



Butch Miles (1944–2023)

He was a celebrated American jazz drummer renowned for his work with the Count Basie Orchestra and numerous jazz legends.

Early Life and Education

Charles J. Thornton Jr., known professionally as Butch Miles, was born July 4, 1944 in Ironton, Ohio, during a family reunion while his mother was visiting relatives in nearby Russell, Kentucky. His mother soon returned to Hinton, West Virginia, in Summers County, where Miles spent his early childhood. He began playing the snare drum at the age of nine. He pursued formal music education at West Virginia State University from 1962 to 1966, where he majored in music. After graduation, he toured with the Iris Bell Trio, marking the start of his professional career in jazz performance.

Career Highlights

Miles is best known for his tenure with the Count Basie Orchestra, first from 1975 to 1979 and later from 1997 to 2007. His entry into the Basie band was recommended by Mel Torme and Buddy Rich, both of whom recognized his exceptional talent. During his time with Basie, Miles was praised for his crowd-pleasing style and technical skill, drawing comparisons to drummers like Buddy Rich and Sonny Payne.

In addition to his work with Basie, Miles performed with jazz icons such as Dave Brubeck, Ella Fitzgerald, Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, Lena Horne, and Tony Bennett. He also led his own group, Jazz Express, during the 1980s and 1990s, and performed at prestigious events like the Newport Jazz Festival and the Montreux Jazz Festival.

Style and Influences

Miles cited Buddy Rich, Gene Krupa, and Jo Jones as his favorite drummers, reflecting his swing-oriented, dynamic, and technically proficient style. His drumming was admired worldwide for its energy, precision, and musicality.

Later Life and Legacy

Butch Miles was inducted into the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame in 2011. He also served as a faculty member at the School of Music at Texas State University-San Marcos, contributing to music education. In 2014, he was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and later underwent a lung transplant. Miles passed away on February 2, 2023, leaving behind a legacy as one of jazz's most respected drummers.

Notable Recordings and Contributions

Miles' discography includes numerous recordings as a bandleader and sideman, including a notable 1979 tribute to Chick Webb. His work with the Count Basie Orchestra and other jazz legends helped define modern swing drumming and inspired generations of musicians

Discography

(As leader)

- *Miles and Miles of Swing...* (Famous Door, 1978)
- *Lady Be Good* with Bucky Pizzarelli (Dreamstreet, 1978)
- *Butch's Encore* (Famous Door, 1979)
- *Butch Miles Salutes Chick Webb* (Famous Door, 1980)
- *Butch Miles Swings Some Standards* (Famous Door, 1981)
- *Butch Miles Salutes Gene Krupa* (Famous Door, 1982)
- *More Miles...More Standards* with Jorge Anders (Famous Door, 1985)
- *Introducing the Ivory Coast Suite* (Dreamstreet, 1986)
- *Cookin'* (Nagel Heyer, 1995)
- *Soulmates* with Howard Alden (Nagel Heyer, 2002)
- *Straight On Till Morning* (Nagel Heyer, 2003)

(As sideman)

With Count Basie

- *Basie Big Band* (Pablo, 1975)
- *I Told You So* (Pablo, 1976)
- *Montreux '77* (Pablo, 1977)
- *Prime Time* (Pablo, 1977)

- *On the Road* (Pablo, 1980)
- *Basie in Europe* (LRC, 1985)
- *Live in Japan '78* (Pablo, 1985)
- *Fun Time* (Pablo, 1991)
- *The Golden Years* (Pablo, 1996)
- *Count Plays Duke* (Mama, 1998)
- *Swing Shift* (Mama, 1999)
- *Basie Is Back* (Eighty-Eight's, 2006)
- *Swinging, Singing, Playing* (Mack Avenue, 2009)

With Phil Bodner

- *Fine & Dandy* (Stash, 1981)
- *Highlights in Jazz* (Stash, 1985)
- *Clarinet Virtuosity* (Arbors, 2006)

With Dick Hyman

- *The Kingdom of Swing & the Republic of Oop Bop Sh'Bam* (Musicmasters, 1989)
- *From the Age of Swing* (Reference, 1994)
- *Swing Is Here* (Reference, 1996)

With Flip Phillips

- *Flipenstein* (Progressive, 1981)
- *A Real Swinger* (Concord Jazz, 1988)
- *Flip Phillips Celebrates His 80th Birthday* (Arbors, 2003)

With Sal Salvador

- *In Our Own Sweet Way* (Stash, 1983)
- *Plays the World's Greatest Jazz Standards* (Stash, 1984)
- *Plays Gerry Mulligan* (Stash, 1985)

With Bob Wilber

- *Ode to Bechet* (Jazzology, 1982)

- *Reflections* (Bodeswell, 1983)
- *On the Road* (Bodeswell, 1992)
- *Nostalgia* (Arbors, 1996)
- *The Hamburg Concert* (Nagel Heyer, 1996)
- *Memories of You* (Black and Blue, 1996)

With others

- Peter Appleyard, *Barbados Heat* (Concord Jazz, 1990)
- Peter Appleyard, *Barbados Cool* (Concord Jazz, 1991)
- Dave Brubeck, *Back Home* (Concord Jazz, 1979)
- John Bunch, *World War II Love Songs* (Groove Jams, 1998)
- Joe Bushkin, *Play It Again Joe* (United Artists, 1977)
- Ray Charles & Count Basie, *Ray Sings, Basie Swings* (Hear Music/Concord, 2006)
- Rosemary Clooney & Count Basie, *At Long Last* (Concord Jazz, 1998)
- Dolly Dawn, *Memories of You* (Dawn, 1981)
- Dany Doriz, *This One's for Basie* (Black and Blue, 1994)
- Big Joe Duskin, *Blues Rendez-Vous* (Back to Blues, 1994)
- Duke Ellington, *Four Symphonic Works by Duke Ellington* (Musical Heritage Society, 1989)
- Ella Fitzgerald, *Digital III at Montreux* (Pablo, 1980)
- Ella Fitzgerald, *A Classy Pair* (Pablo, 1982)
- Johnny Frigo, *Live from Studio A in New York City* (Chesky, 1989)
- Terry Gibbs, Buddy DeFranco, Herb Ellis, *Kings of Swing* (Contemporary, 1992)
- Terry Gibbs, Buddy DeFranco, Herb Ellis, *A Tribute to Benny Goodman* (Contemporary, 2001)
- Scott Hamilton, *Swinging Young Scott* (Famous Door, 1978)
- Peanuts Hucko, *Swing That Music* (Star Line, 1992)
- Helen Humes, *Helen* (Muse, 1981)
- Alberta Hunter, *The Glory of Alberta Hunter* (Columbia, 1982)

- **Alberta Hunter, *Look for the Silver Lining* (Columbia, 1983)**
- **Milt Jackson & Count Basie, *Milt Jackson + Count Basie + the Big Band Vol. 1* (Pablo, 1978)**
- **Milt Jackson & Count Basie, *Milt Jackson + Count Basie + the Big Band Vol. 2* (Pablo, 1978)**
- **Carmen Leggio, *Tarrytown Tenor* (Famous Door, 1978)**
- **Roger Kellaway, Dick Hyman, *Piano Players & Significant Others* (Musicmasters, 1990)**
- **George Kelly, *Plays the Music of Don Redman* (Stash, 1984)**
- **George Masso, *Choice N.Y.C. Bone* (Famous Door, 1979)**
- **George Masso, *A Swinging Case of Masso-Is* (Famous Door, 1981)**
- **Dave McKenna, *No Holds Barred* (Famous Door, 1979)**
- **Danny Moss, *Weaver of Dreams* (Nagel Heyer, 1995)**
- **Gerry Mulligan, *Little Big Horn* (Five, 1983)**
- **Bucky Pizzarelli & John Pizzarelli, *Passion Guitars* (Groove Jams, 1998)**
- **Lou Stein, *Live at the Dome* (Dreamstreet, 1981)**
- **Maxine Sullivan, *Highlights in Jazz* (Storyville, 1999)**
- **Frank Tate, *Live in Belfast* (Nagel Heyer, 2001)**
- **Warren Vache, *Blues Walk* (Dreamstreet, 1978)**
- **Marlene VerPlanck, *Marlene VerPlanck Loves Johnny Mercer* (Audiophile, 1978)**
- **Phil Wilson, *Boston-New York Axis: Phil & Vic* (Famous Door, 1980)**
- **Glenn Zottola, *Secret Love* (Famous Door, 1982)**
- **Wild Bill Davison, *Wild Bill Davison All Stars* (Timeless, 1987)**
- **Tom Saunders' *Wild Bill Davison Band & Guests* (Nagel Heyer, 1996)**
- **Wild Bill Davis Super Trio, *That's All* (Jazz Connoisseur, 1991)**

Charles J. Thornton Jr.

We Salute You!



Buddy Miles

