



JAZZ PROMO SERVICES

***The George Gee Big Band Plays The Music of Frank Foster  
Under His Direction  
SETTIN' THE PACE (GJazz Records GJ3567)  
Street Date: September 21, 2004***

On the first studio recording by his swingin' jazz orchestra, bandleader George Gee turns over his director's baton and the arranging chair to the great arranger/composer Frank Foster. Foster first made a name for himself as a saxophonist and arranger in the organization led by Gee's idol, Count Basie, in the fifties and sixties and following an illustrious career on his own returned to the group as its leader during the eighties and nineties, after the great pianist passed away. Gee's big band has previously recorded Foster's most famous composition, *Shiny Stockings*, on one of their live albums, so he knew the combination of his group and Foster's music was a heavenly match. Foster treats the band like it was his very own and the resulting music is, in his words, both "happy and swingin'" Gee is understandably proud of his fine ensemble. Their performances of Foster's fine arrangements, most of which have never before been recorded, keeps the Basie and the Foster traditions alive and prove that swing still lives.

The date starts off with the classic standard ***Out of Nowhere***. Foster's arrangement features the smooth flowing saxophone section sound punctuated by crisp staccato screaming exclamations by the brass section that was the hallmark of the Basie band. Trumpeter Mark McGowan and tenor saxophonist Michael Hashim get to shine individually while the rhythm section, with John Cowherd at the piano, Joe Cohn on guitar, Darryl Hall on bass and Willard Dyson at the drums, emulates the loping tempo at which the Basie band excelled, spurring a performance that can be loved equally by listeners and dancers alike.

Foster's original, ***Settin' The Pace***, does just that, with the rhythm relaxing in a Basie groove that is given a real sense of authenticity from Cohn's chugging chords on rhythm guitar, in the tradition of the great Freddie Green, over Hall's walking bass, while Cowherd displays his affection for the Count's spare spacious piano sound. Eddie Bert, Charles Stephens and Jack Jeffers increase the velocity with their trombone exchanges over the blaring brass propelled by Dyson's drums and Howard Johnson digs deep into his blues bag for an exciting baritone solo before the band brings it all home.

Grammy award nominated vocalist Carla Cook steps out in front of the band for Foster's appealing arrangement of Oscar Hammerstein's ***Lover Come Back To Me***. The vocalist's delicate tone and distinctive diction hearken back to the great "girl singers" of the big band era, most notably Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn.

Foster utilizes flutes in the sax section and mutes in the brass for ducal harmonies in his elegant introduction to Ellington's ***In A Sentimental Mood***. The beautiful ballad features moving solos from veteran tenor saxophonist Lance Bryant, former Basie band trombonist Robin Trowers and trumpeter Mark McGowan.

Mario Bauza's ***Mambo Inn***, for many years the theme song for Machito's Afro-Cuban Orchestra, was recorded by Basie back in the days when jazz and Latin bands would take turns playing for the dancers in clubs like Roseland and the Palladium. Gee's men demonstrate their facility with the song's Latin rhythms on the exciting arrangement that features Dyson's drums and the conga, bongo and bell of special guest percussionist Renato Thoms.

**Ready Now That You Are GG**, a dedication to the group's leader, is a straight-ahead swinger that affords rhythm guitarist Joe Cohn and lead trumpeter Walt Szymanski the opportunity to shine as soloists. Alto saxophonist Marshall McDonald and trombonist Robert Trowers, a couple of the band's Basie-ites, also step out from their respective sections to make fine individual statements.

Foster's arrangement of his own **Bass In Yo' Face**, is a feature for the band's excellent bassist Daryl Hall, who receives strong support in the comping of his rhythm section mates, Cowherd and Cohn. Saxophones and trombones provide sumptuously soft backing to his soulful solo while the trumpets offer some snappy responses.

Ray Noble's **The Very Thought Of You** is a feature for Carla Cook, who returns to deliver a particularly romantic reading of the still popular lyric. Once again the young singer displays a remarkably mature way with words, caressing every syllable's cadence to rhythmically emphasize their deeper meaning. Michael Hashim makes his own heartfelt statement on tenor saxophone and the band provides some of its lushest backing.

**When Your Lover Is Gone** is arranged by Foster as a full length solo vehicle for Walt Szymanski, who displays a strong affinity for the classic trumpet stylings in the Harry James tradition. Cowherd cleverly inserts a short Basie tag before the trumpeter's crescendoing coda ends this inspired performance.

Carla Cook makes her final appearance on the disc on **Autumn Leaves** -- a highflying swingin' affair that features the singer's expressive scat vocal technique and the band's impressive call and response exchanges.

**I Don't Want To Learn To Sing The Blues** by dancer Dawn Hampton is the one arrangement of the date not written by Frank Foster. The group's own tenor saxophonist, Lance Bryant, penned this one in the classic big band blues style and contributes his own smooth lead vocal on the telling lyric that will sound all too familiar to many listeners.

The date concludes with Foster's Basie style arrangement of Charlie Parker's classic, **Scrapple From The Apple**. Alto saxophonist Ed Pazant and trumpeter Shawn Edmonds show off their bebop chops with hot solos, then alternating trading four and eight bar exchanges with the whole band. Drummer Dyson gives the group a workout on this one and ends the proceedings with a booming downbeat.

George Gee has been leading his swingin' big band out of New York, spreading the classic sound of jazz to dancers and listeners all over the world, for more than two decades. The music on **Settin' The Pace** was recorded following a triumphant appearance by the band, under the direction of special guest Frank Foster, at the city's premiere jazz venue, Birdland. The group brought the spirit inspired by that live date into the studio the next day and the result is one of the most exciting big band records recorded in years. Frank Foster says it best when he notes that, "Thanks to the dedication and persistence of leaders like George Gee - swing, happy swing - will be around for a long, long time." Thanks to Frank Foster, Carla Cook, George Gee and all the swingin' men in his big band the music is surely still alive and well in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Artist Website: [www.GeorgeGee.com](http://www.GeorgeGee.com)

Label Website: [www.GJazzRecords.com](http://www.GJazzRecords.com)

**Media Contact: Jim Eigo Jazz Promo Services T: 845.986.1677 / F: 845.986.1699**

**E Mail:** [jazzpromo@earthlink.net](mailto:jazzpromo@earthlink.net) [www.jazzpromoservices.com](http://www.jazzpromoservices.com)

Exclusive U.S. distributor: City Hall Records, 101 Glacier Point, Suite C, San Rafael, CA 94901 Tel: 415 457 9080 [info@cityhallrecords.com](mailto:info@cityhallrecords.com)

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