
The Legacy of
SAMMY NESTICO

About this Recording

The Jazz Ambassadors of The United States Army Field Band presents the third in a series of recordings honoring the lives and music of individuals who have made significant contributions to jazz.

Designed primarily as educational resources, these recordings are researched to authenticate standard performance practices and to reflect the original intent of the composers. The biographical information, detailed interviews, program notes, and historical photographs are included to provide music educators and their students with insight into the compositions which they hear and perform.

There is possibly no other composer more important in the field of jazz education than Sammy Nestico. For many young students, his are the first jazz charts they encounter. From young bands to professional studio orchestras, thousands of musicians around the world have performed his compositions and arrangements. It was an honor for the Jazz Ambassadors to have Sammy oversee the making of this recording.

This compact disc was recorded in March 2001 at Devers Hall, Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. This recording was reprinted in 2008.

The Legacy of SAMMY NESTICO

Sammy Nestico, composer and arranger for some of the most significant Count Basie albums, is probably one of the most gifted writers ever to hit the jazz band scene.¹

—Rayburn Wright

The Early Years

Sammy Nestico was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on February 6, 1924. Growing up during the swing era, he listened to all of the great big bands on the radio and soon became obsessed with music. By the second semester of eighth grade, Sammy began playing the trombone. His passion for music became so intense that he recalls his mother often admonishing him to “quit practicing and go out and play with the other kids!”² After only two years of playing the trombone, Sammy knew he would spend the rest of his life making music.

Sammy’s interest in composing and arranging came from what he terms “just plain old curiosity.”³ With his love for music growing everyday, it was only a



Sammy at age 16, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1940

matter of time before he started arranging. “My first arrangement was on the tune *All Ashore*—believe it or not. There was only one problem with it. Since I was a trombone player, I wrote all of the parts in bass clef! A friend of mine told me about the other clefs, and I brought my arrangement back the next day. The only problem this time was that I didn’t transpose any of the parts. After I understood certain instruments needed to be transposed, my writing came alive. One year later, when I was seventeen, I began writing for the ABC Staff Orchestra in Pittsburgh.”⁴

While working at ABC, Sammy began studying scores of the masters of classical music. His favorites were the Romantics and Impressionists, including Tchaikovsky, Ravel, Chopin, and any other composer who “seemed to paint pictures with music.”⁵ However, after only one year at ABC, the outbreak of World War II brought Sammy into the Armed Forces.

Duty Calls

After serving in the Army’s Combat Engineer Corps, Sammy attended Duquesne University in Pittsburgh with help from the G.I. Bill. In 1950, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Music Education. He began teaching in Wilmerding, Pennsylvania, but his desire to write music fulltime prompted him to resign after only one year.

When the position of Chief Arranger for the Air Force jazz ensemble, the Airmen of



*Private Sammy Nestico with his mother,
Frances Nestico, 1943*



Sammy leading the Airmen of Note, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, DC, 1955

Note, opened up in 1951, Sammy auditioned and was offered the job. After moving to Washington, DC, he began working double time. When not occupied with the Airmen, he was subbing with some of the top big bands that came to the DC area. “I was doing sub work with Tommy Dorsey, Woody Herman, Charlie Barnet, and Gene Krupa. I remember working with Krupa one night, and having wood chips from his drum sticks hitting me in the head all night long. Brand new drum sticks at the beginning of the night had been chopped down to nothing!”⁶

In 1955, Sammy became Director of the Airmen of Note, but later returned to his previous arranging position. Following twelve years with the Air Force, he became Chief Arranger for the U.S. Marine Band, frequently leading performances at the White House during the administrations of presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

After five years with the Marines, Sammy had completed a total of twenty years of service and retired from military life. He knew that if he was to really make it in the music business,



*Master Sergeant Nestico,
United States Marine Band
Chief Arranger, 1965*

he had to relocate to either New York City or Los Angeles. So, with his wife's blessing, Sammy moved to L.A. in 1968.

The Basie "Audition"

About the same time that Sammy moved to the West Coast, he would meet the man for whom some of his most famous charts would be written: Count Basie. "I got in touch with a guy who was playing with Woody Herman at the time, who happened to have the same name that I do—Sal Nistico [*sic*]. In fact, he turned out to be a cousin of mine. Anyway, he said that he thought I should write for Basie.

So I got in touch with Grover Mitchell, who was Basie's first trombonist (who also happens to be from Pittsburgh). I gave him my arrangement of *The Queen Bee* as an audition. About a week later, Grover called me at about two o'clock in the morning and said, 'The chief likes your writing. Write some more.' That's how it started."⁷

After being in Los Angeles for less than one month, Sammy recorded his first album with Count Basie. Included on *Basie Straight Ahead* was his audition arrangement, *The Queen Bee*.



With the Basie Band at a recording session, R.C.A. Studios, Hollywood, California, late 1970s

Breaking In on the West Coast

Despite his success writing for the Airmen of Note, the Marine Band, and Count Basie, Sammy had difficulty finding steady work on the West Coast. Sammy remembers, “Just as the water was up to my chin, Billy [May] turned to me during a recording session and asked if I could copy a big band arrangement off an album. There was my break.”⁸

“They say that a break is when preparation meets opportunity, and mine came as assistant to Billy May at Capitol Records.”⁹ During his five-year stint at Capitol, Sammy helped write the equivalent of 63 albums. Not only was he constantly writing, but he was also making important connections. He met and worked with his arranging heroes: Nelson Riddle, Billy May, and Quincy Jones. These connections led to writing for some of the most celebrated musicians of the era, including Bing Crosby, Sarah Vaughn, Nancy Wilson, Paul



At home in Northridge, California, 1972

Anka, Barbra Streisand, Pat Boone, and the Chairman of the Board himself, Frank Sinatra. On writing for Sinatra, Sammy recalls, “Quincy Jones was doing an album called *L.A. Is My Lady*, and he asked me to arrange five tunes for that record. It was such an honor working with Frank Sinatra, because I think he was the greatest entertainer of the twentieth century.”¹⁰

The Basie Years

After the Basie Band re-organized in 1952, the Count chose to “institutionalize his music through the work of a group of hand-picked arrangers, who could capture the essence of the Basie sound and make it permanent in a book of written charts.”¹¹ Following the legacy of Neal Hefti, Benny Carter, Quincy Jones, Frank Foster, and Thad Jones, Sammy Nestico became “the keeper of the house sound through the 70s and 80s.”¹²



Sammy with Count Basie, 1971

Down Beat defines Sammy’s contributions as “the principal architect of the later Basie book.”¹³ Over the years from 1968 through 1984, he would write a total of ten albums for Count Basie. Four of those albums won Grammy Awards. In his own unassuming way, Sammy chortles, “Now that’s what I call a success story, and I love success stories.”¹⁴

In 1984, Sammy and the world lost a very special man, Count Basie. “I miss Bill Basie. I miss Bill Basie sitting at the piano. He was such a special person, and everybody who knew him loved him. He was like a big teddy bear.”¹⁵ At the time of Basie’s death, Sammy had 120 charts in the band’s book.



Conducting a performance with Toni Tennille, 1985

Success in Los Angeles

During the period that he wrote for Basie, Sammy began doing studio work in Hollywood. He did source music for more than fifty different television shows, including *The Bob Newhart Show*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Columbo*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Gomer Pyle—U.S.M.C.*, and *M.A.S.H.* He also wrote for a few movies, including *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, and *The Color Purple*, again with his old friend Quincy Jones.

After ten albums with Basie, Sammy went on to write for some established pop stars, including Toni Tennille and Phil Collins. His work for Collins was one of his most difficult endeavors. “I had to take some of Phil’s hit songs and make jazzy instrumental versions, so that he could play drums on them. It was an absolute challenge. But that’s what arrangers are about—challenges.”¹⁶

Jazz Educator

From the late sixties onward, the name Sammy Nestico was being heard more and more often in jazz education circles. With the lack of quality jazz band arrangements in the schools in the sixties, Sammy and a few others started writing for school bands. “For four years, I can remember writing arrangements on all of the public domain tunes like *I’ve Been Workin on the Railroad*, *Little Brown Jug*,

and things like that. Then, later on, band directors started asking me for some of the arrangements that I had done with Basie.”¹⁷

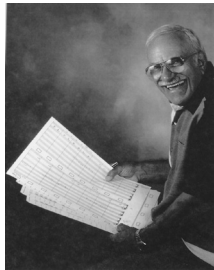
“His clear understanding of how to compose for school groups has made him one of the most respected writers in jazz education today,”¹⁸ wrote Dana Davis in a 1979 *Instrumentalist* interview. Having written more than six hundred arrangements, there is no name more associated with school jazz ensemble music than that of Sammy Nestico.

“I’ve really worked hard for kids. There were so many poor arrangements in the schools that I almost felt an obligation to write quality charts for young people. I really want to pay back some of what was given to me when I was young.”¹⁹

A Lifetime of Achievement

In December 2001, the Midwest Clinic will present the distinguished Medal of Honor to Sammy Nestico for a lifetime of support to music education. He has also received special recognition from the University of North Texas, long noted for its outstanding jazz studies program.

Duquesne University, from which Sammy graduated in 1950, acknowledged him with an honorary Doctor of Music in 1983, presented him with the Distinguished Alumni Award, and inducted him into the “Century Club” in 1994. The Airmen of Note honors the contributions of its alumnus by sponsoring an annual arranging competition entitled “The Sammy Nestico Award.”



A Lasting Legacy

Never one to rest on past accomplishments, Sammy has continued to work long past most people's retirement age. He has recently written a number of arrangements for the Boston Pops and taught at the University of Georgia in Athens as artist-in-residence. His latest projects, *Basie & Beyond* with his old colleague Quincy Jones and *The Legacy of Sammy Nestico* by the Jazz Ambassadors, are the culmination of a career that has spanned more than half a century.

After a week in the studio supervising the Jazz Ambassadors' recording, Sammy concluded, "I think this album with the Jazz Ambassadors and *Basie & Beyond* are the two albums I'm most proud of."²⁰ I'm 77 years old and this has been the best week of my life—having a great band like this playing my charts the way I always dreamed they would sound!"²¹

In the future, Sammy plans on doing two things: rewriting his very influential book, *The Complete Arranger*, and creating his own publishing company, Nestico Publishing. On the challenge of writing, Sammy reflects, "Two days a month I can't get the notes down fast enough on paper, the other 28 days it's really hard work. It's always a process of accepting and rejecting and it's not so much talent as it is persistence and desire."²²

Sammy's persistence and desire to create quality compositions for musicians of all ages has remained constant for more than five decades. His true legacy will be his undying love for the education of young people. "I'm more proud that my music is played in the schools of America than anything else,"²³ Sammy admits. As a living treasure, Sammy Nestico will always be a guiding force, educating others in a truly American art form, jazz.

Program Notes: A Nestico Perspective

Who's Sorry Now (1982)

“This is one of the last charts I ever wrote for the Air Force jazz band, the Airmen of Note. It’s lasted over the years, and it still swings. We’ve updated it a little bit for this recording, but it’s still pretty much the same old chart.”

Free Flight (2001)

“This tune let me do something that is totally unlike the whole Sammy/Basie thing that I’m mostly known for. Whenever I write a chart, I always start out with a melody. Well, with this chart I purposefully wrote a tune without a melody. All there is are a few repeated motifs throughout. I thought it came off pretty well.”

Blues Machine (1983)

“How many arrangements on the blues are there? A hundred thousand? This is just your basic blues arrangement with a tough saxophone soli and a big, swinging Basie-type ensemble section.”

Dawdlin’ (1981)

“I really tried to write something for kids that was interesting, not trite or drab. Too many school arrangements aren’t harmonically or melodically beautiful, and that’s what this chart is. It’s one of those simple but interesting Basie-style charts like Neil Hefti’s *Lil’ Darlin’*.”

A Minor Affair (2000)

“This chart uses a sixteen-measure form in a minor key, almost like a minor blues. It uses quite a bit of melodic counterpoint between the saxophones and the brass. This is a great chart for the younger kids to solo on, because of the relatively simple chord changes.”

I Hadn't Anyone 'Til You (1984)

“I wrote this arrangement for Sarah Vaughn, who I think was one of the greatest ballad singers of the twentieth century. This chart is what I call a ballad with a beat. It also has one of those great hooks that I stuck with all the way through the chart. I sort of hung my hat on that one.”

Satin N'Glass (1985)

“I wrote the first four measures of this chart, and then I got stuck. I tried to finish it six months later, and couldn't. Finally, a year later, the rest of this chart came to me. I was searching for something—something unpredictable. Well, it ended up being a pretty ballad. It's pretty, and it's soulful. It is very much ‘Sammy.’”

The Joy of Cookin' (1999)

“This is another chart from the new album, *Basie & Beyond*. I call it a marriage of two feels—rock 'n' roll and jazz. I thought it would be really nice to get both idioms into one chart, and I think it works great.”



*Sammy with Quincy Jones at
Capitol Records, March 2000*

88 Basie Street (1980)

“This is one of only three tunes that I’ve written that I actually like. 88 is for the number of piano keys, of course. Actually, this is the only arrangement of mine that Count Basie sent back to me! When I brought it back to a recording session later on, Basie played it and said, ‘Gee Sam, this is a nice chart.’ And then I said, ‘But this is the one you sent back to me!’ This is just a nice, easy swinging chart. Notice the double counterpoint in the middle of the chart, right before the shout section.”



Sammy and CW3 Kevin Laird listening to playback

Wind Machine (1975)

“I also wrote this tune for Count Basie. This tune is based on the chord changes to *Call Me Irresponsible*. It’s your classic flag-waver chart, and I can remember watching Buddy Rich play this chart on *The Tonight Show* with the Tonight Show Band. That really helped get this chart a lot of exposure. I don’t think this tune has ever sounded as good as it does on this recording.”

No Time Like the Present (1997)

“This tune was recorded on the new album, *Basie & Beyond*. It’s based on the changes to the Sonny Rollins’ standard, *Doxy*. It gives me a chance to work with each section separately. First, I use the brass, and then just the saxes. Then we put it all together. There is some nice double counterpoint in there later on. I’ve been doing a lot of that lately.”

Day Dream (1986)

“I wrote this arrangement for Toni Tennille. It starts out with an ethereal introduction with the strings. It is a daydream after all! Then, we move into a slow ballad, then a double-time waltz, and end it quietly like we began it.”

The Queen Bee (1964)

“I guess this chart fits this album well because I call it the beginning of my major writing career. This was my audition arrangement for Count Basie, and it was included on my first album with him, *Basie Straight Ahead*.”



Endnotes

1. Rayburn Wright, *Inside the Score: A Detailed Analysis of 8 Classic Jazz Ensemble Charts by Sammy Nestico, Thad Jones, and Bob Brookmeyer* (Delewan, NY: Kendor Music, Inc., 1982), p. 5.
2. Sammy Nestico, *The Complete Arranger* (Carlsbad, CA: Fenwood Music Co., Inc., 1993), p. 324.
3. SSG Andrew Layton, Interview with Sammy Nestico at Devers Hall, Fort Meade, Maryland, 14 March 2001.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. James Warrick, "Straight Ahead with Sammy Nestico," *The Instrumentalist*, vol. 43, no. 7 (Northfield, IL: The Instrumentalist Company, February 1989), p. 14.
9. Nestico, p. 326.
10. Layton.
11. "Count Basie," *Artist Biographies*, Downbeat.com, <http://www.downbeat.com/sections/artists/text/bio.asp?from=&cid1=3958>, 4 October 2001.
12. *Ibid.*
13. John McDonough, "The Quincy Jones-Sammy Nestico Orchestra," "Reviews," *Down Beat* (Elmhurst, IL: Down Beat, January 2001), p. 62.
14. Layton.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Dana Davis, "Taking a Break with Sammy Nestico," , vol. 34, no. 1 (Northfield, IL: The Instrumentalist Company, August 1979), p. 13.
19. Layton.
20. *Ibid.*
21. MSG Tedd Griepentrog, Interview with Sammy Nestico at Devers Hall, Fort Meade, Maryland, 13 March 2001.
22. Warrick, p. 15.
23. Layton.

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Kendor Music, Inc., 1982.

Credits

Executive Producer: CW3 Kevin Laird

Conductor: Sammy Nestico

Producer: SFC Kevin Watt

Assistant Producer: MSG Loran McClung

Recording/Mix Engineers: SGM Anthony Sturba, MSG Loran McClung,
and SFC Kevin Watt

Assistant Engineer: SFC Chris Dodrill

Mastering Engineer: Bill Wolf, Wolf Productions, Inc.

Sammy Nestico Interviewer: SSG Andrew Layton

Liner Notes: SSG Andrew Layton and MSG Tedd Griepentrog

Editor: MSG Tedd Griepentrog

Proofreader: SFC Jeff Price

Photographs at Devers Hall: SSG Jeff Adams

All Other Photographs: Provided by Sammy Nestico

Graphic Design/Layout: SGM Pat Dillon

Strings: The U.S. Army Strings, Ft. Myer, Virginia,
LTC Tony Cason, Director

French Horns: SFC Patrick Lipphardt, SFC Robert Cherry, and
SSG Shawn Hagen

Tuba: SFC Daniel Sherlock

Harp: SSG Melissa Dunne

Marimba, Vibraphone, and Chimes: CW3 Kevin Laird

Timpani, Glockenspiel, and Accessory Percussion: SSG Scott Vincent

The Legacy of Sammy Nestico

1. Who's Sorry Now (2:53)..... composed by B. Kalmar, H. Ruby & T. Snyder
(Songwriters Guild)
arranged by Sammy Nestico *(EMI Mills)*
SSG Tim Young, piano; SSG Chris Buckholz, trombone
2. Free Flight (5:01) comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico *(Fenwood Music)*
SFC Steve Cosper, guitar; SFC Vince Norman, tenor saxophone
3. Blues Machine (6:40) comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico *(Banes Music, Inc.)*
SSG Tim Young, piano; MSG Darryl Brenzel, alto saxophone
SSG Jeff Adams, trombone
4. Dawdlin' (2:44).....comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico *(Fenwood Music)*
SFC Michael Johnston, trumpet
5. A Minor Affair (4:14)comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico *(Fenwood Music)*
SGM Eugene Thorne, baritone saxophone; SGM Pat Dillon, flute
6. I Hadn't Anyone 'Til You (3:32) composed by Ray Noble *(ABA Music)*
arranged by Sammy Nestico *(Bourne Company)*
SFC Marva Lewis, vocal
7. Satin 'N Glass (4:48).....comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico *(Fenwood Music)*
SFC Kevin Watt, flugelhorn

8. The Joy of Cookin' (6:08)comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico (*Fenwood Music*)
SFC Steve Coper, guitar; SFC Kevin Watt, trumpet
MSG Darryl Brenzel, alto saxophone
9. 88 Basic Street (6:55).....comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico (*Fenwood Music*)
SSG Tim Young, piano
10. Wind Machine (3:13).....comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico (*Banes Music, Inc.*)
SSG Tim Young, piano; SFC Vince Norman, tenor saxophone
SFC Todd Harrison, drums
11. No Time Like the Present (5:21).....comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico
(Fenwood Music)
SSG Chris Buckholz, trombone; SSG Andrew Layton, alto saxophone
12. Day Dream (4:39)..... comp. by Duke Ellington, J. LaTouche & Billy Strayhorn
arranged by Sammy Nestico
(Cherry Lane, Dreamworks, EMI Robbins, and Famous Music)
SGM Pat Dillon, flute; SFC Marva Lewis, vocal; SSG Andrew Layton, clarinet
13. The Queen Bee (4:17)..... comp. and arr. by Sammy Nestico (*Dedrick Bros. Music*)
SGM Pat Dillon, tenor saxophone

Educational Outreach

The U.S. Army Field Band is strongly committed to education and the arts, supporting the *National Standards for Arts Education* through an extensive outreach program that ranges from preschool to postgraduate. Each year, the Musical Ambassadors of the Army present more than 650 educational activities throughout the country, reaching over 100,000 students annually.

In addition to performances for school assemblies, programs include presentations for elementary students, instrumental and vocal clinics, chamber music recitals, and college master classes. On evening concerts, outstanding students from local schools are often invited to perform with the Musical Ambassadors. For music educators, guest conducting opportunities and professional development workshops are available.

As a long-term benefit for both students and teachers, the Field Band produces an ongoing series of educational resources. These instructional videotapes, reference recordings, and classroom posters are distributed free of charge to schools throughout the United States.

Inquiries concerning the Field Band's outreach programs should be addressed to:

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