JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS



DIDN' YOU

ARRANGED BY FRANK FOSTER

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MUSIC BY FRANK FOSTER

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FRANK FOSTER SERIES

DIDN' YOU (1996)

Background:

Next to Duke Ellington, there is no more famous band in the history of jazz than that of William "Count" Basie. Although his economical piano playing was ahead of his time compared to several of his more stride-oriented contemporaries, Basie was always best known as the face of an organization that played a continuous role in shaping the trajectory of jazz for over 50 years.

Born on August 21, 1904 in Red Bank, New Jersey, even as a youth Basie was attracted to not just music in general, but the idea of being a bandleader specifically. Settling on the piano as his main instrument as a teen, Basie's musical apprenticeship was fairly typical for the time. Most of his education stemmed from hanging around the Harlem stride piano scene of the 1920s. A series of tours with vaudeville troupes came next; when one of the troupes broke up in Kansas City in 1927, Basie found himself stranded.

This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it was not long before Basie found himself hired by bassist Walter Page to play with his now-legendary territory band, the Blue Devils. His notoriety rising, Basie eventually left the Blue Devils to take over the piano chair in the Bennie Moten Orchestra, considered to be the finest band in the Kansas City area. After Moten's sudden death in 1935, rather than letting the band fall apart, Basie ended up taking over the reigns himself, bringing in several of his former Blue Devils band mates, including Page himself, in the process.

It did not take long for this new band to make its impact on the world of jazz. The Basie organization specialized in arrangements that were fairly loosely organized and easy to customize on the spot, known informally as "head" arrangements. This allowed for a much more soloist-friendly environment than most of the other bands of the swing era. In addition, the band's rhythm section was responsible for a distinctive shift in the way time is kept in jazz. Spurred by drummer "Papa" Jo Jones' more free-form approach and guitarist Freddie Green's steady "rhythm" style of playing, the innovations of this organization would play a key role in setting up the eventual rise of bebop in the 1940s.

World War II was not kind to big bands for a variety of reasons, and Basie's band was no exception. Financial considerations would force him to reduce his ensemble to an octet by the end of the 1940s. By the mid-1950s, however, Basie was able to reform his big band, aided in no small part to a series of hit recordings, including a particularly popular version of the jazz standard "April In Paris." This new Basie band maintained the same relentless sense of swing as the earlier units, but was much more organized as a whole. Gone were the "head" arrangements of old in favor of a consistently expanding library of charts provided by what may have been the greatest stable of arrangers ever housed by a single band.

Basie's celebrity firmly cemented by this point, his band remained true to this new format for the rest of his life. The 1960s and 1970s would see a string of successful albums backing singers such as Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Tony Bennett, among others. In addition, the band began to see an increased presence in Las Vegas and Hollywood; Basie's famous cameo in Mel Brooks' "Blazing Saddles" is no doubt a highlight of the now-classic comedy. Basie continued a busy touring and recording schedule even when he was wheelchair-bound in his final years.

Basie passed away on April 26, 1984. The band that bears his name continues to tour to this day, performing both the favorites of the past as well as new arrangements and continuing to collaborate with some of jazz's top vocalists, including George Benson and Diane Schuur. The list of notable artists brought to prominence through the ranks of his band include saxophonists Lester Young, Frank Foster and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, trumpeters Harry "Sweets Edison, Buck Clayton, and Thad Jones, trombonists Dicky Wells and AI Grey, and drummer Sonny Payne. Notable arrangers who contributed to the band's book include Foster, Jones, Neal Hefti, Quincy Jones and Sammy Nestico.

Saxophonist, composer and arranger Frank Foster (1928-2011) helped shape the sound of the New Testament edition of the Count Basie Orchestra, from 1953 to 1964. He wrote and arranged for played for the Basie band following his service in the Korean War. Foster earned his place in jazz history with tunes like Shiny Stockings, Down for the Count, Blues Backstage, Back to the Apple, Discommotion, and Blues in Hoss' Flat.

Frank Benjamin Foster III was born into Cincinnati's African-American middle class and began his musical studies on piano, later picking up the clarinet and the alto saxophone. Within a year, he was playing in a local dance band. Foster started arranginging while still in high school, and attended Wilberforce University before moving to Detroit to pursue a career in music.

Foster played with and arranged for Benny Goodman, Elvin Jones, George Coleman, Joe Farrell, Duke Pearson, Johnny Richards, Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan and the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis big band. His career also includes stints with The Lloyd Price Orchestra, The Lionel Hampton Orchestra, and The Woody Herman Orchestra. Foster also led the Living Color and Loud Minority Big Bands and toured Europe as a member of Jimmy Smith's quintet in 1985. Foster succeeded Thad Jones as leader of the Basie band in 1986, where he remained until 1995.

After leaving Basie, Foster played in smaller groups, including those led by his wife's first cousin, the drummer Elvin Jones. The album "Well Water" features Foster and Jones leading the Loud Minority Big Band, with a decidedly modern mind-set. The album includes their take on Simone, Mr. Foster's best-known post-Basie composition.

Foster continued to write and arrange music, even after a stroke left him unable to play the saxophone in 2001. During a 60 year career, he received two Grammy Awards and was nominated for two others. He composed and orchestrated material for The Carnegie Hall Jazz Ensemble, The Detroit Civic Symphony Orchestra, The Ithaca College Jazz Ensemble, The Jazzmobile Corporation of New York City, The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, The Malaysia Symphony Orchestra, The Metropole Orchestra of Hilversum, Holland, and The Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. He is the subject of the 2010 film, Shiny Stockings.

The Music:

Although originally written for the Count Basie Orchestra, this version of Frank Foster's *Didn'You*? is an updated version written sometime prior to 1996, when it was recorded by Foster with the SDR Big Band on their album *A Fresh Taste of the Blues*. Although the spirit is largely the same as the original, there are some notable harmonic and rhythmic differences that make this version all its own.

Notes to the Conductor:

Right off the bat there is an 8-measure introduction not present in the Basie arrangement. Harmonically, there are some rather interesting modernist twists, especially in the knotty, chromatically inclined unison line in the tenor saxes and trumpets at measure 5. Things return to largely familiar territory with the melody's entrance at measure 9, played in soli by the saxophone section in a very similar manner to the original. The melody on the bridge is handled by a unison trumpet section, and is slightly harmonically altered from its previous state.

The saxophones handle the final A section with some newly added trombone accompaniment at measure 27 before the full band launches into a completely new half chorus shout section at measure 35. This eventually gives way to a piano solo for the second half of the form at measure 51; the piano continues on for one more chorus at measure 67 with no backgrounds. Another ensemble shout, only 6 measures this time, leads into two choruses of tenor saxophone solo beginning in measure 97, with a nicely varied group of backgrounds popping up throughout.

Foster's chart retreats to familiar territory at measure 155, with a shout section that is ripped directly from his original chart, complete with all the classic dynamic swells and articulations. The bridge of this shout, however, is quite different, with the tenor soloist playing an as-is written line that soars above some powerful band accompaniment. Measure 173 sees a return to Basie-style normalcy before another new, all-out shout chorus begins at measure 181. This time, the A sections are different versus the bridge being recycled from the Basie original. Although the arrangement's conclusion at measure 213 may have a different harmonic and rhythmic palate holding it together, the fire of the original is certainly there as well. A four-measure solo tenor break sweeps the band into a mellow finale. This arrangement is not a transcription - it has been prepared from Frank Foster's original set of parts.

Doug DuBoff and Dylan Canterbury

June 2018

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