

Jazzmen Salute Mingus at Carnegie Concerts

By JOHN S. WILSON



Dexter Gordon, tenor saxophonist and associate of Charles Mingus.

Mr. Mingus, who was dying of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, Mr. Weiner and Mr. Lokin wanted to do a series of "mini-Mingus concerts" to kick off the Charles Mingus Fund. In their letter, they asked Mr. Mingus for programming suggestions.

"Until the letter came from Art and Julie, Charles was principally concerned with his health," Mrs. Mingus, a slim, blond woman with a tanned, outdoor look, recalled the other day. "It was one of the few things that came along then that he showed any interest in. It turned him on enough to think

about some programs. One of his suggestions was a concert with the Juilliard String Quartet, Sonny Rollins, a bowing bass player (he didn't identify anybody — he just said a bowing bass player), Sarah Vaughan and Joni Mitchell. It would have cost a fortune.

"I knew Charles's days were numbered then," she recalled. "I knew he might not be able to do the concerts. We were doing crazy cures in Mexico and he wanted to go to India. Part of the reason he wanted to go to India was because he disliked what so many jazz funerals turn into in this country. They become media events.

"He was horrified by Bird's funeral and he never went to another," she said, referring to the death of Charlie Parker, the saxophonist. "Musicians were fighting over who would play first, fighting over money at the door. It had nothing to do with Bird. When he was asked what he wanted done about a funeral, Charles said, 'Do what you want. I won't be there.'"

But Mr. Mingus knew what he wanted for a funeral. He wanted no celebration in this country, no repetition of the Charlie Parker fiasco. He wanted to be cremated in India, he told his wife. But he never got there. He died in Mexico and he was cremated there. But his widow carried out his wishes by scattering his ashes over the Ganges River. He was 56 years old.

Focus on the Mingus Repertory

After the bassist's death, Mrs. Mingus formed the Mingus Dynasty Band, a seven-piece group that will concentrate on the Mingus repertory. It made its debut at the end of April at the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia. It is composed of musicians who were closely associated with Mr. Mingus — Ted Curson, trumpet; Jimmy Knepper, trombone (Britt Woodman will substitute for Mr. Knepper tonight and tomorrow because Mr. Knepper had made a previous engagement); John

Tips on Tickets

The Charles Mingus concerts will be held at Carnegie Hall, tonight and tomorrow at 8 P.M. Patron seats are \$25. Tickets are \$8.50, \$9.50 and \$10.50. Call the box office, 247-7459, Ticketron, 977-9020 or Chargit, 239-7177.

Handy and Joe Farrell, saxophones; Don Pullen, piano; Charlie Haden, bass, and Dannie Richmond, drums.

"The band will cover the whole creative span of Mingus's work," said Sy Johnson, the pianist, composer and arranger who is musical director for the concerts, and who worked with Mr. Mingus off and on since 1960. He and Jimmy Knepper are writing the arrangements for the group.

"We have about 20 tunes now," Mr. Johnson said, "but Charles as a composer is an unlimited resource. He wrote and recorded so much that was ahead of the times — the Latin trend, the pedal kind of thing, free music."

Mr. Mingus's music — the source material for the Mingus Dynasty Band — covered a wide variety of concepts of jazz. It embraced the rhythmic call-and-response prayers of the Pentacostal and Holiness Churches, New Orleans collective improvisation, the ensemble sounds of Duke Ellington (who was acknowledged by Mr. Mingus to be a primary influence on him), horn solos in the Charlie Parker vein, European impressionism and strong infusions of Mr. Mingus's own highly volatile personality. From the mid-50's on, he was a teacher who had a deep and lasting influence on a large number of the leading jazz musicians of the last quarter of a century, many of whom passed through his groups and some of whom make up the personnel of the Mingus Dynasty Band.