

# Hey Kids, Meet Benny Goodman

America Big Band Leader and Jazz Clarinetist (1909-1986)



**Benny Goodman** was born in Chicago, Illinois on May 30, 1909. He was the ninth of twelve children. His Jewish parents, David and Dora Goodman, left Russia and immigrated to America in hopes of finding a better life. His parents met in Maryland and then moved to Chicago before Benny was born.

When Benny was 10, his father enrolled Benny and his two older brothers in music lessons at the Kehelah Jacob Synagogue. Soon Benny was able to outplay his brothers and the other students in the band. When the synagogue could no longer afford to sponsor a band, Mr. Goodman took his children to the Hull House to continue their musical education. Benny's father recognized his son's exceptional talent and enrolled him in private lessons with classically trained clarinetist Franz Schoepp even though the 50 cents per week for instruction was a struggle to pay.

Benny practiced his clarinet everyday. At age 14, Benny began to play as a professional musician in dance bands and was making more money in one night than his father made in a week. Unfortunately, Mr. Goodman died just as Benny was beginning to become successful. He never was able to express how proud he was of his son.

At 16, Benny joined one of Chicago's top bands, the Ben Pollack Orchestra. It was with this band that he made his first recording in 1926. Two years later he made a record of his own.

In 1934, Goodman auditioned for the NBC Let's Dance radio program which featured a variety of dance music styles. As Goodman needed new arrangements every week for the show, he bought jazz charts from Fletcher Henderson, an arranger from Atlanta, Georgia. The combination of Goodman's exceptional clarinet skills, Fletcher Henderson's arrangements, and a great band, earned Goodman the title "King of Swing." Goodman remained on Let's Dance until the show was cancelled in May 1935.



In August of 1935, Benny and his orchestra began a series of performances at the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles, California. These performances would be a turning point in his career. Playing to 4000 enthusiastic teenage fans, the response was inspiring. Neither Benny nor swing music had ever received that kind of attention from audiences. They just stopped dancing and gathered at the bandstand to hear this new sound.

Late in 1937 Goodman received an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Goodman was hesitant at first because no jazz musician had ever played at Carnegie Hall before. Playing to a sold out crowd, the concert began with "Don't Be That Way", "Sometimes I'm Happy", and "One O'Clock Jump". By the time the band played their final piece, "Sing, Sing, Sing," the success of the concert was certain. Since then, this historic concert is regarded as the most significant concert in jazz history.

Benny Goodman continued to play music until his death in 1986. In the same year he was honored with the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

