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RAY SINGS ***** BASIE SWINGS



RAY CHARLES + COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA = GENIUS²

DREAM CONCERT

by David Ritz

This pairing never happened, but it should have.

And now it has.

It exists, as both a larger-than-life musical reality and a dream realized by the wonders of personal passion and technical wizardry.

However it came together, this imaginary concert is offered as a minor miracle of bold invention and fierce creative energy.

Ray and Basie, a collaboration of cosmic proportions.

HOW IT HAPPENED

When Concord Records recently purchased the extensive Fantasy catalogue, John Burk, head of A&R, came across a number of tapes that caught his attention. The tapes had been the property of Norman Granz, whose Pablo Records, sold to Fantasy, became part of Concord.

“I was stopped cold by the markings that read, ‘Ray Charles and Count Basie,’” says Burk. “I practically ran to put the tapes on the machine.”

What John heard, though, wasn't Basie and Ray playing together, but rather separate sets during concerts performed in Germany and England in the mid-Seventies. As an impresario, Granz had booked both artists in Europe. There were, however, no exact dates or personnel listed. And making matters worse, the extremely poor sound was, at first listen, un-useable. The tapes were made from the concert mixing board, so at least Ray's vocals were pumped up so he could be heard above the instruments. Ray's vocals were spectacular. His band, however, was lost in the muffled and muddy recording.

As producer of the best-selling Grammy®-winning duets

album, *Genius Loves Company*, John had forged a close relationship with Ray. He knew Ray's music intimately.

“I kept going back to those vocal performances,” says John. “I couldn't get them off my mind. They were so compelling that I was trying to figure out a way to make a record out of them. At about the same time, I was at the International Association of Jazz Educators and heard the Count Basie band. That's when the idea hit me: Could we use those amazing Ray Charles performances, record the Basie band and blend the two? I immediately thought of Gregg Field. As a former drummer for both Basie *and* Ray, he really knew these two artists. He had lived the music and, in his own right, Gregg is a genius in the studio—which made him perfect to head up this project.”

Gregg and John spent weeks studying the tapes, working closely with engineer Seth Present.

“I loved John's concept,” says Gregg. “Since Basie was Ray's favorite band and biggest influence as an arranger, inserting Basie's band would be more than logical. It would be a match made in musical heaven.”

“It was a delicate and exacting process,” Burk explains. “It involved Gregg's re-connecting with the current Basie band, led by Bill Hughes, and supervising orchestrations that would fit seamlessly with Ray's vocals. A couple of experts and engineers told us it was impossible.”

“We had to make the impossible possible,” adds Gregg. “What began as a good idea became a project of absolute passion.”

FRAMING PICASSOS

When John first told me the story, I thought of Ray's vocals as vintage Picassos and the original orchestrations as damaged frames. New frames, designed to bring out the glory of the paintings, had to be built. The frames had to highlight the beauty of the art. By employing the new Basie band and commissioning arrangements to match Ray's great Seventies performances, John and Gregg were constructing new frames.

In the Seventies, Ray's vocal artistry was at its height. He had long stopped writing songs as he had in the Fifties. (“I Got A Woman,” “What'd I Say,” etc.) His musical inventions, merging



gospel with secular and reinventing country-and-western, were behind him. Like Louis Armstrong, whose breakthrough innovations had also come early in his illustrious career, Ray had settled into the role of master interpreter. His interpretations ran the gamut, as did Armstrong's, from gut-bucket to Broadway and all stops in between.

In this same period, Ray settled into a concert program that rarely varied. His concerts tended to be short, approximately an hour in length, and included, of course, his own big band and famous Raellettes. At the same time, he never stopped recording. At the time of these German concerts, he had re-signed with Atlantic, the label with which he gained fame in the Fifties, and, as usual, was producing himself in his office/studio in Los Angeles, singing whatever songs struck his fancy. Two of those songs—“Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” from Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma* and George and Ira Gershwin's “How Long Has This Been Going On?”—he sang for the first time on *True to Life*, the Atlantic album released in 1977. His wonderfully idiosyncratic reading of “Look What They've Done to My Song,” originally hits for both the New Seekers and Melanie, and the down-home “Every Saturday Night” appeared on his *Message to the People* album earlier that same decade. The other songs from these European concerts had long been part of Ray's repertoire.

During the Seventies, with a few notable exceptions, Ray stopped writing his own arrangements. At the same time, though, when he commissioned charts, he sat with the arranger and, in precise terms, explained how he wanted the music to sound.

“Basie has holes in his charts,” Ray once said, “and it's those silent moments that gives the stuff such power. That's the stuff I love.”

“There's no doubt that Ray loved Basie,” Hank Crawford, Ray's chief arranger in the Fifties explained. “When I was in Ray's little band, he'd show me how to arrange our seven pieces so they sounded like Basie's 16 pieces. He loved that fat Basie feel. Fact is, Basie's “Lil Darlin'” was part of our book. The connection was the blues. Basie was rooted in the blues. And Ray, well, he was soaked in the blues.”

“When Ray explained how he wanted me to write an arrangement,” said Sid Feller, who probably wrote more Ray

Charles big band orchestrations than anyone, “he'd often point to Basie charts as templates. He wanted that thick harmony in the reeds. He wanted those clean horn punches. He wanted it simple like Basie, and he wanted it strong. Mostly, though, he wanted that Basie swing.”

HOW FIELD + BURK SWUNG IT

As co-producers, Gregg and John decided on a single goal: to make the date sound like a genuine heart-to-heart collaboration.

“Above all else, we wanted to stay true to the sound and character of both Ray Charles and the Basie band,” says John. “This had to sound like a *real* collaboration.”

That meant salvaging the best vocal performances from the tapes of the German concerts. It meant also augmenting Ray's original arrangements and, in just the right spots, Basie-izing them.

“There wasn't a technical precedent, but there was an artistic one,” explains Gregg. “That's the great *Genius Plus Soul Equals Jazz* album that Ray cut on Impulse! in the early Sixties. There he sang with a band of chiefly Basie personnel minus Basie himself. The charts were smoking and Ray sang magnificently. There was a perfect dynamic between singer and orchestra. *Genius Plus Soul Equals Jazz* achieved an atomic-explosive Ray-Basie feel. That's what we went for here.”

“The editing took four months, but Gregg and Seth Present are magicians with Pro Tools,” says John.

“Don Murray did a brilliant job recording and mixing,” adds Field. “You'd never know Ray's vocals were recorded 30 years before the music was recorded.”

Because so many of the original charts were Basie-based, they sound even better in augmented form. They sound bigger and more dynamic. If verisimilitude was the aim—to create the impression that it was actually performed this way—verisimilitude was achieved.

Then there was the challenge of the Raellettes.

“Their original parts on the tape were as muffled and unusable as the bands,” Gregg explains. “But since there can be no authentic Ray concert without Raellettes, we hired Patti Austin, a great singer herself, to write and recreate those

background harmonies so vital to the Ray Charles aesthetic. Patti has an exacting and super-sensitive feel for vocal subtleties. Because of Patti, we wound up with an ideal replication of the Raelettes.

John adds, “What Gregg and Patti did with the The Raelettes was absolutely the icing on the cake.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

It works.

Put on the disc, close your eyes, listen to the music and imagine yourself there.

In my book, it’s real as rain.

Ray sings his ass off.

With his astounding visual abilities, Ray forces you to see the cattle standing like statues and the little brown maverick winking her eye on “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning.”

Even though he’s sung “Let the Good Times Roll” four thousand times, he’s never attacked it with as much fire and funk as he does here. Joey DeFrancesco’s organ solo, flown in on the wings of celestial technology, is a gem.

On the standard fare — “Busted,” “I Can’t Stop Loving You,” “Crying Time,” “Come Live with Me” — Ray sounds like he’s singing the songs for the first time.

“I love *Georgia*,” Ray once told me. “That sweet old song made me a lot of money. I can’t think of a concert where I didn’t sing it.”

This version breaks my heart.

“How Long Has This Been Going On?” originally arranged by Larry Muhoberac and re-imagined here by Shelly Berg, is a brilliant reinvention of the American songbook classic with Ray’s vamp — “listen, woman...how long have you had my nose open?” — covering the Gershwin masterpiece with a delicious film of grit and grime.

“Feel So Bad,” which Ray first heard on a Little Milton Checkers album in the Sixties, is testimony of Charles’s ability to sing 12-bar blues with the authority of the Kings, from B.B. to Freddy to Albert.

But it’s Ray’s reading of Lennon/McCartney’s “The Long and Winding Road” that shakes the earth’s foundation. Like all great interpreters, Ray possesses the seemingly impossible ability to improve a perfect song. He deepens it. He deconstructs it. He

darkens it. He turns it personal. He turns it into the most basic plea a lonely man can make. When he sings, “You oughta take me home with you tonight, baby,” to the woman of his dreams, the deed is done. The dream is real.

WHAT WOULD RAY THINK OF THIS DREAM?

We’ll never know, but I bet he’d love it. Ray was an early believer in high tech. He loved the magic of mechanics. When it came to making music in the studio, Ray was no purist. From the moment he learned he could sing to track — that is, sing to an instrumental track previously recorded — he did so. And never stopped doing so, from the Sixties on. It wasn’t unusual for Ray to work on a vocal performance for two or three days, adding and deleting licks like mad. His final versions were built of thousands of pieces that he constructed with painstaking care. Creating a record like this, where separately created elements are married by technology, is right up Ray’s alley.

Ray lived in his studio. He felt most comfortable among the slides and buttons and faders and knobs. He loved to tinker and toy. He was obsessed with the reproduction of sound. He wanted — and got — the latest innovations. This most creative of innovations, a studio-created concert of Ray with his favorite big band, would have surely satisfied his restless soul.

If I speak with assurance, it’s because of my unshakeable conviction that these are among Ray’s best live performances. There are, of course, others. His Seventies versions of “Am I Blue” and “Till There Was You,” recorded and released only in Japan, are mind-bending. His 1964 “Making Whoopee” from the *Live In Concert* album is priceless. But no concert has the consistency, in both the quality of singing and soaring accompaniment, as what you hear on this disc.

As a lifelong impassioned fan of the music of Ray and Basie, I thank John, Gregg, Seth, Patti, Don, Bill Hughes and all the others who created this most marvelous confection.

It’s a dream come true.

David Ritz collaborated with Charles on his autobiography *Brother Ray*. His most recent book is a novel, *Sanctified Blues*, cowritten with Mable John, former lead Raelette.



1 Oh, What A Beautiful Morning 4:36

(Richard Rodgers-Oscar Hammerstein II)
Williamson Music Co.—ASCAP (*USC4R0614023*)
Arranged by Roger Neumann + Tom Scott

2 Let the Good Times Roll 2:57

(Fleecie Moore-Sam Theard)
Rytvco, Inc.—ASCAP (*USC4R0614024*)
Arranged by Quincy Jones + John Clayton
Organ solo: Joey DeFrancesco
Trumpet solo: Scotty Barnhart

3 How Long Has This Been Going On? 6:19

(George & Ira Gershwin)
WB Music Corp.—ASCAP (*USC4R0614025*)
Arranged by Larry Muhoberac + Shelly Berg
Trumpet solo: Mike Williams

4 Every Saturday Night 4:06

(Jerry West-Silas Hogan)
Embassy Music Corp.—BMI (*USC4R0614026*)
Arranged by Shelly Berg
Vocal arrangement by Patti Austin

5 Busted 2:34

(Harlan Howard)
Sony-ATV Tree Publishing—BMI (*USC4R0614027*)
Arranged by Shelly Berg

6 Crying Time 3:53

(Buck Owens)
Sony-ATV Tree Publishing—BMI/Beachaven Music Corp./Jarest Music Co. c/o Lou Carter Keay—ASCAP (*USC4R0614028*)
Arranged by Shelly Berg
Vocal arrangement by Patti Austin

7 I Can’t Stop Loving You 4:02

(Don Gibson)
Sony-ATV Acuff Rose Music—BMI (*USC4R0614029*)
Arranged by Quincy Jones + Gregg Field
Vocal arrangement by Patti Austin
Organ solo: Joey DeFrancesco
Piano solo: Tony Suggs

8 Come Live with Me 4:10

(Boudleaux & Felice Bryant)
House of Bryant Publications—BMI (*USC4R0614030*)
Arranged by Shelly Berg

9 Feel So Bad 4:10

(James Johnson-Leslie Temple)
Arc Music Corp.—BMI (*USC4R0614031*)
Arranged by Shelly Berg
Saxophone solo: Doug Lawrence

10 The Long and Winding Road 4:03

(John Lennon-Paul McCartney)
EMI Blackwood Music Collecting Agent Lennon -McCartney Writers/ATV (Northern Songs Catalog) c/o Sony-ATV Songs, LLC—BMI (*USC4R0614032*)
Arranged by Shelly Berg

11 Look What They’ve Done To My Song 2:50

(Melanie Safka)
Blenstock Publishing Co./Quartet Music, Inc.—ASCAP (*USC4R0614033*)
Arranged by Shelly Berg
Vocal arrangement by Patti Austin

12 Georgia on My Mind 4:41

(Hoagy Carmichael-Stuart Gorrell)
Peermusic III, Ltd.—BMI (*USC4R0614034*)
Arranged by Tom Scott
Vocal arrangement by Patti Austin + Gregg Field

Produced by GREGG FIELD
Co-Produced by JOE ADAMS + JOHN BURK
Executive Producers: JOE ADAMS, JOHN BURK + AARON WOODWARD

Recorded at Conway Recorders, Capitol Studios,
and G Studio Digital, Los Angeles, CA; February through May 2006
Recording Engineers: DON MURRAY, GREGG FIELD, SETH PRESANT,
BILL SMITH, STEVE GENEWICK, CHARLIE PAAKKARI
Assistant Engineers: PAUL SMITH, ERIC WEAVER, JOE BROWN
Pro Tools Engineers: SETH PRESANT + GREGG FIELD
Mixed by DON MURRAY at G Studio Digital, Los Angeles, CA; May 2006
Mastered by DOUG SAX with SANGWOOK NAM at The Mastering Lab,
Ojai, CA; June 2006

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GREGG FIELD (Booklet pg. 21)
Art Direction + Package Design: ANDREW PHAM
Additional Art Direction: ABBEY ANNA

CONCORD RECORDS WOULD ESPECIALLY LIKE TO THANK

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Alan Mintz, and the entire team at Hear Music and Starbucks.
Bill Hughes, Aaron Woodward, and Dee Askew for continuing to present
the greatest band on the planet. Shelly Berg for his extraordinary talent
and generosity. Patti Austin, Joey DeFrancesco, Tom Scott,
Seth Presant, and especially Don Murray.

ADDITIONAL THANKS TO

Phil Ramone, Al Schmitt, JoAnn Tominaga,
Rex Rideout, and George Benson



THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA Directed by BILL HUGHES



THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA

RHYTHM SECTION:

Butch Miles: drums
Tony Suggs: piano
James Leary: bass
Will Matthews: guitar

SAXOPHONES:

Marshall McDonald: alto, flute
Grant Langford: alto
Doug Lawrence: tenor
Doug Miller: tenor
John Williams: baritone

THE RAELETTES:

Patti Austin
Valerie Pinkston

Lynne Fiddmont
Sandy Simmons

FEATURING:

Joey DeFrancesco: B-3 organ

ADDITIONAL MUSICIANS:

Shelly Berg, Jim Cox, Wayne Bergeron,
Andy Martin, John Chiodini,
Chuck Berghofer, + Gregg Field

Music Contractor: Dee Askew
Vocal Contractor: JoAnn Tominaga

Music Preparation: Terry Woodson Music,
Tom Halm, Robert Schaeer, Michael Stever,
James Lutz + Matthew Rubin
Librarian: Danny Perito

Butch Miles plays Ludwig drums,
Zidjian cymbals, Vic Firth sticks
Will Matthews plays D'Angelico guitars
James Leary uses Acoustic Image amplifiers
Doug Miller plays Keilwerth saxophones
Marshall McDonald plays Vandoren reeds
Michael P. Williams plays Calicchio trumpets
Clarence Banks plays Besson trombones

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12Produced by **GREGG FIELD**Co-Produced by **JOE ADAMS + JOHN BURK** * The Count Basie Orchestra directed by **BILL HUGHES**

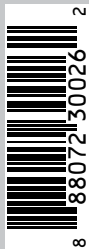
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“Ray Charles and Count Basie were two of the most charismatic personalities I’ve ever known. I loved them both; they were both generous and loving mentors of mine. So to hear this amazing collaboration of their musical geniuses is a treat of the highest order. When 21st century technology and timeless soul come together, watch out! This one is for the ages.”

QUINCY JONES

