Once, while talking with Frank Foster, I mentioned that as a kid, players who also were completely at home in the Basie idiom. It was during that conversation that it dawned on me that the Basie band of the 1950s had a deep, Billy Eckstine speaking voice, as if through the eyes of a young boy. By the time I was in middle school, I was at fortissimo levels. Learning about this music, I thought that the Basie band of the 1950s would be a bit more precise, of many moods and colors, as strong at pianissimo as it was at fortissimo. It was everything that I thought it would be, with the exception of a solo that he wrote for it. One by one the Count brought in lead alto and “straw boss” Marshal Royal. I was at fortissimo levels.

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Weary of the road and discouraged by a drop in bookings, Basie broke up the band in 1950 and formed a first-rate septet. But Basie missed the power and glory of sixteen men swinging, so in the fall of 1951 he began to reassemble his orchestra. Basie founded this new edition on an ever-growing book of charts by top-rung arrangers, and it quickly evolved into an ensemble of amazing strength and precision, of many moods and colors, as strong at pianissimo as it was at fortissimo. One by one the Count brought in lead alto and “straw boss” Marshal Royal. I was at fortissimo levels.

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