

# Eddie Preston: Texas Trumpeter Fallen Through the Cracks

Dave Oliphant







Identifying a jazz musician's place of birth has interested me ever since my parents gave me a copy of Leonard Feather's 1962 *The New Edition of The Encyclopedia of Jazz*. Some thirty years later it became essential for me to know which musicians hailed from my home state of Texas, once I had taken on the task of writing about Texans in jazz history. As a result of this quest for knowledge, I discovered, among other things, that guitarist, trombonist, and composer-arranger Eddie Durham was born and raised in San Marcos, home to Texas State University.

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Although I never worked my way systematically through the Feather encyclopedia or any subsequent volumes devoted to the identification of musicians' places and dates of birth, I mistakenly felt confident that I had checked every musician on any album I had acquired over the years to see if he or she was a native Texan. Following the 1996 publication of *Texan Jazz*, my survey of Texas jazz musicians, I discovered a few Texans and their recordings that I had not been aware of previously. When the opportunity arose, I included them in other publications, such as my 2002 study *The Early Swing Era, 1930 to 1941*, and my essay "Texan Jazz, 1920-1950," included in *The Roots of Texas Music*.

Despite my best efforts to trace the origins of the many jazz musicians I chronicled, it took years before I realized that Eddie Preston (a trumpeter who was born in Dallas in 1925 and died in Palm Coast, Florida, in 2009) was a native of the Lone Star State. It was not that I had never seen Preston's name nor heard him play, but simply that he was not listed in the Feather encyclopedia and was not identified as a Texan on the 1963 album *Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus*, the one recording on which I had read his name at the time that I was writing *Texan Jazz* and my other books and articles prior to 2015.

One factor that greatly affected my oversight, and therefore my omission of Preston as a Texan from my earlier writings, is that he does not take a solo on any of the Mingus album's six tracks, but only performs as a member of the ensemble. Not being able to hear Preston as a soloist meant that I was not interested in him as a jazz performer, since my primary focus has been on a musician's abilities as an improviser rather than as a participant who only performs as part of a group. Because Preston does not solo, he also goes unmentioned in the liner notes by music critic Nat Hentoff. However, even if Hentoff had referred to Preston, he would

not necessarily have mentioned his birthplace, since some commentators do not believe that a musician's place of birth has much bearing on his or her artistry.

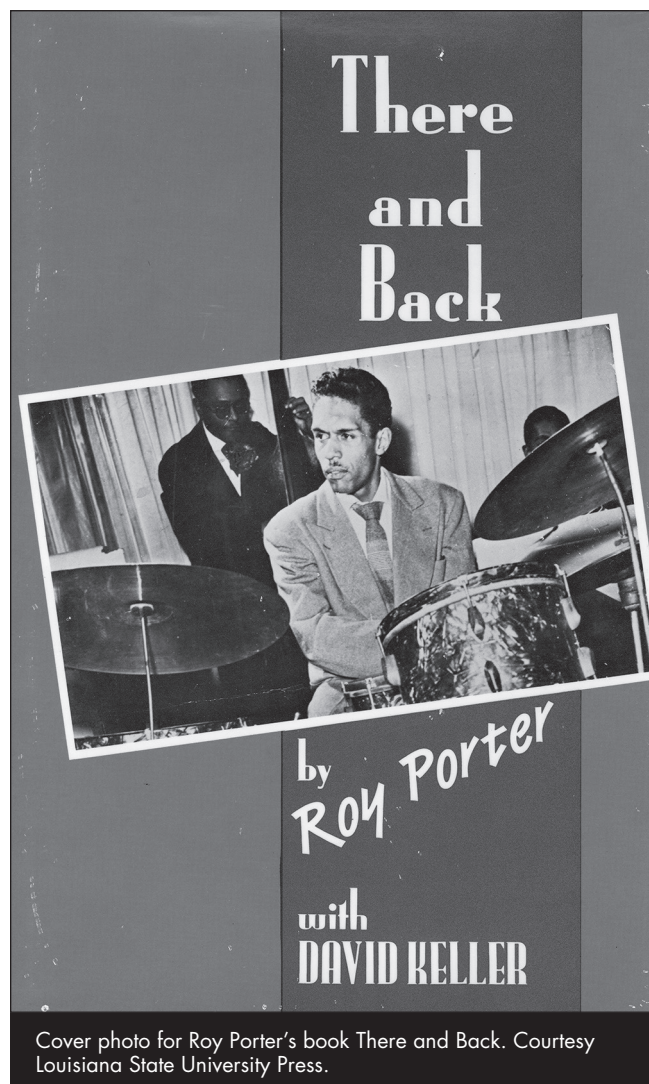
Of the three trumpeters on the Mingus album, Eddie Preston is the only one whose name and work were unfamiliar to me, for I knew that Rolf Ericson was a native of Sweden, and Richard Williams was born in Galveston, Texas, in 1931. I wrote about Williams's career in *Texan Jazz*, and in particular discussed his outstanding solo on "Hora Decubitus" from the 1963 Mingus album, which Hentoff praises in his liner notes.

Because I was so impressed by Williams's solo and because of the regional emphasis of my own writings, I took a special interest in knowing if perhaps Williams was a Texan. Even though he, like Preston, is not listed in the Feather encyclopedia, I made a special effort to discover Williams's birthplace. In the process, I uncovered other recordings on which he was a soloist, including his own 1960 album entitled *New Horn in Town*. Consequently, Williams appears prominently in *Texan Jazz*, just as Preston would have, had I been more diligent in my research.

Although I heard Preston as one of the sidemen on the Mingus album, without being able to hear him solo I had no way of judging his work as an improviser and therefore did not investigate beyond the Feather encyclopedia as to his place and date of birth. Not only did I lose an opportunity to discuss Preston in *Texan Jazz*, but as a result of not seeking information on the trumpeter in sources other than the Feather encyclopedia, I was unable to include Preston, along with Williams, among the native Texans who had recorded or worked with Charles Mingus, such as Booker Ervin of Denison, John Handy of Houston, and Leo Wright of Wichita Falls.

Much to my chagrin, I could have identified Preston as a Texan as early as the first decade of the present century while working on *KD a Jazz Biography*, my 2012 versified life of Texas trumpeter Kenny Dorham, who was born in Post Oak, Texas, in 1924. From reading Dorham's memoir, "Fragments of an Autobiography," I learned that, in 1941, during his first year at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, Dorham had not made the Wiley Collegians dance band. However, the following year, he took Eddie Preston's place when Preston left to join the Ernie Fields Orchestra.

Later, while reading *There and Back*, a 1991 memoir by jazz drummer Roy Porter, I again found Eddie Preston mentioned among members of the 1941 Wiley Collegians, although Preston's name still did not register with me as that of the trumpeter included on the 1963 Mingus album. Being interested at the time only in Dorham's career, I did not read the entire Porter memoir and as a result missed out on finding in the final section of the book, entitled "Colleagues," that



Cover photo for Roy Porter's book *There and Back*. Courtesy Louisiana State University Press.

Preston recounts his subsequent career and speaks of the period when he and Porter were members of a number of prominent bands in Los Angeles.

Prior to his time in California, Preston toured with the orchestra of fellow Dallas native, Oran "Hot Lips" Page, which included performances as far away as New York. Over the following decades, Preston played with many jazz groups, including the Roy Porter Orchestra, which counted among its members Art Farmer, Jimmy Knepper, and Eric Dolphy, the latter taking a remarkable solo on the same 1963 Mingus album. Preston concludes the three-paragraph recollection of his time in Los Angeles by stating "There was nothing but good music around. I consider myself fortunate to have been a part of this scene and thank the Lord for being at the right place at the right time. This scene and the knowledge that I received with the Roy Porter band prepared me for the bands of Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, and all



the others that I worked for.” Nevertheless, even if I had read Preston’s account of his career, I still would not have known that he was a Texan, since he does not mention the fact, nor does Roy Porter.

In 2016, after reading the last section of *There and Back*, I found another contributor to the “Colleagues” section of Porter’s memoir whose name I recalled from writing *Texan Jazz*. This was Maurice Simon, a tenor and baritone saxophonist born in Houston in 1929, whose work with another Houston saxophonist, Illinois Jacquet, I had lauded in *Texan Jazz* without realizing that Simon himself was from the Bayou City. Although in Simon’s “Colleagues” entry he does not indicate his birthplace or year of birth, I found both when I checked his name in my 1962 Feather encyclopedia. I was again disappointed in myself for not having made a more systematic use of the Feather resource for information on Texans in jazz, and of course there were other sources that had come in the wake of Feather’s groundbreaking encyclopedia, which I also could have consulted. Eventually, I found crucial information in the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, including a biography of Preston, references to two interview-articles on the musician, and a book on Mingus by Brian Priestley, which I had used in my research for *Texan Jazz* but which, once again, does not identify Preston as a Texan.

Everything that I eventually learned about Eddie Preston followed from my hearing him take a solo on a CD that I purchased in 2015. Entitled simply *Charles Mingus* and issued in 2002 as part of Savoy’s “timeless” series, the recording features three groups—the Charles Mingus Sextet (not including Preston) on six tracks recorded in 1954; the Wally Cirillo Quartet on four tracks recorded in 1955; and the Charles Mingus Group (including Preston) with Toshiyuki Miyama and His New Herd on the eleventh and final track recorded in 1971.

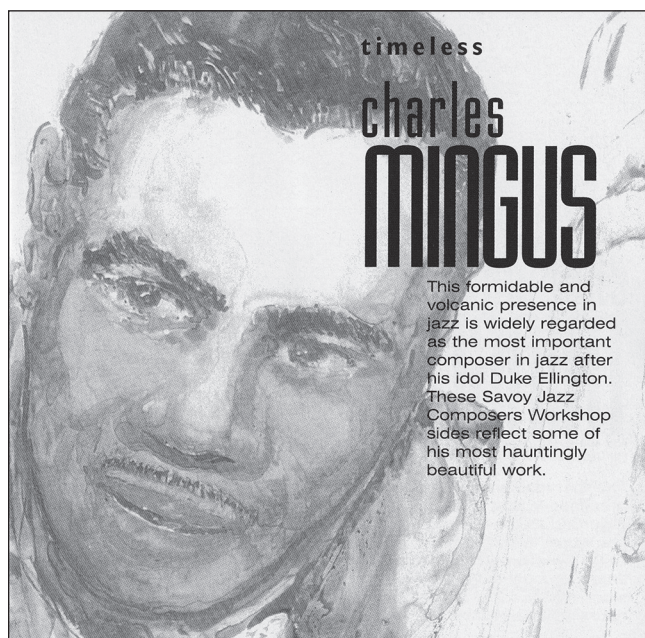
I had listened to the CD when I first acquired it, but I paid little or no attention to the last track. Only in early 2016 did I listen again to the CD and was suddenly struck by the trumpet solo on the final piece, entitled “O.P.” (a Mingus composition whose title initials are those of his fellow bassist, Oscar Pettiford). I could not identify the trumpet player as any Mingus sideman whom I had heard before and began to search for his name in the small print of the liner notes. After reading Preston’s name, I checked for him in the Feather encyclopedia but found that he was not listed, which may have happened when I first saw his name on the 1963 Mingus album.

At some point, I remembered having seen Preston’s name among the personnel on that same Mingus recording. Checking the liner notes to *Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus*, I found that he was listed in the trumpet section along with Rolf Ericson and Richard Williams. It also occurred to

me that I had included his name in *KD* on discussing Kenny Dorham’s having taken Preston’s place in the Wiley Collegians. So, I began searching for additional information about Eddie Preston and hoped to find more solos of the same caliber as his performance on “O.P.”

On the 2002 *Charles Mingus* CD, the tune “O.P.,” arranged by Mingus’s pianist Jaki Byard, was taken from the 1971 album, *Charles Mingus with Orchestra*. This recording consisted of three Mingus compositions, the other two being “The Man Who Never Sleeps” and “Portrait.” “O.P.” opens with the driving tenor saxophone of Bobbie (or Bobby) Jones. Jones was a native of Louisville, Kentucky, who prior to joining Mingus in 1970, had played almost entirely with white big bands like those of Ray McKinley, Hal McIntyre, Jack Teagarden, and Woody Herman. In the setting of this big-band arrangement by Byard, Jones exhibits a celebratory swing, just as Preston does on his trumpet solo that follows.

In a review of the original 1971 recording, Ken Dryden finds “the music is rather conservative sounding for a Mingus record date,” although he does say of Jones and Preston that they “valiantly carry on.” A reference to the same recording appears in Brian Priestley’s book, *Mingus: A Critical Biography*, in which the British critic comments that “Despite the simple but effective arrangements commissioned from Byard prior to the [1971] tour [of Japan], and despite the comparative lack of soloists forcing Mingus to feature himself on bass once again, *Charles Mingus with Orchestra* is one of his more forgettable albums.”



Cover photo for Timeless Charles Mingus album.  
Courtesy Savoy Records, [www.savoyjazz.com](http://www.savoyjazz.com).

While Preston's solo may not be as experimental as the work of other trumpeters in the Mingus workshops, such as Clarence Shaw and Ted Curson, it does continue the powerhouse line represented by fellow Texan Richard Williams's solo on "Hora Decubitus" from the 1963 album. With a strong, full sound, Preston blows a flowing, happy stream of varied melodic phrases in keeping with what Dryden calls an "energetic tribute to" Oscar Pettiford. Preston's facility and lyrical phrasing are reminiscent of Clifford Brown. Although there is nothing particularly adventuresome about Preston's solo, it is a robust response to the Mingus tune and shows that he could hold up the tradition of fine trumpeters like Curson and Williams, who both performed on Mingus recordings of his rousing "Better Git It in Your Soul."

Even if "O.P." is not in the thrilling church revival vein of "Better Git It," Preston had already recorded impressively on another Mingus date, just three months earlier, when he performed in styles more typical of Mingus rather than in the

he is supported by the Toshiyuki Miyama big band as the trumpeter ascends higher and higher until he ends with his highest note and the big band punches out an abrupt ending.

Bobby Jones's clarinet solo is more impressive than when he solos on tenor on "Portrait." Creating a wide variety of clarinet sounds, from chalumeau to high, piercing pitches, Jones explores the Mingus tune with greater imagination than he does on any other solo of his that I have heard. Sato next contributes a nice piano solo, which is far better than his effort on "Portrait." While Preston's slow opening notes on "The Man Who Never Sleeps" represent the very effective ballad side of the trumpeter's repertoire, which was the form that he preferred, I still find his solo on "O.P." more noteworthy, and his ear-catching chorus may have been why this particular Mingus piece was included on the CD *Charles Mingus*; certainly its having caught my ear led to this belated endeavor to give Preston his due as one of the important members of what has been termed the "Mingus Dynasty."

## Preston had been around for years, working with Ellington, Basie, and just about everybody.

big-band tradition of a Woody Herman Herd. Finally, it is to Preston's credit that, as noted before, he does not sound like any other Mingus trumpeter but has his own conception and execution that make him stand out as a soloist in his own right.

As to the other two tracks on *Charles Mingus with Orchestra*, Preston does not solo on "Portrait," but on "The Man Who Never Sleeps" he opens and closes this Mingus composition, which is a very slow ballad that also features solos by Jones and pianist Masahiko Sato. Supported only by the pulse of Mingus's bass and then briefly by Sato's piano chords, Preston first sounds one long note and then continues with mostly long held emotive tones, some slightly bent or with added filigree to lend greater feeling to Mingus's affective melody; later the trumpeter goes into double-time, with his slow melodic and then double-time improvisatory passages enduring in total more than five minutes of the 16 minutes and 29 seconds of the recorded track. Preston returns for the final four minutes to move into the upper register, where at times his second solo appearance turns into a bravura performance, especially when, with two minutes remaining, he plays a kind of classical cadenza. At one point during Preston's first solo he is backed by the saxes, and with his second solo,

As for Eddie Preston's broader career, the *New Grove Dictionary* states that, while in Los Angeles, he had studied privately during 1944 and 1946, and at the University of California in 1946, before and during a stint from 1945 to 1947 with the Johnny Otis band. The Eddie Preston Discography on-line ([discogs.com/artist/356400-EddiePreston](http://discogs.com/artist/356400-EddiePreston)) includes an extensive list of the trumpeter's recorded appearances, beginning in 1955 when he first recorded with the Lionel Hampton band, with which he also would record in subsequent years.

At the same time that Preston recorded with Mingus in 1963, he was also on a Count Basie album, *This Time by Basie*, but the trumpeter is not featured as a soloist, which is also the case on a 1971 Duke Ellington recording, *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*. In general, Preston was just one of three or four trumpets in the big bands of Basie and Ellington and rarely soloed. On the 1971 Ellington album, he is in the company of a fellow Texan, trumpeter Money Johnson of Tyler, but neither Preston nor Johnson solos on *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse*. However, Johnson does solo on "Blem," a tune included on the 1969 album *Up in Duke's Workshop*, on which Texas trombonist Tyree Glenn of Corsicana is also present.

According to the Preston discography, he, too, is on this album.

Although I have yet to hear any of the Lionel Hampton albums on which Preston appears, it seems likely that he was not featured as a soloist or was rarely given a solo spot, judging from the evidence on the Basie and Ellington sides and also from a 1971 article by British jazz critic Max Jones, published in the magazine, *Melody Maker*. Why Preston was not given more opportunities to solo is a question raised by Jones's article, and one that had come to my mind before reading his piece, after having heard on "O.P." the trumpeter's obvious ability as an improviser. The answer in part seems to be that Preston was lower down on the totem pole in big bands, like Basie's and Ellington's, compared to such better-known trumpeters as Al Aarons, Sonny Cohn, Thad Jones, Cootie Williams, Money Johnson, and Duke Ellington's son, Mercer. However, Preston's own words in the Max Jones article offer another point of view as to why he was often relegated to a section member, playing at times the lead parts but rarely soloing.

In the Max Jones *Melody Maker* piece, entitled "Preston: a leading question," the critic reports on his breakfast conversation with the trumpeter at the end of October 1971. Here Preston appears as an aggrieved artist who cannot understand why he has not been given more solo opportunities, stating flatly that he has none with Ellington, whose band he was with at the time. Jones reluctantly contradicts the trumpeter, since he has recently heard Preston solo with the Ellington Orchestra on an arrangement of "How High the Moon." The trumpeter declares that he hates the song, and remarks that "If that's all I'm allowed to do, I'd rather do nothing and just play my parts." He does add that he has "a chorus and a quarter on 'Upper Manhattan Medical Group,' if and when it's called, and I enjoy that." Even though Jones mentions hearing Preston play the high notes on "Rockin' in Rhythm" and "Take the 'A' Train," Jones says that is not his bag. When asked by Jones what is, Preston replies "ballads."

Preston continues, "Once or twice with this band I did 'Prelude to a Kiss,' which was a good number for me and a nice arrangement, too. And I happen to have a good sound on trumpet. Like I say, I know what I can do and what I can't." He also tells Jones that he is no longer given a solo on Ellington's "Prelude to a Kiss" because it was originally for saxophonist Johnny Hodges, and another member of the band asked the Duke not to give it to him. When Preston performed previously with Ellington, he had played all the lead parts. At that time, Preston had not been as concerned about not soloing. However, he points out that, more recently, Money Johnson does most of the leads, and another trumpeter, Harold Minerve, who has only been with the band for eight

weeks, plays a featured solo. By contrast, Preston has been with Ellington for about a year but rarely, if ever, is allowed to solo. When Jones suggests to Preston that he ask the Duke for a solo, Preston replies that "he wouldn't ask for [one]. 'I figure if a man wants to hear you, he'll give you something to play'."

Preston goes on to contrast his experience as an Ellington sideman with his time with both Mingus and Basie, in terms of pay and artistic fulfillment. He says Mingus "let me play and he paid me well," explaining that he earned more from four Mingus one-hour shows than from fourteen Ellington two-hour concerts. As for the Mingus compositions, which he acknowledges were difficult, he tells Jones that "You had to have a memory and ability to think. Chord structures were so unorthodox; [but] that's got to be more interesting than playing the blues on three changes."

As for Basie, Preston recalls that, "One thing I like about Count, he kept up with the things: artistic arrangements, good tunes, just beautiful. We had a different working arrangement, too. With Basie we were on salary. In this [Ellington] band, the only time you get a weekly wage is when you're touring. Otherwise, if you work only two nights in a week that's all the money you get." In Preston's final comments, he notes that if a musician is a reed player, he has plenty of solo features, but with Ellington, unless a trumpeter is Cootie Williams, he has few if any chances to solo. This last point reveals that a leader's preference for one musician over another is but one of a number of reasons for Eddie Preston having largely remained unrecognized as a soloist.

Prior to the Max Jones article, another British jazz critic, Valerie Wilmer, had written in regard to Eddie Preston that, "under-rated has been applied to so many third-rate musicians that it's easy to forget what it really means." She admits that the "trumpeter is never going to win any poll and he knows it," but "there's no reason why under-rated should mean overlooked." Wilmer says she first heard Preston "three summers back" playing fluegelhorn with trumpeter Howard McGhee's rehearsal band. It was then that she had "made a note" of Eddie's name, because "Preston played fat, juicy phrases with the bounce and verve associated with Clark Terry yet with a more boppish frame of reference. He also had lyricism to spare." She goes on to state that "Preston had been around for years, working with Ellington, Basie, and just about everybody out here and the mark of the trumpet in his embouchure tells of the playing hours he's put in, yet in spite of name bands and world tours, he is still only a name in record personnels and not a flesh and blood artist to reckon with."

Upon interviewing Preston, Wilmer found that he lamented not having remained permanently active as a jazz musician, instead of doing studio work and for six years performing

“nothing but soapbox operas!” Preston commented that “[a] lot of leaders don’t realise that playing with a big band is different to a small group where the embouchure is concerned. If you’ve been off the horn for two or three days you can’t come on like gangbusters all of a sudden!” Even though he found his work with Mingus demanding, in part because the composer-leader did not take into consideration the little rehearsal time that was sometimes devoted to new tunes and did not give the trumpeter time to rest his embouchure, especially when there were high notes to be played after having performed for an extended period of time, he was grateful that Mingus had given him “a chance to be heard.”

In 1970, Preston finally would be recorded as a soloist perhaps more fully than at any other time in his long career. The occasion was a Mingus recording session held in Paris on October 31. This was during what music critic Stéphane Ollivier describes as “a single, sleepless night” in a “deserted Decca studio on the rue Beaujon, a stone’s throw from the

Mingus recording session in Paris, which is but one instance of the congruence of a historical event and the participation of a Texas jazz musician.

In the liner notes to the 2007 CD reissue of the Paris recording session, Stéphane Ollivier goes on to say that “this particular studio date was long considered minor in the Mingus discography when compared with the masterpieces he achieved in maturity. And yet, from both a historical and a musical standpoint, this unexpected session—it was anything but premeditated—undeniably stands apart in the bassist’s work; originally released as two records (*Pithecanthropus* and *Blue Bird*), and here reissued for the first time in its entire, intimate dramaturgy, the recordings constitute precious and moving testimony to one of the least documented periods of his exceptional career; with hindsight, it was a period that saw the decisive moment when, after years of doubt and silence, Mingus found a new confidence and faith in his music; it was the instant when he began his final resurrection.”

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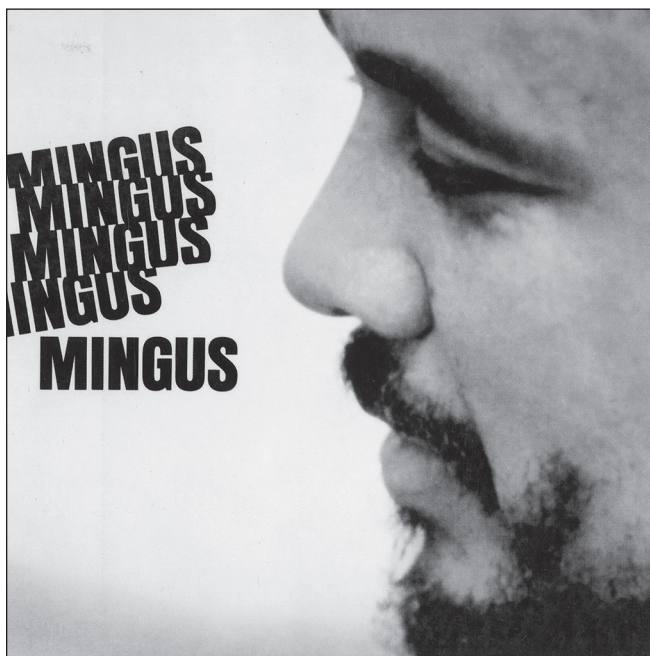
Champs-Élysées,” with the session set up for the American label “at a few hours’ notice by Pierre Jaubert, the day after a concert given by the [Mingus] sextet at the TNP [Théâtre Nationale Populaire].”

In my writings on jazz history, I have always tried to bring out the historical significance of recordings and to identify the Texas musicians who participated in such recording sessions. For this reason, I have sought to distinguish my fellow Texans as a way of appreciating their role in the making of jazz and of understanding what may be especially Texan about their contribution to the development of the art form. Again, for most jazz historians, a musician’s origins are not as important as his or her artistic output. This may hold true as well for the musicians themselves. Eddie Preston appears not to have considered himself first and foremost a Texas musician. He did not mention his origins in the “Colleagues” section of *There and Back*, and he credits his time in Los Angeles as being of primary importance to his musical development. Nevertheless, I am convinced that his roots in Dallas and his time at Wiley College helped determine, at least to some extent, the style and quality of his playing, particularly during the 1970

In the liner notes to a 1973 two-disc vinyl set of the same Paris recording, entitled *Reincarnation of a Lovebird*, issued on the Prestige label, Stephen Davis had already considered this Paris session of special significance. “I think that every record Mingus has made over the last twenty-five years is important, some more than others, but none more so than these four sides.”

As Ollivier explains, it had been six years since Mingus had been in Paris, and he returned after spending “five long years prostrate and in silence” from “the effects of an interminable existential and artistic crisis . . . physically diminished, mentally exhausted . . . at the end of a slow, deathly process.” The composer-bassist’s “moral strength to try and resurface” had been bolstered by several events at the end of 1969—the publication of the first excerpts from his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*; a performance by Ellington of “The Clown,” a composition by Mingus as the Duke’s “spiritual son”; and a reissue of early Mingus recordings on the Candid label. It was not clear, however, if Mingus could lead a band with the same “legendary aggressiveness of his high-power drive” and “give his inimitable, luxuriant, spontaneous music the epic dimension of the masterpieces he’d produced in the past[.]”





Cover photo for Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus album. Courtesy MCA Records.

Even though his present band, with Jaki Byard on piano, Preston on trumpet, Charles McPherson on alto, Bobby Jones on tenor, Dannie Richmond on drums, and Mingus on bass, “had only a few concerts under its belt,” it had been seven years since Mingus’s last studio session, the one that produced *Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus* in 1963, and he “had rediscovered the desire to play” and needed the money offered for a Paris recording. The Mingus band itself was “essentially his old guard,” since it included Richmond, his drummer since 1957, and Byard, a mainstay for many years, and “in varying degrees, [all] had been members of the Mingus nebulae for a decade,” with the exception of Bobby Jones, who “provided a touch of the unexpected in this highly classical sextet.”

Of the six tunes on *Charles Mingus in Paris*, Preston solos and appears prominently on all but “I Left My Heart in San Francisco,” which is a feature for the bandleader’s bass. The trumpeter is featured on Mingus’s “Love Is a Dangerous Necessity” and exhibits his prowess from the opening bars when he begins in the upper register of his horn and then moves on up even higher to hold his highest note for six seconds. The recording of the piece is truncated abruptly after 4 minutes and 34 seconds, but during 4 minutes and 4 seconds of the track, Preston demonstrates his ability to perform a wide range of technical and musical maneuvers, all with an appealing blues flavor.

It is clear from this one piece why Mingus entrusted Preston with the performance of his demanding music. However, with

“*Pithecanthropus Erectus*,” a truly classic Mingus piece, which he had not previously re-recorded from its first recording in 1956, Preston’s solo is perhaps the least inspired of his improvisations from the 1970 Paris session. McPherson’s alto solo is also less engaging when compared with the playing of altoist Jackie McLean on this Mingus composition described by the composer-leader himself in the 1956 liner notes as a “jazz tone poem . . . of the first man to stand erect—how proud he was, considering himself the ‘first’ to ascend from all fours, pounding his chest and preaching his superiority over the animals still in a prone position. Overcome with self-esteem, he goes out to rule the world, if not the universe, but both his own failure to realize the inevitable emancipation of those he sought to enslave, and his greed in attempting to stand on a false security, deny him not only the right of ever being a man, but finally destroy him completely.”

Basically, the composition can be divided into four movements: (1) evolution, (2) superiority-complex, (3) decline, and (4) destruction. Jaki Byard’s solo is quite soulful, and Bobby Jones recaptures something of J.R. Monterose’s superb tenor on the 1956 recording and even adds his own little surprises, which evoke the whole range of the Mingus poem’s tonal depictions of man’s rise and fall. (Notably, both Monterose and Jones, as well as trombonist Jimmy Knepper, were white jazz musicians who proved quite capable of helping Mingus express his frequent musical rage in the face of prejudice and racism.)

Eddie Preston’s part within the ensemble does contribute greatly to the performance of this still exciting Mingus composition, with his open horn and at times hand-in-bell or wa-wa mute a stimulating force, especially in the tone poem’s closing measures. Since the 1956 recording only features alto and tenor saxophones, the addition of trumpet does produce a somewhat different ensemble sound, and since there is no trumpet on the original, Preston’s solo cannot be compared with that by another trumpeter. Even though it is difficult to displace the wondrous original recording from one’s auditory recall, in the end the two recordings are both valid. Brian Priestley has commented that comparison with the original *Pithecanthropus* makes the performance “seem almost polite, despite flashes of brilliance from Preston,” and Stephen Davis has called attention to “Preston’s trumpet gently laying a cloak of enchantatory mojo over the brew.”

On each of the other three pieces on the Paris recording, Preston turns in his finest solos of the session. “Peggy’s Blue Skylight” is a piece on which the trumpeter’s solo contributes a relaxed swing and a tender feeling for its moving Mingus melody. “Reincarnation of a Lovebird,” a typical Mingus composition with its frequent time shifts, leads after the



beginning bars into Preston's solo, which offers its own moving time changes. The trumpeter hits some real winners as he works his way into Mingus's touching love tune. Jones's solo is especially fine here, while Preston's trumpet is crucial to the emotive ending of the whole piece, and he does not disappoint, for his playing is totally flawless and wholly in tune with the saxes.

Preston's very best solos come on Mingus's tribute to Charlie Parker, entitled "Blue Bird." Here the trumpeter really digs into this blues, showing off as he does so his full, warm sound and his impressive technique in all registers of his instrument. This is definitely his most evocative and unified improvisation of the session. All the solos by the Mingus members are deeply felt expressions of the group's homage to the great innovator and bebop genius, and after McPherson's alto solo, Preston returns for another go at the blues, and the second time around he is equally moving, with his high trumpet work demonstrating his total mastery of his horn and his ability to move the listener through a range of emotions. Preston also has the final telling note of this splendid piece of deep-down blues. Ollivier calls Preston's performance "a haunting, sumptuously crepuscular blues on which . . . holding back, [he] allows us to hear a nocturnal, brassy solo that is his most beautiful contribution of the evening."

The Mingus Paris session may have been the high point of Eddie Preston's recording career, so far as his soloing is concerned, but he would continue to record with a variety of other groups. In 1978, Preston appeared on a Roland Kirk album entitled *Boogie-Woogie String Along For Real*, and although he does not have a solo as such, he can be heard in the title tune playing fills in between Kirk's track-long performance backed by a string section, percussion, and Preston's trumpet, at times improvising simultaneously with the tenor saxophonist.

In 1979, Preston took his most powerful solo that I have heard on the Archie Shepp album entitled *Attica Blues Big Band Live at the Palais Des Glaces*, also recorded in Paris. His extended solo here demonstrates that, surely in 1963, when Preston was not given a solo on the Mingus album of that year, he was fully capable of some of the fire that is heard in Richard Williams's dynamite solo on "Hora Decubitus." On Shepp's bossa-nova treatment of "Hi-Fly," Preston produces a mature solo that features him all over his horn, offering along with his great technique in the upper register, and rapid, flawless passages high and low, the lyricism which Valerie Wilmer had praised in 1970. Following Preston's solo performance, the listener can hear the enthusiastic applause from a live audience, which, once again, makes one wonder why Preston was not featured more often as a soloist.

Although there may be more solos on the many albums on which he appeared together with such musicians as McCoy Tyner and Sonny Stitt, on innumerable albums by Ellington, and on Mingus albums for French and German labels that I have been unable to hear, it is clear on the basis of the few recordings discussed here that Eddie Preston was a formidable musician. Both as a section leader and, when given the opportunity, as a bold soloist, his work serves as an object lesson for a historian like myself who overlooked his impressive career through my less than ideal system of researching Texan jazz. ★

## Notes

- 1 Leonard Feather, *The New Edition of The Encyclopedia of Jazz* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1962).
- 2 Dave Oliphant, *Texan Jazz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); *The Early Swing Era, 1930 to 1941* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002); *The Roots of Texas Music*, ed., Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2003).
- 3 Charles Mingus, *Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus* (Impulse IMPD-170, 1995). This is the CD version of the original 1963 vinyl edition, Impulse A-54.
- 4 See *Texan Jazz*, 272. I included Rolf Ericson in my book *KD a Jazz Biography* (San Antonio: Wings Press, 2012), 3, 146-148.
- 5 For my discussion of Ervin, Handy, Williams, and Wright, see "The Mingus Dynasty," Chapter 18 of *Texan Jazz*, and for Wright, see also "Texas Bebop Messengers to the World: Kenny Dorham and Leo Wright," in my *Jazz Mavericks of the Lone Star State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007). The "Texas Bebop Messengers" essay was originally published in *The Journal of Texas Music History*, No. 1, Vol. 1, Spring 2001.
- 6 See *KD a Jazz Biography* in footnote 4 above.
- 7 Kenny Dorham, "Fragments of an Autobiography," in *Down Beat Music Yearbook* (Chicago, 1970).
- 8 Roy Porter, with David Keller, *There and Back* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 40.
- 9 Preston does not specifically mention that in 1949 he and Porter recorded as part of a Charles Mingus 22-piece Bebop Band, which included a number of Stan Kenton sidemen. Two members of the band, trombonist Jimmy Knepper and multi-woodwind musician Eric Dolphy, would be featured on later Mingus albums. See *Charles Mingus: Complete 1945-1949 West Coast Recordings* (The Jazz Factory, 22825, 2001).
- 10 Preston appears on Roy Porter's Arista Records album, *Black California*, recorded on January 19 and February 23, 1949, but he only performs as a member of the ensemble.
- 11 Porter, *There and Back*, 159.
- 12 *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd edition, edited by Barry Kernfeld (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, Inc., 2002), Vol. 3, 325.
- 13 *Charles Mingus* (Savoy SVY 17132, 2002), liner notes by Bill Milkowski. The first ten tracks were recorded by Savoy and the eleventh is credited in the Charles Mingus Discography Project ([www.jazzdisco.org/charles-mingus](http://www.jazzdisco.org/charles-mingus)) as having been recorded by Nippon Columbia.
- 14 *Charles Mingus with Orchestra* (Denon Records DC8565, 1971).
- 15 Ken Dryden, *Allmusic Review*, a review cited in and accessible through a Wikipedia entry on *Charles Mingus with Orchestra*.
- 16 Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), 184.
- 17 For Williams's performance on "Hora Decubitus," see *Texan Jazz*, 268, 272.
- 18 Charles Mingus, *Better Git It in Your Soul* (Classic Jazz, 1013, 1960). The name of the Mingus title tune changed after the 1960 recording with Curson to "Better Get Hit in Yo' Soul" on the 1963 recording with Richard Williams.
- 19 *Mingus Dynasty* is the title of the 1959 Mingus album from Columbia (CL 1440), whose subtitle is *Charles Mingus and His Jazz Groups*. The personnel on *Mingus Dynasty* includes Texans Booker Ervin, John Handy, and Richard Williams. The album title was later the name for a posthumous group of former Mingus sidemen, organized by his wife, Susan Graham Mingus, for the purpose of perpetuating the bassist-composer's music. See Priestley, 225.
- 20 Count Basie, *This Time by Basie* (Reprise 6070, 1963); Duke Ellington, *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse* (New York, 1971; Fantasy OJCCD-645-2, remixed 1975).
- 21 Duke Ellington, *Up in Duke's Workshop* (Pablo Records 2310-815, 1979). In *Texan Jazz* I identify both Johnson and Glenn as Texans, and even though the Preston discography lists him on this Ellington recording, the copy that I consulted in the Fine Arts Library at the University of Texas at Austin does not include Preston; however, there are five versions of this recording, and perhaps Preston is included on one of the 1979 European versions or on the 1991 version from Original Jazz Classics. On *The Ellington Suites* (Pablo Records 2310-762, 1972), Preston is listed in the trumpet section, but once again he does not solo, whereas Money Johnson does during *The Goutelas Suite*.
- 22 There are at least two Hampton recordings in the Fine Arts Library at the University of Texas at Austin, but neither is listed in the Preston discography. *Hamp's Big Band* (Audio Fidelity AFLP 1913, 1959) features William "Cat" Anderson on trumpet, and *Spotlight on Lionel Hampton & His Big Orchestra* (Design Records, 1962) provides no listing of personnel. However, the album does include the 1939 Goodman-Hampton classic "Flying Home," which, when the Hampton big band recorded it in 1942, featured Texas tenor, Illinois Jacquet. See *Texan Jazz*, 220.
- 23 Max Jones, "Preston: a leading question," *Melody Maker* (November 6, 1971), 24.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Valerie Wilmer, "Eddie: a chance to be heard," *Melody Maker* (November 21, 1970), 10. Thanks to Tad Hershorn of the Rutgers University Institute of Jazz Studies for contacting Wolfram Knauer at the Jazz Institute in Darmstadt, Germany, who graciously emailed me a copy of Wilmer's article, which was not available at Rutgers nor at the University of Texas.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Stéphane Ollivier, liner notes to *Charles Mingus in Paris: The Complete America Session* (Sunnyside Communications SSC 3065, 2007). This reissue of the Universal Music France recording from 1971 includes false starts, master and alternate takes, explanations by Mingus, and "Details such as when the electricity was cut right in the middle of the blues in homage to Charlie Parker and the short dialogue before the recording is resumed."
- 30 In the unsigned liner notes to *Charles Mingus with Orchestra*, the writer observes that Mingus "never made any other recordings for albums of joint performances with an existing big band. Therefore, I can state that this disk is an important and unique recording, in the career of Charles Mingus." I am grateful to the Interlibrary Loan Department at the University of Texas at Austin for obtaining a scan of the liner notes, and to the University of New York at Fredonia for supplying the scan, since I was able to listen to the recording through an MP3 but had been unable to read the notes.
- 31 Ollivier, notes to *Charles Mingus in Paris*.
- 32 Stephen Davis, liner notes to Charles Mingus, *Reincarnation of a Lovebird* (Prestige P-23028, 1973).
- 33 Ollivier, notes to *Charles Mingus in Paris*.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Charles Mingus, liner notes to *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (Atlantic 1237, 1956).
- 36 Priestley, *Mingus: a Critical Biography*, 184; Davis, notes to *Reincarnation of a Lovebird*.
- 37 Ollivier, notes to *Charles Mingus in Paris*.
- 38 Roland Kirk, *Boogie-Woogie String Along For Real* (Warner Bros. Records BSK 3085, 1978).
- 39 Archie Shepp, *Artica Blues Big Band Live at the Palais Des Glaces* (France, Blue Marge 1001, 1979). Thanks to Joe Specht for making available to me both the Shepp and Roland Kirk albums.
- 40 Preston appears on *Charles Mingus and Friends in Concert* (Columbia KG31614, 1973), but Lonnie Hillyer, the other trumpeter on the album, takes all the solos.