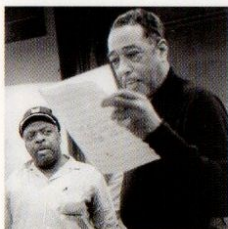




DUKE ELLINGTON *meets* COUNT BASIE
BATTLE ROYAL



MASTERWORKS
— SINGLES —
ORIGINAL ALBUMS



Despite the much spoken rivalry between them, Duke Ellington (1899-1974) and Count Basie (1904-1984) were close friends and great admirers of each other's work. "Duke and the Count were good friends", wrote Duke's son Mercer Ellington in his book, *Duke Ellington in Person –An Intimate Memoir*, "and one time they were both playing at the Bandbox. Pop arranged for two of the most important reviewers to come for his early set on an odd night, which was very unusual, and he fixed it so that Basie never knew they were in the house. He and the band went on and played their damndest. Basie was upstairs, listening to Ellington play this set and wondering what Duke was doing raising so much hell down there, and why. Later, he found out how the Old Man had kept him from knowing the two reviewers were in the house while playing in a way that made his performance seem head and shoulders above Basie's own."

Their bands had different styles, both clearly recognizable. Although they had known each other since their youth, and on many occasions were featured on the same bill, the Duke and the Count never crossed paths in a recording studio before the 1961 session included here. While their bands performed separately

on the same stage many times following the 1961 session, they would never record together again.

Putting two big bands with such individual stylisms together in the same recording studio was no easy feat, and to put so many talents together doesn't guarantee the making of remarkable music. "What was complicated was putting the two bands together and keeping it together", explained bassist Aaron Bell. "That was complicated. I'm not really sure how it was done. There was absolutely no rehearsal. The sum total of warning was the announcement that the gig coming up would be doing an album with Basie: that was it. That's Duke Ellington's style anyway, and for that matter, Billy Strayhorn's. I imagine they did things that way because they thought it would make the music more spontaneous. They'd figure out things right on the date: Duke, Strayhorn, and Tom Whaley. There must have been someone helping out Basie on the other bandstand. Some semblance of rule and order was instituted and it worked as a guide; for instance they would predetermine the solo order. Also, both rhythm sections didn't play at the same time although Duke and Basie would be playing."

The album was originally going to be released under the title *Battle Royal*, following the title of one of the compositions Duke brought to the date. Both "Battle Royal" and "Wild Man Moore" had been composed the previous year for the soundtrack of the film *Paris*

Blues, and both original versions, included here as a bonus, featured Louis Armstrong along with a studio band conducted by Ellington. It was a common thing in the 1930s to have two big bands in alternating performances on the same stage in order to see who came out on top, and both Ellington and Basie participated in such "cutting contests" or "battles of bands". Using the title of the tune as an inspiration, Columbia's designers prepared a cover on which Ellington and Basie appeared in a medieval joust. Duke's impression of the cover remains unknown, but when it was showed to Basie and his manager Teddy Reig, the bandleader seemed to take it as an insult and argued that he and Ellington were collaborating on the album, and not participating in any sort of competition. Teddy Reig then excused himself to go to the bathroom and took with him the originals of the proposed album cover, which he threw into the toilet bowl. Thus no copy exists of that original cover, which was replaced by the poster we know today, on which the title of the album is everything but certain.

Basie wrote about the session in his memoirs, *Good Morning Blues*: "My next extra-special thing that year came in July when we made an album with the Boss himself. Somebody came up with the idea that Duke and I record a battle of the bands, but I knocked that notion out as soon as it was brought up. So what we did was put our two bands together, and we cut four

tracks from his book and four from mine. His four were 'Battle Royal' and 'Wild Man', two new things he had written, featuring Louis Armstrong in a couple of spots in a movie called *Paris Blues*; Billy Strayhorn's 'Take the A Train' and 'BDB', a little blues thing that he and Billy cooked up just for that session to feature the three of us on piano. Our four tracks were Freddie Green's 'Until I Met You [Corner Pocket]'; Thad Jones' 'To You'; Frank Wess' 'Segue in C'; and Frank Foster's arrangement of our old standby, 'Jumping at the Woodside'. I think all of the fellows in both organizations had a ball that day, and that is exactly the way it was supposed to be. We shared the section work and the solos on every number, using Duke's rhythm section on his and mine on mine, but with the two pianos there on all numbers (except 'A Train'), with him comping for his soloists and me for mine. I was not about to touch 'A Train', not with Billy and Duke there. I said, 'Let Billy do it himself', so he and Duke took it. Of course, all three of us got our little taste of 'BDB' (which stands for Billy, Duke, and Basie). Sonny Payne paid Sam Woodyard a little friendly drum visit on 'Battle Royal', and they trade a few bars just before we take it out, but, like I said, there was no battle. It always was rough enough just to have Duke there when you're playing, let alone trying to chop him. Of course, you always tried to do your best whenever he was around, but that wasn't about battling him. It was about pleasing yourself by measuring up."

Bernard Lee (2013)

DUKE ELLINGTON
meets **COUNT BASIE**

 **MASTERWORKS**
SINGLES
ORIGINAL ALBUMS

21321

BATTLE ROYAL



This release presents the complete original album *Battle Royal—Duke Ellington Meets Count Basie* (Columbia CS8515), which was the only collaboration ever recorded by both legendary big band leaders. As a bonus we have added recordings of Basie playing Ellington's "In a Mellow Tone", "I'm Beginning to See the Light", "What Am I Here For?" and "Perdido", as well as Ellington's rendition of Basie's "One O'Clock Jump", and the original versions of "Wild Man Moore" and "Battle Royal" from Ellington's soundtrack to the film *Paris Blues*.

★★★★ **ALL MUSIC GUIDE** (Printed edition, 2002)

"The album was recorded more as a genial get-together than an old-style battle of the bands, and packaging only awaiting the approval of Basie, the Count balked at the 'Battle Royal' title and jacket design, and his manager, Teddy Reig, supposedly flushed the only copy of the latter down the men's room toilet, thus forcing a reconsideration of the whole concept. The result was a hastily designed cover for an obscurely titled album that Columbia was never fully behind in marketing—that it's lingered this long is, thus, even more of a testament to the power of the music and the good feelings from the sessions". (Bruce Eder)

★★★★ **DOWN BEAT** original review

"The parts remain greater than the whole in this amalgamation of the Ellington and Basie bands. But still the parts are so great that they produce a mighty impressive whole. The mere presence of the two leaders at their pianos almost guarantees that, not to mention the galaxy of star sidemen they bring with them." (John S. Wilson)

- 01 **BATTLE ROYAL** (Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn) **5:36**
- 02 **TO YOU** (Thad Jones) **3:56**
- 03 **TAKE THE "A" TRAIN** (Billy Strayhorn) **3:48**
- 04 **CORNER POCKET [aka UNTIL I MET YOU]** (Freddie Green-Don Wolf) **4:55**
- 05 **WILD MAN [aka WILD MAN MOORE]** (Duke Ellington) **6:23**
- 06 **SEGUE IN C** (Frank Wess) **8:24**
- 07 **B D B** (Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn) **4:46**
- 08 **JUMPIN' AT THE WOODSIDE** (Count Basie) **3:11**
- 09 **ONE MORE ONCE** (Duke Ellington) **3:28**
- 10 **BLUES IN HOSS' FLAT [BLUES IN FRANKIE'S FLAT]**
(Frank Foster-Count Basie) **3:15**
- 11 **PERDIDO** (Juan Tizol-Ervin Drake-Hans J. Lengsfelder) **4:55***
- 12 **WHAT AM I HERE FOR?** (Duke Ellington) **3:22***
- 13 **I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT**
(Duke Ellington-Don George-Johnny Hodges-Harry James) **3:09***
- 14 **IN A MELLOW TONE** (Duke Ellington-Milt Gabler) **6:58***
- 15 **ONE O'CLOCK JUMP** (Eddie Durham-Count Basie) **6:13***
- 16 **WILD MAN MOORE [Paris Blues version]** (Duke Ellington) **1:49***
- 17 **BATTLE ROYAL [Paris Blues version]** (Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn) **4:29***

Total Time: 78:42

THE DUKE ELLINGTON ORCHESTRA (heard on the right channel):

Cat Anderson, Willie Cook, Ed Mullens, Fats Ford (tp), Ray Nance (tp, vib), Juan Tizol, Lawrence Brown, Louis Blackburn (tb), Jimmy Hamilton (cl), Johnny Hodges, Russell Procope (as), Paul Gonsalves (ts), Harry Carney (bar), Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn (p), Aaron Bell (b), Sam Woodyard (d).

THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA (heard on the left channel):

Thad Jones, Sonny Cohn, Snooky Young, Lonnie Johnson (tp), Henry Coker, Quentin Jackson, Benny Powell (tb), Marshall Royal (cl, as), Frank Wess (as, ts, fl), Frank Foster, Budd Johnson (ts), Charlie Fowlkes (bar), Count Basie (p), Freddie Green (g), Eddie Jones (b), Sonny Payne (d).

New York, July 6 & 7, 1961.

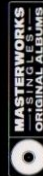
***BONUS TRACKS (11-17):**

- 11: **COUNT BASIE and His Orchestra.** New York, August 16 & 17, 1954.
- 12: **COUNT BASIE and His Orchestra.** New York, January 4, 1956.
- 13: **COUNT BASIE and His Orchestra.** Los Angeles, April 28, 1956.
- 14: **COUNT BASIE and His Orchestra.** Live at The Americana Hotel, Miami, Florida, May 31, 1959.
- 15: **DUKE ELLINGTON and His Orchestra.** Live at Travis Air Force Base, Suisun City, California, March 4, 1958.
- 16-17: From **DUKE ELLINGTON'S PARIS BLUES** soundtrack:
LOUIS ARMSTRONG (tp soloist) with studio orchestra conducted by **DUKE ELLINGTON.** Paris, France, December 15-16, 1960.



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Duke Ellington, Count Basie & Baltimore Orioles
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