

The best Mingus memorial is his own music

Mingus — Joni Mitchell. Asylum SE-505.
Nostalgia in Times Square — Charles Mingus.
Columbia JG-35717.

Charles Mingus — bassist, composer, arranger, bandleader — was a jazz giant who left behind an awesome body of music when he died early this year from Lou Gehrig's disease.

But like most talented artists who somehow never strike a popular nerve, Mingus was largely ignored by those outside jazz circles until death drew near.

He influenced countless musicians with a career that spanned four decades, but it was not until he was confined in a wheelchair, unable to play a bass, that Mingus was praised as "jazz musician of the year" by a popular magazine like *Rolling Stone* and embraced by the President of the United States.

Joni Mitchell had a lot to do with Mingus's recognition in retrospect this year, as the musician's last work of art was a collaboration with the famous folk singer.

The concept of *Mingus*, with words and vocals by Mitchell and music by Mingus, brimmed with potential.

Here was a chance for Charles Mingus, unable to perform himself, to find a new voice, and an opportunity for Joni Mitchell, often stuck in a melodic rut, to discover a new tune to whistle.

Strangely enough, the record is no real departure from Mitchell's recent albums, nor is it an exceptional piece of work by Mingus.

As an album, *Mingus* is low-key, ethereal, and very wordy, but it's not really Mingus.

Mitchell is inarguably a talented wordsmith. Her portrayal of a confined Mingus in "A Chair in the Sky" is a moving piece of poetry, and "The Dry Cleaner from Des Moines" is a delightful bebop depiction of Las Vegas.

But too often here, her lyrics sound like the words of a Rhodes scholar expounding on the significance of the Delta blues.

She may sing with immaculate eloquence on the plight of the black man in America, but it still don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.

Mitchell is backed by a stable of talented con-

temporary musicians, including Herbie Hancock and three-fourths of Weather Report, but only the fat sounds of bassist Jaco Pastorius lend any real instrumental excitement to the record.

The album is pristine clean, impeccably performed and recorded, but it is sorely lacks the one cornerstone of all Mingus music — passion.



To find that quality, you'll have to look back. *Nostalgia in Times Square* is the first of undoubtedly many posthumous Mingus albums, and it is an appropriately vital package.

This is a two-record set of Mingus's 1969 sessions for Columbia, and contains four previously unreleased tracks, and rereleases in the long form some previously edited numbers.

Mingus could be quiet and lyrical, but more often his sound was a hard-driving swing. Both styles are proudly represented on these albums.

You can hear classical elements, tricky time changes, free-form solos, and, as always, a raw gospel pulse in the undertow along with the screams of Mingus pushing his band to the edge.

The music is a tad smoother than the classic recordings Mingus made for Atlantic in the late-60's and early-60's (perhaps his best), and his most famous numbers ("Better Get It in Your Soul," "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" and "Fables of Faubus") are omitted.

But *Nostalgia* is still 100 percent pure free-spirited Mingus, both gentle and fierce, and as such, merits attention and recognition.

— Mark Lundahl

Great Balls of Fire — Dolly Parton. RCA Victor AHL 1-3361.

Dolly's new single hit "You're the Only One" (No. 5 on the KRC survey, No. 3 on the Cashbox) (Continued on A-8, column 1)



Jazz legend Charles Mingus