

on the level of "Blue 7"; it falls short, comparatively, only in terms of originality, but is also notable for a beautifully organized Gillespie solo.) This is not to say that Rollins is incapable of achieving thematic variations in non-blues material. Pieces such as "St. Thomas" or "Way Out West" indicate more than a casual concern with this problem; and in a recent in-the-flesh rendition of "Yesterdays," a lengthy solo cadenza dealt almost exclusively with the melodic line of this tune. His vivid imagination not only permits him the luxury of seemingly endless variants and permutations of a given motive, but even enables him to emulate ideas not indigenous to his instrument, as for instance in "Way Out West" when Rollins, returning for his second solo, imitates Shelly Manne's closing snare drum roll on the saxophone!

Lest I seem to be overstating the case for Rollins, let me add that both his live and recorded performances do include average and less coherent achievements—even an occasional wrong note, as in "You Don't Know What Love Is" (Prestige LP 7079)—which only proves that (fortunately) Rollins is human and fallible. Such minor blemishes are dwarfed into insignificance by the enormity of his talent and the positive values of his great performances. In these and especially "Blue 7," what Sonny Rollins has added conclusively to the scope of jazz improvisation is the idea of developing and varying a *main* theme, and not just a secondary motive or phrase which the player happens to hit upon in the course of his improvisation and which in itself is unrelated to the "head" of the composition. This is not to say that a thematically related improvisation is *necessarily* better than a free harmonically based one. Obviously any generalization to this effect would be unsound: only the quality of a specific musician in a specific performance can be the ultimate basis for judgment. The point is not—as some may think I am implying—that, since Rollins does a true thematic variation, he therefore is superior to Parker or Young in a nonthematic improvisation. I am emphasizing primarily a *difference* of approach, even though, speaking quite subjectively, I may feel the Rollins position to be ultimately the more important one. Certainly it is an approach that inherently has an important future.

The history of classical music provides us with a telling historical precedent for such a prognosis: after largely non-thematic beginnings (in the early Middle Ages), music over a period of centuries developed to a stage where (with the great classical masters) thematic relationships, either in a sonata or various variational forms, became the prime building element of music, later to be carried even further to the level of continuous and complete variation as implied by Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique; in short, an over-all lineage from free almost anarchical beginnings to a relatively confined and therefore more challenging state. The history of jazz gives every indication of following a parallel course, although in an extraordinarily condensed form. In any case, the essential point is not that, with thematically related solos, jazz improvisation can now discard the great tradition established by the Youngs and Parkers, but rather that by building *on* this tradition and enriching it with the new element of thematic relationships, jazz is simply adding a new dimension. And I think we might all agree that renewal through tradition is the best assurance of a flourishing musical future.

"IN OTHER WORDS I AM THREE. . . . THE man who watches and waits, the man who attacks because he's afraid, and the man who wants to trust and love but retreats each time he finds himself betrayed."¹ Using multiple narrative voices to dramatize his conflicts and contradictions, Charles Mingus (1922–1979) wrote one of the most vivid and passionate autobiographies in jazz. Besides being a technically advanced and imaginative double bass player, Mingus was a highly innovative band leader and composer. Drawing on his expertise in a wide range of musical styles, he blurred the lines between improvisation and composition, orally dictating parts to musicians, planning complicated forms and contrasts, but fostering musical dialogue and collective improvisation. Written over many years and finally published in 1971, Mingus's book reflects his awareness of race as an omnipresent social category that affected every aspect of his experience.

In the first excerpt presented here, Mingus recalls his friendship with virtuosic bebop trumpeter Fats Navarro (1923–1950), whom he met while both were playing with Lionel Hampton's band during 1947–48. The second section recounts his experiences playing with the Red Norvo Trio (with Norvo playing vibraphone and Tal Farlow on guitar), 1950–51, as well as his brief tenure with Duke Ellington. The third recreates the night in 1960 when Mingus met Judy Starkey, who would become his third wife, incorporating an explanation of his rhythmic concept of "rotary perception."

There was a man named Fats Navarro who was born in Key West, Florida, in 1923. He was a jazz trumpet player, one of the best in the world. He and my boy met for the first time on a cold winter night in 1947 in Grand Central Station in New York City.² Lionel Hampton's band had just got off the train from Chicago and Benny Bailey gaily said good-bye and split: he was leaving for Paris, France. The guys all stood around in their overcoats by the clock, waiting for the new man joining the band. A big, fat fellow walked up carrying a trumpet case and asked in the oddest high squeaky voice "This the Hampton crew?" and Britt Woodman introduced Fats Navarro.

Charles felt embarrassed as the band walked out. There were strangers, women and children, all around, and the guys were laughing too loudly and joking and words like motherfucker and cocksucker echoed through the station. They took the shuttle to Times Square and another subway to Penn-

Source: Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), chapters 21, 33, and 39.

¹Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 7.

²"My boy" is Mingus referring to himself in the third person.

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first trip to the Apple, but all he saw of it was underground.

Next day they rehearsed in the Palace Theatre in Washington. Hampton had a nine-brass book. The trumpets were Wendell Cully, Duke Garrett, Walter Williams and the high-note player they all called "Whistler."³ Navarro just sat there placidly with his horn on his lap waiting for his solos while the rest of the band played arrangements. When Hamp pointed to him, Fats stood up and played, and played, and played! played! played! One of the other trumpet players became resentful of this new star in their midst and started muttering, "Schitt, this guy can't even read!" Fats laughed, grabbed the musician's part, eyed it and said, "Schitt, you ain't got nothin' to read here!" And he sight-read from the score impeccably for the entire last show.

Fats was featured all that week in Washington and then they went on the road. The trumpet player whose part Fats had read with such scornful ease couldn't forget what had happened. He was a man who carried a gun and he was convinced he had been insulted. He was liping a lot about how he would kill Fats one of these days.

They travelled by bus. The small instruments were in the luggage racks, the basses lay cushioned in the back row. Seats were assigned by seniority and the one next to my boy was vacant and was given to Fats Navarro. Mingus and he hadn't talked much up to now. The first night out the whole band was tired and they settled down to rest as the bus headed west. Later Mingus woke up feeling uneasy. It was past twelve midnight and everything was still, the men were sleeping, but the seat beside Mingus was empty. He heard a voice in the dark, someone pleading. "No . . . nooo . . . nooooo . . ." Then a familiar little high-pitched squeaked, "Don't *ever* say you gonna cut or shoot somebody 'less you do it, hear? Now if you don't be quiet I might cut you too deep so hold still while I makes you bleed a little 'cause when Theodore Navarro says *he's* gonna cut you that's what he's gonna do." My boy felt the others waking and listening too but nobody made a sound.

Later Fats came quietly back to his seat. After a silence he said, "That wasn't no way to treat a new member, that was old-fashioned jealousy schitt. Me and Miles and Dizzy and little Benny Harris played together and didn't never have no old-fashioned jealousy schitt. Why should any old member of the band be so uncourteous as to uncourteously threaten a new member?" Nothing was said afterwards about the cat who got scratched and nothing more was heard from him about shooting Fats.

The band played thirty or forty one-nighters in a row, usually arriving in town just in time to check into their dingy hotel rooms and wash up. Fats and my boy liked to talk to each other and began to room together. It was cheaper that way anyhow.

So this bus rolled on and on across the country, sometimes by day and sometimes at night. And in the crummy hotel rooms with big old-fashioned brass beds that sagged under Fats's enormous weight like hammocks they began a dialogue that continued off and on until the time it had to end.

My family's Cuban. You play Cuban music?"

"I'm not hip to that, Fats. I know some Mexican tunes."
"Hang out with me and I'll take you to some of the joints. You can sit in, blow some. Do you play any other than bass?"

"I try my best not to but I get my chops up on piano sometimes when I'm scoring long enough. I love to hear it on piano."

"Who'd you work with before, Mingus?"

"Illinois Jacquet . . . Alvino Rey . . ."

"Yeah? I played with Jacquet too. You play with Diz or Bird when they was in California? See, I knowed of you before you knowed of me. Talk to Jacquet or someone else—you ain't so undiscovered. Miles played once with you. He used to tell about the band you guys had."

"He did? He hardly said a word except with his horn. How cool can you get when a cat don't even say hello. That's the system, Fats, the system that keeps the blacks apart."

"I see what you mean—so busy worrying how to make a dime with your horn, ain't got time to make a race. Gotta go downtown and see the man, ain't got time to shake your hand. So we play jazz in its place."

"Where's the place, Fats?"

"Right in their faces. They know we know where it's at. Aw, they own us, Mingus. If they don't own us, they push us off the scene. Jazz is big business to the white man and you can't move without him. We just work-ants. He owns the magazines, agencies, record companies and all the joints that sell jazz to the public. If you won't sell out and you try to fight they won't hire you and they give a bad picture of you with that false publicity."

"Sell out, Fats? To who? Look at Ellington, Armstrong, Basie—look at Hamp. All big famous band-leaders. You can't tell me that agents and bookers own guys like that!"

"Mingus, you a nice guy from California, I don't want to disillusion you. But I been through all that schitt and I had to learn to do some other things to get along. I learned better than to try to make it just with my music out on these dirty gang-mob streets 'cause I still love playing better than money. Jazz ain't supposed to make nobody no millions but that's where it's at. Them that shouldn't is raking it in but the purest are out in the street with me and Bird and it rains all over us, man. I was better off when nobody knew my name except musicians. You can bet it ain't jazz no more when the underworld moves in and runs it strictly for geetz and even close out the coloured agents.⁴ They shut you up and cheat you on the count of your record sales and if you go along they tell the world you a real genius. But if you don't play they put out the word you're a trouble-maker, like they did me. Then if some honest club owner tries to get hold of you to book you, they tell you're not available or you don't draw or you'll tear up the joint like you was a gorilla. And you won't hear nothin' about it except by accident. But if you behave, boy, you'll get booked—except for less than the white cats that

³Leo "The Whistler" Sheppard.

⁴"Geetz" is a slang term for money.

copy your playing and likely either the agent or the owner'll pocket the difference."

"But Fats, I know a lot of guys with managers taking a fair cut—fifteen, twenty, maybe thirty per cent."

"Who told you that? Mingus, *King Spook* don't even own fifty per cent of himself! His agent gets fifty-one, forty-nine goes to a corporation set up in his name that he don't control and he draws five hundred a week and don't say *nothing*—but he's famous, Mingus, hear, he's famous!"⁵

"Nobody didn't hold no gun on King Spook to sign no contract like that." "You sure about that? One time he got uppity and they kicked him out of the syndicate joints. He had to break up his band out in California. He tried to buck it on his own with nobody but his old lady to help him beat the system. Mingus, that's the biggest gun in the world to stick in a man's ribs—*hunger*. So he sold out again. Now he's got a club named after him but it ain't his. Oh, it's a hard wrinkle, Mingus. Haw haw! I'm thinking when Peggy Lee be appearing in some east side club. Her biggest applause come out on the street and they all be saying she's a junkie. They had Billie be hung up they wouldn't pay the right way, they just put a little money in her hand every night after work, just enough so she come back tomorrow. They drives ya to it, Mingus. They got you down and they don't let you up."

"If you're right, why don't some of the big Negro businessmen step into the picture?"

"Cause they ain't caught on it's a diamond mine and they too busy scuffin' in their own corn patch and maybe scared. You breaking into Whitey's private vault when you start telling Negroes to wake up and move in where they belong and it ain't safe, Mingus. When the day comes the black man says I want mine, then hide your family and get yourself some guns. 'Cause there ain't no better business for Whitey to be in than Jim Crow business."

"I guess you got something here, Fats. I notice you and me staying in hotels like this one for twice what the white man pays."

"Well, if things don't change, Cholly, do like I tell you, get yourself some heat, guns, cannons, and be willing to die like *they* was. That's all I heard when I was a kid, how bad they was and not afraid to die—to arms, to arms, and all that schitt, give me liberty or give me death! Show me where that atomic power button is and I'll give them cocksuckers some liberty!"

"You said money shouldn't matter to musicians, Fats. What if we all gave up on fame and fortune and played 'cause we love to, like the jazzmen before us—at private sessions for people that listened and respected the players? Then people would know that jazz musicians play for love."

"I thought you had some children, Mingus. Don't they need no ends out there in California?"

"I'm going to write a book and when I sell it I'm not gonna play any more for money. I'll compose and now and then rent a ballroom and throw a party and pay some great musicians to play a couple of things and im-

provisé all night long. That's what jazz originally was, getting away from the usual tiddy, the hime, the gig."

"But Mingus, how about them crumb-crushers of yours when their little stomachs get to poppin' and there ain't nothin' in their jaws but their gums, teeth and tongue, what you gonna do? Play for money or be a pimp?"

"I tried being a pimp, Fats. I didn't like it."

"Then you gonna play for money."

The tour continued and Fats began to complain that he didn't feel good, he hurt all over and he wanted out. My boy thought it was just an excuse because they were all tired of the strenuous one-nighters. One day on the bus Fats began coughing up blood. When they got to Chicago he quit the band and left for New York. But my boy and he were to meet and talk again many times before the day in July of 1950 when Fats Navarro died in New York City of tuberculosis and narcotics addiction. He was twenty-six years old.



So now you've got a job again, boy, in a trio, boy, with a famous name. The leader has red hair, boy, and the guitar player is a white man too, from North Carolina. You're playing in San Francisco and making records and the critics are writing good things. Boy! Boy! Boy!

Then you go out on the road. How does it feel to drive through the South as a member of an otherwise all-white trio and in addition to that you've got a white girl travelling with you? How do you do it? I'll tell you. First you straighten your hair. That's before you start. You're travelling in two cars and your girl rides with you on the road. But before you get to another town, out on the empty highway your girl changes cars and pretends to be the wife of one of the white men so you can check into hotels. You trade rooms that night and again in the morning so she can walk out with her "husband."

How do you go into restaurants? Your girl and her "husband" go in first, then the leader of the band takes you in, big white-man style. You've got straight hair and your skin isn't too dark and you're in the company of a famous guy. But the bouncer looks right at you, looks at you hard, slamming his fist into his palm again and again. He doesn't say anything but you know what he's thinking and he wants you to know.

How does it feel on your last overnight stop in the South when you find in the morning the two other white guys have checked out and you're left there in that hotel, boy, alone with a white woman? It feels very dangerous, that's how it feels. You pack and go downstairs separately not knowing what's going to happen. But thank God nobody says anything, they just *look* at you funny. You get out as fast as you can, get in your car and drive out of that town, and down the road a piece in front of a restaurant you see your leader's car and inside are the two dumb white boys having breakfast.

The trip is almost over so you don't quit. You drive straight through to New York in two cars and go in with this trio to a famous jazz club on the

⁵"King Spook" is most probably a private nickname for Louis Armstrong.

if the bread's low, they at least boost your ego.

How does it feel when the Redhead's trio is asked to do an important, special television show in *colour*? If feels great. At night you're playing this first-class club and daytimes you're rehearsing in the studio. One day during a break you're tuning the bass and you see this producer or somebody talking to the Redhead across the room and they're both looking at you. You feel something is wrong but you don't know what. In a few minutes some guy calls out: "That's all for today, tomorrow at ten," and everyone leaves. While you're packing up, the Redhead comes over and says something like this: "Charlie, I'm sorry to tell you but I have to get another bassist for this show. We'll continue at the club but I can't use you here." What do you say? You ask the name of the new bassist, of course. He tells you. The bassist is white. Now what do you do, curse him out? Probably. You don't remember what you said. He goes away fast. That night he doesn't come to the club, he sends word he's sick. After that somehow you never get a chance to talk to him, he comes late and cuts out early. You have to find out. You start going by where he's staying, at a residential hotel on Broadway. But the desk always says he's not in, they won't even ring. You never get a chance to discuss it with him. Schitt, he can't talk anyway—can't talk about anything real, only about what chick you're going with and like that. You can't talk to the guitarist about it, either, he never says anything. Two dumb white boys can't talk to you. So you quit the trio. How can you play with guys you can't talk to? You wonder and wonder why he didn't tell you face to face or why he didn't walk off the TV job—some leaders would have. He wanted the money too bad. If he had hired Red Mitchell or somebody like that to place you, you might have even believed it was something to do with your playing. But what's good in a club is good anywhere else, wouldn't you think? It didn't take much to figure it out. The way television was in those days, they had sponsors who worried about "the Southern market" and "mixing" was taboo.

Yeah, there are certain things in this life that nobody likes to talk about. Nobody white, that is.

So what do you do after that? Maybe you get a job with the Duke himself. This is The Hero, and this is the band you don't quit, but this time you're asked to leave because of an incident with a trombone player and arranger named Juan Tizol. Tizol wants you to play a solo he's written where bowing is required. You raise the solo an octave, where the bass isn't too muddy. He doesn't like that and he comes to the room under the stage where you're practicing at intermission and comments that you're like the rest of the niggers in the band, you can't read. You ask Juan how he's different from the other niggers and he states that one of the ways he's different is that HE IS WHITE.⁶ So you run his ass upstairs. You leave the rehearsal room, proceed toward the stage with your bass and take your place and at the moment Duke

⁶Tizol was Puerto Rican; when Ellington's band appeared in films of 1929 and 1930, Tizol was forced to blacken his face so that audiences would not think a white musician was performing with a black group.

brings down the baton for "A-Train" and the curtain of the Apollo Theatre goes up, a yelling, whooping Tizol rushes out and lunges at you with a bolo knife. The rest you remember mostly from the Duke's own words in his dressing room as he changes after the show.

"Now, Charles," he says, looking amused, putting Cartier links into the cuffs of his beautiful hand-made shirt, "you could have forewarned me—you left me out of the act entirely! At least you could have let me cue in a few chords as you ran through that Nijinsky routine. I congratulate you on your performance, but why didn't you and Juan inform me about the adagio you planned so that we could score it? I must say I never say a large man so agile—I never saw *anybody* make such tremendous leaps! The gambado over the piano carrying your bass was colossal. When you exited after that I thought, 'That man's really afraid of Juan's knife and at the speed he's going he's probably home in bed by now.' But no, back you came through the same door with your bass still intact. For a moment I was hopeful you'd decided to sit down and play but instead you slashed Juan's chair in two with a fire axe! Really, Charles, that's destructive. 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."

The charming way he says it, it's like he's paying you a compliment. Feeling honoured, you shake hands and resign.

What do you do after that? You start with the gigs again. Maybe you go down to Boston and play a tiddy at Storyville. And in Boston you meet a very sensitive cat named Nat Hentoff who interviews you on his radio show and turned out to be one of the few white guys you could really talk to in your life. Afterwards you get in the habit of writing to him from time to time when you're feeling the pain in the middle of the night and the larger questions that seem to have no answers loom up before your eyes but Hentoff always digs the meaning of the question and replies, all in caps on yellow paper like a story off the wires.

CHARLIE, THIS IS WHAT I THINK: LOVE, THE DIFFICULTIES OF REAL COMMUNICATION, THE REASON FOR WANTING TO HAVE A REASON FOR STAYING ALIVE, THESE HAVE CONCERNED ME TOO EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER. I LAY NO CLAIM TO HAVING ACHIEVED ANY ROCK-LIKE EQUILIBRIUM NOR TO HAVE ANSWERED THE QUESTIONS FOR ANYONE BUT MYSELF. BUT SO FAR THIS IS WHAT I'VE FOUND. THE REASON FOR HATING OTHERS IS HATE OF ONESELF, FEELING THE SELF IS INADEQUATE IN SOME VAGUE OR SPECIFIC WAY, AND PROJECTING THAT TO OTHER OBJECTS. HATE IS A DESTRUCTIVE EMOTION INCAPABLE OF DOING ANY GOOD OR CREATING ANYTHING AND DESTROYS THE MAN WHO HATES MORE PAINFULLY AND THOROUGHLY THAN THE MAN HE HATES. THE MAN WHO HATES DOESN'T REALIZE EVERYONE ELSE IS AS COMPLEX AS HE KNOWS HIMSELF TO BE. NOT THAT THERE AREN'T MANY PEO-

PLE WHO DO EVIL THINGS AND IN THAT RESPECT ARE EVIL. BUT WHAT MADE THEM THAT WAY? NO ONE IS BORN TO DESTROY. THIS IS SOUNDING MORALISTIC, A TONE I TRY TO AVOID, BUT BECAUSE WE KNOW EACH OTHER SO WELL IF MAINLY THROUGH LETTERS I'LL GO ON. AT THE POINT A GUY BEGINS TO REALIZE THE AMAZING EXTENT OF HIS OWN POTENTIALITY HE BEGINS TO KNOW HE'S BEEN WASTING PAIN AND ENERGY IN BLAMING HIMSELF AND HATING OTHERS FOR THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN, THAT WERE DONE, THAT WERE NOT DONE, TO HIMSELF, TO A RACE, TO A UNIVERSE. AT THAT POINT HE SEES THAT LIFE, AS CHAPLIN SAYS, IS A DESIRE NOT A MEANING, WHICH IS WHY A ROSE OR A BIRD HAS TO BE. AFTER ACCEPTING THE SHEER PLEASURE OF WALKING AND BREATHING AND SEEING A SKY, THEN THE QUESTION OF MEANING ARISES.

FOR ME A MAN'S MEANING, THE REASON HE HAS TO KEEP ON LIVING, IS THAT WERE HE TO LIVE THOUSANDS OF YEARS HE WOULD NEVER FULFILL ALL HIS POSSIBILITIES, NEVER COMMUNICATE OR CREATE ALL HE IS CAPABLE OF. SO HE MUST USE WHAT TIME HE HAS CREATING NOW FOR THE FUTURE AND UTILIZE THE PAST ONLY TO HELP THE FUTURE, NOT AS A RAZOR STROP FOR GUILTS AND FEARS THAT INHIBIT HIS VERY BEING. OR LIKE IT SAID AT THE END OF A LABOR UNION SONG I LIKED A LOT WHEN I WAS A KID: WHAT I MEAN IS, TAKE IT EASY, BUT TAKE IT.

I DON'T KNOW IF THIS HAS MADE SENSE OR IS OF ANY USE BUT IT'S WHAT I THINK.

NAT.



The Fast Buck is packed as usual and several cars with chauffeurs are waiting outside, parked against the mountains of snow piled up in the dark streets, with motors running to keep the drivers warm. My boy is back playing in a small club deep in the warehouse district on the Lower West Side of Manhattan. Bellevue seems far in the past, Dr. Wallach is again in charge of his head and women are his escape from reality.⁷

The club is definitely the place this season for society and college girls from New York and out-of-town who want to have a fling at life via the bandstand or the single male customers who press around the bar and it's nothing wild to walk in on a crowded night and find Mingus at a table with half a dozen girls huddled around him or sitting on his knees or him perching on theirs. The owner, Mr. Caligari, calls him son and his two sons call my boy brother and they've given him a contract saying he can always return with his group anytime he chooses no matter who's playing there. These

⁷Dr. Wallach" is Mingus's pseudonym for Dr. Edmund Pollock, the analyst who treated him after his release from Bellevue Hospital, to which he had voluntarily committed himself in 1958. "The Fast Buck" is a disguise for the Half Note Café, whose owner, Mike Canterino, appears as "Mr. Caligari" in the autobiography.

days Charles feels wholly free and not only as good as any white people but better than most and he's found a musical home, a place to play for people who really seem to want to hear.

But there's lumps in everything in this life. My boy can't help having a hunch that the Police Department really enjoys harassing any club where a healthy integrated feeling is a little too out in the open—like the night he sees through a crack from a cubicle in the men's room a uniformed policeman remove and pocket a bar of soap from the washbasin. As soon as the cop walks out my boy finds himself a sliver, quickly lathers his face and runs out to face Mr. Blue writing up a no-soap-in-the-mens'-room citation. Perhaps he suspects it the night another cop walks up outside the big street window, pulls out his penis and pisses right in front of the customers, or when still another one is seen unobtrusively dropping a cigarette butt on the floor, "discovering" it and then writing out a ticket for violation. Perhaps it's the prescents of money in brown paper bags going out of the place as "sandwiches" to cops on the beat, and what he sees written all over fuzz faces when he's making what some folks call free with the white ladies. Maybe it doesn't go down well either when he talks about these things and doesn't care who hears.

Tonight the tall, blue-eyed student nurse with short blonde hair and the kind of bony face he's always liked is sitting at Table Four with her two girlfriends. They've come all the way in from White Plains to hear Mingus and they're in high spirits. When he joins them between sets there's much laughter over very little. She's in her twenties, her father is a milkman, she loves jazz, her name is Judy. My boy asks if he can drive her home. All the way to *Westchester?*—groovy, but he'll have to take Roxanne and Mary Lou home too, okay? And she flirts and asks him a lot of fresh questions. He loves her jovial attitude. But she becomes quiet and listens with interest when the English critic comes over and asks for an interview. "Do excuse me, Mr. Mingus, but may I ask a question or two for my paper? For instance, what do you feel about jazz?" "Man, just listen, it's all there." "No, actually, they'd like to know what you think in England, just a few words?" "Well . . . I can tell you how I feel tonight anyway. Up to now, I don't think *nobody* has given *nothing* important since Bird died except his contemporaries who were overlooked at the time—Monk, Max, Rollins, Bud, others, maybe even me. Bird was playing then what they're calling *avant-garde* today—putting major sevenths with minor sevenths, playing a fourth away from the key, things like that, and people would say he squeaked. Well, now they hear what those squeaks meant. All this free-form business isn't new—dropping bar lines and all. I was doing it and Duke before me and Jelly Roll before that. I wrote "What Love" back in '42 and played it with Buddy Collette and Britt Woodman and just recently some horn men looked at it and said it couldn't be played—too freaky, too hard."

"How would you characterize the kind of music you play now?"

"There once was a word used—swing. Swing went in one direction, it was linear, and everything had to be played with an obvious pulse and that's very restrictive. But I use the term 'rotary perception.' If you get a mental

picture of the beat existing within a circle you're more free to improvise. People used to think the notes had to fall on the centre of the beats in the bar at intervals like a metronome, with three or four men in the rhythm section accenting the same pulse. That's like parade music or dance music. But imagine a circle surrounding each beat—each guy can play his notes anywhere in that circle and it gives him a feeling he has more space. The notes fall anywhere inside the circle but the original feeling for the beat isn't changed. If one in the group loses confidence, somebody hits the beat again. The pulse is inside you. When you're playing with musicians who think this way you can do anything. Anybody can stop and let the others go on. It's called strolling. In the old days when we got arrogant players on the stand we'd do that—just stop playing and a bad musician would be thrown."

"What about the Mingus extended forms?"

"I've been using extended forms and prolonged chords for years and I wasn't the first with that either. I got ideas from Spanish and Arab music. And much more can be done with pedal points—you know, notes sustained underneath changing harmonies but above these notes the keys can be varied so you get all kinds of effects." My boy put his foot against Judy's under the table. "Is that all?" he asked the Englishman.

"What about British jazz? Have we got the feeling?"

"If you're talking about technique, musicianship, I guess the British can be as good as anybody else. But what do they need to play jazz for? It's the American Negro's tradition; it's his music. White people don't have a right to play it, it's coloured folk music. When I was learning bass with Rheinscha-gen he was teaching me to play classical music. He said I was close but I'd never really get it. So I took Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson records to my next lesson and asked him if he thought *those* artists had got it. He said they were *Negroes trying* to sing music that was foreign to them. Solid, so white society has its own traditions, let 'em leave ours to us. You had your Shakespeare and Marx and Freud and Einstein and Jesus Christ and Guy Lombardo but we came up with *jazz*; don't forget it, and all the pop music in the world today is from that primary cause. British cats listen to our records and copy them, why don't they develop something of their own? White cats take our music and make more money out of it than we ever did or do now! My friend Max Roach has been voted best drummer in many polls but he's offered less than half of what Buddy Rich gets to play the same places—what kind of schitt is that? The commercial people are so busy selling what's hot commercially they're choking to death the goose that's laid all them golden eggs. They killed Lester and Bird and Fats Navarro and they'll kill more, probably me. I'll never make money and I'll always suffer 'cause I shoot off my mouth about agents and crooks and that's all I feel like saying tonight!"

My boy gets up thinking now what did I get into that for? He doesn't like to talk on serious subjects when he's working, it interrupts the natural mood that should sustain itself between sets, so he goes back to the bandstand angry, calls the first number—"Hellview of Bellevue!"—and stomps off a furiously fast tempo. The musicians respond with a great burst of power, the horns run unbelievable frantic phrases leaping up and down octaves, tied to whole-note end phrases. It's an insane set.

At closing time the student nurse and her friends are still waiting. He drives the other girls home first because this Judy laughs a lot and makes him laugh and besides, she's exciting. But she cries a little and touches his heart when she tells him she's just broken up with her boyfriend, whose name was Charles too. They agree that much as they need the opposite gender neither of them will *ever* be in love again and that the ideal life is a peaceful, friendly relationship with plenty of sex. By dawn, still riding around near the student nurses' quarters, they're saying they're obviously the kind of people who should be married to each other.

"What would you do," Judy asks my boy, "if you had your life to live all over again?"

"That's easy," Mingus says. "I'd become a pimp, bigger and better than my cousin Billy Bones out in San Francisco. I wouldn't get involved with music or women at all, other than what they could do for me. My main motive for living would be getting money to buy my way out of a decaying society, that's destroying itself while it tries to figure out what to do with the new kind of 'black' it produced. But I'd have nothing to do with black or white, I'd be a member of the raceless people of this earth. When one part of this uncivilized society got around to blowing up the others I'd be in some other country eating caviar and reading the news for the sole purpose of finding out where to move next to keep one jump ahead of the assholes who want to fight. But I'd keep me a loaded forty-five in event of any personal affront and my whores would be non-racist and agree fully with me and they'd carry forty-five automatics too. I state forty-fives because that means business. I wouldn't be carrying a gun to bluff—if I had to use it I'd want it to make a full-size hole that couldn't be patched. I'd live to enjoy life, not to lecture or preach. I wouldn't believe in any bullshit like 'love' and I wouldn't get involved with any woman who talked it—any woman in my company would have to admit that what she loved was money. I'd play music as a hobby and only for close friends in the raceless set. I'd study bass for kicks, I wouldn't get involved in commercial competition. I might even become a junkie if my bank roll could stand it and I felt like that scene. That's what I'd do if I had my life to live all over again."

The girl Judy laughs. She's entertained and amused and she doesn't believe a word of it, otherwise she never would have married him and borne his two youngest children, would she?