

Era's glamour instrument, was relegated to a minor role in bebop's scheme of things. Even the peerless Buddy DeFranco, the definitive bebop clarinetist, was unluckily marginal in an alto saxophone-and-trumpet-dominated idiom. Goodman struggled for a while to reconcile himself to the new music, but in 1950 he decided to disband, and from that time forward his public appearances were rare and were chiefly with small groups (usually sextets or septets) and almost exclusively for television specials or recordings or European tours. In 1950 he toured Europe with a septet that included two other jazz greats, trumpeter Roy Eldridge and tenor saxophonist Zoot Sims. His most celebrated tour, however, was part of the first-ever cultural exchange with the Soviet Union. In 1962, at the behest of the State Department, he went to Russia with a septet that included Sims and alto saxophonist Phil Woods. The trip was a smashing success and contributed greatly to the popularization of American jazz in Eastern Europe.

After his marriage in 1941, Goodman's home was New York City; his wife Alice (John Hammond's sister) died in 1978; they had two daughters, and she had three by a previous marriage. Goodman maintained his habit of spot-performing and in 1985 made a surprise and, by all accounts, spectacular appearance at the Kool Jazz Festival in New York. He died the following year of an apparent heart attack.

With his withdrawal from the limelight, most observers felt that he became a deeper, less flashy player than he was in the glory years when he was fronting the country's most popular swing band. His ultimate contribution to jazz, however, is still being debated: much post-1940s jazz criticism retrospectively judged him to have been overrated relative to the era's other great clarinetist-leader, Artie Shaw, and to the great early Black players of the instrument (Jimmy Noone, Johnny Dodds, Edmond Hall, and Lester Young, a tenor saxophonist who "doubled" on clarinet) and the great white traditionalist Pee Wee Russell. Esthetic evaluations are problematic at best and tend to fluctuate from era to era, but Goodman's technical mastery, burnished tone, highly individual (and influential) solo style, and undeniable swing certainly earned him a permanent place in the jazz pantheon.



# Benny Goodman

Live at Basin Street East 1959  
plus  
Never before released  
Live Recordings



Benny Goodman (1909–1986) was a great jazz clarinetist and leader of one of the most popular big bands of the Swing Era (1935–1945).

Benjamin David Goodman was born in Chicago, Illinois, on May 30, 1909, of a large, poor Jewish family. (A brother, Harry, was later a bassist in Benny's band.) Benny studied music at Hull House and at the age of 10 was already a proficient clarinetist. At age 12, appearing on stage in a talent contest, he did an imitation of the prevailing clarinet favorite, Ted Lewis; so impressed was popular bandleader Ben Pollack that five years later he sent for Goodman to join the band at the Venice ballroom in Los Angeles. After a three-year stint with Pollack, Goodman left in 1929 to free-lance in New York City in pit bands and on radio and recordings. In 1934 he led his first band on an NBC radio series called "Let's Dance" (which became the title of Goodman's theme song). The band also played at Billy Rose's Music Hall and at the Roosevelt Hotel and made a handful of records for the Columbia and Victor labels.

In 1935, armed with a repertory developed by some great African American arrangers (Benny Carter, Edgar Sampson, Horace Henderson, and ex-bandleader and Swing Era genius Fletcher Henderson), the band embarked on a most significant road trip. Not especially successful in most of its cross-country engagements, the band arrived at the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles in a discouraged mood. The evening of August 21, 1935, began inauspiciously, the audience lukewarm to the band's mostly restrained dance music. In desperation Goodman called for the band to launch into a couple of "flagwavers" (up-tempo crowd-pleasers)—"Sometimes I'm Happy" and "King Porter Stomp"—and the crowd reaction was ultimately to send shock waves through the entire pop music world. Hundreds of people stopped dancing and massed around the bandstand, responding enthusiastically and knowledgeably to arrangements and solos that they recognized from the just recently released records. (Apparently Goodman had been too conservative both early in his tour and earlier that night and had underestimated his audience.)

The Palomar engagement turned out to be not only a personal triumph for the band but for swing music in general, serving notice to the music business that "sweet" dance music would have to move over and make room for the upstart (and more jazz-based) sound. Goodman's popularity soared: the band topped almost all the magazine and theater polls, their record sales were astronomical, they were given a weekly cigarette-sponsored radio show, and they were

featured in two big-budget movies, "Hollywood Hotel" and "The Big Broadcast of 1937." But an even greater triumph awaited. Impresario John Hammond rented that bastion of classical music, Carnegie Hall, for a concert that was to win respectability for the music. The night of January 16, 1938, is now legendary; responding to the electric expectancy of the overflow audience, the band outdid itself, improving on recorded favorites like "King Porter Stomp," "Bugle Call Rag," "Down South Camp Meeting," and "Don't Be That Way." It capped off the evening with a lengthy, classic version of "Sing, Sing, Sing" which featured some brilliant solo work by trumpeter Harry James, pianist Jess Stacy, and Benny himself.

Two of the finest musicians ever to work with Goodman were pianist Teddy Wilson and vibraphonist-drummer Lionel Hampton. Both were with the band from the mid-1930s and both were present at Carnegie Hall, but they were used only in trio and quartet contexts because of the unwritten rule forbidding racially integrated bands. Goodman has the distinction of being the first white leader (Artie Shaw and Charlie Barnet followed suit) to challenge segregation in the music business, and as the restrictions eased he hired other African American greats such as guitarist Charlie Christian, trumpeter Cootie Williams, bassist Slam Stewart, and tenor saxophonist Wardell Gray.

Goodman's band had a greater personnel turnover than most bands, and an endless array of top-notch musicians moved through the band, among them trumpeters Bunny Berigan, Harry James, and Ziggy Elman; trombonist Lou McGarity; tenor saxophonists Bud Freeman, Georgie Auld, Zoot Sims, and Stan Getz; pianists Mel Powell and Joe Bushkin; vibists Red Norvo and Terry Gibbs; and drummers Dave Tough and Louis Bellson. Most defected to other bands and a few to start their own bands (Krupa, James, and Hampton). Overwhelmingly, musicians found Goodman an uncongenial employer: he was reputed to be stern and tight-fisted. A taciturn, scholarly-looking man, Goodman was unflattering referred to in music circles as "The Ray" because of his habit of glaring at any player guilty of a "clam" or "clinker" (a wrong note), even in rehearsal. A virtuoso clarinetist equally at home performing Mozart (which he did in concerts and on records), Goodman was less than patient with technical imperfection.

After World War II the clarinet, which, along with the tenor saxophone, had been the Swing

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- 1 Let's Dance
- 2 Raze the Rift
- 3 Avalon
- 4 Poor Butterfly
- 5 When you're Smiling
- 6 Funny Valentine  
performed by Red Norvo & group
- 7 Let's Dance
- 2 Oh, Baby!
- 3 Anything Goes
- 4 At the Darktown Strutters' Ball
- 5 Sometimes I'm Happy
- 6 Don't Be That Way
- 7 I'm Gonna Sit Right Down  
and Write Myself a Letter
- 8 One O'Clock Jump

Artist(s): Tracks 1-6 Benny Goodman - clarinet  
John Markam - drummer Red Wootten- bass  
Jimmy Wyble - guitar Red Norvo - Vibes

Tracks 7-14 Benny Goodman - clarinet performs with unidentified performers

Recording Info: Tracks 1-6 Basin Street East Recorded in Stereo November 13, 1959

Extra tracks 7-14 recorded in Mono undetermined location and artists



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