

music review

Charlie Mingus

12 Nov 2013

Tijuana Moods

[Vinyl](#)

RCA/Speakers Corner



What would sound like processed cheese in any one else's hands comes across with verve, wit and an effortless joie de vivre when Charlie Mingus takes the reins. The title alone might be enough to put many off today but that's only because it's associate with so much schmaltz, it must have been a bit more hip back in 1957 when Mingus recorded this in RCA Victor's Studio A, New York. It took the company five years to release it and yet still sounded so fresh that Downbeat gave it maximum honours.

The name is truly indicative of the inspirational source, these are Mexican folk songs in essence and not disguised as anything else, yet Mingus and his ensemble imbue them with an intensity rarely captured on record. The band consists of Shafi Hadi (listed as Curtis Porter, alto sax), Jimmy Knepper (trombone), Clarence Shaw (trumpet), Bill Triglia (piano), Frankie Dunlop (percussion), Danny Richmond (drums), Ysabel Morel (castanets) and Lonnie Elder on vocals, of which there aren't many. Not exactly an all star line up but as Mingus put it Shaw was a "super-improviser" and Knepper a "technical ace". The original sleeve notes indicate that Mingus was going through the doldrums when he wrote these tunes and had visited Tijuana as a sort of antidote, this state of mind is what gives the flamboyant music its inner depth. The five tunes may not sound like the blues but that is their core, the liveliness is a diversion, a superbly played one that nearly convinces the listener. But if that was all there was too it wouldn't sound so engaging today. Speaker's Corner have done a superb job with this reissue, it sounds dynamic, open and vibrant. The original recording was top notch but you won't get the energy from any of the digital issues that are available, nor any but the rarest vinyl pressings.

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1