

SCOTTISH NATIONAL JAZZ ORCHESTRA  
DIRECTED BY TOMMY SMITH

# THE COUNT & THE DUKE



**BASIE AND ELLINGTON**  
DECEMBER 2018

# The Count and the Duke: Basie and Ellington

It's time to swing again, as the SNJO celebrates jazz legends **Count Basie** and **Duke Ellington**. Pivotal to the evolution of orchestral jazz, Basie and Ellington created music that defined an era and the SNJO have chosen to feature their landmark albums, *The Atomic Mr Basie* and Ellington's *Black, Brown & Beige* in these special concerts.

Playing these suites in full for the first time in their 23 year history, this fabulous SNJO programme will set feet tapping with infectious swing, or soothe with mellow melody. Tracks will include Basie's wonderful *Li'l Darlin'*, *Kid from Red Bank* and *Splanky* as well as Ellington's famous *Work Song* and *Come Sunday*. Once more, Scotland's National Jazz Orchestra offers audiences a wonderful evening of music.

Great swing means everything in orchestral jazz and these repertoires of Count Basie and Duke Ellington have it in enormous bundles of unbridled joy.

## snjo.co.uk

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We are very grateful to Creative Scotland for their ongoing support of the SNJO/TSYJO, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, who provide us with essential rehearsal space, and David McLaughlin and his team at the Abode Hotel, Glasgow, who has offered complimentary accommodation for our guests. Thank you.



design by Nadja von Massow, nadworks

# PROGRAMME NOTES

These concerts feature music from the libraries of iconic jazz figures, **Count Basie** and **Duke Ellington** and in particular, two recordings that are widely considered landmarks in modern jazz: *Atomic Mr Basie* and *Black, Brown and Beige*. Basie and Ellington remain perennially popular, but even their extensive repertoires contain seminal works such as these, that are infrequently heard in full. **The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra** is delighted to play these for you tonight.

*The Atomic Mr. Basie* by the Count Basie Orchestra was seen at the time of its release in 1958, as a startling return to form by a senior jazz figure, long suspected of resting on his laurels. In contrast, Ellington's motives for presenting *Black, Brown and Beige* were treated with some suspicion, and a fair amount of indifference.

'Atomic Basie' is the pet name that fans gave the Count's explosive take on big band music, but it doesn't describe the content entirely or adequately. Certainly, it consists of dynamic arrangements of tunes, composed in the main by **Neal Hefti**, and yet it would be an incomplete statement without Basie's devastatingly articulate blues vocabulary on piano.

It is the leader's trademark light touch, applied sparingly, that provides a much-needed contrasting voice, and prompts the music to leave spaces for soloists to play through an accommodating melody. Hefti's arrangements are also credited with giving Basie's orchestra a new lease of life as a tightened up, punchy, big band. This may be true, but he did so largely by playing to its collective strengths.

The result was a hit album, glowing reviews and awards galore; a Grammy® for Basie, and two for Hefti. More importantly, it revalidated orchestral jazz as an artistic, commercial and relevant force.

Ellington's music should be a national treasure wherever it is heard and played, but it has, all too often, been subject to sterile debate. The *Black, Brown and Beige Suite*, premiered in 1943,

was the first serious piece of jazz composition by Ellington to be organised along classical lines, and he created a sophisticated musical structure built upon a solid foundation of gospel, blues, and folk music.

Purists and self-regarding critics everywhere were offended. Some still are. Similarly, at the first Carnegie Hall performance of this piece, the star-studded audience, whilst supportive, was a little bemused by an elaborate project that interleaved challenging concepts with figurative music. Thankfully, a recording of the concert was made, and released for posterity in 1944.

*Black, Brown and Beige* was billed as "Duke Ellington's first symphony" and blithely described by Ellington himself as "a parallel to the history of the American Negro". Its three themes of black, brown and beige were intended to correspond to three fundamental conditions of the black experience, namely slavery, emancipation and persistent marginalization.

The work was subsequently placed in the margins of Ellington's repertoire, although he did revisit *Black, Brown and Beige* in 1958, re-imagining and recording it as a gospel songbook with singer **Mahalia Jackson**. Since then, it has been fully rehabilitated as a significant piece of modern music, not least through re-releases on CD and retrospective reviews by commentators reaping the benefits of hindsight.

The SNJO has a long-standing and fruitful relationship with historic music, including past performances of Ellington's *Toot's Suite*, *Magnolia Suite*, *Deep South Suite*, *Nut Cracker Suite*, *Peer Gynt Suite*, and *Far East Suite*. This, however, is the first time in the SNJO's twenty-three year history that *The Atomic Mr. Basie* and *Black, Brown and Beige* will be heard in performance. It's time, therefore, to sit back and enjoy wonderful, deeply authentic jazz, and consider yourself very much part of this uplifting chapter in our story.

Michael S. Clark

## William James “Count” Basie

(1904-1984) was, and still is, one of the most popular figures in the story of modern jazz. He was a prominent composer, arranger, pianist and bandleader in a music career that spanned more than six decades. Basie also enjoyed parallel success in radio, film and television, and became an entertainer known to millions worldwide.

He was born in Red Bank, New Jersey, where he grew up and attended high school, but he did not continue with his formal education much beyond the age of fifteen. By that time, he already had very clear ideas about what he wanted to do in life.

Basie received piano lessons from an early age, and quickly applied what he'd learned in various pick-up groups at local dances and amateur nights. He further developed his highly personal style through improvisational accompaniment in a local silent movie theatre.

Sometime in the 1920's, Basie moved to New York City, where he became firmly established as a soloist and accompanist, playing and eventually touring with a variety of jazz, blues and vaudeville acts. His breakthrough, however, came in 1929, when he joined Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra as pianist and co-arranger.

He remained with the Kansas-based outfit on and off until 1935, when he formed the earliest version of the Count Basie Orchestra. In 1936, he and his band moved to Chicago where they were 'discovered' and recorded by legendary producer John Hammond. The following year, Basie and his musicians relocated back to New York City and, from there, consolidated their credentials as a recording, touring and radio jazz orchestra.

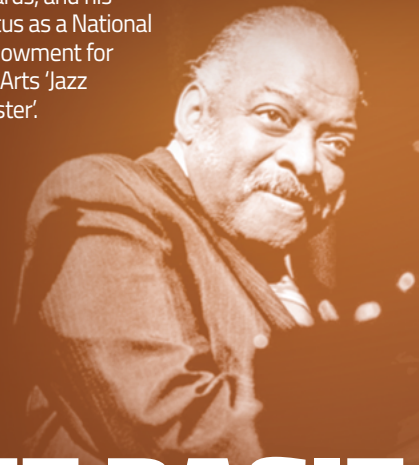
Another significant factor in Basie's apparently unstoppable success was his decision to sign with the William Morris Agency.

This meant better bookings, coast-to-coast tours, better fees, and, on the West Coast, lucrative film work. Basie and his band, enjoyed cameos in several feature films between 1942 and 1974, and made countless television appearances.

In the post-war years that followed the era of swing music, the Count Basie Orchestra began touring internationally. Their popularity, particularly in Europe, seemed undiminished by changing tastes and fashions. Basie didn't fully embrace new and challenging directions jazz, but he did remain essentially modern in outlook.

Count Basie is also associated with the best work by some of the finest jazz singers in the history of contemporary music. These affiliations began with Joe Williams in the 1930's and continued with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Bing Crosby and, most notably, Frank Sinatra.

It is, perhaps, Basie's trademark combination of authentic blues and powerful jazz orchestrations that explain his lasting appeal. The Basie sound has been consistently, instantly recognisable as a benchmark in jazz. The evidence for that is clearly recorded in a voluminous discography, two Grammy awards, and his status as a National Endowment for the Arts 'Jazz Master'.



# COUNT BASIE

## Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington

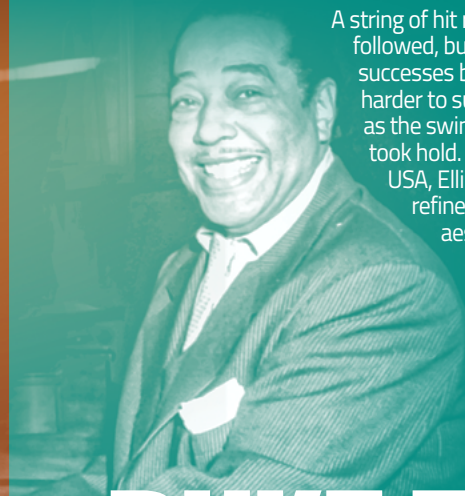
(1899 – 1974) was one of the most significant jazz musicians of all time. He was a composer, bandleader, pianist and arranger who took jazz from its localized roots and crafted it into a uniquely American art form.

Ellington enjoyed a comfortable upbringing in Washington DC, and began piano lessons at the age of seven. He became a proficient player and, by the time he reached his teens, he was playing regularly at middle-class house parties and society gatherings.

He moved to New York in his early twenties where, sometime in September 1923, he and his seven-piece band secured a residency at the 'Hollywood Club' on Broadway. That engagement lasted about four years, until a better offer came in from the famous Cotton Club in Harlem.

At the Cotton Club, Ellington's band expanded from seven to eleven pieces, largely because they were required to play a variety of music for the club's revues. These shows featured comedy, dance, vaudeville, burlesque, and ballads, and demanded high levels of musicianship and versatility. A weekly radio broadcast from the club aided national exposure, and it was about this time that Ellington's recording career began in earnest.

A string of hit records followed, but these successes became harder to sustain as the swing era took hold. In the USA, Ellington's refined, aesthetic



# DUKE ELLINGTON

approach had narrow appeal compared to the dance bands of the time, but his music still had an audience elsewhere.

The Ellington band's visit to Scotland and England in 1933, and mainland Europe the following year, was a response to their increasing popularity across the Atlantic. It also proved a major publicity coup, boosting Ellington's credentials as a serious bandleader at home and abroad.

Ellington's ambitions for jazz were, nevertheless, greater still. A turning point came in 1936, when Billy Strayhorn joined Ellington as an arranger. Together they produced some of Ellington's most memorable work. Throughout the 1940's, and aided by Strayhorn, he began to concentrate on longer, more developed pieces of music. He drew from classical styles for inspiration, but re-drew them as jazz suites, often with challenging themes.

Ellington tried to continue forging new ideas, but ultimately he was unable to take his audience, and even some of his musicians with him. The period of hiatus that followed was broken in spectacular style with a comeback performance at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1956.

This revived his career almost overnight, and led to the recording output that Ellington long sought; one where effusive jazz and artistic vision are synonymous. The outcome is jazz history that is preserved in outstanding recordings, film soundtracks, concert footage, and television appearances. Ellington's greatest legacy, however, is some of the most cultivated jazz music ever written.

Awards and formal recognition of Ellington's achievements are curiously few, but they are of the highest order. Duke Ellington won only a single Grammy for a lifetime's work, but he also received The Presidential Medal of Freedom, The National Order of the Legion of Honour, and a posthumous Pulitzer Prize in appreciation of his contribution to music and art.



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Brian Kellock

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Calum Gourlay (*Bass*)  
Kevin Mackenzie (*Guitar*)



## BLACK, BROWN AND BEIGE

Black: Work Song  
Black: Come Sunday  
Black: Light  
Brown: West Indian Dance  
Brown: Emancipation Celebration  
Brown: Blues Theme Mauve\*  
Beige: Various Themes  
Beige: Sugar Hill Penthouse  
Beige: Finale

*\*feat. special guest vocalist  
Anoushka Nanguy*

Intermission



## ATOMIC MR BASIE

1. Kid from Red Bank  
(Basie, Neal Hefti)
2. Duet
3. After Supper
4. Flight of the Foo Birds
5. Double-O
6. Teddy the Toad
7. Whirlybird
8. Midnite Blue
9. Splanky
10. Fantail
11. Lil' Darlin'

*All songs composed and arranged  
by Neal Hefti except where noted.*

# PROGRAMME



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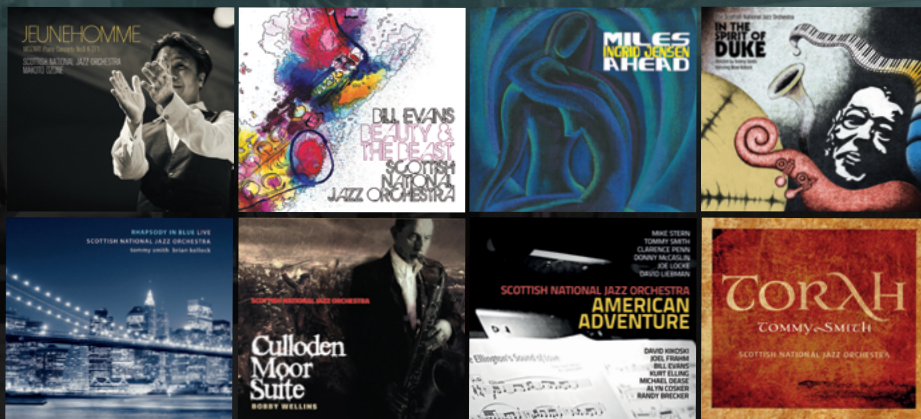


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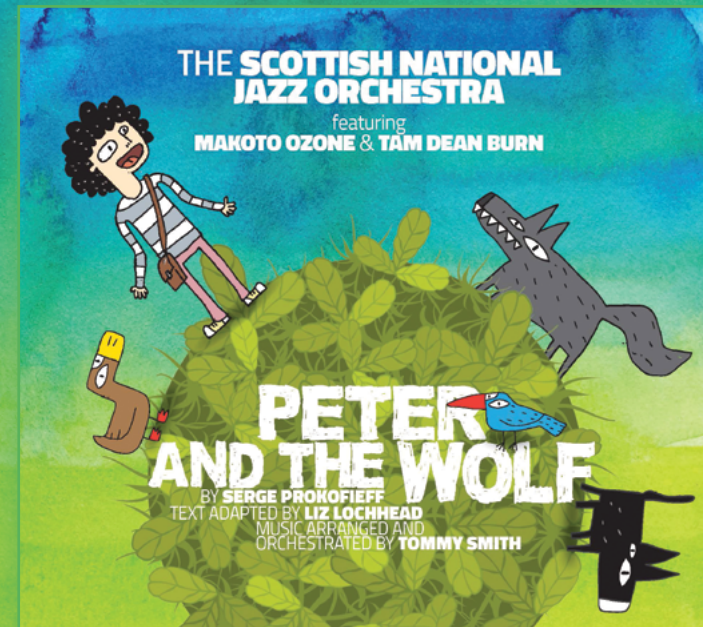
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