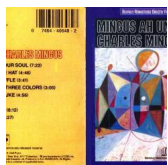


Charles Mingus – Mingus Ah Um (1959)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 16 October 2009 10:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 13 August 2014 14:27

Charles Mingus – Mingus Ah Um (1959)



A1 Better Get It in Your Soul 7:22 A2 Goodbye Pork Pie Hat 4:47 A3 Boogie Stop Shuffle 3:44 A4 Self Portrait in Three Colors 3:06 A5 Open Letter to Duke 4:56 B1 Bird Calls 3:13 B2 Fables of Faubus 8:14 B3 Pussy Cat Dues 6:29 B4 Jelly Roll 4:01 Willie Dennis - Trombone Booker Ervin - Sax (Tenor), Saxophone Shafi Hadi - Sax (Alto), Sax (Tenor) John Handy - Clarinet, Sax (Alto), Saxophone John "Captain John" Handy - Clarinet, Sax (Alto), Sax (Tenor) Jimmy Knepper - Trombone Charles Mingus - Bass, Piano Horace Parlan - Piano

Charles Mingus' debut for Columbia, *Mingus Ah Um* is a stunning summation of the bassist's talents and probably the best reference point for beginners. While there's also a strong case for *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* as his best work overall, it lacks *Ah Um*'s immediate accessibility and brilliantly sculpted individual tunes. Mingus' compositions and arrangements were always extremely focused, assimilating individual spontaneity into a firm consistency of mood, and that approach reaches an ultra-tight zenith on *Mingus Ah Um*. The band includes longtime Mingus stalwarts already well versed in his music, like saxophonists John Handy, Shafi Hadi, and Booker Ervin; trombonists Jimmy Knepper and Willie Dennis; pianist Horace Parlan; and drummer Dannie Richmond. Their razor-sharp performances tie together what may well be Mingus' greatest, most emotionally varied set of compositions. At least three became instant classics, starting with the irrepressible spiritual exuberance of signature tune "Better Get It in Your Soul," taken in a hard-charging 6/8 and punctuated by joyous gospel shouts. "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" is a slow, graceful elegy for Lester Young, who died not long before the sessions. The sharply contrasting "Fables of Faubus" is a savage mockery of segregationist Arkansas governor Orval Faubus, portrayed musically as a bumbling vaudeville clown (the scathing lyrics, censored by skittish executives, can be heard on *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus*). The underrated "Boogie Stop Shuffle" is bursting with aggressive swing, and elsewhere there are tributes to Mingus' most revered influences: "Open Letter to Duke" is inspired by Duke Ellington and "Jelly Roll" is an idiosyncratic yet affectionate nod to jazz's first great composer, Jelly Roll Morton. It simply isn't possible to single out one Mingus album as definitive, but *Mingus Ah Um* comes the closest. ---Steve Huey, Rovi

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