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“It’s Completely Mingus”: Compositional Techniques in Three Works by Charles Mingus for Contemporary Wind Ensemble

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"It's Completely Mingus": Compositional Techniques
in Three Works by Charles Mingus for
Contemporary Wind Ensemble

by

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Doctor of Musical Arts
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Charles Mingus was one of the most important American musical figures of the twentieth century. During his five-decade career, Mingus contributed to many of jazz's stylistic periods—including swing, bebop, cool, hard bop, modal jazz, and soul jazz—and collaborated with its most celebrated figures, including Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Art Tatum, and Miles Davis. As a bassist, he pushed the boundaries of the role and function of the instrument; as a bandleader, he had an unorthodox style of teaching that constantly pushed his fellow performers; as a composer, his endlessly imaginative writing created an output that often confounded critics and listeners.

Recent transcriptions of Mingus's works have enlightened the wind band field to the music of this unique and prolific composer and demonstrated that his music can be performed by contemporary wind ensemble. This dissertation examines two such transcriptions, *Half-Mast Inhibition* and *Adagio ma non troppo*, along with a previously published chamber ensemble piece, *Revelations*. These compositions represent works written by the composer in the early, middle, and late stages of his career.

This study analyzes these works through their orchestration, in order to demonstrate a compositional style of the composer in his large-ensemble writing. This style, as evidenced through recurring techniques, can be defined through the following characteristics: episodic, often segmented form, determined by changes in orchestration; quickly shifting ensemble colors; extremes in ensemble tessitura, both in *tutti* and chamber writing; and frequently shifting tempo and meter.

This dissertation of Michael James is approved.

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VITA

Michael James is a candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he has been a teaching fellow for the wind ensemble, symphonic band, marching band, and introductory practicum course for teaching assistants. He is also a recipient of the 2021–22 Graduate Dean's Scholar Award.

Before coming to UCLA, James had a successful career as a public school teacher in Washington state, where his ensembles were recognized on the local, state, and national levels. With interests in both wind ensemble and jazz, his significant conducting performances include Carnegie Hall, the Washington state music educators conference, Jazz at Lincoln Center's *Essentially Ellington* Festival, and Monterey's *Next Generation* Jazz Festival.

James earned the Master of Arts degree from Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, and the Bachelor of Music Education degree from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. His primary conducting teachers are Raydell Bradley, Dan Peterson, and Travis J. Cross, with additional studies from Gary Hill, John Carnahan, and Allan McMurray.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Charles Mingus, one of the most important American musical figures of the twentieth century, has recently been introduced into the wind band field through transcriptions of his works. This eminent artist has an expansive oeuvre that includes some of the most colorful and imaginative writing of any genre. His compositions often combine classical and jazz elements, blurring musical boundaries and defying categorization. As the wind band repertoire continues to expand, including works by composers of various backgrounds and source material from a wider array of traditions, the important voice of Mingus merits awareness and inclusion.

During his five-decade career, Mingus contributed to many of jazz's stylistic periods—including swing, bebop, cool, hard bop, modal jazz, and soul jazz—and collaborated with its most celebrated figures, including Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Art Tatum, and Miles Davis. As a bassist, he pushed the boundaries of the role and function of the instrument; as a bandleader, he had an unorthodox style of teaching that constantly pushed his fellow performers; as a composer, his endlessly imaginative writing created an output that often confounded critics and listeners. Constantly crossing the boundaries of what was considered jazz and European music, the composer once commented, "I don't want to be caught in any one groove. Everything I do is Mingus. That's why I don't like to use the word, 'jazz,' for my work. I write what I think is classical music too."[1]

[1] Nat Hentoff, "Mingus: I Thought I Was Finished," *New York Times*, January 30, 1972, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

This dissertation examines three such compositions that blur the boundaries of jazz and classical music: *Half-Mast Inhibition, Revelation*s, and *Adagio ma non troppo*. Each of these pieces can be performed by contemporary wind ensemble, a medium which has only recently gained access to Mingus's body of work. By analyzing these compositions through their orchestration, I demonstrate a particular style in the composer's writing—a style that evolved, yet remained consistent, throughout his lifetime, defined through the following characteristics: episodic, often segmented form, determined by changes in orchestration; quickly shifting ensemble colors; extremes in ensemble tessitura, both in tutti and chamber writing; and frequently shifting tempo and meter.

I substantiate these characteristics by describing the orchestration in the various sections of each work, highlighting musical examples indicative of these traits, and summarizing the salient stylistic features of each piece.

Alan Raph, a collaborator of Mingus and the original orchestrator for *Adagio ma non troppo*, one of the works discussed in this document, remarked in an interview that what made that particular piece so special was its uniqueness: "It's unusual… It's completely Mingus."[2] This document aims not only to validate that assertion but also provide further insight into the workings of the composer.

Need for and Purpose of the Study

While Mingus is known as an extraordinary bass player and an iconoclastic bandleader, he thought of himself "first and foremost as a serious composer."[3] However, there exists little

[2] Raph, Telephone Interview, June 23, 2023.

[3] Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*: *African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists*, (1st ed, Vol. 6, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 105.

research addressing his compositions that are performable by contemporary wind ensemble. Conference presentations and performances have only recently illuminated the fact that such pieces even exist.[4] This document aims to enlighten the wind band field concerning transcriptions of *Half-Mast Inhibition* and *Adagio ma non troppo* and bring greater awareness to the chamber ensemble work *Revelations*.

While Mingus is the subject of much discourse, including several biographies and a novelistic autobiography, no study has previously attempted to collate the information surrounding the three compositions in this document. John Goodman's *Mingus Speaks* provides insights into the composer through a series of interviews with Mingus and his closest friends, family, and associates.[5] Jennifer Griffith's dissertation examines the man and his music through the traditions of jazz, the church, and his "Jazz Workshop," while Nichole T. Rustin's study investigates the composer through racial and social lenses.[6] Eduardo López-Dabdoub's dissertation adds to the scholarship by providing a musical analysis of six of Mingus's compositions and discussing the cultural, social, and political circumstances surrounding those works.[7] Magazine articles, interviews, documentaries, and memoirs offer further knowledge about Mingus, and many of his albums include lengthy liner notes that elucidate his thoughts on composition, classical music, jazz, race, and politics.

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[4] Brooks, 2018 CBDNA Western/Northwestern Division Conference Presentation; Peltz, 2014 New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble Performance.

[5] Charles Mingus and John F. Goodman, *Mingus Speaks*, 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

[6] Jennifer Griffith, "His Jelly Roll Soul: Revising and Reclaiming the Past, the Minstrel Mask, and the Communal Blast in Charles Mingus's Jazz Workshop," (DMA diss., The City University of New York, 2010), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses; Nichole Rustin-Paschal, "Mingus Fingers : Charles Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Postwar Jazz Culture," (DMA diss., The City University of New York, 1999).

[7] Eduardo Lopez-Dabdoub, "The Music of Charles Mingus: Compositional Approach, Style, and the Performance of Race and Politics in the 'Free Land of Slavery'," (DMA diss., The City University of New York, 2013), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

As the wind band field continues to diversify, it should not only pursue new and modern compositions, but also embrace historical composers who may previously have been overlooked. Charles Mingus, a prolific American composer, provides one such source. Often unrecognized or underappreciated for the breadth of his output, Mingus exemplifies an underrepresented voice that deserves to be heard. His music may not always fit neatly into one category, but that is exactly why contemporary scholars, conductors, performers, and audience members should be more acutely aware of this unique artist and his compositions.

Methods

Research for this document includes communicating with the transcribers and original orchestrators of these works; corresponding with the Charles Mingus Institute; obtaining scores from the Charles Mingus collection in the Library of Congress—the first such acquisition of a jazz composer; and sorting and listening through discographies. My research reveals that five of Mingus's works are suitable to the wind ensemble medium: *Adagio ma non troppo, Children's Hour of Dream*, *The Chill of Death*, *Half-Mast Inhibition*, and *Revelations*. This study examines *Half-Mast Inhibition, Revelations, and Adagio ma non troppo* through their orchestration and compositional techniques, as they represent the early, middle, and late stages of Mingus's career. The pieces are presented in chronological order from the dates in which they were composed/orchestrated: *Half Mast Inhibition* in 1939, *Revelations* in 1957, and *Adagio ma non troppo* in 1971. The use of tempo and meter are also receive brief discussion, as they are key elements of the composer's style.

For clarity, this document defines a wind ensemble as a group of players who play brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments and are led by a conductor. The size and instrumentation

of a wind ensemble is flexible, depending on the intent of the composer. Contemporary wind ensemble composers frequently write double bass parts in their compositions, and additional instruments, such as cello, can also be included.[8] While Mingus may not have composed the three works of this document specifically with the wind ensemble medium in mind, fortunately scholars and musicians can access his music in this way.

The term "orchestration" refers to the instruments utilized at any given moment within a piece, whereas "instrumentation" describes all the forces in an entire work. "Texture" refers to the number and density of instruments employed; for example, a "thicker" texture comprises more instruments than a "thinner" texture, which uses fewer instruments. "Timbre" and "color" refer to aural qualities achieved through specific instrumental writing, whether high or low ranges producing "brighter" or "darker" colors, brass mutes changing the tone of an instrument, particular instrument combinations resulting in qualities that are different than one or the other individually, or distinctive percussion sounds.

[8]As Mingus played cello before switching to bass, it comes as no surprise that he writes for that instrument in several of his compositions—including the three works discussed in this document.

CHAPTER TWO

BIOGRAPHY

Charles Mingus occupies a place in twentieth-century music that continues to confound contemporary historians. While he is usually confined to the field of jazz, musicians in many genres are beginning to appreciate the composer more deeply for his individuality and inventiveness. Firmly rooted in the histories of both jazz and classical Western music, Mingus wrote works that reflect an amalgamation of both genres. This musical output defiantly refuses to conform to any single category, as Mingus's compositional style evolved not necessarily in response to contemporaneous trends, but also as a reflection of his own personal growth and evolution. While his prodigious bass playing put him on the map, his style as a bandleader and compositional output secured his reputation as one of the twentieth century's greatest artists.

Jazz scholars and musicians recognize Mingus as the second most prolific jazz composer, behind only Duke Ellington. His personal growth and maturation were evident as he continuously strove to express himself fully through his music. Mingus held an incredibly high musical standard for himself and those he worked with—expecting them to be highly skilled on their instruments, understand the traditions of jazz, and synthesize this knowledge into his compositions, sometimes even spontaneously. Throughout his career, he remained steadfast in his musical vision and highly developed sense of artistry, even when it led to conflict with others.

This brief biography highlights the most important teachers, performances, compositions, and interactions that helped to shape who this truly gifted man would eventually become. If society had allowed him, and if he had the desire, to enter the world of classical music, we might

today recognize Mingus as one of the world's greatest classical bass players. Instead, history led this important figure to the world of jazz, where he continued to break boundaries, challenge traditions, and create some of the most innovative and vibrant compositions in the entire spectrum of music. The three works discussed in this document are no exception.

Charles Mingus, Jr., was born on April 22, 1962, in Nogales, Arizona, to Harriett Sophia Mingus and Charles Mingus, Sr. The elder Mingus retired as a staff sergeant from the United States Army shortly after the birth of his son to seek medical attention for his wife, who died of chronic myocarditis in October of that same year. Harriett was of Chinese and English descent, while the elder Charles was "the offspring of a liaison between a Black farm-hand and a Swedish lady" in North Carolina.[9] It was the younger Mingus's stepmother, Mamie, who not only encouraged European classical music in the home, but also occasionally took the boy with her to the local Holiness church, where he was exposed to African American music.[10] As Mingus stated, "The blues was in the Holiness churches — moaning and riffs and that sort of thing between the audience and the preacher."[11]

The first instrument Mingus learned was the trombone, probably due to its use in the Holiness church.[12] His childhood friend, Britt Woodman, suggested that he switch from trombone to cello. At a young age, Mingus's gifted musical ear was clearly evident. He could quickly pick up melodies and lines to play by ear, but his music reading was not as developed. He eventually joined the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic and the Senior Symphony at Jordan

[9] Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 1.

[10] Mingus's two older sisters played violin and piano.

[11] Priestley, *Mingus*, 5.

[12] Trombones, tambourines, trumpets, saxophones, mandolins, washboards, triangles, guitars, pianos, and drums began to be used in Holiness churches in the early 20th century. The instrumental accompaniment they provided added to the emotional intensity of the services.

High School and was further exposed to European classical music through listening to records. Mingus biographer Gene Santoro writes:

> He loved Richard Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration*, with its weighty themes and rich melodies. The bittersweet Romantic lyricism of the Impressionists drew him, especially the mournful cello works of Debussy and Ravel. The cello had introduced him to Bach, the master performer who wrote down his improvisations, who outlined Western ideas of harmony as well as thematic development. And the knotty ensembles of Beethoven's string quartets spoke deeply to him.[13]

While the world of European classical music provided a solid musical foundation for Mingus, it was hearing his first live performance of the Duke Ellington band that captured his spirit. His friend Woodman, whose father played with Duke Ellington (with whom Britt would later play, as well), took Mingus to the performance. Mingus exclaimed, "I never heard no music like that in church. I nearly jumped out of the bleachers. Britt had to hold me."[14]

During high school, Mingus's friend Buddy Collette told him that the school jazz band needed a bass player and suggested Mingus switch from cello to bass. According to Santoro, "The conversation also surrounded race. Classical music was closed to non-whites and jazz could take a talented Black man to the top."[15] Collette also introduced Mingus, then age sixteen, to Red Callender who, although only four years older, had already played bass with the Louis Armstrong band. Callender's focus was to make the bass sing, not just keep time, as was its main role in that day.[16] Mingus watched Callender play melodies on the bass, and his ear picked them right up. Even at the age of sixteen, Mingus had a desire to be the world's best bass player, and he practiced seventeen hours a day.[17] This innate talent and inner drive produced one of the most

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[13] Gene Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 33.

[14] Ira Gitler, "Mingus Speaks — and Bluntly", *DownBeat*, July 21, 1960, 29.

[15] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 30.

[16] Santoro, 37.

[17] Santoro, 38.

influential bass players in the world of music, regardless of genre, and his highly-evolved, boundary-pushing technique would serve as an inspiration for generations of players to come.

Mingus's first serious teacher was multi-instrumentalist Lloyd Reese, who had a conservatory degree from the University of Southern California, worked in the Warner Brothers studios, knew Arnold Schoenberg and other émigrés, and crossed the color barrier at a time when Los Angeles musicians' unions were segregated.[18] Reese's vast record collection included the music of Ravel, Debussy, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Art Tatum, and he taught Mingus piano and theory, emphasizing the full range of musicianship later demonstrated in Mingus's compositions, especially how they included elements of jazz and classical techniques. Reese also held a weekly Sunday rehearsal band where Mingus, Collette, Dexter Gordon, Nat Cole, and others played. According to Mingus, "he taught us like we were going to be professionals," which, indeed, many of them became.[19]

Other early musical influences on Mingus were Jimmy Blanton, T-Bone Walker, and Art Tatum. Blanton was the bassist for the Duke Ellington band and had a "melodic and hornlike" way of playing;[20] Walker, an electric guitarist and vocalist, embodied the combination of a big swing band and blues artist; and Tatum was a pianist who "astounded jazz and classical players alike as he drew audacious harmonic ideas from Debussy and Ravel and used dense, chromatic chords."[21]

After returning from a short tour with the Louis Armstrong band in the fall of 1942, Callender introduced Mingus to his own teacher, Herman Reinshagen, who had played with the New York Philharmonic as principal bassist. After Reinshagen's retirement in 1934, he moved to

[18] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 36.
[19] Priestley, *Mingus*, 11.
[20] Priestley, 16.
[21] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 51.

Los Angeles to teach at the University of Southern California. He was known as a taskmaster, and his students went on to become principal players in many of the world's leading symphony orchestras. At one point, all of the bass players in the Los Angeles Philharmonic were taking lessons with Reinshagen.[22] Reinshagen taught Mingus how to play in the extreme high register of the bass, where the thumb and third finger are needed.[23] This style of playing would become a hallmark for Mingus, as his solo in *Adagio ma non troppo* demonstrates.

Mingus's early style of bass playing pushed the traditional role of the instrument, from timekeeper to a more independent and soloistic voice.[24] His style included double stops (which were rare at the time, especially the way he played them with a "viciously aggressive pizzicato"), octave leaps, and the subdivision of the beats by means of passing notes.[25]

An important moment of clarity came to Mingus when he committed to a "cutting contest" with bassist Oscar Pettiford, the successor to Jimmy Blanton in the Duke Ellington band.[26] Although Pettiford did not show up for the occasion, Mingus described it as such: "I began playing and didn't stop for a long time. It was suddenly *me*; it wasn't the bass any more."[27] This same "one-ness" with his instrument also manifested itself in Mingus's compositions, as his style evolved throughout his lifetime. The earliest work addressed in this document, *Half-Mast Inhibition*, reflects the young Mingus, still discovering his identity, both as

[22] Krin Gabbard, *Better Git It In Your Soul: An Interpretive Biography of Charles Mingus,* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 29.

[23] Priestley, *Mingus*, 20.

[24] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 63.

[25] Priestley, *Mingus*, 25.

[26] A cutting contest is a sort of "duel" amongst musicians to prove which one has the most skill or proficiency on their instrument.

[27] Priestley, *Mingus*, 31.

a composer and a human; his more mature work, *Adagio ma non troppo*, is self-described as a piece he "is proud of" because it demonstrates his ability to "express several feelings as one."[28]

Mingus's breakthrough composition, *Mingus Fingers*, came in 1947, while he was playing with the Lionel Hampton band. His solo in the piece, described as "virtuosic with double-stops and melodic lines" was the centerpiece of the work.[29] The composition was "basically a thirty-two-bar chorus including eight-bar phrases based entirely on pedal points, one of these sections being prolonged by extra bars, which represent the first recorded glimmerings of what Mingus was later to call 'extended form.'"[30]

After leaving the Hampton band, Mingus moved to San Francisco, where he had a rehearsal band that recorded "He's Gone" for Fentone Records. This is the only recording that features Mingus playing cello. The piece begins with a long quasi-symphonic introduction with Mingus on cello and Dante Profumato of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra on flute.[31] According to jazz critic Ralph Gleason, "[Mingus] has proven that there should be no segregation in music between classical and jazz. And that it is possible to make classical musicians swing by *writing* it correctly for them.[32]

This early recognition of Mingus's ability to synthesize classical and jazz genres foreshadows how he incorporates elements of jazz (e.g., improvisation, swing rhythms, brass smears, etc.) into his more classically-leaning compositions. *Revelations* could be considered a classical piece with jazz elements, or perhaps it is a jazz piece with classical elements. The

[28] Charles Mingus, Liner Notes for *Let My Children Hear Music*, Recorded September 23–November 18, 1971, Columbia KC 31039.

[29] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 75.

[30] Priestley, *Mingus*, 35.

[31] Priestley, 39.

[32] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 81.

confluence between the two genres is so complete that it is impossible to describe the work as one or the other.

Playing in the Red Norvo Trio in 1951 provided another pivotal opportunity for Mingus. The group comprised Norvo on vibes, Mingus on bass, and Tal Farlow on guitar. This was the first group in which the bass was seen and heard as more than just a rhythm section instrument. The equal balance between the instruments allowed Mingus to play high, bowed countermelodies against the melodies of the vibes and even occasionally the walking bass of the guitar.[33] The Trio achieved much success, but Mingus eventually left, due to politics of race.[34]

Mingus, who had life-long conflicts with the recording studios and recording industry, founded his own label, Debut Records, in 1952. His partners in the venture were his first wife, Celia, and drummer Max Roach, who had a lively intellect and saw eye-to-eye with Mingus about the position of Black people in society.[35] Although the label only lasted approximately five years, it provided Mingus with an outlet to record and produce some of his own music, as well as that of other burgeoning jazz musicians. The most famous recording on the label is *Jazz at Massey Hall*. Recorded live in Toronto in May 1953, the album includes an all-star line-up, consisting of Mingus on bass, Roach on drums, Bud Powell on piano, Dizzy Gillespie on trumpet, and Charlie Parker on alto saxophone. This concert was the only time that all five of these jazz icons appeared together, and the album would eventually be inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.[36]

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[33] Priestley, *Mingus* 42.

[34] The Trio had a television performance with Mel Tormé lined up at WCBS in New York. Various corporate entities, including the American Federation of Musicians, pressured Norvo to replace Mingus with Clyde Lombardi—a white bass player. *DownBeat* magazine claimed that Mingus did not perform because he did not have his New York union card.

[35] Priestley, 47.

[36] *Jazz at Massey Hall* was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1995.

In January 1953, Mingus had the opportunity of a lifetime: to play in the band of one of his idols, Duke Ellington. Unfortunately, the job did not last very long. Mingus had an altercation with Juan Tizol, one of the trombonists in the group. The musical disagreement, which started as an argument in the dressing room of Harlem's Apollo Theater, became a heated conversation in which Tizol used racial slurs against Mingus. The exchange became increasingly tense and continued toward the stage, with Tizol even brandishing a knife. After the performance, Tizol threatened to quit the band, but Ellington asked Mingus to resign instead. Mingus quoted Ellington's reaction to the situation in his autobiography:

> Everybody knows Juan has a knife but nobody ever took it seriously—he likes to pull it out and show it to people, you understand. So I'm afraid, Charles—I've never fired anybody—you'll have to quit my band. I don't need any new problems. Juan's an old problem, I can cope with that, but you seem to have a whole bag of new tricks. I must ask you to be kind enough to give me your notice, Mingus.[37]

Mingus continued, in his own words, "The charming way he says it, it's like he's paying you a compliment. Feeling honored, you shake hands and resign."[38]

After the incident in the Ellington band, Mingus continued to develop his playing and compositional style. Santoro states:

> He mastered playing two strings at once, one with each hand, and bluesy note bends, adapted from guitarist T-Bone Walker. Double-stops and pedal tones were regular punctuation amid octave jumps, partly to augment pedal tones, partly to agitate. His bass could sing: like Alvino Rey's steel guitar, it suggested a human voice in its flexible tones and timbres. He and his instrument were one.[39]

[37] Charles Mingus and Nel King, *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus*, (1st Vintage books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 325.

[38] Mingus and King, *Beneath the Underdog,* 325.

[39] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real,* 111.

Mingus had great left-hand facility over three octaves and jazz bassist Percy Heath commented that he "was the first person *I* saw who used different [right-hand] fingers to play successive notes in a phrase."[40]

His compositions also showed an expansive nature through his use of orchestration and various musical techniques. For example, the 1953 jazz octet *Eclipse* included a cello, and *Reflections* was written for the trombone duo of JJ Johnson and Kai Winding and bowed bass. *Purple Heart* (1954) included improvised countermelodies behind solo lines at a time when collective improvisation was considered to belong solely to Dixieland, and *Gregarian Chant* (1954) "was the first recorded attempt to create a totally unplanned improvisation built on moods."[41] Mal Waldron quoted Mingus on the occasion:

> When we play this tune, we're not going to play any changes, we're just going to play moods. Just follow me, and put your moods in, and we'll build something beautiful together.[42]

Each of these elements come to bear in the compositions discussed in this paper. Mingus's style consistently included idiosyncratic combinations of instruments to create specific and unusual timbres and sounds, as well as expressions of moods through tessitura and color.

Two other important components of Mingus's style coalesced during this time: the unique way in which he taught his compositions to the ensemble members and his use of the recording studio. As a musician with a naturally gifted ear, Mingus felt the best way for players to fully express themselves through his compositions was to learn them without the aid of written music. Trombonist Jimmy Knepper reveals, "He sang them to us, or played them on the piano.

[40] Priestley, *Mingus*, 54.
[41] Priestley, 54.
[42] Bob Blumenthal, "Mal Waldron", *DownBeat*, April 1981, 29.

And he'd teach us four bars at a time… It was a very time-consuming process."[43] Eddie Bert commented, "He'd say, learn it, because if I write it out, you're gonna play it different. If you learn it in your head you play it like you want to play it."[44]

Mingus was also one of the first musicians who used the recording studio as a tool of composition. Santoro writes:

> He'd found a unique way to compose, to formulate group improvisation. Duke Ellington often wrote tunes from phrases his soloists played, but Mingus went one better. He created a whole arrangement out of the way his musicians played what he gave them. They had to converse. Nobody else was reconceiving composition that way. He'd shape the performance on stage, edit it in the studio.[45]

In January 1956, one of Mingus's album masterpieces, *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, was recorded for Atlantic Records. Mingus describes the title of the album—and its first track— as a jazz tone poem that musically depicts his "conception of the modern counterpart of the first man to stand erect."[46] The album is revolutionary for several reasons: its thirty-seven minutes of music comprises only four tunes, it represents the first fully integrated example on record of Mingus's extended form, and it incorporates non-Afro-Cuban modal improvisation into the tradition of Black jazz.[47]

A defining event of Mingus's career occurred in October 1956, when he hired a twenty-year-old drummer named Dannie Richmond, who would go on to play with Mingus for twenty-two years. Santoro stated that "[Richmond] and Mingus created a heartbeat that was rarely equaled and was utterly crucial to Mingus's extended pieces."[48] In his biography of Mingus,

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[43] Priestley, *Mingus*, 77.
[44] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 116.
[45] Santoro, 117.
[46] Charles Mingus, Liner Notes for Charles Mingus, *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, Recorded January 30, 1956, Atlantic-1237.
[47] Priestley, *Mingus*, 69–70.
[48] Santoro, 127.

Priestley wrote that "Dannie became Mingus's equivalent to Harry Carney in the Ellington band, an indispensable ingredient of 'the Mingus sound.'"[49]

Three of Mingus's more famous albums were recorded in 1959: *Blues and Roots, Mingus Ah Um,* and *Mingus Dynasty*. "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" from *Blues and Roots* paid homage to the composer's background in the Holiness church and featured Mingus's "hollering and its instrumental equivalents, and the equally gospel-inspired section of Booker Ervin's solo accompanied only by hand clapping."[50] This tune was also the first successful use of a fast 6/4 time signature in jazz music.[51] Bruce King's review of *Mingus Dynasty,* although less than favorable, nonetheless placed Mingus's name alongside his idols, Duke Ellington and Jelly Roll Morton:

> While these recordings are very good, I cannot help but feel that Mingus's continual recreations of Ellington and Parker….[and] his reliance upon European musical developments (especially twentieth-century offshoots of late nineteenth-century impressionism) reflects an orchestral sense less original and brilliant than Ellington's or Morton's.[52]

Mingus again played with Ellington in 1962 as part of a trio with drummer Max Roach on the *Money Jungle* album.[53] Critic Max Harrison wrote that "his astonishing bass work… provided an obvious precedent for a freer use of stringed instruments in jazz."[54]

On January 20, 1963, Mingus recorded *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* on Impulse! Records. The album is a monumental example of Mingus's extended compositional writing, with its "basic simplicity of materials and their polyrhythmic development, structural use of passages

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[49] Priestley, 75.
[50] Priestley, *Mingus*, 101.
[51] Priestley, 101.
[52] Bruce King, *Jazz Monthly*, November, 1966, quoted in Priestley, 107.
[53] *Money Jungle,* Recorded September 17, 1962, United Artists Jazz-15017.
[54] Max Harrison, *Jazz Monthly*, February, 1969, quoted in Priestley, 137.

with accelerating tempo or with no tempos, [and] the fact that *all* the improvised solos are modal."[55] In comparing the recording to Ellington's style, Locke wrote that "Mingus has achieved, at what appears to be first attempt, something which Ellington has scarcely even tried: a coherent and unified work of full LP length."[56] He goes on to write that the unified whole of the piece is created "by the skillful way in which the parts are dove-tailed together."[57] The album also marks the first occasion in any field where the combination of overdubbing with creative editing actually determined the nature of the product.[58]

The extremes of Mingus's character were always evident; his musical genius was frequently overshadowed by his fiery, unpredictable personality. Diane Dorr-Dorynek, the composer's assistant and publicist, copied down a speech he once gave as he chided his audience at the Five Spot in New York City:

> So you come to me, you sit in the front row, as noisy as can be. I listen to your millions of conversations, sometimes pulling them all up and putting them together and writing a symphony. But you never hear that symphony… You haven't been told before that you're phonies. You're here because jazz is popular, jazz has publicity, jazz is popular and you like to associate yourself with this sort of thing. But it doesn't make you a connoisseur of the art because you follow it around. You're dilettantes of style. A blind man can go to an exhibition of Picasso and Kline and not even see what works. And comment behind dark glasses. Wow! They're the swingingest painters ever, crazy!... You've got your dark glasses and clogged-up ears… You become the object you came to see, and you think you're important and digging jazz when all the time all you're doing is digging a blind, deaf scene that has nothing to do with any kind of music at all.[59]

Along with the fight with Juan Tizol of the Ellington band and hitting his longtime collaborator, trombonist Jimmy Knepper in the mouth,[60] Mingus once dropped his bass on the floor—in

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[55] Priestley, *Mingus*, 145–6.
[56] Don Locke, *Jazz Monthly*, November, 1965, quoted in Priestley, 146.
[57] Locke, *Jazz Monthly*, 146.
[58] Locke, 147.
[59] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 145.
[60] This bizarre and famous story is recounted by Knepper in an article by Lee Jeske titled "Jimmy Knepper" in *DownBeat*, August, 1981, 16–17.

response to heckling audience members—during a performance at the Five Spot, and it shattered into pieces.[61] On a separate occasion, he and his band members stormed off the stage at the 1965 Monterey Jazz Festival upon finding out that there was no booth to sell his records from the previous year's festival. The album recorded from his performance at UCLA's Royce Hall, titled *Music Written for Monterey, 1965: Not Heard… Played in its Entirety, at UCLA*, is the "first recorded example of Mingus's intolerance towards his musicians" when they couldn't start a tune together, and Mingus instructed them to go practice offstage.[62]

After a period of relative inactivity in the late 1960s— brought on by marital, financial, and mental health struggles—Mingus re-entered the scene for a reunion with Duke Ellington in 1969. The elder composer was being honored at the University of California, Berkeley, with a seventieth birthday celebration. Ellington performed one of Mingus's compositions, *The Clown*, at the culminating concert. Although Mingus was scheduled to conduct the orchestra while Ellington performed the narration to the piece, he did not oblige. According to Mingus's fourth wife, Sue:

> Duke said "I don't know if I can play this. You know, Charles Mingus is a difficult composer." And, of course, a number of the musicians were outraged and didn't want to play at all, because it was hard music. And Charles did not want to get involved himself on stage, with all those musicians who were furious to begin with. Duke was calling "Is Charlie Mingus in the house?" in this packed auditorium, and Mingus was hiding way up at the top of the balcony.[63]

Nevertheless, Mingus gained a renewed sense of confidence from his inclusion at Berkeley, leading to a resurgence of material. In May 1971, his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog,* was finally published, and he won the Guggenheim Fellowship for composition that

[61] Priestley, 160.
[62] Priestley, *Mingus*, 168.
[63] Priestley, 179.

spring. In October, the Joffrey Ballet of New York premiered *The Mingus Dances*, an hour-long work created at the behest of choreographer Alvin Ailey, and in December, he was elected into the *DownBeat* Readers Poll Hall of Fame.[64]

In the fall of 1971, Mingus recorded the album, *Let My Children Hear Music*. Produced by Teo Macero, this album included several pieces written or orchestrated for large ensemble, including the *The Chill of Death, Adagio ma non troppo*, and *The Shoes of the Fisherman's Wife Are Some Jiveass Slippers.* The album is widely regarded as one of Mingus's best, and its release was followed by a successful concert at Philharmonic Hall in New York.

In April 1972, Mingus received one of his few commissions to write something "classical"—or, at least, not specifically "jazz"—when the Whitney Museum's Composers' Showcase asked for a piece inspired by the poetry of Frank O'Hara. Mingus's composition, *String Quartet No. 1*, was written for voice and a string quartet comprising two violins and two cellos.

Throughout the remaining years of his life, Mingus continued with European tours, played American festivals, and recorded additional albums. He composed a film score for *Todo Modo* that was never used and made one of his last solo appearances in 1976, at the anniversary of Duke Ellington's birthday at St. John the Divine in New York.[65] His final collaborator was Joni Mitchell who wrote lyrics for six pieces on the album *Mingus*. Bassist Jaco Pastorius played on the album, and, according to Priestley, "his playing would never have been possible without the influence of Mingus's playing on those who influenced Pastorius."[66]

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[64] Ailey had previously contacted Mingus about using music from nine of his compositions as inspiration for the dances, and trombonist-arranger Alan Raph created the arrangements. Although the ballet was met with mixed reviews, Mingus's artistic output was reinvigorated.

[65] Priestley, *Mingus*, 212.

[66] Priestley, 220.

In April 1978, Atlantic Records arranged a fifty-sixth birthday party for Mingus, which tied in with a performance of *Revelations* by the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Gunther Schuller. After moving to Cuernavaca, Mexico, later that year to seek out medical treatment for ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease), Mingus passed away on January 5, 1979. His ashes were scattered into the sacred Ganges River in India.

CHAPTER 3

HALF-MAST INHIBITION

Background

Charles Mingus utilized an incredible array of timbres, textures, and musical ideas even during his early years as a composer, as exhibited in *Half-Mast Inhibition*. The piece is considered one of his earliest compositional achievements, written in 1939, when he was just seventeen or eighteen years old. During this time, he was living with painter Farwell Taylor outside of San Francisco in Mill Valley, California. Taylor was a respected artist who had painted murals along the causeway for the 1939 World's Fair and whose studio was a hangout for jazzers and bohemians.[67] Of Taylor's paintings, Mingus commented: "I liked his work immediately. It moved me. I couldn't say why I liked it—I didn't know terms like perspective—except to say that what he painted was living off the paper."[68] The two had a mutual admiration for each other, and Farwell was a constant voice of encouragement for Mingus. "'The greatest,' he would say over and over… 'You're the greatest. Remember that.'"[69]

Although *Half-Mast Inhibition* was written in 1939, it was not performed until more than twenty years later, when it was recorded for the album *Pre-Bird* on May 24, 1960, with Gunther Schuller conducting. The circumstances surrounding the piece's recording demonstrate Mingus's confidence, tenacity, and business acumen. According to trumpeter Ted Curson, producer Leonard Feather wanted to record Mingus's quartet. When Feather showed up at the studio:

> [Mingus] had twenty-seven [sic] pieces there, which ended up getting Leonard Feather fired from his new position at Mercury records . . . He said he had this music he did when he was seventeen and nobody would record it. He brought a box in and the music was

[67] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 41.
[68] Santoro, 41.
[69] Santoro, 43.

> yellow, crumbling in your hands. He had told Leonard Feather "I just want you to hear it," but he forced it on Leonard.[70]

As the title suggests, the music on this LP comprises compositions by Mingus that predate his exposure to legendary jazz saxophonist Charlie "Bird" Parker. According to the liner notes for *Pre-Bird*:

> The most unusual work here was written when Mingus was only eighteen… It is almost a written "concert" work. "Writing came natural, I heard things in my head—then I'd find it on the piano. Jazz to me was Duke and church but I thought all music was one… jazz, symphony. That's the bug I was working out of them." Gitler explained the background of the piece in *DownBeat*… Mingus had met a painter named Farwell Taylor. "In late 1939, Taylor introduced him to the study of Karma Yoga. 'I learned through meditation the will to control and actually feel calmness. I found a thing that made me think I could die if I wanted to. And I used to work at it. Not death and destruction but just to will yourself to death.'" During this period in 1940–1941, Mingus was writing a piece of music. He finished it one day and lay down to die. "I had a little thing in there like Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells... not funny style but because it represented Christmas and Christ. While I was lying there, I got to such a point that it scared me and I decided I wasn't ready. And ever since, actually, I've been running because I saw something I didn't want to see. I felt I was too young to reach this point. Then I found something else, a little girl named Jean who I fell in love with. I started to write again and to write out of that."[71]

While the title of the work is often erroneously attributed to a short bout of impotence that the young Mingus may have been experiencing, Theodore Davis of the Charles Mingus Institute corroborates the liner notes: "'Half-Mast' refers to a flag flying at half-mast to commemorate the death of someone, and … 'inhibition' refers to Mingus's coming to a resolution that he did not want to meditate himself to death yet at that early age."[72] Although the liner notes identify the dates of the composition as 1940–1941, Mingus inscribed the year 1939 into the original score. Mingus collaborator and scholar Andrew Homzy agrees with this date.[73]

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[70] Gary Giddins and Robert Rusch, *Cadence*, 1, no. 8 (July 1976): 4, www.jazzripm.fulltext.org.

[71] Martin Williams, Liner Notes for Charlie Mingus, *Pre-Bird*, Recorded May 24, 1960, Mercury SR-60627.

[72] Theodore Davis, email to author, May 16, 2024.

[73] Griffith, "His Jelly Roll Soul", 37.

As with many pieces by jazz composers, the manuscript for *Half-Mast* was not published, and, given the state of the "yellow, crumbling" sheet music at the recording date, it is no wonder that the individual parts did not survive.[74] The score to the work, however, can be found in the Charles Mingus collection in the Library of Congress or through the medium of microfilm, as preserved by the Mid-Atlantic Preservation Service.

Ken Schaphorst, chair of jazz studies at the New England Conservatory, transcribed his arrangement from a photocopy of the original score obtained from the Library of Congress. In the program notes for the performance, Schaphorst credits Larry Applebaum, Maria Jane Loizou, Sue Mingus, and Gunther Schuller for their help in the preparation of the parts and score of the original arrangement.[75] In his edition, Schaphorst eliminates the original doublings of the woodwind parts so that the flute, clarinet, oboe, and saxophone parts are played by separate people, rather than requiring some musicians to play multiple instruments. The resulting arrangement premiered on February 13, 2014, by the New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble, under the baton of Charles Peltz, in a concert entitled "Third Stream Headwaters." Other pieces on the program included *La creation du monde*, Op. 81 by Darius Milhaud, *From Here to There* by Gunther Schuller, *All Set* by Milton Babbitt, and *The Dog Breath Variations* (for Wind Ensemble) by Frank Zappa.

The work was again performed on March 6, 2014, at the CBDNA (College Band Directors National Association) Eastern Division Conference hosted by the New England Conservatory.[76] Peltz wrote of the mission for the conference:

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[74] Gary Giddins and Robert Rusch, *Cadence*, 1, no. 8 (July 1976): 4, www.jazzripm.fulltext.org.

[75] Ken Schaphorst, program notes for NEC Wind Ensemble, *Third Stream Headwaters*, Charles Peltz, conductor, Thursday, February 14, 2014, Jordan Hall, Boston, MA.

[76] Frank L. Battisti, *The New Winds of Change: The Evolution of the Contemporary American Wind Band/Ensemble and Its Music*, First edition, Delray Beach, Florida: Meredith Music Publications, 353.

> The world of music grows smaller as sounds from all corners of the globe are brought to us with breathtaking immediacy. With each generation, the interest of musicians in other music grows as does resistance to the constraints of genres. The mission of the conference is to introduce ideas and music, to initiate thinking and start conversations about how the world of wind music engages with this larger world. It does not attempt to answer all questions or address all issues. Rather, it attempts to clarify the challenges and highlight the rewards when embracing the larger world of music, and moreover, to envision the place of wind music in that larger world.[77]

When the doubled woodwind parts from Mingus's original score are divided amongst players, the instrumentation closely resembles a modern-day wind band. Schaphorst's score calls for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in B♭, Alto Saxophone 1 and 2, Tenor Saxophone 1 and 2, Baritone Saxophone, 4 Trumpets in B♭, 3 Tenor Trombones, 1 Bass Trombone, Tuba (marked optional), Timpani, Drum Set, Piano, Cello, and Double Bass. With doublers on the woodwind parts, this instrumentation also resembles that of a traditional jazz band, but it is how Mingus writes for this instrumentation that clearly shows this is not a jazz work. Biographer Todd Jenkins writes:

> This one is more classical in bent, an opulent arrangement rife with cellos, flutes, and reeds. As conducted by Gunther Schuller, the chart feels more like something Gil Evans would have devised for a large ensemble to accompany Miles Davis… There are a number of melodies and riffs built into *Inhibition*: in fact, at times it seems more like a musical collage than a composition in its own right. Some of the sections have an inarguable charm, like the disjointed, light-hearted dance at 3:23, the folksy waltz that soon follows it, and the pastoral ending. At eight minutes, it's more than twice as long as any other track on the disc [*Pre-Bird*] and is packed with interesting moments, even if the improvisational element is lacking.[78]

Form

Half-Mast Inhibition is approximately eight minutes in length, comprising sixteen distinct sections that include a variety of different musical ideas, styles, and timbral combinations.

[77] Battisti, *The New Winds of Change*, 353.
[78] Todd S. Jenkins, *I Know What I Know*, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006, 73.

Although Mingus commentator Jack Cooke wrote that the work can come across as "a hotchpotch of rather undigested influences,"[79] one can already discern the remarkable musical ingenuity and individuality in this youthful composition.

The piece's sixteen sections employ a wide range of instrumental textures, from solos to *tutti* ensemble, from duets with various accompaniment to traditional "big band" writing. Most of the sections are short—only five to eight measures in length—with the shortest sections at three measures each. The largest sections vary from approximately twenty measures to forty-five measures and typically include a layering of sounds and textures. Each of these characteristics—the variety of instrumental cohorts, the segmented form, and the layering of sounds and textures— are representative of the composer's style.

Figure 3.1 lists the sections of the work, the number of measures in each section, and the orchestration of each section.

Section	Measures	Orchestration
1	1–20	Solo cello with various accompaniment (divided into three parts)
2	21–65	Ostinato Section with polyrhythmic and textural layering
3	66–72	Quarter Note Harmony in Low Brass/Reeds/Strings, solo Cello answered by Woodwinds and Trumpets
4	73–79	Muted Trumpet Harmony, Double Bass solo, Cello solo, Low Ensemble Voices
5	80–82	Trombone and Oboe solos with Low Ensemble Harmony
6	83–92	High Woodwinds, *pizzicato* Cello/Bass and Tuba/Timpani, Trumpets, Trombones
7	93–101	Trumpet with Trombone/Piano/Bass, Oboe/Clarinet with Cello/Bass/Timpani, Trombones/Low Saxophones
8	102–107	Quartet: Cello/Bass/2 Trumpets

[79] Jack Cooke, *Jazz Monthly*, January 1966, quoted in Priestley, 14.

9	108–113	*Tutti.* “Jingle Bells” melody
10	114–121	Oboe/Cello duet, sparse ensemble harmony
11	122–124	Tuba solo
12	125–145	*Tutti*, Oboe/Cello duet, many layers and colors.
13	146–154	Alto Sax solo with first “big band” orchestration, Oboe/Cello duet, Bass solo, *Tutti*
14	155–157	Cello/Piano with Trombones, Trumpets w/harmon mutes and Double Bass join at final *fermata*
15	158–163	Second “big band” orchestration. Saxophones/Trumpets/Trombones, additional Woodwinds/Piano/Strings/Drums
16	164–169	Sustained F in Tuba/Timpani/Double Bass, Oboe/Cello duet, *tutti* orchestration throughout

Figure 3.1 *Half-Mast Inhibition* sections with orchestration.

Section 1, solo cello with ensemble accompaniment, can be divided into three parts based on its orchestration: 1) cello with high (flute and clarinet) and low (tuba or double bass) accompaniment; 2) cello with trumpet and percussion accompaniment; 3) cello with upper woodwind (flute and clarinet) and brass (trumpet and trombone) accompaniment. The first part of this section, marked Largo (♩= 60), suggests C# minor, with a melancholy cello statement that ascends one and a half octaves. Clarinet joins the texture, through contrary motion, while the tuba is added through an ascending line spanning an octave and a fourth. This disparate trio weaves its way through a sparse, contrapuntal texture before a rhapsodic flute flourish ascends to a high D#.

The section continues in mm. 8–14 as the melodic line of the cello is accompanied by a light figure in the snare drum with chordal accompaniment in the trumpets. The high tessitura of the solo cello, joined by a flourish in the flute and oboe, along with a triangle roll creates an ethereal nature. Lower trumpets and trombones punctuate alternating E and G pitches, reinforced

by the sustained harmony of woodwinds and muted trumpets. The section concludes in an Em7 tonality, with the added tension of an A in the flute.

In this opening tripartite section, Mingus demonstrates aspects of his compositional style: high and low instruments of the ensemble spanning wide intervals and written in their extreme registers, use of contrary motion, varying combinations of instruments achieving expressive sounds, and specific and deliberate timbres within the ensemble. The colors achieved represent a unique palette that foreshadows the variety of timbres present in this work.

At forty-five measures in length, Section 2 is the longest of the piece. The entire section is written in one meter (2/4) and at one tempo marking (Allegro, ♩= 108) and provides some of the most interesting and active writing in the entire work. Mingus applies his multi-layered textural approach to this section, as it begins with a rhythmic ostinato consisting of eighth notes and sixteenth notes in the low instruments of the ensemble, double bass and tuba. Cello and low saxophones are added to the texture before a highly syncopated counter-rhythmic and counter-melodic figure in the flute and clarinet join. The trumpets enter with distinct timbres, including an open, half-valve smear, flutter tongue, and mutes (marked "deep in hat" and "in and out of hat"), followed by the trombones, which feature their own plunger and glissando effects. The final layer is an oboe solo marked by wide intervallic leaps of a fourth, fifth, tritone, and major seventh. Figure 3.2 shows the opening of this section.

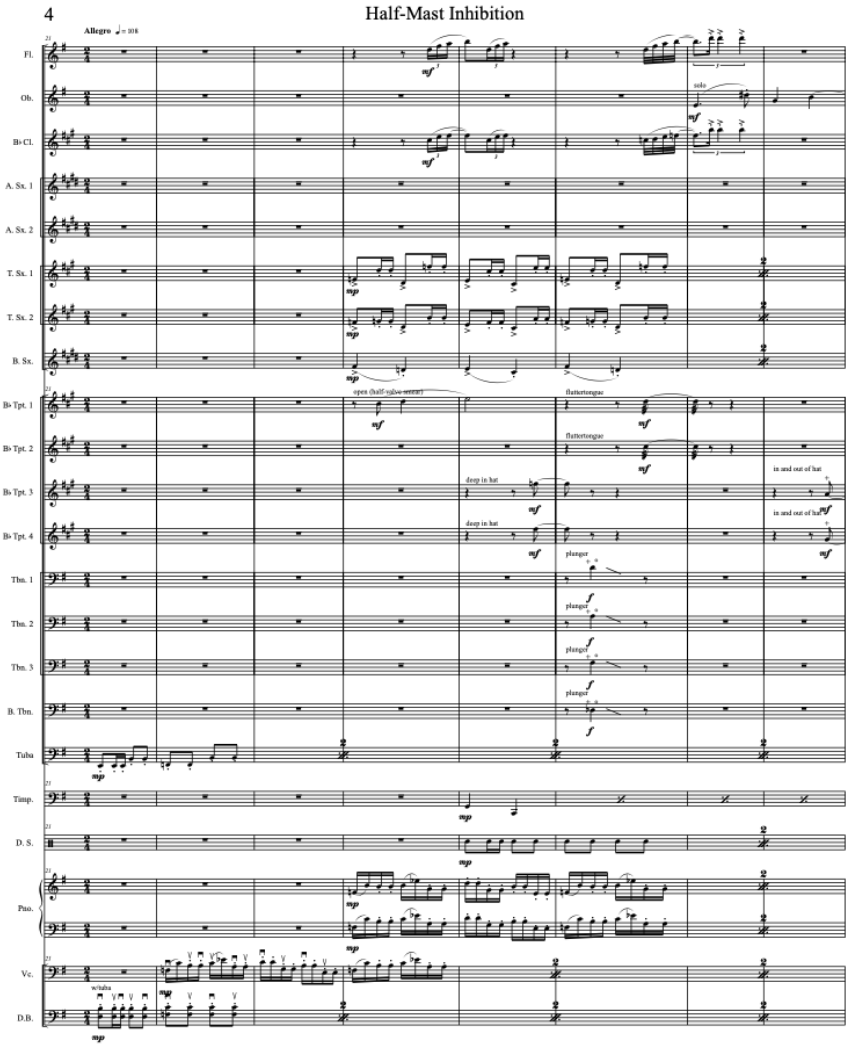

Figure 3.2. mm. 21–28, Ostinato and layering of texture.

Phrases of irregular length add to the unpredictable nature of this section, as the woodwind rhythms become increasingly active, and the overall texture builds to sonic cacophony. The final bars consist of *tutti* ensemble playing one of four parts: the ostinato pattern, a rising and falling scalar pattern (e.g., trombones), the first half of the ostinato followed by a descending chromatic scale (e.g., trumpets), or sustained pitches (e.g., woodwinds). In the original recording, the section accelerates slightly into its final moments before ending with a *staccato* polytonal chord (E-E♭-C-G-B) just prior to a *caesura* (Figure 3.3).

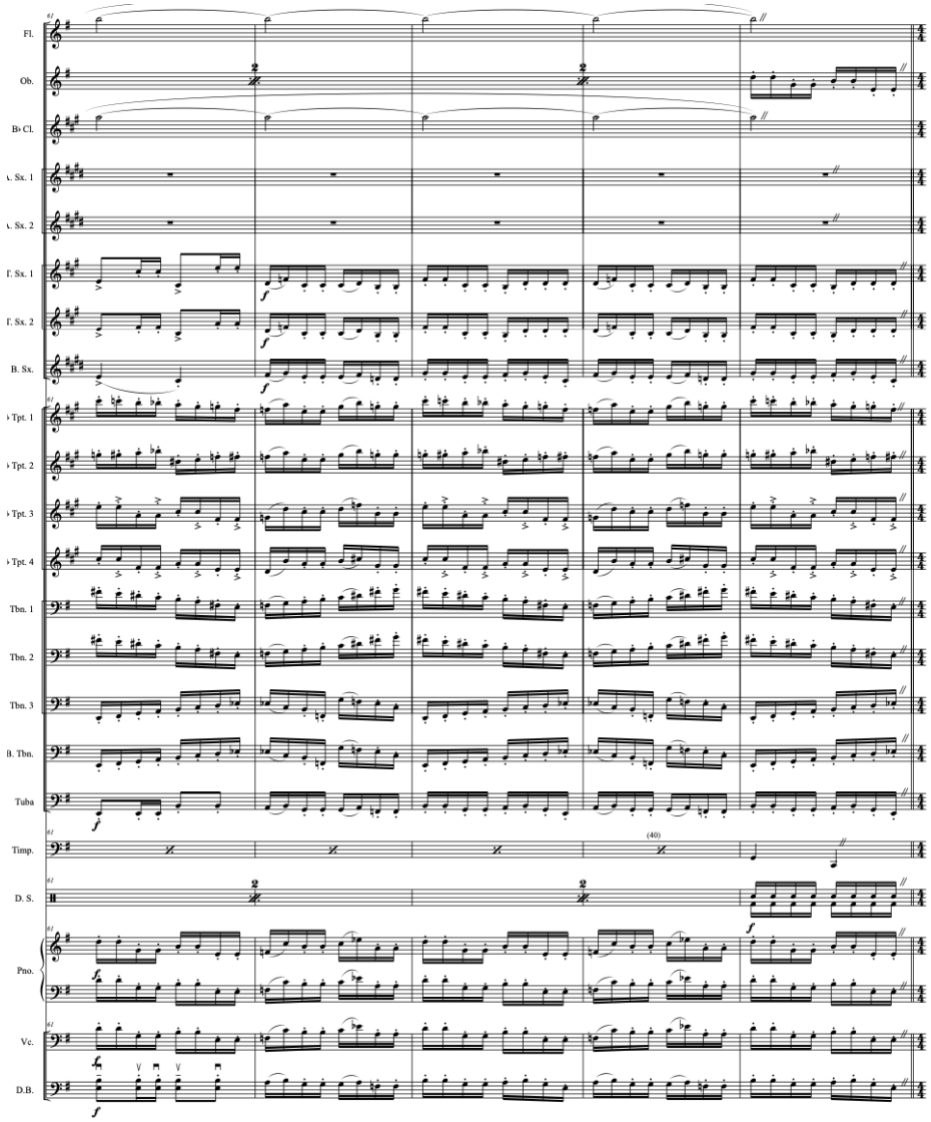

Figure 3.3. mm. 61–65, Dense ensemble writing at end of Section 2.

Mingus's stylistic traits are reinforced as specific instrumental colors again prevail throughout this most active of sections: lows and highs (e.g., tuba/bass ostinato versus flute/clarinet in their higher registers), deliberate brass colors (e.g., trumpets using open half-valve smear, flutter tongue, use of hat mutes and trombones using plunger effects), and an oboe solo layered into the ensemble texture.

The following section, Section 3, begins with slow, dirge-like, polytonal quarter notes alternating between the low saxophones, tuba, and double bass (Cmaj7/E) and trombones (F+7). Percussion rolls add to the heavy, dramatic nature of the section. An expressive cello solo soars above this stagnant pattern, answered—in succession—by a trio of woodwind voices, which lead to a rhythmic statement in the muted trumpets, as the section closes on an ensemble Em9 chord.

The sonority of the muted trumpets carries into the beginning of Section 4, serving as one of the few connective transitional textures throughout the entire piece. The entrance of a light ride cymbal introduces additional timbral variety, while the expressive melodic line in the solo double bass demonstrates the composer's affinity to writing for the complete range of each instrument (Figure 3.4).

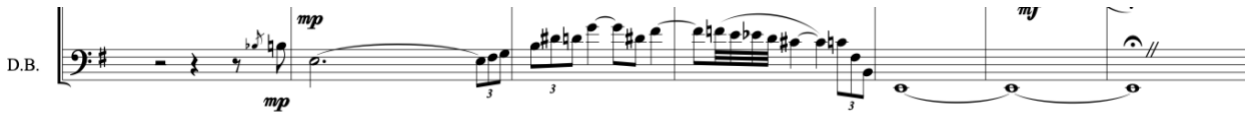

Figure 3.4. mm.74–79, Expressive double bass solo.

The descending ensemble sonority at measures 76–77 is reinforced through unison triplets in the trombones and tuba and a tremolo in the timpani and piano. The section ends with a final statement in the low saxophones and cello and the prevalent color of muted trumpets.

Section 5 is the first of the smallest, three-bar sections. The texture of the orchestration thins to a two-bar trombone solo in E7♭9—accompanied by bass, cello, piano, and trombones—followed by a one-bar oboe solo, in D♭7, with the same accompanying instruments. The melodic line in the oboe is the same as the trombone, but in rhythmic diminution.

Marked at ♩= 100, Section 6 begins with a light, dance-like texture that includes the outermost instruments of the ensemble— *pizzicato* strings, tuba, timpani, flute, and oboe—and a harmony that alternates between Amaj7 and Fmaj9. At measure 90, the texture thickens as the middle instruments of the ensemble fill in the orchestration. This texture becomes even more dense as the ensemble dynamic increases, and the section ends with an intense B♭7(♭9) chord (Figure 3.5).

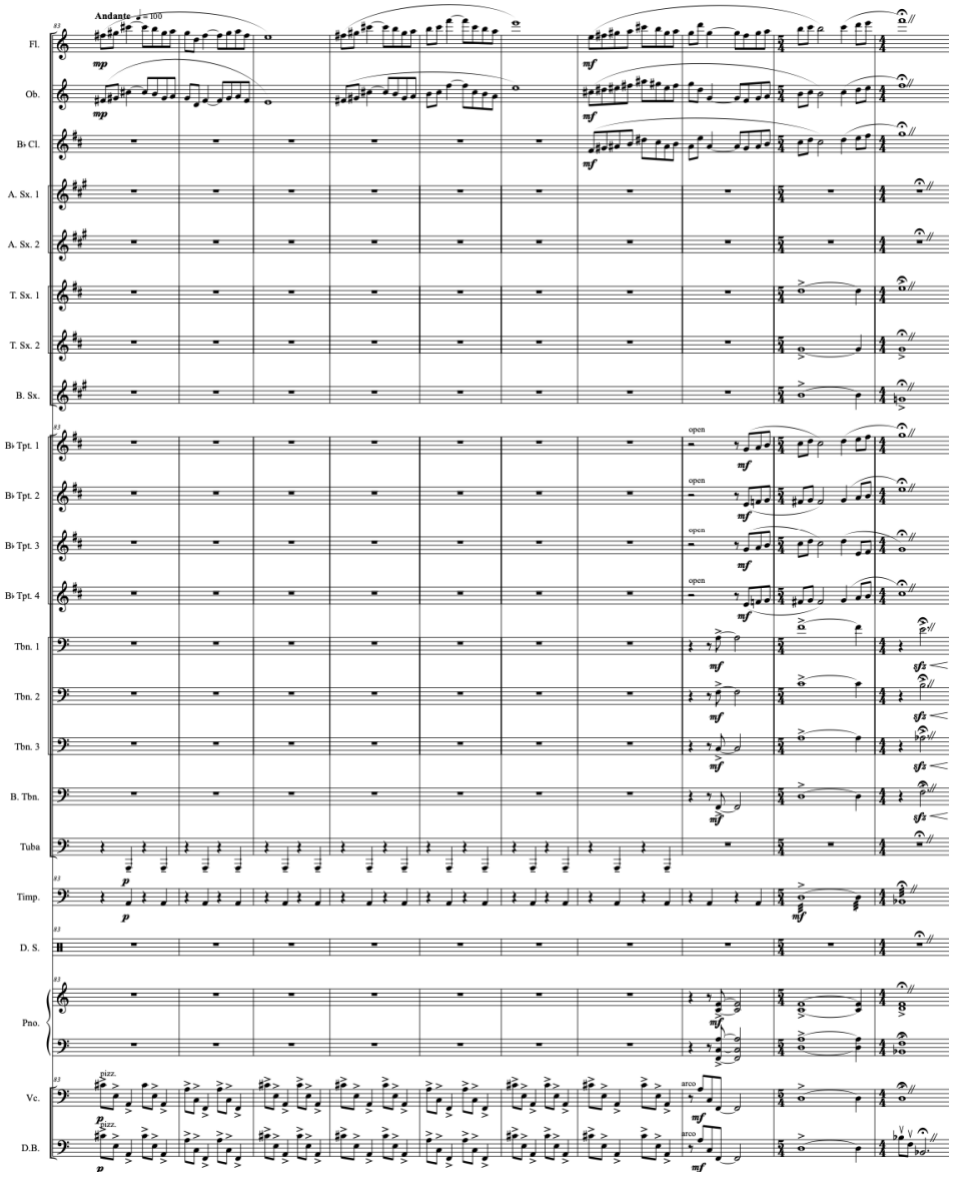

Figure 3.5. mm. 83–92, Lighter texture leading to thicker texture, shifting harmony.

The intensity in the final bar of this section is released, as the sound of solo trumpet, with accompaniment, begins Section 7. The nine bars of this section consist of two phrases that are linked both harmonically and melodically: a Cmaj7–Cdim6–Dm/C–Bdim chord progression is introduced in the first four bars and then repeated in the second. Meanwhile, the melodic contour of the trumpet line is mirrored in a similar fashion by the oboe/clarinet duet. The harmonic accompaniment in the lower instruments of the ensemble, provided first in the trombones and arpeggiated piano and then by a waltz-like pattern in the double bass, cello, and timpani, contrasts with the melodic material in the upper instruments. Following the repeated chord progression, the section ends at measure 101 with an ensemble Cmaj7 chord (Figure 3.6).

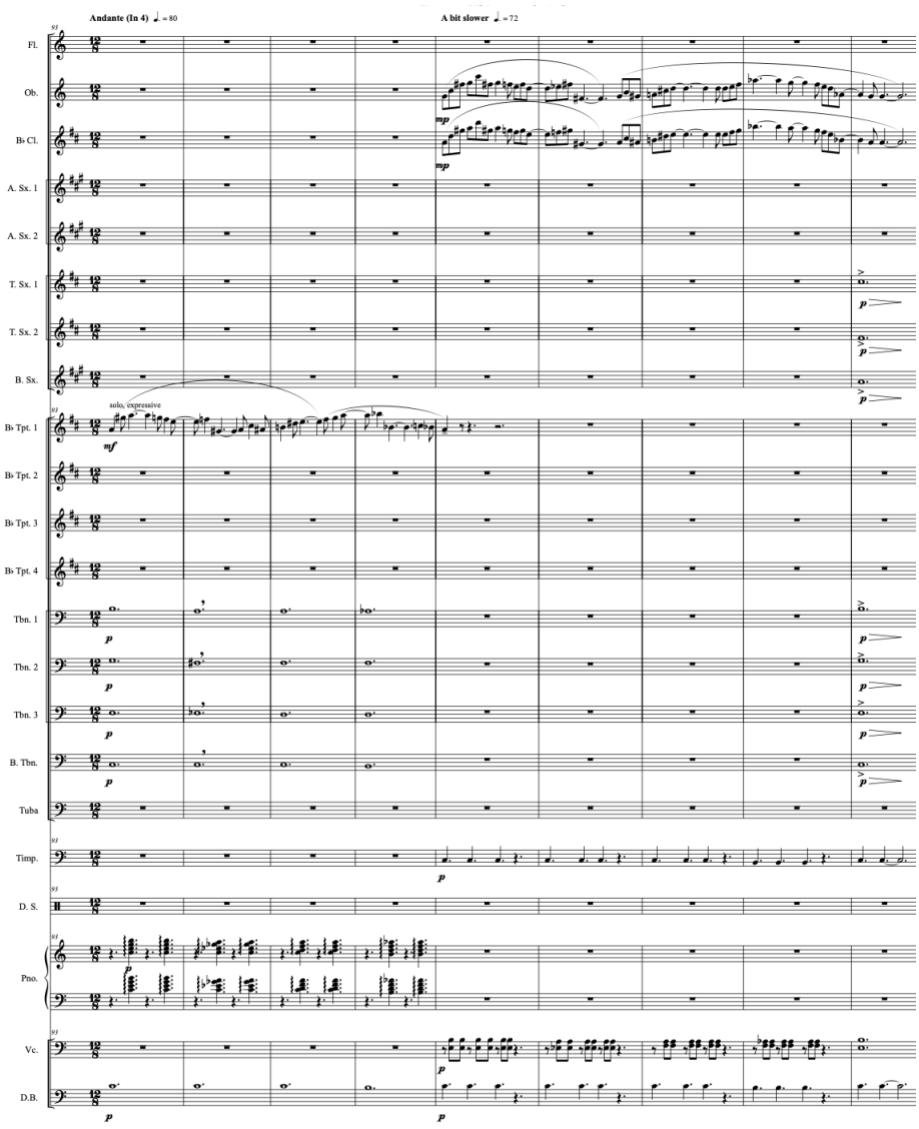

Figure 3.6. mm. 93–101, Repeated chord progression and contrasting orchestration.

Section 8 is marked Largo (♩= 60) and consists of six bars in 3/4 meter. The instrumentation of this section is one quartet comprising two pairs of instruments, trumpets and strings, in contrapuntal motion. The darker sonority of the section is amplified by ambiguous harmony between the strings and trumpets.

A dramatic orchestrational shift from quartet to *tutti* ensemble occurs at the beginning of Section 9. A *tutti crescendo,* leading to an unprecedented *fortissimo* in measure 109, is

heightened by the low and high ranges in the ensemble orchestration. Mingus demonstrates his writing for the extreme registers of the ensemble, as the upper woodwinds ascend in contrary motion to the descending low brass and strings. The dynamic climax of the section occurs when these instruments reach their outermost pitches, just before the “Jingle Bells” quote is introduced in the tenor saxophones. Emphatic changes in harmony and the distinct color of snare drum rolls add to the dramatic effect as the section closes (Figure 3.7).

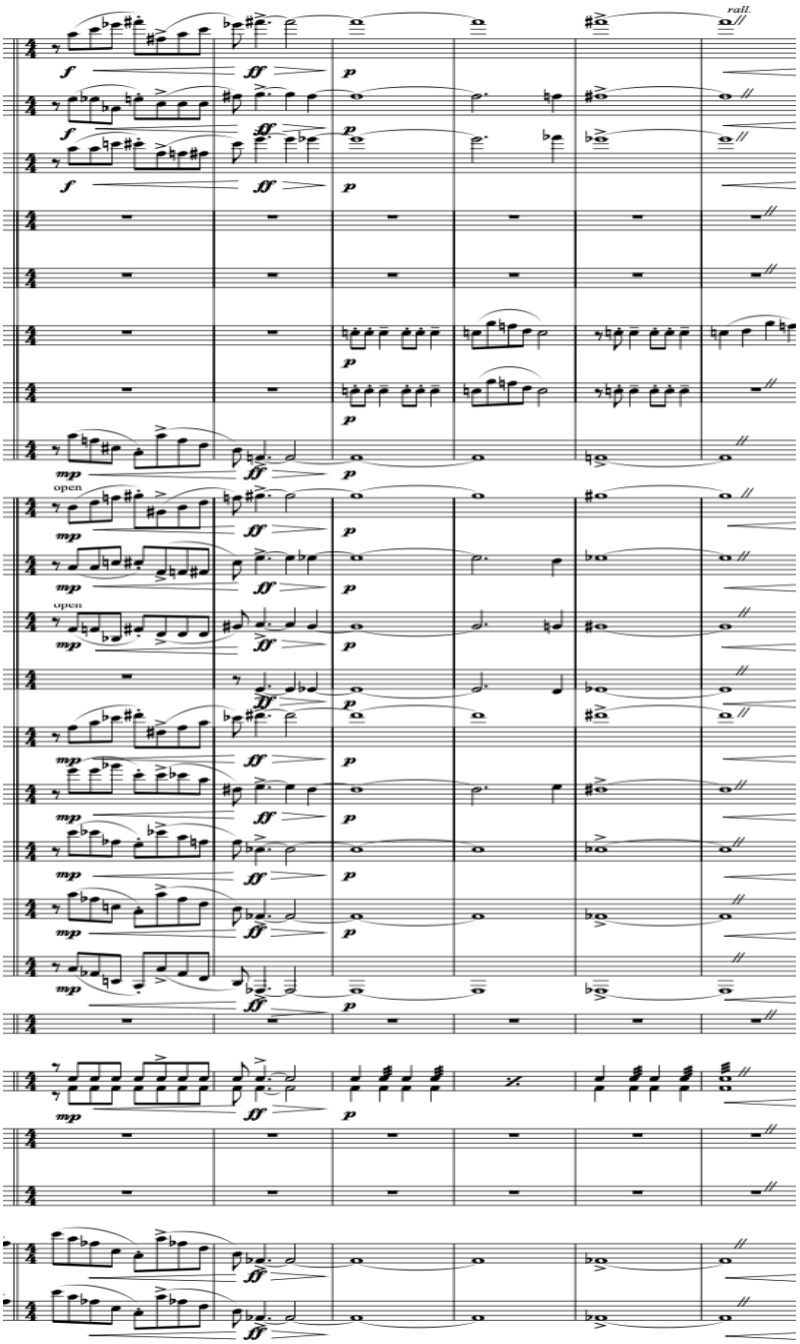

Figure 3.7. mm.108–113, *Tutti* writing, contrary motion in lows and highs, “Jingle Bells” theme.

Following this *tutti* section, Mingus abruptly changes textures for Section 10. The eight-bar section is an oboe/cello duet, in contrapuntal motion, with sparse harmony provided by a single whole note in the trumpets and a single eighth-note at the end of the section played by a

small, disparate cohort of instruments. In this section, Mingus introduces the particular duo of oboe and cello. These instruments each play a four-note motif that will occur, although in various guises, at later moments in the piece (Figure 3.8). This recurring pairing of instruments and their associated motifs are one of the few connective musical ideas in the entire composition.

Figure 3.8. m. 114 and m. 116, Initial four-note motif of oboe and cello

The solo tuba is the only instrument to play during the three bars of section 11. This section establishes a new key center (F major), time signature (2/2), and tempo marking (Allegro, half-note = 76) and also serves as a "reset" of the color palette.

Section 12, at twenty-one measures, is one of the longer sections in the work and is unified by thematic material, harmonic patterns, and rhythmic accompaniment. It divides into the following phrase structure: eight measures, two measures, five measures, six measures. The quarter-note triplets of the tuba in the preceding section continue into a hocketed accompaniment in the lower instruments of the ensemble (e.g., strings, trombones, baritone saxophone, and tenor saxophones) in the next four bars. A repeated snare drum figure similarly contributes to this rhythm.

The antecedent of the first phrase begins in F major, with a clarinet melody atop the light texture of the hocketed accompaniment (Figure 3.9).

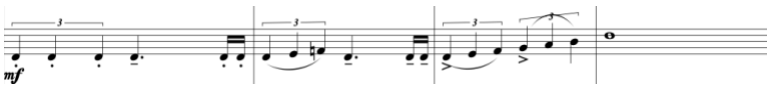

Figure 3.9. mm. 125–128, Opening clarinet melody in Section 12.

Mingus then adds an oboe and muted trombone *glissando* before employing the full forces of the ensemble. A chordal trumpet section completes the consequent of the phrase, again evidencing a multi-layered compositional approach. There are no fewer than six musical ideas occurring in measures 129–131. This thick, polyrhythmic texture quickly thins out as pairings of flute/oboe, clarinet/cello, and tuba/double bass finish out the phrase. The composer creates a sense of calm with a two-bar oboe/cello duet (the second occurrence of this cohort) before again surprising the listener with *tutti* multi-layered writing; four different layers occur simultaneously, including sustained notes in the woodwinds and trumpets and various harmonic rhythms in the low saxophones, low brass, and percussion. A solo in the third trumpet part jumps out of the texture, due to its extremely high range and volume (Figure 3.10).

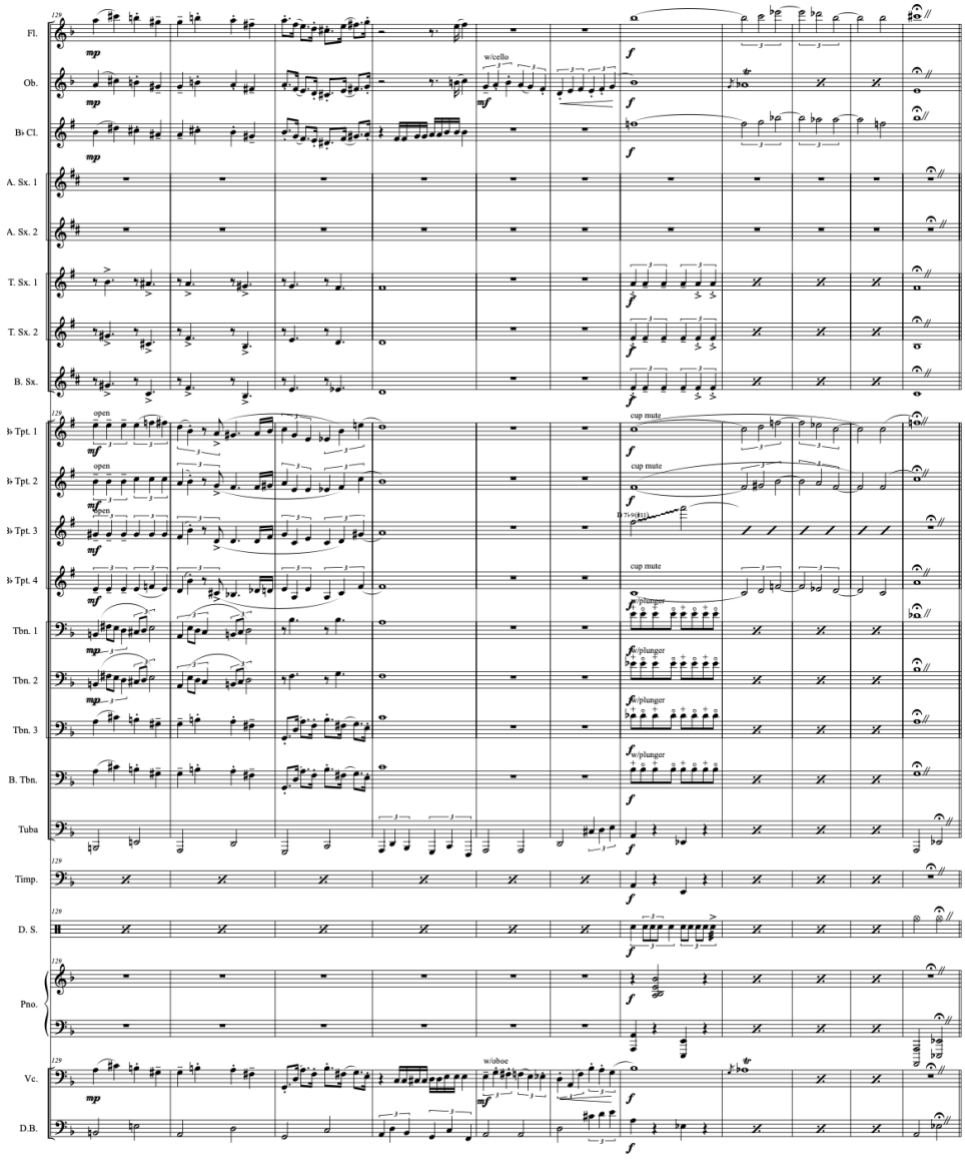

Figure 3.10. mm. 129–139, Multi-layered writing, oboe/cello duet, high trumpet solo.

The final six-bar phrase bookends this section, featuring the same melodic line—now in trumpet 3—and harmonic progression as the first phrase, while continuing with multi-layered writing. For the two bars of measures 141–142, Mingus adds the oboe in canon with the trumpet at the interval of a major seventh. Brass, strings, and percussion close out the final two bars of the section.

Solo alto saxophone leads into Section 13, which has a slower tempo (♩= 80) and a different feel. The first six bars reflect Mingus's jazz experience with traditional "big band" orchestration, including sectional writing for saxophones, trombones, and rhythm section, along with a trumpet solo—an element not present in the original *Pre-Bird* recording.[80] Additional idiomatic jazz elements include the *glissandi* and syncopated accents in these measures. The final three bars transition back to a more classical-sounding composition, as the oboe/cello duet makes its third appearance in the piece.

Even in the final two bars of this section, Mingus's compositional style is evident in the oboe/cello duet, the high tessitura of the woodwinds and cello, and the use of contrary motion leading to contrasting highs and lows within the ensemble.

Schaphorst's edition continues with *arco* bass, solo cello (in its lowest register), chordal trombones, and piano; in the original recording, the piano is not present. Functioning similarly to Sections 5 and 11, the three bars of Section 14 create an aural palette cleanser and shifts the harmony, in this case from G7(♭5) to Ddim9/C.

This harmony transitions into Section 15, which establishes a strong tonal center in C major. It is the second section to feature "big band" orchestration, with sectional writing for the saxophones, trumpets, and trombones and idiomatic jazz elements, such as swung eighth notes in the saxophones, mutes and plungers in the brass, and brushes on the drum set. Strings and woodwinds are incorporated as additional voices, answering the saxophones.

Section 16, the final six bars of the piece, opens with a sustained low F in the double bass, tuba, and timpani. A harmonic connection is revealed as the G7(♭5) of Section 14, leading

[80] The trumpet solo was likely part of the original version, since Schaphorst referred to the extant score when creating his edition; why either Mingus or Schuller chose to exclude the solos from the recording remains a mystery.

to the C of Section 15, then leading to the F of Section 16 resembles a ii–V–I progression commonly found in jazz writing. The fourth presentation of the oboe/cello duet introduces this final section, before Mingus layers sustained woodwinds, muted trumpets, and trombones with dramatic dynamic gestures.

The low notes of the oboe dominate the *tutti* texture in the final bar, just before the piece *crescendos* to its ultimate peak.

Orchestration

True to his style, Mingus writes for a variety of chamber groups within the larger ensemble—evident in nearly every section of this piece. As previously mentioned, the opening section begins with an unusual quartet of instruments: cello, clarinet, tuba, and flute. The staggered outer voices, written in an almost antiphonal style, establish a mysterious atmosphere.

Mingus again uses a quartet in Section 8. However, unlike the opening of the work, this section features two pairs of instruments within the same family: trumpets and strings. Rather than each voice serving an independent role to form one singular quartet, each pair of instruments has its own musical function: the melody in the muted trumpets is supported by the unison harmonic pattern of the cello and double bass. The contrapuntal interplay between each pair of instruments complements the others, with the more serious nature of this section serving as a bridge from the "waltz" style of the previous section to the tutti ensemble writing that follows.

The duet of oboe and cello is a favored sonority for Mingus, used on four different occasions within this piece. Three of these are associated with a four-note motif in each instrument, which is varied throughout the work. This particular pairing of typical orchestral

instruments rarely seen in jazz ensembles likely results from the composer's interest in classical music, and the motivic derivations demonstrate his experimentation with melody and counterpoint.

The classical-leaning orchestration of the oboe/cello duet contrasts with traditional "big band" orchestration at two points in this work, underlining the composer's experience with jazz. The first six bars of Section 13 include first alto saxophone marked "solo" playing above the rhythm section, saxophones, and trombones. The saxophone section in the *Pre-Bird* recording includes idiomatic jazz inflections, such as wide vibrato, pitch bends, and syncopated punctuations from accompanying trombones. Schaphorst's edition includes solo changes for Trumpet 3 and piano, but in the original album recording, those solos are not present.

The second time that "big-band" orchestration is used comes seven bars later, in measures 158–163. Here, the ensemble color softens, as the piece calls for trumpet Harmon mutes, trombone plungers, and drum brushes. In contrast, the saxophone section plays a syncopated unison line with swung eighth notes and dramatic *forte-piano crescendos*. Although additional woodwinds and strings join the texture, the influence of large jazz ensemble writing remains central (Figure 3.11).

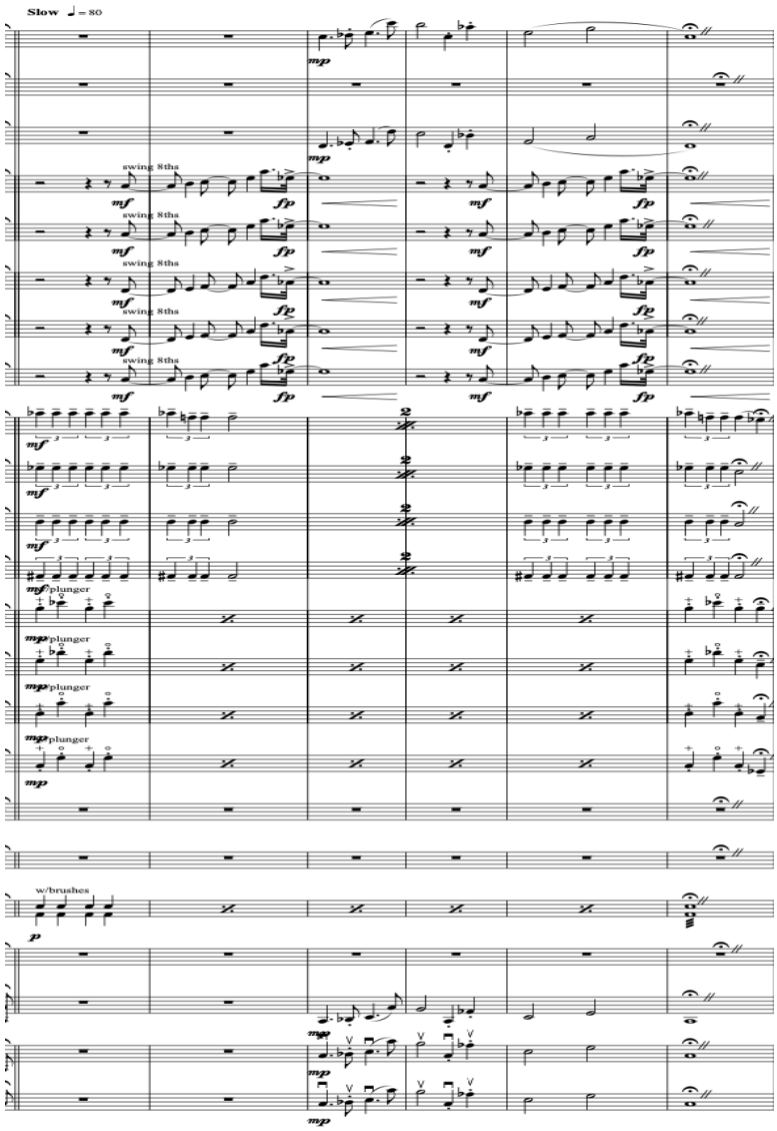

Figure 3.11. mm. 158–163, Second section of "big band" orchestration.

Another example of Mingus's intriguing approach to orchestration appears in Section 3. Marked at a tempo of "Slower, ♩= 69," the harmonic rhythm moves at a quarter note pulse. The low instruments of the ensemble (e.g., low saxophones, low brass, double bass, timpani), in combination with muted trombones and percussion rolls, create a mysterious "plodding" effect throughout this section. A mournful cello solo contributes to this somber mood, answered by a trio of woodwinds. The final bar of the section features muted trumpets and a cymbal roll, adding

to the already unusual timbral canvas (Figure 3.12). The specific choices of plungers, mutes, percussion rolls, and solo cello demonstrate Mingus's expansive variety of instrumental colors.

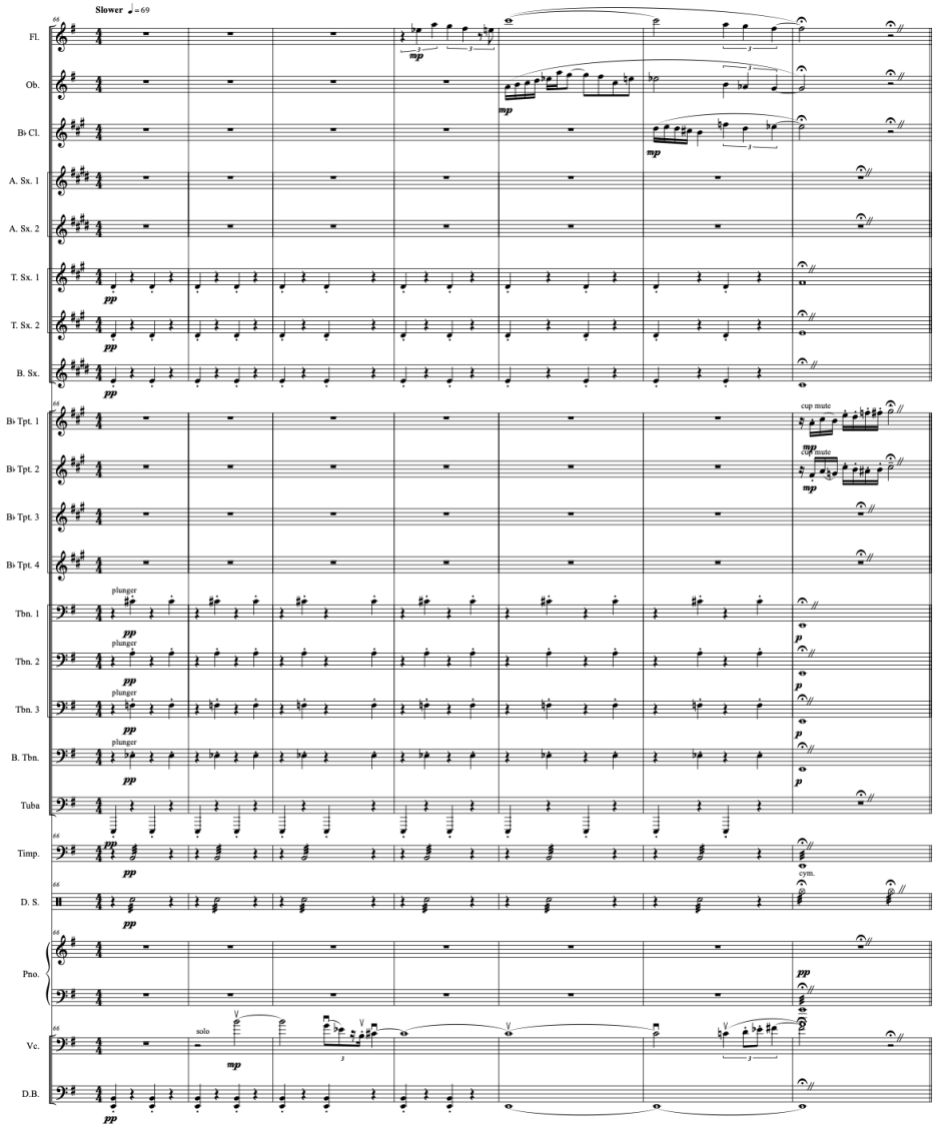

Figure 3.12. mm. 66–72, Variety of instrumental colors.

Texture

Along with composing for various small ensembles and quickly changing groups of instruments, Mingus uses a multi-layered compositional approach in his *tutti* ensemble writing, which he continues to develop further throughout his career and employs again in *Revelations*. Two examples within *Half-Mast Inhibition* clearly demonstrate this technique.

As previously described, Section 2 is the "ostinato" section of the work. Beginning with a repetitive rhythmic pattern in the double bass, tuba, and cello, Mingus thickens the texture of the section in an additive manner. He integrates instruments one at a time, two at a time, or even an entire section at a time. These entrances begin first with a single note or short musical fragment that is either repeated or developed further. The resulting feeling of continuous evolution and transformation helps prevent any sense of stagnation (see Figure 3.1).

At measure 24, the tenor saxophones join the ostinato pattern, as the first trumpet colors the texture with a syncopated half-valve smear. Flute and oboe add another layer with a short rhythmic statement that is developed into its own repetitive countermelody. This six-bar countermelody repeats five times before becoming a flourish-like effect at measure 57 and then settling into a sustained B♭ note in the final five bars of the section.

Trumpets and trombones each join with their various "layers" beginning at measure 25. While the initial entrances of these instruments comprise a single note marked with specific timbral specifications, such as "deep in hat," closed to open plunger, "fall," and flutter tongue, they are developed into section textures beginning at measure 31. Here, both sections serve harmonic roles, as the elongated rhythms of the trumpets contrast with the repetitive figure of the trombones. This writing continues until the end of the section, when both groups of instruments

join the ostinato, through a series of ascending and descending scalar patterns, as the entire ensemble builds to a frenzied climax (Figure 3.13).

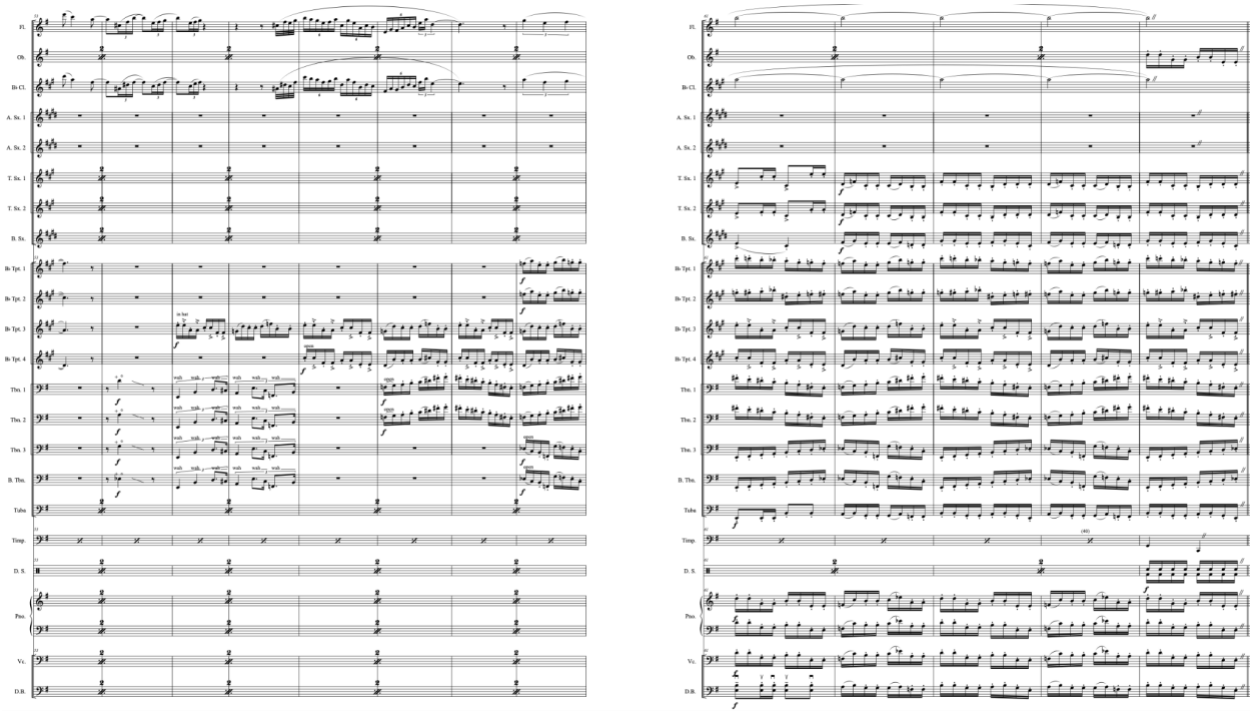

Figure 3.13. mm. 53–65, Section 2 ostinato and textural layering.

Measures 129–132 in Section 12 also demonstrate Mingus's multi-layered technique. This short four-bar segment has no fewer than six musical layers: the bass line of the tuba and double-bass emphasized with timpani; the quarter-note and dotted quarter-note pattern found in the woodwinds, low trombones, and cello; the syncopated accented notes in the low saxophones; the harmonized melody of the trumpets; the triplet figure of the high trombones; and the rhythmic component of the snare drum in the drum set. The result is an extremely dense texture (Figure 3.14). This dense texture continues throughout much of the rest of the section, although the rhythmic activity slows, especially in the final two bars.

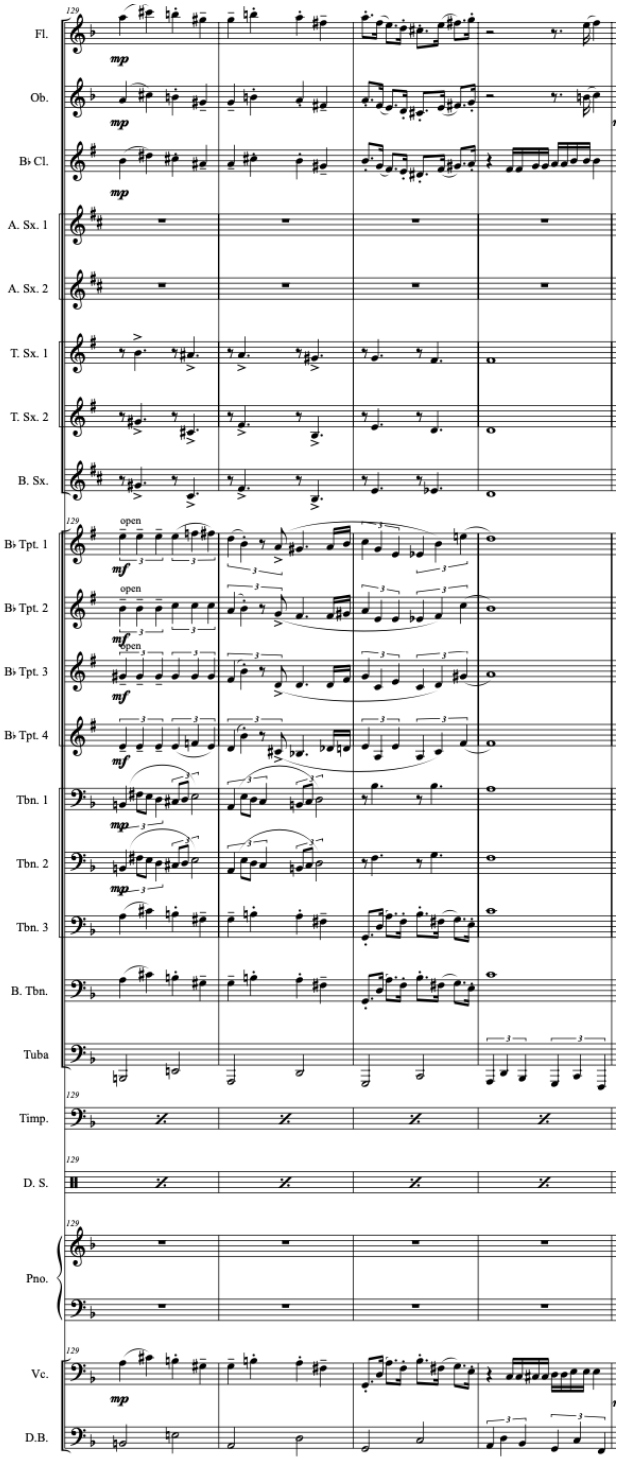

Figure 3.14. mm. 129–132, Dense textural writing.

Meter and Tempo

As this episodic piece presents a multitude of musical ideas and styles, it comes as no surprise that Mingus assigns a new meter and tempo to the majority of sections. Further adding to the delineations, twelve of the sixteen sections end with either a *fermata*, a *caesura*, or a combination of both. Only four sections of the work move continuously from one to the next. There are two sections where the tempo and meter do not change, but the orchestration does. This occurs between Sections 8 and 9, where the orchestration shifts from the trumpets/strings quartet to *tutti* ensemble, and between Sections 15 and 16, where it shifts from the second "big-band" orchestration to the oboe/cello duet that begins the final six bars of the piece. Figure 3.15 shows the tempo, meter, and ending technique of each section.

Section	Measure	Meter, Tempo, Section Ending
1	1	4/4, Largo, ♩= 60, *Fermata*
	8	6/8, Slow, ♩.= 60, *Fermata* and *Caesura*
	15	4/4, Largo, ♩= 60, *Fermata*
2	21	2/4, Allegro, ♩= 108, *Caesura*
3	66	4/4, Slower, ♩= 69, *Fermata* and *Caesura*
4	73	Same meter and tempo, *Fermata* and *Caesura*
5	80	Same meter and tempo, *Attacca*
6	83	4/4 (with one 5/4 bar), Andante, ♩= 100, *Fermata* and *Caesura*
7	93	12/8, Andante (in 4), ♩.= 80, *Attacca*
	97	Same meter, A bit slower, ♩.= 72
8	102	3/4, Largo, ♩= 60, *Attacca*
9	108	4/4, Same tempo, *Caesura*
10	114	4/4, Slow, ♩= 80, *Fermata* and *Caesura*
11	122	2/2, Allegro, half note = 76, *Attacca*

12	125	Same meter and tempo, *Fermata* and *Caesura* In Section, *Fermata*
13	146	4/4, Slow, ♩= 80, *Fermata* and *Caesura*
14	155	4/4, Slow, ♩= 60, *Fermata*
15	158	4/4, Slow, ♩= 80, *Fermata* and *Caesura*
16	164	Same meter and tempo, *Fermata* and *Crescendo*

Figure 3.15. Changes of Meter and tempo, and section endings in *Half-Mast Inhibition*

Summary

The orchestrational choices of *Half-Mast Inhibition* exemplify Mingus's expansive color palette, even in his early years as a composer. He explores myriad timbral possibilities by writing for a variety of instrumental cohorts—many unconventional—which create varied and interesting musical ideas or sections within this episodic piece. Mingus elicits musical interest throughout the entirety of the composition in four main ways: creating interesting textures by writing for various chamber groups and for specific timbres within the larger ensemble; utilizing a multi-layered textural approach in his *tuttis*; writing for the outermost instruments of the ensemble to simultaneously play in their extreme registers; and frequently changing meter and tempo throughout the work.

CHAPTER FOUR

REVELATIONS

Background

Revelations was one of six pieces commissioned by Gunther Schuller for the 1957 Brandeis University Festival of the Arts, the goal of which was to feature compositions that could be considered "Third Stream," works reflecting the influence of both jazz and European classical music.[81] Along with Mingus, the other composers (and their pieces) commissioned for the festival were Milton Babbitt (*All Set),* Jimmy Giuffre (*Suspensions),* George Russell (*All About Rosie),* Gunther Schuller (*Transformation*), and Harold Shapero (*On Green Mountain).*[82] In his liner notes to the album *Modern Jazz Concert*, Schuller writes of the music that "perhaps this is jazz or perhaps it is not. Perhaps it is a new kind of music not yet named, which became possible only in America where, concurrent with a rapidly growing musical maturing, a brand new musico-cultural manifestation came into being…"[83] Whatever the case, *Revelations* is a prime example of Mingus utilizing his developed classical and jazz backgrounds to craft a composition reflective of both genres. The piece is markedly more advanced in terms of musical organization and inspiration than *Half-Mast Inhibition* and demonstrates how far Mingus's individual compositional voice had matured in almost 20 years since the earlier work. It seems as

[81] In his book, *The History of Jazz*, Gunther Schuller, the originator of the term "Third Stream" defines it as "a concept of composing, improvising, and performing which seeks to fuse, creatively, jazz (and other vernacular musics) with contemporary classical concepts, and techniques." Additional thoughts surrounding the term can be found in his book, *Musings.*

[82] Gunther Schuller, Liner Notes for *Modern Jazz Concert,* Recorded June 10-20, 1957, Columbia Records WL-127.

[83] Schuller, Liner Notes, *Modern Jazz Concert*.

though he used this commission to demonstrate fully his capabilities as a composer and establish his prowess with his peers.

The piece was originally written for an ensemble of thirteen or fourteen players, depending on whether the bass part is doubled. The ensemble includes one player who doubles on flute and piccolo and one who doubles on tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, and clarinet. Modern-day wind ensembles could divide these parts among more players, if desired. The listed instrumentation for the work is flute/piccolo, alto saxophone/tenor saxophone/clarinet, baritone saxophone, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, harp, vibraphone, electric guitar, piano, percussion (e.g., triangle, timpani, tambourine, traps, cymbal), and two basses. Mingus writes for various cohorts of instruments and often calls for the performers to play in the extreme ranges of those instruments. Brief, virtuosic solos are written in the horn, trumpet, and trombone parts, and one section of the piece includes collective improvisation for all members of the ensemble. Percussion plays an integral role throughout the work and adds effective, often structural colors to the composition.

The reception to *Revelations* was very favorable. C.H. Garrigues of the *San Francisco Examiner* wrote that, at least up through 1960, the piece was Mingus's "most distinguished work."[84] Critic Max Harrison noted:

> Mingus takes greater risks than the other composers [at the Brandeis Festival.] The unity of his works depends not on their technical organization… but is largely of an emotional order… [*Revelations*] extends itself as a succession of moods, feelings, atmospheres, melting into and out of each other. This was something which had not then been widely attempted in jazz.[85]

[84] C.H. Garrigues, "Chief Anti-Copycat Charlie Mingus on A Workshop Gig," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 11, 1960, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The San Francisco Examiner.

[85] Max Harrison, *A Jazz Retrospect*, London: David and Charles, 1976, 182-3.

The biographer Priestley describes it as:

> […]similar to Mingus's *The Chill of Death* and *Half-Mast Inhibition*, with the exception that it incorporates a highly successful two-minute improvisation over alternating I minor and IV7 chords (as in *Pithecanthropus Erectus*). ...what there is of it stands as the most convincing attempt extant of Mingus's efforts to combine jazz and European music.[86]

Form

Revelations comprises eight sections. The composition is largely in B♭ minor, with forays into A Dorian and B♭ major. It is a classic exemplar of Mingus's large ensemble compositional techniques in terms of orchestration, dynamics, and episodic writing and includes an extended modal improvisatory section. Figure 4.1 lists the various sections of the piece.

Section	Measures	Orchestration
1	1–24	Low Bass Instruments, Triangle, Solo Brass
2	25–32	Baritone Sax/Bassoon/Harp/Guitar/Bass, Alto Sax/Horn/Trumpet/Trombone, Tambourine/Timpani, Voice, *Tutti*/Tam-tam
3	33–64	Piano/Drums/Bass/Vibes/Guitar, Horn
4	65–92	Horn/Bass Duet with Various Accompaniment
5	93–112	*Tutti*, Extended Techniques
6	113–121	Solo Piano, Layered Ensemble, *Tutti*
7	122–172	Solo Piano, *Tutti*, Extended Improvisation
8	173–196	Low Bass Instruments, Triangle, *Tutti*

Figure 4.1 Sections of *Revelations*.

Section 1 is twenty-four measures in length and, as Schuller describes in the album's liner notes, opens the work with a "dark and ominous sounding statement in the bass

[86] Priestley, *Mingus*, 82.

instruments."[87] The low tessitura of the unison line in the baritone saxophone, bassoon, horn, trombone, harp, and bass provides a mysterious soundscape that is interrupted by the eerie interjections of the triangle. The horn and trombone emerge from this texture through dramatic *crescendos* on repeated, syncopated notes that lead to the entrance of harp, guitar, piano, and timpani. The trumpet entrance and cymbal crash at measure ten transition to the middle portion of this first section, which features successive solos for the three brass instruments: horn, trumpet, and trombone. This cymbal crash marks the first occasion in the work where Mingus usesthe color of a percussion instrument during a structural point in the composition. These brief brass solos demonstrate the full sonority of each instrument through wide intervallic leaps and dramatic dynamics. There is a timbral connection between the instruments, as the sound is "passed off" from one to the next. Although these solos sound as if they may be improvised, they are completely notated for the players, with such instructions as *ad libitum* and *poco a piacere*. Following these solos, the bass instruments and triangle repeat the opening four-bar statement of the work.

Measures 25–32 (Section 2) provide a transitional section in the form. Here, a syncopated, unison B♭ in the baritone saxophone, bassoon, harp, guitar, and bass supplies a rhythmic ostinato, accompanied by chordal harmony in the alto saxophone, horn, trumpet, and trombone. Percussion instruments add notable textures to this section: the shaking of the tambourine, *glissando* in the timpani, and foot pats accompanied by rhythmic tambourine lead to instructions for a vocal interjection: "Singing Shout 'oh yes, my LORD!'" The percussion and vocal elements of this section likely harken back to Mingus's experience with the Holiness church. Following the exclamatory statement, *tutti* orchestration appears for the first time in the

[87] Schuller, Liner Notes, *Modern Jazz Concert*.

piece, and the outer instruments of the ensemble are written in their extreme registers, consistent with the composer's style and enhanced by dramatic ensemble dynamics. The tension in these eight bars builds towards the *fortississimo* entrance of the tam-tam, releasing as the final sounds decay into silence.

Section 3 (mm. 33–64) begins with a change of tempo (Bright tempo, dotted half note = 60), orchestration, and style. In Schuller's words, this section begins with an "old church-style piano solo."[88] It is a jazz-waltz section in A Dorian that also includes drum set, bass, vibes and guitar. As the section draws to a close, and the harmonic rhythm slows, Mingus enhances the orchestration through the now-melodic voices of vibes and guitar, along with a change of tempo, as the piece transitions to its next section (see Figure 4.2).

[88] Schuller, Liner Notes, *Modern Jazz Concert*.

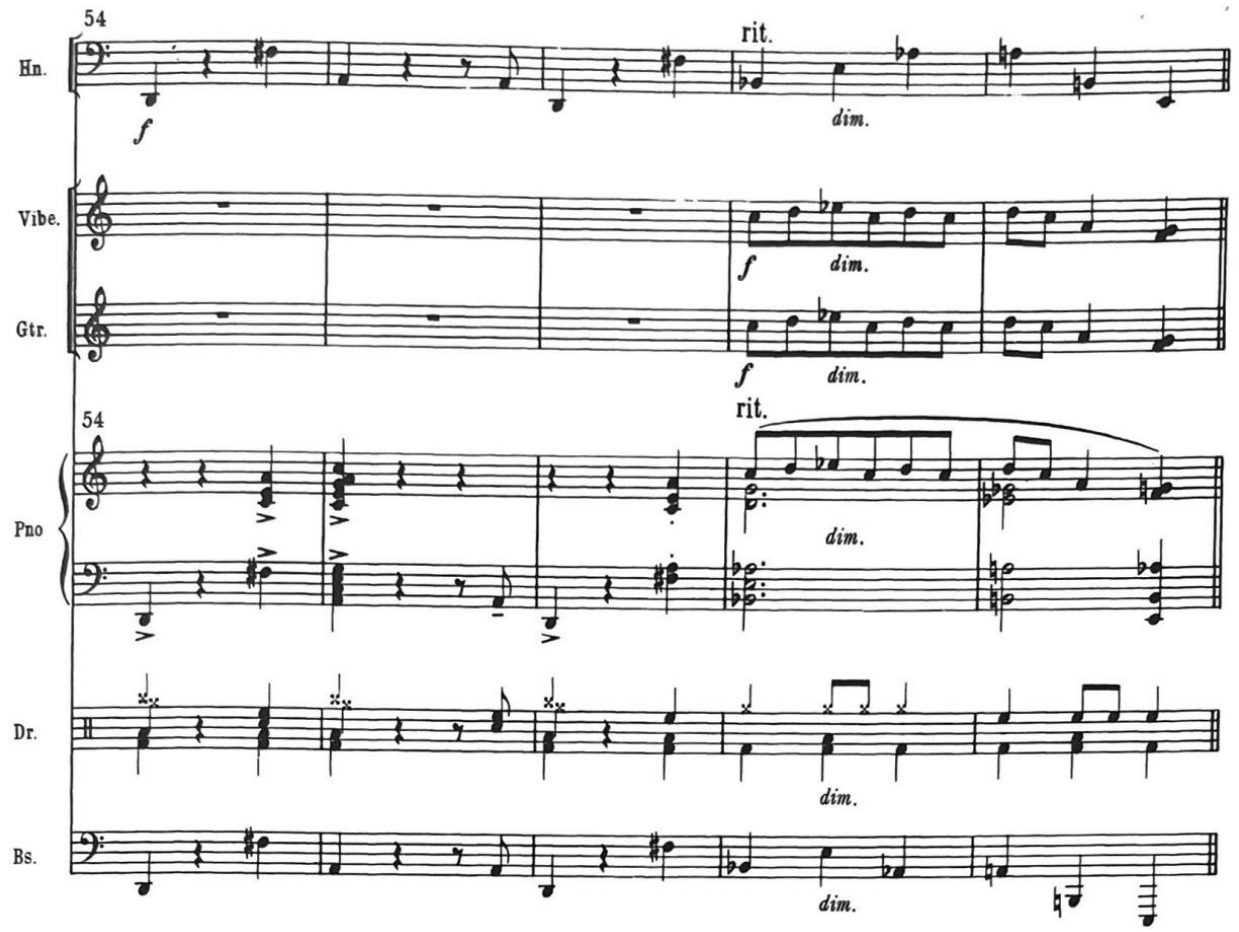

Figure 4.2. mm. 57–58, Enhanced orchestration of vibes and guitar at end of Section 2.

Section 4 (mm. 65–92) features "a remarkable and very difficult passage for French horn and bass in unison" accompanied by various cohorts.[89] *Tutti* ensemble writing occurs at the beginning and end of the section, while an ethereal section comprising sustained woodwinds and improvised harp arpeggios is included in the middle. Increased rhythmic activity, a tempo change, and additional orchestration lead to the next section. Mingus was a master of creating moods through the use of particular combinations of instruments and then shifting them quickly. The colors achieved in Sections 3 and 4 contrast sharply with each other and could themselves be

[89] Schuller, Liner Notes, *Modern Jazz Concert*.

developed or expanded into larger sections within the work. Mingus, ever-ready with additional musical material, instead moves on to new ideas in the next section.

Section 5 includes the densest writing of the piece, with *tutti* orchestration throughout the entirety of its twenty measures (mm. 93–112). Here, Mingus's multi-layered compositional approach is on full display, as there are no fewer than four different ideas happening at once. Compared to Section 2 of *Half-Mast Inhibition*, which features multi-layered writing over an ostinato, this entire section sounds like a rhythm section accompanied by improvising instruments—partly due to the inclusion of walking bass notes, drum set with ride cymbal, and a "call and response" between parts. Idiomatic jazz writing is also apparent in the use of triplets, brass "smears," and chord symbols in the piano part. While this section may sound like an improvisation, it is meticulously notated for the performers (besides the chords in the piano). As the texture thins near the end of the section, Mingus employs his trademark technique of writing for the outer instruments of the ensemble in contrary motion towards the extremes of their registers. Two bars before rehearsal letter K, the composer incorporates *avant-garde* techniques, or what might now be referred to as "extended techniques:" lip *glissandi* in the flute and alto saxophone and the instructions "Blow air into horn, move valves" in the baritone saxophone, bassoon, horn, and trumpet parts. This is accompanied by *ad libitum* playing in the harp, vibes, guitar, and piano (Figure 4.3). For this section, the instructions in the score state:

> The term "ad libitum" is used to indicate passages which are to be improvised. In the case of the harp (at letter H) or piano, vibraphone and guitar (at two before K), the indicated pitches represent merely the over-all "pool" of notes upon which the improviser is to draw. It is not necessary to play *all* the pitches given, not in the order indicated. Indeed, it is preferable that such passages be freely invented in any order or rhythmic configuration.[90]

[90] Charles Mingus, "Performance Notes," in *Revelations*, comp. Charles Mingus, Jazz Workshop, Inc., 1976.

The entire section concludes with another structural use of percussion, the sound of a triangle.

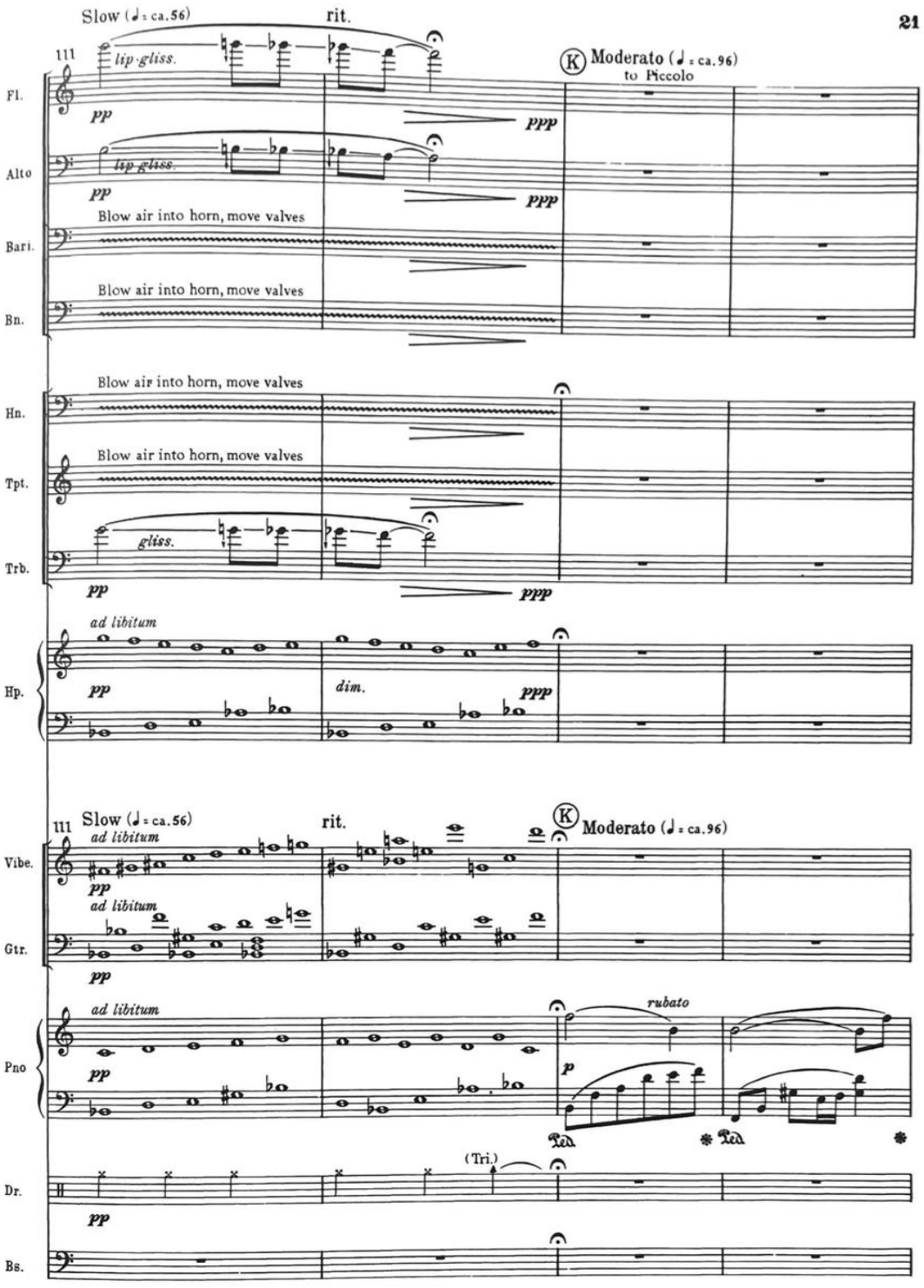

Figure 4.3. mm. 111–112, Extended techniques and *ad libitum* playing. Structural use of triangle.

Section 6 (mm. 113–121) is the second of the two transitional sections. It is eight bars in length, mirroring the length of Section 2. Beginning with solo piano, the composer layers on sustained notes in the original low instruments of the work's opening (e.g., baritone saxophone, bassoon, horn, trombone, harp, and bass). The percussion part, however, now includes a soft timpani roll, instead of triangle. Mingus employs additive orchestration, rhythmic triplet figures in the piccolo, harp, and piano, a dramatic *tutti crescendo*, and a cymbal crash to conclude the section.[91] Its dramatic end contrasts sharply with the next section, which begins with solo piano.

Section 7 starts at measure 122 (rehearsal letter L) and is the longest section of the piece, not just in terms of measures in the printed score, but also on the original recording.[92] Given the extended improvisation in this section, it is not surprising that its approximate three minutes equals nearly one-quarter of the entire work.

The section opens at a Moderato tempo (♩= 116), with solo piano establishing a tonal center in B♭. Six bars later, Mingus adds other instruments to the texture until, at rehearsal letter M (measure 130), the full ensemble is utilized. Mingus marks this section "with jazz feeling" in the score and establishes a half-time feel in the bass and drums. What sounds like an idiomatic jazz "lick" in the alto saxophone and trumpet lead into rehearsal letter N (measure 145), where the triplet rhythms, off-beat accents, and a swing rhythm in the drum set further emphasize the jazz style. Schuller describes this section:

> The next section, back in 4/4 time, is one of Mingus'[s] remarkable extended-form improvisations, where two continuously alternating chords form the solo harmonic basis. This "preaching" session— as Mingus thought of it —begins with the first word from Brother [Art] Farmer who is answered by [John] La Porta and later [Jimmy] Knepper. As

[91] While this crash is not written in the score, it is certainly apparent in the recording.

[92] Charles Mingus, "Revelations," on *Modern Jazz Concert,* cond. Gunther Schuller, Recorded June 10–20, 1957, Columbia WL-127, released 2011, streaming audio, YouTube.

> the tension and "shouting" mounts, all the remaining instruments join in response, like a congregation.[93]

The alternating chords throughout this section are B♭m (maj7) and E♭7. An ostinato pattern in the bass instruments of the ensemble (i.e., baritone saxophone, bassoon, horn, and string bass) then combines with the guitar, piano, and drums to form the ensemble's "rhythm section." In the following measures, additional instruments participate in the improvisatory writing. The performance notes to the composition aid the performers:

> In the extended improvisation, beginning at Letter N, the term "blowing scale" refers to one particular method by which some jazz composers indicate the general tonality and style of the desired improvisation. Again, not *all* the indicated pitches need be used, and the improvisations should obviously not consist of actual scales.[94]

By letter Q (measure 169), nearly the entire ensemble improvises over the alternating chords, minus a few instruments left to play the bass line. The instructions in the score are to "repeat *ad libitum*, build to climax."[95] This sort of collective improvisation is representative of Mingus's style, not solely in his large-ensemble writing, but also in his music for smaller groups, as he references the Dixieland style of jazz. While the improvisational element present in *Revelations* does not occur in *Half-Mast Inhibition*, sections of *Adagio ma non troppo* do incorporate this element; however, the later work has no section that includes such *tutti* ensemble improvisatory writing. The climax of this section occurs at measure 171, which is marked "Wild," with a duration of twenty seconds and a change to a C half-diminished seventh chord at the *fortississimo* dynamic. The energy dissipates into the F7(♭5) chord of the following measure, as

[93] Schuller, Liner Notes, *Modern Jazz Concert.*

[94] Charles Mingus, "Performance Notes," in *Revelations*, comp. Charles Mingus, Jazz Workshop, Inc., 1976.

[95] Mingus, "Performance Notes."

the dynamic level decreases drastically. This measure also lasts for approximately twenty seconds and, on the original recording, finishes with the mysterious sounds of "tinkling" piano. The C half-diminished seventh, which leads to a F7(♭5) then B♭ minor in the final section, suggests the familiar ii–V–i jazz harmonic progression.

The final twenty-four bars of the piece, Section 8, begins with a rhythmic variation of the opening four measures. The tempo is marked "Slow" at ♩= 84. The high timbre of the triangle again interrupts the statement in the low bass instruments. In the second four bars of this section, the high voices of the ensemble (i.e., piccolo, alto saxophone, trumpet, vibes, and right hand piano) introduce new material in a contrapuntal, response-like fashion.

A "Very Slow" tempo of ♩= 56 occurs at letter S. The half-note harmonic motion creates a "dragging" feel, while varying combinations of alto saxophone, trumpet, and vibes play a haunting melody. The piano pitches originally played by Bill Evans are printed in the score for the pianist, who is asked to improvise lightly during this section. Extreme tessituras in the piccolo and bass, ambiguous harmonies, and layering of instruments create a chilling effect, as the piece winds to its conclusion. Letter T seems like an arrival point during this mysterious ending section, with a pedal-B♭ sustained in the low voices of the ensemble. Mingus again emphasizes the outermost instruments, as the basses split into *divisi,* while the piccolo plays "delicately" above the staff. The addition of out-of-time sixteenth notes in the harp and the *ad libitum* "airy" piano creates a curious layer of additional sound. The piece concludes more like a question than an answer, with various sonorities dissolving into an unresolved silence.

Orchestration

The opening section of *Revelations* begins with the bass instruments of the ensemble. A recapitulation of the opening "ominous" statement occurs in the final four bars of Section 1. Mingus loved the low sounds of an ensemble; the biographer Santoro states that, "He loved the low-end horns, their Ellingtonian textures that suggested sexy power."[96] Here, the combination of baritone saxophone, bassoon, horn, trombone, bass, and low harp defines the mood of this entire section and demonstrates this affinity. This writing resembles Section 3 of *Half-Mast Inhibition*, where the composer also utilizes the low instruments of the ensemble to set the mood prior to the entrance of the high cello voice.

At letter H (measure 81), Mingus creates a completely different mood. The melodic duo of horn and bass, established earlier in this section, is joined by sustained notes in the flute, clarinet, vibes, and guitar; improvised arpeggios in the harp; and light *ad lib* rhythms on the ride cymbal. In between the jazzier sound of Section 3—with its "old church-style" piano introduction—and the thick, dense, multi-layered writing of Section 5, these particular moments provide a unique timbral experience and a sense of repose as they float momentarily through time before the transition into letter J (see Figure 4.4).

[96] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real*, 204.

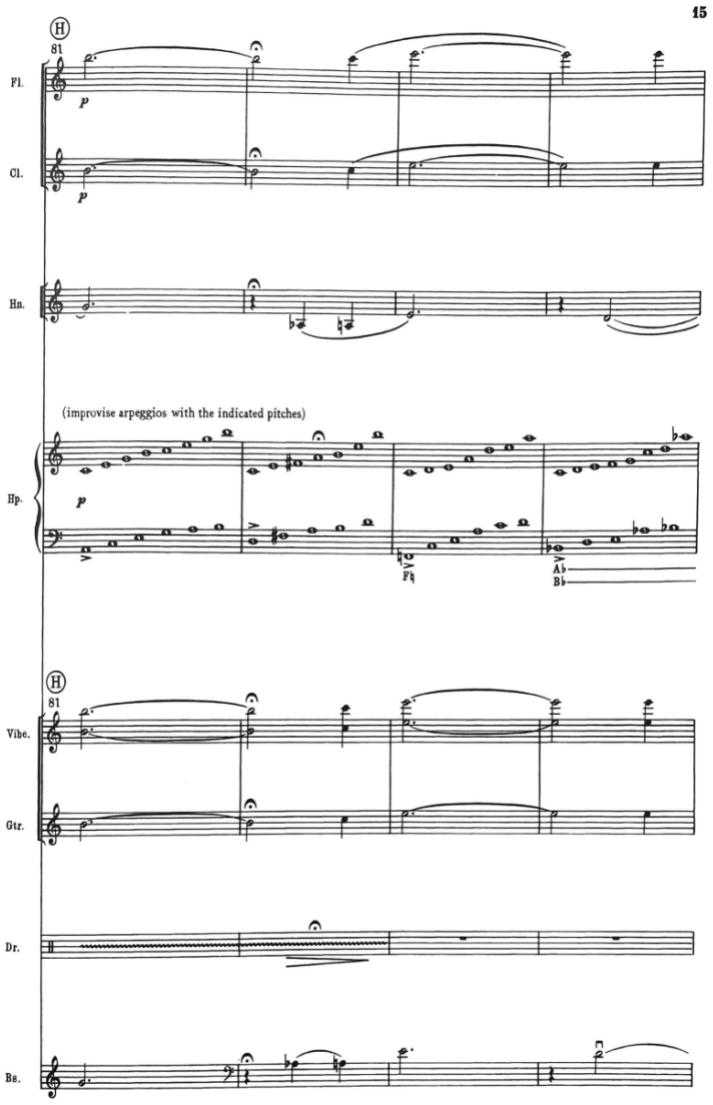

Figure 4.4. mm. 81–84, Timbral moments of repose.

Writing for three successive, unaccompanied brass solos within a large ensemble composition is uncommon. The fact that these solos happen in the opening section of the work may have created consternation and even bewilderment for its contemporary listeners. Figure 4.5 shows measures 13–20, as the horn passes off its solo to the trumpet who, in turn, passes it off to the trombone. The wide intervallic leaps in the trumpet and

trombone demonstrate Mingus's writing for the full range of each instrument, a technique he often employs to maximize expression.

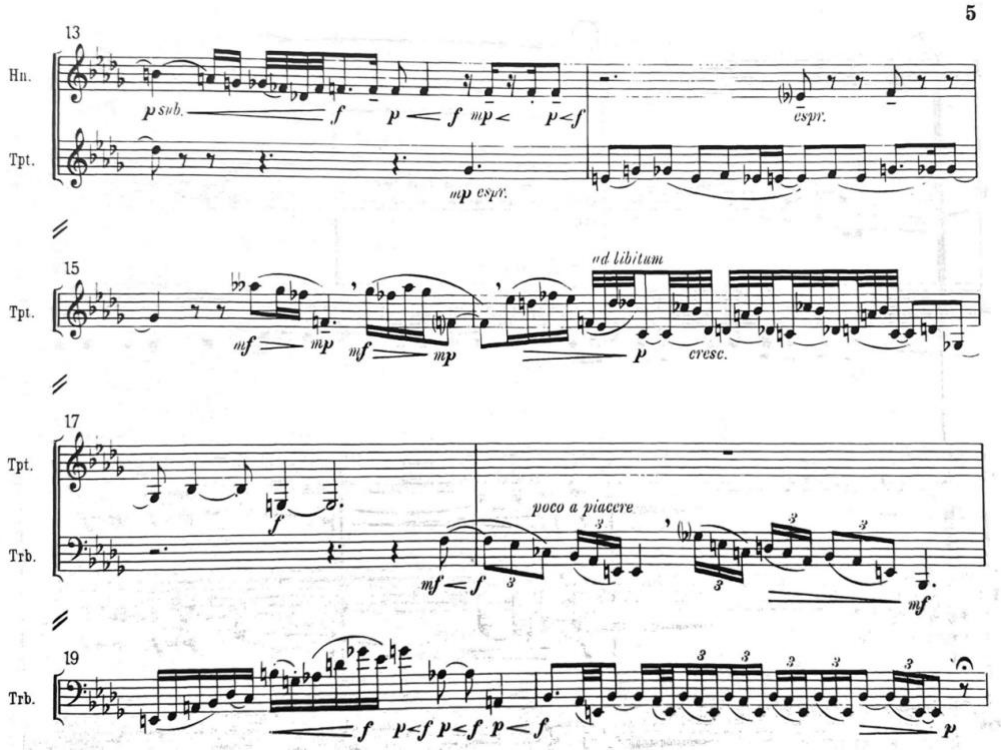

Figure 4.5. mm.13–20, Brass solos.

The composer's structural use of percussion is apparent at three occasions in the work: measures ten, thirty-one, and 111–112. At each instance, the color of a percussion instrument highlights the point of transition. At measure ten, a *tremolo* at the interval of a fourth (E–A) continues in the timpani from beat four of the previous bar. As the texture thickens with the addition of piano, guitar, harp, and trumpet, the composer indicates a *fortissimo* cymbal crash at the loudest point of the phrase, and its decay leads into the *diminuendo* towards the middle part of Section 1.

Measure thirty-one similarly demonstrates a structural use of percussion, as the tam-tam emphasizes the moment following the vocal exclamation, "oh yes, my Lord." After the

fortississimo arrival and the striking of the tam-tam, a *diminuendo* occurs, and the section ends one bar later (Figure 4.6).

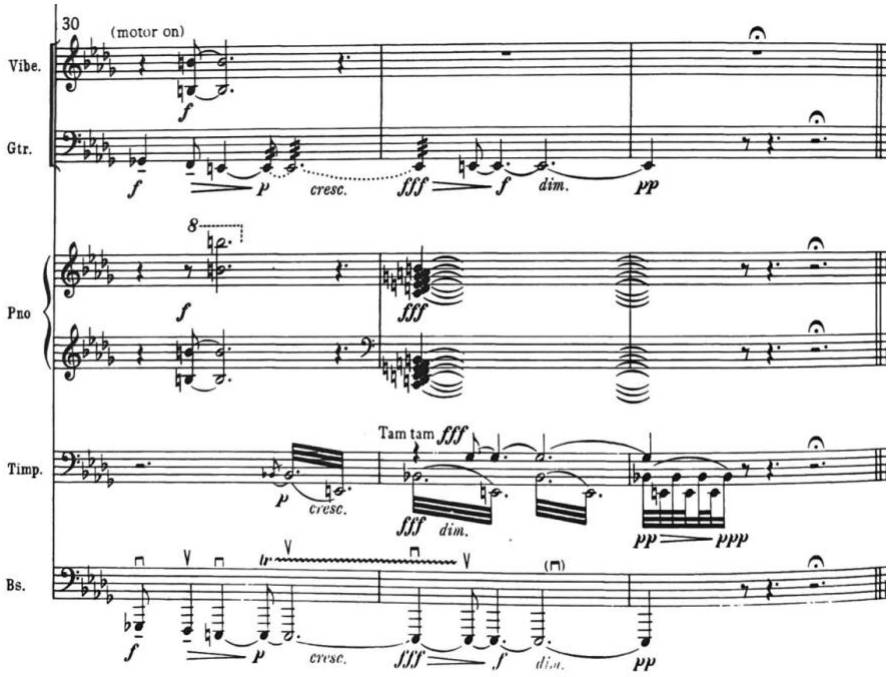

Figure 4.6. m. 31, Structural use of tam-tam.

The *avant-garde* or "extended techniques" at the end of Section 5 demonstrate the third example of Mingus using percussion both for a specific timbral effect and to close a section. Following the "wheezing and rattling of instruments being blown through without producing pitches or tones," Mingus writes for a triangle to be struck at the finale of the section (see Figure 4.3 above).[97]

The aforementioned improvisatory section between letters Q and R is an important component of *Revelations*. As Schuller mentioned, it is "one of Mingus's remarkable extended-

[97]Charles Mingus, "Performance Notes."

form improvisations, where two continuously alternating chords form the sole harmonic basis."[98] Figure 4.7 shows this section of the score.

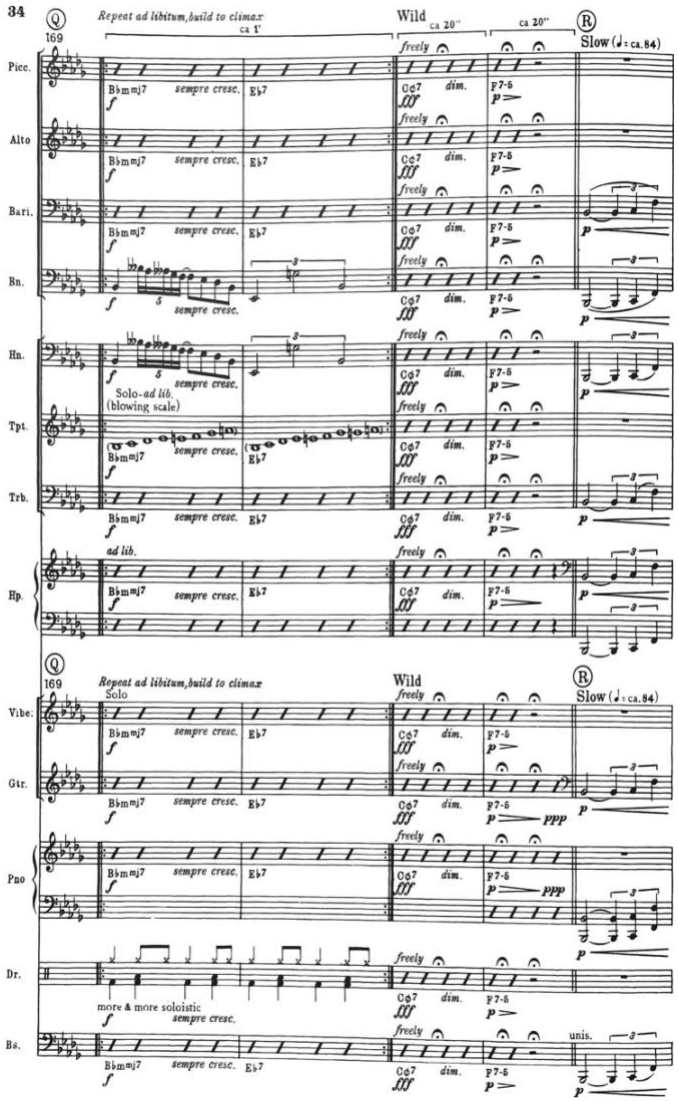

Figure 4.7. mm. 169–172, Improvisation section.

This section of collective (or group) improvisation is the climax of the work and demonstrates a remarkably more advanced conception of this technique than Mingus's composition from just three years earlier, *Purple Heart*.

[98] Gunther Schuller, Liner Notes, *Modern Jazz Concert.*

Texture

Letter J (Section 5) provides an example of Mingus's multi-layered writing. There are no fewer than four different musical ideas occurring at the same time. Texturally, this is the densest notated—as opposed to improvised—orchestration of the piece (Figure 4.8).

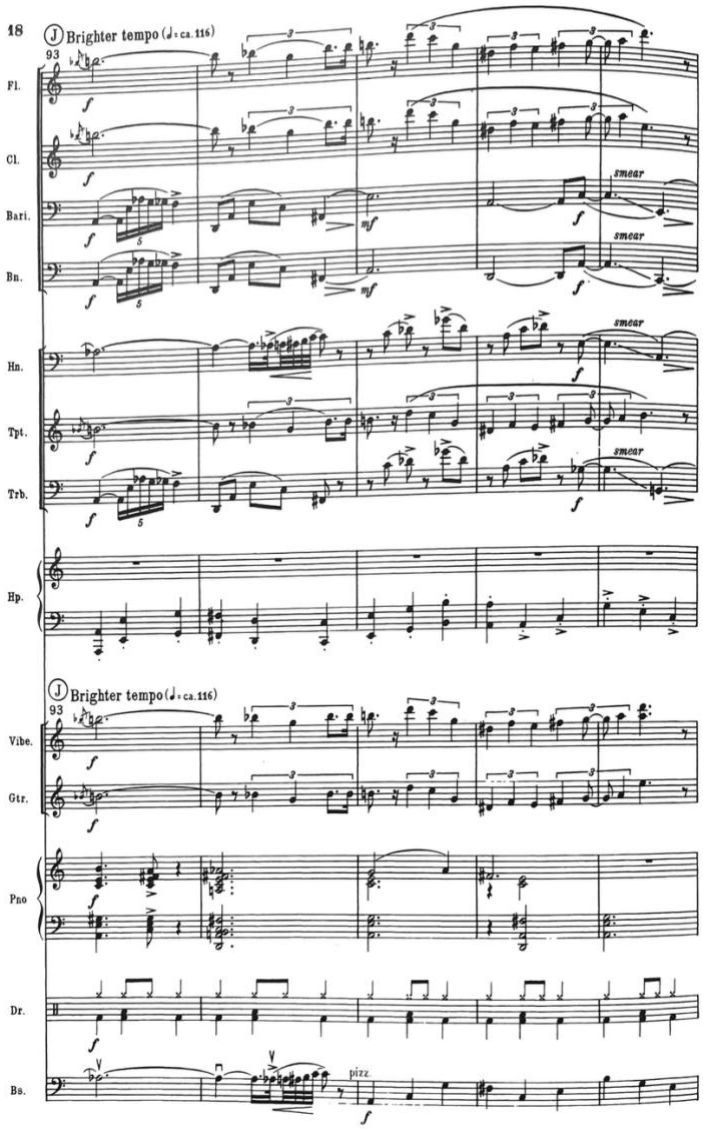

Figure 4.8. mm. 93–97, Multi-layered writing.

Various cohorts of instruments jostle alongside and against one another throughout this section. Mingus changes the size and groupings of instruments, shifting who has portions of the melody,

countermelody, harmony, and bass line. Grace notes, triplets, dotted rhythms, off-beat accents, smears, and a "rhythm section" of piano, drums, bass, and sometimes harp add to the jazzy nature of this section. As the writing gets less active, the texture thins, and the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic voices become more evident.

The transitions between sections in this work include important textural and structural characteristics, as orchestration is either augmented or reduced. Additional musical devices, such as change of tempo, key, dynamic, or rhythmic activity also signify the ending of one section or the beginning of another. The transition between Section 4 and 5 (measures 89–92) shows an example that incorporates a simultaneous change of orchestration, dynamics, rhythmic activity, and tempo. This transition also demonstrates the enhanced orchestration, as the texture thickens from seven instruments to near-*tutti* ensemble. An *accelerando* marked two bars before this excerpt, which continues through the entirety of these four bars, also increases rhythmic activity as part of the ensemble *crescendo* (Figure 4.9).

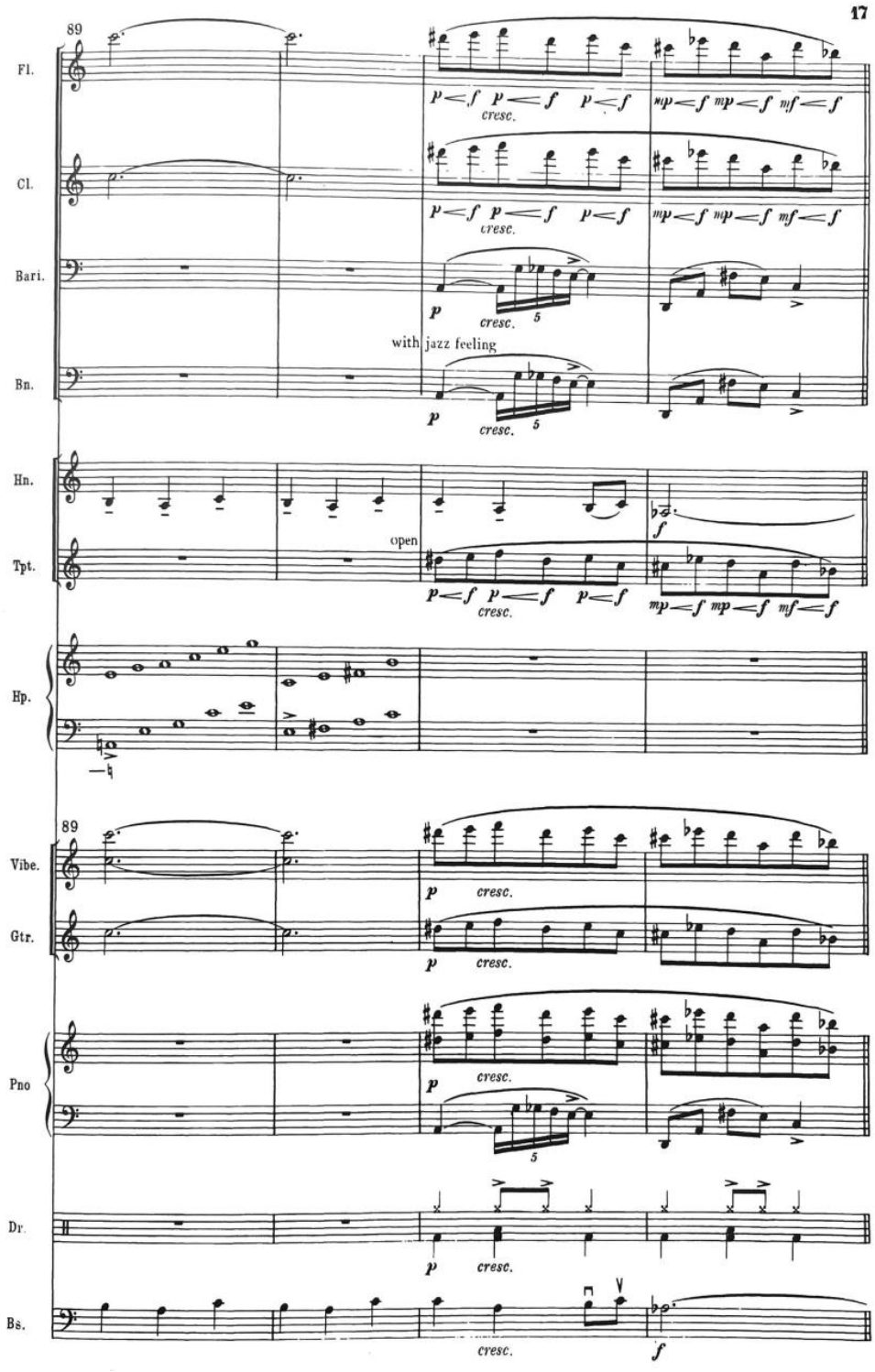

Figure 4.9. mm. 89–92, Change in orchestration, tempo, and dynamic at section transition.

Mingus frequently writes for extreme ensemble tessituras; the final three bars of this work provide a prime example. As the sounds of the instruments are dying away, the low *arco* bass is juxtaposed with the high pointillistic voice of the piccolo, which employs embellished trills and flutter tongues. In the original album recording, the low E–F semitone of the bass is the final sound heard, ending the piece in the same ominous manner with which it began (Figure 4.10).

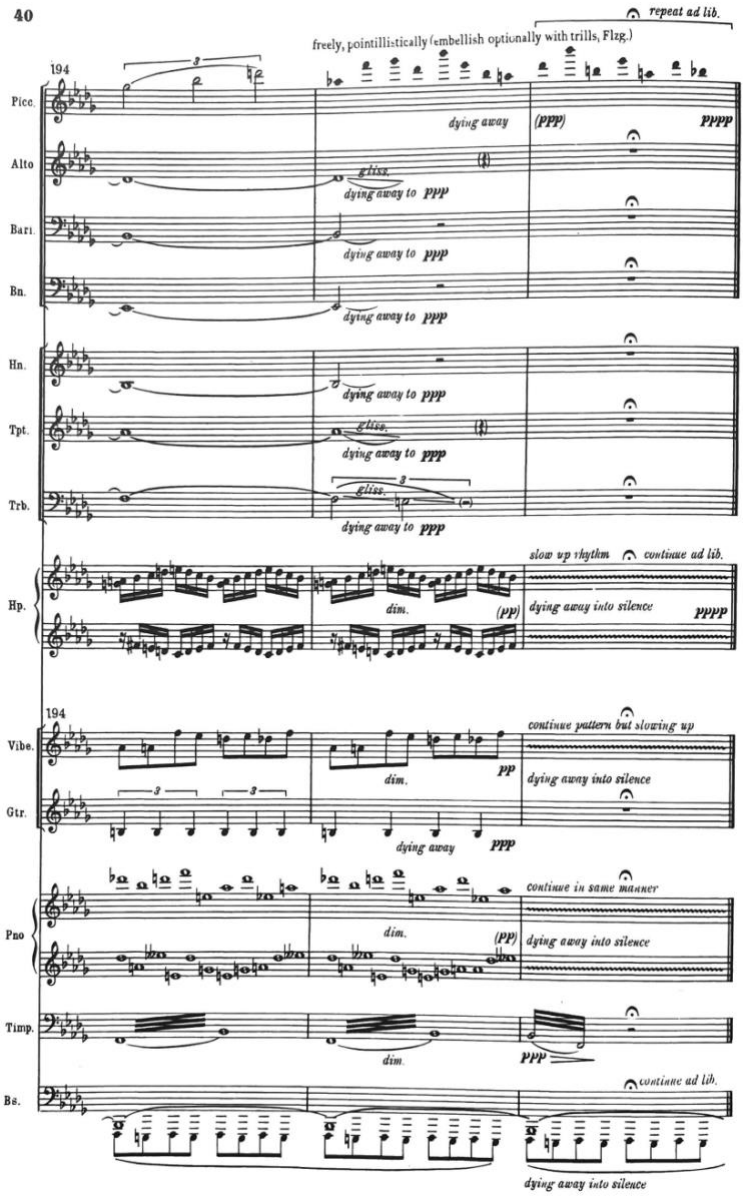

Figure 4.10. mm. 194–196, Extreme ensemble tessitura.

Meter and Tempo

Meter and tempo play an important compositional role in *Revelations*, as evidenced by the number of times the composer changes these components. Figure 4.11 provides a summary of these changes.

Section	Measure	Meter and Tempo
1	1	12/8, Medium slow (♪= ca. 84)
2	25	Same meter and tempo
3	33	3/4, Bright tempo (dotted half note = 60)
	59	A little slower (♩= 126)
4	65	♩= 116
	69	Moderately slow (♩= ca. 80)
5	93	Brighter tempo (♩= ca. 116), *rit*, *più rit*
	111	Slow (♩ = ca. 56)
6	113	Moderato (♩= ca. 96), change to 4/4 in final bar
7	122	4/4, Moderato (♩= ca. 116)
8	173	Slow (♩= ca. 84)
	181	Very slow (♩= ca. 56)

Figure 4.11 Meter and Tempo Changes in *Revelations.*

While nearly every section has its own tempo, with some having multiple tempi, the frequent changes enhance Mingus's delineation of sections and contrasting moods within the piece.

Summary

Similar to *Half-Mast Inhibition*, a variety of Mingus's trademark compositional techniques and devices are present in *Revelations*. The composer exploits a full range of timbral

possibilities, from the stark clarity of solo instruments to the rich depth of low-register sounds, from the conventional "rhythm section" to the bold, expansive textures of the *tutti* ensemble. The inclusion of an extended, modal improvisatory section is noteworthy in this composition, as is the Mingus's use of "extended techniques," as neither of these elements occur in the other two works in this study. Dramatic dynamic effects add to the intensity of the piece and exploit the full color palette of the ensemble. Transitions between sections include orchestrational shifts, often accompanied with tempo or dynamic changes, that are less abrupt than in his earlier composition and suggest a maturing of the composer's style. Contrasts between high and low instruments are apparent, and the composer's multi-layered writing is again present. The use of percussion as a structural element is notable in this piece, as it differs from his writing in *Half-Mast Inhibition.* In the earlier work, percussion is embedded within the various textures of the work and used to establish or contribute to a section groove or achieve a specific color (e.g., a roll). The more prominent structural role of percussion in *Revelations* suggests an evolution in the composer's writing for these instruments.

CHAPTER 5

ADAGIO MA NON TROPPO

Background

Adagio ma non troppo began as a solo piano work entitled *Myself When I Am Real,* recorded by Mingus on July 30, 1963. The piece was released as part of the 1964 album *Mingus Plays Piano: Spontaneous Compositions and Improvisations*.[99] According to the album's liner notes, written by Nat Hentoff, the piece was a "largely spontaneous performance" by the composer:[100]

> "Depending on the mood I'm in," Mingus explains, "this sort of thing comes out differently every time I play it. I go into a kind of trance when I go into this kind of number. I remember when we were recording this one, I noticed suddenly that I didn't seem to be breathing." The title means that it is on these spontaneous, trance-like occasions that Mingus feels his real, his most inner musical personality emerges… Here are the qualities of romanticism, rhapsodic lyricism, and song-like ardor that are at the base of Mingus' character. The allegedly "angry" Mingus is only one part of his personality, and it is a part that is activated in reaction to what he considers hostile stimuli. When Mingus is not besieged by various pressures, this is indeed *Myself When I Am Real.* Clearly, all is not restful in this number, but the occasional turbulence is the expression of a yearning for deeper and fuller experience. It is not bellicose.[101]

The biographer Santoro provides an evocative description of the piano work, almost equating it to a personification of the composer:

> *Myself When I Am Real* was a kaleidoscope. The swirling sounds alternately seduce and seize. A hammered two-note motif opens with surprising gentleness into a Romantic waltz-time fantasia. Moods overlap, collide, elide, layer, and linger, creating an emotional palimpsest as the piece's variegated sections unfold. It was pieces of time metamorphosed into music, each section a different aspect of him, and yet all suggested

[99] Charles Mingus, *Mingus Plays Piano: Spontaneous Compositions and Improvisations,* Recorded July 30, 1963, Impulse! A-60.

[100] Nat Hentoff, Liner Notes for *Mingus Plays Piano,* Recorded July 30, 1963, Impulse! Records A-60

[101] Hentoff, Liner Notes, *Mingus Plays Piano*.

> his coherence and contradictions, his volatility, his sweetness, his irony, his swagger, his frustration, his humor and charm and childlike wonder, his dreams.[102]

In a recording review from 1997, Robert Spencer provides additional insights into the piece and its composer:

> Nothing prepared the world for *Mingus Plays Piano,* except, perhaps, the unpredictable genius of Mr. Mingus himself. If this was even just a seven-and-a-half-minute album, it would be worth the price for the opening cut, *Myself When I Am Real.* To what can Mingus' piano playing be compared? *Myself When I Am Real* sounds like Debussy plays Bill Evans, or maybe it's the other way around. The piece is tender and emotional, as strong in its own way as *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* but a good bit more introverted. *Myself When I Am Real* is like a peek into the quiet core of what makes other Mingus records so comprehensively successful. For all the clowning and braggadocio, at the center of Mingus's art is the soul of a man keenly aware of the joy and suffering that are both inescapable in life. *Myself When I Am Real* is a stunningly beautiful statement of that awareness.[103]

Reviewer Patrick Scott from *The Globe and Mail* wrote shortly after its initial release of the entire album:

> It is a thoroughly beautiful album, in a class with such recently recorded piano triumphs as Thelonius Monk's *It's Monk's Time* and Duke Ellington's *Piano in the Foreground*… starting with the first selection in this, his recorded debut on the instrument, an original composition entitled *Myself When I Am Real,* is an entirely different person (and musician) from Mingus the bassist. His originals are warmly reflective (with the concurrent note of melancholia that characterizes Ellington's best work on piano, which Mingus strongly recalls)… It may not swing you off your feet, and it may not even be jazz, but I haven't [found] another new album all season that has charmed me so completely.[104]

In 1971, Alvin Ailey of the Joffrey Ballet (then located in New York) approached Mingus with the idea of creating a choreography set to the composer's music. As part of this

[102] Santoro, *Myself When I Am Real,* 206.

[103] Robert Spencer, "Charles Mingus: Mingus Plays Piano", All About Music, accessed October 29, 2024, https://www.allaboutjazz.com/mingus-plays-piano-charles-mingus-impulse-review-by-robert-spencer.

[104] Patrick Scott, "Jazz Scene: Mingus Plays Piano is Fine Record Set", *The Globe and Mail,* October 3, 1964, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail.

process, Hub Miller, the rehearsal pianist for the Joffrey, transcribed *Myself When I Am Real* from the original piano recording. Alan Raph, a New York-based arranger, composer, conductor, and trombonist, was then commissioned to orchestrate this transcription for the hour-long ballet featuring Mingus's music, which was eventually titled *The Mingus Dances* and premiered in October of that same year. In an interview, Raph described the scenario as such:

> The Joffrey called me to take the music from the record [*Mingus Plays Piano*] and… transcribe it for like a pit orchestra. So I did that… On a given night, we do two or three ballets so they needed to get an orchestra that would encompass all that they had to do. So we wanted to stick to what they had… They gave me the list of the instruments, and I just arranged it for those instruments.[105]

Ailey described *The Mingus Dances* as "five dances and four vaudeville episodes suggested by the music of Charles Mingus."[106] According to the sheet music—obtained from the Library of Congress—for the ballet version of *Adagio ma non troppo*, the Joffrey orchestra included five woodwind players (flute/piccolo, oboe/English horn, clarinet, alto sax/flute, bassoon), eight brass players (two horns, three trumpets, two trombones, tuba), three percussionists, one pianist, and strings (with unspecified numbers of players for violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, and bass). Ailey changed the title of the piece from *Myself When I Am Real* to *Adagio ma non troppo* for the orchestral version, likely to reflect the new arrangement and tempo of the work.[107] The complete listing of Mingus's pieces in the ballet comprises: "Dance No. 1 Andante con moto (*Pithecanthropus Erectus*)," "Vaudeville: Prestissimo (*O.P.)*," "Dance No. 2 Adagio ma non troppo (*Myself When I Am Real)*," "Vaudeville: Pesante (*Freedom*)," "Dance No. 3 Lento assai (*Half-Mast Inhibition)*," "Vaudeville: Vivace (*Dizzy's Moods)*," "Dance No. 4

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[105] Alan Raph, telephone interview by author, June 23, 2023.

[106] Clive Barnes, "Ballet: Ailey's The Mingus Dances", *The New York Times*, October 14, 1971, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

[107] Sue Mingus, Liner Notes for *Charles Mingus: The Complete Columbia and RCA Albums Collection*, Sony Music-88697979592, 2012, CD, 8.

Andantino (*Diane*)," "Vaudeville: Scherzo (*Ysabel's Table Dance*)," and "Dance No. 5 Allegro Marcato (*Haitian Fight Song*)." While reviews of the overall ballet were mixed, Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* wrote that Raph's arrangements of Mingus's music were "cool, with a sinuous energy. At times Oriental in its melodic curves, and always gently beating, unassertively powerful, music with satin muscles rippling unobtrusively, music perfectly pulsed for dance."[108] *The Mingus Dances* lasted approximately two years in the Joffrey's repertoire.

The success of the orchestral arrangements of Mingus's music prompted Columbia Records producer and longtime Mingus collaborator Teo Macero to encourage Mingus to record a new album with larger instrumental forces. Initially, Mingus wanted to record *The Chill of Death* as the sole large-ensemble work for the album, but Columbia suggested that, since they would already have a large orchestra for the session, they might as well "just do a whole big-band date."[109]

Mingus asked Raph to re-orchestrate *Adagio ma non troppo* for the album that eventually became *Let My Children Hear Music*. Raph commented:

> Mingus heard it all [the Joffrey arrangements]. Then he approached me and said "Look, I wanna record this one. So why don't you arrange it?" And he told me what kind of arrangement to do… And Mingus told me the instruments he wanted on the arrangement, he wanted, like, multi basses and things like that.[110]

When Raph arranged the version of *Adagio ma non troppo* for *Let My Children Hear Music*, he went back to the original piano version of *Myself When I Am Real*: "We didn't just add on to what the pit orchestra [from the Joffrey] did, we actually did a new arrangement [of *Adagio*]. It was really piano to the full version."[111]

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[108] Barnes, "Ballet,"
[109] Priestley, *Mingus*, 186.
[110] Alan Raph, telephone interview with author, June 30, 2023.
[111] Raph, telephone interview.

Raph not only arranged this piece for the album, but he also contracted the players and conducted it at the recording session. Mingus was very hands-on with who he wanted to play for the album: "Mingus wanted certain people… We were talking about basses, he says, 'Oh, well, Ron Carter and Milt Hinton'… [and] Mingus said 'Oh, get Eddie Bert for trombone, and Jimmy Knepper.'"[112]

Raph shared an interesting story about Jimmy Knepper, with whom he was also personally friends, Knepper being the trombonist Mingus had punched in the mouth years earlier. Although most musician hiring for recordings in those days went through a registry, Raph called Knepper directly and said, "Mingus wants you to do a record thing with him." Jimmy replied, "I'll do it, I'll work with anybody." And he did it.[113] When asked about his thoughts regarding *Adagio ma non troppo*, Raph commented, "It's a good piece. It's a neat improvisation… It's unusual… It's completely Mingus."[114]

Following the recording session, there were some disagreements about listing the personnel on the album, and not everyone who played in the studio was credited in the liner notes. The liner notes only include this acknowledgment to the personnel:

> Many Thanks to Soloists: Lonnie Hillyer: trumpet, Julius Watkins: french horn, Bobby Jones: tenor, Joe Wilder: trumpet, Charles McCracken: cello, Charles McPherson: alto saxophone, James Moody: tenor saxophone, Sir Roland Hanna: piano, and to Snooky Young for his lead trumpet throughout.[115]

According to Sy Johnson, who arranged and conducted most of the pieces on the album:

> …the one who decided not to put all that information in—he will kill me for saying it—was Mingus. I was there when he decided not to put it in. Apparently, he did not want it known how many people were in the band at different times and on different dates, you know. He was the one who approved the notes and all that business, and he decided to

[112] Raph, telephone interview.
[113] Raph, telephone interview.
[114] Raph, telephone interview.
[115] Mingus, Liner Notes, *Children.*

> just credit soloists. And he left some of them out… It would have taken up half the insert on the album to list everybody who was on there. There was an enormous amount of people.[116]

While the complete personnel for the specific recording of *Adagio ma non troppo* remains uncertain, Raph, who contracted the musicians for the session, recalled most of the players during a recent interview.[117]

Mingus wrote the liner notes for *Let My Children Hear Music*, and his essay, titled "What Is A Jazz Composer?," was nominated for a Grammy.[118] In his remarks, Mingus describes the album as "serious in every sense," and, as with much of his writing, addresses themes of tradition, composition, creativity, emotion, expression, race, and the connection between classical and jazz music.[119] Of the use of orchestration in jazz, he wrote:

> Jazz—the way it has been handled in the past—stifles them so that they believe only in the trumpet, trombone, saxophone, maybe a flute now and then or a clarinet… But it is not enough… I think it is time our children were raised to think they can play bassoon, oboe, English horn, French horn, lull percussion, violin, cello… If we so-called jazz musicians who are the composers, the spontaneous composers, started including these instruments in our music, it would open everything up, it would get rid of prejudice because the musicianship would be so high in caliber that the symphony couldn't refuse us.[120]

He continues, addressing the topic of how his race affected his writing:

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[116] Charles Mingus and John F. Goodman, *Mingus Speaks*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, 69.

[117] Raph's recollection, however, is not complete, and there are some inconsistencies with the liner notes for *Let My Children Hear Music* in *The Complete Columbia and RCA Albums Collection.* While *The Complete Columbia and RCA Albums Collection* lists personnel for the entire album, it remains uncertain which musicians actually recorded *Adagio*. Both sets of names are listed in the Appendix. Unfortunately, Raph passed away during the writing of this dissertation and could not provide further clarity. His contributions to Brooks's transcription and to this document ensure that Mingus's legacy lives on.

[118] The Grammy nomination for Best Album Notes was the fourth overall nomination for Mingus. He was previously nominated for the *Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (Best Original Jazz Composition) and *Tijuana Moods* (Best Original Jazz Composition and Best Jazz Performance - Soloist or Small Group).

[119] Mingus, Liner Notes, *Children*.

[120] Mingus, Liner Notes, *Children.*

> Had I been born in a different country or had I been born white, I am sure I would have expressed my ideas long ago. Maybe they wouldn't have been as good because when people are born free—I can't imagine it, but I've got a feeling that if it's so easy for you, the struggle and the initiative are not as strong as they are for a person who has to struggle and therefore has more to say.[121]

Mingus considered this album "the best album I have ever made," and Teo Macero, the album's producer and Mingus's longtime friend, agreed.[122] Specifically regarding *Adagio,* Mingus proclaimed:

> Now, on this record there is a tune which is an improvised solo and which I am very proud of. I am proud because to me it has the expression of what I feel, and it shows changes in tempo and changes in mode, yet the variations on the theme still fit into one composition. I would say the composition is on the whole as structured as a written piece of music. For the six or seven minutes it was played (originally on piano), the solo was within the category of one feeling, or rather, several feelings expressed as one.[123]

Adagio ma non troppo is a significant work in the Mingus oeuvre, as it represents his mature style of composition, through expanded orchestration and studio production, at a time of resurgence in his late career. The piece displays a characteristic quality of so many of his works—the desire to express his "thoughts and feelings as fully as is humanly possible all the time."[124]

The wind ensemble transcription of *Adagio ma non troppo* was created in 2017, when Patrick Brooks reconstructed the score and parts to the work.[125] Brooks contacted Raph regarding the recording session and additional information surrounding the work. After speaking with Raph, searching the online Mingus collection in the Library of Congress, and attempting to

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[121] Mingus, Liner Notes, *Children.*

[122] Mingus, Liner Notes, *Children*; Goodman, *Mingus Speaks*, 101.

[123] Mingus, Liner Notes, *Children.*

[124] Mingus King, *Beneath the Underdog,* 335.

[125] Brooks was director of bands at Idaho State University at the time, and this transcription was a sabbatical-leave project.

contact Columbia Records (now the Sony Corporation), both Raph and Brooks shared the opinion that the score and parts to *Adagio* were not to be found.[126] Raph directed Brooks to the Hub Miller transcription of *Myself When I Am Real*, and Brooks used this score, along with Raph's first-hand experience of originally orchestrating the piece, to reconstruct the music for *Adagio ma non troppo*. Brooks worked closely with Raph, who carefully reviewed the entire transcription, measure by measure, to incorporate Raph's corrections and suggestions.[127] Raph commented that Brooks "had great ears."[128] According to Brooks:

> Raph's arrangement sticks very closely to the original Mingus performance of *Myself When I Am Real*… What changes Raph does make are mainly in how he treats the emotional weights of various sections, [making] some that are light in the Mingus piano performance heavier in the *Adagio ma non troppo* arrangement. The only other major change is extending/elongation of two sections into more substantial improvised sections. These two sections add something less than a minute to the original *Myself When I Am Real*.[129]

Figure 5.1 shows a timeline of the creation and evolution of *Adagio ma non troppo.*

[126] The author located two scores that are likely the original version of Raph's arrangement preserved on microfilm by the Mid-Atlantic Preservation Service under the title "The Music of Charles Mingus/Let My Children Hear Music, Inc., the Charles Mingus Institute." These scores are found on Reel 2, under *Tune #53 (Dianeland) Adagio Ma Non Troppo* and *Tune #54 Dianeland (Myself When I Am Real) - Adagio Ma Non Troppo.* The former title also includes parts, some with handwritten names on them, which are most likely the names of the players on the recording session. This handwriting matches the writing on the score and could possibly be Raph's.

[127] Patrick Brooks, "Adagio ma non troppo," (presentation, College Band Directors Western/Northwestern Division Conference, Sonoma, CA, March 21–24, 2018.)

[128] Alan Raph, telephone interview with author, July 18, 2023.

[129] Raph, telephone interview.

Year	Event
1963	Recorded as the original piano composition *Myself When I Am Real*
1964	Released by Impulse! Records on the album *Mingus Plays Piano*
1971	Transcribed by Hub Miller for the Joffrey Ballet
1971	Orchestrated by Alan Raph for the Joffrey Ballet's *The Mingus Dances* Renamed *Adagio ma non troppo* by choreographer Alvin Ailey
1971	Re-orchestrated by Alan Raph and recorded by Columbia Records
1972	Released as *Adagio ma non troppo* on the album *Let My Children Hear Music*
2017	Transcribed/arranged by Patrick Brooks for wind ensemble

Figure 5.1. Timeline of *Adagio ma non troppo.*

Brooks chose the following instrumentation for his transcription: two flutes, oboe, bassoon, two soprano clarinets, bass clarinet, soprano saxophone (which doubles alto), alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, two trumpets, two horns, two trombones, tuba, cello, two basses, classical guitar, three percussion, and piano. Although the original recorded version of *Adagio* included six basses—at the insistence of Mingus—Brooks's transcription only calls for two, which is more conducive to performance by a modern-day wind ensemble.[130]

The cello and bass 1 parts are the most difficult in the piece and require mature players.[131] The "improvised" solos for those instruments are transcribed, along with the solos in the saxophone section, to facilitate re-creation of the original melodies from the recording. Brooks suggests that, due to their strong motivic relationships, the solos on the recording must have been worked out ahead of time. Raph related his opinion that "all of the 'improvised' sections could indeed truly be improvised in each performance if one so chose."[132]

[130] Mingus was not pleased with the sound of the basses on the original recording. He thought that Macero should have mic'd them individually. See Goodman, *Mingus Speaks*, 64.

[131] Brooks, "Adagio ma non troppo."

[132] Brooks, "Adagio ma non troppo."

Form

The form of *Adagio* is episodic or through-composed. While the sections flow smoothly between ideas, changes in orchestration signal the transition from one section to the next. Tempo changes frequently accompany the change of sections, along with various uses of ensemble tessitura. The idea of capturing individual moods within the piece was important to Raph:

> I tried to keep the mood of the different sections, because the different sections were in different moods. There was some concerted ensemble sections, and there were many solo sections, and there was a lot of cross-breeding too. You know, one guy playing with two other unrelated instruments…[133]

The various instrumental cohorts and the use of colors drawn from the ensemble will become evident as the sections of the work are discussed.

Adagio consists of twenty different sections, varying in length from three bars to thirty-three bars, with the majority of sections comprising five to seven measures. Typical of Mingus's writing, changes in orchestration usually signal formal transitions and help define each of the twenty sections. Figure 5.2 shows the various sections of the work and the length (in measures) of each section. To illustrate the structural organization more clearly, musically-related sections are grouped into larger segments, as indicated by darker borders. The longest sections of the work are those that include improvisation.

Section	Measures	Orchestration
1	1–7	Quartet: Oboe, Clarinet, two Horns
2	8–13	Full Brass Section, then Solo Piano
3	14–18	Full Woodwind Section
4	19–23	Trombones with Strings, transitional Clarinet and Brass
5	24–30	Various cohorts within *tutti* ensemble, thinning transitional texture

[133] Raph, telephone interview.

6	31–62	First Improvisatory Section: Rhythm Section, String solos, transitional orchestration
7	63–75	Saxophone Quartet and Ride Cymbal, transitional Woodwinds and Piano
8	76–92	Unaccompanied Saxophone Quartet, transitional Woodwinds and Brass
9	93–97	*Tutti*
10	98–104	High to Middle to Low Instruments
11	105–114	Tremolo Strings, Trombone/Horn accents, low Flute, solo Bass
12	115–129	Various Cohorts within *tutti* ensemble
13	130–162	Second Improvisatory Section: Rhythm Section, Saxophone Trio, Bassoon, Trumpet, transitional Horns
14	163–168	Quartets: Flute, Bassoon, two Trumpets, with Tambourine; Flute, Bassoon, Alto Saxophone, Trumpet
15	169–171	Quartet: two Flutes, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet
16	172–178	*Tutti* transitioning to Cello/Vibes Duet
17	179–189	Third Improvisatory Section: Trumpets, Vibes, Drumset, Arco Bass, String solos
18	190–205	English Horn solo with successive String, Woodwind, Brass accompaniment
19	206–217	Various cohorts within *tutti* ensemble, thinning transitional texture
20	218–222	Solo Piano, sustained Flutes and Strings

Figure 5.2. Sections of *Adagio ma non troppo*

The transcription begins in B♭ minor, the same key as *Myself When I Am Real*. In the first thirty measures of the piece, which includes five of the twenty individual sections, a wide array of timbral combinations is already apparent. Section 1 includes a quartet of two solo woodwind instruments, oboe and clarinet, joined by a pair of horns. The transcription correlates exactly, in terms of pitches, melodic and harmonic material, with the opening seven bars of the original piano work. (Figure 5.3)

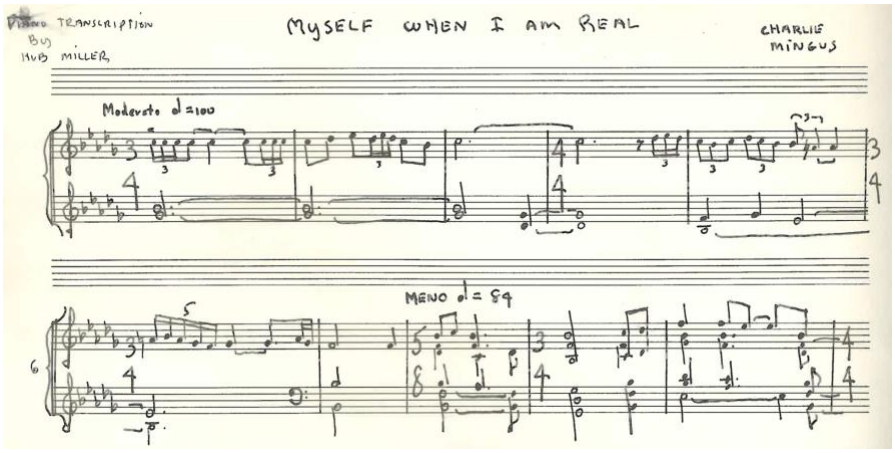

Figure 5.3. Opening of *Myself When I Am Real.*

The orchestration of the next four sections includes the entire brass section (followed by a two-bar piano solo), the entire woodwind section, trombones with strings (and transitional clarinet and brass), and various cohorts of instruments within the larger ensemble (Figure 5.4).

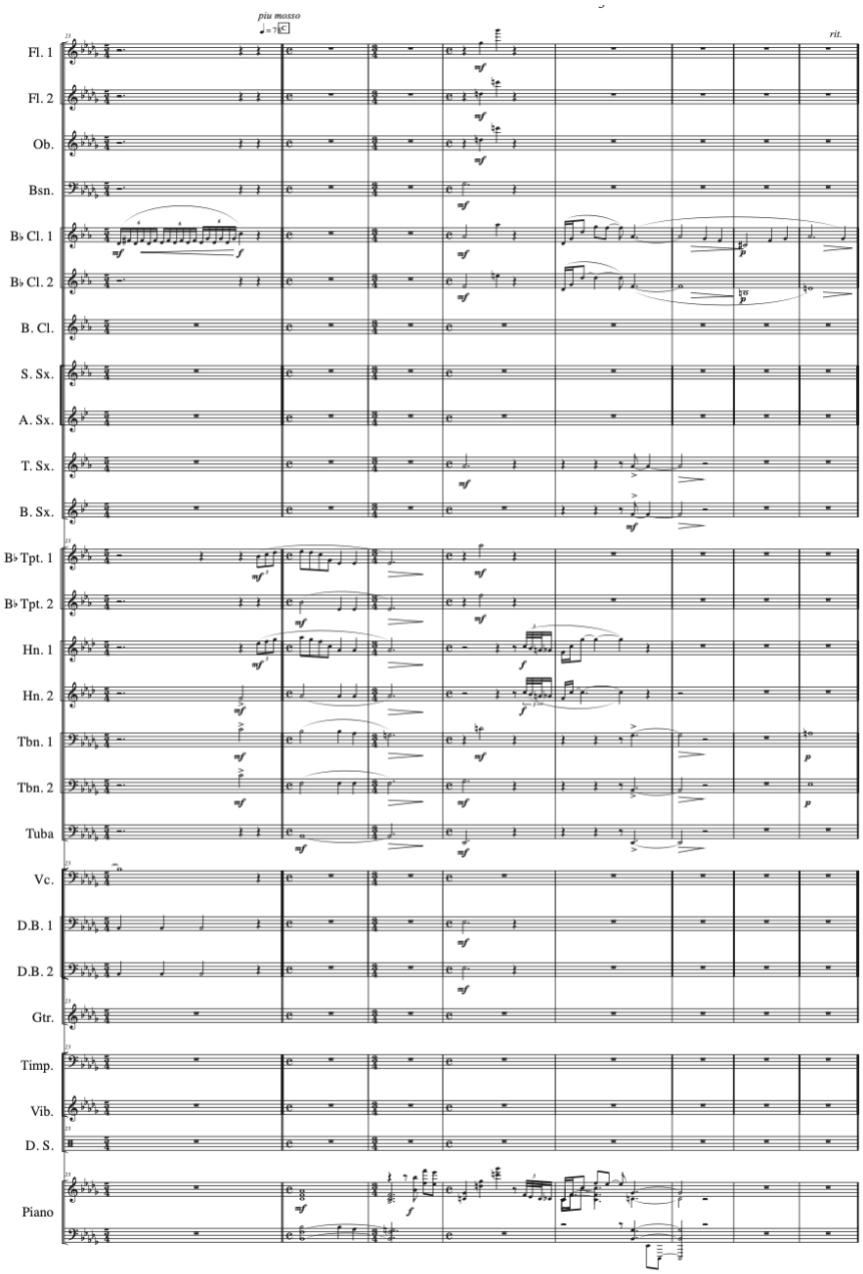

Figure 5.4. mm 24–30, Variety in orchestration.

While the thirty bars of the first five sections display a variety of timbral combinations, the larger structure of the opening section begins quasi-symmetrically with a quartet of woodwinds and brass (e.g., oboe, clarinet, two horns) and ends with a quartet of woodwinds and brass (e.g., pairs of clarinets and trombones).

The second larger section of the work comprises Sections 6 and 7. At forty-three bars, this is one of the largest sections in the entire composition and features the first improvisation. In Section 6, the solos revolve around a B♭m9 chord, transcribed for both double basses and cello, which together form a trio above an ostinato groove in the ensemble's "rhythm section." The simple, syncopated groove allows the soloists to play with more rhythmic freedom. As Mingus was known for his style of playing bass in the upper register of the instrument, it comes as no surprise that these double bass solos are written *8va* throughout their entirety. The cello solo is also written in its upper register.

In measures 56–62, the role of the strings changes from soloists to ensemble members—part of the overall groove. A solo alto saxophone statement—written in the soprano saxophone part—foreshadows the immediate upcoming section, where the rest of the saxophone section joins in the groove. Additional colors of timpani, vibes, and trumpets, emphasized by textural woodwinds, create a dramatic build-up to the "lighter" texture of SATB saxophone quartet in Section 7. This new orchestration, accompanied only by the ride cymbal, qualifies as part of this larger section because of the sustained rhythmic groove in the tenor and baritone saxophones; a more complete orchestrational change to woodwind quartet and piano signals the end of this larger section.

Section 8 begins with a new tempo (♩= 92), solo flute in a high tessitura, and SATB saxophone quartet. This section focuses on the unaccompanied saxophones and, aside from the cello and bass solos in Section 6, features the most rhythmic and contrapuntal writing in the piece so far. Bassoon and clarinets join at measure 87, followed by a timbral and tempo shift, as the middle and low brass (i.e., horns, trombones, tuba) finish the section.

Section 9 is the first *tutti* section of the piece. It begins at letter I (measure 93) in dramatic fashion, with a strong B♭ major sonority in the downbeat of the timpani, strings, low brass, and low woodwinds. The low instruments descend further into their lower registers through contrary motion, while the instruments entering on the offbeat ascend toward their higher registers—a common Mingus technique (Figure 5.5).

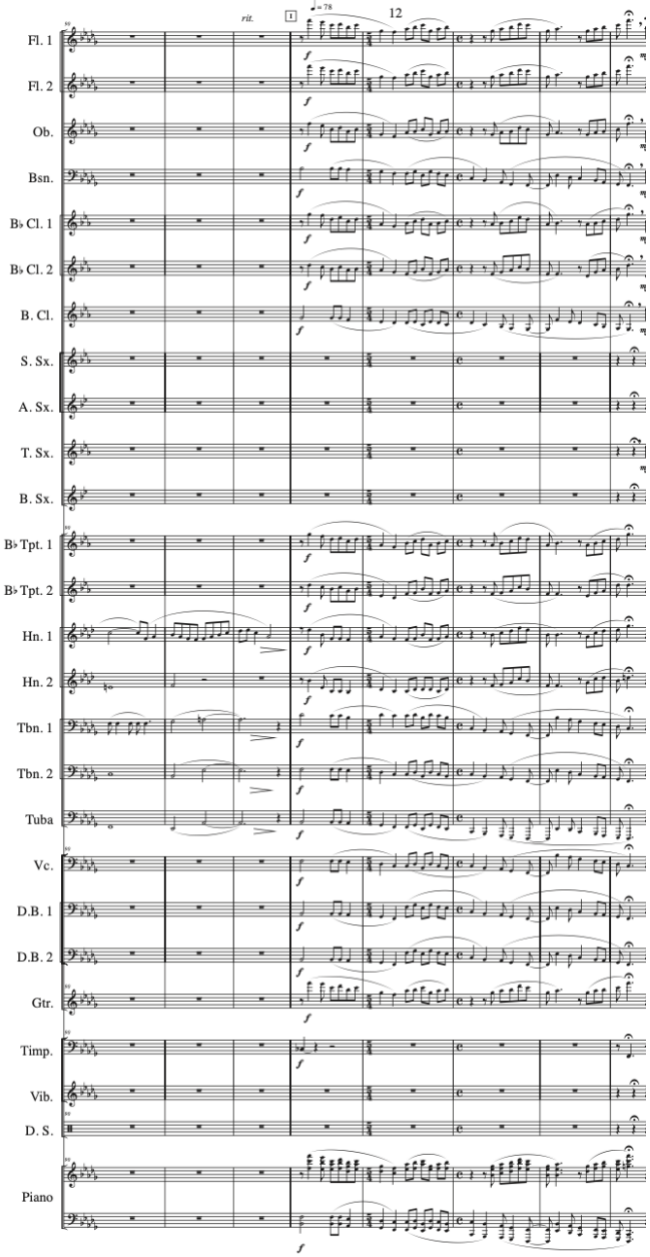

Figure 5.5. mm. 90–97, Contrary motion towards extreme registers.

This is one of the strongest and weightiest moments of the entire piece; all instruments play at the *forte* dynamic.

The seven bars of Section 10 constitute not only an orchestrational transition, but also changes in tempo, meter, and dynamic. The color of the ensemble moves from "light" to "dark" as the instruments shift from woodwinds to oboe/middle brass to oboe/lower brass/strings. There is also a harmonic change in the final two bars of this section, as the D♭ major tonality established in measure 103 changes to D-minor in the following bar.

This D-minor tonality continues seamlessly into Section 11, but the seventh (C) quickly adds into the tremolo of the cello and guitar. The harmonic motion in this section is much more relaxed, and the prominent sonorities are accents in the trombone and horn, ow whole notes in the flutes, and the double bass 1 solo—again written in a high tessitura.

Section 12 (mm. 115–129) provides some of the most interesting scoring of the entire piece. Nearly all of the instruments are used throughout this section, yet no single instrument plays continuously. The groupings of instruments constantly shift, creating a series of unique and astounding timbres. The most prominent voices of this section emerge from the texture through different score markings—"solo," "lead voice," "bring out"—while the remaining voices provide harmonic support. Low, middle, and high instruments sound in a variety of combinations, with the orchestration widely-spaced in the score. The myriad combinations of instruments create an amalgamation of colors, taking advantage of the broad sonic capabilities of a wind ensemble (Figure 5.6).

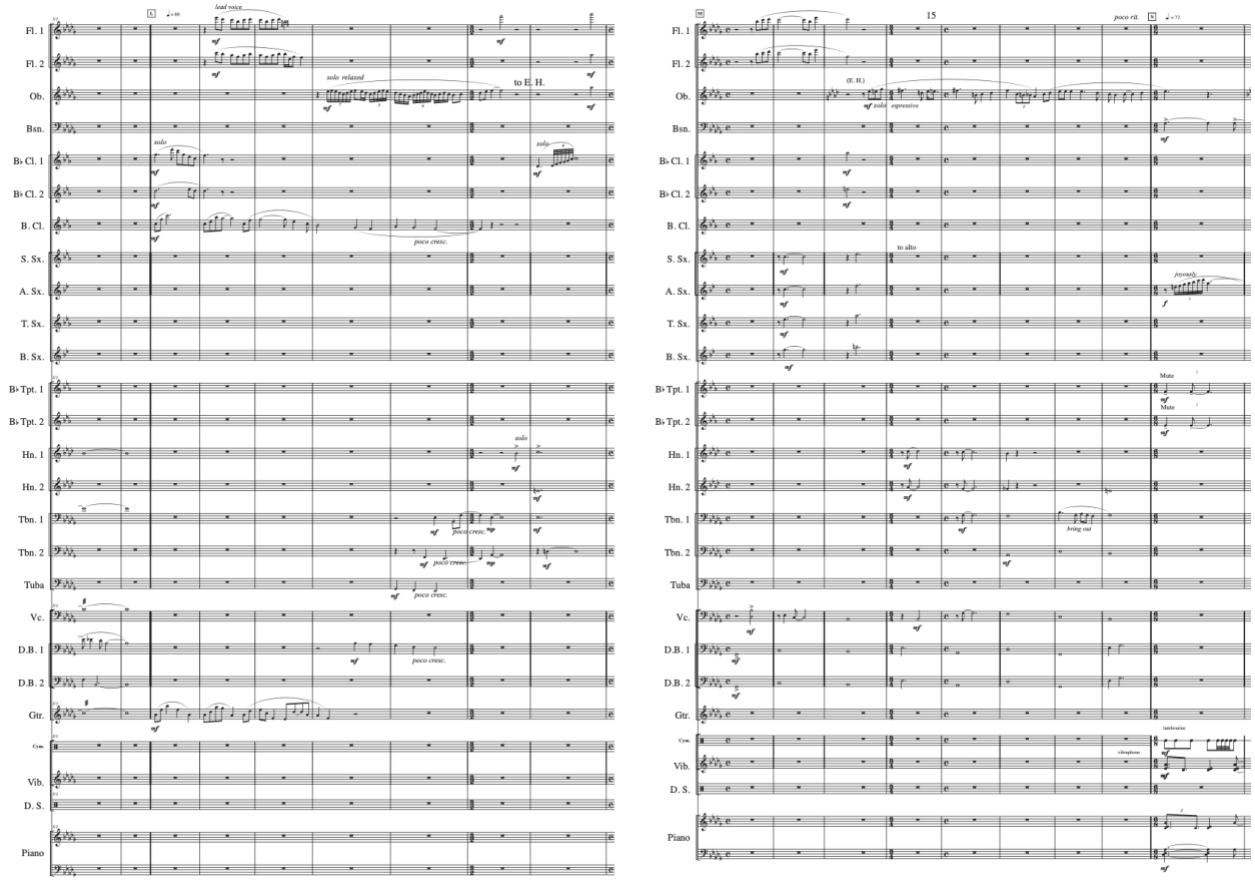

Figure 5.6. mm 113–129, Constantly shifting cohorts of instruments.

The third “large” section of the piece, Sections 13, 14, and 15, comprises the second improvisatory section and two very short transitional sections.

At thirty-three measures, Section 13 is one of the longest individual sections of the entire piece. It begins at measure 130 (letter N) with a rhythmic groove, a new tempo (♩.= 72), and the second appearance of compound duple meter. The groove in this section comes by way of a D♭sus2 chord in the “rhythm section” of vibraphone, piano, bassoon, and muted trumpets, along with an active tambourine part. This is the first occasion in the piece where the “new” colors of muted trumpets and tambourine occur. Here, a saxophone trio—alto, baritone, and an additional alto played by the soprano saxophone player—have notated solos. The markings for the soloists in this section include “joyously” and “freely.” If this solo section were truly improvised in

performance (as both Raph and Brooks suggest), conductors could make adjustments such as extending the section, incorporating additional instruments into the orchestration, and altering which instruments play the background figures.[134]

The six measures of Section 14 include high solo flute, a shift in groove to simple quadruple time, and a slower harmonic rhythm in the bassoon and trumpets (accompanied by the tambourine). The final two measures of this section include an uncommon trio of bassoon, alto saxophone, and trumpet, each playing in their high tessitura. The transitional moments of Section 15 shift to compound quadruple meter, with a woodwind quartet of two flutes, clarinet, and bass clarinet.

Section 16 is the second occurrence of *tutti* writing, marked at the *forte* dynamic for all instruments. Similar to Section 9, the full instrumentation of the wind ensemble is used in a dramatic fashion, with high woodwinds and forceful middle brass (e.g., open trumpets and accented horns) contrasting against the low brass and low strings. Emphatic unison passages in the low reeds, tuba, and low strings and trumpets, horns, and trombones signal the conclusion of this section, and the low voices end on a unison B-flat. Measures 177–178 offer contrast, as the upper neighbor tone (C) undulates with a B♭ in the vibraphone, while the cello plays a tremolo D♭. This minimal orchestration transitions to Section 17, an important timbral and textural shift that leads to the final improvisatory section (Figure 5.7).

[134] This section was not included in either the original piano version or in Raph's arrangement of the work. According to Raph, it was added in the studio by Mingus and Tacero after the initial recording session. It could therefore be surmised that Mingus would approve of artistic discretion during this improvisatory section.

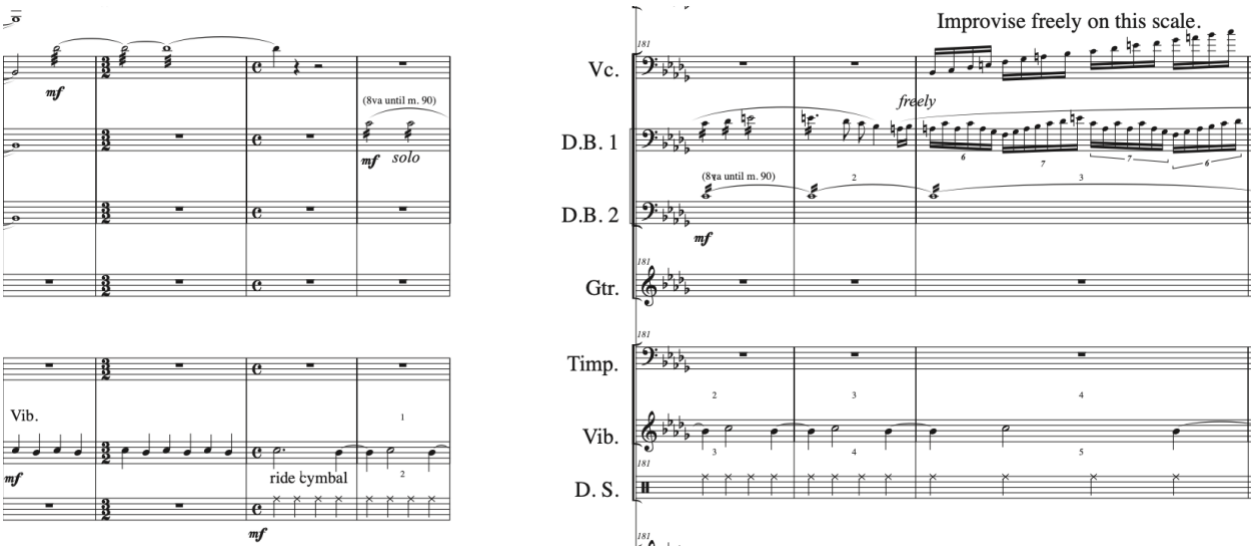

Figure 5.7. mm. 177–183, Cello/vibes transition to strings improvisatory section.

Section 17 begins with a *subito* change to a quicker tempo (♩= 106), a steady quarter-note pulse in the ride cymbal and muted trumpets, and a syncopated pattern in the vibes. This ostinato continues throughout the section, allowing the double bass 1—again written at *8va*—and cello to play rapid, rhythmic improvisations in a high tessitura.

The orchestration unexpectedly shifts at the beginning of Section 18 to solo English horn at measure 190 (letter S), accompanied by various groupings of instruments, including strings, saxophones, and brass. The shifting compound meter throughout the section adds a light and buoyant quality.

This buoyancy yields at the beginning of Section 19 (m. 206) to more section writing for the rhythm, brass, saxophone, and woodwind sections. The full ensemble is marked *forte*, similar to the previous *tutti* passages. The momentum of the first half of this section builds, as the large-scale tessitura of the ensemble moves from lower instruments (e.g., brass and low strings) to middle-register instruments (e.g., saxophones), and finally to the higher register (e.g., flutes, oboe, and clarinet).

As the rhythmic activity decreases, the ensemble dynamic also drops to a *mezzo-forte* F-minor chord at measure 212. In this measure, the time signature changes to 6/4, and the note values are augmented, slowing down both the harmonic and melodic activity. Contrary motion again occurs, as the woodwind voices ascend, and the trumpet voices descend chromatically into the next bar. The texture continues to thin, with the arc of the unison trumpet line contrasting against the ascending unison line in the woodwinds. Rising, accented semitones in the saxophones and horns emphasize motion toward the A♭ major chord played by the horns and trombones at the end of measure 215. This chord clashes with the semitones (B–C) heard in the saxophones, trumpets, and clarinets, creating a tense dissonance. Unison flutes transition into the final bars of the piece (Section 20), where solo piano completes the work, just as in *Myself When I Am Real*, with a mysterious and questioning motif in D♭ Lydian (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8. Last four–bars of final piano statement in both *Myself When I Am Real* and *Adagio ma non troppo.*

Orchestration

As shown in Figure 1, frequent shifts in orchestration result in different ensemble colors and timbres. Numerous solo instruments feature throughout the piece, with varying accompaniments, while different-sized groups of woodwinds, brass, and strings appear in a wide array of combinations. *Tutti* ensemble writing occurs only twice in the entire work: once in Section 9 and again in Section 17. In both instances, this writing demonstrates Mingus's stylistic

use of ensemble tessitura, with the high and low instruments reaching their extremes in contrary motion. Figure 5.9 shows the second of these sections and illustrates the thinning of the texture to a low tessitura, followed by a shift to the higher voices in the vibraphone and cello.

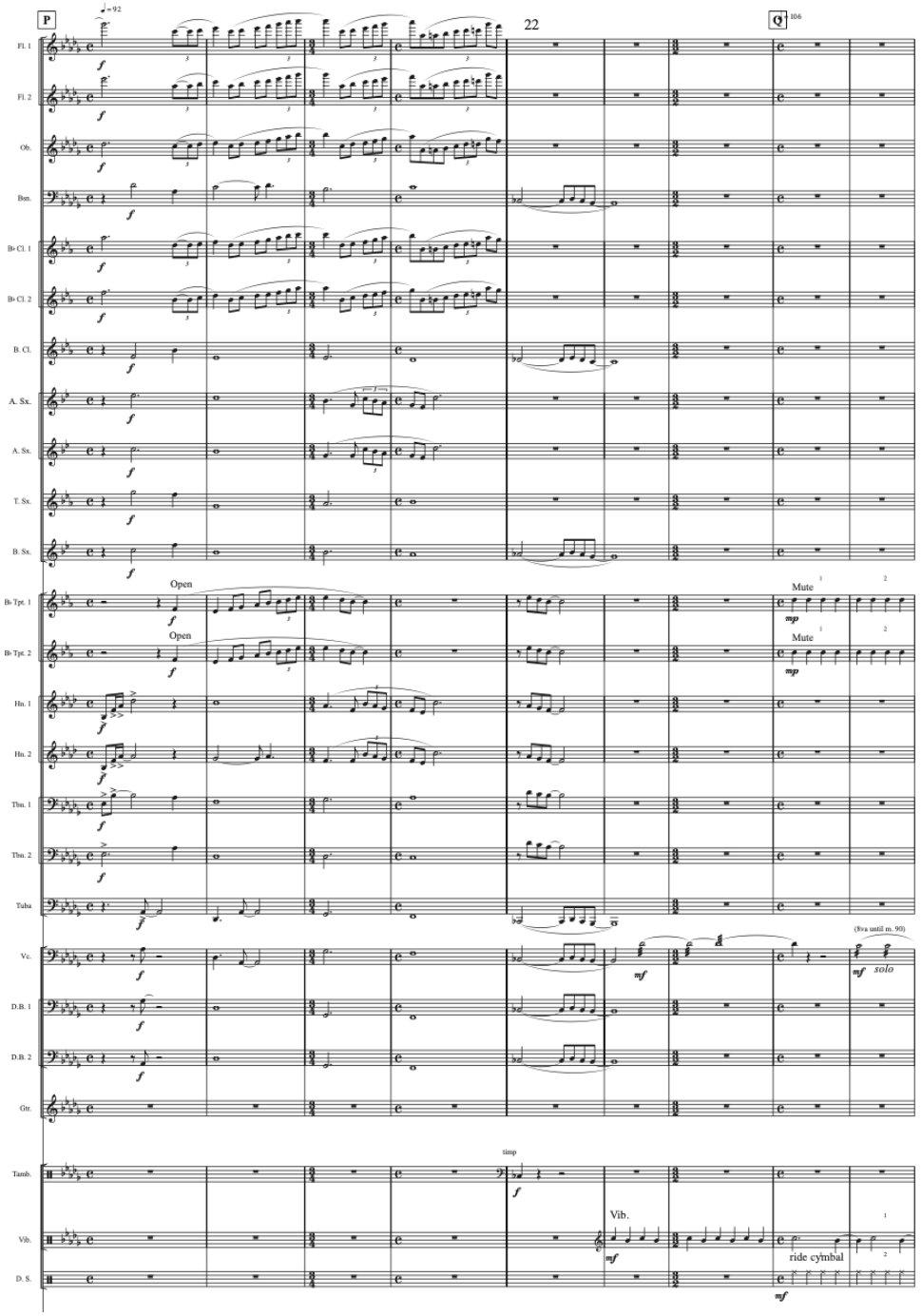

Figure 5.9. mm. 172–180, Thinning of texture and shift to higher tessitura.

Changes of texture and density within the orchestration delineate changes between episodic sections. An occurrence of this technique appears at the end of Section 6. Following the string improvisation, the timpani, vibraphone, and trumpets join the previously established ensemble groove. Additional woodwind voices add to the texture, as the rhythmic and dynamic propulsion of the music builds towards measure sixty-three (letter F). At this point, all voices abruptly drop out, leaving only the new texture of the saxophone quartet and the ride cymbal in Section 7. Figure 5.10 shows this orchestrational shift.

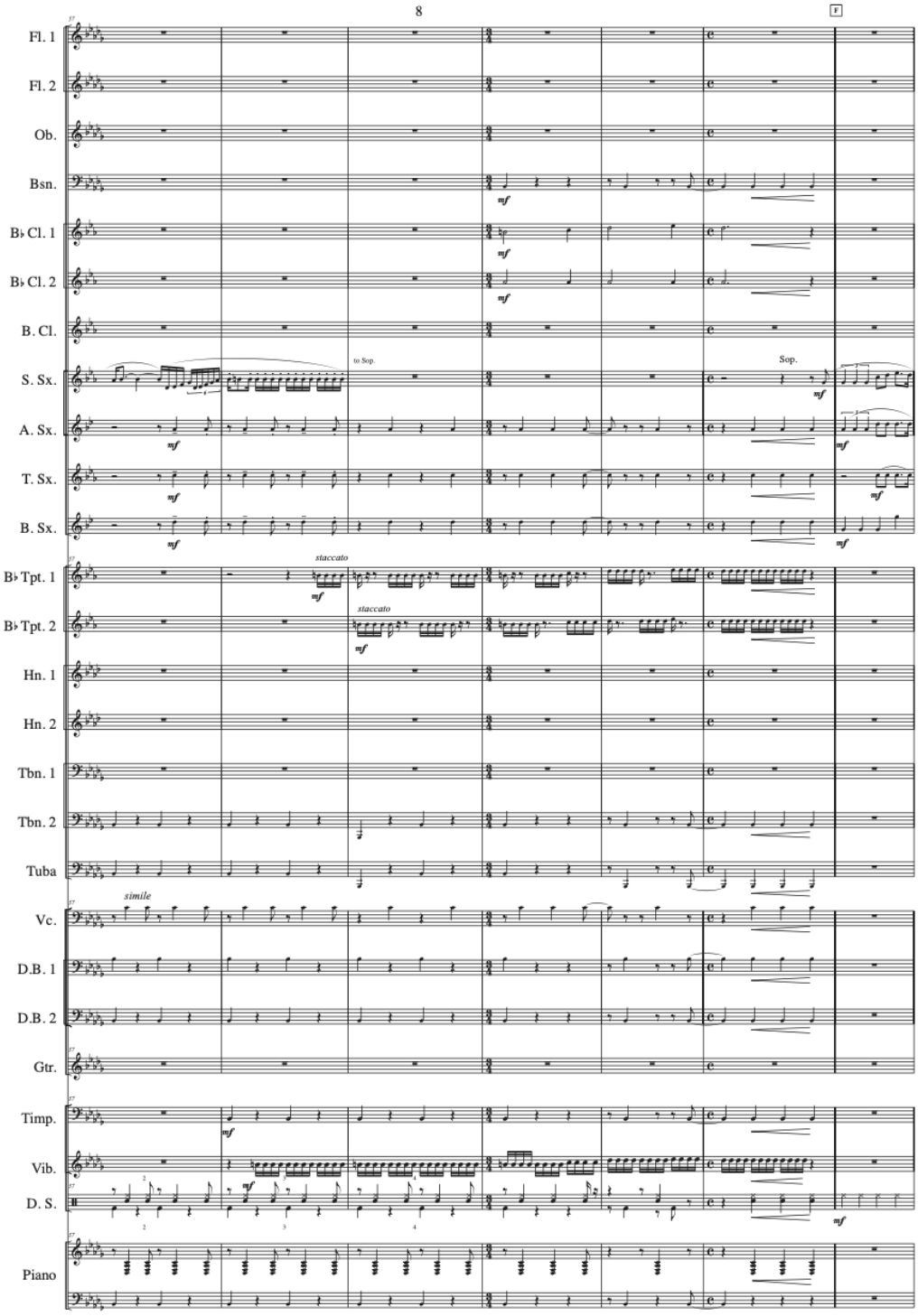

Figure 5.10. mm. 58–63, Dramatic orchestrational shift.

Another sudden and striking change in orchestration occurs at the end of Section 8, as the brass voices *diminuendo* to near silence. The emphatic entrance of a forte B♭ major chord, punctuated by percussion, heightens the impact of this dramatic *tutti* entrance, which begins Section 9 (see Figure 5.5 above).

A more subtle shift in orchestration occurs between Section 10 and Section 11, as the half notes in the bass clarinet and double basses carry over the bar line into a whole note, linking the two sections. The pitch in the bass clarinet remains on a concert A, while the perfect fifth (D–A) is preserved in the second double bass part at measure 105. This continuation of pitches and timbres creates a (still relatively unusual) smooth and seamless transition between the sections. This effortless transition is one that Mingus never achieved in his earlier work, *Half-Mast Inhibition,* and suggests a more mature compositional technique on display in *Adagio ma non troppo*. Figure 5.11 shows this transition.

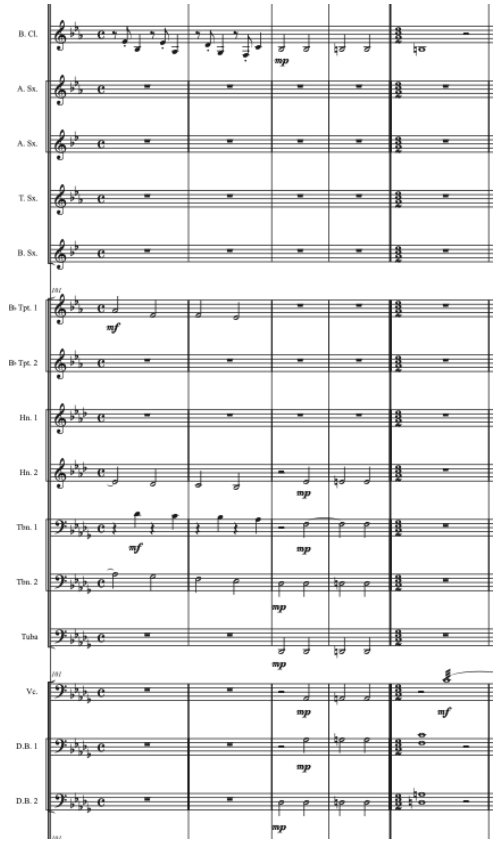

Figure 5.11. mm. 101–105, Subtle orchestrational transition.

Ensemble Tessitura

Often as colors and textures shift throughout *Adagio*, the changes result from contrasting registers of the high and low instruments within the ensemble. Mingus uses this compositional technique frequently throughout the work, creating dynamic contrasts and highlighting the extremes of the ensemble's range. Section 5 provides an example of this type of writing (see Figure 5.2 above).

Following a full brass statement at letter C (measure 24) and a brief moment of high piano writing, the large-scale tessitura of the ensemble shifts quickly from the low to middle to high voices. Wide intervallic leaps of sevenths and octaves heighten this dramatic effect. The ensemble then descends back to the middle voices of the clarinets and horns, before being joined

by the low saxophones and low brass. The ensemble tessitura plunges even further, as the left hand of the piano finishes the statement with a descending octave leap to a low C. The tension builds and culminates, closing the section with a tritone dissonance between the clarinets and trombones on the final downbeat.

Section 9 at letter I (mm. 93–97) is another example of how Mingus utlizes the extreme ranges of the ensemble simultaneously. *Tutti* orchestration distinguishes this section from the preceding and subsequent ones, but particularly significant is the way the bass voices (e.g., double basses, tuba, trombone 2, bass clarinet, and bassoon) move in contrary motion to the highest soprano voices (e.g., unison flutes and guitar). This interplay between the low and high registers, a hallmark of Mingus's writing, plays a crucial role in shaping the overall texture and dramatic effect of the section. The result is a dramatic build to the *fermata* at the end of the section, with the high and low ends of the ensemble on full display (see Figure 5.5 above).

Yet another example of simultaneous high and low tessitura appears not in a *tutti* section, but rather within a more fragmented structure that involves various cohorts of the ensemble. At letter L, in Section 12, guitar and upper woodwinds precede descending low reed, low brass, and bass colors which, in turn, lead to ascending voices in the brass and upper woodwinds. At letter M, the low voices of the strings are joined by the saxophones and flutes, followed by an English horn solo with harmonic accompaniment provided by the horns, trombones, and strings. The result of these timbral combinations is some of the most colorful writing in the entire work (see mm. 113–130 in Figure 5.6 above).

Meter and Tempo

Frequently shifting meter and tempi are integral components of this work. The opening tempo of the transcription is marked *andante rubato* (♩= 72), which is significantly slower than the *moderato* tempo (♩= 100) of *Myself When I Am Real*. Including the initial marked tempo, there are six different tempi in the first thirty measures alone. (Some of these are slight variances, rather than entirely new tempi—markings like *poco rit.* or *rit.*) The ebb and flow of the original improvisation explains the multiple tempi, and a successful interpretation of the work will achieve a natural flow that seamlessly connects each section to the next temporally (while sometimes dramatic changes in orchestration occur at the same transition points). Figure 5.12 shows the tempi that are marked in the score and the sections where they occur.

Section	Measure	Tempo
1	1	*Andante Rubato*, ♩= 72
5	24	♩= 76
6	31	*Allegro Moderato*, ♩= 116
8	76	♩= 92
8	80	♩= 88
8	89	♩= 92
9	93	♩= 78
10	98	♩.= 96
10	100	♩= 96
12	115	♩= 88
13	130	♩= 92
14	163	♩= 106
15	169	♩.= 72
16	172	♩= 92
17	179	♩= 106
18	190	♩.= 78

Figure 5.12 Marked tempi in *Adagio ma non troppo.*

The marked tempo changes almost always coincide with the beginning of a new section. In addition to the marked tempi, there are twenty-two separate occasions of tempo variance on the original recording. Most of these are marked with *rit.* or *molto rit.* in the transcription. Additional marks include *accel.*, "relaxed," and "more relaxed." The transcription does not reflect all of the subtle changes of the original recorded version, but a careful listening of the original album will reveal those that are not marked.

In addition to constantly shifting tempi, meter changes occur with great frequency. Including the opening 3/4 meter of the opening measure, there are a total of fifty-four meter changes throughout the 222 measures of the entire work. The combination of these meter and tempo changes serve the free-flowing nature of the transcription and closely replicate the *rubato* feel of the original piano improvisation.

Summary

Mingus (and Raph and Brooks) achieve a wide range of ensemble colors through various cohorts of instruments and shifting orchestrational combinations. The changes in mood throughout the piece manifest primarily in two ways: subtle alterations, such as the gradual addition or removal of instruments, and more abrupt, dramatic shifts in orchestration. Ensemble tessitura is a key element, as demonstrated in the *tutti* sections, as well as in those where the high, middle, and low instruments are grouped in varying combinations. Changes in tempo and meter also play a critical role, reinforcing the improvisatory nature of the original piano recording and adding to the fluidity and expressiveness of the work.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Although Charles Mingus never intended to write a wind band piece, his music remains an important addition to the repertoire. Through a few works playable by modern wind ensembles, he offers a unique blend of jazz and classical influences that expand the possibilities of the genre. This examination of his published work *Revelations*, along with recent transcriptions of *Half-Mast Inhibition* and *Adagio ma non troppo*, reveals a distinctive and consistent compositional style across these pieces, defined by the following characteristics: episodic, often segmented form determined by changes in orchestration; quickly-shifting ensemble colors; extremes in ensemble tessitura, both in *tutti* and chamber writing; and frequently shifting tempo and meter.

The high number of discrete sections in each composition demonstrate episodic form: *Half-Mast* has sixteen, *Revelations* has eight, and *Adagio* has twenty. It is significant not only that the orchestration changes between sections, but also how these transitions play out. The earliest composition, *Half-Mast Inhibition*, has abrupt and sudden shifts from section to section. Disparate styles of smaller musical ideas seem stitched together to achieve a larger whole. In both *Revelations* and *Adagio ma non troppo*, the transitions between sections are smoother. Mingus employs a more gradual approach, where instruments are added or removed before a section change occurs. Abrupt shifts of orchestration are not absent from either piece, however, and provide moments of interest and surprise, as they would in any composition.

Mingus's unique ability to elicit a rich palette of colors from the larger ensemble is a hallmark of his compositional style, evident in each of the works explored in this study. He

achieves this effect by utilizing various combinations of instrumental cohorts—groups of instruments working together in specific timbral configurations—and frequently shifting these cohorts throughout the music. The effect is a soundscape that evades predictability. Uncommon combinations of instruments—including oboe/cello duet, horn/bass duet, harp/woodwind/horn/vibes/guitar/bass/cymbal, bassoon/alto saxophone/trumpet, and English horn/cello/bass—provide just a few examples of this type of orchestration.

In addition to his deliberate choices in creating interesting timbres through orchestration, Mingus masterfully employs a wide range of textures within the larger ensemble to achieve dramatic and colorful effects. These range from the intimacy of solo instruments to the more intricate interplay of smaller chamber ensembles, such as duets, trios, and quartets, to the full, multi-layered sound of *tutti* orchestration. Mingus uses this multi-layered approach, at times in both *Half-Mast Inhibition* and *Revelations*, as sections of both works include dense scoring and multiple musical ideas occurring at once, as if the "jazz" side of the composer comes through while he notates the individual parts for the "classical" musicians to play atop each other. Similarly, Mingus incorporates sections of collective improvisation in both *Revelations* and *Adagio ma non troppo*, creating a comparable aural experience.

Ensemble tessitura is important to Mingus, demonstrated in all three pieces. His technique includes writing for instruments in their extreme registers, contrasting the low and high instruments of the ensemble (both in chamber group and *tutti* writing), and using contrary motion in the outermost instruments of the ensemble at important structural moments. Often accompanied by visceral dynamic contrasts, these moments demonstrate the expressive capability of the large, multi-faceted ensembles for which Mingus wrote.

Multiple changes of meter and tempo are commonplace in Mingus's writing. These musical devices create interest throughout each composition and help each of his works feel like a living, breathing organism—constantly evolving, pursuing, creating, and reacting—much like Mingus himself. The effect is felt most in the latest of these compositions, *Adagio ma non troppo*, particularly because of the piece's origins as a piano improvisation; the constantly changing tempi of the transcription captures the natural ebb and flow of a creative genius sitting down at the piano and letting the music pour forth into the keys.

Examining *Half-Mast Inhibition*, *Revelations*, and *Adagio ma non troppo*—works that represent Mingus's early, middle, and late career—reveals that his fundamental compositional techniques remained consistent throughout his lifetime. However, his style grew increasingly adventurous, yet more refined, as he pursued ways to express himself more fully through his music. While *Half-Mast Inhibition*, the composer's earliest effort in this study, comes across as disjunct and even harshly segmented, his later composition, *Adagio ma non troppo,* is much more seamless and fluid, more closely representing the personality of the composer, with "several feelings expressed as one."[135]

Recommendations for Further Study

Researching the life and music of Charles Mingus presents countless wormholes in which one might fall at any given moment. There seem to be no words that can fully capture the essence of this uniquely gifted man or his music, and this document represents only the "tip of the iceberg" in my personal exploration of the subject. These recommendations for further study could form the basis of several additional research projects.

[135] Mingus, Liner Notes, Columbia WL-127.

In this dissertation, I examined three of Mingus's compositions that can be performed by contemporary wind ensemble. As mentioned in the introduction, there are two more works that deserve additional study in relation to the medium: *The Chill of Death* and *The Children's Hour of Dream.* Both works have extensive histories and would be fascinating to research. At the time of this writing, *The Chill of Death* had not yet been transcribed into a digital format, but a version of *The Children's Hour of Dream* from Mingus's epic work *Epitaph* is available.

Another potential study could compare Mingus's works suitable for wind ensemble to his smaller ensemble compositions (e.g., quartets, quintets, etc.), to explore whether there are correlations (or differences due to size of forces) in how he approached orchestration, texture, and transitions.

A further project could involve orchestrating one of Mingus's smaller ensemble compositions for a full wind ensemble, similar to the adaptations of his jazz quartets or quintets for large jazz band. This would offer a fresh interpretation of his work and introduce Mingus's music to an even broader audience.

When asked about the title of his album *Let My Children Hear Music*, Mingus commented, "A lot of what the kids get to hear now is noise. It's so limited in what it expresses, and it's limited in what little it does have to say. But kids are able to hear more, much more."[136] My hope is that many more musicians—"children" or "kids" of all ages—have an opportunity to hear more than just noise and experience the deeply expressive power within the music of Mingus.

[136] Hentoff, "Mingus: I Thought I Was Finished."

APPENDIX

Personnel for *Let My Children Hear Music* Album Recording

Collective personnel of the entire album, as listed in the liner notes for *Let My Children Hear Music,* from *The Complete Columbia and RCA Albums Collections*:

Charles Mingus, bass, narration

Lonnie Hillyer, Al DeRisi, Snooky Young, Howard Johnson, Ernie Royal, Jimmy Nottingham, Joe Wilder, Marvin Stamm, trumpet

Eddie Bert, Warren Covington, Jimmy Knepper, trombone

Bob Steward, Jack Jennings, tuba

Julius Watkins, Paul Ingraham, Brooks Tillotson, Jimmy Buffington, French horn

Hubert Laws, flute

Teo Macero, alto saxophone, conductor

Charles McPherson, Bobby Jones, James Moody, Harvey Estrin, Danny Bank, Joe Temperley, Seymour "Red" Press, Al Regni, Hank Freeman, Daniel Trimboli, Ray Beckenstein, Hal McKusick, John Leone, Jerry Dodgion, Romeo Penque, Wallace Shapiro, George Marge, reeds, woodwinds

John Foster, Sir Roland Hanna, Patti Bown, piano

Bucky Pizzarelli, guitar

Charles McCracken, cello

Homer Mensch, Kenneth Fricker, John A. Schaffer, Francis X. Savarese, G. Sonny Brown, bass

Dannie Richmond, drums

Phil Kraus, Warren Smith, percussion

Specific personnel for the recording of *Adagio ma non troppo*, as recalled by orchestrator/contractor/conductor, Alan Raph, in a phone interview from July 18, 2023. Raph acknowledged that this list may not be complete:

Hubert Laws, flute

Wally Shapiro, clarinet

Romeo Penque, oboe

John Leone, bassoon

Danny Bank, Ray Beckenstein, George Marge, Hal McKusick, Dave Tofani, saxophone

Eddie Bert, Jimmy Knepper, trombone

Lyle Atkinson, Ron Carter, Milt Hinton, Ken Fricker, Charles Mingus, Homer Mensch, Frank Savarese, bass

Patty Bown, piano

Bucky Pizzarelli, guitar

Charles McCracken, cello

Phil Kraus, Warren Smith, percussion

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