August 2011

Hi Friends —

As you probably heard by now, tenor saxophonist-composer-arranger Frank Foster died on July 26 at the age of 82. When I wrote our story about his most famous composition: “I was ’Shiny Stockings’ in 1955 and we had a rehearsal at a place in Brooklyn called the Pabst Blue Ribbon. It was my first record date. Everybody was sleepy, tired, hungry, and wilted. Nobody felt like playing. We rehearsed ’Shiny Stockings’ and it sounded like a bunch of jumbled notes, just noise, and I said, ‘Wow, all the work I’ve put into it goes down the drain now.’ Then he’d say, ‘You know, ’Shiny Stockings’? You really made one down that time. You couldn’t have done a better compliment from Count Basie.”

It embodies all the things that were important to him. It builds — it’s soft and ends with an explosion. It has that ensemble rhythm section to do whatever it’s going to do. It has that ensemble writing which the band can sink their teeth into and really make happen — and a wonderful trumpet solo by Thad Jones.

Years later Basie gave me the supreme compliment. Every now and then he’d say about a chart, “Oh, it’s very nice, kid,” and then leave. I’d go, “I know, but —” and he’d say, “Well, I can’t play it and it came together. Finally, we recorded it and, well, it’s the very best known piece that I have contributed to the Basie book.”

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