

Sound Recording Reviews

Benny Goodman: Yale University Archives, Volume 10 - The Original Benny Goodman Quartet.¹ Music Masters Jazz 01612-65129-2 (1 CD), distributed by BMG.

Although Benny Goodman's fame was made initially with his hard-swinging and musically first-rate big bands in the 1930s and '40s, perhaps his greatest contribution to jazz was his development and popularization of small, or "chamber" jazz groups. Beginning with a trio in 1935, Goodman experimented and performed with non-Dixieland combos of various sizes, finally settling on the sextet format as his favorite by the early 1940s. From the demise of the "Big Band Era" in the late 1940s until his death in 1986 at the age of seventy-seven, small groups, usually of six or seven musicians, became the clarinetist's most frequently used ensembles.

The most famous and influential of all of these groups, however, had only four musicians - the original Benny Goodman Quartet. Along with Goodman, the group consisted of pianist Teddy Wilson, vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, and drummer Gene Krupa (who also worked with Goodman's full orchestra). Between August 1936 and December 1937 this combo recorded less than twenty-five sides for Victor Records (there are, however, many live airchecks of this electrifying group, in widely varying sound, available on other labels). Despite the small number of commercial recordings, the quartet, with their virtuosity and youthful exuberance, led the way for other chamber jazz groups. These small groups, including Tommy Dorsey's Clambake Seven and Artie Shaw's Gramercy Five, changed the face of jazz. The life of Goodman's combo was short, the original group lasting only twenty months. Krupa's sudden and rather unpleasant departure from the band in March 1938 brought the original quartet to an end; within two and a half years Hampton and Wilson had left to form their own bands.

In the years that followed, the four were occasionally reunited for individual performances or tours, the last being in the summer of 1973, only months before Krupa's death in October of that year. In 1955 the quartet made recordings for, and appeared in, *The Benny Goodman Story*. This film was loosely based on Goodman's life, and featured actor/comedian Steve Allen in the title role. It was not until 1963 that the original group was again assembled to make studio recordings. *Together Again!*, most recently reissued by RCA Victor in 1987 (CD 6283-2-RB), is a marvelous album. Of the ten selections on the original LP, only "Running Wild" had been recorded by the foursome before. It is a fresh, exciting collection, with the quartet sounding more mature than ever (all were over fifty, and each had been a band leader for more than two decades).

Volume 10 of the *Benny Goodman/Yale University Archives* series, on the Music Masters Jazz label, features out takes and unreleased material from the four *Together Again!* recording sessions in 1963. On the RCA release, only "Who Cares?" and "Dearest" were used from the February 13 and 14 dates. The remaining issued items were recorded on August 26 and 27. Saxophonist/band leader Loren Schoenberg, who wrote the liner notes for the Yale disc, states that most of the cuts on the new release come from the first two sessions. Indeed, the first nine tracks were recorded during the February sessions, with only the remaining five dating from August.

The selections on the Music Masters Album are most interesting, giving us ten new items, and only four alternates from *Together Again!*. Only "Liza" had been recorded by the quartet before, on August 2, 1937. The two versions of this tune make a fascinating comparison. Both are in E-flat, but the 1937 performance is faster, and the arrangement is more specific. By 1963 Goodman had loosened his concept of the piece, harmonically as well as rhythmically. The first four measures of the tune, as written, feature a chord change every two beats: I - V⁷ - ^biii[°] - VI⁷ - iv⁶ - #iv[°] - v⁶ - I⁹. In 1937 Goodman used those changes as the basis for improvisation, creating what is a technically interesting solo. By 1963 his approach is far more linear. He primarily uses a I, or tonic chord for the first three measures, leading to a simple I⁹ chord in bar four. He even arpeggiates the tonic chord at one point, there by "skating" over the difficult changes for the sake of line in his solo. This is most appropriate and effective.

The moderate to slow ballads are all played in typical, tasteful Goodman style, with the clarinetist staying close to the melodic line, and simply embellishing the musical material. It is a pity that today's "fifty-thousand notes-per-minute" soloists have not taken a hint from this marvelous playing. Listen especially to "September Song", "Together", and "East of the Sun" (although the last number ends so abruptly that it may have been a miscalculated ending). On these numbers, Hampton and Wilson reach much further into the chords for their solos, making a nice contrast to Goodman's playing.

Perhaps the strangest choice of repertoire for this hard-driving swing group was "Bernie's Tune", a West Coast anthem popularized by Gerry Mulligan. However, the piece swings well, and with the harmonies left simple, it makes a perfect vehicle for the Benny Goodman Quartet; there is fine playing by all concerned. Hampton does have a momentary lapse finding a second part to Benny's lead in the last eight measures of the first chorus, but returns to play an excellent sixty-four bar solo. The interesting rehearsal sequence for "Four Once More", the only blues number from these sessions, gives us a chance to hear a clarinet/vibes riff than wasn't used in the finished product, as well as some boogie-woogie fills from Wilson that are also not heard in the completed take. Talking by Goodman, and the very loose playing, confirm this as rehearsal material. Even in its heyday, Goodman's group recorded relatively few blues compositions.

Overall, the playing of the entire group is excellent, with Teddy Wilson striking this reviewer as especially fine. Both his solo and ensemble playing are always tasteful, clean and swinging. His left-hand work is truly a wonder; listeners must remind themselves that there was no string bass in this group! Hampton's playing is more subdued and harmonically modern than in the 'thirties. Gene Krupa, not always the most tasteful of drummers, here plays very much in a quartet style; only occasionally does he overpower. Finally, there is Benny Goodman, who plays in a leaner, more classically oriented style here than in the "Swing Era". His technically excellent playing, warm majestic sound, and swinging concept make wonderful listening.

There is, however, some playing on this CD that feels very tentative and uncertain, as if the musicians are feeling their way through the tunes for the first time as an ensemble (which they probably were). This is especially true on two of the faster tunes. "Dearest" feels like a first run-through, with Goodman playing very roughly, even getting apart from the chord changes briefly during his first improvised chorus. "Who Cares?" is also sloppy, as if it were a first take, with some awkward instrumental trading-off near the end. It should be kept firmly in mind that the material presented on this disc was either not intended for release, or was specifically rejected by Goodman and his colleagues. These performances were not intended to be finished products. What is presented, instead, is a fascinating illustration of the collective and individual musicianship of four jazz giants, working through new and less familiar material for possible use.

The recorded sound on this album differs from track to track, but is generally somewhat "boxy" and lacking in definition. At times, one is presented with a very artificial balance among the members of the quartet. Some tunes, especially "Just One of those Things", show tape wear and deterioration. Tape edge stretch is clearly evident in the "swishing" sound on this cut. The sound of the published recordings is far superior on the RCA release. With all the above taken into consideration, this is a significant addition to the Benny Goodman discography. While perhaps not directed toward the uninitiated Goodman listener, it is a valuable supplement to RCA's *Together Again!* album, which is indispensable to Goodman collectors. It is also a fitting tribute to the creative genius collectively known as The Original Benny Goodman Quartet.

Readers who wish to investigate some of Goodman's other small group ventures should consider *Benny Goodman Original Trio and Quartet Sessions, Vol. 1: After You've Gone* (RCA Bluebird CD 5631-2-RB, reissued in 1987), and *Benny Goodman Trio and Quartet, Vol. 2: Avalon - The Small Bands 1937-39* (RCA Bluebird CD 2273-2-RB, reissued in 1990). For further reading, the references listed below are highly recommended.^{2,3,4} *Reviewed by Paul Buell.*

Endnotes

1. **Dearest** (Davis/Akst); **Together** (DeSylva/Brown/Henderson); **Who Cares?** (Gershwin/Gershwin); **September Song** (Weill/Anderson); **Just One of Those Things** (Porter); **Love Sends a Little Gift of Roses** (Cook/Openshaw); **Oh, Gee!** **Oh, Joy!** (Gershwin/Gershwin); **Bernie's Tune** (Miller/Stoller/Lieber); **East of the Sun (and West of the Moon)** (Bowman); **Four Once More** (Goodman); **Liza** (Gershwin/Gershwin/Kahn); **But Not For Me** (Gershwin/Gershwin); **Somebody Loves Me** (Gershwin/MacDonald/DeSylva); **It's All Right With Me** (Porter).
2. Firestone, Ross. *Swing, Swing, Swing: The Life and times of Benny Goodman*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1993).
3. Collier, James Lincoln. *Benny Goodman and the Swing Era*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
4. Simon, George T. *The Big Bands*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967).

Willem Mengelberg: The Complete 1922-1925 New York Philharmonic Recordings.¹ Biddulph WHL 025-26 (2 CDs).

The documentation of Willem Mengelberg's significant recorded legacy on Compact