

The Congregation Sessions

The Big Four | [Tub-Thumper Records](#) (2008)

By [Jakob Baekgaard](#)

The idea of postmodernism has become associated with the death of history, pastiche, playfulness and the breaking down of genres as we know them. To characterize The Big Four as a postmodern R&B band would be no exaggeration.

Here is a group with five members that name themselves The Big Four and sports a musician by the name of Dr. Basie, a pianist, who has a PhD in postmodern psychiatry but decided, as stated in the liner notes: "to concentrate on piano playing after he realized most problems (including his own) are nothing more than social constructs."

There's no doubt that Dr. Basie decided wisely when he chose the musical path. The band's *The Congregation Sessions* is a joy from start to finish and displays a wealth of genres while remaining firmly rooted in rhythm and blues.

The opener, "Honey Tongued," is just as smooth as the name implies with silky saxophones and lounge-style Hammond courtesy of Dr. Basie.

"Compared to What" is a tasty R&B shuffle with honking saxophones, Rhodes and J.B. "Hurricane" Biesmans' gritty vocal.

"A big Chunk" finds the band in a laid-back mood, exploring stylish soul jazz complete with flutes, whispering saxophones, marked hi-hat and wah-wah guitar.

To top things off, there's also an unlikely, but successful, cover of "The Pink Panther Theme," which says a lot about the band's broad universe that leaves space for Count Basie, Dr. John and Muddy Waters, as well as Henry Mancini.

Dusting off musical corners while remaining true to their own eclectic brand of rhythm and blues, The Big Four is a truly enjoyable acquaintance and while it might be true that *The Congregation Sessions* doesn't break any new ground, the question of originality is never really the issue here. Instead, the band prefers play to authenticity, exposing the social construct of the purity of genre.

Visit [The Big Four](#) on the web.

Track listing: Honey Tongued; Compared to What; The Preacher; A big Chunk; The Wobble; Early in the Morning; Don't You; Carlos Rilla Chihuahua; Sweet Lover; On my Own; Bim Bam; The Pink Panther Theme; Dig this menu, Please!; Black Beans.

Personnel: J.B. "Hurricane" Biesmans: vocal, flute, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, soprano saxophone; Bird Stevens: backing vocal, upright bass, trumpet, acoustic guitar; Dr. Basie J.: vocal, piano, Fender Rhodes, Hammond, Hohner clavinet; Frankie Gomez: drums, percussion; Mo Gomez: guitar, baritone guitar.

Style: [Beyond Jazz](#)

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