William “Count” Basie (1904 – 1984)

• Born William James Basie on August 21, 1904 in Red Bank, New Jersey
• Pianist, organist, composer, and bandleader
• Commonly regarded as one of the most important jazz bandleaders of his time

Early Years

• Basie started out to be a drummer, but the talents of a young Sonny Greer (who was Duke Ellington’s drummer from 1919 to 1951), discouraged him and he switched to piano
• While he was in his late teens, he gravitated to Harlem, where he met Fats Waller who taught him how to play organ
• Tourd the vaudeville circuit as a soloist, accompanist to blues singers, and musical director
• His touring took him to Kansas City, Missouri, where he met many jazz musicians in the area

Basie & Bennie Moten

• In 1929, Basie became the pianist in Bennie Moten’s band, based out of Kansas City
• It was at this time that he began to be known as “Count” Basie
• He started his own band in 1934, but eventually returned to Moten’s band
• When Moten died in 1935 after an unsuccessful tonsillectomy, the band was unable to stay together
• Basie formed a new band, which included many Moten alumni

Moten’s Swing

• By Benny Moten’s Kansas City Orchestra
• Recorded December 13, 1932 in Camden, New Jersey
• Personnel:
  • Eddie Barefield (alto sax & clarinet)
  • Jack Washington (alto & baritone sax)
  • Ben Webster (tenor sax)
  • Joe Keyes, Hot Lips Page, & Dee Stewart (trumpet)
  • Eddie Durham (trombone & arranger)
  • Dan Minor (trombone)
  • Leroy Berry (guitar)
  • Count Basie (piano)
  • Walter Page (bass)
  • Willie McWashington (drums)

The Count Basie Orchestra

• When producer John Hammond heard the Basie band’s 1936 radio broadcasts from Kansas City’s Reno Club, he offered a recording contract and a gig at New York’s Roseland Ballroom
At the end of 1936, Bill Basie moved his band from Kansas City to New York City, where the Count Basie Orchestra remained until 1950.

Within two years, Basie’s orchestra made it’s fame with hard-swinging tunes such as One O’Clock Jump and Jumpin’ at the Woodside.

Basie’s music was characterized by his trademark “jumping” beat and the contrapuntal accents of his own piano.

“Riffing”

Compared with the carefully orchestrated sound of Goodman and Ellington, Basie’s band had a looser feel.

Instead of playing songs arranged all the way through, Basie’s band was know for “riffing”:

- Using “head” arrangements, consisting of a basic melody or “head,” at the start of the song
- Followed by improvisations by several band members
- Often, the intuitive interplay between the players and sections sounded if the music was intentionally orchestrated

Jumpin’ at the Woodside

- Count Basie & His Orchestra
- Recorded August 22, 1938 in New York
- Personnel:
  - Earl Warren (alto sax)
  - Jack Washington (alto & baritone saxes)
  - Herschel Evans & Lester Young (tenor sax & clarinet)
  - Freddie Green (guitar)
  - Count Basie (piano)
  - Walter Page (bass)
  - Jo Jones (drums)

Later Years

By the mid-1950s, Basie’s band had become one of the pre-eminent backing big bands for the finest vocalists of the time, including Joe Williams, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, and Frank Sinatra.

He appeared as himself (along with his band) in the Jerry Lewis film Cinderella and in the Mel Brooks movie Blazing Saddles.

Basie died of pancreatic cancer in Hollywood, Florida on April 26, 1984 at the age of 79.

Basie’s Piano Playing

By playing with Walter Page’s strong walking bass, Basie found his piano style evolving away from the heavy-handedness of stride.

His new style was streamlined, sparse, and understated, often using little if any left hand.

It was a major step forward in the evolution of jazz piano.

Li’l Darlin’

- Count Basie & His Orchestra
- Composed and arranged by Neal Hefti
According to Hefti, Basie wanted to develop a stage band that could appear on the Ed Sullivan Show. Although the New Testament band never became a show band in that sense, it was much more of an ensemble band than Basie’s previous bands. Hefti’s tight, well-crafted arrangements established the distinctive, tighter, modern sound of the new Basie band and resulted in a new band identity that was maintained for more than twenty years.

**The All-American Rhythm Section**
- Basie (piano), Freddie Green (guitar), Walter Page (bass), Jo Jones (drums)
- The first modern rhythm section in jazz history
- Because of the delegation of responsibilities and the lighter, more fluid rhythm, Basie revolutionized the rhythm section
- Through its rhythm section, the Basie band built its reputation on swinging harder than anyone else

**Freddie Green (1911 – 1987)**
- Born Frederick William Green on March 21, 1911 in Charleston, North Carolina
- Played a rock-solid downstroke on every beat
- Green was a pioneer in the way the guitar is played in a big band setting
- He held that “You should never hear the guitar by itself—it should be part of the drums so it sounds like the drummer is playing chords”

**Walter Page (1900 – 1957)**
- Born February 9, 1900 in Gallatin, Missouri
- Was a key figure in the development of the walking bass in jazz
- Played the most powerful walking bass of his generation

**“Papa” Jo Jones (1911 – 1985)**
- Born Jonathan Jones on October 11, 1911 in Chicago
- Shifted the emphasis of his playing away from the heavy bass drum on each beat (as was the custom for swing era drummers) to the high-hat cymbal, resulting in a lighter, more buoyant style
- He was one of the first drummers to promote the use of brushes on drums
- Jones is regarded as the premier jazz drummer of the Swing Era, and the transitional figure between classic and modern jazz drumming

**Other Notable Basie Alumni**
- Lester Young
- Frank Foster
- Frank Wess
- Marshall Royal
- Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis
- Quincy Jones
- Thad Jones
- Harry “Sweets” Edison
- Neal Hefti
April in Paris
• Basie’s recording is the most famous version
• Inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame

• Born Edward Kennedy Ellington on April 29, 1899 in Washington DC
• Pianist, composer, and bandleader
• One of the most influential figures in jazz, if not in all American music

Jazz Royalty
• Ellington’s father, J.E. Ellington made worked part-time as a White House butler
• His mother, Daisy surrounded her son with dignified women who reinforced his manners and taught him to live elegantly
• Ellington’s childhood friends noticed that “his casual, offhand manner, his easy grace, and his dapper dress gave him the bearing of a young nobleman,” and began calling him Duke
• It was a nickname that would forever be associated with the jazz legend

Early Career
• Ellington had no formal training
• He moved to New York in 1922 and joined Elmer Snowden’s band
• When other band members discovered that Snowden was pocketing a significant amount of the band’s take, they got rid of him and made Ellington the leader
• Inspired by James P. Johnson’s classically-influenced ragtime compositions, Ellington began to write music of his own

The Cotton Club Years
• In 1927, King Oliver turned down a regular booking for his group as the house band at Harlem’s Cotton Club
• The offer passed to Ellington
• With a weekly radio broadcast and famous clientèle nightly pouring in to see them, this gave rise to what many call the “golden age” for the poor boy from Washington D.C., from 1932 to 1942
• It was during these ten years that Ellington added three new members to his orchestra and composed some of his most well known short works
• While the orchestra had grown in size, their distinct sound had begun to develop as well, displaying the non-traditional expression of Ellington’s arrangements, the street rhythms of Harlem and featured the exotic-sounding trombone growls and wah-wahs, high squealed trumpets, and sultry saxophone blues licks of the band members

1930s & 1940s
• The 1930s saw Ellington’s popularity continue to increase, largely a result of the promotional skills of Ellington's manager Irving Mills, who got more than his fair share of co-composer credits
• The band reached a creative peak in the early 1940s, when Ellington wrote for an orchestra of distinctive voices and displayed tremendous creativity
• Ellington’s long-term aim became to extend the jazz form from the three-minute limit of the 78 rpm record side, of which he was an acknowledged master
Later Years
• Ellington continued to compose, perform all over the world, and make vital and innovative recordings
• Ellington was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1965, but was turned down
• He performed his first Concert of Sacred Music, an attempt at fusing Christian liturgy with jazz, in September of the same year
• He died of lung cancer and pneumonia on May 24, 1974, a month after his 75th birthday

Ellington’s Writing Styles
• Jungle: written for the Cotton Club floorshows, this category is generally comprised of songs featuring the growling wah-wah brass of Bubber Miley and Tricky Sam Nanton
• Popular: a huge catalog of popular and dance tunes written throughout his career, often using the 32-bar standard song form or 12-bar blues form
• Concertos: as the first composer to see the European concerto format, these were written to feature the unique talents of his many fine and versatile soloists
• Impressionistic: extended works written mainly in his middle and later career that evoked images or memories of people, places, or history
  • Musical portraits
  • Musical pictures
  • Historical pieces
  • Religious

Harlem Airshaft
• Duke Ellington & His Famous Orchestra
• One of Ellington’s “Three-Minute Masterpieces”

Notable Ellington Associates
• James “Bubber” Miley (1903 – 1932)
  • Born April 3, 1903 in Aiken, South Carolina
  • Miley had studied the mute techniques of Joe Oliver and was a master in using a plunger mute to get a guttural growling wah-wah effect
  • His notorious unreliability, and problems with alcohol abuse eventually led to his breaking up with Ellington’s band in 1929, but his influence on the Duke Ellington Orchestra lasted far longer

East St. Louis Toodle-oo
• Duke Ellington & His Orchestra
• Recorded on December 19, 1927
• Personnel
  • Otto Hardwicke (soprano, alto, & baritone sax)
  • Harry Carney (clarinet, alto & baritone sax)
  • Rudy Jackson (clarinet & tenor sax)
  • James “Bubber” Miley & Louis Metcalf (trumpet)
  • Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton (trombone)
  • Fred Guy (banjo)
• Duke Ellington (piano)
• Wellman Braud (bass)
• Sonny Greer (drums)

• **Harry Carney (1910 – 1974)**
  • Harry Howell Carney was born in 1910 in Boston, Massachusetts
  • Carney was the longest lasting player in Duke Ellington’s band
  • He was always there and on occasions when Ellington was missing he took over as conductor, particularly when Ellington wished to make a stage entrance after the band had begun playing the first piece of a performance
  • Carney was one of the original innovators of the baritone saxophone in jazz, winning each *Downbeat* magazine poll until the emergence of Gerry Mulligan
  • Carney also pioneered circular breathing

  **Ko-Ko**
  • Duke Ellington & His Famous Orchestra
  • Recorded March 6, 1940 in Chicago
  • Personnel
  • Barney Bigard (clarinet & tenor saxophone)
  • Otto Hardwicke (alto saxophone)
  • Ben Webster (tenor saxophone)
  • Harry Carney (baritone saxophone)
  • Wallace Jones & Cootie Williams (trumpet)
  • Rex Stewart (cornet)
  • Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton, Lawrence Brown (trombone)
  • Juan Tizol (valve trombone)
  • Fred Guy (guitar)
  • Duke Ellington (piano)
  • Jimmy Blanton (bass)
  • Sonny Greer (drums)

• **Johnny Hodges (1907 – 1970)**
  • Born John Cornelius Hodges on July 25, 1907 in Cambridge, Massachusetts
  • His unique sound became the identifying voice of the Ellington orchestra
  • His highly individualistic playing style, which featured the use of a wide vibrato and much sliding between slurred notes, was frequently imitated
  • He earned the nicknames *Rabbit* (for his enjoyment of lettuce sandwiches) and *Jeep* (for his apparent speed as a runner)

  **In a Mellotone**
  • Duke Ellington & His Famous Orchestra
  • Recorded September 5, 1940 in Chicago
  • Personnel
  • Barney Bigard (clarinet & tenor saxophone)
  • Otto Hardwicke & Johnny Hodges (alto saxophone)
  • Ben Webster (tenor saxophone)
  • Harry Carney (baritone saxophone)
• Wallace Jones & Cootie Williams (trumpet)
• Rex Stewart (cornet)
• Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton, Lawrence Brown (trombone)
• Juan Tizol (valve trombone)
• Fred Guy (guitar)
• Duke Ellington (piano)
• Jimmy Blanton (bass)
• Sonny Greer (drums)

**Jimmy Blanton (1918 – 1942)**
• Born October 5, 1918 in Chattanooga, Tennessee
• Blanton made an incalculable contribution in changing the way the bass was perceived in jazz
• Until his emergence, the bass was rarely used to play anything but quarter notes in ensemble or solos
• By playing the bass more like a horn, Blanton began introducing melodic and harmonic ideas that were totally new to the instrument
• His virtuosity made him the first true master of the jazz bass and demonstrated the instrument’s unsuspected potential as a solo instrument

**Billy Strayhorn**
• Ellington’s creative output as composer and arranger was enhanced in 1939 with the addition of Billy Strayhorn as a collaborator
• Strayhorn was college educated and immediately went about studying Ellington’s scores to learn what he called the “Ellington effect”
• By learning to emulate Ellington’s arranging style, he was able to take over an increasing share of those duties
• Strayhorn also began to contribute his own compositions, including some of the most memorable in the Ellington library
• Duke described him as, “my right arm, my left arm, all the eyes in the back if my head, my brain waves in his head, and his in mine”

*Take the “A” Train*
• Duke Ellington & His Famous Orchestra
• A jazz standard by Billy Strayhorn that was the signature tune of Duke Ellington’s band
• Its title refers to the A subway service that runs through New York City, going at that time from eastern Brooklyn up into Harlem and northern Manhattan, using the express tracks in Manhattan

**Other Notable Ellington Alumni**
• Ben Webster
• Paul Gonsalves
• Cootie Williams
• Clark Terry
• Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton
• Juan Tizol
• Oscar Pettiford
• Sonny Greer
• Louie Bellson

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