop in the 1970s. In these, Mingus influenced the affect ("moan and cry") of his players and, through them, the form and drama of the music. When Mingus first reenacted the dynamics of the Holiness church in "Moanin" and "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting," from his album *Blues and Roots* (1959), or in the similar "Better Git It in Your Soul" (he recorded "Moanin" and "Wednesday Night" again in 1960 for *Mingus at Antibes*), he was expanding his musical voice to include other African-American traditions into his jazz continuum. His first brief New Orleans-style moments in the 1955 Debut and 1957 RCA recordings lie within a modern jazz context—within one section of the AABA forms of "Dizzy Moods" and "Jump Monk." Later, Mingus used expanded events of riff build-up and release in the Atlantic recordings of "Moanin" and "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting."

### Analysis of Collective Interplay and Ecstatic Events in Mingus Recordings

Mingus recordings, made in 1950–1960, of works that would be performed live in subsequent years follow a stylistic trajectory that involves collective interplay and what I call "ecstatic events." By collective interplay I mean improvisations by frontline players over a given melody or set of chord changes. By ecstatic event I mean a collective effort to support the expression of chaotic or frenzied emotion in order for the soloist to lose him- or herself, to enter the trance. (One might interpret the Holy Ghost event, per Alland (1962), as either trance or ecstatic or both.) Another part of the ritual is making oneself open to trance. Mingus never said as much, but he picked people who could make themselves available or who let him shape their ability to be available. Still thinking like a composer, Mingus could have turned the tap off at any time, sectionalizing the experience, containing the emotion into segments of time under his control.

In earlier Mingus recordings from this period, episodes of collective interplay and ecstatic events create intertextual references to New Orleans-style composition, combining frontline and rhythm players' extemporized passages over the harmony and in short-lived expressions of exuberance. Set against the later forms, they seem "inserted," creating an effect of a brief extemporized "aside," one that ends abruptly as the next, dictated section is laid out. In the later recordings, collective interplay and ecstatic

events seem to grow out of repetition and riff build-up that replicates the intensification of emotion in the rituals of the revivalist church.

Two works illustrate the range of Mingus's brief windows of group interplay. In "Dizzy Moods," in the repeat of the A section, the trumpet, tenor saxophone, and trombone improvise as a group over the changes (0:42 on *Tijuana Moods*). On the alternate take (in *New Tijuana Moods* [1986]), after Knepper (trombone) and Shafi Hadi (saxophone) take solos (4:59), Clarence Shaw (trumpet) takes one. After eight bars, the saxophone joins in with a complementary improvised line, and the trombone enters at the bridge where the three horns engage in melodic interplay. The resulting effect produces both the conversational interactive dynamic and a heterophonic, compositional texture as a whole.

In "Jump Monk"—and similarly in "Pithecanthropus Erectus"—the effect of interplay is more formalized. Mingus and (drummer) Willie Jones play the opening sixteen bars of "Jump Monk," continuing with George Barrow's serpentine improvisation for the next sixteen. Eddie Bert's trombone joins in and the two interact in counterpoint for another sixteen bars of the extended intro. In the AABA form the two horns play the head: eight bars of a widely ranged melody (extending over two octaves), the first half of section A. Over the second eight bars of A (1:37), the horns improvise together in a high-spirited mood, shifting out into a free interaction.

Eric Porter has noted the call-and-response pattern and the homage in their interplay to New Orleans-styled collective improvisation (2002, 127). Howard Johnson recounts that Mingus liked the plungers and growling (à la Ellington) of his players, evidenced in the many smears and glisses of the horns in this segment (personal communication, July 3, 2008). Bob Stewart testifies that, later, Mingus hired him and others because of their experience in bands like Sam Rivers. "Mingus liked . . . them because they were comin out of that Sam Rivers [*roars/growls*] playin. So he loved that shit, so they got in the act (personal communication, January 22, 2008). Each iteration seems to focus on raising the communal emotive level by injecting blues and gospel-based licks. When performing the tune in the mid-fifties, Mingus liked to announce that "it is based on a blues feeling but doesn't have typical blues changes" (Korall 1957, 27).

One of the most striking color shifts driving these interactive and exuberant segments is the ride cymbal. In the intro we hear Jones's medium dynamic on the sock cymbal at a mezzo forte, much like Baby Dodds might accompany Morton's band. Not until the segment at bar 9 does Jones play the same rhythm with the ride cymbal, with a full-on dynamic. The higher pitch, the resonance, and the diffuse sonority of the ride cymbal all act to release the controlled and subdued energy of the previous eight bars as well as contrast the subtle interplay of horns in the intro. Both horns play in the

high registers of their instruments; we also hear Mingus calling out to the players for the first time in the piece, boosting their energy for the segment (Fig. 1). The hushed bridge (B), written out by Mingus, runs sixteen bars before the A returns. This time the raucous bursts of riff-like phrases of the second eight bars contrast the quieter, complex, long lines of the first eight, conveying the high emotive content of the free segment.

The effects of group improvisation and of the ecstatic event lie in these short bursts set against the context of modern jazz. In particular, the interplay of horns, wailing in their highest registers in the A section of “Jump Monk,” (Fig. 2) is reminiscent of Morton’s segments of “controlled” small group improvisation in “Steamboat Stomp” (1926), a written-out, sectionalized piece. Although in “Jump Monk” the repetition of this event in subsequent iterations of A (in more or less the same gestures and melodies) deemphasizes its surprise effect, the work nevertheless reanimates and connects to New Orleans jazz.

Figure 1: Mingus, “Jump Monk” (1955), my transcription. Ecstatic event in improvisational interplay between saxophone and trombone in mm. 9–16 of head (1:15).

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Jump Monk" by Charles Mingus. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Tenor Saxophone, Trombone, Bass, and Drums. The second system includes parts for Trumpet Saxophone, Trombone, Cymbal, and Drums. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor), and the time signature is common time (C). The score begins with a box containing the number 9, indicating the start of the "ecstatic event." The Tenor Saxophone part is marked *ff* and includes the instruction "[High wails and glisses]." The Trombone part is marked *ff* and includes the instruction "[Highest range of trombone]." The Bass part includes the instruction "Mingus holler" and "Yeah!". The Drums part includes the instruction "(ride cymbal)". The score features various musical notations, including triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Figure 2: "Jump Monk" (1955), ecstatic event "inserted" in form.

Introduction (bass & drums)	Vamp 1 (tenor sax)	Vamp 2 (ts, tbn)	: A :   (theme) (ecstatic event)	B	A    (theme) (ecstatic)
16	16	16	8 ----- 8	16	8 ----- 8

The remainder of this analysis illustrates Mingus's recordings from the late 1950s and 1960 using Jan LaRue's idea of "growth" (1970, 139), as opposed to "form." Mingus's "Wednesday Night" (and "Better Git Hit") exhibit growth while retaining the aesthetic and emotional integrity of ecstatic events as natural extensions of their structural framework. In "Moanin," Mingus had invoked the communal dynamics of the Holiness church in sectionalized instrumentation, a developmental segue between the group interplay in "Dizzy Moods" and the extended structure of "Wednesday Night." In the latter the church rituals appear overtly in both song titles and communal spirit. As he wrote in liner notes: "It has some of the old Church feeling too. I was raised a Methodist but there was a Holiness Church on the corner, and some of the feeling of their music, which was wilder, got into our music. There's a moaning feeling to those church modes. Try a song like Dizzy's "Woody'n You," for example, and make some changes; fit a church minor mode into the chord structure and you'll hear what I mean" (Mingus, 1957; "Dizzy Moods" is based on "Woody'n You").

For "Moanin," Mingus used a larger (nine- and ten-piece) band and employed collective techniques to "[point] a way out of the box that the big band built itself into . . ." as remarked by reviewer Whitney Balliett (1960). In liner notes, Mingus explained:

I'd write for a big sound (and with fewer musicians) by thinking out the form that each instrument *as an individual* is going to play in relation to *all* the others in the composition. This would replace the old-hat system of passing the melody from section to section . . . while the trombones run through their routine of French horn chordal sounds . . . I think it's time to discard these tired arrangements and save only the big Hollywood production introduction and ending which uses a ten or more note chord. If these ten notes were used as a starting point for several melodies and finished as a linear composition—with parallel or simultaneous juxtaposed melodic thoughts—we might come up with some creative big band jazz. (Quoted in Balliett 1960, 127)

Mingus was able to find his way around a dense thicket of voices; in "thinking out the form," his compositional devices reflected both his instructions to the Cafe Bohemia players and his strategy of inviting soloists to develop their own ideas, which he described in his discussion of "Love Chant." A build-up of instrumental color starts with Pepper Adams's baritone sax ostinato in "Moanin." Mingus used a nonet for the album



formal and modern jazz proclivities of the composer but also teasing players and listeners alike by cutting short, for the time being, the collective orgasmic experience (Mingus 1971, 73–74).

Mingus directly linked his musical practices to the ecstatic worship of the Pentecostal church, as “Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting” illustrates. Mingus wrote,

The first, *Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting*, is church music. I heard this as a child when I went to meetings with my mother. The congregation gives their testimonial before the Lord they confess their sins and sing and shout and do a little Holy Rolling. Some preachers cast out demons they call their dialogue talking in tongues or talking unknown tongues (language that the Devil can’t understand). (Mingus 1959, 98)

In “Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting,” “growth” starts in the head’s riff-like motives, interwoven with interplay by the saxophone soloist. Increasing in volume and texture, this work’s development exhibits growth in extensive build-ups, with each soloist in “trance,” similar to how ecstatic events occur in worship services of the church. The ensuing build-up of riffs grows seamlessly from this head to accompany Handy’s and trombonist Jimmy Knepper’s solos. Figure 4 shows a part of the last phase of the trajectory, beginning with the closely related riffs and moving to a single note in Mingus’s bass during the piano solo, which is then taken up by the piano with accompanimental chording.

To understand how the solos and “trance states” function in a Mingus performance, we might consider Alland’s definition of trance within a religious ceremony as “a cultural response to a series of internal and external cues which operate in a particular kind of motivational state . . . most likely a form of hypnosis which later becomes auto-hypnosis through a continuation of the learning process” (1962, 213). External conditions—such as

Figure 4: “Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting” (1959).

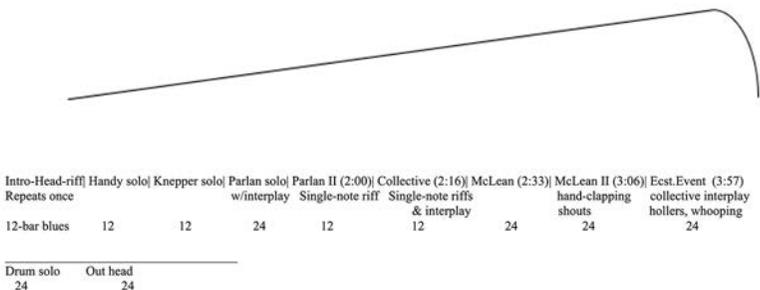


Figure 5: "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" (1960)



Head || Curson (tpt) - ecstatic event || Ervin (ts) - ecstatic event || Dolphy (as) (5:10) extended ecstatic event (6:17)

the behaviors and attitudes of the group—affect the individual's ability to reach a trance, connecting group participation and possessive states. These responses can be learned and triggered with proper cues. "Trance is in one sense a highly distilled essence of all activities in the United House of Prayer which are directed toward joy, ecstasy and final salvation . . . trance fulfills a member's status rights in the eyes of the congregation. Repetition of trance acts to reinforce the belief of performers and spectators alike, proving that the people involved have not wandered from a state of grace" (210). Alland notes the economically deprived membership of the sect and that hypnosis itself is a form of regression in the service of the ego in which a transference-dependency relationship is set up between the hypnotist and his subject. In the church, this relationship appeals to the individual seeking salvation from the Holy Ghost (209, 210).

The form of "Wednesday Night" shows the group supporting the "spirit baptisms" of the soloists, the cumulative effect of the last development peaking in Jackie McLean's saxophone solo (starting at 5:10), with 6/8 on 4 hand-clapping<sup>5</sup> from the other players and the audience (the congregation) and directing and shouting from Mingus (the preacher). Figure 5 shows a variation in the 1960 Antibes, France, performance. With each soloist supported by riffs building to an ecstatic pitch, the peak arising with Eric Dolphy's alto solo "trance" brings players and moves the audience to shouts and hand-clapping supporting the trance and in an expression of collective emotion. Thus, as in the Pentecostal service, Mingus, as the hypnotist/pastor, prepares his subject/soloist to receive the Holy Ghost with the support of the congregation.

5. Mingus and drummer Dannie Richmond had developed a rapport on what Mingus called 6/8 over 4/4, a rhythmic groove heard in his gospel-influenced tunes such as "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" and "Better Get Hit in Your Soul." In an interview, Mingus said, "In church they don't play in 3/4; they play in 6/8 against 4. Even in Africa. . . . Everybody knows that the African rhythms were not in 3/4 but in 6/8 against 4. Dig the way we clap our hands on the record" (Gitler, 1960).

## Conclusion

Mingus was able to forge relationships with players, mentoring and demanding individual contributions in creating composed melody and counter-melody, group and solo improvisation. Along with the freedom and encouragement he gave them, his Workshop members united around collective moments that transcended the ideas of music as art or entertainment.

From the mid-1950s to the early sixties, Mingus's African-derived approaches to the group-oriented experience demonstrated a development from collective improvisation of New Orleans style to the use of dramatic dynamics echoing those of the worship services of the Pentecostal church. These services in Pentecostal and other black church sects were accompanied by devices used earlier in New Orleans music—tone decoration and improvisation as melodic counterpoint to European marches, heterophony, call-response, hand-clapping, and dance. In the musical analysis of his recordings, we see Mingus's compositional trajectory, from the brief windows of frontline interplay to larger dramatic concerns—in depicting spirit baptisms within a scenario of Mingus as preacher and soloists seeking trance, supported by a congregation of Workshop band members and the audience.

Mingus's mentoring and leadership style included selecting well-trained players who demonstrated strong character as soloists, and, as Gene Shaw remarked, who were able to bring forth their essence. Mingus directed them in improvisational groups of two or more in service to his compositional ideas, influenced also by his experience in Ellington's band, where collaboration (solos and improvised melodies) often worked in constructing songs and arrangements.

Collective dynamics lay dormant during the big band and bebop eras. Mingus, who had played with Armstrong, also embraced Morton, bringing the New Orleans style to the forefront again in his music in the 1950s. His use of New Orleans style improvisation coincides with his revision of the jazz continuum to include Morton as his precursor composer. Morton's sections of duo and group improvisation reappear in even shorter sections of Mingus's "Dizzy Moods" and "Jump Monk."

If the early compositional emphasis of group improvisation as practiced by Morton gave only glimpses of a uniting spirit, Mingus's incorporation of his band members' talents to enact the idea of possession created transcendent or ecstatic events that blurred lines between audience and performers—a phenomenon that reflects the group-oriented emphasis of black music. Mingus may have also used the dynamics of the preacher on the pulpit to attract an audience; for "his act," he had even used his bad behavior and exploitation of players in little dramas on the bandstand (Priestley 1982, 87; Griffith 2010b). However, his use of early jazz group

improvisation and the collective rituals of church music primarily enriched the music and group dynamics of the Jazz Workshop. This trajectory toward group oneness perhaps accounts for the devotion to his performances and recordings and the widespread admiration and enthusiasm for “Mingus music” that reaches across generations and musical tastes.

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