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INTRODUCTION

This is the first “fake book” entirely devoted to Charles Mingus compositions, and it required almost three years to complete. It is the result of a collaboration between Don Sickler, Andrew Homzy and Sue Mingus. Andrew Homzy, a professor of music at Concordia University in Montreal, researched the history and performance practice of each work, wrote a description of that work and placed it within the context of Mingus’ life and career. Sue Mingus interviewed musicians who worked with Mingus for their perspectives on the pieces they played or helped orchestrate and added commentary by Mingus wherever possible, including some of the reasons for his provocative titles. In most cases, the transcriptions which follow are derived from recordings of Mingus small band compositions (sometimes a composite of two or three different recorded versions). In other instances they are the result of Homzy’s analyses of written scores or parts available in the Mingus archives. Sometimes alternate versions of the same piece are included when opinions vary (either among the compilers of this book or among musicians who played these tunes with Mingus and played them different ways at different times). Theoretical disagreements occasionally flared over the merits of selecting an F sharp rather than a G flat as, for example, in the composition *E’s Flat, Ah’s Flat Too* (the G flat won). Double flats lost out to the predominance of the key signature.

Homzy has pointed out that, unlike the pieces by Mingus’ contemporaries, there is frequently no fixed format in a Mingus composition: he would often improvise the format in the same way that a soloist improvises on the chord progressions. As a bassist and performing composer, he controlled the fundamental aspects of the music—the rhythm and the harmonic structure—and he improvised on these. Homzy refers to this compositional process in Mingus’ music as “Plastic Form” and considers it one of his major contributions to American music.

The lead sheets which follow are composite renderings or rebuildings of the basic components of each composition, assembled into a practical representation of the music. Also included is a discography of every available recording on which individual tunes can be heard (pirated versions excepted). Original scores from the Mingus Collection are reproduced together with photographs of Mingus working on those scores at home or composing at the piano. Performance photos from the road illustrate many of the pieces.

The music plates were prepared by Orpheus Music Service. All Mingus compositions were transcribed by Don Sickler, Andrew Homzy and Bill Mobley. Don Sickler, a musician and composer, supplied invaluable advice. Andrew Homzy cataloged the complete Mingus collection from 1984–87 during which he found and pieced together the 500-page “Epitaph,” Mingus’ magnum opus.

Certain tunes in the collection like *Carolyn*, *The Clown*, *Passions of a Woman Loved* and others which we had hoped to include will have to wait. This is just a beginning.

Sue Mingus
Editor

In New York City, 1974

Photo by Sue Mingus

