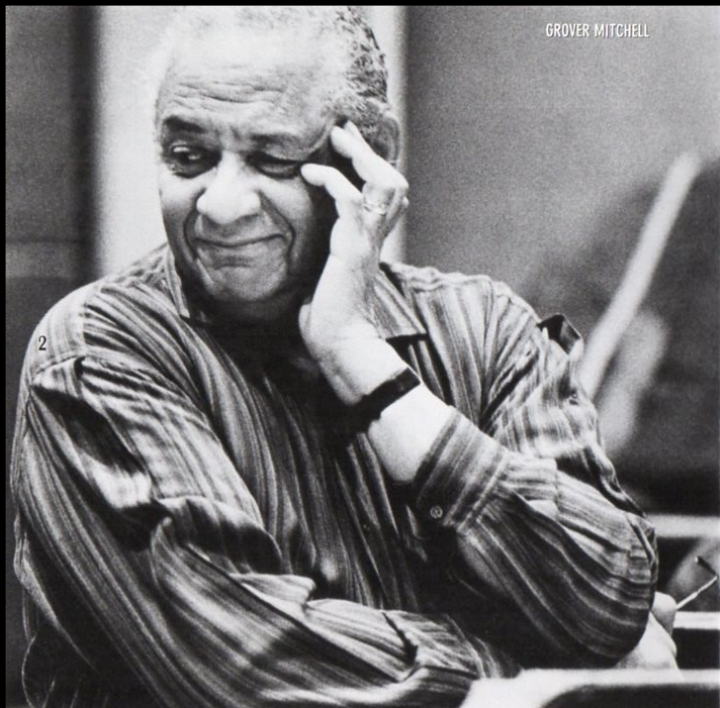




GROVER MITCHELL



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THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA recently played the annual Jazz in June series at Ravinia Park near Chicago, and anyone familiar with the long life of the Basie band would have to admit that it hasn't sounded this crackling good in a long time. For one thing, there was an acoustic rhythm guitarist back in the center of the rhythm section. For another, Butch Miles

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was grinning from the drum chair. And, most important, Grover Mitchell was at the helm (as he's been for the last couple of years), navigating a course correction in which he is determined to steer the band back to basics — which means a wealth of some of the richest writing ever played by a big band.

It's paying off. When was the last time you heard the band

charge its way through "Fantail"? Think early '70s.

"We have so many good things," Mitchell says, "I just want to play things from this huge library that we have — pieces that have been neglected. The course of this band was set 60 years ago. We have charts by Thad Jones, Frank Foster, Quincy Jones, Neal Hefti and Ernie Wilkins, who I think was the best of them all.

Look, I could play all week for you and not repeat a tune once."

To say that a given object of jazz — a player, a band, an arrangement — is stuck in some time warp is, I suppose, just about the worst curse a critic can inflict these days. Well, here's one critic who is here to tell you that stuck is good — if you're stuck in the right place. It means there are roots underneath the work. It means the music has a voice that transcends any single soloist and comes through regardless of tempos or titles.

The decisive test of truth in any artist can be gauged in one simple question: does he belong somewhere or does he not? So, to say that the Count Basie band of this collection is stuck in a '50s sound, as some may whine, is rather like accusing Michelangelo of being stuck in the Renaissance. Would one find Michelangelo more to one's liking dabbling in cubism or perhaps postmodern deconstructionism? By the same token, would the Basie band speak to us more

convincingly wandering in and out of assorted identities; the language of Gil Evans, perhaps; or the Globe Unity Orchestra or heavy metal?

Hardly. In fact, if you're a band, to be "stuck" in the '50s — or the '30s, for that matter, and the Basie band can offer us that choice nightly — is to be stuck in a kind of Nirvana when the big jazz band was the musical language of the land. I can document that, I think, by the following analogy.

In the wake of the Chicago Bulls' sixth championship not long ago, Daniel Okrent of *Time Magazine* sought to take Michael Jordan's measure on a global spectrum of athletic history. His rhetorical question: who was the greatest athlete of them all? When the short list finally reached Jordan, Muhammad Ali, Babe Ruth and Pele, perhaps to the surprise of some, Okrent picked Pele. Here was his reasoning: Though soccer may be ignored in the U.S., it is a global obsession. By the same token, basketball, boxing and baseball are uniquely American enthusiasms not shared by

the rest of the world. Therefore, they draw their players from a far smaller sector of the world talent pool than soccer. Thus, since Pele surmounted a global population of more than 200 million would-be soccer pros to reach the top, he is, by that test, the superior athlete vis à vis Jordan, whose competition was far less.

Similarly, the Count Basie band reached its apogee at precisely that moment when big bands were the epicenter of American music. Competition to get into the game and make it to the top was intense and broadly based. The finest musicians and arrangers were drawn into the idiom in huge numbers, settling loose a firestorm of energy and creative competition, one that would be impossible to conjure on such a scale today. In short, Basie competed within a vast pool of big band talent to achieve his reputation, and that is a test no band is subject to today. Moreover, the momentum and innovation of the '30s and '40s sustained and matured through the '50s and well into the '60s,

when Grover Mitchell joined Basie (October 1962). While a few good bands might have brought up the rear, none could possibly know the stimulation and creative intensity that shaped Basie, or the particular sense of artistic and economic competition in which Basie saw his various primes. The Basie band today is the custodian of that *Zeitgeist*; and its library is a treasury of music produced by those unique conditions across six decades.

Another person-turned-institution who dominated those decades was Duke Ellington. Oddly, or perhaps not so oddly, the two rarely borrowed from one another's book. Duke did "One O'clock Jump" for Capitol and Basie did "Perdido" for Clef in the mid '50s, but there was never any mistaking who was who. Each was a vertically integrated musical entity with its own special ways and means. Nevertheless, it seems remarkable that this is the first time the Basie band has taken on a whole Ellington program.

In *Count Plays Duke*, the second

Basie CD under the baton of Grover Mitchell and the first that is all Basie band (the first, two years ago, was a pairing with the New York Voices), all the pieces may be Ellington, but you won't find a bar of music that isn't pure Basie. For this the credit goes to Allyn Ferguson, whose arrangements shaped all the material. "He never tried to imitate Duke Ellington," says Mitchell, "or do any of those Ellington-Strayhorn tricks. It wouldn't have worked anyway. He went ahead and wrote like we might play it."

Consider "Take the A Train," which gets the Basie "Lil' Darling" treatment with the tempo pulled way, way down. (Only Glenn Miller dared play this tune slower back in 1941.) Or take "Cottontail." Though it remains a tenor vehicle, with Kenny Hing inheriting the space once occupied by Ben Webster and later Paul Gonsalves, it runs very much according to its own muse. Rather than transplant the famous sax section passage in tact, for instance, Ferguson has invented a fresh one which the

Basie reeds bite into with dash.

And Mitchell's own sumptuous trombone is the centerpiece of "In A Sentimental Mood." The full sound and seamless ties between the notes not only serve notice that Mitchell has no intention of trading his horn for a baton, they remind us that Tommy Dorsey was one of the most powerful influences on a couple of generations of jazz trombonists. "I still think he's the greatest player I ever heard on trombone," Mitchell says.

So here is Duke Ellington, filtered through the spirit and substance of Count Basie. Fourteen years after Basie's death and nearly 25 years after Ellington's, the test of time continues as these two figures stand on the edge of the 21st century, each still a force to be reckoned with.

JOHN McDONOUGH

*Down Beat, The Wall Street Journal*

CONDUCTOR/TROMBONE  
TRUMPETS

TROMBONES

REEDS

PIANO

BASS

DRUMS

GUITAR

SPECIAL GUEST

ALL ARRANGEMENTS

GROVER MITCHELL

WILLIAM 'SCOTTY' BARNHART, ROBERT OJEDA,  
MICHAEL P. WILLIAMS, SHAWN C. EDMONDS  
DAVID KEIM, CLARENCE BANKS, ALVIN WALKER,  
WILLIAM H. HUGHES Bass Trombone

DOUG MILLER Tenor Sax/Flute, JOHN WILLIAMS Baritone Sax/Bass Clarinet,

KENNY HING Tenor Sax/Clarinet, JOHN 'JACKIE' KELSO Alto Sax,

BRAD LEALI Alto Sax/Clarinet

TERENCE CONLEY

JAMES LEARY

BUTCH MILES

WILL MATTHEWS

FRANK WESS Flute, Alto Sax

ALLYN FERGUSON

1 **TAKE THE "A" TRAIN** 5:34  
Billy Strayhorn (Music Sales Corp./ASCAP)  
Terence Conley, Piano / Kenny Hing, Tenor Saxophone / Bobby Ojeda, Trumpet

2 **IT DON'T MEAN A THING (IF IT AIN'T GOT THAT SWING)** 3:03  
Duke Ellington & Irving Mills (EMI Mills Music, Inc. & Duke Ellington Music/ASCAP)  
Shawn Edmonds, Trumpet / Brad Leali, Alto Saxophone / Grover Mitchell, Trombone

3 **I GOT IT BAD AND THAT AIN'T GOOD** 6:14  
Duke Ellington & Paul Francis Webster (EMI Robbins Catalog, Inc. & Webster Music Co./ASCAP)  
Scotty Barnhart, Trumpet / Frank Wess, Flute / Doug Miller, Tenor Saxophone

4 **I LET A SONG GO OUT OF MY HEART** 4:21  
Duke Ellington, Henry Nemo, Irving Mills & John Redmond (EMI Mills Music, Inc. & Duke Ellington Music/ASCAP) David Keim, Trombone / Bobby Ojeda, Trumpet

5 **JUST SQUEEZE ME (BUT DON'T TEASE ME)** 4:39  
Duke Ellington & Lee Gaines (EMI Robbins Catalog, Inc./ASCAP)  
Frank Wess, Flute / Scotty Barnhart, Trumpet / Kenny Hing, Tenor Saxophone

6 **DO NOTHIN' TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME** 4:32  
Duke Ellington & Bob Russell (EMI Robbins Catalog, Inc. & Harrison Music Corp./ASCAP)  
Brad Leali, Alto Saxophone / Kenny Hing, Tenor Saxophone / Shawn Edmonds, Trumpet / Clarence Banks, Trombone

7 **THE STAR-CROSSED LOVERS** 4:07  
Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn (Music Sales Corp. & Duke Ellington Music/ASCAP)  
Brad Leali, Alto Saxophone

8 **LOVE YOU MADLY** 3:56  
Duke Ellington (Duke Ellington Music/ASCAP)  
Frank Wess, Flute / Grover Mitchell, Trombone

9 **IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD** 4:26  
Duke Ellington, Irving Mills & Emanuel Kurtz (Duke Ellington Music/ASCAP)  
Grover Mitchell, Trombone / Bobby Ojeda, Trumpet / Brad Leali, Alto Saxophone

10 **COTTONTAIL** 4:11  
Duke Ellington (Estate of Mercer Ellington/ASCAP)  
Terence Conley, Piano / Kenny Hing, Tenor Saxophone / Bobby Ojeda, Trumpet

11 **PARIS BLUES** 2:52  
Duke Ellington (EMI U Catalog, Inc. & Music Sales Corp./ASCAP)  
Jackie Kelso, Alto Saxophone

12 **MOOD INDIGO** 5:13  
Duke Ellington, Irving Mills & Barney Bigard (EMI Mills Music, Inc. & Duke Ellington Music/ASCAP)  
Shawn Edmonds, Trumpet / Kenny Hing, Tenor Saxophone / Alyn Walker, Trombone

13 **I'M JUST A LUCKY SO AND SO** 4:31  
Duke Ellington & David Mack (Polygram Int'l & Paramount Music/ASCAP)  
Scotty Barnhart, Trumpet / Doug Miller, Tenor Saxophone / Clarence Banks, Trombone

TOTAL TIME 58:04

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Count Basie Enterprises and the members of Count Basie Orchestra dedicate this album to the memory of our former lead altoist Emanuel "Manny" Boyd.

To contact Count Basie Orchestra, call 212 977 3651 or fax 212 977 2710.



COUNT BASIE and DUKE ELLINGTON  
Photo courtesy of DownBeat Photo Archives

# COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA



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TROMBONE 1      **A-240**  
JUST SQUEEZE ME  
COMP 1: DUKE ELLINGTON      ARR: ALAN FERGUSON

*comp*

8

*p*

*fine*



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THE WORLD-FAMOUS COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA DIRECTED BY GROVER MITCHELL ON A BRAND-NEW  
 RECORDING OF 13 TIMELESS ELLINGTON CLASSICS PLAYED IN THE SWINGING BASIE STYLE

WITH SPECIAL GUEST FRANK WESS



1. TAKE THE 'B' TRAIN 5:34 2. IT DON'T MEAN A THING (IF IT AIN'T GOT THAT SWING) 3:03 3. I GOT IT BAD AND THAT AIN'T GOOD 6:14  
 4. I LET A SONG GO OUT OF MY HEART 4:21 5. JUST SQUEEZE ME (BUT DON'T TEASE ME) 4:39 6. DO NOTHIN' TILL YOU HEAR FROM ME 4:32  
 7. THE STAR-CROSSED LOVERS 4:07 8. LOVE YOU MADLY 3:56 9. IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD 4:26 10. COTTONTAIL 4:11  
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PRODUCED BY DOUGLAS EVANS, ALLYN FERGUSON, GROVER MITCHELL TOTAL TIME 58:04