FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 26, 2003

WHAT: Fine Arts Center Series presents the Mingus Big Band

WHEN: Saturday, April 12 at 8pm

WHERE: Fine Arts Center Concert Hall
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Call 1-800-999-UMAS or 545-2511 for tickets or go on-line to www.fineartscenter.com/tickets

(Mingus Big Band Brings Swingin’, Bluesy Style of Charles Mingus to FAC)

The Mingus Big Band performs at the Fine Arts Center Concert Hall on Saturday, April 12. The Mingus Big Band celebrates the music of the late, great composer and bassist, Charles Mingus reviving his repertory and the brawling, muscular, hard-swinging, bluesy way he wanted it played. This 14-piece band has been voted "Best Big Band" for three years running in both JazzTimes and Downbeat magazines.

All day that same day, the Fine Arts Center and the Jazz and African-American Music Studies Program of the Department of Music and Dance host the Fifth Annual High School Jazz Festival. High school jazz bands from Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut will participate in the daylong festival. Members of the Mingus Big Band, along with UMass jazz faculty, will adjudicate student performances. The public is welcome to attend the free student performances throughout the day, and at 7:15pm a high school ensemble selected by the Mingus Big Band will perform in the Concert Hall prior to the Mingus Big Band performance.

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The Mingus Big Band remains devoted to the vast repertoire that the late, great bassist and composer Charles Mingus left behind when he died in 1979. Organized and overseen by Sue Mingus (Mingus' widow) the Mingus Big Band consists of a rotating group of 14 players from a pool of over 100 of the best musicians on the jazz scene today. Mingus Big Band plays special big band arrangements of Steve Slagle, Ronnie Cuber, Jack Walrath, as well as himself and his frequent collaborator, Sy Johnson. The band has performed every Thursday night since 1991 to sold-out houses at the Time Cafe in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village.

One of the most important figures in twentieth century American music, Charles Mingus was a virtuoso bass player, accomplished pianist, bandleader and composer. His early professional experience in the 40’s found him touring with bands like Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory and Lionel Hampton. Eventually he settled in New York where he played and recorded with the leading musicians of the 1950’s – Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Bud Powell, Art Tatum and Duke Ellington himself.

Mingus soon found himself at the forefront of the avant-garde. He recorded over a hundred albums for many labels, wrote over three hundred scores and toured extensively throughout the world until the end of 1977 when he was diagnosed as having a rare nerve disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease). He was confined to a wheelchair, and although he was no longer able to write music on paper or compose at the piano, his last works were sung into a tape recorder. From the 1960’s until his death in 1979 at age 56, Mingus remained a vanguard of American music. Both New York City and Washington, D.C. honored him posthumously with “Charles Mingus Day.”

The Mingus Big Band will perform at 8 pm on Saturday, April 12 in the Fine Arts Center Concert Hall. Tickets are $35, $25, $15; $10 for youth 17 and under, and $15, $10, $7 for Five College Students. For tickets and information, call the Fine Arts Center Box Office at 545-2511 or 1-800-999-UMAS, or visit out our website at www.fineartscenter.com/centerseries. Sponsored by the Daily Hampshire Gazette and The River 93.9FM. For more information on daylong Jazz Festival, call the Department of Music and Dance at 545-0018.

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