

record REVIEWS

COUNT BASIE

BASIE ON THE BEATLES—Happy Tiger HT 1007; *Norwegian Wood*; *The Fool on the Hill*; *Something*; *With A Little Help From My Friends*; *Here, There And Everywhere*; *Get Back*; *Hey Jude*; *Eleanor Rigby*; *Penny Lane*; *Come Together*; *Yesterday*.

Personnel (unidentified but including): Gene Goe, Sonny Cohn, trumpets; Grover Mitchell, Frank Hooks, Mel Wanzo, Bill Hughes, trombone; Marshall Royal, Bobby Plater, Eric Dixon, Eddie Lockjaw Davis, Charlie Fowlkes, reeds; Freddie Green, guitar; Basie, organ, piano; Norman Keenan, bass, electric bass; Harold Jones, drums; Bob Florence, arranger.

db/RC Rating: ★★★★★½

The Basie band has been in a recording dilemma for quite some time now. There are limits, of course, to the number of "recreations" of old favorites they can come up with (to wit: *The Best of Basie*, Vols. 1 and 2, Roulette 52081, 52089, circa 1960, and last year's *Standing Ovation*, Dot 25938) and there is a definite limitation on how many mixed bag, compromise LPs they can produce (Basie with Jackie Wilson, the Mills Brothers, Walt Disney movie scores, etc.) without losing, temporarily or permanently, their many loyal, purist followers. Perhaps the most distressing part of the dilemma is the scarcity of challenging and appropriate new material. In the past few years there have been only a few noteworthy additions to the band's repertoire which have been recorded: Frank Foster's *Hey Jim*, Bobby Plater's *Frankie and Johnny*, Eric Dixon's *St. Thomas*, and perhaps a couple of Sammy Nestico's compositions.

Also, in order to not only sustain but expand the band's following, listeners of the "new generation" must be acquired. This album is perhaps the best step the band has taken in that direction, but it will be for naught if the band adheres to its "record 'em and forget 'em" policy. Granted, the product of some of the band's ill-fated recording sessions of the 1960s were better off neglected but the material here deserves a far better fate.

Arranger Florence was a good choice for this assignment. A warm, swinging writer, he was responsible, to a very large degree, for the success of the Si Zentner band with his *Up A Lazy River* chart and he has also made significant contributions to the books of Buddy Rich and Harry James. His best work prior to this LP, however, was his exquisite writing for *Bud Shank & The Sax Section* (Pacific Jazz 20110) and his own *Here & Now*, (Liberty LST-7380)—still available and worth seeking out.

His writing here is typically buoyant—it has direction and also a density not found in his previous work. This is especially true on *Jude* and *Something*, where his brass voicings are thick but not logy

Records are reviewed by Chris Albertson, Mike Bourne, Don DeMicheal, Gilbert M. Erskine, Alan Heineman, Wayne Jones, John Litweiler, John McDonough, Dan Morgenstern, Don Nelsen, Harvey Pekar, Doug Ramsey, Harvey Siders, Carol Sloane, and Jim Szantor.

Reviews are signed by the writers.

Ratings are: ★★★★★ excellent, ★★★★ very good, ★★★ good, ★★ fair, ★ poor.

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and the sax scoring lush but not treacly.

Aside from *Penny Lane*, which I found a bit coy, all the tracks are outstanding—a brilliant marriage of concept and application. The band swings without letup on the straight-ahead *Wood* and *Get Back*, aided immensely by the pulsating rhythm section which is in exceptional form on this LP. Freddie Green is Father Time, Norman Keenan has the perfect touch on electric bass, and Basie's contributions are typically Basie. Drummer Jones, however, is something else. The album would have been a dismal failure, I suspect, with some of the band's prior timekeepers. But Jones, with his flexibility, taste, swing, and ability to drive the band whether the demand be jazz or rock, is nothing short of perfect here and, along with Florence, deserves much of the credit for the LP's success.

The brass section, from Gene Goe's peerless lead to Bill Hughes' bass trombone, must also be cited. A more versatile section does not exist. They cover it all: swing, high-note excitement, relaxed riffs, and subtle commentary. Dig them on *Jude* and *Get Back*.

The reeds, which provide the main soloists in Dixon (on both tenor and flute) and Davis, are also in brilliant form. Since Royal has left the band (he is now working with the house band at the Now Grove in Los Angeles), this album, in a sense, is the "last letter from an old friend." The section's blend and precision is extraordinary as demonstrated on *Get Back* and *Somewhere*, with Dixon and Davis excelling on the former.

This is by far the best pop-oriented Basie album yet and it leaves no doubt that big bands are capable of speaking the language of today—most eloquently.

—Szantor

DON BYAS/BEN WEBSTER

DON BYAS MEETS BEN WEBSTER—Prestige 7692; *Blues for Dottie Mae*; *Lullaby for Dottie Mae*; *Sunday*; *Perdido*; *When Ash Meets Henry*; *Caravan*.

Personnel: Byas, Webster, tenor saxophones; Tete Montoliu, piano; Peter Trunk, bass; Albert (Tootie) Heath, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★

This tenor summit meeting, conducted in Germany in early 1968, is of particular interest in the light of Byas' recent visit to the U.S., his first in 24 years. It is among the too few (and the most recent) of Byas' recordings currently available in this country.

Webster, while a much more recent expatriate, has been absent from these shores long enough to make this sample of his art an event of more than passing interest.

Though neither star is in top form (the session has a somewhat tentative air), the

album is musically rewarding. Both Webster, almost 59 when the album was made, and Byas, some four years his junior, stem from Coleman Hawkins, and to hear them together is to receive a fascinating lesson in how individually and personally each has shaped this common legacy.

Byas' style has changed more over the years than Webster's. Always a harmonically sophisticated player, he has listened well to Rollins and Coltrane, but has adapted what he has heard in a most personal way. He is a bold and imaginative musician, and a true master of his horn.

Webster is more direct and economical, using fewer notes, more space, and a less oblique approach to melody. Both men are outgoing and volatile, and each has a beautiful sound—in Webster's case, as Larry Kart's incisive liner notes point out, the sound sometimes almost seems sufficient to deliver the message.

There is always an element of challenge involved in such get-togethers, no matter how friendly, and on *Sunday*, *Perdido*, and especially *Caravan*, the two masters at times converse heatedly.

Each man has a ballad feature to himself, and both chose originals. Byas' *Lullaby*, excepting the somewhat diffuse cadenza, is masterly, particularly in its harmonic exploration, but Webster's *When Ash* is perhaps the peak of the album—a serene, mature and lovely statement.

The leadoff *Blues* has some of the best Byas of the set, and the Spanish pianist Tete Montoliu takes an idiomatic solo. But the international rhythm section, though each member is excellent as an individual, fails to really jell. Both hornmen, I think, would have preferred a tighter and more steadily swinging backdrop.

This is one of the albums leased by Prestige from the German MPS (formerly SABA) catalog, and as customary with these imports, the sound is first-class, though the pressings are not as superb in quality as the original issues. This is jazz of the heavyweight championship class.

—Morgenstern

KENNY CLARKE-FRANCY BOLAND

LET'S FACE THE MUSIC—Prestige PR 7699; *Let's Face the Music and Dance*; *I'm All Smiles*; *You Stepped Out of a Dream*; *I'm Glad There Is You*; *Get Out of Town*; *By Strauss*; *When Your Lover Has Gone*; *Gloria*; *Sweet and Lovely*; *High School Cadets*.

Personnel: Benny Bailey, Idrees Sulieman, Sonny Grey, Jimmy Deuchar, trumpets; Ake Persson, Nat Peck, Eric Van Lier, trombones; Dero Humble, Ronnie Scott, Johnny Griffin, Tony Co. Sahib Shihab, reeds; Boland, piano; Dave Pike, vibes; Jimmy Woode, bass; Clarke, drums.

db/RC Rating: ★★★★★½

The strength of this band is not in its