

"Epitaph" Charles Mingus' Foresight of Jazz

Authors : Christel Elisabeth Bonin

Abstract : The score of the 2 ½ hour 'magnum opus' named 'Epitaph' was reconstructed 10 years after Charles Mingus' death in 1979. Most of the movements were probably composed in the late 1950s. As the finale was missing, Gunther Schuller, the conductor of the world premiere in 1989, decided to improvise one with the orchestra, using Mingus as a guide. The aim of this paper is to analyze 'Main Score Part I' and 'Main Score Part II' and to look into the score of Mingus' reconstructed compositions under particular observation of the new finale, 'Main Score Reprise'. There, Mingus left instructions for a return to the opening section of 'Epitaph'. By examining 'Epitaph' in the historical context of Jazz between 1955 to 1967 and the 1980s and comparing the finale of 'Epitaph', created - or better said: improvised - by the musicians of the 1989 world premiere with the opening section, at first it will be interesting to discover at which point Gunther Schuller followed Mingus creative process and brought it to life in 1989. Finally, it will be speculated if Charles Mingus composition still represents a foresight of Jazz nearly 30 years after its creation.

Keywords : epitaph, Charles Mingus, Gunter Schuller, jazz reception, bebop, hardbop, Duke Ellington, black, brown and beige, African-American music, free-jazz

Conference Title : ICME 2016 : International Conference on Musicology and Ethnomusicology

Conference Location : Amsterdam, Netherlands

Conference Dates : May 12-13, 2016