

Jazz Greats: Charles Mingus



Charles Mingus was a jazz bassist, composer, and band leader. He was born in 1922 in Arizona, and was raised mostly in the Watts area of Los Angeles, California. When he was a child, his mother allowed only church music in the home, and gospel later became a major influence on the way he played and wrote music.

Mingus studied trombone, and later cello. He was not able to play the cello professionally because there were almost no African-American musicians in classical music at the time. He began learning to play the bass in the late 1930s.

He received a poor education and could not even read music notation when he began playing. Still, he began writing music in his teens. His music was far more complex than might have been expected from a teenager, and he earned a reputation as a bass prodigy. He toured with the legendary Louis Armstrong in 1943. By 1945, he was recording with well-known Los Angeles bands. He began to receive praise and acclaim, and played with the likes of Charlie Parker in the early 1950s. Mingus had a terrible temper, though, and his on- and offstage fights got him fired from several bands and groups.

In 1952, Mingus helped found a record label so he could play his music as he saw fit. He formed the Jazz Workshop, a mid-sized ensemble of rotating musicians. He pushed his musicians to reach new heights of excellence and innovation. The decade that followed was his most productive. He was a part of ten record releases over the next ten years. He began suffering from a degenerative muscular disease in the 1970s and was unable to continue to play bass or piano, but he composed and led bands right up until his death at the age of 56.



Directions: Answer the questions below. Use text evidence to support your answers.

1. What is the main idea of Jazz Greats: Charles Mingus? Write it in your own words.

Name _____

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Jazz Greats: Charles Mingus

2. Choose a quote from the text that supports the following statement, and record it on the lines below.

Charles Mingus chose to persevere through challenges so he could reach success.

3. What can you infer about Charles Mingus continuing to compose and lead bands right up until he died?

4. Describe what the author means when the text says, "...His music was far more complex than might have been expected from a teenager, and he earned a reputation as a bass prodigy."

5. How was Charles Mingus a leader in the jazz community?

6. How did Mingus's terrible temper affect his music career?

7. Who or what influenced Charles Mingus as a musician? Include two pieces of evidence from the passage.

a. _____

b. _____
