

Charles  
King

Composer,  
Assistant



Early life through the 1950's

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# Key Points

- 1) Charles Mingus refused to sacrifice his artistic integrity, creating the Jazz workshop and his own record label (Debut Records, with Max Roach) in order to have increased creative control and freedom to explore collective improvisation.
- 2) Mingus was a great bassist, composer, pianist, and a larger than life figure; capturing an emotional intensity and passion which he was able to harness as a powerful tool in fighting for social justice.
- 3) Mingus pioneered third stream music by fusing elements of classical and jazz along with collective improvisation rooted in the polyphonic sounds of the black church which can be described by Orly Wilson's concept of the heterogeneous sound ideal in African American music. (Third Stream was coined by Gunther Schuller and innovated by George Russell.)

# Background

- Charles Mingus was born in 1922 in Arizona.
- After his mother's death his family settles in Watts California, where he gets exposed to music from the black church very early on.
- Trombone was his 1<sup>st</sup> instrument at 8 years old, then he switches to cello to play in orchestra and learns classical music.
- At age 17, saxophonist Buddy Collette convinces him that prejudices within the classical world would make it extremely difficult for him to get hired and tells him to switch to bass offering him a paid gig in a union swing band.
- Mingus Studied bass with Herman Rheinschagen, Joe Comfort and Red Callender.

# Early Influences and Career Path

- Studied piano and composition with Lloyd Reese.
- Through Red Callender he meets Art Tatum
- Heavily influenced by the sounds within the Black Church
- Youth Orchestra
- Duke Ellington/Art Tatum/Lloyd Reese
- Duke Ellington/Jimmy Blanton-1939 Big Band and 1940 duo recordings showcase Jimmy Blanton who sets a high standard for bass playing with a strong percussive attack and freeing the role of the bass play more melodic figures.
- 1942-1950 He goes on Tour with Louis Armstrong and plays with Kid Ory, Lionel Hampton quintet, and the Red Norvo Trio.
- 1951 Mingus Moves to New York and plays with some of the most influential bebop musicians. Bird, Miles, Monk, Roy Haynes....



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## *The Jazz Workshop*

- **1.** Mingus first joined a 1943 composers workshop at a city college in LA but found it to be too rigid so he quit.
- **2.** In 1953 Mingus founded his own workshop; the Jazz Composers workshop and then also the Jazz Workshop in 1955 out of the Putnam Central Club in Brooklyn, New York.
- **3.** The Jazz Workshop provided a place where young musicians could receive nuanced feedback on their compositions while also providing networking opportunities for like-minded composers.

# Mingus Describing His Process

- “My whole conception with my present Jazz Workshop group deals with nothing written. I “write” compositions – but only on mental score paper – then I lay out the composition part by part to the musicians. I play them the “framework” on piano so that they are all familiar with my interpretation and feeling and with the scale and chord progressions to be used. Each man's own particular style is taken into consideration, both in ensemble and in solos. For instance, 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 find it possible to keep my own compositional flavor in the pieces and yet to allow the musicians more individual freedom in the creation of their group lines and solos.”-Charles Mingus (Liner Notes, Pithecanthropus Erectus)



# Collective Improvisation/Jazz Workshop

- **Pithecanthropus Erectus** (1956) changes the direction of Jazz.
- - According to Mingus there are 4 movements “Man’s Evolution, Superiority Complex, Decline and Destruction”. **(1:21-2:26)**
- **Techniques Used**
  - Mental Scoring
  - Leaving Space
  - Wide use of Dynamics, polyphonic textures,
  - Organic musical conversation/interactions between the rhythm section and horn players.

# Debut Records

- Debut Records was founded in 1952 by Charles Mingus and Max Roach.
- Death of the Big Band era.
- Shifting of values in society placing more importance on Art over Commercialism.
- Why? Artists wanted more creative freedom/control and more equitable profit sharing.

- **Massey Hall** 1953

-"**Jump Monk**" featuring Max Roach. **Mingus at the Bohemia**. Debut, 1955 .

*Chord progression from intro:*

- F-7, Dbmaj, G-7b5, C7. (i, bVI, ii, V)

-Mingus uses this same 4 chord progression in several of his compositions including **Reincarnation of a Lovebird** and **Pithecanthropus Erectus**.

# Demonstration of Mingus Changes



## Third Stream on the Debut Label

- [“All the Things you C#”](#) Mashup featuring **Rachmaninoff’s “Prelude in C# Minor”** Mingus at the Bohemia (Debut) (December 23, 1955).
- Classical and Jazz. Intro begins as Rachmaninoff’s “Prelude in C#” and then combines the melody of “All the things you are”.



Mingus was a great bassist, composer, pianist, and a larger than life figure; capturing an emotional intensity/passion which he was able to use as a powerful tool in the fight for social justice.



# Music and Social Justice

- **“Fables of Faubus” Mingus Ah Um (1959)(Columbia)** In 1957 Arkansas governor, Orval Faubus called in the National Guard to block the integration of Little Rock Central High School after the Supreme Court ruling Brown vs. Board ruled that public schools must integrate.
- Lyrics not included and were considered too controversial by the label.
- Mingus Records another version with Candid Records this time callin it **“The Original Fables of Faubus”** Blues and Roots (1960)



# Performance Demonstration

- “Haitian Fight Song” (1957) The Clown (Atlantic)
  - Mingus pays homage to Duke Ellington for his 1943 performance Black, Brown, and Beige which was in performed in honor of the Haitian soldiers who fought for their freedom in the revolutionary war.
  - Briefly played in Ellington Big Band and even referred to himself as the Baron.
- Beauty can exist in harmonic simplicity.
- Haiti declares independence in 1804 and is one of the few examples of a successful slave revolt in the world.



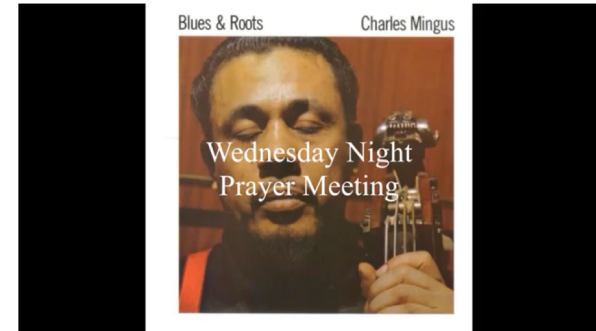
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# From the Church to Third Stream

- **“Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting”** Blues and Roots 1959
- **Characteristics: Hand clapping breakdown, vocalizations, shouting/moaning in background by the musicians.**
- **Polyphonic sound.**
- **The song is a Blues in in 6/4.**
- **Contains duple and triple cross rhythms.**
- **Ends with the four to one cadence.**
- **Similar to “Better get in in your soul”.**
- **Improvisation is strong characteristic of third stream.**



- 1. (Early life). *Beneath the Underdog*, Mingus. Vintage Books. 1974.
- 2 (Description of Jump Monk p.75). *Charlie Mingus: More than a Fake Book* Jazzworkshop 1991.
- 3 (Date Mingus moved to NY) *Mingus Ah Um* Liner Notes
- 4. Pithecanthropus Erectus- (Description of Concept) <https://www.sputnikmusic.com/review/47032/Charles-Mingus-Pithecanthropus-Erectus/>
- 6. (Describing Composing process of Pithecanthropus Erectus and the Mingus Jazz Workshop). <https://www.npr.org/2011/06/20/4540134/charles-mingus-pithecanthropus-erectus>
- 7. Described as a tone poem in 4 movements <https://jazzjournal.co.uk/2019/03/25/charles-mingus-pithecanthropus-erectus/>
- 8. *Mingus early years, fired by Ellington from big band, Important dates before moving to N*
- <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/music-popular-and-jazz-biographies/charles-mingus#:~:text=In%201951%20Mingus%20relocated%20to,Dizzy%20Gillespie%2C%20and%20Charlie%20Parker.>
- 9. *Orgins of Hatian Fight Song.* <https://www.jazziz.com/charles-mingus-haitian-fight-song/#:~:text=Bass%20great%20Charles%20Mingus%20recorded,in%20the%20face%20of%20persecution.>
- 10. *Pithecanthropus Erectus Liner notes.* [http://aln2.albumlinernotes.com/Pithecanthropus Erectus.html](http://aln2.albumlinernotes.com/Pithecanthropus_Erectus.html)
- 11. *Fables of Faubus background:*http. <https://news.allaboutjazz.com/charles-mingus-fables-of-faubus>
- 12. *Photo: Bird, Monk, Roy Haynes, Mingus,* [https://www.reddit.com/r/Jazz/comments/9nws3d/charles\\_mingus\\_roy\\_haynes\\_thelonious\\_monk\\_and/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Jazz/comments/9nws3d/charles_mingus_roy_haynes_thelonious_monk_and/)
- 13. (photo with flag) <https://www.charlesmingus.com/mingusbio>
- 14. (photo of mingus looking down with bass) <https://iconicimages.net/photo/tw-min001-charles-mingus/>