

## **Dennis Mackrel**

Drummer/Composer/Arranger Dennis Mackrel was born on April 3rd, 1962. A child prodigy, he began playing the drums when he was two. He graduated from Clark High School in Las Vegas, Nevada and attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He is the recipient of numerous awards such as "Who's Who in Music", 1979; National Endowment For The Arts grant for composition in 1983; and in 1992; "Outstanding Alumni" from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

While attending UNLV, he was a member of the acclaimed UNLV Jazz Ensemble where his drumming and arranging skills caught the attention of vocalist Joe Williams. In 1981, at 19 years of age, Dennis moved to New York City and landed a gig as a drummer on Broadway. His Broadway credits include "The First" and "A Chorus Line".

In January of 1983, Dennis joined the Count Basie Orchestra on the personal recommendation of Mr. Williams. He would become the youngest member of the orchestra and the last drummer to be hired by Mr. Basie personally.

Dennis traveled extensively and worked alongside Mr. Basie until his death in April 1984. He continued with the orchestra under the direction of interim leader Eric Dixon followed by Thad Jones. "I think Dennis is one of the finest young drummers I've ever heard. He is extremely knowledgeable and he is also a very accomplished writer...", said Jones. In 1985 under Mr. Jones's leadership, the Count Basie Orchestra recorded one of Dennis's compositions entitled "And That's That".

Dennis stayed with the band, when Frank Foster took over as leader, until December of 1987. Dennis's composition "Bus Dust" was included on the CD "Long Live The Chief" which was recorded during Mr. Foster's tenure as leader.

After leaving the Orchestra, he returned to New York to become the drummer of choice for a number of large ensembles including The American Jazz Orchestra, The Carla Bley Big Band, The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, The Dizzy Gillespie All Star Big Band and his own band, The Manhattan Symphony Jazz Orchestra.

Dennis's connection to the Basie family of musicians has remained strong having been a member of Buck Clayton's Swing Band and veteran trombonist Grover Mitchell's 12 piece orchestra which incidentally was co-led by another veteran trombonist, Bill Hughes. Both Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Hughes successively would follow Frank Foster as the leaders of the Count Basie Orchestra. Dennis is one of the few musicians who has performed with the Basie band under every leader since Mr. Basie himself and in 2010, Dennis succeeded Bill Hughes to become the leader of the Count Basie Orchestra.

In addition to becoming a seasoned musician and bandleader, Dennis has also become a highly respected conductor/arranger/educator whose works have been recorded and performed by ensembles such as The WDR Big Band in Koln, Germany, The Klüvers Big Band in Aarhus, Denmark, and most notably The McCoy Tyner Big Band, whose Grammy winning CD's "The Turning Point" and "Journey" included four of Dennis's arrangements. He has also served as a jazz educator in Europe, Asia, Canada and the USA.

Some of the other notable musicians Dennis has performed with include: Lionel Hampton, Hank Jones, Take 6, Tony Bennett, Nancy Wilson, Clare Fischer, Quincy Jones and Sir George Shearing, who said "If I ever have a record date coming up that calls for a drummer and Dennis is not available, I'll postpone the session. He's that good."