

**BENNY**  
**GOODMAN'S**

*Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert*



**CATHERINE TACKLEY**



BENNY GOODMAN'S FAMOUS 1938  
CARNEGIE HALL JAZZ CONCERT

**OXFORD STUDIES IN RECORDED JAZZ**

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CONCERT

*CATHERINE TACKLEY*



# OXFORD

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# SERIES PREFACE

THE OXFORD STUDIES IN Recorded Jazz series offers detailed historical, cultural, and technical analysis of jazz recordings across a broad spectrum of styles, periods, performing media, and nationalities. Each volume, authored by a leading scholar in the field, addresses either a single jazz album or a set of related recordings by one artist/group, placing the recordings fully in their historical and musical context, and thereby enriching our understanding of their cultural and creative significance.

With access to the latest scholarship and with an innovative and balanced approach to its subject matter, the series offers fresh perspectives on both well-known and neglected jazz repertoire. It sets out to renew musical debate in jazz scholarship, and to develop the subtle critical languages and vocabularies necessary to do full justice to the complex expressive, structural, and cultural dimensions of recorded jazz performance.

JEREMY BARHAM  
SERIES EDITOR



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# PREFACE

*DownBeat* reporter Annemarie Ewing, having given a vivid description of the members of Benny Goodman's orchestra backstage at Carnegie Hall before their concert on Sunday, January 16, 1938, wrote: "Much of what followed is by now, as the man says, history." Recognizing the fundamental transience of a live performance, she proceeded to record some of the more ephemeral details of the concert, providing her own contribution to the history of the event. Ewing also noted that "the New York Philharmonic Symphony microphone still hung in austere silence twenty feet above the first rows of the orchestra," unaware that this was in fact capturing what would become *The Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert*. More than seventy years after the concert, this album is available in several reissues, but no matter how expert the remastering, that it is still necessary to read commentary by Ewing and others for us to know, for example, "The way Teddy [Wilson] grinned with appreciation when the audience lifted him on the palms of its applause after 'Body and Soul'" is a salutary reminder of the limitations of recordings to represent live performance (Ewing 1938: 7).

Recordings are integral to jazz history, to the extent that they are often regarded as the "works" of jazz. The dangers of using recordings uncritically in this way have been highlighted by Jed Rasula, for whom they present a "seductive menace" (1995). Scholars such as Matthew Butterfield have gone one step further to argue that the study of live jazz performances should be privileged over recordings (Butterfield 2002). Since it is impossible to ignore the importance of recordings for understanding jazz history, live recordings may offer the experience closest to being

there at the performance. However, as I have argued elsewhere, a historical recording can give access to how the music really sounded, not necessarily to people such as musicians or audience who were present at the time of the performance but to those who bought and heard the recording (Tackley 2010). In other words, hearing the recording of a performance is fundamentally different from experiencing the same performance live (for musicians and audiences). This difference has potential to widen, the further removed (temporally, geographically, culturally) listeners are from the “source” of the recording, the original live performance, as more factors mediate in their reception and (mis)understanding, from post-production effects and editing to large-scale societal developments. Live recordings are, in Rasula’s terms, deeply seductive (not to mention paradoxical), since they explicitly promise an unmediated experience that it is impossible for them to deliver.

This book is a study of *The Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert*, released by Columbia Records in 1950, which remains the most pervasive mediation of Benny Goodman’s 1938 Carnegie Hall concert. The album provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between live performance and recording within the recognized desire of the jazz community to continuously construct history and canon. As a recording of a live event, this album can be reified as a snapshot of jazz at a particular time and therefore regarded as inherently significant. However, we can obtain a more critical assessment of the importance of the album through careful deconstruction of this entity and analysis of the concert’s wider social, historical and musical context.

Not only has the album become synonymous with the concert, but inclusion in most current jazz record guides testifies to its canonical status. Representation of a 1938 concert in the new context and form of a 1950 album establishes *The Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert* as inherently intertextual. Moreover, each stage in the representation of the concert has been accompanied by a statement of Goodman’s biography: the 1938 concert and his autobiography, the 1950 release and *The Benny Goodman Story* biopic and the 1999 reissue as posthumous. Consideration of the album as a text, rather than solely as a work, is fundamental to my approach. As the philosophy of Roland Barthes suggests, this locates the ultimate construction of meaning with the reader rather than the author, or in this case, the listener rather than the performer (Barthes and Heath 1977). This is not to say that performers have no responsibility in this regard, but the listener is the final arbiter, which exposes the potential influence of mediation. *The Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert* has also influenced creation of related texts in the form of sound record-

ings, live performances and film that interact intertextually with the album and the concert.

Consideration of the role of the 1938 concert in jazz history is inextricably linked with the development of techniques of recording and dissemination. Whereas the original concert was heard by a few thousand people but known more widely only through written and oral reportage in 1938; in the twenty-first century print media, blogging, radio, airchecks, bootlegs, LP, film, CD, downloads, streaming audio and more are all relevant and influential to the ongoing reception of the 1938 performance. In the course of this research, I have necessarily become a consumer of all of these forms and have particularly enjoyed my forays into the world of rare vinyl. This study strips back the resultant accumulated layers of interpretation and meaning to assess the performances in their original context and then, through analysis of mediating factors, explores what this material has come to represent in its recorded form. This involves analysis of the concert as an event in itself, the performances captured through recording and the ensuing reception and responses.

In order to understand the impact of recording in the mediation of jazz performance, it is necessary to consider exactly *what* is being mediated. In Part Two: Performance, at the heart of this book, I deliberately embrace the album as the closest (if fundamentally inadequate) representation of the concert and use it as a source through which the Carnegie Hall performances may be more fully understood. To this end, a key methodology is comparative analysis of performances by Goodman and others, where relevant, to determine the extent to which the Carnegie Hall performances were consistent, divergent, definitive, or developmental. For the purpose of this study, the range of performances considered has been restricted to those recordings that are (or have been) commercially available, details of which are provided in the Discography. Fortunately this includes a wide range of Goodman's studio recordings and airchecks from the period around the time of the Carnegie Hall concert. The analysis is informed by original scores and parts from the Benny Goodman Papers in the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library of Yale University and from the Benny Goodman Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. These musicological approaches have been supported by performing with my big band, a process that, although not formally documented in the text, has been crucial to developing this section of the book in particular. Despite the preservation of primary sources and the expert documentation of Goodman's recordings and performances by D. Russell Connor, whose remarkable

bio-discographical volumes have been invaluable and more recently continued by David Jessup, there is yet to be a detailed analytical study of this sort focused on Goodman.

In Part One, I consider the context for the 1938 concert. In recent times, grand claims have been made for the concert as a “first” that can be qualified and moderated by consideration of precedents for the presentation of jazz and popular music in the concert hall, as well as for development of a listening audience for jazz. More specifically, even before a note was heard, a rich context for the concert performance had been created through promotion and the program, both in terms of content and its presentation in print. Goodman performed at Carnegie Hall with his full orchestra and his Trio and Quartet; the concert also included a series of five numbers entitled “Twenty Years of Jazz” and a “Jam Session.” The latter two items included members of Count Basie and Duke Ellington’s bands as well as Goodman’s own.<sup>1</sup> The context for each of the main elements included in the 1938 program will be established with particular reference to the musicians and choice of repertoire. In Part Three: Representation, I explore the reception and impact of the concert as a live event in 1938 and subsequently on the release of the recording in 1950. This involves consideration of the immediate repercussions of the concert on the performers, the circumstances surrounding production of *The Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert* and the subsequent tendency to re-create the concert in live and recorded forms.

I hope this book will contribute to development of the study of recorded sound, and in particular the study of jazz recordings, but also that it sheds new light on the performances of Benny Goodman and other musicians at the height of the swing era. There is surprisingly little literature, scholarly or otherwise, on Goodman; but I am indebted to James Lincoln Collier (1989a) and Ross Firestone (1993) for their well-researched biographies, which include important interviews that would otherwise now, sadly, be impossible to obtain. During my research I discovered that a compatriot, Jon Hancock, was about to publish a book after years of researching and collecting every aspect of the concert, and this has also been useful to me (Hancock 2008). But the last word must go to Otis Ferguson, whose writing on Goodman is without question the most evocative I have read. In his introductory comments to the section “Music and Musicians” in the Ferguson reader *In the Spirit of Jazz*, Malcolm Cowley writes:

The unpublished pieces were excerpted from two unfinished book manuscripts. *Benny Goodman: Adventures in the Kingdom of Swing*

was to be a biography of Goodman, a description of his band and how it functioned, and a critical evaluation of his music. After Ferguson had drafted a few chapters, he discovered that the publisher wanted a first-person, I-Benny Goodman treatment. As he believed that such a book would be “bogus” and could not be objective about either the man or his music, he abandoned the project [Ferguson, Chamberlain, and Wilson 1997: 1].

Ferguson’s extant pieces permit a tantalizing glimpse of what might have been and are a source of inspiration for this book. In particular, his assessment of the performances in question provides a sobering starting point for this investigation:

Their average work is what was heard at Carnegie Hall. The superlative work, which just happens and over which they have no control, is done elsewhere and will be done again. It may be in Hollywood or in the Hotel Pennsylvania; it may even be on some morning when they recorded. But most likely it comes when the hall is full and the air is thick and the acoustics are bright and good, when they can feel the audience listening, the people they are playing for right there in sight, giving their confidence and appreciation in return for the music [78–79].



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BENNY GOODMAN'S FAMOUS 1938  
CARNEGIE HALL JAZZ CONCERT



FIGURE 1.1 Billboard outside Carnegie Hall. MSS 53, the Benny Goodman Papers in the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library of Yale University.

## **PART ONE**

# Context

... it is advertised as “the first swing concert in the history of Carnegie Hall.” In fact, it is.

—ARCHETTI 1938a: 362

### **PRECEDENTS: JAZZ CONCERTS AND AUDIENCES**

ALTHOUGH THE CLAIM, in a publicity flyer, that Benny Goodman’s 1938 concert was ‘the first concert of swing music in the history of Carnegie Hall’ was completely accurate, there were a number of important precedents for an event of this type. As Scott DeVeaux states in his seminal article “The Emergence of the Jazz Concert, 1935–1945,” “Goodman’s Carnegie Hall debut was less an isolated event than a crest of a wave” (DeVeaux 1989: 6). Opened in 1891, Carnegie Hall was the main concert venue in New York City until the Lincoln Center was completed in the 1960s, and it was also bound up with the early history of the jazz concert. In 1910 James Reese Europe and other leading black musicians and composers founded the Clef Club to provide “a central union, a clearing house, and booking agency for the employment of black musicians anywhere in New York and to oversee their contracts and guarantee their professionalism” (Badger 1989: 50). In addition to these practical

functions, the Clef Club Orchestra brought the organization and its members to wider public attention. The orchestra consisted entirely of black musicians and was usually over one hundred strong. The instrumentation was unusual, being dominated by plucked strings, reflecting contemporary trends in popular black music performance. The Clef Club Orchestra initially performed at the Manhattan Casino in Harlem with programs of light classics, popular songs, marches, and ragtime (Charters and Kunstadt 1962: 29). But in 1912, when the orchestra appeared at Carnegie Hall in a concert to raise funds for the newly established Music School Settlement for Colored People, the program was focused on traditional spirituals and compositions by black composers. Although the concert was considered to be “the first organized attempt . . . to show to the public of New York what the Negro race has done and can do in music,” Lester A. Walton, reviewing the concert in the *New York Age*, was struck by the wider social implications of the event that anticipated integration on the Carnegie Hall stage in 1938:

The concert was unique in many respects. Some of the leading white citizens sat in evening dress next to some of our highly respectable colored citizens, who were also in evening clothes. No color line was drawn in any part of the house, both white and colored occupying boxes. . . . Yet no calamity occurred because the colored citizens were not segregated in certain parts of the house as some of our theater managers think it necessary to do, despite laws forbidding discrimination [Southern 1978: 74–75].

This concert brought African American music from Harlem to an established classical music venue in Midtown Manhattan, placing it before new audiences and critics. Similar concerts in aid of the Music School were presented annually at Carnegie Hall until 1915 (Southern 1978: 71). Europe left the Clef Club to pursue his association with the dance team Vernon and Irene Castle, but others such as Will Marion Cook continued to present black music in the concert hall. Cook’s Southern Syncopated Orchestra enjoyed great success on the Continent from 1919, implicitly presenting a lineage from plantation songs and spirituals via ragtime to improvised blues, the latter featuring Sidney Bechet (Parsonage 2005: 143). Contemporaneously in New York, W. C. Handy conducted his Memphis Blues Band of Clef Club musicians in a program of “Real Blues, Jazzy and Classics” at the Manhattan Casino (Charters and Kunstadt 1962: 75). In 1928 Handy staged a concert at Carnegie Hall that made the “evolution of Negro music” an explicit focus (Handy 1941: 212). The program ran from “The Birth of

Jazz,” with “tomtoms and drums,” through spirituals, blues, plantation songs, work songs, cakewalks, and contemporary popular and art songs, culminating in a “Jazz Finale” (Howland 2009: 89; *New York Times* 1928). As well as the roots of this concept in previous presentations of black music in the concert hall, Handy’s concert was a direct response to Paul Whiteman, who presented the evolution of jazz beginning with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in his “Experiment in Modern Music” concert at the Aeolian Hall on February 12, 1924. Whiteman repeated the “Experiment” concert in March and then at Carnegie Hall on April 21, 1924, prior to a national tour (Schiff 1997: 61).

Subsequent attempts to emulate Whiteman’s “Experiment” concert by Vincent Lopez (November 1924 at the Metropolitan Opera House) and Harry Yerkes (December 1925 at the Aeolian Hall) drew on Handy’s blues compositions as a basis for new works, anticipating Handy’s own response in 1928 (Howland 2009: 87). The major work in Handy’s concert was an orchestral arrangement of James P. Johnson’s *Yamekraw* with Fats Waller as piano soloist, representing “a unique African American parallel—and musical response to—Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*,” the main feature of Whiteman’s concert (47). However, whereas Handy used symphonic writing to glorify the blues, Whiteman used it to improve “primitive” jazz. Commensurately, the presentation of musical “evolution” in Handy’s concert provides artistic and cultural roots for contemporary practices, but for Whiteman a justification and valorization of his improvements. In both cases, African American popular music was a basis for creating works and performances that could be considered aesthetically compatible with concert-hall surroundings. Subsequently, symphonic jazz works represent a significant trend in modern music. An apparent precursor to Goodman’s concert was a “jazz concert” given at Carnegie Hall almost exactly a year earlier by Ferde Grofé, a composer and arranger who famously orchestrated *Rhapsody in Blue*. In fact this concert consisted mainly of orchestral performances of jazz-influenced works (and intriguingly included “Bennie Godman’s [sic] ‘Stompin’ at the Savoy” (*New York Times* 1937a)).

Further to the incorporation of jazz into art music composition and performance, “when the jazz concert finally did emerge as a viable institution in the 1930s, it was to come ‘from below’ as an outgrowth of the ordinary situations within which jazz was performed” (DeVeaux 1989: 8). Prior to 1938 the youthful audiences in these “ordinary situations” were becoming more like those of concert halls, namely often listening and not always dancing, demolishing the oft-cited simplistic alignment of dancing with swing and listening with bebop. The development of listening to jazz performances is well illustrated by Benny Goodman’s career as a bandleader. In



1934 Goodman put together his first permanent band to play at Billy Rose's Music Hall. Rose was prepared to seize opportunities offered by the end of Prohibition, having already opened "a large theater restaurant" called the Casino de Paree. The Music Hall promised a "multimedia extravaganza" every evening, which included films, vaudeville acts and a nude tableau as well as two bands (Firestone 1993: 90–91). Goodman had a clear idea about the concept for his band, as he recalled in his 1939 autobiography:

I was trying to get a band together that would play dance music in a free and musical style—in other words, in the way that most good musicians wanted to play, but weren't allowed to on the ordinary job [Goodman and Kolodin 1939: 142].

As a result, although Goodman's band had been engaged primarily to play for dancing at the Music Hall,

some people who came in stood around the bandstand to listen, and while we thought that was fine Rose got the impression we weren't getting across because everybody wasn't dancing. However, we managed to survive that when somebody explained that the sort of music we played, with members of the band taking solos and so on, was something that some people just came to listen to, without dancing [Goodman and Kolodin 1939: 143].

Rose's reaction shows that equation of the positive reception of popular music with a physical response through dancing was clearly well established.

Although the Music Hall closed after only a few months, the engagement did begin to establish Goodman's profile not only for audiences that heard the band live but throughout New York through broadcasts on local station WMCA, and more widely, through recordings. Multimedia dissemination became a characteristic of swing, which "attracted a youthful audience through a complex media network of radio broadcasts, recordings, movies and cross-country tours" (Stowe 1994: 8). Radio, with its ability to disseminate live performance nationally in real time, was central in the development of the swing industry and to Goodman's success. The driving force behind creating these opportunities for jazz musicians was advertisers, who recognized the potential of radio to provide "direct access into the nation's homes" as a result of the affordability of sets (Erenberg 1998: 164). A place on a commercially sponsored program was considered the "swing era's greatest