



Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus

By Gene Santoro

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Charles Mingus was one of the most innovative jazz musicians of the 20th century, and ranks with Charles Ives and Duke Ellington as one of America's greatest composers. By temperament, he was a high-strung and sensitive romantic, a towering figure whose tempestuous personal life found powerfully coherent expression in the ever-shifting textures of his music. Now, acclaimed music critic Gene Santoro strips away the myths shrouding "Jazz's Angry Man," revealing Mingus as more complex than even his close friends knew. Written in a lively, novelistic style, *Myself When I Am Real* draws on dozens of new interviews and previously untapped letters and archival materials to explore the intricate connections between this extraordinary man and the extraordinary music he made.

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Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus By Gene Santoro Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In an art form known for its outrageous characters, Charles Mingus stood out. To paraphrase Walt Whitman, he was a man of "multitudes." He was a forceful, virtuosic bassist. He was an imaginative and original composer and arranger second only to Duke Ellington. He was also a social critic, bully, lady's man, father, and hypersensitive man-child who simply wanted to be appreciated for his work. Making sense of this larger-than-life personality presents an imposing challenge to any biographer. Enter Gene Santoro. The author of *Dancing in Your Head* and *Stir It Up: Musical Mixes from Roots to Jazz*, Santoro updates Brian Priestley's *Mingus: A Critical Biography*; separates the fact from the fiction of Mingus's rowdy autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*; and produces the literary equivalent of a masterful Mingus composition, complete with labyrinthine surprises and complexities.

A light-skinned African American with Native American and Asian bloodlines who was born in 1922, Mingus endured a difficult childhood in Los Angeles, forever stung by the rampant racism that halted his dreams of a career in the classical music field. Undaunted, Mingus went on to work with several jazz giants, including Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie, and Duke Ellington, before creating his own record company (Debut) and composing over 300 iconoclastic compositions, including "Eclipse," "Haitian Fight Song," "Goodbye Porkpie Hat," "Cumbia and Jazz Fusion," and many other jazz standards. Santoro writes that the music "is overwhelming in its torrent of musical styles and psychological switchbacks and emotional punch, its tumble of raucous gospel swing, luminous melodies, European classical threads, bebop tributes, Mexican and Colombian and Indian music and sounds from anywhere and everywhere."

In addition to his keen insights into the music (including a thorough discography), Santoro deftly analyzes Mingus's mercurial personality. From the highs (his celebrated recordings *Blues & Roots* and *Mingus Ah Um*) to the lows (his horrible *Epitaph* concert, his eviction from his New York apartment, his numerous assaults on sidemen, and his slow death from Lou Gehrig's disease in 1979), Santoro fairly and faithfully lays bare the mind, body, soul, and art of an American original who influenced everyone from Wynton Marsalis to Joni Mitchell. "Mingus' music was autobiography in sound," Santoro writes. "Everyone in his life had a role. His portraits, his musical tributes, his insistence on forcing his sidemen to find themselves in what he imagined, his clamor for recognition, his emphasis on his originality ... these were more than stylistic trademarks. They were the essence of who he was." *Myself When I Am Real* captures this essence brilliantly.

--Eugene Holley Jr.

From Publishers Weekly

Santoro, who covers music for New York's Daily News, has attempted not only to capture the complex, contradictory character of jazz bassist and composer Mingus, but also to assert his music's towering significance in American culture as a whole. With such an ambitious goal in mind, it is hard to understand why he dispenses with a critical approach to the man and his music in favor of hagiography, portraying Mingus as a larger-than-life genius who was beyond reproach. Misdeeds often attributed to Mingus, whether they be numerous betrayals of friends and lovers or an alarming tendency to pull knives on people, are explained away as the eccentricities of an artist. This rambling book is not without revealing details about Mingus's life, however. In the Watts section of Los Angeles, where he grew up, Mingus, with his light complexion, could pass for neither black nor white, which, Santoro argues, cemented the feeling of being an outsider that both haunted and drove the musician for the rest of his life. When writing about Mingus's actual musicmaking, Santoro is in his element. He does an admirable job of describing the rough-and-tumble

atmosphere of the jazz workshops. There is also an abundance of anecdotes about Mingus's legendary onstage hijinks, including smashing his bass (he did it before Pete Townshend), haranguing the audience and sitting down to a steak dinner in the middle of a performance. Yet Santoro ultimately fails to marshal his sources into a nuanced portrait, producing a mythological figure, not the man himself. (July)

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From Library Journal

Over the past few years, several exceptional biographies on key jazz artists such as Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, and Sun Ra have appeared. Santoro (music critic, the New York Daily News; *Dancing in Your Head*) has produced a work that belongs with this elite group. Mingus's super-human energy and creativity are the hinges of this work, which is filled out with numerous anecdotes and short, insightful quotes from family, friends, and colleagues. The historical setting is also valuable, showing how Mingus influenced and was affected by events and movements during his lifetime (e.g., the so-called 1960s counterculture). Other fascinating facets come to light, including Mingus's heritage (he had Native American, Chinese, black, and white ancestors). Mingus's opinionated, boisterous, and often mean-spirited personality was balanced by his desire to impart musical ideas and other thoughts to those willing to listen and learn—it's amazing that there were so few who ended up totally antagonized after the Mingus treatment. After reading this work, Mingus's fictionalized account of his life, *Beneath the Underdog* (Vintage, 1991, reprint), makes much more sense. Highly recommended for public, academic, and music libraries."William G. Kenz, Moorhead State Univ., MN

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Fidel Auxier:

The knowledge that you get from *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* is the more deep you looking the information that hide inside the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to understand but *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* giving you enjoyment feeling of reading. The article writer conveys their point in selected way that can be understood simply by anyone who read that because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This book also makes your vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We recommend you for having that *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* instantly.

Mary Nixon:

Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. We recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in words, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort that will put every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* nevertheless doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource info that maybe you can be one of it. This great information could draw you into fresh stage of crucial pondering.

Willie Bergeron:

Is it anyone who having spare time after that spend it whole day by means of watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something new? This Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus can be the response, oh how comes? The new book you know. You are so out of date, spending your spare time by reading in this brand new era is common not a geek activity. So what these guides have than the others?

Amy Joshi:

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