

## John Repp

### MINGUS AND MCLEAN

The year I turned three, Jackie McLean and Charles Mingus  
came to blows over the music Mingus wanted made.  
McLean wanted song, Mingus growl and shout.

Consider a police whistle in the mouth of a three-year-old:  
Dogs Begone. Aunts Begone. Take That Thing Away or I'll Kill Him.  
Consider for the good table tennis player fifty dollars

for paddle rubber means the difference between hunger  
and banquet. Hyperbole? For the good table tennis player a paddle  
is a *racket*, damn it. Do you know what it means to have both

your flat kill and block working? The Common Flicker doesn't.  
The Common Flicker jabs his hemostat in the turf near the forsythia,  
which photosynthesis takes from willowy sticks to bud to yellow to green

in three weeks. Perhaps photosynthesis tells only part of the story,  
but if the crow doesn't know nor the house finch nor the rabbits  
that charge, then daintily hop, each over the other's back,

what need to know at all? Do larvae? In some poems, larvae know a lot.  
In others, grubs know all. Indulging a corrupted animism,  
I wield a grub hoe on the dandelions, considering the claim

of Larry, late of Cheapers, who said a hundred bucks for a guitar  
with good action is a stone steal. That's mostly paraphrase,  
but he did say "stone steal," the mildewed hippie adjective

warming the Sky Pilot chamber of my heart. Not even in Rochester  
will good tone go unnoticed. No bird can nest in a harmonica,  
though right this minute a researcher scrapes with a made-to-order

German blade the G air-hole in a Hohner to see what breeds unremarked  
on Charlie Musslewhite's underlip. Consider Bachelard's meditations  
on closet and ballroom, nest and tree house. Curtains don't shut out

all the light. Are you getting this? Can you hear Mingus stomping,  
then taking it down to near-silence with that blessed right hand?  
Peregrine falcons surf the evening light Heather remarked

before vodka and *mole*. Blondes have drawn me since a cousin and I  
communed over toy trucks or maybe nothing. We shared Zweiback and  
milk.

We bumped foreheads and squeaked till a parent lifted one of us away.

Our family visited theirs three winters straight, then nothing.  
A poem can wade upstream, no matter the current.  
Fishing drenches everything. A hundred bucks for a Fenwick ultra-light

means the difference between chaos and Cecil Taylor. Don't expect  
a baseball reference or praise for linguica. Don't expect rebuilt engines  
and the valve jobs that maintain them. Not long ago a hundred bucks

meant the rent and some food. A hundred bucks told you your friends.  
No matter how Orphic, oracular, rotund or original, the burnt coffee  
of lust remains coffee with maybe a touch of brandy. A horse's skin

so exquisitely knows fear the mare could mark to the second the birth  
of panic. The mare chooses not to, however. The quarter-horse gallops  
along the fence as I drive to work. The Morgan deploys his lips

in the clover. *Stay with me* means *Prepare for disaster*. How decide  
who gets what music? How decide which clover's sweetest?  
Play that menthol alto, Jackie, so the Mountainous One can holler.