

# Basie wows them at Meadow Brook

By MARK E. GALLO

## Review

The Jazz Series at Meadow Brook's Baldwin Pavilion in Avon Township has, sadly, come to a close, putting a large dent in the weekly plans of the many aficionados who set aside each Friday night for the fine showman of America's black classical music. And what a season it was.

No more fitting a finale could have been dreamed up had the administrators taken years to do it. Oscar Peterson, aged 54 years and two days, opened for William "Count" Basie, just four days short of his 75th birthday.

Though closer to Peterson's birthday, the evening paid special tribute to the Count's, which was actually on the 21st.

**THE WORST WEATHER** of the year did little to dampen the spirits of the thousands of faithful. Umbrellas, makeshift tents and lean-tos so densely covered the hills that it was a bit of a miracle that everyone didn't slide to the bottom in a heap.

Oscar Peterson chose to open with an old Bing Crosby standard, "Old Folks." The elegant pianist performed a brisk solo set at a \$50,000 Bosendorfer piano.

Had an anticipated duel between Oscar and the Count taken place, another war in the wings. It would have been the first time in history that two of these magnificent instruments had been on one stage.

For whatever reason, it didn't happen.

**DEFINITELY ONE** of the greatest living pianists, Peterson plays with what might be described as a refined intensity. His stature is pure elegance, yet his hands are a blur, a mass of notes cascading off the keys in lyrical clumps.

His interpretation of Billy Joel's "Just the Way You Are" was the most contemporary tune of his set, most of which was spent in singing the praises of his two major mentors, Art Tatum and Fats Waller, in stylistic approach if not in actual material.

The material did, however, include selections from his beautiful "Canadian Suite" and a piece from his as yet unfinished suite to Africa, "The Fallen Warrior," written for an imprisoned Nelson Mandela.

**FATS WALLERS'** "Honeysuckle Rose" and a medley of Duke Ellington compositions including "Caravan," "I Got It Red (And That Ain't Good)" and "I Don't Get Around Much Anymore" were all wonderfully executed and received. In fact, everything the man played was typically brilliant and predictably beautiful.

Following a brief intermission, local

television personality Jim Herrington ambled onstage to make some brief comments on the longevity and creative importance of Basie as he introduced him, to a standing ovation, and presented him with a plaque from the people at Meadow Brook in appreciation of the 42 years of joying people the Count has brought the people of Michigan and of the world.

**POMP OUT OF** the way, Count Basie and his 15-piece band proceeded to demonstrate, in a much more universal language, why he is so loved and revered the world over.

A short disappointment crossed the minds of many immediately. Our Detroit pride, Buick Miles, was not at the drums. That proved to be a short disappointment, however, as Duffy Jackson showed his stuff and drove the band at a blinding pace, which was all the more amazing considering his whole three days in the band.

It was difficult to catch all of the Count's introductions over the din of applause, so it's uncertain who many of the soloists were. "John Ilt" featured the young bassist John Clayton Jr. "There'll Never Be Another You" had a familiar face, whose name was unclear, blowing a mean flugelhorn.

**ANOTHER TRUMPETER** indulged in a bit of nostalgia by playing Bunny Berigan's signature, "I Can't Get Started." Freddy Green, who has been with Basie from 1937 and is noted for not taking a solo, took a solo.

We should have known better, as his "solo" turned out to be a strum at the end of a musical comedic dialogue between the guitarist and the pianist. Basie is the master of sparseness and in that short interlude said more with a couple of notes than most could say with a handful.

Detroiters Dennis Rowland played "Watch What Happens," "In My Solitude," "Chain Gang" and "Everyday I Have the Blues." His voice is in the Arthur Prysock-Billy Eckstine mold and should improve.

**AFTER A SURPRISE** birthday cake was wheeled to and from the stage, the band closed with its theme, "One O'Clock Jump" and played "Stompin' at the Savoy" as an encore finale.

A birthday party afterward at Treeny's Cafe in Birmingham hosted the Count and a party of 35. Music was provided by the Joe LoDuca Quartet and Phil Marcus Eater. A great end to a memorably fantastic night. We'll miss those Fridays.



William "Count" Basie, 75, blows out the candles on his birthday cake at a party given in his honor at Treeny's Cafe in Birmingham.

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# Youthful 'girls' give great show

By JIM WINDELL

## Review

Four girls and four styles add up to one incomparable evening.

That's the math that makes "4 Girls 4" add up to a fun performance by four singers who have been around forever. Rosemary Clooney, Rose Marie, Helen O'Connell and Margaret Whiting are 'girls' from our past who make us feel young again. They have been associated with an era that is now fondly remembered.

A musical revue, "4 Girls 4" was created about two years ago and has been spreading warmth across the country ever since. The four of them have a unique ability to be themselves and radiate simplicity as they talk about their "lives, swap jokes or sing songs associated with their careers. Careers that perhaps most people consider to be long over. Far from it with this show.

**WITH FRANKIE ORTEGA**, leading the orchestra and playing piano behind the girls, each of them, beginning with Margaret Whiting, does a turn on stage. Each gets about 30 minutes and manages to pack old and new songs, jokes, and patter about their family life into those few minutes. Each does her bit in a fairly low key manner that exudes sincerity from the heart.

Margaret Whiting considers Detroit her home and shares with us that she has a sister Barbara who lives in Bloomfield Village. Moving comfortably and smoothly around the stage she sings the first song she ever recorded on Capitol Records and one which her father, Richard Whiting, wrote.

"My Ideal" is one of the songs identified with her, but so is "It Might As Well Be Spring" and "Moonlight in Vermont," although she confesses she has never been to Vermont. She is believable when she says that and, most important, she can still make us believe her songs.

Margaret Whiting introduces Helen O'Connell to the older Meadow Brook crowd as a "hell of a friend and a wonderful roommate." Helen is a knockout with her looks and could almost be someone's college roommate.

**IN THE OPENING PERFORMANCE** Monday night, Miss O'Connell started weak and apparently nervous,

But that soon passed and she was talking about her family and her relationship with the other girls in the show. She tried some newer material like "After the Love," but it was with the old Bob Eberle and Jimmy Dorsey tunes that she scored biggest. "Tangerine," "Amazola," "Star Eyes" and "Green Eyes."

Her lilting voice and sliding last notes in "Green Eyes" still increase the adrenaline. She could have done more singing and less talking, but that's strictly a personal opinion. Her joke about being the oldest of the four girls does come off and she's the only one of them who could get away with that.

After the intermission, Rose Marie, who was once known as Baby Rose Marie, during her childhood singing days on radio, shows that she is one of the most talented comedienne in the country.

She has had plenty of experience working radio, television and the movies with such great comics as W.C. Fields, Dick Van Dyke and Morey Amsterdam.

She enters in a floor-length black fur coat and as the jokes start to fly, the coat comes off and is flung carelessly across the piano as she reveals a low-cut sparkling evening gown. That becomes part of her act as she tells risqué jokes that are not only old but very funny but include her marvelous sense of timing.

**HER RECOUNTING** of some of the best Paul Lynde jokes from her 13 years as a regular on TV's "Beverly Hills Squares" showed she can do some good impressions and her tribute to Jimmy Durante fit very well in her long routine.

Completing the evening was the "Crown to My House" girl, Rosemary Clooney. After Rose Marie, Rosemary Clooney left the jokes behind and mostly just sang in her well-remembered style. She keeps up with the times with such things as Billy Joel's "I Love You Just the Way You Are" and a new Jove song "The Promise," which she plans to sing at her son's wedding on Sept. 1.