



Mingus: A Critical Biography (A Da Capo paperback)

Brian Priestley

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It would be no exaggeration to call Charles Mingus the greatest bass player in the history of jazz; indeed, some might even regard it as understatement, for the hurricane power of his work as a composer, teacher, band leader, and iconoclast reached far beyond jazz while remaining true to its heritage in the music of Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and Thelonious Monk. In this new biography Brian Priestley has written a masterly study of Mingus's dynamic career from the early years in Swing, to the escapades of the Bebop era, through his musical maturity in the '50s when he directed a band that redefined collective improvisation in jazz. Woven in with exacting assessments of Mingus's artistic legacy is the story of his volatile, unpredictable, sometimes dangerous personality. The book views Mingus as a black artist increasingly politicized by his situation, but also unreliable as a witness to his own persecution. Capturing him in all his furious contradictions—passionate, cool, revolutionary but with a keen sense of tradition—Brian Priestley has produced what can be called, again without exaggeration, the best biography of a jazz musician we have ever seen.



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