

**Review**

**Count Basie overcomes the weather**

By MARK E. GALLO

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 showcase of America's black classical music. And what a season it was.

No more fitting 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 78th 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 duet between Oscar and the Count taken place, another was 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 WALLER'S "Honeysuckle Rose" and a medley of Duke Ellington compositions including "Caravan," "I Got It Bad (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 jockeying that 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, Butch 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" 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 drum 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.

Detroit's Dennis Rowland played "Watch What Happens," "Ma My Solitude," "Chain Gang" and "Everyday I Have the Blues." His voice is in the Arthur Frysco-Billy Eckstine mold and should improve.

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