

## Music Performativity in the Album: Charles Mingus, Nietzschean Aesthetics, and Mental Theater

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*This article analyzes a canonical jazz album through Nietzschean and performance studies concepts, illuminating the album as a case study of multiple performativities. I analyze Charles Mingus' The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady as performing classical theater across the album's images, texts, and music, and as a performance to be constructed in audiences' minds as the sounds, texts, and visuals never simultaneously meet in the same space. Drawing upon Nietzschean aesthetics, I suggest how this performative space operates as "mental theater," hybridizing diverse traditions and configuring distinct dynamics of aesthetic possibility. In this crossroads of jazz traditions, theater traditions, and the album format, Mingus exhibits an artistry between performing the album itself as imagined drama stage and between crafting this space's Apollonian/Dionysian interplay in a performative understanding of aesthetics, sound, and embodiment. This case study progresses several agendas in performance studies involving music performativity, the concept of performance complex, the Dionysian, and the album as a site of performative space.*

When Charlie Parker said "If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn" (Reisner 27), he captured a performativity inherent to jazz music: one is limited to what one has lived. To perform jazz is to make yourself *per* (through) *form* (semblance, image, likeness). Improvising jazz means more than choosing which notes to play. It means steering through an infinity of choices to craft a self made out of sound. Like the stage actor, the jazz musician lives between who they are and who they are becoming. Each choice brings a biographical person into *their* way of performing someone who they might become. Hence Charlie Parker's next sentence was "They teach you there's a boundary line to music. But, man, there's no boundary line to art" (Reisner 27). Jazz is the art form *par excellence* where one casts themselves into sound

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and, in the next second, lets that sound recast them. Charles Mingus captured this, saying, “In my music, I’m trying to play the truth of what I am. The reason it’s difficult is because I’m changing all the time” (Hentoff 99; Fawcett 56). Jazz is not merely a musical style; jazz is a space of performative potential through sound.

Within this space of performative potential, jazz is also ritualized spontaneity. Pianist Bill Evans said, “jazz is not so much a style as [it is] a process of making music—the process of making one minute’s music in one minute’s time, whereas when you compose, you can make one minute’s music in 3 months.” While people mistake jazz as merely a stylistic genre, “jazz is more of a certain creative process of spontaneity than a style” (Cavrell). Charles Mingus considered jazz to be improvisational theater (Ertegun; Porter 118; Saul 154; Santoro 18). Performer and audience come together on the premise of an artistic act occurring live, fresh, and unforeknown within a given framework (e.g., a popular song, dance stage, poetry setting). Never performed the same way twice, jazz’s “process aesthetic” imbues meaning into every aspect of the jazz performance, potentiating each part to affect something else. Thus the musicians and audience together participate in this art of continuous reformation, forged through a heightened drama of uncertainty, paralleling one of our own performances in social life: the search for the right response to the moment. What to do? How to do it? What *not* to do?

Jazz has long permeated the margins of performance studies. The field’s interest in jazz has focused mostly on theater, dance, and music, exploring how jazz aesthetics enrich various aspects of performance (J. L. Jones; Rogers; McRae, “Listening to a Brick”). Many scholarly performance pieces have drawn inspiration from jazz (S. L. H. Jones; McRae, “Miles Away from ‘The Cool’”; Shoemaker; McRae, “Listening, Playing, and Learning”). Jazz has proven to be a helpful thematic for performance studies’ interest in transcending textual epistemologies and in continually refreshing our reflexive practices of knowing and doing (DeChaine). Conversely, performance studies can articulate tacit aspects of jazz (Davidson). The jazz approach to *any* medium (e.g., sound, dance, poetry) comprises a rich, fluid set of social practices of general interest to performance studies, as jazz artists, humanities scholars, and social actors alike share related performance problematics. Pairing jazz with performance studies can contribute much to the nature of social embodiment, identity, sound, stagecraft, cultural process, performance phenomenology, and more. Capable of broadly informing our scholarly and performative practices, the jazz legacy is best understood capaciously, not merely as a craft or style, but as “a mode of social action that musicians selectively employ in their process of communicating” (Monson). Monson’s idea of jazz as a generalized method of approach bridges the two fields in a shared vocabulary: jazz brims with performativities, performativity brims with jazz-like dynamics.

One of jazz’s canonical works makes a compelling, suggestive case study for performance studies. Charles Mingus’ 1963 long-form jazz album, *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (BSSL), reflexively explores many cross-relations between jazz and performance. The BSSL portrays a self-depiction of

Mingus himself in an album where Mingus “reconceived jazz as performance art” and “called his outfits Jazz Workshops... in the same sense as drama workshops” (Santoro 18). The album casts Mingus’ into the role of protagonist of a performed monument of mythic martyrdom. The album has extensive liner notes functioning as a 4000-word playbill containing commentary from Mingus’ psychiatrist as well as Mingus’ own commentaries, confessions, advisories, philosophies, and impassioned musings. The album comprises a prodigious breadth of performance traditions, filling up every space of the album’s resources with elements of theatre (dramatic narrative), visual art (album images), text (liner notes), music (composed for ballet dancers), and performs them with coherence and force. These elements loosely hang together as an open text, comprised of a patchwork of allegory, partially-veiled references, and thematic fragments. The album configures the performance *across* all these constituting elements. As a result, the album demands that the performance be constructed by the audience, to be read and reread for how the disparate elements work together at different times with the music. The audience has to deliberately make choices to bring the text together in their minds since the sounds, texts, and visuals never simultaneously meet in the same space—a kind of “mental theater” emerging from the aesthetics and performativities in this album.

Performative analysis of the BSSL contributes to performance studies and scholarly conversations about the BSSL. Commentaries have addressed its compositional aspects (Rustin-Paschal 92), orchestration (Huey), and technological innovation in overdubbing in jazz (Huey; Kirchner 430). Interpretations have understood the BSSL as a cultural movement (Heisler 190; Rustin-Paschal 90), a political strategy (Saul 182), a psychologizing of the author (Saul), a sexual concourse for the listener (Saul 196), and as Mingus’ search for a language (Rustin-Paschal 10). Such interpretations of the BSSL—and of jazz and music generally—are predominantly based on artist interviews and musical form, which overlook a critical site of aesthetic action: how do the BSSL’s forms amount to its effects? What about this album constitutes its aesthetic power? This question pervades philosophy<sup>1</sup> but is also paradigmatic to performance studies. The concept of performance focuses upon the mediations between form and form’s deployment, which transforms meaning and impact. Emphasizing the *per-* of per-formance directs attention to the *through-ness* occurring upon *form*, as any formal structure is always enacting something in a concrete context, embodiment, and temporality. Thus, using performance as a hermeneutic rehabilitates our aesthetic analyses to include the tacit process-knowledges excised from logocentric aesthetics (Conquergood). Doing so inclines aesthetic analysis toward what is traditionally “mysterious” about aesthetics (though only mysterious by virtue of

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche argues that “Almost all the problems of philosophy once again pose the same form of question as they did two thousand years ago: how can something originate in its opposite, for example rationality in irrationality, the sentient in the dead, logic in unlogic, disinterested contemplation in covetous desire, living for others in egoism, truth in error” (Hollingdale).

methodological narrowness). Performance studies brings such mysteries to light by venturing from the starting points of content and artfully reconceptualizing content's parts according to the work's puzzles and uniquenesses. Since performance studies self-consciously eschews fixed methods and dogmas, the intellectual task for performance analysis is finding a critical frame that locates and extends those mysterious vivifying experiences (Schechner, *Performance Studies*). The artist, Charles Mingus, forges the initial attempt at an aesthetic transcendence in the space of the recorded album, and we scholars continue the work where the artist leaves off, completing, extending, and propagating the work in continual retrospection.

To read BSSL in this performance studies light, I ask: within the album-endowed performance space, how does BSSL's dense multi-textuality amalgamate into improvisational theater? With an album so performative in many ways, concepts of performativity, embodiment, and ritual begin to address these questions about the BSSL. Yet, such performance studies vocabularies lack a vocabulary capacious enough to account for the BSSL's mixed-album format that transposes classical stage tragedy into the vinyl record medium. There are three reasons why performance studies needs to be supplemented here. Firstly, performance studies has a dearth of work on music, specifically the production of aural, sonic elements as performance, and music's relations with embodiment and social phenomenology. Recent scholarship has called for increased theory and case studies of how performance studies can be a productive approach to music. Auslander says that "the fields of theatre and performance studies historically have been reluctant to engage with musical performance" because music is considered "nonliterary" and "nonmimetic." Performance scholars have traditionally studied music via textual analysis, cultural studies, or audience reception, rather than via "the actual performance behavior of musicians" (Auslander, "Music as Performance"). Performance studies' rich legacy of expanding upon theater and ritual do not readily transpose onto the music-driven dramas within the album's space of stagecraft. Secondly, performance studies has not addressed jazz in the form of the recorded album, especially as the album converges legacies of theater, dance, music, text, and image into one of the most widespread forms of musical performance. Gracyk's *Listening to Music: Performances and Recordings* dismantles the prejudice that recorded music is subordinate to live performance, and he argues that recorded music should be explored on its own terms of aesthetic possibilities (Gracyk 139). Scholars have written on diverse matters within individual albums (Pineda; Bowden; Ryalls) but have written little on the performative space of the album itself. Thirdly, performance studies, in its commitment to anti-procedural criticism, can be informed by interdisciplinary methods of album analysis. This very task of matching a critical frame to a given performance constitutes a key intellectual problematic. In *Recordings as Performances*, Christy Mag Uidhir argues that "the proper object of aesthetic interest" is both the performance as well as the type of interpretation it arouses (Uidhir 313). Since the proper work of aesthetic reception includes "the how" of interpretation, performance scholars have long addressed the openness of

performance as an enriching, not stunting, aspect of scholarship. What performance studies cannot do for the BSSL is what scholars are calling for in the field. These three agendas—integrating music into performance studies, analyzing albums’ performative aesthetics, and outlining suitable interpretive frameworks—are the three goals of this case study. To read the BSSL fully with an eye toward continuing these disciplinary agendas is to push the boundaries of the field one increment wider than its extant scope and methods. This requires supplementing performance concepts by drawing heavily from a capacious aesthetic theory well-fitted to the BSSL.

To do this, I use Nietzsche’s aesthetics and theory of tragic performance to illuminate the BSSL in a performance studies light, overcoming the disciplinary limitations discussed above. Nietzschean theory, drawn here mostly from *The Birth of Tragedy*, encompasses all of the BSSL’s textualities (surprisingly addressing each part individually), locates them in the tradition and philosophy of tragic theater, and maintains a performative understanding of how the BSSL’s parts achieve an embodied wholeness whose ineffabilities are referenced in the BSSL’s 50 years of critical admiration. Nietzsche’s vocabulary provides an analytical frame that bridges the gap between form and effect, located at the root of the question of aesthetic power. Nietzsche’s bridge is forged through an extensive philosophy of art that operates through bodily effects of artistically-induced order and ecstasy. A range of states, modes, and effects are classed under two Apollonian and Dionysian thematics, which together assist analyses of works beyond the narrower frames of theater, music, or a particular medium. Nietzsche’s extensive commentary on music—so far as to subtitle his text *Out of the Spirit of Music*—alone contributes much to performance studies’ growing engagement with sound. In these ways, Nietzsche’s theory offers a tight-fit and historically-fortified hermeneutic long used to discuss performances involving music, text, myth, image, and live audiences. This hermeneutic features embodiment as a common nexus distributed throughout artist, artwork, and audience, which is lost in narrower analyses and readily permits readings of unusual formats, such as the BSSL’s recorded album. Additionally, the Apollonian and Dionysian thematics are essentially performative. Rather than strictly name formal, structural features, this dichotomy identifies that which *becomes* Apollonian and Dionysian in the *through-ness* of performance. They characterize not what lies fixed in a dormant work but what animates situationally during performance. Things are Apollonian and Dionysian when in motion, in time, when artistic acts are deployed, consumed, and contemplated.

In these ways, Nietzsche helps redress performance studies’ engagement of music, the album, and performative criticism. There are many ways to read the album through aesthetics and performativity, many of which could be pursued for this particular project and for scholars building a history of jazz performativities. However, Nietzsche’s commentary on theater and aesthetic philosophy complete the missing parts of performance studies vocabulary to enrich a read of the BSSL while substantiating the big “so what” questions of aesthetic endeavor, the suggestibility of human states, and on the variety of

performativities the album deploys. By delineating the distinctly Nietzschean performative relations between music, text, narrative, and the body, I explicate the BSSL's aesthetically coordinated performativities occurring across the album.

The BSSL is one album among many ripe for performative analysis. The albums of Duke Ellington, with whom Mingus sometimes performed, were bound together with a "literary imperative" using a variety of "paratexts" (Edwards). Along with Mingus and Ellington, there are many jazz albums that can and should be read performatively. Performance studies would benefit from scholars analyzing other richly performative albums in jazz and beyond. This article focuses on the BSSL for its case study and its fittedness with the particular theoretical paradigms explored here. The approach used in this article focuses on the BSSL's multiple performativities in relation to Nietzschean aesthetics of the body, sound, and the Dionysian, which does not preclude other ways of analyzing, enjoying, and interacting with this album. This approach helps illustrate how two hermeneutics—of performance and aesthetics—co-operate to highlight the album as performance.

After situating Nietzschean aesthetics in these performance studies lacunae, I argue that Nietzsche's conclusions on aesthetic ideals are exactly what occur in the BSSL: part of the album's power comes from its Apollonian/Dionysian balance throughout the diversity of expressive traditions cooperating within the parameters of the album. These elements, rendered heterodoxically anew, catalyze the album into a distinct space of performative potential. The BSSL renders the music album into mental theater by staging a jazz tragedy across all of its parts. Seen in this way, the BSSL presents a case study where its formal aesthetic integration creates a space of performance. Mingus' rendering of identities, bodies, narrative, and Dionysian effects are testament to the efficacy of the album and its creative uses of the album's performative potential of causes, of facilitations, and of accommodating a multi-textual intervention in collective embodiment. Reading the BSSL through performance studies makes for interesting, mutually-informative performance criticism on its own right, but it also reveals Mingus' album to be a luminous case study of a distinct kind of "performance" that cannot be well-understood in merely musicological, textual, or cultural terms. This inaugural case study for the field of performance studies exemplifies how the concept of performativity, paired with Nietzsche, can capture how the BSSL's performs, transforms, and reforms jazz improvisation within a complex of textualities (e.g., image, narrative, self-mythologizing, liner notes from Mingus and his psychologist, recorded sound, etc.). While many performance studies analyses focus on one part (e.g., music, text, etc.), the BSSL pushes the boundaries for performance studies to preserve its holistic methods while illuminating overlooked aspects of musical albums. Using performance studies' broad encompassing scope, I wish to delineate the value of reading the album itself as the whole performance—one whose mix of disparate parts are best understood as a non-isolatable mutually-reinforcing gestalt. In doing so, BSSL is revealed as a complex of multiple performativities that converges its textualities into a

performative mode distinct to its unusual parts: the mental theater of a jazz tragedy staged across the album. Mingus' artistry goes beyond his music and occurs through imbuing performativity into each of the albums' non-musical parts, bringing them into a coherent mental theater, and creating unique, powerful effects often untapped in the album form. Of the many ways to experience and interpret the BSSL, performance studies' and Nietzsche's capacious synthesis-discourses illuminate these aspects that other analytical frames cannot encompass.

Just as Monson reframes jazz from a musical style to a mode of social action, I too reframe the BSSL from an album to a mode of multiple performativities. I begin with an overview of performance and performativity in music to build links between the case study and the discipline. Then I outline Nietzsche's analytical framework for the aesthetic evaluation of tragedy, providing a level of length and depth required to apply its full philosophical reach to the BSSL. Then I analyze the BSSL for its resonances with Nietzschean aesthetics and its modes of performativity. Concluding remarks discuss ways this case study progresses several agendas in performance studies involving music performativity, the concept of "performance complex," the Dionysian, and the album as a site of performative space.

## **Music and Embodiment in Performance Studies**

### *Performance and Performativity*

Music has been notoriously a difficult matter to write about well, especially when scholarship obligates a fixed and narrow methodology. As a result, music in performance studies is often talked about by proxy through lyrics, identity, testimony, marketing materials, and so forth. The field's moving from a thematic of performance to a thematic of performativity has helped scholars analyze the many performative aspects of music and music's myriad phenomena that it engenders. Applying performativity to music, Alejandro Madrid suggests that "addressing the question of performativity (as understood in performance studies) beyond the locus of performance might allow musicologists and music scholars a way to contribute to the growingly interdisciplinary intellectual projects in the social sciences and the humanities" (Madrid). While performance scholars have studied music's performance, performativity widens the conceptual domain of relevant phenomena, which is particularly useful as music is experienced so variously across time, space, and technological change. Using the thematic of performativity would suggest that "a performance studies approach to the study of music asks what music does or allows people to do; such an approach understands musics as processes within larger social and cultural practices and asks how these musics can help us understand these processes as opposed to how do these processes help us understand music" (Madrid). What can music, in its various instantiations, reveal about its wider context? The lens of performativity delineates music as a social

endeavor constituted through performance, which can be analyzed as a window into its various operant performativities.

Two examples relevant to this project are the performativities involved in constituting the musician and the listener. The thematic of *performance* would cast Mingus as a man in the act of making a recorded album, which overlooks much of the work's artistic craftings. However, the thematic of *performativity* would cast Mingus the man as the product resulting from several performativities used in the album. This analysis takes the latter approach, using Auslander's idea that the musical "performer [is] constructed from the various artifacts of that performer's performance, production, and promotion" (Auslander, "Music as Performance"). Another example performativity occurs in the listener. Frith argues that "in listening to popular music we are listening to a performance, but, further, that 'listening' is a performance" (Frith 203). The listener actively constitutes part of the performance, being "free to construct her relationship to the performer from various spectatorial vantage points or by identifying with the performer" (264). While the listener "has considerable freedom to manipulate those images imaginatively and form various relationships to them," the performative elements provide the initial materials. Both of these processes of creating the musician and audience experience are used in this analysis.

Performance scholars can analyze recorded music's component performativities for insights on the resulting performance and comprising parts. The kinds of available performativities will depend on the media used and will shape the resulting performance. The performance scholar readily understands that such media are both material and immaterial, and where "...materiality and immateriality are not necessarily ontological conditions: [rather] they can be socially and contextually constructed states" (Auslander, "Music as Performance"). A little more than one century of mass-disseminated recorded music has witnessed a variety of technological forms, each providing a complex of resources, affordances, and parameters. Performance scholarship has examined ways in which recordings and albums can be understood as performances in socially and contextually constructed states. For example, Sergio Mazzanti considers live music albums and their audiences as constructed sites of performativity that form highly mediated simulations of live events. Live albums perform upon/in the audience a sense of time, place, authenticity, which also discloses its own hermeneutic to interpret sounds that would be "errors" in studio-recorded music (e.g., a cough or technical glitches) (Mazzanti). In describing their mode of performance upon mediated audiences, Mazzanti argues that live albums liminally stand between the established categories of live, recorded-live, and studio-recorded performances. In Mazzanti's scheme, Mingus' BSSL would be a "recorded-live in the studio" album that uses the resources of the album format to construct a space, a place, a narrative event, and a tragic myth cloaked upon the eponymous musician. Within the construction of the album, persona, and listener, multiple performativities occur together, each with their relationships to the music itself.



These relationships between musical performance and extra-musical performativities are part of a recent growing interest in performance studies.

### *Performativity and Music*

Philip Auslander argues that musical performativity is understudied after being overlooked by both performance and music scholars. He writes, “the fields of theatre and performance studies historically have been reluctant to engage with musical performance” while at the same time musicologists tend to be “focused on the textual dimensions of musical compositions... [and] are generally more concerned with audience and reception than with the actual performance behavior of musicians” (Auslander, “Music as Performance”). Auslander explores recorded music as a special kind of performance involving a material performance and medium, an immaterial listening experience, and a diffusion of audiences.

Recent bridges have been built between music and performance studies, justifying how recorded music can be studied as performance and comprised of interacting performativities to constitute the experience. Alejandro Madrid argues that “what defines performance studies in relation to music is not its object of study, methodology or results but rather its concern with a simple and basic question, what music does as opposed to what music is” (Madrid). Several foundational works have begun this niche. Nicholas Cook argues against the text/music dichotomy and in favor of understanding music as interlinking processes and products that “have become most inextricably intertwined” (Cook §20). Auslander suggests that performance scholars understand that “the material culture of popular music is not just an archive for remnants of performances past but also a generative source for the central experience of performance in the present. The cultural artifacts of popular music not only record and preserve performances that took place elsewhere: they are the raw materials from which fans actively construct performances, and the musicians’ presence, in the present” (Auslander, “Music as Performance”). Seen in this way, nearly every aspect of recorded music—from the packaging, liner notes, and cover art—can be read as elements relevant to its performance, for example, in contributing to how “What musicians perform first and foremost is not music, but their own identities as musicians, their musical personae” (Auslander, “Musical Personae” 102).

Another important aspect of musical performativity is embodiment present throughout. Ways of listening are embodied, situated within technological matrices interfacing with the human body (McLuhan and Powers; McLuhan). Any particular technological mode of recording carries remnants of embodiment through the medium’s relation to liveness and the recorded event. Susan Fast argues that “the performer’s body is very much present” due to the physical and kinetic nature of music (Fast 114). Thus musical sounds on recordings “always imply the physical actions and presence of the human beings who produced them no matter how manipulated they may be” (Auslander, “Music as Performance”).

What makes this BSSL analysis special is its performative nexus between the traditions of theater, text, sound, jazz, and the album form. This performative analysis purposely avoids the binaries such as recorded vs. live [e.g., the debate of (Gracyk; Niblock; Niblock)] and studio recording vs. live recording [e.g. (Mazzanti)] in favor of a richer reading practice that considers the work as a performative whole. Such a reading practice is well suited to analyze the performativity of cross-mediated texts in an ever cross-mediated world. The album itself is a rich convergence of performativities that exemplify Auslander's approach to studying recorded music as a performance distributed across the live musicians, the studio mediations, the material medium, the audience's experience, and the resulting self-mythification of the very jazz artist heard in the music. Such a text's performative potency illustrates one of many ways in which "Recorded music's power to resound musical patterns does much to fortify circles of shared popular experience..." (Kenney 4).

The BSSL offers a case study of performativity in the album, illustrating ways of constructing a multimodal experience drawn from the traditions of narrative, theater, visual art, jazz music, psychological sciences, and so forth. The album is deployed within a socio-historical context of a technology, but one that affords artistic rendering of an immaterial elsewhere: a space, place, persona, and event. This performance space within the album is partly analyzable through the language performance studies or the particularizing vocabularies of musicology, history, or cultural studies. To more fully capture the scope of the album's performativities and of the performative unity of the album, Nietzsche's aesthetic framework helps conceptualize these elements in dynamic inter-relations. His well-established framework across several disciplines has been used for traditional theater, textual analysis of tragedy, music, and art. Especially contributory to performance studies, Nietzsche's aesthetics locate the body central to the assorted performativities and account for artistic potency through the Apollonian and Dionysian modes of embodied engagement. Here, Nietzsche functions both as a contribution toward research in musical performativity and as a bridge between some conceptual gaps to explain the BSSL as mental theater.

#### *Nietzsche and Performance*

Performance scholars have drawn from Nietzschean aesthetics, largely for thematic grounding and widening the scope of performance analysis (Berberović and others; Young; Tuncel; Solomon and Gehring). Albert Henrichs argues that Nietzsche's Dionysus, marked by German Romanticism, has significantly shaped the idea of the Dionysian at least between 1872 and 1972 (Henrichs 206). Nietzsche's Dionysus thematizes "loss of self, suffering, and violence" in ways that have often been used as "a symbol for the human condition in its most tortured moments" (209). David Kornhaber notes that "much of the critical attention on Nietzsche's relationship to modern drama has focused on the reverberations of the philosopher's moral and metaphysical schema..." (Kornhaber 27). He argues that Nietzsche shapes modern drama's expansion

“from the art of performing plays and toward the art of crafting theatrical events” (Kornhaber 40). This expansion emphasizes the performativity constituted by all elements that manifest a text, for example, the acting, space, and audience. Nietzsche’s widening of the scope of drama welcomes its application to a modern jazz recording without loss, but even enhancement, to the notion of modern drama. According to Kornhaber, “modern drama means to give to the actor is not just a voice, but a vocabulary: a language of performance that is entirely distinct and independent from the playwright’s language, one that is not only necessary for a play’s execution, but is fundamental to the very actualization of anything we might properly call, in a modern sense, ‘theatre’” (Kornhaber 40).

Nietzsche’s Dionysian concept expands upon performance studies’ interest in transcendence and embodiment. Recent examples include Justin Trudeau’s exploration of Kerouac’s attempt to exceed the artist’s expressive form, as Mingus’ BSSL does, has been a means to transcend the body’s raced, classed, privileged status (Trudeau). Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston explores instances where improvising with nonlinguistic expression (i.e. such as that found in the BSSL: “movement, gesture and nonverbal vocalization”) initiates a “bodily contagion” that experiences and empathizes a sense of the other (Kazubowski-Houston), which is precisely the BSSL’s stated myth of using music to unify with a beloved other. Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc explore how silence constitutes a “space for generating meaning” and how performing silence can be a “tactic of survival” for subjugated peoples that can “call to conscience for audience members... an encounter that cultivates recognition” of oppression (Palmer-Mehta and Haliliuc). The field has ample examples of sound, performance, and the Dionysian converging by myriad configurations. These various agendas within performance studies—music, embodiment, the Dionysian—converge readily upon this case study, which illustrates how adeptly they work together in one account of a “performance complex” (Madrid).

The concept of the performance complex articulates an important open-endedness and plurality to performance analysis. The open-endedness understands performances as nexuses between other related performances and the influence of their constituting materials. The plurality comes from performances being understood to contain epi-performances nested within each performance, and that every performance inevitably performs attendant social phenomena (e.g., race, class, social status, etc.). Thus the concept of the performance complex finds the BSSL’s open-endedness in the album’s diverse materials and their affinities with the other performances constituting Mingus’ identity, work, and process. Performance complex finds the BSSL’s plurality in the album’s ability to perform much more beyond what the materials provide (e.g., ways of attending, Dionysian effects, sound-narrative, etc.). Performance complex provides a bridge between music and performance studies. Music’s inevitable performance and social existence’s inevitable performativities are brought together as one performance complex, “making us understand that music acquires meaning and significance as it articulates a variety of

practices... and processes that go well beyond the sounds and the texts that represent them" (Madrid).

As scholars explore vocabularies suiting modern performance, Nietzschean aesthetics reveals the BSSL's performativities working together and illustrating Madrid's idea of a "performative complex." The BSSL self-consciously performs itself as means to and as ends of the Dionysian. Sound is central to every aspect of BSSL's performativity, inducing states in the audience, driving the storytelling, and providing answers to existential issues the BSSL raises. Mingus composes the work in congruence with music's embodiment of Nietzsche's Apollonian/Dionysian duality. Mingus' jazz text is able to perform the Dionysian while simultaneously commenting upon it. This constitutes an artistic commentary on the role of sound—and thus on the role of embodied reception of mixed media recordings—in the performance of the Dionysian. Some key tenets from Nietzsche's aesthetics of myth, music, and the Dionysian provide vocabulary helpful for analyzing the BSSL's performative aspects of story, sound, and rehabilitative ecstasy.

### **Nietzsche's Elements of Tragedy**

Nietzsche's philosophy of art disavows itself from several major philosophical positions. It rends Plato's unity of truth and beauty, transcends Aristotle's economy of form, and denies Kant's objectivist aspects of aesthetics. Rather, Nietzsche returns the aesthetic to the world of appearances and seeks art for its function as a stimulus to life against a bleak human condition. For Nietzsche, many important "truths" of existence occur in the realm of appearance, which are real in effect. Such anthropocentric truths are aesthetic truths that assist in our experience of reality. In absence of aesthetic interventions into metaphysics, life is nakedly harsh, unbeautiful, and dangerous. Unlike many aestheticians, Nietzsche does not seek art to reveal reality or wake people up from illusory dreams. Rather, art animates truths. Art's aesthetics and function are analyzed in service of transforming metaphysical conditions for people's sustainability and health. Thus the unity and economy of formal elements—as Aristotle regards for their summation as catharsis via imitation of life—becomes secondary. Nietzsche rebukes the Kantian disinterestedness in the beautiful and rejects the idea that form alone moves the individual into the sublime. Rather, it is a deep interestedness—a play of subjective, objective, and intersubjective—that drives Nietzsche's account of aesthetic motives and aesthetic evaluation.

Nietzsche encapsulates this outlook in a thematic he uses to read Greek tragedy for its tendencies to stimulate life through two modalities of inspiration, the dream, and intoxication. Nietzsche identifies these as primordial and timeless sources of the artistic impulse, which issue from nature itself and come to each individual in full regardless of culture, age, and ability. He adapts this hermeneutic to ancient Greek culture, finding its parallel in their time. Analogous to the dream/intoxication dualism is the ancient Greek deities of Apollo and Dionysus. Adrian Del Caro suggests that Nietzsche's Apollonian

and Dionysian terms are “not so much a philological ‘discovery’ of materials previously overlooked by scholars, but instead a philosophical ‘invention’ of intellectual and aesthetic properties attributed to the ancients but relevant to the moderns” (57).

The Apollonian resembles the dream, conferring visions of form, shape, and semblance. The winged messenger delivers appearances. Nietzsche identifies this as the world of illusion where boundaries are made, and the principle of individuation separates the world into apprehendable things and relations. Every person is a “consummate artist” in this realm, as dreams exemplify the ability to foresee form in the resolution of lived life. A pleasure is taken from creating and apprehending the Apollonian.

The Apollonian aspect of art recognizes that such appearances are illusions despite their intensity. Appearances affect us, even when seen as such. Nietzsche notes that “a person with artistic sensibility relates to the reality of dream in the same way as a philosopher relates to the reality of existence: he attends to it closely and with pleasure, using these images to interpret life, and practising for life with the help of these events” (§1). The Apollonian transfigures the image of the world, recreating it in ways more livable. Its comforting familiarity “speaks to us” (§16) Apollonian order and palatability. However, sometimes one “loses his way amidst the cognitive forms of appearance” and suspends their coherent image of the world as forms. The loss of the Apollonian ushers in the Dionysian.

The Dionysian, resembling intoxication, loosens the hold of the ordered world of form, potentially even destroying it. The individual becomes defamiliarized to his world and to himself, forgetting how to walk and talk. Apollonian forms evaporate. The self is lost, forgotten, and reconnected with nature and fellow human. A sense of “primordial unity” overpowers the illusory bonds and hierarchies in Apollonian life. The individual, as part of something larger, becomes a receptacle to natural and spiritual forces. The loss of individuality brings communion, and the loss of control over form brings ecstasy. The Dionysian overtakes the individual, making him a conduit for divine inspiration and other worlds. Here, “Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art” (§1). Where the Apollonian elicits man’s power to form nature, the Dionysian elicits nature’s power to form man.

These two tendencies are dualistic by their interactions of artistic origin and aim. They are oppositional to each other until they are artistically united “in much the same way as reproduction depends on there being two sexes which co-exist in a state of perpetual conflict interrupted only occasionally by periods of reconciliation” (§1). United, the Dionysian inspires passion, energy, and madness from a deep incomprehensible reality. This experience then directs the creation of beautiful Apollonian arrangements of material. These materials are illusory, for they are stand-ins of the Dionysian experience. Yet, these inspired materials induce sublimity into others and puncture the existing Apollonian order. For Nietzsche, great art does this. The Dionysian sources the Apollonian as the “basic ground for the world” (§25). At the same time, the Apollonian holds the Dionysian at bay to preserve proper distance for

sustaining ordered life. Art without the Apollonian is inaccessible and incoherent. Art without the Dionysian is inert and unspeaking.

How do aesthetic pleasures come from appearances of suffering? Nietzsche argues that the art and artist have a higher aim: “art is not only an imitation of the truth of nature but a metaphysical supplement to that truth of nature, coexisting with it in order to overcome it” (§24). The realm of appearances provides source material for producing complementations to one’s conditions. Where one’s deprivations cannot be remedied by knowledge or action, art offers additional resources from fiction and spectatorship. Art animates appearances to take such an effect in a person as to mend and amend them. In doing so, “The aim of all art... is to effect a metaphysical transfiguration” (§24) into the audience that alters the ways we think and feel about the conditions of hardship. Art intervenes in the Apollonian level, where life is structured by its intelligible forms, in order to refine them. Art that refines the Apollonian in accordance with Dionysian inspiration adjusts the daily world into restorative alignment. Nature furnishes no explanations, no hope, no sense, and thus “only as an aesthetic phenomenon do existence and the world appear justified; which means that tragic myth in particular must convince us that even the ugly and disharmonious is an artistic game which the Will, in the eternal fullness of its delight, plays with itself” (§24). The lived world is endured by maintained fictive necessities.

Nietzsche’s language-body relationships pervade this aesthetic theory, as illustrated in his discussion of music and myth’s bodily dimensions. He emphasizes that “only the spirit of music allows us to understand why we feel joy at the destruction of the individual” and that “music is the immediate idea of this life” (§16). Music’s defining power is its Dionysiac actualization as induced bodily states. When this occurs, music exerts “the power of its sound to shake us to our very foundations... a new world of symbols is required, firstly the symbolism of the entire body, not just of the mouth, the face, the word... To comprehend this complete unchaining of all symbolic powers, a man must already have reached that height of self-abandonment which seeks symbolic expression in those powers...” (§2). The immersive frenzy de-capacitates participation in the symbolic order and “is able to transmit to an entire mass of people... this experience of seeing oneself transformed before one’s eyes and acting as if one had really entered another body, another character. This process stands at the beginning of the development of drama” (§8). Attic tragedy’s depiction of suffering “has the same origin as the pleasurable perception of dissonance in music. The Dionysiac, with its primal pleasure experienced even in pain, is the common womb of music and the tragic myth” (§24). The two work in tandem to further each other. In generating music and myth from the body’s sensations, “the degeneracy and degradation of one will be connected with the atrophy of the other, that the weakening of the myth will express an enfeebling of the Dionysiac capacity” (§24).

Effecting the body is the aim of Dionysian aesthetics. The Dionysian delight and play is not directly experienced in suffering or depictions of suffering. It can be reached as a state through artistic renditions of suffering. It is

the body that feels and suffers, which ushers the need for art and which provides artistic formulae for corporeal ameliorations. The *Birth of Tragedy* describes art, language, expression, and their effects in embodied terms that sketch the formative role of embodiment in the process of meaning-making and aesthesis. Most of his terms are expressed as products of idea-body integrations metaphorized into language. Thus his discussions of thought, feeling, symbols, and states take the body as the grounds for their experience. Words about mind and body provisionally reduce rich interactive processes into conversable names. Embodiment is a continual process in which art participates in the intensifications, ablations, and figurations that together give form to that which is present. Nietzsche's vocabulary of art keeps the body in the valences of his terms. His nomenclature emphasizes art's role in the fluidity to variously perform, deform, reform sense experience without terminological pretense to essentialism or reification. In *Nietzsche and Embodiment*, Kristen Brown Golden describes Nietzsche's notion of embodiment as non-dualistic and dynamic: "a field of overlapping planes—especially the planes of the ideational, the psychosomatic, and the socio-physical" (6). Each plane is constituted by material and immaterial enjoinments that relate synthetically to produce metaphors of experience in "sensation, image, or word" (6).

The only assured way of directly experiencing "this primal and difficult phenomenon of Dionysian art" is "through the wonderful significance of musical dissonance" (§24). Music is the art closest to the Dionysian mode. It bypasses language to the core of people, rousing the passions and leaving the Apollonian. While music has Apollonian features, its essence lies in initiating the Dionysian experience. Music provides a "cosmic symbolism" that "Language can never adequately render" because "music stands in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the primal unity..." (§6). The evocative sensations of music recreate the sensations of life. The interplay of various levels of dissonance through time symbolically mimic the succession of states lived out in our lives. The meaninglessness of each note relates to the music as a whole in the same way that the meaninglessness of each work of art relates to life as a whole. Music "therefore symbolizes a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena. Rather, all phenomena, compared with it, are merely symbols: hence *language*, as the organ and symbol of phenomena, can never by any means disclose the innermost heart of music; language in its attempt to imitate it, can only be in superficial contact with music..." (§6).

While the BSSL readily admits these Apollonian/Dionysian elements, further aspects of BSSL are highlighted by Nietzsche's ideals about art's purpose and the role of the artist. Nietzsche argues that these two "artistic drives of nature" are what the Greeks developed in their art to build an affirming life by embracing rather than hiding suffering, for example, with death, loss, and injustice. Their art exemplifies how appearances, rather than truths, can render an inhospitable world habitable. From this perspective, "every artist is an 'imitator,' and indeed either an Apolline dream-artist or a Dionysiac artist of intoxication or finally—as, for example, in Greek tragedy—an artist of both

dream and intoxication at once" (§2). The Attic tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles embody the Nietzsche's idealized mix of dream and intoxication, whereas Euripides and Socrates became too rationalistic, losing the Dionysian from the Apollonian (§9, §11, §12). Nietzsche prizes the dream/intoxication artist for paralleling in art our fundamental dissonance of human existence, through which the Apollonian and Dionysian guide us like gods above earth (§25). This is most apparent in art about suffering, such as the BSSL.

From the standpoint of Nietzschean embodiment, Mingus' material deployments—music, text, image—are "A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins" (Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense"). As the uniquely human experience fades out of one's sense-metaphors, art provides the corrective jolt of realignment between sensation and form. This is the Nietzschean approach to aesthetic theory that accounts for the necessity to seek recuperative intensity in such Dionysian works.

I therefore apply Golden's Nietzschean approach to the BSSL by heeding language's and art's originating procedures in "Modes of pre-literate experience of which we are habitually unaware." Yet, they must be discussed in the available language. Reflective thought and art, in these terms, partake in "co-creating new bonds within and across traditionally perceived conceptual and cultural planes" (6). These interrelations between the BSSL's language, music, and myth are necessarily experienced through an embodied performative modality. In attempt to reflect this, I analyze their parts' relations to a coherent amalgam. Nietzsche's philosophy of art seeks works that induce Apollonian and Dionysian interplay into the body through music and myth, image, and text. The artist draws upon the potentialities of these media in combination as tragedy. Those tragedies that achieve their fullness alter the world of forms to facilitate people through it. The myth invokes the familiar while the music transports people out of the familiar. Reading the BSSL by this hermeneutic depicts it as a tragic performance that reconfigures tragedy's classical elements through vinyl jazz's conventions and that radiates Nietzsche's aesthetic program of aestheticizing suffering to stimulate living.

The Nietzschean vocabulary guides our attention to the BSSL as a performative "objectification of a Dionysiac state" (§8). I devote the rest of this essay to discussing how each of its features can be read as an "Apolline embodiment of Dionysiac insights and effects" (§8). In doing so, I allude to ways the BSSL ultimately takes audiences to Nietzsche's two ends of Dionysian art. First, "music stimulates us to *contemplate symbolically* Dionysiac universality" (§16). Second, music "causes the symbolic image to emerge with the *highest degree of significance*" (§16). Examining the intermixtures of Apollonian and Dionysian features of the BSSL demonstrates how "music is able to give birth to



*myth*, i.e., to the most significant example, and in particular to *tragic* myth, myth which speaks of Dionysiac knowledge in symbols" (§16). The artful ways Mingus achieves Nietzsche's ends in the form of a vinyl jazz album reveals in Mingus that "the Dionysiac artist presents the essence of everything that appears in a way that is immediately intelligible, for he has command over the chaos of the Will before it has assumed individual shape, and from it he can bring a new world into being at each creative moment, but *also the old world* with which we are already familiar as phenomenon. In this latter sense, he is a tragic musician" ("The Dionysiac World View" §1).

### Mingus' *Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*

My read of the BSSL as a Nietzschean tragedy will proceed by considering their key similarities and how they interrelate within the BSSL to create a unified performance as mental theater of a jazz tragedy staged across the album. Since the BSSL's elements are interconnected and overlapping, I organize my discussion of them by five "entry points" that resemble the order in which people might have experienced the original vinyl record: beginning with the front cover and back cover, proceeding into the music and myth, and finally, reading the liner notes during the music. For each consideration, I briefly discuss its role in configuring tragedy's components and in performing a text with Nietzschean themes.

Generally speaking, BSSL is a musically-told tragedy. The front cover image of Charles Mingus and the title "Mingus *Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*" establish the scope and aim of its themes: martyrdom, redemption, inversion of social norms. Character, plot, and setting are introduced for elaboration through ensuing Apollonian/Dionysian tragic forms, which develop into themes of inspired madness, tragic heroism, mythic strife, rehabilitation through artistry, and exile. Its Nietzschean themes are highlighted by focusing its tragedy upon the artist, his struggle, and his handing over his life for it. BSSL amplifies its Dionysian aspects by putting Nietzsche's elements of tragic form directly into the composition of music and its accompanying texts.

Thus the classical elements of the tragedy are reformed from the Attic plays, which depict characters visually and have a chorus for music. BSSL depicts characters aurally by the use of instrumentation that represents individual voices. The narrative progresses through the interaction of the musical voices, which function both symbolically (Apollonian) and evocatively (Dionysian). The composition's form as a ballet imparts to the listener an imagined visuality, of bodies in motion, of characters' activities, and their interactions. The tragic elements are established through the composition's packaging, where extensive literature and a central image precede the music. This prepares the listener to put a constructed "program" into musical motion.

Musicology names this tradition "programmatic music," which the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines as

Music that, most often explicitly, attempts to express or depict one or more nonmusical ideas, images, or events. The composer usually indicates the "program" (the subject or subjects being evoked) by a suggestive title or preface, which may be quite vague or may be specific and detailed. A seemingly simple title—e.g., *Romeo and Juliet* (Tchaikovsky)—may suggest a rather precise sequence of characters and events (e.g., Friar Laurence, street fights between the Montagues and Capulets, balcony scene, tomb scene). Other titles do little more than label a piece's mood, style, or dance characteristics (e.g., Liszt's *Consolations*, Schumann's *3 Romanzen* op. 28, or Chopin's *Tarantelle*) or suggest an image that is not essential to an understanding of the music's spirit (e.g., Schumann's "Vogel als Prophet" [The Prophet Bird] op. 82 no. 7, MacDowell's "To a Wild Rose," and many of the Debussy Preludes).

In its 1963 vinyl release, the "program" to the musical composition would be experienced first, providing textual elements that initiate the musical experience as a coherent tragedy. The front cover supplies many of the initial components found throughout the performance. The first character is introduced visually from the front cover, which would have been seen more readily than in today's ubiquity of packageless streaming music. The sparsely solo image, the singular name "Mingus," the self-designation of "saint," together cast Mingus into a mythic main character. Dr. Pollock, speaking like a Greek chorus, writes, "There can be no question that he is the Black Saint who suffers for his sins and those of mankind as he reflects his deeply religious philosophy." The subtitle to the work begins with "From a poem," which indicates that the music should be heard in relation to the guiding text. The poem's title summarizes the ensuing myth: "touch my beloved's thought while her world's affluence crumbles at my feet," which plays out sonically when Mingus the black saint Dionysiacally loses himself in his beloved to "touch her thought" through Dionysian music.



The back cover indicates the narrative arc through the music's six movements, whose titles denote musical form, suggest stage imagery, and survey the narrative's progression. This overview of the six thematics provides an impressionistic scaffold for the development of the sonic storytelling. This Apollonian form, here at its least Dionysiac, facilitates the listener's immersion into the music by setting up expectations that assist the listener to enter and stay in the performance. The 40-minute composition was four times the length of most jazz compositions. Its movements divide up the work equally in length:

- Solo Dancer: *Stop! And Listen, Sinner Jim Whitney!* (6:20)
- Duet Solo Dancers: *Heart's Beat And Shades In Physical Embraces* (6:25)
- Group Dancers: *[Soul Fusion] Freewoman And Oh This Freedom's Slave Cries* (7:00)
- Trio and Group Dancers: *Stop! Look! And Sing Songs Of Revolutions!* (6:04)
- Single Solos And Group Dance: *Saint And Sinner Join In Merriment On Bottle Front* (4:35)
- Group And Solo Dance: *Of Love, Pain, And Passioned Revolt, Then Farewell, My Beloved, 'til It's Freedom Day* (7:48)

This album occurs within the larger Apollonian context of jazz history, which designates the same mytho-historical characterization of Mingus as an unsaintly hero of struggle at the feet of others. Prior to the BSSL, Mingus cast himself lowly as "the clown" and "Pithecanthropus Erectus" in his earlier albums' programmatic elements of his artistic persona. Here in the BSSL, Mingus ventures a risky deviation of musical form in jazz's traditionally marketable economics in order to add mythic textuality and perform a heterodox accedence of his own sainthood. The world created by conventional jazz form and the album's commodity logic can crumble at his feet for his own Dionysian transformation. Consequently, BSSL challenges the conventional separateness, even arbitrariness, of an album's music, text, and imagery by putting them all in the service of a narrativ frame with "nonmusical ideas, images, and events." In an extended 4000 words of liner notes, Mingus writes as the composer and directly addresses the audience. His last sentences defer to his personal counselor, who "is very close to me [Mingus] personally." The 900 words from "Dr. Edmund Pollock, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist," play the role of the authority to declare true suffering, nobility, and motive to the biographical Mingus behind the music. Ambiguating fact, fiction, and embellishment, these extensively dramatic and unusual liner notes are instrumental to the rich performance of the album.

Thus, the BSSL embodies Nietzsche's concept of tragedy as a relation of music to myth and character. It also imbues the Dionysian throughout the inevitable Apollonian forms of music, text, and media. Seemingly writing about Mingus, Nietzsche writes that "Tragedy absorbs the supreme, orgiastic qualities of music, so that in Greek culture, as in our own, it effectively brings music to fulfillment, but then allies it with the tragic myth and the tragic hero who, like some mighty Titan, lifts the whole Dionysiac world on to his back, relieving us of its Burden..." (§21). This is heard readily in the music as the listener sustains 40 minutes of what Dr. Pollock writes is incessant in the music: "the suffering is terrible to hear." Mingus as composer and as myth takes the role of lifting "the whole Dionysiac world on to his back, relieving us of its Burden." Mingus as the main character of the narrative is a tragic hero for his suffering, which is beset by adversity and instability (as quoted in this article's epigraph). The appropriation of the Christian myth befits Nietzsche's criteria

for great tragedy, borrowing from the oral tradition and imbuing it with music and timeliness.

Mingus' mythic excursion to the Dionysian is expressed musically. Each subsequent movement accumulates more dancers, each heard as a voice in the instrumentation. The opening movement for solo dancer features a single plaintive saxophone that the liner notes say is "a voice calling to others and saying, 'I am alone, please, please join me!'" The deep mourning and tears of loneliness are echoed and re-echoed by the instruments." The build of dancing voices alternates among the 11-musician "chorus," which impel the leading voice akin to the chorus in Greek tragedy. Throughout each movement are chaotic flurries into the Dionysian until mounting together in the end. Throughout the work is intricate interplay of the collective statement and individual freedom—the auditory translation of the Dionysian and Apollonian. Each is used as a motivator and enabler of the other.

Mingus' instruction to the listener for Dionysian participation voices Nietzsche's role of music. Nietzsche writes, "With this chorus the profound Helene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will. Art saves him, and through art—life" (§7). Part of the BSSL's chorus, Dr. Pollock, accounts the saving power gifted from Mingus' personal toll from continuing to transforming the world through art. He writes, "this particular composition contains Mr. Mingus' personal and also a social message. He feels intensively. He tries to tell people he is in great pain and anguish because he loves. He cannot accept that he is alone, all by himself; he wants to love and be loved. His music is a call for acceptance, respect, love, understanding, fellowship, freedom - a plea to change the evil in man and to end hatred." In this musically-centered tragedy, the hero and his journey are expressed sonically, which makes the pathos imminent to the musician's drama. This tragedy tells its story through the same media of its subject matter: the musical art of improvisation that both destroys and saves Mingus.

Heard in the music and alluded throughout his liner notes, Mingus writes how his own Dionysian excursions put him in the psychiatric ward at Bellevue. Writing of society's insanity, Mingus argues its leaders could not enter the Dionysian and bring it back to the Apollonian: "They'd never get out of the observation ward at Bellevue. I did." The next line—"So, listen how. Play the record."—invites the audience to experience BSSL as a musical translation of his martyred journey. Mingus' heroism derives from his authentic struggle for artistic fidelity to life. He suffers for it, casts himself into mythic composition, and we the listeners take Nietzschean sustenance from it. Playing between the biographical Mingus and the mythic role he simultaneously performs, Mingus presents BSSL as his "best record" that discloses the secrets of Dionysian sustenance.

In the text and music, the Dionysian and Apollonian surround the Black Saint, which creates his tragic suffering through the poignancy of various

tragic antagonisms. Mingus carries burdens for continuing to feel, love, and commit to artistry despite oppositional forces overtaking him. The myth, as Apollonian illusion, extrapolates upon the realities of making a jazz record with 11 musicians in 1960s America. Mingus writes in the liner notes of his antagonism with a culture of musical impotence. He rails against pervasive “rhythms of pounding exactness” whose listeners and creators “must be nuts” to “pound out the already too obvious time night after night.” By acclimating to these dead, shallow rhythms, “...sanity can't be sustained [and] one begins to like it without twisting or even dancing, popping fingers, or at least working out one's frenzy in ye old brass bed mama.” Deadening rhythm from their bodily motion is another of Mingus' tragedies that he burdens to rectify through his composition's emblazoned polychromic time aesthetic.

Further, Mingus is in tragic antagonism with other musicians: he details in his liner notes the difficulties of getting each musician to play the parts with his Dionysian vision. Mingus is in antagonism with his own artistic limitations: the fidelity of his art against the logistics of recording leads him to direct the reader to “throw all other records of mine away” because “I intend to record it all over again on this label the way it was intended to sound.” Mingus is in antagonism with critics: they, like the judges of Christ, determine his fate and influence the public against him. Excluded from BSSL (for commercial and political tact) is Mingus' social antagonisms, which his biographies outline as the most crushing, for example, being a mixed-race jazz musician disavowed by social groups and targeted by the state. These troubles are salient in the writing and music of BSSL. The tragedy of the music and myth both draw from these adversities in the program and in the context of the BSSL. They cripple and inspire the composer/tragic-hero so that we listen to the BSSL in accordance with Mingus wrestling with the Dionysian through each of the Apollonian forms conveyable through the medium of the vinyl album.

The BSSL as tragedy also conveys its cast of characters. It is customary of the jazz idiom to list each musician since the genre features individuals rather than groups. Yet the BSSL takes this much further and details each musician from the perspective of the ecstatic Saint characterizing them Dionysiacally as preparation for the music—sometimes even addresses them directly *in absentia*. Mingus writes a paragraph about each musician, in a Dionysiac first-draft extemporaneousness, that explains how each contributes to both the music and the mythic narrative. The musicians' authenticity, artistic contribution, and deference to the collective statement are the militant virtues of Mingus' heroic stand. Mingus says he only accepts musicians who hand themselves over to the composer and to the music while still able to draw from life and its pangs. The Dionysian element abounds in his Apollonian litany. For example, Mingus writes of his trumpeter, “I feel in musical love too when I hear your sympathetic understanding of my musical chores on this record.” Mingus also discusses his Dionysian relation with his drummer Dannie Richmond, with whom the feel of time is created in all his music: “Without Dannie, who gave me his complete open mind seven years ago, to work with as clay—I didn't play drums so I taught Dannie bass. Dannie is me with his own sense

of will. Instead of hands strumming or bowing he uses his feet, hands, skin, metal, and wood." The Dionysian blurring of individuation between the drums and bass is Mingus' starting point for his artistry, so strong that Mingus blurs the individuation between the people themselves. This Dionysian effect aurally parallels the BSSL's collective musical improvisation, where musicians improvise together upon a singular coherent myth about Mingus.

Lastly, the liner notes intensify the Saint myth by shrouding Mingus' artistry in Dionysiac mystery. Mingus explains some difficult ideas that he is pursuing in his composition and performance. His theory of timekeeping is the most detailed. Like his other ideas, it remains mostly opaque to trained jazz musicians, as Mingus regrets. Yet these sagacious ideals are vivid to the reader's senses and imagination. Any listener can seek Mingus' time-concept in the music and participate in the myth without having to understand it. For example, he assails "Time, perfect or syncopated time, [which] is when a faucet dribbles from a leaky washer." Instead, Mingus insists on a Dionysian theory of time. He explains that for a drummer,

... you don't play the beat where it is. You draw a picture away from the beat right up to its core with different notes of different sounds of the drum instruments so continuously that the core is always there for an open mind. While you make it live now and then you go inside the beat, dead center, and split the core to the sides and shatter the illusion so there is no shakiness ever. If one tries to stay inside dead center or directly on top of the beat or on the bottom the beat, it is too rigid on the outside where it is heard. The stiffness should only be felt inside the imaginary center of the exact tempo's core. The top, the bottom, the sides, the back are where my favorite drummers, Dannie and Elvin, play, though differently. They tease the mind by not telling you exactly what everyone knows—where one, two, three, and four are.

Such passages goad the audience to veer outside themselves, priming their aspirations beyond their familiar bodily habitation. Without this preparation of what to attend to, the listener likely overlooks the artistic ventures in the music that substantiate Mingus' self-portrayal as a tortured and misunderstood artist. In saintly boldness, he concludes, "Perhaps it may sound conceited to point out on my own liner notes what I know I have contributed." And yet doing so is necessary to unify the mythic Mingus in his album's performance of grand tragedy. The martyr knows his lot and carries his burden. And thus attention must be paid.

The programmatic liner notes as a whole perform a Nietzschean interplay of the Dionysian and Apollonian. A non-Dionysian artist would have the composure to articulate him/herself. Mingus, however, resigns to his psychologist as the authority to articulate the meaning of the music. Throughout Mingus' writing, the Dionysiac loss of self pervades the liner notes that establish the audience's expectations and mood for the music. This artist—so scattered, angered, and emotive—cedes to his clinical psychologist to speak comprehensibly about Mingus and his composition. Mingus' and Dr. Pollock's

paired liner notes embody Nietzsche's chiasmic relation between the two artistic deities: "the intricate relation of the Apollonian and Dionysian in tragedy may really be symbolized by a fraternal union of the two deities: Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo; and Apollo, finally the language of Dionysus; and so the highest goal of tragedy and of all art is attained" (§21). We see this in how Mingus' and Pollock's writing work together as a whole, embodying the Apollonian and Dionysian chiasmatically. Mingus' writings reflect the Dionysian. They leap and abound ecstatically, beside oneself, in long sentences of inspired drunkenness. He writes dialectically to himself, and in one of the paragraphs, losing himself in a tangential stream-of-conscious tirade. On the other hand, Dr. Pollock's writing reflects the Apollonian. Measured, balanced, clear, and focused, he writes in the style of clearly ordered form. However, each of the writings contains the other. Mingus' Dionysian style discusses the Apollonian aspects of the music. Dr. Pollock's Apollonian style discusses the Dionysian aspects of the music and Mingus' psyche. Mingus and Pollock perform a balanced complementation of the two approaches to Apollonian/Dionysian aesthetics, heightening the work's presence of both.

Spanning all elements of the BSSL, the myth furthers the music and the music furthers the myth. Nietzsche writes how tragedy's myth "artistically tames the horrible" (§7) by casting one's suffering into an image and participating in the mediating spectacle. The music then makes the illusion poignant. Nietzsche writes, "Between the universal validity of its music and the listener, receptive in his Dionysian state, tragedy places a sublime parable, the myth, and awakens the listener by means of that illusion as if the music were merely the highest means to bring life into the plastic world of myth" (§21). The music is immediately felt as real. It enters the body differently than the myth, providing additional avenues for internalizing narrative. Their entwinement changes each in complementarity. The music "imparts to the tragic myth an intense and convincing metaphysical significance that word and image without this singular help could never have attained. And above all, it is through music that the tragic spectator is overcome by an assured premonition of the highest pleasure attained through destruction and negation, so he feels as if the innermost abyss of things spoke to him perceptibly" (§21). The BSSL, accessed through by these Nietzschean themes, admits a performative coherence of stunning craft and visceral power. Its sound, image, and text interplay upon the ear and eye, creating tacticities palatable as time, space, drama, and disembodiment. More than a text illuminated by Nietzsche's aesthetic theory, the BSSL appears self-conscious of how its order, form, conventions, and spirit are forged through dynamic tensions with their symbionts of disorder, chaos, mystery, and void. The labors consumed to use these aesthetic elements are projected into the work, explicated within its tale: the art of an artist intimates itself. It articulates art's art.

### Dionysian Jazz Tragedy and the Performance Complex

Reading the BSSL through Nietzsche shows the extent that the BSSL performs Greek-style tragedy in a vinyl LP album. Nietzschean themes saturate the work, embodying Nietzsche's aesthetic ideals of Dionysian excursions in jazz's Apollonian forms. The BSSL's distinct Apollonian forms in the jazz genre rend open forays into the Dionysian. The Nietzschean artistry lies in Mingus' balance of accessible Apollonian elements (e.g., simple cover image, uncomplicated harmonies, episodic breaks palatably-sized, etc.) that complement Dionysian excursions. The artistic challenge is animating Apollonian forms to come alive, create new sensations, and transport audiences. The BSSL adapts tragic forms and jazz idioms to inflect a "jazz Dionysian." From the music's opening incantation into hypnosis, to its chaotic spells of frenzied fervor, to spacious bittersweet solo contemplations, and into the final accelerating spiral that unravels into transcendent unity, we are invited into three relationships with the Dionysian. The BSSL is *inspired* by the Dionysian, as conveyed through Mingus' liner notes outlining his philosophy of music and how it developed during his time in Bellevue psychiatric ward. The BSSL is *reflective* of the Dionysian, structured into the music and narrative of characters caught between Apollonian order and Dionysian outbreaks. And the BSSL is *inducing* of the Dionysian, collapsing theatrical enticements upon the audience and stirring pathos. In these three ways, the Dionysian constitutes a *performative* dimension to the arts, especially where "Music and tragic myth both express, in the same way, the Dionysiac capacity of a people, and [how] they cannot be separated from one another" (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* §25). Mingus exemplifies Nietzsche's Dionysian ideals and, in doing so, suggests how they might be variably constructed, effected, and transformed. Reconfiguring classical tragedy in a mass music commodity form allowed Mingus to choreograph Dionysian/Apollonian performativities from diverse artistic traditions, thereby showcasing how the album can initiate trans-musical performances. While the BSSL was acclaimed for extending jazz's compositional possibilities, this performance studies analysis reveals it as a site of interconnected modes of performativity in a constricted commercial-media format.

These cross-relations between the BSSL and Nietzsche address questions about aesthetic power in the album: How does BSSL operate as a space of performative potential? How does that space endow the jazz process? Within the album-endowed performance space, how does BSSL's dense multi-textuality amalgamate into improvisational theater? This analysis of the BSSL broadens the limited, narrower vocabularies of jazz, theater, and performance, and suggests combining these three analytical lenses. Doing so, I have argued, enables the BSSL to admit new readings about 1) the album as a space of performative potential 2) that Mingus crafts into a mental theater 3) with Apollonian/Dionysian artistry. These three arguments necessarily come together. The album is revealed to have various unusual performativities by Mingus' creative reuse of the album's resources as a drama space. Mingus



achieves a mental theater in the album affording a capacious and contemplative space that creates Apollonian/Dionysian possibilities. And the Apollonian/Dionysian interplay is endowed by Mingus' transformation of the album space into a mental theater, engendering a play across the album's resources (i.e., music, image, text, imagined stage, sonic characters, etc.). Analyzed in this way, the BSSL invokes a Dionysian "jazz tragedy" through multimodal textualities that capacitate Mingus' "drama workshop" art space. The BSSL performs itself as mental theater in order to render his performances of a biography, his mythic self-recasting as martyr, a multi-character dramatic narrative, and an audience journey through Dionysiac redemption. This dramatic art space does not exist self-constituted in the album. Rather, Mingus constructs an aesthetic space that occurs in the space and time of audience participation. The BSSL performs a mental theater space located in the mind of the audience, who actively ideate the Mingus-coaxed stagespace required to assemble the album's fragments. The BSSL's mental theater space exists both *between* album and audience and *via* album and audience. This frame mediating the coherence of the work—necessarily performed, embodied, practiced—configures the aesthetic dynamics of the BSSL's world. The audience's ways of listening, their incidences of constellational convergence, and their mind's eye together occasion the BSSL to be experienced differently each encounter.

Paralleling the BSSL, other albums have constituted other kinds of performativities for aesthetic possibilities. For example, The Flaming Lips' *Zaireeka* comprises 4 CDs to be played on 4 sound systems simultaneously, creating "Parking Lot Experiments" and new spatializations and socializations of listening (DeRogatis). The Who's *The Who Sell Out* performs its hypercommercialism (e.g., composing their own radio commercials and product jingles throughout their vinyl record) with such musical integrity that the album ironically redeems pop commercialism. William Basinski's *The Disintegration Loops* repeats poignant five-second synth clips on cassette tapes that self-destruct, which audiates the physical degradation of magnetic tape, the incremental loss of sound signal, and the endstage of a depleted medium. (This album is fabled to have also been recorded on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 as the New York composer watched the World Trade Towers destruct—hence creating another dimension of performativity to the album). These albums exemplify four of many ways performativities abound within the album's parameters, which can be mobilized to create spaces, dynamics, and potentialities for performance.

This article exhibits one particular mode of analysis of performativity in the album with interest in aesthetics of embodiment, sound, and the Dionysian. I invite others to explore related case studies of various modes of performativities and other theoretical lenses in this vein. This approach to performative analysis aims to enlarge, extend, and continue developing the very works that—as artistic interventions, provocations, enigmas, invitations, questions—beckon for such treatment. The BSSL beckoning us as such, this case study models a way of reading the album as a performance complex, an emerging concept that facilitates accounting for performative parts in relation to the synthesis logic within each work. The BSSL demonstrates how these

modes of performativity are idiosyncratic to their performance complex. The BSSL's media formats, theater-ized in Mingus' manner, comprise the conditions enabling the possibility of the album's alchemy to self-transcend into mental theater. Each artistic tradition and media format can draw upon prior modes of performativity, as exemplified by Mingus' composing not just the music but composing the album's media, cohering its parts, and unifying a seamless album-theatricality. The concept of the performance complex highlights how all art performs its media as its own kind of space. Mingus' programmatic content relies upon him also performing his supra-album, a transformative site, a launch pad beyond the album. Delineating the BSSL's album-performativity, and the performative potential of albums in general, can help performance scholars circumnavigate tendencies of fragmentation and reduction, especially regarding album-born performativities, their emerging social performances, and how Apollonian forms combine as new potentialities into Dionysian realms.

Nietzsche's vocabulary provides a useful supplement to performance studies to extend the range of such analyses and fortify their continuities. Nietzschean philosophy readily integrates its language of aesthetic processes with the language of performance, together creating a far-reaching analytic to connect the gaps between form and effect, and to enrich our thinking about aesthetic power. Nietzsche's approach to aesthetics, spurning Kantian rationalism and disinterestedness, embraces the participatory aspects of aesthesis. This provides performance scholars with a performative hermeneutic that generates a distinctly per-formative way of knowing and experiencing processes of becoming and processes of *through-ness*.

Conversely, the BSSL complicates and expands our modern reception of Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy* and Nietzsche's aesthetic philosophy can be variably mapped to modern art forms and explored through stimulating occurrences of (mis)fittedness, opening new questions and ways of engaging. This study locates Nietzschean tragedy in a jazz concept album to direct analysis toward dramatic effects and audience interplay with the Apollonian/Dionysian. Similarly, scholars may locate Nietzschean aesthetics in other forms, such as political spectacle, sport, rituals of consumerism and so forth, drawing upon Nietzsche's generative capacities to refresh our understanding of dramatic events in contemporary formations.

Regarding performance studies generally, this case study contributes to larger questions of aesthetic power. What moves us and in what ways? How do the BSSL and related works operate idiosyncratically? What accounts for mysterious gaps between form and effect? These questions, never answerable through universal prescription, evade generalized answers. Rather, per performance studies' methodology, each work must be confronted, considered, and struggled with on its own basis, within its own world. Each work should be engaged on its own terms that arise from the performativities endowed by the medium's emergent space. Applicable to music, albums, jazz, and beyond, this approach expands our understanding and criticism of performance by equipping scholars with reading practices for changing media and changing

performance spaces. It also helps continually justify the field of performance studies as performance occurs in continual reformation from the original theater and ritual sites that birthed the field.

More specifically, this case study contributes to three sites of interest in the performance studies literature: integrating music into performance studies, analyzing albums' performative aesthetics, and developing suitable interpretive frameworks. This case study advances these efforts and speaks back to them variously, continuing these disciplinary agendas, and pushing the boundaries of the field one increment wider than its extant scope and methods. Performance studies can embrace the album as a historically salient and aesthetically rich site of performance. This expressive form of 20<sup>th</sup>-century mass media has since been incorporated as a basis for 21<sup>st</sup>-century art forms. Although, outside the scope of this paper, more work needs to be done in tracing kinds of performativities through history, how they have cross-related, and how Mingus's BSSL emerged within this history.

The physical album configured distinct parameters for its performance: a music-centered multi-textuality, to be "played" as an event, occurring within material scarcity of the physical medium (e.g., vinyl record), fixed to one of a few possible places (before portable devices), received in relatively sustained and focused attention, and ritualized within communities of collective listening (with people together around a sound system). The hermeneutics of albums' performativities with the Dionysian highlight the field's interest with transportation and transformation in the ritual aspects of performance (Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*; Schechner, "Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed"). The album is a space accommodating Monson's concept of jazz as a mode of social action where the primary performance occurs beyond the music. Madrid similarly prepares a performative approach to music and albums by declaring that "what defines performance studies in relation to music is not its object of study, methodology or results but rather its concern with a simple and basic question, what music does as opposed to what music is" (Madrid). By asking what music *does* rather than *is*, performance studies can assume a privileged claim among the disciplines to analyze music, albums, and other related performances. The field is well-positioned to extend its roots to reach further into swathes of performances, performativities, and performance complexes of contemporary phenomena threaded through 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century societies.

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