

Mingus Dynasty rolls its soul



Mingus: Just a dry cleaner from Howard Goldstein and Steven Hacker

When Charles Mingus passed away two years ago, the jazz community lost more than one of its most influential composers and bassists—it lost a force. Such was the character of the man that not only did he affect the course of the music by his own direct contributions, but he also influenced it by using his own indestructible personality to bring out the best in his sidemen. This in many ways was the aspect of Charles Mingus that set him apart from his contemporaries and made him one of the few indisputable jazz giants.

With this in mind one has to wonder just what Susan Graham Mingus (wife of the great Charles) intended when she began the Mingus Dynasty just after Mingus' death. Surely a collection of Mingus alumni could still play the music, but would it still have the same feel to it without the presence of the master himself? This was to be the challenge.

In the two years since its inception, the Mingus Dynasty has changed personnel many times. At times the band has featured those

hasn't seen in a mainstream form since Eddie Gladden's appearance here with Dexter Gordon two years ago.

Overall, thought, this was a non-event. Not to fault the musicians who put out an honest effort, but there seemed to be something missing. That something was the man himself, and not all the music in the world could make up for his absence.

Clifford Jordan is a veteran tenor saxophonist out of Chicago who is quick to point out that he "was a bebopper when bebop wasn't hip." Jordan played and recorded with Mingus during the early sixties, in a period when the band featured such greats as Eric Dolphy and Booker Ervin. Yet he has mixed feelings about playing in the Dynasty.

"Well, I would prefer to be doing my own thing, what I've been doing all my life," says Jordan.

He especially dislikes and finds it difficult to perform novelty pieces like "My Jelly Roll Soul". "I come out of Charlie Parker and Lester Young. So to come back and play



Clifford Jordan, part of a dynasty. slap tongue tenor is a little difficult, and to do it with a genuine feeling, even more so." But Jordan sees the

Dynasty as an opportunity to find steady employment at a time when jazz musicians are finding it difficult to find work in North America.

He's making only his third appearance with the Dynasty and feels the music's quality in this edition of the band will come along in time. Though he does admit that "there isn't anyone directing the band with that (Mingus) kind of power," he still feels the Dynasty has its place.

"This is going to be an institution, I'm sure."

Jabali Billy Hart is a drummer whose name should be familiar to most jazz fans—after all, it seems



Jabali: The 1,000 year-old man.

like he plays on one in every ten albums made. From Stan Getz to Miles Davis to Hal Galper, there hardly seems to be someone he hasn't recorded with.

Hart though is best known for the time he spent with the influential Herbie Hancock sextet. It was then that he added Jabali to his name. "It was during a period when everybody was becoming conscious of Pan Africanism.

There was a percussionist in the band named Mtume, he gave it to me. It was sort of an added inspiration," Hart explains.

Hart views the Dynasty in a much different light than Jordan. "Money's not important to me, I live in a fantasy world," he boasts. Asked if he'd rather be doing his own thing, as he did so successfully on his A&M album *Enchance*, he replies firmly: "all the music is the same. What you're looking at is the shell of what I'm going after. What I'm trying to get to is the thing that I consider cultural, which is centuries old."

An extremely thoughtful and warm individual, Hart does not place his own ego above the work of masters like Mingus. "What it's all about is discovering my thing in everything else in this case the music of Charles Mingus."

The moral of the story is best expressed in the words of Joni Mitchell, appropriate enough, since she mingled with Mingus on the last record he was ever associated with.

"Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you get till it's gone." It is only now when attempts to recreate his music are being made, that the man's genius shines. Only now, through Mingus Dynasty, do we realize just how irreplaceable he is.

Lobster's choice



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