

# A Music Legend: Jazz great Count Basie dies at 79

By SUN Staff Writers  
and United Press Int'l.

Count Basie, 79, the big band great who wooed music-lovers with his graceful jazz melodies for nearly 50 years, died Thursday of cancer in Hollywood, Fla.

"He won't be replaced by anyone," said contemporary jazz pianist Dave Brubeck.

Basie's "big band" backed some of the top names on the Las Vegas Strip and helped to create the excitement that made Las Vegas the Entertainment Capital of the World.

His concert at the Sahara Hotel in 1977 featuring Oscar Peterson, Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass was a jazz landmark. He performed with Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. at Caesars Palace, his last engagement there, in May of 1982, a memorable one. Although ailing, he performed a third concert one night during Sammy's engagement — for the "show kids" — to standing ovation after standing ovation.



Jazz singer Joe Williams, a Las Vegas resident, performed with Basie in 1950, when the band leader led a septet at the Brass Rail in Chicago for a 10-day engagement. He rejoined

Basie four years later and recorded his first big hit, "Every Day."

Basie, who had been in Doctors Hospital since March 27 for treatment of a severe ulcer, died of duodenal cancer. His adopted son and business manager Aaron Woodward was at his bedside when he died in his sleep at 4 a.m. EST.

"Had he known he had cancer — he had such a fear of cancer — he would not have been able to go on," said Woodward, 37, one of four abandoned youngsters Basie decided to call his own.

"He was very strong," said Woodward. "He had a strong will to live in spite of all the physical problems. He fought like a champion."

Woodward said Basie's body would be flown to New York and would be on view at 1 p.m. Sunday at the Venture Funeral Home in New York City. His funeral will be at noon Monday at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City, followed by a private burial.

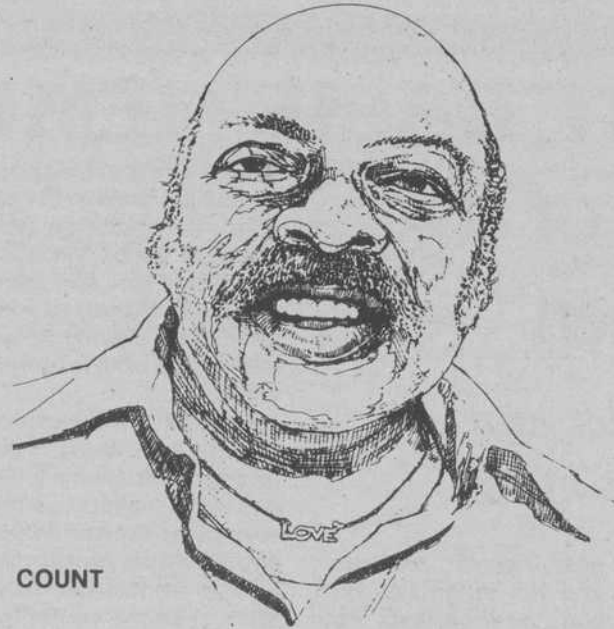
A pupil of the legendary Fats Waller, Basie started as a \$3-a-night piano player in a Chinese restaurant on the New Jersey coast and 50 years later, he was still meeting club dates from coast to coast.

Woodward said no one was told that doctors had discovered duodenal cancer because Basie was a "proud man and would have wanted it that way."

Bass player Cleveland Eaton said members of Basie's 17-member band knew something was seriously wrong because their previously portly leader and pianist had lost weight drastically in

recent months. Eaton said the band would continue in Basie's original image — just as if he were still around.

at a local musical theater. He missed the second show because of illness and returned to the hospital for additional three



COUNT

He said the band has been using another piano player since Basie went into the hospital 40 days ago.

Dr. Leo Schildhaus, Basie's physician, said the Count "had cancer at the head of the pancreas. It eroded into the duodenum and that caused the ulcer. He was not a candidate for surgery. He did not get here to us soon enough."

It was the second time in three months that Basie had been hospitalized in Hollywood, about 20 miles north of Miami. A diabetic, he had been admitted five days before he was scheduled to perform two shows Feb. 11

days. Basie went back to his home in Freeport, Bahamas, but entered the hospital again on March 27.

"Basie was one of the most important figures in jazz because of his inspired use of the rhythm section in big band arrangements, his perfection of the concept of riffing, and his adaptation of the blues to the large band format," according to John Swenson, an editor of The Rolling Stone Jazz Record Guide, to be published later this year.

His death came little more than a year after that of his wife of more than 40 years, Catherine.

## BOB BAILEY RECALLS HIS YEARS WITH BASIE

Bob Bailey, Executive Director, Nevada Economic Development Company, was once a vocalist with the Count Basie orchestra, particularly during the period 1946-49.

"The three most exciting years of my life were spent with him," said Bailey proudly. "He taught me a very deep compassion and appreciation for music and the camaraderie that comes from living with entertainers. He was like a brother or father to me because I had just come out of school at Morehouse and had no idea of what New York offered, or for that matter, the world. He opened up a complete new world for me."

At the testimonial given for him last year by the Gamma Phi Delta Sorority at the Frontier Hotel, Bailey reminisced about the Count Basie tape which was played, saluting him for the service with the band. "This tape I will keep forever,"

said Bailey, as he recalled the appearance of another Basie alumnus who appeared at the testimonial, Joe Williams.

As to how he joined the Basie aggregation, Bailey said he was put with the band by Benny



Bob Bailey

Goodman and John Hammond. "They discovered me in Atlanta. I was then singing on weekend jobs. Benny Goodman asked me what I thought of singing with Count Basie. I thought he was kidding," he remembered.

## NATIONAL JAZZ MONTH PROGRAMS ANNOUNCED

May is National Jazz Month. In keeping with the celebration of our truly national music, the following special programs are being offered in the community:

- \* Popular Music Symposium, UNLV Education Auditorium, May 11, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., followed by an 8 p.m. concert by the UNLV Jazz Ensemble in Artemus Ham Concert Hall. Symposium continues 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. May 12 and 8 a.m. to noon May 13.
- \* "A Portrait of American Music from 1900 to 1984," Jazz Month Concert featuring vocalist Deborah Ann Bonner. Library Card for admission. West Las Vegas Library, 3 p.m. May 12.
- \* Sunday Night Jam Jazz Session with the Las Vegas Jazz Society Quintet, Club Rouge, 900 West Bonanza,

6 p.m. to midnight, May 13. Free.

\* "Jazz Expressions," a multi-media art exhibit by Sally Doyle featuring the world of jazz. Flamingo Library main gallery, through June 1.

\* "Music On My Mind," local writer/artist Beni Caselle's writings and mixed-media of famous musicians in tribute to Monk Montgomery. West Las Vegas Library, May 8 through June 1.

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