

GREAT NICKNAMES OF JAZZ

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

COUNT BASIE

William Basie wrote in his autobiography *Good Morning Blues* that in the late 1920s he wanted to become part of the jazz "royalty," which at the time included Duke Ellington, King Oliver, Earl Hines, and Baron Lee. So he took the nickname "Count."

DUKE ELLINGTON

Edward Kennedy Ellington was called "Duke" by his friends and family when he was a youngster because of his noble manner and elegant clothes. It stuck throughout his career.

FIRST LADY OF SONG ELLA FITZGERALD

"First Lady of Song" was Ella Fitzgerald's nickname because she was the most admired singer of her generation.

KING OF SWING BENNY GOODMAN

Benny Goodman was called the "King of Swing" because of his tremendous popularity, in the same way that Elvis Presley was dubbed the "king" of rock and roll.

SIR ROLAND HANNA

"Sir" is not a nickname. After Roland Hanna led a benefit tour in Africa for young students in 1970, he was knighted by the president of Liberia, William Tubman.

LADY DAY AND BILLIE HOLIDAY

Eleanor McKay was Billie Holiday's legal name after her father left, but she took her father's last name and the nickname "Billie." It was her friend saxophonist Lester Young who gave her the nickname "Lady Day" because of his tremendous respect for her.

KING OLIVER

Joseph Oliver was called "King" because he was the best of the early New Orleans jazz cornet players.

PREZ YOUNG OR THE PRESIDENT

Lester Young's nickname "The President" or simply "Prez" came from his friend Billie Holiday, who thought that he was, indeed, the leader of all saxophone players.

CANNONBALL ADDERLEY

Julian Adderley's original nickname was "Cannibal" because of his big appetite. That name was mistaken for "Cannonball" and the new nickname stuck.

SATCHEL MOUTH OR SATCHMO ARMSTRONG

King Oliver and other early jazz musicians called Louis Armstrong "Satchel Mouth," probably because his mouth was large. Early in the 1930s, Louis visited England and was given the shortened nickname "Satchmo" when British fans heard the first one incorrectly.

DIZZY GILLESPIE

John Birks Gillespie got his nickname "Dizzy" early in his career because of his crazy antics on and off the stage. During the bebop period, while others were acting reserved, Gillespie was still acting dizzy and very showman-like.

YARDBIRD OR BIRD PARKER

Early in his career, Charlie Parker was called "Yardbird." The nickname stuck and was eventually shortened to "Bird." According to one version of the story, when he and his band were driving to town one day, they hit a chicken that ran out into the road. Charlie got out, picked it up, and took it all the way to their destination to get it cooked. Then the other musicians began to call him Yardbird.

Prez Younga (below)